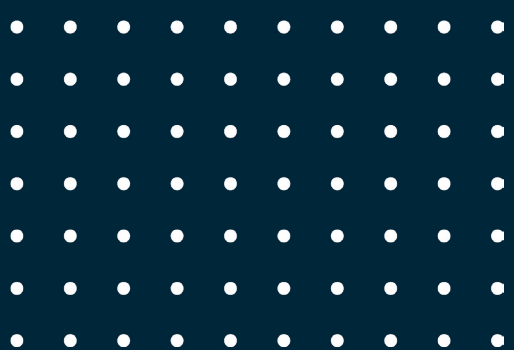




Littler 2026 Canadian Employer Survey Report

OCTOBER 2026



Littler[®]

Executive Summary

Canadian employers are navigating a complex workforce landscape, as tariffs and economic uncertainty add to pressure around changing workplace norms and an evolving regulatory environment. Between the transformative impact of artificial intelligence (AI), shifting expectations around in-office work and differing requirements across jurisdictions, employers face challenges on multiple fronts.

To assess how Canadian employers are responding to those changes, Littler surveyed 200 human resources (HR) professionals, in-house lawyers and C-suite executives at organizations across a range of industries and company sizes.

Littler's 2026 Canadian Employer Survey Report reveals a mixed picture of employer readiness. Though organizations are taking action on multiple fronts, progress varies considerably by issue: most unionized employers, for instance, report being prepared for escalated bargaining activity. Yet, even as adoption of AI in the workplace grows, many organizations are still developing governance frameworks to guide its use.

Keeping pace in this environment is critical. As workplace practices and legal requirements continue to shift, Canadian employers will need to continually assess their policies and practices.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES RESHAPE CANADIAN WORKFORCES

Challenging economic conditions are impacting Canadian workplaces, from paused or reduced hiring to layoffs and increased use of technology to scale back labour needs. More than three-quarters of employers (77%) took those and other workforce actions in response to economic or business pressures over the past year, with 83% of that group saying U.S. tariff-related disruptions contributed to their response.

NAVIGATING NEW CANADIAN EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

Employers vary in their approach to legislative developments at the provincial and federal levels. Just over half (55%) of respondents have updated job postings to address pay transparency requirements and expectations, while only 29% have conducted risk assessments or mapping in response to forced labour, child labour and related supply-chain developments. Sixty-one percent of employers with operations or employees in Québec say French-language obligations pose a moderate or large challenge, while just 40% have updated prevention programs, policies or action plans to address requirements for managing psychosocial risks in the workplace.



FLEXIBLE WORK AND WORKPLACE ACCOMMODATIONS

Employers also continue to adjust expectations about where work gets done. While pandemic-era flexible and hybrid work arrangements seem here to stay, half of respondents have increased required on-site days over the past two years. Those organizations are fielding more requests for remote work as a result, including some that may trigger a duty to accommodate. At the same time, requests for leaves and other accommodations related to mental health are on the rise, presenting additional complexity for employers.

MANAGING AI GOVERNANCE AND WORKFORCE IMPACTS

AI is already influencing how employers approach workflows and hiring, though formal governance remains a work in progress. Nearly half of Canadian employers (44%) have reassessed job responsibilities (30%) or are in the process of doing so (14%) because of actual or anticipated AI use; and about a third have made workforce reductions (22%) or are in the process of doing so (11%). Despite these actions, fewer than half have implemented foundational governance measures such as adopting a formal workplace AI policy (49%) or a review process for AI tools or use cases (42%).

PREPARING FOR UNION ORGANIZING AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

As labour relations remains in focus and regulatory frameworks evolve, more than 8 in 10 (81%) respondents with unionized employees are very or moderately prepared for escalated bargaining tactics. Among nonunion employers, only 29% say the same about potential organizing activity. Employers report similar levels of difficulty navigating the differences in labour relations within Canada and across the Canada-U.S. border, with 44% and 52%, respectively, citing them as a moderate or large challenge.

The report that follows explores these trends in greater detail, including how employers are adapting staffing, workplace practices and compliance strategies for a shifting regulatory and labour relations environment.

For a complete breakdown of respondent demographics, see the [methodology and demographics section](#).



KEY FINDINGS

Economic headwinds are reshaping workforce plans.

- 77% took workforce-related action in response to economic or business pressures over the past year, led by paused or reduced hiring (46%), layoffs/reductions in force (RIFs) (35%) and increased use of automation or AI/technology to reduce labour needs (28%).
- U.S. tariff-related disruptions contributed to those actions for 83% of that group, including 54% who say the disruptions did so to a large or moderate extent.

Regulatory preparedness varies, with some compliance measures more widely implemented than others.

- 55% have updated job postings to address pay transparency requirements, while 37% have conducted pay equity, compensation or pay-gap reviews.
- 48% have developed or updated policies to reflect recent and/or proposed changes addressing forced labour, child labour and human rights risks, but only 29% have conducted risk assessments or mapping of operations or supply chains.

Québec-specific requirements pose challenges and demand new compliance measures.

- Among respondents with Québec operations and employees, 61% say French-language obligations create challenges to a large (25%) or moderate (36%) extent.
- Just 40% have developed or updated prevention programs, policies or action plans to address psychosocial risks that may affect workers' psychological health and safety.

The push toward in-office work is generating more requests for flexibility and accommodation.

- Among the 50% of employers that increased required on-site workdays over the past two years, 81% report some increase in remote-work requests based on protected grounds, while 91% report more requests based on personal preference.
- Separately, 59% report increased requests for leaves or accommodations related to employee mental health.

AI is already impacting workforces—but governance is still developing.

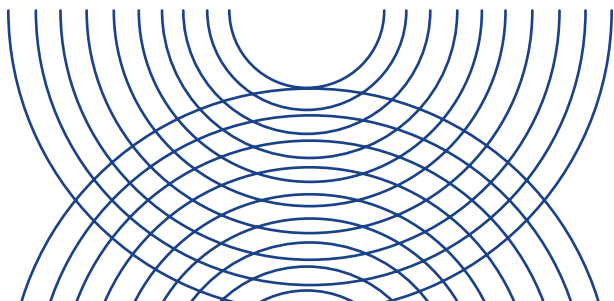
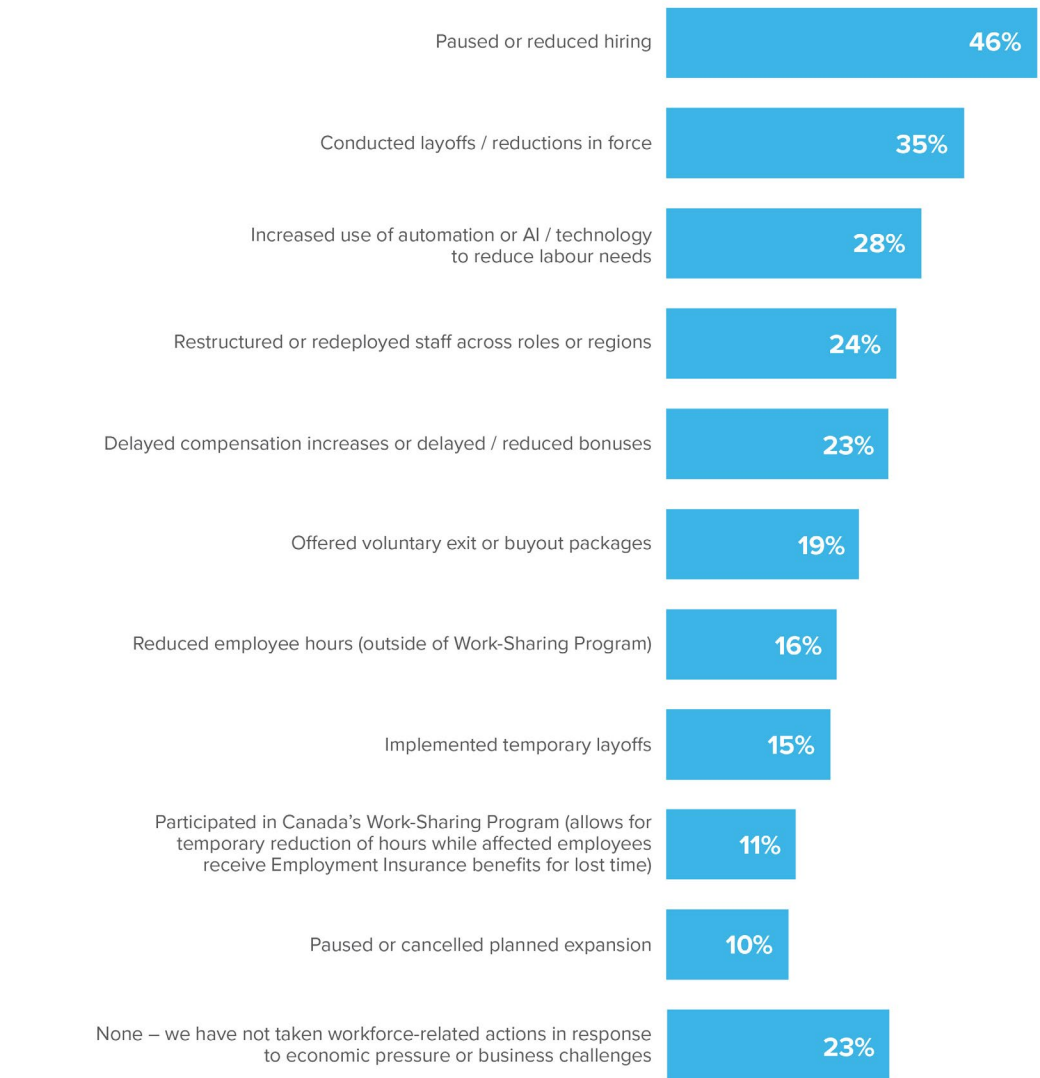
- 44% of respondents have reassessed or are reassessing job responsibilities because of actual or anticipated increased AI use; 36% have reduced or are reducing hiring; and 33% have made or are making workforce reductions.
- However, fewer than half have implemented foundational AI governance measures, including a formal workplace AI policy (49%) or formal review or approval process for AI tools or use cases (42%).

Labour relations preparedness varies across union organizing and collective bargaining challenges.

- 81% of respondents with some or all unionized employees say they are very or moderately prepared for escalated collective bargaining tactics, such as strikes and walkouts.
- Among nonunionized employers, 29% say they are very or moderately prepared to respond to potential union organizing activity.

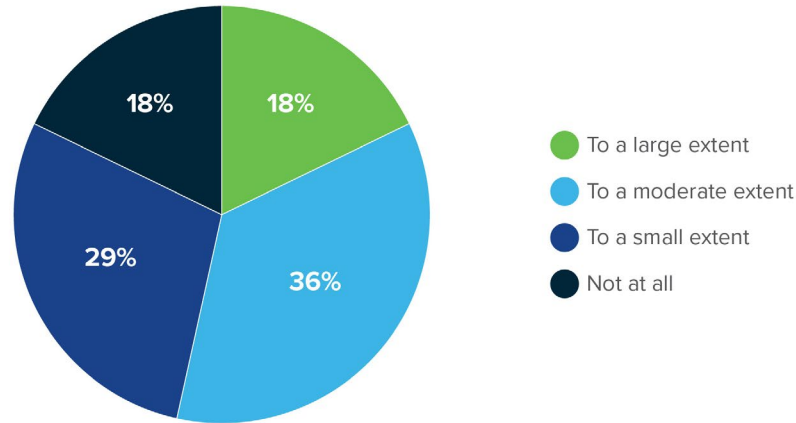
WORKFORCE MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Which of the following workforce-related actions, if any, has your organization taken over the past year in response to economic pressure or business challenges? (Select all that apply)



To what extent has U.S. tariff-related disruption contributed to the workforce-related actions your organization took in response to economic pressure or business challenges?

This question was only asked to those whose organizations have taken workforce-related actions in response to economic pressure or business challenges.



Tariff disruptions and lingering economic uncertainty are prompting many Canadian employers to rethink hiring, staffing and how work gets done. Those impacts are likely to deepen amid the collapse of U.S.-Canada trade talks in August, which [triggered steep retaliatory tariffs](#) from both sides.

More than three-quarters (77%) of respondents took some sort of workforce-related action over the past year in response to economic pressure or business challenges, as [sluggish](#) economic growth and a “[low hire, low fire](#)” labour market weigh on organizations. Almost half (46%) say they paused or reduced hiring, while roughly a third (35%) conducted layoffs or RIFs. Twenty-eight percent increased use of automation or AI and technology to reduce labour needs—a move suggesting technology may be affecting hiring needs even where it has not resulted in direct workforce reductions.

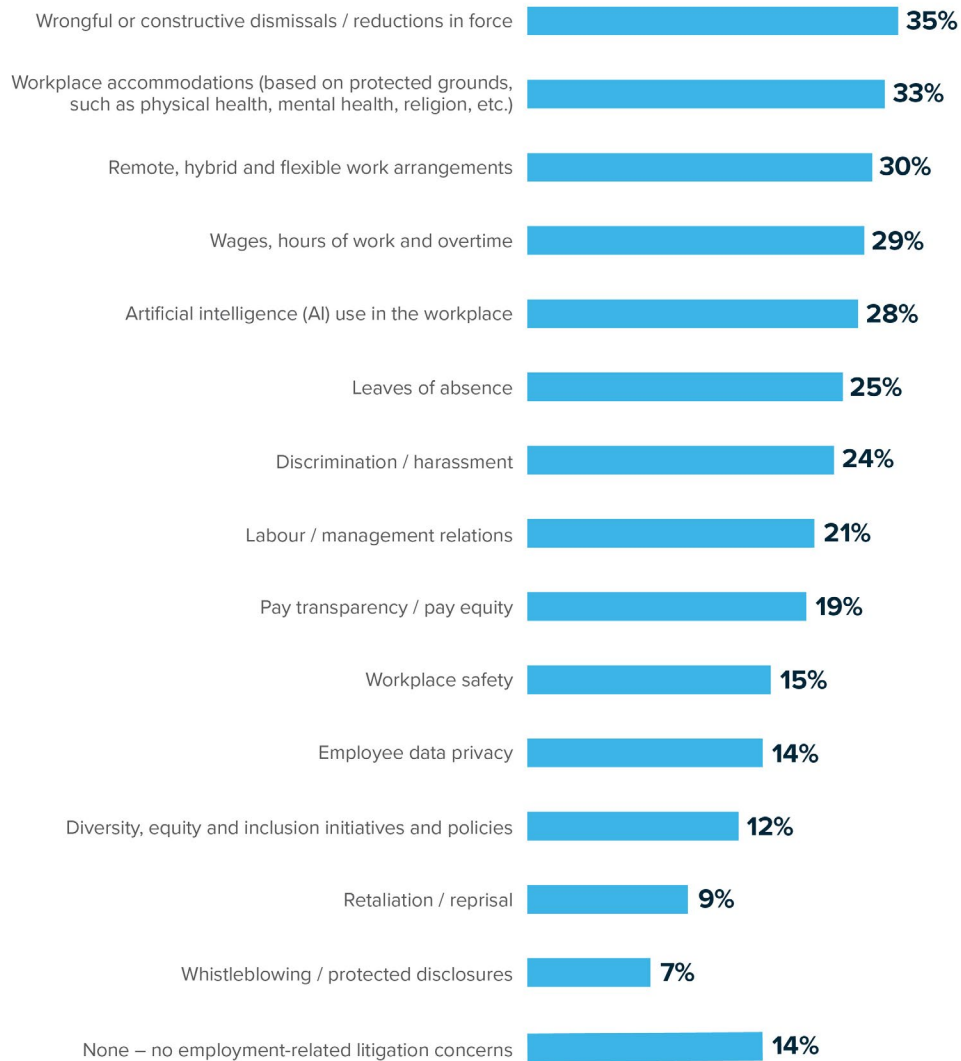
Other responses were less common, including restructuring or redeploying staff across roles or regions (24%), delaying compensation increases or bonuses (23%), offering voluntary exits or buyouts (19%) and reducing employee hours (outside of Canada’s [Work-Sharing Program](#)) (16%).

Special measures for that program—which allows for temporary reduction of hours while affected employees receive Employment Insurance benefits for lost time—have been [extended through March 2027](#) to help [stabilize workplaces](#) impacted by the tariffs. Eleven percent of respondents say they participated in the program over the past year in response to economic pressure or business challenges. The Canadian government plans to integrate the Work-Sharing Program into a [new Workforce Retention and Retraining Program](#) intended to streamline benefits for employers impacted by the tariffs.

Given the [economic strain](#) U.S. tariffs have placed on businesses, it’s not surprising that belt-tightening measures topped the list. U.S. tariff-related disruptions were cited by 83% of employers who made workforce changes as a result of economic or business pressures. Yet the findings suggest the impact has been meaningful but not overwhelming: only 18% say tariffs contributed to a large extent; another 36% say they did so to a moderate extent.

WORKPLACE REGULATION, POLICY AND LITIGATION

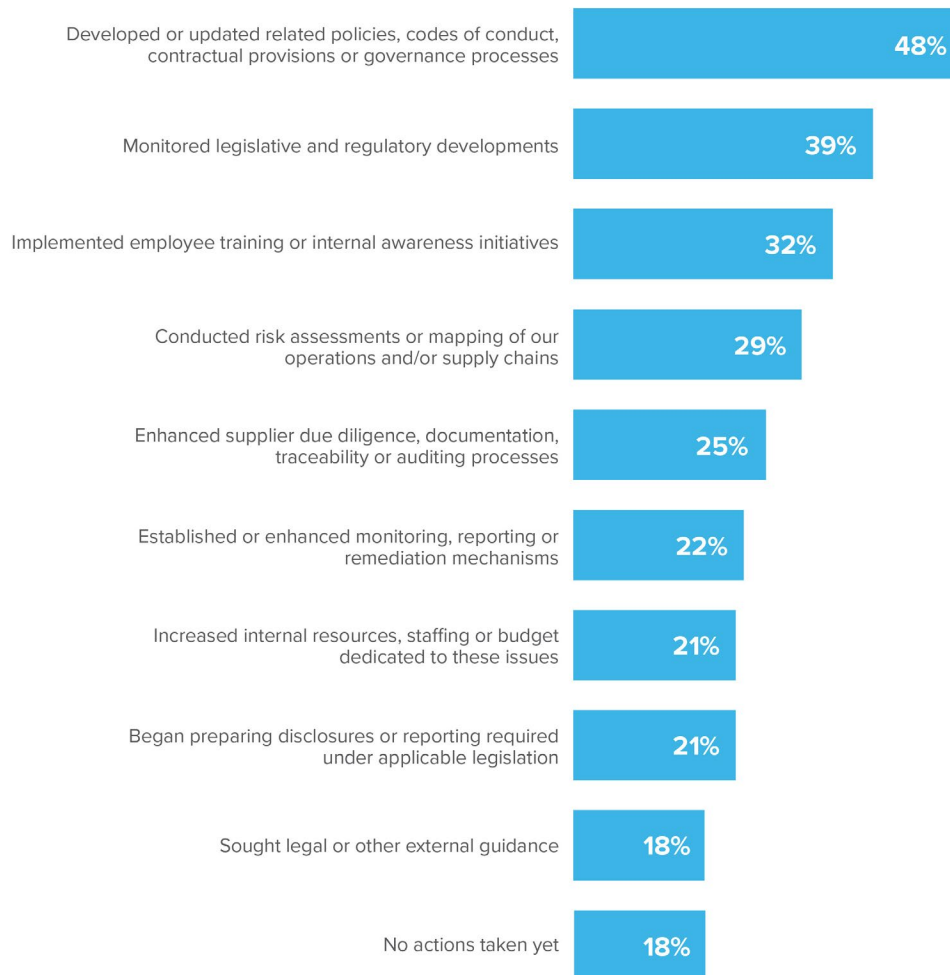
In which of the following areas is your organization concerned about employment-related litigation over the next 12 months? (Select all that apply)



Which of the following actions, if any, has your organization taken in response to legal requirements, market expectations and/or employee expectations regarding pay transparency? (Select all that apply)



In response to recent and/or proposed Canadian legislation addressing forced labour, child labour, modern slavery and human rights risks in business operations and supply chains, which of the following actions has your organization taken? (Select all that apply)



Canadian employers are confronting legal and regulatory pressures on multiple fronts as workplace practices change and new provincial and federal requirements take effect.

Unfortunately, the survey data suggests some organizations may not be as prepared for these pressures as they think. Among the challenges: [return-to-office mandates](#); longer [job-protected illness leave](#) in Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and elsewhere; and patchwork compliance risks for multiprovince employers. Evolving pay transparency rules and federal reporting requirements on forced labour and child labour only add to the complexity.

When it comes to employment-related litigation, no single issue stood out as overwhelmingly concerning to respondents and 14% reported no such concerns. The largest percentage (35%) cite litigation relating to wrongful or constructive dismissals/RIFs as a concern, which aligns with the 35% who say their organizations conducted layoffs or RIFs in response to economic pressure or business challenges.

Roughly 3 in 10 respondents cite employment matters that arise frequently in the workplace, including workplace accommodations based on protected grounds, such as physical health, mental health or religion (33%); remote, hybrid and flexible work arrangements (30%); and wages, hours of work and overtime (29%). Both accommodation and flexible work arrangements can raise tricky issues for employers navigating when, where and under what circumstances employees are required to work.

The relatively low level of concern about various areas of litigation—particularly in comparison to Littler’s U.S. Employer Survey (see page 15 [here](#))—may reflect Canada’s comparatively lower-stakes legal environment. Class-action employment litigation is less prevalent than in the U.S., and sizable jury awards are far less frequent, making individual risk areas less likely to pose existential concerns for employers.

One headline issue for Canadian employers is pay transparency. [In British Columbia](#), employers with 50 or more employees must prepare and [post annual pay transparency reports](#) starting November 1, 2026. And in Ontario, which accounts for [the largest share](#) of the Canadian labour market, organizations must meet stringent [new job posting requirements](#).

Organizations in Ontario with 25 or more employees must ensure that publicly advertised job postings include the expected compensation or range of compensation; when a range is used, it cannot span more than \$50,000. The compensation-disclosure requirement does not apply to jobs where the expected pay or top end of the range exceeds \$200,000 annually. Among other requirements: if AI is used to screen, assess or select applicants, employers must also note that in the job posting. Taken together, these rules go further than pay transparency stipulations already in force in several Canadian provinces.

More than half of respondents (55%) have updated job postings to include expected compensation or salary ranges in response to legal requirements, market expectations and/or employee expectations regarding pay transparency. However, only 41% say they are keeping an eye on legislative developments or regulatory guidance as a result of those drivers. Fewer than 2 in 5 are taking other concrete steps, such as conducting pay equity, compensation or pay-gap reviews (37%) or establishing standardized salary ranges, pay bands or compensation frameworks (36%).

With 64% of survey respondents operating in Ontario and 41% in British Columbia, the fact that just 55% of the overall pool added compensation information to job postings stands out.

A similar pattern emerges in employer responses to recent and/or proposed Canadian [legislation](#) addressing forced labour, child labour, [modern slavery](#) and human rights risks in business operations and supply chains. About half of respondents (48%) say that their organization has developed or updated policies, codes of conduct, contractual provisions or governance processes to address those developments—but just 39% have monitored legislative or regulatory developments, and only about a third have implemented employee training or internal awareness initiatives (32%) or conducted risk assessments or mapping of operations or supply chains (29%).

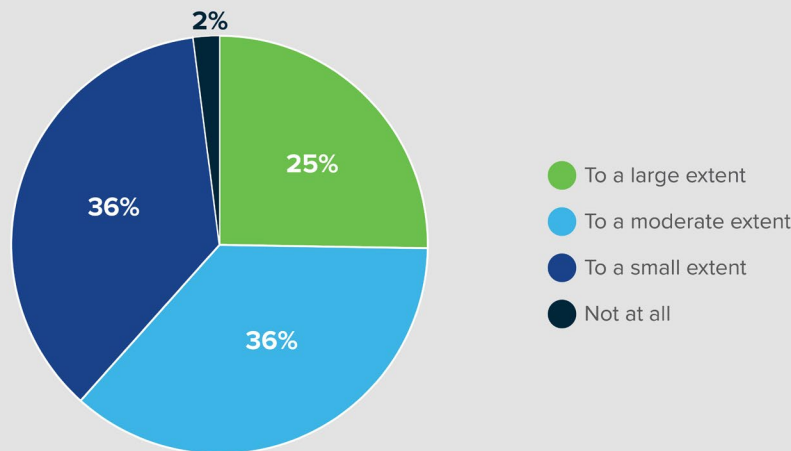
“Risks for Canadian employers are coming from many directions, from bread-and-butter wage-related litigation to shifts in employee expectations around accommodations and flexible work to an increasingly complex regulatory patchwork. Whether the issue is pay transparency or other emerging requirements, it’s important for businesses to do more than just monitor developments—they should be evaluating what the rules mean for their own policies and practices and considering practical changes to guide compliance.”

[Paul Pulver](#),
Partner, Vancouver



Québec

To what extent does complying with Québec's French-language obligations (which mandate the use of French in many business contexts) create challenges for your organization?
This question was only asked to organizations with Québec operations and employees.



Québec employers are now required to identify, assess and address psychosocial risks that may affect workers' psychological health and safety (e.g., harassment, workplace violence, excessive workloads). Which of the following steps, if any, has your organization taken in response to these requirements? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to organizations with Québec operations and employees.



In Québec, employers are facing implementation issues tied to two major shifts. First, the province has significantly strengthened its [French-language](#) regime since 2022, with important new requirements in 2025 now extending to smaller employers. Second, Québec now requires employers to include [work-related psychosocial risks](#), including workplace violence and harassment, in their workplace prevention and safety programs.

Among respondents with Québec operations and employees, virtually all (98%) say compliance with French-language obligations, which mandate the use of French in many business contexts, creates challenges for their organization. For most, the impact is meaningful: 61% say these requirements affect them to a large (25%) or moderate (36%) extent.

Even so, companies may be underestimating the requirements. Some employers, for instance, may mistakenly assume that falling below the 50-worker threshold largely exempts them. That's no longer the case: as of June 2025, the formal francization process extends to businesses with 25 or more employees, which must register with Québec's language regulator, the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF). Since June 1, 2025, organizations with 5 to 24 employees must disclose, in their annual or current updating declaration filed with the Québec enterprise register, the proportion of employees who are unable to communicate in French at work.

Effective October 1, 2025, Québec's modernized occupational health and safety regime requires employers to integrate psychosocial risks into their workplace health and safety prevention measures. Establishments with 20 or more workers must implement a prevention program, while those with fewer than 20 workers must implement an action plan. In both cases, psychosocial risks affecting workers' psychological health and safety must be considered as part of the employer's broader prevention obligations. Additionally, a new regulation has been adopted requiring Québec employers to implement measures to [prevent and address workplace sexual violence](#), with most provisions coming into force in May 2027.

The survey findings suggest that many organizations are still in the process of implementing the newer requirements. Just 40% have developed or updated prevention programs, policies or action plans to address psychosocial risks and other requirements, while 37% have enhanced processes for reporting, investigating or addressing complaints and incidents. Even fewer have conducted an assessment of psychosocial risks in the workplace (32%) or delivered training to managers and/or employees (31%), let alone implemented measures to mitigate identified risks (25%). And 29% haven't taken any steps at all.

The survey results may also overstate how far employers have progressed in implementing the newer requirements, with some respondents reporting measures that were already in place before the latest requirements—such as risk assessment, training and mitigation measures—took effect. Failure to take the required preventive measures could complicate an employer's defense in harassment or other cases. Additionally, employers should be aware that these requirements apply to all companies with Québec-based employees.

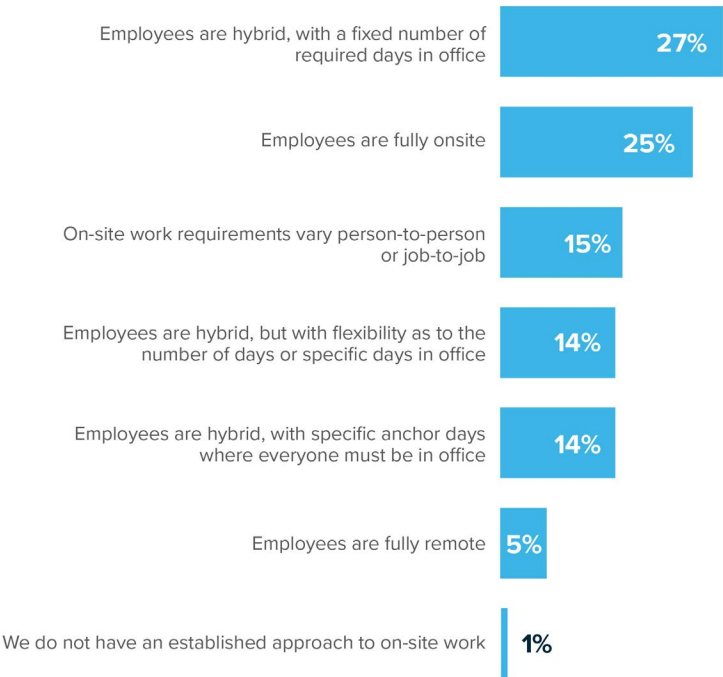
“Having a policy on the books isn't necessarily enough. Québec employers shouldn't assume that existing policies or smaller headcounts mean they're covered as workplace regulations evolve. When it comes to the newer psychosocial risks and other health and safety requirements, employers need to make sure they're assessing risks, putting preventive measures in place and training their people.”

[Olivia Girouard](#),
Of Counsel, Montréal

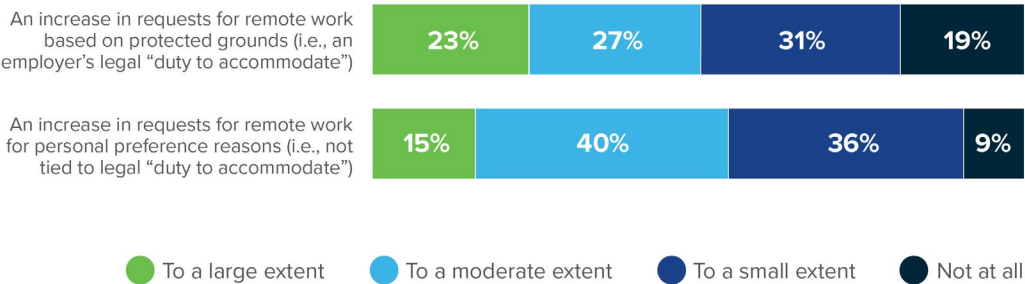


FLEXIBLE WORK, LEAVES AND ACCOMMODATIONS

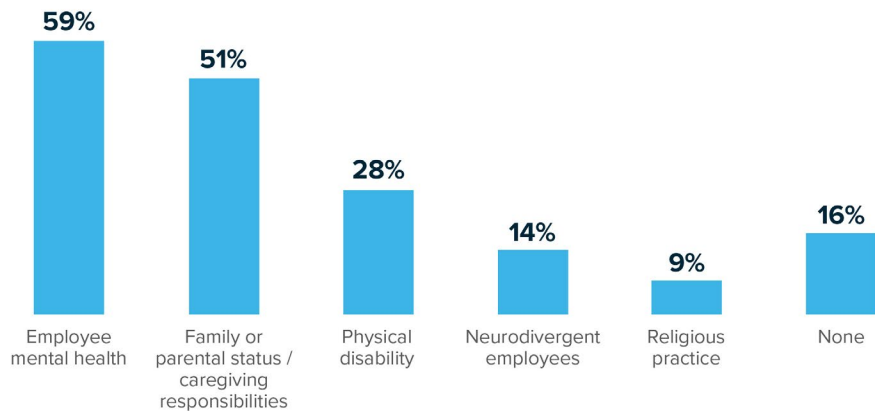
Which of the following best represents your organization’s overall approach to on-site work for positions that could be performed remotely?



To what extent has your organization experienced the following as a result of increasing in-person work requirements?
This question was only asked to the 50% of respondents whose organizations have increased the number of days that employees are required to work in-person over the past two years.



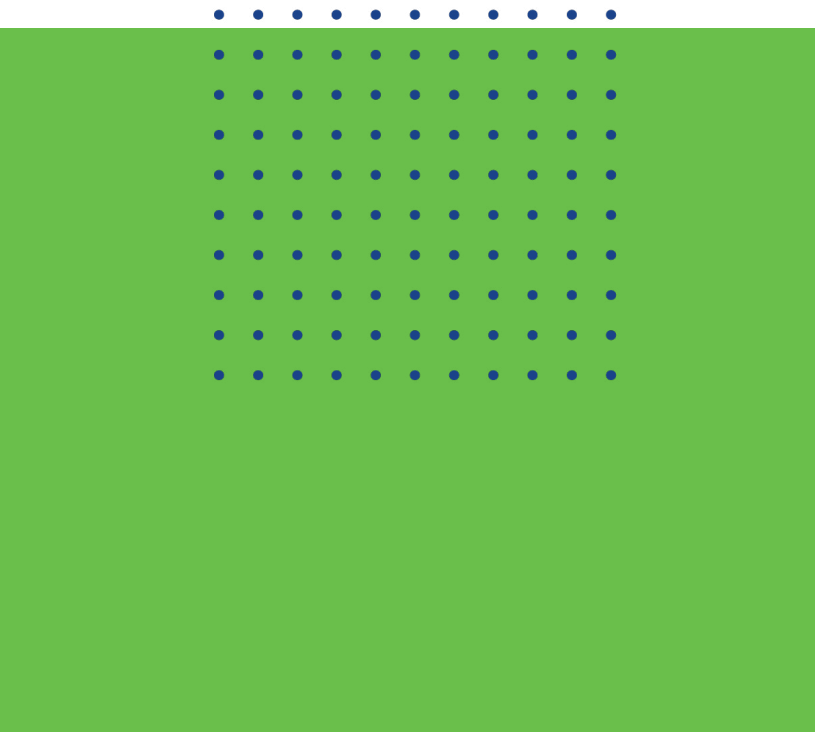
In which of the following areas has your organization received increased requests for leaves or accommodations over the past year? (Select all that apply)



Employers in Canada are shifting from COVID-era remote work policies toward a [more in-office orientation](#), particularly large corporations and those in [financial services](#). However, flexible work arrangements that took off during the pandemic appear here to stay, at least for now. The survey finds 70% of respondents take a hybrid or otherwise variable approach to on-site work—similar to their counterparts in the U.S., where 77% reported the same in Littler’s [2026 Annual Employer Survey](#) (see page 22).

Nearly 3 in 10 (27%) Canadian employers say their employees are hybrid and work a fixed number of required in-office days. Another 14% have hybrid staff with flexibility on the number of days or specific days they spend in the office, while 14% have specific anchor days when everyone must be in person. Fifteen percent say on-site job requirements vary by person or role.

Just 5% say employees are fully remote and a quarter say employees are fully onsite—the latter may partly reflect survey participation by employers in industries where remote work is less feasible, such as manufacturing (which accounted for 15% of respondents). By contrast, just 16% of U.S. employers report having fully onsite employees, while 6% are fully remote.

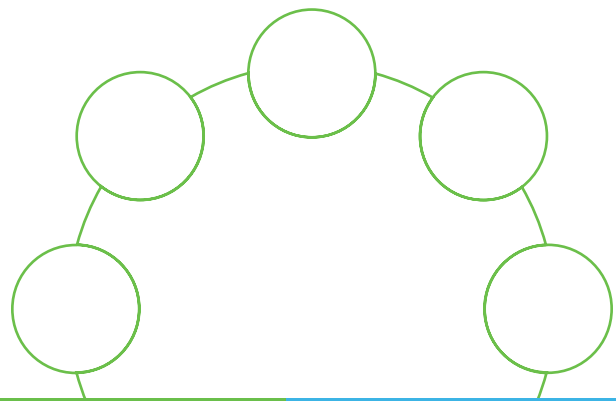


Among the 50% of organizations that have increased the number of required on-site days over the past two years, many are encountering some degree of pushback. Of that group, 81% report a resulting rise in requests for remote work based on protected grounds under applicable human rights legislation—requests that can trigger an employer’s legal [duty to accommodate](#)—and half experienced an increase to a large (23%) or moderate (27%) extent.

Requests based on personal preference rather than protected grounds were even more widespread: 91% report an increase in requests for remote work not tied to the legal duty to accommodate. More than half (55%) experienced that to a large (15%) or moderate (40%) extent.

In Canada, some requests for remote work that initially appear to be based on personal preference, particularly those tied to caregiving responsibilities, may later be framed as protected-ground accommodation questions that engage an employer’s duty to accommodate under applicable human rights law, though the scope of protection varies by jurisdiction (for instance, family status is not protected in Québec).

Echoing trends in Littler’s U.S. research, [mental health in the workplace](#) is a growing area of attention for Canadian employers. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) respondents say they have received more requests for employee mental health leaves or accommodation over the past year. So have requests for family or parental status/caregiving responsibilities (51%), with lower shares reporting requests tied to physical disability (28%), neurodivergent employees (14%) or religious practice (9%).



“Flexible work has settled into a ‘new normal’ in the workplace. The question now for employers is how to manage it alongside evolving expectations around in-person work and accommodations. As employers bring people back to the office, they need to be prepared for more such requests—and to have a clear process for evaluating those requests and applying that process consistently, while recognizing that each must be considered on its own facts.”

[Stephen Shore](#),
Partner, Toronto; Office Managing Partner
for Littler’s Canadian offices



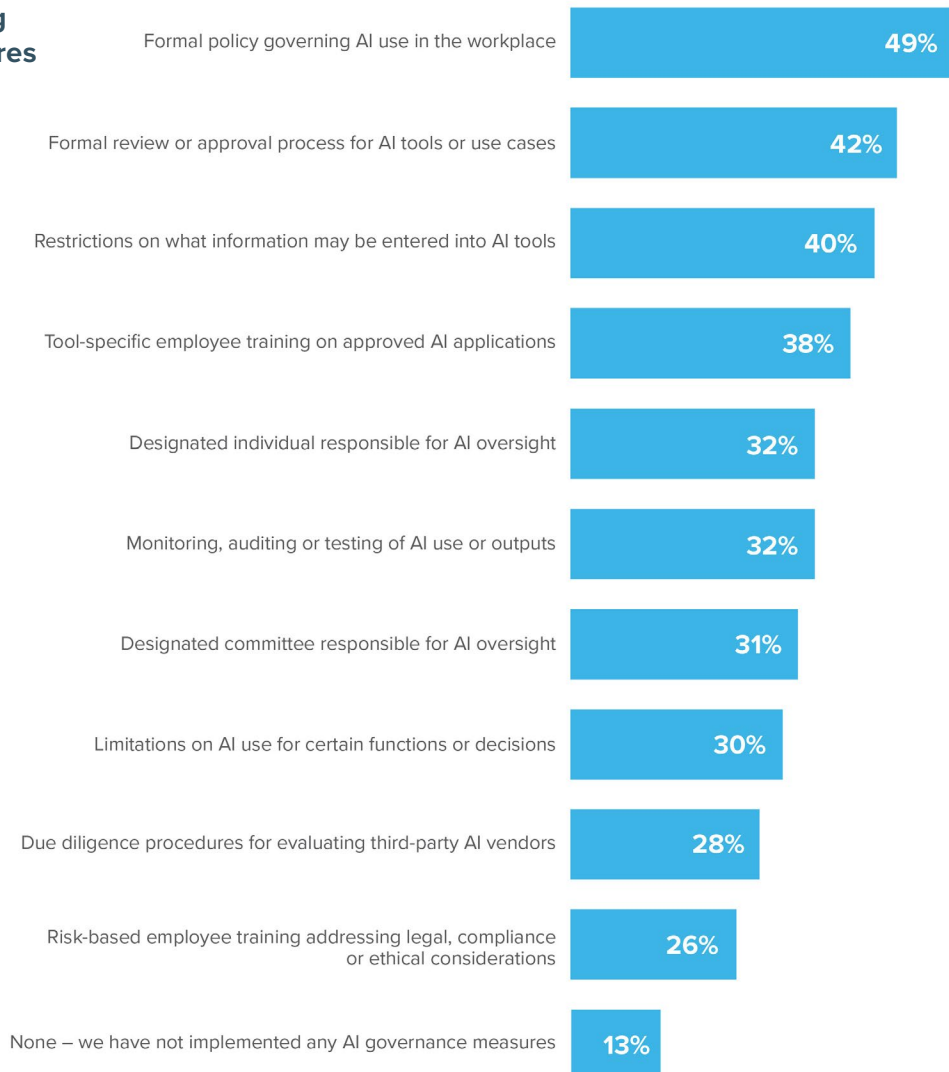
AI IN THE WORKPLACE

Has your organization taken any of the following actions as a result of the actual, or anticipated, increased use of AI in the workplace?

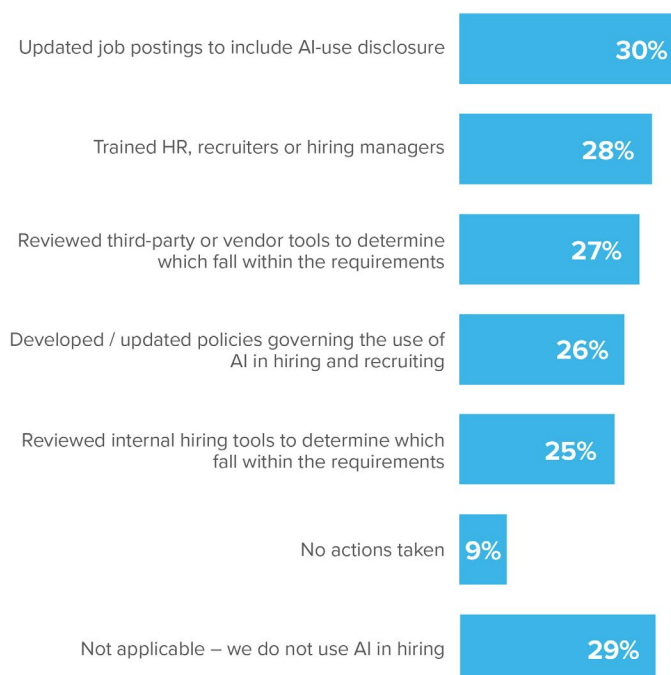


● Yes
 ● Not yet, but in process
 ● Not yet, but considering
 ● No, and unlikely to do so

Which of the following AI governance measures has your organization implemented? (Select all that apply)



Which of the following steps has your organization taken as a result of new legislative requirements and existing privacy laws in Canada that address disclosing the use of AI in the hiring process? (Select all that apply)



AI adoption is increasing across Canadian businesses, with the share using it to produce goods or deliver services [more than tripling](#) in two years, to 19.2% in 2026 from 6.1% in 2024, according to Statistics Canada. As AI tools continue to evolve, employers are rethinking job responsibilities and hiring needs—and confronting a growing need for guardrails around how the technology is used in the workplace.

AI is already reshaping workforce planning, with roughly a third or more of employers making or actively pursuing changes to jobs, hiring or staffing levels. Nearly half of respondents (44%) say their organizations have reassessed (30%) or are reassessing (14%) job responsibilities as a result of actual or anticipated increased AI use. Another 36% have reduced hiring (22%) or are in the process of doing so (14%), while 33% have made workforce reductions (22%) or are in the process of doing so (11%).

While AI's workforce impact is already being felt in Canada, governance may still be catching up. Less than half of respondents have a formal policy governing AI use in the workplace (49%) or a formal review or approval process for AI tools or use cases (42%). Even fewer have restrictions on what information may be entered into AI tools (40%) or offer tool-specific employee training on approved AI applications (38%)—let alone a designated individual or committee responsible for AI oversight (32% and 31%, respectively).

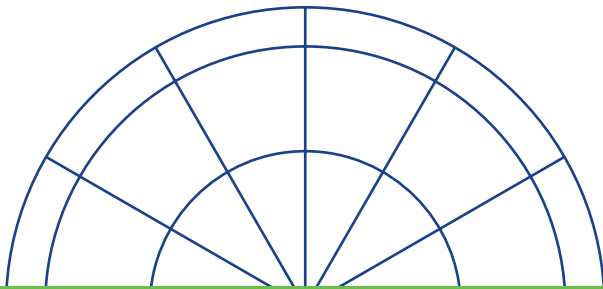


These results are lower than data collected earlier this year among employers in the U.S., where 68% reported having a formal AI workplace use policy and 55% had a formal review or approval process for AI tools and use cases (see page 11 [here](#)). However, Canada still has relatively limited employment-specific AI legislation in place, though existing privacy and human rights laws can apply to AI use in the workplace.

For example, Ontario [requires covered employers to disclose](#) in publicly advertised job postings when they use AI to screen, assess or select applicants. Additionally, Québec's privacy law imposes separate transparency requirements for decisions based exclusively on automated processing of personal information; it would not be surprising if the province implemented a broader framework for AI in the workplace.

Nearly a third of respondents (30%) say their organizations have updated job postings to include AI-use disclosure as a result of new legislative requirements and existing Canadian privacy laws. A slightly lower share has trained HR, recruiters or hiring managers (28%) and developed or updated policies governing the use of AI in hiring and recruiting (26%). Roughly the same percentage have reviewed third-party or vendor tools (27%) or internal hiring tools (25%) to determine which fall within the requirements.

Nine percent report taking no action, while another 29% say the requirements are not applicable because their organizations do not use AI in hiring. For the latter group, more organizations may be using AI than respondents realize because of how the technology is often seamlessly layered into existing HR and employment software.



“There’s still a gap between how much employers are talking about AI and how far many have gone in governing its use. Even if an organization isn’t deploying AI as part of a formal business process, employees may already be using these tools in their day-to-day work. As the technology becomes more embedded in everyday work, employers need to understand where it’s being used and put appropriate policies and oversight in place rather than waiting for regulation to force the issue.”

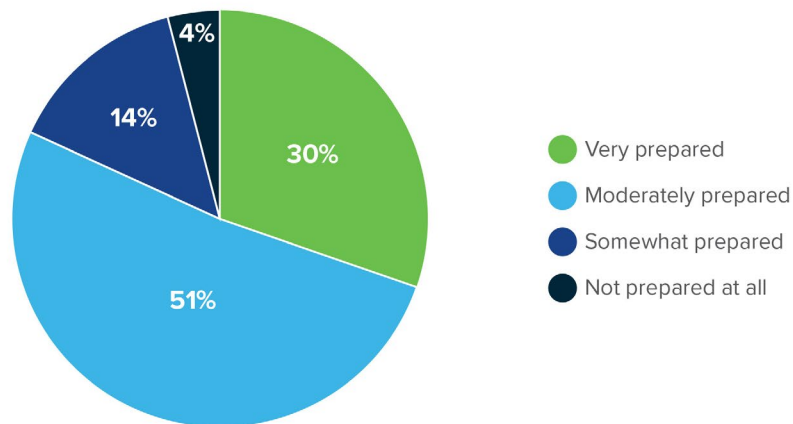
Monty Verlint,
Partner, Toronto



LABOR RELATIONS AND ORGANIZING

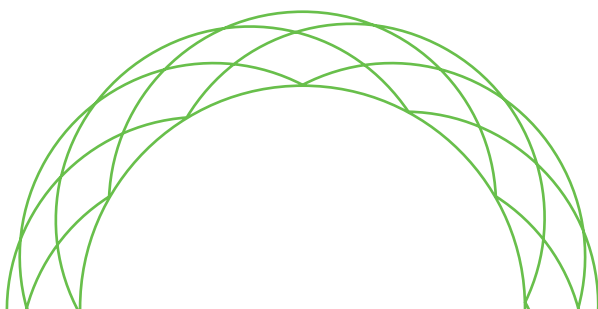
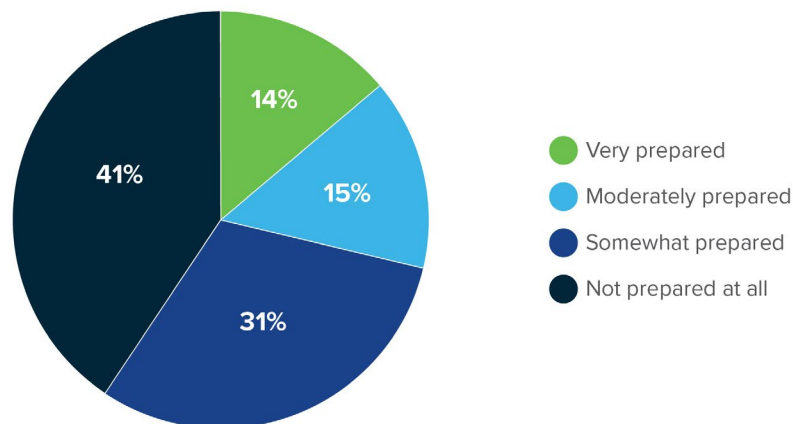
How prepared do you believe your organization is to respond effectively to escalated collective bargaining tactics, such as strikes, walkouts or coordinated corporate campaigns?

This question was only asked to organizations with unionized employees.

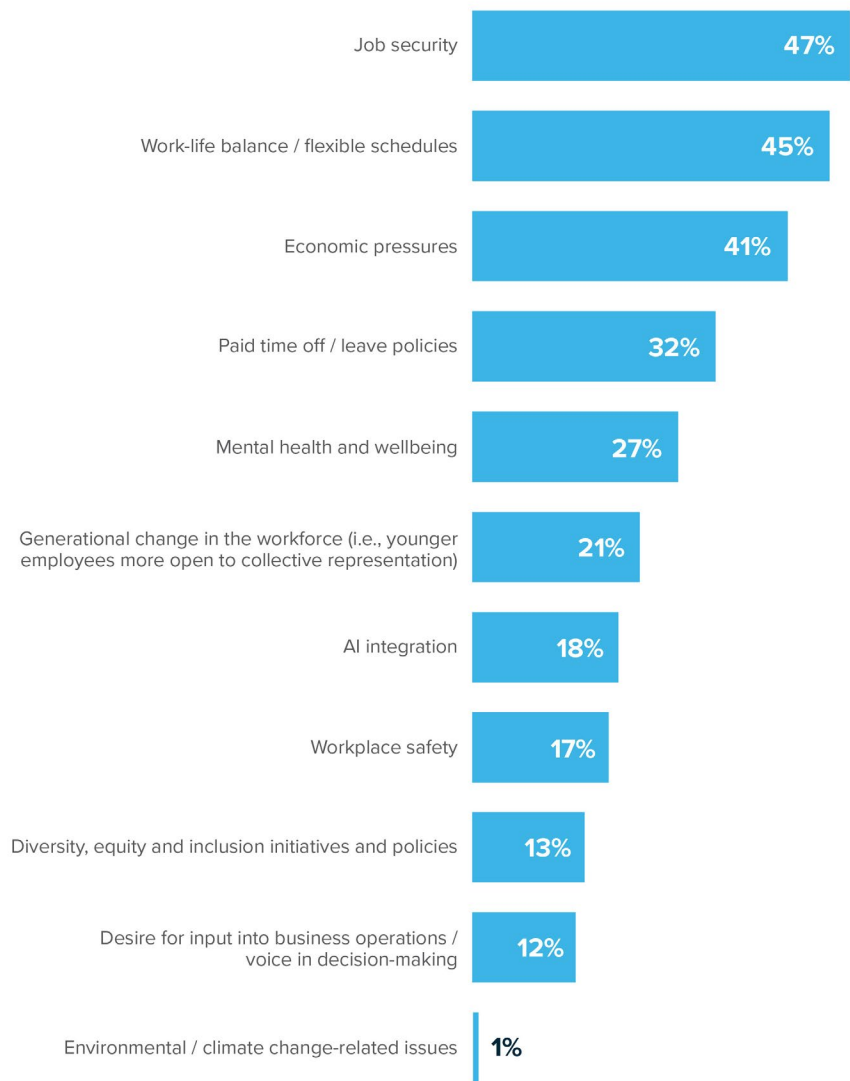


How prepared do you believe your organization is to respond effectively to union organizing activity?

This question was only asked to organizations with no unionized employees.



Outside of compensation and benefits, which of the following factors do you think are likely to drive interest in unionization among employees at your organization? (Select all that apply)
This question was not asked to organizations with all unionized employees.



Organized labour continues to play a role in Canada’s labour market, with [strike activity](#) and [work stoppages](#) continuing in recent years even as unionization, particularly in the private sector, has [declined from historical highs](#).

The labour relations framework is also evolving. Federally regulated employers now face restrictions on the use of replacement workers during strikes and lockouts, as well as changes to requirements for maintaining essential activities during work stoppages. Similar legislation that restricts the use of replacement workers is already in place in certain jurisdictions, including Québec.

Against that backdrop, the survey illustrates that unionized employers have fairly high confidence in their readiness to respond to escalated bargaining tactics, while nonunionized employers show considerably more uncertainty. (Roughly half of all respondents have either some unionized employees (34%) or an entirely unionized workforce (17%), while the remaining 49% do not have any unionized employees.)

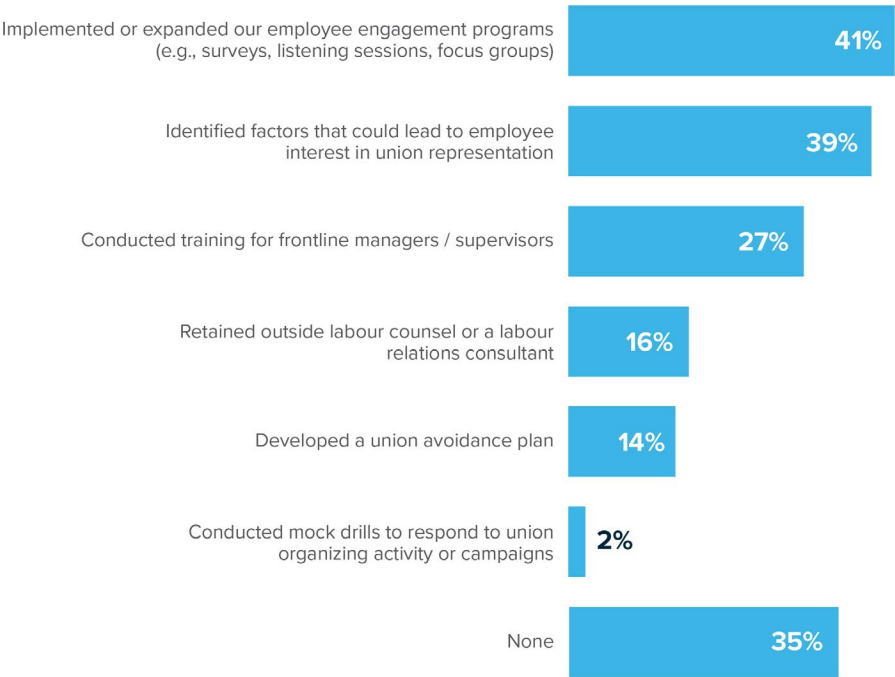
More than 8 in 10 respondents with unionized employees say their organization is very (30%) or moderately (51%) prepared to respond to escalated collective bargaining tactics, such as strikes, walkouts or coordinated corporate campaigns; only 4% are not prepared at all. By contrast, just 29% of nonunionized employers are very (14%) or moderately (15%) prepared to respond effectively to union organizing activity, and 41% characterize their organization as not prepared at all.

These results come as high-profile campaigns in Canada have kept union activity in the headlines—potentially increasing the likelihood of union curiosity from nonunionized workers.

Outside of compensation and benefits, job security (47%) and work-life balance (45%) are the most commonly cited factors that respondents whose workforces are not entirely unionized see as likely to drive interest in unionization among their workforce. Economic pressures (41%), paid time off/leave policies (32%) and mental health and wellbeing (27%) followed, with fewer citing factors such as generational change in the workforce (21%) and AI integration (18%).

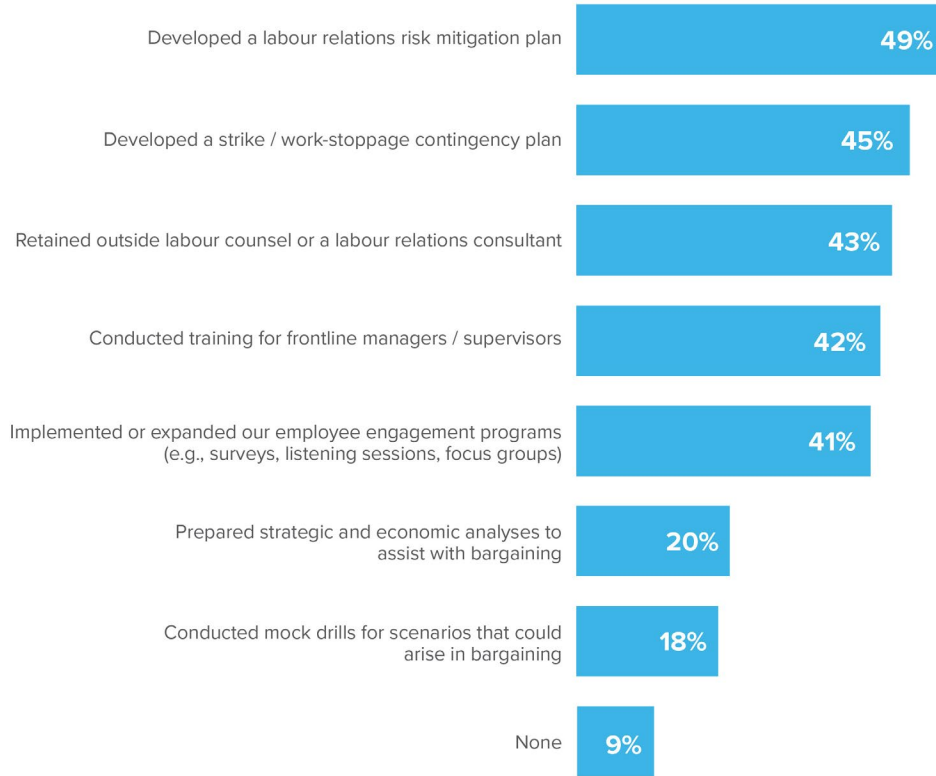
Which of the following steps has your organization taken to prevent or mitigate the risk of union activity? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to organizations with no unionized employees who feel at least somewhat prepared to respond effectively to union organizing activity.

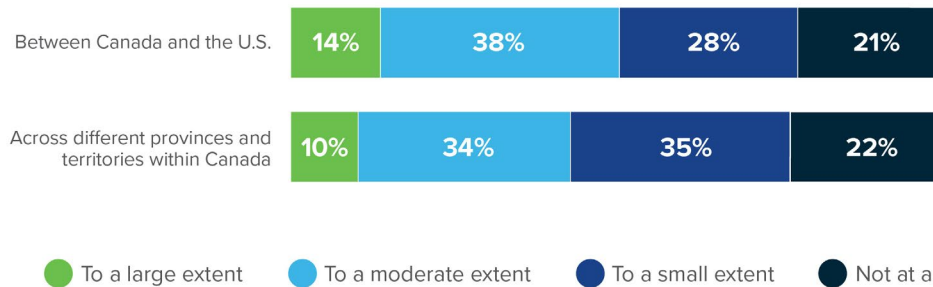


Which of the following steps has your organization taken to prepare for escalated collective bargaining tactics? (Select all that apply)

This question was only asked to organizations with unionized employees who feel at least somewhat prepared to respond effectively to escalated collective bargaining tactics.



To what extent is managing differences in labour relations requirements and strategy a challenge for your organization in each of the following?



Among the 95% of nonunionized employers who indicated at least some level of preparedness for union organizing activity, the most common action was to implement or expand employee engagement programs such as surveys, listening sessions and focus groups (41%). Thirty-nine percent have identified factors that could lead to employee interest in union representation, and 27% have conducted training for frontline managers and supervisors. However, only 14% have developed a union avoidance plan or retained outside labour relations counsel.

Employers already managing unionized workforces are using several strategies to prepare for potentially escalated collective bargaining tactics. Nearly half of the group who indicated some degree of preparedness for the above (49%) have developed a labour relations risk mitigation plan, and nearly as many (45%) have a strike or work-stoppage contingency plan. Roughly 4 in 10 have retained outside labour relations counsel (43%), conducted training for frontline managers or supervisors (42%), and implemented or expanded employee engagement programs (41%).

When it comes to managing differences in labour relations requirements and strategy across jurisdictions, employers report similar levels of difficulty within Canada, which has a range of provincial labour regimes, as they do across the Canada-U.S. border. Roughly half (52%) say Canada-U.S. differences present a moderate (38%) or large (14%) challenge, compared with 44% who say the same about Canadian provinces and territories (34% moderate; 10% large).



“Labour activity has become more visible in recent years, but preparedness means more than recognizing risk. Employers need to understand what could motivate employees to seek union representation, invest in employee engagement and manager readiness, and plan how to respond before an issue arises. In Canada, you can’t necessarily follow a single playbook, because the rules and processes differ from province to province. Employers need to understand the jurisdictions where they operate and make sure their labour strategy accounts for any regional or international differences.”

Matthew Badrov,
Partner, Toronto



Methodology and Demographics

In July 2026, 200 professionals from a variety of industries completed Littler’s survey via an online survey tool.

Respondent titles included:

- Chief Human Resources Officers or Chief People Officers (22%)
- HR Professionals (46%)
- Chief Legal Officers or General Counsel (10%)
- In-House Lawyers (9%)
- Other C-suite or management titles (13%)

Companies represented operate across Canada:

- Ontario (64%)
- Québec (46%)
- British Columbia (41%)
- Alberta (21%)
- Saskatchewan (11%)
- Manitoba (11%)
- Nova Scotia (11%)
- New Brunswick (9%)
- Newfoundland and Labrador (5%)
- Prince Edward Island (4%)
- Territories — Yukon, Northwest, Nunavut (2%)

Companies represented were of a variety of sizes:

- More than 10,000 employees (16%)
- 5,001 to 10,000 employees (9%)
- 1,001 to 5,000 employees (30%)
- 501 to 1,000 employees (14%)
- 101 to 500 employees (27%)
- 1 to 100 employees (4%)

Responses to some questions in the survey do not add up to 100% due to rounding, and some exceed 100% because respondents were invited to select more than one answer.

