

A Worker and Trade Union Perspective on Labour Market Information

Report Prepared for the Advisory Panel to the Forum of Labour
Market Ministers

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Acronyms

BLS Bureau of Labour Statistics

CAW Canadian Autoworkers

CEP Communication Energy and Paperworkers' Union

CLC Canadian Labour Congress

CLFDB Canadian Labour Force Development Board

CSTEC Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress

CUPE Canadian Union of Public Employees

FLMM Forum of Labour Market Ministers

FPT Federal, Provincial and Territorial

GSS General Social Survey

HEU Hospital Employees' Union

HRSDC Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

IAMAW International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers

LEC Labour Education Centre

LFS Labour Force Survey

LMI Labour Market Information

OCISP Ottawa Carleton Immigrant Services Organization

OFL Ontario Federation of Labour

PPP Purchasing power parity

PRB Pay Research Bureau

PSAC Public Service Alliance of Canada

ROE Record of Employment

SLID Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

USW United Steelworkers

WES Workplace and Employee Survey

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Errors of commission and omission are the responsibility of the author.

Section 1: Introduction

This report has been prepared for the Advisory Panel to the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (the Forum or FLMM) on Labour Market Information (LMI).

The Forum brings together the federal, provincial and territorial (FPT) ministers responsible for labour market policy and programming. The Forum defined its objective in creating the Panel as follows:

To create a high-level panel consisting of credible, high-profile individuals from the business community that would:

- Provide advice to the FLMM Ministers on how Labour Market Information (LMI) can:
 - Contribute to economic growth and efficiency over the next decade; and,
 - Better address the needs of business.
- Enlist the support of business/labour and the broader public on the need for re-investments in labour market information.

The Terms of Reference for the Panel invite it to make recommendations on:

- Data: What are the data individuals, businesses and the FPT governments need?
- Guidelines: To what extent should the information be standardized, e.g. through the use of common definitions?
- Delivery: how can our LMI system be better coordinated to deliver the best possible LMI?

The Advisory Panel has been asked to deliver its report to the Forum in the spring of 2009.

In pursuit of its mandate, the Advisory Panel has reviewed relevant Canadian and foreign source research literature. It has also engaged in extensive consultations with developers and users of labour market information in the private and public sectors. As part of its effort to get the full range of perspectives on LMI in Canada, the Advisory Panel engaged Bob Baldwin, a Senior Associate at Informetrica Limited and former Director of Social and Economic Policy at the Canadian Labour Congress, to prepare a worker/trade union perspective on LMI.

In preparing this report, the author has drawn primarily on studies and presentations that have been prepared for the Advisory Panel as well as interviews with key trade union users of LMI and users in private not-for-profit organizations that provide job search assistance. The author has also benefited from very helpful contact with the Panel, its Chairperson and its co-ordinator. The author also draws on his own experience as an LMI user at the CLC, as a former member of the Statistics Canada Advisory Committee on Labour Statistics, and as a former Director of Research and Policy Analysis at the Canadian Labour Force Development Board.

The work of the Advisory Panel began after a good deal of work on Canadian LMI had already been undertaken by the FLMM and both strengths and weaknesses of Canadian LMI had begun to be identified. Moreover, the Advisory Panel had been operating for a period of time before arrangements were made for the preparation of this report.

Given that this report was prepared following a good deal of work on LMI, the discussion in Section 3.1 is organized around the Advisory Panel's summary of conclusions reached in a number of other studies on gaps in Canadian LMI. For the most part, the trade union and community group users of LMI do not disagree with the gaps that have been identified, but they do identify gaps that others do not. In addition, they place a somewhat different emphasis on issues than do other users. Nonetheless, it is important to begin by noting widespread areas of agreement on limitations of Canadian LMI. It should be acknowledged that one consequence of proceeding in this fashion is that somewhat less time will be spent discussing some issues on which there is agreement than would be warranted by the intrinsic importance of the issue (e.g. developing more complete measures of labour utilization).

The time and resources available for the preparation of the report had three other consequences of note. First, a choice had to be made between identifying a limited number of issues and pursuing them in depth or identifying a wider range of LMI issues that concern workers and trade unionists but having them presented in a less complete form. The latter course of action was chosen on the grounds that it would be more useful to the Advisory Panel to appreciate the full scope of concerns of workers and trade unionists. This approach also seems more useful to the contributors to this report. The second consequence of note is that less time was available to discuss LMI issues with representatives of community based service providers to job seekers and to trade unionists outside Ontario than is desirable. Other consultations by the Advisory Panel have helped to offset this weakness in the current report. Third, it would have been helpful to review data collection in the health area to see what data are and are not available that permit a linkage of work and health conditions.

It is also important to acknowledge to the Advisory Panel and the many contributors to this report that the subject matter of this report is potentially vast and could usefully be explored in much greater depth than could be done in the preparation of this report.

The recommendations and suggestions in the following text generally expand data gathering and have financial implications for Statistics Canada and other institutions that gather data in support of LMI in Canada. The time and resources available for the preparation of this report have not permitted an assessment of how the proposed changes might be reconciled with a plausible budget for data gathering. Moreover, given that this report is but one of many inputs to the Advisory Panel, it is not clear how useful an attempt of that sort would be within the context of this report.

This report is structured as follows.

Section 2 provides a brief discussion of LMI needs in the context of changing labour market requirements;

Section 3.1 provides an overview of concerns expressed about LMI in Canada;

Section 3.2 discusses the roles of workers/trade unions as consumers of LMI;

Section 3.3 reviews worker/trade union concerns about missing data and dissemination;

Section 3.4 addresses organizational and financing issues related to LMI; and,

Section 4 offers final thoughts and conclusions.

An important feature of the Terms of Reference for the Panel is the purposive nature of its consideration of LMI issues. It is to consider LMI in relation to economy-wide issues of economic growth and efficiency and in terms of how LMI can better serve the needs of business. The segment of society whose views are being conveyed through this report (workers and trade unionists) would not typically establish the purpose of LMI in this manner.

A broadly shared general concern would be how LMI can support workers' desire for well paid and satisfying employment, with the term "satisfying" encompassing concerns about such things as: the appropriateness of hours worked; the impacts of employment on health; the ability to reconcile work and family life; opportunities for training and promotion, and so on. In recent years, this general concern would typically be overlaid by concerns for how the access to work with favourable characteristics is distributed among different parts of the workforce. In particular, concern would exist about the access to "decent work" for women, aboriginal people, immigrants, people of colour and persons with disabilities.¹

This difference in the starting point for consideration of LMI issues is significant. But, it need not and generally does not lead to irreconcilable differences with respect to LMI as both employers and workers/unions need clear, accurate, timely and unbiased information about conditions in labour (and product) markets, even while they may disagree about the appropriate price of labour and the priorities for macro-economic policy. Among those interviewed in the preparation of this report, it was generally accepted that labour market data are neutral with respect to public policy debate and collective bargaining positions, but the same is not true of the interpretation of data and decisions about what data get collected.

Section 2: LMI in Labour Market Context

The Panel is undertaking its work at an interesting moment. The Canadian economy and labour market have been through a period when conditions have been quite favourable compared to the recession years of the early 1990s and most of the decade prior to that time. The unemployment rate has declined and the duration of unemployment spells has also declined while the portion of the population that is employed has increased substantially. It is particularly striking that the long term trend of a lower employment rate for men aged 55 to 64 was reversed starting in the mid 1990s.

Even in this relatively benign period there were, of course, important concerns with the functioning of the labour market. Despite the progress that was made in equalizing labour market opportunities for men and women, the equalizing process was not complete. Adult immigrants had difficulty in fully integrating into the Canadian labour market. The gap in labour market incomes of young and older workers seemed to widen and precarious work seemed resistant to improvements in the general environment of the labour market. There remained important differences in labour market opportunities among Canada's regions. Moreover, for many workers and trade unionists, an even lower unemployment rate was an achievable aspiration. Without wishing to diminish the importance of these concerns, it remains a safe generalization that by many key measures, the labour market has functioned well from the early 1990s onward compared to the period immediately prior to it.

Without supporting evidence it would be too much to attribute good labour market outcomes to existing LMI arrangements. On the other hand, it would seem that current LMI arrangements are not a barrier to the effective functioning of the labour market. Moreover, an extensive survey in 2003 of Canadians who made job or education transitions showed high usage of LMI and a generally high level of satisfaction with Canadian LMI (Créatec, 2003)²: 87% of people making these transitions sought LMI and 77% of those who sought LMI found the information they were looking for.

These studies were undertaken in a particular economic context — namely a context in which the Canadian labour market was functioning in a relatively positive fashion. There is a great deal of concern that the economic context has changed and that a new and less favourable context may form the context for LMI and labour market programming and policy for some years into the future. The possible shift in economic environment is important in its own right. But, it also challenges us to think about the relative importance of different types of LMI in different environments. In relatively slack labour markets, the accent will likely be fairly strong on moving unemployed workers as quickly as possible from one job to another. In tight labour markets, the emphasis may be greater on using labour market projections to identify sectors and occupational groups that are in short supply, with a view to increasing the supply of people with the relevant skills. (Sharpe and Qiao cite Osberg making the point that the relevance of different types of LMI will shift with economic circumstances).

The point here is that context (and purpose) matter. The Advisory Panel should consider whether Canada's LMI is likely to serve the needs of LMI users in a range of plausible economic scenarios. Ideally we would have an "all weather" LMI system. It is important to address this question as far as possible on an ex ante basis. The time required to construct and implement data and information gathering and dissemination systems makes it difficult to address information needs on a timely basis in response to changing economic circumstances if one is responding after the fact.

In terms of context, it is also worth noting that despite the substantial uncertainties that surround Canada's economic futures, there are some things that seem relatively certain about future labour supply in Canada. For instance:

- Total labour supply will grow very little after about 2015.
- The median age of the labour force will grow and older workers will represent a greater share of total supply.
- The labour force will have higher levels of educational attainment.
- Immigrant workers will be a large and growing share of total supply, especially in Canada's larger cities.
- Aboriginal workers will be an important source of labour supply, especially in Western Canada.
- Women will continue to be an important source of labour supply.

Again, the Panel would do well to spend some time reflecting on LMI (and related labour market programming) in relation to these relatively certain changes in the labour market.

Section 3: Gaps in Canada's LMI

It was noted in the Introduction to this report that by the time the preparation of this report was launched, a number of efforts had been made by the FLMM, by HRSDC and by provincial governments to assess the effectiveness of Canadian LMI efforts. It was also noted that much of the difference in perspective between the worker/trade union view and that of others lay in the realm of omissions rather than disagreements on the gaps that others have identified (i.e. there are few if any cases where others would have said there is a gap here and the worker/trade union perspective would be: "no there isn't").

In identifying worker/trade union views on gaps, it is highly relevant to begin by taking stock of the gaps identified by others. This is done in Section 3.1 with the document *Working Together to Build a Better Labour Market Information System for Canada: A Consultation Document Prepared by the Advisory Panel on Labour Market Information* (the consultation document) serving as a point of departure for the discussion. Section 3.2 provides an overview of worker/trade union uses of LMI and Sections 3.3 and 3.4 articulate a worker/trade union perspective on gaps in a fashion that builds on the views expressed in the consultation document. Section 3.3 looks specifically at data gaps while Section 3.4 addresses issue related to the organization and financing of LMI in Canada.

3.1 Important Received Views

The consultation document includes a discussion of "Main Gaps in LMI Already Identified by Governments". This discussion references a commitment to improve LMI in Canada in a 2006 policy statement by the Government of Canada *Advantage Canada* (Finance Canada, 2006) as well as studies prepared for HRSDC by Sharpe and Qiao, and by Woods and O'Leary. The Advisory Panel has grouped the gaps identified by governments under the headings: data, standardization, coordination and dissemination.

With respect to data, the Advisory Committee notes that even where data are reliable, they are not always available in a timely fashion. In addition, there are important data that don't exist such as: job vacancy data; data on labour mobility; data on the performance and integration of aboriginal people, people with disabilities, immigrants and older workers; and data on skill levels.

Even where appropriate data exist at the national level this is often not the case at the provincial territorial or local level. Labour market data that are generated from surveys cannot be broken down reliably to the provincial, territorial or local levels which makes it difficult for labour market decision-makers with a provincial, territorial or local focus to make informed decisions. Moreover, given the local focus of most job seekers and businesses that are hiring, the absence of reliable local data is a major problem.

For many potential users of LMI, the problem of data availability is compounded by the problem that data from Statistics Canada often come at a price that is not acceptable.

The Advisory Panel also notes limitations in education data and the need in a well integrated LMI system for data that are processed to different degrees to meet the differing needs of users.

With respect to standardization, the Advisory Panel notes that some concepts underlying data and definitions are not standardized among LMI providers and jurisdictions. The quality of services and products related to LMI varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction as does the integration of LMI with other services and programs. Moreover, there is a general lack of quality assurance mechanisms in the LMI field.

The Advisory Panel notes that there are many producers and users of LMI in Canada and that historically, there has been little co-ordination of the production and dissemination of LMI. Although progress has been made with the creation of the LMI Working Group by the FLMM, inefficiencies still result from a lack of co-ordination. A related problem is the lack of long term financial commitment to LMI which makes it difficult to plan and maintain LMI related products.

Finally, with regard to dissemination, the Advisory Panel notes that online sources of LMI are many and diverse which can make it difficult to find information that is there. In addition, some important information is not online at all. It also notes that the education system lacks a coherent framework for the LMI it produces.

The gaps (limitations) of LMI as identified by governments and related by the Advisory Panel are relatively straightforward. They are set in a context that acknowledges the general strength of LMI in Canada. An OECD study that identifies Canada as having one of the world's best LMI systems is cited. It is also worth noting that LMI issues are discussed primarily with reference to the contribution of LMI to matching workers with appropriate jobs in both short term and longer term contexts.³ The existence of short and long term concerns means that relevant LMI will have different time horizons and some of it, by its nature, involves projections. In addition, though, the concern for LMI in the consultation document includes concerns for LMI as it relates to public policy and program decisions (e.g. helping to frame macro-economic policy and education decision-making). This reflects the element in the mandate of the Advisory Panel that Canada's LMI should serve the needs of government users.

3.2 Workers/Trade Unions as Users of LMI

Among the reports that have been prepared for HRSDC on LMI in recent years is a report by the consulting firm Les Études de Marché Créatec + *Labour Market Information — 2003 Users National Survey*. An important conclusion that emerges from this report is that Canadians are major consumers of LMI, especially if they are changing jobs and/or making a school to work transition. No less than 84% of survey respondents who changed jobs during the previous three years made use of LMI as did 95 % of respondents who made education transitions. Roughly 60% of LMI users made use of LMI without assistance from intermediaries. Clearly though, large numbers of people were accessing LMI with the assistance of others.

Trade union organizations are also large consumers of LMI. This is true of both individual unions that organize workers into unions and bargain collective agreements on their behalf, and of "central labour organizations" like the Canadian Labour Congress that are established with several purposes in mind including representing member unions in the political arena.

There has always been a numerically minor part of the Canadian trade union movement that has played a key role in matching workers and jobs through union hiring halls. These institutions have been important in craft based unions in construction, trucking and the entertainment industries.

Starting with the formation of the Canadian Steel Trades and Employment Congress (CSTEC) in the 1980s, industrial unions have begun to take on new roles that are relevant to their consumption of LMI. They have come to be involved in institutions that provide immediate job matching assistance to workers in the context of large layoffs and, in some cases, related services including providing access to training. In the context of sector councils, they have also come to play an important role in human resource planning for the sectors in which their members work. As important as LMI consumption is in the context of job matching and human resource planning, it is important in other contexts as well.

Establishing collective bargaining rights for groups of workers, and then bargaining and administering collective agreements for them is a central activity of Canadian unions. Although union density and collective bargaining coverage as a portion of the workforce has declined in recent years, as of 2005 there were still 4.1 million Canadian workers who were union members.

(Akyeampong, 2006) This is more people than the employed labour force of any single province other than Ontario and is about the same as the number of people employed in British Columbia and the Prairie Provinces. LMI is an important input into the collective bargaining process, and the output of collective bargaining, namely collective agreements are important LMI in their own right.

The LMI that is relevant to collective bargaining is wide ranging and encompasses general conditions in the economy and labour market (e.g. rates of inflation and the overall slack or tightness of labour markets). At times however, it can be quite specific to particular sectors and occupation groups, in particular geographic space. The LMI that enters the collective bargaining discourse is both informal (word of mouth) and formal (statistical analyses done by union staff). Union structures are typically organized so that word of mouth sharing of information on terms and conditions of work is encouraged and can form an important part of the LMI that enters the bargaining process. At the same time, there is often a significant amount of research undertaken by union staff in preparation for collective bargaining. This research will typically include analyses of collective agreements as well as more general statistical data on labour market outcomes.

The link between LMI and collective agreement outcomes can vary significantly. In contexts where agreements are being settled through an arbitration process, the outcomes may be very tightly linked to data and information on the terms and conditions of employment of comparator groups. In other contexts the relationship tends to be looser. LMI will form a basis for discussion between the parties but a variety of other factors will influence outcomes. Within the realm of LMI, the provisions of collective agreements may be as relevant as other forms of LMI. Moreover, in sectors with a strong tendency to pattern bargaining, the LMI that is relevant will have a sectoral rather than a firm specific orientation.

A third and final area of activity of trade unions in which they are significant users of LMI is public policy analysis. Large unions tend to undertake significant amounts of public policy research on the sectors in which their members are employed. Thus, the CAW undertakes significant research on the auto sector, the USWA on the steel sector, CUPE on the municipal and health sectors, and so on. In addition, it is a longstanding feature of trade union movements worldwide that umbrella, central labour organizations are established to represent unions in the political arena. (Other functions of these central labour bodies include providing common services such as education, and resolving internal disputes).

In Canada, the largest central labour organization is the Canadian Labour Congress, the membership of which includes roughly three out of four Canadian union members. Similar bodies exist at the provincial and local levels (federations of labour and labour councils respectively).

The range of public policy issues addressed by the trade union movement is as diverse as the interests and concerns of its membership and covers everything from: macroeconomic policy, to changes in the terms and conditions of employment, to pension legislation, to rights of workers in bankruptcies, to equality rights of disadvantaged groups — to name but a few areas of ongoing interest. Thus the trade union movement uses a wide range of policy relevant LMI.

3.3 Trade Union Concerns about Canadian LMI: Missing Data, Format and Dissemination

The following discussion deals primarily with concerns about existing Canadian LMI. It is important to put the concerns in context. Trade unionists interviewed in the preparation of this report recognize that, in general, the LMI that is available in Canada is reliable and addresses most LMI needs, especially for national level data. This view was expressed with respect to LMI generally and with respect to labour market data produced by Statistics Canada in particular. Indeed, the concerns about the LMI that were expressed most strongly are not purely information issues: they also encompass concerns about unstable labour market programming more generally. But while it is true that the general strength of LMI is accepted, there are shortcomings in what is available.

In this discussion, the substantive areas of concern will be noted and discussed, and each will be related to the fields of activity noted immediately above as is appropriate.

3.3.1 Beyond Wages and Salaries

The single biggest information gap for trade union commentators on LMI is the absence of data on elements of compensation other than wages and salaries. That is, if one wants to know what is happening with non-wage pension and insurance benefits, hours of work⁵ and paid time off, or health and safety provisions in Canadian workplaces, it is difficult to get answers for the society as a whole, for sectors or regions, or — subject to one important caveat — for individual workplaces. This limitation in Canadian LMI is relevant to all of policy analysis, collective bargaining and job matching.

There has been an unsteady history of gathering data that would permit the monitoring of non-wage elements in compensation. Statistics Canada ran a Survey of Work Arrangements on an occasional basis in the 1990s. With the introduction of the Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) in 1999, the need for the Survey of Work Arrangements was deemed to exist no longer. With the WES appearing to be in a suspended state, so is all data collection in this important area.

The question of what is happening to non-wage terms and conditions of work is important in being able to assess progress (or the lack of it) that working people are experiencing. Given the changes that are taking place in the composition of the labour force and the apparent desire of some policy makers to encourage greater labour force participation among older workers, non wage issues are likely to take on even greater importance. The retirement cycle of the General Social Survey (GSS) has regularly found that retired people would be willing to return to work under a variety of circumstances with more limited and flexible hours of work being a prominent condition (Schellenberg and Silver, 2004. See also: Foursly and Gervais, 2002) Some interviewees recommended the *European Survey on Work Conditions* as a model worth emulating in Canada.

Not only is it impossible to monitor the evolution of specific non wage benefits it is also impossible to monitor movements in total employee compensation. This raises general questions about the comparability of pay in different sectors and occupations and it also limits our ability to assess the slack or tightness in labour markets. This has also been an issue in relation to the specific public policy context of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. Under this program, foreign workers are brought to Canada on a temporary basis to fill jobs that employers have been having difficulty filling from domestic labour supply. A condition of the program is that the foreign workers are to be paid the going Canadian wage for their labour. A concern of Canadian trade union commentators is that the wage threshold that has to be matched ignores non-wage benefits. Thus, the wage may be matched but not the total compensation.

The collective bargaining data bases provide an exception to the general rule about the absence of non wage information. All jurisdictions maintain a library of collective agreements in their jurisdiction and these include descriptions of most terms and conditions of employment of workers covered by collective agreements. Thus, one can see not only what terms and conditions exist, but how they are combined. Unfortunately, not all jurisdictions are able to be comprehensive and current in their collections. Moreover, many fall short of meeting the need of union researchers for agreements that are readable online.

The collective bargaining data base is also used to provide custom analyses in response to questions raised by trade union researchers, one off studies by government analysts associated with the data bases, and standardized quarterly trend data. The first two areas of activity were felt to be very valuable but concern was expressed about the last type of analysis on the grounds that conclusions were often dominated by a small number of unrepresentative agreements.

The view was expressed in interviews that more cooperation among jurisdictions with respect to the maintenance of a comprehensive library of agreements and in the realm of analysis would be helpful. That said, the current data are drawn on regularly and are regarded as important and helpful. Collections and analysis in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec and in the federal jurisdiction received positive comment. The federal collection is maintained by the Workplace Information Directorate in the Labour Program of HRSDC. It was a general view that improvements can be made in this area.

3.3.2 Following Workers on the Move: Tracking Mobility

Trade union representatives have both a public policy and job matching interest in longitudinal labour market data. At root, both stem from a concern about the fate of displaced workers.

There are a number of public policy concerns about the extent to which displaced workers find new employment within various time frames. If they do find new employment, do they sustain earnings losses over what time frame? To what extent are they re-employed in the same industrial sector and occupation? Are the transitions from one employment to the next affected by the age of the displaced worker, their gender, national origin or other identifiable social characteristics? To what extent do successful transitions involve geographic mobility? To what extent does displacement lead to labour force exit? What role is played by LMI and labour market programs in facilitating transitions?

In a dynamic labour market with a great deal of structural change it is important to be able to answer questions like the foregoing in order to appreciate the costs (and possible gains) from structural change. It is also potentially helpful from a labour market planning perspective, especially if the survey (or other) instruments that are used to measure transitions include data gathering on the use of labour market services.

In recent years, the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) has been used to track changes of labour market status and incomes of all sorts, including employment earnings. Unfortunately, SLID has a relatively small sample size and hence SLID data can only be successfully decomposed to a limited degree. Moreover, for some purposes the six year time period that respondents participate in the survey is too short (e.g. some displacement effects will not be fully captured within this time frame and it is far too short to understand possible patterns of lifetime pension accrual). Moreover, the release of SLID data has not always been timely. Despite SLID's limitations, it was capable of generating useful insights into labour market and earnings dynamics. But, its current status seems to be in question.

The possibility of creating a survey based data set that tracks workers with the degree of granularity sought by trade unionists is daunting. But, it is conceivable that one could be constructed from administrative data.⁶ More will be said about this below.

3.3.3 Workers on the Move: Some Further Considerations

The development of a tracking capability for workers on the move is the highest priority but not the only concern that needs to be raised about gaps in Canadian LMI with respect to workers changing jobs.

A recent study prepared for the CSTECH *Human Resources Study for the Broader Steel Industry* graphically illustrated the point that even when net employment change in an industry might be zero, there can be substantial gross flows that offset each other: entry into and exit from the sector can be substantial. Thus, gross flow information can be important in identifying employment opportunities for people seeking work. It is important for human resource planning within a sector. It provides important indicators to training and education institutions in terms of the skills and knowledge that will be in demand.

Despite the accent on sector level flows in the previous paragraph, flows among main labour market states (employed, unemployed and not in the labour force) at the economy wide level (nationally and provincially) are also relevant as are migration flows. Given the importance of gross flow data, it is a matter of concern that the background documents prepared for the Advisory Panel raise questions about the reliability of Canadian gross flow data originating from the LFS. It is important that an effort be made to see if the limitations in LFS data can be overcome.

Some of the people interviewed in the preparation of this report raised the question whether administrative data collected in connection with the Employment Insurance program might be used to generate even more timely (but less complete) indicators of labour market flows. It was noted in context that the requirement on employers to submit a Record of Employment (ROE) to Service Canada with each job separation creates a virtual administrative census of job separations. It was noted too that similar data in the United States is used by the Bureau of Labour Statistics (BLS) to provide more timely indicators of labour market conditions.

The EI data publishing program was generally thought to be sparse and falls far short of the detailed data that are prepared for internal use by HRSDC. It also falls far short of the BLS data publishing program in the US. Even with the decline in the number of unemployed receiving EI, interviewees regarded EI data as a means of assessing both overall conditions in the labour market and the well being of the unemployed.

It was also noted that there is no source of data that regularly consolidates information on the use of labour market programs. A displaced worker survey in the mid 1980s tried to document the use of labour market programs by displaced workers but to our knowledge, that was the last attempt to do so.⁷ Given the devolution of labour market programming to the provinces, the LMI Working Group might devote some effort to developing a standardized categorization of programs, a means of measuring their use and indicators of their usefulness.

Participants in the CLC roundtable on LMI noted that almost all of the data we have on Canadian labour markets is designed to measure developments in the external labour market. The internal labour market of the firm is largely an unexplored black box. This is regrettable in that many important labour market issues have dimensions of interest in both the internal and external labour markets. This is especially true of the question of how firms fill skill requirements. To what extent do they rely on internal promotion (and related training and education opportunities) to fill skill needs and to what extent do they use external recruitment? To what extent does the source of labour supply (by age, gender, nationality, etc) affect patterns of mobility and other conditions of work in the firm? To what extent do forms of compensation (e.g. the presence of a defined benefit pension plan) affect patterns of internal and external mobility?

The questions just posed and questions like it are important and may become more so in the future given the anticipated combination of little or no labour force growth and an ageing workforce. Despite its limitations, the WES provided some insight into questions like these and, as has been noted, it is in a suspended state.

Persons interviewed in the preparation of this report noted that the LMI that is relevant to job matching includes not only information on available jobs and available workers, but information on labour market programs and other supports like child care. Being able to supply this information clearly and quickly has been made difficult in recent years by ongoing changes in programming, one aspect of which has been to devolve program responsibility. Some provinces have taken this a step further and devolved responsibility within the province. While there is a positive side to local labour market decision-making, it can create problems in knowing what programs and services are available in each local area and it requires an effort to co-ordinate knowledge of labour supply and demand conditions in neighbouring local areas.

In the preparation of the report, warnings were issued about the downside of an excessive local focus in labour market analysis. Interviewees were able to point to a situation where local labour market analysis suggested that a particular type of skilled worker was in short supply in an urban labour market. But, people in the local area were not aware that in a neighbouring local labour market, workers with those skills had just been laid off in significant numbers.

The general point that was impressed on the author of this report is that the labour market, itself, has integrated national, provincial/territorial and local dimensions and so must LMI and labour market programming.

3.3.4 Measures of Slack (Tightness) in the Labour Market and Skills Utilization

Macro-economic policy settings have been guided since the end of World War II by measures of the degree of slack or tightness in labour markets and the unemployment rate has been the most used metric for measuring slack or tightness. The trade union users of LMI accept the usefulness of the unemployment rate as currently calculated but note that it is not the only measure of slack or tightness and may not be the most complete measure. There are dimensions of the underutilization of labour that are not captured in the unemployment rate. These include: people who have given up looking for work because they believe that no work is available (i.e. discouraged workers) and people who are working part time but would work full time if additional hours of work were available. These limitations of the unemployment rate have been noted by others providing input to the Advisory Panel.

As the LFS is currently designed, many of the dimensions of labour utilization that are not captured in the unemployment rate can be explored. In other words, the issue here is not one of data not being gathered. But, in its public commentary on the state of the labour market through *The Daily* and regular publications such as *Perspectives on Labour and Incomes*, little attention is drawn to the supplementary measures of unemployment.

When it comes to skill utilization, we are not so close to having the relevant measures close at hand. Neither skill requirements nor available skills are currently measured or clearly projected. Under the circumstances, much of the rhetoric about looming skill shortages is just that. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether Canada does and will suffer from a problem of skill underutilization or a skill shortage. It would be helpful to explore whether a reliable method can be found to measure the demand and supply of skills currently needed and available in the future, but there is some scepticism about the success that will be achieved in the attempt to do so among the people interviewed in the preparation of this report.

3.3.5 Being Precise with LMI: Occupation, Sector and Regional. Provincial and Local Data

One of the problems with national LMI is that it often lacks the granularity needed to address issues that are specific to particular regions, sectors or occupations. This concern has certainly been voiced strongly with respect to regions and occupations. Moreover, in some contexts (e.g. arbitration presentations) it is important to be able to distinguish the experience of unionized and non-unionized workers.

Limitations in the precision of Canadian LMI give rise to a variety of issues. While, many Canadians are willing to travel great distances in search of employment, most job changing takes place within local labour markets and, not surprisingly the Créatec survey found that local labour market information is the most sought after information by job changers. In addition to a general absence of data on job vacancies that receives further comment below, survey based labour market data generally cannot be disaggregated to the local level. As a result the census is the main source of labour market data that can be reliably broken down to the level of individual urban settings and the census entails an obvious problem of timeliness.

Occupational data are inherently difficult. Work is being restructured constantly in ways that can quickly render an occupational category out of date. Moreover, occupational categories that can withstand the test of time may have quite different skills and patterns of work associated with them depending on the sectoral context in which they are found. Thus, for example, a carpenter in an industrial setting may require quite different skills and do quite different things than is true of a carpenter in the residential construction industry. In some cases too, occupational categories group occupations in a way that is open to debate as jobs requiring quite different skill levels are combined into a single category. In other cases, the problem with the National Occupational Classification (NOC) category may be that the category has a recognizable meaning in the abstract (e.g. administrative assistant) but the actual requirements of the job vary dramatically depending on the context in which the job holder is working. Finally, there are some NOC job categories that are dominated by public sector employees which makes public and private sector comparisons of limited value.

The concern to be as precise and as current as possible with respect to occupational categories stems in part from the fact that there can be a lot at stake in the way that occupations and jobs are defined. Again, in the context of arbitral awards in particular, the comparators for particular groups of workers will be defined by occupational categories established in the NOC. Poor specification of occupations will result in poor awards.

An interesting case in point is provided by the NOC classification of "Light Duty Cleaners" which includes the following job titles: cleaner, hospital cleaner, hotel cleaner, house cleaner, light duty cleaner, office cleaner, room attendant and sweeper. The question whether a hospital cleaner belongs in the same NOC category as the other types of cleaners has been a bone of contention with the union that represents hospital cleaners in British Columbia. The case against including them in the same category has been argued on the grounds that:

- The skills, effort, responsibilities and working conditions for Hospital Cleaners are markedly different than other Light Duty Cleaners.
- Hospital Cleaners have significant contact with patients, with implications for infection control, contending with facility and medical emergencies as well as patient violence, and contributing to a positive emotional and psychological context for patients.
- There are greater hazards to workers with the chemicals and body substances in the worksite of Hospital Cleaners, as well as risk of infection, and environmental and workload hazards.
- Healthcare specific on-the-job training and experience among Hospital Cleaners is beyond that of other Light Duty Cleaners as the degree of cleanliness in hospitals—particularly operating rooms, ERs, and radiation rooms—is well beyond the level in other non-healthcare cleaning sites.

The point is not to resolve the correct classification of hospital cleaners but to illustrate the difficulty of developing appropriate categories and the material importance of getting them right in some circumstances. The difficulty in matching NOC categories with job classifications is also illustrated in an exercise in which the federal government tried to match job classifications in its collective agreements with NOC categories. It succeeded in doing so for about 70% of employees covered in collective agreements.

Some of the problems with occupational data may not be subject to resolution because they reflect the dynamic nature of the economy. But, the currency of the NOC classifications can probably be improved through more frequent review than once in five years and the process for reviewing the NOC can draw more heavily on nongovernmental input. It has to be acknowledged that more frequent revision of occupational categories will limit the usefulness of time series data as is pointed out in a note on the NOC posted on the HRSDC website. But, one has to question the usefulness of a consistent time series that rests on a classification system in which the content of the categories in the classification system is constantly changing.

Occupations can be thought of as ways to classify jobs by skill type and level. But, some of the input to the Advisory Panel questions the usefulness of defining labour market needs in terms of occupations and jobs. Sharpe and Qiao cite Gunderson questioning whether skills might be a better way to define needs than occupations. Torjman, thinking particularly of job searches by hard to employ individuals, questions whether we should be trying to identify available work as opposed to the current practice of identifying available jobs. Her concern is that the category "jobs" implies a formal structure to work that limits the available work that is conveyed to people seeking work. While these alternatives are worth exploring, it is not clear that they are conceptually easier methods of organizing thinking and information.

Included in the changes made to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in the late 1990s was the introduction of the question whether employed people are union members. The addition of this question was welcomed by trade union representatives as work on policy analysis and collective bargaining often requires that data be separable by union membership status. It should be noted however, that while some other surveys (e.g. SLID and WES) ask about union membership, the

Census, which is an important source of small area data, does not. The GSS is another important source of data on social and economic conditions that does not ask about union membership. All Statistics Canada surveys of labour market conditions and related social and economic conditions should be able to distinguish the situation of unionized and non-unionized workers. Moreover, the union membership question should probably be put to all LFS respondents, not just the employed.

The LFS changes in the late 1990s also introduced a wage question which has increased the timeliness of wage data. However, some trade union representatives expressed scepticism about the monthly movements in LFS wage data and employment by sector on the grounds that the monthly movements were too inconsistent with observed developments in the sectors that they were monitoring. As with other problems that have been noted with the disaggregation of LFS data, the problem could theoretically be solved by increasing the LFS sample size.

Among the people interviewed with in the preparation of this report, wage data was generally not regarded as a major concern. A question that has been of interest to the Advisory Panel is whether local wage data calculated on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis might be of interest. Among interviewees it was noted that local price levels seldom come into play in wage bargaining although the Fort McMurray exception to the rule was noted. Having noted that view, local PPP wages might be of some research interest.

3.3.6 LMI Dissemination: Responding to Users' Needs

Four aspects of LMI dissemination are of concern from the worker/trade union perspective and all four revolve around the need to respond to LMI users' needs.

One issue that is well canvassed in the consultation document and in the background documents is the emerging plethora of online based LMI for job seekers. As has been thoroughly discussed, there is a great deal of information available to job seekers. But the sites are not co-ordinated and there are gaps in what is available as is noted by Sharpe and Qiao.⁸ In addition, the absence of guiding standards for LMI gives rise to non-comparable information. The FLMM seems to have been aware of this for some time and has established an LMI Working Group to address the problem. Among other things, the Working Group has developed standards for LMI that address a number of issue areas such as: privacy and ethical practices; accuracy, completeness and timeliness; information relevance for users; accessibility; internet delivery; program and service information; jobs and recruiting information; career planning information; education and training information; and labour market profile information. This is a positive development and ways of advancing the application of LMI standards should be sought.

From the worker/trade union perspective this is an important issue in the context of work on job matching. The idea of a single portal with links to a wide range of online data is helpful. Being linked to the single portal may be attractive for private as well as public online sources of information. This may create the leverage needed to encourage the use of LMI standards by private sector providers of LMI.

The emergence of online LMI has facilitated job search by job seekers themselves. The study by Créatec suggests that 60% of job changers found the LMI they needed without assistance. However, it would seem that 40% needed assistance and there is evidence that those who needed assistance include those who may be at greatest risk of having difficulty getting matched with suitable jobs.

Much of the discussion of LMI is conducted as if job seekers will gain access to LMI on their own initiative. This practice should be encouraged for efficiency reasons and because it offers the greatest flexibility to job seekers in terms of when and how they gain access to information. But, it would be a serious mistake to deal with LMI as if individual, self-guided access to it was to be the only means of access to it. Indeed much of the trade union work on job matching in mass layoff situations relies very heavily on peer support and peer counselling.

As is argued by Sharpe and Qiao, the intermediaries who provided advice to job seekers should be regarded as part of the LMI production process. (The importance of intermediaries is also noted by Woods and O'Leary). They should be seen as an important source of help with respect to identifying LMI needs of job seekers and an effective means of dissemination. Moreover, consideration should be given to the possibility of running LMI training programs for intermediaries. This may help to address one dimension of the problem identified by Sharpe and Qiao of there being no standardization of qualifications for career counselling.

A good deal of effort has been made in recent years to provide information to Canadian immigrants on jobs that are available in Canada and prior learning and assessment techniques are now employed more widely. This effort has provided a positive complement to a shift in immigration policy that places increased emphasis on meeting Canadian labour market needs. Despite this effort, Canadian LMI provided by governments is provided largely in English and French. Given recent patterns of immigration and what we know of the languages spoken by Canadians, this is not adequate. Strategies for disseminating LMI in many languages are required. Strategies to deal with the issue of language diversity should probably involve a mix of translation of relevant LMI and training key people in national and other organizations that are providing job search assistance to people who speak neither English nor French. One interviewee warned that a strategy that relies entirely on translation may have the unintended effect of limiting the volume and timeliness of the LMI that is produced.⁹

It may not belong in a discussion of LMI dissemination, but it has to be noted too that immigrants to Canada frequently feel that they have not been given adequate information before arrival on the degree to which their credentials and experience will be recognized in Canada and what scope there is for adding to their existing credentials so they can work in professional occupations in Canada. This situation calls out for redress.

The background paper prepared for the Advisory Panel by Sharpe and Qiao includes an important discussion of LMI as a public good. Its character as a public good means that it tends to be under-produced and consumed if it is produced exclusively on a private commercial basis. Thus, it is appropriate that much of the LMI that is produced is produced by public entities and made available on a non-commercial basis.

Unfortunately, there is still a good deal of Statistics Canada data that is only available at prices that may discourage its use. This is true of the relatively easily accessible Cansim data but is also true of special runs of data. Special runs can be expensive, the pricing of them is hard to understand at times, and the production of data varies in its timeliness. Moreover, as was noted in one of the interviews, a person has to know a lot about the data that are collected by Statistics Canada in order to know what might be asked for in terms of special runs. Without pre-judging the right conclusion with respect to the pricing of Statistics Canada's products, the bias of change should be to make more Statistics Canada data available free of charge, and to intensify efforts to make potential users aware of the types of data that already exist.

3.4 Trade Union Concerns about Canadian LMI: Organization and Financing

The consultation document and the background material prepared for the Advisory Panel note that within the Government of Canada, HRSDC has been the department with the lead responsibility for developing LMI and that Statistics Canada has been the major producer of basic LMI. Other departments such as Industry Canada and Citizenship and Immigration have also produced important LMI. A number of provinces have had longstanding LMI production efforts and these have generally been stepped up in recent years. This has given rise to concerns about how best to co-ordinate all of this activity and progress has been made under the auspices of the FLMM, particularly with the formation of the LMI Working Group.

Efforts at better co-ordination are clearly welcome. These efforts need to engage the range of government producers and consumers of LMI including those people who are responsible for collective bargaining data and analysis. But, it is important to create mechanisms that engage the private sector in the co-ordination process as well. The sector councils, for example, are not only intense and sophisticated users of LMI, they are creators of LMI as well. Local training and adjustment boards and not for profit agencies that provide job search help to job seekers may not generate new LMI on a regular basis, but they will be acutely sensitive to LMI needs and dissemination issues. Finally, trade unions and employers are important consumers of LMI and need to be engaged in this process. While there are clearly some core LMI functions that have to be performed by government institutions, LMI should generally be approached as a field that engages labour market partners.

The interviews conducted in connection with the preparation of this report focused primarily on the production and dissemination of raw labour market data. In several interviews the wish was expressed that there should be some institution in Canada that produces a balanced interpretation of labour market developments. This wish reflected a concern that much of the interpretation of LMI is one sided and seems to be designed to promote particular policy objectives. For instance, much of the current interest in prospective labour and skill shortages seems designed to rationalize the temporary or permanent importation of labour rather than upgrading the skills of the existing labour force. Given the exigencies of the political process, an institution that might fill this role probably has to operate at arm's length from government and needs balanced representation of labour market actors in its governing structure. The integrated local, provincial and national nature of the Canadian labour market suggests that institutions of this sort at all of the local, provincial/territorial and national levels would be desirable.

As was noted above, the trade unionists interviewed in the preparation of this report have expressed generally positive views about Canada's LMI in general and about data from Statistics Canada in particular. The view was expressed that its assessments of labour market developments sometimes reflect a political viewpoint, but its data are reliable. Its central role in the process of data generation was supported and, in particular, concerns were expressed about the possible consequences of Statistics Canada's role in some areas being given to departments and agencies with program delivery responsibility. This concern was raised with respect to EI data and workplace injury data. The latter area of data collection was turned over to the association of Workers' Compensation Boards some years ago. Moreover, it was a common view in interviews that LMI related to the job search function should be provided primarily by public sector organizations.

In the 1990s, Statistics Canada launched some new and creative initiatives in longitudinal data collection related to the labour market through the SLID and the WES. Unfortunately, data from these sources were not timely and a relatively small number of people could make direct use of the data. These surveys were financed from sources external to Statistics Canada and now these surveys seem to be in a state of suspension because there is no ongoing financial commitment to them. This situation has given rise to a general concern among people interviewed in the preparation of this report about the need for stable funding for LMI in Canada.

It was also noted by a number of interviewees that a systematic effort should be made to explore the potential uses of administrative data as a source of LMI. About 80% of the respondents to household surveys and the census permit Statistics Canada to gather income information from income tax returns. Moreover, a good deal of "in house" analysis of labour and income issues by Statistics Canada analysts now relies on data from the Longitudinal Administrative Database (LAD). Given its large sample size and longitudinal reach, it has the capacity to provide both reliable small area data as well as longitudinal data.

The LAD is not without its limitations. It does not capture all of the social and economic variables that one might wish to have in a data base. For instance, the LAD data do not include information on educational attainment and occupation. Moreover, to an even greater extent than is true of the WES and the SLID, the population that can make direct use of the data base is very limited. The data base is built up from tax data and this gives rise to appropriate concerns about confidentiality of individual data and timeliness in its production. The same strengths and concerns arise with respect to the Worker Longitudinal File and the Longitudinal Employment and Payroll File. These tax based files may be better suited to addressing research questions rather than immediate policy concerns, while data like the filing of ROEs may assist in the latter sphere.

Nonetheless the general point remains that the possible uses of administrative data as a source of LMI needs to be thoroughly explored.

Section 4: Conclusions and Final Thoughts

The raw material for this report emerged in large measure through a series of interviews with trade union and other researchers. It revealed a starting point for the consideration of LMI within this segment of the population that is not dissimilar to the starting point for the Advisory Panel. The worker/trade union constituency recognizes that there is a great deal of reliable LMI available in Canada that meets most of its needs for national level data whether work that needs to be supported by LMI is policy analysis, collective bargaining or job matching. There is however, plenty of room for improvement.

In the course of this report, a number of data gaps have been noted including: data on non wage compensations, longitudinal data that will permit the tracking of displaced workers and data on the use of employment services by unemployed workers — to name but a few. A number of improvements were also identified with respect data dissemination and it was urged that the potential uses administrative data, including EI data, be explored more fully.

But, when the input from the worker/trade union constituency is weighed against what has been put in the public domain by the Advisory Panel, it may be most important to emphasize a few thematic points:

- 1) There is a very important role for governments to play in producing and disseminating LMI on a non-commercial basis;
- 2) Governments should undertake their LMI efforts on a collaborative basis with private sector labour market actors, including the worker/trade union community;
- 3) The Canadian labour market should be conceived of as an interlocking network of local, provincial/territorial and national labour markets and this should be reflected in both labour market policy and programming and in Canada's LMI efforts; and,
- 4) It is appropriate to encourage the use of web based LMI by job seekers but it would be inappropriate to assume that all LMI needs are going to be fulfilled without the help of intermediaries.

The second and fourth points embody a similar message: collaboration with private sector labour market actors is essential. The private sector actors are important consumers and producers of LMI and their collaboration is essential in achieving desired labour market outcomes.

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¹ In context, it is worth noting the International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of decent work. "Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

² The Créatec study assessed the role of LMI in work and education transitions. Work transitions include transitions from: school to work; home/unemployment to work; one field of work to another; and one level of work to another. Education transitions include transitions from: work to school; home/unemployment to school; and on level of education to another.

³ Short term matching refers to helping workers search for jobs they might take immediately or in the very near future. Long term matching refers to current or prospective workers making career planning decisions.

⁴ It has been thought for many years that the speedy and peaceful resolution of collective agreements can be facilitated by the existence of third party institutions that gathers LMI that is relevant to bargaining. A common data gathering exercise is thought to eliminate a potential source of conflict: duelling data. Thus, for many years the Pay Research Bureau (PRB) gathered LMI to support bargaining in the federal public sector. The PRB was a victim of budget cuts in the 1990s but a successor organization, the Compensation Analysis and Research Services, has been created in the recent past.

⁵ Both LFS and SLID gather a limited amount of information on hours of work and SLID gathers some information on work schedules.

⁶ It should be acknowledged that HRSDC used to maintain a longitudinal file based on administrative data that was capable of answering the questions posed above. Unfortunately, the file ran afoul of privacy considerations and had to be discontinued.

⁷ LFS and SLID gather some information on job search activity and SLID can yield some insight into the education and training activities of the unemployed.

⁸ One of the gaps noted is the absence of online information about apprenticeships. In context, it is interesting to note that the UK has developed a website devoted entirely to matching employers and prospective apprentices.

⁹ A task force on labour market information organized by the Canadian Labour Force Development Board in 1996 produced a report, *Putting the Pieces Together: Step II — Toward a Coherent Labour Market Information System* that spoke very strongly to the importance of diversified means disseminating LMI in order to meet the needs of different user groups. (CLFDB, 1996.)