

Study: Unmasking differences in women's full-time employment

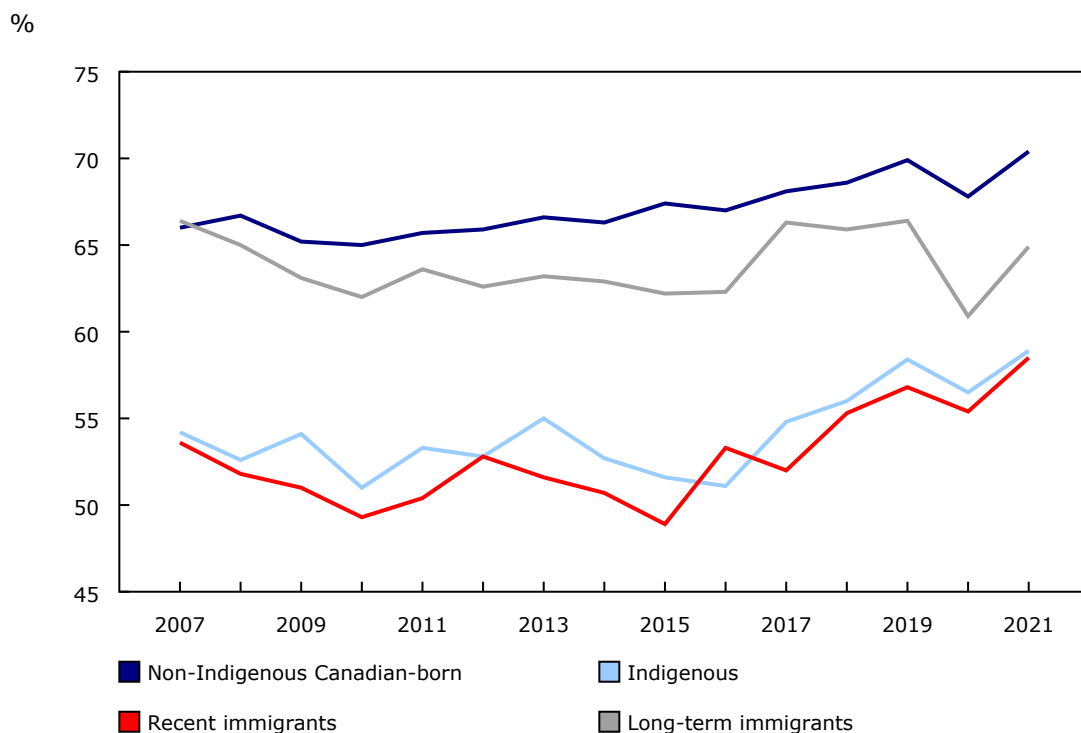
Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Monday, September 26, 2022

A growing share of women in Canada are working full time in their main job—68% of women aged 20 to 54 in 2021, up from 65% in 2007 and 55% in 1997. However, gains in working full time, which reflect a greater degree of current and future financial security, have not been universally experienced by all women.

Driven mainly by rising labour force participation rates and falling part-time employment, non-Indigenous women born in Canada had the highest rate of full-time employment in 2021 at 70%. This was up from 66% in 2007. Meanwhile, little change was recorded for long-term immigrant women (arriving in Canada more than 10 years ago) at 65% in 2021. While both Indigenous women and recent immigrant women saw gains in full-time employment from 2007 to 2021, the 2021 rates were among the lowest (at 59% each).

Understanding the differences in full-time employment among diverse groups of women is the subject of a new study released today. This study, "[Unmasking differences in women's full-time employment](#)," uses data from the Labour Force Survey to analyze how women's full-time employment rates evolved from 2007 to 2021.

Chart 1
Proportion of women employed full time in their main job, by population group, 2007 to 2021



Source(s): Labour Force Survey (3701).

Full-time employment rates increase with age among Indigenous women

Major life transitions, such as family formation and parenthood, can shape women's full-time work pathways. For example, the presence of children can impact women's participation in full-time work, though supports such as childcare can sometimes mitigate the impact. Further, not all groups of women experience the same life transitions or experience them in the same way, and consequently, differences emerge in rates of women's full-time employment over a lifetime.

For this study, cohorts of women who were aged 25 to 29 in 2007 and who were aged 40 to 44 in 2021 were followed to examine trends in full-time work among population groups.

For non-Indigenous women born in Canada, the likelihood of working full time remained high and constant with age. In 2007, 72% of non-Indigenous Canadian-born women aged 25 to 29 were working full time—equal to the proportion in 2021, when they were aged 40 to 44.

By comparison, the full-time employment rate for Indigenous women increased with age. In 2007, 53% of Indigenous women aged 25 to 29 were working full time, increasing to 63% in 2021 when they were 40 to 44 years old. This higher rate of full-time employment in middle age translated into a smaller gap with non-Indigenous Canadian-born women (9 percentage point gap), compared with the gap in young adulthood (19 percentage points). Differences in family structure, such as age of first child or single parenthood, may help explain the age-specific differences in full-time employment.

The relationship between full-time work and aging during the 2007 to 2021 period is somewhat more complicated when looking at patterns among immigrant women. Immigrant women who arrived in Canada as children or teenagers had no change in their rate of full-time employment as they aged. That is, 69% of immigrant women aged 25 to 29 were working full time in 2007 and 14 years later, 69% worked full time. In 2021, this proportion was similar to the rate for non-Indigenous Canadian-born women (72%).

For immigrant women who arrived in Canada after the age of 18, however, age and the number years of residency played a combined role. The full-time employment rate of immigrant women who arrived in Canada in 2003 or 2004 increased from 48% in 2007 to 64% in 2021.

Being educated outside Canada is related to lower rates of full-time work among immigrant women

[Women from all population groups have become better educated over time.](#) Higher education was associated with higher rates of full-time employment for all groups of women and in each period considered. For example, 80% of non-Indigenous Canadian-born women with a university degree worked full time, compared with 53% of their counterparts with a high school diploma or less.

While Indigenous women have the lowest university education rates of all groups of women, university-educated Indigenous women were just as likely to hold a full-time job (79%) as their non-Indigenous Canadian-born counterparts (80%) in 2021. University-educated immigrant women who completed their studies in Canada also fared similarly to their Canadian-born counterparts: 75% of recent immigrants and 79% of long-term immigrants worked full time in 2021.

However, immigrants with a university education obtained outside of Canada were significantly less likely to work full time than non-Indigenous Canadian-born women. In 2021, 66% of long-term immigrants with a university education obtained outside of Canada worked full time. This suggests that credential recognition is an important explanation for lower full-time employment among immigrants with a university education outside of Canada.

Marriage or living common law lowers full-time employment for immigrant women, but not for non-Indigenous Canadian-born and Indigenous women

The association of being married or living in a common-law relationship with full-time employment has reversed over time for non-Indigenous Canadian-born and Indigenous women.

For example, in 2007, a greater proportion of non-Indigenous Canadian-born women not in a couple worked full time (69%) than non-Indigenous Canadian-born women in a couple (65%). In 2021, the results were reversed, with the full-time employment rate of women in couples (71%) now surpassing that of women not in couples (68%). Changing societal norms for married women in the workplace, declining fertility rates, access to affordable childcare, and men's increasing involvement in family responsibilities may explain part of this reversal.

In contrast, being in a couple was consistently associated with lower full-time employment over time for immigrant women. For example, in 2021, about 64% of long-term immigrant women in couples worked full time, compared with 70% of those not in couples.

Among all women groups, the presence of children in the household is associated with a decline in full-time employment and had a stronger impact when the youngest child was aged 1 to 5. In 2021, Indigenous mothers with children aged 1 to 5 had the lowest full-time employment rate (43%), followed by recent immigrants (46%), long-term immigrants (56%) and non-Indigenous Canadian-born mothers (64%).

However, for immigrant women, being part of a couple and motherhood, taken jointly, lower full-time employment rates, whether married or in a common-law relationship. In 2021, nearly 72% of recent immigrant women worked full time when they were not part of a couple and did not have children. This proportion working full time was 64% when they were part of a couple without children and 45% when they were part of a couple where the youngest child was aged 1 to 5. Similar results are found for long-term immigrant women.

A slightly different story is told for non-Indigenous Canadian-born women and Indigenous women. For both groups, being in a couple was associated with a higher rate of full-time work, while being in a couple with young children (aged 1 to 5) had the lowest full-time employment rate.

Note to readers

This article uses March and September data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) from 2007 to 2021. The LFS is a monthly household survey collecting information about the labour market activities of the population aged 15 years and older excluding residents of collective dwellings, persons living on reserves and other settlements in the province, and full-time members of the Canadian forces.

The analytical sample includes women aged 20 to 54 living in one of the 10 provinces excluding full-time students and unpaid family members. Full-time students are excluded since their main activity is going to school. Unpaid family members are excluded since some survey questions are asked differently or not at all comparable to those asked to paid workers.

Definitions

In this article, full-time work refers to the population employed at least 30 hours per week in their main job (outside of the home) including both paid workers and self-employed workers. The full-time employment rate is the percent of individuals employed full-time among the total population.

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

The article entitled "[Unmasking differences in women's full-time employment](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* ([75-006-X](#)).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).