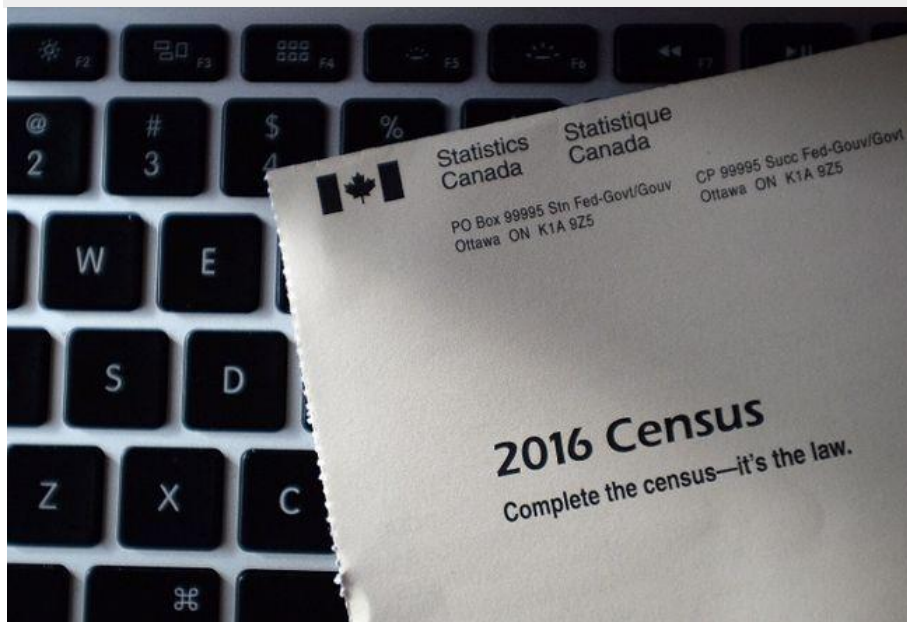




## Census data confirms reduced employment rate

By [Elaine Della-Mattia](#), Sault Star

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A Statistics Canada 2016 Census sits on the key board of a computer after arriving in the mail at a home in Ottawa in a May 2, 2016, file photo. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Sean Kilpatrick

Census Canada's labour force data confirms the alarming theory that more people are leaving the labour force in Sault Ste. Marie than those joining it.

In part, that's due to the aging demographics of the community and the inability to attract and retain young people or young working immigrants, the data shows.

Jonathan Coulman, executive director of the Algoma Workforce Investment Corp. said that while the 2016 Census data is a snapshot in time and shows the trends of the impact of the aging population on the workforce, monthly labour force survey data may show a slight improvement.

That improvement can also be a 'blip' or a seasonal adjustment.

"What that data shows is we are starting to see these theories come into play. They are no longer theoretical. It is becoming a reality that communities must face," he said.

The reality is that a greater number of people in Sault Ste. Marie – and the north and rural areas as a whole – have retired or are nearing retirement age and there are not enough young people to replace them, thus leaving a workforce gap and skilled workforce shortfall.

Census Canada 2016 data shows that about 6,330 Sault Ste. Marie residents are between the ages of 55-59 and another 5,470 between the ages of 60-64.

The average age for Sault Ste. Marie residents is 44.6 and the median age is 46.8.

Reaching precariously close to the 50 mark is a huge problem, said Dan Hollingsworth, executive director of the Sault Ste. Marie Economic Development Corp.

"Our challenge is people. The demographics show our people are getting older, not only in Sault Ste. Marie but in rural Canada and we don't have the population numbers of younger people to replace them," he said.

The Northern Policy Institute has projected a deficit of about 7,000 people over the next few years in Northern Ontario.

Demographics and its relation to workforce issues and youth was the subject of the NPI's inaugural conference in Timmins in October.

The statistics show that a skilled trade shortage, already being noticed in many of the markets now, will continue to be problematic.

In addition, all sectors will be impacted as more people retire and younger people are not available to fill those positions.

Hollingsworth said "the big centres are attracting immigrants and we're not. We need a strategy to attract people and we need to look at it more closely and tie in with the universities and colleges to attract and retain some of these people."

While some efforts are already underway to do that, a more concerted effort is needed, something that may occur as the community adjustment plan unfolds.

Census data numbers released Wednesday show that Sault Ste. Marie's labour force is 35,295. Of those people, 31,660 people are employed and 3,630 are unemployed.

While unemployment numbers have been fairly consistent, the number of people not in the labour force (those who are retired or are not looking for work) has grown to 26,150.

Statistically, that means Sault Ste. Marie's participation in the labour force hovers at about 57 per cent, its employment rate at 51.5 per cent and its unemployment rate at about 10.3 per cent, the data indicates.

Another growing trend is that while 36,990 people over the age of 15 participated in some form of the work force, that work was almost equally divided between full and part time work.

The data shows that 18,045 people responded to the survey calling themselves employed full-time while 18,940 reported only working part-time.

Coulman said the numbers show less people are working or looking for work.

The numbers, he noted, are lower in Sault Ste. Marie than the provincial rate which shows an employment rate of more than 60 per cent.

“We are aging. We are getting ahead of the curve in Northern Ontario and that is a problem,” he said.

Coulman said the statistics can also be broken down further and show that 20 per cent of Sault Ste. Marie’s population is working in the manufacturing industry – once considered the highest area of employment – and 80 per cent work in the service sector.

As retirements occur, and if the city’s population continues to decline, less jobs will be needed to service the community.

However, the trends also show the largest sector of employment growth is the health care and social services sector, which between 2011 and 2016 grew from 14 per cent to 16 per cent.

“Again, it indicates that with our aging demographics, we need more of these services,” he said.

The manufacturing industry dropped two per cent, from 12 per cent to 10 per cent, he said, accounting for differences with technology and productivity.

Employers, educators and other stakeholders need to work together to develop solutions to drive up population numbers, he said.

It’s expected that the

The Algoma Workforce Investment Corp. is a community-based, non-profit corporation funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development.