



Workforce Participation in Sarnia Lambton

February 2022

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- Circles Lambton
- City of Sarnia
- Community Living Sarnia-Lambton
- County of Lambton
- Goodwill Career Centre
- Kettle and Stony Point First Nation
- Lambton College - Co-op and Career Services and International Student Services
- Lambton Immigration Partnership
- Ontario Disability Employment Network
- Sarnia-Lambton Rebound
- Sarnia-Lambton Economic Partnership
- St. Clair Child and Youth
- The Workplace Group
- Walpole Island First Nation
- YMCA Newcomer Services

We invite your feedback on all publications produced by SLWDB. Additional information can be obtained by contacting:

Laura Greaves, Executive Director
Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board
St. Clair Corporate Centre
265 Front Street North, Suite 504
Sarnia, Ontario N7T 7X1
(519) 332-0000
laura.greaves@slwdb.org

Executive Summary

This project has explored the participation rate in Sarnia Lambton through preliminary research and the creation and distribution of a survey to collect data from our local community. By identifying the barriers and challenges of those who do not participate in the labour force, we have created a plan of action along with recommendations that can be used as a framework for future community planning. The Community Action Plan can be found on page 16.

The participation rate in Sarnia Lambton has declined over the recent years, with increased challenges created by the pandemic. Data presented in SWLDB's 2021-2022 [Local Labour Market Plan](#) showed that there were 10,304 job postings between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, indicating that employers continue to experience hiring challenges and that various job openings have gone unfilled. The key objective of this research is to determine the potential causes of the decline in labor force participation pre-pandemic, along with the additional barriers caused by the pandemic.

When fewer people are contributing to the workforce, it can have a negative impact on the overall economy. A lower participation rate can slow the growth of the economy as it creates a shortage in the viable candidate pool for employers looking to hire. Based on the findings from SLWDB's annual [EmployerOne Survey](#), employers are continually faced with the challenge of hard-to-fill positions due to either a lack of qualified candidates or low applicant numbers. In 2021, 20% of survey respondents indicated that positions were hard to fill due to a lack of qualifications and an additional 20% indicated that there were not enough applicants. As the economy recovers post-pandemic, increasing the participation rate of those not in the labour force will be vital to support the increased demand for workers in order to sustain productivity levels or expand operations.

The Workforce Participation survey collected input from 160 survey participants who were neither working nor looking for work at the time that the survey was conducted. Survey results show that the top three barriers identified by survey respondents were: physical health (26%), discouraged workers due to unsuccessful attempts to find employment (25%), and mental health (24%). The results for individual groups are detailed throughout this report, as we hope that the information contained will help to direct programming, economic development and workforce planning for the community and further the discussion surrounding workforce participation in Sarnia Lambton.

Sincerely,



Laura Greaves, Executive Director
Sarnia Lambton Workforce Development Board

Participation Rate in Sarnia Lambton

The participation rate is a calculation of the active portion of an economy's labour force (which is comprised of those who are either employed or unemployed and actively looking for work) out of the total working age population (aged 15 and over). As defined by Statistics Canada, persons not in the labour force consist of those who were either unwilling or unable to work, classifying them as neither employed nor unemployed. This can include discouraged workers (individuals who have given up on looking for work due to the inability to find work), students, homemakers, retired workers, seasonal workers in an 'off' season who were not looking for work, and persons who could not work because of a long-term illness or disability.¹

The participation rate and the unemployment rate are correlated as individuals will shift back and forth across these lines throughout their working lives. In general, as the labour force participation increases, so does the unemployment rate. Despite a 1.83% growth in the population in residents aged 15 and over from 2010 to 2020, the participation rate decreased by 11.3% within the same time frame. The number of people employed in Sarnia Lambton decreased from 60,400 people in 2010 to 54,500 in 2020, as seen in Figure 1.

According to data presented in Workforce Planning West's [Post-Pandemic Scenario Planning Project for Workforce Recovery](#) report, Sarnia Lambton has one of the lowest participation rates in the province. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sarnia Lambton held the lowest employment rate (52.6%), participation rate (58.7%) and the highest level of unemployment (8.7%) across Southwestern Ontario.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has temporarily altered the relationship between the participation and unemployment rates. The unemployment rate has been significantly higher throughout 2020-2021 than in previous years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, however the participation rate has not yet recovered. This is true for not only Sarnia Lambton, but for communities across the province and the country. The monthly unemployment rate relates directly to the public health measures in place, as they have resulted in lockdowns and temporary closures both temporary and permanent layoffs throughout the last year.

Figure 1: Sarnia Lambton Labour Force and Participation Rate Trends

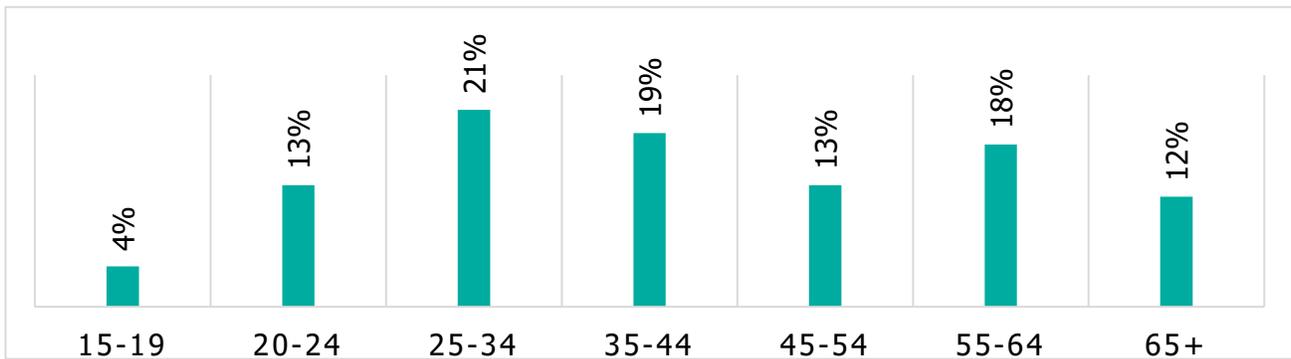
Annual Averages	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Source Population 15+	109.0	109.1	108.9	108.5	108.3	107.9	107.7	108.1	109.3	110.5	111.0
Participation Rate (%)	61.9	61.2	61.8	60.7	61.1	60.9	60.5	59.6	59.6	59.5	54.9
Labour Force	67.5	66.7	67.2	65.8	66.1	65.7	65.2	64.4	65.2	65.7	61.0
Employed	60.4	60.1	60.3	59.9	60.4	60.1	59.9	59.8	60.7	61.2	54.5
Unemployed	7.1	6.6	6.9	5.9	5.8	5.6	5.3	4.6	4.4	4.5	6.5
Unemployment Rate (%)	10.5	9.8	10.3	9.0	8.7	8.5	8.1	7.1	6.8	6.8	10.7

Source: Statistics Canada. Labour Force Survey, 2010-2020. Estimates calculated by Metro Economics.

Summary of Survey Responses

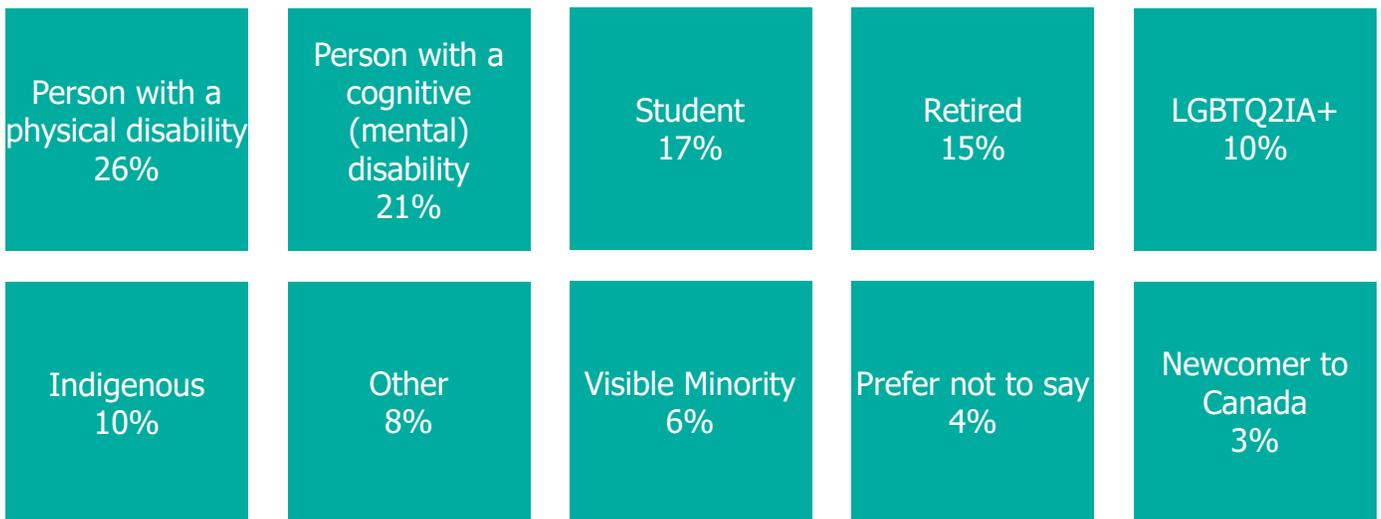
The survey generated 160 responses from local residents who were neither employed nor looking for work. Survey respondents identified as: 53% female, 46% male, and 1% as other. Age cohorts with the largest representation were among core working age adults aged 25-44 (40%) and those aged 55+ (30%).

Figure 2: Respondent Age Cohorts



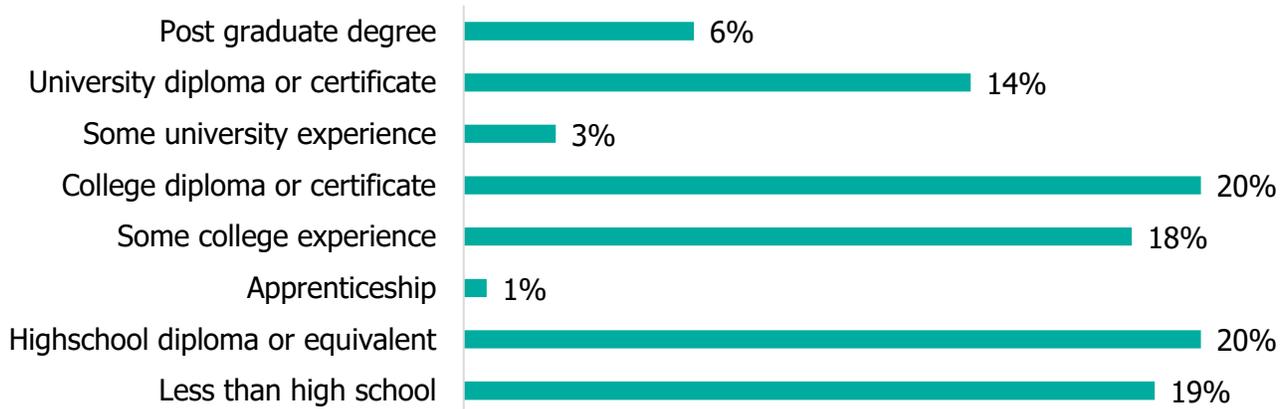
The survey generated responses from people identifying in a wide range of groups. Respondents were given the option of identifying multiple affiliations.

Figure 3: Respondent Group Identity Representation



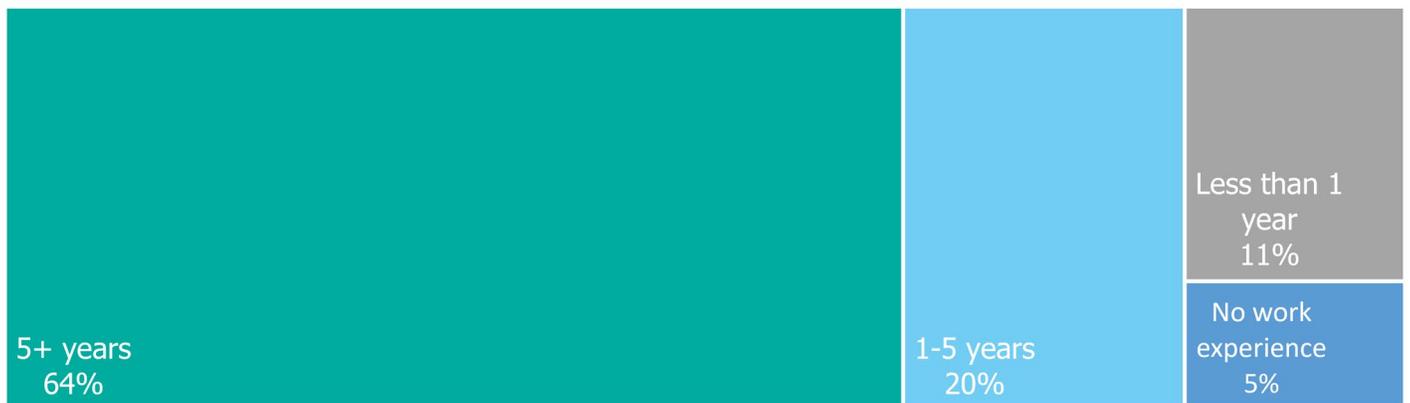
Respondents were asked to identify their highest level of education. Education levels amongst survey respondents varied, with 19% holding less than a high school diploma, 20% holding a high school diploma or equivalent, and 62% having some form of post-secondary experience, diploma, or degree. Respondents were also asked whether or not they were continuing their education, to which 23% of respondents indicated that they were upgrading their education or skills in some capacity.

Figure 4: Respondent Highest Level of Educational Attainment



With regard to work experience, 95% of respondents indicated that they had previous work experience, with 64% having more than five years of experience and 5% having no work experience whatsoever. Regardless of work experience, 73% of respondents indicated that they had previous volunteer experience.

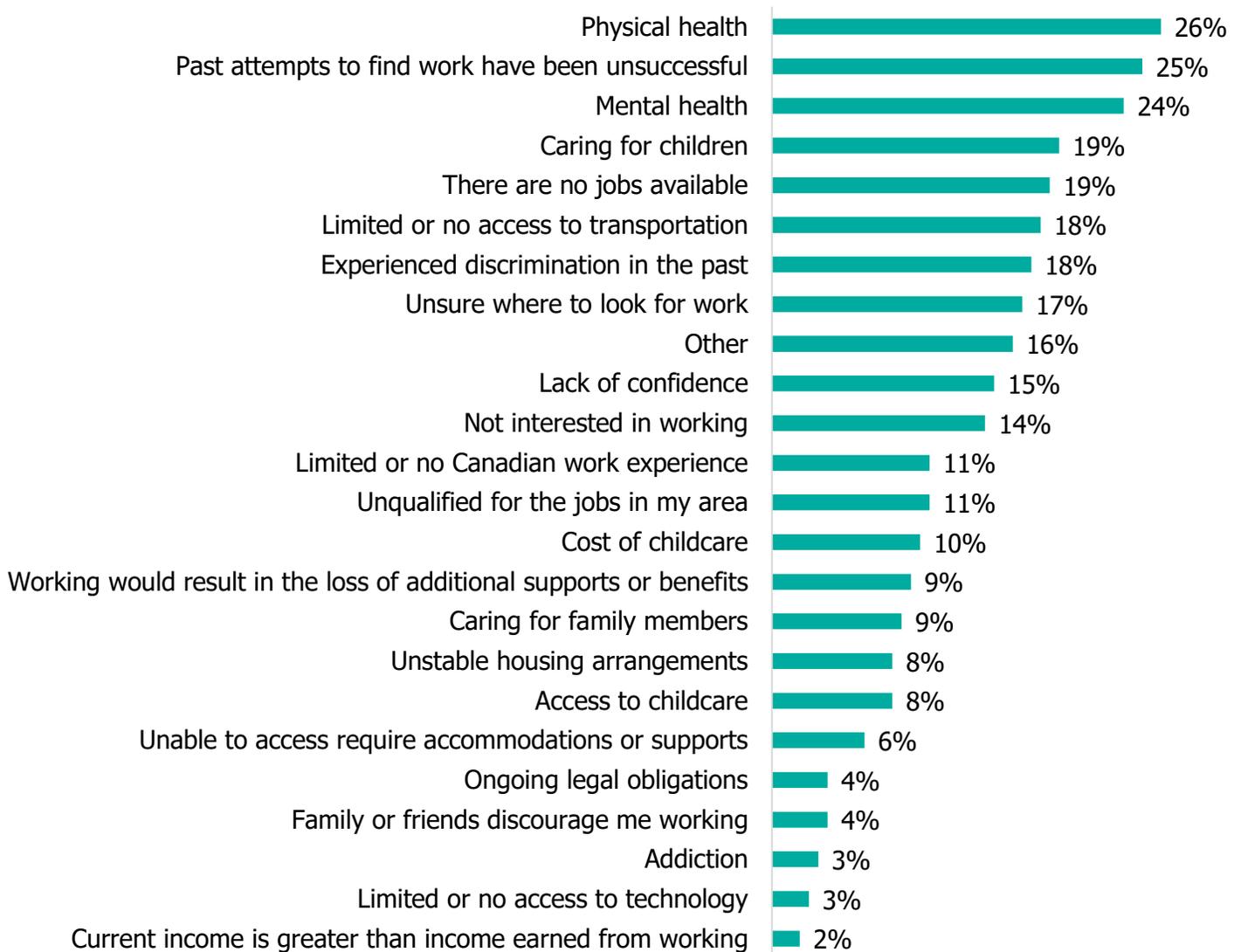
Figure 5: Respondent Work Experience Levels



Key Barriers Identified

Respondents were asked to identify the key reasons as to why they were not looking for work. A list of 24 options was formulated based on consultations with community partners and secondary research models. The top three barriers identified by survey respondents included physical health (26%), discouraged workers due to unsuccessful attempts to find employment (25%), and mental health (24%). Respondents were also given the option to identify any additional barriers not listed in the survey. Additional barriers identified include vaccination status, age discrimination, harassment, lack of work experience, participation in continuing education, weakened immune system, experiencing domestic violence, scheduling restrictions due to caregiver obligations, disability accommodation requirements, and caring for children with special needs.

Figure 6: Barriers Impacting Local Workforce Participation



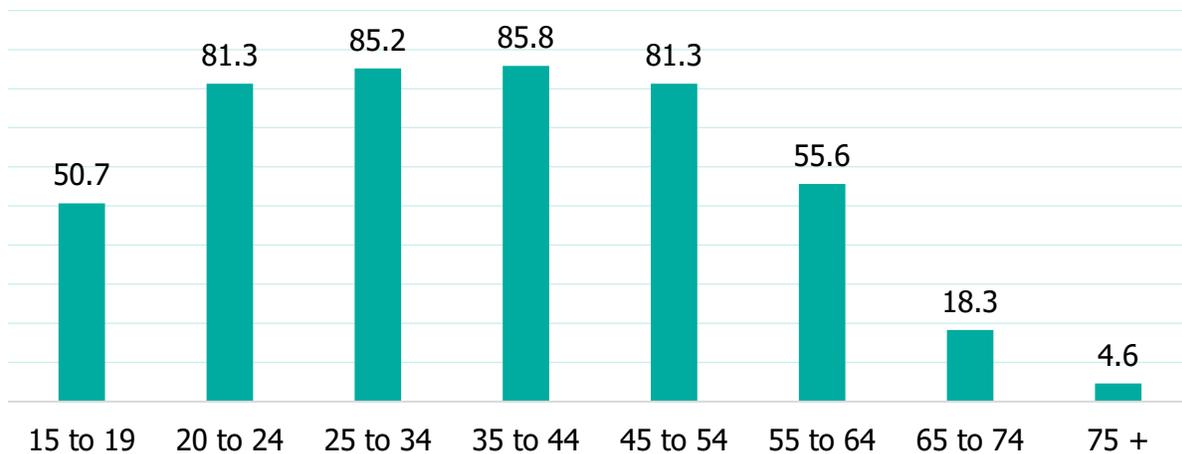
Age

In Ontario, the declining share of core-age (25-44) and youth population has had a drastic negative impact on the labour force, creating challenges such as a decreased tax base and recruitment challenges for employers. The median age and the proportion of people aged 55 and over has increased in Ontario due to the aging of the baby-boomer generation combined with an increase in life expectancy and below replacement fertility rates.¹

Roughly 35% of Sarnia Lambton's population is aged 55 and over and nearing retirement. The aging population in Sarnia Lambton is likely a leading contributor to the low participation rate locally as those aged 55 and over make up 73% of those not in the labour force. Due to the aging population in Sarnia Lambton, there has been an increase in the number of residents receiving CPP and QPP benefits, as well as Old Age Security (OAS) benefits.

In other parts of the province and the country, a higher percentage of older Canadians are continuing to work. In 2016, the age cohort with the highest number of people unemployed were among those aged 20 - 34 years of age. The participation rate among those aged 20 to 34 is the highest of any other age cohort indicating that this population is willing to work, and actively seeking employment opportunities within the local community. The age cohorts that will need to be strategically targeted to increase participation include those within the ages of 15-19 years old, and those aged 55 and over.

Figure 7: Participation Rate by Age Cohort in Sarnia Lambton.



Source: Statistics Canada. 2016 Census, Custom Table.

¹ Source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/14826-eng.htm>

Based on the data collected on the 160 respondents who participated in the local workforce participation survey, the top reasons why Sarnia Lambton residents were neither working nor looking for work varied across all age cohorts. Although each age cohort presented with differing reasons, mental health was listed as one of the top three reasons amongst five out of the six age cohorts listed in Table 8. Additionally, discouraged workers were present primarily among those aged 15-34 and those 45-64; these groups indicated one of the top reasons for neither working nor looking for work was due to past attempts at employment being unsuccessful.

Figure 8: Top Reasons for Neither Working nor Looking for Work by Age

Age Cohort	Top reasons
15-24	Past attempts unsuccessful (39%)
	Transportation (36%)
	Mental Health (36%)
25-34	Caring for Children (55%)
	Unsure where to look (35%)
	Past attempts unsuccessful (32%)
35-44	Physical health (33%)
	Mental health (27%)
	Caring for children (23%)
45-54	Experienced discrimination (43%)
	Past attempts unsuccessful (38%)
	Physical health (29%)
55-64	Physical health (43%)
	Past attempts unsuccessful (14%)
	Mental health (14%)
65+	Not interested in working (53%)
	Physical health (37%)
	Mental health (11%)

Health

Alongside age, poor health is a key barrier to work. This includes physical limitations due to injury, people with disabilities and mental health. In consultations with key partners, discussions around health highlighted physical limitations, mental health limitations, barriers surrounding accessibility, a lack of access to assistive tools, limitations on communication and social skills, and access to transportation.

Increased dependency on government transfers as a source of income for those who experience limitation with their physical, cognitive and mental health may deter those not in the labour force from obtaining employment opportunities to avoid the risk of earning an income that would lessen the amount of government transfers they receive. Approximately 9% of survey respondents indicated that working would result in the loss of additional supports or benefits.

Of those who participated in the workforce participation survey, 40 respondents (25%) indicated they had a physical disability, 32 respondents (20%) indicated that they had a cognitive (mental) disability, and 38 respondents (24%) indicated challenges with their mental health. The top reasons for neither working nor looking for work among those with a physical disability were limitations due to their physical health (60%), mental health (20%), and previously experiencing discrimination (18%), and working would result in the loss of additional supports or benefits (18%).

Those who identified as having a cognitive (mental) disability were primarily among residents within the core working age groups, and the top barriers identified included their mental health (63%), previously experiencing discrimination (44%), and unsuccessful previous attempts at finding employment (38%). Those who indicated that their top barrier was mental health also experienced barriers related to transportation (39%), physical health (37%), being unsure where to look for work (32%), experiencing discrimination (29%), unsuccessful previous attempts at finding employment (29%), and a lack of confidence (29%).

In addition to the physical and cognitive (mental) health of those neither working nor looking for work, other factors related to health that may restrict an individual's ability to participate in the workforce include caregiver responsibilities among those who are caring for individuals with disabilities.

Figure 9: Age Distribution of Those With a Physical or Cognitive Disability

Age Cohort	Physical Disability	Cognitive (mental) Disability
15-19	3%	6%
20-24	8%	19%
25-34	18%	19%
35-44	20%	19%
45-54	10%	19%
55-64	30%	13%
65+	13%	6%

Gender Roles

Women's participation in the workforce has increased drastically since the 1950s due to changes in social norms and gender roles, however females account for 56% of those not in the labour force. Multiple characteristics contribute to low participation rates in women such as: occupation characteristics, gender wage gap, the cost of childcare, educational attainment, marital status, and child and family member care duties.

Recent reports that highlight the impact of the pandemic on women's labour force participation indicate that women were overrepresented in industries hardest hit by the pandemic and had a harder timetable to shifting to remote work environments. Women were found to occupy industries that had slower recovery rates or high exposure occupations. The top occupations that women are employed in locally include Health care and social assistance, Retail trade, and Accommodation and food services, while the top occupations that men are employed in include Manufacturing, Construction, and Retail trade.

Of those who participated in the local workforce participation survey, 85 identified as women. The data collected indicates that the top reasons why women in Sarnia Lambton are neither working nor looking for work include barriers surrounding access to childcare (31%), physical health (28%), and a lack of qualifications (27%). In regard to education, 71% of those who identified as women had some form of post-secondary education, while 26% were currently working to upgrade their education and skills. Additionally, 59% of women indicated they had 5+ years of work experience, while 22% had 1 to 5 years of work experience, 13% had less than 1 year of work experience, and 6% had no work experience. Regardless of work experience, 26% of the 85 women who responded to the survey indicated they had volunteer experience.

Figure 10: Top Reasons Women are Neither Working nor Looking for Work

Top reasons	%
Access to childcare	31%
Physical health	28%
Unqualified	27%
Limited or no access to technology	21%
Past attempts unsuccessful	19%
Unsure where to look	18%
Lack of confidence	18%
Family/friends discourage	18%
Not interested in working	16%
Unstable housing arrangements	15%
Caring for children	14%
Cost of childcare	14%
Canadian work experience	13%
Current income is greater than income earned from working	13%
No jobs available	11%

Of those who participated in the local workforce participation survey, 74 identified as men. The data collected indicates that the top reasons why men in Sarnia Lambton are neither working nor looking for work include Physical health (34%), discouraged workers due to unsuccessful attempts to find employment (21%), no jobs available (20%), and no interest in working (19%). In regard to education, 56% of men had some form of post-secondary education and 25% had a highschool diploma while 22% were currently working to upgrade their education and skills. Additionally, 70% of men indicated they had 5+ years of work experience, while 18% had 1 to 5 years of work experience, 7% had less than 1 year of work experience, and 4% had no work experience. Regardless of work experience, 72% of male respondents indicated they had volunteer experience.

Figure 11: Top Reasons Men are Neither Working nor Looking for Work

Top reasons	%
Physical health	31%
Past attempts unsuccessful	22%
No jobs available	20%
Not interested in working	19%
Canadian work experience	18%
Mental health	18%
Transportation	18%
Unsure where to look	16%

There has been a limited amount of research conducted on the labour force statistics and labour force participation among the 2SLGBTQIA+ community in the Sarnia Lambton area. Based on consultations with local organizations and advocacy groups, the key barriers faced by the 2SLGBTQIA+ community include harassment and discrimination both in the workplace and during the job search process as applications typically lacked in inclusive components such as preferred names and pronouns. In the workplace, common themes identified as barriers include blatant discrimination or disregard for pronouns, unsafe or inaccessible bathrooms (gender neutral washrooms), and the need for diversity and inclusion training within local workplaces.

Data collected from 15 respondents who identified as 2SLGBTQIA+ in the workforce participation survey indicate that the top barriers locally were unsuccessful past attempts to find employment (53%), discrimination (47%), and caring for children (47%). Approximately 87% of respondents within this group had some form of post-secondary education while 73% had over one year of work experience and 74% had previous volunteer experience.

Education Level

The top reasons for neither working nor looking for work varied across each education level, however, those with a high school diploma or education level less than high school both indicated that transportation was a key barrier, while respondents with a college diploma or post graduate degree both indicated that there were no jobs available locally.

There were 27 survey respondents who identified themselves as students, the majority of which were between 20 to 24 years of age (55%) and 78% had some level of post-secondary education or experience. Additionally, 93% of students indicated that they had over 1 year of work experience. The top reasons that were identified as to why students were neither working nor looking for work were because they were unsure where to look for work (37%), they lacked Canadian work experience (37%), their mental health (34%), and a lack of confidence (30%).

Figure 12: Top Reasons for Not Participating by Education Level

Education Level	Top reasons
Less than highschool	Physical health (40%)
	Mental health (30%)
	Transportation (23%)
Highschool diploma or equivalent	Past attempts unsuccessful (25%)
	Unsure where to look (25%)
	Transportation (22%)
Some college experience	Past attempts unsuccessful (38%)
	Mental health (31%)
	Lack of confidence (31%)
College diploma or certificate	Physical health (41%)
	Caring for children (25%)
	No jobs available (19%)
Some university experience	Mental health (75%)
	Past attempts unsuccessful (50%)
	Caring for family members (50%)
University diploma or certificate	Lack of Canadian work experience (32%)
	Experienced discrimination (23%)
	Physical health (23%)
Post graduate degree	Past attempts unsuccessful (50%)
	No jobs available (40%)
	Experienced discrimination (30%)

Race and Ethnicity

The three minority categories highlighted by 2016 Census data included francophone, Indigenous, and visible minority groups. The francophone population in Sarnia Lambton is comprised primarily of an older demographic as 68% of francophone residents are outside of the core working age group, which contributes to a lower workforce participation rate. Alternatively, local First Nations have relatively younger populations compared to the overall Sarnia Lambton population. Some of the key barriers faced by local Indigenous groups that were identified through consultations with local community stakeholder include discrimination, limited transportation, and the increased need for access to training.

The newcomer population is comprised of 12,390 immigrants living in Sarnia Lambton in 2016, with almost two-thirds of newcomers having entered Canada before 1981. Potential barriers faced by newcomers based on consultations with community partners include discrimination, limited transportation, language barriers, and a lack of Canadian work experience.

The workforce participation survey conducted locally resulted in 10% of respondents identifying as Indigenous, 6% identifying as a visible minority, and 3% identifying as a newcomer. The top barriers identified by these groups were: transportation (45%), no jobs available (41%), unsuccessful past attempts at finding employment (41%), experiencing discrimination (38%), and being unsure of where to look for work (34%).

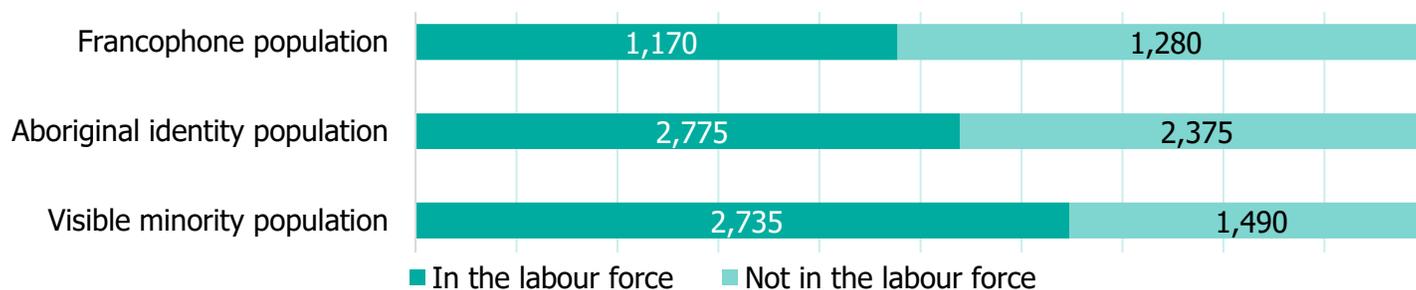
Top barriers for respondents identifying as Indigenous:

- Unsure where to look for work (47%)
- Transportation (47%)
- Past attempt unsuccessful (40%)
- Discrimination (40%)

Top barriers for respondents identifying as a visible minority:

- No jobs available (56%)
- Discrimination (56%)
- Past attempt unsuccessful (56%)
- Transportation (56%)

Figure 13: Minority representation in Sarnia Lambton.



Source: Statistics Canada. 2016 Census, Custom Table.

Community Action Plan

Supporting referrals to community agencies that provide life stabilization services (life skills, basic needs, health, and community supports).

Provide solutions and training to bring awareness to local employers on best practices for establishing a safe and inclusive workplace

Provide solutions and training to bring awareness to local employers on inclusive recruitment and retention strategies hiring from marginalized groups.

Support increased access to financial supports and childcare initiatives to support the return of women in the workforce.

Support increased job seeker access to digital literacy, conflict resolution, soft skills, and communication training to prepare them for entering or re-entering the workforce.

Collaborate with local social and community services who advocate for underrepresented groups to determine solutions to increase diversity and inclusion in the workforce.

Work collaboratively with community partners to address transportation barriers.



SARNIA LAMBTON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

265 Front Street North, Suite 504
Sarnia, Ontario | N7T 7X1

Telephone: (519)-332-0000
Email: info@slwdb.org