

Quality of employment, 2021

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For many Canadians, [employment is a key determinant of quality of life](#). Not only can jobs provide income and contribute to prosperity, but employment can also be a source of personal growth and positive social relationships. At the same time, employment can negatively affect quality of life, as some jobs may expose workers to long working hours, discrimination or low wages.

Working conditions are continuously changing and are affected by multiple factors, including the development of new technologies, business practices, and macroeconomic conditions. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has created new risks for some workers, such as exposure to new mental and physical health risk factors, while others have benefited from new opportunities, including the notable growth in hybrid and home-based work arrangements. For many employers facing record-high job vacancies, improving quality of employment has become an important part of strategies to recruit and retain workers.

Notable changes observed in Canada during the pandemic include a decline in the proportion of workers usually working very long hours (49 hours or more per week), as well as a decrease in the proportion of employees earning low pay.

Ongoing transformations within the labour market highlight the need to complement standard indicators of employment and unemployment with expanded collection, analysis and dissemination of data on *quality of employment*, i.e., aspects of employment which relate to the well-being of individuals.

To address this need, Statistics Canada has released [Quality of Employment in Canada](#), a publication based on the internationally supported framework of the Expert Group on Quality of Employment of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). The publication aims to help Canadians understand and monitor how employment and employment conditions evolve, and features data and several short articles on different indicators of quality of employment. The first release of *Quality of employment in Canada* includes analysis of employees with low pay, coverage by a collective bargaining agreement, and the relationship of employees with their colleagues, among others. The publication will continue to be updated with additional analysis of existing data and new survey results.

As part of the analysis of quality of employment, Statistics Canada is committed to highlighting differences between diverse groups within the labour market and to explore factors which explain why some groups are more disadvantaged than others.

The proportion of employees with low pay is higher among youth and women

A key indicator of quality of employment under the income and benefits dimension is the proportion of employees with low pay. The UNECE Quality of Employment framework defines the low pay threshold as hourly earnings less than two-thirds the median hourly wage (before tax and other deductions). This indicator of wage equity provides insights for those potentially at risk of economic hardship.

In 2021, one in five employees in Canada (20.1%) had hourly earnings below the low pay threshold of \$17.33. Low pay was more common among part-time employees and younger employees aged 15 to 24 years. In addition, there was a larger proportion of female employees (23.2%) earning less than the low pay threshold than male employees (17.1%).

The onset of the pandemic in March 2020 resulted in a sudden shift in the distribution of employment by wage level due to the concentration of job losses among lower-paid employees. This shift has persisted, and in 2021, the proportion of employees earning low pay remained near its lowest level since the late 1990s, when data on wages first became available in the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

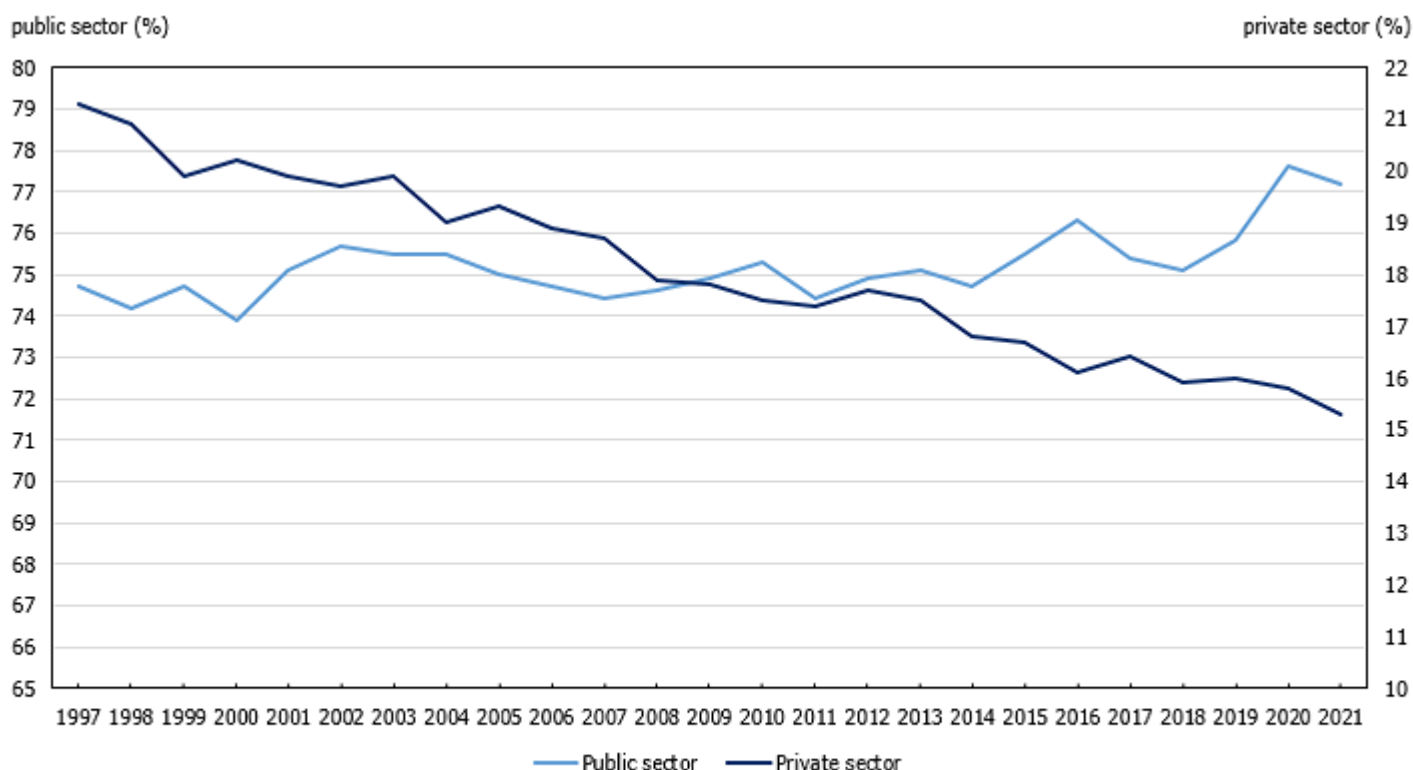


Collective bargaining coverage has declined over the last two decades

Within the UNECE Quality of Employment framework, the dimension of Social dialogue covers the relationships between organizations and employees on a collective basis. A common indicator is collective bargaining coverage, since employees covered by collective bargaining have more protections and higher wages on average compared with employees who are not covered.

The proportion of employees covered by collective bargaining agreements in Canada has decreased over the past two decades, falling from 33.7% in 1997 to 30.9% in 2021. The decline was largely due to a drop in coverage in the private sector.

Infographic 1 – Union coverage rate, employees 15 years and over by private and public sectors, Canada, 1997 to 2021



Note(s): Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables.

Source(s): Labour Force Survey, custom tabulation.

Fewer employees with a disability report having colleagues who often support them

Examining employment-related relationships is also important for understanding quality of employment in Canada. The nature of relationships between managers and employees, or among colleagues, are examples of such relationships.

In 2016, according to results from the General Social Survey, nearly 8 in 10 employees (78.5%) in Canada reported having colleagues who often or always helped and supported them. At the same time, having supportive colleagues was somewhat less common for employees with a disability (73.0%).

While some aspects of quality of employment have improved over the past decades, as shown by a decline in the share of employees earning low pay and a decrease in the proportion of workers working very long hours, other indicators, such as the decline in collective bargaining coverage, have moved in a different direction. In addition, disparities also exist between different groups within the labour market. Some racialized employees have lower pay and employees with a disability are less likely to have supportive colleagues and supervisors. Given the importance of quality of employment to both workers and employers, Statistics Canada is committed to continue monitoring changes across the various dimensions of quality of employment through future data products and publications.

Note to readers

Quality of employment in Canada (14280001) is based on the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Handbook on Measuring Quality of Employment, which was collaboratively developed with other international agencies, and experts in statistical agencies of many countries. This report, containing a framework for measuring quality of employment, was published in 2015.

Based on this internationally supported framework, quality of employment is organized around seven dimensions: safety and ethics of employment; income and benefits from employment; working time and work-life balance; security of employment and social protection; skills development and training; and employment-related relationships and motivation.

The framework itself is envisioned as a toolbox, and the indicators within each dimension are the suggested tools to assess quality of employment. Depending on the user's needs or approach, any or all 'tools' within the framework could be used in the assessment of quality of employment.

Data in Quality of employment in Canada (14280001) cover a number of years, depending on the sources available. The most recent year for this release is 2021. This is the first release of the publication, with more data and updates to be published in the future.

The main data source for this publication is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). While the main objective of the LFS is to provide estimates of the employed, unemployed, and economically inactive population, the survey also includes a wide variety of measures which provide information about quality of employment.

As part of its Labour Market Information program, Statistics Canada will collect additional data on quality of employment through monthly and quarterly LFS supplementary questionnaires. Results from these questionnaires will be used to fill data gaps and track changes in a wider range of quality of employment indicators.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3701.

The publication "[Quality of Employment in Canada](#)" (14280001) 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).