

Work potential and overqualification status among persons with disabilities, 2022

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For this release, an audio version and the video "[Work potential and overqualification status among persons with disabilities, American Sign Language](#)" are available.

In support of National AccessAbility Week, Statistics Canada is releasing a new report using data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) to highlight untapped potential in employment among persons with disabilities. This report, titled "[Examining work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities](#)," explores the rates of work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years.

There is a gap in labour market outcomes between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities. Notably, persons with disabilities have lower rates of employment and higher rates of [unemployment](#) than those without disabilities. Analysis of the characteristics and experiences of persons with work potential adds contextual information on the population of persons whose employment could change these labour market patterns. **Work potential** was defined by considering individuals who were not employed, but could be, as **potential workers**, as long as they were not fully retired. Persons who were completely prevented from working by their condition with no possible accommodations were classified as not being potential workers. It should be noted that the concept of work potential is not an attempt to measure individuals' capacity or ability to work.

Overqualification, which occurs when there is a mismatch between a person's education level and their job requirements, can indicate that an employee may be underused in their role. Overqualified persons with disabilities represent another part of the population that may be able to make greater contributions in the workplace. A better awareness of the characteristics of those who are overqualified allows for a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of this population.

Two in five non-working persons with disabilities have work potential

According to the 2022 CSD, 42.0% of persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years who were unemployed or not in the labour force had work potential. However, the rate of work potential differed when examined across a variety of sociodemographic and disability characteristics.

Labour market outcomes vary by disability characteristics, with severity playing an important role. According to the 2022 CSD, 29.9% of persons with severe disabilities aged 25 to 64 years were employed, compared with 74.9% of those with mild disabilities. Looking at the potential to work among the non-working population with disabilities, 61.6% of those with mild disabilities had work potential, followed by 52.2% of those with moderate disabilities, 40.1% of those with severe disabilities and 24.1% of those with very severe disabilities. Lower rates of work potential among persons with severe and very severe disabilities may be partially connected to a variety of experiences indicative of an unsupportive daily environment that puts employment out of reach for some individuals. For example, persons with very severe disabilities are more likely to experience barriers to accessibility compared with those with mild disabilities, and they are more likely to have unmet needs for aids and assistive devices.

Among non-working persons with disabilities, a larger share of those aged 25 to 44 years (67.1%) had work potential compared with those aged 45 to 64 years (30.5%). This finding is consistent with a number of relevant experiences among the younger age group; for example, having more frequent transitions between jobs, continuing postsecondary education and taking parental leave. A higher rate of work potential among persons with disabilities aged 25 to 44 years may also be tied to disability severity, as nearly half (48.5%) of this age group had mild disabilities; among non-employed persons with mild disabilities, 61.6% had work potential.



Work potential differed by household living arrangements, suggesting persons with caregiving responsibilities may face additional employment-related challenges. These can include constraints on availability, interruptions to labour market attachment and limitations in the types of employment they are able to pursue, often shaped by the intensity and nature of caregiving demands, compared with those without similar responsibilities. Among non-working persons with disabilities, those who were part of a couple with children (53.4%) and those who were part of a one-parent family (46.1%) had higher potential to work compared with non-working couples without children (31.1%).

One-third of employed persons with disabilities are overqualified for their current role

In 2022, 34.0% of employed persons with disabilities were overqualified for their current position, which was similar to the rate of overqualification among persons without disabilities (32.7%). Persons who are overqualified have a higher level of education than is typically required for their job.

Consistent with findings from other studies [showing immigrants have higher rates of overqualification](#), immigrant persons with disabilities were more likely to be overqualified (42.5%) compared with their non-immigrant counterparts (31.9%). Similarly, racialized persons with disabilities had higher rates of overqualification (41.8%) than non-racialized, non-Indigenous persons with disabilities (32.4%).

Employed persons with very severe disabilities are more likely to be overqualified than those with mild disabilities

Looking at disability characteristics, in 2022, employed persons with very severe disabilities (39.6%) were more likely to be overqualified, compared with those with mild disabilities (32.0%). Meanwhile, the overqualification rates were similar among those with moderate (34.6%) and severe (35.3%) disabilities, compared with those with mild disabilities. When looking at the different disability types, those with mental health-related (36.8%), mobility (37.6%) and developmental (43.9%) disabilities had higher rates of overqualification than their counterparts without each of those disability types (35.1%, 32.8% and 33.5%, respectively).

Overqualification is higher among persons who think their condition makes it difficult for them to change jobs or to advance at their current job

Differences in overqualification rates emerged when examined across a variety of employment-related characteristics and experiences. In 2022, persons with disabilities who started their job within the past five years (37.6%) were more likely to be overqualified than those who had worked at their job more than five years earlier (31.4%). Looking at the number of paid hours worked per week, persons with disabilities working less than 30 hours per week (41.9%) had higher rates of overqualification than those working 30 hours or more (32.9%).

The rate of overqualification was higher among persons with disabilities who indicated having to change the kind of work they did at their job because of their condition (40.6%), compared with those who did not report this experience (31.7%). Persons with disabilities who believed their condition made it difficult to change jobs or advance at their job (37.1%) were more likely to be overqualified than those who did not have this view of their employment situation (31.6%).

Note to readers

The Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) is the official source of data on persons with disabilities aged 15 years and older in Canada. The survey population for the CSD consists of Canadians aged 15 years and older—as of the date of the preceding Census of Population—who are living in private dwellings. For methodological details, see [Canadian Survey on Disability \(CSD\)](#).

The CSD identifies persons with disabilities using the Disability Screening Questions (DSQ). The DSQ measure the degree to which difficulties are experienced across 10 domains of functioning and includes a catch-all question about other health problems or conditions not already captured in the 10 previous disability types, which is associated with an 11th unknown disability type. The DSQ collect data about the age of onset of activity limitations in various domains corresponding to the 11 disability types.

Work potential was measured as follows: persons who were officially unemployed or who were not in the labour force but stated they would be looking for work in the next 12 months were classified as potential workers. Among the remaining respondents who were not in the labour force, those who stated they were completely retired or who said that their condition completely prevented them from working and that no workplace accommodation existed that would enable them to work were classified as not being potential workers. Conversely, those who said that they were not completely retired and either that they were not prevented from working because of their condition or that workplace accommodations existed that would enable them to work were classified as potential workers. Work potential was not determined for individuals who could not be explicitly classified into any of the categories above because of incomplete information.

Overqualified refers to individuals whose educational attainment exceeds the educational level typically required for their occupation's training, education, experience and responsibilities (TEER) level, as defined in the National Occupational Classification. This includes individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher working in TEER 2 to 5 occupations, individuals with a university certificate or college diploma working in TEER 3 to 5 occupations, and individuals with a high school diploma or trades certificate working in TEER 5 occupations.

This concept applies to respondents aged 25 to 64 years living in private households who were employed at any time since January 1, 2020. In most cases, job information refers to the job held during the reference week of May 2 to 8, 2021. If the respondent did not work during that week, the job held for the longest period since January 1, 2020, is used. Respondents with no employment in 2020 or 2021 are excluded.

A **global severity score** was developed for the CSD, which was calculated for each person using (a) the number of disability types, (b) the level of difficulty experienced in performing certain tasks and (c) the frequency of activity limitations. To simplify the concept of severity, four severity classes were established: mild, moderate, severe and very severe. Note that the name assigned to each class is intended to facilitate the use of a severity score and is not a label or judgment concerning the person's level of disability. For more information, see [Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022: Concepts and Methods Guide](#).

All differences mentioned in this release are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3251.

The report "[Examining work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities](#)," which is part of the *Reports on Disability and Accessibility in Canada* ([89-654-X](#)), 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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).