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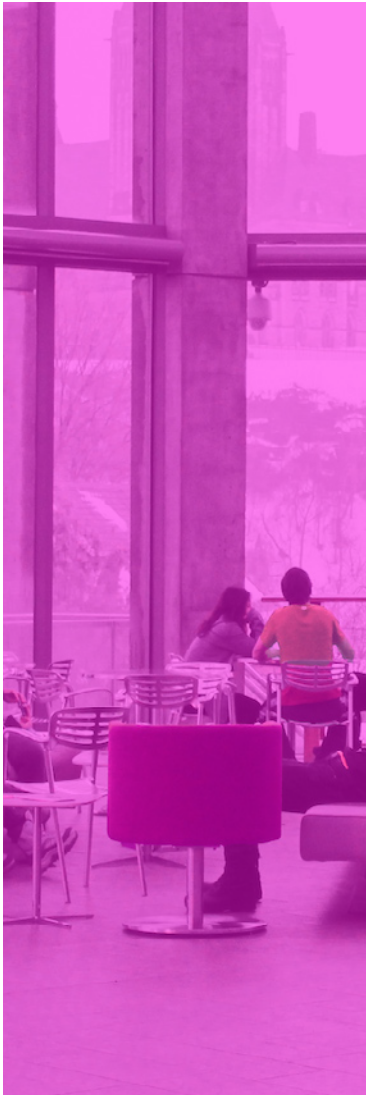
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# Recovery for All

Finding Equities in Education and Employment

Impact Paper | February 17, 2022



The Future Skills Centre – Centre des Compétences futures (FSC-CCF) 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.

The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada.

If you would like to learn more about this report and other skills research from FSC, visit us at [fsc-ccf.ca](http://fsc-ccf.ca) or contact [info@fsc-ccf.ca](mailto:info@fsc-ccf.ca).

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Regional Sounding Tours</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>A Sounding Board for Canadians</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Youth</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Indigenous Peoples</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>Women</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Newcomers</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
	<b>Appendix A</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Methodology</b>
	<b>Appendix B</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>

# Key Findings

- Education, skills, and employment stakeholders across the country expressed concern about the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on certain groups, particularly youth, Indigenous Peoples, women, and newcomers to Canada.
- Leaders are becoming more aware of existing and emerging inequalities. Inequalities have intensified due to the impact of the pandemic and the responses to it, particularly for members of many vulnerable groups.
- While recognizing unique regional needs, the following general guidelines can enhance equity and inclusion in education, skills development, and employment across Canada:
  - Youth aged 15–29 will need catch-up opportunities for personal and professional growth as well as additional supports for learning recovery, mental health, and graduation.
  - Indigenous communities require stronger social and physical infrastructure to recover equitably.
  - There is a need for greater gender analysis in designing employment programs and for flexibility in education and work to help women recover equitably.
  - Newcomers need employment and social supports to navigate through this stressful time.



## Background

# The COVID-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated inequalities within Canada. The changes and restrictions it has brought to our lives have affected people throughout Canada differently.

The pandemic has intensified existing challenges. For example, the nearly two-thirds of rural households with no access to high-speed Internet have had much greater difficulty accessing school, work, and services than those living in urban areas with near-universal Internet access.<sup>1</sup>

The pandemic has introduced new inequalities. For example, racialized women, who are more likely to work in jobs such as long-term care and food processing—and to use public transit to get there—have been put at greater risk of exposure to the virus than people who can shift to working at home.<sup>2</sup>

As the pandemic has progressed, inequalities have been a frequent topic of discussion in Canada and worldwide. Opinion pieces have argued that we are not “all in this together.”<sup>3</sup> In its 2020 report, the Canadian Human Rights Commission noted that the pandemic has both “amplified inequality” and “expanded the circle of vulnerability.”<sup>4</sup> The report discusses how pandemic restrictions have particularly affected those who were already in vulnerable

circumstances. For example, people with disabilities who experienced isolation and had trouble accessing services pre-pandemic saw these challenges increase. The OECD has published on the pandemic influences on youth employment, gender equity, and the effects of the digital divide.<sup>5</sup> The UN warns of a “generational catastrophe” if we do not pay attention to the welfare and education of children and youth, particularly girls and young women in middle- and lower income countries, in response to school shutdowns worldwide.<sup>6</sup>



1 Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, *High-Speed Access for All*.

2 Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, “*More Exposed & Less Protected*” in Canada.

3 Guarnieri Jaradat, “Stop Saying ‘We’re All in This Together.’”; Dunskey, “When It Comes to COVID-19, We’re Not All in It Together.”

4 Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Build Back Better*.

5 OECD, “Key Policy Responses From the OECD.”

6 UN News, “Classroom Crisis.”

What else has contributed to a greater recognition of inequities during this pandemic? For one, virtual learning and work brought about by the pandemic has given us a glimpse into the homes of our colleagues, friends, and students.<sup>7</sup> It has become commonplace to see children, partners, and pets in the background of virtual calls, which has allowed us to empathize more with their home experiences and take greater notice of possible inequities.

**If this was somebody in your (in-person) class, would you have had that opportunity to know his home life (in Saudi Arabia) – in that little nutshell that you saw, his room and the desert behind him – to kind of know and understand where he comes from?**

**VRST participant**, Alberta, February 2021

Alongside the pandemic, national conversations have grappled with racism and the injustices faced by racialized people in Canada and internationally. The police killing of George Floyd in the United States in May 2020 drew attention to inequities in the treatment of Black Canadians—including in education and work environments—and the importance of anti-racism work.<sup>8</sup> Anti-Asian hatred increased in 2020, with

a spike in the number of reported racist incidents in Canada.<sup>9</sup> An increased awareness of different groups' unequal vulnerabilities to climate change has also emerged. For example, the broader public in Canada learned in 2020 that Northern Canada is warming three times faster than the rest of the world, exposing the large Indigenous population in those regions to intensified impacts and disruptions to their everyday lives.<sup>10</sup>

For some, the pandemic has provided an interruption in our lives that has exposed systemic barriers and disrupted everyday activities enough to allow the time and space to re-imagine more inclusive education and employment systems going forward.

**With COVID, it does present to us an opportunity to get things right.... Now that we're all kind of behind the screen for a period of time, it lets us ... work collaboratively, to really help put together some solutions to move (employment equity, diversity, and inclusion) forward....**

**VRST participant**, New Brunswick, February 2021

7 For more on how the pandemic impacted working from home, see the Environics Institute/FSC/Diversity Institute research entitled *Lessons Learned: The Pandemic and Learning From Home in Canada*.

8 Hill and others, "How George Floyd Was Killed in Police Custody"; Abdillahi and Shaw, *Social Determinants and Inequities in Health for Black Canadians*.

9 Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Build Back Better*.

10 Muzumdar, "Climate Change and Health Equity."



Well over a year into the pandemic, the statistics support these understandings of different impacts for different people and groups. For example, we know that young people, people with lower incomes, those with less secure employment, recent immigrants, and racialized people have lost more hours of work due to the impact of COVID-19 than others in Canada.<sup>11</sup> People with higher incomes have been less likely to have their work hours disrupted—and some have reported working even more hours. This polarization could widen income gaps.<sup>12</sup>

## The Regional Sounding Tours

The Conference Board of Canada, in partnership with the Future Skills Centre, spoke with employers and education and skills stakeholders across Canada about their priorities, strategies, and regional perspectives. (See “A Sounding Board for Canadians” for more information about the Regional Sounding Tour.) Prior to COVID-19, we heard about the need to prioritize equity in education and workplaces. For participants of the Virtual Regional Sounding Tour (VRST), held in late 2020 and early 2021 after the emergence of COVID-19, equity remained a priority.

VRST participants identified inequities in education, social determinants of health, employment attainment, and experiences at work and pointed out that the pandemic intensified these inequities. They noted that the effects of these inequities have negative impacts on the wider economy and society.

11 Environics Institute for Survey Research, Future Skills Centre, and Diversity Institute, *Widening Inequality*.

12 Ibid.

## A Sounding Board for Canadians

The Regional Sounding Tour took place from October 2019 to March 2020 through in-person sessions scheduled for each province and territory. (The British Columbia and Quebec sessions were cancelled due to COVID-19.) A total of 553 representatives from post-secondary education, not-for-profit organizations, the public sector, and industry attended. We asked attendees about their regional skills priorities, what they saw as important skills for career success, how vulnerable populations could be better supported, and their vision for a better skills ecosystem.

The Virtual Regional Sounding Tour saw 344 stakeholders attend 12 virtual sessions held from December 2020 to March 2021. Discussion focused on how the pandemic has changed program priorities; current labour market challenges; and suggestions for effective, current, or proposed initiatives to address these challenges.



VRST participants were also mindful of the overlap of different identities, i.e., how social categorizations of race, class, and gender combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Statistics have begun to show the intersectionality—or compounded impacts—of the pandemic. For example, young visible minority women are less likely to be in employment, education, or training programs than those who do not belong to a visible minority.<sup>13</sup> Immigrant women also have a higher rate of not working or training than non-immigrant women. This gap has only widened during the pandemic, particularly for immigrant women who are also a visible minority.<sup>14</sup>

## Analysis

While regional variations and unique perspectives and examples exist, major themes emerged across the meetings. The key themes were:

- equities related to education and employment
- key essential skills
- innovations in post-secondary education
- the changing nature of work
- social and digital infrastructure

Participants spoke about the different impacts the pandemic has had on youth, Indigenous Peoples, women, and newcomers to Canada.

This report discusses stakeholders' perspectives and concerns on equity and looks at guidelines and recommendations for promoting a more inclusive and equitable skills ecosystem. See our other reports for discussions of these other themes.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Wall, *Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Conference Board of Canada, The, "Virtual Regional Sounding Tour."

<sup>16</sup> Wall, *Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

## Youth

### **Young people will need catch-up opportunities for personal and professional growth.**

VRST participants were acutely aware that pandemic employment losses have hit youth hard. With less seniority than more experienced workers, youth aged 15–29 have faced higher employment losses than the overall population during the pandemic. This is especially true for those working in the hardest-hit sectors, such as hospitality and recreation. Youth unemployment averaged 20 per cent from May 2020 to April 2021, reaching a peak of 29.1 per cent in May 2020. In May 2021, it had fallen to 13.7 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

VRST participants across Canada expressed worry about the personal and professional development opportunities in schools and workplaces that youth have missed out on during pandemic closures. According to one youth employment program in Ontario, employers—especially small and medium-sized companies that have had to lay off staff—are not hiring youth. If they are now relying on fewer people, those they do hire are older and more experienced. Similarly, an employment centre in Alberta reported an increase in teens looking for work.

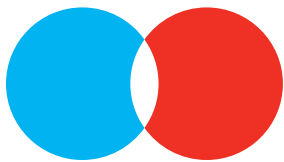


**Why would you hire a 16-year-old, when you could hire someone who got laid off from West Jet and [is] looking for a customer service job? I think there is going to be a huge gap, because there's going to be a group of youth that haven't had any work experience.**

**VRST participant**, Alberta, February 2021

Participants from the VRST, in particular, were concerned about *employment scarring*: youth struggling to find work are further disengaging from employment opportunities and are losing out on long-term career growth and earnings. The Canadian government and education leaders have recognized this concern, knowing that youth graduating during past recessions have faced a long-term disadvantage.<sup>17</sup>

International students could be more vulnerable to financial, social, and psychological stressors caused by the pandemic.<sup>18</sup> We know that these students already found it more difficult to find paid employment while studying compared to domestic students, and that this contributes to lower wages in full-time employment down the line.<sup>19</sup> The loss of part-time or summer jobs due to COVID-19 further restricted this valuable Canadian work experience.



VRST participants in Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Alberta empathized with young people entering the workforce during this difficult time. We also heard that students themselves appear anxious about the opportunities that will be available to them given the economic uncertainty and their loss of employment and volunteering experience.

**... [T]he second component that's worth mentioning is the increased anxiety that students are experiencing around the subject of transition to careers or finding meaningful experiences or meaningful work-integrated learning opportunities during COVID.**

**VRST participant**, Alberta, February 2021

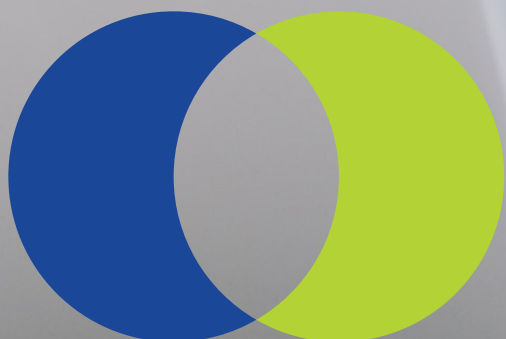
Discussions also highlighted the challenges of networking and career planning during a pandemic. While a new reliance on digital tools has provided young people with more opportunities to connect on a national and global level, young workers are still missing the social connections that come from in-person interactions. Participants from Prince Edward Island and Alberta, for example, expressed concern that it would be more difficult for new graduates to develop professional connections and find job opportunities while interacting virtually.

<sup>17</sup> Paas-Lang, "Youth Job Prospects Face 'Long-Term Scarring' From Pandemic."

<sup>18</sup> Firang, "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on International Students in Canada."

<sup>19</sup> Pereira, "The International Student Wage Gap."

**The pandemic has provided an interruption in our lives that has exposed systemic barriers enough to allow the time to re-imagine more inclusive education and employment systems going forward.**



**Particularly for young people entering into the workforce ... the things that are lost are informal interactions in the workforce. I have questions about that. How do you help integrate young staff ... what are the nuances that are missed when your staff meeting and your orientation is done via Teams?"**

**VRST participant**, Nova Scotia, January 2021

Another theme across many of the in-person and virtual sounding sessions was the critical importance of career awareness and work experiences for youth and the impact of the pandemic on these activities. For youth, these experiences are key to developing lifelong skills and exposure to industries of interest.<sup>20</sup> However, work-integrated learning opportunities have not looked the same during the pandemic. As the end of the school year approached in the spring of 2020, tight restrictions and uncertainty about the pandemic's progression cancelled or stalled many volunteering, co-op, and summer work opportunities. In Alberta, participants reported that many students saw co-op and summer job offers rescinded or delayed. In May 2020, summer student employment across Canada was 40 per cent lower than in the previous year.<sup>21</sup>

However, many employers, as well as career services, adapted quickly. Some companies increased the number of summer employees they took on, given that they did not require office space and that students could work from any geographic location. In British Columbia, for example, career services for at-risk youth saw new levels of participation from both school districts and employers. In Eastern Ontario,

program managers of a career mentorship program reported that engagement grew virtually because connecting online allowed for more flexibility. Despite these new opportunities to access employment and education experiences virtually, the pandemic has had far-reaching impacts on learning that concerned VRST participants. Overall, youth will need catch-up opportunities for personal and professional growth because they have:

- missed out on personal and professional development opportunities;
- suffered employment scarring;
- appeared anxious about future opportunities;
- experienced challenges in networking and career planning in a pandemic;
- been affected by fewer opportunities for work experience, volunteering, co-op, and summer work.



<sup>20</sup> Bieler, *Work-Integrated Learning in the Post Covid-19 World*.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada, "Labour Force Survey, April 2021."

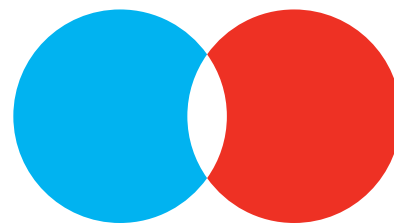
## Additional Supports for Learning Recovery, Mental Health, and Graduation

From K–12 through to post-secondary and continuing education, education and skills stakeholders from the Virtual Regional Sounding Tour voiced their concern about the learning and mental health of youth aged 15–29. They worried that high school graduates who have faced disrupted learning and a condensed curriculum would not be prepared for future school and work opportunities. A leader from an Alberta college described concerns from parents who are troubled about their children and their ability to learn online. This was echoed in Ontario, where it was noted that virtual learning does not work for all youth and that some are disengaging or postponing education opportunities. For example, some students with developmental disabilities were overwhelmed by the move to online environments.

In Quebec, education stakeholders lamented the loss of regular school experiences that are integral to youth’s development, such as extracurriculars like sports or drama clubs, meeting new people, and spending time with friends. They were worried about how this might affect their development as “engaged citizens.”

Prior to the pandemic, education and skills stakeholders we met with during the RST expressed concerns about high school graduation rates for vulnerable youth pre-pandemic. For example, participants in Nunavut brought attention to that territory’s low high school graduation rate: although the numbers are improving, only 47.8 per cent of Nunavut residents aged 25–64 had a Grade 12 diploma in 2016, compared to 86.3 per cent across Canada.<sup>22</sup> During the pandemic, on average, research has highlighted that high school attendance has declined across Canada,<sup>23</sup> as is likely the case in Nunavut. What will this mean for graduation rates in the coming years? In Nova Scotia and Northern Ontario, we heard that the pandemic has accelerated the erosion of good jobs available for individuals without a high school diploma. These individuals are finding it even harder to re-enter the labour market following layoffs.

It will be important to track the school graduation rates, post-secondary enrolment and completion statistics, and workforce participation of young people. We know youth have faced challenges in education and employment during the pandemic and so ensuring an equitable recovery is critical.



<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada, *Focus on Geography Series, 2016 Census: Nunavut*.

<sup>23</sup> Wall, *Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic*.



## Indigenous Peoples

### **Indigenous communities require stronger social and physical infrastructure.**

Indigenous Peoples in Canada entered the COVID-19 pandemic with pre-existing economic vulnerabilities such as a higher prevalence of poverty and food insecurity.<sup>24</sup> These vulnerabilities have been linked to stronger negative impacts—like declining mental health—reported by Indigenous respondents to a Statistics Canada crowdsourcing project conducted in 2020.<sup>25</sup>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) summarized and shared powerfully with Canadians the history and legacy of the residential school system imposed on Indigenous communities. The result has been “ongoing individual and collective harms” such as health disparities and a large number of Indigenous children in the child welfare system.<sup>26</sup> In 2015, the TRC called for an elimination of the gaps in education and employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.<sup>27</sup>

**(The pandemic) has really hit Indigenous people and Indigenous communities, and particularly Indigenous women and youth, hard.**

**VRST participant**, Northern Ontario, March 2021

In the first few months of the pandemic, employment showed a similar decline for Indigenous people living off-reserve and for non-Indigenous peoples.<sup>28</sup> However, the employment rate for Indigenous people began at a lower rate and was slower to recover in the summer of 2020.<sup>29</sup> Indigenous people were more likely to work in occupations most affected by pandemic closures, such as sales and service and trades, transport, and equipment operators.

Indigenous Peoples in Canada are a young population. In 2016, about 44 per cent of the Indigenous population was under 25, compared to 28 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.<sup>30</sup> High school graduation rates are lower for Indigenous than for non-Indigenous people. For example, in British Columbia in 2019, the graduation rate for Indigenous students was 69.6 per cent; for non-Indigenous students it was 86.5 per cent.<sup>31</sup> While many Indigenous people live in urban areas, others live in rural and remote areas that are isolated and have few education and employment opportunities. VRST participants raised the issue of digital access and connectivity as critical to accessing

24 Arriagada, Hahmann, and O'Donnell, *Indigenous People in Urban Areas*.

25 Arriagada, Hahmann, and O'Donnell, *Indigenous People and Mental Health*.

26 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*.

27 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*.

28 Bleakney, Masoud, and Robertson, *Labour Market Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous People*.

29 Ibid.

30 Indigenous Services Canada, *Annual Report to Parliament 2020*.

31 British Columbia Teachers' Federation, *Graduation Rates in BC Fact Sheet*.

virtual education and employment opportunities. For example, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) reported in 2020 that just 34.8 per cent of First Nations reserves had broadband Internet service availability, compared with 45.6 per cent of rural households and 98.6 per cent of urban households.<sup>32</sup>

We need to consider the wider socio-economic context and the wraparound supports that are required for education and employment success. One of the principles of reconciliation as defined by the TRC is to address the “ongoing legacies of colonialism” that have created negative impacts on aspects of everyday life such as language, education, economic opportunities, and prosperity.<sup>33</sup> Concerns such as housing, access to child care, and mental health care are all key. See our report on social and digital infrastructure for more detail on this topic (forthcoming).

For Indigenous communities facing increased socio-economic vulnerabilities due to the legacies of colonialism and residential schools, continuous work toward the TRC’s Calls to Action is important to ensure an equitable recovery.

## Women

### **Gendered analysis in program design and flexibility in education and work could remove barriers.**

Education and skills leaders across Canada also recognized the barriers that women have faced before and during the pandemic. For example, during the Regional Sounding Tour, participants raised the issue of barriers to entry in the trades that result in the under-representation of women in the trades.

**Some things that we’ve heard as far as barriers for women participation in the trades [are] things like child care ... They also talk about the difficulties with the trades in shiftwork and travelling or spending extended periods of time in northern camps when they may have responsibility at home.**

**RST participant, Saskatoon, February 2020**

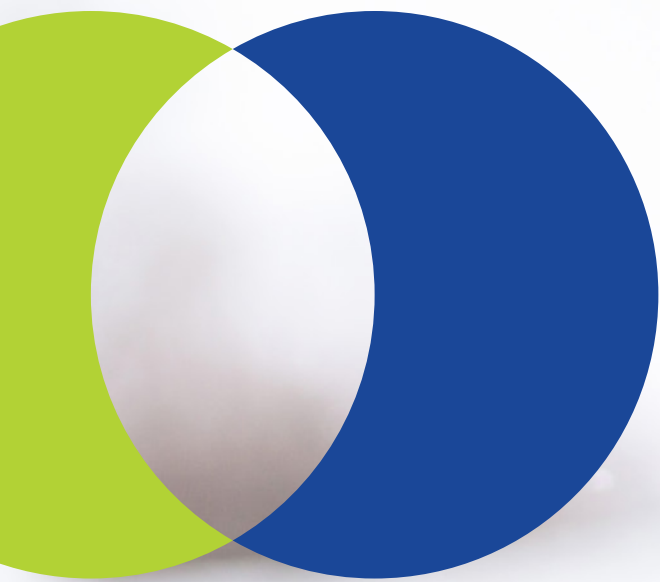


32 CRTC, *Communications Monitoring Report*.

33 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *What We Have Learned*.



**A GBA+ lens assesses how sex and socio-cultural gender—as well as other factors such as race—affect how diverse individuals might be impacted by government policies and initiatives.**



Women dominate fields such as service and retail, which have seen significant job losses since the pandemic.<sup>34</sup> They are also highly represented in frontline fields like early childhood education, nursing, and home support that put them at greater risk of exposure to the virus.<sup>35</sup> VRST participants recognized that because of COVID-19 women are taking on additional responsibilities at home, such as child care and supporting their children with virtual learning, and that this has an impact on their work lives.

VRST participants were concerned about what some were calling a “she-cession” as a result of the pandemic, with the economic and employment impacts falling more heavily on women. These observations from across the country have been backed up by employment statistics. In past recessions, the drop in workforce participation was higher for men than for women.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the pandemic introduced more job losses for women in every month except August 2020. Women accounted for 62.5 per cent of job losses in March 2020, when female-dominated areas like service and retail were shut down. And from October 2020 to February 2021, women accounted for 56.4 per cent of job losses.<sup>37</sup> As of March 2021, 10 times more women than men had dropped out of the workforce entirely<sup>38</sup> and rates of family/intimate partner violence had surged.<sup>39</sup>

In Northern Ontario, it was noted that Indigenous women in particular have been hit hard. Statistics Canada surveys reveal that Indigenous women reported greater negative impacts during the early months of the pandemic.<sup>40</sup> VRST participants acknowledged the experiences of economically vulnerable women and the heightened impacts they might encounter in precarious or part-time work, as young parents, or as newcomers to Canada.

One British Columbia group described how the pandemic helped them become aware of the barriers in their programming “that make access to learning and skills training more difficult for women, or mothers ... or people that have other family commitments.” They discussed a renewed emphasis on a Gender-Based Analysis+ (GBA+) lens in their design of employment programs and services. A GBA+ lens assesses how biological sex and socio-cultural gender—as well as other intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age, and mental or physical ability—affect how diverse individuals might experience or be impacted by government policies and initiatives.<sup>41</sup>

34 Grekou and Lu, *Gender Differences in Employment One Year Into the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

35 Canadian Women's Foundation and others, *Resetting Normal*.

36 Labour Market Information Council, *Women in Recessions*.

37 Grekou and Lu, *Gender Differences in Employment One Year Into the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

38 Desjardins and Freestone, “Covid Further Clouded the Outlook.”

39 Canadian Women's Foundation. “Why Is the COVID-19 Pandemic Linked to More Gender-Based Violence?”

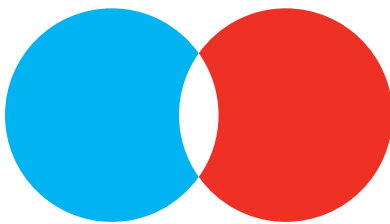
40 Bleakney, Masoud, and Robertson, *Labour Market Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous People*.

41 Women and Gender Equality Canada, *What Is Gender-Based Analysis Plus*.

**How are we going to recover from this by thinking about an equitable way to bring women back into the workforce, and to acknowledge the load that they carry in the work that they do?**

**VRST participant**, New Brunswick,  
February 2021

Discussions focused on how broader use of a GBA+ lens will allow for decisions that recognize intersectionality and create solutions that work for everyone. Participants told us that women have struggled during the pandemic to deal with increased child care duties and that flexibility in work and education solutions (such as flexible workdays or asynchronous learning) has helped. Many Canadian families struggle to find local, affordable child care that accommodates their schedules.<sup>42</sup> As the government introduces \$10/day child care, it will be interesting to see how it affects families in the wake of the pandemic. Overall, there was unanimous agreement that greater awareness and attention must be paid to women's recovery post-pandemic.



## Newcomers

**Employment and social supports will help newcomers navigate this stressful time.**

The ongoing challenges faced by newcomers have been widely documented in research. For example, skilled newcomers to Canada often work in jobs for which they are overqualified. Lower employment rates for immigrants with higher education levels can be credited to a lack of professional connections in Canada, a lack of recognition of international qualifications and experience, and (often) racism during the hiring process.<sup>43</sup>

In both the Regional Sounding Tour and the Virtual Regional Sounding Tour, participants discussed the importance of recruiting, supporting, and retaining newcomers in different regions of Canada. In Northern Ontario, participants saw the international students studying in the region as an opportunity to recruit new residents by encouraging them to stay after their studies, contributing their education to the local communities. Prior to the pandemic, we heard about challenges new immigrants faced, such as difficulty connecting with employers, lack of recognition of international qualifications, and language barriers. Participants highlighted the importance of wraparound supports like

<sup>42</sup> Weikle, "Difficulty Finding Child Care Is Affecting Some Canadians' Ability to Work."

<sup>43</sup> Feenan and Madhany, *Immigration and the Success of Canada's Post-Pandemic Economy*.

transportation, child care, and connection to employment services. In Manitoba, for instance, we heard about the importance of providing career guidance to newcomers to help them successfully find and secure employment.

The pandemic has caused disruptions for newcomers in finding, securing, and maintaining employment in Canada. For example, in Newfoundland and Labrador many refugees find work in the province's important tourism and hospitality industries. Their employment was disrupted when pandemic closures decimated these industries. In New Brunswick, we heard about internationally trained professionals seeing their credential recognition delayed by slowdowns in governments and licensing bodies. And due to financial hardships, some employers became unable to take on these individuals to provide their required Canadian work experience. Newcomers set to open a new business through the provincial nominee system were unable to access the same government supports, which resulted in a stressful time for these individuals. Retraining efforts to support newcomers and others in hard-hit industries such as tourism will be important if health restrictions continue and businesses close for good.

In Southern Ontario, we learned that some newcomers faced challenges using services in online formats because they lacked access to technology and the ability to interact effectively using the technology. The switch to online services alleviated some other challenges such as access to child care and transportation. One employment service in Ontario found that the transition online helped participation—at least at first—but that it was difficult to sustain engagement and attention over many months. Having pre-recorded sessions available online also proved helpful for on-demand access by language learners, as they could slow down or repeat the content to enhance their understanding. In short, newcomers, like women and youth, have their own sets of challenges that must be addressed when considering equitable recovery moving forward.



## Conclusion

The pandemic has disrupted everything. Education and skills leaders across Canada recognize that equity issues existed long before the pandemic, but they have worsened. The skills and education ecosystem needs to learn and adapt to better serve diverse groups now and in the future. While education and skills stakeholders did not have all the solutions, the awareness of inequities and a concern for an equitable recovery has formed a foundation on which to build.

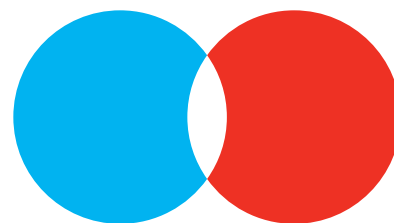
We know that regional and demographic differences necessitate different solutions. But in general, education, training, and employment leaders recognize that programs to increase supports and representation of certain groups must involve leadership from the groups themselves to be successful. They also agree on the importance of funding to support those types of initiatives. For example, one participant spoke to the success of an employment program in Nova Scotia that supports Black individuals and people of African descent in obtaining employment. It is led in a culturally responsive way by Black leaders in that province.

## What's Next?

What are the Future Skills Centre (FSC) and its partners doing in response to the issues raised throughout the VRST? Mid-way through 2020 the Centre issued a call for proposals, and in 2021, announced [partnerships](#) with more than 75 new organizations working on workforce development, skills, and employer partnerships. Equity is a key focus of this work, with close attention paid to ensuring equal access to opportunities for training and advancement, especially given the inequities exacerbated by the pandemic.

FSC is committed to raising equity issues as we learn from this diverse portfolio of investments in skills development. While our focus is post-secondary training systems, we are committed to working with our partners and policy-makers to understand the impacts of these pilots; determine the equity-related implications for policy, programs, and practice; and share this knowledge with our partners and stakeholders.

Read our other reports in this series on the major themes from the Virtual Regional Sounding Tour. And stay tuned for future research from the Conference Board and Future Skills Centre on these topics.



# Appendix A

# Methodology

In collaboration with the Future Skills Centre (FSC), The Conference Board of Canada spoke with Canadians who are actively engaged in the country's skills and training community as well as individuals interested in learning more about skills development and the future of work.

The Regional Sounding Tour (RST) brought together Canadians who are actively involved or interested in education, employment, skills, and training. The RST sessions were held in person between October 2019 and October 2020.

The Virtual Regional Sounding Tour (VRST) focused on the impact of COVID-19 on Canada and how the Future Skills Centre can help on the road to recovery. The VRST sessions were held virtually between December 2020 and March 2021.

## Who Attended?

Most participants who attended the RST and the VRST were employers and professionals working in government, post-secondary institutions, professional associations, and non-profit organizations across Canada. We spoke to 1,376 participants in 26 Sounding Tour “stops.”

## Data Analysis

In total, we analyzed 92 transcripts (52 from the RST, 40 from the VRST) to help us understand communities' needs and think of a regional approach to skills training that aligns with the future of work.

Data were organized by region and Sounding Tour format (in person or virtually). Team members created a codebook to code transcripts consistently. We also looked at popular themes in grey literature (news clippings, journal articles) to help us identify the latest research in skills gaps, upskilling, equity, and shifts due to the pandemic. We coded only conversations from participants, removing all staff commentary and remarks. NVivo 12 software was used to code all interviews.

To learn more about whom we spoke to and what we asked, please visit the [Sounding Tours web page](#).



# Appendix B

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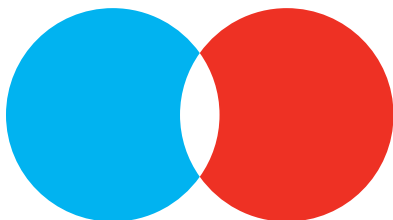
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## Recovery for All: Finding Equities in Education and Employment

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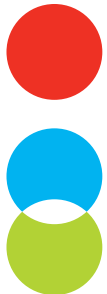
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