



BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab

2024 Progress Report

**Toronto
Metropolitan
University**



The Launch of the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab

The BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab was officially launched on May 8, 2024, marking a groundbreaking step in addressing the employment challenges faced by newcomers to Canada. Housed at Toronto Metropolitan University (TMU), the lab was made possible by a generous \$3 million donation from BMO Financial Group to support the **Labour Market Migration in the 21st Century** research pillar of the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration. This collaboration bridges the gap between evidence-based academic research and employer practices in the corporate sector, fostering a unique partnership that combines rigorous scholarly insights with real-world application. By aligning the expertise of TMU's research teams with the practical needs of employers, the lab is poised to generate innovative solutions that are both impactful and actionable.

The lab focuses on addressing systemic barriers, leveraging innovative technology and AI tools and sharing evidence-based strategies to empower employers in hiring skilled immigrants, while supporting newcomers to thrive within Canada's labour market. By combining TMU's world-class research expertise with BMO's deep-rooted commitment to diversity and inclusion, this partnership seeks to unlock the full potential of newcomers—driving benefits for individuals, businesses and the broader Canadian economy. This transformative initiative advances the workforce integration of newcomers and highlights the strength of collaboration between academia and industry in fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

The May launch event—which kicked off the CERC's annual Migration Disrupted Conference—brought together a distinguished group of attendees to celebrate BMO's generous donation, and underscored the significance of the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab. Among the prominent guests were senior BMO executives, including Helen Siebel (Head, Community and Employee Giving) and Alexandra Soares (Strategic Talent Acquisition and People & Culture Leader), alongside TMU leadership, including Dr. Mohamed Lachemi (President and Vice-Chancellor), Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou (Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration and Integration), and Dr. Steven Liss (Vice-President of Research and Innovation).

At the top of the day, Helen Siebel made remarks on behalf of BMO, and Dr. Marshia Akbar, the Director of the BMO Lab, also played a central role in the proceedings. Additionally, the event welcomed more than 200 leading researchers, academics and practitioners specializing in migration and integration, showcasing the breadth of expertise and collaboration, and the CERC's important role in fostering dialogue and partnership within the field.



Dr. Mohamed Lachemi (President and Vice-Chancellor of TMU).



Dr. Steven Liss (Vice-President of Research and Innovation at TMU).



Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou



Helen Siebel with BMO staff.

BMO Gift Announcement

With gratitude, [TMU's public gift announcement](#) highlighted the university's dedication to fostering inclusive innovation, and addressing migration challenges—messages that were amplified in [BMO's public announcement](#). The excitement and appetite for this important research was clear, as multiple external organizations (e.g. [Benefits and Pensions Monitor](#)) and social media outlets (e.g. [LinkedIn](#)) shared the news.



Gift Announcement, as part of the CERC Annual Migration Disrupted Conference.

Milestones and Achievements: May – December 2024

BMO Lab Team

Following the launch of the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab, a team of leaders and researchers was assembled, dedicated to advancing research, fostering partnerships and promoting collaboration to support the integration of newcomers into Canada's labour market. This team is focused on developing innovative solutions and building strategic alliances to address workforce challenges, and will focus on developing and implementing strategies that empower both employers and newcomers.

Leadership Team



Dr. Anna Triandafyllidou

As the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) in Migration and Integration and Scientific Director of Bridging Divides at TMU, Professor Triandafyllidou provides strategic oversight and ensures the scientific rigor of the lab's initiatives.



Dr. Marshia Akbar

Appointed as the Director of the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab, Dr. Akbar leads the lab's efforts with her extensive expertise in labour migration and the economic integration of migrants in Canada.



Evelyn Siu

As the Manager of Partnership Engagement, Evelyn facilitates critical collaborations between the lab and external stakeholders, fostering partnerships that support newcomer workforce integration and employer engagement.

Research and Innovation Team



Dr. Asma Atique

A Research Fellow in the CERC in Migration and Integration Program, Asma contributes to the lab's foundational research on migration and workforce integration.



Dr. Homayoun Shirazi

As a Research Fellow, Homayoun plays a vital role in advancing migration studies and supporting the lab's key research initiatives.



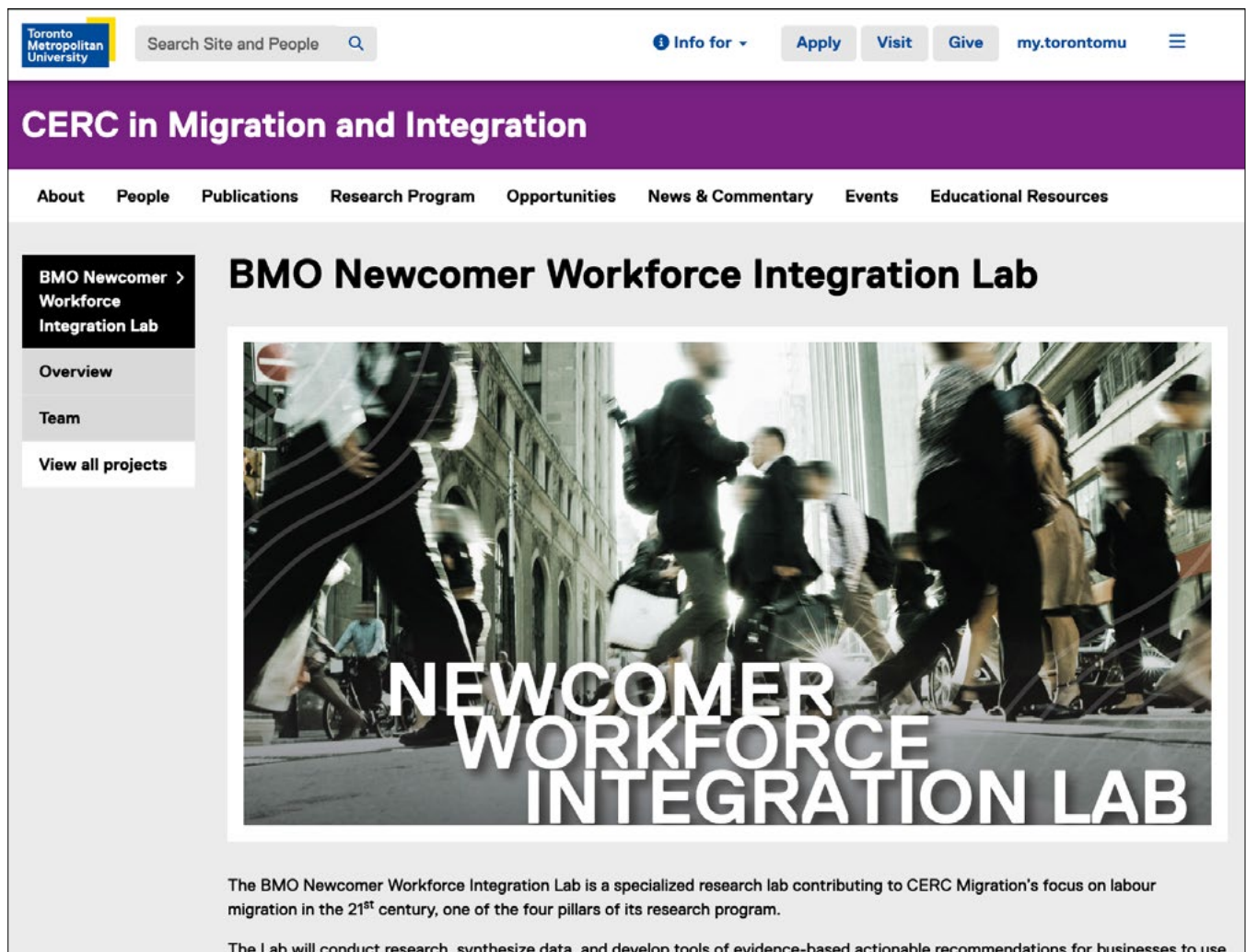
Kiana Jenabidehkordi

Serving as the Innovation Lead, Kiana focuses on developing and implementing cutting-edge solutions, including technological and evidence-based strategies, to enhance newcomer workforce integration.

For more information about the team, please visit:
torontomu.ca/cerc-migration/newcomer-lab/newcomer-lab/team

Webpage Development

Hosted on the TMU website, the new [BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab webpage](#) serves as a comprehensive hub for information about the lab's objectives and activities. The website is designed to function as an information platform for the BMO Lab, as well as a knowledge dissemination hub, providing access to events, reports, blogs, toolkits for employers and other publications. These resources will be shared with a wide range of audiences, including policymakers, industry leaders, academics and the general public, ensuring broad access to the lab's findings and tools for maximum and meaningful impact.



The screenshot displays the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab webpage. At the top, the Toronto Metropolitan University logo is visible alongside a search bar and navigation links for 'Info for', 'Apply', 'Visit', 'Give', and 'my.torontomu'. A purple banner reads 'CERC in Migration and Integration'. Below this is a navigation menu with links: 'About', 'People', 'Publications', 'Research Program', 'Opportunities', 'News & Commentary', 'Events', and 'Educational Resources'. The main heading is 'BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab'. A sidebar on the left contains a 'BMO Newcomer > Workforce Integration Lab' section with links for 'Overview', 'Team', and 'View all projects'. The central image shows a busy city street with the text 'NEWCOMER WORKFORCE INTEGRATION LAB' overlaid. Below the image, a paragraph states: 'The BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab is a specialized research lab contributing to CERC Migration's focus on labour migration in the 21st century, one of the four pillars of its research program.' At the bottom, a line of text reads: 'The Lab will conduct research, synthesize data, and develop tools of evidence-based actionable recommendations for businesses to use'.

A key feature of the webpage is its detailed presentation of the lab's projects on labour migration and workforce integration. The overarching research agenda focuses on addressing critical gaps in understanding the employment challenges faced by newcomers and developing innovative tools and evidence-based strategies for employers and policymakers. Individual projects, such as those examining employer perspectives on hiring international graduates or exploring pathways for integrating skilled immigrants, are highlighted with summaries and insights. These initiatives demonstrate the lab's commitment to producing actionable research and fostering practical solutions that focus on diverse labour migration themes. With its dual role as an information and dissemination platform, the webpage will ensure that the lab's outputs are accessible to a diverse audience, contributing to the development of an inclusive and sustainable labour market in Canada. The BMO Lab webpage, events and activities are promoted across all CERC Migration social media platforms across X, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram pages (+8,500 followers total), as well as through the monthly newsletter (+8,000 subscribers).

BMO Lab Events

A series of regular meetings have created meaningful opportunities to strengthen the partnership between TMU's research team and BMO corporate leaders, and foster knowledge sharing within the community.

PRE-CONFERENCE BREAKFAST (MAY 8)

A breakfast was organized for senior leaders of BMO's corporate team and TMU's academic team to promote networking and connection.

BMO LAB VIRTUAL KICK-OFF MEETING (JUNE 4)

Representatives from BMO and TMU discussed the objectives, strategies and next steps for the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab, as well as topics for upcoming roundtables.

BMO LAB ROUNDTABLE (JUNE 28)

On June 28, 2024, the BMO Lab co-convoked a high-level roundtable discussion with Senator Ratna Omidvar and Director General Amy Pope, International Organization for Migration (IOM) on *Labour Migration in Canada: Opportunities and Challenges*. As part of an international learning exchange, representatives from senior members of government, private sector and civil society shared effective Canadian policies and practices to inform the development of global, national and local policies and governance to ensure more effective labour migration and integration.



Marshaia Akbar (Director of the BMO Lab, TMU) co-convokes a roundtable with Senator Ratna Omidvar and Amy Pope (Director General, IOM).

BMO ACADEMY (SEPTEMBER 10)

TMU researchers and senior staff were invited to attend the launch of the BMO Academy to learn more about BMO's new flagship learning and event centre and its commitment to employee skill building and career growth.



Renee Lantaigne
(Manager, Community Giving Canada, BMO).



Alexandra Soares
(Strategic Talent Acquisition and People & Culture Leader, BMO).

BMO IDEAS LAB WORKSHOP (DECEMBER 6)

The inaugural BMO Ideas Lab Workshop brought together a dynamic community of practice with more than 40 leaders, practitioners and researchers from civil society, the private sector and academia, all focused on labour market integration. The workshop fostered insightful group discussions centered on the challenges international students face in securing and integrating into employment post-graduation. The discussions were organized around two primary themes:

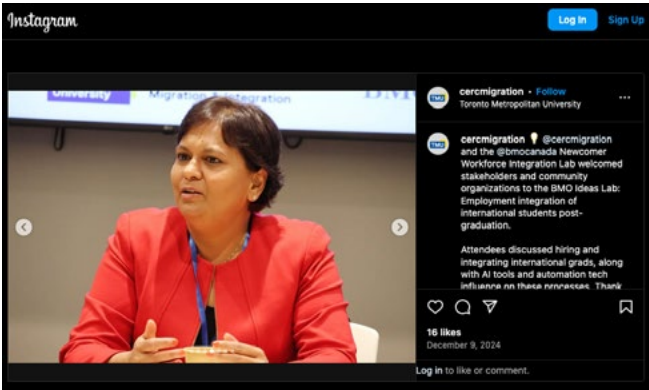
- Hiring Practices and Workplace Integration, with a particular emphasis on technology-related barriers, including the implications of AI tools in recruitment; and
- Potential solutions to address these issues.

Members of BMO's leadership team are actively engaged as part of our Community of Practice with other partners. Alexandra Soares, Strategic Talent Acquisition and People & Culture Leader and Renee Lantaigne, Manager, Community Giving Canada, contributed their expertise during the Ideas Lab.



BMO Ideas Lab Workshop, held at the CERC offices in downtown Toronto.

Social Media Posts of the event:



A short report has been prepared to capture the key outcomes of the workshop. This report highlights the challenges and solutions identified during the discussions, along with outlining potential research questions, examples of good practices and partnership opportunities. By guiding future investigations and fostering collaborative efforts, the report aims to advance actionable strategies for effectively addressing the employment and integration challenges faced by international students.

[Read the report >>](#)



Speaking Engagements

As the Director of the BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab, Dr. Marshia Akbar actively participated in 13 national and international speaking engagements from May to December 2024 to disseminate knowledge, promote the CERC's Labour Market Migration in the 21st Century research pillar and share the lab's mission. These engagements focused on critical themes such as labour migration, workforce integration and the lived experiences of newcomers, allowing Dr. Akbar to connect with policymakers, academics, industry leaders and practitioners. Through these platforms, she shared insights from the lab's research and initiatives, highlighted evidence-based strategies and fostered dialogue on improving policies and practices to support immigrants and international students in Canada and beyond.

Dr. Akbar's international speaking engagements spanned prestigious summits, workshops and academic conferences in Ottawa, Vancouver, Geneva, London, Lisbon, Lipkoping and Melbourne, reflecting her global leadership in the field. These events provided opportunities to discuss best practices, policy innovations and emerging challenges in migration and integration. By engaging with diverse audiences and contributing to discussions on critical topics, Dr. Akbar strengthened the visibility of the BMO Lab, promoted its initiatives and advanced its goal of bridging research and practice to create a more inclusive and equitable labour market. Below is a comprehensive list of her speaking engagements during this period.

INVITED SPEAKER

- **Panel Discussion:** *Pathways to Inclusion: Advancing Economic Integration for Immigrant Women*, Summit at University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, Toronto, November 8, 2024.
- **IGC Immigration Working Group Meeting:** Focus on International Student Mobility, hosted by the IGC Secretariat, Geneva, Switzerland, October 30–31, 2024.
- **City of Toronto's Newcomer Leadership Table (NLT):** Toronto, September 11, 2024.
- **Panel Discussion:** *Community Perspectives on Ensuring Welcoming and Supportive Integration for Canada's International Students*, National Dialogue on International Students: Charting a Path Forward for a Sustainable and Responsible International Education Sector, Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE), Ottawa, May 22–23, 2024.
- **Presentation:** *Key Learnings from the Study on Best Practices in Supporting International Students Enrolled in Toronto-area Colleges*, The College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants (CICC), Toronto, June 21–22, 2024.
- **Presentation:** *Navigating Employment and Immigration: Bridging the Gap Between Policy Objectives and International Students' Lived Experiences*, The Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, July 2024.



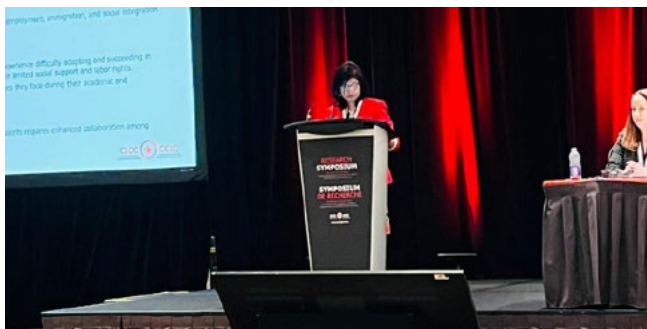
CBIE Panel Discussion, Ottawa, May 22–23, 2024.



CBoc Canadian Immigration Summit, Ottawa, November 20–21, 2024.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- **Building Blocks for International Student Success**
Canadian Immigration Summit 2024, Conference Board of Canada, Ottawa, November 20–21, 2024.
- **Best Practices in Supporting International Students Enrolled in Toronto-Area Colleges**
BC International Education Week (BCIEW), Vancouver, June 23–26, 2024.
- **Temporariness, Identity and Integration: Canadian Context**
Session: *Legal Status, Temporality and Integration – Changing Migration Regimes and Precarization of Citizenship*, Linköping University, Sweden, September 3–4, 2024.
- **Pathways to Employment and Immigration: Strategies and Resilience Among International Students in Canada**
Session: *Everyday Economic Geographies of International Students*, Royal Geographical Society, London, August 27–30, 2024.
- **Practicing Decolonization Through Migration Research Methods**
Session: *Practicing Decolonization Through Migration Research Methods*, The 21st IMISCOE Annual Conference, Lisbon, July 2–5, 2024.
- **How is Education Migration Shaping the Discourse on the Housing ‘Crisis’ in Canada?**
Session: *Global Student Mobility and Complex Migration Trajectories*, The 21st IMISCOE Annual Conference, Lisbon, July 2–5, 2024.
- **Navigating Canada’s Multi-Step Immigration Pathway: Policy Categories and the Lived Experiences of International Students**
Session: *Policy Categories and Migrant Resistance: A Reflexive Inquiry (Part 2)*, The 21st IMISCOE Annual Conference, Lisbon, July 2–5, 2024.



CICC Annual Conference, Toronto, June 21–22, 2024.



Pathways to Inclusion Summit, University of Toronto, November 8, 2024.



Linköping University, Sweden, September 3–4, 2024.

Publications on Labour Migration Theme in 2024

Under the auspices of the **BMO Newcomer Workforce Integration Lab**, researchers have produced an impressive array of 10 publications in 2024 addressing critical issues in labour migration and workforce integration. These works delve into topics such as the challenges faced by international students, policy frameworks for labour migration and the lived experiences of skilled immigrants. By combining rigorous research with practical insights, these publications aim to inform policymakers, academics and practitioners while advancing the lab's mission to foster inclusive and equitable labour markets. Below is a selection of key publications that highlight the lab's contributions to the field.

List of Publications

Akbar, M. (2024). Challenges Facing International College Students in Canada. In S. Irudaya Rajan (Ed.), *India Migration Report 2023: Student Migration* (pp. 138-160). Routledge.

Akbar, M., Deegan, H., & Aziz, A. (2024). Labour migration policies: Case study series Canada. *Picum*, March 2024.

Alboim, N., Cohl, K., & Akbar, M. (2024). Ontario colleges and international students: A pivotal time. *CERC Migration Policy Brief* 18, February 2024.

Leach, B., Biswas, N. U., Jijina, P., & Niraula, A. (2024). Navigating uncharted trajectories: Skilled Indian women migrating to Canada. In I. Rajan (Ed.), *India Migration Report 2024: Student Migration*. Routledge.

Mohan, S. (2024). MlrreM Country Brief on Migration Policy Context – Canada. In *MlrreM Report*. Krems: University for Continuing Education Krems (Danube University Krems).

Monteiro, S. (2022). Extended family migration decisions: Evidence from Nepal. *SN Soc Sci*, 2:238, 1-22.

Monteiro, S. (2024). Economic assimilation of Indians in Canada. In I. Rajan (Ed.), *India Migration Report 2024: Student Migration*. Routledge, 97.

Monteiro, S. (2024). Searching for settlement information on Reddit (external link). *International Migration*, 62(3), 100-119.

Monteiro, S., & Triandafyllidou, A. (2024). Migration narratives on social media: Digital racism and subversive migrant subjectivities (external link). *First Monday*, 29(8-5).

Triandafyllidou, A. (2024). Migration and Globalisation: Dynamics and Contradictions. In A. Triandafyllidou (Ed.), *Handbook of Migration and Globalisation*. Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 1-24.

Thank You

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