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DECENT OR PRECARIOUS?

Understanding the Quality of Employment in Nova Scotia

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Advancing Decent Work

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1. Executive Summary

Nova Scotia's labour market shows a growing gap between how hard people work and the stability and security they experience. Wages are among the lowest in Canada, and poverty remains high, while the cost of housing, food, and utilities keeps rising faster than pay. This report asks two main questions: **how widespread is precarious work in Nova Scotia, and who is most affected?**

We answer it using two tools: an Employment Precarity Index built from Statistics Canada's 2024 Labour Force Survey (LFS-2024), and the 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey (Precarity Survey), which asks workers about schedules, on-call expectations, changes in hours and income, benefits, and fear of losing work. Together, these measures show both the big picture and people's day to day experiences at work. Because some groups facing higher levels of precarity are harder to capture in survey data, especially in online panels, the survey-based findings likely provide a conservative picture of the full extent of precarious employment in Nova Scotia.

The LFS-based index shows that precarious work is widespread. Almost one in three paid employees in Nova Scotia (30.4 per cent, about 131,000 workers) are in precarious jobs. Beyond this group, about 43 per cent of employees show at least two signs of precariousness, placing them just below the precarious threshold. This represents a large share of the workforce who, with only one additional negative change –such as lower wages, shorter tenure, or weaker protections– could quickly fall into fully precarious

employment. In practice, many workers are only one bad change away from deeper insecurity. Precarious jobs are especially common in non-standard forms of work: rates are much higher among temporary and part-time workers, and more than half of workers aged 20 to 24 are in precarious jobs, with precariousness remaining present across adult age groups. Precarious work is also highly concentrated by industry: accommodation and food services, and retail trade have the highest rates in the index, and about 20 per cent of Nova Scotia's employees work in these two industries.

Union coverage stands out as one of the strongest protections against precarious work. The LFS-based index shows much lower rates of precarious employment among unionized workers, while the Precarity Survey findings show that unionized workers are more likely to be in permanent full-time jobs and to have access to paid sick days, benefits, and workplace pensions. Because union coverage in Nova Scotia is concentrated in the public sector, this protection also appears as a strong divide between public and private sector jobs.

These findings match the first study in the Advancing Decent Work series,[1] which showed that Nova Scotia's labour standards have big gaps in who is covered, modest minimums, and limited enforcement. Many workers are left out of basic protections because of the type of job they have, the sector where they work, or the size of their employer. The current system relies heavily on individual complaints, which is especially hard for people in precarious jobs who fear retaliation or cannot risk losing hours. The high levels of precarious and vulnerable employment documented here reflect the real-life consequences of that weak system of protections.

Reducing precarious work and advancing decent work in Nova Scotia will require action on several fronts. This report calls for:

[1] Casey, R., & Saulnier, C. (2025). *Foundations of decent work: An evaluation of Nova Scotia labour standards.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Nova Scotia. policyalternatives.ca/news-research/the-foundations-of-decent-work-an-evaluation-of-nova-scotia-labour-standards/

- **Raising the floor on wages and hours**, including a medium term plan to bring the minimum wage closer to the living wage, and stronger limits on very short or highly variable shifts.
- **Improving rules around scheduling and on-call work**, with clear standards on advance notice, pay for last minute changes, and fair treatment for workers whose hours change from week to week.
- **Expanding access to paid sick leave, paid vacation, and basic employment benefits** so that illness, caregiving, or family responsibilities do not push workers into deeper insecurity.
- **Closing gaps in protection for non-standard workers**, including those on temporary or casual contracts, in agency work, or in app based and platform jobs.
- **Building a more active enforcement system** that focuses on sectors and regions where precarious work is most common, instead of relying mainly on individual complaints.
- **Supporting unionization, collective bargaining, and other forms of worker voice**, especially in low wage, high turnover sectors.
- **Making job quality an explicit goal of regional development and public procurement**, with institutional mechanisms that both hold employers accountable and provide targeted support to small-sized employers who offer decent, stable work.

Precarious work is not a natural or unavoidable feature of Nova Scotia's labour market. It follows from policy choices about labour standards, enforcement, and support for collective bargaining. By strengthening basic protections, improving enforcement, and supporting workers' ability to organize and speak up, Nova Scotia can move away from an economy built on insecurity and toward one where secure, decent work becomes the norm.

2. Introduction

In early October 2025, we released the first report in our *Advancing Decent Work* series, "Foundations of Decent Work: An Evaluation of Nova Scotia Labour Standards."[2] That report examined the institutional, legal, and regulatory framework affecting working conditions in the province. It revealed deep structural weaknesses in Nova Scotia's labour standards: gaps in coverage, outdated legislation, and limited enforcement, that leave many workers without necessary protection.

This second report turns from policy to people. It explores how those institutional deficiencies translate into workers' day-to-day realities: their jobs, earnings, and overall sense of job stability and security. Drawing on data from our Precarity Survey and Statistics Canada's 2024 LFS, it examines the quality of work across the province and documents the state of precarious employment.

These results also need to be understood in the context of rising living costs. As shown in *2025 Living Wages for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island*,[3] the cost of living in Nova Scotia keeps going up. Even with recent increases to the

[2] Casey, R., & Saulnier, C. *Op Cit.*
[3] Cerdas Sandí, D., Saulnier, C., & Williams, R. (2025). *2025 living wages for Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island: Too many workers struggle to make ends meet.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Nova Scotia. policyalternatives.ca/news-research/2025-living-wages-for-newfoundland-and-labrador-nova-scotia-and-prince-edward-island-too-many-workers-struggle-to-make-ends-meet/

minimum wage, the gap between what people earn and what they need to get by has grown. Many workers still struggle to cover basic expenses like rent, food, and child care, and must make hard choices every month to make ends meet.

Taken together, these reports paint a consistent picture: Nova Scotia's labour market is characterized by low wages, limited protections, and growing insecurity. While the province's legislative framework sets a weak floor, the lived experience of workers reveals how far we still are from achieving decent and stable work for all.[4]

Why this study: the rise of insecure, low-wage, and unstable work in NS

Available evidence suggests that many workers in Nova Scotia face greater job insecurity and lower pay than workers in most other parts of Canada[5]. Although many workers across Canada face growing job insecurity and rising living costs in recent years, Nova Scotia is particularly notable for its elevated rates of low income, longer working hours, and limited job benefits.

In 2024, people in Nova Scotia worked an average of 1,710 hours per year, only slightly above the national average of 1,697 hours.[6] Even so, longer working hours, Nova Scotia's average earnings are still near the bottom compared to other provinces. In 2024, the average weekly wage (current dollars) in Nova Scotia was $1,121,

[4] Interviews with labour movement stakeholders conducted as part of this Advancing Decent Work series reinforce this picture, highlighting ongoing challenges to unionization in the province, which will be explored further in a forthcoming report in the series.

[5] Pascoe-Deslauriers, R. (2020). Putting employers to work in economic development in the Atlantic provinces of Canada. *Local Economy: The Journal of the Local Economy Policy Unit*, *35*(2), 165-175. doi.org/10.1177/0269094220907550

[6] Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0480-01 Labour productivity and related measures by business sector industry and by non-commercial activity consistent with the industry accounts. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3610048001

compared with $1,261 nationally.[7] Only Prince Edward Island reported lower pay. In contrast, workers in Ontario ($1,294), British Columbia ($1,273), and Alberta ($1,328) earned more. This mismatch between long hours and low wages highlights a key challenge in Nova Scotia's labour market: people are working hard, but many are still struggling to reach financial stability.

This mismatch helps explain why Nova Scotia has a higher share of people living in poverty compared with the rest of Canada, even when we focus only on the working-age population. In 2023, 13.9 per cent of Nova Scotians aged 18 to 64 lived below the Market Basket Measure (MBM) poverty line, compared with 11.6 per cent across Canada[8]. This makes Nova Scotia's working-age poverty rate one of the highest in the country, second only to Saskatchewan's rate of 14.2 per cent. Within Atlantic Canada, Nova Scotia had the highest rate, a bit higher than Prince Edward Island (12.5 per cent) and New Brunswick (12.3 per cent).

Poverty dropped markedly in 2020 because of temporary pandemic supports, but it has gone up again since those programs ended and living costs increased. The same pattern is highlighted in the *2024 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty in Nova Scotia*[9], which shows a reduction in child poverty in 2020 followed by a renewed rise once emergency benefits wound down.

These numbers raise important questions about what is happening in Nova Scotia's labour market in general. People are working more but earning less, and many lack basic job protections. To understand why, it is necessary to look more closely at the quality of employment across the province: how stable jobs are, what kinds of benefits workers receive, and how many people face

[7] Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0204-01, Employment and average weekly earnings (including overtime), seasonally adjusted. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410020401

[8] Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=1110013501

[9] Frank, L., Saulnier, C., & Harrington, R. (2024). *2024 report card on child and family poverty in Nova Scotia*. CCPA-NS; Campaign 2000; Fed Family Lab. https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-report-card-on-child-and-family-poverty-in-nova-scotia.pdf

conditions of precarity. This report examines these issues in detail, exploring which sectors are most affected and how job quality differs by gender, age, income level, and type of employment. It aims to provide a clearer picture of how precarious work looks in the province and who is most impacted. As explained in more detail in section 3, this report uses a multidimensional approach to understand precarious employment and how different factors interact to shape workers' economic and social security.

2.1. What defines "decent work" vs. "precarious work"

In our first report[10] of this series, we defined decent work following the International Labour Organization (ILO) framework. According to this framework, decent work is "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity."[11] This concept encompasses the following key elements: "it pays a fair income, guarantees secure employment and safe working conditions, ensures equal opportunities and treatment for all, includes social protection for workers and their families, offers prospects for personal development and encourages social integration, and allows workers to express their concerns freely and to organize."[12]

In other words, decent work is not only about having access to jobs but about the characteristics of those jobs —considering rights and benefits at work, social protection, and social dialogue. Together, these elements ensure that employment contributes not only to economic growth but also to social inclusion and individual well-being.

[10] Casey, R., & Saulnier, C. (2025). *Op cit*.
[11] International Labour Organization. (1999). Decent Work. Report of the Director-General, 87th Session, International Labour Conference. https://webapps.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/P/09605/09605(1999-87).pdf
[12] Arora, K. & Spiteri, S. (2023). What is "decent work". https://lmic-cimt.ca/what-is-decent-work/

Figure 1 / What is "Decent Work"?

While the concept of decent work sets a basic standard, precarious employment is not simply its opposite. Because there is no single accepted definition of precarious employment, this report adopts one established multidimensional approach, as discussed later in this section. The definition of precarious employment has evolved over time, taking on different characteristics depending on the theoretical approach and context.[13] For the purposes of this report, it is useful to focus on two key distinctions identified by Vosko, MacDonald, and Campbell.[14] One approach links precarious

[13] See, for example, the European case in Duell, N. (2004). *Defining and assessing precarious employment in Europe: a review of main studies and surveys.* International Labour Organization. ilo.org/resource/defining-and-assessing-precarious-employment-europe

For the Canadian context, see the review presented in Ivanova, I. & Strauss, K. (2023). *But is it a good job? Understanding employment precarity in BC*. Morgan Centre for Labour Research and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – BC Office, pp. 13–17.

Union perspective: It is worth noting that definitions of precarious employment vary widely in practice. Labour organizers and workers interviewed for related projects often use broader, experience-based definitions. These perspectives differ from and complement the academic frameworks summarized here, and they offer useful insights into how precarity is lived and understood on the ground.

[14] Vosko, LF., MacDonald, M. and Campbell, I. (2009). Gender and the Contours of Precarious Employment. Vol. 8 of Routledge IAFFE Advances in Feminist Economics, edited by Smriti Rao. New York: Routledge.

employment to specific forms of non-standard work, while the other adopts a multidimensional perspective that identifies and measures various indicators of job insecurity. Although both approaches focus primarily on the characteristics of the job itself, they differ in how extensively they define and interpret the dimensions of precariousness.

Table 1 / Decent work vs. precarious work

Decent Work	Precarious Work
Fair income	Low wages
Job security and stability	Job insecurity
Safe working conditions	Limited health and safety protections
Access to benefits (paid leave, health coverage, pensions)	Limited or no employment benefits
Predictable schedule and stable hours	Unpredictable or unstable hours
Protection through labour standards and enforcement	Weak legal protections or enforcement gaps
Ability to speak up and organize	Fear of retaliation or lack of voice
Long-term employment prospects	Short tenure or temporary arrangements

The first approach builds on a binary view of employment types, distinguishing between standard and non-standard jobs, and identifying precarious work primarily with the latter—especially temporary or short-term employment. Within this framework, the concept of the *Standard Employment Relationship* (SER) refers to jobs "characterized as a lifelong, continuous, full-time employment relationship where the worker has one employer and normally works on the employer's premises or under his or her direct supervision."[15] This approach leads to a typology of employment defined by binary categories such as employees vs. self-employed, permanent vs. temporary, and full-time vs. part-time. Under this view, being an employee in a permanent, full-time position under the SER is not considered precarious employment, while other forms of work are seen as more exposed to precarity. Given the limitations of this approach, "there is consensus that 'binary'

[15] Vosko, L. (2000). Temporary Work: The Gendered Rise of the Precarious Employment Relationship. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, pp. 15.

approaches to standard and non-standard work do not capture the complexity of the dimensions of job quality and security."[16]

The second approach builds on what Rodgers (1989) has emphasized about the multidimensional and complex nature of precarious work. As he explained, "the concept of precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability. Not that this eliminates ambiguity; an unstable job is not necessarily precarious. It is some combination of these factors which identifies precarious jobs, and the boundaries around the concept are inevitably to some extent arbitrary."[17]

Based on this perspective, Ivanova and Strauss[18] point out that the multidimensional approach has inspired a wide range of academic and policy efforts to conceptualize and measure precarious employment and precarious work. These studies include an expanding variety of employment relationships beyond the traditional employee role and have been applied across both national and subnational contexts.

As a result, there is no single, universally accepted definition of precarious employment or precarious work. This point is also reflected in other Canadian research. Ornstein argues that there is no consensus definition of precarious employment and questions attempts to collapse contractual status, part-time work, and low wages into a single dimension of precarity. His work also shows that there is still debate in the Canadian literature about how precarious employment should be defined and measured.[19] For this reason, the goal of this report is not to resolve this broader conceptual debate, but to examine how different dimensions of precarious employment are experienced in Nova Scotia.

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[16] Ivanova, I. & Strauss, K. *Op cit.,* pp. 21.
[17] Rodgers, G. (1989). "Precarious Work in Western Europe: The State of the Debate." Chap. 1 in Rodgers and Rodgers, eds. Precarious Jobs in Labour Market Regulation: The Growth of Atypical Employment in Western Europe. Geneva, Switzerland: International Institute for Labour Studies; Brussels: Free University of Brussels. ilo.org/public/libdoc/ ilo/1989/89B09_333_engl.pdf
[18] Ivanova, I. & Strauss, K. *Op cit.,* pp. 15.
[19] Ornstein, M. (2021). Precarious employment in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 46(3), 219–221. DOI: doi.org/10.29173/cjs29735

Among these contributions, it is worth highlighting Vosko's work,[20] which expanded the multidimensional perspective by showing that precarious employment combines low wages, job insecurity, limited access to social benefits, and heightened health and safety risks. She also emphasized that employment precarity is shaped by workers' employment status and form of employment, by labour market conditions, and by social identities such as gender and race. More recently, Ali and Newbold[21] emphasized the importance of incorporating the spatial dimensions of precarity, showing how insecure and low-quality forms of work are unequally distributed across regions and between urban and rural labour markets in Canada.

This report draws on multidimensional perspectives on job quality and employment insecurity.[22] It uses two complementary approaches to examine precarious employment in Nova Scotia. First, it builds a provincial-level Precarious Employment Index using the LFS-2024, based on a limited set of standard labour market indicators. Second, it uses the Precarity Survey to provide a detailed descriptive analysis of workers' experiences of insecurity, instability, and vulnerability at work. However, the report does not construct a more elaborate precarity index using a larger number of variables from the Precarity Survey.[23] Instead, the survey is used to provide a

[20] Vosko, L. F. (2006). *Precarious employment: Towards an improved understanding of labour market insecurity.* In L. F. Vosko (Ed.), *Precarious employment: Understanding labour market insecurity in Canada* (pp. 3–39). Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press.

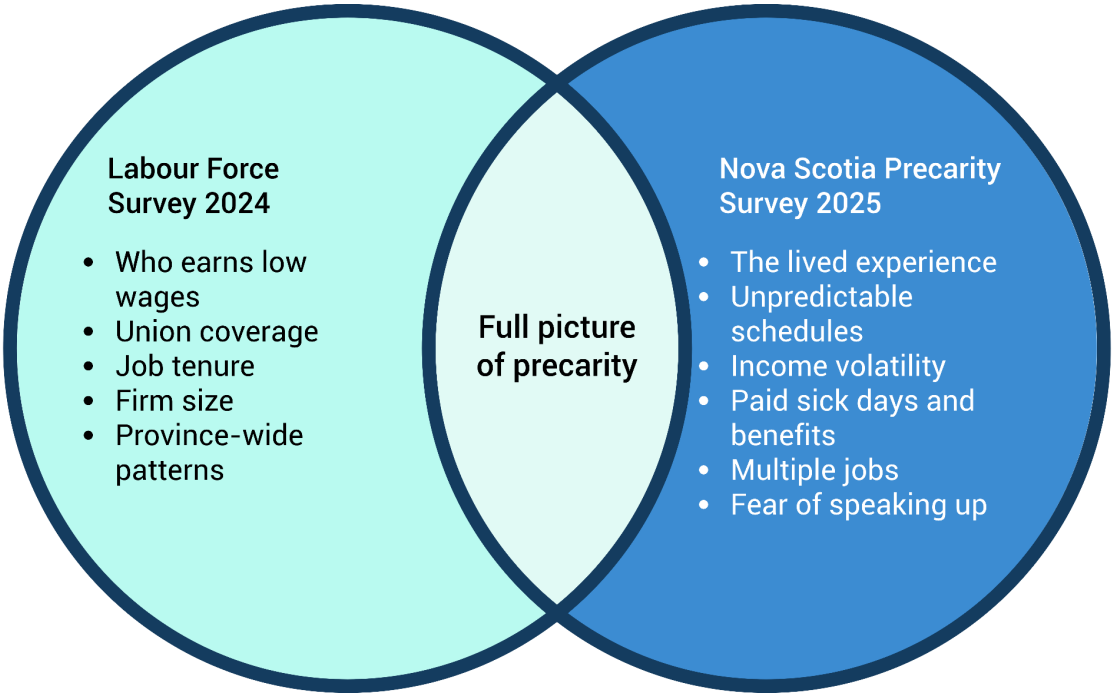
[21] Ali, W. K., & Newbold, K. B. (2021). Gender, space, and precarious employment in Canada. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, 112*(5), 566–588. https://doi.org/10.1111/tesg.12488

[22] Ivanova, I. & Strauss, K. *Op cit.,* pp. 39-41. Also see https://pepso.ca/tools

[23] The decision not to use the Precarity Survey to build a multidimensional precarity index is based on the composition of the survey sample. Compared with the LFS-2024, the sample shows important biases toward more secure and stable employment. For example, it includes a higher share of public sector workers, people living in the Halifax area, workers aged 35 and over, and people in permanent jobs, as well as fewer self-employed workers and very few workers aged 18 to 24. Although survey weights were applied, weighting can correct proportions but not content: it cannot create enough cases where they are largely missing from the sample. As a result, some biases toward more stable and secure jobs remain, which would tend to hide or understate job quality problems in the province if the survey were used to construct an index. Methodological aspects of the weighting process and further details on the composition of the sample are explained in more detail in Appendix B.

closer look at the main dimensions of precarious employment across the province. Together, these two approaches provide insight into both the structural and lived dimensions of precarious employment in Nova Scotia.

Figure 2 / How we measured precarity



Both approaches move beyond simple binary distinctions between standard and non-standard employment. They recognize that job precarity is shaped by the interaction of multiple factors affecting workers' economic security, working conditions, and ability to exercise rights at work. While the LFS-based index provides a broad statistical picture, the survey-based analysis examines these dimensions more directly, allowing for a more transparent and detailed understanding of where and how insecurity arises across the workforce.

The Precarity Survey provides rich information on key aspects of job quality that are not fully captured in standard labour market data, including:

- **Job stability**, such as the continuity and duration of employment arrangements;

- **Income predictability**, including volatility of earnings and financial uncertainty;
- **Access to employment benefits**, such as paid leave, health coverage, and retirement plans;
- **Ability to exercise rights at work**, including voice, collective representation, and protection from unfair treatment; and
- **Exposure to health and safety risks**, encompassing both physical and mental well-being at work.

These dimensions are analyzed across key socio-demographic and geographic characteristics, including gender, age group, racial identity, and region, to highlight how experiences of precarity are unevenly distributed across the workforce.

At the same time, the report relies on the LFS-2024 to provide a province-wide picture of employment patterns using standardized and comparable labour market indicators. While the LFS is essential for understanding the overall structure of employment in Nova Scotia, it cannot capture many of the lived and relational aspects of job insecurity. The descriptive analysis based on the Precarity Survey complements the LFS-2024 by offering deeper insight into workers' day-to-day experiences of instability, vulnerability, and lack of control at work.

3. A Precarious Employment Index for Nova Scotia

Understanding the extent and nature of precarious employment is necessary to designing effective labour policies and promoting decent work in Nova Scotia. This section presents two complementary measures of job precarity. The first (Section 3.1) builds a provincial-level Precarious Employment Index using the 2024 LFS, showing a broad statistical picture based on standard labour market indicators. The second (Section 3.2) is based on the Precarity Survey, offering a more detailed measure that captures workers' experiences of insecurity, instability, and vulnerability at work. Together, the LFS-based index and the survey-based measure allow us to examine both the structural and lived dimensions of precarious employment across the province.

Before introducing these views, it is useful to look at how employment itself is structured in Nova Scotia. The distinction between standard and non-standard jobs remains a central reference in debates on job quality and precarity, shaping how we understand the scope and forms of insecure work in the province.

Non-standard vs standard employment in Nova Scotia

Debates over what constitutes a *standard employment relationship* (SER) have evolved considerably over recent decades.[24] Traditionally, the SER was understood as a stable, full-time job with a single employer, a predictable schedule, and access to employment benefits.[25] Yet this model no longer reflects the complexity of contemporary labour markets.

In Nova Scotia, as elsewhere, the rise of part-time, temporary, and self-employed work has blurred the boundaries of what is considered "standard" employment. While permanent, full-time employment continues to represent the dominant form of work in the province, it no longer defines the experience of all workers. Data from the LFS 2024 show that only about two-thirds of all employed individuals hold a permanent full-time position—either with stable or variable hours. The remaining share of workers are in part-time, temporary, or self-employed arrangements, many of which fall outside the concept of the standard employment relationship (SER).

As shown in Figure 3, among all workers, 90.5 per cent are employees and 9.5 per cent are self-employed. Within the employee group,14.1 per cent hold temporary jobs—including casual, app-based, and fixed-term contracts—while the vast majority (85.9 per cent) are in permanent positions. Permanent jobs, however, include different arrangements. For example, 12.4 per cent of workers are permanent part-timers. Part-time work can be either voluntarily chosen or reflect fewer hours than workers would prefer,

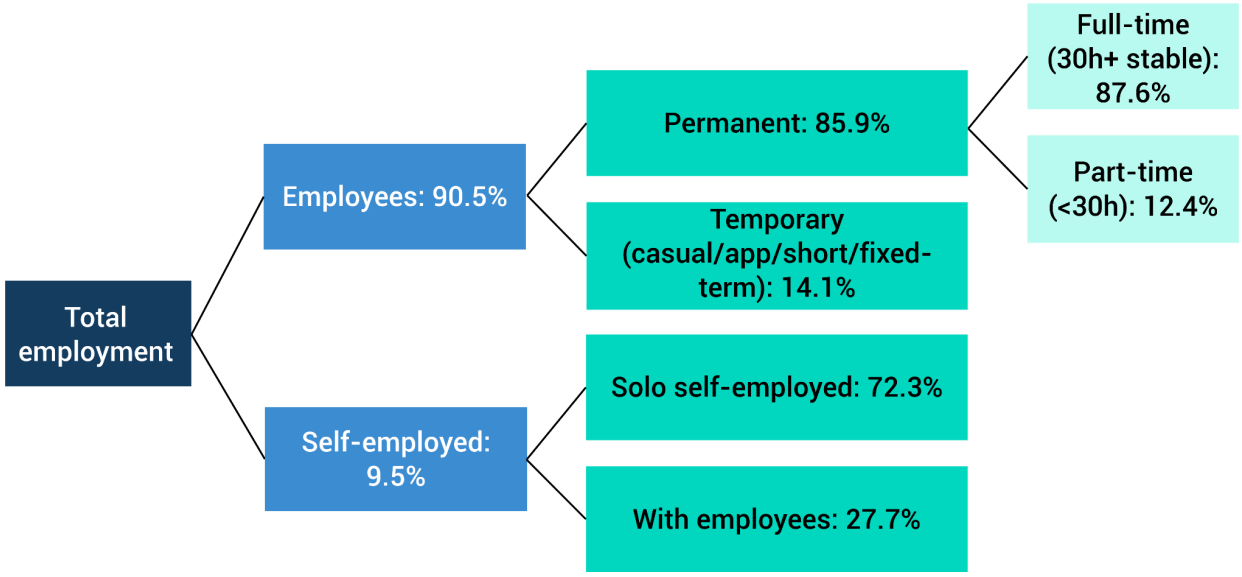
[24] Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group. (2020). Closing the enforcement gap : improving employment standards protections for people in precarious jobs. Toronto: University of Toronto.

Fudge, J. & Vosk, L.F. (2001). Gender, Segmentation and the Standard Employment Relationship in Canadian Labour Law, Legislation and Policy. Economic and Industrial Democracy. Vol. 22(2): 271-310. https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/10414739.pdf

[25] Vosko, L.F. (2010). Managing the margins: Gender, citizenship, and the international regulation of precarious employment. New York: Oxford University Press.

yet it is commonly used in the specialized literature[26] as an indicator of employment insecurity. Only 87.6 per cent of all permanent jobs are permanent full-time positions.

Figure 3 / LFS-2024 sample total employment, by type of employment relationship and selected job characteristics



Source Based on weighted data from LFS-2024, annual average of monthly estimate and include only individuals who were employed and at work (lfsstat = 1). The employee/self-employed classification is based on cowmain (Class of worker, main job): employees include public and private sector employees (cowmain = 1–2); self-employed include incorporated and unincorporated self-employment, with and without paid help (cowmain = 3–6). Unpaid family workers (cowmain = 7) are excluded.

3.1. Building a Precarious Employment Index from the 2024 Labour Force Survey in Nova Scotia

To get a broad picture of how job insecurity looks across Nova Scotia, we first use data from the LFS-2024. The analysis focuses on paid employees only, excluding self employed and unpaid family

[26] See: Vosko, L. F. (2006). *Opt cit.*

workers.[27] All figures are weighted to represent the provincial population. The framework follows the approach developed by Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group.[28]

How to define and measure a precarious job using LFS-2024

We can consider a job precarious when several signals of insecurity come together. Here we looked at four main signs of job instability and low protection. Each indicator highlights a different dimension of vulnerability at work:

1. No union coverage: This indicator identifies employees who are not covered by a union or collective agreement. Union coverage is included in this index as one indicator of precarious employment following the multidimensional framework developed by Vosko et al. (2020). In this approach, union status is not treated as a normative solution to precariousness, but as a proxy for workers' access to collective voice, bargaining power, and mechanisms for enforcing workplace rights. As noted by Vosko et al., union coverage is a "critical indicator" because workers who are not covered by a union or collective agreement often have less power to influence their working conditions and must rely only on minimum employment standards.[29] In this way, precarious employment is not defined by a single factor, but by the combined presence of different forms of insecurity at work.

2. Low wage: We used $20.00 an hour as our indicator for low wages. Nova Scotia's economy is systemically and structurally

[27] The LFS groups workers into seven categories: 1. Public sector employee, 2. Private sector employee, 3. Self-employed incorporated, with paid help, 4. Self-employed incorporated, no paid help, 5. Self-employed unincorporated, with paid help, 6. Self-employed unincorporated, no paid help, and 7. Unpaid family worker (Persons who work without pay on a farm or in a business or professional practice owned and operated by another family member living in the same dwelling). For this analysis, we include only paid employees, which correspond to categories 1 and 2.

[28] Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group. (2020). Closing the enforcement gap: Improving employment standards protections for people in precarious jobs. Toronto: University of Toronto.

[29] Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group. (2020). Op. Cit. pp. 17.

based on a low-wage labour market and we have made recommendations to improve the minimum wage in Nova Scotia to $20.00 an hour which will help to reduce the living wage gap for workers. Although Vosko et al. define low wage as earning less than two thirds of the full-time median, which equals $18.67 per hour,[30] we argue that $20.00 is a better reflection of a low wage in Nova Scotia and accurately describes workers who are more likely to experience economic insecurity.

3. Short job tenure: This measures how long a person has worked for their current employer. Workers with less than 12 months of tenure were considered to have short tenure. As noted by Vosko et al. job tenure is a useful indicator because it reflects both how likely a worker is to remain in their job and how protected they are from frequent job turnover. Workers with less than one year in their current job may also have more limited access to workplace benefits, since some protections, such as vacation time under the Labour Standards Code, only accrue after twelve months of employment.[31] In this sense, short job tenure helps capture both employment instability and limited protection at work.

4. Small firm size: We identified jobs in workplaces with fewer than 20 employees as small-firm jobs. Employment in small firms is often linked to less job security and fewer employment benefits. Vosko et al. note that precarious jobs are more common in small firms and that workers in these workplaces are less likely to see their rights enforced because enforcement resources are limited and must be spread across many workplaces.[32] Other research has pointed in the same direction, linking small firms to greater labour

[30] The median hourly wage among full-time employees in Nova Scotia in 2024 was $28.00. Source: Statistics Canada. (2026). *Table 14-10-0064-01 Employee wages by industry, annual.*
[31] Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group. (2020). Op. Cit. pp. 18.
[32] Vosko, L.F. and the Closing the Enforcement Gap Research Group. (2020). Op. Cit. pp. 18.

market insecurity and weaker compliance with employment standards.[33]

Building the precarious employment index

After defining each indicator, we combined them to create a single measure of job precarity. A job was labeled as *precarious* if it met three or more of the four indicators above, or if it was *low wage* and had at least one other sign of insecurity.

Indicators of Precarious Employment in Nova Scotia, 2024

At first glance, the data show that several characteristics of job precariousness are widespread among paid employees in Nova Scotia. For example, around 70 per cent of workers are not covered by a union, meaning most lack the support of a collective voice to defend their interests and are more exposed to unequal power relations at work, which often translates into fewer opportunities to participate in shaping their work environment and fewer chances to achieve improved job quality.[34]

Unfortunately, low wages remain a defining feature of precarious employment in Nova Scotia. The data are very clear: almost one in three workers (31.1 per cent) earn $20 per hour or less. These wage patterns are reinforced by other signs of instability in the labour market. Nearly one in five workers (18.8 per cent) have been in their current job for less than a year, and about 17.8 per cent work in

[33] See: Vosko, L. F., Grundy, J., Tucker, E., Thomas, M. P., Noack, A. M., Casey, R., Gellatly, M., and Mussell, J. (2017) The compliance model of employment standards enforcement: an evidence-based assessment of its efficacy in instances of wage theft. Industrial Relations Journal, 48: 256–273. doi: 10.1111/irj.12178, and Noack, A.M., & Vosko, L.F. (2011). Precarious jobs in Ontario: Mapping dimensions of labour market insecurity by workers' social location and context. Toronto: Law Commission of Ontario. Retrieved from lco-cdo.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/vulnerable-workers-call-forpapers-noack-vosko.pdf

[34] Piasna, A., Smith, M., Rose, J., Rubery, J., Burchell, B., & Rafferty, A. (2013). Participatory HRM practices and job quality of vulnerable workers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *24*(22), 4094–4115. https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2013.845423 and Fine, J. (2013). "Solving the Problem from Hell: Tripartism as a Strategy for Addressing Labour Standards Non-Compliance in the United States." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 50(4), 813-844. DOI: https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.1002

small firms with fewer than 20 employees, where protections are typically weaker. Together, these figures reveal that a large share of the workforce faces some form of precarious employment (see Table 2).

Table 2 / Indicators of precarious employment in Nova Scotia
2024, All employees

Indicator	Precarious Employment (per cent)	Estimated number of workers
No union coverage	70.2	302,771
Low wage (≤ $20.00/hour)	31.1	134,102
Short tenure (< 12 months)	18.8	81,053
Small firm (< 20 employees)	17.8	76,913

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

When we look at the results by sector, strong differences appear between public and private employment (see Table 3). The majority of employees work in the private sector (71.5 per cent), while 28.5 per cent are employed in the public sector. Workers in the private sector face substantially higher levels of job insecurity. Nearly nine in ten private sector employees (88.3 per cent) are not covered by a union, compared with 24.8 per cent in the public sector. Low wages are also far more common in the private sector, where 38.9 per cent of employees earn $20 per hour or less, compared with 11.6 per cent in the public sector. Other indicators point in the same direction. Short job tenure affects 21.1 per cent of private sector workers, compared with 13.1 per cent in the public sector, and employment in small firms is much more prevalent in the private sector (23.7 per cent versus 3.1 per cent).

These differences across individual indicators translate into a much higher overall rate of precarious employment in the private sector. Nearly four in ten private sector workers (39.5 per cent) are classified as being in precarious jobs, compared with just 7.6 per cent of public sector employees. This gap highlights how strongly job quality is shaped by sector. In the public sector, higher wages, stronger union coverage, and more stable employment arrangements substantially reduce exposure to precarious

conditions. In contrast, the private sector combines low pay, weaker protections, and smaller workplaces in ways that make precarious employment far more common.

Table 3 / Indicators of precarious employment in Nova Scotia by sector
2024, Public and Private Sectors, per cent

Indicator	All employees	Public sector employees	Private sector employees
No union coverage	70.2	24.8	88.3
Low wage (≤ $20)	31.1	11.6	38.9
Short tenure (< 12 months)	18.8	13.1	21.1
Small firm (< 20 employees)	17.8	3.1	23.7
Precarious jobs	30.4	7.6	39.5

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Almost one in three paid jobs in Nova Scotia were precarious in 2024: 30.4 per cent of employees meet our definition of precarious employment (detailed above). In terms of people, this represents more than 131,000 workers in precarious jobs across the province (see Table 4).

The composition of precarious jobs matters. Most precarious jobs are not driven by a single factor but by multiple overlapping risks. Specifically, 15.8 per cent of all employees face three or more conditions of precarity (about 68,000 workers). That group represents about half of all precarious jobs. Also, 14.6 per cent of employees are in low-wage jobs plus one other condition (about 62,000 workers), which is about half of all precarious jobs. This split shows that raising wages alone would help many workers, but it would not fully address precariousness for the majority who also face short tenure, lack of union coverage, and employment in very small firms.

Table 4 / Precarious employment
Nova Scotia, 2024

Category	Per cent	Weighted count
Precarious jobs (overall)	30.4	131,047
Breakdown by type of precariousness:		
Not precarious	69.6	300,019
3 or more conditions	15.8	68,310
Low wage + 1 other	14.6	62,736

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

On the other hand, 69.6 per cent of employees are classified as not precarious according to this index, and an estimated 300,000 workers. Put simply, for every 100 paid workers, about 70 hold jobs that do not trigger the index. However, it is important to note that the group of workers in a vulnerable position just below the precarious threshold is likely much larger. More specifically, about 43 per cent of employees show at least two signs of precariousness. This is a significant share of the workforce who, with only one additional factor (for example a drop in wages or a shorter contract) would immediately fall into the category of precarious employment.

These findings show that precarious employment is not limited to a small segment of the workforce, but rather forms part of a broader spectrum of insecurity that affects many workers across Nova Scotia. Even those who are not yet classified as precarious often face conditions that make them vulnerable[35] to instability if their

[35] It is important to define what we mean by *vulnerable employment* and *vulnerable workers*. In this report, we use these terms to refer to workers who are not classified as being in precarious employment, but who show signs of precariousness and are close to falling into that category. This usage is linked to the idea of a continuum of precariousness. In other words, workers may face different degrees of insecurity, rather than falling into one fixed category. See Cynthia J. Cranford, Leah F. Vosko and Nancy Zukewich. (2003). Precarious Employment in The Canadian Labour Market: A Statistical Portrait. *Just Labour* Vol. 3: justlabour.yorku.ca/index.php?page=cranfordetal&volume=3

circumstances change. This underlines the need for stronger labour standards, broader union representation and collective bargaining coverage, fair wage policies, and better job protection to prevent more workers from falling into precarious employment and to promote greater stability and higher job quality in the province's labour market. It is also important to emphasize the relevance of unions, as research has shown that stronger workplace voice—especially through unions and collective bargaining—enhances democratic engagement and improves workers' ability to influence decisions that shape their economic and social well-being.[36]

Table 5 shows clear differences in job conditions across types of employment in Nova Scotia. Permanent full-time workers have the lowest levels of low wages, short tenure, and precarious jobs. This pattern is consistent with findings from other studies in Canada: permanent full-time positions tend to be the least precarious form of employment. As the table shows, temporary and part-time positions carry much higher risks of low pay, limited job continuity, and weaker protections.

The situation is particularly challenging for temporary and part-time workers. For example, 36 per cent of full-time temporary workers and two thirds of part-time permanent or temporary workers fall into the precarious category. It is important to note that the "low wage" indicator refers to hourly wages, meaning the higher rate among part-time workers is not simply because they work fewer hours, but because they are more likely to be paid lower hourly rates.

At the same time, the ILO notes that there is no generally accepted definition of *vulnerable worker*, and that the term is often used more broadly to refer to workers whose employment is already precarious. See ILO (2022), *ILO Curriculum on Building Modern and Effective Labour Inspection Systems: Module 9, Dealing with Vulnerable Groups of Workers*: ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_dialogue/%40lab_admin/documents/genericdocument/wcms_856569.pdf

[36] Bryson, A., Gomez, R., Kretschmer, T., & Willman, P. (2013). *Workplace voice and civic engagement: What theory and data tell us about unions and their relationship to the democratic process*. Osgoode Hall Law Journal, 50(4), 965–998. https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.1007

Table 5 / The relationship between form of employment and indicators of precarious employment

Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Form of Employment	No union	Small firm	Low wage	Short tenure	Precarious job
All employees	70.2	17.8	31.1	18.8	**30.4**
Full-time permanent	68.2	15.8	22.6	13.5	**22.0**
Full-time temporary	66.2	23.2	35.7	38.2	**36.2**
Part-time permanent	83.2	25.2	68.7	26.8	**66.5**
Part-time temporary	78.8	23.6	66.8	44.8	**65.0**

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Union coverage suggests evident trends. Workers in the most precarious categories—temporary and part-time—have very low union coverage, with between 66 per cent and 83 per cent reporting no union. In contrast, permanent full-time workers are much more likely to have union protection, with roughly one-third covered by a union. These differences matter because the groups with the lowest levels of union coverage also show the highest rates of low wages, short tenure, and overall precariousness.

Precarious Employment by Gender[37]

Table 6 shows that men and women in Nova Scotia experience precarious employment differently. Women face a higher risk of low wages: 34 per cent of women earn low hourly pay compared with 28 per cent of men. This is one of the strongest gender gaps in the table, and it reflects the well-documented pattern that women are more likely to work in lower-paid sectors, occupations, and positions, or even receive lower pay while performing the same functions as men.

[37] Throughout this report, gender is generally presented using two categories, men and women, to maintain consistency across data sources. Since 2022, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) has collected gender rather than sex, but Statistics Canada reports these data using a two-category gender variable to protect confidentiality, given the small size of the non-binary population (See Guide to the Labour Force Survey, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-543-g/71-543-g2025001-eng.htm).

Table 6 / Indicators of precarious employment by gender
Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Gender	No union	Small firm	Low wage	Short tenure	Precarious
Men+	74.2	18.6	28.3	18.8	**28.5**
Women+	66.1	17	34	18.8	**32.4**

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Women also show a higher rate of overall precarious employment: 32.4 per cent compared with 28.5 per cent for men. This means that, even when looking only at basic indicators (wages, job tenure, and firm size), women are more often in conditions linked to insecurity at work. Using the relative risk,[38] women have a 14 per cent higher risk of being in precarious employment than men.

Men, however, are more likely to be non-unionized: 74.2 per cent of male workers report having no union coverage, compared with 66.1 per cent of women. The fact that women have higher unionization but still face higher rates of low wages and precariousness points to broader gender inequalities in the labour market. In other words, even with stronger union coverage (which is typically associated with better wages and more job security), women continue to face disadvantages in other areas that push them toward more precarious conditions.

Small-firm employment is also higher among men (18.6 per cent versus 17.0 per cent), while short-tenure rates are the same for both groups. Taken together, these results show why women end up with a higher overall precariousness score: the precariousness indicator places greater weight on low wages, and women's much higher rate of low hourly pay drives their total precariousness upwards. In practical terms: even though women are more unionized and slightly less concentrated in small firms, their high rate of low wages is enough to classify many of them as

[38] Relative risk compares the probability of an event between two groups. It is calculated by dividing the rate for women (32.4 per cent) by the rate for men (28.5 per cent). A value above 1 shows a higher risk for the first group.

precarious, because the index identifies workers as precarious when they have low wages plus just one additional condition.

Precarious Employment by Age

Precarious employment in Nova Scotia is strongly shaped by age (see Table 7). Young workers experience the highest levels of job insecurity: 92 per cent of employees aged 15-19 and nearly two thirds of those aged 20-24 are in precarious jobs, reflecting their concentration in low-wage, non-unionized, short-tenure positions. While job quality improves for workers in the core labour-market age range (25-54), levels of precarious employment remain relatively high and tend to increase again after age 55. Wage conditions deteriorate after age 55: the share of low-wage workers increases from 22.2 per cent among those aged 25-54 to 25.5 per cent among workers aged 55-64. This deterioration in wages is reflected in overall job quality at older ages, with the rate of precarious employment rising again among workers aged 65 and over, 38 per cent of whom remain in precarious jobs. This pattern shows that although precarity is most pronounced in younger cohorts, it also affects many older workers, especially those who stay in or return to the labour market through part-time, low-wage, or non-standard forms of employment.

Table 7 / Indicators of precarious employment by age
Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Age group	No union	Small firm	Low wage	Short tenure	Precarious job
All employees	70.2	17.8	31.1	18.8	**30.4**
15–19	96.5	25.2	92.3	53.3	**92.1**
20–24	83.6	25.4	64.5	47.4	**66.0**
25–54	66.7	15.6	22.2	15.8	**21.8**
55–64	66.8	17.2	25.5	6.4	**22.4**
65+	75.4	27.2	40.8	5.7	**38.4**

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Precarious Employment Across Industries

There is substantial variation in precarious employment across industries (see Table 8). The highest levels are found in accommodation and food services (81.6 per cent) and retail trade (67.8 per cent), followed by agriculture (59.9 per cent), business, building and other support services (56 per cent), and fishing, hunting and trapping (53.6 per cent) (see Figure 4). These sectors share several risk factors: very high rates of non-unionized work, widespread low wages, and a strong presence of small firms. Many jobs in these industries are also part-time, temporary, or seasonal, which further increases workers' exposure to precarious conditions.

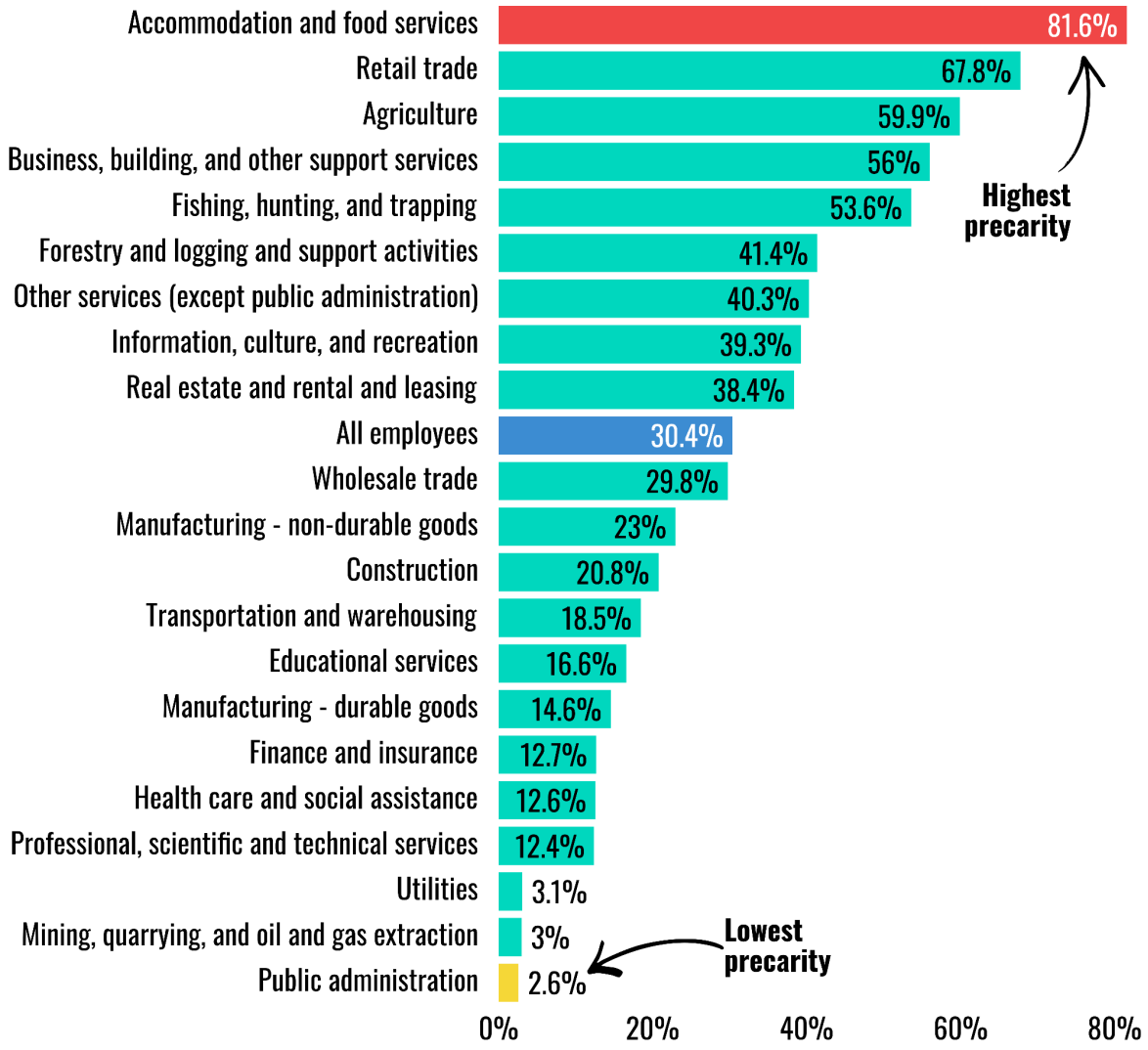
It is important to note that accommodation and food services and retail trade together account for a significant share of total employment in the province, representing 7.3 per cent and 13.2 per cent of all employees, respectively. This means that large groups of workers are experiencing precarious conditions, and that precarious employment is not confined to a marginal segment of the labour market.

Other service industries, such as forestry and logging, other services, information, culture and recreation, and real estate and rental and leasing, also show elevated levels of precarious employment, with rates ranging from about 38 to 41 per cent. In these sectors, low wages and short job tenure remain common, even when small-firm employment is less dominant.

In contrast, sectors such as public administration (2.6 per cent), utilities (3.1 per cent), mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction (3 per cent), and health care and social assistance (12.6 per cent) show much lower levels of precarious employment. Education (16.6 per cent) and finance and insurance (12.7 per cent) also fall well below the provincial average. These industries are generally characterized by higher wages, stronger union coverage, larger employers, and more stable and regulated forms of employment. Overall, these patterns show that precarious employment is not equally distributed across the labour market. Instead, it is concentrated in specific industries where low pay, weak union

coverage, small workplaces, and unstable work arrangements are built into how jobs are organized.

Figure 4 / Precarious employment by industry
Nova Scotia, 2024



Source Based on Statistics Canada's LFS-2024. Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Table 8 / Indicators of precarious employment by industry
Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Industry	No union	Small firm	Low wage	Short tenure	Precarious job
Accommodation and food services	94.6	28.6	82.2	29.3	**81.6**
Retail trade	95.7	16.1	68.8	23.0	**67.8**
Agriculture	100.0	69.5	58.8	12.7	**59.9**
Business, building and other support services	89.2	24.4	58.7	24.3	**56.0**
Fishing, hunting and trapping	99.7	68.1	47.2	16.3	**53.6**
Forestry and logging and support activities	82.5	39.0	37.0	10.4	**41.4**
Other services (except public administration)	90.5	52.2	37.0	23.4	**40.3**
Information, culture and recreation	77.5	17.5	40.4	24.9	**39.3**
Real estate and rental and leasing	92.7	23.7	37.1	22.0	**38.4**
All employees	**70.2**	**17.8**	**31.1**	**18.8**	**30.4**
Wholesale trade	94.8	19.6	30.1	17.0	**29.8**
Manufacturing – non-durable goods	86.8	9.5	21.9	15.0	**23.0**
Construction	78.5	38.6	15.6	22.8	**20.8**
Transportation and warehousing	59.6	10.8	19.7	15.6	**18.5**
Educational services	32.6	6.4	22.4	18.0	**16.6**
Manufacturing – durable goods	75.5	10.1	14.2	14.4	**14.6**
Finance and insurance	94.8	6.1	12.6	15.1	**12.7**
Health care and social assistance	38.1	12.0	16.7	17.3	**12.6**
Professional, scientific and technical services	96.0	21.5	9.9	14.4	**12.4**
Utilities	54.5	1.5	2.0	10.4	**3.1**
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	69.4	12.9	6.2	7.4	**3.0**
Public administration	26.5	3.5	3.1	9.2	**2.6**

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Immigration status is another important factor linked to job quality in Nova Scotia. Looking at precarious employment through this lens helps show whether some groups of workers face greater exposure to low wages, weak union coverage, small workplaces, and unstable employment. The tables below (9, 10, 11 and 12), based on LFS-2024, compare landed immigrants[39] and non-immigrants, and also look at differences within the private and public sectors. It is important to note that these data include only landed immigrants, that is, people with permanent resident status. They do not capture temporary foreign workers, refugee claimants, or other non-permanent residents, who are likely to face even higher levels of labour market insecurity and precarious employment. This means that the patterns shown here may not fully capture the extent of precarity among migrant workers in Nova Scotia.

Although available official survey data do not allow us to examine all immigrant groups separately, previous research in Nova Scotia helps fill part of this gap. Studies on immigrant and migrant women in low-wage essential sectors, as well as on temporary migrant workers in agriculture, show that workers with temporary status often face some of the most precarious conditions in the province, including low pay, unstable or insufficient hours, discrimination, dependence on employers, barriers to health care, overcrowded housing, and weak enforcement of labour standards.[40] These studies suggest that the patterns shown here for landed immigrants minimize the broader extent of precarity among migrant workers in Nova Scotia.

[39] "Landed immigrant" refers to a person who has been granted permanent resident status in Canada, meaning they have the legal right to live and work in the country indefinitely

[40] See: Bryan, C., Yax-Fraser, M. J., Almukhtar, Z., Augustine, M., & VanderHeide, J. (2024). *Cooking, cleaning, and caring: COVID-19, essential labour and the experiences of immigrant and migrant women in Nova Scotia*. CCPA Nova Scotia: policyalternatives.ca/news-research/cooking-cleaning-and-caring-2/, and Bejan, R., Allain, K., Glynn, T., & Soto Flores, P. (2024). *Falling short: Troubles with the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program in Nova Scotia*. TFW Maritimes and CCPA Nova Scotia: policyalternatives.ca/news-research/falling-short-troubles-with-the-seasonal-agricultural-worker-program-in-nova-scotia/

Immigrants are not distributed evenly across the labour market in Nova Scotia (see Table 9). Landed immigrants make up 12.0 per cent of all workers, but they are slightly more concentrated in the private sector than in the public sector, and slightly less represented among unionized workers. This pattern is even clearer for workers who immigrated within the past 10 years. They make up a larger share of private sector workers, but a smaller share of public sector and unionized workers. In contrast, immigrants who arrived more than 10 years ago are somewhat more represented in public sector and unionized jobs. This suggests that more recent immigrants are more likely to be found in jobs with less protection.

Table 9 / Immigration status composition of employment and union coverage
Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Group	All workers	Private sector	Public sector	Union member/covered by Collective Agreement	Not union member or covered by Collective Agreement
Landed immigrants total	12.0	12.5	10.7	11.0	12.4
Immigrant (landed), became a permanent resident 10 years ago or less	7.4	8.3	5.4	6.3	7.9
Immigrant (landed), became a permanent resident more than 10 years ago	4.5	4.2	5.2	4.7	4.4
Non immigrant	88.0	87.5	89.3	89.0	87.6

Source Based on Statistics Canada's LFS-2024. Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain =1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

Precarious employment affects a large share of workers in Nova Scotia, but the situation is worse for recently landed immigrants. Among all employees, about 30 per cent are in precarious jobs. However, this rises to 34.1 per cent for landed immigrants who arrived in the last 10 years. These landed immigrants also show higher exposure to low wages and short job tenure. In contrast, landed immigrants who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years have lower levels of precarious employment (21.5 per cent), suggesting that labour market conditions improve over time (see Table 10).

Table 10 / Indicators of precarious employment by immigration status
Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

Group	No union	Small firm	Low wage	Short tenure	Precarious
All employees	70.2	17.8	31.1	18.8	**30.4**
Immigrant, became a permanent resident 10 years ago or less	74.7	14.2	34.4	23.6	**34.1**
Immigrant, became a permanent resident more than 10 years ago	68.9	15.8	20.8	15.7	**21.5**
Non-immigrant	69.9	18.3	31.4	18.6	**30.5**

Source Based on Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey (2024). Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1, 2) and at work (lfsstat = 1).

As shown earlier, precarious work is especially common in the private sector. When we look at the situation through the lens of immigration status, some inequalities appear (see Table 11). Overall, almost four in ten private sector workers are in precarious jobs. Workers who immigrated within the past 10 years face the highest risks, with 41.7 per cent in precarious employment. They are also more likely to experience low wages and short job tenure. By contrast, the rate for immigrants who have been in Canada for more than 10 years is lower, at 28.8 per cent. Even so, this still means that nearly three in ten workers in this group are in precarious employment. These results show that the private sector plays a central role in shaping unequal labour market outcomes for landed immigrants.

On the other hand, working conditions are much more stable in the public sector for all groups (see Table 11). Only about 7.6 per cent of public sector employees are in precarious jobs. Workers who immigrated within the past 10 years show even slightly lower levels of precarious employment than the overall public workforce. This reflects stronger union coverage, better wages, and more stable employment relationships in public sector jobs. However, access to these jobs may be limited. Many landed immigrants are more concentrated in private sector employment, where the risks of precarious work are much higher.

Table 11 / Indicators of precarious employment by immigration status and sector
Private sector and public sector, Nova Scotia, 2024, per cent

	No union		Small firm		Low wage		Short tenure		Precarious	
Group	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public
All (landed immigrant and non-immigrant)	88.3	24.8	23.7	3.1	38.9	11.6	21.1	13.1	39.5	7.6
Immigrant, became a permanent resident 10 years ago or less	88.3	22.9	17.5	1.6	41.1	9.0	25.3	17.0	41.7	5.3
Immigrant, became a permanent resident more than 10 years ago	90.8	24.7	21.5	4.4	27.1	8.1	17.3	12.4	28.8	6.8
Non-immigrant	88.2	24.9	24.4	3.1	39.3	11.9	20.8	12.9	39.8	7.8

Source Based on Statistics Canada's LFS 2024. Estimates use annual average survey weights and include only individuals who were employed (cowmain = 1) and at work (lfsstat = 1)

While the previous tables focused on the risk of precarious employment, it is also important to look at other labour market outcomes for landed immigrants. In particular, unemployment rates and income levels provide additional insight into the economic situation of migrant workers. Examining these indicators helps us understand not only the conditions of those who are employed, but also the broader challenges landed immigrants may face in finding stable work and achieving adequate living standards in Nova Scotia.

Table 12 shows important differences in unemployment rates by immigration status. First, landed immigrants face slightly higher unemployment than the total population, with a rate of 7.1 per cent compared with 6.5 per cent. The situation is more difficult for workers who immigrated within the past 10 years, whose unemployment rate reaches 8.6 per cent. This suggests that the first years after arrival are a period of greater economic uncertainty and weaker attachment to the labour market. Over time, unemployment rates tend to decline. Landed immigrants who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years have an unemployment rate of 5.7 per cent, which is even lower than that of people born in Canada (6.1 per cent). This pattern points to gradual labour market integration, but it also highlights that recent landed immigrants face

higher barriers when trying to access stable employment opportunities.

Table 12 / Unemployment rate by immigrant status
Nova Scotia, 2024

Population group	Unemployment rate (per cent)
Total population	6.5
Landed immigrants	7.1
Immigrants, landed 5 years or less earlier	8.6
Immigrants, landed more than 5 to 10 years earlier	6.6
Immigrants, landed more than 10 years earlier	5.7
Born in Canada	6.1

Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0472-01 Labour force characteristics of immigrants, annual. DOI: doi.org/10.25318/1410047201-eng

The picture becomes more complex when unemployment is examined only among racialized groups in Nova Scotia. Table 13 shows that the average unemployment rate for the racialized population was 12.7 per cent in 2021, a level notably higher than the provincial rates observed in recent years. For context, between 2019 and 2024 Nova Scotia's overall unemployment rate generally moved between about 5.7 per cent and 9.7 per cent, with the highest level recorded in 2020 as a result of the economic shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Even in that difficult year, the general unemployment rate reached 9.7 per cent, while in 2021 it had already declined to around 7.5 per cent. This comparison shows that unemployment among racialized workers remained significantly higher even after broader labour market conditions began to improve.

At the same time, the unemployment rate for racialized workers as a whole hides large differences across communities. Some groups, such as Filipino and South Asian workers, show relatively lower unemployment rates, below 9 per cent. In contrast, other groups face much higher levels of labour market exclusion. Unemployment reaches 15.4 per cent among Black workers, 16.1 per cent among Arab workers, 17.6 per cent among Southeast Asian workers, and as high as 18.1 per cent among West Asian workers.

Table 13 / Unemployment rate by racialized group
Nova Scotia, 2021

Population group	Unemployment rate (per cent)
West Asian	18.1
Southeast Asian	17.6
Arab	16.1
Japanese	16.0
Black	15.4
Individuals belonging to multiple racialized group	14.4
Latin American	13.8
Chinese	13.4
Other racialized groups, n.i.e.	13.3
Total visible racialized population	**12.7**
Korean	12.3
South Asian	8.9
Filipino	8.8

Source Statistics Canada, Census of Population 2021. Social inclusion indicators for ethnocultural groups in Canada: Participation in the labour market, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2023004-eng.htm

Note: The term "racialized population" is used in place of "visible minority," although the Statistics Canada data visualization tool from which these data are drawn continues to use the term 'visible minority' for technical reasons.

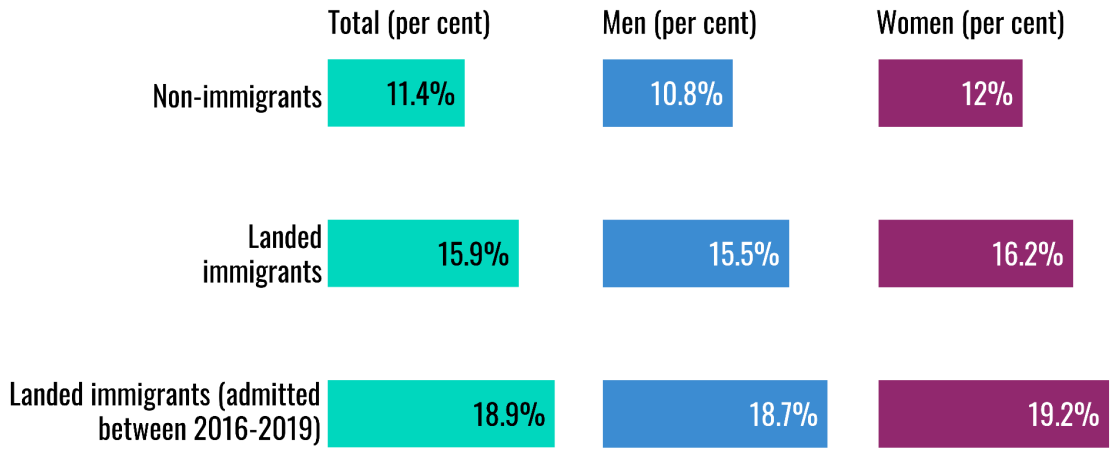
In addition, census data show that non-permanent residents[41] faced an unemployment rate of 11.1 per cent in 2021. This suggests that people with less secure migration status face more barriers in the labour market. These disparities suggest that racialized workers and non-permanent residents do not experience the labour market in the same way and may face different

[41] According to Statistics Canada, "Non-permanent residents' includes persons from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who have a work or study permit or who have claimed refugee status (asylum claimants). Family members living with work or study permit holders are also included, unless these family members are already Canadian citizens, landed immigrants or permanent residents." https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/az/Definition-eng.cfm?ID=pop253

structural barriers when trying to access employment opportunities. As a result, they may have fewer job options and may be more likely to accept positions with a higher risk of precarious working conditions.

Beyond differences in unemployment, income outcomes provide another important perspective on the economic situation of landed immigrants. Figure 5 shows that landed immigrants in Nova Scotia are more likely to live in low-income situations than non-immigrants. Among people aged 18 to 64, the low-income rate after tax is 15.9 per cent for landed immigrants, compared with 11.4 per cent for non-immigrants. The situation is even more difficult for recent landed immigrants, whose low-income rate reaches 18.9 per cent. This means that nearly one in five workers who immigrated within the past 10 years live with income below the low-income measure. Additionally, women show slightly higher rates than men in all groups. These findings suggest that the challenges faced by landed immigrants are not limited to job quality or access to employment, but also affect their broader living standards and economic security.

Figure 5 / Low-income prevalence (after-tax)
Population aged 18—64, LIM-AT, Nova Scotia, 2020, (Census 2021)



Source Statistics Canada. *Table 98-10-0314-01 Individual low-income status by immigrant status and period of immigration: Canada, provinces, and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts.*

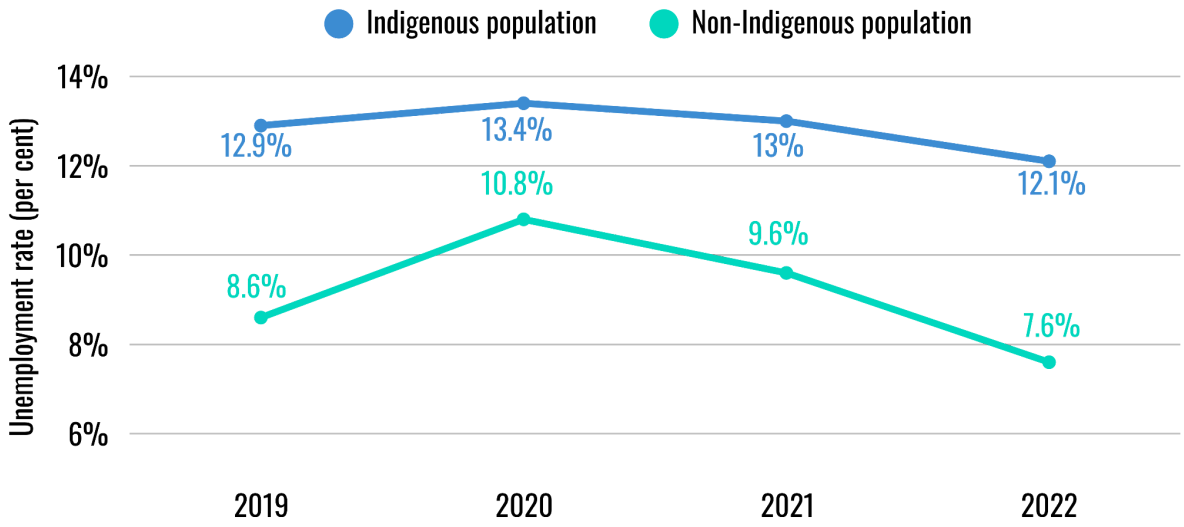
Indigenous Labour Market Inequalities

Labour market outcomes also differ for Indigenous people in Nova Scotia. According to data from the 2021 Census,[42] the participation rate was lower among Indigenous people than among the non-Indigenous population. In particular, only about 47.3 per cent of Indigenous people living on reserves were either working or looking for work, compared with 61.9 per cent of those living off reserve and 59.5 per cent of non-Indigenous people. Lower participation rates suggest that many Indigenous individuals living on reserves face barriers that limit their connection to the labour market, including limited job opportunities, geographic constraints, and structural inequalities.

Unemployment rates show similar patterns of disadvantage for Indigenous people (see Figure 6). In 2022, the unemployment rate among Indigenous people was 12.1 per cent, compared with 7.6 per cent for the non-Indigenous population. Conditions were even more difficult for those living on reserve, where unemployment reached about 21 per cent, compared with 15.2 per cent off reserve. These differences indicate that Indigenous workers are more likely to face challenges in accessing stable employment. These patterns of lower participation and higher unemployment show ongoing labour market inequalities affecting Indigenous communities in Nova Scotia.

[42] The data presented in this subsection are based on the Government of Nova Scotia report Nova Scotia's Indigenous Labour Force, which draws on analysis of the 2021 Census of Population. The report is available at: https://lmi.novascotia.ca/Indigenous-labour-force

Figure 6 / Unemployment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity
Per cent, Nova Scotia, 2019—2022



Source Government of Nova Scotia. *Nova Scotia's Indigenous Labour Force.* lmi.novascotia.ca/Indigenous-labour-force

3.2. Nova Scotia Precarity Survey: Descriptive evidence on precarious work

Building on multidimensional perspectives on job quality and employment insecurity, this section uses the 2024 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey (Precarity Survey) to present descriptive evidence on how precarious work is experienced by workers across the province. Rather than constructing a composite precarity index, the analysis focuses on individual dimensions of job insecurity, allowing each to be examined directly and transparently.

This approach reflects both conceptual and empirical considerations. While multidimensional frameworks have been central to understanding precarious employment, the characteristics of our survey data are better suited to descriptive analysis than to the construction of a single summary measure.[43] This decision was also based on comparisons of weighted and

[43] See Appendix B.

unweighted results during the analysis.[44] As a result, the findings presented here do not classify workers into fixed categories of precarity. Instead, they document patterns of insecurity related to job stability, income predictability, access to benefits, working conditions, and workers' ability to exercise rights at work.

The Precarity Survey helps us understand important parts of people's jobs that aren't usually captured by standard job statistics, particularly those related to workers' lived experiences of instability, vulnerability, and lack of control in their jobs. The analysis examines how these conditions vary across key socio-demographic and geographic groups, highlighting the uneven distribution of precarious work within the province.

Taken together with the analysis based on the LFS-2024 presented in the previous section, these descriptive findings help bridge structural patterns of employment with workers' everyday realities. While the LFS offers a province-wide picture based on standardized indicators, the Precarity Survey adds depth by showing how insecurity is felt and managed at the workplace level.

The Precarity Survey is an original survey designed by researchers at Acadia University in collaboration with the CCPA-Nova Scotia. The survey was administered online by Angus Reid between June 30 and July 4, 2025, to 551 adults aged 18-65 who were employed in Nova Scotia at the time of the survey. The questionnaire captures multiple dimensions of precarious employment (including job security, scheduling, benefits, income volatility, and economic stress), that are not available in standard labour force data.

To improve representativeness, survey weights were applied to align the sample with key characteristics of Nova Scotia's employed population, including age, gender, educational level, and regional

[44] Weighted and unweighted versions of the main survey results were compared during the analysis. Weighting did not substantially change the overall patterns, but it improved the alignment of the survey sample with available population benchmarks. For this reason, weighted results are presented throughout the report. At the same time, weighting cannot fully correct the under-representation of some groups, especially workers in more insecure jobs, which means that some forms of precarious employment may be more widespread and more severe than these results suggest.

population distribution, using data from the LFS-2024 and the 2021 Census. Further details on survey design, sampling, questionnaire structure, and weighting methodology are provided in the Appendix B.

Table 14 provides detailed information about participants in the Precarity Survey. It shows the survey results before and after weighting and compares the weighted results with a similar group from the LFS 2024.

Before weighting, the survey included more highly educated workers, older workers, public sector employees, non-immigrants, and people living in the Halifax region than population data would suggest. Weighting improved the match in key areas, including gender and age. For example, the share of workers aged 18–24 increased from 1.2 per cent before weighting to 11.2 per cent after weighting, close to the 12 per cent seen in the LFS. However, some of these adjustments are based on a very small number of responses. In the case of younger workers, only a handful of survey participants represent a much larger share of the population after weighting. As a result, weighting can correct overall percentages but cannot fully reflect the range of experiences within under-represented groups. Findings for groups that are under-represented in the survey sample should therefore be interpreted with caution.[45]

It's important to highlight that some important differences remain even after weighting. The weighted survey still includes more people with university degrees (41.5 per cent vs. 36.9 per cent in the LFS) and fewer people with college or trade credentials (30.9 per cent vs. 40.3 per cent). There are also fewer workers in the private sector (57 per cent vs. 64.7 per cent) and more in the public sector (36.1 per cent vs. 26.7 per cent) than in the overall labour market. Temporary jobs remain under-represented (10 per cent vs. 14 per cent), while full-time work is slightly more common in the survey.

[45] Respondents aged 18–24 were not excluded from the analysis. They are included in the full sample and in all other breakdowns. However, because the number of cases in this age group is too small to produce reliable stand-alone estimates, they are not shown here as a separate age category.

Table 14 / How the survey sample compares with Nova Scotia's workforce
Per cent

Variable	Category	Survey (Unweighted)	Survey (Weighted)	LFS 2024 (Annual Avg.)
Gender	Female	47.7	48.4	48.5
	Male	51.6	51.6	51.5
Education	HS or less	6.1	27.6	22.8
	College / Trade	38	30.9	40.3
	University (BA+)	55.9	41.5	36.9
Age (18–64)	18–24	1.2	11.2	12.0
	25–29	6.4	13.4	13.0
	30–34	6.4	12.5	12.1
	35–39	16.1	13.4	12.2
	40–44	15.9	12.3	11.4
	45–49	9.9	8.5	10.7
	50–54	14.3	9.7	10.5
	55–59	14.5	8.7	9.9
	60–64	15.3	10.4	8.1
Sector of employment	Private sector	48	57	64.7
	Public Sector	42.1	36.1	26.7
	Self-employed	9.8	7.0	8.6
Union coverage, employees only	Covered by union or collective agreement	30.1	25.3	30.8
	Not a member and not covered	69.9	74.7	69.2
Permanent or temporary job, employees only	Permanent	90.8	90.0	86.0
	Temporary	9.2	10.0	14.0
Full-time or part-time	Full Time	91.7	86.4	87.1.
	Part-Time	8.3	13.6	12.9
Immigration status	Immigrant, landed 10 or less years earlier	1.7	3.7	7.5
	Immigrant, landed more than 10 years earlier	4.1	3.7	4.7
	Non-immigrant	94.2	92.6	87.8
				Census 2021
Region	Halifax	64.5	55.9	*48.54*
	Rest of NS	35.5	44.1	*51.46*

Source Statistics Canada's LFS 2024, 2024 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey, and 2021 Census

Differences are also visible in immigration status and geography. Immigrants who arrived within the last 10 years make up a smaller share of the weighted sample (3.7 per cent) than in the LFS (7.5 per cent).[46] People living in the Halifax region continue to be over-represented (55.9 per cent in the survey compared to 48.5 per cent in the 2021 Census).

Although the two sources (LFS and Precarity Survey) are not directly comparable due to differences in question design and industry classification, a comparison with the LFS-2024 suggests that the Precarity Survey over-represents some public and professional service sectors. For example, government or public administration, meaning workers employed in that sector, accounts for about 17 per cent of survey respondents, compared to roughly 8 per cent of paid employees in the LFS. The same is true for the education sector, which represents 10 per cent of survey respondents versus 8 per cent in the LFS, and for professional, scientific and technical services, which account for 10 per cent versus 7 per cent. By contrast, the survey under-represents workers in accommodation and food services (4 per cent in the survey versus 7 per cent in the LFS), retail trade (8 per cent versus 13 per cent), and health care and social assistance (12 per cent in the survey compared to 16 per cent in the LFS workforce).

These remaining differences are also important to interpret in light of the survey method. Because the survey was administered through an online panel,[47] it likely under-represents some workers in more precarious situations, including groups with lower levels of labour market security and workers in sectors marked by more

[46] Available survey data do not fully capture immigrant workers. In the LFS, immigration status refers only to landed immigrants, so it does not include temporary foreign workers, refugee claimants, or other non-permanent residents, who may face even more precarious working conditions. Immigrants are also under-represented in the weighted survey sample used in this report. For more discussion, see the section titled "Precarious Employment among Immigrants and Racialized Workers."

[47] An online panel is a group of people who have agreed in advance to take part in online surveys if they are selected. This is different from a one-time online survey, because the respondents come from an existing pool of people who are already willing to participate. See: Svensson, J. (2014). Web panel surveys – a challenge for official statistics. *Proceedings of Statistics Canada Symposium 2014*, https://www.statcan.gc.ca/sites/default/files/media/14280-eng.pdf

unstable or lower-paid jobs. This helps explain, at least in part, the under-representation of recent immigrants, temporary workers, and workers in sectors such as retail and accommodation and food services. As a result, the findings in this section may understate the full extent of precarious employment in Nova Scotia.

Despite these differences, the Precarity Survey represents a first-of-its-kind effort to better understand the conditions of decent and precarious employment among workers in Nova Scotia. While the survey over- and under-sampled some groups relative to the LFS, its findings provide important new evidence and underscore the need for continued research to develop an even fuller picture of employment conditions in the province.

What the Precarity Survey Shows

Type of Main Job

One important dimension of job insecurity is the stability of the employment relationship itself. As shown in Table 15, most employees in Nova Scotia are in permanent, full-time jobs, but a meaningful minority are not. Overall, 16.6 per cent of employees report that the job that paid them the most in the last three months was non-permanent or part-time, while 83.4 per cent were in permanent full-time work.

Differences across groups are still clear. Mid-career workers (aged 45—54) show the lowest share of non-permanent or part-time employment (8.5 per cent), pointing to greater job stability at this stage of working life. In contrast, workers aged 35—44 report a higher share (19.3 per cent), closer to the overall average.

Union coverage is strongly linked to job stability. Only 8 per cent of unionized employees are in non-permanent or part-time roles, compared with 20.5 per cent of non-unionized employees. Sector differences point in the same direction: the share is lower in the public sector (14.8 per cent) and higher in the private sector (19 per cent).

Finally, differences by location are small. The share of non-permanent or part-time work is 16.8 per cent in Halifax and 16.3 per cent outside Halifax, suggesting that for this measure of job stability, union coverage and sector matter more than geography.

Table 15 / Employment type of main job in the past three months
Per cent

Variable	Group	Non-permanent or part-time	Permanent full-time
Workers	All employees	16.6	83.4
Gender	Women	15.5	84.5
	Men	17.7	82.3
Age	25–34	16.9	83.1
	35–44	19.3	80.7
	45–54	8.5	91.5
	55–64	14.4	85.6
Region	Halifax	16.8	83.2
	Outside Halifax	16.3	83.7
Union Status	Unionized	8.0	92.0
	Non-unionized	20.5	79.5
Sector	Public sector	14.8	85.2
	Private sector	19.0	81.0

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Union coverage

Union coverage remains limited for most workers in Nova Scotia (see Table 16). Precarity Survey shows that only 27.1 per cent of employees are unionized, while nearly three quarters are not. Differences by gender and region are small, but there are clearer differences by age and, above all, by sector. Union coverage is highest among workers aged 45 to 54, at 37.2 per cent, and lowest among younger and mid-career workers. The biggest gap appears between the public and private sectors. More than half of public sector workers are unionized, compared with only 9.3 per cent in

the private sector. This highlights how uneven access to collective bargaining remains across the labour market.

Table 16 / Union coverage

Variable	Group	Unionized (per cent)	Non-unionized (per cent)
Workers	All employees	27.1	72.9
Gender	Women	26.2	73.8
	Men	28.0	72.0
Age	25-34	29.2	70.8
	35-44	28.1	71.9
	45-54	37.2	62.8
	55-64	30.5	69.5
Region	Halifax	27.5	72.5
	Outside Halifax	26.6	73.4
Sector	Public	57.3	42.7
	Private	9.3	90.7

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Public vs. private sector

The private sector provides most jobs in Nova Scotia, but many of the jobs with stronger protections are concentrated in the public sector. While 61.2 per cent of employees work in the private sector, the public sector accounts for 79.7 per cent of all unionized workers. By contrast, non-unionized workers are heavily concentrated in the private sector. Public sector employment is also more common among workers aged 25 to 54 and among workers in Halifax. This helps explain why job quality is often so different across sectors: the public sector plays a much larger role in providing union coverage and stronger workplace protections (see Table 17).

Table 17 / **Public sector versus private sector**

Variable	Group	Public (per cent)	Private (per cent)
Workers	All employees	38.8	61.2
Gender	Women	38.3	61.7
	Men	39.2	60.8
Age	25-34	40.6	59.4
	35-44	41.5	58.5
	45-54	46.2	53.8
	55-64	35.9	64.1
Region	Halifax	43.3	56.7
	Outside Halifax	33.3	66.7
Union status	Unionized	79.7	20.3
	Non-unionized	23.0	77.0

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Number of Jobs

Table 18 shows that most workers in Nova Scotia report having just one job, but a noticeable minority hold more than one. Overall, 13 per cent of employees say they are currently working two or more jobs, while 87 per cent report one job. The gender gap is clear. Men are much more likely to work multiple jobs than women: 18.2 per cent of men report two or more jobs, compared with 7.5 per cent of women.

Location also matters. Multiple jobholding is far more common outside Halifax (19.1 per cent) than in Halifax (8.3 per cent), suggesting that workers outside the Halifax area may rely more on combining jobs to make ends meet or to find enough hours. Across age groups, the share working two or more jobs ranges from 10.1 per cent (25–34) to 15.7 per cent (35–44), with 14 per cent among workers aged 45–54 and 10.6 per cent among those 55–64. Differences by sector are smaller: 14.5 per cent in the private sector versus 11.8 per cent in the public sector.

Table 18 / Number of jobs currently worked

Variable	Group	1 job (per cent)	2 or more jobs (per cent)
Workers	All employees	87.0	13.0
Gender	Women	92.5	7.5
	Men	81.8	18.2
Age	25–34	89.9	10.1
	35–44	84.3	15.7
	45–54	86.0	14.0
	55–64	89.4	10.6
Region	Halifax	91.7	8.3
	Outside Halifax	80.9	10.1
Sector	Public sector	88.2	11.8
	Private sector	85.5	14.5

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Paid sick days

Access to paid sick days is a core dimension of job security and employment precarity. Data from the Precarity Survey shows a concerning pattern: 25.6 per cent of employees report having no paid sick days at all, and another 5.5 per cent report only 1–3 paid sick days per year. Taken together, about three in ten workers (31.1 per cent) have either no paid sick days or very limited coverage, leaving many workers exposed to income loss when they get sick.

Access to paid sick days is strongly linked to job protections. Unionized workers are far less likely to report having no paid sick days (12.4 per cent) compared with non-unionized workers (30.5 per cent). The difference is even more visible at the high end: 71 per cent of unionized workers report receiving 10 or more paid sick days, compared with 35.5 per cent of non-unionized workers. This gap suggests that collective bargaining is closely tied to stronger workplace protections.

Sector patterns reinforce the same story. In the public sector, only 8.9 per cent report having zero paid sick days, and 66.6 per cent receive 10+ days. In the private sector, the situation is almost the

reverse: 36.9 per cent report no paid sick days, and only 29.7 per cent report 10 or more days. These differences point to a concentration of benefit insecurity in private employment, where formal protections tend to be weaker.

Geography also matters, though less than union coverage and sector. Outside Halifax, 29.4 per cent report 0 paid sick days, compared with 22.7 per cent in Halifax, suggesting weaker benefit coverage in non-Halifax areas. These patterns show that the lack of paid sick days remains a significant feature of precarious work in Nova Scotia, particularly among non-unionized workers and those in the private sector (see Table 19).

Table 19 / Number of paid sick days offered by employers

Per cent

Variable	Group	0 days	1-3 days	4-9 days	10+ days
Workers	All employees	25.6	5.5	23.7	45.1
Gender	Women	21.3	8.7	26.8	43.2
	Men	29.7	2.5	20.9	46.9
Age	25–34	21.2	5.2	24.9	48.7
	35–44	16.7	7.8	32.2	43.3
	45–54	9.6	6.9	30.8	52.6
	55–64	22.4	4.9	19.2	53.5
Region	Halifax	22.7	5.4	22.6	49.3
	Outside Halifax	29.4	5.6	25.2	39.9
Union status	Unionized	12.4	1.6	15.0	71.0
	Non-unionized	30.5	6.9	27.0	35.5
Sector	Public sector	8.9	6.0	18.4	66.6
	Private sector	36.9	5.4	28.0	29.7

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Note: Respondents who reported having no paid sick days in QB12 are classified in the "0 days" category. The 1–3, 4–9, and 10+ days categories include only respondents who reported having paid sick days, based on their responses to QB13.

Fear of Negative Consequences for Speaking Up at Work

Another important dimension of job quality is whether workers feel able to raise health and safety or employment rights concerns without fear of negative consequences. Table 20 shows how workers assess this risk across different groups, about one in four workers (25.6 per cent) believe their job could be negatively affected if they raise a health and safety or employment rights concern.

Table 20 / Perceived risk of negative consequences for raising health and safety or employment rights concerns

Variable	Group	Likely (per cent)	Unlikely (per cent)
Workers	All employees	25.6	74.4
Gender	Women	18.5	81.5
	Men	32.5	67.5
Age	25–34	27.0	73.0
	35–44	12.4	87.6
	45–54	26.4	73.6
	55–64	24.4	75.6
Region	Halifax	29.4	70.6
	Outside Halifax	21.0	79.0
Union status	Unionized	21.8	78.2
	Non-unionized	27.1	72.9
Sector	Public sector	21.1	78.9
	Private sector	25.5	74.5

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Note: The original survey question was asked on a five-point likelihood scale: *Very likely, Likely, Somewhat likely, Not likely,* and *Not likely at all*. For presentation purposes, responses were collapsed into two categories: Likely (combining *Very likely, Likely,* and *Somewhat likely*) and Not likely (combining *Not likely* and *Not likely at all*).

This sense of risk is stronger in Halifax, where nearly three in ten workers (29.4 per cent) report that negative consequences are likely, compared with a smaller share outside Halifax. The

perception of risk is also notably higher among men, with 32.5 per cent reporting concern about possible negative impacts, compared with much lower levels among women.

As with other aspects discussed here, being part of a union is important as a job protection. Among non-unionized workers, 27.1 per cent report that speaking up could put their job at risk, compared with 21.8 per cent of unionized workers. A similar pattern appears by sector: workers in the private sector are more likely to fear negative consequences (25.5 per cent) than those in the public sector.

Taken together, these findings suggest that a substantial share of workers do not feel fully safe raising concerns at work. The higher levels of perceived risk among men, workers in Halifax, non-unionized workers, and those in the private sector point to ongoing power imbalances in the workplace that are closely linked to precarious employment.

Perceived Risk of Reduced Work Hours

A key part of job security is whether workers can count on stable hours. Table 21 shows that most employees do not expect their hours to be cut in the next three months: 88.3 per cent say this is unlikely. Still, 11.7 per cent responded “Likely,” meaning about one in nine workers see at least some risk of losing hours. The risk is not evenly shared. It is much higher outside Halifax, where 18.6 per cent report likely compared with 6.4 per cent in Halifax. This suggests that workers outside the Halifax area are more exposed to unpredictable or reduced hours.

Differences also appear by sector and job protections. Workers in the private sector report a higher risk (16.2 per cent) than those in the public sector (5.2 per cent). Similarly, non-unionized workers are more likely to expect reduced hours (13.3 per cent) than unionized workers (7.3 per cent), pointing to stronger stability where protections are stronger. Finally, men report a higher risk (15.7 per cent) than women (7.3 per cent).

In summary, these results suggest that while most workers feel their hours are stable, a meaningful minority face uncertainty, especially those outside Halifax, in the private sector, and without union coverage.

Table 21 / Perceived risk of reduced work hours in the next three months

Variable	Group	Likely (per cent)	Unlikely (per cent)
Workers	All employees	11.7	88.3
Gender	Women	7.3	92.7
	Men	15.7	84.3
Age	25–34	2.3	97.7
	35–44	14.8	85.2
	45–54	12.7	87.3
	55–64	6.0	94.0
Region	Halifax	6.4	93.7
	Outside Halifax	18.6	81.5
Union status	Unionized	7.3	92.7
	Non-unionized	13.3	86.7
Sector	Public sector	5.2	94.8
	Private sector	16.2	83.7

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Note: The original survey question was asked on a five-point likelihood scale: *Very likely, Likely, Somewhat likely, Not likely,* and *Not likely at all*. For presentation purposes, responses were collapsed into two categories: Likely (combining *Very likely, Likely,* and *Somewhat likely*) and Not likely (combining *Not likely* and *Not likely at all*).

Worried about losing the job

Table 22 shows that worrying about losing one's main job is fairly common, even if it is not the majority experience. Overall, 18.9 per cent of employees say they were worried about losing the job that paid them the most in the last three months. In other words, nearly one in five workers experienced job-loss anxiety over a short period of time.

Some groups report noticeably higher levels of concern. Men are more likely than women to report worry (20.3 per cent vs. 17.5 per cent). By age, workers in the 35-44 group stand out: 26 per cent say they were worried about losing their job, a much higher share than among younger (25-34) or older workers (45-64). This suggests that mid-career workers may face particular pressures or responsibilities that make job loss feel especially risky.

Geography also matters. Workers in Halifax report higher levels of worry (22.1 per cent) than those outside Halifax (14.5 per cent). Differences by job protections are smaller but still present. Unionized workers report slightly higher worry (20.3 per cent) than non-unionized workers (18.4 per cent), which may reflect greater awareness of job risks rather than weaker protection. By sector, concern is similar in the public and private sectors (around 19 per cent in both), suggesting that fear of job loss is not limited to one part of the labour market.

Table 22 / Worried about losing the job that paid you the most in the last three months

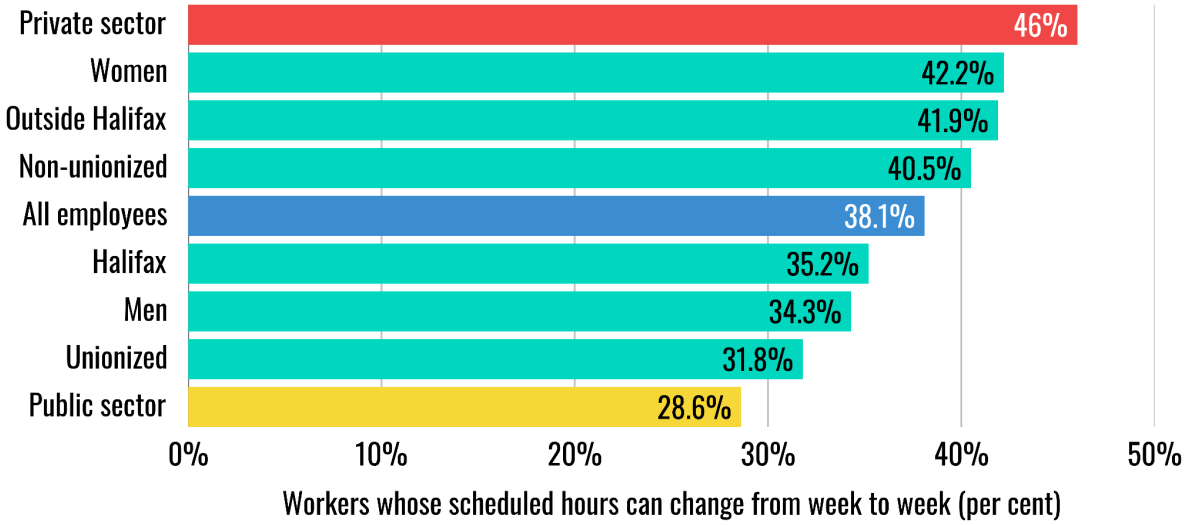
Variable	Group	Yes (per cent)	No (per cent)
Workers	All employees	18.9	81.1
Gender	Women	17.5	82.5
	Men	20.3	79.7
Age	25–34	15.5	84.5
	35–44	26.0	74.0
	45–54	17.3	82.7
	55–64	14.4	85.6
Region	Halifax	22.1	77.9
	Outside Halifax	14.5	85.5
Union status	Unionized	20.3	79.7
	Non-unionized	18.4	81.6
Sector	Public sector	19.9	80.1
	Private sector	18.9	81.1

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Changing work schedules and schedule uncertainty

Changing schedules are common for many employees in Nova Scotia. Figure 7 shows that 38.1 per cent of all employees report that their scheduled hours can change from week to week. This share is higher in the private sector (46.0 per cent), among women (42.2 per cent), among employees outside Halifax (41.9 per cent), and among non-unionized workers (40.5 per cent). It is lower in the public sector (28.6 per cent), among unionized workers (31.8 per cent), among men (34.3 per cent), and among employees in Halifax (35.2). In general, the figure suggests that changing schedules are more common among groups of workers who may have less job stability and fewer workplace protections.

Figure 7 / Workers whose scheduled hours can change from week to week



Source Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

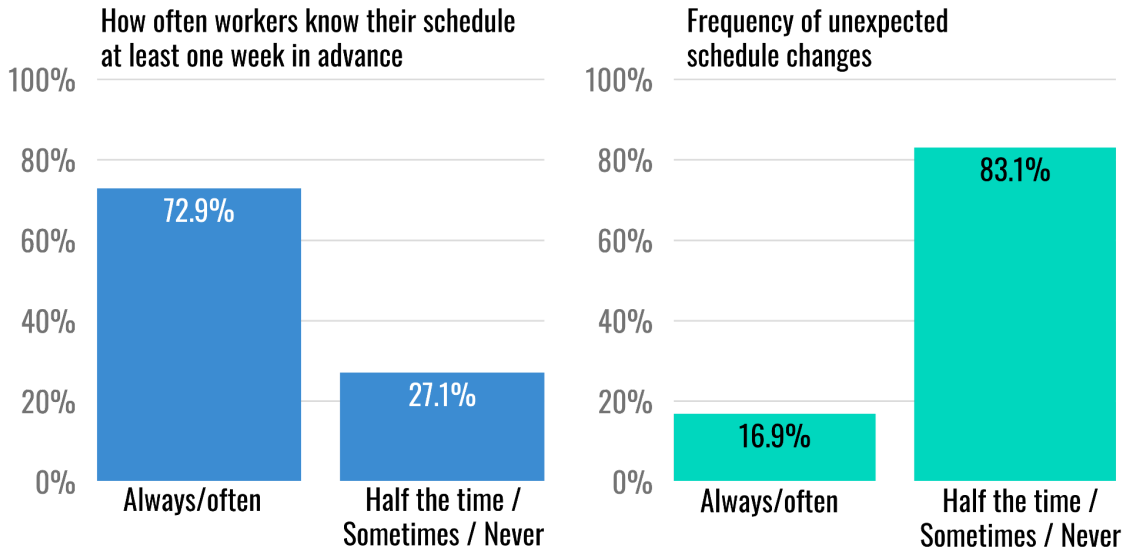
Note: Based on workers who reported that they work at a job where their scheduled hours can change from week to week.

For employees with changing schedules, the problem is not only flexibility but also unpredictability. Figure 8 presents two separate measures of schedule uncertainty among employees whose scheduled hours can change from week to week. The first shows that 72.9 per cent always or often know their schedule at least one week in advance, while 27.1 per cent say this happens only half the time, sometimes, or never. The second shows that 16.9 per cent

experience unexpected schedule changes always or often, while 83.1 per cent say this happens only half the time, sometimes, or never.

While the figure suggests that most employees with changing schedules usually receive advance notice and do not frequently face unexpected changes, a significant minority still experience an important degree of schedule instability. This can have serious effects on workers' lives, particularly for those with caregiving responsibilities, such as children, sick relatives, or other dependents. Even for those without these responsibilities, unstable schedules can disrupt daily life, make planning difficult, and create additional stress.

Figure 8 / Work schedule uncertainty among employees



Source Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

Note: Based on workers who reported that they work at a job where their scheduled hours can change from week to week.

Access to Employer-Provided Benefits

Table 23 shows that many workers report having access to employer-provided benefits such as prescriptions, vision care, dental care, and extended health benefits (e.g., massage therapy, physiotherapy, paramedical services, medical supplies and equipment, etc.). For all employees, access to each benefit sits between about 69 per cent and 73 per cent. While this may look

relatively high at first glance, it also points to a serious gap. Nearly three in ten workers report having no access to any of these benefits at all.

This is an important finding, especially given that the survey sample leans toward more stable and secure jobs. Even under these favourable conditions, a large share of workers is still left without basic health-related benefits. This suggests that benefit insecurity is likely even more widespread in the broader workforce. Lack of access to benefits means higher out-of-pocket costs, more financial stress, and greater risk when workers or their families get sick. In this context, the results highlight not strength, but a clear weakness in how employment benefits are distributed across jobs in Nova Scotia.

Table 23 / Access to employer-provided benefits

Per cent

Variable	Group	Prescriptions	Vision care	Dental care	Extended health benefits
Workers	All employees	72.5	68.6	71.7	70.4
Gender	Women	76.6	75.1	75.8	73.2
	Men	68.8	62.5	68.0	67.9
Age	25-34	76.2	76.9	74.5	74.4
	35-44	81.2	76.9	80.3	78.9
	45-54	87.0	85.4	86.4	83.3
	55-64	66.7	63.0	66.3	64.5
Region	Halifax	78.9	72.5	78.6	77.1
	Outside Halifax	64.4	63.7	63.0	61.9
Union status	Unionized	87.6	87.7	86.1	86.5
	Non-unionized	66.9	61.5	66.4	64.4
Sector	Public	85.8	85.9	84.7	83.9
	Private	63.0	59.8	62.3	60.8

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

The biggest differences in Table 23 are linked to union coverage. Unionized workers are much more likely to report having each benefit: around 86 per cent to 88 per cent have prescriptions, vision,

dental, and extended health coverage. For non-unionized workers, the numbers drop to about 61 per cent to 67 per cent. In other words, being in a union is strongly tied to having benefits, and the gap is large no matter which benefit we look at.

We also see a clear split between the public and private sectors. Public sector workers report much higher access (about 84 per cent to 86 per cent across benefits), while private sector workers are lower (about 60 per cent to 63 per cent). This pattern matches the wider story in the report: jobs with stronger protections tend to come with better benefit coverage, while benefit insecurity is more common in private sector work.

There are differences by gender, but these likely reflect the composition of our survey sample. In Table 23, women report higher access than men for every benefit (for example, 76.6 per cent vs. 68.8 per cent for prescriptions, and 75.1 per cent vs. 62.5 per cent for vision care). Also, benefit access also varies by age. Workers aged 45-54 report the highest access (for example, 87 per cent for prescriptions and 86.4 per cent for dental), while workers aged 55–64 report much lower access (about 63 per cent to 67 per cent across benefits). This suggests that benefit coverage is not steady across working life, and older workers in this survey are more likely to be missing benefits.

Access to Employer-Provided Pension and RRSP Benefits

Retirement security looks very different depending on where people work (see Table 24). In Nova Scotia, access to employer-supported retirement benefits is uneven across the labour market. While Canada has a public pension system, workplace pensions and employer RRSP contributions still play a major role in shaping people's financial security in retirement. Just 57.8 per cent of workers report having a workplace pension plan, and 39.3 per cent receive employer RRSP contributions. Only 28.8 per cent have access to both, meaning that many workers depend on weaker or more individualized forms of retirement support rather than stronger, collectively provided plans. At the same time, nearly

one-third of workers (31.8 per cent) report having neither a workplace pension nor employer RRSP contributions.

The data clearly show that these two types of benefits are structured very differently across jobs. Workplace pension plans are heavily concentrated in unionized and public sector employment, where retirement security is built through collective arrangements. In contrast, employer RRSP contributions are more common in private and non-unionized jobs, where responsibility for retirement savings is shifted more onto individual workers. These are not the same kind of protection, and they do not offer the same level of security or predictability over time.

Union coverage stands out as a key dividing line. More than eight in ten unionized workers (82.1 per cent) report having a workplace pension plan, compared with less than half of non-unionized workers (48.7 per cent). This gap shows how collective bargaining continues to be one of the main ways workers gain access to stronger and more reliable retirement benefits. At the same time, 39.1 per cent of non-unionized workers report having neither a workplace pension nor employer RRSP contributions, compared with a much smaller share among unionized workers. Without union protection, many workers are left with fewer options and greater long-term uncertainty.

A similar divide appears between the public and private sectors. Public sector workers report very high access to workplace pensions (84.6 per cent), while access in the private sector is far lower (39.3 per cent). In addition, 46.3 per cent of private sector workers report having neither a workplace pension nor employer RRSP contributions. This means that many private sector workers must rely on individual savings or employer RRSPs that offer less stability and shift more risk onto workers themselves.

Table 24 / **Access to employer-provided pension and RRSP benefits**
Per cent

Variable	Group	Workplace pension plan	Employer RRSP contributions	Both	Neither
Workers	All employees	57.8	39.3	28.8	31.8
Gender	Women	61.5	46.0	35.9	28.4
	Men	54.3	33.0	22.3	35.0
Age	25-34	57.0	40.4	29.8	32.5
	35-44	57.8	48.2	27.9	21.9
	45-54	72.9	43.2	35	19.0
	55-64	60.2	25.0	19.8	34.5
Region	Halifax	64.2	43.6	32.8	25.0
	Outside Halifax	49.6	33.8	23.9	40.5
Union status	Unionized	82.1	30.8	25.2	12.2
	Non-unionized	48.7	42.4	30.2	39.1
Sector	Public	84.6	30.2	25.7	10.9
	Private	39.3	42.8	28.3	46.3

Source 2025 Nova Scotia Precarity Survey

There are also important regional differences. Workers outside Halifax are significantly more likely to lack employer-supported retirement benefits, with 40.5 per cent reporting neither a workplace pension nor employer RRSP contributions. There are also clear differences by age. Workers aged 45–54 report the highest access to workplace pensions and combined benefits, while workers aged 55–64 are much less likely to receive employer RRSP contributions or both benefits together. This suggests that even as workers approach retirement, many are doing so without strong employer-supported savings, reinforcing patterns of economic insecurity later in life.

4. Conclusions, Limitations, and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions: Why this matters for the future of work in Nova Scotia

The findings of this report, read alongside the first report in the decent work series, point to a clear conclusion: advancing decent work in Nova Scotia requires more than marginal adjustments to existing policies. It calls for a rethinking of how employment standards, collective bargaining, and social protections intersect.

From a worker's perspective, what is at stake is not simply income, but the ability to plan a life. Taken together, the LFS-based index and the Precarity Survey findings show how low wages, weak protections, and insecurity at work can make it hard to arrange child care, take training, care for relatives, or take part in community life. The Precarity Survey also shows how common basic gaps in protection still are: even in a sample tilted toward more secure jobs, close to three in ten workers report having none of the core health benefits, and about three in ten report having no paid sick days or only a few per year. When workers lack paid leave and benefits, many feel pressure to work while sick, increasing risks for their own health and for others. The survey also points to a serious climate of fear: about one quarter of workers say raising concerns about rights or safety could bring negative consequences. Over time, these pressures increase stress, worsen health, and deepen inequality.

From the perspective of workers and their families, a labour market built on widespread precarity makes it very hard to sustain a decent standard of living. When work is unstable and hours are uncertain, it becomes difficult to budget for rent, food, child care, transportation, or debt payments.The survey evidence reinforces this day-to-day insecurity: a meaningful share of workers see a cut in hours as a real possibility in the near term. For many workers in precarious jobs, even a small reduction in hours or an unexpected expense can make it harder to keep up with bills or maintain essentials, especially when wages are low and hours unstable. The province's high rates of working-age and child poverty are closely connected to this situation: too many jobs do not provide the stability and income needed to support a secure family life, even when people are working hard.

Finally, from a democratic perspective, the evidence underscores the importance of collective worker voice. Across the report, union coverage and public sector employment stand out as strong protections –linked to better wages, better benefits, more stable work, and stronger retirement security through workplace pension plans. In contrast, many private sector and non-union jobs offer weaker protections, and retirement support is more likely to rely on more individualized arrangements, such as employer RRSP contributions, or no employer support at all. Strengthening the conditions that allow workers to organize and bargain collectively is therefore not only a matter of workplace fairness, but also a foundation for a more secure and more democratic economy.

4.2. Limitations: Online panel constraints and under-representation of vulnerable workers

This report should be read with some important limitations in mind. The survey-based findings presented in Section 3.2 are drawn from an online panel and, even after weighting, the sample remains somewhat skewed toward more stable and secure jobs. In particular, the survey under-represents some groups that are more likely to face precarious employment, including younger workers,

recent immigrants, temporary workers, and workers in sectors such as retail and accommodation and food services.

Temporary foreign workers, refugee claimants, and other non-permanent residents are also difficult to capture through online panel surveys and are not identified in the LFS immigration variables used here. As a result, the survey-based findings may not fully capture the extent of precarious employment in Nova Scotia. Similar challenges were also identified in the B.C. Precarity Survey, suggesting that this is a broader methodological issue rather than a limitation unique to this study.

Gig and platform-based work are also under-captured in this report. Because our Precarity Survey relies on an online panel, it likely does not capture this part of the workforce well, especially workers doing irregular, multiple, or app-based jobs. The LFS also has important limits for this purpose. Statistics Canada notes that gig work includes short-term or task-based work, sometimes done through digital platforms and sometimes not, and that this workforce includes both self-employed workers and some paid employees. In practice, however, many gig and platform workers are counted as self-employed, while the LFS-based index used in this report focuses on employees. This means that part of this workforce is not well reflected in our analysis. This is especially important because recent Statistics Canada data show that digital platform work remains more common among recent immigrants, suggesting that one group with higher exposure to insecurity may also be harder to measure well in both sources.[48]

The LFS-based index also has limits. It provides a valuable province-wide picture using available structural indicators, but it cannot capture several important dimensions of precarious work,

[48] For discussion of the challenges involved in measuring gig work, see Vincent Hardy, "Defining and measuring the gig economy using survey data," *Labour Statistics: Research Papers*, Statistics Canada, March 4, 2024: www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-004-m/75-004-m2024001-eng.htm.
A brief 2025 update from Statistics Canada, "In the spotlight: The number of digital platform workers largely unchanged in 2025, and digital platform work continues to be more prevalent among recent immigrants," is available in Statistics Canada, *The Daily, Labour Force Survey, December 2025,* January 1, 2026: www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/260109/dq260109a-eng.htm

including schedule predictability, on-call requirements, paid sick days, benefits coverage, fear of retaliation, and household economic stress. For this reason, the two measures used in this report should be understood as complementary rather than exhaustive. Together, they provide a strong and useful picture of precarious employment in Nova Scotia, while still likely offering a conservative estimate of the problem.

4.3. Recommendations: Reducing precarious employment and advancing decent work

The recommendations below do two things. First, they respond directly to the evidence presented in this report, especially the findings on low pay, weak access to benefits and paid sick days, insecurity about job loss and hours, and the protective role of union coverage and public sector employment. Second, they carry forward key labour standards reforms set out in the first report in this series, particularly on hours, scheduling, paid leave, and enforcement. Read together, the two reports point to a common conclusion: reducing precarious work in Nova Scotia requires both stronger labour standards and stronger worker voice.

Strengthen employment standards to reduce insecurity

Precarious work in Nova Scotia is closely linked to low wages, weak access to benefits and paid leave, and other forms of insecurity at work. Updating basic employment standards is a necessary first step to reduce this insecurity.

1. Raise the floor on wages and hours. Low hourly pay is one of the clearest signs of precarious work in Nova Scotia. This report also shows that many workers face insecurity linked to reduced hours, limited benefits, and weak workplace protections. Building on the

first report in this series,[49] stronger standards on wages, minimum hours, and scheduling are needed to reduce this insecurity.

- Align minimum wage policy with the goal of decent work by setting out a medium-term plan to gradually close the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage, so that full-time work at or near the minimum wage allows workers to cover basic needs instead of leaving them in ongoing economic insecurity.
- Strengthen protections on minimum hours and scheduling to limit the use of very short or highly variable shifts that make it hard for workers to predict their paycheque.

2. Improve protections around scheduling and on-call work. The first report in this series identified important gaps in working time protections, including advance notice of schedules and minimum hours. The broader patterns of insecurity documented in this report reinforce the importance of stronger protections in this area, especially for workers in low-wage and non-standard jobs.

- Introduce clear minimum standards for advance notice of work schedules, especially for workers whose hours vary from week to week.
- Require compensation for on-call time and last-minute schedule changes, so that the cost of flexibility is not pushed entirely onto workers.
- Set reasonable limits on the use of "just-in-time" scheduling in sectors where it has become routine.

3. Expand access to paid sick leave and basic benefits. The findings in this report show clear gaps in basic protections. About three in ten workers report having no paid sick days or only a few per year, and many also lack core job-related benefits. Building on the first report in this series, Nova Scotia should strengthen

[49] Casey, R., & Saulnier, C. (2025). *Foundations of decent work: An evaluation of Nova Scotia labour standards.* Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives–Nova Scotia. policyalternatives.ca/news-research/the-foundations-of-decent-work-an-evaluation-of-nova-scotia-labour-standards/

minimum standards on paid sick leave, paid vacation, and related leave protections.

- Ensure that all employees are entitled to 10 employer-paid sick leave days that can also be used for family responsibilities, plus 14 paid days during public health outbreaks. Allow unused sick days to be carried forward, and prevent employers from requiring doctor's notes to access paid leave.
- Improve paid vacation standards by ensuring that employees accrue vacation time or pay during their first year of employment, have access to three weeks of paid vacation after one year, and four weeks after 10 years.

Extend protections to non-standard and low-union sectors

4. Close gaps in coverage for non-standard workers. The first report in this series identified legal gaps that leave some workers excluded from, or only partially covered by, labour standards. The findings in this report reinforce the importance of closing those gaps, especially for workers in temporary, casual, and other insecure forms of employment.

- Clarify and update definitions of employee, dependent contractor, and self-employed worker in order to reduce misclassification and ensure that workers who depend on a single business for their livelihood are covered by core protections.
- Extend minimum standards to workers in temporary agency arrangements, short fixed-term contracts, casual and on-call positions, and app-based or platform work, including equal treatment provisions where appropriate.

5. Address the risks created by temporary and casual work. The LFS-based index shows very high rates of precarious employment among temporary and part-time workers. The first report in this series also highlighted how gaps in labour standards leave many non-standard workers with weaker protections. Together, these

findings support stronger rules for temporary, casual, and other insecure forms of work.

- Limit the repeated use of short-term or casual contracts to fill ongoing positions, and require conversion to permanent status after a reasonable period in appropriate cases.
- Introduce or strengthen equal pay and equal treatment rules where workers on temporary or casual contracts perform similar work to permanent employees in the same workplace.

6. Focus enforcement and support on sectors with high precarious work. The LFS-based index shows that precarious employment is especially concentrated in accommodation and food services, retail, agriculture, fishing, and some other service industries. These sectors combine high rates of low wages, weak union coverage, and short job tenure, making them a clear priority for stronger enforcement and support.

- Prioritize active inspections and targeted enforcement in sectors and occupations where precarious employment is more common.
- Combine enforcement with outreach, education, and support for employers and workers in these sectors, recognizing that many small workplaces may need clear guidance to comply with standards.

Strengthen enforcement and access to rights

7. Build a more active and better targeted enforcement system. The first report in this series showed that Nova Scotia's labour standards system relies too heavily on individual complaints and has limited capacity for proactive enforcement. The findings in this report reinforce the need for a more active approach, especially in sectors and regions where precarious work is more common.

- Increase resources for inspections that are planned in advance and focus on sectors and regions where the indices point to high levels of precarious work.

- Develop clear criteria to identify high-risk workplaces and use data from both administrative sources and surveys to guide inspection priorities.

8. Reduce barriers to making complaints and protect workers from retaliation. The first report highlighted the limits of a complaint-based system, especially for workers in low-wage and precarious jobs. This report also shows that many workers face insecurity and may be reluctant to raise concerns or report violations.

- Simplify complaint procedures and provide accessible, multilingual information and support so that workers understand their rights and how to use them.
- Strengthen legal protections and enforcement against retaliation when workers report violations or take part in investigations.

9. Improve data collection and transparency. Both reports point to the need for better information on how labour standards work in practice and where precarious employment is most concentrated. Better public data would support enforcement, accountability, and future research.

- Systematically collect and publish data on labour standards violations, complaints, outcomes, and repeat offenders, broken down by sector and region.
- Where possible, continue or repeat survey-based monitoring of job quality and precarious employment, so that policymakers, researchers, unions, and community organizations can track changes over time.

Support collective bargaining and worker voice

10. Remove barriers to unionization in high-precarity sectors. The first report in this series, together with the findings in this report, points to unionization as one of the clearest protections against precarious work, especially in low-wage and high-turnover sectors.

- Review and amend labour relations rules that make it difficult for workers in small, fragmented, or highly mobile workplaces to organize collectively.
- Make union certification and first-contract processes work better for all workers, with particular attention to sectors where turnover is high and precarious employment is more common.

11. Explore sector-level approaches that strengthen, rather than replace, collective bargaining. In sectors dominated by small firms, part-time work, and high turnover, traditional single-employer bargaining may not always be enough to lift job quality across the sector. Any broader approach should be developed in consultation with unions and workers, and should be designed to complement workplace-level bargaining, not replace it.

- Explore sector-level mechanisms in key low-wage sectors that can help set stronger minimum standards on wages, hours, and benefits, while preserving the central role of union organizing and collective bargaining at the workplace level.
- Encourage sector-based forums or other forms of worker-employer dialogue on job quality, scheduling, and minimum standards in sectors with high levels of precarious work.

A broader decent work agenda should also include regional and economic policy

12. Make job quality an explicit goal of regional economic development.

- Include decent work indicators, such as the prevalence of precarious and vulnerable employment, in regional development strategies and evaluations.
- Design incentives and supports for employers in high-precarity regions that are conditional on improving job quality, for example by offering more stable hours, better benefits, and safer working conditions.

13. Use public funding and procurement to support decent work.

- Attach clear job quality expectations to public procurement, grants, and subsidies, so that public funds do not reinforce low-wage, high-precarity business models.
- Encourage public and non-profit institutions to model best practices in job quality, especially in regions and sectors where precarious employment is most common.

These measures would not eliminate precarious employment overnight. But they would begin to change the conditions that allow low wages, instability, and weak protections to remain common in Nova Scotia. By raising the floor of employment standards, closing coverage gaps, strengthening enforcement, and supporting collective bargaining and worker voice, the province can move closer to a labour market where secure and decent work is the norm rather than the exception.

Appendix A.

Methodology: Building the Employment Precarity Index N.S. from the LFS 2024

The Employment Precarity Index for Nova Scotia based on data from the LFS-2024. Its goal is to provide a broad, province-wide measure of the labour conditions using the limited but high-quality structural indicators available in the LFS public-use microdata file.

Data source and sample

All results are based on Statistics Canada's LFS-2024, using the annual public-use microdata file (PUMF). The analysis is restricted to paid employees and excludes self-employed workers and unpaid family workers. All estimates use the LFS person-weight to produce representative provincial totals.

Conceptual Approach and Indicator Construction

This Employment Precarity Index is based on four indicators available in the 2024 LFS. These indicators capture different forms of job insecurity among paid employees in Nova Scotia:

- Union coverage: whether the employee is covered by a union or collective agreement.
- Hourly wage level: whether the employee earns at or below the low-wage threshold, defined as $20, so workers earning $20 or less are coded as "low wage."
- Job tenure: whether the employee has been in their current job for less than 12 months.
- Firm size: whether the employee works in a workplace with fewer than 20 employees.

These four indicators reflect different dimensions of insecurity: limited worker protections, low pay, short job stability, and weaker institutional supports.[50]

Classification Rule

Because the LFS does not include enough questions to build a continuous index, a simple and transparent classification rule is used. A worker is considered precarious if:

- they meet three or more of the four indicators, or
- they are low wage and meet at least one additional indicator.

Then, each paid employee is placed into one of two categories:

- Not precarious
- Precarious, which includes:
  - low wage plus one additional indicator, or
  - three or more indicators

These categories are used in Section 3.1 in this report to compare results across gender, age, regions, and industries.

Weighting and statistical treatment

The LFS-2024 Public Use Microdata File (PUMF) combines all twelve monthly LFS samples into a single annual dataset. The standard person weight (*finalwt*) provided in the PUMF corresponds to each monthly sample and therefore reflects the population for that specific month.

Because the annual PUMF stacks all twelve months together, the sum of *finalwt* represents approximately twelve times the monthly employed population of Nova Scotia. To obtain annual average population–consistent estimates, the weight was rescaled by dividing it by twelve (wt12 = *finalwt* / 12). This adjustment ensures that the sum of weights corresponds to Nova Scotia's average

[50] This index is based on, and adapts, the precarious employment index developed by Vosko et al. (2020). See Section 3.1, "Building a Precarious Employment Index from the 2024 Labour Force Survey in Nova Scotia."

annual employed population, rather than twelve stacked monthly populations.

All statistical estimates were produced in R using the survey package together with standard data-processing packages (including tidyr, *dplyr*, *readr*, *tibble*, and *janitor*). All estimates apply the annual analytical weight (wt12). Confidence intervals were generated using the default variance estimation procedures implemented in the survey package. Because the LFS PUMF does not provide replicate weights or full survey design information, variance estimates do not fully account for the complex sampling design of the LFS and should therefore be interpreted as approximate.

Limitations

The LFS provides a strong structural overview but cannot measure key dimensions of precarity such as:

- schedule predictability
- on-call requirements
- benefits coverage
- wage theft
- paid sick days
- income volatility
- fear of retaliation
- household economic stress

For this reason, the LFS-based index should be interpreted as a minimum estimate of precarious employment.

Appendix B.

Survey Methodology

This appendix describes the Precarity Survey, which provides original data used to support the descriptive analysis of working conditions and employment insecurity presented in this report.

The survey was designed by faculty members at Acadia University and staff of the CCPA-NS, based on the survey design used by the Understanding Precarity in B.C. (UP-BC) Partnership and the PEPSO study. Ethics approval was received in March 2025 by the Acadia University Research Ethics Board (25-15).

The online survey was active between June 30th to July 4th, 2025. Our sample included 551 Canadians aged 18 and plus who had worked in Nova Scotia at least three months prior to the day of taking the survey. The survey was conducted in English. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/-4.17 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

As with the precarity study in British Columbia, the N.S. Precarity Study was carried out by a professional survey firm with a panel of participants. We determined that an online panel from Angus Reid would provide the most reliable data considering online recruiting has resulted in spam or bot responses. Participants were recruited from a representative panel from the Angus Reid Forum. Eligible participants from Angus Reid Forum's proprietary panel were emailed about the survey. All members of the panel are double opted-in to receive invites to surveys. They accepted our terms and conditions and privacy policy. Angus Reid relies heavily on deep profiling of our panel in order to respect our panelists' time and only send surveys that are relevant to the respondent.

Target population

The target population for the survey is:

- **Geography:** People living in Nova Scotia.
- **Age:** Adults aged 18-65
- **Labour market status:** Currently employed at the time of the survey interview (including full-time and part-time workers and self-employed).

Sample size

The final analytic sample used in this report consists of 551 employed respondents with complete information on the core variables used in the index and weighting.

Some tables in the main text may use smaller effective sample sizes when restricted to specific groups (for example, by age, gender, or region) or when additional variables with missing data are required.

Data collection mode and coverage

The data collection strategy was designed to reach workers in all regions of Nova Scotia: Cape Breton-Canso, Central Nova/Nova Centre, Cumberland-Colchester, Dartmouth-Cole Harbour, Halifax, Halifax West/Halifax-Ouest, Kings-Hants, Sackville-Preston-Chezzetcook, South Shore-St. Margarets, Sydney-Victoria, West Nova/Nova-Ouest.

Questionnaire and core concepts

The questionnaire captures domains of precarious employment that are not available in standard administrative or labour force data, including:

- Employment relationship (permanent, temporary, casual, platform/app based);
- Hours and scheduling (on call expectations, advance notice, variability);

- Job security (contract length, fear of job loss, reduction of hours);
- Benefits and workplace protections (union coverage, paid sick leave, extended health benefits);
- Economic stress (income variability, struggles with expenses, reliance on credit);
- Health, safety, and well being (stress, harassment, work related pressures);
- Demographic and household context.

Structure of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire followed a clear progression, starting with screening questions and moving through employment characteristics, working conditions, and socioeconomic context.

Below is the complete module structure based on the questionnaire provided:

- Screening (QS series)
  - QS1: Worked for pay or profit in the last 3 months.
  - QS2: Age.
  - QS2A: Region of residence.
  - QS3: Current paid work in Nova Scotia.
- Section A - Employment Relationship & Unionization (QA series)
  - QA1: Number of jobs currently worked.
  - QA2: Main job type.
  - QA3: Employment relationship specifics.
  - QA4: Industry or field.
  - QA5: Sector (public/private/non profit).
  - QA6: Hourly wage.
  - QA7: Concern about job loss.
  - QA8: Union status.
  - QA9–QA12: Union activities, attitudes, and challenges.
- Section B - Hours, Scheduling, Benefits, Job Security (QB series)
  - QB1: On call work.
  - QB2: Hours from temporary agencies.

- QB3: Income received in cash.
- QB4-QB7: Schedule variability, notice, and mismatches between contracted and actual hours.
- QB8-QB9: Risk of negative consequences or reduction in hours.
- QB10: Week to week income variation.
- QB11: Detailed benefits (prescriptions, dental, vision, health, pension, RRSP, leave top ups, etc.).
- QB12–QB14: Paid and unpaid sick days.
- QB15: Training.
- QB16-QB17: App based income.

- Section C - Demographics, Household Conditions, Income & Hardship (QC series)
  - QC1–QC5: Gender identity, residency status, race/ethnicity, trans identity, sexual orientation.
  - QC6: Student status.
  - QC7: Household composition.
  - QC8: Share of household expenses covered.
  - QC9-QC12: Children, childcare access, time limitations, and material constraints.
  - QC1-QC14: Adult caregiving.
  - QC15-QC17: Housing and self rated physical/mental health.
  - QC18: Disability.
  - QC19: Personal income.
  - QC20–QC21: Financial strain and difficulty paying essential expenses.

Weighting methodology[51]

Although recruitment through the Angus Reid Forum reached workers across Nova Scotia, the final sample does not perfectly match the province's employed population. To reduce coverage and non-response imbalances, we created post-stratification weights using a two-stage calibration strategy that combines the strengths of the 2021 Census (stable demographic and geographic composition) and the LFS-2024 (labour-market-relevant benchmarks for the employed population).[52]

Analytic universe

Weights were constructed for the analytic universe of employed respondents aged 18–64 with valid values for the calibration variables. Respondents outside 18–64 and cases with missing calibration information were excluded from the weighted analytic file.

[51] Final survey weights were built using iterative raking to LFS-2024 (gender–age) and Census 2021 (region) targets, followed by trimming (0.5–4.3) and rescaling. This approach ensures representativeness while controlling variance inflation. For readers interested in the underlying methods, see Valliant, R., Dever, J. A., & Kreuter, F. (2018). *Practical Tools for Designing and Weighting Survey Samples*; Gelman, A. (2007). Struggles with survey weighting and regression modeling. Statistical Science, 22(2), 153–164. doi.org/10.1214/088342306000000691; and Mercer, A., Lau, A., & Kennedy, C. (2021). *For Weighting Online Opt-In Samples, What Matters Most?* Pew Research Center. pewresearch.org/methods/2018/01/26/for-weighting-online-opt-in-samples-what-matters-most/

[52] Weight calibration often draws on multiple auxiliary data sources, not just a single benchmark. For example, one study notes that "other data sources provide auxiliary information" when estimating population summaries. See: Longford J. (2024). *Relaxed calibration of survey weights*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/12-001-x/2024002/article/00012-eng.pdf?st=8HLMdZ-n
Another observes that calibration is "commonly used … to correct for non-response and coverage errors" across demographic and coverage variables. See: Kolenikov, S., and Hammer, H. (2015). Simultaneous Raking of Survey Weights at Multiple Levels. Survey Methods: Insights from the Field, Special issue: 'Weighting: Practical Issues and 'How to' Approach. http://surveyinsights.org/?p=5099

Stage 1: Census-based calibration (region, age, gender)

The first stage aligns the survey to the Census 2021 distribution of Nova Scotia's adult population by:

- Economic region (five regions: Halifax, Cape Breton, North Shore, Annapolis Valley, Southern),
- Gender (Female/Male), and
- Age (collapsed into five working-age bands: 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64).

Census population counts were first harmonized to match the survey's age, gender, and regional categories and converted into population targets. Calibration at this stage uses iterative proportional fitting (raking) to adjust the survey weights so that the weighted sample matches the Census margins for region, age, and gender simultaneously. Raking works by repeatedly rescaling case weights across each dimension until all target distributions are met within a small tolerance. As a result, respondents in groups that are under-represented in the raw sample receive larger weights, while those in over-represented groups receive smaller weights, ensuring that the weighted survey reproduces the Census population structure.

Stage 2: Labour-market calibration using LFS 2024 (employed 18–64 totals, education, gender)

Census benchmarks are excellent for demographic/geographic structure, but they do not directly describe the current employed population in the way needed for labour-market analysis. Therefore, a second calibration stage uses the LFS 2024 as a labour-market reference for the employed population aged 18-64.

In this stage, we:

1. Defined the employment benchmark. The LFS-2024 public-use microdata file stacks all twelve-monthly samples into a single annual file. Because the standard person weight (*finalwt*) refers to the population represented in each individual month, we rescaled the weight by dividing it by twelve (wt12 = *finalwt*

/ 12) to obtain population-consistent annual totals. The employment benchmark was constructed using only respondents classified as "Employed, at work" and restricted to Nova Scotia residents aged 18–64, producing an annual estimate of the employed population that is consistent with the survey's analytic universe. Derived labour-market targets:

- Education (3 groups): High School or less, College/Trade, University (BA+),
- Gender (Female/Male), and
- The overall employed total (18–64) used for population scaling (for weights that sum to a meaningful employed count).

2. Re-calibrated the survey weights: Starting from a base weight of 1 (for eligible cases), we applied raking to match the survey simultaneously to the chosen margins. This stage ensures the weighted dataset reflects the labour-market composition of employed Nova Scotians aged 18-64 more closely, particularly on education, while maintaining alignment with the working-age universe.

Weight trimming and final scaling

To limit variance inflation from extreme weights, we applied moderate trimming after the initial calibration. Trimming caps unusually large weights so that no single respondent carries disproportionate influence. After trimming, we re-ran calibration so that the final weights continue to match the target margins. To reduce the influence of extreme survey weights, we applied moderate trimming after the initial calibration. After trimming, the weights were recalibrated to ensure they continue to match the target population benchmarks.The final analysis weight provided in the dataset is *finalwt_lfs24*.

Important: The weights correct for differences in region, age, gender, and education relative to benchmark sources, but they do not eliminate all potential biases (e.g., unmeasured characteristics correlated with non-response). Precision also depends on subgroup sample size: very fine cross-tabulations can produce unstable estimates even with weighting.

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