

WCG National Employment Index 2021

British Columbia Spotlight





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WCG Services: leading the way in sustainable employment

WCG Services is an industry leader in developing and delivering employment and vocational rehabilitation services across Canada.

For more than 25 years WCG has been partnering with governments and local service delivery organizations to create sustainable employment opportunities for people, businesses, and communities.

Every day we help people reach their employment goals and improve the quality of their lives - many of them with multiple, complex barriers to entering or re-entering the workforce. Our participants include persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, youth, Veterans, and other demographic groups underrepresented in the labour market.

WCG is part of the [APM Group](#), which delivers employment and allied health services internationally. Our global network of companies shares a core purpose: to enable better lives.

In the last 12 months, our team of 6,650 people in 10 countries have reached the lives of more than 1 million people.

WCG commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to conduct research on diversity and inclusivity in the workplace. The result is the WCG National Employment Index and three spotlight reports on Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario.

A landmark piece of research, the Index sought to create a benchmark against which to measure and track over time the employment and career access, equity and inclusion in the workforce.

The research findings mark an inaugural waypost for businesses and job seekers to navigate and progress towards equitable employment.

The global pandemic has accelerated change

The pandemic has accelerated workplace trends to dramatically increase remote work, automation and the need for greater digital and technological skill. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Preparing for the Future of Work in Canada* makes it clear this greater rate of change could exacerbate economic and social inequality.

The OECD's report, *Skill Measures to Mobilise the Workforce During the COVID-19 Crisis*, outlines the crucial role of ensuring displaced workers are rapidly retrained for areas of high demand. It details the importance of services to retrain and redeploy displaced workers and says governments will need to increase their investment in adult training as well as making targeted efforts to reach at risk groups. "Aligning retraining efforts with labour market needs is critical," it says.

WCG National Employment Index

About the Index

WCG Services commissioned independent market research consultancy, CoreData, to develop and establish a National Employment Index. The index assesses the equity of employment opportunities for unemployed Canadians, and the proactive steps being taken by both job seekers and employers to improve employment outcomes.

The Index assesses three main areas: attitudes, access and actions.

Attitudes	Access	Actions
<p>measures whether the mindsets of employers and job seekers are strengthening employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>1.1 Employability: Employer perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce and individuals' perceptions of their own employability</p> <p>1.2 Equity: Employer perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce and individuals' perceptions of their own employability</p> <p>1.3 Myths: Prevalence of negative attitudes and employer misperceptions.</p>	<p>measures the accessibility of meaningful employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>2.1 Awareness: Whether individuals know where to go for assistance finding a job and whether employers know where to go for help recruiting underrepresented groups</p> <p>2.2 Availability: Whether individuals have the support needed to find work and employers have the support needed to recruit and retain people from underrepresented groups</p> <p>2.3 Capability: Job seekers' existing skills and knowledge and employers' organizational capability to recruit people from typically underrepresented groups</p>	<p>measures the tangible actions and interventions that are influencing employment outcomes. It includes:</p> <p>3.1 Services: Employers' and individuals' ease of accessing employment services to assist with recruitment, retention and finding work and relevance of services</p> <p>3.2 System: Employers' and individuals' understanding of how to access these supports within the current system</p> <p>3.3 Activity: Actions taken or planned by job seekers to increase their employability and by employers to recruit and retain job seekers</p>

The Index was developed from quantitative surveys conducted in May 2021 of 1,236 employers involved in recruitment and 1,159 Canadians who had been actively seeking work within the last 12 months*.

While the sample of individuals included both employed and unemployed respondents, the Index results are based only on the responses of those currently unemployed.

Throughout the report, we use the term "people who represent groups that are typically underrepresented in the workforce", abbreviated thereafter to "underrepresented groups". For the purposes of this research, this includes people who are, or identify as:

- Indigenous
- Visible minorities
- People with disability or chronic physical and/or mental health conditions
- Those with limited work experience
- Recent immigrants to Canada
- People previously incarcerated/with a criminal record
- Homeless or without stable, secure accommodation
- Survivors of violence or abuse
- Youth (under 25)
- People who identify as part of the LGBTQ2+ community
- Those who have experienced periods of involuntary long-term unemployment

*Referred to throughout the report as 'job seekers'

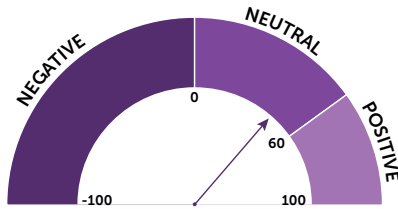


2021 National Employment Index Scorecard

2021 Index Scorecard

(average of attitudes, access and actions)

40.4 / 100



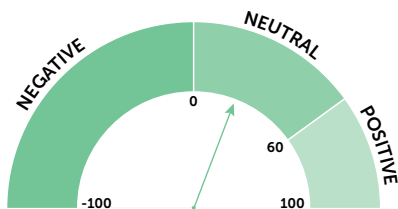
This score is in the neutral-to-negative range and suggests there is strong room for improvement.

This inaugural National Employment Index is designed to understand the employment landscape in Canada from the perspective of both unemployed Canadians and employers. It tracks the challenges and issues they face, job seekers' steps to become employed and employers' steps to recruit and retain people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce.

The Index and sub-component scores can range from -100 to +100 as they track both positive and negative factors.

Attitudes

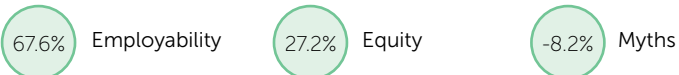
28.9 / 100



Overall, employers have a neutral perception of the employability of those typically underrepresented in the workforce, as do unemployed Canadians from these groups. However, there is wide variation in the perceived employability of people with specific characteristics, with some viewed as far less employable by businesses.

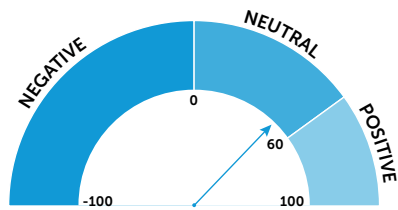
Notably, employers perceive greater employment equity for these groups than job seekers themselves. However, the main source of downward pressure on this Index component is widespread myths and misperceptions about underrepresented groups, observed and experienced by both employers and individuals.

Components



Access

54.1 / 100



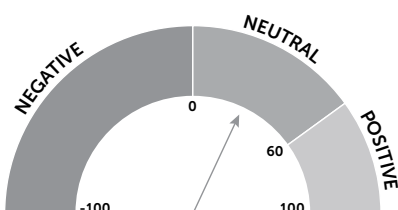
The best performing Index component, Access is driven up by positive perceptions of capability among both employers and unemployed Canadians. The downward pressure stems from a lack of awareness of available supports, and sense on both sides that more support is required to facilitate successful employment and retention of employment for people from groups underrepresented in the Canadian workforce.

Components



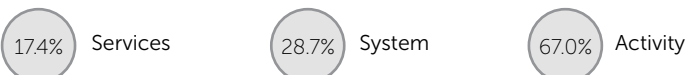
Actions

38.3 / 100



Most Canadian employers are actively recruiting at least one underrepresented group. However, recruitment efforts target these groups disproportionately. System complexity is hampering success and pulling this Index measure into negative territory. Specifically, the majority of businesses do not find it easy to access services and supports, and some believe the services provided are not relevant to their needs. For unemployed Canadians the situation is even worse, but the overwhelming majority still taking active steps to find employment on their own without any additional support.

Components





Overall 2021 Index Score

40.4/100

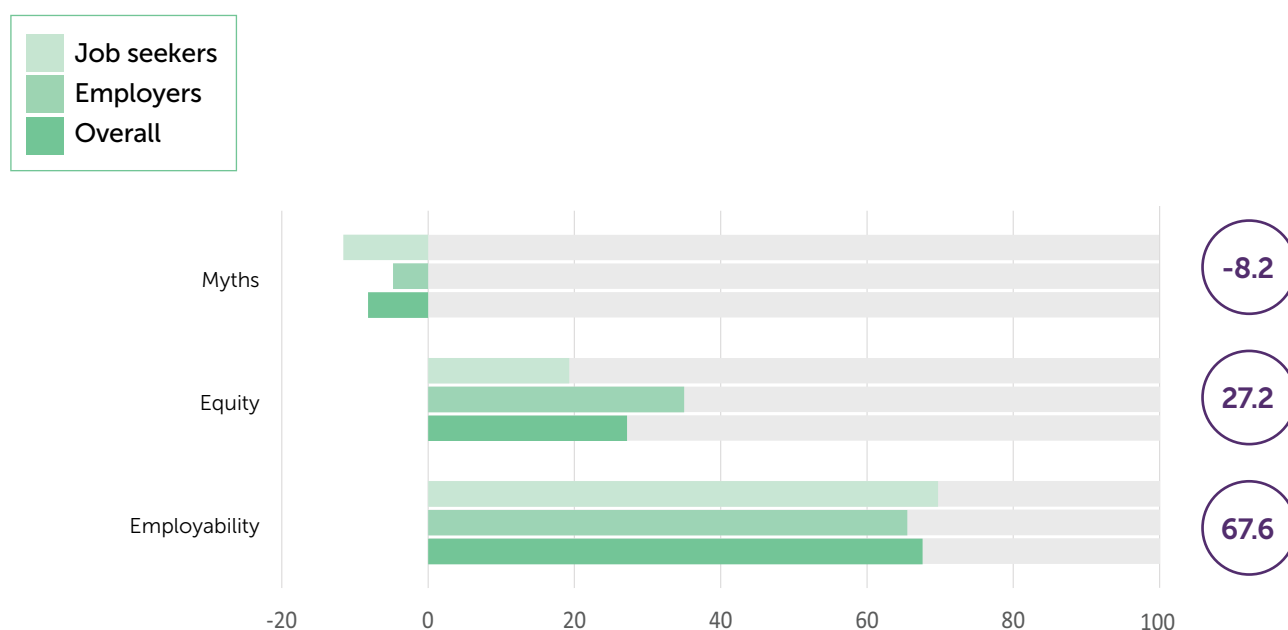
This score is in the neutral-to-negative range and suggests there is strong room for improvement.

This inaugural National Employment Index is designed to understand the employment landscape in Canada from the perspective of both unemployed Canadians and employers. It tracks the challenges and issues they face, job seekers' steps to become employed and employers' steps to recruit and retain people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce.

The Index and sub-component scores can range from -100 to +100 as they track both positive and negative factors.

Overall, employers have a neutral perception of the employability of those typically underrepresented in the workforce, as do unemployed Canadians from these groups. However, there is wide variation in the perceived employability of people with specific characteristics, with some viewed as far less employable by businesses.

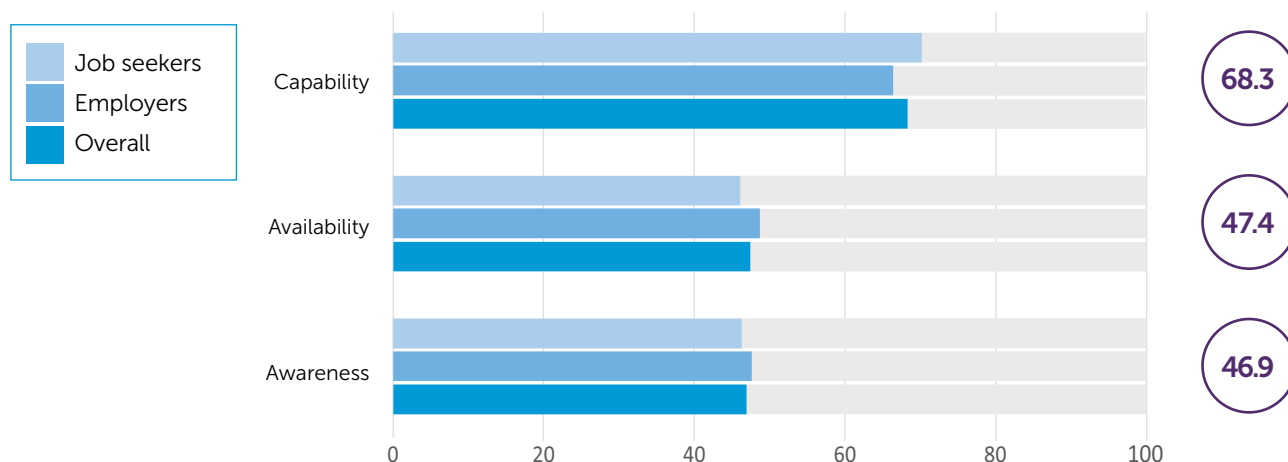
Notably, employers perceive greater employment equity for these groups than job seekers themselves. However, the main source of downward pressure on this Index component is widespread myths and misperceptions about underrepresented groups, observed and experienced by both employers and individuals.



Key Research Findings

- Employers have neutral perceptions of the employability of groups typically underrepresented in the workforce
- Fewer than three in 10 (28.9 per cent) employers consider those who were previously incarcerated to be employable (based on a 7-10 rating). This improves slightly to two in five (44.1 per cent) for people living with disability
- In contrast, three in five (61.4 per cent) Canadians from underrepresented groups perceive themselves as employable, however they are less likely to perceive themselves as employable as those not from underrepresented groups (74.2 per cent)
- Individuals from underrepresented groups are less likely to believe Canadian employers are willing to provide employment opportunities to people like themselves (53.3 per cent) than employers (62.8 per cent)
- Almost two in three employers (64.5 per cent) have encountered negative attitudes and misperceptions about underrepresented groups among their peers. This negativity has been experienced by nearly three quarters (73.2 per cent) of individuals from these groups, with the number climbing to nearly four in five among people with disability (78.2 per cent)
- These misperceptions and negative attitudes are impacting individuals from underrepresented groups when they are searching for work. Most noticeably, their self-esteem (59.2 per cent) and wellbeing, leaving 45.4 per cent feeling miserable and 44.5 per cent isolated

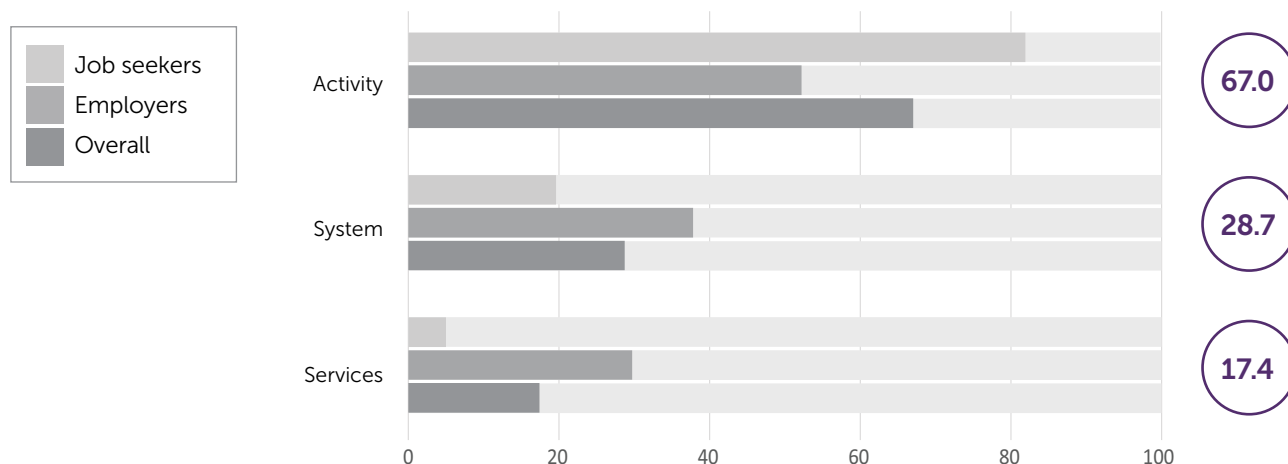
The best performing Index component, Access is driven up by positive perceptions of capability among both employers and unemployed Canadians. The downward pressure stems from a lack of awareness of available supports, and sense on both sides that more support is required to facilitate successful employment and retention of employment for people from groups underrepresented in the Canadian workforce.



Key Research Findings

- Employers rate their ability to recruit and retain employees typically underrepresented in the workforce lower than their overall recruitment and retention capabilities
- While nearly three quarters of employers (70 per cent) believe they have good capability to recruit new employees, two thirds (65.9 per cent) believe they have good capability to retain new hires, this falls to 54 per cent and 56.2 per cent respectively for those underrepresented in the workforce
- More than three in five (63.6 per cent) unemployed Canadians from underrepresented groups believe they have the skills and knowledge required for the job they are seeking
- However, less than half of unemployed individuals from underrepresented groups (46.4 per cent) and employers (47.6 per cent) are confident they know where to seek assistance finding a job/ help recruiting people from groups typically underrepresented in the workforce
- Only one in five employers say they have all the support needed to recruit (22.8 per cent) and retain (22.3 per cent) groups typically underrepresented in the workforce. Similarly, fewer than one in five unemployed Canadians (19.2 per cent) say they have all the support they need to find and maintain employment

Most Canadian employers are actively recruiting at least one underrepresented group. However, recruitment efforts target these groups disproportionately. System complexity is hampering success and pulling this Index measure into negative territory. Specifically, the majority of businesses do not find it easy to access services and supports, and some believe the services provided are not relevant to their needs. For unemployed Canadians the situation is even worse, but the overwhelming majority still taking active steps to find employment on their own without any additional support.



Key Research Findings

- Only half of Canadian employers (52.5 per cent) and less than two in five unemployed Canadians (36.9 per cent) find it easy to access recruitment and retention support, and job seeking and retention support respectively
- While half of Canadian employers (53.6 per cent) believe employment services are relevant to their needs, unemployed Canadians are less likely to view services as relevant (34.2 per cent)
- 69.8% employers are actively recruiting from at least one underrepresented group. However, their levels of focus evidently differ:
 - Youth under 25 years - 42.3 per cent
 - People with limited work experience - 42.1 per cent
 - Visible minorities - 39.4 per cent
 - Indigenous Canadians - 31 per cent
 - People with disability - 20.4 per cent
 - People previously incarcerated - 10.5 per cent
 - People with no fixed address - 10.2 per cent
- 40.2 per cent of Canadian employers have taken active steps to promote hiring inclusivity and workforce diversity in the last 12 months. Among these employers, some of the most common steps taken were:
 - 49.5 per cent made changes to workplace values and culture
 - 41.2 per cent introduced new role or expanded current diversity and inclusion roles
 - 38.4 per cent engaged with staff from underrepresented groups to guide organizational change
 - 38 per cent provided training for HR staff to build capability
- Despite their challenges, more than two in three (68.3 per cent) unemployed Canadians have taken steps in the last 12 months to increase their chances of getting a job. The most common steps related to active job research and applications, with just one in five (21.3 per cent) seeking help from an employment services provider and even fewer from private recruiters (15.4 per cent).



The background of the slide features a photograph of a city skyline, likely Vancouver, with numerous high-rise buildings and sailboats in the water. The image is split diagonally from the top-left to the bottom-right. The upper-left portion shows the city skyline and its reflection in the water, while the lower-right portion is a solid light blue. The title 'British Columbia Spotlight' is positioned in the upper right, over the light blue area.

British Columbia Spotlight

Employer misperceptions are hampering progress

Stigma about underrepresented groups is prevalent in British Columbia.

This spotlight on British Columbia takes an in-depth look at the employment landscape and the challenges faced in rebuilding the world of work.

Our survey highlights four key findings that will support employment growth in British Columbia.

1. Employer misperceptions are hampering progress
2. Employers (and individuals) need a navigator to ensure sustainable employment outcomes
3. Soft skills and life skills are just as important as technical skills for employee recruitment and retention
4. The employment services system needs simplifying

Less than half (44.0 per cent) of the British Columbian employers surveyed said a person with a disability, including chronic physical or mental health conditions, was employable. This falls further for those without stable accommodation (26.9 per cent) or with a criminal record (25.9 per cent).

Employer perceptions of employability are much more positive towards Veterans (74.1 per cent), people over 50 (77.3 per cent) and those under 25 (83.5 per cent).

The perceptions about employability of underrepresented groups are likely being driven by negative attitudes. Almost two in three employers had heard other employers express the view that poor employment history is a red flag (64.3 per cent), higher than for Canadian employers overall (57.1 per cent). Employers had also commonly heard the view that older workers are too set in their ways (44.2 per cent), employing someone with a disability is challenging (41.7 per cent) and that people with criminal records rarely make good employees (42.7 per cent). Disturbingly, one in five had heard their peers express an attitude that barriers experienced by job seekers were their own fault (21.6 per cent).

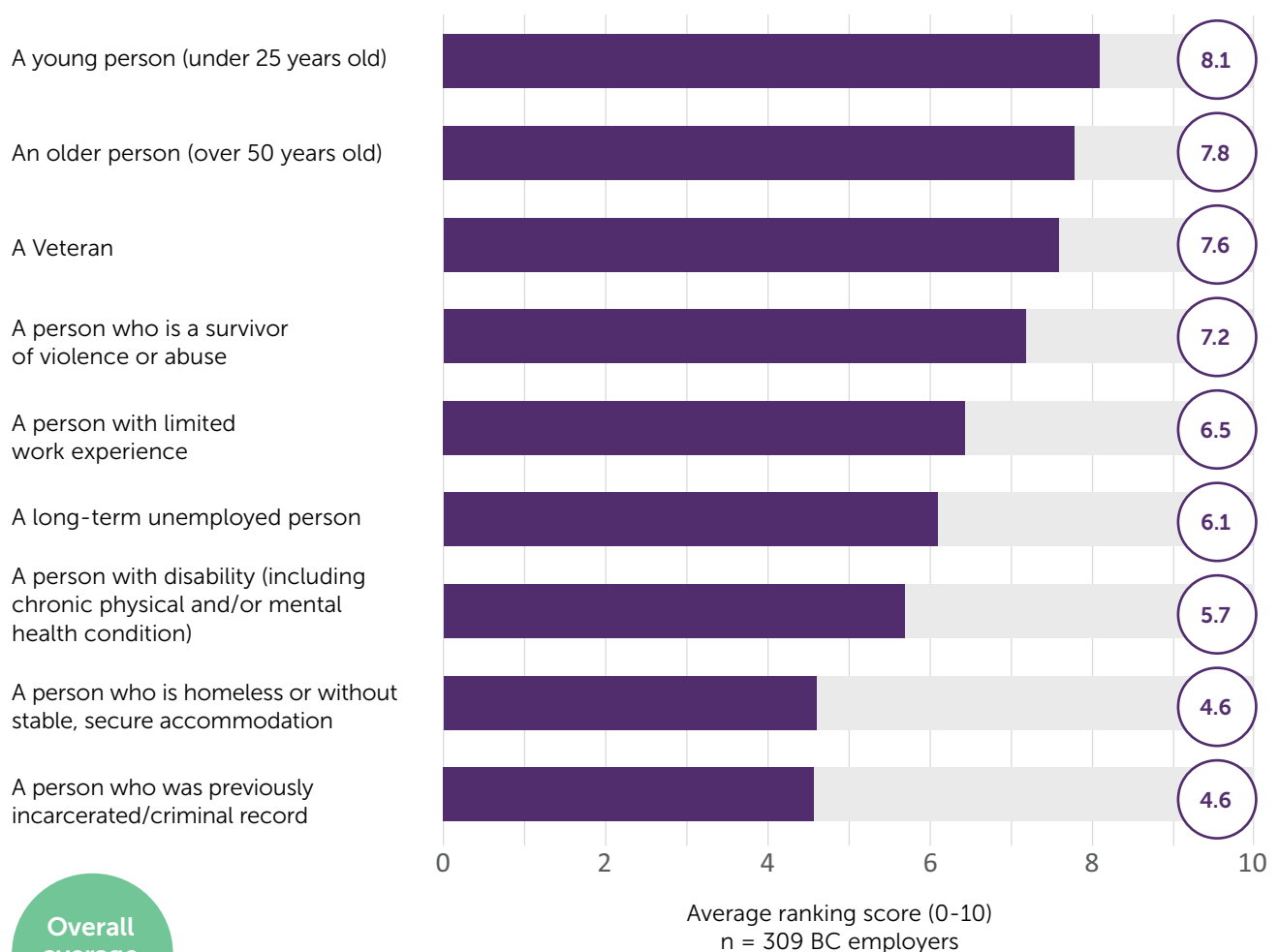
There are also misperceptions about the cost to business of hiring underrepresented groups. Not only is government-funded support available to employers through government-funded employment programs, but wage subsidies are also available for employers who employ underrepresented groups. One in five employers have observed the perception that hiring underrepresented groups will come at a cost to the business or that foreign qualifications aren't valuable in Canada (21.1 per cent and 22.1 per cent, respectively) and that employment services providers only refer those with limited skills and experience (22.6 per cent). These groups face real barriers to employment based on organizations' perceptions of their employability.

While most British Columbian employers (92.2 per cent) had hired job seekers from underrepresented groups, this was skewed in favour of those under 25 (72.8 per cent), older workers (64.4 per cent) and visible minorities (63.8 per cent).



The perceived employability of underrepresented groups varies.

In general, how employable do you believe the following potential job applicants are? Please rate their employability on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is extremely employable and 0 is not employable at all



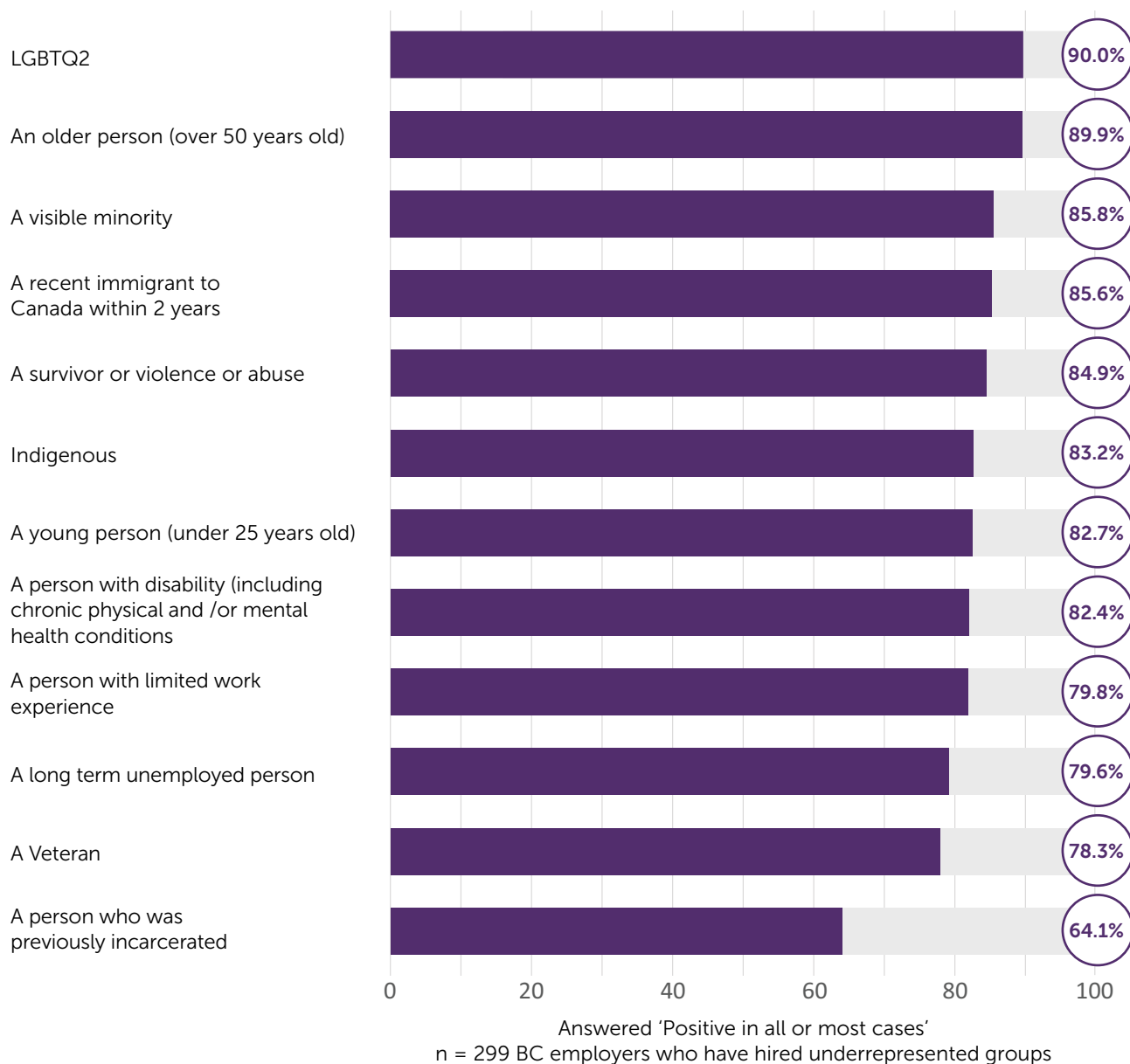
In reality, employer experience hiring underrepresented job seekers is overwhelmingly positive.

Despite the prevalence of negative attitudes from employers about those in underrepresented groups (64.4 per cent), backed up by job seeker experience (69.3 per cent), British Columbian employers that had previously recruited a job seeker from an underrepresented group overwhelmingly reported a positive experience.

In fact, more than four in five (82.4 per cent) British Columbian employers who had hired people with a disability (PWD) reported having a positive experience in most if not all cases. Further, employers reported positive experiences employing workers over 50 years of age (89.9 per cent), long-term unemployed job seekers (79.6 per cent) and even people with a previous criminal record (64.1 per cent).

Employers also reported positive experiences employing other underrepresented cohorts. More than four in five were positive about the experience employing Indigenous Canadians, recent immigrants, individuals from the LGBTQ2 community and domestic violence survivors. Veterans (78.3 per cent) and those with limited work experience (79.8 per cent) also generated positive employer feedback.

How would you rate your experience employing this person or people?





"I feel paralyzed - I am sick of being told that 'someone else is sure to hire me given my credentials', yet there is only rejection."

(Female, 49 years old, British Columbia, Unemployed)

Negative perceptions are taking a toll on job seekers and employment outcomes.

More than two thirds (64.6 per cent) of British Columbian job seekers have encountered negative attitudes or misperceptions from employers while seeking work. For people living with disability, this figure rises to 74.6 per cent.

This is exacerbated by prevalent encounters with employers who perceive that hiring a person with a disability is a burden for business (63.6 per cent).

People with disabilities are also more likely to have experienced the attitude that those who have been out of work for more than six months are not employable (52.3 per cent), compared to less than three in 10 British Columbians without a disability (28.4 per cent).

Of the unemployed British Columbians surveyed, three in five (60.5 per cent) lost their job because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has contributed to lengthening periods of unemployment.

This compounds the challenges job seekers face, with unemployed British Columbians encountering negative attitudes about those with gaps in their resumes, assuming:

- They are not good employees - 47.7 per cent
- Hiring those needing flexibility is too hard - 38.5 per cent
- Their age is a barrier to work - 36.9 per cent

Employers within British Columbia cite a candidate's attitude or mindset as a key reason underrepresented job seekers are not being hired (43.7 per cent), second to lack of technical or hard skills (45 per cent).

However, British Columbian job seekers report a discouraging impact from these negative encounters. This negativity was felt even more acutely by more vulnerable job seekers in underrepresented groups who reported:

- Lower self-esteem (62.7 per cent compared with 42.5 per cent for other British Columbians)
- Feeling miserable (45.1 per cent vs. 22.5 per cent)
- Feelings of isolation (43.1 per cent vs. 22.5 per cent)

Those from underrepresented groups were almost twice as likely to say they had given up on their job search as a result (23.5 per cent vs. 12.5 per cent).



“I want to work but I think some of my obstacles are age related which I know is not legal but there you have it.”

(Female, 63 years old, British Columbia)

The situation was even worse for job seekers with a disability, illness or injury. Almost three-quarters (74.6 per cent) of PWD reported experiencing negative attitudes and perceptions while searching for a job. As a result, job seekers reported:

- Lower self-esteem - 76.7 per cent
- Feeling isolated and miserable - 55.8 per cent
- Stopping their job search as a result - 30.2 per cent

Where underrepresented job seekers face negative attitudes from potential employers, these findings indicate it may create a cycle of negativity.

Employers cited candidate attitude or mindset as a key reason underrepresented groups were not successfully gaining employment and admitted that negative perceptions of candidates who were underrepresented in the workforce posed organizational challenges to hiring them.

Constant setbacks and misperceptions are taking a much heavier toll on the mental health of underrepresented job seekers, undermining resilience and creating a vicious circle.

"I find that there are very few jobs to apply for, it is very time consuming and frustrating applying to [sic] so many jobs and rarely hearing anything back."

(Female, 26 years old, British Columbia, Unemployed)

Employers (and individuals) need a navigator to ensure sustainable employment outcomes

Employers face organizational barriers to recruiting underrepresented job seekers.

Those who hired underrepresented job seekers overwhelmingly had a positive experience. Yet those without this positive experience face barriers in recruiting these job seekers because of a lack of organizational capacity. Furthermore, a lack of confidence about the support needed to ensure the recruitment succeeds.

When asked about the key barriers the organization would face in hiring and retaining these employees, the employees cited:

- Negative perceptions - 35.6 per cent
- Rigid recruitment criteria - 35.6 per cent
- A lack of organizational capability to provide support for these candidates - 30.7 per cent
- Lack of support from leaders - 25.6 per cent

When asked if they knew where to go for support to recruit a candidate from an underrepresented group, more than half (53.1 per cent) of British Columbian employers did not know or were not sure.

Just over two in five (43 per cent) reported their organization had taken steps within the past 12 months to promote hiring inclusivity and a diverse workforce.

72.9 per cent of British Columbian employers are actively recruiting from underrepresented groups with a focus on:

- visible minorities - 46.2 per cent (above the national average of 39.4 per cent)
- those with limited work experience - 45.2 per cent
- young people under 25 - 43.5 per cent
- recent immigrants - 33.6 per cent
- Indigenous Canadians - 33.2 per cent
- People with a disability - 22.3 per cent
- long-term unemployed - 24.3 per cent



Employers lack confidence and need support to recruit and retain underrepresented job seekers.

Despite the prevalence of government-funded employment programs, less than half (47.9 per cent) of British Columbian employers agree it's easy for their organization to access employment services and support to recruit and retain underrepresented job seekers.

Just over half (51.5 per cent) believe the support on offer is relevant and only slightly more (55.3 per cent) said they understood what they needed to do to achieve this. Two in five (41.4 per cent) employers did not understand the steps that they needed to take to diversify their workforce by recruiting and retaining employees from underrepresented groups.

British Columbian employers typically perceive they are highly capable of filling available job openings (67 per cent) and retaining newly hired employees (69.9 per cent). However, this falls to 52.1 per cent and 58.6 per cent when it comes to their capability to recruit and retain underrepresented groups.

While most (61.5 per cent) believe Canadian employers are willing to provide employment opportunities to these groups, only one in five (22.0 per cent) BC employers said they had all the support they needed to recruit and retain job seekers in this cohort.

This suggests employers are willing to hire underrepresented job seekers but need support to ensure sustainable outcomes. Employers nominated a mentor, access to soft skills training, HR support, wage subsidies and a support worker for the employee as the third party supports that would help their organization retain underrepresented job seekers. When asked what they would be willing to offer, they cited flexible work times, adjustments to duties and access to technical and soft skills training.



“I have retrained and upskilled so much, I have no idea what to do anymore - I am either too much or not enough.”

(Female, 49 years old, British Columbia, Unemployed)

Underrepresented job seekers need more support to find and keep a job.

British Columbian job seekers also express a need for support to find and keep a job, particularly those typically underrepresented in the workforce.

This group has straightforward needs, however:

- Less than one in five said they had all the support they needed to find and maintain a job - 17 per cent
- Three in five would like to be connected to employers who are hiring - 58.7 per cent
- Half said they would like training to prepare for a specific role - 52.4 per cent
- Two in five needed help with their resume and cover letter - 41.3 percent
- Almost a third wanted help with submitting a job application - 31.7 percent
- A further third raised needing help preparing for an interview - 31.7 per cent

Getting a job was a greater hurdle than keeping it, with fewer than two in five (37.3 per cent) British Columbians who are typically underrepresented finding keeping their job challenging, however this was higher than the Canadian average (32.9 per cent).

Unemployed British Columbians who needed support to keep a job cited on the job training (50 per cent), flexible working arrangements (44.2 per cent), job-related upskilling and real opportunities for promotion (40.7 per cent respectively).

These supports were similar to those sought by underrepresented unemployed British Columbians however, the underrepresented cohort were more likely to need transport to work (27 per cent compared with 20.9 per cent) and assistance with managing their disability, illness or injury (25.4 per cent vs. 20.9 per cent).

Soft skills and life skills are just as important as technical skills for employee recruitment and retention

The perceived willingness of Canadian employers to hire underrepresented groups is compromised by perceptions that job seekers lack the skills required to do the job.

British Columbian employers cite a mix of missing “soft” and “hard” skills as reasons underrepresented groups do not make it through the hiring process.

They say candidates do not get hired because:

- They do not have the technical skills - 45 per cent
- Because of attitude or mindset - 43.7 per cent
- Because they lack qualifications - 42.7 per cent
- They did not have enough work experience - 41.7 per cent
- They lacked soft skills - 39.2 per cent
- They did not have adequate digital skills - 29.4 per cent

Nearly seven in 10 (68.1 per cent) of British Columbian job seekers had a college or vocational qualification or higher compared with three in five underrepresented job seekers (64.7 per cent) and people living with disability (64.4 per cent). The research demonstrates a gap between the perceptions of potential employers who believe job seekers do not have the education and skills and the job seekers, who believe they do.

The findings suggest British Columbian job seekers have the required skills and the capacity to develop them. Despite the hurdles, nearly two in three underrepresented job seekers (64.2 per cent) had taken steps to increase their chances of getting a job in the last 12 months, while another three in 10 (31.1 per cent) expressed an intention to do so.

This cohort were looking for available jobs online, applying for jobs, researching opportunities, updating their resume, attending job interviews and reaching out to people to find job opportunities.

British Columbians from underrepresented groups typically (63.8 per cent) believe they have the skills and knowledge to undertake the job they are seeking. However, seven in 10 (69.9 per cent) find it hard to get a job. They identified several barriers to employment:

- A lack of vacancies - cited by 55.1 per cent
- Not having transport - 20.6 per cent compared with 1.8 per cent for other job seekers
- Living with an injury, illness or disability - 26.2 per cent vs. 5.4 per cent
- Poor self-esteem after repeated rejection - 30.8 per cent vs. 10.7 per cent

This cohort is almost twice as likely to experience fear, anxiety or confusion over what to do than other job seekers (41.1 per cent vs. 21.4 per cent).



Soft skills training and HR support are enablers for British Columbian employers and job seekers.

Individuals in underrepresented groups said the key things that would help them and others with similar skills and abilities get a job were:

- a positive attitude or mindset - 68.6 per cent
- confidence - 62.1 per cent
- good work experience - 60.8 per cent
- communication skills - 59.5 per cent
- education or qualifications - 57.5 per cent

These job seekers would likely benefit from training and support services provided by employment services providers. However, only 16.7 per cent of underrepresented British Columbian job seekers had sought help from an employment services provider in the last 12 months, though this figure almost doubled to 30.4 per cent for people living with injury, illness or disability.

Among unemployed British Columbian job seekers who had not yet taken steps to increase their chances of getting a job but were planning to in the future, more than one quarter (27.3 per cent) planned to seek help from an employment services provider. This rose to more than one in three (36.8 per cent) among underrepresented British Columbian job seekers seeking to improve their employment prospects.

The findings suggest that access to soft skills training and support by employers of underrepresented job seekers and the job seekers themselves would likely lead to more positive hiring and retention outcomes.

It would provide an opportunity for this cohort to improve their job prospects by supporting a positive mindset and providing encouragement, networks and connections to employers and opportunities to gain access to training for technical and hard skills.

“I think certain cultures in unrepresented workers have built an excellent work profile. They are known as hard workers and are very reliable. I feel strange saying that but it is a comment often heard in the construction industry.”

(Employer, Female, British Columbia)

The employment services system needs simplifying

Employers and job seekers lack awareness of where to get help.

Despite the long-running role played by employment services providers in Canada, less than a third (30.1 per cent) of British Columbian employers were currently working or had previously worked with an employment services provider.

While the services were better used by people with disability job seekers than other job seekers, this cohort also experienced greater levels of fear, anxiety or confusion over what to do to find a job (53.3 per cent) compared with just over a third (34.4 per cent) of British Columbian job seekers.

When asked which skills were required for the jobs they were seeking, underrepresented British Columbian job seekers cited communication skills (65.9 per cent), reliability (55.8 per cent), team work (61.6) and problem solving skills (58 per cent), suggesting employment services providers could play a constructive and meaningful role.

When asked why they hadn't worked with an employment services provider:

- More than one in five British Columbian employers said they were unaware they existed
- They were unsure how they the employment services provider could benefit their organization
- They had never been contacted by one and that their organization did not need help recruiting and retaining people

One in ten (12.8 per cent) employers were unsure how to contact them. Intriguingly almost one in five (19.3 per cent) employers said they did not want to pay for their services.

The findings suggest that some employers are not aware employment services are government funded. If employers were aware the services were funded, they may be more likely to use them to improve their diversity and inclusion recruitment and retention.

This, coupled with the demoralizing impact of employer rejection for underrepresented groups, and particularly people with disability, suggests there is a vital role for employment services providers in training and supporting job seekers, particularly from disadvantaged cohorts, to acquire the soft skills they need to be attractive to an employer and to retain their job.

Systemic barriers are likely contributing to confusion for job seekers and a need to reduce complexity to avoid intensifying the anxiety and confusion already being experienced by so many.



People with disabilities

People with disabilities (PWD) make up approximately 22 per cent of the Canadian population according to latest official figures¹. Almost six times more likely to be survivors of domestic violence or abuse (29.3 per cent) and more than three times as likely to identify as LGBTQ2 (24.4 per cent), they are also more likely to be Indigenous, long term unemployed or to have limited work experience than their peers without a disability. The result is over-representation of PWD among both unemployed Canadians (29.9 per cent) and employed Canadians from groups underrepresented in the workforce (20.7 per cent).

Canadians with a disability self-rate their employability lower than other Canadians. Their perceptions are likely influenced by frequent encounters with employer misperceptions (78.2 per cent). Employers are also witnessing a range of employment-related misperceptions among their peers (64.5 per cent). One of the most common observations of these employers was negativity about hiring PWD or chronic illness (45.0 per cent).

The impact of these negative employer encounters on Canadians with a disability is stark. More than two in three (67.5 per cent) say their self-esteem has suffered, more than half (55.5 per cent) were left feeling isolated and almost as many miserable (54.8 per cent). The effects persist among those who are employed, with a third (34.4 per cent) feeling unable to ask for the supports they need and close to half (44.9 per cent) saying fear, anxiety and confusion impact their ability to retain employment. The influence on prevailing employer perceptions is challenging, given two in five (42.0 per cent) employers say candidate attitude and mindset are key factors preventing underrepresented groups from securing employment.

Despite the challenges they face, most unemployed Canadians with a disability have taken steps to increase their employability in the last year (71.9 per cent). They are actively searching and researching, submitting applications and reaching out to find opportunities. More likely than other Canadians to report weak communication skills, two in five (41.6 per cent) of those who have been upskilling in the last 12 months have taken steps to directly address this.

While employers are more focused on whether they can adapt roles and provide supports or accommodations, less than one in four (22.5 per cent) Canadians with a disability say this is what they need. Instead, flexible working arrangements, something all Canadians are more familiar with due to the pandemic, are the most common support required (57.3 per cent). And while help managing their disability is useful for nearly half (49.4 per cent), the desire for meaningful employment and career progression are clear, with upskilling (42.5 per cent), on-the-job training (44.7 per cent) and real promotion opportunities (35.2 per cent) important to many Canadians with a disability.

¹ Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0348-01 Labour force status for adults with disabilities by disability type <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

Women face structural barriers magnified by local economic conditions

Nationally, women have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Women experienced the largest initial employment losses and represent the majority of workers in the sectors that were hit hardest by economic shutdowns. Young women, mothers, racialized and immigrant women have borne the brunt of the impact². Participation rates among British Columbian women dropped 2.8 percentage points between 2019 and 2020, compared to 2.1 percentage points for men. The disparity among young British Columbians (15-24) over this period is alarming, with the female participation rate dropping 8.6 percentage points, compared to 2.8 percentage points among their male peers³.

Female employment rates have also contracted sharply. In July 2020, there was almost seven percentage points difference in the employment rates of racialized and non-racialized women (57.7% vs. 64.4%). By November 2020, the unemployment rate for women of colour was a staggering 10.5%, compared to just 6.2% among women generally⁴.

Gender remuneration differences in British Columbia are also stark, with more than a quarter of employed women (26.8%) surveyed as part of our research reporting an annual income of \$20,000 or less, compared to just 3.4% of men.

In the province, women were also more likely to encounter negativity from employers when it came to employing people requiring flexible workdays or hours (47.7 per cent vs. 29.6 per cent of men) and that gaps in resumes indicated a person was not a good employee (45.5 per cent vs 40.7 per cent).

Our research found that, compared to men, British Columbian women were more likely to experience fear, anxiety, or confusion over what to do when job seeking (34.7 per cent vs. 30.8 per cent). Women were also more likely to have suffered lower self-esteem from experiencing negative employer attitudes while jobseeking or working (59.8 per cent vs. 51.9 per cent).

² Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Women, Work and COVID-19: Priorities for Supporting Women and the Economy, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/women-work-and-covid19>

³ Statistics Canada, Labour force characteristics by immigrant status, annual, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410008301>

⁴ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Women, Work and COVID-19 <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/03/Women%20work%20and%20COVID.pdf>







Conclusion

We hope this report has helped contribute to the conversation about the need to rebuild the world of work. The research demonstrated a clear need to simplify employment services so that job seekers make successful labour market transitions and more employers are able to meet their workforce needs.

Our survey put the spotlight on four key areas that, if addressed, will support employment growth in British Columbia.

1. Employer misperceptions hampering progress

While our findings demonstrate that employer misperceptions are hampering progress, employers told us they need and value expert support for successful and sustainable job placement.

2. Employers (and individuals) need a navigator to ensure sustainable employment outcomes

This research underscored the need for a 'navigator' to help job seekers gain and retain employment and help employers to achieve more sustainable employment outcomes for their employees.

3. Soft skills and life skills are just as important as technical skills for employee recruitment and retention

We found that soft skills are seen by employers as just as valuable as technical skills in the workplace. This is an important insight, as it challenges misperceptions that barriered job seekers, particularly those without prior work experience, either do not have or cannot develop the required skills to get and keep a job.

4. The employment services system needs simplifying

Finally, to meet labour market needs, employers and job seekers need employment services that are easy to use and access. Our research highlights the continued work that is needed to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes in British Columbia and in Canada more generally.

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