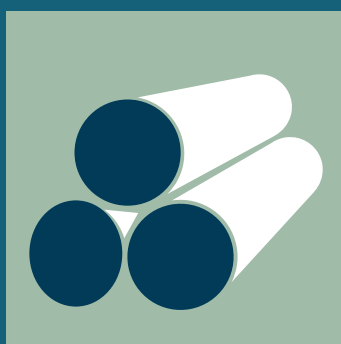
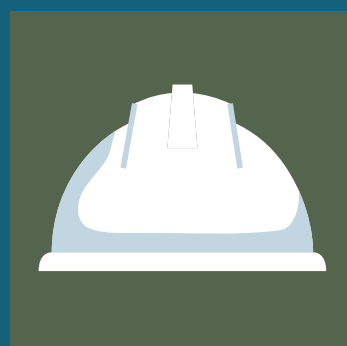
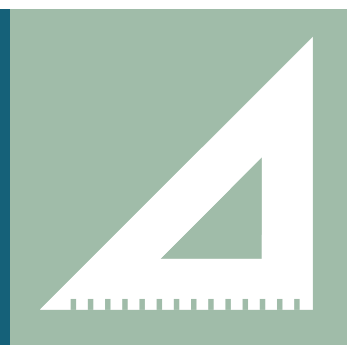
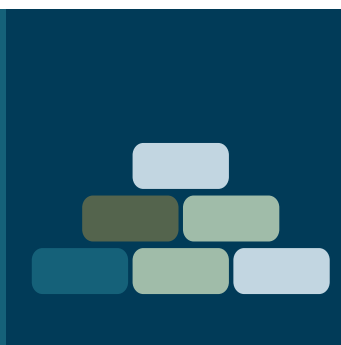


2025

UNIONS POWER PROSPERITY :

A REPORT FROM THE UNION-LED
ADVISORY TABLE 2025



Employment and
Social Development Canada

Emploi et
Développement social Canada

Canada 

Unions Power Prosperity: A Report from the Union-Led Advisory Table

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Disclaimer

The information contained in this report does not necessarily reflect the position or views of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour or the Government of Canada.

Minister's Message

Governments make better economic decisions when they listen to the people affected. Collaboration between workers, unions, industry, and government, offers a wide range of perspectives that best reflect Canada's labour market needs.

With this in mind, the Union-Led Advisory Table was created, and as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, it is my pleasure to share with you the Union-Led Advisory Table's final report, *Unions Power Prosperity: A Report from the Union-Led Advisory Table*.

This report will guide our next steps. The Table members, who are respected and knowledgeable in their fields, have provided invaluable advice that will help us support workers in a changing labour market and ensure economic opportunity and prosperity.

Our government is already working hard to implement some of the recommendations in this report, like improving worker mobility, increasing opportunities for women and under-represented groups, and opening doors to skilled trades.

We're also making great strides in federally regulated sectors. We're banning the use of replacement workers and improving work-life balance by requiring employers to have the right to disconnect policies. And we've made changes to help protect gig workers from misclassification so they can access the pay and benefits they deserve.

Thank you to the members of the Union-Led Advisory Table for this work. Workers deserve a place at the table where decisions about them are being made. They provide insight and leadership. I look forward to using this report as we continue to build our shared vision.

The Honourable Steven MacKinnon

Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour

Message from the Chair, Union-Led Advisory Table

The 2020s are proving to be an exceedingly difficult decade for working people. On top of the upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing cost-of-living crisis, workers face growing sources of strain, including profound structural shifts such as aging workforces and mounting staffing shortages, industrial transformation stemming from climate change, and far-reaching technological changes. Far from being abstract considerations, these forces represent real pressures in the daily lives of working people.

It is imperative that Canada's political institutions and economic decision makers respond urgently and effectively to these pressures. Canada's economic prosperity, social cohesion and political stability hang in the balance, as do individual workers' lives, their families' futures and the fate of their communities. Canadians expect action and leadership, and we must not let them down.

Working people rarely have access to national platforms through which they can express their views. I am therefore particularly grateful for opportunities like the Union-Led Advisory Table (ULAT) that allow us to draw attention to the challenges workers face, amplify their voices and make the case for change. It has been my honour and privilege to serve as Chair of the ULAT. I want to thank Minister MacKinnon for his interest, enthusiasm and confidence in the ULAT and its work. Catherine Demers, Rhonda Fernandes, Stephanie Jackson and the ESDC staff who served as the Secretariat of the ULAT have been vital in ensuring the Advisory Table's work progressed smoothly. Most of all, I want to express my gratitude to the union leaders and representatives who devoted their time, attention and hard work to making the ULAT discussions a success. Their passionate commitment to improving the lives of working people was an inspiration and a credit to the work of the ULAT.

Bea Bruske

President, Canadian Labour Congress

Executive Summary

Transformative changes to work and the economy are posing exceptional challenges for mid- and late-career workers in at-risk occupations and industries. New risks and stressors in the workplace include climate change, revolutionary new automation capabilities such as artificial intelligence and algorithmic management, skills shortages, chronic staffing challenges, and continuing shifts in trade and supply chains. Initiatives to assist and empower workers, both while employed and when displaced, are key to fostering greater worker resilience in the face of disruption.

The Union-Led Advisory Table was tasked with advising the federal government on actions and priorities for supporting mid-career workers affected by industry and occupational transitions. An unstated precondition for the Advisory Table's recommendations is the need to ensure a plentiful supply of good jobs with opportunities to learn, adjust and grow.¹ Making more good jobs available means improving the quality of existing jobs and increasing opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making that affects the industry, sector and workplace. This in turn means that workers need the time and job flexibility to take part in upskilling, professional development and continuous learning activities; they need flexible child care, elder care and work scheduling to facilitate effective access to training and to break down occupational segregation; and they need mental health supports, career counselling and adjustment assistance when displaced.

Summary of Mandate Priority 1: Identifying the needs of workers in industries, sectors and occupations facing transitions and disruptions

To anticipate, plan for, and respond effectively and equitably to change, greater capacity at the sectoral level is needed to promote workers' participation and to support workers and industries in transition. To identify and address the specific needs of workers in different industry sectors and occupations, Canada should **reinstate support for**

¹ Elements of a good job include strong health and safety conditions and training; access to regular and predictable hours of work (including full-time hours for those who want them); freedom from harassment and discrimination, along with fair and equal treatment at work; elected representation, security and workplace protections against arbitrary punishment or dismissal; paid time off work for holidays and vacation, illness, and personal and family care needs; meaningful and productive work that allows for personal development; continuous lifelong learning and training; health, insurance, and pension benefits; and compensation providing an adequate standard of living for workers and their families that facilitates full participation in society.

sector councils and expand engagement with strategic sectors undergoing significant changes, starting with at-risk industry sectors. Sectoral tables bring together unions, employers, labour-market intermediaries and education providers to systemically identify and address industry and workforce challenges through cooperation, dialogue, research and advice on how to tackle common problems. Other sector-specific initiatives would support workers at risk of transition to a low-carbon economy, including in the energy sector, and workforce adjustment, such as an auto parts supplier transition program and a forestry adjustment board.

Sectoral strategies to **strengthen national labour market information and planning**, including national skills assessments and inventories, would help address labour shortages and workforce challenges, as would a health human resources strategy, a national child care workforce development initiative, and a labour market information system for the skilled trades and construction sector. Improved career counselling and development services would also support individual sectoral plans. Finally, a national advisory council of the social partners (employers and organized labour) with provincial and territorial government participation would improve coordination and accountability in active labour-market programming.

Summary of Mandate Priority 2: Improving supports for mid-career workers, particularly those in at-risk sectors and jobs, to access and participate in training and improve their capacity to manage transitions

Canada's Employment Insurance program plays a pivotal role in assisting workers as they navigate transitions; the federal government must **improve access to and participation in Employment Insurance**, including by expanding the EI Work-Sharing Program and the EI Skills Boost program, and by incentivizing employers to offer Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) plans. Workers also need access to financial assistance for both direct costs of training and upskilling, such as tuition, and indirect costs such as transportation, child care and course materials.

In industrial regions, worker-led labour adjustment centres ensure effective and timely access to EI, serving as a one-stop shop for folks seeking to navigate and access EI-related benefits and other supports, including training, counselling and employment services. Public colleges and universities should be properly funded to play a role in assisting workers affected by this transition. Adjustment centres also serve a liaison function when workers have questions about EI claims administration or other issues.

Nationally portable standards and certification programs for at-risk workers with lower levels of formal education lacking formal credentials would boost labour adjustment for newcomers to Canada and vulnerable workers. Skilled trades and other workers would gain from a training benefit, modelled after the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP), for workers affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Summary of Mandate Priority 3: Improving recruitment, retention, and helping workers approaching retirement leave their jobs with dignity

Improving job quality is essential for retaining long-tenured workers and facilitating retirement on workers' own terms. Employers should allocate time for late-career workers to engage in on-the-job mentoring and professional development, facilitating extended careers and phased retirement. Pre-retirement full-time equivalent reduction programs and expanded late-career retention initiatives can help keep workers on the job, as can succession planning and stay interviews in all at-risk occupations. Joint efforts between unions, employers and government to combat age discrimination in employment could help shift a workplace culture that presents barrier to retaining older workers; workplace violence reduction initiatives and mental health supports are also needed for front-line and at-risk workers. Governments and employers can also develop meaningful right to disconnect provisions to improve job quality for late-career workers.

Government investments in labour-market programming aimed at mid- and late-career workers (for example, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers) can help prevent and address long-term unemployment while fostering labour-force attachment into later life. **Pathways to retirement, including late-career counselling, financial planning, and worker-centred phased retirement initiatives**, can facilitate both extended working lives and greater security when workers decide to leave work.

Summary of Mandate Priority 4: Promoting continuous skills development throughout Canadians' working lives

Employers must make **access to continuing education and lifelong learning** a priority. Adopting the 80/20 professional development model and mentorship programs in workplaces can help cultivate a culture of learning. To foster trust and raise participation in workplace learning programs, unions should take the lead in identifying workplace literacy needs, essential skills needs and opportunities for learning, in consultation with adult literacy practitioners. EI benefits and services should also be expanded to help workers in transition upgrade their skills and education.

Governments should **renew and expand apprenticeship opportunities** to support the next generation of skilled tradespeople. Expanding the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) to include funding for brick-and-mortar investments and related projects will equip training centres to meet the new challenges and demands of the labour market.

Summary of Mandate Priority 5: Addressing barriers facing equity-deserving groups, and supporting diversity and inclusion in skills development and career extension efforts

Governments should **support employers and community organizations committed to hiring, training and retaining workers from underrepresented communities**. Working with unions, employers and territorial and provincial governments, the federal government should look for ways to expand training opportunities, career development supports, and employment services to Indigenous workers and youth, especially in Northern and rural communities, as well as to other marginalized workers. Regularization and other measures should also be developed to protect undocumented and non-status workers. Collaboration between governments is also needed to expand key public services tasked with protecting our forests, oceans, lakes and waterfront.

The federal government should also coordinate with the provinces and territories to **expand the newly formed child care program** to ensure it is flexible enough to allow more women, including single mothers, to enter and train in historically male-dominated occupations and industries such as the construction sector. **Flexible scheduling, flexible child care, and elder care** remain key preconditions for helping more workers, especially women, access training and employment. All levels of government should coordinate to implement initiatives, such as the right to access properly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), to support women in the trades and other occupations. Engaging and supporting unions' capacity in these areas should also be scaled up and expanded. This should build on the way that the UTIP program improves the participation of women and equity-deserving groups in the skilled trades, targeting women, Indigenous people, newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities and racialized workers. Governments, industry and unions can **scale up successful union pathways and other on-ramps to employment for workers with disabilities**. The federal, provincial and territorial governments should mandate negotiated community benefits agreements (CBAs) on government-funded construction projects to ensure training and apprenticeship opportunities flow to equity-deserving communities.

Introduction

Canada's medium- and long-term economic success depends on supporting workers through transitions, including by helping them to develop the skills employers need in growth sectors as the Canadian labour market changes. Complex overlapping socio-economic, technological and climate-related challenges are transforming Canada's labour force. Demographically, the workforce is aging, posing challenges for mid- and late-stage worker resilience, retention, the transition to a secure and adequate retirement, and workforce succession with the entry of new and younger workers.² The workforce is also becoming more diversified as women, Indigenous and racialized workers, newcomers, 2SLGBTQI+ workers and individuals from other equity-deserving groups move into new occupations and lines of work. Indigenous workers and newcomers will be particularly important to Canada's future labour-supply growth.³

Climate change and climate change policy are already reshaping work and employment, with even larger impacts on the horizon. The transition to net-zero emissions by mid-century is bringing seismic changes to the energy, forestry, manufacturing and transportation sectors.⁴ In both the private and public sectors, the digitalization of work and the spread of automation, artificial intelligence and algorithmic management are also causing widespread disruption and uncertainty.⁵ The division of powers and responsibilities between federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments adds an extra layer of complexity to these shifts.

Unions are in a unique position to understand and respond to this disruption and change. As workplace and community advocates for all working people, direct suppliers of training, educators, resources, and benefit providers, unions will be indispensable in

² Employment and Social Development Canada, *Canada's transforming labour market*. Presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table by Pierre Therrien, January 2024. The share of workers in Canada born outside of Canada is projected to continue to rise, while labour-force aging and labour-force participation rates are expected to stabilize once the baby boom generation retires; see S. Vézina et al., *Canadian Labour Force: What Will Happen Once Baby Boomers Retire?* Insights on Canadian Society Catalogue no. 75-006-X (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2024).

³ Indspire and the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, *The Contribution of Indigenous People to Future Labour Force Growth in Canada: An Update* (Ottawa: CSLS, 2023).

⁴ Canadian Labour Congress and Pembina Institute, *A Sustainable Jobs Blueprint Part I: Governance recommendations to support Canada's clean energy workforce and economy*, September 2023; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *OECD Employment Outlook 2024: The Net-Zero Transition and the Labour Market* (Paris: OECD, 2024).

⁵ See for instance *Implications of Artificial Intelligence Technologies for the Canadian Labour Force*, Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 44th Parliament, 1st Session, May 2024.

promoting the interests and voices of workers through economic and labour-market transitions. Unions are the largest worker-controlled, democratically governed organizations in Canada articulating and advancing the needs and interests of labour. Collective bargaining gives unions a platform for negotiating workplace standards, terms and conditions of employment, and innovative responses to challenges at work.

Union training centres are the primary suppliers of skilled trades training outside of universities and colleges, offering comprehensive programs for new and current tradespeople. These centres equip workers with the skills they will need to succeed in the low-carbon economy. Union-trained apprentices in the skilled trades are highly sought-after, with a majority of apprentices securing employment upon completion of their apprenticeships.

Working in conjunction with governments, employers, education providers and other interests, unions play a pivotal role and have a unique perspective on how to navigate the winds of change currently buffeting workers and workplaces. Unionized educators working in Canada's public college system provide a critical foundation for vocational training and education in Canada.

In the 2022 federal budget, the Government of Canada announced that Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) would form a Union-Led Advisory Table to elicit labour leaders' insights and recommendations for helping workers navigate the changing labour market.⁶

In December 2023, the Advisory Table convened its first meeting. Members agreed on October 31, 2024, as the deadline to deliver on their mandate. The Advisory Table, chaired by Canadian Labour Congress President Bea Bruske, convened a minimum of once per month, receiving presentations from economists, policy analysts and experts in a range of relevant fields, industry sectors and occupations. The Advisory Table's Secretariat, housed within ESDC, provided administrative, logistical and strategic support and guidance.

Advisory Table members agreed to advise ESDC in support of mandate priorities for the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development, and Official Languages and for the Minister of Labour and Seniors. Specifically, the Advisory Table's mandate was to inform the Government's skills and future of work agenda and foster a Canadian workforce that

⁶ The work of the Advisory Table is meant to be complementary but not connected to consultations on a just transition led by the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Labour. The recommendations contained in this report will also be shared with the Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council and Secretariat for their review and consideration before the next Sustainable Jobs Action Plan is developed.

can contribute to Canada's long-term economic success by helping workers upgrade their current skillsets for future jobs and sectors. This mandate included providing advice on actions and priorities for supporting skilled, mid-career workers affected by industry transitions.

In accordance with the Advisory Table's terms of reference, this report includes concrete areas of action to help workers gain the skills they need to navigate changes within their own sector, or to successfully transition to a job and sector that needs them. The issues discussed in this report affect workers in general and are by no means restricted to unionized workers; if anything, non-unionized workers need even more support given their lack of protection and representation in the workplace. The report's recommendations are not restricted to specific industries and occupations (for example, auto manufacturing or nursing) but instead apply broadly across sectors and lines of work.

The Advisory Table is keenly aware of the complexity of Canada's labour-market and workforce development system, particularly the shared responsibility for funding, designing and delivering programming in the Canadian federation.⁷ The Advisory Table recognizes that many of its recommendations will require not only provincial and territorial partners but also employers, training providers, educators and other actors to coordinate and get involved in these efforts.

Nevertheless, the recommendations in this report are primarily directed at the federal government, for good reason. Regardless of where they live, all workers in Canada deserve equal access to decent work, employment services, adjustment programs, training and learning opportunities, and high-quality public services. The Government of Canada has a responsibility to ensure that all workers—rural or urban, newcomer or Canadian-born—have the means to thrive in a turbulent, fast-changing economy, and as well as a responsibility to respect the full diversity of Canada's regional economies and local labour markets. Although our decentralized federation requires inter-governmental cooperation and coordination, our federal government in Ottawa remains responsible for defining and achieving a coherent, national vision for labour-market policy.

The importance of this national leadership role cannot be overstated. While the Advisory Table has strived to set out concrete, practical recommendations for policy makers in this report, in other instances, the federal government can have the greatest impact by helping convene social partners and stakeholders around shared objectives so that they

⁷ ESDC presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table on federal programming for workers in transition, May 2024.

themselves can identify specific, granular solutions tailored to individual industries and occupations.

The Advisory Table was comprised to reflect the broad range of industries, sectors and occupations at risk of disruption and change; while not every industry and occupation could be directly represented on the Advisory Table, the views of labour experts from non-participating unions were solicited, and the final report aims to reflect their interests and needs.

The Advisory Table's mandate did not extend to providing recommendations in the areas of macroeconomic, trade or industrial policy. However, Advisory Table members felt strongly that a worker-centred economic policy geared toward preserving and expanding good jobs is the necessary basis for high-quality opportunities for workers who are at risk of disruption and change. Saving good jobs while expanding investment in infrastructure, manufacturing, housing, private and public services, and industrial development is essential for giving workers the ability to adjust to technological and climate-related forces.⁸ A well-designed and resourced labour-market policy is important but inadequate in the absence of sound economic, trade and industrial strategy focused on creating good jobs, economic development across Canada, and shared prosperity.

Similarly, properly funded and resourced public services are necessary for supporting at-risk workers not just in public services like health care, but in all industries.⁹ A commonly overlooked but essential component of a successful community transition is high-quality, well-funded health, education and social services.¹⁰ Restored funding is crucial to ensuring that training and labour-market supports are available to help workers adjust. Public education and training require government investment to put skills development programming in place for workers who need expanded opportunities for upskilling and reskilling.

⁸ L. Osberg, "Full Employment in Canada in the Early 21st Century," Dalhousie University Department of Economics working paper 2018-02, May 2018.

⁹ For instance, with one third of 55- to 64-year-olds and one quarter of those age 65 and over providing unpaid care to a care-dependent adult in 2022, ensuring high-quality, accessible, public long-term care is essential to retaining mid- and late-career workers; Rosanna Tamburri, "How to help older Canadians continue to work," *Policy Options*, July 2024.

¹⁰ See for instance the findings of the social resilience audit undertaken in conjunction with the closure of the local coal mine in the town of Hanna, Alberta: Lana Wells, Julie L. Drolet, and Lianne Lee, *Supporting Individuals and Communities in a Changing Landscape: A Social Resilience Audit in Partnership with Hanna Learning Centre* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 2020).

Mandate Priority 1: Identifying the needs of workers in industries, sectors and occupations facing transitions and disruptions

Over the course of nearly a year, the Advisory Table gathered evidence on a wide range of needs, pressures and risks workers face across a variety of industries, occupations and regions. These pressures and risks are discussed in detail in this report.

A common thread across the diverse range of experience that the Advisory Table reviewed was the deep institutional deficit in identifying and responding to the needs of workers in industries, sectors and occupations undergoing transition. Most of Canada has insufficient and uneven opportunities for workers to make their voices, needs and interests heard on a permanent, continuing basis. Few permanent consultative bodies exist where workers, through unions, can participate in systematic information-gathering and sharing, coordination among the social partners, and negotiated planning. Unions are effective at collectively identifying and solving problems through dialogue and negotiation. However, they need a framework for ongoing information-sharing and dialogue to accomplish this.

The exception to the rule in Canada is Quebec. The Government of Quebec and social partners in the province established the *Commission des partenaires du marché du travail* (CPMT, commission of labour market partners) 25 years ago to facilitate adaptation to changes in the labour market. The Commission is a unique space where the Quebec government and representatives of the union, employer, community and education movements come together for social dialogue.¹¹

Outside of Quebec's rich ecosystem of social dialogue, facilitated by the CPMT, institutionalized social dialogue is relatively weak at the workplace, industry, sector and occupational levels.¹² Collective bargaining and social dialogue are well-established and effective in many areas of the economy. However, in other industries and occupations, there is a lack of ongoing institutionalized dialogue that allows the social partners to

¹¹ To achieve its mission and exercise its responsibilities, the CPMT relies on the participation of approximately a thousand partners that are involved in a network of regional sectoral organizations representing underrepresented groups. This network includes 29 sectoral workforce committees, 17 regional councils of labour market partners, 8 advisory committees that represent groups underrepresented in the labour market, as well as the Metropolitan Employment Council. Underpinning the CPMT's architecture is the Quebec law imposing a 1% training levy on enterprises above a certain size that do not provide employee training directly.

¹² Highlighting the distinct and unique level of concertation in Quebec is not meant to suggest that social dialogue at the sectoral and other levels is altogether absent in other parts of Canada; see for instance the Association of Industry Sector Councils in Nova Scotia: <https://www.aisc.ca/>.

discuss; negotiate; collaborate; identify common challenges, gaps and needs; and work together on solutions.

Consultation, dialogue and engagement are essential because climate change, automation and technological change affect communities and local economies alongside workers and workplaces. When industry and workplaces make decisions with far-reaching impacts, workers need, deserve and demand a seat at the table. They must be included in negotiating decisions that affect their lives, and inclusive, accountable sectoral tables are an indispensable way to make their voices heard.

Recommendations and Areas for Action

1.1. Re-establish sectoral partnership tables to identify and address the specific needs of workers in different industry sectors and occupations in a modern, transitioning economy

Canada's Sector Council Program was a federal government initiative intended to enhance workforce productivity and innovation through industry-targeted skills development and social dialogue among labour, business, government and community stakeholders. At a time of rapid labour market transformation, acute recruitment and retention pressures, lacklustre productivity growth and intensification of global competition for new productive investments, sector councils could serve a strategic purpose once again, helping to further differentiate Canada as a highly skilled, highly innovative economy.

Sectoral tables are not only a forum for addressing skill shortages, training needs, and recruitment of internationally trained workers; they are also a venue for discussing many of the critical issues raised in this report:

- workforce mental health challenges
- recruitment, retention and succession planning
- the employment, training, health and safety, and human rights consequences of artificial intelligence, automation, digitalization and technological change in the workplace
- fatigue due to understaffing and excessive workload
- the needs of migrant, immigrant and undocumented workers working in the sector
- inclusion, equity and diversity goals
- other industry labour force challenges

Sectoral tables facilitate labour-market research on areas of industry growth and skill gaps resulting from the shift to a net-zero economy. Ideally, sectoral tables would also

permit an integrated supply chain approach by identifying how investments in a particular industry will yield demand for different types of jobs along the supply chain and would allow for the development of training plans for those jobs.

For example, trade-exposed heavy industry such as steelmaking, aluminum and cement must be included in efforts to decarbonize and develop a clean manufacturing sector. However, specific job shifts and skill shifts will require a different approach to workforce development than shifts focused on clean technology. In addition to industry-specific labour adjustment, sectoral tables can help protect existing collective agreements, maintaining jobs in industries and communities wherever possible. With government support, sectoral tables can help create a jobs strategy aimed at keeping good jobs in Canada, tying procurement and public investments to job guarantees, developing training programs, and establishing strategies for addressing automation and technological change.

Workers affected by AI, automation and technological change need opportunities and support to move to other jobs, access training, maintain their incomes or bridge to decent pensions. In cases where greenfield automation threatens sudden, mass technological unemployment, automation can have serious negative impacts on communities and local economies.¹³ Advanced information-sharing, collaboration and cooperation is required to mitigate the impacts of automation; the business case for automation and workplace technological change (including workplace artificial intelligence) should therefore be negotiated with workers, and unions should be informed and involved. Regulators should be given statutory authority to require economic impact assessments and negotiated memoranda between employers and unions outlining full mitigation plans.

Artificial intelligence and digital transformations will displace some workers while improving aspects of work for others. However, these technologies also have the potential to reinforce existing inequality, increase bias and discrimination, and undermine workers' privacy rights. These risks extend to workers in low-skilled and semi-skilled jobs as well as in high-skilled occupations.

The Advisory Table urges governments to implement a comprehensive suite of supports, including training and transitional benefits, to assist workers who lose their jobs due to AI. However, labour adjustment supports should be accompanied by

¹³ Prism Economics and Analysis, *Economic Impact Study of Digitization and Automation of Marine Port Terminal Operations in British Columbia*, July 2019. Greenfield automation refers to investment in brand new, fully automated facilities that displace older facilities elsewhere, as opposed to incremental or even large-scale automation at existing worksites ("brownfield" investment).

strengthened workplace rights when new workplace technologies are adopted. To minimize harm, unions and workers must be informed and consulted before AI and other digital technologies are introduced in workplaces. All jurisdictions should develop a strong regulatory AI oversight regime to ensure responsible use. Regulations should ban harmful uses of AI such as emotion recognition, social scoring or human behaviour manipulation, including in the workplace, and clear requirements should be in place wherever fully or semi-automated AI decision-making is used, such as the right to information and the right to request a human review.

1.2. Implement sector-specific initiatives to support workers in industries in transition, address critical human resource challenges and promote sectoral dialogue

The 2024 federal budget indicated the Government's intention to form a sectoral table on the care economy; this type of initiative should be extended to other critical industries and sectors. To be clear, the Advisory Table is not recommending restoring the prior sectoral council program. Rather, sectoral partnership tables should initially be established in select at-risk industries currently undergoing significant change-related pressures or that are expected to in coming years. Some of these industries already have effective sectoral tables, but others lack an industry table for coordinating, cooperating and planning, despite significant need. Others nominally have tables but do not have secure, stable funding and support for their activities.

Given the acute state of staffing shortages and need to coordinate across jurisdictions and professions, health care, for example, would greatly benefit from a sectoral table, as ensuring adequate highly trained health care professionals in all regions of Canada is significantly more difficult without pan-Canadian coordination and dialogue. A sectoral table on public health care could work with professional bodies, regulators, health care unions, employers, educational institutions and provincial and territorial governments to ensure the next generation of health care professionals has access to adequate training, clinical placements and mentorship opportunities.

Unions and employers should be consulted on relaunching sector councils, including the future of existing sectoral tables. While sector councils continue to function in specific industry sectors, they are often underfunded and under supported. Project-specific funding currently allocated to the Sectoral Workplace Solutions Program¹⁴

¹⁴ ESDC's application-based Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program (SWSP) provides multi-year funding for individual skill development projects in a wide range of sectors; see <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/sectoral-workforce-solutions-program.html>.

should be reallocated toward a relaunch of sector council skills dialogues, starting on a pilot basis with two or three strategic industries (for example, transportation, telecommunications).

Areas for Action

1.2.1. Support energy workers impacted by the transition to a low-carbon economy—particularly in the oil and gas industry—by investing in new large-scale infrastructure projects and green technologies

The move to a low-carbon economy has displaced many workers, leaving them struggling with little support.¹⁵ Without appropriate training, support and guidance, these workers have a hard time securing other employment opportunities and face persistent and ongoing hardships.¹⁶ Over half of all displaced oil and gas sector workers experience at least a 30% drop in earnings and benefits.

The job opportunities available to displaced workers, especially in the oil and gas sector, must be appealing and comparable to current opportunities. Communities suffer if they are unable to attract investment in renewables, or when they go from having projects that utilize many workers to projects that require very few; governments must invest in green jobs that provide long-term employment and comparable benefits. Expanded investment in clean energy technology helps fight climate change and provides job opportunities for displaced workers.

Finally, it is important to consider the broader, community-wide impact of industrial transition and labour-market disruption.¹⁷ In addition to maintaining jobs in existing industries and communities as much as possible, reinvestment and redevelopment plans for local economies and public services must support the broader community experiencing the impact of labour-market transition in major industries.

¹⁵ See for instance, Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities, *A Just and Fair Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities: Final Report* (Ottawa: Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2019).

¹⁶ Navius Research presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table on transitions for energy sector workers, March 2024. The new Sustainable Jobs Training Fund represents an important acknowledgement of this need.

¹⁷ H. Mertins-Kirkwood and Z. Deshpande, *Who is included in a Just Transition? Considering social equity in Canada's shift to a zero-carbon economy* (Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2019). The Government of Canada's Canada Retraining and Opportunities Initiative, targeting communities affected by mass layoffs, represents an acknowledgement of the broader effects of industrial restructuring. However, the Advisory Table is unaware of any continuous tracking of mass layoffs maintained by the federal government.

1.2.2. Launch an auto parts supplier transition support program to support sectoral dialogue in the automotive sector

The federal government must dedicate resources to a comprehensive risk assessment of Canada's auto parts industry, the largest employment sub-sector of the auto industry and most vulnerable to disruption from the shift to zero emission vehicles. This work will require partnership between the federal and provincial governments. It is vital for governments to understand the country's supplier vulnerabilities, know where these firms are located and develop strategies to support them. Governments must proactively identify at-risk suppliers and coordinate directly with them with respect to future product plans, advising them of government supports and linking them with new customers as the electric vehicle industry grows to manage this transition in a constructive way. By working with unions, governments can also determine the most appropriate training and the transitional supports that workers need. Transition supports should be conditional on firms maintaining both collective bargaining agreements and production in Canada.

1.2.3. Establish a Forestry Adjustment Board to support sectoral dialogue in the forestry sector

A Forestry Adjustment Board would monitor sector developments (to gain advance warning of possible adverse events), align various existing programs, recognize regional differences, and allocate additional resources to support transitions across the provincial forestry sector in coming years. The goal of this integrated Forestry Adjustment Board would not be solely to assist workers and communities affected by facility closures and job losses—although the reality is that this will continue to be a painful but necessary challenge in the industry. The Board is also intended to facilitate transitions to alternative growing opportunities within the sector (including upskilling and relocation, where necessary).¹⁸ The Board will be essential in helping forestry workers in British Columbia, Quebec, New Brunswick and other provinces adapt.

1.2.4. Create a dedicated labour market adjustment program for critical industries in transition, including the automotive industry

In Canada's uneven system of labour adjustment, far too great a burden falls on individual displaced workers.¹⁹ Beyond providing a minimum notice requirement,

¹⁸ A full description and rationale for a forestry industry adjustment board is contained in BC Forestry Workers, *A Better Future for B.C. Forestry: A Sector Strategy for Sustainable, Value-Added Forest Industries* (Vancouver, 2024).

¹⁹ OECD, *Back to Work: Canada Improving the Re-employment Prospects of Displaced Workers* (Paris: OECD, 2015).

Canadian employers laying off workers face few other regulatory restrictions and obligations to laid-off employees.²⁰ Programming to provide income support and employment assistance, divided between multiple levels of government, is notoriously complex and difficult for individual workers to navigate.²¹ As a consequence, displaced workers (especially older, long-tenured workers) commonly struggle to find new jobs, and when they do, they experience significant earnings losses.

The federal jurisdiction is unusual in that it requires employers to form a joint planning committee and develop an adjustment program to eliminate the necessity for termination of employment or to minimize the impact of the termination of employment on the redundant employees and to assist those employees in obtaining other employment.²² Advisory Table members noted that legislation in all jurisdictions should be in place to require adjustment and training committees, with worker representation, to give displaced workers a better chance of swiftly finding suitable re-employment.

In coordination with the provinces, and with the advice of industry and union partners (organized into sectoral councils, where they exist), the federal government should promote the development and delivery of a variety of job transition supports for workers affected by job displacement resulting from climate change policy or significant technological change. These supports would include:

- tailored income maintenance
- labour market readiness
- skills upgrading
- relocation assistance
- early retirement bridging
- other supports necessary for successful labour market adjustment

In some provinces, several of these supports are currently provided with Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA) funding. However, systematic labour adjustment and transition planning in at-risk industries and occupations should be developed in all provinces through social dialogue at the sector council level.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Bonen and M. Oschinski, *Mapping Canada's Training Ecosystem: Much Needed and Long Overdue*.

²² See *Canada Labour Code* s. 221 (1) and Division IX *passim*.

1.2.5. Develop a pan-Canadian health human resources strategy to deal with health care staffing shortages and retention and recruitment challenges ²³

The Advisory Table discussed the urgent need for integrated workforce planning and coordination among stakeholders, including health care unions, with a strong federal role. Accurate, timely, comparable and publicly available data on current staffing shortages and projections of future needs are essential.

First and foremost, a health human resource strategy would need to be integrated with full funding of the public health care system, systematic opposition to privatization and outsourcing of health care, and the proper regulation and management of virtual care.²⁴ Such a strategy would also feature incentives for health professionals to work in rural and remote areas, including relocation assistance, housing subsidies and enhanced support for professional development, as housing costs and moving expenses currently constitute an obstacle to mobility. The national harmonization of standards and certification requirements for health professionals would further facilitate geographic mobility.

In Indigenous communities, recruiting and retaining Indigenous workers will help ensure culturally appropriate care. In much the same way that the building trades, governments and construction associations have fostered education campaigns promoting careers in the skilled trades, unions and governments could partner to de-stigmatize careers in health services to recruit Indigenous people, women and young workers to health care work.

A health human resources strategy would also prioritize training, with additional funding for public colleges and universities to create more spaces to train health professionals.

²³ See quarterly job vacancies for health care workers compiled in Statistics Canada CANSIM table 14-10-0443-01. Also see presentations to the Union-Led Advisory Table by James Janeiro and Liv Mendelsohn, Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence, June 2024, and Pierre Therrien, Employment and Social Development Canada, January 2024; Summary of results (2022-2031) - Canadian Occupational Projection System (COPS) - Canada.ca (esdc.gc.ca). This report uses the terms “skill shortages” and “staffing shortages” but avoids the expressions “labour shortage” or “worker shortage” due to inherent conceptual and empirical problems with the assumption of general “labour shortages”; see Jim Stanford, “Interrogating the Labour Shortage Hypothesis,” Testimony to the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, October 4, 2023, October 11, 2023, available at <https://centreforfuturework.ca/2023/10/11/interrogating-the-labour-shortage-hypothesis/>.

²⁴ Joan Almost, *Opening the Black Box: Unpacking the Use of Nursing Agencies in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, 2024); specifically, the Advisory Table calls for restoring federal funding for health care to 35% of total provincial and territorial public health care expenditure, with a goal of returning to funding 50% of expenditures. Federal funding must also attach conditions to ensure transfers go to the public health care system. Consistent with the principles and objectives of this report, expanded and renewed funding of the public health care system must be accompanied by the full protection of jobs and bargaining rights for health workers currently employed in the private sector.

Additionally, the federal government could work collaboratively with provincial and territorial governments to actively promote the full range of health professions as rewarding career paths, ensuring a steady influx of talent into the health care sector as a whole.

When health care professionals are recruited internationally to cope with staffing shortages, they must be hired in conformity with ethical international recruitment standards, principally the *World Health Organization 2010 Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel*. There are thousands of internationally educated health professionals (IEHPs) living in Canada who are unemployed or who are employed in a non-health care field. In 2021, over 76% of the approximately 260,000 IEHPs in Canada were employed, and of those, more than four out of ten were not employed in health occupations. The federal government could support a streamlined credential recognition process and enhanced integration of IEHPs into our health care system to ensure IEHPs who are already in Canada are working in their health care profession. This process would be accompanied by concerted measures to optimize health workers' time spent directly caring for patients and to better use their skills in required tasks and roles ("scope of practice optimization").

This work must be prioritized over recruitment from abroad, where workers are being recruited from countries with existing health care worker shortages. Canada's focus should be on recruiting and retaining domestically trained nurses and health care workers, leading to good jobs in our communities. Canada should also support IEHPs who are already in Canada by expanding pathways to integration into our health care workplaces and communities, and swiftly providing citizenship for them and their families.

1.2.6. Develop a pan-Canadian child care workforce initiative to deal with the child care workforce crisis

If the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreements are to be successful, child care centres must recruit and retain qualified professionals. However, low pay, lack of benefits and difficult working conditions are drawing qualified child care workers away from the profession, leading to a staffing crisis in the sector. According to Statistics Canada, nearly nine in ten child care centres reported difficulties in filling vacant positions in 2022.²⁵ Any further child care funding to provinces and territories must therefore be conditional on increased compensation and improved working conditions, alongside continued expansion of public, nonprofit and Indigenous-led spaces.

²⁵ Statistics Canada, "Canadian Survey on the Provision of Child Care Services," Statistics Canada, *The Daily*, March 22, 2023).

Recruiting and retaining qualified professionals in the child care sector while maintaining low fees for parents and ensuring inclusive access are key for Canadians to access full-time employment. Moreover, publicly managed expansion models and expansion through publicly owned facilities can ensure more equitable access to child care services across the country, thereby limiting the number of child care deserts and allowing more Canadian parents to work.

1.2.7. Develop a sophisticated, granular national labour market management information system for the skilled trades and construction sector

The combination of an expected shift in skilled trades labour market requirements as the economy transitions away from oil and gas to net-zero, a severe housing crisis, and demographic changes in the skilled trades worker population will necessitate more sophisticated labour market management information systems that are accessible to businesses, governments and unions. The Advisory Table recommends that the federal government should fund a sophisticated national skilled trades labour market information system, alongside a re-established construction sector council and the previously recommended national skills assessment and inventory to mitigate this significant labour market transition.

Such a system would combine labour forecast inputs from major construction projects (valued at \$1 billion or more) sourced from federal departments, provincial and municipal governments, First Nations, and private sector proponents to create a publicly accessible database for national skilled trades workforce planning at a granular, skills-based level.

Funding such a system would:

- allow rapid matching of workers in sectors and regions experiencing disruption and/or displacement with current and future projects aligned with their skills, ensuring high-quality jobs are retained throughout transitions and that re-training is targeted toward near-term employment opportunities
- enable building trades unions to accurately forecast apprenticeship intakes to absorb displaced workers from other sectors with adjacent/tacit skills while allowing skilled trades workers to reskill or upskill
- enable governments and the private sector to accurately and granularly forecast skilled trades construction labour availability for major industrial, commercial and investment (ICI) and civil projects, providing the conditions necessary to coordinate and time projects to maximize employment opportunities as displacement and/or disruption occurs in some sectors and demand grows in others

- permit better-informed labour market impact assessments (LMIAs) that accurately reflect the need for migrant workers with temporary work permits matched against domestic availability of displaced workers

1.3. Develop a comprehensive national skills assessment and inventory for workers in at-risk industries and occupations

Mapping and assessing shifting skill demands for at-risk workers is crucial in managing industry and occupational transitions. Auto workers, for example, face evolving work processes as well as the steady shift to electric vehicle and parts production, and a national skills assessment and inventory is essential in managing the transition to net zero.²⁶ Other manufacturing industries, including aerospace, electronics, food and beverage, and transportation equipment manufacturing would similarly benefit. A skills inventory would help stakeholders identify projected needs and existing gaps, assess capacity and access issues, and promote training opportunities for workers.

Such a map or skills inventory could include:²⁷

1. a database of training and education programs and providers
2. a classification system (or “taxonomy”) of skills and other job requirements that reflects how job seekers and employers think and talk about skills
3. linkages that map the training database to skills and other work requirements described in the taxonomy

1.4. Invest in accessible, effective career development services to assist workers in transition

Canada has a world-leading public education system and various services targeting unemployed workers. However, the third pillar in this edifice—career development services for workers who need to proactively anticipate and adjust to change, in part through upskilling and reskilling—is missing.²⁸ Few working adults in Canada make use of career development services, for reasons ranging from a general lack of awareness

²⁶ Unifor, *Navigating the Road Ahead: Rebuilding Canada’s Powerhouse Auto Sector* (Toronto: Unifor, 2022), p. 30.

²⁷ T. Bonen and M. Oschinski, *Mapping Canada’s Training Ecosystem: Much Needed and Long Overdue*, IRPP Insight, 2021.

²⁸ Blueprint presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table on supporting mid-career workers, April 2024.

and access to information, to workload, caregiving and financial burdens.²⁹ However, those who do report positive experiences. Unemployed workers are more likely to take advantage of career development opportunities, but other workers who are most in need—lower-wage, precariously employed workers with lower levels of formal educational attainment—are least likely to access these services.

Career development services, including personalized supports, are crucial for older workers, as they report lower confidence in their job searches.³⁰ Governments can offer career guidance, growth and progression services to overcome information gaps and strengthen confidence among older workers, including those who lack professional and personal networks for entering new professions and industries. Career development services should include:

- prior Learning Assessment and Recognition to help workers assess their learning needs and options
- accessible information about the range of learning options available, and readily available and understandable information on how workers can access the learning opportunity that is best for them
- information about the costs and benefits of skills upgrading to help workers make an informed decision in their best interest

In-person, face-to-face contact with well-trained skills development counsellors and supplemental web-based information is the best way to achieve this.

The government should make accompanying and reinforcing investments in literacy, numeracy and digital skills for workers who need to strengthen essential skills (including the proposal below for a union-led workplace literacy and essential skills strategy). Effective career development services depend on high-quality, accessible labour-market information, such as a national skills inventory. Finally, the government should put a comprehensive communications strategy in place to ensure that at-risk workers receive information on and access to career guidance and employment services.

²⁹ Future Skills Centre, *Are Adults Making Use of Career Services in Canada?* 2021. According to the OECD, Australia's Skills Checkpoint for Older Workers program helps workers aged 40 years and over to access support and guidance in their career through career assessment and one-on-one career guidance with an advisor. The program also provides recommendations on further skills training to support workers in a current role, a new role, or when transitioning to a new career. OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

³⁰ OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

1.5. Promote continuous social dialogue, collaboration and coordination

Quebec's CPMT demonstrates the advantages of institutionalized social dialogue regarding labour-market programming. The federal government's promised Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council is a further example of institutionalized social dialogue on skills and workforce development.

Area for Action

1.5.1. Introduce a representative advisory committee on skills training and labour-force development within the EI Commission comprised of unions, employers and government

An EI Advisory Council within the EI Commission comprised of union, employer and other representatives could be tasked with gathering research and providing advice to the EI Commission on aspects of the EI program affecting skills development and employment services. The Union-Led Advisory Table wants to underscore that adding an advisory council would not reduce ministerial powers or prerogatives; rather, the council would generate research, share information and provide advice.

The federal government should also promote greater consultation, transparency and accountability in provincial/territorial spending and delivery of LMDA programming through a federal expectation that provinces and territories will create and maintain labour-employer advisory committees at the subnational level.

Mandate Priority 2: Improving supports for mid-career workers, particularly those in at-risk sectors and jobs, to help them access and participate in training and improve their capacity to manage transitions

Both currently employed, and unemployed and displaced workers deserve access to suitable, high-quality training and learning programs. According to the International Labour Organization, access to continuous learning opportunities at work is an important aspect of decent work.

The Advisory Table heard how important upskilling, continuous adult education and lifelong learning are for building worker resilience in the face of workplace change. The Table discussed the situation of workers who wish to participate in professional development and continuous learning but face barriers in workload, staffing shortages, cost and other constraints.

All workers in at-risk industries and jobs need protection and support. However, mid- and later-career workers facing disruption and transition have specific needs. Older workers change jobs less frequently than younger workers; they are also less likely than younger workers to change jobs voluntarily (voluntary job changes tend to produce better outcomes than involuntary job changes). In other words, dismissals rise with age as a share of job moves, and downward job mobility is a risk for older workers. When older workers in low-skilled occupations do change jobs, they are more likely to move to another low-skilled occupation.

Worker participation in training also tends to decline with age. According to the OECD's Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), on average only a quarter of adults aged 55–65 participate in job-related training compared to more than 40% of adults aged 45–54.³¹ One international survey found that roughly half of employers offer support for mid-career and older workers to complete training, and that significantly fewer mid-career and older workers had received training in the previous three years than younger workers.³²

However, it is a myth that all older workers are resistant to learning and training opportunities or that older workers do not benefit from upskilling. International research suggests that for mid- and late-career workers, the leading barriers to participating in training are affordability, time, limited training offers, not knowing whether the training is

³¹ OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*.

³² OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

worthwhile, and difficulties in finding the right course or training provider.³³ It is therefore crucial to identify the specific training needs of mid-career and older workers, assess and validate their skills and competencies, and tailor training to the needs of older workers instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.³⁴ Unions play a key role in this process by providing training and skills assessment, helping to ensure workers do not view workplace learning as a management threat or an empty promise.

Administered through bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments, labour market transfers are a primary mechanism for funding labour-market programming in Canada. These transfer agreements need consistent, improved funding so access to training courses for unemployed workers can be expanded and to meet the training needs of employed people. Unions must also be consulted on the design and delivery of programming funded through the transfers.

Canada suffers from chronically inadequate and uneven employer investment in workplace training. To combat this issue, employers must share responsibility for the time required and training expenses.³⁵ Quebec handles this most efficiently through the 1% training levy. Outside Quebec, industry has resisted this approach. Either way, employers must share responsibility for the time and expense of training.

Federal investments in training must deliver the skills that are needed in a sustainable economy. It is vital that union training centres deliver training. These not-for-profit centres have a strong record of training workers to the highest standards, as courses are delivered by qualified instructors and align with real job opportunities.

Public universities and colleges are also essential to delivering high-quality training for workers from all industries. For-profit institutions will not deliver the training workers need and will weaken the effectiveness of training investments.

³³ OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*.

³⁴ Fang, T., Gunderson, M. and Lee, B. "Can Older Workers Be Retrained? Canadian Evidence from Worker-Firm Linked Data," *Relations industrielles/Industrial Relations*, 76:3 (2021).

³⁵ Future Skills Centre, *Employer-Sponsored Skills Training: A Picture of Skills Training Opportunities Provided by Canadian Employers*, 2023.

Recommendations and Areas for Action

2.1. Enhance and adequately support the proven and effective mid-career transition tools and services already in place

Areas for Action

2.1.1. Create a training benefit modelled after the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) to support skilled tradespeople and other workers affected by the transition to a low-carbon economy

The federal government can help workers successfully weather the transition by allocating existing infrastructure funds, economic development funds, employment and training supports, and other programs to support displaced and soon-to-be-displaced workers.

A training program like the UTIP could be developed to retrain workers with the skills they need to succeed.³⁶ Such a program could provide funding for workers to train in new and emerging technologies or update their skills to obtain other meaningful jobs, including in non-construction jobs in clean manufacturing and critical minerals. The UTIP has proven to be a great model, as its use by training centres and their partners demonstrates.³⁷

Public colleges and universities should also be funded to play a role in assisting workers affected by this transition.

2.1.2. Introduce multi-year core funding and support for worker-led labour adjustment centres

When workers lose their jobs, they need support. For years now, unions have responded, in part, by setting up worker “action centres” to support members facing layoffs and job transitions; in Ontario, for example, unions have relied on the provincial government’s Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP), funded through federal LMDA monies. Action centres deliver a range of critically important services that are heavily utilized by workers, in a unique environment built on peer support. This approach responds to local worker adjustment needs, encourages worker engagement, eases

³⁶ ESDC’s Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) provides several streams of funding in support of apprenticeship training, innovative skills development, and the Red Seal trades across Canada. See <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/union-training-innovation.html>. A Sustainable Jobs stream has recently been added; see <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/funding/cas-utip-sustainable-jobs-stream.html>.

³⁷ Employment and Social Development Canada, Evaluation Directorate, Strategic and Service Policy Branch, *Evaluation of the Union Training and Innovation Program: Final Report*, January 2022.

anxiety and builds confidence. Action centre supports include a variety of services and interventions that both enhance employability and support workers through a difficult period of transition. Services can be roughly divided into two broad categories: labour market readiness and social supports. These supports are particularly important and beneficial for workers who are disadvantaged in the labour market and require a more comprehensive range of services in the adjustment process.

For mid-career workers, trying to navigate a transitioning job market and a complex training system on their own can be daunting at the best of times; peer helpers and action centre staff provide essential support. Unifor, for instance, currently assists eight such action centres in Ontario. These centres directly help displaced members impacted by plant closures, including auto assembly and parts plants retooling for EV production, within targeted geographical areas in proximity to assembly plants. Organizing workers through action centres has enabled Unifor to establish training partnerships for in-demand skills in battery cell production in conjunction with community colleges, for example. These centres also serve as convenient and centralized recruitment hubs for employers.

Support for the use of actions centres is needed across Canada to maintain vital services for the newly unemployed, enable workers to access critical information, and better integrate displaced workers into vast provincial employment service networks in a peer-supported environment. Governments should assign dedicated, annual funding for developing community-based action centres, including through joint sponsorships with provinces and partnerships with unions.

2.1.3. Promote more flexible scheduling, access to paid leave, and flexible, high-quality child and elder care to improve workers' access to training and employment

Tuition subsidies are critical for low-income workers to access and participate in training, but financial assistance with the cost of transportation, child care, meals and course materials is also important.³⁸ A common priority for younger and older workers alike is control over scheduling and the number of days worked. In some instances, seniority provisions in collective agreements afford this control for longer-tenured workers. In the first instance, flexibility must be negotiated with unions to ensure that scheduling and hours of work respect workers' needs and interests. Accommodative work arrangements should be improved by ensuring paid leave (for example, for mid-

³⁸ Amr Soliman et al., *Improving the Participation of Low-Skilled Adults in Lifelong Learning in Canada*, McGill University Max Bell School of Public Policy, 2021.

and late-career workers with unpaid caregiving responsibilities) and flexible child care for parents and caregivers, especially women and Indigenous workers starting careers in construction and health care.³⁹

2.1.4. Provide support for industry-based, nationally portable standards and certification programs for mid-career workers with high levels of tacit skills and on-the-job learning but lower levels of formal education and few credentials

For workers with extensive work experience and on-the-job learning but low levels of formal education, recognition and accreditation of prior learning can give older workers and newcomers the credentials they need to successfully manage transitions in the labour market. Tacit skills acquired at work should be better recognized not only to assist with adjustment and job mobility, but also to provide a baseline for acquisition of new skills.

For example, CertWORK+ was the result of a collaboration between the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME) to develop national occupational standards and a certification program for front-line production jobs and entry-level management positions in the manufacturing sector. The CLC and CME partnered with the Canadian Skills Training and Employment Coalition (CSTEC) to develop a suite of industry-validated national occupational standards for production worker jobs in the manufacturing sector. These standards established clear, objective benchmarks for the skills and knowledge workers need to perform these production jobs. The CSTEC was key in ensuring the occupational standards were used to develop a certification system to formally assess and certify the skills, knowledge and experience of production workers. CertWORK+'s greatest success was as a labour adjustment program. Governments should support the development of similar industry skills assessment and certification programs.

2.2. Adapt federal program policies to support mid-career training opportunities

Areas for Action

³⁹ Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence, presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table, June 2024. A good discussion of the challenge of providing both flexible and non-standard hours child care to working parents who need it is contained in Childcare Resource and Research Unit, *Developing Non-Standard Hours Child Care*, March 2022.

2.2.1. Mandate that training funds provided by the federal government through transfer arrangements such as the Labour Market Development Agreements provide measurable outcomes and results, and that training is provided solely by not-for-profit training centres

The federal government transfers approximately \$2.5 billion annually to support skills training, employment programming and support measures delivered each year at the provincial/territorial level via Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) with provincial and territorial governments. Employees and employers pay for training and labour-market programming funded through Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act*, yet they have a limited institutionalized role in providing oversight, feedback and recommendations regarding that EI-funded programming (excluding in Quebec). Advisory Table members urge all levels of government to institutionalize continuous engagement of the social partners to provide input and ensure accountability for these expenditures and programming decisions.

Federally funded training should be accredited and provided by qualified, experienced instructors; accredited training centres must demonstrate value-for-money and measurable outcomes (i.e. showing that retrained workers successfully obtain new jobs). The federal government should ensure that pop-up, for-profit training centres cannot access federal training funds and that the provinces and territories move away from relying on for-profit training centres, especially in the construction and energy sectors.

2.2.2. Restore LMDA funding withheld in Budget 2024

Advisory Table members felt strongly that the federal government should immediately restore the \$625 million in labour-market transfers (the LMDAs and Workforce Development Agreements) that were withheld in Budget 2024. The federal government's funding reduction effectively returns skills training and employment benefits funding to pre-2017 levels at a time when skills training and labour-market development investments are needed more than ever—and despite the fact that the federal government is expanding access to EI Part II funds to employed workers. This decision jeopardizes successful and timely renegotiation of labour-market transfer agreements with the provinces and territories, leaving the future uncertain for the programs and benefits that employed and unemployed workers, newcomers to Canada, and vulnerable Canadians depend on to find and retain work.

2.2.3. Improve access to Employment Insurance to provide temporary replacement income and employment services for workers in transition

The Employment Insurance program is Canada's most important automatic stabilizer and source of income support and employment services for unemployed workers. Constitutionally, EI lies within the federal government's domain, although EI-funded

labour-market programming is funded and delivered through bilateral Labour Market Development Agreements with the provinces and territories.

Improving access to Employment Insurance benefits is critical to extending income support, adjustment assistance and employment services to vulnerable workers in precarious work, including women, racialized workers, newcomers, workers with disabilities and young workers. Through a combination of program cuts in the 1990s and subsequent increases in non-standard forms of employment, just two in five jobless workers today (and as few as one in five in large cities) draw EI benefits. This means that many of the most vulnerable EI contributors, who need and would benefit most from EI benefits and EI-funded services (for example, low-paid workers in part-time, casual and precarious jobs), cannot access the EI program.⁴⁰

The federal government has recognized that significant reforms are needed to ensure that EI is ready for the 21st century. The federal government's compassionate response to the 2020 unemployment crisis showed what expanded access to a more adequate EI system could mean for working people. Joblessness is a leading factor in child poverty in Canada; the introduction of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) helped lower the child poverty rate in Canada, which surged in 2021 following the cessation of the CERB.⁴¹ The Advisory Table urges the government to:

- Reinstatement of the 2021–2022 EI “temporary measures” (universal 420-hour entrance requirement, along with no allocation of separation payments, and only the last reason for separation taken into account when establishing eligibility)
- Expand EI Skills Boost, specifically to enable more long-tenured, occasional and frequent EI claimants to enrol full-time in education programs without losing EI benefits
- Establish a more robust EI Training Support Benefit to support an expanded lifelong/continuous learning Canada Training Benefit, on a pilot basis
- Expand and streamline the EI Work-Sharing Program with the ability to access training while on work-sharing

⁴⁰ Armine Yalnizyan, “Out of work? You may be out of luck. Why getting EI is harder than it’s ever been,” *Toronto Star*, August 9, 2024.

⁴¹ OECD, *The Economic Cost of Childhood Socio-Economic Disadvantage in Canada*, OECD Papers in Well-Being and Inequalities No. 25 (May 2024).

- Provide incentives to employers offering Supplemental Unemployment Benefit (SUB) plans that increase earnings when employees are unemployed due to a plant shutdown, dealing with illness or injury, or in training
- Improve Record of Employment (ROE) and claims processing to expedite EI benefits to apprentices on block release

As employment benefits and support measures under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act* are expanding to include employed as well as unemployed workers, additional funding will be required to ensure the EI program can provide appropriate labour adjustment as well as upskilling supports for workers. The Advisory Table recommends that the federal government restore direct contributions to the EI Operating Account (terminated in 1990), at the level of 20% of the cost of benefits.

Registered supplemental unemployment benefit plans are an important but underutilized tool for providing additional income security and earnings replacement (up to a maximum of 95%) for workers faced with temporary work stoppages and workers undergoing training. Payments made through these plans are not treated as normal earnings and therefore not subject to year-end clawbacks.

The inability to apply SUB payments to emergency income relief programs, such as the Canada Emergency Recovery Benefit (CERB), was a policy failure that could have provided significant reprieve to workers on layoff during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the merit of SUB plans is evident, and the federal government must do more to encourage take-up. The Advisory Table recommends that ESDC promote SUB plan registration by raising awareness among employers and by introducing an EI premium reduction incentive for employers with registered plans, commensurate with the size of benefit top-ups provided to laid-off workers.

Mandate Priority 3: Improving recruitment and retention, and helping workers approaching retirement leave their jobs with dignity

Many workers who are undecided about whether to continue working or retire face serious barriers on both sides of the equation. For mid-career and older workers in low-quality jobs who want to continue working, the Advisory Table heard the ways in which low-quality jobs⁴² lead to poor health, in turn causing employee turnover and premature labour-force exit.⁴³ High levels of job strain, often from working long hours and working under intense pressure, can generate chronic work stress, a significant problem for many older workers. Exiting the labour force prematurely due to disability is also common, especially for lower-paid workers. Job dissatisfaction is a major factor in job quits, labour market attrition and early retirement.⁴⁴ A high-quality working environment is therefore essential in preventing work-related health problems with negative long-term consequences that affect workers' ability to continue working.⁴⁵

The Advisory Table also heard that many workers wishing to retire simply cannot afford to do so; they have no workplace pension and inadequate savings to retire with security and dignity. As a sole or primary source of retirement income, public pensions alone are too meagre to constitute an adequate standard of living in retirement.

The Advisory Table is adamant that governments and employers must prioritize expanding opportunities to workers who wish to stay at work while making retiring possible for those who want and need to do so. Workers under pressure need choices—real options, not false ones.

Creating choice starts with the recognition that all workers deserve access to a secure and adequate retirement income. The Advisory Table heard from experts that

⁴² “Low-quality jobs” are characterized by high levels of physical and mental strain, long and irregular hours of work, overwork, chronic stress, and health and safety hazards; these features may result from under-staffing, insufficient resources, and mismanagement, and can lead to low levels of job satisfaction.

⁴³ Lower-paid workers in precarious and often physically arduous jobs are at particular risk. Leading causes of pre-mature exit include musculoskeletal injuries and mental health strains including depression and anxiety (OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*). In 2023, 1 in 6 workers in Canada aged 55 and older had an hourly wage below two-thirds of the median hourly wage for all workers.

⁴⁴ OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

⁴⁵ It also allows ill and injured workers to return to work more quickly, and to continue participating in the workforce. Individuals with mental health conditions are more likely to end up unemployed, unsuccessful job seekers, and to transition in and out of the labour market (OECD, *Working Better with Age; Retaining Talent at All Ages*).

undermining pensions and secure retirement income in a bid to keep workers working longer is deeply unjust and counterproductive.⁴⁶ Discouraging retirement by raising the pension claiming age, eliminating early retirement benefits, and through other disincentives disproportionately harms lower-paid workers who are not benefiting equally from the overall trend toward longer working lives and better health in old age.⁴⁷ Access to a secure, adequate retirement income is also increasingly unequal.⁴⁸ The government must therefore protect and expand access to adequate public pensions and workplace pensions. Employers should also support workers in developing pathways to retirement, including late-career counselling, financial planning and worker-centred phased retirement initiatives.

Instead of disincentivizing retirement, workers must be given opportunities and supports to continue working if they wish to do so. There are many workers who can and want to continue working, as well as unseized opportunities for boosting employment among underemployed, unemployed and discouraged 50- to 64-year-olds, not just retirement-age workers.⁴⁹

Above all, this means improving the quality of jobs. Increased emphasis on improving workplace health and well-being can reduce employee burnout and enhance morale and job satisfaction. Paid sick days, flexible scheduling and teleworking opportunities are an important feature of workplace health and well-being programs, as are worker-centred return-to-work processes and workplace accommodations.⁵⁰ At their core, work and well-being programs should be designed to increase worker schedule control and worker voice, moderate job demands, and provide training and employer support aimed at improving social relations at work.⁵¹ Flexible working-time arrangements and altered

⁴⁶ Teresa Ghilarducci, presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table, June 2024. Also see Teresa Ghilarducci, *Work, Retire, Repeat: The Uncertainty of Retirement in the New Economy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024); Lisa F. Berkman and Beth C. Truesdale, eds. *Overtime: America's Aging Workforce and the Future of Working Longer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁴⁷ Stefan Staubli and Qiongda Zhao, *The Long-Run and Distributional Impacts of Public Pensions* (Toronto: Global Risk Institute, 2024).

⁴⁸ OECD, *Preventing Ageing Unequally* (Paris: OECD, 2017); S. Block et al., *Colour-coded Retirement: An intersectional analysis of retirement income and savings in Canada*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (Ottawa: CCPA, 2021).

⁴⁹ Teresa Ghilarducci, presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table, June 2024.

⁵⁰ OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*.

⁵¹ OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*. Workplace and sectoral negotiation with unions over work organization and job design is therefore useful for reducing the conditions that cause early exit among older workers. According to the OECD, French companies are required to negotiate or develop an age-management action plan to retain older staff. OECD, *Working Better with Age*.

work responsibilities are as critical to recruitment and retention as they are to continuous learning and upskilling. They are necessary to reflect the varying capacities of workers and shifting family responsibilities of mid- and late-career workers, especially women.

Preventing mental and physical strain is a top priority, and strengthening workplace safety is key, especially for vulnerable, lower-paid workers in precarious jobs who are more likely to be exposed to workplaces with poor working conditions.⁵² Employers should take preventative steps, including psychosocial risk assessments of working practices to improve working conditions and facilitate retention.⁵³

The Advisory Table fully recognizes that retaining mid- and late-career workers has benefits for both workers and employers. Retaining skilled workers in the public sector is the most effective way to address staffing shortages in the health care workforce, for example. Workers maintain their social networks and relationships at work, while employers reduce hiring and turnover costs while limiting the loss of workers' skills and experience. An age-diverse workforce also carries observed benefits, and complementarities between ages in the workplace can facilitate the transfer of workplace-specific knowledge accumulated over time.⁵⁴ Enduring, long-term relationships lower employers' turnover costs and facilitate investment in training and workplace learning.⁵⁵ Higher turnover incentivizes employers to poach other employers' skill investments and under-invest in their own employees. Moreover, the high costs associated with the use of staffing agencies when the public system is unable to keep workers further demonstrate the importance of retention.⁵⁶

⁵² The oft-made recommendation to focus on developing pathways to help transition older workers out of hazardous or arduous jobs is inadequate insofar as it fails to address the risks posed by the unsafe jobs themselves and the need to improve job quality for all workers.

⁵³ Howat HR Consulting, presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table, May 2024.

⁵⁴ OECD, *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer* (Paris: OECD, 2020).

⁵⁵ During the pandemic and related disruption, the additional costs of restaffing, searching for workers and filling vacancies became evident and were one of the primary justifications for job retention programs to keep workers attached to their jobs.

⁵⁶ For the high cost of employing agency nurses in hospitals facing staffing shortages, see Auditor-General of Ontario, *Value-for-Money Audit: Emergency Departments* (Toronto: Office of the Auditor-General of Ontario, 2023).

Recommendations and Areas for Action

3.1. Implement flexible practices and labour market programming for the recruitment, retention and transition of mid- and late-career workers

Areas for Action

3.1.1. Develop pathways to retirement that include pre-retirement full-time equivalent (FTE) reduction programs, late-career counselling, financial planning and worker-centred phased retirement initiatives

An Alberta program used this approach, offering late-career nurses an opportunity to reduce their employment hours prior to retirement without a negative impact on their pension.⁵⁷ This resulted in positive outcomes for nurses who reported having more time, more energy and more stability during their work and were therefore able to provide better care services. Initially created for nurses in New Brunswick over 20 years ago, this program could be emulated in other occupations and jurisdictions, including for other health care professionals.

3.1.2. Scale up and expand late-career retention initiatives, like the Late Career Nursing Initiative

This Ontario initiative was designed to retain nurses aged 55 and over by giving them fewer physically or psychologically demanding tasks and thereby enabling them to provide high-quality patient care. While this program is not a magic bullet for preventing stress and overwork, participating nurses reported positive perceptions of their managers' ability, leadership, support and intention to participate in hospital affairs within their organization.⁵⁸ This initiative could be scaled up and applied more broadly within health care and adapted to other industries, occupations and jurisdictions.

3.1.3. Support succession planning and stay interviews in all at-risk occupations

Succession planning provides an opportunity for employers to discuss retirement plans and goals with late-career workers and support workers who would like to continue using their accumulated knowledge, skills and experience.⁵⁹ Another technique is "stay interviews," in which workplace leaders engage in relationship-building with staff

⁵⁷ A. Weidner et al., "Alberta: evaluation of nursing retention and recruitment programs," *Nursing Leadership* 25(Sp), March 2012; Almost, *Opening the Black Box*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ D. Doran et al., "Evaluating the late career nurse initiative: a cross-sectional survey of senior nurses in Ontario," *Journal of Nursing Management* 23 (2015).

⁵⁹ Ben Ahmed and Bourgeault, *op. cit.*

through structured discussions aimed at understanding what will enable them to stay in their jobs. These formal and purposeful engagements help employers make changes before staff decide to leave or retire.

3.1.4. Reinvest in labour-market programming aimed at mid- and late-career workers (for example, Targeted Initiative for Older Workers) to prevent and address long-term unemployment

The ability to move between jobs is crucial for keeping displaced and dissatisfied older workers in the job market. This extends to workers with health issues and disabilities; not all workers will have the capacity to work, but many want to and can continue working with the right combination of supports.⁶⁰

Supports for displaced older workers should include tailored re-employment services for workers aged 40 and over comprised of career counselling, resumé writing and job-search support to prevent mid-career workers from slipping into long-term unemployment. In regions with concentrations of at-risk industries and workers, this could involve strengthening career development services or even reintroducing a limited number of Service Canada outlets offering enhanced assistance (employment and career counselling, job search assistance, needs assessments and assistance, return to work initiatives, etc.).

Governments can also use targeted wage subsidies to encourage employers to hire and retain older workers, especially long-term unemployed low-wage older workers. It is well established that workers displaced due to layoff, firm closures or downsizing typically face extended periods of unemployment, and when they do find new jobs, on average they tend to earn lower wages and have fewer benefits than in their previous job.⁶¹ This “wage penalty” is especially serious for older, longer-tenured workers.⁶² Wage loss insurance programs are crucial for these workers, especially when EI benefits replace a shrinking share of wages at higher rates. Since laid-off older workers are more likely to

⁶⁰ OECD, *Retaining Talent at All Ages*.

⁶¹ OECD, *Promoting Better Career Choices for Longer Working Lives*, 2024. Plant closures increase the likelihood of workers entering into gig work following displacement, and for many lower-paid older workers, this shift to self-employment can amount to a shift to precarious self-employment; Sung-Hee Jeon and Yuri Ostrovsky, “The impact of involuntary job displacement on participation in gig work: A causal analysis,” *Industrial Relations*, July 2024, and Brigitte Hoogendoorn et al., “Does self-employment provide a bridge to retirement?” *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 48 (2024).

⁶² In recognition of this, in 2021, the Liberal Party [proposed](#) an EI Career Insurance Benefit available to laid-off individuals who worked continuously for the same employer for a minimum of five years. The Career Insurance Benefit would kick in at the end of the regular EI claim, providing an additional 20% of insured earnings in the first year following the layoff, and an extra 10% in the second year.

exit the labour force prematurely, wage insurance targeted at older displaced workers can reduce income loss and promote rapid reintegration into quality employment.⁶³

3.2. Improving the quality of jobs and workplace well-being, especially for vulnerable workers with poor working conditions

Areas for Action

3.2.1. Convene unions, employers and government to develop educational programming, information and materials to combat age discrimination in employment

Age discrimination in hiring is well-documented, and the widespread use of AI in human resources recruitment and screening processes raises additional concerns about the potential for age-related bias. Many employers have mistaken perceptions about older workers' productivity (especially in relation to cost), and stereotypes are common regarding older workers' supposed inflexibility, inability to adapt to new technology and unwillingness to engage in lifelong learning.⁶⁴ Age discrimination in hiring can force older workers to settle for low-quality jobs. Concrete, practical mechanisms must be implemented to eliminate bias against hiring older workers,⁶⁵ such as awareness campaigns for employers; guidance for human resource practitioners to avoid age-related bias in recruiting, hiring and promotion practices; and initiatives to promote inclusive workplaces.⁶⁶

Key tools in tackling age discrimination in hiring include information and awareness campaigns, best practices and tool kits for employers, consultation and co-operation with unions, and greater enforcement of the prohibition on age discrimination. Employers can alter screening procedures and interview questions to account for the strengths of mid-career and older workers while training and equipping human resource personnel to fairly and accurately evaluate candidates.⁶⁷ Combatting discrimination against older workers will also help reduce discrimination against younger workers and

⁶³ OECD, *Promoting Better Career Choices for Longer Working Lives*.

⁶⁴ OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity: Meeting the Challenges of an Ageing Workforce* (Paris: OECD, 2023).

⁶⁵ According to the OECD, the Netherlands' "Vacancies for All Ages" initiative screens newspaper and internet job vacancy ads for age discrimination. Employers believed to have violated prohibitions on age discrimination are contacted with information about employer responsibilities and legal risks of non-compliance. OECD, *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce*, p. 87.

⁶⁶ Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors, *Older Workers: Exploring and Addressing the Stereotypes* (Ottawa: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, 2021).

⁶⁷ OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

new entrants, who struggle with stereotypical perceptions of them as inexperienced and unreliable.

3.2.2. Develop and implement workplace violence reduction initiatives for public-facing service workers and other at-risk workers

Workplace violence reduction programs, developed in conjunction with joint health and safety committees (or worker health and safety representatives) and grounded in formal risk assessments are necessary not only for workers' physical safety and mental well-being, but also for job quality and job satisfaction. These programs are urgently needed in the health care sector (including nursing, allied health professions and other health care professions), education, other care sectors and the service sector (for example, transit workers, pre-board screeners in airports).⁶⁸ In addition to promoting workplace violence prevention programs, government, employer and union initiatives could include a national public awareness campaign on violence against health care and front-line workers, including awareness and training for police, prosecutors and judges on enforcing the Government of Canada's new legislation to combat intimidation and violence directed toward health care workers.⁶⁹ It should also involve direct federal funding to the provinces and territories for de-escalation training for health care workers, violence prevention infrastructure and security personnel in health care facilities. In 2023, with the cooperation of provincial and territorial governments, the Government of Canada ratified ILO convention No. 190, *Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019*, thereby signalling its commitment to achieving workplaces free of violence and harassment for all; the Advisory Table expects the Government to work closely with unions and employers to develop a roadmap, implementation plan and timetable for achieving violence- and harassment-free workplaces.

3.2.3. Tailor mental health supports to at-risk workers to help retain mid-career workers in education, health services and other industries

Governments and employers should strengthen mental health supports for at-risk workers to help retain mid-career workers in education, health services, care work and

⁶⁸ Overall, nearly half of women, and about three in ten men, report experiencing harassment or sexual assault in the workplace; Statistics Canada, "Gender Results Framework: A new data table on workplace harassment," *The Daily*, February 12, 2024. Research on workplace violence experienced by workers in specific occupations and industries can be found at Public Services Health and Safety Association's website at <https://workplace-violence.ca>.

⁶⁹ *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Canada Labour Code* (Bill C-3), given Royal Assent December 17, 2021; WorkSafeBC, *Take Care: how to develop and implement a workplace violence prevention program* (WorkSafeBC, 2012).

other industries. Programs for at-risk workers should include workplace trauma supports and assistance for the families of front-line workers. These programs also need to recognize that all front-line workers in sectors like health care and education are affected.

3.2.4. Work with provinces and territories to introduce robust right to disconnect provisions in employment standards statutes

Unions participating in the federal Labour Program's Right to Disconnect Advisory Committee asserted that to be effective, the right to disconnect should be grounded in law as a statutory entitlement.⁷⁰ Voluntary approaches requiring only that certain employers have a policy on employees responding to work-related electronic communications outside of normal work hours are unlikely to be enough to protect workers from the pressure to respond to email and texts after work. Unfortunately, Ontario and the federal government's legislative initiatives to require a workplace policy on disconnecting are too weak to provide an actual right to disconnect from work-related communications after normal working hours.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Labour Program, Employment and Social Development Canada, *Final Report of the Right to Disconnect Advisory Committee*, February 2022.

⁷¹ See Division 22 of *An Act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on April 16, 2024* (Bill C-69), given Royal Assent June 20, 2024, and Government of Ontario, *Written policy on disconnecting from work*, <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/written-policy-disconnecting-from-work>.

Mandate Priority 4: Promoting continuous skills development throughout Canadians' working lives

The Advisory Table discussed the importance of access to upskilling, continuous education and lifelong learning as a means of mitigating disruption. Workplace learning can increase resilience in at-risk workers in industries and occupations facing upheaval, create opportunities for career progression, and reduce workplace attrition from low morale and job dissatisfaction.

The Advisory Table also discussed the challenge that many workers face in securing the time, resources and management support to make upskilling and workplace learning a priority. The single greatest obstacle reported by older workers who want to participate in training is cost.⁷² This barrier includes training fees and expenses, but also foregone income that workers and their families depend on. Paid training leave is therefore a crucial way to give workers the time and financial resources to upskill and reskill.

Workers changing occupations and professions need a clear picture of the opportunities that best align with their current skills, needs and interests. Personalized career counselling can provide this guidance. The Advisory Table believes that governments should provide more information and career guidance to support job mobility for mid- and later-career workers.⁷³ They should also expand tailored re-employment services for individuals aged 40 and over, including improved job-search skills and support, counselling and resumé writing.

Experiential learning opportunities such as apprenticeships and work experience programs aimed at older workers also introduce individuals to different sectors and occupations without requiring a long-term commitment. By allowing workers to earn while they learn, apprenticeships and paid experiential learning opportunities lower financial barriers that dissuade many older workers from taking part in training.⁷⁴ Union involvement is important to increase take-up and participation in these programs, as are financial subsidies, online and virtual options, receiving a recognized certificate or credential, and the guarantee of a job offer after training.

The Advisory Table is adamant that micro-credentials are not a substitute for real commitments to continuous education and lifelong learning or the acquisition of comprehensive, portable skills. Learning opportunities must be designed to develop

⁷² OECD, *Promoting Better Career Choices for Longer Working Lives*, 2024.

⁷³ OECD, *The Midcareer Opportunity*.

⁷⁴ OECD, *Promoting Better Career Choices for Longer Working Lives*, 2024.

transferable skills that allow workers to acquire additional competencies; micro-credentials focused on the employer's immediate and specific needs are not adequate and reiterate the necessity of properly investing in union and public training, including through community colleges and post-secondary educational institutions.

Recommendations and Areas for Action

4.1. Encourage and enable employers to support worker skills development

Areas for Action

4.1.1. Facilitate access to continuing education and lifelong learning

Research shows that training and advancement opportunities result in higher job satisfaction and workers who are less likely to seek early retirement.⁷⁵ All workers in transition—not just jobless workers—should have access to Employment Insurance (EI) benefits and services to upgrade their skills and education. Granting EI benefits to workers in the trades who do mandatory block-release training has made education and further training possible by removing some of the financial barriers. Replicating this program for at-risk private-sector workers and education, health care and public-sector workers through laddering of education and skills could offer the same advantages. Governments and employers can further support workers in transition by offering training opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills through free or subsidized tuition, flexible work schedules, accommodation of time off requests, bridging programs, workplace-based training opportunities and online learning.

4.1.2. Support the 80/20 professional development model

This initiative is aimed at ensuring workers have the time and adjusted workload to access professional development. The 80/20 model allows workers to spend 80% of their salaried work time in direct work-related duties and 20% on professional development activities (for example, participating in leadership development or research proposal-writing workshops, attending conferences, etc.). An evaluation of the professional development model offered to nurses showed general satisfaction at having more time to participate in professional development activities and various positive outcomes, including reduced sick time, overtime hours and turnover rates.

⁷⁵ K. Leppel et al., "The Importance of Job Training to Job Satisfaction of Older Workers," *Journal of Aging and Social Policy* 24:1 (2012).

Developed in the nursing profession, this model could be adapted and promoted to white-collar and blue-collar workers in a range of occupations.⁷⁶

4.1.3. Implement mentorship programs across the career course

Employers should be encouraged to offer online or workplace-based mentorship opportunities for new graduate, mid-career and late-career workers to foster retention and support these workers through their career pathway. Research has shown clear benefits of mentorship programs, which are an effective strategy for creating a healthy workforce and retaining staff.⁷⁷ They are also key in supporting young workers and new entrants in the workforce. Construction trades and apprenticeship programs have a long and successful history with job mentoring, the lessons of which should be adapted to other industries and occupations.

4.1.4. Promote retention via professional development programs

Akin to the 80/20 model, this interactive learning strategy can be offered two full days per month over four months.⁷⁸ Offering professional development programs to longer-tenured workers in all sectors fosters retention by enhancing and consolidating their knowledge and leadership skills, helping them gain more confidence in managerial roles. These programs can and should be piloted in private- and public-sector workplaces.

4.2. Leverage and support unions' capacity to deliver skills upgrading

Areas for Action

4.2.1. Develop a union-led workplace literacy and essential skills strategy in consultation with adult literacy practitioners

This strategy could include piloting a program to fund Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in the workplace. Patterned on legislation enacted in the United Kingdom, this program would task an employer-recognized, elected workplace representative with

⁷⁶ Ben Ahmed, H., & Bourgeault, I., *Sustaining Nursing in Canada: A set of coordinated evidence-based solutions targeted to support the nursing workforce now and into the future* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, 2022).

⁷⁷ For instance, R. Perumal and M. Singh, "Mentorship in Nursing in Canada: A Scoping Review," *Nurse Education in Practice*, Volume 65, November 2022.

⁷⁸ H. Ben Ahmed and I. Bourgeault, I., *Sustaining Nursing in Canada: A set of coordinated evidence-based solutions targeted to support the nursing workforce now and into the future* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, 2022).

promoting and supporting workplace training and learning.⁷⁹ The ULR's role would be to promote the value of learning, support learners and facilitate workplace learning and training to embed learning in the workplace, including by:

- Identifying workplace learning and training needs (for example, literacy, numeracy and essential skills needs)
- Providing information and advice about learning or training matters
- Arranging learning or training (for example, promoting courses to potential learners, working with Human Resources to arrange suitable dates and times for on-site learning/training)
- Promoting the value of learning or training (for example, addressing the negative experiences of education carried by many potential learners due to undiagnosed learning difficulties, direct or indirect discrimination, lack of resources, bullying, etc.)
- Consulting the employer about carrying out ULR activities, including discussing and securing buy-in for learning opportunities with managers and senior managers
- Training and preparing for ULR activities

The OECD recommends mid-career reviews, which are an employer-provided, workplace assessment of workers at a mid-point in their working life. For these reviews to succeed, unions must play a central role; otherwise, workers may be likely to view assessments of this sort as another management tool for reviewing performance or discipline. When designed and implemented correctly, mid-career assessments can be an important tool for identifying learning opportunities and setting a benchmark for additional skills acquisition.⁸⁰

4.2.2. Work with unions to restore and expand apprenticeship opportunities and supports

Canada faces existing and anticipated skill shortages. The workforce is aging and employers are facing challenges in recruiting and retaining workers. According to BuildForce Canada, 156,000 individuals are expected to retire from the construction

⁷⁹ R. Saundry et al., "Union Learning Representatives in the UK: Activity, Impact and Organization," *Work, Employment & Society* 31:2 (April 2017); B. Clough, "The role of union learning representatives and their impact on England's vocational education and training system," *Arbetsmarknad & Arbetsliv*, 16:2 (2010).

⁸⁰ OECD, *Working Better with Age*.

industry by 2027; the industry will need to recruit an estimated 171,850 workers by the same year to meet an increasing demand for skilled construction labour.⁸¹

Apprenticeships are crucial to training and retraining Canadian tradespeople. Apprenticeship training combines on-the-job training with theoretical and practical technical training; apprentices spend most of their time learning the knowledge and skills of the trade on the job, while earning a wage. Apprenticeships are important for all of society because it is through this process that skills and expertise are passed on from one generation of journeypersons to the next.

Canada's successful apprenticeship model should be extended to more occupations and trades. Accordingly, incentives for sponsors of apprentices, as well as a focus on outcomes and availability of apprenticeship completions and job placements for apprentices, should be put in place.⁸² Apprentices also require direct financial support to overcome cost barriers to starting, and importantly, completing apprenticeships. Restoring and expanding the Apprenticeship Incentive Grant, Apprenticeship Incentive Grant for Women, and the Apprenticeship Completion Grant will help overcome these barriers and lead to higher apprenticeship completion rates.

4.2.3. Expand the Union Training and Innovation Program (UTIP) to include funding for other projects, including brick-and-mortar projects, which can better equip training centres to meet new labour market challenges and demands

The UTIP has helped the next generation of apprentices and tradespeople get the skills they need to succeed in Canada's changing economy. Training centres will need the flexibility to be able to purchase equipment and supplies as well as renovate and expand to ensure they can meet the demands of the labour market. A permanent, ongoing expansion of this program would help in training more Canadian tradespeople.

⁸¹ BuildForce Canada, *Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward: An Assessment of Construction Labour Markets from 2022 to 2027* (BuildForce Canada, 2022).

⁸² For example, the federal government's requirement that firms seeking green economy investment tax credits provide apprenticeship opportunities will incentivize employers to sponsor more apprentices.

Mandate Priority 5: Addressing barriers facing equity-deserving groups, and supporting diversity and inclusion in skills development and career extension efforts

Discrimination on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, age and other prohibited grounds is commonplace in Canadian workplaces, contributing not just to unequal employment, wages and benefits, but also to unequal skills development and training opportunities.⁸³ Unions are firmly committed to combatting workplace discrimination; promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace; and breaking down barriers to inclusion and equity. This commitment has only increased under the leadership of women and racialized union leaders. In the construction industry, unions have pioneered programs to attract and retain more women, Indigenous workers and workers from other underrepresented groups in the trades. Similarly, unions in health services and related lines of work are a key conduit and support mechanism for racialized workers and newcomers to Canada to enter and thrive in the health professions.

The Advisory Table heard from experts on just how rapidly and extensively the Canadian workforce is changing across industries, sectors and regions.⁸⁴ In all of the Advisory Table's deliberations, the shifting gender, ethnocultural and age composition of the workforce was a consistent reminder that workers experience transitions and the risk of disruption in very different ways. Although historic barriers to job and occupational mobility and training opportunities have eroded over time, they continue to constrain the choices of women, Indigenous workers and racialized workers while making it harder for employers and industries to quickly adapt to change. Effective supports for at-risk workers must therefore recognize and reflect the specific needs of women and all equity-deserving workers.

Occupational segregation and barriers to entry for women and equity-deserving groups remain major impediments to equity and opportunity for workers. Women and workers with disabilities may need support services and accommodation to participate fully and integrate effectively. Training programs must be accessible and flexible to increase the participation of workers with caregiving responsibilities. These supports often require longer-term commitments with enduring investments, and programs must be designed and monitored to ensure new entrants to the field succeed.

⁸³ Christopher Zou et al., *Experiences of Discrimination at Work* (Environics Institute for Survey Research, Future Skills Centre, and Diversity Institute, 2022).

⁸⁴ Laurent Martel, *Recent Shifts in Canadian Demographics and Possible Future Trends/Implications*. Presentation to the Union-Led Advisory Table, January 2024.

The Advisory Table was especially concerned about one category of particularly vulnerable workers: low-wage migrant workers and non-status workers in Canada. These workers need and deserve the same rights as other workers in Canada. This means open work permits, more pathways to permanent residency, and a broad regularization program for undocumented workers to eliminate the fundamental source of these workers' vulnerability.⁸⁵ Newcomers also need comprehensive settlement services to help them succeed in the job market, including opportunities to learn English and French (in Quebec and New Brunswick).

The Advisory Table also heard that faster recognition of international education and foreign credentials is essential. Workers with international training and qualifications face barriers in getting their qualifications recognized in Canada and are subsequently forced into jobs with lower skills and lower formal education requirements than they would have otherwise. Internationally trained newcomers often require a formal assessment of their certifications and licenses obtained abroad before they are able to work in Canada. This process should be made less costly, time consuming and arduous. Internationally trained workers also need financial assistance, career counselling and employment services (such as mentoring, work placements and wage subsidies) to accumulate Canadian work experience and integrate quickly into jobs that correspond with their skills. Some governments in Canada have begun to dismantle requirements for Canadian experience and to regulate job postings to reduce bias, but these reforms should be generalized across the country.

Recommendations and Areas for Action

5.1. Create and support programs that target specific at-risk groups

Areas for Action

5.1.1. Support employers and community organizations committed to hiring, training and retaining workers from underrepresented communities

Creating opportunities for historically marginalized and underrepresented groups to secure jobs in transitioning industries and occupations requires collaboration among various stakeholders. Governments can assist by allocating funds to offset costs for employers that commit to hiring, training and retaining workers from marginalized groups, contingent on those employers having employment equity action plans and

⁸⁵ Several Parliamentary committees have recommended these reforms, including the February 2024 report of the Standing Committee on Finance, *Shaping Our Economic Future: Canadian Priorities*, and the May 2024 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Act Now: Solutions for Temporary and Migrant Labour in Canada*.

systems reviews in place. Such programs can operate in conjunction with the proposed national skills assessment and inventory (see Section 1 above) and can build on the efforts of industry groups, such as the Automotive Parts Manufacturer's Association's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Fund. These programs must also make education and training opportunities available in communities across Canada, including rural, remote and Indigenous communities. This will allow workers to stay in their communities to obtain training and upskilling, which is another incentive to participating in learning opportunities. Providing workers with access to training at home will also help address local staff shortages, reduce out-migration and improve recruitment and retention challenges in these communities.

5.1.2. Scale up union pathways and other on-ramps to employment for workers with disabilities, including learning and cognitive challenges

In conjunction with grocery store employers, the Centre de formation de l'alimentation et du commerce du Québec (CFACQ), and SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la Personne Handicapée En Route vers l'Emploi), United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW) Local 500 has established a training and work-readiness program for workers with physical and learning challenges that has enjoyed considerable success and a high retention rate. Participants receive customized training in grocery or food industry occupations; on completion, they obtain a certificate from the Government of Quebec and can access supervised internships sponsored by grocers, restaurants and caterers. With government, industry and union support, similar pathways could be implemented and brought to scale in other service and goods-producing industries.

5.1.3. Tailor training opportunities, career development supports and employment services to Indigenous workers and youth, especially in Northern communities

Successful, inclusive programming for Indigenous people relies on a variety of community and workplace supports for elders, employers, unions, schools, guidance counsellors and Indigenous youth; these programs should include information and awareness campaigns, mentoring, and learning and workplace opportunities.⁸⁶ Barriers are longstanding and widespread, ranging from economic deprivation to isolation and scarce opportunities for mentoring, training, experiential learning and apprenticeships.⁸⁷ Institutionalized networks and partnerships between Indigenous communities, employers, unions, public education providers and different levels of government

⁸⁶ Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, *Promoting Careers in the Skilled Trades to Indigenous Youth in Canada* (Ottawa: CAF, 2019).

⁸⁷ Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, *Hiring and Retaining Indigenous Apprentices: Challenges, Solutions and Opportunities*, Dialogue Summary Report, n.d.

appear to be essential in establishing trust, coordination and continuous investment for success.⁸⁸

5.1.4. Develop regularization and other measures for undocumented and non-status workers to address workers at particular risk, formalize informal employment, and restrict the underground economy

An extensive May 2024 report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology contains many excellent recommendations to protect the rights and interests of these vulnerable workers,⁸⁹ such as implementing pathways for undocumented workers to achieve full status and replacing employer-specific, closed permits with open work permits for migrant workers.

5.2. Leverage public investments to support diversity and inclusion imperatives

Areas for Action

5.2.1. Mandate negotiated community benefits agreements for federally funded construction projects to ensure training and apprenticeship opportunities flow to equity-deserving communities

Mandatory community benefits agreements (CBAs) on federally funded projects would expand the hiring and training of displaced workers and workers from underrepresented groups, especially women and Indigenous workers. CBAs contain provisions enabling apprenticeships, guaranteeing prevailing wages and benefits, and establishing grounds for training and workplace development. Through CBAs, workers obtain a legacy of experience, skills training and employability.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Conference Board of Canada, *Working Together: Indigenous Recruitment and Retention in Remote Canada* (Ottawa: Conference Board, 2019); Centre for the Study of Living Standards, *Indigenous Recruitment, Retention and Community Outreach in the Canadian Natural Resource Sector* (Ottawa: CSLs, 2018).

⁸⁹ See United Food and Commercial Workers Canada, *The Status of Migrant Agricultural Workers in Canada – 2023* (UFCW Canada, 2023), and Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Act Now: Solutions for Temporary and Migrant Labour in Canada* (Ottawa: Senate of Canada, 2024)

⁹⁰ In 2016, Member of Parliament Ahmed Hussen introduced the private member's bill [Bill C-227](#), which would empower the government to require community benefits agreements on federal contracts for construction, maintenance or repair projects.

In Toronto, the Toronto Community Benefits Network has successfully negotiated robust CBAs on various large-scale, multi-year projects.⁹¹ These agreements not only expand employment and training opportunities, but they also establish ongoing relationships between communities and project developers and managers, with built-in public reporting and accountability mechanisms.

5.2.2. Continue funding and supporting the UTIP to improve the participation of women and equity-deserving groups in the skilled trades, especially women, Indigenous workers, newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities and racialized workers

The UTIP program has made important progress on breaking down occupational segregation in the skilled trades and ensuring more women, Indigenous youth and newcomers make careers in these professions.⁹² The federal government should continue to support this vital work, including through investments to expand union training facilities.

5.3. Leverage federal convening capacity to streamline adoption of initiatives that support at-risk workers

Areas for Action

5.3.1. Coordinate with the provinces and territories to expand the newly formed child care program and ensure the program is flexible enough to allow more women, especially single mothers, to enter and train in historically male-dominated occupations and industries, including the construction sector

Inadequate or inexistant child care arrangements is well-recognized obstacle for women entering or working in many male-dominated industries such as construction. A lack of child care spaces for shift workers is a significant issue even in female-dominated sectors such as health care.⁹³ A priority should therefore be targeted funding and supports for high-quality, affordable child care for people who are partaking in any course or training opportunity. The federal government must ensure adequate funding, training and regulation to guarantee a sufficient supply of flexible, high-quality, accessible child care spots, including for non-standard hours of work. Governments

⁹¹ Links to the Network's CBAs can be found on its website at https://www.communitybenefits.ca/capacity_building.

⁹² Employment and Social Development Canada, Evaluation Directorate, Strategic and Service Policy Branch, *Evaluation of the Union Training and Innovation Program: Final Report*, January 2022.

⁹³ Donna S. Lero et al., *Non-Standard Work and Child Care in Canada: A Challenge for Parents, Policy Makers, and Child Care Provision* (Guelph: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2019).

should also work with employers and unions to ensure adequate and sanitary worksite restrooms and facilities in occupations and industries women are seeking to break into.

5.3.2. Coordinate labour market access policies with the provinces and territories such as the right to access properly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE) to support women in the trades and workers in other sectors

Canada could be a leader in guiding the provinces and employers on measures to support the health and safety of workers, including women, in the skilled trades. One such initiative is supporting the right to access properly fitting personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE products do not reflect the diversity and inclusion of all tradespeople; in the construction sector, PPE is made almost exclusively for men. Workers have a right to access adequate, properly fitting workplace PPE in any occupation that could be exposed to unhealthy or unsafe conditions; workers are more prone to injury if their PPE does not fit correctly.⁹⁴ Supporting women in the skilled trades means ensuring they have the equipment they need to do their jobs safely.

5.3.3. Strengthen federal-provincial/territorial collaboration to develop plans for key public services that need to be expanded, such as wildland firefighting, and for occupations tasked with protecting our forests, oceans, lakes and waterfront

Climate change is placing greater demands on many public services. As the frequency and severity of wildfires and other extreme weather events intensify, so too does the risk for people and communities in Canada. Severe weather events also cause significant damage to forests, oceans, lakes and other natural resources. These growing threats will put additional pressure on the public services responsible for responding to natural disasters, demanding an increase in staffing and resources. Predicting where these additional resources are needed will be critical, and in many cases, the scale of the required response will demand close cooperation between governments.

⁹⁴ Mario Possamai, Seniors Advisor to Ontario's SARS Commission, *A Time of Fear: How Canada Failed Our Health Care Workers and Mismanaged Covid-19* (Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

The Advisory Table's final report represents much of the labour movement's current thinking and priorities regarding workers in transition. While the recommendations included in this report are extensive, they are not exhaustive. Although this report focuses on upskilling, labour adjustment and other programs workers need to adapt to workplace and labour-market change, workers also need more workplace rights and protections when facing disruptive change.

The recommendations in this report are primarily aimed at the federal government, for important reasons. First, the challenges outlined in this report are not restricted to workers in a handful of regions in Canada; they affect workers in all parts of the country. Despite the constitutional assignment of relevant responsibilities to provinces and territories, the devolution of labour-market programming in recent decades, and the unique position of Quebec within confederation, the Advisory Table feels strongly that the national government of Canada has a responsibility to safeguard and advance the common interests of all workers in Canada. Working with all provinces, territories and stakeholders, the Government of Canada should define a nationwide vision to safeguard and advance the interests of all workers.

Second, it is the legal responsibility of the federal government to amend and reform certain critical programs, such as the Employment Insurance program. In areas where provincial and territorial governments have primary authority, the Government of Canada retains important influence via federal spending power.

Finally, under the auspices of the International Labour Organization, the Government of Canada has committed to promoting decent work in conformity with international labour standards and in consultation with the social partners. The Advisory Table is grateful for the opportunity to make recommendations to the Government and looks forward to the next steps for advancing and implementing the recommendations contained in its final report. Some of these recommendations have been studied in detail and entail relatively few additional financial resources and no new legislative authority to implement. Other recommendations are more far-reaching in nature and will require policy development and legislative amendments. Unions in Canada are committed to working with governments to realize these recommendations.

The Advisory Table is also committed to engaging employers on many of these recommendations. We believe the final report contains many initiatives that will resonate with and appeal to employers that are interested and open to engaging unions in improving retention, recruitment and the outcomes of workers in transition.

Lastly, and most importantly, Canada's unions intend to engage their membership on the ideas advanced in this final report. These ideas have emerged out of the lived

experience of workers; effective and positive action to improve the everyday lives of workers will only succeed with their full participation and involvement.

Annex A: Members of the Union-Led Advisory Table

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