



# Youth Employment: Opportunities and Challenges in the Local Economy



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# Foreword

The pathway from school to employment can be challenging for young people. As youth finish school and begin searching for work, they are faced with limited job opportunities, high costs of living, inadequate incomes, and substantial debt.

According to a report on youth employment by Employment and Social Development Canada,<sup>1</sup> many young people looking for work or seeking to improve their employment situation are meeting significant barriers. Youth do not have the work experience that makes it easier to get jobs relevant to their education. Therefore, it is more likely that they will engage in precarious, short-term contract work that creates insecurity. Many may end up accepting a job for which they are overqualified, with uncertain prospects and low pay.

Some young people are more at risk than others in the labour market, such as Indigenous youth, racialized youth, recent immigrant youth and youth with disabilities. These groups often encounter unique obstacles, including lower levels of education and experience, which can make them more vulnerable to finding stable employment opportunities.

Of particular concern are youth who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET). The longer a young person is NEET, the harder it can be for them to reintegrate into the labour market. Additionally, youth who have some employment but struggle to find full-time, stable jobs are at risk of lower wages, fewer benefits, and the possibility of being trapped in such positions.

A 2021 data report from Statistics Canada<sup>2</sup> indicates that employment has become more precarious for both young men and young women in Canada. The employment rates for youth are lower than for older Canadians for various reasons. Many young Canadians do not work as they are full time students. Even when they do work, they face higher unemployment rates. This happens for several reasons. Young workers are often the first to lose their jobs when companies are restructuring, or cutting costs, as they are usually the last to be hired. Moreover, when starting their careers young Canadians often look for jobs that suit their skills. Finding fitting employment takes time and may involve being unemployed for a while. In addition, employers may not hire young people when they apply for new jobs because they have less work experience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Employment and Social Development Canada, Understanding the Realities: Youth Employment in Canada – Interim report of the Expert Panel on Youth Employment, 2016, accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/youth-expert-panel/interim-report.html>*

<sup>2</sup> *Statistics Canada, Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report by René Morissette, July 2021, accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm>*

In a rapidly transforming work environment, new technology is changing the types of jobs that are available and the skills that industries now require.<sup>3</sup> More employers are choosing to hire workers for short term, temporary contracts or on a part time basis rather than for permanent full time positions. Youth today are entering the workforce at a time of greater inequality. They must navigate job seeking and hiring processes that can be impersonal, unresponsive and biased.

Young people need the opportunities and support to adapt as the labour environment evolves. There is a need to rethink the delivery of youth employment programming and modernize support mechanisms with innovative practices and focused approaches for young people, particularly those who face more barriers to employment than others.

## In this Report

**Section 1** of this report examines the barriers and opportunities for employment experienced by young people in Ottawa. It explores the trajectories in the labour force status of youth aged 15 to 24 over the years and portrays a comprehensive picture of youth from various backgrounds to compare the challenges they face. The report builds on previous research on the topic of youth unemployment and under-employment in Ottawa conducted by the Youth Leadership for Change, an initiative of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa.

**Section 2** presents the Evaluation report of the Youth Employment and Economic Development Program, a pilot initiative managed by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa. The Youth Employment Program explores innovative ways for youth to gain the valuable expertise they need to overcome obstacles to employment and be successful in today's workforce.

**Section 3** describes what we learned from the Youth Mental Health Survey conducted in 2022 by the Social Planning Council of Ottawa and the Active Newcomer Youth Ottawa (ANYO).

## About the Data

The data in **Section 1** of this report comes from two Statistics Canada datasets: the 2021 Census of Canadian Population and the Labour Force Survey (obtained via the Community Data Consortium).

Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (LFS) is an annual survey that is suitable for monitoring labour force trends. We are analyzing the overtime change in the labour force status of Ottawa Youth aged 15 to 24 from 2006 to 2022 in the area of Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part) <sup>1</sup>.

Data from the 2021 Census provide a snapshot of the Youth situation in Ottawa in 2020 - 2021. We are looking at the overall characteristics of Youth aged 15 to 24 from various backgrounds and comparing the barriers and opportunities for employment they experience.

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<sup>3</sup> *Employment and Social Development Canada, 13 Ways to modernize youth employment in Canada – Strategies for a new world of work, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/corporate/youth-expert-panel/report-modern-strategies-youth-employment.html>*

# Section I: Youth and the Labour Market in Ottawa

## Key findings

- ❖ The labour market participation rate of Ottawa youth aged 15 to 24 has remained relatively stable over the past sixteen years, showing only a slight decline in the long term.
- ❖ Through 2021 and 2022, the youth employment rate started to gradually recover from the economic downturn during COVID-19.
- ❖ Youth aged 15 to 24 work in part time positions at considerably higher rates compared to the core working population aged 25 to 54.
- ❖ The percentage of youth employed in temporary positions is significantly higher compared to the workers aged 25 to 54.
- ❖ Over the years, the median hourly earnings for young workers remain close to the minimum wage and about two times lower than the earnings of those aged 25 to 54.
- ❖ The level of educational attainment is critical for a youth's successful career.
- ❖ The industries of Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services are employing the highest number of Ottawa youth.
- ❖ Diverse groups of Ottawa youth are experiencing the labour market in considerably different ways.
- ❖ Unemployment is worse for youth in particular groups, including but not limited to Indigenous youth, racialized youth, and recent immigrant youth than for the general and non-racialized youth population.
- ❖ Between racialized groups, the highest rate of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) was among Black (12.6%) and Latin American (11.4%) youth.
- ❖ Low-income rates are more than two times higher for racialized youth than for the non-racialized young population.

## Introduction

According to Statistics Canada 2022 postcensal estimates<sup>4</sup>, the population of the City of Ottawa is approximately 1,071,868. Of the total Ottawa population, the number of youths between the ages of 15 to 24 is 138,688. Youths aged 15 to 24 comprise 12.9% of the City of Ottawa population and 12.6% of Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part).

Young workers typically are paid the lowest wages. In November 2021, the average hourly wage for Canadian workers 15 to 24 years old was \$20.50, whereas the workers aged 25 years and over received \$36.57.

In Canada, younger earners in the 15 to 24 age group tend to make an average of 55% less than older workers aged 25 and over. The average hourly wage gap between these age groups has increased over time from \$11.72 in 2011 to \$16.07 in 2023.

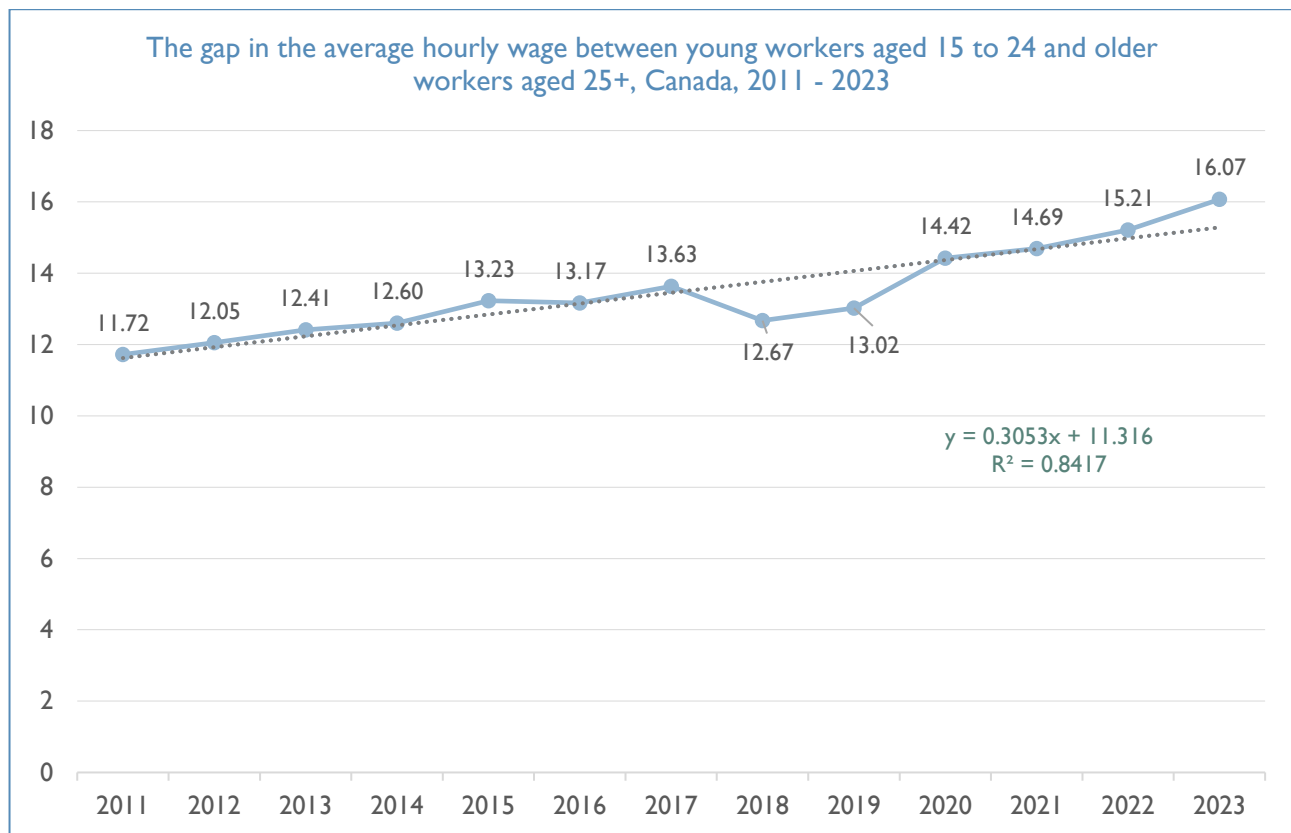


Fig. 1. The average hourly wage gap, Canada. Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0320-02 Average usual hours and wages by selected characteristics unadjusted for seasonality. Accessed at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410032001>.

<sup>4</sup> Postcensal estimates are based on the latest census counts adjusted for census net undercoverage and for the estimated population growth that occurred since that census.

## Labour market participation rate among young people

The participation rate measures the share of the population that is currently active in the labour force, including those who are employed and those who are looking for work or on temporary leave from work. Students if they are working or looking for a job are also included. Retired workers, stay-at-home parents and people with conditions that prevent them from working are examples of people not active in the labour force.

The Labour Force Survey indicates that the participation rate of Ottawa youth aged 15 to 24 has remained relatively stable over the past sixteen years, showing a slight decline in the long-term participation rate of young individuals.

The last two years, 2021-2022 show an increase in the participation rate of over 6 percentage points from the lowest percentage of participation (59.6%) in 2020. This upturn marks a recovery from the 2020 COVID-19 economic decline, which saw many young people exit the labour market.

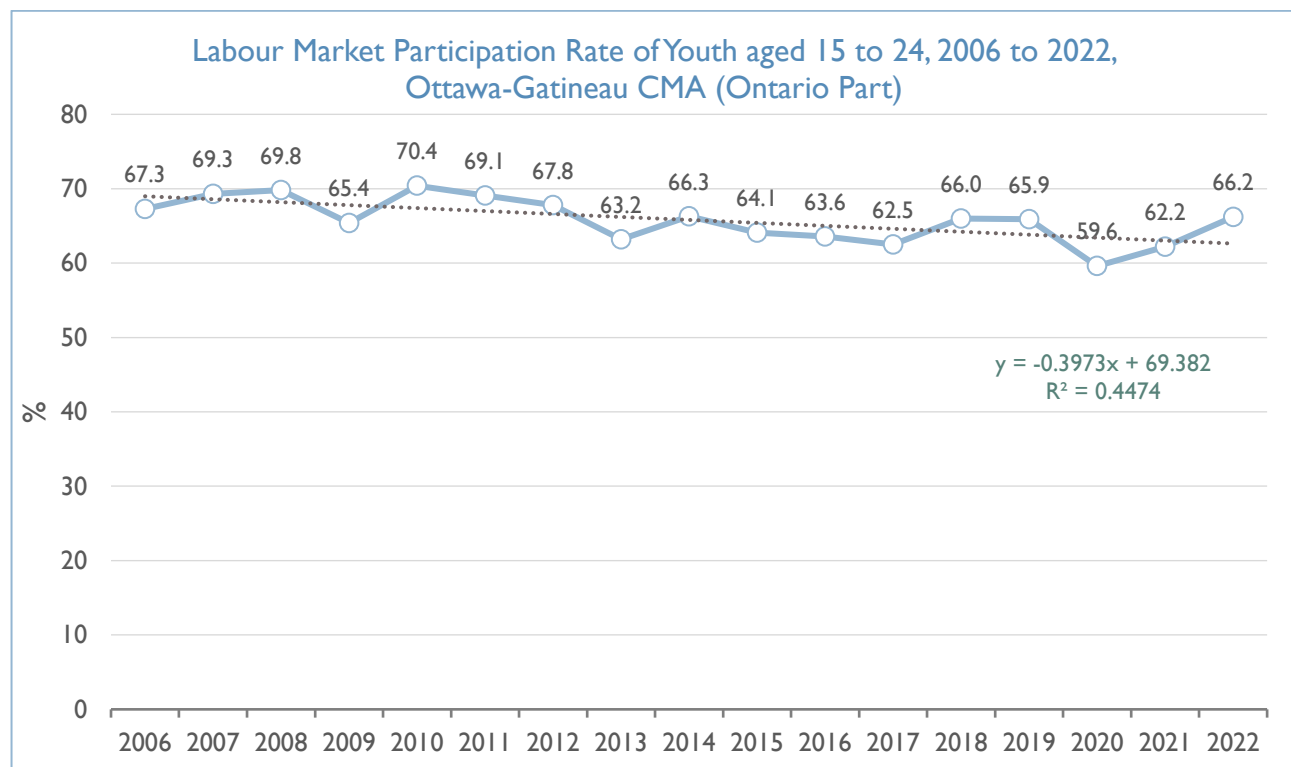


Fig. 2. Labour Market Participation Rate of Youth, 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410038501>.

## Youth Unemployment Rate

The Labour Force Survey shows that youth unemployment between 2006 and 2022 is fluctuating around a slightly upward trend line. The best environment for youth in the labour market was around 2018 when the rate of unemployment dropped to 8.0%. The largest single-year increase in youth unemployment was recorded during COVID-19, following the economic crisis of 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Canadian labour market, employment rates of young men and women fell substantially from 2019 to 2020, more so than those of older Canadians.<sup>5</sup> This means that the youth unemployment rate was growing while the participation rate was declining. In other words, more youth were unemployed, and at the same time, many youth were leaving the labour force altogether.

Since 2020, the unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 gradually improved by 8 percentage points in 2021 and another 4.6 points in 2022, (from 22.4% in 2020 to 9.6% in 2022).

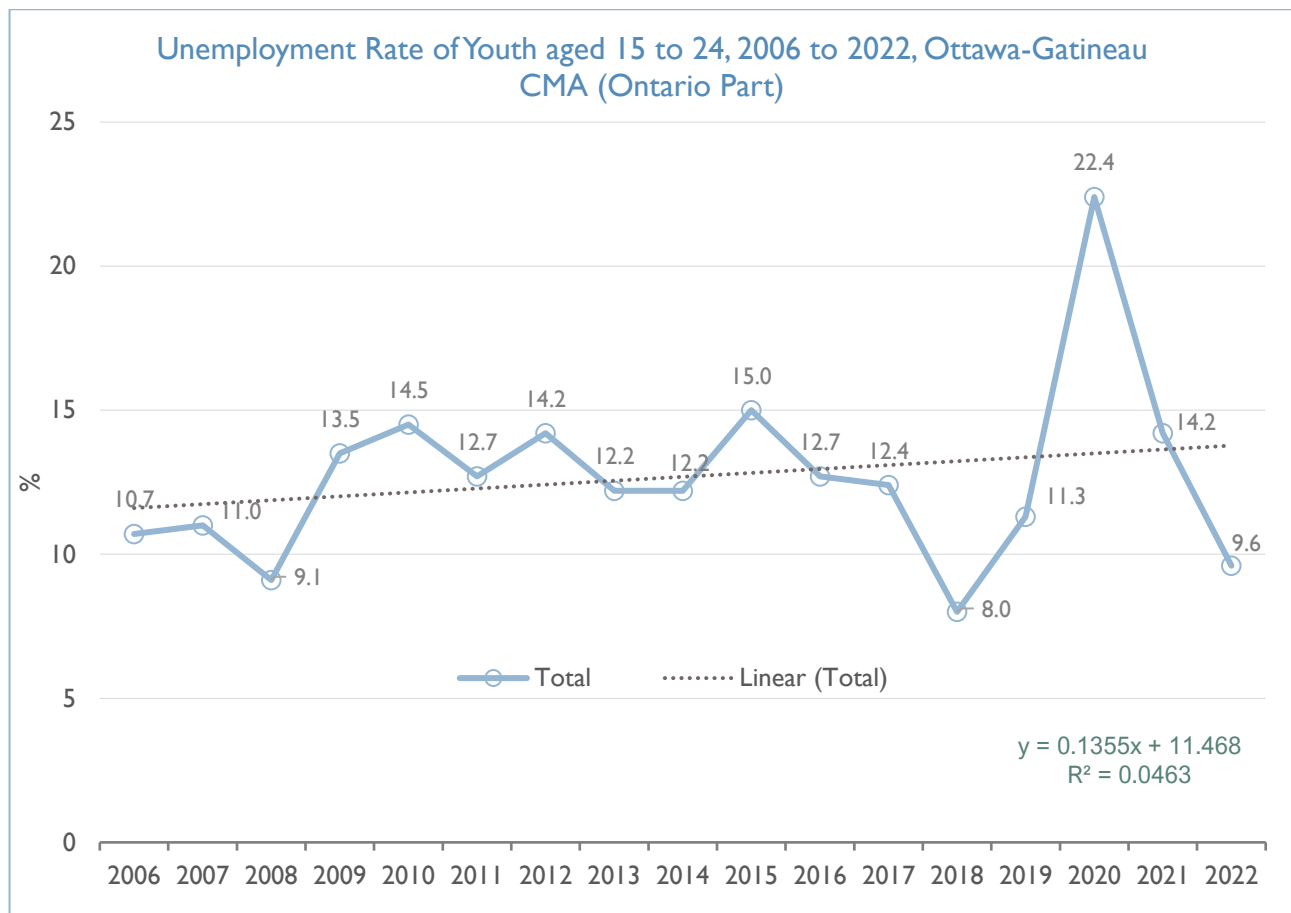


Fig. 3. Unemployment Rate of Youth, 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410038501>.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report* by René Morissette, July 2021, accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00002-eng.htm>



The average length of weeks without work for those aged 15 to 24 varies around a visibly growing long-term trend.

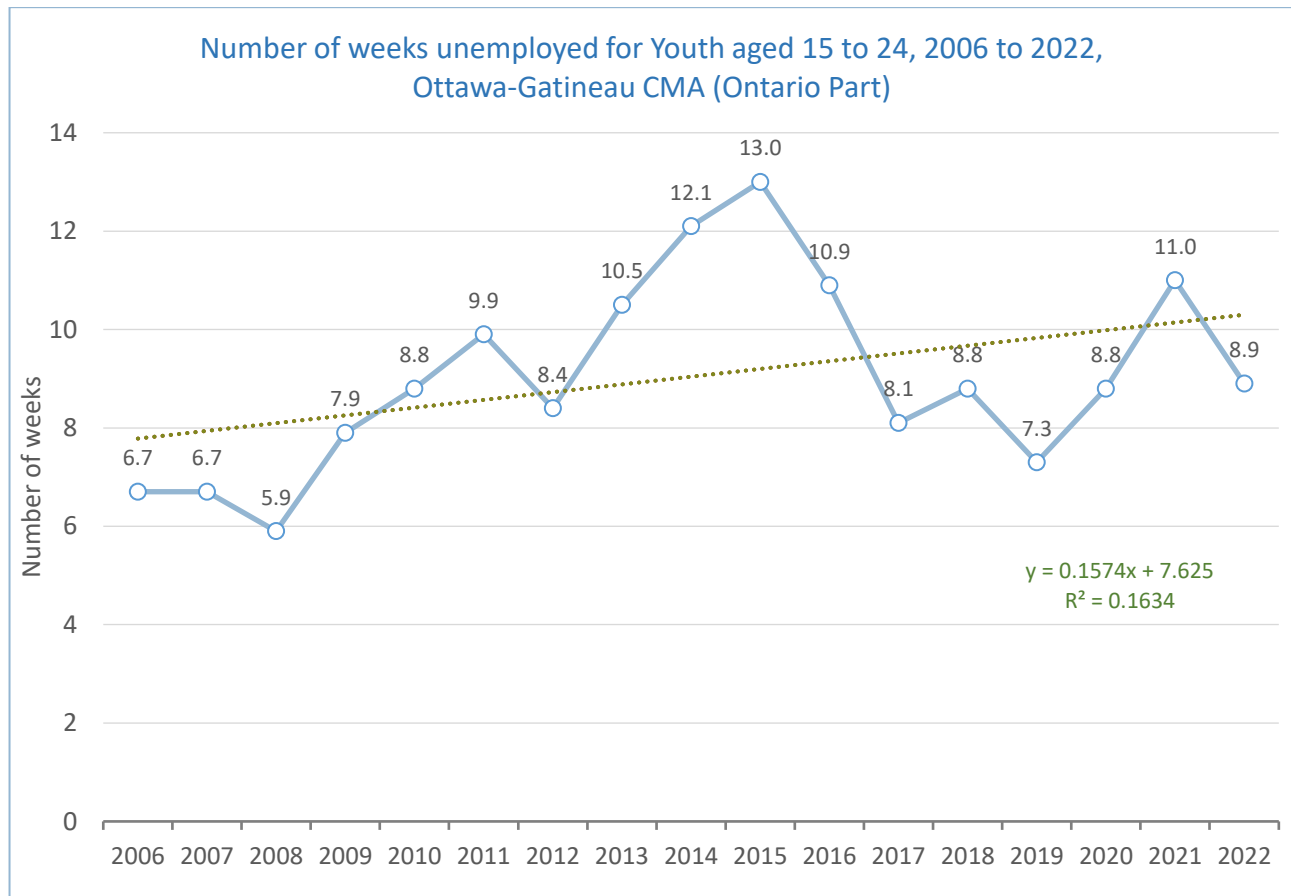


Fig. 4. Number of weeks unemployed for Youth, 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

### ***Equity Lens: Disparity between groups of Ottawa youth.***

The youth unemployment rate has historically been higher than for adults. Recent years, marked by the 2019-2020 COVID-19 downturn and the subsequent recovery, have been no exception. In 2021, the unemployment rate of youth was about 3.4 times higher than the rate among the core working population aged 25 to 54. The unemployment rate for those aged 15 to 24 was 25.3%, in contrast to the 7.5% rate for workers aged 25 to 54.

Unemployment is notably higher for youth in particular groups, including but not limited to Indigenous<sup>ii</sup> youth, racialized<sup>iii</sup> youth, recent immigrant<sup>iv</sup> youth and youth with disabilities. For these youth, barriers often intersect making them more likely to be among those involuntarily not in employment, education, or training.

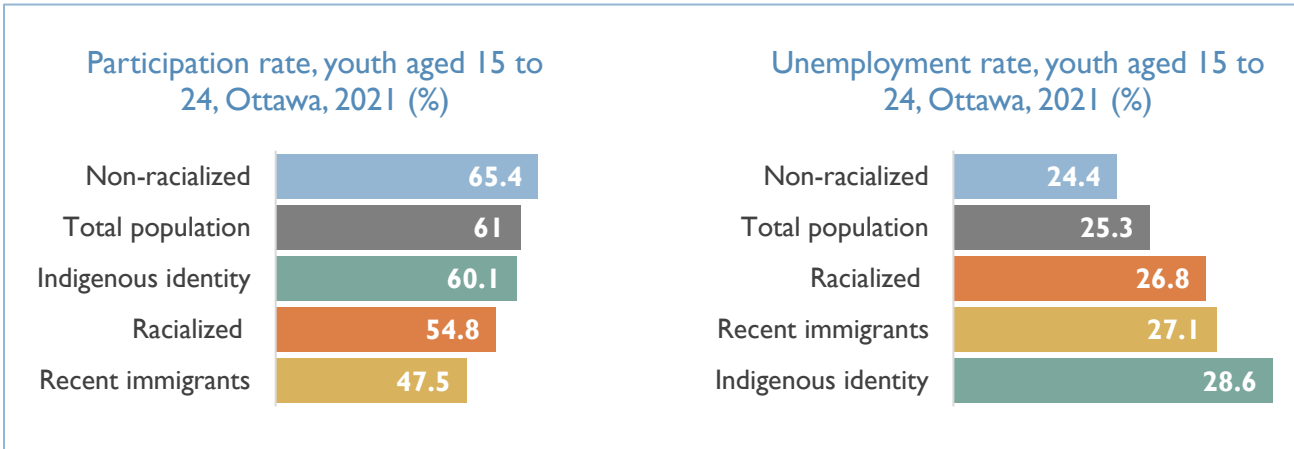


Fig. 5. Participation and Unemployment rate for Youth of diverse groups, Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Lower participation rates in racialized and new immigrant youth can positively indicate higher enrolment rates in full time studies.

In other cases, however, it can reflect a decrease in the labour force participation among non-students, suggesting that a larger portion of youth from these groups are not at school, not working and not looking for a job. The resulting social isolation could have serious and long-term consequences for their wellbeing and prospects.

Unemployment was highest for Indigenous youth, 4.2 percentage points above the rate of non-racialized youth and 3.3 points above the total youth population. The new immigrants and racialized young workers were also more likely to be without a job compared to the total and non-racialized youth.

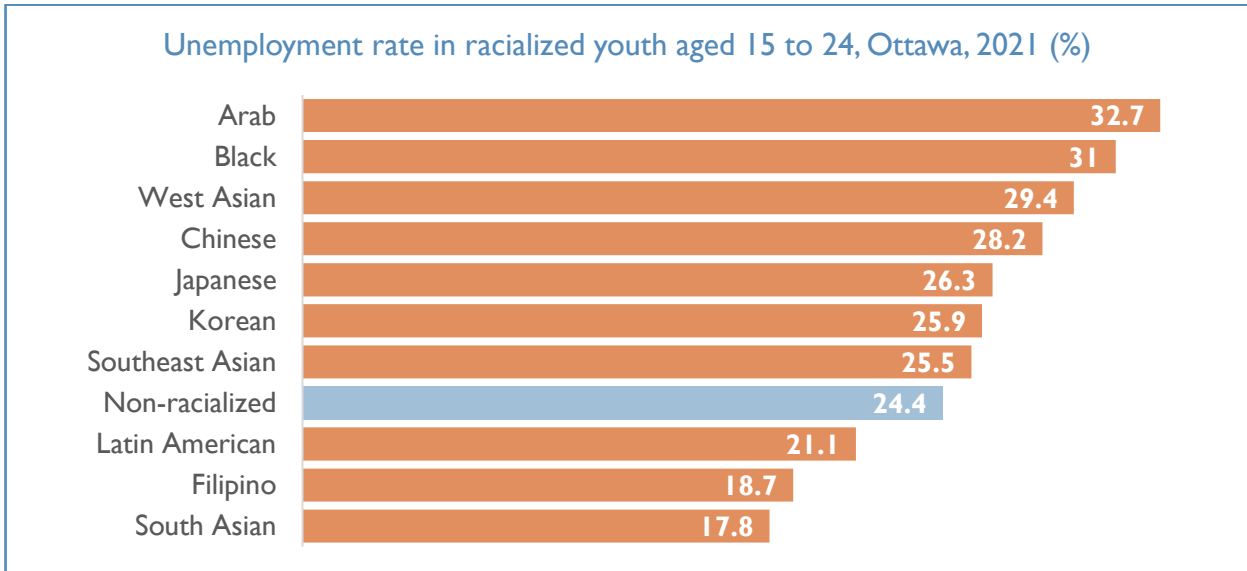


Fig. 6. Unemployment rate for Youth of racialized groups, Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

The rate of unemployment varies between different racialized groups. The Arab and Black youth, followed by West Asian and Chinese were notably less successful in finding work compared to the non-racialized youth.

## Youth with part-time or temporary employment

The Labour Force Survey indicates that the proportion of youth working part-time<sup>v</sup> in Ottawa has not changed significantly between 2006 and 2022. Despite slight increases between 2014 and 2018, the percentage has remained relatively constant, at about 50%.

The substantial gap in the percentage of part-time working arrangements between youth and the core working population aged 25 to 54 is noteworthy.

It is more likely for youth to engage in unstable, part-time or short-term contracts leading to employment and financial instability. For some young people who also go to school, working part-time is a choice that allows them to keep up with their studies. For others, it could mean that they were not able to find suitable full-time work due to economic conditions.

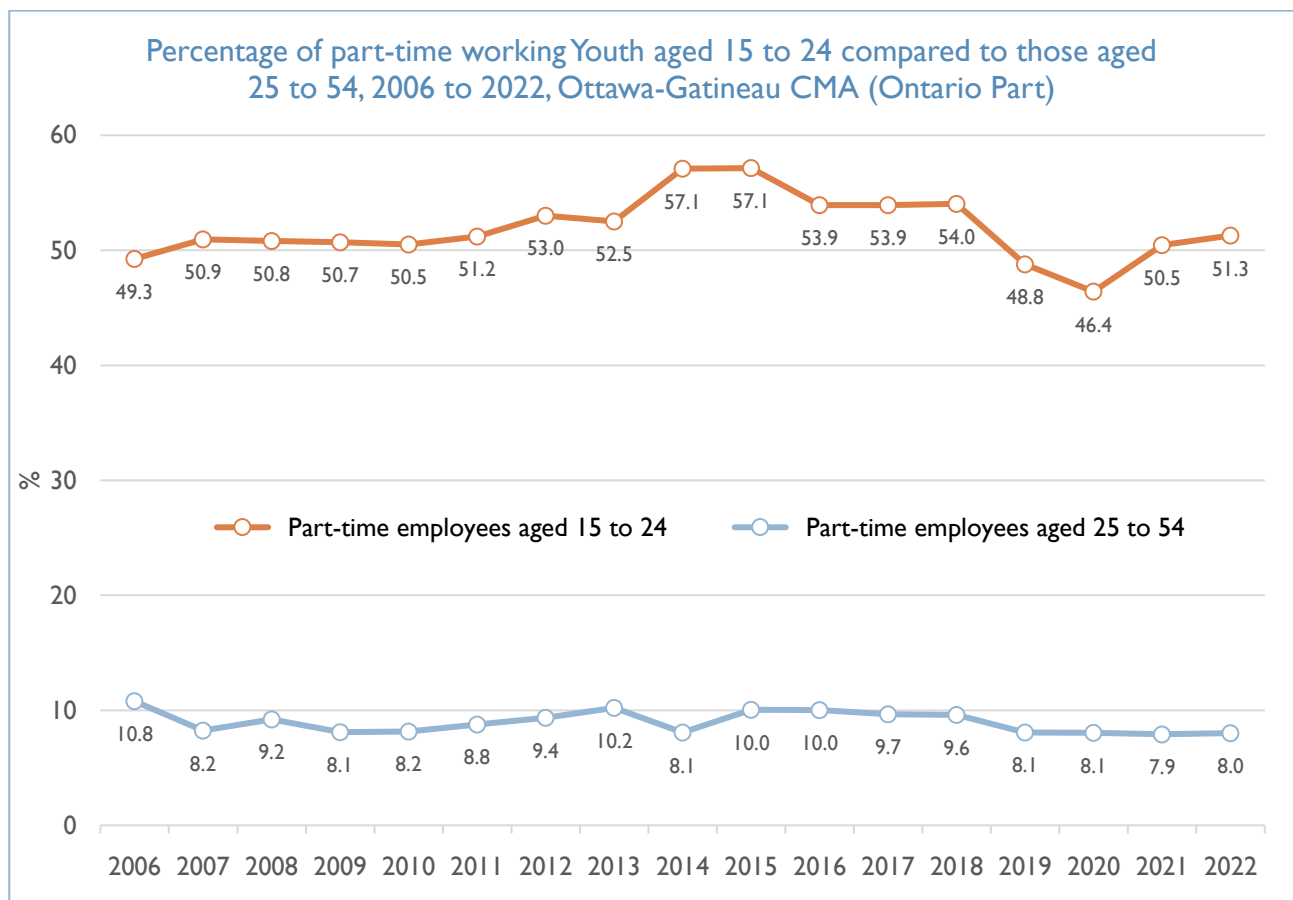


Fig. 7. Percentage of part-time working Youth aged 15 to 24 compared to those aged 25 to 54, 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410038501>.

Similarly, there is a significant difference in the permanency of employment for youth and those of core working age. Through the years, the percentage of young people with temporary jobs has been above 30% while only around 10% of workers aged 25 to 54 have been temporarily employed.

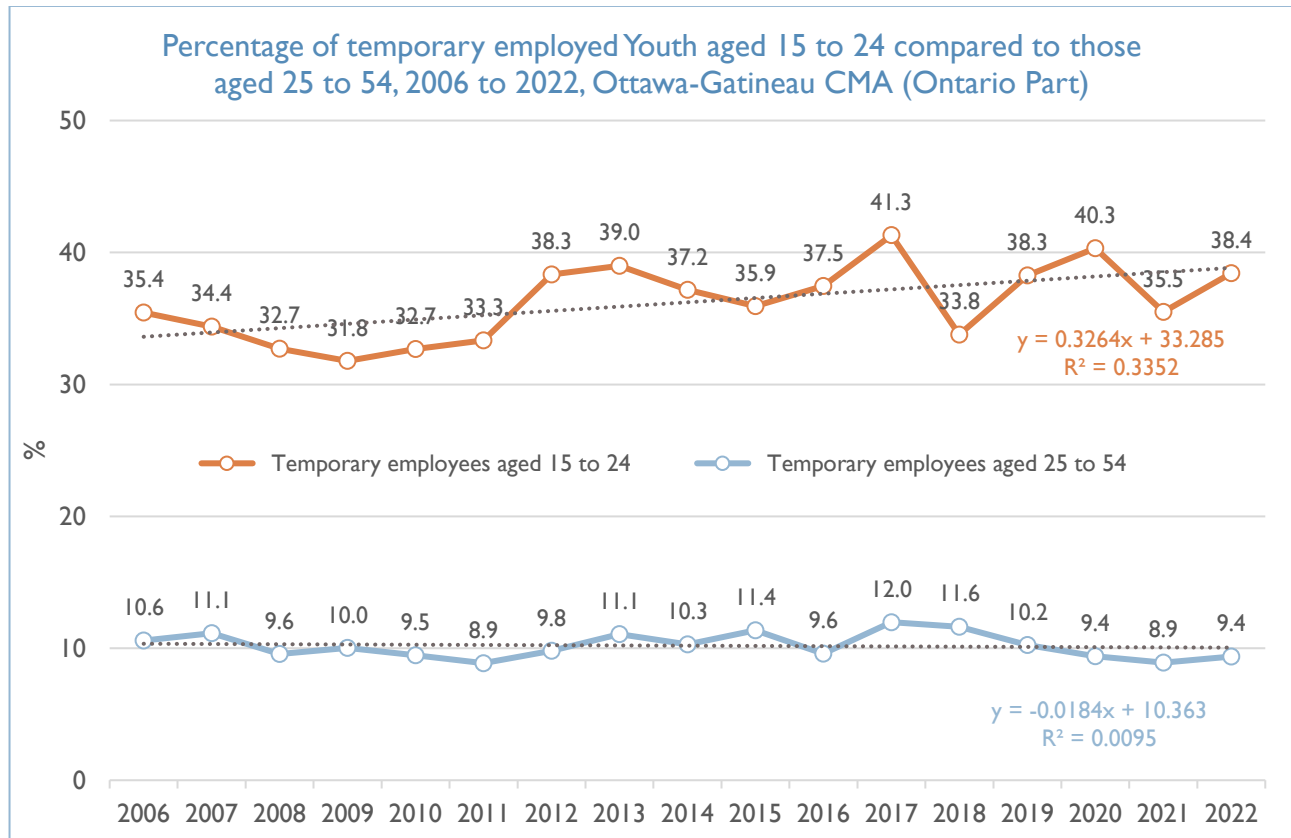


Fig. 8. Percentage of temporary employed Youth aged 15 to 24 compared to those aged 25 to 54, 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410038501>.

### Equity Lens: Disparity between groups of Ottawa youth.

Social scientists adopted the term 'precarity' to describe states of employment that do not have the security or benefits enjoyed in more traditional employment relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Permanent, full-time employment with benefits is less common with young workers. Youth are more likely to be in precarious employment, e.g., temporary, casual, short term, fixed term, or self employed. In this type of job, they might be paid less and face uncertainty in many other aspects of their employment relationships. Rarely they would receive employment benefits beyond a basic wage. As a result, youth with temporary, part time contracts have limited career prospects and are less likely to be satisfied with their job.

<sup>6</sup> *The Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO). It is more than poverty. Employment precarity and households' wellbeing. February 2013. Accessed at: <https://pepso.ca/>.*

New immigrants (69.3%) and racialized youth (64.3%) are more likely to work in part time jobs than non-racialized youth (58.3%). Across all groups, the part time contracts are predominantly for part of the year with a small percentage of youth working part time for a full year (Fig. 9).

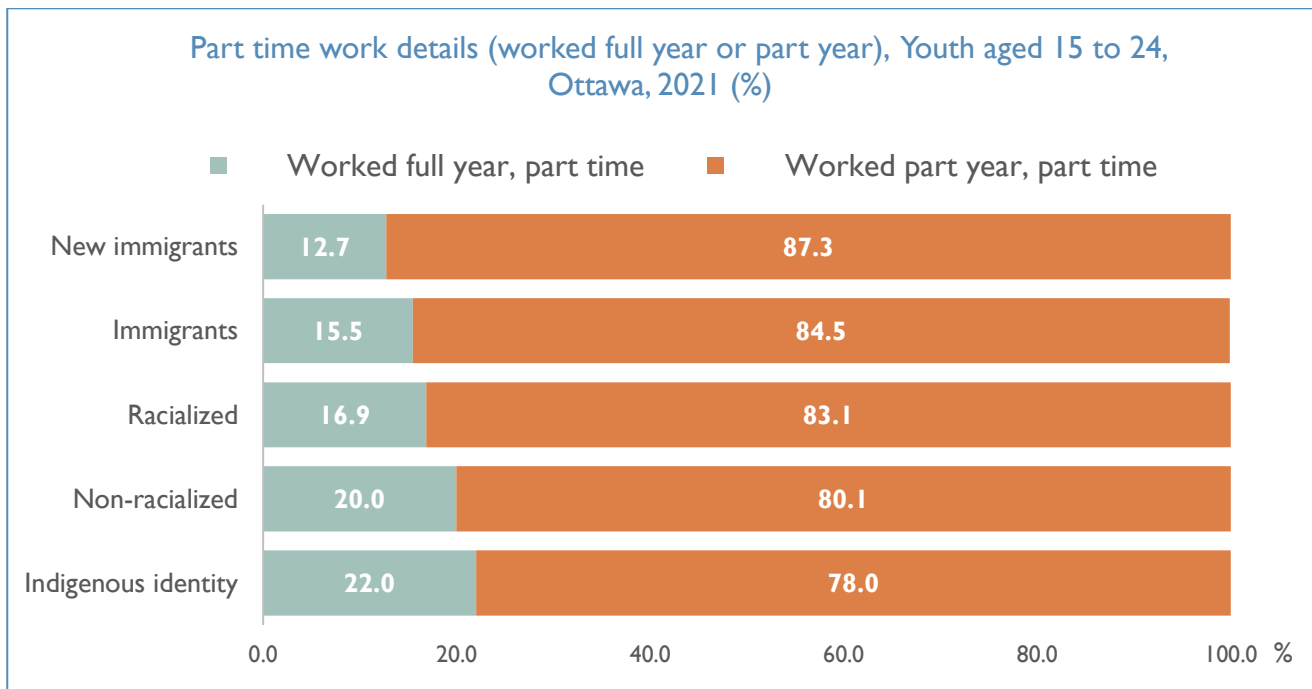
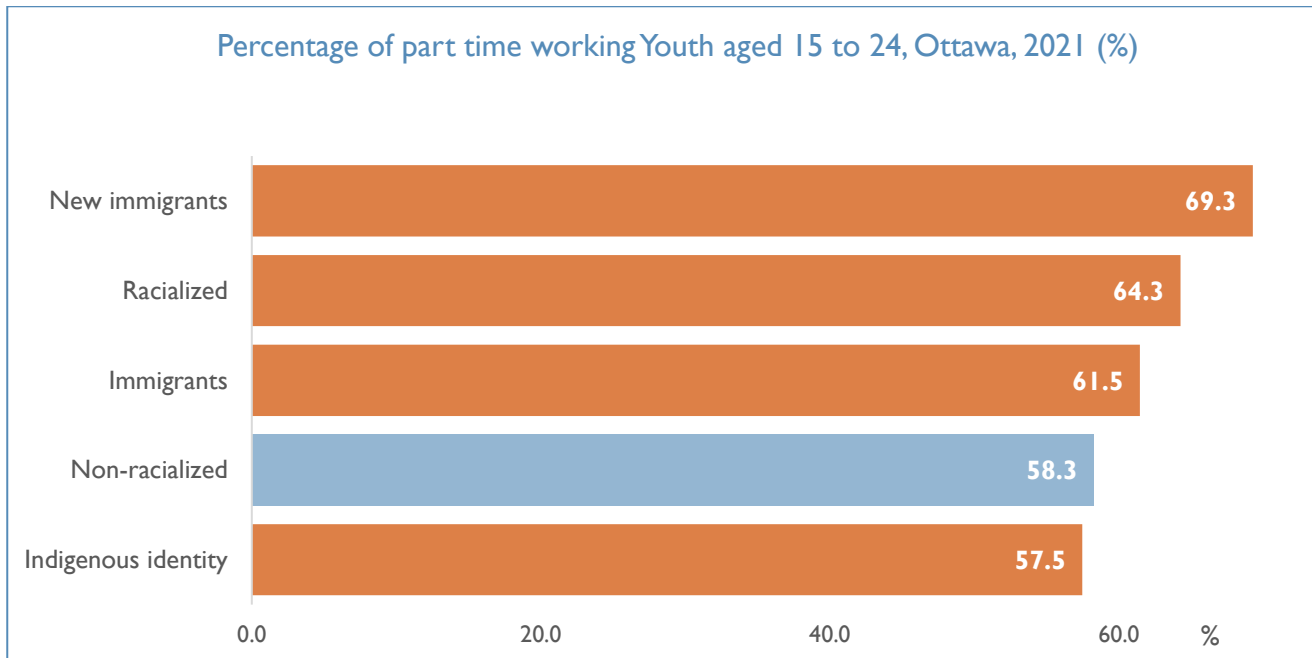


Fig. 9. Part time work - part year or full year. Youth of diverse groups, Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

## Median hourly earnings of young workers (15 to 24) compared to the core working population (25 to 54)

Despite the overall growth in the hourly earnings, some workers continuously have lower wages than others. In addition to economic and labour market conditions, several factors can affect workers' hourly wages. Level of education, skills and experience from a personal perspective as well as job characteristics, such as occupation and industry can interact in complex ways and impact the specific circumstances of each individual and job.

Age plays a key role in these factors. Youth are typically employed at significantly lower hourly wages compared to the core working-age population.

The median hourly earnings for young individuals have changed little over the years and remain close to the minimum wage. The hourly wages of youth have stayed about two times lower than the earnings of those aged 25 to 54 (Fig. 10).

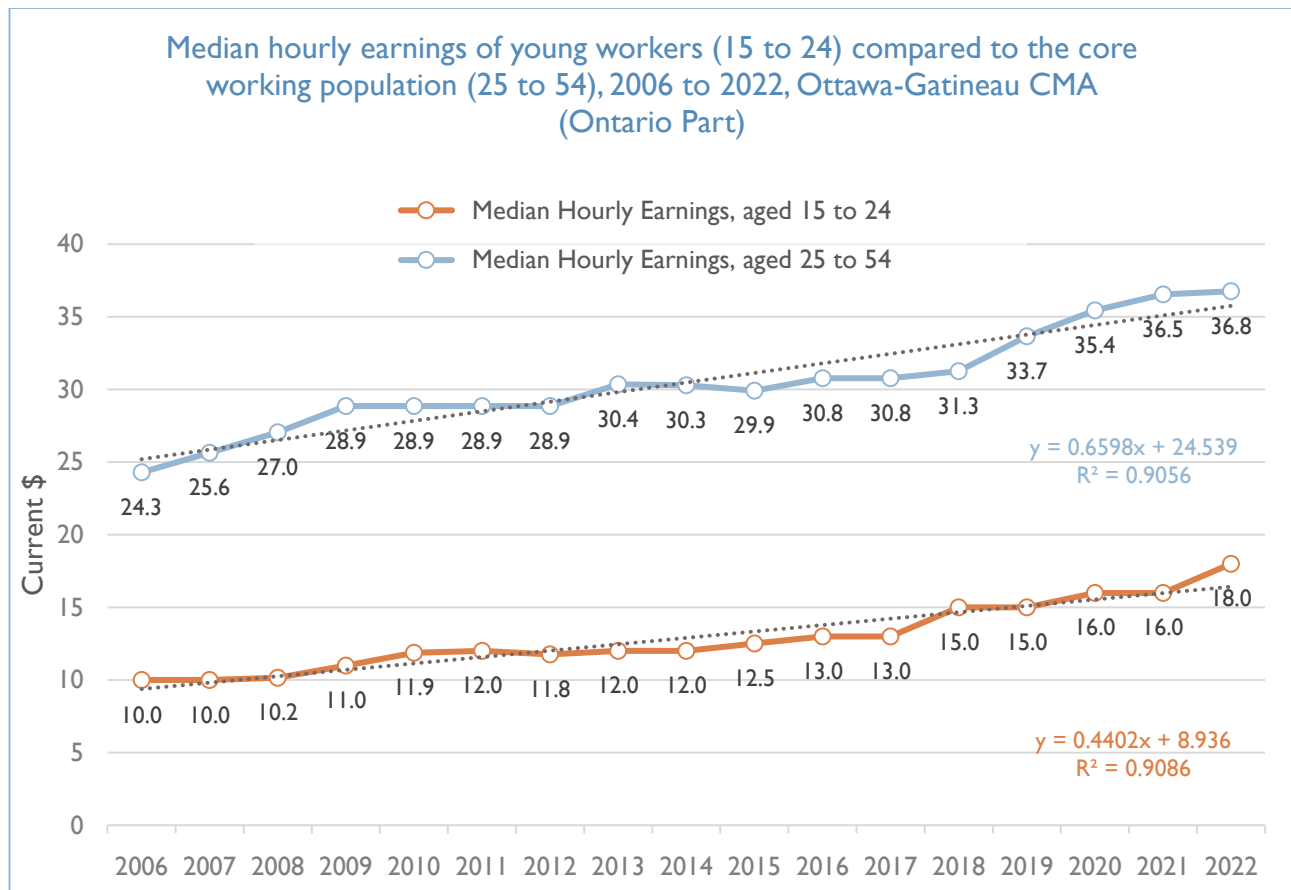


Fig. 10. Median hourly earnings of young workers compared to the core working population. 2006 to 2022, Ottawa-Gatineau CMA (Ontario Part). Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, Accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

## Equity Lens: Disparity between groups of Ottawa youth.

2021 census data show that the employment income from wages salaries and commissions of racialized youth was lower than the non-racialized youth in Ottawa. The racialized workers aged 15 to 24 earned an average of 85 cents for every dollar earned by their non-racialized counterparts.

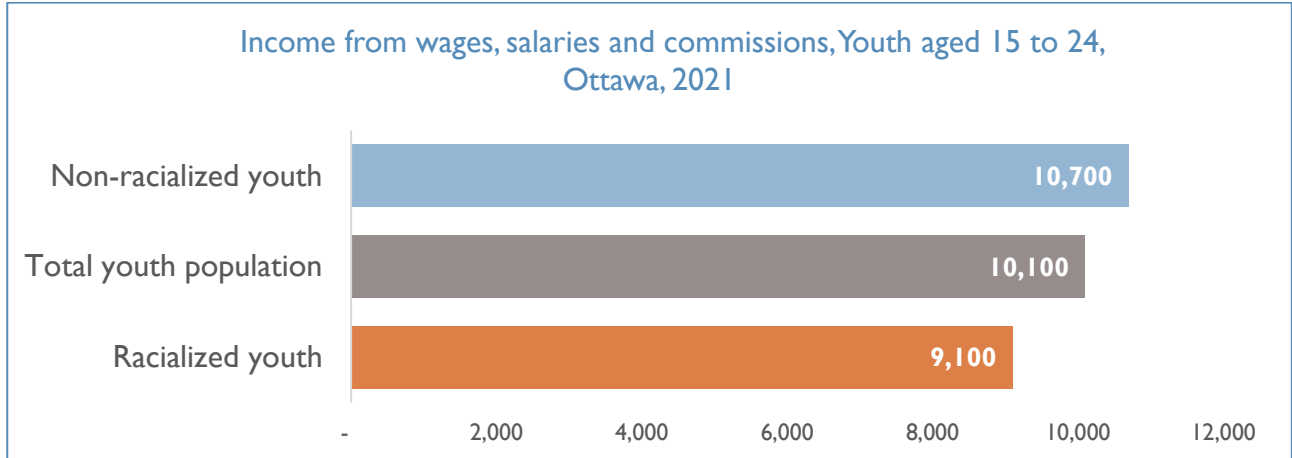


Fig. 11. Income from wages, salaries and commissions. Youth of diverse groups, Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Employment income inequality between racialized and non-racialized youth extends to the second and third generations<sup>vi</sup>. The income gap between racialized and non-racialized youth is markedly wider in the second and third generations of Ottawa youth.



Fig. 12. Income from wages, salaries and commissions. Youth of diverse groups and generations, Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

# Where are Youths in Ottawa Working?

**The level of educational attainment is critical for a youth’s successful career.**

Close to half of young people in Ottawa (47%) work in Sales and Services positions. Jobs in Sales and Services are most common for youth with all levels of education below a bachelor’s degree.

Statistics show that a sizable percentage of youth who work in occupations<sup>vii</sup> requiring fewer skills such as Sales or Trades have lower levels of education: 76% without a high school diploma and 57% without postsecondary education.

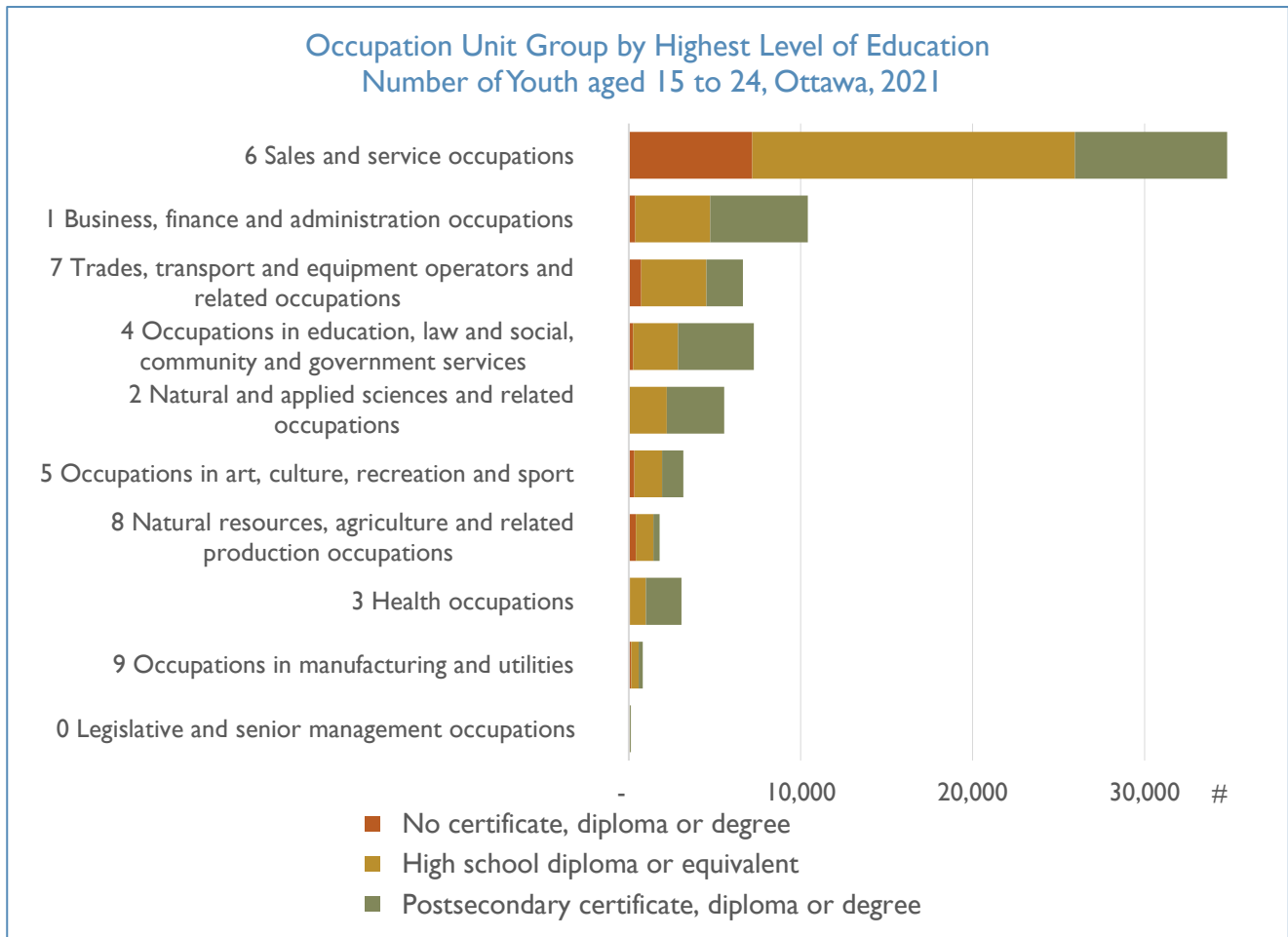


Fig. 13. Top Youth occupations by the highest level of education<sup>viii</sup>. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Youth with postsecondary education are more likely to take positions in occupations requiring professional qualifications such as in Business, Finance and Administration (20%), Natural and Applied Sciences (12%), or Education, Law and Social, Community and Government Services (16%).



Still, a much higher percentage of youth with postsecondary education (31%) work in Sales and Services occupations, compared to the general labour force with the same level of education (14%).

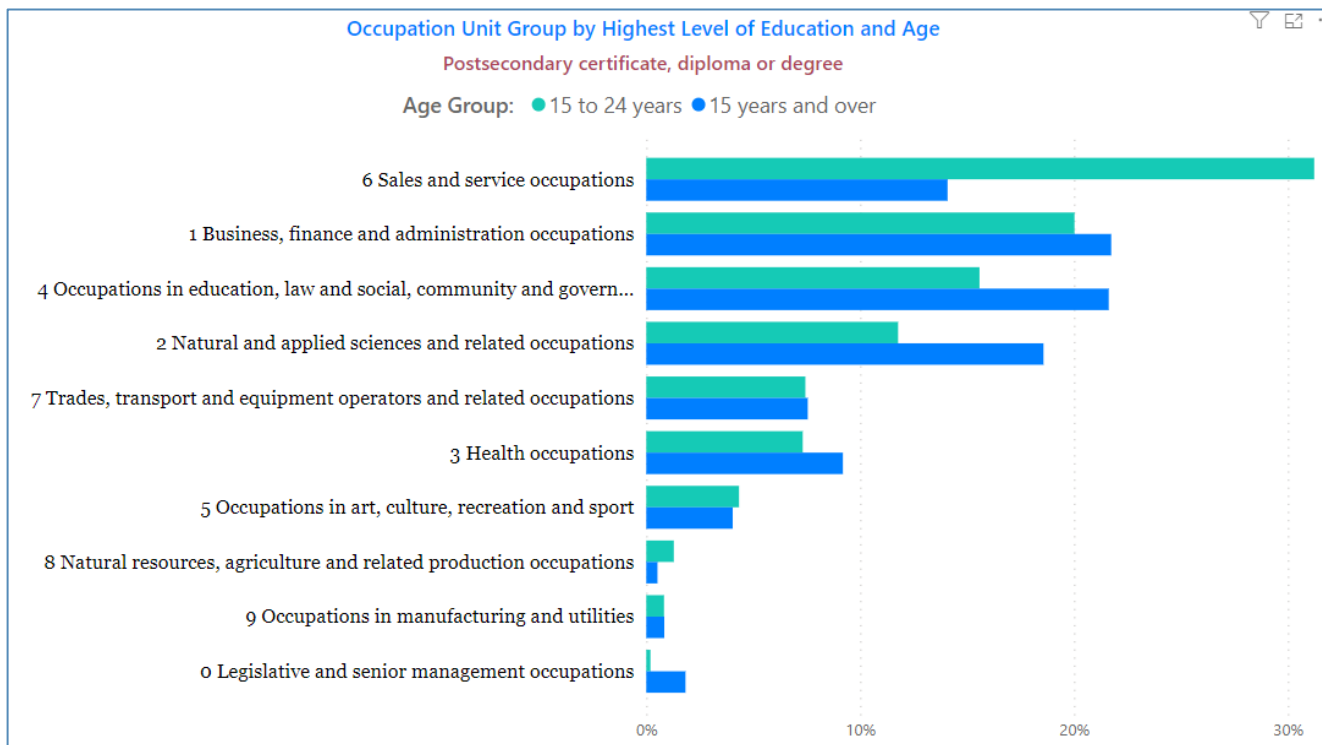


Fig. 14. Top Occupations of youth and total population with postsecondary education. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

### Top Industries for Youth: Low Wages and Limited Advancement

The industries<sup>ix</sup> of Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services are employing the highest number of Ottawa youth.

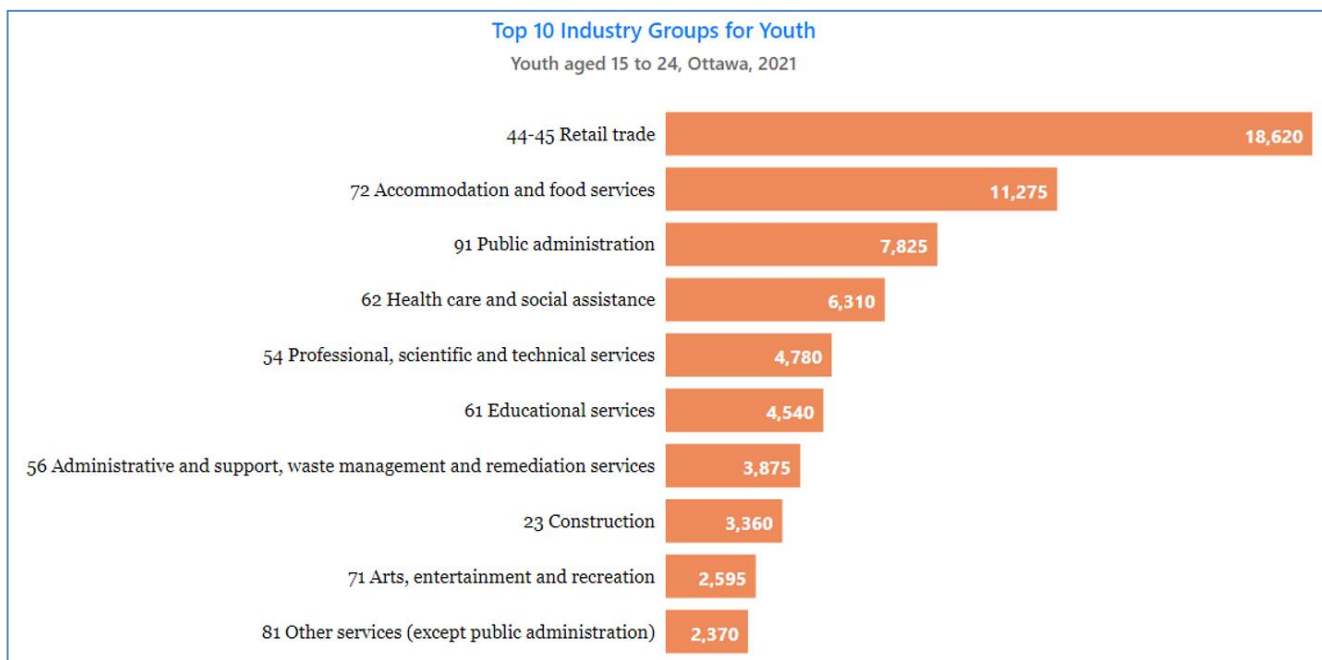


Fig. 15. Top 10 industries employing Ottawa youths. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

The retail industry employs the largest portion of youth in the workforce. One in four young individuals (25%) is having a job in the Retail Trade. Another 15% of youth work in the Accommodation and Food Services industry.

A similar pattern is observed for both temporary and permanent jobs that young people in Ottawa are occupying.

The Retail Trade and Accommodation and Food Services offer the highest percentages (~50% combined) of permanent jobs for Ottawa youth.

Close to one in three of youth temporary contract jobs (32%) are in the same two industries, followed by Public Administration (16%) and Educational Services (11%).

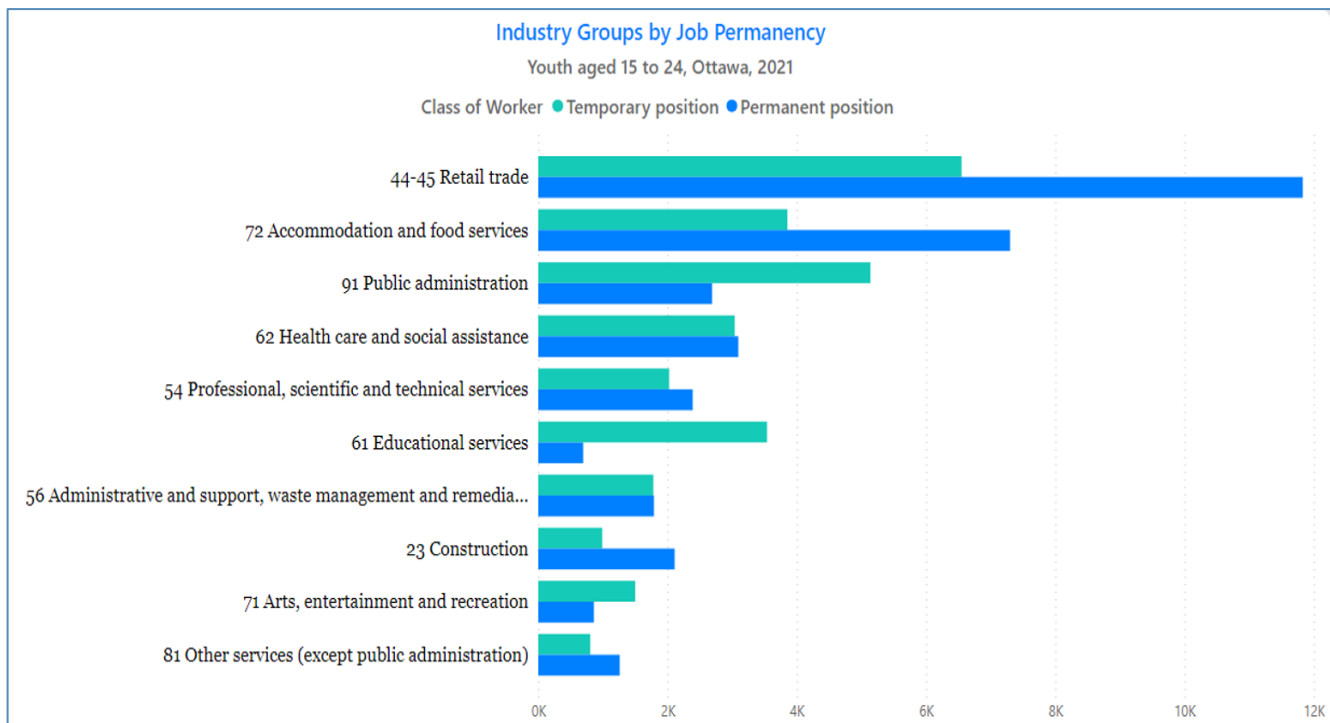


Fig. 16. Industries employing Ottawa youths by job permanency. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Comparing the top industries for youth and the total labour force in Ottawa shows a clear discrepancy between the types of employment. For youth, the predominant forms of employment are entry level positions that require minimal training, pay the lowest wages and have little opportunities for career growth. In contrast, the top ten industries listed for the total labour force include jobs that require formal education and training. The only industry shared by both groups is retail. This trend indicates that it is not easy for Ottawa youth to obtain employment in a career oriented field.

*Follow the link to an interactive dashboard to:*

*Explore the relationship between youth education, occupation, or industry employing them and the youth job type.*

## Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

Young people (aged 15 to 24) who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) are often considered to be more vulnerable than their peers, as they may face a risk of becoming disengaged or socially excluded and could miss out on gaining skills or experience in the labour market.

Being not in employment, education or training (NEET) can have serious and long-term consequences for youth. Youth NEET are more likely to experience low income, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, social isolation and criminal involvement than youth who are employed or in school. Some of the factors that increase the risk of becoming NEET are low educational attainment, family obligations, disability, immigration status and living in rural or remote areas<sup>7</sup>.

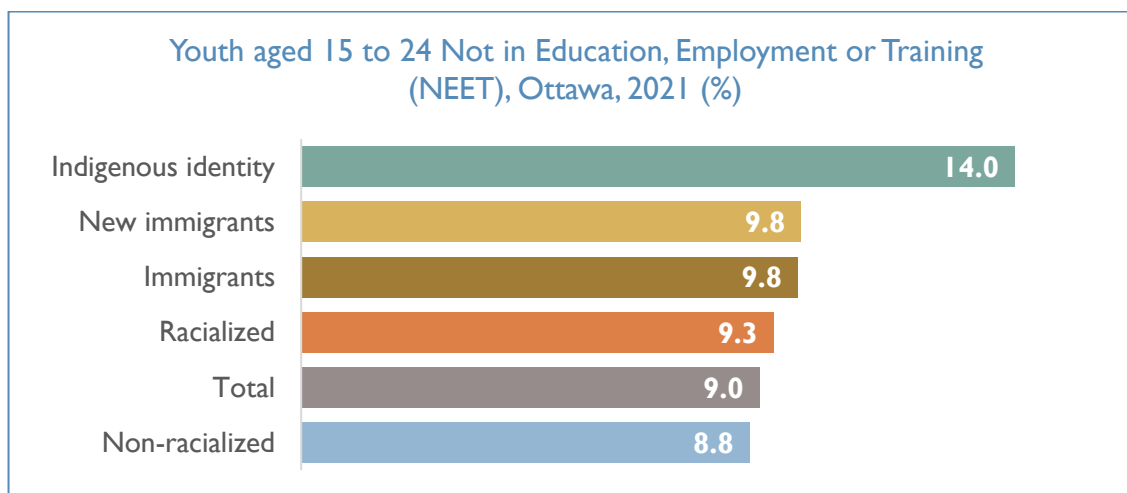
Youth NEET are not a homogeneous group, and they may have different reasons and challenges for being in this status. Being in a transition stage between school and work, having a physical or mental health concern or disability, or caring for children is why some youth are NEET. The main challenges NEET youth face in finding suitable work are a lack of experience and an absence of job opportunities in their area<sup>8</sup>.

It is important to provide tailored and targeted support and interventions for different subgroups of youth NEET to help them overcome the barriers and risks associated with being NEET.

### *Equity Lens: Disparity between groups of Ottawa youth.*

In 2021, the NEET rate for new immigrants (9.8%) and racialized youth (9.3%) was higher than the rate for total youth and non-racialized youth (8.8%).

The Indigenous identity youth had the highest rate of NEET (14.0%).



<sup>7</sup> Statistics Canada, *A Profile of Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) in Canada, 2015 to 2017*, by Jordan Davidson and Rubab Arim, November 1, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019020-eng.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Labour Market Information Council (LMIC), *What Youth Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET) Want*, August 2019. Accessed at: <https://lmic-cimt.ca/publications-all/lmi-insights-report-no-17-finding-their-path-what-youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet-want/>.

Fig. 17. Youth NEET from diverse groups. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Between racialized groups, the highest rate of youth NEET was among Black (12.6%) and Latin American (11.4%) followed by Arab (9.8%), South Asian (9.6%) and Filipino (9.6%) youth.

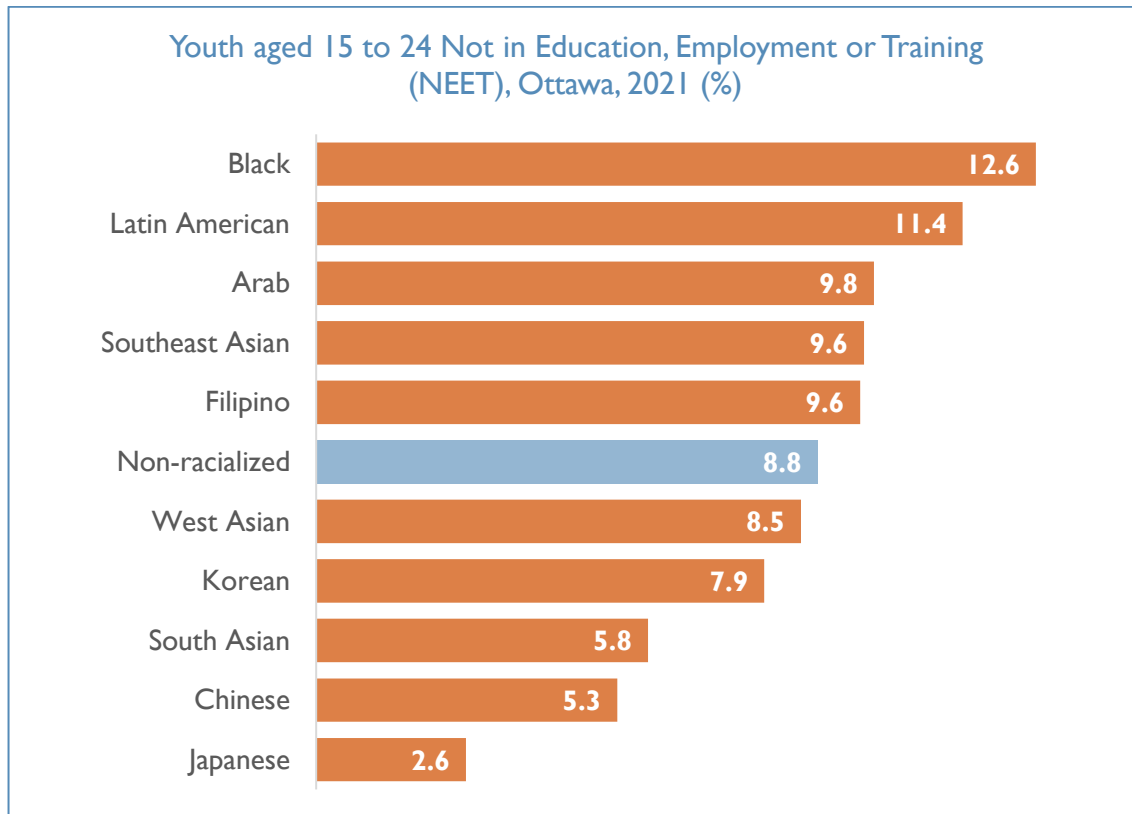


Fig. 18. Youth NEET from racialized groups. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

## Low Income Youth

Youth who come from low-income or marginalized communities are disproportionately impacted by barriers to employment, such as a lack of access to technology, professional networks and career development opportunities. Youth from low-income communities can not build a strong network of professional connections which ultimately hampers their job opportunities. In addition, discrimination in the workplace leads to pay gaps and unequal opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada. (2021). *Canada's First State of the Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth*. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth.html>.

Data show a much higher prevalence of poverty among racialized communities in Ottawa. Low-income<sup>x</sup> rates are more than two times higher for racialized youth than for the non-racialized young population.

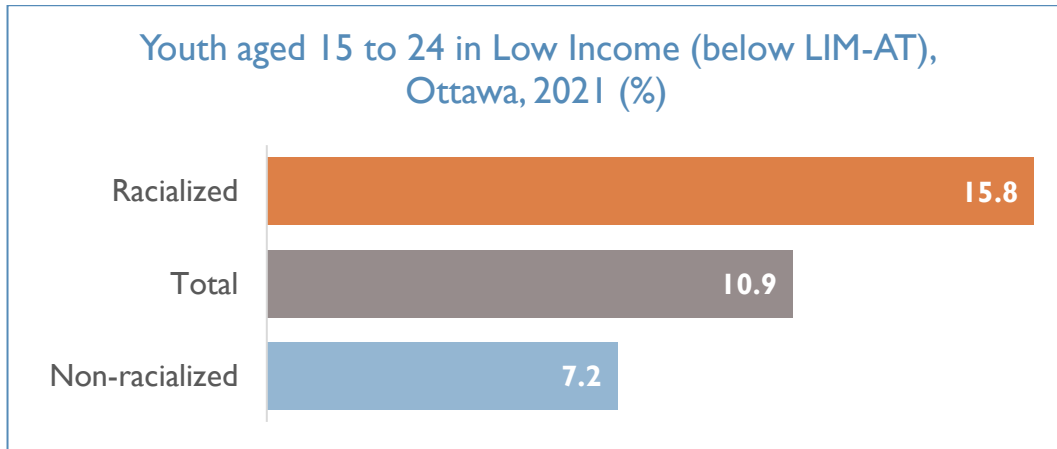


Fig. 19. Youth in low income. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

Poverty was more prevalent for most racialized youth compared to the non-racialized young population.

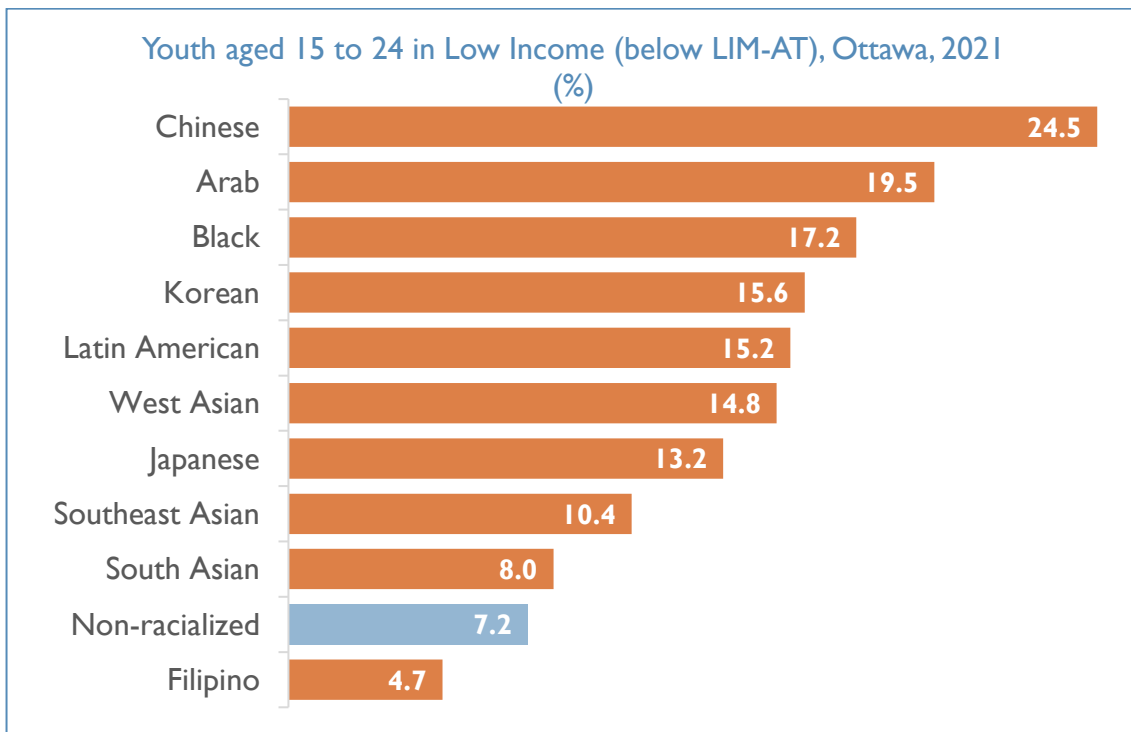


Fig. 20. Youth from racialized groups in low income. Ottawa, 2021. Source: Statistics Canada, 2021 census, custom table accessed at Ottawa Data Consortium, <https://communitydata.ca/>.

The difference from the poverty rate of the non-racialized population aged 15 to 24 varies in size across racialized groups. Among Chinese youths, one in four (24.5%) were low income. This was 17.3 percentage points higher than the rate of non-racialized youth in low income (7.5%). Next, with almost

one in five persons in low income was the group of Arab youth (19.3%), followed by the Black youth with 17.2% having an income below the low income limit.

Research shows that disparities in poverty rates are at least partially linked to disadvantages in employment and earnings.<sup>10</sup>

The leading idea behind many strategies to reduce poverty is to improve employment and increase income. Better earnings from more decent and more secure jobs can be the key to moving out of low income situations. Poverty and unemployment often go together, especially for some groups who face more challenges in finding work, such as newcomer youth, youth with disabilities, indigenous youth, and racialized youth. Insufficient income can also make it harder for young people to get high employment qualifications and develop a strategy for a successful career because work is often the only resource to improve their lives.

## Employment Barriers for Youth in Ottawa

### **Access to information**

One of the greatest obstacles for youth in search of employment is a lack of access to relevant and useful information about immediate job availability as well as long-term career planning. Youths between 15 and 24 are often unaware of employment counsellors and services available to them. Accessing accurate and correct information about work culture and job postings is especially challenging for newcomer immigrant youth.

### **Lack of networking skills**

The most significant barrier to accessing information about employment among youth is the lack of networking. Networking is considered to be the most important avenue for gaining access to key employment opportunities.

Youth between 15 and 24 tend to not recognize networking as a significant employment resource. Young people often underrate being recommended for work through “word of mouth”. Youth are more comfortable and familiar with using formal job search methods, such as searching online job postings. Forming relationships and building potential employment contacts is a skill that is not typically formed at a young age. There are not many opportunities for youth to develop and practice networking skills. During middle and high school or at university, students have little chances to participate in networking events. These are major factors that prevent youth from growing accustomed to the culture of forming professional relationships.

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<sup>10</sup> *Statistics Canada, Poverty among racialized groups across generations, by Christoph Schimmele, Feng Hou and Max Stick, Aug 23, 2023. Accessed at <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2023008/article/00002-eng.htm>.*

## **Lack of soft skills**

In addition to education or technical skills, resiliency and soft skills like problem solving, communication and interpersonal skills, and critical thinking can make a difference for young people in getting a job. However, too few youth have been given the opportunity to improve these skills in high school and throughout their post-secondary education. Those who work part-time find that these jobs often fail to help them develop the relevant and transferrable skills required by the careers they want.

## **Complex and varied barriers for some young people**

For some youth, finding employment is more complicated than just needing to make contacts and work on soft skills. Many young people are dealing with complex barriers like homelessness, experience with the criminal justice system, food insecurity, young children, the effects of childhood trauma, and mental health challenges. For youth with disabilities, additional challenges include a lack of previous work experience and obtaining appropriate accommodations at work.

Racism and other forms of discrimination can also be real barriers to youth employment. During the hiring process, employers may discriminate (consciously or unconsciously) based on the name or address on a young person's resume. Once employed, discrimination can also be a barrier to advancement in the workplace.

For newcomer youth, the language barriers, cultural barriers and the non-recognition of non-Canadian education and credentials are factors that impact the job search experience and the path to social and economic integration.

While Indigenous youth face a lot of the same barriers as other youth across Canada, many are also dealing with challenges that reflect intergenerational experiences of colonization and discrimination.

These barriers are considered structural and systemic because they impact employability consistently in ways that are beyond an individual's control.

## **Employer perceptions of young workers' experience and skills**

The advantages the youth have on the job market are their level of perseverance and energy, comfort with new technology and willingness to learn new skills.

Compared to the general labour force, however, youth are significantly disadvantaged by their relatively low levels of professional experience. Although volunteering can serve important functions in workplace exposure and skills learning, volunteer experiences alone are often not enough to convey to employers that young people are employable.

As a result, employers tend to view young workers as requiring more guidance and training compared to experienced workers. When this is coupled with the lack of training resources available within the workplace, it becomes a significant structural factor that influences employers against hiring youth.

## Evolving labour market

Many young people are concerned with what they call the “gig economy:” An economy characterized by short-term contracts, no benefits, no stability, and no vacation. Some youths thrive in this environment. Excited about forging their own path, these youth have the support they need from friends or family to help them manage any associated risk.

However, other youth engaged in precarious work find it to be too much to manage. A full-time and full-year job is what these young people want; instead, they are forced to work multiple jobs and hope that they never get sick. Many young people do not understand their rights in the workplace and worry about losing their jobs if they speak up or ask for help when problems arise.

## Conclusion

The recommendations in this report are based on research<sup>11 12 13</sup> and SPCO’s experience in delivering Youth employment programs and related publications<sup>14</sup>.

The relative inexperience of young workers compared to older workers, the limited number of job openings, systemic discrimination and non-recognition of non-Canadian credentials are issues that must be concretely addressed in a framework that extends the analysis into a wider economic context beyond the situations of individual youth.

Youth are facing a variety of challenges finding meaningful employment and there are significant inequities across different groups. Youth need continuous support from governments to attain entry-level jobs that provide opportunities for growth and career development. Youth need help building their professional networks, finding internships, developing 21st-century skills and managing their finances. Governments should support programming that will help youth in these core areas, encourage entrepreneurship and identify the inequities in employment outcomes across different groups.

- Increase opportunities for youth to learn and practice networking skills and increase awareness about these opportunities.
  - A form of networking could be all forms of civic participation, including volunteering in community initiatives, attending community events, keeping up with local politics and gaining an awareness of potential employment leads where one resides. Searching for

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<sup>11</sup> Government of Canada. (2021). *Canada’s First State of the Youth Report: For Youth, with Youth, by Youth*. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/state-youth.html>

<sup>12</sup> Government of Canada. (2017). *13 Ways to modernize youth employment in Canada. Strategies for a new world of work*. Accessed at: [canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC](https://www.canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC).

<sup>13</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (2016). *Understanding the realities. Youth employment in Canada*. Accessed at: [canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC](https://www.canada.ca/publiccentre-ESDC)

<sup>14</sup> SPCO (2013-14). *Youth Leadership for Change Youth Employment, Unemployment and Under-Employment in Ottawa*.



local and community-based work opportunities could be one of the ways for relatively inexperienced young workers to gain exposure to the working world.

- Increase opportunities for youth to develop both technical and transferable job skills.
  - Increase the availability of information and skills training workshops geared toward youth like problem solving, communication and interpersonal skills, and critical thinking.
  - Increase opportunities for co-operative education programs which support students in finding work placements and gaining experience in real work environments.
  - Create opportunities for mentorship between youth and professionals in their fields of interest to expose them to career options, to the education and experience required to work in specific fields, and to the daily culture, expectations and routines of work.
- Build on methods of community development that work closely with local businesses to create career-oriented jobs allowing Ottawa youth to find meaningful work. This would provide youth with practical experience by enabling them to meet local business needs.
- Provide more support to Indigenous, new-immigrant and racialized youth.
  - Provide support for programs that help youth from diverse groups grow their network, develop core 21st-century skills (communication, technical knowledge, creativity) and gain meaningful work experience.
  - Fund and develop culturally appropriate and safe spaces and events for mutual peer support to address cultural barriers of newcomer youth.
  - Provide more paid internships and practicums targeted at low-income and marginalized students.
  - Expand on regulations that prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace.
- Employers that have adjusted their workplaces to appeal to youth are more successful in attracting and retaining young workers. These modifications can include:
  - Providing opportunities for personal and professional development and ensuring that youth feel like their work has meaning.
  - Encouraging youth to be autonomous by treating them as equal participants with meaningful responsibility in the job search process can be effective in developing accountability and ownership over the employment process.
  - Increasing awareness and opportunities for supportive employment, on-the-job training and coaching. When they are given explicit and clear instructions at their earliest jobs, youth develop the skills to ask for the information they need.

Employers need to be ready, willing and able to accept the risk of making the effort necessary to overcome the barriers to integrating youth into their workforces, especially for those youth who are less job ready.

# Section 2: Youth Employment and Economic Development Pilot Program, 2020-2023.

## Evaluation Report

### Executive Summary

The Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO) is a dedicated non-profit organization committed to empowering Ottawa's vulnerable communities and grassroots social agencies. By fostering community-led initiatives, the SPCO catalyzes significant change in addressing critical local issues, including youth unemployment, social inequities, poverty, and senior isolation.

The SPCO's Youth Employment and Economic Development Program is at the forefront of addressing youth employment challenges, offering comprehensive outreach, training, paid work placements, professional network development, and mentorship to empower young people for meaningful employment. In late 2023, the SPCO evaluated its pilot youth employment and economic development program, launched in 2020 and funded till March 2024. The pilot program specifically targeted diverse and economically challenged communities facing high unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and significant economic disparities and aimed to address these challenges by providing training in soft skills and career development. With an initial goal of serving 60 participants in three years through 12 cohorts, the program surpassed expectations by reaching 172 participants in the first three years. The program used social media, flyers, word-of-mouth promotion, and community outreach initiatives to exceed its reach target.

The evaluation followed a mixed-method approach, collecting quantitative data via surveys and qualitative data through in-depth interviews and focus groups. This comprehensive methodology captured insights from 18 youth participants, two employers, and four programs and outreach staff, ensuring a holistic analysis. The evaluation assessed the program's effectiveness, impact, and areas for improvement, emphasizing participant satisfaction, awareness, and the program's influence on employment outcomes.

The evaluation found that 72% of participants were satisfied with the program, and 95% felt encouraged. The level of satisfaction varied by gender and age, with males and the 26-30 age group expressing higher satisfaction. Most participants (89%) felt prepared for employment, and 44% found long-term jobs, while 56% secured temporary work. Further to this, employers were satisfied with the participants' skills and readiness, with some offering permanent positions. The employers valued the training and were open to increasing cohort sizes.

Youth participants suggested showcasing graduate testimonials and job placement success stories to inspire confidence and attract participants. The program could also benefit by addressing gaps in satisfaction to increase inclusivity for female youths and those with disabilities. Youth participants also suggested diversifying training beyond IT and communications with flexible schedules, including part-

time and evening classes, while integrating social networking events for community building. The program could further benefit by investing in user-friendly learning platforms and more instructors to offer varied, flexible training options, and ensure program materials are accessible and inclusive of gender and disability among others.

The evaluation revealed a growing demand for expanded funding, stronger partnerships, and improved communication to enhance program accessibility, support participants with disabilities and mental health needs, and foster collaborations with other youth employment programs. The program and the outreach staff emphasized the importance of personalized onboarding, accessible skill development, collaborative mentorship, and inclusive recognition of youth achievements. The team also emphasized how sustained support, resource allocation, and inclusive participation are critical to achieving these objectives, which include enhancing program accessibility, providing tailored support for individuals with disabilities and mental health considerations, improving class flexibility, and exploring opportunities for collaboration with other youth employment programs and organizations.

Moreover, the pilot program's success in addressing youth unemployment through skill development and career training showcases the importance of comprehensive partnerships and innovative outreach strategies. Based on the high employment rates post-program, the evaluation recommends expanding outreach and multisectoral support mechanisms to further increase these rates. Additionally, continuous monitoring of employment trends among participants will help in tailoring the program to meet evolving labour market needs.

## Introduction

### Program context

The community in which the program operates is diverse and has a low standard of living. Many young people in this community struggle with various financial challenges, which are primarily caused by widespread problems like high unemployment rates, limited access to opportunities for high-quality education and skill development, and noticeable economic disparities. As a result, many young people in the community frequently struggle with unstable work circumstances and face significant challenges when pursuing steady, well-paying careers. These difficulties obstruct their financial growth and raise concerns about the community's overall economic stability.

While the communities face significant challenges, the program's targeted skill development, career development, and job placement opportunities helped empower youth from these communities. A total of 12 cohorts to 60 participants over three years was initially planned for the pilot program, however, the program reached more than 172 youths, surpassing its target. Furthermore, the SPCO has reached 369 youths through its overall youth programming from 2020 till the end of 2023. The program uses social media, flyers, and word-of-mouth promotion to reach the youth communities effectively.

*Follow the link below to an interactive dashboard:  
[Find out more about the program participant's background.](#)*

The training in soft skills was intended for youth with little formal education, limited language skills, and no professional experience. The skill sets of those receiving soft skills training were taken into consideration when assigning them to jobs. As the program ends, participants continue to meet, participate in skill-sharing events, receive mentorships, form career-focused connections, and hone their entrepreneurial skills.

Alternatively, career development training was offered to college graduates who are currently unemployed. Information and communication technology (ICT), marketing, social services, and non-profit organizations are among the industries where this group is placed for work. Both training courses are paid full-time, with a work week of 35 hours, that lasts for four weeks.

After completing the training and program activities, participants would be connected with employers for four weeks of paid placement or training. To ensure alignment between employers and job providers, the SPCO uses a detailed stakeholder mapping and profiling process to identify these stakeholders.

Having outlined the program's context and aims, the following methodology section details the approaches used to gather and analyze data while ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of the pilot youth and economic development program.

## Methodology

The evaluation encompasses a mixed approach to measure the pilot program's success by integrating quantitative and qualitative data to draw and interpret findings.

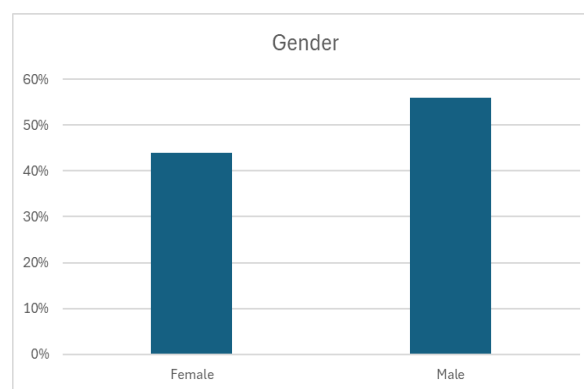
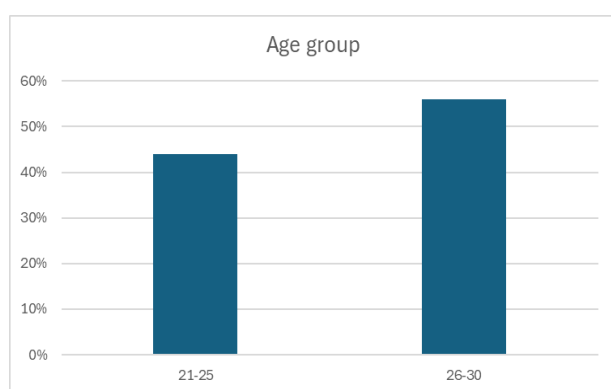
### Sampling

For the pilot program evaluation, a convenient sampling method was used to include **eighteen youth participants and two employers** in the quantitative survey. **Six of these youths also joined the focused group discussion** sharing deeper insights. The primary aim of the focus group was to gain valuable insights into participants' perceptions of the program and how it contributed to their job-seeking success. Open and structured discussions allowed us to explore the various aspects of their experiences and gather rich qualitative data.

In addition to this, a series of **in-depth conversations were done with four staff** from the youth program and the outreach team for the reflective analysis and exploring evolving strategies and pertaining challenges. Given the sample size, the results might not necessarily represent the larger population, and thus should not be generalized and should be treated as an initial and/or emerging trend.

## Sampling profile of youth participants

The survey identified two age groups: 44% of the respondents were in the age group of 21–25, and 56% were in the 26–30 age group. Similarly, 44% of the respondents were female and 56% of them were male. While Amharic, Arabic, Farsi, Tigrinya, and Somali were among the other native languages listed in the survey, the majority, or 39% (7 of 18), claimed Swahili as their mother tongue. Up to 89% (16 out of 18) of youths stated that their household makes less than CAD 30,000 annually. 39% (7 of 18) said they were the only ones living at home. The evaluation included youth from the following program components: 28% in the general employment support (economic incubator), 28% in the IT cohort, 11% in the social research, and 33% in the soft skills (computer literacy, first aid, resumes, etc.).



## Data collection

The evaluation data was collected using a combination of methods, including online surveys administered through the Qualtrics platform, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The online surveys were utilized to gather quantitative data, while focus group interviews and in-depth interviews were conducted to capture qualitative insights. This multi-pronged data collection approach allowed us to capture a holistic view of the program's impact, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives from program participants, as well as from the staff and employers, the youth participants interacted with.

The evaluation was conducted using a range of data sources:

Data Source	Description
Project documents	A thorough review of project documents, including the monitoring datasets, was done for the evaluation design and planning, and to draw a background and context.
Survey with youth participants	Eighteen youths who had completed at least one pilot program component participated in the survey.
Survey with employers	Eighteen youths who had completed at least one pilot program component participated in the survey.
In-depth interview	The conversation was part of the reflective analysis exercise with the youth program and outreach team of the SPCO.
Focused group discussion	Qualitative data collection through a focus group discussion with a diverse group of six youth participants, including both past and current cohorts.
Longitudinal observation	A review of youth programs by social impact agencies and SPCO's outreach initiatives over a six month period, to develop recommendations for a multisectoral approach that could enhance benefits for racialized and newcomer youth.

## Data analysis

To analyze the collected data, a two-pronged approach was employed. First, quantitative data from the online surveys was processed and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Second, qualitative data from the focus group and one-on-one interviews were transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes for interpretation.

In summary, the mixed-method approach combining surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions has enabled a robust evaluation of the program's diverse impacts.

Following the discussion of the data collection and analysis methods, the evaluation examines the key findings. The findings section will highlight how the program has impacted participants drawing on both quantitative and qualitative insights.

## Findings

Overall, 172 youths took part and completed at least one component of the pilot youth employment program. While general support such as resume building and professional networking were provided to all youth participants, some of these youths also received one-to-one mentoring support through

the pilot program. Furthermore, the survey with youth participants showed that "word of mouth" was the most effective method for reaching participants.

"Word-of-mouth, in my opinion, is the safest method of communication because it spreads quickly and is especially effective when it comes from people who have completed the program and can speak with some experience. However, social media is also a fantastic tool for spreading word-of-mouth information. I believe that focusing on the younger generation might help make that work."

- Youth participant, 26-30 age group

## Perception of youth participants

### The youth employment program was received positively by the participants.

According to the survey, 13 out of 18 youth participants, or **72% of the total, expressed satisfaction** with the youth employment program they participated in. Similarly, **95%** (17 of 18) reported **feeling encouraged or supported** while enrolled in the program. In addition to the 72% satisfaction rate, the focused group discussion revealed that participants valued the hands-on training and real-world application provided during the program, which significantly enhanced their job readiness.

Moreover, youth's perceptions of the service were influenced by their age and gender. Survey findings revealed that whereas just 50% (4 of 8) of the female youth participants expressed the same degree of satisfaction with the program, as many as 90% (9 of 10) of the male youth respondents felt satisfied with the program. Similarly, a higher percentage of youth (90%) in the 26–30 age group than in the younger 21–25 age group (25%) expressed satisfaction with the program.

Furthermore, youth's perceptions of the usefulness of program materials for their job search were similarly influenced by their age and gender. Overall, 67% (12 of 18) youths reported that the program materials helped them in their job search; however, only 37% (3 of 8) of the female participants felt that the materials were helpful in their job search, compared to 90% (9 of 10) of the male participants. Similarly, 80% of youth in the 26–30 age group and 50% of youth in the younger 21–25 age group felt that the program materials were beneficial.

In light of the program's hybrid model, 61% of respondents rated it as extremely effective, 33% as fairly effective, and 6% as completely ineffective. Compared to 50% of youths in the younger age group (21–25), more youths in the older age group (26–30) (63%) thought the program delivery using a hybrid format was very effective.

### **Youths felt prepared for employment.**

The program was successful in providing youth with **better job preparation** and **increased work opportunities**. **Up to 89%** (16 out of 18) of young participants said the employment program **helped them feel ready for the workforce**. Moreover, all of the youths thought that the program had improved their chances of finding work.

Upon further exploration, it was discovered that, in comparison to female youth respondents and youths in the younger age group, more male youth respondents and youths in the older age group felt that the program sufficiently prepared them for employment.

### **Youths are successful in finding employment opportunities.**

Overall, 8 out of 18 youths, or **44%** of the total, reported finding **long-term work** after participating in the youth employment program. In a similar vein, **56%** of the youth (10 out of 18) said that the program helped them find **temporary work**. While some participants found both short-term and long-term employment opportunities following the program, one-third of respondents (33%, 6 of 18) didn't find either at the time of the survey.

Upon further exploration, it was discovered that, of the two age groups, more youth in the older age group reported securing long-term employment. 12% of youths under the age of 21–25 reported finding long-term employment, whereas 70% of youths under the age of 26–30 reported doing so. Similarly, more of the male youth participants could find short-term or long-term employment following the program as compared to female participants.

In line with the theory of change, youths **who felt prepared or supported** by the program were **more likely to find either short-term or long-term employment**. Interestingly, more of the youths from the “soft skills” component of the program reported having found short-term employment. In the case of long-term employment, more of the youths from the “**general employment support (economic incubator)**” component reported having found it. Among the IT cohort's participants, 60% found long-term and/or short-term employment.



## Perception of potential employers

### **Employers are satisfied with the skill set offered by youths from the program.**

"We appreciated SPCO's support in identifying potential candidates and then having the opportunity to interview youths through our normal processes as we feel this is a better outcome for everyone."

- Employer A, non-profit

"The program gives a great opportunity for youth to get enough training and work in an actual position before they get hired."

- Employer B, non-profit

### **Employers valued the youths' readiness for training and placement.**

Consequently, following the training, some youths were offered permanent positions by both non-profit organizations engaged with the youth program as an employer. Both employers stated that youth began their training with an orientation covering the background and core values of the organization, as well as its services, stakeholders, and context. The in-house training that came next helped them get ready for full-time jobs. The employers also indicated the possibility of increasing the number of participants per cohort in the future.

#### **Benefits of having youths from SPCO's youth program:**

"They are kind of ready to take on responsibilities. It is also saving time for the organization in terms of doing new interviews or training."

- Employer A, non-profit

"We increase our staff capacity while helping youth get meaningful work experiences."

- Employer B, non-profit

"They (youth participants) knew the job description of the position they came for, they already knew about the program and expectations from them doing the job, and they knew some part of the administration as well."

- Employer, non-profit

## Reflective analysis with the SPCO's youth program and outreach staff

Grounded in the insights from the youth program and the outreach team, the reflection explores the dynamics of support, funding, partnerships, and the broad spectrum of challenges and strategies that have shaped the program's impact and sustainability.

### **Support and Funding for Employment Mentorship**

A crucial area identified by the team concerns the allocation of funding and support structures within the SPCO. The current framework, while supportive, is viewed as insufficient in fully realizing the potential impact on youth employment. The initiative to subsidize employer costs for youth placements has proven beneficial. However, the need for more accessible funding is clear, with a call to expand the program's reach and make a tangible difference in the community. The team suggests that by enhancing funding accessibility, the SPCO could significantly increase youth participation, thereby catalyzing notable changes within Ottawa's employment landscape.

### **Long-term Program Sustainability**

Reflecting on SPCO's journey in social planning, it's evident that the organization's strategies have continuously evolved to meet changing socio-economic needs. The introduction of technology and the fostering of key partnerships have been pivotal. However, the importance of learning from past initiatives, especially around diversity and membership, is emphasized as vital for future planning.

One of the youth program coordinators also shared the shift towards empowering youth through initiatives like *Youth Leadership for Change*, highlighting the evolution towards programs that not only address economic needs but also promote leadership, resilience, and civic engagement among racialized youth.

### **Partnership Dynamics**

The insights from the team reveal a perceived gap in establishing strong connections with essential partners like educational institutions, government agencies, and community organizations. This gap has limited the program's outreach capabilities, underscoring the need for a concerted effort to reinforce these partnerships. As a result, the SPCO strives to increase advocacy and accessibility of its programs for vulnerable youth.

Successful collaboration with entities like the City of Ottawa and Youth Action Now has shown the potential benefits of such partnerships, providing access to additional resources, expertise, and networks crucial for supporting youth employment.

## Promoting Community Collaboration

Community collaboration is identified as critical in fostering unity, empowering individuals, and leveraging diverse skills. The youth program and the outreach team stress the importance of community collaboration in breaking down barriers and creating a supportive ecosystem for youth employment. Initiatives have shown that by engaging with community partners, the SPCO can tailor programming to address specific challenges, enhancing the impact of its youth employment programs.

Drawing from the youth program and outreach team's insights, the SPCO's approach to youth employment has undergone significant evolution. Despite challenges such as funding limitations and dynamic partnership dynamics, the organization's commitment to adaptability, community collaboration, and continuous strategy improvement stands out. Employers engaged in the SPCO's youth employment support initiatives are thus encouraged to embrace these enriched strategies, leveraging the unique strengths and perspectives that young talent brings to the workplace, ultimately driving innovation and growth within Ottawa's communities.

The findings and participant feedback provide a clear picture of the program's successes and areas for improvement. In the conclusion and recommendation, the evaluation summarizes these insights and outlines the strategic steps forward to enhance the program's impact.

## Conclusion

The evaluation of the SPCO's pilot program reveals promising outcomes in empowering youth through soft skills and career development. With a focus on marginalized communities facing financial challenges, the program exceeded its initial target by serving over 172 participants, demonstrating a strong reach through its effective use of social media, flyers, and word-of-mouth promotion.

Key findings highlight a positive reception among youth participants, with 72% expressing satisfaction and 89% feeling better prepared for employment. Notably, the program effectively tailored training to different participant demographics, such as college graduates and individuals with limited formal education. Although gender and age disparities influenced satisfaction and perceived usefulness, the majority of participants acknowledged improved job readiness and an increased likelihood of finding employment.

The data also reveals that 44% of participants found long-term employment, which underscores the program's role in facilitating sustained employment opportunities. This significant figure, coupled with the high rates of temporary employment, confirms the program's effectiveness in improving job readiness among youths.

Specifically, the evaluation has gained valuable insights into these key program focus areas:

**Skill Development:** The program has been highly successful in equipping participants with sought-after IT skills and knowledge, effectively bridging the gap between educational attainment and industry demands.

**Confidence Building:** The program's emphasis on enhancing participants' self-confidence has proven to be a significant strength. As a result of their education, graduates consistently report higher levels of self-confidence, which positions them to excel in their professions.

**Networking Opportunities:** The creation of networking opportunities has been commendable. Building professional connections has facilitated job prospects and mentorship, enhancing participants' career growth.

**Career Clarity and Empowerment:** Participants have found clarity in their IT and communications career paths through the program, empowering them to pursue roles aligned with their unique interests and aptitudes.

Similarly, employers also expressed satisfaction with the quality of candidates, particularly appreciating their preparedness and skill set. The program's hybrid model was lauded for its flexibility, and employers suggested increasing cohort sizes in the future due to the noticeable benefits of hiring program participants.

With a deeper understanding of the employment challenges Ottawa's youth face, it becomes imperative to identify targeted strategies that address these obstacles. The SPCO has been at the forefront of pioneering approaches that not only recognize these barriers but actively work towards dismantling them. In conclusion, this program not only met but exceeded its initial goals, setting a strong foundation for continued efforts to combat youth unemployment in the Ottawa community. To ensure long-term sustainability, the program must continue refining its funding models, strengthen partnerships with educational institutions, government, non-profit organizations, and grassroots groups, and keep addressing identified challenges.

## Recommendations

While celebrating the achievements, the evaluation acknowledges the need for continuous improvement to better serve youth participants and the broader community. The following recommendations are based on the survey and focus group discussions with youth participants,

**Program Testimonials and Success Stories:** Incorporating more testimonials and success stories from program graduates can inspire confidence and attract new participants. Highlighting the track record of job placement success is key.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** The program's commitment to inclusivity, welcoming individuals from diverse backgrounds, has contributed to a more equitable learning environment, fostering enriched experiences and perspectives. However, there needs to be more effort to make it further inclusive of diversified groups. For example, female participants felt less satisfied with the program as compared to male participants.

While the program was generally well-received, disparities in satisfaction and outcomes, particularly among female participants and younger age groups, were noted. These disparities may be influenced by factors such as the perceived relevance of training materials or the adequacy of support mechanisms. To address observed disparities, the evaluation recommends targeted support initiatives and tailored communication strategies. For example, to address lower satisfaction rates among younger participants, introduce mentorship programs pairing them with older, experienced participants who can provide guidance and support.

**Diverse Course Offerings:** Expanding program content beyond IT and communications to encompass a broader array of skills can cater to a more diverse range of participants. For example, introduce new courses focusing on soft skills, entrepreneurship, and emerging industries. Allocate funds for curriculum development, instructor training, and materials for new courses. And periodically conduct surveys and focus groups to identify the most sought-after courses among participants.

**Flexibility:** To cater to a diverse group with varying schedules and needs, offering flexible training options like part-time, evening classes, or online learning is key. Investing in a user-friendly Learning Management System and hiring additional instructors to cover extended program hours is recommended.

**Social Networking Boost:** Hosting social networking events can play a pivotal role in boosting participant confidence and fostering valuable professional connections. Integrating these events into the program can create a sense of community and shared learning.

**Accessibility Matters:** Ensuring that all the program materials and platforms are accessible to individuals with disabilities is a cornerstone of inclusivity.

**Feedback Matters:** Building a robust feedback mechanism that actively encourages participant input is vital for continuous program improvement. This real-time feedback loop empowers the program to adapt to evolving youth needs.

## Evolving Employer Engagement Strategies within the SPCO's Youth Workforce Integration

Insights drawn from the youth program and the outreach team offer a deeper understanding of the nuanced approaches necessary to address the evolving needs of youth, particularly racialized and newcomers. These strategies are not just responses to immediate challenges but are reflective of a commitment to long-term empowerment and systemic change.

**Tailored Onboarding and Role-Specific Training:** The necessity of a structured and comprehensive onboarding process cannot be overstated. Feedback highlights the importance of designing these programs to cater specifically to the unique learning styles and needs of youth, ensuring a smoother transition into the workforce. This tailored approach is seen as crucial for enhancing the onboarding experience, drawing from both past lessons and the evolving needs to ensure effective workforce integration.

**Accessible Skill Development Opportunities:** The team acknowledges the critical role of accessible skill development in empowering youth. The historical challenge of resource allocation underscores the need for employers to open avenues for youth to access the latest industry-required skills through comprehensive workshops and courses. This initiative directly responds to the staff's feedback on the necessity for more accessible funding and resources, aiming to bridge skill gaps and enhance youth employability.

**Mentorship and Sustained Support:** Mentorship is identified as a cornerstone for providing youth participants with the guidance and support necessary for career success. The feedback from the youth program and the outreach team underscores the importance of overcoming partnership challenges to establish effective mentorship programs. These initiatives are integral to ensuring that young employees receive the adequate support needed to navigate their careers successfully. Exploring opportunities for ongoing support and mentorship for program graduates as they transition into the workforce can significantly contribute to their long-term success.

**Enhanced Communication Strategies:** The desire for improved communication strategies within the SPCO is evident. The team suggests that establishing regular, constructive feedback mechanisms is vital for helping young workers identify growth opportunities. This need aligns with a broader call for improved communications with partners, aiming to strengthen the overall support framework for youth employment.

**Youth Engagement and Achievement Recognition:** Acknowledging the contributions of youth is seen as fundamental to fostering a sense of belonging and appreciation within the organization. Platforms that allow young employees to share their ideas and innovations are crucial for recognizing their potential to contribute meaningfully to the organization's goals.

**Ongoing Evaluation and Adaptation:** Periodically evaluating and adapting the program through regular participant feedback (surveys, focus groups, individual sessions) and maintaining a dedicated evaluation team is key to supporting evidence-informed program adjustments and improvements.

## Strengthening Youth Employment Programs through a Multisectoral Approach

In line with the SPCO's established framework for empowering young individuals, the proposed recommendations aim to amplify the effectiveness of the youth employment programs through a broadened multisectoral approach. As we transition from the challenges to the solutions, let us consider

these strategies as a blueprint for change, demonstrating the potential for impactful collaboration between employers, educational institutions, and community organizations in supporting the next generation of workers.

**Deepening Industry and Educational Partnerships:** Strengthen connections with industry and academic partners to enrich the program offerings. This alignment ensures the curriculum meets current standards and anticipates future employment trends, and better-preparing youth. Partner with other Youth Employment programs, local businesses, and community organizations. Organize roundtable discussions with stakeholders to identify collaborative initiatives.

**Adapting Programs to Meet Emerging Market Needs:** Continuously refine the training initiatives to incorporate advanced skill sets and progressive educational techniques. This adaptive strategy is essential for keeping pace with technological advancements and market dynamics, ensuring that the participants are versatile and competitive.

**Expanding Community and Peer-Based Support:** Augment the focus on community integration and peer mentorship, enhancing the structural support network available to the youth. This enhancement will facilitate richer interpersonal connections and broader community engagement, crucial for holistic development and successful employment outcomes.

**Elevating Program Visibility Through Strategic Outreach:** Utilize targeted marketing and robust social media strategies to elevate the visibility of multisectoral collective efforts. Highlighting participant success stories and the broad-reaching benefits of the initiatives will attract a more diverse participant base and garner additional community and corporate support.

**Prioritizing Sustainable Employment Trajectories:** Ensure that the job placement strategies are not just tailored to immediate skill matches but also oriented towards long-term career sustainability. This forward-thinking approach guarantees that the youth are not only placed but are also primed for continual growth and professional development within their chosen fields.

**Mental Health and Well-being Support:** Introduce mental health workshops, counselling services, and mindfulness sessions within the program. Allocate funds for mental health workshops and counselling services, in collaboration with local organizations. Create a stigma-free environment where participants feel comfortable discussing mental health challenges.

**Alumni Mentorship Program:** Establish an alumni mentorship program where successful graduates from the youth employment support programs mentor current participants. Encourage alums from diverse backgrounds to participate as mentors. This could be a collective program involving all non-profit agencies in Ottawa that provide youth employment support and services.

# Section 3: Summary of the Youth Mental Health Survey

## Background

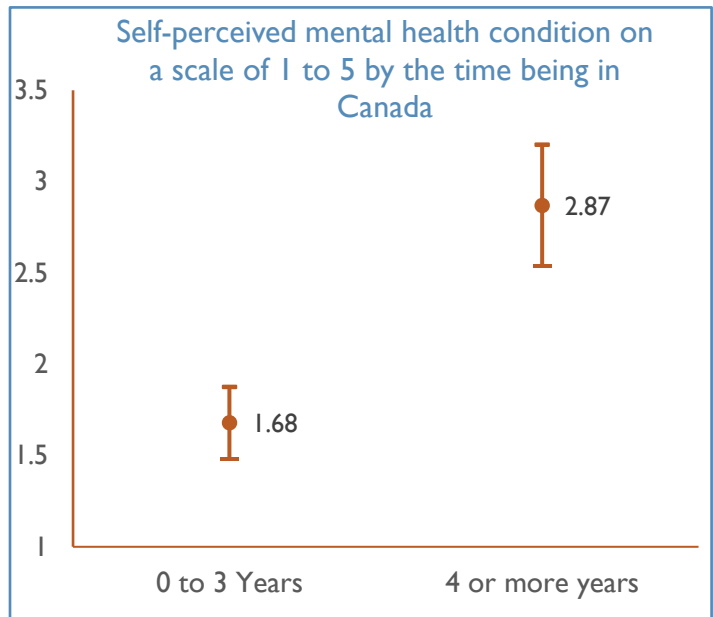
To help newcomer youths cope with their mental health through sports and social activities, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa (SPCO) and Active Newcomer Youth Ottawa (ANYO) have been jointly organizing annual soccer tournaments since 2021. A total of 403 unique young individuals took part in the soccer tournament in 2022.

Along with the engagement in sports, 47% (189 of 403) of youths also participated in the survey sharing their challenges and perceptions related to mental health. This section outlines key findings while also comparing the answers to two different survey questions: Length of time being in Canada and Native language (language spoken or mother tongue) and how these factors reflect in the youth's self-accessed mental health state.

## Findings

### Perceived mental health

The survey revealed that a vast majority of youths are living with mental health issues and facing challenges or barriers around accessing mental health services. Overall, **78%** (138 of 189) of the youth respondents reported having mental health issues. The survey participants were asked to evaluate their overall mental health on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = poor to 5 = excellent). The prevalence of mental health issues is considerably greater among youths who have been living in Canada for three years or less and whose first language is English.



The data suggest that the perceived mental health condition is worse among those who arrived in Canada more recently (up to three years) as compared to those who have been here for four or more years. As high as 82% (112 of 137) of youths who arrived in Canada in the last three years rated their mental health condition as either poor or very poor while it is lower among youths (50%, 26 of 52) who

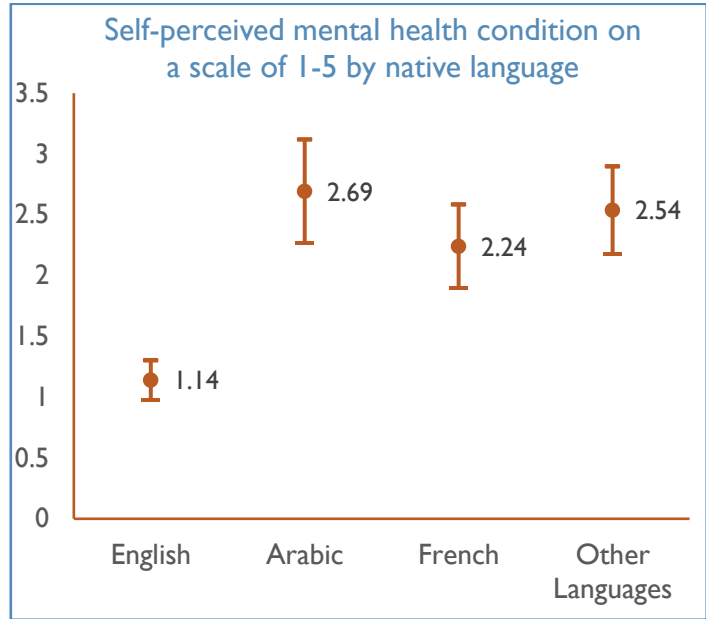


arrived here in four or more years.

The perceived mental health state varied significantly between youths with English and non-English languages of origin.

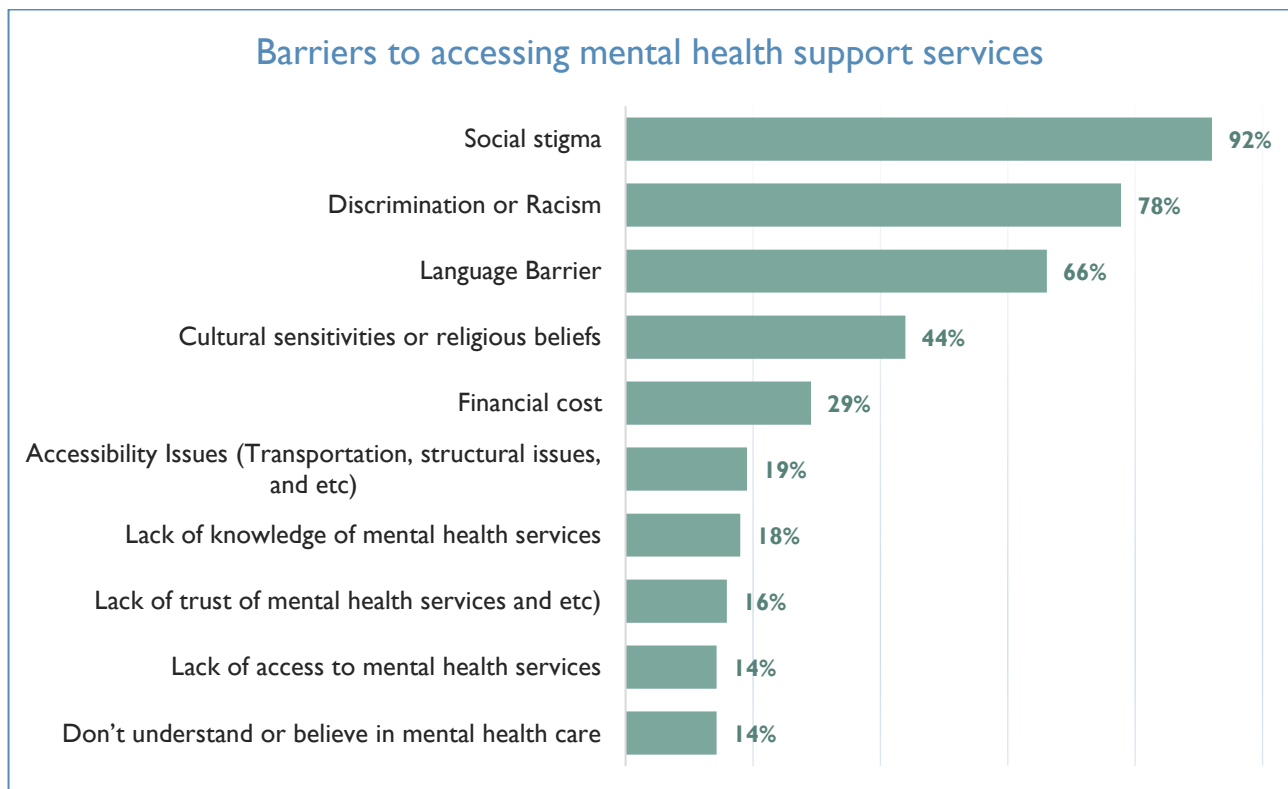
As high as 96% (68 of 71) of youths with English language of origin described their mental health condition as poor, as compared to 59% (70 of 118) of youths with a non-English language of origin who reported the same.

Further to this, among the youths with non-English language of origin, a strong majority (88%, 22 of 25) of youths with French language rated their mental health as poor.

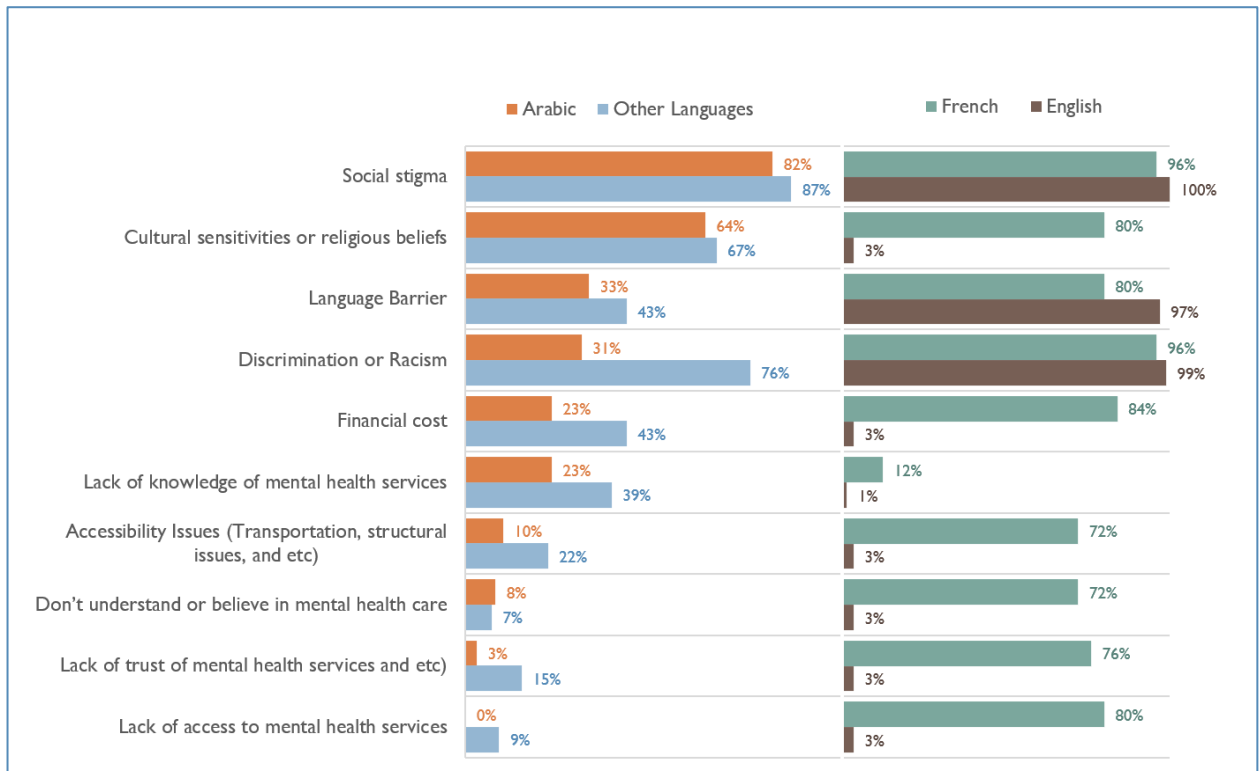
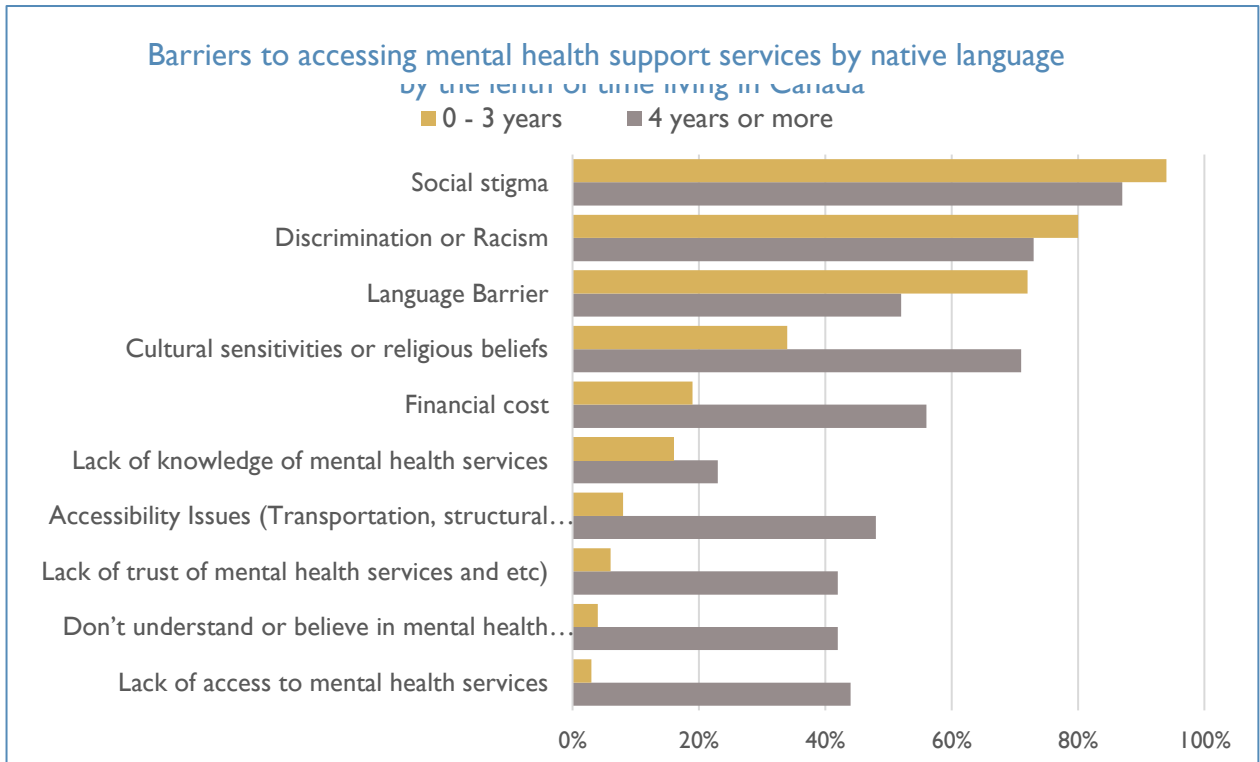


In comparison, 49% (19 of 39) of youth with Arabic languages and 54% (29 of 54) of youth with other non-official languages evaluated their mental health as poor. More youths with Arabic language of origin perceived their mental health condition as normal, compared to any other language.

## Barriers to accessing mental health support services

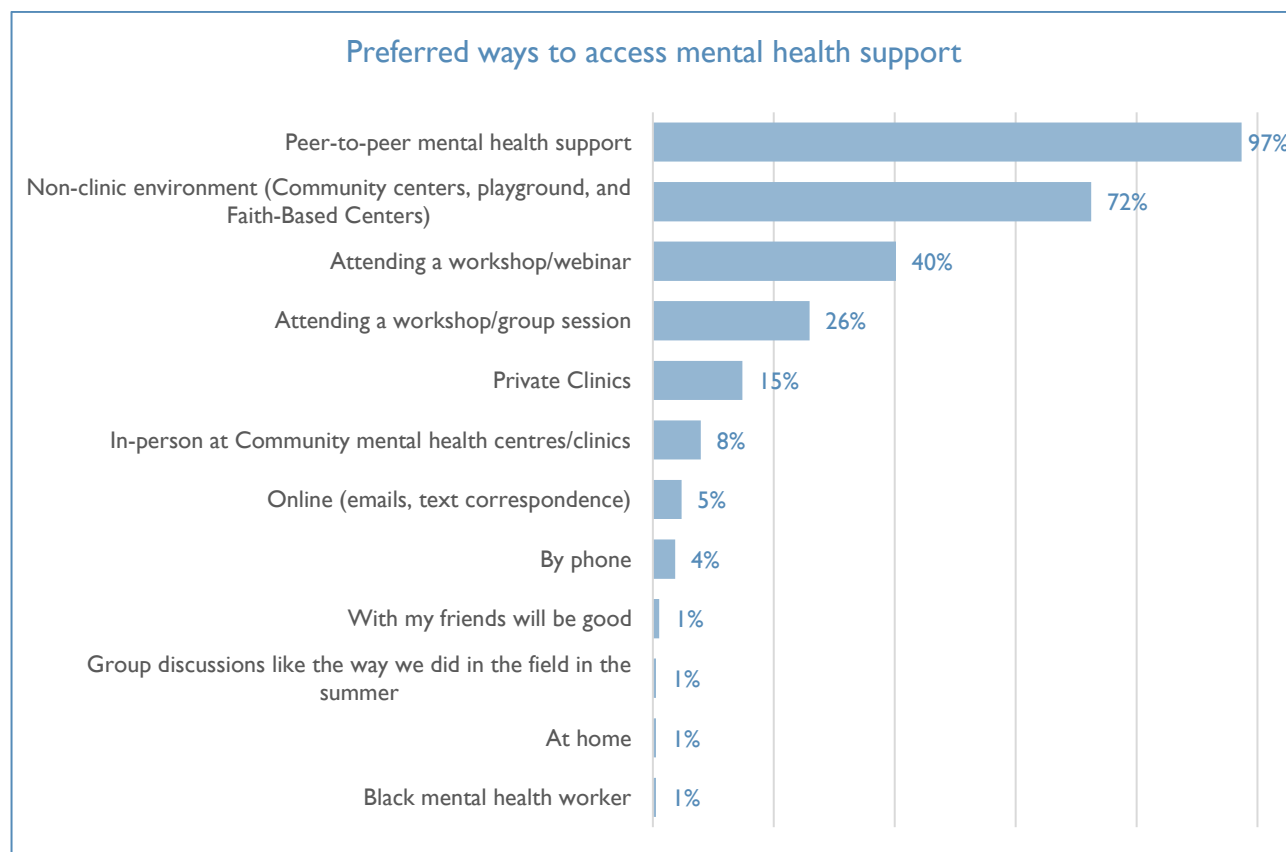


The three prevailing obstacles according to survey responders are: 1. Social stigma, 2. Discrimination or racism, and 3. Language barriers. However, a more comprehensive analysis considering how long the responder has been in Canada and the language spoken at home provides a more nuanced understanding of this tendency.



Social stigma around mental health is the top-most challenge overall and across all sub-groups. Unlike the overall trend, however, youths with Arabic and other non-official languages considered cultural sensitivity or religious beliefs as the second most common challenge or barrier in accessing these services. Notably, youths who arrived in Canada in the past four or more years and French native speakers recalled more challenges or barriers as compared to any other sub-groups. Also, while some youths in all sub-groups indicated lack of physical access as a challenge or barrier, none among the youths with Arabic language of origin felt that way.

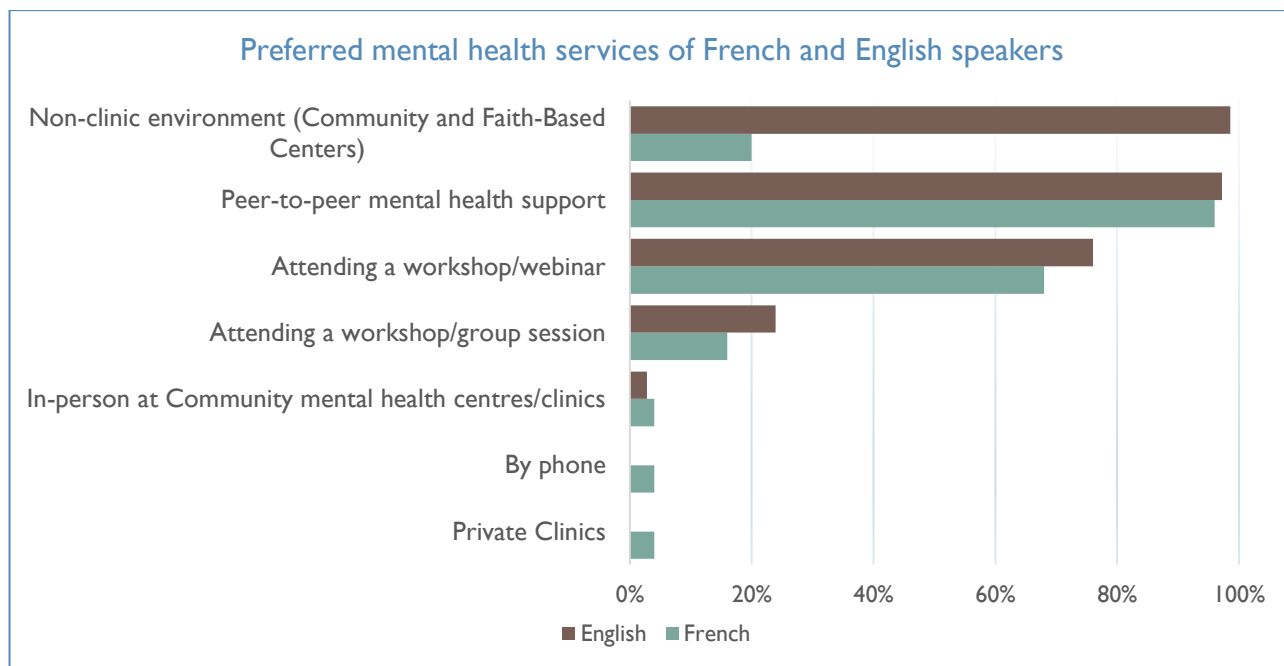
## Preference for accessing mental health services



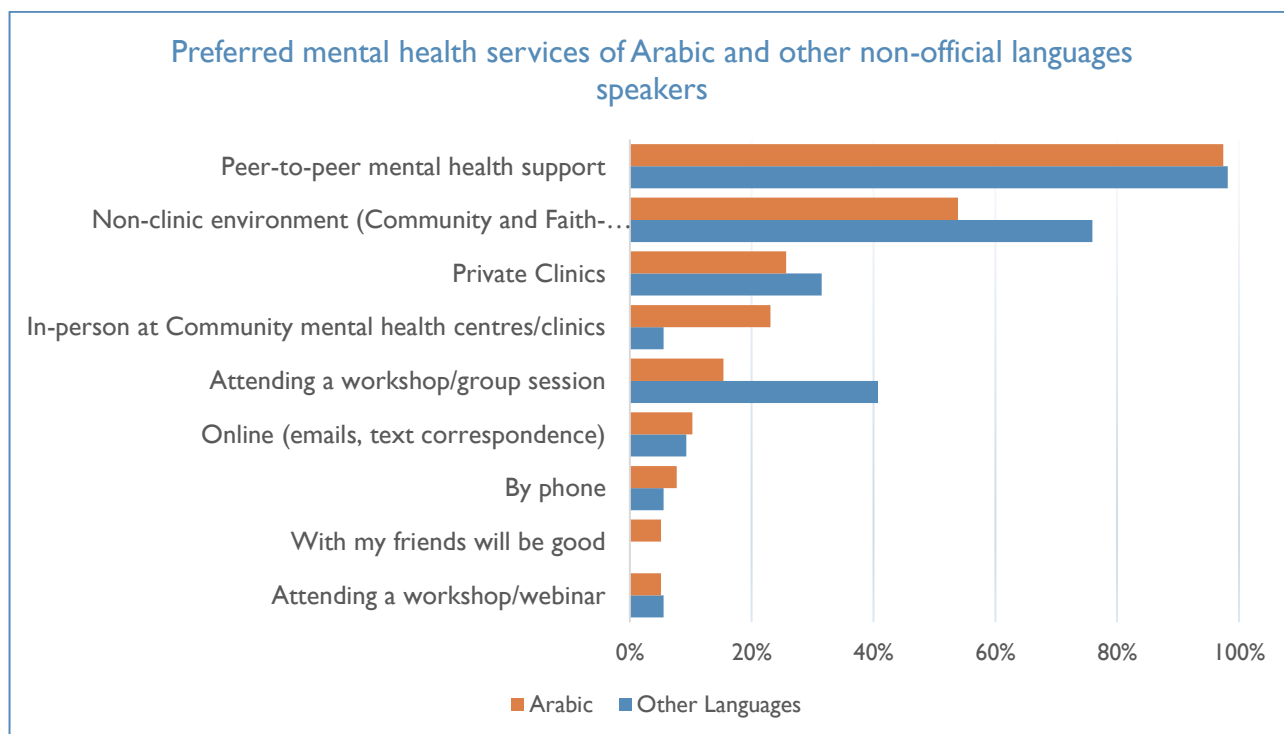
The three most preferred ways to access mental health support services by all survey responders are:

1. Peer-to-peer support,
2. Non-clinic environment, and
3. Attending workshops or webinars.

However, further exploration suggests that this varies within the sub-groups.

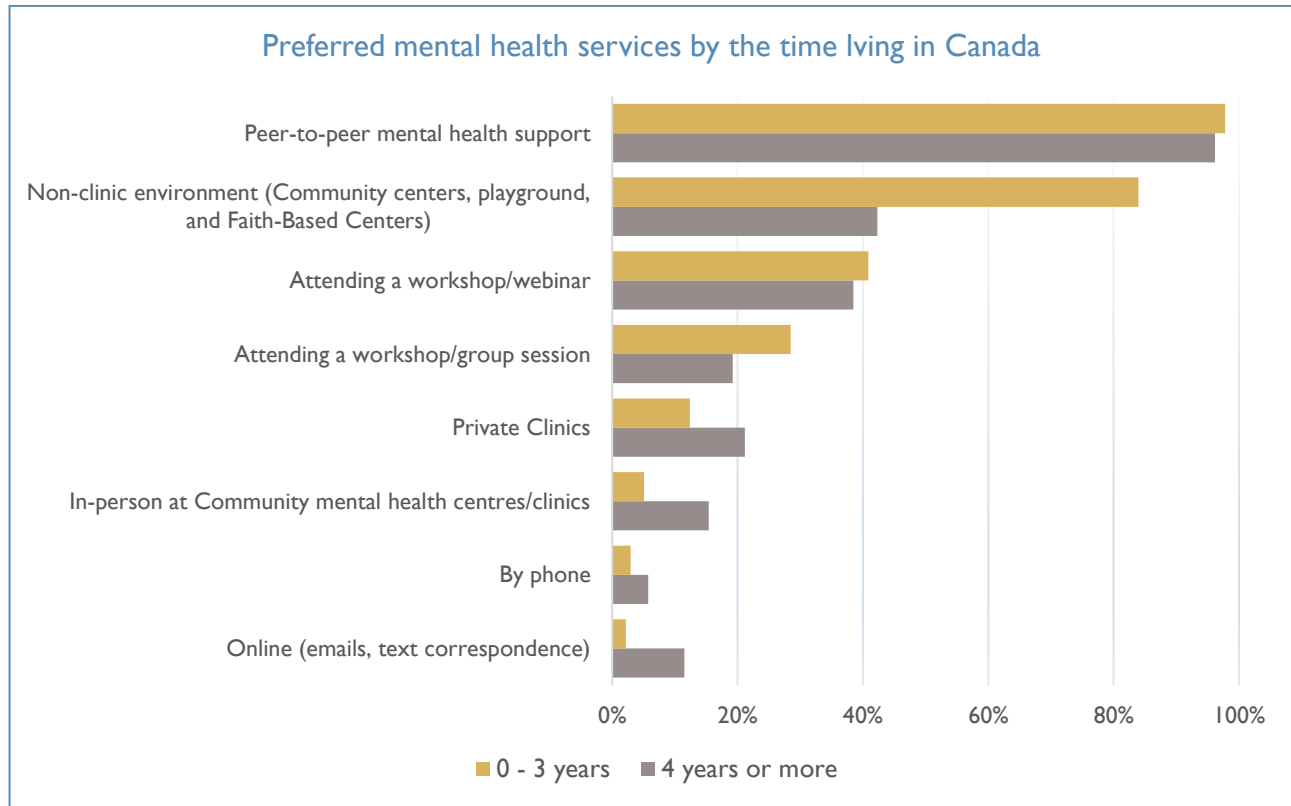


Unlike the overall tendency, youths with an English language of origin preferred non-clinic environments over peer-to-peer support, such as community centres, playgrounds, and faith-based centres. Attending workshops or webinars is popular among those who speak French (68%).



Private clinics are preferred by those who speak other non-official languages (31%) and those who have been in Canada for 4 years or more (21%). None among the youths with the English language of origin preferred private clinics or services by phone. In-person support at community mental health centres

or clinics is more popular among those who speak Arabic (23%) and those who have been in Canada for four years or more (15%).



The least preferred way to access mental health support services came out to be the online and phone consultation services, receiving services along with friends or at home, receiving services from black mental health workers and participating in group discussions around mental health.

# Reference: Key Terms and Definitions

**Equity:** the absence of barriers, biases, and obstacles that impede equal access and opportunity to succeed in society.

**Diversity:** differences in race, colour, place of origin, religion, immigrant and newcomer status, ethnic origin, ability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and age.

**Inclusion:** active engagement of equity and diversity concepts in all aspects of decision-making. This includes fostering a sense of belonging for all, making all people feel included, and having those values reflected in all that is said and done so that diverse professionals feel that they have equal access to opportunities.

**Systemic Discrimination:** the result of organizational policies, practices and cultures that perpetuate unequal treatment of individuals or groups.

**Indigenous identity** refers to whether the person identifies with the Indigenous peoples of Canada. This includes those who identify as First Nations (North American Indian), Métis and/or Inuk (Inuit), and/or those who report being Registered or Treaty Indians (that is, registered under the Indian Act of Canada), and/or those who have membership in a First Nation or Indian band. Aboriginal peoples of Canada (referred to here as Indigenous peoples) are defined in the Constitution Act, 1982, Section 35 (2) as including the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.

**Racialized:** This paper uses data on visible minority status from the 2021 census. Visible minority status is self-reported and refers to the visible minority group to which the respondent belongs. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as “persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour.” The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups: South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.

**Unemployed:** Refers to persons who, during the week of Sunday, May 2 to Saturday, May 8, 2021, were without paid work or self-employment work, were available for work and either:

- (a) had actively looked for paid work in the past four weeks; or
- (b) were on temporary lay-off and expected to return to their job; or
- (c) had definite arrangements to start a new job in four weeks or less.

**Unemployment rate:** Refers to the unemployed expressed as a percentage of the labour force in the week of Sunday, May 2 to Saturday, May 8, 2021.

**Participation rate:** Refers to the labour force in the week of Sunday, May 2 to Saturday, May 8, 2021, expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 years and over.

**Worked part year and/or part time:** Includes persons aged 15 years and over who worked full year mostly part time or part year either mostly full time or mostly part time in 2020. Part year is less than 49 weeks and part time is less than 30 hours per week.

**Class of worker** refers to whether a person is an employee or is self-employed. The employee class includes permanent and temporary positions. The self-employed include persons with or without a business, as well as unpaid family workers.

**Occupation** refers to the kind of work performed in a job, a job being all the tasks carried out by a particular worker to complete his or her duties. An occupation is a set of jobs that are sufficiently similar in work performed.

The **highest certificate, diploma or degree** is the classification used in the census to measure the broader concept of 'Educational attainment.' This variable refers to the highest level of education that a person has successfully completed and is derived from the educational qualifications questions, which asked for all certificates, diplomas and degrees to be reported.

**Industry** refers to the general nature of the business carried out in the establishment where the person worked.

**The Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT)**, refers to a fixed percentage (50%) of the median adjusted after-tax income of private households. The household after-tax income is adjusted by an equivalence scale to take economies of scale into account. Using data from the 2021 Census of Population, the line applicable to a household is defined as half the Canadian median of adjusted household after-tax income, multiplied by the square root of household size.

## Data notes

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<sup>i</sup> The numbers are for the Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Area. The Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) has a total population of 1,135,000 people. The Ontario part includes the municipalities of [Ottawa \(population 1,017,449\)](#), Clarence-Rockland (population 26,505), Russell (population 19,598), North Grenville (population 17,964), Beckwith (population 9,021), Carleton Place (population 12,517), Mississippi Mills (population 14,740), Arnprior (population 9,629), and McNab/Braeside (population 7,591). The total population [outside Ottawa's boundaries is 117,205 people](#). The population numbers source is the 2021 census.

<sup>ii</sup> Indigenous: persons who identify with the Indigenous peoples of Canada.

<sup>iii</sup> Racialized refers to the total visible minority population.

<sup>iv</sup> New immigrants: those who arrived in Canada between 2016 and 2021.

<sup>v</sup> Part time work: part year is less than 49 weeks and part time is less than 30 hours per week.

<sup>vi</sup> Generation status refers to whether or not the person or the person's parents were born in Canada.

<sup>vii</sup> Occupations are based on the National Occupational Classification [NOC] 2021 Version 1.0.

<sup>viii</sup> Highest level of education that a person has successfully completed.

<sup>ix</sup> The industry data are produced according to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) Canada 2017 Version 3.0.

<sup>x</sup> The low income is based on the low-income measure, after tax.