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Quality of Employment in Canada

Parental leave, 1997 to 2022

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Parental leave, 1997 to 2022

The labour force participation of mothers with young children has increased considerably over the last four decades. For example, there was a marked rise in the participation rate of mothers aged 20 to 49 with a child three years old or younger, which grew from 33.5% in 1976 to 77.1% in 2022. Over this period, new family-friendly employment policies—such as maternity/parental leaves and childcare policies—have been introduced, making it easier for women to remain employed after welcoming a child. The current analysis focuses on maternity and parental leave.

Provincial and federal labour laws in Canada guarantee employees' right to take time off from work to care for a new baby or adopted child. In 1971, mothers could access up to 15 weeks of benefits through the Employment Insurance (EI) program. Parental leave benefits were introduced in 1990, providing 10 weeks of shareable leave between the parents in addition to the 15 weeks of maternity leave. EI parental benefits were subsequently extended to 35 weeks in 2000. At the end of 2017, parents became eligible to receive extended parental benefits for a period of up to 61 weeks, totalling approximately 18 months of leave (including maternity leave) at a reduced rate, with more flexibility introduced for pregnant workers in selecting the start-date of their maternity leave.

Within the UNECE Quality of Employment framework, the parental leave indicator measures the percentage of employed parents aged 20 to 49 who are currently on full-time leave to take care of a recently born child. Since maternity and parental leave under the EI program typically covers the first year after the birth or adoption of a child, the current analysis is restricted to parents with a child under 1 year of age. As the indicator is a snapshot of the current status of parents, it should be complemented with information on whether parents have ever taken leave after the birth of their child.

All analyses are based on annual averages from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Employment Insurance Coverage Survey (EICS), with additional information taken from the General Social Survey on Family.

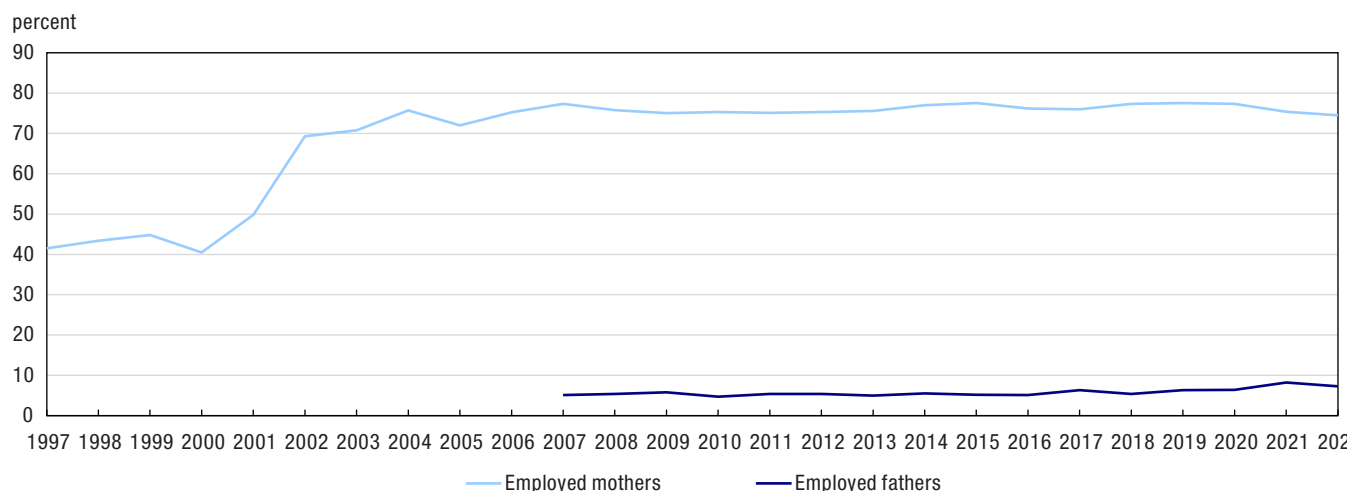
Historical trends, 1997 to 2022

In 1997, when the concept of maternity and parental leave first started to be measured in the LFS, the proportion of employed mothers with a child under the age of 1 who were on maternity or parental leave during a given month was 41.5% on average.¹ This proportion rose markedly in the early 2000s, reaching a high of 77.3% by 2007. This upward trend coincided with changes to the national EI program that increased the number of weeks of paid parental leave from 10 to 35 weeks in 2000 and with the introduction of Quebec's own provincially-funded parental insurance plan in 2006. The proportion of new working mothers with a child under the age of 1 on maternity or parental leave has remained in the 75% to 78% range since then.

According to data from the LFS, the average proportion of employed fathers of a child under the age of 1 who were on parental leave has remained below 9% since 2007, the first year when LFS data on fathers on parental leave became available. While an average of 1 in 17 employed fathers with a child under 1 were absent from their job due to parental leave, a larger proportion took leave at some point after the birth or adoption of a child. According to [data from the 2017 General Social Survey on Family](#), from 2012 to 2017, 7 in 10 fathers took leave of some type after the birth or adoption of their child. Over the same period, 9 in 10 mothers took leave for their child.

1. The Labour Force Survey does not distinguish between absences due to a maternity or parental leave.

Chart 1
Proportion (%) of employed parents aged 20 to 49 with a child under 1 year old on maternity or parental leave by sex, 1997 to 2022



Notes: Data on maternity and parental leave for mothers became available in the LFS in 1997. Comparable data for fathers became available in 2007. 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.

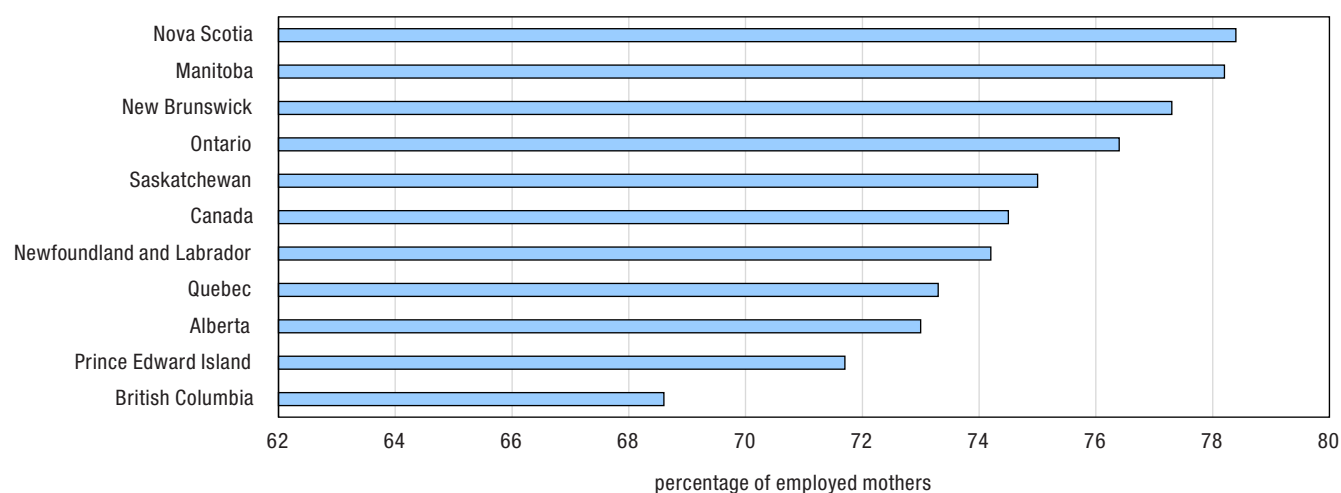
At 7.2%, the proportion of self-employed women with a child under 1 on maternity or parental leave in 1997 was notably lower than for those who were employees, at 46.4%. Still, the proportion of self-employed women on maternity or parental leave has trended up over time, reaching 22.0% in 2022. Since 2011, self-employed workers can opt into the EI Program and receive maternity and parental benefits when they become parents.²

A recent snapshot

The share of employed parents aged 20 to 49 with a child under 1 on maternity or parental leave varies by province. In 2022, Nova Scotia (78.4%) and Manitoba (78.2%) had relatively high proportions of employed mothers on leave, while British Columbia had one of the lowest (68.6%). Although Quebec has historically maintained one of the highest shares of working mothers with a child under 1 year on leave, in 2022 the proportion of employed mothers on leave stood at 73.3% on average in the province. Among fathers, however, the historical trend held steady, with Quebec (11.7%) recording one of the highest proportions of working fathers on parental leave in 2022, above the national average of 7.3%.

2. Since 2006, the province of Quebec has its own Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), which includes higher benefit rates, coverage of the self-employed, and a five-week non-transferable leave for fathers.

Chart 2
Proportion (%) of employed mothers aged 20 to 49 with a child under 1 year old on maternity or parental leave by province, 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.

In 2022, among Indigenous people living off-reserve in the provinces, 60.3% of employed First Nations mothers aged 20 to 49 with a child younger than 1 reported being on maternity or parental leave, and 61.1% of employed Métis mothers reported being on either maternity or parental leave on average.

The proportion of mothers aged 20 to 49 taking maternity or parental leave also varied by immigrant status. In 2022, among employed Canadian-born mothers with a child under 1 year, 76.3% were on maternity or parental leave on average. In contrast, 69.0% of employed mothers who were immigrants to Canada were on leave. Among working fathers with a child less than 1 year, 7.9% of those born in Canada and 6.4% of immigrants were on parental leave.

Among racialized groups in Canada, employed Black (77.4%), Chinese (73.1%), and South Asian (73.0%) mothers with a child under 1 were among the most likely to report being on maternity or parental leave on average in 2022. Employed Arab mothers—who had one of the lowest overall labour force participation rates among racialized women—were among the least likely to report being on leave in 2022 (48.4%), suggesting that they are more likely to remain outside or leave the labour force rather than opt for maternity or parental leave.

To complement data from the LFS and GSS, the [Employment Insurance Coverage Survey \(EICS\)](#) provides information on access to EI benefits among parents. In 2021, of all new parents with a child aged 18 months or less who had insurable employment, 92.1% received maternity or parental benefits since the birth of their child. For insured parents in Quebec, which provides separate maternity and parental benefits through the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP), virtually all received benefits (99.8%). In comparison, of all parents insured under the EI program in the remaining Canadian provinces, 89.3% received benefits.

Among spouses or partners, 42.2% had claimed or intended to claim parental benefits in 2021 according to the EICS. However, excluding the province of Quebec, the proportion of spouses or partners who claimed parental benefits in 2021 was 29.9%. In Quebec, the proportion of partners who claimed benefits in 2021 was 76.6%.

In addition to maternity and parental benefits available through the EI and QPIP programs, certain employers offer additional benefits for new parents. LFS data show that in 2022, 55.7% of employed women aged 20 to 49 reported that they had access to employer-provided maternity or parental benefits, while 51.8% of their male counterparts reported that they also had access to parental benefits through their employer.

Information on the indicator

Description or definition

The **parental leave** indicator is the number of employed parents aged 20 to 49 who have a child under 1 year of age and are on maternity or parental leave, expressed as a percentage of all employed parents with a child under 1.

Since the LFS does not distinguish between absences due to a maternity or parental leave, the two reasons were combined into one.

Source

Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997 to 2022.

Statistics Canada, Employment Insurance Coverage Survey, 2021.

Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Family, 2017.

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](#).

Detailed information on concepts and methodology are also available for the [General Social Survey: Family](#) and the [Employment Insurance Coverage Survey](#).

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.

Estimates focus on parents who live with their own children aged less than 1 year. Other children under the age of 1 who are foster children or not related to the reference person are excluded.

Other related information

Additional Statistics Canada data are available on the following subject:

[Parental leave](#)