

# Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, April 2020 to June 2021

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Wednesday, August 4, 2021

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## Working from home: a new experiment for many Canadian workers and employers

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the work location of thousands of Canadian workers. From April 2020 to June 2021, 30% of employees aged 15 to 64 who worked during the Labour Force Survey (LFS) reference week had performed most of their hours from home. In contrast, about 4% of employees did so in 2016.

These unprecedented changes in the proportion of Canadians working from home raise several questions for employees and employers regarding the work arrangements that should prevail once the COVID-19 pandemic is over.

For employers, the optimal amount of telework will likely depend on many factors, including the degree to which working from home affects productivity and worker turnover, facilitates the hiring of employees living far from the workplace, fosters or inhibits teamwork, makes training more or less difficult, and affects employees' sense of belonging. These factors are likely to impact the types of investments that businesses will make in the near future to improve employee training, office design, and the security and performance of their telework systems.

In contrast, workers' preferences for telework will likely depend on how much working from home will lower their commuting expenses, affect their ability to perform most of their tasks, reduce their social interactions, and facilitate or hinder work–life balance. For the first time, the February 2021 Labour Force Survey measured the preferences of Canadian employees regarding working from home in a post-COVID-19 context. For more information on workers' preferences for telework, see the study titled "[Working from home: Productivity and preferences.](#)"

To inform discussions on these issues, today Statistics Canada sketches a detailed profile of workers and families who worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021.

## High-income families were more likely to work from home

Canadians have worked from home to varying degrees since April 2020.

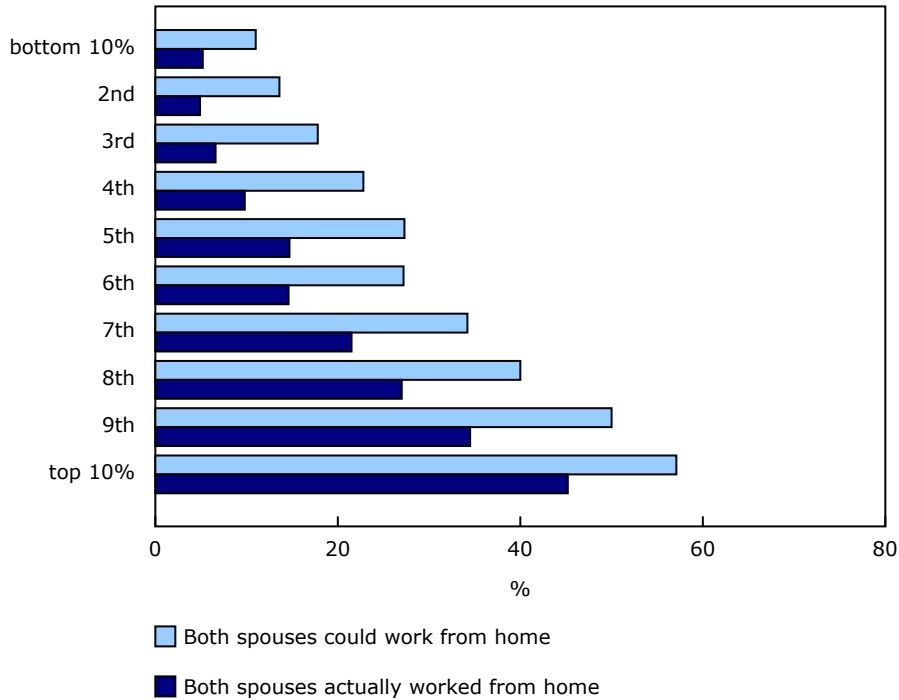
From April 2020 to June 2021, 45% of dual-earner salaried couples in the top 10% of the earnings distribution had both spouses working from home. This was nine times the rate of 5% observed for their counterparts in the bottom 10% of the earnings distribution.

The greater propensity of high-income families to work from home largely reflects the fact that these couples generally hold jobs that are more amenable to telework than lower-income couples.

For example, in 57% of dual-earner salaried couples in the top 10% of the earnings distribution, both spouses held jobs that could in principle be done from home. For dual-earner salaried couples in the bottom 10% of the earnings distribution, the rate was 11%.

**Chart 1**

**Percentage of dual-earner salaried couples where both spouses worked from home, April 2020 to June 2021, by weekly earnings decile**



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (3701).

**Roughly 7 in 10 workers in finance and insurance, as well as in professional, scientific and technical services, worked from home**

As expected, the propensity to work from home varied substantially across industries. Roughly 7 in 10 individuals in the finance and insurance and professional, scientific and technical services sectors worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021. At the other end of the spectrum, 5% of workers in accommodation and food services performed their jobs from home during that period.

Working from home was also fairly frequent in information and cultural industries (65%) and public administration (56%).

In many industries, employees in large firms—those with 500 employees or more—were more likely to work from home than those in small firms (those with fewer than 20 employees).

For example, 80% of employees of large firms in professional, scientific and technical services worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021. In contrast, 54% of their counterparts employed in small firms worked from home during that period.

In the private sector, 36% of employees of large firms worked from home, twice the rate of 18% observed for those working in small firms.

The large differences observed across industries and firm sizes from April 2020 to June 2021 suggest that employers' preferences for telework in a post-COVID-19 context might differ along these two dimensions.

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## The propensity to work from home varied substantially across regions and provinces

Partly because of regional differences in industrial structure, the degree to which Canadians worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021 differed substantially across regions and provinces.

Of all Ontario workers—employees and self-employed—aged 15 to 64 who were working during the LFS reference week, 37% worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021. The corresponding percentage for Quebec workers was 30%.

In contrast, between 17% and 23% of workers in the Atlantic provinces worked from home during that period. In Saskatchewan, 20% did so.

These differences have potential implications for public transit. They likely explain—at least in part—why the number of passenger trips in urban transit systems fell more in Quebec and Ontario than it did in the Atlantic provinces since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From January 2020 to April 2021, the number of passenger trips in urban transit systems dropped by 72% in Quebec and Ontario combined, compared with 48% in the Atlantic provinces (Statistics Canada Table 23-10-0251-01). For more information on the relationship between working from home and public transit, see the study titled "[Working from home: Potential implications for public transit and greenhouse gas emissions.](#)"

Larger differences in the propensity to work from home were observed across economic regions, with large regions generally displaying higher rates of telework than small towns or communities.

Ottawa had the highest rate of people working from home, with close to half (47%) of all workers—many of whom are employed in the federal public administration—performing their tasks from home from April 2020 to June 2021. In contrast, at most 12% of workers did so in smaller regions such as Cape Breton, Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine, South Coast–Burin Peninsula and Notre Dame–Central Bonavista Bay.

In Outaouais, Montréal and Toronto, between 41% and 44% of workers worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021.

## Virtually all self-employed workers who could work from home did so

Working from home was more frequent among self-employed workers than among employees.

Of all self-employed workers aged 15 to 64 who were working during the LFS reference week, 38% worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021. Since 39% of them held jobs that could actually be done from home, these numbers indicate that virtually all self-employed workers who could work from home did so.

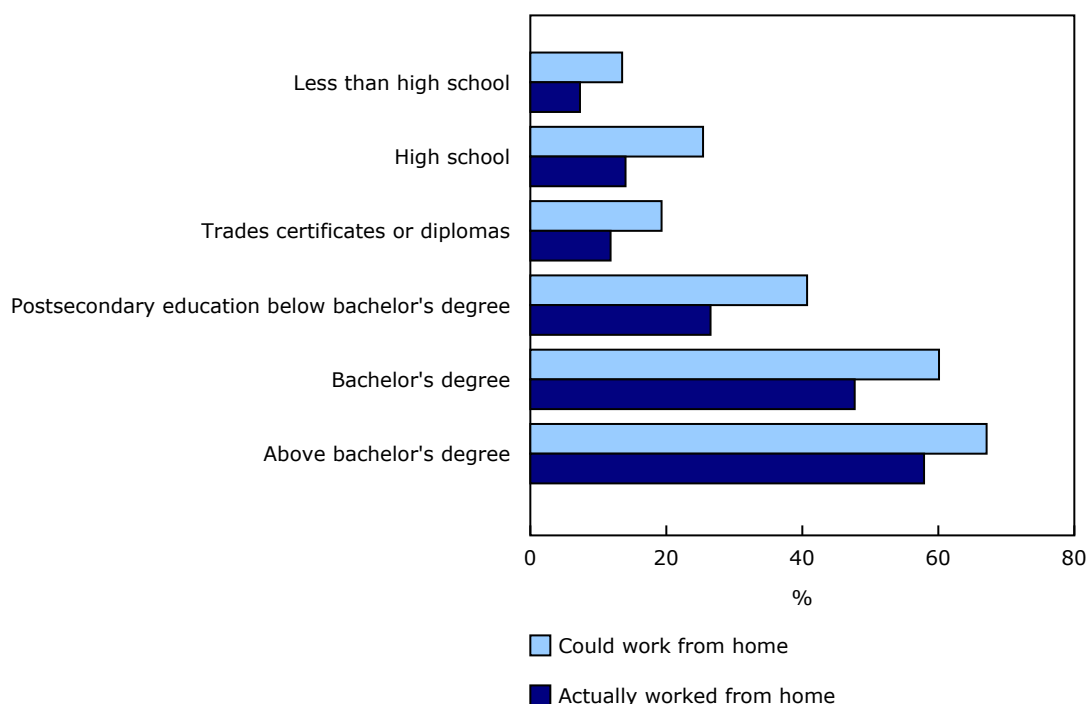
This was not the case for employees. While 43% of them held jobs that could be done from home, 30% worked most of their hours from home from April 2020 to June 2021.

Overall, 31% of all workers—employees and self-employed—worked from home during that period.

The propensity to work from home increased with educational attainment, in line with the fact that highly educated workers hold jobs that are more conducive to telework, compared with less educated workers. For example, 58% of workers who have more than a bachelor's degree performed most of their hours from home, compared with 7% of workers with no high school diploma.

Likewise, highly paid employees were more likely than other employees to work from home. For instance, 63% of employees in the top 10% of the hourly wage distribution worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021, almost eight times the rate of 8% observed for their counterparts in the bottom 10% of the distribution.

**Chart 2**  
**Percentage of workers who worked from home, by education level, April 2020 to June 2021**



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (3701).

### Men and young workers were less likely to work from home

Partly because they are overrepresented in retail trade as well as accommodation and food services—two sectors where working from home is rarely feasible—workers aged 15 to 24 were at least half as likely to work from home than older workers.

To illustrate, 16% of women aged 15 to 24 worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021, compared with 36% of women aged 45 to 54. The corresponding percentages were 12% for men aged 15 to 24 and 28% for those aged 45 to 54.

Regardless of marital status and whether they had children or not, men worked from home to a lesser extent than women. For example, 30% of married men with children worked from home from April 2020 to June 2021, compared with 39% for their female counterparts.

Overall, 27% of men worked from home, while 35% of women did so.

### The propensity to work from home varied across population groups

In July 2020, the Labour Force Survey started collecting data on Canada's population groups. These data help to improve our understanding of the degree to which Canadians worked from home during the pandemic.

From July 2020 to June 2021, the degree to which Canadian workers worked from home varied across population groups. Partly because they are overrepresented in finance and insurance and in professional, scientific and technical services—two sectors where the vast majority of jobs can be done home—a relatively high proportion

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(43%) of men of Chinese origin worked from home during that period. This was almost three times the rate of 15% observed among men of Filipino origin. Furthermore, 37% of men of South Asian origin and 27% of Black men worked from home from July 2020 to June 2021.

Similar differences were observed among women. The propensity to work from home was substantially higher among women of Chinese origin (49%), South Asian origin (36%) and Black women (33%) than among Filipino women (19%).

Overall, 29% of Canadians worked from home from July 2020 to June 2021.

### **Note to readers**

*The data in this release are from the April 2020 to June 2021 cycles of the Labour Force Survey and reflect averages observed during this period in the 10 Canadian provinces.*

*Worker-level results are based on a sample comprising individuals aged 15 to 64 who were employed and were working (i.e., who were not absent) during the LFS reference week. Unless otherwise noted, both self-employed workers and employees are included in the estimates. In all cases, full-time students, full-time members of the Armed Forces and legislators are excluded.*

*Results for dual-earner salaried couples are based on a sample comprising husband-wife couples (married or living common-law) in which both spouses are aged 18 to 64 and are employees working during the LFS reference week. Couples in which at least one spouse is a full-time student, a full-time member of the Armed Forces or a legislator are excluded.*

*Jobs that in principle can be done from home are identified using the methodology outlined in Deng, Morissette and Messacar (2020).*

*In this release, the term "worked from home" refers to workers who worked most of their hours from home during the LFS reference week. The term "married" refers to individuals who are married or in a common-law relationship.*

*Additional information is available in the paper titled "[Running the economy remotely: Potential for working from home during and after COVID-19](#)", which is part of the series StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 45-28-0001*

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of workers working from home, by selected characteristics, April 2020 to June 2021**

	Worker could work from home	Worker worked from home
	%	
<b>All workers</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>30.7</b>
<b>Class of worker</b>		
Employee	42.8	29.5
Self-employed	39.0	38.4
<b>Sex</b>		
Men	35.5	26.8
Women	50.3	35.3
<b>Age</b>		
15 to 24	22.7	13.6
25 to 34	44.2	33.5
35 to 44	46.7	35.6
45 to 54	45.3	31.7
55 to 64	40.3	28.4
<b>Men</b>		
15 to 24	18.9	12.0
25 to 34	37.5	29.3
35 to 44	39.9	31.1
45 to 54	37.3	27.6
55 to 64	33.6	24.7
<b>Women</b>		
15 to 24	27.6	15.5
25 to 34	52.4	38.6
35 to 44	54.7	40.8
45 to 54	54.2	36.3
55 to 64	48.4	32.8
<b>Men</b>		
Unmarried, no children	30.5	21.9
Unmarried, with children	37.0	27.4
Married, no children	36.4	28.2
Married with children	38.7	29.7
<b>Women</b>		
Unmarried, no children	43.0	29.6
Unmarried, with children	50.6	34.7
Married, no children	50.7	36.0
Married with children	54.9	38.8
<b>Education</b>		
Less than high school	13.5	7.3
High school	25.4	14.0
Trades certificates or diplomas	19.3	11.8
Postsecondary education below bachelor's degree	40.7	26.5
Bachelor's degree	60.1	47.7
Above bachelor's degree	67.1	57.9
<b>Industry</b>		
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	4.8	28.6
Mining and oil and gas extraction	27.8	27.5
Utilities	37.5	44.0
Construction	12.3	9.7
Manufacturing	20.9	16.2
Wholesale trade	58.5	32.2
Retail trade	23.8	11.2
Transportation and warehousing	26.9	12.7
Information and cultural industries	76.7	65.1
Finance and insurance	87.3	72.9
Real estate and rental and leasing	53.2	41.9
Professional, scientific and technical services	84.6	69.6
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	36.6	25.3
Educational services	84.1	43.4
Health care and social assistance	28.8	16.7
Arts, entertainment and recreation	47.5	38.0
Accommodation and food services	8.0	5.1
Other services (except public administration)	33.4	26.8

**Table 1 - continued**  
**Percentage of workers working from home, by selected characteristics, April 2020 to June 2021**

	Worker could work from home	Worker worked from home
Public administration	59.6	55.6
<b>Occupation</b>		
Management	57.8	43.3
Business, finance and administration	82.0	50.2
Natural and applied sciences and related occupations	73.4	66.2
Health	1.5	7.8
Education, law and social, community and government services	73.5	41.6
Art, culture, recreation and sport	60.4	58.6
Sales and services	23.6	17.8
Trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations	1.8	2.9
Natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations	2.4	9.4
Manufacturing and utilities	1.4	4.5
<b>Province</b>		
Newfoundland and Labrador	32.0	17.0
Prince Edward Island	34.3	19.3
Nova Scotia	37.0	23.4
New Brunswick	37.1	20.3
Quebec	43.1	30.3
Ontario	45.4	36.5
Manitoba	37.3	21.7
Saskatchewan	33.5	19.5
Alberta	38.6	26.5
British Columbia	41.6	27.8
<b>Canadian-born</b>		
No	44.4	34.7
Yes	41.4	29.1
<b>Permanent job (employees only)</b>		
No	39.8	25.7
Yes	43.1	30.0
<b>Unionized job (employees only)</b>		
No	45.1	31.7
Yes	37.6	24.7
<b>Firm size (employees only)</b>		
Fewer than 20 employees	36.9	18.5
20 to 99 employees	37.2	20.5
100 to 499 employees	42.3	28.6
500 employees or more	46.7	36.6
<b>Firm size (private sector employees)</b>		
Fewer than 20 employees	36.5	18.2
20 to 99 employees	35.9	20.0
100 to 499 employees	40.5	28.1
500 employees or more	42.4	35.6
<b>Hourly wage decile (employees only)</b>		
Bottom 10%	17.2	7.9
2nd	24.4	10.6
3rd	33.2	15.5
4th	39.7	20.3
5th	44.0	26.2
6th	46.7	31.2
7th	48.6	36.8
8th	50.2	40.6
9th	56.1	45.8
Top 10%	70.3	62.5

**Note(s):** Individuals aged 15 to 64 who were employed and working (i.e., who were not absent) during the Labour Force Survey reference week. Full-time students, full-time members of the Armed Forces and legislators are excluded.

**Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (3701).

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of workers working from home, by economic region, April 2020 to June 2021**

	Worker could work from home	Worker worked from home
	%	
<b>All workers</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>30.7</b>
<b>Economic region</b>		
Avalon Peninsula	37.5	23.0
South Coast–Burin Peninsula and Notre Dame–Central Bonavista Bay	22.2	7.8
West Coast–Northern Peninsula–Labrador	27.5	10.2
Prince Edward Island	34.3	19.3
Cape Breton	30.4	12.0
North Shore	28.6	14.5
Annapolis Valley	30.8	17.7
Southern	26.4	16.1
Halifax	44.3	31.2
Campbellton–Miramichi	27.9	12.3
Moncton–Richibucto	39.9	24.1
Saint John–St. Stephen	36.2	20.1
Fredericton–Oromocto	45.6	25.6
Edmundston–Woodstock	29.6	12.6
Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine	27.4	11.7
Bas-Saint-Laurent	32.1	19.5
Capitale-Nationale	49.7	36.4
Chaudière-Appalaches	35.4	21.4
Estrie	34.9	20.6
Centre-du-Québec	32.3	16.8
Montérégie	40.2	27.6
Montréal	52.9	43.3
Laval	49.2	30.4
Lanaudière	35.0	20.0
Laurentides	38.0	23.7
Outaouais	49.4	40.6
Abitibi-Témiscamingue	31.3	14.4
Mauricie	36.0	22.8
Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean	32.0	21.1
Côte-Nord and Nord-du-Québec	31.7	11.4
Ottawa	53.8	47.5
Kingston–Pembroke	35.6	20.4
Muskoka–Kawartha	30.8	19.8
Toronto	52.0	43.9
Kitchener–Waterloo–Barrie	39.0	29.6
Hamilton–Niagara Peninsula	37.0	26.9
London	36.2	26.9
Windsor–Sarnia	31.1	19.4
Stratford–Bruce Peninsula	27.7	20.0
Northeast	34.7	22.7
Northwest	32.5	19.4
Southeast	31.9	16.5
South Central and North Central	28.8	14.9
Southwest	30.0	12.9
Winnipeg	41.1	25.1
Interlake	33.0	20.9
Parklands and North	31.3	16.2
Regina–Moose Mountain	39.4	22.9
Swift Current–Moose Jaw	23.1	15.1
Saskatoon–Biggar	36.2	21.1
Yorkton–Melville	20.2	14.5
Prince Albert and Northern	28.0	14.5
Lethbridge–Medicine Hat	26.3	12.2
Camrose–Drumheller	24.5	14.0
Calgary	45.1	33.5
Banff–Jasper–Rocky Mountain House and Athabasca–Grande Prairie–Peace River	28.9	14.1
Red Deer	24.3	13.4
Edmonton	40.3	28.2
Wood Buffalo–Cold Lake	27.1	15.7



**Table 2**  
**Percentage of workers working from home, by economic region, April 2020 to June 2021**

	Worker could work from home	Worker worked from home
Vancouver Island and Coast	39.5	25.5
Lower Mainland–Southwest	44.9	31.5
Thompson–Okanagan	35.1	21.0
Kootenay	32.1	19.8
Cariboo	29.6	14.9
North Coast and Nechako	29.4	11.6
Northeast	32.4	13.7

**Note(s):** Individuals aged 15 to 64 who were employed and working (i.e., who were not absent) during the Labour Force Survey reference week. Full-time students, full-time members of the Armed Forces and legislators are excluded.

**Source(s):** Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey (3701).

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3701.**

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