



BC Employment in 2030 Action Labs: Regional Summary

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A special thank you to all of the workshop participants who contributed their lived expertise and energy to help job seekers and workers better prepare for the future labour market in Canada.

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Introduction

Employment in 2030 was an 18-month initiative that combined futures research, expert workshops, and a machine-learning algorithm to generate a forecast of skills demand and occupational growth in 2030. The project was summarized in the Brookfield Institute's *Ahead by a Decade* (Spring 2020). The intent of the original initiative was to fill a gap in Canada's labour market information (LMI) by providing a skills-based forecast that was responsive to changing labour market conditions across the country.

Given the Brookfield Institute's mandate to make research practical and applied, Employment in 2030 Action Labs (herein referred to as "Action Labs") was designed to build on the original initiative and to translate this labour market forecast (in addition to other sources of LMI) into tangible solutions that could help workers prepare for their future. With funding from the Future Skills Centre, this project launched in fall 2020.

Given the diversity of Canada's labour market and worker experiences across the country, this project sought to generate region-specific solutions that

would ideally have replicability and scalability to other contexts. To accomplish this, we partnered with five organizations:

- + Yukon University (Whitehorse, Yukon)
- + RADIUS SFU (Vancouver, British Columbia)
- + Tech Manitoba (Winnipeg, Manitoba)
- + Observatoire compétences-emplois (Montréal, Québec)
- + Newfoundland and Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre (Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador)

The following summary describes the British Columbia Action Labs.



About Action Labs

Action Labs included three project phases. The first phase focused on exploring the impact COVID-19 may have on Canada's labour market, and how that may impact current projections. To do this, we conducted futures research and engaged a national panel of experts to provide feedback on emerging trends and their potential impact. This phase culminated in the release of *Yesterday's Gone: Exploring possible futures of Canada's labour market in a post-COVID world.*

The second phase entailed a series of human-centred design workshops that started by reviewing existing LMI to identify a regional challenge area. After identifying the challenge, we conducted interviews with living experts [see call out box] to gain a deeper understanding of the current experience, which led to two virtual workshops to translate the challenge into possible solutions. These challenge areas varied across regions, with British Columbia Action Labs focused on supporting newcomer, immigrant, and refugee women to leverage and future-proof their existing skills. For more details about the design of the workshops, see our workshop design commentary.

The third and final phase focused on translating our process into LMI insights, which led to the generation of a series of considerations and ideas about how we might redesign LMI in the future to be more worker-centric. This information is summarized in *Ground Control to LMI: Making Labour Market Information Work for Workers.*

What is a living expert?

Every day, each of us uses the skills and experience we possess to solve challenges. These skills and experiences are part of our “expertise” and the result of our lived experiences, education, and training. While we may each take a different approach to tackle a challenge based on our expertise, problem-solving is a shared human experience, a skill we are all required to use on a daily basis. This project invited participants to bring their expertise, as a living expert, to explore and suggest ideas that respond to the regional challenge.



Selecting the British Columbia Regional Challenge

We started with the broad research question of “How might we identify practical solutions that help workers across Canada gain the foundational skills and abilities identified by the *Forecast of Canadian Occupational Growth* (FCOG) critical for the future of work?” We worked with RADIUS SFU, along with a number of labour market experts, consultants, and other stakeholders in British Columbia to identify a promising focus area based on the regional labour market in the province.

British Columbia has the fastest-growing population of immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in Canada. In BC, 28.3 percent of residents are immigrants and 22.9 percent of residents are second-generation immigrants. However, the Forecast of Canadian Occupational Growth identified that first-generation immigrants make up about 35 percent of workers in occupations projected to decline in the next decade.

This, paired with the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on women, led to the decision to focus on supporting immigrant, refugee, and newcomer women aged 25 to 45 to future-proof their skills.

Regional challenge question:
How might we help immigrant, refugee, and newcomer women to access culturally relevant and meaningful opportunities to leverage and future-proof their skills?



Understanding the Challenge

Using this information as a foundation, the Brookfield Institute facilitated interactive workshops on May 17 and 25, 2021. These workshops engaged participants with lived experience of being an immigrant, refugee, and newcomer, in addition to human resources professionals, settlement services workers, job placement experts, and labour market experts with knowledge and experience supporting newcomers.

Workshop participants identified a range of programs currently providing support for newcomer, refugee, and immigrant women, such as:

Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia (ISSoBC) provides digital literacy and other programs that focus on immigrant and refugee women. ISSoBC also delivers Career Paths guidance, which helps professional newcomers with permanent resident status to complete the licensing process and find a professional job.

DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society provides multilingual settlement programs, as well as employment, skills, and mental health support programs for newcomers and other diverse

communities in Surrey and the Lower Mainland.

Pacific Immigrant Resources Society (PIRS) provides child care programming and English language classes that are tailored to the needs of participants, children, and family programs that improve access and understanding about life and parenting in the Canadian context, as well as leadership programs that support women's personal and career development.

Facilitating Access to Skilled Talent (FAST), created by the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia, is a free online, occupation-specific career-preparation and competency assessment program designed for immigrants in accounting, biotech and life sciences, culinary arts, IT and data services, and skilled trades.

Job Quest (also delivered by the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia) helps immigrants and refugees with customized services to reach their educational, training, and career goals.



A focus on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI): working closely with our partners at RADIUS SFU, we incorporated a JEDI approach to our workshop design. This included setting a series of community commitments and expectations at the beginning of the workshop to ensure that each participant understood and was committed to creating an environment of respect. This was particularly important given that our process intentionally engaged a diversity of participants, including “users” with lived experience related to the challenge area. This also resulted in an overall shift in the language we used, avoiding suggestions that the challenges these workshops sought to address would be “solved” and that a “solution” was not necessarily the workshop goal or a required contribution of participants.

Despite the successes of these programs, participants felt that gaps remained in the support available for newcomer, immigrant, and refugee women. To better understand these gaps, participants explored the challenge statement in further detail by discussing their individual lived experience. The following section outlines what participants identified as being the current experience, main challenges, as well as what is currently working well.

What immigrant, newcomer and refugee women hear:

- + “I was told I needed a ‘high level of English’ to work”
- + “I hear a lot about ‘Canadian experience’. I don’t know what that means.”
- + “You need to study again/get certified/designated in your occupation in Canada”
- + “It will take a while to achieve your career goals in Canada”
- + “You can’t be a doctor in Canada, or a lawyer”
- + “This is Canada and this is how it is, so accept it to fit in”
- + “Do volunteer work first”
- + “Canada doesn’t recognize your skill; you will need to retrain”



What immigrant, newcomer, and refugee women think + feel:

- + Overwhelmed with a range of responsibilities (settling in, getting kids into school, etc.)
- + Fear that barriers to participate in appropriate employment opportunities are causing previous skills and experience to diminish
- + Frustration over systematic barriers (lack of community/child care/access)
- + Mental health struggles/loneliness
- + Discriminated against
- + Overwhelmed with new cultural realities

What immigrant, newcomer and refugee women see:

- + A complex system
- + Many programs and services for immigrants, but not sure where to start
- + A lack of coordination between organizations and duplication of services
- + Low-paying job opportunities
- + New cultural expectations and practice in the workforce. Adapting to Canadian workplace culture/learning employers' expectations are key to getting hired

What immigrant, newcomer and refugee women say + do:

- + Frustration over lack of credential recognition: “I have two degrees and a career in my home country. Why do I have to do more education here?” and “Is my past experience valuable?”
- + Challenges developing English-language skills: “I don’t feel confident with my English yet” and “I have two children to take care of, so I am studying English part-time only”
- + Difficulty navigating the labour market: “I have no connections” and “I don’t know the job market here”

What immigrant, newcomer and refugee women say is working well:

- + Availability of resources
- + Career preparation programs that help newcomers achieve employment outcomes
- + Initiatives that combine employment and community-building
- + Immigrant-led businesses
- + Connecting with other service providers in my area
- + Accessing informal, peer support groups



What immigrant, newcomer and refugee women say is most frustrating:

- + Foreign credentials and experience are not recognized which means newcomers have to study again to be able to work. This is expensive and takes a long time to complete
- + Number of programs, organizations, and resources can be confusing/overwhelming; same with a lack of coordination between agencies
- + Lack of accessible, affordable childcare support
- + Lack of financial support to build a career
- + Lack of focus on healing and trauma recovery, compounded by lateral violence from within immigrant communities



Solution Criteria

Based on these challenges, participants identified the following as a list of criteria that any new program, policy or solution would need to consider to successfully support immigrant, newcomer, and refugee women to leverage and future-proof their skills:

A solution must:

- + Include the user in its design
- + Have a sustainable funding model
- + Feature inclusive criteria, as well as flexibility and adaptability to support different communities
- + Benefit all stakeholders involved
- + Connect to existing support structures and not duplicate current programs and solutions
- + Provide language support for participants
- + Include mentorship
- + Incorporate digital literacy and accessibility of users
- + Consider childcare needs of women

Initial Solution Ideas

Using these criteria and their knowledge of the challenge, participants identified the following ideas as possible solutions to support immigrant, refugee, and newcomer women to leverage and future proof their skills:

1. Building on pre-arrival programs such as Community Airport Newcomers Network ([CANN](#)), a centralized way of welcoming new immigrants that provides advisory services to start appropriate pathways so immigrants can navigate program and service options in a planned manner
2. A competency-based assessment for employers that identifies immigrants' skills and abilities, allowing employers to better understand how newcomers can contribute their skills to their business growth
3. An online platform that allows women to showcase their talents and trade competencies because they want to start offering their skills, build a network, generate income, and connect with meaningful opportunities

Other ideas discussed include:

- + An accessible and culturally-relevant daycare service at work that lowers existing employment barriers
- + A policy/practice that enables active and intentional listening of women, giving immigrant women a voice and minimizing oppressive organizational practices
- + An app/device that provides immediate interpretation/translation to overcome language barriers
- + A certification that supports career exploration so newcomer women are able to access better support in finding careers that incorporate mental health/anxiety awareness and other skills



Developing and Refining Solutions

To further develop these ideas, participants developed a series of prototypes. Each group created a storyboard outlining how the solution would be used, allowing groups to clarify their ideas and identify areas for improvements. From there, groups explored further prototyping options including draft immigration and employment policies, information cards, and website designs. Based on this exercise, participants clarified their solution, and identified possible implementation considerations. The following summarizes their comments:

Solution 1: A centralized way of welcoming new immigrants and connecting them with appropriate services in collaboration with the Community

Airport Newcomers Network (CANN)

The group working on this idea identified that a quick and easy way to test this approach would be through the creation of a welcome card that newcomers receive on first arrival in British Columbia. These cards should include:

- + Email address of one or two settlement agencies in the area they first settle and neighborhood

houses providing community services

- + Service Canada locations to apply for a social insurance number (SIN)
- + Links to Medical Services Plan and Healthy Kids Program forms
- + A list of schools (all levels) in the area
- + Links to the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia's online skills assessment and language assessment

Solution 2: A competency-based assessment for employers that identifies immigrants' skills

The group working on this idea discussed the range of formats a skills-based competency assessment tool for employers could take in order for it to be able to understand the existing skills of immigrant, newcomer, and refugee women. This group determined that this tool could be included as part of immigration and refugee processes and policies, as a requirement for newcomers to complete during their immigration process. Alternatively, or in addition, there was support for this tool to be implemented through employment and hiring policies, to ensure employers were using the tool directly to understand the high level of skills offered by immigrant, newcomer, and refugee women.



Solution 3: Online skills and service marketplace

The third solution explored the feasibility of an online platform for immigrant women to trade their products and services in a supportive environment, a tech-friendly, economical, ethical, and safe space. The team determined that this platform would be accessible, be available in various languages, and have individual business profiles that were searchable. In order for this platform to be developed, participants identified the need to access additional funding to develop the technology needed. Participants felt that it would make sense to start with a small prototype to test overall viability.



Next Steps

While there is clearly interest in each idea, RADIUS SFU expressed the most interest in exploring the idea of a skills-competency evaluation framework (Solution #2) that would help employers to better assess the skills of newcomer, immigrant, and refugee women. RADIUS SFU felt this idea would complement the work currently underway as part of their Refugee Livelihood Lab. Further funding is needed to explore the feasibility of this idea, as well as a landscape analysis of current competency assessment tools available.

About the Regional Partner

RADIUS is a social innovation hub based out of the Beedie School of Business, SFU, and located in the heart of Vancouver at the Charles Chang Innovation Centre. RADIUS builds programs to collaboratively develop, test, and accelerate innovative responses to tough social problems. Drawing on this leading-edge work, RADIUS also offers training, events and educational opportunities to build collective capacity to respond to the challenges of our time. With the help of the RADIUS team, the Action Labs workshops across regions incorporated a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) approach to ensure that the workshops were inclusive and considered the diverse needs and lived and living experiences of participants.

Quick Links:

[Executive Summary](#)

[Ground Control to LMI](#)

[Manitoba Regional Summary](#)

[Newfoundland and Labrador Regional Summary](#)

[Rapport sommaire régional, Québec](#)

[Yukon Regional Summary](#)





The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) is an independent and nonpartisan policy institute, housed within Ryerson University, that is dedicated to building a prosperous Canada where everyone has the opportunity to thrive in an inclusive, resilient economy. BII+E generates forward-looking insights and stimulates new thinking to advance actionable innovation policy in Canada.

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