



The state of employment equity in British Columbia

This infosheet provides an overview of current information—and gaps in information—about employment equity in B.C. It helps the reader build a deeper understanding about employment equity in the province including providing information on:

- Representation and pay as key indicators of equity in the workplace
- Representation and diversity in workplaces across B.C.
- Pay gaps in B.C.

Representation and pay as key indicators of equity in the workplace

Representation

This type of data describes:

- Who is employed and where, and what type of work people are doing
- Which workplaces and sectors employ (or don't employ) people who are marginalized¹ or who face discrimination²

Data on representation can help us answer questions like:

- Are marginalized groups represented in the workforce to the same extent that they are in the general population?
- Are marginalized groups represented less or more in certain types of work than others?
- Are marginalized groups represented in leadership roles?

Pay

This type of data looks at:

- salary and wage levels across workplaces and sectors

Data on pay can help us answer questions like:

- Are people with similar responsibilities, roles and credentials paid equally within an organization or sector?
- Are employers paying workers fairly when workers are from groups who have historically faced discrimination (such as women, racialized or Indigenous people) compared to groups that have historically been privileged (such as men or white people)?
- Might discrimination and exclusion be affecting pay levels for different groups?

Gathering and analyzing data in these two areas can help us identify patterns of exclusion and discrimination at the organizational level, in entire sectors or fields of work, and across all of society.

In the rest of this infosheet, we look at major differences in representation and pay across B.C. for four areas of personal identity: gender, race, Indigeneity and disability.

You'll notice there's a lack of intersectional information based on a combination of areas of a person's identity. This is because this type of data is currently not available in B.C. The same applies to more detailed data about employment in the private sector. At the end of this infosheet, we note these gaps in the data and how further research can help us improve the state of employment equity in B.C.

On intersectionality

Addressing discrimination effectively in the workplace involves considering intersectionality.³ Exclusion and discrimination can show up in multiple and overlapping ways. For example, gender and disability combined can create and amplify inequitable outcomes such as wage gaps.

Research by Canadian Heritage found that the income of middle-aged women with mild disabilities was 24% less than that of their male counterparts and 13% less than that of women without disabilities.⁴

Representation and diversity in B.C. workplaces

Women

- Overrepresented in jobs that are often stereotyped as women’s roles (e.g., work focused on caregiving like nursing or childcare)
- Underrepresented in industrial and manual labour as well as among executive and management-level positions (see Table 1 on [page 5](#))

Persons with disabilities

- Most underrepresented group in B.C.’s workforce⁵
- Underrepresented in all areas of the B.C. public service (only 6.9% of employees in this sector in 2020)
- Lack of data for specific industries and occupations in B.C.

Indigenous peoples

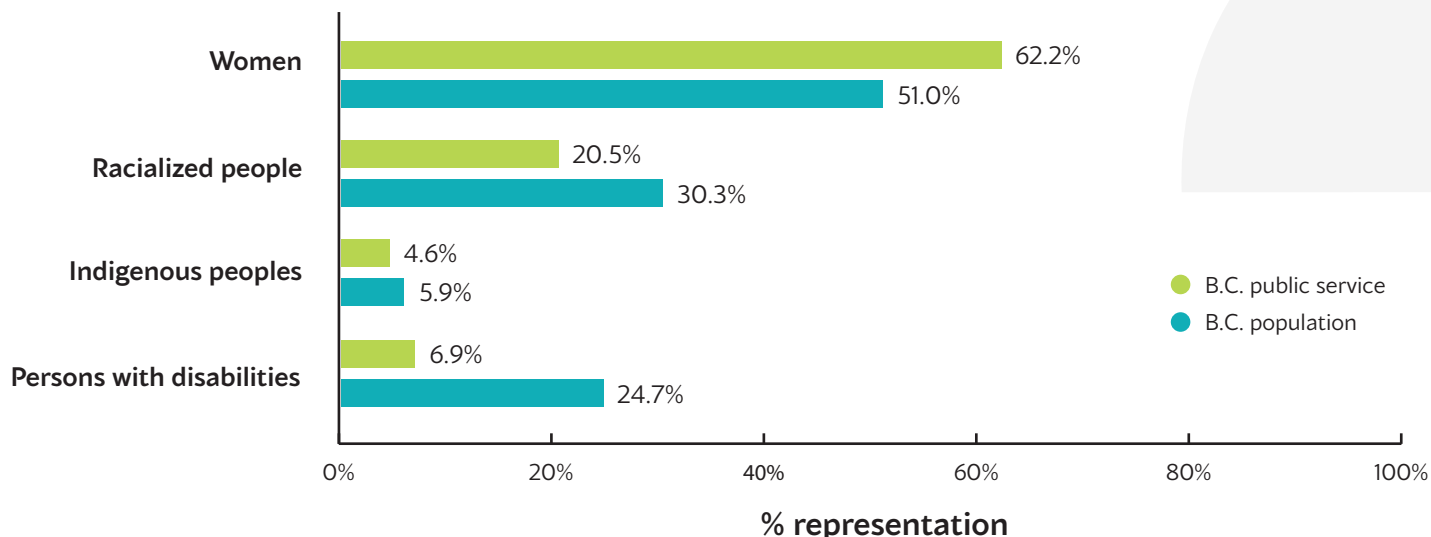
- Representation in B.C. public service hasn’t experienced much change (4.5% in 2018; 4.6% in 2020)
- High representation in B.C. public sector areas that engage with Indigenous communities, families, and culture
- Underrepresentation in all other sectors and lack of data for other industries and occupations in B.C.

Racialized people⁶

- Overall underrepresented in most parts of the B.C. public service, but slowly increasing (from 18.2% in 2018 to 20.5% in 2020)⁷
- Underrepresentation in industries that deal with natural resources, the environment and climate
- Lack of data for other industries and occupations in B.C.

Representation in B.C.’s public service and general population, 2020⁸

The graph indicates the representation of select groups in B.C.’s public service in comparison to their representation in the province’s general population.



A closer look at persons with disabilities in the workforce

Available data from BC Stats indicates that workforce representation among people with disabilities varies depending on disability type and severity.

Disability type

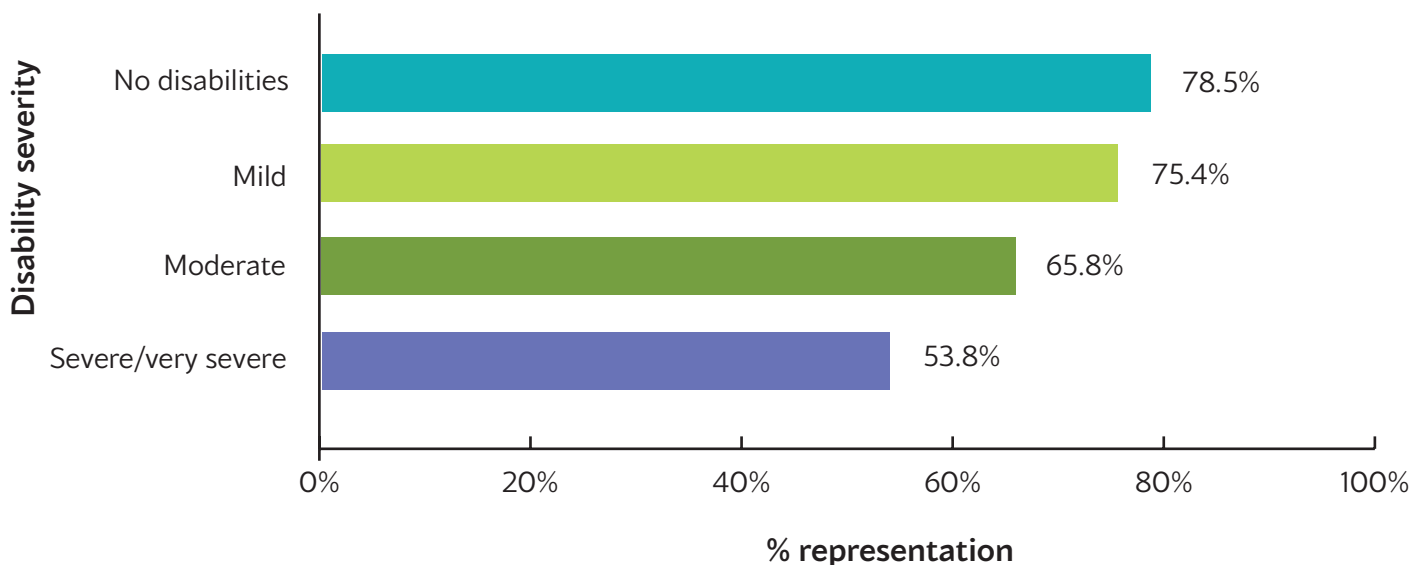
People with mobility related disabilities are better represented in the workforce than those with mental disabilities.⁹

Disability severity

People with more severe disabilities have lower representation in B.C.'s workforce than people with moderate and mild disabilities.

Representation in B.C.'s workforce by disability severity, 2006¹⁰

The graph indicates the percentage of people employed from different disability severity groups. The percentage declines with increasing disability severity where 53.8% of people with severe or very severe disabilities are employed, compared to 78.5% of people without disabilities.



A closer look at the representation of women in the workforce

Although women are close to being equally represented in the labour force, there are still inequities around gender in B.C. Specifically, women tend to work in:

- Occupations stereotyped as women's work
- Lower-paying and lower status positions (see Table 1 on [page 5](#))
- Women are still notably absent in types of work that have been historically dominated by men (for example construction or industrial trades¹¹)

Table 1: Representation of men and women in B.C.'s workforce in 2021, select industries¹²

Sector	Percent women*	Percent men**
Accommodation and food services	55%	45%
Construction	15%	85%
Educational services	69%	31%
Finance, insurance, and real estate	54%	46%
Forestry and logging with support activities	22%	78%
Healthcare and social assistance	78%	22%
Manufacturing	27%	73%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	42%	58%
Retail trade	53%	47%
Transportation and warehousing	22%	78%
Wholesale trade	35%	65%

* Women made up 48% of B.C.'s workforce.

** Men made up 52% of B.C.'s workforce.

COVID-19's impact on representation in employment

When it comes to employment equity, there is evidence that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted different groups more than others. For example, unemployment rates increased for women aged 25–54 while staying the same for men of the same age.¹³ This trend has been attributed to:

- Women's overrepresentation in sectors that are more impacted by healthcare regulations (such as hospitality)¹⁴
- The tendency for stereotypes¹⁵ about gender to put more pressure on women to leave their paid jobs and take on caregiving responsibilities when external childcare options are no longer available¹⁶

Considering intersectionality, racialized women and those who recently immigrated to Canada were more severely affected by the pandemic.¹⁷

A closer look at representation in leadership roles

Data demonstrating representation in leadership positions does not exist for all industries and occupations in B.C. However, available data from the provincial public service does show that women, racialized people, people with disabilities and Indigenous people are all underrepresented in leadership positions in this sector.¹⁸

Gaps in leadership in any sector can be affected by:

- Unequal access to leadership and other career-building opportunities
- Hiring, mentoring, and promotional processes that exclude and discriminate against women, racialized people, people with disabilities and Indigenous people
- Differences in individual qualifications such as education, skills and experience, which may be driven by unequal access to opportunities

Have you heard of the “glass ceiling” and “sticky floor” concepts?

The phrase “glass ceiling” is often used to talk about the invisible barriers that exclude people from promotions and positions of leadership because of their gender, race or other factors.

“Sticky floor” refers to the ways that members of historically marginalized groups can be clustered into low-paying jobs at entry levels.¹⁹

How we value certain types of work can contribute to these trends.

For example, women have historically been responsible for caregiving which is largely unpaid and can affect both their workplace representation and pay.



Pay gaps in B.C.

Women

- In 2021, women in B.C. made 86 cents for every dollar men made in average hourly wages²⁰
- Men tend to have roles in higher-paying industries and occupations
- Education, experience, job attributes, occupation, industry and demographic factors also account for this wage gap²¹
- On average, men out-earn women in every industrial sector with varying gaps across each sector (see Table 2 on [page 8](#))
- Even in industries with a higher representation of women, they earn about 0.83–0.88 cents to every man’s dollar

Racialized people, Indigenous people, and people with disabilities

- B.C.’s pay gap based on race is larger than the Canadian average
 - In 2021, university-educated racialized people earned just 86.4 cents to their white peers’ dollar²²
- In 2012, people with disabilities in B.C. earned ~70.7% of what those without disabilities earned²³
- There’s no comparable data on pay gaps experienced by Indigenous people
- Intersectional information about pay gaps is missing based on a combination of a person’s identity such as race, Indigeneity, disability and gender by industry in B.C.

Did you know?

B.C. has among the largest gender pay gaps in Canada.

Pay discrimination based on sex is prohibited in B.C.’s *Human Rights Code*, but B.C. doesn’t have proactive pay equity legislation like many other places in Canada and around the world do. Under our current law, this means that an employee would have to file a complaint under the *Human Rights Code* to enforce it.

Proactive pay equity laws typically require employers to conduct and make public an unbiased comparison of the work done by various groups of people across a workplace to ensure all groups are being paid equitably.

A BCOHRC review of existing pay equity laws in Canada found that they only apply on the basis of sex or gender and don’t address other important and intersectional pay gaps.



Table 2: Private sector gender pay gaps, select industries²⁴

Sector	2016 gap	2021 gap
Accommodation and food services	\$1.62/hr	\$1.06/hr
Construction	\$3.78/hr	\$3.69/hr
Educational services	\$4.00/hr	\$3.54/hr
Finance, insurance, and real estate	\$5.45/hr	\$3.70/hr
Forestry and logging with support activities	\$5.23/hr	\$4.38/hr
Healthcare and social assistance	\$1.77/hr	\$3.10/hr
Manufacturing	\$7.31/hr	\$6.30/hr
Professional, scientific, and technical services	\$8.60/hr	\$8.58/hr
Retail trade	\$3.60/hr	\$5.00/hr
Transportation and warehousing	\$5.91/hr	\$4.67/hr
Wholesale trade	\$5.00/hr	\$4.00/hr

Employment equity in B.C.: What we don't know yet

Available data shows that B.C. has significant and persistent gaps in representation and pay for workers across various marginalized groups. However, there is still a lot we don't know.

Gaps in the data include:

- There is a lack of available data to convey the experiences of people who identify as transgender or non-binary
- Considering intersectionality, the available data does not reflect the ways any of the groups we have examined might face discrimination in multiple and overlapping ways

For example, we know racialized women lost jobs at higher rates during the global pandemic, but we lack basic data on their representation across sectors and job categories in B.C.

- There is also more data available about B.C.'s public sector than its private sector, which paints only part of the picture of employment equity in the province

Further research focusing on intersectionality and across sectors will help us learn more about the unique workplace experiences and trends of various groups.

We must also remember that representation and pay aren't the only factors that contribute to employment equity. For example, workplace culture is another domain where equity is relevant, including how safe and welcome someone might feel in the workplace.²⁵

Employment equity is a complex story and we still have much to learn about trends in B.C. and about what we can fix. Thoughtfully collecting more data about the experiences of people from specific marginalized groups can help us do this (to learn more about human-rights-based approaches to disaggregated data collection, see our [Grandmother's perspective report](#)). We also invite you to explore our further materials and guides on employment equity.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

¹ Marginalization is the process through which certain people are denied opportunities to become fully participating members of society and pushed to the margins of the mainstream, including being prevented from finding work, pursuing further education or gaining access to social services.

² Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, for example on the grounds of race, age or gender.

³ Intersectionality is a concept first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the United States. From this perspective, inequities are the outcome of different and combined characteristics and experiences. See [Intersectionality 101](#) by Olena Hankivsky for more about this concept.

⁴ Canadian Heritage. "[Systemic Barriers to the Full Socio-Economic Participation of Persons with Disabilities and the Benefits Realized When Such Persons Are Included in the Workplace](#)," December 2020, 7.

⁵ BC Stats. "[Labour Market Outcomes of Persons with Disabilities in British Columbia](#)," 2009.

⁶ The phrase "racialized people" is used in this context as an update to the language of the Employment Equity Act. In the Act, the phrase "visible minority" refers to people who are racialized and who are not Indigenous.

⁷ BC Stats. "[Indicators of Progress - By Designated Group](#)," 2020.

⁸ BC Stats. "Workforce Profiles: Comparison with Provincial Workforce: BC Public Service, All Employees," 2020.

⁹ BC Stats, 2009.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Torre Fernández, Margarita. "[Women in Blue: Structural and Individual Determinants of Sex Segregation in Blue-Collar Occupations](#)." *Gender & Society* 33, no. 3 (June 1, 2019): 410–38.

¹² Data compiled from [WorkBC Industry Profiles](#) and originating from the 2021 Labour Force Survey.

¹³ The Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey measured employment rates during the fifth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2022. Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. "[The Daily — Labour Force Survey, January 2022](#)," February 4, 2022.

¹⁴ Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2022.

¹⁵ Stereotyping is when people use aspects of personal identity such as race, disability or gender to acquire and attribute the same characteristics to all members of a group without considering their individual differences. Ontario Human Rights Commission. "[Part 2 – The policy framework](#)," n.d.

¹⁶ Qian, Yue, and Sylvia Fuller. "[COVID-19 and the Gender Employment Gap among Parents of Young Children](#)." *Canadian Public Policy* 46, no. S2 (August 1, 2020): S89–S101.

¹⁷ Patel, Rehana. "[Women struggling due to pandemic need meaningful support to help get back on their feet](#)." CBC News. March 17, 2021.

¹⁸ BC Stats. "[Leadership by Type, BC Public Service, All Employees](#)," 2020.

¹⁹ Bond, Meg A., and Michelle C. Haynes. "[Workplace Diversity: A Social-Ecological Framework and Policy Implications: Workplace Diversity](#)." *Social Issues and Policy Review* 8, no. 1 (January 2014): 172.

²⁰ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0340-02 Average and median gender wage ratio, annual.

²¹ Statistics Canada. "[The Gender Wage Gap in Canada: 1998 to 2008](#)," 2019.

²² The Conference Board of Canada. "[Racial Wage Gap - Society Provincial Rankings - How Canada Performs](#)," April 2017.

²³ The Conference Board of Canada. "[Income of People with Disabilities - Society Provincial Rankings - How Canada Performs](#)," April 2017.

²⁴ Data compiled from [WorkBC Industry Profiles](#) and originating from the 2021 Labour Force Survey.

²⁵ Bond, 176.

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