

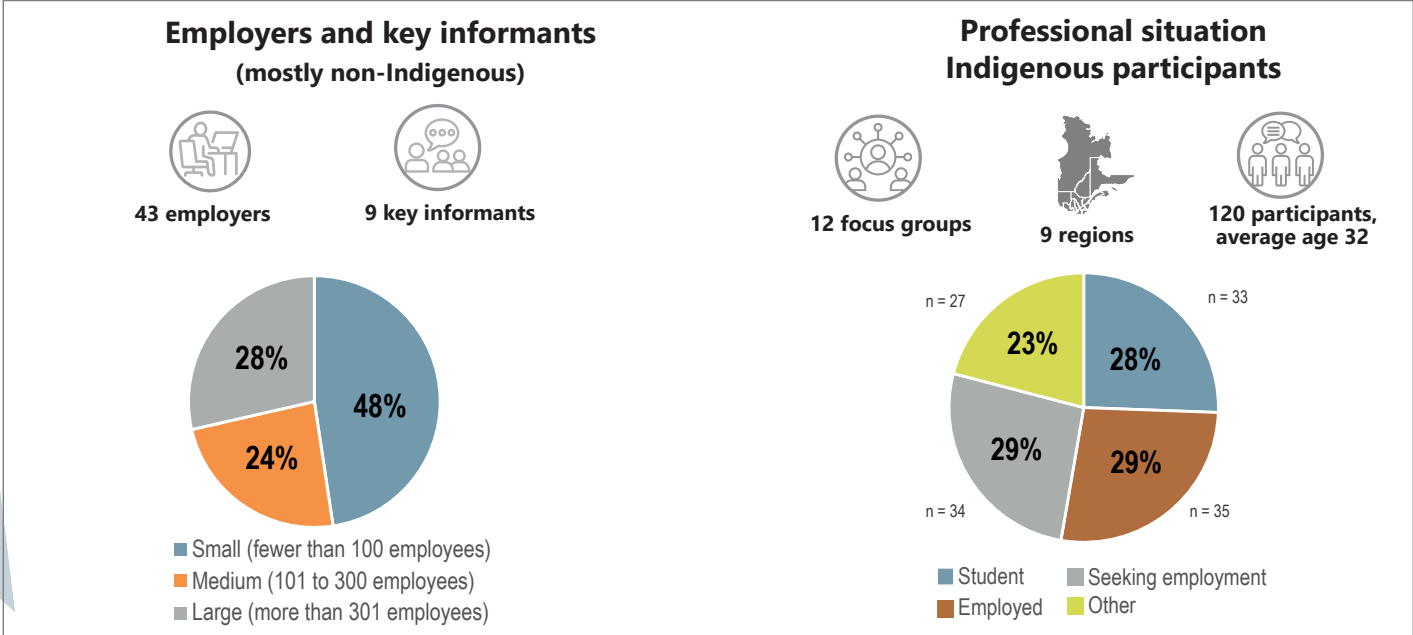
BACKGROUND

In response to the labour shortage that Quebec has experienced in recent years, many efforts have been made to maximize the number of people in employment. Several labour market partners are seeking to support the integration into the workplace of under-represented groups, including Indigenous people. This economic context is also in line with the government's desire to foster closer ties with Indigenous peoples and to make up for the historical inequalities that affect these populations, while contributing to social justice and prosperity for all citizens within Quebec society.

The result of a multipartite partnership, the NIKa project drew on the strengths and expertise of various players, namely the *Regroupement des centres d'amitié autochtones du Québec (RCAAQ)*, the *Conseil du patronat du Québec (CPQ)*, AXTRA (the *Alliance des centres-conseils en emploi*), the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière school board, and the Granules LG company. This innovative project aims to stimulate the full participation of Indigenous workers in the Quebec labour market.

METHODS

AXTRA was given the responsibility to document challenges, good practices and needs of Indigenous workers and Quebec employers. A literature review helped set the course of data collection in the field. In the spring and fall of 2018, the RCAAQ organized focus groups with Indigenous workers (residing primarily in urban areas), while AXTRA conducted semi-structured interviews with key labour market players in nine regions.



Limitations of the research

It is important to stress the fact that the data presented in the research report and in this summary represents the opinions of the 172 respondents interviewed. Therefore, it does not cover all aspects of Indigenous workers' participation in the Quebec labour market. In addition, the non-probability sampling method used to recruit employers, informants and Indigenous participants does not allow the data to be generalized to the entire population.

CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIGENOUS WORKERS

FINANCIAL INSECURITY

Several Indigenous participants pointed to the major challenge of accessing a stable and sufficient income during periods without work. This makes it impossible to meet their basic needs, such as adequate housing, and to settle down or feel safe. It is difficult, under such conditions, to focus on training or looking for a job.

PERSONAL AND FAMILY CHALLENGES

Even when basic needs are met, some Indigenous participants find themselves unequipped or delayed in entering the labour market due to previous or current personal experiences, including mental health issues, substance abuse, situations of violence or criminal records. Other barriers to employment highlighted by Indigenous participants, as well as by employers and key informants, include limited transportation options and a lack of support around family responsibilities, which often fall on working-age adults.

If someone wants to have a full-time position with us, they have to be available at all times. What are you supposed to do when you're alone with young children and you have to work from 1 to 10 p.m.? (Employer, Abitibi-Témiscamingue region)

LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Many unemployed Indigenous people do not have a degree or diploma. For those further removed from the labour market, learning a trade or accessing certain types of jobs often means first returning to school before they can complete their training.

« *The number of Indigenous graduates in a year can be counted on one hand. There aren't that many, so when you do have them, you want to put them at the forefront—to show others that it is possible to get a degree, then a job, and change your living conditions. (Key informant, Abitibi-Témiscamingue region)* »

GAINING WORK EXPERIENCE

Indigenous participants with little or no work experience often have to first develop professional practices and behaviours to meet the expectations of Quebec employers. Generally speaking, this learning period is essential for integration and, above all, for job retention in the future.

« *I understand that for this person, it's the first job they've had. They might not understand the importance of being there and the problems for us at the shop if they don't show up for their eight-hour shift. But at the same time, for the shop, it's really a problem. (Employer, Abitibi-Témiscamingue region)* »

CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIGENOUS WORKERS

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

French is often Indigenous people's second or even third language. It can be difficult to fit in and progress in a work environment without a sufficient command of the language spoken by the majority.

« They made me have a walkie-talkie. And I couldn't talk, and everybody was speaking in French. And I didn't understand, and that was a big challenge. [...] I guess they get frustrated sometimes too, and I was frustrated too. (Indigenous participant) »

MISTRUST AND LACK OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

« The Indigenous workforce needs to be promoted and valued. For a long time, I think that many of our communities, many people, felt an inferiority complex. And today, we're turning that around. (Indigenous participant) »

Many prejudices and certain discriminatory behaviours persist in Quebec, in the labour market as in other sectors. Respondents also stressed the importance of raising awareness among employers, managers and recruiters to facilitate the career paths of Indigenous people within Quebec businesses.

CHALLENGES FACING EMPLOYERS

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AND AWARENESS

« You realize pretty quickly that we're in contact with these people every day, but we don't necessarily know or understand them. Let's face it, because we've never bothered to understand them. (Key informant, Côte-Nord region) »

While most of the employers interviewed were open to hiring more Indigenous workers, few made targeted efforts to recruit from this labour pool, which is under-represented in the work force. In addition, almost half of the employers and informants interviewed said that prejudice and racism towards the Indigenous workforce was a challenge.

CHALLENGES FACING EMPLOYERS

A SHORTAGE OF APPLICATIONS AND THE NEED TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS WORKERS

Quebec companies seem to have difficulty attracting Indigenous candidates.

« Few people apply, actually. Probably because they don't see our ads. Perhaps it would be a good idea to post ads in Native Friendship Centres. We don't have a strategy to find them. We haven't developed anything. We are more in emergency mode over here. But it would be a good thing to develop strategies and partnerships. (Employer, Abitibi-Témiscamingue region) »

A lack of knowledge and connection with Indigenous communities make recruitment of Indigenous workers difficult for a majority of Quebec employers.

« If we need to post an ad, like me, I post ads [on a general job site], and I've never had an Indigenous person apply for a job. So, I think we don't have the reflex to go seek them out and they don't have the reflex to come and apply. I don't know why, there is a missing link. (Employer, Outaouais region) »

A GAP BETWEEN HIRING CRITERIA AND CANDIDATES' PROFILES

In particular, the criteria of training, work experience and criminal record checks (sometimes governed by collective agreements or legislation) can make recruitment difficult when it comes to candidates with an atypical employment profile.

« They require you to have so many years of experience, but you have to have experience to get experience. [...] And sometimes they don't give you a chance. You know when they say "You don't have experience," Why do they not want to... Give me experience and then I'll have some! You have to start somewhere. (Indigenous participant) »

As a result, Indigenous candidates—already few and far between—are often eliminated from the selection process.

« There are many more barriers to entry. To be honest, [out of] everyone who goes through our selection process—and it's the same for everyone—many more of the rejections are Indigenous people than not. (Employer, Mauricie region) »

CHALLENGES FACING EMPLOYERS

ADAPTING RECRUITMENT METHODS AND SELECTION TOOLS

Interviews are not always the most appropriate method to assess the skills and abilities of Indigenous workers, who may have more difficulty talking about and selling themselves. This can put them at a disadvantage in the selection process. Several employers mentioned the need to review their recruitment and selection techniques to better reach Indigenous job seekers. Some expressed a need for support in doing this.

« We have changed our interviewing methods, as traditional methods definitely don't work. [...] Indigenous people just don't sell themselves easily. [...] Sometimes we'll have an interpreter with us if we know the person doesn't feel comfortable. But most of the time, interviews don't work, they don't give good results. You really have to put them in the context, asking "How would you do such and such a thing?" (Employer, Mauricie region) »

This situation, combined with the gap between hiring criteria and candidates' profiles, means that potential Indigenous workers, already few and far between, are often eliminated from the selection process.

ORGANIZATIONAL FLEXIBILITY IN RESPONSE TO DIFFERENT SOCIOCULTURAL REALITIES TO THOSE OF THE MAJORITY

Indigenous communities have sociocultural practices that differ from those of the majority culture in Quebec, particularly with respect to family responsibilities, mourning and festivities. As a result, employers sometimes find it difficult to manage employees' absences for cultural or community events or traditional activities, or absences on an occasional basis to take care of an extended family member.

In addition, many companies do not have integration policies, neither for their workforce in general nor for specific groups, such as Indigenous people. Creating inclusive and safe workplaces for Indigenous workers can therefore be a significant challenge:

« Cultural safety means getting closer to their culture, and no longer trying to mould them to our organizational culture alone. There are ways to teach them the corporate culture, while also respecting their personal culture. [...] But companies need help: they can't do it alone, it's impossible. (Employer, Abitibi-Témiscamingue region) »

RESPONDENTS' SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The research also identified 12 possible solutions, formulated both by Indigenous workers and by the Quebec employers and key informants interviewed.

1. Develop more culturally relevant services for Indigenous job seekers.
2. Offer more consistent support for future Indigenous workers, beginning with the training period.
3. Inform and educate employers in order to deconstruct prejudices; encourage them to be open to hiring workers from diverse backgrounds.
4. Offer employers adequate support in recruiting Indigenous workers.
5. Improve and simplify tax credits and wage subsidies for recruitment of Indigenous workers.
6. Improve awareness among Indigenous workers of the sectors and trades in demand.
7. Include Indigenous models of success in training and the workplace.
8. Strengthen partnerships with Indigenous organizations in communities and in urban settings, with a view to long-term collaboration based on a relationship of trust.
9. Provide awareness training to managers and work teams about Indigenous realities and cultural safety.
10. Support employers in integrating new Indigenous workers, both financially and in terms of human resources management.
11. Improve and extend support for new Indigenous workers during the hiring process and throughout their career.
12. Diversify integration practices to create inclusive workplaces.

CONCLUSION

Many challenges remain for Indigenous workers who want to enter the Quebec labour market and for employers who wish to hire them. Although many Indigenous workers have a different—but no less valid—relationship to work than that of most non-Indigenous people, the cultural specificities of Indigenous peoples remain fully compatible with the world of work. Certain adjustments are called for on both sides:

These are great solitudes that do not understand one another. [We need to] create channels and then make them understand that equity is not like a cake: if I take a piece, there isn't less for the group. Everyone has their place, and everyone adds value to diversity. (Key informant, Capitale-Nationale region)

Much remains to be done—at the individual, organizational and systemic levels—to stimulate the full participation of Indigenous people in the Quebec labour market. Nonetheless, this study proves both parties' willingness to find creative and consensual solutions for more inclusive and secure work environments.