

Project Insights Report

Indigenous Peoples in the Workplace: AI, Employment and Training



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LOCATIONS

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Ontario



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Executive Summary

Indigenous Peoples face significant barriers to employment as a result of colonialism and systemic discrimination. Despite being the fastest-growing population in Canada, Indigenous Peoples remain underrepresented in the labour market, especially in mid- to senior-level positions, and face more challenges in the educational system compared to non-Indigenous populations. Issues of labour market access and workplace discrimination have been well established by research, but less is known about the current experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples in the workplace. This report aims to address that gap by answering the following research question: How do Indigenous Peoples' experiences in the workplace differ from those of the general population?

While Indigenous Peoples have lower levels of formal education, particularly at the post-secondary level, and face significant levels of discrimination, they report being more satisfied with their jobs, receive more training and report more familiarity with AI than non-Indigenous respondents. This report shows how structural barriers, including discrimination, employment instability, and poorer mental health outcomes, coexist with high levels of job satisfaction, optimism, training participation, and engagement with emerging technologies. This latest data reaffirms previous research about the importance of addressing well-being alongside employment and skills development. Advancing labour market inclusion requires both reducing systemic barriers and building on demonstrated strengths in workplace engagement, skills development, and technological adaptation.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Indigenous Peoples participated in employer-provided training programs at a higher rate than their non-Indigenous counterparts (56% vs. 44%). For those who participated in training, Indigenous Peoples are more likely to report salary increases as a result of their training compared to non-Indigenous people (58% vs. 38%). Indigenous Peoples also reported that their training resulted in a promotion at a rate of almost double the non-Indigenous participants (51% vs 27%).
- 2 The proportion of Indigenous Peoples who reported that they are “very familiar” with AI programs in the workplace was almost double that of the non-Indigenous employees (32% vs 17%). Moreover, Indigenous participants had a much higher (46.0%) percentage saying AI made them “much more productive” compared to non-Indigenous participants (30%).
- 3 Job satisfaction appeared to be higher among Indigenous Peoples, with 44% being “very satisfied” with their current job, compared to only 30% of the non-Indigenous participants. Indigenous men are more likely to report being “very satisfied” than women (52% vs 38%), but both Indigenous men and women reported similar levels of overall positive job satisfaction (82% vs 77%).

The Issue

Indigenous Peoples face significant barriers to employment as a result of historical and systemic barriers. Despite being the fastest growing population in Canada, Indigenous Peoples remain underrepresented in the labour market, especially in mid- to senior-level positions, and face more challenges in the educational system compared to non-Indigenous populations. Issues of labour market access and workplace discrimination have been well established by research, but less is known about the current experiences and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples in the workplace. This report aims to address that gap by answering the following research question: How do Indigenous Peoples' experiences in the workplace differ from the general population?



What We Investigated

This report aims to address the knowledge gap by answering the following research question: How do Indigenous People's experiences in the workplace differ from the general population? Using a diversity and intersectional lens, this report explores experiences in the areas of employment, training, AI use at work, and discrimination at work.

This report draws on the National [Survey on Employment and Skills](#). The data was collected from Wave 8 of the survey during early 2025, which is a collaboration of the Environics Institute, Diversity Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University and Future Skills Centre. Among the weighted survey respondents 5.1% identified as Indigenous (n=281), including 189 First Nations (3.4%), 61 as Metis (1.1%), 14 as Inuit (0.2%), and 17 as other or prefer not to say (0.3%). This dataset is considered representative of both the Indigenous Peoples and the general population in Canada.

What We're Learning

The data explored in this report demonstrates the strengths and ongoing challenges for Indigenous Peoples in the labour market. Their pursuit of skills training opportunities and use of technology in the workplace suggest a proactive approach to skill development and adaptability. At the same time, challenges and barriers persist, making it critical to provide supports for labour market integration and enact systemic changes to address discrimination.

The survey showed differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents in terms of education. For example, 53% of Indigenous respondents had completed high school or less compared to 19% of non-Indigenous respondents. Among Indigenous respondents, 19% had completed apprenticeship or trades training compared to 9% among the non-Indigenous respondents, but only 29% had completed some college or university compared to 62% of the non-Indigenous respondents.

In comparison to racialized groups, Indigenous Peoples reported higher rates of discrimination than Chinese respondents but lower rates of discrimination than South Asian or Black people. There were variations among Indigenous Peoples about their experiences with workplace discrimination. Higher rates of discrimination were reported by those who identify as First Nations (46%) and by those in the youngest age group (ages 18 to 34 years) (45%).

Despite these challenges, Indigenous Peoples reported a more positive outlook than those from the non-Indigenous population. While Indigenous peoples were more likely to be unemployed than non-Indigenous peoples, they are significantly more likely to believe now is a good time to find a job (42%) compared to non-Indigenous respondents (25%), suggesting labour market optimism among respondents even alongside ongoing employment challenges. When asked how they felt about the way things are going in Canada today, 43% said they were satisfied, compared to just 31% of the non-Indigenous population. Indigenous respondents were also more optimistic about their financial situation over the next six months (42% vs 23%), indicating stronger expectations of economic improvement despite employment disparities.

Indigenous respondents are more likely to report good physical health (47%) than non-Indigenous respondents (37%), although there are gender differences (61% for men vs. 40% for women). However, Indigenous respondents report poorer overall mental health than non-Indigenous respondents. While 18.1% of Indigenous respondents rate their mental health as excellent (compared with 14.6% of non-Indigenous respondents), a larger share report their mental health as fair or poor (36.3% vs. 27.6%), indicating greater overall mental health challenges. Indigenous respondents also report more frequent symptoms of depression (41% vs 25%), anxiety (37% vs. 32%), and isolation (38% vs. 25%) three or more days per week.

Job satisfaction also appeared to be higher among Indigenous Peoples, with 44% being reported that they were “very satisfied” with their current job, compared to only 30% of the non-Indigenous population. Higher reported job satisfaction coexists with elevated unemployment and substantial reports of workplace discrimination, underscoring the complexity of Indigenous Peoples’ workplace experiences.

Why It Matters

The data explored in this report demonstrates the strengths and ongoing challenges for Indigenous Peoples in the labour market. Although disparities in education and documented experiences of Anti-Indigenous discrimination are well established in research, less attention has been given to Indigenous Peoples' workplace experiences, including training participation, technological engagement, job satisfaction, and perceptions of labour market conditions. The findings in this report indicate that, despite higher unemployment and ongoing exposure to discrimination, Indigenous respondents report comparatively high levels of job satisfaction, strong engagement in employer-provided training, and greater optimism about current job opportunities. At the same time, mental health indicators, including elevated reports of depression, anxiety, and isolation, demonstrate that positive workplace engagement does not eliminate broader structural and well-being challenges.

Using a diversity and intersectional lens, this report explores experiences in the areas of employment, training, AI use at work, and discrimination at work, using the latest wave of the Survey on Skills and Employment during early 2025, which is a collaboration of the Environics Institute, Diversity Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University and Future Skills Centre.

► What's Next

The findings from this report inform our recommendations, which include:

1. Implement measures to reduce discrimination in the workplace, while simultaneously increasing the proportion of Indigenous leadership in companies and organizations. Organizations should also establish transparent promotion criteria and track advancement outcomes to ensure equitable access to career progression and leadership pathways.
2. Barriers to education remain at all levels, highlighting the need for increased supports for Indigenous youth to access education, especially for women. These supports should include targeted pathways into skilled trades, post-secondary education, and emerging technology sectors.
3. Introduce more mentorship opportunities for Indigenous youth and workers to help expand their professional networks and improve workplace outcomes. Mentorship programs should support career advancement, earnings progression, and access to decision-making roles.
4. Continued supports for both the mental and physical health of Indigenous Peoples to ensure they have avenues to help deal with the barriers and discrimination they face. These supports should be culturally responsive and trauma-informed, recognizing the intersection of workplace



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discrimination, employment instability, health outcomes and the inter-generational impacts of residential schools.

5. A gender and diversity lens is needed to address the various needs of Indigenous Peoples. Intersectional and distinctions-based approaches should recognize differences across gender, age, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, as well as regional and urban–rural (on-reserve and off-reserve) contexts.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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The Future Skills Centre acknowledges that the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee share a special relationship to the 'Dish With One Spoon Territory,' where our office is located, bound to share and protect the land. As a pan-Canadian initiative, FSC operates on the traditional territory of many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, the name given to the North American continent by some Indigenous peoples. We are grateful for the opportunity to work in this territory and commit ourselves to learning about our shared history and doing our part towards reconciliation.

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