



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

IRCC Anti-Racism Employee Focus Groups

Executive Summary

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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. This study consisted of 10 online focus group discussions with a total of 54 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 : **Groupes de discussion des employés d'IRCC sur antiracisme**

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Executive Summary

Background and objectives

Following the reverberations of the George Floyd murder in the United States, like many other public and private organizations in Canada, IRCC began taking a deeper look at the department's internal environment from an anti-racism lens. An employee survey conducted in 2020 revealed that perceptions of the existence and nature of racism in the department varied significantly based on respondent racial and ethnic background, and that significant proportions of racialized employees consider racism to be a problem within the department.

As a result, it was determined that focus groups should be held to gain greater insight into the realities underlying the survey results.

The primary objectives of this focus group study are to:

- Gain insight into the impacts and nature of racism witnessed or experienced within the department;
- Identify strengths and failings of the mechanisms currently in place to address and prevent racism; and
- Gather input into the creation of programs and policies that will be effective at dealing with racism at IRCC and its impacts.

Method

10 two-hour online focus groups were conducted among a cross-section of IRCC employees from various levels of the organization. A total of 54 employees participated in the groups. The focus groups were held from March 18th to 26th, 2021.

Participants were chosen from among those who, when completing the anti-racism survey, had indicated they would be willing to participate in a follow-up study if required, as well as those who expressed interest in participating in response to an internal callout within the department for volunteers. Those who expressed an interest in participating in the focus groups were sent a questionnaire to complete which, among other things, allowed us to separate participants, based on self-identification, into the groups described below. Participants included both racialized and non-racialized employees and employees from various sectors of the department, including people working in operational roles, client service, and policy and program development as well as internal services such as HR and Finance.

The group composition and schedule was as follows:

GROUP NUMBER	DATE	TIME	GROUP COMPOSITION
1	18-Mar	10 am to noon	Black
2	18-Mar	2 to 4 pm	South Asian
3	22-Mar	10 am to noon	East Asian
4	23-Mar	2 to 4 pm	Black
5	24-Mar	10 am to noon	People of Mixed Origin
6	24-Mar	2 to 4 pm	Non-racialized
7	25-Mar	10 am to noon	BIPOC (mix)
8	25-Mar	2 to 4 pm	Black
9	26-Mar	10 am to noon	South Asian / BIPOC (mix)
10	26-Mar	2 to 4 pm	Black (Group Conducted in French)

Each group discussion was attended by between 5 and 8 participants, and the focus groups were held online. This report also incorporates observations gathered in a follow-up in-depth telephone interview with one respondent who was not able to attend the focus group at which their presence was initially planned. 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. Note also 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 should 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.

Contract Value for this research: \$59,207.50.

Summary of findings

Experiences of racism at IRCC include microaggressions, biases in hiring and promotion as well as biases in the delivery of IRCCs programs, policies and client service

Participants shared a large number of specific examples of racism witnessed within IRCC, as well as their causes. These include but are not limited to:

- Microaggressions ranging from well-intentioned comments with hurtful impacts to blatantly racist tropes
- Sources of discrimination in hiring ranging from screening requirements that are biased against racialized candidates and selection criteria that do not sufficiently guard against implicit bias, to the location of management positions in places where the pool of qualified racialized candidates is likely to be low (without compensation for relocation or efforts to recruit from more diverse metropolises)

- Experiences of discrimination in access to professional growth, with suspected causes that range from work conditions that disincentivize the extension of training and development opportunities where the prevalence of racialized employees is high, to what are perceived to be blatant examples of subverting selection criteria to disadvantage racialized employees
- Racial biases in the application of IRCC's programs, policies and client service that are believed to result from implicit biases among decision makers, as well as administrative practices that introduce biases or the potential for bias over time.

In addition, employees paint a picture of an organization fraught with challenges at the level of workplace culture.

- little in the way of clear guidelines or training for management on how to handle reports of racism
- a history of racism going unchecked, resulting in low willingness to speak out or seek retribution by witnesses and victims alike
- a deep imbalance in racial representation in management that inherently militates against progress on dealing with racism in the department.

Under these circumstances, IRCCs anti-racism initiatives are initially met with skepticism. **It will take bold, decisive actions to convince employees there is a real management commitment to change.**