



LIBRARY



This profile is intended to provide CUPE members with basic information about the sector they work in from a national perspective. Find all our sector profiles and more information online at cupe.ca

CUPE's 22,300 library workers provide front-line services to Canadians across the country. Approximately 12,200 of CUPE's library workers are in 116 stand-alone public library locals, while the rest belong to locals with municipal, university, college and school board members.

The primary job classifications are librarian, library clerk, library archive technician, and page. The vast majority of library workers are women (85 per cent), while racialized workers account for about 12 per cent of CUPE library members.

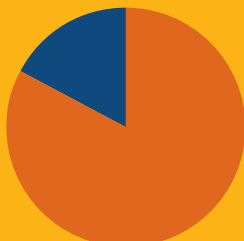
Many library workers are in part-time or casual positions. CUPE represents 80 per cent of all unionized library workers in Canada. The majority are in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia, with members in most other provinces.

Funding

Federal, provincial and municipal governments all fund libraries. Municipalities are the largest funders, spending more than the federal and provincial governments combined. The federal government provides funding exclusively to national libraries, while the provinces and territories fund public, school, university, and college libraries.

Federal library funding has been inconsistent over the years, and has been dramatically reduced over the past decade or more. The federal government significantly reduced the library workforce and closed a number of federal departmental libraries. These closures meant the end of interlibrary loans from those collections, threats to irreplaceable documentation and the loss of skilled researchers.

Provincial and municipal library budgets have also faced serious threats. In 2013, Newfoundland and Labrador's government cut the library budget drastically. More recently, the province's Liberal government announced plans to close 54 libraries, to save just under \$1 million. The closures would see almost 60 women in rural communities lose their jobs. CUPE 2329, the local representing the province's library workers, and CUPE Newfoundland and Labrador campaigned to win a temporary halt to any library closures until a review is completed.



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The rise of part-time work hurts workers and affects service quality.

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Library workers are getting creative to keep libraries public.

Precarious work is extremely common in the library sector.

The review is expected to be finished in the fall of 2016.

Toronto has also seen serious threats to its library funding. In 2011, the city tried to cut library funding by 10 per cent. Members of CUPE 4948 fought back with a campaign that reduced the scope of the cuts and even brought about a budget increase for 2014.

ISSUES

Rise of precarious work

Precarious work (part-time, temporary, casual or contract work) is extremely common in the library sector. Workers in public library boards are more likely to be precariously employed, along with

airlines, health and social services, and long-term care workers. CUPE’s 2014 membership survey found that permanent, part-time employment is highest among public library board workers, at 46 per cent, with 70 per cent of library clerks working part-time. Many library workers work for years before securing a full-time job.

Many part-time workers hold down several jobs to make ends meet. Split shifts and lack of guaranteed hours make coordinating with other jobs and achieving work-life balance difficult. The lack of full-time work opportunities makes it difficult to attract young workers into the field. The rise of precarious work not only affects workers, but also has an impact on the quality and scope of library services.

Health and safety

Workplace health and safety is an ongoing concern. A CUPE BC survey of over 500 library workers found that library workers “witness, and in many cases are responsible for dealing with, verbal threats, intoxicated patrons, drug use, theft, and viewing of explicit material.” Over 65 per cent of respondents reported exposure to biohazards like feces, urine, used needles, and bed bugs.

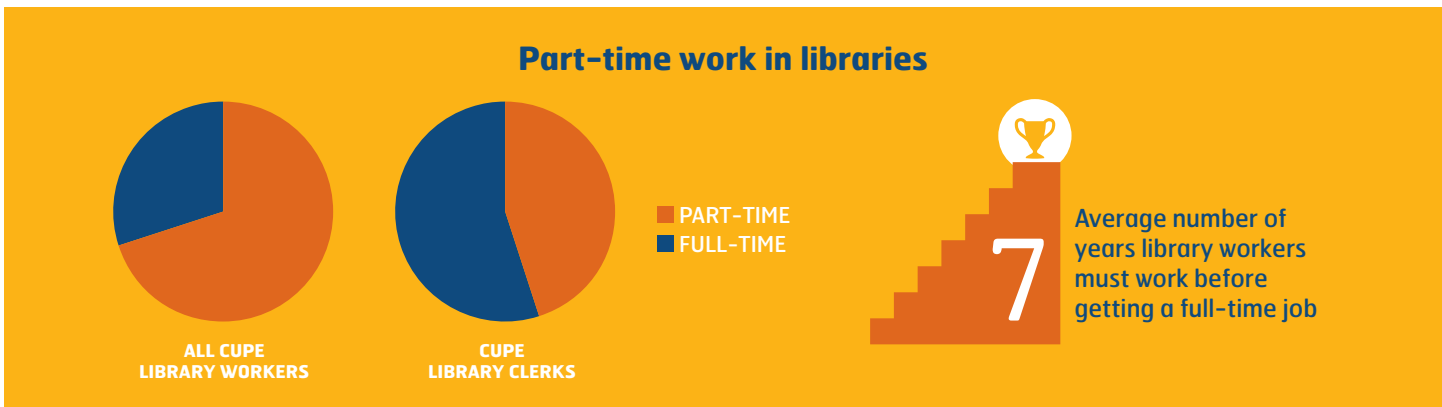
Public libraries are among the last safe, public spaces that are open to all. They are a safe haven for people who are homeless, or battling addictions or mental health challenges. Library workers interact with marginalized and vulnerable populations daily, and are often called upon to perform duties more commonly associated with social work – but with little to no training in skills such as conflict resolution.

Sometimes situations escalate and workers are subjected to physical or verbal violence and harassment. Library workers are especially at risk when working alone.

In addition, many libraries are located in old or under-maintained buildings. Indoor air quality issues are common, including mold, asbestos and off-gassing from decomposing microfilm and film.

Technological change

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is an electronic chip that replaces traditional barcodes. It is used to identify and track books, DVDs, CDs and other library materials. RFID is a threat to library workers because it allows patrons to check materials in and out of the library without staff assistance.



Initially touted as helping existing staff, RFID is increasingly used by management as a way to cut positions. The North Vancouver District Public Library introduced this technology system-wide in 2009. RFID technology is expected to be operating in all branches of the Ottawa Public Library in 2017. And the Halifax Public Library began introducing RFID in 2013.

Libraries as community centres

A library is often a central community hub. Meeting rooms are used by community groups, library staff host education programs and clubs, and the publicly accessible computer terminals are so popular that users line up. There are services for seniors, employment supports, language and reading groups, citizenship test preparation, and help for newcomers to build their resumes.

After the 2008 recession, visits to libraries surged as community members

flocked there to search for jobs, upgrade their education and sometimes just find a safe place to be.

Privatization and restructuring

Privatization affects libraries in various ways. A common threat is contracting out of bibliographical services (ordering, processing, cataloguing material, and technology).

The move to self-service checkout and returns is also common, leading to fewer staff positions and a decrease in the valued frontline service culture. Further hurting quality frontline service, private contractors tend to cut corners, lay off or hire fewer staff, and try to cut wages and benefits.

Public-private partnerships (P3s) are a new threat. The City of Ottawa is considering a P3 for the Ottawa Public Library's new main branch. The library

board is evaluating twelve sites, both publicly- and privately owned, for the new facility.

In Coquitlam, BC, the 70 members of CUPE 561 have launched a campaign lobbying city council and the library director to cancel an \$800,000 restructuring plan. The plan would create six new management positions. The local is arguing the \$800,000 would be better spent on new books and resources.

BARGAINING

Most library locals bargain directly with their employer. In some areas, lead local or limited coordinated bargaining is part of an overall bargaining strategy. For example, in the Metro Vancouver area, libraries negotiated a regional wage settlement and then bargained benefits and other language at individual tables. Negotiated annual wage increases continue to be small in the library sector, at less than two per cent.

The summer of 2016 will be remembered as the summer of labour disruption in Ontario's library sector. In late June, the almost 60 members of CUPE 2974 in Essex County went on strike over the employer's demands to cut sick time in half. Workers in public library boards are already the least likely to be paid for sick days.

In Mississauga, 390 members of CUPE 1989 went on strike for three weeks in July. Their new contract brings pages, who make up nearly 30 per cent of the membership, from near-minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The members also won improvements for part-time workers, who make up more than half the workforce.

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Another increasingly important issue for bargaining is the trend toward de-professionalization and de-skilling. Under the guise of flexibility to accommodate reorganization and longer working hours, workers in lower-paid classifications are being required to do work traditionally done by higher-paid classifications.

To address a related problem, CUPE 2202 in Kingston, Ont., bargained language requiring students on education placements to be scheduled above and beyond the regular staff complement. This protects staff job security and ensures a higher level of training for the students on placement.

PENSIONS

New pension information for CUPE members working in stand-alone public libraries shows that about 92 per cent of these members are able to participate in a registered pension plan, with a defined benefit plan as the most common type of pension.

Library workers employed by schools, universities, colleges, and municipalities often have more access to pension plans than those working for not-for-profit boards.

Most part-time and casual workers are excluded from or must meet high standards to be eligible for workplace pension plans. This hits workers at smaller library boards, largely staffed by part-time workers, especially hard.

ALLIES

CUPE has engaged with allies in creative ways to promote and protect libraries. In Newfoundland and Labrador, CUPE participated in a pilot project on early literacy facilitation with the government and community partners. CUPE 2329 members facilitated the 12-session program on early literacy and play for

parents, caregivers and children up to age three.

In Toronto, CUPE 4948 does a tremendous amount of community outreach around the city budget. Every year the local uses *Word on the Street*, a national book and literacy fair, to connect with the 250,000 attendees about its campaigns against budget cuts. The local's "librarian glasses" photo booth has been a smash hit.

CUPE is also active with the Canadian Library Association, the voice of Canada's library community, in order to be more responsive to library workers' needs.

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