

2025

Young People &
Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study -
Report #2



UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

YOUTH &
INNOVATION PROJECT



FACING CHALLENGES, FINDING OPPORTUNITY

Young people in Canada navigating a new
employment reality

Insights from the Young People & Economic
Inclusion Longitudinal study

Funded by



Future Launch

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Positionality statements from the authors

Morgan Harris: I am a young, white, cisgender Canadian woman, and my lived experience and professional experiences shape my interpretation of the data presented. My experiences growing up and living in Toronto, working with young people, working in health research, and being a patient partner all inform my understanding of the topics discussed in this report.

Valentina Castillo-Cifuentes: I am a 31-year-old Latin American woman from Chile, who immigrated to Canada in 2017. My experiences navigating a new country, language, and workforce shape my perspective and understanding on the issues discussed in this report. Professionally, my expertise lies in social impact measurement and youth engagement, this combination of lived experience and research expertise informs the lens I bring to this work.

Dr. Ana Ferrer: I am a 55-year-old woman economist. My views and understanding of Canadian labour markets are shaped by my experience as a woman working in a predominantly male environment.

Mariah Jolin: My interpretation of the data shared in this report is shaped by my experience as a young Canadian woman participating in the Canadian labour force. It has also been influenced by my experience working with young people in various education and recreation settings.

Hongfang Ding: My interpretation of the data in this report is shaped by my experience as an international graduate student in economics. Coming from a foreign background and adapting to a new country and culture has influenced how I approached the analysis and how I understood the challenges and opportunities facing young Canadians in the workforce.

Ilona Dougherty: I am a 45-year-old Canadian-born white cisgender woman with a long-term physical disability. I am also a solo choice parent with a 10-month-old son. My privilege, as well as my experience growing up in rural Canada, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and Whitehorse, Yukon, my experience as a mother and as someone living with a disability have influenced my contributions to this report.

Dr. Amelia Clarke: I am a full professor in sustainability management, in the School of Environment, Enterprise and Development at the University of Waterloo. I have a PhD in management from McGill University. I am currently the Principal Investigator (PI) for two research initiatives: the Youth & Innovation Project and the Municipal Net-Zero Action Research Partnership, and I care deeply about youth engagement, social equity and addressing the climate emergency. I was born in Ireland and became a Canadian citizen at age 9. I also identify as a parent, as non-binary, and as LGBTQ+. Both my professional and personal experiences shape my interests and perspective.

Territorial acknowledgement

We acknowledge that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples. The University of Waterloo's campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. The University's work toward reconciliation takes place across its campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is coordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations.

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For more information visit: www.uwaterloo.ca/youthinn

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Most importantly, our deepest thanks to the young people that participated in the longitudinal study. In a context where youth are heavily surveyed, their willingness to share their experiences is significant, and deeply meaningful. We are immensely grateful for their contributions.

This report is part of the Youth & Innovation Project's Economic Impact Research program. The data analysis in this report was conducted at the Southwestern Ontario Research Data Centre, using administrative data made available by Statistics Canada through the CRDCN which provides secure access to confidential microdata files and administrative data. The views expressed in the paper do not necessarily reflect those of the CRDCN, or Statistics Canada.

Executive Summary

Introduction and methodology

Young people in Canada, ages 15 to 30, are entering the workforce in a time of uncertainty. Inflation, driven by the lasting effects of the pandemic, geopolitical instability and a rapid increase in population that outpaces job creation have put significant pressure on the labour market (Deloitte, 2025). Also, due to the tariffs imposed by the United States, employers have become more cautious and are creating fewer new jobs, particularly in the sectors most affected, such as manufacturing and warehousing (Hughes, 2025).

Adding to these challenges, there are concerns about the impact artificial intelligence (AI) may have on youth employment as entry level positions, typically occupied by young workers, are declining and wages for these roles are decreasing (Leopold, 2025). In The Future of Jobs Report 2025, 40% of employers indicated that they expect to reduce their staff capacity for roles where AI can automate tasks (World Economic Forum, 2025). Similarly, a recent CIBC report suggests that workers under age 25 are more likely to work in areas that are at high risk of being impacted by AI (Grantham, 2025). Recent layoffs in the tech sector are also seen as a sign of what may be to come more broadly as other industries begin adopting AI at scale (Rogelberg, 2025).

We are seeing the consequences of these myriads of factors play out for young people in real time. In May 2025, unemployment rates for students aged 15-24 reached 20.1%, the highest in a generation, with similar numbers seen only in 2009 and 1999 after major economic disruptions (Statistics Canada, 2025b). Job postings have declined while competition for stable work is rising (Statistics Canada, 2025a). Sectors traditionally accessible to young workers, especially those requiring only a high school diploma, have seen notable declines. For example, job vacancies in sales and trades, common early career jobs for younger workers, dropped by 22% between 2024 and 2025 (Fan, 2024).

Even Canada's most educated are struggling to find meaningful employment. For many, particularly young immigrants, securing a job that matches their qualifications has become increasingly challenging (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). The traditional promise that higher education leads to stable employment and independence has become less certain (Business + Higher Education Roundtable, 2022).

While earlier generations may have wondered, “what kind of job will I get?”, today, young people are left asking, “will I get a job at all? Will I ever earn enough to become financially independent?”

From 2017 to 2025, the RBC Foundation was committed to supporting young people as they navigate the future of work. Through RBC Future Launch, the RBC Foundation reached over 8.4 million Canadian youth and provided \$451 million of the \$500 million of promised funding through more than 960 partner programs playing a critical role supporting youth with skill-building, work experience, networking and mental well-being (RBC, 2025).

To understand how this investment has impacted young people's employment trajectories, the Youth & Innovation Project developed the Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study in collaboration with the RBC Foundation.

This six-year study (2022-2028) aims to understand and measure the outcomes for young participants who have taken part in a youth employment program as well as how these outcomes vary over time. The study offers a comprehensive look at young participants' outcomes in the areas of education, work experience, employment status and workplace well-being, including work-life satisfaction, resilience and collaboration with decision-makers. The findings are relevant for everyone who cares about the wellbeing of young people, in particular for employers, policymakers, funders and those organizations who run youth employment programs.

The main research question that guides this study is:



What are the impacts of youth employment programs on young participants and the Canadian economy?

Study sub-questions:

- ① How much more likely is it, in the years after participating in a program, for young people to be employed as compared to their peers?
- ② How much more likely is it, in the years after participating in a program, for young people to have completed additional training as compared to their peers?
- ③ If they are employed, how much more likely are the young participants to be thriving at work in the years after a program as compared to their peers?
- ④ Do all young participants have the same outcomes or are the outcomes different when diversity characteristics are accounted for?

This study has unique characteristics that make it a trendsetter for social impact measurement:



It is longitudinal and over 32,000 young people have opted into the study to date



It allows for comparisons with the Canadian population through the Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS)



It has been developed in consultation with the Youth & Innovation Project's Youth Advisory Council, a Longitudinal Study Partner Advisory Council, and with insight from several of our colleagues at the University of Waterloo, including from the Work-Learn Institute, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Waterloo Institute for Complexity & Innovation.

This longitudinal study tracks multiple groups of youth employment program participants over the course of six years (2022-2028). Once participants complete a youth employment program, they are asked to complete a Post-Program Evaluation Survey. This survey assesses the skills and knowledge that participants gained while participating in their program. At the end of this survey, participants can choose to opt into the longitudinal study.

Participants who opt into the longitudinal study are surveyed three times over three years to track their progress and outcomes. The first survey is conducted between one year to one year and six months after the participants complete a youth employment program. The second survey takes place one year after the first survey and the third survey is conducted one year after the second survey. At the end of the third survey, participants can express their interest in participating in an interview to provide additional qualitative insights into their career paths.

The results presented below are based on descriptive and bivariate analyses of data from two subgroups; we will call this combined group 'Group 2'. Group 2a's data collection period was between January 10th and February 7th, 2024. A total of 1,366 survey invitations were sent, and 265 responses were received, resulting in a 19% response rate. The participants in Group 2a completed their youth employment programs between August and December of 2022. Group 2b's data collection period was between July 10th and August 7th, 2024. A total of 2,249 survey invitations were sent, and 521 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 23%. The participants in group 2b completed their youth employment programs between January and July of 2023.

The results in this report are based on descriptive and bivariate analyses of this combined second group of longitudinal study participants and are presented when relevant and/or statistically significant. When applicable, comparisons are made with data from the first group of longitudinal study participants, which was shared in the first report from this study (published in 2024), data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) for May, June and July 2023 as well as other relevant data sources that speak to the topics covered in this report.

Results and insights

The key findings outlined in this report are:

1. The participants in the longitudinal study are fairly representative of the Canadian population. However, the voices of Francophone participants from Québec and participants from Nunavut are missing in the study.
2. Once again this year the transition youth (20-24) and young adults (25-34) in the longitudinal study have higher education levels as compared to the Canadian population. This might suggest that youth employment programs may not be engaging with young people with less education despite these young people being particularly economically vulnerable.
3. Young people have the same amount of access to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities as compared to graduates in 2020. While it is good to see that the rates of WIL have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, given that the increased understanding of the importance of WIL in the last 10 years, we would have expected to see significant increases in WIL opportunities rather than stagnation. Also, among the participants who reported participating in WIL, this year we saw 49% indicated that these opportunities were paid, which is 9% lower than last year.

4. Over half of participants had access to on-the-job and/or professional development training. However, among those who did participate, about one in three spent 10 hours or less over the past year.
5. Once again this year a strong overall preference was shown for hybrid work arrangements. Adolescents were the most likely to indicate a preference for in-person work, while transition youth showed the strongest preference for hybrid models.
6. This year age appears to be a stronger factor as to whether someone is thriving at work rather than other demographic factors, adults aged 35 and older report the highest levels of thriving with levels decreasing progressively across younger age groups.
7. Similar to what we saw in 2024, female participants continue to be paid less than their male counterparts, and the biggest disparities occur at the lower end of the earnings range.
8. International students share many of the same integration barriers as other immigrant youth, but these are often intensified by their temporary status and financial pressures.
9. Among those who reported opportunities to share ideas with decision-makers in the workplace, participants of all ages are generally optimistic that their input is heard and taken seriously. Despite this, all age groups remain less confident that their ideas will ultimately influence decision-makers.

Based on these results the following are our recommendations for funders, policymakers, those who run youth employment programs and employers:

Recommendations for Funders & Policymakers:

- ◆ Invest in rigorous and inclusive research to ensure that the youth employment context is better understood, particularly in the in the Canadian North while ensuring efforts are culturally relevant.
- ◆ Invest in efforts to ensure equitable access to youth programs for individuals with lower levels of education as well as facilitating their participation and completion of these programs.
- ◆ Invest in significantly expanding access to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) to ensure that access to WIL opportunities doesn't continue to stagnate.
- ◆ Invest in significantly expanding on-the-job and/or professional development training including targeted support for younger employees.
- ◆ Ensure that young women are paid living wages, not stuck in low-earning trajectories, and that programs aimed at closing gender wage gaps are funded.
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into the Canadian workforce by recognizing international credentials, funding programs that offer tailored career guidance and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.

Recommendations for organizations that run youth employment programs:

- ◆ Invest in rigorous and inclusive research to ensure that the youth employment context is better understood, particularly in the Canadian North while ensuring efforts are culturally relevant.
- ◆ Ensure equitable access to your programs for individuals with lower levels of education as well as facilitating their participation and completion of your programs.
- ◆ Ensure young people who work in your organization are well supported through on-the-job and/or professional development training as well as offering targeted support for younger employees.
- ◆ Ensure that young women who work in your organization are paid living wages and not stuck in low-earning trajectories.
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into your organization by recognizing international credentials and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.
- ◆ Collaborate with post-secondary education institutions to offer Work-Integrated Learning opportunities at your organization.
- ◆ Embrace the desire of younger employees to work in-person by providing meaningful in-person work experiences when young people are in the office.
- ◆ Create opportunities for intergenerational collaboration at work and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, especially in the context of an aging population.

Recommendations for employers:

- ◆ Collaborate with post-secondary education institutions to offer Work-Integrated Learning opportunities at your company.
- ◆ Invest in significantly expanding on-the-job and/or professional development training including targeted support for your younger employees.
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into your company by recognizing international credentials, and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.
- ◆ Embrace the desire of younger employees to work in-person by providing meaningful in-person work experiences when young people are in the office.
- ◆ Ensure that young women who work in your company are paid living wages and not stuck in low-earning trajectories.
- ◆ Create more opportunities for intergenerational collaboration with your company and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, especially in the context of an aging population.

The findings from this second group of participants of the Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities young people face in Canada. Youth employment is not a youth issue; it is one that impacts all Canadians. Whether we are their parents, grandparents, employers or mentors, many of us worry that even when today's young people do everything 'right', this is not leading to jobs and the financial stability that previous generations would have had available to them. Left unaddressed, the uncertainty that young people today are facing will have wide ranging social and economic impacts far into the future. Investing in youth employment is not optional, it is essential to building a resilient, inclusive and innovative economy.

As we move forward, it is important to consider the use of AI is a trend that is shaping the future of youth employment. If we do not pay the necessary attention, the use of AI could exacerbate inequities, impact entry-level jobs and leave not only vulnerable youth but all youth further behind.

We hope that these insights and calls to action guide policymakers, funders, organizations who run youth employment programs and employers leading to young people thriving in this rapidly changing workforce.

Introduction & Methodology

■ What is happening in youth employment in Canada today?

Young people in Canada, ages 15 to 30, are entering the workforce during a time of uncertainty. Inflation, driven by the lasting effects of the pandemic, geopolitical instability, and a rapid increase in population that outpaces job creation have put significant pressure on the labour market (Deloitte, 2025). Also, due to the tariffs imposed by the United States, employers have become more cautious and are creating fewer new jobs, particularly in the sectors most affected, such as manufacturing and warehousing (Hughes, 2025).

At the same time, the transition from school to work has become more difficult. There is a growing mismatch between the skills young people obtain in higher education and the demands of the labour market (Stackhouse et al., 2025). Adding to these challenges, there are concerns about the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on youth employment as entry level positions, typically occupied by young workers, are declining and wages for these roles are decreasing (Leopold, 2025). In The Future of Jobs Report 2025, 40% of employers indicated that they expect to reduce staff capacity in roles where AI can automate tasks (World Economic Forum, 2025). Similarly, a recent CIBC report suggests that workers under 25 are more likely to work in areas that are at high risk of being replaced by AI (Grantham, 2025). Recent layoffs in the tech sector are also seen as a sign of what may be coming more broadly as other industries begin adopting AI at scale (Rogelberg, 2025). While it is still early days when it comes to definitive evidence about how AI will impact young workers, a picture is beginning to emerge that suggests that young people are in for a rough ride in the short to medium term as AI adoption becomes more prevalent.

We are seeing the consequences of these many headwinds young people are facing play out in real time. In May 2025, unemployment rates for students ages 15-24 reached 20.1%, the highest in a generation, with similar numbers only occurring in 2009 and 1999 after major economic disruptions (Statistics Canada, 2025b). Job postings have declined while, competition for stable work is rising (Statistics Canada, 2025a). Sectors traditionally accessible to young workers, especially those requiring only a high school diploma, have seen notable declines. For example, job vacancies in sales and trades, common early career jobs for younger workers, dropped by 22% between 2024 and 2025 (Fan, 2024).

Even Canada's most educated young people are struggling to find meaningful employment. For many, particularly young immigrants, securing a job that matches their qualifications has become increasingly challenging (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). The traditional promise that higher education leads to stable employment has become less certain (BHER, 2022).

While earlier generations may have wondered, “what kind of job will I get?”, today, young people are left asking, “will I get a job at all? Will I ever earn enough to become financially independent?”

The evidence is clear that when young people face challenges early on in their careers, such as job instability and low earnings, this leads to long-term economic scarring, affecting life-long earnings as well as health and social outcomes (Future Skills Centre, 2024; Von Wachter, 2020). These impacts disproportionately affect equity-deserving groups, making social and economic inequality even more prominent (Diversity Institute, 2025).

Youth employment is not a youth issue; it is one that impacts all Canadians. Whether we are their parents, grandparents, employers or mentors, many of us worry that even when today's young people do everything 'right', this is not leading to jobs and the financial stability that previous generations would have had available to them. Left unaddressed, the uncertainty that young people today are facing will have wide ranging social and economic impacts far into the future. Investing in youth employment is not optional, it is essential to building a resilient, inclusive and innovative economy.

Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study

Beginning in 2017 and ending in 2025, the RBC Foundation through RBC Future Launch, made a \$500 million commitment to support young people aged 15-29 to prepare for the future of work. RBC Future Launch has reached over 8.4 million Canadian youth and provided \$451 million of funding to more than 960 partner programs (RBC, 2025).

To understand how this investment is impacting young people's employment trajectories, the Youth & Innovation Project developed the Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study in collaboration with the RBC Foundation. This longitudinal study which began in 2022 aims to understand and measure the outcomes for those young participants who have taken part in a youth employment program as well as how these outcomes vary over time. This study offers a comprehensive look at young people's outcomes related to education, work experience, employment status and workplace well-being, including work-life satisfaction, resilience and collaboration with decision-makers. The findings are relevant for everyone who cares about the wellbeing of young people and in particular for employers, policymakers and those organizations who offer youth employment programs.

The main research question that guides this study is:



What are the impacts of youth employment programs on young participants and the Canadian economy?

Study sub-questions:

- ① How much more likely is it, in the years after participating in a program, for young people to be employed as compared to their peers?
- ① How much more likely is it, in the years after participating in a program, for young people to have completed additional training as compared to their peers?
- ① If they are employed, how much more likely are the young participants to be thriving at work in the years after a program as compared to their peers?

③ Do all young participants have the same outcomes or are the outcomes different when diversity characteristics are accounted for?

This study has unique characteristics that make it a trendsetter for social impact measurement:



It is longitudinal and over 32,000 young people have opted into the study to date



It allows for comparisons with the Canadian population through the Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS)



It has been developed in consultation with the Youth & Innovation Project's Youth Advisory Council, a Longitudinal Study Partner Advisory Council, and with insight from several of our colleagues at the University of Waterloo, including from the Work-Learn Institute, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing and Waterloo Institute for Complexity & Innovation.

In 2022, we conducted a pilot study to test the survey and determine which incentive options led to the highest response rates. Results showed higher response rates when participants were offered a \$10 cash incentive and outlined the importance of a strong survey design that included consulting with young people and those leading the youth employment programs who would be surveyed (Castillo Cifuentes et al., 2025).

Table 1: Research themes and examples of survey questions

Research Themes	Examples of Survey Questions
Economic outcomes and socioeco- nomic status <ul style="list-style-type: none">Differences between RBC-funded program participants and non-RBC participants (LFS control group)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What is your current labour force status?In the last 12 months, did you hold more than one job simultaneously?How many hours do you usually work per week at your main job (the job where you work the most hours)?
Education and informal training <ul style="list-style-type: none">Work integrated-learningVolunteerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What is the highest level of education that you have completed?Did you have any work-integrated learning experiences as part of your academic program of study?In the past 12 months, have you volunteered without pay on behalf of a group or an organization?
Thriving at work <ul style="list-style-type: none">Work-life balanceResilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">How satisfied are you with your main job (the job where you work the most hours)?How valued do you feel at your main job?How likely do you think it is that you will get a promotion at your main job (the job where you work the most hours) in the next 6 months?
Identifying demographic group out- comes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Which of the following most closely reflects your gender identity?What is your place of birth?What is the language that you first learned at home in childhood and still under-stand?

Participants and data collection

This longitudinal study tracks multiple groups of youth employment program participants over the course of six years (2022-2028). Once participants complete a youth employment program, they are asked to complete a Post-Program Evaluation Survey. This survey assesses the skills and knowledge that participants gained from participating in a youth employment program. At the end of this survey, participants can choose to opt into the longitudinal study.

Participants who opt into the longitudinal study are surveyed three times over three years. The first survey is conducted between one year to one year and six months after the participants complete a youth employment program. The second survey takes place one year after the first survey and the third survey is conducted one year after the second survey. At the end of the third survey, participants can agree to take part in an interview with the Youth & Innovation Project to provide additional qualitative insights into their career paths.

Given that participants complete youth employment programs on a rolling basis, they are grouped based on their program completion dates.

For example:

A participant who completed a program between January 2022 and July 2022, is surveyed in July 2023, July 2024, and July 2025.

A participant who completed a program between August 2022 and December 2022, is surveyed in January 2024, January 2025 and January 2026.

To manage the data collection, participants are divided into two subgroups per year based on when they completed their program. One subgroup is surveyed in January, and the other subgroup is surveyed in July. Each calendar year, data from both subgroups are combined and analyzed together, and then referred to collectively as a single group. Over the course of the six-year study (2022-2028), this will result in six groups in total (one per year) and 12 subgroups (two per year: January and July). This structure enables us to monitor trends over time, analyze program outcomes consistently, and compare findings across different years and program completion periods.

Figure 1. Study Design

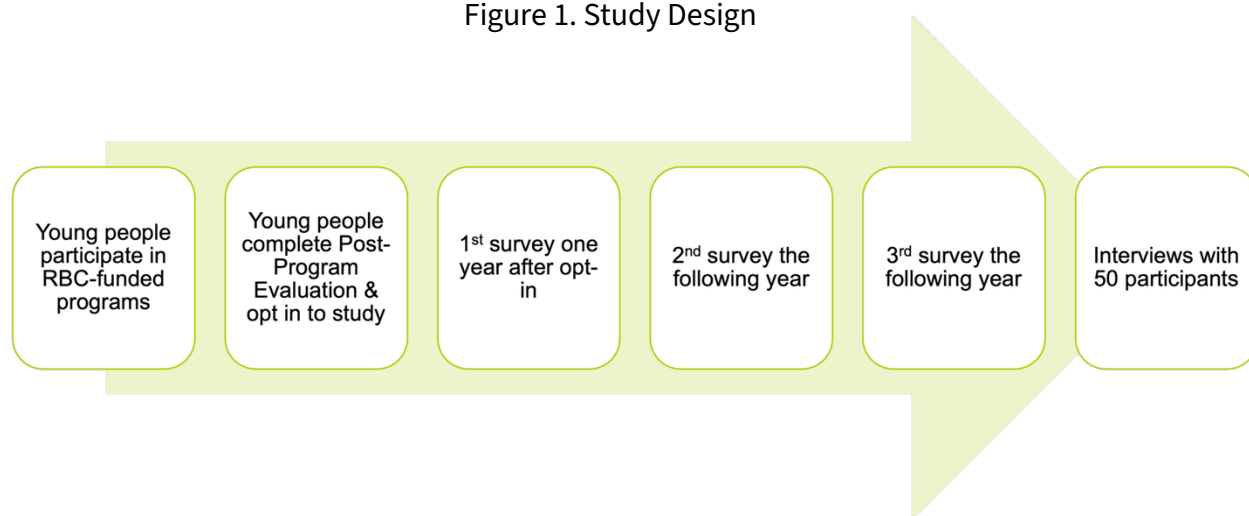
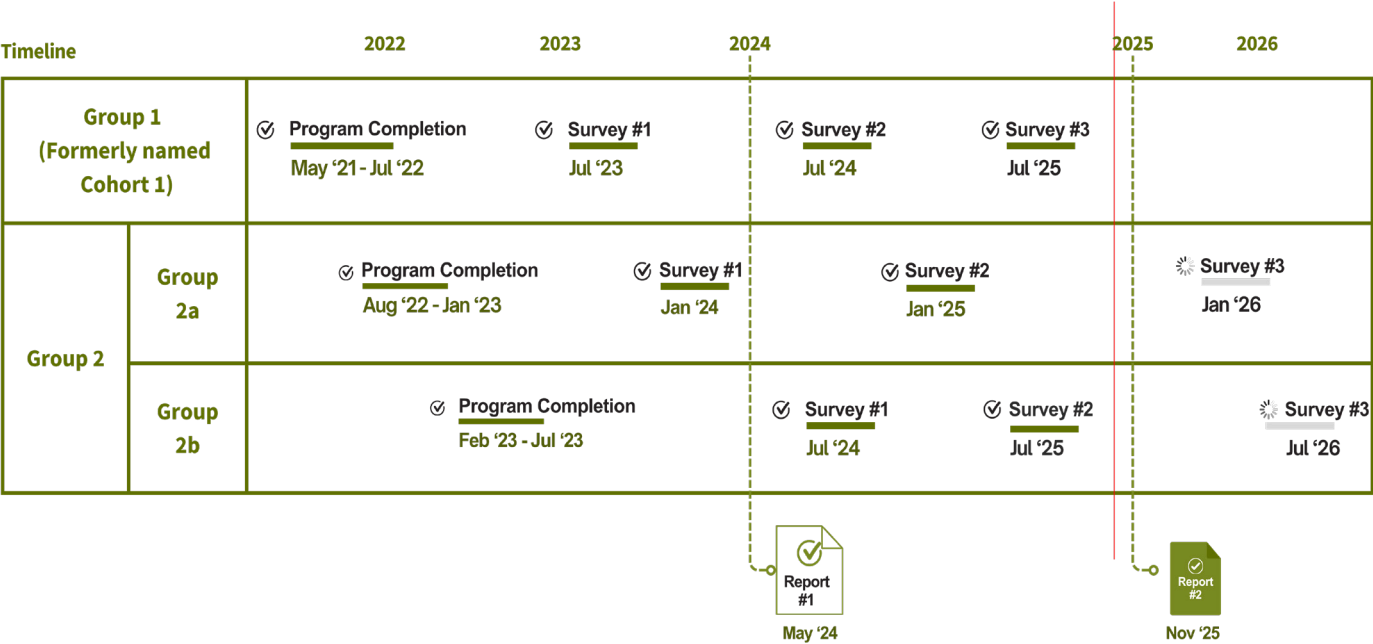


Figure 2: Study Progress



Key highlights of 2024 report

In 2024, we released our first report with data collected from May 15, 2023 to August 30, 2023. This report draws responses from 713 young people across Canada, representing a 16% response rate. These participants completed a youth employment program between May 2021 and July 2022. In that report, we identified four key recommendations that employers should consider in order to retain and leverage the unique abilities of their young talent:

- ◆ Embrace the desire of younger employees to work in-person by providing meaningful in-person work experiences and supporting relationship-building when young people are in the office.
- ◆ Promote equal pay initiatives for young women, financial literacy, and support women’s access to higher-paying jobs.
- ◆ Implement initiatives to support young immigrants in their professional growth and integration into the workplace.
- ◆ Create more opportunities for intergenerational collaboration at work and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, especially in the context of an aging population.

These recommendations resonated across sectors and sparked broad engagement, including being:



Featured in 25 news articles, op-eds and radio interviews



Shared with broad audiences through 22 presentations to business, government and civil society audiences



Shared on LinkedIn and receiving over 15,000 impressions



Shared with Federal Ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Provincial Parliament Senators, Political staff, Senior bureaucrats and Senior leaders in business and civil society

The study's tangible influence on youth employment policy is already visible. For example, the Federal Government announced 6,000 more Canada Summer Jobs, following our Managing Director's interview with CBC's The House.

Facing challenges, finding opportunities in 2025

This year's report builds on the 2024 findings, continuing to track young participants' outcomes related to education, work experience, employment status and workplace well-being, including work-life satisfaction, resilience and collaboration with decision-makers. While the findings outlined in this report are not yet longitudinal, we compare the experiences of this year's participants with those included in the 2024 report to begin to identify trends and patterns.

In 2025, we are adding two additional areas of focus. First, we look at the experiences of young immigrants and international students. This focus stems from Canada's evolving immigration policies and shift in public attitudes (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022). We examine how young immigrants and international students are navigating the labour market, and whether they feel included, supported and well positioned to thrive in the workplace. Second, we explore how young people are using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace.

The data presented in this 2025 report combines the results of two subgroups; we will call this combined group 'Group 2' throughout the report. Group 2a's data collection period was between January 10th and February 7th, 2024. A total of 1,366 survey invitations were sent, and 265 responses were received, resulting in a 19% response rate. The participants in Group 2a completed their youth employment programs between August and December of 2022.

Group 2b's data collection period was between July 10th and August 7th, 2024. A total of 2,249 survey invitations were sent, and 521 responses were received, resulting in a response rate of 23%. The participants in group 2b completed their youth employment programs between January and July of 2023.

The results in this report are based on descriptive and bivariate analyses of Group 2 and are presented when relevant and/or statistically significant. When applicable, comparisons are made with data from the first group of longitudinal study participants, which was shared in the first report from this study (published in 2024), data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) for May, June and July 2023 as well as other relevant data sources that speak to the topics covered in this report.

Results

This section begins with an overview of the longitudinal study participant demographics. We then discuss participant education levels, participation in Work-Integrated Learning, current employment situation as well as whether participants feel as though they are thriving at work. This last section includes questions about work-life satisfaction, resilience at work and collaboration with decision-makers in the workplace.

This year’s report also provides initial insights into young immigrants’ and international students’ experiences in the Canadian workforce and the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) by young people in the workplace.

Section 1: Demographics

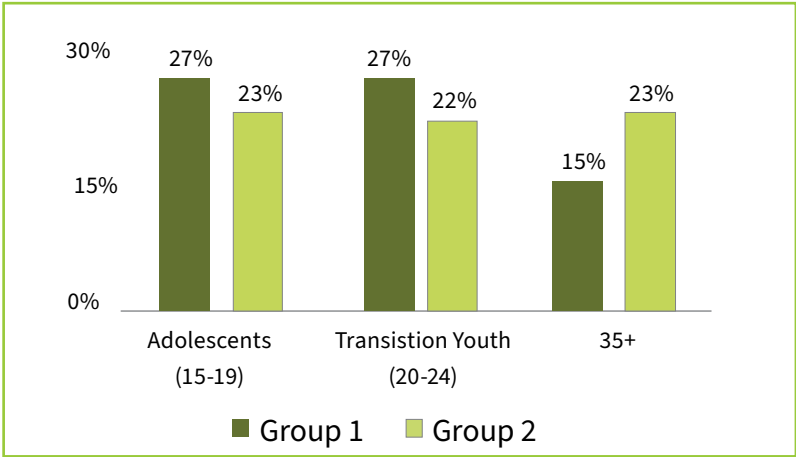
■ Who are the longitudinal study participants in Group 2?

The majority of Group 2 study participants are female: 62% of the Group 2 survey participants are female, 36% are male and less than 1% are intersex. This is not representative of the Canadian population (51% male and 49% female, as recorded by the LFS). As indicated in the 2024 report, higher response rates from female participants in online surveys is a recognized trend; however, the reasons behind this disparity remain understudied (Becker, 2022).

Similarly to last year, the participants have been divided into four age groups: adolescents (ages 15-19), transition youth (ages 20-24), young adults (ages 25-34), and adults (ages 35 and older). These categories align with the age categories used in the publicly available LFS data, allowing for meaningful comparisons between the two datasets3.

In Group 2, 23% of the participants are adolescents, 22% are transition youth, 32% are young adults and 23% are adults. Adolescents, transition youth and young adults are all within the target population of youth employment programs participants took part in and as such these groups are well represented in the longitudinal study. Comparing Group 1 (formerly referred to as Cohort 1 in the 2024 report) and Group 2, there are slightly fewer adolescents and transition youth in Group 2.

Figure 3: Age comparison between Group 1 and Group 2



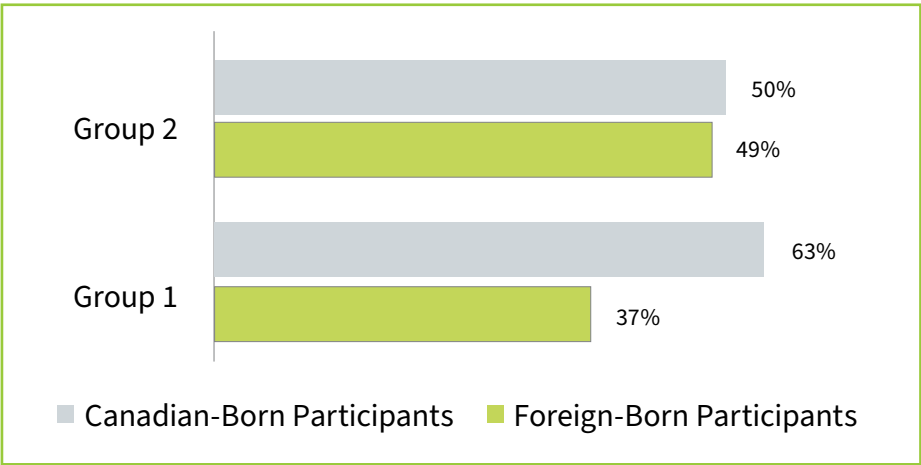
649 respondents in Group 1 of the longitudinal study.
700 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Most of the Group 2 participants come from Ontario (52%), Alberta (17%), or British Columbia (10%), following the same geographical distribution pattern as Group 1. This year the study saw new engagement from participants in the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. While these participants represent less than 1% of the study, this is proportionally representative, as the Northwest Territories and the Yukon together account for only 0.2% of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, 2022b). However, the LFS does not collect data from the Territories due to the challenges of reaching remote areas with dispersed populations. This leaves persisting gaps in our understanding of the labour force and the needs of young people in these regions.

Only 4% of participants in Group 2 are from Québec and only 4% report French as their first language, both representing a 2% drop from Group 1. This is notable given that young adults in Québec account for over 16% of Canada’s population. Although RBC-funded programs exist in Québec, participants from the province are underrepresented in the RBC Post-Program Evaluation compared to those from other Provinces and Territories. This underrepresentation limits the opportunity for young Québécois to opt into this longitudinal study and hinders our ability to understand their employment realities.

Group 2 of the longitudinal study includes a higher proportion of participants who are Black and of Asian descent compared to the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2022c). This reflects the RBC Foundation’s goal of supporting youth employment programs that serve racialized youth. The proportion of Black respondents in Group 2 (18%) is higher than in Group 1 (13%). Indigenous representation in Group 2 is 4%, which is slightly below the national average of approximately 5% (Statistics Canada, 2022b).

Figure 4: Canadian- and foreign-born participants in Group 1 compared to Group 2



608 respondents in Group 1 of the longitudinal study
644 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study

In Group 2, 49% of respondents are foreign-born, and 51% are Canadian-born, compared to 61% and 37% respectively in Group 14. Among the foreign-born participants in Group 2, 48% were born in Asia, 25% were born in Africa and the Middle East, 10% in Europe, and 9% in Latin America and the United States.

Notably, a significant portion of these individuals are relatively new to Canada: 43% arrived within the past five years, and 23% arrived between five and ten years ago. This means that two-thirds of the immigrant participants have been in Canada for less than a decade, with almost half being in the midst of navigating the critical first five years of settlement in their new country.

Regarding education, 64% of the Group 2 participants are currently studying, either in formal education or informal training, compared to 66% of participants from Group 1. Looking at the highest level of education completed, 63% of participants have completed a college or university degree or higher, while 36% have completed high school or a lower level of education. In comparison, 59% of participants in Group 1 had completed a college or university degree or higher, while 41% had completed high school or a lower level of education.

In respect to employment, 63% of the Group 2 participants are employed. Of those, 65% work full-time and 35% work part-time. In comparison, 67% of Group 1 participants are working. Of those, 65% were working full-time and 35% were working part-time.

Lastly, 21% of participants reported living with a physical and/or mental disability in Group 2, compared to 25% in Group 1, both of which are below the 27% of Canadians aged 15 and over who report having one or more disabilities that limit them in their daily activities (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Key demographic insights and gaps

While Group 2 of the longitudinal study is moderately representative of the Canadian population, as it broadly reflects national averages in core demographics such as age, gender and race, there are still critical gaps in regional, linguistic and cultural representation. As with Group 1, Québec and Francophone communities remain underrepresented and Nunavut is not represented at all. Indigenous participation in Group 2 is also slightly lower than in Group 1.

Compared to Group 1, Group 2 includes a higher proportion of foreign-born and adult participants, with a lower proportion of Canadian-born, adolescent (15-19), and transition youth (20-24) participants.

The gaps outlined in this study are unfortunately, not unusual. The LFS does not contain data from Northern Canada at all, while many so-called ‘national’ studies fail to include adequate representation from Québec or from diverse cohorts of young people (Statistics Canada, 2025b).

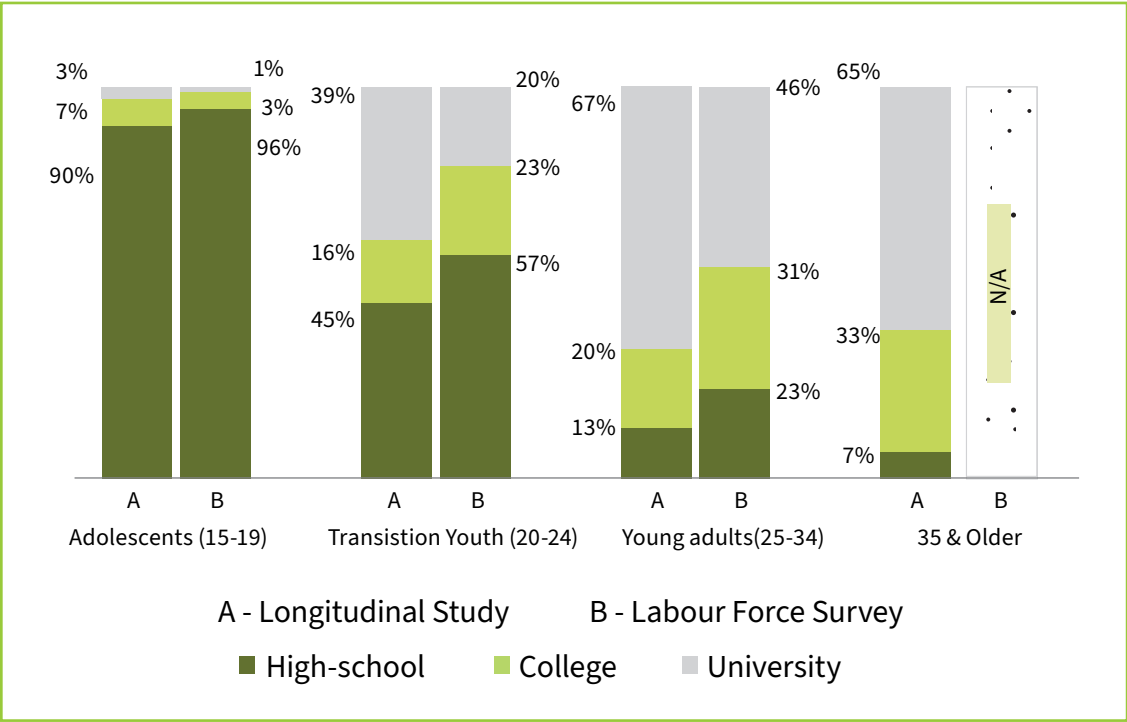
Consistent, thoughtful and long-term investment in evaluation and impact measurement is sorely needed to ensure that employment outcomes and barriers for all Canadian youth are accurately understood.

Governments, business and foundations who fund youth employment programs and organizations who run youth-focused programs should prioritize investing in research practices that are both in rigorous and inclusive to ensure the full diversity of Canada's young people, particularly those in Francophone, Northern, and Indigenous communities, is captured.

Section 2: Education and Work-Integrated Learning

In this section we present study results related to education and Work-Integrated Learning from Group 2 and compare with Group 1 and the Canadian population when possible.

Figure 5: Educational achievements



630 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study
Statistically significant. P-value <0.01

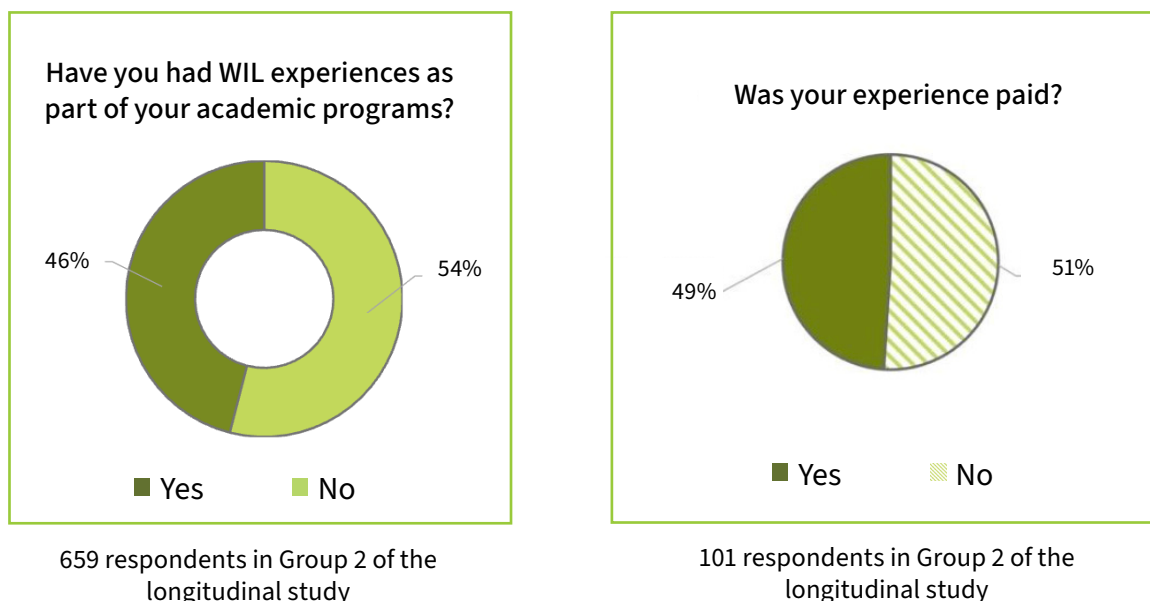
Similar to Group 1, Group 2 participants in the longitudinal study continue to be more educated than the Canadian average. Transition youth and young adults in the longitudinal study were more likely to have completed a university degree compared to those in the LFS. With two groups surveyed, the data suggests that participants in the youth employment programs included in this study tend to be more highly educated than the general Canadian population. While the study offers a clear view of Canada’s most educated young people, it may underrepresent the realities of young people who pursue college, trades or enter the workforce without post-secondary education.

Young people with lower education levels often face barriers to stable employment, including limited access to high-paying roles, skills training and professional networks (Quinlan-Davidson et al., 2024). This vulnerability leaves them disproportionately impacted by economic downturns and shifts in the labour market (Conference Board of Canada, 2024). The results suggest that youth employment programs may not be engaging these young people despite these young people being particularly economically vulnerable. Employment programs close skills gaps, enhance employability, and should ensure that all young Canadians, not only the most educated, meaningfully participate in the economy.

Work-Integrated Learning

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), often referred to as co-op education, is a type of experiential learning embedded within academic programs, where students gain hands-on experience in real workplaces or practical settings (CEWIL, n.d.). Research shows that students who participate in WIL are more likely to secure employment soon after graduation, report higher job satisfaction, and earn higher starting salaries compared with their peers (Pizarro Milian et al., 2021; Wyonch, 2020).

Figure 6: Work-Integrated Learning



In Group 2, 46% of participants reported having the opportunity to participate in WIL; this is slightly higher than Group 1 at 43%. In 2015, the National Graduate Surveys indicated that 50% of students had WIL opportunities, and 46% in 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2025c). Our data suggests that the number of young people who are participating in WIL is at the same level as it was in 2020, but still below 2015 levels. While it is encouraging to see recent federal investment to expand WIL (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025), the scale of these efforts needs to increase significantly in order to reach the WIL participation rates seen in 2015. Given the understanding of the importance of WIL that has become common place in the last 10 years, we would have expected to see significant increases in WIL opportunities rather than a stagnation.

Among Group 2 participants who reported participating in WIL, 49% indicated that these opportunities were paid, which is 9% lower than Group 1. Regardless, this remains higher than the national average, as only 40% of Canadian graduates who participated in WIL in 2020 reported receiving paid opportunities.

Unpaid WIL opportunities create barriers to equitable access to this type of practical experience, particularly for young people from low- and middle-income backgrounds who may be unable to afford to work without compensation. These students are often forced to choose between gaining valuable experience or earning income through jobs which are less relevant to their long-term career ambitions. (Macqueen et al., 2025). This financial barrier can limit access to career-relevant learning opportunities, widen existing inequalities, and contribute to unequal employment outcomes post-graduation (Hunt & Scott, 2023).

If WIL opportunities for young people are indeed a priority for policy makers, as recent funding announcements suggest (Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2025), then there is an urgent need to scale up the funding and infrastructure needed to offer a substantially larger number of WIL opportunities while ensuring that these opportunities are paid and supported by policies that promote fair compensation.

Professional development opportunities

When young people enter the workforce, they may have the opportunity to participate in on-the-job training–learning while working (Mat Nawi, Tambi & Abu Bakar, 2019) and/or professional development, which focuses on gaining new skills through continuing education and career training after entering the workforce (Parsons, 2022). Research shows that access to on-the-job training and professional development are linked to improved employee performance and growth (Rodriguez & Walters, 2017). We asked young people whether their jobs provided them with such opportunities, and if so, how many hours they spent on those activities in the past 12 months.

The findings in Group 2 show that, while more than half of participants reported having access to on-the-job and/or professional development training, actual time spent in these activities was low. Similar to Group 1, across all age groups, about one-third of those who participated in on-the-job training and/or professional development training participated for 10 hours or less over the course of the last year.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of publicly available data in Canada, we are unable to compare these results with the Canadian population. There is a pressing need for more comprehensive data on access to and participation in on-the-job training and professional development, so that employers and policymakers can make informed decisions about how to design effective programs and policies that support all workers’ ongoing development. Our data makes it clear that while young people have access to on-the-job and/or professional development training, the number of hours of this training that they are participating in is low.

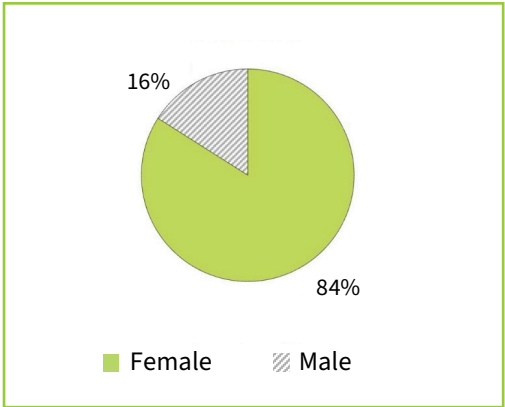
If business, government and organizations hope to ensure that they maintain a talent pipeline that will facilitate young people gaining the skills needed to move into more senior roles, this needs to change.

Healthcare practitioners

In 2024, the RBC Foundation committed \$6 million to support the reskilling, upskilling, and resilience of nurses and healthcare workers across Canadian hospitals (RBC, 2024). This initiative aims to enhance healthcare delivery nationwide by investing in the professional development of frontline staff. With this investment, we wanted to begin tracking healthcare professionals in the longitudinal study.

The Canadian government has also made a commitment to strengthen the healthcare system by investing in its workforce and shared systems across provinces, streamlining licensing for internationally educated professionals, and increasing pay in targeted roles that aim to stabilize the system (Health Canada, 2024)

Figure 7: Participants in the health sector by gender



43 participants in Group 2 of the longitudinal study

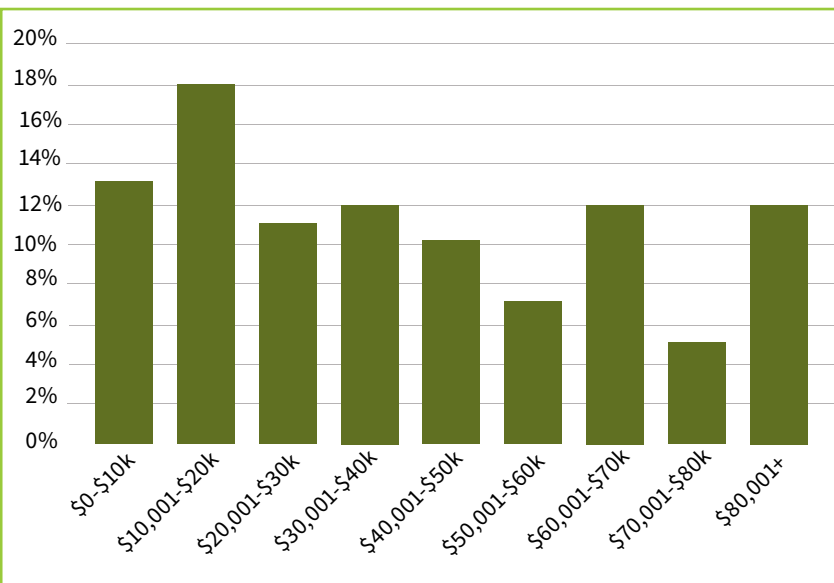
Education and occupation match

Canada has one of the most highly educated workforce of the G7 countries, yet many young people struggle to find jobs that align with their education (Statistics Canada, 2022d). Some are overqualified for their roles, while others find that their education has not equipped them with the skills employers require (RBC, 2018).

Among respondents of Group 2 of the longitudinal study, 33% reported having an education-occupation match, 32% reported a partial match, and 35% reported no match.

While overall education-to-occupation alignment remains low in Group 2, 64% of respondents are currently enrolled in full-time, part-time, or informal education. This indicates that many young people are actively seeking to improve their qualifications and skills, presumably with the goal of securing better-aligned work in the future. The relationship between education and job outcomes is complex, and it is not yet clear why these efforts are not translating into better-aligned work. Continued monitoring of trends in this area are essential, and longitudinal data will be critical for understanding this topic.

Figure 8: Yearly earnings of healthcare workers

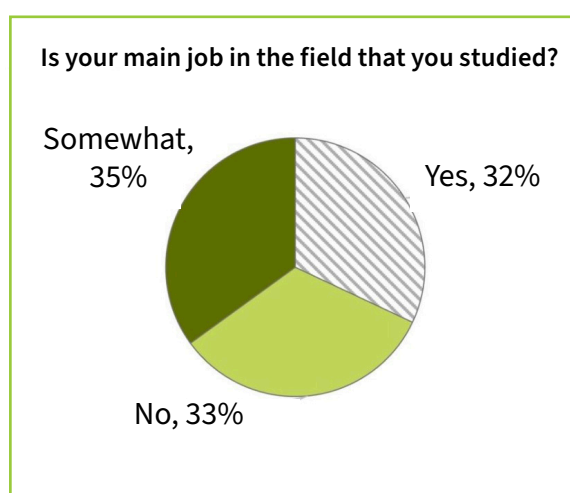


40 participants in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Statistically significant. p-value <0.05.

With these recent investments made to strengthen health system capacity in mind, the results from this study show that 10% of the participants in Group 2 report working in the healthcare sector. Of those participants, 84% are female and 16% are male. Interestingly, a higher proportion of graduates from the health sector are in entry-level roles (68%) compared to peers in other fields (59%), which may indicate accessibility to enter the profession but difficulty moving up or gaining leadership roles. We will continue to track health care professionals throughout the study to assess the indirect effects of recent investments by the Government of Canada and the RBC Foundation.

Figure 9: Education-occupation match



396 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Not statistically significant.

Section 3: Employment

This section presents the results related to employment and financial well-being.

Young people - Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)

Tracking the rate of NEET youth is critical for understanding how well education systems, labour markets, and social supports are serving young people (Blueprint, 2018). A high prevalence of NEET youth can indicate systemic challenges, including barriers in education-to-work transitions, labour-systems disconnect and growing risks among vulnerable populations (Quinlan-Davidson et al., 2024).

There are two categories of NEET youth; both are considered vulnerable populations, but they need different types of support. Unemployed NEET youth are actively looking for work but may face economic challenges, such as few job opportunities, job precarity or inadequate training. Inactive NEET youth are not currently looking for work; they may be unable to work, taking a break, caring for family members, traveling or planning to return to school in the future (Brunet, 2018).

Figure 10: NEET Participants

Current student status	Current labour force status			Total
	Employed	Not employed	Out of the LF ²	
Full-time student	22.4%	10.9%	6%	39.3%
Part-time student	5.5%	1.7%	0.0%	7.2%
Informal education	11.5%	5%	0.5%	17%
Not a student	23.7	11.5	1.3% (NEET)	36.5%
Total	63.1%	29.1%	7.8%	100%

635 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study

According to the most recent LFS, 9.3% of Canadian youth report being NEET, which is slightly higher than last year’s 8.7%. This aligns with current unemployment trends among young people; the prevalence of NEET youth in Canada is rising (Statistics Canada, 2025d). In this longitudinal study, only 1.3% of Group 2 participants are NEET, which is consistent with the findings from Group 1.

This year we added additional survey questions to better understand the realities of NEET youth. This revealed that while very few participants are currently NEET, 33% reported having been NEET at some point in the past five years⁵, and of those participants, 52% reported being NEET for six months or longer⁶.

The challenges that NEET youth face extend beyond the individual; they affect communities and the broader economy through lost productivity, increased reliance on social services, and long-term impacts on health and well-being (Blueprint, 2018). One report estimated that over a lifetime there are \$212,000 in direct costs associated with NEET youth (healthcare, social assistance programs, etc.), and \$424,000 when accounting for foregone earnings (Blueprint, 2018).

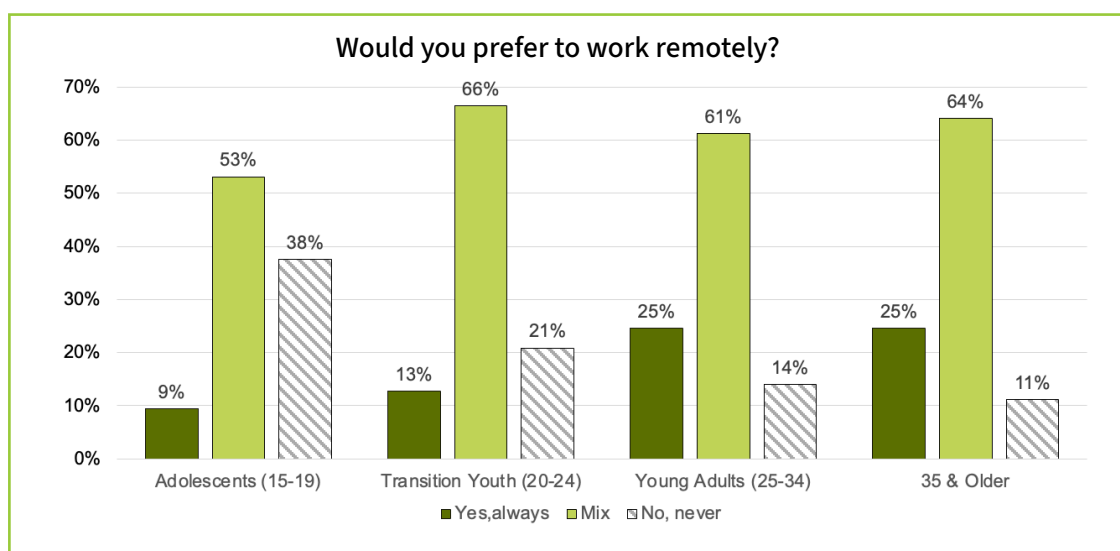
Our new survey data suggests that youth employment programs are reaching NEET youth and it may be that these programs are having a positive impact on NEET levels amongst participants, thus keeping the rate low among study participants.

Further insights from follow-up interviews will be important to understand the factors that support young people in staying engaged in education and employment.

Working arrangements:

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered how we study and work, with remote options becoming common from 2020 to 2022 when provinces were cycling in and out of lockdowns (Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2022). As restrictions eased, and with daily life largely returning to normal, many workplaces and schools have shifted back to in-person or hybrid models with some organizations implementing stricter return-to-office policies (CBRE, 2025). As the workplace evolves, we aim to understand young people's preferences for different working arrangements.

Figure 11: Working arrangement preferences



554 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Statistically significant. P-value<0.01.

Participants in Group 2 showed a strong overall preference for hybrid work arrangements. Adolescents were the most likely to indicate a preference for in-person work (38%), while transition youth showed the strongest preference for hybrid models (66%). These findings are statistically significant and mirror the trends observed in Group 1. While it may seem surprising given assumptions that young people are highly tech-savvy and comfortable online, this suggests that adolescents may value the social interaction and hands-on experience of in-person work. It is also important to consider that many entry-level jobs available to them, such as those in retail or childcare, are typically in-person roles.

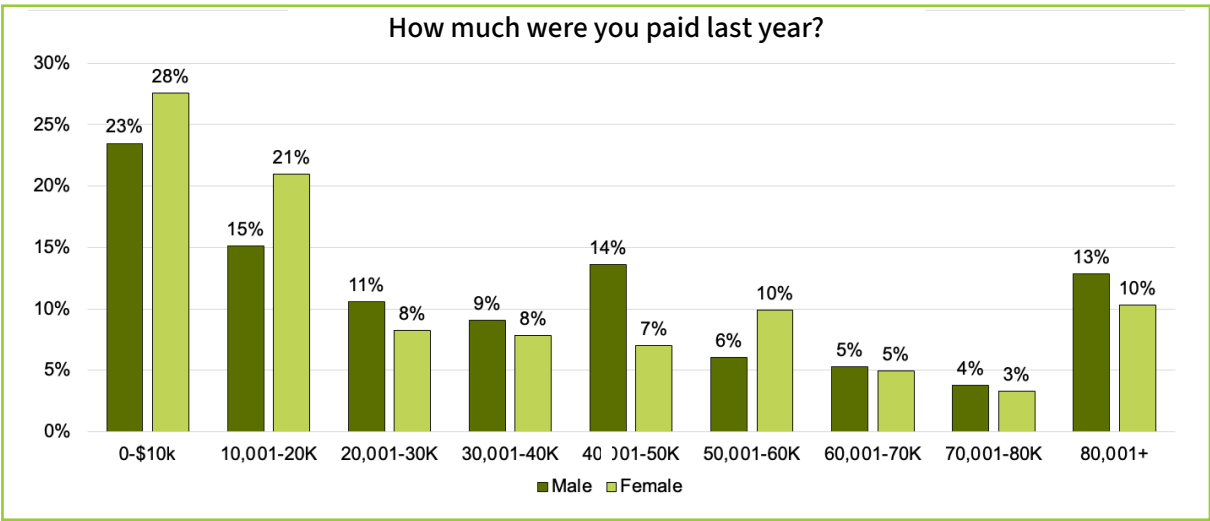
Consistent with last year’s findings, adolescents maintain the highest preference for fully in-person work (38%)

It will be interesting to see how these results might change over the coming years as younger cohorts continue to engage more consistently in in-person schooling and work and as the pandemic becomes a more distant memory Current preferences may be influenced by whether adolescents spent key developmental years learning remotely during the pandemic, which could shape their comfort and desire for hybrid or in-person work.

Financial well-being

Matching the patterns observed in Group 1, women in Group 2 earn less than men; this also reflects global data which shows that women are consistently paid less than their male counterparts (Youthful Cities, n.d.).

Figure 12: Yearly earnings of participants



381 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.
Not statistically significant.

The largest income disparities between males and females are found at the lower end of the salary range. Specifically, 57% of female participants earn under \$30,000, compared to 49% of male participants. There are a higher proportion of participants in this lowest income bracket compared to Group 1 (5% for females and 4% for males). This is concerning, especially since Group 2 participants are older than those in Group 1 and would typically be expected to earn more.

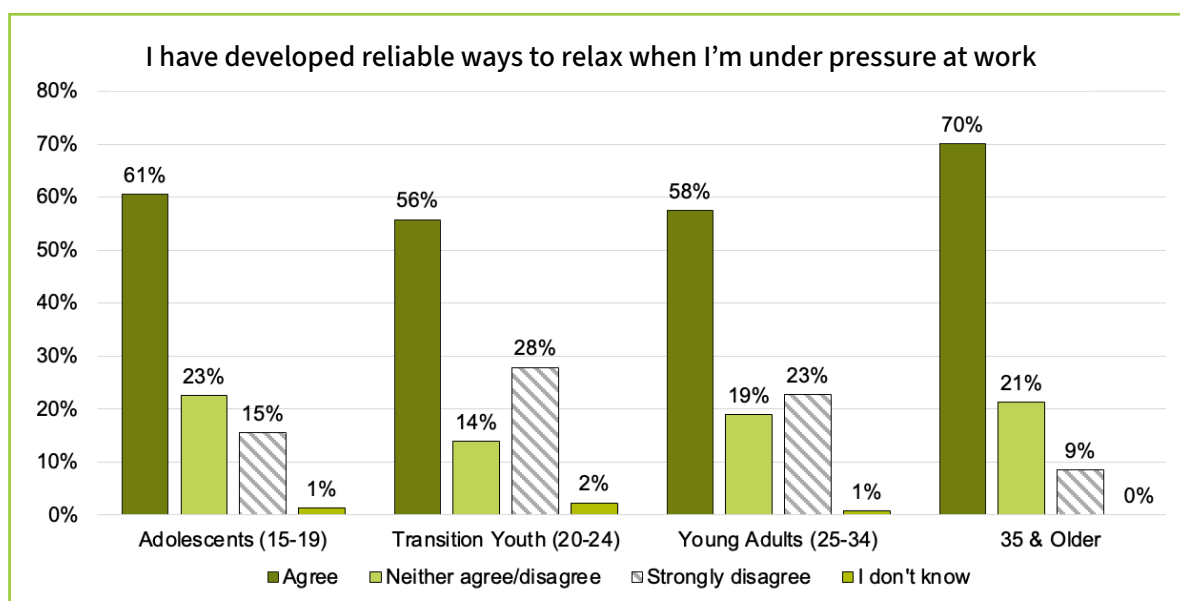
Policymakers, employers, and youth-serving organizations should ensure that young people, particularly young women, are paid living wages, not stuck in low-earning trajectories, and that programs aimed at closing gender wage gaps are funded.

Section 4: Thriving at work

We ask a variety of questions to capture a full picture of whether young Canadians are thriving at work in areas including life satisfaction, balance between work and personal life, feeling valued at work, resilience at work, and collaboration with decision-makers in the workplace.

Included in the concept of resilience at work, we include items that touch on whether young people have developed reliable ways to relax when they are under pressure at work. The findings indicate that transition-age youth report lower levels of resilience at their jobs; this is consistent with the findings from Group 1 which suggests that this remains an area requiring ongoing attention and support.

Figure 13: Resilience at work



383 respondents in the Group 2 longitudinal study.

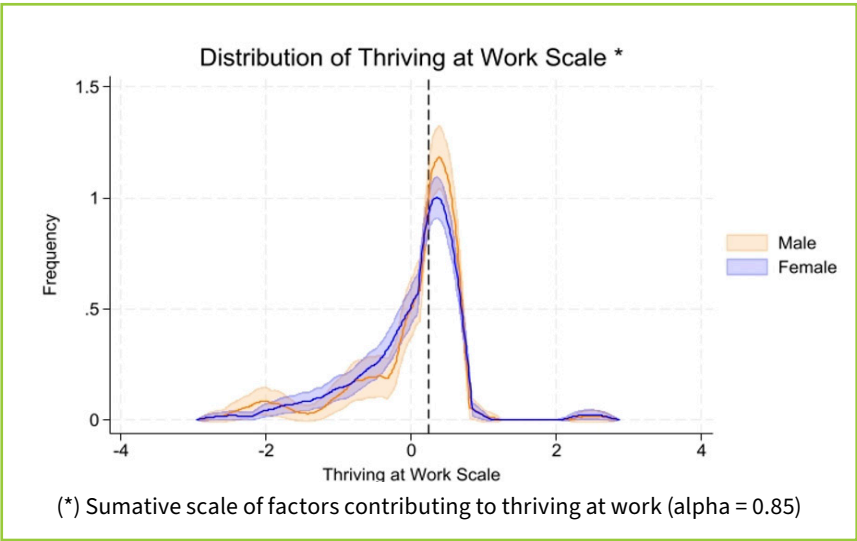
Not statistically significant.

We also included an academic scale to measure thriving at work that includes the following items:

Table 2: Thriving at work scale (Source- Porath et al., 2012)

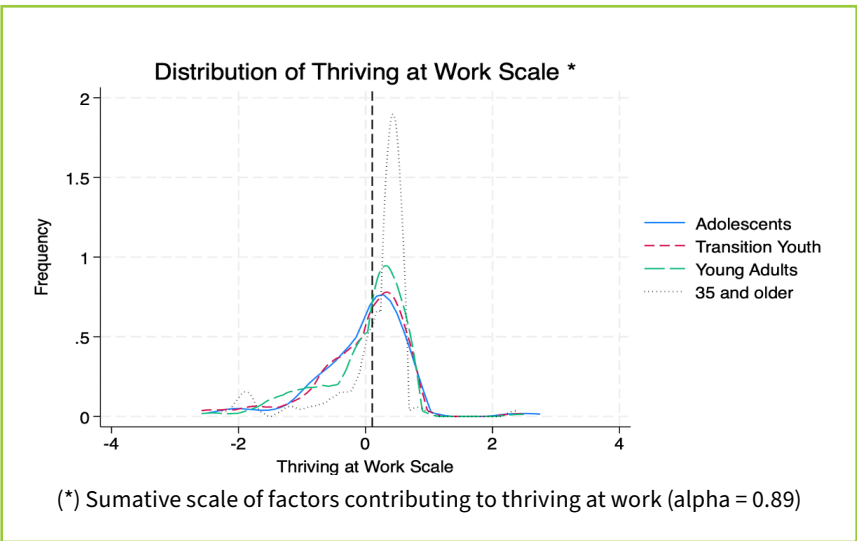
Items	Measurement
I find myself learning often	Likert scale from 1-5, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree
I continue to learn more as time goes by	
I see myself continually improving	
I am not learning at all	
I am developing a lot as a person	
I feel alive and vital	
I have energy and spirit	
I do not feel energetic	
I feel alert and awake	
I am looking forward to each new day	

Figure 14: Resilience at work (Comparison between sex)



Male and female participants reported similar levels of thriving at work, though males reported a slightly higher positive experience overall.

Figure 15: Resilience at work (Comparison between age)

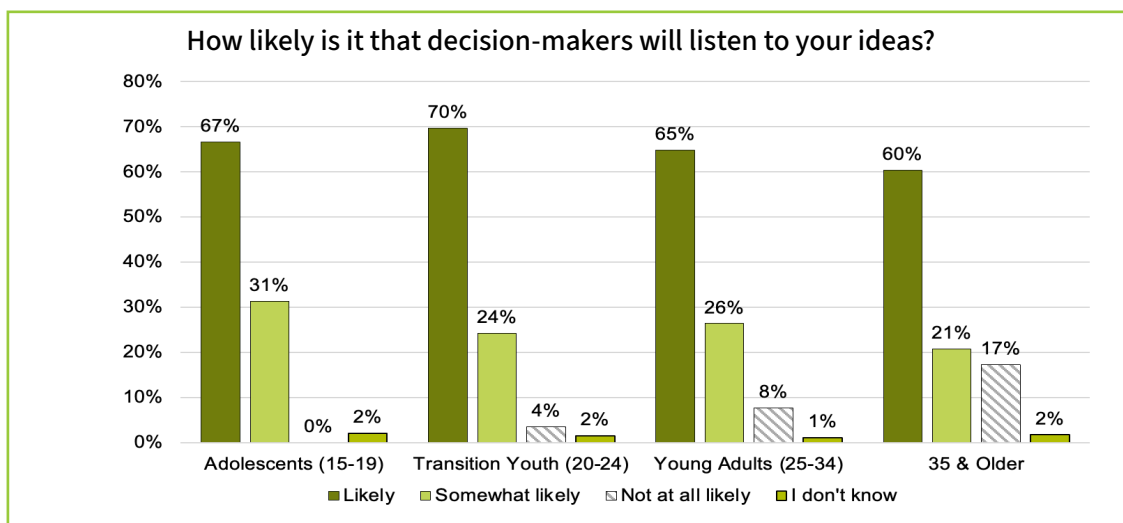


Age appears to be a stronger factor: adults aged 35 and older report the highest levels of thriving, with levels decreasing progressively across younger age groups.

These findings highlight that while average levels of thriving at work appear to be similar across gender, the greater variability among younger workers suggest more uneven workplaces experiences across age groups.

This underscores the importance of targeted support for younger employees, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, as a critical step toward fostering a more resilient, inclusive, and equitable workforce.

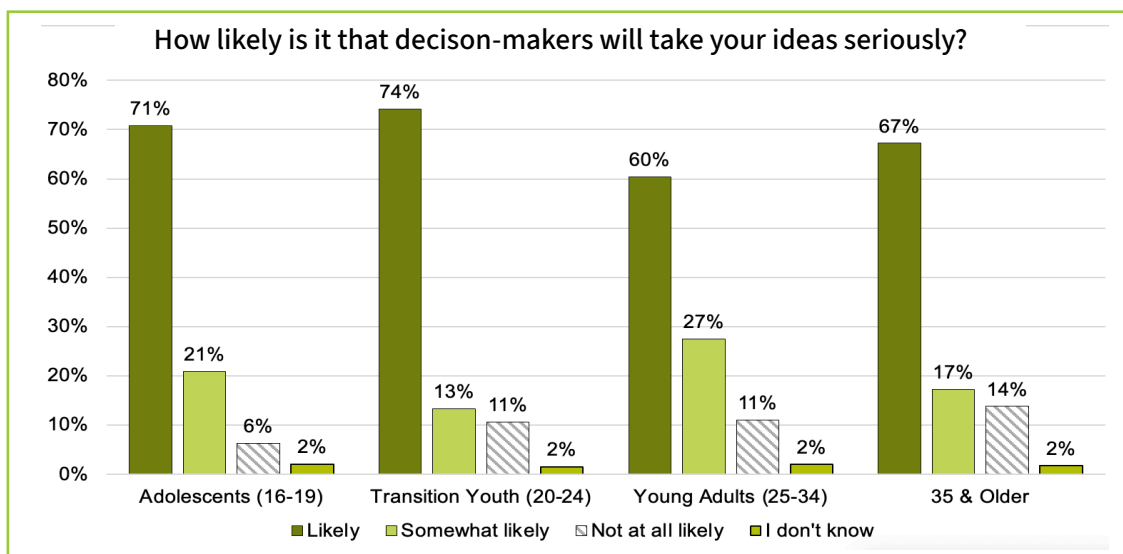
Figure 16: Decision-makers listening to ideas



263 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Not statistically significant.

Figure 17: Decision-makers taking ideas seriously

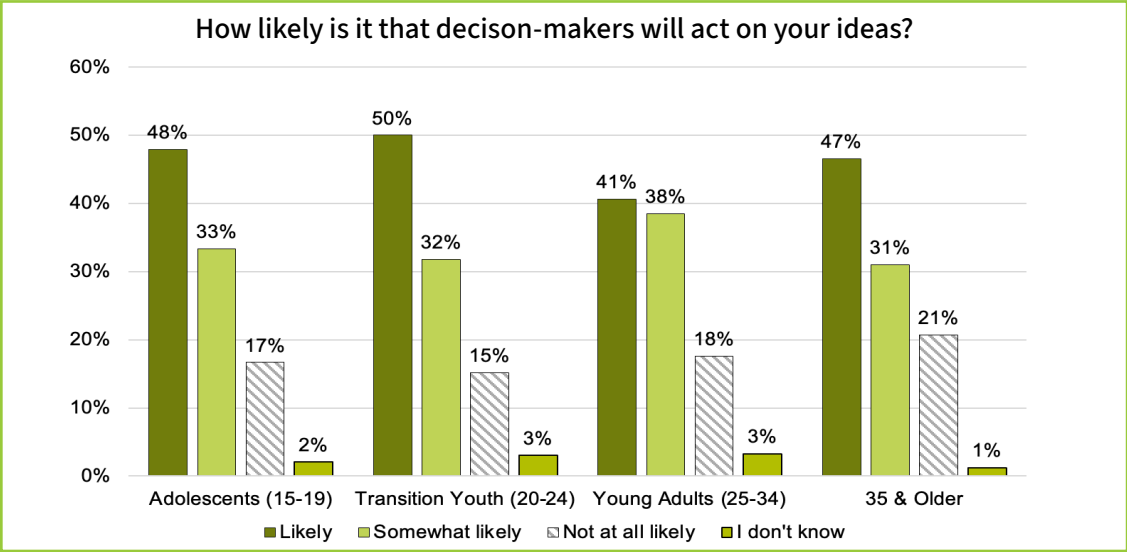


273 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Not statistically significant.

We asked participants about the opportunities they had to share ideas with decision-makers. Among those who reported having such opportunities, participants of all ages are generally optimistic that their input is heard and taken seriously. Despite this, they remain less confident that their ideas will ultimately influence decision-makers. These findings align with the results from Group 1 and our previous academic research, highlighting a critical gap in intergenerational collaboration. While young people bring valuable perspectives and are eager to contribute, people across all age groups often lack consistent channels for influence and follow-through.

Figure 18: Decision-makers acting on ideas



263 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.
Not statistically significant.

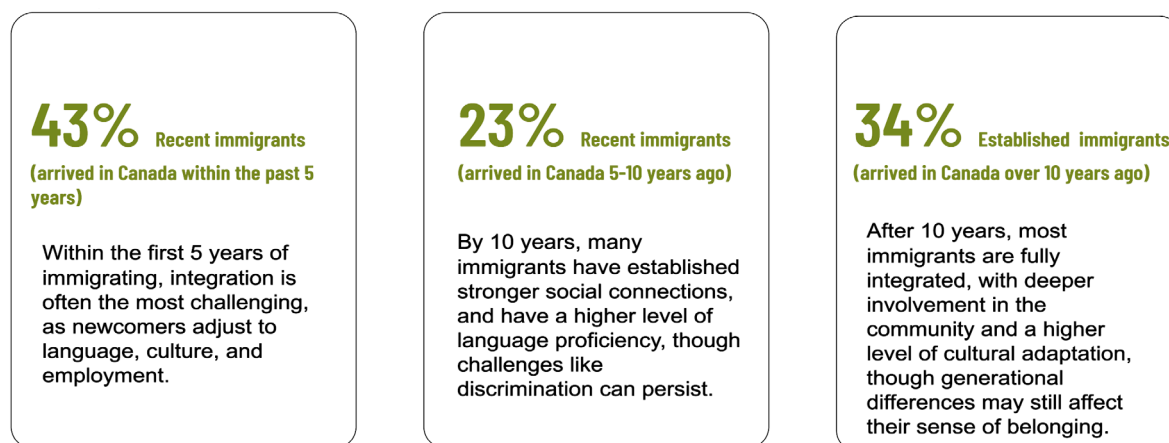
Strengthening intergenerational dialogue and creating more structured opportunities for participants of all ages to meaningfully contribute to workplace decisions could support both resilience and sense of belonging at work.

Section 5: Young immigrants and international students

Canada is home to a population where over 20% of people are immigrants (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024). Following a period where immigration was institutionally encouraged, shifting public opinion and a precarious economy has resulted in new policy approaches that are less welcoming (Statistics Canada, 2022a).

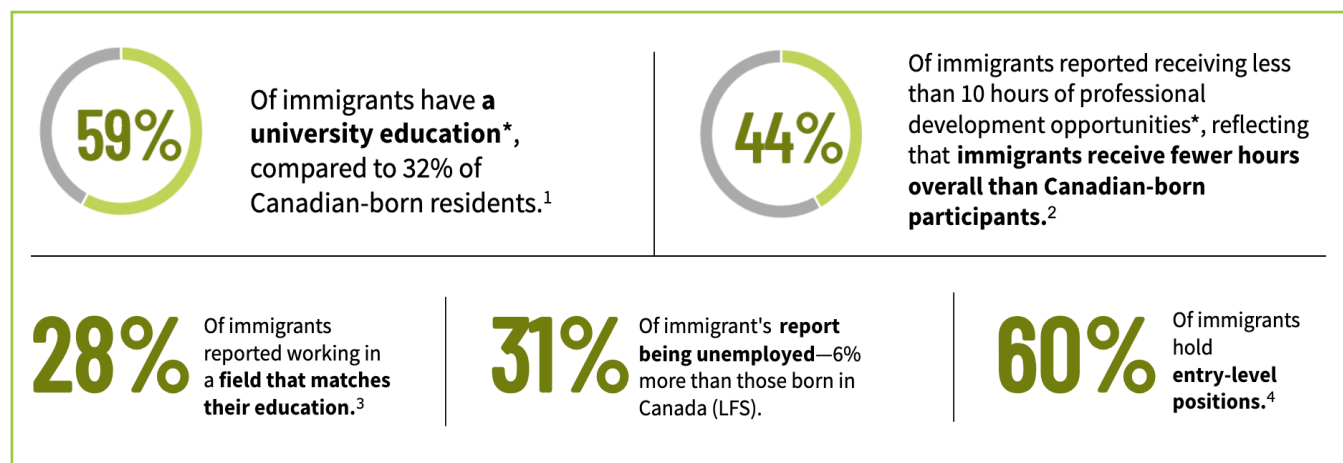
At the same time, immigration remains critical to Canada’s future. Canada’s population is aging rapidly, creating serious concerns about long-term economic stability (Statistics Canada, 2022b). Recent census data shows that 11% of newcomers are youth (15–24) and 64% are in the core working-age group (25–54), suggesting immigration can help address these demographic pressures. If effectively integrated into the workforce, young and working-age immigrants can help fill labour shortages, support key industries and drive sustainable economic growth (Navigating Socioeconomic Obstacle, 2023). This underscores the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment, not only for immigrants’ success, but for Canada’s prosperity.

Figure 19: Study participants' year of arrival and economic integration into Canada



186 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Of Group 2 participants, 49% reported being born outside of Canada. Among them, 43% are recent immigrants, having arrived in Canada within the past 5 years, while 23% arrived in Canada between 5 and 10 years ago. This means that two-thirds (66%) of the foreign-born respondents are relatively new to the country. Integration into Canadian society typically strengthens over time as immigrants adapt to their new environment (Monteiro & Haan, 2022). The first five years after arrival often present the greatest challenges, as newcomers navigate language barriers, cultural differences and adapting to a new working environment. By the ten-year mark, many have established stronger social connections, and have a higher level of language proficiency, though challenges such as discrimination can persist (Monteiro & Haan, 2022).



*Statistically significant, p-value <0.05.

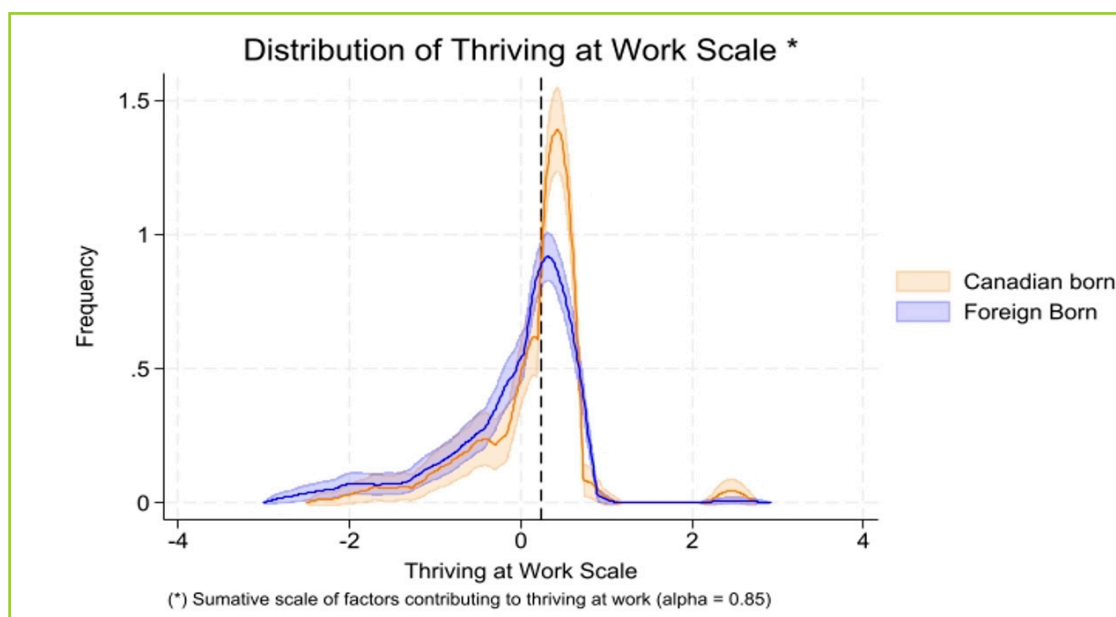
1 n = 314 immigrant and 359 Canadian-born participants in the Longitudinal Study.

2 n = 95 immigrant participants in the Longitudinal Study.

3 n = 163 immigrant participants in the Longitudinal Study.

4 n = 177 immigrant participants in the Longitudinal Study.

Young immigrants in Group 2 tend to be more educated than Canadian-born participants, with 59% compared to 32% having a university education. Despite being more educated than the Canadian-born population, many young immigrants in Group 2 struggle to find jobs that align with their skills. Only 28% report that their education matches their occupation, compared with 33% across all participants in Group 2. This mismatch likely contributes to many young immigrants in our study feeling less optimistic than Canadian-born participants about job fit as well as job alignment with their personal values⁷.



Young immigrants in Group 2 felt more optimistic than Canadian-born participants about being able to act independently and manage job-related stress. However, as shown in the graph below, they are less likely to report that they are thriving at work. While 66% want to stay in Canada⁸, those who want to leave, the main reasons are to pursue better job opportunities and better salaries.

When analyzing Group 2's responses, we purposefully identified current international students, i.e., those who are temporarily studying in Canada at a recognized post-secondary institution and are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025a). While Canada has been seen in the past as a top destination for international students because of its diversity, safety and promising career opportunities (Prince et al., 2024), international students in Canada are currently facing financial pressures, work experience barriers, and challenges with immigration policies (Banerjee, 2025). Like other immigrants, they also face challenges with social integration (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015). These challenges are compounded by recent Canadian government policy changes, such as new limits on study permits (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025b).

The international students within Group 2 are predominantly from South Asia (34%) as well as Africa and the Middle East (34%). They are concentrated in fields of study including engineering, health, mathematics and computer science. Compared to other students in the longitudinal study, they earn lower salaries, work fewer hours, and are employed more frequently in casual jobs, such as seasonal work, retail food service and short-term roles. Notably, a higher percentage of international students (74%) would prefer to stay in Canada compared to young immigrants who are not international students (66%).

International students share many of the same integration barriers as other immigrant youth, but these are often intensified by their temporary status and financial pressures (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2015).

Supporting the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into the Canadian workforce is not only a matter of equity, but also a strategic investment in Canada's economic growth and social cohesion.

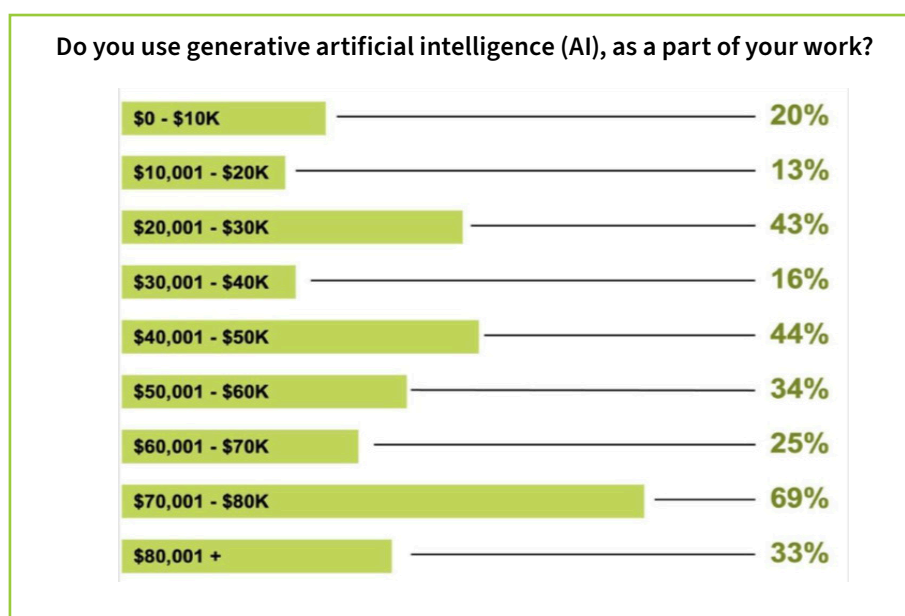
This includes improving job and occupation matching by recognizing international credentials, offering tailored career guidance, and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship. These efforts will help ensure that young newcomers contribute their full potential to the Canadian economy.

Section 6: Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the workplace

In 2024 and 2025, the use of AI in the workplace has grown rapidly, with early evidence suggesting transformation across multiple industries that are integrating AI into everyday processes, shaping both job tasks and workforce skills (Singla et al., 2024). Currently, an estimated 45% of employees in Canada, equivalent to approximately 9.2 million people, work in sectors with high exposure to AI, including education, law, management, government services and applied sciences (Kazemi et al., 2024). While long-term effects remain uncertain, the adoption of AI in the workplace is anticipated to grow in years to come (Shact et al., 2024). We will monitor this evolution throughout the remainder of the longitudinal study.

The widespread integration of AI in many fields signals that its use has become almost inevitable and indicates the potential for job transformations (Wilson & Daugherty, 2024). A recent CIBC report suggests that workers under 25 are more likely to work in areas that are at high risk of being replaced by AI advancements (Grantham, 2025), and recent layoffs in the tech sector are also seen as a sign of what is to come more broadly as other industries begin adopting AI at scale (Rogelberg, 2025). We asked participants if they use AI software (Chat GPT, Bard, Dall E2 or others) in their work.

Figure 20: AI usage at work and earnings

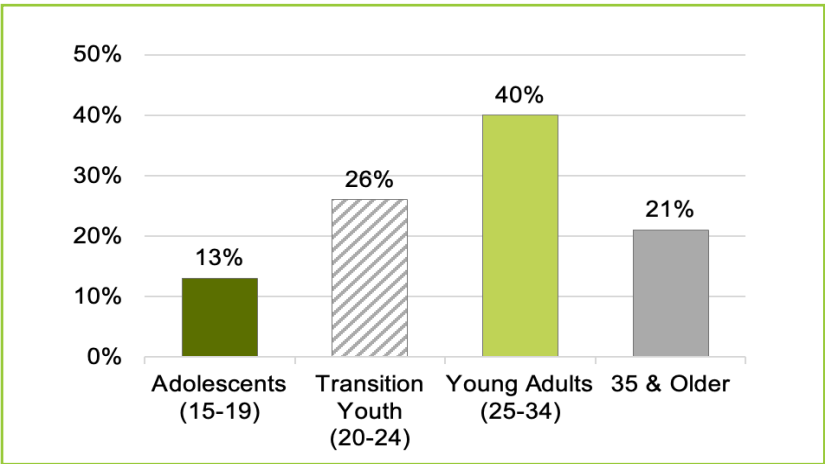


383 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Statistically significant. p-value <0.01.

Usage varied by income level, but at least one-quarter of all participants earning over \$40,001 annually report using AI in their primary job. Notably, 69% of participants making between \$70,001-\$80,000 annually reported using AI in the workplace. Similarly, AI use differed by job level: entry level employees were the least likely to report AI use in their workplaces (19.8%), compared to 41.8% of intermediate employees and 34.7% of those in management roles. These statistically significant⁹ findings suggest that exposure to AI technologies increases with job seniority, indicating that AI integration may be more prevalent in roles requiring specialized skills or decision-making responsibilities.

Figure 21: AI usage at work by age group



385 respondents in Group 2 of the longitudinal study.

Statistically significant. p-value <0.01.

Age differences followed a similar trend. Young adults (40%) were the most frequent users of AI in their work, followed by transition youth (26%) and adults (21%), while adolescents (13%) reported the lowest rates.

Even though our results show that younger cohorts, particularly those in entry-level roles with lower incomes are using AI less in their jobs, this should not be taken as call to increase young people’s “AI skills”. Let’s be honest, it is often the young people in our lives who teach us about new technology, not the other way around (Dougherty, 2025).

It is likely that, while adolescents may not yet be using AI in their workplaces, they are already engaging with it in their personal lives or at school. The data we have gathered so far does not yet provide a clear picture of how AI will shape youth employment in the years ahead, but we will continue to explore this important topic.

Insights and recommendations

Our hope is that the results of two groups of participants of the Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study will meaningfully contribute to the conversation about the employment context faced by young people in Canada. This year's report echoes many of the results that were shared in last year's report, and as such we can now identify trends that are showing up in the data. These results, although not longitudinal yet, provide a multi-year view of young people's socioeconomic reality including their access to Work-Integrated Learning, on-the job training and professional development, wages, their relationships with their workplaces, and overall well-being at work. These results are a call to action for employers, funders and policy makers to work to address the challenges and embrace the opportunities that are identified in this report.

The participants in this longitudinal study are from diverse contexts: over half are women, diverse in age, some come from racialized communities, and they live in all Provinces and two Territories. However, there still remain gaps in the data, particularly a lack of data from Northern Canada, namely Nunavut, and adequate representation from Québec, that continue to persist. We will continue to work to ensure that in future groups in this study are more representative. As we have outlined, unfortunately the lack of inclusion of young people from Northern Canada in employment data is not unique to our study. The Labour Force Survey does not contain data from Northern Canada at all, while many so-called 'national' studies fail to include adequate representation from Québec or from diverse cohorts of young people.

For the second year in a row the results lead us to encourage government, business and foundations who fund youth employment programs, as well as organizations who run youth-focused programs to prioritize investing in research practices that are both in rigorous and inclusive to ensure the full diversity of Canada's young people, particularly those in Francophone and Northern Canada is captured.

We found once again this year that transition youth (20-24) and young adults (25-34) in the longitudinal study have higher education levels as compared to the Canadian population. This might suggest that youth employment programs may not be engaging those with less education despite their particular economic vulnerability. Employment programs can close skills gaps, enhance employability and therefore they should ensure that all young Canadians, not only the most educated, meaningfully participate in the economy.

This year the results in the area of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), were a little more encouraging than last year. Young people in Group 2 have the same amount of access to WIL opportunities as compared to graduates in 2020 (Statistics Canada, 2024c). While it is good to see that the rates of WIL have rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, given that the increased understanding of the importance of WIL in the last 10 years, we would have expected to see significant increases in WIL opportunities rather than stagnation. Also, among the participants who reported participating in WIL, this year we saw 49% indicated that these opportunities were paid, which is 9% lower than last year.

If WIL opportunities for young people are indeed a priority for policy makers, then there is an urgent need to scale up the funding and infrastructure needed to offer a substantially larger number of WIL opportunities while ensuring that these opportunities are paid and supported by policies that promote fair compensation.

Our data from the last two years makes it clear that while young people have access to on-the-job and/or professional development training, the number of hours during which they participate in this training are low.

If business, government and organizations hope to ensure that they maintain a talent pipeline that will facilitate young people gaining the skills needed to grow and advance in their careers, young people need more on-the-job and/or professional development training.

While overall education-to-occupation alignment remains low in Group 2, the relationship between education and job outcomes is complex, and it is not yet clear why young people don't have work that is better-aligned to their areas of study. Continued monitoring of trends in this area are essential, and longitudinal data will be critical for understanding this topic.

This year, we also looked specifically at data of health care professionals. We will continue to monitor trends in the health care sector moving forward.

Data from new questions added to this year's survey suggest that youth employment programs are reaching NEET youth and it may be that these programs having a positive impact on NEET levels amongst participants.

Further insights from follow-up interviews will be important to understand the factors that support young people who are furthers from opportunity to stay engaged in education and employment.

Participants again this year showed a strong overall preference for hybrid work arrangements. Adolescents were the most likely to indicate a preference for in-person work, while transition youth showed the strongest preference for hybrid models. It continues to be important to ask: **How can we ensure that both employers and employees benefit from this interest in in-person work amongst young people by ensuring that time spent in-person is meaningful?**

Similar to last year, we also found higher income differences between male and female participants in the lower income brackets. **If income discrepancies between females and males are persisting in younger generations, how can we address this? How can we ensure that women have access to higher paying jobs early in their careers?**

Policymakers, employers, and youth-serving organizations should ensure that young people, particularly young women, are paid living wages, not stuck in low-earning trajectories, and that programs aimed at closing gender wage gaps are funded.

This year, age appears to be a stronger factor as to whether someone is thriving at work rather than other demographic factors, adults aged 35 and older report the highest levels of thriving with levels decreasing progressively across younger age groups.

This underscores the importance of targeted support for younger employees, as a critical step toward fostering a more resilient, inclusive and equitable workforce.

We asked participants about the opportunities they have to share ideas with decision-makers in the workplace. Among those who reported having such opportunities, participants of all ages are generally optimistic that their input is heard and taken seriously. Despite this, they remain less confident that their ideas will ultimately influence decision-makers. Workers have valuable perspectives and are eager to contribute and all age groups lack consistent channels for influence and follow-through.

Strengthening intergenerational dialogue and creating more structured opportunities for participants of all ages to meaningfully contribute to workplace decisions could support both resilience and sense of belonging at work.

This year, we analysed the data for both international students and other immigrant youth. Our data showed that international students share many of the same integration barriers as other immigrant youth, but these are often intensified by their temporary status and financial pressures.

Supporting the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into the Canadian workforce is not only a matter of equity, but also a strategic investment in Canada's economic growth and social cohesion. This includes improving job and occupation matching by recognizing international credentials, offering tailored career guidance, and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.

This year we also looked at how young people are using AI in the workplace. Our data shows that AI use is highest among young adults, ages 25 to 34, intermediate and management roles in higher paying jobs, while adolescents and lower-income workers are the least likely to engage with AI. Even though our results show that younger cohorts and those in more entry-level roles and those who earn less money are using AI less in their jobs, this should not be understood as a call to increase young people's 'AI skills'. Let's be honest, it is often the young people in our lives who teach us about new technology, not the other way around. We will continue to study this topic.

These results are relevant for everyone who cares about the economic wellbeing of young people. We recommend the following for funders, policy makers, those who run youth employment programs and employers:

Recommendations for funders & policymakers:

- ◆ Invest in rigorous and inclusive research to ensure that the youth employment context is better understood, particularly in the in the Canadian North while ensuring efforts are culturally relevant.
- ◆ Invest in efforts to ensure equitable access to youth programs for individuals with lower levels of education as well as facilitating their participation and completion of these programs.
- ◆ Invest in significantly expanding access to Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) to ensure that access to WIL opportunities doesn't continue to stagnate.
- ◆ Invest in significantly expanding on-the-job and/or professional development training including targeted support for younger employees.
- ◆ Ensure that young women are paid living wages, not stuck in low-earning trajectories, and that programs aimed at closing gender wage gaps are funded.
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into the Canadian workforce by recognizing international credentials, funding programs that offer tailored career guidance and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.

Recommendations for organizations that run youth employment programs:

- ◆ Invest in rigorous and inclusive research to ensure that the youth employment context is better understood, particularly in the in the Canadian North while ensuring efforts are culturally relevant.
- ◆ Ensure equitable access to your programs for individuals with lower levels of education as well as facilitating their participation and completion of your programs.
- ◆ **Ensure young people who work in your organization are well supported through on-the-job and/or professional development training as well as offering targeted support for younger employees.**
- ◆ **Ensure that young women who work in your organization are paid living wages and not stuck in low-earning trajectories.**
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into your organization by recognizing international credentials and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.
- ◆ Collaborate with post-secondary education institutions to offer Work-Integrated Learning opportunities at your organization.
- ◆ Embrace the desire of younger employees to work in-person by providing meaningful in-person work experiences when young people are in the office.
- ◆ Create opportunities for intergenerational collaboration at work and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, especially in the context of an aging population.

Recommendations for employers:

- ◆ Collaborate with post-secondary education institutions to offer Work-Integrated Learning opportunities at your company.
- ◆ **Invest in significantly expanding on-the-job and/or professional development training including targeted support for your younger employees.**
- ◆ Support the successful integration of young immigrants and international students into your company by recognizing international credentials and creating pathways to gain relevant Canadian work experience through Work-Integrated Learning opportunities and mentorship.
- ◆ Embrace the desire of younger employees to work in-person by providing meaningful in-person work experiences when young people are in the office.
- ◆ Ensure that young women who work in your company are paid living wages and not stuck in low-earning trajectories.
- ◆ Create more opportunities for intergenerational collaboration with your company and recognize the value of diverse perspectives, especially in the context of an aging population.

Conclusion

The findings from this second group of participants of the Young People & Economic Inclusion Longitudinal Study deepen our understanding of the challenges and opportunities young people face in Canada. Youth employment is not a youth issue; it is one that impacts all Canadians. Whether we are their parents, grandparents, employers or mentors, many of us worry that even when today's young people do everything 'right', this is not leading to jobs and the financial stability that previous generations would have had available to them. Left unaddressed, the uncertainty that young people today are facing will have wide ranging social and economic impacts far into the future. Investing in youth employment is not optional, it is essential to building a resilient, inclusive and innovative economy.

As we move forward, it is important to consider the use of AI is a trend that is shaping the future of youth employment. If we do not pay the necessary attention, the use of AI could exacerbate inequities, impact entry-level jobs and leave not only vulnerable youth but all youth further behind.

We hope that these insights and calls to action guide policymakers, funders, organizations who run youth employment programs and employers leading to young people thriving in this rapidly changing workforce.

What's next? Future directions of the study

Looking ahead, our study is in the unique position of tracking dynamic changes in the labour market in real time. As more groups are surveyed, longitudinal and more complex data analysis will be included in upcoming reports. This past summer (Summer 2025), we collected the third survey for Group 1, and they are being interviewed in Fall 2025 so that we can better understand their workplace experiences. These longitudinal results and in-depth conversations will be shared in our next report in 2026.

We are also excited to share that we continue to develop a new Program Design and Implementation Study. This research will better allow for the measurement of the impacts of youth employment programs by gathering data on program design and implementation. This research will allow us to understand how different program designs influence the outcomes achieved by the young participants. This research is innovative and unique in the youth sector, and we hope it can serve to further understand young people's realities and support them navigating the path ahead while at the same time providing valuable insight to the youth-serving and youth-led sectors so that they can ensure their programs are as impactful and effective as possible.

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