

## Understanding Long-Term Unemployment and How to Move Forward: Learning from Key Stakeholders in the London, Ontario Region

*A summary of the SSHRC Research Project: Possibilities and Boundaries in the Socio-Political Shaping of Unemployment: How Service Seekers and Service Providers Negotiate Long-Term Unemployment.*

Long-term unemployment presents significant challenges for individuals, families, and communities, and it has continued to persist at high levels since the 2008 recession. This summary presents on-going findings from a collaborative research project on long-term unemployment. This research was conducted in order to inform policy and program changes and more fully support persons experiencing long-term employment to engage in the range of activities they need and want to do to support themselves and their families and contribute to their communities.

Possibilities and Boundaries is collecting data between 2014 and 2017 in London, Ontario and Saint Louis, Missouri. It aims to illuminate how policy and program changes since the 2008 recession are shaping possibilities and boundaries for the negotiation of long-term unemployment by employment support service organizations and individuals who are without work.

Within this report, we provide a summary of insights gathered from interviews conducted in phase 1 of the study with persons identified as key stakeholders in the employment sector and employment services sector in London, Ontario. Stakeholders tackled the pressing questions of how to adequately define long-term unemployment, the limits and strengths of existing policies and service delivery models, and put forward new proposals that aim to create and sustain opportunities for the unemployed in more effective and socially just ways.

## Broadening and Diversifying Understandings of Long-Term Unemployment

According to Statistics Canada, long-term unemployment is defined as the proportion of the labour force aged 15 or older who did not have a job any time during the current or previous 12-months and have been actively looking for work in the past 4-weeks.

As Figure 1 shows, although long-term unemployment is below its 2011 peak, levels have remained sharply elevated since 2008. When asked HOW TO DEFINE long-term unemployment, stakeholders raised concerns with sole reliance on this quantifiable, homogenous measurement of unemployment. Rather, many stakeholders noted how understandings of unemployment need to be much more fluid given variations tied to individuals' self-perception and resources, sectoral experiences, workplace history, citizenship status, age, and educational status. Stakeholders noted that a 'one-size-fits-all' definition of long-term unemployment does not work given that older workers, newcomers, historically racialized groups, and persons with fewer years of formal education are more likely to experience

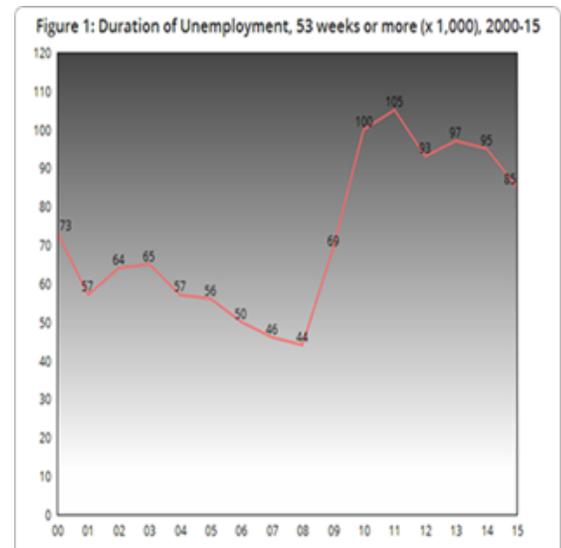
## Objectives of Study

Enhance understanding of the nature and effects of long-term unemployment since the 2008 recession.

Explain the consequences of changes in public policies for service provision and the everyday lives of persons experiencing long-term unemployment.

Outline possibilities and boundaries that exist in everyday life for service providers and persons experiencing long-term unemployment.

Foster opportunities to create better support for persons experiencing long-term unemployment in more adequate and socially just ways.



Reference: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey - Table 282-0048

# Possibilities and Boundaries

extended periods of long-term unemployment, accentuating other forms of labour market disadvantages. Stakeholders also noted how contractual, temporary and long-term part-time employment – work generally understood as PRECARIOUS owing to low-pay, lack of security, and the absence of benefits – can also be understood as related to long-term unemployment as a result of its inability to provide social and financial security.

In other words, stakeholders defined long-term unemployment much more broadly than traditional definitions, taking into account not only time-based definitions (often six-months to one-year) but also forms of employment with limited social benefits and statutory entitlements, low wages, lack of control over working conditions, uncertainty of job tenure and limited access to career ladders.

## Addressing Long-Term Unemployment in the Region

Respondents noted that one of the major causes of long-term unemployment, particularly in the Greater London Area, has been related to the significant erosion of well-paying manufacturing jobs.

“Employers have reduced their permanent hiring based on uncertainty. They’ve tended also to work their existing work force harder part-time roles which would have been converted to longer-term and better employment over time, have been held in a fixed state for a longer period of time than normally would have occurred.”

Stakeholders also noted how rising costs and lack of accessible public transit have made it more difficult for lower-income individuals to get to certain regions of the city, worsening the conditions of poverty and unemployment in disadvantaged communities.

“There’s a number of people who are in part-time, short-term and other roles, so the overall employment statistic is not descriptive of adequacy of income for individuals to sustain their families and to survive. I think we have to get beyond those gross measures to looking at some other measures of well-being and a community to really understand some of those dynamics .

“I spend most of my day trying to secure food and bus tickets for individuals, trying to find coverage for prescriptions, trying to convince them that life is worth living because of the hopelessness of years of unemployment.”

The absence of accessible public transit combined with the persistence of poverty made it more difficult for those unemployed to:

- Access employment opportunities**
- Attend educational or professional development and training**
- Remedy health concerns**
- Make child and elder care arrangements**
- Actively participate in civic and community life**

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Stakeholders also noted that major challenges for newcomer populations, particularly foreign-trained professionals, are getting Canadian experience and recognition of credentials by Canadian accreditation bodies. Given the significant time and financial investments often necessary to meet these requirements, stakeholders expressed how a good many highly-skilled individuals are not being adequately integrated into the Canadian labour market.

## Positive approaches to Addressing Long-Term Unemployment in the Region

Despite the range of challenges, stakeholders pointed out that London employment services centres are, on the whole, amongst the leaders in the province in developing a **NO WRONG DOOR APPROACH (NWDA)** for clients.

“No matter what door a client walked into that they would be well looked after and, if they weren’t in the right place, that they would get to the right place so that they would be referred to somebody who had met the community standard for compliant.”

A NWDA is based on the principle that staff members at community organizations are able to connect individuals with the appropriate service provider quickly and effectively. In many cases, a NWDA was facilitated by close coordination among and between employment services agencies, including strong working relationships with the local municipal government, Chamber of Commerce, the Employment Sector Council of London Middlesex, the Workforce Planning and Development Board, Fanshawe college, Western University, and other organizations. While each organization provided a full suite of services, this coordination meant the particular organizations

were recognized as providing niche services for particular client groups, such as newcomers or youth, and that clients were referred when such foci were required.

“We’re dealing with far more professional immigrants than we have before. People are coming to us who already have licenses in their professions from their home countries. So, we’re dealing with pharmacists, nurses, doctors, civil engineers. We have a lot of newcomers and immigrants and who are in regulated professions. They want to continue to work in their field of expertise. Their impacted differently because it takes longer for them to get to work in their area of expertise, and some of them will never be able to get relicensed here in Canada. The process is far too long. And, it’s very expensive to go through, depending on your profession.”

Respondents noted how such relationship building among agencies ensures that service seekers are able to draw on the necessary support systems in a timely and adequate fashion. Stakeholders identified the **ONE-CLIENT** assessment approach as the guiding framework ensuring best practices across the nonprofit employment services. As one participant explained:

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“OneClient is sort of the entire package. It’s the framework which guides ESCLM and our principals. It was an effort to identify a shared language, common standards for service delivery. Everything from what happens when somebody walks in the door, like the intake process, to the various sorts of job maintenance as a component, and the sort of standards that they expected at each agency to meet with respect to those components.”

In a related vein, many stakeholders emphasized the significance of RAPID RESPONSE and the JOB DEVELOPMENT NETWORK as a leading practice in collaboration. The goal of Rapid Response is to respond quickly to impending layoffs or employers looking to hire large numbers of workers. The network coordinates job postings, identifies potential employers, and organizes job fairs linking workers and workplaces.

## Enhancing Approaches to Long-Term Unemployment

Stakeholders proposed a number of ways to help remedy the impasse of long-term unemployment, including new funding arrangements, data pooling, working with small businesses, and collaboration with education and governmental partners.

### a. Altering funding

Respondents emphasized the importance of stable, multi-year funding in order to help support and administer existing programs, but also new dedicated funds that could enable pilot projects that sought to develop new programs and initiatives without the fear of losing funding should job placement quotas be missed.

“The not-for-profit sector unfortunately spends more time chasing the funding than spending time on providing quality service”

### b. Acquiring, Organizing, and Sharing Data

Stakeholders also noted that better local data was necessary to address the conditions specific to the Greater London Area. This might include, for instance, a shared database noting the skills of the unemployed, service organizations they have worked with in the past to facilitate follow-up with counsellors, and linking them with potential employers.

Others noted how readily available local labour market data could help identify existing voids waiting to be filled and facilitate more efficient job search plans.

“We have no idea of the skills of the unemployed there was no common database or shared database of what are the skills. I have to scramble every time I’m responding to what skills we have.”

“In the first year of our job developers’ network our agencies matched more than four thousand people directly with jobs. That was like 10 percent of the jobs in London.”

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## c. Working with Small Businesses

Some respondents suggested public subsidies and incentives for small business in order to aid employers. Access to unemployed individuals could be further facilitated through job development networks and dedicated sectoral approaches.

“I really believe that you can support employers. Give them a tax break if they invest in their upscaling or retraining of their employees. Give them a subsidy to hire someone that needs a job because that person is then going to be paying taxes that will help with the tax break.”

## d. Enhancing Collaborations

Stakeholders also noted that closer collaboration between business, government and employment agencies with career colleges and technical institutes could help to ensure job-ready graduates with diverse experiences.

“There’s been lots of effort in recent years to bring agencies, employers, and all of those people interested in turning that around together. And I think we’re beginning to see the impact of that.”

## Moving Forward

Meeting the challenges of long-term unemployment requires a multifaceted approach. Stakeholders, community organizations, labour, government, business and educational institutions all have a role to play in facilitating evidence-based

policy making. The data collected here counters prevailing understandings and depictions of long-term unemployed and precarious workers as having chosen their destiny, or as somehow deficient.

Some six years into a so-called post-recessionary period, structural long-term unemployment remains significantly elevated. The data collected here, informed by the firsthand experiences of stakeholders involved in the business community, municipal and provincial governments, and employment support organizations is a critical first step toward identifying and addressing such public policy concerns.

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*Prepared July 2016 by Carlo Fanelli, Debbie Laliberte Rudman, Rebecca Aldrich, and Kate Whiting. Study co-investigators/collaborators: Suzanne Huot, Lilian Magalhaes and John Griffiths.*

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*For further information visit: <http://possibilitiesandboundaries.ca>*

