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Involuntary part-time work, 1997 to 2022

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Involuntary part-time work, 1997 to 2022

While many workers in Canada work fewer than 30 hours per week as a matter of choice, others do so involuntarily. In 2022, there were 556,000 involuntary part-time workers in the Canadian labour market on average, representing 2.8% of all workers. Although employed women (3.6%) were more likely than men (2.2%) to be involuntary part-time workers overall, involuntary part-time work represented a larger proportion of male part-time employment (17.4%) than female part-time employment (14.5%).

Involuntary part-time work exists when individuals work on a part-time basis due to economic or business conditions, or because they could not find full-time work. Involuntary part-time work is an indicator of underemployment and may be associated with financial stress.

According to the UNECE Quality of employment framework, the involuntary part-time work rate is the number of involuntary part-time workers expressed as a proportion of all workers. An alternative indicator is the percentage of people working part-time who do so involuntarily. While the first indicator measures the overall prevalence of involuntary part-time work, the second provides information on the nature of part-time work in different groups.

All analyses are based on annual averages from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and reflect the situation of workers aged 15 and older.

Historical trends, 1997 to 2022

The involuntary part-time work rate tends to vary alongside the level of economic activity and the tightness of the labour market. When the unemployment rate is low and job vacancies are high, workers are more likely to find a job that provides their preferred work hours. Conversely, when unemployment is high, workers are more likely to accept or stay in a job offering less than their desired number of hours.

In 1997, the involuntary part-time rate was 5.9%. It reached a low of 4.1% in 2007, before increasing to 5.5% in 2010 in the wake of the 2008/2009 recession.

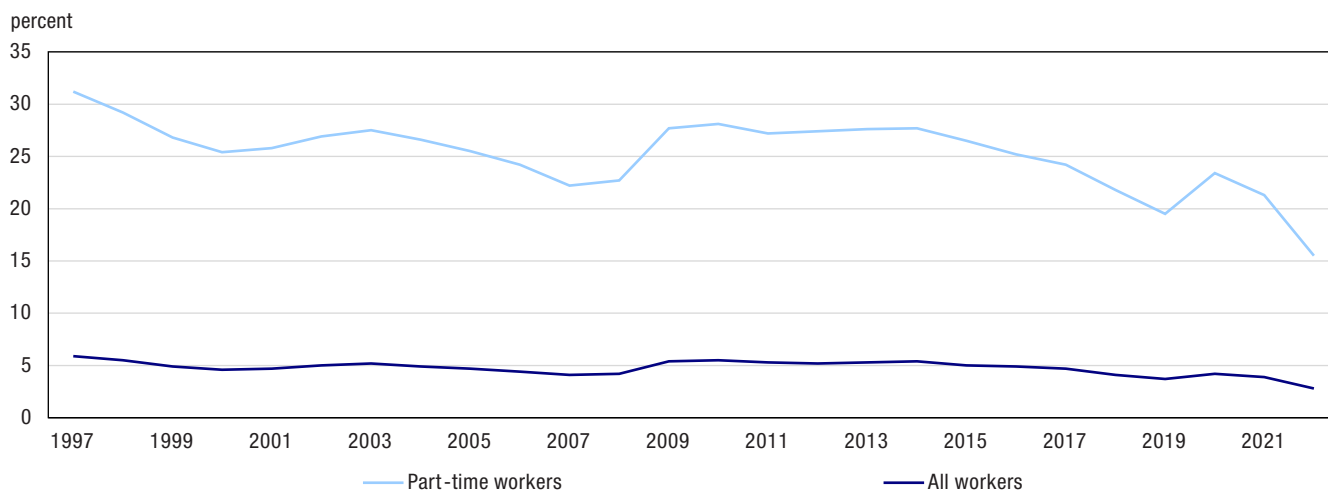
The involuntary part-time rate subsequently fell from 5.4% in 2014 to 3.7% in 2019. In Alberta, an increase of 1.6 percentage points to 5.1% was recorded from 2015 to 2016 alongside the decline in oil prices.

From 2019 to 2020, the involuntary part-time rate increased by 0.5 percentage points to 4.2% nationally in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated public health restrictions. Similar to the 2008/2009 recession, a decline in labour demand led to a reduction in hours worked, and an increase in the proportion of workers working part-time involuntarily.

In the context of the tight labour market which followed the lifting of public health restrictions in 2021 and 2022, the involuntary part-time rate fell to 2.8% in 2022, its lowest level since the beginning of the series in 1997.

Expressed as a proportion of part-time employment, the share of involuntary part-time workers has fluctuated more. It rose from 19.5% in 2019 to an average of 23.4% in 2020, before falling to a record low of 15.5% in 2022.

Chart 1
Involuntary part-time work as a percentage of employed persons and as a percentage of part-time workers aged 15 and older, 1997 to 2022



Note: Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom tabulation.

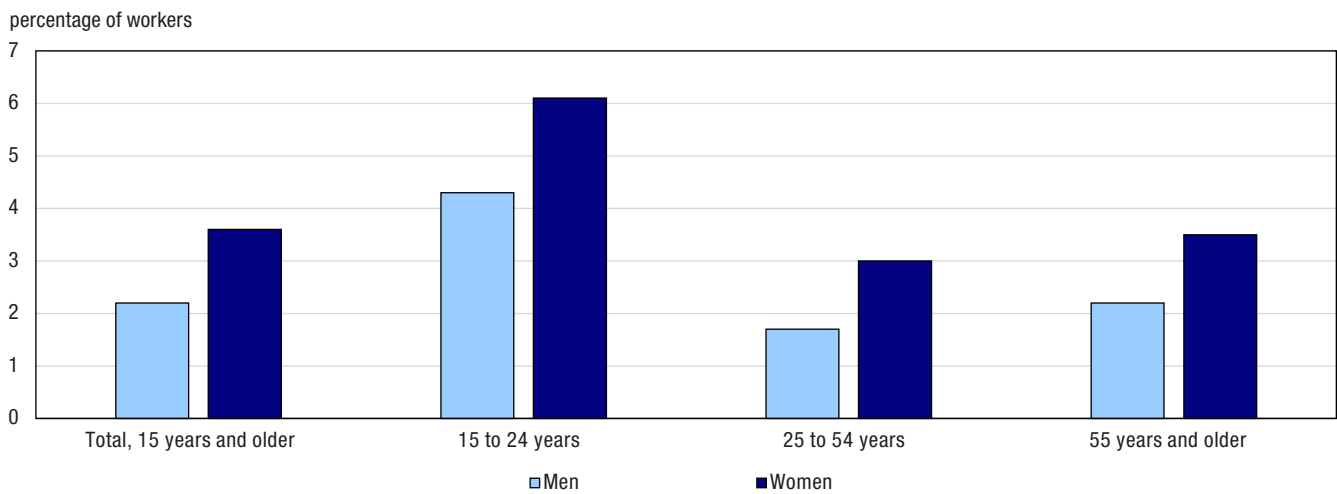
The involuntary part-time rate was lower in 2022 than in 1997 in all major demographic groups. Notable declines over the period were recorded among youth aged 15 to 24 (from 11.1% to 5.2%) and among workers in the core working ages of 25 to 54 (from 5.2% to 2.3%). Among women, the involuntary part-time rate declined from 8.7% in 1997 to 3.6% in 2022, while the rate for men fell from 3.6% to 2.2%.

A recent snapshot

In 2022, the involuntary part-time work rate was highest among young women (6.1%), young men (4.3%) and women aged 55 and older (3.5%). This partly reflects the above-average share of workers who work part-time in each of these groups.

Employed men aged 25 to 54 were the least likely to be involuntary part-time workers (1.7%). However, among the relatively small number of core-aged men who worked part-time, 32.2% did so involuntarily, the highest proportion across the major demographic groups. In other words, core-aged men were less likely to work part-time, but among those who did, a higher share would have preferred to work full-time if economic conditions allowed it. Among those who worked part-time, the share who did so involuntarily was also relatively high among core-aged women (19.0%). Core-aged workers have typically completed their formal education, are less likely to be transitioning to retirement, and may have more incentives to work more hours.

Chart 2
Involuntary part-time work rate (%) by age group and sex, workers aged 15 and older, 2022



Note: Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom tabulation.

Young men (10.4%), young women (10.6%), women aged 55 and older (11.7%), and men aged 55 and older (13.7%) had relatively similar shares of part-time workers who were working part-time involuntarily.

Compared with paid employees, self-employed workers may have more control over when, and for how long they work. Yet, the involuntary part-time rate was more than twice as high among self-employed workers (5.1%) compared with employees (2.5%) in 2022, suggesting that self-employed workers face other pressures that may involuntarily limit their work hours.

Some provinces had a higher involuntary part-time rate than others. In 2022, Newfoundland and Labrador and Alberta had among the highest rates of involuntary part-time work at 3.6%, while Quebec had the lowest rate at 1.7%.

Information on the indicator

Description or definition

The **involuntary part-time work** indicator is the number of persons whose reason for working part-time in their main job is business conditions or could not find work with 30 or more hours, expressed as a percentage of the total number of persons working part-time at their main job. The article also describes the share of part-time workers who work part-time involuntarily, which provides information on the characteristics of part-time workers in different subpopulations.

Involuntary part-time work includes both workers who have, and who have not, looked for full-time work in the previous month.

Source

Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997 to 2022.

Information for interpretation

For more information on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) methodology and population coverage, please consult the [Guide to the Labour Force Survey, 2020](#).

The LFS estimates are based on a sample and are therefore subject to sampling variability. The analysis focuses on differences between estimates that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Due to rounding, estimates and percentages may differ slightly between different Statistics Canada products, such as analytical documents and data tables.

In the LFS, respondents are asked if they want to work more or less than 30 hours a week at a single job or business. Depending on their answer, the main reason for working part-time is collected.

While data on the reasons for part-time employment were also collected prior to 1997, a change in concepts and definitions introduced in January 1997 results in a break in the involuntary part-time series.

Other related information

Additional Statistics Canada data are available on the following subject:

[Reasons for part-time employment](#)