



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

IRCC 2022-23 Anti-Racism Employee Qualitative Research

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For more information on this report, please contact IRCC at:

IRCC.COMMPOR-ROPCOMM.IRCC@cic.gc.ca

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Canada 

Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Copyright | 3 |
| Executive Summary | 4 |
| Background and objectives..... | 4 |
| Method | 4 |
| Political neutrality certification | 6 |
| Summary of findings | 7 |
| Results in detail | 9 |
| Perceived strengths of IRCC as a department to work in..... | 9 |
| Progress since 2021..... | 9 |
| Current assessment of racism at IRCC | 11 |
| Reasons for rating racism a significant problem at IRCC..... | 11 |
| Increasing bias awareness and creating a culture of zero tolerance for racism in the workplace | 14 |
| Reactions to the Return-to-Work Order..... | 17 |
| Creating a safe channel for reporting incidences of racism | 19 |
| Removing bias and increasing transparency in hiring and access to promotions..... | 21 |
| Experiences of racism in foreign postings..... | 25 |
| On the impacts of racism on program and service delivery | 28 |
| Conclusion | 32 |
| Appendix A: Qualitative instruments | 33 |

Copyright

This public opinion research presents the results of a series of qualitative focus group discussions conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights on behalf of the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC). This study consisted of 15 online focus group discussions and 6 in-depth interviews with a total of 62 employees from across IRCC. The purpose of the study was to understand current experiences of racism within the Department as well as perceptions of management's handling of racism within the workplace and gather suggestions for changes in policies and practices moving forward.

Cette publication est aussi disponible en français sous le titre : Recherche qualitative sur l'antiracisme auprès des employés d'IRCC 2022-2023.

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Communications Branch
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
Jean Edmonds Tower South
365 Laurier Ave W
Ottawa ON K1A 1L1

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Executive Summary

Background and objectives

IRCC's Anti-Racism Strategy 2.0 (2021-2024) lays out several concrete commitments aimed at continuing to identify the unjust and harmful impacts of systemic racism in the Department and at removing barriers to equity and inclusion for racialized people in Canada. Continued engagement with employees to gather feedback and insights is a cornerstone of these efforts.

As such, IRCC completed a second Anti-Racism employee survey in the fall of 2022 and mandated Pollara Strategic Insights to conduct follow-up qualitative research, the results of which are the subject of this report.

The IRCC 2022-23 Anti-Racism Employee Qualitative Research was designed to allow the Department to dig deeper into employees' lived experiences with racism than is possible through departmental anti-racism surveys. It also provides an independent and confidential channel through which IRCC employees can safely provide comments to, and about, the Department.

The objectives of this study included, but were not limited to, exploring:

- Employees' experiences of racism at IRCC
- Views of racism in IRCC policies, programs, or practices
- Ways in which IRCC can make improvements.

The results of this research are intended to help IRCC identify areas for improvement within the Department and provide employee input into how these improvements should be made.

Method

We recommended a hybrid method for this study in order to maximize our ability to achieve three key goals simultaneously, namely:

- Receiving input from as many participants as possible, while also
- Creating a safe space for participants to express themselves fully, and
- Allowing time to delve deeply into certain subjects (such as experiences with reporting and escalating incidents of racism, impacts of racism on program and service design and delivery, and experiences of racism in foreign postings) that we were only able to touch on briefly in the previous study.

This year, participants were chosen from among those who responded to a department-wide callout inviting participation in the study. Those who expressed interest were sent a questionnaire to complete which, among other things, asked respondents to categorize themselves based on age, gender identity, race, religious affiliation, branch and level of employment and knowledge and experience with the subject areas mentioned above. The number of focus groups and in-depth interviews as well as their composition, which is summarized below, was determined based on the size and characteristics of this pool of volunteers.

Table 1: Number and Composition of Research Consultations

| Participant Common Characteristics | Number of Focus Groups | Number of In-depth Interviews |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
|------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|

| | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Employees in Middle Management/ with Decision-Making Experience in Hiring and Promotions | 1 | 2 |
| Employees with Insight into Impacts of Racism on Program and Service Delivery - Operations (OPS) | 1 | |
| Employees with Insight into Impacts of Racism on Program and Service Delivery – Strategic and Program Policy (SPP) and Digital Strategy, Services and Innovation (DSSI) | 1 | |
| Racialized Employees with Current or Past Experience in Foreign Postings | 1 | 2 |
| Executives (including some with Current or Past Experience in Foreign Postings) | 1 | 2 |
| Black Employees | 3 (of which 1 in French) | |
| Non-Black Racialized Employees | 3 (of which 1 in French) | |
| Indigenous Employees | 1 | |
| White Employees | 2 | |
| Employees from Religious Minorities | 1 | |
| Total Number of Sessions | 15 | 6 |

In total, 15 two-hour online focus groups and an additional six, 20-40 minute, online individual in-depth interviews were conducted among a cross-section of IRCC employees from various levels of the organization and across multiple branches including employees in operations, client services, policy, and program development as well as internal services such as human resources and finance. In all, 62 employees participated in this study. The sessions were held from February 6th to 21st, 2023.

The tables below provide further insight into participant demographics.

Table 2: Number of Participants by Race

| | |
|---------------------------|----|
| Indigenous or Aboriginal: | 2 |
| Black: | 21 |
| Non-Black Racialized: | 26 |
| White: | 11 |
| Not Specified: | 2 |

Table 3: Number of Participants by Gender

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Woman: | 45 |
| Man: | 15 |
| Other Gender: | 2 |

Table 4: Number of Participants by Religion

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Christianity: | 25 |
| Buddhism: | 2 |
| Hinduism: | 3 |
| Islam: | 3 |
| Judaism: | 1 |
| Sikhism: | 4 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Traditional (North American Indigenous) spirituality: | 1 |
| Another religion and/or spiritual tradition: | 6 |
| No Religion and Secular Perspectives: | 15 |
| Prefer not to Say: | 2 |

Given the confidential nature of the discussion, as is often the case in employee focus groups, these sessions were not recorded. What is reported here is the product of detailed notes taken by the Pollara team. Also note that, in keeping with research conventions, certain details provided to us may need to be withheld or dissimulated in order to protect respondent confidentiality and anonymity.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, results cannot be extrapolated to a broader audience and therefore must be considered indicative, rather than definitive. Further, while participants were randomly selected from a list of potential participants, that list was generated through an opt-in process rather than random selection. Consequently, the sample of employees who participated cannot be said to be representative of all IRCC employees.

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Political neutrality certification

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of Pollara Strategic Insights that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communication and Federal Identity and the Directive on the Management of Communications.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings within the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed:

Craig Worden
 President
 Pollara Strategic Insights

Summary of findings

Participants in this research believe IRCC should be the Department to set the bar, and many feel proud to work for a department that is doing so.

Participants report numerous signs of progress since 2021, the most important of which is the perceived acknowledgement, through the actions and communications of the Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) and of some of the Department's senior executives, that racism is a real problem at IRCC, and one that needs to be dealt with. This has allowed for a transition from waving the red flag to thinking about solutions.

Participants report that while there has been visible progress in a few areas, such as increased opportunities to talk about racism and nascent increases of racial representation in higher positions, they still feel there is a lot to be done, particularly in areas considered critical to transforming the organization.

- To begin with, participants feel IRCC must ensure a baseline level of bias awareness and intercultural competency throughout the organization, making this, and a commitment to uphold the Department's anti-racism values, a pre-requisite for hiring and promotions. Many add that this must be backed by a willingness to remove employees who do not meet these criteria.
- Participants consider that the only trustworthy mechanism for reporting and escalating incidents of racism at IRCC is through an external entity, which many liken to an Ombudsman. They want an independent body that can receive and investigate complaints anonymously and is given the power to impose consequences and report on case numbers, case progression and high-level outcomes.
- When it comes to increasing racial representation in upper echelons of the Department, participants emphasize the need to:
 - Communicate this objective in a way that not only avoids the appearance of putting race over competence, but also nourishes understanding that the intent is to correct for biases that penalize racialized employees *in spite* of their competencies.
 - Hold HR professionals accountable for supervising and accompanying managers through hiring processes to ensure that racial bias does not impact employee selection.
 - Increase transparency around what it takes to succeed in internal hiring processes.
 - Implement career development plans for employees.
 - Increase support for mentoring and sponsoring racialized employees; and
 - Increase access to non-operations roles, language training and higher-level positions outside the National Capital Region.
- When it comes to minimizing the impact of racism on program and service delivery, participants feel IRCC should:

- Submit fully to a process of re-evaluating the assumptions that underlie case processing procedures and policies and assess the impacts of alternative assumptions in order to consciously choose those most aligned with the Department's values; and
- Ensure that adequate racism impact analysis precedes development of automated solutions, a goal several believe it is difficult to achieve given the current pressure imposed on IRCC by increasing immigration targets.
- And finally, participants feel there is an urgent need for bold action to investigate and deal adequately with employees and managers in the International Network whose seemingly racist behaviours and communications continue to create a toxic work environment in offices abroad and impact how the Department is represented in foreign postings.

In short, two years in, participants feel that faith in the Anti-Racism Task Force remains strong and the Department's communications have created a positive shift in the internal climate. However, participants are now looking to see increased action on some of the tougher challenges organisational transformation requires.

Results in detail

Perceived strengths of IRCC as a department to work in

As was done in the previous iteration of this work, given that the remainder of the discussion would necessarily focus on areas in need of improvement, we began each session by asking participants to share briefly what they appreciate most about working at IRCC. The responses we heard make clear there is strong consensus among the participants about IRCC's strengths as a department to work in and that the Department attracts employees who are deeply committed to the work of continuing to build on Canada's legacy as a nation forged from diversity and immigration.

- Several say they appreciate that the scope of work at IRCC is relatively varied so one can, at least in theory, spend a career experiencing different types of roles and having access to ample opportunities for professional growth and new challenges within a single Department.
- The vast majority of participants also speak spontaneously and passionately about their commitment to IRCC's mandate. Employees are very conscious of the importance of the Department's role in designing and creating the future of Canada as a nation. In addition, several also point out that the work they get to do at IRCC is unique in the extent to which employees see, concretely, how their actions impact clients and, as such, is very fulfilling for those driven by a desire to be of service, and particularly for those who are a product of recent immigration to Canada themselves.

Progress since 2021

It is clear from the tone of the discussions this year that, except for the environment in foreign postings (which we will discuss in more detail later in this report) when it comes to internal racism in IRCC, participants feel the Department is in a different place from where it was two years ago.

In 2021, participants expressed an urgent desire to be heard and to have someone sit up and take notice of how real and widespread lived experiences of racism were within IRCC. The need for participants to vent as they described the racially discriminatory experiences they had lived, situations they had observed and conversations they had heard was strong then, making it difficult to steer the conversation towards solutions. While that tension was still present for a few people this year, the need to recount, divulge and rehash was palpably less intense.

In fact, what we observed, and what some participants explicitly stated is that the widespread acknowledgement that racism is a problem within the Department, coupled with IRCC's formal commitments to do something about it, were critically important first steps. Except for those in foreign postings, participants feel that it is now generally recognized that racism is a real and significant issue for the Department and are therefore ready to turn their attention towards solutions.

“There has been a shift in acknowledgement that there is a problem. And now we have data showing there is a problem.”

In addition, many participants say they are confident that the Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) and its leadership are serious about their commitment to push through change. This, combined with

the external political pressure and public scrutiny on the Department, gives them hope that progress will continue, at least for now.

Finally, participants agree that there is currently a lot of communication around IRCC's commitment to anti-racism and employees have already begun noticing the impacts of some of the initiatives designed to address the problem.

It should be noted that a few participants underscore the importance of recognizing that, while racism at IRCC is real and present and has received much public attention, that does not mean the Department is in a worse position than others when it comes to this issue.

- In fact, a number of participants who have worked at other federal government departments say IRCC is better, both in terms of its internal diversity (at least at lower echelons of the organisation) and in terms of its commitment to tackle racism head on.
- Many participants believe that, given its mandate, IRCC **should** be the one to set and raise the bar for all the federal public service. And some say they feel proud that it is.

“I saw a lot more instances [of racism] in my previous department.”

“Given what we represent as an organization, we should be a department that leads in this area.”

A few other dimensions along which participants say they have noticed progress include:

- An increase in opportunities for employees to share their experiences with peers and allies through the multiple working groups, committees and townhalls within and across branches of IRCC. Participants believe this has left equity impacted employees feeling validated and less isolated and alone, mitigating the trauma, self-doubt and resultant erosion in confidence, productivity and efficacy that can result from racism in the workplace.
- Employees feeling more emboldened to speak out to defend themselves, or, more often, others when they observe incidences of racism.

“These initiatives have us talking more about it. It’s been helpful because I know it’s not just me. Our previous DM said if you see something wrong, say something, because that’s the only way things will change. I feel safer now because there is more recognition that you should speak up.”

- A slight but visible increase in the number of racialized employees being hired or promoted into positions of higher responsibility.
- The creation of the Operations and Strategic Initiatives and Projects team (OSIP) with its promising initiatives to provide mentorship and sponsorship for racialized employees.
- Less exposure to overtly racist microaggressions within the office environment, though several hasten to mention that this may have been aided by the move to remote work which has reduced the occurrence of situations in which these incidences tend to occur.

“I feel like I’m in limbo. The microaggressions have dissipated but that might be because we are not in the office anymore.”

Current assessment of racism at IRCC

When asked to rate how much of a problem racism is at IRCC today using a scale where 1 = “not at all a problem” and 10 = “very much a problem”, the average score given is **7/10**.

- **17% of participants gave the Department a rating of 5 or less.**
 - The percentage was somewhat higher among men (26%) and white participants (36%).
- **63% gave it a rating of 7 or more.**
 - The percentage was somewhat higher among participants with experience in foreign postings (70%) and racialized participants (77%), and somewhat lower among executives and middle managers (59%).

(It is important to note that the study methodology does NOT allow us to establish whether or not these differences have any statistical significance.)

Most participants who provide low scores explain they are basing them on their personal experiences and immediate work environment or team while recognizing that other employees may have vastly different experiences.

Those who provide high scores do so for multiple reasons which we will explore further in the remainder of this report.

Reasons for rating racism a significant problem at IRCC

1. Some participants are disappointed at how the Department’s early anti-racism initiatives have been received in certain quarters.

- For one, despite the early signs of progress mentioned in the previous pages, some say they have observed a bit of backlash with certain specific individuals or groups of individuals. Participants report seeing or experiencing: Increased defensiveness from some white colleagues and hierarchical superiors when racist comments or behaviours are called out.
- Message fatigue among some colleagues and hierarchical superiors who feel there is too much focus on anti-racism communication and activities.

“Of the people I speak to, some say we have a continuing problem to address. And others say it’s coming fast and furious from too many angles.”

“There is a bit of fatigue that is happening within the organization...a bit of ‘we have to be careful not to come across as just complaining.’”

- Reluctance (in some quarters) to allow employees to take more time away from core tasks participation in anti-racism initiatives (as well as hesitancy to ask for it).

“I had to send three to four emails to get the ok just to participate in this two-hour focus group.”

A few say this backlash makes them think twice about being seen as too involved in anti-racism initiatives so as not to be singled out or negatively labelled.

In addition, resistance to the Department’s anti-racism efforts is seen by many participants as further proof of how deeply racism is rooted within the organisation. Many believe that, though there are some in senior leadership who are sincere and serious in their commitment to eliminating racism in the Department, others are not. They argue that so long as there continue to be people, particularly people with decision-making power, who resist or react to combatting racism, there will be a limit to how much things can change.

“I am still not convinced. There are some people who are true hardliner racists. It’s the way they react, subtly protesting things.”

“When it comes to directors saying things about employment equity even...the comments that come out of their mouths.... there is no training focused on convincing them of the why behind it.”

2. Several participants are skeptical of IRCC’s ability to sustain the current momentum.

Several believe the current will to combat racism in the Department is fueled primarily by external forces (political pressure and public scrutiny) and that once this impetus dies down, the internal commitment will too. Furthermore, there is concern that the pressure on the Department to increase productivity in order to meet rising immigration targets will eventually take precedence over anti-racism.

3. Participants also express frustration at what they perceive to be a lack of concrete actions and at the timidity of some of the actions taken thus far.

Part of this may stem from a lack of information about what actions have been taken. Some say there is so much communication it is hard to keep up with all of it. In fact, several learned about initiatives because they were mentioned by others during the focus groups. It also may stem from the fact that some employees’ work exposes them to initiatives others simply may not get to see in action.

“I haven’t seen a lot of concrete actions that are confidence inspiring.”

Whatever the reason behind any lack of knowledge of the concrete actions that have been undertaken to combat racism in the Department, there is a general perception among participants that there has been more talk than action. This, in turn, feeds into the lingering distrust, that persists among many, who believe not all the Department’s leaders genuinely support the commitment to eliminate racism.

Beyond what is communicated, participants also point to specific actions they consider poorly designed or inadequately implemented, leaving them with the impression that there is either a lack of commitment or of funding sufficient to achieve change. A few such examples are listed below.

Examples of actions considered poorly designed or inadequately implemented

- The mandatory unconscious bias training rolled out department-wide was universally criticized by participants as a missed opportunity. While making it mandatory sent a powerful signal, participants were unanimous in saying the training lacked depth and impact and was easily dismissed by some managers and employees as “just a box to check”. Note also that few seemed to know that management has undergone further in-depth training.

“The unconscious bias training was super obvious, with no nuance.”

“A bunch of people admitted they didn’t pay attention because they had lots of work to do, and people were like it’s all blah blah blah.”

“Our manager put a lot of pressure on us to do it, saying ‘it doesn’t take a lot of time, just get it done’. He forewarned us that there is a test you can redo if you fail it the first time.”

- Though many participants were not aware of this and suggested it as something IRCC *should* implement, those who knew that executive Performance Management Agreements (PMAs) now include anti-racism, equity and inclusion objectives laud the principle of attaching accountability for combatting racism to PMAs. However, several participants believe that:
 - Executives get the credit, when the work of creating and implementing these initiatives tends to be delegated to racialized employees, placing an additional burden on them, as this takes time away from tasks necessary for career progression and exposes them to being labelled for involvement in anti-racism work, a label some fear could hinder career progress; and
 - Executives stand to receive additional compensation for this (through bonuses, it is believed), while the initiatives themselves appear underfunded.

“They say things are tied to their PMAs now, but they keep trying to offload it to lower-level employees like myself...we have to come up with the ideas, develop the plans”

- The recently created racialized employee mentorship and sponsorship initiatives are seen by participants as important steps forward but dimly under-resourced and underfunded.
- Those with experience with program and policy design say the goal of applying an anti-racism lens to program and service delivery faces multiple challenges. For example, these participants believe that:
 - The tools and initiatives created to support this are too numerous and disparate to be effective.
 - The resources and project timelines allotted are insufficient to the task; and

- The goal risks being overshadowed by the imperative to rapidly increase case processing efficiency.
4. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, participants say there has been little to no concrete action in areas considered critical to eliminating systemic racism.

While there are several areas in which participants point to a lack of action, participants believe the following seem key to reinforcing employee belief that lasting change is possible:

- Increasing bias awareness and creating a culture of zero-tolerance of racism at all levels of the Department.
- Providing a safe and effective channel for reporting and escalating incidents of racism.
- Ensuring perpetrators of racist behaviour face consequences for their actions; and
- Making proving intercultural competency and a commitment to the Department's anti-racism values a pre-requisite for holding managerial and executive level positions at IRCC.

The lack of progress perceived by participants in these areas contributes to concerns that anti-racism actions will be limited to those that are performative and palatable to people in power. It also reinforces the belief among many participants that there is an old boys' club at IRCC that protects the status quo, and it erodes employee confidence the Department's capacity to succeed.

“Trust is where it all begins.”

In what follows, we provide more details on participant feedback and suggestions for improvement in each of the specific topic areas addressed.

Increasing bias awareness and creating a culture of zero tolerance for racism in the workplace

Participants say that, for IRCC, the goal should not stop at eliminating impacts of racism but extend to creating an organization where all employees demonstrate a level of bias self-awareness and intercultural competency fitting for an organization whose mandate centers around diversity.

In this context, intercultural competency means having an expanded capacity to apply an anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion lens to all situations when dealing with people with different backgrounds and experiences.

“As a newcomer-focused department, you need to have a baseline of cultural competency. It's inconceivable that even the most simple request is met with resistance or my having to justify what exactly it means. The people who set the tone in this department are just wildly out of touch with these competency pieces. We don't build in time for cultural competency, but we must.”

According to participants, such a profound shift in the organization's culture will require a mix of transformational experiences and compulsion.

Conditions and actions required for such a profound cultural shift

- Participants say anti-racism, equity, diversity, and inclusion trainings must be experiential, interactive and immersive and designed to impact participants emotionally, in order to be effective and draw on the human capacity for empathy to foster understanding of the impacts of racism and other forms of discrimination and injustice. Some share examples from other trainings they have been exposed to underscore that more effective methodologies in this area do exist.

“We need more conversations and less online training. The pride network has an online scenario based interactive learning module that was well adapted for virtual...but the connection with people is important. To examine unconscious bias is to interact with and listen to people with different points of view.”

“Training has to create conversations that has people putting themselves in each other’s shoes.”

“If it doesn’t resonate with people, it’s not going to do what it’s intended to do.”

- Participants also feel managers need to be better equipped to respond adequately when incidents of racism are brought to their attention and to navigate the difficult conversations about racism that they are encouraged to create space for. Participants say that when leadership responds by getting defensive or gaslighting by making light of incidents or suggesting it is the complainant who is being oversensitive, this erodes confidence and the will to speak out.

“Directors and managers are trying to make it more of a discussion, but they don’t know how to handle it”

“Middle managers are reluctant and just too busy to address racism given that the emotional aspect of it is so heavy. It’s so touchy, so difficult for them to deal with. They are afraid to bring it up, afraid to make mistakes.”

“People get defensive as opposed to seeing this as a real systemic issue...oh you think I said something wrong, maybe you took it too hard...it keeps coming back to, you didn’t take it properly, your feelings are too easily hurt.”

“[After reporting a racist comment to a manager] ...the problematic person was not reprimanded, instead I was told to try to understand what they were really saying.”

- Several say that successfully addressing racism requires a basis of understanding that association and discrimination are inherent to the way the human mind works and combatting racism requires creating a culture that encourages accepting personal responsibility for one’s thought patterns. This is foundational to shifting conversations about racism from the defensiveness that participants say persists within the organisation today to ones that foster empathy and understanding.

Note also that a number of participants, particularly racialized participants who belong to marginalized groups across multiple intersectionalities (e.g., employees with disabilities, members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community and women) emphasized the importance of tying

anti-racism discussions to discrimination more broadly in order to include all marginalized groups.

“There can be no change unless you can acknowledge your own biases.”

“Most managers don’t want to be racist but have no realisation of how racist they are.”

“People don’t want to believe they are racist...so they will say things like I didn’t mean to make you feel like that or I have racialized friends so how can I be racist.”

“Even I have my own biases, my own colorism ideas. These conversations will be uncomfortable. We have to recognize that and be willing to embrace it.”

- Recognizing that changing mindsets takes time, participants say these efforts must be accompanied by increased hiring of racialized people into decision-making positions so they can act as catalysts, contributing their perspectives and lived experiences with the upper echelons of the Department.

“Cultural change does not happen without people in the right positions. You need people with lived experiences in power.”

- Participants feel it is also sometimes necessary to compel change because they believe there are people at IRCC who appear resistant to anti-racism efforts.

“There are forces who are clearly against this...There are still a lot of people at IRCC who are completely against employment equity.”

“People who have difficulty with diversity should not be working here.”

- Many participants feel the Department should have a policy of zero-tolerance for racist behaviour. According to these participants, lasting change requires a willingness to demonstrate that racism will not be tolerated by implementing consequences and, if necessary, removing employees who refuse to carry out their responsibilities in a way that is aligned with the Department’s stated values.

Many participants find it difficult to accept that, despite what they consider to be reports of clearly racist incidences within the organisation, they still are not aware of examples of employees facing negative consequences for such behaviour.

“If someone says I ran a red light, or I was drunk driving, you know what the consequences are. If a manager comes and says I was called up for racism, do we know what would happen? NO. There has never been an example of that.”

“We need to start approaching this as being less about feelings, more about responsibility and accountability. If you go against the values, it could result in dismissal. Some people do need to be fired, not just, oh let’s go train. If you are a problem, you are a legal liability, and some people need to be taken out.”

“There are people who are extremely cynical. I see it in the trainings. We need to weed those people out. If you don’t support this, don’t work at our department.”

“Our values have to be communicated as part of your role as an employee, in the same way you have to follow the values and ethics of being a public servant.”

- Achieving profound cultural change also requires visible support from leadership. Participants emphasize the need for these changes to be fully backed by the people at the very top of the organisation and they believe that this is key to maintaining employee confidence and momentum.

“There was a lot of engagement and honest, spirited efforts from the executives. Now, I haven’t seen the perspectives of the new executives. That doesn’t mean there isn’t a lot happening. We’re just not hearing a lot of vision from the top tiers. The efforts speak more when there is someone supporting it at the decision level.”

“These initiatives need a top-down approach. Upper management support is necessary. Going back to when the movement was in full swing, if a meeting of the ARTF was being organized, one of the two ministers would show up at the meeting which would send a signal that this is serious stuff. Even for 5 minutes. And there were meetings where they stayed for the entire hour. You have to create the time.”

Reactions to the Return-to-Work Order

Given the timing of these consultations, we included a few questions to assess how participants viewed the recent Return to Work Order and its impacts from an anti-racism perspective.

- A few participants had positive perspectives to share. Some said they were personally looking forward to in person interactions again. Several, especially those in leadership roles, feel interpersonal contact will help cultivate human connection and empathy to the benefit of some of the anti-racism work underway.
- On the other hand, many participants are apprehensive about returning to the physical environment they associate with the microaggressions and experiences of racism they lived before the pandemic. A few say this is causing intense anxiety and disruption for them.
- Though participants say that remote working reduced exposure to overtly racist comments and microaggressions, many suspect this was circumstantial and anticipate it will start happening more frequently again once they are interacting with certain people in person. Many also do not believe that the people most responsible for creating the racist climate that existed in the Department before lockdowns have fundamentally changed.

“Working from home felt better because you didn’t have to be around all those conversations, hearing all those remarks. But that’s not a solution.”

“It’s been freeing to work from behind a screen so there are no conversations about my hair and physical appearance, which was exhausting.”

“The only reason things have gotten better is from not being in the office. I personally hated being in the office because I knew I would suffer some type of microaggression. And now that we are being mandated to go back in, I have so much severe anxiety about it. I don’t think it’s gotten any better.”

“I’m planning to go into an office where I don’t have to see these people. I have to think about my health first.”

Participants say that when they continue to hear some colleagues or superiors reacting defensively or arguing that there was no racism intended or that complainants are being overly sensitive when racist comments are called out, this highlights the lack of understanding.

- Many participants also mentioned experiences with the virtual town halls held on the topic of Return-to-Work, where employee concerns were sometimes belittled or dismissed, as further proof of how little has changed.

Several also decried management responses to the concerns expressed. These participants believe that given everything that has been reported about distrust of leadership, the perception of lack of consequences for perpetrators and reprisals against complainants, saying things to the effect of “*my door is open, come talk to me* [if there is a concern]” lands “*like a slap in the face*” and is seen as further proof that management is “*tone deaf*” and does not appreciate the nature and scope of the problem.

“Working from home was like erasing my exposure to all these daily microaggressions. Having that out of my work environment has helped me. But now, when people bring up their concerns, all they get [from management] is this media line saying we are committed to equity instead of saying IRCC gets it.”

“I agree things are better [in general] because there has been more attention [on racism]. We are more able to talk about it. But in upper management, our faith in them has gone down. The way they shut down questions in town halls...seeing how managers are responding, is diminishing my faith in managers.”

“I have worked on files where I have seen racism to employees. Now you are asking me to come back to work. What are you going to do so support me? I get an email from the DG saying my door is open, you should talk to me if you are experiencing something. How can people talk to someone if they don’t think anything will be done?”

“Understand that, as an organisation, any blank responses like that one with the RTO and trust goes backwards ten steps...it feels so disingenuous.”

- Several feel the Return-to-Work Order was implemented without sufficient forethought and planning from an anti-racism perspective. They point to this as another example of how easily the anti-racism commitment can be pushed aside in the face of other imperatives.
- Finally, several point out that the Return-to-Work Order will likely negatively impact IRCC’s efforts to hire and promote racialized people into higher level positions since many of these are reserved for people living in the National Capital Region where there is less racial diversity than in other regions. In fact, several participants say they are personally aware of recent promotions of racialized employees from a regional office to a position on an NHQ team that were facilitated by the fact that employees could work remotely. Finding creative ways to mitigate this impact is one of the main participant recommendations moving forward.

“I’m regional. Upward mobility for us was limited before the pandemic, while since the pandemic, that has changed.”

Creating a safe channel for reporting incidences of racism

Participants believe that nothing has yet been done to provide a safe and effective mechanism for employees to report and escalate incidents of racism. The lack of movement in this area feeds into perceptions that there may be institutional protectionism at play. It also reinforces the belief that reporting incidents of racism will result in retribution.

Fear of facing reprisal for reporting incidents of racism was mentioned often, as was the case in 2021. However, as a few participants point out, the increased public discussion of the past two years around experiences of racism has exposed “*retribution horror stories*” and may increase reluctance to report.

“It’s hard to muster the courage to say something. At the time I was acting. So do you want to risk that acting position and perhaps after your acting they will say go back to your substantive position which can be two levels down on the payroll?”

Participants also feel that the current forms of recourse provided by IRCC are not safe or effective.

- They believe the Office of Conflict Resolution has no power to intervene and typically only provides complainants with tools and suggestions, leaving the onus for confronting the problem with the employee, with nothing to protect them from retribution.

“IRCC needs to learn from the private sector... If I am to report a situation, unless it’s completely necessary there should be no interaction between myself and the manager I am reporting against”

- Participants say that they believe that nepotism and favouritism are prevalent at IRCC and that people in positions of power are likely to protect each other, employees do not feel that speaking to someone up the chain of command will help.

“I’m supposed to go to my manager, but they are good friends with the supervisor. They will talk to each other”

Consequently, today, almost all participants feel the only viable solution is for reporting to be managed externally, through an entity that some refer to as an Ombudsman’s office, though they expect it to have powers and responsibilities that may go beyond what is conventionally ascribed to an Ombudsman.

To be trusted and effective, participants say the mechanism for reporting incidents of racism at IRCC would need to include what follows.

Expectations of a trusted and effective reporting mechanism

- Be completely external to and independent from IRCC.

“Confidence in the employer is broken beyond repair. The only way is to work with an independent third party. The department has to be supervised.”

- Have the capacity to receive complaints anonymously and to protect complainants from retribution.

“We help people leave their countries and get protection within Canada, and within IRCC we can’t even get that protection. We put our careers and salaries on the line [if we decide to report]”

- Have the capacity to investigate complaints.
- Be accountable for tracking and reporting the number of complaints received and their status
 - For example, how many are still being investigated, how many were resolved.
- Have the capacity to ensure appropriate consequences are meted out, including the possibility of being fired (as opposed to simply being transferred elsewhere)
- Have some capacity to divulge the nature and scope of the consequences applied.

“We need a forum where people could submit anonymous experiences and have a team that investigates them and posts what they have done to resolve it. We don’t see anything about what has been done.”

“If IRCC was transparent about what has been done, I might be willing to report.”

Participants also say IRCC should take measures to proactively facilitate obtaining information about racism that is likely to remain concealed. This is partly to prevent minor situations from getting worse, but could also help identify areas (for example, specific teams) where racism is an under-reported issue because of the lack of an effective reporting mechanism or fear of retribution. They suggest a number of ways of doing so.

Other suggested actions to facilitate identifying racism

- One suggestion by participants is to have employees regularly complete department-wide anonymous surveys on workplace climate when it comes to racism and any issues within their teams. This way the Department could follow-up by investigating in areas where it seems necessary, and intervene if appropriate.

“Not enough is being done to deal with certain individuals who are reported again and again.”

“It’s not enough to just have an open box to receive complaints. Someone needs to come in and ask, proactively, in the past 3 months, do you have anything to share. If they hear anything, even anonymously, investigate actively.”

“People will not trust it unless you address the issues that are outstanding in a substantive manner.”

“Incidents need to be investigated, even if the person is not filing a formal complaint. There needs to be more effort in reviewing the entire system in place right now.”

- Along these lines, one participant shared that when they left another department that had an Ombudsman’s office, they were contacted for an exit interview after mentioning a negative experience in their exit survey, a responsibility this participant suggests an eventual IRCC Ombudsman’s office could also be tasked with.
- Several participants also suggest having managers systematically evaluated by their employees. There is some skepticism about how effective this would be given the belief that IRCC leaders are likely to protect each other. A few specify that the person receiving this feedback should be at least two levels removed from the manager being evaluated.

“There is nowhere in the performance assessments to report on how we have been treated by management.”

Removing bias and increasing transparency in hiring and access to promotions

Participants suggest improvements to the anti-racism initiatives already undertaken in this area as well as numerous additional initiatives.

Suggested improvements to existing initiatives

1. Adjust how diversity hiring goals are communicated

Participants acknowledge that there has been a strong push to increase representation of racialized individuals at higher levels of the organization in the last two years. However, participants feel that despite some early successes, the way the current objectives are communicated has significant deleterious effects and needs to be adjusted.

- For one, participants say that the goal is often communicated as encouraging hiring and promoting racialized employees “without compromising on competency”. Participants feel this is misleading and counterproductive because it puts an added burden on the racialized employee to prove they are of equal competency. What they feel **should** be communicated as a goal is to encourage hiring and promoting racialized employees to *correct for* the systemic biases that hinder adequate recognition of their competencies. Participants feel this would be more accurate and would place the responsibility where they believe it should lie, with the organization and its failure to eliminate the impacts of systemic racism, not with the racialized employee.

“I heard this manager going on a tangent on how they have to pull from employment equity groups and how she didn’t understand why they were being asked to step over people who are more qualified. This was 1 year ago. They are just not there yet. How could she think it was ok to say that?”

- Second, participants feel that when hiring managers are celebrated publicly for having achieved quantitative diversity hiring goals (e.g., hired or promoted a certain number of racialized employees), this leaves both the manager and the employee feeling there is something false or unjustified about the decision. Again, participants believe the problem lies in how things are communicated: the emphasis should be on having made the effort to seek out and recognize competency where it may not have been recognized historically, and not just on the numbers.

2. Increase resources allocated to the racialized employee mentorship and sponsorship programs.

Another welcome initiative is the mentorship and sponsorship program aimed at identifying and preparing racialized employees to be promoted into leadership roles. Participants believe that both employees and managers feel this, and, in particular, sponsorship, can go a long way towards growing the pool of racialized employees who are ready to be hired into higher level positions. Participants feel that the problem is a lack of resources with far too few mentees and sponsors mobilized so far.

While these are positive starts, participants mention a number of other ways in which hiring and access to promotions should be addressed.

Suggestions for additional initiatives

- Firstly, as mentioned in a previous section, participants say access to leadership positions, particularly those with responsibility for hiring decisions, should require proof of a minimal level of bias consciousness and intercultural competency.

“Hiring managers should be chosen through a point system weighted based on genuine commitment to cultural fairness... If they don’t genuinely care, you can’t train them to it.”

“The civil service has tests to measure how you react when you are faced with intercultural situations.”

“The same way you have to pass a drug test to work at the RCMP, IRCC needs to have some kind of test to rule out hiring racists.”

One participant adds that external consultants hired by IRCC should also be required to abide by the anti-racism organizational values that internal staff commit to.

“I’m shocked at the things that have come out of consultants’ mouths. There is no proper vetting process for consultants.”

- Second, participants suggest initiating a callout to racialized employees inviting anyone who feels they may have missed out on opportunities to act or be promoted to submit information documenting their experiences (including details considered relevant such as tenure at IRCC, time spent in each position held, academic credentials or others.) Participants believe this could help:
 - Identify qualified candidates for mentorship, sponsorship, or promotion.
 - Provide data allowing IRCC to identify pockets of the organization, hierarchical levels, or employment statuses (e.g., casual or acting positions) where systemic biases are common.
 - Release and rehabilitate employees who have been blocked within unhealthy work environments by taking them away from oppressive managers and supporting them in rebuilding their professional confidence and efficacy.

“You hear a lot about appointing, sponsoring, recruiting, but the missing pillar is to identify those people with high potential that management may not have been aware of.”

- Participants also feel human resources staff are currently overwhelmed and under-equipped to adequately support hiring managers. They say hiring managers are not specialists and lack sufficient time, knowledge, and training to perform the HR aspects of their roles adequately.

Participants believe that HR specialists should be empowered and held responsible not only for advising hiring managers on minimizing the impact of racial biases on their decision-making, but for going beyond that and ensuring human resource management at IRCC is bias-free. They feel this is particularly important given the current context in which the push to rapidly increase hiring to meet increased production targets has increased recourse to informal hiring processes. Participants believe it involves:

- HR being accountable for approving job postings and supervising examinations, selection, and interview processes. (According to participants, in the current fast-paced hiring environment, these tasks are often carried out by managers with little to no support from HR).
- Hiring more racialized HR specialists.
- Ensuring interview panels are balanced and include interviewers with a minimum level of intercultural competency and bias self-awareness; and
- Occasional audits of hiring and promotion decisions with a view to identifying nascent issues before they become bigger ones.

“The HR advisors are not as helpful as you would hope. Right now, all hiring rests with hiring managers: writing up the post, writing the exam, assessing the exam. Having that extra support would mean you are not just doing it off the side of your desk.”

“Before 2009, when you got to management you got lots of training. Since 2018 there has been very little management training for team leads and managers are more empowered to promote people based on right fit, so they promote people they like but who are not necessarily qualified.”

“Managers should not be the ones hiring. They have unconscious biases and some of them don’t have the experience, training, or time to do things properly. There should be a qualified hiring team.”

“The HR teams should be more involved and have a diversity sub team to bring in tools that evaluate unconscious bias and help develop interview questions that are screened for racial bias. HR has to be better equipped for that.”

- When it comes to the hiring process, participants feel it is better for the Department to be transparent about the biases that exist and provide all candidates with equal access to information on how these processes work, rather than unrealistically claiming its processes are fair and bias-free. Participants believe that saying the latter maintains the status quo

and keeps the game secret. According to participants, there should be more transparency, and occasional audits, around such things as:

- The realities that drive the decision to run a pool.
- The reasons for choosing certain candidates from a pool and not others; and
- Favoured interview strategies.

“The lie I have been told multiple times is that IRCC is a meritocracy. They say you are promoted based on your experiences and capabilities but in reality, it’s a lot of favoritism, nepotism and hiring people who look like you”.

“Transparency can help reduce distrust. If I think I am not being promoted because I am racialized, tell me the whole story. Maybe you are not promoting me because you don’t have the budget. Not understanding the story behind your decisions creates anxiety and misunderstanding. Tell people the full story, proactively.”

“We are trying to get better at documenting why we run a pool and who has access to that information. Currently, its mainly based on a complaint process, but it should be more transparent.”

“The way candidates are evaluated is different from what some cultures would find acceptable. For example, taking ownership is something that would be seen as aggressive and not humble in my culture, whereas at IRCC, you get penalized if you say ‘we did it’ in an interview. They want you to say, ‘I did it’. These interview things need to be made explicit.”

“The interview process for leadership positions is a very special format. It’s a game and you have to learn to play the game to get through.”

“[The people in positions of power] all have similar ways of speaking, similar backgrounds. Where they went to school. It’s that Franco-Canadian, Laurentian elite, immersion school thing. It seems like a club that we are not a part of, and we don’t know how to get in. It’s a government-wide issue but at IRCC we should be better, because we are bringing in immigrants.”

- As was often mentioned in 2021, participants believe that centralizing higher level positions at National Headquarters (NHQ) in Ottawa imposes a significant limit on the Department’s ability to achieve adequate racial representation throughout the organizational hierarchy. They feel that Canada’s racial minorities are more likely to face challenges in living away from more racially diverse cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Edmonton. Given the particular importance of diversity to the IRCC’s mandate, many participants say the Department should explore ways to staff higher level positions outside of NHQ and/or allow racialized employees to work remotely.
- The same is true for language requirements that participants believe place a disproportionate burden on employees from immigrant backgrounds. In this area, participants feel IRCC should:

- Question the relative importance of French-English language requirements over the impact of other skillsets such as cultural competency and other languages spoken on a position by position basis, and/or
- Ensure increased and equitable access to language training for employees outside of the National Capital Region. (Several participants have observed that there seems to be much more investment in human capital development at NHQ compared to other IRCC locations).
- According to participants, another missing piece is the lack of implementation of performance evaluations and creation and follow through on career development plans for employees. Participants believe this to be partly due to high production targets, but it's also perceived to be a result of poor management training and support. Participants suggest the Department needs a specialized career development team where managers can refer employees for support in identifying their ideal career development path and for mentorship on how to move through the organization.

Some also say having this done by people external to one's direct management team can help circumvent situations where racialized employees become trapped working under managers who are not supportive of their career development.

"We are not good at documenting performance. I have not had a valid performance agreement since 2014."

"We need to get more consistent about documenting performance. I have not been trained on how to measure performance and mentor people."

"As managers, we have too much on our plate, we don't have the time or skills to do this."

"Giving people the opportunities from the start of their career is very important. Execs are wondering why there are not people higher up to choose from. Mentoring is key. It has to start from the very beginning."

"I know for a fact there are biased managers out there. There are some that will only coach and mentor employees of a certain race."

Experiences of racism in foreign postings

As indicated at the start of this report, discussions with employees with recent experience in foreign postings (which included people in entry level and executive roles and both expatriates and Locally Engaged Staff (LES)) make it clear that they believe that the progress seen at IRCC within Canada over the past two years has *not* been replicated in its offices abroad.

These employees still seem to be crying out to have their experiences of racism heard, taken seriously, and ended. Plus, as was indicated in our 2021 report, the expressions of racism experienced by participants in IRCC's foreign postings are particularly egregious and weighty in impact.

Several participants say they have frequently and repeatedly witnessed or been subjected to racially motivated microaggressions, harassment and professional marginalization. Attempts to

report or escalate these situations were often brushed aside or met with retaliation and, in some cases, even threats from management. Furthermore, participants say that known offenders often continue on to other postings (including postings in racialized majority countries) without facing any consequences and they also believe that many are even promoted.

“Being a black person here is an extreme sport. I kid you not. We are not protected.”

As the participants point out, they feel it is important that this situation be attended to because:

- These IRCC employees represent Canada and its values abroad.
- The nature of the organizational structure in foreign postings is such that victims of racism often feel trapped in these situations with little possibility of escaping a toxic work environment other than to leave their jobs.

Types of experiences mentioned

Participants with experience in foreign postings shared details of numerous recent incidences of overtly racist comments and workplace harassment experienced abroad, as well as how their complaints were dealt with. Examples experienced by participants included:

- Managers mocking accents of Locally Engaged Staff, asking them to repeat themselves, pretending not to understand them and ignoring them.
- Managers publicly and privately harassing, discriminatorily micro-managing and criticizing Locally Engaged Staff to such an extent that it is noticed, discussed, and complained about by colleagues and peers.
- Employees and, in some cases, managers, making demeaning comments and hurtful jokes about employees that are based on the employee’s racial or ethnic origins, or that make derogatory associations between employees and applicants.
- IRCC employees in leadership positions in foreign postings expressing overt disdain and even hatred for people from certain countries and for immigrants to Canada in general, using racial slurs and stating support for violence against people from other countries.
- Complaints to HR about some of these situations being met with dismissive responses including saying that it is not worth addressing because the offender will soon be moving to another foreign posting; and
- Being advised or warned by managers not to report or complain about these situations because doing so could result in being bullied, penalized, or risking losing one’s job for complaining.

Environmental factors that contribute to the problem

Participants point to a number of factors that create an environment where such behaviors can persist without consequence.

- One is that Canadian consulates abroad often combine employees from several departments with differing values and organisational cultures that, according to participants, may be more lax when it comes to addressing racism in the workplace. Participants feel that this makes it harder to uphold the anti-racism values and standards that IRCC is currently working to instill.
- Participants also say that in these offices, IRCC employees sometimes report to managers from other departments, creating a break in the accountability chain. They believe that employees seeking to report or escalate incidents may not have a clear chain of command within IRCC to report up through, or, if there is one, it can be hard to navigate. In some cases, participants feel that if the offender is from another department, IRCC may have limited power to implement consequences.

“There is a major discord when trying to sort complaints as there are several different governing bodies who often pass the buck between them. The process is very disjointed. And also, in view of diplomatic immunity, etc., there is virtually no accountability, it seems, even in the most serious of cases.”

- Participants believe that IRCC leadership positions abroad also tend to be occupied by a tight knit circle of people who rotate in and out of foreign postings and therefore form a strong bond and tend to defend each other. Participants also feel that since many are in position for a limited time, complaints often get dragged out until the perpetrator moves to the next posting, with no follow-up or consequences.

“What I encountered overseas was outright racist Canadian staff in a way that I was shocked. In Canada, you don’t vocalize those things. But if you have been overseas a long time or posted in places where it wasn’t a big deal, you develop a level of comfort expressing these things. And the space enables it. It’s like seeing a shocking example from a training happening right in front of you. Expressed by an older white man.”

“They are posted there for years at a time. They cycle around as friends. They don’t want to create problems for their friends, and they can make the time run out on complaints.”

“People feel threatened to speak up because they know they can get away with it and they have power in numbers.”

- In addition, participants feel that the small and rather hierarchical organizational structure in foreign postings, means managers have few options for removing people whose behavior is problematic without a significant impact on operations. Furthermore, there is not always a local HR or OCR (Office of Conflict Resolution) representative to turn to for support dealing with workplace racism or harassment issues. If there is, participants believe that they tend to be particularly ineffectual because of their proximity to local managers.

“Overseas, the ranking is more prevalent. You can’t move people horizontally. There is no way to move laterally... I had to pull someone aside and say I am not tolerating these things, but I couldn’t write them up because you still have to produce. You still have to deliver your mandate. It’s similar to the dynamic in our smaller IRCC offices inland where you have to deal with nepotistic cultures.”

Suggested solutions

When it comes to solutions, participants say that:

- It is critical for IRCC employees in foreign postings to have recourse to a specialized resource, in Canada that is independent from the local chain of command and that can receive reports of incidents of racism, protect employees from retribution, and investigate and enforce consequences.
- IRCC employees in foreign postings should have to be rotated back inland every few years and for long enough to be reacclimated with prevailing Canadian and organizational values; and
- And finally, IRCC employees should have to demonstrate a minimum level of bias consciousness and cultural competency, as well as a commitment to the organization's anti-racism values to gain access to foreign postings.

On the impacts of racism on program and service delivery

Impacts of racism on program and service delivery

Participants mention several observed or suspected examples of impacts of racism on delivery of IRCC's programs and services. These include:

- Differences between approval rates for immigrants from majority racialized versus non racialized countries.
- Lower approval rates for immigrants from African countries.
- The speed with which applications from European countries are processed compared to other regions, and
- Differences between the efforts deployed to deal with refugee crises (most notably, the differences between how the recent Ukrainian refugee crisis was handled compared to others such as Syria, Afghanistan and Haiti).

"When I was onboarding, and I saw the approval rates from different countries and the differential in willingness to support arriving Afghans versus Ukrainians... I was expecting there to be a difference. I am not naïve. But it's the extent of the difference that struck me."

"The decisions made around Ukraine were flawed and racialized people saw it immediately. To open the doors and just say come on in...that has never been done before. Not in Yemen, not in Syria..."

Hypotheses about the impacts of racial bias on case processing

Participants feel that case processing outcomes clearly suggest that racially motivated biases impact program and service delivery. What is less clear is where these biases stem from and what

should be done about them. While participants shared thoughts about how internal policies and processes may enable these impacts, they have more questions than answers at this stage.

- Some participants recognize that, since there is always a degree of subjectivity in application approval decisions, it is possible that racial biases at the level of the individual handling the client file could have an impact. In fact, some say that comments they hear made by some case processing staff are a source of concern.

“I used to be a citizenship application decision maker and some of the comments I heard from colleagues makes me question the decision-making being done at certain levels. If you are expressing such things, it makes me feel you might be discriminating against certain candidates.”

On the other hand, some argue that, at the level of the individual case processing officer, there are countervailing incentives to approve rather than deny an application, because approving an application is (1) less time consuming (and therefore contributes to achieving production targets); (2) less risky (because less likely to be contested) and (3) personally satisfying (based on the assumption that is usually more satisfying to say yes to something than to say no).

- Some participants feel it is more likely the policies and processes that guide decision making contribute to observed biases in outcomes, especially in the current climate where there is a lot of pressure on the Department to increase production.
 - Participants believe that in order to increase the number of applications approved, there is a tendency to separate files into those that are simpler (i.e., faster to process and more likely to be approved) versus those seen as more complex. The latter tend to move through the system more slowly and risk being de-prioritized when targets change.
 - Participants say that in some areas, there has been a move towards bulk processing as a way to increase efficiency. This means that instead of considering all the aspects of a candidate’s file to get a holistic view of their circumstances, different teams analyse different parts of an application with an eye to detecting specific indicators suggesting an application should be held back for further scrutiny. As participants point out, these “red flags” are sometimes based on unsubstantiated assumptions (for example, looking to see if people are smiling in a wedding photo without taking into account cultural contexts in which that might not be the norm, or assumptions about stamps in an applicant’s passport without firm data to inform what these stamps are believed to imply).

“I have to review entire case files and sometimes the case notes reveal assumptions based on stereotypes and anecdotes and not facts.”

“Anyone watching the announcements every year about IRCC’s objectives...in terms of permanent residents it’s now in the millions and we have lacked staff to process these applications for a while. So, the focus goes on the difficult ones ...the crooks, the ones who make our lives difficult...It shapes IRCC’s culture...We start to see in terms of trends ... of people trying to cheat the system.”

- Participants say that applications from certain countries or regions also tend to be flagged for increased scrutiny based on beliefs about the prevalence of document fraud or security concerns in those regions, for example. And while there may be valid reasons behind some of these rules, many feel that, in the context of IRCC's commitment to apply an anti-racism lens to its work, these rules should at least be scrutinized.

Hypotheses about the impacts of racial bias on program and policy design

While it may not be feasible to eliminate all impacts of racism on program and policy design, many participants feel that, as part of its anti-racism commitment, IRCC should fully explore the impacts of the assumptions that underlie its policies and programs and at least examine whether they are warranted and aligned with departmental objectives today.

- For example, participants say that the requirement that applicants prove their capacity to support themselves financially by producing bank statements in their own name may impose an undue bias against applicants from countries where communities usually combine resources to support each other financially. From an anti-racism perspective, participants feel the Department should at least explore the feasibility and impact of allowing applicants to demonstrate financial solvability through alternate means and weigh this against the impact of forcing them to produce documents that do not reflect their reality.
- Another example mentioned by participants goes back to the assumptions that underlie Canada's economic immigration point system which favors educated, wealthy, urban immigrants who, as some point out, also tend to resemble the socio-economic profiles of most of IRCC's policy decision-makers. Participants feel that this system is based on assumptions about the type of individuals most likely to contribute positively to Canada's economic development. However, participants believe that in today's economic realities, there may be other, more beneficial characteristics worth favouring, such as having a farming background, for example, as a way to select immigrants who might be more inclined to populate Canada's shrinking rural regions or favouring immigrants from entrepreneurial classes.

“With our human capital approach to selecting permanent economic immigrants, the underlying assumption is that people who make more money and do well in school will be better citizens. Because that is the bias of the people who created those policies. We are choosing people who have the same qualities we do at senior levels of our public service.”

“A lot of this goes to the roots of how our department was formed. How do you decide if someone is going to be a good immigrant?”

“We pride ourselves in having an objective, transparent fair system. For example, we don't interview applicants because interviews may bring in bias. Other countries do but that was a choice we made. So maybe we need to look at the other things we do and ask ourselves, ‘Are we missing something here? Are we being myopic?’ ...I don't know what the answer is, but I think we need to ask the questions.”

Participant suggestions

- Participants say the Department should at least question the current relevance of assumptions that underlie policies and process design and analyse their impacts.
- As several point out, there should also be greater collaboration between the branches that design policies and programs and the Operations branch responsible for implementing them. The two sides of the Department tend to work in silos which means there is little opportunity to account for the impact decisions made by one can have on decisions made by the other.

“We [policy] don’t even know how processing works and how these targets we set impact people. The branches don’t talk to each other. Operations don’t talk to settlement and integration. There is no connection between branches.”

- Finally, participants underscore the importance of ensuring that racism impact analysis is done *in advance* of automating processes because, once automation is set in motion, it becomes nearly impossible to wind back.

“Our aggressive output targets have us moving fast towards technological solutions. Creating those systems can be risky if a diversity and inclusion (DI) lens is not properly applied before it is automated because once it gets embedded in that machine and its running, good luck trying to get it modified.”

Conclusion

Recognizing that eliminating racism in an organization as large and as complex as IRCC is a big undertaking, with the exception of the situation in foreign postings, based on the progress achieved thus far, participants are generally hopeful and proud to be part of an organisation that is setting the bar for anti-racism in the federal government.

However, participants feel that the gains so far are considered to be in areas that were relatively easy to take on. They believe the challenge and expectation now is for the Department to demonstrate the strength of its commitment to anti-racism by going beyond compensating for systemic racism and beginning to dismantle it. Participants believe that this will require:

- Ensuring IRCC employees demonstrate a baseline level of intercultural competency and bias awareness fitting for a department whose mandate centers around diversity and;
- The political will to enforce a culture of zero-tolerance for racist behaviour, including removing employees who refuse to carry out their responsibilities in a way that is aligned with the Department's stated values.

Participants also suggest a large number of improvements to initiatives already begun as well as additional actions to prioritize. The most salient of these include:

- Enrolling employees and management in immersive, experiential trainings designed to transform empathy for and understanding of experiences of racism and their impacts.
- Making managers directly accountable for actions that help combat racism through Performance Management Agreements, and in a way that is better targeted to achieve the desired results.
- Creating a safe and effective external reporting mechanism that is responsible for receiving, tracking, investigating, and resolving complaints and empowered to protect complainants, report high-level outcomes, and enforce, or, at least, recommend, consequences.
- Increasing investment to support career mobility for racialized employees by expanding mentorship and sponsorship programs, supporting language training, career development planning and the creation of higher-level positions outside the National Capital Region.
- Undertaking a comprehensive review of the assumptions underlying program and policy design as well as case processing rules to weigh their impacts against current priorities and values.
- Convincing International Network leadership of the importance of disrupting the protective sub-culture that exists in foreign postings in order to begin taking on racism in IRCC offices abroad.

Appendix A: Qualitative instruments

English and French qualitative instruments are provided under separate cover.