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Black-owned enterprises in Canada: A profile of enterprise owners, employees and recipients of federal business innovation and growth support, 2022

by Grant Yake

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Table of contents

Abstract	4
Introduction	4
Data and methodology	5
Black-owned enterprises	6
Black-owned enterprises were primarily concentrated in Ontario and Quebec	6
Almost six in ten Black-owned enterprises were concentrated in four industries	7
Profile of Black enterprise owners	8
Most Black enterprise owners were men	8
Black enterprise owners were younger than their non-racialized counterparts	8
Seven in ten Black enterprise owners were immigrants	9
Black enterprise owners were more likely to be single	10
Who do Black-owned enterprises employ?	11
Black-owned enterprises employed a higher proportion of Black employees	11
Slightly over half of employees at Black-owned enterprises were female.....	12
Black-owned enterprises had a higher proportion of immigrant employees than non-racialized- owned enterprises	13
Business innovation and growth support	13
Conclusion	15
References	16

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Abstract

This study examines Black-owned enterprises in Canada, including the people they employ and the support they receive from federal programs. It compares these characteristics across enterprises based on the racialized profile of the primary owner. The data for this analysis were obtained by linking the Census of Population (2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021), the 2011 National Household Survey and various administrative data sources within the Business - Linkable File Environment.

Based on these linkages, there were an estimated 179,850 Black-owned enterprises in Canada in 2022, accounting for 2.8% of all enterprises. Black enterprise owners were primarily men and immigrants and were younger and more likely to be single than non-racialized owners.

Slightly over half (50.6%) of employees at Black-owned enterprises were female, and these enterprises employed a higher proportion of Black employees (22.2%) than enterprises with owners from other population groups. In 2022, 1,020 Black-owned enterprises received an estimated \$93.2 million in federal support through business innovation and growth support programs, accounting for 2.2% of the total in-scope financial support provided to non-government enterprises.

Introduction

The Black population in Canada is distinct in terms of its history and ethnocultural and linguistic diversity, and it is younger than the overall Canadian population. From 1996 to 2021, the Black population in Canada grew from 570,160 to 1,547,870, representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population, based on the 2021 Census of Population. In 2021, the Black population was the third-largest racialized group in Canada after the South Asian and Chinese populations (Domey & Patsiurko, 2024). The Black population is projected to become the second-largest racialized group by 2041, surpassing the Chinese population (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Despite the increasing size of the Black population in Canada, research on Black-owned enterprises is limited. Gueye (2023) conducted a comprehensive analysis on Black-owned businesses in 2018 using the Canadian Employer–Employee Dynamics Database (CEEDD) and found that 2.1% of all businesses were Black-owned.^{1,2} However, data gaps for Black-owned enterprises persist in more recent years, particularly in information on employees and support received from federal programs.

The Government of Canada provides financial and service-based support to enterprises through business innovation and growth support (BIGS) programs. BIGS programs cover federal government activities that support business innovation and growth, including funding, consulting, industry-facing research and development, direct or partnership-based support, and technology development and export assistance. BIGS is a valuable resource for applicable enterprises that can assist with their economic performance and diversity outcomes.

To help support Black-owned businesses, the Government of Canada launched the Black Entrepreneurship Program (BEP) in 2021. Since its inception, the BEP has supported more than 24,000 Black entrepreneurs across Canada. Recently, the federal government allocated an additional investment of up to \$189 million over five years, from 2025 to 2030, to the BEP to continue its support of Black-owned businesses and address systemic barriers (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025).

1. Gueye (2023) used data from the CEEDD, the Census of Population (2001, 2006 and 2016) and the 2011 National Household Survey. Gueye (2023) excluded unincorporated businesses that were not required to have a business number. A business number is required when business income exceeds \$30,000, and a program account is required to collect certain taxes, make payroll deductions, or import or export goods.

2. The terms “business” and “enterprise” are used interchangeably in this article.

This study will assist policy makers and federal programs by adding to the existing literature on Black-owned enterprises by exploring this topic with more recent data (2022) available from the Business - Linkable File Environment (B-LFE), including linked 2021 Census of Population data. Also, for the first time, this study will use data from the B-LFE T4 employee file and the BIGS database to fill data gaps on employees and the support enterprises receive from federal programs, based on the racialized group of the owners.

Data and methodology

The data source for this study is Statistics Canada's B-LFE. The B-LFE is the "virtual space in which Statistics Canada's business microdata from administrative and survey sources are linked together to support analysis and research and generate powerful insights on the Canadian economy" (Statistics Canada, 2024).

The B-LFE contains business and demographic information at the enterprise level. The term enterprise refers to the highest level of the Business Register statistical hierarchy and includes corporations, quasi-corporations, institutions and unincorporated businesses such as sole proprietorships or partnerships. Unincorporated enterprises were included in this study regardless of their employment and revenue levels. Enterprises within the government sector, identified using industry classifications and administrative data, were excluded from this analysis.

The identification of Black-owned enterprises was made possible through linkages of the Census of Population (2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021), the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) and various administrative data sources within the B-LFE. Using these linkages, the B-LFE owner file was created. This file includes extensive demographic information on the primary owners of active enterprises in Canada for which a primary owner could be identified.

The B-LFE owner file contains information about the individual who is most likely to be an enterprise's primary owner (owner or manager) among the known owners and office bearers. The primary owner is defined as the individual with the greatest ownership share. In cases of a tie, individuals' positions within the enterprise (e.g., sole owner, proprietor, owner) are considered, with total income used as a final tiebreaker.

In this study, data on the racialized profile of owners and employees were measured using the visible minority variable. The term "visible minority" refers to whether a person belongs to one of the visible minority groups defined under the Employment Equity Act. The act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour." In this study, the Black population is identified as a separate category. The "other racialized groups" category consists primarily of the following visible minority groups: South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese. The non-racialized group is measured using the "not a visible minority" category of the visible minority variable, excluding Indigenous respondents.

Within the B-LFE, 2022 was the most recent reference year for which data on enterprise owners, employees and BIGS were all available and, as a result, was the primary focus of this study. Using census cycles from 2001 to 2021 and the 2011 NHS, it was possible to determine the racialized profile of primary owners for 59.6% of active enterprises with an identified owner in 2022. For the remaining 40.4% of enterprises with missing information on the owner's racialized profile, values were imputed using a nearest neighbour matching model. During this imputation process, enterprises with missing racialized profile information for the primary owner were matched to the most similar enterprise with a primary owner whose racialized profile was reported in the 2021 Census of Population. Matching was based on characteristics such as owner age, gender, language, place of birth, education, employment income and social insurance number, and enterprise location (province and postal code).

The B-LFE T4 employee file includes demographic indicators for employees at the enterprise level. These indicators are derived by linking T4 Supplemental Files with administrative data sources, including census cycles from 2001 to 2021 and the 2011 NHS. The racialized profile of employees was imputed using a model similar to that used for owners. Linking the T4 employee file with the owner file enabled analysis of employees by the racialized profile of enterprise owners, providing policy-relevant information.

Although the level of imputation for the racialized profile of owners and employees is consistent with previous research, it remains a potential source of bias. Incorporating past and future census data could reduce the extent of imputation in future studies.

Black-owned enterprises

In 2022, there were an estimated 179,850 Black-owned enterprises in Canada, accounting for 2.8% of all enterprises.³ This represented an increase from 103,420 Black-owned enterprises (1.8%) in 2016. Despite this increase, Black enterprise owners were still underrepresented relative to their overall share of the population (4.3%). This underrepresentation can be partly attributed to the younger age of the Black population compared with the non-racialized and other racialized populations, as enterprise owners were generally older.

Table 1
Number of enterprises by racialized profile of owner, 2016 to 2022

Year	Non-racialized-owned enterprises	Black-owned enterprises	Other racialized-owned enterprises	Total
2016	4,636,920	103,420	1,105,995	5,846,335
2017	4,663,555	111,965	1,188,500	5,964,020
2018	4,700,525	123,225	1,288,170	6,111,920
2019	4,671,115	140,995	1,418,915	6,231,025
2020	4,592,630	151,100	1,494,425	6,238,155
2021	4,592,465	164,335	1,587,840	6,344,640
2022	4,599,575	179,850	1,692,625	6,472,050

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

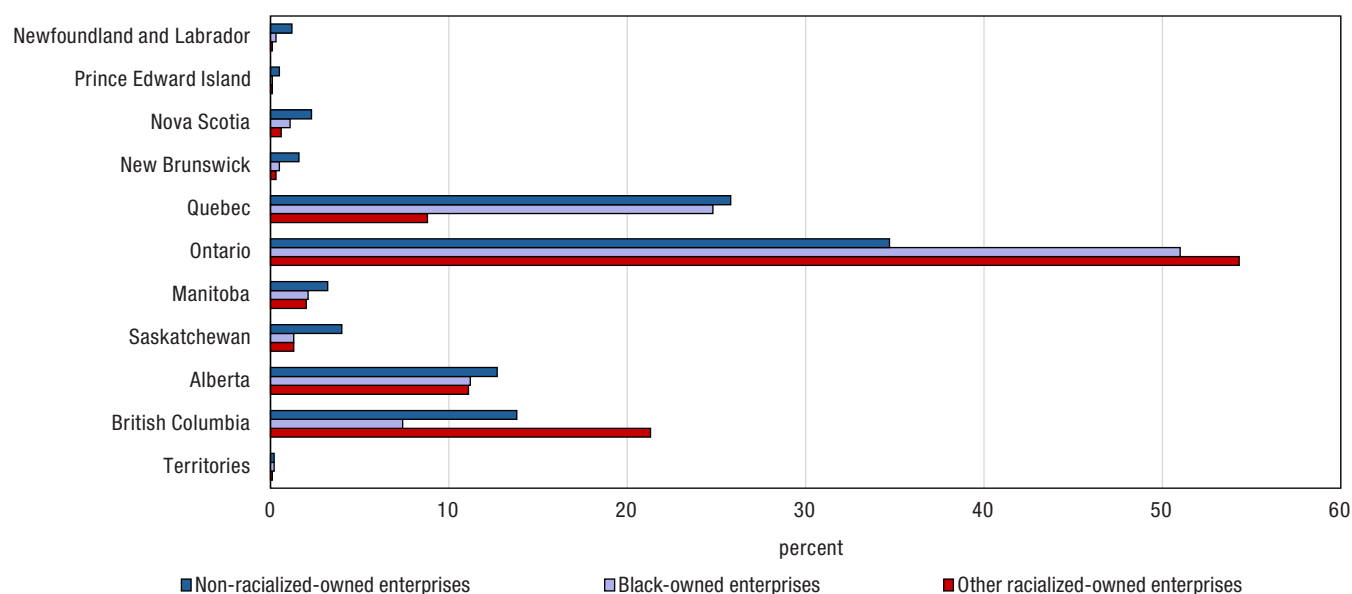
Black-owned enterprises were primarily concentrated in Ontario and Quebec

Three in four Black-owned enterprises (75.8%) were in Ontario (51.0%) and Quebec (24.8%). Alberta (11.2%) and British Columbia (7.4%) had the next highest concentration of Black-owned enterprises. This result aligns with the distribution of the Black population, as these four provinces had the largest Black populations.

Enterprises owned by other racialized groups were also predominantly in Ontario (54.3%), followed by British Columbia (21.3%), Alberta (11.1%) and Quebec (8.8%). This order was slightly different than what was observed for the Black population, primarily reflecting the differences in the geographic distribution of the Black and other racialized populations.

While Ontario had the highest proportion of non-racialized-owned enterprises (34.7%), this proportion was lower than the province's proportion of Black-owned enterprises. Consequently, in the other nine provinces, the proportion of non-racialized-owned enterprises exceeded that of Black-owned enterprises.

Chart 1
Distribution of enterprises by racialized profile of owner and province or territories, 2022



Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

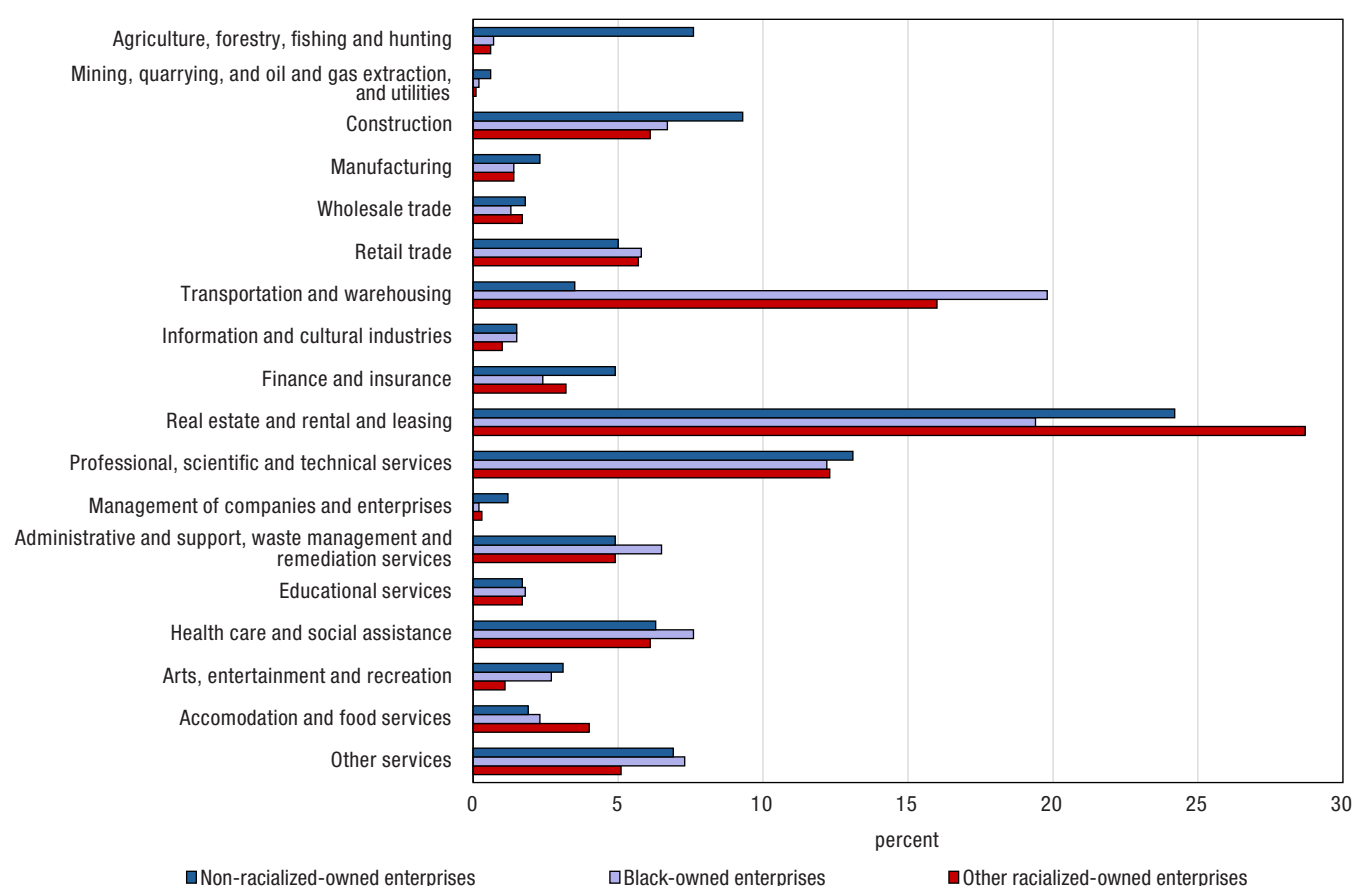
3. Indigenous-owned enterprises and Indigenous employees were excluded from this analysis.

Almost six in ten Black-owned enterprises were concentrated in four industries

In 2022, the four industries with the largest proportion of Black-owned enterprises were transportation and warehousing (19.8%); real estate and rental and leasing (19.4%); professional, scientific and technical services (12.2%); and health care and social assistance (7.6%).⁴ The distribution of Black-owned enterprises was relatively comparable to that of enterprises owned by other racialized groups, with both groups sharing the same top three industries, although in different proportions and a slightly different order.

Enterprises with non-racialized owners also had a high proportion of enterprises in real estate and rental and leasing (24.2%) and professional, scientific and technical services (13.1%). However, they were more heavily represented than Black-owned enterprises in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; construction; and finance and insurance.

Chart 2
Distribution of enterprises by industry and racialized profile of owner, 2022



Notes: Excludes enterprises with an unclassified industry. The sum of the percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

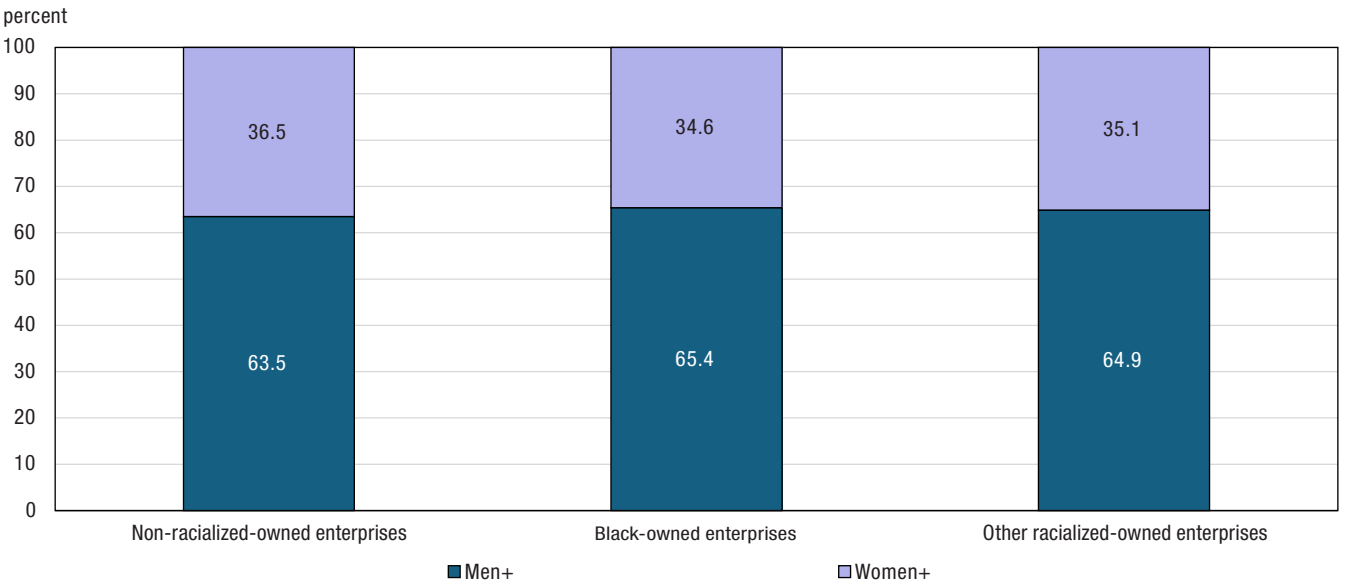
4. Industries were defined by the 2022 North American Industry Classification System.

Profile of Black enterprise owners

Most Black enterprise owners were men

In 2022, slightly less than two-thirds (65.4%) of Black-owned enterprises were owned by men, with the remaining 34.6% owned by women.^{5,6} This is comparable to the proportion of men-owned enterprises observed among those owned by other racialized groups (64.9%) and slightly higher than that of enterprises owned by the non-racialized population (63.5%). Overall, 36.1% of enterprises were owned by women in 2022, and this share has remained relatively stable since 2019 (35.8%), the earliest year for which comparable gender data are available.

Chart 3
Proportion of enterprises by gender and racialized profile of owner, 2022



Note: The "men+" category includes men and some non-binary individuals, and the "women+" category includes women and some non-binary individuals.
Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

Black enterprise owners were younger than their non-racialized counterparts

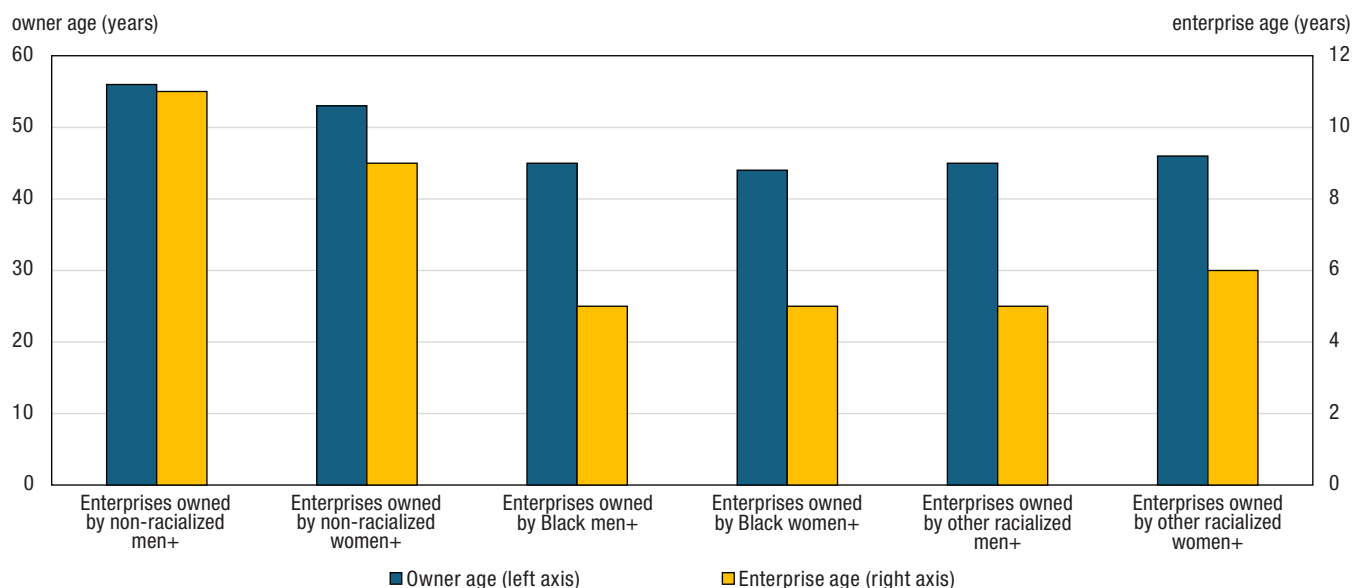
With a median age of 30.2 years in 2021, the Black population was younger than other racialized groups (34.8 years) and the overall Canadian population (41.2 years) (Domey & Patsiurko, 2024). In 2022, the median age of Black women enterprise owners was 44 years, 9 years younger than their non-racialized counterparts (53 years), while the median age of Black men enterprise owners was 45 years, 11 years younger than their non-racialized counterparts (56 years). Black men enterprise owners were the same age as their counterparts from other racialized groups. However, Black women enterprise owners were 2 years younger than their counterparts from other racialized groups (46 years). Overall, enterprise owners had a median age of 52 years in 2022. This result is consistent with other studies, such as those by Grekou and Gueye (2021) and Gueye (2023), which found that business owners were older than the overall Canadian population. These results suggest that individuals may need time to accumulate experience and wealth before becoming enterprise owners.

In 2022, the median age of enterprises owned by Black women and men was 5 years. Enterprises owned by men from other racialized groups had the same median age, whereas those owned by women from other racialized groups were slightly older, with a median age of 6 years. Enterprises with a non-racialized owner were older, with median ages of 9 years for women and 11 years for men.

5. The term "men" corresponds to the "men+" gender classification, which includes men and some non-binary individuals.
6. The term "women" corresponds to the "women+" gender classification, which includes women and some non-binary individuals.

Chart 4

Median age of enterprises and enterprise owners by gender and racialized profile of owner, 2022



Note: The "men+" category includes men and some non-binary individuals, and the "women+" category includes women and some non-binary individuals.

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

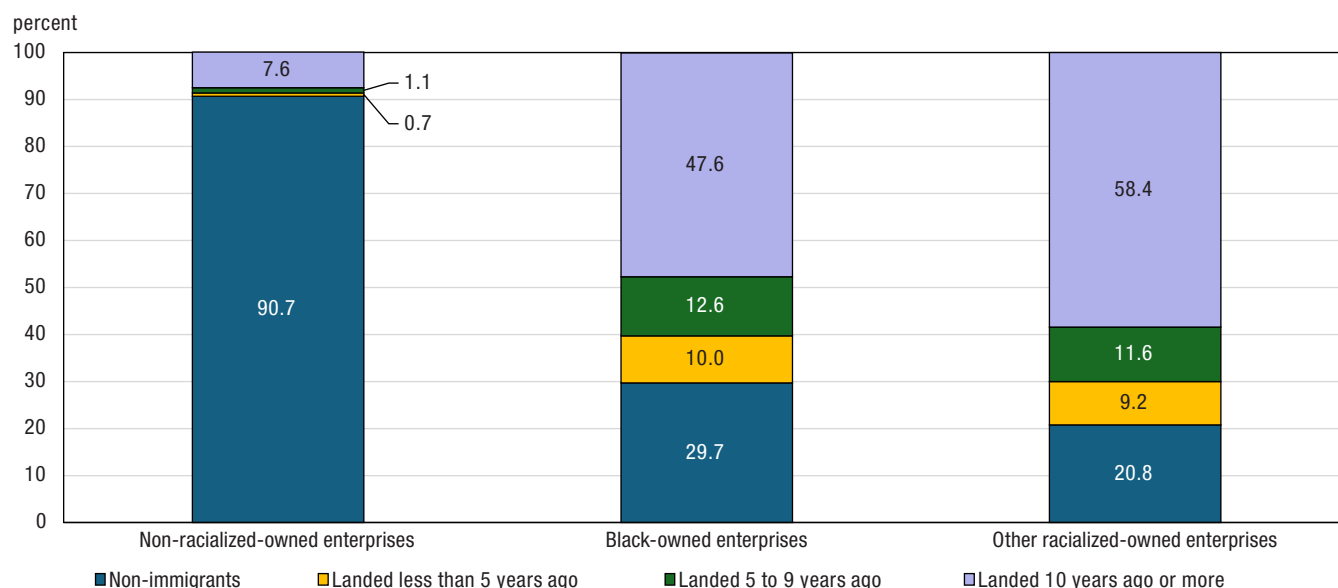
Seven in ten Black enterprise owners were immigrants

In 2022, 70.2% of Black-owned enterprises had an immigrant owner. Among Black owners, nearly half (47.6%) were immigrants who landed in Canada before 2013, while almost one-quarter (22.6%) landed in Canada in 2013 or later. Compared with Black owners, owners from other racialized groups included a higher proportion of immigrants who landed in Canada before 2013 (58.4%).

In contrast, Black owners were more likely to be non-immigrants (29.7%) than owners from other racialized groups (20.8%). While enterprise ownership among other racialized groups was more strongly associated with earlier immigration cohorts, ownership among the Black population was more closely linked to the non-immigrant population.

Chart 5

Proportion of enterprises by immigrant status and racialized profile of owner, 2022



Notes: Data for immigrant status and related categories are limited to individuals admitted since 1980. Excludes enterprises owned by non-permanent residents. The sum of the percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

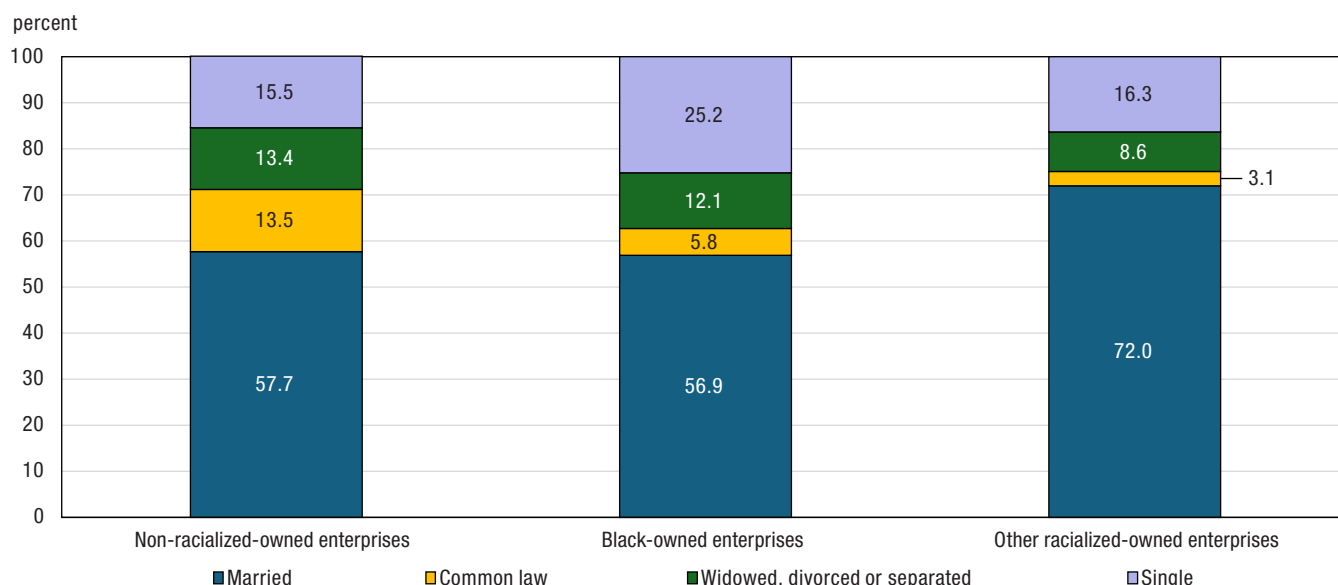
Black enterprise owners were more likely to be single

Black enterprise owners were more likely to be single (25.2%) than non-racialized owners (15.5%) and owners from other racialized groups (16.3%). Grekou and Gueye (2021) found that single individuals were less likely to own a business than individuals who were married, widowed, divorced, separated or in a common-law relationship. As Black enterprise owners were younger and more likely than owners from other groups to be single, they may experience more difficulties in capital and wealth accumulation or face additional barriers to economic opportunities or enterprise ownership.

While Black enterprise owners (56.9%) had similar marriage rates to those of non-racialized owners (57.7%), they were less likely to be in a common-law relationship than non-racialized owners (5.8% versus 13.5%). Both Black and non-racialized owners had lower rates of marriage and higher rates of common-law status than other racialized owners, at 72.0% and 3.1%, respectively. Black owners were also slightly less likely to be widowed, divorced or separated (12.1%) than non-racialized owners (13.4%).

Chart 6

Proportion of enterprises by marital status and racialized profile of owner, 2022



Note: The sum of the percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

Who do Black-owned enterprises employ?

Black-owned enterprises employed a higher proportion of Black employees

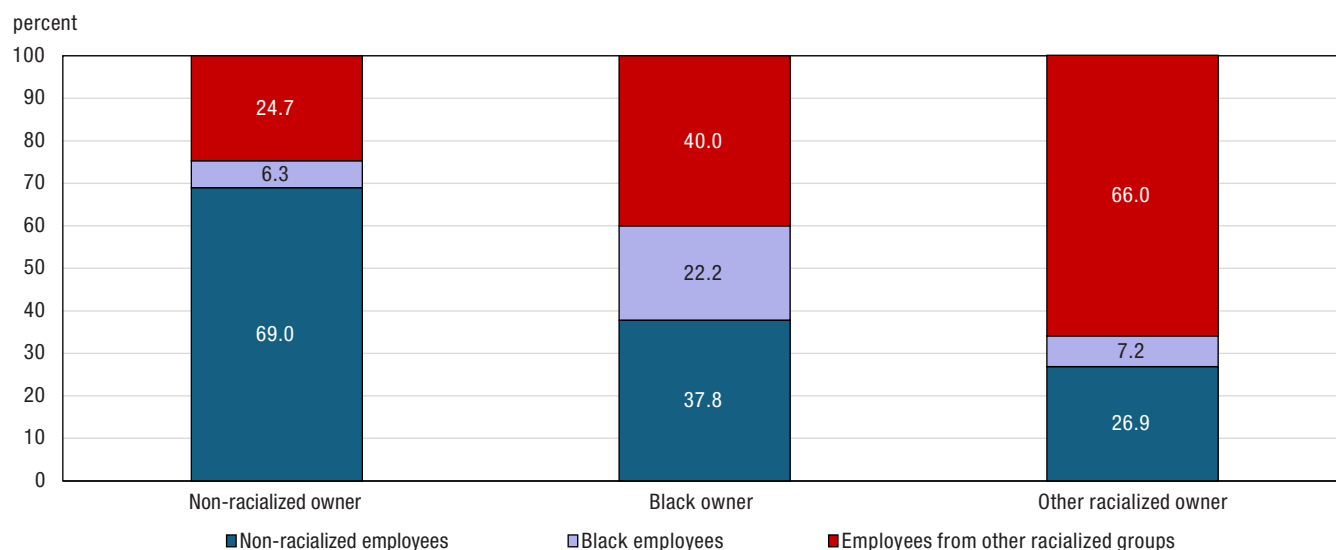
The proportion of Black employees at Black-owned enterprises (22.2%) was approximately three times higher than the proportion of Black employees at non-racialized-owned (6.3%) and other racialized-owned (7.2%) enterprises.

While the proportion of other racialized employees at Black-owned enterprises (40.0%) was higher than the proportion of other racialized employees at non-racialized-owned enterprises (24.7%), it was lower than the proportion observed for other racialized-owned enterprises (66.0%).

Differences in the proportion of enterprises with paid employees by owners' racialized profile may reflect the distribution of racialized populations across Canada and variations in the size of each group's labour force.

Chart 7

Proportion of paid employees by racialized profile of employees and owner, 2022



Notes: Includes only paid employees for whom a T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid was reported. The sum of percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

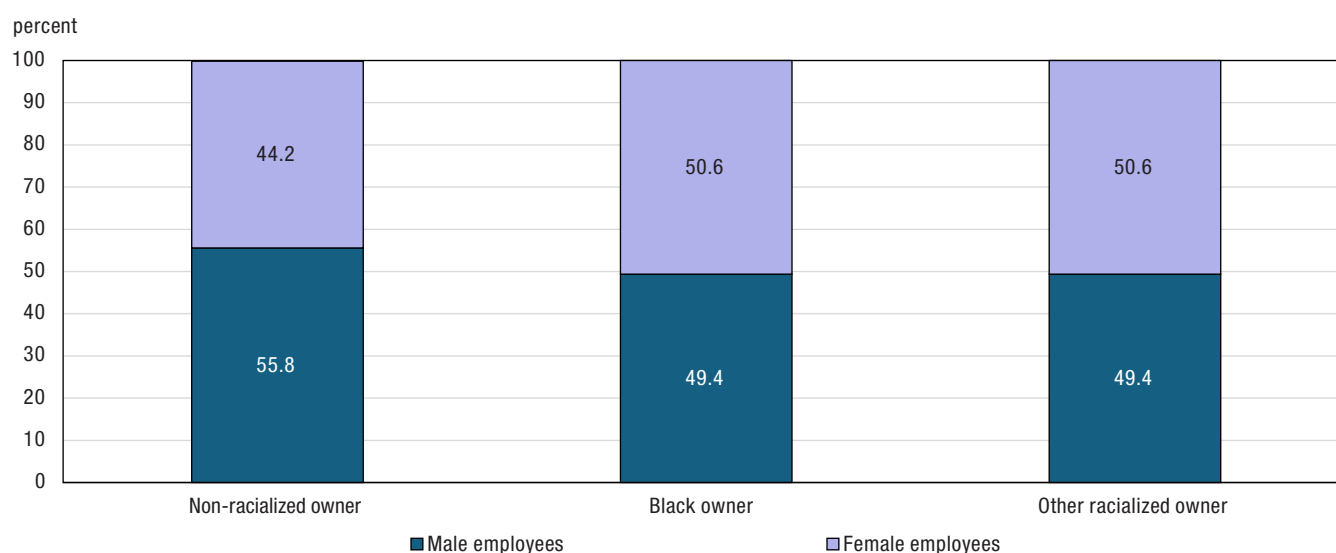
Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

Slightly over half of employees at Black-owned enterprises were female

Among enterprises with a Black owner or an owner from another racialized group, slightly over half (50.6%) of employees were female.⁷ Conversely, for enterprises with a non-racialized owner, slightly over half (55.8%) of employees were male.

Chart 8

Proportion of paid employees by sex of employees and racialized profile of enterprise owner, 2022



Note: Includes only paid employees for whom a T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid was reported.

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

7. The terms "female" and "male" correspond to the sex at birth classification. Sex at birth was used for employees, as gender was not available in the B-LFE T4 employee file.

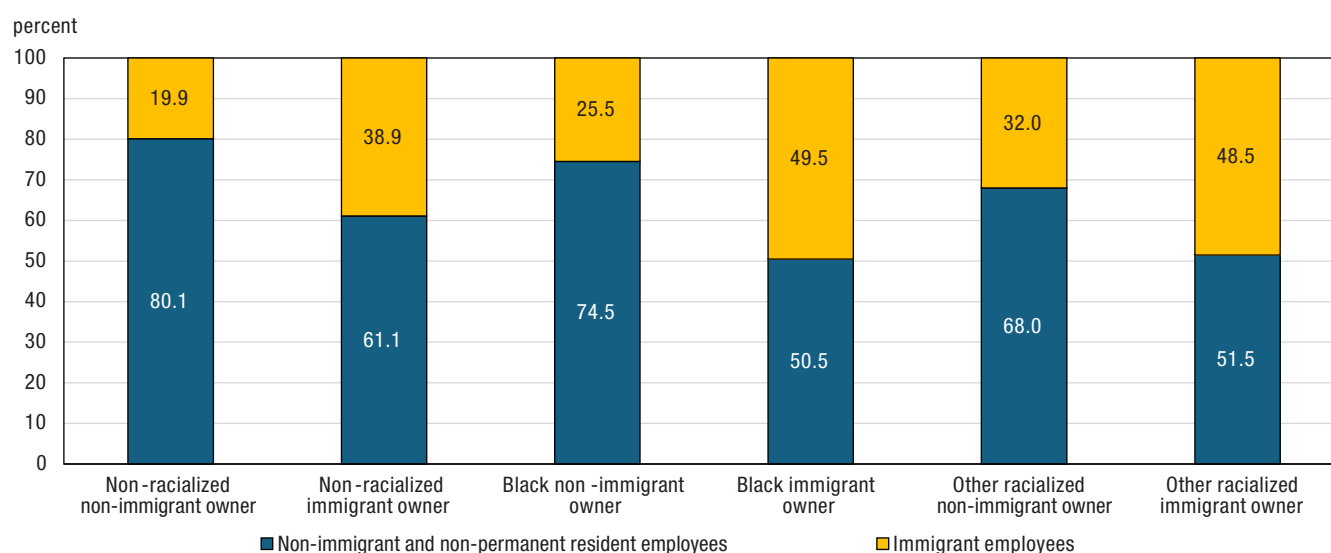
Black-owned enterprises had a higher proportion of immigrant employees than non-racialized-owned enterprises

In 2022, enterprises with an immigrant owner had a higher proportion of immigrant employees than enterprises with a non-immigrant owner for all three racialized profiles. For both immigrant and non-immigrant owners, Black-owned enterprises and other racialized-owned enterprises had a higher proportion of immigrant employees than non-racialized-owned enterprises.

Black immigrant-owned enterprises had the largest proportion of immigrant employees (49.5%), followed by other racialized immigrant-owned (48.5%) and non-racialized immigrant-owned (38.9%) enterprises. All ownership types, except for enterprises with a non-racialized non-immigrant owner, had a higher proportion of immigrant employees than the share of immigrants within the Canadian population, which was 23%, according to the 2021 Census of Population.

Chart 9

Proportion of paid employees by immigrant status of employees and racialized profile and immigrant status of owner, 2022



Notes: Includes only paid employees for whom a T4 Statement of Remuneration Paid was reported. Data for immigrant status and related categories are limited to individuals admitted since 1980. Excludes enterprises owned by non-permanent residents. Due to data limitations, non-immigrant employees and non-permanent resident employees are aggregated into a single category.

Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

Business innovation and growth support

The Government of Canada provides financial and service-based support to enterprises through BIGS programs. BIGS programs aim to improve the economic performance of recipient enterprises, support high-performing enterprises and improve diversity outcomes for enterprises by increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in the economy (Carta & Demers, 2023). Studies such as that by Demers (2021) have found that enterprises that received support from BIGS programs experienced larger revenue and employment growth relative to comparable enterprises that did not receive support.

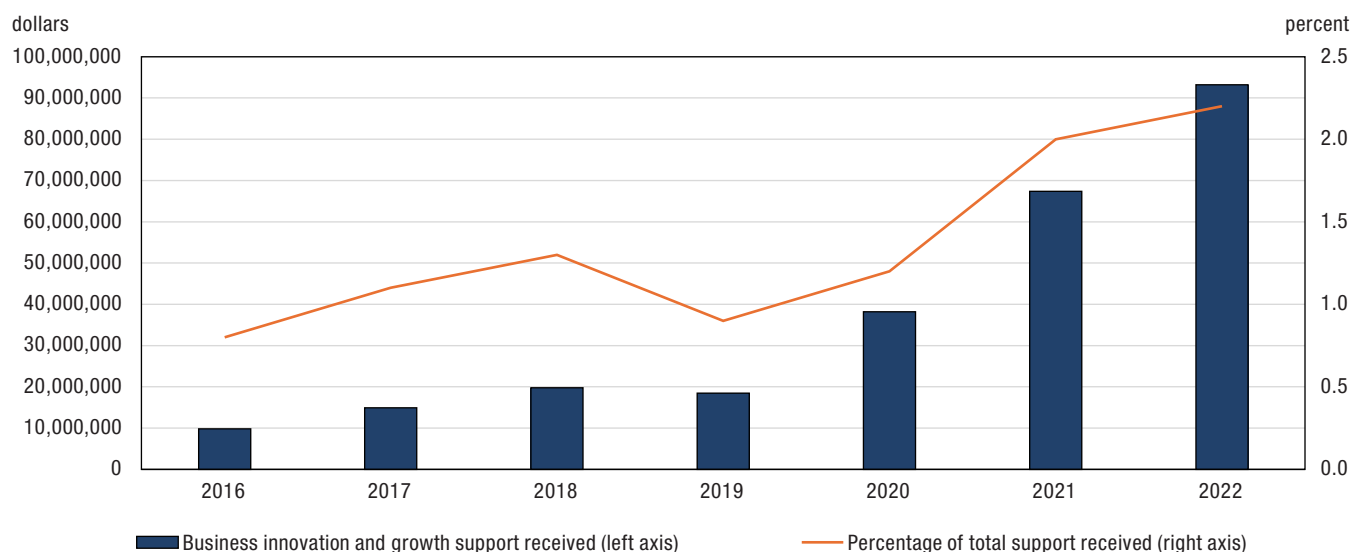
From 2016 to 2022, the amount provided to non-government enterprises by BIGS programs increased from over \$1.31 billion to \$4.27 billion.⁸ While support more than tripled during this period, the estimated total amount received by enterprises with different owner racialized profiles varied. The financial support received by Black-owned enterprises increased from \$9.8 million in 2016 to \$93.2 million in 2022, with their share of total support rising from 0.8% to 2.2%. Despite this increase, the total share of financial support received by Black-owned

8. Statistics on BIGS provided to enterprises with an Indigenous owner, enterprises in the government sector and enterprises whose primary owner could not be identified were excluded. As a result, approximately 12.4% of BIGS recipients were excluded from this analysis, accounting for 27.1% of the total financial support.

enterprises was lower than their representation in the overall economy (2.8%). This underrepresentation is largely attributable to the lower proportion of corporations among Black-owned enterprises and their lower likelihood of having employees compared with enterprises owned by other racialized groups. This reflects the fact that corporations and employer enterprises tend to be the largest financial recipients of BIGS programs.

From 2016 to 2022, enterprises owned by other racialized groups also experienced a significant increase in financial support from BIGS programs, rising from \$137.4 million to \$1.23 billion. Although non-racialized-owned enterprises saw an increase in support from \$1.16 billion to \$2.94 billion, their overall share of financial support declined from 88.7% to 68.9%.

Chart 10
Business innovation and growth support received by Black-owned enterprises, 2016 to 2022



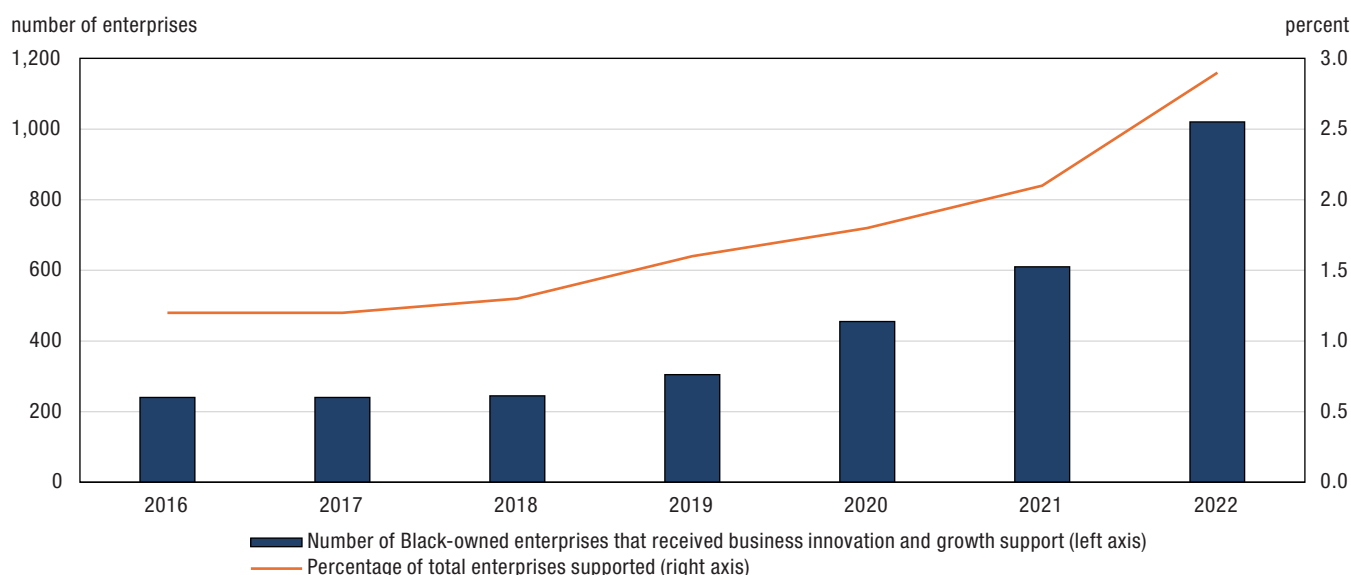
Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

In addition to an increase in financial support received from BIGS programs from 2016 to 2022, the estimated number of Black-owned enterprises receiving support rose from 240 to 1,020. As a result, the share of Black-owned enterprises receiving support increased from 1.2% to 2.9%, which was marginally higher than the share of Black-owned enterprises in the Canadian economy in 2022.

During this period, the number and share of enterprises owned by other racialized groups receiving BIGS also increased from 2,580 (13.1%) to 8,325 (24.1%). While the number of non-racialized-owned enterprises receiving BIGS increased from 16,850 to 25,235, their overall share decreased from 85.7% to 73.0%.

Chart 11

Number and share of Black-owned enterprises that received business innovation and growth support, 2016 to 2022



Source: Statistics Canada, Business - Linkable File Environment.

Conclusion

Based on the linkage of the Census of Population (2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021), the 2011 NHS and administrative data sources within the B-LFE, there were an estimated 179,850 Black-owned enterprises in Canada in 2022, accounting for 2.8% of all enterprises. While the number of Black-owned enterprises in the Canadian economy has risen in recent years, they remain underrepresented relative to the Black population's share of the overall population (4.3%).

For all three racialized profiles examined in this study, almost two-thirds of enterprises were owned by men. While seven in ten Black enterprise owners were immigrants, this was lower than the share of immigrants among owners from other racialized groups. Although Black and non-racialized enterprise owners had a similar proportion of owners who were married, Black enterprise owners were younger and more likely to be single. This may present additional obstacles to economic and entrepreneurial opportunities.

By linking the B-LFE employee file with the owner file, demographic data for employees based on the owner's racialized profile are available for the first time. Based on this linkage, slightly over half of employees at Black-owned enterprises were female (50.6%), and Black-owned enterprises had a higher proportion of Black employees (22.2%) than enterprises with non-racialized owners or owners from other racialized groups. Immigrant-owned enterprises had a higher share of immigrant employees than those owned by non-immigrants, with Black-owned immigrant enterprises having the highest proportion of immigrant employees (49.5%).

The number of Black-owned enterprises receiving federal support quadrupled from 2016 to 2022, and the estimated total amount of support increased from \$9.8 million to \$93.2 million. While the percentage of Black-owned enterprises that received BIGS in 2022 was slightly higher than their prevalence in the Canadian economy (2.9%), they were underrepresented in their share of financial support (2.2%). Increasing financial support to Black-owned enterprises could benefit Black owners and the other equity groups they employ, including female, Black and other racialized employees.

Integrating past and future census data or data from other administrative sources containing information about racialized profiles could reduce the number of owners with imputed racialized profiles. In future analyses, it may be beneficial to assess Black enterprise ownership through an intersectional perspective to account for the diversity within the Black population in Canada.

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