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From Low-Mobility to Rapid-Growth Jobs

How Governments and Agencies Can Build
the Bridge to Clean Economy Careers

Issue Briefing | July 28, 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 Toronto Metropolitan 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 or contact info@fsc-ccf.ca.

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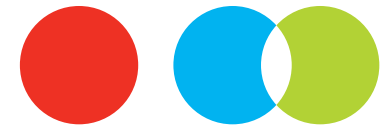
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Key Findings

- High-risk, low-mobility (HRLM) occupations represent roughly 3.5 million Canadian workers.
- Numerous transition paths exist between HRLM occupations and rapid-growth jobs, such as those in the clean economy.
- Looking at the retraining required to move from HRLM jobs to green jobs, the highest return on investment is in the paths enabled by six months to one year of retraining.
- One year of retraining can create at least one transition path for 90 out of the 92 HRLM occupations we studied.
- Although most workers would consider moving to a job in the clean economy, factors holding them back include worries about compensation, their sense of identity in their current role, and job security in an unfamiliar role.
- Taking advantage of this transition opportunity will require careful thinking (and significant investment) by government and funding agencies, skills development agencies, and economic development agencies.

Technological innovations like artificial intelligence and automation threaten long-term, well-paying jobs in many sectors. Such high-risk, low-mobility (HRLM) occupations represent roughly 3.5 million Canadian workers, so this problem is not trivial. Fortunately, our research has found that numerous transition paths exist between HRLM occupations and rapid-growth jobs, such as those in the clean economy—jobs closely aligned with Canada’s future direction. Defining those paths, linking them to economic development plans and workforce strategies, and supporting workers as they set out to follow them will be important tasks for provincial governments and their economic and skills development agencies.



Transition Paths Exist—and Most Don't Require Extended Retraining

The clean economy is one of multiple rapidly growing sectors in Canada. We focused on it in part because of the lower risk profile it enjoys as a participant in the global effort to build low-carbon economies.

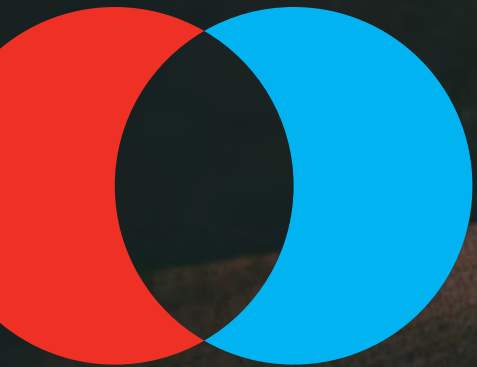
In our investigation, we began by identifying industries that could be classified as green due to their central role in the transition. Then, we identified green occupations within those industries. To compare green and HRLM occupations, we developed a comprehensive inventory of skills, knowledge requirements, and wages. We estimated the years of training and skills acquisition required to move from the HRLM jobs to the green jobs.

Next, we mapped out all the possible career transitions from old economy roles to clean economy roles. We then estimated the number of both **feasible** and **desirable** transition opportunities, or pathways, by identifying occupation pairings that had:

- many of the same required skills
- a manageable increase in skill level
- a potential decrease in wages of no more than 10 per cent

We found that with only one year of worker retraining, almost 58 per cent of potential transition paths are both feasible and desirable (i.e., meeting all three above criteria). This percentage is more than double the number of pathways available with six months of retraining. However, making possible the next 42 per cent of paths is harder. Assuming three years of retraining, the proportion of feasible and desirable paths is 79.5 per cent—a significant increase, to be sure, but one that also points to the declining marginal utility of additional training years. While more difficult transition opportunities shouldn't be ignored, we find the highest return on investment in the paths enabled by six months to one year of retraining. Indeed, one year of retraining can create at least one transition path for 90 out of the 92 HRLM occupations we studied.

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at least one transition path for
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we studied.**



Workers Will Need Support and Guidance to Make the Jump

While identifying the existence of a range of feasible and desirable transition paths is helpful, getting a large number of workers to take those paths is more challenging.

We conducted a survey of 546 workers from across Canada and across industries, supplemented with 27 in-depth expert interviews. The results showed us that although most workers would consider moving to a job in the clean economy, several factors were likely to hold them back—such as worries about compensation, the strength of their sense of identity in their current role, and the amount of job security that an unfamiliar role might offer them. Many workers were also concerned about the transition process itself. Respondents mentioned their uncertainty about the accessibility of retraining, including whether a new employer would demand that they be trained before hiring them or offer training after hiring them.

They also worried about the time investment of re-skilling (and their lost wages during that time), as well as the lack of information and guidance about the labour market and the opportunities that might be a good fit for them.



Although most workers would consider moving to a job in the clean economy, many were concerned about the transition process itself.

Implications and Opportunities to Consider

The evidence shows that transition paths to the clean economy exist for almost all HRLM occupations and may even be feasible with just one year of retraining.

Taking advantage of this opportunity will require careful thinking (and significant investment) by all parties involved—not least because it requires helping both agencies and workers do some forward planning. We offer some questions for consideration.

For Governments and Funding Agencies

- What kind of financial and organizational support might increase workers' ability and inclination to switch from HRLM jobs to clean careers?
- Should support be provided only to workers themselves (in a demand-pull scenario for incentivizing new educational programs)? Or, should support also be provided to educational institutions and, potentially, employers (in a supply-push scenario that creates programs that funders are sure will be needed at scale)?
- In terms of mitigating risk for workers, how much mitigation would be too much, potentially depriving them of having skin in the game and inadvertently nudging workers toward lower-value (but perhaps easier) paths?
- How might the harder half of transition paths be supported so that workers have the opportunity and ability to take on the multiple years of retraining these roles may require?

- Conversely, might these roles be better filled over a longer period by new entrants rather than by career transitioners? What criteria should be used to make this decision?

For Skills Development Agencies

- If the shortest training times provide the biggest return on investment, what kinds of programs can be developed both in-house and by non-profits or private sector partners to take advantage of this finding?
- How can the disruption and risk that workers face be minimized during and immediately after retraining?
- For transition paths that require extended retraining, what program models might decrease the opportunity costs that workers face and increase their likelihood of enrolling?
- For clean economy occupations in the trades, how might apprenticeship requirements, trade equivalency, and certification paths be changed to both reflect the needs of that sector and make worker transitions easier and more attractive—while maintaining high standards?

For Economic Development Agencies

- How might the findings in this study change economic models that rely on assumptions about labour mobility between sectors and about total labour availability for new, fast-growing sectors?
- If the ability of HRLM workers to transition relatively swiftly to rapid-growth jobs in the clean economy increases (due to the creation of accessible and affordable retraining programs, for example), how will that increase impact an agency's propensity to invest in and encourage the growth of such industries in its jurisdictions?
- How might entrepreneurship and scale-up programs be re-prioritized to help businesses attract (and potentially train) the talent they need, sourced from their own or nearby regions?
- How could existing hiring incentives and employment programs—often focused on new graduates—be adapted to the needs of companies acquiring experienced workers from HRLM industries?
- To what extent are clean economy employers even aware of the available pool of potential talent and labour that they can tap into within a relatively short time?
- How might agencies communicate this opportunity?

While newer sectors continue their rapid advance, generating immense economic potential for Canadians, the good news is that the skills gap is not too wide to bridge. Canadian workers can cross that gap—so long as they get the right training and the right support for that training.

This briefing is an extract.

To **read the full report** and explore our methodology and detailed findings, visit [Green Occupation Pathways: From Vulnerable Jobs to Rapid-Growth Careers](#).

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