

Recent labour market developments. The Canadian labour force went through a period of significant change from 1981 to 1986. The economy experienced its most severe recession since the 1930s during the period from mid-1981 until the end of 1982. This was followed by a span of continuous recovery throughout the remainder of the 1981-86 period.

In the decade preceding the recession, the labour force grew at a robust rate of about 3.8% per year. The number of women in the labour force increased by 63% during that period; the number of men rose by only 24%. While the number in the labour force rose in all major age/sex categories, the increase was most significant for women aged 25 and over (73.4%). As a result, the difference in the participation rates for men and women (the percentage of persons in the population taking part in the labour force) narrowed from 37.9% in 1971 to 26.7% by 1981.

During the economic downturn in 1981-82, the overall size of the labour force remained virtually unchanged, with an increase of 1.5% for women being offset by a decline of 0.3% among men. Employment levels dropped sharply (3.3%) from 11,006,000 in 1981 to 10,644,000 in 1982. This decrease of 362,000 persons employed came as the result of a decline of 409,000 in the number of persons working full-time while part-time employment rose moderately (47,000). There were employment declines in all sectors with the exception of finance, insurance and real estate and community, business and personal services. The most severely affected industries were the primary industries other than agriculture (-16.1%), manufacturing (-9.0%), and construction (-8.3%).

The recovery, which began in early 1983, continued throughout the period up to 1986. While average employment in 1983 rose only 90,000 (0.8%) over the level in 1982, it maintained a more substantial growth of about 2.8% during the subsequent three years of the recovery. However, some aspects of the recovery have been less than uniform.

Employment increases in service-producing industries have averaged 2.8% per year during the four years of recovery while the goods-producing sectors averaged a more modest 1.4% growth. In fact, none of the goods-producing industries had achieved their pre-recession peaks by 1986, whereas only one of the service sectors, transportation, communications and utilities, still remained below its 1981 peak. This increase in service sector employment has resulted in strong growth in part-time employment,

bringing its share of total employment to 15.6% in 1986 compared to 13.5% in 1981. Increases in employment for women accounted for nearly 60% of the overall gains during the recovery period. Across the provinces, the recovery has been strongest in Central Canada, with gains of 10.9% and 12.0% in Quebec and Ontario, respectively, for the four years. Aside from Prince Edward Island, which posted employment increases of 15.6% during the same period, the Atlantic provinces averaged employment growth in the 10% range except for Newfoundland (at 4%). The weakest growth during the period since 1982 occurred in Alberta (1.2%), which did not reach its minimum employment level until 1984 and where the recent recovery has been affected by low world prices for crude petroleum.

Unemployment as a percentage of the labour force reached a peak of 11.9% in 1983. It declined to an average of 9.6% by 1986, still significantly above the rate of 7.5% which was recorded in 1981. The rate for youth aged 15 to 24 stood at 15.2% in 1986, down from the recessionary peak of 19.9%; it was 8.0% for persons aged 25 and over, from 9.4% in 1983. The unemployment level in 1986 stood at 1,236,000, which was 338,000 above the number of persons without jobs recorded in 1981 but down 212,000 from the peak in 1983.

5.5.2 Other labour market highlights

Statistics Canada regularly adds a series of supplementary questions to the monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). Although these supplementary surveys cover a wide range of topics, many ask labour-market-related questions, which subsequently provide data dealing with the patterns and characteristics of the labour market. This information can then be analyzed in conjunction with LFS data. The following are highlights from several LFS supplementary surveys:

Survey of volunteer work. In the 12-month period ending February 1980, about 15% of Canada's adult population contributed a total of 374 million hours of voluntary work.

Survey of union membership. Among full-time workers in December 1984, the average hourly earnings of women were 26% less than those of men.

Survey of job opportunities. In March 1986, an estimated 245,000 persons wanted a job but did not seek work because they were waiting for recall, waiting for replies or believed no work was available.