

SIGNATURE MONTHLY EDITION

THE SASKATCHEWAN IMPERATIVE

LABOUR FORCE FRIDAY | September 2026

Saskatchewan evidence, national context, and leadership choices

THE EVIDENCE → THE IMPLICATION → THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION → THE ACTION → WHAT TO WATCH

LABOUR FORCE FRIDAY

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Lower unemployment masks weaker workforce participation

+300

monthly employment
versus August 2026

+2,300

annual employment
versus September 2025

5.4%

unemployment rate
September 2026

66.5%

participation rate
September 2026

-5,500

annual full-time jobs
versus September 2025

-2.3%

annual real wage change
September 2026

The evidence behind the workforce decisions leaders face next.

EXPLORE THE EVIDENCE · [DCI-HCM.COM/LABOUR-FORCE-FRIDAY](https://dcihcm.com/labour-force-friday)

DCI

October 2026 publication edition

Prepared by Daniels Consulting International Ltd. (DCI)

Executive Brief

Saskatchewan's unemployment rate fell to 5.4% in September, but the province added only 300 jobs. The larger change was a drop in the number of people working or looking for work. For employers, that is not the same as a broad hiring recovery.

Over the year, full-time employment fell by 5,500 and the participation rate declined by 1.5 percentage points. Average hourly pay also lost about 2.3% of its purchasing power. These findings raise different questions: whether people can secure durable work, whether employers can retain needed skills and whether the jobs on offer meet workers' needs.

Investment and population growth create opportunities, but they do not resolve those questions automatically. This edition examines where project demand may support hiring, where workforce participation warrants attention and how leaders can prepare without confusing a provincial headline with conditions in their own organization.

September 2026 Saskatchewan Scorecard

Indicator	September 2026	Change and comparison
Employment	622,100	+300 monthly; +2,300 annually
Employment rate	62.9%	-0.1 points monthly; -1.0 points annually
Unemployment rate	5.4%	-0.6 points monthly; -0.6 points annually
Participation rate	66.5%	-0.5 points monthly; -1.5 points annually
Full-time employment	511,800	+1,200 monthly; -5,500 annually
Part-time employment	110,300	-900 monthly; +7,800 annually

Monthly means September versus August 2026; annually means September 2026 versus September 2025. Headline estimates are seasonally adjusted. Changes in rates are percentage points.

What the Evidence Says

The unemployment rate needs a second look

Employment reached 622,100 in September, just 300 above August. The labour force fell by about 3,500 and the unemployment rate declined from 6.0% to 5.4%. The participation rate also fell, to 66.5%. A large fall in the jobless rate alongside a very small employment gain is a reason to examine attachment to work before declaring a strong recovery.

Job growth is not keeping pace with the covered population

Employment was 2,300 higher than a year earlier, an increase of about 0.4%. The population covered by the Labour Force Survey grew about 2.0%. As a result, the employment rate fell from 63.9% to 62.9%. The province had more jobs, but a smaller proportion of the covered population was employed. Total resident population estimates use a different definition and should not be substituted in this comparison.

Full-time and part-time work tell different stories

Full-time employment rose by 1,200 in September, while part-time employment fell by 900. Over the year the pattern reversed: full-time work was 5,500 lower and part-time work 7,800 higher. The estimates do not tell us whether people preferred shorter hours. They do show why a stable total can conceal important changes in income security, scheduling and access to a full-time role.

Sector demand is uneven

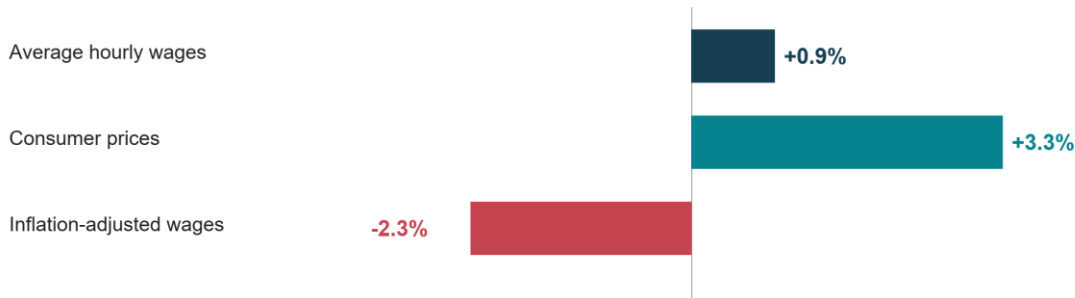
Retail trade lost 3,100 jobs during September, while wholesale trade added 2,400 and accommodation and food services added 1,600. Health care and social assistance gained 700 and was 4,500 above a year earlier. Provincial estimates can move sharply from month to month. Hiring plans should be tested against funded workload and several periods of evidence rather than one industry estimate.

The employer mix is changing

Private-sector employee employment was 21,200 higher than a year earlier. Public-sector employment was 9,000 lower and self-employment was 9,900 lower. The small net provincial gain therefore conceals a substantial shift. That may change where applicants and experience are coming from, but it does not prove that workers can move easily between roles or locations.

Pay is rising more slowly than living costs

Average hourly pay was \$34.14 in September, up 0.9% over the year. Consumer prices rose 3.3%. After allowing for inflation, average pay bought about 2.3% less than a year earlier. Individual circumstances differ, but the result makes retention, predictable hours and the practical cost of taking a job worth examining even while the unemployment rate falls.



September 2026 versus September 2025 (%)

Annual output growth was uneven across industries

Saskatchewan's real gross domestic product, a measure of output after allowing for price changes, rose about 2.2% in 2025. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting grew 15.2%, while manufacturing fell 6.2%. These are annual results, not September 2026 production. They show why the provincial total cannot describe every supplier, employer or local economy.

Trade exposure deserves its own staffing assumptions

Merchandise exports totalled \$43.58 billion in 2025, down 3.9% from 2024. A lower export value can reflect prices as well as volumes, and this measure excludes services and trade with other provinces. Export-facing employers should connect staffing to their own orders, margins and customer exposure rather than infer a province-wide cause from the annual total.

Construction supports preparation rather than a blanket expansion

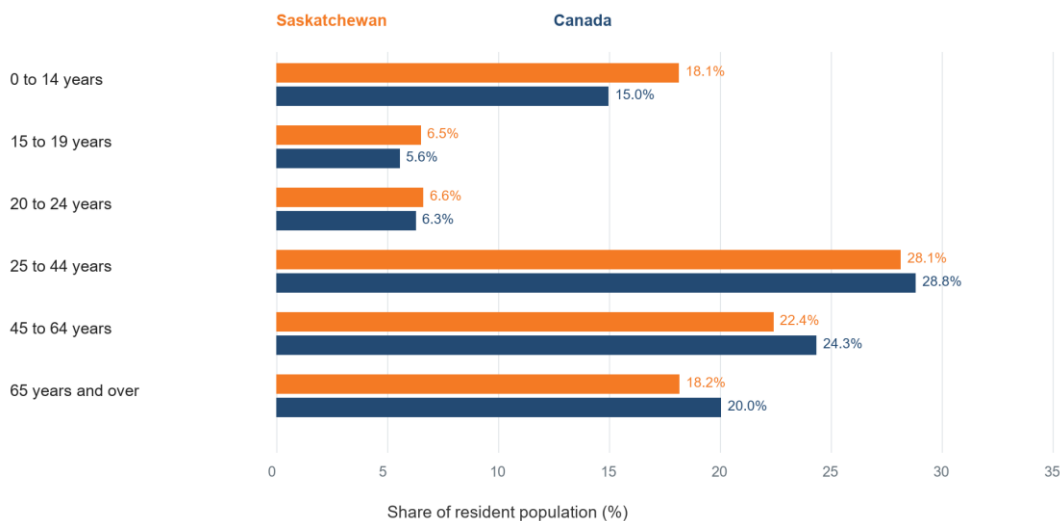
July building investment rose 5.7% from June to \$612.8 million on the seasonally adjusted current-dollar measure. This supports attention to project delivery and supplier capacity. It does not establish that every project is funded, that costs are unchanged or that all roles will be needed at the same time. Identify the commitments that would make recruitment or training worthwhile now.

Housing starts point in two directions

The September monthly housing-start rate fell 35.7% from August, while the six-month trend rose 5.0% to 7,909 annualized units. One volatile month should not be treated as a collapse, and a rising trend should not be treated as completed housing. Builders and suppliers need to compare the pipeline with financing, confirmed work and the timing of skilled labour needs.

A younger growing population creates a development task

Saskatchewan had an estimated 1,278,402 residents on July 1, up 0.96% from a year earlier. Children under 15 represented 18.1% of residents, compared with 15.0% nationally. A younger population can support future workforce growth, but the benefit depends on education, practical entry routes and opportunities to stay. It is not a count of people ready to fill today's vacancies.



Population diversity is a reason to examine access

The 2021 Census counted 187,885 people reporting Indigenous identity and 137,620 immigrants in Saskatchewan's private household population. These categories overlap and remain dated 2021. They are not measures of current hiring availability. Employers should ask how selection requirements, qualification assessment and development partnerships affect access to real opportunities without assuming a shared barrier or a shared level of readiness.

What the Bank of Canada Surveys Add

National business evidence sharpens the local question

The Bank of Canada's Business Outlook Survey found soft hiring intentions despite better sales prospects. Reported labour difficulties remained concentrated in trades, technical work and rural locations. These are national findings, not Saskatchewan estimates.

Consumer caution matters to local demand

The Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations found improved financial confidence but weaker spending plans. This is national context, not proof that Saskatchewan customers are cutting purchases. Local businesses should test it against actual sales, bookings and delayed orders.

Use the surveys to test a decision

For Saskatchewan leaders, the value is the question these findings raise: can the organization meet committed work with its current people, and where could a specific capability become the constraint? The surveys do not establish how many provincial jobs will be created. Most interviews preceded the late-August breakdown in Canada–United States trade talks, so the timing matters when using the outlook.

Where Occupation and Youth Evidence Matters

The province's matched occupation screen identifies two High groups and one Elevated group. General trades employment rose 28.2% over the year while second-quarter vacancies rose 38.6%. Sales and service support also showed growth in both measures. In the broader sales and services group, employment rose while vacancies fell. These patterns call for different responses; they are not three independent shortages that can be added together.

Youth unemployment fell from 13.3% to 11.0% between September 2025 and September 2026. Youth participation also fell, from 64.0% to 59.9%, and the youth employment rate declined. Lower unemployment did not mean that a larger share of young people was working. Separately, 12% of people aged 15 to 29 were not in employment, education or training (NEET) in 2025. That annual measure is not a September result or the same age group as the monthly youth figures.

Average usual weekly hours in the main job were 36.8 in Saskatchewan, down from 37.2 in September 2025. These are unadjusted usual hours, not actual hours worked in a particular week. Changes may reflect the mix of work and do not, by themselves, prove that people want more hours.

The Human Capital Signal

These editorial readings identify where to investigate and act. They combine evidence with different reference periods; they are not an official index or a count of labour shortages.

Dimension	Reading	Evidence and leadership meaning
Talent availability	Mixed	Check the match between active applicants and essential role requirements.
Workforce participation	Weakening	Participation fell both monthly and annually.
Wage pressure	Purchasing power watch	Inflation-adjusted average wages fell 2.3% over the year.
Youth attachment	Watch	Lower youth unemployment did not bring stronger participation.
Skills pressure	Targeted	2 High and 1 Elevated matched groups; investigate rather than add them.
Employer conditions	Uneven	Industry and employer-category results differ.
Leadership urgency	Elevated	Test staffing commitments against demand and time needed to build capability.

What It Means for Human Capital

Attraction and recruitment. Match the job to the practical conditions of taking it. For a project or rural role, examine travel, housing, schedules, qualifications and supervision. Track where otherwise suitable applicants leave the process. The provincial unemployment rate cannot tell an employer whether the real problem is a missing skill, an avoidable selection delay or a job that is difficult to accept.

Workforce planning and talent development. Translate funded projects into a timetable of capabilities rather than a single headcount target. Where trades or support roles remain difficult, compare external recruitment with apprenticeships, supervised entry and internal progression. A younger population creates a reason to invest in pathways; it does not remove the need to define the work and provide experienced supervision.

Leadership development and retention. Participation among older people and women fell over the year, but the evidence does not establish why. Managers should examine their own scheduling, progression and workload evidence before assigning a cause. With average pay losing purchasing power, test whether job costs and working conditions are creating avoidable departures. A pay decision should reflect the role and employee evidence, not the provincial average alone.

What Leaders Should Consider Doing

Put project demand and workforce supply in the same discussion. Finance, operations and human resources should agree which work is funded, when capability is needed and what delay would cost. Use those answers to sequence hiring, development and contracting. Stronger construction investment is a reason to prepare; weaker participation is a reason to make the plan realistic.

Test one practical route into durable work. Select a role with a clear business need, identify the skills required at entry and define the learning that can follow. Work with appropriate education or community partners

where they can improve the pathway. Judge the result by progression, time to become effective, retention and delivery quality. Population identity or immigration status must never substitute for an assessment of individual capability.

Make retention an operating responsibility. Ask which departure would disrupt a service, project or customer relationship and what can reasonably be done before it happens. Compare the cost of a targeted response with vacancy time, overtime and lost delivery. The opportunity is to preserve useful capability while offering credible work, not simply to keep every position unchanged.

What to Watch

Watch whether lower unemployment is joined by stronger employment. A rising employment rate with stable or improving participation would support a more positive reading. If the labour force keeps shrinking while employment remains flat, retain the warning about attachment. Require persistence and check revisions before changing a long-term workforce plan.

Watch whether investment becomes funded local work. Compare building investment and the housing trend with actual project starts, supplier commitments and completion schedules. The case for earlier recruitment strengthens when funded demand and role-specific constraints coincide. It weakens when projects slip, orders soften or a gain proves concentrated in a small number of developments.

Watch the route from opportunity to participation. Follow youth employment, full-time work and participation alongside the province's population growth. Pair wages with the same month's inflation. Better results would mean that more residents are securing viable work and employers can maintain needed capability, not simply that the headline jobless rate has fallen.

Explore the Evidence

The interactive report lets readers explore the labour, wage, occupation, economic and population evidence. Check the reference period shown on each figure; the report does not treat annual or Census results as current monthly observations.

[Explore the interactive Power BI evidence dashboard](#)

Keep the Next Workforce Decision in View

See the workforce story behind Saskatchewan's headline. Subscribe to THE SASKATCHEWAN IMPERATIVE for a monthly assessment of economic demand, workforce participation and the leadership decisions they change. Follow the province's opportunities and risks with the national context kept in view.

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Sources and Interpretation Notes

Reference periods and coverage. October edition; September labour evidence released October 9 2026. The StatCan values use the October 19–20 reconciled vintage. A StatCan service interruption prevented a new release-completeness check on October 22. Counts use the appropriate survey universe, not total resident population. Rounded totals and components may differ. Annual 2025 and Census 2021 observations retain their actual years.

Labour market. Statistics Canada tables 14-10-0287-01 for headline seasonally adjusted estimates; 14-10-0017-01 for unadjusted demographic comparisons; 14-10-0355-01 for industries; 14-10-0288-01 for class of

worker; 14-10-0042-01 for usual main-job hours. National Labour Force Survey totals exclude the territories and have source coverage exclusions. Estimates are subject to sampling variability and revision; no untested claim of statistical significance is made.

Pay and prices. Average hourly wages use 14-10-0063-01 and all-items Consumer Price Index uses 18-10-0004-01, September 2026 and September 2025. Real wage growth divides the wage growth factor by the price growth factor, subtracts one and expresses the result as a percentage. Employee composition affects the averages; these are not individual pay changes.

Occupations and youth. Occupation matching pairs September unadjusted 14-10-0421-01 with second-quarter vacancies in 14-10-0444-01, using corresponding prior-year periods. Vacancy quality flags A to D are retained. Groups in the National Occupational Classification can overlap. Missing or suppressed values are not zeros. Annual youth not in employment, education or training uses 37-10-0196-01, ages 15 to 29, 2025; the 12% estimate has standard error 0.8 percentage point. Monthly youth figures cover ages 15 to 24 and are not interchangeable with the annual measure.

Economic activity. Monthly national gross domestic product uses 36-10-0434-01, July 2026. Quarterly expenditure output uses 36-10-0104-01, second quarter 2026, non-annualized quarter-to-quarter change. Saskatchewan annual output uses 36-10-0711-01, 2025, chained 2017 dollars; industries are not automatically additive. National monthly merchandise trade uses 12-10-0011-01, August 2026, balance-of-payments basis. Provincial annual merchandise trade uses 12-10-0173-01, 2025, customs basis. These trade definitions are not interchangeable.

Construction and population. Building investment uses 34-10-0293-01, July 2026, seasonally adjusted current dollars. Housing starts use 34-10-0158-01 and 34-10-0159-01, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation via StatCan, September 2026, all areas. Annualized start rates are not completions. Resident population uses 17-10-0009-01 and annual age estimates use 17-10-0005-01, July 1 2026. Census identity and immigration use 98-10-0264-01 and 98-10-0347-01, 2021 private-household populations; categories overlap.

Bank of Canada surveys. Both third-quarter 2026 reports were released October 19 and downloaded October 22. Business interviews ran August 6 to September 2; the consumer panel ran August 5 to 27. Most interviews preceded the late-August breakdown in Canada–United States trade talks. These are national survey findings, not Saskatchewan estimates, forecasts or observed outcomes. Complete report HTML and release data exports are retained locally.

Interpretation. Analysis, Human Capital Signal readings and recommendations are DCI judgments. Associations and survey intentions do not establish causes or guarantee business outcomes.

[Statistics Canada table catalogue](#)

[Bank of Canada Business Outlook Survey third quarter 2026](#)

[Bank of Canada Canadian Survey of Consumer Expectations third quarter 2026](#)