



RESEARCH & CONSULTING

# OUT OF THE MARGINS

2SLGBTQIA+  
PROFESSIONALS  
NAVIGATING SETT AND  
SKILLED TRADES IN  
CANADA (2020-2025)

2025

AUTHORED BY ROSHEEKA PARAHOO,  
*M.A.*, RP RESEARCH & CONSULTING

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:  
[RO@RPRESEARCHCONSULTING.COM](mailto:RO@RPRESEARCHCONSULTING.COM)



# About Us



**RP Research & Consulting** is a research-driven boutique consultancy specializing in equity-focused research, policy evaluation, and strategic consulting. Founded and led by Rosheeka Parahoo, M.A, we bring a unique blend of academic rigor and practical expertise to every project. Our mission is to uncover systemic barriers, provide actionable insights, and drive meaningful change through research, evaluation, and knowledge mobilization.

With a strong track record in gender equity and EDI research across sectors such as finance, STEM, gender-based violence prevention, arts and culture, and entrepreneurship, our work is grounded in mixed-methods approaches that integrate quantitative analysis with qualitative insight. We engage stakeholders through participatory research to ensure our findings are relevant, inclusive, and actionable. By translating complex data into strategic communications and knowledge products, we empower organizations to implement equity-driven solutions and shape effective, transformative policies and cultures.



# About This Report

CCWESTT engaged **RP Research & Consulting** to produce this report examining the employment experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in Canada, with a particular focus on the science, engineering, trades, and technology (SETT) sectors. This research was conducted as part of CCWESTT's broader initiative, *Changing the Narrative: An Advocacy Pathway for Systemic Change in SETT*, which aims to advance gender equity and economic security for underrepresented groups by addressing structural and policy-level barriers.

Through a jurisdictional analysis of legislation, workplace policy, and employment outcomes from 2020 to 2025, this report provides an intersectional perspective on how 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals (particularly queer women and gender-diverse people) navigate systemic challenges within Canada's employment landscape. It draws on government data, academic literature, and national surveys to identify disparities, best practices, and policy gaps across provinces and territories. The findings will contribute to CCWESTT's Gender Equality Report Card and support its advocacy campaign to drive legislative and organizational change across the SETT community and beyond.

# Introduction

Between 2020 and 2025, Canada made significant strides in policy commitments to equity, but workplace realities for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, particularly queer women and gender-diverse individuals, tell a different story. Despite legal protections and growing public awareness, systemic inequities continue to shape the employment landscape across the science, engineering, trades, and technology (SETT) sectors.

Approximately 4% of Canadians self-identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and the 2021 Census counted about 100,815 transgender or non-binary people nationwide (roughly 0.33% of the population aged 15 and over). Within this diverse community, women (including transgender and lesbian, bisexual, and Two-Spirit women) and gender-diverse individuals (including gender non-conforming and non-binary people) face distinct challenges in the workplace. From pay equity and wage gaps to discrimination protections, occupational health and safety (OHS) inclusion, and the impact of domestic violence on employment, multiple factors influence the safety and opportunity of 2SLGBTQIA+ workers across Canada.

This report, commissioned by CCWESTT and authored by RP Research & Consulting, provides a scan of how structural factors impact employment outcomes for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in Canada. It highlights disparities in pay, representation, safety, and legal enforcement across provinces and industries.

## Key Themes:

- Legal protections do not guarantee equitable workplace experiences.
- Income gaps, harassment, and underrepresentation remain persistent.
- Provincial variation and sectoral culture play critical roles.
- Policy progress must now be matched by implementation and cultural change.

We present these findings to inform strategic advocacy and drive evidence-based reform.



# Executive Summary

## Purpose of the Report

This report offers a national, evidence-based scan of how 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, especially queer women and gender-diverse individuals, are navigating employment in Canada's science, engineering, trades, and technology (SETT) sectors. Drawing on five years of data, it identifies systemic gaps in pay, representation, legal protection, and workplace culture, with strategic recommendations for change.

## Key Challenges Identified

- **Persistent Wage Gaps:** Bisexual women earn 25% less than heterosexual men; 50% of trans and non-binary professionals report median incomes under \$30,000 despite high education levels.
- **Underrepresentation in SETT:** Queer and gender-diverse professionals remain drastically underrepresented in trades and senior roles in STEM.
- **Harassment and Violence:** 73% of gender-diverse professionals report workplace harassment; queer women face compounded sexism and homophobia.
- **Legal Enforcement Gaps:** Rights exist on paper, but fear of reprisal, weak enforcement, and sectoral silence persist.
- **Disrupted Employment Due to Domestic Violence:** Queer and trans survivors face elevated intimate partner violence rates and limited access to inclusive supports, jeopardizing job stability in rigid or male-dominated sectors.

## Strategic Recommendations

*To build truly inclusive SETT workplaces, organizations and governments must:*

1. Collect identity-specific labour market data to guide interventions.
2. Expand pay equity legislation to reflect sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. Embed 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion into OHS, DV leave, and leadership pipelines.
4. Fund mentorship, peer networks, and anti-harassment audits tailored to SETT.
5. Ensure federal and provincial alignment on inclusive labour standards and enforcement.

## Bottom Line

From 2020–2025, Canada saw increased awareness and new policy tools, but equity for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals in SETT remains unfinished work. The time is now to act boldly, back data with enforcement, and move beyond inclusion in theory to inclusion in practice.

# Representation and Barriers in STEM and Trades

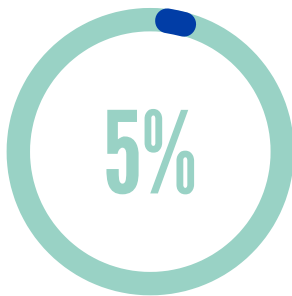
## Progress Without Presence Isn't Progress

Science, engineering, trades, and technology (SETT) sectors are often heralded as engines of innovation, but they remain structurally exclusionary for many 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. Cultural conservatism, gendered expectations, and hypermasculine norms create invisible walls that limit access and advancement, particularly for queer women and gender-diverse individuals.

## Emerging Practices

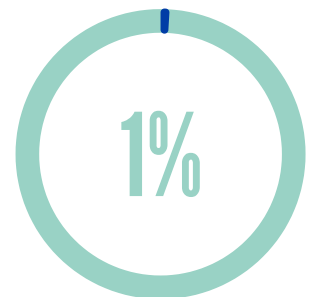
Organizations like QueerTech and initiatives such as Build Together have started to shift norms in urban hubs. These programs provide role models, safe networks, and targeted outreach to queer professionals.

## Key Insights



- **Representation gaps are stark.** Less than 5% of lesbian or bisexual women work in trades. Queer men are also underrepresented in male-dominated sectors due to cultural pressures and safety concerns.
- **Workplace culture drives exit.** Research shows 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals often conceal their identities to avoid hostility. Some leave STEM or trades entirely due to repeated harassment or isolation.

- **The leaky pipeline is acute for queer women.** While 42.9% of women in leadership pipelines are non-queer, only 1% are queer women, highlighting barriers to advancement even for those who enter the sector.
- **Inclusive infrastructure is lacking.** Facilities, benefit plans, and mentorship programs often fail to reflect the realities of diverse family structures and gender identities.



## Strategic Recommendations

*Close the representation gap with intentional retention and culture-change strategies:*

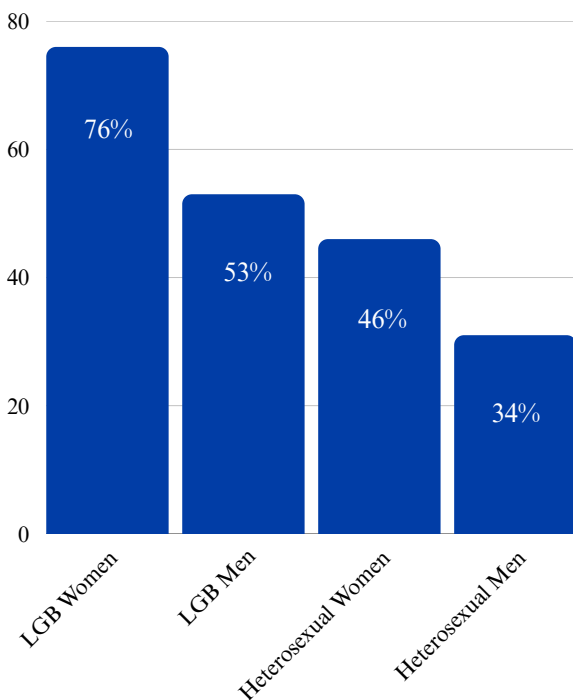
1. Fund mentorship programs pairing queer professionals with 2SLGBTQIA+ role models in STEM and trades.
2. Require apprenticeship and innovation grants to include 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion criteria.
3. Incentivize union and employer partnerships that dismantle stereotypes in training and promotion pathways.

# Legal Protections and Human Rights Enforcement

## Strong Laws. Uneven Realities.

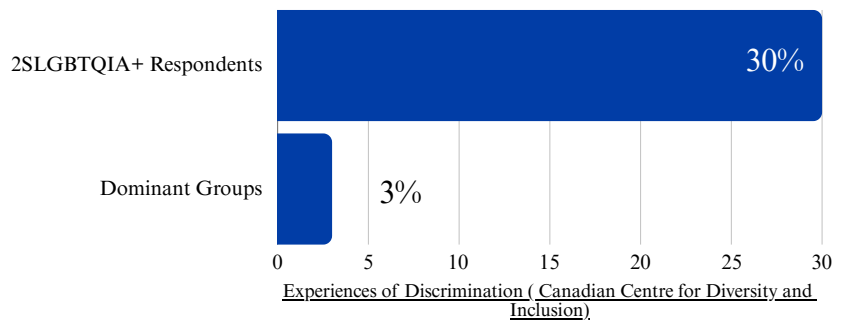
Despite legal protections, the SETT sector continues to reflect a wide gap between policy and practice. Its traditionally hierarchical and male-dominated workplaces can magnify the effects of discrimination, especially for 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals who already face underrepresentation and scrutiny. Legal rights mean little without active enforcement and safe reporting environments.

## Key Insights



Experiences of harassment or sexual assault in the workplace. (Statistics Canada)

- **Discrimination remains systemic.** 30% of 2SLGBTQIA+ workers across Canada reported discrimination, over 10 times the rate of their non-LGBTQ peers (3%).
- **Fear of speaking out is high.** Less than half of LGBTQ2S+ employees feel safe being out at work. Many avoid reporting due to fear of reprisal or disbelief that change will follow.
- **Queer women experience layered bias.** 76% of LGB women reported experiencing harassment or sexual assault in the workplace.



## Strategic Recommendations

*Ensure legal protections translate into practical accountability:*

1. Integrate human rights education and enforcement mechanisms into sector-specific safety training and union materials.
2. Encourage SETT employers to conduct anonymous climate surveys and track grievances by identity group.
3. Support Employment Equity Act reforms to formally recognize 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals as a designated group in federally regulated STEM fields.

# Pay Equity and Wage Gaps for 2SLGBTQIA+ Workers

## Equal Pay Isn't Reaching *Everyone*

While STEM and trades roles often offer above-average compensation, 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals, especially queer women and gender-diverse individuals, face persistent wage gaps that suggest exclusion from the sector's economic promise. These disparities undermine recruitment, retention, and the promise of equity in high-growth fields.

*Even with similar qualifications,  
bisexual women earn*

**25% less**

*than heterosexual men: a gap  
unexplained by experience or role.  
Without identity-specific data,  
SETT employers risk reinforcing  
systemic pay discrimination under  
the guise of neutrality.*

## Key Insights

- **Bisexual women earn the least.** In 2023, their median income was just \$25,290, less than half that of heterosexual men (\$55,959): a gap that persists even after controlling for education and occupation.
- **Transgender and non-binary professionals face systemic economic marginalization.** Despite high levels of education, 50% of trans and nonbinary Canadians aged 25+ earn under \$30K/year, and 40% live in low-income households.
- **SETT's pay equity policies are not identity-inclusive.** Current laws focus on binary gender comparisons (male vs. female). They rarely address disparities based on sexual orientation or gender identity, leaving queer workers invisible in equity audits.

Pay equity laws in Canada, which mandate equal pay for equal work or for work of equal value, primarily address the gender (male–female) wage gap and have seen advancements between 2020 and 2025. Notably, the federal Pay Equity Act came into force in August 2021, requiring federally regulated employers to develop plans to close wage gaps between male- and female- dominated job classes. Several provinces (Ontario, Quebec, etc.) also have pay equity legislation.

While these measures improve earnings for many women (including lesbians, bisexual women, and trans women who are counted within female pay equity categories), they do not directly target wage disparities linked to sexual orientation or gender identity. The data here suggest that bisexual and LGBTQ2S+ workers' lower earnings cannot be explained by qualifications alone, indicating a need for broader equity strategies beyond traditional pay equity.

## Strategic Recommendations

*Broaden pay equity frameworks to recognize the income gaps experienced by 2SLGBTQIA+ workers:*

1. Require employers and governments to collect and analyze wage data disaggregated by both gender identity and sexual orientation, with attention to privacy.
2. Use this data to inform wage audits, equity reviews, and targeted salary adjustments in SETT workplaces.
3. Encourage industry associations and regulators to expand the definition of pay equity to include identity-based income disparities.

# Workplace Harassment, Violence, and OHS

## The Culture of Safety Starts with Inclusion

From construction sites to research labs, the SETT sector's emphasis on physical safety has not always extended to psychological safety. For 2SLGBTQIA+ workers—particularly those in trades or fieldwork—harassment and bullying often go unchecked, especially in environments lacking diversity or inclusion infrastructure.

Across Canada, all jurisdictions have taken steps to address workplace harassment and violence, mainly through Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) laws.

Employers are legally required to provide a safe work environment, which now includes protection from harassment. In 2021, the federal government introduced Bill C-65, mandating clear policies and training to prevent harassment, including that based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Canada also ratified ILO Convention 190 in 2023, committing to eliminate workplace violence and harassment globally.

Provinces have strengthened their own OHS or employment standards to address harassment, with many requiring codes of conduct and investigation procedures. This gives 2SLGBTQIA+ workers more ways to seek protection and accountability. Despite this progress, the culture shift remains uneven. As shown above, only 24% of queer STEM workers feel diversity efforts are effective, and over half report harassment tied to gender identity. Legal protections exist, but implementation and impact still lag behind.

## Key Insights

- **Harassment is pervasive.** 73% of gender-diverse professionals reported experiencing multiple forms of harassment or violence at work.
- **Training is not translating into impact.** Just 24% of queer STEM workers feel their company's inclusion initiatives are effective—pointing to a gap between policy adoption and cultural change.
- **Workplace harassment is a harsh reality for many.** Over 56% have experienced it because of their gender identity, and 35% because of their sexual orientation.

## Strategic Recommendations

*Make harassment prevention sector-relevant and identity-specific:*

1. Require SETT employers to integrate anti-harassment training specific to 2SLGBTQIA+ realities—including fieldwork, lab, and trades contexts.
2. Tie public funding and contracts to completion of inclusive workplace safety audits.
3. Expand OHS definitions of “workplace violence” to explicitly include homophobia, transphobia, and identity-based microaggressions.

# Domestic Violence and Impacts on Employment

## When Home Isn't Safe, Work Becomes a Lifeline

STEM and trades jobs often involve rigid hours, remote fieldwork, or workplace cultures that undervalue caregiving and crisis support. For 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals facing intimate partner violence, these conditions can compound risk, limiting their ability to access safety, services, or protected leave.

## Key Insights

- **Bisexual women face extreme vulnerability.** Nearly half (48%) report experiencing physical IPV in their lifetime. Lesbian women (59%) and trans women (60%) also report significantly higher abuse rates than their heterosexual peers.
- **Violence disrupts work.** 82% of victims said domestic violence affected their job performance. Over half reported abuse continuing into the workplace through harassment, stalking, or intimidation.
- **Trans and non-binary survivors face layered barriers.** Many services are not inclusive of gender-diverse individuals, leaving them to choose between unsafe options or staying with an abuser.
- **Access varies by province.** While all jurisdictions now offer some form of domestic violence leave, the scope and paid provisions differ widely. For example, BC offers 5 paid days; Alberta's leave remains unpaid.

*Sexual minority women (lesbian or bisexual) are about*

***twice as likely***

*heterosexual women to have experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime*

Leave laws are crucial for women and gender-diverse victims. They allow an employee to attend court, find a new apartment, or see a doctor without fear of losing their job. The leave is confidential and protected, meaning an employer cannot penalize someone for taking it. This safety net can make the difference between a victim keeping stable employment (and thus financial independence from an abuser) or falling out of the workforce.

Given that being employed is a key pathway to escaping a violent relationship, these measures are directly tied to economic security for 2SLGBTQIA+ survivors. For example, a transgender person fleeing an abusive partner may need to travel to access one of the few LGBTQ-specific shelters; having job leave and income continuity makes that feasible.

## Strategic Recommendations

*Embed survivor support into employment policy and workplace practice:*

1. Mandate that all STEM/trades employers provide information on domestic violence leave during onboarding and in employee handbooks.
2. Ensure benefit packages include mental health and crisis support accessible to queer and trans survivors.
3. Develop confidential reporting pathways and EAP services tailored to 2SLGBTQIA+ employees.

# What's Next?

Between 2020 and 2025, Canada made visible strides in recognizing the unique employment challenges faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals. But recognition is only the first step. For queer women and gender-diverse individuals, particularly in SETT fields, the data tells a clear story: equity gaps remain persistent, measurable, and systemic.

Legal protections exist across all jurisdictions, yet they're unevenly enforced. Wage disparities remain stark, especially for bisexual women and trans workers. Harassment, isolation, and underrepresentation in leadership roles continue to push talented professionals out of high-growth sectors like science, engineering, technology, and trades. Even domestic violence policies, while improving, don't always account for the unique barriers queer and trans survivors face in male-dominated or inflexible workplaces.

## What's Needed Next:

1. Sector-specific data collection on sexual orientation and gender identity to track income, advancement, and retention in SETT.
2. Policy alignment between human rights protections, pay equity, OHS, and domestic violence leave, designed with queer and trans realities in mind.
3. Workplace transformation, not just training, embedding inclusive culture through leadership accountability, inclusive benefits, and zero-tolerance enforcement.
4. Provincial coordination to ensure equitable standards across regions, preventing geography from determining one's safety or opportunity.

Canada is entering a new phase in equity: one where data, advocacy, and culture must converge. The next chapter for SETT must go beyond compliance and toward culture change. Only then will 2SLGBTQIA+ professionals be fully included: not just in the margins, but at the centre of innovation, infrastructure, and progress.



RP





RESEARCH & CONSULTING

**Copyright © 2025 RP Research & Consulting. All rights reserved.**

This report was produced by RP Research & Consulting in partnership with the Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology (CCWESTT). It is protected under Canadian and international copyright laws. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, or stored in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of RP Research & Consulting.

Approved excerpts may be used for educational, advocacy, or non-commercial purposes with clear attribution to both RP Research & Consulting and CCWESTT. For permissions or inquiries, please contact: [ro@rpresearchconsulting.com](mailto:ro@rpresearchconsulting.com).

Unauthorized use, reproduction, or distribution of this material is strictly prohibited and may result in legal action.