

NEWS RELEASE
For immediate release

Study sheds light on current level of representation of women, racialized persons and Indigenous Peoples in leadership roles locally and province-wide

London, ON, June 22, 2021 - A study led by researchers Alina Sutter and Victoria Esses at Western University's Network for Economic and Social Trends on representation in the public and nonprofit sectors locally and across Ontario offers useful information to organizations and sector leaders aiming to diversify their senior leadership teams. The study is a follow up to the 2016 study Medianu and Esses conducted on the same topic and was supported by Mitacs through the Mitacs Accelerate Program and by Pillar Nonprofit Network.

The current study reassessed and compared the level of representation of women and racialized persons in leadership roles in selected organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors in London and in Ontario's agencies, boards and commissions (ABCs). The study also offers new data that assess and establish a baseline for the level of Indigenous representation in leadership roles in these same organizations. New qualitative research shows what local organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors have experienced when attempting to improve the level of diversity in leadership positions, and the associated challenges and potential solutions.

Overall, compared to Medianu and Esses' 2016 study, and to population benchmarks, the results of this study show that representation of women in leadership positions across sectors in London and in Ontario's ABCs has improved the most, reaching a level of representation that is similar to the population level. The study highlights, however, that there is ample room for improvement in representation of racialized persons, racialized women, and Indigenous Peoples in leadership. The research suggests that to achieve equitable representation, additional education, training and improved recruitment programs, as well as encouraging ongoing dialogue on equity, diversity and inclusion, must be a focus for leadership teams across sectors.

Research Highlights

Representation of Women in Leadership Positions

The study found that in London and in Ontario's ABCs, the level of representation of women in leadership positions increased from 2016 to 2020. Across sectors in London, the percentage of female leaders rose from 44.5 percent in 2016 to 51.5 percent in 2020. In Ontario's ABCs, the percentage of female leaders increased from 47.4 percent in 2016 to 51.0 percent in 2020. In 2020, the percentage of women in leadership positions across sectors in London and in Ontario's ABCs was comparable to the percentage of women in the population (51.6 percent and 51.1 percent, respectively).

In London, the level of representation of women in leadership positions differed depending on the sector. Women were still underrepresented in the public sector (42.9 percent) and in municipal agencies, boards and commissions (43.8 percent). In contrast, in the voluntary sector, women were overrepresented in leadership positions (59.5 percent).

Representation of Racialized Persons and Racialized Women in Leadership Positions

The current study found that the level of representation of racialized persons and racialized women in leadership positions also improved from 2016 to 2020. This was the case for London across sectors and for Ontario's ABCs. Across sectors in London, the percentage of racialized persons in leadership rose from 7.9 percent to 11.7 percent, and the percentage of racialized women rose from 3.1 to 5.5 percent. Ontario's ABCs saw a rise in the percentage of racialized persons in leadership from 13.2 to 16.0 percent and in racialized women from 5.6 to 7.7 percent.

While these figures show improvement, in 2020 racialized persons and racialized women were still considerably underrepresented in leadership positions when compared to the population levels. For example, across sectors in London the percentage of racialized persons in leadership positions was 11.7 percent compared to the 19.9 percent at the population level, and the percentage of racialized women was 5.5 percent compared to the 10.1 percent at the population level.

In London, compared to 2016, the largest increases in the representation of racialized persons and racialized women were in the public sector and in municipal agencies, boards, and commissions.

Representation of Indigenous Peoples in Leadership Positions

The study also aimed to assess and establish a baseline for the level of representation of Indigenous Peoples in leadership positions. The results showed that in London and in Ontario's ABCs, Indigenous Peoples were underrepresented in leadership positions when compared to the population. The level of underrepresentation was particularly acute in London where, across sectors, 0.2 percent of the investigated leaders were Indigenous, a percentage well below the level of representation of Indigenous Peoples in the population (2.6 percent). In Ontario's ABCs, 1.0 percent of leaders were Indigenous compared to the 2.8 percent of Indigenous Peoples in the population.

Experiences with Diversity Initiatives in Local Public and Nonprofit Organizations

Collecting qualitative data on the experiences with diversity initiatives of public and nonprofit organizations in London was another new goal of the study. Local executive directors and board members of six organizations in the public and nonprofit sectors identified several barriers that impact public and nonprofit organizations' efforts to increase diversity in senior leadership positions. These include time constraints, limited funding, the difficulty of breaking down diversity initiatives into actionable steps, and the challenge of approaching diverse communities without appearing tokenistic, among other factors.

Local executive directors and board members offered a variety of strategies to overcome these barriers, including the need to provide action-oriented education and training to executive leaders and new and existing board members. Those interviewed also suggested specialized recruitment programs to overcome recruitment challenges, and toolkits and a repository of best practices for implementing change. Interviewees also stressed the importance of continuing to raise awareness to keep the topic of diversity, inclusion, and equity in the public eye on an ongoing basis. One way to do so is to continue to assess the level of representation of racialized persons, Indigenous Peoples and women in senior leadership positions in key sectors to determine whether and where there is progress (or decline) over time.

[Review the report](#) to discover more data on representation in leadership roles across sectors.

About the Network for Economic and Social Trends at Western University

The Network for Economic and Social Trends (NEST) is the flagship research and policy alliance in the Faculty of Social Science at Western University. NEST produces policy and practice relevant research through a multidisciplinary approach using advanced data creation, management, and analytic techniques. Research focuses on issues related to poverty, inequality, immigration, diversity, population change, local government, urban affairs, political behaviour, transitional justice, and community development. NEST also aims to train the next generation of applied researchers through mentorships, fellowships, and the new MA in Research for Policy and Evaluation.

About Pillar Nonprofit Network

Pillar Nonprofit Network strengthens individuals, organizations and enterprises invested in positive community impact. We support nonprofits, social enterprises and social innovators by sharing resources, exchanging knowledge and creating meaningful connections across the three pillars of nonprofit, business and government. We believe that a connected network sparks collaboration and a willingness to lean on each other to build an engaged, inclusive and vibrant community.

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