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# Immigrants, Employment and Entrepreneurship

# Agenda

- The Diversity Institute
- Background
- Innovative Programs Supporting Newcomers
- Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Canada
- The Way Forward



# The Diversity Institute



25

Years of ground-breaking research and programming



80

Full-time research staff



300

Academic, industry, community and government partners



10

Community hubs across Canada

We focus on “what works, for whom” so that we can **innovate, replicate and scale best practices**



2,000

served by our skills and job placement programs



Numerous bilingual programs



Founder and academic research lead for the **Future Skills Centre**



Founder for the **Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub**

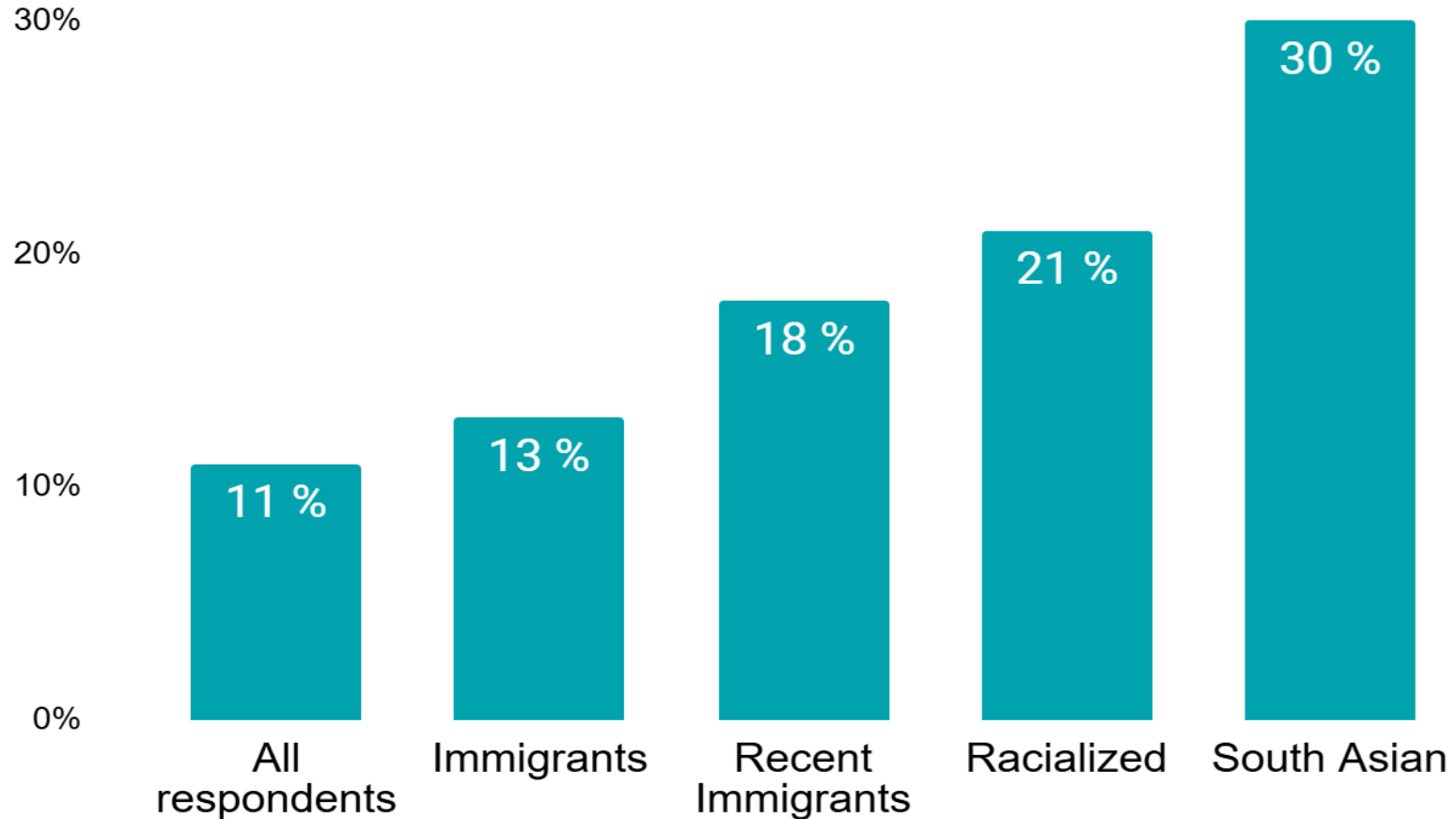
# Background - Literature Review

- Employment is critical to newcomer especially in early years after arrival: without a good job match early on, newcomers become locked into survival jobs or downgraded career paths with long-term consequences (Rawling, 2025)
  - Skills paradox: Employers report shortages but immigrants are under-employed
  - Experiences of racism and discrimination in the workplace are associated with mental and physical disabilities (Environics, 2025)
  - Immigrants are not monolithic: Intersectionality is critical
- In 2024, **unemployment rate** of immigrants almost **doubled** that of non-immigrants (11.1% vs 5.6%)
  - **26%** of people with foreign degrees were underemployed, compared with 11% of Canadian-educated workers
  - Immigrants **twice** as likely to be overqualified (17.2%) than non-immigrants (8.5%); recent immigrants are most **overqualified** (21%)

# Barriers to employment

- Skills are not necessarily related to employment (Xu & Hou, 2025)
- Lack of credential recognition, racism, discrimination and unconscious bias (Quillian & Lee, 2023; Dietz, et al., 2015; Banerjee, et al., 2018)
- Bias in design of programs and processes (Cukier & Donaldson, 2025)
- Employer hiring of immigrants is tied to attitudes propensity to hire (Fang et al., 2021)
- Pre-arrival and early settlement supports are misaligned with local labour markets (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2023; 2025)
- Fragmentation, duplication, uneven performance- lack of connection to employers in immigrant serving organizations (Crea-Arsenio et al., 2025)
- Lack of competency frameworks and outcome measurement
- Risks and potential of technology, particularly AI (Environics, 2025)

# Experiences of discrimination

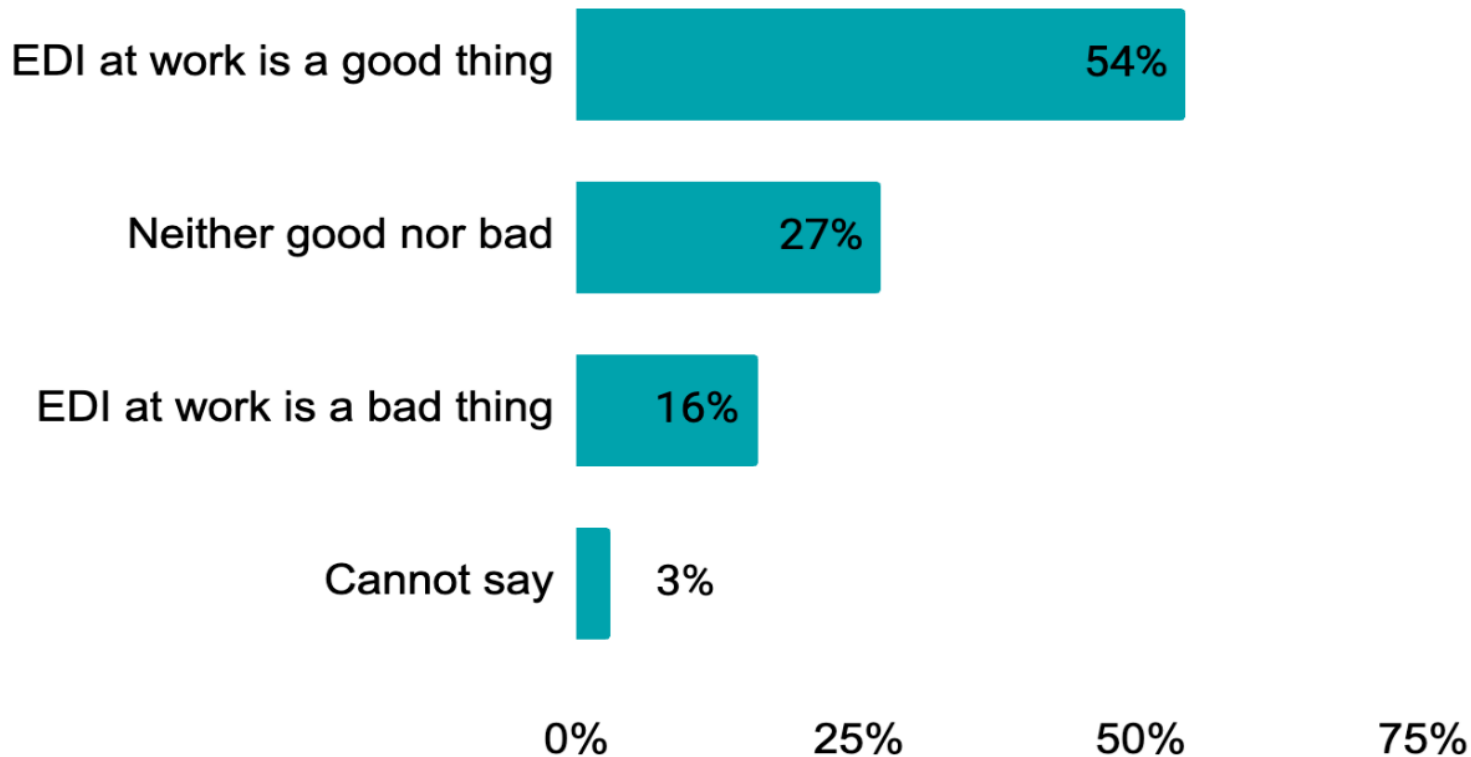


Source: Diversity Institute, 2024.

# Canadians' attitudes on immigrants and immigration

- **About 70% of Canadians believe there is too much immigration**
- Canadians who are **worried about job loss** are slightly more likely to view immigration levels as too high (74% vs. 69%)
- While attitudes toward immigration levels are critical, **most Canadians still see immigration as economically beneficial**, especially younger people, university graduates, and recent immigrants (73%)
- Perceptions of newcomers are also shifting, with 57% agreeing that many immigrants are **not adopting Canadian values**
- Negative assumptions are becoming more common: 43% believe many refugee claimants are **not “real” refugees**

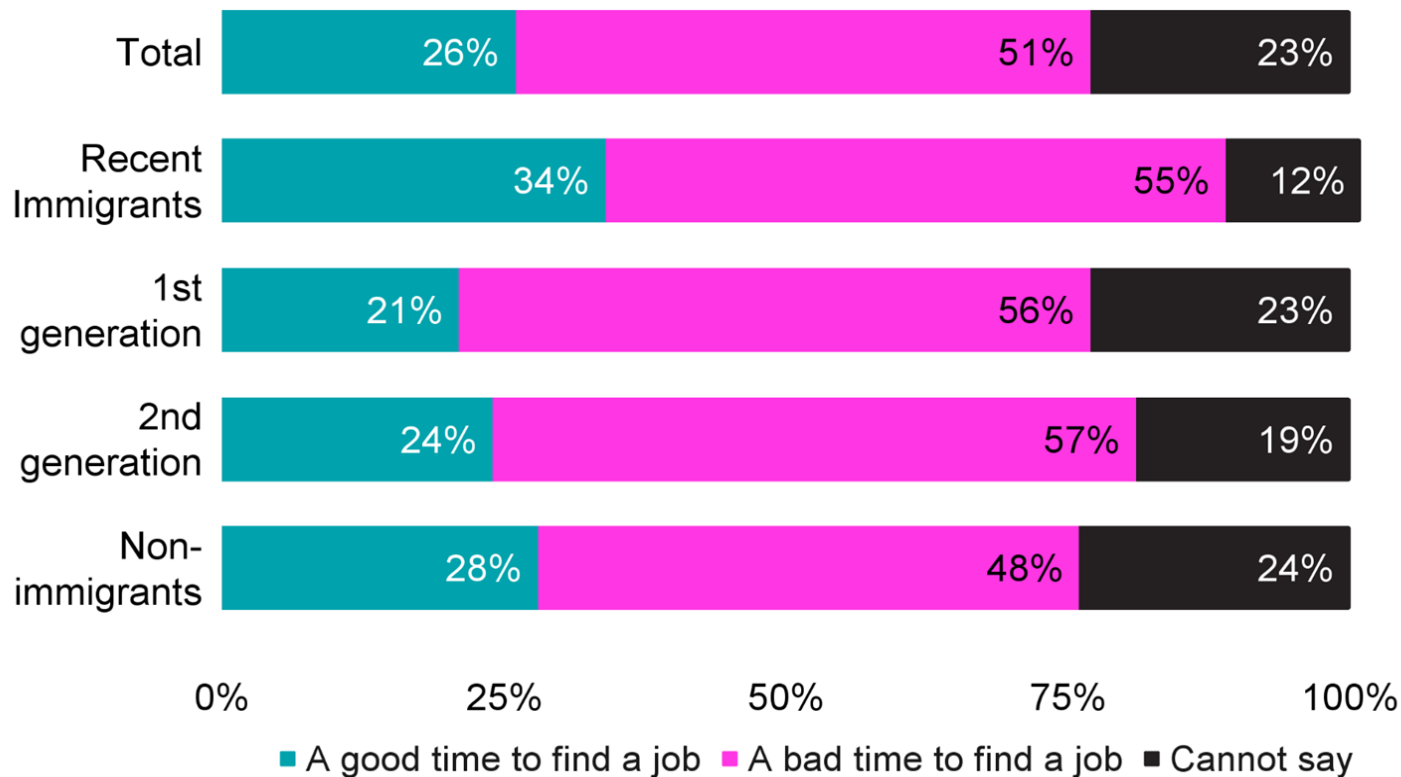
# Attitudes to EDI



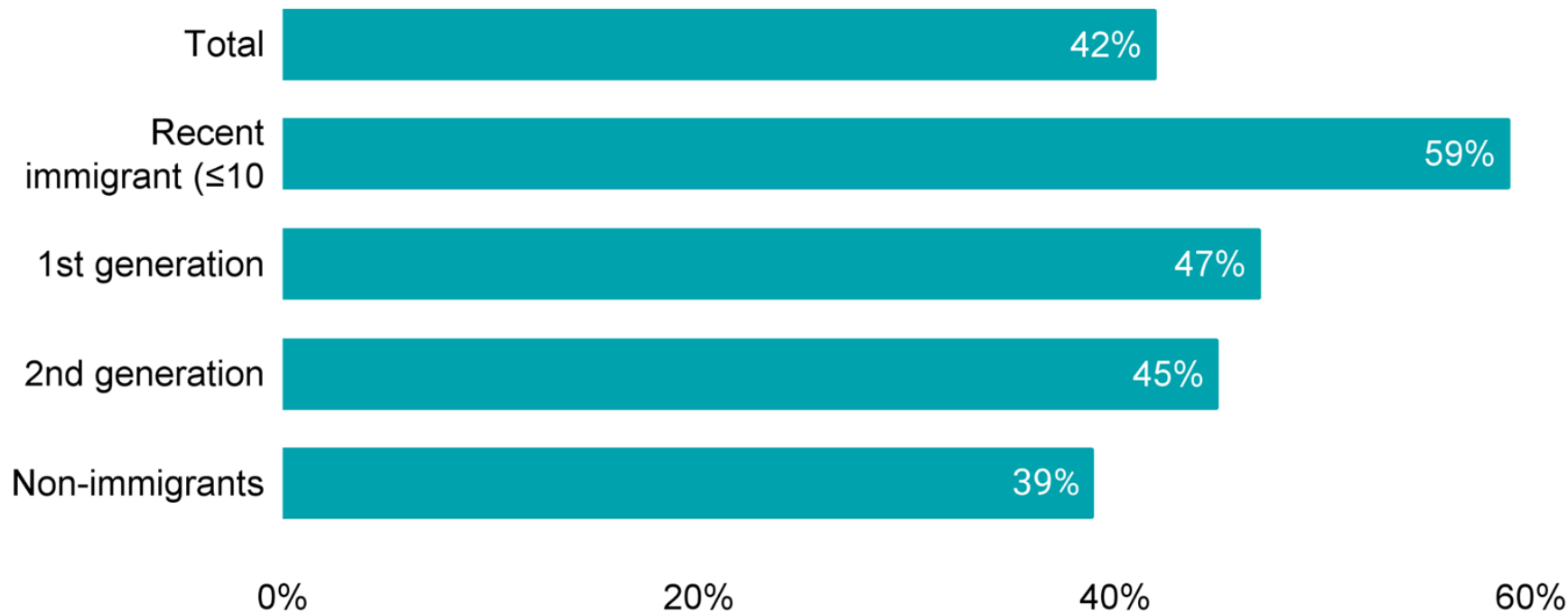
Source: Diversity Institute, 2025.



# Perceptions of whether it is a good or bad time to find a job in Canada, by immigrant status



# Share of Canadian-born and immigrant workers who say they are worried about losing their job to automation



Source: Diversity Institute, 2025.

# Use of AI tools in the workplace by immigration status

|                                                   | 1st-gen<br>immigrants (%) | 2nd-gen<br>immigrants (%) | Non-immigrants<br>(%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Familiar with AI tools in the workplace           | 65                        | 52                        | 42                    |
| Did not receive AI training                       | 46                        | 49                        | 41                    |
| Did not receive much guidance on AI               | 41                        | 33                        | 32                    |
| My workplace has been slow to adapt to new tech   | 51                        | 43                        | 40                    |
| Hard to keep up with tech-related changes at work | 43                        | 35                        | 33                    |

Source: Cukier et al., 2024

# Innovative Programs Supporting Newcomers

|                                                               | Focus                                              | Skills development | Inclusive Career Pathing | Advancing I&D | Wraparound Supports |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| <b>Platforms</b>                                              | Job matching, career pathing eg. Magnet, myStartr  |                    | ✓                        | ✓             |                     |
| <b>ADaPT for Newcomers</b>                                    | Technical Skills, WIL, Skills for Success          | ✓                  |                          | ✓             | ✓                   |
| <b>Capital Skills; Rise up, NeHub, WeHub, BACEL, NEESH</b>    | Entrepreneurship Financing, Procurement and Grants | ✓                  | ✓                        | ✓             | ✓                   |
| <b>OCC Skills Bridge</b>                                      | Mature companies                                   | ✓                  |                          | ✓             | ✓                   |
| <b>ITAC, NGEN, Trades, Healthcare, Mindframe, Foodpreneur</b> | Sector specific                                    | ✓                  |                          | ✓             |                     |

# Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) Program

- Skills development and work placement program
  - Provides alternative pathways into ICT from various degree programs and populations - variants
- Core curriculum includes: Career development strategies; project management skills; SEO and Google Analytics; business financials; sales and marketing; and design thinking
- Virtual classroom and online self-directed delivery
  - Customizable training on technology tools like Pega, Salesforce and data analytics



**256 immigrants**  
trained  
(Jan 2022 - Apr 2024)



**88%**  
placement rate

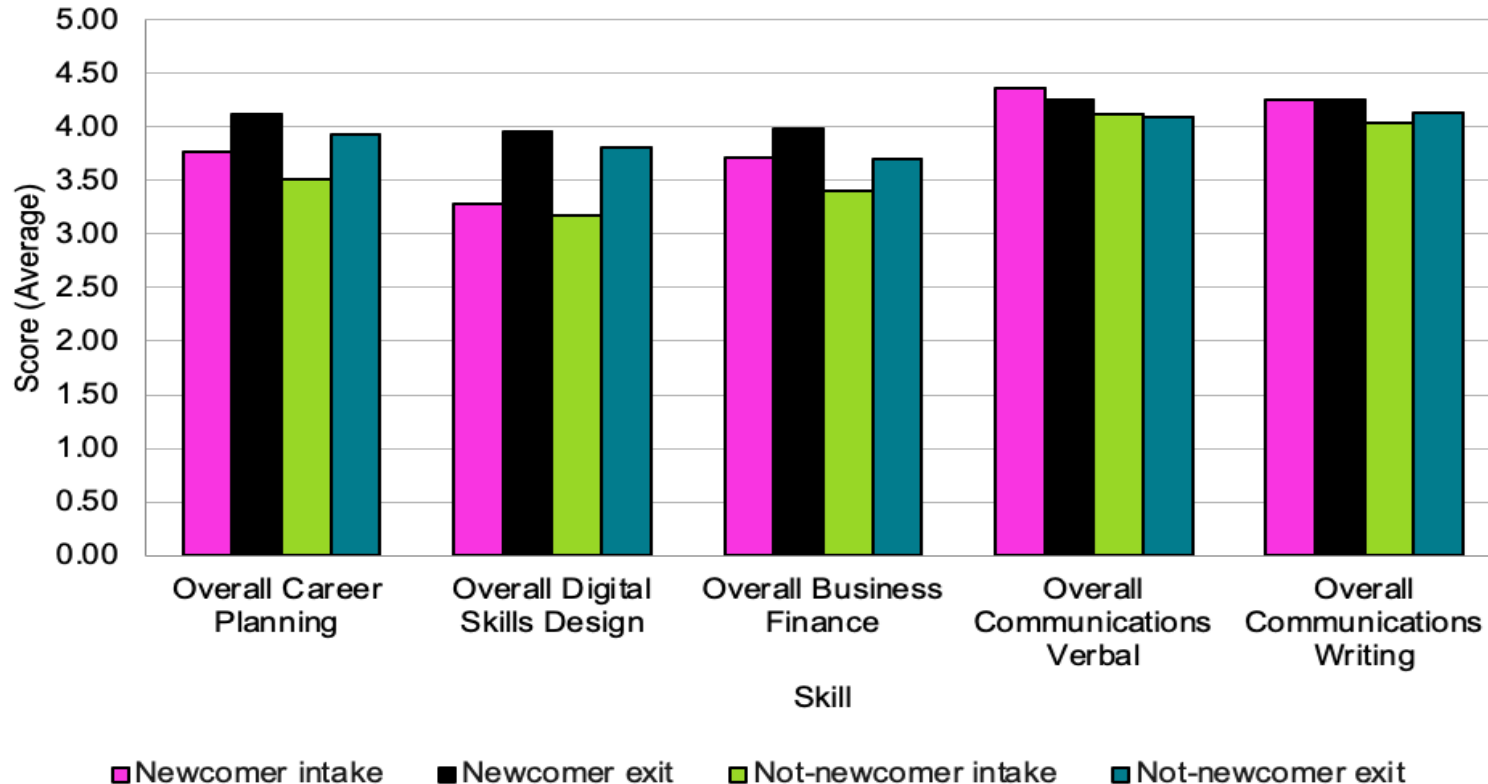


**89%**  
satisfaction rate

**Over 50%**  
of participants  
are women

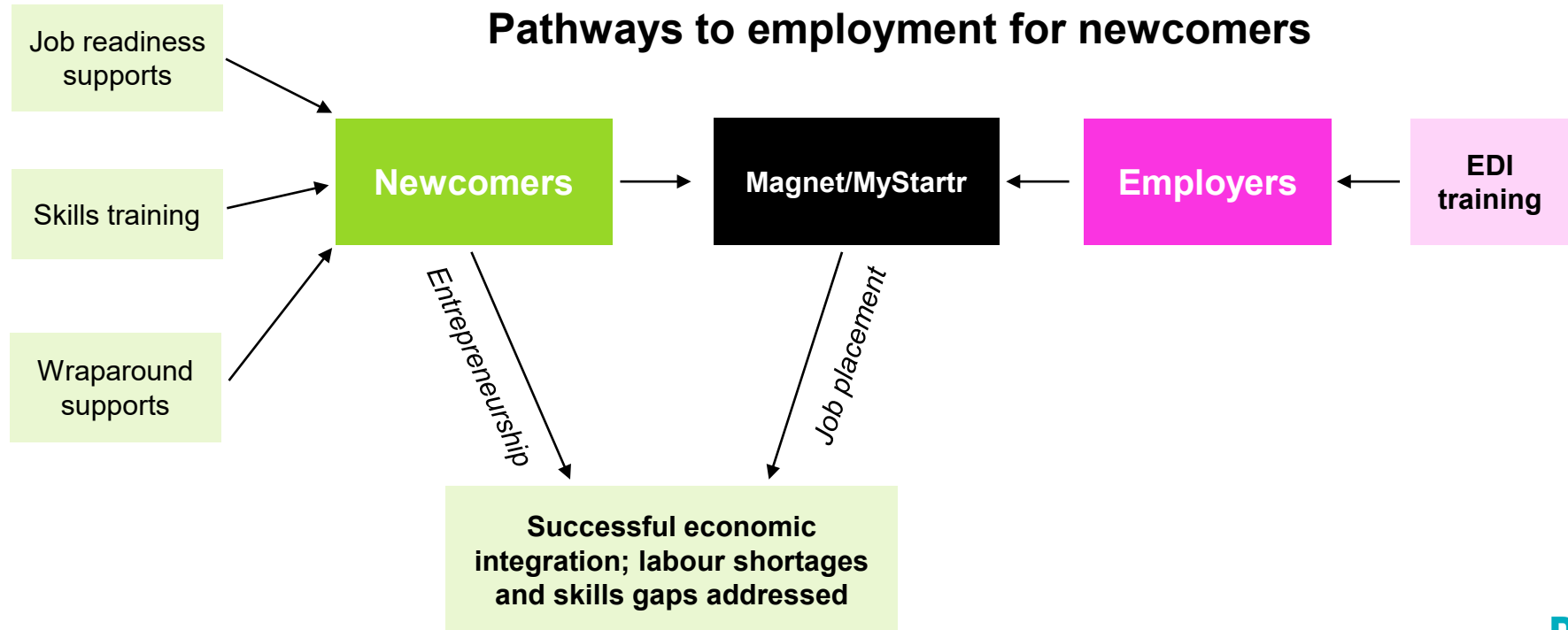
# ADaPT: Impact on Skills

Newcomer vs. non-newcomer change in self-assessment of skills (average score, intake and exit surveys)

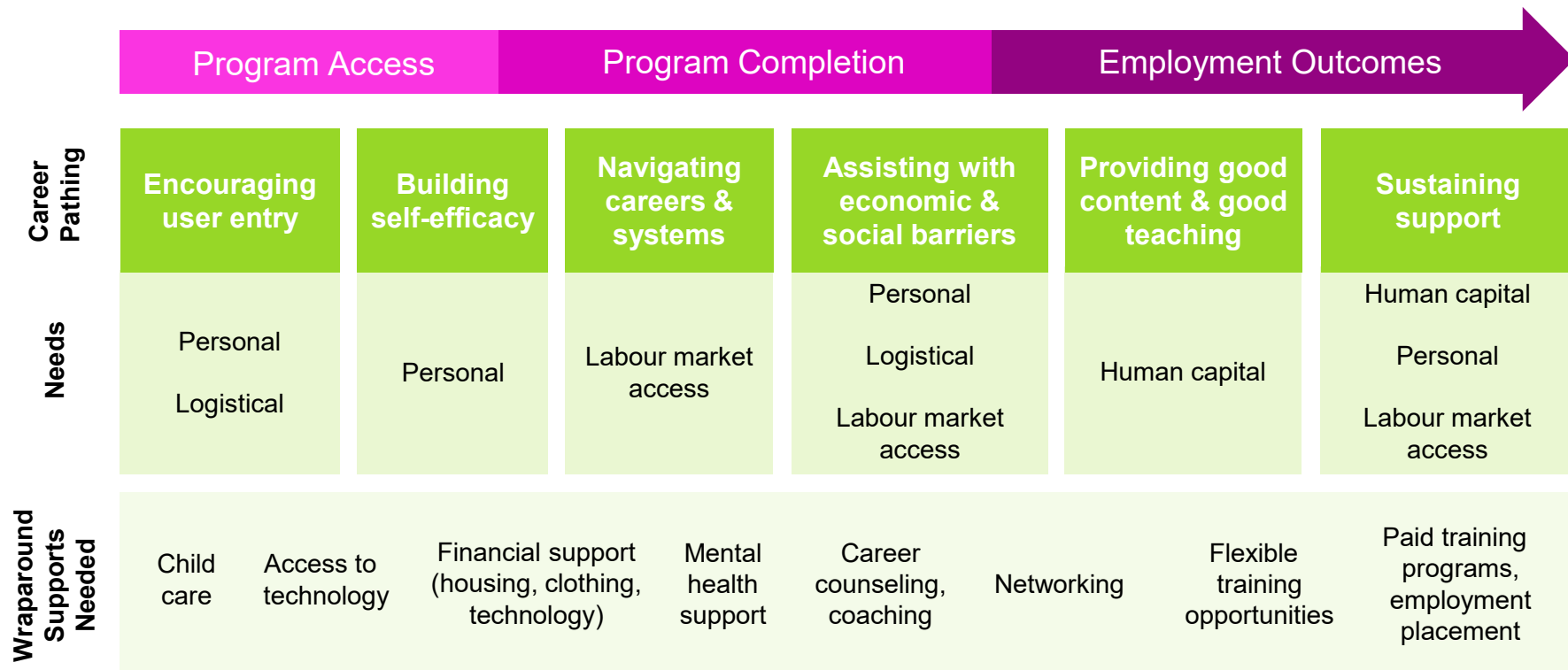


# A network of supports for newcomers and employers

## Pathways to employment for newcomers



# Inclusive career pathing and wraparound supports



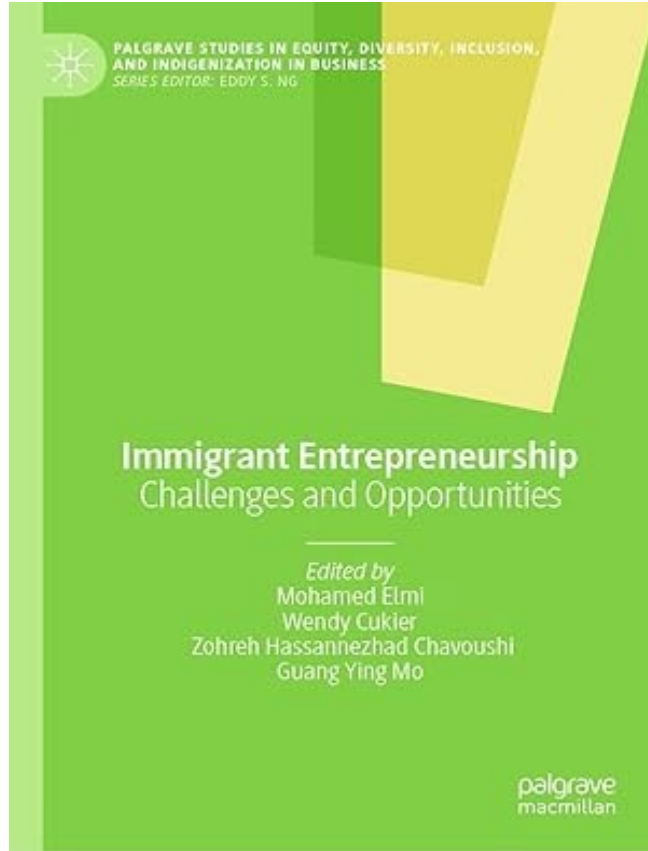
Adapted from Escobari, M. Seyal, I. Meaney, M. (2019).



# Immigrant Entrepreneurs in Canada

- Immigrant-owned businesses make up 21.5% of private sector firms, generate \$218 billion in revenue, and employ over 800,000 people
- Immigrant-owned SMEs boost local economies through job creation and strong multiplier effects
- Immigrant-led SMEs are more likely to export than those led by Canadian-born entrepreneurs
- Recent tariffs have added operational and financial pressures for many Canadian SMEs, including immigrant-led firms
- Among racialized entrepreneurs, women-owned SMEs declined slightly (23.5% to 21.3%) while men-owned SMEs increased (57.8% to 61.1%)
- Among Black entrepreneurs, women-owned SMEs grew (33.4% to 38.8%) while men-owned SMEs declined sharply (58.4% to 40.4%)

# Entrepreneurship research



# Challenges of immigrant entrepreneurs

- Lack of **financial capital** reported as a major barrier to business growth (George et al, 2024).
- **Navigating Canadian regulations and the tax system** (e.g., business practices, government regulations, and licensing requirements) (George et al, 2024).
- Many highly qualified immigrants experience "**deskilling**" upon arrival in Canada, struggling to find employment matching their professional degrees or experience, often due to employers requiring "Canadian experience". (Creese & Wiebe, 2012)
- Building credibility and networks; "**Credibility gap**" slows partnership formation, client acquisition, and supplier trust. Without established social capital, many immigrant-owned businesses remain confined to ethnic-market niches, restricting growth opportunities. (CFIB, 2025)

# Entrepreneurship program evaluations

- Entrepreneurship is a pathway to economic inclusion
- Entrepreneurship training can be effective as experiential learning
- Immigrant diasporas have competitive advantage in global markets
  - **Capital Skills:** Investment readiness is key
  - **ITAC:** Infrastructure support is essential for enabling entrepreneurship in northern and remote Indigenous communities
  - **BACEL:** Comprehensive wraparound supports (e.g., financial stipends, child care) are critical Black women entrepreneurs and training should be tailored to their stage of development
  - **deSedulous:** Sector-specific program using culturally sensitive approach with networking and mentorship leads to stronger participant outcomes
  - **MindFrame:** Training on building effective mentee-mentor relationships
  - **Newcomer Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub:** Gender & diversity lens to program design & delivery for newcomers improves accessibility and relevance

# The Way Forward: Immigrants Drive Economic Success

Half of the Toronto population was born outside Canada. Another 25% of the population are children of immigrants.



**Cheryl Kerr**  
Nurse, founder and managing partner;  
Medex, Health care entrepreneur

**The Italians Who Built Toronto:**  
Italian Workers and Contractors in the City's House-building Industry, 1950–1980 by  
**Stefano Agnoletto**  
**Angelo Principe**



**Dr. Nassif** qualified to practice dentistry in Canada and he and his family have moved to Newfoundland and bought a home. The children excel in school.

21

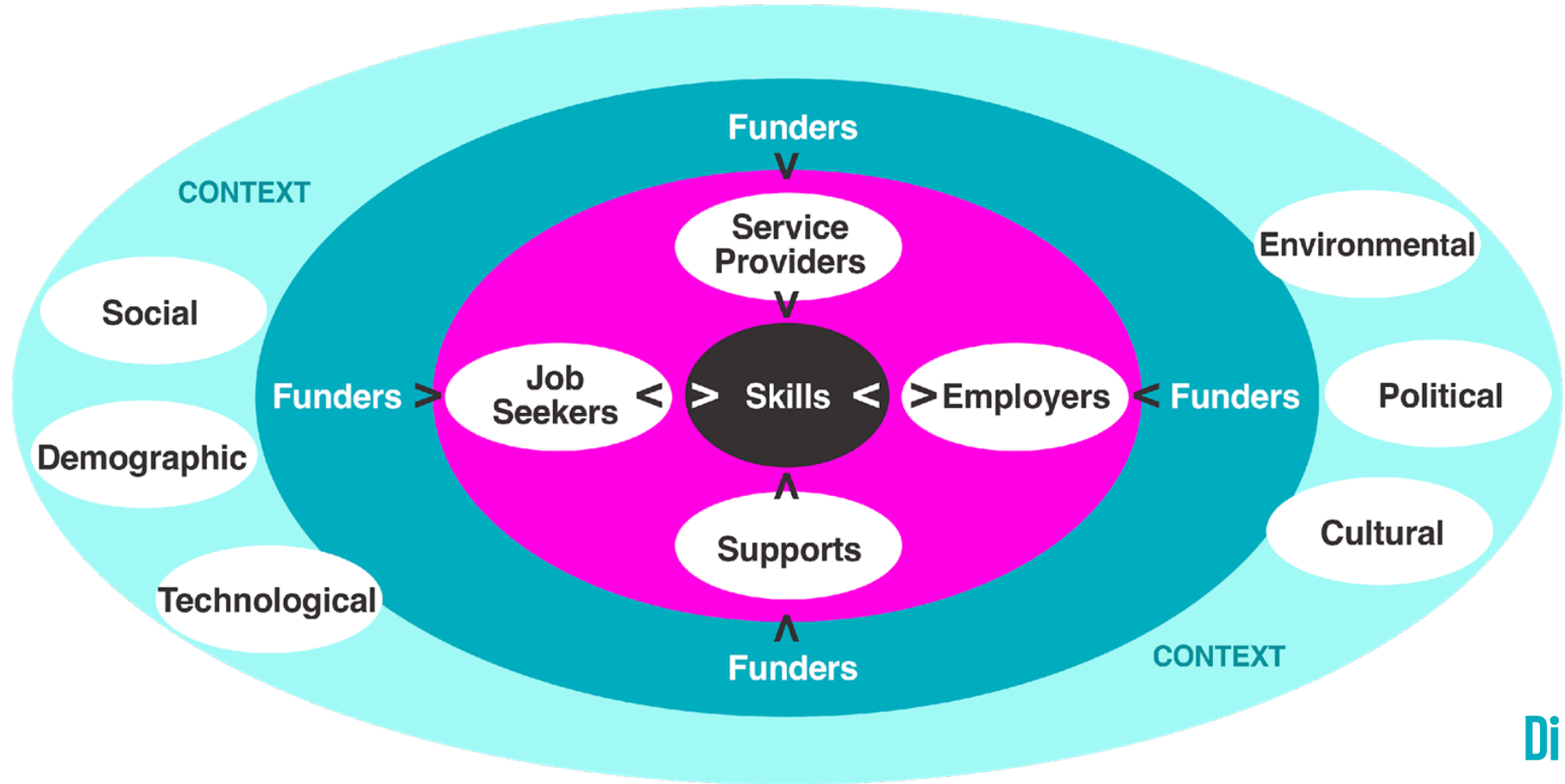
**Tareq Hadhad** 'Peace by Chocolate, 3rd largest employer in Antigonish'



"Canada's Warren Buffet" Canadian billionaire **Prem Watsa** to step down as Fairfax India chairman.

Di

# Skills and employment ecosystem



# eg. A.I. skills competency framework

## AI Innovation Skills

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- Understanding how AI is used in different industries
- Competence in using AI technologies for content generation and analysis
- Mid-level expertise working with datasets

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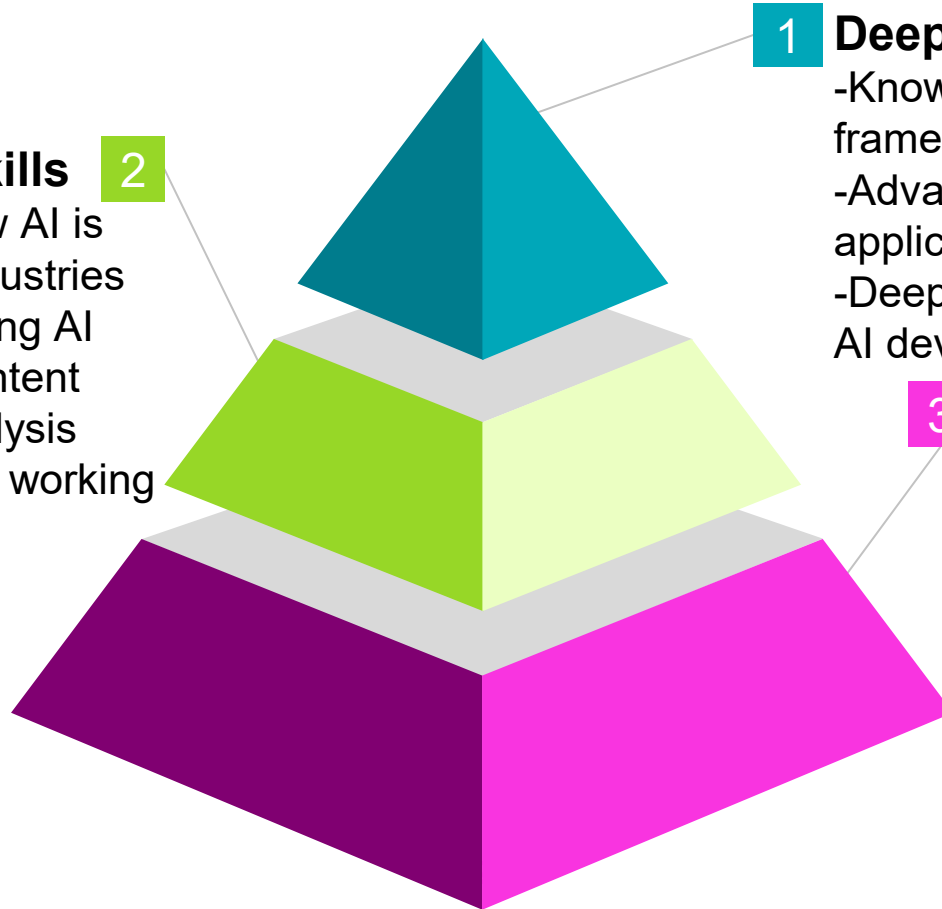
## Deep AI Skills

- Knowledge of AI development frameworks and models
- Advanced knowledge of AI applications in specific fields
- Deep understanding of ethical AI development

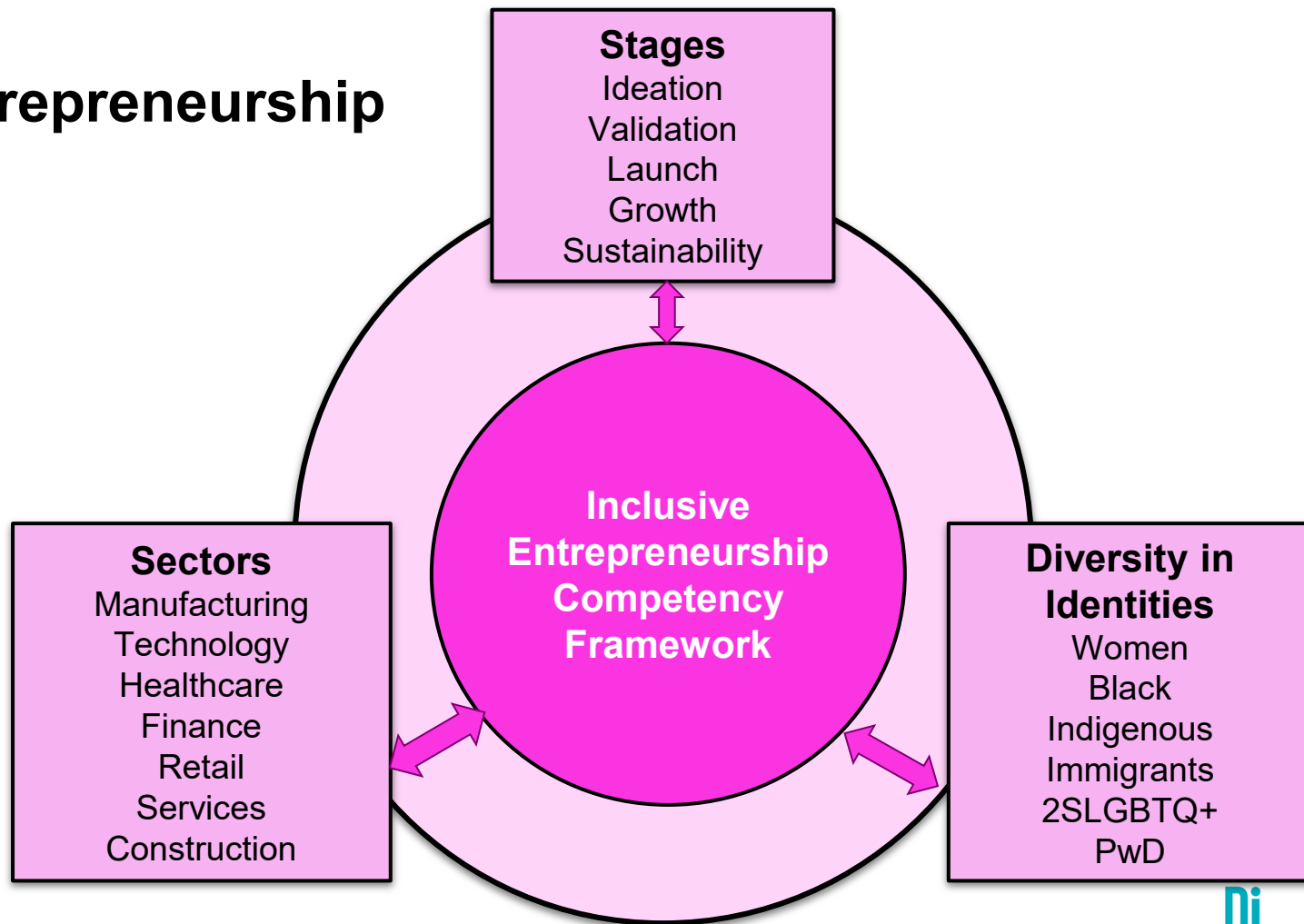
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## Basic AI Literacy

- Knowledge of core AI concepts
- Familiarity with generative AI tools
- AI in value chain
- Awareness of key ethical considerations



# Inclusive entrepreneurship competency





# The Diversity Assessment Tool (DAT)



Governance,  
Leadership  
& Strategy



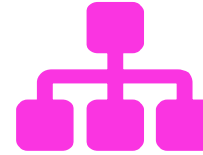
Human  
Resources  
Processes



Values  
&  
Culture



Measurement  
& Tracking of  
EDI

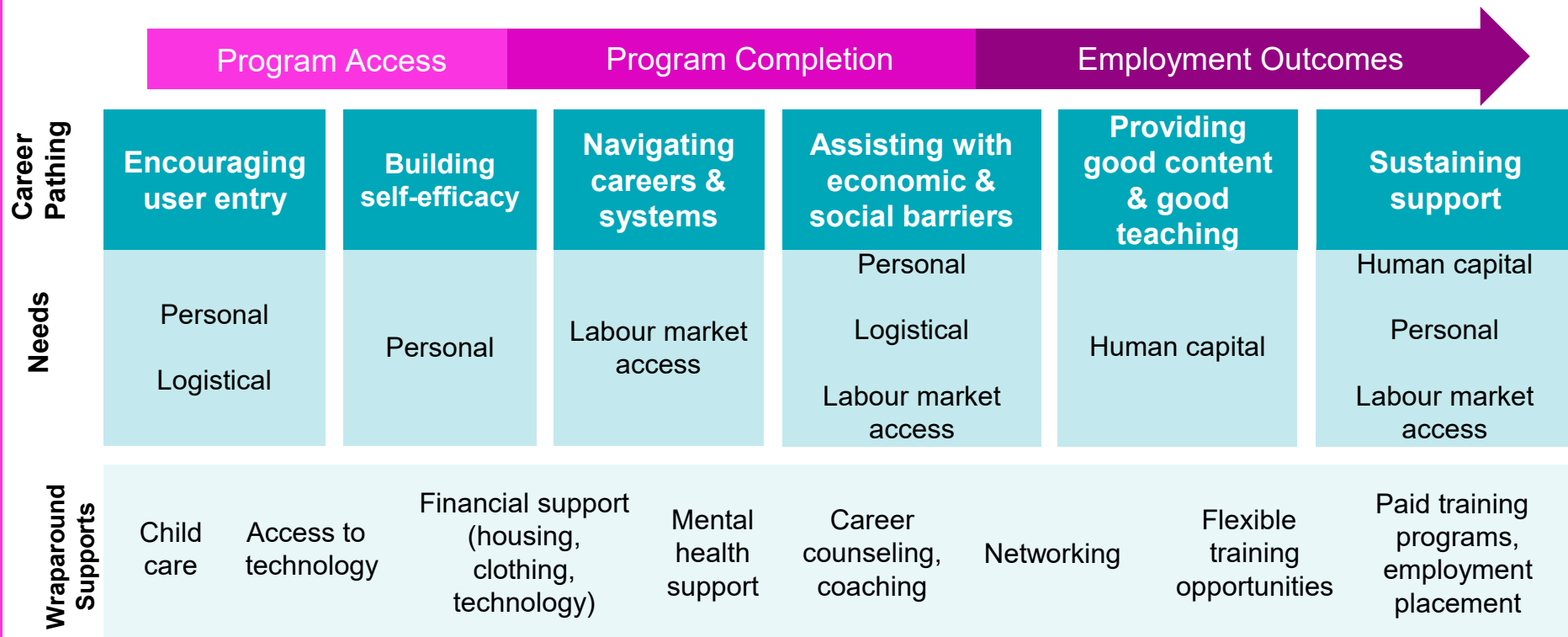


Diversity  
across the  
Value  
Chain



Outreach &  
Expanding  
the Pool

# Inclusive career pathing



Adapted from Escobari, M. Seyal, I. Meaney, M. (2019).

# Conclusions and implications

- Newcomer experiences vary; intersectional and disaggregated data key
- Early supports, competency-based training, and wraparound services help prevent long-term deskilling and strengthen employment outcomes
- Strong links between training, job matching, and employers ensure newcomers can use their skills in real workplace settings
- Inclusive hiring practices, EDI training, and active employer engagement improve both access to jobs and retention
- Entrepreneurship remains an important pathway for economic inclusion, but newcomers need better access to capital, networks, tailored supports
- Wider ecosystem of funders, service providers, and employers must work in alignment to address skills gaps and labour shortages
- Digital and AI skills are increasingly important and present both opportunity and risk for newcomers

# Thank You

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