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EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS FACING ARAB WOMEN IN CANADA



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ABOUT CAI

The Canadian Arab Institute (CAI) is a national, non-partisan think-and-do-tank based in Toronto. With a community centric approach, our aim is to focus on and highlight the issues and interests of the nearly one-million Arab-Canadians from coast to coast to coast. On the one hand, CAI produces crucial research reports to help the general Canadian public understand what the Arab experience is like in Canada. On the other hand, through community programming and engagement, we contribute to the social, economic, and civic integration of all Arabs in Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by the Canadian Arab Institute, in partnership with the Newcomer's Students Association. The Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada generously funded this project, and it was made possible by the dedicated work and contributions of many people. Emna Braham, Rania Younes, Sara Asalya, and Jad El Tal co-authored the report. Jasmine Hawamdeh carried out line editing and designing. The research assistants collected data in three different provinces. Layla Jabbour collected in Ontario, Czara Awad collected in Quebec, Paulina Awwadeh collected in Alberta, and Maria Almhana and Lobna Mahdi both collected in Ontario and Quebec. Earlier on in the project, Elona Canellari supported the design work and Nada Aoudeh consulted the research team on anti-oppressive research techniques. Shireen Salti provided thought leadership. During the data analysis phase, Tatiana Abboud helped cross-tabulate the quantitative data, while Kassie Drodge assisted in coding the qualitative data. Abacus Data was responsible for collecting the survey data. Sincere gratitude to the many participants who shared their experiences and insights to help understand the barriers that exist for Arab women trying to integrate economically into Canada.

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TEAM



Emna Braham
Co-Lead Investigator

Emna Braham is a senior economist at Institut du Québec, a think tank based in Montreal since 2020. Prior to that she was a senior economist at the Labour Market Information Council where she assessed the current state of labour market information in Canada and conducts forward-looking research in collaboration with stakeholders.

Emna previously supported collaborations among government partners, associations and employer groups in the field of labour market information collection, analysis and dissemination. She worked for CIDE where she planned, designed and carried out several research projects related to labour market issues. She holds a master's degree in economics from Queen's University



Rania Younes
Co-Lead Investigator

Rania strongly believes that when immigrants prosper we all prosper, and with that belief rooted in her community work, she co-founded WelcomeHomeTO, a grassroots initiative that works closely with local community groups to articulate and bring attention to settlement challenges and opportunities, envisioning a dynamic settlement network where all newcomers are welcomed with open hearts and minds, and supported to reach their highest potential for a stronger Canada. She also co-founded a networking and mentoring platform for professionals within the Canadian Arab community. The creation of PCAN was motivated by Rania's personal commitment to helping others, especially women and youth, become the best version of themselves through peer mentoring and building a supportive environment in which they flourish. She has personally mentored many professionals getting started in their new homes and careers.

Rania is currently the National Project Manager for Immigrant Employment Councils of Canada at IEC-BC and has worked with other equity-seeking organizations such as TRIEC and the Canadian Arab Institute. In the last 10 years, social justice, inclusion and economic empowerment became a focus for Rania after being involved with various NGOs.

Rania's commitment is evident in the success of community-led organizations she continues to support. From the Canadian Arab Institute, to WelcomeHomeTO, Yalla Let's Talk, Canadian Arabic Orchestra, Syrian Canadian Foundation, Newcomer Students' Association, Scale Without Borders, the ACCT, and many more that advance the interests of our diverse communities.

TEAM



Jad El Tal
Project Manager and
co-author

Jad El Tal is a proud Arab-Canadian community connector, who grew up between Beirut, Dubai, Mississauga, and Paris. He oversees all research projects and policy files at the Canadian Arab Institute (CAI). Jad's passions in public policy and community building began as a 10 year-old witnessing the impact of the devastating 2006 war in Lebanon on his community. He has since been committed to understanding the important roles that governments play, and the impact this has on communities. In 2018, Jad had the opportunity to see this relationship between government and community unfold at Queen's Park, as part of the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme (OLIP), where he worked with both government and opposition Members of Provincial Parliament. In 2021, he completed a Master's of Public Policy from SciencesPo - Paris, and a Master's of Global Affairs from the Munk School at the University of Toronto. His Masters' was fully funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) through his sensitive research on the impact of transportation policies in Lebanon.

Jad is a strong advocate for the Arab-Canadian community and is passionate about making Canada a better place for Arabs. Whether it's through better job opportunities, improved housing, access to healthcare, or understanding the education system, Arab-Canadians deserve better, especially since many of us have recently started calling Canada home. In his free time, Jad runs an Instagram account called TarbiLeb that raises awareness about Lebanese history and culture to diaspora communities around the world.



Sara Asalya
Project Manager and
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Sara Asalya is the Executive Director of Newcomer Women's Services Toronto (NEW); a multi-service not-for-profit charity serving 800+ Immigrants and Refugees annually. Prior to joining NEW, Sara was the Founder and Executive Director of The Newcomer Students' Association, a national not-for-profit organization working at the intersection of migration, education, and social justice, and a platform committed to promoting inclusion and equity for post-secondary immigrant and refugee students. Sara holds a Master of Education in Higher Education from the University of Toronto, and has over 10 years of experience in not-for-profit management, operations and research, as well as significant contributions to community advocacy and engagement on newcomer settlement and employment. Her lived experience as an immigrant woman to Canada inspired her passion and work with many immigrant communities.

Sara has collaborated and worked on different research and policy development projects and has published editorials on national media outlets focused on refugee displacement and resettlement, gender-based violence, unemployment and deskilling of immigrants, labour market trends and issues impacting skilled newcomers, foreign credentials policies, and access and integration of refugees and migrants into higher education.

TEAM



Czara Awad
Research Assistant

Czara Awad is an Arab-Canadian researcher and Canadian Public Servant with roots in Athens, Amman and Montreal. She holds a BA in Political Science, Economics and Social Entrepreneurship from McGill University and has aspirations of pursuing a degree in law. Czara has experience working in public policy at the Royal Hashemite Court in Jordan, in the Canadian P3 Sector, and currently works as an Infrastructure Trade Commissioner at Global Affairs Canada. Her research interests include MENA relations with major powers, critical approaches to state-building, education, foreign and trade policy analysis, and cross-jurisdictional issues. Aside from her work in the Public Service, Czara is a freelance artist, using her creations as an avenue for identity expression and social commentary.



Layla Jabbour
Research Assistant

Layla Jabbour is a Syrian migrant-settler, currently living in Tkaronto. She is driven by her passion for justice and approaches her work with anti-racist, feminist and anti-oppression lens. Layla holds a Master of Social Work from York University and a bachelor in community planning from the University of Waterloo.



Lobna Mahdi
Research Assistant

Lobna Mahdi is a researcher, writer, and program coordinator located in Toronto. She holds an MA in Adult Education and Community Development as well as a BSc in Equity Studies and Psychology from the University of Toronto. She wrote her Master's thesis on lower-class Egyptian women filmmakers of the early 20th century, demonstrating their pioneering role in the Egyptian and Arab arts and their influence on nationalist and feminist discourse of their time. Lobna is currently a Program Coordinator at National Zakat Foundation

TEAM



Maria Almhana
Research Assistant

Maria Almhana is a Research Assistant and an Administrative Assistant at Wilfrid Laurier University. Maria completed her Master's in International Public Policy at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University in 2020. She concentrated on two main streams Human Security and International Economic Relations. She previously completed her BA in Accounting at the Faculty of Economics - Damascus University. Maria has been involved in various academic research projects. Prior to coming to Canada, she worked as a Case Analyst and Project coordinator at Terre des Hommes, Syria. She also has experience working in the private sector in the Middle East.



Paulina Awwadeh
Research Assistant

Paulina Awwadeh is a communications and policy specialist who is based out of Toronto yet has a worldly experience which she gained by studying and working in various major cities across the world including Dubai, Toronto, and Cambridge. Paulina studied International Relations and has then specialized in political science. Her work experience includes working for a leading news station in the Middle East and the United Nations (UNHCR). She has begun work with the Canadian Arab Institute due to her passion for research especially on topics focusing on empowering women and breaking barriers for marginalized communities. When not working, you can safely bet that Paulina is either reading, hiking, or scrolling through social media which she says is for social awareness and research – and will never admit otherwise!

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From 2016 until March 2020, the Arab-Canadian community had the highest unemployment rate amongst all visible minority communities in Canada, at 13.5%.^[1] When the pandemic hit in March 2020, all communities across Canada experienced increased rates of unemployment, as the national average peaked at 13.7% in April 2020.^[2]

The Problem

In September 2020, the unemployment rate of Arab-Canadians stubbornly stood at 17.9%,^[1] while the national unemployment rate decreased to 9%. Arab-Canadian women experienced higher rates of unemployment at 20.3%, which was the second highest unemployment rate amongst visible minority women groups^[2]. In March 2022, the Labour Force Survey indicated that the unemployment rates across the board were decreasing; however, Arabs still had the second highest unemployment rate among all visible minority groups at 8.2% after West Asian. Arab women also had the second highest rate among visible minority women at 10%. As for the employment rate, which measures the proportion of the working-age population who are employed, Arab women had the lowest at an alarming rate of 68.1% - the second lowest was West Asian women at 64.9%. The numbers from the Labour Force Survey paint a bleak picture - Arab-Canadian women are the least employed group of eligible workers in Canada. Indeed, Arab women in Canada could be facing the most difficulties when it comes to economic integration and rebounding after the pandemic. This paves the way to the next question we raise - why do Arab women have a higher unemployment rate than most non-Arab women? Our main objective in this study is to understand the knowledge gaps behind the ever-increasing employment barriers facing Arab women and filling these gaps with evidence that inform policy recommendations.

Methodology

To achieve the study's objective, we decided to divide a person's career journey into different stages based on chronology from gathering information about the labour market to career development. We first conducted a reliable quantitative survey and then complemented it with rich qualitative interviews and focus groups in the top three provinces where Arab-Canadians reside: Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta.

The survey focused on the perceptions of Arab women with regards to the different stages of a person's career journey. We compared the perceptions of Arab and non-Arab women through a reliable sample size of 300 Arab women and 300 non-Arab women, for a total of 600 responses.

The survey was conducted in both English and French. The qualitative guide was written in the form of a semi-structured interview, which offered participants flexibility to look into the "why" employment barriers exist and "how" it impacts them. Similar to the survey, the guide took participants through the five different stages of career development in Canada. With regards to the demographic criteria of the participants, all of them self-identified as Arab women who are working or actively looking for work. In total, we interviewed 30 women in Ontario, 20 women in Quebec, and 7 women in Alberta, and conducted 3 focus groups.

Results

STAGE	BARRIER(S)	FACILITATOR(S)
Stage 1: Information gathering about the local labour market	Inadequate employment services	Access to tailor made digital tools
Stage 2: Looking for job opportunities	Identity Foreign credentials Inadequate employment services	Access to a social network Reskilling
Stage 3: Recruitment Process	Canadian experience Identity Language and communication Inadequate employment services	Access to a social network
Stage 4: Work Experience and Inclusion in Workplaces	Identity Language and communication Inadequate employment services	None
Stage 5: Career Development and Future Prospects	Mixture of barriers	None

The Results

After compiling the data, we found that the most frequent and impactful barriers that Arab women were facing in the labour market were, in order of appearance: inadequate employment services, identity, foreign credentials, Canadian experience, and language/communication obstacles. What the data showed us is that there is no barrier that is inherently unique to the Arab women experience, such that both Arab and non-Arab women experience barriers related to having foreign credentials or not having Canadian experience. However, what the quantitative data specifically showed us is that the degree and intensity to which Arab women are facing specific barriers are significantly higher at times than their non-Arab counterparts. As such, the solutions required for Arab women will inherently be more unique and systemic.

- **Inadequate employment services:** there are different services that newcomers could have access to as soon as they arrive in Canada. There are several categories observed within that space, some are general integration services, some offer newcomer specific services, and others offer employment specific services. For this report, we are focusing on experiences with employment specific services. Although they are mandated to be facilitators for newcomers to seek employment, in many instances, we found that they seemed to have created more barriers for Arab women to successfully integrate into the Canadian labour market.
- **Identity:** When it comes to identity as a barrier, it is more difficult to pinpoint than foreign credentials or Canadian experience (which are more technical). Indeed, the identity barrier is a more subjective experience. However, participants reported incidents of discrimination that made them feel othered throughout the stages, which hindered their performance and ultimately, employment opportunities.
- **Foreign credentials:** most economic immigrants who come to Canada have some form of a post-secondary degree issued in their home country. Once in Canada, they are deemed to have a foreign credential, and are required to seek its equivalency in the province they reside. This equivalency process varies between provinces and sectors, and could be a time-consuming and expensive process.
- **Lack of Canadian experience:** this barrier refers to a requirement that some recruiters/jobs have communicated or alluded to in the recruitment process. The requirement is that a person must prove that they have worked in Canada prior to being hired. There are several reasons why this requirement is instated.
- **Communication and language barriers:** When it comes to language, it is worth noting that every woman that was interviewed had the level of English and/or French comprehension required to immigrate to Canada, be job ready, and carry a full conversation. The large majority of interviews were conducted in English or French, not in Arabic, by the participant's preference. As such, when speaking about "language barriers," this report is not referring to basic or technical language skill abilities that are used in everyday life to carry common conversations; rather, we are referring to the lingo and jargon used in a professional setting, in certain sectors, and in workplaces, which are difficult to learn and understand if you're not practising in a professional work environment.

In addition to the barriers, some participants discussed ways in which they individually overcame certain barriers. In the report, we label these as “facilitators.” For example, navigation of the Internet and access to certain networks proved to be successful ways that Arab-Canadian women were improving their job prospects.

Recommendations

1. Digital streaming of information

a. **Issue:** In the early stages of the employment process, almost all participants used some form of digital tool or platform to seek or access information about the labour market. There is currently no portal or website that hosts all this information.

b. **Solution:** There was a recommendation that was echoed across several participants that they wish information was streamlined from the beginning so that it would take less time and money to find a job or integrate meaningfully in the labour market.

2. Pre-Arrival Equivalency Process

a. **Issue:** One of the issues with immigration and foreign credentials is that while the former is a federal responsibility, the latter is a provincial responsibility. As such, some Arab women fall through the cracks between jurisdictions when it comes to going through the accreditation process. Before arriving in Canada, there are many pre-arrival services that the Government of Canada offers for free to provide information about life in Canada, how to find a job, and how to access other free settlement services when newcomers arrive in Canada.

b. **Solution:** There is a desire amongst participants to start the equivalency process early on, perhaps after being approved for immigration and before arriving in Canada. Although pre-arrival information sessions run by the federal government are helpful, starting the degree equivalency process before a newcomer’s arrival to Canada gives them a chance to start working in their field in Canada sooner.

3. Cultural Competency Training to combat Anti-Arab Racism

a. **Issue:** from the experiences of Arab women in the workplace and the recruitment process, it is clear that there are misconceptions about the Arab identity that the participants said made them feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, and in some cases, disrespected. Workplace dynamics are tough to manoeuvre in general, and the added intersectionality of race, gender, and religion can impact an Arab woman’s career. At this time, there is no widespread training module on anti-Arab racism being offered to companies and organizations in Canada.

b. **Solution:** accordingly, more training needs to be given to hiring managers and senior managers about anti-Arab racism in Canada.

Recommendations

4. Equitable Performance Evaluation Processes

a. **Issue:** When faced with microaggressions in the workplace, some participants were worried that they were perceived differently by their bosses because of their identity. Some were uncomfortable in disclosing their identity altogether.

b. **Solution:** What we know from the quantitative data is that Arab women are more likely to appreciate fair evaluation at work. This might be related to wanting to ensure that their performance is being judged based on their work, and not on their identity or jargon skills. Hence, if workplaces do not already have a standardized performance evaluation, then organizations should use one.

5. Tailored communication and soft skills training opportunities

a. **Issue:** As mentioned in the findings, unemployed women are those who are job-ready and have a level of English and/or French comprehension required to live in Canada. However, there are some fields where the jargon and lingo used in the workplace are specific to that field or even to that organization.

b. **Solution:** Accordingly, in addition to language lessons that the government offers, there should be more targeted, individualized French/English workshops or resources for different careers and different fields.

6. Supported efforts to build and expand social and professional networks

a. **Issue:** What is clear from the facilitators that Arab women have used to break down the barriers is that social networks are key in career development in Canada, and Arab women understand that. However, this automatically puts newcomers at a disadvantage because their social networks are not as vast, especially professionally. Even for Arab women who are second and third generation, a lack of social networks results in poor social capital for them as well.

b. **Solution:** Hence, more government funding needs to be invested in organizations and/or events that specifically focus on mentorship and helping newcomer and/or racialized women find social networks through events

7. Enhance impact and success metrics of employment support services

a. **Issue:** Support services that help newcomers and immigrants find jobs tend to cease support as soon as their client's find a job - any job. Indeed, this means that even if a highly skilled doctor is employed as a cashier at a pharmacy, this is considered a success measured by employment support services. However, from our research, we know that Arab women want to find meaningful jobs, not just survival jobs. Hence, this type of underemployment should not be lauded as a success metric.

b. **Solution:** Accordingly, we recommend government and support services to reconsider their metrics of success from clients seeking employment to clients seeking commensurate employment in the field that they are skilled in.

Bottom Line

Ultimately, Arab women who are job ready and seeking employment find themselves dealing with a system that tends to set them up for failure. In this sense, failure could mean both unemployment and underemployment. Arab women, and especially those who are newcomers and immigrants, come to Canada for an opportunity to live in a country where their basic needs are met, but they are not afforded the opportunity stay in this country because their livelihood is in danger.

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BACKGROUND

"I FEEL LIKE I HAVE MORE TO OFFER, BUT I DON'T HAVE THE CHANCE TO DO SO."

- PARTICIPANT FROM QUEBEC

Arab-Canadians: a growing population

The Arab population of Canada is currently one of the fastest growing groups in the country, given the high rate of immigration to the country.[1] From the 1 million Arab-Canadians, approximately 7 out of 10 of them are first generation immigrants, and within the next decade, the Arab community is expected to grow in size by 200%.[2] From the Canadian Arab Institute's work within the community and through countless interactions with community members during this project, we know that Arabs come to Canada with a dream and determination of what they want to do and a vision of how they want to achieve it. However, they consistently face systemic barriers to employment that could turn those dreams into living nightmares. These barriers have contributed to the high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and a low labour market participation rate faced by Arabs. These barriers could push Arab-Canadians further into poverty and social isolation, and farther away from successful integration and belonging within the larger Canadian society. When examining the intersectionality of gender and race, this complex problem starts to have further repercussions for the more vulnerable within the Arab community – the women.

DEFINITIONS

- Arab-Canadian: in line with Statistics Canada, an "Arab" is a person who indicates that their ethnic origin or that of their ancestors is a country that belongs to one of the Arab League's 22 member states.
- First generation: in line with Statistics Canada, this "includes persons who were born outside Canada. For the most part, these are people who are now, or once were, immigrants to Canada." This term is used interchangeably with immigrant.
- Visible minority: the Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". This term is used interchangeably with racialized.
- Woman: we use woman to refer to any individual, whether cisgender or transgender, who identifies as a woman.

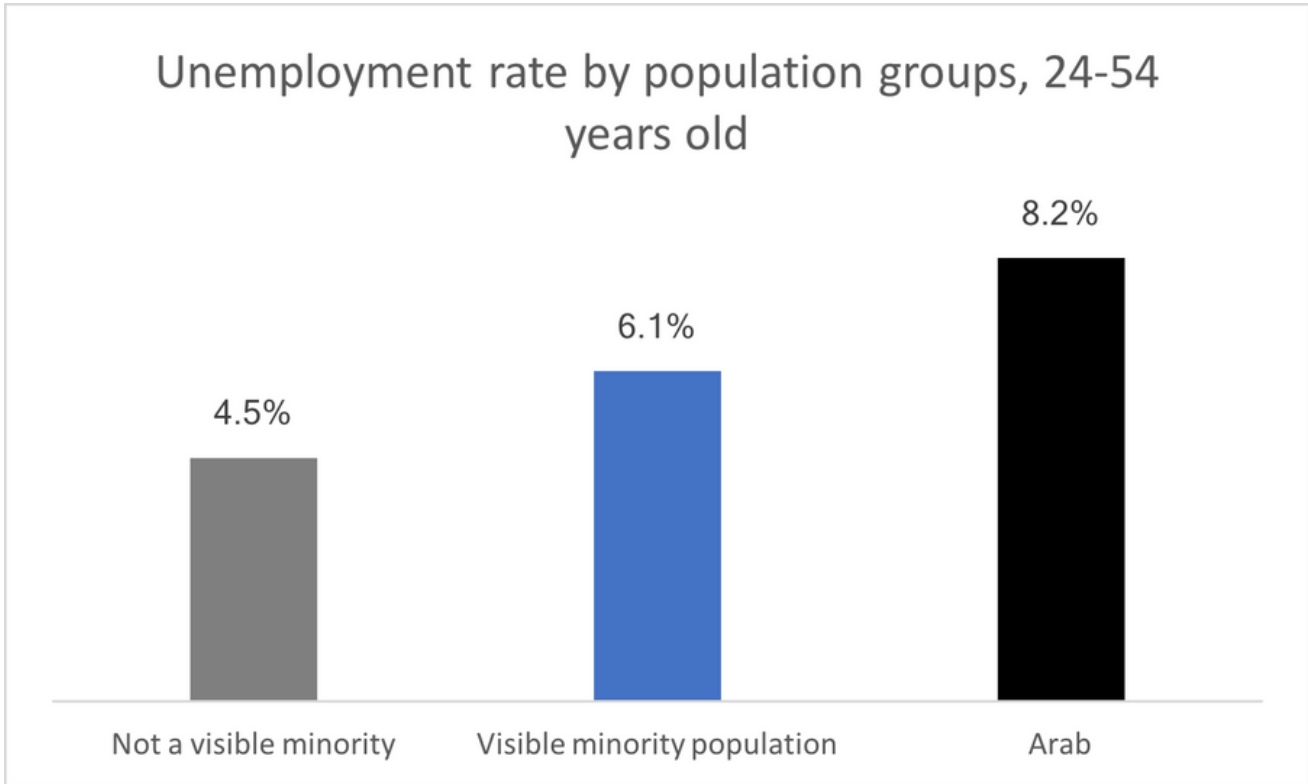
Arab-Women face challenges in integrating into the labour market

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the most marginalized groups undoubtedly faced the most challenges. In May 2021, the Canadian Arab Institute published a report on the experiences of racialized communities during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report found that some racialized - also known as visible minority - Canadians were facing more barriers than their non-racialized counterparts.[1] Whether it relates to housing, healthcare or employment, lockdowns and other economic closure policies exacerbated the issues that some visible minority communities were already facing pre-pandemic. For example, from 2016 until March 2020, the Arab-Canadian community had the highest unemployment rate amongst all visible minority communities in Canada, at 13.5%.[2] When the pandemic hit in March 2020, all communities across Canada experienced increased rates of unemployment, as the national average peaked at 13.7% in April 2020.[3] It is safe to assume that the pandemic had a more intense impact on a community that was already far behind when it came to unemployment.

Before July 2020, the Census (every five years) was the only reliable source that gathered labour market information on visible minorities in Canada. In July 2020, Canada's Labour Force Survey began asking respondents to report what visible minority group(s) they identify as, which included Arab, Black, Chinese, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, and South Asian. Due to this crucial policy change to start collecting race-based data, we were able to uncover that the unemployment rate of Arab-Canadians stubbornly stood at 17.9%, [1] while the national unemployment rate decreased to 9% by September 2020. Indeed, the unemployment rate among six of the seven largest visible minority population groups declined, while the one for Arabs did not.[1] Simultaneously, Arab women experienced higher rates of unemployment at 20.3%, which was the second highest unemployment rate amongst visible minority women groups[2].

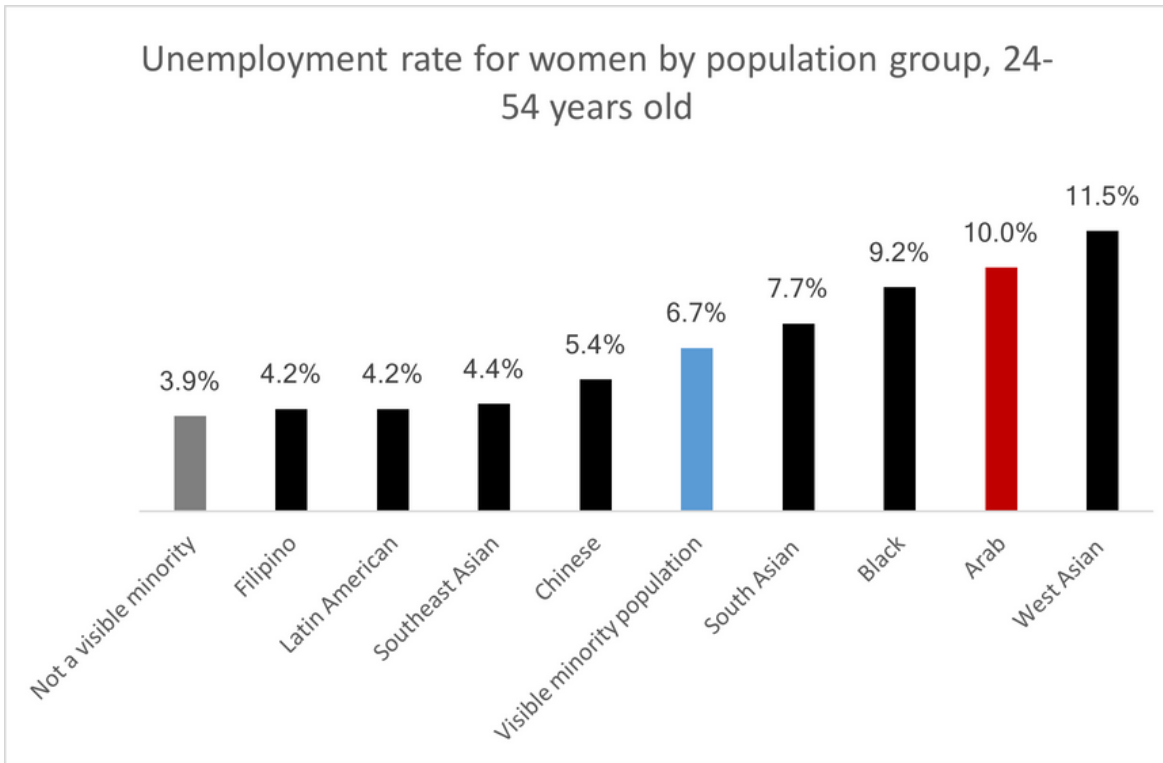
In March 2022 (last available data), the Labour Force Survey indicated that the unemployment rates across the board were decreasing; however, Arabs still had the second highest unemployment rate among all visible minority groups at 8.2% after West Asian (Graph 1). Arab women had also the second highest rate among visible minority women at 10% (Graph 2). As for the employment rate, which measures the proportion of the working-age population who are employed, Arab women had the lowest at an alarming rate of 68.1% - the second lowest was West Asian women at 64.9%.

Graph 1: Unemployment rate by population groups, 24-54 years old



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, table 14-10-0373-01

Graph 2: Unemployment rate for women by population groups, 24-54 years old



Source: Statistics Canada, table 14-10-0373-01

The numbers from the Labour Force Survey paint a bleak picture - Arab-Canadian women are the least employed group of eligible workers in Canada. From this, it is possible to infer that Arab women in Canada are facing the most difficulties when it comes to economic integration and rebounding after the pandemic. This paves the way to the next question we raise - why? Why do Arab women have a higher unemployment rate than non-Arab women? Indeed, this is a crucial question to ask now as economies begin to bounce back from the pandemic; an economic recovery plan without including the perspectives of the most marginalised - Arab-Canadian women - is disadvantageous for the whole Canadian economy.

As such and in accordance with Canada's Department for Women and Gender Equality's goals of improving women's and girls' economic security, participation and prosperity, this study presents three objectives:

1. To understand the knowledge gaps behind the ever-increasing employment barriers facing Arab women and filling these gaps with evidence that inform policy recommendations;
2. To conduct a community-based research project with a focus on race-based data collection that highlight intersectionality in the community (refugee Arab women, Muslim Arab women, Black Arab women, Queer Arab women, etc.) to ensure the data is reliable and generalizable; and
3. To contribute to a larger discussion on employment with emphasis on improving integration outcomes and policies for newcomers in Canada.

METHODOLOGY

In partnership with Abacus Data, Institut du Québec, the Professional Canadian Arab Network, and the Newcomer Students' Association, we have conducted a mixed methods approach, whereby we collected and analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data within the same study. We first conducted a reliable quantitative survey and then complemented it with rich qualitative interviews and focus groups in the top three provinces where Arab-Canadians reside: Ontario, Quebec, and Alberta.

For a community-based research project of this nature, using a mixed methods approach had several advantages. First, since this study is specifically about Arab women in Canada, the mixed-methods approach gave a voice to the participants, which ensured that the findings are rooted in their experiences. Second, the quantitative survey allowed us to understand how Arab Canadian women are feeling about the labour market, while the qualitative interviews allowed us to dig deeper into the nuances of why they were feeling this way; both lines of questioning were crucial to fulfil the objectives of this study. To achieve the study's objective to gain a full understanding of the barriers that Arab women are facing in the Canadian labour market, we decided to divide a person's career journey into different stages based on chronology from entering the labour market to career development.



Table 2: a breakdown of how each stage of a person's career journey is defined. Would be nice to have as visual .

STAGE	LABEL	DEFINITION
1	Information gathering	The earliest stage is devoted to information gathering about the local labour market - seeing what is out there, what organisational structures are like, what sectors exist, what the labour market is like, etc.
2	Looking	The second stage is looking for job opportunities in a specific sector that you have identified from the labour market search.
3	Recruitment	The third stage is going through the recruitment process from submitting your cover letter to signing a contract.
4	Working	The fourth stage of a person's career journey is related to being in the job/workplace itself.
5	Development	Finally, the final stage is a bit more abstract and individual, as it relates to a person's career development goals and prospects.

In addition to the labour market stages, another set of labels that were defined before data collection began is employment status. We used Deloitte Canada's definitions of unemployment and underemployment to ensure that the statuses are reflective of the job market.

EMPLOYMENT STATUSES

- Unemployed: refers to individuals who are not employed at all, even though they are able, willing to do so, and are actively looking for a job.
- Underemployed: there are two types of underemployment - visible and invisible.
 - Visible refers to individuals who are working on a part-time basis when they would prefer full-time employment.
 - Invisible refers to individuals who are working in jobs where their skills and past experiences are not adequately utilized, and as such, they are overqualified for the job. For this study, when highlighting underemployment, we are referring to invisible underemployment.
- Recently employed: we define recently employed as a person who has secured employment in their desired field/sector within the last 6 months.

APPROACH TO QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The survey focused on the perceptions of Arab women with regards to the different stages of a person's career journey. We compared the perceptions of Arab and non-Arab women through a reliable sample size of 300 Arab women and 300 non-Arab women, for a total of 600 responses. The survey was conducted in both English and French. To ensure accuracy and intersectionality of identities (objective 2 of the study), we asked a few demographic questions in line with the questioning of Statistics Canada, including ethnic country of origin, generational status, education status, gender, age, and employment status. Thereafter and depending on some of the demographic question responses, we asked respondents about their perceptions and experiences in the Canadian labour market.

APPROACH TO QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

To ensure data reliability and comparability across both methods, the qualitative guide was written in the form of a semi-structured interview, which offered participants flexibility to look into the "why" employment barriers exist and "how" it impacts them. Similar to the survey, the guide took participants through the five different stages of career development in Canada. Before the interview, all participants signed an informed consent form in their language of choice (English, French or Arabic). The interviews were conducted in the three different languages as well, depending on the participants' comfort level. With regards to the demographic criteria of the participants, all of them self-identified as Arab women who are working or actively looking for work.

Table 3: outline of the participants' employment status for interviews in each province:

PROVINCE	UNEMPLOYED	UNDER-EMPLOYED	RECENTLY EMPLOYED	TOTAL # OF PARTICIPANTS
ONTARIO	15	9	6	30
QUEBEC	10	6	4	20
ALBERTA	5	1	1	7
TOTAL #	30	16	11	57

Ultimately, the use of a mixed approach (quantitative survey responses and qualitative individual interviews and focus groups) has proven to be a success for this project, as the data is rich and thorough enough to be used to paint a picture of the Arab woman experience with employment in Canada, which opens the door for further research avenues in the future.

Literature Review

A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted in March 2021, and we found that there are no publications, both academic and non-academic, in Canada that look into the employment barriers that Arab women in Canada are facing. Indeed, there are a few works on the experience of immigrant women, some on the experience of Muslim women, others on the experience of visible minority women, but none of them mention or highlight the unique experience of Arab women. As such, we have identified a gap in the literature, and this report, in accordance with the first and third objectives, aims to fill those gaps with real world data.

With that being said, the pre-existed works on non-Arab women helped us build the survey instruments in April 2021. Indeed, understanding what other scholars found to be the employment barriers facing visible minority women was necessary for us to ensure that our data and findings can contribute to the larger discussion on employment and integration (objective 3). Some of the main scholars in this field, including Sheila Block and Rupa Banerjee, show that discrimination and foreign credentials are the key barriers that visible minority, and especially immigrant, women face. Other scholars, including Stephanie Premjia and Alison Taylor, study how these barriers, which lead to un/under-employment impact other factors in life, such as housing, physical and mental health, and child rearing. However, there is a lack of quality research on the outcome and experience of Arab-Canadian women with regards to unemployment, even though they have hitherto faced some of the highest barriers to employment in Canada. This is where this study, and the data coming out of it, contributes to the larger discussion on the experience of some racialized women in the Canadian labour market.

RESULTS

In this section, we take a deep look into both the quantitative and qualitative data at each stage of the participants' career journey in Canada to understand the barriers that Arab women are facing within each stage.

The most common barriers that emerged

In the survey, we asked both Arab and non-Arab women several questions to better understand their career journey from understanding the labour market to career development (see Table 2). In the interviews, we took a deeper dive in the career journeys of Arab women.

After compiling the data, we found that the most frequent and impactful barriers that Arab women were facing in the labour market were, in order of appearance: inadequate employment services, identity, foreign credentials, Canadian experience, and language/communication obstacles. What the data showed us is that there is no barrier that is inherently unique to the Arab women experience, such that both Arab and non-Arab women experience barriers related to having foreign credentials or not having Canadian experience. However, what the quantitative data specifically showed us is that **the degree and intensity to which Arab women are facing specific barriers are significantly higher at times than their non-Arab counterparts**. As such, the solutions required for Arab women will inherently be more unique and systemic. Before diving into each stage, we will briefly explain each barrier and include a relevant quote from a participant that brings its essence to life

Inadequate employment services: there are different services that newcomers could have access to as soon as they arrive in Canada. There are several categories observed within that space, some are general integration services, some offer newcomer specific services, and others offer employment specific services. For this report, we are focusing on experiences with employment specific services. Although they are mandated to be facilitators for newcomers to seek employment, in many instances, we found that they seemed to have created more barriers for Arab women to successfully integrate into the Canadian labour market.

"I HAVE NEVER FELT SO DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN MY LIFE THAN WHEN ACCESSING THESE EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES."

- PARTICIPANT IN ONTARIO

Identity: When it comes to identity as a barrier, it is more difficult to pinpoint than foreign credentials or Canadian experience (which are more technical). Indeed, the identity barrier is a more subjective experience. However, participants reported incidents of discrimination that made them feel othered throughout the stages, which hindered their performance and ultimately, employment opportunities.

"I CONSTANTLY FEEL LIKE I HAVE TO CENSOR MYSELF."

- PARTICIPANT IN ONTARIO

Foreign credentials: most economic immigrants who come to Canada have some form of a post-secondary degree issued in their home country. Once in Canada, they are deemed to have a foreign credential, and are required to seek its equivalency in the province they reside. This equivalency process varies between provinces and sectors, and could be a time-consuming and expensive process.

"THE FIRST TWO, THREE YEARS, I FELT I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING TO DO HERE IN THIS COUNTRY. I CAN'T WORK IN A JOB I LIKE BECAUSE IT'S A FOREIGN DEGREE. BACK HOME, I WAS A TEACHING ASSISTANT, AND I HAVE MY MASTER'S DEGREE."

- PARTICIPANT IN ONTARIO

Lack of Canadian experience: this barrier refers to a requirement that some recruiters/jobs have communicated or alluded to in the recruitment process. The requirement is that a person must prove that they have worked in Canada prior to being hired. There are several reasons why this requirement is instated.

"IF YOU'RE NOT GOING TO EMPLOY ME BECAUSE I DON'T HAVE CANADIAN EXPERIENCE, WHEN AM I EVER GOING TO GET THAT CANADIAN EXPERIENCE?"

- PARTICIPANT IN ALBERTA

Communication and language barriers: When it comes to language, it is worth noting that every woman that was interviewed had the level of English and/or French comprehension required to immigrate to Canada, be job ready, and carry a full conversation. The large majority of interviews were conducted in English or French, not in Arabic, by the participant’s preference. As such, when speaking about “language barriers,” this report is not referring to basic or technical language skill abilities that are used in everyday life to carry common conversations; rather, we are referring to the lingo and jargon used in a professional setting, in certain sectors, and in workplaces, which are difficult to learn and understand if you’re not practising in a professional work environment.

“IT’S NOT THAT THE JOB REQUIRES YOU TO SPEAK FRENCH BUT IT’S THAT THERE ARE CERTAIN TERMS AND REFERENCES IN THE JOB THAT I CAN ONLY LEARN ON THE JOB.”
- PARTICIPANT IN QUEBEC

In addition to the barriers, some participants discussed ways in which they individually overcame certain barriers. In the report, we label these as “facilitators.” For example, navigation of the Internet and access to certain networks proved to be successful ways that Arab-Canadian women were improving their job prospects

Where and How These Barriers Played Out

Table 4: an outline of the different barriers that Arab women experience in each stage, and the facilitators that they use in order to help break down those barriers:

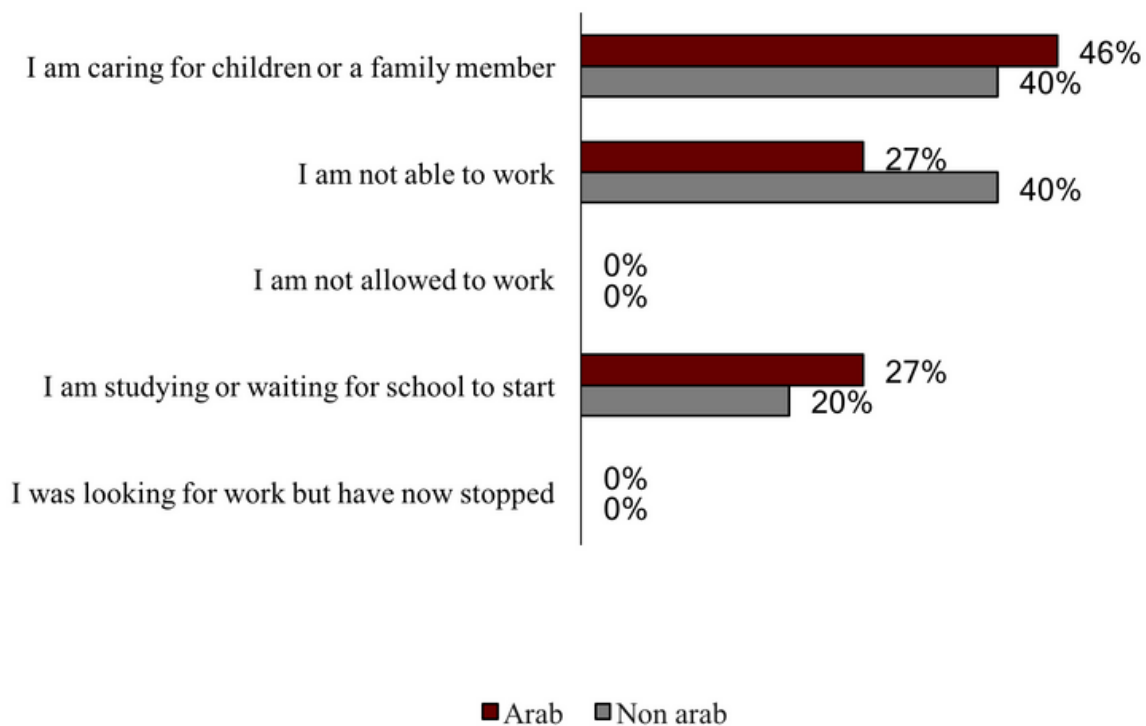
STAGE	BARRIER(S)	FACILITATOR(S)
Stage 1: Information gathering about the local labour market	Inadequate employment services	Access to tailor made digital tools
Stage 2: Looking for job opportunities	Identity Foreign credentials Inadequate employment services	Access to a social network Reskilling
Stage 3: Recruitment Process	Canadian experience Identity Language and communication Inadequate employment services	Access to a social network
Stage 4: Work Experience and Inclusion in Workplaces	Identity Language and communication Inadequate employment services	None
Stage 5: Career Development and Future Prospects	Mixture of barriers	None

STAGE 1 - INFORMATION GATHERING ABOUT THE LOCAL LABOUR MARKET

During the first stage, prospective candidates need to gather information about how the local labour market works and where they fit into it. This stage was the one with the least reported barriers, perhaps because it is an independent information-gathering stage, where each participant's experience is based on their own research and information navigation context. Nevertheless, we wanted to see how Arab women were getting their information about the labour market in Canada. Participants in both the survey and the interview were asked if they were looking for a job (and if not, why not), how they felt at this point of the journey, and what they do to search for information on the job market.

First, Arab women are more likely than non-Arab women to be unemployed or out of the labour force. We wanted to better understand the reasons why these women are not on the job.

Figure 1: Why are Arab women not working and/or not looking for work?



Among women who are not working or not looking for work, the main reason for Arab women is “caring for children or a family member (46%) whereas for non-Arab women it is “not able to work” (40%).

In the interviews, we focused on understanding how certain barriers at each stage of employment impacted participants and how it made them feel. We asked questions like what were the challenges you face? How did it make you feel? What did you do about it? What worked and what did not work for you? We wanted to illustrate the full picture of the Arab woman’s experiences trying to economically integrate into Canada. Accordingly, we coded and categorized the feelings of Arab women during each stage of employment and produced word clouds based on word frequency to understand the personal impact of this journey on Arab women.

Figure 2: Stage 1 - information gathering about the local labour market

The story that these word clouds paint is one where Arab women, like most other women and especially immigrant women in Canada, start their career journeys with hope, enthusiasm, and certainty that they will find a job that they want. Due to the abundance of information in the first stage, it can be overwhelming, and some may feel lost under the question of “where do I even begin?”



Barriers

Identify and accessing employment services

Some participants reported that employment agencies themselves created barriers towards finding information about the labour market. Less than a third of women interviewed accessed support services, with 18 out of 57 participants having accessed services with an agency; the issue related to access is beyond the scope of this report and it has been studied elsewhere[1], but it should be noted that out of the 18 women, more than half cited negative experiences with the service provided.

For example, a woman at the mid-career level engineer in Ontario was facing difficulties regarding her lack of Canadian experience. The employment agency she accessed advised her to volunteer her time in any field in order to cite having Canadian experience on her resume. After volunteering for hundreds of hours, her volunteering experience was seen as irrelevant by employers she applied to because they required Canadian experience in the field she wanted to work in. However, she couldn't have volunteered in her field due to her foreign credentials. When collecting information about the labour market, the participant received misleading information on seeking employment in her desired field from an employment support service counsellor/coach.

Another participant, who has a bachelor's degree from a university in Lebanon and a certificate in education from a community college in Toronto, attended general webinars and information sessions being offered by a support service when she first arrived. In hindsight, she didn't "think that they paint an accurate picture in a sense of how the reality actually is. They're like 'oh, welcome to Canada, this is what you have,' but they don't tell you that in order to get to the service, for example, you have to go through 1000 burdens until you get there. They just make it look easy." For another participant, who is queer and also has a bachelor's degree from a university in Lebanon and a certificate in education from a community college in Toronto, she actually appreciated the 'perfect picture' approach because it "simplified the idea to me like of course 'everybody finds a job in Canada.' You work here. You volunteer there. You work on yourself; take a course and you find a job. It tells you there's hope, be helpful and also work on yourself a bit. It's not that easy but it's doable."

From these two perceptions of the same approach, it is possible to infer that while some appreciate very general information about the labour market with a sense of hope (i.e., “everyone finds a job”), others prefer the more realistic and practical information. Both participants agree that it’s not an easy journey. These services tend to paint a very basic, standard, and generic job search journey. While this works for some participants, it misguides and frustrates others, especially those who are not able to apply to their given professional sector. It also oversimplifies the process and expectations involved, leaving them with more questions than answers. Hence, this further shows how at this stage, the barriers seem to be more at an individual level, rather than at a systemic level.

Facilitator

While support services seem to be a hit-or-miss for some participants, more than 49 out of 57 participants turn to digital tools and platforms, such as LinkedIn, Google and Indeed, to gain insights about the job market. For these newcomer women, these digital mediums are the key gateways to understanding the Canadian labour market. For example, a participant from Ontario, who is visibly Muslim and has a bachelor’s degree from the UAE, mentioned how she is “gaining experience on how to search for jobs because I have a LinkedIn account. follow people who work for companies I’m interested in and build my knowledge forward from there.”

For those women who are slightly older, being technologically savvy is a barrier. Although their digital literacy is high, they might struggle in knowing how to build the optimal digital profile. For example, a participant immigrated as a refugee from Egypt to Ontario; she is a single mother and had a successful career as a pharmacist in Egypt. She does not have Canadian experience in the field, so she struggled to know how to best present herself, claiming that “I need help from someone professional to help me with developing my LinkedIn profile.” Nevertheless, once women are able to access online tools, finding information about the labour market becomes easier, as proven from the other examples above. Hence, this might suggest that online tools and digital access are promising facilitators of improving employment outcomes for Arab women, and especially newcomers, specifically at this information gathering stage.

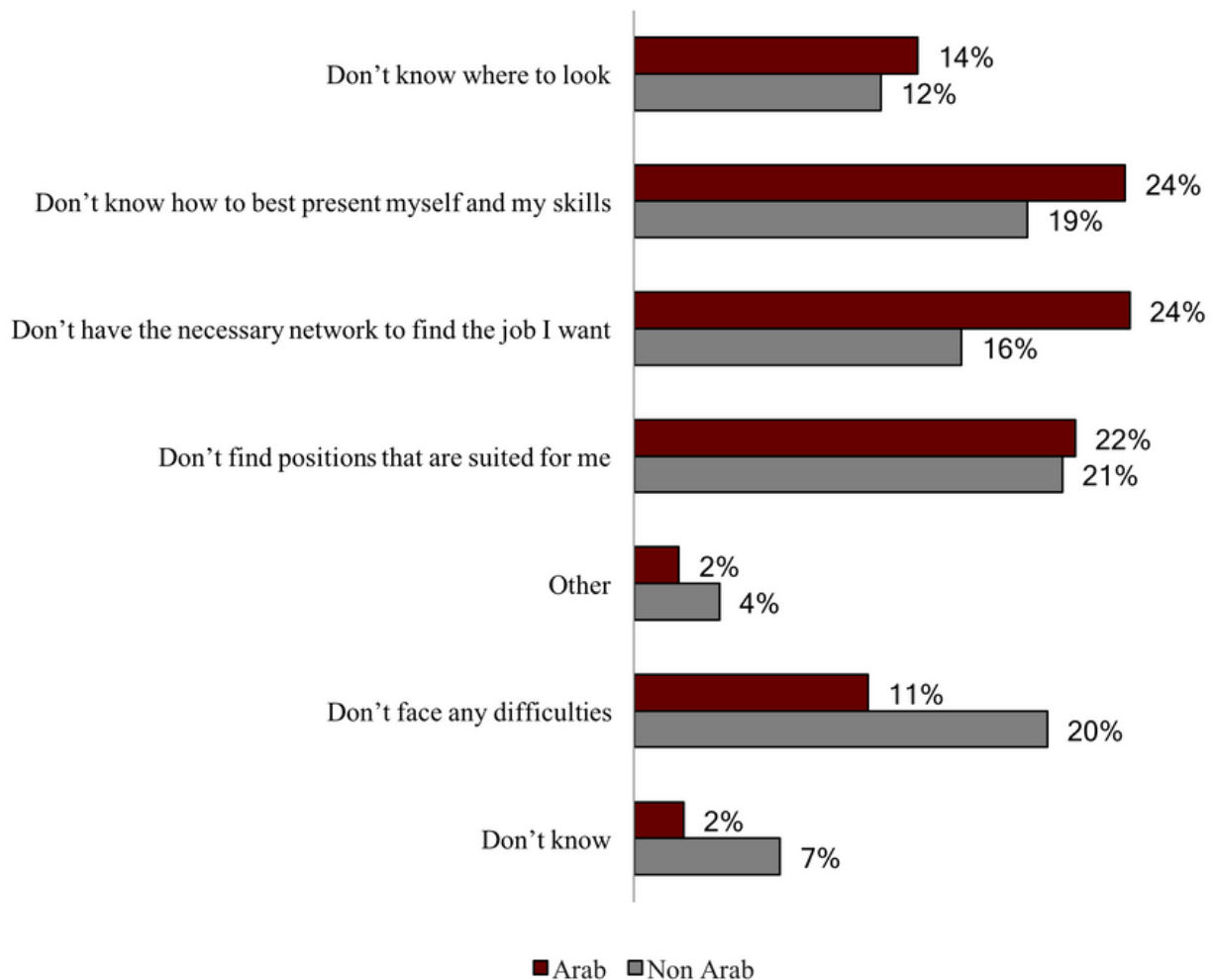
Accordingly, while support services could be both the barriers and facilitators of employment for Arab women in this early stage, online tools offer a more reliable, tangible, and independent way to gather information.

STAGE 2: LOOKING FOR AND IDENTIFYING SUITABLE JOB OPPORTUNITIES

This stage focuses on the job search experience for Arab women. The job search stage is a critical step between gathering information on the labour market and starting the recruitment process - it is when candidates start applying for prospect jobs. Some questions asked include: Did you know where to look for jobs that suited your skills and training background? How were you applying for jobs? And what kind of help or support do you think you need to make this process more successful?

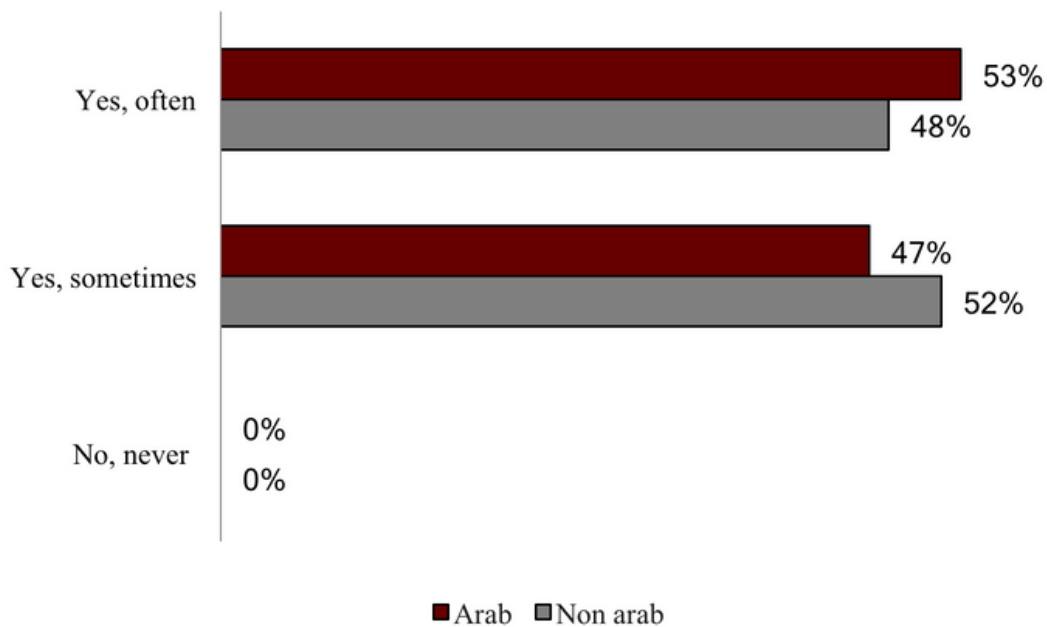
We wanted to know what Arab women were feeling when looking for a job, keeping in mind their whole career (now or in the past) to better capture the lived experience rather than one specific event.

Figure 3: What are Arab women feeling when looking for a job?



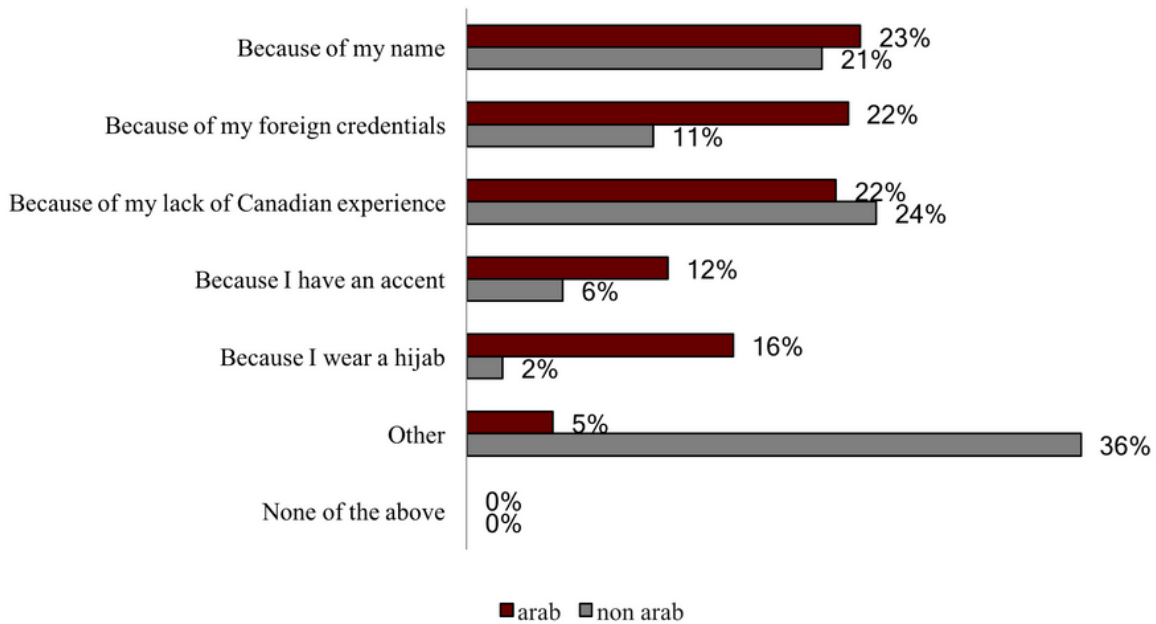
Around 1 out of 4 Arab women feel like they do not have the right network to find the job that they want and 1 out of 4 also feel unsure about how to best present themselves and their skills. In this stage, we also wanted to know if Arab women were expecting more call-backs after they sent out their resumes for job postings, and if they didn't receive many call-backs, what they felt were the main reasons why.

Figure 4: After sending resumés for a job posting, did you feel like you didn't get as many calls back as expected?



All Arab women surveyed feel like they receive fewer calls back than they were expecting. More than half (53%) of Arab women feel like this is often the case. This is comparable to non-Arab women, who also feel the same (48%).

Figure 5: why do you believe you didn't get as many calls as expected?



The three main reason Arab women cite as the reasons why they didn't get as many calls as expected are: name (23%), foreign credentials (22%), lack of Canadian experience (22%). Arab-women are more likely than non-Arab women to cite the following reasons: 1) foreign credentials (10 percentage points), accent (6 percentage points) and hijab (14 percentage points). The reasons proposed in our survey were tailored to better understand the experience of Arab women therefore non-Arab women mentioned other reasons

In the interviews, we dived into some of the emotions that Arab women were feeling in this stage. We noticed that once the labour market information became clearer in stage 1, Arab women tried applying for jobs that they searched in their sector. Arab women tend to feel gratitude and appreciation for the opportunities that they are applying for. However, they start to face some barriers in this stage, which leads to fear in some cases.

Figure 6: Stage 2

happy
appreciate
trying
hope fear
prepared ready

Barriers

The barriers that Arab women reported in this stage include inadequate employment services, foreign credential recognition, and identity.

Inadequate Employment Services

Participants generally found support services accessed at this stage, were inadequate and, at times, insulting and humiliating. An Ontario participant, who received her bachelor's degree in the Middle East in 2007, recalled going to an employment service agency as soon as she landed in Canada as an economic immigrant - "they had a workshop on how to write a resume, how to write a cover letter, what are the skills needed, what companies are usually looking for, and how to include that in the cover letters. But it was very basic. I'd say it would be mostly for high school graduates. They were university students who were looking for jobs. I was looking for something higher. I was overqualified even for that but that's what was offered so I had to take it." Hence, for Arab women who are further ahead in their careers (starting at manager to mid-level career), support services are not always as helpful in their job search and could potentially weigh them down.

Another participant, who arrived in Canada with her family at 18 as a refugee and is now 24 years old, required some more assistance. She found that “they won't give you enough time. They will catch up with you for 30 minutes every week which is only enough to talk about what you did this week, but there is no time to teach you or to show you how or sit with you and give you enough time just to make you understand how the system works.” She is still facing systemic barriers that she faced 6 years ago as a newcomer. This participant’s feelings were echoed across several other participants in Ontario and Quebec.

In Alberta, a participant who holds a bachelor’s and master’s in Engineering and an MBA felt discriminated against from a support service when the program coordinator set up a training session on “how to prepare for interviews. We're not talking about excessive makeup, we were talking about basic hygiene for 20 to 25 minutes. What is it that we don't know how to clean and take showers? Their assumption about Arab and immigrant women is beyond racist, beyond racist.” As such, the interviews show that support services do offer resources, but most participants who used these resources feel like they were either too basic, unhelpful, and, for some, racist.

Accordingly, the informational, training, and development resources seem to be mismatching the needs of Arab women. Indeed, Figure 3 illustrates that Arab women are more likely to not feel confident about how to best present themselves and their skills, and they’re more likely to feel like they do not have the right network. As such, Arab women who find themselves at employment agencies asking for support with how to best communicate and present their skills and abilities, do not find those services sufficient or relevant to their level of experience, nature of work (sector) or matching to the type of positions they are seeking to apply to. In some cases, this has resulted in unemployment and underemployment amongst Arab women.

Identity

Another barrier that was identified at this stage was identity and self-expression. This was especially highlighted in Quebec, where participants felt “other”-ed during the application process. For example, one participant, who is a permanent resident and recent graduate from a Canadian university, claimed that “because there are a lot of Arab women in Montreal, I feel like I’m at a disadvantage because they look at me like ‘oh just another Arab woman.’” Another Quebecer, who is a Canadian citizen but lived most of her life in the Middle East, feels like employers “prefer Quebec students and people that have lived their whole lives here, actual Canadians. I can just tell that it is different. Like ‘you’re different, you’re not a Canadian like us.’ It’s never in your face, but more undertones of discrimination.” This has precluded her from even applying to jobs. For a participant in Ontario, who is Palestinian-Syrian and lives with a disability, she believes that “being Arab is definitely a disadvantage for me because there’s a lot of Islamophobic people. Even in recent years, when Trump took over people were very open about their dislike of Muslim people.” When it comes to Arab identity, the intersection between race and religion (in this case, anti-Arab racism and Islamophobia) must be highlighted because they feed off one another.

For a woman in Ontario who wears the Hijab and a refugee, she “was told many times from other Arabs in my field that I can’t have similar opportunities as a new graduate of arts, someone white or who’s born here in Canada or not visibly having any identity. I was told I have to create my own opportunities, I have to build my own work, which I think creates more barriers for me.” For some Arab women to be so conscientious about their identity this early in the employment process signifies that they might be feeling other-ed and disadvantaged from the start.

Foreign Credential Recognition

Foreign credentials were also found as a barrier in this stage of seeking employment. During the job search and application process, some participants were barred from applying to jobs in their field because they had missing documents. For example, an Arab woman in Quebec has a teaching degree from Saudi Arabia but is missing a “teaching licence” document to get an equivalency in Quebec. This document is a prerequisite for teacher training, which are the courses that she must do to be qualified to teach in Canada. “There is no teaching licence because we don't have that back home, and it's really hard to communicate by myself as a woman to the Ministry of Education in Saudi.” This participant's story is not uncommon amongst newcomer educators, and especially those who have fled countries in politically risky situations. Another participant in Quebec has “some friends who, after all this time living in Canada, cannot find a way to evaluate their documents,” so they just give up on the job search.

For many participants who came to Canada with a foreign professional degree (such as medicine, architecture, law, teaching, etc.), having this credential inhibits them from even applying to jobs in their field. For many fields, reskilling is required, which can be very costly to acquire and/or sustain a living while reskilling or pursuing an equivalency certification. Hence, having a foreign credential starts to become a barrier at this stage, but this is then further exacerbated in further stages. This is in line with Figure 5, where Arab women are twice as likely to cite foreign credentials as a reason why they did not move forward in an application process than non-Arab women.

Example

“I'm an architect and I cannot work here. You have to do the regulation process. And I've started doing this. I've sent my file and everything. but you know with COVID everything takes forever. I'm waiting to hear from them. I have to do a course after that in the university for six months. It's called the Canadian building code or something like this. I need to do these things before I apply for a job here in my field. Even then, I won't easily be accepted because I don't have any experience. I have a foreign degree, I don't have any close network because I haven't worked, so I need to practise or volunteer first while doing the regulation, I don't know.”

Facilitator

Arab women have used a few different tools to attempt breaking barriers they are facing. Most notably, participants lean on their community and grow social networks to help them. A participant in Quebec, who went into an employment agency once but found their services too general, said that “it's interesting to me that an employment agency wasn't able to do that much for you as much as you feel your network did - to kind of make your resume more Canadian.” Hence, when it comes to looking for opportunities and preparing their applications, some participants feel like they can trust and rely on their social networks more than an agency. Another example of this facilitator is information related to degree equivalencies. When asked about a source of information that is trustworthy, a participant in Ontario, who is a newcomer and mother, said “friends who have the same experience in the same situation, who try some places and tell me ‘this is a good place, try this one.’ For example, they told me about a group that helps Syrian architects certify their degree, so I went and they helped me a lot, told me what I should do, and gave me the correct and most relevant information.” This example illustrates how important a network could be to help Arab women better integrate into the workforce.

However, many participants mentioned that their network was not strong or wide enough to help them. For example, a participant in Ontario felt like although she would be qualified for the jobs she's applying for, “I also felt that maybe 90% of the time, I won't be called for an interview because if you know somebody in the company, that helps, and I don't.” As such, although not having a social network could be seen as a barrier, having one is a critical facilitator for most other barriers, as illustrated above.

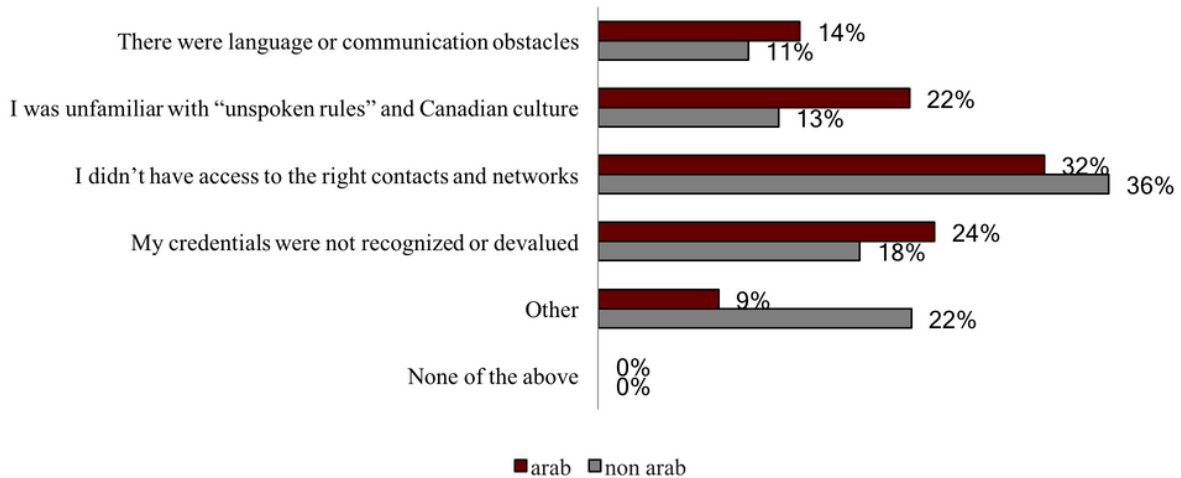
Beyond social networks, reskilling and upskilling for foreign credential recognition remains a key facilitating factor. We heard from women who were able to secure jobs once their degrees were certified. However, the vast majority found difficulties in completing their certifications because of cost, or childcare responsibilities, or because they had to take on survival jobs to pay bills, so they could not afford the time needed. Participants in the Ontario focus group agreed that there are financial barriers to reskilling and upskilling. Hence, while it is a viable option, it could be an inaccessible one for Arab women, especially newcomers.

STAGE 3: RECRUITMENT

This stage captures the time between submitting a job application and starting a job, and includes events such as interviews, negotiations, and follow-up questions. Some of the questions asked include: if you did not hear back from employers/recruiters, what did you think the reason was? How did that make you feel? How was your interview experience? Did you feel prepared? Did you feel suited for the position you are being interviewed for?

We also wanted to know how Arab women were feeling when going through the recruitment process. Again,

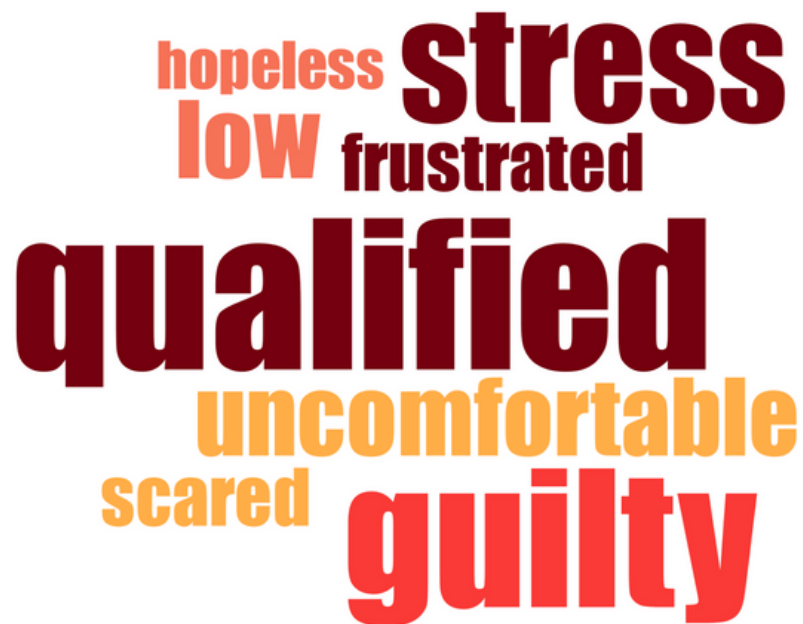
Figure 7: when going through a recruitment process, have you at least once felt like:



The three main feelings Arab women had were: they didn’t have access to the right contacts and networks (32%), their foreign credentials weren’t valued (24%), and they were unfamiliar with the “unspoken rules” in Canadian work culture. The first two challenges were mentioned in earlier stages when looking for a job. Again, the answers that were proposed in our survey were tailored to better understand the experience of Arab women therefore non-Arab women mentioned other reasons.

When it came to the interviews, this stage is when Arab women begin to feel more stressed and frustrated. Although they might have the degrees and professional experience to make them qualified for a job, since those degrees and experiences are foreign, they tend to not be recognized in Canada, making the process hopeless at times.

Figure 8: Stage 3



Barriers

Arab women reported the most barriers in this stage, with identity, communication and language skills, inadequate employment services, and Canadian experience cited as key barriers to employment.

Communication, presentation, and professional language skills

Women across Alberta, Ontario and Quebec cited communication and language as the reason for unemployment and/or underemployment. However, the prevalence of this barrier is much higher in Quebec. Indeed, more than half (13) of the participants in Quebec cited not knowing a sufficient level of French as a barrier to employment in their field. For the unemployed participants in Quebec, almost all were trying to learn French through services, school, or self-teaching. However, different responsibilities such as child-rearing and gig/part-time work made it more difficult to focus on language training. As well, some women said that the government's French program was either too advanced or not applicable to the jobs that they were seeking.

For some women, they felt as though they met all the qualifications of the job except fluency in French, which hiring managers told them is the only reason why they were not chosen. One participant from Quebec, who has 17 years of work experience in Sudan, successfully completed the equivalence for her bachelor's and master's degrees in human resources, and she returned to CEGEP (college in Quebec) to work on her English and French skills. In many ways, her **credentials and skills deemed her as job-ready; however, after finishing 54 credits, she still "hasn't finished the French needed to receive the highest secondary diploma of Quebec,"** so she remains "unqualified" in the eyes of hiring managers. The experiences of these women in Quebec might suggest that not having an accepted level of French skills is the reason behind their unemployment, and the training that women have access to is not filling this gap.

In Alberta and Ontario, some women cited having a foreign accent when speaking in English as a barrier. A participant in Ontario, who has been in Canada for 7 years, said, **"I felt that when you do an interview with a person whose first language is English, they start talking to you as if you're less - that you have less skills or less smart because of your accent. Or you are less qualified for jobs that are maybe easy."** This sentiment was shared by another participant in Ontario, who has a degree in English literature, and commented on how having an accent negatively impacts one's self-confidence:

"When English is your second language, then the anxiety would directly impact your linguistic abilities. And that will lead you to many bad job interviews and not because of the content, but because of the stress. An interview is stressful anyways and then I lose some of my English skills. And then I feel like oh my God, I know I can express myself better in English, and then I get more stressed, and then the interview goes down the drain."

These two examples illustrate how some women in the community, while technically functional or even fluent in one of the two official languages (English), can still feel like language is a barrier due to their accents.

For a participant in Alberta, a Syrian refugee who came from Lebanon in 2015, this fear of accents showing where you're from stems from her experience in the Middle East: "being afraid of my accent is not only from my connections here in Canada, it is also from my connection back home. In Lebanon, I was studying English as a second language, and I was worried about my accent. They were kind of saying your accent is weird. Your accent is a Syrian accent, so I came here afraid of talking in English, especially in front of Arabic people." Accordingly, for some participants, particularly those who were subjected to discrimination in the places that they have lived before coming to Canada, there could be some post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to languages and accents.

Ultimately, one participant in Quebec put it best when she said that "as Arab women honestly we face serious difficulties with the lingo. It makes me feel humiliated like I am not able to do anything because I miss one skill." Indeed, these sentiments are also found in Figure 7, where Arab women are more likely to feel like there were language and communication obstacles in the recruitment process than non-Arab women.

Identity and self-expression

When it comes to identity, some women felt like their race and religion were the reasons why they were not recruited. For example, some women in Ontario and Quebec feel like they were being discriminated against because their "Arabic sounding" names are on the application, and that getting to the interview stage is hard because "my name is not European, so people won't give me a fair chance." Hence, there is a perception among a few Arab women that their ethnic identity is a barrier to employment. In one instance, a participant who was looking for a part-time job to make extra cash recalled her experience walking into an interview where the selection committee were all white, so "I knew that I'm not getting the job. I felt that it is not the place that I'll get the job in, and I didn't get the job although my interview went amazing." This example shows how conscientious and aware Arab women can be about their racial identity during the employment process.

The intersection of religion and race is crucial for the Arab women experience in the labour market. For Arab women who wear the Hijab, the barriers are even more rigid. We know from the survey (Figure 5) that Arab women are more likely to cite the Hijab as the reason why they were not called back in the recruitment process. In Alberta, one participant who wears the hijab said, “I am hearing from a lot of my friends that maybe if I take off my hijab I would have more chances. I am hearing that from my friends who did take off their hijab to have more opportunities and chances here, and to be honest, I am thinking about changing my appearance and taking off my hijab.” A participant in Quebec, who arrived in Canada 2 years ago, decided to take off her hijab right before moving to Quebec to “take off my Arab identity” and have an easier time integrating. Clearly, there is a perception that if you are no longer visibly Muslim, then you will have more chances. This might suggest that the way a person chooses to show their identity impacts their chances of employment.

Example

“I am an African Arab so the colour of my skin is also related to the issue of not finding a job. I didn't feel discriminated against until coming to Canada, due to my religion, the colour of my skin, the barrier that I don't speak French, and so on. I faced a lot of discrimination but this will not stop me from doing what I want to do. I didn't come here to feel that I am less fortunate, or a second-class citizen. If need be, I can take my bag and return back home. I have just been feeling so bad that I'm just living from welfare check to welfare check just to pay my bills and I even tried to volunteer in several companies. I sent in my CV, and I tried to contact companies personally. But nothing.” - a participant in Quebec in her 40's.

This participant's experience captures the intersectionality of the barriers - they cannot be solved or analyzed in silos. Indeed, they feed into one another, and their collective weight leads Arab women into unemployment.

Canadian Experience

Another barrier that participants reported in the recruitment process was needing Canadian experience in your CV to get hired. This was a common experience - 35 out of the 57 participants have had to deal with this barrier at some point in their labour market experience. It is worth noting that the quantitative data showed that Arab women are less likely to cite lack of Canadian experience as a reason behind not receiving a call back for an interview, yet the qualitative data indicates that this was a common barrier for participants. For example, a kindergarten educator in Quebec had the necessary training and equivalency in her credentials to work, but her potential employer told her “**sorry because you don't have any Canadian experience, I cannot accept you.**” Many participants pointed out the inherent “Catch-22 problem” with this barrier, where in order to work in Canada, you need previous Canadian experience, but you cannot have Canadian experience if you cannot work. The current “solution” tends to be seeking out survival jobs that do not match the skills of the participants.

Some participants have resisted this. A woman in Quebec, who arrived in Canada as a refugee and holds 3 post-secondary degrees, questioned “where can I get Canadian experience if you don't even call me for an interview? Where can I get this Canadian experience? At a warehouse? No, I didn't leave my home country with these degrees to come do that here.” For others, they accept a job not in their field, usually way below their skill set, to get some Canadian experience; however, this does not necessarily translate into finding a meaningful job later on. Indeed, the requirement to have Canadian experience usually leads women towards underemployment. An under-employed woman in Ontario worked in retail for two years before starting to apply to positions within her field of work (fashion design), but she found herself struggling to find appropriate or relevant references to the jobs she was seeking within her level of skill and expertise. Hence, the solution is not to find any job in Canada; rather, it is to find a meaningful job that shapes and advances future career progression and development.[1]

Although some participants understand the need to have Canadian experience, they still expressed frustration at the situation. Some questioned why it seems like their whole life before Canada was being erased, saying “is my whole experience outside of Canada, my life, is it valid?” or “it had a bad impact on me regardless of the reason; it makes you lose your confidence when you get rejected. It affected my attitude towards trying again.” Indeed, the humiliation behind not being hired because of something you have no control over is present. Additionally, some of the participants who were recently employed proved that having Canadian experience did improve their chances of employment. In Ontario, one participant said that she “got an interview. This is the first job I got an interview in without a reference. But maybe right now I’m more experienced and more professional, and I have the Canadian experience.” A few other participants cited similar experiences. Hence, getting hired quicker after gaining relevant Canadian experience shows how the latter is necessary; however, it is still a major barrier for women.

Inadequate Employment Services

In this stage, participants who used employment or support services had mixed feelings about their experience. On the one hand, some participants in Alberta and Ontario said that employment agencies did help them find a job, and in some cases, did practice interviews with them to prepare for the actual job interview. Some participants appreciated the words of encouragement from the support services but were disheartened that “after studying all those years, I will go back to low-income work.” On the other hand, some participants were skeptical about the motives behind these support services. In Alberta, a participant, who has a medical background, claimed that “the agency just needs people who are numbers, so that they can continue receiving funding from the government, regardless of the client’s experience. If you find any job and get paid after the programs, settlement agencies will gladly take credit for it, regardless of what the job is and if it has anything to do with what you want to do.” This highlights the issue of underemployment, where Arab women tend to accept survival jobs in order to have an income, even if that means working in a field that doesn’t utilize their skill set and expertise. In Ontario, a participant, who is a trained physician with a degree from her home country, tried to access an agency’s services to secure employment in the healthcare field. The agency told her that they can find her a job as a pharmacy assistant, so she did not seek further help from them. Accordingly, when it comes to recruitment, it seems that agencies are able to help women find jobs, but these jobs tend to not match the skills that the participants offer. As such, these women tend to become underemployed or remain unemployed, both of which are unfavourable outcomes for both women and the Canadian economy.

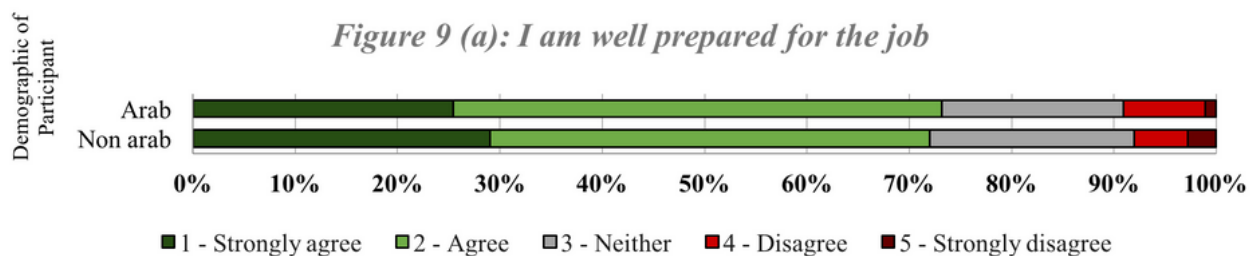
Facilitator

Similar to the looking for job opportunities stage, a main facilitator in the recruitment stage is having access to social networks. There is a sentiment amongst some Arab women that “It’s about who you know.” This is not to say that folks get hired solely because of their social network and who they know, but having a social network allows a person to learn more about opportunities and seek help to advance their chances. For example, a participant in Ontario who was recently employed said that she finally got hired because “my resume looks better with the help of someone, a friend helped me. Also, I know more people who have been in Canada longer, so they helped me make my resume look Canadian.” This type of help is crucial and craved by those participants who do not have access to social networks. One participant in Alberta, who is struggling to exit the cycle of under-employment, said “I mean if we’re going to dream. I wish I had family and friends in these positions to help me access so that they can talk to me directly about how to do it. They can inform me about opportunities and also tell me about things I can do to better my skills. That would be amazing.” As such, this illustrates how important social networks are when it comes to labour market participation and integration in Canada.

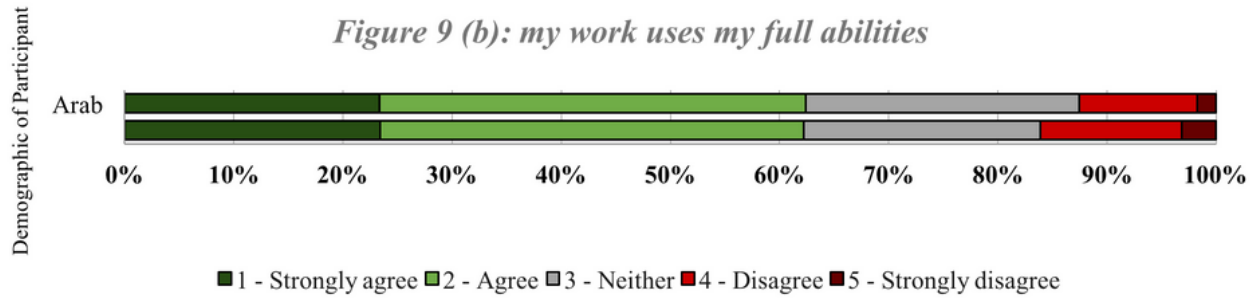
STAGE 4: WORK EXPERIENCE

At this stage of the employment cycle, we are trying to understand the barriers that Arab women face in the workplace and evaluate their perceived inclusion. This stage comes after the hiring process, and it includes experiences such as training, productivity, workplace culture, and the actual work itself.

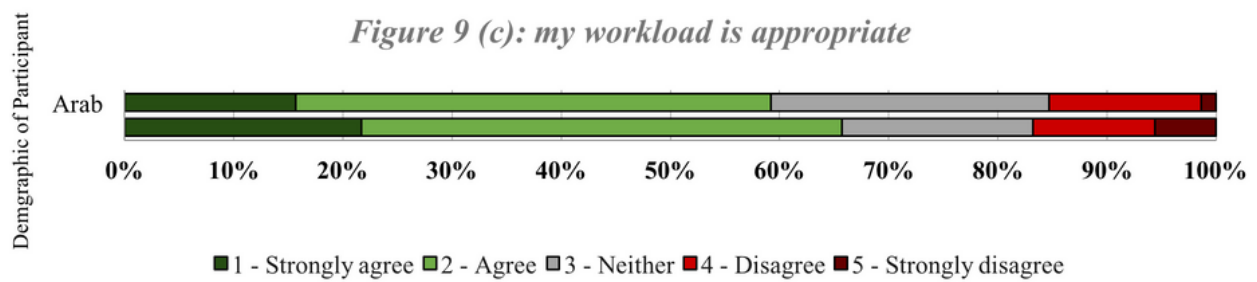
In the next set of figures, we asked participants to agree or disagree with certain statements about the workplace and themes such as preparation, inclusion, appreciation, and support.



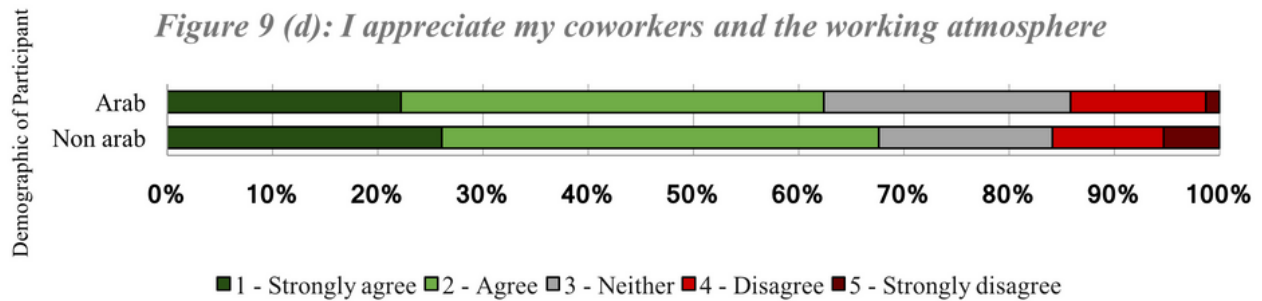
Arab women generally felt as prepared for the job as non-Arab women.



Around two-thirds of both Arab and non-Arab women feel like their current job uses their full abilities.



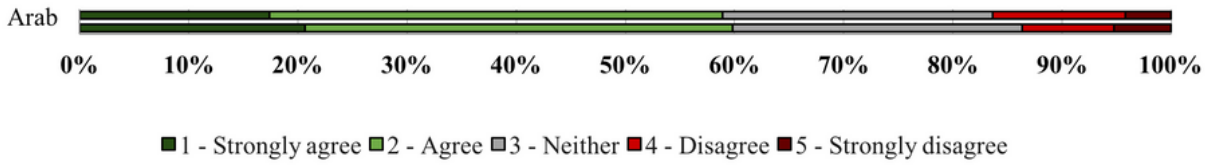
Arab women are less likely than non-Arab women to agree that their workload is appropriate.



Arab women are less likely than non-Arab women to appreciate their current working atmosphere and co-workers.

Demographic of Participant

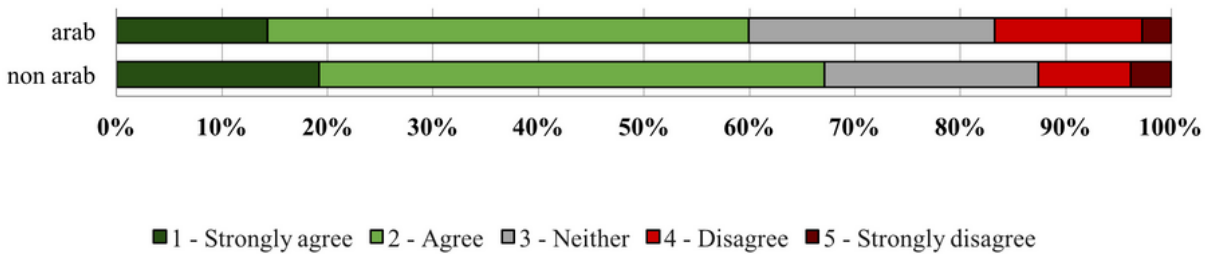
Figure 9 (e): I am supported by my boss and other leaders in the organization



Arab women are more likely to feel that they are not supported by their current bosses than non-Arab women.

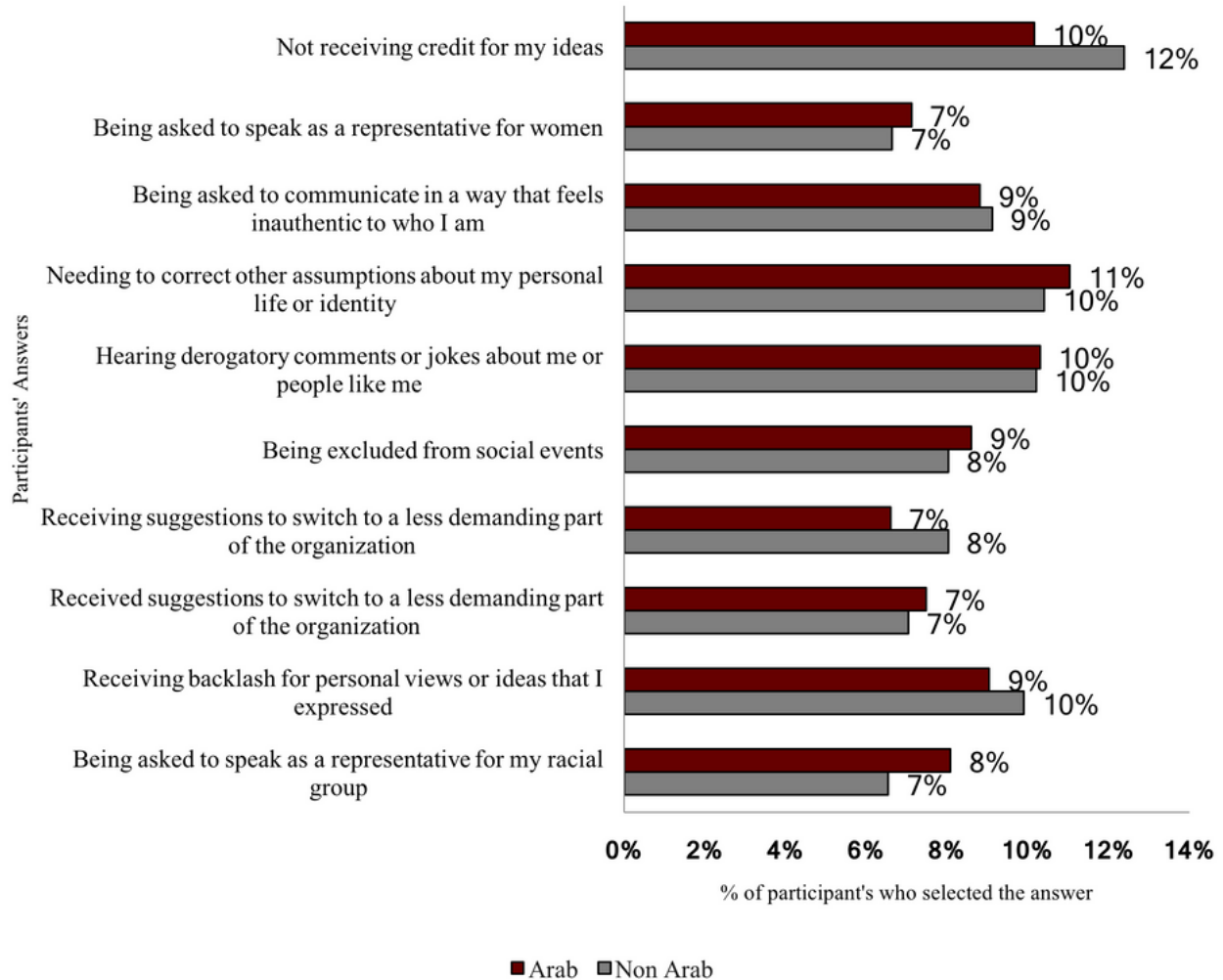
Demographic of Participant

Figure 9 (f): throughout my career, I've generally felt included in my workplace



Arab women are less likely to feel included in the workplace, compared to their non-Arab counterparts.

Figure 10: specific examples of experiences in the workplace



Overall, Arab and non-Arab women have reported similar experiences when it comes to workplace inclusion. Indeed, these might be challenges common to women in general. However, Arab women are slightly more likely to: correct assumptions about their personal life or identity (1 percentage point), be excluded from social events (1 percentage point) and be asked to speak as a representative for their social group (1 percentage point). Arab women didn't mention "not receiving credits for their ideas" as often as non-Arab women, indicating that the other challenges were more important to them.

For Arab women who are recently employed and working, we heard in the interviews that oftentimes they feel used for tasks that they did not sign up for. As well, they sometimes feel alienated from work culture and are afraid to point out certain discriminatory practices at work.

Figure 11: Stage 4

excluded alone
hate judged
used
afraid sad
tired

Barriers

The major barriers identified in this stage include identity and language.

Identity and self-expression

Based on the survey results (Figure 10), Arab and non-Arab women have reported similar experiences when it comes to workplace inclusion. However, Arabs are slightly more likely to speak as a representative of a racial group or correct others about their identity. This is on par with the qualitative data across Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. For instance, a woman who is a Canadian citizen in Quebec “constantly has to correct people, even to the ‘you’re Arab, so why are you working if you’re rich?’ Having to continuously correct assumptions is exhausting. Technically I’m just like one of them because I am Canadian, but I don’t feel like I am similar to any of them. As much as I love this country and I am privileged to live here and recognize the benefits, I feel out of place all the time.” This example illustrates how it takes effort to correct people’s assumptions about your own identity, which might cause Arab women to experience fatigue and otherness.

In Ontario, an Arab Christian woman says she deals with the assumption that she's Muslim. At work, in an effort to be inclusive, her colleagues would wish her a "happy Ramadan." She responds by saying that she's Christian, and the response is consistently "what? You're an Arab!" The participant says these stereotypes and misconceptions about who we are, how we live and how diverse we are, are not inherently hurtful, but the constant microaggressions point to the ignorance and how little information the general public has about Arabs.

For Arab Muslim women, there were two different experiences. The first one is when visibly Muslim women would be questioned about why they wear their Hijab and what their beliefs are, which some participants "found extremely disrespectful." The second experience included those who identified themselves as Muslim, but were not necessarily religious. These women also found themselves being questioned by their non-Muslim colleagues on why they didn't wear the Hijab, or asking intimate questions such as "do your parents know about your boyfriend and you wearing short shorts?" In both experiences, the constant justification of why you are who you are is tiresome. Hence, this might suggest that Arab women across the religious spectrum are questioned, as though they are damned if they do, or damned if they don't, subscribe to the religion.

Additionally, it is worth noting that there is an experience that Palestinians particularly face with regards to their identity in the workplace due to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Although this requires further research, some Palestinian participants were told by their non-white colleagues to hide their Palestinian identity because "I would burn bridges by disclosing my nationality, so for a long time I felt like I couldn't tell them where I'm from. I couldn't say. It was really tough." Having to censor your identity due to political sensitivities could take a toll on a person's experience in the workplace.

Language

Similar to the recruitment stage, language becomes a barrier when it comes to confidence in the workplace. For example, a participant in Ontario feels like "the way they look at me like English is my second language and I'm incompetent could be all in my head, but I'm insecure about how my accent is." Another woman tries to code switch and imitate a "Canadian accent" as much as she can in order to fit in more at work because she doesn't like her accent. A participant from Quebec started to feel like her accent was different in the workplace, and said that "they make you feel like you come from a different world, or that your accent is really strange." Hence, it is clear from these examples that even if someone is functional enough in speaking the language at the workplace, there is still an insecurity associated with having a foreign accent.

Some participants in Alberta and Quebec explained that it's not necessarily just knowledge of the language, but it is getting acquainted with the workplace jargon and lingo that is the barrier. For example, "in my field (architecture), the professional language is different from the spoken basic language, which I am fine to speak, so I feel like I am not a professional with my language at work." These examples might show how not knowing sector-specific or even company-specific jargon can limit a person's experiences in the workplace.

Inadequate Employment Services

With regards to support services, because their goal is to help people find jobs, they tend to play a more minor role at this point in the employment process. However, a participant in Ontario, who has a background in being a pharmacist, "had a bit of conflict with them because they referred me and got me a position as a pharmacy assistant, but a lot of the duties that I did in the pharmacy were not the duties of the pharmacy assistant, they were below. I wasn't treated very well there. The employment agencies are a business at the end of the day. They do business with pharmacies for example and they get money if somebody is hired. So I felt that because the pharmacy was getting money from the employment agency, I was just left there and not trained well." This participant's experience is worth highlighting due to the perceived connections between employment agencies and the workplace. This perception of "the employment agency running like a business" was also mentioned in the recruitment stage by another participant.

During the interviews, the women who reached the working stage did not have much to say about the tools they used to break down the barriers in this stage, other than various coping mechanisms, such as disassociation, to brush off the microaggressions.

STAGE 5: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Finally, this stage is to understand the perspectives of Arab women on their career advancement barriers and overall systemic barriers as their career progresses. Frankly, not many participants in the interviews were able to answer questions, such as: have you been satisfied with the progress you made in your current or past positions? Or with the progress to meet your career development goals and income goals? However, participants who filled out the survey answered these questions.

We asked participants if they feel satisfied with their overall career goals and skills development.

Figure 12 (a): I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my overall career goals

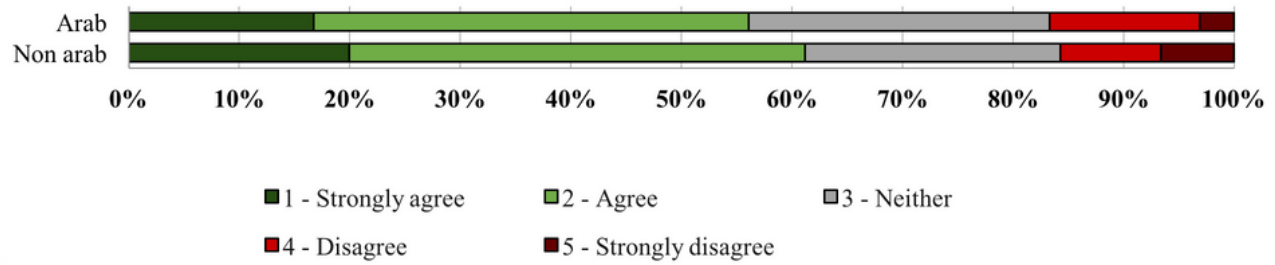
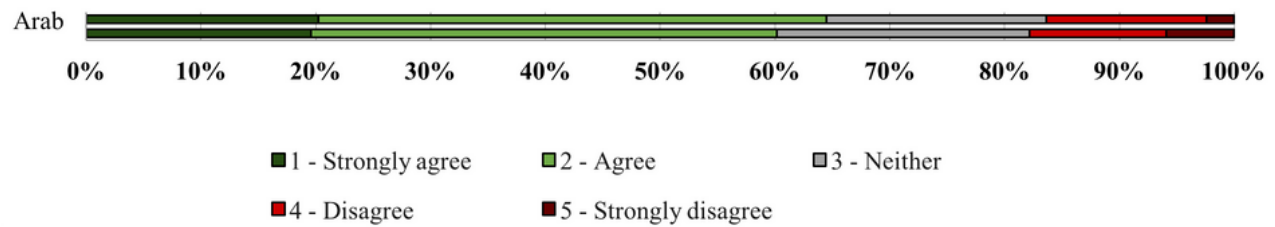
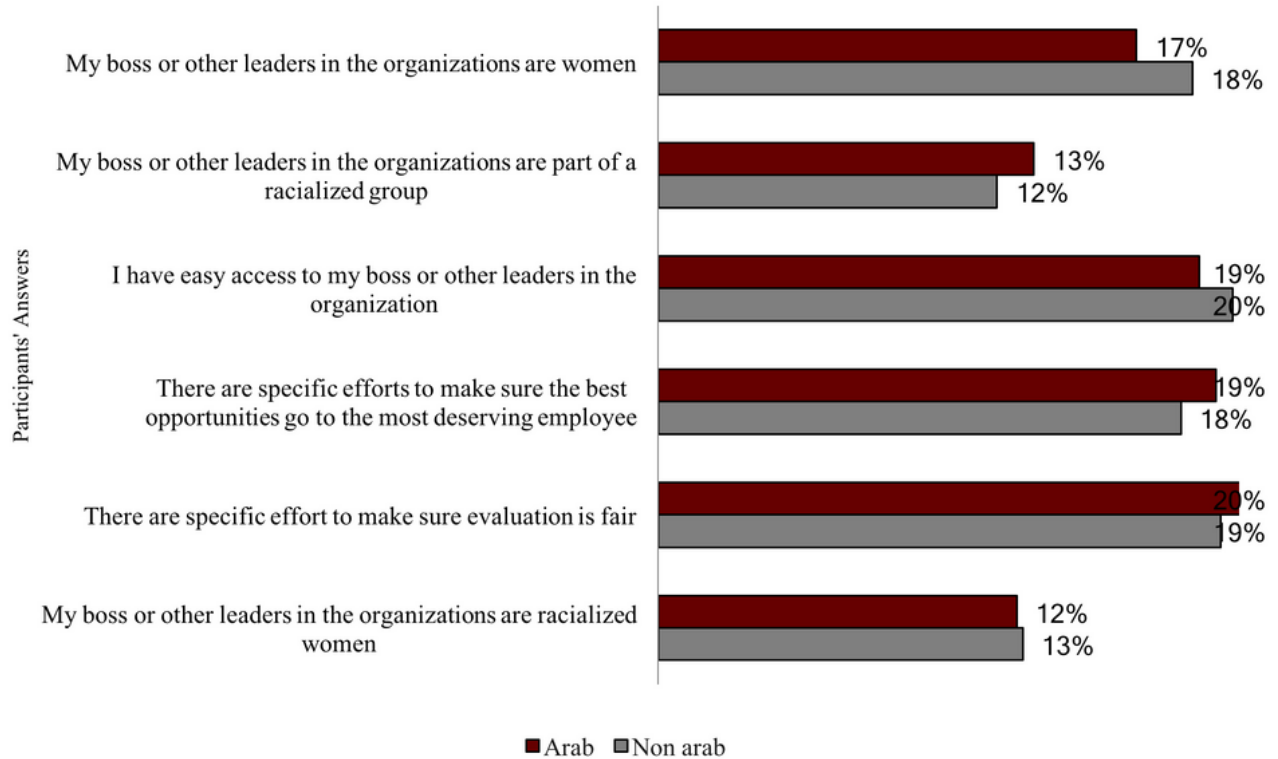


Figure 12 (b): I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for the development of new skills



Although Arab women are less satisfied with their overall career goals than their non-Arab counterparts, they feel more satisfied with their interim goals of developing new skills than non-Arab women. This could mean that Arab women are happy with developing new skills in the workplace.

Figure 13: What Arab women appreciate the most in their career journeys



Arab women are slightly more likely to appreciate when: their boss is part of a racialized group (1 percentage point), there are efforts to ensure the most deserving employee gets the best opportunity (1 percentage point), and evaluation is fair (1 percentage point). When it came to the interviews, this stage was not a part of the realities of many participants, so they could not comment further on their experiences here. For those who did expand on this stage, we found that although they are hopeful in finding success, they are also afraid and feel like they might have wasted some time in getting to the place in their career.

Figure 14: Stage 5

successful
impossible
waste
hope
afraid

Barriers

Many of the women are facing such intense barriers in their day-to-day work and in the early stages of their employment journeys that they couldn't think of their overall career development yet. This is in line with the quantitative data, where less Arab women are satisfied with their overall career goals than their non-Arab counterparts; however more Arab women are satisfied with their interim goals of developing new skills. This signifies that Arab women are actively seeking and gaining new skills - potentially a sign of reskilling - but they are not necessarily always within their career goals, but rather in their job survival goals. An example of this is a participant from Alberta who wanted to work in her field - architecture, where she has 23 years of experience - when she first arrived in Canada, **but it was too difficult and costly for her to upskill and get her certificate, so she is instead "taking a course on the child care system as I decided to change my career path."** This example illustrates how even though Arab women are gaining new skills in some cases, they are not necessarily within the field that they are trained in and wanted to work in when they first arrived. Hence, this shows how the barriers, such as foreign credentials, have an impact on career development and advancement.

Additionally, in Ontario, a participant explained that being underemployed so that she can “gain Canadian experience” makes her feel like she “wasted so many years. I’m not really sure where I stand on my career development right now.” This is another example of a barrier that hinders career development and progress. A participant in Quebec, who is a recent graduate, said she is not sure about her career growth because “I feel like the French requirement puts a halt to everything that I’m trying to achieve.” As such, these examples might suggest that the barriers in the previous stages have a significant and mostly negative impact on the career progression of some Arab women. Ultimately, the sentiment among a few is ‘is this all worth it?’ Indeed, one participant in Quebec is “conflicted between trying to stay here and get more Canadian experience and have a higher chance to get into graduate school here or just go back home somewhere in the Middle East and get a job there, where it will likely be easier to get accepted and fit into a workplace - to be myself.” No one should question whether they belong in Canada just because they are facing barriers that are out of their control.

LOOKING FORWARD

To that end, why do these findings matter? What will happen if Arab women can't find meaningful employment in Canada? For some participants, going back to their home countries is a serious option that they constantly consider. The debate about whether to return to their home countries usually comes up during the career development stage of the interview, where participants say that they have so much **to offer, but their talent is being wasted in Canada. A woman in Quebec said that she's "just waiting for my daughter to finish secondary school and I am thinking about taking the Canadian citizenship and returning back home. Regardless of all the difficulties I may face in my home country and the situation and government are very bad, at least I can find a job there, at least I can be somebody useful in society."** Indeed, the humiliating experience of not being able to land a meaningful job is exhausting.

For some participants who came to Canada as Syrian refugees, they felt more comfortable in countries like Lebanon, where they were stateless, than in Canada, where they are permanent residents, because they cannot find jobs here. Some participants reported that they felt scammed when they arrived in Canada because **"the way that Canada is advertised abroad is that even with a minimum wage job you'll be just fine and you can find a job in your field, but that's not true."** Additionally, sometimes this journey towards meaningful employment is isolating, which has had a grave toll on some participants' mental health. For a participant in Alberta, who has a degree in engineering and took up a job at a warehouse to gain Canadian experience, she says **"each day when I was coming back from work I was crying. I say why, why, why am I working like this after eight years of studying to be an engineer?"** Accordingly, by facing these barriers, most unemployed Arab women feel like they currently have three options in front of them: accept underemployment, stop searching for work all together, or go back to their home country. In all three scenarios, not only are Arab women losing their dignity, but the Canadian labour market is losing talent. That is why these findings matter.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having studied and understood the knowledge gaps behind the ever-increasing employment barriers facing Arab women in Canada, the first objective of this study instructs us to address these gaps with evidence-based policy recommendations. Accordingly, here is a list of seven recommendations, in no specific order, to help alleviate the employment barriers that Arab women are facing in the labour market.

1. Digital streaming of information

- a. **Issue:** In the early stages of the employment process, almost all participants used some form of digital tool or platform to seek or access information about the labour market. There is currently no portal or website that hosts all this information.
- b. **Solution:** There was a recommendation that was echoed across several participants that they wish information was streamlined from the beginning so that it would take less time and money to find a job or integrate meaningfully in the labour market. For example, newcomers can go on this website and fill out their credentials, experience, language skills, province they live in, and desired field of work. Based on the personal information you provide, the digital platform can guide you through the best suited career pathway that is relevant to the sector, skill level and local labour market needs. This ultimately serves as an equalizing tool for many who are facing barriers to labour market integration. It will not only be valuable to Arab women, but also to many others who experience similar difficulties. These guided pathways would include expected timelines, costs and career progress indicators.
- c. **Impact:** as one participant from Ontario put it, “I got this information after four years, can you imagine if I got it in the first few weeks of arriving?” Indeed, all this information is available in some pocket of the digital world and depending on how tech savvy or how involved your social network is, you can get this information quicker. However, to create an equal level playing field for all newcomers, Arab or not, this streamline of information online is key.
- d. **Institution(s) responsible:** mixed between different levels of government, but the federal government has the best reach to offer a solution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Pre-Arrival Equivalency Process

- a. Issue: One of the issues with immigration and foreign credentials is that while the former is a federal responsibility, the latter is a provincial responsibility. As such, some Arab women fall through the cracks between jurisdictions when it comes to going through the accreditation process. Before arriving in Canada, there are many pre-arrival services that the Government of Canada offers for free to provide information about life in Canada, how to find a job, and how to access other free settlement services when newcomers arrive in Canada.
- b. Solution: There is a desire amongst participants to start the equivalency process early on, perhaps after being approved for immigration and before arriving in Canada. Although pre-arrival information sessions run by the federal government are helpful, starting the degree equivalency process before a newcomer's arrival to Canada gives them a chance to start working in their field in Canada sooner.
- c. Impact: by starting this process earlier, newcomers will integrate into Canada and feel a sense of belonging quicker. As well, the Canadian economy would benefit from using newcomer talent as soon as they arrive in Canada.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: there is an opportunity here for the federal and provincial governments to work closer together on successfully integrating incoming newcomer talent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3. Cultural Competency Training to combat Anti-Arab Racism

- a. Issue: from the experiences of Arab women in the workplace and the recruitment process, it is clear that there are misconceptions about the Arab identity that the participants said made them feel uncomfortable, unwelcome, and in some cases, disrespected. Workplace dynamics are tough to manoeuvre in general, and the added intersectionality of race, gender, and religion can impact an Arab woman's career. At this time, there is no widespread training module on anti-Arab racism being offered to companies and organizations in Canada.
- b. Solution: accordingly, more training needs to be given to hiring managers and senior managers about anti-Arab racism in Canada. The training does not need to be extensive. Indeed, it can be a module within pre-existing cultural competency trainings and diversity, equity, and inclusion workshops. This module will offer information about the Arab identity, diversity within, the history of Arabs in Canada, and the current struggles they face and report in workplaces.
- c. Impact: we believe that this type of training could halt the microaggressions from happening in the workplace and recruitment process.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: NGOs and think tanks could develop an effective anti-Arab racism training guide that would include both historical and current narratives and tools to combat anti-Arab hate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4. Equitable Performance Evaluation Processes

- a. Issue: When faced with microaggressions in the workplace, some participants were worried that they were perceived differently by their bosses because of their identity. Some were uncomfortable in disclosing their identity altogether.
- b. Solution: What we know from the quantitative data (figure 8) is that Arab women are more likely to appreciate fair evaluation at work. This might be related to wanting to ensure that their performance is being judged based on their work, and not on their identity or jargon skills. Hence, if workplaces do not already have a standardized performance evaluation, then organizations should use one.
- c. Impact: A performance evaluation process will help Arab women feel like they are being treated fairly and equally as their non-Arab counterparts. It could also help them improve their skills and develop their careers.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: Workplaces

5. Tailored communication and soft skills training opportunities

- a. Issue: As mentioned in the findings, unemployed women are those who are job-ready and have a level of English and/or French comprehension required to live in Canada. However, there are some fields where the jargon and lingo used in the workplace are specific to that field or even to that organization.
- b. Solution: Accordingly, in addition to language lessons that the government offers, there should be more targeted, individualized French/English workshops or resources for different careers and different fields.
- c. Impact: Having sector-specific language classes can help Arab women and other newcomer women feel more confident in the workplace, which will undoubtedly help them thrive in their field.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: government-affiliated and private language training centres and professional associations can work together to come up with a curriculum that is suitable for a certain sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. Supported efforts to build and expand social and professional networks

- a. Issue: What is clear from the facilitators that Arab women have used to break down the barriers is that social networks are key in career development in Canada, and Arab women understand that. However, this automatically puts newcomers at a disadvantage because their social networks are not as vast, especially professionally. Even for Arab women who are second and third generation, a lack of social networks results in poor social capital for them as well.
- b. Solution: Hence, more government funding needs to be invested in organizations and/or events that specifically focus on mentorship and helping newcomer and/or racialized women find social networks through events. Some participants even expressed having spaces only for women, so that it gives them a safe space to ask questions, practice techniques on how to get a job, and practice the different jargons, without feeling pressured by the presence of men.
- c. Impact: there is a desire and crave for Arab women to expand their social networks either digitally or in person, but there needs to be an increased investment of resources to help set up the environment for this. The impact of having a social network is proven by the recently-employed women we interviewed who mostly secured a job in their field through a connection in their social network.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: federal and provincial governments can fund organisations and events that have a mission of helping newcomer and racialized women build their professional social network, through activities such as job fairs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

7. Enhance impact and success metrics of employment support services

- a. Issue: Support services that help newcomers and immigrants find jobs tend to cease support as soon as their client's find a job - any job. Indeed, this means that even if a highly skilled doctor is employed as a cashier at a pharmacy, this is considered a success measured by employment support services. However, from our research, we know that Arab women want to find meaningful jobs, not just survival jobs. Hence, this type of underemployment should not be lauded as a success metric.
- b. Solution: Accordingly, we recommend government and support services to reconsider their metrics of success from clients seeking employment to clients seeking commensurate employment in the field that they are skilled in. Some clients will undoubtedly want to explore new career options and pathways when they arrive in Canada, but this change must come out of a desire and choice to change, rather than a necessity for survival.
- c. Impact: officially recognizing under-employment rates in Canada will give governments the opportunity to measure the impact of barriers to full employment. Under-employment insinuates that newcomer and Canadian talent is not being used to its fullest potential, which inevitably has a negative impact on the Canadian economy.
- d. Institution(s) responsible: Through its Labour Force Survey, Statistics Canada could start defining and measuring under-employment. Although it is slightly more difficult to measure than generic unemployment, employment, and participation rates, it is still worth measuring, according to this report by Deloitte Canada.[1] On the grassroots level, the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada could start requesting employment service agencies to measure under-employment in their client population, in order to get an accurate picture of employment in Canada.

Avenues for Future Research

As this research study is first-of-its-kind, there are several avenues that future researchers can embark on in order to ensure the full economic integration of Arab and/or newcomer women. Indeed, this research study aimed to plant the seeds for future studies to grow. Accordingly, some opportunities for future research that were identified include: studying why support services are not used more often - less than a third of participants in this study used a support service, so what does this tell us about how accessible they are? Is the way they operate conducive to service provision? Or is the way they are perceived by community members impacting their reputation? Another area of research specifically to women is in underemployment. We found that many participants would settle with a job that they are overqualified for just to have income and gain Canadian experience. Should underemployment be the benchmark for success? Should it be measured as part of the Labour Force Survey? Moreover, some participants struggled with admitting that they are unemployed or underemployed - indeed, this could be a phenomenon across immigrant communities. Instead, they would refer to themselves as self-employed or workers in the gig economy. Accordingly, future research can investigate how the gig economy is helping (or hindering) newcomer women in their career advancement.

When it comes to family dynamics, none of the participants interviewed discussed gender-based violence at home. In fairness, our study's objectives were not aimed at looking into homeplace issues. However, what other research has shown is that lower household income and unemployment could result in an increase of domestic violence against women. Accordingly, a research project could look closely into the impacts of unemployment and/or economic insecurity from minimum wage jobs on the family or at home. Moreover, there is a unique and cross-racial experience that is shared by women who are visibly Muslim. This could be further examined in order to understand the barriers that women who wear the Hijab face. This type of research is timely, with the passage of labour policies such as Bill 21 in Quebec.

Also, there is another unique and cross-racial experience that is shared by women who came to Canada as refugees. These women face more challenges in preparing documents for degree equivalencies because they likely cannot safely access government institutions in their home country. As well, these women experience post-traumatic stress disorder with regards to their identity and language skills to a higher degree than non-refugee women because of their lived experiences. Finally, even though the Canadian Arab community experienced exponential growth since 1990, there are members of the community who are second and third generation. These are Arab-Canadians who also experience barriers when finding employment, but this study had a limited scope of focusing on newcomers (objective 3). Accordingly, future research projects can look into the employment journeys of Arabs who were born and raised in Canada, but are still facing barriers when trying to achieve their full potential.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has fulfilled the three objectives that it sought out. The first objective is to understand the knowledge gaps behind the ever-increasing employment barriers facing Arab women and filling these gaps with evidence that inform policy recommendations. We have attempted to fill these knowledge gaps with primary source evidence. Through an inductive approach, we found that the barriers that Arab women face include: Canadian experience, foreign credentials, identity, language/communication obstacles, and support services. What this showed us is that there is no barrier that is inherently unique to the Arab women experience, such that both Arab and non-Arab women experience barriers related to having foreign credentials or not having Canadian experience. However, what the quantitative data specifically showed us is that the degree and intensity to which Arab women are facing specific barriers are significantly higher at times than their non-Arab counterparts. As such, the solutions required for Arab women will inherently be more unique and systemic.

The second objective of the study is to conduct a community-based project with a focus on race-based data collection that ensures intersectionality to ensure the data is reliable and generalizable. This objective guided our methodology, which includes both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to paint a robust, rounded, and holistic picture of the Arab woman experience in employment in Canada. The third objective of the study is to contribute to a larger discussion on employment with emphasis on improving integration outcomes and policies for newcomers in Canada. Indeed, because the Arab community is the fastest growing immigrant community, we were able to come up with policy recommendations that would not only help Arab women in Canada, but also other racialized community groups. As such, this report contributes to the large discussion on employment because it includes suggestions on how to improve integration outcomes for marginalised groups coming to Canada.

Ultimately, Arab women who are job ready and seeking employment find themselves dealing with a system that tends to set them up for failure. In this sense, failure could mean unemployment and underemployment. With each day that passes where this issue is not addressed, the Canadian economy is losing talent. Arab women come to Canada for an opportunity to live in a country where their basic needs are met, but they cannot stay in a country where their livelihood is in danger. As mentioned in the opening section of this report, Arab women have more to offer, but they do not have the chance to show their talent and brilliance to the rest of Canada, which will hurt the Canadian economy in the long run.

NOTES

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