



**SKILLSNEXT**

# Mapping the Landscape: Indigenous Skills Training and Jobs in Canada

JUNE 2020

Max Skudra, Andrew Avgerinos,  
and Karen E. McCallum





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The Future Skills Centre is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead.

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The word "Canada" in a large, black, serif font, with a small Canadian flag above the letter 'a'.

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# ABOUT THE PROJECT

Canadians' needs for skills training are changing rapidly. Through Skills Next, the Public Policy Forum and the Diversity Institute—in its role as a research lead for the Future Skills Centre—are publishing a series of reports that explore a number of the most important issues currently impacting the skills ecosystem in Canada. Each report focuses on one issue, reviews the existing state of knowledge on this topic, and identifies areas in need of additional research. This strong foundation is intended to help support further research and strengthen policymaking. A diverse set of authors who are engaged in the skills ecosystem through various roles, including through research, activism and policymaking, have been carefully selected to provide a broad range of perspectives while also foregrounding the Canadian context. Their varied backgrounds, experiences and expertise have shaped their individual perspectives, their analyses of the current skills ecosystem, and the reports they have authored.

## MAJOR THEMES EXPLORED IN SKILLS NEXT INCLUDE:

- Digital skills and training;
- Barriers to employment for specific groups and demographics;
- Alternative approaches to skills & training; and
- Offering readers a primer on what we know, what we don't know, and how we can dig deeper on skills training & the future of work;

## RELEASES SUMMER 2020

- Indigenous skills and employment training;
- Competency frameworks and essential skills;
- Technology-enabled innovations in the skills and employment ecosystem;
- Understanding gig work and the experience of gig work in Canada; and
- Barriers to employment based on gender.

## RELEASES JANUARY 2020

- See [eight Skills Next papers](#) from the winter 2020 release and the [full series](#).



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Max has extensive experience in planning, conducting and analyzing research to shape corporate strategy and government policy. As the head of Creative Fire's research initiatives, he is bringing new insights to deliver innovative ideas to our clients. Prior to joining Creative Fire, Max spent seven years developing the research arm of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB), working with governments and industry to identify the most impactful ways to increase Indigenous participation in the National economy. His work led to the establishment of the Province of Ontario's \$95 million Indigenous Economic Development Fund as well as a Federal Commitment to ensure Indigenous businesses represent 5 percent of government supply chains, representing a \$1 billion target.



### ANDREW AVGERINOS

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Andy has a background in the diverse field of Cognitive Science, which seeks to define and explain mental processes, driving him to look deeper into the knowledge, opinions, and past behaviour of target groups. Andy is committed to doing his part to support reconciliation and always looking for new ways to give back to the Indigenous community. He is a key leader in CCAB's data management and analysis efforts, generating insights from both qualitative and quantitative datasets. Andy also leads CCAB's research on innovation and disruption, helping to ensure that Indigenous Peoples are not left out of the discussions shaping our economy.



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Karen has a research background in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences with degrees from Waterloo and McMaster, and is proud to have returned to Canada to re-engage on the vanguard of Canadian human rights after completing doctoral studies at the University of London (UK). Karen's work at Ryerson builds on her previous academic experience as a visiting professor at Bridgewater State University (US) and lecturer at the University of Oxford. She is driven to work in constructive partnerships to improve public policy and contribute meaningful research to boost outcomes for Indigenous peoples, racialized minorities, and other equity-seeking groups. Her research and teaching draw primarily from Indigenous studies, Sociology (social movement studies), and Social psychology (group identity theory, contact theory, and sociology of emotions).





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**“There is an unprecedented opportunity for Indigenous peoples to get ahead.” Between 2016 and 2026, 350,000 Indigenous youth will turn 15, the age at which they become potential members of the workforce.**

However, for many reasons including chronic under-funding of quality on-reserve education, the challenge of acquiring reliable internet in remote conditions, and the myriad corollary effects of growing up in households disproportionately impacted by poverty and residential school syndrome, many Indigenous youth and adults do not graduate high school or graduate without requisite essential literacy and numeracy skills.

People need basic essential skills to get and keep good jobs, and to upskill as required in rapidly changing and increasingly digital workplaces. People missing these essential skills are missing their foundation, facing down the threat of job disruption due to automation, or being underqualified to gain workforce entry, without the tools they need to adapt and succeed.

If this cohort gets the support they need to build essential skills through access to quality, targeted, and culturally appropriate education, skills and training, they would boost the country’s economy by \$27.7 billion annually. Failure in that endeavour would represent a lost opportunity for all. Successfully filling this skills gap holds the door open for new Indigenous employees and employers to realize their talent and potential.

So what could that boon look like if we examine Indigenous people’s prospects for future work? The numbers tell an important story: Between 2006 and 2016, the Indigenous population grew at four times the rate of the non-Indigenous population, though Indigenous peoples experience poorer socio-



economic outcomes, higher unemployment rates and lower levels of education. Indigenous peoples cite a lack of jobs, education, training and prior work experience as reasons for unemployment.

This is not only a supply-side issue, however — even at higher numeracy and literacy skill levels, First Nations people have a significantly lower probability of employment (75 percent) than Métis (87 percent) or non-Indigenous (90 percent). Even lower-skilled non-Indigenous people have a higher probability of employment than First Nations people (87 percent). Workplace bullying and discrimination causes some Indigenous peoples to leave employment.

Despite the challenges presented by the underemployment of skilled Indigenous workers and by a lack of baseline essential skills amongst Indigenous youth and adults, there are many bright spots on the horizon. Indigenous businesses are growing and creating employment, and self-employment and entrepreneurship are both increasing.

Indigenous firms are major employers of Indigenous people. However, these firms are often in sectors that face disruption. Business operators cite unfavourable business climates on reserves, and would-be Indigenous entrepreneurs have cited difficulties accessing capital. Gaps in Indigenous education and skills-training presents both a labour and business problem — Indigenous firms say finding capable staff is difficult, and growth is threatened if action is not taken to upskill prospective workers.

Indigenous skills training programs need the following to reach their fullest potential: 1) an ability to support youth through earlier intervention and pre-employment training; 2) programming for clients to upgrade essential skills before they reach pre-employment training; and 3) affordable, accessible childcare. Other studies have shown that the likelihood of success increases when training is culturally appropriate, engaging in land-based training and including wrap-around supports. Meanwhile, current federal skills and training programs are flawed: one independent study found that data was not collected on program success, rendering the most effective programs no more likely to be supported or renewed than the least.

We also need clarity on what labour market data is most useful to Indigenous business operators, policy makers, and workers. Some studies say that Indigenous community organizers lack enough Indigenous labour market data to plan programs and services. Others reach opposite conclusions, citing a wealth of Aboriginal labour market information. Evidence-driven policy requires good data, and we recommend investment in understanding the nature of Indigenous labour market data gaps.



The gaps in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples present an immediate challenge to fostering employability and essential skills. Indigenous peoples tend to have—and are clustered in jobs requiring—lower levels of literacy skills. With required levels of literacy skills increasing, they're at further risk of job loss.



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# INTRODUCTION

In the words of Sridhar Kota and Tom Mahoney, authors of the book *Building Competitiveness*, there are certain truths that Canadians must accept if we are to build our “capacity to generate genuine, long-term national wealth.”<sup>1</sup> One is that there is an unprecedented opportunity for Indigenous peoples—a population in Canada that experiences higher poverty and lower employment than the rest of the general Canadian population—to get ahead.

Between 2016 and 2026, 350,000 Indigenous youth will turn 15, the age at which Statistics Canada considers them to be an adult and a potential member of the labour force.<sup>2</sup> Failure to support this cohort with the education, skills and training they will require to succeed in Canada’s evolving economy may very well mean a continuation of the status quo for Indigenous peoples, effectively putting a brake on Canada’s national economic engine. Success, however, could boost Canada’s economy by \$27.7 billion annually.<sup>3</sup>

With the overhanging spectre of such a loss of potential gains, there is much work to do to mitigate those risks and support Indigenous success in business and in the workforce.

Our paper looks at current trends in Canada and at our current state of knowledge. It does not offer policy advice or analysis; rather, our goal is to set out some facts to inform future conversations and to highlight what we know, what we do not and what we think might be important to know about skills and training for Indigenous peoples in Canada.

While this is not a research piece, we are informed by Indigenous Wholistic Theory, and in general by Indigenous epistemologies.<sup>4, 5</sup> Indigenous wholistic theory is “whole, ecological, cyclical and relational.”<sup>6</sup> As such, in this review of what we know about skills and Indigenous peoples, we invite you to join us in examining some of the legal, historical and contextual pieces that are vital to understanding the present and future skills landscape.

In that spirit, this paper will begin with an environmental scan of Indigenous peoples in Canada, collating knowledge about the context for Indigenous skills and outlining the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Crown/state. We then expand into a review of the known demographics of Indigenous

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<sup>1</sup> Kota, S. and Mahoney, T. (2019). [Reinventing competitiveness](#).

<sup>2</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#).

<sup>3</sup> National Aboriginal Economic Development Board. (2016). [Reconciliation: Growing Canada's Economy by \\$27.7B](#).

<sup>4</sup> Wilson, S. (2008). [Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods](#).

<sup>5</sup> Absolon, K. (2011). [Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know](#).

<sup>6</sup> Absolon, K. (2010). [Indigenous Wholistic Theory: A Knowledge Set for Practice](#), p. 74–87.

populations, and then move into a review of Indigenous future-of-work and skills-training arenas. We summarize our findings and suggest areas for future research in our sections on uncertainty and questions for future research. In inviting the reader to deeply consider the context of the Indigenous skills ecosystem, we aim to promote collective and collaborative solutions that will complement the efforts already being made by Indigenous business operators, service providers and workers to improve their skillsets and prepare for the future of work.

# INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

There is no one reality for Indigenous peoples in Canada, and no universality amongst Indigenous thinkers from diverse national, geographical, cultural and political contexts. This is a hallmark of democracy and diversity.



There is substantial diversity within the broad group of “Indigenous peoples” in Canada. It is important to acknowledge that there are three Indigenous groups each with its own history, including with the Crown. They include First Nations, Inuit and Métis. These three groups have been recognized as distinct, rights-bearing Indigenous groups by Section 35 of Canada’s Constitution. This distinction-based approach ensures that the unique rights, interests and circumstances of First Nations, Métis and Inuit are acknowledged, affirmed and implemented.<sup>7</sup>

There is a fourth group, Non-Status Indians, which has been recently recognized as a rights-bearing Indigenous group. The 2016 *Daniels* decision proved that Métis and Non-Status Indians are fiduciary responsibilities of the federal government.<sup>8</sup> Through this, Non-Status Indians have been recognized as a rights-bearing group, though the extent to which these rights will be delineated and defined is unknown. While we are unclear on the specific rights, and who qualifies for them, they are now legally recognized.

Within each of these groups, Indigenous communities range in geography from remote to urban. Communities may be self-governing, publicly governed, federally administered or unorganized politically, but part of the urban fabric. Where communities fall within that spectrum can affect their relationship with federal and provincial/territorial governments, and access to

<sup>7</sup> Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada. (2018). [Principles: Respecting the Government of Canada’s relationship with Indigenous peoples](#).

<sup>8</sup> Supreme Court of Canada. (April 14, 2016). [2016 SCC 12](#).

programs and services offered by each. Furthermore, individual members may live in their nations' homelands, perhaps on-reserve, or off-reserve in cities far away, and their access therefore to Indigenous or public education, skills-training and other programs and services can vary.<sup>9</sup>

There is no one reality for Indigenous peoples in Canada, and no universality amongst Indigenous thinkers from diverse national, geographical, cultural and political contexts. This is a hallmark of democracy and diversity.<sup>10</sup>

Nonetheless, members of Indigenous nations living in Canada constitute a politically distinct group. In this paper, we write about broad trends that speak to the many co-existing truths, while acknowledging the existence of diverse particularities.

## Context for Indigenous Skills in Canada

**Indigenous identity is important because when legal recognition is not extended, this lack of status impacts upon very tangible aspects of peoples' lives.**

For those unfamiliar with the Canadian context, we offer a quick primer. First Nations are the historical and present peoples of this land, and from a legal standpoint, First Nations are Status Indians under the *Indian Act*. Within this broad category, there are many distinct nations from many distinct communities from coast to coast to coast. First Nations people may live in cities, on title lands over which their nations have self-government or modern treaties, off reserve or on reserves set out under the *Indian Act*.

Inuit are the Indigenous people of Inuit Nunangat, which spans Inuit regions across North American and the Greenlandic Arctic, sharing a common language base (Inuktitut) with regional variations. In Canada, Inuit have four land claims corresponding to distinctly governed regions: Inuvialuit (Western Arctic, modern treaty), Nunavut (Eastern Arctic, modern treaty/territorial government), Nunavik (Northern Quebec, modern treaty) and Nunatsiavut (Labrador, self-governing).<sup>11</sup>

Métis are a distinct Indigenous peoples who emerged after Europeans arrived in the Americas, but before the imposition of European-state control over territory. According to the Supreme Court of Canada in the *Powley* (2003) decision, Métis peoples are of mixed ancestry with their own customs, practices and traditions that separate them from their First Nation, Inuit and European ancestors. Under this definition,

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada. (1996). [Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#).

<sup>10</sup> King, H. (2014). [We Natives are deeply divided. There's nothing wrong with that](#), p. 150-152.

<sup>11</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2018). [National Inuit strategy on research](#).



not all individuals of mixed Indigenous and European ancestry are Métis, notwithstanding the fact that self-identifying Métis individuals may use a broader definition.<sup>12</sup> As a general trend, Métis groups across the Métis homelands have been moving increasingly towards self-government.

In general, Non-Status Indian refers to those who self-identify (and, as we will discuss below, meet certain other external criteria for Indigenous identity) as First Nations, but who have not, for a multitude of reasons, been registered as Status under the Indian Act.<sup>13</sup> Non-Status Indians may self-identify as also being Métis or Inuit. This includes individuals who may be eligible for status, but who also experience barriers to obtaining status due to disenfranchisement, such as heavy bureaucracy within Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. Métis and Inuit do not require Status cards, and they each have their own registration process outside of the *Indian Act*.

The socio-legal environment that surrounds Indigenous identity is important because when legal recognition is not extended, this lack of status impacts upon very tangible aspects of peoples' lives. For example, Statistics Canada differentiates in some of their datasets between four Aboriginal identity groups: Status Indian, Non-Status Indian, Métis and Inuit. Significant disparities and differences can be measured, for example, between Status and Non-Status Indians.

Some members of First Nations have been, and continue to be, disenfranchised of legal status because of sexist federal policies that historically forced Indigenous women, and not men, to give up their status if they married someone without status (Non-Status Indian, non-Indigenous, or otherwise), denying impacted women the right to pass down status to their children. The intergenerational impact of status loss has meant that Non-Status Indians have, in many cases, been disallowed from accessing the cultural environment of the reserve community, and also denied many of the limited reparative and supportive initiatives offered by different tiers of the Canadian government to support Indigenous community development.<sup>14, 15</sup>

In addition to sex-based disenfranchisement, many Indigenous individuals lost their Indian status and even their knowledge of their Indigenous identity through being removed as children from their families by child welfare officials and placed with non-Indigenous families. The Sixties Scoop describes a period in Aboriginal and Canadian history in which thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from birth families, and 70 percent were placed in non-Aboriginal environments. The term “scoop” is apt because children were removed, often forcibly, from their families without the consent or prior knowledge of

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<sup>12</sup> Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. (2016). [Métis rights](#).

<sup>13</sup> Weaver, H. N. (2001). [Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?](#), p. 240–255.

<sup>14</sup> Hurley, M. C., and Simeone, T. (2014). [Legislative Summary of Bill C-3: Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act](#), p. 153–172.

<sup>15</sup> McIvor, S. D. (2004). [Aboriginal Women Unmasked: Using Equality Litigation to Advance Women's Rights](#), p. 112–120.

families or bands.<sup>16</sup> By the 1970s, one in three Indigenous children had been separated from his or her birth family through adoption or fostering.<sup>17</sup>

The Sixties Scoop and continuing high rates of apprehension of Indigenous children are widely understood to be consistent with the assimilationist policies at the core of the Indian Residential School System, wherein Aboriginal parents were understood by non-Indigenous Child Welfare professionals to be inferior and inadequate parents.<sup>18, 19</sup> For example, Aboriginal parents were more likely than other parents whose children were apprehended to have children removed because of a perceived lack of supervision, often due to parents not having access to child-care services and being required to work outside the home. However, analysis shows that while Aboriginal parents in some cases showed more functioning problems, apprehended Aboriginal children often showed lower rates of difficulties, meaning that Aboriginal children were removed at higher rates while displaying fewer problems.<sup>20</sup>

It has been determined by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (2019) that the government of Canada has discriminated against Indigenous children by underfunding family services programming to First Nations families, with the demonstrable result of there being inadequate and comparatively far fewer preventative and community support services available for families.<sup>21</sup> This underfunding was found to directly result in higher rates of apprehension in Indigenous families than in non-Indigenous families facing similar challenges. Other studies show the dramatically high rates of relationship breakdown between apprehended Indigenous children and non-Indigenous parents.<sup>22</sup> These circumstances call into serious doubt the notion that health, educational and, later, employment outcomes for Indigenous children can be improved by removing children from community and family. Instead, they suggest that children can be best prepared for school, and eventually economic activities, through supporting families living in poverty.<sup>23</sup>

## Relationship Between Indigenous Peoples and the Crown

The government of Canada has exclusive legislative authority set out under section 91(24) of the Constitution with respect to First Nations people and their lands. In 1939, the Supreme Court ruled that

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<sup>16</sup> Sinclair, R. (2007). [Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop](#), p. 65–82.

<sup>17</sup> Fournier, S. and Crey, E. (1997). [Stolen from our embrace: The abduction of First Nations children and the restoration of Aboriginal communities](#).

<sup>18</sup> Chrisjohn, R. D., Young, S. L. and Maraun, Michael. (1997). [The circle game: Shadows and substance in the Indian residential school experience in Canada](#).

<sup>19</sup> Sinha, V. and Kozlowski, A. (2013). [The structure of Aboriginal child welfare in Canada](#), p.1-21.

<sup>20</sup> Blackstock, C., Trocmé, N. and Bennett, M. (2004). [Child maltreatment investigations among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in Canada](#), p. 901–916.

<sup>21</sup> Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. (September 6, 2019). [2019 CHRT 39](#).

<sup>22</sup> Sinclair, R. (2007). [Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop](#), p. 65–82.

<sup>23</sup> Blackstock, C., Trocmé, N. and Bennett, M. (2004). [Child maltreatment investigations among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in Canada](#), p. 901–916.

Inuit fall within the government's s. 91(24) purview as well. As a result, funding, program and service provision for First Nations' and Inuit communities has largely fallen to the federal government, including education, health care, housing and other areas that have direct correlations to labour-market outcomes.<sup>24</sup> Provincial governments have provided uneven leadership on programs and services for Indigenous peoples living outside of reserve communities and this division of powers has left many people in a services gap.<sup>25, 26</sup> There have been efforts to address this gap, most notably Jordan's Principle for children's health care, but evidence would suggest even high-profile and high-stakes efforts have not been sufficient.<sup>27, 28</sup>

Program and service responsibilities function differently in the three territories, all of which are majority-Indigenous jurisdictions and all of which are covered with a quilt of modern treaties and self-government agreements. These agreements create distinct relationships and responsibilities between the public federal and territorial governments, modern treaty holder representative groups and Indigenous governments. Thus, what generally holds true in the federal-provincial context does not always hold true in the federal-territorial context, and the latter context changes from place to place depending on the content of final agreements.

With the provision of the *Daniels* decision, the Supreme Court determined that s. 91(24) of the Constitution extends to Métis and Non-Status Indians as well.<sup>29</sup> Following that decision, there has been a push from self-identified Indigenous groups for access to federal services and programs, as well as other perceived benefits.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, the *Daniels* decision also triggered non-Indigenous antipathy towards Métis status holders, resulting in some non-Indigenous peoples attempting to abuse the legislation to accrue rights designed for wrongfully denied, rights-bearing Métis.<sup>31</sup> It remains to be seen how, exactly, Métis and Non-Status peoples' access to currently existing federal programming may change as a result of the 2016 *Daniels* decision.

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<sup>24</sup> Wilson, J. B. (2007). [First Nations education: The need for legislation in the jurisdictional gray zone](#), p. 248–256.

<sup>25</sup> Ontario's Panel on Economic Growth and Prosperity. (2017). [Strength in numbers: Targeting labour force participation to improve prosperity in Ontario](#).

<sup>26</sup> Noël, A. and Larocque, F. (2009). [Aboriginal peoples and poverty in Canada: Can provincial governments make a difference?](#)

<sup>27</sup> Government of Canada. (2019). [Jordan's principle](#).

<sup>28</sup> Canadian Human Rights Tribunal. (September 6, 2019). [2019 CHRT 39](#).

<sup>29</sup> Supreme Court of Canada. (April 14, 2016). [2016 SCC 12](#).

<sup>30</sup> Gaudry, A. and Andersen, C. (2016). *Daniels v. Canada: Racialized legacies, settler self-indigenization and the denial of Indigenous peoplehood*, p. 19–30.

<sup>31</sup> Vowel, C. and Leroux, D. (2016). [White settler antipathy and the Daniels decision](#), p. 30–42.

# THE FACTS: DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE INDIGENOUS POPULATION

As a necessary word of caution, census data is self-reported, which can create challenges in interpreting the data.<sup>32</sup> As noted previously, the legal definition for rights-bearing Métis is narrower than definitions that may be used by those who self-identify as Métis. Similarly, individuals identifying themselves as First Nations may be Non-Status Indians. The latter category, Non-Status Indian, is growing faster as a population than Status Indian (75.1-per-cent Non-Status versus 30.8-per-cent Status growth rate) and Métis populations have grown the most of the three groups identified in the constitution (51.5 percent).<sup>33</sup> While some data for First Nations people can be separated out between Status and Non-Status, data for registered Métis cannot be easily separated from self-reported Métis for several reasons, including that it is not differentiated in statistical programs such as the Census of Population, nor in the Aboriginal Peoples Survey. It is therefore not always easy to differentiate who, exactly, is reflected in certain data points. Methodologies and population definitions change between studies, making apples-to-apples comparisons difficult, even within the same category distinctions. Notwithstanding these caveats, we can draw multiple conclusions from existing data.

The Indigenous population in Canada is unquestionably young and growing. Between 2011 and 2016, the Indigenous population in Canada grew by 18 percent. The 2016 Census reported growth has two drivers: self-identification<sup>34, 35</sup> and births, with fertility rates for Indigenous women in Census 2016 reported to be 20.1 percent higher than the general population.<sup>36</sup> The average age of Indigenous people in Canada is 32.1, which is 8.4 years younger than the average age of non-Indigenous Canadians, and the median age is 29.1 (versus 40.7 for non-Indigenous Canadians). Close to one of every 13 people in Canada younger than the age of 14 is Indigenous.<sup>37</sup> Approximately 50 percent of all Inuit are younger than the age of 25<sup>38</sup> and 51.6 percent of First Nations people are younger than 30.<sup>39</sup> From 2006-2016, the Indigenous population has grown at four times the rate of the non-Indigenous population over the same period.

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<sup>32</sup> Delic, S. (2009). [Statistical information pertaining to socio-economic conditions of northern Aboriginal people in Canada: Sources and limitations](#), p. 119-150.

<sup>33</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017). [Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 census](#).

<sup>34</sup> Andersen, C. (2008). [From nation to population: The racialisation of 'Métis' in the Canadian census](#), p. 347-368.

<sup>35</sup> Barrera, J. (October 25, 2017). [Court cases, changing society impacting Indigenous self-identity claims](#).

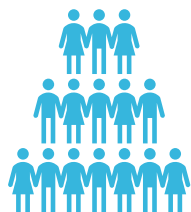
<sup>36</sup> Statistics Canada. (2017). [Aboriginal peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 census](#).

<sup>37</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018a). [Aboriginal population profile, 2016 census](#).

<sup>38</sup> Government of Canada. (2018). [Nunavut Inuit labour force analysis report: Executive summary](#), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2018). [National report of the First Nations regional health survey phase 3](#).

## Indigenous population is young and growing:






- on average, the Indigenous population is 8.4 years younger than the non-Indigenous population
- the Indigenous population in Canada grew by 18% between 2001-2016
- approximately 50% of all Inuit are younger than 25
- 56.1% of all First Nations people are younger than 30
- the Indigenous population has grown at 4X the rate of the non-Indigenous population in the 10 years between 2006-2016

Indigenous peoples have poorer socio-economic outcomes than non-Indigenous Canadians, although those outcomes vary depending on the Indigenous group. There has been a wealth of literature produced with respect to the different outcomes, and perhaps none sums up the issue as well as the 2019 Indigenous Economic Progress Report published by the National Indigenous Economic Development Board.<sup>40</sup> Tables 1 and 2 are re-published from this report to summarize the target areas for addressing educational and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous population groups. The three core indicators in Table 1 are explained further by the five underlying indicators that underpin the challenges to target achievement.

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<sup>40</sup> The National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019a). [The Indigenous economic progress report, 2019](#).





Table 1: Core Indicators


INDICATOR	KEY MEASURES	2006 INDIGENOUS GAP	2016 INDIGENOUS GAP	2022 TARGET
<b>Employment</b> 	Employment rate	9.0 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate	8.4 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate	The NIEDB target for employment is Indigenous employment, labour-force participation and unemployment rates comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.
	Labour-force participation rate	3.9 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate	4.0 percentage points below the non-Indigenous rate	
	Unemployment rate	8.5 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	7.8 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	
<b>Income (2005 &amp; 2015)</b> 	Indigenous median income	35.5 percentage points below the non-Indigenous median income	26.2 percentage points below the non-Indigenous median income	The NIEDB target for income is Indigenous income and percentage of income from transfers comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.
	Percent of income from transfers	7.2 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	5.9 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	
	Main source of income from transfers	9.6 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	8.6 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	
<b>Community Well-being</b> 	Community Well-being (CWB) Index	First Nations communities have a CWB score 18.4 below other Canadian communities	First Nations communities have a CWB score 19.1 below other Canadian communities	The NIEDB target for community well-being is average well-being scores comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.
		Inuit communities have a CWB score 14.9 points below other Canadian communities	Inuit communities have a CWB score 16.2 points below other Canadian communities	

Source: The National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019a). [The Indigenous economic progress report, 2019](#).



Table 1: Underlying indicators

INDICATOR	KEY MEASURES	2006 INDIGENOUS GAP	2016 INDIGENOUS GAP	2022 TARGET
<b>Education</b> 	High school completion rate	19.3 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	14.8 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	The NIEDB target for education is Indigenous high school and university completion rates comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.
	College/trades completion rates	0.4 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	2.6 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	
	University completion rate	17.1 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	18.8 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	
<b>Entrepreneurship and Business Development</b> 	Indigenous Median Self-employment rate	5.3 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	4.3 percentage points lower than the non-Indigenous rate	The NIEDB target for entrepreneurship is Indigenous self-employment rates comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.
<b>Governance</b> 	Indigenous community intervention status	150 First Nations under intervention	147 First Nations under intervention	The NIEDB target for governance is 0 First Nations communities under intervention.
<b>Lands and Resources</b> 	Participation in the FNLMA	96 First Nations under the FNLMA	131 First Nations under the FNLMA (2018)	The NIEDB target for lands and resources is 50 percent of First Nations communities to be either participating in the FNLMA or having settled comprehensive land claim and self-government agreements.
	Participation in Comprehensive Land Claims and Self-Government Agreements.	96 Indigenous communities involved in Ratified Agreements	100 Indigenous communities involved in Ratified Agreements	

<b>Infrastructure</b> 	Drinking water	46 percent of First Nations communities have drinking water infrastructure that meets prescribed standards	92 percent of First Nations communities have drinking water infrastructure that meets prescribed standards	<b>The NIEDB target for infrastructure is 100 percent of First Nations communities having drinking water infrastructure that meets prescribed Health Canada standards and overcrowding rates comparable to those of Canada's non-Indigenous population.</b>
	Overcrowding of dwellings	8.5 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	5.8 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	
	Proportion of population living in dwellings in need of major repair	16.4 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	13.4 percentage points above the non-Indigenous rate	

Source: The National Indigenous Economic Development Board. (2019a). [The Indigenous Economic Progress Report, 2019](#), p. 25-26.

Unemployment rates for First Nations, Métis and Inuit are higher year-over-year from 2010-2018, as compared to the non-Indigenous population, and employment rates are lower. There is variation amongst the rights-bearing groups, as provided in the Constitution.

Education rates vary as well. Inuit have the lowest levels of diploma, certificate or degree attainment<sup>41</sup>, which is tied to the relative scarcity of post-secondary opportunities in Inuit Nunangat. For Inuit youth, there are specific challenges in attaining quality secondary education, especially in specialist qualifying subjects such as chemistry or advanced maths, in isolated and remote community contexts. Amongst Inuit, high school graduation is less common; for example, in Nunavut 48 percent of the Indigenous population aged 25 to 64 had attained at least a high school diploma compared with 96 percent of the non-Indigenous population. First Nations people also have substantially lower rates of educational completion at all levels than the non-Indigenous population, as do Métis who, relative to First Nations and Inuit, have higher educational attainment.<sup>42</sup> Across the country, on-reserve and off-reserve educational outcomes vary drastically and there are significant disparities present in funding relative to provincial benchmarks, as well as in educational outcomes.<sup>43</sup>

Due to the paucity of universities and scarce distribution of colleges in Inuit Nunangat, post-secondary study is a distant (almost perceivably unattainable) reality for many Inuit. Further, there are few

<sup>41</sup> Statistics Canada. (2012). [Table 41-10-0038-01 Path to obtaining high school diploma and postsecondary education by Aboriginal Identity](#).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Beresford, Q. (2012). [Separate and unequal: An outline of Aboriginal education 1900-1996](#).

Southern institutions that make accommodations for students coming from the North. ENGAP is an Engineering Access Program at the University of Manitoba, and it's the only program that bypasses the post-secondary entrance requirements, providing instead an upgrading opportunity for students. The limited availability of post-secondary institutions in the North, and the lack of bridging programs and favourable access policies in the South, represents a huge barrier to education and training opportunities for Inuit youth.

## Labour-market outlook

Even at the same level of education as their non-Indigenous counterparts, Indigenous peoples fare worse in the labour market.<sup>44</sup> This is not consistent across the constitutionally distinct groups: one study suggests that even at higher numeracy and literacy skill levels, First Nations people still have a significantly lower probability of employment (75 percent) than Métis (87 percent) or non-Indigenous (90 percent). Notably, even lower-skilled non-Indigenous people have a higher probability of employment than First Nations people (87 percent).<sup>45</sup>

The most significant gaps in labour-market participation are, in order, found in Nunavut, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, which roughly correlates to the jurisdictions in which Indigenous peoples comprise the largest percentages of the population.<sup>46</sup> The jurisdictions with the largest gaps are also predominately remote or rural. Indigenous youth and adults living in remote communities are hampered by lack of opportunity to develop and use their skills,<sup>47</sup> resulting in three out of every five First Nations citizens living outside of their community at some point for education (45.3 percent) or employment (44.8 percent ).<sup>48</sup>

The main reason for a lack of workforce participation cited by people from across all Indigenous population groups is a lack of available jobs (60.3 percent ), with other major barriers cited including a lack of education and training and a lack of prior work experience to qualify candidates for advertised positions.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#).

<sup>45</sup> Arriaganda, P. and Hango, D. (2016). [Literacy and numeracy among off-reserve First Nations people and Métis. Do higher skills levels improve labour market outcomes?](#)

<sup>46</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#).

<sup>47</sup> Wannell, T. and Currie, S. (2016). [Determinants of participation in Indigenous labour market programs: Final report](#).

<sup>48</sup> First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2018). [National report of the First Nations Regional Health Survey Phase 3 \(Volume 1\)](#).

<sup>49</sup> Statistics Canada. (2019a). [Table 41-10-0014-01 Reasons for difficulty in finding work by Aboriginal identity, unemployed](#).

## Low labour market-participation for Indigenous people is due to:



- Lack of available jobs
- Lack of education & training
- Lack of prior work experience

In the Prairies, 84.4% of respondents to the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) cited a shortage of jobs; in Quebec, 82.1% of respondents cited this same reason, with that proportion rising to 87.2% for men.<sup>50</sup> Meanwhile, significant proportions of jobs go unfilled in parts of Canada with high Indigenous populations. For example, in Nunavut, 28% of Inuit are unemployed, compared to three percent of non-Indigenous people.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, significant proportions of public services jobs in these regions go unfilled. For example, in the government of Nunavut, public services jobs in health recruit to only 55% capacity, and community and government services to 62%, with the average across all departments being a 71 % recruitment rate, leaving 29% of all jobs unfilled.<sup>52</sup> More than half (52%) of unemployed Inuit also said that not having enough education or training for available jobs had caused them difficulty. This was highest in Nunavut (60%).<sup>53</sup>

There are greater numbers of Indigenous peoples available to work than are represented in the workforce. In 2017, of the 37% of Inuit who were not working, but considered to be in the labour force, 23% wanted to work. The main reasons given by Inuit for not being employed despite wanting to work included believing no work was available (24%), caring for their children (13%) and having an illness or disability (13%).<sup>54</sup>

These low labour market-participation and high unemployment rates persist for multiple reasons. In 2017, Ontario's Panel on Growth and Prosperity handily summed up the core drivers as: unfavourable business climate on-reserves; lack of access to capital; effects of residential school syndrome; inadequate

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Fiser, A., Lalonde, M. and MacLaine, C. (2019). [Working together: Indigenous recruitment and retention in remote Canada](#), p. 39.

<sup>52</sup> Government of Nunavut. (2019). [Toward a representative public service](#).

<sup>53</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018b). [Labour market experiences of Inuit: Key findings from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey](#), p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018b). [Labour market experiences of Inuit: Key findings from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey](#), p. 3.

**While many skills research reports foretell the need for Canadians to increasingly exercise mobility and flexibility as cornerstones of the new economy, youth and adults from many Indigenous communities have been required to exercise mobility and flexibility since the first organized formal education was introduced in Canada.**



infrastructure and insufficient education opportunities.<sup>55</sup> Several other drivers were identified in the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples' Survey, including lack of skills, lack of job experience, poor health, lack of transportation to jobs, poor understanding of how to find jobs and a perception of job scarcity. Disproportionate levels of interaction with the justice and child-welfare systems are likely to contribute to these drivers as well. As mentioned, there is only one university located within Inuit Nunangat, as Yukon College transitioned into Yukon University earlier this year. This lack of institutions has held back untold numbers of potential Inuit graduates.<sup>56</sup> Establishing a university in Inuit Nunangat was outlined as a major goal in the National Strategy on Inuit Education.<sup>57</sup>

First Nations, Métis and Inuit experience barriers to accessing post-secondary education to an acute degree, especially those living in remote locations. While many skills research reports foretell the need for Canadians to increasingly exercise mobility and flexibility as cornerstones of the new economy, youth and adults from many Indigenous communities have been required to exercise mobility and flexibility since the first organized formal education was introduced in Canada. As noted above, many First Nations people travel—sometimes thousands of kilometres from home—to work or to attend post-secondary, or even high school. Mobility, for Indigenous women in particular, is linked not only to opportunity, but also to vulnerability and precarity, as young people living

<sup>55</sup> Ontario's Panel on Economic Growth and Prosperity. (2017). [Strength in numbers: Targeting labour force participation to improve prosperity in Ontario](#), p. 34-35.

<sup>56</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2018). [National Inuit strategy on research](#), p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> National Committee on Inuit Education. (2011). [First Canadians. Canadians first: National strategy on Inuit education](#).

away from family and community are exposed to mainstream Canadian cultures that can be hostile and even violent towards Indigenous peoples.

The *Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* states that travelling away from home to access health or education is directly related to vulnerability to violence. The mitigating effect of staying within community is captured through the Inuit concepts of:

**ilagiinniq, or being [with] family and tursurautiniq, kinship ties. It is related to both culture, and to health, and links to the ability to provide security and justice for community members. As witnesses explained, the destruction [of] ilagiinniq and tursurautiniq through residential and day schools, hostels, forced resettlement and medical relocation and, more recently, child welfare apprehensions, has contributed to damaging the health, safety and well-being of all Inuit.**<sup>58</sup>

Poverty, lack of socio-economic opportunity, and a lack of training and development opportunities are some of the factors that motivate Indigenous youth and adults to leave their home communities. Away from home, Indigenous peoples from across identity groups and genders face disproportionate rates of not only workplace discrimination, but also physical and sexual violence. Researchers have reported that Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than other women in Canada, and 16 times more likely than Caucasian women.<sup>59</sup> It is worth considering, given these circumstances, how universally desirable the attributes of mobility and flexibility might be given the already extremely vulnerable conditions in which some Indigenous learners and workers live. In fact, there is a desire amongst many members of remote Indigenous communities to pursue education and find employment closer to home, rather than be forced to leave.

In addition to problems related to skills gaps and unemployment, it is also the case that the jobs disproportionately done by Indigenous peoples are not necessarily the jobs that will drive Canada's economic future. If Sean Speer and Robert Asselin's predictions<sup>60</sup> holds true, lower Indigenous representation in knowledge-based industries, and higher representation in resource-based sectors, foreshadows Indigenous worker vulnerability to automation and digital futures. This projection foretells poor socio-economic outcomes and even greater job insecurity for Indigenous members of the labour force.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019a). [Reclaiming power and place: Executive summary of the final report](#), p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019b). [Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls \(No. 1A\)](#), p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> Public Policy Forum. (2019). [A new north star: Canadian competitiveness in an intangibles economy](#).

<sup>61</sup> Statistics Canada. (2019b). [Table 14-10-Q359-01 Labour force characteristics by Aboriginal group and educational attainment](#).



## FUTURE OF WORK

The gaps in Indigenous education and skills-training are a labour and business problem. As the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) data demonstrates, Indigenous firms are major employers of Indigenous people<sup>62</sup> and these firms are often in sectors that face disruption.<sup>63</sup> The risk of disruptive innovation to Indigenous job loss is compounded by the fact that Indigenous firms already identify finding talented staff as a significant hurdle.<sup>64</sup> These factors represent potential headwinds for Indigenous businesses, threatening to make growth more difficult if concrete actions are not taken to upskill prospective staff.

While the federal government is considering the digitization of Canada and how to bolster the economy as automation changes the world of work, consideration needs to be taken towards the policies needed to meet the unique education and training needs of Indigenous peoples.

The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs study estimates that five million jobs will be displaced before the end of 2020 as robotics, artificial intelligence, drone technology and other socio-economic factors eliminate the need for human workers.<sup>65</sup> Most new jobs will be in more specialized areas such as computing, mathematics, architecture and engineering. The report, which relied on an extensive survey of chief human resources and chief strategy officers of leading global employers, found that digital transformation will be highly specific across industries, with some occupational groups being more susceptible to job dislocation than others.

CCAB's 2016 *Promise and Prosperity* report reveals that more than one-third (38 percent) of Indigenous businesses operate in the primary sector, construction, manufacturing and transportation—industries projected to be disproportionately impacted by rises in automation.<sup>66</sup> As more than half (54 percent) of the employees working for Indigenous firms are Indigenous people, it follows that Indigenous employees and business owners may be the most acutely impacted—and most at risk of displacement—by a digital revolution. It is therefore particularly urgent that Indigenous businesses be involved in the formation of policies and programs that will mitigate against the impact of disruption through supporting business development and innovation, facilitating continued learning and re-assessing the link between occupations and skills to ensure Indigenous peoples will excel in the increasingly automated and digital workforces of the future.

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<sup>62</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2016). [Promise and prosperity: The 2016 Aboriginal business survey](#), p. 19-21.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 13-14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Centre for the New Economy and Society. (2018). [The future of jobs report 2018](#).

<sup>66</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2016). [Promise and prosperity: The 2016 Aboriginal business survey](#), p. 31.

## Risk of Displacement by a digital revolution

*Humans Wanted* is a major analysis of the 2011 National Occupational Classifications (NOC) that was cross-tabulated (in the absence of Canada-specific definitions) with the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) taxonomy of skills.<sup>67</sup> In this report, authors identified six clusters that are organized by a mix of occupation type and required skills capacities, supporting an overall thesis that workplaces of the future are going to require candidates to draw from skillsets rather than job experiences or qualifications. Jobs of the future will require candidates and employers to become more adept at articulating and identifying transferable essential skills that will be applicable across a range of roles.<sup>68</sup> Report authors found that people working in certain clusters—namely, solvers and providers—would experience minimal change to their jobs as a result of disruptive technologies. In these categories, authors identified traditional job roles such as mechanical engineers, judges and heavy equipment mechanics (solvers) and veterinarians, musicians, childcare providers (providers). This was contrasted with the technicians, drafters and doers clusters, which were projected to experience, respectively, medium, high and very high levels of disruption—indicating a link between disruption and the employment and skills areas where Indigenous workers are disproportionately employed.<sup>69</sup>

An analysis of labour-force survey (LFS) data conducted for this review by the authors demonstrates a number of trends and factors that are relevant to understanding how differences and existent inequalities may be exacerbated in workforces of the future. In an analysis of data on Canadian employment type, gathered between 2014 and 2018, differentiated by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal identity, there are clear differences contingent upon Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal Status, as well as some similarities.<sup>70</sup> The most obvious similarity is that the majority of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents were working in “sales and service occupations,” though the proportion is higher for Aboriginal peoples. A major difference is that the second major occupation category for Aboriginal peoples is in the area of “trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations” while for non-Aboriginal peoples it is “business, finance and administration occupations.”<sup>71</sup>

Figure 1 below indicates that Aboriginal people are overrepresented in “trades, transport and equipment operators, and related occupations.” This occupational category is characterized by the NOC as having “limited mobility or transferability of skills among occupations in this category due to specific

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<sup>67</sup> Royal Bank of Canada. (2018). [Humans wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption](#).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

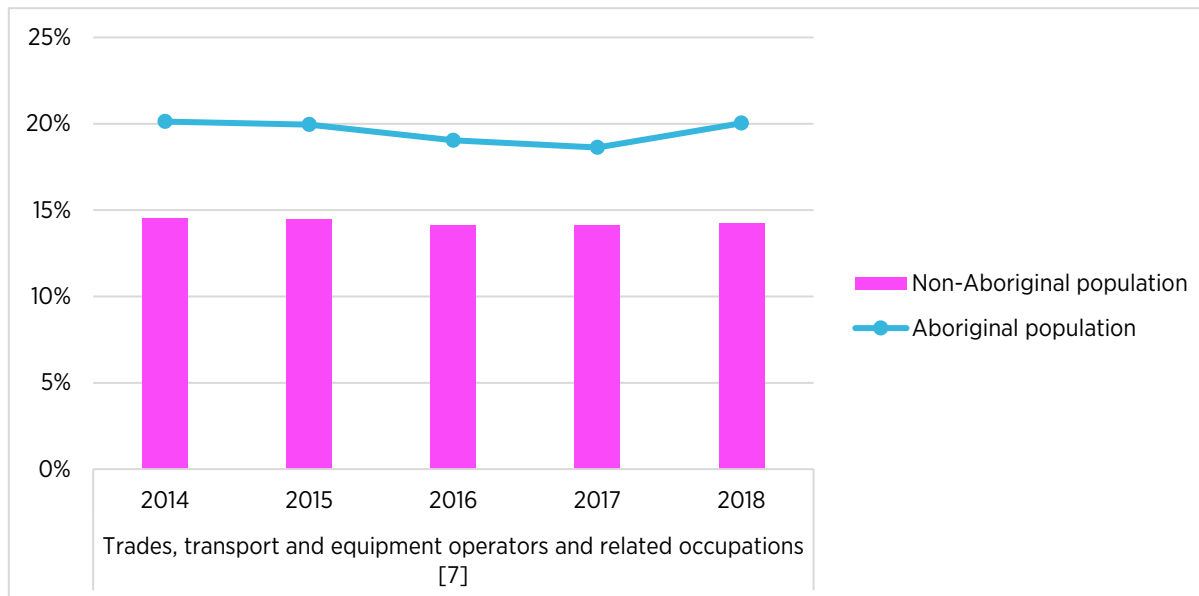
<sup>69</sup> Royal Bank of Canada. (2018). [Humans wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption](#), p. 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Statistics Canada. (2019c). [Table 14-10-0104-01 Employment by Aboriginal group and occupation \(x 1,000\)](#).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

apprenticeship, training and licensing requirements for most occupations”<sup>72</sup> and usually requires on-the-job training or apprenticeship rather than any formal post-secondary training.

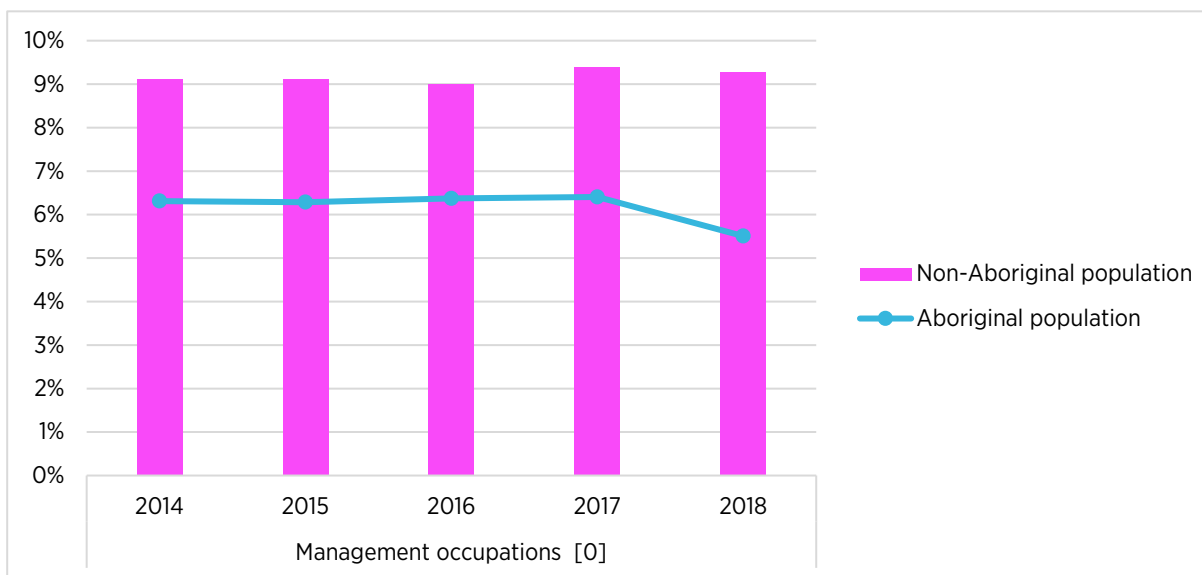
**Figure 1: Employment in “trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations” by Aboriginal group**



Source: Statistics Canada. (2019c). [Table 14-10-0104-01 Employment by Aboriginal group and occupation \(x 1,000\)](#).

Figure 2 indicates the under-representation of Indigenous peoples in “management occupations.” Management occupations, however, are usually associated with the possession of some form of post-secondary training, with highly transferable and recognized skillset.

<sup>72</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018d). [National occupational classification \(NOC\) 2016 version 1.2](#).

**Figure 2: Employment in “Management occupations” by Aboriginal group**

Source: Statistics Canada. (2019c). [Table 14-10-0104-01 Employment by Aboriginal group and occupation \(x 1,000\)](#).

When we think about susceptibility to job loss through automation and the need to prepare for widespread digital upskilling, we see warning signs that Indigenous peoples may be proportionally harder hit by disruptive technologies because the occupational roles held more often by members of this group are associated with measurably less transferability. These conditions are precipitated by such factors as Indigenous peoples having lower access to quality educational and training opportunities and correspondingly lower rates of qualification attainment.



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# SKILLS TRAINING

While already faced with a series of educational, geographic and cultural hurdles blocking full and equitable participation in the national workforce, how can Indigenous students, workers and entrepreneurs adjust successfully to emerging economic and technological trends?

Skill typologies have been rigorously described and analyzed by various actors in the skills-development and training world. In 1994, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) conducted research, identifying nine literacy and essential skills that are required for jobs and that serve the basis for all further learning.

The Canadian workforce demands that people be adaptable as they prepare for increasingly flexible, mobile and changeable workplaces. When thinking about skills-development for Indigenous peoples, it is necessary to keep the focus not simply on increasing access to qualification attainment, but on training and educational programs that build capacity in the area of essential skills and on these future skills.

**High-status skills-development programs should help develop recognizable and transferrable skills that will give participants access to decision-making and leadership roles.**

This kind of skilling focus is not only for future generations, but also applies to older generations of workers. Current adult workers will need to be engaged as lifelong learners to transition successfully within work contexts as skillsets required of them in their current workplaces change.

As discussed, there are gaps in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and these gaps present an immediate challenge to fostering employability and essential skills. A 2012 study of literacy markets using data and metrics from the *2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey* (IALSS) found that Indigenous peoples tend to have lower levels of literacy skills and are also clustered in jobs requiring lower levels of literacy skills. These results render the adjacent conclusion, that there are far fewer Indigenous peoples in jobs that require advanced levels of these essential literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>73</sup> Research has shown that required levels of literacy skills are actually increasing, putting people without basic literacy skills at further risk of disruption and job loss.<sup>74</sup>

There are other indirect negative impacts of low levels of essential skills in Indigenous communities. Research has shown that most people experience significant skill loss over their careers, roughly

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<sup>73</sup> Murray, T. S. and Shillington, R. (2012). [Understanding Aboriginal literacy markets in Canada: A segmentation analysis](#), p. 21-56.

<sup>74</sup> Data Angel Policy Research Incorporated. (2008). [Addressing Canada's literacy challenge: A cost-benefit analysis](#).

equivalent to nearly half a year of additional schooling over the nine-year period.<sup>75</sup> Exposure to education and stable employment experience can mitigate against skill loss, meaning that people who already possess low rates of essential literacy skills may be most at risk to disruption—and worst impacted—by the natural effects of skill-loss over a lifetime.<sup>76</sup>

When seeking to train and retain Indigenous peoples in skilled occupations, there is a real concern about how to engage Indigenous students in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) early in their learning journey so they will pursue higher education and careers in the STEM fields. According to the *2016 Census of Population*, only 4.13% of the Indigenous labour force has post-secondary education in STEM compared to 10.26% of non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>77</sup> The difference in employment rates between Indigenous (70.5% ) and non-Indigenous (72.6% ) Canadians with a STEM background is encouragingly small.<sup>78</sup> This demonstrates the potential of Indigenous talent if STEM education and training opportunities are made culturally appropriate, accessible and attractive to Indigenous youth.

Over the years, various administrations have allocated considerable shares of federal expenditures to addressing the education and labour-market gaps for Indigenous peoples and yet these challenges still exist. CCAB encourages the government of Canada to work with experts in Indigenous skills-training and mismatch bridging to find long-term, sustainable solutions to leveraging economic opportunities and investing in Indigenous businesses and futures. We already know from previous CCAB research that, on average, Indigenous people comprise more than half (54 percent) of employees in Indigenous-owned private firms.<sup>79</sup> Indigenous business is building talent in communities and keeping it close to home by creating meaningful, high-skill jobs for youth. The local multiplier effect of economic development in communities is difficult to quantify, but it is an area in which CCAB has made significant headway.

We know that educational attainment, and the success achieved with that attainment, is lower for Indigenous peoples. But are there some trends that can be pulled out that may indicate where there are opportunities to support the upcoming generation? Perhaps.

According to the First Nations Regional Health Survey (2016), although university degree attainments are low, post-secondary certificate/diploma attainment rates are improving.<sup>80</sup> This raises a key question—one that this paper can only begin to answer: are colleges, trade institutes and Indigenous Institutes training Indigenous youth for future skills needs? Another angle on this question is, what can universities

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<sup>75</sup> Willms, J. D. (1999). [Inequalities in literacy skills among youth in Canada and the United States](#).

<sup>76</sup> Willms, J. D. and Murray, T. S. (2007). [Gaining and losing literacy skills over the lifecourse](#), p. 22-23.

<sup>77</sup> Statistics Canada. (2018b). [Data Tables, 2016 census](#).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2016). [Promise and prosperity: The 2016 Aboriginal business survey](#), p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2018). [National report of the First Nations regional health survey phase 3](#), p. 15.



learn from colleges, trades institutes and Indigenous institutes about improving access for and retention of Indigenous learners?

On cursory view, the answer appears to differ by jurisdiction. For instance, in Ontario, legislation in 2017 has opened the door for nine Indigenous institutions to pursue accreditation and to be funded through a yet-to-be-determined regulatory framework. Public colleges in British Columbia—such as the British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)—have increased their offerings for Indigenous learners. However, more information is necessary to provide a full answer to the question, which we will return to below.

A corollary question can also be raised: what is the role of universities for Indigenous learners? How can they attract and support new Indigenous learners, or increase their share of recruitment amongst high school graduates? This question, too, is only partially answered by the work of this paper.

Skills training programs are left to fill the gap between post-secondary education and labour-market needs. These programs are even more vital for Indigenous learners in jurisdictions where secondary schools regularly fail to produce graduates who have further-education or workplace-ready essential skillsets.<sup>81</sup> According to the OECD, well-informed Indigenous-delivered and Indigenous-led employment training is a critical element for improving Indigenous labour-market outcomes.<sup>82</sup> This begs the question: what programming then currently exists, and to whom is it available/accessible? An additional question along the lines of which skills-development programs already in operation will work for Indigenous learners, and/or in what ways do these existing programs need to be modified to achieve at least equal learning outcomes? For some skills, or some locations, it might be more effective and expedient not to modify from existing offerings, but to develop completely new programs that speak directly to Indigenous worldviews, aspirations and identified learning objectives. At a minimum this means that the skills-development policy agenda needs to include both adequate supports for Indigenous-specific programs and also supports to enable equitable access to existing, general programs.

In this following section, we look at Indigenous skills-oriented training programs, funding provisions for skills-training, and then at current skills-training programs.

## Indigenous skills strategy documents

Also in the Indigenous skills space, we have four labour-market strategy documents relevant to understanding the landscape of closing the Indigenous skills gaps:

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<sup>81</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2016). [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programs](#).

<sup>82</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#).

- [First Nations Labour-Market Strategy](#)<sup>83</sup>
- [Inuit Labour-Market Strategy](#)<sup>84</sup>
- [Métis Nation Labour-Market Strategy](#)<sup>85</sup>
- [Urban/Non-affiliated Indigenous People Labour-Market Strategy](#)<sup>86</sup>

These four strategies are all overseen by distinctive key performance measures and trace their origins to the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training program. While each strategy's mandate is particular to the group, the document was drawn up to identify shared and common goals, which include:

- Improving skills levels and reducing skills gap between the designated group and non-Indigenous people; and
- Improving employment outcomes and reducing employment gap between designated groups and non-Indigenous people.

Engagement supported by ESDC points to several factors required for Indigenous skills-training programs to reach their full potential.<sup>87</sup> The first is an ability to support youth through earlier intervention and pre-employment training. The second is programming for clients to upgrade essential skills before they reach pre-employment training. The last is childcare. Other studies have added other characteristics that increase the likelihood of success, such as land-based training and wrap-around supports.<sup>88</sup>

## The skills and training funding landscape

Several federally funded programs have been offered by ESDC since 1991 to support employment skills-development amongst Indigenous peoples:

- Pathways (1991-1996);
- The Regional Bilateral Agreements (1996-1999);
- The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (1999-2004);

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<sup>83</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019a). [Terms and conditions for contributions: First Nations labour market strategy - Indigenous skills and employment training program](#).

<sup>84</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019b). [Terms and conditions for contributions: Inuit labour market strategy - Indigenous skills and employment training program](#).

<sup>85</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019c). [Terms and conditions for contributions: Métis nation labour market funding stream - Indigenous skills and employment training program](#).

<sup>86</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019d). [Terms and conditions for contributions: Urban and non-affiliated labour market stream - Indigenous skills and employment training program](#).

<sup>87</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2016). [Engagement on the future of Indigenous labour market programs](#).

<sup>88</sup> Wannell, T. and Currie, S. (2016). [Determinants of participation in Indigenous labour market programs: Final report](#).

- The Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy II (2004-2010);
- The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) (2010-2018); and
- The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program (2019-present).<sup>89</sup>

The most recent iteration of these programs, the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET), aims to improve access to skills-training and development programs as delivered by Indigenous partners across Canada. The ISET Program operates through funding “Indigenous service delivery organizations that design and deliver job training services to First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban/non-affiliated Indigenous people in their communities.”<sup>90</sup> Training partners range from colleges, such as the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (in partnership with the Saskatchewan Indian Training Assessment Group Inc.), to individual First Nations, Indigenous governments and comprehensive claim/modern treaty groups, regional Métis organizations and Inuit governments and organizations. While the diffused delivery of programs across many different regional partners can be a strength because it allows participants to access programs in their home communities, there are challenges. For example, of the almost 110 ISET recipients, only 10 percent are focused on the urban/non-affiliated community while 51.8 percent of the Indigenous population is urban (though many funding recipients have urban mandates and urban program offerings may therefore be more common than they appear at first glance).<sup>91</sup>

Complementing the work conducted by ISET and its predecessors, different iterations of ESDC’s Skills and Partnership Fund have been running since 2010 with funding currently guaranteed until 2021.<sup>92</sup> This demand-driven, partnership-based program supports government priorities through strategic partnerships, funding skills-development and training-to-employment projects, and programs leading to meaningful and stable employment for Indigenous Labour Force participants. This fund operates through the format of accepting calls for proposals through external partners, complementing the work of the former ASETS program and now the ISET program.<sup>93</sup>

## Program assessment—evaluation requires data

While this program has provided vital support for some jobs and skills initiatives, an independent review by the Office of the Auditor General of ESDC employment training programs designed for Indigenous peoples noted some areas of concern. This report identified that ESDC did not collect data or define

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019a). [Description of the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training \(ISET\) Program](#).

<sup>91</sup> OECD. (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#).

<sup>92</sup> Office of the Auditor General. (2018). [Report 6—Employment training for Indigenous people—Employment and Social Development Canada](#).

<sup>93</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019b). [Funding: Skills and partnership fund](#).

performance indicators adequately enough to allow for meaningful assessment of whether ASETS and the Skills and Partnership Fund were meeting their common overall objective of increasing the number of Indigenous people who had sustainable and meaningful employment. Further, there was no evidence to show that the most effective programs were more likely to be supported or renewed. Finally, it was found that ESDC was using 1996 data to determine funding strategies, inhibiting their likelihood of prioritizing funding for initiatives that address the most current needs.<sup>94</sup>

Given the mismatches outlined above, including the use of 20+ year old data by ESDC to guide funding decisions, as well as the overemphasis on rural development opportunities when the Indigenous population is primarily urban, reformation of the economic development fund management system appears necessary. In the 2019 National Indigenous Economic Development Board report, authors recommended that economic development programming and funding that has been historically administered by the national government would be better managed in the hands of Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs).<sup>95</sup> They recommend that government funding for economic development be transferred to AFIs for management and distribution as these organizations are better situated to understand the needs of Aboriginal business owners as well as the economic drivers and barriers experienced by Indigenous communities.

In this final sub-category of the skills-training section, we will give an overview of some of the current skills-training programs that are available, and some of the sources where data about these programs are collected and shared.

## Current skills training programs

A key project that brings together the work and strengths of different initiatives is the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP). The project began in 2011 and today constitutes an online inventory of individuals and organizations from across Canada working in literacy and essential skills (LES) for Indigenous peoples. Its current iteration—*Extending Promising Practice: Updating the FIMESIP Inventory (2018-2019)*—aims to keep the inventory of LES programs and best practices up to date. The FIMESIP inventory is complemented by a self-assessment tool that program delivery organizations can use to understand if their initiatives are adequately meeting the needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis participants. The inventory is largely populated by organizations voluntarily submitting their projects for inclusion in the inventory.

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<sup>94</sup> Office of the Auditor General. (2018). [Report 6—Employment training for Indigenous people—Employment and Social Development Canada](#), p. 26-29.

<sup>95</sup> National Economic Development Board. (2019). [Indigenous economic reconciliation: Recommendations on reconciliation and inclusive economic growth for Indigenous peoples and Canada](#), p. 12.

This database moves towards addressing the problem of the absence of a central hub that lists the projects funded by the ISET program. However, at time of writing, there were 87 programs listed in the FIMESIP inventory while 109 organizations were listed as service delivery organizations on the ISET program website.<sup>96</sup> This discrepancy suggests that some organizations delivering services are no longer actively doing so, and/or that not all these programs are registered on the FIMESIP inventory.

It was also found in conducting a review of the inventory that some of the programs listed were inactive. Further, in some cases, listed programs were actually not programs, but affiliated kinds of initiatives, such as publishing houses with Indigenous essential skills specialties, or products such as educational materials. After exclusion of programs that were registered as currently inactive, or were not upskilling programs, we identified 63 active programs in the FIMESIP inventory, which, again, we expect is only a fraction of existing programs.

In summary, there are problems with this dataset, ranging from uncertainty over active status to some lack of clarity over what counts as a skills-development or bridging program. Accessing consolidated information about Indigenous-specific provincial and territorial programming is difficult. Some federal labour market development agreements with provinces and territories are publicly available and several of them share provincial- or territorial-level data on Indigenous training initiatives, offering some consolidation of resources and opportunities at the sub-national level.

Some resources exist to help Indigenous students access programs tailored to meet their learning needs. For example, there is an Indigenous Programs and Services Directory available online.<sup>97</sup> Additionally, regionally focused databases such as the Transitions project exist, maintaining a resource on programs, services and bridging programs in Ontario with its origins in research conducted by the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019g). [Get the skills and training you need by finding your local Indigenous service delivery organization.](#)

<sup>97</sup> Universities Canada. (n.d.). [Indigenous programs and services directory.](#)

<sup>98</sup> Transitions. (n.d.). [Student information.](#)

## QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite what may seem like a bleak picture, there are bright spots on the horizon. Indigenous businesses are growing and—importantly—creating employment for others.<sup>99</sup> Further, self-employment and entrepreneurship is increasing. If there is an opportunity for the next generation, and for current adult workers, to leapfrog into the future of Canadian work, it may very well be through Indigenous-led business. Against the backdrop of the preceding overhead, as researchers and experts in Indigenous business, we have identified the following areas that require research in order for us to advance an agenda of sustainable growth and economic development. We hope that additional data collection and case study assessment in this area will help Indigenous peoples thrive in all aspects of the Canadian economy, from business ownership to skills-translation between digitizing occupations.

Against this backdrop, there are areas that require further research in order for Indigenous peoples to prosper in workplaces of the future. For example, further research into the trajectory of economic development, and also into gender, is needed. Research has shown social inequality to be increasingly polarized between those who are succeeding and those who are not, with conditions stagnating or deteriorating for those in lower deciles.<sup>100</sup> Notwithstanding the National Indigenous Economic Development Board's (NIEDB) 2019 finding that gender parity is greater amongst Indigenous workers, a 2014 study suggests that First Nations women fare worse than men due to discrimination based on the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender.<sup>101</sup>

We need further clarity on what labour-market data is most useful to Indigenous business operators, policymakers and workers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted in 2018 that communities lack enough Indigenous labour-market data to plan programs and services for Indigenous communities.<sup>102</sup> However, a 2015 study conducted for the National Association of Friendship Centres reached the opposite conclusion, noting that there is a wealth of Aboriginal labour-market information available in Canada, at national, regional and local levels.<sup>103</sup> Further research on these questions is warranted with regional and contextual specificity to provide a more robust evidence base for programs.

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<sup>99</sup> Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. (2016). [Promise and prosperity: The 2016 Aboriginal business survey](#).

<sup>100</sup> Gerber, L. M. (2014). [Education, employment and income polarization among Aboriginal men and women in Canada](#), p. 121-144.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2018). [Indigenous employment and skills strategies in Canada](#), p. 18.

<sup>103</sup> McKellips, F. (2015). [Aboriginal labour market information in Canada: An overview](#).

Below are a few more questions that might guide research in the area of Indigenous training and closing Indigenous skills gaps:

- **Given that half (49.3 percent<sup>104</sup>) of status First Nations live on reserve, business and economic development opportunities need to be tailored to address or integrate with existing infrastructure and skills situations. How can business growth and economic opportunities be brought to, and function, in remote communities?**
- **Will the Indigenous-led economy, and/or business sphere, look like the broader Canadian economy?**
- **How can skills-training be designed to best facilitate knowledge transfer for Indigenous peoples? Additionally, what aspects of skills-training practice can be generalized from the non-Indigenous skills ecosystem, and what aspects need to be tailored for the Indigenous skills ecosystem context? Further, what aspects must be customized for the different needs of specific Indigenous groups, e.g. for Inuit in Inuit Nunangat, for status First Nations living off-reserve, etc.?**
- **What measures can we take to ensure current policy and funding environments are adequately supporting Indigenous education, training and entrepreneurial development?**
- **What employee-side practices need to be in place to ensure that Indigenous workers experience a bias-free, culturally safe workplace, and what can non-Indigenous business operators learn about these practices from Indigenous-owned businesses?**

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<sup>104</sup> Statistics Canada. (2013). [Aboriginal peoples in Canada: First Nations: People, Métis and Inuit](#).



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