**Breakout 1 - Digital Economy and Changing Nature of Work**

**Session at a Glance**

Session Time: 10:45 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Room: Cartier B

Discussion Topics: Impacts of a changing labour force (gig work, part-time work) and technological advancements such as artificial intelligence, automation, robotics, quantum computing and the impacts of digital adoption on SMEs, labour productivity and growth

Panelists

* Moderator: **Namir Anani**, President and CEO, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC)
* Panelist 1: **Stephanie Enders**, Chief Delivery Officer, Alberta Machine Intelligence Institute (Amii)
* Panelist 2: **Sharif Mahdy**, CEO, Students Commission of Canada and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Panelist 3: **Jean-Pierre Giroux**, President, Excellence in Manufacturing (EMC)

**Key Issues**

* Technological changes have traditionally improved labour productivity, helped create new jobs and reshaped the way people work and earn a living.
* With the adoption of new technologies and the automation of a growing number of job activities, employers are increasingly looking for workers with digital skills.
* Some occupations are more susceptible to change.
* According to the OECD, 45.6% of jobs are vulnerable to automation in Canada. Of these jobs, 15% are at high risk.
* Part-time and low-income workers are more likely to work in jobs exposed to a high risk of automation.
* Investment in new technologies is needed to increase labour productivity, meet the evolving needs of workers and boost competitiveness in all sectors.
* There is an emerging interest in putting people at the centre of production and use of new technologies to improve prosperity beyond jobs and growth.
* A challenge is how best to promote technological changes to maximize growth, while managing the risks and better supporting affected workers.
* Technology adoption can enable businesses to focus on new products and new markets and create opportunities for more meaningful engagement of workers.
* For instance, generative artificial intelligence (AI), increasingly adopted by Canadian businesses, can help improve productivity, with the potential to add nearly 2% to Canada's GDP.
* Changing business and work models require new approaches to knowledge and skills acquisition that will prepare Canada's workforce to effectively use new tools and technologies and become more productive.

**Government Action**

* The Government of Canada is transforming the lives of 22,000 young people through ESDC’s Youth Employment and Skills Strategy program (YESS).
  + A new requirement is that all projects serve youth furthest from employment in some capacity, including youth not in employment, education or training, and youth facing multiple and compounding barriers to employment. In addition to introducing the youth with disabilities stream, other priority groups include Indigenous youth, 2SLGBTQI+ youth, Black and other racialized youth, and youth in official language minority communities.
* *Recent announcements from Budget 2024:*
* $50 million for the Sectoral Workforce Solutions Program to support workers who may be impacted by AI and provide new skills training for disrupted sectors and communities.
* $2 billion to launch a new AI Compute Access Fund and a Canadian AI Sovereign Compute Strategy, which will provide Canadian researchers and AI companies with the tools needed to be competitive.
* $200 million to support Canada’s regional development agencies to boost AI adoption across key sectors such as agriculture, clean technology, and healthcare.
* Other Government Programs:
* Digital Skills for Youth (ISED) – connects underemployed postsecondary youth with small businesses and not-for-profits to gain meaningful work experience in critical digital skills, such as cybersecurity, big data, automation and AI.
* Digital Literacy Exchange Program (ISED) – supports fundamental digital skills training for Canadians who face barriers to participation in the digital economy, helping them adapt to rapidly evolving technology.
* CanCode (ISED) is a federal program that, since its launch, has helped over 4.5 million K-12 students develop technology skills, priming kids for success in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. CanCode’s programming has equipped over 200,000 teachers with the tools they need to help their students learn to code

**Points to Register**

* Canada has been successful in establishing its leadership in AI and quantum and supporting sectors to adopt cutting-edge technologies.
* Technology adoption presents many opportunities, including boosting productivity and economic growth, and improving living standards.
* The impact on the Canadian workforce is also a major concern, with the risk of displacing jobs, exacerbating inequalities, and changing skill requirements.
* Specific challenges remain in Canada, including enabling wider adoption of technologies, identifying business and workers needs, ensuring access to new technological tools, and filling gaps in digital skills.
* As Canada progresses towards becoming a modern, digital nation, it is essential to align skills development and training programs with strategic growth areas.
* Digitalization is essential to the future of industry, government and research, and AI is changing the scale and scope of computer processing and storage that is required. For SMEs to be able to scale and be competitive, access to computing and AI power is becoming essential, and for research to be relevant, it needs to leverage the efficiencies and analytics that AI affords.
* Efforts to improve workers' skills, ensure inclusion and mitigate negative impacts are essential to capitalize on opportunities.

**Questions to Raise**

* What strategies and measures can be implemented to upskill workers and foster a smooth transition to a digital economy?
* What are effective ways to support SMEs, including improving automation and AI adoption?