

Reports on Disability and Accessibility in Canada

Examining work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities

by Diana Simionescu and Skyla Baroud

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On June 5, 2026, an error was corrected in the statement of the conclusion on overqualification among employed persons with disabilities. The estimate was revised from nearly one in three (30.3%) to around one in three (34.0%) to align with the data presented in the table.

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Examining work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities

by **Diana Simionescu** and **Skyla Baroud**

Introduction

Canada's economic and labour market landscape is undergoing notable change. Demographic trends, including population aging and declining birth rates, alongside recent instability across industries dependent on exports, are placing pressure on workforce capacity (Clark & Fields, 2025; Vézina et al., 2024; Statistics Canada, 2025). At the same time, technological developments and evolving workplace practices are reshaping the nature of work and the skills required for labour market participation (Mehdi & Morissette, 2024; Schimmele et al., 2024; Statistics Canada, 2023). Within this context, changes in labour force participation rates have implications for both employers, in terms of finding workers with the right skillset, and for workers, in terms of their ability to find suitable employment.

Recent research has examined employment outcomes associated with the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce (Jurado-Caraballo & Quintana-García, 2025). This body of literature demonstrates a range of positive organizational and economic outcomes, including higher employee retention, stronger workplace morale, enhanced organizational reputation and various economic outcomes benefiting both employees and employers (Aichner, 2021; Hartnett et al., 2011).

Despite the benefits of greater inclusion of persons with disabilities in the workforce, persons with disabilities are less likely to participate in the labour market than persons without disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2025). Specifically, although persons with disabilities represent a substantial and growing share of Canada's working-age population (aged 25 to 64 years), their employment rates remain lower than for those without disabilities (Vergara & Hardy, 2025). A range of factors—including structural barriers, workplace practices and access to accommodations—have been identified as contributing to underrepresentation in the workforce (Nevala et al., 2015; Statistics Canada, 2025).

Persons with disabilities who are not employed may represent an underutilized resource within the labour market. Previous research has provided an overview of the total size of the potential labour force among persons with disabilities under the scenario of an inclusive labour market without discrimination, with full accessibility and accommodation (Hébert et al., 2024). Among those with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years who were not employed in 2022, two in five (42%) could be considered as having work potential. Furthermore, persons who are overqualified for their position, as a result of a mismatch between education and employment, may also represent underutilized resources within the labour market. Exploring the characteristics of those who are underemployed can also help inform strategies for employment and economic inclusion.

This paper aims to explore different forms of underrepresentation in the labour market among persons with disabilities: persons with work potential and those who are overqualified for their current job. Those with work potential are defined as those who are not currently employed, but are likely to enter paid employment under the circumstances of a labour market with full accessibility and accommodation. The qualification status of individuals will be divided into those who are overqualified, those who are well matched in their position and those who are underqualified. Each concept will be examined by a variety of sociodemographic and disability-related characteristics. Overqualification will also be examined across a variety of employment-related characteristics.

Data and methods

Data source

The Canadian Survey on Disability

This study used data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD), a national survey of Canadians aged 15 and over whose everyday activities are limited because of a long-term condition or health-related problem. The CSD provides comprehensive data on persons with disabilities for each province and territory. The survey also collects essential information on disability types and severity, supports for persons with disabilities, employment profiles, income, education and other disability-specific information.

The survey population for the 2022 CSD comprised Canadians aged 15 years and over as of the date of the 2021 Census of the Population (May 2021) who were living in private dwellings. It excludes those living in institutions, on Canadian Armed Forces bases, on First Nations reserves, and those living in collective dwellings.¹ Since the institutionalized population is excluded, the data should be interpreted accordingly.

The CSD uses Disability Screening Questions (DSQ), which are based on the social model of disability (Grondin, 2016). They require that a limitation in daily activities be reported for the identification of a disability—the presence of a difficulty alone is not sufficient. To identify persons with a disability, the DSQ first measure the degree to which difficulties are experienced across various domains of functioning and then ask how often daily activities are limited by these difficulties. Only persons who report a limitation in their day-to-day activities are identified as having a disability. The CSD definition of disability includes anyone who reported being “sometimes,” “often” or “always” limited in their daily activities because of a long-term condition or health problem, as well as anyone who reported being “rarely” limited if they were also unable to do certain tasks or could do them only with a lot of difficulty.²

Concepts

Work potential

Work potential is a concept used to assess the potential size of the labour force with disabilities in an inclusive, accessible and accommodating labour market. It applies to persons with disabilities who are not currently working who might be likely to enter paid employment under the best-case scenario, i.e., an inclusive labour market without discrimination, with full accessibility and accommodation. It is not an attempt to measure individuals’ capacity or ability to work. It is rather a way to examine how the labour market might change under more inclusive conditions.

The work potential concept was measured as follows: persons who were officially unemployed or who were not in the labour force but stated they would be looking for work in the next 12 months were classified as potential workers. Among the remaining respondents who were not in the labour force, those who stated they were “completely retired” or who said their condition completely prevented them from working and that no workplace accommodation existed that would enable them to work were classified as not being potential workers. Conversely, those who said that they were not completely retired and that either they were not prevented from working because of their condition or that workplace accommodations existed that would enable them to work were classified as potential workers. Work potential was not determined for individuals who could not be explicitly classified into any of the categories above because of incomplete information.

Qualification status

Overqualification can be defined in multiple ways and the results can vary depending on the approach used. In this paper, two approaches are considered: a subjective measure and an objective measure.

1. Collective dwellings include hospitals, residences for seniors, residential care facilities such as group homes for persons with a disability or an addiction, shelters, correctional and custodial facilities, lodging and rooming houses, religious establishments, Hutterite colonies, establishments offering temporary accommodation services, and other establishments. Please see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 – Collective dwelling](#) for more information.

2. An exception is persons with a developmental disability, who are identified as disabled if the respondent has been diagnosed with a developmental condition, regardless of the level of difficulty or the frequency of the activity limitation reported.

The subjective measure is presented primarily to provide contextual information and to offer an understanding of the individual respondents' own self-assessment.

In contrast, the focus of the analysis in this report will apply the objective measure of overqualification.³ This approach classifies a person's qualification status based on the relationship between the educational attainment of the individual and the educational level typically required for their occupation's training, education, experience and responsibilities (TEER) level, as defined in the National Occupational Classification (NOC).⁴ TEER categories range from 1, occupations that require the highest levels of formalized education or credentials, to 5, occupations requiring no formal education or credentials. TEER 0 includes management occupations with varying educational requirements. These positions were excluded from the analysis because they do not have standardized or formal educational requirements. Since highest level of education is a key variable in the creation of this concept, excluding TEER 0 helps reduce potential confounding in the analysis.

The population used in the creation of this concept is respondents aged 25 to 64, living in private households, who were employed at any time since January 1, 2020. For the majority of cases, the individual's data pertains to the job held during the reference week of May 2 to May 8, 2021, or if the respondent did not work during that week, it refers to the job held for the longest period since January 1, 2020. Respondents without employment in 2020 or 2021 are excluded from this concept.

Category 1: Overqualified: This category refers to individuals whose education is above what is typically required for their occupation's TEER level. This includes those with a bachelor's degree and above working in TEER 2 to 5 jobs; those with a university certificate, college diploma or apprenticeship certificate in TEER 3 to 5 jobs; or those with a high school or trades education in TEER 5 jobs. Individuals with less than a high school education are not considered overqualified because no TEER level falls below their credentials.

Category 2: Well-matched: This category refers to individuals whose education aligns with the typical requirements of their occupation's TEER level. This includes those with a bachelor's degree or higher working in TEER 1 occupations; individuals with a university certificate, college diploma, or apprenticeship certificate in TEER 2 occupations; those with a high school diploma or trades certificate in TEER 3 or 4 occupations; and those with less than a high school education in TEER 5 occupations.

Category 3: Underqualified: This category is defined as individuals whose education is below what is generally required for their occupation's TEER level. This includes those with a university certificate, college diploma, or apprenticeship certificate in TEER 1 or 2; those with a high school diploma or trades certificate in TEER 1 to 3; and those with less than a high school education in TEER 1 to 4. Note that individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher are never considered underqualified, since their education meets or exceeds the requirements for all TEER levels.

Section 1: Work potential among non-working persons with disabilities

1.1 Prevalence of work potential among non-working persons with disabilities by sociodemographic characteristics

In 2022, among persons with disabilities who were unemployed or not in the labour force, 42.0% had work potential, totaling 741,280 people in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2024). Across age groups, for persons with disabilities, youth (aged 15 to 24 years) had the highest work potential (88.7%), followed by the core working-age group (25 to 64 years) at 42.0% and seniors (aged 65 years and over) with the lowest work potential at 6.0%. Given that youth are often new to the workforce or still enrolled in school and seniors are typically at the end of their employment journey, these two groups will be excluded from the analysis. Within the working-age population, those aged 25 to 44 years (67.1%) were more likely to have work potential than those aged 45 to 64 years (30.5%) (Table 1.1).

3. This report applies a previously established method for measuring overqualification that has been used in other Statistics Canada publications: [Persistent overqualification among immigrants and non-immigrants](#), [Overqualification among 2012 and 2013 bachelor's graduates](#). However, the definition used in this report is broader than the one established in those earlier reports.

4. For more information, please see [Variant of the National Occupational Classification \(NOC\) 2021 Version 1.0 for Analysis by TEER \(Training, Education, Experience and Responsibility\) categories](#).

Table 1.1

Prevalence of work potential among non-working persons with disabilities, by select sociodemographic characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select sociodemographic characteristics	Percent	95% confidence interval	
		Lower	Upper
Overall	42.0	39.5	44.4
Age group			
25 to 44 years	67.1*	62.9	71.3
45 to 64 years (reference category)	30.5	27.6	33.4
Gender			
Men+ (reference category)	43.4	39.6	47.2
Women+	41.0	37.7	44.3
Geographic regions			
Atlantic provinces	36.4	33.7	39.2
Quebec	38.5	33.8	43.5
Ontario (reference category)	41.2	36.3	46.4
Prairie provinces	49.0*	45.5	52.5
British Columbia	47.8*	42.4	53.2
Territories	63.2*	56.7	69.2
Place of residence			
Population centre (reference category)	43.5	40.7	46.3
Rural area	35.4*	30.3	40.8
Household living arrangement			
Couple without children (reference category)	31.1	26.9	35.6
Couple with children	53.4*	48.6	58.1
Lone parent household	46.1*	39.8	52.6
Living alone	35.7	30.6	41.2
Person not in census family	41.9 ^E *	33.5	50.9
Marital status			
Single, never married (reference category)	45.4	40.9	49.9
Married or common-law	41.9	38.4	45.4
Separated, divorced, widowed	36.9*	31.0	43.2
2SLGBTQ+			
2SLGBTQ+	60.7 ^E *	51.3	69.4
Non-2SLGBTQ+ (reference category)	41.2	38.4	44.0
Immigration status			
Non-immigrant (reference category)	40.9	38.2	43.6
Immigrant	45.8	39.7	52.0
Indigenous group			
Non-Indigenous (reference category)	42.1	39.6	44.7
Indigenous	39.7 ^E	31.7	48.4
Racialized group			
Racialized, non-Indigenous	51.7 ^E *	44.6	58.8
Non-racialized, non-Indigenous (reference category)	39.9	37.1	42.7
Educational attainment			
High school diploma or less (reference category)	40.5	36.2	44.9
College or CEGEP certificate or diploma	45.0	39.4	50.8
Postsecondary certificate or diploma below bachelor level	42.3	35.6	49.2
Bachelor's degree or above	55.3*	48.9	61.5

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Work potential refers to non-working individuals who were officially unemployed, or who were not in the labour force but stated they would be looking for work in the next 12 months or those who were not in the labour force, not completely retired and either not prevented from working due to their condition, or workplace accommodations existed that would enable them to work. Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, people in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed in the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. Racialized groups is measured with the 'visible minority' variable and the 'non-racialized group' is measured with the category 'Not a visible minority' of the variable, both excluding Indigenous respondents. Indigenous respondents are not part of the racialized group, nor the non-racialized group for the purposes of this study.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Among persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, there was no significant difference in the rates of work potential between men and women. The proportion of persons with disabilities who had work potential was higher in the western regions when compared with Ontario. In the Prairie provinces, the proportion of those with work potential was 49.0%; in British Columbia, it was 47.8%; and in the territories it was 63.2%, compared with 41.2% in Ontario. Those living in rural areas (35.4%) were less likely to have work potential than those living in population centres (43.5%).

Differences in the rate of work potential were observed among the 2SLGBTQ+ and racialized populations. The proportion of racialized persons with disabilities who had work potential was higher (51.7%) than among their non-racialized and non-Indigenous counterparts (39.9%). As well, 2SLGBTQ+ persons with disabilities had higher rates of work potential (60.7%) than non-2SLGBTQ+ persons with disabilities (41.2%). Work potential did not differ significantly by Indigenous identity or immigration status.

Household living arrangements could have an influence on workforce participation, particularly arrangements involving caregiving responsibilities. Those who were part of a couple with children (53.4%) or a one-parent family (46.1%) had higher potential to work compared with couples without children (31.1%). The proportion of those with work potential was lower among those who were separated, divorced or widowed (36.9%) than among those who were single (45.4%).

Looking at educational attainment, persons with disabilities who earned a bachelor's degree or above were more likely to have work potential (55.3%) than those with a high school diploma or less (40.5%).

1.2 Prevalence of work potential among non-working persons with disabilities by disability-related characteristics

Among non-working persons with disabilities, variations emerged in the rate of work potential when examined by certain disability characteristics. As the severity level increased, the proportion of those with work potential decreased. Among persons with mild disabilities, 61.6% had work potential, followed by 52.2% of those with moderate disabilities, 40.1% of those with severe disabilities and 24.1% of those with very severe disabilities (Table 1.2). A similar pattern was observed for number of disability types. When compared with those with one disability type (61.4%), work potential was lower for those with two or three disability types (49.0%) and for those with four or more disability types (29.8%).

Table 1.2

Prevalence of work potential among non-working persons with disabilities, by select disability characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select disability characteristics	Percent	95% confidence interval	
		Lower	Upper
Type of disability			
Seeing disability			
Has a seeing disability	39.5	35.0	44.3
Does not have a seeing disability (reference category)	43.1	40.3	46.0
Hearing disability			
Has a hearing disability	38.5	32.6	44.7
Does not have a hearing disability (reference category)	42.9	40.3	45.6
Mobility disability			
Has a mobility disability	27.6*	24.6	30.9
Does not have a mobility disability (reference category)	57.0	53.3	60.6
Flexibility disability			
Has a flexibility disability	29.4*	26.4	32.5
Does not have a flexibility disability (reference category)	55.2	51.6	58.9
Dexterity disability			
Has a dexterity disability	23.6*	19.9	27.8
Does not have a dexterity disability (reference category)	47.9	44.9	50.8
Pain-related disability			
Has a pain-related disability	37.4*	34.6	40.3
Does not have a pain-related disability (reference category)	56.4	51.5	61.2
Mental health-related disability			
Has a mental health-related disability	42.8	39.4	46.3
Does not have a mental health-related disability (reference category)	40.5	36.7	44.2
Developmental disability			
Has a developmental disability	40.6	33.6	48.0
Does not have a developmental disability (reference category)	42.2	39.5	44.9
Learning disability			
Has a learning disability	39.8	35.3	44.4
Does not have a learning disability (reference category)	42.8	39.8	45.7

Table 1.2**Prevalence of work potential among non-working persons with disabilities, by select disability characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022**

Select disability characteristics	Percent	95% confidence interval	
		Lower	Upper
Memory disability			
Has a memory disability	33.9*	29.5	38.6
Does not have a memory disability (reference category)	45.2	42.2	48.3
Severity of disability			
Mild (reference category)	61.6	56.6	66.4
Moderate	52.2*	45.9	58.4
Severe	40.1*	35.4	44.9
Very severe	24.1*	20.7	27.9
Number of disability types			
One disability type (reference category)	61.4	55.6	67.0
Two or three disability types	49.0*	44.5	53.6
Four or more disability types	29.8*	26.7	33.1
Type of limitation			
Progressive	27.7*	23.5	32.3
Recurrent	50.6*	45.1	56.0
Fluctuating	49.2	43.4	55.0
Continuous (reference category)	42.8	38.5	47.1
Assistive aids or devices			
Unmet needs for assistive aids or devices	34.9*	30.4	39.5
Needs met for assistive aids or devices	39.4*	35.8	43.1
Does not need assistive aids or devices (reference category)	56.0	50.8	61.2
Barriers to accessibility			
No barriers experienced (reference category)	52.4	46.5	58.3
Lower rate of barriers experienced	44.1*	40.0	48.2
Higher rate of barriers experienced	35.9*	32.2	39.6

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Work potential refers to non-working individuals who were officially unemployed, or who were not in the labour force but stated they would be looking for work in the next 12 months or those who were not in the labour force, not completely retired and either not prevented from working due to their condition, or workplace accommodations existed that would enable them to work. People could have reported multiple disability types. Therefore, the data are based on the impact of all disability types these individuals may have. It is important to note that the questions related to barriers were asked in a general context and not specifically in relation to employment experiences. Based on the average number of barriers to accessibility experienced by persons with disabilities, which was around 6, the categories of "lower rate" and "higher rate" of barriers experienced were established. The lower rate of barriers category includes those who experienced 1 to 6 barriers, while the higher rate category includes those who experienced 7 or more barriers. Progressive limitation is when the ability to do daily activities declines over time. Recurrent limitation is when there are periods of one month or more without any limitations and the ability to do daily activities improves, remains the same or changes. Fluctuating limitations does not have any periods without limitations, but the ability to do daily activities fluctuates. For more information on the categories of dynamic disabilities, please consult the report [The Dynamics of Disability: Progressive, Recurrent or Fluctuating Limitations](#).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Looking at different disability types, those with pain-related disabilities had lower rates of work potential than those without this type of disability.⁵ Among the physical disability types, work potential was lower for those with mobility, flexibility or dexterity disabilities, compared with their counterparts without each of these disability types. Those with memory disabilities were less likely to have work potential than those without a memory disability.

Compared with those who experienced continuous limitations (42.8%), those with recurrent limitations (50.6%) were more likely to have work potential. Conversely, persons with progressive limitations (27.7%) were less likely to have work potential than those with continuous limitations.⁶

Barriers to accessibility can impact the daily activities of persons with disabilities and include difficulties with features of the physical environment, in communication, when using the Internet, and with behaviours, misconceptions or assumptions made about them from others. The rate of work potential was lower among both persons with disabilities who experienced a lower rate of barriers (44.1%) and a higher rate of barriers (35.9%), compared with those who experienced no barriers (52.4%).⁷ It is important to note that the questions related to barriers were asked in a general context and not specifically in relation to employment experiences.

5. It is important to note that people could have reported multiple disability types. Therefore, the data are based on the impact of all disability types these individuals may have.

6. Progressive limitation is when the ability to do daily activities declines over time. Recurrent limitation is when there are periods of one month or more without any limitations and the ability to do daily activities improves, remains the same or changes. Fluctuating limitations does not have any periods without limitations, but the ability to do daily activities fluctuates. For more information on the categories of dynamic disabilities, please consult the report [The Dynamics of Disability: Progressive, Recurrent or Fluctuating Limitations](#).

7. Based on the average number of barriers to accessibility experienced by persons with disabilities, which was around six, the categories of "lower rate" and "higher rate" of barriers experienced were established. The lower rate of barriers category includes those who experienced one to six barriers, while the higher rate category includes those who experienced 7 or more barriers.

When examining the use of assistive aids or devices, the work potential rate was lower for both persons with disabilities who had unmet needs (34.9%) and those without unmet needs (39.4%), when compared with those who do not use any aid (56.0%).⁸

Section 2: Prevalence of overqualification status for employed persons with disabilities

This section focuses on understanding the prevalence of overqualification among employed persons with disabilities by different demographic, disability and employment-related characteristics, using an objective measure based on the relationship between an individual's highest level of educational attainment and the skill requirements of their job, with contextual information added where relevant.

2.1 Prevalence of overqualification for employed persons with disabilities by sociodemographic characteristics

In 2022, among employed persons with disabilities, 39.3% were well matched in terms of education and occupation, 34.0% were overqualified, and 26.6% were underqualified for their current roles. A higher proportion of employed persons without disabilities (41.7%) were well matched compared with the proportion of persons with disabilities who were well matched. Similar rates were observed for overqualified (32.7%) and underqualified (25.6%) persons without disabilities when compared with persons with disabilities.

Text box 1: Subjective measure of qualification status

The majority of this section in the report focuses on developing a profile using an objective measure of qualification, derived from the relationship between an individual's highest level of educational attainment and the skill requirements of their current position. To provide additional context and contrast to these findings, it is also important to examine the subjective measure of qualification status. The subjective measure is based on self-reported data from the Canadian Survey on Disability. Respondents were asked: "Considering your experience, education and training, how qualified do you feel for the job you held last week?" The following response options were available: "overqualified," "qualified," "underqualified," and "don't know."

According to this measure, in 2022, 75.2% of employed persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 considered themselves qualified for the job they held during the reference week. An additional 19.6% reported feeling overqualified, while 1.9% reported feeling underqualified. Gender differences were also observed. Among men with disabilities, 72.5% considered themselves qualified, followed by 23.2% who felt overqualified and 1.4% who felt underqualified. Among women with disabilities, 77.2% reported feeling qualified, while 17.1% felt overqualified and 2.3% felt underqualified.

It is important to note that discrepancies may arise between the subjective and objective measures. These differences may occur if the job held during the reference week (i.e., the job respondents reported on when answering the subjective question) is not the same job used to derive the objective measure. As a result, the two measures cannot be assumed to refer to the same employment situation.

Among employed persons with disabilities who were identified as overqualified using the objective measure, several sociodemographic characteristics were examined. The proportion of the population that was overqualified differed significantly by immigrant status, racialized group and place of residence, though not by other characteristics such as gender, household composition or Indigenous identity.

8. The CSD asked a number of questions regarding needs for various personal aids, devices or technologies (e.g., canes, recording or note taking equipment, large print materials, specialized software, or architectural features in the home such as widened doorways and ramps). For more information on the complete list of assistive aids or devices, please see the [2022 CSD questionnaire](#).

Immigrant employed persons with disabilities had higher rates of overqualification (42.5%)⁹ compared with their non-immigrant counterparts (31.9%). Similarly, racialized persons with disabilities had higher rates of overqualification (41.8%) than non-racialized, non-Indigenous persons with disabilities (32.4%). When compared with those living in rural areas (28.2%), persons with disabilities living in population centres were more likely to be overqualified (35.1%).

Table 2.1

Prevalence of being overqualified for employed persons with disabilities, by select sociodemographic characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select sociodemographic characteristics	Overqualified for current role		
	percent	95% confidence interval	
Overall	34.0	32.2	35.9
Gender			
Men+ (reference category)	32.6	29.8	35.4
Women+	35.1	32.8	37.6
2SLGBTQ+			
Non-2SLGBTQ+ (reference category)	33.5	31.5	35.6
2SLGBTQ+	33.6	28.8	38.7
Racialized group			
Non-racialized, non-Indigenous (reference category)	32.4	30.4	34.5
Racialized, non-Indigenous	41.8*	36.7	47.0
Immigration status			
Non-immigrants (reference category)	31.9	30.0	33.9
Immigrants	42.5*	37.7	47.5
Indigenous group			
Non-Indigenous (reference category)	34.2	32.3	36.1
Indigenous	30.6 ^E	23.9	38.1
Geographic region			
Atlantic provinces	33.3	31.1	35.6
Quebec	30.1*	26.7	33.8
Ontario (reference category)	36.1	32.1	40.2
Prairie provinces	32.4	29.9	35.0
British Columbia	36.6	32.9	40.5
Territories	21.1*	17.3	25.6
Place of residence			
Population centre	35.1*	33.1	37.2
Rural area (reference category)	28.2	24.3	32.3
Household living arrangement			
Living alone (reference category)	35.5	31.8	39.3
Couple without children	33.9	30.4	37.6
Couple with children	32.8	29.9	35.9
Lone parent household	35.2	29.8	41.0

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, people in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed in the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. Racialized group is measured with the 'visible minority' variable and the 'non-racialized group' is measured with the category 'Not a visible minority' of the variable, both excluding Indigenous respondents. Indigenous respondents are not part of the racialized group, nor the non-racialized group for the purposes of this study.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

9. Overqualification among immigrant and racialized populations has been explored in many studies. Certain characteristics, such as location of study, field of study or period since immigration, have emerged as factors in overqualification among these populations. Because of the sample size constraints of the CSD, it is not possible to provide further analysis by these types of characteristics for persons with disabilities. For further information on the topic of overqualification among immigrants and racialized groups, please refer to the following sources: [A portrait of educational attainment and occupational outcomes among racialized populations in 2021](#), [Immigrants with a foreign degree are twice as likely to be overqualified as those with a Canadian degree](#), [Persistent over qualification among immigrants and non-immigrants](#), [Overqualification among 2012 and 2013 bachelor's graduates](#).

Text box 2: A look at the prevalence of overqualification status by sociodemographic characteristics among persons without disabilities

To understand whether the patterns for persons with disabilities are unique or align with those observed in the broader population, data were analyzed to examine overqualification status among persons without disabilities. This analysis provides context for the report and helps determine whether the observed patterns reflect broader population trends or indicate a disability-specific experience.

Among persons without disabilities, the rate of overqualification among employed women (35.4%) was higher than among employed men (30.2%) (Table 2.4). When examining different household compositions, among those without disabilities, employed couples without children (30.4%) had lower rates of overqualification than employed persons living alone (34.7%).

Additionally, the rates of overqualification were significantly higher among racialized persons without disabilities (44.3%) and immigrants without disabilities (43.5%) when compared with their non-racialized (27.6%) and non-immigrant (27.1%) counterparts. The rate of overqualification for Indigenous persons without disabilities (24.1%) was lower than the rate for non-Indigenous persons with disabilities (33.0%).⁹

When examining geography, employed persons without disabilities residing in rural areas (26.1%) had lower rates of overqualification than employed persons without disabilities residing in population centres (34.0%). Additionally, rates of overqualification varied by province and territory. When compared with rates of overqualification for persons without disabilities who reside in Ontario (34.6%), those residing in the Atlantic provinces (30.4%), Quebec (29.9%), Prairie provinces (31.7%) and the territories (23.1%) had lower rates of overqualification.

2.2 Prevalence of overqualification for employed persons with disabilities by disability-related characteristics

In contrast, multiple disability-related and employment-related characteristics were found to be associated with significantly different rates of overqualification. The prevalence of overqualification varied by both the severity of disability and the number of co-occurring disability types (Table 2.2). Employed persons with very severe (39.6%) disabilities were more likely to be overqualified when compared with those with mild disabilities (32.0%), while the overqualification rates were similar among those with moderate (34.6%) and severe (35.3%) disabilities when compared with those with mild disabilities. Additionally, those with four or more disability types (38.0%) were more likely to be overqualified than those with one disability type (31.8%).

When looking at the different disability types, those with mental health-related, mobility and developmental disabilities showed higher rates of overqualification than their counterparts without each of these disability types. Persons with hearing disabilities (28.5%) had lower rates of overqualification than persons without hearing disabilities (35.1%). There were no differences observed in overqualification between persons with continuous limitations and those with different types of dynamic disabilities.

10. As noted above, sample size limitations in the CSD restrict further analysis by education-related variables that could provide additional context to these data.

Table 2.2

Prevalence of being overqualified for employed persons with disabilities, by select disability characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select disability characteristics	Overqualified for current role		
	percent	95% confidence interval	
		lower	upper
Overall	34.0	32.2	35.9
Type of disability			
Seeing disability			
Has a seeing disability	35.8	32.0	39.7
Does not have a seeing disability (reference category)	33.3	31.3	35.5
Hearing disability			
Has a hearing disability	28.5*	24.4	33.1
Does not have a hearing disability (reference category)	35.1	33.0	37.2
Pain-related disability			
Has a pain-related disability	34.7	32.3	37.2
Does not have a pain-related disability (reference category)	32.9	30.0	35.8
Dexterity disability			
Has a dexterity disability	39.0	33.4	44.9
Does not have a dexterity disability (reference category)	33.3	31.4	35.3
Mobility disability			
Has a mobility disability	37.6*	33.8	41.6
Does not have a mobility disability (reference category)	32.8	30.8	34.9
Flexibility disability			
Has a flexibility disability	35.9	32.5	39.5
Does not have a flexibility disability (reference category)	32.9	30.8	35.1
Mental health-related disability			
Has a mental health-related disability	36.8*	34.1	39.6
Does not have a mental health-related disability (reference category)	31.9	29.4	34.5
Learning disability			
Has a learning disability	35.7	31.8	39.8
Does not have a learning disability (reference category)	33.7	31.7	35.9
Memory disability			
Has a memory disability	39.1	34.1	44.3
Does not have a memory disability (reference category)	33.0	31.0	35.1
Developmental disability			
Has a developmental disability	43.9 ^E *	35.0	53.1
Does not have a developmental disability (reference category)	33.5	31.6	35.5
Severity of disability			
Mild (reference category)	32.0	29.4	34.7
Moderate	34.6	30.8	38.5
Severe	35.3	31.3	39.6
Very severe	39.6*	34.1	45.4
Type of limitation			
Continuous (reference category)	33.5	30.5	36.7
Progressive	33.2	28.3	38.6
Recurrent	34.1	31.1	37.2
Fluctuating	35.2	30.9	39.6
Number of disability types			
One disability type (reference category)	31.8	28.9	34.9
Two or three disability types	33.7	30.7	36.8
Four or more disability types	38.0*	34.3	41.8

^E use with caution

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: It is important to note that people could have reported multiple disability types. Therefore, the data are based on the impact of all disability types these individuals may have. Progressive limitation is when the ability to do daily activities declines over time. Recurrent limitation is when there are periods of one month or more without any limitations and the ability to do daily activities improves, remains the same or changes. Fluctuating limitations does not have any periods without limitations, but the ability to do daily activities fluctuates. For more information on the categories of dynamic disabilities, please consult the report [The Dynamics of Disability: Progressive, Recurrent or Fluctuating Limitations](#).

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

2.3 Prevalence of overqualification for employed persons with disabilities by employment-related characteristics

Differences also emerged when looking at a variety of job-related characteristics and labour market experiences. Employed persons with disabilities who had worked at their current job for five years or more (31.4%) were less likely to be overqualified than those who started their current job more recently (within the past five years) (37.6%) (Table 2.3). Furthermore, employed persons with disabilities who received on-the-job training in the previous 12 months (32.1%) had lower rates of overqualification than those who did not receive similar training (35.9%). In terms of job security, a higher proportion of those in non-permanent positions (40.1%) were overqualified than those in permanent positions (32.9%). Looking at the number of paid hours worked per week, those working less than 30 hours per week (41.9%) had higher rates of overqualification than those working 30 hours or more (32.9%).

Among employed persons with disabilities, those who experienced one or more periods of unemployment in the past five years (39.5%) were more likely to be overqualified for their job than those who did not have any periods of unemployment (30.5%). Additionally, the proportion of overqualified individuals was higher among those who indicated that they had to change the kind of work they did at their job (40.6%), compared with their counterparts who did not have that experience (31.7%).

A higher proportion of persons with disabilities who indicated that they felt their condition makes it difficult for them to change jobs or advance at their job (37.1%) were overqualified than those who indicated no difficulty in this area (31.6%). Differences were observed in the perception of labour market discrimination among overqualified individuals as well. Those who considered themselves disadvantaged in employment because of their condition (38.3%) were more likely to be overqualified than those who did not have this perception of their employment situation (32.0%). Similarly, overqualification was higher among those who felt a current or potential employer would consider them disadvantaged in employment (37.6%) than those who did not feel this way (32.3%).

Among persons with disabilities, differences in rates of overqualification by work location size, requirements for workplace accommodations and the presence of unmet needs for workplace accommodations were not found to be statistically significant.

Table 2.3
Prevalence of being overqualified for employed persons with disabilities, by select employment characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select employment characteristics	Overqualified for current role		
	percent	95% confidence interval	
		lower	upper
Overall	34.0	32.2	35.9
Job security			
Permanent employee	32.9*	30.5	35.3
Non-permanent employee (reference category)	40.1	34.1	46.5
Tenure at current position			
Started within 5 years	37.6*	34.7	40.6
Started more than 5 years ago (reference category)	31.4	28.5	34.4
Received training			
Received on-the-job/classroom training in the past 12 months	32.1*	29.8	34.5
Did not receive on-the-job/classroom training in the past 12 months (reference category)	35.9	32.9	39.0
Workplace size			
Under 20 employees (reference category)	35.0	31.4	38.8
20 to 99 employees	33.5	29.4	37.9
100 to 500 employees	35.3	30.3	40.6
Over 500 employees	29.5	24.9	34.6
Number of paid hours worked per week			
Worked less than 30 hours per week	41.9*	36.7	47.4
Worked 30 hours or more per week (reference category)	32.9	31.0	34.9
Periods of unemployment			
Experienced one or more periods in past five years	39.5*	36.0	43.1
Did not experience periods in past five years (reference category)	30.5	28.0	33.1
Difficult changing jobs or advancing due to condition			
Experienced difficulty changing or advancing due to condition	37.1*	33.5	41.0
Did not experience difficulty in changing or advancing due to condition (reference category)	31.6	28.9	34.4

Table 2.3**Prevalence of being overqualified for employed persons with disabilities, by select employment characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022**

Select employment characteristics	percent	Overqualified for current role	
		95% confidence interval	
		lower	upper
Believe current or potential employer would consider them disadvantaged due to condition			
Yes, believed would be disadvantaged due to condition	37.6*	34.1	41.3
No, does not believe they would be disadvantaged due to condition (reference category)	32.3	30.2	34.5
Disadvantaged in employment due to condition			
Considered themselves disadvantaged	38.3*	34.9	41.7
Did not consider themselves disadvantaged (reference category)	32.0	29.9	34.2
Changed kind of work due to condition			
Needed to change kind of work due to condition	40.6*	36.5	44.9
Did not need to change kind of work (reference category)	31.7	29.3	34.1
Changed job due to condition			
Changed job due to condition	37.7	33.6	42.1
Did not need to change job due to condition (reference category)	32.8	30.5	35.2
Workplace accommodations			
Needs workplace accommodations	34.0	31.0	37.1
Does not need workplace accommodations (reference category)	33.8	31.3	36.4
Unmet needs for workplace accommodations			
Unmet needs for workplace accommodations	34.1	29.4	39.2
No unmet needs for workplace accommodations (reference category)	33.7	29.9	37.8

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

Conclusion

This paper examined the prevalence of work potential and overqualification among persons with disabilities aged 25 to 64 years, to better understand how these situations may relate to their contribution to the labour force. By analyzing both concepts across a range of sociodemographic, disability-related and employment-related characteristics, the study provides a descriptive profile of persons with disabilities who have work potential, as well as employed persons with disabilities experiencing overqualification.

The results indicate that among non-working persons with disabilities, approximately two in five (42.0%) demonstrated work potential. Conversely, among employed persons with disabilities, around one in three (34.0%) were overqualified based on an objective measure comparing an individual's highest level of educational attainment with the skill requirements of their job. This suggests that underutilization occurs both at the point of labour market entry and within employment through skill mismatch.

In this report, various patterns emerged across the two concepts when examined by selected sociodemographic characteristics. In particular, prevalence rates for both work potential and overqualification differed notably by urban and rural residence and being part of a racialized group. In contrast, gender differences were not statistically significant for either work potential or overqualification. Among persons with disabilities who were not working, being 25 to 44 years of age, being 2SLGBTQ+, having a bachelor's degree or higher, residing in the western provinces or territories and living in a household with dependants were associated with a higher prevalence of work potential compared with those without these characteristics. In contrast, among employed persons with disabilities, certain demographic characteristics, such as 2SLGBTQ+ identity and household composition, did not show significant differences in rates of overqualification.

Furthermore, significant differences in prevalence were observed across several disability-related characteristics. Among non-working persons with disabilities, those with mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain-related and memory disabilities had lower rates of work potential compared with those without these types of disabilities. Among employed persons with disabilities, individuals with mobility, mental health-related and developmental disabilities had higher rates of overqualification than those without these disability types. In contrast, employed persons with hearing disabilities had lower rates of overqualification than their counterparts without hearing disabilities. Higher rates of overqualification were also observed among persons with more severe disabilities and among those reporting four or more disability types.

The analysis further showed that several employment-related characteristics were associated with a higher rate of overqualification among employed persons with disabilities. Job security, participation in training and tenure in the current position were statistically significant, whereas reported workplace accommodation needs were not. Workplace experiences were also relevant. For example, persons with disabilities who reported being perceived as disadvantaged because of their condition showed a higher prevalence of overqualification. These findings are consistent with existing research suggesting that persons with disabilities may encounter systemic and attitudinal barriers within the labour market (Friedman, 2019; Konrad et al., 2012).

To further advance understanding of these two concepts, future research could apply multivariate approaches, such as logistic regression, to examine these concepts while holding sociodemographic characteristics constant. Another area for further exploration is the role of workplace experiences. Analysis in this area could provide additional insights into how these factors relate to skill optimization and may also provide context relevant to programs and initiatives aimed at improving labour market participation among persons with disabilities.

Annex

Table 2.4

Prevalence of being overqualified for employed persons without disabilities, by select sociodemographic characteristics, aged 25 to 64 years, Canada, 2022

Select sociodemographic characteristics	Overqualified for current role		
	percent	95% confidence interval	
		lower	upper
Overall	32.7	32.0	33.4
Gender			
Men+ (reference category)	30.2	29.3	31.1
Women+	35.4*	34.4	36.3
Racialized group			
Non-racialized, non-Indigenous (reference category)	27.6	26.8	28.4
Racialized, non-Indigenous	44.3*	43.0	45.6
Immigration status			
Non-immigrants (reference category)	27.1	26.3	27.8
Immigrants	43.5*	42.3	44.7
Indigenous group			
Non-Indigenous (reference category)	33.0	32.3	33.7
Indigenous	24.1*	21.1	27.4
Geographic region			
Atlantic provinces	30.4*	29.5	31.3
Quebec	29.9*	28.7	31.2
Ontario (reference category)	34.6	33.2	36.0
Prairies provinces	31.7*	30.7	32.6
British Columbia	35.0	33.6	36.4
Territories	23.1*	20.0	26.5
Place of residence			
Population centre	34.0*	33.2	34.7
Rural area (reference category)	26.1	24.6	27.6
Household living arrangement			
Living alone (reference category)	34.7	33.2	36.2
Couple without children	30.4*	29.2	31.8
Couple with children	32.9	32.0	33.9
Lone parent household	33.4	31.2	35.8

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Notes: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. In this table, data on 'racialized group' is measured with the "visible minority" variable. The "non-racialized group, non-Indigenous" is measured with the category "Not a visible minority" of the variable, excluding Indigenous respondents. Estimates for the 2SLGBTQ+ characteristic are not included for persons without disabilities (PWOD), as this information is sourced from the Canadian Survey on Disability (CSD) for persons with disabilities (PWD) only.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022.

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