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Categories: Infographic Wednesday

There has been a dramatic increase in recent years in precarious work in the Canadian job

market. Precarious work is commonly defined as unprotected, non-standard employment that

pays poorly, and makes it difficult to support a household. This week’s infographic, published

by the Workers' Action Centre, takes a look at the growth of precarious and low-wage work in

Ontario in recent years.

The infographic states that precarious and low-wage work has become Ontario’s new normal.

According to a CCPA report on Ontario’s changing labor market, part-time jobs have shown

25% job growth since 2010 and temporary jobs have shown 40% job growth. Temporary

employment, by its very nature, often results in incomes that are unpredictable, making

households are more prone to suffering from fluctuations in income. Furthermore, precarious work

is growing mostly in low-wage sectors: the percentage of low-wage workforce has increased

by 11% in the last ten years.

A common stereotype that is held by Canadians is the belief that many individuals live in

poverty and homelessness because they choose to be unemployed. The reality is that high-

quality, full-time jobs are becoming increasingly scarce, and that precarious work often fails to

even put families over the poverty line. In fact, according to a recent Citizens for Public Justice

Report, 44% of poor households in Canada had at least one person working in 2011: a job on

its own does not guarantee freedom from poverty.

Addressing Precarious Employment

This increase in precarious work has commonly been attributed to restructuring of employment

relationships that prioritize productivity over the health and well-being of workers. However, by

enacting policies that emphasizes the rights of workers and the need for livable wages,

governments can be active participants in supporting the economic health and well-being of its

citizens. For this reason, provincial governments across Canada are being asked to increase

their minimum wages, so that they become living wages. The term living wages is used to refer

to wages that are high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

As more temporary and part-time employment continues to replace full-time positions,the role

of collective representation, including labor union, could play a part in the movement towards

change. Compared to non-union members, union members are more likely to receive benefits,

wage increases, and opportunities to voice their concerns to management. Unions also help

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bridge the income divide that exist along the lines of gender and race in non-unionized

workplaces. Important thing to consider, is that women and racialized individuals are more

likely to live in poverty. Canadian women in unionized workplaces earned, on average, $6.89

more than non-union women in 2013. The earning gap between racialized workers and white

workers decreases from an estimated 30% in non-unionized workplaces to 8% in unionized

workplaces. Unions achieve these outcomes partially due to collective bargaining. Collective

bargaining helps to level the playing field between employees and employers and provides

members with representation in the decision-making process.

The continued dissemination and knowledge mobilization of research surrounding existing

Employment precarity can pave the way for public support for changes in policy and practice.

Advocacy and growing public support for the adoption of strategies that address precarious

Employment is a step towards change.

