Racialized Populations in Durham Region

Volume 6, Fall 2025

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Land Acknowledgement & Historical Context

We begin this report by recognizing that the communities and municipalities that make up Durham Region are located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, covered by the Williams Treaties of 1923. For almost ten thousand years before the arrival of European settlers, as archaeological records show, this territory was home to Indigenous nations, including the Mississaugas, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat Nations, who have lived here with deep relational ties to the land and water, ties based on care, reciprocity and responsibility.

The history of settlement in Durham Region includes a series of treaties between European settlers and Indigenous nations, such as the Gunshot Treaty (1787), Treaty 13 (1805) and the Williams Treaties (1923), which enabled European settlement while undermining Indigenous land rights, ways of life and governance. These treaties were often marked by coercion, lack of informed consent and the failure of governments to honour their obligations. Indigenous communities thus experienced, and continue to experience, systemic displacement, loss of land, death and barriers to economic, cultural and social well-being.

While this report focuses on the experiences of racialized populations in Durham Region, it is important to acknowledge that conversations about racial and gender equity and inclusion must be grounded in the understanding that all of this takes place on Indigenous land. We do so with the understanding that these discussions are part of a larger history, one that includes Indigenous peoples, colonization, immigration and ongoing community and government efforts to build a more inclusive and equitable society for all in Durham. We also recognize that Indigenous communities face distinct histories and ongoing challenges, which will be explored in a similar manner in a future report dedicated to Indigenous populations in Durham.

Labour Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the historical and ongoing contributions of racialized peoples whose labour has built and sustained Canada, Ontario and Durham Region. From the enslavement of African and Indigenous peoples in early Canada, to the indentured servitude of Chinese and South Asian workers, to the exploitation of migrant and temporary foreign workers in agriculture, caregiving and service industries, racialized labour has been central to the development of this country.

In Durham Region, as across Ontario, racialized and newcomer communities continue to contribute to the region's economy through manufacturing, caregiving, education, healthcare, construction and service work, most often under conditions of precarious employment, wage inequality and systemic discrimination. We honour the resilience of Indigenous and racialized workers past and present, and recognize that their labour has too often been undervalued, excluded or rendered invisible in our collective histories.

This report provides a snapshot of the experiences of racialized populations in Durham Region by presenting a plain language analysis of the latest 2021 Census data. Our labour acknowledgement calls for actively challenging systemic racism, ensuring fair and dignified working conditions for all and building an inclusive Durham Region where the contributions of racialized and Indigenous workers are fully recognized and respected.

Introduction

The communities that make up Durham Region are changing. Over the past decade, Durham has experienced significant growth and increasing diversity. One of the most noticeable changes is the rapid rise in the number of racialized[1] residents; people who identify as Black, South Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Arab, Latin American and other non-White groups. Between 2016 and 2021, Durham's racialized population grew by more than 45%, over four times faster than the region's total population. This growth is not only happening in large urban centres like Ajax, Pickering and Oshawa but also in smaller, rural municipalities such as Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock, where communities are becoming more diverse than ever before.

These changes are part of a much longer history of settlement and development in Durham Region and southern Ontario. It is important to recognize that the land we now call Durham is the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation and other Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples. These lands have been governed by Indigenous laws, relationships and treaties for thousands of years. The signing of treaties such as the Williams Treaties[2] (1923) that made way for European settlement and eventual development of Durham Region also resulted in the systemic displacement and death of Indigenous peoples, a legacy that continues to impact communities today.

Following the displacement of Indigenous peoples, what began as farming communities and majority-White, working-class towns and local municipalities have transformed into a diverse region that combines both urban and rural settings, shaped by labour market, national and regional economies, suburban expansion, immigration and government settlement policies. In the late 1960s, Canada's immigration system opened up to immigrants from across the world, increasingly bringing racialized individuals and families from the Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East to Canada and Durham Region. Today, Durham has evolved into a complex mix of diverse urban and rural settings, where the challenges and opportunities of inclusion, equity and access now intersect, particularly for racialized women and rural residents.

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD), as the region's primary settlement service provider, understands the importance of reliable information to help shape programs, services and policies that support all communities. This report is part of that effort; it provides a snapshot of the current immigration, socio-economic and housing realities of racialized populations across Durham's eight municipalities: Ajax, Pickering, Oshawa, Whitby, Clarington, Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock.

The goal of this report is not to provide an exhaustive analysis but to highlight key patterns and inequalities based on the latest available data from the 2021 Census. We recognize that census data has limitations, especially when it comes to smaller communities or specific groups. That's why this report is part of a broader series, with upcoming reports focusing in more detail on Ajax, Pickering, and Oshawa.

[1] In this report, we use the term "racialized populations" or "racialized groups" instead of the older term "visible minority" to use a more accurate and critical term to refer to non-White populations (excluding Indigenous peoples) in Canada. In 2021, Statistics Canada began using the term "racialized." While the 2021 Census data is still categorized under "visible minority," in the 2021 Census analytical and communications products, Statistics Canada used the terms "racialized populations" and "racialized groups" instead of "visible minority."

[2] Indigenous Nations that signed the 1923 Williams Treaty include: Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, Alderville Frist Nation (Mississauga), Curve Lake First (Mississauga), Hiawatha First Nation (Mississauga), Chippewas of Beausoleil First Nation, Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, Chippewas of Rama First Nation and Mississauga of the Credit First Nation (historically linked, although now based near Hagersville).

This report offers the first region-wide picture of the realities of racialized communities in Durham Region. We hope it will be a useful foundation for deeper community-based research, service planning, advocacy, policy development and stable funding for settlement services to create a more equitable Durham for all.

Demographics & Diversity in Durham Region

The 2021 Census data reveals a significant demographic transformation in Durham Region, underscoring the region's increasing racial and cultural diversity. Between 2016 and 2021, Durham's racialized populations grew by 45%, from 173,330 to 251,305, far outpacing the overall population growth of 7.9%. By 2021, racialized individuals made up over one-third (36.3%) of the region's total population; that is, roughly 7 in every 20 residents identified as racialized. As shown in Table 1, the most pronounced concentrations of racialized populations were in urban municipalities, particularly Ajax (where 64.6% of residents identified as racialized), Pickering (51.9%) and Whitby (35.5%), reflecting a well-established trend of newcomers settling in suburban areas of the GTA. Oshawa also experienced a steady rise in diversity, with 28.9% of its population identifying as racialized. In contrast, rural municipalities such as Clarington, Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock had lower proportions of racialized residents, although even these areas witnessed a sharp increase in demographic diversity.

Municipality	# of racialized populations	% of racialized populations
Ajax	81,560	64.6
Pickering	51,125	51.9
Whitby	48,325	35.5
Oshawa	50,610	28.9
Clarington	16,615	16.5
Uxbridge	1,715	14.5
Scugog	1,110	5.2
Brock	570	4.6

Table 1: Distribution of racialized populations across Durham's municipalities
Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021

This uneven distribution of racialized populations is deeply connected to the historical patterns of settlement and urban development in Durham. Historically, the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA) was shaped by agricultural economies and majority-White small towns, with most newcomers settling in larger cities like Toronto or Mississauga. As housing affordability declined in Toronto and its immediate suburbs, many racialized families and immigrants began relocating to Durham's more affordable suburban and exurban areas, particularly Ajax and Pickering, which have long-standing ethnocultural communities and access to transportation corridors such as Highway 401 and GO Transit. More recently, rural municipalities have seen increases in racialized populations, often tied to secondary migration of immigrants and refugees who initially settled in urban, as well as to federal and provincial refugee settlement policies and the expansion of community infrastructure and services. For example, from 2016 to 2021, Clarington had the highest increase of racialized populations, from 7,225 to 16,615 (130% increase), while Uxbridge had the least increase from 1,205 to 1,720, marking a 42.7% increase. Brock stood at 82.5% increase (from 315 to 575) and Scugog stood at 67.7% increase, from 665 to 1,115.

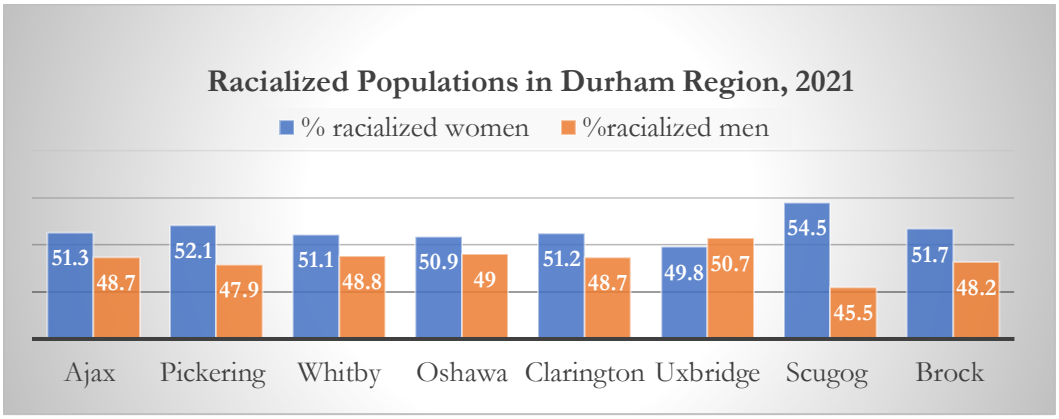

Figure 1: Percentage of those who identified as woman & man in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

While Table 1 shows the number and percentage of racialized populations in each Durham municipality, the data in Figure 1 indicates the gendered[3] dimensions of this demographic change. Across nearly all Durham municipalities, there were more racialized women than men, reflecting feminized migration streams such as caregiving, healthcare and family sponsorship (see Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010).

Geographical Distribution of Durham's Racialized Populations

Durham's racial and ethnic diversity is not evenly distributed across the region as documented in Table 2. By 2021, the urban municipalities of Ajax, Pickering, Oshawa and Whitby accounted for more than 90% of Durham's racialized populations. Ajax alone was home to 32.4% of Durham's racialized residents, with racialized individuals making up 64.6% of its total population.

Geography	# racialized populations	% racialized population
Durham Region	251,305	100
Ajax	81,560	32.4
Pickering	51,125	20.3
Oshawa	50,610	20.1
Whitby	48,325	19.2
Clarington	16,615	6.6
Uxbridge	1,715	0.7
Scugog	1,110	0.4
Brock	570	0.2

Table 2: Distribution and share of racialized populations across Durham's municipalities
Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021

[3] In this report, we use a limited definition of gender: those who identify as man and woman. We acknowledge the diversity of gender identities; the sole reason for our limited use of gender is due to Statistics Canada 2021 Census data that has only gathered data on men or women.

This urban concentration reflects longstanding settlement patterns established in the region, particularly since the mid-20th century. The immediate post-World War II period saw significant migration to suburbs like Ajax and Pickering, primarily from Europe and within Canada. As Canada's immigration policies gradually dropped its race-based policies and opened up to the rest of the world in the late 1960s, racialized populations were able to enter the country based on skills and family reunification programs (Knowles, 2016). Since the 1990s, non-European, racialized immigrants have become the dominant group among newcomers (Alba & Foner, 2015). As Toronto's real-estate prices surged in the 1990s and afterwards, many racialized newcomers sought affordable housing in the eastern suburbs, including Ajax and Pickering. The appeal of suburban homeownership, combined with access to highways, employment and cultural communities, positioned Durham's southern municipalities as gateways for newcomer settlement (Anucha et al., 2019).

In contrast to urban areas, Durham's rural municipalities (Clarington, Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock) collectively accounted for less than 8% of the region's racialized populations. These communities, however, witnessed some of the highest growth rates in racialized populations between 2016 and 2021. Clarington's racialized populations more than doubled (130% increase), while Brock and Uxbridge experienced increases of 81% and 42%, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2021; 2016). This emerging pattern challenges the conventional view of rural homogeneity and reflects the broader national trends of racial diversification beyond major urban centres (Bourne et al., 2021). A key driver of this shift is Canada's refugee resettlement strategy, especially Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program, which increasingly directs newcomers to smaller and mid-sized communities through Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR), launched in 2013 (Hyndman, Reynolds & Herodorou, 2021; IRCC, 2023).

	South Asian	Black	Filipino	Chinese	West Asian	Arab	Latin America	Southeast Asian	Korean	Japanese	Other racialized	Total
Ajax	33,055	21,210	6,670	3,760	3,745	2,505	1,695	820	230	245	3,565	81,560
Pickering	20,885	11,270	4,085	2,935	2,060	1,645	1,495	570	420	335	2,580	51,125
Whitby	16,365	12,395	3,570	4,910	2,150	1,350	1,655	660	520	325	1,875	48,325
Oshawa	16,235	15,425	4,325	3,125	2,120	1,250	2,280	770	465	135	1,870	50,280
Clarington	4,970	5,260	1,170	895	690	565	740	380	145	175	795	16,615
Uxbridge	335	220	190	395	80	25	75	25	50	110	65	1,715
Scugog	295	155	40	210	40	55	80	45	40	45	40	1,110
Brock	165	100	15	40	55	0	80	25	20	0	0	570
Total	92,305	66,035	20,065	16,270	10,940	7,395	8,100	3,295	1,890	1,370	10,790	251,305

Table 3: Detailed distribution of various racialized groups across Durham's municipalities
Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021

The largest racialized group in Durham Region in 2021, as shown in Table 3, was South Asians,[4] followed by Black,[5] Filipino, Chinese, West Asian,[6] Latin American[7] and Arab[8] communities. These populations were heavily concentrated in Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa, indicating a clustering pattern that often occurs when newcomers settle in proximity to ethnocultural networks for support, identity and employment (Teixeira, 2008). While racialized newcomers in rural municipalities may find more affordable housing and a quieter quality of life, the on-the-ground realities indicate that rural municipalities often lack the culturally responsive services, language supports and public transit infrastructure that facilitate successful integration (Sano et al., 2019; OCASI, 2021).

Immigration Status of Durham's Racialized Populations

When it comes to the immigration status of racialized populations in Durham in 2021, as documented in Figure 2, the strong majority (86.6%) of racialized populations were Canadian citizens, while 54.6% were immigrants and 8% were refugees, indicating both long-term integration and ongoing waves of newcomer arrivals. A closer look at individual municipalities reveals distinct patterns.

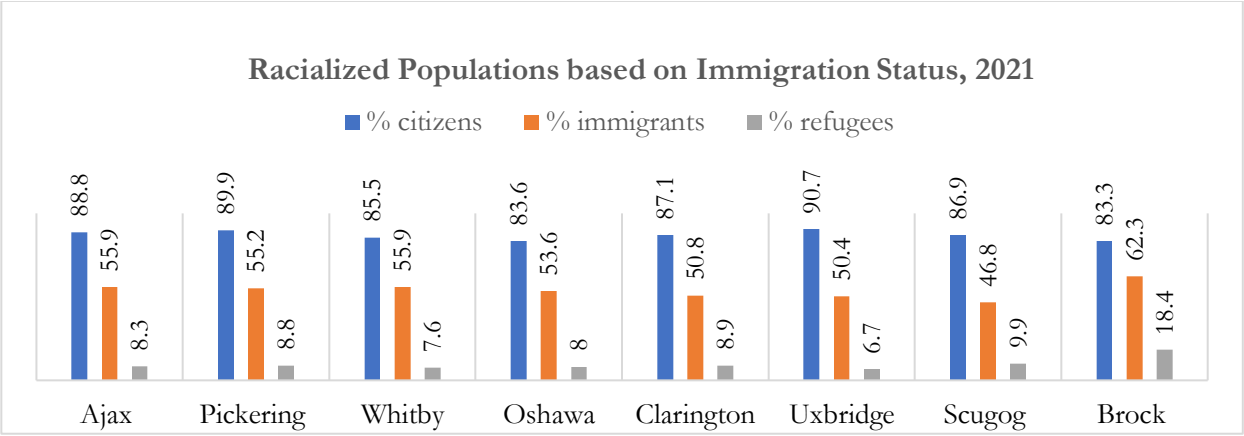

Figure 2: Composition of citizens, immigrants and refugees across Durham's municipalities
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

[4] Statistics Canada uses "South Asian" as one of the racialized groups in compiling census data, the category is also used in monitoring employment equity under the Employment Equity Act. South Asian refers to individuals who identify their ethnic or cultural origins as: East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Bengali, Punjabi, Tamil, Nepali, Goan, Gujarati, Sinhalese, or any other South Asian origin. This classification (along with all other identity classifications) is based on self-identification in the census or National Household Survey (NHS).

[5] Statistics Canada uses "Black" as a social and racial identity, not a nationality or ethnic group. Black refers to persons who identify as having African ancestral origins, including those from: Sub-Saharan Africa; The Caribbean, African American ancestry and central or south America, if they identify as Black. The identification is based on self-reporting.

[6] Statistics Canada defines West Asian as persons who identify their ethnocultural or ancestral origins as being from the region of Southwest Asia (excluding Arab countries). West Asian includes those who self-identify as: Iranian, Afghan, Armenian, Georgian, Kurdish, Azerbaijani, Turkmen and other related groups.

[7] Statistics Canada defines Latin American as persons who identify with Central or South American origins, or the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, regardless of race, and who do not report being White or of European descent. Latin American includes those non-White people who identify as: Mexican, Colombian, Salvadoran, Chilean, Argentinian, Peruvian, Dominican, Cuban and others from Central and South America.

[8] Statistics Canada defines Arab as persons who identify their ethnic or cultural origins as being from Arabic-speaking countries in the Middle East and North Africa. This includes: Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, Egyptian, Iraqi, Jordanian, Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian (and other Arabic-speaking backgrounds).

Urban centres like Ajax, Pickering and Whitby host large racialized communities with high immigrant-to-citizen conversion rates. For instance, Pickering's racialized population includes 55.2% immigrants and 8.8% refugees, while Ajax's includes 55.9% immigrants and 8.3% refugees. These figures reflect longstanding trends in Canada's immigration system that have historically directed newcomers, particularly skilled workers and family reunification applicants into the GTA, where existing ethnocultural networks and settlement infrastructure are well established (IRCC, 2024a).

More striking are the figures emerging from rural municipalities such as Brock (18.4% refugees among racialized populations), Scugog (9.9%) and Clarington (8.9%). These relatively high proportions of refugees (compared to urban averages) reflects the shift in Canada's refugee resettlement strategy over the past decade. As mentioned earlier, Canada's federal government has increasingly adopted decentralized resettlement policies, such as the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) program and the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program, which intentionally channel refugee arrivals into small and medium-sized municipalities (IRCC, 2023; OCASI, 2021).

These policies were developed in part to ease the burden on major urban centres and to support population and labour market growth in smaller communities. Durham Region, with its mix of urban and rural municipalities, has emerged as a key site for these resettlement efforts. The rural settlement of racialized newcomers raises critical questions about the capacity of these municipalities to provide culturally safe services, affordable housing and employment opportunities. As racialized refugees increasingly settle in areas without historically diverse populations, there is an urgent need for stable funding for local institutions to adapt by expanding ESL programs, anti-racism training and mental health services that are trauma- and violence-informed (OCASI, 2021).

Education Levels of Durham's Racialized Populations

In Durham Region, racialized populations (many of whom are recent immigrants) are not only matching but often surpassing the general population in educational attainment, especially at the bachelor's degree level and above (Figures 3 and 4). This reality directly contradicts xenophobic narratives that paint immigrants as a burden on public services or lacking the skills to contribute meaningfully to Canada's economy and society. This data demands a reframing of how we understand and value the educational attainment of racialized and newcomer populations in Canada. Across both urban and rural municipalities in Durham, racialized residents are proving to be among the most educated groups**,** challenging the White-centric notion of "merit" as something immigrants must earn or prove upon arrival.

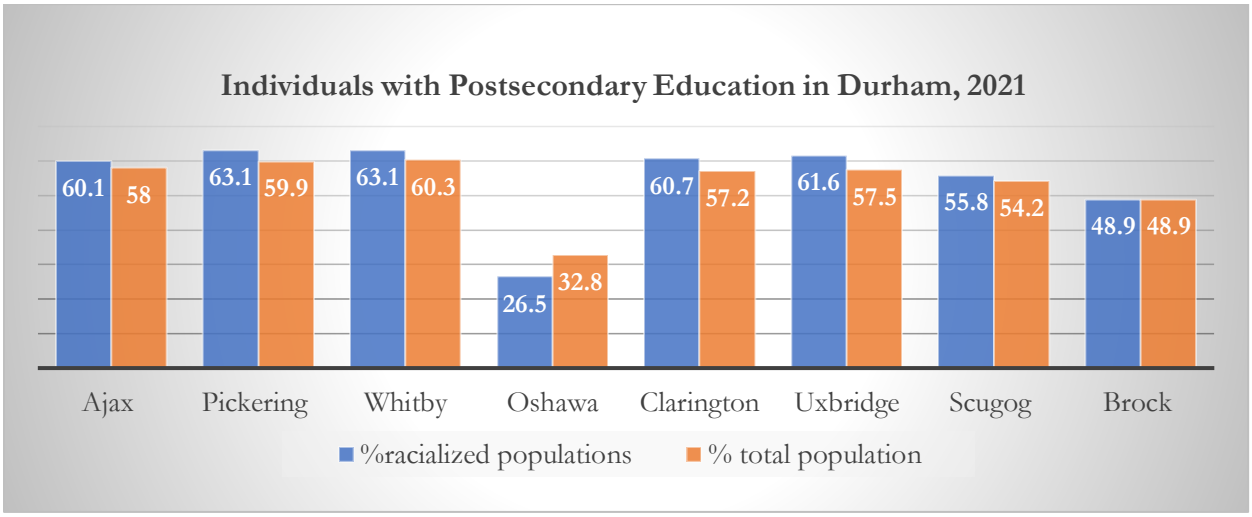

Figure 3: Postsecondary education levels of racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

In urban centres such as Ajax, Pickering and Whitby, as shown in Figure 4, over one-third of racialized residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher**,** compared to lower rates in the general population. The data from **rural** municipalities such as Brock, Uxbridge and Scugog further debunks the myth that rural areas are only sites of economic and educational disadvantage. In Brock, 23.9% of racialized residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to just 13.5% of the total population. This indicates that even in areas with limited access to postsecondary institutions, racialized newcomers are bringing with them advanced education and credentials. These figures underscore that the challenge is not a lack of education among newcomers, but rather a failure of systems to recognize and reward **t**he capabilities they already possess (OCASI, 2021).

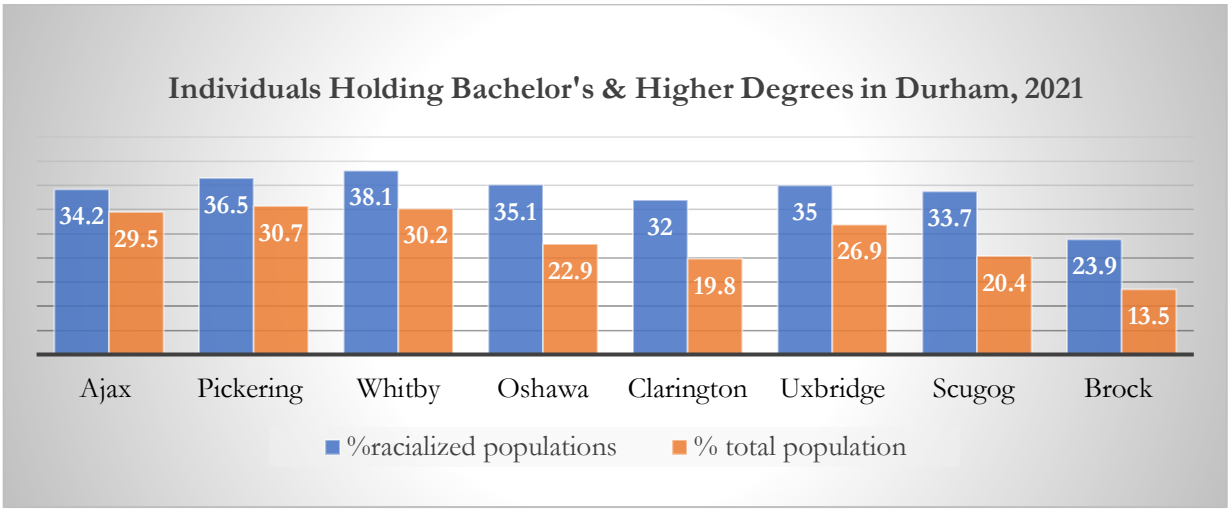

Figure 4: Composition of higher education among racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Crucially, this trend is most pronounced among racialized women, who emerge as the most highly educated demographic group across Durham Region. As shown in Figures 5 and 6, in nearly every municipality, racialized women hold higher rates of postsecondary education and university degrees than total women, racialized men, and total men. For example, in Whitby, 39.9% of racialized women held a bachelor's degree or higher—exceeding all other groups including total women (32.7%), racialized men (36.3%) and total men (27.4%). This trend challenges longstanding gendered and racial stereotypes and highlights the urgent need to dismantle structural barriers that continue to exclude racialized women from full economic and civic participation (Cheng & Guo, 2023).

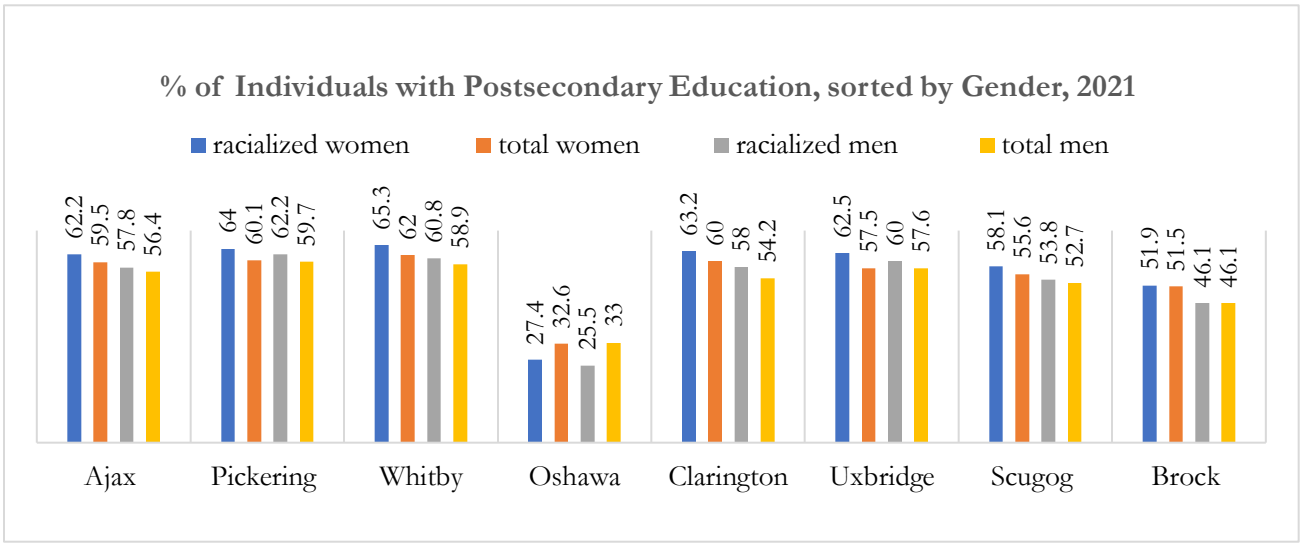

Figure 5: Gendered composition of postsecondary education among racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

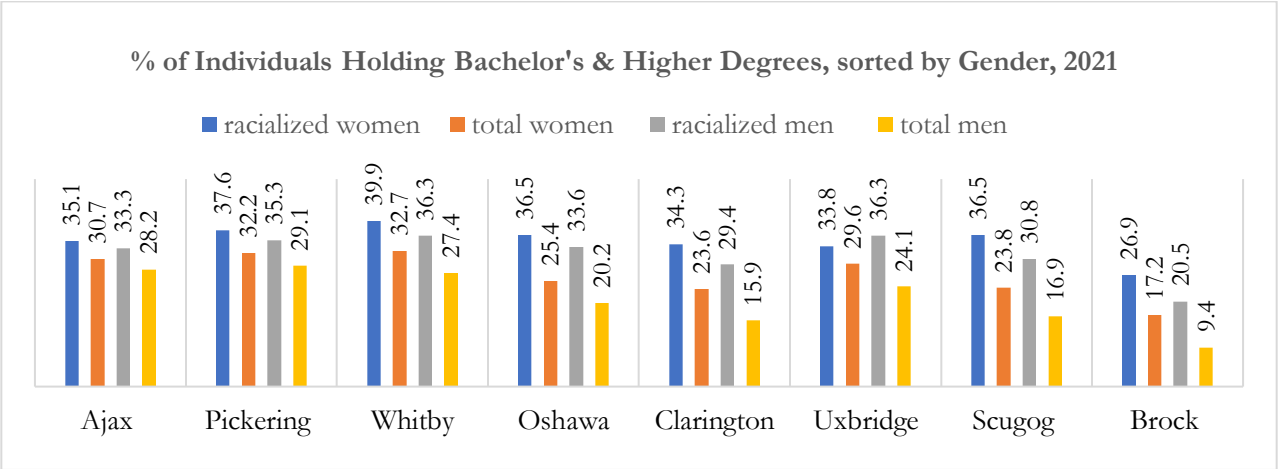

Figure 6: Gendered composition of higher postsecondary education among racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

It is no accident that racialized newcomers arrive with strong academic credentials. By the introduction of the points-based selection model in 1967, Canada's immigration system was explicitly designed to attract immigrants with high levels of education and work experience (Government of Canada, 2023). What is often overlooked, however, is the systemic devaluation of international credentials, racially biased hiring practices and institutional barriers that undermine the economic integration of these very individuals (Reitz, 2012; Guo & Shan, 2013; Tolley 2021).

Employment Reality of Durham's Racialized Populations

The 2021 Census data paints a revealing picture of the persistent and complex inequalities faced by racialized populations in Durham Region's labour market. Despite high levels of educational attainment (particularly among racialized women), these communities continue to experience structural exclusion, precarious employment and unequal access to stable, meaningful work, as documented in Figures 7 and 8. These trends, however, are not uniform across Durham. A closer look reveals distinct urban-rural differences, alongside clear gendered patterns that underscore the intersectional nature of labour market inequality.

Historically, Durham's labour market was shaped by the rise and decline of manufacturing industries, which provided stable, well-paying jobs, particularly for White male workers in the post-WWII-war period (Galabuzi, 2006; Block & Galabuzi, 2011). From the 1990s onwards, as manufacturing contracted abroad and suburban growth accelerated, Durham's economy became increasingly tied to the service sector, logistics, retail and knowledge industries. As research and the 2021 Census data show, systemic barriers such as credential recognition challenges, racial discrimination in hiring and limited investment in newcomer employment programs have continued to restrict the full economic integration of racialized populations (see, Reitz, 2012; OCASI, 2021).

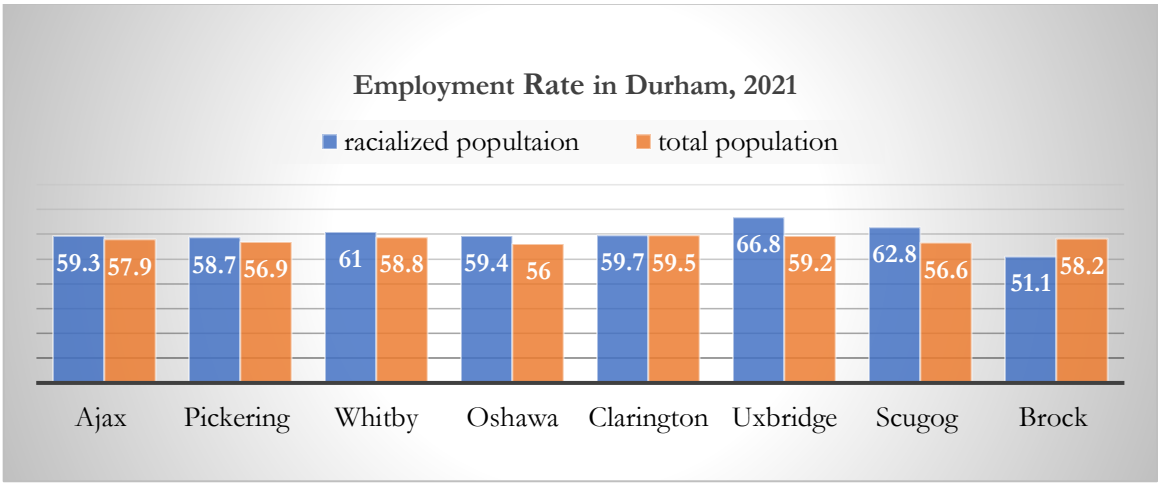

Figure 7: Employment rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The 2021 Census reveals that while racialized populations in both urban and rural Durham are actively engaged in the labour market, their experiences differ significantly by geography and gender. In urban municipalities like Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa, racialized populations generally reported higher employment rates than the total population. For instance, in Ajax, 59.3% of racialized residents were employed compared to 57.9% of the total population, while in Whitby, the racialized employment rate was 61% compared to 58.8% for the total population (Figure 7).

This higher employment rate, however, does not translate to economic stability. These same urban areas, as Figure 8 shows, also recorded higher unemployment rates for racialized populations, signaling a labour market characterized by precarious, low-wage and often part-time work. Clarington and Oshawa, for example, reported the highest unemployment rates for racialized residents (14.8% and 14.7%, respectively), despite their proximity

to employment hubs. This reflects broader patterns of labour market exclusion rooted in discriminatory hiring practices, under-recognition of foreign credentials and systemic barriers to quality employment (Galabuzi, 2006; Lewchuk et al., 2013).

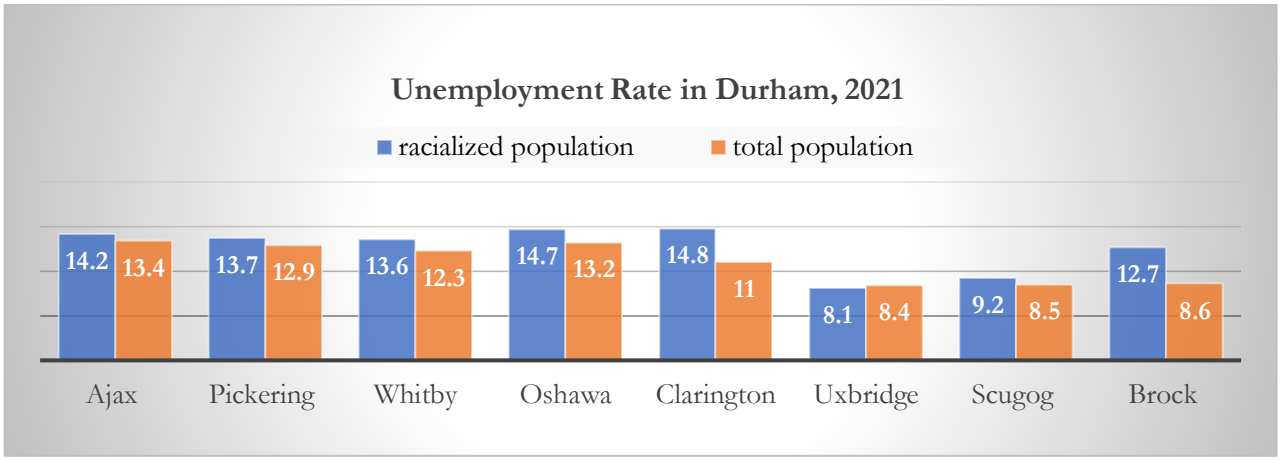

Figure 8: Unemployment rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Rural Durham presents a different but equally concerning picture. In Uxbridge and Scugog, racialized residents reported higher employment rates (66.8% and 62.8%, respectively, see Figure 7) than both the racialized and total populations in many urban areas. Yet, these numbers can be misleading. The types of available employment in rural areas are often seasonal, low-paid, or part-time and may mask underemployment and labour market marginalization. Moreover, in Brock, the racialized employment rate was just 51.1%, significantly below that of the total population (58.2%), suggesting that rural racialized residents face distinct structural barriers tied to limited job opportunities, geographic isolation and lack of transportation.

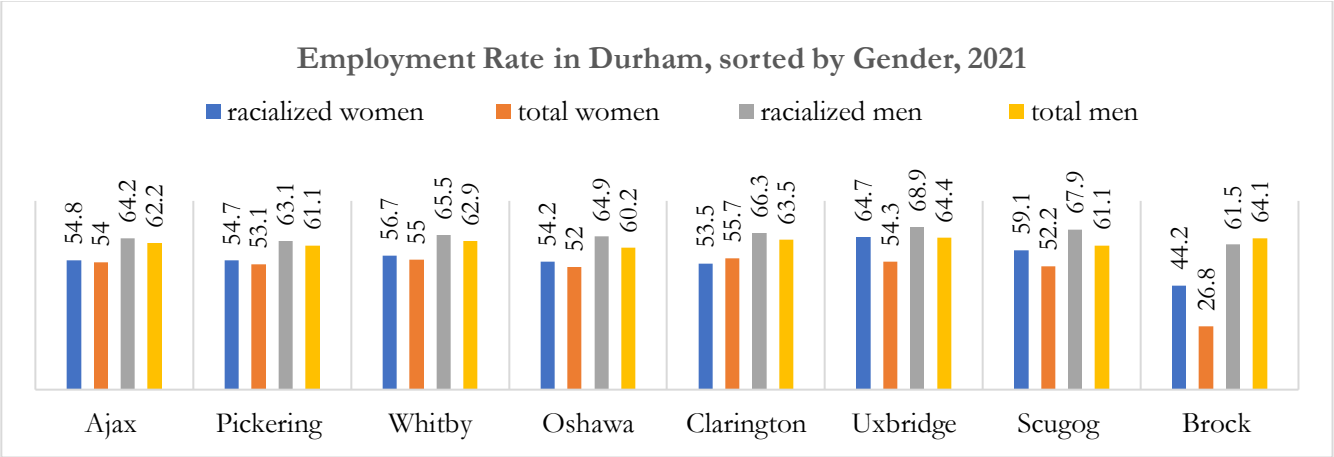

Figure 9: Gendered-based unemployment rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Gender disparities further compound these inequalities, as shown in Figures 9 and 10. Across both urban and rural areas, racialized women experience significantly lower employment rates than racialized men. In Ajax, for example, 54.8% of racialized women were employed compared to 64.2% of racialized men (Figure 9). Similar gaps exist across Pickering, Whitby, and Oshawa. In rural areas, the pattern persists, though with greater variability. In Uxbridge and Scugog, racialized women reported relatively high employment rates (64.7% and 59.1%, respectively), yet in Brock, only 44.2% of racialized women were employed; by far the lowest rate in Durham Region (Figure 9). These gender disparities in employment are even more concerning given that data in the previous section showed racialized women had the highest education level in the Region.

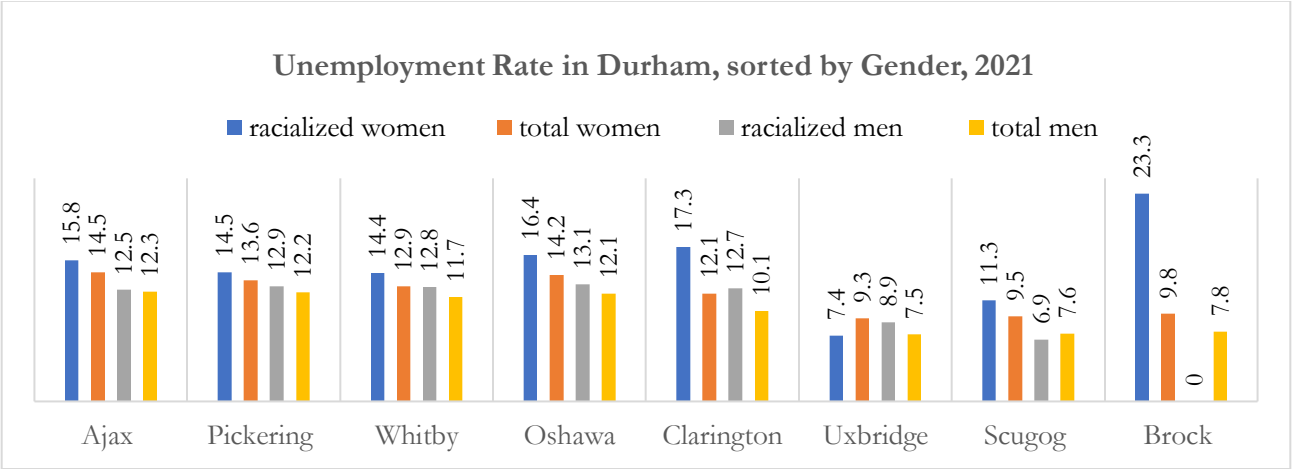

Figure 10: Gendered-based unemployment rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

These gender and racial inequalities in employment and unemployment rates reflect broader patterns of racial and gender discrimination, as well as structural barriers such as caregiving responsibilities, limited access to childcare and inadequate culturally responsive employment services (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010). Municipal efforts to address these challenges remain fragmented. While some urban centres have invested in newcomer services and workforce development initiatives, rural municipalities often lack targeted policies or programs to support the economic integration of racialized women and other marginalized groups (OCASI, 2021).

Income Levels of Durham's Racialized Populations

The 2021 Census data exposes a deeply entrenched pattern of racial and gender income inequality across Durham Region, one that persists despite high educational attainment and significant labour force participation among racialized populations, particularly racialized women. These inequalities reflect not only the structural racism and sexism embedded in Canada's labour market but also the ongoing failure of federal, provincial and municipal policy frameworks to meaningfully support the economic integration of immigrants, refugees and racialized residents (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Reitz, 2012).

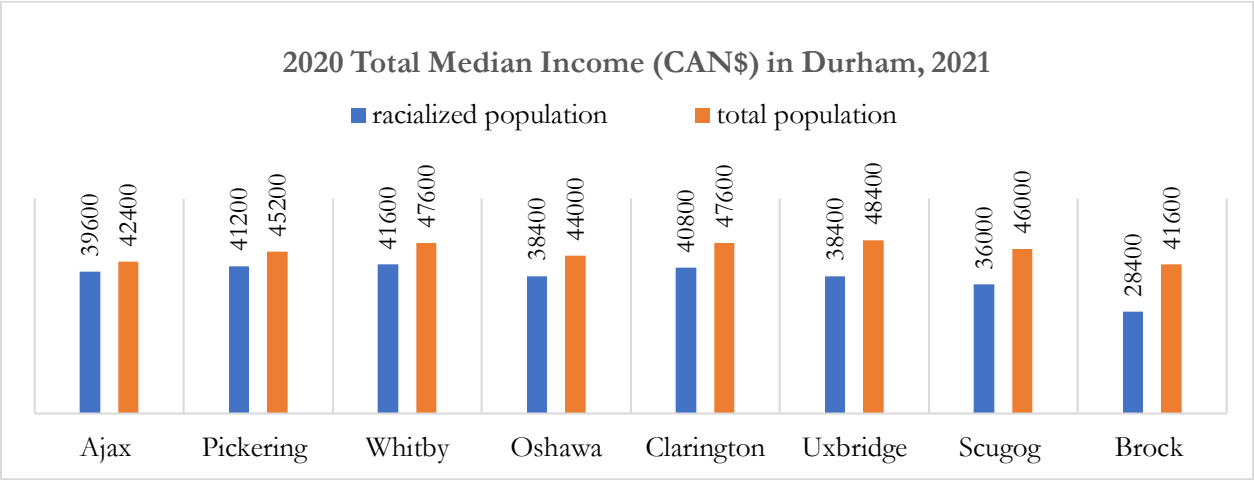

Figure 11: Total median income of racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

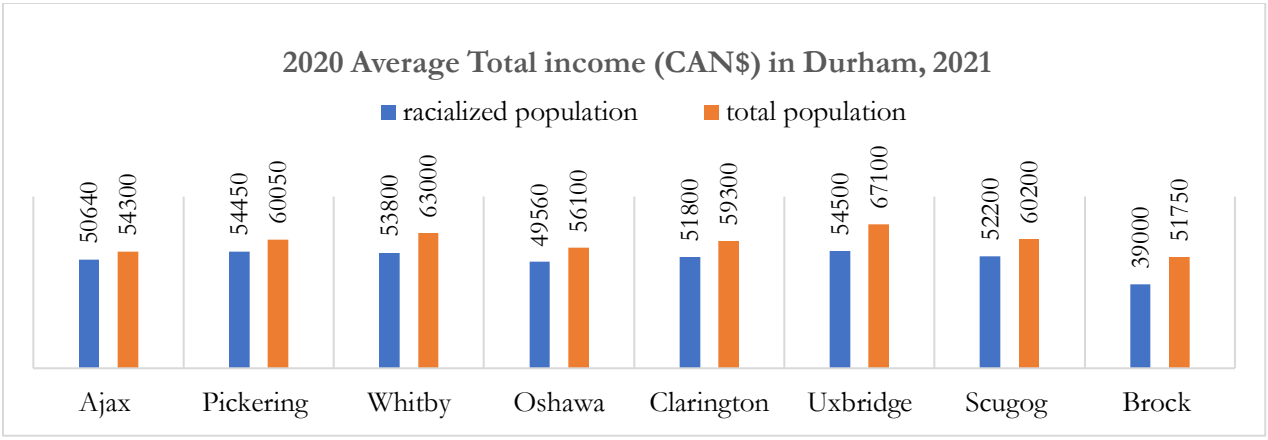

Figure 12: Average total income of racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Across both urban and rural areas of Durham, racialized residents consistently earn less than their non-racialized counterparts, regardless of education levels. This racial income gap, as shown in Figures 11 and 12, is most pronounced in rural areas, where structural barriers to employment, limited economic opportunities and geographic isolation intersect with systemic discrimination. In Brock, for example, the median income for racialized populations was just $28,400, a mere 68.3% of the total population's median income of $41,600. Urban centres, while slightly better, are far from equitable. In Oshawa, the median income for racialized

populations was $38,400, 87% of the city's total population median income, indicating that proximity to economic centres does not insulate racialized communities from systemic wage suppression.

These disparities are amplified when gender is considered, as Figures 13 and 14 demonstrate. Racialized women face the most severe income inequality, earning significantly less than all other groups, including racialized men, total women and especially total men. In rural Brock, for instance, racialized women's median income was just $30,400, which amounts to 59.3% of total men's median income of $51,200. Even in urban areas like Whitby, where economic opportunities are more abundant, as shown in Figure 13, racialized women earned a median income of $38,600—just 68.5% of what total men earned ($56,000).

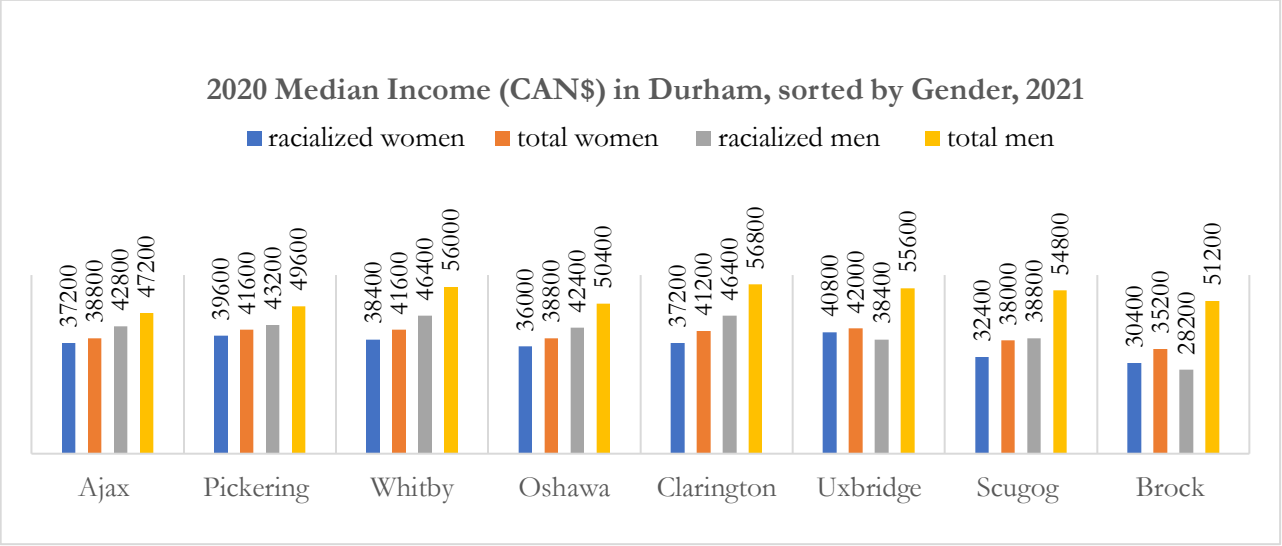

Figure 13: Gendered-based median income among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

This triangle of racialization, gender and geography reflects an alarming failure of Canada's labour market to deliver on principles of equity and inclusion, despite decades of formal multicultural and employment equity policies (Galabuzi, 2006; Block & Galabuzi, 2011). The fact that racialized women, who, as a group, also hold the highest levels of educational attainment in Durham Region, continue to experience such profound income disadvantages underscores the systemic nature of labour market gender and racial exclusion (OCASI, 2021).

In rural municipalities like Uxbridge and Scugog, the picture is more complex. On the surface, racialized women's median incomes ($40,800 and $32,400 respectively) appear comparable to or slightly above total women's incomes. These figures, however, mask critical issues, including the limited availability of stable, high-paying jobs in rural areas, the prevalence of underemployment, and the disproportionate concentration of racialized women in precarious, low-wage sectors (Sano et al., 2019; Shields & Alrob, 2020; Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010). Moreover, the higher average incomes for racialized men in these areas suggest gendered labour market segmentation that continues to marginalize women, regardless of educational credentials.

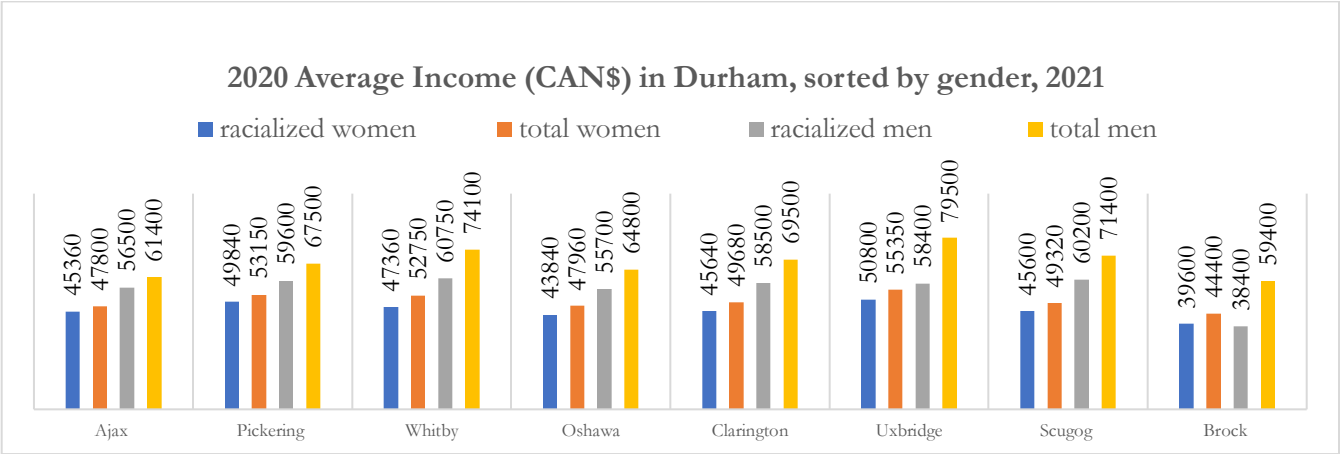

Figure 14: Gendered-based average income among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

These patterns cannot be divorced from broader policy failures at all levels of government. While Canada's federal immigration policies have facilitated the recruitment of highly educated newcomers, provincial and municipal efforts to recognize international credentials, enforce employment equity, and address systemic discrimination remain fragmented and inconsistent (Reitz, 2012; Block & Galabuzi, 2011). In rural areas, these policy gaps are even more pronounced, as targeted newcomer and racialized workforce programs are scarce, and local economic development strategies often fail to incorporate an equity lens (OCASI, 2021).

Poverty Rate of Durham's Racialized Populations

The 2021 Census data reveals a persistent and deeply troubling pattern of racial and gender inequality in poverty and low-income rates across Durham Region, exposing the structural barriers that continue to undermine the economic integration of racialized populations, newcomers and refugees. Despite their high levels of education, particularly among racialized women, these communities face disproportionate rates of poverty, underemployment and economic precarity, both in urban centres and rural municipalities (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; OCASI, 2021).

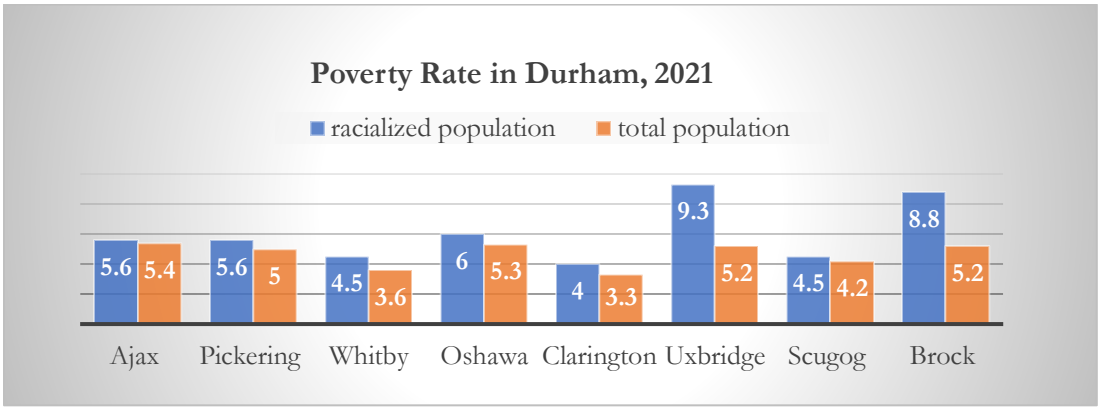

Figure 15: Poverty rate among racialized and general populations across Durham Region
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

As Figure 15 shows, in urban municipalities like Oshawa, 6% of racialized residents lived in poverty, and 8.1% were classified as low-income. This reflects the systemic nature of labour market discrimination, where educational achievement does not translate into economic security for racialized groups (Reitz, 2012). Similarly, as Figure 16 demonstrates, in Whitby, the low-income rate for racialized populations (6.7%) exceeds that of the total population (5.4%), underscoring the racialized barriers to equitable participation in Durham's growing economy.

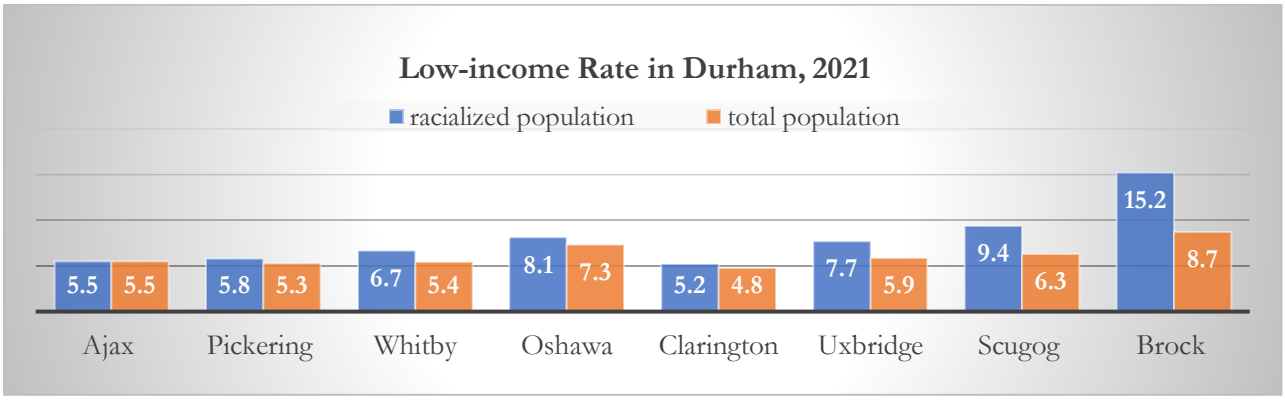

Figure 16: Percentage of individuals identified as low-income among racialized and general populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The most acute disparities, however, emerge in Durham's rural municipalities (Figures 15 and 16), where geographic isolation, limited services and smaller labour markets intersect with systemic racism to deepen economic exclusion. In Brock, 15.2% of racialized residents live with low income, compared to 8.7% of the

total population. Poverty rates follow a similar trend, with 8.8% of racialized residents in Brock living in poverty; significantly higher than the 5.2% rate for the total population. Uxbridge shows comparable disparities, where 9.3% of racialized residents live in poverty, nearly double the 5.2% poverty rate for the total population.

These rural-urban comparisons reveal that racialized poverty is not merely a function of individual qualifications or labour market participation, but reflects deeper structural barriers present in smaller communities and regional economic systems (Hyndman et al., 2021). Rural areas in particular lack the culturally responsive employment supports, credential recognition programs, and anti-discrimination policies that are marginally more present in urban centres (OCASI, 2021; Galabuzi, 2006).

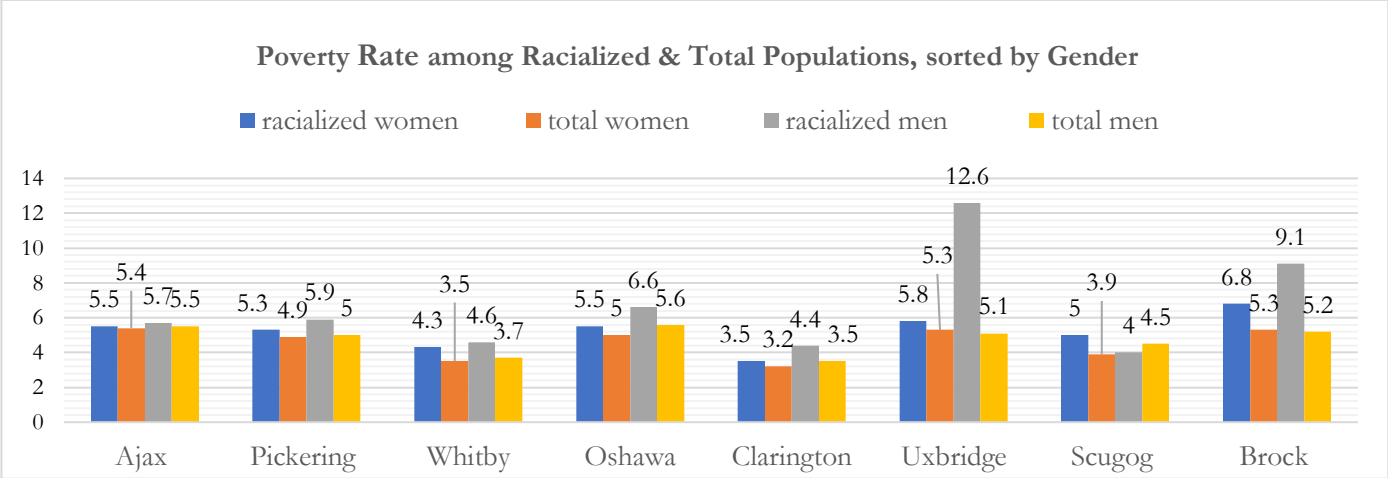

Figure 17: Gendered-based poverty rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

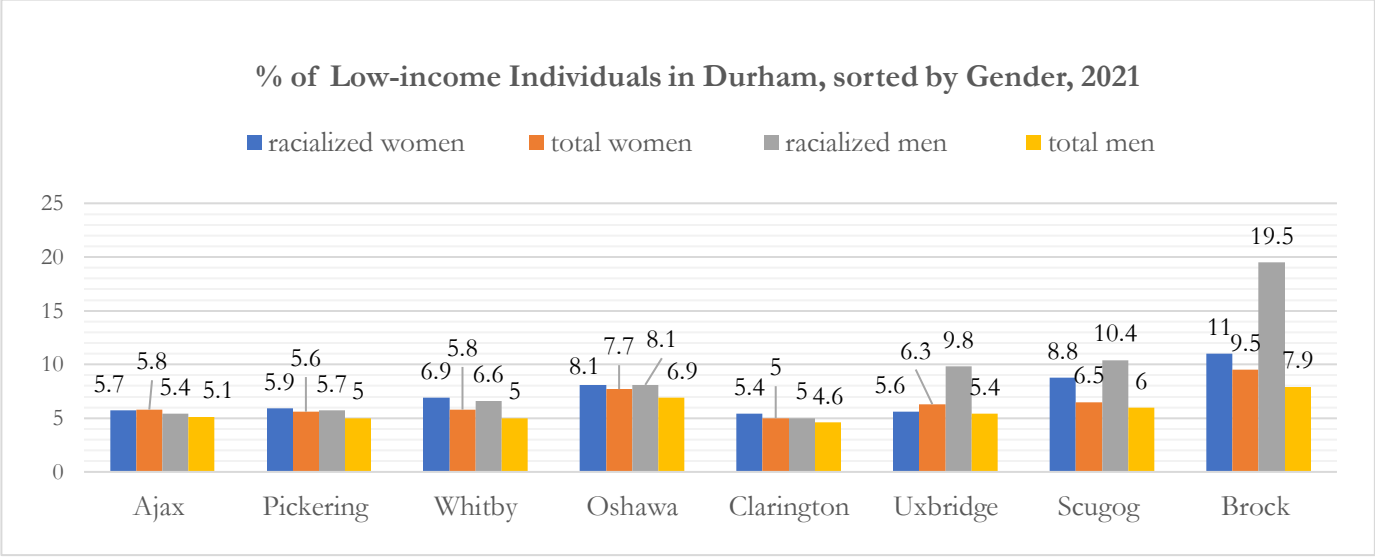

Figure 18: Gendered-based low-income rate among racialized and total populations in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

As Figures 17 and 18 demonstrate, the gendered dimension of this inequality further exposes the intersectional barriers facing racialized women in Durham. In urban centres like Oshawa, racialized women experience higher poverty rates (5.5%) and low-income rates (8.1%) than racialized men and total women, despite being the most

educated group in the region. This reflects the compounded impacts of racism and sexism, where women are more likely to be concentrated in low-wage, precarious sectors and face greater barriers to accessing full-time, stable employment (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

In rural areas, however, the pattern shifts in alarming ways. Racialized men in places like Uxbridge and Brock experience exceptionally high poverty (12.6% and 9.1%, respectively) and low-income rates (9.8% and 19.5%, respectively), far exceeding both the total male population and racialized women in these areas. This suggests that rural labour markets not only fail to integrate racialized populations generally but also offer few viable pathways to stable, well-paying work for racialized men in particular. The structural nature of this exclusion is compounded by a lack of targeted rural economic development policies that address the realities of an increasingly diverse population (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010). Moreover, municipal poverty reduction plans across Durham Region have yet to fully incorporate an intersectional, race- and gender-based lens that addresses the structural roots of inequality (OCASI, 2021).

Housing Reality of Durham's Racialized Populations

The 2021 Census data reveals a persistent and systemic pattern of racial and gender inequality in accessing affordable and suitable housing[9] across Durham Region, highlighting deep structural barriers that disproportionately affect racialized populations and newcomer communities. Despite higher levels of education and labour market participation (especially among racialized women), these groups face significantly higher rates of housing unaffordability and unsuitable living conditions compared to the general population, reinforcing the interconnected inequities identified in education, income, employment, and poverty (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Galabuzi, 2006).

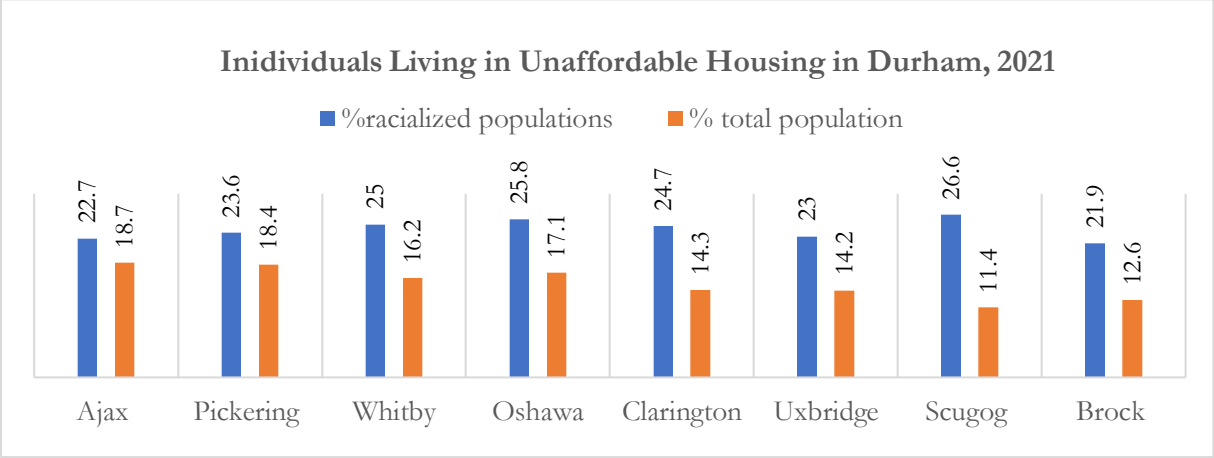

Figure 19: Percentage of those living in unaffordable housing among racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Across all eight of Durham's municipalities, racialized populations are more likely to live in unaffordable housing compared to the total population (Figure 19). The disparities are most pronounced in urban centres like Oshawa, where 25.8% of racialized residents live in unaffordable housing, compared to 17.1% of the total population. A similar pattern emerges in Whitby, with 25% of racialized residents living in unaffordable housing versus just 16.2% of the total population. These figures expose the failure of the housing market, in combination with weak policy interventions, to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population in urban Durham (OCASI, 2021).

As Figure 19 demonstrates, the situation is even more severe in rural municipalities, where structural barriers are compounded by geographic isolation and a lack of affordable housing stock. In Scugog, 26.6% of racialized residents live in unaffordable housing; more than double the rate for the total population (11.4%). Brock shows a similar pattern, with 21.9% of racialized residents facing housing unaffordability compared to 12.6% of the total population. These rural-urban disparities illustrate how the decentralization of immigrant settlement, driven partly by federal resettlement policies and escalating urban housing costs, has shifted racialized populations into rural areas that lack the infrastructure, affordable housing options, and culturally appropriate services required for successful integration (Preibisch & Encalada Grez, 2010; Reitz, 2012).

[9] Based on Statistics Canada, a household is considered in "unaffordable housing" if they spend 30% and more of their total household income on shelter costs (rent or mortgage, property taxes, utilities, etc.). A dwelling in considered "suitable" if it has enough bedrooms for the size and composition of the household. A household is in "unsuitable housing" if it does not have sufficient bedrooms, according to National Occupancy Standard requirements.

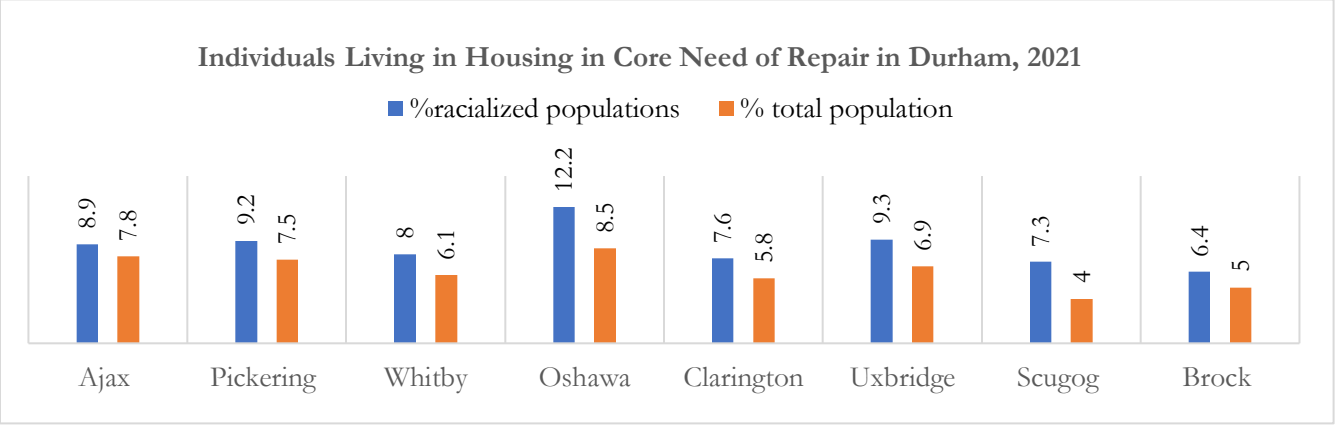

Figure 20: Percentage of those living in housing in core need of repair among racialized and total populations
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The quality of housing stock, as Figure 20 shows, further exposes these inequities. Racialized populations are significantly more likely to live in housing in "core need of repair"; that is, living in homes requiring major structural repairs to plumbing, electrical systems, or walls. In Uxbridge, 9.3% of racialized residents lived in such substandard housing, compared to just 4% of the total population. Oshawa, a major urban centre, reflects a similar disparity, with 12.2% of racialized residents living in homes in need of major repairs, compared to 8.5% of the general population. These conditions reflect not only the economic marginalization of racialized communities but also systemic exclusion from safe, suitable housing options.

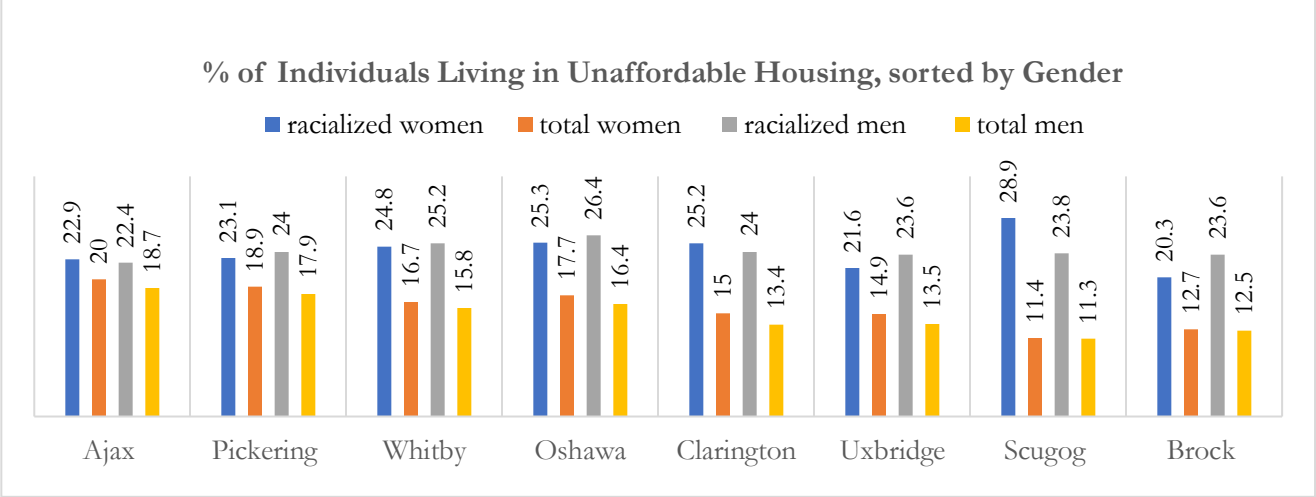

Figure 21: Gender-based housing unaffordability rate in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

A gender analysis of the data, as Figures 21 and 22 demonstrate, reveals additional layers of structural inequality. In urban centres like Oshawa and Whitby, both racialized men and women face higher rates of housing unaffordability compared to the total population. The burden, however, often falls more heavily on women. In Ajax, for example, 22.9% of racialized women lived in unaffordable housing compared to 22.4% of racialized men and 20% of total women. This pattern reflects the intersectional impacts of racism, sexism and economic exclusion that have been documented throughout Durham's labour market, where racialized women, despite their high educational attainment, experience disproportionately low incomes and higher poverty rates (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2021).

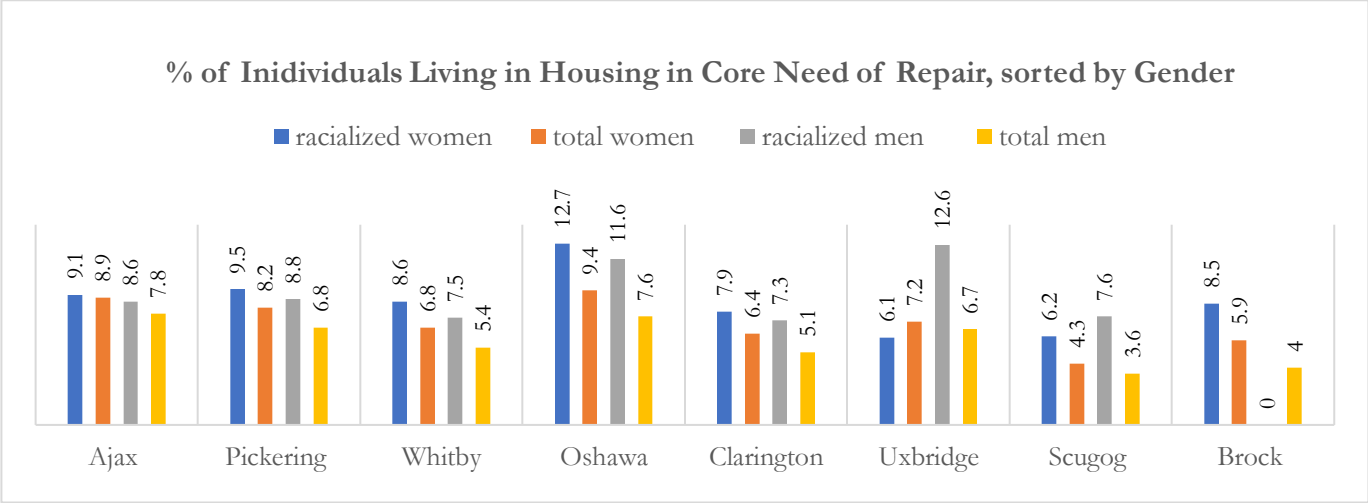

Figure 22: Gender-based housing unaffordability rate in Durham
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

In rural areas, the gendered dynamics shift in complex ways. Scugog has the highest ratio of racialized women living in unaffordable housing at 28.9%, reflecting the compounded barriers facing women in rural settings, where access to employment, transportation, and services is more limited. Conversely, in terms of housing in need of major repair, rural racialized men bear the brunt, with Uxbridge showing the highest ratio at 12.6%. This suggests that while women face greater economic exclusion in securing affordable housing, men in rural areas are more likely to be concentrated in low-quality, deteriorating housing stock.

These patterns expose critical gaps in federal, provincial and municipal housing and settlement strategies. While the federal government has promoted immigration to smaller centres through refugee resettlement policies and regional immigration programs, there has been a failure to ensure that rural areas have the affordable, suitable housing stock and culturally responsive services necessary to support integration (OCASI, 2021; Reitz, 2012). At the municipal level, housing affordability remains a significant policy challenge across Durham, yet few initiatives explicitly address the racialized and gendered dimensions of housing exclusion, particularly outside urban centres.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The 2021 Census data reveals that Durham Region is undergoing a profound demographic transformation, with racialized populations growing more than four times faster than the region's total population between 2016 and 2021. Today, over one-third of Durham's residents identify as racialized. Yet, this growing diversity is accompanied by persistent systemic inequalities that disproportionately affect racialized communities, in particular women, newcomers and rural residents.

Urban centres such as Ajax, Pickering, Whitby and Oshawa have long served as settlement hubs for racialized newcomers, reflecting historical migration trends, access to existing cultural communities, employment and settlement services. However, rural municipalities like Clarington, Uxbridge, Scugog and Brock are now experiencing rapid racial diversification due to refugee resettlement and affordability pressures. The readiness of these areas to support newcomers, through culturally safe services, affordable housing, employment access and anti-racism policies, remains limited and uneven.

Despite high educational attainment, particularly among racialized women (who are the most educated demographic group in Durham), systemic racism and sexism continue to hinder their full participation in the labour market. Structural barriers such as the devaluation of international credentials, gender and racial discrimination in hiring and lack of accessible employment services contribute to higher unemployment, wage suppression and poverty, particularly in rural areas, where infrastructure and services are lacking.

Housing inequality is a critical area of concern. Racialized residents, especially in Scugog, Brock and Oshawa, are more likely to experience unaffordable or inadequate housing. These patterns point to failures in all levels of government to deliver inclusive housing and settlement policies that address the intersecting realities of racialization, gender, geography and immigration status.

While federal strategies, such as the Government-Assisted Refugee (GAR) and Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) programs, have diversified smaller communities, they have not been matched by sufficient local infrastructure, targeted settlement supports, or anti-racism initiatives. Provincial and municipal responses remain fragmented and often overlook the racialized and gendered dimensions of poverty, housing exclusion and labour market discrimination, especially in rural Durham. To move toward equity and inclusion for racialized populations across Durham, we offer the following key policy and programmatic recommendations:

1. Expand and Fund Culturally Safe Housing Programs

- Increase the supply of affordable, high-quality and family-sized housing units in both urban and rural municipalities.
- Support non-profit and cooperative housing models that are community-governed and responsive to the needs of racialized and newcomer communities.
- Require all municipal housing strategies to include race- and gender-based analysis (GBA+) and set measurable equity targets.
- Ensure data collection and policy monitoring systems are disaggregated by race, gender, immigration status and geography to guide evidence-based equity interventions.

2. Strengthen Employment and Credential Recognition Supports

- Establish or scale up municipality-based employment hubs in rural areas, offering wraparound services including credential evaluation, sector bridging, language training, and culturally responsive job-matching.

- Provide targeted funding to community agencies to deliver **anti-racism and inclusive hiring training** to employers, particularly in sectors reliant on immigrant and racialized labour (e.g., caregiving, service, trades, tech).

3. Prioritize Funding for Community-focused Organizations

- Increase multi-year core funding to racialized- and immigrant-led organizations providing housing, settlement and employment support.
- Develop funding streams specifically targeting the needs of racialized children and youth, including after-school programming, mentorship, and access to safe public spaces.

4. Invest in Rural Integration Infrastructure

- Increase public transportation access to and within rural municipalities to connect residents to jobs, services and schools.
- Fund rural settlement agencies and service hubs, including mobile or hybrid service delivery models tailored to small-town and dispersed populations.
- Expand ESL, trauma-informed mental health and child care services in rural communities where racialized newcomers are settling.

In conclusion, racial equity in Durham Region cannot be achieved through diversity alone. It requires bold, intersectional, and place-based policy responses that dismantle systemic barriers and invest in the resilience and potential of racialized communities. Ensuring racialized residents, particularly women, youth, and rural newcomers, have equitable access to housing, education, employment and civic life is essential for building a just, prosperous, and inclusive future for all in Durham.

Housing, Settlement, Employment & Social Services in Durham Region

Housing Services

Affordable housing providers: programs under Canada–Ontario Affordable Housing (IAH) offering subsidized homes at ~80 % of average market rent.

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD): provides direct, personalized, supports to individuals and families in securing and maintaining safe, stable housing. CDCD Housing Program serve clients who may be experiencing homelessness, at risk of eviction, or new to Canada.

Cornerstone Community Association Durham: transitional housing for single transient men and women, with wrap-around supports.

Durham Access to Social Housing (DASH): central wait-list for Durham Region's Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) and modified (accessible) housing in community/social housing providers.

Durham Regional Local Housing Corporation (DRLHC): the largest social housing provider in Durham, offering RGI units.

Housing Supports & Housing Stability Program (HSP): Durham Region provide housing support across all municipalities.

John Howard Society of Durham Region: delivers Housing Stability Program intake, Ontario Electricity Support applications, settlement support referrals for Oshawa/Whitby (youth, women, newcomers). Also operates alternative housing programs for youth 16–22, women with children, survivors of trauma (e.g., via YWCA partnerships).

North House (Uxbridge/Port Perry): intake for Housing Stability Program, assists with DASH applications, newcomer housing navigation, supports low-income & refugee claimant eligibility.

Other community-based co-ops: located across Ajax and Oshawa and offering RGI or subsidized housing.

Settlement & Social Services

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD): provides settlement services and Newcomer Youth Services including leadership programs, workshops, referrals on housing, legal, social support.

Durham Black Educators Network: A network of Durham District School Board (DDSB) educators, representing Durham's Black diaspora, who help optimizing education experiences for students, parents, community and staff within DDSB.

Durham Community Action Group: provides a range of services to support the community, including a food pantry, seniors programming and supports, youth personal development, training and counseling.

Durham Family and Cultural Centre: A Durham-based organization that provides culturally focused programs (counselling, parenting, education, mentorship, child & youth development programs.

Durham Welcome Centre Immigrant Services: three Welcome Centers in Ajax, Pickering and Oshawa/Clarington providing free newcomer supports: housing search, forms assistance, referrals (employment, health, education), English classes, child supervision while in class

John Howard Society of Durham Region: delivers Housing Stability Program intake, Ontario Electricity Support applications, settlement support referrals for Oshawa/Whitby (youth, women, newcomers). Also operates alternative housing programs for youth 16–22, women with children, survivors of trauma (e.g., via YWCA partnerships).

Women's Multicultural Resource & Counselling Centre of Durham (WMRCC): culturally-responsive, trauma-informed counselling, crisis supports, youth & children's programs, newcomer support, mentorship, anti-racism advocacy.

Employment Services

Durham Region Unemployed Help Centre (DRUHC): provides job seekers and employers with a single location to access a range of employment-related services and resources.

Racialized Children & Youth — Afterschool & Community Supports

Newcomer Youth Services: by CDCD and Welcome Centre: orientation workshops, school-based settlement supports, youth leadership programs, parent-and-youth sessions. These are tailored to newcomer and racialized youth in Ajax, Oshawa and surrounding areas.

WMRCC youth & children programming: trauma-informed, culturally responsive counselling, mentorship, outreach, crisis support targeted to racialized youth and girls of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds.

Mental Health Services

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD): Newcomer Mental Health & Wellness: offers immediate, culturally sensitive, short-term counselling via Mental Health Settlement Workers for adults age 13+ in multiple languages (e.g. Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu). Also provides wellness workshops and regular check-ins under Newcomer Wellness initiative.

IFARADA Centre for Excellence: Ifarada seeks to support, heal and empower community members through the use of holistic interventions, providing services that include individual psychotherapy, family therapy, child and youth therapy, group therapy, life coaching and more.

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