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Three reports have been released in the past week warning that Canada's labour market is so badly broken that it creates more losers than winners and threatens the country's economic vitality.

The first, from the [Metcalf Foundation](#), looked at the mismatch between skills and jobs in Ontario. Employers can't find the skilled workers they need, it pointed out, while highly trained immigrants with credentials and experience can't get their foot in the door. Meanwhile, talented graduates from Canadian universities and colleges are stuck in entry-level jobs. "The current system is not serving anyone," concluded Tom Zizys, author of the 76-page report.

The second, from the [Toronto Workforce Innovation Group](#) (formerly known as the Toronto Training Board), showed how the city's economic transformation has outpaced its labour market, leaving a polarized workforce with a hollowed-out middle. This has led to extremes of wealth and poverty, less social mobility, more part-time, contract and casual work and a large, but inequitable, knowledge sector.

The third, from the [International Labour Organization](#), said workplace discrimination is on the rise. It did not cite Canada specifically, but the symptoms it identified — cutbacks to human rights bodies; fewer opportunities for new immigrants and members of racial minorities; a disproportionate increase in youth unemployment, and a rise in support for populist politicians — are evident here. "Economically adverse times are a breeding ground for discrimination," said Juan Somavia, head of the 183-nation body.

None of the reports was shocking. Canadians know there are blockages and inequities in the job market. Many workers have experienced them. Most families have been affected; parents are working longer and harder without gaining ground while their kids, who followed their advice and got a good education, are faring worse than they did at the same age.

But the three publications, coming in rapid succession, underscored the urgency of the issue.

Regrettably, all were heavy on diagnosis and light on solutions. They called for further research and proposed vague reforms. But there were common themes:

- Waiting for the policy-makers to solve the problem won't work. Government can't create jobs for the well-educated graduates pouring out of colleges and universities. It can't restore the mid-level jobs that once allowed workers to climb the career ladder.

Elected officials can certainly update their policies, most of which date back to the industrial era when there were secure, full-time jobs with good wages and benefits. They can repair Canada's fraying safety nets. At minimum, they can enforce existing labour laws and workplace regulations.

- Waiting for big business to spot and hire talented newcomers won't work. Most chief executives don't venture outside their comfort zone. Most headhunters don't approach candidates with no track record in Canada or the United States.

Corporate leaders can certainly pay more attention to demographic realities and widen their networks. At minimum, they can check their own organizations for unused skills and wasted potential.

- Waiting for the "invisible hand of the market" to bring supply and demand into balance won't work. There are too many barriers, bottlenecks and missing links in the job pipeline. Moreover, the theory was intended for goods and services, not people.

This makes it essential for decision-makers to work together. They have to look at the whole picture, not just their piece of it; figure out what needs to be done; identify steps each of them can take; and follow through until they have a labour market suited for a diverse population, a digital economy and a new generation.

There are few precedents for this kind of problem-solving and no obvious leaders.

That means the pressure for change will have to come from the multitude of Canadians trapped in a job market that is failing them, their children and their country.

*Carol Goar's column appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday.*