

Métis Women's
and 2SLGBTQQIA+
Folks' Experiences
with the Gig
Economy





Background

For centuries and to this day, Métis women have played pivotal roles in communities, leadership and economic development. Their lived experiences have shaped policies, programs and community responses. They have held esteemed roles in conversations and have sat at tables that have shaped the Métis Nation as a whole. Across the Métis Motherland, women hold 50% of the elected leadership positions.¹

Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks occupy many positions within the labour market, including business administration (24%), sales and services (24%), education and social services (20%) and health (12%).² Many are also beadwork artists, painters, designers, crafters, caregivers and homemakers, either in addition to their main source of income or as their main source of income.

While Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have been politically involved and empowered for centuries, this has not translated into an improved socio-economic status for them. Métis women are less likely to participate in the paid and formal economy and largely occupy vulnerable and low-paying jobs and sectors. They are more likely to work part-time and generally earn less than men for the same jobs and skill levels.³

In many cases, Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have left the labour market or their education to care for dependents or to pursue other ways of knowledge-keeping such as land-based learning. This has meant that many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have difficulties returning to mainstream work later as they are considered to not have enough relevant experience.

Many Métis women have also experienced major barriers in navigating online employment applications and employment supports. During LFMO's engagement session, a participant who has difficulties reading text from online materials noted that additional supports are needed for people with disabilities when applying for jobs or for federal income support. She explained that many applications are only online, difficult to navigate and as a result, decreased her opportunity to access income.

COVID-19 has also impacted Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks' jobs, through reduced hours, reduced pay, job loss and decreased income opportunities for those who are self-employed. These have had ripple effects throughout Métis communities, where food insecurity has been rampant, housing situations have become precarious and those who were forced to stay at home in domestic violence situations were at even further risk.

¹ Women of the Métis Nation (2017). "Women of the Métis Nation Perspectives": 2.

² "Labour Market Experiences of Métis: Key Findings from the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey." Statistics Canada. November 26, 2018. Accessed March 17 2021. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/89-653-x/89-653-x2018002-eng.pdf?st=fllG_4OA

³ Ibid.

During the pandemic, many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks have also been in frontline positions, such as health and food service delivery, and thus have been at increased risk of spreading and contracting the virus.

The Gig Economy, Gig Workers and Short-Term Contract Work

Gig workers are defined as those who enter into short-term contracts with organizations or firms and/or individuals who complete specific and often one-off tasks. Further, Statistics Canada defines gig workers as those who “are usually not employed on a long-term basis by a single firm; instead they enter into various contracts with firms or individuals to complete a specific task or to work for a specific period of time for which they are paid a negotiated sum.”⁴

The gig economy is a reality for many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks, many of whom work in the gig economy within the creative arts industry, such as beadwork, painting, printmaking, graphic design, sewing, and several other forms. During the pandemic especially, there has been an influx of Métis gig workers, especially in the areas of food delivery services, to secure income streams to sustain family expenses. This has been to secure additional income to provide for dependants who have lost their income, or to secure income when a Métis woman or 2SLGBTQQIA+ person has lost their own source of income themselves.

The creative arts industry regularly revolves around markets, seasons and holidays. In addition to these time-limited opportunities to generate income, participants expressed that they have felt increased stress, anxiety and fear because of the shift to online markets. Often online applications are not easy to navigate, especially for those with limited Internet access or those who have difficulties reading from screens. This has led to a great loss of income for many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks who are gig workers, or for those who are able to access such opportunities, this has led to increased isolation stemming from working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another major challenge cited by Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ gig workers included the obstacles that sole proprietors have experienced in understanding their eligibility for supports, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA). It was noted that this information was not hugely accessible to Métis communities and workers, the language was confusing and as a result, many “fell through the cracks” and have been unable to apply for support.

In other cases, Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ -owned business and entrepreneurs whose businesses are in their spouse’s name have also been unable to apply for Indigenous grants. For many Métis women and 2SLGBTQQIA+ folks whose economic situations are precarious or have been in the past, they often must rely on another individual to begin their business, thus compromising their future ability to apply for much-needed grants and loans.

⁴ Employment and Social Development Canada Labour Program (2020). “Developing Labour Protections for Gig Workers: Consultation Discussion Paper”: 3.

Recommendations

- 1) The federal government should put in place stronger protections, including a direct focus on security and accessibility measures, for gig workers to ensure they are able to access grants and funding supports during emergency events.