

# THE MINING SECTOR IN ONTARIO: 2023 LABOUR MARKET RESEARCH STUDY IN SUMMARY

## The reality of the mining labour market in Ontario today

The lack of a robust workforce pipeline is a critical challenge facing the mining sector in Ontario, with not enough workers to maintain existing operations nor meet growing demand for minerals and metals. Three compounding factors are driving the significant hiring needs in the sector:

### It is difficult to find candidates to fill critical skilled roles

Many occupations in mining require a unique set of skills and mining companies in Ontario are challenged to find qualified candidates with these unique skills because of high retirement rates in senior positions and those with the most demanding requirements.

Accelerating retirement is further exacerbated by growth in the demand for certified occupations, but supply of certified workers has not kept up and trade qualifications have been stable or declining. The availability and enrolment in mining-related courses at post-secondary institutions are on the decline. Mining courses exist as a part of post-secondary education, but are unavailable in all regions in the province, and enrollment has been declining, or the courses are no longer offered to the same degree as in the past. Post-secondary programs are also not seen to be catering to the industry's evolving skill requirements driven by technological innovations, particularly the increasing need for technical and automation skills.

There is a shirking pool of talent where mining employers are competing for the same qualified and experienced talent across trades, engineering, and frontline supervision roles.

### Geographic remoteness of mining operations complicates recruitment

The geographical remoteness of mining operations in Northern Ontario complicates efforts to attract talent to the sector. While the mining sector is a lead employer in the North, it is not in Ontario as a whole, and few employed in the sector are originally from the North. This means the sector must contend with attracting workers to the Northern region while competing with employers in more accessible locations, closer to where the bulk of the workforce resides. This is particularly notable for credentialed roles, given the gap observed in supply and demand, where the mining sector employs a relatively small proportion of the workforce and must compete against other industries without 'home court' advantage.

### Outdated perceptions of mining are a significant impediment to recruitment

Outdated perceptions of mining, often linked to stereotypes of the sector as unsafe and environmentally harmful, emerged as a significant impediment to building a robust workforce pipeline. This is coupled with a significant lack of understanding and familiarity with the variety of occupations within the mining sector. There are also noticeable "role model" gaps for potential female and visible minority hires to see themselves in some roles in mining. While women and visible minorities are well represented in degreed occupations, they have a more limited presence in other roles, such as managers, skilled workers, and credentialed positions.

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## There is much that can be done to build a robust pipeline of mining talent in Ontario

There is broad optimism about the future in the Ontario mining sector, and widespread agreement that minerals and metals are crucial to low carbon energy solutions. There is concurrence on the need to find, develop and mine these resources, and to see Ontario become a world-leader in the mining and production of critical minerals. This is backed by a strong desire to see the government do more to promote the role of mining and the job opportunities that exist.

Mining compensates employees considerably better compared to competing industries and offers continual skills training, while the cost of living is much lower in Northern Ontario compared to other Southern markets in the province. Early exposure to the industry, long-term revisions to the provincial mining education curriculum to reflect more current information about mining and its purpose, and consistent access to courses and training opportunities that enhance the skillset of the future workforce will go a long way to garner employment interest in the sector.

The greatest opportunities to attract talent to the sector is found among youth, those with a racialized background and those not born in Canada, who have notably more positive attitudes about mining, its role in efforts to combat climate change, and its connection to green energy solutions. They are also particularly receptive to a change in career, and would be most motivated by financial compensation and job stability – key competitive advantages for the sector.

Traditional audiences for hiring recruitment efforts, including Indigenous Canadians and those who reside in Northern Ontario, should continue to be a focus, given their more receptive attitudes towards the sector, and proximity to mining operations. Notable progress has already been made in increasing the breadth and depth of the Indigenous-identify workforce, who now make up a higher-than-average share in many mining occupations and have also increased as a share of the sector's workforce over time.

In response to the challenges facing the sector, there are critical elements for a path forward: increased communication to counter negative perceptions and demonstrate inclusive policies and practices; expanded education, training and continuous upskilling; and targeted recruitment of new audiences.

## Data-driven roadmap to success

The study examined trends, barriers and opportunities, skills gaps, and key audiences and messaging to help shape the Ontario Mining Association's "This is Mine Life" campaign, which aims to shift perceptions and attract youth to careers in the sector, while also providing recommendations for industry and the Ontario government.

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## The “This is Mine Life” campaign should target new audiences

The information campaign should concentrate efforts on reaching youth, individuals from racialized backgrounds, immigrants, Indigenous Canadians, and those living in Northern Ontario. The campaign should aim to familiarize potential recruits with the variety of occupations within the sector, highlighting the competitive compensation, job security, and continual training opportunities that the industry offers. It is pivotal to demonstrate the industry's contribution to green energy solutions in order to counteract negative environmental perceptions. To inspire potential recruits, the campaign should showcase the industry's diversity, emphasizing the progress made on involving the Indigenous workforce. The industry's need for specialized skills should also be underscored, emphasizing the value placed on communication and teamwork skills, as well as dedication and initiative. The use of online channels was deemed the most effective way to communicate with these target groups.

## The industry should expand training and continuous upskilling

The mining industry should leverage the expertise of veteran staff to train new recruits now, while this experienced workforce is still available. The industry should also more effectively advertise the benefits of working in mining, such as the higher pay, superior benefits and the lower cost of living in mining regions, and emphasize the potential for career progression, skills training, and opportunities to work with advanced technology and automation. It is also advised that mining companies consider long-term investments in the form of apprenticeships or scholarships for students in areas of projected hiring needs. They should also increase their proactive outreach at the post-secondary level to educate students about the opportunities and career paths in the mining industry.

## The government should modernize mining curriculum and actively support awareness efforts

In line with the Ontario Government's "Growing the labour supply and developing a skilled labour force" commitment under Ontario's Critical Minerals Strategy 2022-2027, the Ontario Government should support the industry's communication efforts, as it is the most trusted source of information among job seekers. The government should also aid in promoting Northern Ontario as an attractive and affordable place to live and work, given the significant structural challenge posed by workforce mobility.

Increasing the availability of mining courses in the province, and identifying measures that support the continuing skill development of trade workers, should also be considered. Likewise, the existing high school curriculum should be updated with more current information about modern mining and its purpose-driven role as an economically vital and responsible supplier of the raw materials needed for the green energy transition. The government should consider expanding the reach and requirement of basic mining education in high schools beyond Northern Ontario to school boards in Central Ontario that border the North.

Furthermore, it is recommended to revisit regulations regarding the minimum age requirements for working on mine sites in order to allow younger individuals the opportunity to explore jobs in the sector earlier and provide them with greater access to apprenticeship or COOP placements, while also creating a larger pool of talent from which employers could recruit.