

Experimental estimates of family weekly income through the pandemic, January 2020 to March 2021

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The pandemic has led to considerable work interruptions in Canada and around the world since March 2020. In March 2020, employment in Canada fell by more than 1 million and, among those who remained employed, the number of people who worked no hours rose by 1.3 million. Subsequently, employment growth followed the easing and tightening of public health measures, but in March 2021, the number of workers was 296,000 below the pre-pandemic level.

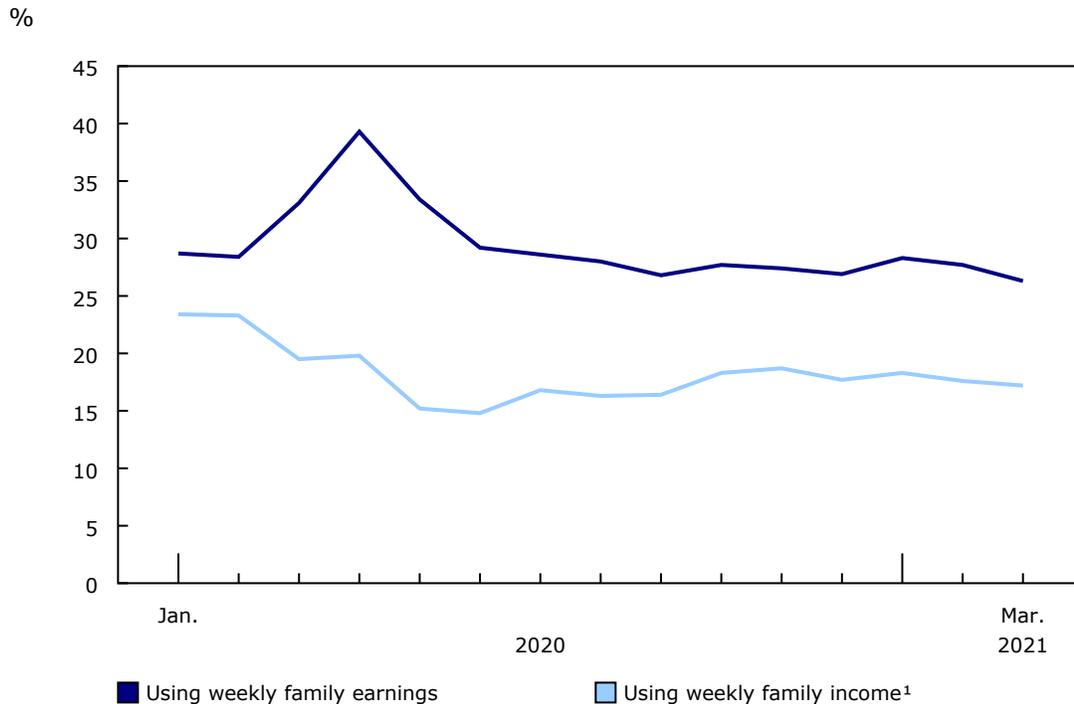
Statistics Canada developed an experimental approach ([first released in December 18, 2020](#)) in order to provide more timely data on the income of Canadians.

[Evidence](#) suggests that COVID-19 related pandemic relief benefits mitigated the impact of declines in employment and earnings for many Canadian families. Results showed that, from February to June 2020, a drop in weekly family earnings (wages, salaries and self-employment income) was offset by government pandemic relief benefits. Median weekly family income, which includes earnings and income from the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and selected government benefits, remained steady, while the low-weekly income rate fell from 23.3% in February 2020 to 14.6% in June 2020. Persons were determined to be in low-weekly income when their income was less than half of median provincial income, adjusted for family size (see Note to readers).

Results from tracking weekly family incomes over the pandemic, [updated today](#), indicate that low-income rates remained below pre-pandemic levels through the first quarter of 2021. In March 2021, 17.2% of Canadians had low weekly income.



Chart 1
Share of persons in families below provincial low-income thresholds by selected income definitions, January 2020 to March 2021



1. Earnings plus GST/HST credits, child benefits, EI, emergency and recovery benefits.

Note(s): Data exclude people living with seniors aged 65 and older. Results represent the percentage of people below their respective provincial threshold.

Source(s): Experimental weekly income estimates, July 2021 (75F0002M2021006).

Low-income rates are lowest for couples, higher for single people and lone parents

All family types had relatively stable low-weekly income rates through the first three months of 2021. In March 2021, these rates were lowest for couples with children (11.1%), followed by couples without children (15.9%). Conversely, almost one-third of unattached individuals (33.5%) and lone-parent families (31.5%) were deemed to have low weekly income.

Nearly one in five visible minority Canadians in low-weekly income in March 2021

The low-weekly income rate of population groups designated as visible minority trended up in the second half of 2020, rising from 14.1% in June to 21.0% in November. In March 2021, 18.3% of visible minority Canadians had low-weekly income, compared with 16.7% of non-visible minority Canadians.

Almost one in four Chinese Canadians (23.7%) had low-weekly income in March 2021, while nearly one in five Black (19.5%) and nearly one in five South Asian Canadians had low-weekly income (17.3%).

Almost three in ten First Nations people had low-weekly income in March 2021

Among those who self-identify as First Nations living off reserve, nearly three in ten (29.4%) lived in families with low-weekly incomes in March 2021, this proportion was 16.4% for Métis.

Weekly earnings of recent immigrants hit harder at the start of the pandemic

With this release, statistics on both weekly family earnings and weekly family income are now available separately for immigrants. In the early months of the pandemic, recent immigrants (those living in Canada for more than five years but less than ten) experienced among the largest changes in low-weekly earnings. The share of recent immigrants with low-weekly earnings rose from just under one-third (30.9%) in February 2020 to over half (50.6%) by April 2020 and then fell to 33.7% in August. Other immigrant groups also saw increases in low-weekly earnings, but to a lesser degree than recent immigrants.

As with other groups, pandemic-related benefits offset surges in low income of immigrants. While very recent immigrants (those living in Canada for five years or less) consistently have the highest share of persons with low-weekly income, this rate fell from 33.0% in February to 17.3% in May 2020.

Low-weekly income rates remained at a lower rate for all immigrant groups until October 2020, when the rates for very recent immigrants saw a marked increase, rising to 24.1%. This change coincides with the replacement of the CERB with the Canada Recovery Benefit as well as changes made to Employment Insurance, which may have affected benefit eligibility for some very recent immigrants.

In March 2021, the low-weekly income rates were 16.5% for Canadian born and established immigrants (those living in Canada for more than 10 years), 18.4% for recent immigrants, and 20.5% for very recent immigrants.

Note to readers

Further analysis and detailed charts and tables can be found in the *Experimental estimates of family weekly income, January 2020 to March 2021* report, which follows two previous publications released in [March 2021](#) and [December 2020](#). These studies investigated the economic impact of the pandemic on the income and earnings of Canadian families under the age of 65.

This study uses methods based on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in combination with administrative data where possible. The statistics cannot be directly compared with annual statistics on median income or annual statistics on the Market Basket Measure (MBM) or the Low-Income Measure (LIM).

Low-income thresholds are set at 50% of median provincial adjusted after-tax income in 2019 and are inflated using provincial CPI-All indices, where December 2019 is used as the base month.

Adjusted family income equals weekly family income divided by the square root of the number of family members. This value is assigned to all family members and compared against their respective provincial threshold to determine the low-income status.

In this study, low-income rates were compared based on two principal measures:

Family earnings, which is composed of wages and salaries plus self-employment income, and

Family income, which is earnings plus selected government transfers such as emergency federal COVID-19 benefits as well as child benefits and GST and HST credits.

The share of the population with weekly family earnings below the provincial threshold appropriate to their family size is referred to as having "**low weekly earnings**," and the share of the population with weekly family income below the threshold appropriate to their family size is referred to as having "**low weekly income**."

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

The article "[Experimental estimates of family weekly income, January 2020 to March 2021](#)" 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).