

# Navigating DEI: African Immigrants' Experiences with Workplace Inclusivity Policies

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## Abstract

This paper explores the experiences of African immigrants in Canadian workplaces through the lens of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) frameworks. While Canada has long celebrated its multicultural identity, systemic barriers such as credential recognition challenges, implicit bias, and exclusionary practices persist. Drawing on literature about immigrants and African immigrants in North America, the paper highlights how DEI policies often overlook the nuanced needs of African professionals, particularly in Northern and remote regions. Recent backlash against DEI further threatens immigrant inclusion, undermining organizational commitments to equity. The paper identifies three major themes: exclusionary design of DEI policies, rigid implementation, and limited accessibility of supports. It concludes with an expanded research agenda addressing unfair discrimination, intersectionality, and the future of African immigrant integration in the Canadian labor market.

## Keywords

African Immigrants, Workplace Integration, Northern Canada, Phenomenology, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

## 1. Introduction

Canada's identity as a multicultural society is reflected in its increasingly diverse workforce. Immigration has long been central to the nation's demographic and economic growth, with immigrants now comprising nearly one in four Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2022). Among these groups, African immigrants represent one of the fastest-growing populations, contributing critical skills across health care, education, technology, and resource industries. Yet despite their qualifications

and potential, African immigrants often encounter systemic barriers that undermine full participation in the labor market. These include challenges in credential recognition, underemployment, stereotyping, and discrimination that confine many to positions below their education and experience levels (Agyekum & Newbold, 2019; Chen & Davies, 2020; McGregor, 2021).

In response to such inequities, Canadian organizations have embraced Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, designed to create fairer workplaces and leverage the advantages of a diverse workforce. However, the effectiveness of these initiatives remains uneven. While some sectors have advanced equity through deliberate recruitment and retention practices, many African immigrants perceive DEI as exclusionary, symbolic, or narrowly focused on other underrepresented groups (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). These gaps are particularly acute in Northern and remote regions, where organizational diversity is limited and immigrant integration receives less policy attention. The current political and cultural backlash against DEI further complicates matters. Critics frame DEI as unnecessary, divisive, or politically motivated, creating a climate in which immigrant-focused initiatives are vulnerable to neglect or retrenchment. For African immigrants, who already experience invisibility in organizational cultures, this backlash heightens risks of exclusion and unfair treatment.

This paper therefore explores the lived experiences of African immigrants within Canadian workplaces, particularly in Northern regions. By centering their perspectives, it interrogates how DEI policies are designed, implemented, and received, while also considering the implications of DEI backlash. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing debates about organizational inclusivity, immigrant integration, and the pursuit of equitable labor practices in Canada.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Immigrant Workplace Integration in Canada

Studies consistently reveal that highly skilled immigrants, including Africans, face downward occupational mobility in Canada (Vosko, 2020; Alaazi et al., 2020). African immigrants report higher unemployment and underemployment rates compared to European immigrants, with many relegated to precarious work (Villegas & Aberman, 2019). This phenomenon is attributed to several systemic barriers, such as, accent discrimination, stereotyping, and exclusion from professional networks (Smith, 2020). Additionally, racial microaggressions and the devaluation of foreign credentials further hinder the employment prospects of racialized immigrants (Bilgili et al., 2019). Employers often fail to recognize the qualifications and experiences of immigrants, leading to underemployment and job dissatisfaction (Brochu et al., 2020).

Furthermore, Northern regions of Canada present unique challenges for immigrant integration. Smaller labor markets limit job opportunities, and organizational cultures may lack experience with diverse employees (Brezicha, 2022). While institutions like Aurora College and CDETNO offer support services, these

programs are often insufficiently tailored to the needs of African professionals, leaving many without mentorship or advancement pathways (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). The barriers to workplace integration have significant mental health implications for immigrants. Studies have shown that low job market integration leads to decreased social integration and deteriorating mental well-being among skilled immigrants (BCC, 2022). Experiencing discrimination and underemployment can contribute to feelings of marginalization and stress.

To address these challenges, research indicates that it is essential to implement anti-racist and inclusive policies that recognize the value of immigrant professionals. Programs should be developed to facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials and provide mentorship opportunities. Additionally, fostering inclusive organizational cultures and expanding support services in underserved regions can enhance the integration and well-being of immigrant workers (Tomas, 2021).

## 2.2. African Immigrants' Experiences in North America

African immigrants in North America frequently encounter a “triple bind” of racialization, immigrant status, and foreign credential devaluation, which collectively impede their full integration into the workforce (Ertorer et al., 2022). This intersectional discrimination manifests in various forms, including workplace bias, stereotyping, and exclusion from leadership opportunities, leading to significant challenges in career advancement and overall well-being. Racialization processes often result in African immigrants being perceived through a lens of inferiority, irrespective of their qualifications or professional experience (Fossati et al., 2019). This perception is compounded by the devaluation of foreign credentials, where employers may fail to recognize or undervalue qualifications obtained outside of North America.

Such systemic biases contribute to occupational downgrading, where skilled immigrants are employed in positions that do not align with their expertise or aspirations. For example, studies have highlighted that African immigrants are more likely to experience unemployment and underemployment compared to their European counterparts, often relegated to precarious work despite possessing advanced degrees and professional experience. This phenomenon underscores the persistent barriers to equitable employment opportunities for African immigrants in North America (Zaami & Madibbo, 2021). Beyond the immediate economic implications, these experiences of discrimination and marginalization have profound effects on the mental health and social integration of African immigrants. The compounded stress of navigating multiple forms of discrimination can lead to feelings of alienation, identity loss, and diminished self-esteem. Moreover, the lack of access to professional networks and mentorship opportunities further isolates these individuals, hindering their career progression and contributing to a sense of disconnection from the broader societal fabric (Fankah et al., 2020).

Addressing these challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach that includes policy reforms aimed at recognizing foreign credentials, implementing anti-dis-

crimination training in workplaces, and fostering inclusive organizational cultures that value diversity. Additionally, providing targeted support services, such as mentorship programs and professional development opportunities, can empower African immigrants to navigate the complexities of the labor market and achieve their professional aspirations. By addressing the systemic barriers that perpetuate the triple bind of racialization, immigrant status, and credential devaluation, North American societies can move towards more equitable and inclusive labor markets that harness the full potential of all individuals, regardless of their background.

### **2.3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Policies**

Canadian Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies, notably those under the Employment Equity Act (EEA, 1986), aim to rectify historical and systemic underrepresentation of marginalized groups in the workforce. While these initiatives have led to increased representation of women, Indigenous peoples, visible minorities, and persons with disabilities in federally regulated workplaces, critics argue that the focus often remains on compliance rather than transformative change. The Employment Equity Act was not designed to be the hospital after the crash; it is meant to be a proactive measure, not a reactive one (Thomas, 2024).

In Canada's northern regions, DEI efforts frequently prioritize Indigenous representation, reflecting the unique historical and cultural context of these communities. However, this emphasis can inadvertently sideline the specific needs of African immigrants, who may face distinct challenges in the labor market. The term "designated groups" in the Employment Equity Act has been criticized for its broad categorization, which may obscure the unique barriers faced by sub-groups, including African immigrants (Government of Canada, 2025). Furthermore, symbolic DEI strategies, such as implementing quotas or conducting diversity training without accompanying structural changes, can erode trust among marginalized communities. When organizations engage in performative diversity without substantive actions, they risk reinforcing existing inequities and perpetuating feelings of alienation. Anti-racism efforts that stop at symbolic gestures not only fail to dismantle inequity but also erode trust and harm marginalized communities further (Prachi, 2025).

To achieve meaningful inclusion, it is essential for DEI policies to go beyond compliance and symbolic gestures. This requires commitment to systemic change, including the recognition of foreign credentials, the provision of mentorship opportunities, and the development of culturally competent support services. Only through such comprehensive approaches can DEI initiatives genuinely address the needs of African immigrants and other marginalized groups in Canada's workforce.

### **2.4. Backlash against DEI and Implications for African Immigrants**

The recent backlash against DEI initiatives, particularly evident in U.S. discourse, is beginning to influence Canadian organizations. Critics argue that DEI pro-

grams are politicized, costly, and unnecessary, leading to a re-evaluation of such policies across various sectors. This shift has significant implications for African immigrants in Canada, who may experience increased invisibility, reduced organizational support, reinforced biases, and heightened emotional stress because of these changes. One of the primary concerns is the increased invisibility of African immigrants within DEI frameworks. As organizations retract commitments to racialized minorities under the guise of depoliticization, African immigrants' risk being deprioritized in favor of other groups (Forbes, 2025). This marginalization can lead to a lack of representation in decision-making processes and a diminished voice in shaping workplace policies that affect them.

Furthermore, the reduction or elimination of DEI initiatives often results in decreased organizational support for African immigrants. Programs such as mentorship, anti-racism training, and immigrant-specific support services are frequently the first to be cut when organizations seek to “depoliticize” their operations (Inside Higher Ed, 2024). The loss of these resources leaves African immigrants without critical tools and networks that facilitate their integration and advancement within the workplace. The absence of DEI safeguards also contributes to the entrenchment of biases in recruitment, promotion, and evaluation processes. Without structured interventions to address systemic inequities, organizations may revert to traditional practices that favor candidates from dominant cultural backgrounds. This reinforcement of bias exacerbates existing disparities and hinders the professional growth of African immigrants (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2025).

Additionally, the prevailing anti-DEI discourse can take an emotional toll on African immigrant employees. Navigating workplaces where their struggles are delegitimized or ignored adds stress and contributes to feelings of alienation. The lack of institutional support and acknowledgment of their experiences can lead to diminished job satisfaction and overall well-being. In response to these challenges, it is crucial for Canadian organizations to reaffirm their commitment to DEI principles (Cohen, 2021). Maintaining and strengthening DEI initiatives not only fosters a more inclusive and equitable work environment but also enhances organizational performance by leveraging the diverse perspectives and talents of all employees. Organizations should prioritize the development and implementation of policies that support the inclusion and advancement of African immigrants, ensuring that DEI efforts are substantive and not merely symbolic.

## 2.5. Literature Gaps

Despite growing attention to DEI, significant shortcomings remain in how initiatives are planned, implemented, and evaluated, particularly with respect to immigrant populations. Existing approaches often rely on inadequate training, lack an intersectional perspective, and prioritize surface-level changes over systemic transformation. Lara and Volante (2019) noted that many organizations still lack the accountability structures needed to consistently implement and monitor meaningful DEI policies.

Leadership diversity is another unresolved gap. Representation at senior decision-making levels is critical to driving organizational transformation, yet most organizations fall short in this area. Although training programs have the potential to improve employees' understanding of diversity and foster workplace integration, ineffective or insufficient training undermines these outcomes. Moreover, DEI is rarely embedded into organizations' long-term strategies. Instead, responses are often reactive, triggered by external pressures or crises (Fang et al., 2022). This lack of intentionality reinforces systemic inequities rather than dismantling them. Recruitment and retention practices further perpetuate these gaps. Many organizations continue to rely on conventional hiring methods that inadvertently exclude underrepresented groups. To create truly inclusive workplaces, companies must reconsider these practices and actively recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds (Chen & Davies, 2020).

The Northern Canadian context intensifies these challenges. The region has experienced an influx of immigrants and temporary foreign workers, bringing attention to the adequacy of settlement services. However, as Fang et al. (2022) highlighted, settlement organizations often lack sufficient resources and funding to provide the support newcomers require. The disconnect between organizational DEI strategies and community-level settlement realities creates additional barriers to immigrant integration.

It is within this context that the present study makes its contribution. By examining the workplace integration experiences of African immigrants in Northern Canada, this research addresses a critical gap in the literature: the intersection of organizational DEI efforts, leadership practices, and regional settlement constraints. While much of the existing scholarship identifies shortcomings at a general level, few studies explore how these challenges manifest for immigrant groups in geographically and economically unique contexts such as Northern Canada.

Building on Haapakoski and Pashby's (2017) argument that acknowledging systemic gaps is the first step toward creating inclusive cultures, this study seeks to illuminate the lived realities of African immigrants navigating these organizational and structural limitations. In doing so, it provides empirical insights that can inform more responsive DEI strategies and guide the development of sustainable, equity-driven workplace practices in underserved regions.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Stone et al. (2020) developed a framework to understand the organizational treatment of immigrants and the factors that contribute to unfair discrimination in workplace settings. The framework emphasizes the interaction between individual-level, organizational-level, and structural factors in shaping immigrant workplace outcomes. Individual attributes, such as an immigrant's professional qualifications, accent, cultural background, or perceived adaptability, interact with the attributes of evaluators—such as managers' biases, stereotypes, and prior experiences with diverse employees—and with characteristics of the job itself, including

its formal requirements and informal expectations. These intersections create conditions under which immigrants may experience systematic disadvantage, even in organizations with formal DEI policies. When applied to African immigrants in Northern Canadian workplaces, this framework illuminates how systemic inequities persist despite formal commitments to DEI.

A central element of Stone et al.'s framework is the role of prejudice and stereotyping. Immigrants are often assessed not solely on their competencies but through the lens of visible or perceived differences, including accents, foreign credentials, and cultural norms. In Canadian organizations, African immigrants are frequently subjected to such judgments, leading to biased evaluations of competence, exclusion from high-visibility projects, and limitations on access to leadership development opportunities (Agyekum & Newbold, 2019). Structural barriers form another critical component of the framework. Policies and practices that appear neutral—such as rigid credential recognition, narrowly defined recruitment channels, or limited mentorship programs—systematically disadvantage immigrant employees. These structural impediments intersect stereotyping to reinforce inequities, effectively constraining career advancement and professional integration. In Northern Canadian contexts, these barriers are often exacerbated by smaller labor markets, limited professional networks, and a scarcity of culturally tailored support services for African professionals (Brezicha, 2022).

The framework also delineates outcomes resulting from these interacting factors. Negative workplace outcomes for immigrants include underemployment, exclusion from leadership pipelines, reduced career satisfaction, and heightened vulnerability to discrimination. Applying Stone et al.'s model to African immigrants in Canadian organizations highlights how systemic inequities persist despite formal DEI commitments. DEI initiatives that prioritize some groups—such as Indigenous employees—while sidelining others inadvertently reinforce structural barriers, leaving African immigrants marginalized. Furthermore, rigid implementation of DEI policies without flexibility or cultural responsiveness can exacerbate stereotyping, as African immigrants' experiences and needs are often treated as peripheral or “out of scope.”

By employing Stone et al.'s framework, I was able to better identify the multi-level mechanisms that sustain inequities for African immigrants and develop recommendations that address not only individual biases but also structural and organizational obstacles. This approach underscores the necessity of comprehensive, inclusive, and contextually adapted DEI strategies that move beyond symbolic compliance toward genuine transformation.

#### 4. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of African immigrants working in Northern Canada, with a particular focus on how they encounter and interpret Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies within corporate organizations. Phenomenology was selected because of its capacity to uncover the meanings participants ascribe to their experi-

ences, thereby providing nuanced insights into workplace integration and systemic barriers (Moustakas, 1994). Within this tradition, an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was applied, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of both individual narratives and the broader intersectional factors that shape them (Tindall, 2009). This approach prioritizes participants' voices, encourages researcher reflexivity, and fosters openness to the complexity of immigrant experiences in unique geographical contexts.

#### **4.1. Research Objective**

The primary objective of this research was to illuminate the ways African immigrants experience DEI initiatives in their workplaces, the systemic and structural barriers they face, and the extent to which DEI policies influence their integration and career progression. Addressing this objective responds directly to a gap in the literature: while prior studies have examined immigrant workplace experiences in urban Canadian centers, little is known about how these dynamics unfold in Northern Canada. The region's geographical isolation, limited organizational diversity, and distinct sociocultural dynamics make it a particularly compelling setting for this investigation. By situating the study in this context, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how DEI policies function across diverse Canadian workplaces and underscores the need to adapt frameworks to regional realities.

#### **4.2. Participants and Sampling**

Participants were recruited using purposeful sampling to ensure diverse representation in terms of cultural background, education, and professional experience. Ten African immigrants currently living and working in Northern Canada took part in the study. Recruitment was facilitated through the Black Advocacy Coalition Up North, a non-profit organization supporting African immigrants in the region. A sample of ten participants was deemed appropriate for this phenomenological study, as the goal was to capture in-depth, nuanced experiences rather than achieve statistical generalizability.

Phenomenological research prioritizes the richness of participants' narratives, and sample adequacy is guided by data saturation, which was reached when no new themes emerged (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Moustakas, 1994). Participants were purposively selected to ensure diversity in cultural background, education, and professional experience, providing sufficient depth to explore African immigrants' experiences with DEI policies in Northern Canadian workplaces.

#### **4.3. Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either virtually or in person, depending on participant preference and availability. The interview protocol was designed to elicit open-ended, narrative responses, encouraging participants to reflect deeply on their workplace experiences and interactions with

DEI policies. Each interview was audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymized to ensure confidentiality. All data were stored securely in a password-protected system, in line with established ethical research practices (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

#### 4.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach. Interview transcripts were systematically coded, with recurring patterns identified and grouped into broader themes. This iterative process involved moving back and forth between the raw data, the developing codes, and existing scholarship on DEI and immigrant integration to ensure both rigor and contextual grounding. Key themes—such as exclusionary perceptions, rigid policy implementation, and limited accessibility of workplace supports—emerged as central to participants' accounts, providing a detailed picture of the challenges faced by African immigrants in navigating organizational DEI landscapes.

#### 4.5. Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research process, strict ethical standards were maintained. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage. Approval was secured from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and measures were taken to preserve participant anonymity and data confidentiality.

By adopting a phenomenological lens and focusing on narratives from African immigrants in Northern Canada, this methodology provides a grounded understanding of how DEI policies are experienced in a region that has been largely overlooked in prior research. The findings generated from this study are positioned to inform both organizational practices and broader policy frameworks, bridging the gap between the design of DEI initiatives and their lived realities in marginalized communities.

### 5. Findings and Discussion

This study examined African immigrants' perceptions and experiences of DEI policies within Northern Canadian workplaces. Analysis of ten participant interviews revealed three interrelated themes: (1) perceptions of DEI policies as exclusionary, (2) rigid and siloed implementation, and (3) limited accessibility and accommodation. Together, these findings highlight a disconnect between the intended goals of DEI initiatives and the lived realities of African immigrants in organizational settings.

#### 5.1. Perceptions of DEI Policies as Exclusionary

Participants consistently described DEI policies as exclusionary, emphasizing that these policies often fail to reflect their unique cultural and professional realities. Several participants noted that organizational DEI efforts heavily prioritize Indig-

enous cultures and languages—a vital and necessary focus in Northern Canada—but in doing so, inadvertently marginalize African immigrant voices. As one participant expressed, *“Our voices feel lost; the focus is always on Indigenous representation, but what about us?”*

This perception aligns with earlier studies that point to the limited intersectionality of DEI frameworks, which often fail to account for overlapping identities and diverse immigrant trajectories (Agyekum & Newbold, 2019; Fang et al., 2022). By applying generalized assumptions, organizations risk overlooking the specific needs of African immigrants, leading to feelings of alienation, diminished job satisfaction, and weakened team cohesion. These findings underscore the need to design DEI policies that embrace cultural plurality rather than focusing narrowly on one axis of diversity. Such an approach would extend the current literature, which has primarily emphasized Indigenous-settler relations in Northern Canada, by broadening the scope to incorporate immigrant perspectives.

### 5.2. Rigid and Siloed Policy Implementation

A second theme was the rigid and compartmental implementation of DEI policies. Participants noted significant inconsistencies in how DEI initiatives were applied across departments, even within the same organization. Policies were often interpreted narrowly, with little flexibility to address the particular barriers encountered by African immigrants. As a result, DEI initiatives appeared symbolic rather than transformative—a finding that resonates with the theoretical framework, which suggests that organizations often adopt DEI policies primarily to signal compliance or reputational commitment rather than to foster meaningful change (Crossley et al., 2021).

This finding echoes Thornton (2019) and Tamtik and Guenter (2019), who argued that siloed DEI strategies undermine coherence and limit their effectiveness. For African immigrants in Northern workplaces, this rigidity compounds feelings of invisibility and erodes trust in organizational structures. Importantly, this study adds to the literature by situating these dynamics within remote, resource-constrained contexts, where organizational diversity is already limited and inconsistencies in policy application can have amplified consequences.

### 5.3. Limited Accessibility and Accommodation

Participants also emphasized barriers related to limited accessibility and insufficient accommodation. Many reported a lack of professional development opportunities, inadequate mentorship, and minimal organizational support structures tailored to immigrant employees. This absence of targeted support hindered both assimilation into workplace culture and long-term career advancement. As one participant explained, opportunities for promotion were often *“out of reach because we don't have the networks or recognition others have.”*

Participants' experiences reflect broader findings that immigrants frequently encounter inequitable access to professional development, networks, and recog-

dition (Tamtik, 2022; Villegas & Aberman, 2019). In Northern Canada, where organizations operate with fewer resources, the absence of structured supports such as mentorship programs or employee resource groups is particularly acute. The result is a sense of marginalization and disconnection that mirrors what Brezicha (2022) described as “structural exclusion” within DEI efforts. This study extends that argument by showing how structural exclusion operates in Northern, non-urban contexts where immigrant workers face additional geographic and social isolation.

#### 5.4. Contribution to Literature

This study contributes to the literature by filling a notable gap: while much research on immigrant workplace integration has focused on urban centers, few studies have examined how DEI policies are experienced in Northern Canadian workplaces. By foregrounding African immigrant voices, this research illuminates how exclusionary perceptions, rigid implementations, and limited accessibility intersect with geographical and cultural isolation. These insights extend theoretical debates on symbolic versus substantive DEI practices and call for frameworks that are responsive to both immigrant and Indigenous perspectives in Northern regions. In doing so, the study advances understanding of how DEI policies can move beyond compliance and symbolism toward genuine inclusion, thereby addressing a critical gap in organizational research and practice.

#### 5.5. Implications for Workplace Integration

Taken together, these findings reveal that DEI policies, as currently designed and implemented, do not adequately support the workplace integration of African immigrants in Northern Canada. Instead, exclusionary practices, rigid policy structures, and limited support create barriers to belonging, professional growth, and overall well-being. The disconnect between DEI rhetoric and practice echoes earlier critiques of symbolic DEI efforts (Haapakoski & Pashby, 2017) and highlights a need for more intentional, immigrant-inclusive approaches.

Addressing these gaps requires organizations to:

- **Embed intersectionality into DEI strategies** by recognizing the distinct challenges faced by African immigrants and other immigrant groups alongside Indigenous reconciliation priorities.
- **Promote inclusive leadership** by training leaders in cultural competency, accountability, and immigrant-focused equity practices, and by integrating DEI performance metrics into leadership evaluations.
- **Strengthen accessibility and support structures** through mentorship programs, immigrant resource groups, and recognition of foreign credentials and skills.
- **Enhance communication and transparency** so that employees clearly understand the purpose, scope, and intended outcomes of DEI initiatives.

The findings also have broader implications for policy and practice. Settlement

services in Northern Canada remain underfunded and underprepared to support growing immigrant populations (Fang et al., 2022), which reinforces organizational-level barriers. This suggests that integration challenges cannot be addressed by workplaces alone; rather, multi-level interventions that connect organizational DEI strategies with regional settlement resources are necessary.

### **5.6. Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study underscore significant challenges to workplace integration for African immigrants in Northern Canada and highlight important implications for both organizational practice and policy development. The lack of tailored DEI initiatives, combined with exclusionary perceptions and rigid implementation, demonstrates that current approaches are insufficient to meet the unique needs of immigrant employees. Addressing these shortcomings requires intentional, evidence-based, and intersectional strategies that move beyond compliance and symbolic gestures.

At the organizational level, companies should conduct systematic needs assessments to identify the specific barriers facing immigrant employees and adapt DEI programs accordingly. This involves moving away from one-size-fits-all policies and toward targeted initiatives that acknowledge cultural and professional diversity. Mentorship programs, for example, can provide critical support by pairing African immigrant employees with experienced colleagues, thereby fostering knowledge transfer, professional development, and a stronger sense of belonging. Similarly, employee resource groups (ERGs), cultural competency training for all staff, and greater representation of immigrants in leadership roles can cultivate inclusive organizational cultures that extend beyond surface-level diversity.

Clear and inclusive communication emerged as another critical area for improvement. Many African immigrants reported limited awareness of DEI policies or uncertainty about how to access support. Organizations must ensure that DEI initiatives are communicated transparently and accessibly—through multilingual materials, inclusive communication platforms, and regular updates on progress and outcomes. Such practices not only enhance awareness of available resources but also build trust and accountability within the workforce.

Another pressing implication concerns the recognition of foreign credentials and work experience. Many African immigrants struggle to integrate into the workforce because their prior qualifications are undervalued or overlooked. Organizations, in collaboration with professional associations and policymakers, should advocate for fairer credential recognition and develop bridging programs that validate and enhance immigrant employees' existing skills. Corporate consultants can play an important role in shaping these efforts by lobbying for policy changes, designing training and development pathways, and promoting immigrant inclusion as a strategic organizational priority.

The study also highlights the link between exclusionary workplace practices and immigrant mental health. Experiences of marginalization, prejudice, and

inadequate support contribute to stress, frustration, and reduced well-being among African immigrants. Clinical practitioners and mental health professionals must therefore provide culturally competent care that addresses the specific stressors associated with immigrant workplace integration. This could include counseling tailored to the immigrant experience, proactive outreach, and partnerships with organizations to develop inclusive wellness programs that benefit all employees.

At the leadership level, the findings point to the critical role of inclusive leadership in shaping workplace culture. Leaders must be trained in inclusive practices and held accountable for modeling equitable behaviors. Incorporating DEI metrics into performance evaluations can ensure that leaders actively promote diversity and inclusion rather than treating these principles as peripheral or symbolic. Leadership inclusion not only signals organizational commitment but also creates a sense of welcome and legitimacy for immigrant employees, thereby facilitating workplace integration.

At the policy level, these findings suggest that organizational DEI strategies cannot exist in isolation. Broader collaboration with government agencies, settlement organizations, and regional stakeholders is necessary to ensure that immigrant integration is supported both inside and outside the workplace. Policymakers should allocate resources to strengthen settlement services in Northern Canada, which are currently underfunded, and align these services with organizational DEI efforts. By fostering alignment between corporate policies and community-level supports, immigrant employees can benefit from a more holistic integration process.

In summary, the implications of this study point to the need for DEI frameworks that are both intersectional and regionally responsive. For organizations, this means embedding immigrant-focused supports into policy and practice, ensuring clear communication, valuing immigrant credentials, and investing in inclusive leadership. For policymakers, it requires strengthening the infrastructure of settlement and integration services, particularly in underserved regions such as Northern Canada. Together, these measures can help close the gap between the stated goals of DEI initiatives and the lived realities of immigrant employees.

## 6. Future Research Directions

While this study sheds light on the lived experiences of African immigrants navigating workplace integration in Northern Canadian organizations, it also underscores the need for more expansive and systematic research in this area. Several promising directions for future inquiry emerge from the findings.

### 6.1. Comparative Regional Analyses

Most existing research on immigrant workplace integration has concentrated on metropolitan and urban centers, where organizational resources, diversity, and professional networks are relatively abundant. By contrast, Northern and remote

regions remain underexplored despite their unique sociocultural dynamics and labor market constraints. Comparative studies that examine immigrant experiences across urban and Northern contexts would help clarify whether the barriers identified in this study—such as limited DEI implementation, challenges in credential recognition, and reduced access to professional advancement—are distinct to remote regions or reflect broader systemic issues.

### **6.2. Longitudinal Tracking of Workplace Experiences**

Workplace integration is not a static outcome but a process that unfolds over time. Longitudinal research could follow African immigrants from their entry into the Canadian labor market through different career stages, documenting how their perceptions of DEI policies evolve and how organizational practices shape their professional development. Such studies would provide a dynamic understanding of integration pathways, while identifying both persistent and shifting barriers across time.

### **6.3. Intersectional and Cross-Group Analyses**

This study focused specifically on African immigrants, yet integration challenges are rarely uniform across immigrant groups. Future research should adopt intersectional approaches that consider the interplay of race, gender, language, religion, and migration status. Comparative studies involving African immigrants alongside other groups, such as Asian or Middle Eastern newcomers, would help illuminate both commonalities and unique challenges. This would deepen our understanding of how identity markers intersect to influence workplace inclusion, discrimination, and advancement.

### **6.4. Leadership and Organizational Culture**

The findings point to leadership and organizational culture as critical determinants of immigrant integration. Further research could investigate the impact of leadership styles, managerial accountability, and inclusive organizational practices on immigrant employees' sense of belonging and career progression. Evaluating the outcomes of leadership training programs in diversity and inclusion could provide concrete evidence of what types of interventions foster authentic workplace inclusivity.

### **6.5. Evaluation of DEI Initiatives in Practice**

Despite widespread adoption of DEI policies, there is limited empirical evidence on their effectiveness from the perspective of immigrant employees. Future studies should evaluate specific initiatives such as mentorship programs, employee resource groups, and cultural competency training. Research of this kind could distinguish between symbolic compliance and substantive inclusion practices, offering evidence-based guidance for organizations aiming to close the gap between policy design and practice.

## 6.6. Credential Recognition and Career Advancement

The undervaluation of foreign credentials and prior professional experience remains a significant barrier to workplace integration. Further inquiry could explore how bridging programs, licensing reforms, or partnerships between employers and settlement agencies impact career mobility for immigrants. This research could identify pathways that enable immigrants to leverage their skills fully, rather than being relegated to roles beneath their qualifications.

## 6.7. Mental Health and Well-Being Dimensions

The study revealed that experiences of exclusion, prejudice, and insufficient organizational support can adversely affect mental health. Future research could examine the psychological consequences of workplace integration challenges, considering how these intersect with broader settlement stressors. Studies focusing on organizational interventions that promote mental health and well-being, including culturally responsive counseling or workplace wellness initiatives, would provide a holistic perspective on immigrant integration.

## 6.8. Policy-Organizational Nexus

Finally, more research is needed to examine the alignment or misalignment between government-level settlement policies and organizational DEI practices. In Northern regions where resources are often scarce, such investigations could assess whether policy frameworks adequately support organizational realities and immigrant needs. Comparative studies across provinces and territories, or between federally supported and community-driven initiatives, would provide critical insights into designing policies that better bridge systemic gaps.

In sum, future research must move beyond descriptive accounts of immigrant experiences to critically examine the effectiveness of policies, programs, and practices across diverse contexts and timeframes. Comparative, longitudinal, intersectional, and evaluative approaches will not only advance academic knowledge but also generate actionable insights for policymakers, organizations, and practitioners seeking to foster more inclusive and equitable workplaces for immigrants in Canada and beyond.

## 7. Conclusion

This study examined African immigrants' perceptions of diversity, equity, and inclusion policies in Northern Canadian workplaces, drawing on Stone et al.'s (2020) model of factors influencing unfair discrimination against immigrants in organizations. Through qualitative interviews with ten participants, three themes emerged: perceptions of DEI policies as exclusionary, rigid and siloed implementation, and limited accessibility to professional development and support. Together, these findings reveal that while organizations espouse commitments to diversity, their policies often fail to address the unique needs of African immigrants, leaving them marginalized and under-supported in the workplace.

By applying Stone et al.'s framework, the study demonstrates how structural and organizational factors—such as inadequate training, reliance on surface-level compliance, and failure to recognize intersectionality—shape experiences of unfair discrimination. The findings extend current scholarship by situating immigrant workplace integration within the distinct sociocultural and resource-constrained context of Northern Canada, a region largely overlooked in DEI research. Participants' narratives underscore that exclusionary practices not only hinder career advancement but also erode well-being, sense of belonging, and trust in organizational commitments to equity.

The study contributes to both research and practice by emphasizing the need for DEI policies that move beyond symbolic gestures to substantive strategies, such as mentorship programs, immigrant-focused inclusion initiatives, and clearer communication of organizational supports. It also highlights the importance of culturally responsive approaches that account for immigrants' diverse educational, professional, and cultural backgrounds. Ultimately, creating inclusive workplaces requires intentional, evidence-based action informed by immigrant voices. For African immigrants in Northern Canada, this means policies that not only acknowledge but actively address the systemic and structural barriers they face—ensuring workplaces that are genuinely equitable, supportive, and inclusive.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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