

CANADIAN UNIONIZATION RATES CONTINUING TO FALL

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The reshaping of Canada's workforce and the related drop in union density in the private sector is confirmed by numbers recently released by Statistics Canada.

Today a union member is slightly more likely to be a female, and working in an office, school or hospital. By contrast, factory workers, miners and other blue collar trades have seen their union memberships continue to fall over the past three decades.

The decline in Canada's unionization rate has been noted since Statistics Canada began tracking it in 1981. The rate has fallen from 37.6% of employees being unionized in 1981 to 28.8% in 2014.

The trends differ, however, based on gender. Over the span from 1981 to 2014, the union density for male workers dropped from 41% to 27%. For female workers over the same period, the rate remained relatively stable, varying between 30% and 32%.

There is also a notable decline in the unionization rate among young workers. While this decline was also present among younger female workers, the trend is most pronounced among younger males. And the relatively constant overall rate for female workers is based on an overall increase in the unionization rate for older women.

One factor contributing to the decline in unionization of younger men is the employment shift away from industries and occupations with high union density (such as construction and manufacturing) and towards those with lower rates (such as retail and professional services). The higher rates for older women are in part attributable to their concentration in industries with high union density, such as health care, education, and the public service.

These numbers reflect trends which are likely to continue. The overall unionization rate within Canada's private sector (15.2% in 2014) has been declining for over 30 years. This will continue to be partially offset by high public sector union density (71.3% in 2014). When taken together, the image of a "typical" union member will continue to evolve.

by George Waggott

A Cautionary Note

The foregoing provides only an overview and does not constitute legal advice. Readers are cautioned against making any decisions based on this material alone. Rather, specific legal advice should be obtained.

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