

Study: Self-employed Canadians: Who and Why?

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Tuesday, May 28, 2019

In a Canadian labour market that is dynamic and multifaceted, self-employment is a major aspect of economic activity and can be an important source of employment growth. Self-employed workers make up a diverse population, with characteristics that have evolved over time along with changes in the broader economy and society.

About 1 in 7 Canadian workers were self-employed in 2018, accounting for 15% of total employment compared with 12% in 1976. The share of women among self-employed workers increased from 26% in 1976 to 38% in 2018.

Professional, scientific and technical services have emerged as the industry with the second highest self-employment rate: 32% in 2018, up from 27% in 1987—the year such data became available. Agriculture remains the industry with the highest, albeit declining, share of self-employment: 57% in 2018, down from 68% in 1987.

Understanding self-employment requires information on why Canadians choose this form of employment. As part of a one-time supplement to the Labour Force Survey of September 2018, respondents who were self-employed in their main job during the 12 months prior to the survey were asked to indicate the main reason for their self-employment.

One-third (33.5%) of self-employed workers reported independence and freedom as the main reason for choosing this form of employment. About 15% reported that they had to be self-employed because of the nature of their job.

Provincially, the proportion of self-employed who reported independence and freedom as reasons for choosing this type of work ranged from 29% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 38% in New Brunswick. On the other hand, self-employed workers in Newfoundland and Labrador were more likely to cite "nature of job – had to be self-employed" as the main reason for their self-employment (23%, compared with a national average of 15%).

Workers in certain occupations—such as physicians, dentists and veterinarians—were more likely to be self-employed due to the nature of their job. Nature of job was also more commonly cited among self-employed workers in occupations as diverse as managers in agriculture and performing artists.

While independence and freedom were the top reason for both men and women in self-employment, women were more likely than men to indicate flexible hours (11% vs. 7%) and work-family balance (15% vs. 5%) as their main reason.

For more information, the article "Self-employed Canadians: Who and Why?" describes the profile of workers who were self-employed in their main job during the 12 months prior to September 2018, with a focus on the main reasons motivating them to be their own boss.



Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3701](#).

The article "[Self-employed Canadians: Who and Why?](#)" is now available online in the *Labour Statistics at a Glance* series ([71-222-X](#)).

The infographic "[Self-employment in Canada, 2018](#)" is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).

To enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact Vincent Ferrao (613-951-4750; vincent.ferrao@canada.ca) or Valerie Gagnon (613-867-5782; valerie.gagnon@canada.ca).