

Breaking Down Barriers

Identifying barriers to
employment for unemployed
persons in Algoma

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
SURVEY RESULTS	3
DEMOGRAPHICS	3
EMPLOYMENT STATUS	5
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES	7
TRAINING AND EDUCATION	8
BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT	9
IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND THEMES	10
CONCLUSION	11

INTRODUCTION

A barrier to employment refers to anything that prevents an individual from finding and maintaining employment. Barriers can include discrimination, accessibility issues, family responsibilities, lack of transportation, inadequate training or experience, and more.

Examining the reasons behind unemployment can provide the insight necessary to eliminate barriers to employment, and possibly reveal barriers that were otherwise unknown, which ultimately could lead to improved labour market outcomes for individuals and an increased labour supply for employers.

The survey was meant to capture information that may not be evident from looking at unemployment statistics alone, and the intention was to help identify the extent of employment difficulties that unemployed individuals may be facing. By providing an opportunity for this group to self-identify the difficulties they've faced as well as tell us directly what they need to overcome these barriers, we hope to fill any gaps that may be present in existing data and reports.

Some key topics:

- Barriers that have discouraged/disincentivized employment
- Job search activities and difficulties encountered in job search process
- Obstacles preventing education/training
- Supports/conditions necessary for workforce re-entry

Ultimately, we hope to determine the factors that have discouraged people from looking for work or have prevented them from securing work, and what—if anything—could help them find and maintain meaningful employment.

METHODOLOGY

Responses were collected from participants using a computerized questionnaire during a 2-month collection period from November to December 2022. The survey consisted of several components with assigned paths based on answers provided in the first section.

The target population was unemployed and underemployed individuals in Algoma region, but responses were collected from all participants regardless of employment status to ensure data accuracy.

Due to the sample size, the data and information in this report should be used cautiously and treated as more preliminary than conclusive.

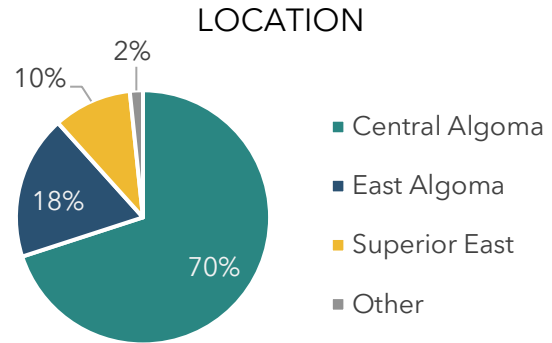
SURVEY RESULTS

Note: As a result of rounding, some totals may not match the individual values presented, and some percentages may not necessarily add up to 100%.

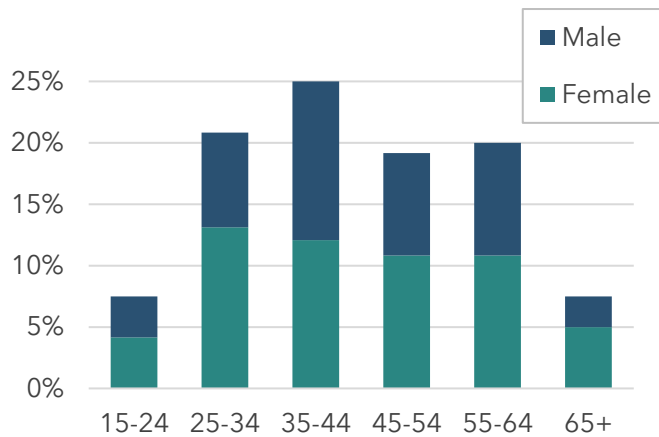
DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of respondents (70%) are from central Algoma (Sault Ste. Marie), with 18% from East Algoma (Blind River, Elliot Lake) and 10% from Superior East (Wawa, White River, Dubreuilville).

The small portion from outside of the Algoma region ("Other") are non-permanent residents (e.g., work or study permit).



AGE AND GENDER DISTRIBUTION



Over half (56%) of the respondents identified as female.¹

The median age of respondents is 35 to 44 years.

- 23% identified as Indigenous
- 30% identified as a person with a disability
- 86% are Canadian citizens by birth
- 13% are students

¹ Due to the small population, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" have been distributed into the other two gender categories to protect the confidentiality of responses provided.

Over half (53%) of respondents earn less than \$30,000 in total household income, and a third (33%) receive some form of social assistance. Of respondents collecting social assistance, 64% earn less than \$20,000 in total household income, and 92% earn less than \$30,000 total household income.

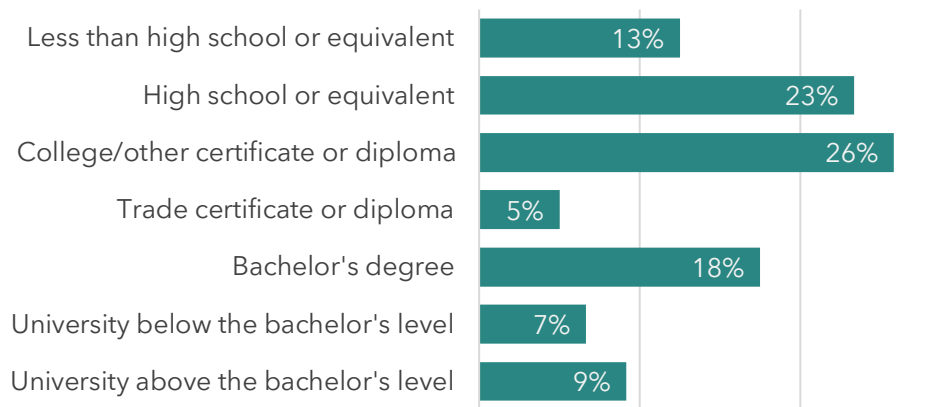
HOUSEHOLD INCOME	PERCENTAGE (%)
Less than \$20,000	34%
\$20,000-\$29,999	18%
\$30,000-\$49,999	16%
\$50,000-\$69,999	10%
\$70,000-\$99,999	9%
\$100,000+	13%

The main sources of personal income are primarily employment income (35%) and social assistance including disability benefits (27%), followed by no personal income source (16%).

- 23% are clients of employment agencies
- 17% are clients of financial or housing assistance
- 9% are clients of other social services (addictions, mental health, childcare, etc.)
- 2% are clients of literacy and basic skills or ESL

The highest level of education for a quarter of respondents (26%) is a college certificate or diploma (excluding trades certificates or diplomas), and high school or equivalent for another quarter (23%).

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION



Just under half (46%) of respondents who are unemployed and looking for work have a high school diploma or less, and 62% of respondents with a bachelor's degree are employed full-time.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Half (51%) of the respondents are unemployed, 41% are employed, and 8% are retired or on leave. Of those who are unemployed, three quarters (75%) are looking for work.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Unemployed and looking for work	38%
Unemployed and not looking for work/unable to work	13%
Employed full-time	28%
Employed part-time and looking for full-time work	8%
Employed part-time and prefer not to/unable to work full-time	4%
Retired/on leave	8%

Most respondents who are unemployed and not looking for work/unable to work are unemployed due to illness or disease (60%), followed by personal or family care responsibilities (33%), and almost three quarters (73%) have been unemployed for more than a year. Most don't know if they're planning to go back to work in the next 12 months (87%); however, 87% would like to work if a suitable² job was offered.

Over half (54%) of the respondents who said their employment situation changed as a result of COVID-19 are unemployed and looking for work.

The reasons for unemployment vary among those who are unemployed and looking for work:

- 38% laid off, dismissed, or a temporary job ending
- 18% caring for own children or an adult family member, or other personal or family responsibilities
- 16% quit to look for other employment
- 13% illness or disability
- 11% going to school

Of the respondents who are unemployed and looking for work, 39% are clients of an employment agency, 20% are clients of financial or housing assistance, and 15% are clients of other social services (addictions, mental health, childcare, etc.). Over half (56%) want to work more than 30 hours per week, and the rest want to work between 10 and 30 hours per week.

² A "suitable job" is defined as one within respondents' health/physical capabilities; hours that don't interfere with family obligations; would not put them in a worse financial situation (wouldn't make less money or lose any benefits); or any other working condition they would find ideal.

Almost half (49%) of respondents who are unemployed and looking for work have been unemployed for more than 1 year, and 29% for 1 to 6 months. Of the respondents who have been unemployed for more than 1 year, half (50%) have also been looking for work for more than 1 year.

Most (71%) respondents looking for work reported participating in job-seeking activities³ in the last 4 weeks. The most common job-seeking activities are looking at job ads/job banks, submitting job applications, and preparing a resume/cover letter.

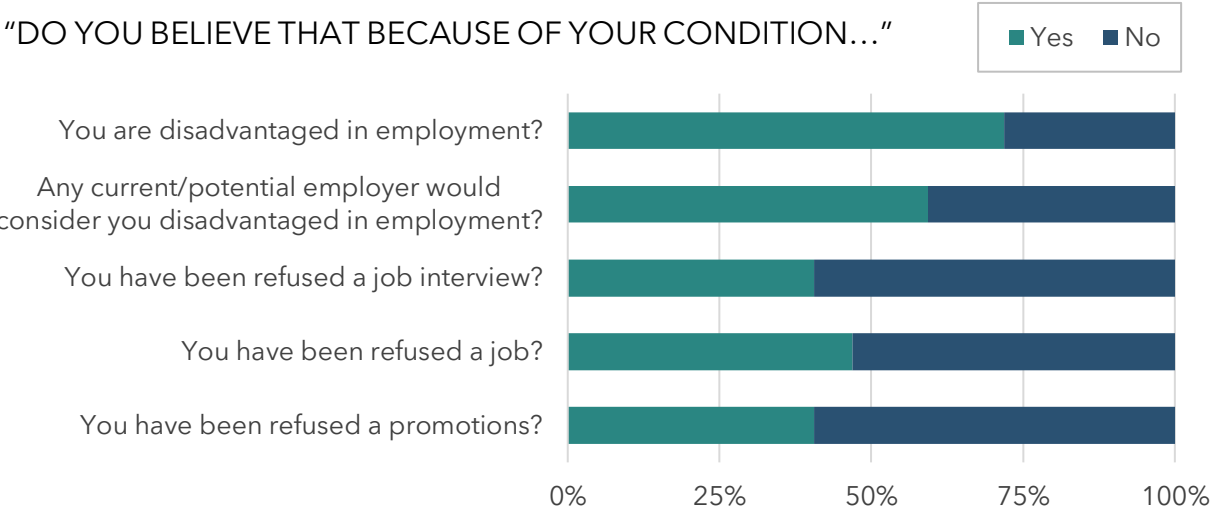
For those looking for work, only 22% think their chance of finding a suitable job in the next 3 months is very likely.

"IN THE NEXT 3 MONTHS, WHAT DO YOU THINK YOUR CHANCES ARE OF FINDING A SUITABLE JOB?"	22%	Very likely
	38%	Somewhat likely
	22%	Unlikely
	18%	Don't know

³ Job-seeking activities are defined as any effort put towards finding employment, such as assessing employment opportunities, contacting employers, preparing a resume, and submitting applications.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Almost half (47%) of the respondents who identified as a person with a disability said their condition limits their ability to look for a job, and 59% said their condition limits the amount of work they can do at a job. When asked if there was some type of workplace arrangement that would enable them to work at a job or business (such as modified duties, technical aids, or other accommodations), 38% said yes and 44% said they didn't know.



Just under three quarters (72%) consider themselves disadvantaged in employment because of their condition, and 59% believe their current or any potential employer would likely consider them disadvantaged in employment because of their condition.

When asked if they would like to work if suitable job were offered in next 3 months, 78% said yes—53% would like to work between 10-30 hours and 41% would like to work more than 30 hours.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Half (51%) of the respondents had participated in a training activity in the last 12 months, most of whom are employed in some capacity, but the unemployed and looking for work group was a significant portion as well. The primary reason for participating in training among all groups was to improve their job or career opportunities.

The most common types of training are computer/software skills, handling customers, clients, patients, or students, teamwork/leadership skills, and project management or organizational skills.

- Computer/software skills and teamwork/leadership training was more popular among those who are employed
- Handling customers/patients and project management/organizational training was more popular among those who are unemployed

Only 33% did not participate in training activities in the last 12 months even though they wanted to—mostly respondents who are unemployed and looking for work—with the primary reason being it was too expensive.

The results were evenly split when asked of any plans to take any formal schooling in the next 5 years—37% said yes, 34% said no, and 29% said they don't know. Of the respondents who said yes, 43% are unemployed and looking for work, and 27% are employed full-time; those unemployed and looking for work were also the most uncertain group, accounting for half (49%) of the "don't know" answers.

College and trade certificates/diplomas are the most common levels of schooling that respondents plan on taking.

A little over half (55%) said they are encountering difficulties in pursuing formal schooling, with the majority (73%) stating cost as a barrier. The other most frequently selected barrier (58%) was personal, family, and/or childcare responsibilities. Illness or disability was also a factor for 23% of respondents, followed by a lack of confidence (i.e., not feeling prepared) for 19%.

BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT⁴

The most common situations that discourage unemployed individuals from looking for work are feeling their training/education is not adequate for the current job market, unsuccessful past attempts at finding work, and health conditions limiting the type of work they can do. Discrimination, family responsibilities, and an expected decrease in income are notable factors as well.

Just under half (45%) of respondents whose income included social assistance said a fear of losing income supports or benefits is a factor in their unemployment status.

Knowing where to look for work and how to navigate the application process were not major barriers at all, and just 15% of respondents stated resume writing skills/workshops would help them find and keep a suitable job.

Unemployed individuals who are not looking for work more frequently selected anxiety or uncertainty about re-entering the workforce as a factor contributing to their unemployment status. They were also more likely to select not knowing the type of job they wanted and no work-from-home option as barriers.

For those unemployed and looking for work, more jobs or work available and having contacts or networking were the main factors they feel could help them to find/keep a suitable job, followed closely by having more work experience.

"WHAT WOULD HELP YOU MOST TO FIND A JOB?"	
45%	More jobs or work available
41%	Having contacts or networking
36%	More work experience
34%	Skills training
30%	Education

For those who are unemployed and not looking for work, more jobs or work available, skills training, and better access to transportation were the main factors they believe would help them find/keep a suitable job.

Individuals with a college level education and individuals with less than a high school diploma were most likely to pick education as something that would help them most to find/keep a suitable job.

⁴ This section of the survey excludes all participants who are employed full-time.

IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND THEMES

The results of the survey indicate a strong overall desire to work among the various groups represented, but also an overarching sentiment of inadequate skills or experience for the current job market, which in turn may be contributing to the idea that more job availability is the solution to their unemployment.

Difficulty understanding how the skills and experience gained in one job can transfer to another job, perhaps one with a different title or duties, could be contributing to this feeling of mismatched skills and a lack of jobs. Is the problem a lack of jobs overall, or a lack of jobs that they perceive to be suited to them? If an individual is unable to visualize how they can fit into different roles—i.e., the roles currently available in the form of job postings—it is possible they may drop out of the labour market entirely. There is no standard for the language used in job postings, and it can vary as much as the employers posting. The transferability of skills may not be obvious due to this variation in language, and the ability to identify one's own skills and understand how they apply to different roles is in itself a skill that may not be present. Additionally, the requirements set by employers in job postings may further alienate people from the labour market.

People with disabilities are interested in working but largely don't know what kind of accommodations, if any, could help them in the workplace. That a considerable portion of this group feels disadvantaged in employment because of their condition, and as though potential employers would also consider them disadvantaged in employment, shows there is much progress to be made in terms of workplace accommodations, discrimination, and valuing the work that people with disabilities are capable of.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this project was to identify some of the obstacles that unemployed individuals face when attempting to re-enter the workforce, and to understand the reasons some may choose to remain unemployed.

Some key takeaways:

- Overall, people want to work
- Lack of skills/training/experience is a major barrier
- Cost is the primary barrier to accessing training/formal education
- Wider availability of jobs is seen as a solution to unemployment status
- Accommodations and discrimination are significant barriers for people with disabilities

NEXT STEPS

Suggestions for further research include a survey on job postings from both the employer and job seeker perspectives to determine if employers are unintentionally (or intentionally) precluding entire groups of potential labour. Depending on the results, workshops for employers on creating inclusive job postings and setting reasonable expectations for education and experience may be worthwhile.

Webinars or informative videos could be used to help educate the workforce about transferable skills—what they are, how to identify them, how to apply them to different situations, etc.—and could be shared among educational institutions, employment agencies, and other relevant organizations to ensure it reaches the individuals who would benefit from this information. Data on the top skills employers in Algoma look for can be gathered from job postings to tailor these videos to the region's needs.

Research into barriers to employment for specific groups, such as persons with disabilities or Indigenous peoples, could help to gain a better understanding of the unique challenges these groups face so that these barriers can be removed to improve labour market outcomes.