FOSTERING NEWCOMER ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: THE LESSONS OF COVID-19[1]

Dr. June Francis is the Director of the Institute for Diaspora Research and Engagement at Simon Fraser University, Canada, where she is an Associate Professor in the Beedie School of Business. She is the Co-Founder of the Co-Laboratorio Project, which works to strengthen collaboration, learning and innovation – for more diverse and inclusive resilient solutions in governance, policies and industry practice and is a member of the COVID-19 Social Impacts Network Expert Advisory Committee. As Co-Chair of The Hogan's Alley Society's Board of Director she leads an organization whose mission is to advance the social, political, economic and cultural well-being of people of African Descent through the delivery of housing, built spaces and programming. She is an advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion for racialized groups as well as the advancement of non-traditional intellectual property law related to community well-being and cultural and human rights through her research, consulting, the media and as a volunteer. Dr. Francis has extensive experience in the private sector as an entrepreneur, with civil society on governance boards and as an academic. She previously directed the Program in Development and Sustainability in Faculty of Environment at SFU. She served on the SFU's Board of Governors from 2012-2018 and previously served for several years on the Board of Directors of MOSAIC, a key immigrant and refugee settlement society.

Dr. Kristina Henriksson is Adjunct Professor in the Beedie School of Business at Simon Fraser University and the Co-Founder of the Co-Laboratorio Project that works with organizations and institutions to strengthen collaboration, learning and innovation for more inclusive resilient solutions. She is also the owner of Learning@Work Solutions, mobilizing knowledge for impact with challenge-based learning and community-engaged research. An experienced higher education senior executive, organization development consultant and advisor, her work helps advance equity and inclusive leadership practices, strategy, programs and service design. She has spent over 15 years leading and designing innovative ways of collaborating and learning across borders, disciplines and perspectives – including business transformation initiatives, customized leadership development programs and convened multi-stakeholder spaces. Kristina's research interests include interculturality, global partnerships, inclusive markets and social investment strategies, community-building and participatory engagement practices. Kristina earnt her PhD from Lund University and has published articles in international refereed journals, books, book chapters and case studies.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and pandemic is shining a harsh unforgiving light on the longstanding systemic economic vulnerabilities of newcomers to Canada[2], especially of those migrants who face particular disadvantages due to race and gender. By rendering visible and exacerbating the inequalities and fissures in Canadian society, the pandemic has laid bare the disproportionate negative impacts for newcomers. However, insights wrought by this pandemic also provide an unprecedented opportunity to address these issues systemically by reimagining more resilient policy responses.

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2 Newcomers usually refers to immigrants arriving in the past 5 years. 340,000 immigrants arrived in 2019, a near record with 341,000 planned for 2020 and 350,000 for 2021. "Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada Departmental Plan 2020-2021". www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/departmental-plan-2020-2021/departmental-plan.html#core2.

This essay draws on recent polling Data from the COVID-19 Social Impacts Network, StatsCan COVID-19 data and other sources, to shed light on the economic impact of COVID-19 for newcomers. Applying an intersectional analysis, the data reveals the extent to which some newcomers, especially Black and racialized newcomers, face greater exposure risks, and compounding economic and social disadvantages. We discuss the policy implications and offer specific recommendations.

THE LESSONS OF COVID-19

Already from the beginning of the pandemic, more immigrants, especially newcomers, relative to Canadian born (CB), expressed being afraid of the virus outbreak (72% vs 58%; F=2.824, p=.06), and took specific protective actions like buying masks, stocking up on supplies and changing their day to day activities. Further, 50% of immigrants reported being *very* or *extremely* concerned about their own health compared with (33%) of the Canadian-born[3] (F=4.165, p<.05). Relative to White respondents, Black and Chinese respondents indicate the highest level of fear of the virus (60% Black, 75% Chinese, 50% White) and are more likely "to wear a mask to go grocery shopping" (70% Black, 83% Chinese, 53% White) and "to the office" (54% Black, 65% Chinese, 31% White).[4] Immigrants indicate weaker sense of belonging amid COVID-19. Relative to Canadian Born, Immigrants have greater likelihood of high levels of concern about the maintenance of social ties (44% vs. 30%), the ability to support one another during or after the pandemic (57% vs 37), the possibility of civil disorder (53% vs. 37%) and violence in the home (12% vs. 7%).[5] Newcomers in particular also show greater attachments (relative to Canadian born) to family and religious groups and are least attached to their neighbourhood.[6]

COVID-19 EXACERBATED ECONOMIC FRAGILITY OF IMMIGRANTS AND NEWCOMERS

Relative to Canadian born, all immigrants (36.4% vs 26.7%), and male immigrants in particular were more likely to indicate COVID-19 would have a *major* or *moderate* impact on their ability to meet financial obligations (43% male vs. 27% female), and are more concerned about loss of livelihood (28.2 vs 21.0%).[7] Relative to Canadian born, more newcomers indicated early in the pandemic they had been negatively impacted financially (i.e., pay bills on time)(51% vs 25%, F=20.336, p<.001), in their capacity to pay rent or mortgage (46% vs 19%, F=26.058, p<.001), and fewer felt they had a place to turn to in an emergency (77% vs 89%, F=18.797, p<.001).[8] Racialized communities were significantly more negatively affected in their capacity to pay rent or mortgage relative to White respondents (19% White vs 47% Black, 46% South Asian and 44% Latin American,[9] F=40.104, p<.001). These concerns reflect the reality that newcomers, because they also are among the most recently hired, are likely to be the first to be displaced from jobs and these displacements could have significant long-term effects, including sometimes broader family impacts, through loss of household income. As a result of COVID-19, workers who had tenure of employment of less than two years and five years have experienced layoffs rates of 17.7% and 13.2% respectively compared with a rate of 8.2% for workers with 10 years plus. Beyond this immediate economic setback, the concern is that if the pattern of layoffs follows previous recessions, at least one in five of these workers will have earnings 25% below their prior earnings five years out, thus entrenching these economic disadvantages.[10] Other data demonstrate the fact that Black Canadians never catch up, even 3+ generation. Relative to the average income of non-racialized Canadians (1.0), racialized Canadians on average significantly narrowed the income gap from .74 in the first

3 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/ Leger "Canadian Opinion on Corona Virus, N 3: Attitudes and Behaviours: Immigrant and Non-Immigrant. March 20, 2020

4 Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté and Sharanjit Uppal (2020) Statistics Canada, "The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic". Accessed from www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00012-eng.htm.

5 Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté and Sharanjit Uppal (2020) Statistics Canada, "The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic". Accessed from www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00012-eng.htm.

6 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/ Leger April 22, 2020 "COVID-19 Advanced Analysis Of Week 5 Survey Results".

7 Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté and Sharanjit Uppal (2020) Statistics Canada, "The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic". www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00012-eng.htm.

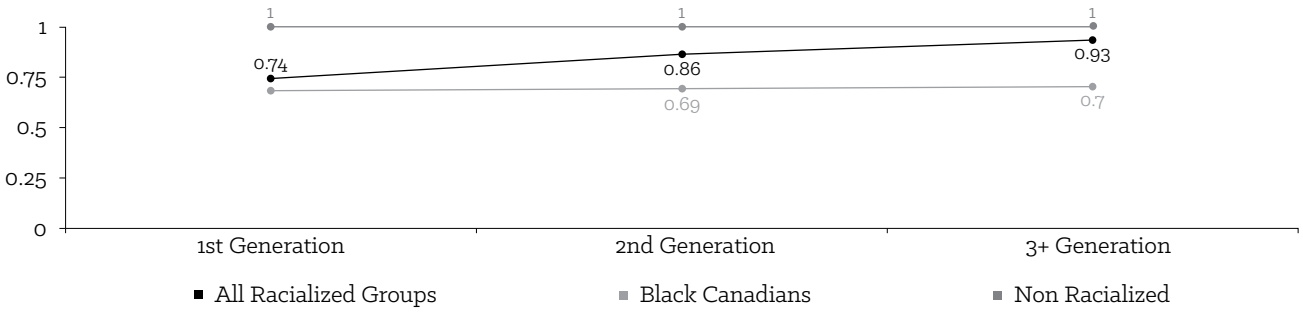
8 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/ Leger April 3rd, 2020 "Canadian Opinion on The Coronavirus N°9: Newcomers to Canada Hard Hit Economically by COVID-19".

9 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/ Leger "Canadian Opinion on The Coronavirus N°14: Economic Vulnerability Score for Selected Visible Minorities and The Effects COVID-19".

10 Chan, P. C. W., Morissette, R., & Frenette, M. (2011). "Workers Laid-off During the Last Three Recessions: Who Were They, and How Did They Fare?" Statistics Canada. https://deslibris.ca/ID/229998.

generation to .86 and .93 in the second and third generations respectively. However, Black Canadians' large income gaps remain almost constant across subsequent generations (.68, .69, .70). See Chart 1 below.

GRAPHIC 1: AVERAGE EMPLOYMENT INCOME RATIOS BY GENERATION AND RACIALIZED GROUP, PRIME-AGE WORKERS – CANADA 2016



Source: Based on Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives/Statistics Canada Data.[11]

The lower income status of many newcomers also increases the likelihood that they have jobs for which working at home is infeasible thus further exposing them to the potential of harm as well as further job losses.[12] For families in which both parents are working, 54% of those in the top decile of the family earnings indicate having jobs for which both parents can work from home relative to only 8% for families in the bottom decile. Black Canadians indicated the greatest economic vulnerability being the most supportive of maintaining the current CERB of any racial group (53% Black, 35% White, Total 40%, F=9.352, p<.001).[13]

The digital divide created additional disadvantages for newcomer families given their lower income status, as families in the top 25% of income-levels had greater access to the internet (1.2% lacked access) relative to families in the bottom 25% of incomes where 4.2% lacked access and had to rely on mobile devices (versus computers) for accessing the internet (24.1% vs 8% in the highest quartile).[14] Immigrant Youth (12-17 years), relative to Canadian born, are also more likely to find that COVID-19 will have *a lot* of negative impact on their academic success (38% vs 28%, F=10.222, p<.001).[15]

Newcomers and immigrants hold the types of healthcare Caring Aid jobs that place them at greater exposure to COVID-19. Newcomers are especially overrepresented as nurse aide, orderly and patient service associate, putting them at greater risk of contracting the virus. Immigrants, accounted for 36% of these jobs in 2016, up from 22% in 1996, indicating an increasing proportion of newcomers in these fields. In large metropolitan areas the concentration is even greater with immigrants accounting for 79%, 72% and 70 % in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary respectively (Table 2[16]). With 81% of COVID-19 deaths occurring in nursing homes[17] and given PPEs were not initially widely available to people in these fields, disproportionate exposure to the risk of

11 Block, S. (2019). "Canada's Colour Coded Income Inequality. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives". https://deslibris.ca/ID/10102903.

12 Derek Messacar, René Morissette and Zechuan Deng. "Inequality in the feasibility of working from home during and after COVID-19", Statistics Canada. Accessed from www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00029-eng.htm

13 Holley, P. (June 25, 2020). "COVID-19 Advanced Analysis of Week 13 Survey Results." Unpublished research findings. COVID-19 Social Impacts Network: Association for Canadian Studies/Leger.

14 Statistics Canada, "COVID-19 Pandemic: School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children". www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm

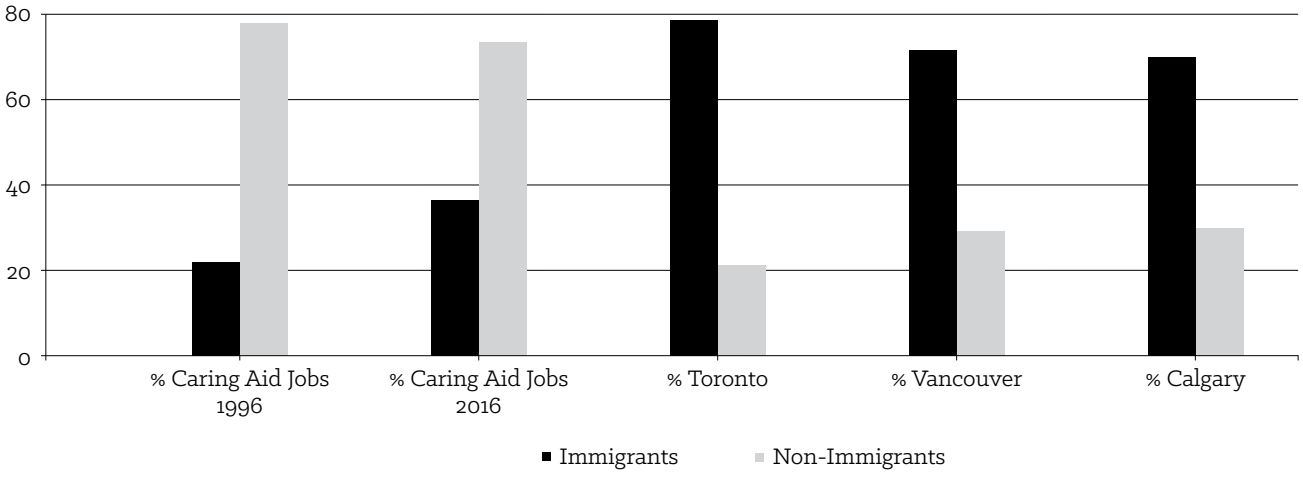
15 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/Leger "Social Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadian Youth", may 21, 2020.

16 Martin Turcotte and Katherine Savage, Statistics Canada, "The contribution of immigrants and population groups designated as visible minorities to nurse aide, orderly and patient service associate occupations", by Release date: June 22, 2020. Accessed from: www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7.

17 Canadian Institute for Health Information. "Pandemic Experience in the Long-Term Care Sector: How Does Canada Compare With Other Countries?". Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2020.

COVID-19 seems inevitable. Presence in these occupations are likely due to necessity rather than choice as immigrants and newcomers in particular, are often overqualified for work in these fields, as at least 50% of newcomers at the time of the 2016 census have a degree compared to 25% for Canadian Born and among workers in these health care fields with a minimum of a bachelor's degree, immigrants were twice as likely (44%) as non-immigrants (22%) to have a health-field related degree.[18] Challenges to having their credentials and experience prior to coming to Canada recognized in Canada are major contributing factors.

GRAPHIC 2: PERCENTAGE OF IMMIGRANTS WORKING IN HEALTH CARE AID JOBS



Source: Turcotte and Savage, Statistics Canada (2020).

A disproportionate share of Caring Aid workers is Black and Filipino Immigrant Women and, these two groups together accounted for approximately 60% of immigrant workers in these fields (30% Black, 30% Filipino). Given the gendered nature of these occupations, where women account for approximately 87% of all workers, 86% of immigrants and 87% of non-immigrants, Black women were especially overrepresented relative to other fields, accounting for 26% of all immigrant workers in these fields, while they accounted for less than 4% of all immigrant workers in all other occupations.[19]

COVID-19 exacerbates pre-existing economic vulnerability along racial, gendered and immigrant status.[20] The pre-existing gendered and racial inequities expose Visible Minority newcomers, especially women, to greater levels of economic vulnerability and predispose these groups to compounding impacts of COVID-19. Given the changing pattern of Canada's immigration arrivals, most members of the visible minority are first-generation immigrants born outside of Canada and most newcomers arrive from non-European countries.[21] Even without COVID-19, Visible Minority (VM) women earn 59 cents compared to the 67 cents that non-VM women earn for every dollar that non-VM men earn.[22] COVID-19 has exacerbated these inequalities as the financial impact have been greater for Visible Minorities. For example, relative to Non-VM women, more VM women have experienced

18 Martin Turcotte and Katherine Savage, Statistics Canada, "The contribution of immigrants and population groups designated as visible minorities to nurse aide, orderly and patient service associate occupations" by Release date: June 22, 2020. Accessed from: www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7

19 Martin Turcotte and Katherine Savage, Statistics Canada, "The contribution of immigrants and population groups designated as visible minorities to nurse aide, orderly and patient service associate occupations" by Release date: June 22, 2020. Accessed from: www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7

20 Derek Messacar and René Morissette, "Work interruptions and financial vulnerability" . www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00010-eng.htm.

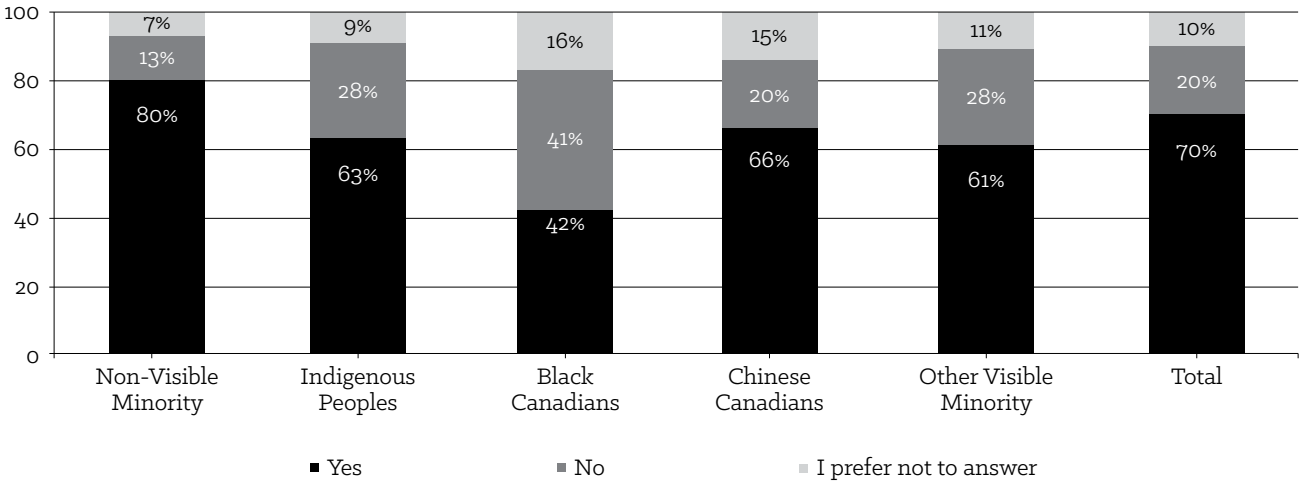
21 Statistics Canada, "Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity". www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Facts-can-eng.cfm?Lang=Eng&GK=CAN&GC=01&TOPIC=7.

22 Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016360.

a decrease in their income (59% vs 41%, Chi-Square = 20.767, p<.001), are finding it difficult to assist other family members (57% vs 36%, Chi-Square = 26.552, p<.001), are having an impact on their capacity to pay mortgage or rent, (34% vs 16%, Chi-Square = 29.102, p<.001) and have had their retirement savings/investments negatively impacted (58% vs 47%, Chi-Square = 7.698, p=.006).[23] Likewise, relative to all businesses VM majority owned immigrant businesses report being more seriously impacted by reduced demand for products and services (75.2% vs 64.8%) and report the lowest overall averages in being "Able to remain fully or partially operational for 6 months or more." Immigrant majority owned business are less "able to remain fully or partially operational for 6 months or more while social distancing is in place" relative to all business. (All 32.1% vs Immigrant majority owned 27.3%[24]).

Systemic racism in Canada is likely to have had untold impacts on newcomers, especially Black immigrants. While we lack the race-based data on incidence of contracting the virus and health outcomes, data indicates systemic racism may be undermining the trust of Black Canadians in a number of institutions and socials supports at a time of great vulnerability (Figure 3). Relative to other respondents, Black Canadians indicate feeling less safe in interactions with police (42% feel safe compared to 80% of White Canadians and 70% of Canadians overall, F=48.198, p<.001), the lowest of any racial group. Black Canadians are also the least satisfied with the efforts made to effect change with visible minorities at the level of local police (39% vs 62% for White Canadians and 56% overall, F=30.515, p<.001).

GRAPHIC 3: DID YOU FEEL SAFE WHEN YOU HAVE HAD TO INTERACT WITH POLICE OFFICERS?



Source: Holley, P. Association for Canadian Studies/Leger (June 25, 2020).

Regarding the sense of social inclusion, relative to White Canadians, fewer Black Canadians indicate they trust "Canadians" (78% vs 88%), "my neighbor" (63% vs 84%), "people in general" (51% vs 74%) and "the police" (40% vs 75%). Black respondents trust levels were the lowest of any racial group. There is also growing evidence of income polarization in Canadian cities showing that areas of major cities with high proportions of Blacks and Indigenous people and new immigrants were more likely to be losing ground (having declining income relative to the average[25]). The need for secure housing by immigrants is particularly poignant during the pandemic as relative to other Canadians, Visible minorities are more likely to have a senior living in their house (25% vs 15%).[26]

23 Association of Canadian Studies (ACS)/ Leger April 22, 2020, "COVID-19 Advanced Analysis of Week 5 Survey Results".

24 Statistics Canada. Table 33-10-0229-01, "Extent of various impacts experienced by businesses because of COVID-19, by business characteristics" DOI: https://doi.org/10.25318/3310022901-eng.

25 Ramos, H., Walks, A., Grant, J., & Scholars Portal. (2020). "Changing neighbourhoods: social and spatial polarization in Canadian cities", edited by Jill L. Grant, Alan Walks, and Howard Ramos. UBC Press.

26 Holley, P. (June 25, 2020). COVID-19 Advanced Analysis of Week 13 Survey Results. Unpublished research findings. COVID-19 Social Impacts Network: Association for Canadian Studies/Leger.

FOSTERING NEWCOMER ECONOMIC RESILIENCE – RETHINKING POLICY FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

The lessons learnt based on emerging data clearly point to the many ways in which immigrants and newcomers have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and how, in rethinking policy and improvements in the system, there is a need to focus on multiple intersecting parts – education, health, safety, housing, workplace. More critically however, the data also points to the shortcomings of trying to identify new policy and solutions while maintaining the same monolithic or simplified narratives of 'visible minority' 'immigrants' or 'newcomers'. For example, 'visible minorities' fails to capture the variation of needs and challenges, that for some groups are systemic and structural including perpetuated, notably, racial legacies.

Based on the intersectional analysis presented in this essay, we argue that more transformative approaches are needed to reimagine policy for systemic change. To be able to interrogate and address change, Canada needs to see race. Intersectional lenses should drive intersectional policies, programs and services. As governments, funding institutions, NGOs and service providers pivot efforts towards post-COVID-19 recovery it is also an opportunity to re-set to more resilient new normal. It will be imperative to use the learning from ongoing intersectional analysis of the effects of COVID-19 to better understand and respond to how some groups of immigrants and newcomers may need tailored policies and responses rather than one size fits all. The analysis calls for targeted supports but also for creating more enabling pathways that value the educational, wealth of experience, diverse worldviews, linguistic capacity and innovation potential of newcomers that often remain underutilized.

Given these data indicating that almost half of the caring aid workers newcomers were overqualified for these jobs, one wonders what additional value they could have brought to addressing the pandemic had their credentials and full experience been martialed in the face of this crisis. The current analysis provides a glimpse of the causes and deep systemic barriers and their effects, however more intersectional research and analysis is needed to provide the basis for policies and practices that can more fully address the root causes of systemic barriers for newcomers.

The data also reveals the compounding effects of racial, health and social inequality that are inextricably linked to economic vulnerability. Greater coordination and integration of policies and services across agencies and providers, and better multivariate analyses are needed to further characterize these interdependencies.

We conclude by offering the following specific actionable recommendations:

- Equity should be used to guide resource allocation decisions if we are to successfully address inequities revealed by intersectional analysis. Numbers of particular demographic groups should not dictate budgets as some with the greatest challenges are faced by smaller or less powerful newcomer groups who lack the networks and diaspora in Canada to facilitate the transition to Canada.

- Greater inter-organizational and cross-sectoral collaboration among governments, non-profit organizations, unions, professional organizations and educational institutions are needed to address the compounding and intersecting factors that affect the successful transition for newcomers to Canada. Resources need to be directed towards facilitating this cultural shift that will require capacity for mutual leaning across sectors and organizational types.

- More emphasis needs to be placed on fulfilling the aspirations of the Employment equity Act as it relates to all newcomers and immigrants. Longstanding barriers that deny some groups of immigrants, such as Black and racialized immigrants, the opportunity to fully actualize their potential in Canadian society free from the stifling effects of systemic racism and exclusion requires systemic responses.

- Finding solutions will require innovation and the decentering of traditional power, voices and decision-making. Newcomers and Immigrants, especially the most excluded, need to be part of driving this change in meaningful ways. Disruption of deep habits of practice and organization will be required if we are to chart a more economically resilient post-COVID-19 era for newcomers to Canada.