

## Working women are worried

### Poll shows Canadian women concerned that pandemic workplace accommodations won't last

TORONTO, June 15, 2022 – Fewer Canadian women are working full-time – 62 per cent, compared to 70 per cent before the COVID-19 pandemic – and nearly half say they are likely to quit their jobs if asked to return to the office full-time.

The Prosperity Project's 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Household Perspectives survey found the vast majority of women (91 per cent) would prefer most or at least part of their work to be done remotely moving forward.

Conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights in partnership with CIBC and Enterprise Canada in mid-May of this year, the online survey canvassed 800 employed women across the country.

“As organizations create post-pandemic work strategies, this research sheds light on what women are thinking and feeling about work and their careers. A majority would like the flexibility offered during the pandemic to continue, specifically the option to work remotely some of the time,” said Andrea Spender, CEO of The Prosperity Project, a registered charity created to ensure Canadian women are not left behind in the COVID-19 recovery.

Overall, the research shows mixed views on the impact of the pandemic, with 35 per cent of respondents saying their careers are in a better place now, compared to 29 per cent who said they are worse off than two years ago and 36 per cent saying their career condition has not changed.

Opinions were also mixed on what the end of the pandemic could mean for career prospects, with nearly a third (29 per cent) of respondents optimistic that there will be more opportunities ahead and a quarter (24 per cent) believing there will be fewer opportunities. However, the research shows many Canadian women are concerned that the better paying and higher level jobs are more likely to be offered to men than to themselves.

A plurality (44 per cent) of women are excited about their career prospects, while one-third (33 per cent) are not.

While 73 per cent of respondents acknowledged that employers were more accommodating during the pandemic, a similar proportion (72 per cent) expect employers to put the priority on in-person office work going forward. Nearly 60 per cent feel they will have to choose between their career and their family – at a time when almost half (46 per cent) said the pandemic has increased their responsibilities at home.

Nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) said they would turn down promotions in order to keep working from home. Most alarmingly, 45 per cent are more likely to quit their jobs if working from home at least part of the time is not an option.

“We learned important lessons about workplace flexibility during the pandemic, and we must continue to heed those lessons,” said Pamela Jeffery, founder of The Prosperity Project. “Canada’s economic growth needs women contributing. Enabling women to balance their careers and home responsibilities – through hybrid home/office work and other adjustments, with equal opportunity for promotion and advancement – is a critical priority.”

Other highlights from the poll:

- **Working from Home** – All of the women surveyed were working full-time in January 2019. During the pandemic, almost half (46 per cent) went from working outside the home to working from home. Of those who started working remotely, 71 per cent continue to work from home at least part of the time, with 28 per cent returning to work in-person at the office most or all of the time.
- **Home/Office Preferences** – The vast majority (91 per cent) of women surveyed want to work remotely at least part of the time. Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of women would prefer to work from home all (42

per cent) or most (31 per cent) of the time. One-fifth (22 per cent) would rather spend all (9 per cent) or most (13 per cent) of their work time in the office.

- **Barriers** – For half (52 per cent) of the working women with kids under 18, balancing their career with being a good parent is the major barrier. Only a sixth (16 per cent) said it is not a barrier at all. Work-life balance is cited as a barrier for almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of the women surveyed.
- **Finances** – Views on women’s financial situations were almost evenly split: 33 per cent said they are in a better place in terms of their finances, with almost an equal number (37 per cent) saying they are in a worse place, and 30 per cent reporting no change in their finances. Younger women are likely to be in a better place with their finances (46 per cent for those aged 18-34, versus 30 per cent for the 35-54 age group and 20 per cent for 55+).
- **Advancement** – In terms of career advancement, 28 per cent of working women are considering but not actively looking to advance, 22 per cent are actively looking, and 19 per cent said they could be open to advancement if the right opportunity came along. Racialized women are more likely to be actively looking to advance their careers (31 per cent).
- **Return to In-Person Office Work** – Half of the respondents believe they will be returning to working in the office, either with a hybrid model (31 per cent) or in the office full-time (23 per cent), while 8 per cent said their employer no longer has an office, and 17 per cent believe they will have a choice where they want to work. Approximately half of the women surveyed (51 per cent) are fine with their organization’s plan regarding going back to the office. A fifth (19 per cent) said it is not exactly what they want, but they aren’t concerned about it, and 18 per cent are concerned about how they will make it work.
- **Childcare** – Those working from home during the pandemic and having kids under 12 are somewhat (37 per cent) to very (24 per cent) concerned about going back to work in-person. Younger women are most likely to be concerned about going back into the office. More than half of the women surveyed (55 per cent) are primarily responsible for child care. Only 7 per cent said their partner/spouse are responsible and over a third (35 per cent) share the responsibilities equally.

“This research tells us some changes brought about by the pandemic were actually improvements for working women, but there’s still uncertainty about whether they’re permanent,” said Pollara Senior Vice-President Lesli Martin. “Amid this uncertainty, many Canadian working women are understandably apprehensive about their future.”

On behalf of The Prosperity Project, Pollara Strategic Insights conducted an online survey among a randomly-selected, reliable sample of N=800 Canadian Women above 18 years who are working. The field window was May 12 to May 17, 2022. As a guideline, a probability sample of N=800 carries a margin of error of  $\pm 3.5$ , 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is larger for sub-segments. The dataset was weighted by the most current age and region Census data, to ensure the sample reflects the actual population of women in Canada.

This survey is part of The Prosperity Project’s Canadian Households’ Perspective on the New Economy initiative. Partner organizations in the initiative are CIBC, Enterprise Canada and Pollara Strategic Insights.

### About The Prosperity Project

Launched in May 2020, The Prosperity Project is a volunteer-driven, registered charity conceived by a diverse group of 62 female leaders from across the country – women who have historically made a difference and are committed to continuing to promote positive change as active participants in The Prosperity Project.

The organization was founded by Pamela Jeffery, founder of the Women’s Executive Network and Canadian Board Diversity Council. The Prosperity Project is taking action to explicitly link women and prosperity, underscoring the

economic importance of gender equality. Specific initiatives include an awareness campaign – modelled on the famous “Rosie the Riveter” campaign from World War II – to promote women’s workforce participation and advancement and a matching program connecting registered charities with business expertise to bolster these organizations’ in-house skills and expertise.

Visit The Prosperity Project website at [www.canadianprosperityproject.ca](http://www.canadianprosperityproject.ca).

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