

Back to work(place): As employers beckon, telecommuters grow more entrenched at home

Those working from home more likely than those who don't to say their life improved over last two years

March 23, 2022 – With work-from-home orders a thing of the past, Canadian employers are getting more serious about calling their employees back to the office.

Banks have **"led the pack"**. CIBC brought employees back starting this week as part of a hybrid model, while last week HSBC opened two new offices in Vancouver and Toronto with 50 per cent capacity.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute, in partnership with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, finds workers from home reluctant to return. More than half (56%) of those currently working from home say they would look for a new job if they were asked to return to the office, including almost one-quarter (23%) who say they would quit on the spot.

This is a marked shift of the attitudes of Canadians working from home from last summer. Then, two-in-five (39%) said they would roll with it and return full time without complaints. Now three-in-ten (29%) say the same.

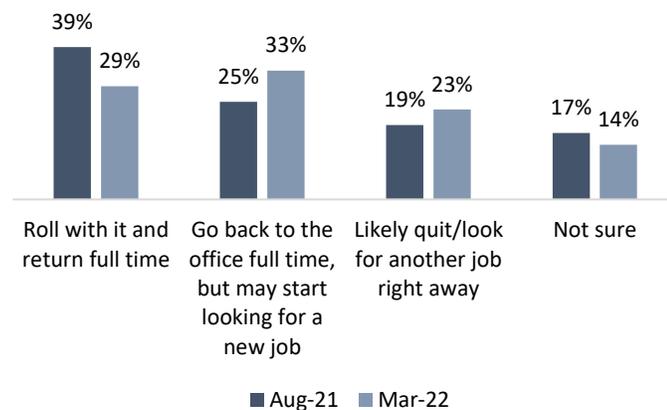
Overall, Canadians are more likely to say the work from home experience has not hurt their productivity – four-in-five say it is 'good' or 'great' – though they are more split when it comes to its effect on their connections with colleagues. Half say the digital connection with their workmates is 'good' or 'great'; half say it is 'challenging' or 'awful'. As for the work itself, three-in-five (59%) say they've had no trouble staying in the loop on projects, while two-in-five (41%) say that was a struggle.

However, perhaps it is the non-work considerations that are the more significant reasons workers from home are less than enthused to return to the office full time. Canadians who work from home are more likely than those who don't to say their work/life balance (35% vs. 21%), relationship with their spouse (32% vs 21%) and their life overall (30% vs 18%) have improved over the course of the pandemic.

The great home-office reorganization brought on by the pandemic wasn't the only effect COVID-19 had on the job market. Public health restrictions forced many businesses to close, and many Canadians lost their jobs. More than one-third of Canadians (35%) say they left or quit their job during the pandemic.

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

(Among those who prefer to work from home)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 1 – 4, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 2,550 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 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

The survey was conducted in partnership with CBC and paid for jointly by ARI and CBC. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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That includes 14 per cent who quit, 12 per cent who lost their job and one-in-ten (9%) who retired or took a time out from the workforce

Many who were forced out of their position, or who stayed on with lower pay or fewer hours, are still feeling the financial and mental health effects. Three-in-ten (30%) of those who lost their job or lost hours during the pandemic say their mental health is 'a lot' worse than two years ago. That's double the number of those who stayed at the same job with no change or a promotion who say the same.

More Key Findings:

- Three-in-five (58%) Canadians say their personal finances have come out of the other side of the pandemic in 'good' shape. Three-in-ten say instead they are in 'bad' or 'terrible' shape financially. More than half (54%) of those who lost their job or lost hours during the pandemic are in the latter group.
- Canadians over the age of 54 are more attached than younger age groups to their full-time home office life. Two-in-five (42%) prefer to work from home entirely, compared to three-in-ten (29%) 18- to 34-year-olds who say the same. Younger Canadians are most likely to prefer a hybrid of working in the office and working from home.
- That said, three-in-ten (29%) of 18- to 34-year-olds who prefer to work from home say they would quit immediately if asked to return to the office full time, the most of any age group.

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.*

INDEX

Part One: The COVID and work experience

- **More than one-third of Canadians left or quit their job during pandemic**
- **How Canadians feel the pandemic affected their finances**
- **Mental health toll of pandemic higher for those who lost job**

Part Two: Home office life

- **Canadians report high work productivity, more divided on workplace connections**

Part Three: Will workers answer the call back to the office?

Part One: The COVID and work experience

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant upheaval in the job market. When the pandemic initially arrived in March 2020, public health restrictions closed businesses, caused lay-offs and pushed office workers into a new life working from home. When the virus ebbed, businesses and offices reopened. Still,

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many Canadians didn't return to the workplace they left from. Last year, businesses **struggled to hire**, with some economists blaming **too-generous government benefit programs**, and others speculating that the pandemic had exacerbated a **pre-pandemic labour shortage**.

More than one-third of Canadians left or quit their job during pandemic

Two-thirds of Canadians (65%) who were working at the beginning of the pandemic report that they're still working the same job they were two years ago. For the rest of March 2020 workforce, 14 per cent say they quit their job, 12 per cent say they lost their job, while one-in-ten (9%) retired or decided to temporarily step out of the job market.

While one-quarter (24%) of Canadians say they both held onto their pre-pandemic job and got a promotion or raise, one-third (33%) say their job materially stayed the same and about one-in-ten (8%) had either their hours or pay reduced.

For the one-quarter of Canadians who either voluntarily – or not – left their job during the pandemic, most (20% of the 26%) say they found a new job – half in a new field, half in a different one. The remaining six per cent of that group report still looking for work or giving up on looking entirely:

And thinking about the difference or change, between March 2020 and now, which of the following best describe your situation? (Among those working in March 2020, n=2,236)		
Working at the same place (65%)	No change at all	33%
	Got a promotion/ raise	24%
	Reduced or fewer hours/ less pay	8%
Quit my job (14%)	Found a new one in the same field	7%
	Found a new one in a different field	5%
	Still looking	2%
	Not looking anymore	1%
Lost my job (12%)	Found a new one in the same field	4%
	Found a new one in a different field	4%
	Still looking	3%
	Not looking anymore	1%
Retired/Taking a "time out" (9%)	Retired as planned	4%
	Retired early	2%
	Taking a "time out" from work	3%

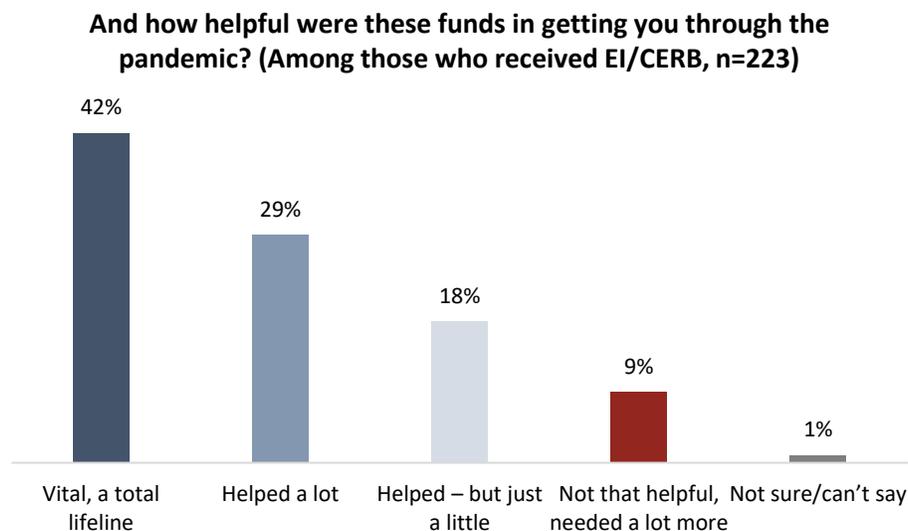
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Some used the time off from their job for self-improvement. One-in-five (22%) of people who quit or lost their job during the pandemic say they went back to school or did professional training (see [detailed tables](#)).

For others, it was a more stressful time. Two-thirds (63%) of those who lost hours or lost their job during the pandemic say they received employment insurance or the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). (See [detailed tables](#)).

For that group, two-in-five (42%) say the government assistance was a ‘vital’ lifeline to get them through the pandemic and a further three-in-ten (29%) say the funds helped a lot. One-in-five (18%) felt the programs only offered a slight amount of assistance. A handful, one-in-ten (9%), felt they needed more support:



How Canadians feel the pandemic affected their finances

The two-year anniversary of the pandemic offers a milestone for Canadians to assess the overall impact on their lives after 24 months of disruption. This is the fifth study in a series evaluating how Canadians reflect on the two years of COVID-19 conducted in partnership between ARI and the CBC.

Related:

- [**COVID at Two: Vast majorities say the pandemic has pulled Canadians apart, brought out the worst in people**](#)
- [**Two Years of COVID-19: Half of Canadians say their mental health has worsened; women under 55 hit hardest**](#)
- [**As 24 months of pandemic restrictions lift, are Canadians ready – or reluctant – to let go?**](#)
- [**Thinking of the children: Two-thirds of parents feel kids’ well-being an afterthought in pandemic decisions**](#)

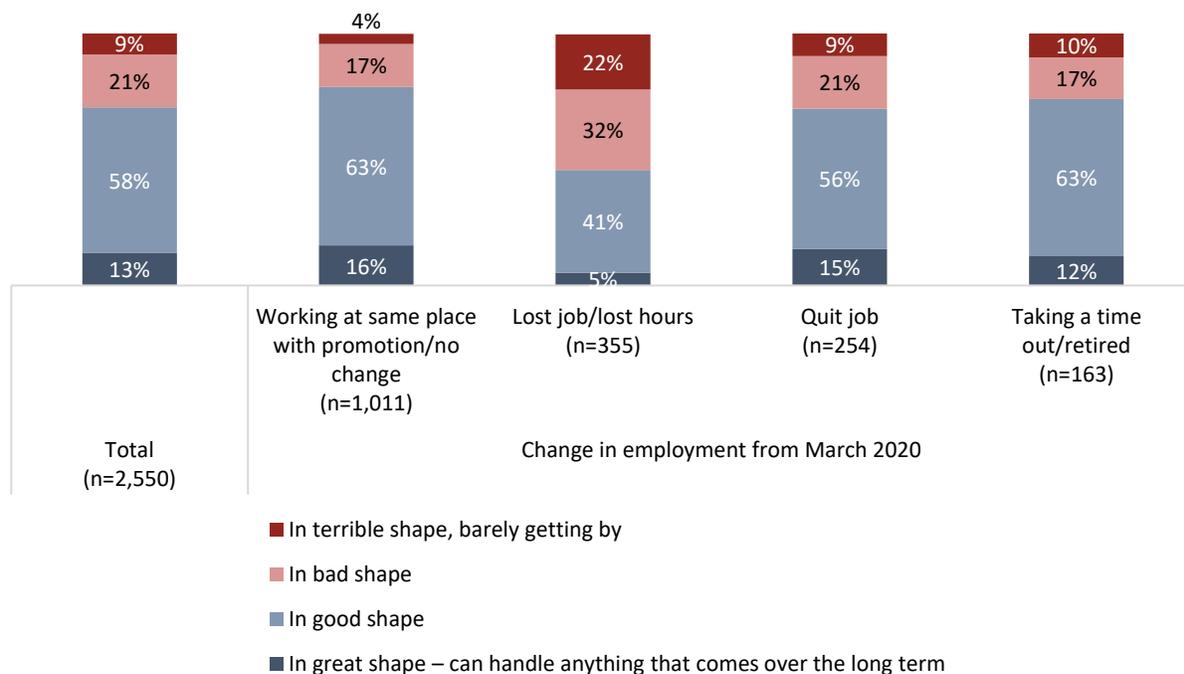
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When it comes to their finances, many Canadians say they've weathered the storm of COVID-19 well. Overall, three-in-five (58%) say their finances are in 'good shape.' Still, a significant segment, three-in-ten, are in more dire straits, including one-in-ten (9%) who say they are barely getting by.

Canadians who lost either their job or experienced reduced work hours during the pandemic are more likely to be in the latter group. More than half (54%) among this group say they are struggling financially:

Considering the overall impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on your personal financial situation, would you say you are now...



Mental health toll of pandemic higher for those who lost job

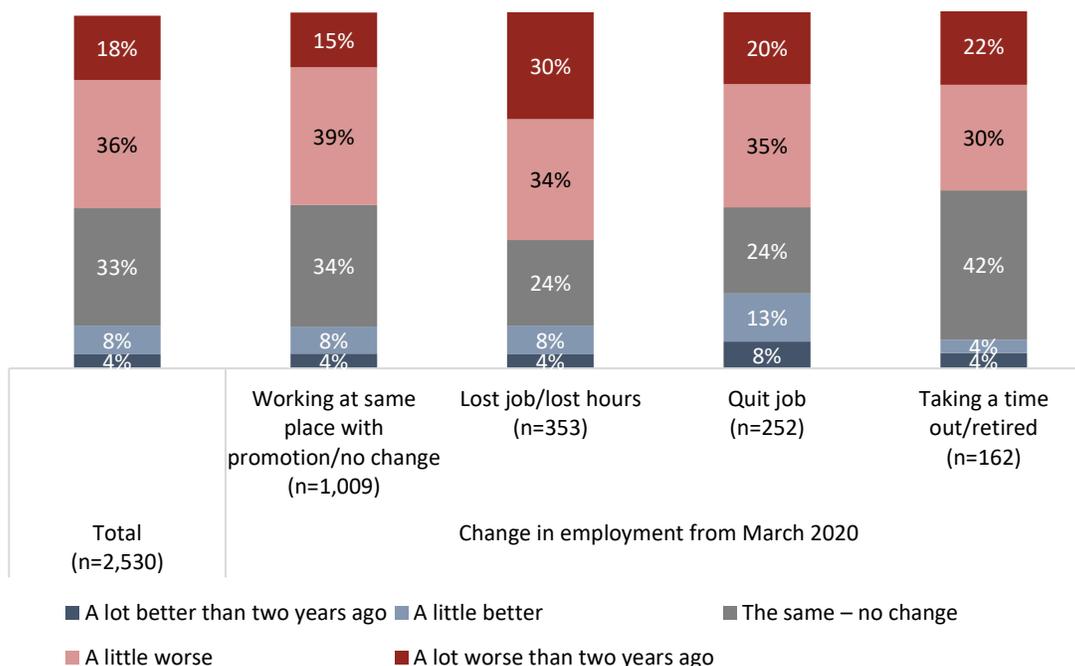
Canadians are much more likely to be negative about the effect of [two years of COVID-19 on their mental health](#) than their finances. Indeed, regardless of whether they are working at the same place, quit their job, retired, or lost their job or hours, a majority of Canadians say their mental health has suffered over the last two years.

But three-in-ten who lost their job entirely or had their hours reduced say their mental health is a lot worse than two years ago, double the rate of those who managed to tread water or advance at the same workplace.

Meanwhile, one-in-five (21%) of those who quit their job during the pandemic report better mental health, a rate nearly double those who stayed at the same workplace or lost their job or hours:

Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020

Your mental health
(Excluding not applicable)

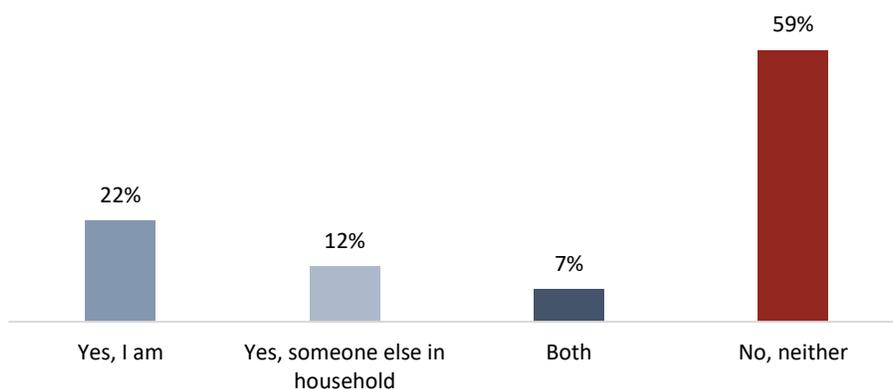


Part Two: Home office life

While the initial wave of COVID-19 caused an immediate effect on the job market, the pandemic also caused another seismic shift in the economy – the move to the home office – the aftershocks of which will continue for long after the virus is no longer a global threat. [Statistics Canada estimated](#) that four per cent of employees did most of their work from home in 2016. At times during the pandemic, that was [as high as 40 per cent](#).

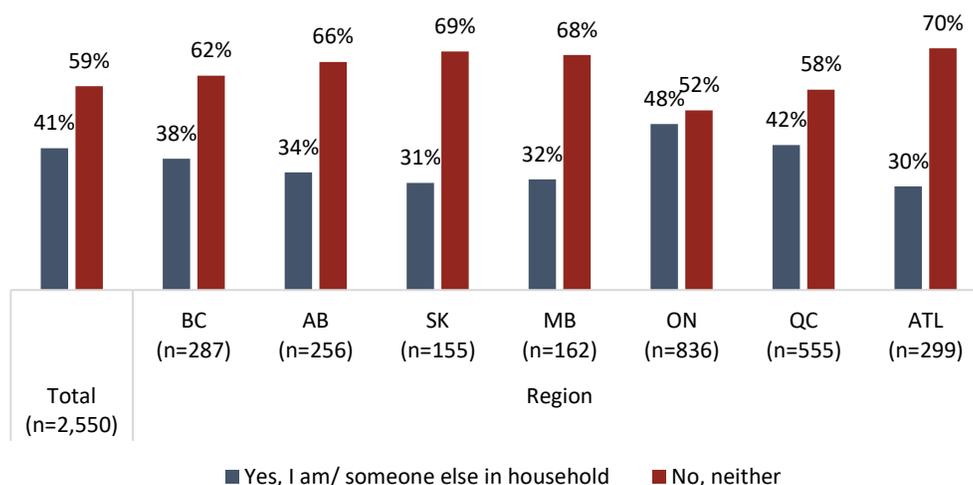
With public health restrictions [ending or phasing out](#) across the country, more Canadians have returned to the office. Still, two-in-five (41%) Canadians report they or someone else in their household is working from home, including one-in-five (22%) who say they themselves are:

**Currently, due to the pandemic, are you or someone in your household working from home?
(All respondents, n=2,550)**



Half of Canadians under 55 say someone in their household is working from home ([see detailed tables](#)). The splits vary regionally. Ontarians and Quebecers are much more likely to report someone in their household is working from home. In Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, instead seven-in-ten say no one in their home is:

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

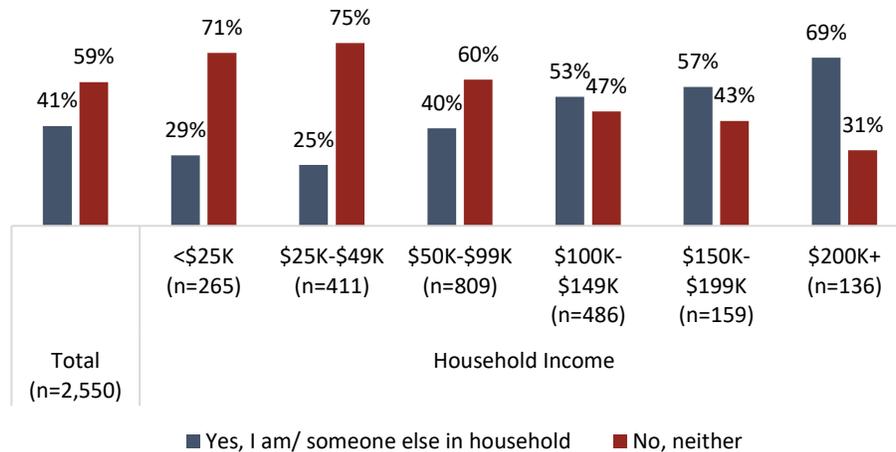


Many jobs can't be done from home, including service sector and retail jobs that are often lower paying. With that in mind, Canadians living in lower income households are much less likely to say someone is working from home in their household.

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



Canadians report high work productivity, more divided on workplace connections

Despite a myriad of potential distractions – among them, [kids](#) and [pandemic pets](#) – few (22%) Canadians report their work productivity suffers at home.

Related: Many (especially those with children) got new pets during the pandemic

Indeed, those with kids under 18 in the household are as likely to say their work productivity from home was ‘good’ or ‘great’ (78%) as those without (78%, [see detailed tables](#)).

However, it is women aged 18- to 34-years-old, who are more likely to report their work productivity was ‘challenging’ or ‘awful’ at home – one-in-three (32%) say this. Among women older than that, at least half say it was instead ‘great’:

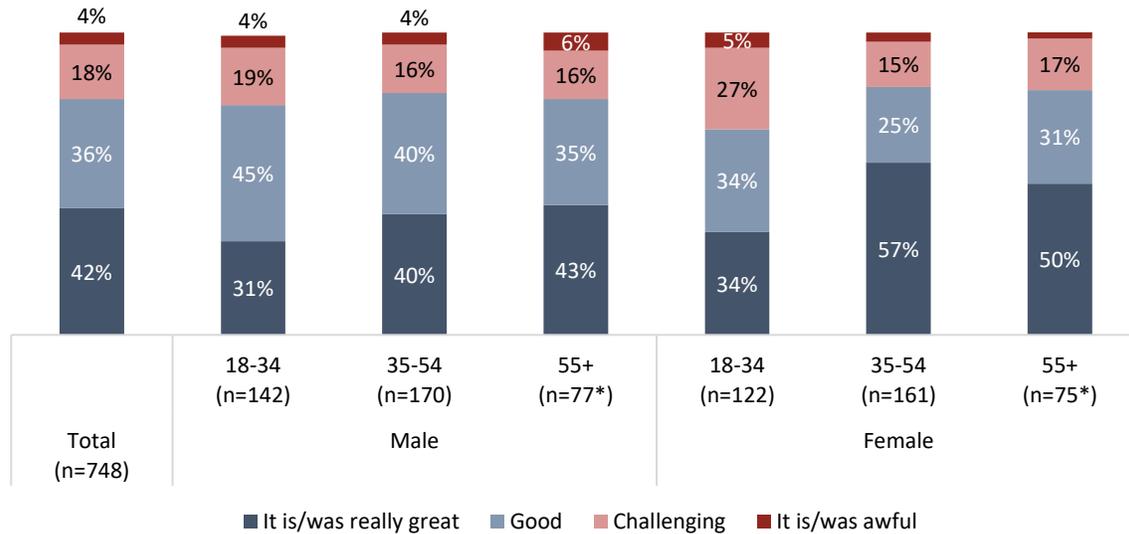
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And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?

Work productivity

(Among those currently working from home)



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Canadians are more divided on the effect working from home has on office cohesion. Half of Canadians say they felt solid connections with their colleagues; half disagree.

Men are more likely than women to be in the latter group, and those in their early career more so than older Canadians. Approaching three-in-five (57%) 18- to 34-year-old men say feeling connected to their colleagues from their home office is 'challenging' or 'awful':

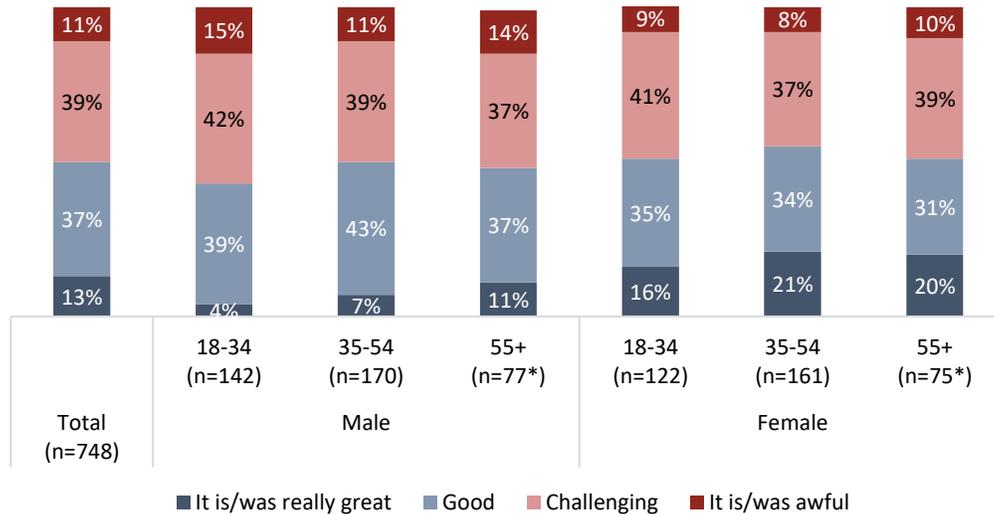
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And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?

Feeling connected to colleagues
(Among those currently working from home)

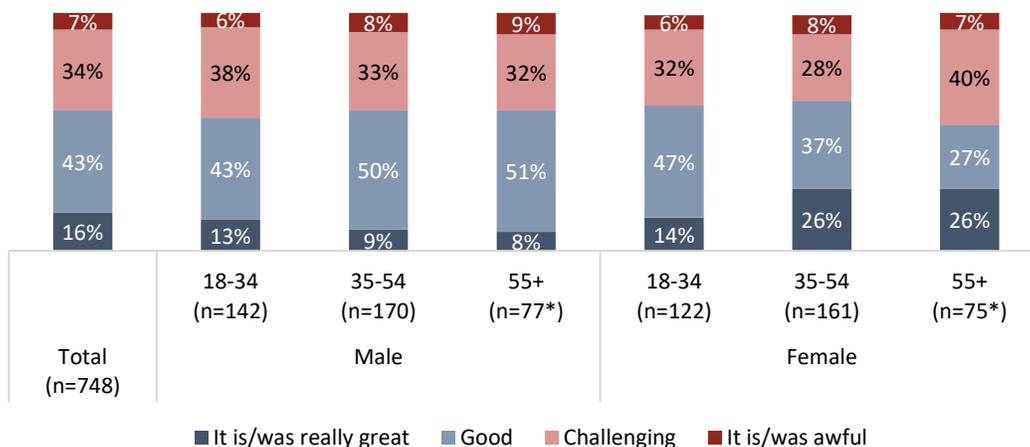


*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution

Canadians are more likely to feel like they were connected to their work, but still two-in-five (41%) say they felt out of the loop when it came to work projects. Women are more likely than men to say instead that that aspect of working from home was 'great'. One-quarter of women older than 34 say this, double the rate of men of any age:

And, thinking about the following factors, how would you describe the experience of working from home?

Feeling "in the loop" around work/projects
(Among those currently working from home)



*Smaller sample size, interpret with caution

Overall, Canadians who work from home are more positive than those who don't about the effect of the pandemic on many aspects of their life. They are more likely to say their work/life balance, relationships with friends, family and their partner, their physical health, life overall, sense of optimism and mental health improved over last two years than those who say no one in their household works from home.

Still, it's worth noting a majority of both those who work from home and those who don't say their mental health is worse than it was in March 2020 ([see detailed tables](#)).

Overall, when it comes to the following aspects of your life, you would say things are better, worse or unchanged since March 2020 (Percent selecting 'a little' or 'a lot' better shown; excluding not applicable)					
	Total (n=2,550)	Currently working from home?			
		Yes, I am (n=566)	Yes, someone else in household (n=302)	Both (n=182)	No, neither (n=1,499)
Your work/life balance	28%	35%	31%	47%	21%
Relationships with your spouse/partner	27%	32%	35%	36%	21%
Your life overall	23%	30%	29%	37%	18%
Your overall physical health/well being	18%	25%	20%	23%	14%
Your sense of optimism	16%	20%	20%	16%	14%
Relationships with friends and family	14%	19%	18%	16%	12%
Your mental health	12%	16%	15%	14%	10%

Part Three: Will workers answer the call back to the office?

Those still working from home are more likely to be attached to their arrangement than eager to return to the office. Four-in-five (79%) Canadians currently working from home prefer to be doing it all or most of the time. Few – four per cent – say they'd actually like to be in the office full time.

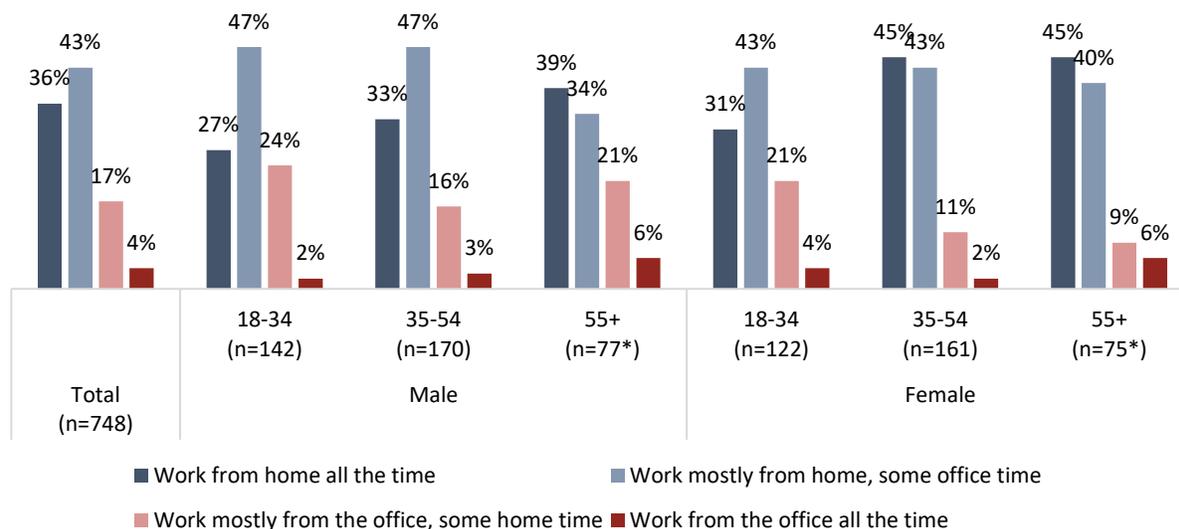
It's older Canadians who are more attached to their work from home life. At least two-in-five of Canadians older than 54 say they prefer to work from home all the time. Comparatively, three-in-ten 18- to 34-year-old men (27%) and women (31%) say the same. Instead, that age group is more likely to prefer a hybrid model split between the home and the office, with more leaning towards a bigger share at home:

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Whether you anticipate going to your place of work as you did before the pandemic, or continuing to work from home, which would you prefer, if it were up to you?

(Among those currently working from home)



**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

The pull back to the office has begun in many industries. [Several Canadian](#) banks began to bring back workers this month. Many workers will be faced with a choice: answer the call or try to find a different job.

Three-in-ten say they'd return to the office full time if their employer demanded it. One-third say they would return but would keep an eye on the job boards. Approaching one-quarter (23%) say they would quit immediately to find a new job.

Younger Canadians are most likely to say they would quit immediately. Three-in-ten (29%) of those aged 18- to 34-years-old say they would start looking for another job right away. Canadians aged 35- to 54-years-old are more likely to take a gradual approach – two-in-five (39%) say they'd return, but would start looking for another job at the same time:

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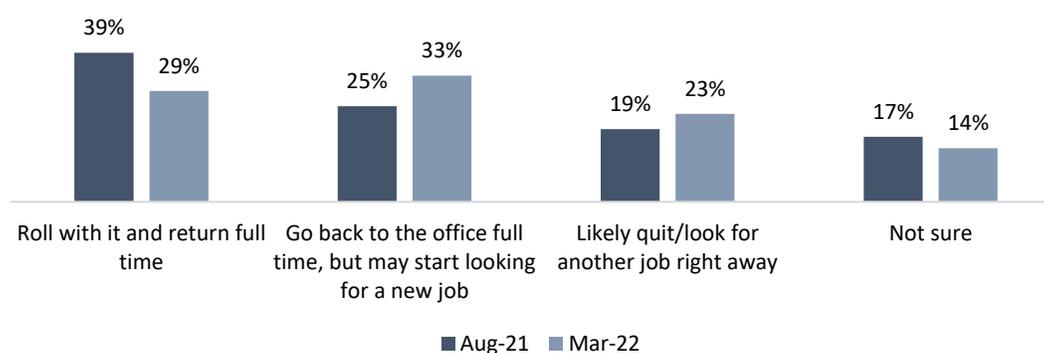
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Suppose your employer demands that you return to the office full time, what would you do in this case? (Among those working from home and prefer to work from home)						
	Total (n=594)	Gender		Age		
		Male (n=297)	Female (n=295)	18-34 (n=197)	35-54 (n=278)	55+ (n=119)
Roll with it and return full time	29%	30%	28%	30%	28%	29%
Go back to the office full time, but may start looking for a new job	33%	35%	30%	32%	39%	20%
Likely quit/look for another job right away	23%	24%	22%	29%	19%	21%
Have already given notice/signalled that I will be leaving	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	2%
Not sure	14%	10%	18%	6%	13%	28%

Overall, this marks a shift in attitude from [last summer](#). Then, two-in-five Canadians working from home who preferred it stay that way (39%) said they would roll with it and come back to the office full time, while 44 per cent would look for a new job gradually or immediately.

Compared to the summer, women are much less willing to return to the office full time if their employer demanded it. In August, [43 per cent said they would roll with it](#). Now, 28 per cent say the same. For men, that figure has declined from 35 per cent to 30 per cent.

**Suppose your employer demands that you return to the office full time, what would you do in this case?
(Among those who prefer to work from home)**



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

For detailed results by whether or not the respondent has kids in their household, [click here](#).

For detailed results by respondents' change in employment status, [click here](#).

For detailed results by whether or not the respondent or someone in their household works from home, [click here](#).

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