

UNIFOR RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

# LABOUR MARKET INSIGHTS

*A monthly review of labour market indicators*

March 2026



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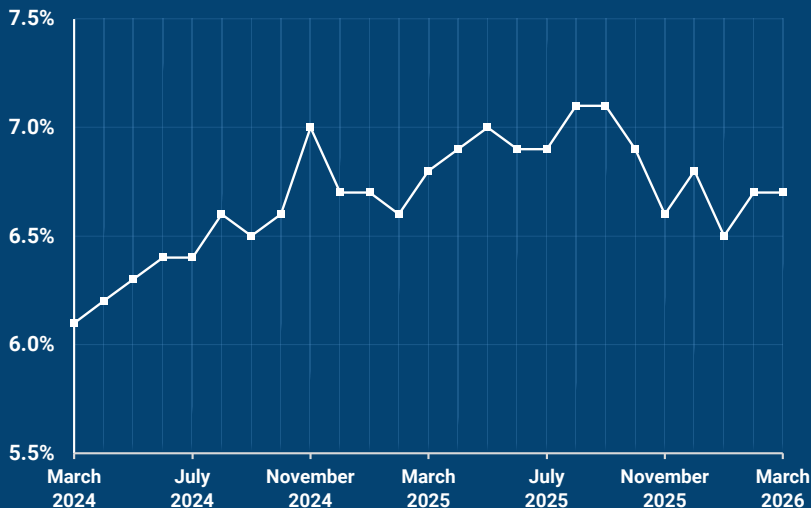
# National Statistics

Canada's headline labour market figures stood largely unchanged in March as the economy added just 14,000 jobs (+0.1%) while the unemployment rate stayed level at 6.7% and the participation rate held at 64.9%. On a year-over-year basis, the unemployment rate is marginally lower (-0.1 percentage points), but there has been a substantial reduction in labour force participation (-0.4), reflecting the departure of frustrated jobseekers from the labour market and barriers to entry for many young Canadians.

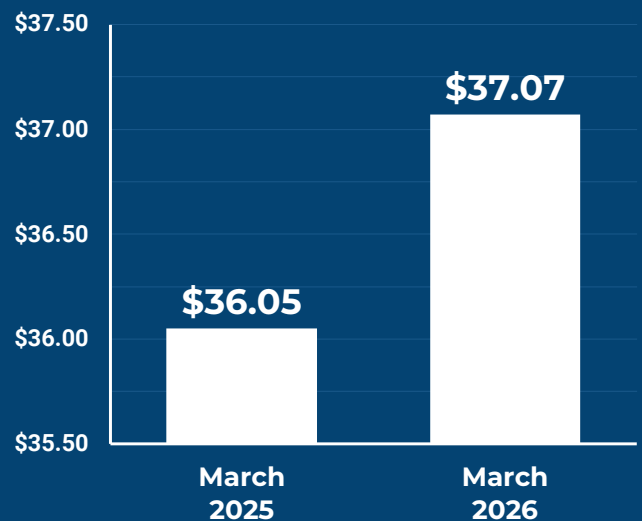
Average hourly wages jumped by 0.5% in March, amounting to a 4.7% annualized increase and a 2.8% real increase after adjusting for inflation. More data from the coming months will be needed to establish if this is a temporary spike or part of a sustained trend that may ultimately affect the Bank of Canada's monetary policy considerations.

Statistic	March 2020–24 average	March 2025	February 2026	March 2026	Year-over-year (Y/Y) change	Monthly (M/M) change
Total employment (#) <sup>1</sup>	19,482,900	20,964,300	21,037,300	21,051,400	87,100 0.4%	14,100 0.1%
Unemployment rate (%) <sup>2</sup>	6.6	6.8	6.7	6.7	-0.1	0.0
Participation rate (%) <sup>3</sup>	65.2	65.3	64.9	64.9	-0.4	0.0
Union coverage (%) <sup>4</sup>	30.6	31.1	31.3	31.2	0.1	-0.1
Average hourly wage (\$) <sup>5</sup>	\$31.95	\$36.05	\$37.56	\$37.73	4.7%	0.5%
Real average hourly wage (\$) <sup>6</sup>	\$35.37	\$36.05	\$37.10	\$37.07	2.8%	-0.1%

## Unemployment Rate



## Real Average Hourly Wage



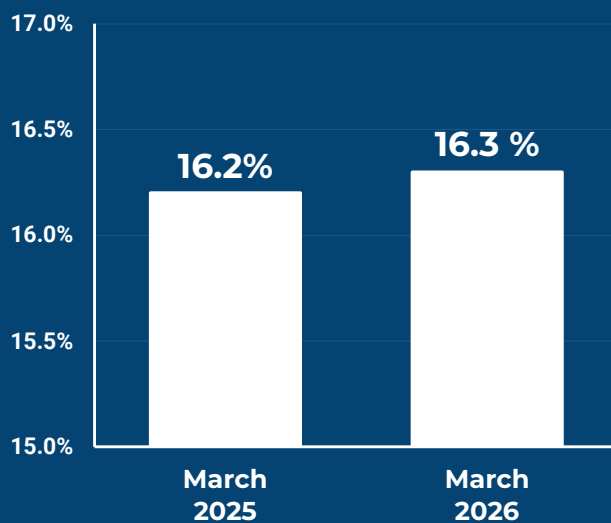
# National Precarity Indicators

In line with headline figures, Unifor's precarity indicators remained level in March, suggesting that the economy was in a holding pattern after absorbing a number of economic shocks from the U.S. trade war. Compared to March 2025, the level of precarity in the labour market was only marginally higher, with the most noteworthy change being a larger proportion of temporary job holders (+0.3), mainly due to a higher percentage of casual and seasonal workers. Notably, however, there is growing evidence

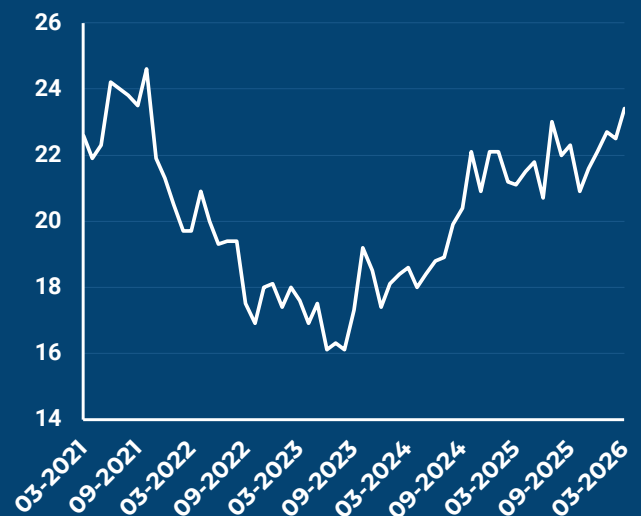
Indicator	Mar. 2025	Feb. 2026	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Part-time rate (%) <sup>7</sup>	19.3	19.1	19.2	-0.1	0.1
Involuntary part-time (%) <sup>8</sup>	41.5	42.5	42.4	0.9	-0.1
Underutilization (R8) rate (%) <sup>9</sup>	9.5	9.5	9.6	0.1	0.1
Underemployment rate (%) <sup>10</sup>	16.2	16.4	16.3	0.1	-0.1
Multiple job holders (%) <sup>11</sup>	5.8	5.8	5.9	0.1	0.1
Temporary job holders (%) <sup>12</sup>	10.7	10.8	11.0	0.3	0.2
Casual/other (%)	3.4	3.6	3.6	0.2	0.0
Temporary/contract (%)	6.3	6.1	6.3	0.0	0.2
Seasonal (%)	0.9	1.0	1.1	0.2	0.1
Low wage incidence (%) <sup>13</sup>	20.6	21.2	20.8	0.2	-0.4
Gender wage gap <sup>14</sup>	\$5.16	\$4.87	\$4.87	-5.6%	0.0%
NEETs (x1,000) <sup>15</sup>	902.9	846.3	856.6	-5.1%	1.2%

that jobseekers are being squeezed out of the labour force due to the length of time it takes to find a job. The average duration of unemployment reached 23.4 weeks in March, which is the highest level since October 2021 (see chart below), and the highest level since the late 1990s outside of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Underemployment Rate



## Duration of Unemployment



# Regional Statistics

Employment trends were varied across the country, with job gains concentrated in the Atlantic, Quebec and Prairie regions. Job growth was most pronounced in the Prairies where employment increased by 0.6% (+23,000), followed by Atlantic Canada at 0.5% growth (+6,000) and finally, Quebec, with a 0.2% increase (+10,000). Ontario recorded a slight decline with the loss of close to 6,000 jobs (-0.1%), while British Columbia observed a loss of 19,000 jobs (-0.2%).

The unemployment rate remained largely the same in the Atlantic, Prairie and Ontario regions, although a notable increase in the participation rate in the Prairies (+0.3) meant that an influx of jobseekers contributed to maintaining a level unemployment rate, despite significant job gains there. Quebec recorded a significant drop in the regional unemployment rate (-0.5) due to a combination of job gains and a shrinking labour force (-0.1), while the loss of nearly 20,000 jobs in B.C. saw the unemployment rate there jump to 6.7% (+0.6).

Year-over-year wage growth was robust across the country, with the largest gains in Quebec (6.4%), followed by Ontario (4.9%), Atlantic Canada (3.9%), B.C. (3.8%) and the Prairies (3.3%).



# Regional Statistics Continued

## Atlantic

Statistic	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Total employment (#)	1,263,900	1,284,900	21,000 1.7%	5,900 0.5%
Unemployment rate (%)	7.3	7.4	0.1	-0.1
Participation rate (%)	60.5	61.0	0.5	0.2
Union coverage (%)	34.4	34.1	-0.3	-0.1
Average hourly wage (\$)	\$31.96	\$33.16	3.8%	0.3%
Real avg. hourly wage (\$)	\$31.96	\$32.58	1.9%	-0.2%



## Quebec

Statistic	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Total employment (#)	4,631,600	4,622,300	-9,300 -0.2%	9,900 0.2%
Unemployment rate (%)	5.8	5.4	-0.4	-0.5
Participation rate (%)	65.1	64.4	-0.7	-0.1
Union coverage (%)	40.2	40.4	0.2	-0.7
Average hourly wage (\$)	\$34.54	\$36.74	6.4%	0.8%
Real avg. hourly wage (\$)	\$34.54	\$36.10	4.5%	0.2%



## Ontario

Statistic	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Total employment (#)	8,221,600	8,205,500	-16,100 -0.2%	-5,800 -0.1%
Unemployment rate (%)	7.5	7.6	0.1	0.0
Participation rate (%)	65.1	64.6	-0.5	0.0
Union coverage (%)	27.0	27.0	0.0	-0.2
Average hourly wage (\$)	\$37.28	\$39.09	4.9%	0.3%
Real avg. hourly wage (\$)	\$37.28	\$38.41	3.0%	-0.2%



# Regional Statistics Continued

## Prairies

Statistic	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Total employment (#)	3,902,300	4,030,400	128,100 3.3%	23,000 0.6%
Unemployment rate (%)	6.6	6.1	-0.5	0.0
Participation rate (%)	67.9	68.3	0.4	0.3
Union coverage (%)	27.6	27.9	0.3	-0.1
Average hourly wage (\$)	\$35.48	\$36.66	3.3%	0.4%
Real avg. hourly wage (\$)	\$35.48	\$36.02	1.5%	-0.1%



## British Columbia

Statistic	Mar. 2025	Mar. 2026	Y/Y change	M/M change
Total employment (#)	2,944,900	2,908,200	-36,700 -1.2%	-19,200 -0.7%
Unemployment rate (%)	6.1	6.7	0.6	0.6
Participation rate (%)	65.0	64.4	-0.6	0.0
Union coverage (%)	30.6	31.4	0.8	1.0
Average hourly wage (\$)	\$37.63	\$39.08	3.9%	0.4%
Real avg. hourly wage (\$)	\$37.63	\$38.40	2.0%	-0.1%



# Average Hourly Wages by Industry

## Nominal vs. Inflation-Adjusted Wage Growth

Industry	March 2025	March 2026	Y/Y change	Y/Y inflation-adjusted change
Agriculture	\$26.24	\$27.32	4.1%	2.2%
Forestry	\$36.27	\$40.07	10.5%	7.9%
Mining, oil and gas	\$53.51	\$55.26	3.3%	1.4%
Utilities	\$57.42	\$56.26	-2.0%	-3.9%
Construction	\$38.07	\$38.98	2.4%	0.6%
Manufacturing: durables	\$36.02	\$38.44	6.7%	4.6%
Manufacturing: non-durables	\$33.69	\$35.00	3.9%	2.0%
Wholesale Trade	\$36.14	\$40.28	11.5%	8.7%
Retail Trade	\$24.29	\$25.58	5.3%	3.4%
Transportation and Warehousing	\$34.12	\$34.35	0.7%	-1.1%
Finance and Insurance	\$44.77	\$49.56	10.7%	8.1%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	\$33.97	\$36.93	8.7%	6.4%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	\$47.03	\$49.72	5.7%	3.7%
Business, building and other support	\$28.27	\$28.87	2.1%	0.3%
Educational Services	\$41.40	\$43.30	4.6%	2.7%
Health Care and Social Assistance	\$34.70	\$35.61	2.6%	0.8%
Information, Culture and Recreation	\$34.90	\$35.92	2.9%	1.1%
Accommodation and Food Services	\$20.97	\$21.23	1.2%	-0.5%
Other Services	\$31.05	\$33.65	8.4%	6.1%
Public Administration	\$46.77	\$47.92	2.5%	0.7%

The growth in employment during March was mainly focused in the goods-producing sector (+12,500) with the natural resources industries – forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas – recording the largest gains (+10,300), followed by construction (+4,000) and manufacturing (+2,500). On a year-over-year basis, manufacturing continues to take the brunt of the Trump administration’s trade war on Canada, with a loss of 44,000 jobs since March 2025 – the largest decline among all industries.

Employment trends were more varied in the services-producing sector, with robust gains in other services (+15,100) and professional, scientific and technical services (+12,100) offset by substantial losses elsewhere, including finance & real estate (-11,200) and accommodation and food services (-10,000).

# Monthly Employment Gains and Losses by Industry and Sector

Employment Change by Industry/Sector, February to March 2026

<b>GOODS-PRODUCING SECTOR</b>		12,500
Agriculture	-5,000	
Forestry, fishing, mining, quarrying, oil and gas		10,300
Utilities		800
Construction		4,000
Manufacturing		2,500
<b>SERVICES PRODUCING SECTOR</b>		1,700
Wholesale and retail trade	-6,700	
Transportation and warehousing		1,600
Finance, insurance, real estate, rental and leasing	-11,200	
Professional, scientific and technical services		12,100
Business, building and other support services	-9,500	
Educational services	-7,200	
Health care and social assistance		5,000
Information, culture and recreation		8,800
Accommodation and food services	-10,000	
Other services (except public administration)		15,100
Public administration		3,600



# NOTES

1. Total employment counts all working age individuals (15 years old and above) who are currently employed. Seasonally adjusted.
2. The unemployment rate expresses the percentage of working age people who are unemployed and actively seeking work. It does not include unemployed individuals who are not currently searching for jobs or who are permanently without work, and who are therefore considered to fall outside the labour market. Seasonally adjusted.
3. The participation rate expresses the percentage of all working age people who are participating in the labour market, including both employed and unemployed (actively job-seeking) individuals. Seasonally adjusted.
4. Union coverage includes workers who are union members as well as those who are non-unionized but covered by the terms of a collective agreement.
5. The average hourly wage is calculated using usual wages or salaries reported by employees for their main job.
6. The real average hourly wage adjusts wages to account for the impact of inflation and is reported in dollars from the corresponding month of the previous year. Since CPI data is unavailable for the current month prior to the release of the Labour Force Survey, the previous month's CPI level is used to estimate real wages for the current period.
7. The part-time rate measures the percentage of all employed workers who are working part-time hours.
8. The involuntary part-time rate measures the percentage of part-time workers who wanted full-time employment.
9. The underutilization rate, or R8, is used by Statistics Canada to measure underutilized labour. It adds to the unemployment rate those who are waiting for recall or replies, long-term future starts, discouraged workers (those who did not search because they believed no jobs were available) and a portion of involuntary part-time workers.
10. The underemployment rate measures the percentage of people who want work but cannot find suitable employment or who do not have adequate support systems in place that would allow them to engage in job-seeking. It therefore measures the true extent of labour underutilization in Canada. The underemployment rate adds to the unemployment rate all involuntary part-time workers and the marginally attached (i.e. those who wanted to work but who were not able to actively search for jobs due to extenuating circumstances).
11. The multiple job holder rate measures the percentage of employed workers who hold two or more jobs.
12. The temporary job holder rate measures the percentage of employed workers whose jobs are temporary in tenure.
13. Low wage incidence is expressed as the percentage of hourly wage earners earning less than two-thirds of the median hourly wage. This measure is a widely accepted standard for determining the low pay threshold.
14. The gender pay gap measures the average difference in income between men and women who earn hourly wages. A positive gap indicates that men earn, on average, more than women.
15. The NEET category measures the number of people aged 15 to 29 who are not in employment, education or training.





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