NAVIGATING WORKPLACE BARRIERS FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADA:

Employee-Facing Toolkit for Building Culturally Safe & Equitable Workplaces for Canadian Muslim Women

#IBelongYouBelong

Canadian Council of Muslim Women @ CCMW 2025. All Rights Reserved.

Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)
Le conseil canadien des femmes musulmanes (CCFM)

The employee toolkit for Canadian Muslim women, is developed by consultants Rotbah Nitia of Rotbah Nitia Consulting with contributions from Sheena Chaudhry of SK Consulting

Designed by: Hana Shafi

Published by: The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

Acknowledgement:
CCMW gratefully acknowledges the funding provided by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) for the project "Addressing Systemic Problems and Inequities to Resolve Employment Issues - (Project ASPIRE)"

@ Canadian Council of Muslim Women 2026 All Rights Reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-7386870-9-1

Email: info@ccmw.com I www.ccmw.com

Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)
Le conseil canadien des femmes musulmanes (CCFM)

Women and Gender Equality Canada
Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. **MODULE 1: NAVIGATING RECRUITMENT & JOB SEARCH**
    a. Content Module
    b. Workshop Module & Facilitator Guide
3. **MODULE 2: THRIVING IN EARLY EMPLOYMENT**
    a. Content Module
    b. Workshop Module & Facilitator Guide
4. **MODULE 3: BUILDING CAREER PATHWAYS & LEADERSHIP CONFIDENCE**
    a. Content Module
    b. Workshop Module & Facilitator Guide
5. **MODULE 4: CREATING SAFE & INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES**
    a. Content Module
    b. Workshop Module & Facilitator Guide
6. Glossary of Terms
7. Annexes
    a. Annex 1 – Mental Health Services Resource List
    b. Annex 2 – Settlement Services Resource List
    c. Annex 3 – List of Legislations Across Canada related to Accessibility and Duty of Accommodate

About CCMW:

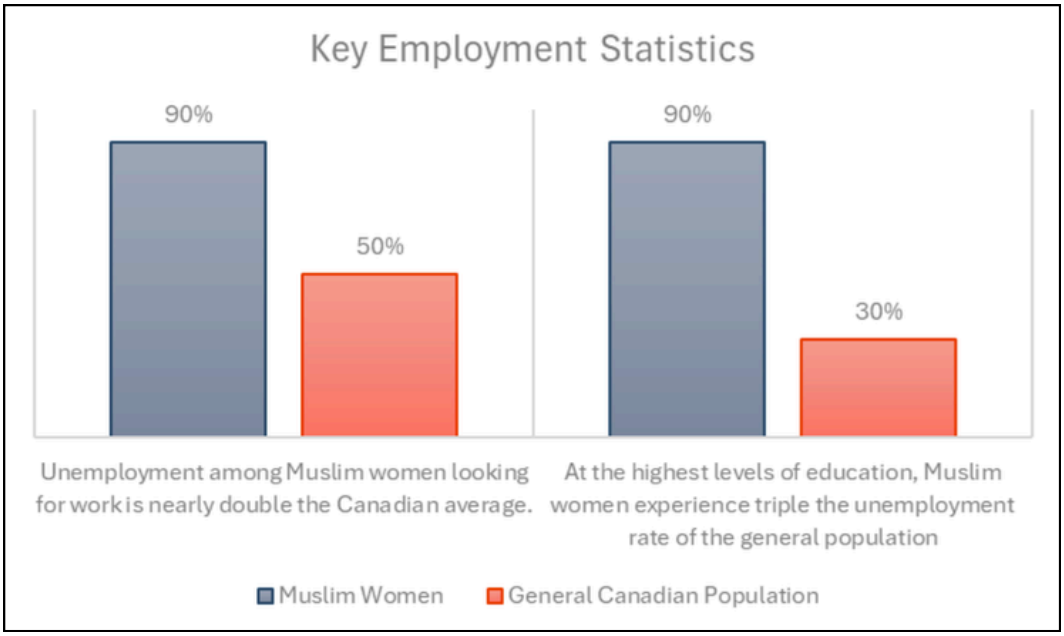
The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) is a national charitable non-profit organization dedicated to the empowerment, equality and equity of all Muslim women in Canada. Our mission is to affirm the identities of Canadian Muslim women and promote their lived experiences through community engagement, public policy, stakeholder engagement and amplified awareness of the social injustices that Muslim women and girls endure in Canada, while advocating for their diverse needs and equipping local CCMW chapters with the necessary resources to maximize national efforts and mobilize local communities to join the movement.

Our Guiding Principles:

- We are guided by the Quranic message of God's mercy and justice, and of the equality of all persons, and that each person is directly answerable to God.
- We value a pluralistic society, and foster for the goals of strength and diversity within a unifying vision and the values of Canada.
- Our identity of being Muslim women and of diverse ethnicity and race is integral to being Canadian.
- As Canadians, we abide by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the law of Canada.
- We believe in the universality of human rights, which means equality and social justice, with no restriction or discrimination based on race, religion, sex, age, and disability.
- We are vigilant in safeguarding and enhancing our identity and our rights to make informed choices amongst a variety of options.
- We acknowledge that CCMW is one voice amongst many who speak on behalf of Muslim women, and that there are others who may represent differing perspectives.
- We aim to be actively inclusive and accepting of diversity among ourselves, as Muslim women.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EMPLOYEE-FACING TOOLKIT (FOR CANADIAN MUSLIM WOMEN)

Muslim women across Canada are highly educated, multilingual, community-rooted, and globally connected professionals who bring enormous value to workplaces. According to Statistics Canada, the Muslim population has grown to nearly **4.9% of Canada's population** (2021 Census), and Muslim women are increasingly present in universities, professional programs, and skilled sectors.[1] Yet, despite their strengths, Muslim women continue to face persistent inequities from recruitment through promotion and leadership. These barriers are not the result of individual shortcomings but of structural systems that undervalue their identities, devalue their credentials, and fail to provide culturally safe, inclusive work environments.[2]



These disparities are not reflective of ability or motivation. They reveal deeper systemic barriers connected to Islamophobia, gender bias, racism, immigration status, and discriminatory workplace cultures.[3] The Muslims in Canada Data Initiative (MiCDI) at the University of Toronto has highlighted persistent patterns of bias against visibly Muslim women in hiring, promotion, and everyday work interactions—echoing findings from numerous diversity and labour-market studies across Canada.

The **Navigating Workplace Barriers for Muslim Women in Canada Toolkit** is created to support Muslim women at every stage of their employment journey—including newcomers navigating the Canadian job market for the first time, early-career professionals seeking meaningful roles, mid-career women facing advancement barriers, and Muslim women with intersecting identities such as Black Muslim women, queer and trans Muslim women, and Muslim women with disabilities.[4]

Drawing on the **2024 ASPIRE Study**, legal frameworks, community consultations, and global research, the toolkit provides practical, validated strategies to navigate hiring processes, build belonging, access advancement, and foster safety and inclusion at work.

ABOUT THE ASPIRE STUDY

The ASPIRE Study: Addressing Systemic Problems and Inequities in Resolving Employment Issues was conducted by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW) in collaboration with the Muslims in Canada Data Initiative (MiCDI) at the University of Toronto. Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), it is one of the most comprehensive national studies on employment barriers faced by Muslim women.

Using a mixed-methods approach—including surveys, interviews, focus groups, and Census-based labour market analyses—the study documents how systemic discrimination affects Muslim women in recruitment, retention, promotion, leadership access, and workplace safety. The study includes the experiences of newcomers, second-generation Canadians, racialized women, women from 2SLGBTQ+ communities, women living with disabilities, and women across various sectors.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE ASPIRE STUDY

1. Navigating Recruitment and Job Search

Muslim women face significant barriers before they even enter the workforce:

- **Name-based and hijab-based discrimination:** Résumés with Muslim names receive fewer callbacks; women who wear hijab experience negative interview biases.
- **Credential devaluation:** International education and work experience are often dismissed, limiting access to professional roles and forcing many into survival jobs.
- **Network exclusion:** Newcomers and women outside dominant networks struggle to access mentorship, sponsorship, and insider hiring opportunities.
- **Bias around "fit" and professionalism:** Employers often make assumptions about communication style, culture, or religious identity, which affect hiring decisions.
- **Gendered Islamophobia shapes hiring outcomes:** Particularly for visibly Muslim women, especially those who wear hijab—are perceived as less competent, less "modern," or incompatible with workplace culture, leading to exclusion at the screening and interview stages

2. Thriving in Early Employment

Early workplace experiences shape long-term retention:

- Many Muslim women reported feeling isolated or "watched" during onboarding.
- A lack of clarity around religious accommodation—prayer space, modest dress, Ramadan scheduling—was common.
- Early microaggressions and cultural exclusion often led to disengagement or early turnover.
- Lack of structured support and connection contributed to poor integration.
- The study found a direct link between early workplace exclusion and declining mental health. Women described anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion stemming from constant monitoring, microaggressions, and uncertainty about belonging. Several participants explicitly connected underemployment, precarity, and lack of accommodation to deteriorating mental well-being.

3. Building Career Pathways and Leadership Confidence

Muslim women encounter systemic barriers that prevent upward mobility:

- They remain significantly underrepresented in senior management positions despite high education levels.
- Many experience a "broken rung": being passed over for early-career advancement opportunities that would place them on leadership tracks.
- Sponsorship is often inaccessible, leaving Muslim women without influential advocates.
- Performance evaluations frequently reflect biased assumptions related to tone, assertiveness, or communication style.[2]
- Black Muslim women and visibly Muslim women report especially high levels of scrutiny and exclusion.
- Muslim women who do reach senior or managerial roles report heightened isolation, hostility, and resistance from peers—most often within leadership teams dominated by white men. The study documents experiences of being treated as outsiders, excluded from informal decision-making, and subjected to intensified scrutiny once in leadership positions.

4. Creating Safe and Inclusive Workplaces

Safety for Muslim women extends far beyond the absence of harassment:

- Faith-based needs—prayer space, modest dress, flexible schedules during Ramadan—were often inconsistently supported.[5]
- Microaggressions (comments about hijab, accents, food, or religious practice) were widespread and persistent.
- Many Muslim women reported burnout, identity suppression, or emotional exhaustion due to repeated bias.

- 2SLGBTQ+ Muslim women, trans Muslim women, Black Muslim women, and Muslim women with disabilities faced compounded forms of discrimination.
- DEI policies often existed on paper but did not translate into meaningful, culturally safe practice.

Across modules, a consistent theme emerged: **belonging is fragile, and exclusion—whether subtle or overt—has significant mental health and career impacts.**

SUMMARY OF STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS



ASPIRE calls for systemic changes that address every stage of the employment cycle. Key recommendations include:

1. **Strengthening DEI policies through accountability:** Move beyond symbolic diversity gestures; implement anti-racism training, inclusive hiring practices, and measurable DEI goals.
2. **Recognizing international credentials:** Improve pathways for foreign-trained professionals and reduce barriers for newcomer women.
3. **Expanding mentorship and sponsorship opportunities:** Develop structured programs to support long-term career development.
4. **Improving workplace flexibility and childcare supports:** Expand access to affordable childcare and flexible schedules to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.
5. **Addressing discrimination through robust reporting systems:** Create clear, survivor-centered reporting mechanisms for Islamophobia, racism, and harassment.

6. **Supporting digital skills, job search training, and credential transfer:** Offer career coaching, technical training, and LinkedIn optimization for job seekers.
7. **Ensuring consistent religious accommodation:** Guarantee access to clean prayer spaces, scheduling flexibility during Ramadan, and dress-code inclusivity.

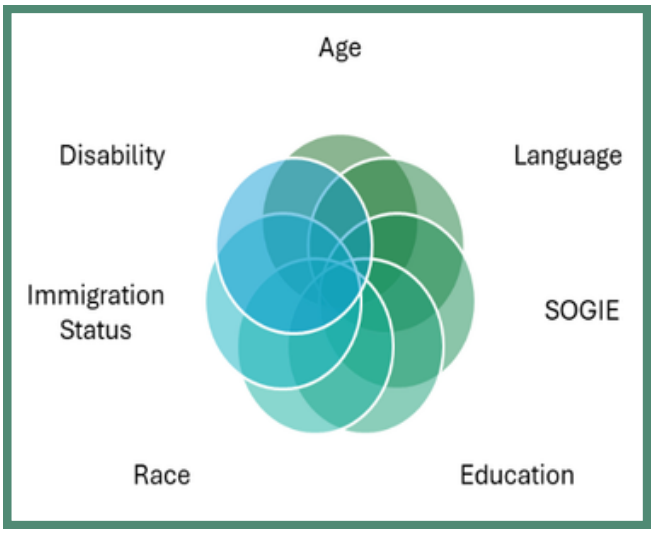
These recommendations inform the structure and content of the four toolkit modules.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY & INTERSECTIONALITY

Muslim women's employment experiences cannot be understood through a single lens. Intersectionality—first articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw—explains how identities such as gender, race, religion, disability, immigration status, and sexual orientation interact to create unique forms of discrimination.

Muslim women face discrimination shaped by **multiple, overlapping identities**—religion, race, gender, language, disability, immigration status, and age. This is core to understanding employment inequities.[5]

- **Racialized Muslim women** (Black, Arab, South Asian) face higher unemployment despite higher education levels.
- **Newcomer Muslim women** often navigate language barriers, lack of networks, and credential devaluation.
- **Muslim women with disabilities** are doubly marginalized by ableism and Islamophobia.
- **Queer and trans Muslim women** report exclusion from both workplace and community networks.



While Canada's legal frameworks—**the Charter, Human Rights Act, Employment Equity Act, and Accessible Canada Act**—provide protection, enforcement is uneven. Muslim women often lack access to culturally-safe reporting channels or leadership that understands intersectional harm. Recognizing intersectionality helps employers and policymakers build more equitable systems—and helps Muslim women self-advocate with clarity and confidence.

Belonging as a Workplace Equity Imperative

Research consistently shows that **belonging predicts retention, psychological safety, and performance**. When Muslim women feel they must hide their identity to "fit in," employee engagement and well-being decline.

Québec's Legislative Context: What It Means for Muslim Women

Muslim women in Québec face a uniquely challenging employment landscape shaped by laws that directly restrict their participation in public life. **Bill 21**, passed in 2019, bans public-sector workers in positions of authority—such as teachers, police officers, and prosecutors—from wearing religious symbols. For hijab-wearing Muslim women, this effectively closes the door to entire professions. The **National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)** has documented how many women have left teacher-training programs, abandoned public-service career paths, or moved out of Québec altogether because the law makes full economic participation impossible.[6]

The situation intensified with **Bill 9**, proposed in 2024, which expands "religious neutrality" requirements into Québec's immigration system. NCCM and legal scholars warn that it could introduce new surveillance mechanisms and allow decisions on immigration status to be influenced by religious expression. Together, Bills 21 and 9 deepen what NCCM calls "state-sanctioned discrimination," disproportionately affecting Muslim women whose religious identity is visible.

These measures sharply contradict national human rights protections found in the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms,** the **Canadian Human Rights Act,** and the **Employment Equity Act**, all of which prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion and protect freedom of expression. Although Québec invokes the notwithstanding clause to shield Bill 21, the impact remains clear: Muslim women face structural exclusion from key professions, reduced economic mobility, and heightened stigma.

For organizations and practitioners supporting Muslim women, the Québec context illustrates why rights-based employment supports, culturally safe programming, and strong advocacy are essential—not optional.

Table 1: Human Rights Protections for Muslim Women in Canada

Legal Framework	Protected Grounds	Key Protections	What This Means for Muslim Women at Work
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	Religion, sex, race, ethnic origin	Freedom of religion; equality before the law	Right to wear hijab/niqab in public-sector jobs; protection from state-imposed religious discrimination
Canadian Human Rights Act (Federal)	Religion, sex, race, ethnic/national origin, family status	Non-discrimination; duty to accommodate; protection from harassment	Banks, airlines, telecoms must accommodate prayer, dress, Ramadan needs and prevent Islamophobia
Provincial / Territorial Human Rights Codes	Religion/creed, sex, race, ancestry, place of origin	Protection in hiring, promotion, pay, termination	Employers cannot reject candidates due to Muslim names, hijab, or stereotypes about "fit"
Duty to Accommodate (Human Rights Law)	Religion, gender, family status	Accommodation up to undue hardship	Flexible breaks for prayer, private prayer space, modest uniform options
Employment Standards Acts	Sex, pregnancy, family status (implicit)	Leave protections; anti-reprisal	Protection during pregnancy, caregiving, and religious observance
Occupational Health & Safety Laws	Religion, sex (via harassment protections)	Right to a harassment-free workplace	Protection from Islamophobic jokes, microaggressions, or hostile environments
Employment Equity Act (Federal)	Women, racialized persons	Address systemic barriers	Encourages proactive hiring and promotion of racialized Muslim women
Anti-Racism & Inclusion Strategies	Race, religion (policy recognition)	Recognition of Islamophobia	Strengthens institutional accountability for bias affecting Muslim women
Human Rights Tribunals & Commissions	All protected grounds	Complaint and enforcement mechanisms	Muslim women can seek remedies for discrimination and retaliation
Intersectional Jurisprudence	Combined grounds (religion + gender + race)	Recognition of compounded discrimination	Acknowledges gendered Islamophobia distinct from sexism or racism alone

GROUNDED IN CCMW GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This toolkit is grounded in the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's foundational values:

- **Equality and justice**, inspired by Quranic principles of mercy and fairness.
- **Pluralism,** affirming that Muslim women's diverse identities enrich Canadian society.
- **Commitment to the Charter and human rights,** prioritizing equity and dignity for all.
- **Autonomy and informed choice,** ensuring Muslim women shape their own employment journeys.
- **Active inclusion and belonging**, recognizing that representation is not enough—voice and influence matter.
- **Recognition of diverse perspectives within Muslim communities**, acknowledging that no single narrative captures the full experience of Muslim women in Canada.

These principles shape the structure, tone, and purpose of the toolkit.

WHY THIS TOOLKIT IS NEEDED

Muslim women in Canada are among the most educated, multilingual, and globally connected professionals. Yet their employment outcomes remain disproportionately low compared to non-Muslim women with similar qualifications. This toolkit recognizes:

- **The gap between talent and opportunity:** Muslim women's credentials, global experience, and multilingual capacity remain undervalued.
- **The emotional labour of navigating bias:** Many Muslim women described needing to "prove" themselves repeatedly while managing microaggressions, tokenism, and identity suppression.
- **The need for self-advocacy tools that honour identity:** Muslim women should not have to choose between authenticity and career growth.
- **The importance of community and collective knowledge:** Muslim women consistently emphasized the value of networks, sisterhood, and shared strategies.

This toolkit supports Muslim women as they navigate—and challenge—these systems, while acknowledging that long-term equity requires structural reform.

WHY A TOOLKIT FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADA?

Entry Barriers and Hiring Discrimination

- Muslim women are among the most educated groups of women in Canada, yet face disproportionate unemployment and underemployment due to systemic hiring bias.
- Hiring discrimination based on names, hijab, accent, and perceived "fit" continues to exclude qualified Muslim women from professional roles.
- International education and work experience held by Muslim women are routinely devalued, forcing many into survival or precarious employment.
- Workplace inequities faced by Muslim women are not individual failures, but the result of intersecting gendered, racialized, and religious discrimination.

Belonging, Accommodation, and Rentention

- Early workplace experiences of inclusion or exclusion strongly shape retention, wellbeing, and long-term career confidence.
- Inconsistent or denied religious accommodation undermines psychological safety and contributes to early disengagement.
- Muslim women are often pressured to adapt, stay silent, or suppress visible identity in order to "fit in" at work.
- Islamophobia in everyday workplace interactions has direct mental health impacts, including stress, burnout, and imposter syndrome.

Advancement, Sponsorship and Leadership Bias

- Exclusion from informal networks and sponsorship opportunities creates a "broken rung" that stalls Muslim women's career progression.
- Performance evaluations and promotion decisions often reflect bias rather than merit, limiting advancement into leadership roles.
- Black, newcomer, disabled, queer, and trans Muslim women face compounded barriers to leadership and decision-making spaces.
- Supporting Muslim women's leadership strengthens workplace equity, innovation, and organizational effectiveness.

Safety, Rights, and Systemic Change

- Islamophobia and gender-based harassment create unsafe and exclusionary work environments for Muslim women.
- Shifting responsibility onto individual resilience or "adaptation" obscures the structural roots of workplace discrimination.
- Rights awareness is essential for dignity, safety, and collective advocacy within inequitable systems.
- Meaningful change requires both institutional reform and tools that strengthen Muslim women's agency and collective power.

Despite being among the most educated groups of women in Canada, Muslim women continue to face persistent and systemic barriers across the employment lifecycle—from recruitment and onboarding to advancement and workplace inclusion.[7] These barriers are not isolated incidents; they are shaped by overlapping forms of discrimination related to gender, religion, race, immigration status, disability, and sexual orientation. National data show that Muslim women experience higher unemployment and underemployment than non-Muslim women, even when they hold comparable or higher levels of education and professional experience.[8]

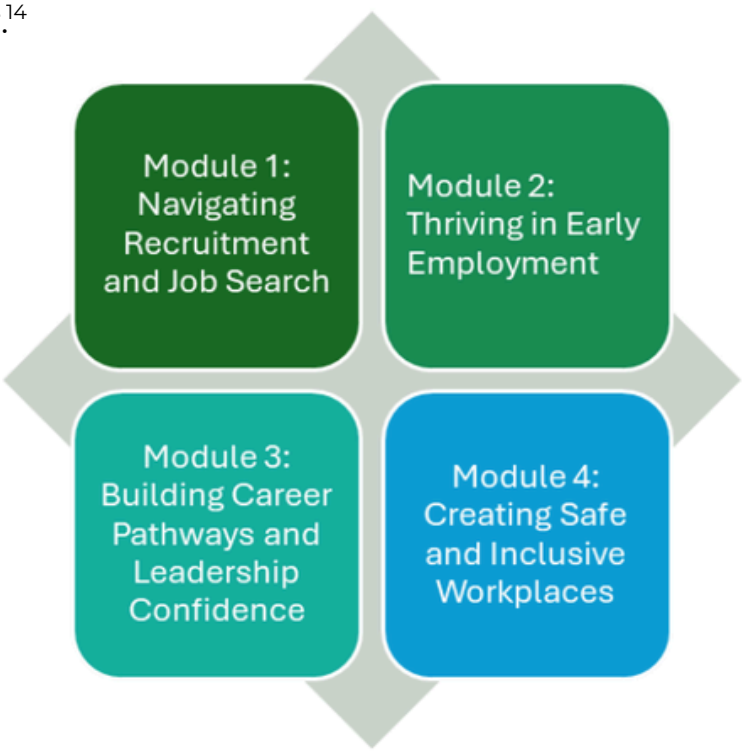
Findings from the ASPIRE Study reveal that these inequities are reinforced through name and hijab bias in hiring, devaluation of international credentials, exclusion from informal workplace networks, limited access to sponsorship, and inconsistent religious accommodation.[9] These challenges are particularly acute for Black Muslim women, newcomer women, Muslim women with disabilities, and queer and trans Muslim women, who face compounded marginalization and heightened vulnerability to workplace exclusion.[10] Beyond economic impacts, Muslim women report serious consequences for mental health, belonging, and long-term career confidence—describing burnout, imposter syndrome, and disengagement linked directly to unsafe or exclusionary work environments.[11]

At the same time, many Muslim women describe being implicitly or explicitly told that success requires adaptation, silence, or the suppression of visible identity. This framing places responsibility on individuals rather than on systems, obscuring the structural roots of workplace inequities. A dedicated toolkit for Muslim women is therefore essential—one that validates lived experiences, demystifies workplace systems, and equips women with practical, rights-aware strategies to navigate employment while maintaining dignity, faith, and wellbeing. As the ASPIRE Study makes clear, meaningful change requires not only institutional reform, but also tools that strengthen Muslim women's agency, confidence, and collective power within existing structures.[12]

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

This toolkit was developed to support Muslim women in Canada—particularly newcomers, early-career professionals, and those navigating mid-career transitions—to access, sustain, and thrive in employment without compromising their identities. It is grounded in the findings of the **ASPIRE Study: Addressing Systemic Problems and Inequities in Resolving Employment Issues**, which draws on national Census data, surveys, interviews, and focus groups with Muslim women across Canada.[13] The toolkit is designed to function both as a **self-navigation resource for Muslim women** and as a **capacity-building tool for organizations, service providers, and community partners** working alongside them.

Structured around four interconnected modules, the toolkit reflects critical stages of the employment journey: navigating recruitment, building belonging during onboarding, advancing into leadership, and creating safe and inclusive workplaces. Each module integrates evidence-based analysis with practical tools, including advocacy scripts, skills-mapping exercises, reflection prompts, and workshop activities. The content is intentionally intersectional, recognizing that Muslim women are not a monolithic group and that experiences vary widely based on race, disability, gender identity, immigration status, age, and sector.[14]



Importantly, this toolkit does not frame Muslim women as lacking skills or readiness. Instead, it centers structural barriers while affirming Muslim women's strengths, resilience, and leadership. It aligns with Canada's human rights and employment equity frameworks—including protections under the Canadian Human Rights Act and provincial human rights codes—while also responding to contemporary realities such as rising Islamophobia and legislative restrictions on religious expression that shape Muslim women's employment options.[15]

By combining rights-based knowledge with practical strategies and collective learning tools, this resource aims to support Muslim women in building sustainable careers, fostering belonging, and shaping workplaces that are not merely diverse, but genuinely equitable and inclusive.

WHAT THIS TOOLKIT OFFERS

The toolkit provides practical, research-based strategies tailored to Muslim women navigating the Canadian workforce. Each section includes:

- Clear explanations of the barriers
- Actionable strategies for Muslim women
- Sector-specific considerations
- Real Canadian case studies
- Worksheets, scripts, templates, and workshop modules
- Guidance for both early-career and mid-career women
- Tools for queer, trans, Black, disabled, and newcomer Muslim women

The toolkit is designed to be both a **practical guide** and a **source of validation and empowerment**, affirming that the barriers Muslim women face are structural—not personal. It consists of four interconnected modules, each addressing a different stage of the employment journey.

Module 1: Navigating Recruitment & Job Search

Helps Muslim women understand hiring biases, use skills-based application tools, advocate for religious accommodations during interviews, and build strategic networks. Drawing on ASPIRE findings, it addresses barriers such as name/hijab bias, credential devaluation, and exclusion from professional networks. The workshop supports Muslim women to navigate recruitment processes with confidence and clarity by understanding their legal rights and the systemic nature of hiring bias. Participants explore common barriers identified in the ASPIRE Study—such as name-based and hijab-related discrimination, credential devaluation, and exclusion from professional networks—and learn practical strategies to counter these barriers. Through interactive activities, the workshop builds skills in rights-based self-advocacy, skills-focused applications, interview preparation, and decision-making around disclosure and accommodation.

Module 2: Thriving in Early Employment

Covers the "first 90 days" of work—building belonging, understanding rights, navigating team dynamics, and setting the foundation for safe and supportive work relationships. Based on ASPIRE findings, early experiences of cultural safety strongly predict retention and wellbeing. Focusing on the first 90 days of employment, this workshop helps Muslim women establish a strong foundation for belonging, safety, and retention. Participants examine early workplace experiences through a human rights lens, with particular attention to religious accommodation, team dynamics, and psychological safety. Drawing on ASPIRE findings that link early cultural safety to long-term wellbeing and job retention, the workshop provides tools to navigate workplace norms, seek support, and address concerns before they escalate.

Module 3: Building Career Pathways & Leadership Advancement

Addresses the "broken rung" where many Muslim women stall between entry-level and mid-level roles. This module incorporates tools for navigating biased evaluations, seeking sponsorship, leading from where you are, and supporting advancement as managers. Black, queer, trans, and disabled Muslim women's experiences are centered. The workshop addresses the career progression gap many Muslim women face between entry-level and mid-level roles. Participants explore how bias and intersectional discrimination shape performance evaluations, access to sponsorship, and leadership opportunities. Grounded in ASPIRE evidence, the workshop offers practical tools for navigating biased systems, leading from where you are, and building pathways to advancement—while centering the experiences of Black, queer, trans, and disabled Muslim women.

Module 4: Creating Safe and Inclusive Workplaces

Provides strategies for navigating religious accommodations, microaggressions, Islamophobia, and exclusion from informal networks. It also offers tools for building psychological safety, managing mental health impacts, and advocating for gender- and faith-inclusive practices. The workshop equips Muslim women with strategies to navigate and respond to Islamophobia, microaggressions, and exclusion in the workplace. Participants deepen their understanding of legal protections against harassment and discrimination, while developing skills to protect their mental health, build psychological safety, and engage in collective advocacy. The workshop emphasizes both individual and collective approaches to creating workplaces that are safer, more inclusive, and responsive to faith and gender diversity.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE TOOLKIT

You can use this toolkit in multiple ways:

For Muslim women

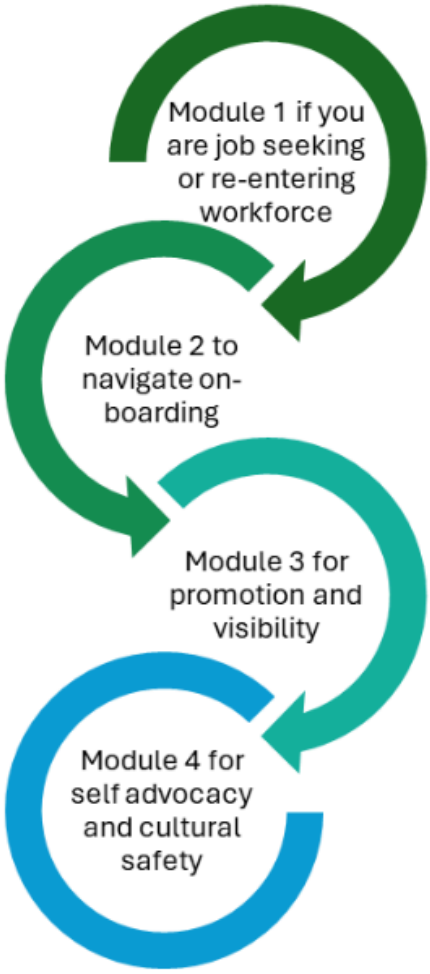
- Start at **Module 1** if you are job seeking or re-entering the workforce
- Use **Module 2** to navigate onboarding and early expectations
- Apply **Module 3** for promotion, visibility, and leadership development
- Use **Module 4** for self-advocacy around cultural safety and religious accommodation

For organizations or service providers

- Use the modules sequentially as a training pathway
- Facilitate the included workshops with staff or clients
- Incorporate tools into employment programs, coaching, or HR policy reforms

For community groups

- Use activities and handouts to support women's circles, peer mentoring, and networking programs



This toolkit is designed to be flexible, practical, and empowering—helping Muslim women and those who support them build pathways to safety, opportunity, leadership, and belonging.

Endnotes

1 Statistics Canada (2024). The Muslim Population in Canada. *https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2024058-eng.htm?utm*

2 ASPIRE Study. (2014). Canadian Council of Muslim Women. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

3 Mansouri, K. et al. "Job Type, Religion, and Muslim Gender as Predictors of Employment Outcomes in Canada," 2022. *https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11067403/?utm*

4 Ibid

5 ASPIRE Study. (2014). Canadian Council of Muslim Women. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

6 NCCM. The Hijab Ban (Bill 21). *https://nccm.ca/bill-21/?utm*

7 ASPIRE Study. (2014). Canadian Council of Muslim Women. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

8 Ibid

9 Ibid

10 Ibid

11 Ibid

12 Ibid

13 Ibid

14 Ibid

15 NCCM. The Hijab Ban (Bill 21). https://nccm.ca/bill-21/?utm

CONTENT MODULE 1

Navigating Recruitment & Job Search

I. OVERVIEW

For many Canadian Muslim women, the hiring process is the first point where inequity becomes tangible. Before they ever enter a workplace, they encounter employers, systems, and norms that were not built with their identities—gendered, racialized, faith-based, immigrant—at the center. The ASPIRE Study Report (2024) confirms overwhelmingly that recruitment is not a neutral gateway. It is a site where bias, credential devaluation, and exclusion accumulate, shaping who gets seen, who gets shortlisted, and who gets hired.

A Highly Educated Group Facing Deep Employment Gaps[1]

One of the most striking findings in the ASPIRE Study is the dissonance between education and employment outcomes for Muslim women. Despite being *more educated than the general Canadian population*, Muslim women have significantly poorer employment prospects. According to the report:

- Only 44% of Canadian Muslim women are employed, compared to 55% of non-Muslim women and 58% of the general population.
- 9% of Muslim women are unemployed and actively looking for work—nearly double the Canadian average of 5%.
- Even at the highest levels of education, unemployment among Muslim women remains at 9%, *triple* the rate of the wider highly educated population (3%).

The report underscores the systemic nature of this inequity:
"Canadian Muslim women boast significantly higher levels of education… yet remain significantly more likely to be unemployed or underemployed." — ASPIRE Study
This mismatch between credentials and outcomes reveals that employment barriers are not tied to capability, but to structural discrimination.

Bias Begins Before the First Interview

ASPIRE's qualitative interviews provide vivid accounts of how hiring bias appears at the earliest stages. Women described receiving more callbacks after Anglicizing their names or removing photos, while hijab-wearing women reported being screened out before being offered interviews.

Credential Devaluation: A Barrier Unique in Its Severity

[1] **Statistics Canada.** (2022). *Labour force characteristics by religion, age and gender (2021 Census).* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm

Recruitment is also shaped by an entrenched system of undervaluing international credentials—especially those earned in South and Southeast Asia. ASPIRE findings show:

- Only 31% of Muslim women who studied in South/Southeast Asia reported full-time work, compared to 52% of those who studied in Canada.
- This disparity is *not* reflected among the general population, where those who studied in those regions actually have *higher* employment rates than Canadian-educated peers.

The report concludes:
"There is significant evidence for the impact of gendered Islamophobia beyond anti-immigrant bias."
— ASPIRE Study

This finding directly challenges the myth that "Canadian experience" requirements are neutral.

Who You Are Shapes Your Chances — Intersectional Reality in Recruitment
ASPIRE's intersectional analysis shows that certain groups of Muslim women face even steeper recruitment barriers:

- Black, Arab, South Asian, West Asian, and Indigenous Muslim women reported the *poorest employment outcomes*.
- Widowed and divorced Muslim women were twice as likely to be unemployed and seeking work compared to the general Canadian population.
- Muslim women with disabilities faced the *highest unemployment rates* in the study (narrative sections).

These patterns reflect not only racism and Islamophobia, but layered ableism, sexism, and anti-immigrant bias.

Hypervisibility, Invisibility, and the Emotional Weight of Recruitment
Many women described feeling caught between being hyper visible (scrutinized for hijab, name, accent) and invisible (dismissed, overlooked, not seen as a "fit"). One participant described the system as one where:
"They don't fire you… it's in the non-renewal of contracts… you're replaced by someone with fewer credentials but the right social fit." — ASPIRE Study

Even in job search stages, this dynamic creates a sense of precarity and self-surveillance. Women described rehearsing answers about hijab, fasting, childcare, or modest dress—not because this affects performance, but because they feared employer bias.

Recruitment becomes not just a technical process, but an emotional gauntlet marked by:

- self-censorship
- internalized doubt
- fear of discrimination
- anxiety around "fit" and belonging
- exhaustion from constant self-monitoring

Belonging Begins Before You Are Hired

One of the strongest themes in the ASPIRE Study is that "belonging" is not something that begins on Day 1 of employment—it is signaled or denied during recruitment.

- Lack of information about accommodations leaves Muslim women unsure if they can pray or fast safely.
- Homogeneous hiring panels send clear signals about who belongs.
- "Culture fit" language acts as coded exclusion.
- Informal hiring channels disadvantage Muslim women who cannot participate in alcohol-centered networking.

As one participant explained:
"If the interview feels unsafe, I already know I won't belong there." -— ASPIRE Study (narrative interviews)

This underscores that recruitment is not only about being evaluated—it is about evaluating the workplace in return.

Module 1 recognizes that systemic discrimination—not lack of skill—is the primary barrier Muslim women face. The goal is to equip Muslim women with practical tools to:

- navigate biased hiring environments
- communicate their needs without fear
- de-bias their materials while staying authentic
- build strategic networks that bypass exclusion
- identify culturally safe workplaces
- understand their rights under Canadian law

II. UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS

Name, Hijab, and Accent Bias at Screening and Interviews

The ASPIRE Study makes clear that recruitment is one of the most significant choke points for Muslim women. While participants did not always name the term "bias," their testimonies reveal consistent patterns of Islamophobia, racism, and appearance-based discrimination.

Women described being constantly assessed against white, Christian-coded norms of "fit" and "professionalism," where hijab, accents, or culturally grounded communication styles were judged as deficits.

Another expressed how the fear of being judged forces silence:
"If I speak, I'm too strong. If I don't speak, I'm weak. Either way, I'm being judged for who I am."
— ASPIRE Study Report, p. 23

These quotes reflect the emotional labour Muslim women carry even before employment begins. Many women also shared experiences of being screened out immediately after employers realized they wore hijab or had a non-Anglicized name.

This aligns with global research: visibly Muslim women, particularly hijab-wearing applicants, experience the highest hiring penalties across the UK, EU, Australia, and the United States.

Devaluation of International Education and Professional Experience[2]

International credentials are a major barrier for Muslim women, especially newcomers and racialized immigrants. ASPIRE's quantitative findings demonstrate systemic disregard for international qualifications. The report states that women who studied in South or Southeast Asia were significantly less likely to be employed full-time (31%) compared to women who studied in Canada (52%). Furthermore, there is significant evidence for the impact of gendered Islamophobia beyond anti-immigrant bias. Participants described being forced to "start over," redo degrees, or accept entry-level roles far below their prior experience.

One newcomer explained:
"You bend, bend, bend…you stay quiet because you need the job. You don't want them to think you're difficult." — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 23

Credential devaluation is not a neutral assessment—it is a structural barrier that disproportionately impacts Muslim women from the Global South.

Network Gaps and Exclusion from "Warm" Hiring Pathways

A major finding of ASPIRE is that Muslim women are excluded from informal and formal professional networks, especially in early career stages.

Across participants, the message was consistent: jobs are increasingly obtained through relationships, not formal applications, and Muslim women—especially newcomers, hijab-wearing women, and racialized women—are excluded from these circles.

This exclusion is compounded by alcohol-centered networking culture. One participant described:
"They said networking was the key to promotion, but all the events were at bars after work. I couldn't go, and I knew it put me at a disadvantage." — ASPIRE Study (Interview)

This limitation is not about personal preference—it's a structural barrier shaped by workplace norms that centre majority identities.

---

[2] **Statistics Canada.** (2023). *Education and labour market outcomes of immigrants.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2023006/article/00003-eng.htm

Globally, similar patterns appear: UK and US studies show that Muslim women are left out of "culture fit" networks that lead to sponsorship and hiring referrals.

Biased Interview Practices and Culturally Unsafe Recruitment Processes

ASPIRE interviews describe interview environments where Muslim women must anticipate bias before they even walk in. This includes:

- inappropriate questions about Ramadan
- assumptions that hijab signals "restrictions"
- "Canadian experience" requirements
- interviewers linking "communication style" to "fit"

One woman described the subtle but devastating pattern of being excluded:
"You're not fired… never fired. It's in the non-renewal of contracts… replaced by someone with fewer credentials but the right social fit." — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 23

Another described how culture-coded professionalism shaped outcomes:
"I was told I wasn't a good fit before they even knew anything about my work. They decided based on my appearance." — ASPIRE Study (Interview)

This reflects the Pyramid 2 evidence on "gatekeeping"—structures that reward conformity to whiteness and penalize racialized Muslim women for visible faith.

Structural Hiring Barriers: "Canadian Experience," Reference Bias, and Lack of Accommodation Clarity

ASPIRE highlights that "Canadian experience" requirements particularly harm Muslim women:

- Many could not access interviews without Canadian references.
- Employers used cultural norms ("communication expectations," "team fit") to justify exclusion.
- Requests for accommodations (prayer space, Ramadan support) were seen as "burdens" or "inconveniences."

One participant shared:
"Job security and precarity has always been directly linked to my race and my faith." — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 23

This reveals a deeper truth: hiring systems are not culturally neutral—they actively gate-keep who is seen as "ready" or "professional."

Intersectional Disadvantages: Race, Disability, Sexual Orientation, and Family Status

Black & Southeast Asian Muslim women

The study presents stark racial disparities:

"Black and Southeast Asian Muslim women reported unemployment rates of 12–13%—the highest among all Muslim women respondents." — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 24

One Black Muslim woman summarized her experience:

"As a Black Muslim woman, I feel invisible—I don't see myself reflected anywhere in leadership, and I am constantly questioned on my 'tone.'" — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 112

Muslim women with disabilities

ASPIRE underscores compounded ableism:

"Muslim women with disabilities experienced the highest unemployment rates at 18%." — ASPIRE Study Report (Labour Force Analysis)

One participant described the dual stigma:

"When they see my cane and my hijab, it feels like two strikes against me." — ASPIRE Study (Interview)

Queer & trans Muslim women

The study includes a focus group of queer Muslim women who expressed deep concerns about disclosure:

"I stayed silent about being queer during the group because I didn't want to face judgment from either side." — ASPIRE Study (Interview)

They reported barriers navigating dress codes, prayer spaces, and pronoun systems during recruitment.

Family status

The study notes:

"Widowed and divorced Muslim women were twice as likely to be unemployed (7%) compared to the general Canadian female population (3%)." — ASPIRE Study Report, p. 33

This signals systemic exclusion of women with caregiving responsibilities.

Internalized Impacts: Self-Doubt, Code-Switching, and Shrinking Aspirations

ASPIRE documents how external discrimination produces internal consequences.

Women described:

- lowering aspirations
- applying only to "safe" roles
- avoiding leadership ambitions
- suppressing their identity
- code-switching their communication
- hesitating to request accommodations

One participant articulated:
"You start to shrink yourself—speak softer, laugh less, just to fit in. It's dehumanizing." — ASPIRE Study (Interview)

These internalized responses are not personal weaknesses—they are survival strategies within exclusionary systems.

Name, Hijab & Accent Bias

ASPIRE found that visibly Muslim women were disproportionately screened out in the earliest stages.
"I stopped getting interviews when I started wearing hijab. When I removed my photo from my résumé, the calls increased again." — *ASPIRE participant, Ontario*
Hiring bias shows up through:

- Resume sorting algorithms reflecting racialized patterns
- Interviewers questioning "fit," "confidence," or "communication style"
- Comments on accent, modest dress, or hijab interpreted as "lack of professionalism"

Devaluation of International Credentials[3]

Many internationally educated Muslim women reported being told to "start over," even with senior international experience.

- Degrees from South Asia, MENA (Middle East and North Africa) often dismissed without transparent criteria
- Employers using "Canadian experience" as a gatekeeping mechanism
- Women losing confidence after repeated credential-based rejection

Network Gaps & Social Capital Exclusion

ASPIRE confirms that Muslim women—especially newcomers—face:

- Lack of access to professional references
- Exclusion from informal hiring circles
- Fewer champions or sponsors who can open doors

"They told me to network, but every event was at a bar. I couldn't go, and it hurt my chances." — ASPIRE participant

Biased Interview Practices

Muslim women reported:

- Illegal or inappropriate questions ("Will Ramadan affect your work?" or "Will you remove the hijab in meetings?")
- Panels lacking racial or gender diversity
- Scoring rubrics based on Western communication norms and cultural familiarity

[3] **Statistics Canada.** (2023). *Education and labour market outcomes of immigrants.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2023006/article/00003-eng.htm

After repeated exclusion, many described:

- shrinking aspirations
- applying only to “safe” roles
- questioning their worth or skill
- avoiding leadership-track postings

III. KEY INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME RECRUITMENT BARRIERS

OVERARCHING STRATEGIES

These strategies directly address the barriers documented in the ASPIRE Study Report (2024) and global evidence on hiring discrimination against Muslim women—particularly those wearing hijab, those racialized as Black or Southeast Asian, newcomers, queer/trans Muslim women, and women with disabilities.

Muslim women did not ask for “resilience”—they built it through systemic exclusion.
These strategies are designed to minimize harm, maximize visibility, protect dignity, and strengthen agency while navigating biased hiring systems.

De-bias Your Application Materials Without Erasing Identity

Use a Skills-Based or Hybrid Resume Format: This format highlights outcomes, achievements, and competencies rather than job titles or unfamiliar international organizations. Useful for women whose experience was undervalued due to international credentials:

- Emphasize quantifiable outcomes: “Increased project efficiency by 20%.”
- Translate sector-specific achievements using Canadian terminology.
- Create a “Selected Achievements” section linked to STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Result)[4].

Create a STAR Achievement Bank for Interviews[5]: Build a digital folder with:

- major accomplishments
- leadership moments
- technical and soft skills
- conflict-resolution examples
- equity or inclusion contributions

[4] Marlo Lyons. (2025, February). *Use the STAR interview method to land your next job. Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/2025/02/use-the-star-interview-method-to-land-your-next-job
[5] Ibid

Translate International Credentials Strategically: Do not erase global experience—frame it in terms of:

- Scale: "Worked across three regions."
- Complexity: "Managed multi-country teams."
- Transferability: "Experience directly aligns with Canadian safety, compliance, or customer service standards."

Rights-Aware Interviewing & Accommodation Scripts

Prepare Neutral, Firm, Professional Scripts

Examples:
Prayer time: "I take a short break in the afternoon for prayer. It doesn't affect my productivity and I manage my schedule around it."

Ramadan: "During Ramadan, I continue working as usual and coordinate energy-intensive tasks earlier in the day."

Alcohol-centered events: "I don't drink, but I enjoy participating in daytime or non-alcohol-centered team activities."

These statements align with your legal rights under provincial Human Rights Codes.

Know the Duty to Accommodate[6]: If pressed illegally: "Could you clarify how your organization handles accommodations for employees? I know accommodation is a standard right under provincial human rights laws."

This reframes the question from *defense* to *rights-based clarity*.

Build Strategic Networks That Respect Your Values

Join Muslim-led and newcomer-led professional networks

Examples:

- MAX Women in Leadership
- Canadian Muslim Women in STEM
- TRIEC Mentoring Partnership
- Immigrant Women in Business
- Black Muslim Initiative Leadership Circles
- Disability Without Poverty (for disabled Muslim women)
- Queer Muslim Network Canada (for queer/trans women)

[6] **Government of Canada.** (2019). *Accessible Canada Act.* https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada.html

These networks provide warm referrals that bypass exclusionary mainstream systems.

Build micro-networks: Start with:

- 1–2 peers in your field
- 1 mentor inside the sector
- 1 sponsor or ally willing to advocate for you

Use social media strategically: LinkedIn is essential for:

- following hiring managers
- commenting on thought leadership
- showcasing achievements
- connecting to ERGs before applying

Practice Identity-Safe Visibility

Highlight your strengths in identity-informed ways

Examples:

- "My multilingual background strengthens client engagement."
- "My experience navigating multicultural teams improves conflict resolution."

Claim authorship in group projects: Muslim women often experience "credit climbing" (credit being taken upwards). Use lines like:

- "In this project, I led the research and analysis."
- "My contribution was in stakeholder coordination."

Use low-stakes leadership moments: Lead on initiatives such as:

- onboarding checklists
- process improvements
- DEIAB initiatives that build community *but do not drain you*

Protect Wellbeing and Avoid Internalizing Systemic Bias

Build emotional safety practices

- journaling
- prayer breaks
- mindfulness apps
- community circles
- therapy with culturally competent practitioners

Identify supportive spaces outside work

Find belonging through:

- masjid-based women's groups

- newcomer circles
- professional Muslim women's Slack groups

Recognize when bias—not you—is the barrier

Use a self-check: "Is this feedback about my work—or about their discomfort with my identity?"

Navigate Ableism, Ageism, and Intersectional Barriers With Rights & Community

Disability

- Know rights under the Accessible Canada Act
- Frame accommodations as productivity enhancers
- Join disability-justice networks
- Document every accommodation request and response

Age

- outcome-based resumes
- skills framing
- inter-generational mentorship

Queer & trans Muslim women

- blending 2SLGBTQ+ and faith-based networks
- seeking queer-affirming Muslim mentors
- requesting gender-inclusive interview processes (correct pronouns, neutral prayer spaces)

Targeted Strategies by Career Stage

Early-Career Muslim Women

Build a Skills-Forward Professional Identity

Because hiring panels often lack context for junior candidates:

- Use skill-based résumés that foreground competencies over job titles.
- Build a "mini portfolio" with 3–5 concrete achievements (even from school or volunteer roles).

Structure Your Network Early—and Strategically

- Join sector-aligned Muslim or newcomer networks (MAX Women in Leadership, Black Muslim Initiative).
- Attend daytime-only networking events to bypass alcohol-centered cultures.
- Use LinkedIn proactively—comment, repost, and follow hiring managers.

Develop Advocacy Scripts for Interviews

Interviews are where early-career Muslim women experience the most identity policing. Prepare short, neutral statements for:

- prayer needs
- Ramadan
- alcohol-free participation
- modest dress

Practice "identity-safe visibility"

Early-career women described being simultaneously invisible (work minimized) and hyper-visible (hijab/accent judged). To counter this:

- Name and own your contributions clearly in group settings.
- Use phrases like:
  "In this project, my role was…" "I led the analysis on…"

Join peer "micro-networks"

Create a peer safety net of 3–5 women in the same field/sector for:

- résumé swapping
- interview practice
- emotional support

Mid-Career Muslim Women

Build Sponsorship Relationships (Not Just Mentorship)

Mid-career advancement is driven by sponsorship—someone in power advocating for you.
Steps:

- Identify 1–2 senior allies who *value your contributions.*
- Request specific advocacy actions (e.g., "nominate me for X project," "bring my name into succession conversations").

Create an Evidence Portfolio

Because ASPIRE participants described injustice in performance evaluation:

- Track achievements quarterly.
- Keep email receipts showing leadership or contributions.
- Document "invisible labour" (translation, DEI work, community engagement).

Strategically Challenge Biased Feedback[7]

Bias often appears as vague critiques: "not a culture fit," "needs more presence," "soft skills gap."
Use questions like:

- "Can you provide an example tied to a project outcome?"
- "What specific behaviour would demonstrate improvement?"
  This reframes cultural bias into measurable criteria.

[7] **Impact HR.** (n.d.). *Why Hiring for "Cultural Fit" Undermines Diversity.* https://impacthr.ca/why-hiring-for-cultural-fit-undermines-diversity/

Practice "boundary-setting visibility"
Instead of over-correcting bias through overwork:

- Set clear hours
- Name—and claim—your accomplishments
- Decline unpaid DEI labour unless it advances your goals

Build External Validation Loops
When internal systems suppress visibility:

- Speak at conferences
- Publish thought leadership
- Join external leadership programs
- Connect with Muslim women leaders in the sector

These builds influence *outside* organizations that may not recognize internal leadership.

Newcomer Muslim Women

Use Bridging Programs to Create Canadian Social Capital
Canadian employers often rely on references and local experience.
Use:

- TRIEC Mentoring Partnership
- Access Alliance newcomer bridging
- ACCES Employment programs
- Alberta Women's Economic Council
- Immigrant Women Services Ottawa

These programs provide:

- local references
- mock interviews
- employer networking
- sector alignment

Translate International Experience Into Canadian Outcomes
Instead of listing titles:

- describe scope, complexity, budgets
- link international experience to Canadian standards
- quantify impact
- Highlight transferable skills

Build a "Canadian Experience Portfolio"

Show evidence through:

- volunteer work
- sector-aligned internships
- consulting for diaspora organizations
- student or community-led projects

This satisfies biased "Canadian experience" expectations without erasing your global expertise.

Join Immigrant-Led and Muslim-Led Networks

These networks provide:

- support navigating discrimination
- warm referrals
- emotional belonging
- labour market insights

Examples:

- Muslim Women Professional Network
- Newcomer Women's Hub
- Canadian Muslim Lawyers Association (for law fields)

Learn Your Rights Early

Many newcomers are unaware that employers cannot legally:

- ask about family plans
- ask about hijab
- deny prayer breaks
- reject accommodation requests

Use plain-language scripts to articulate needs confidently.

BARRIERS AND STRATEGIES ACROSS DIFFERENT SECTORS[8]

Sector	Barriers	Strategies
STEM	• Persistent microaggressions around hijab, accents, "fit" • Alcohol-centered networking • Few visible Muslim women leaders	• Join daytime/alcohol-free STEM networks • Highlight technical contributions (post work publicly) • Follow Muslim women STEM leaders • Build micro-communities in labs to bypass exclusion

[8] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

Sector	Barriers	Strategies
Financial	• Overreliance on cultural "fit" • Network-heavy hiring • Tokenism in recruitment	• Reframe "fit" as value-add ("global perspective," "risk fluency") • Create sponsorship relationships early • Build cross-sector financial networks (CFA groups, fintech meetups)
Healthcare	• 0.07% senior leadership representation • Assumptions about modesty or communication • Credential barriers for internationally trained professionals	• Document contributions in patient care and cultural safety • Join specialized newcomer healthcare bridging programs • Build alliances with Muslim healthcare ERGs
Skilled Trades	• 12% unemployment (highest among sectors) • Male-dominated recruitment • Safety issues	• Join women-in-trades programs • Build peer safety triangles • Showcase portfolios online to bypass biased gatekeepers
Public Sector	• Slow hiring processes • Poor accommodation clarity • Bill 21 exclusions	• Use human-rights framing in interviews • Join public-sector ERGs • Build advocacy coalitions outside the workplace
Not-profit/ NGO	• "Performative inclusion" • Underpaid "community expertise" labour • Exclusion from donor-facing roles	• Track all invisible labour • Set boundaries with DEI demands • Join feminist or justice-centered networks for mentorship

IV. Conclusion

The journey into the Canadian labour market is not a neutral or equal one for Muslim women. As the ASPIRE Study makes clear, Muslim women—especially those who are visibly Muslim, Black, newcomers, queer, trans, or living with disabilities—encounter systemic barriers before they ever step into a workplace. These barriers appear during résumé screening, credential evaluation, "Canadian experience" filters, interviews, and informal networking expectations. They show up in the questions asked, the silence after applications, the discomfort in interview rooms, and the subtle messages that belonging must be earned through assimilation rather than guaranteed through rights.

Despite these realities, the stories and strategies explored in this module highlight something deeply powerful: the issue has never been a lack of talent, motivation, or capability among Muslim women. The issue lies in systems built without their identities in mind. Participants in the ASPIRE Study repeatedly demonstrated resilience, creativity, and strategic navigation—crafting stronger résumés, adapting interview strategies, building parallel networks, and maintaining dignity in the face of discrimination.

Many described doing the work of navigating two labour markets at once: the formal one where qualifications matter, and the informal one where bias shapes who is allowed in.

This module underscores a foundational truth: the labour market's biases are structural and systemic, not personal. Understanding this allows Muslim women to detach from narratives of self-blame and instead approach job search with clarity, agency, and confidence. It also reinforces that strategies such as skills-based résumés, STAR achievement banks, rights-aware interview scripts, and culturally aligned networks are not "workarounds"—they are tools for navigating a system that must still be transformed.

At the same time, our collective reflection throughout this workshop reveals that Muslim women are not passive recipients of inequity. They are active agents in reshaping the recruitment landscape. Whether advocating for accommodations, challenging biased interview questions, documenting their achievements, or mentoring others, Muslim women are cultivating forms of leadership long before formal leadership roles are made available to them.

Across early-career, mid-career, and newcomer experiences, one theme stands out: belonging begins long before employment. It begins at the point of recruitment—when candidates see themselves reflected, respected, and valued. It begins when employers demonstrate cultural safety and transparency. It begins when Muslim women are not expected to shrink themselves to fit into systems that were not built with them in mind.

The work ahead is collective. Understanding the barriers is only the first step. Building strategies rooted in self-advocacy, rights awareness, community, and solidarity ensures that Muslim women can continue entering the workforce with strength and clarity—while also advancing the long-term transformation needed to make Canadian workplaces equitable, culturally safe, and inclusive.

As one ASPIRE participant reflected so clearly:
"I learned to stop shrinking myself. The problem was never my qualifications—only the places that couldn't see them."

This module honours that truth and affirms that Muslim women deserve not only access to opportunity, but environments where their talents, identities, and lived experiences are recognized as integral to Canada's workforce.

Key Takeaways

The Challenge

Muslim women in Canada face persistent hiring barriers rooted in bias, credential devaluation, and limited access to professional networks. ASPIRE (2024) shows that **name bias, hijab bias, and assumptions about "fit"** continue to affect screening and interviews. Statistics Canada reports that **Muslim women—even with high levels of education—experience higher unemployment and**

underemployment than non-racialized women. Newcomers' face added challenges with unfamiliar hiring norms and slow credential recognition. These barriers shape confidence and restrict entry into career-aligned roles.

Why It Matters for Muslim Women

Recruitment is the gateway to long-term economic stability, professional growth, and leadership pathways. Early exclusion limits earnings, delays career progression, and reinforces impostor syndrome. Discriminatory hiring practices also impact mental wellbeing—Government of Canada research links workplace discrimination to increased stress and reduced wellbeing among racialized women. Strong, informed job search strategies help Muslim women enter workplaces where they can thrive, not merely "fit in."

What Muslim Women Should Do

1. **Strengthen your application narrative:** Use skills-based or hybrid resumes and keep a STAR achievements bank to demonstrate your impact.
2. **Prepare rights-aware responses:** Approach questions about accommodation with calm confidence—creed accommodation is protected by law.
3. **Build purposeful networks:** Join Muslim women's leadership circles, newcomer mentorship programs, and university networks to access referrals and hidden opportunities.
4. **Reframe global experience:** Present international education and work history as assets, not gaps.
5. **Document your journey:** Track applications, feedback, and discriminatory incidents for clarity and self-advocacy.
6. **Adapt to your career stage:**
    - Early-career → focus on mentorship and learning opportunities
    - Mid-career → emphasize leadership and strategic impact
    - Newcomers → use credential evaluation and government-funded employment support

These strategies help Muslim women approach the job search with clarity, confidence, and a community behind them.

Workshop Module and Facilitator Guide

Module 1: Navigating Recruitment and Job Search

Overview

The ASPIRE Study findings show that when Muslim women are navigating recruitment and job search processes, they often face implicit bias, Islamophobia, credential devaluation, and network exclusion. Rather than placing the burden of "fixing" systemic bias on women, this module emphasizes **strategic navigation, self-advocacy, and collective knowledge-sharing**—recognizing that barriers are structural, not individual failures.

This module centers around three goals:

1. **Increase clarity and confidence** in navigating Canadian recruitment systems while recognizing systemic barriers such as name bias, hijab bias, and credential devaluation.
2. **Equip participants with practical, rights-aware job search tools** to apply strategically, interview effectively, and advocate for fair treatment and religious accommodation.
3. **Strengthen agency and peer connection** by building networks, sharing strategies, and reinforcing resilience throughout the job search process.

This facilitator guide, based on ***Module 1: Navigating Recruitment and Job Search***, draws on adult learning pedagogies. Based on the learning objectives listed below – a sample 2-hour workshop agenda will be presented in a tabulated format. Additionally, a 'menu' of activities will be provided where facilitators can pick and choose different activities depending on their target audience. CCMW encourages you to be flexible and to adapt these materials to meet the needs of participants as well as the budget and logistical realities of each workshop setting.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Identify common recruitment barriers faced by Muslim women in Canada
- Recognize how Islamophobia, credential bias, and network gaps operate in hiring
- Strengthen resumes and interview narratives to counter bias
- Practice rights-aware self-advocacy during interviews and onboarding
- Build intentional networking strategies aligned with career stage
- Apply sector-specific strategies to job search efforts
- Leave with concrete tools they can immediately use

Duration:

- **Full-day workshop (6 hours)**
- Can be adapted to a **half-day (3 hours)** format

Ideal Participants:

- Muslim women who are new immigrants
- Muslim women early in their careers or recently graduated
- Muslim women re-entering the workforce or seeking career transitions

Materials Required

- PowerPoint deck: *Module 1 – Navigating Recruitment and Job Search*
- Copy of your own resume/CV
- Flip charts, markers, sticky notes
- Projector and audio setup

Sample Workshop Agenda (2-Hour Condensed Version)

Agenda	**Time**	**Resources**
Welcome and icebreaker	10 minutes	Flip-chart, markers
Review workshop objectives and setting a common group	10 minutes	Powerpoint slide
Review of Module 1 content	20 minutes	Slides, ASPIRE infographics
Activity 3	60 minutes	Printed quotes, sticky notes
Workshop Evaluation	5 minutes	Open discussion
Wrap-up final thoughts and review parking lot	10 minutes	

Icebreakers

- *Early career:* "One strength you bring to the workplace that isn't on your resume"
- *Mid-career:* "A career pivot you've made—or want to make"
- *Newcomers:* "One skill from your previous experience that Canada hasn't recognized yet"

Set community agreements: confidentiality, respect, non-judgment, shared learning.

Parking Lot:

At the beginning of the workshop, set aside a flipchart or board with the title "Parking Lot". Use this space throughout the workshop to list questions or topics that do not get addressed during the workshop. After the workshop, the facilitator should provide answers to the questions through an agreed upon form of communication (email, follow-up meeting, communique, etc.).

Menu of Activities

Activity 1: Naming Bias in Recruitment (30 minutes)

Objective: Help participants recognize that many job search challenges are systemic, not personal, and name where bias shows up.

Instructions:

1. Begin with a grounding statement:
   "Today we are separating what belongs to you from what belongs to the system."
2. Ask participants (individually or in chat/sticky notes):
   - "What reasons have you been given for rejection?"
3. Write responses on a flipchart (e.g., *not a fit, lack of Canadian experience*).
4. Introduce common recruitment biases (name bias, hijab bias, credential bias, cultural fit).
5. Facilitate a short group discussion:
   - Where do these explanations hide bias?
   - Who benefits from these norms?
6. Close by reframing rejection as **information**, not inadequacy.

Handouts:

- "Where Bias Shows Up in Hiring" (1-page overview)

HANDOUT: Where Bias Shows Up in Recruitment

Purpose:
To help you recognize how bias operates in hiring systems—so rejection is understood as **systemic**, not personal.

Common Recruitment Biases Affecting Muslim Women

Name Bias

- Résumés screened out before interviews based on "foreign sounding" names
- Often invisible and undocumented

Hijab / Appearance Bias

- Assumptions about professionalism, leadership, or "client fit"
- Comments framed as "presentation" or "image"

Accent Bias

- Equating accent with intelligence or communication ability
- Over-scrutiny of tone or confidence

Credential Bias

- International degrees or experience discounted
- "Canadian experience" used as a gatekeeping tool

Cultural Fit Bias

- Hiring people who feel familiar to existing teams
- Rewards similarity, not competence

Network Bias

- Jobs filled through informal referrals and social spaces
- Excludes newcomers and those outside dominant networks

Reflection

- Which of these have you encountered?
- How were they framed to sound "neutral" or "objective"?

Reminder: Bias explains patterns. It does not define your worth.

Activity 2: Spot the Bias – Hiring Scenario (45 minutes)

Objective: Build skill in identifying coded bias in job ads, interviews, and feedback.

Instructions:

1. Divide participants into small groups (3–5).
2. Give each group one scenario card (examples below).
3. Groups discussion
4. Groups report back one insight at plenary.
5. The facilitator summarizes patterns across groups.

Handouts

- Scenario cards
- Bias decoding worksheet

HANDOUT: Spot the Bias – Scenario Worksheet

Instructions:
Read the scenario your group received. Discuss and answer below.

Scenarios: *Please provide each group with one scenario from the list below.*

- "Canadian experience required"

- "Client-facing role—must fit team culture"
- Networking event at a bar during Ramadan
- Interview question about availability during religious holidays

Discussion Questions:

1. Where is the bias showing up?
☐ Job ad
☐ Interview question
☐ Feedback after rejection
☐ Networking expectation

2. Is the bias:
☐ Explicit
☐ Coded / indirect
☐ Structural

3. What is being implied but not said?

4. Who benefits from this norm?

5. What skill or requirement is actually needed?

Facilitator Notes:

- Encourage naming **systems**, not blaming individuals.
- Highlight intersectional impacts (hijab, accent, immigration status).

Activity 3: De-biasing Your Resume and Experience (60 minutes)

Objective: Help participants reposition international and non-linear experience using Canadian hiring logic.

Instructions

1. Explain the difference between:
    - Chronological résumé
    - Skills-based / hybrid résumé
2. Ask participants to choose **one past role** (paid or unpaid).
3. Guide them through rewriting it using:
    - Action verb
    - Outcome

    - Transferable skill
4. Pair participants to peer-review for clarity and impact.
5. Facilitate a group reflection: How did reframing change how the experience felt?

Handouts

- Transferable skills mapping sheet

HANDOUT: Resume Lab – Transferrable Skills Mapping

Step 1: Identify Your Experience

Choose one experience to work with (paid or unpaid):

☐ International job
☐ Volunteer role
☐ Community / faith leadership
☐ Caregiving or family management
☐ Survival job
☐ Internship / student role

Role / Experience Title:

Where did this take place? (Country, organization, community, home, etc.)

Step 2: What Did You Actually Do?

List 3–5 tasks or responsibilities (use plain language):

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Step 3: Map Tasks to Transferable Skills

Use the table below to translate your experience into employer-recognized skills.

What I Did	Skills Used	How this Skill Shows Up at Work

Examples of Transferable Skills

- Communication
- Coordination
- Problem-solving
- Leadership
- Time management

- Client service
- Training or mentoring
- Conflict resolution
- Data tracking
- Project management

Step 4: Identify Outcomes (Results Matter)
For each skill, ask:

- What changed because of my work?
- What has improved?
- What did I manage, reduce, or increase?

Outcome(s) achieved:

Step 5: Translate Into Resume Language
Use this sentence structure: Action verb + skill + outcome
Draft Resume Bullet:
(Example: *Coordinated scheduling and communications for a 20-member team, improving response times and service delivery.*)

Step 6: Interview Translation (Optional)
How would you explain this experience in an interview?
Interview Story (1–2 sentences):
_____
_____
_____

Reflection

- One skill I underestimated before this exercise:
- One experience I now see differently:

Your experience is valid—even if employers have not recognized it yet.
This tool helps you tell your story on your terms.

Facilitator Notes:

- Encourage use of non-paid experience
- Validate caregiving and community leadership
- Pair participants for peer feedback
- Emphasize clarity over perfection

Activity 4: Rights-Aware Interviewing and Accommodation Scripts (45 minutes)

Objective: Build confidence to navigate interviews without oversharing or self-penalizing.

Instructions

1. Review the STAR method with participants
2. Using the handout, participants work individually to develop 3-5 STAR stories they can adapt for different situations.
3. Participants peer-review each other's stories and provide feedback.

Handouts

- Self-Advocacy Script Cards
- Rights-aware interview language guide

HANDOUT: STAR Achievement Bank *(For Interviews)*

Use this to prepare for behavioural interview questions.

1. **Situation:** Context of the challenge
2. **Task:** Your responsibility
3. **Action:** What you actually did
4. **Result:** What changed / improved

Prepare **3–5 STAR stories** you can adapt to many questions.

Facilitator Notes:

- Emphasize choice: disclose only what feels safe.
- Avoid pressuring participants to “be brave.”

Activity 5: Network Mapping – From Isolation to Strategy (60 minutes)

Objective: Shift networking from informal access to intentional strategy.

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to draw their current network (people, programs, organizations).
2. Identify gaps:
    - Industry insiders
    - Sponsors vs mentors
3. Introduce examples of Muslim-led and newcomer networks.
4. Participants identify **3 concrete next steps** (e.g., request informational interview).

5. Optional pair share for accountability.

Handouts

- Network mapping worksheet
- List of Canadian Muslim & newcomer professional networks

HANDOUT: Network Mapping Worksheet

Step 1: Map Your Current Network

People you know

- Mentors: _____
- Peers: _____
- Community contacts: _____

Programs / Organizations

- Employment programs: _____
- Professional associations: _____

Step 2: Identify Gaps

☐ Industry insiders
☐ Sponsors (people who advocate for you)
☐ Hiring managers
☐ Muslim women in your field

Step 3: Your 3 Next Moves

1.
2.
3.

Reminder: Networking is not asking for favours—it is exchanging insight.

Notes:

- Normalize that newcomers start with thin networks.
- Emphasize quality over quantity.

HANDOUT: List of Canadian Muslim and Newcomer Professional Network

National Networks (Canada-Wide)

1. Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW). Focus: Advocacy, leadership, employment equity, policy
   https://www.ccmw.com
2. Muslim Women in Leadership (MWIL). Focus: Leadership development, mentoring, professional growth
   https://www.mwilcanada.org
3. MAX Women in Leadership. Focus: Leadership acceleration for Muslim women (national reach)
   https://www.maxwomenleadership.com
4. National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM). Focus: Human rights, anti-Islamophobia advocacy, workplace equity
   https://www.nccm.ca
5. Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC). *(Not Muslim-specific, but heavily used by Muslim women newcomers).* Focus: Mentoring, employer connections, newcomer employment
   https://triec.ca
6. ACCES Employment. *(Strong track record serving Muslim and racialized newcomers)*
   https://accesemployment.ca

Provincial & Territorial Networks

Ontario:

1. Canadian Muslim Women of Ontario (CMWO). Focus: Employment, leadership, civic participation
   https://www.cmwo.ca
2. Muslim Women in Business (MWIB – Toronto/GTA). Focus: Entrepreneurship, professional networking
   https://www.instagram.com/mwibcanada
   (Primary platform is Instagram; active community)
3. Immigrant Women in Business (IWB – Toronto). Focus: Professional development for newcomer women
   https://iwbtoronto.org
4. Skills for Change (Ontario). Focus: Employment bridging, credential recognition
   https://www.skillsforchange.org

Quebec:

1. Canadian Council of Muslim Women – Quebec Chapter. Focus: Advocacy, employment equity, Bill 21 impacts
   https://www.ccmw.com/quebec
2. Muslim Women of Montreal (MWM). Focus: Community leadership, employment support
   https://mwmontréal.org

3. Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes (TCRI). *(Francophone newcomer employment support)*
   https://tcri.qc.ca

British Columbia:

1. Canadian Muslim Women of BC. Focus: Employment support, leadership
   https://www.cmwbccanada.com
2. MOSAIC BC. *(Not Muslim-specific; strong newcomer employment services)*
   https://mosaicbc.org
3. SUCCESS BC. *(Widely used by Muslim women newcomers)*
   https://successbc.ca

Alberta:

1. Canadian Muslim Women of Alberta (CMWA). Focus: Employment, leadership, advocacy
   https://www.cmwa.ca
2. Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA). https://ciwa-online.com

Manitoba:

1. **Canadian Muslim Women of Manitoba.**
   https://www.cmwm.ca
2. **Manitoba Start. *(Newcomer employment hub)***
   https://manitobastart.com

Saskatchewan:

1. Canadian Muslim Women of Saskatchewan
   https://cmwsaskatchewan.org
2. Saskatoon Open Door Society
   https://www.sods.sk.ca

Atlantic Canada:

1. Canadian Muslim Women of Nova Scotia
   https://www.cmwns.ca
2. Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS)
   https://isans.ca

Sector-Specific Networks

STEM / Tech:

1. Muslim Women in Tech Canada. Focus: Tech careers, mentoring, skill building
   https://www.muslimwomenintech.ca
2. Women in AI – Canada. *(Not Muslim-specific, but inclusive and used by Muslim women)*
   https://womeninai.co/canada

Healthcare:

1. Canadian Muslim Healthcare Network (CMHN). Focus: Muslim professionals across healthcare fields
   https://www.cmhn.ca
2. Muslim Medical Association of Canada (MMAC)
   https://www.mmac.ca

Financial Services / Business:

1. Muslim Women in Business Canada. Focus: Entrepreneurship, finance, leadership
   https://www.instagram.com/muslimwomeninbusinesscanada
2. Islamic Chamber of Commerce Canada
   https://islamicchamber.ca

Skilled Trades:

1. Women Building Futures (Alberta). *(Strong participation from Muslim newcomer women)*
   https://womenbuildingfutures.ca
2. New Boots (BC). *(Women in construction, inclusive of Muslim women)*
   https://newboots.org

Public Sector / Policy:

1. DiverseCity Fellows (BC). *(Leadership pipeline for racialized professionals)*
   https://www.sfubec.com/diversecity
2. Maytree Foundation. *(Public policy, employment equity, immigrant inclusion)*
   https://maytree.com

Non-Profit / NGO / Advocacy:

1. Canadian Women's Foundation. *(Many Muslim women leaders access fellowships & grants)*
   https://canadianwomen.org
2. Equality Fund
   https://equalityfund.ca

Activity 6: Personal Action Planning (75 Minutes or Longer)

Objective: Help participants translate insight into a concrete, realistic job search plan.

Instructions:

1. Ask participants to reflect on one recent rejection.
2. Using a guided worksheet, identify:
   - What was in their control
   - What was systemic
3. Develop a 30-day action plan (applications, networking, skill gaps).
4. Small group sharing for feedback and encouragement.
5. Close with collective affirmation.

Handouts

- 30-Day Job Search Action Plan

HANDOUT: 30-Day Job Search Action Plan

Your Focus Area (choose one)

☐ Resume refinement
☐ Interview practice
☐ Networking
☐ Skill upgrading

Week 1
Actions:

Week 2
Actions:

Week 3
Actions:

Week 4
Actions:

Support I Will Seek:
(Person / group / program)

CONTENT MODULE 2

Thriving in Early Employment

I. Overview

Onboarding represents one of the most influential phases in a Muslim woman's employment journey. For Muslim women themselves, it is often a moment of hope, transition, and vulnerability—a time when you may step into a workplace wondering whether you will be welcomed, heard, and valued. For organizations and community partners supporting Muslim women, onboarding is the first real opportunity to demonstrate that inclusion is not symbolic but lived.

The ASPIRE Study makes clear that **Muslim women in Canada continue to experience significant employment disparities**, including lower full-time employment rates, higher unemployment, and greater underemployment despite strong educational backgrounds. These inequities do not end at the point of hiring; they continue through onboarding, where early experiences heavily influence whether a new employee thrives, stagnates, or disengages

For many Muslim women, onboarding doubles as a test of psychological and cultural safety:

- *Will my identity be respected here?*
- *Is it safe to ask for prayer space?*
- *Will my accent or international background impact how I'm perceived?*
- *Do I need to work twice as hard to be taken seriously?*

These questions emerge not because Muslim women lack confidence or competence, but because they are navigating systems where exclusion has been normalized. Canadian Labour Congress's reporting on workplace Islamophobia illustrates how even well-meaning employers often overlook structural barriers that Muslim women face—from subtle microaggressions to inconsistent accommodation processes.[1]

Statistics Canada data reinforces this reality.[2] As of 2021, **Muslims in Canada experienced an unemployment rate of 7.8%, higher than the national rate**, and Muslim women in particular were more likely to be unemployed or employed part-time despite comparable or higher educational attainment.

---

[1] Canadian Labour Congress (2019). https://canadianlabour.ca/islamophobia-at-work-requires-immediate-action-say-canadas-unions/

[2] **Statistics Canada.** (2022). *Labour force characteristics by religion, age and gender (2021 Census).* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm

For Arab women with a university degree obtained in Canada, unemployment can reach **11.1%**, more than double the rate for non-racialized women with the same credentials.

Meanwhile, Forbes[3] reports that **strong onboarding increases retention by up to 82% and boosts productivity**, yet Gallup notes that only **12% of employees strongly agree that their organization excels at onboarding**. When Muslim women—especially those who are racialized, visibly Muslim (hijab/niqab), queer or trans, newcomers, or living with disabilities—enter a new workplace, they often face a compounded risk of exclusion if onboarding is vague, unstructured, or culturally unsafe.

For many, onboarding becomes the moment they learn whether religious accommodation is normalized or discouraged. Although the **Canadian Human Rights Act** and provincial codes require accommodation of prayer breaks, modest dress, and religious observance, Muslim women in ASPIRE described feeling hesitant to request accommodation, especially during probation. NCCM's national documentation of workplace Islamophobia echoes this pattern—employees often wait months to raise needs due to fear of stigma or retaliation.

Workplace culture also reveals itself early. New employees often observe[4]:

- Whether colleagues avoid or question hijab-wearing women
- Whether orientation includes diversity and belonging content
- Whether social activities (often alcohol-centered or held after-hours) exclude them
- Whether managers demonstrate cultural sensitivity or rely on stereotypes

These first impressions profoundly influence retention. Forbes research shows that strong onboarding increases retention by up to **82%**, and Gallup reports that meaningful orientation significantly boosts engagement and productivity.[5] For Muslim women—particularly those who are racialized, newcomers, queer or trans, or living with disabilities—the presence or absence of belonging during onboarding can determine whether they stay, advance, or quietly disengage.

A comprehensive onboarding experience for Muslim women must therefore go beyond checklists. It must create[5]:

- **Clarity** – transparent expectations, structured support, and accessible communication
- **Cultural safety** – normalized religious accommodation and inclusive norms
- **Connection** – intentional integration into networks and team culture
- **Credibility** – recognition of skills, lived experiences, and international backgrounds
- **Confidence** – affirmation of identity, psychological safety, and room to thrive

---

[3] Tara Milburn. (2022). Why Effective Onboarding is Critical to Employee Retention. Forbes Business Council. https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/12/02/why-effective-onboarding-is-critical-to-employee-retention/

[4] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

[5] https://www.preppio.com/blog/the-5-cs-of-onboarding

For many Muslim women, onboarding is not simply administrative; it is the moment when they learn whether the workplace is prepared to support their religious practices, recognize their professional credibility, and welcome their full identity. This module addresses how onboarding can either reinforce systemic exclusion—or become a powerful gateway to belonging.

II. Understanding the Challenge

Lack of Clarity and Opaque Expectations

The ASPIRE Study highlights that many Muslim women, particularly newcomers, encounter **unclear job expectations, informal norms, and inconsistent communication** that leave them second-guessing their performance. Without written expectations or structured check-ins, women reported feeling they were "being evaluated on invisible rules." Structural ambiguity amplifies impostor syndrome and leaves new hires vulnerable to biased interpretations of performance.

Inconsistent Religious Accommodation

Despite clear legal protections under the **Canadian Human Rights Act** and provincial human rights codes requiring accommodation of creed, Muslim women commonly report:

- No designated prayer space
- Discomfort requesting breaks
- Confusion about Ramadan expectations
- Managers who treat accommodations as "special requests"

NCCM has documented patterns of **Islamophobic bias and inconsistent accommodation** in Canadian workplaces, noting that the burden often falls on Muslim employees to educate or self-advocate. ASPIRE participants described delaying requests until they felt psychologically safe, reinforcing early isolation rather than belonging.

Microaggressions, Identity Scrutiny, and Bias

From comments about hijab or "good English," to assumptions about social participation or culture, **microaggressions often appear in the first weeks of employment**. ASPIRE shows such comments erode confidence and signal whose identities are considered "normal" in professional spaces.

Racialized Muslim women—especially Black Muslims—reported heightened scrutiny of tone, competence, and leadership potential. This bias enters onboarding early and affects everything from feedback to social invitations.

Exclusion from Informal Networks

Networking-heavy onboarding practices—team drinks, after-hours meetups, alcohol-centered socializing—create exclusion for those who cannot attend because of religious, caregiving, or cultural reasons. ASPIRE participants noted that **exclusion from informal networks is one of the strongest predictors of stalled careers**, and this exclusion typically begins during onboarding.

Intersectional Marginalization[6]

- **Black Muslim women** reported facing both anti-Black racism and Islamophobia during onboarding, shaping early perceptions of their "fit" and authority.
- **Queer and trans Muslim women** described navigating environments unsafe for both religious and 2SLGBTQ+ identities.
- **Muslim women with disabilities** faced reluctance to request both religious and disability accommodations simultaneously due to fear of retaliation or stigma.
- **Newcomer women** faced additional systemic uncertainty around credential recognition and unfamiliarity with workplace norms, per Statistics Canada and Government of Canada newcomer integration research.

Intersectionality magnifies exclusion during onboarding precisely when new employees lack security or social capital.

III. Key Inclusive Solutions and Strategies

Seek Clarity and Written Expectations Early

ASPIRE findings show that opaque expectations contribute to stress and misinterpretation of performance.

For Newcomers

- Ask for a written onboarding plan outlining tasks, timelines, and responsibilities.
- Request clarity on workplace norms (communication, decision-making, break times, feedback culture).
- If unclear, say:
  "To help me integrate well, could you share written expectations for my first 90 days?"

For Early-Career Women

- Book a 1:1 meeting in week one to clarify priorities and success metrics.
- Create a "First 90 Days Roadmap" to guide focus and reduce guesswork.

For Mid-Career Women

[6] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

- Clarify authority, decision-making boundaries, and leadership expectations early.
- Align expectations with your manager to avoid misinterpretation.

For Muslim Women Managers

- Share expectations transparently with new team members.
- Offer written guidance to reduce ambiguity and support structured belonging.

Clarity reduces the potential for biased evaluation and provides a documented roadmap for success.

Navigating Religious Accommodations Confidently

The **Canadian Human Rights Act** and provincial human rights codes legally require employers to provide reasonable religious accommodation. ASPIRE study recommendations affirms the legitimacy of requesting:

- Prayer breaks
- Clean, private prayer space
- Flexible scheduling during Ramadan
- Modest dress accommodations

For All Women

Use proactive, neutral language:

- **"I take a short prayer break in the afternoon—what's the best private space to use?"**
- **"During Ramadan I may adjust my lunch break. Can we discuss what works best for the team?"**

For Newcomers

- Learn your provincial human rights protections for prayer, dress, and scheduling.
- Ask HR for written accommodation procedures.

For Muslim Women Managers

- Normalize religious accommodation in team culture by naming it openly (e.g., Ramadan briefings, Eid calendar updates, prayer norms).

Building Belonging Through Intentional Connection

Women in ASPIRE described creating **parallel professional networks**, inside or beyond their workplace, to compensate for exclusion from informal networks. Useful options include:

- Muslim women's networks hosted by universities
- Professional immigrant integration programs
- Sector-specific mentorship programs (finance, STEM, public service)
- CCMW or NCCM leadership circles

For Newcomers

- Ask your supervisor to pair you with a workplace "buddy" or cultural navigator.
- Seek external community mentorship (e.g., MAX, TRIEC, Muslim Women in Tech).

For Early-Career Women

- Join ERGs, professional associations, or newcomer networks relevant to your sector.
- Establish weekly check-ins with a peer or mentor.

For Mid-Career Women

- Build cross-departmental relationships to expand influence early.

For Muslim Women Managers

- Provide structured introductions and ensure new hires meet key colleagues.
- Check in frequently in the first 90 days.

These relationships reduce isolation and become protective assets during probation and beyond.

Document Contributions from Day One

Given persistent hiring and promotion inequities documented in ASPIRE and Statistics Canada, written evidence helps counter biased evaluations. This includes:

- Tracking tasks completed
- Saving positive feedback
- Keeping a list of achievements
- Logging any discriminatory incidents

Documentation is especially important for probation reviews.

Protect Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

ASPIRE findings underscore the link between workplace exclusion and mental health strain among Muslim women. Government of Canada mental health research also shows that discrimination contributes significantly to anxiety, depression, and disengagement among racialized groups.

Wellbeing practices may include:

- Prayer and grounding routines
- Journaling
- Community support groups
- Accessing culturally competent mental health resources (e.g., NCCM referrals)

Responding to Microaggressions & Protecting Confidence

Use boundary-setting scripts:

- **"I prefer not to discuss my personal life in that way."**
- **"Actually, hijab is my choice—it's not restrictive."**
- **"I'd like to refocus on the task."**

Document incidents if needed.

Sector Specific Barriers and Strategies[7]

Sector	Barriers	Strategies
STEM	● Isolation in male-dominated labs/teams ● Microaggressions about hijab or accent ● Long hours incompatible with prayer or family responsibilities	● Set boundaries around work hours early. ● Build peer networks (Women in STEM, Muslim STEM groups). ● Document contributions in collaborative projects.
Healthcare	● Higher scrutiny for visibly Muslim women ● Lack of gender-sensitive spaces ● Ramadan scheduling challenges during shift work	● Clarify accommodation processes with supervisors immediately. ● Build alliances with cultural safety or DEI leads. ● Join sector networks like Canadian Muslim Healthcare Professionals.
Finance	● Social integration tied to after-work drinks ● Fast-paced onboarding with little mentorship ● Implicit “fit” expectations	● Suggest alternative social meetings (coffee chats). ● Seek early sponsorship or mentorship. ● Use scripted responses for opting out of alcohol-based events.
Public Sector	● Bureaucratic onboarding processes ● Lack of prayer space clarity ● Regional disparities (including Bill 21 limits in Quebec)	● Request written onboarding guidelines. ● Reference human rights protections when seeking accommodations. ● Join public-sector ERGs for support.
Skilled Trades	● Male-dominated worksites ● Inconsistent accommodation ● Harassment risks	● Build safety networks with women-in-trades programs. ● Assert boundaries around equipment, dress codes, and breaks. ● Seek mentorship through union or apprenticeship programs.

[7] Ibid

Sector	Barriers	Strategies
Non-Profit / NGO Sector	• Emotional labour overload • Expectation to represent all Muslim communities • Low pay and unclear onboarding processes	• Set boundaries around DEI/emotional labour early. • Document workload creep. • Seek external mentorship for career alignment.

IV. Conclusion

Onboarding is not merely an introduction to a new job—it is an introduction to a workplace's values. For Muslim women in Canada, whose employment journeys are shaped by multiple layers of systemic inequity, onboarding becomes a critical determinant of whether they feel seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.

The evidence is clear. The ASPIRE Study highlights that **Muslim women's early workplace experiences often involve ambiguity, bias, and exclusion**, with significant consequences for confidence, performance, and long-term career progression. Statistics Canada data further confirms that **Muslim women—even when highly educated—face persistent wage gaps, unemployment disparities, and barriers to full participation in the workforce**. These inequities are not inevitable; they are the result of social, organizational, and structural conditions that can be changed.

A strong onboarding process can interrupt these patterns. It can:

- Set clear expectations that prevent biased evaluation
- Normalize religious accommodation as a right rather than an exception
- Establish early pathways to mentorship, sponsorship, and community
- Integrate newcomers and internationally trained professionals with respect for their expertise
- Offer culturally safe support that affirms both identity and performance
- Build environments where psychological safety is foundational

For Muslim women—especially those facing intersecting marginalization as Black, queer, trans, disabled, or newcomer—the first weeks of employment often reveal whether the workplace is capable of embracing their full complexity. This makes onboarding not only an HR function but a **justice function**, shaping an employee's sense of belonging and future trajectory.

Belonging is not a by-product of diversity; it is the result of intentional structures, practices, and relationships. When onboarding is done well, Muslim women are positioned not just to adapt but to contribute, lead, and thrive. When it is done poorly, the cycle of underemployment, attrition, and exclusion continues.

A workplace committed to equity understands that onboarding is its first promise—a promise of dignity, fairness, and opportunity. For Muslim women in Canada, honouring that promise is a necessary step toward a labour market where talent is recognized, leadership is diverse, and every individual is free to bring their whole self to work.

Key Takeaways

The Challenge

Muslim women in Canada enter workplaces where early experiences often shape their long-term trajectory. The ASPIRE Study (2024) shows that onboarding is frequently affected by **unclear expectations, unspoken norms, inconsistent religious accommodation, and early microaggressions**—all of which undermine confidence and belonging. Despite high levels of education, Statistics Canada reports that **Muslim women face higher unemployment and underemployment rates** compared with non-racialized women, making the onboarding period particularly vulnerable.

When onboarding is unclear or culturally unsafe, Muslim women may internalize systemic barriers as personal shortcomings, setting the stage for stalled advancement or eventual disengagement.

Why It Matters for Muslim Women

Onboarding has a long-lasting impact on wellbeing, confidence, and career progression. Research from Gallup and Forbes demonstrates that high-quality onboarding significantly improves retention and job satisfaction. For Muslim women, this is especially critical because:

- **Belonging predicts retention**: ASPIRE shows that women who experience early inclusion are more likely to stay and advance.
- **Accommodations affect mental health**: Government of Canada research confirms that discrimination contributes to anxiety and depression among racialized women.
- **Early biases can stick**: First impressions set the tone for evaluations, opportunities, and visibility.
- **Newcomer Muslim women face amplified uncertainty** around workplace norms, language expectations, and credential recognition.

A supportive onboarding experience helps Muslim women feel grounded, respected, and able to show up authentically—without shrinking themselves or fearing consequences for expressing their identity. Belonging is not a luxury; it is a predictor of success, particularly for women entering environments where they have been historically underrepresented.

What Muslim Women Should Do

While responsibility for creating inclusive onboarding lies with employers, Muslim women deserve practical tools to navigate early weeks with clarity and confidence. Based on ASPIRE insights and best practices:

1. **Seek Clarity Early:** Ask for written expectations, a 30–60–90-day outline, and regular check-ins. Clear benchmarks protect you from subjective or biased evaluation.
2. **Normalize Your Rights Around Accommodation:** Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, you have the right to reasonable religious accommodation. Use calm, simple language when

requesting prayer space, breaks, or Ramadan adjustments—these are standard rights, not personal favours.

3. **Build Intentional Networks:** Connections made during onboarding influence visibility and support. Seek allies, join professional Muslim women's networks, and connect with newcomer or sector-based mentorship programs.
4. **Document Your Progress:** Track achievements, feedback, and any incidents of bias. Documentation strengthens your confidence and provides evidence if needed during probation or reviews.
5. **Protect Your Wellbeing:** Use grounding practices—prayer, journaling, community contact—and seek culturally competent mental health support if needed. NCCM and CCMW offer guidance and referrals.
6. **Adapt Strategies Based on Your Stage:**
    - **Early-career:** Ask questions freely, observe team norms, and prioritize learning.
    - **Mid-career:** Assert boundaries, clarify expectations confidently, and identify potential sponsors.
    - **Newcomers:** Request plain-language explanations, learn reporting processes, and take advantage of government-funded integration programs.

These strategies are not meant to shift responsibility onto Muslim women. Instead, they provide practical ways to navigate systems that are still evolving. You do not have to change who you are to fit in. You have the right to belong—and onboarding is your opportunity to claim that space with assurance and support.

Workshop Module and Facilitator Guide

Module 2: Thriving in Early Employment

Overview

Module 2 focuses on the **critical transition period after hiring**, when Muslim women often face heightened vulnerability, pressure to assimilate, and uncertainty about safety and belonging. The ASPIRE Study highlights that many women experience **early disengagement or exit** not because of performance, but because onboarding processes fail to create culturally safe, transparent, and supportive environments. This module reframes onboarding as more than orientation—it is about **belonging, clarity, protection, and confidence-building**. Participants are equipped with tools to navigate probation periods, decode workplace norms, advocate for themselves safely, and build early networks without compromising identity or wellbeing.

This module centers around three goals:

1. **Build confidence and clarity** in navigating onboarding systems, workplace norms, and early performance expectations without suppressing identity.
2. **Strengthen a sense of belonging and psychological safety** by equipping participants to understand their rights, request accommodations, and decode informal workplace rules.
3. **Support sustainable integration and wellbeing** by helping Muslim women establish credibility, boundaries, and support networks during the critical first months of employment.

This facilitator guide is based on ***Module 2: Thriving in Early Employment***. The facilitator guide draws on adult learning pedagogies. Based on the learning objectives listed below – a sample 2-hour workshop agenda will be presented in a tabulated format. Additionally, a 'menu' of activities will be provided where facilitators can pick and choose different activities depending on their target audience. CCMW encourages you to be flexible and to adapt these materials to meet the needs of participants as well as the budget and logistical realities of each workshop setting.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand why onboarding is a high-risk period for Muslim women
- Identify common early-employment barriers and hidden expectations
- Clarify workplace norms without over-assimilating
- Navigate probation periods strategically and confidently
- Practice rights-aware self-advocacy for accommodations
- Build early networks and allies
- Protect mental health and prevent early burnout

Duration:

- **Full day (5.5–6 hours)**
- Can be adapted to **half-day (3 hours)**

Ideal Participants

Primary audience:

- Muslim women who are newly hired
- Newcomers to Canada in their first 1–2 years of employment
- Early-career Muslim women navigating probation periods
- Muslim women re-entering the workforce

Secondary audience:

- Employment counsellors
- Community organizations supporting Muslim women
- Employers delivering internal training (with adaptations)

Materials Required

- PowerPoint deck: *Module 2 – Thriving in Early Employment*
- Flip charts, markers, sticky notes
- Projector and audio setup

Sample Workshop Agenda (2-Hour Condensed Version)

Agenda	Time	Resources
Welcome and icebreaker	10 minutes	Flip-chart, markers
Review workshop objectives and setting a common group	10 minutes	Powerpoint slide
Review of Module 2 content	20 minutes	Slides, ASPIRE infographics
Activity 3	60 minutes	Printed quotes, sticky notes
Workshop Evaluation	5 minutes	Open discussion
Wrap-up final thoughts and review parking lot	10 minutes	

Icebreakers

- “One thing I wish I knew before starting my last job”
- “One value I don’t want to lose at work”

Set group agreements: confidentiality, opt-out, respect lived experience.

Parking Lot:

At the beginning of the workshop, set aside a flipchart or board with the title “Parking Lot”. Use this space throughout the workshop to list questions or topics that do not get addressed during the workshop. After the workshop, the facilitator should provide answers to the questions through an agreed upon form of communication (email, follow-up meeting, communique, etc.).

Menu of Activities

Activity 1: The First 90 Days Reality Check (30 Minutes)

Objective: Normalize the emotional and structural challenges Muslim women face during onboarding and early integration.

Instructions:

1. Begin with a grounding statement: *"Onboarding is not just paperwork—it's where belonging is tested."*
2. Ask participants to individually reflect (or write in chat): "What was hardest in your first weeks at work?"
3. Collect responses on a flip chart (e.g., confusion, silence, fear of asking).
4. Introduce the idea that onboarding gaps are **systemic**, not personal.
5. Briefly connect to ASPIRE findings on early exclusion and silence.

Handouts

- "What Onboarding Is Really About" reflection sheet

HANDOUT: What Onboarding Is Really About
Purpose:
To reframe onboarding as a process of **belonging, clarity, and safety**, not just orientation tasks.

Onboarding Includes:

- Understanding expectations (spoken and unspoken)
- Learning who has power and influence
- Knowing how decisions are made
- Feeling safe to ask questions
- Being able to show up without hiding who you are

Reflection

- One thing that confused me in my first weeks:
- One thing I wish someone had explained earlier:

Reminder: Struggling during onboarding does not mean you are failing. It often means the system is unclear.

Activity 2: Decoding Workplace Culture – The Unwritten Rules (45 Minutes)

Objective: Help participants identify informal norms that shape belonging and advancement.

Instructions:

1. Explain the difference between:
    - Formal onboarding (policies, orientation)
    - Informal onboarding (norms, expectations, power)
2. Divide participants into small groups.
3. Ask groups to list:
    - Unwritten rules they noticed (meetings, communication, socializing)
4. Groups share one example and how it affected them.
5. The facilitator highlights patterns and power dynamics.

Handouts

- "Unwritten Rules Decoder" worksheet

HANDOUT: Unwritten Rules Decoder

Purpose: To help you identify informal rules that shape belonging and advancement.

Examples of Unwritten Rules

- Who speaks first in meetings?
- Is it okay to ask questions?
- Are people expected to socialize after work?
- How are mistakes handled?
- Who gets credit?

Your Workplace Observations

Situation	What I Observed	How It Affected Me
Meetings		
Emails		
Social Events		
Feedback		

Reflection

- Which rules feel exclusionary?
- Which ones can be navigated strategically?

Activity 3: Faith, Identity, and Belonging Mapping (60 Minutes)

Objective: Support participants to reflect on how identity shows up (or is suppressed) at work and its impact on belonging.

Instructions

1. Ask participants to map aspects of identity:
    - Faith, dress, language, caregiving, disability, sexuality
2. For each, ask:
    - Where do I feel safe?
    - Where do I feel pressure to hide?
3. Small-group or pair discussion (optional).
4. Facilitator debriefs on belonging vs. assimilation.

Handouts

- Identity & Belonging Mapping tool

HANDOUT: Identity & Belonging Map

Purpose: To reflect on where you feel safe, pressured, or invisible at work.

Parts of My Identity at Work

☐ Faith / prayer
☐ Hijab / dress
☐ Language / accent
☐ Caregiving responsibilities
☐ Disability / health
☐ Sexual orientation / gender identity
☐ Immigration status

Mapping Exercise:

Identity Aspect	I Feel Safe	I Feel Pressure to Hide

Reflection

- Where do I feel belonging?
- Where do I feel I am surviving rather than thriving?

Activity 4: Navigating Accommodation Without Self- Penalty (45 Minutes)

Objective: Build confidence in requesting religious or accessibility accommodations during onboarding.

Instructions:

1. Briefly explain duty to accommodate (high-level).
2. Introduce common accommodation moments:
    - Prayer space
    - Ramadan scheduling
    - Dress
    - Disability/access needs
3. Distribute scenario cards.
4. Participants practice responses in pairs.
5. Group reflection:
    - What felt empowering?
    - What felt risky?

Handouts

- Accommodation request scripts
- Rights overview (plain language)

HANDOUT: Requesting Accommodation Without Self-Penalty

Purpose: To support confident, neutral requests for religious or accessibility accommodations.

Key Principles

- Accommodation is a **right**, not a favour
- You decide **what, when, and how much** to disclose
- Neutral language protects you

Sample Scripts

Prayer: "I schedule brief prayer breaks and ensure my responsibilities are fully covered."
Ramadan: "During Ramadan I may adjust my break times. I plan ahead to maintain performance."
Dress: "My attire aligns with professional standards and does not affect my work."
Accessibility: "This adjustment will help me perform my role effectively."

Reflection

- Which scripts feel safe for me?
- Which might I adapt?

Canadian Human Rights Act – A Summary on Accommodation

Under the Canadian Human Rights Act, employers in federally regulated workplaces have a legal duty to accommodate employees' needs related to protected grounds such as religion (creed), disability, sex, gender identity or expression, race, and family status.

Accommodation means adjusting workplace rules, practices, or environments so that employees can participate fully and perform their jobs without discrimination, unless doing so would cause the employer undue hardship.

In practice, this can include:

- Allowing prayer breaks, flexible scheduling, or time off for religious observance
- Accommodating religious dress such as hijab or other faith-based attire
- Providing accessible workspaces, assistive technologies, or modified duties for employees with disabilities
- Offering flexible work arrangements to address caregiving or family responsibilities

The duty to accommodate is proactive and ongoing. Employers must assess requests individually, act in good faith, and explore reasonable solutions rather than dismissing requests outright. Employees are not required to give up their dignity, faith, or identity to be considered "professional."

Accommodation is not a favour or special treatment—it is a legal requirement intended to ensure substantive equality in the workplace.

Activity 5: Building Credibility Without Overwork (45 Minutes)

Objective: Help participants establish credibility while avoiding burnout and hyper-visibility.

Instructions:

1. Ask participants:
    - "What do you feel pressure to prove?"
2. Introduce common traps:
    - Overperforming
    - Silence
    - Taking on unpaid emotional labour
3. Participants identify:
    - One strength to showcase
    - One boundary to set
4. Pair share strategies for sustainable credibility.

Handouts

- Early Career Credibility Planner

HANDOUT: Early Career Credibility Planner

Purpose: To help you build credibility without overworking or shrinking yourself.

What I Feel Pressure to Prove:

One Strength I Want to Be Known For:

One Boundary I Will Set:

Examples of Boundaries:

- Not taking on unpaid diversity labour alone
- Asking for clarity instead of guessing
- Saying no without over-explaining

Activity 6: Belonging Strategy Lab – From Survival to Stability (75 Minutes or longer)

Objective: Support participants to create a personalized early-career integration plan.

Instructions

1. Participants reflect on:
    - What makes them feel they belong?
    - What drains them?
2. Using a guided worksheet, develop:
    - Support map
    - Accommodation plan
    - Self-care anchors
3. Small-group sharing for accountability.
4. The facilitator closes with collective affirmation.

Handouts

- 60-Day Belonging & Integration Plan

HANDOUT: Belonging & Integration Plan (60 Days)

Purpose: To move from survival to stability during early integration.

1. Support Map

- Person I can ask questions: _____
- Peer or mentor: _____
- Community or external support: _____

2. Accommodation Plan

- What I need: _____
- When I might raise it: _____

3. Energy & Wellbeing Anchors

- What grounds me (prayer, routine, movement): _____
- Warning signs of burnout: _____

4. One Action I Commit To:

FACILITATOR REMINDERS

- Early onboarding is a **high-risk period** for exclusion.
- Belonging is emotional *and* structural.
- Avoid framing adaptation as assimilation.
- Centre dignity, safety, and choice.

Before the Workshop:

- Review ASPIRE findings and trauma-informed facilitation principles
- Prepare to hold emotion without rushing to solutions
- Anticipate varied comfort levels with disclosure

During the Workshop:

- Do not minimize discrimination experiences
- Avoid “positive spin” language
- Reframe systemic issues when self-blame emerges
- Encourage peer validation over expert authority

If Distress Arises:

- Pause the activity if needed
- Offer grounding techniques (breathing, writing)
- Provide resource lists (counselling, community supports)

Language to Avoid:

- “That’s just workplace culture”
- “Everyone goes through that”
- “You should be more confident”

CONTENT MODULE 3

Building Career Pathways & Leadership Confidence

I. Overview

Career progression and leadership opportunities remain among the most persistent challenges for Canadian Muslim women in the labour market. Despite being one of the most highly educated demographics in the country, Muslim women continue to experience higher unemployment (9%) and lower employment rates (44%) compared to the Canadian average (58%). Even at the postgraduate level, unemployment for Muslim women holds at 9%, compared with just 3% for their peers.[1]

These inequities extend sharply into leadership. Only 0.19% of Canadian Muslim women hold legislative or senior management positions, compared with 0.48% of non-Muslim women and 1.25% of men. Black, Indigenous, Southeast Asian, and Latin American Muslim women were absent from senior management data in the 2021 Census.[2] One ASPIREStudy participant shared: *"I have two Canadian degrees, but I'm told I lack 'leadership presence.' What they mean is that my hijab doesn't fit their image of a leader."* Another woman reflected: *"It feels like I'm working four times as hard as everyone else just to prove I deserve to be here."*

Beyond Canada, global research reinforces these systemic inequities:

- In the United Kingdom, the Women and Equalities Committee report documents **major labour-market disadvantages for Muslims**, including **unemployment more than twice the general population (12.8% vs 5.4%)** and **41% economically inactive vs 21.8% for the general population**, noting disadvantage is "greater still" for Muslim women.[3]
- In the European Union, field experiments show that visibly Muslim women (especially those who wear hijab) face 40–60% fewer callbacks for employment, regardless of qualifications.[4]

---

[1] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

[2] **Statistics Canada.** (2022). *Labour force characteristics by religion, age and gender (2021 Census).* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm

[3] House of Commons, UK (2016). Employment Opportunities for Muslims in the UK. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/89/89.pdf

[4] Expert Group on Democracy Promotion / Racism Monitoring (DEZIM Institute listing). (n.d.). *Discrimination unveiled: A field experiment on the barriers faced by Muslim women in Germany, the Netherlands and Spain.* *https://www.dezim-institut.de/en/publications/discrimination-unveiled-a-field-experiment-on-the-barriers-faced-by-muslim-women-in-germany-the-netherlands-and-spain/?utm*

- In the United States, the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (2020) found that Muslim women are more likely than men to report workplace discrimination, with Black Muslim women facing the steepest barriers in promotion and leadership.[5]
- For queer and trans Muslim women, global studies highlight the "double invisibility" they face: homophobia in faith contexts, Islamophobia in queer spaces, and systemic erasure in workplaces. The Stonewall reports that 50% of trans employees conceal their identity at work due to fear of exclusion, a pattern echoed by queer Muslim participants in the ASPIRE Study focus groups.[6]

These comparative findings highlight that while the Canadian context is shaped by its own multicultural policies and employment equity frameworks, the structural patterns mirror global realities: structural racism, rigid workplace hierarchies, tokenism, and exclusion from informal networks that are essential for sponsorship and promotion. Furthermore, queer and trans Muslim women face additional risks of invisibility and discrimination, with several participants choosing to remain closeted in workplace contexts for fear of reprisal. Black Muslim women, in particular, report heightened scrutiny and exclusion from advancement pipelines, describing feelings of "invisibility" within leadership spaces.[7]

The ASPIRE Study further underscores that **mentorship—when available—often operates as an informal survival mechanism rather than a structured pathway to advancement for Muslim women**. While some participants described receiving advice or emotional support from individual mentors, these relationships rarely translated into **active sponsorship, visibility in promotion discussions, or protection within biased hierarchies**. Many Muslim women noted that mentorship was frequently **self-initiated and peer-based**, relying on community or affinity networks rather than organizational systems. As one participant explained, mentorship helped her "understand the rules," but not necessarily "change them." The study highlights that for Black, visibly Muslim, and queer Muslim women, even mentorship opportunities were limited, as exclusion from informal networks meant fewer chances to build trusting relationships with senior leaders. These findings reinforce that while mentorship can offer guidance and validation, **its impact remains constrained in the absence of sponsorship and structurally inclusive advancement systems**.

The persistence of these inequities underscores that policy-level commitments to employment equity and diversity are not translating into systemic change. As one senior-level Muslim woman bluntly stated: *"If you graduate university and you can't get a job because of your name, or you have to start over because of your hijab — that's abuse. This is financial abuse. This is social abuse. We need to name it for what it is."* - ASPIRE Study participant.

---

[5] Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. (2020). *American Muslim Poll 2020.* https://ispu.org/public-policy/american-muslim-poll-2020/

[6] Stonewall. (2018). *LGBT in Britain: Trans report.* https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/lgbt-britain-trans-report-2018?

[7] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

This module situates Muslim women's career advancement within both Canadian and global contexts, guided by feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial frameworks. It aims to:

- Identify the structural and cultural barriers that impede career progression.
- Highlight the unique experiences of Black, queer, and trans Muslim women in leadership trajectories.
- Explore strategies for Muslim women to "lead from where they sit," building influence without authority while navigating systemic barriers.
- Provide tools for Muslim women managers to coach, mentor, and sponsor others, creating collective pathways into leadership.

By weaving together Canadian data, global statistics, and testimonial voices, this module underscores that advancing Muslim women in leadership is not simply about equity — it is about justice, accountability, and redefining what leadership looks like in Canadian workplaces.

II. Understanding the Challenge

Limited sponsorship, credential recognition and advancement opportunities

Immigrant Muslim women, even with Canadian degrees, are often denied recognition of international credentials or experience. The ASPIRE Study found that Muslim women with degrees from outside Canada had higher underemployment and were more likely to work in roles below their skill level. This structural barrier delays progression into leadership.

Furthermore, Muslim women remain systematically excluded from informal networks where sponsorship relationships form. Canadian Muslim women report employment rates of **44%**, compared to 55% for non-Muslim women and 62% for men. Unemployment is **9%**, nearly double the Canadian average (5%). Even with higher education, unemployment does not fall for Muslim women; at the highest levels of education, unemployment is **9% for Muslim women vs. 3% for the Canadian public.**

Sponsorship where senior leaders advocate for advancement — often happens at golf courses, bars, or informal dinners, spaces where Muslim women (especially visibly Muslim, immigrant, or queer women) are absent or excluded. This results in Muslim women being overlooked for promotions, stretch assignments, and leadership roles.

"I have two degrees from Canada, but I am still passed over for jobs in favor of people with less experience. I'm told I don't 'fit in.'" (ASPIRE Study Participant).

Racialized Muslim women are also frequently perceived as lacking "leadership presence," a bias rooted in Eurocentric standards of assertiveness and communication. One ASPIRE participant shared: *"My manager said I lacked leadership presence but couldn't give an example beyond my hijab."* These

stereotypes result in women being pigeonholed in supportive or administrative roles, rather than leadership pathways.

Bias in performance evaluations

Leadership is equated with Eurocentric norms of "executive presence" — loudness, extroversion, and physical assertiveness. Muslim women, especially those wearing hijab, are often rated as "quiet" or "lacking presence," even when performance outcomes are strong. Many report being treated as "less competent, less dependable, less desirable — working four times as hard as their colleagues"

"My manager said I lacked leadership presence, but couldn't give an example beyond my hijab." (ASPIRE Study).

Cultural taxation and identity suppression

Muslim women are asked to "represent diversity" without compensation or decision-making power. They are simultaneously pressured to mute their identities — downplaying religion, removing hijab, or avoiding prayer — to appear "leadership ready." The ASPIRE study documents cultural taxation as a recurring barrier.

"I was rolled out as the poster child for diversity but not given meaningful opportunities to lead."- ASPIRE Study participant.

Childcare and traditional caregiving roles

Muslim women often face compounded pressures from traditional roles at home, where expectations around caregiving and domestic labour limit time available for networking, stretch assignments, or leadership training. The ASPIRE Study notes that women with young children disproportionately report slowed advancement or leaving the workforce altogether.

Rigid hierarchies and glass ceilings/cliffs

In hierarchical organizations, credit flows upward while Muslim women's contributions are diluted or claimed by senior staff. ASPIRE identifies the glass ceiling (invisible barriers blocking upper-level mobility) and the glass cliff (promotions into precarious crisis roles without support), both disproportionately affecting Muslim women. ASPIRE Study findings further revealed how stratified systems reinforce marginalization and Muslim women participating in the study reported, "increasing discrimination and outright hostility" when attempting to climb organizational ladders.

The ASPIRE Study further documents how Muslim women who do break through into senior positions face hostility, exclusion, and subtle undermining from fellow managers—mainly white men. Women reported being treated as "outsiders" in leadership circles, facing heightened scrutiny, and being isolated in decision-making spaces. One leader shared: *"Even at the table, I wasn't part of the table. I was there, but invisible."*

Microaggressions and over-scrutiny

Muslim women face constant questions about hijab, fasting, or assumptions of "difficulty." Many experience "prove-it-again" bias, where they must continually re-demonstrate competence. This hyper-surveillance creates psychological fatigue and stalls progression.

Mental health tolls and disengagement

Persistent roadblocks lead to burnout, imposter syndrome, and eventual withdrawal from sectors. The ASPIRE Study highlights stalled career growth, imposter syndrome, code-switching, gaslighting, and identity watering down as career-impacting outcomes. Surveys across Europe confirm women with visible faith markers (e.g., hijab) report higher stress and lower workplace satisfaction.

Compounded barriers for Black, queer, and trans Muslim women

Muslim women's experiences in Canadian workplaces are shaped not only by gendered Islamophobia but also by **intersecting oppressions of race, sexuality, gender identity, and disability**. The ASPIRE Study Report underscores how these compounded barriers produce particularly stark outcomes in employment, leadership representation, and workplace safety.

- Black Muslim women and Southeast Asian Muslim women report the highest unemployment rates (12–13%).
- No Black, Latin American, Southeast Asian, or Indigenous Muslim women appeared in the 2021 Census dataset for senior management positions.
- Black Muslim women face anti-Black racism layered with Islamophobia, leading to harsher scrutiny of "tone" and "fit." One participant shared: *"As a Black Muslim woman, I feel invisible — I don't see myself reflected anywhere in leadership, and I am constantly questioned on my 'tone.'*.

Queer and trans Muslim women face overlapping marginalizations:

- Queer Muslim women navigate invisibility in both Muslim and 2SLGBTQ+ spaces, often hiding identity to avoid harassment.
- Trans Muslim women face structural barriers in pronoun use, dress codes, and lack of gender-inclusive prayer/quiet spaces. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021) found that 50% of trans employees globally conceal identity at work due to exclusion. The ASPIRE Study included a focus group of queer and trans Muslim women, many of whom remained closeted for fear of homophobia and transphobia. One participant shared: *"I stayed silent about being queer during the group because I didn't want to face judgment from either side".* Structural barriers also include misgendering, binary dress codes, and lack of gender-inclusive prayer/quiet spaces.

Muslim women with disabilities experience additional compounded inequities:

- According to the ASPIRE Study, Muslim women with disabilities have an unemployment rate of 18%, double the rate of Muslim women without disabilities, and over three times the Canadian average (5%).

- They are more likely to be excluded from recruitment pipelines due to ableism, inaccessible hiring practices, and assumptions about their capabilities.
- Within workplaces, they face dual stigma: discrimination linked to visible or invisible disability layered with Islamophobia and gender bias.
- Leadership pathways are particularly narrow—Muslim women with disabilities were almost completely absent in management datasets, reflecting compounded structural exclusion.

Testimonial from a study participant: *"When they see my cane and my hijab, it feels like two strikes against me. I'm either seen as incapable or too much trouble to accommodate."*.

Barriers vary across sectors[8]:

Sector	Barriers & Evidence
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)	Canadian Muslim women in engineering report the **highest employment rate (65%)** among all fields of study (ASPIRE Study). - Women in mathematics and computer science have relatively low unemployment (8%) yet face underrepresentation in leadership pipelines. - Persistent "prove-it-again" bias and lack of sponsorship prevent career progression despite strong entry-level access.
Financial Services	Overemphasis on "cultural fit" in recruitment and promotion narrows opportunities and sustains homogenous leadership cultures. - Sponsorship and mentorship pipelines often exclude Muslim women, particularly those visibly Muslim. - Microaggressions about religious attire and social exclusion in networking-heavy environments restrict advancement.
Healthcare	Muslim women in health sciences report better employment outcomes compared to arts or trades graduates. - Yet representation in **senior management is just 0.07%** for Canadian Muslim women (Census 2021). Employer branding and workplace cultures often overlook **cultural safety**, deterring diverse applicants and undermining patient-centered care.
Skilled Trades	Muslim women face the **highest unemployment rates (12%)** in this sector (ASPIRE Study). - Male-dominated and informally recruited environments reinforce systemic barriers to entry. - Reliance on word-of-mouth hiring, apprenticeship "fit," and exclusionary cultures reduce access and retention.
Public Sector	Bureaucratic recruitment processes lack flexibility for religious accommodations (e.g., prayer breaks, Ramadan schedules). - **Quebec's Bill 21** restricts visible religious symbols for public-facing employees, directly penalizing hijab-wearing Muslim women. - ASPIRE participants reported **changing career paths** to avoid being excluded by such legislation.
Non-profit/NGOs	Despite strong equity mandates, Muslim women often experience *performative inclusion*—being visible in DEI or community-facing roles without access to decision-making or leadership pathways. The ASPIRE Study documents how racialized and faith-based labour (e.g., translation, community mediation, DEI work) is frequently unpaid or unrecognized in promotion criteria, contributing to stalled advancement. Leadership cultures dominated by white decision-makers reinforce paternalism and limit sponsorship, while visibly Muslim women—particularly hijab-wearers—report being excluded from donor-facing or public leadership roles due to assumptions about funder comfort. High emotional labour, low pay, and pressure to "represent the community" drive burnout and attrition, and Muslim women who reach

[8] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

Sector	Barriers & Evidence
	managerial roles report isolation and resistance when challenging inequitable practices from within.

III. Key Inclusive Solutions and Strategies

Early-career advancement and leadership opportunities

For Muslim women who are new to the Canadian workplace—recent graduates, international students, or newcomers with prior experience abroad—the first years are critical. The ASPIRE Study shows that barriers such as underemployment, stereotyping, and exclusion often begin at entry level, shaping career trajectories from the outset. Yet women also shared strategies they used to push back, gain visibility, and create early leadership pathways for themselves.

- Document and showcase impact
    - Keep an "impact portfolio" or "brag book" from day one—tracking projects completed, skills gained, client or supervisor feedback, and measurable outcomes.
    - This provides evidence to counter vague performance reviews (e.g., "not ready for leadership") and creates leverage for promotion conversations.
- Seek mentorship and sponsorship actively
    - Don't wait for formal programs—identify potential mentors and sponsors early. Approach senior colleagues or community leaders directly, sharing your career goals and asking for advocacy.
    - ASPIRE participants noted that sponsorship was transformative: *"When my director put my name forward for a project, it was the first time I felt seen."*
- Leverage external networks for growth
    - Join Muslim and racialized women's networks (e.g., MAX Women in Leadership, TRIEC Mentorship, Canadian Muslim Women's Network) to access training, mentorship, and peer solidarity beyond the workplace.
    - These networks provide visibility opportunities (speaking panels, leadership programs) that employers may not offer.
- Build peer support and coalitions
    - Form or join peer mentoring circles with other early-career Muslim women or allies. Share job search tips, promotion strategies, and experiences navigating bias.
    - Coalition-building demonstrates initiative and can also create informal influence within organizations.
- Develop a leadership voice early
    - Take initiative to lead from where you sit: volunteer to present findings, coordinate team projects, or propose small process improvements.
    - Leadership is not only about position but about influence—showing initiative makes contributions visible to decision-makers.

- Strengthen identity resilience
    - Embrace and affirm your identity rather than code-switching to "fit in." As one ASPIRE participant explained: *"Even when I was told I didn't fit their idea of a leader, I made myself visible in other ways. I kept records, I asked for opportunities, and I didn't let them silence me."*
    - Practicing identity-affirming leadership helps set a precedent for others and challenges stereotypes from the start.
- Plan strategically for work-life integration
    - For women balancing early career with family or community expectations, proactively set boundaries and create support systems (childcare sharing, community resources).
    - This helps manage traditional role expectations while pursuing long-term advancement opportunities.

For Female Muslim Managers — Coaching, Sponsorship, and Advocacy

Muslim women leaders can use their positional power to uplift others while influencing organizational culture:

- **Sponsorship slates**: Commit to championing 2–3 Muslim women each quarter. Actions include nominating them for panels, ensuring their names are raised in promotion discussions, or securing them visible project ownership.
- **Bias-proofing evaluations**: Push for structured rubrics with evidence-based performance notes. Intervene when vague labels like "lacks executive presence" arise, asking for concrete examples. Ask colleagues to provide specific, evidence-based examples. Quote: *"I push back when I hear 'not leadership material' — I ask: based on what metrics?"* (Muslim Manager, ASPIRE Interview).
- **Engineering safe stretch roles**: Assign projects with clear success metrics and provide coaching/cover if scrutiny increases. Pair challenging work with visibility opportunities (presenting at leadership reviews, representing teams externally). Protect staff from over-scrutiny by framing risks as learning, not failure.
- **Mentorship across identities**: Ensure Black, queer, and trans Muslim women have access to tailored support. This includes advocating for gender-neutral prayer rooms, pronoun inclusion in systems, and visible leadership pathways.
- **Identity-affirming leadership**: Normalize discussions of accommodations (prayer, fasting, dress) and explicitly include queer and trans Muslim needs (gender-inclusive prayer/quiet rooms, pronoun respect).
- **Mental health as productivity**: Check in on team workload during Ramadan/Eid, encourage mental health day usage, and create peer support circles. Research shows supportive managers can cut burnout risk by 25%.

At the Organizational Level

Influence and advocate your employers (including leveraging labour unions where applicable) to systemically dismantle barriers through policies, accountability, and inclusive practices:

- **Formal sponsorship programs**: Move beyond mentoring. Pair Muslim women with senior leaders who advocate in calibration meetings, assign high-visibility projects, and track sponsorship actions.
- **Transparent pathways**: Publish role competencies and advancement criteria to reduce reliance on insider knowledge. This reduces reliance on informal networks that exclude Muslim women.
- **Equity dashboards**: Disaggregate promotion and retention data by gender, race, and religion, with added focus on Black, queer, and trans Muslim women. Public reporting builds accountability.
- **Repair hierarchical credit flows:** Implement "I-led, we-delivered" slides in project presentations to ensure individual contributions aren't siphoned upward
- **Faith-friendly HR policies**: Integrate Ramadan flexibility, prayer/quiet rooms, and modest dress accommodations into employee handbooks and onboarding. These should be standardized, not case-by-case.
- **Anti-Islamophobia & trauma-informed leadership training:** Train managers to recognize the psychological toll of repeated bias, gaslighting, and exclusion. Equip allies with bystander intervention skills to interrupt harassment in real time. *"I cried on my commute every day, debating quitting. Having one manager validate my experience made me stay."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).

IV. Conclusion

Muslim women in Canada remain highly educated yet face entrenched barriers to leadership, including **underemployment, biased evaluations, exclusion from sponsorship, and rigid hierarchies**. These challenges are even sharper for **Black, queer, and trans Muslim women**, who experience compounded discrimination and invisibility.

Despite this, many show persistence and creativity by **leading without authority, building coalitions, and creating community networks**. As one participant explained: *"Even when I was told I didn't fit their idea of a leader, I made myself visible in other ways. I kept records, I asked for opportunities, and I didn't let them silence me."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).

Globally, Muslim women face similar inequities, confirming these are **structural, not individual failings**. Solutions such as **bias-proof evaluations, sponsorship programs, and identity-affirming leadership practices** are essential to dismantle barriers.

Change must happen at three levels:

- **Individuals** documenting achievements, leading from where they sit, and leveraging networks.
- **Managers** sponsoring others, modeling inclusive leadership, and challenging bias.
- **Organizations** embedding reforms like transparent promotion pathways, trauma-informed leadership training, and equity dashboards.

The challenge is not capability — Muslim women are qualified leaders. The real question is whether workplaces are ready to remove systemic barriers. As one Black Muslim woman noted: *"We don't need more training to be leaders. We need systems to stop blocking us."*

Advancing Muslim women into leadership is not just about representation — it is about **reimagining leadership, redefining presence, and holding institutions accountable** to feminist, anti-racist, and decolonial principles. Their inclusion is a litmus test of Canada's broader commitment to equity and justice.

Key Takeaways: Career Progression & Leadership

The Challenge:
Muslim women in Canada face systemic barriers to career progression, including exclusion from mentorship and sponsorship networks, biased performance evaluations, tokenism, and rigid hierarchies. Black, queer, and trans Muslim women encounter additional layers of discrimination. Even with strong qualifications, Muslim women are underrepresented in senior leadership and often face cultural taxation, identity suppression, and precarious "glass cliff" appointments.

Why It Matters for Muslim Women:
Career advancement is not just about individual success — it's about reshaping workplaces to be more inclusive, building solidarity across identities, and opening doors for future generations. By navigating and challenging systemic barriers, Muslim women can expand leadership representation, influence organizational culture, and create pathways for other marginalized women.

What Muslim Women Should Do:
- Build a **results log or impact portfolio** to document achievements and counter vague feedback in performance reviews.
- Seek and cultivate **sponsorship-ready visibility** by volunteering for high-profile projects, presentations, or committee roles.
- Engage in **coalition building** across teams and departments to showcase leadership and innovation "from where you sit."
- Join **external networks** (e.g., TRIEC, MAX Women in Leadership, Canadian Muslim Healthcare Network, Muslim Women in Tech) to gain mentorship, sponsorship, and solidarity outside the workplace.
- Develop **peer mentoring circles** with other Muslim women to share strategies, resources, and advocacy tactics.

- For Muslim women managers: maintain **sponsorship slates**, actively nominating others for promotions, projects, and leadership programs.
- Prioritize **mental health and wellbeing** by setting boundaries, using organizational supports, and seeking culturally competent care where needed.
- **Affirm and embrace identity** — whether through faith, race, sexuality, or gender expression — and advocate for inclusive spaces that recognize and protect these identities.

Case examples (Canada)

- City of Vancouver – Muslim Staff ERG supports voice & visibility pathways.
- Finance sector example: **VersaFi** (formerly Women in Capital Markets) widely partners with employers to open advancement pathways.

Workshop Module and Facilitator Guide

Module 3: Building Career Pathways & Leadership Confidence

Overview

This workshop is grounded in findings from the *ASPIRE Study (2024)* and draws from the lived realities of Muslim women in Canada's workplaces. It uses participatory, feminist, and trauma-informed facilitation approaches to help participants identify systemic barriers and co-create pathways to leadership grounded in equity and belonging.

The module centers on three intersecting goals:

1. Empower Muslim women to document, articulate, and advocate for their career achievements.
2. Equip participants with strategies to "lead from where they sit."
3. Support Muslim women managers in mentoring and sponsoring others.

This facilitator guide is based on ***Module 3: Building Career Pathways and Leadership Confidence***. The facilitator guide draws on adult learning pedagogies. Based on the learning objectives listed below – a sample 2-hour workshop agenda will be presented in a tabulated format. Additionally, a 'menu' of activities will be provided where facilitators can pick and choose different activities depending on their target audience. CCMW encourages you to be flexible and to adapt these materials to meet the needs of participants as well as the budget and logistical realities of each workshop setting.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Identify structural and cultural barriers to career advancement faced by Muslim women in Canadian workplaces.
- Recognize the impact of intersecting biases (Islamophobia, racism, ableism, ageism, queerphobia) on leadership access.
- Apply strategies for career visibility, sponsorship, and leadership confidence.
- Practice identity-affirming leadership and collective mentorship.
- Build a personalized leadership development plan.

Duration: 6–7 hours total (including breaks and lunch). Optional condensed version: **2 hours**

Ideal Participants: Early- to mid-career Muslim women, women in supervisory roles, and emerging leaders in public, private, and non-profit sectors.

Materials Required

- PowerPoint deck: *Module 3 – Building Career Pathways & Leadership Confidence*
- *ASPIRE Study Infographic: Rethinking restructuring workplace policies*
- *ASPIRE Study Infographic: Workplace Hierarchy*
- Flip charts, markers, sticky notes
- Projector and audio setup

Sample Workshop Agenda (2-Hour Condensed Version)

Agenda	**Time**	**Resources**
Welcome and ice-breaker	10 minutes	Flip-chart, markers
Review workshop objectives	10 minutes	Powerpoint slide
Setting a common ground	20 minutes	Slides, ASPIRE infographics
Activity: Testimony Wall: Invisible Leaders	30 minutes	Printed quotes, sticky notes
Activity: Career Mapping	30 minutes	Handout, slides
Workshop Evaluation	5 minutes	Open discussion
Wrap-up final thoughts and review parking lot	15 minutes	

Icebreakers

1. **"Leadership Snapshot"** — Ask participants to draw or list a woman who inspires their leadership journey and what qualities she embodies.
2. **"Two Truths and One Aspiration"** — Each person shares two true professional facts and one career aspiration.
3. **"Quote Resonance"** — Display this ASPIRE quote:

"Even when I was told I didn't fit their idea of a leader, I made myself visible in other ways."
Ask participants to discuss what "visibility" means to them.

Parking Lot:

At the beginning of the workshop, set aside a flipchart or board with the title "Parking Lot". Use this space throughout the workshop to list questions or topics that do not get addressed during the workshop. After the workshop, the facilitator should provide answers to the questions through an agreed upon form of communication (email, follow-up meeting, communique, etc.).

Menu of Activities

Activity 1 – Testimony Wall: "Invisible Leaders" (30 minutes)

Objective: To surface shared experiences and emotions around leadership exclusion and visibility among Muslim women — and to recognize patterns of resilience, silencing, and resistance that shape leadership journeys.

Instructions:

- Setup: Post 6–8 large, printed quotes from the *ASPIRE Study Report* around the room (see sample below).
- Provide each participant with sticky notes and a marker.
- Participant Task:
    - Invite participants to walk around silently for 5–7 minutes, read the quotes, and reflect.
    - On sticky notes, they write:
        - *What resonates with you personally?*
        - *What needs to change for this to stop being true?*
        - Encourage multiple notes — one per quote or emotion.
- Group Debrief (15 minutes):
    - Invite volunteers to share one quote that strongly resonated and why.
    - As a group, identify emerging themes — for example, *feeling unseen in meetings*, *bias in evaluation*, or *lack of sponsorship*.
    - Capture themes on a flip chart titled "From Invisible to Visible."

Facilitator Notes

- Normalize emotions; this activity can be deeply validating but also triggering.
- Emphasize shared experience and collective wisdom, not individual struggle.
- Reinforce that naming invisibility is the first step toward designing structural solutions.

Debrief Questions

- What patterns do you see across these testimonies?
- What role does "visibility" play in leadership confidence?
- How can we collectively rewrite these narratives in our workplaces?

HANDOUT – TESTIMONY WALL

#	Quotes	Theme	Page Reference
1	*"Even when I was told I didn't fit their idea of a leader, I made myself visible in other ways. I kept records, I asked for opportunities, and I didn't let them silence me."*	Resilience and self-advocacy	p. 84
2	*"They said I was too quiet to be a leader, but when I spoke up, I was told I was too aggressive. It's like there's no right way to exist."*	Bias in performance evaluations	p. 91
3	*"Every time I got promoted, I'd hear whispers — 'she's a diversity hire.' It made me question if I really belonged."*	Tokenism and belonging	p. 103

4	*"As a Black Muslim woman, I feel invisible — I don't see myself reflected anywhere in leadership, and I am constantly questioned on my tone."*	Anti-Black racism and invisibility	p. 112
5	*"I was asked to be on the diversity poster, but not in the leadership meeting. They wanted the optics, not the change."*	Performative inclusion / optics over substance	p. 98
6	*"I don't have anyone to sponsor me. Mentorship is about advice — sponsorship is about opportunity, and we rarely get that."*	Lack of sponsorship and advocacy	p. 77
7	*"We don't need more training to be leaders. We need systems to stop blocking us."*	Structural barriers and systemic exclusion	p. 118
8	*"When we started sharing stories, I realized how many of us were experiencing the same thing — it wasn't just me."*	Collective resilience and solidarity	p. 105

Activity 2: Understanding the Barriers – Pathways & Pitfalls (40 min)

Objective: Identify barriers Muslim women face in career progression and leadership.

Instructions:

- Present ASPIRE data on leadership gaps, credential bias, exclusion from networks, and microaggressions.
- Small group discussion: *Which barriers resonate most with your sector?*
- Visual synthesis: Participants create a "barrier web" using sticky notes.
    - **Facilitator Prompt:** "Where do you notice structural vs. cultural barriers in your own path?"

Handout: Summary of key ASPIRE leadership barriers with quotes (pp. 31, 85, 99).

HANDOUT:

Key Leadership Barriers for Muslim Women – Insights from the ASPIRE Study (2024)
Muslim women across Canada consistently reported that **leadership exclusion is not about a lack of ability or aspiration**, but the result of **systemic barriers** — rooted in bias, lack of sponsorship, and cultural exclusion.

1. Structural Barriers and Underemployment (p. 31)
Many highly educated Muslim women experience career stagnation or downward mobility, despite strong qualifications. Degrees earned abroad or in non-Western contexts are often **devalued or not recognized**, and hiring practices subtly reproduce bias through emphasis on "fit."

"I have two master's degrees, but I'm still doing work far below my level because my credentials are always being questioned." — Participant, Ontario (p. 31)**Key Issues:**

- Lack of credential recognition, especially for internationally educated women.
- Exclusion from leadership pipelines due to hiring bias and informal gatekeeping.
- Underemployment erodes confidence and long-term career growth.

2. Performance Bias and Visibility Gap (p. 85)

Muslim women report feeling **invisible in leadership discussions** and **scrutinized in evaluation processes**. Their work is often described in subjective terms ("not assertive," "too quiet," or "not ready for leadership"), while equivalent performance from others is praised.

"Even when I was told I didn't fit their idea of a leader, I made myself visible in other ways." — Participant, Toronto (p. 85). **Key Issues:**

- Double standards in performance evaluation and feedback.
- Unconscious bias penalizing Muslim women for both quietness and confidence.
- Leadership stereotypes (assertiveness, Western communication norms) excluding diverse expressions of authority.

3. Tokenism and Lack of Advancement Opportunities (p. 99)

At senior levels, Muslim women described being celebrated as symbols of diversity but **excluded from meaningful decision-making**. DEI roles often become "glass boxes" — highly visible but low in power.

"I was asked to be on the diversity poster, but not in the leadership meeting." — Participant, Quebec (p. 99). **Key Issues:**

- Representation without influence (performative inclusion).
- Burden of emotional labor and unpaid diversity work.
- Limited sponsorship and structural barriers to advancement.

Synthesis

Across all pages, the ASPIRE Study makes clear that **leadership barriers are systemic**, not individual:

- Muslim women *want* to lead and *do* lead, but their leadership is often unrecognized or undervalued.
- Bias in evaluation, lack of sponsorship, and tokenism compound to produce underrepresentation.
- Intersectional identities — especially being Black, immigrant, or queer — further intensify exclusion.

"We don't need more training to be leaders. We need systems to stop blocking us." — Participant, Alberta (p. 118)

Activity 3: Leading from Where You Sit (50 min)

Objective: Strengthen self-leadership skills for those without formal authority.

Instructions:

- Share examples from ASPIRE on women leading initiatives informally (e.g., Ramadan guides, mentorship groups).
- Participants identify one small change they can lead in their role.
- Optional: Role-play an "advocacy moment" (asking for visibility or sponsorship).

Debrief Questions:

1. What power do you already hold?
2. What would leading "from where you sit" look like this month?

HANDOUT:

Examples from ASPIRE

- **Faith-based inclusion initiatives:** Muslim women described developing *Ramadan workplace guides* and *fasting awareness briefings* to educate colleagues and normalize accommodations. These were often initiated without official titles or budgets — what one participant called *"leading quietly but effectively."*
- **Peer mentoring and safety circles:** The study notes women forming *informal mentorship groups* and *story-sharing circles* to discuss challenges like microaggressions, promotion bias, and mental health. One participant said: *"When we started sharing stories, I realized how many of us were experiencing the same thing — it wasn't just me."* (ASPIRE Study, 2024)
- **Community and cross-sector networks:** Participants also mentioned creating networks linking Muslim women in healthcare, STEM, and non-profit sectors to share strategies and build visibility.
- **Cultural safety initiatives:** In some hospitals and public offices, Muslim women spearheaded internal guidance on prayer space access, gender-sensitive patient care, and anti-Islamophobia awareness campaigns — often under informal or voluntary roles.

Activity 4: Sponsorship in Action – Building Others Up (45 min)

Objective: Equip Muslim women managers to sponsor and mentor others.

Instructions:

- Case study: *"Aisha's Dilemma"* — a mid-level manager struggles to advocate for junior staff amid biased leadership.
- Groups discuss: *How can Aisha create visibility and safety for her team?*
- Introduce the *Sponsorship Strategy Map* handout to track advocacy actions (nomination, visibility, protection).
  Facilitator Note: Highlight ASPIRE participant quote:
  "I push back when I hear 'not leadership material.' I ask: based on what metrics?"

HANDOUT: AISHA'S DILEMMA

Aisha Rahman is a 36-year-old mid-level manager at a large national non-profit organization in Toronto. She has been with the organization for six years and is widely respected for her professionalism, cross-cultural competence, and strong project delivery record. Her team includes four junior staff members — two of whom are also racialized Muslim women and one who wears a hijab. The organization often promotes a public image of diversity, showcasing women of color in marketing materials, but decision-making at senior levels remains predominantly white and non-Muslim. In leadership meetings, Aisha is frequently the only visibly Muslim woman in the room. Although she is praised for her "community connections" and "empathy," she notices that her strategic insights are often overlooked until echoed by others.

Recently, two of her high-performing team members — Mariam and Saira — were passed over for stretch assignments in favor of less-experienced colleagues described as a "better cultural fit." When Aisha raised concerns, a senior director cautioned her to "avoid making everything about identity," warning that she risked being seen as "divisive."

Aisha feels torn. She wants to advocate for her team without jeopardizing her credibility or being labeled as confrontational. She also worries about burnout and the emotional toll of always being the one to speak up.

The Dilemma

Aisha now faces three interrelated challenges:

1. **Advocacy fatigue** – Feeling pressure to represent all Muslim women and diversity concerns without institutional backing.
2. **Visibility gap** – Her team's contributions are often overshadowed by senior managers who take credit or reframe their ideas.
3. **Psychological risk** – The fear that assertive advocacy might harm her own career progression.

"It's like we can mentor others, but sponsorship comes at a cost — you risk being seen as the troublemaker." — ASPIRE Study participant, Ontario (2024)

Aisha wants to find ways to **sponsor her junior staff effectively**, ensuring they gain visibility, recognition, and access to opportunities — while protecting both their and her professional standing.

Facilitator Notes

- Highlight *ASPIRE Study* findings showing that Muslim women leaders often act as informal sponsors, creating shadow mentorship systems where formal DEI mechanisms fail.
- Encourage participants to share personal strategies (e.g., nominating colleagues for awards, co-presenting in meetings, amplifying voices in email threads).
- Emphasize the balance between **visibility and safety** — sponsorship should elevate others *without placing them at additional risk of bias.*

Application: Sponsorship Strategy Map

After discussing the case:

- Introduce the **Sponsorship Strategy Map Handout**.

Sponsorship Strategy Map

Purpose: Track relationships that enhance visibility and advocacy.

Potential Sponsor	Their Influence Zone	How I'll Build Trust	Action They Can Take (Visibility / Nomination / Protection)

Self-Reflection:

- Who currently speaks for me in rooms I'm not in?
- How can I make my contributions easier for others to recognize?

Ask participants to fill in:

- *Who can I sponsor this quarter?*
- *What opportunities can I nominate them for?*
- *How can I make their contributions visible in meetings or reports?*
- *What protection can I offer (e.g., backing them publicly, deflecting bias)?*

Activity 5 – Career Mapping: "From Aspiration to Action" (30 minutes)

Objective: To help participants translate reflection into tangible career and leadership goals — identifying actionable next steps, allies, and sponsors that can help them progress.

Instructions for Facilitators

- Setup: Distribute the *Career Pathway Map* handout. Explain that participants will complete three sections: Goals → Barriers → Allies/Sponsors.
- Step 1: Reflection (5–7 minutes)
  - Ask participants to think about where they want to be 1–3 years from now.
  - Prompts:
    - What kind of work excites me most?
    - What leadership opportunities feel out of reach right now?
- Step 2: Mapping Barriers (10 minutes)
  - Invite participants to name 2–3 barriers that may hold them back — e.g., lack of recognition, credential bias, limited mentorship, cultural fit pressure.
  - Encourage them to distinguish between personal control (confidence, communication, documentation) and structural (policies, bias, networks).
- Step 3: Identifying Allies & Sponsors (10 minutes)
  - Ask participants to think about who can help them grow — mentors, senior allies, peers.

    - Prompt: *"Who could mention your name in a room you're not in?"*
- Optional Pair Share (5 minutes)
    - In pairs, participants share one goal and one support action they'll take in the next 30 days.

Facilitator Notes:

- Keep the tone empowering and forward-looking — focus on action, not deficit.
- Emphasize the concept of "leading from where you sit." Leadership begins with small, visible acts of influence.
- Normalize that barriers are systemic — participants are not at fault for facing them.

Debrief Questions

- What did you notice while mapping your path?
- Who are the sponsors or allies you can engage this month?
- How can you create visibility for yourself or another Muslim woman at work?

HANDOUT: Career Mapping Worksheet — From Aspiration to Action

Step 1: Vision

What does success look like for you 1, 3, and 5 years from now?

Timeline	**My Goal**	**Why It Matters**
1 Year		
3 Years		
5 Years		

Step 2: Barriers I Face

List systemic or personal barriers (e.g., lack of sponsorship, credential bias, microaggressions).

Step 3: Allies & Sponsors

Who can champion your work, nominate you, or amplify your visibility?

Step 4: Next Steps (Next 30 Days)

Three immediate actions to advance your pathway.

Activity 6: Intersectional Reflection – Leadership Identities (30 min)

Objective: Reflect on identity, visibility, and belonging across intersections (race, faith, sexuality, ability).

Instructions:

- Display a quote:*"As a Black Muslim woman, I feel invisible — I don't see myself reflected anywhere in leadership."* (ASPIRE, p. 112)
- Ask: *How do our identities shape how we lead, and what spaces we access?*
  Encourage sharing resilience strategies and solidarity practices.

Activity 7: My Leadership Blueprint (30 min)

Objective: Translate learning into action.

Instructions:

- Participants fill in a one-page *Leadership Blueprint*:
    - Three strengths I bring
    - Two allies/sponsors I will approach
    - One visible leadership action I will take in the next 3 months
        - **Closing Reflection Prompt:** "What does it mean to belong as a leader?

HANDOUT:

Purpose: Translate learning into a practical 3-month plan.

Element	**Reflection**
Three Strengths I Bring	
Two Allies / Sponsors to Approach	
One Visible Leadership Action for Next 3 Months	
How I'll Measure Progress	

Prompts

- What barriers am I ready to name and navigate?
- How does leadership look when it centres faith, care, and solidarity?

Evaluation and Closing (15 min)

- Use a "Temperature Check" chart: participants place a sticky note on how confident they feel about leading after the workshop.
- Review parking lot questions and share follow-up contact or resource list.
- End with a quote slide:

"We don't need more training to be leaders. We need systems to stop blocking us." — Black Muslim Woman, *ASPIRE Study (2024)*

List of Handouts

1. Career Mapping Worksheet
2. Impact Portfolio Template

3. Sponsorship Tracker
4. Leadership Blueprint Worksheet

General Facilitator Notes

- Use trauma-informed facilitation: affirm experiences, avoid asking participants to disclose harm.
- Be intersectional: name race, faith, and gender dynamics explicitly.
- Model inclusion: ensure prayer and reflection breaks are built into timing.
- Maintain psychological safety: reinforce confidentiality and choice in sharing.

CONTENT MODULE 4

Creating Safe & Inclusive Workplaces

I. Overview

Creating safe and inclusive workplaces for Muslim women in Canada is not simply about preventing discrimination—it is about ensuring cultural safety, belonging, and equitable participation in every aspect of organizational life. The ASPIRE Study found that for many Muslim women, safety is defined not by the absence of harm, but by the presence of respect, recognition, and belonging - spaces where their faith, identities, and voices are valued rather than tolerated.

One participant captured this powerfully:
"Safety for me isn't just not being harassed. It's being able to pray without fear, speak without being silenced, and bring my whole self to work without being punished for it." (ASPIRE Study)

The lack of such belonging has tangible consequences. Muslim women who feel excluded or tokenized are more likely to disengage, underperform, or leave. The ASPIRE Study underscores this link: workplaces that fail to provide consistent religious accommodations, psychological safety, and equity in advancement see higher turnover among Muslim women, especially those in early-career roles. One respondent described feeling she was "always on trial," constantly questioned on competence and "fit." Another reflected, *"When you don't belong, you don't stay—you just survive until you can leave."*

Daily Realities: Bias, Belonging, and Burnout
Across industries, Muslim women face daily realities that compound over time: subtle microaggressions, exclusion from social networks, and the constant pressure to perform while suppressing identity. These experiences erode confidence and belonging, even among highly qualified professionals.[1]

The ASPIRE Study and national labour data reveal stark patterns:

- Muslim women's employment rate is only 44%, with an unemployment rate of 9%—nearly double the national average.
- For Black and Southeast Asian Muslim women, unemployment rises to 12–13%, despite higher education levels.

[1] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

- Muslim women with disabilities experience unemployment at 18%, the highest among all subgroups.
- Women who wear hijab or niqab report the steepest bias penalties, being less likely to be promoted and more likely to experience overt Islamophobia.

Beyond structural bias, many participants described the internalized effects of exclusion—imposter syndrome (feeling undeserving of success despite competence) and tall poppy syndrome (being criticized or undermined for standing out or succeeding). One ASPIRE participant shared:
"Every time I got promoted, I'd hear whispers - 'she's a diversity hire.' It made me question if I really belonged."

These biases manifest in performance reviews, promotion discussions, and even peer interactions, leading to cycles of self-doubt and burnout. The study found that many women felt compelled to overperform to "earn" belonging, even as they faced invisible ceilings.

Belonging as the Foundation of Inclusion[2]
Inclusion without belonging is fragile. True inclusion means more than having a seat at the table—it means being able to **speak, influence, and thrive** without fear of penalty. Belonging, in this context, is both an emotional and structural condition:

- **Emotional belonging** arises when women can show up authentically—wearing hijab, requesting prayer breaks, or speaking about faith—without being othered.
- **Structural belonging** occurs when accommodations, equity in advancement, and cultural safety are built into policies, not left to personal negotiation.

The ASPIRE Study emphasizes that belonging predicts retention: Muslim women who reported supportive colleagues, clear accommodations, and recognition of their contributions were far more likely to stay, grow, and aspire to leadership.

"My colleagues are supportive… they listen and give me what I need. That support is very important." (Saskatchewan immigrant woman, ASPIRE Study)

The Hidden Costs of Unsafe Workplaces[3]
When belonging is absent, the costs ripple across mental health and career progression. Muslim women described emotional exhaustion, hypervigilance, and self-censorship—constantly calculating what can or cannot be said. One woman noted:
"You start to shrink yourself—speak softer, laugh less, just to fit in. It's not just tiring, it's dehumanizing."

These experiences intersect with wider systemic barriers:

- Rigid hierarchies that reward conformity over authenticity.

[2] Ibid
[3] Ibid

- Performance systems that prioritize “fit” and “presence” over outcomes.
- Inconsistent reporting and DEIAB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging) mechanisms that rarely hold perpetrators accountable.

The result, as ASPIRE found, is disengagement and attrition—a pattern especially visible among younger Muslim women who, seeing the isolation faced by senior peers, choose to exit early rather than endure.

A Vision for Safe, Inclusive, and Belonging Workplaces

A safe and inclusive workplace for Muslim women is one where:

- Religious and cultural identities are respected as integral to professional life.
- Policies reflect intersectional realities—accounting for race, gender, faith, disability, and sexual orientation.
- Managers are trained to interrupt bias and support psychological safety.
- Success is redefined: collaboration, empathy, and authenticity are as valued as output.

Such workplaces don’t require Muslim women to constantly self-advocate or prove legitimacy—they enable them to belong fully. As one senior ASPIRE participant reflected:
“Inclusion should not mean adapting to survive; it should mean the workplace adapts so everyone can belong.”

This module builds from that insight—exploring not only the barriers that erode safety and belonging, but also the strategies Muslim women can use to protect themselves, lift others, and continue shaping workplaces that truly reflect justice, empathy, and shared humanity. As such, this module aims to:

- Examine the barriers to safety and inclusion, including harassment, rigid hierarchies, exclusionary cultures, and mental health consequences.
- Highlight the intersectional experiences of disabled, Black, queer, and trans Muslim women in Canadian workplaces.
- Present strategies at individual, managerial, and organizational levels to foster safe, inclusive, and culturally affirming environments.
- Draw from Canadian and global best practices to reimagine safety and inclusion not as compliance, but as collective accountability and justice.

II. Understanding the challenge

Religious accommodation gaps mean daily exclusion[4]

For many Muslim women, **basic religious needs** such as prayer space, modest dress, or flexibility during Ramadan are either handled informally or inconsistently enforced. This inconsistency means inclusion depends on the goodwill of individual managers rather than guaranteed rights. Women describe the

[4] Ibid

pressure to **suppress or mute their faith practices** in order to appear "professional," creating daily exclusion from workplace culture.

As one ASPIRE participant emphasized: *"Safety for me isn't just not being harassed. It's being able to pray without fear, speak without being silenced, and bring my whole self to work without being punished for it."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).

Global studies echo this pattern: in the UK, visibly Muslim women wearing hijab are penalized in hiring and told they are "less employable" because of assumptions around professionalism (Ghumman & Ryan, 2013). In Canada, this dynamic is compounded by provincial restrictions such as **Quebec's Bill 21**, which explicitly prohibits visible religious symbols in public-sector roles, creating structural exclusion for Muslim women seeking careers in education, law, or policing.

Tokenism and "performative inclusion"

The ASPIRE Study found that Muslim women are frequently showcased for **"diversity optics"**—holiday greetings, cultural food days, or promotional campaigns—while being excluded from substantive decision-making or leadership pipelines. This form of **performative inclusion** creates the appearance of equity without addressing opaque promotion criteria, pay inequities, or lack of voice.

One participant described this clearly: *"They do the training… but people with privilege don't want to let it go… the trainings aren't very effective."* (Canadian Muslim woman, ASPIRE Study). Women reported being praised for "diversity" in public but ignored in private when advocating for real organizational change.

This tokenism undermines **psychological safety**: it communicates that Muslim women are valuable only as symbols, not as leaders or decision-makers. Without structural shifts, they remain at the margins of influence.

Rigid hierarchies and cascading bias

Workplace structures that are **highly stratified** allow bias to flow downward, concentrating vulnerability among women with the least positional power. Within such hierarchies, credit for work often "moves up" to managers, while racialized Muslim women's contributions are erased.

The ASPIRE Study reported that women in entry- and mid-level positions often felt "stuck" because promotions were awarded through **closed-door networks**, often dominated by white male colleagues. Even when Muslim women reached leadership roles, they were treated as **outsiders** in spaces dominated by majority-group managers. One leader reflected: *"Even at the table, I wasn't part of the table. I was there, but invisible."*

This pattern mirrors global evidence: McKinsey's 2023 *Women in the Workplace* study shows racialized women are less likely to be credited for their work and more likely to have ideas co-opted, leading to

slower progression. For Muslim women, bias cascades across **both identity and religion**, intensifying invisibility within rigid hierarchies.

Reporting channels and DEI policies that don't work in practice

Many organizations showcase diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies, but Muslim women in the ASPIRE Study reported that these policies are often **ineffective, unsafe, or inaccessible**. Trainings lacked racial reflexivity, accommodation rules were gate-kept by managers, and reporting systems were slow or placed women at risk of retaliation.

One woman explained: *"They do the training… but people with privilege don't want to let it go… the trainings aren't very effective."* (ASPIRE Study). Another described being discouraged from reporting discrimination because it might "affect team cohesion."

When reporting channels are unsafe, Muslim women either remain silent or leave the workplace altogether. This leads to attrition, underreporting of harassment, and the perpetuation of harmful workplace cultures.

Exclusion from Informal Networks[5]

For many Canadian Muslim women, professional growth hinges not just on skill and performance, but on access to informal networks—after-work drinks, evening networking sessions, or hallway conversations. Yet these often conflict with religious obligations such as prayer times, fasting during Ramadan, or the need to avoid alcohol-centered environments. This exclusion significantly limits visibility, sponsorship opportunities, and access to advancement. The study identifies this as one of the most consistent barriers across sectors: *"When Muslim women are left out of social spaces (e.g., after-work drinks, prayer-clashing meetings), they miss visibility and advancement opportunities"*.

One participant reflected: *"They said networking was the key to promotion, but all the events were at bars after work. I couldn't go, and I knew it put me at a disadvantage."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).

Globally, research confirms similar patterns – for example in the UK, Muslim women report exclusion from "culture fit" activities, reinforcing occupational segregation and restricting career growth. In Canada, this dynamic plays out acutely in finance and tech sectors, where career progression is tightly linked to social visibility.

Islamophobic microaggressions, burnout and mental health consequences[6]

Daily exposure to Islamophobic microaggressions—ranging from comments on hijab, accents, or dietary practices to subtle dismissals of competence—creates an ongoing emotional burden. Muslim women often engage in "code-switching" or "identity suppression" to minimize bias, which adds to invisible

[5] Ibid
[6] Ibid

labour and mental strain. The toll is evident in testimonies: *"I would get a temporary role, and… it felt like I was always being tested with certain things. Job security and precarity has always been directly linked to my race and my faith."*

The ASPIRE Study highlights how these stereotypes—paired with exclusion from informal networks—produce stalled careers and burnout. Globally, women with visible religious symbols (especially headscarf) experience higher discrimination and harassment at work across the EU. The study describes this as *"chronic burnout from microaggressions and emotional labour… navigating day-to-day bias, defending one's faith, or educating colleagues contributes to mental exhaustion"*. Mental health consequences are also significant: participants in the ASPIRE Study spoke about depression, anxiety, and frustration resulting from workplace exclusion. One woman noted: *"Not getting work has a really bad impact on mental health… you feel depression, anger, frustration. These past 10 years, it's really taken a toll on my health"* (first-generation professional woman, 60s).

Intersectional harms: Black, queer, trans, and disabled Muslim women

The ASPIRE Study makes clear that **intersectionality magnifies harms**:

- **Black Muslim women**: Reported heightened scrutiny of "tone" and "fit," invisibility in leadership, and compounded anti-Black racism and Islamophobia. Despite higher-than-average education, they remain underrepresented in management. One participant shared: *"As a Black Muslim woman, I feel invisible — I don't see myself reflected anywhere in leadership, and I am constantly questioned on my 'tone.'"* (ASPIRE Study, p. 112).
- **Queer & trans Muslim women**: Described a "double invisibility"—facing Islamophobia in 2SLGBTQ+ spaces and homo/transphobia in faith or workplace contexts. Many concealed identity to avoid harassment. Structural barriers included **binary dress codes, misgendering, and lack of gender-inclusive prayer/quiet spaces.** *"I stayed silent about being queer during the group because I didn't want to face judgment from either side."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).
- **Muslim women with disabilities**: Reported the highest unemployment rates (18%), facing both ableism and Islamophobia. One woman explained: *"When they see my cane and my hijab, it feels like two strikes against me. I'm either seen as incapable or too much trouble to accommodate."* (ASPIRE Study Interview).

These compounded barriers illustrate how **"one-size-fits-all" DEIAB efforts fail** to address the lived realities of marginalized subgroups. Without intersectional frameworks, safety and inclusion remain incomplete.

Generational and community effects

The impact of exclusion and lack of safety extends beyond individual careers. Workplace barriers faced by Muslim women discourage younger generations from pursuing careers in certain fields, particularly where visible underrepresentation or outright hostility persists. This disillusionment ripples across families and communities, undermining wealth-building, leadership pipelines, and intergenerational

progress. As one participant explained: *"When my niece asked if she should go into law, I told her honestly, 'you'll always be questioned for wearing hijab.' I didn't want her to go through what I did."* Canadian labour data reinforce this concern: Muslim women are more likely than their peers to hold bachelor's or postgraduate degrees yet remain underrepresented in professional and leadership roles.[7] The mismatch between qualifications and opportunities perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation that younger Muslim women see and internalize as discouragement.

III. Key inclusive solutions and strategies

Muslim women cannot and should not be expected to carry the full weight of workplace inclusion. However, the ASPIRE Study shows that women often deploy creative, resilient strategies to navigate daily exclusion, protect their wellbeing, and carve out spaces of safety and influence. The following approaches reflect what women at different career stages have shared as effective, while also offering commentary on what an inclusive workplace would ideally look like.

Faith-Inclusive Practices in Daily Work

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Set expectations early**: During hiring or onboarding, state your needs (e.g., prayer times, Ramadan adjustments). As one study participant explained: *"I learned to ask upfront, because if I waited, it was seen as me being 'difficult' later on."*
- **Prepare "advocacy scripts"**: Short, confident responses (e.g., "I don't drink but I'd love to join daytime events") can normalize boundaries without apology.
- **Seek solidarity**: Join Muslim or immigrant women's professional networks for advice on navigating unsupportive workplaces.

For Supervisors/Managers

- **Normalize openly**: Share your own practices, such as taking prayer breaks or scheduling around Jumu'ah (Friday), to make space for others.
- **Mentor younger colleagues**: Provide practical tips, such as how to manage fasting during high-demand roles.

Inclusive workplace benchmark: A workplace where **faith practices are pre-built into handbooks and culture**—so no one feels they're asking for a "favor."

Navigating Bias, Imposter Syndrome[8], and Tall Poppy Syndrome[9]

For Early-Career Muslim Women

[7] Mansouri, K. et al. "Job Type, Religion, and Muslim Gender as Predictors of Employment Outcomes in Canada," 2022. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11067403/?utm

[8] https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006

[9] **https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/tps/**

- **Reframe self-doubt:** Recognize that feelings of imposter syndrome are not personal failings but a response to exclusionary systems. Keep a record of achievements to counter internalized bias.
- **Name the bias:** When experiencing "tall poppy syndrome" (being undermined for standing out), reframe visibility as leadership. Seek sponsors who celebrate your success.
- **Protect your confidence:** Counter microaggressions with factual self-affirmation—acknowledge your qualifications and contributions without apology.

For Supervisors/Managers
Build psychological safety: Validate and celebrate the achievements of other Muslim women—public recognition disrupts invisibility.
Interrupt bias publicly: When colleagues question a woman's authority or tone, correct it immediately ("She's making a valid point; let's listen.").

*Inclusive workplace benchmark***:** Performance conversations emphasize outcomes, not "fit" or "personality," and success is celebrated across differences.

Navigating Tokenism[10] and Finding Voice

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Reframe tokenism**: If invited to "diversity events," use the visibility to build networks or push for substance.
- **Own your contributions**: Keep receipts—emails, slides, project briefs—that link your name to achievements.

For Supervisors/Managers

- **Redirect token roles**: Decline surface-level invitations unless they lead to policy dialogue or resource influence.
- **Amplify peers**: Cite and uplift the work of other Muslim women in meetings.

ASPIRE Study: *"I was asked to be on the diversity poster, but when I pushed for policy changes, I was told it wasn't my role."* (Second-generation participant, Ontario).

Inclusive workplace benchmark: Inclusion means **decision-making power and influence**, not just visibility on a brochure.

Protecting Wellbeing and Mental Health

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Recognize burnout early:** If microaggressions or overwork are taking a toll, seek culturally competent support (e.g., Muslim counsellors, racialized therapist directories).

[10] https://www.fdmgroup.com/news-insights/tokenism-in-the-workplace/

- **Anchor in routine**: Use meditation, prayer, journaling, or exercise as protective grounding strategies. *"Having a job helps my mental health… the routine and structure helps me."* (ASPIRE Study, Ontario immigrant woman).
- **Peer care circles**: Build informal spaces with colleagues to share stress and strategies confidentially.
- **Create community anchors:** Find belonging outside work—faith circles, mentorship groups, or virtual networks—to buffer workplace isolation.

For Supervisors/Managers

- **Practice faith-centered leadership**: Demonstrate that stepping away for Eid or prayer is normal.
- **Coach younger women**: Share approaches to balancing high workload periods with Ramadan or family responsibilities.
- **Share vulnerability:** Talk openly about mental wellbeing and faith as part of holistic leadership.

Inclusive workplace benchmark: A safe workplace is one where **wellbeing is integrated into performance culture**, not seen as weakness.

Navigating Unsafe DEI Systems

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Map the system**: Learn both formal channels (HR, ombuds) and informal allies. Use whichever feels safest.
- **Document patterns**: Keep written records—dates, quotes, outcomes—as insurance in case you must escalate.

For Supervisors/Managers

- **Be a safe listener**: Provide trusted space for colleagues who fear retaliation.
- **Strategic guidance**: Help juniors understand when to escalate issues formally versus informally.

ASPIRE Study: *"They do the training… but people with privilege don't want to let it go. The trainings aren't very effective."* (Canadian Muslim woman).

Inclusive workplace benchmark: A workplace where **reporting is confidential, survivor-centred, supportive and leads to change**, not risk.

Addressing Ableism and Accessibility

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Know your rights:** Knowing your rights is an important form of protection and self-advocacy for Muslim women navigating Canadian workplaces—especially during onboarding, probation, or when requesting accommodations. Many barriers persist not because rights do not exist, but because employees are expected to remain silent or are unsure what they are legally entitled to. For example, under Canadian human rights law, employers have a **duty to accommodate**

disability and religious practices (such as prayer breaks or modified schedules) up to the point of undue hardship, and it is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of disability in hiring, onboarding, or employment decisions. Being aware of these rights can help you recognize when a workplace issue is systemic rather than personal, and can support more confident, informed conversations with managers or HR. A **full, detailed list of relevant federal, provincial, and territorial legislation** is provided in the **Annex 3** for reference..

- **Reframe accommodations:** Position requests (e.g., ergonomic adjustments, hybrid work) as empowerment and productivity tools, not burdens.
- **Document barriers:** Keep a simple log of accommodation requests, responses, and outcomes—it's a record and an empowerment practice.
- **Join disability-justice spaces:** Connect with networks like **DAWN Canada**, **Disability Without Poverty**,, **DEEN** (Disability Empowerment Equality Network), **SMILE Canada** among other organizations for collective advocacy.

For Supervisors/Managers

- **Lead by example:** If you have a disability or chronic condition, share it openly (where comfortable) to normalize accessibility conversations.
- **Champion intersectionality:** Recognize how faith, gender, and ability intersect—support staff who experience compounded barriers.

Inclusive workplace benchmark: Accessibility is universal design—not reactive accommodation. Disabled Muslim women feel seen as contributors, not exceptions.

Confronting Ageism and Building Intergenerational Solidarity

For Early-Career Muslim Women

- **Value intergenerational mentorship:** Seek out older Muslim women for advice on navigating institutional systems and long-term growth.
- **Challenge stereotypes:** If dismissed as inexperienced, reframe your newness as adaptability and innovation.
- **Document your wins:** Keep records of your accomplishments to counter "too young to lead" assumptions.

For Senior/Older Muslim Women

- **Reclaim expertise:** Articulate the strategic value of your international experience and leadership history.
- **Pay it forward:** Mentor and sponsor younger Muslim women—showing solidarity across generations strengthens collective power.
- **Advocate collectively:** Join advocacy coalitions addressing immigrant credential recognition and age bias in hiring (e.g., TRIEC, MOSAIC, Immigrant Women's Services Ottawa).

Inclusive workplace benchmark: Age and experience are seen as assets. Younger and older Muslim women collaborate as equals, each bringing critical knowledge and resilience.

Building Peer Accountability and Safe Networks

For All Muslim Women

- **Create informal safety circles:** Form small peer groups for emotional check-ins, information-sharing, and advocacy planning.
- **Leverage Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** If available, use ERGs to surface issues collectively, ensuring shared voice rather than isolated complaints.
- **Use storytelling as advocacy:** Share experiences in safe spaces (e.g., community dialogues, mentorship forums) to make systemic barriers visible and build collective agency.

"When we started sharing stories, I realized how many of us were experiencing the same thing—it wasn't just me."— ASPIRE Study.

Inclusive workplace benchmark: Safety and inclusion are collective responsibilities. Everyone, regardless of role, is accountable for fostering belonging.

Barriers and solutions across different sectors[11]:

Sector	Barriers to Safety & Inclusion	Strategies & Solutions (Muslim Women's Approaches)
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)	• Microaggressions around hijab, accents, and cultural identity. • Long hours and networking events centered on alcohol exclude Muslim women. • Lack of visible Muslim women role models in leadership.	• **Curate alternative networks**: Build or join daytime/alcohol-free professional groups (e.g., Muslim women in STEM networks, community-based meetups). • **Document contributions in male-dominated labs/teams** to counter invisibility. • **Seek role model visibility**: Follow and highlight Muslim women in STEM through conferences, LinkedIn, and mentorship; amplify their work to normalize representation.
Financial Services	• Overreliance on "cultural fit" excludes diverse applicants. • Networking-heavy culture often excludes those avoiding	• **Prepare "fit reframing" narratives**: Emphasize how difference adds value (e.g., global perspective, multilingual skills). **Build sponsorship from within**:

[11] ASPIRE Study. (2014). *Canadian Council of Muslim Women*. Canadian Council of Muslim Women. https://www.ccmw.com/aspire-study

Sector	Barriers to Safety & Inclusion	Strategies & Solutions (Muslim Women's Approaches)
	alcohol-based events. Tokenism without meaningful decision-making power.	Actively seek allies and ask for advocacy in promotion conversations. ● **Push beyond tokenism**: Use visible moments (panels, brochures) as openings to raise substantive issues, rather than settling for surface visibility.
Healthcare	● Only **0.07% of Canadian Muslim women** hold senior management roles in healthcare. ● Lack of cultural safety in teams (fasting, prayer, modesty ignored). ● Queer and trans Muslim women rendered invisible in workforce planning.	● **Early-career**: Build credibility by documenting contributions in patient safety and equity, areas where Muslim women's cultural competencies are strong assets. ● **Supervisors/managers**: Mentor junior Muslim women by guiding them through credentialing processes and coaching on leadership tracks. ● **Queer/trans Muslim women**: Form dual alliances (health-sector 2SLGBTQ+ networks and faith-based groups) to counter double invisibility.
Skilled Trades	● **12% unemployment** among Muslim women—highest across sectors. ● Male-dominated worksites foster harassment and informal "fit-based" recruitment. ● Weak reporting structures for harassment/Islamophobia.	● **Early-career**: Join women-in-trades or newcomer apprenticeship programs that include peer mentorship. Build small peer alliances to counter harassment. **Managers**: Model zero-tolerance by visibly supporting women when incidents occur, even without formal authority. ● **Visibility strategy**: Showcase technical skills publicly (e.g., online portfolios, community projects) to bypass biased word-of-mouth recruitment.
Public Sector	● Bureaucratic hiring lacks flexibility for religious accommodations. ● Quebec's Bill 21 blocks hijab/niqab-wearing women from frontline jobs. Muslim women are	● **Early-career**: Learn the policy frameworks (Human Rights Act, Employment Equity Act) to assert rights during hiring/onboarding. ● **Managers**: Build collective advocacy by connecting with Muslim ERGs and

Sector	Barriers to Safety & Inclusion	Strategies & Solutions (Muslim Women's Approaches)
	often sidelined or leave to avoid discrimination.	equity committees to influence from within. ● **Quebec-specific**: Form or join advocacy coalitions outside the workplace (civil society, legal groups) to challenge systemic exclusion.
Non-Profit / NGO Sector	● Despite equity mandates, many Muslim women experience "performative inclusion" — symbolic gestures without shared decision-making power. ● Muslim staff often face emotional labor burnout as they are expected to "represent the community" while being underpaid and overextended. ● White saviorism and unconscious paternalism limit advancement into leadership. ● Hijab-wearing staff report subtle exclusion from donor-facing roles or media work.	● **Early-career**: Be clear about boundaries — advocacy should not mean carrying institutional equity work alone. One ASPIRE participant said: *"They wanted me to explain Islamophobia every week. It was exhausting."* ● **Use networks strategically**: Connect with feminist and equity-centered NGOs (e.g., Equality Fund, Canadian Women's Foundation, or Maison Femme) to find mentorship outside your organization. ● **Mid-career/Managers**: Document "invisible work" (diversity committees, translation, community outreach) for performance reviews. ● Build cross-sector coalitions: Partner with other racialized and faith-based leaders to amplify systemic issues through joint advocacy.

Cross-Sectoral Insights

- Across all sectors, the ASPIRE Study identified that belonging and safety improve when Muslim women: Set boundaries early and frame accommodations as professional norms.
- Build horizontal mentorship and peer accountability networks.
- Document contributions and bias incidents to ensure fair evaluation.
- Create visibility for Muslim women's excellence — not just their identity.

IV. Conclusion

The evidence is consistent: while Canadian Muslim women are among the most educated immigrant groups, they remain underrepresented in senior roles (just 0.19% in senior management vs. 0.84% of the general public) and overrepresented in retail and service sectors. Their daily experiences—ranging from subtle Islamophobic microaggressions to systemic exclusion from networks, sponsorship, and decision-making—undermine both wellbeing and career progression. These barriers compound for Black, queer, and trans Muslim women, who face intersectional harms that current DEI approaches rarely address. Yet, the ASPIRE Study highlights that inclusion is possible when organizations commit to cultural safety and accountability. Women described thriving in workplaces that normalized prayer accommodations, embedded wellness policies, and valued diversity in practice—not just in optics. As one participant emphasized: *"The focus of this company seems to be employee wellness… they prioritize the welfare of the employees, whereas in the previous organization, it was all about output"*.

Globally, hijab-wearing women face the steepest discrimination penalties in hiring and retention, reinforcing that these are not individual deficits but structural inequities. The solutions explored in this module—from trauma-informed leadership to sponsorship pipelines and equity dashboards—demonstrate that when organizations move beyond compliance toward genuine inclusion, Muslim women are able not only to stay but to lead.

Inclusion is not charity—it is justice. Building safe and inclusive workplaces for Muslim women strengthens organizational performance, models Canada's commitments to anti-racism, and expands the very definition of leadership in ways that benefit all workers.

Key Takeaways: Creating Safe and Inclusive Workplaces

The Challenge:
Muslim women in Canada face entrenched barriers to safety and belonging at work—including inconsistent accommodations, tokenism, microaggressions, rigid hierarchies, and ineffective reporting systems. These harms undermine mental health and stall career progression, with compounded effects for Black, queer, and trans Muslim women and Muslim women living with a disability/ies.

Why It Matters for Muslim Women:
Safe and inclusive workplaces are critical for mental health, retention, and advancement. Inclusion allows women to bring their full selves to work, build visibility, and access fair pathways to leadership. As one ASPIRE participant noted: *"My colleagues are supportive… they listen and give me what I need. That support is very important"*.

What Muslim Women Should Do:

- Assert Rights & Build Safety Nets: Document accommodations, learn organizational policies, and use anonymous reporting or collective advocacy when possible.

- Leverage Networks & Mentors: Join Muslim or racialized women's professional networks (e.g., TRIEC Mentorship, MAX Women in Leadership).
- Develop Leadership Voice: Keep a "brag book" of achievements, take initiative on visible projects, and practice identity-affirming leadership.
- Prioritize Wellbeing: Use culturally competent wellness supports (ISPU workplace wellness modules, faith-informed practices).
- Support One Another: For Muslim women in managerial roles, sponsor and coach junior Muslim women, advocate for bias-free evaluations, and challenge harmful norms directly.

Inclusive Workplace Vision: A truly inclusive workplace is one where Muslim women don't have to self-advocate daily; where **accommodations are automatic, voices carry weight, wellbeing is protected, and intersectional identities are affirmed**.

Workshop Module and Facilitator Guide

Module 4: Creating Safe & Inclusive Workplaces

Overview

This workshop is grounded in the *ASPIRE Study (2024)* and related research on Muslim women's experiences in Canadian workplaces. It explores what **safety, belonging, and inclusion** mean in practice — moving beyond compliance toward psychological and cultural safety. Muslim women define safety not simply as freedom from harassment, but as the freedom to **express identity without penalty**. As one participant stated: *"Safety for me isn't just not being harassed. It's being able to pray without fear, speak without being silenced, and bring my whole self to work without being punished for it."* (ASPIRE Study, 2024)

This module focuses on:

1. Identifying and unpacking barriers to safety and inclusion.
2. Equipping Muslim women with strategies to build faith-affirming and inclusive work environments.
3. Strengthening agency and solidarity through peer and community networks.

This facilitator guide is based on ***Module 4: Creating Safe and Inclusive Workplaces***. The facilitator guide draws on adult learning pedagogies. Based on the learning objectives listed below – a sample 2-hour workshop agenda will be presented in a tabulated format. Additionally, a 'menu' of activities will be provided where facilitators can pick and choose different activities depending on their target audience. CCMW encourages you to be flexible and to adapt these materials to meet the needs of participants as well as the budget and logistical realities of each workshop setting.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Understand barriers to safety, belonging, and inclusion for Muslim women in Canada.
- Recognize the mental health and professional consequences of exclusion, tokenism, and burnout.
- Learn identity-affirming strategies to navigate Islamophobia, microaggressions, and ineffective DEI systems.
- Strengthen tools for self-advocacy, peer solidarity, and wellbeing.
- Co-create visions for inclusive workplaces that reflect justice, empathy, and shared humanity.

Duration: 6–7 hours (full-day), 2 hours (condensed version)

Ideal Participants: Muslim women employees across sectors (STEM, healthcare, finance, skilled trades, public and non-profit), early-career to mid-level professionals, and supervisors who mentor others.

Materials Required

- PowerPoint deck: *Module 4 – Creating Safe and Inclusive Workplaces*
- Flip charts, markers, and sticky notes
- ASPIRE Study quotes (printed)
- Projector, speakers, and quiet room for reflection breaks

Sample Workshop Agenda (2-hour condensed)

Agenda	Time	Resources
Welcome and icebreaker	10 minutes	Flip-chart, markers
Review workshop objectives	10 minutes	Powerpoint slide
Setting a common ground	10 minutes	Slides, ASPIRE infographics
Presentation of Findings from ASPIRE Study	10 minutes	Slides
Activity: Mapping Workplace Safety	30 minutes	Printed quotes, sticky notes
Activity: Intersectional Belonging Map	30 minutes	Handout, slides
Workshop Evaluation	5 minutes	Open discussion
Wrap-up final thoughts and review parking lot	15 minutes	

Icebreakers

1. **"Belonging Word Cloud":** Each participant writes one word that defines belonging for them. The facilitator maps responses into a visual cloud (e.g., "respect," "visibility," "safety," "solidarity").
2. **"Safety Scale"**: On a line from 1 (unsafe) to 5 (fully safe), participants place sticky notes reflecting how they feel at work. Discussion prompt: *What would it take to move one point higher?*
3. **"Quote Reflection"**: Display quote: *"You start to shrink yourself—speak softer, laugh less, just to fit in."* (ASPIRE Study, 2024). Invite short reflections: What pressures cause this shrinking? How can we resist it together?

Parking Lot:

At the beginning of the workshop, set aside a flipchart or board with the title "Parking Lot". Use this space throughout the workshop to list questions or topics that do not get addressed during the workshop. After the workshop, the facilitator should provide answers to the questions through an agreed upon form of communication (email, follow-up meeting, communique, etc.).

Menu of Activities

Activity 1: Mapping Workplace Safety (30 minutes)

Objective: Identify what "safety" and "exclusion" look like in practice.

Instructions:

- Participants reflect on spaces where they feel safe vs. excluded (e.g., prayer spaces, meetings, social events).
- Use *Belonging Index Worksheet* to mark "zones" of inclusion/exclusion.
- Discuss in small groups: *What patterns emerge? What could transform unsafe zones into safe ones?*

Facilitator Note: Affirm that safety includes cultural, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing — not only physical.

HANDOUT: Belonging Index Worksheet

Purpose: Reflect on how belonging, safety, and inclusion show up in your workplace.

Step 1: Mapping Your Workplace Experience (1=very unsafe and 5=very safe)

Workplace Area / Situation	How Safe Do I Feel? (1–5)	Why?	What Would Improve It?
Team Meetings			
Lunch / Break Spaces			
Manager 1:1s			
After-Work Events			
Performance Reviews			
Informal Networking			

Step 2: Reflection Questions

- When do I feel most "seen" and valued at work?
- When do I feel like I need to hide parts of myself?
- What would make me feel a stronger sense of belonging?

"When you don't belong, you don't stay — you just survive until you can leave."
(ASPIRE Study, 2024)

Activity 2: Advocacy in Action – Faith-Inclusive Practices (45 minutes)

Objective: Practice articulating faith and identity needs confidently.

Instructions:

- Participants use *Self-Advocacy Script Cards* to role-play scenarios (e.g., prayer time requests, alcohol-centered events). Pair-up or work in trios. Switch roles between being a female Muslim employee and the manager. If working in trios, one participant can be an observer.
- Encourage use of "I statements" (e.g., "I work best when I can observe my prayers on time.").
- After each round, discuss: How did it feel to voice the request? What responses from the manager felt supportive and/or dismissive?

Quote Prompt: *"I learned to ask upfront, because if I waited, it was seen as me being 'difficult' later on."* (ASPIRE Study Participant)

HANDOUT: Self-Advocacy Script Cards

Objective
To help Muslim women practice **assertive yet professional communication** when navigating faith, identity, or accommodation-related conversations at work.

Script Card 1 – Prayer Time Request
Scenario: You need to request a short daily break to perform prayers, but your manager seems unfamiliar with religious accommodations.
Suggested Script: "I'd like to discuss scheduling flexibility for my daily prayer time. It usually takes 5–10 minutes, and I'll ensure coverage for my responsibilities. This practice helps me stay focused and balanced throughout the day."
Advocacy Tip: Frame it as a productivity support rather than a special favor. Keep it factual and confident: *"This is part of my regular routine; it helps me return to work more centered."*

Script Card 2 – Alcohol-Centered Networking Event
Scenario: Your team has scheduled a client social event at a bar, but you do not drink for religious reasons.
Suggested Script: "Thanks for including me — I don't drink, but I'd love to join for the parts that aren't centered on alcohol. Are there upcoming daytime or coffee meet-ups where we can connect with the same group?"
Advocacy Tip: You can also propose an inclusive alternative: *"Maybe next time we could host a lunch or volunteer activity so everyone feels comfortable participating."*

Script Card 3 – Ramadan Schedule and Energy Management
Scenario: You're fasting during Ramadan and need to adjust your workload or break times.
Suggested Script: "During Ramadan, I'll be fasting and may have lower energy later in the afternoon. Could we adjust deadlines or heavy meetings to earlier in the day?"
Advocacy Tip: Anchor the ask in **performance language** — *"This schedule helps me maintain focus and continue delivering quality work."*

Script Card 4 – Dress Code and Modesty
Scenario: A supervisor comments that your hijab "looks unprofessional" or asks you to "tone down" traditional clothing.
Suggested Script: "I wear the hijab as part of my professional identity — it aligns with my values and does not affect my performance. I'd appreciate it if we could focus on results rather than appearance."
Advocacy Tip: Use "I" statements to redirect bias without confrontation. You may also cite workplace policy or the **Canadian Human Rights Act**, which protects against religious discrimination.

Script Card 5 – Exclusion from Informal Networks
Scenario: You realize key discussions or mentoring happen at after-hours events that clash with family or prayer times.
Suggested Script: "I really value building connections — would there be daytime team meetings or mentorship sessions I can join? I'd love to contribute and stay connected."
Advocacy Tip: Normalize the ask by showing engagement: *"I'm proactive about team building and want to ensure full participation."*

Script Card 6 – Bias or Microaggression Response
Scenario: A colleague says, "You speak English so well!" or questions your fit for leadership because of your accent or hijab.
Suggested Script: "Thanks — I was raised and educated here, so English is actually my first language." or "I'm confident in leading this project and appreciate the chance to show results."
Advocacy Tip: Stay calm, correct misinformation succinctly, and pivot back to competence. Rehearse confidence in tone as much as in words.

Script Card 7 – Disability or Accessibility Accommodation
Scenario: You require ergonomic adjustments, flexible hours, or assistive tools as a Muslim woman with a disability.
Suggested Script: "I'd like to formalize an accommodation for [specific need]. It supports my productivity and aligns with our inclusion policy. Can we document next steps together?"
Advocacy Tip: Keep a written record of requests and responses. The **Accessible Canada Act (2019)** guarantees accommodations without stigma.

Script Card 8 – Manager Allyship Practice
Scenario: You're a Muslim woman in a supervisory role and notice a junior colleague struggling to advocate for prayer time or faith needs.
Suggested Script: "You can block your prayer time on the shared calendar — I'll back you up if anyone questions it. Your wellbeing matters to our team."
Advocacy Tip: Model faith-inclusive behavior openly — *"When leaders normalize accommodations, others feel safe doing the same."*

Activity 3: Navigating Tokenism and Finding Voice (30 minutes)

Objective: Build agency and resilience against tokenism and performative inclusion.

Instructions:

- Share quote: *"I was asked to be on the diversity poster, but when I pushed for policy changes, I was told it wasn't my role."*
- Small groups discuss: What strategies help turn token visibility into real influence?
- Each participant writes one "visibility boundary" (e.g., "I will only participate in DEI panels that include policy change dialogue").

Activity 4: Intersectional Belonging Map (30 minutes)

Objective: Explore how identity intersections (faith, race, gender, disability, sexuality, age) affect belonging.

Instructions:

- Use *Intersectional Inclusion Map* handout.
- Participants mark which aspects of their identity are affirmed, ignored, or penalized at work.
- Group debrief: What intersections need more advocacy?

Facilitator Note: Acknowledge experiences of Black, queer, trans, and disabled Muslim women.

Handout: Intersectional Inclusion Map

Purpose: Explore how different parts of your identity influence safety and belonging.

Identity Dimension	How It's Valued at Work	Challenges or Biases Faced	Support I Need
Faith / Religion			
Race / Ethnicity			
Gender / Gender Expression			
Disability / Neurodiversity			
Sexual Orientation			
Age / Career Stage			

Tips: Highlight intersectional experiences — no single identity explains belonging alone.

Activity 5: Building Peer Accountability and Solidarity (30 minutes)

Objective: Strengthen networks of care and mutual advocacy.

Instructions:

- Introduce the *Peer Solidarity Planner* handout.
- Participants identify 2–3 peers they can check in with regularly to share support and opportunities.
- Encourage setting up monthly peer circles or "accountability duos."

Quote Prompt: *"When we started sharing stories, I realized how many of us were experiencing the same thing—it wasn't just me."* (ASPIRE Study, 2024)

HANDOUT: Peer Solidarity Planner

Purpose: Build intentional networks of care, accountability, and support.

Peer / Colleague	How We Support Each Other	Frequency of Check-Ins	Shared Goals / Advocacy Focus

Reflection Questions

- Who do I feel safest sharing my experiences with at work?
- What would a meaningful peer support system look like for me?
- How can we keep one another accountable to inclusion goals?

Reflection & Closing

Discussion Prompts:

- What would an inclusive workplace look like for you — one where you can thrive and belong?
- What one change will you make or advocate for this month?

Closing Quote: *"Inclusion should not mean adapting to survive; it should mean the workplace adapts so everyone can belong."* (Senior Muslim leader, ASPIRE Study, 2024)

Facilitator Note:
End with a grounding exercise — one deep breath for release, one for intention.

List of Handouts

1. **Belonging Index Worksheet** – map inclusion/exclusion zones
2. **Self-Advocacy Script Cards** – faith-inclusive responses
3. **Intersectional Inclusion Map** – identity reflection
4. **Peer Solidarity Planner** – network accountability tracker
5. **Evaluation Form** – post-workshop reflection

General Facilitator Notes:

- Use trauma-informed principles: avoid forcing disclosures, center choice.
- Normalize prayer and reflection breaks.
- Use inclusive language: say “Muslim women and gender-diverse Muslims.”
- Celebrate intersectionality — invite diverse experiences without comparison.
- End with actionable follow-up: encourage participants to identify one next-step action and share it with a peer.

Glossary of Key Terms

Ableism: Discrimination, prejudice, or systemic barriers that disadvantage people with disabilities by assuming typical ability as the norm (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2016)
Source: https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability

Accessibility: The design of workplaces, programs, services, and environments so that people of all abilities can participate fully (Government of Canada, Accessible Canada Act, 2019).
Source: https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada.html

Anti-Black Racism: Prejudicial attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and systemic discrimination directed at people of African descent, deeply rooted in institutions, policies, and social norms (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2020).
Source:
https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/black-history-month/anti-black-racism.html

Belonging: A psychological state in which individuals feel valued, included, and able to express their identities without fear of marginalization (Cornell University, n.d).
Source: https://diversity.cornell.edu/belonging/belonging-metrics/sense-belonging

Broken Rung: The most significant drop-off in women's leadership progression—typically at the first promotion to management—where racialized women face compounded barriers (McKinsey & LeanIn, 2023).
Source: https://womenintheworkplace.com/

Cultural Competence: The ability to recognize, understand, and interact effectively across cultural differences through knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Government of Canada, 2018).
Source:
https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/chief-public-health-officer-health-professional-forum-common-definitions-cultural-safety.html#a4

Cultural Fit Bias: A discriminatory hiring or evaluation practice that prioritizes similarity to existing staff over objective qualifications or performance (Impact HR, n.d.).
Source: https://impacthr.ca/why-hiring-for-cultural-fit-undermines-diversity/

Cultural Safety: An environment where people feel respected, free from discrimination, and able to express their identity without fear, created by addressing systemic power imbalances (Government of Canada, 2020).
Source:
https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/chief-public-health-officer-health-professional-forum-common-definitions-cultural-safety.html#a4

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI): Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) refer to a set of organizational principles and practices aimed at ensuring representation of varied identities, fair treatment and opportunity for all employees, and the creation of workplace environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and able to contribute fully. More specifically:

- ***Diversity***: Diversity refers to the range of differences within a population, including race, religion, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and more. In the workplace, diversity means having employees who reflect the communities and clients an organization serves. As Canadian census data show, social identities—such as gender diversity—are evolving, especially among younger generations. True diversity is not just about who is hired, but also about ensuring representation across all levels of an organization, including leadership.
- ***Equity***: Equity is about removing barriers so everyone has a fair opportunity to succeed. Unlike equality, which treats everyone the same, equity recognizes that different people have different needs. Providing accommodations—such as assistive technologies, flexible work arrangements, or accessible workspaces—ensures that employees can perform at their best. Equity focuses on fairness, not sameness.
- ***Inclusion***: Inclusion is the practice of creating environments where all employees feel valued, heard, and able to contribute fully. It goes beyond representation and accommodations by fostering belonging and participation. Inclusive workplaces actively involve employees in shaping culture, celebrate diverse identities, and remain open to feedback when people feel excluded. Inclusion is an ongoing effort, not a one-time initiative.

Source:
https://www.bdc.ca/en/articles-tools/entrepreneur-toolkit/templates-business-guides/glossary/diversity-equity-and-inclusion-dei

Duty to Accommodate: The legal obligation of employers to adjust workplace policies or practices to meet employee needs related to protected grounds (e.g., religion, disability), unless undue hardship is demonstrated (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023).
Source:
https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate

Employment Equity: A federal policy designed to remove systemic barriers for four designated groups—women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and visible minorities—through proactive workplace measures (Government of Canada, 2023).
Source:
https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/employment-equity.html

Imposter Syndrome: A psychological pattern where individuals doubt their accomplishments and fear being exposed as unqualified despite evidence of competence (Clance & Imes, 1978).
Source (journal): https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006

Inclusive Leadership: Leadership characterized by awareness of bias, active engagement with diverse perspectives, and deliberate efforts to create equitable and high-trust workplace cultures (Harvard Business School Online, n.d.).
Source: **https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/inclusive-leadership**

Islamophobia: A form of racism that targets Muslim identity—including beliefs, dress, and cultural markers—resulting in prejudice, discrimination, and systemic exclusion (Government of Canada, 2024).
Source:
https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/combatting-islamophobia-canada/resources/guide-combatting-islamophobia.html

Mentorship: A relationship focused on guidance, knowledge-sharing, and support for professional growth, without direct advocacy power (Dhalberg et. al., 2019).
Source: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK552775/

Microaggressions: Subtle verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights or insults that communicate derogatory or negative messages to marginalized individuals (Sue et al., 2007).
Source: https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271

Newcomer: An immigrant, refugee, or temporary resident who has recently arrived in Canada and is adapting to new cultural, social, and workplace systems (IRCC, 2022).
Source: https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants.html

Psychological Burnout: A state of chronic workplace stress characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization, 2019).
Source: https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon

Psychological Safety: A shared belief that team members can express ideas, concerns, and mistakes without fear of punishment or humiliation (Edmondson, 1999).
Source: https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Religious Accommodation: Adjustments made to workplace policies to enable employees to practice their faith meaningfully (e.g., prayer, dress, fasting) unless it creates undue hardship (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.).
Source:
https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-creed/9-duty-accommodate

Sponsorship: A career-building relationship where a senior leader actively advocates for a protégé's advancement, visibility, and access to opportunities (World Economic Forum, 2023).
Source:

https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/04/growth-summit-2023-sponsorship-women-workplace-equity/

Tall Poppy Syndrome: A social dynamic in which people who stand out or succeed are criticized, resented, or undermined by peers (Women of Influence, 2025).
Source: **https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/tps/**

Tokenism: The superficial inclusion of marginalized individuals without granting meaningful decision-making power or structural change (Preeta Ghoshal, 2023).
Source: **https://www.fdmgroup.com/news-insights/tokenism-in-the-workplace/**

References

Clance, P. R., & Imes, S. A. (1978). The imposter phenomenon in high-achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice, 15*(3), 241–247. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0086006

Cornell University. (n.d.). *Sense of belonging.* Cornell University, Diversity and Inclusion. https://diversity.cornell.edu/belonging/belonging-metrics/sense-belonging

Dahlberg, M. L., Byars-Winston, A., & Schneider, B. (2019). *Mentoring programs and practices.* National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK552775/

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 44*(2), 350–383. https://doi.org/10.2307/2666999

Government of Canada. (2018). *Cultural safety and cultural competence.* Health Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/chief-public-health-officer-health-professional-forum-common-definitions-cultural-safety.html#a4

Government of Canada. (2019). *Accessible Canada Act.* Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada.html

Government of Canada. (2020). *Cultural safety.* Public Health Agency of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/health-system-services/chief-public-health-officer-health-professional-forum-common-definitions-cultural-safety.html#a4

Government of Canada. (2022). *Newcomers to Canada.* Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/new-immigrants.html

Government of Canada. (2023). *Employment Equity Act.* Employment and Social Development Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/employment-equity.html

Government of Canada. (2024). *Guide to combatting Islamophobia in Canada.* Canadian Heritage. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/combatting-islamophobia-canada/resources/guide-combatting-islamophobia.html

Harvard Business School Online. (n.d.). *What is inclusive leadership?* https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/inclusive-leadership

Impact HR. (n.d.). *Why hiring for cultural fit undermines diversity.* https://impacthr.ca/why-hiring-for-cultural-fit-undermines-diversity/

McKinsey & Company, & LeanIn.Org. (2023). ***Women in the workplace 2023.*** **https://womenintheworkplace.com/**

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2016). ***Policy on ableism and discrimination based on disability.*** **https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability**

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2020). ***Addressing anti-Black racism.*** **Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/black-history-month/anti-black-racism.html**

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2023). ***Duty to accommodate.*** **https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-ableism-and-discrimination-based-disability/8-duty-accommodate**

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (n.d.). ***Policy on preventing discrimination based on creed.*** **https://www3.ohrc.on.ca/en/policy-preventing-discrimination-based-creed/9-duty-accommodate**

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. ***American Psychologist, 62*****(4), 271–286. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.62.4.271**

Women of Influence. (2025). ***Tall poppy syndrome.*** **https://www.womenofinfluence.ca/tps/**

World Economic Forum. (2023). ***Why sponsorship—not mentorship—is key to workplace equity.*** **https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/04/growth-summit-2023-sponsorship-women-workplace-equity/**

World Health Organization. (2019). ***Burn-out an occupational phenomenon.*** **https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon**

Annex 1: Mental Health Services Resource List

The following checklist is used to evaluate any mental health **service provider** (e.g., hotline, counselling, clinic, helpline, virtual platform).

Mental Health Service Providers – Disclaimer

The information provided in this directory of Mental Health Service Providers is for general informational purposes only and is based on publicly available content from each provider's website. It does not constitute professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We do not independently verify or assess the quality, cultural inclusivity, accessibility, or clinical effectiveness of the listed services. Users are strongly encouraged to contact providers directly to determine their suitability for individual needs.

Criteria	Yes/No
Culturally sensitive to Muslim values and diverse communities	
Supports the mental health of **women** and/or **Muslim individuals**	
Offers trauma-informed or gender-sensitive care	
Accessible nationally (virtual, phone, or across provinces)	
Free or low-cost	
Provided by a nonprofit, charity, or healthcare organization	
Aligned with CCMW values (gender equity, inclusion, anti-racism)	
Staff/providers reflect cultural and community diversity	
Available in English and French (and ideally Arabic, Urdu, etc.)	

Offers group or individual support options	

Comparative Analysis:

Mental Health Service Providers – Disclaimer

The information provided in this directory of Mental Health Service Providers is for general informational purposes only and is based on publicly available content from each provider's website. It does not constitute professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We do not independently verify or assess the quality, cultural inclusivity, accessibility, or clinical effectiveness of the listed services. Users are strongly encouraged to contact providers directly to determine their suitability for individual needs.

Service	Culturally Sensitive	Supports Women/Muslims	Trauma-/Gender-Informed	National Reach	Free/Low-Cost	Non-profit/Charity	CCMW-Aligned Values	Diverse Staff/Culture	Multilingual	Group & Individual Support
Naseeha Mental Health	Yes	Muslim focus, open to all	Peer+therapy, workshops	Canada-wide	Free	Non-profit	Yes, faith-aware & equity-oriented	Implied multilingual services	EN, FR, Arabic, Farsi, Urdu, Somali	Helpline & therapy
Nisa Helpline	Culturally, spiritually sensitive	For Muslim women & girls	Peer counselling	Canada-wide (North America)	Free	Canadian charity	Yes	Female peer counsellors	EN, FR, Arabic, Somali, Urdu	Helpline
COSTI	Ethno-cultural sensitivity (incl. Muslim-focused groups)	Tailored to immigrant women incl. Muslim	Psycho-educational groups for abuse, Islamophobia	Provincial (Ontario centres)	Low-/subsidized cost	Non-profit	Gender equity, anti-racism	Multilingual staff	EN/Italian/Arabic/Spanish/Portuguese	Groups & individual counselling
CAMH	Culturally general; staff offer diversity*	Serves all, with women focus via women mind	Trauma-informed evidence-based	Province-wide (Ontario)	Free/insured	Charity hospital	Gender equity, research-oriented	Diverse staff implied*	EN (some FR)	Referrals to groups & therapy
YWCA Canada	Trauma-informed, gender-equity focus	Women/ gender-diverse	Clearly	National affiliates	Free/low-cost	Charity	Strong alignment	Local diversity varies*	EN; many locals bilingual*	Groups, counselling
Salaam Canada	Culturally LGBTQ/Muslim sensitive	Focused on queer/trans Muslims	Peer support, advocacy	National network*	Free	Non-profit	Equity-focused	Peer-led	EN*	Peer support groups
Canadian Women's Foundation	Gender equity advocate	Women's mental wellness funded	Funds trauma-informed programs	National funder	Resources ↔ funded	Charity	Gender/racial equity	Indirect staff diversity*	EN/FR	Indirect via funded programs
988 (Suicide Crisis Helpline)	General crisis line*	Serves all	Trauma-informed	National	Free	Charitable / public	Equity-oriented	Staff diverse local centres*	EN/FR	Individual support
Distress Centre	General crisis line*	Serves all	Crisis-informed	Provincial/regional (multiple centres)*	Free	Non-profit	Inclusive	Local staff diversity*	EN*	Phone/text/chat

* show some limitations, may not fully meet certain criteria

Mental Health Services Referral Sheet

Mental Health Service Providers – Disclaimer

The information provided in this directory of Mental Health Service Providers is for general informational purposes only and is based on publicly available content from each provider's website. It does not constitute professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We do not independently verify or assess the quality, cultural inclusivity, accessibility, or clinical effectiveness of the listed services. Users are strongly encouraged to contact providers directly to determine their suitability for individual needs.

1. **Naseeha Mental Health**

   Website: https://naseeha.org

   Services Provided: 24/7 helpline, online therapy, youth workshops, community education

   Contact Details: Helpline: 1-866-627-3342
   Email: info@naseeha.org

2. **Nisa Helpline**

   Website: https://nisahelpline.com

   Services Provided: Peer counselling, helpline for Muslim women, trauma support, workshops

   Contact Details: Helpline: 1-888-711-6472
   Email: info@nisafoundation.ca

3. **Salaam Canada**

   Website: https://www.themasgd.org/orgs-canada

   Services Provided: Peer-led support for queer/trans Muslims, community advocacy, mental health workshops

   Contact Details: Contact via website form

4. **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)**

   Website: https://www.camh.ca

   Services Provided: Psychiatric assessment and care, trauma-informed therapy, womenmind™ research, group referrals

   Contact Details: Phone: 416-535-8501 (press 1) or 1-800-463-6273
   Email: info@camh.ca

5. **YWCA Canada**

   Website: https://ywcacanada.ca

   Services Provided: Trauma-informed counselling, wellness groups, shelters, advocacy, housing support

   Contact Details: Phone: 416-962-8881
   Email: national@ywcacanada.ca

6. **988 Suicide Crisis Helpline**

   Website: https://988.ca

   Services Provided: 24/7 crisis support via phone or text, bilingual English and French

   Contact Details: Call or Text: 988

7. **Ruh Care**

   Website: https://www.ruhcare.com/

   Service Provided: Online therapy platform offering Islamically aligned, culturally responsive, and accessible mental health care in multiple languages including English, Arabic, French, Hindi, Farsi, Urdu, Somali, Malayalam, Tamil, Sindhi, Punjabi, German, Bengali, Rohingya, Harari, Creole, and American Sign Language (ASL).

8. **ICNA Relief Canada**

   Website: https://icna.ca/

Service Provided: Specializes in pre-marital and marriage counselling, comprehensive family support, anger management, stress/time management, anxiety, depression, settlement counselling.

Contact Details: +1 (905) 858-1067 |

agha@icnareliefcanada.ca

9. **ISNA Canada**

   Website: https://isnacares.ca/

   Service Provided: Specializes in religious counselling, mental health challenges, domestic violence and child welfare issues, relational challenges: couples and extended family.

   Contact Details: +1 (905) 403-8406 (647) 370-7616

   Email: info@isnacares.ca

10. **Clear Path Counselling & Consultation**

    Website: https://pathwayscounsellingcentre.com/

    Contact Details:(416) 571-7142

    Email : areeba@cpathcounselling.com

11. **Wisdom Speaks Counselling and Consulting**

    Website: www.mywisdomspeaks.ca
    Registered Social Worker in Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta, offering counselling in English, Urdu and Hindi
    Contact tDetails: (204) 269-5356
    Email: sophiaali@mywisdomspeaks.ca

12. **Sakeenah**

Website: https://sakeenahcanada.com/

Service Provided: Trauma-informed, culturally sensitive services to women and children across Canada, including short- and long-term transitional housing, in-home and remote casework, mental health programs, and essential support services, operate 8 transitional homes in Toronto, Brampton, London, Ottawa, Montreal, Regina, Winnipeg, and Newfoundland, along with a long-term transitional home in Windsor.

Contact Details: : +1 (888) 671-3446 | info@sakeenahhomes.com

13. **South Asian Community Health Services**

maher2004@gmail.com

Contact: +1 (647) 718-0786

Service Provided: Specializes in mental health, addictions, violence, anger management, stress management, group and individual counselling, couples and marriage counselling.

Locations: Brampton, provide online services as well.

2) Mental Health Tools Checklist

Mental Health Service Providers – Disclaimer

The information provided in this directory of Mental Health Service Providers is for general informational purposes only and is based on publicly available content from each provider's website. It does not constitute professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We do not independently verify or assess the quality, cultural inclusivity, accessibility, or clinical effectiveness of the listed services. Users are strongly encouraged to contact providers directly to determine their suitability for individual needs.

The following checklist is used to evaluate self-help resources, guides, PDFs, mobile apps, or educational materials.

Criteria	Yes/No
Focuses on topics like self-care, resilience, or emotional wellness	
Created or adapted for Muslim women or marginalized groups	
Written in clear, accessible language (low-barrier to read/use)	
Free to access or download	
Available online (website, PDF, mobile app, etc.)	
Offered in English and French (plus other community languages if possible)	
Reflects culturally appropriate imagery or messaging	
Developed by a trusted organization aligned with CCMW values	
Supports personal or community mental health learning	
Can be used individually or shared in group/community settings	

Comparative Analysis:

Resource	Self-Care Focus	Muslim/Marginalized Tailored	Accessible Language	Free	Online Format	Bilingual	Cultural Imagery	Supports Learning	Group/Individual Use
IWK Moms Toolkit	√	×	√	√	√	×	Neutral	√	√
CAMH womenmind™	√	×	√	√	√	×	Inclusive	√	√
CAMH Moodle / Crisis	√	×	√	√	√	×	Clinical	√	√
Nisa Self-Care Guides	√	√	√	√	√	EN/FR/AR/UR/SO	Islamic	√	√
CMHA Toolkits	√	×	√	√	√	EN/FR	Inclusive	√	√
MyGrief.ca	√	×	√	√	√	EN/FR	Professional	√	√
YWCA Guided Roots	√	√	√	√	√	×	Muslim-Centered	√	√
Anxiety Canada	√	×	√	√	√	EN/FR	Inclusive	√	√
Canadian Women's Foundation	√	×	√	√	√	EN/FR	Inclusive	√	√

Mental Health Tools – Website and Contact Information

Mental Health Service Providers – Disclaimer

The information provided in this directory of Mental Health Service Providers is for general informational purposes only and is based on publicly available content from each provider's website. It does not constitute professional advice, diagnosis, or treatment. We do not independently verify or assess the quality, cultural inclusivity, accessibility, or clinical effectiveness of the listed services. Users are strongly encouraged to contact providers directly to determine their suitability for individual needs.

1. **IWK Moms Mental Health Toolkit**

Website: https://iwkhealth.ca/clinics-programs-services/mothers-mental-health-toolkit-resource-community

Services Provided: Self-care and mental health resources for perinatal women, including assessment tools, educational guides, and worksheets.

Contact Details: 902-470-8098 | Email: rmhs@iwk.nshealth.ca

2. **CAMH womenmind™**

Website: https://www.camh.ca/en/get-involved/join-the-cause/womenmind

Services Provided: Initiatives supporting women's mental health through research, mentorship, public education, and conference events.

Contact Details: 416-535-8501 | 1-800-463-2338 | Email: info@camh.ca

3. **CAMH Moodle / Crisis Resources**

Website: https://moodle8.camhx.ca/moodle/
https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/crisis-resources

Services Provided: Online courses on mental health topics, stress, crisis coping, alongside crisis referral information.

Contact Details: CAMH Switchboard: 416-535-8501 | Emergency: 911 or local crisis line

4. **Nisa Foundation – Self-Care Guides**

Website: https://nisahelpline.com
https://nisafoundation.ca

Services Provided: Faith-sensitive self-care guides and peer support content, including blog and PDF guides crafted for Muslim women.

Contact Details: Helpline: 1-888-711-6472 | Email: info@nisafoundation.ca

5. CMHA Toolkits

Website: https://cmha.ca

Services Provided: Mental health promotion and self-care toolkits covering resilience, stress, perinatal mental health, and professional learning.

Contact Details: 416-646-5557 | Email: info@cmha.ca

6. MyGrief.ca

Website: https://www.mygrief.ca

Services Provided: Interactive self-guided grief resource with modules, stories, and professional and peer support for loss.

Contact Details: Use the contact form on the website

7. YWCA Guided Roots

Website: https://guidedroots.ca/services-for-muslims/

Services Provided: Mental health and healing supports tailored for Muslim families, including culturally informed workshops and online resources.

Contact Details: 1-888-229-0262 | Email: info@muslimcounselling.ca

8. Anxiety Canada

Website: https://www.anxietycanada.com

Services Provided: Evidence-based anxiety self-help resources, CBT guides, and MindShift mobile app (iOS/Android).

Contact Details: 604-620-0744 | Email: info@anxietycanada.com

9. Canadian Women's Foundation

Website: https://canadianwomen.org

Services Provided: Wellness toolkits, self-care guides, funding trauma-informed mental health programs for women and girls.

Contact Details: 1-866-293-4483 | 416-365-1444 | Email: info@canadianwomen.org

Annex 2: Settlement Services Resource List

Settlement Service Providers – Disclaimer

This directory of settlement service providers is intended for general reference and is based on information available on the providers' official websites. We do not verify or guarantee the accuracy, cultural appropriateness, inclusivity, accessibility, or effectiveness of the services listed. Users are encouraged to independently assess each provider to ensure the services align with their individual needs and expectations.

Newcomer Organization Selection Criteria

Criteria	Description
National or Regional	Does the organization operate nationally or regionally (in a major Canadian city)?
Focus on Newcomers	Does the organization primarily support immigrants, refugees, or newcomers to Canada?
Supports Muslim Women	Does the organization offer tailored programs or safe spaces for Muslim women?
Service Range	Does it offer multiple services (employment, housing, mental health, legal aid)?
Cultural Competency	Are programs culturally sensitive or trauma-informed?
Language Support	Are services offered in multiple languages?
Women-Focused Programs	Are there dedicated programs for women or gender-diverse clients?
Free or Low-Cost	Are services free or subsidized for low-income newcomers?
Online Accessibility	Can newcomers access information or services online (website, forms, virtual workshops)?

National Organizations

Name	Website	Services Provided	Culturally Competent (incl. Muslim women)	Contact Details
IRCC Settlement Program	https://ircc.canada.ca/english/newcomers/services/index.asp	Funds over 500 orgs: language, housing, employment, referrals, support for vulnerable groups, manage website for immigrants to seek support services	Trauma-informed, culturally responsive	Via website; use 'Find a provider' tool
Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR)	https://ccrweb.ca/en	National NGO network advocating for refugee rights and policy change.	Anti-oppression, equity-based	514-277-7223 info@ccrweb.ca

Name	Website	Services Provided	Culturally Competent (incl. Muslim women)	Contact Details
Canadian Race Relations Foundation (CRRF)	https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/	Grants, education and inclusion work on racial and faith-based discrimination.	Supports Muslim communities	Contact via website
YWCA Canada	https://ywcacanada.ca	National office supporting a network of 29 local YWCAs offering housing, counselling, and wellness programs. Referrals should be made to local YWCAs directly.	Gender-equity; local culturally competent programs	https://ywcacanada.ca/find-your-ywca/
SettlementAtWork	https://settlementatwork.org/en/about-settlementatwork	SettlementAtWork provides culturally appropriate training, resources, and collaboration tools to support Ontario's immigrant-serving professionals in delivering equitable, inclusive services.	Culturally responsive.	Web page: https://settlementatwork.org/en/lets-connect

Regional/Provincial Organizations

Name	Website	Services Provided	Muslim Women Support	Contact Details
Alberta'				
Centre for Newcomers	https://centrefornewcomers.ca	Settlement, employment, EAL, childcare	Multicultural, trauma-aware	403-569-3325
CIWA	https://ciwa-online.com	Immigrant women's settlement & employment	Dedicated to women, culturally responsive	403-444-1758
Trellis Society	https://growwithtrellis.ca	Legal aid, housing, employment	Trauma-informed	403-930-3370
ISFFA (Islamic Family & Social Services Association)	https://www.islamicfamily.ca	Settlement support, casework, food security, newcomer aid.	Culturally competent, supports Muslim women and families	780-900-2777

MCN (Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers)	https://newcomercentre.coM	Language, employment, settlement, youth, women's programs.	Inclusive programs with some cultural-linguistic matching	780-424-7709 780-424-7736
British Columbia				
MOSAIC	https://mosaicbc.org	Settlement, employment, counselling	Multi-ethnic, gender-sensitive	604-254-9626
DIVERSEcity	https://www.dcrs.ca	Trauma counselling, housing, employment	Arabic/Punjabi interpreters	604-547-1202
ISSofBC	https://issbc.org	Settlement, language, employment, peer support, Newcomer women support	Inclusive and accessible	604-684-2561
Collingwood NH	https://www.cnh.bc.ca	Community settlement services	Inclusive and accessible	604-435-0323
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.	https://successbc.ca	Language, family support, housing, employment, counselling	Cultural and language-matched programs, trauma-informed inclusive and accessible	604-684-1628 info@success.bc.ca
Manitoba				
MANSO	https://mansomanitoba.ca	Support for orgs, language/employment services	Coordinates culturally competent services	(204) 272-0872
Westman Immigrant Services	https://westmanimmigrantservices.ca/	Employment, language, settlement services	Multi-language	204-727-6031 info@westmanimmigrantservices.ca
New Brunswick				
MCAF	https://mcaf.nb.ca/en/	Employment, language, settlement services	Community inclusive	(506) 454-8292
Saint John Newcomers Centre	https://sjnewcomers.ca	Orientation, planning, conversation circles	Community inclusive	506-642-4242
Newfoundland and Labrador				
Association of New Canadians (ANC)	https://ancnl.ca/	Settlement, employment, wellness, language	Diverse newcomer support	(709) 722-9680 Email: information@ancnl.ca
Nova Scotia				
ISANS	https://isans.ca	Settlement, employment, wellness	Multilingual, newcomer-sensitive	902-423-3607
Halifax Refugee Clinic	https://halifaxrefugeeclinic.org	Legal & refugee services	Muslim refugee women supported	902-422-6736

YMCA-YWCA Halifax	https://ymcahfx.ca	Settlement, EAL, employment	Family-centred	Web form
Ontario				
ACCES Employment	https://accesemployment.ca	Career coaching, mentoring, job search help.	Culturally responsive	416-921-1800 info@accesemployment.ca
211 Ontario	https://211ontario.ca/	Free, confidential, 24/7 referral to community programs in over 150 languages, including support for housing, mental health, food, employment, and more	Inclusive, Culturally responsive, multi-lingual, partnership with Muslim helplines like Nisa	24/7 by dialing 2-1-1 (toll-free 1-877-330-3213), via text/online chat, or Email: **gethelp@211ontario.ca**
Newcomer Women's Services	https://newcomerwomen.org	ESL, legal help, citizenship, employment	Women-focused	647-224-1371
Settlement.Org (OCASI)	https://settlement.org	Ontario-based multilingual guides & webinars for newcomers.	Multilingual, inclusive	Web form
COSTI Immigrant Services	https://costi.org	Settlement, employment, housing, and counselling services.	Includes programs for Muslim women, Islamophobia response	416-244-7714 info@costi.org
CICS	https://www.cicscanada.com	Settlement, family & youth programs	Inclusive, multilingual	416-293-4565
Arab Community Centre	https://acctonline.ca	Settlement, youth, women's programming	Arab & Muslim newcomers	416-750-9600
TNO – The Neighbourhood Organization	https://tno-toronto.org	Services: Settlement, employment, housing, youth and women-focused counselling	Multilingual, culturally relevant programming for Muslim communities	1-855-421-3054 info@tno-toronto.org
Immigrant Women Services Ottawa	https://immigrantwomenservices.com	Settlement, crisis counselling, legal advocacy for immigrant women	Designed for women; Muslim clients welcome and supported	613-729-3145 F:613-729-9308 infomail@iwso.ca
Prince Edward Island				
IRSA PEI	https://irsapei.ca	Translation, pre/post arrival support	Supports newcomers	902-628-6009
Quebec				
Women's Centre of Montréal	https://centredesfemmesdemtl.org	Settlement, French courses, workshops	Inclusive of Muslim women	514 842-6652 514 842-4780

Amal – Centre for Women	https://www.amalwomencenter.ca/	Counselling and services for Muslim women	Specific to Muslim women	(514) 855-0330
Saskatchewan				
Sask Intercultural Association	https://saskinterculturalorg	Free settlement support	Inclusive	(306) 978-1818
Newcomer Gateways	https://battlefordsimmigration.ca	Orientation, referrals	Rural newcomer support	306-446-0622 1-877-494-0622
Northwest Territories				
CDETNO	https://cdetno.com/en/	Needs assessment, translation	Bilingual support	867-873-5962 1-866-849-9139
Nunavut				
Carrefour Nunavut	https://carrefournunavut.ca/en	Integration, referrals	Inuktitut & English	867-979-2800
Yukon				
Multicultural Centre Yukon	https://mcyukon.com	Employment, housing, orientation	Supports Muslim/diverse groups	1-867-667-6205

Annex 3: List of Legislations Across Canada related to Accessibility and Duty to Accommodate

This annex provides a consolidated overview of the federal, provincial, and territorial legislation that addresses disability discrimination, ableism, and accessibility in Canadian workplaces. It is intended as a practical reference for Muslim women to better understand the legal protections that apply across sectors and jurisdictions, particularly in relation to employment, onboarding, accommodation, and workplace inclusion. While not a substitute for legal advice, the annex highlights the key laws that establish the duty to accommodate and prohibit discrimination, and can support informed, rights-aware conversations with employers, managers, and human resources professionals.

Federal laws (apply to federally regulated workplaces and federal services)

- **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (s.15 equality)** – governments can't discriminate on grounds including physical or mental disability.
- **Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA)–** bans discrimination (including disability) in **federal** employment/services; foundation for the **duty to accommodate**.
- **Accessible Canada Act (2019) (ACA)** – requires federally regulated organizations to identify/remove/prevent barriers (employment, built environment, ICT, communications, procurement, transportation, etc.).
- **Accessible Canada Regulations (SOR/2021-241)** – planning/reporting requirements under the ACA.
- **Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR)** – accessibility rules for federally regulated transportation (air/rail/marine/bus terminals and services).

Employee note: If your employer is federally regulated (e.g., banks, airlines, interprovincial telecom/transport), the **CHRA + ACA** are key anchors.

Provinces with dedicated accessibility legislation (beyond human rights laws)

British Columbia

- **Accessible British Columbia Act (2021)**
- **BC Human Rights Code** (disability discrimination + accommodation in provincially regulated workplaces).

Ontario

- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA)**
- **Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (O. Reg. 191/11)** — sector/area-specific standards including **employment**, information/communications, transportation, design of public spaces.
- **Ontario Human Rights Code** (disability discrimination + duty to accommodate; works alongside AODA).

Manitoba

- **The Accessibility for Manitobans Act (2013)**
- **Manitoba accessibility standards regulations** (sector/area-specific), including:
    - **Accessible Employment Standard Regulation**
    - **Accessible Customer Service Standard Regulation**
    - **Accessible Information & Communication Standard Regulation** (and others as developed)

Nova Scotia

- **Nova Scotia Accessibility Act (2017)**

Newfoundland and Labrador

- **Newfoundland and Labrador Accessibility Act (2021)**

New Brunswick

- **New Brunswick Accessibility Act (2024)**

Québec (distinct model: targeted disability integration statute + human rights charter)

- **Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights** (E-20.1) — integration measures (social, school, workplace), obligations for certain action plans.
- **Québec Charter of human rights and freedoms** — prohibits disability discrimination.

Provinces without a standalone "Accessibility Act" (human rights law is the main legal anchor)

These jurisdictions still prohibit disability discrimination in employment and require accommodation through their **human rights laws**. A cross-Canada overview of human rights codes/acts is summarized here.

Alberta

- **Alberta Human Rights Act** (disability discrimination; duty to accommodate to undue hardship).

Saskatchewan

- **Saskatchewan Human Rights Code** (disability discrimination / accommodation).

Prince Edward Island

- **Prince Edward Island Human Rights Act** (disability discrimination / accommodation).

Territories (human rights acts are the main legal anchor)

Nunavut

- **Nunavut Human Rights Act**

Northwest Territories

- **Northwest Territories Human Rights Act**

Yukon

- **Yukon Human Rights Act** (territorial human rights protections, including disability).

Legislations by Sectors

STEM (Technology, Engineering, Research, Science)

Primary legal anchors

- Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Acts
  (duty to accommodate disability; applies to most STEM employers, including private tech firms and research organizations)
- Canadian Human Rights Act *(only if federally regulated, e.g., telecom, some research bodies)*

Accessibility legislation (where applicable by province)

- AODA (Ontario) – Employment accessibility standards (recruitment, onboarding, performance management)
- Accessibility for Manitobans Act – Employment standard
- Accessible BC Act / NS / NL / NB Accessibility Acts – Barrier identification and prevention frameworks

Why this matters in STEM

- Covers accommodations for cognitive, sensory, mental health, and physical disabilities
- Applies to hiring tests, performance metrics, lab safety procedures, and work-hour expectations

Financial Sector (Banking, Insurance, Investments)

Primary legal anchors

- Canadian Human Rights Act *(most financial institutions are federally regulated)*
- Accessible Canada Act + Accessible Canada Regulations *(proactive barrier removal)*

Sector-specific

- Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (APDTR)
  (relevant for customer-facing or travel-related roles, not internal HR decisions)

Why this matters in finance

- Strong obligations around accessible recruitment, workplace accommodations, and digital accessibility
- Duty to accommodate applies to disability, including episodic and mental health disabilities

Healthcare (Hospitals, Clinics, Long-Term Care)

Primary legal anchors

- Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Acts
- Provincial Accessibility Legislation, where applicable:
    - Ontario AODA (employment + information & communications)
    - Manitoba AMA
    - Nova Scotia / NL / NB Accessibility Acts

Related frameworks

- Provincial health and safety legislation (intersects with disability accommodations)

Why this matters in healthcare

- Applies to shift scheduling, modified duties, assistive devices, and accessible training
- Protects employees with disabilities even where patient-care demands are high

Skilled Trades (Construction, Manufacturing, Apprenticeships)

Primary legal anchors

- Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Acts
- Provincial Occupational Health & Safety legislation *(intersects with accommodation)*

Accessibility legislation

- Ontario AODA (employment standard applies to construction employers)
- Manitoba AMA
- Other provinces: accessibility obligations through human rights law rather than standalone acts

Why this matters in skilled trades

- Covers accommodations related to tools, schedules, modified duties, and training
- Protects against discrimination tied to physical, sensory, or episodic disabilities

Public Sector (Federal, Provincial, Municipal)

Federal public service

- Canadian Human Rights Act
- Accessible Canada Act + Regulations
- Employment Equity Act *(complements disability inclusion)*

Provincial/municipal public service

- Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Acts
- Provincial Accessibility Acts (ON, MB, BC, NS, NL, NB)
- Québec: *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights*

Why this matters in the public sector

- Strongest formal obligations for accessibility and accommodation
- Applies to onboarding, performance management, workplace design, and digital systems

Not-for-Profit / NGO Sector

Primary legal anchors

- Provincial/Territorial Human Rights Acts
- Provincial Accessibility Legislation (where applicable: ON, MB, BC, NS, NL, NB)

Why this matters in the non-profit sector

- Disability accommodation obligations apply regardless of funding size or mission
- Emotional labour, flexible roles, or “values-based” workplaces do not override legal duties

References

Federal Legislation and Regulations

Government of Canada. (1982). *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html

Government of Canada. (1985). *Canadian Human Rights Act* (R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6). https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/H-6/

Government of Canada. (1995). *Employment Equity Act* (S.C. 1995, c. 44). https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/E-5.401/

Government of Canada. (2019). *Accessible Canada Act* (S.C. 2019, c. 10). https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/A-0.6/

Government of Canada. (2021). *Accessible Canada Regulations* (SOR/2021-241). https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2021-241/

Government of Canada. (2019). *Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations* (SOR/2019-244). https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2019-244/

Provincial Accessibility Legislation

Government of British Columbia. (2021). *Accessible British Columbia Act* (S.B.C. 2021, c. 19). https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/21019

Government of Manitoba. (2013). *The Accessibility for Manitobans Act* (C.C.S.M. c. A1.7). https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/a001-7e.php

Government of Manitoba. (2016). *Accessible Employment Standard Regulation* (Man. Reg. 217/2016). https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/regs/current/_pdf-regs.php?reg=217/2016

Government of Ontario. (2005). *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (S.O. 2005, c. 11). https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11

Government of Ontario. (2011). *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (O. Reg. 191/11). https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/110191

Government of Nova Scotia. (2017). *Accessibility Act* (S.N.S. 2017, c. 7). https://nslegislature.ca/sites/default/files/legc/statutes/accessibility.pdf

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. (2021). *Accessibility Act* (S.N.L. 2021, c. A-03.01). https://www.assembly.nl.ca/legislation/sr/statutes/a03-01.htm

Government of New Brunswick. (2024). *Accessibility Act* (S.N.B. 2024, c. 27). https://laws.gnb.ca/en/showdoc/cs/2024-c.27

Provincial and Territorial Human Rights Legislation

(Primary legal anchor for disability accommodation in most sectors)

Government of Alberta. (2000). *Alberta Human Rights Act* (R.S.A. 2000, c. A-25.5). https://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/A25P5.pdf

Government of British Columbia. (1996). *Human Rights Code* (R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 210). https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96210_01

Government of Saskatchewan. (2018). *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code* (S.S. 2018, c. S-24.1). https://www.canlii.org/en/sk/laws/stat/ss-2018-c-s-24.1/latest/

Government of Manitoba. (1987). *The Human Rights Code* (C.C.S.M. c. H175). https://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/h175e.php

Government of Ontario. (1990). *Ontario Human Rights Code* (R.S.O. 1990, c. H.19). https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19

Government of Québec. (1977). *Charter of human rights and freedoms* (CQLR c. C-12). https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/C-12
Government of Prince Edward Island. (1988). *Human Rights Act* (R.S.P.E.I. 1988, c. H-12). https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/legislation/human-rights-act
Government of Yukon. (2002). *Yukon Human Rights Act* (R.S.Y. 2002, c. 116). https://laws.yukon.ca/cms/images/legislation/statutes/humanrights.pdf
Government of the Northwest Territories. (2002). *Human Rights Act* (S.N.W.T. 2002, c. 18). https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/human-rights/human-rights.a.pdf
Government of Nunavut. (2003). *Human Rights Act* (S.Nu. 2003, c. 12). https://www.canlii.org/en/nu/laws/stat/snu-2003-c-12/latest/

Québec – Disability-Specific Legislation
Government of Québec. (1978). *Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights* (CQLR c. E-20.1). https://www.legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/document/cs/E-20.1

Sector-Relevant Occupational and Employment Frameworks
Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Federally regulated workplaces*. https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/workplace/federally-regulated-industries.html
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. (n.d.). *Workplace accommodation*. https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/working_accommodations.html
Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Duty to accommodate*. https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/duty-accommodate.html

Accessibility, Employment, and Retention (Contextual Sources)
Forbes. (2018). *The true cost of a bad hire—and how to avoid it*. https://www.forbes.com
Gallup. (2017). *State of the American workplace*. https://www.gallup.com
Statistics Canada. (2021). *Labour force characteristics by religion*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca

NAVIGATING WORKPLACE BARRIERS FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN CANADA:

Employee-Facing Toolkit for Building Culturally Safe and Equitable Workplaces for Canadian Muslim Women

Funded by: Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE Canada)

Published by: The Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)

@ Canadian Council of Muslim Women 2025 All Rights Reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-7386870-9-1

Email: info@ccmw.com I www.ccmw.com

Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW)
Le conseil canadien des femmes musulmanes (CCFM)

Women and Gender Equality Canada
Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada