

## Quality of Employment in Canada

# Days not worked due to strikes and lockouts, 2023

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# Days not worked due to strikes and lockouts, 2023

Following a period characterized by an elevated number of days not worked due to labour disputes from 1966 to 1981, the number of days not worked due to strikes or lockouts was lower and more stable, particularly after 1990. In 2023, the number of person-days not worked due to labour disputes rose to its highest level since 1986, mostly due to strikes in the educational services and public administration sectors. From 2014 to 2023, employees in the educational services industry have had the highest average number of hours lost due to labour disputes per 1,000 employees.

The number of days or hours not worked due to labour disputes can have economic and social impacts. Fewer hours worked can lead to reduced economic output, lower earnings for workers, as well as an increase in social tensions. Further, this indicator provides information on the effectiveness of social dialogue between workers' organizations, employers' organizations and governments.

Annual changes in the days not worked due to labour disputes may be affected by dynamics such as unionization rates, the number and length of collective agreements, the size of the unions involved, the duration of the disputes and economic conditions.

Two data sources are used to provide information on the number of days or hours not worked due to labour disputes.

The **average number of hours lost due to strikes or lockouts per 1,000 employees** is based on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for employees aged 15 and over. It provides information on the prevalence of hours lost due to labour disputes during an average work week.

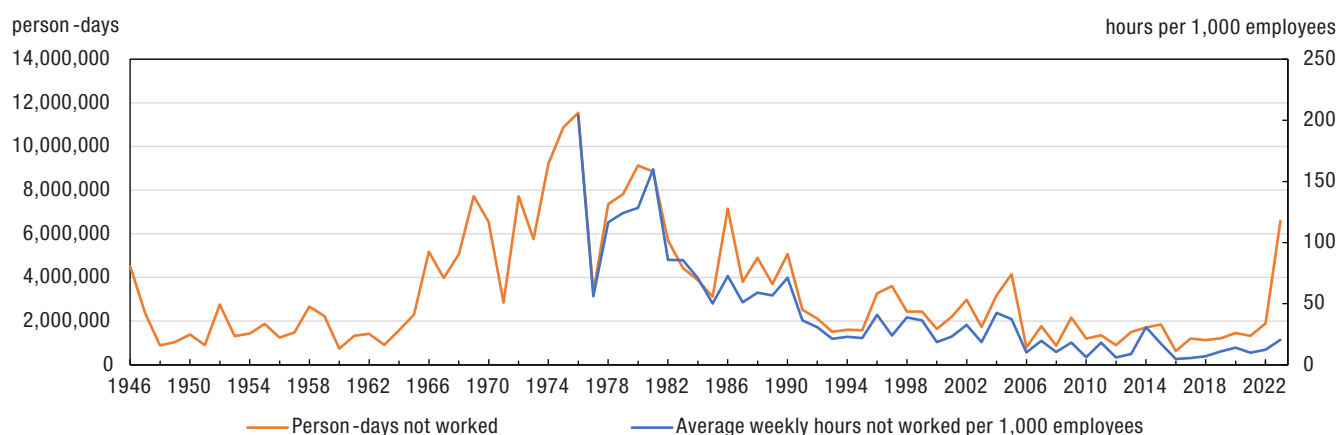
The **number of person-days not worked due to labour disputes** is another measure that can be used to examine the impacts of strikes and lockouts taking place during a calendar year. This indicator is based on information compiled by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC).

## Historical trends, 1946 to 2023

Based on data from ESDC, approximately 4.5 million person-days were not worked due to labour disputes in 1946. The number of person-days not worked remained below this level from 1947 to 1965, hovering between a high of 2.8 million in 1952 and a low of 740,000 in 1960. Industrial relations were more unstable during the following decade, and the number of person-days not worked followed a rapid upward trend from 1966, culminating in a historic high of 11.5 million person-days not worked in 1976. In October of that year, a national one-day strike was organized as part of a protest against federal wage control legislation.

### Chart 1

**Person-days and average hours not worked due to labour disputes per 1,000 employees, Canada, 1946 to 2023**



**Note:** Estimates of weekly hours not worked per 1,000 employees are based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for employees aged 15 and older and reflect the labour market situation during the LFS reference week.

**Sources:** Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, custom tabulation and author's calculations based on Statistics Canada, table 14-10-0350-01, Work stoppages in Canada, by jurisdiction and industry based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), Employment and Social Development Canada - Labour Program.

While the number of person-days not worked due to labour disputes decreased notably the following year, it trended up from 1978 to 1980, when it reached 9.1 million.

Since 1981, the number of days not worked due to labour disputes declined notably from 1982 to 1991, with the number of person-days not worked stabilizing at a lower level from 1991 to 2022. However, in the context of a rapid increase in the cost of living in 2022 and 2023, person-days not worked due to labour disputes spiked to 6.6 million in 2023, the highest level since 1986. Most of the increase was due to the education, health and social services,<sup>1</sup> as well as public administration sectors.

The number of hours lost per 1,000 employees in an average work week has generally followed a similar trend since 1976, showing reduced lost hours among employees in the 1990s and 2000s compared with the 1970s and 1980s.

The prevalence of lost hours due to labour disputes has evolved differently by industry. From 1976 to 1985, the industries with the highest average number of hours lost per 1,000 employees were natural resources (384.4), utilities (249.0) and manufacturing (217.2). By 2014-2023, the average number of hours lost had declined markedly, to 30.5 in natural resources, 10.6 in utilities and 12.5 in manufacturing.

The number of hours lost per 1,000 employees also declined from its 1976-1985 average in educational services (from 143.8 to 73.4). However, from 2014 to 2023, employees in the sector had the highest average number of hours lost per 1,000 employees, followed by natural resources, and transportation and warehousing (18.6).

### A recent snapshot

#### Recent increases in the prevalence of lost hours due to labour disputes mostly driven by the public sector

Alongside the rise in the total number of person-days not worked due to strikes or lockouts in 2023, the likelihood for an average employee to lose work hours also increased. During an average work week, 20.4 hours were lost due to labour disputes per 1,000 employees in 2023, the highest level since 2014.

In 2023, an average of 54.4 hours were lost per 1,000 employees in the public sector compared with 9.4 in the private sector. Since the late 1990s, employees in the public sector have been generally more likely to lose hours due to labour disputes. As noted in the article "[Collective bargaining coverage rate, 2023](#)", the proportion of employees who are unionized is higher in the public sector compared with the private sector.

#### Women tended to lose more hours due to labour disputes in 2023

Largely due to the higher concentration of female employees in educational services, and in the public sector more generally, during an average work week, female employees lost more hours due to strikes or lockouts (25.0 hours per 1,000 employees) compared with men (15.8) in 2023. From 1976 to 2000, the average number of hours lost due to labour disputes was notably higher among male employees. Since then, there have been smaller differences in the average number of hours lost per 1,000 employees between men and women. While the average number of hours lost has been slightly higher among male employees in most years during the 2000 to 2024 period, female employees recorded more hours lost per 1,000 employees in 2014, 2015, and 2023.

1. Reflects the combination of educational services and health care and social assistance based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

### Information on the indicator

#### Description or definition

The **days not worked due to strikes and lockouts** indicator measures annual changes in the number of hours or days not worked due to labour disputes. Two measures are used to analyse the indicator:

1. The **number of hours lost due to labour disputes per 1,000 employees** during an average work week, based on Labour Force Survey (LFS) data for employees aged 15 and older.
2. The **number of person-days not worked due to labour disputes** during the calendar year based on data compiled by ESDC.

#### Source

Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1976 to 2023.

Statistics Canada, [Table 14-10-0350-01 Work stoppages in Canada, by jurisdiction and industry based on the North American Industry Classification System \(NAICS\), Employment and Social Development Canada - Labour Program.](#)

#### 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.

Many variables from the LFS reflect the activities carried out by workers during a specific reference week. As such, LFS estimates of hours lost due to labour disputes are representative of an average work week and do not capture all hours lost due to strikes or lockouts during the calendar year.

In the LFS, hours not worked due to labour disputes are one of the many reasons for absences from work that are collected for both part- and full-week absences. For those absent for the full week as a result of labour disputes, hours lost reflect employees' usual hours of work at their main job, while for those absent for part of the week, a variable capturing the number of hours of absence is used.

Data on strikes and lockouts are compiled by the Labour Program at ESDC and reflect labour disputes with a minimum of 10 person-days not worked. For more information on the methodology and concepts, see the [Technical Notes](#).

The industry coding is based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). LFS data from 1987 to 2023 are based on NAICS 2017, while those from 1976 to 1986 are based on NAICS 2002. The data compiled by ESDC are organized into 11 sectors restructured from NAICS 2002.

#### Other related information

Additional Statistics Canada data are available on the following subjects:

[Workplace health and work absences](#)

[Unionization and industrial relations](#)