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# CLOSING THE GAPS:

Gender pay inequity in Atlantic Canada

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for POLICY ALTERNATIVES  
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# Summary

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- **Gender pay gaps vary by province:** Based on average weekly earnings, the wage gap is lowest for women on Prince Edward Island at five per cent. The wage gap is 14 per cent for women in New Brunswick, and 15 per cent for women in Nova Scotia. The highest wage gap in the Atlantic provinces is in Newfoundland and Labrador at 24 per cent.
- **The gender pay gap is even greater for racialized women:** The pay gap between men and women increases when looking at how much racialized women make compared to non-racialized men. The gap is greatest on Prince Edward Island, at 42 per cent, followed by 38 per cent in Nova Scotia, 37 per cent in New Brunswick, and 36 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- **Indigenous women also face large income gaps:** Indigenous women earned less than non-Indigenous men in every Atlantic province. The gap was 38 per cent in New Brunswick, 34 per cent in Nova Scotia, 33 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador, and 17 per cent in Prince Edward Island. These gaps reflect both current labour market barriers and the ongoing effects of colonialism, racism, and unequal access to education, training, stable work, and higher-paid jobs.
- **Provincial gaps for immigrant women:** Across all four Atlantic provinces, women earned less than men whether as landed immigrants or permanent residents or as those with non-permanent status. The largest gender gap is between

Canadian-born men and immigrant women with non-permanent status: 53.8 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 53.7 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador, 53.6 per cent in Nova Scotia, and 50.9 per cent in New Brunswick.

- **Provincial gaps for women with disabilities:** Disability adds another layer of inequality. The issue is not only lower income, but also access to paid work. Across the region, people with disabilities face major barriers to employment. Nova Scotia income data show that disability severity matters: women with very severe disabilities had about half the income of men without disabilities. This shows how gender and disability can combine to create deeper economic insecurity.
- **The public sector has the smallest gender pay gap:** The gap for women working public sector jobs is significantly less than those working private sector jobs in all Atlantic provinces. In the public sector, the gap is 2 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 6 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador, 8 per cent in New Brunswick, and 14 per cent in Nova Scotia. In the private sector, the gap is much wider: 20 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 23 per cent in Nova Scotia, 25 per cent in New Brunswick, and 36 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- **There is a union advantage:** Women working in unionized positions face smaller wage gaps, with a nine per cent weekly gender wage gap for unionized workers in New Brunswick (compared to 21 per cent for non-unionized), and 11 per cent in Nova Scotia (compared to 21 per cent for non-unionized workers). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the gap for those with union coverage is 20 per cent, compared with the non-unionized workers (28 per cent). Prince Edward Island stands out because unionized women earn slightly more than men by one per cent, but among non-unionized workers, the pay gap for women is 17 per cent.
- **Gender gaps exist in nearly every industry:** In nearly every industry across the Atlantic provinces, on average, men earned more than women. The biggest wage gaps were observed in mining, fishing, transportation, construction, finance, and professional services.

## ■ **Care economy work that women do is still undervalued**

- Even in women dominated sectors, like health care, education, and administration, women earn less than men on average.
- In health occupations, women make up more than 80 per cent of workers in every Atlantic province, but still earn less than men. In education, law, social, community and government services, women are also the majority, but women's earnings still fall well below men's in the four provinces.

## ■ **Even women with highest education face gender pay gaps**

- On average, women without a high school diploma make significantly less than men without a high school diploma, with the gap ranging from a low on Prince Edward Island (27 per cent) to a high in Nova Scotia (49 per cent).
- Education helps reduce the gap, but it does not close it. Among workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, the gap is smaller, but women still earn less than men in most Atlantic provinces.

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## **Closing the gender pay gap requires policy action**

Atlantic Canada needs stronger pay equity laws, pay transparency, better enforcement of labour standards, stronger access to collective bargaining, improved wages in low-paid sectors, affordable child care and care supports, and better pathways for women into higher-paid industries and leadership roles. The gender pay gap is not inevitable. It is the result of policy choices, labour market structures, and how society values different kinds of work.

# Introduction

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This report focuses on the gender pay gap in the Atlantic provinces. The gender pay gap measures the difference in employment earnings between men and women. We are releasing this report twelve days after June 12<sup>th</sup>, the 2026 Equal Pay Day for women in Newfoundland and Labrador, which has the largest pay gap in Atlantic Canada and the second-largest in Canada. This symbolic date shows how many extra days women must work in the new year to earn what men earned on average in the previous year. While men’s wages are counted until December 31, women must keep working into the next year to catch up. Equal Pay Day reminds us that fair pay is not only an economic issue. It is about dignity, equality, and basic justice at work. Equal Pay Day is not a celebration. It is a warning and a call for action. It marks how far we still are from pay justice.

This report is part of CCPA-NS’s Advancing Decent Work series. Earlier reports examined labour standards<sup>1</sup> and precarious work<sup>2</sup> in Nova Scotia. This report turns to pay inequality across

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<sup>1</sup> 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](https://policyalternatives.ca/news-research/the-foundations-of-decent-work-an-evaluation-of-nova-scotia-labour-standards)

<sup>2</sup> Cerdas-Sandí, D., Casey, R. and Brickner, R.K. (2026). *Decent or precarious? Understanding the quality of employment in Nova Scotia*.

[policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Decent-or-Precarious\\_-\\_Understanding-the-Quality-of-Employment-in-Nova-Scotia-FINAL-1.pdf?x46002](https://policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Decent-or-Precarious_-_Understanding-the-Quality-of-Employment-in-Nova-Scotia-FINAL-1.pdf?x46002)

Atlantic Canada and shows how women continue to be left behind in the labour market—and some women more than others.

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### **Notes on terminology and data:**

The authors use quantitative data from official Statistics Canada sources that categorise data as gender (man, woman) rather than sex (male, female). Statistics Canada understands that these are not interchangeable and not binary.<sup>3</sup> The authors of this report use the binary terms "men" and "women" because the data do not provide any further disaggregation. We also recognize that this type of language does not accurately reflect gender because it does not account for gender diversity and assumes that sex at birth aligns with gender (cisgender), thus excluding non-binary and transgender data. The Atlantic Economic Council reports that limited data from Statistics Canada for 2SLGBTQ+ people living in the region show that they are more likely to work part-time and have lower incomes than the general population, despite more of them having a post-secondary degree.<sup>4</sup>

One of our recommendations is for Statistics Canada to collect data that can be disaggregated more accurately and made more available. The data also needs to be more accessible and available for a full intersectional analysis that considers gender, income, and race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, immigration status, and disability, and not just in the Census every five years.

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada. (2021). "Gender of person." Government of Canada. <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=410445>

<sup>4</sup> Atlantic Economic Council. (2024). "Spotlight on diversity, equity, and inclusion in Atlantic Canada." [atlanticeconomiccouncil.ca/page/NRdiversityinclusion24](http://atlanticeconomiccouncil.ca/page/NRdiversityinclusion24)

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## Notes on measuring the gender pay gap:

There are different ways to measure the pay gap, using averages or medians, hourly pay, weekly earnings or annual wages. No matter which measure or data is used, there are gender pay gaps.

**Hourly, Weekly vs Annual wages:** This report mainly uses average weekly wages from the Labour Force Survey. Weekly wages are useful because they capture both wage rates and paid hours in a typical week. Hourly wages do not capture hours worked. This matters because gendered patterns in unpaid care and access to full-time work shape paid hours. Hourly wages are important, but they do not capture the effect of fewer paid hours per week. At the same time, weekly wages should not be read as annual earnings and likely underestimate the gap because they do not adequately account for commission, bonuses, and time off during the year (for unpaid care, most often by women). Multiplying weekly wages by 52 would only create an annualized estimate, not a true annual wage measure. It would also assume that workers were employed and earning the same weekly wage for all 52 weeks of the year, which is often not the case. It would not measure the total income a person actually earned across the full year, including changes in employment status, hours, wages, jobs, unpaid time off, or periods without work. For that reason, we use weekly wages as a measure of average weekly pay, not of total annual earnings.

**Averages vs Median:** We mainly use averages because they are more sensitive to differences across the full wage distribution, including women's over-representation in lower-paying jobs and under-representation in higher-paying jobs. Median wages are also useful, but they show the middle worker and can miss some inequality at the bottom and top of the wage distribution.

**Data Sources:** The main employment income data (for all those aged 15 and over) used in this report is Statistics Canada's *Labour Force Survey*, which provides weekly wages for all workers, including part-time and full-time, as well as

self-employment. However, the hourly and weekly wage measures used in this report are for employees only based on the main job; for this reason, all LFS-based wage calculations in this report exclude self-employment. *The Labour Force Survey* provides hourly and weekly wage measures for employees based on their main job, published monthly and representing the most timely data available. Another source of data is Statistics Canada's *Canadian Income Survey*, which provides annual employment income, including wages, salaries, and commissions, as well as self-employment earnings.<sup>5</sup> The *Canadian Income Survey* is published only annually, and there can be a longer lag before the data becomes available (e.g., the 2024 annual data was released on April 29, 2026). Excluded from both surveys are persons living on reserves and other Aboriginal settlements, as well as residents of institutions. In addition, the Labour Force Survey excludes full-time members of the Canadian Forces and residents of regions that are extremely remote or of extremely low population density. These groups together represent an exclusion of approximately 2% of the population aged 15 and over. The *Canadian Census* is the other source of data used in this report; it is currently being conducted by Statistics Canada and occurs only every five years. The 2021 Census is the only data source that disaggregates data for Indigenous peoples, as well as by race and immigration status, in the four Atlantic provinces (since January 2022, racialized data are provided for the Atlantic region, but not by province, in the Labour Force Survey). All the wage income used is gross employment income (before taxes and payroll deductions).

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### **Note on Measuring Equal Pay Day:**

Equal Pay Day for 2026 is estimated using average weekly data from Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey. We start by comparing men's and women's average weekly wages for 2025. This tells us how much more men earn, on average, compared with women. We then use that percentage to estimate how many additional paid workdays women would need to work in

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<sup>5</sup>Statistics Canada. "Canadian Income Survey. Detailed information for 2024." [www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=1552692](http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=1552692)

the next year to earn the same amount men earned on average in the previous year. For example, if the wage gap means women need about 94 additional paid workdays to catch up, we do not count those 94 days as calendar days. Instead, we count them as workdays within a standard five-day workweek to determine the actual date of the symbolic day. This means weekends are not counted as paid workdays.

# Equal pay dates and the gender pay gaps

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Across Atlantic Canada, women are still being paid less than men. The size of the gap varies by province and by the way we measure pay, but the pattern is clear: women's earnings continue to fall behind. This matters not only on payday, but over a lifetime. Lower pay means less money for rent, food, savings, emergencies, and retirement.<sup>6</sup> These persistent gaps show that pay inequality is not an individual problem. It reflects value systems and the organisation of regional labour markets, and the gap will not disappear without policy action to achieve pay equity. As is outlined in the following sections, the gap is wider when women face other forms of discrimination based on race, ethnicity, immigration status, and Indigeneity.

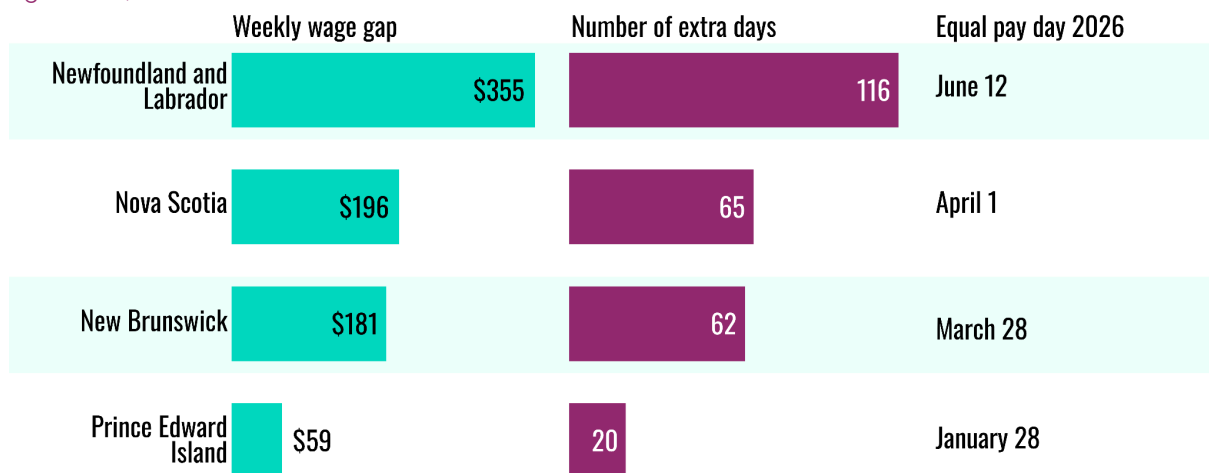
This report examines the gender pay gap using two main sources. Figure 1 and 2 use average weekly wages from the Labour Force Survey to estimate Equal Pay Day in each Atlantic province. Table 1 uses annual employment earnings from the Canadian Income Survey, including wages, salaries and commissions. These two sources measure pay differently, but they point to the same problem: women earn less than men across Atlantic Canada.

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<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada. (2024). "Overview of the Economic Situation of Older Persons in Canada, 1976 to 2022." Government of Canada. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241204/dq241204b-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/241204/dq241204b-eng.htm)

Figure 1 shows the average weekly wage gap and estimates Equal Pay Day for 2026. Equal Pay Day is a symbolic date. It shows how far into the new year women would have to keep working to earn what men, on average, earned in the previous year. This estimate is based on a 5-day paid workweek, so weekends are not counted as paid workdays. Using this measure, Newfoundland and Labrador has the largest gap and the latest Equal Pay Day in Atlantic Canada. Women there earn \$355 less per week than men, a gap of 24 per cent, and would need to work about 116 extra paid days, until June 12, 2026, to catch up. Nova Scotia follows with a \$196 weekly gap and an estimated Equal Pay Day of April 1, 2026. In New Brunswick, the gap is \$181, and Equal Pay Day falls on March 28. Prince Edward Island has the smallest weekly gap in the region, at \$59, with Equal Pay Day on January 28.

**Figure 1 /** Wage gap, number of extra days worked, and Equal Pay Day in Atlantic Canada  
Ages 15+, 2026



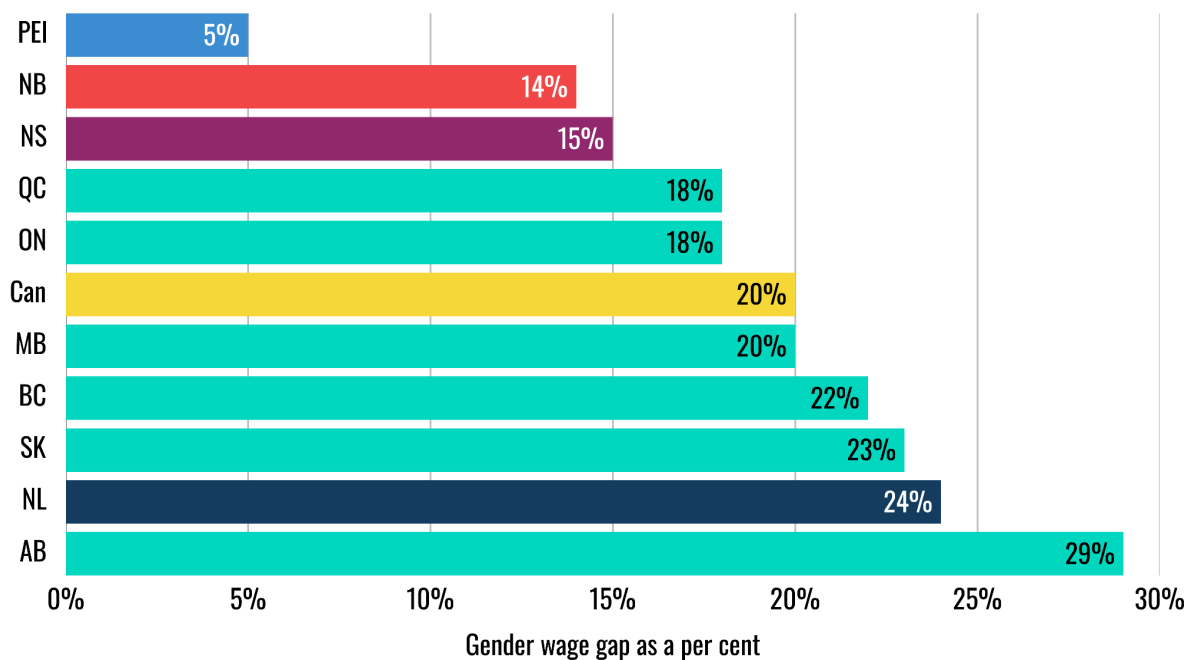
**Source** Based on Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0064-01 Employee wages by industry, annual. DOI: [doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng)

**Note:** Equal Pay Day here is based on a five day work week with two days of rest. Weekly wages include both full-time and part-time employees.

Figure 2 puts the Atlantic provinces in the national context. Women are paid less than men in every province. The size of the gap varies, but there is no province where women’s average weekly wages are equal to or higher than men’s. Prince Edward Island has the smallest weekly gender wage gap in the country, at 5 per cent. New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are also below

the Canadian average, with gaps of 14 per cent and 15 per cent. But these smaller gaps still mean women are earning less. A smaller gap is not the same as pay equality. Newfoundland and Labrador stands out in the opposite direction. Its weekly gender wage gap is 24 per cent, higher than the Canadian average of 20 per cent and the largest in Atlantic Canada. Among the provinces shown here, only Alberta has a larger gap, at 29 per cent.

**Figure 2 /** Weekly gender wage gap across Canada  
Per cent, ages 15+, Canada and provinces, 2025



**Source** Based on Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0064-01 Employee wages by industry, annual. DOI: [doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng)

**Note:** Weekly wages include both full and part-time employees.

Weekly wages are useful because they capture both wage rates and the usual hours paid in a typical week. This matters because the gender pay gap is not only about hourly pay. It is also shaped by access to full-time work, the number of paid hours people get, unpaid care responsibilities, and the types of jobs and sectors where women and men are concentrated. At the same time, weekly wages should not be read as annual employment income. Table 1 adds that annual perspective. It uses Canadian Income Survey data on annual wages, salaries and commissions. Here, the gap is shown as a gender pay ratio.

A ratio of 1.00 would mean women and men earn the same amount. A ratio below 1.00 means women earn less than men. For example, a ratio of 0.78 means women earn 78 cents for every dollar earned by men. Another way to read this is to subtract the ratio from 1 and multiply by 100. In this case, 1 minus 0.78 equals 0.22, which means a 22 per cent gender pay gap.

**Table 1 /** Average and median gender pay ratios in annual wages, salaries, and commissions  
Ages 15+, Canada and provinces, 2024

Geography	Average gender pay ratio in annual wages, salaries and commissions	Median gender pay ratio in annual wages, salaries and commissions
Alberta	0.64	0.68
British Columbia	0.68	0.69
Canada	0.72	0.75
Manitoba	0.77	0.75
New Brunswick	0.81	0.84
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.70	0.72
Northwest Territories	0.89	0.86
Nova Scotia	0.78	0.80
Nunavut	0.89	1.05
Ontario	0.72	0.75
Prince Edward Island	0.84	0.84
Quebec	0.78	0.81
Saskatchewan	0.70	0.75
Yukon	0.89	0.84

**Source** Canadian Income Survey, Statistics Canada. *Table 14-10-0324-01 Average and median gender pay ratio in annual wages, salaries and commissions*. DOI: [doi.org/10.25318/1410032401-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410032401-eng)

The annual earnings data show that in Canada, women's average annual wages, salaries and commissions are 72 cents for every dollar earned by men. In Atlantic Canada, the average annual ratio ranges from 0.70 in Newfoundland and Labrador to 0.84 in Prince Edward Island. Nova Scotia's ratio is 0.78, and New Brunswick's is 0.81. These ratios show that women in the four Atlantic provinces are struggling with gender pay gaps that

are even larger than shown by the average weekly earnings. This is especially notable for Prince Edward Island. The weekly data do not capture everything that can happen over a full year, including bonuses, commissions, months without work, job changes, or employment interruptions.

Table 1 also shows median ratios. The median is the middle point of a data set. Imagine lining up all workers from the lowest annual earnings to the highest annual earnings. The median is the worker in the middle: half of the workers earn less than the median, and half earn more. Median wages are useful because they show what is happening to the middle worker, and they are less affected by very high incomes at the top. Although median wages are very useful, they can miss some inequality at the bottom and top of the wage distribution. In Table 1, the median ratios are somewhat higher than the average ratios in most provinces. In most provinces, this means the gap is smaller when we compare the middle worker instead of the full wage distribution. Even so, the same basic pattern remains: women's annual employment earnings are lower than men's.

As Table 2 shows, the hourly data have smaller gaps than both the weekly wage and annual earnings data for most provinces across Canada, including all four Atlantic provinces. Hourly wage data does not capture hours worked; it only reflects hourly compensation. Unlike the weekly wage data, which considers average weekly hours worked, the hourly data does not account for how earnings between men and women can diverge based on hours worked. The data for P.E.I. best illustrate this; P.E.I. women earn higher hourly wages than men but have lower average weekly and much lower average annual employment income. The annual data capture how hours, and indeed any unpaid leave, decrease women's earnings, as well as how overtime hours disproportionately increase men's wages.

The numbers change depending on how we measure the gap, but the story does not. The exact size of the gender pay gap changes depending on whether we use weekly wages or annual employment earnings, and whether we compare averages or medians. But except for P.E.I. and hourly wages, gender pay gaps persist regardless of the measure used. These gaps may

look modest in a single week, but they accumulate over months and years, shaping women’s income, savings, and retirement security. As the next sections show, not all women experience the gap equally. It is often wider when gender inequality overlaps with race, immigration status, disability, and Indigeneity.

**Table 2 /** Hourly average wage gap as a percentage  
Ages 15+, Canada and provinces, 2025

Region	Gender	Average hourly wage	Hourly wage gap as a percentage
Canada	Men+	\$38.64	12%
	Women+	\$34.04	
Newfoundland and Labrador	Men+	\$35.24	10%
	Women+	\$31.59	
Prince Edward Island	Men+	\$29.57	-4%
	Women+	\$30.63	
Nova Scotia	Men+	\$33.46	6%
	Women+	\$31.30	
New Brunswick	Men+	\$32.06	5%
	Women+	\$30.48	
Quebec	Men+	\$36.81	10%
	Women+	\$33.17	
Ontario	Men+	\$39.98	12%
	Women+	\$35.35	
Manitoba	Men+	\$33.16	10%
	Women+	\$29.96	
Saskatchewan	Men+	\$35.60	13%
	Women+	\$31.07	
Alberta	Men+	\$40.87	18%
	Women+	\$33.46	
British Columbia	Men+	\$40.47	13%
	Women+	\$35.28	

**Source** Statistics Canada. *Table 14-10-0064-01 Employee wages by industry, annual.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410006401-eng)

# Understanding the pay gaps: Barriers and buffers

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To fully understand pay gaps and pay inequities, it is important to consider where we see the largest and smallest gaps, which sectors, occupations, and industries, as well as whether a job is unionized. Further, as this chapter shows, some women face larger gaps than others because they face additional discriminatory barriers.

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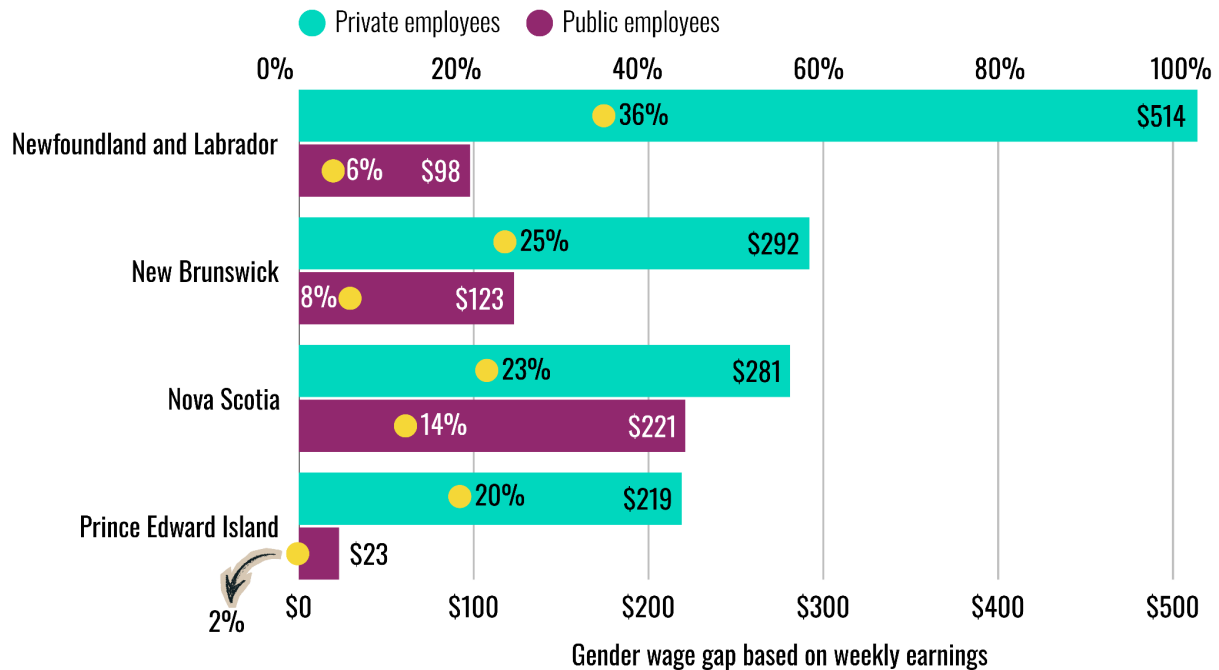
## *Pay inequality is wider in the private sector*

As Figure 3 shows, average weekly wages by sector tell a different story. Women in private sector jobs earn significantly less than men in every Atlantic province. The largest private sector gap is in Newfoundland and Labrador, where men earn, on average, \$514 more per week than women. The gap is also large in the other provinces: it reaches \$292 in New Brunswick, \$281 in Nova Scotia, and \$219 in Prince Edward Island.

In contrast, the gap is smaller in the public sector across all Atlantic provinces, and in Prince Edward Island, it is almost closed. However, pay gaps remain. Nova Scotia reports the largest gender pay gap in public sector weekly wages: \$221 (14 per cent). In New Brunswick, the gap is \$123 (8 per cent), while in Newfoundland and Labrador it is \$98 (6 per cent). Prince

Edward Island shows the smallest public sector gap, at \$23 (2 per cent).

**Figure 3 /** Difference in gender pay gap in the private sector vs public sector  
Weekly earnings (\$), ages 15+, per cent, Atlantic Provinces, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

This suggests that stronger wage-setting rules, higher union coverage, and better pay transparency in the public sector help reduce inequality. A 2024 analysis by CCPA of pay equity in the public sector versus the private sector controlled for 15 common factors to compare sectors, including age, education, tenure and unionization, and still found that in the private sector, men make 10 per cent more than women, while in the public sector, it is five per cent.<sup>7</sup> This analysis comparing sectors shows that part of the reason the gap is lower in the public sector is that men’s wages are slightly lower and women’s slightly higher than in the private sector. Macdonald also finds that the motherhood penalty (pay drops when they have children) is present in both. Still, the fatherhood premium (pay increases when they have children) is much higher in the private

<sup>7</sup> Macdonald, D. (2024). *How the public sector is fighting income inequality (and why it's still not enough)*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. [policyalternatives.ca/news-research/how-the-public-sector-is-fighting-income-inequality-and-why-its-still-not-enough/](https://policyalternatives.ca/news-research/how-the-public-sector-is-fighting-income-inequality-and-why-its-still-not-enough/)

sector.<sup>8</sup> Macdonald finds that compared with the private sector, the public sector raises pay for those experiencing discrimination, including women, mothers, and new Canadians, and that it pays less for men, fathers, executives, and medical professionals. To achieve parity between sectors, greater equality in the private sector can be achieved through wage compression and addressing pay extremes at the bottom and top. On the other hand, the pay gap could be worsened if provincial governments implement public-sector cuts, as planned by the Nova Scotia government.<sup>9</sup>

The private sector continues to produce much wider pay gaps, leaving many women with lower pay, less stability, and weaker long-term economic security. At the same time, the persistence of pay gaps in the public sector may reflect ongoing barriers that prevent many women from moving into senior leadership positions, where wages are higher. Statistics Canada highlighted this issue in a 2024 report,<sup>10</sup> showing that women remain underrepresented in management roles across Canada, especially at the senior level. The Atlantic Economic Council found that about 39 per cent of senior management jobs were held by women in 2021 (up from 16 per cent in 2016).<sup>11</sup>

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### ***Occupational segregation partially explains the pay gap***

Figure 4 shows that women are concentrated in some lower-paid occupations and underrepresented in higher-paid ones. This is an important part of the gender pay gap. Women are more likely to work in health, education, community services, and business, finance and administration. They are much less likely to work in trades, transport, natural resources, manufacturing, utilities, and some technical fields.

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<sup>8</sup> Macdonald. 2024. Op Cit.

<sup>9</sup> Saulnier, C. (2026). *Nova Scotia budget 2026-27 misses the mark: Austerity and resource extraction not the road to prosperity for the many*. CCPA Nova Scotia.

[policyalternatives.ca/news-research/ns-budget-2026-2027-misses-the-mark/](https://policyalternatives.ca/news-research/ns-budget-2026-2027-misses-the-mark/)

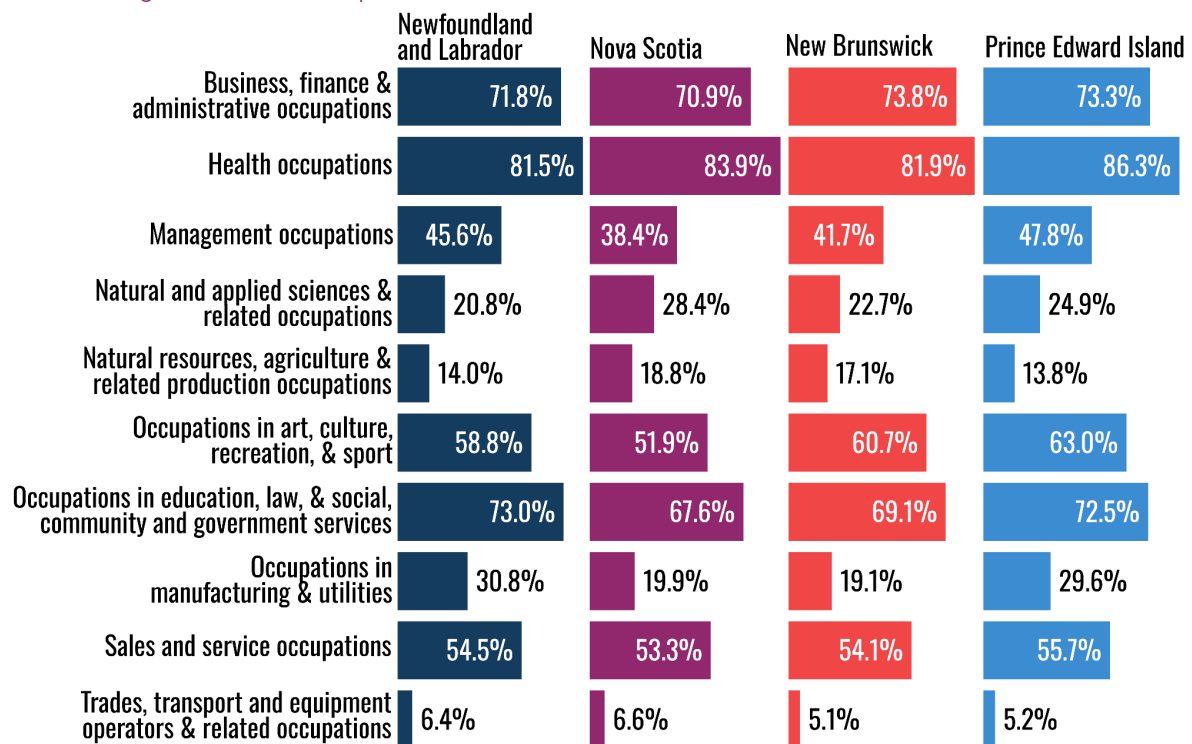
<sup>10</sup> Gueye, B. (2024). *Women middle and senior Managers*. Government of Canada.

[www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2024010/article/00005-eng.htm](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2024010/article/00005-eng.htm)

<sup>11</sup> Atlantic Economic Council. (2024). Op Cit.

But occupational segregation does not explain everything. Even within the same broad occupational groups, women often earn less than men. This means the pay gap is not only about women and men working in different kinds of jobs. It is also about what happens inside those occupations: who gets the better-paid roles, who moves into senior positions, who works full-time or part-time, and how different kinds of work are valued.

**Figure 4 /** Women’s share of employment by occupation  
Per cent, ages 15+, Atlantic provinces, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada. *Labour Force Survey, 2025*. PUMF data.

Another way to look at wage inequality is through wage ratios. A gender wage ratio compares women’s average wages with men’s average wages in the same broad occupational group. A ratio of 1.00 means women and men earn the same on average. A ratio below 1.00 means women earn less than men. For example, a ratio of 0.87 means women earn 87 cents for every dollar that men earn. A ratio above 1.00 means women earn more than men on average in that group. Looking at wage ratios helps us see more clearly where the gap is smaller, where it is larger, and where pay is closer to equality.

**Figure 5 /** Women’s average weekly wage as a share of men’s by occupation  
Ages 15+, Atlantic provinces, 2025

	Newfoundland and Labrador	Nova Scotia	New Brunswick	Prince Edward Island
Business, finance & administrative occupations	0.84	0.87	0.89	0.96
Health occupations	0.96	0.96	0.90	0.93
Management occupations	0.83	0.85	0.92	0.97
Natural and applied sciences & related occupations	0.99	0.92	0.89	1.03
Natural resources, agriculture & related production occupations	0.76	0.67	0.70	0.78
Occupations in art, culture, recreation, & sport	1.01	0.73	0.81	1.00
Occupations in education, law, & social, community and government services	0.79	0.74	0.83	0.86
Occupations in manufacturing & utilities	0.63	0.79	0.77	0.88
Sales and service occupations	0.86	0.83	0.81	0.87
Trades, transport and equipment operators & related occupations	0.78	0.80	0.83	0.84

**Source** Based on Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0417-01.

Figure 5 shows that women earn less than men in most occupational groups across Atlantic Canada. In all occupations combined, women earn less than men in every province. The gap is largest in Newfoundland and Labrador, where women earn 76 cents for every dollar earned by men. The ratio is 85 cents in Nova Scotia, 86 cents in New Brunswick, and 95 cents in Prince Edward Island.

The pattern is especially important in women-dominated occupations. In health occupations, women make up more than 80 per cent of workers in every Atlantic province, but they still earn less than men. The ratio ranges from 90 cents in New Brunswick to 96 cents in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. In education, law, social, community and government services, where women are also the majority, the gap is larger. Women earn only 74 cents for every dollar earned by men in Nova Scotia, 79 cents in Newfoundland and Labrador, 83 cents in New Brunswick, and 86 cents in Prince Edward Island.

This shows a key problem: even when women are the majority in an occupation, pay equality does not automatically follow.

Women's work can still be undervalued, and men may still be more likely to hold the higher-paid roles within the same broad field.

The gaps are also large in several male-dominated occupations. In natural resources, agriculture and related production occupations, women earn only 67 cents for every dollar earned by men in Nova Scotia and 70 cents in New Brunswick. In manufacturing and utilities, the ratio is especially low in Newfoundland and Labrador, at 63 cents. These are occupations where women are already a small minority, so the wage gap adds another barrier.

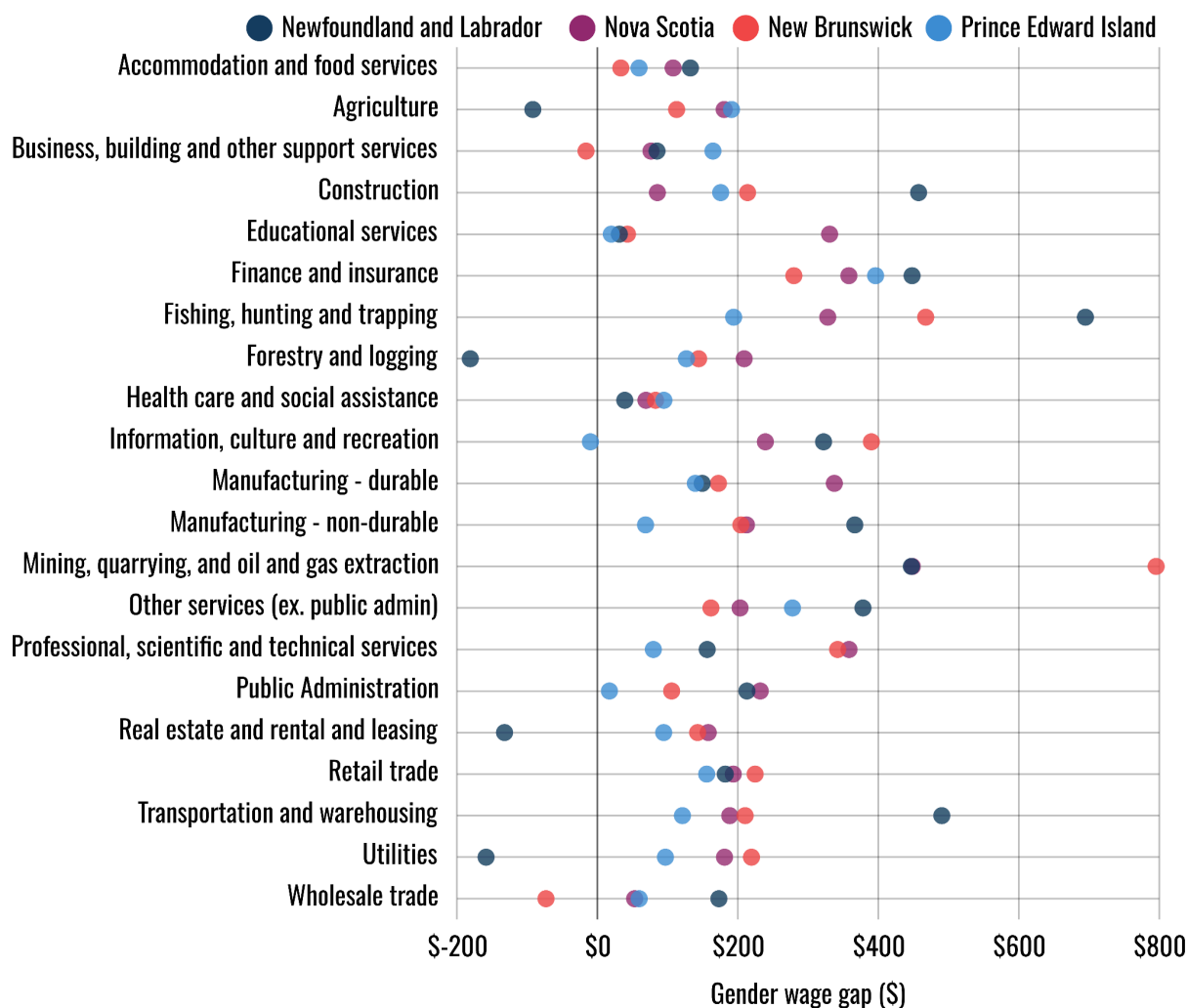
There are a few exceptions. In natural and applied sciences, women's average weekly wages are close to men's in Newfoundland and Labrador and slightly higher in Prince Edward Island. In art, culture, recreation and sport, women's wages are also close to or slightly above men's in Newfoundland and Labrador and Prince Edward Island. But these cases are limited. They do not change the overall picture: across most occupations and provinces, women continue to earn less than men.

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### ***Gender pay gap by industry***

The previous section looked at occupations. Occupation means the kind of work a person does, such as health occupations, sales and service, trades, management, or business and administration. Industry is different. Industry refers to the type of business or sector in which the job is located, such as construction, retail, health care, manufacturing, finance, or fishing. This distinction matters because women and men can work in the same industry but do very different jobs. For example, a woman working in the construction industry may be in an administrative occupation, while a man in the same industry may be in trades or management. Looking at industry data helps us see where women are falling behind across broad sectors of the economy, not only across types of jobs.

**Figure 6 /** Average weekly wage gap between men and women employees  
Ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

**Note:** An interactive version of this figure can be accessed here: [policyalternatives.ca/news-research/gender-wage-gaps-vary-widely-across-industries-in-atlantic-canada/](https://policyalternatives.ca/news-research/gender-wage-gaps-vary-widely-across-industries-in-atlantic-canada/)

The gaps discussed above do not appear in the same way across industries in the economy. Looking at the weekly gender pay gap by industry provides a more detailed picture of where women are falling furthest behind and where the pattern is more uneven across Atlantic Canada. Several things stand out in Figure 6. First, in most industries across Atlantic Canada, on average, men earned more per week than women in 2025. The biggest gaps are often found in mining, fishing, transportation, construction, finance, and professional services. These are not

small differences. In many cases, men earned hundreds of dollars more per week than women in the same broad industry.

Nova Scotia shows a broad and consistent pattern. In every industry shown, men earned more than women. The largest gaps were in mining (\$448), professional, scientific and technical services (\$358), finance and insurance (\$358), durable manufacturing (\$337), educational services (\$331), and fishing, hunting and trapping (\$328). What stands out in Nova Scotia is not one extreme case, but how widespread across industries.

New Brunswick looks even more unequal in some sectors. The gap in mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction reached \$796 per week, the largest on the chart. Large gaps also appeared in fishing, hunting and trapping (\$467), information, culture and recreation (\$390), professional, scientific and technical services (\$342), and finance and insurance (\$280). There are a few exceptions where the gap was very small or slightly reversed, such as business, building and other support services (-\$16) and wholesale trade (-\$73). A negative number means that women's average weekly wages were higher than men's in that industry. This happens because the gap is calculated by subtracting women's wages from men's wages. When the result is positive, men earn more. When the result is negative, women earn more. For example, a gap of -\$73 means women earn \$73 more per week than men, on average, in that industry. However, these are exceptions. In most industries, women in New Brunswick still earn less than men.

Newfoundland and Labrador has the most mixed picture. It has some of the largest gaps in the region, including fishing, hunting and trapping (\$695), transportation and warehousing (\$490), construction (\$457), finance and insurance (\$448), and mining (\$447). At the same time, it also has several industries where women earn more than men on average, including forestry and logging (\$181 more), utilities (\$159 more), real estate and rental and leasing (\$132 more), and agriculture (\$92 more). These results should be read carefully. They do not necessarily mean women were paid more for the same work. Part of this pattern appears to be linked to the kinds of jobs women hold within

those sectors, rather than to women and men doing the same work for different pay.

The pattern is especially clear in forestry and logging. About 90 per cent of women in that sector work in business, finance and administration occupations, while only 10 per cent are in natural resources and related production jobs. In agriculture, 59.5 per cent of women are in natural resources and related production occupations, but another 19.3 per cent are in business, finance and administration jobs and 10.9 per cent are in management. In real estate and rental and leasing, women are concentrated mainly in business, finance and administration occupations (45.7 per cent), sales and service occupations (32.0 per cent), and management (9.1 per cent). In utilities, women are more spread across business, finance and administration occupations (27.3 per cent), management (22.3 per cent), natural and applied sciences (15.1 per cent), and education, law and social, community and government services (13.7 per cent). This suggests that these results are explained, at least in part, by occupational segregation within sectors, meaning that women and men are often working in different kinds of jobs.

Prince Edward Island generally shows smaller gaps than other provinces, but the problem remains. The largest gaps were in finance and insurance (\$396), other services except public administration<sup>12</sup> (\$278), fishing, hunting and trapping (\$194), agriculture (\$191), construction (\$176), and business, building and other support services (\$164). In most other sectors, the gap was smaller, and in information, culture, and recreation, women earned slightly more than men on average (\$10 more). Prince Edward Island looks less extreme overall, but it is still not equal.

Across the region, a few industries stand out because the gap is large in more than one province. Finance and insurance show a large gap across the board. Fishing, hunting and trapping also

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<sup>12</sup> The industry named "Other services" is a sector that "comprises establishments, not classified to any other sector, in supportive roles except not in public administration." See Statistics Canada for details on this category and all industry categories:

[www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=1369825&CVD=1369826&CPV=81&CST=27012022&CLV=1&MLV=5](http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3VD.pl?Function=getVD&TVD=1369825&CVD=1369826&CPV=81&CST=27012022&CLV=1&MLV=5)

show very large gaps in all four provinces. Professional, scientific and technical services are also important because they include many jobs that are often seen as skilled and well-paid. For that reason, some people may expect a smaller gender pay gap in this sector. But the figure shows that the gap remains large. This suggests that pay inequality is not only a problem in lower-paid industries. It is also present in sectors of the economy that are often linked to higher education and specialized work.

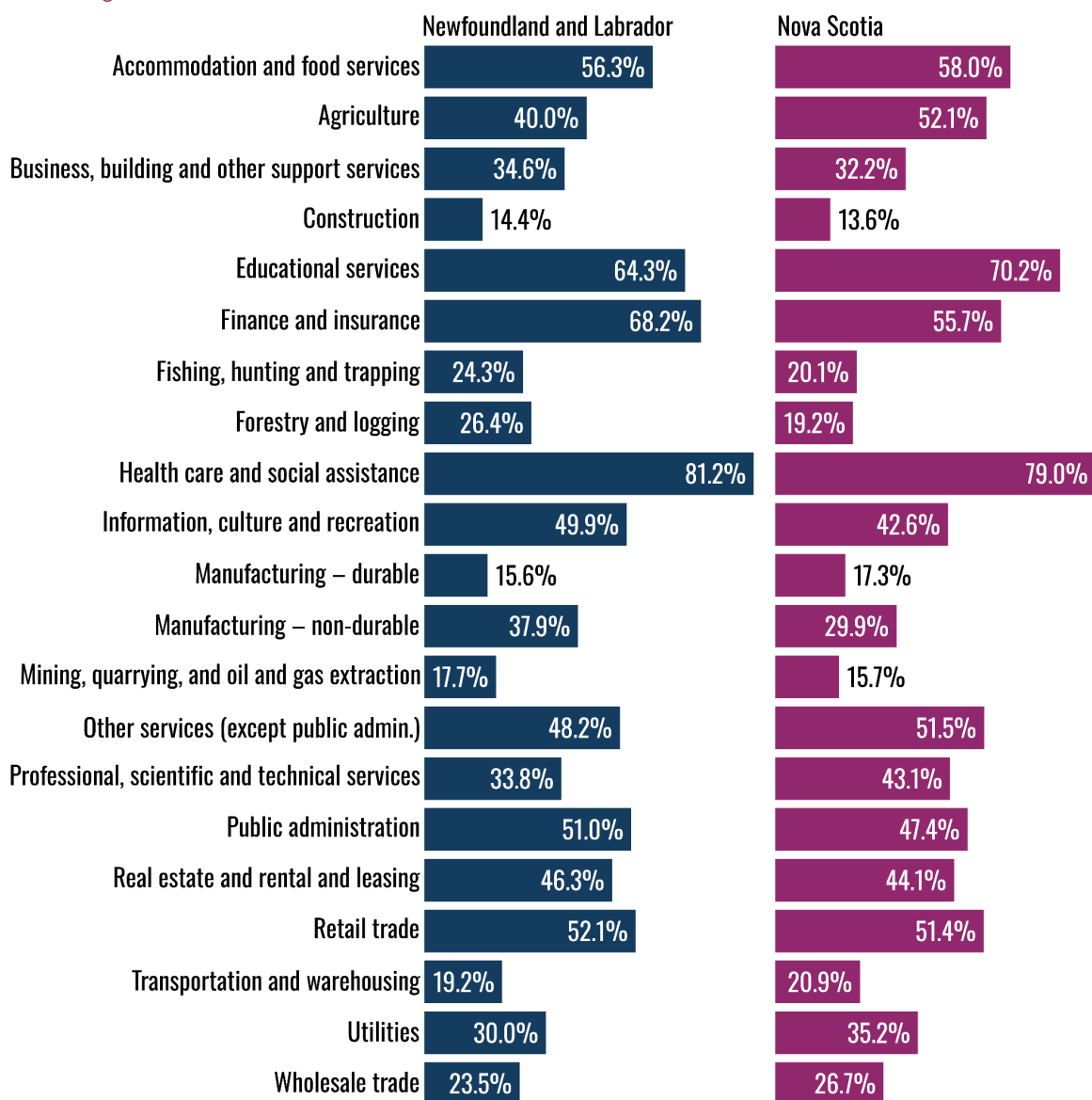
Figure 6 shows weekly pay gaps, not hourly pay gaps. Therefore, part of the difference may come from their hourly pay, part from hours worked, and part from women and men being concentrated in different jobs within the same industry. Also, a smaller gap in a low-pay sector does not always mean better conditions. It may simply mean that both women and men are poorly paid. Even with those limits, the main message is clear: gender pay inequality remains a major problem across Atlantic Canada, and in many industries the weekly gap is still very large.

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### ***Women are concentrated in care, education, and several service industries***

Figures 7 and 8 help explain why industry pay gaps need to be read carefully. Women make up close to half of all workers in every Atlantic province, but they are not evenly distributed across industries. They are highly concentrated in health care and social assistance, where they make up about eight in ten workers in every province. Women are also the majority in educational services, accommodation and food services, retail trade, and finance and insurance in most provinces.

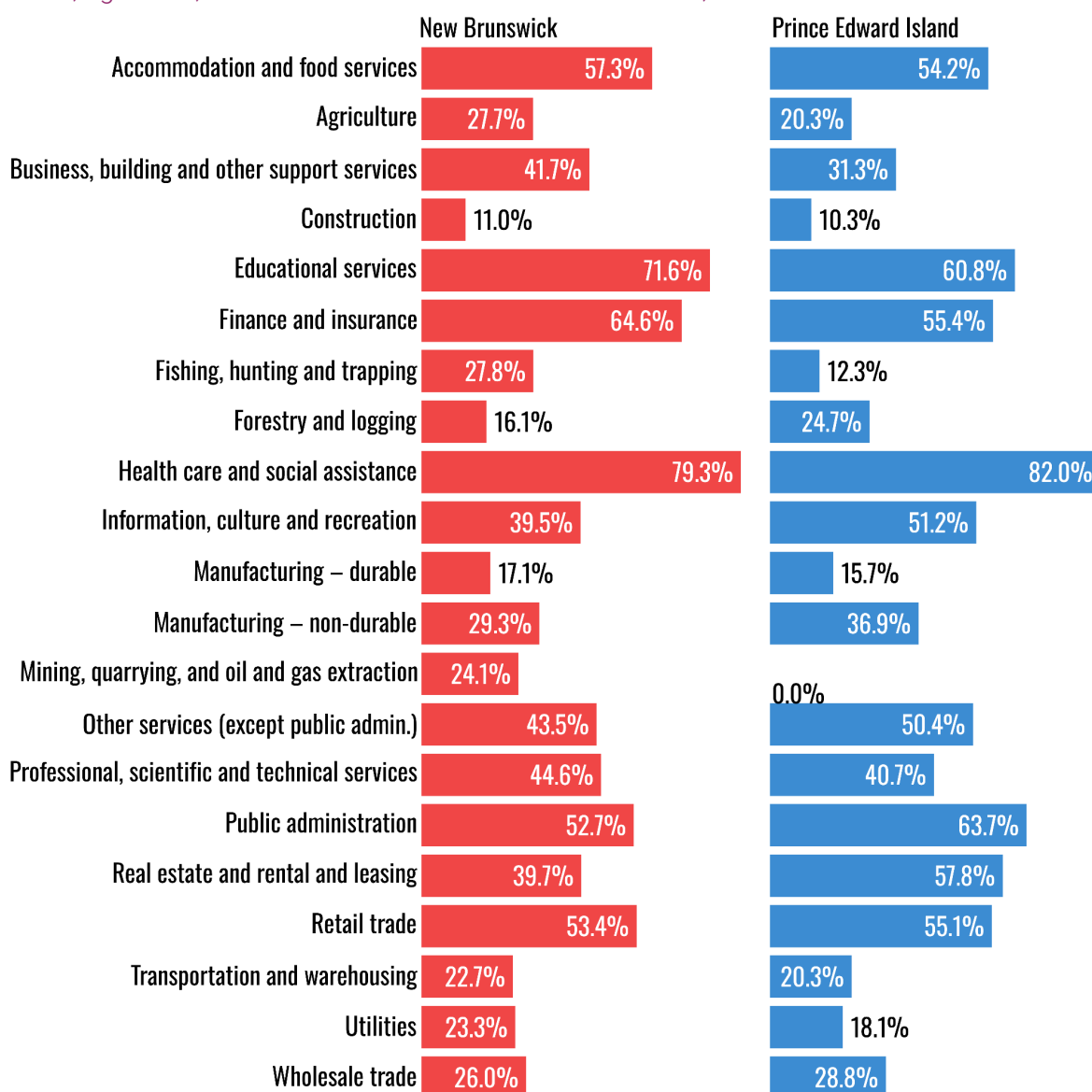
**Figure 7 / Women's share of employment by industry**  
Per cent, ages 15+, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, 2025



**Source** Statistics Canada. *Table 14-10-0417-02 Average and median gender wage ratio, annual.* [doi.org/10.25318/1410041701-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410041701-eng)

**Note:** Management positions are in their own occupation and thus excluded from the others.

**Figure 8 / Women's share of employment by industry**  
Per cent, ages 15+, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, 2025



**Source** Statistics Canada. *Table 14-10-0417-02 Average and median gender wage ratio, annual.* [doi.org/10.25318/1410041701-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410041701-eng)

**Note:** Management positions are in their own occupation and thus excluded from the others.

Some of the industries where women are most concentrated are essential to daily life, especially health care, education, and care-related services. However, being the majority in an industry does not mean women have pay equality. As the previous figure shows, women can still earn less than men in women-dominated sectors, especially when men are more likely to be in higher-paid roles, such as management positions or specialized jobs.

Figures 7 and 8 also show the other side of the problem. Women remain underrepresented in many goods-producing and resource-based industries. In construction, women make up only about 10 to 14 per cent of workers across the region. They are also a small minority in transportation and warehousing, durable manufacturing, forestry and logging, fishing, mining, and utilities. These industries often include higher-paid jobs, but women still have limited access to them.

Together, Figures 6, 7 and 8 show that the gender pay gap is shaped by both pay inequality within industries and the way women and men are distributed across the labour market. Women are concentrated in sectors where work has often been undervalued, and they are underrepresented in many sectors where pay can be higher. Closing the gender pay gap, therefore, requires action on both fronts: improving wages and working conditions in women-dominated industries, especially care and education, while also removing barriers that keep women out of higher-paid industries such as construction, transportation, manufacturing, natural resources, and utilities.

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### ***Education helps, but it does not close the gap***

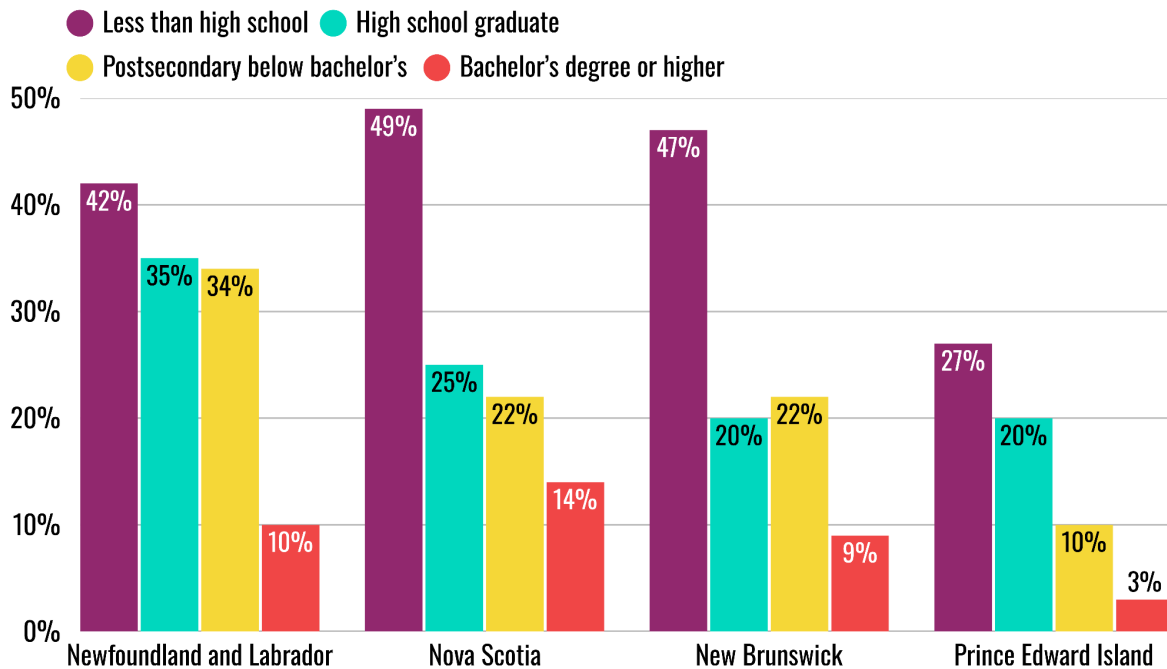
After looking at occupation and industry, another question arises: Is the gender pay gap mainly an education problem? In other words, do women earn less because they have lower levels of education, or does the gap remain even when women have more schooling?

Figure 9 suggests that education helps, but it does not solve the problem. The gap is clearly much larger among workers with less than a high school education. In Nova Scotia, women in this group earn 49 per cent less than men. The gap is also very large in New Brunswick (47 per cent), Newfoundland and Labrador (42 per cent), and Prince Edward Island (27 per cent).

As education levels rise, the gap becomes smaller. Among workers with a bachelor's degree or higher, the gap falls to 14 per cent in Nova Scotia, 10 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador, 9 per cent in New Brunswick, and only 3 per cent in

Prince Edward Island. This is a much better picture than that for workers with lower levels of education, but it is still not full equality in most provinces.

**Figure 9 / Gender pay gap by education level**  
Per cent, ages 15+, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

This matters because women are often told that education is the path to economic security. That is partly true. Higher education does reduce the gap and likely opens access to better-paid jobs. But Figure 9 makes clear that education alone is not enough. Even among highly educated workers, women still earn less than men on average in most Atlantic provinces.

The reason is that education does not erase the other barriers discussed above. Women may have similar or higher levels of education, but still be concentrated in lower-paid fields, lower-paid occupations, or jobs with fewer paths to senior positions. Men may still be more likely to move into higher-paid management, technical, resource-sector, or private-sector roles.

There is also another barrier, which we discuss later in the report: care responsibilities. Women are still more likely to take on unpaid care work, especially after having children. This can affect pay in the short term, through fewer hours, time away

from paid work, or more limited job choices. But it can also affect careers over the long term. It may slow down promotions, reduce access to senior positions, and make it harder to stay in jobs that demand long hours, travel, or constant availability, as studies on the motherhood penalty and women's underrepresentation in senior leadership have shown.<sup>13</sup>

The gap is not only about what women study. It is also about what happens to women's careers after they enter the labour market. The main point is not that education does not matter. It does. But the gender pay gap cannot be fixed by telling women to get more advanced education. A serious pay equity strategy also has to address how wages are set, how care and education work are valued, who gets promoted, who carries unpaid care work, and who has access to higher-paid industries and leadership roles.

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### ***Women face smaller pay gaps with union coverage, but access is unequal***

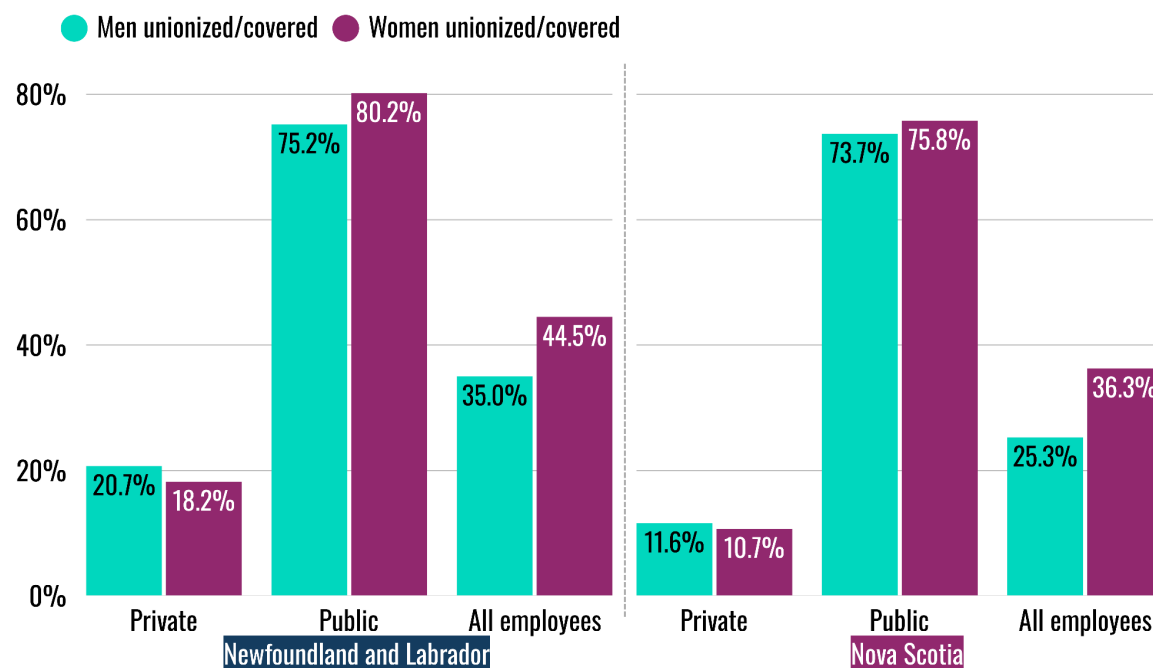
The earlier sections show that the gender pay gap is shaped by sector, occupation, industry, and education. Union coverage adds another important piece to the picture. Before examining the pay gap between unionized and non-unionized workers, it is important to ask who has access to union coverage in the first place.

Figures 10 and 11 show a sharp divide between the public and private sectors. Public-sector workers are much more likely to be unionized or covered by a collective agreement. Private-sector workers have much less access to this protection. This matters because the private sector is also where the gender pay gap is much wider.

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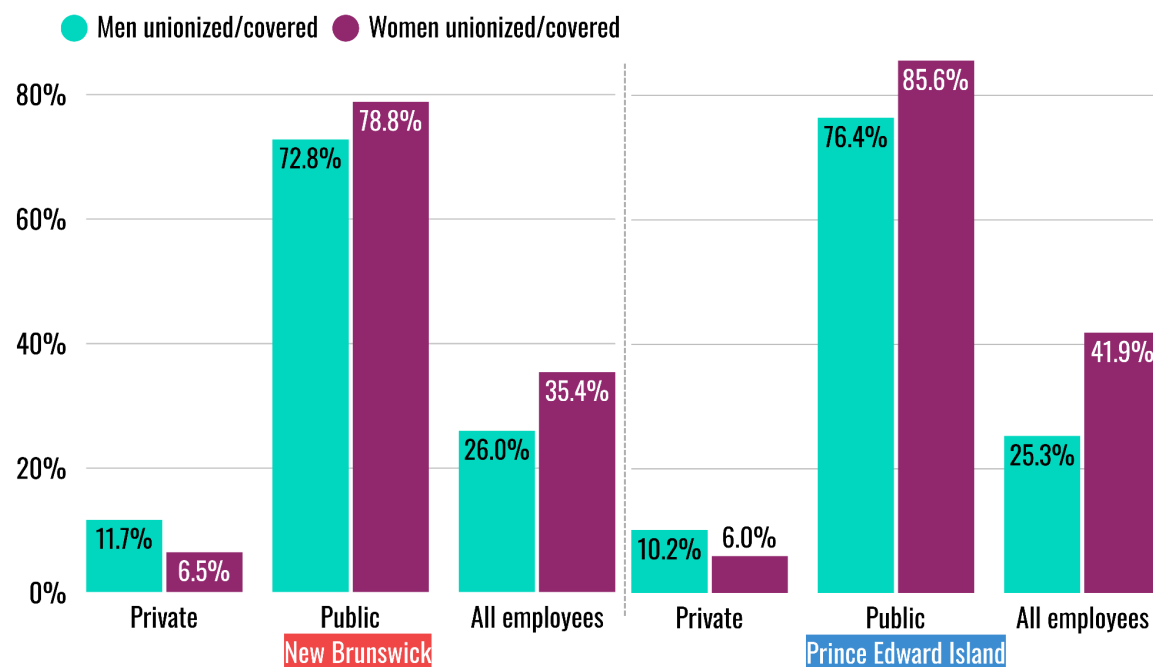
<sup>13</sup> See: Zhang, X. (2009) . Earnings of women with and without children. Perspectives on Labour and Income. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-001-x/2009103/article/10823-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-001-x/2009103/article/10823-eng.htm), and Connolly, M.; Fontaine, M.M. and Haeck, C. (2023). Child Penalties in Canada. Working Paper No. 23-02. Research Group on Human Capital. Working Paper Series. [qrch.esg.ugam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/82/Connolly\\_Fontaine\\_Haekc\\_GRCH\\_WP23-02.pdf](http://qrch.esg.ugam.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/82/Connolly_Fontaine_Haekc_GRCH_WP23-02.pdf)

**Figure 10 / Union coverage by gender**  
Per cent, ages 15+, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

**Figure 11 / Union coverage by gender**  
Per cent, ages 15+, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, 2025



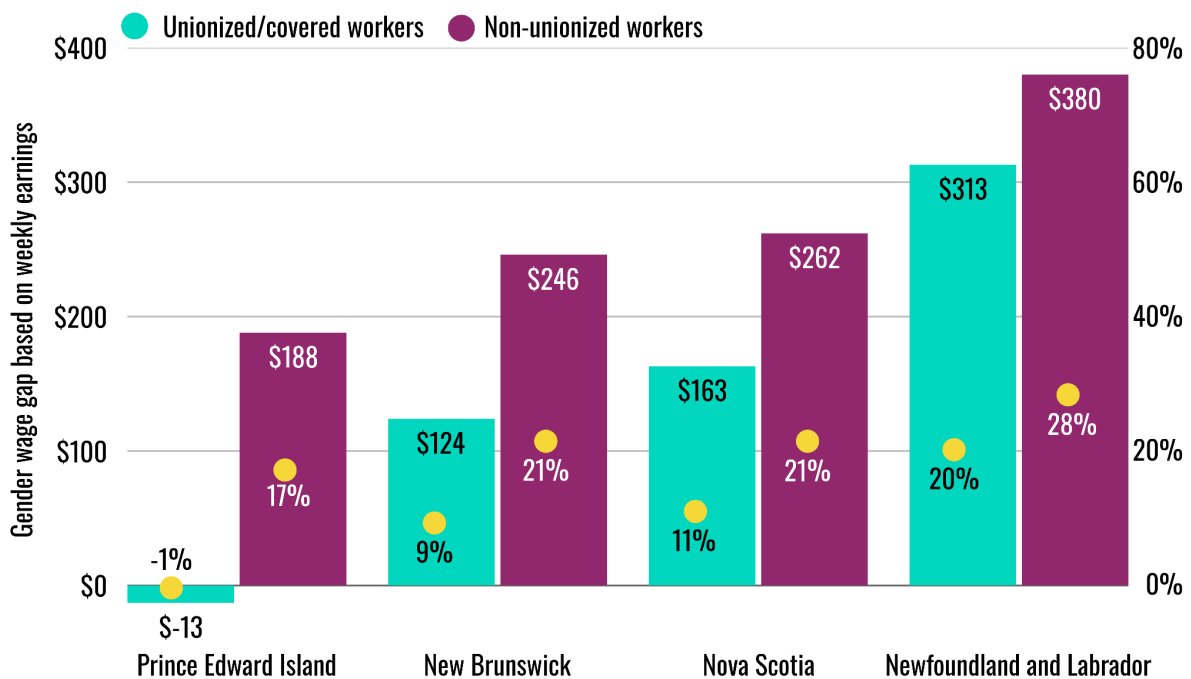
**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

The divide is especially important for women. In the public sector, women’s union coverage is high in every Atlantic

province. In fact, public-sector women have higher union coverage than public-sector men in all four provinces. Women’s coverage reaches 85.6 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 80.2 per cent in Newfoundland and Labrador, 78.8 per cent in New Brunswick, and 75.8 per cent in Nova Scotia.

The private sector looks very different. Private-sector women have the lowest access to union coverage in every province. Only 6.0 per cent of private-sector women in Prince Edward Island and 6.5 per cent in New Brunswick are unionized or covered by a collective agreement. The rate is also low in Nova Scotia at 10.7 per cent and in Newfoundland and Labrador at 18.2 per cent. In every Atlantic province, private-sector women have lower union coverage than private-sector men.

**Figure 12 /** Weekly gender wage gap (\$), and pay gap (%), by union coverage  
Ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

Figure 12 shows why unequal access to union coverage matters for pay equity. In every Atlantic province, women face a smaller pay gap when they are unionized or covered by a collective agreement. The difference is clear in New Brunswick, where the weekly gap is \$124 for unionized or covered workers (9 per cent), compared with \$246 for non-unionized workers (21 per cent). In Nova Scotia, the gap rises from \$163 among unionized

or covered workers (11 per cent) to \$262 among non-unionized workers (21 per cent). In Newfoundland and Labrador, the gap remains large in both cases, but it is still smaller with union coverage: \$313 (20 per cent) compared with \$380 without it (28 per cent). Then Prince Edward Island stands out. Among unionized or covered workers, the gap is slightly reversed, with women earning \$13 more per week than men on average (-1 per cent). Among non-unionized workers, however, men earn \$188 more per week than women (17 per cent). This contrast shows that union coverage does not automatically eliminate inequality everywhere, but it is clearly associated with smaller gender pay gaps.

Together, Figures 10 through 12 show both the value and the limits of union coverage. Unionized workplaces tend to have smaller gender pay gaps, likely because collective bargaining, wage grids, clearer rules, and stronger workplace protections reduce arbitrary differences in pay. But union coverage is not equally available. Many women, especially in private-sector jobs, are working in the part of the labour market where union protection is weakest. This means unions can be part of the solution, but access to union coverage is itself unequal.

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### ***The gender pay gap is worse for racialized women<sup>14</sup>***

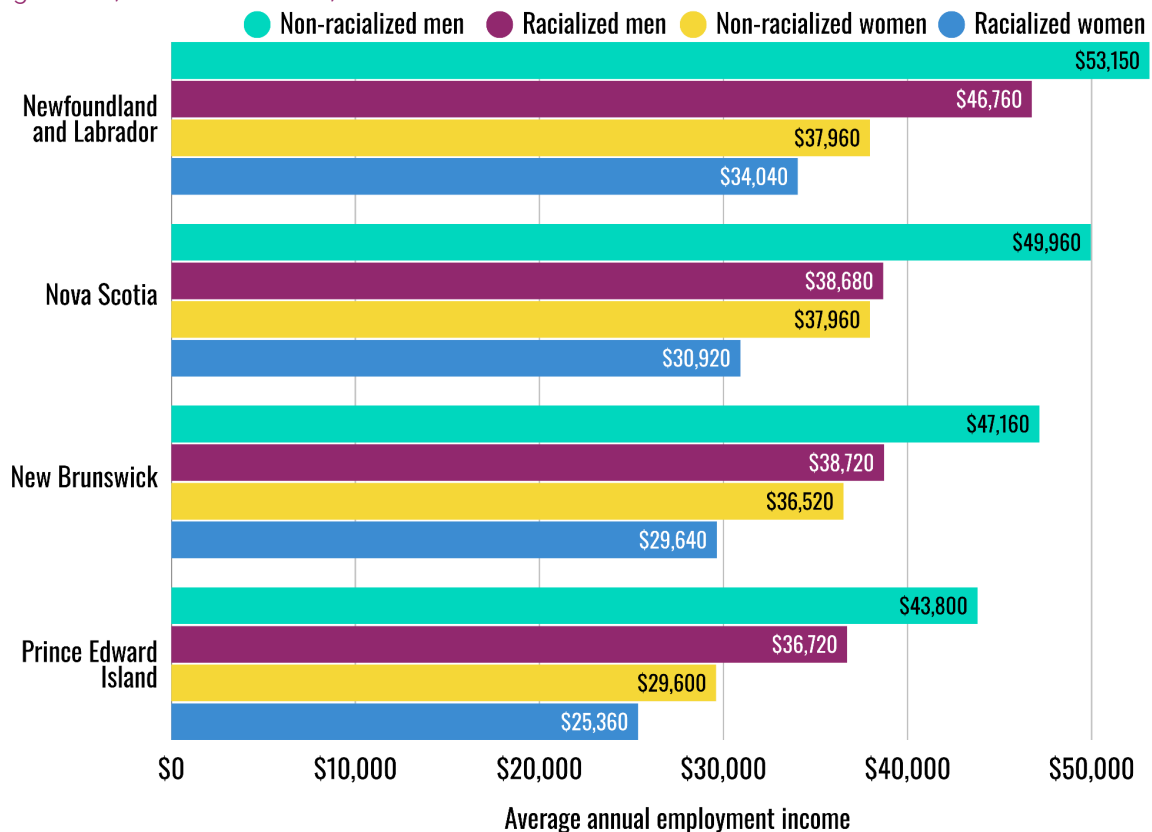
The gender pay gap is not experienced in the same way by all women. Using 2021 Census data, Figure 13 looks at average annual employment income by gender and racialized status. It shows that racialized women have the lowest average annual

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<sup>14</sup> This report uses “racialized population” because we understand it as a more appropriate term for describing how racial inequality is socially produced. The term ‘racialized’ excludes people who self-identify as Caucasian, white in colour or Indigenous and includes people who self-identify as South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, Visible minority, n.i.e. (not included elsewhere) or multiple visible minorities. The 2021 Census data, however, use the term “visible minority.” This is the term used in the federal Employment Equity Act. In this report, “racialized population” refers to the population classified by Statistics Canada in the 2021 Census as “visible minority.” See: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/98-500/006/98-500-x2021006-eng.cfm>

employment income in every Atlantic province. Non-racialized men have the highest income in all four provinces, while racialized women are consistently at the bottom. This is not only a gender gap, and it is not only a racialized status gap. It is both at the same time.

**Figure 13 /** Average annual employment income by gender and racialized status Ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2021



**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. Table 98-10-0642-01. [doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

The distance between racialized women and non-racialized men is large. In Newfoundland and Labrador, racialized women report average annual employment income of \$34,040, compared with \$53,150 for non-racialized men. In Nova Scotia, the figures are \$30,920 and \$49,960. In New Brunswick, they are \$29,640 and \$47,160. In Prince Edward Island, the gap is also very wide: racialized women report \$25,360, while non-racialized men report \$43,800.

What stands out is that racialized women are behind both men and non-racialized women. In Nova Scotia, racialized women earn about \$7,000 less than non-racialized women. In New

Brunswick, the difference is almost \$6,900. In Newfoundland and Labrador, it is about \$3,900. The gap is especially large in Prince Edward Island, where racialized women earn more than \$11,000 less than non-racialized women.

**Table 3 /** Wage gap between racialized women and non-racialized men  
Per cent, ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2021

Province	Wage gap
Newfoundland and Labrador	36%
Nova Scotia	38%
New Brunswick	37%
Prince Edward Island	42%

**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01*.  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

Table 3 shows the same problem as a percentage gap. Racialized women earned 36 per cent less than non-racialized men in Newfoundland and Labrador, 37 per cent less in New Brunswick, 38 per cent less in Nova Scotia, and 42 per cent less in Prince Edward Island. The largest gap is in Prince Edward Island, even though P.E.I. has the smallest weekly gender wage gap shown earlier in the report. This matters because a province can appear closer to equality in the average gender gap, even as some groups of women remain much further behind.

These are not small differences. A 38 per cent gap in Nova Scotia, for example, means that for every \$100 earned by non-racialized men, racialized women earned about \$62. Figure 13 also shows that racialized women are not only behind men. In every Atlantic province, they also earn less than non-racialized women. This tells us that gender alone does not explain the full picture. Racialized status also shapes who has access to better-paid jobs, stable hours, promotions, and higher-paid sectors.

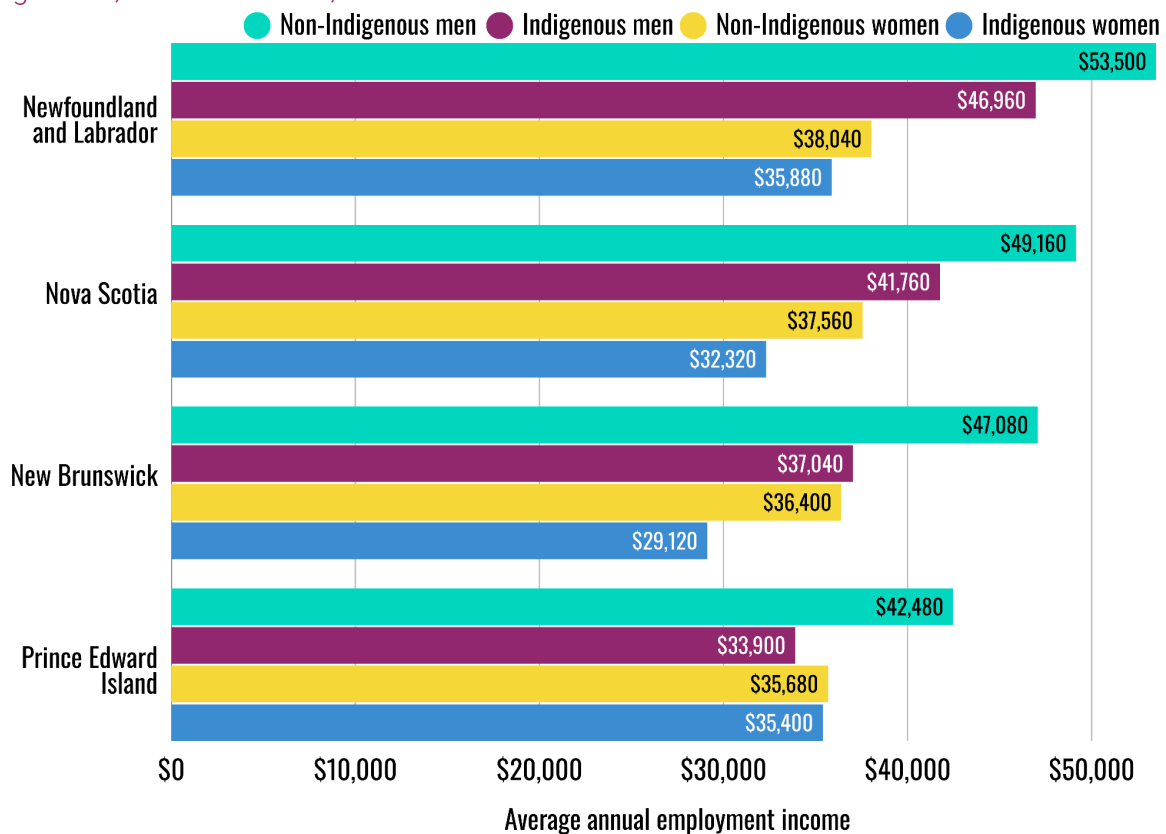
The overall gender pay gap tells us that women earn less than men. But it does not tell the full story. Figure 13 shows that racialized women have the lowest incomes in every Atlantic province. This matters for policy development. A pay equity plan that only looks at the average gap between all men and all women will miss many of the workers facing the deepest

inequality. Closing the gap also means looking at racialized women’s access to fair wages, stable jobs, union coverage, promotions, and higher-paid industries and occupations.

### Gender and Indigeneity

Figure 14 tells a related story, but not the same one. Using 2021 Census data, the figure looks at average annual employment income by gender and Indigenous identity. In three of the four Atlantic provinces, Indigenous women have the lowest income. Prince Edward Island is different: Indigenous women earn slightly more than Indigenous men, but still less than non-Indigenous men and slightly less than non-Indigenous women.

**Figure 14 /** Average annual employment income by gender and Indigenous identity  
Ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2021



**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0281-01*.  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810028101-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810028101-eng)

The largest concern is New Brunswick. Indigenous women there earned an average of \$29,120, compared with \$47,080 for non-Indigenous men. That is a difference of almost \$18,000 a year. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador also show large gaps. In Nova Scotia, Indigenous women earned \$32,320, compared with \$49,160 for non-Indigenous men. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Indigenous women earned \$35,880, compared with \$53,500 for non-Indigenous men.

Table 4 shows this in percentage terms. Indigenous women earned 38 per cent less than non-Indigenous men in New Brunswick, 34 per cent less in Nova Scotia, and 33 per cent less in Newfoundland and Labrador. Prince Edward Island had a smaller gap, at 17 per cent, but it was still a gap. Even in the province where the difference is smaller, Indigenous women are not earning the same as non-Indigenous men.

**Table 4 /** Wage gap between Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men  
Per cent, ages 15+, Atlantic Canada, 2021

Province	Wage gap
Newfoundland and Labrador	33%
Nova Scotia	34%
New Brunswick	38%
Prince Edward Island	17%

**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0281-01*.  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810028101-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810028101-eng)

These gaps have to be read in context. Indigenous women’s earnings are shaped by today’s labour market, but also by the long history of colonial policies that limited access to education, training, public services, and economic opportunity. That history still affects access to stable work, higher-paid jobs, safe workplaces, and career paths. Closing the gender pay gap means taking this reality seriously. It means removing barriers that keep Indigenous women in lower-paid work, improving access to training and higher-paid sectors, and making sure workplaces are safe, fair, and free from racism and discrimination.

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## *Gender pay gap by immigrant status*

As shown above, the gender pay gap does not affect all women in the same way. Figures 15 to 19 focus only on gender and immigration status; they do not include racialized status. In these figures, there are three immigration-status groups: “immigrants” refers to people who are or have been landed immigrants, or permanent residents; non-permanent residents are people with a temporary or less secure status; and non-immigrants are Canadian-born workers. With those categories in mind, the figures show a clear regional pattern. Across all four Atlantic provinces, the same basic pattern appears: women earned less than men within each immigration-status group, and non-permanent resident women were generally at the bottom of the income scale. In 2021, they earned about \$22,920 in New Brunswick, \$24,500 in Newfoundland and Labrador, around \$23,000 in Nova Scotia, and \$20,220 in Prince Edward Island. This is the key point in Figures 15 to 18: immigration status changes the gender income gap, and the weakest position is usually held by women with non-permanent status.

The distance from non-permanent resident women to men in more secure labour market positions is especially important. In New Brunswick, Figure 15 shows that non-permanent resident women earned about \$22,920, compared with \$46,720 for non-immigrant men. That is a gap of about \$23,800. In Newfoundland and Labrador, Figure 16 shows an even wider distance: non-permanent resident women earned about \$24,500, compared with \$52,900 for non-immigrant men, a gap of about \$28,400. In Nova Scotia, Figure 17 shows a similar pattern, with non-permanent resident women earning around \$23,000, or roughly \$26,000 less than non-immigrant men. In Prince Edward Island, Figure 18 shows that non-permanent resident women earned \$20,220, compared with \$43,720 for non-immigrant men, a gap of about \$23,500.

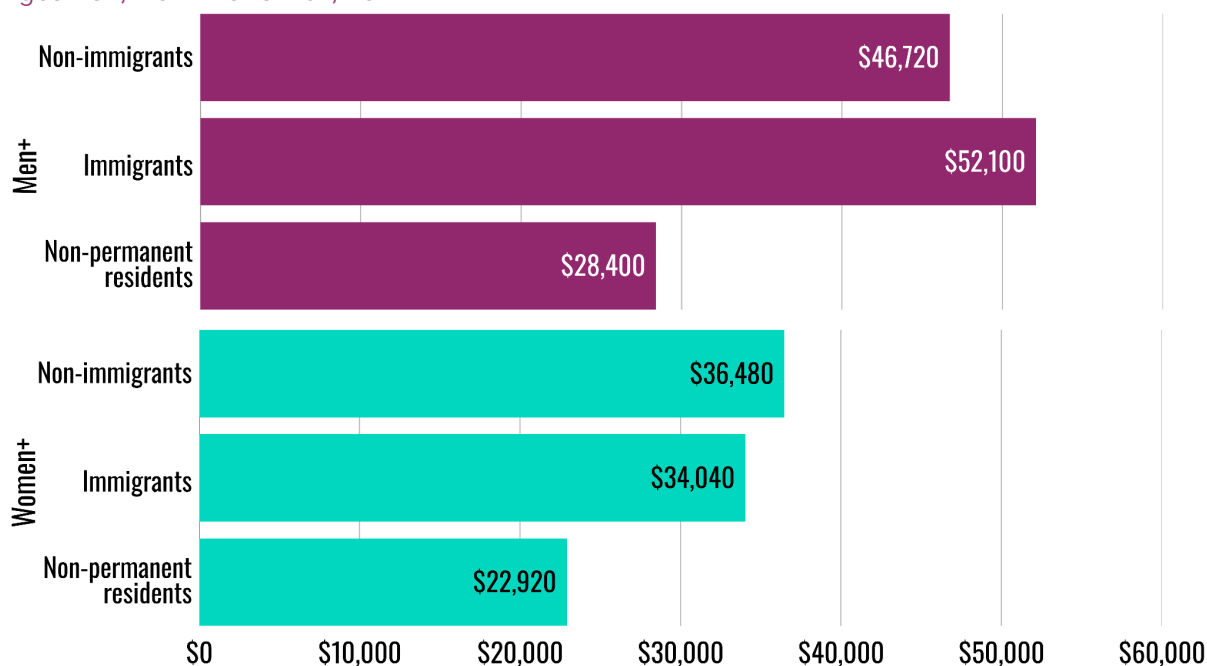
These comparisons are not meant to make men the centre of the story. They are useful because they show how far the lowest-paid women are from a group that usually has a stronger

position in the labour market. The gap is not only within each immigration-status group. It is also between women with the least secure status and men with more secure status.

There are also differences between provinces. In Newfoundland and Labrador, immigrant women earned more than non-immigrant women, but they still earned much less than immigrant men. Nova Scotia shows a different pattern: immigrant and non-immigrant women had nearly the same annual employment income, while both groups remained below men within the same immigration-status groups. In New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, immigrant women earned less than non-immigrant women, and the gender gap remained clear. In other words, immigration status changes the size and shape of the gap across provinces, but it does not eliminate the gender gap.

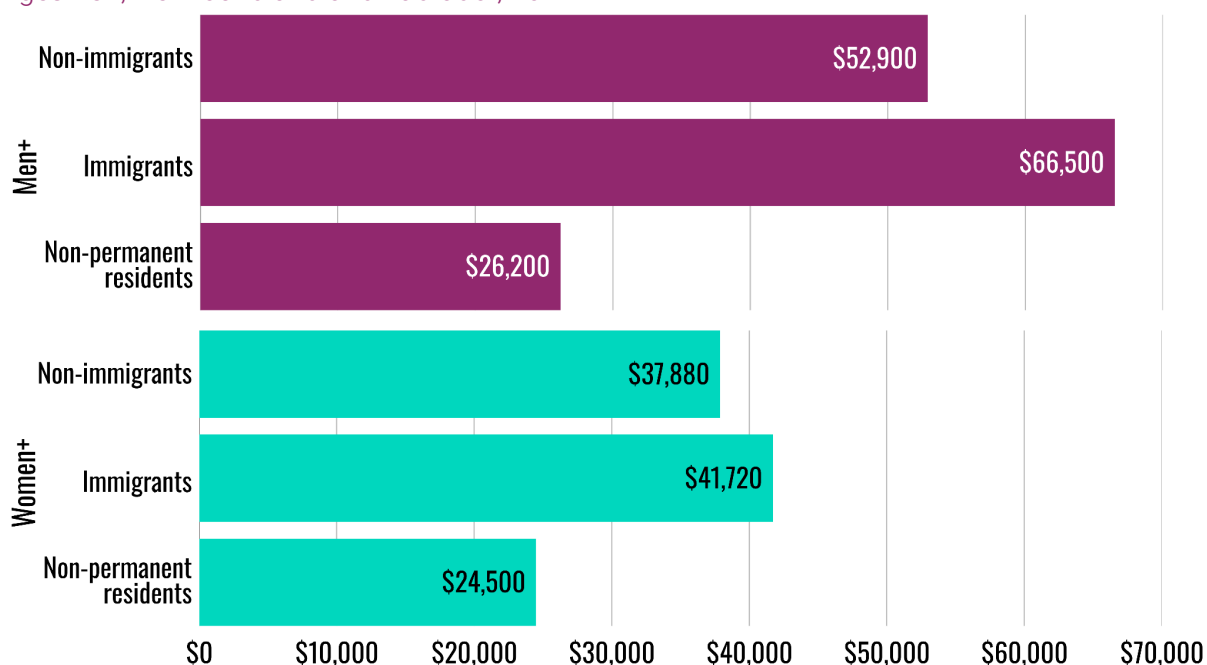
The non-permanent resident category is especially important. In some provinces, the gender gap among non-permanent residents is smaller than the gap among immigrants or non-immigrants. But that should not be read as a sign of equality. A smaller gap at the bottom can simply mean that both women and men in that group have low annual incomes. Figures 15 to 19 show this clearly. Non-permanent resident men also had low incomes compared with other men, but non-permanent resident women were still the most economically vulnerable group in the gender and immigration-status comparison.

**Figure 15 /** Average annual employment income by gender and immigration status  
Ages 15+, New Brunswick, 2021



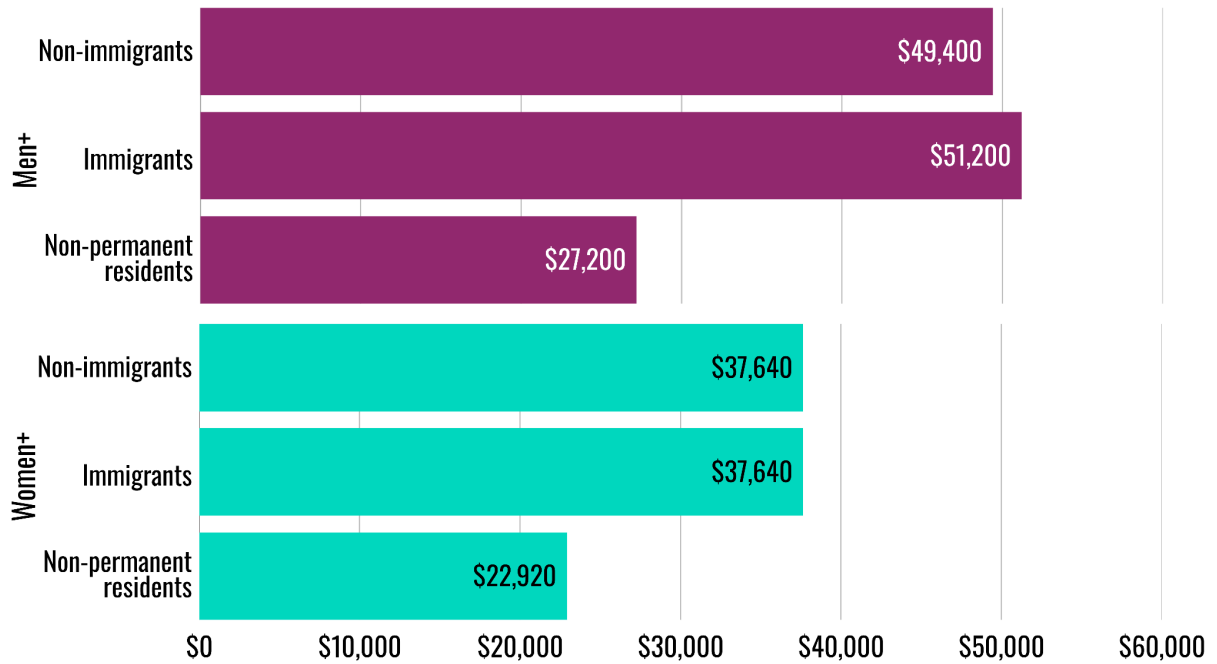
**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01 Average and median employment income by visible minority, selected sociodemographic characteristics.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

**Figure 16 /** Average annual employment income by gender and immigration status  
Ages 15+, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2021



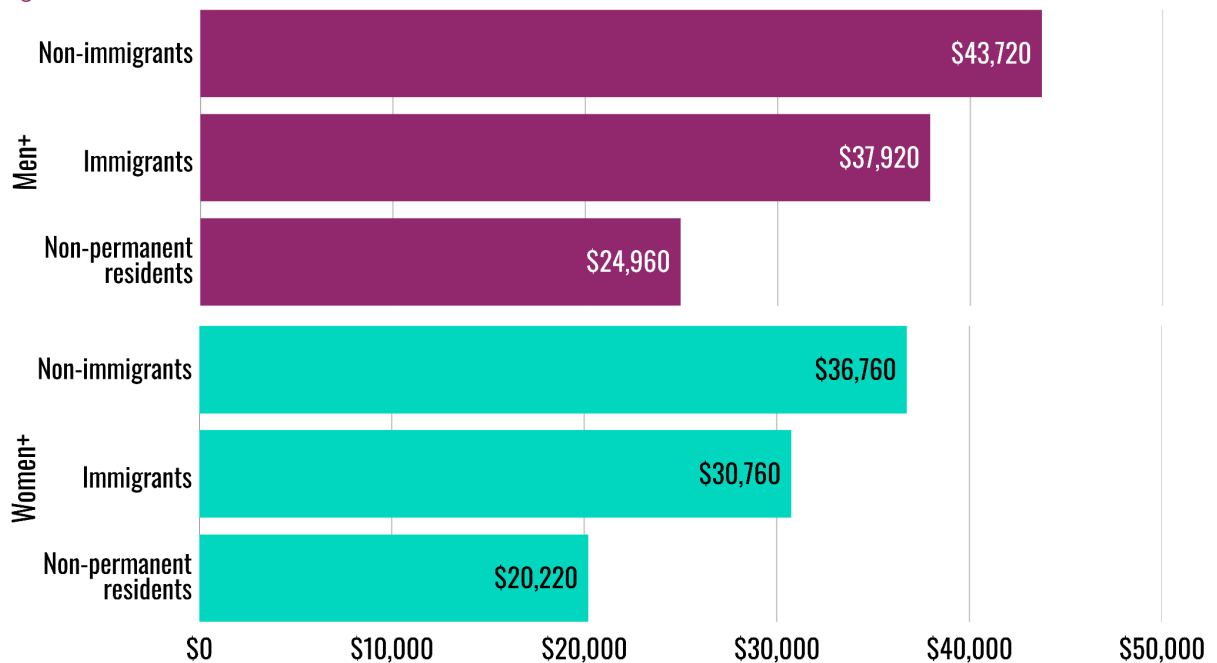
**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01 Average and median employment income by visible minority, selected sociodemographic characteristics.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

**Figure 17 /** Average annual employment income by gender and immigration status  
Ages 15+, Nova Scotia, 2021



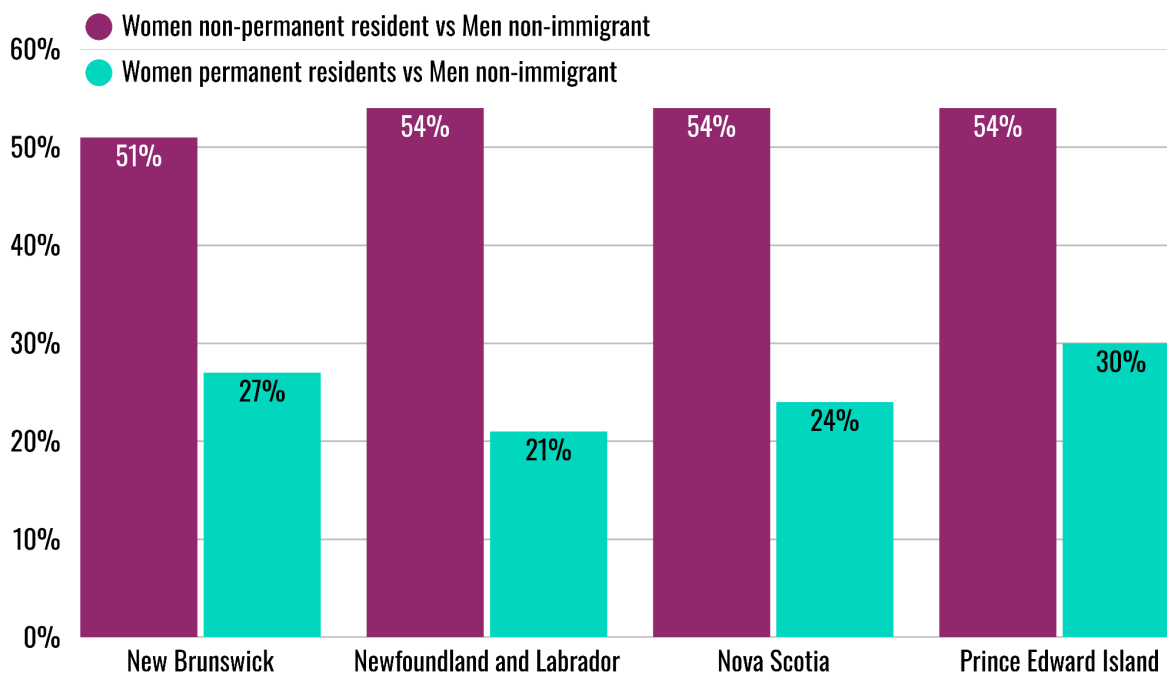
**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01 Average and median employment income by visible minority, selected sociodemographic characteristics.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

**Figure 18 /** Average annual employment income by gender and immigration status  
Ages 15+, Prince Edward Island, 2021



**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01 Average and median employment income by visible minority, selected sociodemographic characteristics.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

**Figure 19 /** Gender wage gap for immigrants and non-permanent residents  
Ages 15+, Per cent, Atlantic Canada, 2021

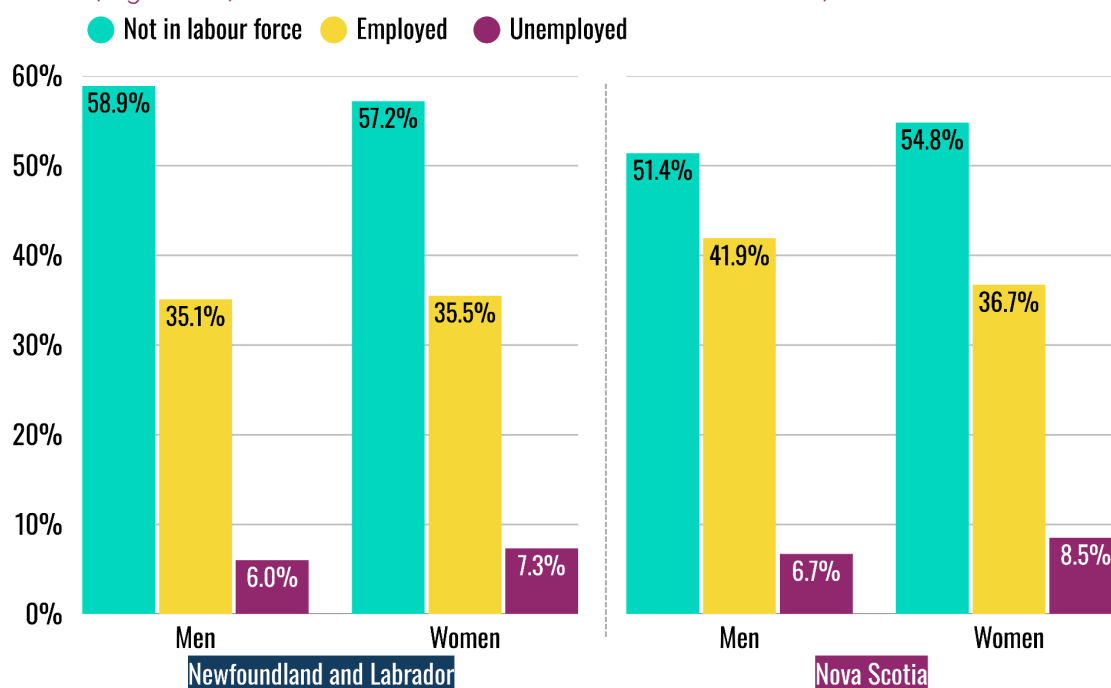


**Source** Statistics Canada. Census 2021. *Table 98-10-0642-01 Average and median employment income by visible minority, selected sociodemographic characteristics.*  
[doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/9810064201-eng)

### *Inequity is deeper for women with disabilities*

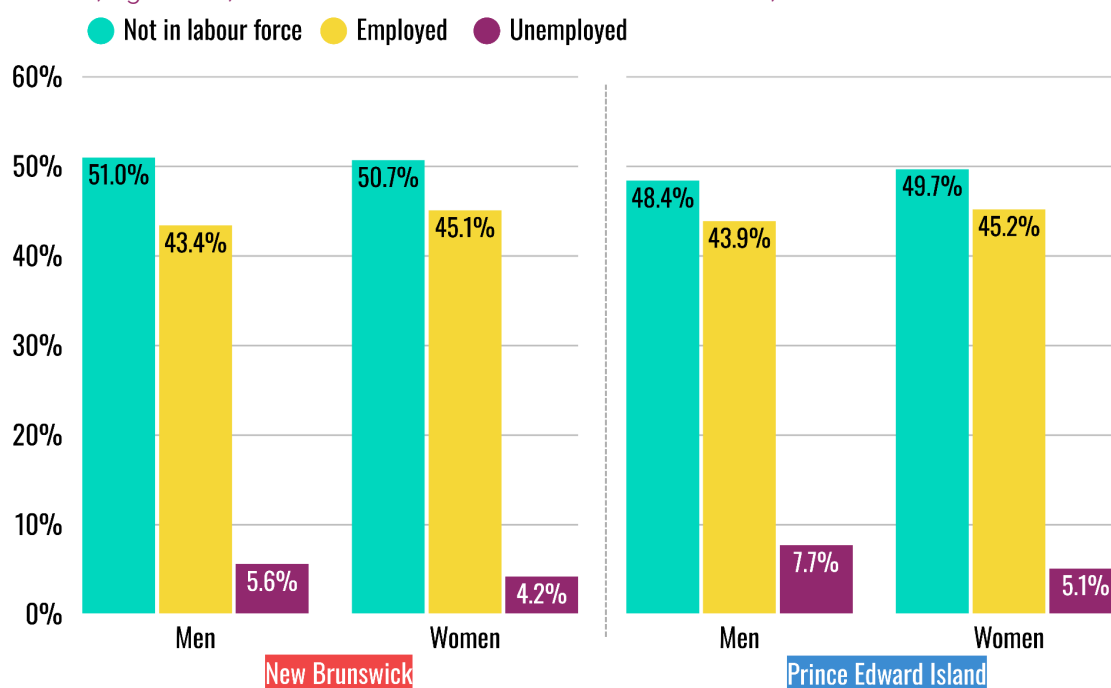
Whether a woman has a disability is important to consider when examining inequity. Using data from the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, Figures 20 and 21 show the labour force status of people with disabilities across Atlantic Canada. This does not show wages directly, but it points to a key issue: across all four Atlantic provinces, a large share of people with disabilities are outside the labour force. In Newfoundland and Labrador, 58.9 per cent of men with disabilities and 57.2 per cent of women with disabilities were not in the labour force. In Nova Scotia, the share was 51.4 per cent for men and 54.8 per cent for women. Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick had somewhat lower rates, but still close to half of people with disabilities were not in the labour force. These numbers show that the issue is not only about pay. It is also about access to paid work in the first place.

**Figure 20 /** Labour force status of people with disabilities  
Per cent, ages 15+, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, 2022



**Source** Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0377-01 Labour force status of persons with and without disabilities aged 15 years and over, by age group and gender. DOI: [doi.org/10.25318/1310037701-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1310037701-eng)

**Figure 21 /** Labour force status of people with disabilities  
Per cent, ages 15+, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, 2022



**Source** Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0377-01 Labour force status of persons with and without disabilities aged 15 years and over, by age group and gender. DOI: [doi.org/10.25318/1310037701-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1310037701-eng)

The gender picture is not the same in every province. In Nova Scotia, women with disabilities had a lower employment rate than men with disabilities: 36.7 per cent compared with 41.9 per cent. Women with disabilities in Nova Scotia also had the highest unemployment rate shown in these figures, at 8.5 per cent. In New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, women with disabilities had slightly higher employment rates than men with disabilities. But the bigger message remains: people with disabilities face major barriers to paid work across the region.

Income data from Nova Scotia show how these barriers affect people's annual income. The Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate, using the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, found that median annual after-tax income falls as disability severity increases.<sup>15</sup> Nova Scotians without disabilities had a median annual after-tax income of about \$42,000. For people with moderate disabilities, it was \$36,810, which is 12.3 per cent lower than for people without disabilities. For people with severe disabilities, it was \$30,060, or 28.4 per cent lower. For people with very severe disabilities, it dropped to \$25,100, or 40.2 per cent lower. That is a difference of almost \$17,000 between people without disabilities and people with very severe disabilities.

The same Nova Scotia data also show how gender and disability can combine. Men without disabilities had a median annual after-tax income of \$45,630. Women without disabilities had a median income of \$38,810, which is 14.9 per cent lower than men without disabilities. For women with disabilities, the gap was often much larger. Women with moderate disabilities had a median income of \$32,120, which is 29.6 per cent lower than men without disabilities. Women with severe disabilities had a median income of \$30,910, or 32.3 per cent lower. Women with very severe disabilities had a median income of \$23,530, or 48.4 per cent lower. In other words, women with very severe

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<sup>15</sup> Government of Nova Scotia's Accessibility Directorate. (2024). 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability Nova Scotia Results. [accessible.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/2024-09/2022%20Canadian%20Survey%20on%20Disability-Nova%20Scotia%20Overview%20-%20web-ua\\_0.pdf](https://accessible.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/2024-09/2022%20Canadian%20Survey%20on%20Disability-Nova%20Scotia%20Overview%20-%20web-ua_0.pdf)

disabilities had about half the income of men without disabilities.

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### ***Unpaid care and part-time work exacerbate the pay gap***

The gender pay gap is not only about a smaller paycheck. It compounds over a lifetime. Lower pay leaves less room to save, reduces contributions to workplace pensions and retirement accounts, and diminishes financial security in later life. Recent Statistics Canada research on older people in Canada found that the gender gap in median after-tax income was still 26.1 per cent in 2022.<sup>16</sup> The same study found that older women had higher low-income and poverty rates than older men, with especially high risks for racialized and immigrant older women.

One reason the gap lasts over time is that paid work is still shaped by unpaid care. When child care, elder care, and workplace flexibility are limited, many women adjust their paid work around family responsibilities. This often shows up in taking unpaid time away or working part-time hours. As can be seen in Figures 22 and 23, women make up about half of all employees in every Atlantic province, but they make up a much larger share of part-time workers. In Nova Scotia women are 48.5 per cent of all employees, but 64.3 per cent of part-time employees. The pattern is similar in New Brunswick, where women are 49.1 per cent of all employees and 64 per cent of part-time employees. In Newfoundland and Labrador, women are 49.3 per cent of all employees, but 66 per cent of part-time employees. Prince Edward Island has the smallest difference, but women are still the majority of part-time workers, at 58.5 per cent.

This matters for the gender pay gap because part-time work means fewer paid hours in the week. Even when hourly wages are similar, fewer paid hours can lead to lower weekly earnings. Over time, this can also mean reduced access to workplace

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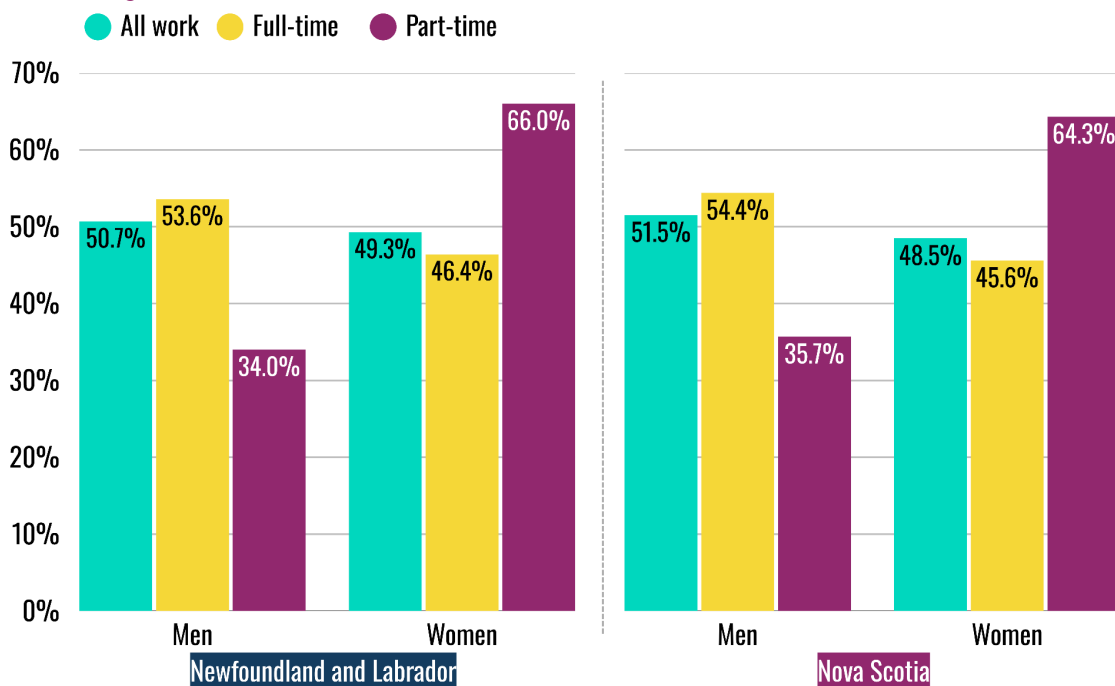
<sup>16</sup> Leclerc, K. (2024). *The poverty rate and low-income situation of older persons in Canada: An intersectional analysis*. Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics.  
[www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-20-0002/452000022024002-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-20-0002/452000022024002-eng.htm)

benefits, lower pension contributions, and reduced financial security.

The Figures also show the other side of the same problem. Men are the majority of full-time workers in every Atlantic province. This gives men greater access to the type of work that typically offers higher weekly earnings, more stable income, and stronger workplace benefits. Women’s over-representation in part-time work is one reason the pay gap does not disappear, even when women have high levels of education and labour force participation. This does not mean that all part-time work is bad or that every woman working part-time wants full-time hours. But it does show that paid work is still organized in ways that affect women differently. When care responsibilities, child care costs, elder care, and workplace schedules are not shared equally, women are more likely to carry the cost through fewer paid hours and lower income.

**Figure 22 /** Women’s and men’s share of all, full-time, and part-time employees by provinces

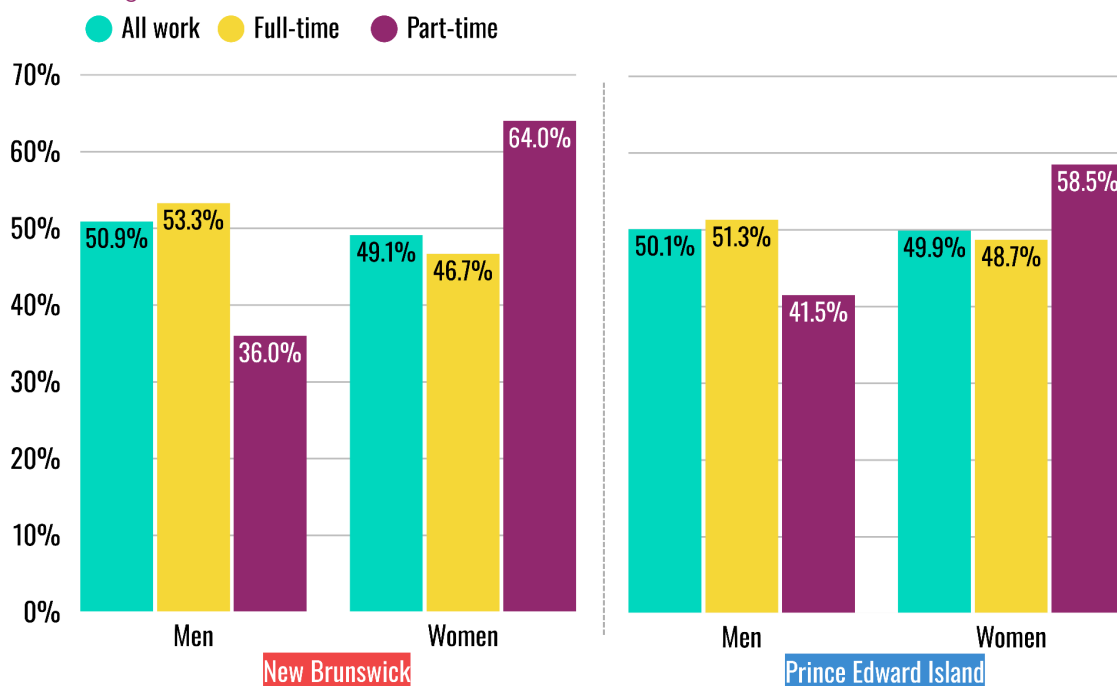
Per cent, ages 15+, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

**Figure 23 /** Women’s and men’s share of all, full-time, and part-time employees by provinces

Per cent, ages 15+, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, 2025



**Source** Own calculations based on Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2025 PUMF data.

This pattern is not new. In 2016, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Oxfam Canada<sup>17</sup> made a similar point: women with family caregiving responsibilities are more likely to seek work that fits the schedule of those responsibilities. The same report noted that women in Canada were three times as likely as men to work part-time, and much more likely to say they did so because they were caring for children. Women report working part-time because of child care or other personal or family responsibilities much more often than men do; in every Atlantic province women represent up to 90 per cent of those workers who report working part-time for these reasons.<sup>18</sup>

This matters because reduced hours and lower-paid jobs affect more than today’s pay. They also affect seniority, benefits,

<sup>17</sup> Lambert, B. and McInturff, K. (2016). *Making women count: The unequal economics of women’s work*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Oxfam Canada. [policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Making\\_Women\\_Count2016.pdf](https://policyalternatives.ca/wp-content/uploads/attachments/Making_Women_Count2016.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada. (2026). *Table 14-10-0028-01 Part-time employment by reason, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality (x 1,000)*. [doi.org/10.25318/1410002801-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/1410002801-eng)

training, promotion, and pension rights. Over time, these losses accumulate. A smaller weekly wage gap can become a much larger lifetime income gap, especially for women who spend years in jobs with fewer hours, weaker benefits, or fewer pathways to higher pay.

The wider economy also pays a price. When women are pushed into lower-paid, less secure, or reduced-hours work, the labour market loses skills, hours, and productivity. Child care is one of the clearest examples. Research published in Statistics Canada's Economic and Social Reports<sup>19</sup> found that Quebec's low-cost child care system increased the employment rate of women with children by about seven percentage points by 2015. It also increased their annual paid hours by about nine per cent, which is equivalent to an estimated \$2.8 billion contribution to GDP.

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<sup>19</sup> Gu, W. (2022). *The value of unpaid childcare and paid employment by gender: What are the impacts of the low-fee universal childcare program?* Government of Canada, Economic and Social Reports.  
[doi.org/10.25318/36280001202200700003-eng](https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202200700003-eng)

# Tools to remove barriers to pay equity

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The gender pay gap is not natural, fixed, or unavoidable. It changes when institutions change. Long-term wage data from Statistics Canada<sup>20</sup> show that among full-time employees aged 25 to 54, women’s median hourly wage increased from 75 per cent of men’s in 1981 to 90 per cent in 2024. That is real progress, but it is also unfinished progress. Even among prime-age workers in full-time jobs, women still earned less than men at the median.

That progress did not happen because the market corrected itself. It happened alongside changes in women’s education, labour force participation, occupation, job tenure, union coverage, public-sector employment, child care policy, and social expectations around women’s paid work. A study on the gender wage gap between 1998 and 2018 found that the gap narrowed partly because women had higher levels of education, moved into different kinds of jobs, and experienced changes in job conditions.<sup>21</sup> The same study found that the remaining gap was still strongly linked to women’s overrepresentation in part-time work and to differences in the industries where women and men work.

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<sup>20</sup> Government of Canada. (2025). “Wages in Canada, 1981 to 2024.” [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250609/dq250609a-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250609/dq250609a-eng.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Pelletier, R., Patterson, M. and Moyser, M. (2019). *The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998 to 2018*. Government of Canada, Labour Statistics: Research Papers. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-004-m/75-004-m2019004-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-004-m/75-004-m2019004-eng.htm)

This section explores tools to tackle pay gaps and remove barriers to pay equity.

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### ***Pay Equity Legislation: Addressing wage discrimination***

Pay equity legislation is important for closing the gender wage gap by addressing systemic wage discrimination and the inequities that lead to the undervaluation of 'women's work' in the labour market. Achieving pay equity means ensuring "equal pay for work of equal value."<sup>22</sup> This means that if two different jobs contribute equal value (based on qualifications, responsibilities, effort, and working conditions) to an employer's operations, then the employees in those jobs should receive equal pay.

It is already prohibited to discriminate based on gender, race, ability or Indigeneity in human rights legislation across the country and as laid out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The legislative framework for seeking a remedy under human rights law is on an individual-complaint basis, whereas Pay Equity legislation seeks to implement systemic remedies. Pay equity is to be achieved by also requiring compensation increases for predominantly female job classes that earn less than their predominantly male job classes of comparable value. In other words, employers cannot lower employees' pay rates to create equal pay for work of equal value.

The first such pay equity law was introduced in 1986 in Manitoba, followed by Ontario, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec over the next decade.<sup>23</sup> Saskatchewan, British Columbia and Newfoundland and Labrador have pay equity negotiation frameworks for specific

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<sup>22</sup> Canadian human rights commission. (n.d.) "About pay equity."

[chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/pay-equity/about-pay-equity](https://chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/individuals/pay-equity/about-pay-equity)

<sup>23</sup> Scott, K. (2026). *There's a long way to go to closing the gender pay gap in Canada*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

[policyalternatives.ca/news-research/theres-a-long-way-to-go-to-closing-the-gender-pay-gap-in-canada/](https://policyalternatives.ca/news-research/theres-a-long-way-to-go-to-closing-the-gender-pay-gap-in-canada/)

public sector employees.<sup>24</sup> Alberta has neither pay equity legislation nor any framework for negotiations. In the federal jurisdiction, the Pay Equity Act came into effect on August 31, 2021,<sup>25</sup> and applies to all federal public sector workers as well as federally regulated private workplaces with 10 or more employees. The Acts in each province differ in their objectives and application (the size of the workforce and whether they apply to the public and private sectors). They also differ in their reporting requirements, enforcement and accountability measures.<sup>26</sup>

All the Atlantic provinces have pay equity laws, but none extend to the private sector. Prince Edward Island stands out for having a Pay Equity Commissioner and a Pay Equity Bureau, with its Pay Equity Act passed in 1988.<sup>27</sup> New Brunswick also has a Pay Equity Bureau, which operates under the provincial Office of Women and Gender Equity.<sup>28</sup> In 2022, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador introduced the Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Action, however regulations have not yet been implemented.<sup>29</sup> The Act as it has been passed has been criticized by feminist, labour and community organizations, for

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<sup>24</sup> Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. (2022). Jurisdictional scan of pay equity legislation in Canada and abroad. Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

[pacsw.ca/site/uploads/2022/12/PACSW-Pay-Equity-Scan-August-2022-Web-site.pdf](https://pacsw.ca/site/uploads/2022/12/PACSW-Pay-Equity-Scan-August-2022-Web-site.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> Government of Canada. (2023). "Overview of the Pay Equity Act." <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/jobs/workplace/human-rights/overview-pay-equity-act.html>

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed examination and comparison of these laws in Canada, as well as a dozen internationally, published in 2022 see: Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women. (2022). Op Cit.; For details of the current pay equity and pay transparency laws in each of the Atlantic provinces release in March 2026, see: Herrington, A., Williams, A., and McCarville, R. (2026). Obligation of Opportunity? What Atlantic Canadian Employers Need to Know about Pay Equity and Pay Transparency. McInnes Cooper. [mcinnescooper.com/publications/pay-equity-and-transparency-laws-creating-obligations-and-opportunities-in-employment/](https://mcinnescooper.com/publications/pay-equity-and-transparency-laws-creating-obligations-and-opportunities-in-employment/)

<sup>27</sup> *Pay Equity Act, Government of Prince Edward Island*, 2016. [princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/P-02-Pay%20Equity%20Act.pdf](https://princeedwardisland.ca/sites/default/files/legislation/P-02-Pay%20Equity%20Act.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Pay Equity Bureau. (n.d.) "What we do." [gnb.ca/en/org/paye-equity-bureau.html](https://gnb.ca/en/org/paye-equity-bureau.html)

<sup>29</sup> Gomes, A. (2024). "Pay equity regulations nowhere to be found nearly a year after deadline, say advocates." CBC News. [cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/pay-equity-nl-government-update-1.7345831](https://cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/pay-equity-nl-government-update-1.7345831)

being too weak to narrow the gender pay gap. Among the recommendations for strengthening that Act, which should be the case in the other provinces, are that it apply to both the private and public sectors (with ten or more employees), to all employees (the current Act exempts contract workers), and that it include proactive enforcement mechanisms.<sup>30</sup>

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### **Pay transparency laws work**

Pay transparency is a policy tool that has been shown to support decreasing the gender pay gap. For example, a study of public-sector salary disclosure laws in Canadian universities found that these laws reduced the gender wage gap among university faculty by about 2.2 to 2.4 percentage points, roughly 30 per cent of the initial gap.<sup>31</sup> The effect was strongest in unionized universities, where salary information could be combined with collective agreements, grievance procedures, and worker representation. These laws can also benefit employers; a recent Indeed survey found, “Nearly three-quarters (73 per cent) of Canadian workers say they would be more likely to apply for a job that includes the pay range in the posting, and 59 per cent say they have withdrawn from an application or interview process after seeing the salary range.”<sup>32</sup>

British Columbia has had the Pay Transparency Act since May 11, 2023. The Act requires all public job postings to include a pay range. Employers cannot ask about previous salaries, nor can they retaliate if employees discuss pay with colleagues or request the employer’s pay transparency report. These pay transparency reports must be posted annually. The B.C.

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<sup>30</sup> Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour. (2023). *Newfoundland and Labrador needs an equality reset: A backgrounder on Bill 3 Pay Equity and Pay Transparency Act*.

<sup>31</sup> Baker, M., Halberstam, Y., Kroft, K., Mas, A. and Messacar, D. (2019). *Pay Transparency and the Gender Gap*. Government of Canada, Analytical Studies Branch.

[www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019018-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019018-eng.htm)

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, J. (2025). “3 in 4 Canadian job candidates more likely to apply for job with pay range: survey.” Human Resources Director.

[hcamag.com/ca/specialization/employment-law/3-in-4-canadian-job-candidates-more-likely-to-apply-for-job-with-pay-range-survey/557798](https://hcamag.com/ca/specialization/employment-law/3-in-4-canadian-job-candidates-more-likely-to-apply-for-job-with-pay-range-survey/557798)

government's Pay Transparency Annual Report for 2025 shows that the gender gap narrowed from 18.4 per cent in 2022 to 14.5 per cent in 2025. The government reports that by the end of 2024, 85 per cent of job postings included pay ranges (compared with 45 per cent in 2023).

New Brunswick is the most recent province to pass Pay Transparency legislation (in March 2026, and was given royal assent on June 12th).<sup>33</sup> It will be the only Atlantic province with standalone legislation like B.C.'s Act, which includes annual reporting for businesses with 50 or more employees.<sup>34</sup>

Nova Scotia's Labour Standards Code currently includes language that prevents employers from seeking compensation history from job applicants and from disciplining employees for discussing salaries. Prince Edward Island also amended its Employment Standards Act to include pay-transparency obligations, as Nova Scotia has. Still, it goes further by requiring job postings to include salary/wage ranges.<sup>35</sup>

The evidence on salary disclosure shows that transparency can reduce wage gaps, especially when workers also have collective tools to act on that information.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bill 24, *Pay Transparency Act*, 2nd Sess, 61st Leg, New Brunswick, 2026. [legnb.ca/en/legislation/bills/61/2/24/pay-transparency-act](https://legnb.ca/en/legislation/bills/61/2/24/pay-transparency-act)

<sup>34</sup> Herrington, A., Williams, A., and McCarville, R. (2026). Op Cit.

<sup>35</sup> Government of Prince Edward Island. (2024). "Pay Transparency." [princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/workforce-advanced-learning-and-population/pay-transparency](https://princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/workforce-advanced-learning-and-population/pay-transparency)

<sup>36</sup> Gu, W. (2022). Op Cit.

# Conclusion: What work is valued?

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Pay equity laws are important, but not enough on their own to address these pay gaps. Canada was an early leader in pay equity legislation, with the first law introduced in 1986 in Manitoba. Though it has been decades since the first law, the gender pay gap persists because the problem is broader than unequal pay for jobs of comparable value. It is also about occupational segregation, the undervaluation of care work, the maternity wage penalty, discrimination, weak labour standards, lack of accommodations, and the unequal treatment of foreign credentials and work experience.<sup>37</sup>

A serious strategy to tackle these inequities must also look at what kinds of work governments choose to value. Canada is now making very large investments in defence (where men make up most of the workforce). Budget 2025 proposes \$81.8 billion over five years, on a cash basis, to rebuild, rearm, and reinvest in the Canadian Armed Forces.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Canada's care systems – a sector where most workers are

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<sup>37</sup>Hardy, V. (2026). *Labour market experiences of recent working-age immigrants and non-permanent residents, 2019 to 2024*. Statistics Canada, Labour Statistics at a Glance. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2025002-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-222-x/71-222-x2025002-eng.htm); and Statistics Canada. (2023). "Intersectional Gender Wage Gap in Canada, 2007 to 2022." *The Daily*. [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230921/dq230921b-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230921/dq230921b-eng.htm)

<sup>38</sup>Government of Canada. (2025). "Protecting Canada's sovereignty and security," in *Budget 2025*. [budget.canada.ca/2025/report-rapport/chap4-en.html](http://budget.canada.ca/2025/report-rapport/chap4-en.html)

women – are under pressure. The Canadian Institute for Health Information<sup>39</sup> reported that 5.7 million Canadian adults did not have a regular health care provider in 2024, and that an estimated 49 per cent increase in the number of family physicians would be required to meet current demand. This does not mean that defence and care are the same issue. But it does raise a basic question about public priorities. If public investment mainly grows male-dominated sectors (also including natural resources and industrial trades), while care work remains underpaid, understaffed, and treated as a cost, the gender pay gap will be harder to close. Care work is essential economic infrastructure. A real strategy for pay equality has to include better wages in care, stronger staffing, safer workloads, more secure full-time jobs, stronger collective bargaining, and clear pathways to better jobs and higher pay.

The lesson for Atlantic Canada is simple: the gap responds to rules and institutions. Pay equity legislation and pay transparency are important, as are affordable child care, stronger collective bargaining, better enforcement of employment standards, access to secure full-time hours, and better promotion pathways. All these tools are needed to help reduce the forces that keep women's earnings lower and ensure decent work for all. The gender pay gap is not a law of nature. It is the result of choices, and different choices can produce different outcomes.

Governments must act to change the conditions that produce the gap: low wages, weak care systems, occupational segregation, limited bargaining power, discrimination, and the undervaluing of women's work. Atlantic Canada can do this, but it requires political choices. A fairer labour market will not come from waiting for the market to fix itself. It will come from stronger public policy, stronger worker power, and a clear commitment to women's economic rights.

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<sup>39</sup> Canadian Institute for Health Information. (2025). *The state of the health workforce in Canada, 2024*.  
[cihi.ca/en/the-state-of-the-health-workforce-in-canada-2024](https://cihi.ca/en/the-state-of-the-health-workforce-in-canada-2024)

# Recommendations: What Atlantic Canada can do now

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Closing the gender pay gap is a public responsibility. Equal pay is a labour rights issue, a human rights issue, and an economic justice issue. Governments, employers, and unions all have a role to play, but the state has to lead. Voluntary action is not enough when the problem is structural.

Atlantic Canada should move on several fronts at the same time:

## **Strengthen pay equity laws and include action plans to address wage discrimination:**

- Provincial governments should make pay equity rules proactive, regularly reviewed, properly enforced and apply to all employers and employees, requiring government resources to support and monitor implementation.
- Ensure pay equity rules reach more workers, including workers in the private sector and workers in women-dominated sectors.
- Governments should develop action plans with clear, measurable goals and timelines, developed along with advocates, representatives from unions, and experts on pay equity.

- Measurable goals must also tackle intersectional gender discrimination that also includes non-binary and transgender understandings and data for workers who are racialized, with a disability, and/or Indigenous.
- Job evaluation must be carefully considered when addressing pay equity in female-dominated jobs that have historically been undervalued, including care work.<sup>40</sup>
- Enforcement may require penalties or fines; Quebec's Pay Equity Act includes fines based on a business's size.

### **Require pay transparency.**

Provinces should require all employers to publish salary ranges in job postings, ban the use of pay history in hiring, and protect workers who discuss wages.<sup>41</sup>

### **Treat care as essential infrastructure.**

Governments should invest in child care, long-term care, home care, disability supports, and health care as core economic policy. Affordable child care helps women stay in paid work and increase paid hours, as the Canadian evidence shows<sup>42</sup>. But the workers who provide care also need better wages, safer staffing levels, secure full-time jobs, benefits, and clear career pathways. A serious pay strategy has to value both the people who need care and the people who provide it.

### **Raise the minimum wage and labour standards.**

As we have outlined in a recent report on Nova Scotia,<sup>43</sup> all Atlantic provinces should raise minimum wages toward living wages, require fair scheduling, guarantee paid sick days, improve access to benefits for part-time and temporary workers,

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<sup>40</sup> Coalition for Pay Equity. (2025). Pay equity evaluations: A guide to understanding the process.

[equite-equity.com/sites/default/files/2025-06/CES\\_Guide\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://equite-equity.com/sites/default/files/2025-06/CES_Guide_EN_Web.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> For detailed recommendations on what the model legislation should require, see: Coalition for Pay Equity. (2025). *Pay transparency in New Brunswick: The necessary tool to enforce equity in workplaces.*

[equite-equity.com/sites/default/files/2026-01/Pay%20Transparency%20in%20New%20Brunswick\\_Position%20Paper.pdf](https://equite-equity.com/sites/default/files/2026-01/Pay%20Transparency%20in%20New%20Brunswick_Position%20Paper.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Gu, W. (2022). Op Cit.

<sup>43</sup> Casey, R., & Saulnier, C. (2025). Op Cit.

and enforce employment standards more seriously. This is especially important in lower-paid sectors where many women work and where unstable hours, low wages, and limited benefits are still common.

### **Use public money to support fair work.**

Municipal and provincial governments should attach labour standards to public funding. Public contracts, grants, and procurement should require living wages, pay transparency, and fair employment practices. Public money should not support low-wage business models or unequal pay practices.

### **Expand non-profit and public care services.**

Provincial and municipal governments can support public and non-profit child care through funding, land use, public buildings, and local partnerships, instead of relying mainly on market solutions. This would help families and improve conditions in sectors where many women work and can be paid for by strengthening progressive taxation to ensure those who have the ability pay their fair share.

### **Improve public transit and expand local public services.**

Workers with care responsibilities need reliable ways to get to work, child care, school, appointments, and elder care. Better transit is not only a transportation policy. It is also a gender equity policy, especially for low-wage workers and workers outside major urban centres.

### **Strengthen collective bargaining and make it easier to unionize.**

Unions can reduce wage inequality by replacing secrecy and discretion with wage grids, job evaluation, grievance rights, and worker representation. Unions should bargain for pay equity reviews, wage increases in women-dominated jobs, fair scheduling, paid leave, better benefits for part-time workers, and stronger protections against discrimination and harassment.

## **Put the most affected workers at the centre.**

Women most affected by low pay should be represented in policy design, workplace committees, bargaining priorities, and union leadership. This includes racialized women, immigrant women, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, single mothers, care workers, part-time workers, and low-wage workers.

## About the authors

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The CCPA-NS office is located in Kijipuktuk in Mi'kma'ki, the unceded, un-surrendered ancestral land of the Mi'kmaq people. We recognize that we are all treaty people and have responsibilities to each other and this land.

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