

Guest editorial: EDI in resilient labour markets: socioeconomic and policy perspectives

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Socioeconomic research and public policy play a foundational role in shaping labour market inclusion, yet these influences remain underexamined within much of the EDI literature addressing labour market issues. In recent decades, for example, the Canadian immigration system has diversified away from its traditional focus on migrants of European origin (Reitz and Banerjee, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2023), contributing to population growth and generating measurable economic benefits such as increased productivity and innovation (Dungan *et al.*, 2013; Gu *et al.*, 2020; Hunt and Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2025), with little evidence of adverse effects on native-born workers' wages or employment (Card, 2005, 2009; Dungan *et al.*, 2013; Friedberg and Hunt, 1995; Tu, 2010). Despite these aggregate gains, labour market outcomes for immigrants themselves remain persistently unequal as foreign education and work experience remain undervalued (Aydemir and Skuterud, 2005; Guo, 2009; Picot and Hou, 2019; Wald and Fang, 2008), limiting access to stable and well-matched employment (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; Schimmele and Hou, 2024a, b). Moreover, the increasing reliance on two- or three-step immigration pathways, in which individuals first enter Canada as international students and/or temporary workers before seeking permanent residency, raises further questions about how immigration status and policy design shape access to well-matched employment (Brunner, 2022; Hari and Wang-Dufil, 2023). Structural gaps are also evident for other vulnerable groups, including Indigenous peoples and women (Pelletier *et al.*, 2019; Wilson and Macdonald, 2010), who continue to experience lower employment rates and earnings despite longstanding equity commitments.

While EDI scholarship has tended to emphasize organizational practices and employer-led diversity management as mechanisms for improving inclusion, this focus risks obscuring the broader socioeconomic and policy contexts, such as immigration regimes, credential recognition systems and labour market institutions, that systematically shape opportunity structures. Research that bridges EDI with socioeconomic research and public policy is therefore essential for understanding why inequalities persist and how labour market outcomes for vulnerable groups might be meaningfully improved.

This Special Issue aims to expand the conceptual and empirical foundations of EDI research by focusing on the role of socioeconomic conditions and public policy in shaping labour market outcomes. Moving beyond dominant organization-centric perspectives, the contributions examine how economic structures, immigration regimes and public policy interventions influence patterns of access, mobility and inequality for vulnerable groups across diverse contexts. Together, the articles respond to calls to extend EDI scholarship beyond organizational-level practices by integrating insights from labour economics, sociology, industrial relations, human resource management and public policy (Morfaki and Morfaki, 2022; Offe, 2010; Omanović and Langley, 2023; Post *et al.*, 2021; Wang *et al.*, 2024). In this editorial, we synthesize these contributions to highlight shared themes, identify critical

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Socioeconomic research and public policy

In recent decades, EDI practices and policies have gained increasing attention in Canada and beyond as a means of addressing labour market issues (Boucher, 2020; Herring, 2009; Offe, 2010). However, the lived experiences of historically disadvantaged social groups as employees and citizens often continue to fall short of the ideals articulated in EDI discourses, and their voices are often unrecognized (Klinksiek, 2024). These discrepancies between formal commitments and everyday experiences have prompted scholars to question whether workplace-level initiatives alone are sufficient to address labour market inequities. Accordingly, researchers have increasingly investigated EDI policies and practices alongside organizational and extra-organizational factors, thereby contributing to wider debates on how labour market inequities might be more effectively addressed (Boucher, 2020; Klinksiek, 2024; Mishel and Bivens, 2021; Omanović and Langley, 2023).

Concerning analytical approaches to such investigations, Omanović and Langley (2023) emphasized the importance of adopting a comprehensive perspective that looks beyond organizations to their wider sociocultural environments. Similarly, Offe (2010) argued that unequal labour market outcomes do not arise from the market itself but from the institutional and political frameworks, such as educational systems, labour laws and family-related policies, in which the market is embedded and which are shaped through political decision-making. These frameworks, in turn, produce and reproduce inequities, including gender gaps, poor job quality and employment insecurity. As Offe's analysis suggests, a single-axis economic perspective is neither sufficient nor appropriate for capturing the complexity of labour market inequalities.

Similar arguments were further advanced by Borg Ellul and Friggieri (2025) in their systematic literature review on the critical role of EDI in sustainable development, particularly in relation to poverty reduction. Drawing on academic perspectives, policy discussions and case studies from various sectors, including labour markets, project management and women's entrepreneurship, Borg Ellul and Friggieri identified institutional inertia and systemic inequalities as major barriers to the effective integration of EDI initiatives. Institutional inertia refers to the slow adaptation of EDI policies in established institutions, while systemic inequities refer to structural conditions that limit marginalized groups' access to resources and opportunities. In addition to these institutional and structural constraints, Borg Ellul and Friggieri (2025) highlighted cultural resistance, data deficiencies and digital divide as key obstacles to EDI integration. These barriers include social norms that resist inclusion, particularly in patriarchal contexts, limited data on marginalized communities needed to inform EDI policy and unequal access to digital technologies among low-income and rural populations.

Building on the aforementioned ideas, examining how public policies, social norms and broader socioeconomic structures shape labour market inclusion is essential for evaluating the effectiveness of EDI initiatives. Socioeconomic research that draws on and delves into disaggregated data on marginalized groups is vital in this regard as it allows researchers to identify group-specific labour market disparities and assess whether EDI policies meaningfully address the inequalities. It is encouraging to see that articles included in this special issue pay close attention to the roles of public policies and social norms in shaping the issues they examine. Notably, the authors of this Special Issue also foreground a concerning lack of detailed and intersectional data on marginalized groups, which significantly constrains the development of effective EDI initiatives. For example, Banerjee *et al.* (2025) find that immigrants are largely overlooked in management studies, particularly those focusing on EDI practices. Skilled immigrants are often broadly categorized as visible minorities, a classification that obscures the distinct challenges arising from intersecting positionalities

such as gender, age, educational background and sexual orientation (Banerjee *et al.*, 2025). Likewise, Coron (2025) identifies a scarcity of academic research adopting an intersectional lens to examine gender wage gaps, especially disparities shaped by the intersection of gender and sexual orientation.

Against this backdrop, this brief review highlights key themes emerging from the contributions of the featured articles, which advance our understanding of how socioeconomic and public policies shape EDI in the labour market. Here, the featured papers underscore the systemic, institutional and intersectional mechanisms through which disadvantage is produced and sustained. In the sections that follow, we synthesize the contributions found specifically within this issue, situate them within broader scholarly and policy debates and clarify the insights they offer for advancing EDI scholarship.

In this issue

Building on the aforementioned review of the EDI literature, which has often overlooked perspectives such as socioeconomic and public policy, we introduce the featured articles through a set of interconnected themes. This organization focuses on how economic structures and public policy shape labour market experiences, highlighting the value of socioeconomic and public policy insights for advancing EDI scholarship.

Immigration policy, human capital and labour market valuation

Several papers examine how immigration policy and institutional contexts shape the valuation of immigrants' skills and labour market outcomes, challenging assumptions embedded in both EDI and meritocratic narratives. In Banerjee *et al.*'s (2025) "*Between diversity and meritocracy: employer and skilled immigrant perspectives from the Canadian context*," the authors use qualitative interviews to examine how employers and skilled immigrants in Canada navigate the diversity-meritocracy paradox, revealing how formally merit-based immigration systems coexist with racialized labour market penalties. Complementing this perspective, in Akbari and Xiao's (2025) "*Human capital valuation of visible minority immigrants in Atlantic Canada during a COVID-19 Year: evidence from a sample of the CERB recipients*," the authors use census microdata to assess regional labour market returns to immigrant education and experience, showing that while visible minority immigrants face earnings disadvantages, these penalties are more limited in Atlantic Canada, underscoring the role of regional policy strategies and public-private partnerships.

Extending these institutional insights beyond immigration, Ong *et al.*'s (2026) "*Institutional framework for neurodiversity employment*" similarly highlights the importance of systemic supports in shaping inclusion outcomes. The authors propose a holistic framework encompassing policy interventions, organizational initiatives and individual support to promote neuro-inclusion while noting that current efforts to support neurodiverse employment remain extremely limited. Together, these papers situate EDI outcomes within broader institutional structures, including immigration selection systems, regional development strategies and emerging inclusion frameworks, thereby advancing knowledge beyond organization-level explanations of workforce diversity and labour market integration.

Credential recognition, occupational matching and sectoral inequality

A second theme focuses on how public policy and institutional arrangements affect occupational access and skill utilization, particularly in regulated professions. Schimmele and Hou's (2024a, b) "*The inclusion of racialized women in the nursing Workforce*", the authors analyse census data and reveal how immigrant status and place of education significantly influence the integration of racialized women into Canada's nursing workforce. The findings show that Canadian education largely neutralizes racial disparities, while foreign-educated

immigrant women, especially those from racialized groups, experience significant underemployment and skill underutilization. This paper highlights credential recognition regimes and professional regulation as central policy levers influencing EDI outcomes, reinforcing the point that labour market inclusion requires attention to sectoral governance and institutional barriers.

Intersectionality, inequality and life course labour market outcomes

Several contributions emphasize intersectionality as a structural outcome of socioeconomic systems rather than an individual-level characteristic. In Coron's "*Gender, sexual orientation and the pay gap: an analysis in light of homophobia and gender stereotypes*", a cross-national multilevel analysis is used to examine wage inequalities across gender and sexual orientation, demonstrating how national gender ideology and homophobia condition pay outcomes across 25 European countries. In [Sogaolu and Sweetman's \(2025\)](#) "*Low income among Canadian seniors: interactions between immigration status, racial identity and gender*", the authors extend an intersectional lens to later-life labour market consequences, showing how immigration status, racial identity and gender cumulatively shape seniors' income sources and poverty risks. Together, these studies appear to support a life course perspective on labour market outcomes (e.g. [Elder, 1994](#); [Elder et al., 2004](#)), suggesting that labour market inequalities accumulate over a person's life and are deeply rooted in national value systems, welfare regimes and employment histories. This perspective helps advance EDI scholarship toward a macro-structural understanding of inequality.

Economic shocks, policy responses and labour market vulnerability

Another theme addresses how external shocks and macroeconomic conditions disproportionately affect vulnerable workers, revealing the limits of EDI initiatives detached from broader policy environments. [Fang et al. \(2025a, b\)](#) use a difference-in-differences approach in "*The short-term effects of COVID-19 on labour market outcomes of recent immigrants to Canada*" and found how COVID-19 had disproportionately negative employment effects for recent immigrants, particularly those in low-level occupations and hard-hit industries. In [Gunderson and Cukier's \(2024\)](#) "*Immigrants and house prices: myths and realities*", they situate immigration within wider economic systems. These disentangle misconceptions linking immigrants to housing price inflation while highlighting immigration's role in alleviating labour shortages, including in the construction sector. Together, these papers highlight how policy narratives, crisis responses and structural economic conditions intersect to shape labour market risks and opportunities for marginalized groups.

Institutional, organizational and governance-level analyses

The final theme highlights institutional and governance mechanisms that mediate the relationship between EDI goals and labour market outcomes across diverse national contexts. In [Smoke and Gray's \(2024\)](#) "*Does reconciliation affect your bottom dollar? The business case for honouring Indigenous rights in Canada*", the authors present a business case for honouring Indigenous rights in Canada, linking reconciliation, risk mitigation and long-term economic sustainability in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. In [Sapozhnikov and Sinelnikova \(2025\)](#) "*Beyond employment: how Russian companies engage with disability inclusion*", they examine how regulatory frameworks and non-financial reporting shape disability inclusion in a non-Western context, highlighting the role of state actors and disclosure regimes. At the organizational governance level, in [Cho et al.'s \(2025\)](#) "*Board ethnic diversity, director age and firm values*", the authors show how diversity outcomes depend on the interaction between social attributes and governance structures. In contrast, [Ong et al.'s \(2026\)](#) "*Institutional framework for neurodiversity*

employment” suggests how regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive institutions jointly shape neurodiversity employment in Malaysia. Finally, in “*Do top executives’ immigration status and multiculturalism perceptions matter? A diversity mindsets perspective*”, the authors further examine the relationship between leadership diversity, diversity mindsets and firm performance, as well as regional economic expectations. Taken together, these studies highlight how EDI outcomes are shaped by institutional design, regulatory environments and leadership practices, rather than isolated organizational initiatives.

A new agenda for research, policy and practice

Building on the themes emerging across the Special Issue, we outline several priorities for advancing EDI in labour markets through socioeconomic and public policy perspectives. The contributions collectively demonstrate that addressing labour market inequalities requires action across multiple levels: research, policy and organizational practice. Advancing EDI therefore depends on strengthening empirical evidence, improving policy design and implementation and embedding accountability within institutional and organizational systems.

Research

Future scholarship on EDI in labour markets should more directly examine the roles of socioeconomic structures, public policy and labour market institutions. The contributions in this Special Issue suggest that advancing understanding in this area requires more than organization-level analysis. Strengthening intersectional and life-course perspectives (Elder, 1994) is particularly critical. This entails improving data infrastructures that support the ethical collection of self-identified, disaggregated information across multiple identity markers, alongside robust privacy protections. Longitudinal research designs are important for capturing early disadvantages, policy interventions and economic shocks that compound over time, shaping careers, income security and outcomes later in life. Expanding the geographic and cultural scope of EDI research remains another pressing priority. While this Special Issue includes important work beyond dominant Western contexts, substantial gaps persist in understanding how labour market inclusion unfolds across diverse political economies, regulatory environments and cultural settings. Comparative and cross-national research, particularly collaborations between scholars from the Global North and the Global South, may create valuable opportunities to identify context-specific mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion while challenging the implicit universality of many prevailing EDI models. Similarly, thorough analyses of equality and diversity policies across different continents can demonstrate how historical legacies, labour market institutions and national regulatory frameworks shape distinct approaches to workplace inclusion that diverge from dominant Western EDI frameworks (Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2022).

Methodological pluralism should be embraced as a defining feature of the next generation of EDI scholarship. Combining large-scale quantitative analyses with qualitative, ethnographic and participatory approaches can illuminate both structural patterns and lived experiences of inequality. Rapid technological change and evolving forms of work also demand sustained scholarly attention. The growing use of algorithmic decision-making, artificial intelligence, platform-based labour and remote work arrangements has significant implications for access, evaluation and control in labour markets (Kellogg *et al.*, 2020). Collaboration across the social sciences and technological fields will be essential to assess whether these developments exacerbate existing inequalities or create new opportunities for inclusion.

Policy

Consistent with previous research, policy approaches that incorporate systemic design are likely to enhance inclusion. Stronger regulatory frameworks, such as enhanced transparency

requirements, proactive enforcement of employment equity legislation and accountability mechanisms linked to public funding and procurement, emerge as a critical level playing field for addressing persistent labour market inequalities. Policies that focus narrowly on representation without addressing underlying institutional processes risk producing symbolic rather than substantive changes. Equally important is the reform of institutional systems that govern labour market access and security. Credential recognition regimes, immigration and settlement policies and social protection systems must be redesigned to accommodate non-linear careers, caregiving responsibilities and transnational mobility (Brunner, 2022; Guo, 2009; Schimmele and Hou, 2024a, b). Greater attention to policy implementation and enforcement is essential as the gap between formal commitments and lived outcomes often arises at this stage. Policy agendas must also engage with public discourse. Rigorous socioeconomic research plays an important role in countering misleading narratives surrounding immigration, meritocracy and inclusion. Strategic dissemination of evidence can support more informed public debate and help sustain political will for inclusive labour market reforms.

Practice. At the organizational level, the contributions of this Special Issue underscore the importance of integrating accountability and inclusion into everyday management systems. Linking leadership evaluation, promotion and reward structures to measurable outcomes related to inclusion, retention and progression can help shift EDI from aspiration to practice. However, accountability mechanisms must be accompanied by sustained investment in organizational capabilities, including inclusive leadership development, mentoring and transparent career pathways. Organizations are also encouraged to critically examine how “merit” is defined and operationalized in hiring, promotion and compensation practices. Auditing these processes can reveal how ostensibly neutral criteria reproduce existing power structures and exclusions. Advancing inclusion, therefore, requires ongoing scrutiny of the norms, routines and informal practices through which opportunity is allocated (Agocs, 2002). For instance, the Canadian federal government has recently appointed an expert task force to review the *Employment Equity Act* (EEA), consult Canadians and provide input on modernizing the policy framework (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2023).

Toward inclusion of socioeconomic/public policy perspectives in EDI scholarship

Several key priorities arise from the contributions in this Special Issue for advancing EDI research through socioeconomic and public policy perspectives. First, progress requires ongoing collaboration across economic, sociological and policy studies. The papers show that labour market inequalities cannot be fully understood through organization-level analysis alone. Instead, they are influenced by interacting factors: individuals’ lived experiences of intersecting disadvantages, institutional systems that determine access to employment and mobility and broader economic and regulatory contexts that shape opportunities.

Second, significant methodological challenges still exist. While administrative and survey data continue to highlight structural inequalities, future research must improve how inclusion is measured and adopt more rigorous causal and longitudinal designs. Greater use of experimental, quasi-experimental and life-course approaches would enhance understanding of how policy reforms, institutional arrangements and economic shocks influence labour market paths over time. In particular, more work is needed to explore how policy instruments, including immigration systems, credential recognition regimes, labour regulations and social protection programs, lead to varied outcomes across intersecting identities.

Third, expanding the geographic and institutional scope of EDI research remains essential. The contributions illustrate how labour market inclusion varies across political economies, regulatory systems and cultural contexts, challenging assumptions that policy approaches are universally transferable. Comparative research is therefore critical for identifying which institutional arrangements and policy models meaningfully reduce inequality and which primarily serve symbolic purposes.

Finally, the articles in this Special Issue highlight unresolved questions about governance, power and resistance. Employers, professional bodies and government actors play key roles in translating policy frameworks into labour market outcomes, yet little research explores how these actors interact across institutional levels. Ongoing resistance, often framed in terms of meritocracy or efficiency, emphasizes the need to examine the political and organizational forces that maintain inequality. To advance EDI scholarship, it is essential to move beyond simply documenting disparities and focus on identifying the institutional and policy tools capable of creating lasting and fair labour market changes.

Conclusion

By emphasizing socioeconomic and public policy perspectives, this Special Issue's contributions highlight the institutional and systemic mechanisms that create and maintain inequality. The agenda outlined here calls for ongoing collaboration among researchers, policymakers and practitioners, increased methodological innovation and broader engagement with the policy frameworks shaping labour market outcomes.

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