

## From Exclusion to Opportunity: Advancing Equity and Racial Justice in Canadian Sports

Janelle Joseph (2025). *Equity and racial justice in sport and play: Barriers, opportunities, and calls for action in the Canadian sport system*. IDEAS Research Lab & Sport Information Research Centre. Commissioned by the Canadian Network for Equity and Racial Justice (CNERJ). [You can read the full report here.](#)

Systemic racism, discrimination, and colonial legacies continue to shape sport participation and experiences for racialized people in Canada. Persistent inequities limit access to the social and health benefits of sport for many of them. However, there are concrete opportunities for transformation which must be supported; through targeted and community-based solutions, leadership diversification, and anti-racist action.

### Racialized People in Canada Have Less Access to Sport and its Benefits

#### Historical exclusion

- Some racialized athletes broke colour barriers - but their success did not dismantle systemic exclusion
- Black, Indigenous, East and South Asian communities built parallel sport cultures while remaining excluded from the mainstream (e.g., Coloured Hockey League, Asahi Baseball)

#### Participation rates

- In a 2024 Vividata survey, **racialized Canadians** reported participating in sport on a regular basis at **less than half the rate of non-racialized Canadians (14 % vs 35%, respectively)**.
- Racialized Canadians **begin sport later** (age 10.2) than non-racialized peers (age 8.5).
- Sport participation rates vary widely across groups, but **gender gaps are more pronounced across racialized groups**.
- Outcomes clearly indicate the need for the development of targeted programs.

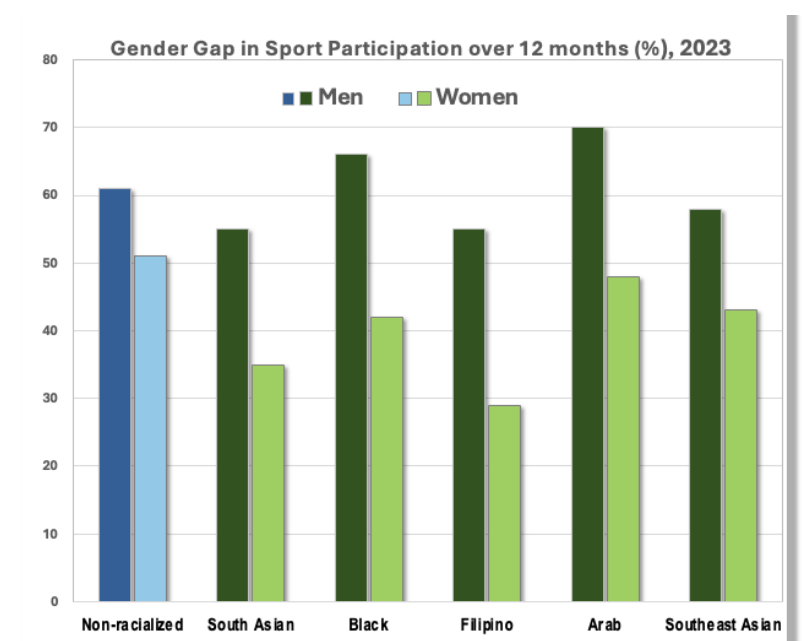


Fig. 1 Adapted from Statistics Canada, 2023.

### Barriers Stack Up and Overlap

#### Limited access to resources

- Racialized households are **disproportionately affected by poverty**, constraining access to pay-to-play sports.
- Newcomers face additional barriers**: lack of information, cultural unfamiliarity, and linguistic barriers.

#### Discrimination and overt racism

- Nearly **1 in 5 people experienced or witnessed unfair treatment in community sport**, and more than 1 in 3 did not act or intervene (Statistics Canada 2024).
- Racial slurs, biased officiating, microaggressions, and stereotypes** impact racialized athletes across regions.

#### Systemic racism in policies and structures

- Hiring practices, volunteer requirements, and advancement pathways often effectively exclude racialized people.
- Indigenous communities face structural barriers tied to underinvestment, geographic isolation, and colonial systems.

#### Lacking Representation in Leadership and Media

- Lack of lived experiences of race/racism at the top (e.g., hardly any racialized athletics directors in Ontario) **limits anti-racist and culturally relevant decision-making**.
- Representation gaps** in coaching, administration, and media **limit belonging and mentorship** opportunities.



To **achieve racial justice**, our sport systems must

- move beyond symbolic inclusion toward equitable distribution of resources
- improve anti-racist decision-making power and policy enforcement
- create culturally affirming sport environments

## Recommendations

### 1. Expand Access Through Equitable Investment

- Fund research on the nuances among racial groups, on intersecting inequalities, as well as on rural vs. urban barriers and needs.
- Fund community-led, culturally grounded programs in racialized and underserved neighbourhoods.
- Subsidize equipment, transportation, and facility access to eliminate pay-to-play barriers.

### 2. Transform Governance and Leadership

- Require racial equity plans, racial demographic data collection, and transparent hiring practices.
- Increase racialized representation in coaching, officiating, boards, and athletic administration.

### 3. Strengthen Anti-Racism Policies and Accountability

- Implement mandatory anti-racism education for coaches, officials, administrators, and volunteers.
- Create clear reporting mechanisms and consequences for racist incidents.
- End the use of all remaining Indigenous mascots and establish ongoing Indigenous partnerships.

### 4. Advance Inclusion for Racialized Girls, Women, and 2SLGBTQ+ Participants

- Invest in safe spaces, mentorship, and culturally affirming participation pathways, especially for racialized girls and nonbinary or trans youth.

### 5. Center Indigenous Self-Determination

- Collaborate with Indigenous communities on facility development, program design, leadership pipelines, and recognition of Indigenous athletes.
- Align sport policies with TRC Calls to Action, particularly Call #87.

### 6. Amplify Activism and Celebrate Role Models

- Highlight racialized athletes' contributions across history and contemporary sport.

***“The fight against racism in Canadian sport requires more than just individual actions – it calls for systemic change at all levels of sport, from grassroots to elite.”***

- Report, p.30

