

## National Advocacy Campaign: Signal Scanning Analysis – Beyond Decent

In December 2023, members of the National Advocacy Campaign Working Group undertook a series of research activities to build a foundation of knowledge and generate ideas for an advocacy campaign addressing the topic area of “Beyond Decent Work.” This document provides an analysis of the results of the Signal Scanning exercise. In this exercise, Working Group members collected a variety of sources (e.g. articles, reports, budget submission) related to decent work to identify emerging trends, patterns or significant developments.

The original campaign prototype for “Beyond Decent” envisioned striving to define and advocate for decent work through the lens of career development – moving beyond the baseline of decent working conditions. Steering Committee ideation on Beyond Decent included the following considerations:

- Advocating for the impact of career development could result in greater investment in the field, which could in turn improve working conditions for career development professionals
- The language of decent work does not fully encompass what career development is able to achieve (e.g. Contributing to labour market integration and attachment, employee recruitment and retention, supporting a thriving economy, quality of work, etc.)
- There are potential connections to government priorities around education and immigration

### Understanding decent work

The term [decent work](#) has been used by the International Labour Organization since 1999. Today, when used by governments or international bodies, decent work often refers to the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. [Decent work](#) is often understood to encompass fair compensation, safe working conditions, worker rights, dignity and equality in the workplace. It also commonly includes job security, appropriate scheduling and benefits. SDG 8 additionally targets the advancement of youth education, employment and training.

### Language considerations

[Research from Future Skills Centre](#) finds that there are many terms used interchangeably, and without a clear definition, that connect to decent work. The lack of consistency in language could present a challenge or an opportunity for an NAC. Here is the language found in the Signal Scanning exercise:

- Beyond decent work ([IONS](#))
- Decent work ([CEDEFOP](#), [ONN](#), [ILO](#), [Frontiers in Psychology](#), [LMIC](#), [CERIC/Future Economy](#), [Dr. Samuel Braithwaite](#), [UN](#), [WEF](#), [World Bank](#), [York University Staff Association](#))
- Good job ([LMIC](#))
- Job quality ([LMIC](#))
- Quality jobs ([ILO](#), [Jobs for the Future](#))
- Quality of work / quality of employment ([FSC](#), [Gallup](#), [Dr. Samuel Braithwaite](#), [Statistics Canada](#))

## What could “Beyond Decent” look like?

In addition to the baseline of fair wages, safe work and other considerations outlined above, discussions of decent work (and similar terms) include many other characteristics, outlined below. Opportunities for career growth and advancement emerged as a key career development consideration.

Opportunities for career growth /advancement <i>(LMIC, ONN, CCDF, FSC, Gallup, Jobs for the Future, LMIC, CERIC/Future Economy)</i>	Autonomy <i>(LMIC, StatsCan, Jobs for the Future, CERIC/Future Economy)</i>	Participatory work culture / workers’ voices are heard <i>(ONN, FSC, Jobs for the Future)</i>	Purpose and connection to work <i>(FSC, Gallup, CERIC/Future Economy)</i>	Alignment between skills and job requirements <i>(LMIC, CERIC/Future Economy)</i>
Access to skills development and training <i>(FSC, StatsCan, LMIC)</i>	Positive workplace relationships <i>(LMIC, StatsCan)</i>	Ability to organize and engage in bargaining <i>(StatsCan, LMIC)</i>	Alignment between work and workers’ values <i>(CERIC/Future Economy)</i>	Inclusive, accessible recruitment and retention <i>(IONS)</i>
Work flexibility <i>(IONS)</i>	Interesting and fulfilling work <i>(LMIC)</i>	Conflict resolution processes <i>(ONN)</i>	Respect for employees <i>(CCDF)</i>	Work-life balance <i>(StatsCan)</i>
Work motivation <i>(StatsCan)</i>	Prioritization of worker health and well-being <i>(LMIC)</i>			

## Making the case for Beyond Decent

The following quotes illustrate some of the potential impacts of Beyond Decent Work on individuals, employers and the economy.

“When workers feel that their employment is meaningful and fair they will not only **perform better**, but also be **happier and healthier** ... [these benefits] will contribute to **increasing productivity and competitiveness for Canadian enterprises** and limit reliance on social services and costs to our healthcare system.” – [CCDF](#)

“Quality of work is an important driver of **labour force participation, worker motivation and engagement, productivity and retention**. Therefore, quality of work should be a priority not just for policy but also for education, training, workforce intermediaries and leaders in business, community, and economic development.” – [FSC](#)

“For the sake of individuals, businesses and our country, the future of work has to be decent work. To get there, we need career development.” – [CERIC/Future Economy](#)

## Emerging themes

### **Artificial intelligence**

Advancing (beyond) decent work will take place amid a backdrop of rapid technological change. Several sources in the signal scanning exercise noted uncertainty around the [impact of AI](#) on workers and the workplace. As one [ILO source](#) said, *“Some are predicting it will cost millions of jobs. Others say it could actually support decent work by helping workers and taking over some of the more mundane tasks.”*

The ILO podcast noted AI tools could be used to degrade quality of work and intensify employee monitoring, but also said that it could be leveraged to improve skills, reduce management bias and create job opportunities in diverse locations.

### **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

Fair compensation and gender equality, for instance, are pillars in international definitions of decent work. However, broader considerations of equity may also be inherent to advancing decent work as companies face increased pressure to demonstrate their commitments to sustainability and EDI.

The [LMIC](#) highlighted the importance of advancing decent work for underrepresented groups: *“Gig workers also face declining labour standards and pay due to the nature of their work. Black Canadians are overrepresented in precarious, temporary and low-paying positions and underrepresented in high-paying managerial jobs.”*

Integrating [EDI in K-12 curricula](#) and government commitment to [advancing Truth & Reconciliation](#) may also find resonance in the Beyond Decent conversation.

### **Collaboration**

Advancing decent work requires the alignment of policymakers, employers, researchers and others, noted the [LMIC](#). This sentiment was echoed by [Jobs for the Future](#): *“We need the power of policymakers. We need the power of philanthropists, thought leaders, changemakers, and innovators.”*

### **Evolving perspectives on work**

As noted in [The Financial Post](#), the pandemic “[upended] many of our beliefs about jobs and careers, including where, why and how we work.” Worker expectations around flexibility and remote/hybrid work continue to evolve, and some employers are identifying the increased importance of [employee engagement](#). However, [Gallup research](#) found that pandemic exacerbated previous inequities in the labour market, with 40% of workers experiencing worsening job quality.

### **Economic and labour market challenges**

The COVID-19 pandemic led to a global recession, leaving many countries falling short of [pre-pandemic projections of economic output](#). CERIC and Creative Futures’ [Career Development in 2040](#) report noted that many Canadians are struggling with the cost of living in the wake of the pandemic. Meanwhile, Canadian employers have reported ongoing [labour market shortages](#).