Analytical Frameworks for Building Equity: An Educational Resource for the Im/migrant and Refugee Serving Sector

Introduction

The im/migrant and refugee serving sector has a key role to play in confronting and combating systemic racism and oppression. This educational tool provides key information and considerations for comparing different analytical frameworks and theories to build and promote accessibility, equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. Its goal is to support organizations in assessing and strengthening their capacity to build equitable policies, programs, procedures, and practices.

The various different analytical frameworks and theories explored in this resource are not exhaustive, but are some of the most common approaches towards building accessibility, equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism within the im/migrant and refugee serving sector. This resource only includes a brief 'snapshot' of each of the frameworks or theories. A reference list is provided at the end of the resource so that readers may further explore each of the various topics in depth.

Selecting and Using an Analytical Framework or Theory:

Organizations focused on creating barrier-free and equitable workplaces and services are often challenged by the complex and diverse priorities and needs of their service-users, staff, leadership, and community members. Using a guiding analytical framework or theory is a common strategy to align organizational values, mission, policies and operational practices to ensure it is meeting its commitments and the priorities to the communities it serves.

When selecting which analytical framework or theory to use, organizations/teams should consider a variety of different factors, such as: the target group(s); the social, political, economic, cultural, and environmental contexts, as well as the purpose of the analysis and its desired outcomes.

Depending on context, organizations may apply multiple frameworks to provide a comprehensive assessment of diverse needs for different target populations/communities. The aim is to produce the most inclusive and equitable outcome(s) that adheres to the principles of the organization and its operational, service delivery, and advocacy priorities.

A Process for Analysis

The 5-step analysis process is one example of how organizations can assess current priorities and determine the analytical frameworks. Organizations can use various strategies, methods, and resources to help build capacity and achieve priorities and goals to build equity.

1. **Identify** what is being reviewed or assessed:
   - This step will vary depending on the current objective and the organization's overall priorities. Consider the scope of the analysis and how it can strengthen aligning the organization's commitments to equity, accessibility, inclusion, diversity, anti-racism anti-oppression, etc.

2. **Determine** the most suitable framework/theory(s) that will be used to analyze the practice, policy, program, procedure, etc.
   - Consider whether consultations with connected communities or third parties can further support the review or assessment and offer insight into potential recommendations for change.
   - Consider where the sources of information needed for the analysis can come from (i.e. existing data, qualitative vs. quantitative data, literature, focus groups, informal feedback, etc.)

3. **Revise** or change the current practice, policy, procedure, or process: Revise or update the policy, procedure, process, or practice under review or assessment and determine if it meets people's or the group's needs by advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

4. **Introduce** or provide updates on the reviewed/revised practice, policy, program, or procedure.
   - Communicate the process and changes to practices, policies, programs, or procedures that impact organizational perspective, staff work, service delivery, and the intended outcome or goal for the communities and members the organization serves.

5. **Assess** the impact of the change:
   - Assess and reflect on how recent changes impact leadership, employees, and clients/customers. The organization can take this opportunity to identify and name any gaps, seek areas of improvement, or continue to enhance or advance organizational changes.

Analytical Frameworks and Theories:

Organizations may use various theories, approaches, and analytical frameworks to challenge and remove systemic barriers, racism, and oppression. Each approach has unique objectives, applications, and limitations that impact how it is applied and the outcomes for individuals, groups, and organizations. Below is a chart of relevant frameworks, theories, and approaches that can support reviews and assessments. It is important to note that these frameworks, theories, and approaches are not exhaustive.

Framework / Theory: Gender-Based Analysis Plus

An analytical tool used to support the development of responsive and inclusive policies, programs and other initiatives developed by the government of Canada.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
- Great for undertaking a gender and diversity-sensitive analysis that is evidence-based, and informed by data and experience of various stakeholders. - Goes beyond gender to recognize the impact of other identity factors that impact individual or group experiences (e.g. race, faith, age, ability, etc.) - Designed to be a flexible and adaptable approach that addresses gaps to inequitably and barriers to participation. - Commitment to gender equality as per the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and has a legislative basis enshrined in IRPA (Immigration and Refugee Protection Act). All Federal departments and agencies are required to integrate GBA Plus into all: - Memoranda to Cabinet; - Treasury Board submissions; - Regulations; - Budget proposals.	- Analyzing the gender pay gap within im/migrant communities and developing strategies to promote equal pay for equal work amongst diverse communities. - Examining the intersectionality of gender, ethnicity, and immigration status in accessing social services and support networks for employment and education. - Considering how gender impacts health and safety outcomes in private and public realms or settings.	- The lack of disaggregated data poses a significant challenge to applying GBA Plus, as it affects the ability to understand how different policies and initiatives impact diverse stakeholders. More specifically, there may be challenges in effectively integrating intersectional perspectives into policies and programs that are based on evidence. - The "plus" is an "addition" rather than an integrated part of the analysis. People still interpret GBA plus as a tool to first and foremost explore the differential impact of gender. - GBA plus is not well known or understood outside of the federal government. It does not connect the need for gender-equity to other systems of power or domination (i.e. patriarchy, capitalism, etc.) and does not explicitly emphasize systemic change to address the root causes of inequity.

Reflection Questions:

- What are the sources of "data" for your GBA plus analysis? Are they informed by a variety of different types of data and information?
- Does your analysis consider environmental, cultural, social, political, religious, and economic contexts that impact diverse groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people?
- Does your analysis over-simplify/generalize the experiences, potential outcomes, and access to resources, services, and information of groups of women, men, and gender-diverse people?
- Does your analysis include considerations of the systemic barriers created by the related organizations/institutions/systems/?

Framework / Theory: Anti-Racism

An anti-racist framework supports identifying, challenging, and changing structures and systems that perpetuate systemic, institutional, and individual racism in our society.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
• Race and racism are the starting point for understanding the various types of inequity and discrimination facing racialized individuals and groups. • Recognizes the impacts (historical and present) of racism on the lived experiences of Indigenous, Black, and racialized people and seeks to prevent and mitigate inequitable outcomes and power imbalances in our society. • Anti-racism as a practice emerges from Black and other racialized equity-seeking groups in their fight for equality, justice, and humanization. The focus is on changing the existing systems that uphold racist and discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, policies, laws, and institutions. • Race, nationality and ethnic origin are protected grounds under the Canadian charter of Rights and Freedoms.	• Taking action to remediate covert and overt forms of racism or microaggressions, including considering how later racism may be perpetuated and experienced by staff and clients. • Examining how internal or external systems and structures lead to unequal access to opportunities or resources. • Analyzing how certain practices, ideologues, behaviours, or attitudes limit or undermine understandings of racism and its manifestations and the impact on various groups and individuals.	• Can often be used as a one-size-fits-all approach that does not account for the different experiences of different racial groups or individuals. For example, Anti-Black racism is experienced differently than Anti-Asian racism. • May highlight injustice, inequity, and discrimination between racial groups but needs to intentionally incorporate an intersectional approach to racism and anti-racism in practice. • Is often only applied on the inter-personal level, i.e. interactions between individuals, rather on the systemic level or institutional level. • Anti-Racism is sometimes criticized for its focus on analysis and understanding the systemic and underlying causes of inequity and discrimination, rather than providing concrete and actionable steps towards change.

Reflection Questions:

• What is the specific change you are trying to achieve by using an anti-racist practice or approach?
• How are the relevant internal and external systems influencing and impacting the existing and desired outcomes?
• What are some potential solutions at various levels (systemic, institutional, and individual)?
• What other practices, policies, programs, or procedures are in place to ensure the full integration of anti-racism within the organization?
• Has the organization considered internal dialogue and staff capacity to engage and participate in anti-racism practices? How has it been communicated or championed? Have we identified any gaps? What systems exist for reporting, feedback, investigation, and review processes?

Framework / Theory: Anti-Oppression

Anti-oppressive practices promote actions and practices that create environments free of oppression for all.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
• Oppression is broadly interpreted as any imbalance of power that creates barriers for specific "social groups." An anti-oppressive framework examines systemic basis for inequity within society that impact groups differently. • Acknowledges individual characteristics and intersections to promote equity across and between various identities, people, and groups (ex. Age, gender, sex, race, ability, faith, etc.) • An approach that seeks to create environments of belonging free of systemic, intuitional, and individual oppressions and forms of discrimination named by individuals and groups and those named and protected under legislation. • Is often positioned with anti-racism to strengthen the analysis of racial inequity.	• Consider how workplace dynamics and hierarchies impact individual experience and access to resources and opportunities, including power dynamics, role responsibilities and expectations, and leadership. • Poor communication can lead to mistrust, frustration, and further experiences of oppression within the organization where there is a lack of direction, understanding, capacity accountability and leadership. • Providing regular and relevant training and updates and creating forums for discussion or feedback to engage, encourage, challenge, and understand various forms and manifestations of oppression.	• Can lead to simplistic views and minimize or misrepresentation of experience, directly impacting diverse groups of people. • Does not always challenge systemic inequities or racism experienced differently by groups and may not account for histories or historical components that impact present-day experiences, including personal ideologies, beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, and system inequities. • Can often be used as a one-size-fits-all approach that does not lead to anti-oppressive practices, attitudes, or behaviours.

Reflection Questions:

- What groups or considerations have we yet to include in the research/analysis/outcome? Are other policies, practices, procedures, and processes in place to cover other oppressions or marginalization? Is this information accessible to all staff and other relevant parties?
- Is the physical, psychological, and cultural environment conducive or supportive of anti-oppression? What gaps can we identify to create an anti-oppressive environment?
- Is our understanding (leadership, staff, etc.) of anti-oppression at all levels so strong that we can effectively practice it? Have we assessed the organizational capacity? If not, what can we do to engage in and practice anti-oppression?
- Do we provide ongoing, relevant training or discussions to support anti-oppression at all organizational levels?

Framework / Theory: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI)

Aims to create fair and just practices and environments by including diverse representation where everyone is respected and can fully participate.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
- Prioritizes creating welcoming spaces that recognize, promote, and advocate for diverse spaces. This prioritizes, encourages, and engages difference—differences in abilities, thoughts, experiences, skills, and talents, etc. - EDI considers qualities, experiences and identities that shape individual and group experiences in contrast to equality, where everyone is treated equally without concern for characteristics or dimensions of identity. - Often used to provide concrete actions or pathways for "diverse groups" to participate or integrate into a larger group, while recognizing their difference.	- Examining policies, procedures, processes, and practices that can support a range of needs from diverse groups and recognize a spectrum of personalities, styles, capacities, and thoughts/perspectives. - Assessing environments to create welcoming spaces that recognize and actively seek to engage and include a range of identities, thoughts, perspectives, skills, and talents.	- Does not critically engage components of race, culture, dis/ability, histories, geographies, ideologies, class/caste, gender and gender expression, and other characteristics, identities, and other identities, including environmental, economic, political, religious, and social that shape, impact and influence individual or group experiences. - Can equate difference with sameness across groups, further oppressing or erasing the unique experiences or needs of different people or groups. - Assumes a basis of trust between institutions/systems and equity-seeking groups. There focuses on "micro-level" (i.e. individual) assimilation into a broader organizational, institutional or societal culture, rather than on changing the systemic basis for exclusion.

Reflection Questions:

- Does the organization currently have diverse representation at all levels of the organization? Is the organization representative of the community it serves? And if not, what measures are in place to ensure representation and the full participation, respect, and inclusion of different people?
- How does the organization ensure or measure how people feel about the organization internally or externally?
- What can we learn from past incidents to inform our current equity, diversity, and inclusion practices?
- What resources are in place to help support the full integration or practice of equity, diversity, and inclusion in the organization? If none exist internally, does the organization collaborate with third-party providers to support these in the workplace?

Framework / Theory: Human Rights Framework

Promotes and protects individual rights by recognizing, promoting, and upholding laws and policies that are local, national, and international.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
• Emphasizes upholding international human rights law, and a humanistic approach to protecting individuals' inherent rights as human beings. • Focuses on empowering vulnerable or underserved groups on grounds protected under the human rights legislation (i.e. Canadian Charter of Human Rights, Ontario Human Rights Code, etc.) • Develops capacity of state actors and non-state actors as rights-holders and duty-bearers, and recognizes the role of the state in protecting its citizens and residents. • Human Rights framework that emphasizes concepts like "dignity, respect, justice, and fairness" that are not necessarily explicit in other frameworks.	• Ensuring that labour migration policies and practices uphold the human rights of migrant workers, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection from exploitation. • Promoting accountability mechanisms to address instances of discrimination or human rights violations in the workplace, housing, healthcare, and justice system, particularly for vulnerable im/migrant populations	• Relies on governments' and organizations' political will and commitment to prioritize human rights, and reinforces the power and authority of the state. • Implementation and monitoring processes may face challenges where human rights are not universally respected or enforced, or subject to interpretation. • The distinction between absolute and non-absolute rights can create complexities in balancing rights with restrictions for individuals and groups. For example, human rights may be subject to formalities, conditions, restrictions, and penalties in the interests of national security, public safety, or the protection of others' rights and freedoms. • Is a "blunt instrument" in practice (i.e. slow judicial process, subject to formalities, may be inaccessible to some).

Reflection Questions:

- How do laws and rights protections inform our organizational practices? Is there a difference across levels? How does the organization manage or mitigate that? What sources or resources are in place (internal and external) to support organizational commitment and will to advocate for human rights broadly and as they impact specific groups?
- How does the organization view, engage in, and ensure accountability and advocate for protections to address discrimination or human rights violations? What are our organizational limitations?
- How does the organization collaborate with communities to educate and empower vulnerable and underserved groups? How does the organization ensure their safety and reduce perpetuating or causing harm?
- Are there any past experiences we can learn from to help inform how the organization operates in the future?

Framework / Theory: Critical Race Theory

Interrogates assumptions that equate liberal order with equality by centring counter narratives and by analyzing race and racial power between individuals and groups.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
- Interrogates race and racial power. - Examines the relationship between social structures and ideals. - Acknowledges situational circumstances and complexities of equity-seeking communities. - Prioritizes and centers voices and experiences of equity-seeking groups.	- Examining how the unconscious impacts individual or group experiences, such as internalized racism, gender or group dynamics and the impact of systems on private, personal, and professional life. - Exploring concepts such as the "pipeline to prison" and how it interacts with law and racial power. For example, the impact of law and racial power on racialized communities, particularly concerning immigration detention and deportation policies. - Analyzing the intersection of race and immigration status in shaping experiences of discrimination and marginalization within the labour market	- Implementation may encounter resistance from individuals or institutions invested in maintaining existing power structures. - Conflation with other frameworks of our theories can minimize the breadth and impact of analysis and outcome. - Challenge in balancing perceptions of equity within political, social, and legal realms, systems, and structures.

Reflection Questions:

- Have we analyzed race, religious power, division of labour, etc., within our governance, policies, procedures, and processes?
- Do we generalize or oversimplify situational experiences that can be harmful or negatively impact individual or group experiences?
- Have we generalized our equity, diversity, and inclusion practices, policies, procedures, and processes?
- Have we considered diverse groups' unique historical and present-day experiences and the impact of race and racial power on individual and group experiences?
- Have we considered the legal implications and consequences of race and racial power on individual and group experience and how they can impact the organization internally and externally?

Framework / Theory: Critical Disability Theory

Utilizes an action-orientated transformative approach and expands worldviews and understanding of disability to include intersectionality and interconnectedness.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
- Challenges conventional disability studies by positing disability as a continuum. - Recognizes that disabilities and abilities are not fixed characteristics but are shaped by social, cultural, historical, and political factors. - Engages with intersectionality, recognizing the interconnectedness of disability with other forms of oppression. - Seeks to denaturalize dis/ability and challenge ableism. - Considers alternative perspectives and sites of knowledge production and that people living with disabilities are leading.	- Investigating the impact of disability on employment opportunities and workplace accommodations for im/migrants with disabilities, including challenges in accessing suitable jobs and support services. - Advocating for inclusive immigration policies recognizing the rights and contributions of people with disabilities. - Advancing inclusive and equitable access to resources, opportunities, services, programs and service delivery, transportation, education, housing, and healthcare. - Challenging stereotypes and biases related to dis/ability in the labour market, promoting a more inclusive and diverse workforce that values skills and abilities.	- Developing discipline with blurry boundaries of dis/ability and determining who qualifies as disabled. - Implementation may be hindered by policy makers and decision makers due to the resources necessary to change infrastructure and materials. - Requires addressing internal biases and to continuously promote inclusivity within organizations, which changes over time.

Reflection Questions:

- How has the organization understood dis/ability? Is the view limited, specific, or exclusionary? What changes can we make to the organization's understanding of disability/ability?
- Do we go beyond traditional understandings of dis/ability? Have we considered physical, historical, racial, psychological, and other forms of dis/ability that impact organizational structures, culture, knowledge, and practices?
- How do we ensure that our practices related to critical disability are reflective, inclusive, or representative of all groups?
- What measures are in place to help further understand dis/ability and how they impact organizational affairs and relationships?

Framework / Theory: Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theory and analytic framework coined by African-American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. It analyzes the complex and interconnected way social categorizations (e.g., race, class, gender, age, etc.) and the corresponding interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage overlap in the experience of oppressed and marginalized individuals.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
• Intersectionality challenges dominant thinking about systems and structures, and emphasizes reframing or generating new ways of producing and using knowledge. • 'Matrix of Domination' helps ground understanding, use, and application by examining interrelated domains that organize power (structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains). • Integrative analysis and practice that see significant systems of oppression as overlapping and interlocking. • Helps expand assessment or examination from singular or exclusionary perspectives that further produce racist and oppressive outcomes to one that seeks more inclusive, responsive, and equitable outcomes.	• Examine how courts and the justice system frame and interpret experiences of Black, Indigenous, Brown, Queer, and equity-seeking groups, including im/migrants and refugees. • Consider and examine how policy impacts individual experience and choice differently through their participation in the workplace for women of colour, im/migrants and refugees. • Promoting and integrating non-white knowledge to support reviewing practices, policies, procedures, and programs that impact equity-seeking groups, including m/migrant and refugees.	• Dismissal or lack of understanding of the impacts of race, class, and gender on diverse groups. Distinct factors can significantly impact this and how solutions are produced or remedied. • Challenges to reorienting or including framing or understandings that center non-traditional or non-white perspectives of knowledge production, introduction, and use. • Is criticized for staying too theoretical rather than providing tools for building solutions and actions. • Can result in a fragmented understanding of broader systems of power and how they continue to operate by oppressing groups (i.e. focus on individual lived experience).

Reflection Questions:

- Do we make any generalizations about intersectionality, and how can this harm diverse groups?
- Do we have the knowledge or capacity to understand the complexity of intersectionality? How can we manage the harmful impacts or outcomes of intersectionality through capacity and knowledge building?
- How do we shift, integrate, and center non-traditional or non-white perspectives and forms of knowledge production to reorient new ways of thinking, relationships, and ways of being and doing?
- Have we considered systems of power and how power is organized in the organization? How is the organization informed by external systems of power (structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal)? How does the organization challenge or recreate power struggles within the organization?

Framework / Theory: Decolonization

Engages transdisciplinary discourse, empowerment, and agency through critical reflection and prioritizing Indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Key Features	Examples	Limitations
• Complex, ongoing process involving relinquishing colonial power and unlearning the practices which uphold it, and replacing knowledge and practices with Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. • Emphasis on authenticity and the analysis of colonial mechanisms both in the history and present day treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. • It encompasses addressing historical injustices, restoring Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, and fostering truth, reconciliation, and healing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.	• Respecting Indigenous cultures, traditions, and worldviews in program design to ensure that interactions with Indigenous clients or communities are respectful and culturally appropriate. • Reviewing current organizational structures, systems, practices, and culture by consulting, working with, and including Indigenous perspectives and knowledge. • Advocating for policy changes that address systemic barriers faced by Indigenous peoples, and that advocate for Indigenous sovereignty.	• Implementation may face resistance from those benefiting from colonial systems. • Challenges in balancing Indigenous and Western knowledge systems and perspectives. • Restorative justice practices may be controlled by Western institutions and ideologies, hindering full decolonization and, in turn, exacerbating limitations within traditional conflict resolution processes, such as patriarchal structures and lack of representation.

Reflection Questions:

- What are the definitions and meanings of decolonization within the organization? How do we adhere to or uphold decolonization practices?
- Do we reflect on, include, and prioritize Indigenous perspectives or knowledge? What would that look like in the organization?
- Have we considered how we might perpetuate harm even with the best intentions? What parameters are in place to advance decolonization efforts and protect Indigenous perspectives and knowledge?
- How does decolonization work within other antiracist and anti-oppressive frameworks?
- What relationships have we established within the community, and do we engage in ongoing discussions with our community partners? How does the organization include Indigenous perspectives or knowledge in its organizational activities?

Consultant

Asha Edwin of ASHARE Group Inc., with the support of Junior Advisor Hannah Loffelmann, created this supplemental tool for the OCASI-AAISA collaboration to support the organizational introduction and implementation of the sector-wide Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Policy.

Resource
Examining and reflecting upon decolonization and Indigenous solidarity work:
https://equitableeducation.ca/2013/reflecting-decolonization

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