



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

# IRCC 2022-23 Anti-Racism Employee Qualitative Research Executive Summary

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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.**

Canada 

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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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## 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	
<b>Total Number of Sessions</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>6</b>

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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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.