

# The 8-Day Workweek

The impact of labour shortages on the number of hours worked by Canada's small business owners



**CANADIAN FEDERATION  
OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS™**



59%

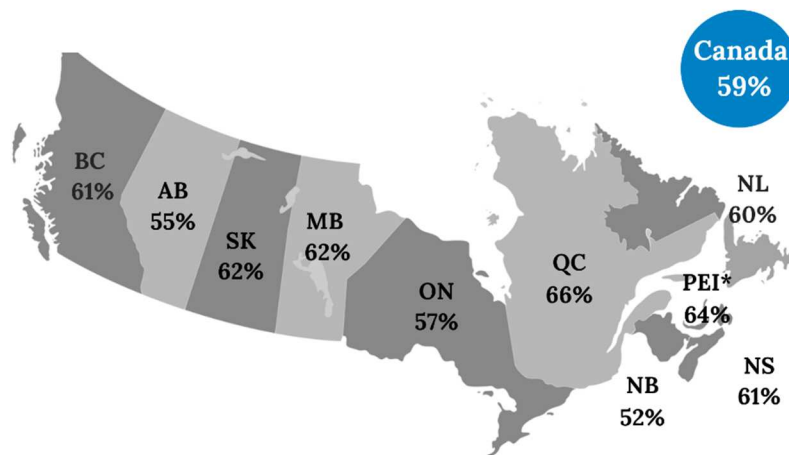
of Canada's small- and medium-sized businesses were affected by labour shortages in September 2022.

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, final results, n = 3,489.

## Introduction

In late 2021, CFIB published a comprehensive report that offers a springboard for understanding the nuances of the national labour shortage challenge and exploring potential solutions.<sup>1</sup> At that time, 55% of Canadian business owners said they were directly affected by labour shortages, a figure that jumped to 59% in September 2022 (see Figure 1). Although businesses in certain provinces are more affected, such as Quebec (66%), Saskatchewan (62%) and Manitoba (62%), all provinces report that more than half of businesses are impacted. At least 70% of businesses in the construction, enterprise and administrative management, transportation and hospitality sectors are affected.<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1 - Small businesses affected by labour shortages, by province



Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 3,489.

In order to determine the impact of labour shortages on small businesses, CFIB has been surveying its members periodically since June 2021. The impact most often reported by small business owners then was that they were forced to work extra hours to work to compensate for the lack of employees (76%). In September 2022, this is still the most cited result, affecting 73% of owners (see Figure 3).

This report looks at the impact of labour shortages on the number of hours worked by business owners using data from a recent survey conducted across Canada. The report breaks down the number of extra hours worked by province and by sector, with detailed data provided in Appendix A.

## Trends in labour shortages for small business owners

We can get a sense of the current magnitude of the challenge facing Canada's small businesses by looking at historical data. In CFIB's March Business Barometer®, about 50% and 33% of small businesses said their production and sales growth are being hampered by a shortage of skilled and

<sup>1</sup> Bomal, Laure-Anna, *Labour shortages are back with a vengeance*. CFIB, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 3,489. <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/your-voice-omnibus-survey-on-small-business-issues>

“The shortage of workers and materials is the single greatest challenge we’ve faced as owners since we launched our business over 20 years ago. It’s the only reason we would decide to shut down. We can’t keep working all day, every day, much longer!”

— Small business owner  
- Construction, Quebec

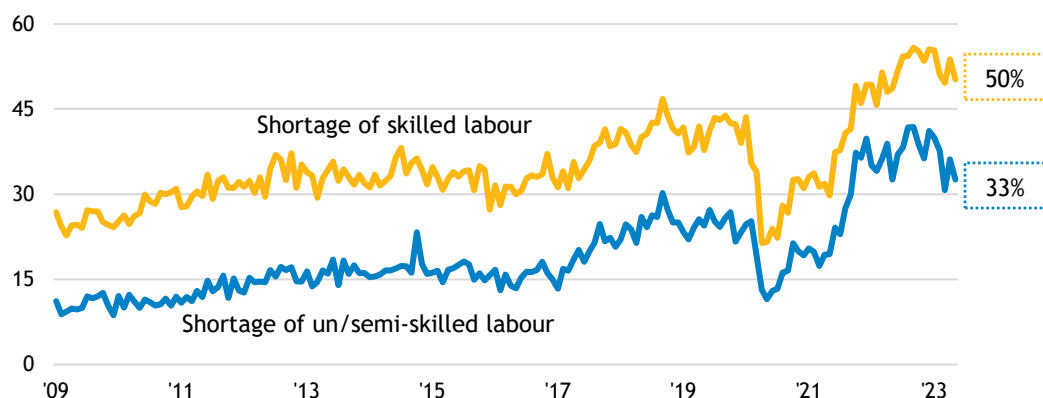
61%

of Canada's small- and medium-sized businesses mentioned that labour shortages are hindering their ability to achieve production/sales growth.

Source: CFIB, Business Barometer - March 2023, n = 540.

un- or semi-skilled labour, respectively (see Figure 2).<sup>3</sup> While these figures are decreasing, they are still well above their respective averages of 35% (shortage of skilled labour) and 19% (un-skilled or semi-skilled labour). These are the first and second most limiting factors, respectively, to sales or production growth. This strongly suggests that, in addition to creating stress for small business owners, labour shortages are limiting the country's economic growth.

Figure 2 - Share of small businesses with labour shortages hindering their ability to achieve production/sales growth

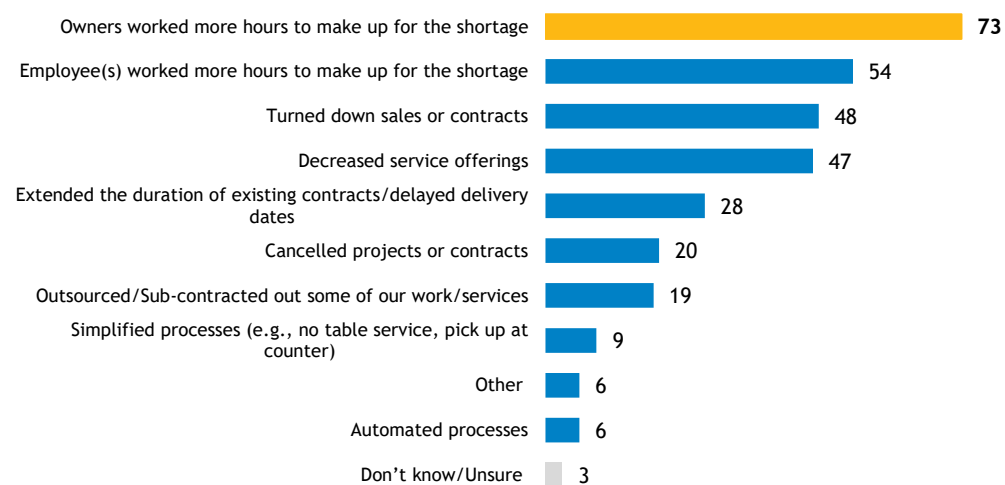


Source: CFIB, Business Barometer - February 2009-March 2023, more details available at [cfib.ca/barometer](http://cfib.ca/barometer).

## Impacts of labour shortages on small businesses

As shown in Figure 3, labour shortages primarily affect the number of work hours, which have increased for owners (73%) and employees (54%) having to make up for being short-staffed. On the financial side, businesses are having to turn down sales and contracts (48%) or decrease their service offerings (47%).

Figure 3 - Impact of labour shortages on small business owners (%)



Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 2,804.

<sup>3</sup> Business Barometer®. CFIB, March 2023.

“We have had to shut down our entire sub shop because of staffing shortages. Owners are currently working 70+ hours a week just to keep the main business open. This has been going on for far too long—we are not going to be able to sustain so many hours (without any days off) for much longer.”

— Small business owner  
- Retail, Ontario



73%

of small business owners affected by labour shortages work more hours to make up for the lack of staff.

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, final results, n = 2,804.

The proportion of small businesses whose owners work more hours is higher in Alberta (76%), Manitoba (75%) and British Columbia (75%) (Table 1). The difference is more striking by sector, as the share of owners working more hours to compensate for the shortage reaches 84% in the hospitality sector and 82% in agriculture.

Table 1 - Proportion of owners affected by labour shortages who are working more hours as a result, by province and by sector

Province	Share of SMEs (in %)	Sector	Share of SMEs (in %)
PEI*	79	Hospitality	84
AB	76	Agriculture	82
MB	75	Arts, Rec., & Info.	78
BC	75	Retail	78
NB	74	Personal, Misc. Services	75
CA	73	Ent. & Admin. Mgmt.	74
NS	73	Wholesale	74
ON	73	<b>Canada</b>	<b>73</b>
QC	72	Professional Services	70
SK	69	Transportation	69
NL	55	Fin., Ins., etc.	69
		Manufacturing	68
		Social services	64
		Construction	64
		Natural Resources*	52

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 2,804.  
Note: \* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

While the CFIB study focuses on the number of hours worked by owners, labour shortages also have a tangible effect on employees, who are working more—often to their own detriment. Long hours and overtime can take a toll on their health, add to their stress and fatigue and skew their work-life balance. As overworked employees become increasingly dissatisfied and less productive, their overall efficiency can suffer.<sup>4 5</sup>

## Number of hours worked by small business owners

In 2010, Statistics Canada<sup>6</sup> found that more than 40% of business owners age 25 to 64 worked 50 or more hours per week. Additionally, in 2016, the Alternative Board estimated that business owners worked an average of 49.4 hours per week.<sup>7</sup> It seems that few studies have been done, therefore this report updates the data and suggests that the number of hours owners currently work is even higher.

The results show that the average Canadian small business owner works 54 hours per week (Table 2), which is almost the equivalent of an 8-day work week if a normal workday consists of 7 hours. By comparison, according to

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6617405/>. Viewed October 18, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.invensislearning.com/blog/overtime-and-work-efficiency/>. Viewed October 18, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/sme-profiles>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.agilitypr.com/pr-news/business/time-management-new-survey-reveals-biz-owners-spending-time-theyd-rather-spend/>. Viewed October 18, 2022.

“As a business owner, I have to work longer hours and I’m back to working weekends because I don’t have enough qualified employees to keep the store open.”

— Small business owner  
- Retail, Quebec



Canada's small business owners work **54 hours** per week on average.

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, final results, n = 2,946.

Statistics Canada's September 2022 Labour Force Survey,<sup>8</sup> Canadian full-time and part-time employees age 15 and over typically work 35.6 hours per week. In other words, small business owners work 18 hours (50%) more than typical employees.

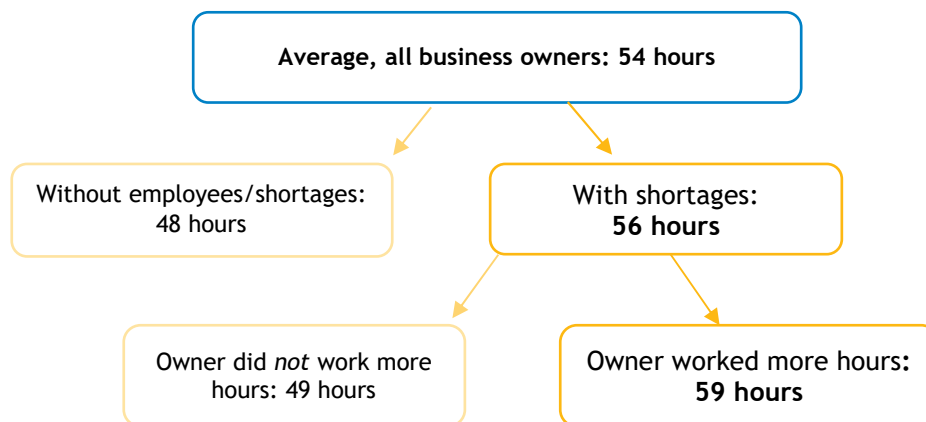
Table 2 - Average number of hours worked by small business owners, by province and by sector

Province	Mean (in hours)	Sector	Mean (in hours)
PEI*	60	Hospitality	61
QC	56	Agriculture	58
NL	55	Transportation	57
NB	55	Construction	56
MB	54	Ent. & Admin. Mgmt.	56
CA	54	Arts, Rec., & Info.	55
SK	54	<b>Canada</b>	<b>54</b>
NS	54	Retail	54
ON	54	Manufacturing	54
BC	54	Wholesale	54
AB	54	Professional Services	53
		Personal, Misc. Services	53
		Natural Resources*	51
		Fin., Ins., etc.	50
		Social services	49

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 2,946.  
Note: \* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

As shown in Table 2, this increase in hours worked can also be seen at the provincial and sector levels, with few differences among provinces (ranging from 54 to 60 hours) and more marked differences among sectors (ranging from 49 to 61 hours). Hospitality, agriculture and transportation small business owners are working 61, 58 and 57 hours per week, respectively.

Figure 4 - Number of hours worked per week by Canadian small business owners based on different criteria (hours per week)



Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, final results, n = 2,946.

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0320-02. Average usual hours and wages by selected characteristics, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality

“We are greatly struggling with staffing, causing us (the owners) to physically be at work all of the time and struggling with fitting in administrative tasks, etc. We have no personal time for family and friends or enjoyment of the simple pleasures. We are just in survival mode. [...]”

— Small business owner  
- Hospitality, New Brunswick



Short-staffed small business owners sacrifice **34%** of their work week trying to close the gap.

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, final results, n = 1,591.

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“[Our staffing shortage] diverted owners from developing and implementing strategies to improve, grow and increase business.”

— Small business owner  
— Retail, Nova Scotia

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Figure 4 also shows the number of hours worked by small business owners based on their staffing situation and the main impact labour shortages have had on it. Owners affected by staffing shortages work longer hours, on average. If the labour shortages happen to affect current operations, owners put in even longer hours. In fact, owners who say they work more hours to make up for being short-staffed work about 59 hours per week.

In the next section, we take a closer look at the owners who said they worked more to make up for labour shortages.

## Closing the gap

CFIB asked owners impacted by labour shortages to break down their work hours into regular work hours and hours spent working due to shortages. The survey found that these small business owners work a whopping 20 extra hours per week, on average. That means they spend 34% of their 59-hour workweek making up for staffing challenges. The range among provinces is not very wide (32% to 42%), and more details are available in Table A1 in the Appendix A. The differences are more pronounced by sector, ranging from 22% to 45%, with the hospitality sector at the high end of the range (Table A2).

The fact that small business owners are devoting so many additional hours to current business operations is significant because that time could be spent on other priorities, whether professional or personal. For instance, owners could devote more time to business planning and development, looking into government programs or putting a dent in their paperwork. This is borne out by the fact that owners without staffing shortages still work an average of 48 hours per week.

## Number of small- and medium-sized businesses impacted by longer hours

We evaluated that 58% of all Canadian small business owners with employees are working longer hours. Looking at the total number of businesses, this percentage translates to an estimated 700,000 Canadian small businesses with employees working more hours (see Table A3 in the Appendix for more details).

By province, Quebec leads at 65%, followed by British Columbia and Nova Scotia at 60% and 59%, respectively. Of course, the number of businesses with employees operating in each province largely dictates how many of them are affected by labour shortages. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia lead, with nearly 250,000, 165,000 and 115,000 owners (respectively) working longer hours to make up for being short-staffed.

By sector, hospitality appears to be the hardest hit, with 78% of business owners with employees reporting they work more hours to make up for the lack of personnel (Table A4). This equates to just under 65,000 businesses in the hospitality sector. As a reminder, owners in hospitality also have a higher ratio of extra hours (Table A2). These alarming findings underscore the high-pressure conditions they are working in.

## Strategies for giving small business owners time back

### Public policies that address labour shortages are key

As already shared in our 2021 report, labour shortages do not have a single solution and many angles of attack are possible.<sup>9</sup> That being said, some key concepts should be considered by governments.

First, measures that aim to increase the available labour pool are essential. For example, improving the education system to better prepare students for the job market or providing tax relief for older workers (65 and over) are measures that would address labour availability. In addition, improving and streamlining the temporary foreign worker and immigration processes would also bring more workers that small businesses need into Canada.

Alternatively, reducing the tax burden, introducing a payroll tax holiday for all new hires (e.g., EI, CPP/QPP, WCB premiums, Employer Health Tax, etc.) or a tax incentive for hiring underrepresented workers (including young workers and seniors) would give businesses more resources to increase wages, purchase machinery and equipment or invest in employee training. Furthermore, introducing training tax credits that recognize on-the-job training and tax credits to stimulate automation (as this was the most successful solution used by small business owners) are also options that help address labour shortages.

Improving the visibility of existing programs to smaller businesses remains essential since it is not certain that owners are aware of them.<sup>10</sup> In fact, business owners do not have time to search for information, and shortages exacerbate this effect.

### Red tape reduction plans are more vital than ever

Demographic trends indicate that labour shortages will not be resolved any time soon, so they will continue to put pressure on small businesses and require more hours worked by owners to compensate. How can we help them get some of their valuable time back? Reducing red tape is one way to do just that.

A recent CFIB study on the cost of red tape shows that, in 2021, Canadian businesses spent an average of 677 hours complying with government regulation.<sup>11</sup> In addition, as owners work more hours to compensate for labour shortages, the relative volume of paperwork increases. Therefore, all levels of government (federal, provincial, and municipal) should make reducing the regulatory burden a priority by adopting, delivering, and ramping up regulatory relief action plans and improving government customer service. In that same study, CFIB shared a Ten Point Plan for Effective Regulatory Reform

<sup>9</sup> Bomal, Laure-Anna, *Labour shortages are back with a vengeance*. CFIB, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Only 26% of Quebec small businesses said they were aware of Quebec government programs and initiatives to help them find and train staff. Source: Bérubé, Francis, *Training in the midst of a labour shortage: Understanding what small businesses need in order to better equip them*. CFIB, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Cruz, Marvin, Kosiorek K., Jones L., Matchett T., *Canada's Red Tape Report, Sixth Edition*. CFIB, 2021

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“I would like to hire a foreign worker for my shop. In doing so in the past, it was torturous, time consuming, and frustrating. While I require such an employee right now, I am reluctant to even try. The red tape and bureaucracy would outweigh the stress level available for such a search.”

— Small business owner  
- Retail, Alberta

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“We have been hit with a lot of debt due to the pandemic as well as finding the people with the skills we need. We have absolutely no issue training people, but we need the skilled numbers to train the rookies. It's just myself and my husband, and we have been going 6 days, sometimes 7 days a week trying to keep our head above water, and we are getting closer and closer to drowning. [...]”

— Small business owner  
- Construction, Alberta

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that includes recommendations on this issue—actioning them would help small business owners save a few hours.

## Conclusion

The negative impacts of labour shortages are snowballing, in part because they are a constant drain on business owners' energy. The ones who said they were affected by labour shortages work about 59 hours per week, 20 of which (or 34% of their workweek) are due to staffing issues. So instead of being captains who keep their ships on course, these business owners are having to paddle just to stay afloat.

This report also examines the impacts labour shortages are having on an increasing number of small businesses (from 55% in November 2021 to 59% in September 2022). With Canada's aging population, the shortages will get worse if our labour market approach does not change. In the next 30 years, the working-age population will decline from 66% to 61% of the total population. By 2050, Canada will have lost a significant portion of its working-age individuals and its future workforce. That does not bode well for our overworked small business owners.

With proper planning by owners and targeted government measures to support them, our small businesses can weather the labour shortage storm.

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“We're short-staffed. Here I am working 7 days a week at the age of 62! I'm the captain of this ship and I need to steer it in the right direction, but I can't do that without my employees' help. I won't last much longer at this pace. Fortunately I'm healthy—otherwise where would I be? Going out of business, that's where. What's the solution?”

— Small business owner  
- Personal, Misc. Services,  
Quebec

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## Appendix A: Data by province and sector

**Table A1 - Total and extra work hours per week for sole owners and co-owners of small- and medium-sized businesses (with employees) who work more hours to make up for labour shortages, associated ratio, by province**

	Total work hours	Extra work hours	Ratio
PEI*	63	26	42%
NB	59	24	41%
NL*	60	22	36%
BC	57	20	35%
ON	59	20	34%
CA	59	20	34%
MB	60	20	34%
AB	58	19	34%
SK	60	20	34%
NS	59	19	33%
QC	60	19	32%

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 1,591.

Note: \* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

**Table A2 - Total and extra work hours per week for sole owners and co-owners of small- and medium-sized businesses (with employees) who work more hours to make up for labour shortages, associated ratio, by sector**

	Total work hours	Extra work hours	Ratio
Hospitality	65	29	45%
Social Services	53	21	39%
Transportation	64	24	37%
Personal, Misc. Services	56	21	36%
<b>Canada</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>34%</b>
Ent. & Admin. Mgmt.	57	19	34%
Retail	58	19	33%
Construction	60	20	33%
Arts, Rec. & Info.	59	19	32%
Fin., Ins., Etc.*	56	17	31%
Agriculture	59	18	30%
Professional Services	56	16	29%
Manufacturing	59	17	29%
Wholesale	56	16	28%
Natural Resources*	60	13	22%

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 1,591.

Note: \* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

**Table A3 - Proportion and number of small- and medium-sized businesses with employees who work more hours to make up for labour shortages, by province**

	Share with SMEs with employees	Number of SMEs with employees
QC	65%	166,386
BC	60%	116,110
NS	59%	17,531
PEI*	57%	3,403
MB	56%	22,241
ON	56%	253,441
NB	54%	13,089
AB	53%	83,718
SK	45%	17,989
NL*	38%	5,922
<b>CA**</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>699,830</b>

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 2,792.

**Notes:**

\* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

\*\* To reflect the expected total by province, the proportion and number of affected small- and medium-sized businesses with employees for Canada were weight-adjusted.

**Table A4 – Proportion and number of small- and medium-sized businesses with employees who work more hours to make up for labour shortages, by sector**

	Share with SMEs with employees	Number of SMEs with employees***
Hospitality	78%	64,907
Arts, Rec. & Info.	64%	24,333
Personal, Misc. Services	62%	70,009
Wholesale	59%	33,562
Ent. & Admin. Mgmt.	57%	34,791
Transportation	57%	43,106
Manufacturing	56%	29,428
Professional Services	55%	87,874
Retail	54%	79,232
Construction	54%	83,214
Agriculture	53%	26,623
Social services	48%	72,408
Fin., Ins., Etc.	46%	47,880
Natural Resources*	32%	2,463
<b>Canada**</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>699,830</b>

Source: CFIB, Your Voice - September 2022 survey, September 8-26, 2022, n = 2,792.

**Notes:**

\* Small number of respondents. Results should be interpreted with caution.

\*\* To reflect the expected total by province, the proportion and number of affected small- and medium-sized businesses with employees for Canada were weight-adjusted.

\*\*\* To reflect the expected total by province, the number of affected small- and medium-sized businesses with employees per sector was weight-adjusted.

## Appendix B: Methodology

### About the survey

The *Your Voice - September 2022* survey was conducted online from September 8 to 26, 2022, among 3,679 Canadian CFIB members. Since this was a non-probability survey, it has no error margin.

### Hours worked per week

The number of hours worked by the owner was analyzed so that only members who are sole owners or co-owners could answer the question. The question was phrased as follows, where X is the name of the business surveyed:

- ***Are you the owner (or co-owner) of the following business: X? (Select one)***
  - Yes, I am the sole owner*
  - Yes, I am a co-owner*
  - No, but I am a senior-level decision maker*
  - No, and I am not a senior-level decision maker*

Only members who are sole owners or co-owners were asked the following additional question:

- ***On average, how many hours do you currently work per week? (Enter an approximate number)***

Extreme values for the number of hours worked were handled by excluding entries of 112 hours or more from the sample. Seven answers were removed after this adjustment was made.

### Proportion of small business owners with employees who work extra hours

The proportions shown in Figure 3 and Table 1 are valid for businesses with employees that reported being affected by labour shortages. To cover the proportion of owners who work more hours because of labour shortages across all small- and medium-sized businesses with employees, a slightly different calculation was used.

First, using the previous question and the labour shortages question (see Figure 1 and more information on this question in the next section of Appendix A), we can easily determine the number of members who are sole owners or co-owners of a business with employees.

Then we can obtain the number of members affected by this impact using the following additional question on how many extra hours they worked:

- ***How many of the total hours you work per week are due to labour shortages? (Enter an approximate number)***

By definition, this figure only includes businesses with employees. The ratio between these two values gives us an estimate of the proportion of sole owners or co-owners who work more hours due to labour shortages, for small- and medium-sized businesses with employees.

Using these two open-ended questions generates a more precise estimate, restricting it to complete responses with no outliers (for more information on how extreme values are handled, see the previous and following sections) from sole owners or co-owners only.

Using Statistics Canada Table 33-10-0568-01, which shows the Canadian business counts with employees in June 2022, we can estimate the number of small- and medium-sized businesses affected, by province and by sector. Businesses with more than 500 employees, businesses in the public administration and utilities sectors and businesses that are not classified were removed from this total. Small- and medium-sized businesses in Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories have also been removed from these totals, as the CFIB sample is too small to produce an estimate.

### Extra hours worked to make up for being short-staffed

Members who experienced labour shortages and whose owner(s) had to work more hours to close the gap were asked to estimate the number of extra hours worked. Because this is a specific profile, a series of questions was used to filter the responses. The first filter question asked in this analysis was:

- ***Which of the following best describes your business situation regarding labour shortages (described here as difficulties hiring, retaining, or getting staff to work the hours needed)? (Select one)***
  - Not applicable - We do not have any employees*
  - No shortages - We have all the staff we need*
  - We have all the staff we need, but at a significant additional cost to our business (wage increases, flexible hours, hiring bonuses)*
  - We have all the staff we need for current operations, but cannot get the staff that we need to expand or meet increased/new demand*
  - We don't have all the staff we need for current operations, due to labour shortages*
  - Other (Please specify)*
  - Don't know/Unsure*

Members who selected “Not applicable,” “No shortages,” or “Don’t know/Unsure” were excluded from further consideration, while those affected by labour shortages were asked to answer the following question:

- ***What impact, if any, have labour shortages had on your business? (Select all that apply)***
  - Decreased service offerings*
  - Cancelled projects or contracts*
  - Turned down sales or contracts*
  - Extended the duration of existing contracts/delayed delivery dates*
  - Owners worked more hours to make up for the shortage*
  - Employee(s) worked more hours to make up for the shortage*
  - Automated processes*
  - Simplified processes (e.g., no table service, pick up at counter)*

- Outsourced/Sub-contracted out some of our work/services*
- Other (Please specify)*
- Don't know/Unsure*

Since the analysis focuses on small business owners who work more hours, members who selected “Owners worked more hours to make up for the shortage” were asked a follow-up question. As in the first part of the appendix, only those who self-identified as sole owners or co-owners were asked the following question:

- ***How many of the total hours you work per week are due to labour shortages? (Enter an approximate number)***

Extreme values for the number of extra hours worked due to labour shortages were handled by excluding entries that far exceeded the number of hours usually worked per week, which was capped at 112 hours. Fifty-three answers were removed after this adjustment was made.

## About CFIB

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) is Canada's largest association of small- and medium-sized businesses with 97,000 members across every industry and region. CFIB is dedicated to increasing business owners' chances of success by driving policy change at all levels of government, providing expert advice and tools, and negotiating exclusive savings.

Learn more at [cfib.ca](https://cfib.ca)

## About the Authors



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Laure-Anna Bomal is an Economist in Montreal for the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB). Since joining CFIB in 2021, she has worked on a range of surveys and research reports on issues affecting small business, including business logistics and labour shortages.

Laure-Anna holds a Master of Arts in Economics from the University of Ottawa and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and Economics from the Université de Montréal.



**François Vincent**

Vice-president, Québec

As Vice-President, Québec, François Vincent leads a team that advocates for the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the province. He meets with policy makers at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels to ensure that the actual experience of SMEs is taken into account in public policy development. He also reviews legislative bills that will have an impact on businesses and is active in the media on behalf of SMEs.

François holds a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and Politics and a Certificate in Law from the Université de Montréal, as well as a post-graduate degree in Management from HEC Montréal.

