General Services
Sector Profile

Sector Facts and Figures

Total GDP *Share of Canadian GDP*	$460.4 billion 23.29%
Total Employment (2021) *Change since 2011*	13,247,600 *+10.7%*
Real wage growth (2011-2019)	+5.0%
Labour Productivity (2019)	$53.3/hr
Average Work Hours/Week (2019)	31.7
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (2019) *Change since 2009* *Share of Canadian industry total*	139,828kt *+8.6%* *22.20%*
Union Coverage Rate	32%
Unifor Members in the Industry	86,900
Share of Total Unifor Membership	28%
Number of Unifor Bargaining Units	1059
Average Bargaining Unit Size	82

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Current Conditions

The growth in both public and private service industries since the beginning of the millennium has been the main story of the Canadian economy and, for that matter, of almost all other advanced economies in the world. Although declines in employment in the goods manufacturing sector have somewhat levelled off in recent years, the growth trend in service industries has been relentless. The Bank of Canada's previous governor, Stephen Poloz, noted in 2016 that for every job that had been lost in the goods sector since 2001, about 30 jobs had been created in service industries.

General services employment, 2001 - 2021
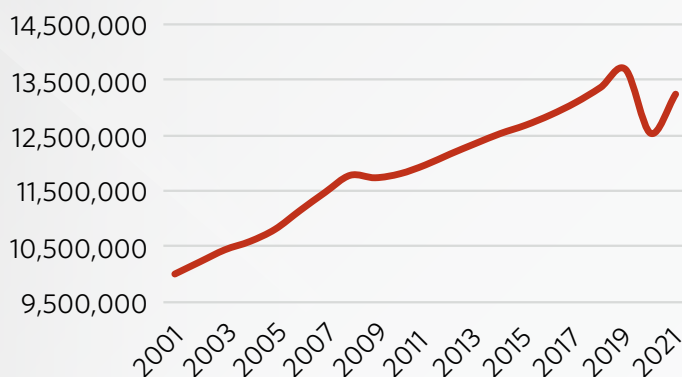
In 2021, more than 13 million Canadians were working in the service industries, almost 3 million more than in 2005 and a 10% increase over the last 10 years. If this sector is contributing to almost a quarter of the national economic output, one must remember that the "service industries" category encompasses very diverse economic clusters, operating environments

General services: Real wages (2011=100)
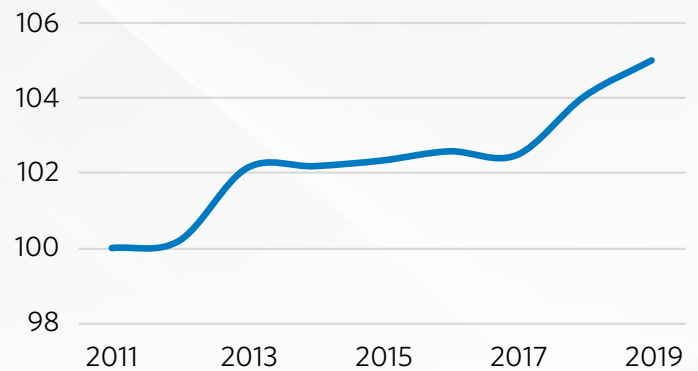
and does not lend itself easily to general statements or averages. If some growing segments are very well compensated (think artificial intelligence or custom software engineering), others face much more stagnant incomes and, often times, precarious and unstable working conditions in the face of increasing automation and gig economy business models.

It is important to note that if the general upward trend in services seems ubiquitous, not all segments are experiencing growth. For example, between 2011 and 2021, professional, scientific and technical services jobs (+34%) as well as transportation and warehousing jobs (+14%) have grown steadily while arts, entertainment and recreation services (-10%) and accommodation and food services (-6%) have largely faltered. When looking at employment numbers per subcategory, tendencies appear more divergent and point to fundamental structural shifts currently affecting the Canadian labour market and overall economy.

Unifor in the General Services Sector

Select Unifor Employers	Approx. # Members
Securitas	425
SerVantage	300
Sunshine Coast Regional District	300
ISM Canada	200

Unifor's general services membership encompasses both members in sectors profiled elsewhere (e.g., retail, media, hospitality and gaming, telecommunications, etc.) as well as members in miscellaneous service industries that are not captured by existing sectors. These members in "other" services perform work in a large variety of industries, including security, cleaning and janitorial services, IT support, non-profit organizations (e.g., advocacy groups, cultural institutions, and employment services), municipalities, and labour organizations.

Some of the largest employers in these miscellaneous service industries include Securitas, SerVantage, Sunshine Coast Regional District, and ISM Canada. Approximately 50% of the 7100 members in these other service industries are located in Ontario, 22% in B.C., 13% in Quebec, and 10% in the Prairies (Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba).

Moving Forward: Developing the General Services Sector

The diverse nature of service sector work poses a number of unique challenges for labour moving forward. Ongoing consolidation of business operations through mergers and acquisitions continues to be the preferred way of driving profitability, most frequently on the backs of the workers who must endure their lasting and often detrimental effects. The core competency mantra is still very prevalent amongst many Canadian companies and fuels subcontracting practices and lower-quality work conditions for thousands of workers with less mobility (mostly women and racialized Canadians). Finally, the advent of gig-work and technological platforms, while promoting individual flexibility and catering to the just in time business mentality towards workers, erodes safety and stability in many workplaces while also inhibiting the emergence of collective bargaining.

Moving forward, in order to substantially develop higher quality, higher-wage service jobs we need to deliberately intervene in so-called "free-market" competition by imposing rules and standards which force the whole industry to invest more in its

people – including better wages, better work schedules, better job security and better training. Alternative sectoral bargaining models could help make progress in historically underrepresented sectors (think retail or warehousing and logistics with less than 15% unionization rates). Current staffing and labour shortages offer unions an opportunity to move forward on these sectors more decisively with the hopes of achieving better outcomes for marginalized and precarious workers.

Major Sector Development Issues

• Service sector work has become the dominant engine of growth for Canada's labour market, but is also linked to higher rates of precarity and low-waged work compared to goods-producing sectors.

• Low levels of service sector union density limit service sector workers' capacity to resist poor working conditions, job flexibilization, and downwards wage pressure.

• Governments at all levels must support efforts to organize service sector workers by implementing card check certification and sectoral or broader-based bargaining.

• Labour protections for service sector workers must be enshrined in employment standards legislation, including fair scheduling, right(s) to disconnect, limiting temporary contracts, and eliminating misclassification loopholes.

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