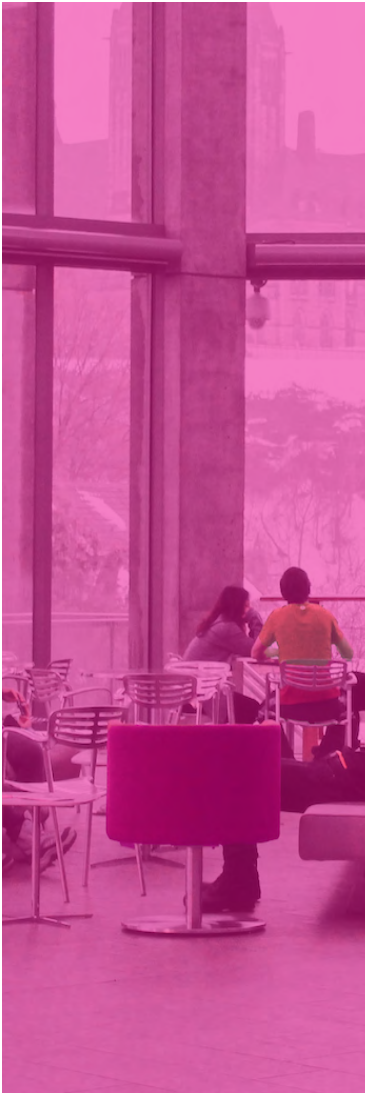


Learning From One Another

Labour Markets in Nunavut





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.

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Highlights

- The COVID-19 pandemic hurt Nunavut's economic growth by reducing mining output as well as the output of tourism-related industries. As key industries in the territory recover from the pandemic, the economy is expected to grow over the next 20 years.
- The central issue impacting Nunavut's overall labour market is unemployment. There are disparities in labour market outcomes between Inuit and non-Indigenous populations that contribute to fewer Inuit in the labour market.
- The public sector is Nunavut's largest employer, with a large proportion of workers employed in Iqaluit. However, Inuit people are under-represented in the federal and territorial public service workforce. Inuit represent 84 per cent of the population in the territory but make up only 57 per cent of employees in the federal and territorial government in the territory.
- As efforts are under way to increase Inuit representation in the public service, it will be important to increase the number of Inuit filling jobs requiring university education.
- Skills gaps contribute to disparities in labour market outcomes between Inuit and non-Indigenous peoples. Inuit in the territory are less likely to have a post-secondary education compared with non-Indigenous populations, the largest differences being at the university level.
- A lack of employment opportunities within communities, the need for accessible education and skills training, supports for health and well-being, and housing are critical barriers to employment for the Inuit population.
- To fill labour market gaps, Nunavut relies on out-of-territory workers. This reliance on out-of-territory workers has grown over the last decade, meaning that less income earned in the territory flows through Nunavut's economy.
- There is an opportunity to increase employment among Nunavut residents in jobs in the construction and mining industries, which are primarily staffed by out-of-territory workers.
- To retain skilled labour in the territory and attract skills that can't be sourced locally, policies and programs need to support home ownership.
- For Inuit, directing resources toward supporting entrepreneurs operating in a Northern and remote context can support participation in the economy outside of dominant sectors.

Challenges for a growing economy

The economy in Nunavut is expected to grow in the coming years, along with the demand for employment in the territory. However, skills mismatches and other challenges continue to limit the capacity of the resident labour force to satisfy labour market demands.

This primer provides an overview of Nunavut's labour market conditions, including the labour recruitment and retention challenges of key employers. It is part of a multi-year collaborative research project that explores labour markets in Nunavut, Northern Ontario, and Yukon. (See "Learning From One Another Project.")

Our labour market analysis for Nunavut highlights which economic sectors are growing or changing and provides insight into the availability and readiness of the resident workforce to take on employment opportunities in growth sectors. This preliminary labour market analysis also helps inform what supports, education, and training are necessary to meet each sector's needs and maximize employment within the territory.

For an in-depth look at the data, including additional charts and tables, please [download the associated data file](#).



Learning from one another project

Learning From One Another: A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Needs and Corresponding Skills in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut is a multi-year collaborative research project led by The Conference Board of Canada. This project, undertaken for Canada's Future Skills Centre, drew in various Indigenous, government, and post-secondary partners from Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut. It features a labour market analysis and economic forecast for each region from 2024 to 2045, as well as descriptions of the in-demand skills and key challenges to workforce and skills development in these Northern regions. This is complemented by an analysis and showcase of training and skills development initiatives across the regions.

See our other [Learning From One Another](#) publications for our in-depth analysis.

Nunavut's population and labour force

Nunavut has fewer people than any other Canadian province or territory, accounting for less than 1 per cent of Canada's total population in 2021.¹ The territory is broken down into three regions—the Kivalliq region, the Baffin (Qikiqtaaluk) region, and the Kitikmeot region—which include 25 communities.² The Baffin region has the largest population. In 2021, 53 per cent of the population of Nunavut lived in the Baffin region, followed by 30 per cent in the Kivalliq region, and 18 per cent in the Kitikmeot region.³

Nunavut's capital, Iqaluit, in the Baffin region is by far the largest community and a primary centre for economic activity. In 2021, 21 per cent of the population in Nunavut lived in Iqaluit. Following Iqaluit, Rankin Inlet, Arviat, Baker Lake, and Igloolik were the largest communities. Many of the remaining communities are remote with small populations. In 2021, 16 communities in the territory had fewer than 1,500 residents and five of those communities had fewer than 500 people.⁴

A growing population

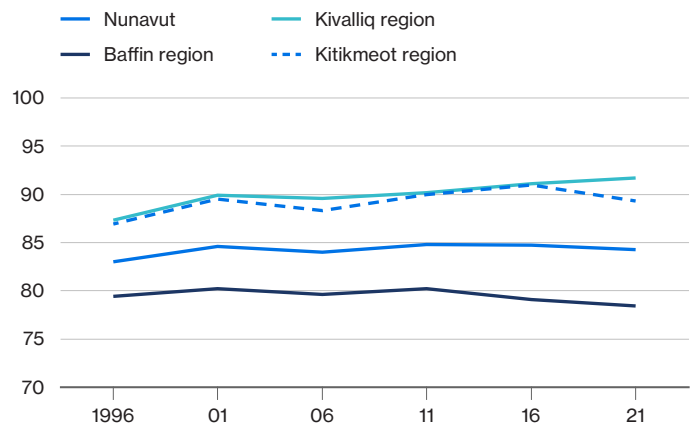
Nunavut was one of the fastest-growing provinces and territories in Canada between 2011 and 2021.⁵ Over that 10-year period, the population in Nunavut grew by 15.5 per cent, from 31,906 in 2011 to 36,858 in 2021.⁶ And it is expected that the population will continue to grow. Conference Board projections show that Nunavut's population will grow at an average annual rate of 1.3 per cent between 2022 and 2045.⁷ For comparison, Canada's average population growth is expected to be 0.8 per cent annually between 2021 and 2045.⁸ Higher birth rates may contribute to this growth. In 2020, there were 2.7 births per woman in Nunavut, compared with 1.4 for the rest of Canada.⁹

The population in the territory is predominately Inuit

In 2021, 84 per cent of Nunavut's population identified as Inuit.¹⁰ Between 1996 and 2021, the representation of Inuit people in Nunavut remained steady. But it differs by region. (See Chart 1.) In 2021, the population in the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions had the highest proportion of Inuit at 92 and 89 per cent of the population, respectively. During the same period, the Baffin region had the lowest proportion of Inuit people at 78 per cent. This is mainly due to the higher proportion of non-Indigenous residents living in Iqaluit. In 2021, only 54 per cent of the population in Iqaluit identified as Inuit.¹¹

Chart 1

The population in Nunavut predominately identifies as Inuit but there are differences across the regions (per cent of the population that identifies as Inuit)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

1 Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0001-01.

2 Kivalliq became the official name for similar boundaries for the region of Keewatin in 1999. Similarly, some organizations refer to the Baffin region as the Qikiqtaaluk region. In this primer we will use the Kivalliq and Baffin terminology.

3 Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

4 Statistics Canada, Table 98-10-0001-01.

5 Statistics Canada, Canada at a Glance, 2022.

6 Ibid.

7 The Conference Board of Canada, "Rising Gold Production Spurs Growth."

8 The Conference Board of Canada, "Aging Population Requires Immigration Backfill."

9 The Conference Board of Canada, "Rising Gold Production Spurs Growth."

10 Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

11 Ibid.

Nunavut has a young population

Nunavut's population is much younger than in the rest of Canada. In Nunavut in 2022, children aged 0 to 14 made up 31 per cent of the population, while only 5 per cent of the population was aged 65 and older.¹² As a result, Nunavut had the highest demographic dependency ratio in Canada.¹³ In 2022, the median age in Nunavut was 26.9, the lowest in Canada, while Canada's median age was 41.0 years.¹⁴ Overall, the Inuit population is much younger than the non-Indigenous population. In 2021, children and youth under 25 years of age made up 54 per cent of all Inuit in Nunavut while children and youth made up 22 per cent of the non-Indigenous population living in the territory.¹⁵

The economic outlook is robust but declines are expected in the mining sector

Growth in the economy in Nunavut has been closely tied to mining and resource development. In 2022, mining accounted for the greatest slice of real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), followed by public administration and defence, and non-commercial services. (See Chart 2.) However, the COVID-19 pandemic hurt the territory's economic growth by reducing mining output as well as the output of tourism-related industries.¹⁶ After a strong performance in the years leading up to the pandemic, real GDP growth in Nunavut fell in 2020 by 2.6 per cent.¹⁷

Chart 2

Mining, public administration, and non-commercial services were the biggest contributors to real GDP in Nunavut in 2022 (2012 \$ millions)



Note: Commercial services include the following industries: professional, scientific, and technical services; business, building, and other support services; information and cultural services; arts, entertainment, and recreation; accommodation and food services; other services. Non-commercial services include the following industries: healthcare, social assistance, and hospitals; educational services; other primary sector includes agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

¹² Statistics Canada, Annual Demographic Estimates, 2022.

¹³ The demographic dependency ratio represents the number of children age 0 to 14 years and adults age 65 years and older per 100 working-age people 15 to 64 years of age.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada, Annual Demographic Estimates.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada, Indigenous Population Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

¹⁶ The Conference Board of Canada, "Rising Gold Production Spurs Growth."

¹⁷ Ibid.

However, Nunavut's economic outlook is relatively robust. The Conference Board of Canada projects that Nunavut's real GDP will grow by 8 per cent over the forecast period of 2024–2045; year-over-year, the economy is expected to average 1 per cent growth.¹⁸ The two sectors expected to see the most real GDP growth by 2045 are public administration and defence with 40 per cent projected growth, and non-commercial services with an estimated 50 per cent growth. These will contribute to the territory's expected real GDP growth of 8 per cent and will help to offset the large decrease in the mining sector, which is expected to take place in the mid-2030s. Smaller sectors projected to grow by large amounts are utilities and commercial services.

Conference Board of Canada projections also show that total employment in the territory is forecast to increase by 18 per cent between 2024 and 2045, with stable yearly growth. The sectors driving most of this growth are public administration and defence, which are projected to increase by 30 per cent, non-commercial services at 18 per cent, and wholesale and retail trade at 24 per cent.

The public sector is a major employer in the territory

In 2021, five industries accounted for more than 70 per cent of employment in Nunavut—public administration; retail trade; education; health care and social assistance; and construction. Compared with Canada as a whole, the territory has a larger proportion of employment in public administration and education. Likewise, the territory has a smaller proportion of employment in manufacturing and professional, scientific, and technical services. (See Chart 3).

The public sector is Nunavut's largest employer. In 2021, 32 per cent of Nunavut's employment was in public administration, 12 per cent in educational services, and 10 per cent in healthcare and social assistance. (See Chart 3.) And employment in the territory's government and education sector has increased, from 49 per cent of total employment in the territory in 2013 to 57 per cent in 2020.¹⁹ However, the public administration industry is largely concentrated in Iqaluit. In 2021 almost 45 per cent of workers in Iqaluit were employed in public administration compared with only 32 per cent throughout the territory. (See Chart 3.)

While mining and quarrying and construction account for large proportions of Nunavut's real GDP, these sectors currently employ a small proportion of Nunavut residents. Instead, these sectors are reliant on out-of-territory workers.

Despite the dominance of a few sectors on Nunavut's real GDP, the territory is home to a mixed economy, especially for its majority Inuit population. Land-based activities are critical to Inuit identities, culture, and food security, and help define Nunavut's local economies. Many Inuit families support themselves by hunting, fishing, and harvesting country foods, and by producing craft goods and artwork for personal use or to supplement wage income.²⁰ In 2017, 93 per cent of working-age Inuit in Nunavut who participated in land-based activities reported doing so for personal use or their family's use while about one in four people reported engaging in land-based activities for money.²¹ The mixture of wage-based and land-based economic activities therefore defines the economic realities of most Inuit households in Nunavut.

18 The Learning from One Another project includes an economic forecast with occupational demand scenarios for Nunavut. The forecast was completed in September 2023. The findings of the forecast can be found [here](#).

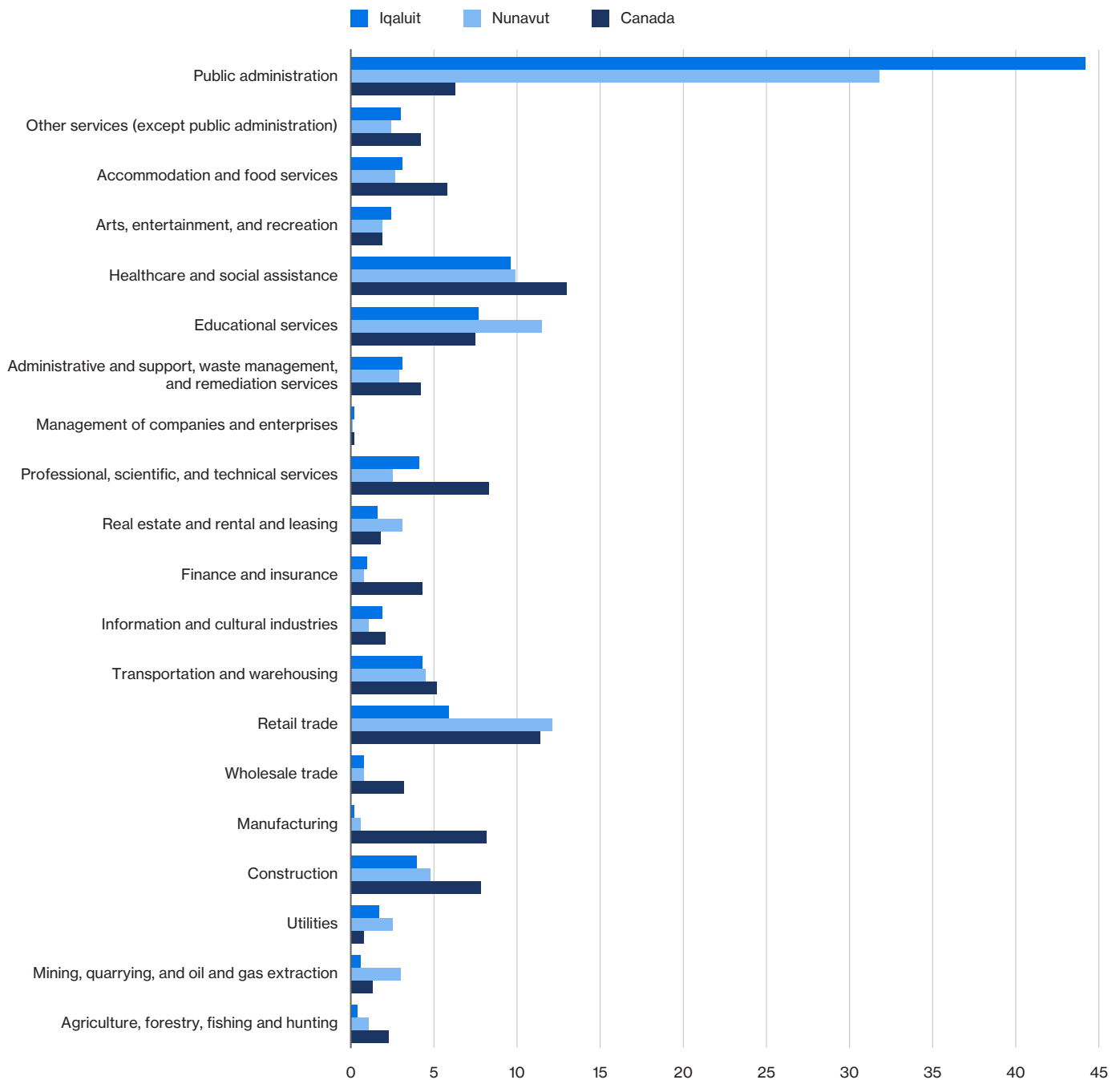
19 See Chart 13 in the [data download](#).

20 Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation in the Wage and Land-Based Economies in Inuit Nunangat*.

21 Ibid.

Chart 3

Public administration was the largest employer in Nunavut in 2021
(employed population age 15 and over, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

Challenges in the labour market

As the Nunavut economy continues to grow, several challenges will need to be addressed to help residents take on emerging economic and employment opportunities. These include engaging more people from Nunavut in the labour force, especially Inuit and women; improving access to education and attainment of skills by residents in the territory; and retaining skilled labour within the territory.

Unemployment rates are high, rural employment opportunities are limited

The central issue impacting Nunavut's overall labour market is high unemployment. Over the last 10 years, the unemployment rate has been significantly higher in Nunavut compared with the national average. (See Chart 4.) In 2023, the unemployment rate in Nunavut was 13.2 per cent compared with 5.4 per cent in Canada.²² In the long run we expect unemployment in Nunavut to remain high—around 12 per cent each year—up to 2045.²³

Participation in the labour force in Nunavut is also below the national average. In 2023, the participation rate in Nunavut was 62.1 per cent while the national average was 65.6 per cent.²⁴

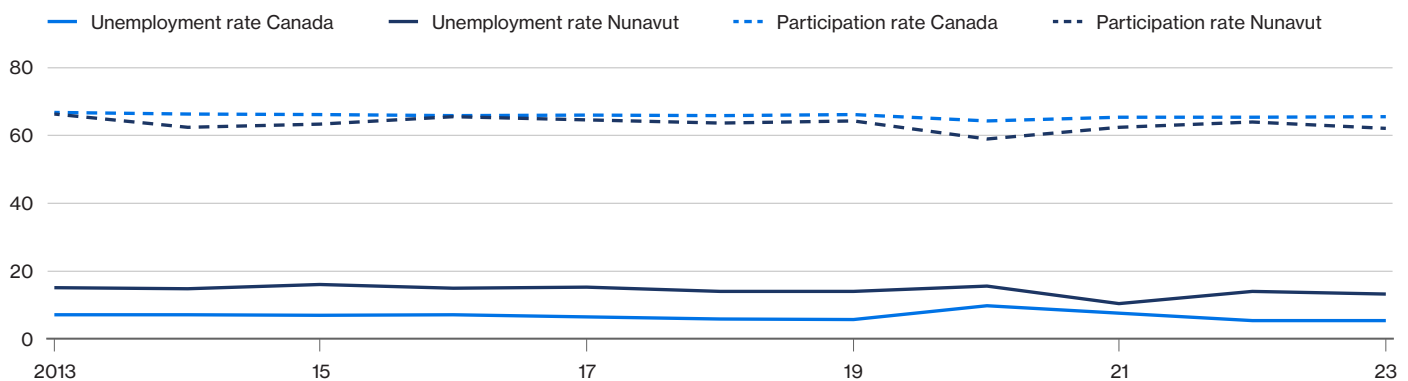
In Nunavut, rural and remote regions have lower labour market outcomes compared with larger communities in the territory. In 2019, the participation rate was 82.1 per cent in Iqaluit compared with 56.3 per cent across 18 other communities in Nunavut. During the same year, the employment rate was 77.5 per cent in Iqaluit compared with 46.3 per cent across 18 other communities in Nunavut.²⁵

Inuit and non-Inuit populations experience different labour force outcomes

Another key challenge surrounding labour supply in Nunavut is the disparity in labour market outcomes between Inuit and non-Indigenous populations living in the territory.

Chart 4

Unemployment rates are higher in Nunavut compared with Canada
(annual average, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

²² Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0393-01.

²³ The Conference Board of Canada, "Rising Gold Production Spurs Growth."

²⁴ Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0393-01.

²⁵ See Chart 14 in the [data download](#).

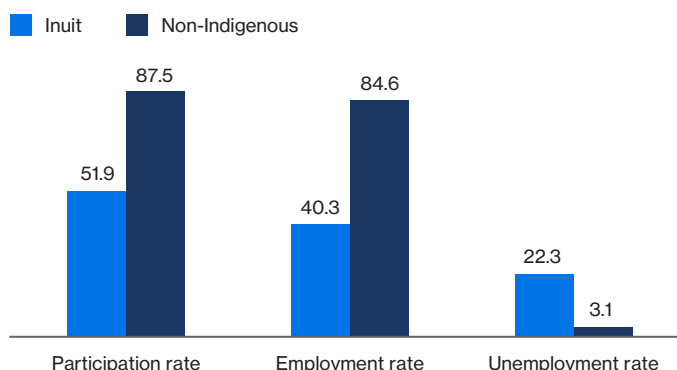
Inuit have higher unemployment rates and lower participation rates

In Nunavut, there are large gaps in participation, employment, and unemployment rates between the Inuit and non-Indigenous populations that have persisted over time. In 2021, the participation rate of the Inuit population aged 15 and older in Nunavut was 51.9 per cent compared with 87.5 per cent for the non-Indigenous population. (See Chart 5.) And in 2021, the unemployment rate for Inuit in Nunavut was 22.3 per cent, well above the unemployment rate of 3.1 per cent for the non-Indigenous population living in the territory. Inuit in Nunavut are also earning less income and are more likely to work in lower-skilled and lower-paying occupations compared with non-Indigenous people.²⁶

Chart 5

Important gaps in labour market outcomes exist between the Inuit and non-Indigenous populations living in Nunavut in 2021

(population age 15 and older, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

Inuit are under-represented in the public service in the territory

There are also important differences between the industries where Inuit and non-Indigenous people living in Nunavut are employed in the territory. While public service is a major employer for both Inuit and non-Indigenous people in Nunavut, it employs a higher proportion of the non-Indigenous population. (See Chart 6.) In 2021, 40 per cent of non-Indigenous workers living in the territory were employed in public administration compared with 28 per cent of Inuit workers. At the same time, Inuit workers living in the territory were more likely to be working in Nunavut's retail trade sector and the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sectors compared with non-Indigenous workers living in the territory. (See Chart 6).

The Government of Nunavut has plans to increase Inuit staff. Its long-term goal is to raise the proportion of Inuit employees to a level representative of the Inuit population in Nunavut, which was 84 per cent in 2021.²⁷ Data from the Nunavut Government Employee Survey, 2021 showed that 57 per cent of all federal and territorial government employees were Inuit.²⁸ However, achieving higher rates of Inuit employment is challenged by the limited number of Inuit who can currently meet job requirements demanding university certifications.²⁹ Between 2016 and 2019, Inuit employment in the public service grew the most in occupations requiring a college diploma or trades training, while representation in the public service was lowest in occupations that are regulated professions requiring university certifications.³⁰

Education and skills, local opportunities, and health are barriers to employment for Inuit

A lack of opportunities and the need for education or skills training were identified by Inuit as important barriers to employment in Nunavut. According to data from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 83 per cent of unemployed Inuit in Nunavut reported a shortage of jobs as a barrier to employment while 60 per cent of unemployed Inuit in Nunavut reported not having enough education or training to find gainful employment.³¹

26 Spinu, "Sustainable Northern Livelihoods."

27 Bell, "Nunavut Government Aims for 58 Per Cent Inuit Employment by 2023."

28 Statistics Canada, "Nunavut Government Employee Survey, 2021."

29 Government of Nunavut, *2017 to 2023 Master Inuit Employment Plan*.

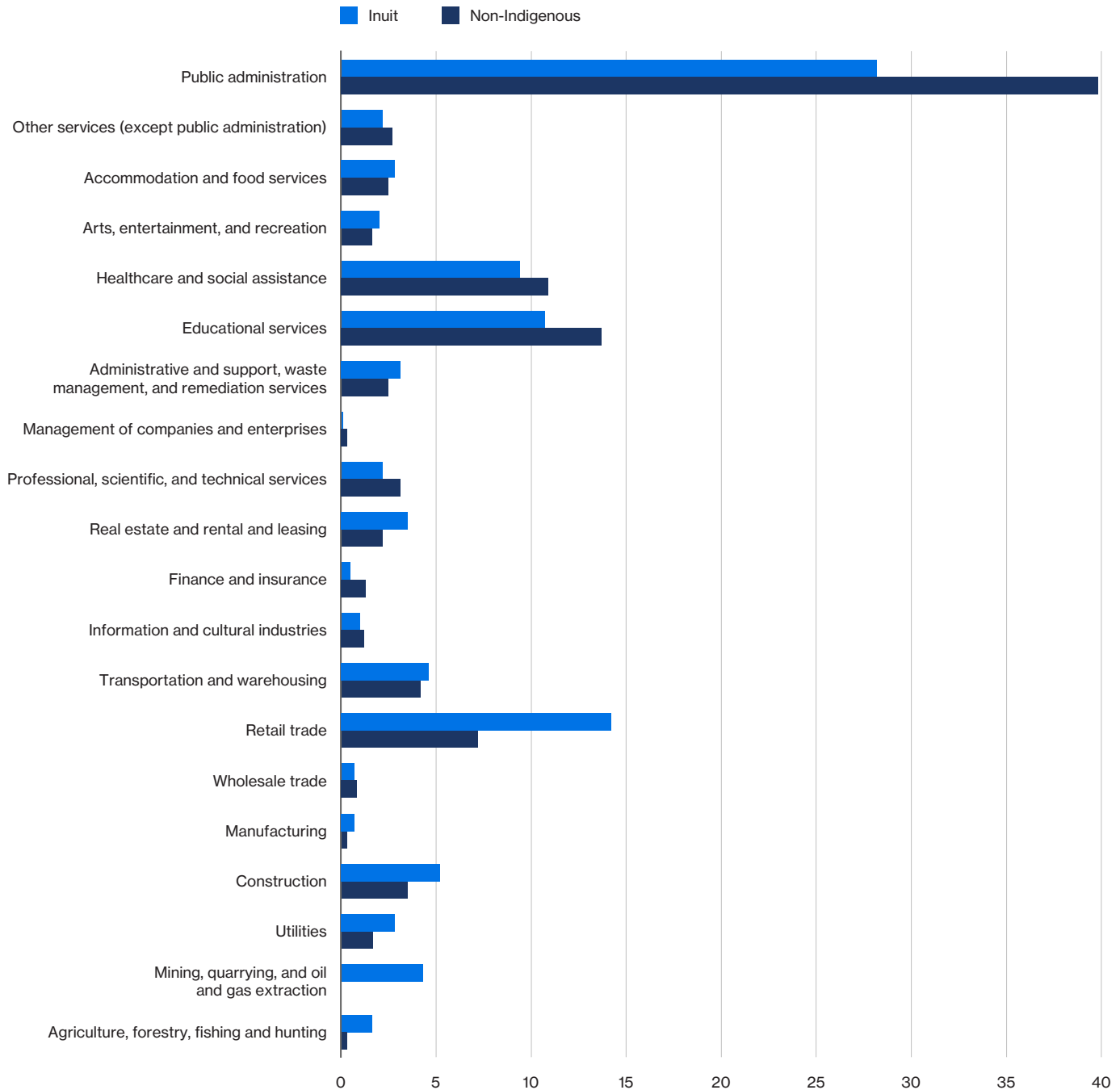
30 Bell, "Nunavut Government Aims for 58 Per Cent Inuit Employment by 2023."

31 Statistics Canada, "Labour Market Experiences of Inuit."

Chart 6

Inuit workers were less likely to be employed in the public service sector compared with non-Indigenous workers living in Nunavut in 2021

(employed population age 15 and over, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

The health and well-being of the Inuit workforce is another important factor contributing to employment gaps in Nunavut. The legacy of colonial policies and residential school systems, along with gaps in wealth, food, and housing security, have contributed to health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. For example, Indigenous populations in Canada have higher rates of diabetes, obesity, mental health issues, and other health conditions.³² And the health of Inuit communities and workers has a direct impact on their educational attainment and labour force participation. In fact—along with availability of daycare—historical trauma, health problems, and limited access to healthcare were the top barriers to Inuit employment within the Government in Nunavut.³³

Another important barrier to Inuit employment in the territorial government involves hiring practices. Many Inuit are not aware of what jobs are available, the process that is involved in applying for these jobs, or associated job requirements. Aligning the hiring practices for government jobs with the realities of Inuit life and culture may help to increase Inuit employment in the Government in Nunavut.³⁴

Many Inuit in Nunavut also participate in both the wage and traditional economies. However, Inuit employees often report challenges in balancing the demands of land-based activities with employment in the wage economy, which often requires standard work schedules. Challenges surrounding participation in land-based activities can be a driver of turnover for Inuit employees.^{35,36}

Finally, housing is an important barrier to employment for Nunavut residents. The ongoing housing crisis in the territory further complicates efforts to attract skilled labour from other provinces and territories. Many skilled workers are also leaving the territory for employment opportunities in southern areas of Canada where housing is more affordable.³⁷ In addition, many residents in the territory live in subsidized housing where rent subsidies are tied to employment earnings.³⁸ When an individual takes on a job, their rent can increase.

Education and skills gap in Nunavut impacts labour market participation

There is a large skills gap between Nunavut and the rest of Canada. In 2021, 45 per cent of Nunavut residents aged 25 to 64 years had no formal education compared with only 10 per cent in Canada. (See Chart 7.) This is up slightly from 2016 when 41 per cent of the population 25 to 64 years of age held no formal education.³⁹ While there are gaps across all levels of education, the gaps are greatest in the attainment of a university certificate or diploma. Only 16 per cent of the population in Nunavut held a university degree compared with 36 per cent in the Canadian population. However, populations living in urban regions of Nunavut have higher levels of education compared with populations living in more remote communities. The population living in the Baffin region, which includes Iqaluit, has higher levels of college degrees and university degrees than the Kivalliq and Kitikmeot regions. Residents living in Iqaluit typically have better access to education and services. The high school in Iqaluit, for example, offers a wider array of classes and more extra-curricular activities than in other regions of the territory.⁴⁰

32 Wilk, Maltby, and Cooke, “Residential Schools and the Effects on Indigenous Health and Well-Being in Canada.”

33 Employment and Social Development Canada, *Nunavut Inuit Labour Force Analysis Report*.

34 Ibid.

35 MacLaine, Lalonde, and Fiser, *Working Together*.

36 Thompson, “Fly-In, Fly-Out Labour in Canada’s North.”

37 George, “Housing Crisis Is a Factor in Nunavut Teacher Shortage.”

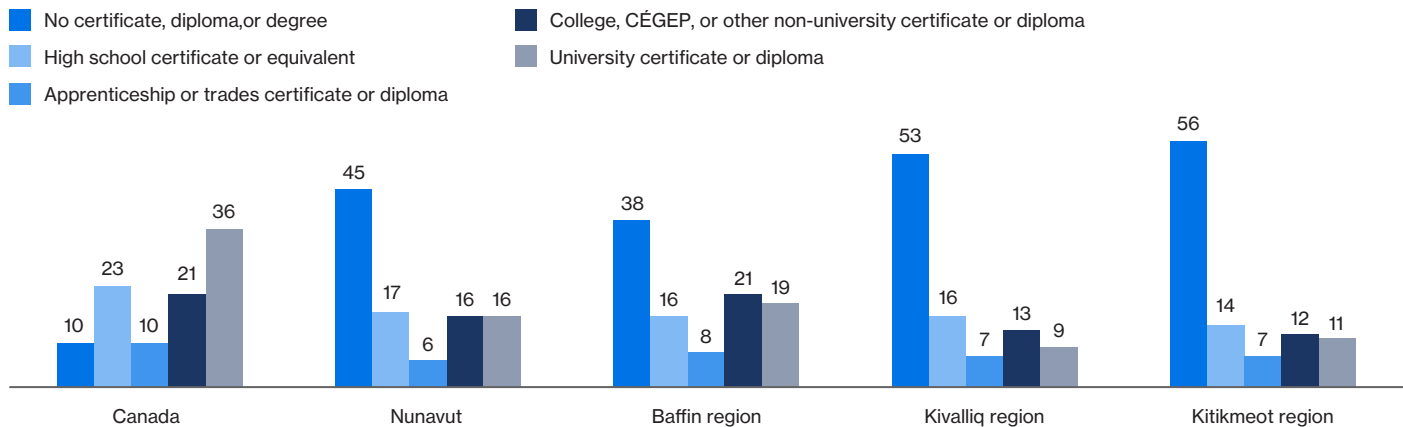
38 Nunavut Housing Corporation, “Public Housing.”

39 Statistics Canada, *Census Profile, 2016 Census*.

40 Participant interview, 2023.

Chart 7

The rates of post-secondary attainment are lower in Nunavut compared with Canada
(highest level of education, 2021, population age 25 to 64 years of age, per cent)



Note: CÉGEP = Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel
Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

The gaps between Nunavut and the rest of Canada reflect important discrepancies in educational attainment between Nunavut's Inuit and non-Indigenous populations. In 2021, 8 per cent of the non-Indigenous population had no formal education compared with 62 per cent of the Inuit population. (See Chart 8.) Again, the greatest disparities exist at the university level. Fifty-one per cent of the non-Indigenous population but only 3 per cent of Inuit held a university certificate or diploma. This gap in education between Nunavut and Canada can in part be explained by the fact that a formal school system was instituted throughout the territory only between 1945 and 1970.⁴¹ And today, the formal education system in Nunavut continues to evolve to best fit the needs of Inuit people and the labour market in the territory.

Increasing Inuit post-secondary education rates is important to increasing career options and financial security. On average, post-secondary education is a very important income multiplier; Inuit with a university degree make on average \$37,526 more per year than Inuit high school graduates.⁴² This translates into additional financial and social security as well as an ability to participate in management and professional positions.

Transformations to the primary and secondary education systems are needed to improve attainment

While the graduation rates in Nunavut have been trending upwards, they still remain the lowest in Canada.⁴³ In 2017-18, the graduation rate in Nunavut was 39 per cent.⁴⁴ A 2015 study found that childcare responsibilities were the number one reason that individuals in Nunavut dropped out of high school. For those who completed high school, having support from a parent was the most important factor to graduating.⁴⁵

41 McGregor, *Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic*.

42 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy*.

43 Elez and Zeman, "High School Graduation Rates in Canada, 2016/2017 to 2019/2020."

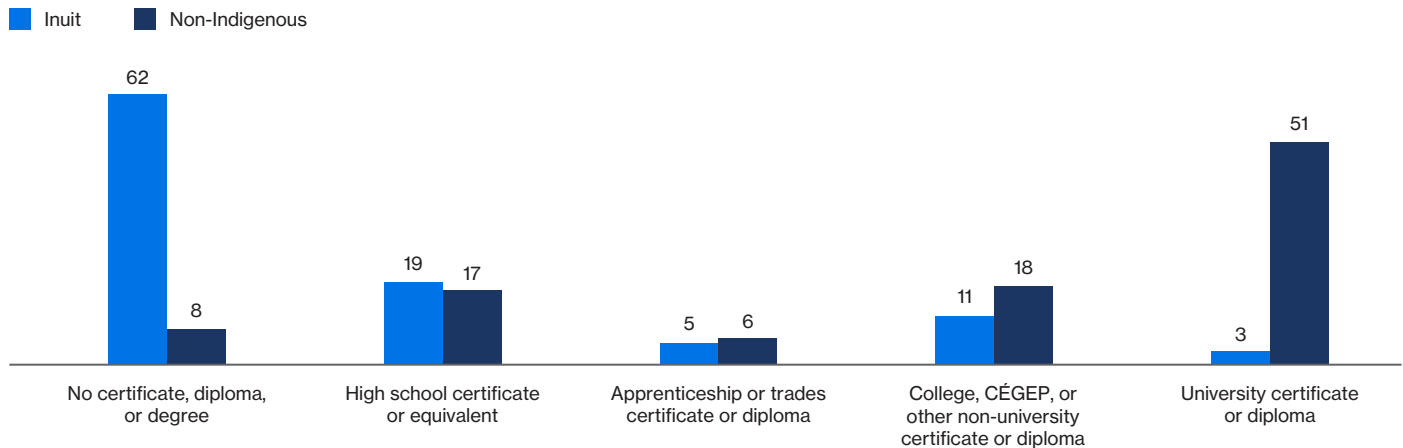
44 See Chart 15 in the [data download](#). The graduation rates presented come from the Nunavut Bureau of Statistics. The gross graduation rate was calculated by dividing the number of graduates by the average of the estimated 17- and 18-year-old population (as the typical age of graduation).

45 O'Gorman and Pandey, *Cultivating the Arctic's Most Valuable Resource*.

Chart 8

Post-secondary attainment is lower among the Inuit population compared with the non-Indigenous population living in Nunavut

(highest level of education, 2021, population age 25 to 64 years of age, per cent)



Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

The history of formal education in the territory has created a sense of distrust in the education system among some Inuit.⁴⁶ When the federal government introduced a formal education system to the territory, its agenda was the assimilation of Inuit people into the Canadian population. As a result, the transfer of the Inuktitut language from one generation to another has been declining in the territory over the last 20 years.⁴⁷ Culture and language are important predictors of Inuit people's wellbeing and health. The school system can play an important role in preserving Inuit culture and language among the population in the territory.^{48,49}

Today, the focus is on re-establishing a focus on Inuit culture and language in the school system.⁵⁰ Part of achieving this goal is building the capacity to support the use of Inuktitut in schools.⁵¹ In 2016, most schools in Nunavut were able to provide instruction where

Inuktitut was the primary language only up to grades 3 and 4.⁵² In 2020, a bill was passed in the Nunavut legislature aiming to phase in Inuktitut as the primary language of instruction in Nunavut schools over the next 20 years.⁵³ There have been significant government investments to increase the number of educators who speak Inuktitut as well as the revitalization of the language in the territory.⁵⁴

It is also worth noting that there are disparities in the education being offered across the territory. In particular, schools in smaller communities have fewer resources and are not able to offer all academic streams and extracurricular activities compared with schools in the regional centres.⁵⁵

This has an impact on students who want to pursue post-secondary education programs where the pre-requisite high school courses are not available in their school.

46 Participant interview, 2023.

47 Lepage, Langlois, and Turcotte, "Evolution of the Language Situation in Nunavut, 2001 to 2016."

48 McMillian, "Educating for Cultural Survival in Nunavut."

49 Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Social Determinants of Inuit Health in Canada*.

50 McGregor, *Inuit Education and Schools in the Eastern Arctic*.

51 Ibid.

52 Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, and Dunbar, "Is Nunavut Education Criminally Inadequate?"

53 Canadian Press, "'Cultural Genocide.'"

54 Canadian Heritage, "Working Together to Support Inuktitut Education in Nunavut."

55 Participant interview, 2023.

Limited access to post-secondary education contributes to education and skills gaps

Nunavut Arctic College is the only post-secondary school in Nunavut. A total of 744 students were enrolled in 2019/20.^{56,57} Just over 90 per cent of students at the college identified as Inuit and 80 per cent of the students identified as female. Fewer students were enrolled from smaller communities of Nunavut whereas almost half of all students attending the college were from Iqaluit or Rankin Inlet. (See Chart 9).

The largest enrolments were in the Nunavut teacher education program, followed by Adult Basic Education Essential Skills, Pathways to Adult Secondary School, and Home and Continuing Care Worker. (See Chart 10.) About one-quarter of the students at Nunavut Arctic College in 2019/20 were taking entry-level adult education courses, including Adult Basic Education Essential Skills, Pathways to Adult Secondary Education, Getting Ready for Employment and Training, and Adult Basic Education and Academic Studies.

Prospective post-secondary students in Nunavut face many barriers that deter their successful enrolment into and completion of a post-secondary program.⁵⁸ Barriers include issues accessing foundational education in secondary school systems, financial barriers, issues securing student housing while at school, issues with securing daycare, and language barriers as English is a second language for many Inuit peoples.⁵⁹

Data on enrolment in public post-secondary institutions in Canada also show that the student population in the territories is older compared with the rest of the country. These older students may have more familial responsibilities. In the 2019/20 academic year, 42 per cent of students enrolled in public post-secondary institutes in the territories were age 35 and over compared with 12 per cent in Canada.⁶⁰ The average of age of students enrolled in Nunavut Arctic College in 2019/20 was 35 years of age.⁶¹

Chart 9

Almost half of students enrolled at Nunavut Arctic College were from either Iqaluit or Rankin Inlet (number of enrolments by community, 2019/20)



Notes: Baffin region other 12 communities include Arctic Bay, Kinngait, Clyde River, Grise Fiord, Sanirajak, Igloodik, Kimmirut, Pangnirtung, Pond Inlet, Qikiqtarjuaq, Resolute Bay, Sanikiluaq. Kivalliq region other 6 communities include Arviat, Baker Lake, Chesterfield Inlet, Coral Harbour, Nauyasat, and Whale Cove; Kitikmeot communities include Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Kugaaruk, Kugluktuk, Taloyoak. The 2019/20 report was the last annual report from Nunavut Arctic College that included detailed data on the demographics of the student population at the college.

Sources: Nunavut Arctic College; The Conference Board of Canada.

⁵⁶ Nunavut Arctic College, *Annual Report, 2019-2020*.

⁵⁷ The 2019–20 report was the last annual report from Nunavut Arctic College that included detailed data on the demographics of the student population at the college.

⁵⁸ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *Inuit Post-Secondary Education Strategy*.

⁵⁹ Task Force on Northern Post-Secondary Education, *A Shared Responsibility*.

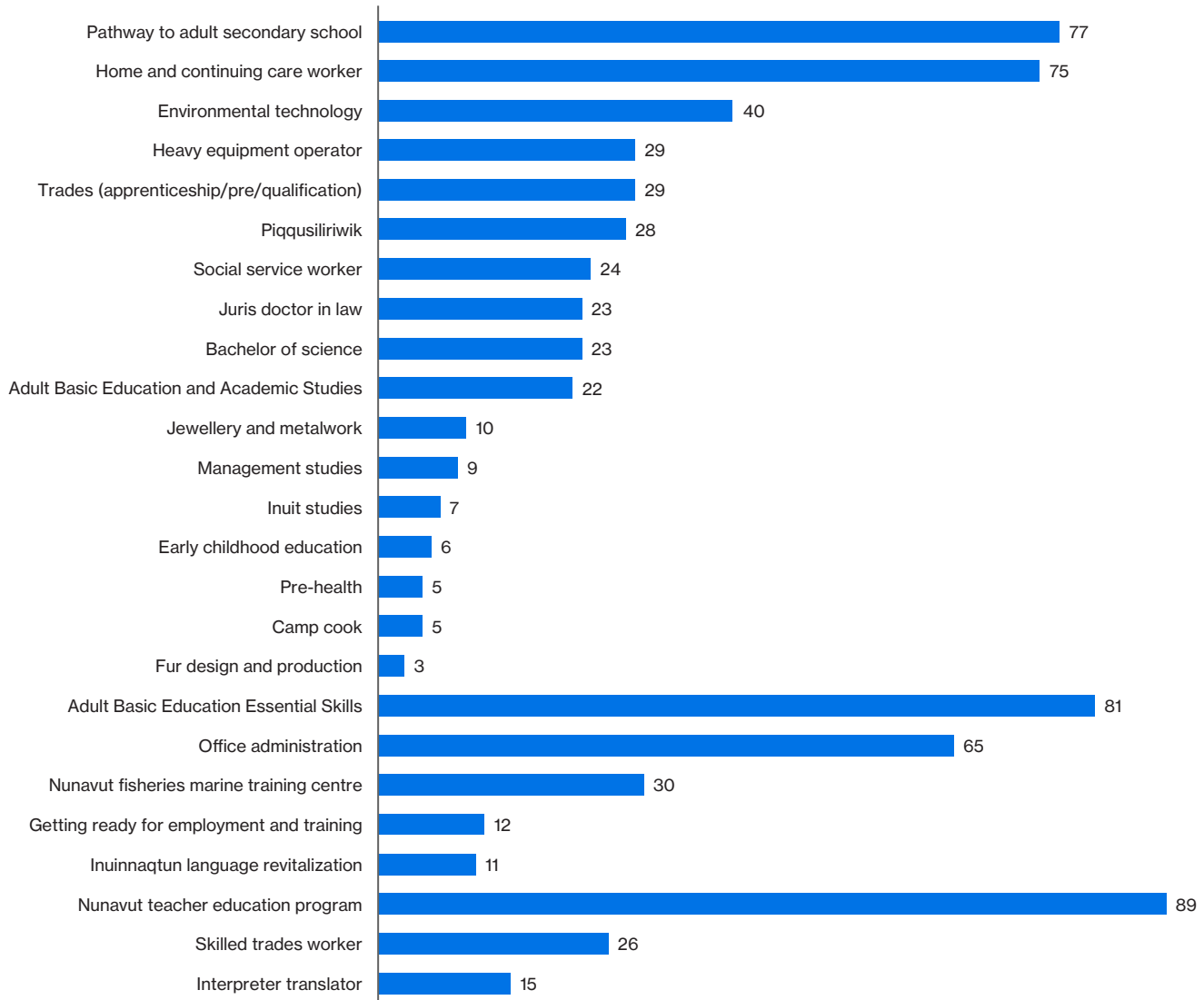
⁶⁰ Statistics Canada, Table 37-10-0015-01.

⁶¹ Nunavut Arctic College, *Annual Report, 2019-2020*.

Chart 10

Programs with the highest enrollment at Nunavut Arctic College include the Nunavut Teacher Education Program and Adult Education Programs

(2019/20, number of enrolments)



Sources: Nunavut Arctic College; The Conference Board of Canada.

Most Nunavut students would prefer to remain in their home community where they feel supported. However, many post-secondary programs are not offered in the territory and students are required to travel out of territory for school.⁶² Poor Internet access also means that there are barriers to remote learning and training in remote communities.

Out-of-territory workers fill the demand for labour in the territory

To fill the demand for skills and labour, the territory relies on employees from out of the territory who are working in Nunavut but living outside the territory. The reliance on out-of-territory workers has been growing in Nunavut over the last decade. In fact, Nunavut has the highest reliance on out-of-territory employees across the three territories.⁶³ In 2008, out-of-territory employees represented 19 per cent of the territory's workforce; this trended upwards over the decade, rising to 34 per cent of the workforce in 2019.^{64,65,66}

Out-of-territory workers can be found across most if not all sectors in Nunavut. But some sectors are more reliant on them than others. (See Chart 11.) While mining and quarrying and construction account for large proportions of Nunavut's GDP, these sectors currently employ a small proportion of Nunavut residents. In 2019, out-of-territory workers made up 82 per cent of the workforce in the oil and gas, and mining and quarrying sectors and 61 per cent of the workforce in the construction sector. In addition, the reliance on out-of-territory workers in these sectors has grown over the last 15 years.

High reliance on out-of-territory workers means that less income earned in the territory flows through Nunavut's economy. In 2019, out-of-territory employees earned 37 per cent of the total employment earnings in the territory.⁶⁷

Working alongside a southern workforce can present both benefits and challenges on the job for the Nunavut workforce, especially for Inuit workers. Skilled out-of-territory workers can provide mentorship, training, and development opportunities for the Nunavut workforce. Having a skilled workforce in the territory makes it less costly to provide apprenticeship and training opportunities.⁶⁸

However, the presence of out-of-territory labour can also have negative impacts on the experience of Nunavut workers on the job. For example, English and/or French are often the languages used at work in industries with a large presence of out-of-territory workers, creating challenges for Inuktitut speakers. Cultural gaps between the out-of-territory and Inuit workforce can also lead to a lack of understanding, discrimination, and racism on-site.⁶⁹ Harassment and violence against women on the job is also an important issue for women working in sectors with a predominately male out-of-territory workforce.⁷⁰

Women are less likely to be working in a skilled trade

Women are an under-represented and untapped workforce in the skilled trades. In 2021, men were 13 times more likely to be employed in the trades, transport, and equipment operators and related occupations in Nunavut compared with the female population. Women are more likely to be employed in business, finance, and administration occupations or in education, law, and social, community, and government services occupations. (See Chart 12.) Engaging more women in the trades in Nunavut could help to fill some of the existing skills gap, especially in the natural resource development and construction sectors.⁷¹

62 Sallaffie and others, "Survey of Nunavut Post-Secondary Students."

63 Thompson, "The Borders of Labour."

64 Data on interjurisdictional labour are currently available from Statistics Canada up to 2020, but the estimates in 2020 would be impacted by COVID-19 and the lockdowns in the territory.

65 Thompson, "The Borders of Labour."

66 Statistics Canada, Count of Interjurisdictional Employees and Resident Employees by Age Group and Sex, 2002–2020.

67 Statistics Canada, "Aggregate T4 Earnings for Interjurisdictional Employees and Resident Employees, 2002–2020."

68 Thompson, "Fly-In, Fly-Out Labour in Canada's North."

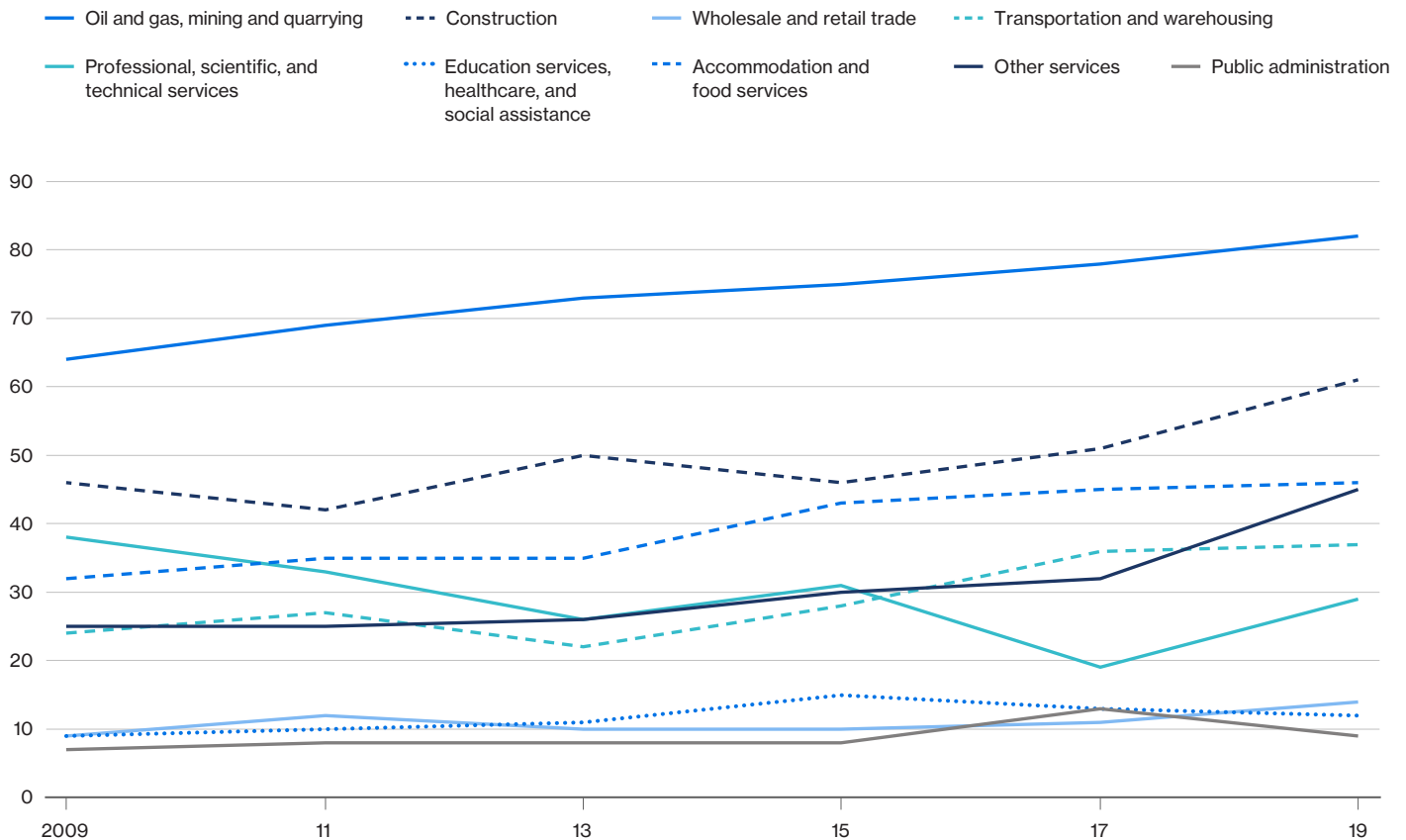
69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

Chart 11

The mining and construction industry are primarily staffed by out-of-territory workers in Nunavut
(out-of territory workers, per cent of total workforce)

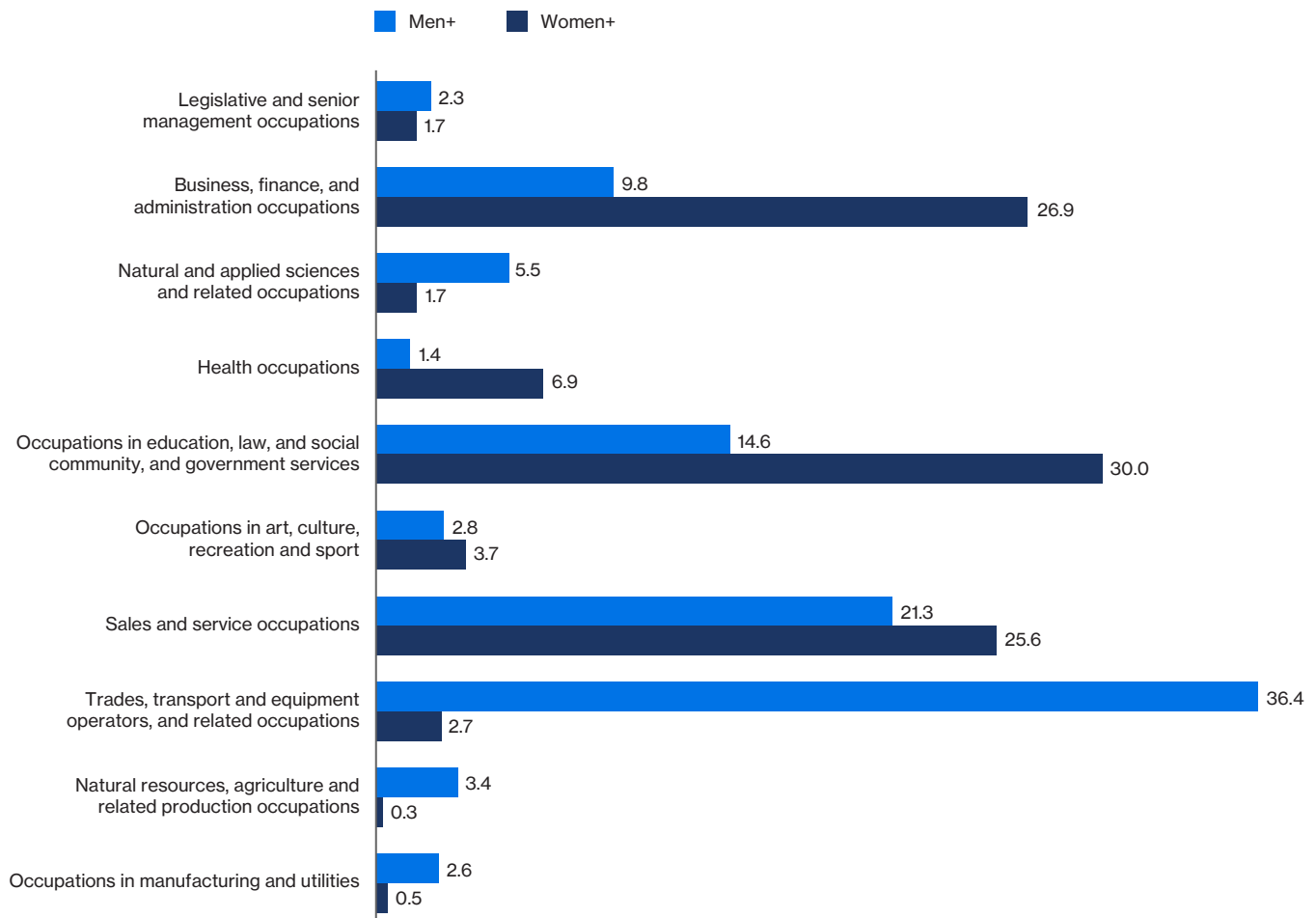


Note: The total workforce consists of incoming, outgoing, and resident workers. The outgoing workers reported employment income both inside and outside the territory, and were included in the calculation of the total workforce. In a few cases, suppressed cells were set to zero for calculations.
Sources: Canadian Employee-Employer Dynamics Database; The Conference Board of Canada.

Chart 12

Women are less likely to be employed in trades, transport and equipment operator, and related occupations compared with men living in Nunavut in 2021

(employed population age 15 and over, per cent)



Note: In the 2021 Census, Statistics Canada defines men and women based on gender which refers to an individual's personal and social identity as a man, women, or non-binary person. Men+ includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons while women+ includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.

Sources: Statistics Canada; The Conference Board of Canada.

Over the last 10 years, the number of female registered apprentices in Nunavut has steadily increased and has the potential to increase further with support from industry and government.⁷² Moreover, women are starting to take on opportunities in resource and infrastructure development, such as at Agnico Eagle's Meadowbank and White Tail sites, where the rate of female employment has increased since 2013.⁷³

An important barrier to employment for Inuit women is childcare assistance.⁷⁴ In Nunavut, there is a lack of early learning and childcare facilities compared with the rest of Canada, which means that parents—in many cases women—have to take time away from work, education, or job training to care for their children.^{75,76}

Entrepreneurship is less prevalent in the territory

Entrepreneurship can provide income for people living in remote contexts where regular employment is limited. For the Indigenous population, entrepreneurship also provides the opportunity for personal agency and self-determination as well as the opportunity to fulfill a need in the community or share one's culture through business.⁷⁷ However, the proportion of the workforce that is self-employed is lower in Nunavut compared with the rest of Canada.

In 2021, 14 per cent of the total labour force aged 15 years and over in Canada was self-employed compared with only 3.2 per cent of the Nunavut labour force.⁷⁸ This is comparable to the proportion of the labour force that was self-employed in the territory in 2016, at 2.7 per cent.⁷⁹ Looking across the region in 2021, rates of self-employment were highest in the Baffin region at 4.0 per cent compared with 1.9 per cent in Kitikmeot and 2.3 per cent in the Kivalliq region.⁸⁰



Non-Indigenous people living in the territory were also more likely to be self-employed compared with Inuit. In 2021, 4.8 per cent of the non-Indigenous population in the territory were self-employed compared with 2.9 per cent of Inuit.⁸¹

The lower rates of self-employment in Nunavut may reflect a more difficult environment for entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs operating in Northern and remote regions can face several challenges, including difficulty in securing funding, not having adequate business and financial skills to start and operate a business, and limited access to business planning supports. In addition, there is a higher cost of securing goods and providing services in Nunavut and limited infrastructure to distribute goods, along with difficulties securing qualified support staff.⁸² In addition, people living in subsidized housing in Nunavut are restricted from operating a small business within their units.

Directing resources toward supporting entrepreneurs operating in a Northern and remote context can support job creation and diversification of the economy in these regions.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Arriagada and Bleakney, *Inuit Participation in the Wage and Land-Based Economies in Inuit Nunangat*.

⁷⁵ Hill, "Nunavut Lags Behind Rest of Canada for Use of Child Care."

⁷⁶ Burke, "Childcare Is a Chronic Issue."

⁷⁷ Gresch and Shaw, "Indigenous Entrepreneurship in Northern and Remote Canada."

⁷⁸ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

⁷⁹ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2016 Census.

⁸⁰ Statistics Canada, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

⁸¹ Statistics Canada, Indigenous Population Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

⁸² Gresch and Shaw, "Indigenous Entrepreneurship in Northern and Remote Canada."

Initiatives are needed to support employment for young adults in the territory

An aging workforce is a problem that Canada is facing but this is less of a challenge in Nunavut. The proportion of the workforce facing retirement in Nunavut is smaller than in the rest of Canada—due in part to the territory’s younger population. In Canada in 2021, 23 per cent of the workforce was aged 55 and over compared with only 16 per cent of the workforce in Nunavut.⁸³ However, unemployment among youth in Nunavut is high compared with the rest of Canada. According to the 2021 Census, the unemployment rate for youth aged 15 to 24 in Nunavut was 27.7 per cent compared with 19.5 per cent in Canada.⁸⁴ In the same year, the unemployment rate for adults age 25 to 64 in Nunavut was only 15.1 per cent. Policies aimed at supporting youth entering the labour market in Nunavut—especially Inuit youth—would help engage younger people and fill the gap as older workers leave the labour market.

Out-migration is high in the territory

Several factors are driving some workers in Nunavut to relocate to Southern Canada. These include limited employment prospects, an affordable housing crisis, the high cost of goods, and the limited access to services in the territory.⁸⁵ Net interprovincial migration was negative every year over the past 10 years in Nunavut, and the territory has some of the highest rates of negative interprovincial migration in Canada. In 2022/23, 34 people out of every 1,000 in Nunavut had moved to Nunavut from another province or territory in Canada while 44 people out of every 1,000 in the territory left Nunavut and moved to another province

or territory in Canada. This results in a net loss of 10 people per 1,000 to the territory’s population.⁸⁶

Some Nunavut residents are moving outside the territory but remain employed in the territory—joining the fly-in, fly-out workforce. Each year between 2002 and 2016, about 3 per cent of resident workers migrated out but still worked in Nunavut.⁸⁷ In addition, mining companies, such as Agnico Eagle, reported that in 2015, about 7 per cent of its Inuit workforce lived outside Nunavut, and this trend has been increasing.⁸⁸

While it is difficult to attract newcomers to remote regions of the territory, the City of Iqaluit has had an influx of people moving there from outside the territory. In 2016, 28 per cent of the total population aged 5 and older living in Iqaluit were living elsewhere in Canada or abroad five years before.⁸⁹ This is significantly higher than the rate in other communities in the territory.⁹⁰ Most of the people moving to Iqaluit came from outside the territory, with 73 per cent from other provinces, 22 per cent from within Nunavut, and 6 per cent from international locations.⁹¹

To retain skilled workers in Nunavut and prevent out-migration, policies and programs need to support Northern home ownership.⁹² Lack of affordable housing and public housing policies in the territory not only drives out-migration but is also a barrier to employment, as increased income can result in increased public housing payments. Other challenges to home ownership are the lack of a housing market and difficulties securing a mortgage. While the affordable housing investment by the federal government in its 2022 budget will support Nunavut, new policies and programs that reduce barriers to housing can support retention and keep Northern workers in the North closer to home and contributing to the economy.

83 See Table 1 in the [data download](#).

84 Statistics Canada, Indigenous Population Profile, 2021 Census of Population.

85 Thompson, “Fly-In, Fly-Out Labour in Canada’s North.”

86 Statistics Canada, Interprovincial Migration Indicators, Province and Territories: Interactive Dashboard.

87 Thompson, “Fly-In, Fly-Out Labour in Canada’s North.”

88 Ibid.

89 Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, *Economic Profile Series*.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid.

Conclusion

The central issue impacting Nunavut's labour market is high unemployment rates along with skills gaps affecting the resident workforce. Being unable to source the necessary skills locally, many employers in Nunavut rely on out-of-territory labour.

Moving forward, there will be increasing labour market demand across a range of industries, such as public administration, construction, natural resource development, and the conservation economy. Employers, governments, communities, schools, and skills and training organizations have the challenge of training Nunavut residents in jobs that are currently dominated by out-of-territory workers, including jobs in the construction and mining industries.



While efforts to improve employment rates for residents in Nunavut are under way, important barriers still need to be addressed—especially among the majority Inuit population in the territory. These include improving access to education especially for those living in remote communities, as well as improving readiness for work among the Inuit workforce. The legacy of colonial policies and residential school systems along with gaps in wealth, food, and housing security have contributed to health disparities in the Inuit population, all of which impact the ability to work. Access to affordable daycare will also be important for engaging women in the workforce. Finally, employers in Nunavut must consider how best to support participation in the wage economy alongside participation in traditional activities among the Inuit population.

To close the skills gap in Nunavut, Northern employers can develop innovative methods for assessing the skills that are required for successful recruitment and retention. Educational pipeline programs between industry and secondary and post-secondary institutions can support specific training and support programs to ensure success. Innovative credentialing programs can also capture the unique skills and experiences that Inuit employees bring. And engagement between industry and Indigenous communities in economic development opportunities is necessary to support local training and employment opportunities.

Appendix A

Methodology

In the project Learning From One Another: A Comparative Analysis of Labour Market Needs and Corresponding Skill in Northern Ontario, Yukon and Nunavut, The Conference Board of Canada in partnership with the Future Skills Centre takes a comparative look at the labour markets in Northern Ontario, Yukon, and Nunavut.

Our analysis of factors shaping the Nunavut labour market applied a mixed-methods approach that includes qualitative analysis, cross-sectional data analysis, and historical time series analysis. Specific research activities included:

- A review of academic and grey literature (public policy, industry, etc.) on key labour market issues in the territory and Northern economies, which includes major sectors driving the economy, labour market participation, education, migration, housing, and disparities in labour market and education between Inuit and non-Inuit populations living the territory. The review included documents from academic, public (federal, territorial, and Indigenous governments), and private sector sources.
- A review of data sources, including databases maintained by Statistics Canada and relevant federal and territorial government departments. Data from these sources were used to quantify key labour market issues in the territory. This includes but is not limited to the following databases:
 - Census, Statistics Canada
 - Indigenous population profiles, Census, Statistics Canada
 - Annual demographic estimates, Statistics Canada
 - Labour Force Survey, Statistics Canada
 - Job Vacancy and Wage Survey, Statistics Canada
 - Canadian Employer-Employee Dynamics Database, Statistics Canada
 - Population data, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics
 - Labour force and employment data, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics
 - Social data, Nunavut Bureau of Statistics
 - Nunavut Arctic College: Annual Report, 2019-2020

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on employment and education estimates in Canada

It is worth noting the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic may have had on estimates of education and employment in the 2021 Census and annual iterations of the Labour Force Survey between 2020 and 2022. This includes the impact of the pandemic on data collection as well as the impact of the lockdowns on employment and education pursuit and attainment.¹ The pandemic also had an impact on the data collection for the 2021 Census for Indigenous and Northern communities in Canada. The response rate for the 2021 Census for Indigenous and Northern communities was 85.6 per cent, down from 92 per cent in 2016.²

1 Statistics Canada, "Guide to the Census of Population, 2021—Appendix 1.4."

2 Indigenous Services Canada, "An Update on the Socio-Economic Gaps Between Indigenous Peoples and the Non-Indigenous Population in Canada."

Appendix B

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Amanda Thompson and Nick Moroz

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