The push for renewable energy is gaining momentum globally, and Canada is a key supplier of critical minerals for the new green economy. Since 2020, mineral prices have risen by about 50%, and Canada’s mining workforce has also expanded.

These trends will only intensify: global demand for minerals is on track to double by 2040, which means Canada will need to increase its production of critical minerals.

DEMAND SCENARIOS FOR CRITICAL MINERALS

LOOMING LABOUR SHORTAGES

In 2023, roughly one of every five mining workers was 55 years or older, and approaching retirement. With the rising demand for critical minerals, one thing is clear – Canada’s mining industry needs a fresh influx of talent.

MINING NEEDS SPECIALIZED STUDENTS

The future of mining is bright, but Canada’s mining education has major issues. Simply put, we are not training enough students in the programs we need. Demand for skilled workers is growing, but many mining-centric programs have declining enrolments.

BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN MINING

So why aren’t more students joining the industry?

A. NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MINING

Surveys show that two-thirds of young Canadians would not consider working in mining. Of all sectors, mining ranks the lowest, even below oil and gas.

B. GENERAL LACK OF AWARENESS

Many students simply do not have mining programs on their radar. A 2023 survey found that 66% of mining career-seekers first learned about the industry during postsecondary studies or after graduation.

C. MINING AS A LAST CAREER CHOICE

Many students worry that mining may have more limited career options, less job stability, fewer co-op positions and less prestige.

Interviews with postsecondary administrators have noted that mining is one of students’ least favorite career options.

D. GEOGRAPHY

Mining projects are located in remote regions, far from urban centres. This is a major obstacle because graduates typically prefer job opportunities closer to home, and it puts mining out of students’ sight lines when planning their careers.

E. BARRIERS TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

People from diverse backgrounds represent a relatively untapped pool of talent for the mining industry. In 2023, only 15% of the mining workforce were women, and only 10% were immigrants.

These barriers are not going away on their own—mining employers, governments and the education sector will have to work together to avoid future skills shortages.

You can explore these issues and potential solutions in MIHR’s latest report, by visiting MIHR.ca.