



# BEYOND SURVIVAL: UNLOCKING NEWCOMERS' SKILLS, TALENT, AND ECONOMIC POTENTIAL



## ActionDignity & Community Partners Social Inclusion and Economic Empowerment Project (SIEEP)

A Community-based Participatory Action Research studying the impact of non-recognition of foreign credentials and requirement of Canadian work experience on the lives of newcomers, their families and communities.

Funded by



United Way  
Calgary and Area

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Study Context and Methodology</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Barriers to Labour Market Integration</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The Economic Consequences</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Mental Health, Identity, and Psychological Well-being</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Family Well-being, Intergenerational and Gendered Impacts</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Belonging, Social Inclusion, and Intersectionality</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Understanding Situation Through a Systems Lens</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Community Evidence Supporting Alberta's FCAC Recommendations</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Looking Forward: Strengthening Talent Utilization Through Community Evidence</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>62</b>

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Conducted through ActionDignity's Social Inclusion and Economic Empowerment Project (SIEEP), this Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) study was guided by the principles of collaboration, shared learning, and community leadership. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the CBPAR Steering Committee, whose guidance helped shape the research process and ensured that the study remained grounded in community realities and priorities. We also gratefully acknowledge the support of our funders, FCSS and United Way, whose contributions helped make this community-led research possible.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to our six community partner organizations:

- *Calgary Single Mothers Society*
- *Afghan Canadian Women for Global Cooperation (ACWGC)*
- *Chinar Kashmir Community Foundation (CKCF)*
- *Canadian Centre for Integrated Health and Social Services (CCIHSS)*
- *Eritrean Seniors Community Calgary*
- *Habesha United Sports & Cultural Society*

Their support in community outreach, participant engagement, and knowledge sharing was instrumental to the success of this study. We also acknowledge the valuable support of Momentum and the Alberta International Medical Graduates Association (AIMGA) in helping amplify the study and connect with potential participants.

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Team SIEEP  
ActionDignity

## Executive Summary

### Background and Context

Alberta increasingly relies on immigration to address labour shortages, strengthen economic competitiveness, and support community well-being. Many newcomers arrive with advanced education, professional expertise, and years of international work experience. However, barriers related to foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements continue to limit labour market integration for many internationally trained professionals.<sup>1</sup>

In 2025, Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee (FCAC) identified significant challenges within the province's foreign credential recognition landscape and outlined recommendations to improve workforce participation and talent utilization.<sup>1</sup> This Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) study builds upon that foundation by examining how these barriers are experienced by racialized newcomer communities in Calgary.

### About the Study

Conducted through ActionDignity's Social Inclusion and Economic Empowerment Project (SIEEP), this study employed a Community-Based Participatory Action Research approach to better understand the lived experiences and impact of non-recognition of foreign credentials and the barrier of Canadian work experience on the lives of newcomers, their families and communities. Guided by a CBPAR Steering Committee and supported by grassroots community organizations, the study centered community voices throughout the research process.

A total of 506 participants contributed through a mixed-methods survey exploring experiences related to employment, economic wellbeing, mental health, family life, and social inclusion.<sup>2</sup>



*I have seen multiple layoffs despite being told that I am a good worker. I have also been told that I am way too skilled or qualified for the jobs I applied for. Layoffs have played significantly on my psyche and taken away my confidence in myself along with taking away the income as well.*

— A Study Participant

## Key Findings

### Recognition Barriers Persist

Only **29.7%** reported that their foreign credentials had been fully recognized. In contrast, **70.3%** indicated that their credentials had either not been recognized, had only been partially recognized, or were still awaiting recognition.<sup>2</sup> These findings suggest that recognition barriers continue to affect the ability of many internationally trained professionals to pursue careers aligned with their qualifications and expertise.

### Canadian Work Experience Remains a Significant Barrier

Nearly half (**47.7%**) identified Canadian work experience requirements as a barrier to obtaining employment aligned with their skills and expertise.<sup>2</sup> Other commonly reported barriers included limited professional networks (**34.3%**), non-recognition of foreign credentials (**31.9%**), and the absence of Canadian references (**30.9%**).<sup>2</sup>

These findings reinforce concerns raised by FCAC regarding barriers that prevent effective utilization of internationally educated talent.<sup>1</sup>

### Deskilling and Underemployment are Widespread

Overall, **65.5%** reported having experienced underemployment at some point after arriving in Canada. Many described prolonged periods of working below their qualifications because of financial necessity, delayed recognition processes, or difficulties accessing professional opportunities. These experiences suggest that talent underutilization may contribute to deskilling, delayed career progression, and reduced economic mobility over time.

### The Impacts Extend Beyond Employment

Labour market barriers influenced multiple dimensions of participants' well-being.

- **62.2%** reported experiencing anxiety, stress, or depression associated with their employment experiences.<sup>2</sup>
- **50.7%** described a loss of confidence.<sup>2</sup>
- **45.0%** reported feeling undervalued because of their inability to secure employment aligned with their skills and experience.<sup>2</sup>

These findings indicate that labour market integration should be understood not only as an economic objective but also as a well-being objective.

## Families Bear the Costs

The impacts of labour market exclusion extended beyond individuals, affecting households and families.

- **63.6%** reported housing affordability pressures.<sup>2</sup>
- 50.5% experienced food insecurity or increased financial strain related to necessities.<sup>2</sup>
- 40.2% described family conflict or tension associated with economic pressures and employment challenges.<sup>2</sup>
- Participants also reported increased caregiving burdens, strained intergenerational relationships, and concerns regarding their children's future opportunities.

## Why These Findings Matter

The findings strongly align with concerns identified by Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee.<sup>1</sup> Participants described many of the same barriers highlighted by FCAC, including complex recognition processes, Canadian work experience requirements, underemployment, and restricted access to professional opportunities.

However, this study extends the conversation by demonstrating how these barriers affect economic security, mental well-being, family life, and social inclusion. The findings suggest that prolonged talent underutilization carries cumulative consequences. Over time, delayed labour market integration may contribute to deskilling, reduced economic mobility, and permanent disengagement from professional fields, resulting in costs for individuals, families, communities, employers, and Alberta's broader economy.

## Contribution of the Study

This study contributes three important insights to ongoing policy discussions.

First, it provides **community validation** of many of the challenges identified through FCAC and other labour market research.

Second, it contributes **lived-experience evidence** demonstrating how labour market barriers are experienced in everyday life by racialized newcomer communities.

Third, it applies a **systems perspective** to illustrate how employment outcomes intersect with housing stability, mental health, family well-being, and social inclusion.

Together, these findings strengthen the evidence base supporting implementation of Alberta's foreign credential recognition reforms while ensuring that community voices remain central to future policy development.

## Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements continue to limit the ability of many internationally trained professionals to contribute fully within Alberta's labour market. The evidence further suggests that the consequences extend far beyond employment, affecting economic security, mental well-being, family resilience, and community participation.

As Alberta advances implementation of the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee's recommendations, this study provides important community-based evidence regarding why reform matters and what is at stake if talent remains underutilized. Alberta's success depends not only on attracting skilled newcomers, but also on creating systems capable of recognizing, valuing, and utilizing the talent already present within its communities.

## Study Context and Methodology

### Background and Policy Context

Alberta's economic growth increasingly depends on its ability to attract, retain, and effectively utilize skilled talent. Immigration has become an important source of labour force growth, helping address workforce shortages, strengthen economic competitiveness, and support vibrant communities across the province. Through Canada's immigration system, many newcomers arrive with advanced education, professional expertise, leadership experience, and years of international work experience.

Despite these strengths, internationally trained professionals continue to encounter barriers when seeking employment aligned with their qualifications and experience. Foreign credential recognition processes, licensing requirements, employer preferences for Canadian work experience, and limited access to professional networks can delay or restrict access to professional opportunities.<sup>1, 5-8</sup> These barriers have been documented extensively within Canadian labour market literature and continue to influence employment outcomes among newcomer populations.

Recognizing the importance of these issues, the Government of Alberta established the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee (FCAC) to examine challenges affecting internationally trained professionals and identify opportunities to improve workforce participation and talent utilization. In its 2025 Final Report, FCAC highlighted concerns related to complex recognition pathways, inconsistent processes, financial barriers, and employer expectations surrounding Canadian work experience. The Committee emphasized that foreign credential recognition should not be understood solely as an immigration issue, but also as a workforce development and economic competitiveness priority.<sup>1</sup>

### Why Community-Based Evidence Matters

Research examining foreign credential recognition and labour market integration has traditionally relied upon administrative datasets, labour market indicators, earnings analyses, and institutional perspectives. These sources have generated important insights regarding employment outcomes, occupational mismatch, and barriers affecting internationally trained professionals. However, less attention has been devoted to understanding how these barriers are experienced within households, relationships, and communities.

Community-based evidence offers a different but complementary perspective. It provides insight into how labour market barriers shape economic security, mental well-being, family relationships,

caregiving responsibilities, and experiences of belonging. It also highlights the strategies individuals and communities adopt while navigating systems that may not fully recognize internationally acquired expertise.

Consistent with ActionDignity's commitment to advancing equity through grassroots leadership and Systems Change, this study sought to generate evidence that reflects both community realities and policy priorities. By centering lived experience, the study contributes an important dimension to ongoing conversations regarding foreign credential recognition and labour market integration.

## Study Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to generate community-based evidence regarding the experiences and impacts of foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements among racialized newcomer communities in Calgary. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1** Examine experiences related to foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements among internationally trained professionals
- 2** Explore how these barriers influence employment outcomes, including underemployment and occupational mismatch
- 3** Understand the social and economic impacts of labour market exclusion on individuals and families, including implications for housing stability, financial well-being, and mental health
- 4** Document community experiences related to belonging, inclusion, and access to opportunities
- 5** Identify systems-level considerations that may inform ongoing implementation of Alberta's foreign credential recognition reforms

The study does not seek to duplicate existing policy reviews or labour market analyses. Rather, it contributes lived-experience evidence that complements existing research while ensuring that the voices of racialized newcomer communities remain central to discussions regarding workforce participation and Systems Change.

## Community-Based Participatory Action Research Approach

This study employed a Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) approach, recognizing that communities are not merely subjects of research but essential partners in generating knowledge and identifying solutions. CBPAR emphasizes collaboration, mutual learning, shared ownership, and the meaningful inclusion of people with lived experience throughout the research process.

Consistent with ActionDignity's systems-change approach, the study sought not only to document community experiences but also to strengthen community capacity to participate in conversations affecting policies and systems that shape their lives through Community Action Plans.

The research was guided by a CBPAR Steering Committee comprising representatives from ActionDignity, grassroots organizations, and community leaders with lived experience of foreign credential recognition and labour market integration challenges. The Steering Committee provided guidance throughout the study, including refining research questions, reviewing data collection tools, supporting recruitment strategies, interpreting findings, and identifying priorities for knowledge mobilization.

The study was conducted in partnership with six community organizations representing diverse racialized newcomer communities in Calgary:

1. Calgary Single Mothers Society
2. Afghan Canadian Women for Global Cooperation (ACWGC)
3. Canadian Centre for Integrated Health and Social Services (CCIHSS)
4. Eritrean Seniors Community Calgary
5. Chinar Kashmir Community Foundation (CKCF)
6. Calgary Habesha United Sports & Cultural Society

These organizations played an important role in participant outreach, community engagement, cultural adaptation of research approaches, and dissemination of information within their networks. Their involvement strengthened the accessibility, relevance, and credibility of the research process.

The study also benefited from the support of organizations such as Momentum and the Alberta International Medical Graduates Association (AIMGA), which helped amplify the study and connect with potential participants.

## Study Design and Participant Profile

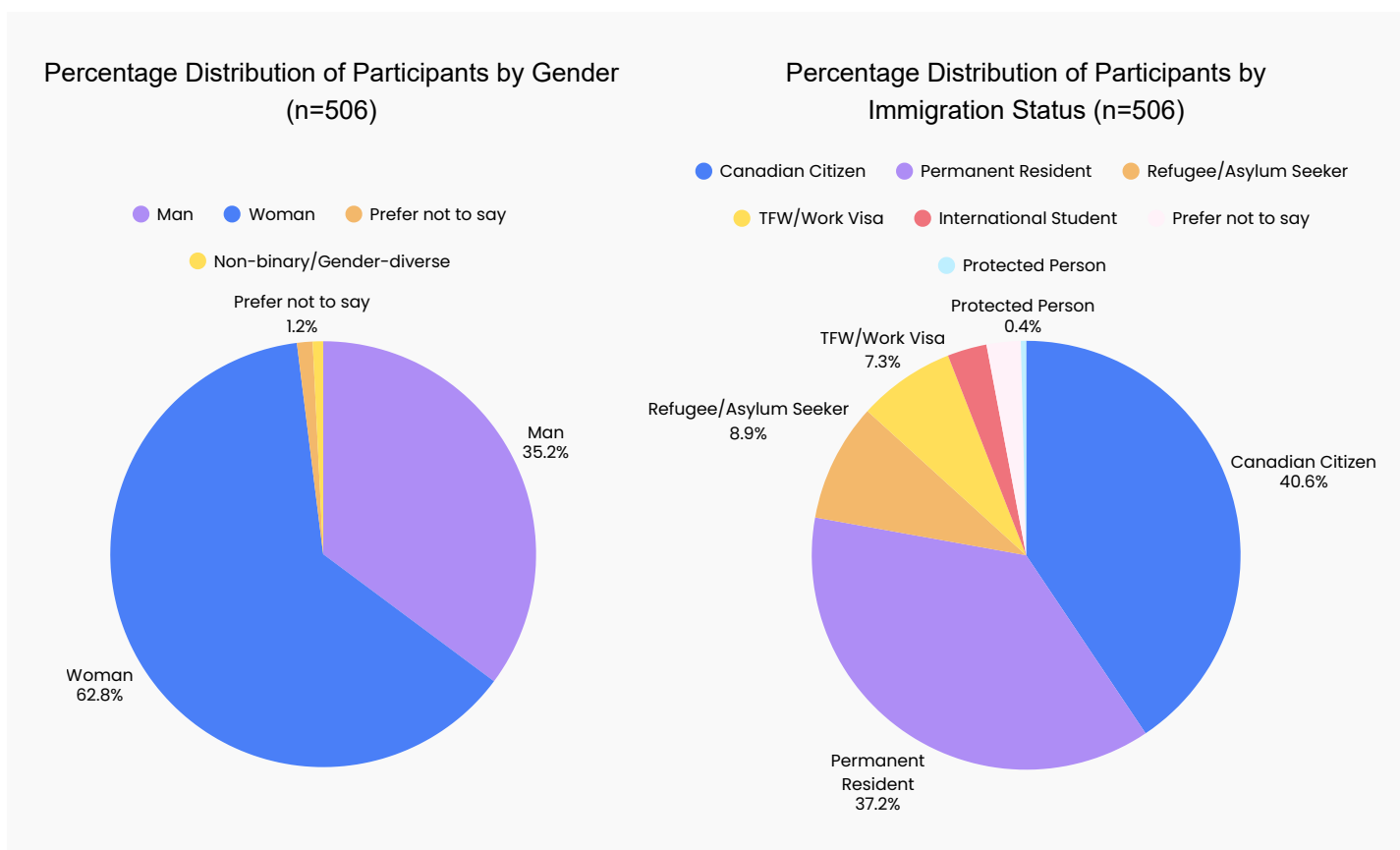
The study utilized a mixed-methods survey design where quantitative questions generated descriptive information regarding employment experiences and associated impacts, while qualitative responses provided opportunities for participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

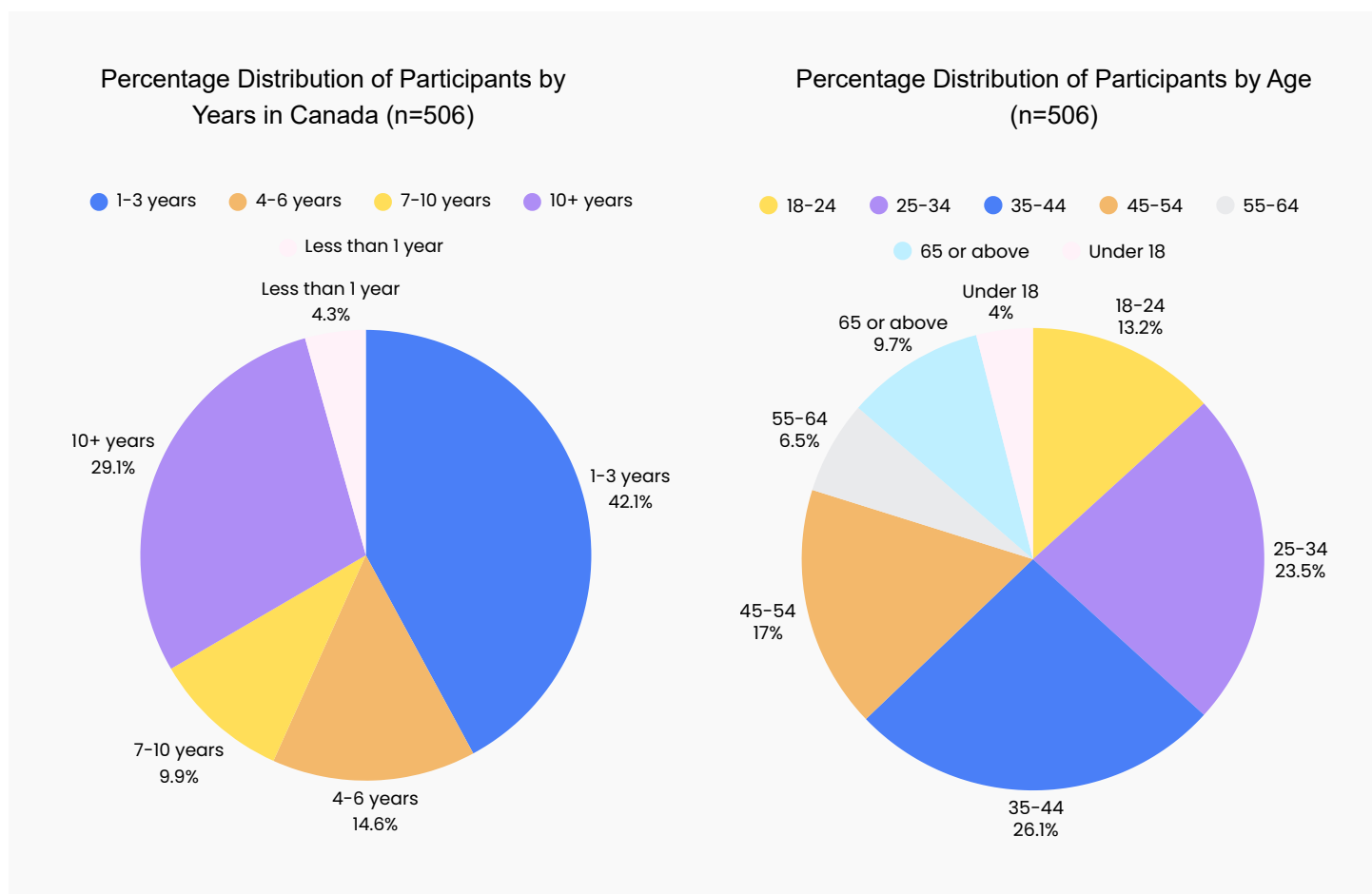
The selection criteria for participants were:

- be 18 years of age or older
- identify as racialized
- live or have lived in Calgary
- be a recent immigrant to Canada

A total of 506 participants completed the survey. Recruitment occurred through ActionDignity's community networks, partner organizations, community events, and targeted outreach efforts. The community-led recruitment approach helped ensure participation from diverse ethnocultural groups that are often underrepresented in traditional research settings.

Participants represented a wide range of professional backgrounds, educational experiences, and stages of settlement. Many arrived in Canada with significant international qualifications and work experience but reported challenges securing employment aligned with their expertise.





These demographic characteristics provide important context for interpreting the findings presented throughout this report.

### Data Analysis, Limitations, and the Structure of the Report

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns and trends across participant responses. Qualitative responses were examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring experiences, perceptions, and priorities emerging from participants' narratives.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings strengthened the overall analysis by allowing statistical patterns to be understood alongside community perspectives and lived experience. Ongoing engagement with the Steering Committee further supported the interpretation of findings and enhanced the trustworthiness of the research process.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study relied on a

non-probability sample and therefore cannot be generalized to all newcomer populations in Alberta. Second, the findings are based on self-reported experiences and perceptions. Finally, while participants represented diverse communities and experiences, the study was conducted within Calgary and may not capture regional variations across the province. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable community-based evidence regarding issues that have significant implications for workforce participation, economic inclusion, and Systems Change.

Participant quotations have been reproduced verbatim where possible. Minor edits for clarity, grammar, and confidentiality have been made where necessary without altering meaning. Ellipses indicate omitted text. No identifier information for participants is being shared.

The chapters that follow examine the findings through multiple interconnected lenses. Chapter 2 explores labour market integration and the persistent barriers. Subsequent chapters examine impacts on economic security, mental well-being, family life, intersectional experiences, and social inclusion. The report then applies a systems perspective to consider how community evidence can inform ongoing implementation of Alberta's foreign credential recognition reforms.

Together, these chapters position labour market integration not simply as an employment issue, but as a multidimensional issue influencing wellbeing, family resilience, and community participation.

## Barriers to Labour Market Integration

### Introduction

Alberta's economic growth increasingly depends on attracting and effectively utilizing skilled immigrant talent. While many newcomers arrive with strong educational backgrounds and professional experience, they often face barriers to securing employment that match their qualifications.

Findings from this study suggest that Alberta's challenge is not a lack of talent, but the underutilization of existing talent. Participants reported underemployment, occupational mismatch, and difficulties entering professions for which they were already credentialed. These concerns align with those raised by Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee (FCAC), which identified credential recognition as both a workforce and economic priority.

This chapter examines how credential recognition challenges and Canadian work experience requirements contribute to talent underutilization among racialized newcomers.



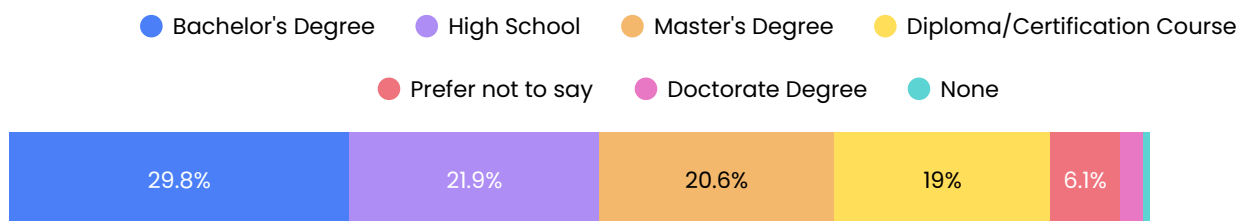
*I was working at the same level as a school dropout and a 12th pass despite having an MBA. Pay was fine, but there was no actual learning. I felt my skills slipping away.*

— A Study Participant

### Internationally Educated Talent within the Study Population

Participants were highly educated and represented diverse professional backgrounds.

Percentage Distribution of Participants by Highest Level of Education Attained (n=506)



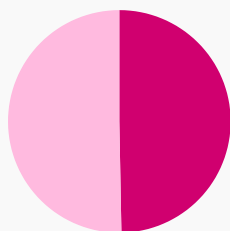
Participants have experience in fields such as education, engineering, business, healthcare, law, skilled trades, and social services. About 2 in every 10 participants hold a master's or doctoral degree, 3 in 10 have a bachelor's degree, while another 2 in 10 have completed a diploma or certification program. These findings demonstrate that many newcomers arrive with significant human capital. The key issue is whether systems effectively recognize and utilize these skills.

## Recognition Gaps and Professional Re-Entry Challenges

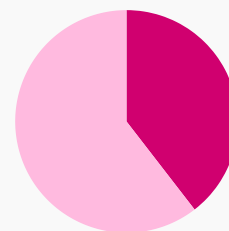
Experiences with credential recognition varied considerably. Among respondents:

- **29.1%** reported full recognition of their foreign credentials
- **25.9%** reported partial recognition
- **8.5%** were awaiting recognition
- **35.2%** reported no recognition

Nearly half of the participants had repeated courses, retrained, or pursued additional Canadian credentials despite prior qualifications.



39.6% respondents identified these requirements as a significant financial burden.



## Employment Alignment and Occupational Mismatch

A significant gap existed between participants' qualifications and employment outcomes.

When asked whether their employment aligned with their education and experience:

- **13.1%** reported full alignment between their qualifications and current employment
- **21.0%** reported partial alignment
- **47.3%** reported no alignment
- **12.9%** were uncertain

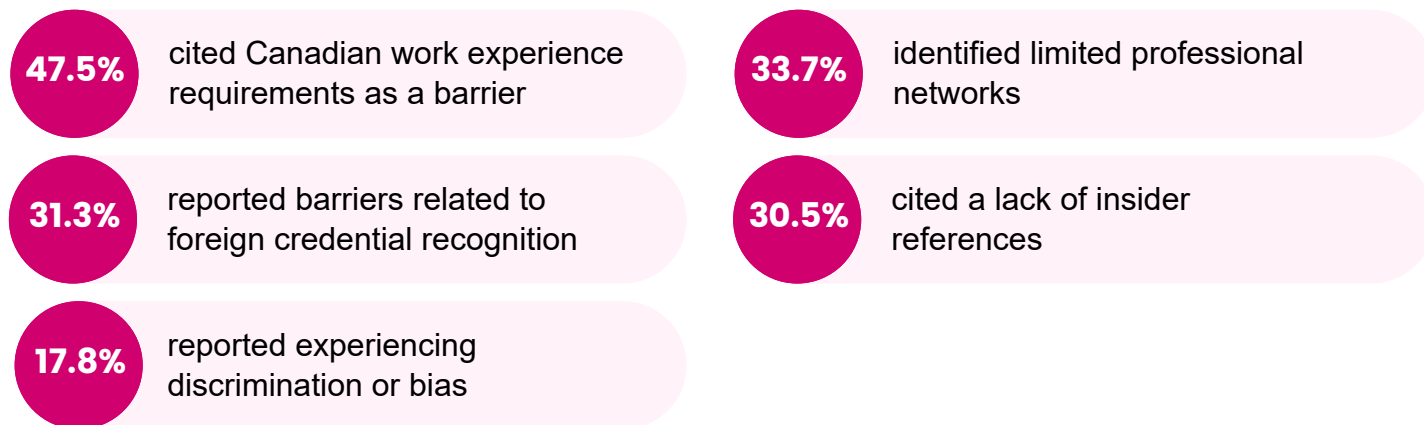


*It's hard for me as a medical practitioner and public health consultant with years of experience to start working as a low-wage instructor, affecting mental and family health.*

— A Study Participant

## Canadian Work Experience as a Structural Barrier

Canadian work experience requirements emerged as a major barrier to labour market integration. Among respondents unable to secure aligned employment:



Participants described the contradiction of being selected for immigration based on their expertise while struggling to have that expertise recognized in the labour market.

## Survival Employment and Economic Necessity

Many participants accepted jobs below their qualifications out of necessity. Among those who had worked below their skill level:

- **57.4%** cited financial necessity as the primary reason
- **32.3%** identified Canadian work experience requirements
- **30.9%** reported limited professional networks
- **19.6%** cited foreign credential recognition barriers
- **19.0%** identified family pressures

Participants often accepted these roles to support their families, meet basic needs, and establish Canadian work histories.

## The Hidden Costs of Talent Underutilization

Underutilization affected both economic well-being and personal well-being. Participants reported:

- **57.4%** reported mental health stress and burnout
- **51.7%** reported financial instability and debt
- **31.1%** experienced exclusion from professional networks
- **30.5%** reported family conflict and stress
- **22.8%** experienced humiliation and feelings of betrayal

These findings highlight the broader social and economic costs of occupational mismatch.



*When I first looked for work, my previous experience wasn't recognized, even though I was qualified. Due to lack of Canadian experience, I ended up taking survival jobs just to get by. This made me feel frustrated and stressed, and it affected my confidence at home and at work. Over time, I felt my skills slipping away, which hurt my mental health and made it harder to see a clear future.*

— A Study Participant

## From Labour Market Integration to Talent Utilization

Participants consistently expressed a desire to contribute through meaningful employment aligned with their expertise. The findings suggest that policy discussions should move beyond whether newcomers can find jobs and instead focus on whether Alberta is fully utilizing the talent it recruits.

## Conclusion

Newcomers arrive in Canada with education, skills, professional experience, and high hopes for the future. They expect to continue their careers and contribute to their new communities. For many, however, the reality is very different. Instead of finding meaningful employment, many encounter barriers that prevent them from fully utilizing their talents. The findings consistently point to three key challenges: limited recognition of foreign credentials, Canadian work experience requirements, and limited access to professional networks.

As a result, many highly skilled newcomers accept survival jobs or employment that do not match their education and experience. The issue is therefore not simply unemployment, but the inability to access meaningful employment that reflects their qualifications and enables them to contribute to their full potential.

These findings are consistent with concerns raised by the Foreign Credentials Advisory Committee (FCAC) regarding the complexity, cost, and lengthy delays associated with foreign credential recognition. However, this study also contributes to an important insight: employment alone is not an adequate measure of successful labour market integration. Rather, meaningful integration occurs when newcomers can secure work that recognizes their qualifications, values their experience, and enables them to contribute fully to Alberta's economy and communities.

The findings also reveal the hidden costs of losing the immigrant talent pool. When internationally trained professionals are unable to apply their knowledge and skills, the impacts extend far beyond the workplace. Participants reported financial instability, stress and burnout, exclusion from professional networks, family conflict, and feelings of humiliation and betrayal. These findings suggest that occupational mismatch is not only an economic loss but also a human and social cost that affects individuals, families, communities, and Alberta's broader prosperity.

## The Economic Consequences

### Introduction

The impacts of foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements extend well beyond employment, affecting household stability, housing security, financial well-being, and long-term economic mobility. These barriers shape the conditions through which newcomers build their lives, support their families, and contribute to society. Consistent with the Foreign Credential Advisory Committee's emphasis on improving labour market integration to strengthen Alberta's workforce and economy, this study finds that effective talent utilization also promotes financial security, family well-being, and broader economic inclusion.

This chapter examines how the barriers to accessing meaningful opportunities contribute to economic vulnerability among racialized newcomer households.



*Upon arriving in Canada, my foreign medical credentials were not recognized and I couldn't secure a job. I had to enroll in another degree program to get into the Healthcare field, had to do an academic program for about 3.5 years, and in the process incurred a student loan of about 45,000 CAD.*

— A Study Participant

### Employment Quality Matters

Public discussions regarding labour market integration often focus on whether newcomers are employed. Participants described accepting such employment to meet immediate obligations related to:



Housing Costs



Food and Household Expenses



Childcare Responsibilities



Transportation Needs



Financial Commitments to Family

These findings highlight the distinction between employment and meaningful labour market integration. Employment alone does not necessarily lead to economic mobility, career advancement, or long-term security. Rather, access to quality employment that utilizes existing skills and provides opportunities for growth is critical to economic inclusion.

## Economic Insecurity Despite Employment

Participants frequently described experiences of financial insecurity despite remaining active participants in the labour market. Survey findings indicate that:

**58.5%**

of respondents reported experiencing lower pay, financial instability, or increased debt due to underemployment.

**44.8%**

reported using savings or taking on debt to meet basic needs.

**42.8%**

described working multiple part-time jobs to cope with financial pressures.

These findings suggest that employment does not automatically translate into economic security when employment fails to reflect individuals' qualifications and earning potential. Participants described difficulties saving money, managing unexpected expenses, and planning for the future. Several respondents indicated that their financial circumstances would likely have been different had their international qualifications and professional experience been fully recognized.

## Housing Stability and Affordability

Housing emerged as one of the most significant economic concerns identified by participants.

**71.1%** reported experiencing pressure related to high housing costs.

**27.6%** indicated that financial constraints limited access to private transportation options.

Participants frequently linked housing challenges to underemployment and reduced earning potential. Several respondents described:

- difficulty managing rent increases
- delays in pursuing home ownership
- reliance on shared housing arrangements
- ongoing anxiety regarding housing affordability

These findings suggest that not finding jobs in their area of education or experience contributes to broader economic vulnerabilities that extend beyond the labour market itself. Housing security is closely tied to income stability. Consequently, barriers that limit access to professional employment may also influence individuals' ability to establish stable housing conditions for themselves and their families.

## Food Insecurity and Cost-of-Living Pressures

Participants consistently described the cumulative effects of rising costs and constrained earning opportunities. Survey findings indicate that:

**56.5%** of respondents experienced food insecurity or challenges related to increasing grocery costs.

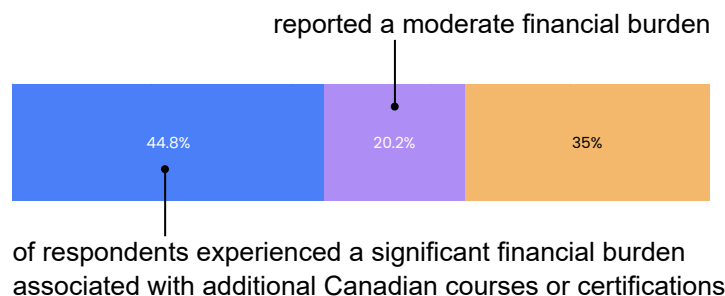
**55.8%** reported having no extra income available for recreation, vacations, or hobbies.

Participants described making difficult choices regarding household expenditures while attempting to meet essential needs. Several respondents reported postponing non-essential spending, reducing participation in social activities, and limiting opportunities available to their families because of financial constraints. These findings illustrate how underemployment can influence quality of life beyond immediate employment outcomes.

## The Financial Burden of Professional Re-Entry

An important theme emerging from participant experiences was the financial cost associated with pursuing professional recognition.

Survey findings indicate that a total of 65% of respondents reported experiencing a financial burden associated with pursuing Canadian courses, certifications, or other credential recognition requirements



Participants described expenses related to:

- credential assessments
- licensing examinations
- bridging programs
- professional memberships
- additional educational requirements
- language assessments

For many respondents, these investments occurred during periods of financial instability. Participants often expressed uncertainty regarding whether additional expenditures would ultimately result in improved employment outcomes. These findings suggest that professional re-entry pathways may impose substantial economic demands on individuals already experiencing reduced earning potential.

## Delayed Economic Mobility

Participants frequently described postponing important life goals because of prolonged underemployment and economic uncertainty. Survey findings indicate that 40.8% of respondents had significantly delayed pursuing further education, career goals, family formation, or responsibilities toward parents because of financial constraints.



*It is stressful. Especially as a newcomer, you need to work, but almost every employer asks for Canadian experience and if you own a car. As a newcomer, I don't understand how anyone can expect these from me without giving me an opportunity to start somewhere.*

— A Study Participant

Participants described postponing plans related to home ownership, retirement savings, further education, entrepreneurship, family reunification and supporting aging relatives. These findings suggest that barriers to appropriate employment opportunities may disrupt long-term pathways to economic mobility. Migration is often motivated by aspirations for improved economic opportunities. When labour market integration does not occur as anticipated, participants may experience delays in achieving those aspirations.

## Economic Security Through a Systems Lens

Participants' experiences demonstrate that economic insecurity is often a downstream consequence of labour market barriers. Foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements influence access to professional employment. Professional employment influences earnings and career progression. Earnings affect housing stability, food security, savings, and financial resilience. These conditions shape broader dimensions of wellbeing and opportunity.

Viewed through a systems lens, economic vulnerability cannot be understood solely as an individual outcome. Rather, it reflects the interconnected effects of barriers operating across labour market systems. This perspective highlights the importance of addressing upstream factors influencing talent utilization.

## Conclusion

The findings show that labour market barriers affect more than employment. They shape newcomers' ability to build stable lives, support their families, and contribute fully to Alberta. Participants' experiences suggest that the more important question is not whether newcomers find employment, but whether they find meaningful employment that utilizes their qualifications, skills, and professional experience. While many respondents secured jobs after arriving in Canada, these positions often did not reflect their education or expertise. For many participants, survival employment became a necessary “coping” strategy to maintain short-term financial stability while navigating barriers to professional employment.

The study also suggests that employment alone does not guarantee economic security. When newcomers are unable to access employment that matches their education and skills, reduced earning potential often leads to housing stress, food insecurity, debt, and the financial burden of professional re-entry. Together, these pressures delay important life goals such as home ownership, further education, entrepreneurship, retirement planning, and family reunification, slowing long-term economic mobility for individuals and their families.

Viewed through a systems lens, these outcomes are not simply the result of individual circumstances. They reflect interconnected barriers, including foreign credential non-recognition, Canadian work experience requirements, licensing processes, and limited access to professional networks that prevent internationally trained professionals from fully contributing their talents. Improving talent utilization is therefore not only an employment issue but also an investment in household well-being, economic mobility, and Alberta's long-term prosperity.

## Mental Health, Identity, and Psychological Wellbeing

### Introduction

Employment is often understood as a source of income and economic security. However, meaningful employment also contributes to identity, purpose, self-worth, social participation, and psychological well-being. When individuals are unable to utilize their education, professional experience, and skills, the labor market exclusion becomes a human well-being issue.

Participants in this study consistently described the emotional and psychological impacts of foreign credential non-recognition, Canadian work experience requirements, and prolonged underemployment. Experiences of occupational mismatch often influenced how participants viewed themselves, their future opportunities, and their sense of belonging within Canadian society.

This chapter explores the relationship between labour market exclusion and mental well-being, highlighting the ways in which systemic barriers shape confidence, identity, dignity, and hope.



*As an internationally trained medical doctor living alone in Canada, the barriers to credential recognition have taken a real toll on my mental health. The long delays and lack of clarity around verifying my medical degree create constant stress, especially without family support here. My skills are going unused, and the feeling of de-skilling affects my confidence and sense of identity. Even from far away, my family feels the tension and worry, and this experience has deeply impacted both my well-being and my sense of belonging.*

— A Study Participant

### Mental Health Consequences of Labour Market Exclusion

Participants frequently identify emotional distress associated with barriers to professional employment, suggesting that the process of labour market integration can have substantial emotional consequences. Survey findings indicate that:

**62.2%** of respondents experienced anxiety, stress, or depression related to their employment experiences.



**45%** described feeling undervalued despite possessing significant qualifications and experience.



**49.3%** reported that underemployment had negatively affected their overall quality of life.



**43.5%** indicated that employment-related challenges had strained their personal relationships and family well-being.



Participants often described feelings of frustration arising from repeated rejection to secure employment aligned with their expertise. For many, prolonged periods of underemployment created uncertainty regarding future career prospects and economic stability. These findings suggest that barriers to labour market integration have implications that extend well beyond economic outcomes.

Participants often described the process of rebuilding careers in Canada as emotionally demanding. In addition to adapting to a new country, respondents reported navigating:



- unfamiliar recognition systems
- financial pressures associated with retraining
- repeated requests for Canadian experience
- uncertainty regarding career pathways
- competing family responsibilities

The cumulative effect of these challenges often contributed to emotional exhaustion. For some participants, repeated rejection from employers despite meeting educational and professional requirements generated feelings of discouragement and hopelessness. While many respondents demonstrated resilience and determination, they also emphasized the emotional costs associated with repeatedly proving their competence within systems that appeared to discount internationally acquired expertise. These findings suggest that labour market integration should be understood not only as an economic issue but also as a matter of psychological well-being.

## Professional Identity and Loss of Purpose

Participants frequently described strong professional identities developed through years of education, training, and work experience in their countries of origin. Many participants had previously occupied positions of leadership, responsibility, and expertise. The inability to practice within their professions often resulted in feelings of grief, loss, and disconnection from aspects of identity that had previously provided meaning and purpose.

Survey findings revealed that 50.7% of respondents experienced a decline in confidence related to their professional abilities. In qualitative responses, participants described questioning their competence despite possessing extensive experience and internationally recognized credentials. Others expressed concerns that prolonged periods away from their professions would result in permanent systemic deskilling and reduced confidence. For respondents who had invested significant time and resources into their education and careers, the inability to work in their fields represented more than a disruption in employment. It challenged their sense of identity, achievement, and future aspirations. These experiences highlight the important role that meaningful employment plays in shaping identity and self-perception.

## Dignity, Recognition, and Feeling Valued

A recurring theme throughout the qualitative responses was the importance of dignity. Participants often frame employment not only as a source of income but also as a reflection of social recognition and contribution. Survey data showed that 45.0% of respondents felt undervalued despite possessing significant qualifications and experience. Several participants described feeling invisible within the labour market, while others expressed disappointment that professional accomplishments recognized elsewhere appeared to carry limited value in Canada.

These experiences influenced participants' perceptions of fairness and belonging. For some, repeated experiences of dismissal or exclusion contributed to feelings of social marginalization and reduced trust in institutional systems designed to support newcomer integration. The findings suggest that recognition extends beyond formal credential assessment processes. Recognition also encompasses the extent to which individuals feel respected, valued, and trusted within workplaces and communities.

## Coping Strategies and Sources of Resilience

Despite the challenges described throughout the study, participants also demonstrated considerable resilience. Many respondents described drawing strength from:

- family relationships
- faith and spirituality
- community networks
- volunteer opportunities
- mentorship relationships
- personal determination to achieve long-term goals

Participants frequently emphasized their commitment to supporting their families and contributing positively to Canadian society. Others described pursuing additional education, professional development opportunities, or alternative pathways into their chosen fields despite encountering repeated barriers.

At the same time, the findings suggest that resilience often emerged in response to necessity rather than choice. The fact that many participants persevered despite significant obstacles should not obscure the structural conditions that contributed to their distress. These findings highlight the importance of community assets and social support in promoting well-being during periods of labour market transition. However, resilience should not be interpreted as a justification for maintaining barriers that contribute to unnecessary hardship.

## **Mental Well-being through a Systems Lens**

The findings suggest that psychological well-being is shaped by factors extending beyond individual coping capacity. Barriers related to credential recognition and Canadian work experience influence access to meaningful employment. In turn, employment experiences affect financial security, social participation, and perceptions of future opportunities. The survey findings illustrate these interconnected relationships.

Viewed collectively, these findings demonstrate that labour market exclusion can have cascading effects across multiple dimensions of well-being. Viewed through a systems lens, mental health outcomes emerge not solely from individual circumstances but also from the broader environments in which people live and work. This perspective underscores the importance of addressing upstream factors that contribute to distress while simultaneously strengthening protective factors that promote well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The findings show that employment is about far more than earning an income. For many participants, meaningful employment represented identity, purpose, dignity, hope, and belonging.

When barriers prevent internationally trained professionals from using their education, skills, and experience, the impacts extended beyond the workplace to affect confidence, professional identity, and overall well-being. These experiences occurred alongside financial hardship and delayed life plans, highlighting the close relationship between employment, economic security, and well-being.

Although participants demonstrated remarkable resilience through the support of their families, faith, communities, and personal determination, resilience should not be mistaken for evidence that existing systems are working. Rather, it reflects the extraordinary efforts individuals make to overcome barriers that continue to limit their ability to contribute fully.

Viewed through a systems lens, labour market integration is not simply about filling vacancies or increasing employment rates. It is about creating conditions in which internationally trained professionals are recognized, valued, and able to contribute meaningfully. In doing so, Alberta strengthens not only its workforce but also the dignity, belonging, and well-being of the people it has intentionally welcomed.

## Family Well-being, Intergenerational and Gendered Impacts

### Introduction

This section will delve into how labour market barriers rippled through the entire family system and across generations.

The impacts of foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements extend beyond individuals seeking professional employment. Participants in this study consistently described how prolonged underemployment and economic insecurity affected family relationships, caregiving responsibilities, parenting experiences, and aspirations for future generations.

For many participants, migration represented an investment in the future well-being of their families. When there is a delay in achieving professional stability, the consequences do not stop with the individual worker. They are felt by spouses, children, aging parents, and future generations. Labour market barriers become family well-being issues.



*Growing up, my mother always dreamed of becoming a nurse. She had a passion for helping others and was determined to make a career out of it. However, when we moved to Canada, her nursing degree and experience were not recognized. She was forced to take on low-paying jobs and was constantly struggling to make ends meet. This not only affected her mental health but also had a ripple effect on our family and community.*

*We were unable to afford quality healthcare (dental treatment), and my mother's dream of making a positive impact on her profession was shattered. Seeing her struggle and feeling helpless in the face of barriers to employment and credential non-recognition took a toll on all of us. It is a personal story that highlights the negative impact of these issues on an individual's mental health, family, and community.*

— A Study Participant

### Labour Market Barriers Become Family Challenges

Participants frequently described the ways in which employment barriers affected the broader household. Survey findings indicate that:

**43.5%**

of respondents reported that underemployment had strained family relationships and overall family well-being.

**40.2%**

experienced family conflict or tension related to financial pressures and employment circumstances.

**9.8%**

reported reduced communication and quality time with their children.

Participants often described the emotional difficulty of balancing financial responsibilities with family expectations. For many, survival employment required working irregular hours, multiple jobs, or accepting positions with limited flexibility, reducing opportunities for family engagement. These findings suggest that the effects of labour market exclusion are often experienced collectively rather than individually.

## Financial Pressure Shapes Family Life

Economic insecurity emerged as a significant source of stress within households. As discussed in the previous chapter, many participants experienced housing pressures, food insecurity, debt accumulation, and delayed economic mobility. These challenges frequently influenced family relationships and household decision-making. Participants described:



- **disagreements related to financial priorities**
- **stress associated with meeting basic needs**
- **concerns regarding children's well-being and opportunities**
- **feelings of guilt related to an inability to contribute in ways they had anticipated prior to migration**

Several respondents noted that economic instability affected their confidence as parents and caregivers. These findings illustrate the interconnected relationship between economic well-being and family functioning.

## Gender Shapes Family Experiences

The findings suggest that labour market barriers may have distinct implications for women and men within newcomer households. Survey findings indicate that 31.7% of participants identified increased caregiving responsibilities as an important consequence of underemployment. Qualitative responses highlighted that women often experienced multiple and overlapping pressures, including:

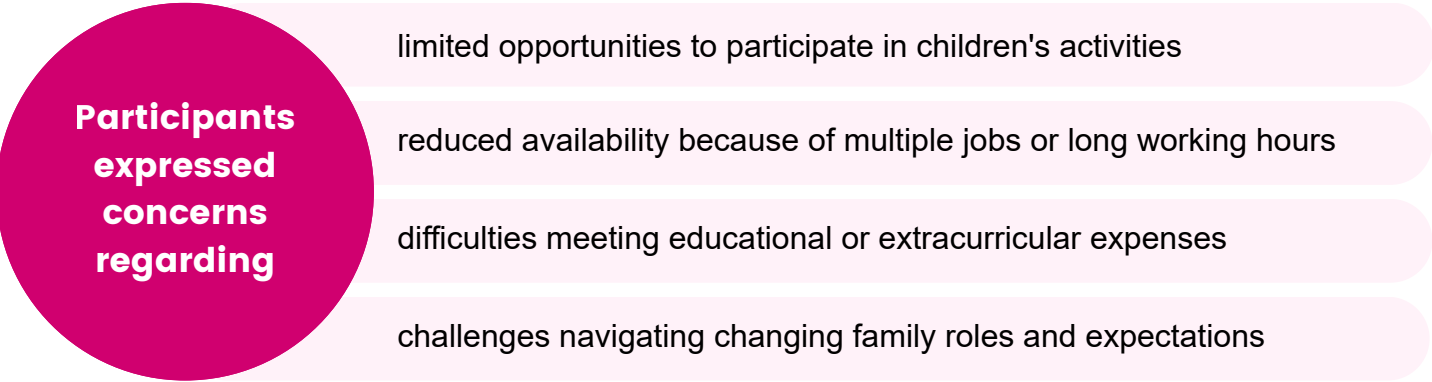
- managing childcare responsibilities
- pursuing additional training or credentialing requirements
- contributing to household income through precarious employment
- supporting family settlement and adaptation processes

Some participants described postponing career aspirations because of caregiving demands, while others reported difficulties balancing professional re-entry with family obligations. These findings underscore the importance of applying an intersectional lens when examining labour market integration experiences.

## Parenting and Impact on children

Participants frequently identified concerns regarding the effects of employment-related stress on relationships with children. Survey findings indicate that:

- **24.2%** of respondents reported strained intergenerational relationships associated with employment and financial pressures; and
- **19.8%** described reduced communication and time with their children.



**Participants  
expressed  
concerns  
regarding**

limited opportunities to participate in children's activities

reduced availability because of multiple jobs or long working hours

difficulties meeting educational or extracurricular expenses

challenges navigating changing family roles and expectations

For some participants, the inability to achieve anticipated economic stability generated concerns regarding whether migration had fulfilled its intended promise of creating improved opportunities for future generations. At the same time, many respondents remain strongly motivated by the desire to provide better educational and social opportunities for their children.

## When Family Dreams are Put on Hold

Migration decisions are often grounded in hopes for greater stability and opportunity. However, participants described postponing important family goals because of prolonged underemployment and economic uncertainty. Survey findings indicate that 40.8% of respondents had significantly delayed major life decisions because of financial constraints.

Participants described postponing home ownership, family reunification, further education, retirement planning, support for aging parents, and decisions related to family expansion. These findings suggest that labour market barriers may disrupt anticipated life trajectories and reshape family plans over extended periods.

## The Hidden Cost of Survival Employment: Time

A recurring theme throughout participant narratives was the challenge of balancing work, family responsibilities, and professional advancement. Participants frequently described working:

- multiple jobs
- evening shifts
- weekend schedules
- temporary positions

Others reported simultaneously pursuing credential recognition pathways, additional education, or professional licensing requirements. These competing demands often reduce the time available for family relationships, community participation, personal well-being, and caregiving responsibilities.

## Family Resilience and Community Strengths

Despite these challenges, participants also described important sources of resilience within families and communities. Respondents emphasized the importance of:



Mutual support  
among family  
members



Encouragement  
from spouses and  
extended family



Faith and  
Spirituality



Community  
Relationships



Shared  
Commitment to  
Long-term Goals

Many participants described drawing motivation from their desire to create better opportunities for their children and future generations. These findings highlight the strengths and assets that families mobilize while navigating settlement and labour market transitions. At the same time, reliance on resilience should not obscure the structural barriers that contribute to family stress and delayed economic security.

## Family Well-being Through a Systems Lens

The findings suggest that family well-being is shaped by conditions operating across multiple systems. Barriers related to credential recognition and Canadian work experience influence access to meaningful employment. Underemployment experiences shape household income, time availability, and economic security. These factors result in financial stress, long working hours, multiple jobs, and time poverty. These affect family relationships, caregiving responsibilities, parenting experiences, and future planning.

Viewed through a systems lens, family outcomes cannot be understood independently from labour market conditions and broader institutional environments. This perspective reinforces the importance of addressing upstream barriers that influence both individual and family well-being.

## Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the effects of not having access to meaningful economic/professional opportunities extend well beyond the individual worker. Labour market barriers that limit access to meaningful employment often lead to financial strain, which in turn shapes family relationships, caregiving responsibilities, parenting experiences, and long-term aspirations. For many participants, survival employment meant working multiple jobs, irregular hours, or pursuing professional re-entry while balancing family responsibilities. As a result, families experienced not only financial strain but also the loss of valuable time together and reduced opportunities to participate in community life. The impacts are therefore felt not only by workers but also by their spouses, children, and future generations. The Good Job Journey identifies time as an important dimension of employment quality, recognizing that economic participation should not come at the expense of family wellbeing and community engagement (Momentum, 2024).

Despite these challenges, participants consistently described remarkable resilience, drawing strength from their families, communities, faith, and a shared commitment to creating better opportunities for their children. However, resilience should not be viewed as a substitute for systemic change. Rather, it reflects the determination of families to overcome barriers that continue to limit

their ability to fully contribute their knowledge and skills.

Viewed through a systems lens, the findings suggest that improving talent utilization is about more than increasing workforce participation. It is an investment in stronger families, greater economic stability, healthier relationships, and better opportunities for future generations. Policies that remove barriers to meaningful employment therefore strengthen not only Alberta's economy but also the well-being and resilience of the families who have chosen to build their lives here.

## Belonging, Social Inclusion, and Intersectionality

### Introduction

Labour market integration is often discussed in terms of employment outcomes and economic contributions. However, participants in this study described broader social consequences associated with foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements. Their experiences suggest that barriers to meaningful employment can influence individuals' sense of belonging, social participation, and trust in the institutions and systems that shape their daily lives.

For many participants, migration represented not only an opportunity for economic advancement but also a desire to become active members of their new communities. When qualifications and experience were repeatedly discounted, participants described questioning whether they were fully accepted or valued within Canadian society.

This chapter explores how labour market experiences shape social inclusion, belonging, and community participation among racialized newcomers.



*As a newcomer, I experienced how non-recognition of foreign credentials creates real emotional and financial stress. Despite having education and skills, I had to start over in low-paying jobs to “prove myself.” This affected my confidence, mental health, and sense of dignity. I also saw the same struggle across my community qualified professionals facing de-skilling, stress, and burnout, which impacts families and slows community progress.*

— A Study Participant

### Belonging Beyond Employment

Participants frequently described employment as more than a source of income. Meaningful employment represented recognition, contribution, and inclusion. When individuals are unable to secure employment aligned with their qualifications, the consequences may extend beyond economic hardship. Participants described feeling disconnected from professional communities, excluded from decision-making spaces, and uncertain about whether their expertise was valued.

Survey findings indicate that 45.0% of respondents felt undervalued despite possessing substantial qualifications and experience. In qualitative responses, participants frequently linked these experiences to broader questions of fairness, inclusion, and belonging. These findings suggest that labour market experiences can influence how individuals perceive their place within society.

## Social Isolation and Reduced Participation

Participants often described withdrawing from social activities during periods of prolonged underemployment. Survey findings indicate that 31.1% of respondents experienced social isolation associated with employment challenges. Participants attributed these experiences to factors such as:

- financial barriers limit participation in community activities
- feelings of embarrassment related to underemployment
- reduced confidence in professional and social settings
- time constraints associated with multiple jobs
- the emotional exhaustion associated with repeated labour market setbacks.

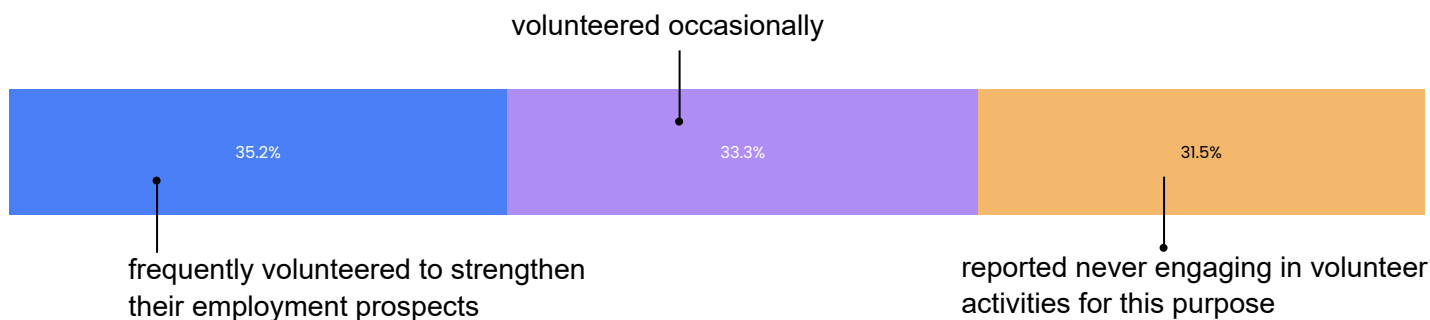
**31.1%** of respondents experienced social isolation associated with employment challenges.



Several participants described avoiding social gatherings because of concerns regarding questions about employment status or career progression. These findings suggest that labour market exclusion may contribute to reduced social connectedness and participation.

## Volunteering as a Pathway to Inclusion

Participants frequently described volunteering as both a strategy for gaining Canadian experience and a means of establishing social connections. Survey findings indicate that:



Collectively, these findings suggest that approximately 68.5% of respondents have participated in volunteering as a strategy to improve labour market integration. Participants often described volunteering as an opportunity to:

- expand professional networks
- gain familiarity with Canadian workplace norms
- contribute to their communities
- strengthen their sense of belonging

At the same time, some participants questioned whether unpaid labour had become an informal expectation within pathways to professional employment.

## Race, Ethnicity, and Perceptions of Inclusion

Participants also described experiences suggesting that labour market outcomes may be influenced by broader processes of racialization and social inclusion. Several respondents reported perceptions that factors such as:

- Names
- Accents
- Ethnic backgrounds
- Cultural identities
- Religious identities
- Influenced employment opportunities

These findings are consistent with Canadian research demonstrating that racialized immigrants often experience different labour market outcomes than non-racialized immigrants, even when education and professional qualifications are comparable.<sup>14</sup> The findings do not permit conclusions regarding the prevalence of discrimination within specific sectors or occupations.



*Barriers to employment not only undermine my professional knowledge and background, but it also affects my daily life since it does not give me a chance to be employed. Instead, many people with family references can work even though they are also newcomers, but have no working experience like mine. It is unfair, a poor hiring system, and being biased towards an ethnic race when a person who goes to apply for a job.*

— A Study Participant

However, they do suggest that many participants perceive labour market experiences as being shaped by more than credential recognition alone. This observation highlights the importance of examining labour market integration within broader discussions of inclusion, representation, and belonging.

## Immigration Pathways and Settlement Experiences

Participants represented a range of immigration pathways, including Permanent residents, Refugees, Temporary residents, international students, Naturalized citizens, TFWs, etc. These pathways often shaped access to resources, supports, and opportunities. For example, individuals arriving through different immigration streams may face different timelines, documentation requirements, financial resources, and settlement circumstances.

Several participants described challenges associated with navigating labour market systems while simultaneously managing immigration-related uncertainties. These findings reinforce the importance of recognizing diversity within newcomer populations. Policies and programs designed to support labour market integration may be most effective when they account for the differing circumstances associated with various immigration pathways.

## Access to Networks and Social Capital

The findings suggest that access to professional networks influences labour market experiences significantly. Participants who reported stronger connections to mentors, employers, professional associations, or community networks often described greater access to information and opportunities. Others reported difficulties obtaining:

- references
- industry contacts
- mentorship
- informal labour market information

Research consistently demonstrates that social capital influences employment outcomes. The Good Job Journey similarly identifies relationships and networks as important factors shaping access to quality employment and economic mobility.<sup>4</sup> The findings suggest that labour market integration cannot be understood solely through formal qualifications and credentials. Access to relationships and opportunities also plays a significant role.

## Intersectionality and Talent Utilization

The concept of talent utilization provides a useful lens for interpreting these findings. The evidence suggests that barriers affecting labour market integration rarely occur in isolation. Instead, participants often described multiple factors interacting simultaneously. Examples included:

- 1 Credential recognition barriers combined with caregiving responsibilities
- 2 Canadian experience requirements combined with limited professional networks
- 3 Financial constraints combined with professional licensing requirements
- 4 Settlement challenges combined with labour market uncertainty

These overlapping factors may influence how quickly and successfully individuals are able to utilize their skills and qualifications. An intersectional perspective therefore helps explain why labour market outcomes can vary considerably even among individuals with similar educational backgrounds.

## Community Organizations as Bridges to Inclusion

Participants frequently emphasized the important role of community organizations in supporting settlement, connection, and resilience. Organizations such as ethnocultural associations, faith communities, mentoring initiatives, and grassroots groups provided opportunities for information sharing, emotional support, leadership development, networking, and civic participation.

These findings align closely with ActionDignity's approach to Systems Change, which recognizes the importance of strengthening grassroots leadership and community capacity. Community organizations may therefore function not only as service providers but also as important spaces for belonging and collective action.

## Social Inclusion through a Systems Lens

The findings suggest that belonging and social inclusion are shaped by multiple interconnected systems. Credential recognition processes and employment experiences influence access to professional opportunities. Professional opportunities shape economic security, confidence, and social participation. These factors influence whether individuals feel recognized, valued, and connected within their communities.

Viewed through a systems lens, belonging emerges not solely as an individual experience but also

as a reflection of broader social, economic, and institutional conditions. This perspective highlights the importance of fostering environments in which internationally trained professionals can participate fully in both economic and community life. In other words, economic inclusion fosters social inclusion.

## Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that the effects of talent underutilization extend beyond employment and economic security to influence whether newcomers feel recognized, valued, and able to contribute within their communities. Participants consistently described meaningful employment as more than a job. It represented recognition, purpose, contribution, and belonging. When these opportunities were limited, many experienced social isolation, reduced participation, and uncertainty about whether they were fully included in Canadian society.

At the same time, participants actively sought opportunities to build belonging through volunteering, community organizations, mentoring relationships, and grassroots networks. These experiences demonstrate that belonging is strengthened not only through employment but also through meaningful relationships and opportunities to contribute. However, community efforts alone cannot overcome structural barriers that continue to limit talent utilization.

Viewed through a systems lens, the findings suggest that economic inclusion and social inclusion are closely connected. When internationally trained professionals are recognized, trusted, and able to contribute their skills, they strengthen not only Alberta's workforce but also the social fabric of its communities. Improving talent utilization is therefore an investment in belonging, inclusion, and a more resilient Alberta.

## Understanding Situation through a Systems Lens



*Moving to a new country was both hopeful and humbling for me. Back home, I had built a strong career in communications, coordination, and operations, working with international organizations and leading high-level initiatives. I arrived with confidence that my experience, education, and dedication would allow me to contribute meaningfully here as well.*

*However, the reality of credential non-recognition and the hidden job market was deeply challenging. Despite years of professional experience, I often found myself overlooked because my international background was unfamiliar to employers. Job postings that seemed aligned with my skills would result in silence or polite rejections. Over time, the gap between my capabilities and the opportunities available to me began to feel like a quiet form of de-skilling.*

*This experience has had a real impact on my mental health and confidence. There were moments of self-doubt, questioning whether my experience still held value or whether I was left behind professionally. It was particularly difficult explaining to family members why someone with my background was struggling to re-enter the workforce. The emotional weight of wanting to contribute, yet feeling underutilized, is something many newcomers silently carry.*

*At the same time, this journey has strengthened my resilience and empathy. I have become more aware of how systemic barriers affect not just individuals but entire families and communities. Many highly skilled newcomers in my network are driving taxis, working survival jobs, or stepping away from their professions altogether. This represents not only personal loss but also lost potential for the broader community.*

*I continue to actively bridge this gap through networking, upskilling, and volunteering, and I remain hopeful. My goal is not only to rebuild my own professional pathway but also to advocate for better recognition of internationally trained professionals, so others do not face the same prolonged uncertainty.*

— A Study Participant



## Introduction

The findings from the previous chapters tell a consistent story. Internationally trained professionals arrive in Alberta with education, skills, professional experience, and a strong desire to contribute to their new communities. Yet many remain unable to secure meaningful employment that reflects their qualifications and expertise. The challenge, therefore, is not a shortage of talent, but the continued underutilization of the talent Alberta has intentionally recruited.

Labour market barriers contribute to economic insecurity, affecting housing stability, food security, and long-term economic mobility. They also affect mental health, professional identity, dignity, hope, and well-being. These impacts ripple through families by increasing financial pressures, reducing time together, delaying important life aspirations, and influencing opportunities for future generations. Ultimately, they shape newcomers' sense of belonging, social inclusion, and trust in the institutions that influence their daily lives.

Across these findings, two barriers consistently emerged as significant obstacles to meaningful employment: foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements. These barriers are the focus of this report's policy recommendations. However, participants' experiences also suggest that these barriers do not exist in isolation. Rather, they are sustained by a broader system of interconnected conditions that continue to limit the full utilization of internationally trained professionals.

This raises an important question: **Why do foreign credential recognition barriers and Canadian work experience requirements continue to persist despite years of policy attention and labour market initiatives?**

To answer this question, this chapter applies the Water of Systems Change Framework. Developed by Kania, Kramer, and Senge, the framework proposes that complex social issues are sustained through interconnected structural, relational, and transformative conditions.<sup>3</sup> Using this lens, the study moves beyond asking what barriers exist to examining how systems contribute to their persistence.

The framework recognizes that persistent problems are maintained by conditions operating at multiple levels of a system. These include structural or explicit conditions (policies, practices, and resource flows), relational or semi-explicit conditions (relationships and connections, and power dynamics), and transformative or implicit conditions (mental models). Together, these six conditions

influence how systems function and why certain outcomes continue over time.

Applying this framework shifts the discussion from viewing foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements as isolated barriers to understanding the broader system that reinforces them. It also highlights where change is needed to improve the recognition and utilization of internationally trained professionals. The findings presented throughout this report demonstrate that foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements influence multiple dimensions of well-being, including employment outcomes, economic security, mental health, family relationships, and social inclusion. While these impacts are often experienced at the individual or household level, participants' experiences suggest that the factors contributing to these outcomes are embedded within broader systems.

## Understanding Systems Change – Policies

Participants consistently identified foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements as significant barriers to meaningful employment. While these barriers appear as individual policy issues, they also influence how internationally trained professionals access employment, licensing, and career advancement.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Policies	Foreign credential recognition processes remain lengthy and complex. Canadian work experience continues to be required in many hiring processes.	Acts as an upstream gatekeeper that limits access to meaningful employment.	Streamline foreign credential recognition and eliminate unnecessary Canadian work experience requirements.

This table illustrates that foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements are not simply administrative requirements. They are upstream conditions that shape those who have access to meaningful employment. Rather than assessing competence alone, these barriers often determine whether internationally trained professionals are given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in the first place.

Because these policies operate at the upstream level, they set out the conditions that influence

everything: organizational practices, resource allocation, relationships, power-dynamics, reinforce mental models, and ultimately employment outcomes. If these policy barriers remain, many internationally trained professionals will continue to experience occupational mismatch, regardless of their qualifications or motivation.

## Understanding Systems Change – Practices

Policies establish the formal rules that shape labour market integration, but it is organizational practices that determine how those rules are implemented in everyday decisions. Throughout this study, participants described hiring practices, recruitment processes, credential assessments, and professional licensing procedures that often required them to repeatedly demonstrate their competence despite years of education and professional experience. These practices frequently reinforced the effects of foreign credential recognition barriers and Canadian work experience requirements, even where policy reforms had begun.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Practices	Hiring managers continue requesting Canadian work experience. Employers rely heavily on familiar credentials and local experience. Regulatory and licensing practices vary considerably across professions.	Organizational practices reinforce policy barriers by limiting opportunities for ITPs to demonstrate their competence. Even where policy reforms exist, inconsistent hiring and licensing practices continue to contribute to occupational mismatch and missed potential.	Align hiring and licensing practices with policy reforms by removing unnecessary Canadian work experience requirements, adopting competency-based assessment approaches, promoting skills-based hiring, and supporting employers and regulatory organizations to recognize international qualifications more consistently.

The findings suggest that changing policies alone may not be sufficient to improve talent utilization. Unless employers, professional regulatory organizations, and other institutions also change how they recruit, assess, and recognize internationally trained professionals, organizational practices may continue to reproduce the same barriers. This highlights the importance of aligning day-to-day practices with the broader goal of enabling meaningful employment.

## Understanding Systems Change – Resource Flow

Resource flows reflect where systems invest their time, funding, and attention. Participants' experiences suggest that considerable resources are directed toward helping internationally trained professionals adapt to existing labour market systems through settlement services, language training, bridging programs, and retraining. These investments are essential and continue to play an important role in supporting newcomers and their families. However, the findings also suggest an opportunity to rebalance investments toward addressing the upstream conditions that produce these barriers.

This raises an important systems question: Are resources primarily helping internationally trained professionals navigate existing barriers, or are they also being invested in closing the systems gaps that create those barriers? A systems approach suggests that lasting change requires both continuing to support individuals and families while investing in reforms that improve foreign credential recognition, remove unnecessary Canadian work experience requirements, and strengthen the labour market system itself.

A systems approach requires investing not only in services that help internationally trained professionals and their families navigate barriers, but also in closing the systems gaps that create those barriers in the first place.

Participants frequently described challenges related to the formal structures governing labour market integration. These included:



- **complex credential recognition pathways**
- **inconsistent requirements across professions**
- **costs associated with assessments, examinations, and bridging programs**
- **limited access to information regarding professional pathways**
- **employer practices emphasizing Canadian work experience.**

The *Foreign Credential Advisory Committee* similarly identified concerns related to fragmentation, duplication, transparency, and accessibility within foreign credential recognition systems.<sup>1</sup> The findings suggest that structural conditions can create unintended barriers even when systems are designed with positive intentions. Participants often described navigating multiple organizations, processes, and requirements simultaneously, contributing to confusion, delays, and financial strain.

Viewed through a systems lens, these experiences highlight the importance of examining how policies, institutional practices, and resource allocation interact to shape labour market outcomes.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Resource Flow	<p>Participants described investing significant time and financial resources in credential assessments, bridging programs, retraining, licensing requirements, and other professional re-entry pathways. At the same time, many continued to encounter barriers related to foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements.</p>	<p>Resource investments are largely directed toward helping internationally trained professionals adapt to existing labour market systems rather than addressing the upstream conditions that continue to produce these barriers. This reinforces a cycle in which individuals bear much of the responsibility and cost of overcoming systemic obstacles.</p>	<p>Rebalance investments to address both immediate settlement needs and upstream systems change. While services that support individuals and families remain essential, greater investment is needed to address the systems gaps that create these challenges. This includes strengthening foreign credential recognition pathways, eliminating unnecessary Canadian work experience requirements, supporting employer engagement and competency-based hiring, expanding professional mentorship and networks, and investing in cross-sector collaboration to remove barriers rather than continually helping people navigate them.</p>

## Understanding Systems Change – Relationships and Connections

Relationships shape how people move through systems. While policies and organizational practices are important, meaningful employment also depends on how well employers, regulatory organizations, government, settlement agencies, and community organizations work together. Participants' experiences suggest that these relationships are often fragmented, making it difficult to navigate employment pathways and access coordinated support.

Many participants also described the important role of ethnocultural and community organizations in helping them understand complex systems, build professional networks, connect with employers, and access opportunities. These organizations frequently act as trusted bridges between

internationally trained professionals and the institutions responsible for employment, credential recognition, and professional practice.

The findings suggest that stronger collaboration across sectors can create more coordinated pathways to meaningful employment. Improving relationships is therefore not only about increasing communication, but also about building shared responsibility for recognizing and utilizing the talents of internationally trained professionals.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Relationships and Connections	Limited coordination exists among employers, regulatory organizations, settlement agencies, and community organizations. Ethnocultural community organizations frequently help internationally trained professionals navigate systems, build networks, and connect with employment opportunities.	Fragmented relationships create disconnected employment pathways, making it more difficult for internationally trained professionals to access coordinated supports, professional networks, and meaningful employment opportunities.	Strengthen collaboration among employers, regulatory organizations, government, settlement agencies, post-secondary institutions, and ethnocultural organizations. Invest in coordinated referral pathways, shared learning, employer-community partnerships, mentoring, and cross-sector collaboration to create more seamless pathways into meaningful employment.

The findings suggest that stronger relationships do more than improve coordination. They create the trust, partnerships, and shared responsibility needed to unlock the full potential of internationally trained professionals.

## Understanding Systems Change – Power Dynamics

Power influences who make decisions, whose perspectives are heard, and whose knowledge is recognized. Throughout this study, participants described navigating systems in which important decisions about credential recognition, hiring, licensing, and professional practice were largely made by employers, regulatory organizations, and other institutions. While these organizations play an essential role in protecting professional standards and public confidence, internationally trained professionals often had limited opportunities to participate in shaping the policies and practices that directly affected their employment pathways.

The findings suggest that creating more inclusive decision-making processes can strengthen both policy development and implementation. Engaging internationally trained professionals, employers, regulatory organizations, community organizations, and other system partners in identifying barriers and co-developing solutions can help ensure that reforms are practical, equitable, and responsive to lived experience.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Power Dynamics	Employers, regulatory organizations, and professional associations largely determine credential recognition and employment pathways. Internationally trained professionals have limited opportunities to influence these decisions.	Decision-making authority is concentrated within institutions responsible for hiring, licensing, and professional regulation. When those most affected have limited opportunities to contribute to decision-making, policies and practices may not fully reflect the lived experiences of internationally trained professionals or address barriers to meaningful employment.	Strengthen shared decision-making by engaging internationally trained professionals, employers, regulatory organizations, ethnocultural organizations, settlement agencies, and government in the design, implementation, and evaluation of labour market policies and reforms. Create mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, feedback, and co-design so that those most affected by labour market barriers have meaningful opportunities to shape solutions.

The findings suggest that lasting systems change is most likely when those who experience labour market barriers are not only consulted, but also meaningfully involved in designing the solutions.

Participants' experiences also underscored the importance of relationships and power dynamics in shaping opportunities. Many respondents identified limited professional networks and lack of insider references as barriers to obtaining employment aligned with their qualifications. Others described difficulties accessing mentors, sponsors, or individuals who could provide guidance regarding professional pathways. These findings suggest that access to opportunity is influenced not only by formal qualifications but also by social connections and relationships.

Participants frequently described volunteering, community engagement, and mentorship as important strategies for building networks and navigating unfamiliar systems. At the same time, reliance on informal networks may disadvantage individuals who newly arrived, socially isolated, or

unfamiliar with unspoken workplace expectations. The findings therefore, point to the importance of considering how relational dynamics influence access to employment opportunities and professional advancement.

## Understanding Systems Change – Mental Models

Mental models are deep-seated beliefs and assumptions that shape how people understand problems and make decisions. Unlike policies or organizational practices, they are often unspoken, yet they influence how systems operate.

Participants frequently described perceptions that foreign qualifications and professional experience were viewed differently from Canadian credentials, and that Canadian work experience was often treated as evidence of competence. These assumptions influenced hiring decisions, credential recognition, and professional opportunities, even when internationally trained professionals possessed the education, skills, and experience required for the role.

The findings suggest that lasting systems change requires more than policy reform. It also requires challenging the assumptions that influence how competence is recognized, how talent is valued, and who is given the opportunity to contribute.

Condition	Findings from the Study	How this Condition Sustains Talent Underutilization	Opportunity for Systems Change
Mental Models	Participants described perceptions that foreign credentials were often viewed as less credible, while Canadian work experience was commonly treated as evidence of competence. These assumptions influenced hiring decisions, credential recognition, and professional opportunities.	Underlying assumptions shape policies, organizational practices, and decision-making. When Canadian experience is viewed as the primary indicator of competence, internationally trained professionals may have fewer opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and experience, reinforcing systemic barriers to socio-economic integration.	Foster a strengths-based approach that recognizes internationally trained professionals for the knowledge, skills, and experience they bring. Increase awareness among employers, regulatory organizations, and decision-makers about unconscious bias and competency-based assessment. Promote narratives that recognize internationally trained professionals as assets who contribute to Alberta's workforce, economy, and communities.

The findings suggest that mental models are the deepest conditions sustaining these systemic barriers because they shape the policies, practices, relationships, resource flows, and power dynamics throughout the system. Addressing foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements requires more than just changing rules. It also requires changing how internationally trained professionals are perceived, valued, and trusted. Shifting from a deficit-based perspective to one that recognizes their strengths and contributions creates the conditions for more equitable and meaningful labour market integration.

Several respondents described feeling that their qualifications, professional experience, and accomplishments were discounted or viewed as less credible because they had been obtained outside Canada. These experiences raise important questions regarding the assumptions that underpin recognition processes and employer decision-making. For example:

- What constitutes a valuable experience?
- Whose expertise is recognized as legitimate?
- How are competence and potential assessed?
- What assumptions inform requirements related to Canadian experience?

The findings do not suggest that professional standards should be compromised. Rather, they highlight the importance of critically examining the mental models that shape how international expertise is understood and evaluated. Transformative change often requires shifts not only in systems and processes but also in the beliefs that sustain them.

## The Interconnected Nature of Systems

One of the central insights emerging from the *Water of Systems Change* framework is that these conditions do not operate independently. Policies and institutional practices influence relationships and access to opportunity. Relationships and power dynamics shape individuals' experiences of inclusion and belonging. Underlying assumptions influence how policies are designed and how practices are implemented. The findings from this study illustrate these interconnections. For example, Canadian work experience requirements may function simultaneously as:

- a structural condition through employer hiring practices;
- a relational condition through restricted access to networks and opportunities; and
- a transformative condition through assumptions regarding the value of internationally acquired expertise.

This interconnectedness helps explain why longstanding challenges related to foreign credential recognition may persist despite ongoing reform efforts.

Structural Conditions	Relational Conditions	Transformative Conditions
Credential recognition pathways	Professional networks	Assumptions about foreign experience
Canadian experience requirements	Mentorship access	Definitions of competence
Costs of professional re-entry	Insider references	Perceptions of international qualifications
Information accessibility	Power dynamics in hiring	Beliefs regarding “right fit”

*Table: Conditions of Water of Systems Change Model and relevant examples from the study*

Taken together, the six conditions of the Water of Systems Change Framework suggest that foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements are not isolated barriers. They are reinforced by interconnected policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models that collectively sustain the underutilization of internationally trained professionals. Lasting change therefore requires coordinated action across all six conditions to create a labour market system that recognizes talent, values experience and enables internationally trained professionals to contribute fully to Alberta's prosperity.

## Implications for Systems Change

The findings suggest that improving labour market integration may require attention across multiple levels of the system. Structural reforms alone may be insufficient if relational barriers and underlying assumptions remain unchanged. Similarly, efforts to shift attitudes without addressing practical barriers related to cost, information, or access may have limited impact.

A systems perspective encourages a more holistic understanding of change by recognizing that sustainable progress often requires coordinated action across interconnected conditions. Importantly, community-based evidence can play a valuable role in these efforts by illuminating how systems are experienced by those directly affected.

## Conclusion

The findings presented throughout this report demonstrate that foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements cannot be understood solely as individual employment challenges. Applying the Water of Systems Change framework reveals how structural conditions, relational dynamics, and underlying assumptions interact to influence labour market integration experiences among racialized newcomer communities.

This Systems perspective does not diminish individual resilience or agency. Rather, it highlights the broader contexts within which individuals and families navigate professional re-entry and pursue opportunities to contribute their knowledge and expertise. Understanding these interconnected conditions may support more responsive approaches to implementation and reform.

The next chapter examines how the community-based evidence generated through this study aligns with and complements the findings of Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee, highlighting opportunities to strengthen ongoing efforts related to foreign credential recognition and talent utilization.

## Community Evidence Supporting Alberta's FCAC Recommendations

### Introduction

In 2025, Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee (FCAC) released a comprehensive set of findings and recommendations aimed at strengthening foreign credential recognition processes and improving workforce participation among internationally trained professionals.<sup>1</sup> The report identified opportunities to improve transparency, reduce barriers, enhance coordination, and better utilize the skills and expertise of internationally trained individuals already living in Alberta.

The findings of this Community-Based Participatory Action Research study closely aligned with many of the concerns highlighted by FCAC. At the same time, the study contributes to an important dimension that was beyond the scope of the Committee's work: the lived experiences of racialized newcomers and the broader impacts of labour market exclusion on individuals, families, and communities. Rather than duplicating FCAC's recommendations, this chapter examines how community-based evidence can strengthen ongoing implementation efforts by providing insight into how systems are experienced by those most directly affected.

### Recognition Pathways and Access to Professional Opportunities

FCAC identified the need for more transparent, efficient, and coordinated approaches to foreign credential recognition.<sup>1</sup> The experiences documented in this study reinforce the importance of these priorities. Survey findings indicate that 70.3% of participants experienced incomplete recognition of their foreign credentials, including situations in which credentials had not been recognized, had only been partially recognized, or remained under review.<sup>2</sup> Participants frequently described uncertainty regarding requirements, limited access to information, and frustration associated with navigating multiple systems simultaneously. These findings suggest that implementation efforts aimed at improving clarity, accessibility, and consistency may have important implications for newcomer experiences and workforce participation.

### Canadian Work Experience Requirements

The findings of this study provide additional insight into the significance of Canadian work experience requirements. Nearly half of participants (47.7%) identified Canadian work experience requirements as a major barrier to obtaining employment aligned with their qualifications and experience.<sup>2</sup>

Participants frequently described situations in which international expertise appeared insufficient despite meeting educational and professional requirements.

FCAC similarly highlighted the need to examine barriers that restrict labour market access for internationally trained professionals.<sup>1</sup> The experiences documented through this study suggest that continued attention to this issue may be important in supporting effective talent utilization across sectors.

## **Financial Barriers and Professional Re-Entry**

FCAC emphasized the importance of reducing barriers that delay professional integration.<sup>1</sup> Participants in this study frequently described the financial implications of pursuing credential recognition and professional re-entry pathways. Costs associated with assessments, examinations, bridging programs, licensing processes, and additional education often occur during periods of underemployment and financial uncertainty. These findings suggest that implementation efforts focused on improving accessibility may benefit from considering the cumulative financial demands experienced by internationally trained professionals during settlement and career transition.

## **Community Navigation and Information Sharing**

A recurring theme throughout the study was the importance of access to trusted information and guidance. Participants frequently relied on community organizations, informal networks, mentors, and peers to navigate recognition pathways and identify employment opportunities. The findings suggest that community-based organizations may serve as important partners in knowledge mobilization and outreach efforts related to foreign credential recognition reforms. Consistent with ActionDignity's systems-change approach, community leadership can play a valuable role in ensuring that information reaches individuals who may otherwise experience barriers to access.

## **Community Evidence as a Complement to Policy Reform**

The FCAC report provides an important roadmap for improving foreign credential recognition systems within Alberta.<sup>1</sup> This study complements that work by documenting the broader consequences of labour market exclusion, including impacts on economic security, mental well-being, family relationships, and social inclusion. Together, these sources of evidence provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Policy evidence helps identify what changes may be required within Systems. Community evidence

helps illuminate why those changes matter and how they may influence the lives of individuals and families. Both forms of evidence are important to supporting responsive and effective implementation efforts.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study strongly align with the concerns identified by Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee regarding the utilization of internationally educated talent. Participants described experiences related to incomplete credential recognition, Canadian work experience requirements, financial barriers, and challenges navigating professional pathways. These experiences provide important context for understanding how labour market barriers are experienced within communities.

By contributing lived-experience evidence, this study complements Alberta's ongoing reform efforts and strengthens the evidence base available to policymakers, employers, regulators, and community organizations. Taken together, the FCAC report and this community-based study underscore the importance of creating systems capable of recognizing, valuing, and effectively utilizing the expertise already present within Alberta's diverse communities.

## Looking Forward: Strengthening Talent Utilization through Community Evidence

### Introduction

This Community-Based Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) study examined the lived experiences of racialized newcomer professionals in Calgary affected by foreign credential non-recognition and Canadian work experience requirements. While the study focused on labour market integration, participants consistently described impacts extending far beyond employment. Their experiences revealed interconnected effects on economic security, housing stability, mental well-being, family relationships, community participation, and social inclusion.

Throughout the research, participants also demonstrated resilience, determination, and a strong commitment to contributing their knowledge, skills, and professional expertise to Alberta's workforce and communities. Collectively, the findings suggest that the challenge facing Alberta is not simply attracting skilled immigrants but ensuring that the talent already present is effectively recognized, valued, and utilized.

### Community Evidence and Talent Utilization

Administrative data and labour market analyses provide valuable evidence about employment trends and workforce shortages, while Alberta's Foreign Credential Advisory Committee has identified important opportunities to strengthen credential recognition systems and improve talent utilization. This study complements those efforts by documenting how these barriers are experienced in everyday life through the voices of 506 participants.

Participants described uncertainty surrounding credential recognition pathways, difficulties obtaining employment aligned with their qualifications, and challenges associated with limited professional networks and Canadian work experience requirements. These barriers contributed to underemployment, delayed career progression, financial insecurity, and the underutilization of internationally trained professionals.

Beyond employment, participants reported broader impacts on confidence, identity, caregiving responsibilities, parenting experiences, community participation, and future aspirations. These findings reinforce the importance of incorporating community-based evidence alongside administrative and policy evidence to better understand the human dimensions of labour market integration.

## A Systems Perspective

The findings suggest that foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements operate within interconnected systems rather than isolated policies. Professional regulations, employer practices, institutional processes, social networks, and underlying assumptions about internationally acquired qualifications collectively shape labour market experiences.

Applying the *Water of Systems Change* framework illustrates how visible barriers, institutional practices, relationships, and underlying beliefs interact to influence opportunities for participation and belonging. Viewing labour market integration through this systems lens encourages collaborative responses that address not only structural conditions but also relational and transformative dimensions of change.

## Considerations for Future Implementation

Although this study was not designed to produce formal policy recommendations, participants' experiences highlight several considerations that may support ongoing implementation of Alberta's foreign credential recognition reforms.

### Policyholders

Participants emphasized the importance of transparent, coordinated, and accessible credential recognition systems. Simplifying pathways, improving communication, and strengthening coordination among government departments, regulatory bodies, employers, and settlement organizations may improve implementation while reducing uncertainty for internationally trained professionals.

The findings also suggest that foreign credential recognition should be viewed not only as a workforce issue but as one with broader implications for economic security, housing, family wellbeing, and social inclusion.

### Regulatory Bodies and Professional Associations

Participants frequently expressed uncertainty regarding assessment requirements, timelines, and expectations for professional registration. Transparent, predictable, and well-communicated processes may improve accessibility while maintaining professional standards.

Continued examination of assessment approaches may help ensure that competency evaluation

remains rigorous, efficient, equitable, and responsive to diverse educational and professional pathways.

### Employers

Canadian work experience requirements, limited professional networks, and reliance on insider references emerged as significant barriers to employment aligned with participants' qualifications.

Employers may benefit from reviewing recruitment and hiring practices to ensure internationally acquired education, experience, and transferable skills are appropriately recognized. Mentorship opportunities, structured onboarding, internships, and inclusive recruitment practices may further support successful labour market integration while strengthening organizational innovation and workforce diversity.

### Community Organizations

Participants consistently identified community organizations as trusted sources of information, mentoring, advocacy, settlement support, and social connection. These organizations play an important role in knowledge mobilization, leadership development, and connecting internationally trained professionals with resources and opportunities.

Community organizations can also continue serving as valuable partners by bringing lived experience into discussions surrounding implementation and ongoing system improvement.

### Researchers and Knowledge Mobilization

This study demonstrates the value of Community-Based Participatory Action Research in generating evidence on complex social issues. Future research could further examine the relationships between labour market integration, mental health, family wellbeing, housing, social inclusion, and long-term community outcomes.

The findings also reinforce the importance of engaging communities as partners throughout the research process, from identifying priorities to interpreting findings and mobilizing knowledge. Integrating community evidence with policy and academic research can support more comprehensive and responsive decision-making.

## Looking Ahead

Participants consistently demonstrated resilience despite significant barriers. Many pursued additional education, volunteered within their communities, developed new professional networks, and continued working toward careers that reflected their expertise.

Their experiences illustrate both the strengths that internationally trained professionals bring to Alberta and the importance of creating systems that enable those strengths to flourish. As Alberta continues implementing foreign credential recognition reforms, community voices can help ensure that implementation remains responsive, accessible, and grounded in lived experience.

## Conclusion

The findings presented throughout this report demonstrate that foreign credential recognition and Canadian work experience requirements influence far more than employment outcomes. They shape economic security, family well-being, mental health, housing stability, community participation, and social inclusion.

Rather than prescribing specific solutions, this study provides community-based evidence that supports ongoing reflection among governments, regulatory bodies, employers, community organizations, researchers, and newcomer communities. The experiences shared by participants suggest that meaningful progress will depend not only on improvements to policies and administrative processes but also on continued collaboration across institutions and communities.

Ultimately, recognizing internationally trained professionals is not solely an economic imperative. It is also a matter of dignity, inclusion, equity, and ensuring that the knowledge, skills, and leadership already present within Alberta's diverse communities can contribute fully to the province's social and economic future.

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## Appendices

### 1. Composition of CBPAR Steering Committee

Robina Hamdard, Community Leader, Afghan Canadian Women for Global Cooperation (ACWGC)

Shamaila Maqsood, Community Leader, Calgary Single Mothers Society

Asif Nazir, Community Leader, Chinar Kashmir Community Foundation (CKCF)

Joan Okrawaha, Community Leader, Canadian Centre for Integrated Health and Social Services (CCIHSS)

Ted Abraha, Community Leader, Habesha United Sports & Cultural Society

Tekeste Arya, Community Leader, Eritrean Seniors Community Calgary

### 2. Survey Questionnaire



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