

WORKFORCE PROFILES OF QUEBEC FIRST NATIONS

PROVISIONAL REPORT



A portrait drawn from 22 participating communities,
to better understand certain realities experienced
within Quebec's First Nations.



Commission de développement
des ressources humaines des
Premières Nations du Québec

First Nations Human
Resources Development
Commission of Quebec

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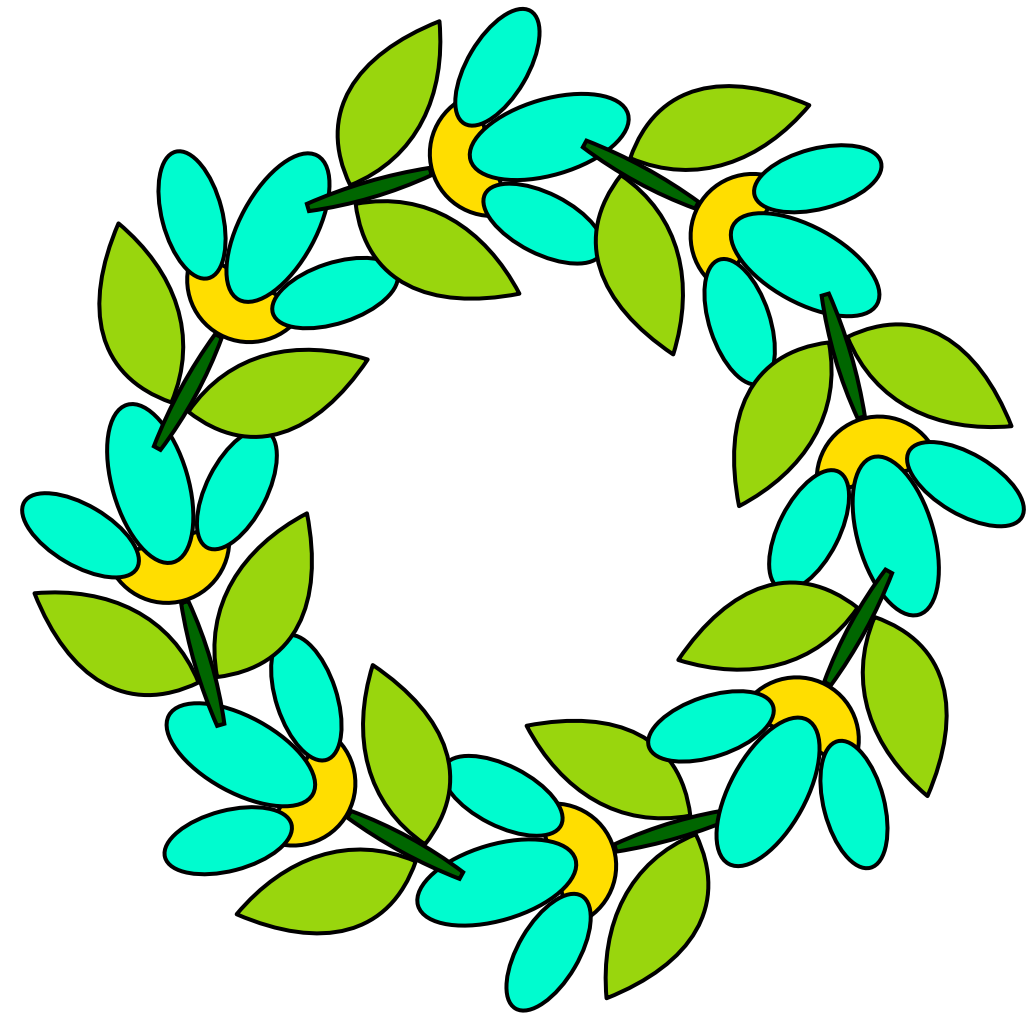
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METHODOLOGY

The data used in this study were collected from individuals aged 15 and over who were surveyed in member communities as well as in urban areas (primarily Montreal, Quebec City, Sept-Îles, Val-d'Or, and Gatineau). As it was not possible to survey the entire labour force, it was essential that the sample be representative of the target population to ensure scientific rigour.

The results presented pertain only to the 22 communities that participated in the survey and cannot be generalized to all FNHRDCQ member communities or to all First Nations in Quebec.

The distribution by age group and sex observed in the collected data often differs from that of the initial population, namely the population listed in the band registry as of December 31, 2023.



To correct this imbalance, a weighting procedure was applied. The XLSTAT software uses iterative algorithms to determine the appropriate weights so that the sample (the enumerated population) accurately reflects the initial population. This step involves adjusting the sample based on auxiliary variables (which must be qualitative). The selected variables are sex (male and female) and age, divided into five groups.

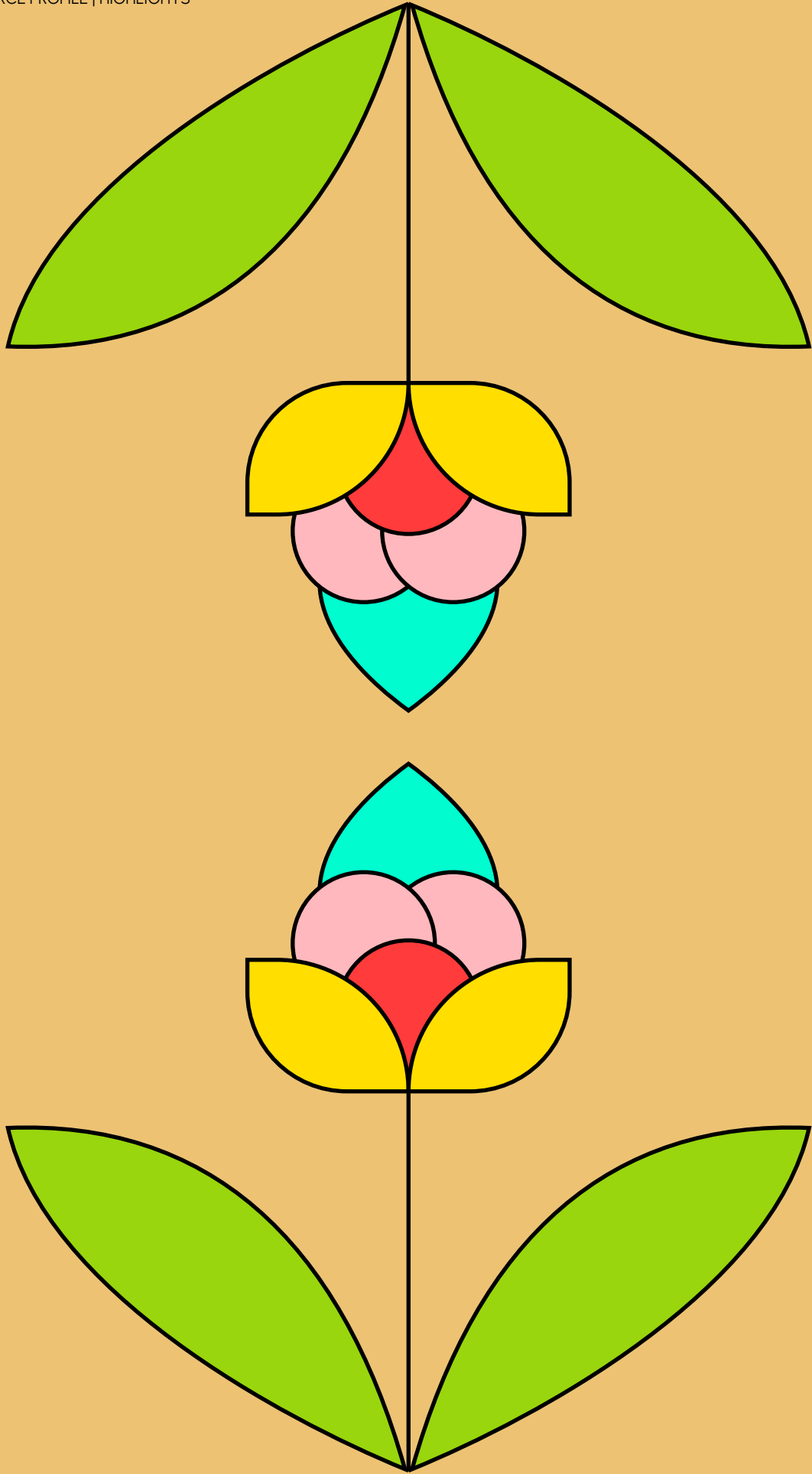
The statistics obtained after weighting; that is, after applying the weights; ensure a stronger alignment between the sample and the initial population.

Using XLSTAT, weighted descriptive statistics were produced based on selected relevant variables. Most tables and figures were generated in Excel. Indicators such as the employment rate, the unemployment rate, and other ratios relevant to a labour-force profile were also calculated. These statistics support the analysis of local data, enriched by comparisons with provincial and regional data.

HIGHLIGHTS

12.9%
Of the workforce hold
a high school diploma.

More than 19.3%
Of First Nations people
hold a competency
certificate.

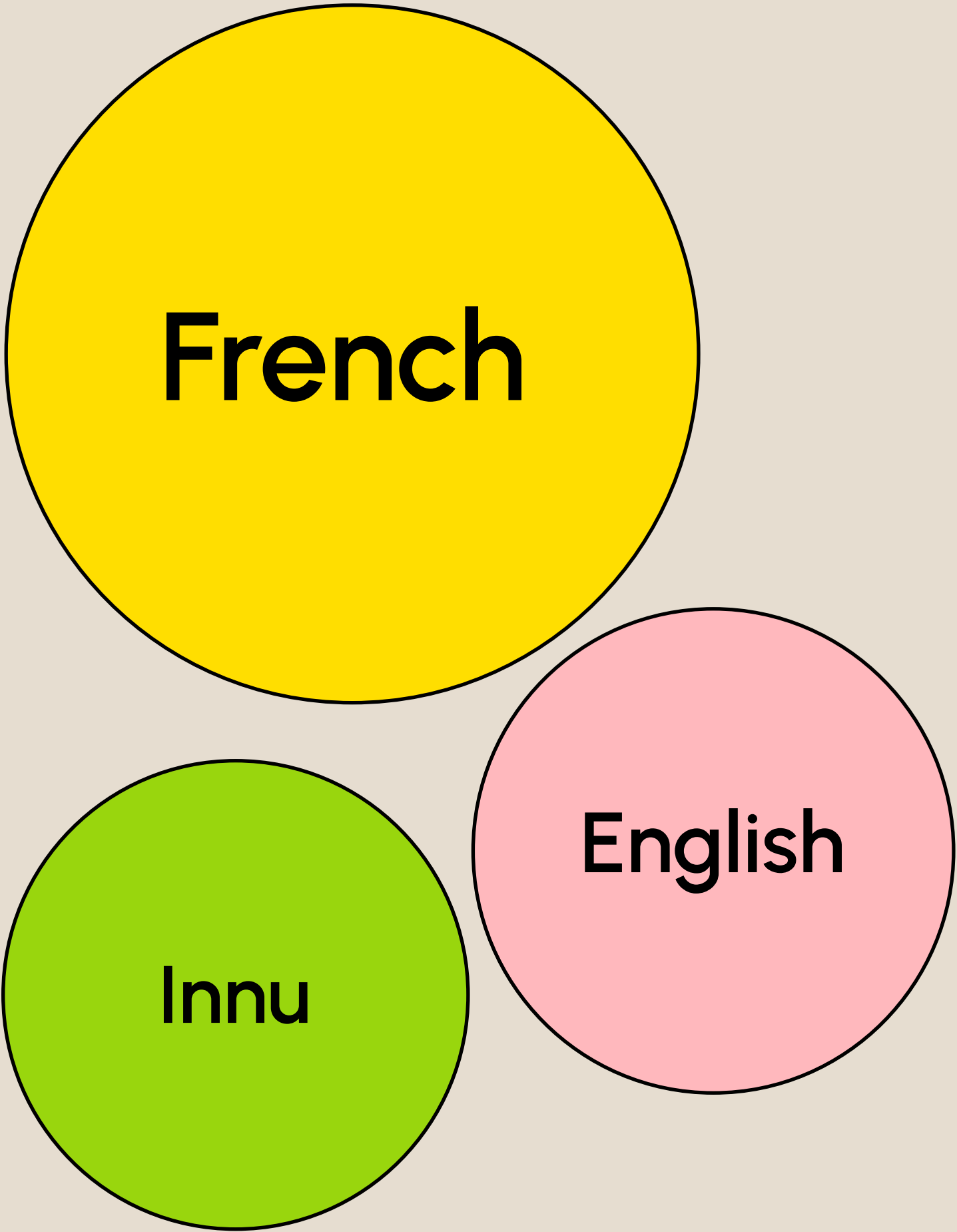


A DIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN AT HOME:

45.3%
Of First Nations speak
French at home.

22.8%
Speak English.

23.3%
Speak the Innu language.



IN 2025, THE
EMPLOYMENT
RATE STOOD
AT 56.4%:

Employees account for 51.9%
of the workforce:

87.4% Work full-time.	73.4% Hold permanent positions.	51.2% Hold jobs closely related to their field of study.
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Self-employed workers account
for 4.5% of the workforce:

67.6% Own sole proprietorships.	6% Operate family businesses.	55.5% Of these businesses employ Indigenous workers.
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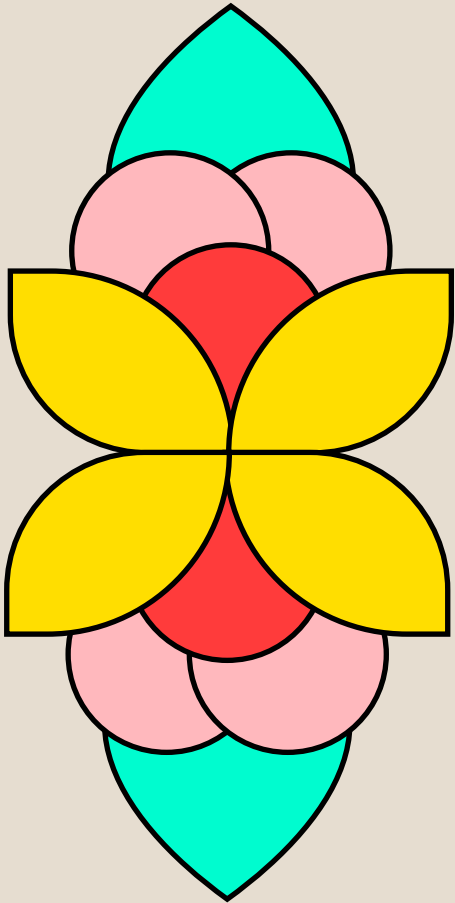
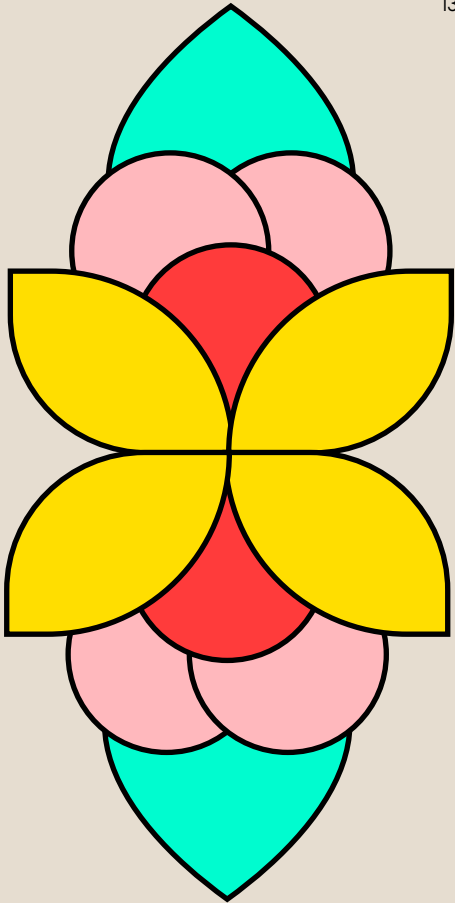
21% OF THE
WORKFORCE IS
UNEMPLOYED:

37.9%
Of job seekers contact
employers directly.

16.4%
Use online job
search platforms.

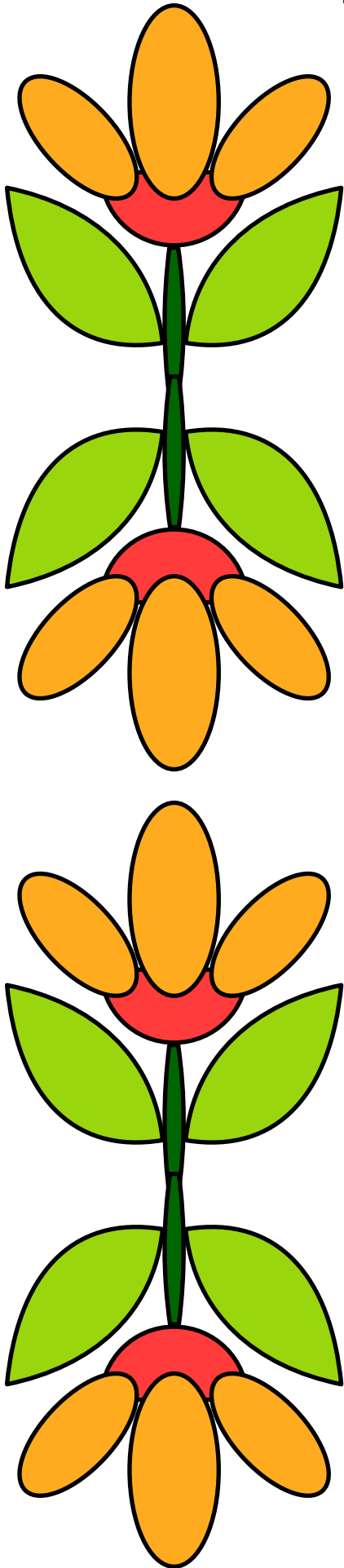
52.4%
Of unemployed persons
are seeking permanent
employment.

23.2%
Are seeking temporary
or seasonal work.



RETIREES
ACCOUNT FOR
10.6% OF THE
POPULATION AGED
15 AND OVER:

- 20.5%
Of retirees held paid employment in 2025.
- 78.8%
Were employees.
- 16.8%
Were self-employed.



STUDENTS ACCOUNT FOR 12.0% OF THE WORKFORCE, AMONG WHOM:

43.9%

Looked for work
while studying.

30.5%

Were seeking
temporary employment.

21%

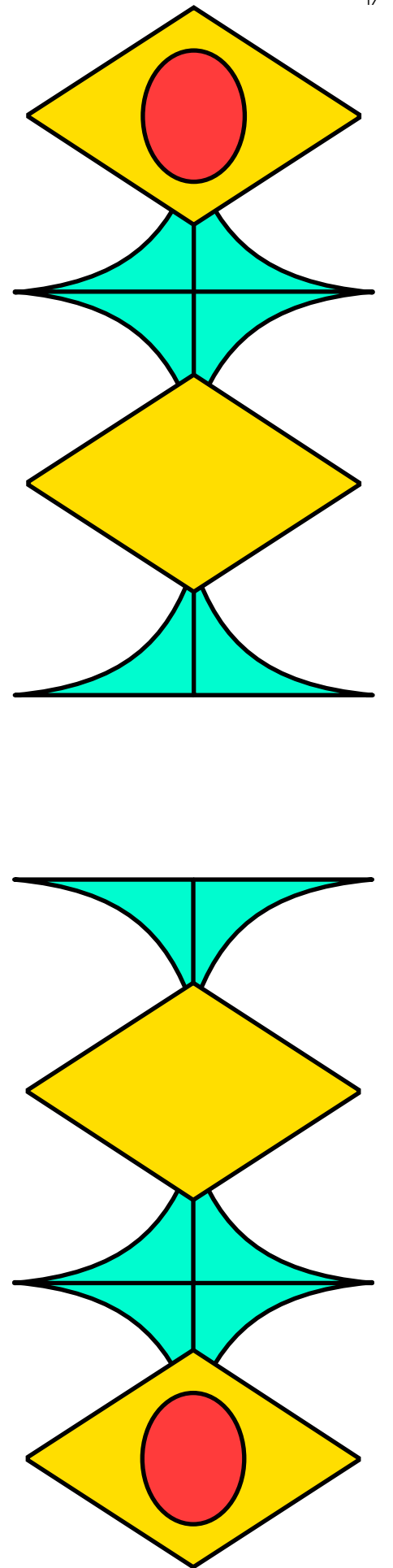
Were seeking
permanent position.

51.6%

Of First Nations people aged
15 and over earn an income
from paid employment
or self-employment.

55.6%

Of the workforce have
an annual income before
tax and deductions of less
than \$60,000.



SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

POPULATION
STRUCTURE

In 2025, the workforce in the 22 participating First Nations (FN) communities had a younger demographic profile than the Quebec average.

More than two out of five working-age respondents (41.2%) were under the age of 35, a significantly higher proportion than in the province as a whole (29.1%).

Conversely, the share of those aged 45 and older is proportionally lower among First Nations (42.7%) than in the rest of the Quebec population (54.9%). Within this age group, the proportion of individuals aged 65 and over remains higher at the provincial level than among the members of the surveyed communities (Fig. 1).

A sex-based analysis reveals that the proportion of individuals aged 15 to 34 is higher among men (43.2%) than among women (39.3%). In contrast, in the 45-and-over age group, women account for a higher proportion (45%) than men (40.4%).

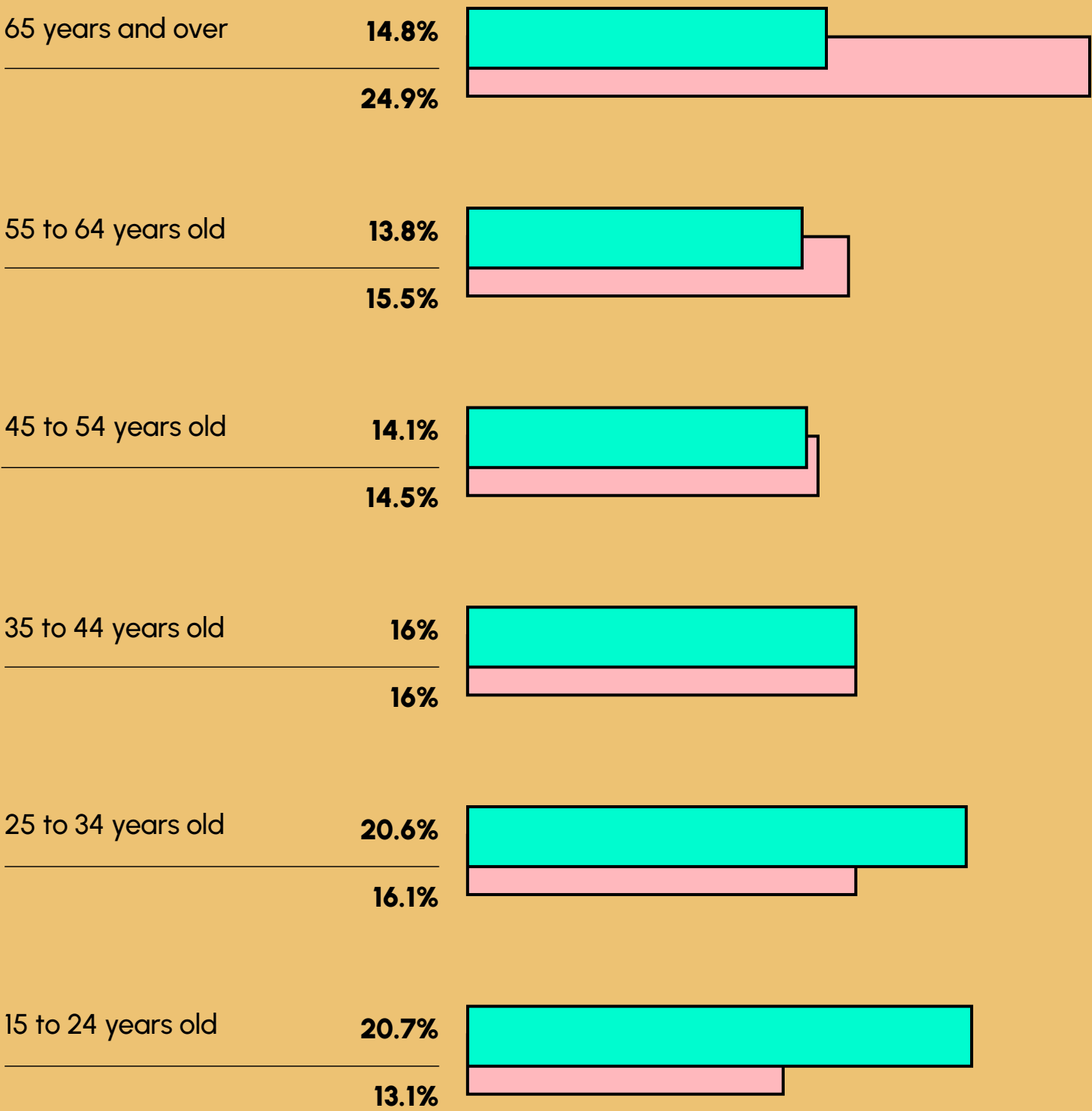


Figure 19

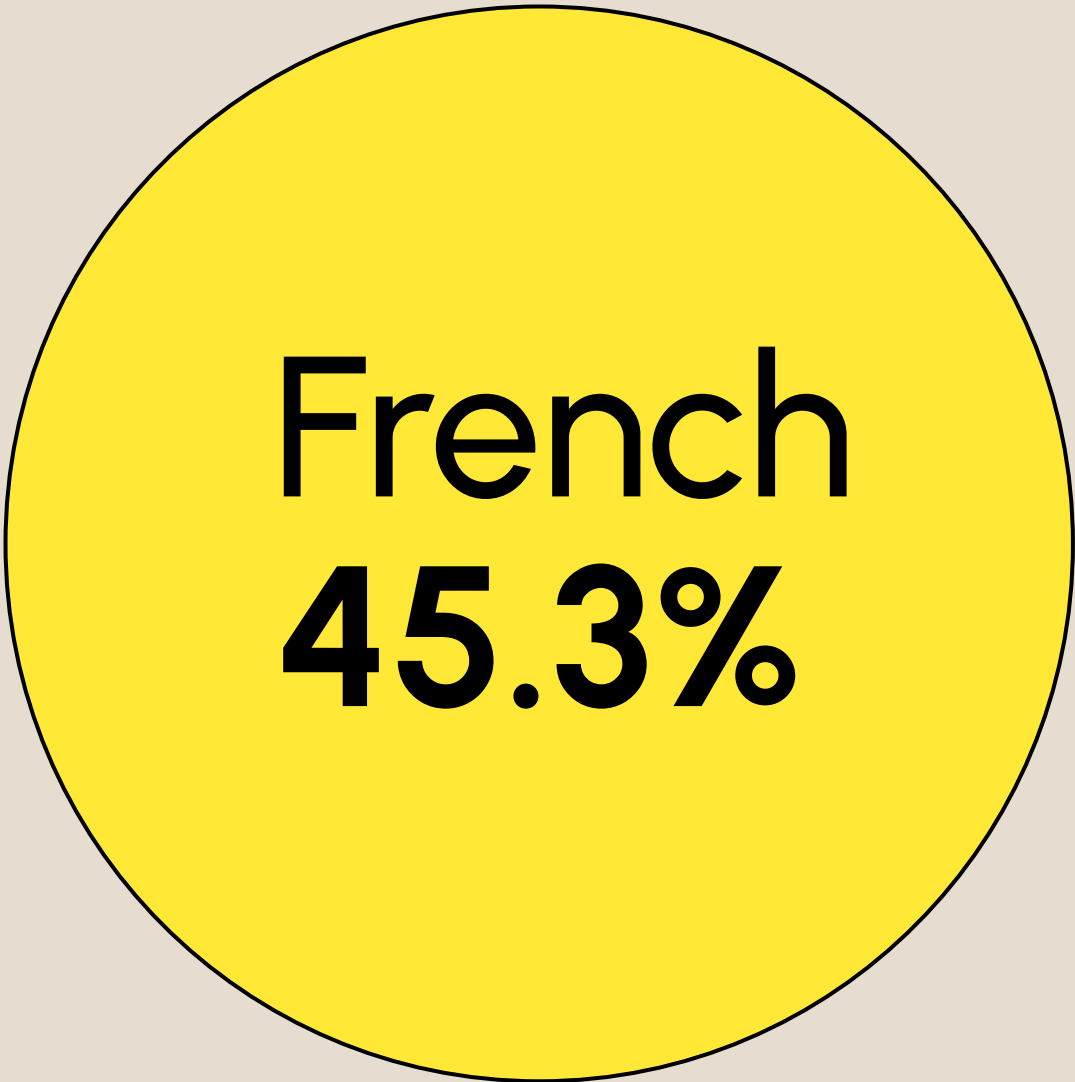


Age distribution of the First Nations respondent population compared with Quebec.

Figure 1. 2025. Québec

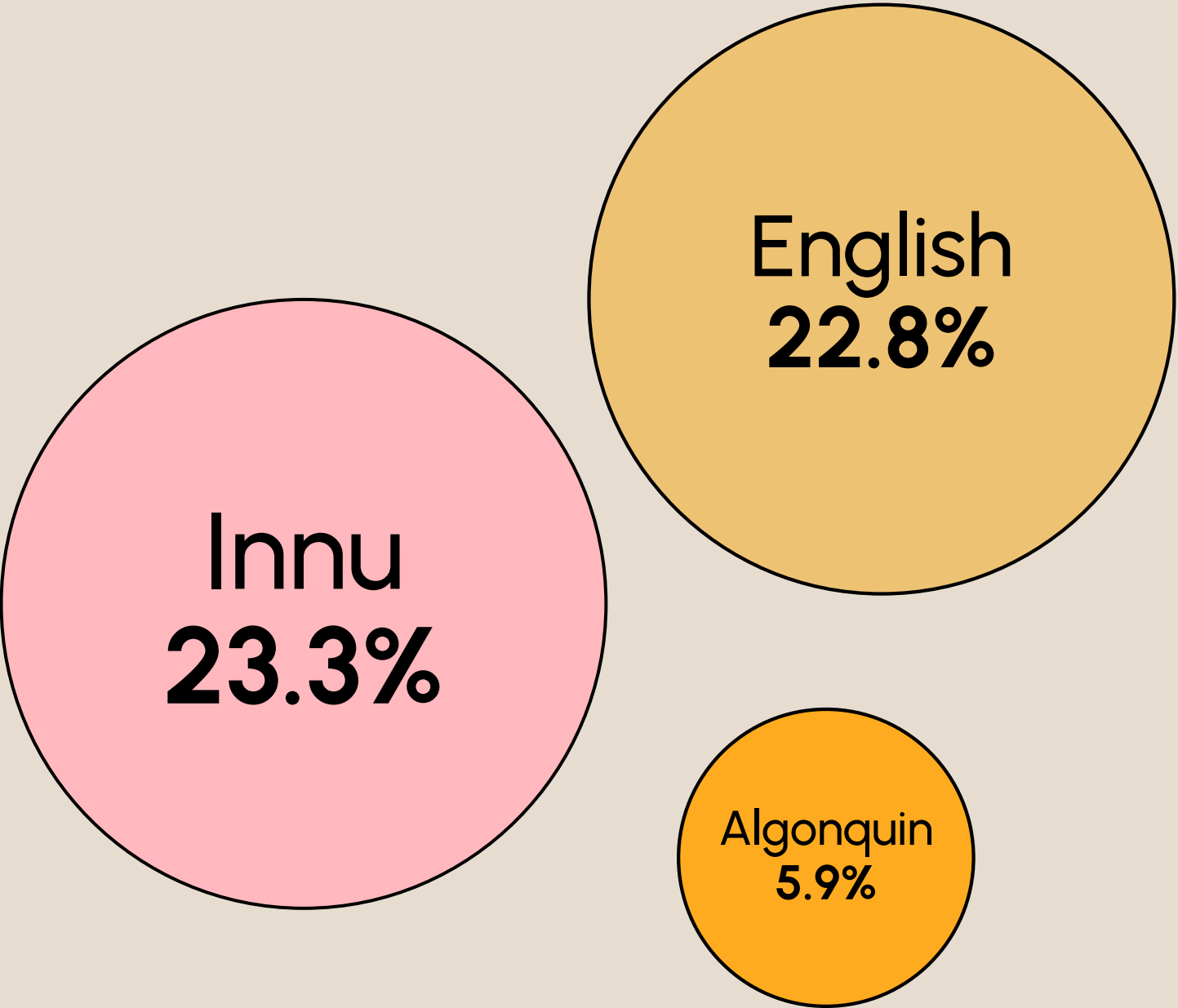
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

LANGUAGE
KNOWLEDGE



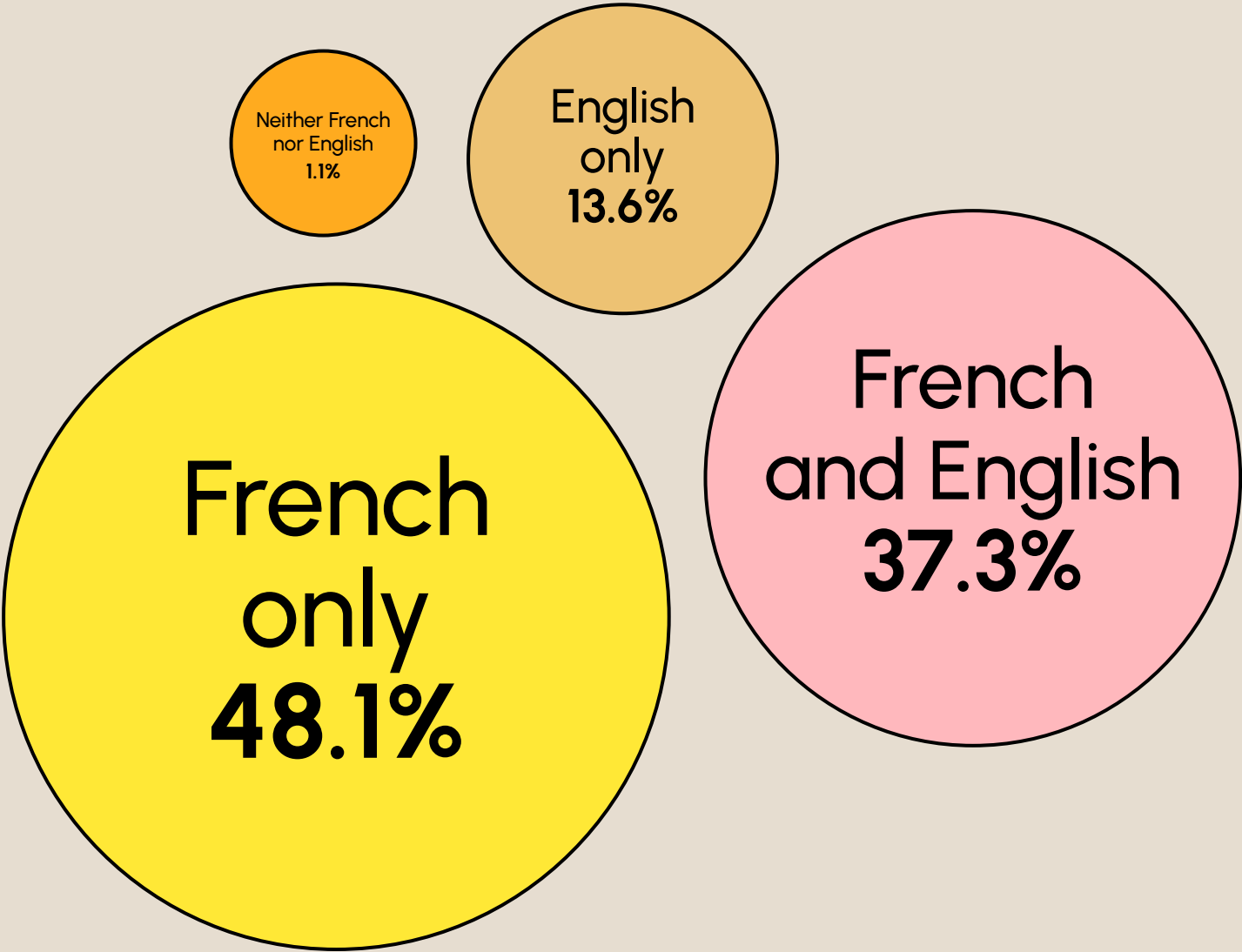
In the surveyed communities, French remains the primary language spoken at home, with more than 45% of speakers.

Main language spoken at home by First Nations respondents.
Figure 2. 2025.



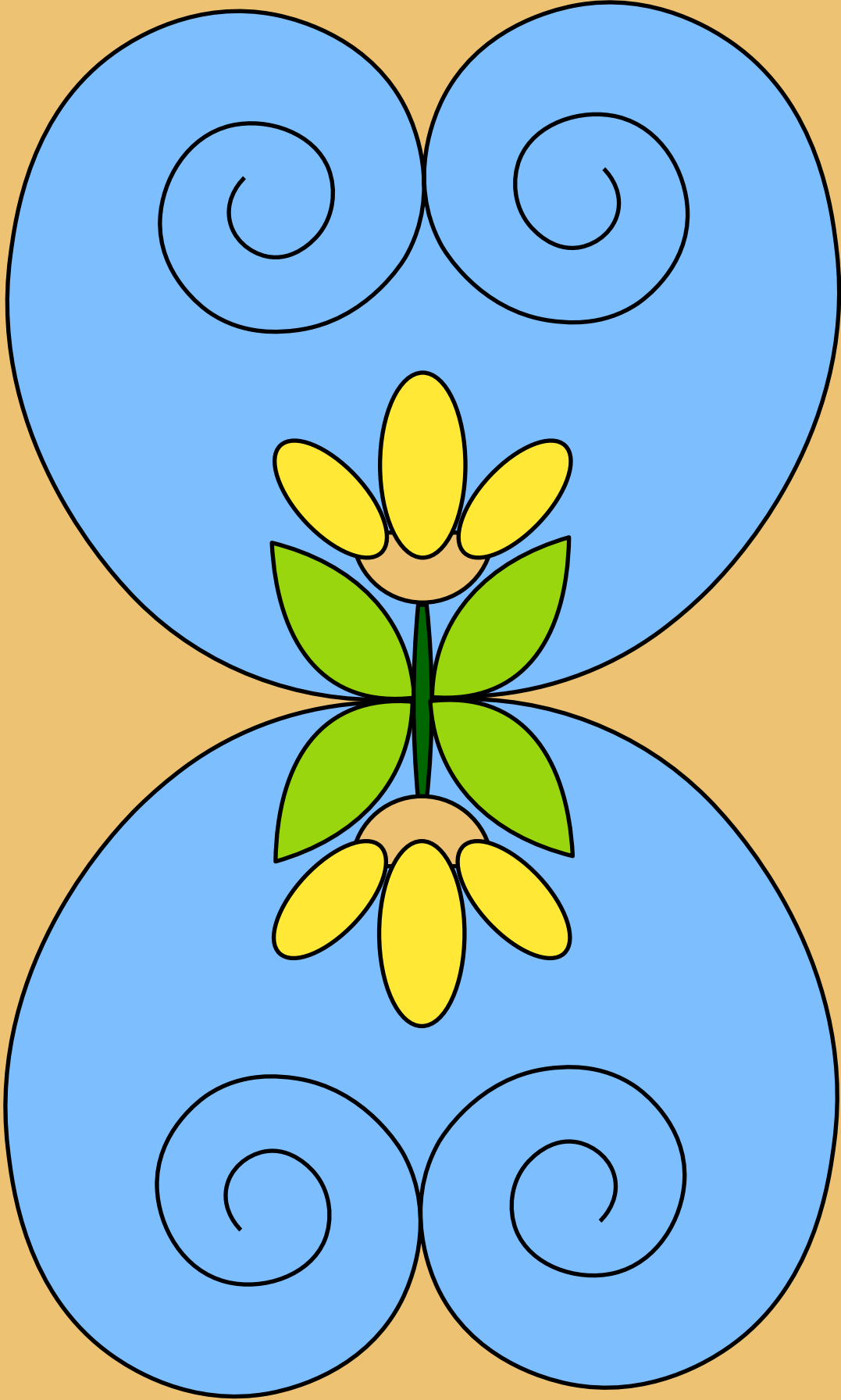
Innu is the most commonly spoken Indigenous language at home (over 23%), followed by English, which accounts for a similar proportion (Fig. 2).

Knowledge of official languages among First Nations respondents.
Figure 3. 2025.



Regarding knowledge of the official languages¹, which are also the most commonly used in the workplace, French ranks first, with over 48% of respondents reporting knowledge of French. The proportion of community members who speak only English is approximately 14%. Finally, just over 37% of respondents report being bilingual, while a small proportion (1.1%) speak neither French nor English (Fig. 3).

¹According to Statistics Canada, knowledge of the official languages refers to a person's ability to conduct a conversation in French only, English only, both languages, or neither language.



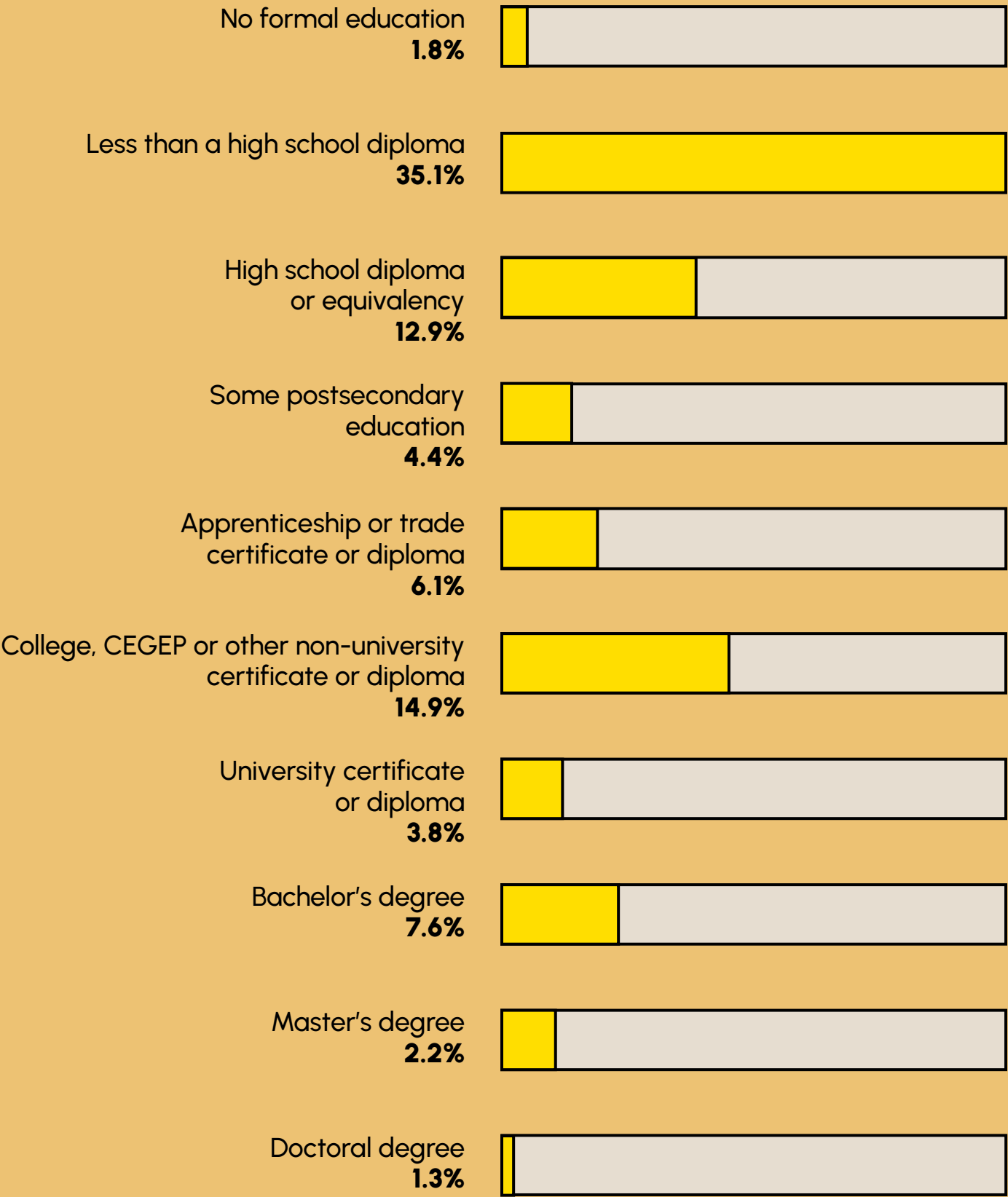
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

EDUCATION
AND TRAINING

Obtaining a high school diploma or an equivalent diploma remains a challenge for a portion of respondents. Survey results indicate that nearly 37% of participants had not reached this level of education in 2025 (Fig. 4).

Among respondents, the proportion of individuals with a high school diploma is just under 13%, compared with 18.2% for the overall Quebec population, according to the 2021 Census.

The same observation applies to postsecondary education (college and university), where the proportion of graduates remains well below the provincial average.



Highest level of education completed by First Nations respondents.

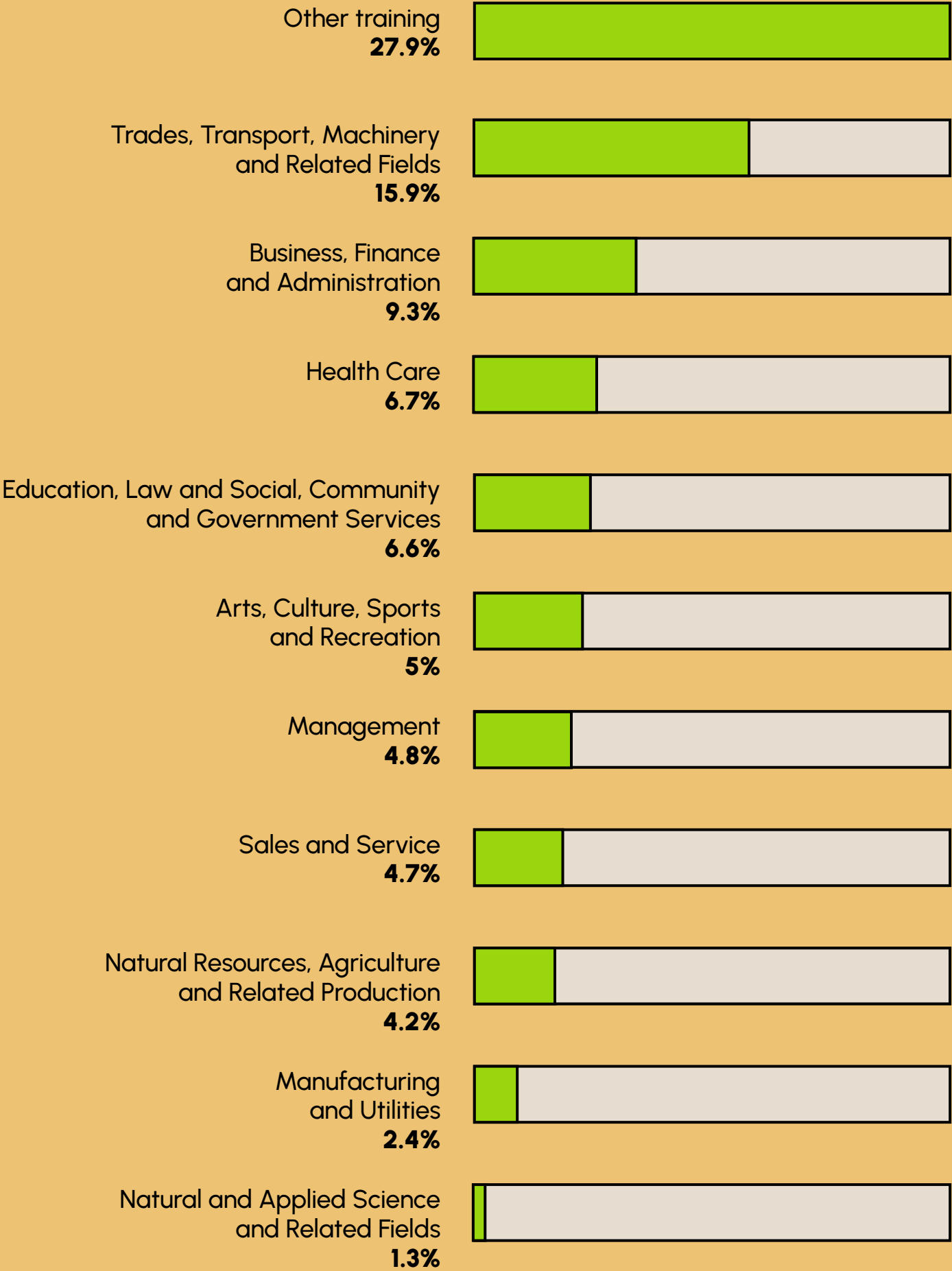
SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

OTHER KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Beyond formal education, more than 12% of respondents have completed training programs that offer real employment prospects to many First Nations people in Quebec.

Among those who completed such training, nearly 16% chose transportation, equipment operation, and related fields.

Just under 10% pursued training in administration, finance, and business, while more than 13% opted for education or health-related fields. Approximately 9% chose management, sales, and service occupations (Fig. 5).



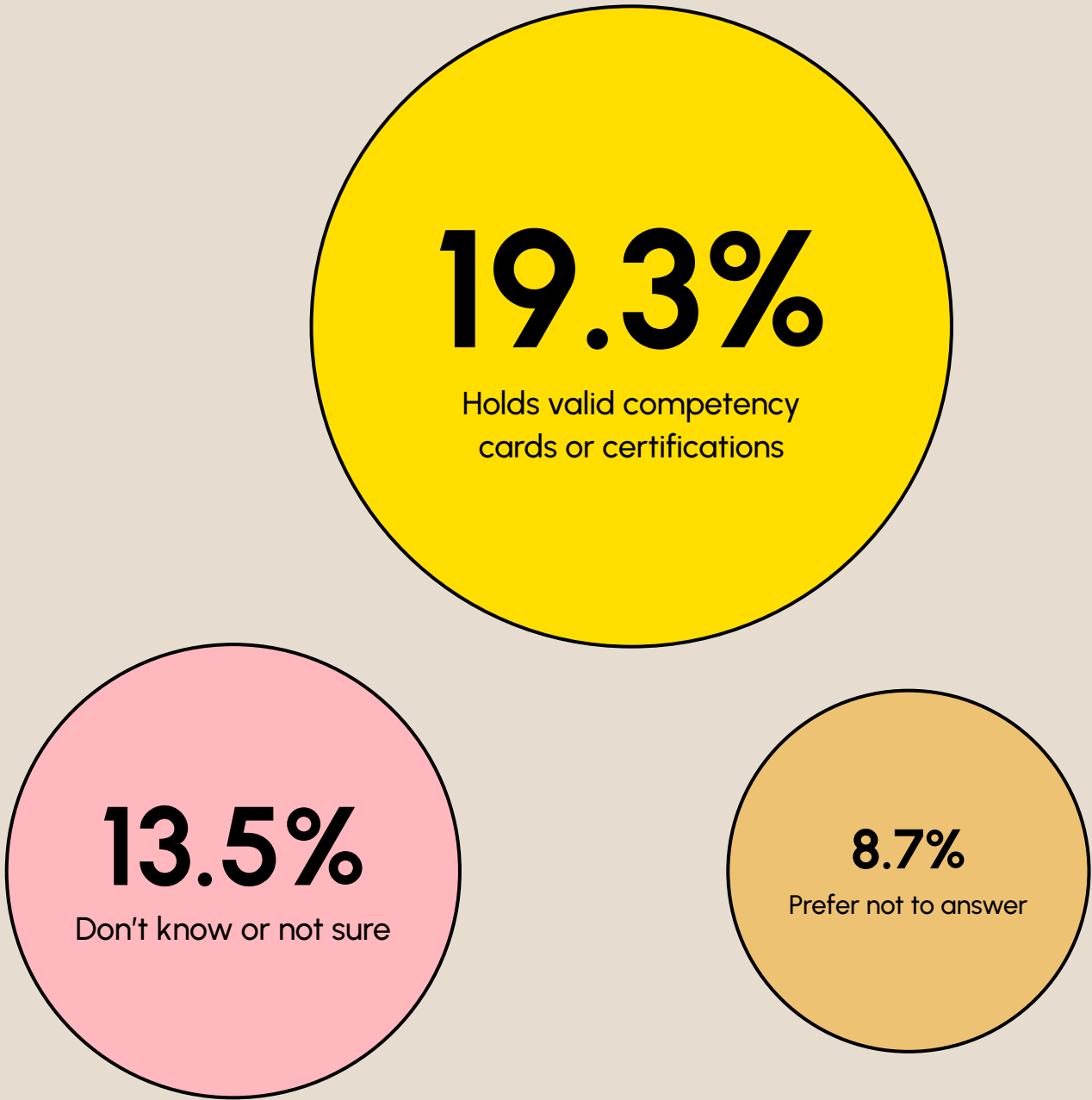
Preferred employment-related fields of study among First Nations respondents.

In the context of the First Nations labour market in Quebec, competency cards or certifications are important, as many jobs require them.



According to survey data, just over 19% of respondents hold a valid competency card or certification, which is primarily required in the construction, health care, fishing, and education sectors.

Distribution of First Nations respondents by possession of valid competency cards or certifications.
Figure 6. 2025.



LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

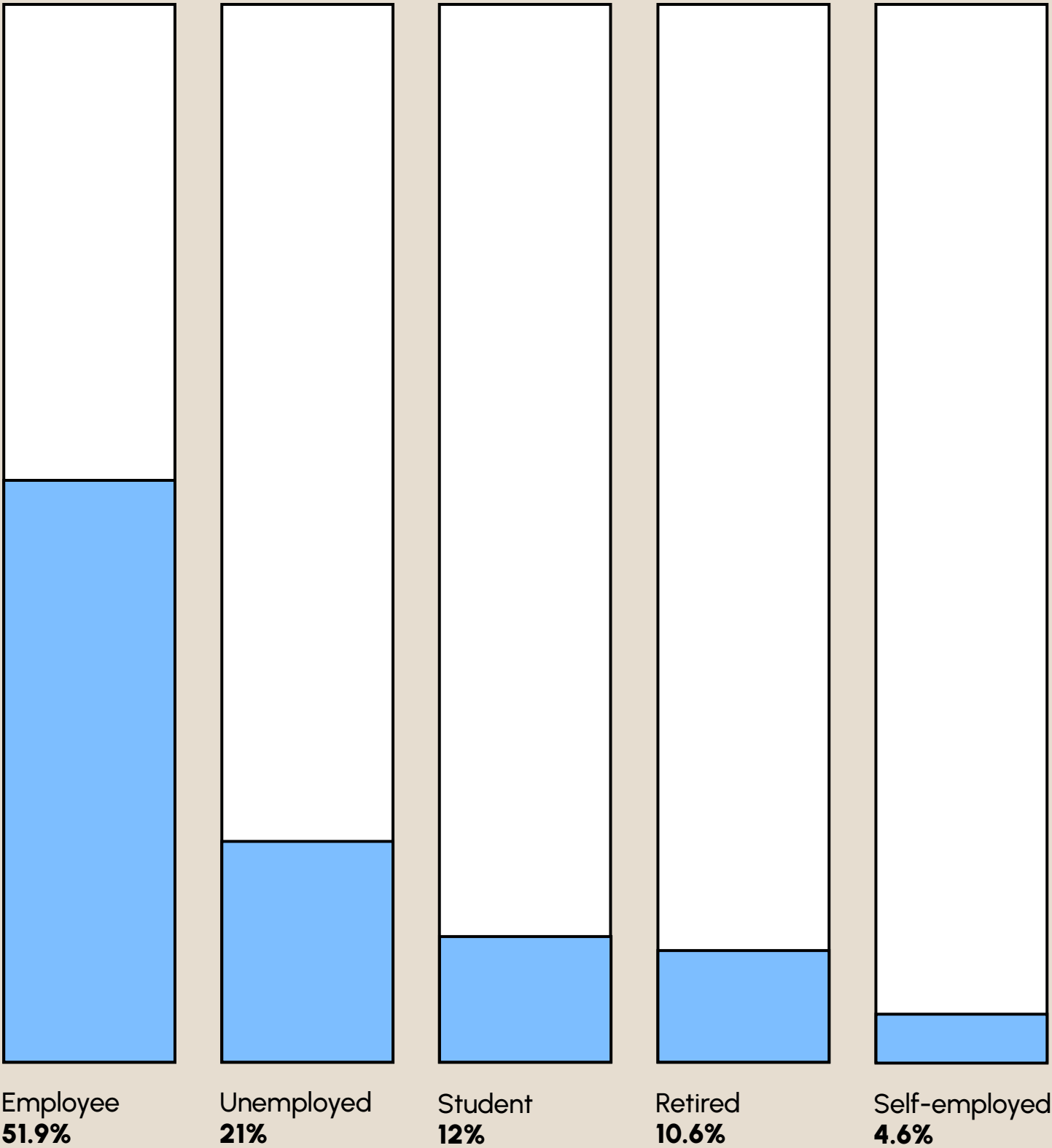
According to survey data, the employment rate in the 22 communities stood at 56.4% in 2025. This figure is lower than the Quebec average, which was approximately 61% in the same year.

The unemployment rate among respondents remains particularly high at 21%. This elevated rate is explained by low levels of economic activity within the communities, which limits job creation.

In addition, the relatively low proportion of individuals with postsecondary degrees or qualifying training reduces their competitiveness in the labour market outside their communities.

Regarding employment status, the vast majority of workers are employees. Self-employed workers account for less than 5% of the surveyed workforce.

Employment status of First Nations respondents.
Figure 7. 2025.

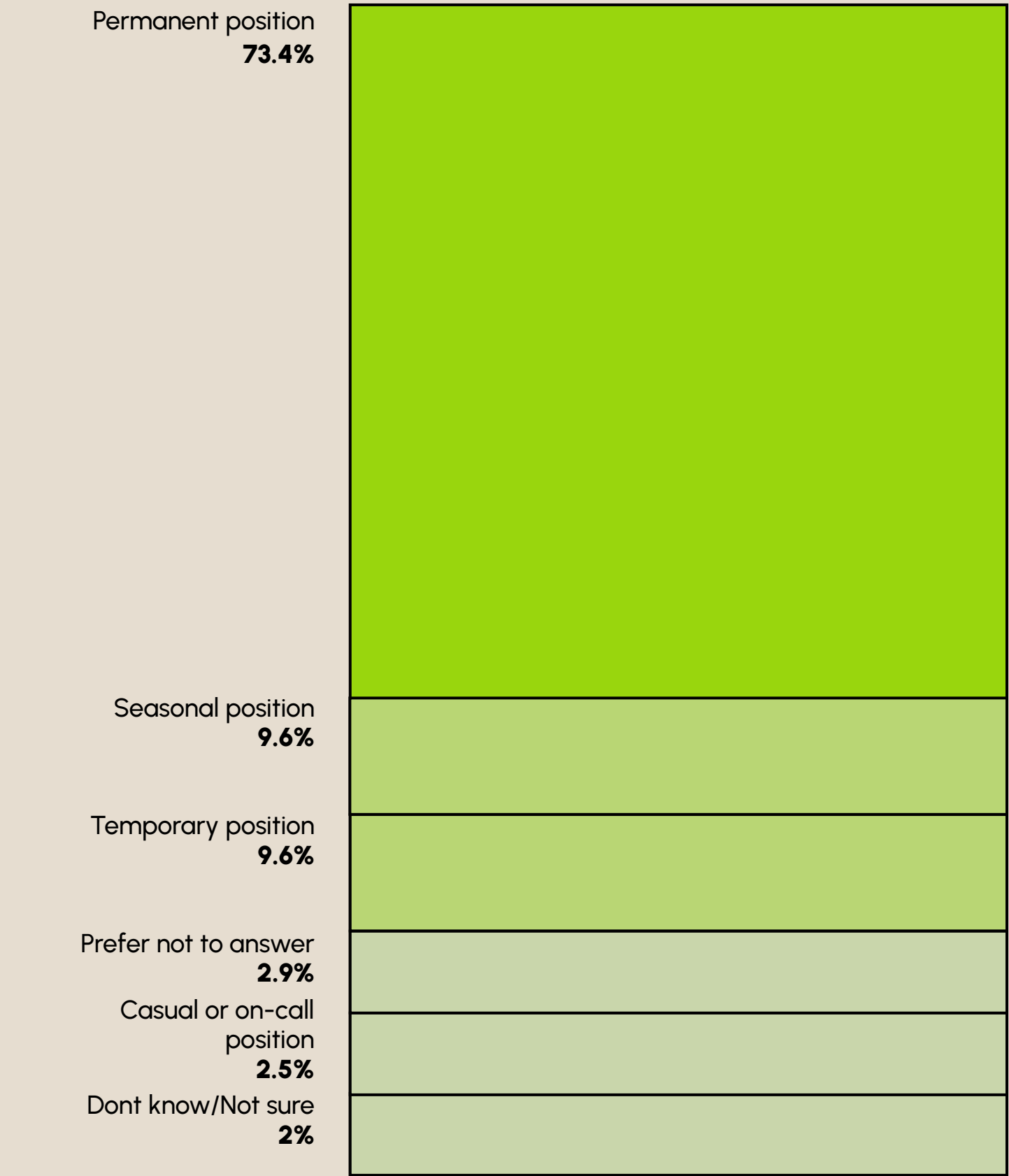


LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

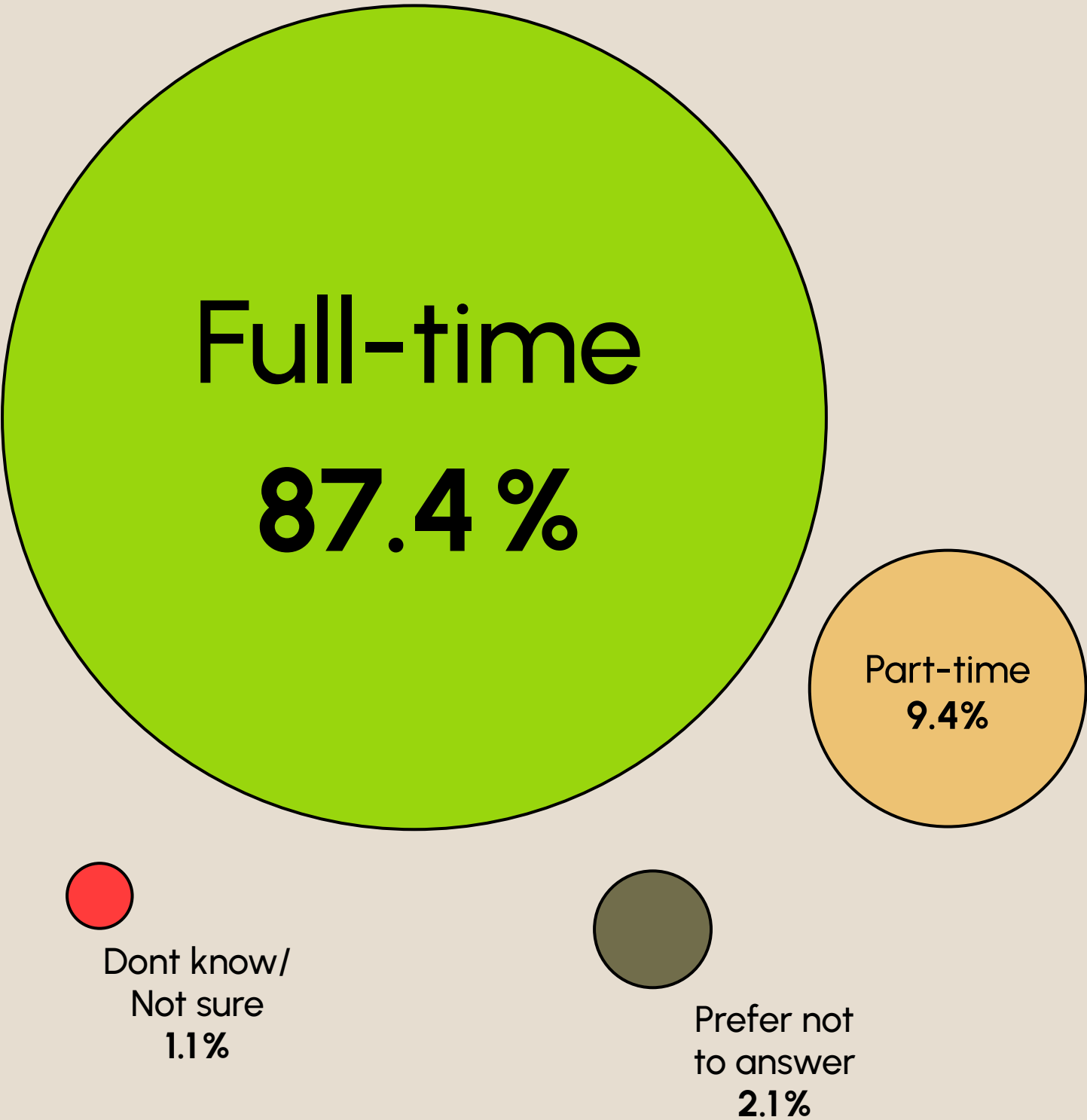
EMPLOYEES

Among surveyed employees, nearly three out of four jobs (73.4%) are permanent positions. This high proportion of permanent positions can be explained by the fact that band councils employ the vast majority of respondents.

Types of employment held by First Nations employees.
Figure 8. 2025.



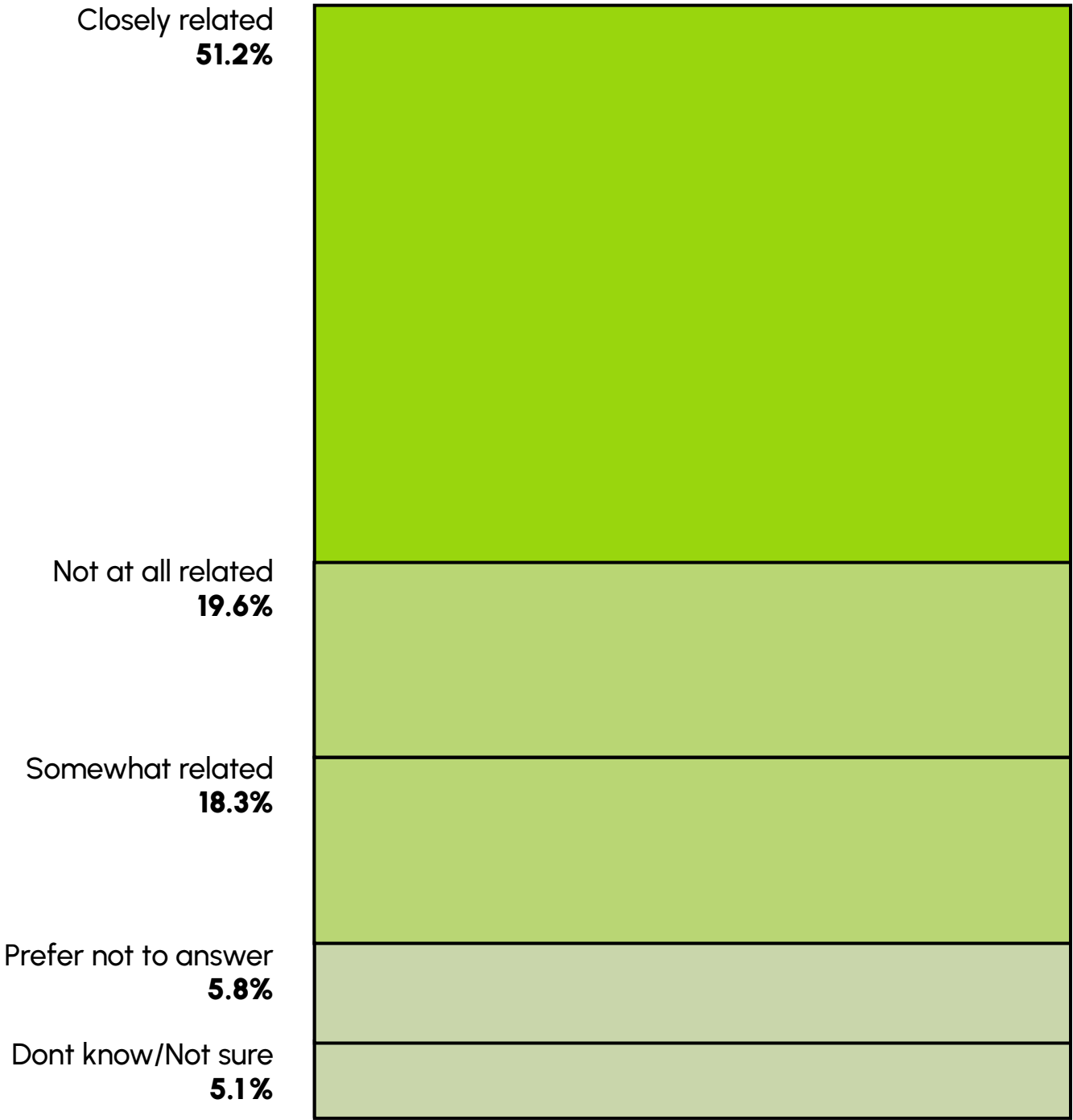
Work arrangements of First Nations employees.
Figure 9. 2025.



Regarding work arrangements, nearly 90% of employees work full-time (Fig. 9).

More than half of employees (51.2%) hold jobs closely related to their field of study. However, just under 20% work in sectors unrelated to their education or training (Fig. 10).

Relationship between employment and fields of study among First Nations respondents.
Figure 10. 2025



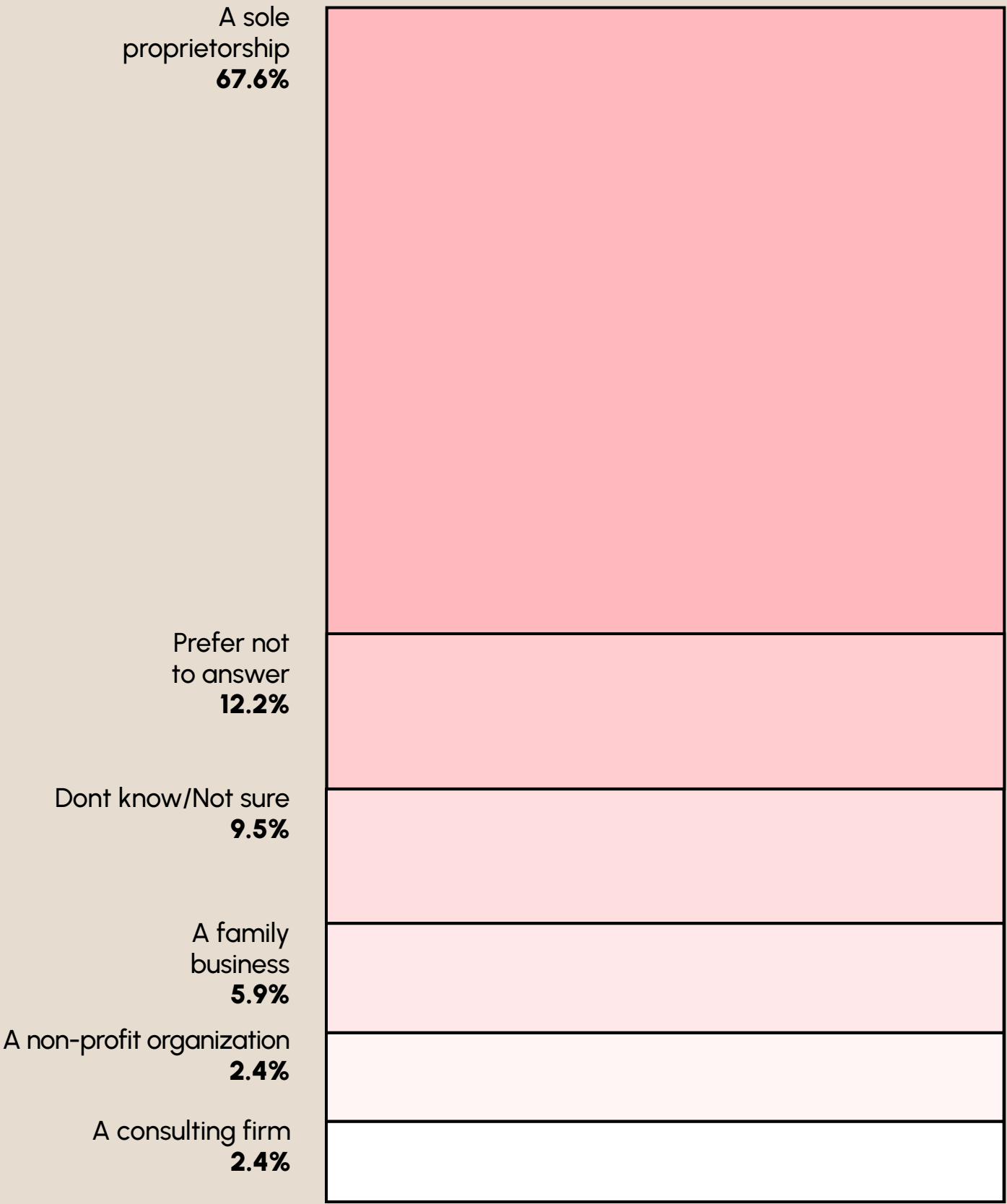
LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

SELF-EMPLOYED
WORKERS

According to the survey, there are 980 self-employed workers in the 22 participating communities. Among them, a large majority (67.6%) operates sole proprietorships, while 5.9% operate family businesses (Fig. 11).

Types of businesses operated by self-employed First Nations workers

Figure 11. 2025.



55.5%
Of businesses,
most of which are
First Nations-owned,
employ Indigenous
workers (Fig. 12).

²Total percentages may be less than 100%. The “Don’t know,” “Prefer not to answer,” and “Other” responses are not shown. Throughout the report, these categories are not displayed in the charts when their value is below 10%.

Organizations employing or not employing Indigenous workers.²
Figure 12. 2025.

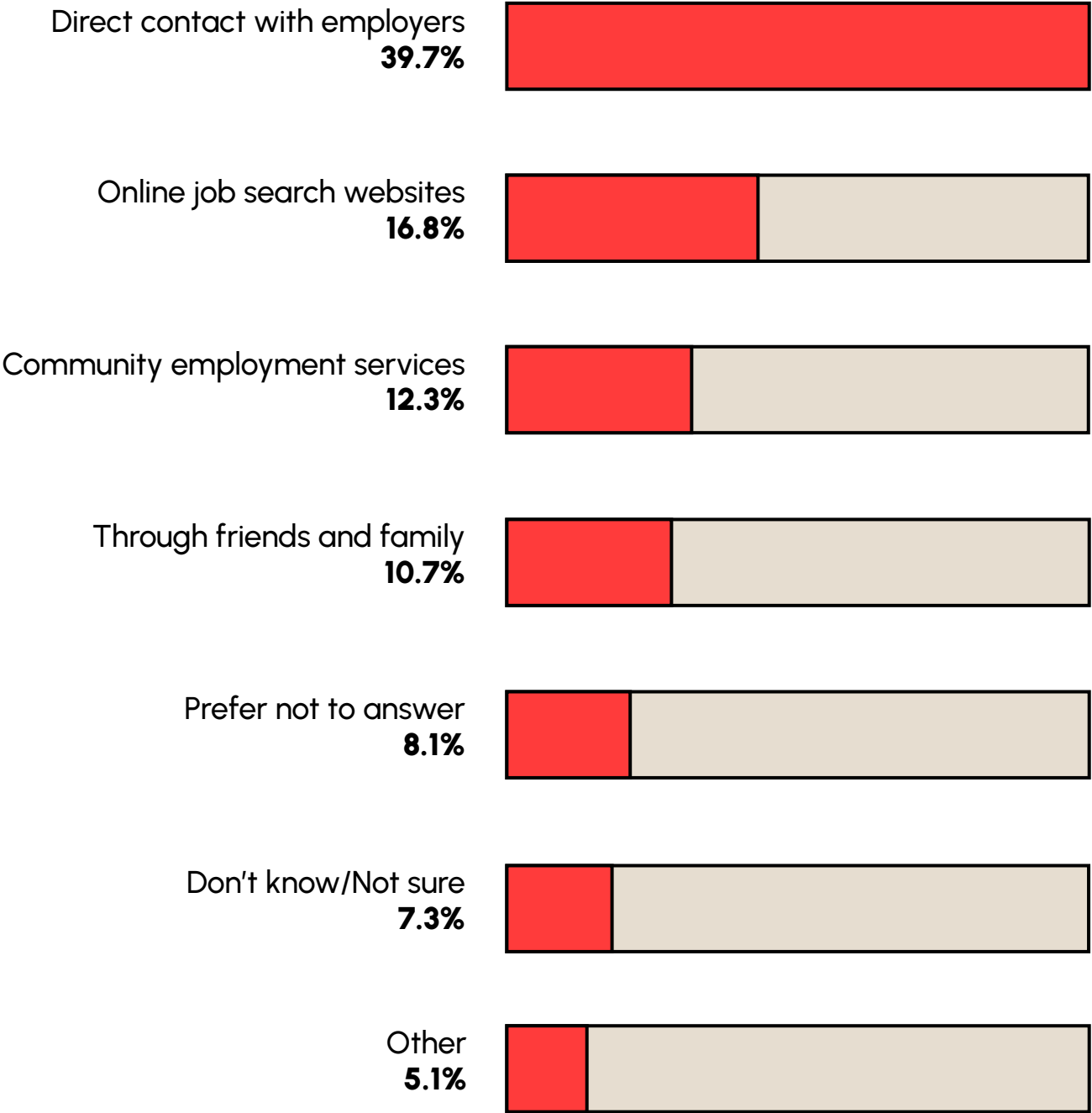


LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

UNEMPLOYED PERSONS

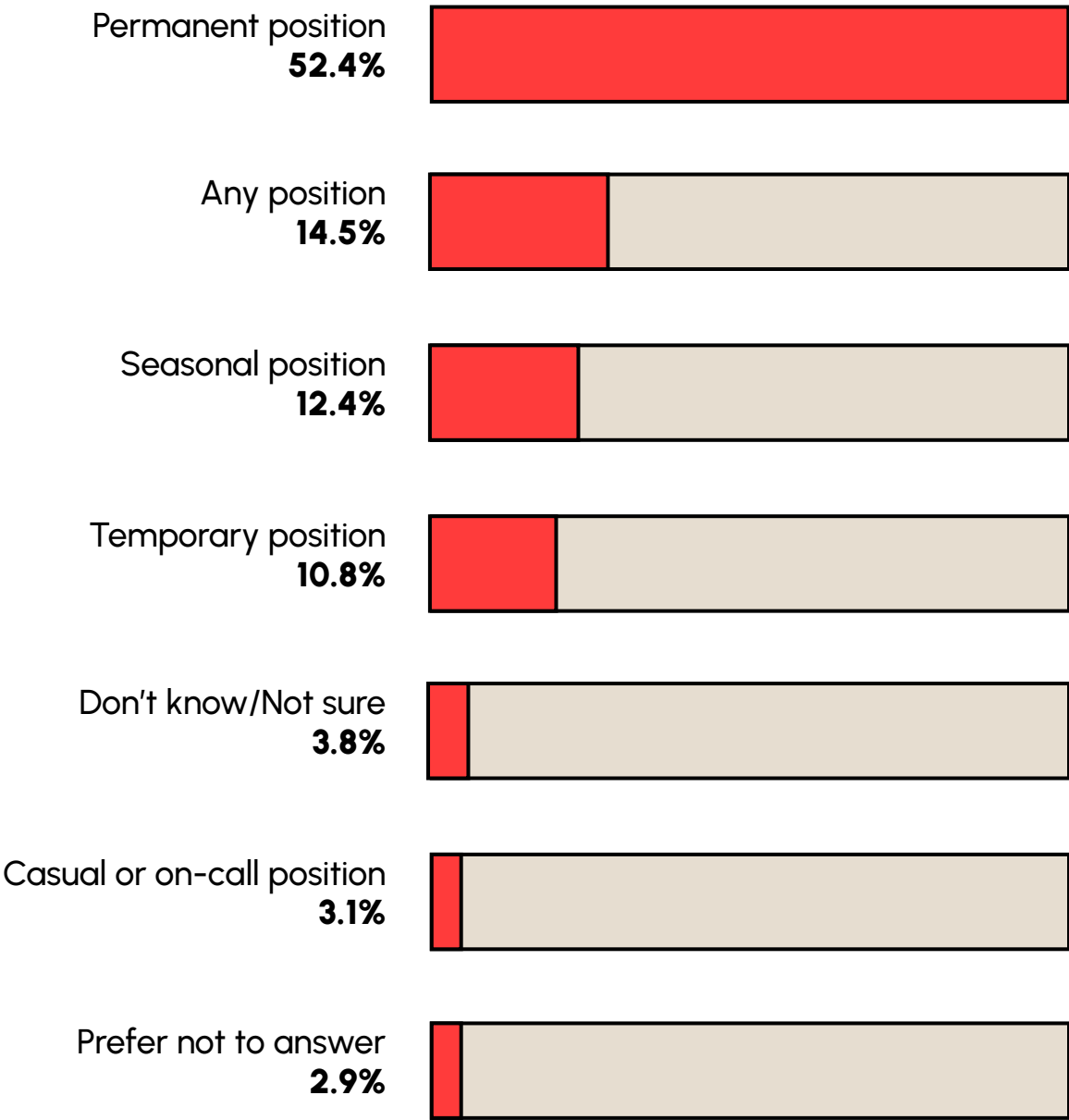
Unemployed persons use several job search strategies. Nearly 40% of job seekers contact employers directly, while close to 17% use online job search platforms. In addition, 12.3% of job seekers rely on community employment services (Fig. 13).

Job search strategies used.
Figure 13. 2025.

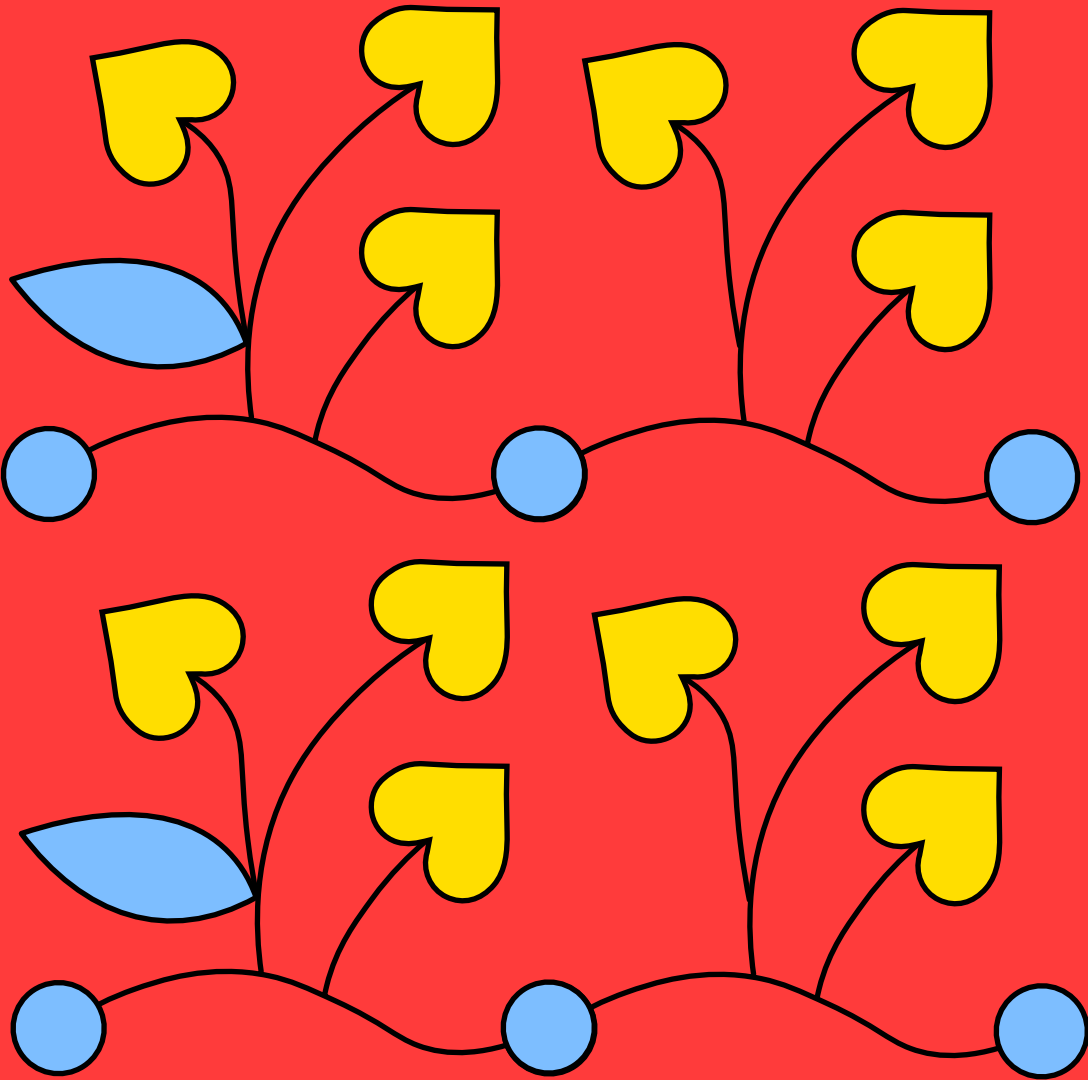


Just over half of unemployed persons (52.4%) are seeking permanent positions, and among them, more than 49% prefer full-time employment (Fig. 14).

Types of employment sought by unemployed First Nations respondents
Figure 14. 2025.

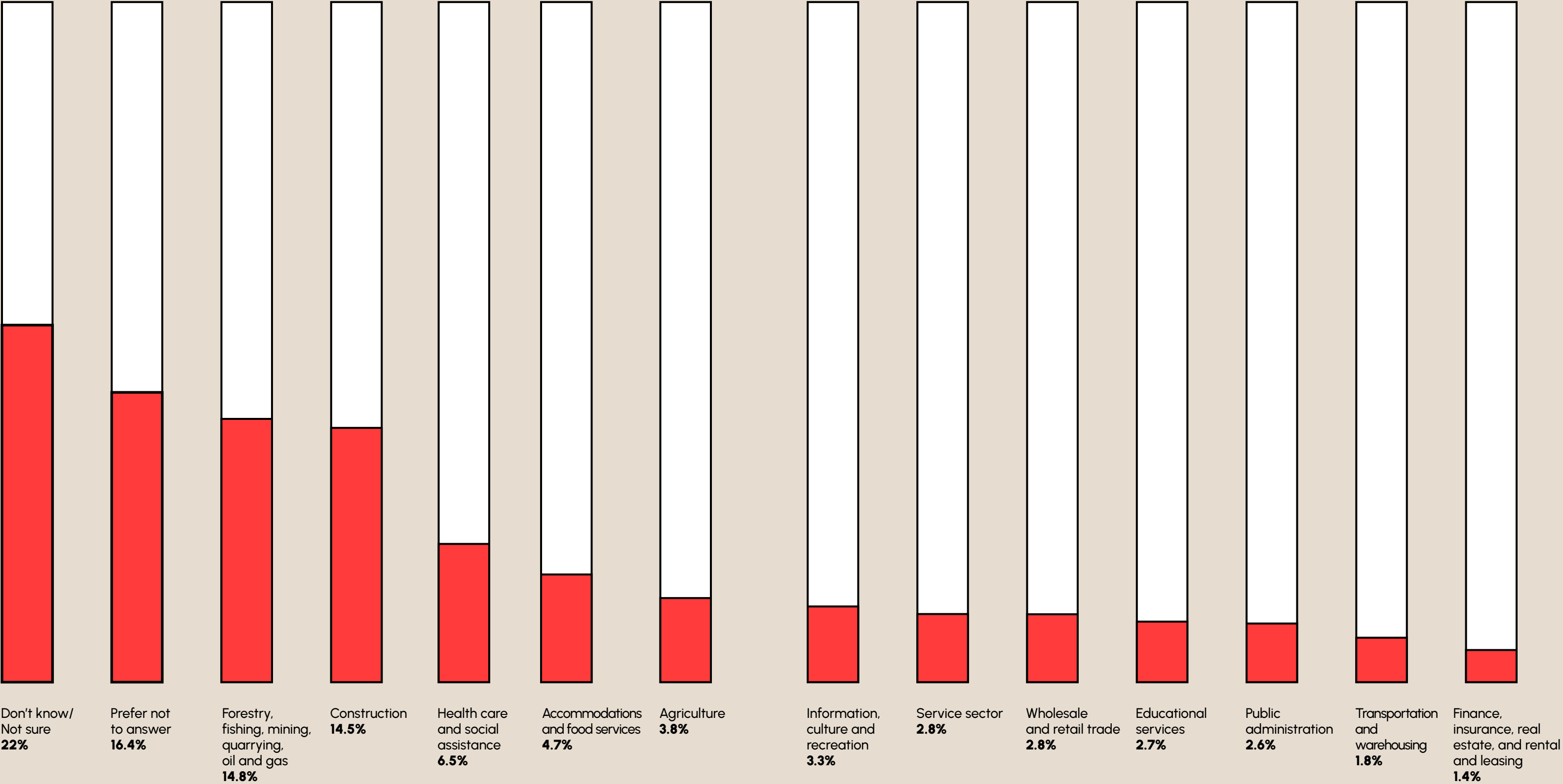


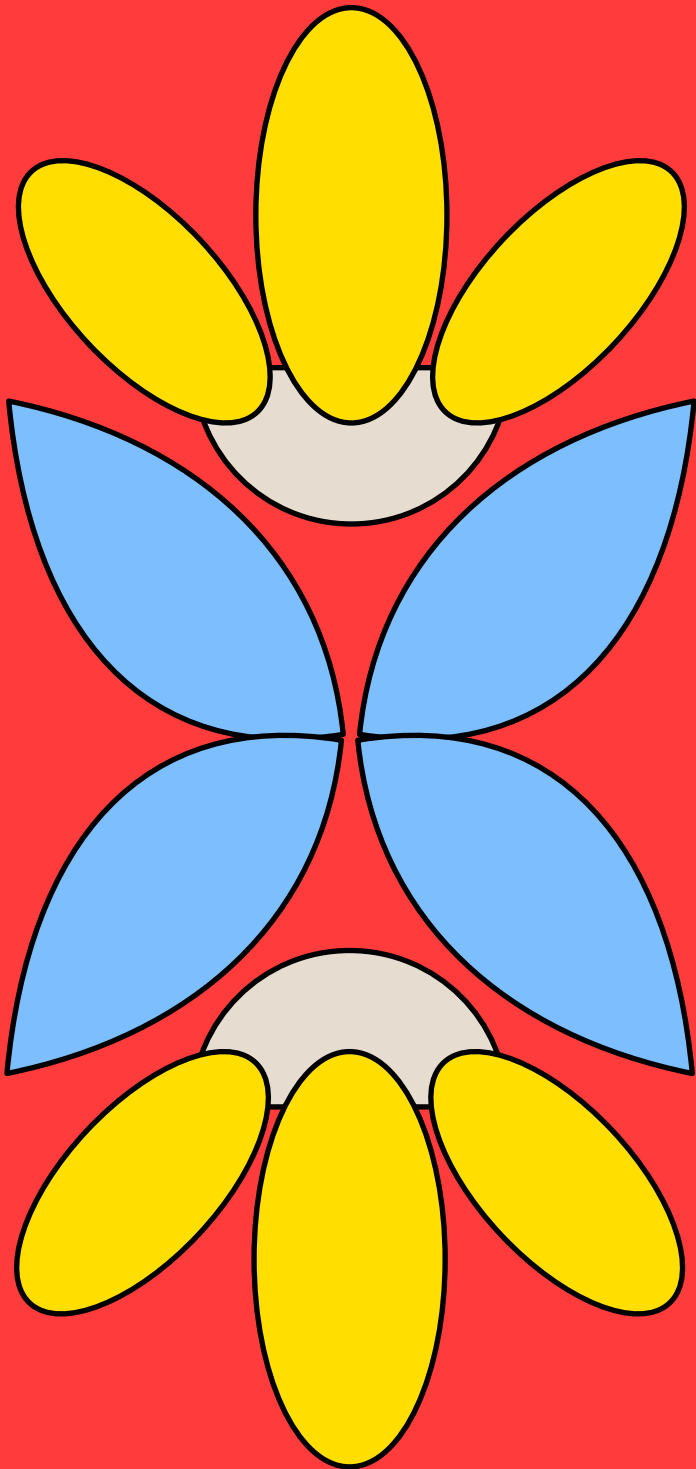
Jobs in forestry, fishing, and mining (14.8%), as well as construction (14.5%), are the most sought-after among unemployed persons. To a lesser extent, jobs in health care and accommodation and food services are also popular among community members seeking employment (Fig. 15).



Employment sectors sought by unemployed First Nations respondents.

Figure 15. 2025.



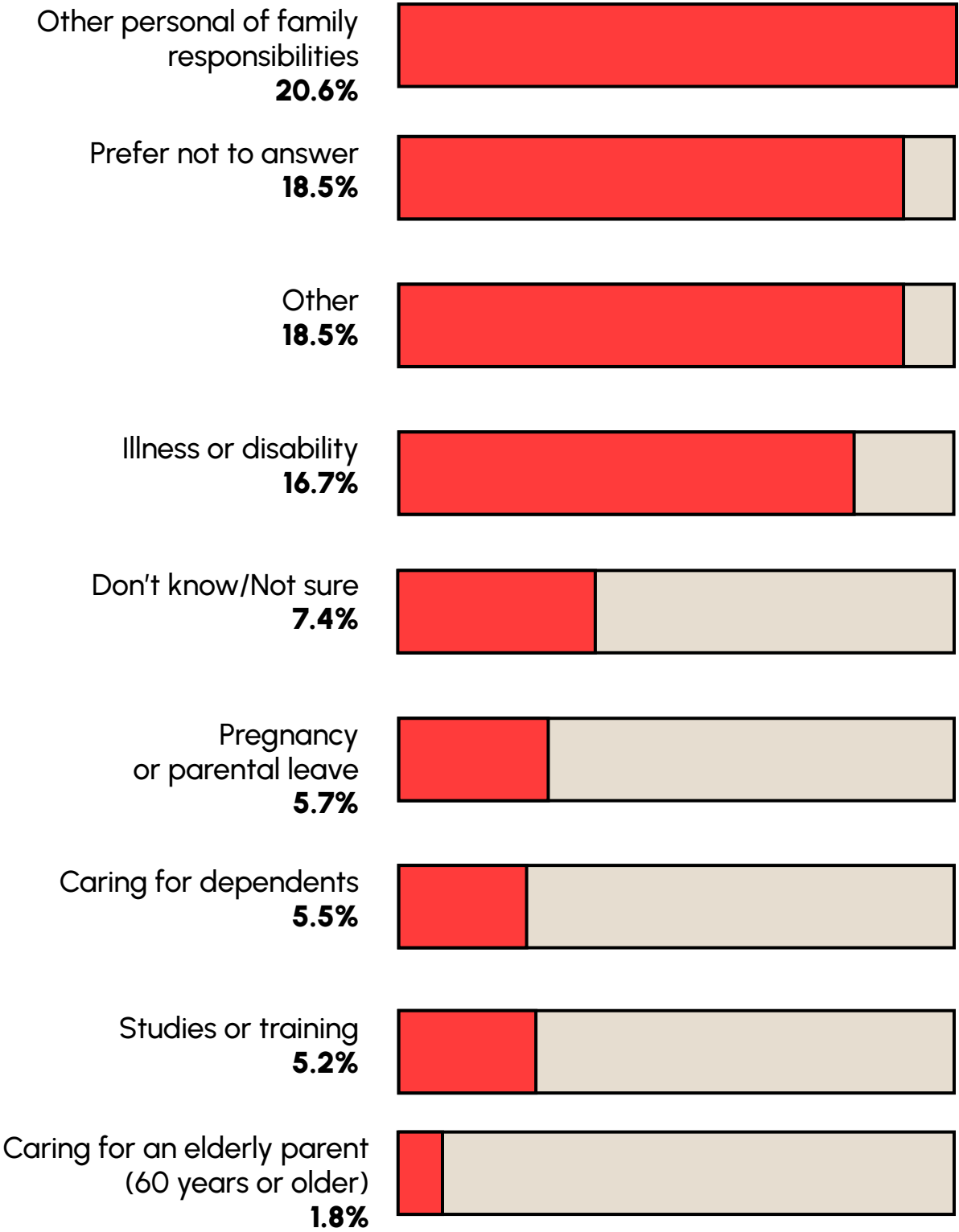


Among respondents who reported not seeking employment, the main reasons cited were personal and family responsibilities. Including pregnancy and caregiving responsibilities for seniors or dependents, this proportion reaches 33.6%.

In addition, nearly 17% of unemployed respondents who provided a reason for their labour market inactivity cited illness or disability. Lastly, 5.2% of unemployed persons left the workforce to pursue further education or training (Fig. 16).

Main reasons for inactivity among unemployed First Nations respondents.

Figure 16. 2025.

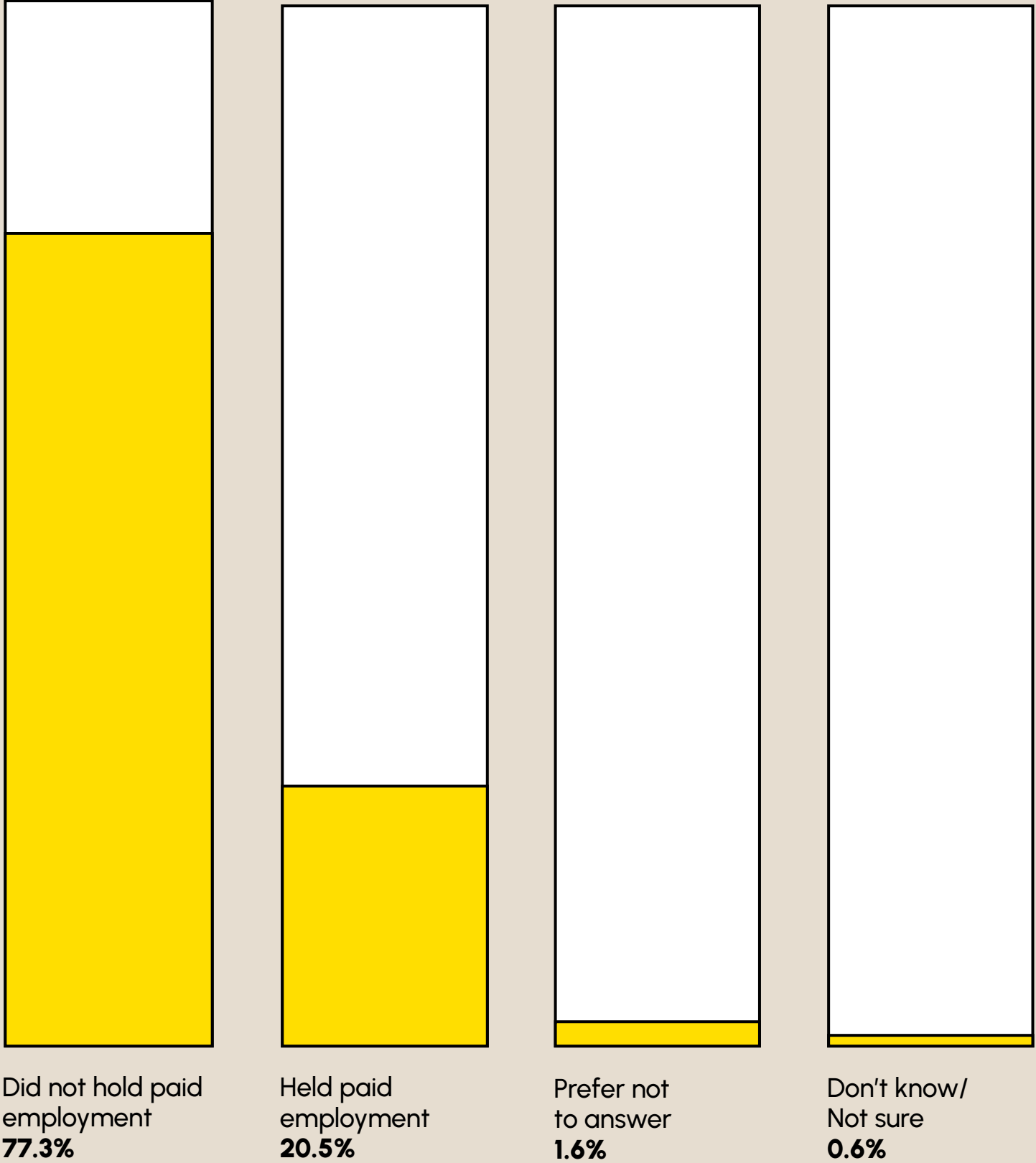


LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

RETIREES

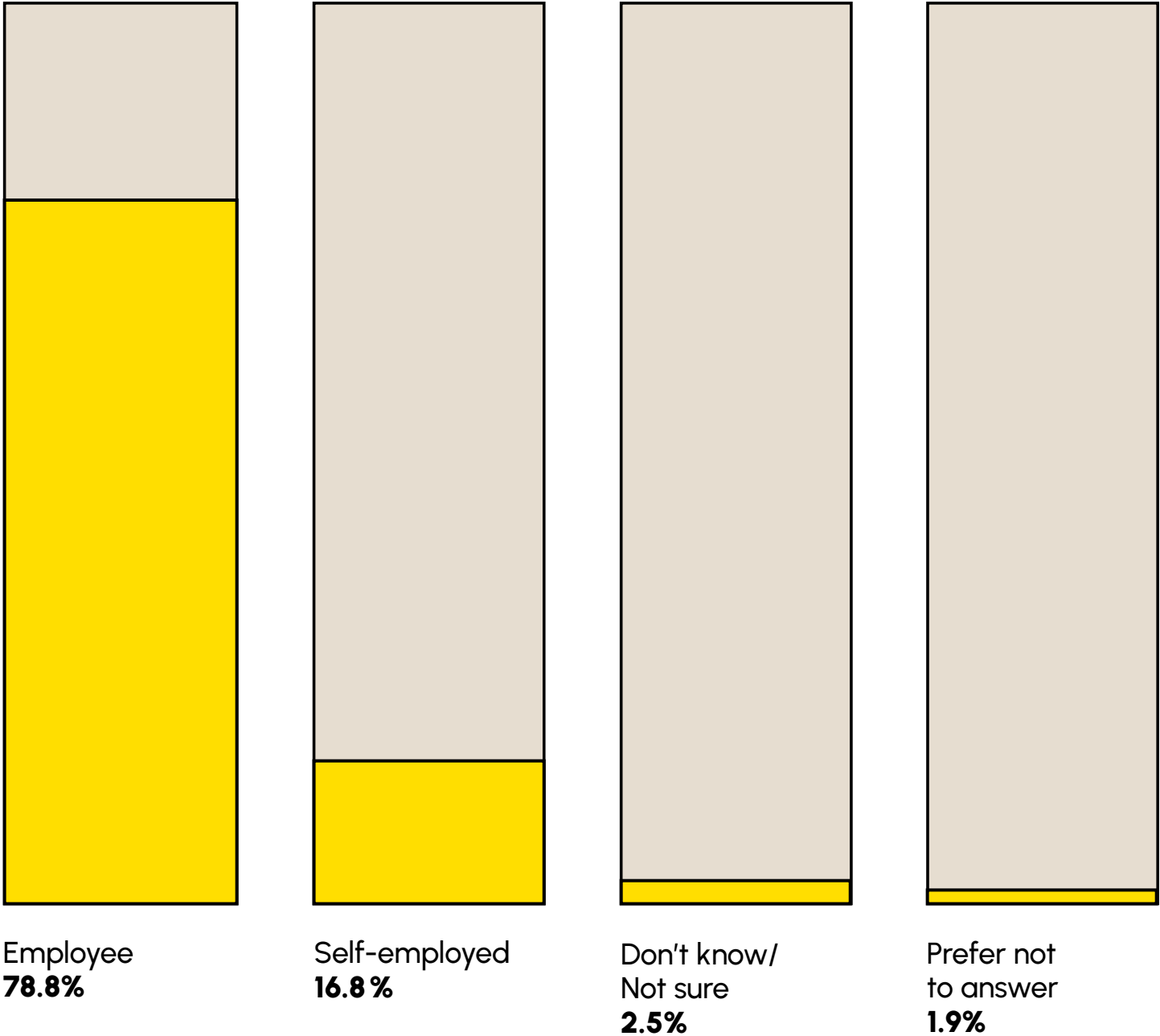
In the participating communities, a number of individuals return to the labour market after retirement. According to survey data, one in five retirees held paid employment within these communities in 2025 (Fig. 17). This trend is nearly twice as prevalent among women as among men.

Employment status of retired First Nations respondents. 2025.
Figure 17. 2025.

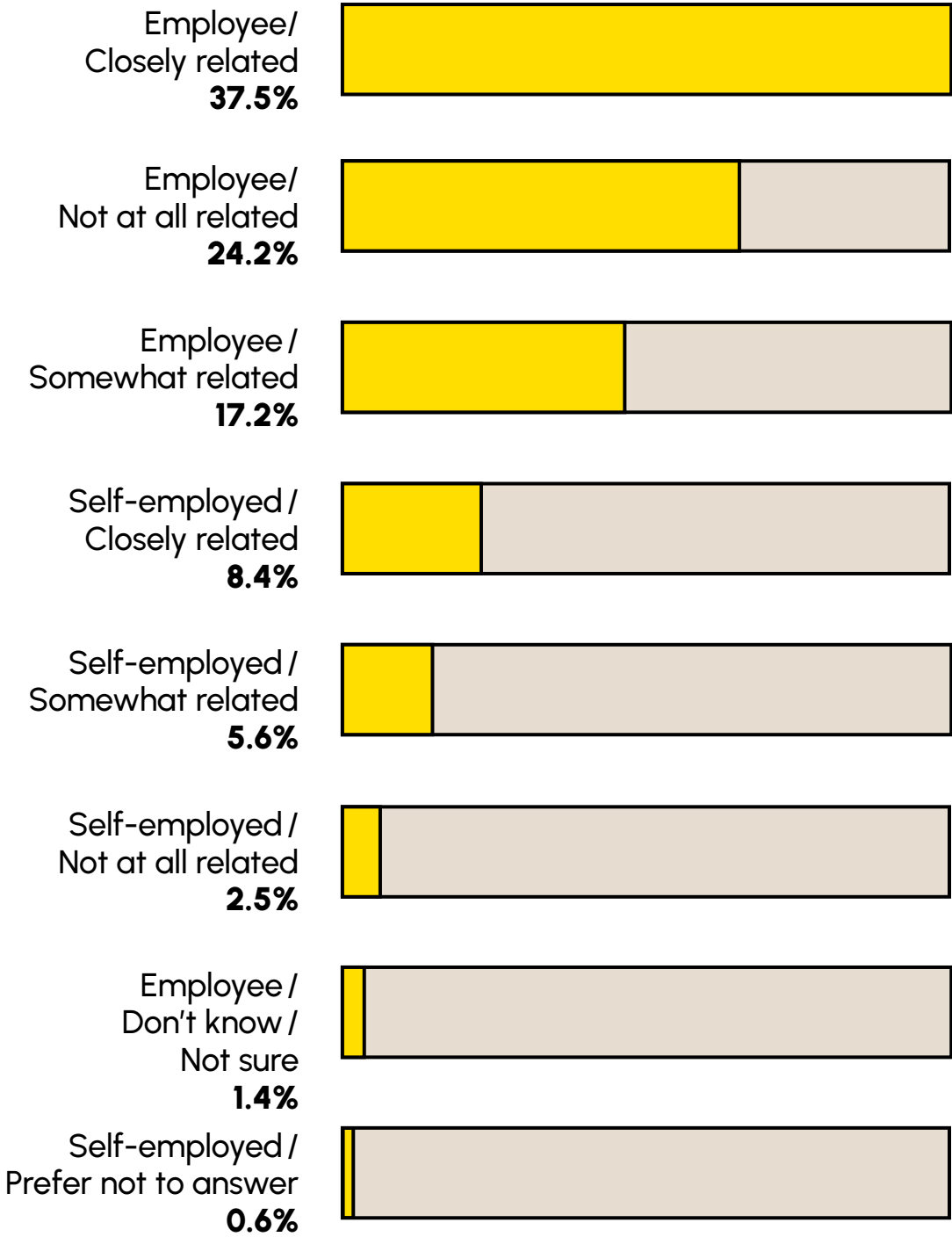


A large majority of these working retirees (78.8%) are employees. Those who have re-entered the labour market as self-employed workers account for 16.8% of the total (Fig. 18).

Types of employment held by retired First Nations respondents.
Figure 18. 2025.



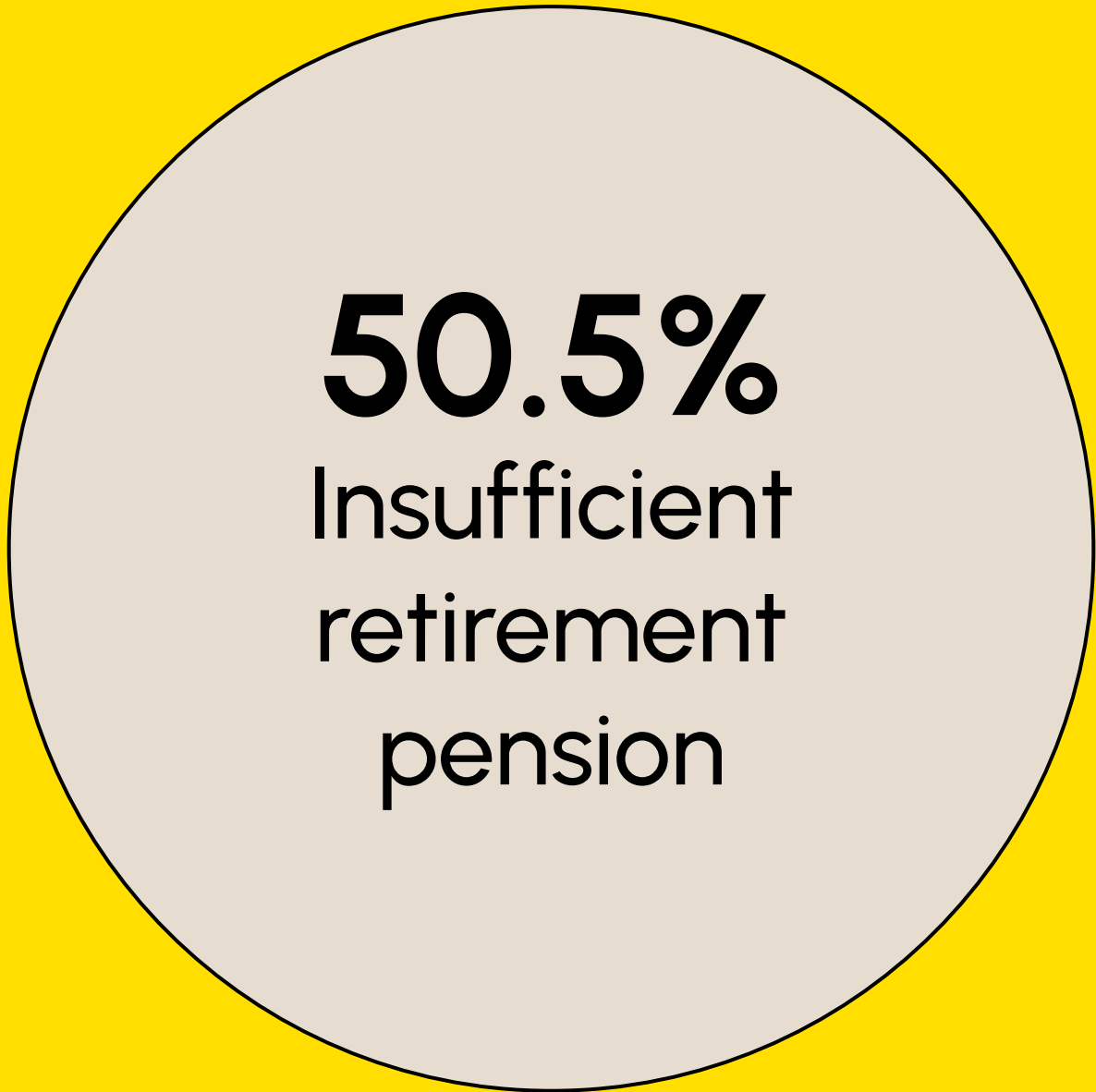
Relationship between employment and training among retired First Nations respondents.
Figure 19. 2025.



Nearly 46% of active retirees held jobs (as employees or self-employed workers) related to their field of study.

In contrast, more than 24% of them held paid jobs in 2025 that were unrelated to their education, work experience, or skills (Fig. 19).

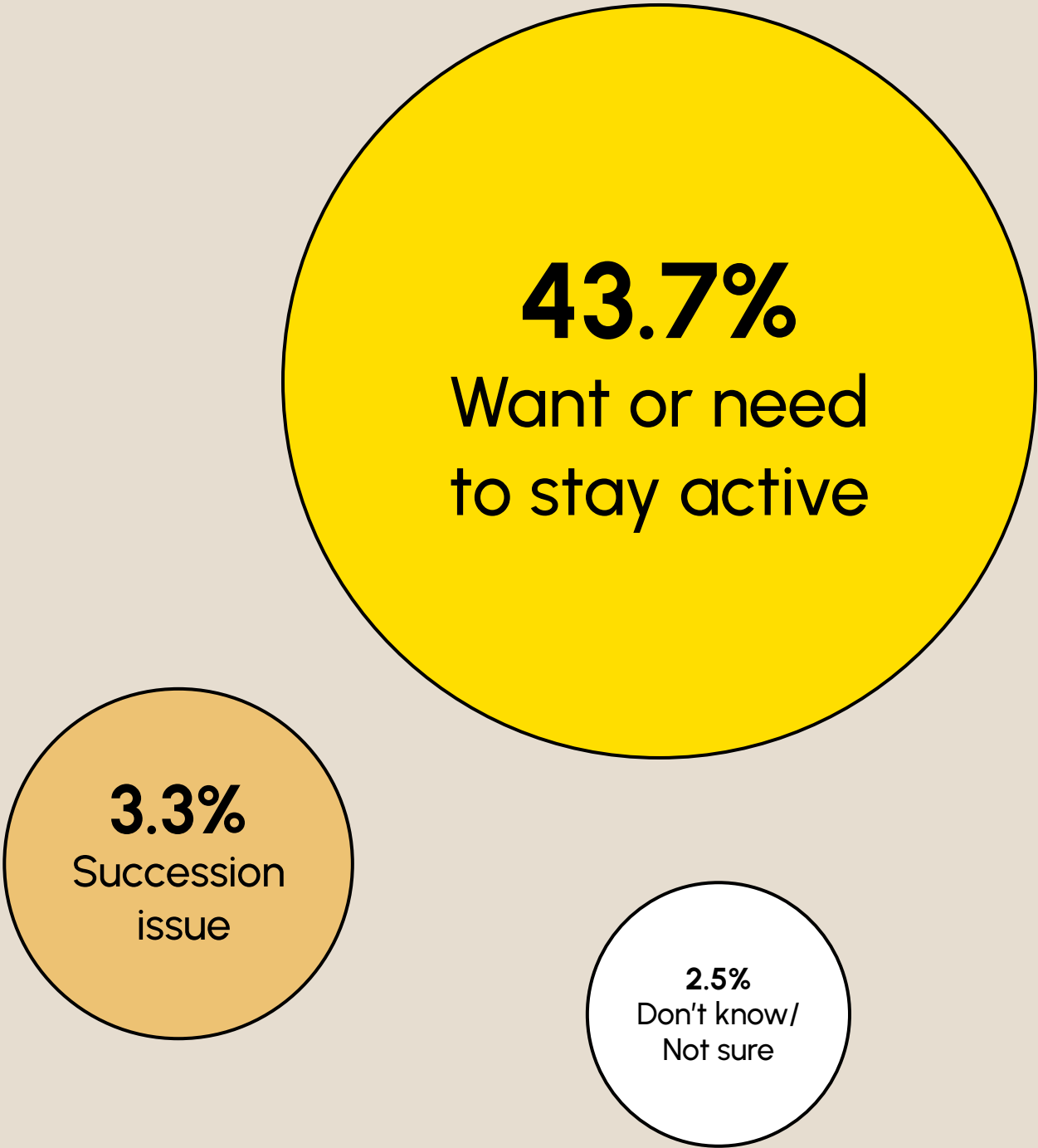
Main reasons why retired First Nations respondents work.
Figure 20. 2025



Retirees cited several reasons for returning to work.

More than half of them (50.5%) cited insufficient retirement income as the reason for continuing to work.

In addition, a significant proportion (43.7%) attributed this decision to a desire or need to remain active (Fig. 20).



LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

STUDENTS

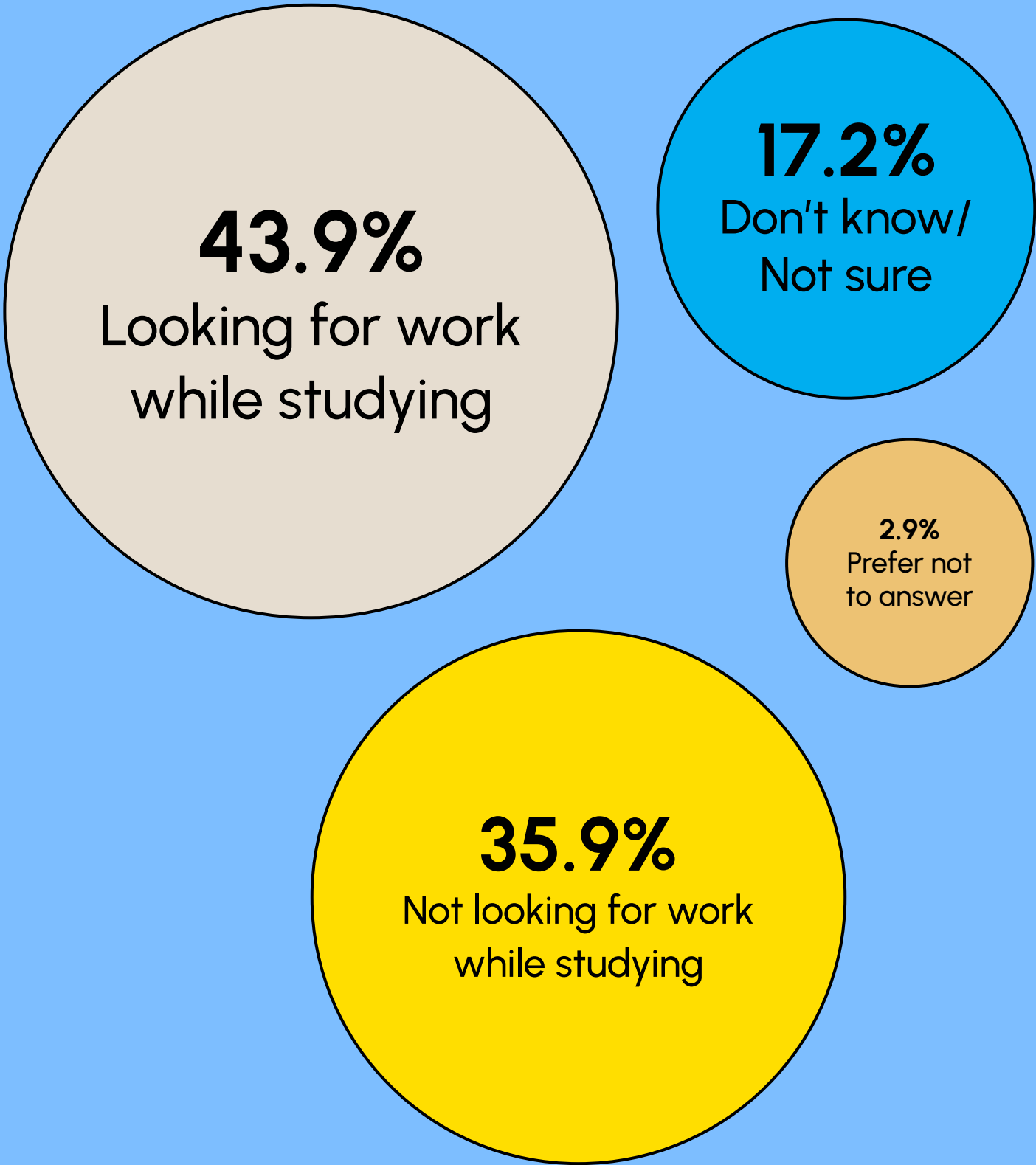
Many First Nations students seek employment while pursuing their studies. In 2025, approximately 44% reported having looked for a job while studying. This proportion is higher than that of students who chose not to work (Fig. 21).

Two factors explain this trend. On the one hand, early family responsibilities (marriage, children, etc.) often require an income to cover living expenses. On the other hand, many individuals return to school after leaving school and holding precarious, low-paying jobs. Consequently, they return to their studies to access more rewarding and better-paid employment.

Having become accustomed to the labour market, these individuals continue to seek employment while studying.

Young people enter the workforce early to meet family obligations. However, this situation may contribute to the school dropout and, consequently, to lower levels of education among First Nations.

Distribution of First Nations students by job search status.
Figure 21. 2025.



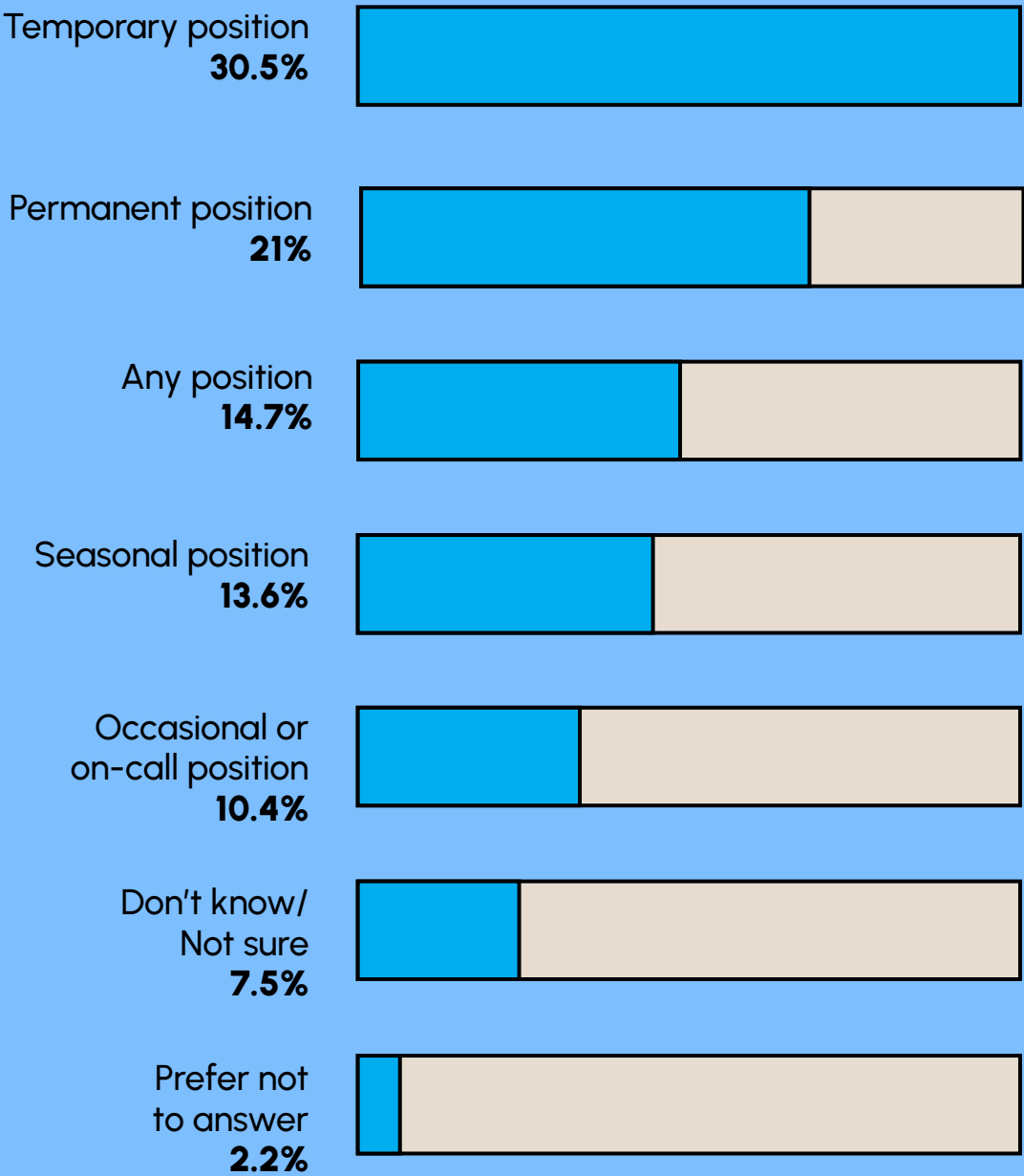
30,5 %
Of First Nations
students are seeking
temporary employment.

A higher proportion of First Nations students are seeking temporary employment (30.5%). However, the proportion of those seeking permanent positions (21%) remains significant (Fig. 22).

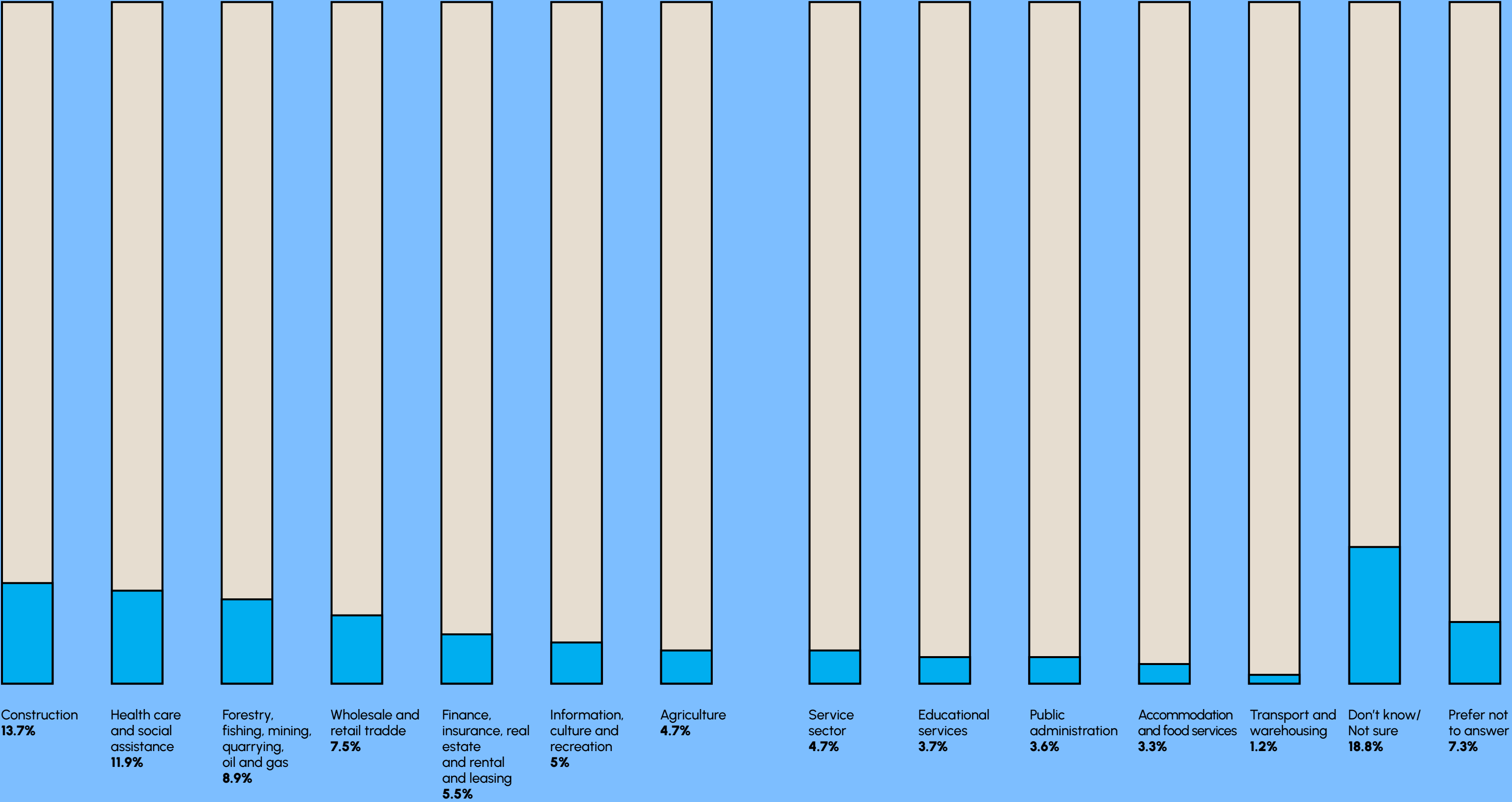
More than half of students wishing to work during their studies are seeking employment in six main sectors:

construction (13.7%), health care and social assistance (11.9%), forestry, fishing, mining, and related sectors (8.9%), wholesale and retail trade (7.5%), finance, insurance, and real estate (5.5%), and culture and recreation (5.0%).

Types of employment sought by First Nations students.
Figure 22. 2025.



Main employment sectors sought by First Nations students.
Figure 23. 2025.

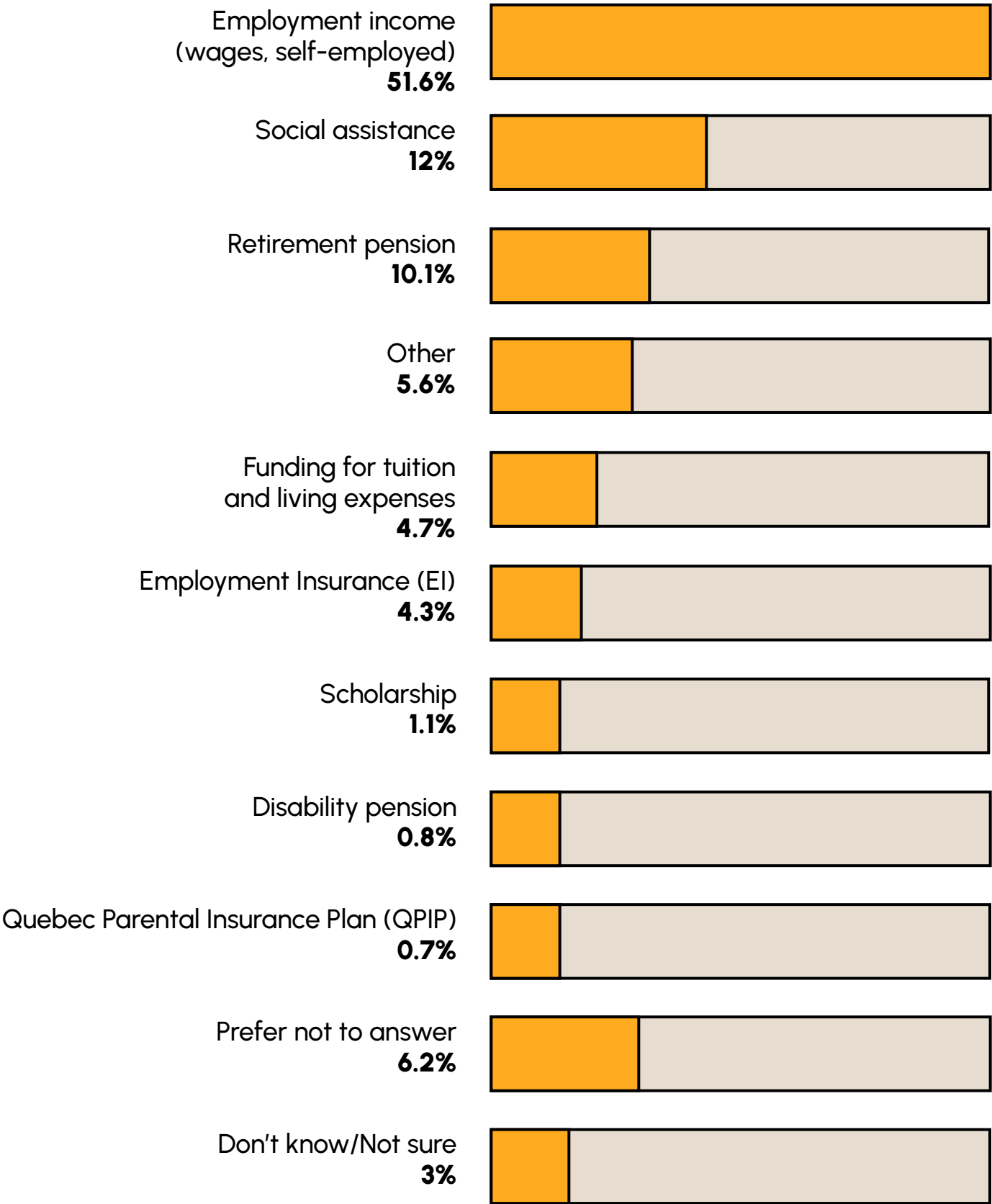


LABOUR MARKET ACTIVITIES

INCOME

Survey results suggest that more than half of First Nations respondents (51.6%) derive their income from employment or self-employment. Furthermore, 12% report social assistance as their primary source of income, while 10.9% rely on retirement or disability pensions (Fig. 24).

Primary sources of income for First Nations respondents.
Figure 24. 2025.



The data also reveal that more than half of respondents (55.6%) have a total annual income before taxes and deductions of less than \$60,000. In contrast, the proportion of individuals earning \$100,000 or more is estimated at 5% (Fig. 25).

Distribution of First Nations respondents by total annual income before taxes and deductions.
Figure 25. 2025

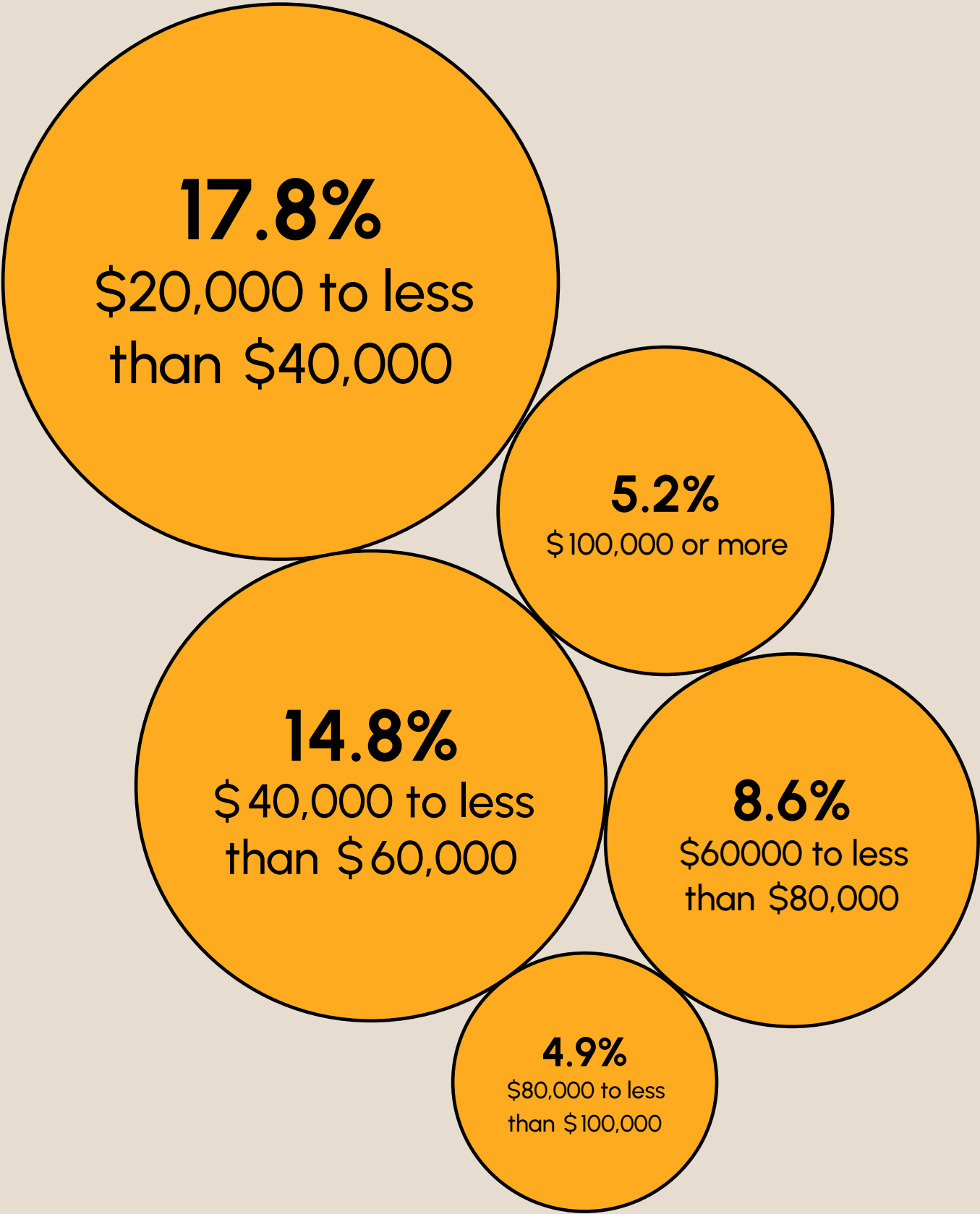
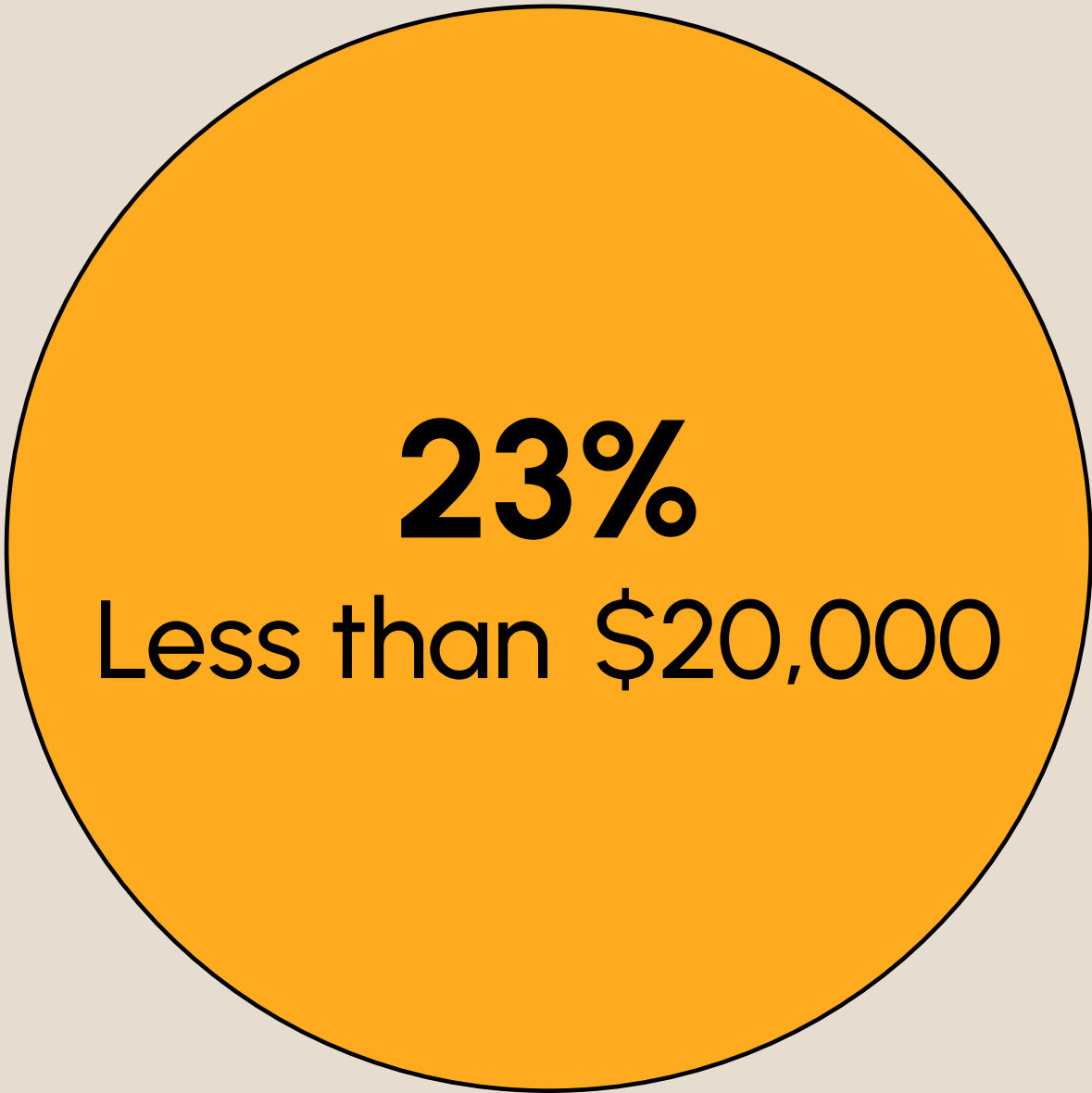


Figure 25. Répartition des répondants des Premières Nations selon le revenu annuel total avant impôts

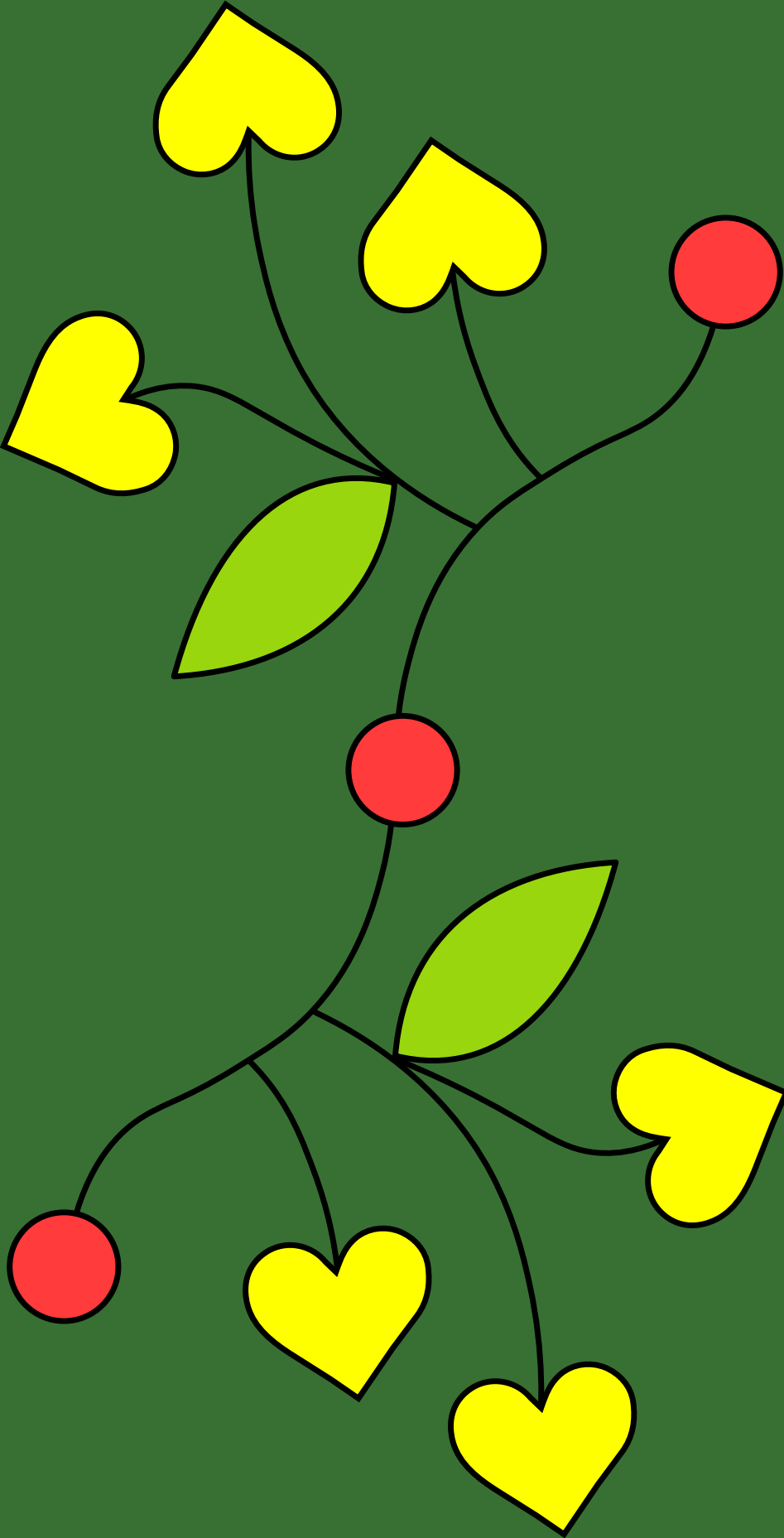
CHRISTINE SIOUI WAWANOLOATH

BIOGRAPHY

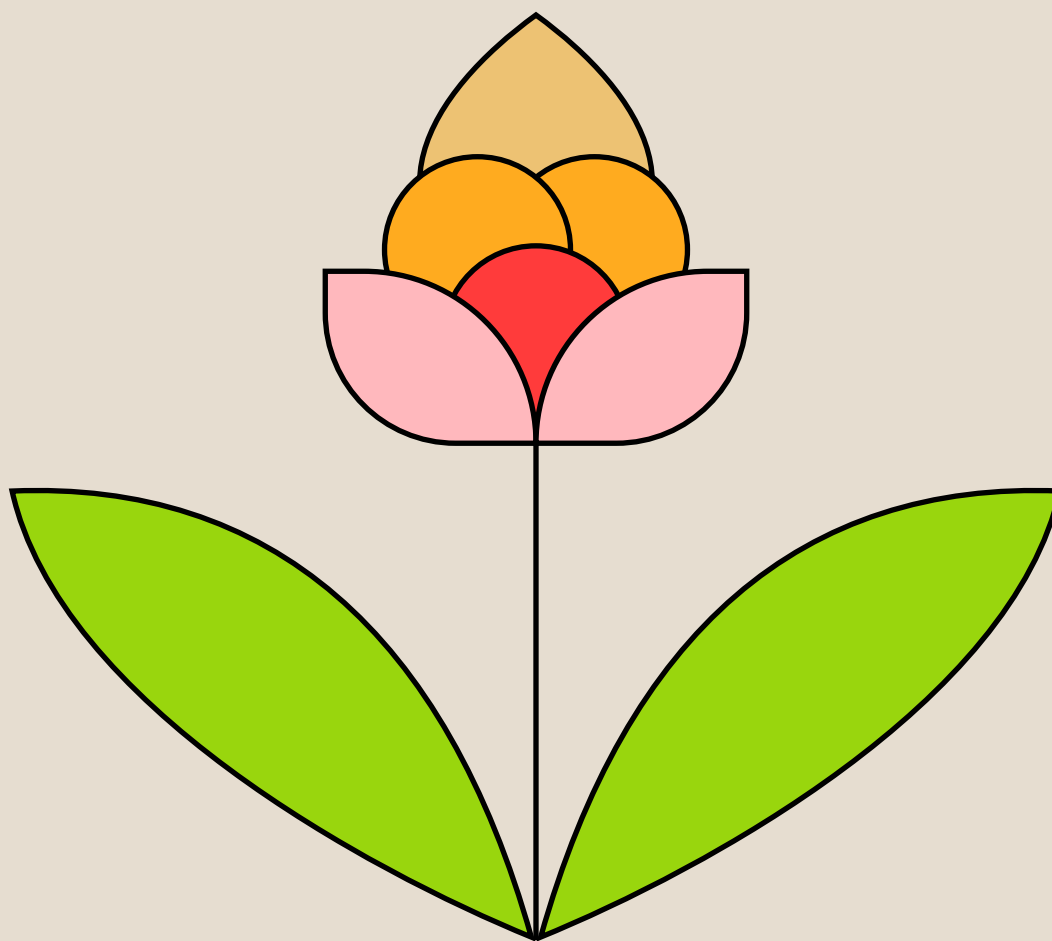
Christine Sioui Wawanoloath is an Abenaki and Wendat multidisciplinary artist. Born in Wendake in 1952 and raised in Odanak, she grew up in an environment where art, creativity and cultural transmission played an important role. Her journey has led her to explore many forms of expression, including visual arts, illustration, writing, storytelling and theatre. With a background in arts, photography and history, she has developed an artistic practice deeply connected to memory, nature, traditional stories and Wendat and Abenaki cultures.

Through her work, Christine Sioui Wawanoloath creates evocative, colourful and meaningful worlds. Her artistic and literary contributions help promote First Nations cultures while contributing to the transmission of stories connected to identity, continuity and the relationship with the land.

The FNHRDCQ is proud to highlight the journey of an artist whose work reflects the richness of First Nations knowledge, stories and artistic expression.



WORKFORCE
PROFILES OF QUEBEC
FIRST NATIONS



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