

I N V I S I B L E WORKERS

HEALTH RISKS FOR TEMPORARY AGENCY WORKERS

2016 REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH FOR MONTRÉAL

Over the past few years, use of temporary employment agencies has been rising in Québec, particularly in the Greater Montréal area. For his 2016 report, Montréal's director of public health assembled data on the working conditions and health problems of agency workers, and the legal protections in effect. Based on the information collected, the report puts forward solutions to improve the health and safety of those workers, who are some of society's most vulnerable citizens.

Temporary Employment Agencies

Revenue Québec defines a temporary employment agency as a business "whose activities consist in offering personnel placement services or temporary help services that consist in providing workers needed to meet the temporary workforce needs of the client" in return for fees or other remuneration.

Key statistics for Québec:

- Over 80% of these agencies are located in Greater Montréal (Island of Montréal, Laval, Laurentides, Lanaudière and Montérégie).
- From 2009 to 2014, the employment services sector, which includes these agencies, created 75% more jobs than any other employment sector.
- In 2014, agencies generated operating revenues of \$1.4 billion.

When comparing the same types of jobs, the wage gap between temporary agency workers and permanent employees is higher than for any other form of temporary work in Canada: salaries are 18% lower for men and 23% lower for women.

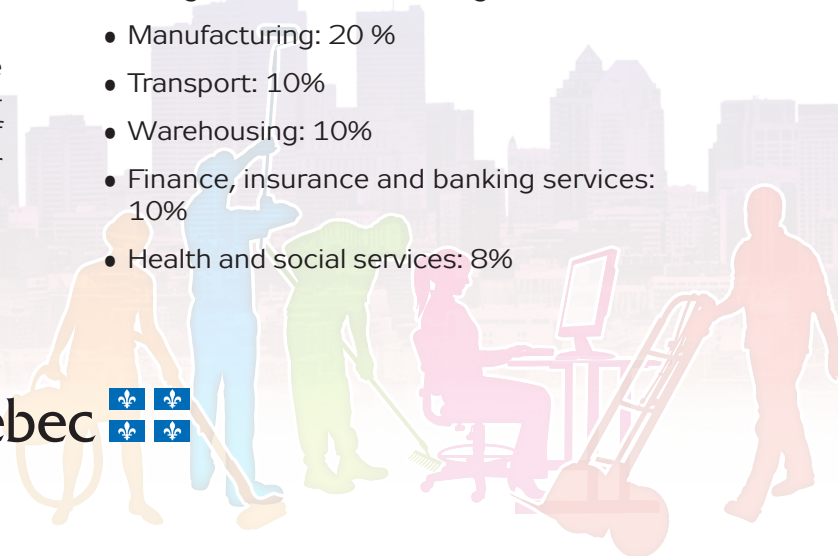
Agency Workers

In 2012, a survey of 1000 temporary employment agency workers in Québec commissioned by the Commission des normes du travail provided a first look at these workers:

- 60% are men
- 41% are under 35 years old
- 45% have college (24%) or university (21%) degrees
- 86% had jobs for which few skills are required
- 81% live in the Greater Montréal area – 53% on the Island of Montréal

The main employment sectors to which workers were assigned were the following:

- Manufacturing: 20 %
- Transport: 10%
- Warehousing: 10%
- Finance, insurance and banking services: 10%
- Health and social services: 8%



Occupational Injuries

According to studies conducted around the world, workers from temporary employment agencies are at higher risk of occupation injury. For instance, the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) has estimated that the risk of occupational injury is *high to extreme* for workers from the "temporary help services" and "professional employer organizations" sectors, which include the "Employment placement agencies" classification.

For the Greater Montréal area, CNESST data on reported and compensated occupational injuries indicate that agency workers' injuries result in compensation periods that are 10 days longer, on average; this suggests that those workers' injuries are more serious.

Average duration of compensation period for occupational injuries accepted by the CNESST for Greater Montréal, by type of injury, 2005 to 2012

Type of injury	Agency workers	Other workers	Difference
Musculoskeletal problems ¹	136 days	117 days	+ 19 days
Traumatic accidents ²	90 days	80 days	+ 10 days
Health problems ³	113 days	115 days	- 2 days
All types of injuries	107 days	97 days	+ 10 days

1. Sprains, strains, tears, tendinitis, low back pain, etc.
2. Bruises, contusions, sprains, strains, tears, cuts, lacerations, fractures, etc.
3. Deafness, asbestosis, silicosis, etc.

The full report is available at
dsp.santemontreal.qc.ca/travailleursagence

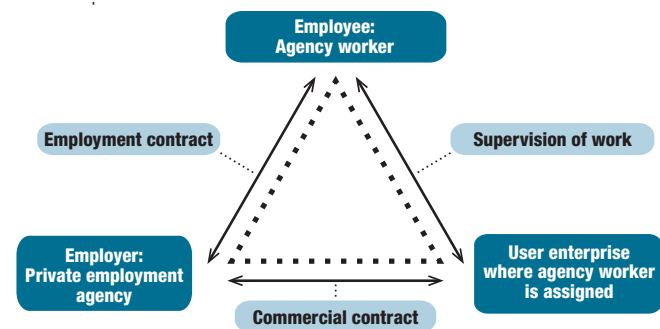
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Three-way Relationship: Agency – Client Employer – Worker

The *Act respecting occupational health and safety* is unclear as to who is legally responsible for preventing workplace injuries among temporary agency workers. The three-way employment relationship is particularly problematic:

- Agencies hire, manage and pay the workers, but often have no control over working conditions.
- Client employers temporarily assign agency workers to given tasks, but are not officially recognized as having the accompanying responsibilities (for example, providing personal protective equipment or training).



Based on an illustration of the International Confederation of Private Employment Agencies (CIETT): *The agency work industry around the world* (Brussels, 2009).

Possible Solutions

- Review provincial legislation, drawing inspiration from laws in Ontario and Australia, to ensure that employers who use the services of temporary agency workers clearly have the responsibility for the health and safety of those workers, whether or not the latter come from temporary employment agencies.
- Enhance knowledge related to precarious employment and health risks by carrying out surveys and studies to improve monitoring of conditions.
- Modify interventions by the occupational health network by adopting a provincial policy designed to include agency workers in prevention activities.