

RETAIL & WHOLESALE

Sector Profile



Sector Facts and Figures, 2016

Total Sales	\$1.23 trillion
Total GDP <i>Share of Canadian GDP</i>	\$190 billion 11.3%
Total Employment <i>Change since 2007</i>	2.7 million +5%
Average Hourly Wage (Excluding overtime) <i>Inflation-adjusted change since 2007</i>	\$19.93 +9%
Productivity Growth 2007-2016	21%
Average Work Hours/Week (Excluding overtime)	30
Average Overtime Hours/Year	39
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Kilotons, 2014) <i>Share of Canada's total industrial emissions</i>	17,400 2.8%
Union Coverage Rate (Approximate)	12%
Unifor Members in the Industry	20,000
Share of Total Unifor Membership	6%
Number of Unifor Bargaining Units	126
Average Bargaining Unit Size	161

Source: Cansim; Unifor Research Department.

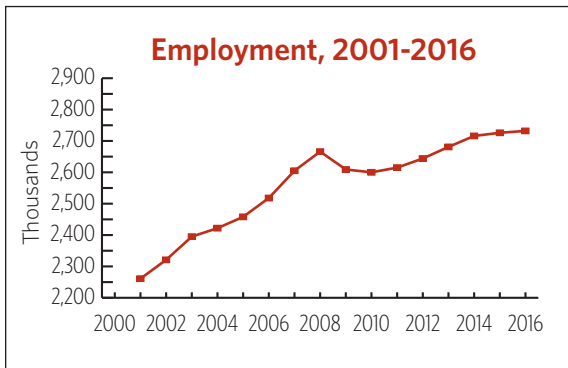


unifor
theUnion | le syndicat

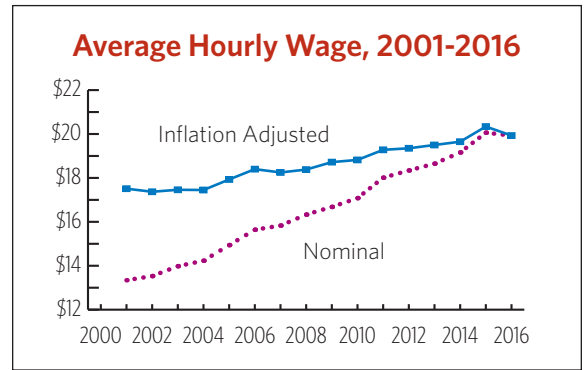
unifor.org

Current Conditions

The retail and wholesale industries are a hugely significant part of Canadian economic activity. One-in-six Canadian workers—2.7 million people—are employed in this industry. It generates a staggering \$1.2 trillion in annual sales and adds \$190 billion to Canada’s annual economic output. It is a large and rapidly growing segment of the Canadian economy, which is why it is so concerning that this sector, perhaps more than any other, is synonymous with “precarious employment”.



Consider that the average wage for retail clerks (both full and part-time) is just shy of \$14 per hour. When we blend the entire retail and wholesale industry together, the average wage is just shy of \$20 per hour, which is 15 per cent below the industrial average. Add to that the extraordinary reliance retailers place on part-time work (in Unifor, 80-90 per cent of members in supermarkets work part-time), persistently high rates of turnover (average tenure in retail is 4.5 years), hard-to-secure work



hours, unpredictable schedules and low levels of unionization, and there’s good reason for concern. If Canadians are increasingly relying on retail jobs to make ends meet, the quality of jobs on offer currently doesn’t cut it.

More than 195,000 stores dot Canada’s retail landscape. Large retail outfits are popping up 2.5 times faster than small “mom-and-pop” shops, illustrating the “big-box” effect that is transforming customers shopping experience and industry supply chains, including wholesaling and warehousing. As price competition continues to intensify, especially as more customers venture online to shop (a field dominated by large tech firms like Amazon), retailers will continue to consolidate through mergers (think Loblaw/Shoppers Drug Mart, Canadian Tire/Forzani and Sobeys/Safeway), adopt cost-saving and job-displacing technologies (think self-serve kiosks and automated warehousing) or face bankruptcy (think Tip Top Tailors, Jean Machine and American Apparel).

Unifor in the Canadian Retail & Wholesale Industry

Select Unifor Employers	Approx. # Members
Metro and associated chains	9,000
Loblaws and associated chains	2,600
Logistics in Motion	1,050
Sobey's	870
Hudson's Bay Company	620

Approximately six per cent of Unifor members work in the retail and wholesale industries. Unifor's 20,000 or so retail and wholesale members are distributed across 126 bargaining units in eight Canadian provinces, though nearly 80 per cent work in Ontario and a further 13 per cent in Atlantic Canada.

This sector of the economy has below-average levels of union representation, with roughly one in ten workers being covered by a collective agreement. This is a challenge, but also an enormous organizing opportunity.

Two out of every three Unifor members are employed by one of the five largest employers in this sector, namely the Metro (Dominion/Food Basics), Loblaws (ValueMart/No Frills), Logistics in Motion, Sobey's and HBC. The remaining one-third work in a wide array of retail and wholesale establishments.

Moving Forward: Developing the Retail and Wholesale Industry

Retail jobs have, unfortunately, become synonymous with "precarious" jobs. However, in recent years retail workers have also become champions in the fight for good jobs. Mass grassroots movements in the U.S. and Canada (most notably through the "Fight for \$15" campaign) have given voice to low-wage workers' demands for fair wages and the right to unionize. Calls for a \$15 minimum wage, once a pipe dream, are being realized across the continent. In 2018, Alberta will be the first \$15 minimum wage province, followed in 2019 by Ontario. Hopefully more provinces will follow suit.

Complementing this wave of political activism have been ground-breaking collective agreements in retail, mostly notably in supermarkets. Guided by its sector-development strategy, Unifor has made historic gains for members at the bargaining table and set new industry standards for wages, scheduling and access to work hours. Wage "escalator" provisions help ensure there is some shared benefit following a minimum wage hike. Employers must now post schedules well in advance of shifts. Part-time work hour protections avoid week-to-week fluctuations. And a greater share of part-time workers now has access to health benefits. Equally important: members are re-engaging in the bargaining process.

Despite these successes, Unifor's work is far from done. Full-time jobs are still too rare in retail shops. Employers often download these responsibilities onto part-time workers without any associated pay or benefit improvements. Pay disparities also extend across gender lines. Research shows men working in retail disproportionately hold more full-time and higher-paying jobs than women. Students often earn wages below the legislated minimum (allowable under some provincial laws) for performing the same work as older workers. These practices and policies must be challenged.

Most employers treat retail workers as a short-term, disposable input to be bought and sold as cheaply as possible. This is wrong and Unifor must continue to push back, both in the political arena and at the bargaining table. As the retail and wholesale industries continue to grow, employers must understand their responsibilities in contributing to a good jobs economy. A well-trained, well-paid and well-respected workforce can be a pathway to better employment and also a strategic advantage for retailers.

Major Sector Development Issues

- Continue to push for elevated standards around wages, scheduling and access to work hours, following the pattern established in Canadian supermarkets.
- More stable scheduling and access to health benefits for part-time workers.
- Continue pushing for a \$15 minimum wage across all Canadian provinces, with "wage escalator" provisions built into collective agreements.
- Reduce employer reliance on "part-time" status in favour of full-time hours and benefits.
- Key goal: break the association between retail and "precarity". Make this industry a source of good jobs.



unifor
theUnion | lesyndicat