



Racialized Populations in Oshawa

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Land Acknowledgement and Historical Context

We begin this report by acknowledging that Oshawa is situated on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, part of the Michi Saagiig (Mississauga) Nation. For thousands of years before the arrival of European settlers, these lands and waters were home to Indigenous peoples, including the Mississaugas, Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee and Wendat Nations. These communities maintained deep relationships with the land rooted in care, responsibility, and stewardship.

The history of Oshawa and its surroundings is shaped by settler treaty-making and land acquisition processes, including the Williams Treaties of 1923, which enabled European settlement while undermining Indigenous land rights, governance and self-determination. These treaties were marked by unequal power relations, lack of informed consent and failures by settler governments to honour their commitments. The impacts of these processes continue to be felt today through the ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples and persistent social, economic and territorial inequities.

Oshawa's development from a milling and agricultural centre to an industrial and manufacturing centre in the late 19th and 20th centuries unfolded on these dispossessed lands and benefited from Canadian planning and policies that excluded Indigenous peoples and racialized populations. While this report focuses on the current realities of racialized populations in Oshawa, we affirm that any discussion of equity and inclusion must begin by acknowledging the colonial foundations of the town itself and the ongoing presence and resistance of Indigenous communities.

Oshawa has undergone significant demographic change in recent years. What was once a largely homogeneous, White, industrial city has become an increasingly diverse, multiracial urban centre. Shifts in Canadian immigration policy since the late 1960s, along with broader housing and economic pressures across the Greater Toronto Area, have brought newcomers from the Caribbean, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East, many of whom have made Oshawa their home.

We offer this Community Lens Report as one small step toward building a fuller understanding of the living conditions and experiences of racialized residents in Oshawa today, and the structural forces that continue to shape their opportunities, exclusions and struggles. We also recognize that Indigenous experiences and conditions are distinct from those of racialized populations. A forthcoming report will explore Indigenous realities in Durham Region.

Labour Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the essential labour of racialized peoples whose labour has shaped Oshawa from its earliest days to the present. The history of labour and settlement in Oshawa and Durham Region cannot be separated from Canada's displacement of Indigenous peoples and the country's broader reliance on enslaved Blacks, indentured workers from Asia, migrant labourers and temporary foreign workers from the global south, whose efforts were often marked by coercion, racial exclusion and systemic inequities.

As a manufacturing city, Oshawa's growth was closely tied to the automotive industry and unionized industrial labour. While these jobs provided economic stability for many White working-class families, racialized, immigrant and women workers were frequently excluded from secure employment or confined to lower-paid, less protected roles. As Oshawa's economy shifted away from manufacturing toward service, care, logistics and retail sectors, racialized workers (particularly newcomers and racialized women) became increasingly concentrated in precarious and low-wage employment.

This report provides a snapshot of the living conditions and experiences of racialized populations in Oshawa 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 Oshawa where the contributions of racialized and Indigenous workers are fully recognized and respected.

Introduction

The area called Oshawa today sits on the lands of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation, part of the larger Michi Saagiig (Mississauga) Nation. For thousands of years, Indigenous communities including the Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe people lived, traded, governed and cared for these lands. The arrival of the French and British settlers and their imposed treaties changed everything. British-imposed land treaties signed under duress or without informed consent, along with the expansion of settler industries, led to the displacement and marginalization of these nations. Today, while Indigenous peoples continue to live in and around Oshawa, their histories are often erased from mainstream narratives about the city's development.

By the late 18th century, Oshawa had already evolved into a British fur-trading post; it was first incorporated as a village in 1850, and later as a city in 1924. For most of its history, Oshawa was a predominantly White, working-class, manufacturing city built on Indigenous lands. British Loyalists and later European immigrants helped grow the city in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially during the rise of General Motors, which made Oshawa a symbol of Canada's industrial boom. Oshawa's population was primarily of British and Irish descent.

The opening of the Canadian immigration system to non-White populations in the late 1960s, along with the prominence of globalization and automation since the 1990s, have reshaped the local economy and who calls Oshawa home. By prioritizing education and skills over race-based categories, the system allowed growing numbers of racialized¹ immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America to settle in Canada, including in suburban cities like Oshawa. The 2021 Census reflects the depth of this transformation. As Toronto and the GTA experienced rapid population growth and escalating housing pressures, Oshawa emerged as a key suburban destination for racialized, immigrant and newcomer families seeking affordability, stability and community connection. Between 2016 and 2021, Oshawa's population grew by 6.7%, while its racialized population grew by 28.8%. In 2021, over 29% of the city's residents identified as racialized, including large and rapidly growing South Asian, Black, Filipino, Chinese, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian and West Asian communities.

At the same time, racialized residents in Oshawa face persistent and systemic inequities. Despite having higher-than-average levels of education and strong labour force participation, racialized communities, particularly racialized women, experience higher unemployment, lower wages and higher poverty rates than the total population. These inequalities extend into the housing sector, where racialized families face greater rates of unaffordable and unsuitable housing and are disproportionately represented among households living in dwellings requiring major repair. These findings demonstrate that the barriers facing racialized residents are structural, not individual; they are shaped by intersections of racial and gender identities, immigration status, and economic change.

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."

As the Region's social planning and primary settlement organization in Durham Region, Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) recognizes the importance of accessible, disaggregated, community-focused data to inform equitable policies and programs. This report is the third volume in CDCD's series on racialized populations in Durham Region and provides the first statistically grounded snapshot of the socio-economic and housing conditions of racialized populations in Oshawa, based on the latest available Census data from 2021. This report will be followed by a similar report on Pickering. While this report does not claim to offer a comprehensive or qualitative account of the experiences of all racialized residents, it aims to support evidence-informed discussions about equity, inclusion and systemic change in Oshawa.

We acknowledge the limitations of relying solely on Census data, particularly in capturing the full diversity, complexity, and lived experiences of racialized communities. Nevertheless, this is the first report focused specifically on the situations of racialized populations in Oshawa. It is intended as a foundation for ongoing dialogue, community-based research, and action to address the persistent structural barriers that shape the lives of racialized residents in Oshawa.

Demographics & Diversity in Oshawa

Between 2016 and 2021, Oshawa experienced a major shift in its population, especially among racialized communities, reflecting both national immigration trends and regional economic and housing pressures. While the city's total population increased by 6.7% over the five-year period (from 159,458 to 170,071), the number of racialized residents grew by 28.8% (from 30,470 to 50,280). This means that nearly one in every three new residents added to Oshawa during that time was racialized. In 2021, racialized people made up over 29% of Oshawa's total population and over 20% of all racialized residents in Durham Region.

This growth did not happen in a vacuum; it reflects broader changes shaped by past immigration policies, urban development and economic restructuring in Canada and Ontario. Historically, Oshawa was built on the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation and became a European settler town in the 19th century. British and Irish immigrants formed the core of the early population, and the city grew around manufacturing, in particular the rise of General Motors in the 20th century (Hood, 1978; High, 2003).

Oshawa's racialized population	# of racialized residents	% of racialized population
Total racialized population	50,280	100.00
South Asian	16,235	32.3
Black	15,425	30.7
Filipino	4,325	8.6
Chinese	3,125	6.2
West Asian	2,120	4.2
Arab	1,250	2.5
Latin American	2,280	4.5
Southeast Asian	770	1.5
Korean	465	0.9
Japanese	135	0.3
Other racialized	1,870	3.7

Table 1: Distribution of different racialized groups in Oshawa Source: Statistics Canada Census 2021

The introduction of the points system in 1967 opened the door for skilled immigrants from around the world, particularly from the global south. Over subsequent decades, immigration from South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and the Middle East steadily increased.

From 2016 to 2021, as Table 1 shows, South Asian² residents in Oshawa more than doubled, growing by an astonishing 185% to reach 16,235 people, or 32.3% of the town's racialized residents. Black³ residents were the second largest group at 15,425, making up 30.7% of the city's racialized residents. Other growing communities included Filipinos (8.6%), Chinese (6.2%), Latin Americans⁴ (4.5%) and West Asians⁵ (4.2%). These numbers tell a deeper story: Oshawa, like many cities on the edges of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), has become a key destination for newcomers and second-generation immigrant families priced out of Toronto. With the ongoing increase in property values and rents in Toronto since the early 2000s, working- and middle-class immigrant families looked eastward to more affordable cities like Oshawa (Biles et al., 2013). With its access to highways and commuter trains, Oshawa has become a suburban hub, attracting families looking for space, jobs, and community. This suburbanization of diversity is not unique to Durham Region, as we can also observe similar patterns in the regions of Peel and York.

This growth also reflects the decline of Oshawa's manufacturing base. In past decades, the automotive sector provided stable jobs to largely White, male workers. But since the 1990s, globalization, automation and the outsourcing of manufacturing have led to plant closures and job losses in the city (High, 2003). As Oshawa's economy diversified into education, services, logistics and retail, new forms of labour emerged, often filled by newcomers, racialized workers and women. Consequently, Oshawa has turned into a growing, multiracial city whose future will depend on how well the city supports and integrates its diverse populations.

Immigration Status of Oshawa's Racialized Populations

In 2021, more than half (52.9%) of Oshawa's racialized population were immigrants,⁶ compared to just 22.1% of the city's total population. This means that newcomers are not evenly distributed across all

² 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).

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ We follow Statistics Canada's definition of "immigrant" as "a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident," meaning they were not born in Canada or did not have Canadian citizenship at birth. (Continued on next page).

population groups; they are overwhelmingly racialized. The strong majority (80.6%) of the city's racialized populations were Canadian citizens in 2021, showing that many have put down permanent roots.

Among all racialized immigrants, the largest share (58%) were first-generation Canadians (people who immigrated themselves rather than being born to immigrant parents in Canada). These numbers reflect the deep and continuing impact of immigration policy changes that began in 1967, when Canada replaced race-based immigration rules with a points-based system prioritizing education, work experience and language skills (Li, 2003; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). This opened the door for immigrants from South Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, communities that now make up much of Oshawa's racialized population.

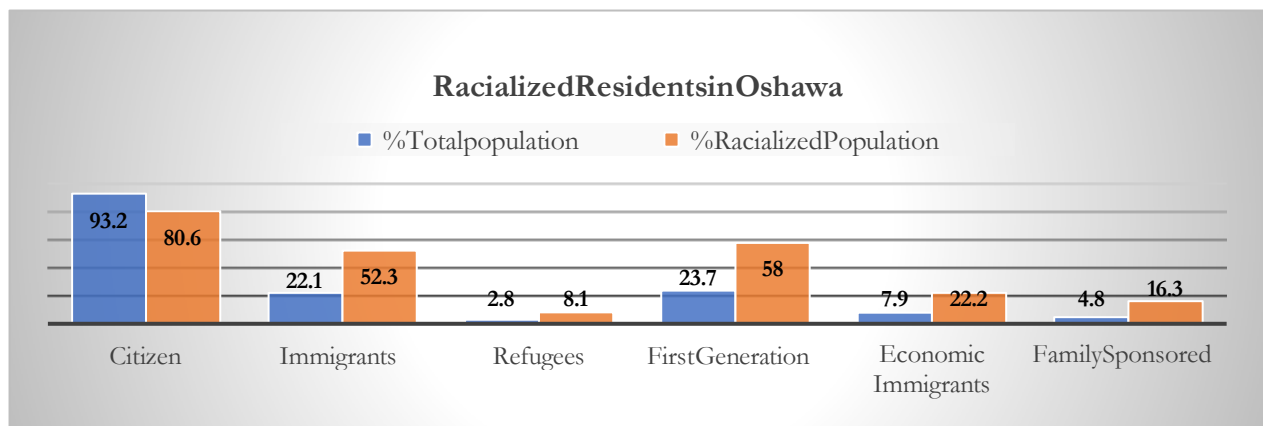


Figure 1: Immigration status & class of racialized and total populations in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Not all immigrants come to Canada in the same way. As demonstrated in Figure 1, about 22.2% of Oshawa's racialized immigrants arrived through the economic class (typically skilled workers and professionals), while 16.3% came through family reunification programs. A smaller but significant group (8.1%) arrived as refugees. This refugee figure is more than double the rate for the total population of Oshawa (2.8%).

Gender also matters when it comes to immigration status, as gendered assumptions have been central to Canada's immigration policies in the 20th century. Black women, as Figure 2 shows, had the highest rate of Canadian citizenship (85.9%) among racialized women and the lowest rate of immigrant status (40.3%) in Oshawa. These numbers indicate that many Black women are second-generation Canadians or long-term residents due to gender-based Canadian immigration policies that brought women for domestic and caregiver work from the Caribbean since the mid-20th century, before the opening up of the immigration policy. In contrast, 64.8% of South Asian women were immigrants, the highest among all racialized female groups, suggesting more recent migration. West Asian and Arab women had the

This category does not include temporary residents (e.g. international students, temporary foreign workers, visitors), Canadian citizens born abroad to Canadian parents and non-permanent residents (unless they later obtained PR status).

highest refugee rates (28.7% and 22.2%, respectively), reflecting the impact of global conflicts, such as continuous and ongoing wars in the Middle East.

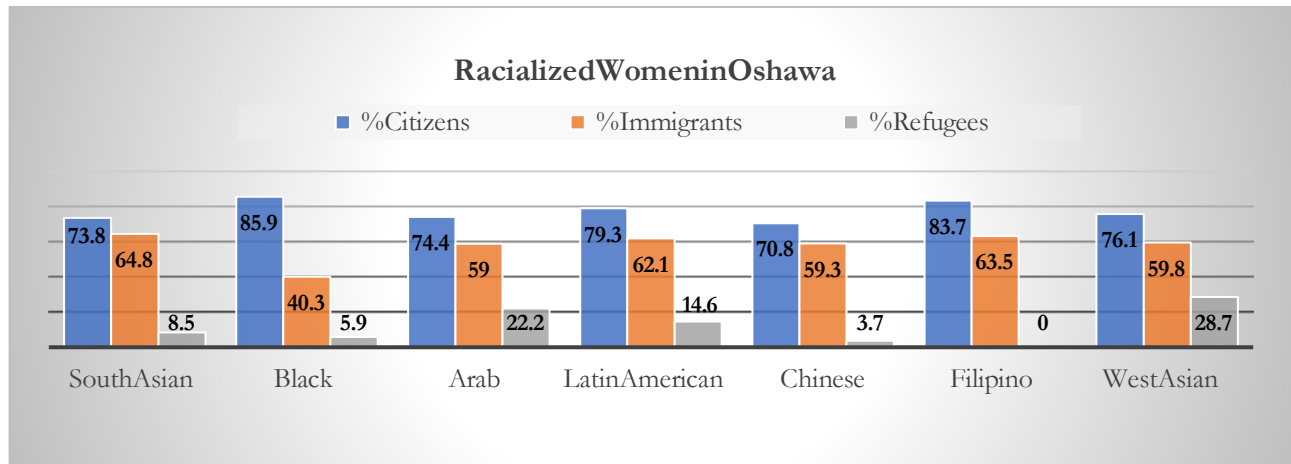


Figure 2: Immigration status of main groups of racialized women in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Similar patterns emerge for men as Figure 3 demonstrates. West Asian men had the highest rates of both immigrant (61.4%) and refugee (40.9%) status, followed closely by Arab men (59.4% immigrant, 24.8% refugee). Latin American men had the highest overall immigrant rate (61%), while Black men had the highest citizenship rate (85.8%), again showing the longer presence of Black communities in Canada.

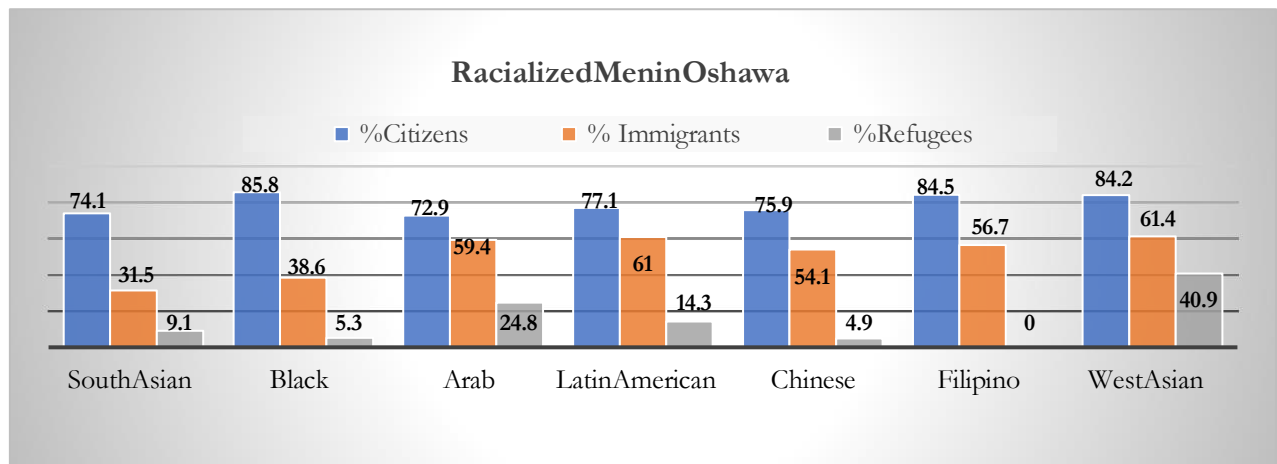


Figure 3: Immigration status of main groups of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

These numbers are not just statistics; they represent very different migration experiences and levels of vulnerability. For example, economic immigrants often arrive with higher education but may face credential barriers and systemic discrimination in hiring practices. Refugees may arrive with urgent

needs for housing, language training and trauma support. Family-class immigrants might come to care for children or elders and need services that recognize their unpaid caregiving roles (Bushell & Shields, 2017).

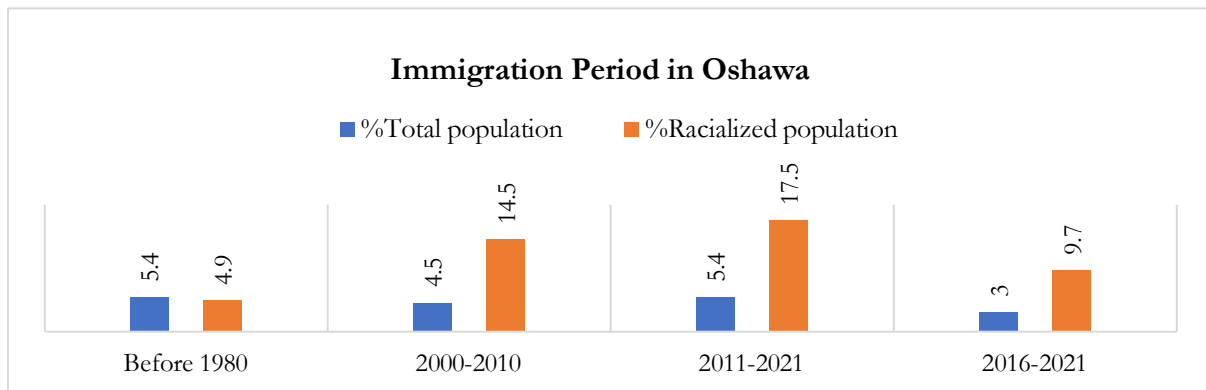


Figure 4: Immigration period of total & racialized populations in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The 2021 Census also reveals important trends about the immigration period of racialized residents in Oshawa. Only 4.9% of Oshawa's racialized residents in 2021 immigrated before 1980, an expected result given Canada's former White Canada Policy and its discrimination against non-White populations. Racialized immigration to Canada only began to slowly grow after the 1970s, following major policy shifts and human rights reforms (Walker, 2008). Since then, Oshawa's transformation into a suburban alternative to Toronto has drawn more newcomers, especially since the 2000s. Not surprisingly, over 45% of the city's racialized populations arrived between 2011 and 2021, compared to only 19% among non-racialized immigrants.

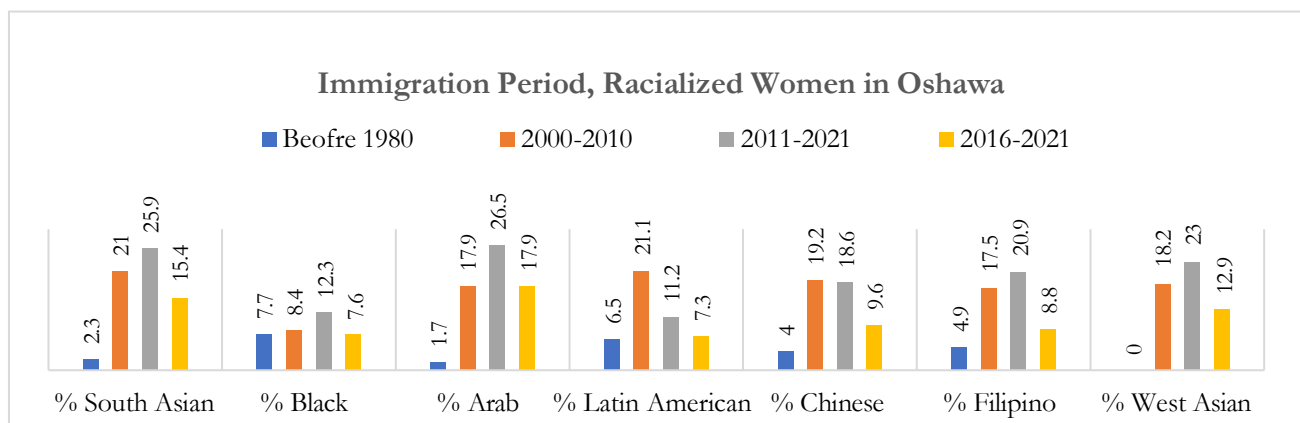


Figure 5: Immigration period of main groups of racialized women in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Not all racialized groups have had a similar immigration period or path, as Figure 5 shows. For example, Black women had the highest rate of immigration before 1980, followed by Latin American women; trends that are directly related to the gender-based, labour and family reunification policies of Canada. Arab, South Asian, West Asian and Filipino women had the highest rate of immigration between 2011 and 2021, while Latin American and Chinese women had their highest rate of immigration between 2000 and 2010.

As Figure 6 demonstrates, West Asian, Chinese, Filipino, Arab and Latin American men all showed the highest levels of migration since the 2000s. For example, 8.1% of Latin American men arrived before 1980 (higher than any other group), but the majority came in the last two decades. These more recent arrivals coincide with Oshawa's shift from an industrial-based economy to a more diverse, service-oriented urban hub (High, 2003; Harris, 2003).

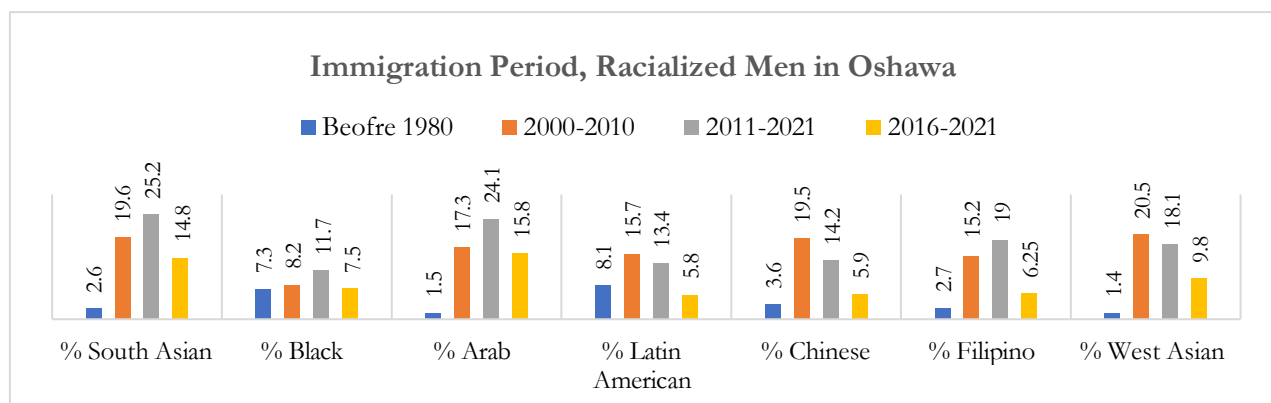


Figure 6: Immigration period of main groups of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Understanding these immigration patterns is critical for local planning and policy. The fact that most of Oshawa's racialized population are immigrants and that many arrived recently means service providers must design culturally safe, linguistically accessible and trauma-informed programs. This includes everything from job training and housing support to healthcare, education, and community services.

This data is also a reminder for local policymakers and politicians to consider how gender and racial identities, immigration status and length of residency shape the challenges people face. For example, a newcomer Arab woman with refugee status and limited English may need very different supports than a second-generation Black Canadian woman with deep community ties. Similarly, family-sponsored elders may struggle with social isolation or lack of access to transportation, while younger skilled immigrants may face job market discrimination despite strong qualifications. In other words, Oshawa's rapid demographic change is not just a result of immigration; it is a result of how immigration intersects with racial and gender identities, class, settlement policy, and place. Recognizing this complexity is essential to building a more equitable and inclusive city.

Education Levels of Racialized Populations in Oshawa

The education profile of Oshawa's racialized populations reveals one of the most striking aspects of the city's demographic transformation between 2016 and 2021: racialized populations, particularly women, show high levels of educational attainment, even though the overall rate for racialized populations remains slightly below the city's total population. In 2021, 28.8% of Oshawa's racialized populations held a postsecondary credential, compared to 31.5% of the city's total population. Racialized women, as a demographic group, had the highest rate (33.8%) of having a bachelor's degree or higher, well above the 20.8% rate among total women. This data directly challenges long-standing racist narratives that portray newcomers (particularly racialized immigrants) as less educated or less skilled (Galabuzi 2006). In reality, Canada's point-based immigration system, adopted in 1967 and developed in the 1970s, has consistently prioritized applicants with higher education, professional skills and official language proficiency (Li, 2003; Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). Yet this higher educational attainment does not always translate into equal access to jobs or economic stability. Many racialized immigrants face systemic barriers to employment, including racism in hiring, lack of recognition for international credentials and limited access to training pathways (Bushell & Shields, 2017).

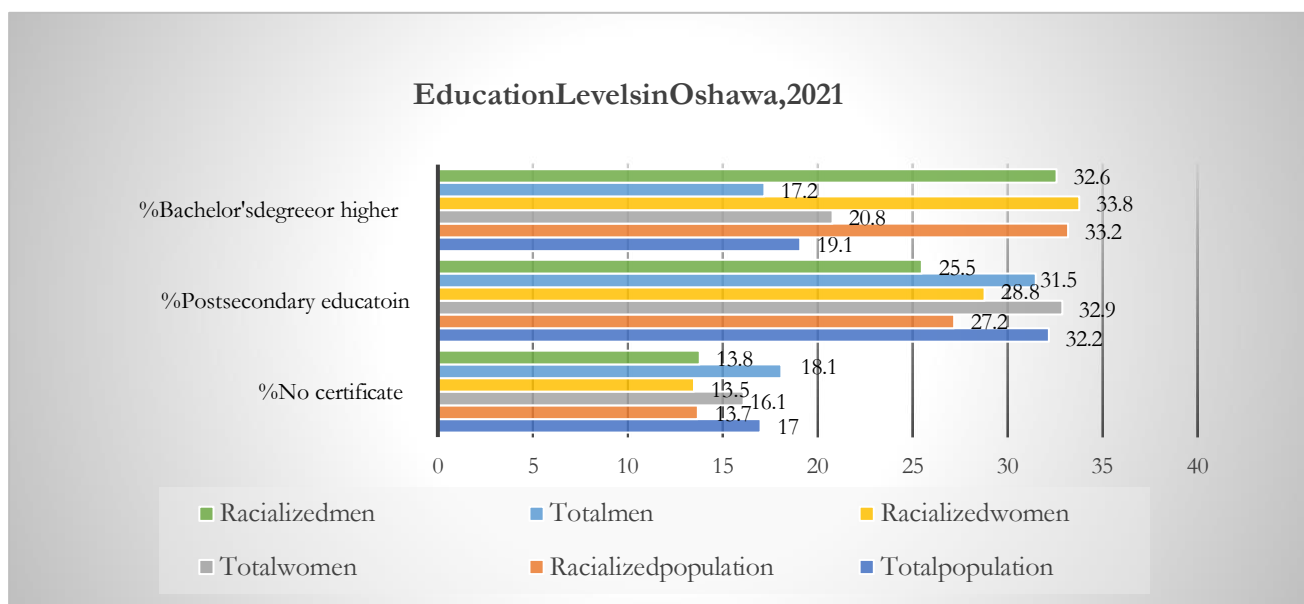


Figure 7: Education levels of racialized & total populations in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

As discussed earlier, more than half of Oshawa's racialized residents are immigrants, with a significant share arriving between 2000 and 2021. Many came through the economic class, selected precisely for their educational and occupational backgrounds. This policy design explains the data in Figures 8 and 9, showing why groups like Filipino and South Asian residents (two of Oshawa's fastest-growing racialized communities) show the highest postsecondary attainment rates. As we see in Figure 8, in

2021, 60% of Filipino women held a postsecondary credential, while almost half (46.3%) of South Asian women had a bachelor's degree or higher.

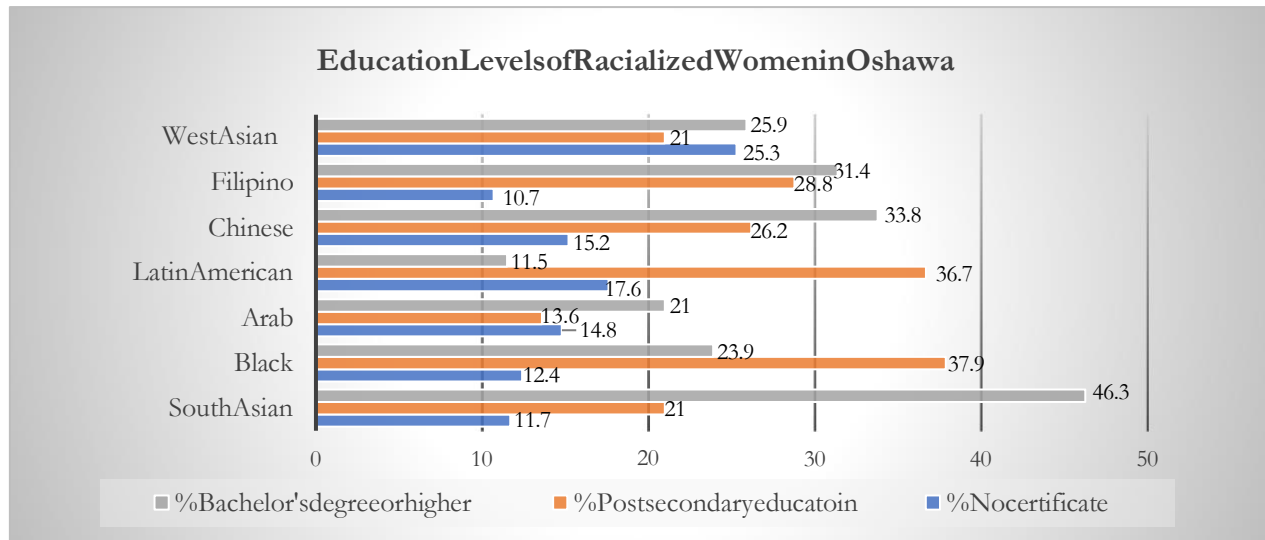


Figure 8: Education levels of the main groups of racialized women in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

These statistics reflect not just individual effort but also systemic factors. For example, Filipino women often migrate as part of Canada's caregiver and healthcare streams, which favour applicants with postsecondary training (Pratt, 2012). In contrast, West Asian and Arab women, who had lower overall levels of education in 2021, are more likely to arrive as refugees or under family sponsorship, which may impact their access to pre-arrival education or ability to pursue education post-migration (Shields et al., 2016).

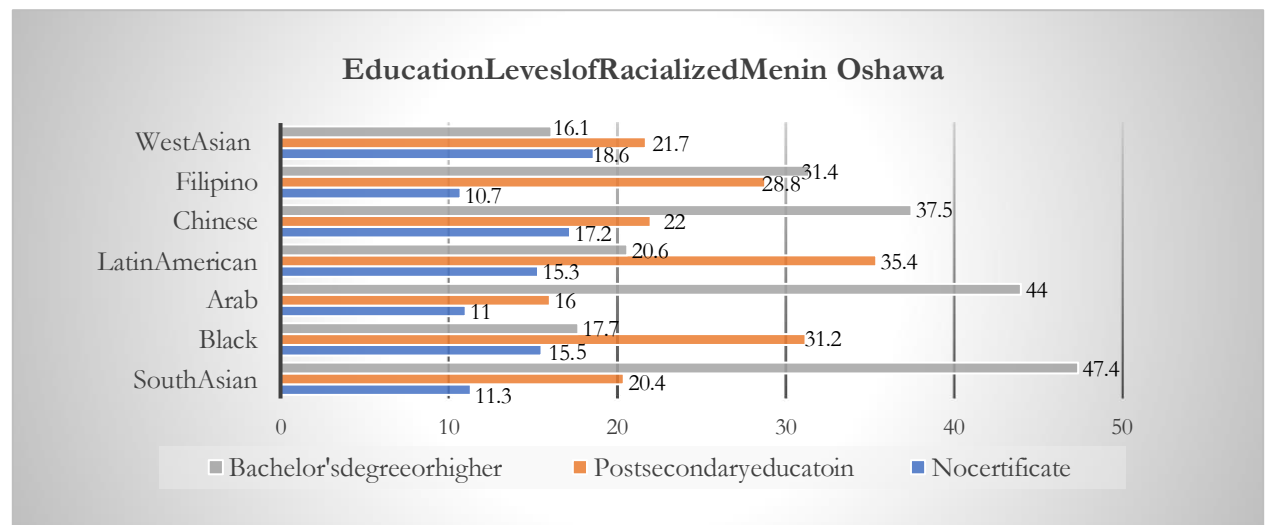


Figure 9: Education levels of the main groups of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Figure 9 demonstrates similar trends among Oshawa’s racialized men, in spite of the fact that racialized women had higher education. South Asian and Filipino men had the highest levels of postsecondary education (67.8% and 60%, respectively) in 2021. South Asian men also led in having bachelor’s degree or higher, with 47.4% achieving that level. In contrast, West Asian and Black men had the lowest levels of educational attainment. This educational gap among racialized men may be connected to several factors, including pre-migration access to education, conditions of migration and ongoing structural barriers and racism in the education system in Canada (Galabuzi, 2006; Walks, 2013). For example, groups with higher refugee representation (e.g., West Asians and Arabs) face more challenges accessing education before and after arrival due to displacement, trauma, or lack of institutional support (Bushell & Shields, 2017).

For service providers in Oshawa and Durham Region, this data demonstrates that racialized and immigrant residents, in particular women, are highly educated but may still struggle to access jobs that reflect their qualifications. The data also signals the need for targeted interventions, such as credential recognition programs, bridging courses, anti-racist hiring practices and language-accessible professional training, without which Oshawa risks wasting the skills and potential of a growing share of its residents. Finally, this data invites educators, employers and policymakers to challenge assumptions about who is “qualified” and who is “in need.” Addressing these gaps is essential to building an inclusive and equitable Oshawa and Durham Region.

Employment Reality of Oshawa's Racialized Populations

The 2021 Census shows that racialized residents in Oshawa participate in the labour market at rates equal to or higher than the general population, yet remain far more likely to experience unemployment and precarious work. These disparities cannot be explained by personal qualifications or “lack of skills,” as racialized communities in Oshawa have some of the highest rates of postsecondary education in the city. Instead, these disparities reflect long-standing structural inequalities in Canada’s labour market, barriers rooted in systemic racism, unequal access to settlement and employment services and economic restructuring that has narrowed pathways to stable, well-paid jobs (Block & Galabuzi, 2018; Galabuzi, 2006).

In 2021, as Figure 10 shows, racialized residents in Oshawa had a labour force participation rate of 69.6%, higher than that of the city’s total population (64.5%). Racialized men (74.7%) and women (64.9%) both have higher participation rates than those of their total counterparts, challenging persistent stereotypes that newcomers are less willing to work. Despite this high participation, racialized communities, as Figure 10 also shows, experienced higher unemployment rates. The unemployment rate for racialized residents was 14.7%, compared to 13.2% for the total population in Oshawa, with racialized women experiencing the highest unemployment at 16.4%, despite the fact that as a group they had the highest level of education.

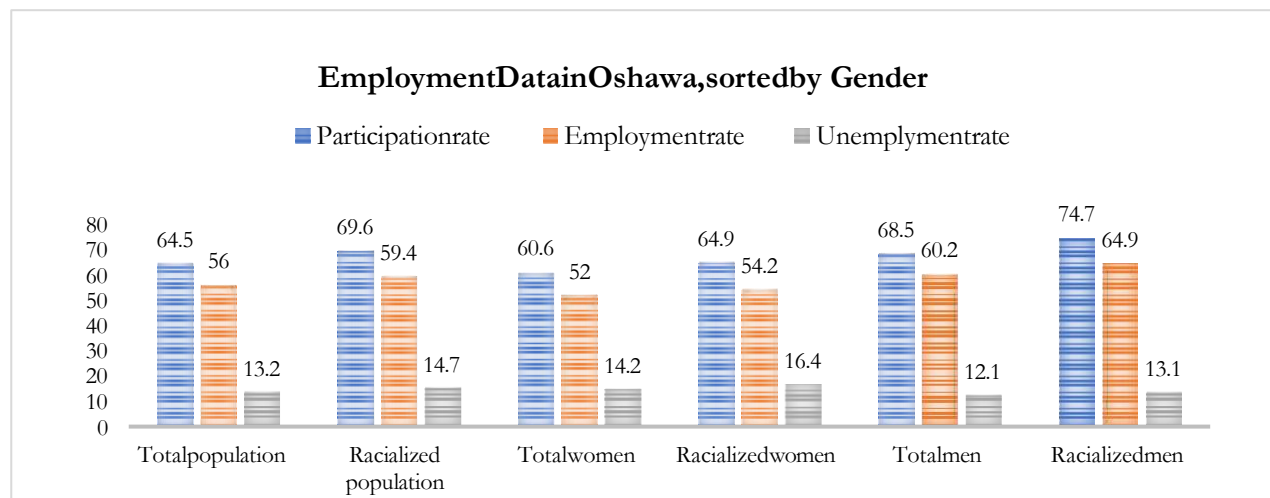


Figure 10: Employment data of racialized & total populations in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

This disconnect between education and employment is striking. As noted in the previous section, racialized populations, especially women, often arrive in Canada with strong educational qualifications (Li, 2003; Galabuzi, 2006). Yet systemic racism, non-recognition of international credentials, employment discrimination and limited access to tailored employment services prevent many from accessing stable, well-paying jobs (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2004).

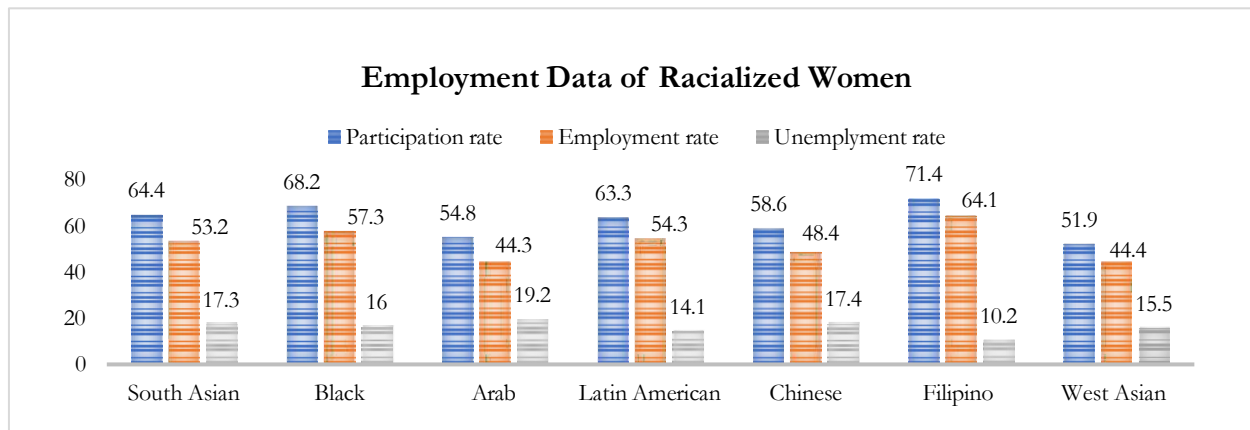


Figure 11: Employment data of main groups of racialized women in Oshawa Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Figures 11 and 12 show the complex intersections of racial and gender identities in employment. We can see the differences that both gender and various racial identities have made in racialized women access to jobs by 2021. Among Oshawa's racialized women, Filipino women had the highest participation rate (71.4%) and employment rate (64.1%). This reflects the concentration of Filipino women in caregiving and health sectors, areas shaped by Canada's labour migration streams, which actively recruited Filipinas into nursing and caregiving (Pratt, 2012). Even within health care, however, many remain in lower-wage, less secure jobs. Black women (68.2% participation rate; 57.3% employment rate) and South Asian women (64.4% participation rate; 53.2% employment rate) also showed strong engagement in the workforce. Yet, their unemployment rates (17.3% and 16% respectively) exceed that of total women (14.2%). This points to occupational segregation, where racialized women are overrepresented in retail, health and childcare, as well as personal service jobs that offer limited advancement and benefits. Meanwhile, Arab, Chinese and West Asian women had the highest level of unemployment rates (19.2%, 17.4%, 15.5% respectively). These numbers reflect how migration class, particularly for refugees and family-sponsored immigrants, can affect women's access stable employment.

Among racialized men, as shown in Figure 12, Latin American men had the highest participation (80.8%) and employment rates (69.9%), but as Figure 14 shows, they are heavily concentrated in construction, a sector prone to seasonal layoffs and lacking long-term stability. Meanwhile, Arab men faced the highest unemployment rate (21.1%), followed by Black men (14.3%), showing that even in male-dominated industries, racial discrimination and network exclusion limit access to good jobs (Block et al., 2014; Galabuzi, 2006).

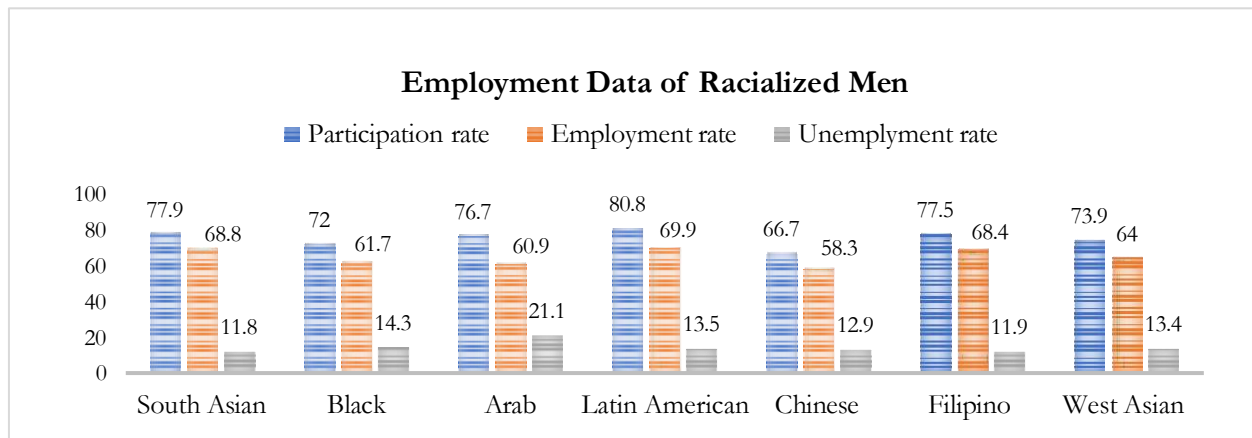


Figure 12: Employment data of main groups of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

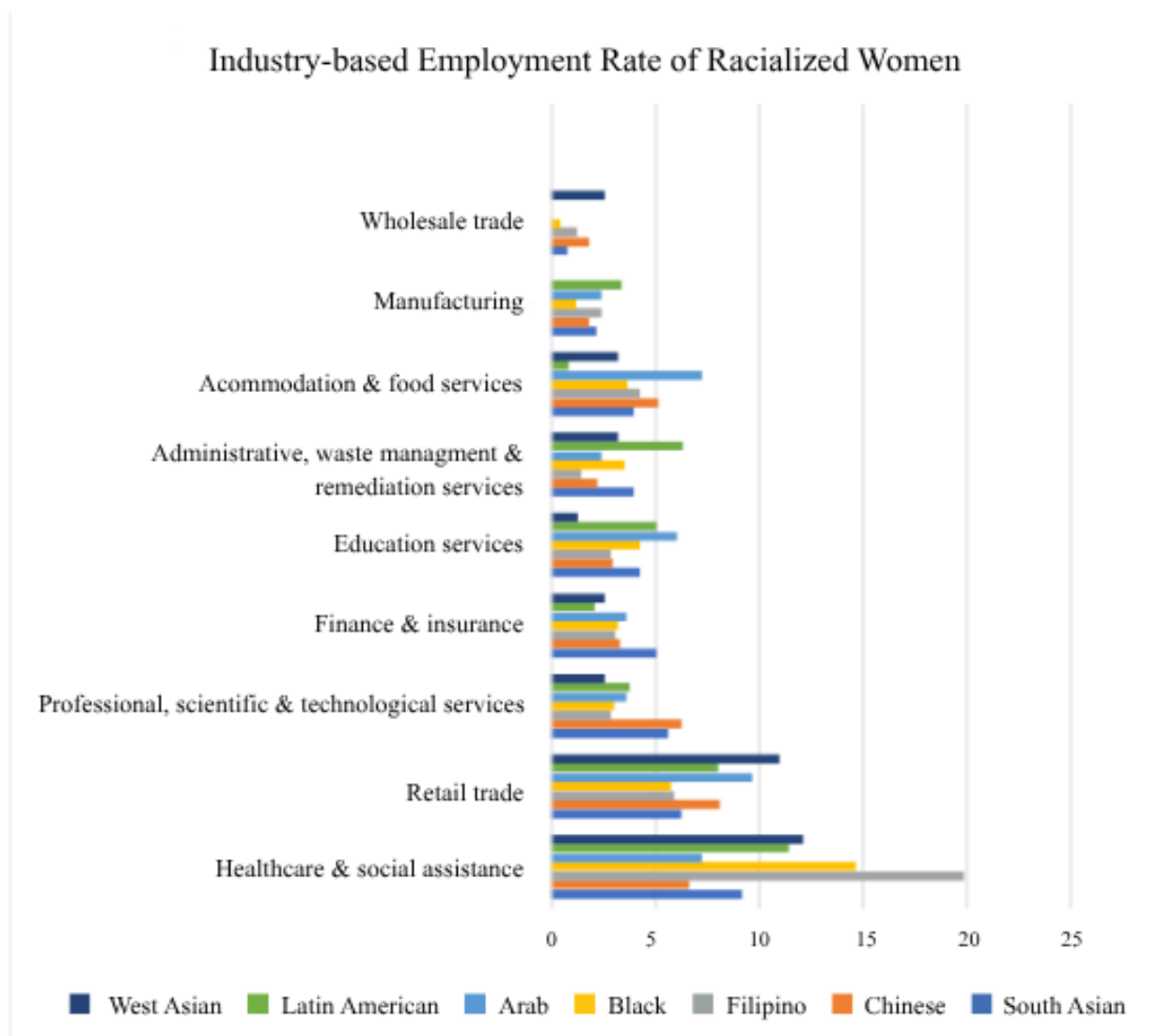


Figure 13: Industry-based employment data of main groups of racialized women in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

As Figures 13 and 14 demonstrate, the decline of unionized automotive manufacturing jobs in Oshawa (High 2003) has been replaced by employment in retail trade, transportation and warehousing, as well as health care and social assistance. These are sectors in which racialized workers are overrepresented. In fact, employment among racialized populations is highly concentrated in specific sectors. In 2021, among all racialized workers in Oshawa, the top industries were: health care & social assistance (14.6%); retail (13.1%); professional, scientific & technical services (9.1%); and transportation and warehousing (9.0%).

Racialized women were overrepresented in feminized, lower-wage sectors. The four top sectors for racialized women included: health care & social assistance (24.5%); retail trade (13.3%); professional services (8%) and education (7.8%). Notably, Filipino women were heavily concentrated in healthcare (39.9%), followed by Black women (29.5%), West Asian women (24.4%) and Latin American women (22.9%). Arab women were clustered in retail (19.5%), healthcare and social assistance (14.6%) and education (12.2%). Chinese women were most concentrated in retail (16.4%), health care & social assistance (14.6%) and education (12.2%). Chinese women were most concentrated in retail (16.4%), health care & social assistance (13.4%) and professional, scientific and technological services (12.7%).

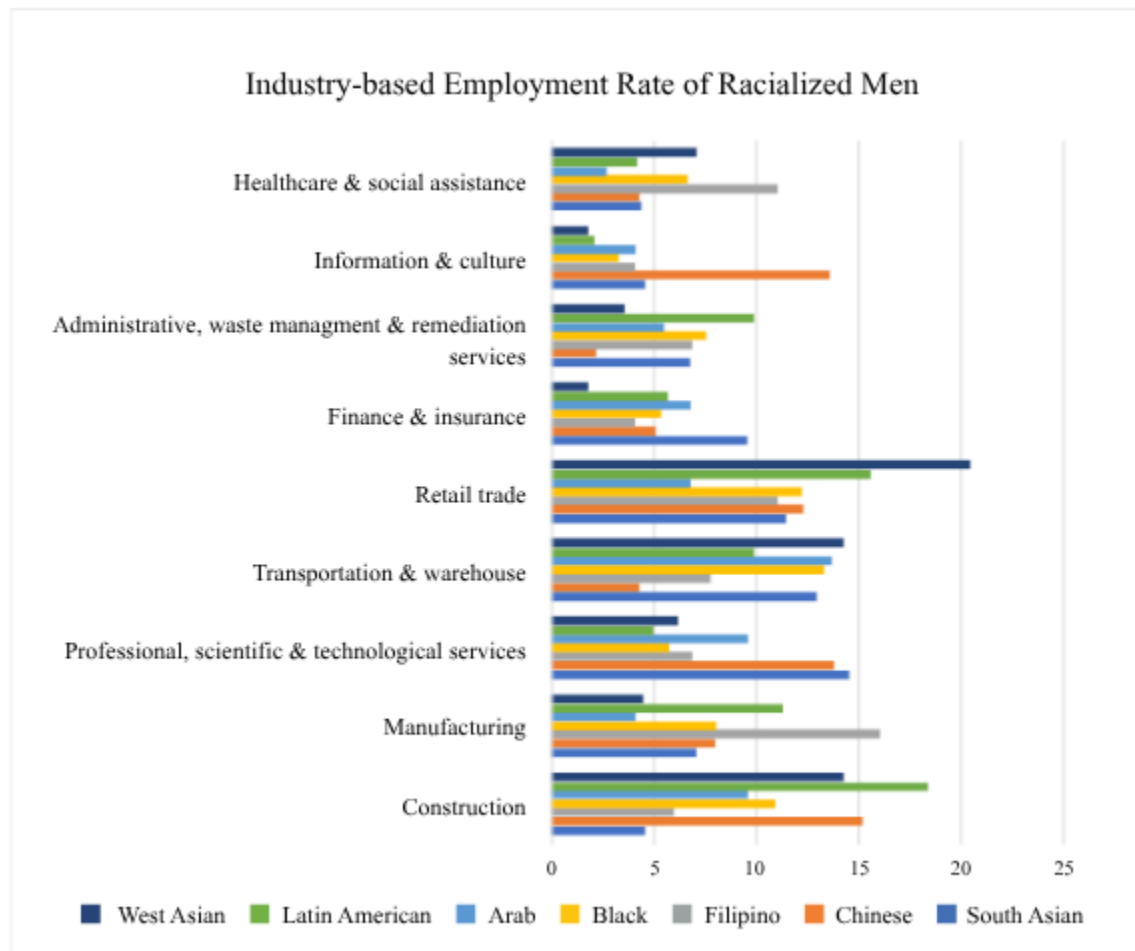


Figure 14: Employment data of main groups of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

While there is less gendered concentration among racialized men in particular jobs, still dominant industries included: retail trade (12.5%), transportation & warehousing (11.7%), professional, scientific & technological services (10%) and construction (9%). As Figure 14 shows, South Asian men led in professional, scientific & technological services (14.6%), transportation (13.7%) and retail (11.5%). Black men were concentrated in transportation (13.4%), retail (12.3%) and construction (11%). Latin American men had the highest presence in construction (18.4%) and retail (15.6%), reflecting historical access to manual labour and low-paid retail jobs, while West Asian men were heavily concentrated in retail (20.5%), transportation (14.3%) and construction (14.3%).

These patterns show clear occupational segregation based on racial and gender identities, a reflection of structural inequities that place certain groups in lower-paying, less secure jobs regardless of their education or experience (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2004).

Oshawa's employment trends cannot be understood without considering its industrial history. As a former automotive hub, Oshawa's economy once relied on stable, unionized manufacturing jobs filled primarily by White male workers. But the decline of the auto sector in the 2000s, combined with the city's rapid suburbanization and demographic shift, has led to a labour market increasingly stratified along racial and gender lines (High, 2003; Harris, 2003). Many racialized newcomers who arrived in Oshawa in the 2000s and 2010s were pushed into lower-wage service and care work, despite holding university degrees or professional training. This underemployment contributes to broader income inequality and limits social mobility. Employment outcomes are shaped not only by hiring practices but also by settlement service accessibility, housing affordability and transportation connectivity.

Income Levels of Racialized Populations in Oshawa

The 2021 Census income data makes clear that Oshawa’s racialized residents continue to face systemic economic inequities despite high levels of education and active labour force participation. Figures 15 through 17 show how racialized men and women earn significantly less than their non-racialized counterparts, reflecting both racial and gendered barriers in Canada’s labour market.

In 2020, the median income for racialized men in Oshawa was \$38,400 compared to \$44,800 for all men, while racialized women had the lowest median income of any group at just \$34,000 (Figure 15). This gendered wage gap is particularly concerning given earlier findings in this report that racialized women were among the most highly educated residents in Oshawa. These numbers demonstrate how systemic barriers (structural racism, credential non-recognition, hiring discrimination, occupational segregation and unequal access to opportunities) undermine the economic returns on education for racialized communities (Block & Galabuzi, 2021; Galabuzi 2006).

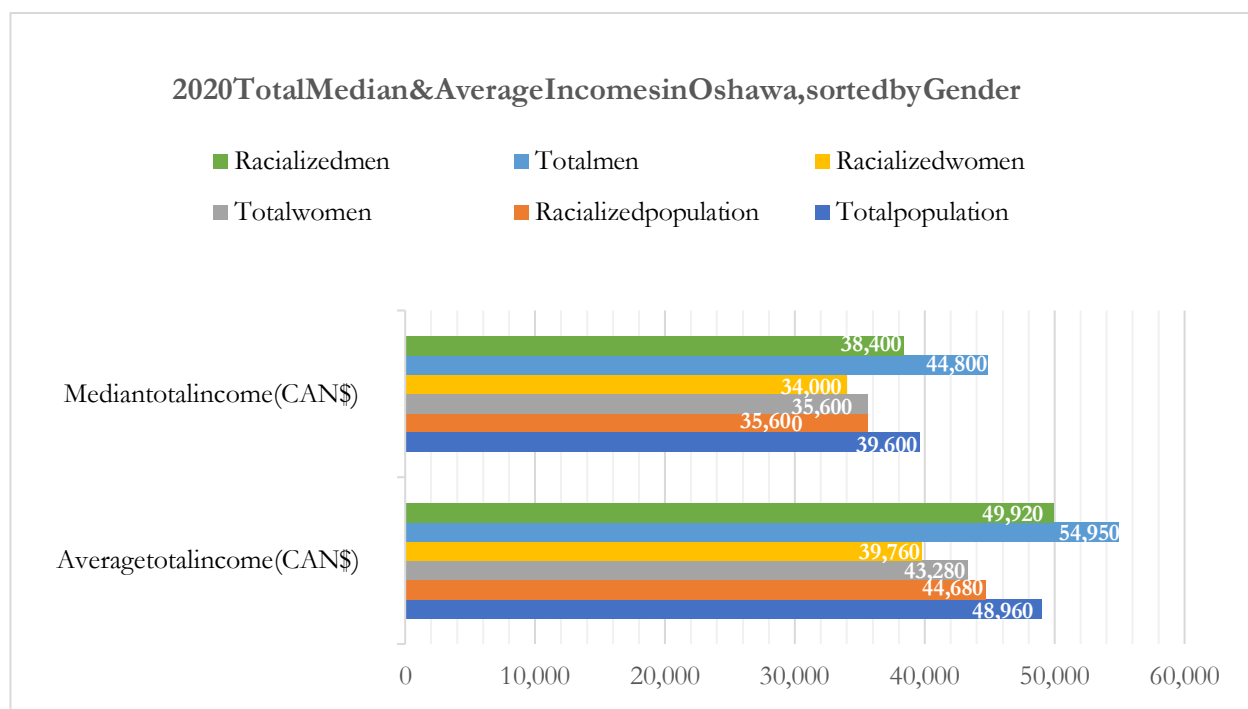


Figure 15: 2020 Total median & average income (CAN\$) in Oshawa, sorted by gender Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

As Figures 15 to 17 show, the wage gap is particularly stark at the intersection of racial and gender identities. Racialized women earn less than both racialized men and total women, illustrating the “double disadvantage” described in Canadian labour studies (Block & Galabuzi 2018). Filipino and Black women, as Figure 16 illustrates in detail, earned the highest median incomes among racialized women (\$38,000 and \$37,600 respectively), reflecting their concentration in health care and social assistance, sectors that provide relatively stable but modest wages. By contrast, South Asian women

earned \$30,200 and Chinese women earned \$29,200. These gaps cannot be explained by education, since South Asian and Chinese women in Oshawa (as demographic groups) hold some of the highest levels of postsecondary credentials (see Figure 8). Instead, these outcomes reflect structural exclusion: employers frequently discount international qualifications, and racialized women are often clustered in feminized, low-wage service jobs (Block & Galabuzi 2011).

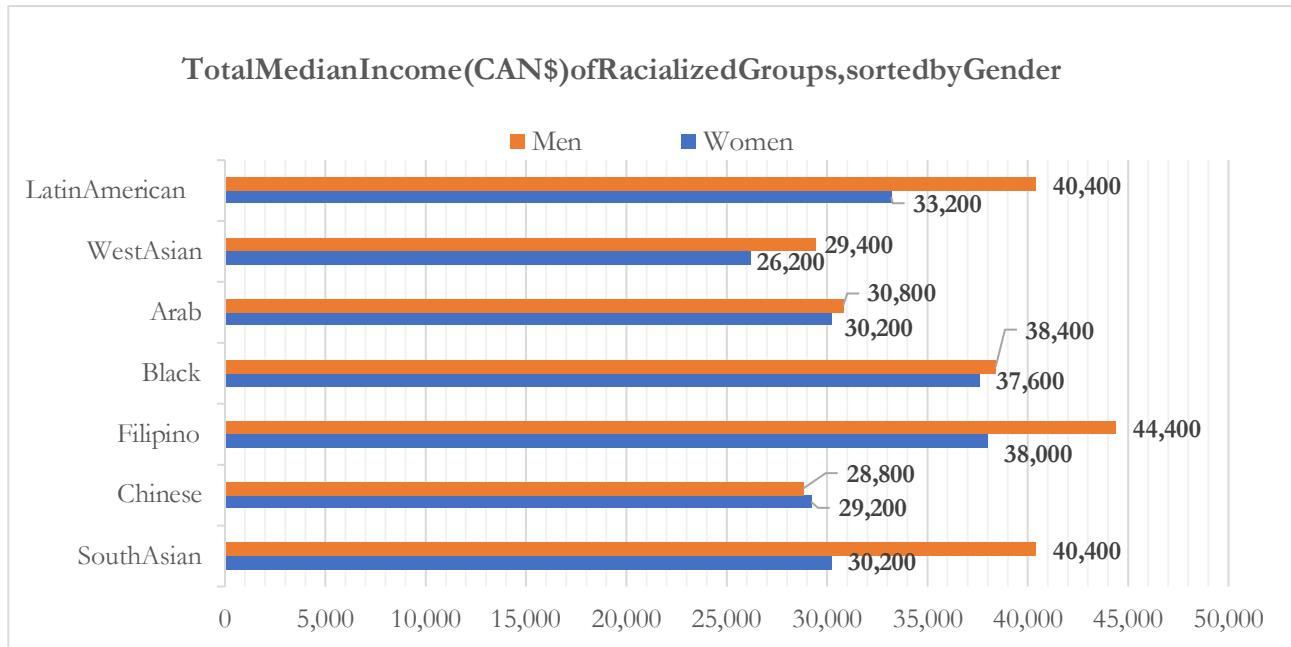


Figure 16: 2020 Total median incomes (CAN\$) of racialized groups in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Among racialized men, Filipino (\$44,400), Latin American (\$40,400) and South Asian men (\$40,400) reported the highest median incomes, while Chinese men had the lowest at \$28,800 (Figure 16). Despite relatively high educational attainment, Chinese men's lower earnings suggest persistent underemployment and barriers to entering professional sectors (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi 2004). For Latin American men, slightly higher incomes are linked to concentration in construction, which can provide decent short-term wages but is precarious and lacks long-term stability (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

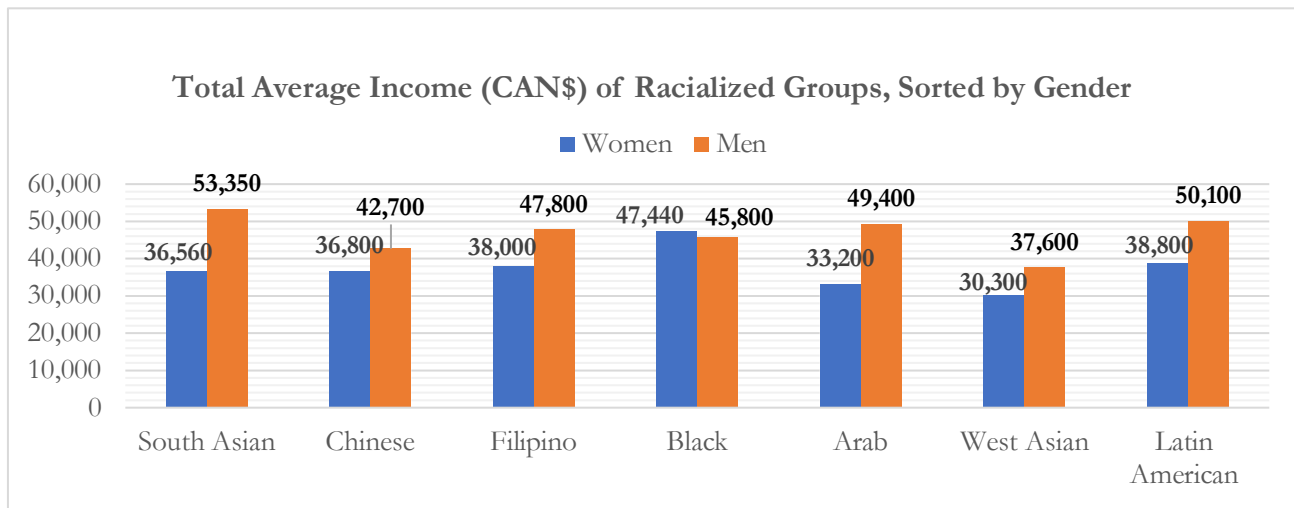


Figure 17: 2020 average incomes (CAN\$) of main racialized groups in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The wage gap is particularly stark at the intersection of race and gender. Racialized women earn less than both racialized men and total women, illustrating the “double disadvantage” described in Canadian labour studies (Block & Galabuzi, 2011). For example, while Filipino women report higher median earnings relative to other racialized women, they are still overrepresented in care work, where pay remains modest compared to male-dominated industries. Meanwhile, South Asian and Chinese women face both racial discrimination and occupational barriers, which limit their access to higher-paying jobs despite strong qualifications.

These disparities must be situated within Oshawa’s economic history. For decades, unionized automotive manufacturing provided stable, middle-class incomes, predominately for White men (High 2003). The decline of this sector since the 1990s and the rise of service, logistics and care work have restructured the city’s economy toward sectors that are lower paid, less secure and disproportionately staffed by racialized and immigrant workers (Harris, 2003; Walks 2013; Biles et al., 2013). The combination of racial discrimination in hiring, lack of union protection in emerging sectors and housing affordability pressures has left many racialized residents vulnerable to persistent income inequity.

Importantly, these income inequities cannot be explained by “lack of skills” among immigrants or newcomers; instead, they reflect systemic racism, gendered occupational segregation and inadequate policy supports for credential recognition and equitable employment. The persistence of these gaps underscores the need for stronger anti-racism frameworks in employment policy and practice, proactive credential recognition programs and expanded union protections in feminized and racialized industries. Without such structural reforms, Oshawa risks perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality for a significant portion of its growing population.

Poverty among Racialized Populations in Oshawa

The poverty patterns observed among racialized populations in Oshawa represent the cumulative outcome of the racial and gender inequalities documented earlier in this report. As the preceding sections on education, employment and income demonstrated, racialized residents (particularly women) often have high levels of education and participate actively in the labour market. Yet persistent disparities in employment stability and earnings mean that these advantages do not translate into economic security. The poverty indicators illustrate how these structural disadvantages consolidate into uneven exposure to hardship.

At the citywide level, poverty rates among racialized populations exceed those of the total population. As shown in Figure 18, 8.2% of racialized residents in Oshawa were living in poverty, compared to 7.8% of the total population. Disaggregation by gender reveals sharper inequities: racialized men experienced the highest poverty rate at 9.1% (Figure 18). This pattern aligns with earlier employment analysis, which showed that racialized men are disproportionately concentrated in cyclical and precarious industries (such as construction, transportation, and warehousing) where layoffs, seasonal work and income volatility are common (Block & Galabuzi, 2018; Galabuzi, 2006).

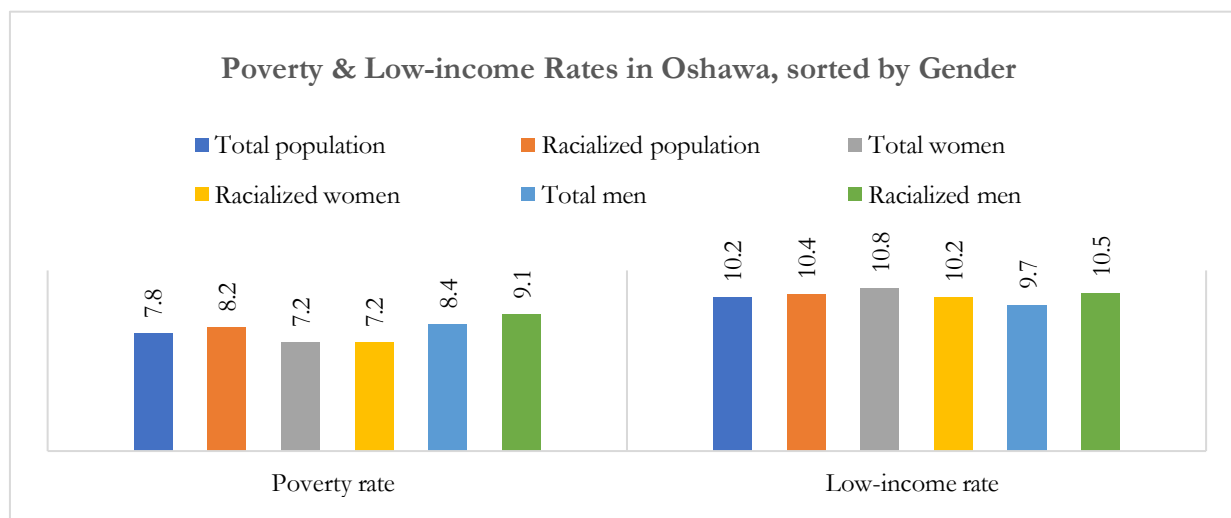


Figure 18: Poverty & low-income rates of total & racialized populations in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

When poverty is examined across racialized groups, the depth of inequality becomes more pronounced. Figures 19 and 20 show that Arab residents experienced the highest poverty rates in Oshawa, with 14.3% of Arab men and 10.3% of Arab women living in poverty. West Asian women had the highest poverty rate (12.4%) among racialized women. Combined with earlier evidence of higher unemployment and lower median incomes, the poverty data illustrates how racialization, gender identity and migration pathways intersect to heighten vulnerability to economic hardship (Li, 2003; Bushell & Shields, 2017).

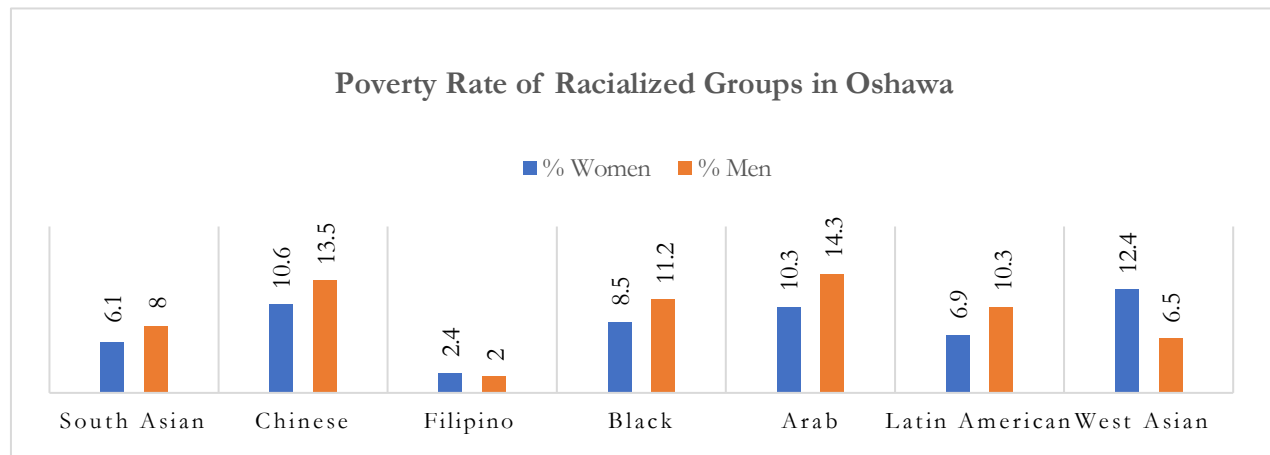


Figure 19: Poverty rate of main groups of racialized populations in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

This pattern is particularly striking for Chinese residents. As shown in the education section, Chinese populations in Oshawa have relatively high levels of postsecondary attainment, yet this educational advantage does not shield them from poverty. The persistence of poverty among an educated racialized group reinforces a central conclusion of this report: education alone does not function as an equalizer when credential non-recognition, racial discrimination, and occupational segregation restrict access to stable and adequately paid employment (Block & Galabuzi, 2011; Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2004).

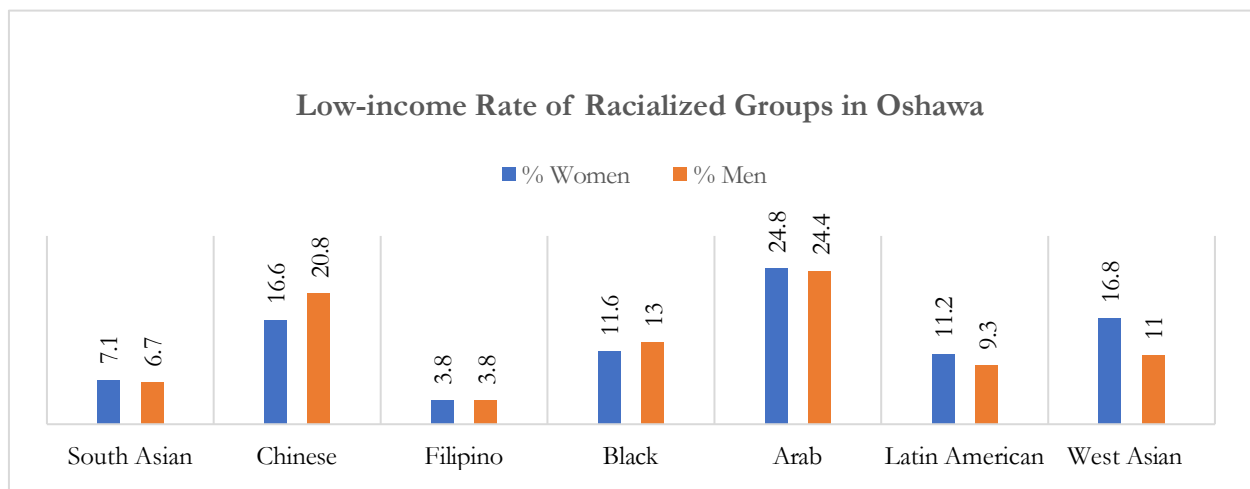


Figure 20: Prevalence of low-income racialized individuals in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

By contrast, Filipino populations experience the lowest poverty rates, with 2% of men and 2.4% of women living in poverty (Figure 19). Earlier employment analysis help contextualize this outcome. Filipino workers in Oshawa are more likely to be concentrated in health care and caregiving sectors (fields that, while modestly paid, tend to offer more consistent employment and hours). This relative

stability appears to buffer against poverty, even within a labour market shaped by broader racialized inequality (Pratt, 2012).

Beyond poverty rates alone, the prevalence of low income further reveals how gender shapes economic vulnerability within racialized communities. As Figure 20 shows, the intersection of race and gender reveals further inequities. Except for Chinese and Black communities, racialized women had higher poverty rates than men, suggesting the feminization of precarious labour in childcare, retail and part-time service jobs, which disproportionately employ racialized women at low wages and without benefits (Block & Galabuzi, 2018).

These poverty patterns cannot be separated from Oshawa's broader socio-economic trajectory. The collapse of the auto manufacturing sector (High, 2003) eliminated many of the city's unionized, stable jobs; jobs historically accessible to White men but largely exclusionary toward racialized workers. The restructuring of Oshawa's economy into low-wage service and care industries has locked many racialized newcomers into precarious positions, preventing intergenerational wealth-building and reinforcing systemic poverty. Housing affordability pressures in Durham Region compound these challenges: many racialized families, priced out of Toronto, moved to Oshawa in search of affordable housing (Walks, 2013; Harris, 2003), only to encounter rising rents and limited social housing and settlement services.

Taken together, the data shows that poverty among racialized populations in Oshawa is not an accident of individual choice or skill, but the predictable outcome of intersecting structures of racial capitalism, gendered labour markets and restrictive immigration and settlement policies. Addressing these inequities requires multi-level interventions: affordable housing strategies, expansion of union protections in emerging sectors, targeted employment equity programs, gender- and race-responsive settlement services and systemic reforms to credential recognition. Without such structural changes, the cycle of poverty among racialized men and women in Oshawa will persist, even as the city continues to diversify.

Housing Reality of Racialized Populations in Oshawa

Housing outcomes among racialized populations in Oshawa represent the most tangible and cumulative expression of the inequalities documented throughout this report. Across all key housing indicators, racialized residents face greater challenges than the total population. As Figure 21 demonstrates, a quarter (25.8%) of racialized residents in Oshawa lived in unaffordable housing, compared to 19.3% of the total population. Racialized men, as a demographic group, experienced the highest rate (26.4%) of housing unaffordability. Housing inadequacy is also more prevalent among racialized residents: 14.6% lived in unsuitable housing, and 12.6% lived in dwellings requiring major repairs, compared to 8.1% and 11.3% of the total population, respectively. These numbers point to structural barriers rather than individual circumstances: they echo the patterns observed in earlier sections of this report, where racialized groups consistently face higher unemployment, lower wages, and deeper poverty.

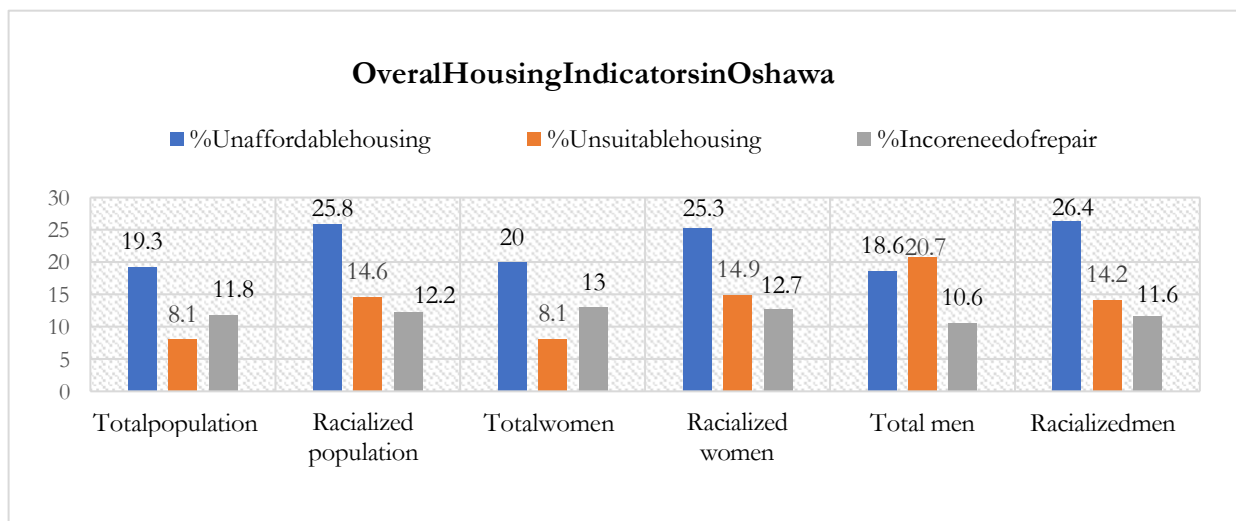


Figure 21: Housing indicators for racialized & total populations in Oshawa, sorted by gender
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

A critical gender and racial analysis shows that racialized women are particularly disadvantaged in the housing market. Despite having some of the highest educational attainment levels in the city, racialized women experience the lowest median incomes (Figure 15) and higher unemployment rates (Figure 11), conditions that directly reduce their ability to secure stable housing. In 2021, more than one-third (36.6%) of Chinese women lived in unaffordable housing, the highest rate of any group, while 30.4% of South Asian women and 25.8% of West Asian women lived in households spending more than 30% of income on shelter costs (Figure 22). These housing burdens reflect the combined effects of gendered labour market segregation (where racialized women are concentrated in lower-wage caregiving, service, and retail sectors) and structural racism that limits their access to higher-paid professional jobs even when they hold advanced degrees (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

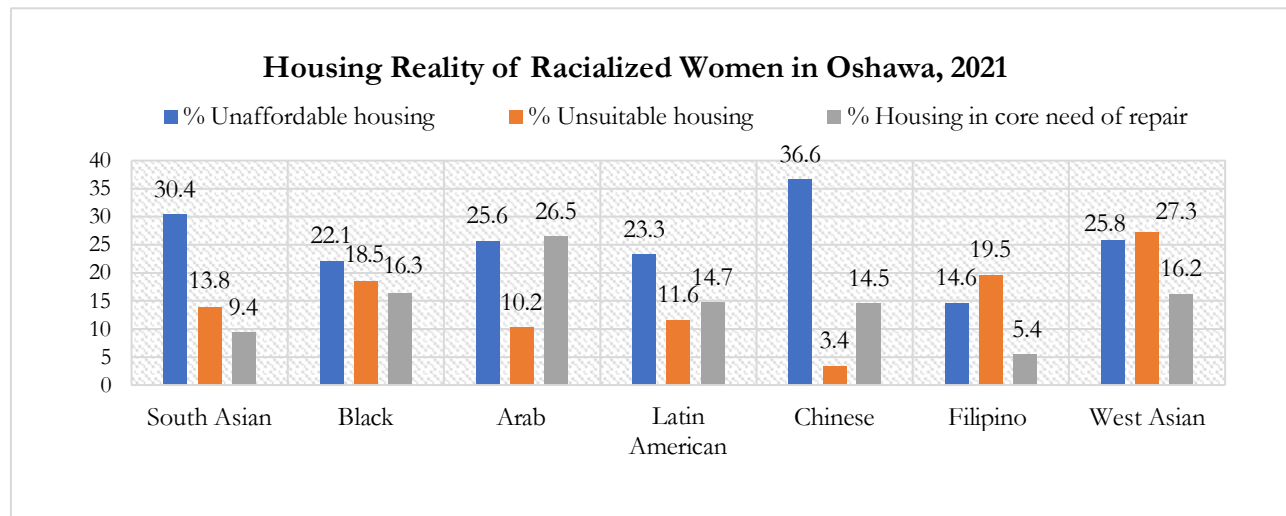


Figure 22: Housing reality of racialized women in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

Racialized men also face severe housing challenges. In 2021, more than a third (39.3%) of Chinese men, 31% of South Asian men and more than a quarter (27.8%) of Arab men lived in unaffordable housing, again outpacing the overall population. These groups also showed high rates of unsuitable housing, with Arab men experiencing the highest rate at 26.7% (Figure 23). The concentration of racialized men in volatile sectors such as construction, warehousing, transportation and manufacturing (industries prone to layoffs, inconsistent scheduling, and seasonal employment) makes their housing situations vulnerable to economic fluctuations. As shown in earlier employment data, unemployment rates were highest among Arab men (21.1%) and Black men (14.3%) (Figure 12), reinforcing how labour market discrimination shapes housing outcomes by limiting access to stable incomes.

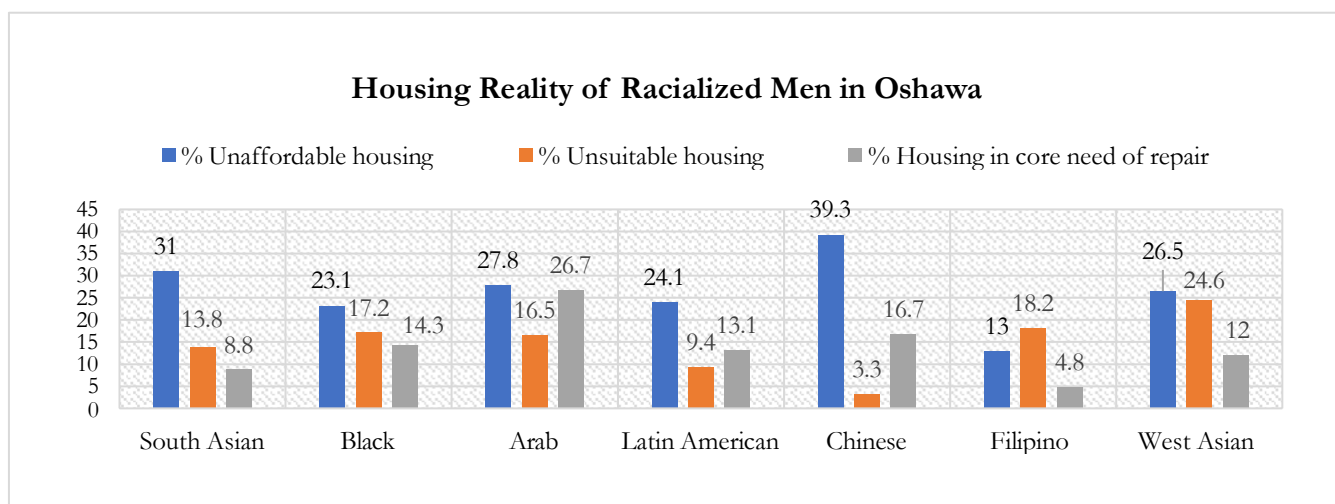


Figure 23: Housing reality of racialized men in Oshawa
Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2021

The housing inequalities experienced by racialized groups in Oshawa must be understood within the broader context of the regional housing crisis. Over the past two decades, Toronto's soaring home prices and rent increases have displaced many working-class, newcomer and racialized families outward into the suburbs. Scholars describe this as the "suburbanization of poverty" (Walks, 2013), a process accelerated by the financialization of housing, the conversion of rental stock into investment assets and the chronic under-supply of non-market housing (August, 2022). As Toronto became increasingly unaffordable, families moved to Oshawa in search of lower housing costs, contributing to the 28.8% growth of Oshawa's racialized population between 2016 and 2021 (Table 1). The 2021 housing data shows that Oshawa's racialized residents are now confronting many of the same housing pressures that defined Toronto during the previous decade.

Linkages to national and provincial housing policy are critical to understanding why these disparities persist. Canada's withdrawal from building social housing in the 1990s, combined with Ontario's devolution of housing responsibility to municipalities without the necessary funding, created a severe shortage of affordable rental units across the province (Suttor, 2016). As immigration increased after the 2000s, newcomers (especially refugees, lower-income families and workers in precarious sectors) entered a housing market already strained by decades of underinvestment. Refugee-background households, particularly among Arab and West Asian groups in Oshawa, face the highest housing hardships; this aligns with national findings showing refugees have the highest rates of core housing need due to limited pre-arrival resources and systemic employment barriers (Brag & Hiebert, 2022).

Taken together, the 2021 Census data paints a stark picture: housing insecurity among racialized populations in Oshawa is not a coincidence but the predictable result of structural inequalities in employment, income distribution, immigration policy, labour market segmentation and regional housing markets. The cumulative effects of higher unemployment, lower earnings, gendered wage gaps, lack of credential recognition, and systemic racism converge in the housing sector, where racialized households (particularly women) carry the heaviest burdens. Without substantial policy shifts in housing supply, rental protections, regional planning, employment equity, and settlement services, the housing inequalities documented in 2021 will likely deepen as Oshawa continues to grow and absorb displacement from Toronto.

Conclusion and Key Findings

The 2021 Census data reveals that Oshawa is undergoing a profound demographic, social, and economic transformation. Racialized communities now make up a significant and rapidly growing share of the city's population, reshaping its cultural landscape, labour force, and community needs. Between 2016 and 2021, the racialized population increased by nearly 29%, far outpacing the city's overall growth and reflecting both international migration and secondary migration from Toronto driven by housing pressures. This demographic change is not incidental: it is the result of long-term shifts in Canadian immigration policy, labour market restructuring and the widening housing affordability divide across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Oshawa is no longer the homogeneous industrial centre it once was; it is now a diverse, multiethnic city whose future depends on how well it responds to the needs, strengths and realities of its racialized residents.

Across every major socio-economic indicator (education, employment, income, poverty and housing), racialized populations in Oshawa face systemic barriers that reflect broader patterns of racial inequality in Canada. While racialized residents show exceptionally high levels of educational attainment, especially among South Asian, Chinese, Filipino and Black communities, these qualifications do not translate into equitable employment outcomes. Racialized workers, particularly women, continue to experience higher unemployment rates, lower wages, and greater occupational segregation than the general population. Education serves as an entry point, not an equalizer, because structural forces such as credential non-recognition, labour market discrimination and the declining supply of secure jobs continue to limit racialized residents' economic mobility.

Lower incomes disproportionately position racialized communities at greater risk of poverty, even though their poverty rates appear modest when viewed at the aggregate level. The intersection of race, gender and employment precarity places racialized women at the greatest disadvantage, with many earning far below the median incomes of both racialized men and non-racialized workers. These income inequities compound sharply in the housing sector. Racialized families are significantly more likely to live in unaffordable or unsuitable housing and in dwellings needing major repair. Arab, West Asian, South Asian, Chinese and Latin American communities face some of the highest levels of housing need in the city. Their housing challenges are further shaped by displacement pressures from Toronto and the GTA, where escalating rents and home prices have pushed many newcomer and racialized households into suburban municipalities like Oshawa, where affordable options are increasingly limited.

Seen together, these findings reveal a clear pattern: racialized residents in Oshawa are structurally prevented from fully accessing the social and economic benefits that their education, labour and contributions should yield. The barriers they face are not the product of individual choices but of systemic inequities embedded within Canada's labour, housing and settlement systems. As Oshawa continues to diversify and grow, the city's ability to thrive will depend on whether it confronts these inequities directly; through coordinated policy, community planning, and investment in systems that support racial equity and inclusion.

To move towards equity and inclusion for racialized populations in Oshawa, we offer the following key policy and programmatic recommendations:

1. Expand and Fund Affordable, Suitable and Culturally Safe Housing

- Increase the supply of *family-size* affordable rental units to meet the needs of multigenerational households common among South Asian, Black, Filipino, West Asian and Arab communities.
- Partner with non-profit, co-operative and community housing providers to develop permanently affordable units and prevent displacement as Oshawa grows.
- Strengthen rental standards enforcement to address the overrepresentation of racialized households in unaffordable, unsuitable or poorly maintained housing (see Figures 21–23).
- Embed anti-discrimination policies and monitoring mechanisms into municipal housing systems to challenge systemic barriers faced by racialized renters.

2. Close the Racial and Gender Employment and Income Gaps

- Develop municipal and regional employment equity initiatives requiring large employers, public institutions and contractors to adopt transparent, anti-racist hiring and advancement practices.
- Establish a *Workforce Integration Hub* in Oshawa to provide credential recognition pathways, inclusive training programs and bridging supports for internationally educated professionals, especially women.
- Expand access to subsidized childcare and flexible work supports to reduce the employment barriers facing racialized women, who show high participation but experience persistent wage and unemployment gaps (see Figures 10–12 and 15–17).

3. Strengthen Refugee and Newcomer Settlement and Integration Supports

- Develop wraparound settlement hubs combining employment services, ESL, mental health supports and housing navigation under one roof.
- Expand stable funding for language training, digital literacy programs and professional language upgrading for groups with higher unemployment or recent arrival patterns, including Arab, West Asian and Chinese newcomers.
- Provide targeted supports for refugee-background households, who face heightened risks of poverty and housing precarity due to migration class, trauma, and systemic barriers to employment.

4. Advance Gender and Racial Equity in Municipal Planning and Policy

- Apply Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) and race-based equity assessments in all municipal decisions related to housing, economic development, social policy and community safety.
- Require the City of Oshawa to publish annual racial equity reports using disaggregated data on employment, income, housing and poverty to track systemic change over time.
- Support leadership development programs for racialized women and youth to increase representation in civic decision-making spaces.

5. Invest in Community-Led, Culturally Grounded Solutions

- Provide multi-year operational funding to racialized and newcomer-led organizations offering employment services, housing supports, community safety initiatives, cultural programming and advocacy.
- Expand community hubs and intercultural centres in growing neighbourhoods in north and central Oshawa, offering after-school programs, settlement supports, language services and community-building activities.
- Strengthen tenant advocacy programs and legal support services to address housing discrimination, eviction and unsafe living conditions that disproportionately affect racialized families.

6. Improve Transportation Access and Regional Connectivity

- Expand high-frequency transit routes within Oshawa, particularly connecting racialized and newcomer neighbourhoods to employment centres, educational institutions and service hubs.
- Strengthen regional integration with Durham Region Transit and GO Transit to address the spatial mismatch between where racialized residents live and where jobs and services are located.

7. Strengthen Anti-Poverty Measures and Income Supports

- Expand local poverty-reduction measures including food security programs, rental supports, emergency funds, and childcare subsidies tailored to low-income racialized households.
- Advocate for increased provincial social assistance and income-support rates to address the higher poverty risks facing racialized women, single-parent families and recent immigrant households.
- Integrate culturally responsive financial literacy and legal supports into existing community services to help racialized families navigate income insecurity, employment precarity, and housing instability.

Housing, Settlement, Employment & Social Services in Durham Region

Housing Services

Housing Supports & Housing Stability Program (HSP): Durham Region provides housing support in Oshawa, including eviction prevention, housing retention assistance and referrals to emergency and longer-term housing supports.

Durham Access to Social Housing (DASH): residents of Oshawa can put their name on this central wait-list for Durham Region's Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) and modified (accessible) housing in community/social housing providers.

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

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

Settlement & Social Services

Oshawa Welcome Centre Immigrant Services: providing free newcomer supports: housing search, forms assistance, referrals (employment, health, education), English classes, child supervision while in class in Oshawa.

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

Women's Multicultural Resource & Counselling Centre of Durham (WMRCC): while located in Pickering, WMRCC provides culturally responsive, trauma-informed counselling, crisis supports, youth & children's programs, newcomer support, mentorship and anti-racism advocacy for residents of Oshawa as well.

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.

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 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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