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Quality of Employment in Canada

Long working hours, 2023

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Long working hours, 2023

In 2023, 8.2% of workers in Canada worked long hours (49 or more hours per week), a proportion which has been trending downwards since 1997. The share of workers who usually work 49 hours or more per week has remained relatively stable since the COVID-19 pandemic.

This indicator provides information on the proportion of employed persons who usually work 49 hours or more per week, that is, workers who have long working hours. The indicator covers usual hours worked at both the main and the second job (if applicable). This threshold is based on International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions,¹ and in Canada, workers under federal jurisdiction cannot work more than 48 hours under normal circumstances. Working long hours is related to different dimensions of quality of employment. It could lead to difficulties managing work-life balance and negatively impact physical and mental well-being.

This analysis demonstrates that the age and gender of workers, belonging to certain racialized groups, being self-employed, and working in certain industries are factors associated with higher rates of long hours.

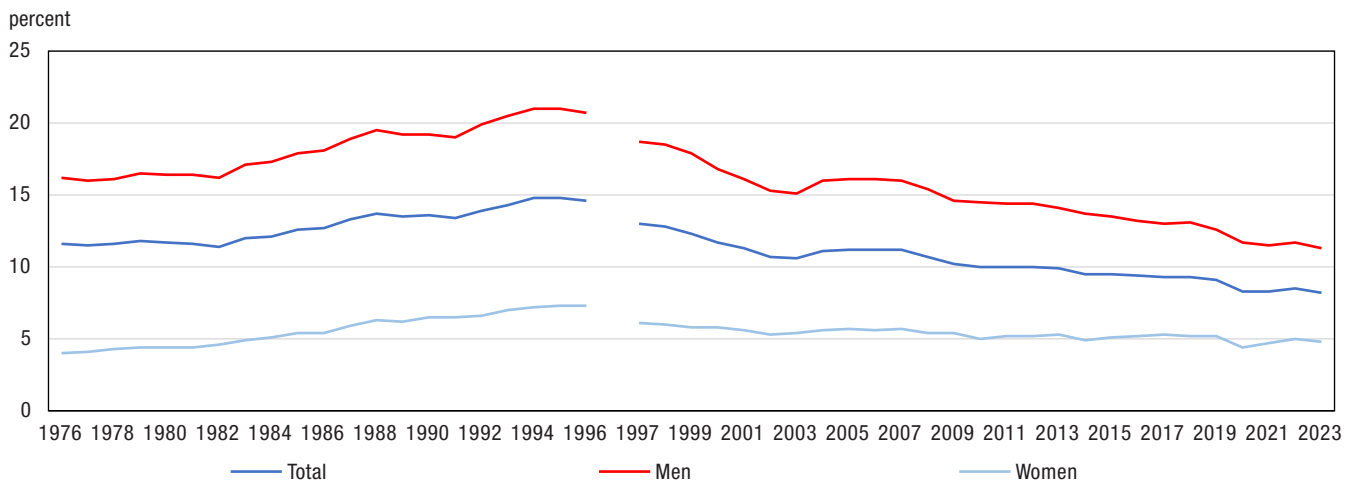
Unless otherwise noted, all analyses are based on annual averages from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and reflect the situation of workers aged 15 years and older.

Historical trends, 1976 to 2023

While data collected prior to 1997 are not directly comparable with data collected from 1997 onwards, the two time periods can be examined separately.² The percentage of workers who worked long hours was 11.6% in 1976. It then rose to a peak of 14.8% in 1994 and 1995. With the exceptions of the 2003 to 2007 period, and from 2020 to 2022, the proportion of workers with long usual hours followed a downward trend from 1997 to 2023, falling from 13.0% to 8.2%.

Chart 1

Percentage of employed persons 15 years and over who usually work 49 hours or more per week by sex, all jobs, Canada, 1976 to 2023



Note: Break in series in 1997 due to a change in the Labour Force Survey questionnaire. "All jobs" refers to the main job, and the second job if applicable. 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.

1. [C001 - Hours of Work \(Industry\) Convention, 1919 \(No. 1\)](#) and [C030 - Hours of Work \(Commerce and Offices\) Convention, 1930 \(No. 30\)](#).
2. For more information, see the "Information for interpretation" section.

The decline from 1997 to 2023 was driven by a 7.4 percentage points decrease in the proportion of employed men working long hours. Although a smaller proportion of women than men have worked long hours since 1976, the gap has narrowed over time. In 1976, 4.0% of female workers worked 49 hours or more per week, compared with 16.2% of male workers—a gap of 12.2 percentage points. By 2023, the prevalence of long hours among employed men was down 4.9 percentage points to 11.3%. Among women it changed less, rising 0.8 percentage points to 4.8% by 2023, resulting in a gap of 6.5 percentage points between the proportion of employed men and women who worked long hours in that year.

A recent snapshot

Older workers more likely to work long hours

Among the main age groups, workers aged 55 and older had the highest prevalence of long hours (9.5%) in 2023, followed by workers aged 25 to 54 (8.8%).

Young workers aged 15 to 24 remained least likely to work long hours. In 2023, 3.5% of them worked long hours, the smallest proportion among the main age groups. Younger workers are more likely to work part-time, to attend school full-time and have lower labour force participation rates.

West Asian workers were among those with the highest rates of long working hours

In 2023, West Asian workers recorded a slightly higher rate of long working hours (9.9%) compared with workers who were not racialized or Indigenous (8.3%).³ Rates of working long hours were 9.0% for South Asian workers and 8.3% for Black workers. A smaller proportion of Chinese workers had long working hours compared with workers who were not racialized or Indigenous. The share of Chinese workers who usually worked long hours was 2.6 percentage points lower than the proportion observed among non-racialized non-Indigenous workers (5.7% versus 8.3%).

A higher proportion of self-employed workers have long working hours

Although most self-employed workers worked less than 49 hours per week, they more often had long working hours compared with paid employees. While the self-employed accounted for 13.2% of all employed persons in 2023, they comprised 41.5% of those working long hours.

Over one quarter of all self-employed persons (26.0%) worked long hours in 2023 compared to 5.5% of paid employees. However, a larger proportion of self-employed men usually work long hours compared with self-employed women. In 2023, nearly one-third of self-employed men (31.5%) had long working hours compared with 16.7% of self-employed women.

Workers in Newfoundland and Labrador had higher rates of long working hours

The rate of long hours varies by province. In 2023, the prevalence of long working hours ranged from 6.0% in Quebec to 13.7% in Newfoundland and Labrador. The high rate of long hours in Newfoundland and Labrador was partly related to the higher proportion of employed persons who work in the natural resources industry—one of the industries with the highest proportions of workers who usually work 49 hours or more per week. A larger proportion of workers in Newfoundland and Labrador were working in the natural resources industry (7.0%) compared with Quebec (0.8%).

Workers in agriculture have the highest rates of long working hours

When looking at usual weekly hours in the main job only, the incidence of long hours in 2023 was highest in agriculture (33.0%), natural resources (25.3%), transportation and warehousing (17.7%), and construction (14.2%). The higher proportion of workers working long hours in those industries may partly reflect above-average rates of self-employment. Approximately half (49.6%) of workers in agriculture, 23.7% of workers in construction, and 17.1% of workers in transportation and warehousing were self-employed compared with an average of 13.2% across all industries.

3. Statistically significant at the 90% confidence level.

The incidence of long hours in the main job was among the lowest in public administration (3.4%), retail trade (4.7%), and educational services (4.8%). The public administration industry is almost exclusively composed of paid employees, and the proportion of workers who were self-employed was relatively low in retail trade (7.2%) and educational services (5.8%).

Information on the indicator

Description or definition

The **long working hours** indicator is the number of employed persons who usually work 49 hours or more per week at their main and second job (if applicable), expressed as a percentage of all employed persons.

Source

Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 to 2023.

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.

Industry coding is based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2017.

Prior to January 1997, usual hours were the number of hours usually worked by the respondent in a typical week, regardless of whether they were paid. Beginning in January 1997, usual hours for employees refers to their normal paid or contract hours, not counting any overtime. However, the definition of usual hours remains unchanged for the self-employed and unpaid family workers.

In addition, the calculation of usual hours worked for those who changed jobs during the reference week was modified. Prior to 1997, total usual hours consisted of the sum of usual hours worked at the main and second job (if applicable). After 1997, total usual hours worked for job changers refers to usual hours at the new or main job.

Other related information

Additional Statistics Canada data are available on the following subject:

[Hours of work and work arrangements](#)