

Quitting Time? Nearly half who prefer to work from home would look for a new job if forced back post-pandemic

Work from home brought social, mental health challenges, but productivity as good or better than at office

August 4, 2021 – The last thing that many Canadians working from home may wish to think about at this midpoint of summer is returning to the office. Their employers, on the other hand, may well be thinking of little else.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds some Canadians pushing back on the idea of returning to work onsite, to the point where many would leave their job if asked.

Half of Canadian households had someone working from home over the past year (53%). Among those who continue to work from home, a considerable group (29%) would like to continue doing so in perpetuity, while the largest group would do a mix of both telecommuting and office work (44%). Only 27 per cent would prefer to return primarily to the office.

The future is also a source of fissure. What would those Canadians who want to continue working from home do if they were asked to return to the office? This condition has the potential to create some tension in employer-employee relationships in the coming months. While two-in-five say they would return to work at the office full time without much issue, 25 per cent say they would go back begrudgingly and likely start looking for another job. One-in-five say they would lean toward quitting immediately.

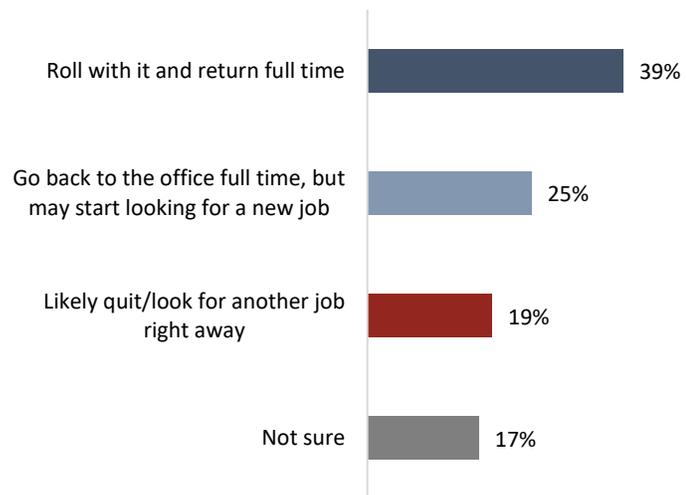
Young people (ages 18 to 34) and men, in particular, say they are likely to reconsider their employment if such a demand is made of them. Fully half (50%) of 18-to-34-year-olds say this would be the case. The hybrid office will evidently be in high demand as Canadians return to their pre-pandemic activities with post-pandemic expectations.

More Key Findings:

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Suppose your employer demands that you return to the office full time, what would you do in this case? (Currently WFH and prefer to WFH, n=395)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from July 9-13, 2021, among a representative randomized sample of 2,040 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

- 71 per cent say their productivity at home was good or great. Fewer, but still three-in-five (61%) say this of their mental state. One-in-five (21%) say the social aspect of working from home has been terrible, while another 45 per cent say it was challenging
- Half of those aged 18 to 24 say their productivity was “awful” or “challenging”
- Two-thirds of people in households with less than \$50,000 in annual income say no one worked from home in the pandemic; only one-in-five in households with greater than \$150,000 annual income said the same

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

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Part One: The work from home experience

Majority of households had at least one person who worked from home during pandemic

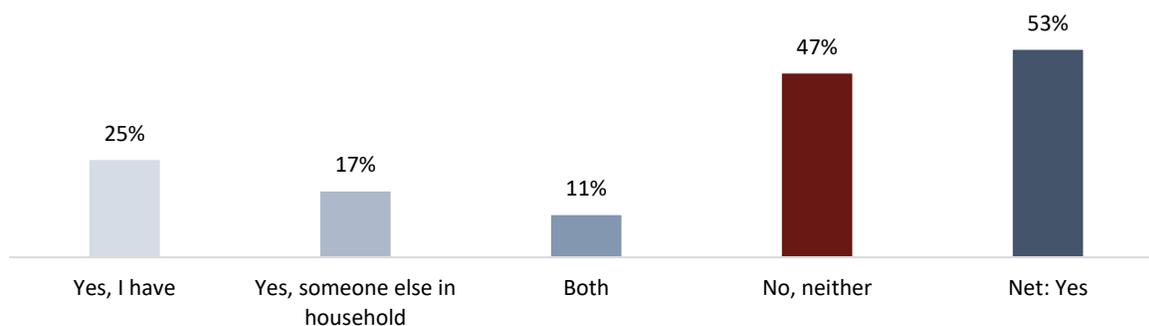
The COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant disruption to many workplaces and left many individuals and businesses struggling to get by from month to month. Now, as the country begins to reopen, both are stuck navigating their way through an altered reality. For now, that [new reality](#) includes quieter downtown spaces where once bustling crowds signalled the buzz of commerce. Some organizations are greeting the change as a saving grace, as at-home workers save expensive real estate costs. For others, it is a worrisome change of culture.

The Angus Reid Institute finds the shift to work from home enmeshed in the Canadian experience due to the pandemic. Fully half of Canadian households were affected by the shift over the past 18 months. One-quarter of Canadian adults say they worked from home themselves, 17 per cent say another member of their household did, while one-in-ten (11%) say multiple people did so in their home:

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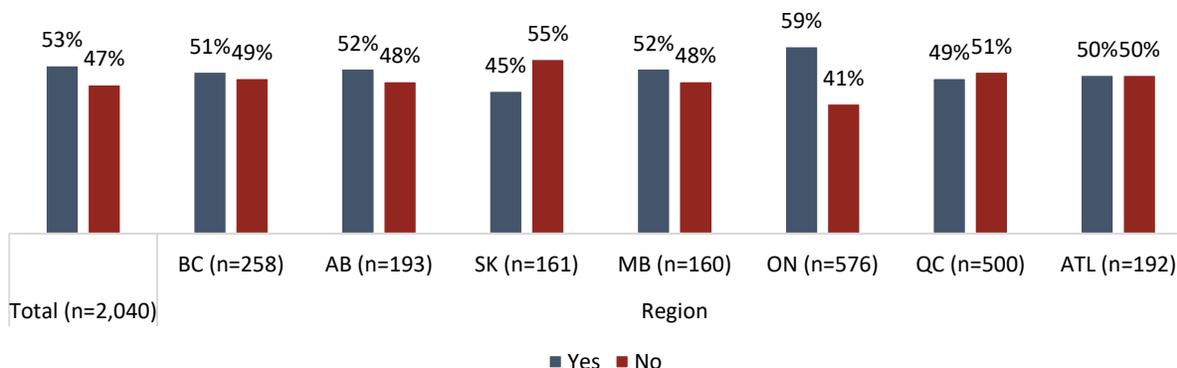
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**Due to the pandemic, have you or someone in your household, worked at home at any point since March 2020?
(All respondents, n=2,040)**



About half of Canadians in every region report someone working from home during the pandemic, except in Ontario. In Canada's largest province, and where there have been [two multi-week stay-at-home orders in 2021](#), three-in-five say someone worked from home:

Due to the pandemic, have you or someone in your household, worked at home at any point since March 2020?

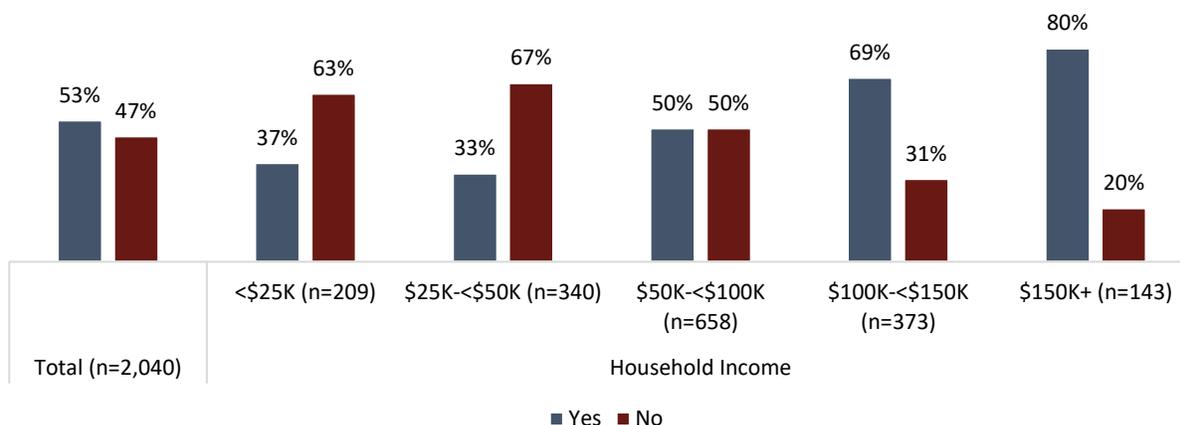


A person's occupation dictates whether or not they are able to work from home. Many hourly employees can't, and some, such as [grocery workers](#), were thrust into the role of frontline workers given the essential nature of their place of employment. That reality is reflected when examining the data split by income. Approximately two-thirds of those in households earning less than \$50,000 annually say no one worked from home; only one-in-five in households making \$150,000 annually or more say the same:

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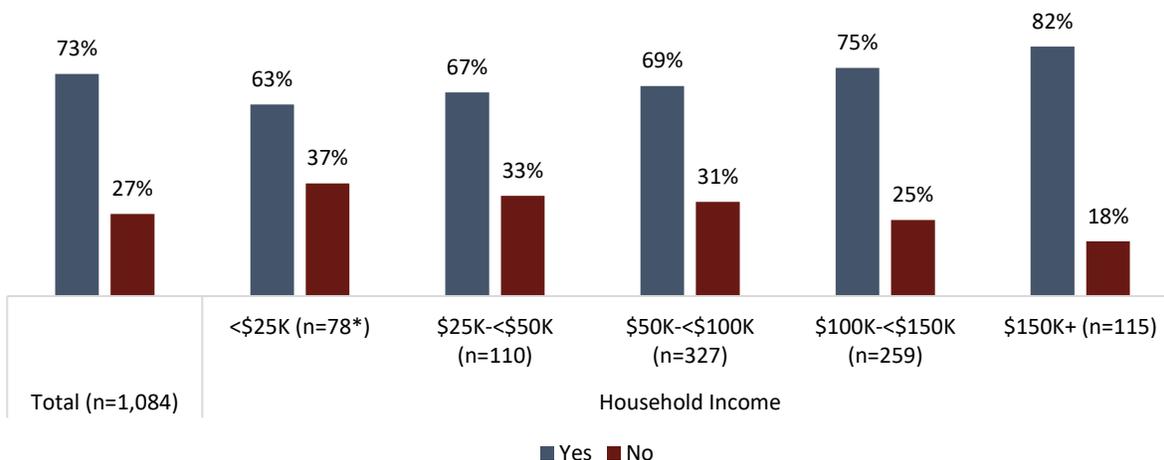
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Due to the pandemic, have you or someone in your household, worked at home at any point since March 2020?



Of those who worked at home at some point throughout the last 17 months, 73 per cent are still working from home now. That number dips among those in the lower income brackets. Those in households earning \$25,000 or less annually have been called back to the workplace at double the rate of those in households earning \$150,000 or more annually:

Currently, due to the pandemic, are you or someone in your household working from home? (Someone in household WFH)



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Social life suffered, productivity didn't

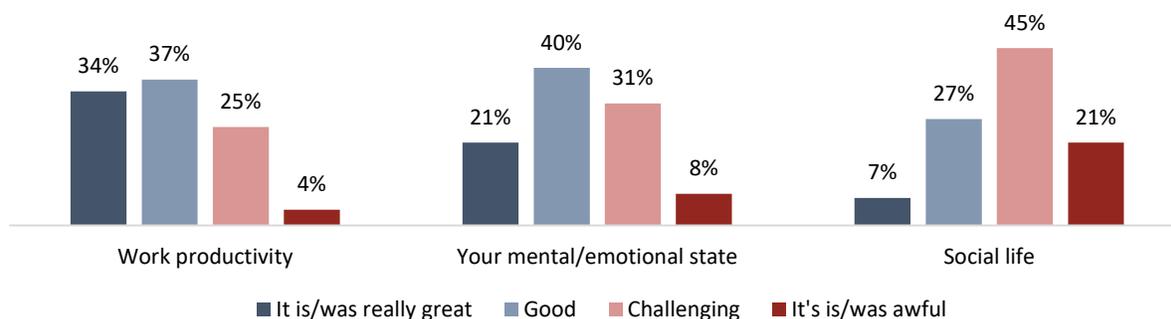
While work from home policies helped many people limit their close contacts and potentially avoid avenues of COVID-19 infection, the home office experience wasn't all positive. Two-thirds of those who worked from home at some point during the pandemic describe their social life as "challenging" or "awful," while two-in-five say the same of their mental or emotional state. For most, however, while there were

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challenges outside of work, their productivity was largely sustained while working from home. Seven-in-ten say work productivity was “good” or “great”, while just four per cent say it was awful:

**And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?
(Someone in household WFH, n=1,084)**



The work from home experience was evidently much more negative for younger people. Half of those aged 18 to 24 call their work from home productivity “awful” or “challenging;” no more than three-in-10 of any other age group say the same. Three-in-five 18-to-24-year-olds also use those words to describe their work from home mental health:

**And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?
(Percentage who described it as challenging or awful)**

| | Someone in household WFH (n=1,084) | Age | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | 18-24 (n=104) | 25-34 (n=293) | 35-44 (n=202) | 45-54 (n=236) | 55-64 (n=169) | 65+ (n=81*) |
| Work productivity | 29% | 50% | 28% | 26% | 29% | 21% | 25% |
| Your mental/emotional state | 39% | 59% | 42% | 39% | 39% | 33% | 19% |
| Social life | 66% | 67% | 63% | 71% | 70% | 62% | 57% |

**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

Men and women are more or less aligned in their feelings on their work from home productivity and mental health, but there are slight differences between the two when it comes to their appraisal of the effect on their social life. One-in-10 men say their social life was “great” (9%), while roughly half the number of women say the same (5%):

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**And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?
(Someone in household WFH)**

| | Work productivity | | | Your mental/emotional state | | | Social life | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| | Total (n=1,084) | Men (n=533) | Women (n=547) | Total (n=1,084) | Men (n=533) | Women (n=547) | Total (n=1,084) | Men (n=533) | Women (n=547) |
| It is/was really great | 34% | 33% | 35% | 21% | 20% | 21% | 7% | 9% | 5% |
| Good | 37% | 37% | 37% | 40% | 42% | 38% | 27% | 25% | 29% |
| Challenging | 25% | 25% | 24% | 31% | 29% | 34% | 45% | 43% | 47% |
| It's is/was awful | 4% | 4% | 3% | 8% | 9% | 7% | 21% | 23% | 19% |

Part Two: The return to work

The eventual return to the office has been a tricky path for companies to navigate. Many businesses are exploring a move towards a [“hybrid model,”](#) which could see work done at both the office and at home. A recent study from the Fraser Institute [estimates](#) one-quarter of the work force will continue to work remotely after pandemic related concerns subside.

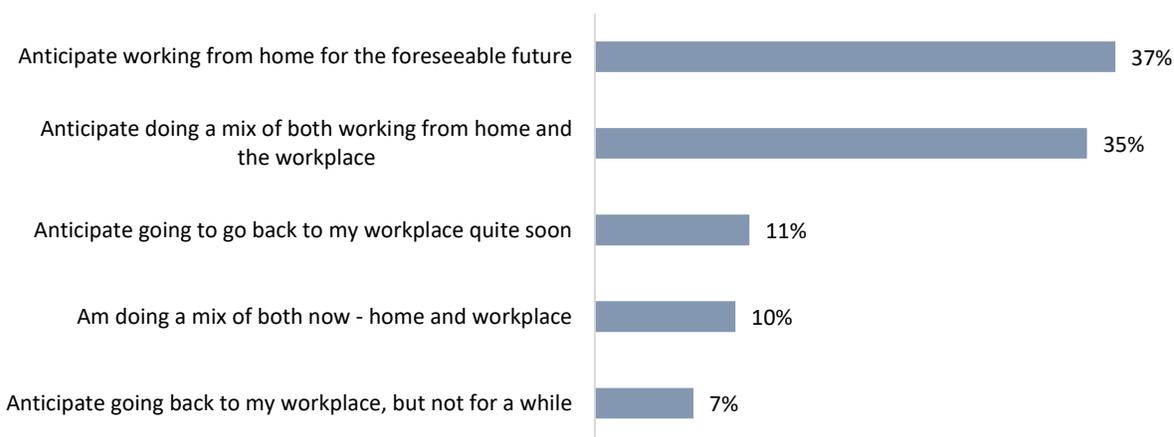
Most anticipate work from home to continue

Among those currently working from home, one-third (35%) are anticipating a hybrid model and a further one-in-10 are already doing a mix of both working from home and the office. The largest group (37%), however, anticipate working from home entirely for the foreseeable future and just one-in-five (18%) believe they will be going back to their workplace full time at some point:

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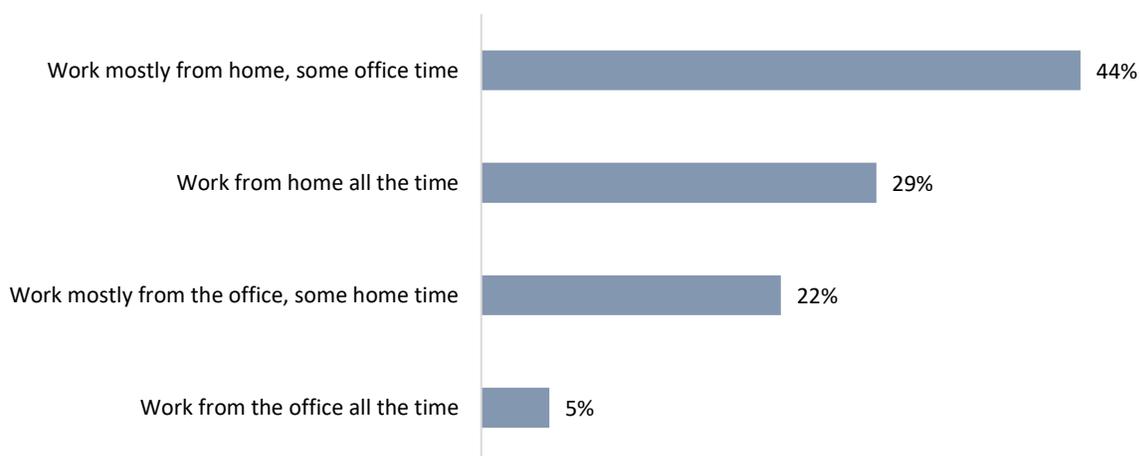
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**Do you anticipate going back to your place of work as you did before the pandemic, OR do you anticipate continuing to work from home?
(Currently WFH, n=545)**



The expectation does not quite match preferences for some of those working from home currently. Few actually want to go back to their workplace full time (5%), a number much lower than the one-in-five (18%) who believe they'll have to go back at some point. One-in-five (22%) would prefer at least *some* work from home time, while nearly three-quarters (73%) would prefer to rarely or never have to go to their workplace again:

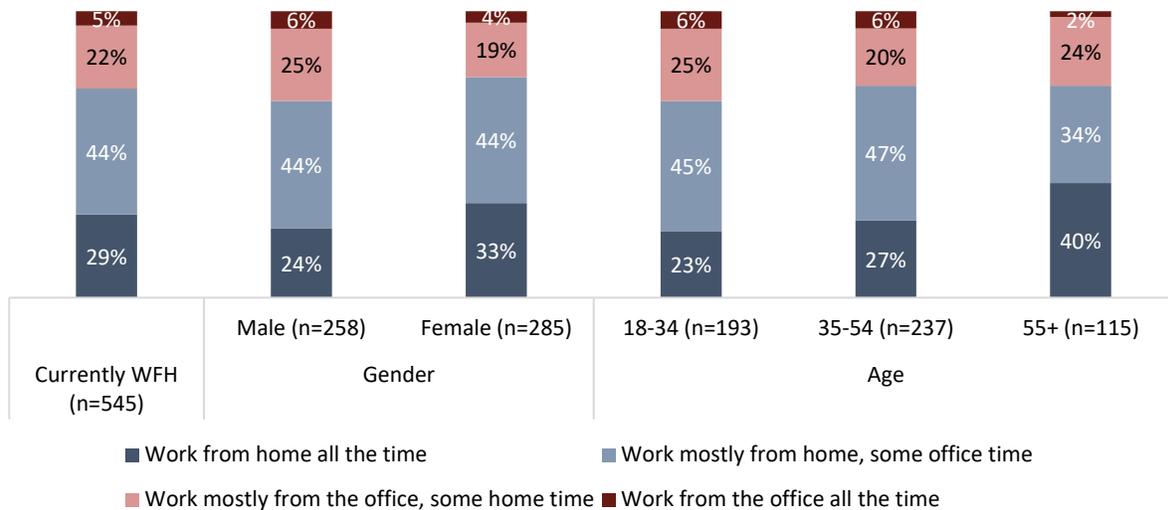
**Regardless of what you think will happen, what would you prefer?
(Currently WFH, n=545)**



While Canadians from different gender and age groups are mostly aligned on their expectations of whether or not they'll continue to work from home ([see detailed tables](#)), there is a split on preferences. Women are more likely than men to want to continue working from home all the time. Those 55-plus have the strongest desire to never return to the office:

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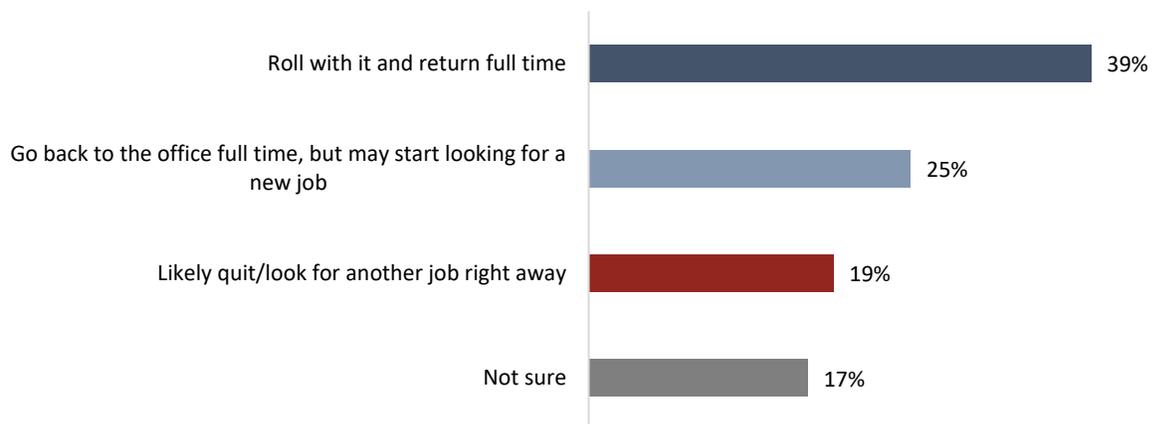
Regardless of what you think will happen, what would you prefer?



Many would look for a new job if asked to return to office full time

The gap between expectations and reality creates a dilemma for those who want to continue working at home. A significant segment – nearly one-fifth (19%) – of those who’d prefer to work from home regard a demand from employers to return to the office full time to be a dealbreaker and indicate they would quit immediately. Another quarter (25%) would go back but begin searching for work elsewhere. But the plurality, two-in-five, say they’ll return full time without resistance:

Suppose your employer demands that you return to the office full time, what would you do in this case? (Currently WFH and prefer to WFH, n=395)



While there is no data yet in Canada as to whether or not people are quitting en masse if they’re being asked to return to the office, in the U.S. the Department of Labour reported four million people quit their jobs in April — [a record](#). (The exodus isn’t all about working from home; 740,000 in the leisure and hospitality industry — [which includes restaurant workers](#) — also quit their jobs in April.)

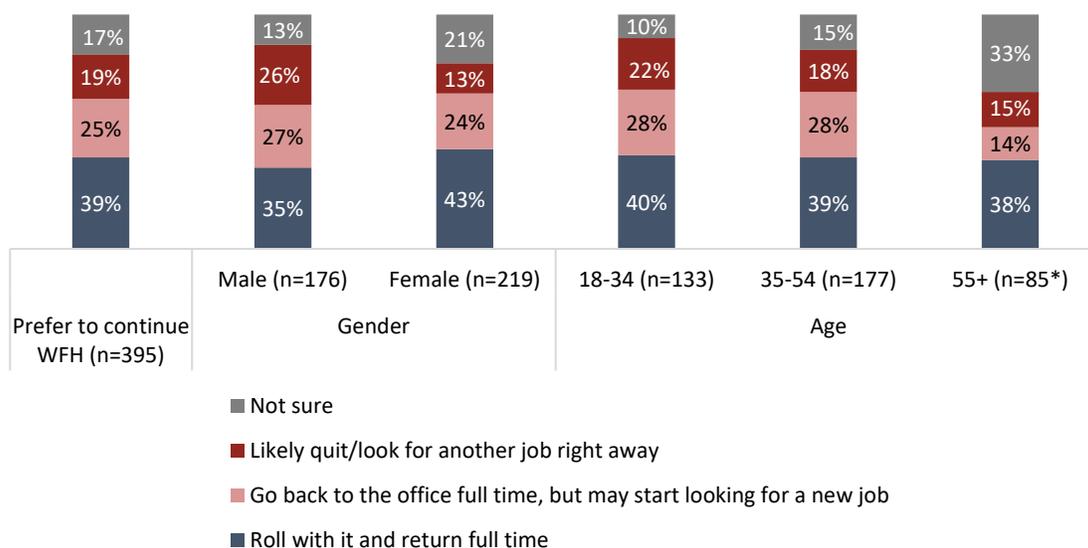
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In Alberta, where unemployment was 9.3 per cent in June, the province's largest companies are telling the Business Council of Alberta that it's more difficult than expected to fill vacancies, and [employees are looking for flexibility](#).

Despite being more likely to want to work from home full time, most women say they will roll with it if they are called back. One-quarter of men, on the other hand, say they will quit immediately, twice the number of women who say the same. Those aged 55 or older are the most likely to be unsure about what they'll do:

Suppose your employer demands that you return to the office full time, what would you do in this case?



**Small sample size, interpret with caution*

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

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