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Insights on Canadian Society

How are young Canadian university graduates faring in the recent labour market?



by Darcy Hango, Sylvie Brunet and André Bernard

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INSIGHTS ON CANADIAN SOCIETY



How are young Canadian university graduates faring in the recent labour market?

by **Darcy Hango, Sylvie Brunet** and **André Bernard**

Overview of the study

This study looks at how young Canadians aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher who were not in school were faring in the recent labour market, compared with earlier periods. Using annual data from the Labour Force Survey, it tracks full-time permanent work, wages, job coverage by collective bargaining agreements, pension coverage and overqualification. It also explores gender differences and the impact of having young children on employment outcomes.

- In 2025, 69% of young adults aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher worked in permanent, full-time positions. This percentage was slightly below the recent peak recorded during the late stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when labour market conditions were especially tight, but higher than both pre-pandemic and longer-term historical averages.
- The average hourly wage of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher in 2025 ($39.18) was higher than that of young adults with a trades certificate or diploma ($34.71), a diploma or certificate from a community college, CEGEP or equivalent ($31.39), a high school diploma ($28.77), or less than a high school diploma ($26.97). However, young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher have experienced modest real wage growth (i.e., adjusted for inflation) in recent years.
- Men with a bachelor's degree or higher were slightly more likely to work in permanent, full time jobs than women, although the gender gap has narrowed since 2006. A gender wage gap persisted, since men consistently earned more per hour on average than women, and the gap has not narrowed in the past two decades.
- Among parents aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher, having a young child at home reduced the likelihood of working in permanent, full-time positions for women, but not for men. However, this gender gap has narrowed, largely because the employment rates of mothers have increased.

Introduction

Canadians with a bachelor's degree or higher levels of education have traditionally fared well in the labour market. Their degrees typically lead to better employment options, such as higher-paying and more secure jobs, and occupations that more closely match their skills and training.[1]

In recent years, a cooling labour market and higher rates of youth unemployment, as well as disruptions associated with technological transformation and other sources of uncertainty, have raised concerns about the difficulties that young graduates are facing in the labour market.[2,3]

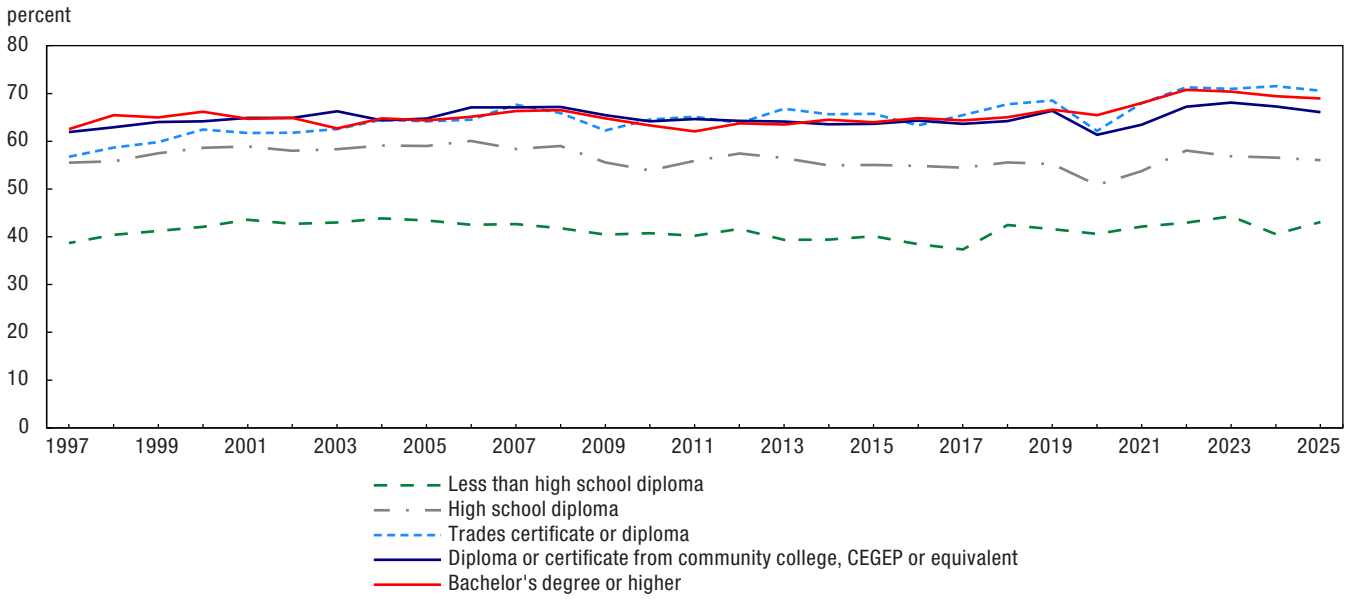
Within this current context, annual data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) are used to understand early employment outcomes for recent[4] graduates aged 25 to 34 with at least a bachelor's degree who are not currently in school. A range of labour market indicators are examined, including employment in permanent, full-time positions; average hourly wages; union and pension coverage; and incidence of overqualification. These indicators are meant to capture not only the likelihood of holding a job, but also various aspects of quality of employment.

Examining these measures over time is important for policy makers to assess the extent to which graduates are transitioning into roles that fully leverage their skills or facing barriers that may hinder career development. Understanding job quality is also important for evaluating how effectively the labour market is supporting university graduates as they transition from education into meaningful careers. For university-educated young adults, early employment experiences shape not only their economic prospects, but also their long-term engagement, development and ability to fully apply their skills.[5]

The share of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher in permanent, full-time positions has decreased slightly since 2022

For young adults, postsecondary education, including holding a university degree, continues to be associated with a higher likelihood of working in permanent, full-time positions. Despite a slight downward trend from the recent late pandemic peak in 2022, there is little evidence that this advantage has eroded substantially in recent years (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Proportion of non-students aged 25 to 34 employed in permanent, full-time positions, by educational attainment, 1997 to 2025



Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
Results for "some postsecondary education" and "university certificate below bachelor's level" are not shown.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1997 to 2025.

In 2025, 69% of young adults aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher worked in permanent, full-time positions. This was slightly below the share for those with a trades certificate or diploma (71%) but higher than the share for young adults with lower levels of education, most notably those with a high school diploma (56%) or less than a high school diploma (43%).

Recently, the share of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher working in full-time, permanent positions has followed a slight downward trend, from a peak of 71% in 2022 during the late stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, when labour market conditions were especially tight, to 69% in 2024 and 2025. However, the percentage in 2025 remained above both the pre-pandemic average from 2017 to 2019 (65%) and the historical average since 1997 (66%).

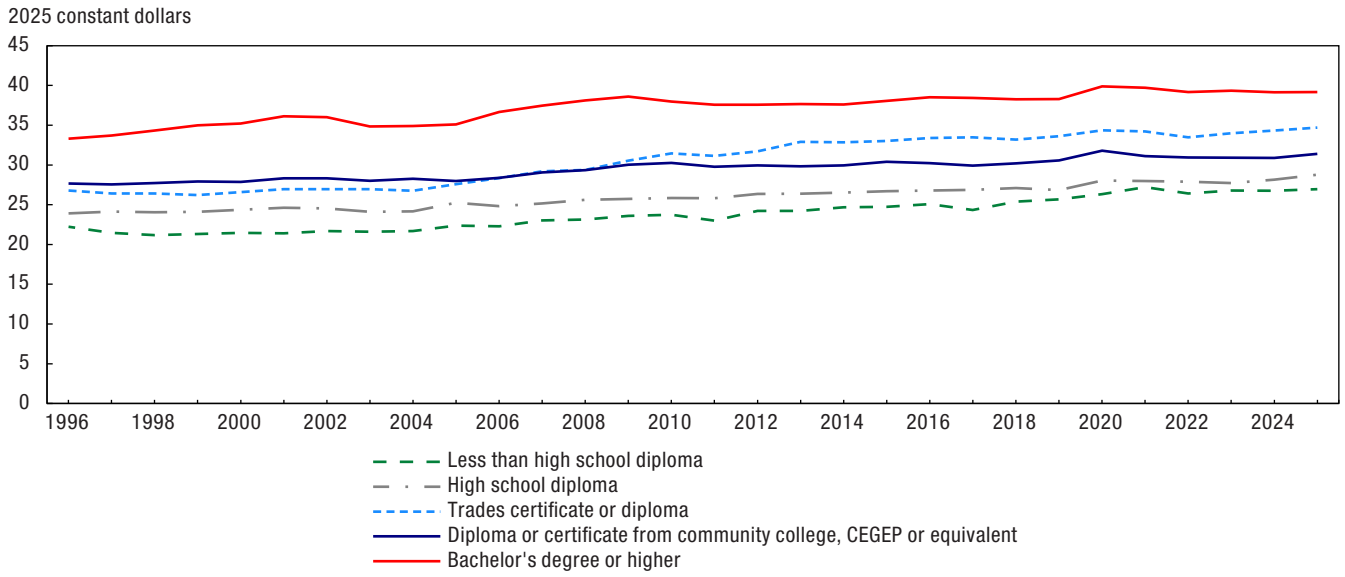
Young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher continue to earn more than their counterparts with other levels of education, but recent growth has been modest

Average hourly wages have remained consistently higher for recent graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher not currently in school (expressed in 2025 constant dollars) than for those with other levels of education over the study period. In 2025, the average hourly wage of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher ($39.18) was greater than that of young adults with a trades certificate or diploma ($34.71); a diploma or certificate from a community college, CEGEP or equivalent ($31.39); a high school diploma ($28.77); and less than a high school diploma ($26.97).

For young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher, wages rose in the early pandemic period, before easing slightly by 2025 (Chart 2). Wages in 2025 remained slightly above pre-pandemic levels, indicating that many of the gains have been sustained.

However, the broader pattern over time is one of modest growth, rather than strong upward movement. In recent years, real wage gains for young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher have been limited. Given the rapid increases in housing costs experienced by many young adults, such limited real wage growth in recent years may have translated into greater financial vulnerability for many university-educated young adults.[6]

Chart 2
Average hourly inflation-adjusted wages among non-students aged 25 to 34, by educational attainment, 1996 to 2025



Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
Results for "some postsecondary education" and "university certificate below bachelor's level" are not shown.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 1996 to 2025.

The proportion of men and women entering different fields of study continues to influence earnings

While the majority of university graduates have completed bachelor's programs,[7] the fields of study vary between men and women. From the 2017/2018 academic year to the 2023/2024 academic year, approximately 20% of women graduating with a bachelor's degree were from STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), while 80% were from BHASE fields (business, humanities, health, arts, social science and education). During the same period, 40% of men graduating with a bachelor's degree were from STEM fields and 60% from BHASE fields.

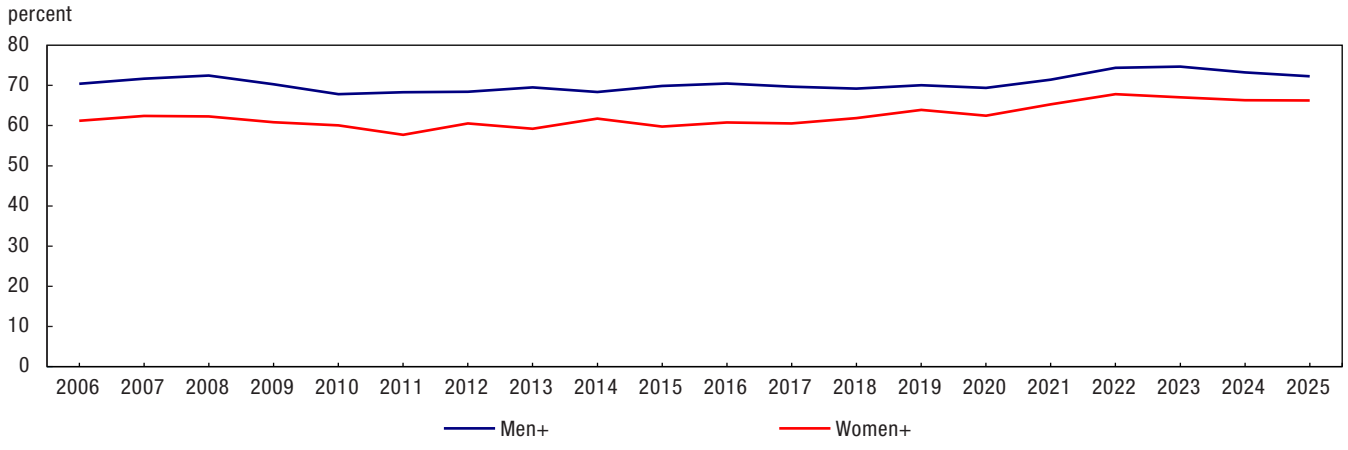
The field of study chosen by graduates influences the occupations they enter[8] and the employment income they receive upon joining the labour market.[9] Two years after completing their bachelor's degree, women from all fields of study reported a median income of $59,100 in 2024, while men reported a higher median income of $65,600. This difference could not be attributed to the STEM–BHASE split alone. Men who had graduated from STEM fields reported a median income of $74,500, while those from the BHASE field business and administration, the most popular field of study among men, earned $64,800. In contrast, women who had studied in STEM fields earned a median income of $58,200, while those from the BHASE field social and behavioural sciences, the most popular among women, earned $49,200.

Women with a bachelor's degree or higher have seen modest gains in permanent, full-time positions and in average hourly wages

In 2025, 72% of men and 66% of women aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher were in permanent, full-time positions. For both men and women, these shares were slightly lower than in 2022 and 2023, but they remained above pre-pandemic averages (Chart 3).

A gender employment gap favouring men persisted throughout the study period. However, it narrowed somewhat over time, largely reflecting stronger employment gains among women, including

Chart 3
Proportion of non-students aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher employed in permanent, full-time positions, by gender, 2006 to 2025



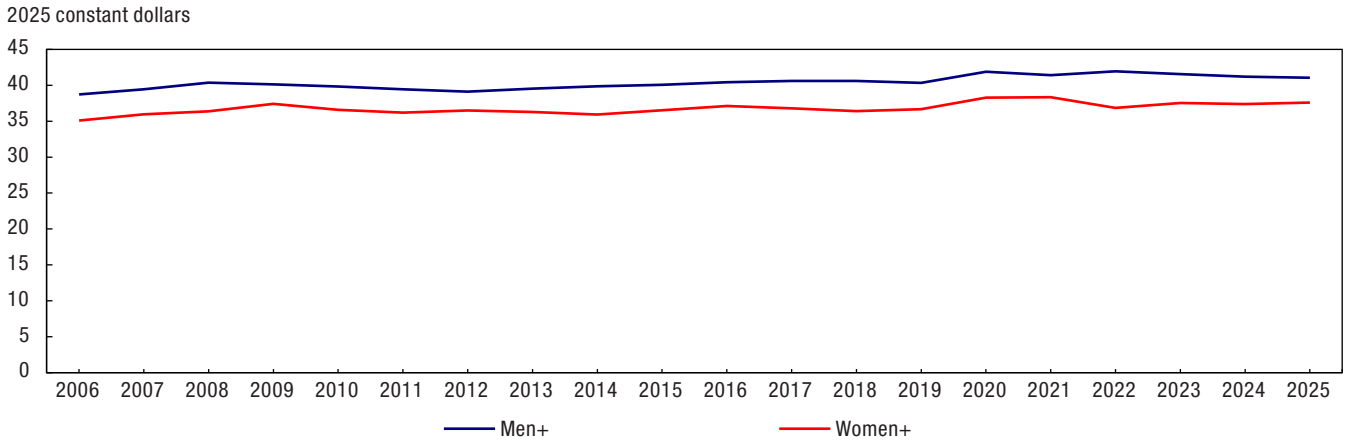
Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary people, while the category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary people. Before 2022, the Labour Force Survey collected information on the sex of a person (male or female). The sex variable before 2022 and the two-category gender variable since 2022 are combined in this table. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2006 to 2025.

among women with young children (see the text box "Presence of young children and employment outcomes among young university graduates").

Moreover, real wage growth has been modest in recent years for both men and women aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher (Chart 4). For men, inflation-adjusted average hourly wages rose 1.8% from 2019 to 2025, while for women, they increased 2.5%.

As with employment in full-time permanent positions, a persistent gender wage gap favouring men was observed over the study period, but notably, the wage gap between women and men did not narrow during this period. In 2025, young women aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher who were not in school earned on average $0.92 for every dollar earned by men. This was virtually identical to the average wage gap recorded from 1997 to 2025 ($0.91).

Chart 4
Average hourly inflation-adjusted wages among non-students aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher, by gender, 2006 to 2025



Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary people, while the category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary people. Before 2022, the Labour Force Survey collected information on the sex of a person (male or female). The sex variable before 2022 and the two-category gender variable since 2022 are combined in this table. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2006 to 2025.

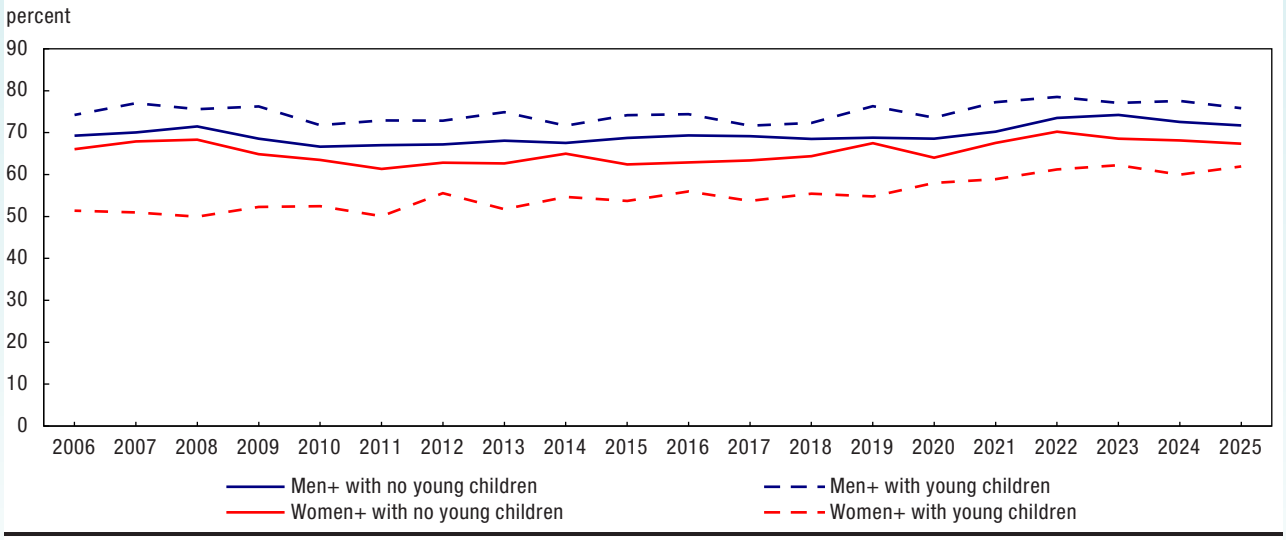
Presence of young children and employment outcomes among young university graduates

The current study focuses on people aged 25 to 34, a life stage during which childbearing is more likely to occur. In turn, the presence of children often impacts labour force participation and employment outcomes.[10] While men's involvement in unpaid child care has increased over the past decades, women still carry out the bulk of child care—and, as a result, their careers are more often affected than those of men.[11,12]

According to the LFS, women university graduates with a child aged 6 or younger in the home were less likely to work in permanent, full-time jobs,[13] while this difference was not observed among men (Chart 5).[14] However, the gender gap has narrowed over the past few decades. For example, the difference in the percentage of university graduates employed in permanent, full-time positions between men and women with young children was about 26 percentage points in 2007 and has since narrowed to 14 percentage points in 2025.[15]

The narrowing of this gap may be related to child care policies that offer young parents, especially mothers, greater opportunities to participate more fully in the labour market.[16] For example, evidence from Quebec shows that lower child care costs have increased the labour force participation of mothers.[17] There was virtually no difference between the proportions of university-educated women with and without children working in permanent, full-time positions in Quebec (both at about 67% in 2025). In contrast, in the rest of Canada, a lower proportion of women with young children were employed in permanent, full-time positions than women without children.

Chart 5
Proportion of non-students aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher employed in permanent, full-time positions, by gender and the presence of at least one young child in the home, 2006 to 2025



Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
The presence of young children in the home was defined as having at least one child aged 6 years or younger.
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary people, while the category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary people. Before 2022, the Labour Force Survey collected information on the sex of a person (male or female). The sex variable before 2022 and the two-category gender variable since 2022 are combined in this table. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2006 to 2025.

Quality of employment for young university graduates remains relatively stable

While early career roles can offer valuable experience, they may also come with challenges, such as limited benefits. In contrast, positions that offer stronger protections—such as unionized jobs that include pension benefits[18]—tend to provide greater stability, fairer working conditions and more reliable long-term supports.[19] Meanwhile, education–occupation mismatch represents a broader economic loss, because the economy is not fully benefiting from the available human capital, leading to an inefficient allocation of skilled labour.[20]

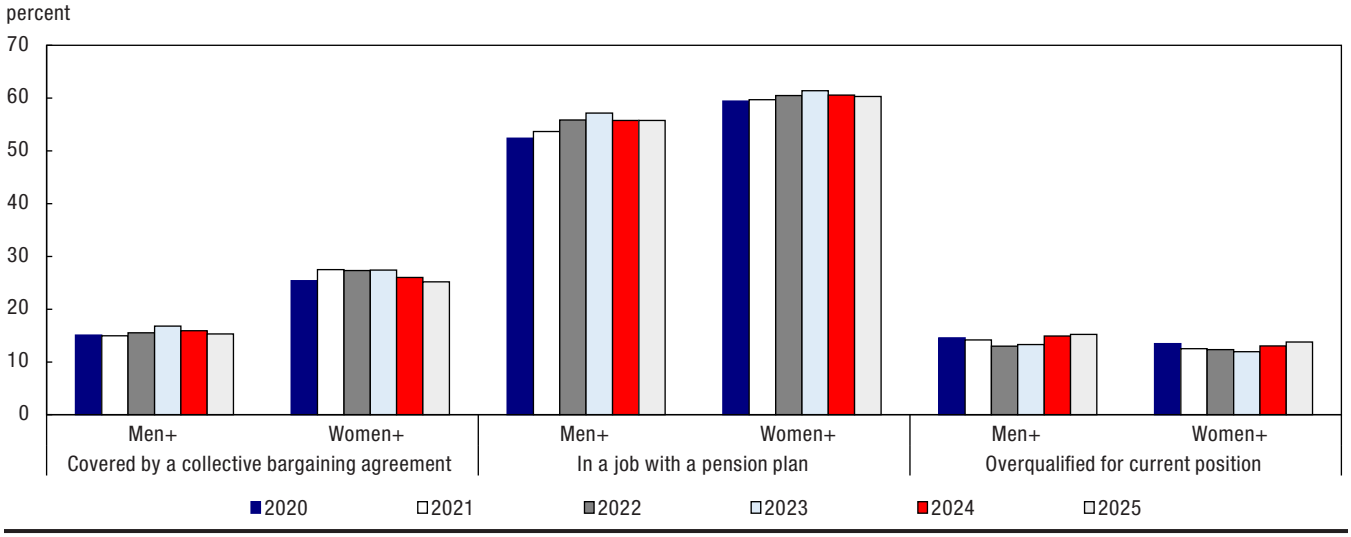
Therefore, it is important to examine selected aspects of employment quality among young adults aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher. In this study, three measures are considered: the proportion of people covered by a collective bargaining agreement, the percentage of jobs with an employer-sponsored pension plan and the share of people in jobs that usually require no postsecondary education (Chart 6).

The recent period was characterized by relative stability with respect to these indicators, except for union coverage. In 2025, among young adults aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher, 25% of women and 15% of men were covered by a collective bargaining agreement. These proportions varied little in recent years but had decreased from high levels of coverage in 2009 for women (at 33%) and in 2008 for men (at 19%). The higher rates for women are largely driven by a higher concentration of women with a bachelor's degree or higher working in occupations that are more likely to be covered by collective bargaining agreements (such as health care, teaching and government).

Meanwhile, the share of young adults with a bachelor's degree or higher in jobs that offer a pension plan has increased slightly since 2020 (the first year for which this information is available in the LFS), particularly among men. In 2025, 60% of women and 56% of men had an employer-sponsored pension plan. Across all years, women maintained a modestly higher coverage rate than men.

In 2025, 15% of men and 14% of women aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher were deemed "overqualified" for their job, meaning they were in jobs that usually require no postsecondary education. These shares have fluctuated marginally over the years, with no clear trend.[21]

Chart 6
Proportion of non-students aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher who were covered by a collective bargaining agreement, participated in a pension plan or were overqualified, by gender, 2020 to 2025



Notes: Full-time and part-time students were excluded from the analysis.
A person is overqualified if they have a bachelor's degree or higher and are working in an occupation that typically requires a high school diploma or less, or short on-the-job training. This refers to occupations in Training, Education, Experience and Responsibilities (TEER) categories 4 or 5 in the National Occupational Classification 2021.
Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. The category "Men+" includes men, as well as some non-binary people, while the category "Women+" includes women, as well as some non-binary people. Before 2022, the Labour Force Survey collected information on the sex of a person (male or female). The sex variable before 2022 and the two-category gender variable since 2022 are combined in this table. Although sex and gender refer to two different concepts, the introduction of gender is not expected to have a significant impact on data analysis and historical comparability, given the small size of the transgender and non-binary populations.
Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2020 to 2025.

Conclusion

This study used annual LFS data to examine how young Canadians aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher are faring in the recent labour market. The findings show that holding a university degree continues to provide an advantage in the labour market, with limited evidence that this advantage has eroded over time. For example, graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher are consistently more likely to have better access to permanent, full-time work and higher average hourly wages, compared with other levels of education.

The past five years have also been characterized by relative stability in quality of employment. There was little variation in the proportion of workers in jobs covered by a collective bargaining agreement or an employer-sponsored pension plan. Likewise, the proportion of young degree holders who are overqualified for their job has also remained relatively consistent.

However, the advantage of holding a university degree is not uniformly distributed. Permanent, full-time work rates remain slightly higher for men than women, but the gap between men and women has narrowed since 2006. A gender wage gap also persists among young graduates with a bachelor's degree or higher—a gap that has not narrowed in recent years.

Parenthood remains a key source of inequality. Young children have a detrimental effect on the employment of women in permanent, full-time positions, and although the gap has narrowed, mothers still face more barriers to stable work.

At the same time, gains in terms of real (inflation-adjusted) wages among young women and men with a bachelor's degree or higher in recent years have been modest. In the context of rising housing costs, especially among young people, such limited growth may translate into greater financial vulnerability.

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Data sources, methods and definitions

The analysis is based on data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is a monthly survey of approximately 65,000 households, resulting in labour data for well over 100,000 individuals. Data in this study are based on annual averages of the monthly LFS data.

The target population of the LFS includes all people aged 15 years and older whose usual place of residence is in Canada,[22] including people born in Canada, landed immigrants and non-permanent residents. Non-permanent residents are those with a work or study permit and their families, asylum claimants, protected persons, and related groups.

Most LFS indicators have been available since 1976, including labour force status, occupation and most sociodemographic characteristics. Information related to wages and union coverage has been available since 1997, while questions on employment benefits, including pension benefits, were added in 2020. Although information on educational attainment is available for all years, the LFS does not collect information on field of study.

The proportion of people employed full time in permanent positions refers to those who were employees during the LFS week; usually worked 30 hours or more; and reported that their job was permanent, as opposed to temporary, contract, term, seasonal or casual. Hourly wages refer to the usual hourly earnings of employees.

Notes

1. Morissette, 2021.
2. Aragão, 2025; Spiteri and Adkins-Hackett, 2024; Layton et al., 2025; Morissette, 2021.
3. Norman et al., 2025; Statistics Canada, 2025 (October 10).
4. The average age of bachelor's degree completion from 2000 to 2020 was around age 25 or 26 (Statistics Canada, 2024), so by choosing ages 25 to 34, we are assuming that respondents who state that their highest level of education is a bachelor's degree or higher are relatively recent graduates.
5. Nelson and Yang, 2025.
6. Statistics Canada, 2025b; Gauthier and McCormack, 2024.
7. Statistics Canada, 2025 (November 20); Statistics Canada, 2025c.
8. Statistics Canada, 2025 (October 16).
9. Statistics Canada, 2026 (June 24); Statistics Canada, 2026.
10. The average age at first birth is increasing in Canada and was 29 in 2019 (Statistics Canada, 2020). Data on age at first birth by education level are not available for Canada, but recent data from the United States showed that the mean age at first birth increases with successive education levels (see Westrick-Payne and Manning, 2025).
11. Statistics Canada, 2022 (November 8); Stechyson, 2025; Battams, 2024.
12. Frank and Frenette, 2021.
13. Using age 6 and younger helps to measure respondents with children before they enter the school system. Given the age of respondents in this sample (25 to 34 years), it is expected that if a child is present they will be young. For instance, the average age of the youngest child is around 2. Alternative estimates were derived using different age cut points, but the results do not change appreciably. It is also important to note that women on maternity leave are considered to be employed in LFS data.
14. Brunet (2018) similarly found that higher rates of women not in employment, education or training (NEET; specifically those not seeking employment) were associated with motherhood, while the NEET rates for men were not affected by the presence of children.
15. A longer-term look back to the late 1990s reveals that the gender gap in permanent, full-time employment among men and women aged 25 to 34 with a bachelor's degree or higher who have young children has been steadily narrowing, peaking at 31 percentage points in 1999.
16. These results are not shown and are available upon request.
17. Simintzi et al., 2025; St-Cerny et al., 2012.
18. Morissette, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2025a; UNECE, 2015.
19. See recent research by Brunet et al., 2024; Galarneau et al., 2023; Beauregard et al., 2025.
20. See Summerfield, 2022; Schimmele and Hou, 2024.
21. These results based on longer-term trends are available upon request.
22. People living on reserves, full-time members of the regular Armed Forces and people living in institutions are excluded from the survey target population. These groups together represent an exclusion of approximately 2% of the population aged 15 and older.

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