

Thunder Bay 'engine' amid regional change

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Thunder Bay 'engine' amid regional change BY BRYAN MEADOWS NORTHWEST BUREAU | [1 comment](#)

With the Thunder Bay region's population continuing a shift to urban living from rural areas, a new report is recommending that government and other policy makers shift focus on several fronts.

The report, Northern Projections: Human Capital Series, released Thursday by the Northern Policy Institute and Northern Ontario Workforce Planning Boards, recommends: marketing the city of Thunder Bay as the economic engine of the Northwest; continuing to foster female participation in the labour force; and making indigenous education the number one priority in the region.

"Meaningful engagement of our indigenous population is our number one priority in the region," Madge Richardson, executive director of the North Superior Workforce Planning Board and Local Employment Planning Council, said Thursday. "Expanded access to services and educational opportunities are key to increasing and realizing their full share of the labour force."

The report, authored by James Cuddy and Bakhtiar Moazzami, focuses on the Thunder Bay District, highlighting the contrasts that exist between urban and rural population and workforce trends.

From 2001 to 2011, Thunder Bay district's population declined by roughly three per cent. During the same period the urban population increased, while the rural population declined.

Of the district's indigenous population, 68.2 per cent live in urban areas, mostly off-reserve, while 31.8 per cent live in rural areas. Among the rural indigenous population, 58.2 per cent live in relatively remote areas with a weak link to an urban centre, and 26.8 per cent live in very remote regions with absolutely no link to an urban centre, the report said.

The report notes that the region's rural indigenous population is not the only one far from urban services. Of the Francophone population in the district, 53.9 per cent live in urban centres, but of those who live in rural areas, 83.9 per cent live in relatively remote areas with only a weak link to an urban centre.

On a labour and educational front, the report predicts the district will face a situation where workers' qualifications do not match existing and potential jobs because the workforce skill level "is below the estimated requirement needed" for emerging occupations, such as finance, health and administration.

Despite that, the report sheds light on several areas of strength that the district can build upon, noting that education levels are relatively high in urban centres in and around the city of Thunder Bay.

Female employment levels are also high - and rising in the region. Labour force participation and employment rates declined among men for the region as a whole, but rose among women from 2001 to 2011, the report stated.

“The female population, whom have historically participated less in the labour force than males, are a key source of increasing workforce participation in the Thunder Bay district,” noted Northern Policy Institute president Charles Cirtwill. “This is true for indigenous, anglophone, Francophone and immigrant women.”

Full story inside Saturday's print and digital edition of The Chronicle-Journal, A1/A3

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