



RURAL WELLBEING

Jobs & Wages Factsheet

HIGHLIGHTS



- In 2024, healthcare continued to be top employment industry for rural communities.
- There has been a 12% increase in the number of rural and urban jobs since the pandemic low in 2020.
- On average, most industries in Ontario pay their workers a living wage.

Overview

Jobs data helps us understand how many people are working in different industries and how much employees are paid for their work. This factsheet presents jobs data for 2020-2024, including self-employment. It also presents average industry wages for employees in 2024, along with estimates for living wage.

Hourly living wage data were obtained from the [Ontario Living Wage Network](#). Jobs and average industry wage data were obtained from [Analyst](#), an online tool of the Ontario Ministry of Rural Affairs. Analyst sources jobs and earnings data from the Survey of Employment, Payroll, and Hours, the Labour Force Survey, and the Census. Note that wage data are not available for self-employment jobs. Industry names are based on the 2-digit North American Industry Classification System.

Note that we calculated total jobs and average wages from data at the census subdivision level. However, data are not always available for every census subdivision. Data at this small geographic scale may be suppressed for confidentiality reasons. Because of missing data at the census

This factsheet presents information about employment indicators from ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#).

Explore the dashboard to view interactive maps and data visualizations.



subdivision level, some of the totals or averages presented here and in our accompanying dashboard may differ from other sources using different geographic levels or different methods for aggregation.

Definitions

Community: Census subdivisions, municipalities, and areas treated as municipal for statistical purposes, such as unorganized territories.

Community type: Categories of communities as rural or urban.

Rural: Any municipality outside of census metropolitan areas. Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Urban: Any municipality within a [census metropolitan area](#). Does not include communities designated as First Nations reserves or settlements.

Job: Any position in which a worker provides labour in exchange for monetary compensation. This includes those who work as full-time or part-time employees. This also includes self-employment jobs.

Industry: A group of businesses that produce similar goods and services, and share similar production processes for creating the goods and services they sell. Industries are classified using the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Average wage: Average compensation and earnings from working at a job.

Living wage: The wage a worker needs to earn to cover their basic expenses and enjoy modest engagement in civic and cultural community.

See the [Indicator Definitions](#) website for more information.

Jobs

For both rural and urban communities, there was a slight increase in the number of jobs between 2023 and 2024 (Table 1). Notably, jobs seem to have recovered from the pandemic low in 2020. In 2024, there were about 12% more jobs in rural and urban areas, as compared to 2020.

In 2024, healthcare continued to be top employment industry in rural communities (Table 2), followed by retail, manufacturing, construction, and accommodation. As with the overall numbers, there was not much change in jobs for specific industries between 2023-24. However, all industries showed significant improvement compared to 2020. Accommodation and arts industries showed the largest increase in jobs since 2020, at 41% and 30% respectively.

The ongoing trade dispute with the United States is already affecting jobs in Ontario. Rural jobs may be more at risk than urban jobs. Indeed, 55% of all rural jobs could be directly or indirectly affected by trade disputes, including retail, manufacturing, construction, accommodation and food services, agriculture, transportation and warehousing, wholesale trade, arts, real estate and mining. Collectively, these industries account for 46% of urban jobs.

Table 1. Number of working age people and jobs by community type.

Community type	Number of working age people (15-64)	2020 Jobs	2021 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change 2023-24
Rural	1,460,575	1,042,296	1,069,457	1,128,592	1,158,131	1,174,216	1%
Urban	7,839,190	6,288,640	6,461,872	6,844,169	6,995,100	7,069,09	1%
Ontario	9,333,555	7,350,886	7,550,901	7,993,859	8,175,612	8,266,085	1%

Table 2. Number of jobs by industry in rural communities.

Industry name	2020 Jobs	2021 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change 2023-24
Health care and social assistance	144,980	152,649	158,527	160,679	163,740	2%
Retail trade	119,389	125,529	128,089	127,336	127,661	0%
Manufacturing	109,074	115,238	119,404	122,277	124,511	2%
Construction	90,693	95,805	101,241	105,657	106,704	1%
Accommodation and food services	62,914	69,428	83,575	85,626	88,664	4%
Public administration	75,827	75,789	79,071	75,134	75,306	0%
Educational services	63,562	66,248	69,769	69,171	70,055	1%
Professional, scientific and technical services	46,508	50,332	53,832	53,357	53,885	1%
Administrative, support, waste management, remediation	49,880	52,415	53,035	52,319	52,818	1%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	47,378	45,609	45,084	48,582	48,941	1%
Transportation and warehousing	43,012	44,469	48,861	46,616	47,884	3%
Other services (except public administration)	43,223	42,275	42,838	44,058	44,459	1%
Wholesale trade	35,011	36,740	37,950	38,689	39,140	1%
Finance and insurance	24,533	25,401	26,779	27,446	28,059	2%
Arts, entertainment and recreation	19,036	18,416	22,949	24,444	24,793	1%

Industry name	2020 Jobs	2021 Jobs	2022 Jobs	2023 Jobs	2024 Jobs	Change 2023-24
Unclassified	14,593	15,588	17,891	17,590	17,875	2%
Real estate and rental and leasing	16,666	15,724	17,219	17,403	17,712	2%
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	13,329	13,757	14,670	14,840	14,940	1%
Utilities	14,382	14,284	14,621	14,709	14,705	0%
Information and cultural industries	9,821	9,989	10,723	10,627	10,740	1%
Management of companies and enterprises	1,358	1,531	1,576	1,572	1,622	3%

Wages

Industry wages are generally higher in urban communities (Table 3). Consistent with 2022, the industries that employed the most people in 2024 are those that also paid the least. Retail is the second largest employer in rural communities, but ranks 19th for wages. The accommodation and food services industry is the 5th largest rural employer, but ranks in last place for wages.

Living wage

We used hourly wage data from the Ontario Living Wage Network to calculate the average living wage for rural and urban communities. The network uses a 35 hour work week for 52 weeks per year in their calculations. The rates are location-specific based on living wage regions. We assigned the regional rates to all communities in Ontario based on their location within these regions. We then calculated the average living wage for rural and urban areas. This approach enabled us to compare the average living wage with average industry wages.

The average living wage is similar for rural and urban areas (Table 4). On average, industry wages are greater than the living wage. Average industry wages increased by 4% for both rural and urban communities. According to the Ontario Living Wage Network, the living wage rates for 2024 increased by about 3.4%, mostly because of increased costs for rent and food. So, it seems industry wages may be keeping up with the cost of living.

However, the situation appears different when we look at specific industry wages (Table 3). Eighteen out of 21 industries pay employees a living wage, but three industries do not: retail; arts, entertainment and recreation; and accommodation and food services. This is concerning given that these industries provide 20% of jobs in rural communities and 18% of jobs in urban communities. Further, many of the jobs in these industries may be directly or indirectly affected by ongoing trade disputes and people working in these industries may be less resilient in the face of job losses due to lower incomes.

Table 3. Comparison of industry wages for rural and urban communities in 2024.

Industry Name	Rural Wage	Urban Wage
Utilities	\$101,343	\$98,610
Management of companies and enterprises	\$96,371	\$72,937
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	\$81,354	\$94,833
Professional, scientific and technical services	\$74,850	\$80,711
Public administration	\$70,724	\$77,183
Wholesale trade	\$68,779	\$72,507
Construction	\$66,160	\$71,407
Unclassified	\$64,061	\$64,061
Educational services	\$63,025	\$63,971
Manufacturing	\$62,867	\$67,288
Finance and insurance	\$62,842	\$70,595
Information and cultural industries	\$61,408	\$75,561
Transportation and warehousing	\$58,149	\$60,226
Health care and social assistance	\$51,611	\$51,540
Real estate and rental and leasing	\$49,540	\$56,768
Administrative, support, waste management, remediation	\$49,106	\$49,852
Other services (except public administration)	\$47,971	\$51,003
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	\$41,345	\$41,231
Retail trade	\$32,214	\$35,004
Arts, entertainment and recreation	\$32,069	\$32,329
Accommodation and food services	\$22,897	\$23,173
Average living wage	\$38,704	\$39,914

Table 4. Average living wage and average industry wage.

Community type	2024 Average living wage	2022 Average industry wage	2024 Average industry wage	Change in average industry wage 2022-24
Rural	\$38,704	\$55,916	\$58,060	4%
Urban	\$39,914	\$59,476	\$61,726	4%
Ontario	\$38,771	\$56,139	\$58,240	4%

Summary

Understanding employment statistics can highlight possible areas of action for policy makers based on local economic conditions. For example, communities with a higher proportion of jobs affected by tariffs may require additional support during disputes. Further, rural economic development programs could explore ways to diversify the workforce and reduce dependence on low wage industries such as retail.

It's likely that people working in retail or hospitality are paid the minimum wage. The Ontario Living Wage Network's calculations show that there is nowhere in the province where full-time work at minimum wage will cover all expenses. Urgent attention is needed to address the complex issue of working poverty. Governments could consider implementing measures to support low income earners, or possibly raising the minimum wage to ensure that all working people can afford to pay the cost of living.

Detailed community data about economics and jobs can be found on the [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#).

Ontario Living Wage Network

The [Ontario Living Wage Network](#) strives to raise wages and address poverty through paid work. The network calculates living wage rates and encourages employers to pay at least the living wage to workers. To date, over 600 certified living wage employers have made this commitment in the province.



The living wage calculation includes a modest basket of goods and services that are used to determine the annual expenses required by a household. The basic necessities included in the basket of goods accounts for a large portion of the annual expenses. The costs of food and shelter are two of the biggest expenses in the living wage calculation. The calculations are location-specific and build from Statistics Canada's geographic concept of economic regions. These geographic groupings, as well as the city of Hamilton and two census metropolitan areas also defined by Statistics Canada – Toronto and Ottawa – are used to create the official living wage regions.

Please see the Ontario Living Wage Network's website for [documentation](#) about living wage calculations.



This factsheet was prepared by Danielle Letang, Manager of Data Strategy for the Rural Ontario Institute. Questions about data sources and comments or feedback can be directed to facts@ruralontarioinstitute.ca.

This factsheet complements ROI's [Community Wellbeing Dashboard](#). Factsheets provide insight and analysis of rural facts and trends featured in the dashboards.

FOLLOW US

