

FNILMAC

FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT
LABOUR MARKET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The evolution of the labour market of First Nations and Inuit in Quebec from 2019 to 2021

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SERVICE CONTRACT CARRIED OUT FOR THE FIRST NATIONS AND
INUIT OF QUEBEC LABOUR MARKET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

By Normand Roy, Economist

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Mandate

The mandate adopted by the First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee at its August 2021 meeting reads:

"Produce summary tables of the portraits of the clientele from 2006 to 2019 as well as the data that is available for 2021 in order to define and analyze the progression of the FNI labour force in the labour market since 2006.

- Research qualitative data for FNI participants in Emploi Québec programs and measures.
- Compile the existing data available on communities with the results of the First Nations Regional Education, Employment and Early Childhood Survey and the FNQLHSSC 2020 Labour Force and Employment Development Survey as well as with the 2021 labour force profile produced by the Cree Nation Government.

Acronyms

FNLMAC:	First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee
FNIGC:	First Nations Governance and Information Centre
FNQLHSSC :	First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission
DEC:	Diploma of Collegial Studies
FNLMDA:	First Nations Labour Force and Employment Development Survey
EDSC:	Employment and Social Development Canada
NHS:	National Household Survey
LFS:	Labour Force Survey
FNQECEE:	First Nations of Quebec Regional Survey on Early Childhood, Education and Employment
MTESS:	Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Solidarity
PN :	Premières Nations
FNI :	First Nations and Inuits

Introduction

In September 2021, the First Nations and Inuit Labour Market Advisory Committee (FNILMAC) requested an update to the client portrait delivered in 2019. This document responds to that request.

In addition to a review of the main demographic findings, Part 1 also discusses the population projections to 2041 produced by Statistics Canada. Part 2 discusses Aboriginal labour market indicators, and more specifically those of the FNIs, taken essentially from the 2016 census and the Labour Force Survey (LFS) figures for the period from 2007 to 2018. The recent evolution of the Quebec (and Canadian where data is aggregated at the federal level) FNI labour market is then examined in Part 3. The Covid-19 pandemic has, of course, dominated the news over the past year and a half, and it has hit Aboriginal people, including FNIs, in a distinct way. This is naturally given special attention.

Part 4 adds other elements to this statistical overview, including those resulting from the First Nations Labour Force and Employment Development Survey (FNLFEDES), conducted by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) in 2019-2020. A reminder of previous surveys is provided, including the 2014 survey. The Quebec and federal strategies for supporting Aboriginal training and employment, including the FNP, are examined in Part 5. In addition to the cyclical consequences of the pandemic, the longer-term trajectory of the FNI labour market is considered in Part 6. Structural determinants, including demographics and the climate crisis, are among the forces that will affect the labor market in the coming years and will affect FNIs, like the rest of their fellow citizens. The question of the differentiated impact of these forces and the specific issues facing FNIs must therefore be addressed in strategic thinking about the labor market and the policies and initiatives that primarily affect it. Finally, the conclusion brings together the main findings.

The statistical appendix will not include the 2016 census tables that can be found in the 2019 document. Instead, Statistics Canada's population projection data to the year 2041 and recent labour force survey figures will be presented. In the latter case, the limitations of the survey must be kept in mind, including the fact that it does not include people living in First Nations and Inuit communities. In addition, Aboriginal respondents, including FNIs, are small in the monthly sample, so results must be aggregated with all Aboriginal identities merged. In addition to these limitations, the data remain volatile and should be viewed with caution, including not stopping unduly at a monthly or even quarterly observation. The identification of trends over several quarters then allows for a more informed judgment by reality. Other approaches, including that of the EDMEPN, enrich our understanding and help to validate or qualify what the official statistics tell us about the situation.

1. Demography of the First Nations and Inuit of Quebec

Many years ago, a popular book at the time claimed that demography explains two-thirds of everything. This was obviously an exaggeration, but it contained a significant amount of truth. Demography, which includes the composition of the population according to sex and age, as well as its evolutionary dynamics, which depend on natural growth or decline (births and deaths) or on net migratory movements, plays a crucial role in any society. It has a decisive influence on the needs to be met (education, housing, health, etc.), as well as on the capacity to meet them, for example in terms of the proportion of people of working age in the total population. This is why we will approach this review of the labour market situation of Quebec FNIs by reviewing known facts, in particular the 2006 and 2016 censuses, the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), and recent population projections by Statistics Canada covering the period from 2016 to 2041.

1.1 The situation in 2016

In a previous study published in 2019, it was written that according to the 2016 Canadian census, Quebec had 106,590 FNIs at the time, or 1.3% of its total population. This number and the proportion it represents have been increasing for several years. For example, approximately 1% of Quebecers identified themselves as First Nations and Inuit in 2006; and 1.2% in 2011. The census estimates the First Nations (FN) population at 92,650 and the Inuit at 13,940. More broadly, the population reporting Aboriginal origins (Métis, and multiple Aboriginal identities in addition to FN) numbered 182,890. The Métis alone numbered 69,360.

In the Canadian context, Quebec FNIs constitute a small proportion of the total population of the province (1.3% compared to 3.5% in the rest of Canada). The Canadian average masks significant differences between provinces and territories. For example, 85.2% of Nunavut's population was of Aboriginal origin in 2016. Provincially, Saskatchewan had 10.7% of its population as FN, followed closely by Manitoba. At the other end of the spectrum, Prince Edward Island was virtually tied with Quebec at 1.4% FNI, while 1.8% of Ontarians were FNI. However, Quebec FNIs constitute 10.2% of the Canadian total, more than Nunavut (2.9%).

The FNI and Aboriginal population in Quebec is also young compared to the non-Aboriginal population, as is the case elsewhere in Canada. Those under 15 years of age accounted for 22.1% of the FNI group (31.6% for Inuit), compared to 13.4% of the total population. At the other end of the age spectrum, only 9% of FNIs (including 5% of Inuit) were over the age of 65, compared to 14.2% of Quebecers. As a result of this demographic distribution, the working-age population, i.e., those aged 15 to 64, accounted for only 68.9% of FNIs, compared to 72.6% of the Quebec total. The median age for First Nations was 27 years in 2016, 24.1 years for Inuit, and 41.3 years for the general population.

Female FNIs (51.3% of FNIs) and Inuit (51.2%) outnumber males, primarily among those 35 years and older for FNIs, and 25 years and older for Inuit. Men, on the other hand, outnumber women in the younger age groups. This difference in age structure has its own impacts, of course, particularly with respect to the needs and challenges of women aged 65 and over, or of children and adolescents who are more likely to be male.

The low educational attainment of FNIs is also a characteristic that sets them apart from the rest of the population. In 2016, 40.8% of FNIs and 61.3% of Inuit over 15 years of age did not have a diploma or degree, compared to 19.9% of the Quebec total. They were also less likely to have completed high school (17.7% of FN, 17.1% of Inuit versus 21.5% overall). The gap widens at the higher education level. For example, 7.9% of FN and 2% of Inuit had completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 20.5% of Quebecers. There was some progress compared to previous censuses and among the younger cohorts, but the gaps remain large. Young FNI women dominated in the higher education category and accounted for two-thirds of graduates in the 25-34 age group. This finding was encouraging given the strength of the relationship between education and labor market status.

The relative share and evolution of FN populations on reserve or in northern communities are aspects of the reality of these nations that affect several dimensions, including that of language and cultural preservation. In 2016, 60.5% of Quebec FN were living off-reserve, a percentage that has been increasing for several years now. However, the number of FN living on reserve continues to grow, due to population strength. Among Inuit, the percentage of people living outside of Nunavut is low (12.6%). Finally, the share of FNs in census metropolitan areas is growing. In 2016, there were 34,000 in the Montreal CMA and 11,500 in the Quebec CMA. Across Canada, more than half lived in a metropolitan area with a population of more than 30,000.

In total, the 2016 demographic review showed a young and rapidly growing population. However, this population was also experiencing a fairly steady aging process, less apparent than in the rest of the population, but real nonetheless. The low level of education and the more limited participation in the labour market than for non-Aboriginal people were reflected in lower incomes. The census identified several issues, including housing that is often too scarce, overcrowded and in poor condition, particularly in communities located far from service centers and many economic activities that offer more numerous and varied employment and housing opportunities.

1.2 Statistics Canada Projections

The strong demographic evolution of the FNI will continue over the next twenty years according to Statistics Canada, whose latest projection exercise was recently published. It should be noted that the exercise starts with a First Nations population of 105,000 in Quebec, whereas the census indicates 92,600 individuals in this group. As for the Inuit, the number of 14,000 is a rounding of the census figure of 13,940. As a result, the projection assumes an estimated FNI population of 119,000, given the rounding, while the census gives us a figure of 106,595 (107,000 rounded). The difference is 12,000. Regardless of this difference, it can be assumed that the announced trend under any of the three scenarios presented is valid. Even in the most conservative case, the Quebec FNP population will increase by 32.8% between 2016 and 2041. If the average scenario is used instead, the growth will be 48.7% for a total population of 177,000. In comparison, the average scenario produced by the Institut de la statistique du Québec for the year 2041 indicates a total population growth of 13.7%.

Whether one uses the census figures or the Statistics Canada 2021 population projections, in all scenarios, the share of FNIs in the Quebec population will continue to grow. In the medium scenario, it will rise to 1.5% in 2041 according to the census data, or to 1.9% if the demographic projection base is used (compared to 1.3% in the 2016 census). First Nations population growth would be higher than that of Inuit, 49.5% versus 42.9% in the medium scenario used here. Under the latter scenario, the Inuit population would increase to 20,000 in 2041 (from 14,000 in 2016), while the FN population would be either 122,000 according to the 2016 census or 157,000 according to the 2021 population projection.

Table 1			
Population projections from 2016 to 2041			
3 scénarios			
Reference period	Low growth scenario	Medium Growth Scenario	Strong growth scenario
2016	119	119	119
2017	122	123	125
2018	123	125	128
2019	124	127	132
2020	126	129	135
2021	128	132	140
2022	129	134	143
2023	130	136	146
2024	131	139	149
2025	132	142	153
2026	135	144	157
2027	136	146	160
2028	137	148	164
2029	138	151	166
2030	140	153	169
2031	142	155	173
2032	143	157	176
2033	145	160	178
2034	146	162	181
2035	148	163	184
2036	150	165	187
2037	151	168	190
2038	153	170	192
2039	154	172	195
2040	157	175	198
2041	158	177	200

Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 17-10-0144-01, Release date , 2021-10-06

1.3 Age groups

The distribution by age groups highlights the youthfulness of the FN population. In 2016, the median age of Quebec FNs was 27 years and that of Inuit was 24.1 years, as opposed to 41.3 years in the overall population. The Statistics Canada projection scenarios released in October do not provide the projected median age of Quebec FNs in 2041. However, the median age of the Canadian Aboriginal population, which was 29.1 years in 2016, would be between 38.2 and 38.4 years in 2041, compared to a Canadian median age between 41.4 and 44.7 years. Recall that Aboriginal Canadians include the Métis, who are older on average than the FN. It can be assumed that the aging trend of the Aboriginal population will also affect the Quebec FNI who, while remaining younger than their fellow citizens, will experience a demographic trajectory marked by an increase in life expectancy as well as by lower fertility levels than in previous decades.

Table 2 shows the expected distribution of the population by age group in 2041, based on projections by Statistics Canada for FNIs, and by the ISQ for Quebec as a whole. They confirm that the relative proportion of 0-19 year olds will be significantly higher among FNIs, and that the opposite will be true for those aged 65 and over. However, the relative gap will decrease compared to 2016. Moreover, as can be seen by comparing this table with Table 3, the aging of the FNP population will be marked, as the relative share of those 65 and older will nearly double by 2041, while that of those 0-19 will decline by 7.5 percentage points. The relative weight of 20- to 64-year-olds will decline slightly by 0.6 percentage points.

Table 2

Quebec population projections 2041 Medium scenario		
Age groups	First Nations and Inuits	Population of Quebec
0 to 9	25,8	19,5
20 to 64	56,7	54,1
65 and +	17,5	26,3

Source: Statistics Canada, Population projections, October 6, 2021 and Institut de la statistique du Québec, July 23, 2019

The proportion of working-age FNIs will remain roughly constant, as will the share of the population most likely to be active in the labour market. This will not be the case for the overall Quebec population, where the 20-64 age group will decline by 7 percentage points, as seen in Table 3, which reports the situation observed in the 2016 census. The so-called dependent (or potentially dependent, i.e. too young or too old to work according to the common interpretation) NDP population will therefore also be approximately stable as a proportion of the total population, but it will be made up more of people aged 65 and over. The need for goods and services within communities will therefore shift to some extent in terms of housing, health care and education, among other things. The share of those aged 65 and over will increase by 8 percentage points, a very large increase, while the share of those aged 0-19 will decrease by 7.5 percentage points, again a large change, but in the opposite direction.

Table 3

Quebec Census 2041		
Age groups	First Nations and Inuits	Population of Quebec
0 to 9	33,3	22,1
20 to 64	57,3	61,1
65 and +	9,5	16,8

Sources: Statistics Canada, Population projections, October 6, 2021 and Institut de la statistique du Québec, July 23, 2019

1.4 On and Off Reserve Population

Past censuses have confirmed the trend of relative growth in the off-reserve contingent, both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. While the on-reserve group is growing, its share of the Aboriginal ancestry population, primarily FNIs, is declining. In 2016, 29.8% of these lived within the communities, and 70.2% lived outside. Among those 15 years and older, the percentage of those living off-reserve climbed to 73.9%. In fact, generally speaking, the older the individuals, the more they are on-reserve, at least before they reach 65. For example, 81.8% of those aged 55 to 64 were living off-reserve. In contrast, children under 15 years of age were 43.8% on reserve.

According to Statistics Canada's population projections, this trend of increasing relative share of FNIs outside the community will continue until at least 2041. Although the data differs from the census data for the reasons stated above, the trajectory will be the same.

From 2016 to 2041, the on-reserve First Nations group will decline from 50.5% of the total to 37.8% according to the population projections presented in Table 4, under Statistics Canada's medium scenario, but will still grow by 6,000 during this period. In contrast, the out-of-town population will increase by 45,000. The number of 0-14 year olds living on reserve would decrease by 4,000 while the 15+ age group would increase by 8,000. For the Inuit, Statistics Canada does not provide data for those outside of northern villages, presumably because the numbers are too small to allow for a sufficiently reliable projection.

Table 4

Demographic population			
Share of First Nations population living on reserve, Québec			
Year	Total	0-14 years old	15 years old and over
2016	50,5	64,0	47,5
2026	44,1	50,0	43,0
2041	37,8	41,4	36,2

Source: Statistics Canada, Population Projections, October 6, 2021

An overview of the population projections to 2041 and a reminder of some of the findings from the 2016 census highlight important transformations in Quebec's FNI. Population growth will continue in the future, but at a slower pace. Aging will also affect these communities, although they will remain young compared to the rest of Quebec. The relative share of the group residing outside these communities will continue to grow, particularly in the large metropolitan areas. The impressive surge in educational attainment among young women is also expected to continue, but the lags vis-à-vis the non-Aboriginal population are likely to persist for a long time to come, due in part to the remoteness of some on-reserve cohorts from institutions of higher learning and to economic, cultural and other barriers.

2. The labor market in 2016

The labour market situation of FNIs remains significantly less favourable than that of other Quebecers or Canadians. We will recall some observations from the 2016 census. In section 3, we will use the most recent data available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), despite the shortcomings of this survey with respect to FNIs. In addition to the picture that can be painted at a given point in time, it is important to capture the dynamics at work, i.e., the factors that determine the trajectory over a longer period of time, while taking into account deviations caused by unanticipated external shocks, such as the Covid-19 pandemic for example. A key question with respect to these shocks is whether their effects are transitory or more durable.

2.1 On and Off Reserve Situation

The shift in the relative weight of FNs to the off-reserve group will obviously have implications. It will likely improve access to employment, based on census data. In 2016, labour force participation and employment rates were higher off reserve (60.7% vs. 53.3%; and 49.5% vs. 42.6% respectively). In turn, unemployment was lower off-reserve (10.9 percent versus 20.2 percent). This can be explained on the one hand by the higher level of education of this group, but also by the presence of a larger and more diversified labour market, especially in populated areas. We noted in 2019 that FNs living in communities but near a large city had a more favorable employment situation. As an example, Table 5 shows the situation in 2016 for Quebec, the National Capital and Montreal. The participation and employment rates are clearly higher in the two metropolitan regions than in Quebec as a whole, for both FNs and non-Natives. Conversely, unemployment rates are lower for all groups in the labour market, with the exception of the Inuit, whose situation was at best only marginally better in the major cities.

		Activity rate	Employment rate	Unemployment rate
Québec (province)	First Nations	57,7	49,5	14,3
	Inuits	66,2	54,6	17,4
	Non-Aboriginals	64,2	59,7	7,1
Quebec métro	First Nations	65,3	61,1	6,6
	Inuits	66,7	61,1	16,7
	Non-Aboriginals	66,8	63,7	4,6
Montreal métro	First Nations	66,1	59	10,7
	Inuits	57	47,4	15,6
	Non-Aboriginals	66	61,1	7,4

Source : Statistique Canada, recensement de 2016, fichier 98-400-X2016287

The situation of FNs residing in the Quebec City metropolitan area was particularly interesting. Their participation and employment rates exceeded those of the Quebec average for non-Aboriginal people, and their unemployment rate was 6.6%, 0.7 percentage points below the Quebec average for non-Aboriginal people. The remarkable state of the labour market in the Capitale-Nationale benefited all groups, albeit in a differentiated manner, since the unemployment rate for non-Aboriginals was 4.6%.

2.2 Age groups

The 2016 Census reminded us that people's labor market outcomes systematically vary by age. The FNIs are no exception, but because the relative weight of youth in the FNIs is greater than in the general population, this is reflected negatively in indicators of participation, employment, and unemployment rates, as well as earnings. In Table 6, there are significant differences across age groups for both non-Aboriginal and FNIs. In contrast, regardless of age group, FNIs suffer from lower outcomes. For all age groups except the youngest, FNIs have about twice the unemployment rate of non-Aboriginals. Inuit fare even worse, except again for the youngest age group. Thus, there is a double disadvantage for FNIs, in terms of performance within each age group, and in terms of age structure. Note in passing the considerable differences between the 15-19 and 20-24 year olds. The frequent lumping together of 15-24 year olds into a single group masks sharply contrasting realities, both for FNIs and non-FNIs.

Âge	Activity rate			Employment rate			Unemployment rate		
	FN	Inuit	Non-A	FN	Inuit	Non-A	FN	Inuit	Non-A
15 à 19 ans	29,5	46,9	45,1	22,5	37,1	38	23,7	20,9	15,8
20 à 24 ans	58,9	72,3	78,3	46,6	55,4	70	20,9	24	10,6
25 à 64 ans	71	74	80,6	61,9	62,4	75,7	12,8	15,7	6
Total	57,7	66,2	64,2	49,5	54,6	59,7	14,3	17,4	7,1

Source: Statistics Canada, Census 2016, File 98-287-2016X

2.3 Evolution of schooling

FNI women are increasingly enrolled in school, and the gap with their male counterparts is widening. This phenomenon is also evident in the general population. Among FNIs aged 25-34, women account for more than two-thirds (67.4%) of university degrees at the bachelor's level or higher. Among FNIs aged 35-44, the female share of the same degrees is 70.1%. Among 45-54 year olds, the rate is 60.5% in favour of women. For Inuit, small numbers are less reliable. However, in terms of college, CEGEP or other non-university certificates and diplomas, women have almost three out of four in the 25-34 age group (73.9%), almost two-thirds (65.5%) in the 35-44 age group, and 56.3% in the 45-54 age group. These shares are all higher than those observed for non-Aboriginal women. For example, those aged 25 to 34 held 59.6% of university degrees at the bachelor's level or higher in 2016.

2.4 Occupation and sectors of activity

The census showed that FNIs are highly concentrated in a limited number of occupations and activities. These include sales and service occupations (23.2% for FN and 26.1% for Inuit, compared to 22.7% in the general population), trades (15.7% and 16.8% compared to 13.1% overall), and teaching (14.1% and 16.8% compared to 11.5% for all workers). The proportion of low- and medium-skilled occupations held by FNIs is higher than that found in the labor market as a whole. For example, about 1 in 5 jobs held by FNIs and 1 in 4 by Inuit require only on-the-job training, compared to 1 in 8 in the entire economy. Conversely, very few FNIs hold positions in natural and applied science occupations (3% of FNIs vs. 6.6% of the general population). FNIs are also under-represented in health occupations (4.6% FN, 2.9% Inuit and 6.8% overall). In addition to lower wages, these jobs are typically less stable and more subject to the vagaries of the economy.

Although not a significant presence in the health professions, FNIs are employed extensively in health and social service activities, but more in support roles. Almost one in six FNIs work in health and social services and one in four Inuit. The latter proportion is almost double that of the general population (12.7% or one in eight). FNIs are also highly represented in public administration (15% of FNIs, 22% of Inuit, versus 6.7% overall). The concentration of FNI employment in a few fields, including those listed above and a few others such as education and construction, is offset by their low presence in other sectors, including finance and professional and technical services, information and culture, and manufacturing.

The greater clustering of FNIs in certain occupations and activities, often dependent on public funding, is akin to greater employment and income vulnerability, compared to a situation of greater dispersion of workers across a larger number of occupations and activities. The vagaries of the economy and of public funding lead to greater economic fragility than in a highly diversified economy. santé (4,6 % chez les PN, 2,9 % chez les Inuits et 6,8 % au total). Outre des salaires inférieurs, ces emplois sont habituellement moins stables et plus soumis aux aléas de la conjoncture.

2.5 Working hours and income

In addition to having lower employment rates than non-Aboriginal people and higher unemployment rates, FNIs are less likely to work year-round than the rest of their population (27% for FN and 29.3% for Inuit compared to 31.5% for non-Aboriginal people). This is one reason for the lower income, but even FNIs who are employed year-round earn on average \$8,234 less annually than the non-Aboriginal population. The unfavourable gap is \$5,535 for Inuit.

The duration of work and income are notably dependent on the other factors studied above, namely location, age, education, occupation and field of activity.

2.6 Language

Knowledge of the language of the nation to which one belongs is certainly a determinant of identity, and is particularly useful, if not essential, to individuals working in FNI communities. However, little or no knowledge of French, or often English, is likely to be a handicap for those who want or need to live off reserve. The census does not shed any light on this subject, but it is known that the mastery of French, English or both increases with the level of education of the FNI, and that this last factor is strongly correlated with the situation on the labour market.

In summary, the 2016 data demonstrated progress that was undoubtedly too slow, but real compared to previous years. At the same time, it showed the persistence of major gaps compared to the rest of the Quebec population. Some explanatory factors stand out. The impact of discrimination on the observed gaps is difficult to establish with precision. Few studies have addressed this issue quantitatively. According to the study cited in the 2019 document, up to 30% of the gap in employment income between FNIs and non-FNIs could be due to this cause.

3. The Labour Force Survey before, during (and after?) Covid 19

The previous two sections have served as a reminder and background before turning to the analysis of recent data and events and looking forward to the years ahead. We will now look at what the pre-pandemic LFS tells us, and then turn to the effects of Covid-19 on the labor market for FNIs, especially women.

3.1 The Labour Force Survey to 2019

Since 2007, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has provided Quebec with data on the labour market status of Aboriginal people. The figures published by Statistics Canada are published on an annual basis, and they combine all Aboriginal groups into a single category for statistical reliability purposes. Since the LFS is based on a monthly sample of 10,000 households in Quebec, the number of respondents who report an Aboriginal identity is small. Aggregation of the data is necessary, as well as dissemination of the results over a 12-month period in order to meet the disclosure criteria acceptable to Statistics Canada. In addition, the observations are limited to off-reserve individuals. Logistical, cost and community participation issues dictate this choice. More disaggregated information on First Nations and on monthly surveys exists, but it is not part of the official publications, as it is deemed insufficiently reliable. We will deal with the latter, but their limitations must be taken into account and kept in mind at all times when examining the results, which here deal mainly with FNs, since there are too few off-reserve Inuit to be statistically studied on the basis of the LFS.

The analysis of LFS data on Aboriginal respondents conducted in 2019 covered the period from 2007 to 2018. Complementing information from the 2006 and 2016 censuses and the NHS, it highlighted two important phenomena. The first is the effect of the economic climate. The recession of 2008 and 2009 marked a pause in the progress made by Aboriginal people and their fellow Quebecers in terms of employment and unemployment. Thereafter, the recovery, initially modest, was transformed into major gains, notably because of a favorable demographic evolution and a vigorous economic expansion. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal people had fallen from 16.1 percent in 2012 to 7.1 percent in 2018, and for the entire population from 7.8 percent to 5.5 percent over the same period, while the employment rate for the former increased from 48.4 percent to 57.9 percent. The increase in this rate was much more modest in Quebec as a whole, mainly because of the aging of the population, but also because progress becomes more difficult after a certain level of performance. Thereafter, the situation had improved slightly by 2019. Then came COVID 19..

3.2 Covid-19 and the FNI Labour Market

Employment would have decreased by 5,400 among Quebec Aboriginals in 2020, or 7.9% in relative terms (among First Nations, unpublished data from Statistics Canada would indicate an increase in employment of 2,200, or 9.3%. However, these data appear suspect a priori). In Quebec as a whole, the loss was 215,000 on average per year in 2020, or 5% of the total. Recall that this decline occurred mainly in the second quarter, with a partial recovery in the second half of the year. The first half of 2021 saw a recovery of 130,000 jobs in total, including 9,800 among aboriginals, so that their unemployment rate, which had reached 12.6 percent in 2020, fell by one percentage point to 11.6 percent. While this recovery may seem small on the surface, it is associated with a 14% growth in the labour force.

For the working age population of Quebec, the latest information covers September inclusive, and indicates a continued catching up in terms of employment and unemployment rates. For Aboriginal people, all groups combined, the latest quarter shows that the level of employment is 2,000 lower than the last pre-pandemic quarter (65,200 versus 67,300, a decline of 3.1%). The number of individuals in the labor force is 2,800 less, so unemployment would have fallen by 700. But this decline in unemployment is not a positive indicator, as it results either from those who have become inactive giving up their job search or from a decision not to try their luck on the part of individuals who judge that the probability of finding a job is too low.

A key aspect of the impact of covid 19 on the labour market is its differentiated nature, by industry and occupation. An analysis of annual data for 2020 conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) showed that manufacturing (down 34,500 jobs, or 7.7 per cent of the total), trade (down 56,000 jobs, a loss of 8.9 per cent), and especially arts and entertainment (down 18,600 jobs, for 28.3 per cent of pre-covid employment) as well as accommodation and food services (down 80,900 jobs, a decline of 29.6 per cent) were particularly affected. Some other industries were relatively unaffected, including professional and technical services, finance and insurance, and public administration. Finally, health care and social assistance even gained nearly 7,000 jobs, or 1.5%.

The losses on the occupational side mirror those observed by industry. For example, the unemployment rate for sales representatives and salespeople increased from 4.4 percent in 2019 to 12.7 percent in 2020, for service representatives and other customer service personnel from 4.5 percent to 17.1 percent, for supervisory personnel from 3.4 percent to 12.9 percent, and for service support and other service personnel from 6.1 percent to 15.1 percent. Table 7 selects some occupations whose members were particularly affected by the job losses and unemployment associated with covid 19 in 2020.

In addition to industry and occupation, education is one of the main determinants of the situation of Quebec participants in the labor force. In times of growth and declining unemployment, the position of these and other disadvantaged groups tends to improve more rapidly than that of the overall labour force. During economic hardship, the reverse is true. The 2020 pandemic was no exception. In its Bulletin sur le marché du travail au Québec pour l'année 2020, Emploi-Québec summarizes the situation: *“ Job losses were concentrated entirely in skilled employment (-89,400; -11.3 percent), which usually requires a vocational diploma (DVS), and in low-skilled employment (-136,800; -9.0 percent), which requires at most a high school diploma. High-skilled jobs, on the other hand, grew (+17,800; +0.9 percent), with gains concentrated in professional (university degree) employment, while managerial and college-level jobs declined. Thus, workers in high-skilled jobs, which tend to be more amenable to telecommuting while also having a strong presence in key sectors such as education and health care, emerged as the winners of the crisis. (see notes on page 33-34)*

The most recent data on the education of Quebec's Aboriginal people, including FNIs, to our knowledge dates from the 2016 census. Information on the 2021 census will gradually become available over the next month or two. In 2016, 40.8% of FNIs aged 15 years and older had no certificate, diploma or degree, compared to 19.6% of non-Aboriginal people. In terms of having a high school diploma or equivalent, 17.7% of FNIs had a high school diploma compared to 21.6% of non-Aboriginal people, 13.4% of FNIs had a college diploma, and 17.6% of non-Aboriginal people. At the university level, 2% of FNIs had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 20.8% of non-Aboriginal people. Thus, significant gaps in educational attainment remained between the two groups.

Tableau 7		
Unemployment Rate, Selected Occupations, Québec 2020		
Profession	2019	2020
	Pourcentage	
Total, all occupations	5,1	8,9
Professional staff in educational services	2,9	6,5
Professional arts and culture staff	x	4,5
Technical staff in arts, culture, recreation and sport	5,9	12,8
Supervisory personnel in services and specialized services	3,4	12,9
Sales Representatives and Salespersons - Wholesale and Retail	4,4	12,7
Service representatives and other customer service and personalized staff	4,4	17,1
In-service support and other service personnel, n.e.c	6,1	15,1
Electrical, Construction and Industrial Trades	5,6	9,9
Installation, repair and maintenance personnel and handlers	7,5	11,8
Supervisors and technical trades in natural resources, agriculture and related production	x	8
Assemblers in manufacturing	3,3	11,2
Labourers in Processing, Manufacturing and Utilities	5,9	11,2

Source, Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0335-01, 2021-01-2

These gaps were reflected in the labour market. The unemployment rate for all Quebecers without a diploma was 13.3 percent in the 2016 census, compared to 8.3 percent for those with a high school diploma or equivalent, 5.5 percent for those with a DEC or equivalent, and 4.9 percent among university graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher. For each of these levels, FNIs had a higher unemployment rate, although the gap diminished as education increased, except for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, where the unemployment rate for FNIs was lower than for their fellow citizens, at 4.4 percent versus 4.9 percent.

Thus, FNIs suffered a double disadvantage in the labor market: they had less education, and for each level of education, their unemployment rate was higher, except for FNIs with a bachelor's degree or higher. Location may partly explain the disadvantage experienced by FNIs, given education. Residents of a census metropolitan area had higher labour force participation and employment rates than other Quebecers, and lower unemployment rates, whether they were Aboriginal or not. Differences in age structure, years of experience, and proficiency in English or French can be added as explanations for the differential outcomes. As for the gender composition of working-age Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, it is obviously marginal: it plays a role within the two groups rather than between them. The residual gap in performance may amount to discrimination. However, this gap may also depend on other causes that are not accounted for or adequately measured.

3.3 Aboriginal Women and Men in the Labour Market

Aboriginal women have become increasingly involved in the labour market in recent years. Their advances in education, as well as the increased availability of childcare in particular, have contributed to this change. Figure 1 shows the progression of the employment rate from the low point in 2010 to the high point in 2018. For males aged 15-64, the employment rate increased from 40.5 percent to 55.8 percent, while for females it increased from 43.2 percent in 2012 to 56.2 percent, also in 2018. Again, recall that these data are subject to wide variation, in part random, due in part to the small number of people interviewed. However, there is little doubt that women's employment rates have indeed risen significantly from the low point in the early 2010s to the cyclical peak in 2018. Among their peers, the decline in employment rates following the 2008-2009 recession has not been fully recovered thereafter, either in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada.

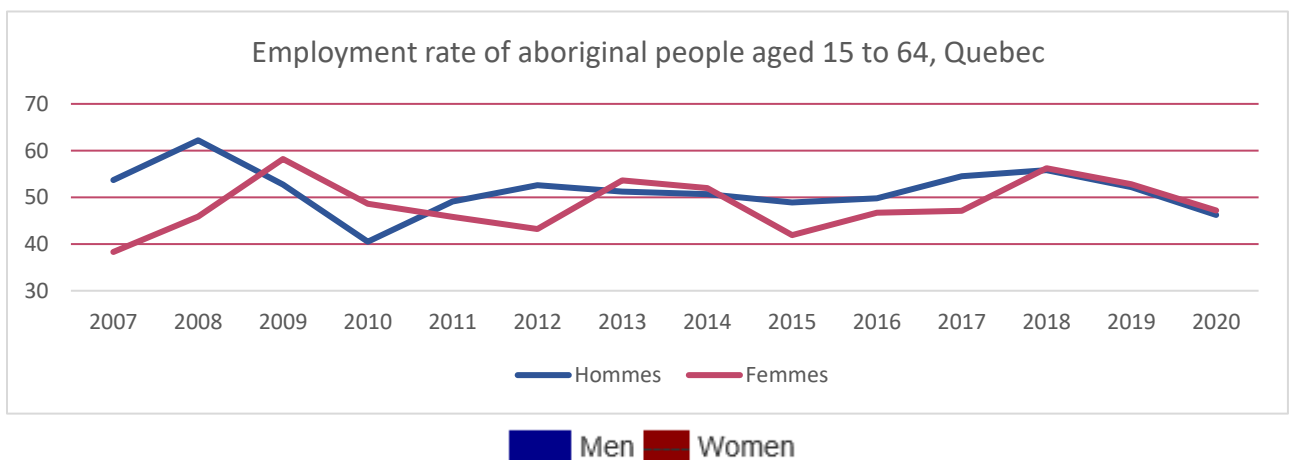
Employment rates would have fallen quite sharply in 2019, which seems surprising on the surface, as this is the opposite of the trend seen for the rest of the population for both men and women. In both cases, the non-native group would have made modest progress during 2019. We are therefore not convinced that the decline observed by Aboriginal people at that time actually occurred, especially since such a result is not seen in Canada and Ontario.

The pandemic loss was essentially the same for men and women (employment rate of 47.2 percent for women and 46.2 percent for men, which is not statistically significant). The recovery is slower for Aboriginal women, at least on the basis of monthly labour force survey information that is not completely reliable. Nevertheless, comparative data for July, August and September 2021 and December, January and February 2020 (the latest pre-pandemic data) show that Quebec women as a whole have suffered more than men from the impact of Covid-19. In the last available quarter, women still suffered a net loss of 38,800 jobs and their unemployment rate was 1.5 percentage points higher than before Covid. For men, the job loss was only 4,500, and unemployment was 0.5 percentage points higher than in the pre-Covid quarter.

Among the factors that explain this gender-differentiated situation is the fact that women are more present in certain activities and occupations that are more affected by layoffs, such as accommodation and food services, information, recreation and culture, childcare services and retail trade. They are also more likely to be in part-time positions, which have been more affected by layoffs. In addition, many of them have had the care of young children confined to the home, while not always being able to balance work and family responsibilities.

Note that the decline in employment rates was more pronounced for Aboriginal men and women than for non-Aboriginal men and women, with declines of 6 and 5.6 percentage points among Aboriginal men and women, respectively, compared to 3.2 and 3.6 among non-Aboriginal men and women.

Chart



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, annual data

3.4 Impacts of Covid-19 on Aboriginal Canadians of August 2021

Statistics Canada has produced a pan-Canadian analysis that provides an update on recent developments in the labour market impacts of Covid-19 on off-reserve Aboriginal people. Covering the period from March 2020 to August 2021, the authors of the text show that the impacts of the pandemic "have amplified existing disparities and slowed the labour market recovery of Aboriginal people, particularly women and young adults..." As with their non-Aboriginal compatriots, the presence of young children whose schools or daycares were closed or raised concerns meant that Aboriginal parents faced the difficult task of balancing childcare and online learning. Women were more likely to be involved, especially those who did not have the option of telecommuting, which is more common among Aboriginal people, given the occupations and economic activities involved. Mothers are more likely to be in precarious, low-paying jobs, such as food service and accommodation, which are hard hit by the pandemic. However, these difficulties have been largely temporary. The employment rate slightly exceeded its prepandemic level of 56.2% for the 3 months ending February 2020, having reached 57.7% in the 3 months ending August 2021. Among non-natives, the employment rate returned to its pre-pandemic level of 61.2 percent in August 2021 on a quarterly basis. As a result, the gap that had widened between March 2020 and February 2021 closed during the spring and summer of 2021. Of course, a fifth wave is still possible if the new Covid-19 omicron variant that has recently emerged is taken into account, and it could bring back a larger divergence, presumably to the disadvantage Aboriginal people.

In the specific case of First Nations, the observed recovery brought the employment rate to 53.6% in August 2021, on a quarterly basis, only slightly lower than in February 2020 (56.7%). However, the unemployment rate of 15 percent was 3.9 percentage points higher than the pre-pandemic rate. That is, the labor force participation rate increased by roughly the same amount as the unemployment rate. The unemployment rate for Aboriginal women remains much higher (15.5 percent in August 2021) than before Covid (8.2 percent in February 2020), largely for the reasons discussed in the previous paragraph, while the unemployment rate for men (14.5 percent in August 2021) is somewhat higher than in February 2020 (13.9 percent).

3.5 Post -Covid

There is a certain paradox. On the one hand, the employment rate has essentially returned to its pre-pandemic level, but the unemployment rate, especially for FN women, is significantly higher. Given the significant increase in job vacancies reported by employers, it is logical to expect that the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people, and particularly for First Nations, will decline. Fields such as health, construction, retail and manufacturing are experiencing record numbers of job openings and employers have indicated that they are willing to make significant efforts to integrate people who are far from the labour market. This is a test of their intentions. Indeed, except for workers aged 55 and over, participation rates are up for both women and men, for Aboriginal people, including FNs, and for non-Aboriginal people.

A growing number of analysts believe that the pandemic has profoundly altered the perception of work, its role and its place in people's lives. For some, it has meant early retirement. But that is probably not the point. Increasingly, workers want better working conditions, and not just in monetary terms. For example, the rate of voluntary turnover, that is, a worker's decision to leave his or her job to look for another, is rising significantly, at least in the United States. This does not yet appear to be the case in Canada. However, rising wages, particularly in lower-level occupations, and frequent discussion and reporting of employer initiatives, including the four-day work week, increased benefits and improved work-family balance, point to a shift in the bargaining power balance between workers and employers.

For members of Aboriginal groups, including First Nations and Inuit, this should also translate into gains, not only in employment rates, but also in the conditions of employment. In particular, business associations could be expected to put at least as much effort into integrating these individuals into employment as they do into asking the government to significantly increase immigration levels to address what they describe as labour shortages.

4. First Nations Labour Force and Employment Development Survey

The First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission (FNQLHSSC) has been conducting First Nations surveys for several years in collaboration with the FNIGC (First Nations Governance and Information Centre). These studies focus on the training, skills and employment of the members of the participating communities, in addition to addressing issues of family status, income, mental and physical health, well-being, language, education and early childhood, substance abuse and judicialization, traditional activities and Aboriginal culture, housing and discrimination.

The results of a Workforce and Employment Development Survey (WES) were recently released. It covers the period from January 2019 to February 2020, which is before the official start of the Covid-19 pandemic. A total of 1,307 individuals residing in 15 communities and representing 7 nations responded. In addition to quantitative information to estimate percentages, including employment rate, education level, personal income, and other characteristics of respondents, the survey helps to better understand the causal or interdependent relationships between certain elements, such as the decision to leave the community for employment reasons, or the incidence of visible or hidden homelessness, and access to the labor market. The high incidence of a criminal record, at 18% of respondents, sheds additional light on the various determinants of people's labour market outcomes. The direction of these causalities is not always easy to pinpoint, but it is certain that systemic factors are at work: having a criminal record makes it harder to get a job, while not having a job may lead someone to commit an offence that leads to a criminal record, setting off a vicious circle from which it is difficult to escape. A significant number of elements raise this kind of question about the causality or reciprocal reinforcement of factors. For example, overcrowded housing, identified by 14% of participants, or poor physical and mental health, identified by about half of them, can be both a cause and a consequence of a precarious labour market situation.

The survey reached individuals who reside in First Nations communities. It highlights the reasons for choosing to remain in the community, even when this means giving up outside employment opportunities. Family reasons dominate, but attachment to language and culture is also a reason for this choice. For example, 49% of respondents say that the First Nations language is their daily language of use, which would likely not be the case if they lived outside the village. Although the perception of discrimination in the workplace does not vary significantly between those who work in the community (24%) and those who work outside the community (25%), the perception of racism in the workplace is lower in the community (7% versus 26%). This is likely a factor in the choice of workplace.

The central themes of the survey were training, skills, aspirations, success factors and barriers to employment, employment, income, and needs satisfaction.

An earlier exercise in 2014, the First Nations of Quebec Regional Survey on Early Childhood, Education and Employment (QFNELCC), provided results that highlight some of the characteristics and challenges related to education and employment in the communities. In terms of education, the overcrowding of sometimes unsanitary housing is often an obstacle to well-being and education. This is a major issue in many cases. Similarly, the geographical distance from secondary or higher education reduces the chances of obtaining a degree. For one in five children and one in three teens, absenteeism also impedes academic success, and 40% of adults are dropouts, while half did not complete high school on a regular pathway. Teens whose mothers have a high school diploma are more likely to aspire to higher education than those whose mothers do not have a degree. Similarly, having a sibling with a high school diploma or higher is a greater incentive to pursue postsecondary education.

On the issue of employment, the ELEE highlights some qualitative observations that complement those of the census or labor force survey data. For example, while 90 percent of teens believe that school is helpful in finding and holding a job, more than 60 percent say that the skills needed to get a job are not learned in school. One-quarter of teens who attend school have a job, and half of them say it affects their academic performance. The survey also confirms the negative effect of not having a diploma (one in two unemployed adults belong to this group), or only a high school diploma (one-third of the unemployed belong to this group). In contrast, 90% of university graduates are employed. Band councils hire more than two-thirds of the workers in the community. For isolated communities, this percentage exceeds 85%. This is significant because it highlights the limited opportunities on reserve, including private wage employment and self-employment, such as being an entrepreneur and employer. A consequence of this is the exodus to areas where opportunities are more diverse and numerous, particularly in the metropolitan area. Finally, the availability of child care is a determinant of the ability to hold or seek a job, especially for mothers of young children. Transportation is a frequently cited reason for not working for pay.

5. Participation in employment measures and outcomes of that participation

The Quebec government produced an Aboriginal-specific strategy in 2017, while the federal government, as a trustee, has several years of practice in this area. This section will therefore focus on these public initiatives, and the findings to date.

5.1 The Ministerial Strategy for the Professional Integration of First Nations and Inuit of Quebec

Quebec adopted a first ministerial strategy for the professional integration of First Nations and Inuit in 2017. This strategy recognized the specificities of Aboriginal peoples, including existing agreements, the federal government's fiduciary role, and the particular difficulties encountered by these people in the labour market. In 2019, an integration assistance program put into action the proposals from the directions set out in the 2017 Strategy.

Statistics on the presence of First Nations and Inuit members in the various activities have been produced annually by the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MTESS) for the past two years. During the year 2020-2021, 2,046 FNIs were involved in one or more measures, including 951 women (47% of the total) and 1,095 men (53% of the total). Some regions stand out for their high level of participation, such as Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean (16.1% of active FNIs, i.e., diligently following the activities set out in their intervention plan), Mauricie (14.1%), Abitibi-Témiscamingue (13.2%), and Côte-Nord (10.2%). These are obviously areas where a high proportion of residents are Aboriginal. However, Montreal (9.6% of the active population), Capitale-Nationale (8.5%), and Outaouais (7.9%) have a significant ratio of FNI participation because, although they constitute a relatively small percentage of the regional society, FNIs are a numerically important group.

Enrollees under the age of 35 account for 69.1% of the cohort, and more than 2 in 3 (67%) have less than a high school education, 44.4% are welfare clients, and 48.5% are EI clients. In 2020-2021, the 2,046 FNIs engaged in employment measures were 1.1% of participants (180,594 total), roughly their share of the total population (1.3%). Employment Assistance Services and Employment Assistance Activities, which are typically short-term, each had more than 650 individuals, followed by the training measure, with 207 enrolled in 2020-2021. Job readiness projects, aimed at individuals relatively far from the labor market, attracted 122 FNIs, while the Wage Subsidy program funded 43, which seems small a priori, as FNIs often lack recognized employment experience, particularly because of the large contingent of young people in their midst and cultural barriers still too present. In fact, the pattern of FNI attendance is not very different from that of the general clientele, which needs to be better understood.

Engaging in measures is an important step in the process of accessing employment, returning to the labor market, or improving professional prospects. From this point of view, one might think that the participation of FNIs should be higher than that of the rest of the population, given their needs and characteristics (education, work experience, age, unemployment, etc.). But their actual participation may be higher than observed, as some undoubtedly take advantage of services without necessarily identifying themselves as FNIs. Unfortunately, we do not have a numerical estimate.

The critical question in the medium to long term, for FNIs as for other participants, is of course the impact of enrollment in the measures. Evaluations have been conducted and made public in the past, but to our knowledge none have focused specifically on the effects on FNI clients. The Quebec strategy is very recent. The information and lessons that can be learned from it at this time are therefore limited. Appropriate attention should be paid to its follow-up, and one or more evaluations should eventually be carried out in order to draw the necessary lessons for its eventual improvement, if necessary.

5.2 The Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Federal Skills and Partnership Fund

On the federal government side, program evaluations that target Aboriginal people that Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) has conducted or commissioned have targeted measures and services for Aboriginal people. In the spring of 2018, the Auditor General of Canada produced a report on employment training for Aboriginal people. While not strictly an evaluative study, the document comes close, at least in terms of the design and management of the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy and the Skills and Partnership Fund.

Essentially, both the Strategy and the Fund are aimed at increasing the number of individuals who obtain sustainable and meaningful employment. However, the Auditor General concluded that the information collected by EDSC does not indicate whether this objective is being met. There are a number of gaps, firstly in the definition of what constitutes sustainable and meaningful employment. Second, even if the definition were made explicit, post-participation follow-up is too short to answer the question. Problems of an administrative nature and relations with the Aboriginal organizations responsible for implementation are also highlighted in the report. In short, of the three performance indicators used by EDSC to report on program performance, only the first, the number of participants receiving services, is clearly defined and measured with any degree of precision.

As for the number of participants who found employment after receiving services and the number of participants who returned to school after receiving services, the achievement of targets cannot be adequately measured in the first case, and no targets are defined in the second. In response to these criticisms, EDSC acknowledged much of the rationale, but also explained that previous evaluations of Aboriginal programs have shown continued increases in employment and earnings after 5 years.

We found an evaluation report on the EDSC website dated 2015, the latest year available online, that reports these positive results, including references to earlier evaluations that we could not find. However, the evaluation does not directly answer the question of whether these programs have a differential effect for participants, compared to a control or comparison group that was not participating but had comparable pre-program characteristics.

The need for rigorous monitoring, and eventually an evaluation that takes into account the net difference (or net benefit) of participation in the departmental First Nations and Inuit Workforce Integration Strategy, emerges from this overview of existing data, both in Quebec and at the federal level.

6. Long term perspectives

Predictions are difficult, especially when they concern the future. Consequently, we will limit ourselves to recalling certain issues that in many cases affect the entire Quebec population, and in others that are specific to FNIs.

6.1 Demography

Demographics are, as we have noted, a key factor at present and will remain so for some decades. The growing concern about labour scarcity, which some refer to as a shortage, is a striking illustration of this. The most recent data from Statistics Canada indicates that last October there were 255,500 unemployed people in Quebec and 188,125 job vacancies, for a ratio of 1.36 unemployed people per job vacancy. In the past, the ratio was more like 5 or 6 unemployed per job opening. It is understandable that the current situation worries the business community, which is exerting strong pressure on public opinion and the government to substantially increase the number of immigrants received.

Few independent economists share these concerns and instead see this labour scarcity as an opportunity to address some of the critical labour market issues, including low wages and difficult working conditions in many fields and professions. They also see it as an incentive to look for ways to increase labour productivity, which is low in Quebec compared to the Canadian average, which is itself low among Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. Finally, they believe that the context is favourable to further integrate disadvantaged groups, including Aboriginal people, into the labour market. The government's recent announcement of a major investment in training and employment integration of additional people in strategic activities should be of particular benefit to members of these currently marginalized groups. Health and social services, education, and child care are among these so-called strategic sectors. The goal is to train and employ 60,000 people over the next ten years. Information technology, engineering and construction are three other fields for which 110,000 workers are to be prepared. Scholarships for students in key disciplines will support the strategy. These are substantial opportunities arising from the labour shortage that is essentially a product of the demographic changes that Quebec, like other similar societies, is experiencing.

It is therefore important to ensure that FNIs, whether they live in their communities or outside of them, benefit from this context which makes employers, both public and private, more willing than ever to welcome new workers whose profile differs in some respects from that of their traditional employees. In strictly economic terms, it can be said that discrimination in all its forms becomes prohibitive in a situation of great labour scarcity, which is excellent news, we agree.

6.2 The climate crisis and the necessary green shift

La réponse à la crise climatique qui a beaucoup trop tardé et qui reste encore aujourd'hui A positive aspect of the response to the climate crisis, which is long overdue and still largely insufficient to meet the COP 26 targets, is that it is forcing governments and the private sector to make significant expenditures in the direction of carbon neutral economic activities and products. In particular, green energy provides opportunities for NIP communities that are far from major population centers, but have a large land base and the potential to produce these types of energy, whether wind, solar, geothermal or other, to supply their internal demand or to export to consumer markets.

The need to move quickly towards carbon neutrality involves, among other things, the construction or renovation of energy efficient buildings, including of course single family homes. Here again, the acute and often specific needs of NIP communities will require substantial investments and a skilled workforce. Already, mobilizing projects are underway in Canada that rely on Aboriginal workers, as well as a commitment from these communities to build in response to their own climatic, cultural, social and other realities.

6.3 Schooling

Young FNI women have been impressively educated for some years now, with observable results in the labor market, both within and outside the communities. Women hold many key positions in community and inter-community institutions, as well as in important public and private institutions. Their voices are increasingly being heard in the arts and literature. There is an emulation effect that inspires many young FNI women to pursue higher education. This example is also being set for young men whose mothers have a high school diploma or higher.

This progression will certainly continue over the next few years. The question is how fast it will happen and to what extent young men will join it; and the issue is how best to get there as quickly as possible. Physical investments, such as high speed internet in remote areas, adequate facilities, including housing that is not overcrowded or unsanitary, are part of this. Access to adequate financial assistance for those who must attend school away from home would facilitate the pursuit of higher education. More FNI teachers would allow for an informed approach to community realities, and these individuals would serve as role models for their young students, demonstrating that advanced education is not incompatible with, but a necessary condition for, the preservation and promotion of ancestral culture, including language. It should be noted that French-speaking Quebecers have experienced a somewhat similar situation. In the early 1960s, they were very poorly educated, and one obstacle to the effort to educate them was the fear of the loss of identity that might result from such a major change in their social and cultural reality.

6.4 Place of residence

The Labour Force and Employment Development Survey (LFEDS) identifies four zones of FN community settlement and the proximity of a government or other service center. The towns and villages in zone 1 are located less than 50 km from such a center, those in zone 2 between 50 and 350 km, those in zone 3 more than 350 km, and those in zone 4 do not have year-round access roads. This differentiated location is reflected in a number of important socioeconomic and health indicators. For example, 49% of people in zone 1 have a mother with a high school diploma or higher, compared to 33% in zone 2 and 29% in zones 3 and 4 combined. In terms of household overcrowding, the problem is more acute in zone 2 (24%) than in zone 3 (14%), but is lowest in zone 1 (7%).

However, Zone 1 residents move outside their community more frequently for work (30%, compared to 18% in Zone 2 and 20% in Zone 3). The increased ease of migrating to available jobs translates into higher income in zone 1. In particular, the proportion of people with incomes below \$20,000 per year is lower in zone 1 than in zones 2 and 3. Only visible homelessness is more prevalent in zone 1 (11% versus 8% in zone 2). However, hidden homelessness (defined as having to live temporarily with family, friends or in their car) is more prevalent in zone 2 (38%) and zone 3 (35%) than in zone 1 (33%).

In addition, we know from the 2016 Census data that out-of-community FNIs, and particularly those living in a metropolitan area, show better labor market and income outcomes. They are also more educated overall. Of course, this does not mean that they do not have problems. In addition to the problems that many non-natives face, they also face barriers that may depend on discrimination against them.

The economic challenges experienced by residents of small communities far from major population centers are found everywhere, not just among FNIs. It is a reality for which solutions are often not easy to find. They depend on a detailed knowledge of the specific conditions of the environment and on the commitment of the partners to articulate and support the deployment of an adapted strategy. In the case of Quebec NP communities in zones 2, 3 and 4, one apparent advantage is the fact that they live in very large territories or have relatively easy access to them. The question of control over the development of these territories and the equitable sharing of its fruits is rightly at the heart of economic and political issues.

6.5 Spoken languages

According to the FNLMDA, 71% of the individuals residing in the communities surveyed by the investigators speak a First Nations language and 48% claim to use it on a daily basis. The attachment to the mother tongue is present and culturally valued, and its knowledge is useful for employment on the community's territory.

However, when it comes to working outside the community or in a job that requires communication with people outside the community, fluency in French, English or both languages is essential. According to the 2016 Census, the vast majority of Registered Indians or Treaty Indians aged 25 to 54 living in Quebec report being proficient in French (77.6%) English (58.9%) or both (71.8%). This means that almost 3 out of 10 adults in this age group are not bilingual. Perhaps surprisingly, bilingualism is more prevalent on-reserve (86.8%) than off-reserve (55.7%). Off-reserve residents are much more likely to speak only French (41.6% vs. 9.7% on-reserve), while unilingual English is spoken by 9.9% of on-reserve residents and 11.4% of off-reserve individuals.

The information derived from the census questions is self-reporting and does not provide an indication of language proficiency. The FNLMDA provides indirect insight when participants are asked to rate their oral, reading and writing skills. These skills vary according to education, age and parental education. Among those who had completed high school, 62% rated their oral communication skills as very good, 72% rated their reading skills as very good and 51% rated their writing skills as very good. The respective percentages for those who have not completed high school are 38%, 42% and 25%. The differences are therefore significant. Age tends to improve these skills, as does parental education. As schooling continues to increase, so will fluency in French, and ideally in English.

Conclusion

In the general picture of relations between First Nations and non-Aboriginal Quebecers and Canadians, the place occupied by economic and labour market issues is not negligible. On the one hand, FN communities and individuals are increasingly taking charge of their own lives, as can be seen from the FNLMDA and other internal sources. They face significant challenges in demographics, education and training, housing, infrastructure, health and sensitive social issues. They show an impressive determination to tackle them with lucidity. On the other hand, interdependent relationships exist with non-Aboriginal people, and here too there are challenges.

For small and isolated communities, economic development requires the mobilization of local actors and an adapted strategy. This strategy is partly based on public services, but it must also incorporate entrepreneurship capable of producing goods and services for the community, but also for export purposes in order to generate the income and employment necessary to maintain and develop these communities. Given this need and the constraints of the geographic and demographic context, partnerships are essential and must be beneficial to all involved. Trust is an essential ingredient in building these relationships. We know that in this regard, much work remains to be done, but First Nations and their fellow Quebecers depend on each other, if only by virtue of the labour shortage that will accompany us for at least two decades. This situation offers opportunities that should not be missed, and we must expect public authorities and private decision-makers to make every effort to develop the skills and productive and rewarding employment of all those who are able and willing to contribute to their own and their society's development. This obviously includes the members of the First Nations.

The more rapid and sustained growth of the out-of-community FN population raises questions, including the relationship with the place of origin of those who choose this option or are forced to do so. Substantial benefits to communities can be seen if contact is maintained between residents and "expatriates. The latter are, on average, better educated, more employed and have higher incomes. To the extent that the links remain, these benefits are likely to help communities, particularly by using the services of these "ambassadors" to establish and develop beneficial relationships with other Quebecers.

Statistical appendix

Table A1								
Population projection scenario, Quebec								
Year	Total population	Growth rates	First Nations	Grow rate 2	Inuits	Grow rate 3	FNI	Grow rate 4
2016	8 225 900		105		14		119	
2021	8 588 701	4,4	116	10,5	16	14,3	132	10,9
2026	8 947 602	8,8	127	21,0	17	21,4	144	21,0
2031	9 162 536	11,4	137	30,5	18	28,6	155	30,3
2036	9 337 755	13,5	146	39,0	19	35,7	165	38,7
2041	9 485 356	15,3	156	48,6	21	50,0	177	48,7

Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0144-01 Projected population by Aboriginal identity, age group sex, region of residence, provinces and territories, and projection scenario (medium scenario) (in thousands); and Institut de la statistique du Québec, Population by age and sex, Reference scenario A2021, Quebec, 2020-2066, September 2021.

Table A2 Percentage of population by age group 2016 and Population Projections								
Year	Quebec		First Nations		Inuits		FNI	
	0 à 14 years old	15 years +	0 à 14 years old	15 years + 3	0 à 14 years 4	15 years +5	0 à 14 years 6	15 years + 7
2016	15,7	84,3	23,8	76,2	35,7	64,3	25,2	74,8
2021	15,8	84,2	22,4	77,6	31,3	68,8	23,5	76,5
2026	15,2	84,8	20,5	79,5	29,4	70,6	21,5	78,5
2031	14,7	85,3	19,7	80,3	27,8	72,2	20,6	79,4
2036	14,5	85,5	18,5	81,5	26,3	73,7	19,4	80,6
2041	14,4	85,6	18,6	81,4	28,6	71,4	19,8	80,2

Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0144-01 Projected population by Aboriginal identity, age group, sex, region of residence, provinces and territories, and projection scenario (medium scenario) (in thousands); and Institut de la statistique du Québec, Population by age and sex, Reference scenario A2021, Quebec, 2020-2066, September 2021.

Table A3				
Percentage of the population 65 years and older, 2016 and population projections				
Year	Quebec	First Nations	Inuits	FNI
2016	18,0	11,4	7,1	10,9
2021	20,4	13,8	6,3	12,9
2026	22,9	17,3	5,9	16,0
2031	25,1	16,1	5,6	14,8
2036	25,8	18,1	10,5	17,2
2041	26,0	19,2	9,5	18,1

Sources: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0144-01 Projected population by Aboriginal identity, age group, sex, region of residence, provinces and territories, and projection scenario, Canada (x 1,000) Institut de la statistique du Québec, Population by age and sex, Reference scenario A2021, Quebec, 2020-2066

Table A4 Demographic projections Number and % of First Nations people living on or off reserve, Quebec				
On reserve			Off reserve	
Year	Number	%	Number	%
2016	53	50,5	52	49,5
2021	55	47,4	61	52,6
2026	56	44,1	71	55,9
2031	57	41,6	80	58,4
2036	58	39,7	88	60,3
2041	59	37,8	97	62,2

Source: Statistics Canada, Table 17-10-0144-01 projected population by Aboriginal identity, age group, sex, area of residence, provinces and territories, and projection scenario, Canada (x 1000), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/fr/tv.action?pid=1710014401>

Table A5								
Quarterly labor market indicators pre-pandemic and recent quarters, Quebec, December 2019 to August 2020, selected terms								
	Dec-19 to Feb-2020		March 2020 to May 2021		March 2021 to May 2021		June 2021 to August 2021	
	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals	Aboriginals	Non-Aboriginals
	Working population	77,6	4431,7	78,9	4263,6	81,7	4423,8	77,1
Employment	70,1	4201,4	63,9	3689,8	73,6	4116,6	70,0	4291,3
Unemployment	7,5	230,3	14,9	573,7	8,2	307,1	7,2	270,6
Employment rate	52,8	60,9	47,6	53,4	53,1	59,2	50,1	61,7
Unemployment	9,6	5,2	19,1	13,5	9,9	6,9	9,1	5,9

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey 3701

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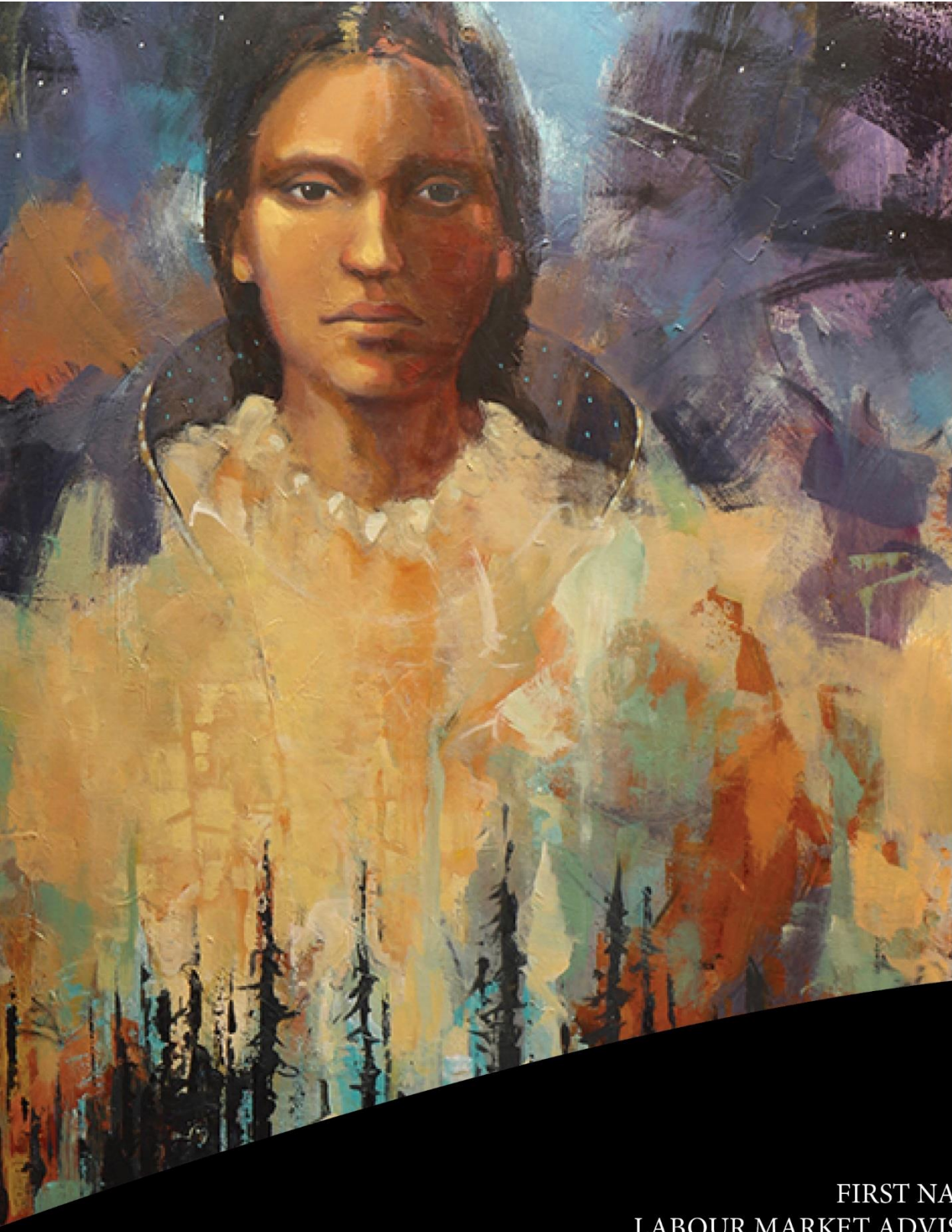
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