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STILL STRUGGLING

Racialized workers in the post-pandemic labour market

Katherine Scott



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Still struggling

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SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic clearly illustrated the precarity that many racialized workers experience, disproportionately represented on the front lines, in jobs lacking the job protections, benefits or paid sick days. The recovery has proven to be equally challenging.

One of the most notable changes in Canada's labour market was the sharp reduction in low-waged service sector employment and the simultaneous increase in several higher-paying industries such as professional services and finance.

The change in the industrial structure of employment in the context of a very tight labour market helped to narrow the employment gap between racialized and white workers between 2019 and 2022. At the same time, other racialized workers were caught on the wrong side of the recession.

This report provides a detailed examination of the fallout of the pandemic and its recovery focusing in on the experiences of racialized workers in the key age group 25 to 54 years, drawing on custom data from Statistics Canada on employment, wages and industrial sector.

KEY FINDINGS

1. There has been a significant boost in the number of racialized workers

- For several decades, Canada's labour force has been changing as a result of population growth through immigration and the inexorable

march of population aging. The period between 2022 and 2024 is noteworthy because of rapid rise in the number of new immigrants and non-permanent residents including those on study and work permits.

- The population of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years grew by 19.1 per cent over this period whereas there was an actual decline in the number of white workers of -0.2 per cent. As a result, racialized workers now make up more than one-third (36.3 per cent) of the total labour market, up from 32.4 per cent in 2022—an increase of roughly 800,000 people.

2. Employment rates hit historic highs in 2023

- The post pandemic surge in employment brought many racialized workers into the labour market. In 2023, the employment rate of racialized workers aged 25-54 years hit an historic high (81.5 per cent), helping to narrow the employment gap with white workers (86.1 per cent).
- Indeed, employment parity has been effectively achieved among core-aged men (87.2 per cent vs 88.0 per cent). Lower rates of employment among racialized women now account for almost all of the remaining gap (76.1 per cent vs 83.7 per cent).

3. Racialized workers are moving into all industries, the largest gains in high-wage and low-wage sectors

- With the notable exception of agriculture, administrative and support services, accommodation and food services, and retail, the labour market has recouped pandemic losses. Employment among all core-aged workers increased by 11.2 per cent between 2019 and 2024, with immigrant workers (and immigrant men in particular) accounting for almost all of the gains.
- Racialized workers have increased their share of workers in every industry, many new entrants finding employment in “high growth” industries as well as filling vacancies in the care economy and industries like accommodation and food services.

4. Have employment gains translated into wage gains?

Yes—and no

- A sizable group of racialized workers have moved up the wage grid since 2020, as some workers took advantage of the surge of job vacancies in higher-paying industries. But the number of racialized workers working in lower-paid employment also increased at the same time, offsetting aggregate wage gains of the total group.
- Looking at the period 2022 to 2024, the median hourly wage of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years increased by 0.7 per cent after taking inflation into account, reaching \$29.63 per hour.
- The median wage of white workers also increased modestly to \$35.02 per hour—producing a wage gap of 84.6 per cent, effectively unchanged from 2022.
- The wage gap is and remains particularly high for racialized women. In 2024, racialized women earned, on average, 74.1 cents for every dollar a white male worker earned, a difference of roughly ten dollars (\$27.88 vs \$37.63). The wage gap is 83.0 per cent between racialized and white male workers.

5. Making gains and falling behind

- Stark differences are obvious between industries. For example, between 2022 and 2024, real median wages of core-aged, racialized workers increased in professional services (3.3 per cent), utilities (7.9 per cent), transportation (2.2 per cent), mining (1.8 per cent), manufacturing (1.1 per cent), information and cultural industries (0.9 per cent) and health care and social assistance (0.9 per cent).
- With the exception of mining, these wage gains helped to narrow the racial wage gap in these industries. Indeed, in 2024, racialized workers made more than white workers in information and cultural industries (102.7 per cent), in professional services (100.4 per cent) and in utilities (107.5 per cent).
- At the same time, the real wages declined in real estate (-7.2 per cent), administrative and support services (-5.9 per cent), construction (-5.1 per cent) agriculture (-3.6 per cent), finance and insurance (-3.0 per cent), further widening the large wage gap in several sectors.

6. Rates of low-wage employment among racialized workers are on the rise

- These findings are consistent with growth in the proportion of low-waged racialized workers over the 2022-24 period, those earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage.
- In 2022, the earliest point for which we have comparable data, 13.1 per cent of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years occupied a low wage job, almost twice the level of comparable white workers (7.1 per cent).
- By 2024, the proportion of low-waged racialized workers had risen to 15.2 per cent while the rate among white workers held steady (7.3 per cent).
- Racialized women workers are more likely to be low-waged workers compared to racialized men (18.7 per cent vs 12 per cent in 2024). That said, the increase in the rate of low wage work since 2022 has been larger among racialized men given the changing nature of economy.

CONCLUSION

A robust employment recovery in 2021 and 2022 helped to boost the employment and wages of racialized workers between 2022 and 2024. Looking behind the aggregate figures, however, reveals the two-track character of the recovery.

The pandemic experience did not disrupt the divide between “good” jobs and “bad” jobs in the Canadian labour market. The wages and working conditions of “bad” jobs remain largely unchanged. Rather, the workers and groups caught on one side or the other of this divide has changed.

Our study looks at the experiences of racialized workers as a group. It does not speak to the industry location of different groups, that is which groups have a foothold in higher-paying sectors and which ones are over-represented in lower-paying fields. This critical question needs an answer. Who is being left behind? And why?

The gains reported by some racialized workers may yet be temporary. Unemployment is rising. In 2024, the unemployment rate among racialized workers aged 25-54 years was 7.4 per cent as compared to 4.3 per cent among white workers.

With a trade war upon us, prospects are dimming. Potential job losses will hit racialized workers hard, initially in manufacturing, and then rippling out through “trade-adjacent” industries such as finance, professional services and transportation and then the larger labour market.

Canada is not prepared. The federal government did not address the shortcomings of our EI system that were so graphically revealed during the pandemic. There remain gaping holes in our employment standards and regulations. Our health and social services systems have not recovered—drained and strained by years of austerity—care workers traumatized by the pandemic experience.

Our immigrant settlements services, for their part, have been running flat out to serve the needs of the million+ newcomers and temporary residents who have entered the country in the last three years, thousands upon thousands who are now working in low-waged, precarious jobs.

Our study provides further evidence that the rising tide in the aftermath of the pandemic did not lift all boats—and that a comprehensive approach to dismantle entrenched disparities in Canada’s racialized labour market remains a top priority.

INTRODUCTION

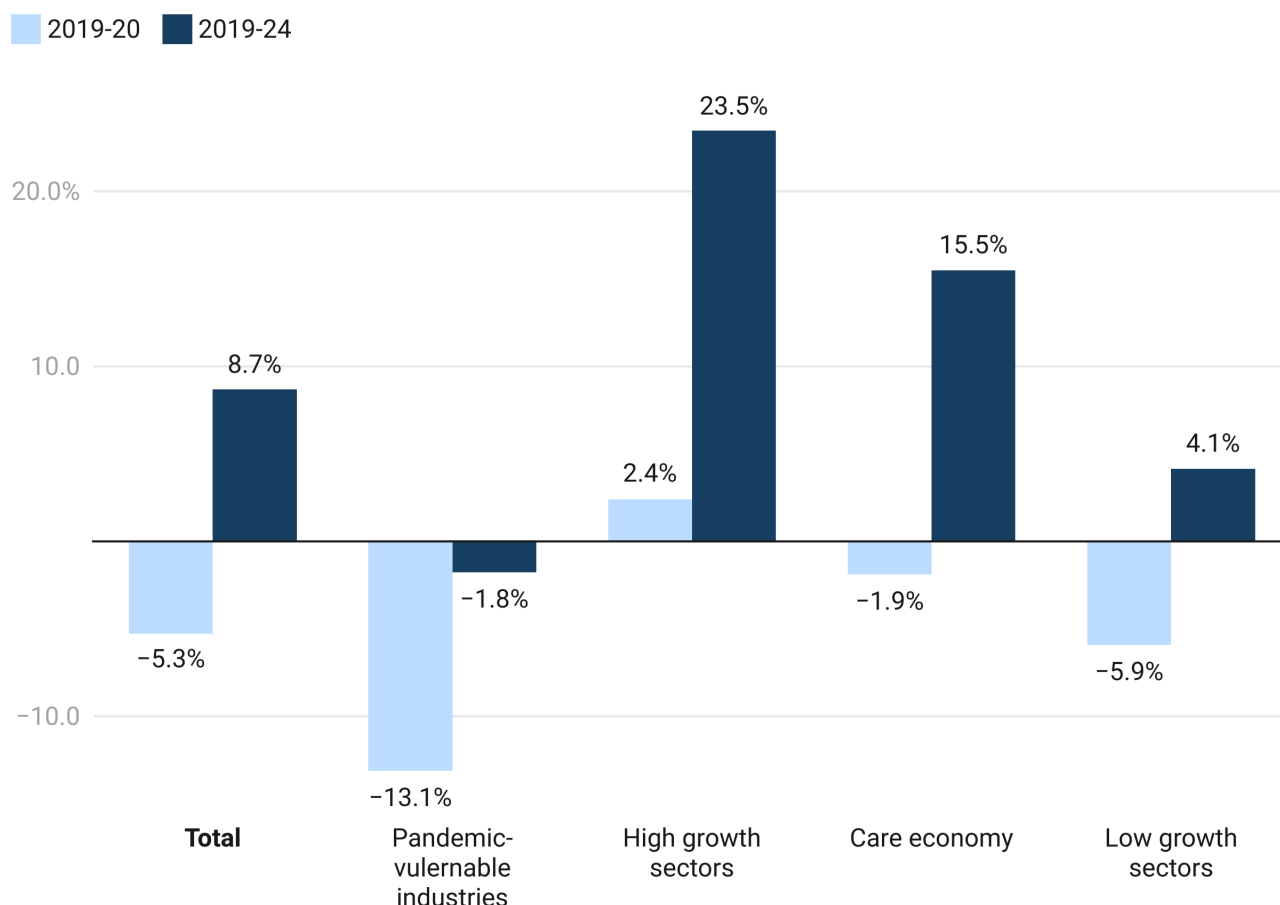
THE CANADIAN LABOUR MARKET is characterized by deeply entrenched racial disparities evident in the structural patterns in wage discrimination, barriers confronting racialized workers in the search of decent, well-paid employment, persistent occupational segregation, as well as large differences in earnings and financial security.¹ The pandemic clearly illustrated the precarity of many racialized workers' experience. They were disproportionately represented on the front lines of the pandemic, in jobs lacking the employment protections, benefits or paid sick days.² The recovery has proven to be equally challenging.

The pandemic disrupted Canada's labour market in a myriad of ways. One of the most notable changes was the sharp reduction in low-waged service sector employment and the simultaneous increase in several higher-paying industries, such as professional services and finance. The change in the industrial structure of employment in the context of a very tight labour market helped to narrow the employment gap for some racialized workers.

At the same time, others were caught on the wrong side of the recovery. As Block and Galabuzi found in their study of Ontario workers at the time of the pandemic, the employment gap between Black and white workers, for example, actually widened as Black workers, concentrated in struggling industries, fell further behind.³

This report takes up the story in 2022. It examines the fallout of the pandemic period and its recovery—focusing on the experiences of racialized workers. How have racialized workers fared? Has the pandemic disrupted deeply entrenched racial disparities in the Canadian labour market? Where do racialized workers stand at this moment of economic uncertainty?

Figure 1 / Workers in front-facing industries have yet to recover pandemic losses
Change in employment among workers 15 and older, by industry group, 2019-24



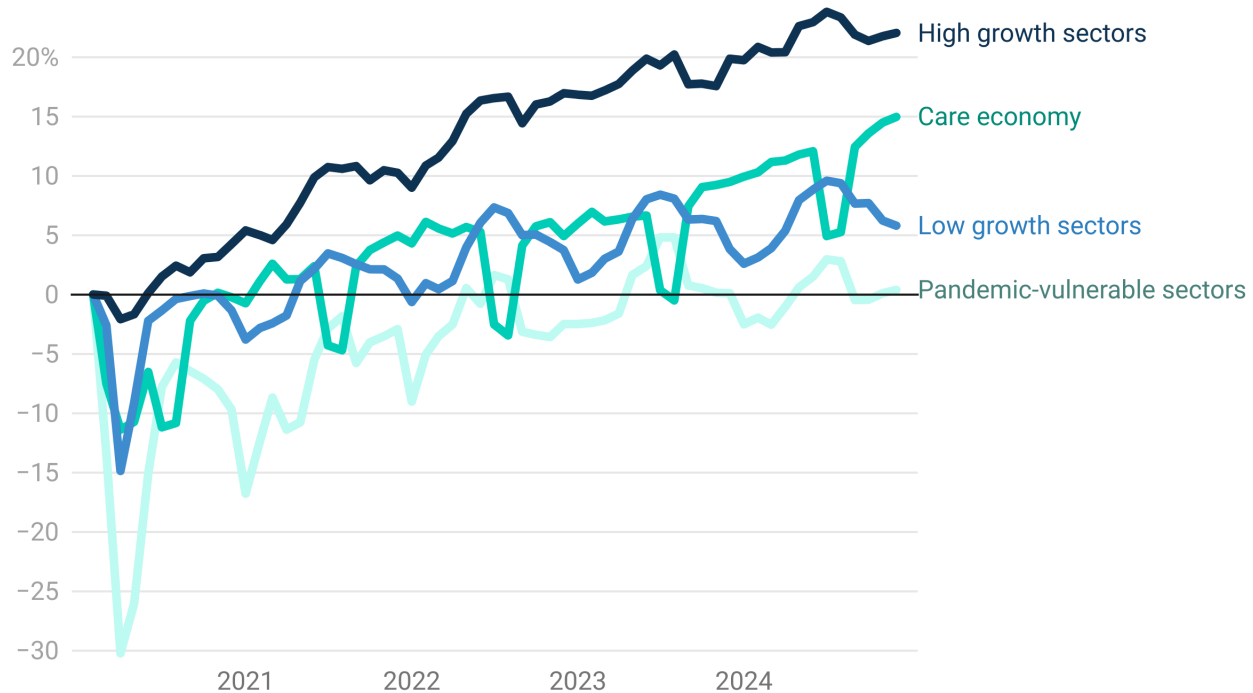
Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0023-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, annual (x 1,000)

The paper draws on custom data on employment, wages and the industrial sector, by racialized status, from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey.^{4,5} It builds on the work completed for the CCPA's Beyond Recovery project,⁶ which analyzed the experiences of women workers during the pandemic and its immediate aftermath, with a specific focus on marginalized women in hard-hit sectors and the care economy. The paper looks specifically at the changing structure of the labour market by analyzing the trajectory of racialized and white workers in four different groups of industries based on their pandemic experiences:

- **Pandemic-vulnerable industries:** These industries experienced a sharp drop in employment in 2020 and have been slow to rebound. Levels of employment are still below pre-pandemic levels. The

Figure 2 / A small number of industries have driven post-pandemic employment gains

Change in level of employment relative to February 2020 by industry group



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0022-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality (x1,000)

industries include retail trade; arts, entertainment and recreation; accommodation and food services; and other services.

- **High-growth industries:** This group, by contrast, experienced minimal disruption in 2020 and led the post-pandemic period in employment growth. They include information and cultural industries; finance and insurance; professional, scientific and technical services; and public administration.
- **Care-economy industries:** The care economy includes educational services and health care and social assistance, both of which experienced significant employment losses in 2020 and have since bounced back, surpassing pre-pandemic levels. That said, working conditions in these sectors have deteriorated and the churn of workers is high, especially in health care services. Wage gains have not kept up with inflation, further eroding the value of care labour.

- **Low-growth industries:** This group includes a mix of industries that experienced relatively modest employment losses during the pandemic and have been on a low-growth trajectory since 2020 in comparison to their peers. They include agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction; utilities; construction; manufacturing; wholesale trade; transportation and warehousing; real estate and rental; business, building and other support services.⁷

This paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 looks at the significant increase in the number of racialized workers in Canada's labour market between 2022 and 2024, a result of immigration. This is critical context for understanding current employment trends and their implications for racialized workers. Section 3 presents a portrait of racialized workers aged 25-54 years of age, examining recent employment trends by industrial sector, as well as wage rates among male and female workers, in comparison to non-racialized or white workers. The concluding section discusses key takeaways and the potential for policy reform.

Back in 2020, the concern from the start of the pandemic was that the crisis would set off a devastating feedback loop that would deepen and entrench existing inequalities.⁸ Our evidence confirms that the rising tide did not lift all boats. The divide between "good jobs" and "bad jobs" persists. The current moment demands new ideas and strategies for tackling entrenched racial disparities, strengthening fundamental labour rights, and overhauling Canada's immigration programs.

THE CHANGING COMPOSITION OF CANADA'S LABOUR MARKET

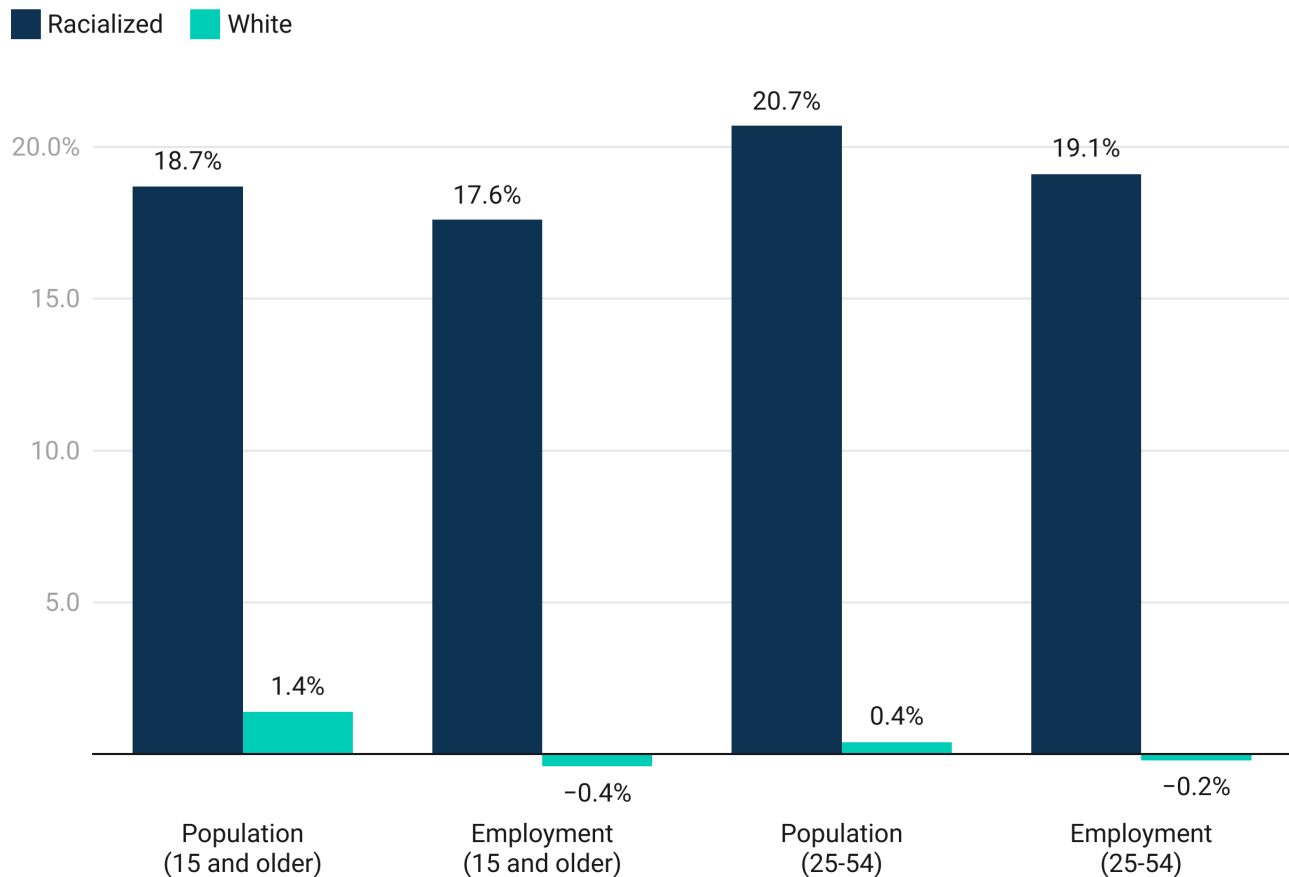
THE 2019-22 PERIOD MARKED an important change in the industrial structure of the economy. More recent labour force data point to an equally significant shift in the composition of the labour market—one that is key to understanding recent labour force developments among racialized workers.⁹

For several decades, Canada's labour force has been changing as a result of population growth through immigration and the inexorable march of population aging. Large numbers of racialized workers (a population that already skews younger) are entering the labour market and older non-racialized or white workers are exiting. The period between 2022 and 2024 is noteworthy because of a rapid rise in the number of new immigrants and non-permanent residents on study or work permits.

Figure 3 compares the change in the overall population of racialized and non-racialized residents in Canada for those 15 years and older and the core working age group aged 25 to 54 years. The number of racialized people 15 years and older grew by 18.7 per cent between 2022 and 2024, compared to only 1.4 per cent among white people. The gap was even larger in the core working age group: 20.7 per cent compared to 0.4 per cent.¹⁰

Figure 3 / Significant boost in number of racialized workers

Percentage change in level of employment and population by racialized status and age group, 2022-24



Source: Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0023-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, annual (x 1,000)

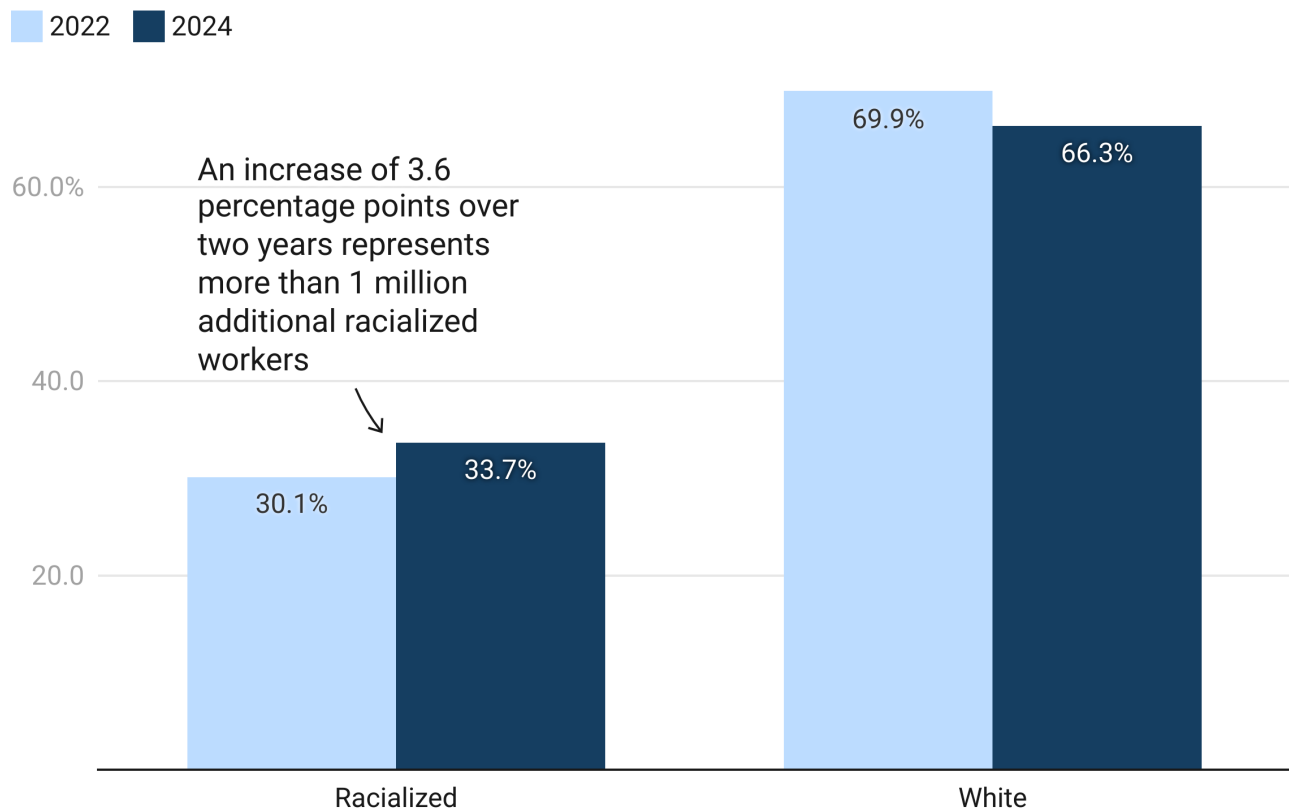
There's, predictably, a similar pattern in the employment figures. The number of racialized workers aged 15 years and over grew by 17.6 per cent over this period whereas there was an actual decline in the number of white workers of -0.4 per cent. And among those aged 25 to 54 years, the gap was 19.1 per cent versus -0.2 per cent.

As a result, racialized workers now make up one-third (33.7 per cent) of the Canada's total labour force, up from 30.1 per cent in 2022—an increase of 3.6 percentage points, or more than one million people, in three short years.¹¹ Among the core-working aged group, racialized people now represent 36.3 per cent of all workers.

The surge in employment in 2022 brought many racialized workers into the labour market, narrowing the employment gap with white workers. The employment rate among all racialized people now exceeds

Figure 4 / Racialized workers now make up one-third of work force

Employment share by racialized status, 15 and older, 2022 and 2024



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0440-01 Labour force characteristics by visible minority group, annual

the rate among white people aged 15 years and older by a substantial margin: 65.5 per cent vs. 59.1 per cent.

A simple comparison of the aggregate figures, however, is misleading, given the impact of population aging and the very large number of Canadian residents over age 55. Looking at the core working age group aged 25 to 54 years is a much better gauge of comparative standing. Using this measure, we see a flip in the figures. In 2022, the employment rate among racialized workers was 81.4 per cent, compared to 86 per cent among white workers, representing an employment gap of 94.7 per cent.

The employment rates for racialized and non-racialized workers, both historic highs, were substantially higher in 2022 and 2023 than those recorded prior to the pandemic.¹² In particular, the increase among racialized men helped to narrow, but not eliminate, the employment gap with white men (87.2 per cent versus 88 per cent in 2023). By contrast, the 2023 employment rate among racialized women was much lower, at

Table 1 / Employment rates hit historic highs post pandemic

Employment rate by age group, 2022 and 2024

	Population (15 and older)		Population (25-54)	
	2022	2024	2022	2024
Total				
Racialized	66.1	65.5	81.4	80.4
White	60.2	59.1	86.0	85.5
Men				
Racialized	70.4	70.0	86.8	85.7
White	63.9	62.5	88.4	87.3
Women				
Racialized	62.0	61.0	76.3	75.0
White	56.5	55.7	83.5	83.7

Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0440-01 Labour force characteristics by visible minority group, annual

76.1 per cent, compared to 83.7 per cent among white women (See Table 1).

The post-pandemic increase in employment rates among racialized and white workers was significant, fuelled by a strong rebound in demand for goods and services. But it is also clear—as we discuss below—that employment growth has not been keeping pace with population growth. Indeed, employment rates among working-aged racialized workers started to decline in 2024. They remain above 2019 levels for now.

Table 2 / Among core-aged workers, the employment gap between racialized and white workers is large among women, less so among men

Employment rate by gender and population group, workers 25-54, 2024

With the exception of the Filipino community, the employment rates of people aged 25 to 54 years for other racialized groups (including both men and women) are all lower than the rate for non-racialized people.

The gap is particularly large among women, ranging from 86.4 per cent among Filipino women and 60 per cent among Arab women. (For comparison, the employment rate is 83.7 per cent among non-racialized women).

The employment gap is narrower among different groups of men, about 10 percentage points. Japanese, Filipino, South Asian and Southeast Asian men all have higher rates of employment than non-racialized men. Black and West Asian men have much lower rates in comparison to non-racialized men.

Total		Men+		Women+	
Racialized, total	80.4%	Racialized, total	85.7%	Racialized, total	75.0%
Filipino	88.3%	Japanese	90.7%	Filipino	86.4%
Southeast Asian	83.6%	Filipino	90.6%	Southeast Asian	79.8%
South Asian	81.9%	South Asian	88.4%	Latin American	78.2%
Latin American	81.3%	Southeast Asian	88.0%	Chinese	75.8%
Korean	80.1%	Korean	85.4%	Korean	75.4%
Chinese	79.6%	Latin American	84.4%	South Asian	74.5%
Japanese	79.6%	Chinese	83.9%	Black	73.0%
Black	76.8%	Arab	83.4%	Japanese	72.8%
West Asian	73.0%	West Asian	82.2%	West Asian	63.7%
Arab	72.6%	Black	80.8%	Arab	60.0%
White	85.5%	White	87.3%	White	83.7%

Source Statistics Canada Table 14-10-0440-01 Labour force characteristics by visible minority group, annual

RACIALIZED WORKERS AND THE CHANGING STRUCTURE OF CANADA'S LABOUR MARKET

GROWING DIVIDE IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The recovery in total employment continued over the 2022-24 period, growing by a total of five per cent across the economy. The pace of growth finally picked up among industries heavily impacted by pandemic closures and industries such as oil and gas extraction, transportation, and real estate. Manufacturing and construction published marginal gains (less than two per cent over the three years), while the rate of growth among the top performers between 2019 to 2022 fell back from the highs of the immediate post-pandemic period to 6.2 per cent (from 16.2 per cent). Indeed, information and cultural industries experienced employment losses between 2022 and 2024 (-3.9 per cent). By contrast, there was sustained growth in the care economy.

With the notable exception of agriculture, administrative and support services, accommodation and food services, and retail, the

Table 3 / The shift away from front-facing services and administrative jobs continues

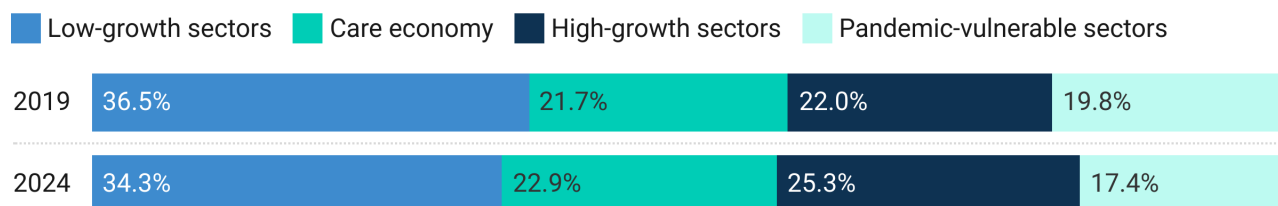
Change in employment among workers 25-54, by industry group, 2019-24

	2019-20	2019-22	2022-24	2019-24
Total	-3.6%	4.8%	6.1%	11.2%
Rest of economy	-1.5%	7.8%	6.1%	14.4%
Low growth sectors	-6.1%	0.6%	3.9%	4.5%
Care economy	-0.3%	9.6%	7.1%	17.4%
High growth sectors	5.1%	18.1%	8.3%	27.9%
Pandemic vulnerable	-12.0%	-7.6%	6.2%	-1.9%

Source Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0023-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, annual (x 1,000)

Figure 5 / A larger share of workers are now employed in professional services, finance, IT and public admin

Percentage distribution of workers 25-54 by industry sector, 2019 and 2024



Source Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0023-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, annual (x1,000)

labour market had recouped pandemic losses by 2024. Looking back to 2019, employment has increased by more than 1.6 million workers, or 8.7 per cent (Table 3). “High growth” industries accounted for over half (52.7 per cent) of the gains, followed by the care economy (35.4 per cent) and “low growth” industries (16.9 per cent).

We see the same pattern among core-aged workers. Employment among these workers increased by 11.2 per cent between 2019 and 2024. And again, growth was concentrated in the post-pandemic “high growth” industries, a slightly larger share (54.9 per cent) than recorded for the total population, and a slightly smaller share with respect to the care economy (33.7 per cent).

These data show the continuing shift away from jobs involving routine, manual tasks in industries such as accommodation and food services and retail as well as administrative and support industries and even well-paid manufacturing into health care and white-collar areas of the labour market such as professional services and education.¹³ The pandemic has accelerated these shifts in the composition of the labour market.¹⁴

In 2019, for example, 19.8 per cent of workers aged 25 to 54 years were employed in pandemic vulnerable industries. By 2024, the figure had dropped by 2.3 percentage points to 17.4 per cent. By contrast, the proportion working in “high growth” industries increased by 3.3 per cent to 25.3 per cent (See Figure 5). This structural shift in employment helped to boost median wages in the aftermath of the pandemic, notably during the 2019 to 2022 period, coinciding with the large movement of workers during the initial phase of the recovery.

HOW DID RACIALIZED WORKERS NAVIGATE THE TRANSITION?

In 2022, information on population groups designated “visible minorities” was made available on Statistics Canada’s Labour Force Survey. This long-overdue step provides the opportunity to generate and track monthly changes in the labour force status of racialized workers. Our study draws on this new information to examine the trajectories of racialized and non-racialized or white workers, focusing on those aged 25 to 54 years.

As noted earlier, racialized workers accounted for almost all employment gains recorded among core-aged workers between 2022 and 2024 (at 88.2 per cent). Racialized men represented more than half (53.2 per cent) of the total increase, while racialized women made up 35 per cent. The balance was accounted for by white workers.

Looking more closely at the industry breakdown, racialized workers led employment growth in each of the four industry groups in our study—the overall number of racialized workers increased by 15 per cent (Table 4). The increases ranged from a high of 16.8 per cent in pandemic-vulnerable industries to a low of 13 per cent in the low-growth industry group. By contrast, the number of white workers engaged in these two industry sectors declined over the same period by 1.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively. The influx of racialized workers is more than offsetting the exit of white workers from these specific labour markets.

Table 4 / Racialized workers led employment growth in every industry group

Change in employment among workers 25-54, by racialized group and industry group, 2022-24

	Total		Men		Women	
	Racialized workers	White workers	Racialized workers	White workers	Racialized workers	White workers
Total	15.0%	0.9%	17.6%	0.3%	12.2%	1.5%
Rest of economy	14.5%	1.3%	16.1%	0.5%	12.8%	2.2%
Low growth sectors	13.0%	-1.6%	15.4%	-1.5%	7.6%	-2.1%
Care economy	16.1%	3.3%	15.3%	4.6%	16.3%	3.0%
High growth sectors	15.2%	3.8%	17.4%	3.2%	12.6%	4.5%
Pandemic vulnerable	16.8%	-1.5%	24.4%	-1.0%	10.1%	-1.9%

Source Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

Numerically, high-growth and low-growth industries reported the largest increase in racialized workers between 2022 and 2024, at roughly 160,000 each. The number of racialized workers working in professional services, for example, grew by more than 100,000 (or 21.2 per cent), more than double the number of white workers (41,200). There was also a significant increase in the number of racialized workers engaged in the care economy, growing by 130,000, the largest share in health care and social assistance.

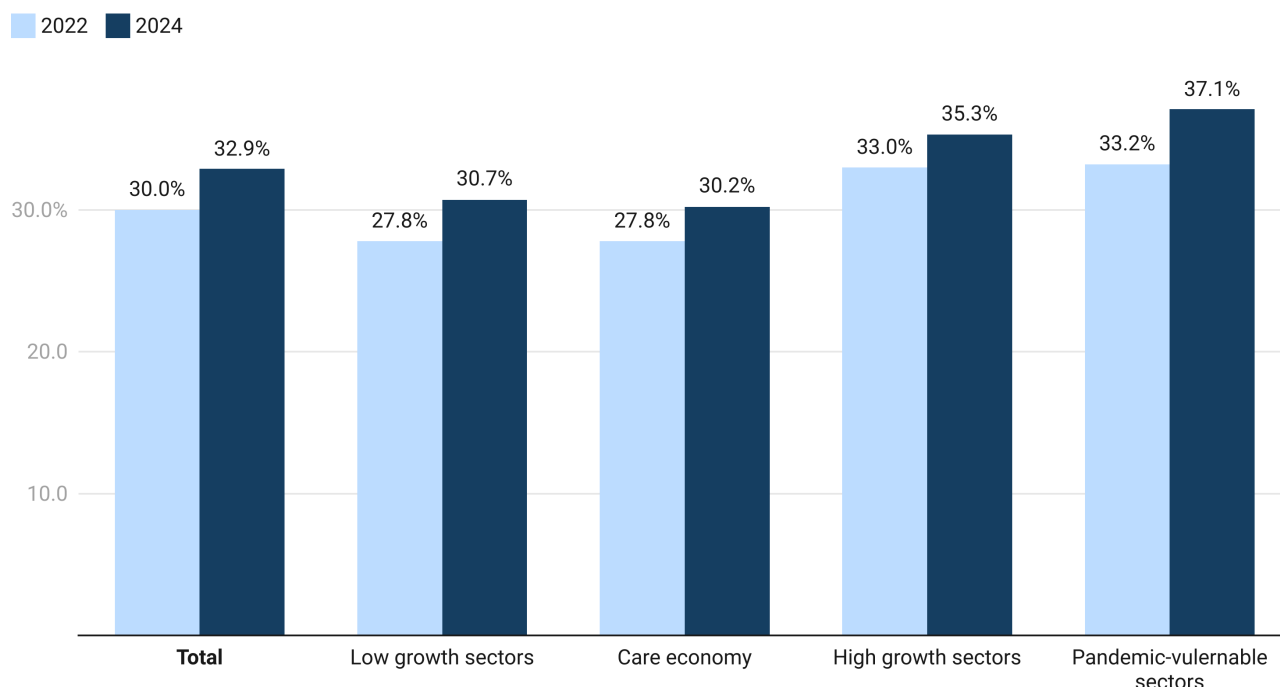
As a consequence, racialized workers are making up a growing share of each industry,¹⁵ many new entrants are finding employment in high-growth industries as well filling gaps in the care economy and industries like accommodation and food services. Racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years now comprise 37.1 per cent of all workers in pandemic-vulnerable industries and 35.3 per cent of those in the high growth group (See Figure 6).

There is growth in low-growth sectors—such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, transportation and administration and support services—but the pace of growth has been slower as these employers continue to struggle. Thus, while the number of racialized workers increased between 2022 and 2024, the share of the racialized workforce working in low-growth industries declined.

The size of the non-racialized, or white, workforce increased between 2022 and 2024 too, but by only a meagre 0.9 per cent. All employment growth was concentrated in high-growth industries, such as professional

Figure 6 / Racialized workers flowing into high-paying and low-paying sectors

Racialized workers' share of employment by industry group, 25-54, 2022 and 2024



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

services and public administration (3.8 per cent) and in the care economy (3.3 per cent).

At the same time, there have been declines in the number of white workers engaged in agriculture (-14.4 per cent), administration and support services (-7.9 per cent) and retail (-6.3 per cent). In total, the share of white workers in low-growth industries fell by 0.9 percentage points over this period. Likewise, the share of workers in pandemic vulnerable sector declined by 0.4 percentage points; this is a key point of difference with racialized workers whose numbers have grown.

WHAT DOES THE INDUSTRY LEVEL DATA TELL US?

The analysis of labour market data for 2022 to 2024 suggests that the dual-track recovery that Block and Galabuzi first identified has continued, with racialized workers flowing disproportionately into the top and the bottom of the labour market.

Table 5 / Significant growth among racialized workers in high-paying and low-paying industries

Change in number and share of racialized workers 25-54, by industry, 2022-24

	2022-24 change		Share of racialized workers	Percentage point change in share
	(%)	(x1,000)		
Accommodation & food services	31.6%	65.8	51.8%	6.5%
Real estate, rental & leasing	25.1%	18.6	38.7%	5.5%
Professional, scientific & technical services	21.2%	100.8	40.0%	3.4%
Other services	19.8%	24.2	29.4%	2.3%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	19.5%	8.0	23.1%	3.2%
Public administration	19.4%	33.5	22.5%	2.1%
Educational services	17.5%	36.2	21.9%	2.1%
Health care & social assistance	15.5%	93.2	34.8%	2.5%
Total, all industries	15.0%	575.3	32.9%	2.8%
Construction	14.5%	26.7	19.5%	2.1%
Transportation & warehousing	14.1%	38.7	44.8%	2.7%
Manufacturing	12.0%	45.4	35.6%	3.3%
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	11.9%	1.9	12.1%	2.6%
Finance & insurance	10.7%	32.4	42.7%	2.1%
Administrative & support	10.6%	15.6	38.2%	4.2%
Wholesale trade	9.0%	11.2	29.6%	1.6%
Mining, quarrying, oil & gas extraction	8.8%	2.3	12.7%	-0.1%
Retail trade	7.2%	27.0	36.2%	3.1%
Utilities	6.5%	1.2	17.0%	0.7%
Information & cultural industries	-7.6%	-7.3	32.2%	-1.2%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Custom data

Table 5 provides more detailed information for individual industries organized by the scale of employment growth among racialized workers (aged 25-54 years). Accommodation and food services tops the list. The number of racialized workers working in these businesses grew by 31.6 per cent between 2022 and 2024, boosting the already high share of racialized workers in this sector to 51.8 per cent. (For reference, racialized workers comprised one-third (32.9 per cent of the total workforce aged 25-54 years in 2024.)

There were sizable increases in the number of racialized workers working in other low-wage sectors, such as other services—typically small businesses such as hair salons and garages—and in arts, entertainment and recreation. Administrative and support services and retail also stand out. While the pace of growth in these industries was slower, the share of racialized workers working in these areas jumped by 4.2 and 3.1 percentage points, respectively, as the share of white workers dropped. Racialized workers were already over-represented, they are now more so.

There were increases, as well, in higher-paying industries, notably professional services (21.2 per cent), public administration (19.4 per cent) and educational services (17.5 per cent). For example, racialized workers expanded their share of the professional services workforce to 40 per cent in 2024. Racialized workers are also well represented in finance and insurance, at 42.7 per cent. That said, there is still a considerable employment gap in public administration and educational services where just over 20 per cent of the workforce is racialized.

Racialized workers are also well represented in transportation and warehousing (44.8 per cent) and manufacturing (35.6 per cent)—sectors where median hourly wage hovers near the national benchmark (\$30 per hour in 2024). These industries have clawed back pandemic losses but now stand squarely in the sights of American tariffs. Potential job layoffs will significantly impact all workers here.

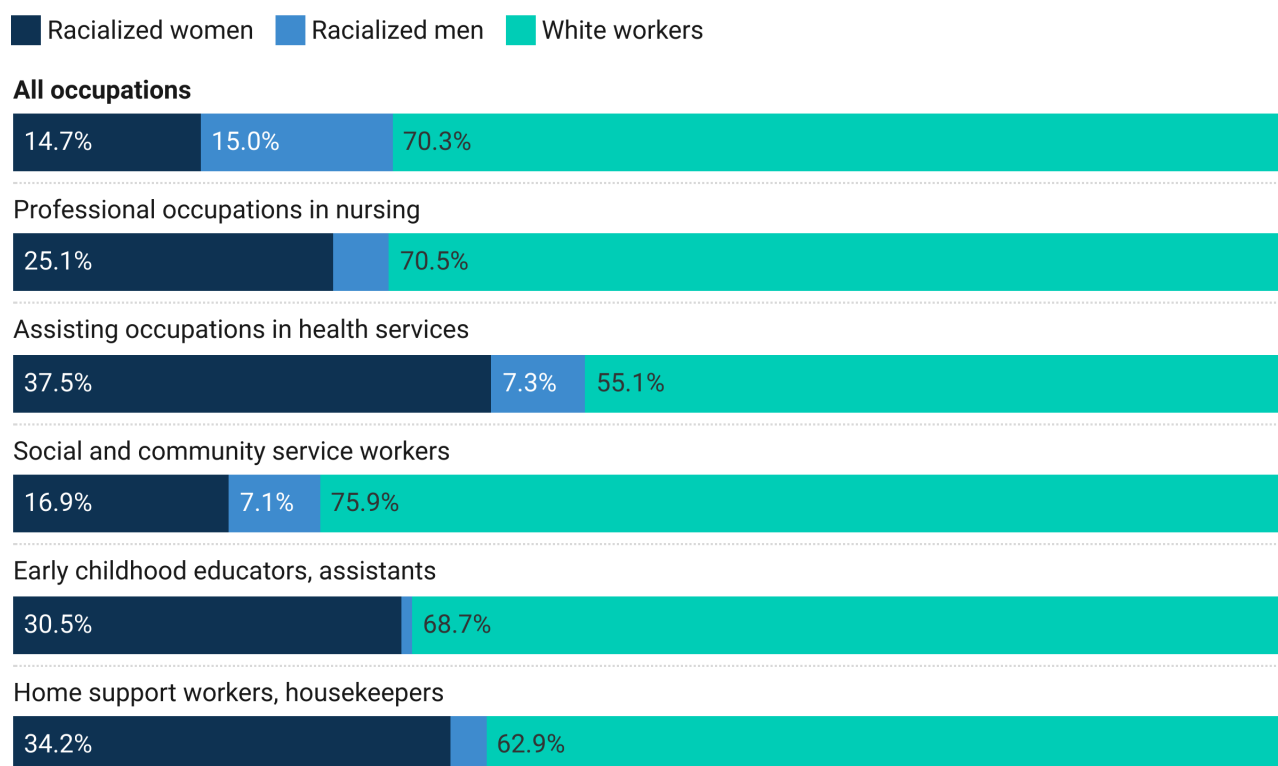
No group of workers felt the pandemic more keenly than the millions working in Canada's care economy. These workers—largely female and racialized—are still under enormous pressure. Canada's health and community services, strained and drained by years of austerity, have been running full out for five years trying to keep up with demand.¹⁶

Vacancies soared in 2022 as burned-out staff retired and/or sought less stressful employment in other occupations and industries. While total vacancies have dropped by half since their peak in spring 2022, vacancies in the health care and social assistance industry are still 50 per cent higher than before the pandemic.¹⁷ Hospitals and other community services continue to have tremendous difficulty recruiting and retaining staff.¹⁸

The number of racialized staff working in health care and social assistance has grown by about 100,000 (or 15.5 per cent), pushing up the share of racialized workers in the industry to just over one-third (34.8 per cent). In particular, there are large numbers of racialized women working in assisting occupations in health services, child care and home support services (Figure 7).

Figure 7 / Racialized workers tend to work in lower-paying occupations in the care economy

Population share of care economy occupations by gender and racialized status, 25-54, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0330-01 Visible minority by occupation, highest level of education and generation status.

Much of the growth has taken place in hospitals at the expense of community-based services as workers have sought out better paying employment.¹⁹ Young workers are entering fields like child care but leaving after just a few years because of low wages and poor working conditions.²⁰ Working conditions have continued to deteriorate though the 2022-24 period. There was a fleeting moment when care workers were held up as heroes during the pandemic. This moment quickly passed.

MAKING GAINS AND FALLING BEHIND: WAGE TRENDS AMONG RACIALIZED WORKERS

The pandemic generated a great deal of economic upheaval, triggering large employment losses, followed by equally large employment gains in a very short period of time. The racially segregated character of the

Figure 8 / Wage gap effectively unchanged between 2022 and 2024

Median hourly wage among workers 25-54, by gender and racialized status, 2022 and 2024 (constant 2024 dollars)



Source Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

workforce was such that racialized workers experienced comparatively high rates of employment loss and, in turn, a comparatively large rebound in the aftermath of the pandemic, fueled by high levels immigration.

What has been the impact, if any, of these trends on the earnings of racialized workers? Have racialized worker's employment gain translated into wage gains? Have recent gains disrupted long standing wage disparities?²¹

The short answer is yes—and no. A sizable group of racialized workers did move up the wage grid after 2020, as many took advantage of the surge of job vacancies in higher-paying industries in the tightest labour market in decades. But the number of racialized workers working in

lower-paid employment increased at the same time, offsetting aggregate wage gains of the total group. Thus, the earnings of racialized workers continue to lag those of white workers—even among many newer labour market entrants who have education levels well above the national average.²²

The median hourly wage of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years increased by 0.7 per cent between 2022 and 2024, after taking inflation into account, reaching \$29.63 per hour. The median wage of white workers also increased modestly, to \$35.02 per hour—producing a wage gap of 84.6 per cent, effectively unchanged from 2022.

The wage gap remains particularly high for racialized women. In 2024, racialized women earned, on average, 74.1 cents for every dollar a white male workers earned, a difference of roughly 10 dollars (\$27.88 vs \$37.63). The wage gap between racialized men and white men was 83 cents on the dollar (\$31.25 vs \$37.63). See Figure 8.

In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, sizable wage gains were reported by workers in selected industries, notably information and cultural industries, finance and insurance and professional, technical and scientific services. As new workers filled positions, average wages increased, even as inflation started to bite.

During 2022-24, real wage growth slowed considerably (See Table 6). Among racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years, professional services remained a bright spot. The median wage increased by 3.3 per cent to \$43.27 per hour. Wages jumped by 7.9 per cent to \$53.75 per hour in the very small utilities sector and much more modestly in transportation (2.2 per cent), mining (1.8 per cent), manufacturing (1.1 per cent), information and cultural industries (0.9 per cent) and health care and social assistance (0.9 per cent).

With the exception of mining, these wage gains helped narrow the racial wage gap in these industries. Indeed, in 2024, racialized workers made more than white workers in information and cultural industries (102.7 per cent), in professional services (100.4 per cent) and in utilities (107.5 per cent).

At the same time, this hasn't been the experience of all racialized workers. The real wages of core-aged workers declined in real estate (-7.2 per cent), administrative and support services (-5.9 per cent), construction (-5.1 per cent) agriculture (-3.6 per cent), finance and insurance (-3.0 per cent), further widening the significant wage gap in several areas. These wage losses have weighed on racialized men in particular.

Table 6 / Making gains and falling behind

Median hourly wage among workers 25-54, by racialized status and industry, 2024

	Racialized workers	White workers	Wage gap
Total	\$29.63	\$35.02	84.6%
High growth industries			
Information and cultural industries	\$38.94	\$37.91	102.7%
Finance and insurance	\$38.46	\$41.00	93.8%
Professional, scientific and technical services	\$43.27	\$43.08	100.4%
Public administration	\$41.44	\$44.00	94.2%
Pandemic vulnerable industries			
Retail trade	\$21.00	\$23.60	89.0%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	\$25.00	\$27.50	90.9%
Accommodation and food services	\$19.00	\$20.19	94.1%
Other services (except public administration)	\$24.74	\$30.00	82.5%
Care economy			
Educational services	\$33.33	\$41.00	81.3%
Health care and social assistance	\$28.00	\$32.46	86.3%
Low growth industries			
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	\$21.00	\$27.00	77.8%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	\$48.00	\$50.00	96.0%
Utilities	\$53.75	\$50.00	107.5%
Construction	\$31.00	\$38.00	81.6%
Manufacturing	\$27.00	\$33.00	81.8%
Wholesale trade	\$28.00	\$33.33	84.0%
Transportation and warehousing	\$27.83	\$32.00	87.0%
Real estate and rental	\$27.69	\$32.00	86.5%
Business, building and other support services	\$20.50	\$26.14	78.4%

Source Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

THE RATE OF LOW-WAGE WORK IS ON THE RISE AGAIN

The erosion of earnings in low-waged sectors of the economy is consistent with growth in the proportion of low-waged racialized workers over the 2022-24 period, those earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage.

In 2022, the earliest point for which we have comparable data, 13.1 per cent of racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years occupied a low-wage job, almost twice the level of comparable white workers

Table 7 / Rate of low-wage work two times higher among racialized workers than white workers

Low wage rate among workers 25-54, by industry, 2024

	Racialized workers	White workers
Total	15.2%	7.3%
High growth industries	3.6%	1.9%
Information and cultural industries	7.2%	4.5%
Finance and insurance	4.2%	2.2%
Professional, scientific and technical services	3.6%	2.1%
Public administration	1.2%	0.7%
Pandemic vulnerable industries	37.5%	23.8%
Retail trade	38.1%	28.5%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	17.8%	11.6%
Accommodation and food services	48.8%	39.2%
Other services (except public administration)	21.4%	9.0%
Care economy	9.8%	4.7%
Educational services	9.6%	3.7%
Health care and social assistance	9.9%	5.3%
Low growth industries	14.9%	5.1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	37.1%	12.9%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	x	x
Utilities	x	x
Construction	5.7%	1.9%
Manufacturing	16.9%	5.0%
Wholesale trade	13.9%	7.5%
Transportation and warehousing	10.5%	6.2%
Real estate and rental	12.0%	5.6%
Administrative and support services	34.2%	12.8%

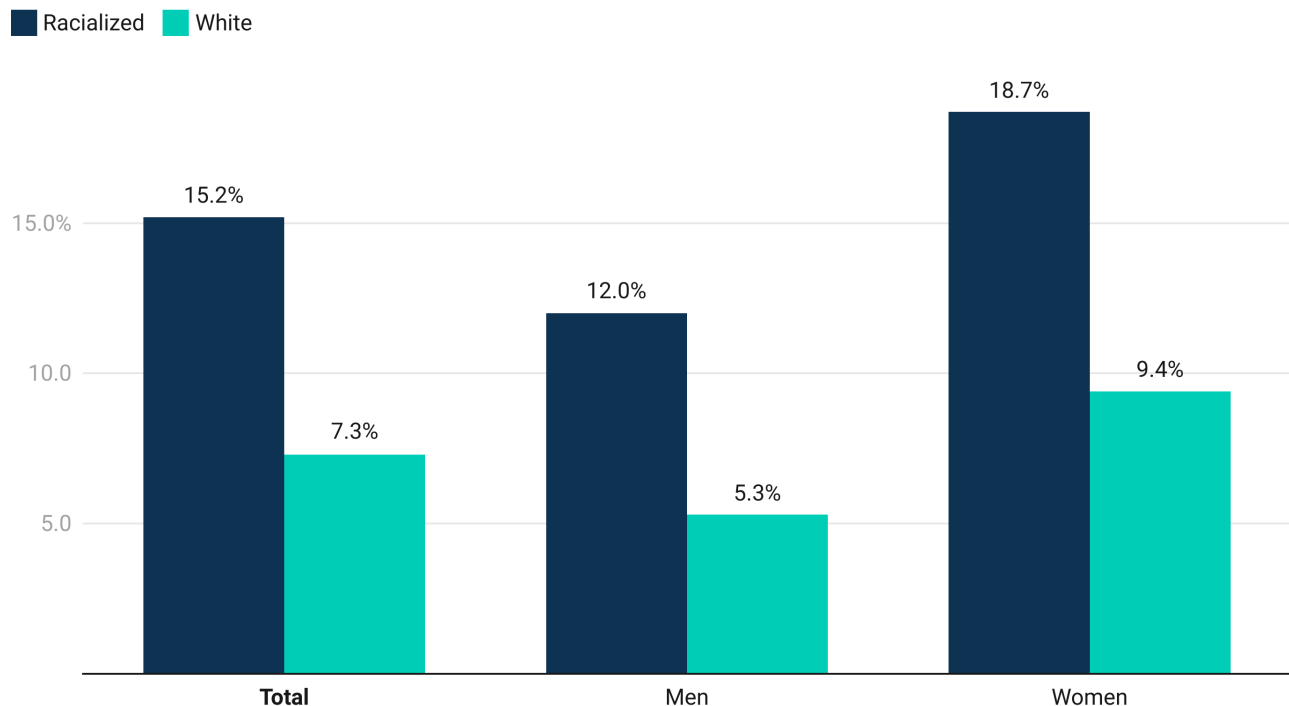
Source Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

(71 per cent). By 2024, the proportion of low-waged racialized workers had risen to 15.2 per cent while the rate among white workers held steady (7.3 per cent).

The increase in low-wage work among racialized workers was concentrated in agriculture (8.1 percentage points), administrative and

Figure 9 / Low-wage employment among racialized workers on the rise

Rate of low-wage work among workers 25-54, by gender and racialized status, 2024



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom data

support services (including waste management) (6.3 percentage points), wholesale trade (5.7 percentage points) and retail (5.1 percentage points).

In all industries, racialized workers are over-represented among low-wage workers, compared to their share of the core-aged labour market. The gap is particularly large in manufacturing, where racialized workers make up 35.6 per cent of all workers but 65.2 per cent of the low-waged workers working there.

Racialized women workers are more likely to be low-waged workers compared to racialized men (18.7 per cent versus 12 per cent in 2024). That said, the increase in the rate of low-wage work since 2022 has been larger among racialized men, given the changing structure of the labour market (three percentage points versus 1.2 percentage points).

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY

A ROBUST EMPLOYMENT RECOVERY IN 2021 and 2022 and Canada's immigration system came together to boost the employment and wages of racialized workers between 2022 and 2024.²³ Looking behind the aggregate figures, however, reveals the bifurcated character of the recovery. The pandemic experience has not disrupted the divide between "good" jobs and "bad" jobs in the Canadian labour market. The wages and working conditions of "bad" jobs remain largely unchanged. Racialized workers have found themselves on both sides of Canada's two-track recovery.

This study raises as many questions as it answers. Which groups of racialized workers have gained a foothold in higher-paying industries? Which groups remain over-represented in low-waged areas? What are the employment trends within individual industries? Are racialized workers being streamed into particular occupations? The lack of timely disaggregated and intersectional labour market data remains a critical challenge to generating the nuanced understanding needed to effectively tackle systemic employment barriers.

Canada's changing labour market—and the significant increase in the number of racialized workers—sets the stage for a renewed conversation about how best to strengthen the position of racialized workers. Current government policy hasn't successfully bridged the chasm between racialized and white workers. Indeed, Canada's immigration system and regulations governing temporary workers, refugees, international

students and other non-permanent residents are primary sources of racial inequities in the labour market.²⁴ Canada's system is explicitly designed, on the one hand, to recruit "high-skilled" immigrants through programs such as the Federal Skilled Worker Program, the Canadian Experience Class, and the Provincial Nominee Program, and on the other hand, it's designed to prop up low-wage industries via access to temporary foreign workers.²⁵ In the last 15 years, the Temporary Foreign Worker program has been retooled and expanded—most recently during the pandemic—to fill vacancies in low-waged sectors, such as accommodation and food services, caregiving, and food manufacturing. Unlike other immigration streams, low-waged workers entering as temporary workers are tied to a specific employer. As a result, they are subjected to heightened risks of exploitation and abuses as decades of evidence reveals.²⁶

Likewise, existing employment standards and human rights protections have been inadequate in addressing employment discrimination in both the public or private sectors. Federal and provincial human rights regulations prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, gender, and more—but the burden of filing complaints rests with individuals. It's a system that is patently unfair and cases drag on for years. The Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario, for instance, had nearly 9,000 unresolved cases on its books as of June 2024. Many applicants eventually give up as time and expense drags on.²⁷

Diversity, equity and inclusion programs in the private sector are very modest in scale and largely voluntary. There are no "hiring quotas" or "affirmative action" programs in Canada. Some companies offer recruitment and mentorship programs, flexible work policies, special events or workshops; others run campaigns on the importance of mental health. Diversity initiatives of all sorts, however, are being rolled back as large companies bough to the pressure from the Trump administration even in Canada. As Debra Thompson writes, corporations jumped on board in the Obama years when "the pluralistic vision of American nationalism was considered edgy and subversive."²⁸ They are acting just as quickly to jettison them.

The frontal assault on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) programming is further eroding confidence of marginalized communities that expect and deserve an equal economic playing field—in access to employment, financing, promotion and the like. The Employment Equity Review Task Force report, along with this report, makes the point that too much attention in the past has focused on numbers and representation and not enough attention has been paid to what is needed to remove sources of systemic discrimination in the labour market. "[T]he purpose

of the *Employment Equity Act* is to secure social justice through equitable representation of workers, but not just in any jobs. Employment equity is unabashedly about making sure that all workers have an equal opportunity to be represented in good, stable jobs [emphasis added]."²⁹ This challenge confronts us still.

LOOKING AHEAD

The gains reported by some racialized workers may be temporary. Labour market conditions have weakened since 2023. While job growth was fairly steady in 2024, it did not keep pace with the growth in Canada's workforce and the rate of unemployment among racialized workers is now rising, widening the gap with non-racialized workers.

In 2024, 7.4 per cent of the racialized workforce was unemployed, compared to 4.3 per cent of white workers. The largest increases were among racialized women, reaching 8.2 per cent, more than two times the rate of unemployment among white women (3.7 per cent). Arab women and Black women reported the largest increases, 3.9 percentage points and 3.6 percentage points, respectively.

With a trade war upon us, unemployment will continue to increase.³⁰ Potential job losses will hit racialized workers hard, initially in manufacturing, and then rippling out through "trade-adjacent" industries such as finance, professional services and transportation and then the larger labour market.³¹ Rising inflation will touch every household.

This is a difficult moment—made all the worse, given the enormous toll that the cost-of-living crisis³² has exacted on economically vulnerable households; pressures that will undoubtedly get worse if the value of the Canadian dollar drops.³³ In October 2024, nearly three in 10 (28.8 per cent) adults aged 15 and older were living in a household that found it difficult or very difficult to meet its financial needs. The rate was especially high among renters (39.2 per cent) and recent immigrants (41.2 per cent).³⁴

At the moment, all eyes are focused on the trade war with the United States and the potentially existential threat that this may portend. The new Prime Minister, Mark Carney, has asserted that his government will be focusing all of its energies on the crisis.³⁵ His initial decision to eliminate the cabinet positions dedicated to social justice, equality and labour didn't bode well.³⁶ This move reinforced the myth that issues of equality and social justice are divorced from the economy, and not fundamentally intertwined. The government has since partially walked this decision back, bringing the Minister of Gender and Women's Equality

back to the cabinet table and introducing a tier of junior Secretaries of State for Labour, Children and Families and Seniors. At this juncture, it remains to be seen whether the new Liberal government will pursue economic policy that creates the conditions where all can thrive.

The COVID-19 crisis illustrated both the shortcomings of existing policies and institutions and what's possible with strong public leadership. The imperative now is to apply the lessons of COVID-19 in service of a more resilient and inclusive labour market. Institutional reforms and greater awareness of the damaging impacts of persistent racial disparities may yet create opportunities for systemic change. This is the time for the federal government, indeed all Canadian governments, to stand firm in their commitment to social justice and human rights as they take action to position Canada's economy for the future.

Our study provides further evidence that the rising tide did not lift all boats in the aftermath of the pandemic and that a comprehensive approach to dismantling entrenched disparities impacting racialized workers remains a top priority.

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NOTES

- 1 African American political theorist Cedric Robinson coined the term “racial capitalism” to describe the ways in which the global economic system is organized along lines of racial domination. His 1983 book, *Black Marxism*, argued that capitalism is generated and sustained through the reproduction of racial hierarchies. See: Cedric Robinson, 2021, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 3rd edition.
- 2 See Angele Alook, Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, 2021, [A disproportionate burden: COVID-19 labour market impacts on Indigenous and racialized workers in Canada](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Statistics Canada, October 20, 2020, “[Impacts on Immigrants and People Designated as Visible Minorities](#)”; A presentation series from Statistics Canada about the economy, *Environment and Society*.
- 3 Racialized men—and South Asian and Chinese men, in particular—benefitted, not only from working in these booming industries but also in occupations experiencing rapid wage growth. “Thirty-one per cent of racialized men worked in the three fastest-growing industries, compared to 23 per cent of Black men and 25 per cent of white men. The large share of South Asian and Chinese workers in professional, scientific and technical industries, along with finance, insurance and real estate, account for much of the high share of racialized workers in these high-growth industries. Racialized men not only worked disproportionately in high-employment growth occupations, they also worked in high-wage growth occupations. Thirty-nine per cent of racialized men worked in the three occupations with the fastest wage growth, compared to 27 per cent of Black men and 34 per cent of white men.” Sheila Block and Grace-Edward Galabuzi, 2023, [A rising tide does not lift all boats: Ontario's colour-coded labour market recovery](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, p. 5.
- 4 Statistics Canada began to collect information on racialized workers on its main Labour Force Survey in 2022. This was a positive step. Unfortunately, we do not have baseline information for 2019, the year before the pandemic. A labour force supplemental survey was fielded between July 2020 and December 2021, for a smaller population. These results are not directly comparable with the current survey.
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- 6 *Beyond Recovery*, 2021-2024, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/news-research/beyond-recovery/>.
- 7 It should be noted that agriculture and business, building and other support services don't fit this pattern. Both contracted between 2019 and 2024.
- 8 M. Fisher and E. Bubola, March 15, 2020, “As Coronavirus deepens inequality, inequality worsens its spread,” *New York Times*.

9 Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0009-01—Population estimates, quarterly. Canada's population increased sharply between 2021 and 2024 by almost three million people (or 7.6 per cent), more than 90 per cent of which stemmed from immigration. The rate of growth started to slow in 2024 as a result of new lower targets for non-permanent residents imposed by the federal government.

10 Between 2022 and 2024, among people aged 25 to 54 years, West Asians (29.8 per cent) and South Asians (29.4 per cent) experienced the highest rates of population growth. Men accounted for the majority, at 58 per cent.

11 In large urban areas such as Toronto, racialized people now make up over half of the labour force. Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0446-01—Labour force status by visible minority, immigrant status and period of immigration, highest level of education, age and gender: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas.

12 In 2016, the employment rates among racialized and non-racialized workers aged 25 to 54 years were 75.9 per cent and 81.9 per cent, respectively. Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016286.

13 Over the last 20 years, health care and social assistance, construction, and professional, scientific and technical services have gained in prominence, accounting for more than half of net employment growth since 2001. Other relatively large industries that each contributed more than 10 per cent of net employment gains in Canada from 2001 to 2021 include educational services, retail trade, and public administration. Statistics Canada, November 11, 2022, "[Jobs in Canada: Navigating changing local labour markets](#)," *The Daily*.

14 Marc Frenette, 2023, "[The changing nature of work since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," Statistics Canada, *Economic and Social Reports*, Catalogue no. 36-28-0001, Vol. 3, no.7, p. 1.

15 There is one notable exception: Information and cultural industries. Between 2022 and 2024, the number of racialized workers working in this industry fell by 7.6 per cent (and by 2.3 per cent among non-racialized workers) as this industry contracted following the surge in hires post pandemic.

16 See: Catherine Bryan et al., 2024, [Cooking, cleaning, and caring: COVID-19, essential labour, and the experiences of immigrant and migrant women in Nova Scotia](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives—Nova Scotia Office.

17 Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0406-01—Job vacancies, payroll employees, and job vacancy rate by industry sector, monthly, adjusted for seasonality.

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