

Women, work and COVID-19

Priorities for supporting women
and the economy

Katherine Scott





CCPA

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Executive summary

COVID-19 HAS BEEN particularly hard on women in Canada, especially lower-income women experiencing intersecting inequalities based on race, gender identity, class, disability, immigration status, and other social identities. This study focuses on three areas: (1) It examines the impact of COVID-19 on women's participation in the labour market since the pandemic struck in spring of 2020; (2) It assesses the impact of federal and provincial government programs and income supports through a gendered and intersectional lens; (3) It examines gaps in the system and proposes measures to help women get through the COVID crisis and ensure their speedy return to the labour market once the worst of the crisis is over.

Among the key findings in this study:

Women's economic security is fragile: While many women are working on the front lines of COVID-19 in the caring and service sectors, women also represent the majority of workers in sectors hardest hit by the economic shutdown in the first and second waves of COVID-19 community infection. In total, 2.8 million women lost their job or were working less than half of their regular hours as a result of the March 2020 economic lockdown. By the end of 2020, female workers were working 8% fewer hours in the aggregate than before the pandemic, while the December employment rate (55.3% for women 15+ years) was 2.7 percentage points below the rate posted in February, the same level of employment as in 2000.

Unpaid caring demands impacting women's paid work: Following the spring closures of businesses, schools and services, close to 900,000 female

workers (aged 15–64 years) left the labour market—the large majority left because there was no work at hand, others had to juggle increased family responsibilities and, for many, it was a combination of both. In two short months, the labour force participation rate of women aged 15–64 years fell from 75.6% to 68.5%—a level not seen in over 40 years. The participation rate rebounded through the summer, reaching 74.8% in August, and has since stalled. In December 2020 there were 90,000 more women outside of the labour market compared to February 2020.

Young women particularly hard hit: Women aged 15–24 experienced the greatest initial COVID-related employment losses in March and April 2020. As of December 2020, employment for this group was down -12.1% from pre-pandemic February levels and their employment rate was still 7.1 percentage points below February levels (at 52.3%). The second round of closures in accommodation, food services, information, culture and recreation sectors, which account for almost 30% of employment among young women, has represented another setback in their economic recovery.

Many mothers exiting the workforce: Between February and April 2020, 620,000 mothers with children 12 and under lost working hours. This included a drop in employment of 235,000 and an increase of 385,000 absences from work, affecting 27.2% of all mothers with young children who were working in February 2020. By August 2020, fathers had effectively recouped all of their employment losses, while 12% of mothers who were working in February 2020 were still without work or working less than half of their regular hours. The situation for mothers did not improve in fall 2020. The November jobs report from Statistics Canada notes that 54.9% more mothers with children 12 and under were working less than half of their usual hours compared to a year ago. Looking at total hours worked, by December single-parent mothers with children under 6 were working -38.5% fewer hours than in February, while single mothers with school-aged children (6–12 years) were working -11.7% fewer hours.

The impact of COVID-19 on women’s work has been unequal: Fully half (52%) of all low-wage workers earning \$14 an hour or less were laid off or lost the majority of their hours between February and April. This included 58% of low-wage women and 45% of men in this earnings bracket. For those in the top earnings group, with wages of more than \$48 an hour, only 1% lost employment or a majority of hours and, by the end of the summer they had more than fully recovered. There was an economic rebound through the summer until the second wave of community infections triggered a second wave of employment losses among vulnerable workers, which has continued

into 2021. Workers in the rest of the economy did not miss a beat, continuing to recoup employment losses through to the end of the year.

Racialized and immigrant women disproportionately impacted: Job losses and reductions in working hours were particularly high among recent immigrants to Canada (those who have immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years), a large majority of whom are racialized and working in precarious jobs that carry a high risk of exposure to COVID-19. Over one-third of recent immigrants (-37.7%) who were employed in February 2020 had lost their job or the majority of their working hours by the end of April 2020—eight percentage points above the losses posted by Canadian-born workers (-29.1%).

Inequities exposed by COVID-19: In July 2020, there was almost a seven percentage point difference in the employment rate between racialized and non-racialized women (57.7% vs. 64.4%) and more than an eight percentage point difference in their unemployment rate (17.4% vs. 9.2%). Black, racialized, and Indigenous women working in hard-hit sectors and occupations bore the brunt of the first wave of employment losses. These gaps narrowed somewhat between July and December 2020, but they are still significant and may widen further in the wake of second-wave closures. Indigenous women have fared the worst. The employment rate fell from 55.6% to 49.9% among women living off reserve between the three-month period ending in February 2020 and the three-month period ending in May 2020. While Indigenous men and non-Indigenous people experienced a rebound starting in May, Indigenous women's employment rate continued to fall through the summer and fall of 2020, dropping to 47.8% by December—a reflection, in part, of their concentration in hard-hit employment sectors, as well as the heightened demands related to unpaid labour and care, particularly for mothers.

Income benefits have protected women: Income security programs have played a critical role for women, offsetting a devastating collapse in employment earnings. Between April and September 2020, the CERB provided an unprecedented level of support to 8.9 million individuals, including 4.3 million women (48.5% of total recipients) and 4,700 gender-diverse people (0.5%). In the program's last month, 54.8% of the roughly 4 million CERB beneficiaries were women. Large numbers of new immigrants and racialized Canadians were receiving support as well, comprising 13% and 14% of total September applicants, respectively.

Women need ongoing support: In January 2021, there were 2.2 million unemployed workers receiving EI benefits, half of which were women. This represents a significant increase in both the number of female EI

beneficiaries and their share as compared to men, directly as a result of the new “temporary” eligibility rules for EI introduced in October and the new round of economic closures. Indeed: the number of female recipients in mid-January 2021 was 6.5 times higher than in February 2020. Another 1.6 million workers had received the CRB between October 2020 and January 2021, including roughly 700,000 women (45.8% of applicants).

But many are still falling through the cracks: At the same time, many of the most vulnerable continue to fall through the cracks, including those who have not qualified for any direct support at all, such as the estimated 1.8 million migrant and undocumented workers working on the frontlines of the crisis or sex workers who do not qualify for CERB or other emergency income supports. They are at greater risk of contracting the virus and experiencing employment loss, yet have access to the fewest protections and resources.

Investments in care are hit and miss: With the onset of the pandemic, the holes in Canada’s care economy and related social infrastructure have compounded the health care and economic crisis, and further exacerbated existing gender disparities. The failure to address the crisis in child care has been profoundly troubling. Federal funds allocated to support the crisis (\$625 million) fell far short of the \$2.5 billion that advocates were calling for to stabilize revenues, curb staff losses and enhance service delivery to meet new safety standards for children and staff. Essential worker top up programs have also delivered concrete support to women workers, notably in Quebec. But five out of 10 provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia) chose to leave federal money for essential workers on the table—a total of \$126 million. Alberta finally announced its program for essential workers in the public and private sector in February 2021, waiting nine months before confirming its support.

Toward a gender just recovery: The COVID-19 pandemic is shaping up to be a significant setback for women’s economic security, especially the most marginalized. They have suffered the most profound losses and are experiencing the greatest difficulties emerging from the crisis. The pandemic has also shown the critical role that the social safety net plays, or fails to play, in times of crisis. In Canada, the response of public health care systems and the emergency income benefits have helped to reduce, but not halt, the damaging spread and economic impact of the virus. But investments in women’s employment—and especially in caring services—have largely been an afterthought, exposing the systematic undervaluing of women’s paid and unpaid work. Over the long term, a successful strategy for women in the economy has to create the enabling conditions for diverse women to

engage in paid employment, address women’s structural disadvantages and foster the creation of decent work that delivers a fair income and enjoys employment and social protections. The goal is to ensure that wealth, work and care responsibilities are more fairly distributed, and that everyone—racialized women, women with disabilities, low-income women, gender diverse people—can engage in the economy on equitable and just terms, in ways that generate shared prosperity and well-being.

Introduction

CANADA IS STILL in the grip of this global COVID-19 crisis, which has exacerbated long-standing inequities. Economic losses, in particular, have fallen heavily on women¹ and most dramatically on lower-income women experiencing intersecting inequalities based on race, gender identity, class, disability, immigration status, and other social identities. For single mothers, the economic lockdown wiped out two decades of economic progress in a single a stroke.

Women have been sent to the front lines and they've been sidelined in the pandemic. As primary caregivers and care workers in the public and private sectors, women are at the forefront of the crisis, containing the pandemic and providing needed care and support. Women also represent the majority of workers in sectors hardest hit by the economic shutdown in the first and second waves of COVID-19 community infection. Today, more women are back at work, but not in the same numbers as before COVID-19 struck and women's economic security is fragile.

In many provinces, the lack of coherent government plans to safely reopen schools and government refusal to extend stabilization funding to child care centres have created significant barriers for mothers looking to re-enter the workforce. Social norms and traditional caregiving roles of women, which have contributed to gender gaps in pay, are now pushing mothers, more than fathers, out of the labour market and into full-time caregiving and homeschooling.

Ahead lies tremendous economic hardship. Prior to the pandemic, women earned 42% of household income and were, on average, responsible for almost half of household spending.² The precipitous collapse in employment and steep rise in unpaid labour, shouldered largely by women, will inevitably lead to higher levels of low income and poverty, not just in the coming months—for years to come.

This report looks at the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economic security of women in Canada and the current efforts to respond to urgent economic need in the short- to medium-term, as well as demands for fundamental systemic change moving forward. Do Canada's pandemic responses measure up? Are they providing essential financial support to those in need? Are they working to eliminate systemic barriers facing women—and marginalized women, in particular—in the labour market? Are they setting a course for an intersectional feminist recovery—one that not only recovers lost ground, but also tackles long-standing economic disparities?

It presents an overview of both trends and policy responses, recognizing women's varied experiences of the pandemic across the country,³ as well as differences in the degree to which concerns about gender equality have figured in federal and provincial recovery planning. Its goal is to provide crucial context to assess the differential gendered impact of the economic crisis and the current policy and program prescriptions on offer.

A report such as this one that leans heavily on quantitative research has its limits, but hopefully it can identify important issues and help to target policy areas and particular groups that demand attention from Canada's policy-makers and community leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic is putting Canada's commitment to gender equity to the test. What's needed now is the political will to tackle systemic and overlapping barriers to gender equity and to chart a course for the future; one in which women in all of their diversity can lead full and equal lives. This is not about getting “back to normal” or building back from the “she-cession.”⁴ This is a broader vision to address the long-term and pressing challenges of our time that impact gender equality, such as spiralling income disparities, racial injustice, profound ableism and the current climate emergency. This is a vision for a safer, more resilient, and gender-just future for everyone.

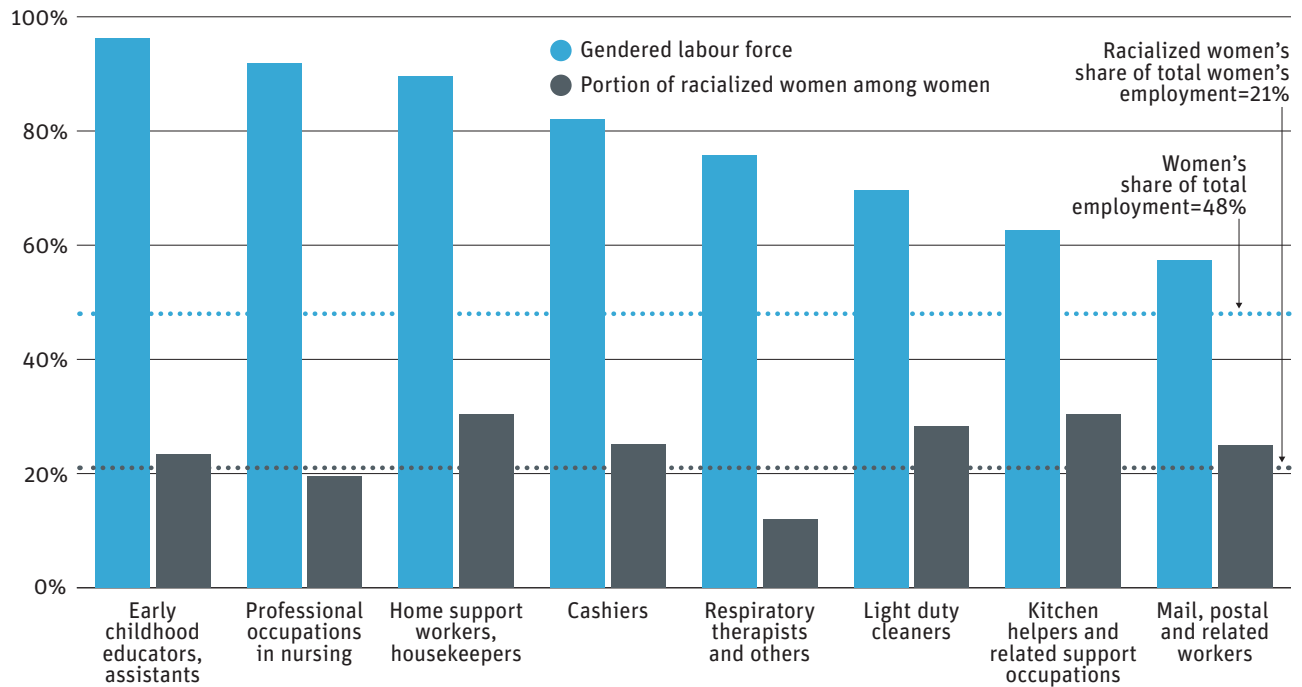
Women and the pandemic economy

FROM HEALTH TO the economy, physical security to income security, the COVID-19 crisis has magnified and exacerbated existing gender disparities. The economic, health, and social fallout of the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women worldwide, including here in Canada, and those who belong to Indigenous, Black or racialized communities,⁵ immigrants and refugees, women living with disabilities and members of trans and queer communities.⁶

As primary caregivers and care workers in the public and private sectors, women are at the forefront of the crisis, containing the pandemic and providing needed care and support. Canada's primary care and long-term care systems are staffed largely by women, a significant share of which come from racialized and newcomer communities, as Figure 1 shows.⁷ More than 90% of nurses are women, 75% of respiratory therapists are women, and 80% of those working in medical labs are women. Up to 90% of the Personal Support Workers (PSWs) who do the lion's share of work in long-term care homes and home care are women. Over two-thirds of people who clean and disinfect our hospitals, our schools, and our office buildings are women.

These same women go home to start their double shift, providing care and support for their families, with the worry that they are bringing the virus with them.⁸ In some countries, COVID-19 infections among female health workers are two to three times higher than among male health workers.⁹ (This information is not being reported in Canada.) Frontline health care

FIGURE 1 Women’s and racialized women’s share of the work force in selected frontline occupations



Source: Statistics Canada—2016 Census. Catalogue number 98-400-X2016356.

workers are now, thankfully, getting their COVID-19 vaccine shots, but high levels of community transmission ensure that the coronavirus will remain a huge risk to their health—and the health of other essential workers, such as grocery store cashiers, educational workers, food manufacturers and warehouse employees—for many months to come.

Women also represent the majority of workers in sectors hardest hit by the spring 2020 economic shutdown and in the ongoing wave of layoffs in sectors such as accommodation and food services, personal care services and retail trade. Large numbers of racialized women and immigrants work in these areas, which include some of the lowest paying and most precarious jobs in Canada.¹⁰ These people have scant access to paid sick leave, health benefits or other workplace protections.¹¹ Those with precarious immigration status¹² or in criminalized work, such as sex workers, have no protection at all.¹³

In addition these economic losses, women have also faced a significant rise in unpaid labour, taking care of loved ones, homeschooling, provisioning supplies, and finding ways to shoulder the enormous economic and social burdens of our time. Before the pandemic, women’s ability to earn a

living and pursue financial security was already constrained by the unequal nature of unpaid care and domestic work.¹⁴ As schools, nurseries and child care centres shut down, these pressures increased both for women working outside of the home and the millions now working from home. Large numbers of women have ended up scaling back their hours or leaving paid employment altogether—sacrificing their financial security and the security of their families.¹⁵

Those from marginalized communities have been the most impacted. Least likely to have the financial means to withstand this crisis, they are experiencing the slowest return to work, the greatest caregiving challenges¹⁶ and the most severe knock-on effects, including increased levels of gender-based violence¹⁷ and unmet health needs.¹⁸ Forty per cent of women polled by Oxfam Canada in June 2020 reported feelings of stress, anxiety and depression, while 35% said that they felt isolated and lonely. These impacts were most acute for essential workers and racialized women.¹⁹

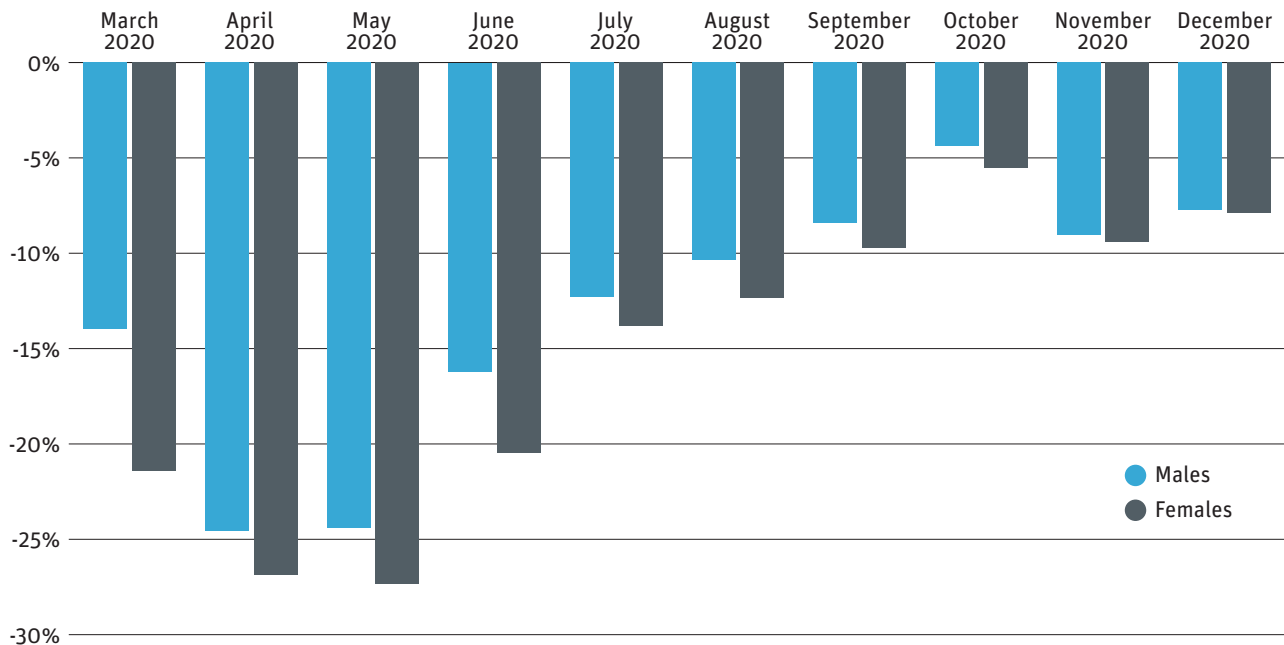
Unless recovery efforts focus on women experiencing the greatest risks and barriers, women's progress will be rolled back by decades and recovery will be prolonged, with massively damaging consequences for the whole of society.

Women's economic progress set back by decades in two short months

The coronavirus cut a swath across regions of the country and continues to drive our collective economic fortunes.²⁰ At the height of the lockdown, women were working 27% fewer hours, in the aggregate, than in February 2020—a difference of more than three percentage points with men (all figures seasonally adjusted in Figure 2). In total, 2.8 million women lost their job or were working less than half of their regular hours as a result of the March 2020 economic lockdown.²¹

Provinces with a high rate of female employment and relatively narrow wage gaps were not isolated from the economic damage that followed the arrival of the pandemic. Quebec had the highest female employment rate going into the pandemic; it also reported the one of the largest shares of female job loss in Canada, as did neighbouring Ontario, which had one of the lowest female employment rates pre-pandemic. By the end of April 2020, female employment had dropped by -17% Canada-wide, ranging from a high of -19.3% in Nova Scotia to a low -13.9% in Newfoundland and Labrador.

FIGURE 2 Percentage change in total actual hours worked (main job) each month relative to February 2020 among workers by gender (15+ years)

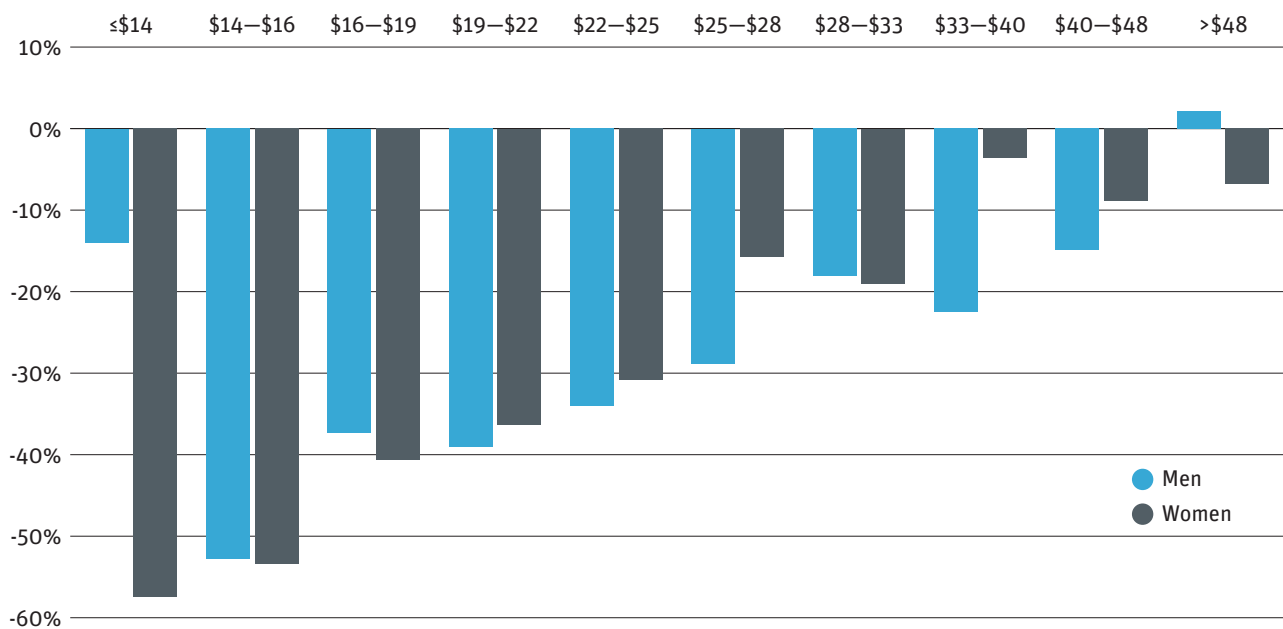


Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0032-01 Actual hours worked by job type, monthly, adjusted for seasonality.

Low-wage workers—overwhelmingly women, highly racialized and facing the greatest barriers to employment—accounted for the largest share of these losses. Fully half (52%) of all low-wage workers earning \$14 an hour or less were laid off or lost the majority of their hours between February and April.²² This included 58% of low-wage women and 45% of men in this earnings bracket. For those in the top earnings group, with wages of more than \$48 an hour, only 1% lost employment or a majority of hours and, by the end of the summer, they had more than fully recovered.²³

Job losses and reductions in working hours were particularly high among recent immigrants to Canada (those who have immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years), a large majority of whom are racialized²⁴ and working in precarious jobs that carry a high risk of exposure to COVID-19.²⁵ Over one-third of recent immigrants (-37.7%) who were employed in February 2020 had lost their job or the majority of their working hours by the end of April 2020—eight percentage points above the losses posted by Canadian-born workers (-29.1%).²⁶

FIGURE 3 Jobs and majority of hours lost among men and women (15+ years) by earnings, February to April 2020



Source: Statistics Canada, February and April 2020 Labour Force Survey PUMF, excludes self employed.

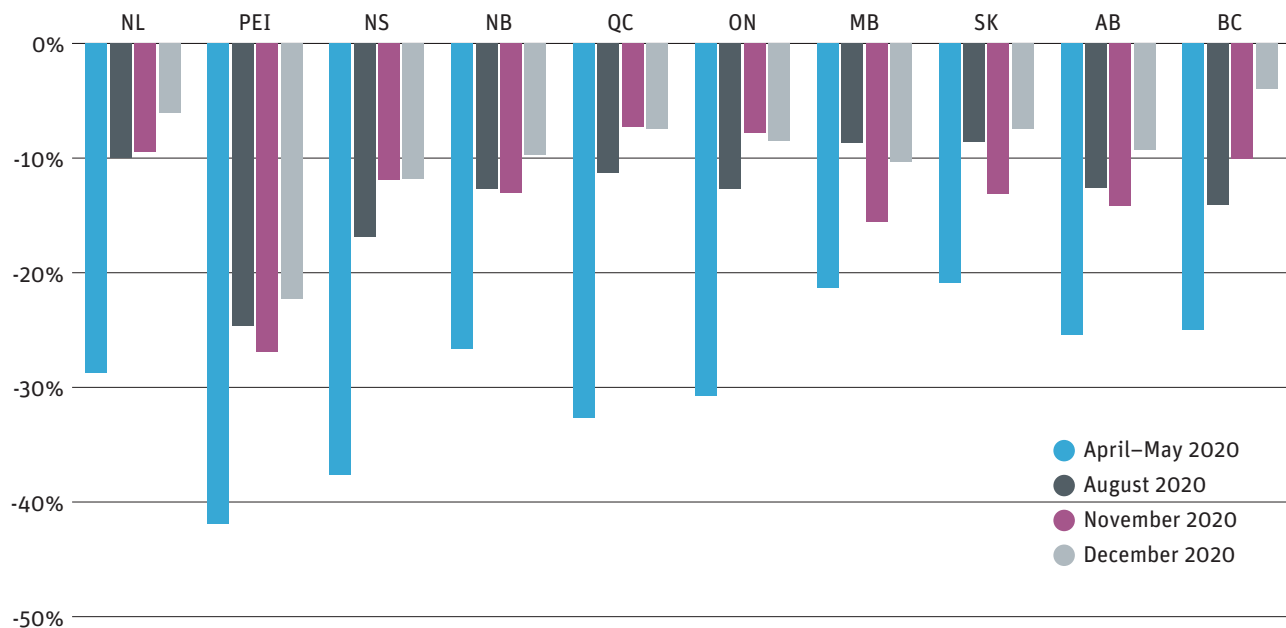
Second wave ground women’s economic recovery to a halt

Today, more women are back at work and have picked up lost hours, but the recovery remains as inequitable as the downturn.

By mid-November 2020, women’s modest progress had come to a stop, with total hours worked reducing in every province as the second wave took hold and new restrictions were introduced. The spread of COVID-19 in spring 2020 was initially concentrated in Quebec and Ontario. But this changed in fall 2020 with the onset of the second wave of infections. Alberta and Saskatchewan, with the weakest pandemic responses through the spring and fall of 2020, saw the sharpest rise in infections, along with Manitoba, which took action sooner but has struggled to contain community spread.^{27, 28}

Between October and November 2020, women’s total hours worked at a main job dropped by -3.9 percentage points nation-wide. The largest decreases were reported in Manitoba (-13.0 percentage points), Saskatchewan (-9.2 percentage points) and Alberta (-6.6 percentage points)—all figures seasonally adjusted.

FIGURE 4 Percentage change in total actual hours worked (main job) relative to February 2020 among female workers (15+ years), by province



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0032-01 Actual hours worked by job type (main or all jobs), monthly. Adjusted for seasonality.

By year-end, women’s employment remained -3.7% below February 2020 levels. Women in Prince Edward Island (-8.1%) were furthest away from their pre-pandemic benchmark, followed by Manitoba (-7.7%), Alberta (-5.2%) and Saskatchewan (-5%). Women in New Brunswick (-0.8%), Newfoundland and Labrador (-1.2%), British Columbia (-1.5%) and Nova Scotia (-1.6%) came closest to pre-pandemic work levels. Women in Ontario (-4.2%) and Quebec (-3.3%) were in the middle of the pack.²⁹

On the key measure of total hours worked, by the end of 2020 female workers were working roughly 8% fewer hours, in the aggregate, than before the pandemic, while the December 2020 employment rate (55.3%) was 2.7 percentage points below the rate posted in February 2020, the same level of employment as in 2000. Compared to February 2020, the greatest gap in hours was in Prince Edward Island, where women were working -22.2% fewer hours, followed by Nova Scotia (-11.8% fewer hours) and Manitoba (-10.3% fewer hours).

The labour market impact of COVID-19 has been particularly challenging for young women (aged 15 to 24), who experienced the greatest initial COVID-related employment losses in March and April 2020 than any other

age group. As of December, employment for this group was down -12.1% from pre-pandemic February levels and their employment rate was still 7.1 percentage points below February levels (at 52.3%). The second round of closures in accommodation, food services, information, culture and recreation sectors, which account for almost 30% of employment among young women, has represented another setback in their economic recovery.

Many mothers exiting the workforce

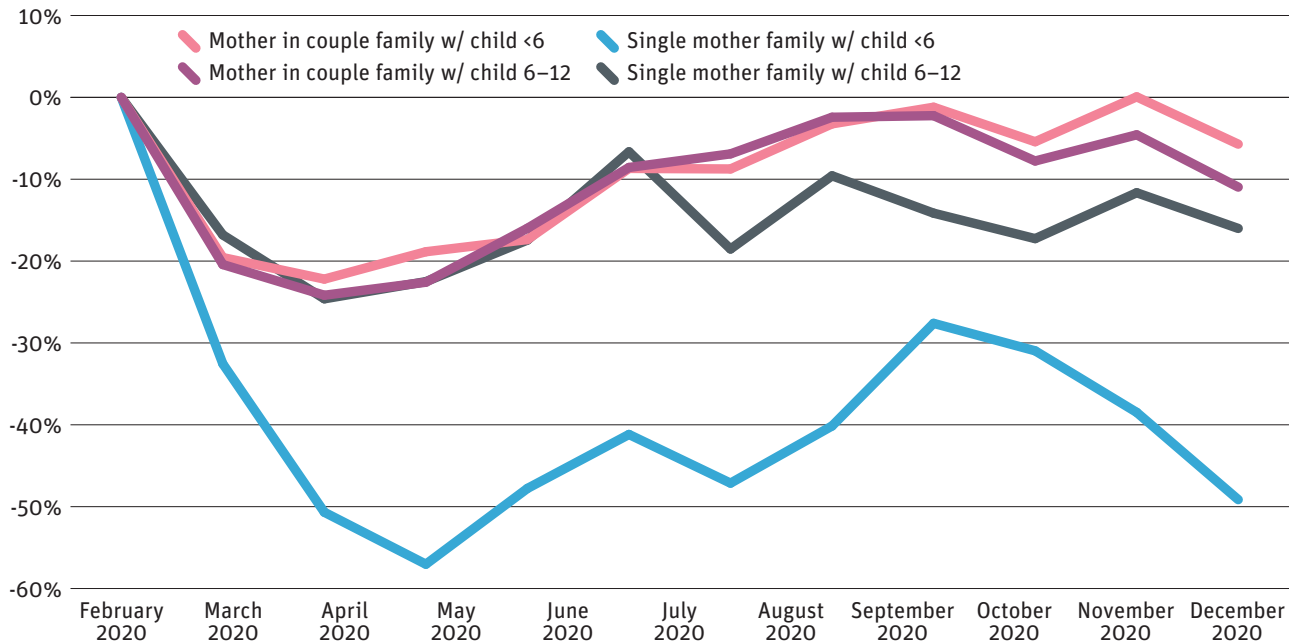
Mothers have a particularly long road ahead. Between February and April 2020, 620,000 mothers with children 12 and under lost working hours. This included a drop in employment of 235,000 and an increase of 385,000 absences from work, affecting 27.2% of all mothers with young children who were working in February 2020. With school closures and uncertain access to child care, employment gains have been weak, pointing to the unequal division of labour at home.³⁰ By August 2020, fathers had effectively recouped all of their employment losses, while 12% of mothers who were working in February 2020 were still without work or working less than half of their regular hours.

On this score, single-parent mothers have experienced the greatest economic challenges compared to fathers and mothers in two-parent families. By September 2020, they had recovered a much smaller fraction of their spring employment losses, particularly those with young children under the age of 6, who had recouped just 30% of lost hours.³¹ Rates of employment among mothers living in couple families were also still much lower than in February 2020, especially among those with school-aged kids (6–12 years). This coincides with an increase in the number of mothers (both single-parent and couple families) who are employed but on leave.

Juggling work and care responsibilities has been especially hard for low-income mothers and others, such as mothers with disabilities and immigrant mothers—many of whom don't have a safety net or a network of family and friends to fall back on. Purchasing needed supports is beyond the budgets of most low-income women in the best of economic times. It is now out of reach.

The situation for mothers did not improve in fall 2020. The November jobs report from Statistics Canada notes that 54.9% more mothers with children 12 and under were working less than half of their usual hours than a year ago.³² Looking at total hours worked, by December, single-parent mothers

FIGURE 5 Change in total actual hours worked of mothers with children (0–12 years) relative to February 2020, by family status



Source Feb–Dec 2020 Labour Force Survey PUMF, calculations by D. Macdonald. Excludes self-employed. Seasonally adjusted.

with children under 6 were working -38.5% fewer hours than in February, while single mothers with school-aged children (6–12 years) were working -11.7% fewer hours.

These figures don’t capture the proportion of women who have completely dropped out of the labour market to care for their family’s needs. As of December 2020, there were almost 160,000 more women aged 15 and older who were “not in the labour force” than in February 2020. Women aged 35–39, in particular, are exiting the labour force “in droves”, according to recent research from RBC Economics; mothers of children under 6 account for two-thirds of the exodus.³³

In December 2020, the rate of exit was highest in Prince Edward Island (+15.3%), Saskatchewan (+8.1%) and Manitoba (+6.2%). The crisis in the child care sector, in combination with the challenges attached to schooling, are exacting a huge toll on women. Large losses of employment among youth—and female workers over 55 (notably in Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan)—are also important factors. Many women aren’t finding their way back into the labour market.

The situation for mothers represents a perfect storm of intersecting circumstances, pushing women out of jobs and preventing others from seeking new jobs. Without access to supports such as child care, women with caring responsibilities will be permanently sidelined, reducing their autonomy and entrenching their poverty—to say nothing of the individual toll on the women’s aspirations and hopes for the future.³⁴

Low-wage workers face prolonged hardship

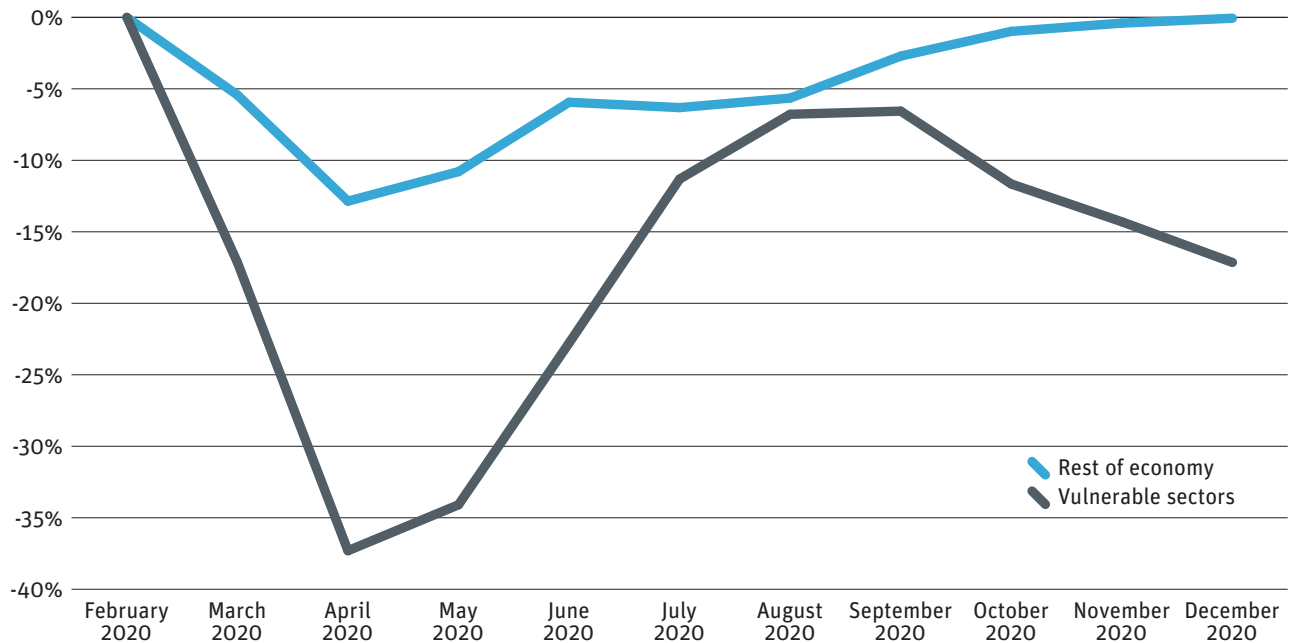
At the start of the lockdown in spring of 2020, the initial concern was about the type of recovery that Canada would experience. Would it be a sharp downturn and quick rebound—a V-shaped recovery? A W-shaped recovery—a double or triple dip recession? Or an L-shaped recovery—a non-recovery, in effect?

What is clear at this point is that a K-shaped recovery has emerged, in which some sectors of the economy and those who can work from home have bounced back quite quickly (indeed many haven’t experienced any disruption in their employment or income), while other sectors and groups of workers (retail, food servers, personal services and the like) are facing prolonged economic hardship, as public safety concerns and displacement from automation converge.³⁵

As Figure 6 shows, women employed in vulnerable sectors—defined here as those employed in accommodation and food services, information, culture, recreation and other services, including small businesses, such as hair salons—experienced a precipitous drop in employment (-37.3%) between February and April 2020, compared to a -12.9% employment drop among women working in the rest of the economy. There was a sizable economic rebound through the summer until the second wave of community infections triggered a second wave of employment losses among vulnerable workers in the fall of 2020. Workers in the rest of the economy did not miss a beat, continuing to recoup employment losses through to the end of the year.³⁶

This has been one of the most troubling trends of the economic downturn. Low-wage workers and their families are in the fight of their economic lives while high-income earners have continued to prosper—not only continuing on with their jobs but, also, realizing the gains associated with the run-up in housing values, pension plans and investment holdings and the savings associated with working from home and deferred travel and entertainment. Canada’s top 20 billionaires have led the way, amassing “an average of nearly \$2 billion in wealth each month during six of the most economically

FIGURE 6 Change in level of employment among female workers (15+ years) relative to February 2020, by industry group

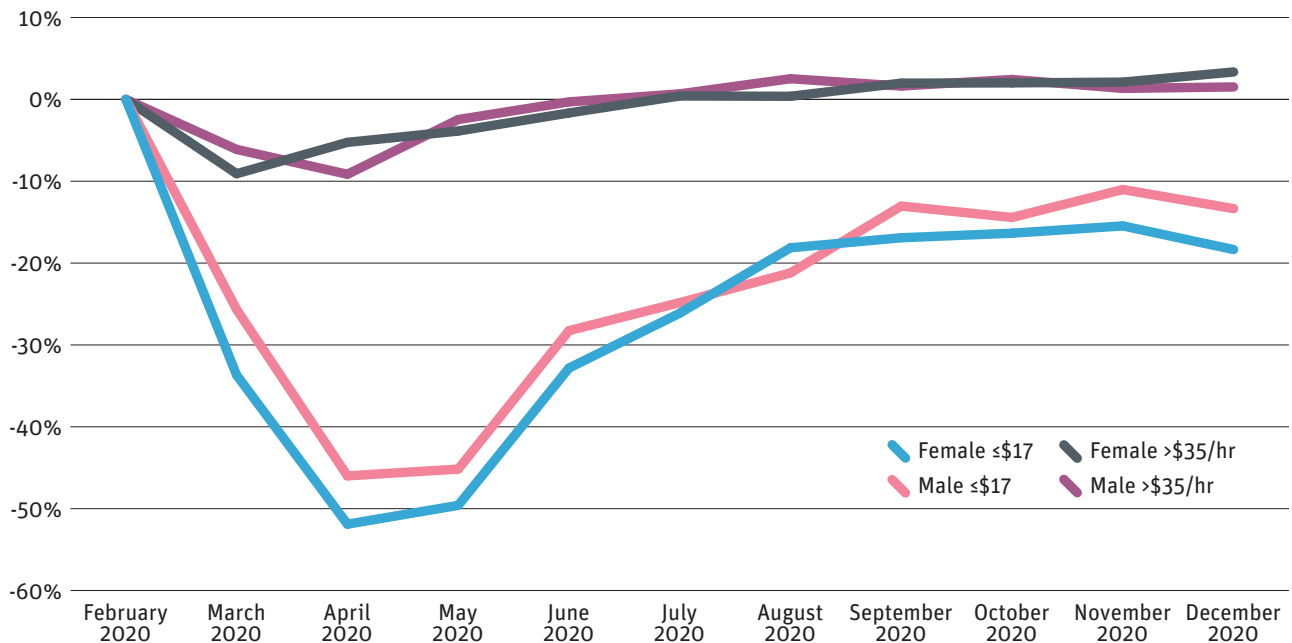


Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0022-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality. Vulnerable sectors: Accommodation & food services; Information, culture and recreation; Other services.

catastrophic months in Canadian history.”³⁷ The gap in the economic fortunes of the poor and the wealthy has been widening by the month.

Women, people with disabilities, racialized workers, Indigenous peoples and others facing employment barriers are caught on the wrong side of Canada’s halting economic recovery and continue to struggle with the ongoing fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. All of these groups are over-represented among low-wage earners.³⁸ As Figure 7 shows, by September 2020, 16.9% of female workers earning less than \$17 an hour were still coping with pandemic-related employment losses, almost four percentage points more than men in this earnings bracket (13%). There was a modest decline in the number of workers who were impacted in October and November, with men outpacing women (-2.0 percentage points compared to -1.4 percentage points), but the December spike in rates of illness and resulting round of public health restrictions resulted another sizeable drop in employment among low-wage workers.

FIGURE 7 Jobs and majority hours lost among female workers (15+ years) by top and bottom earnings quartiles relative to February 2020



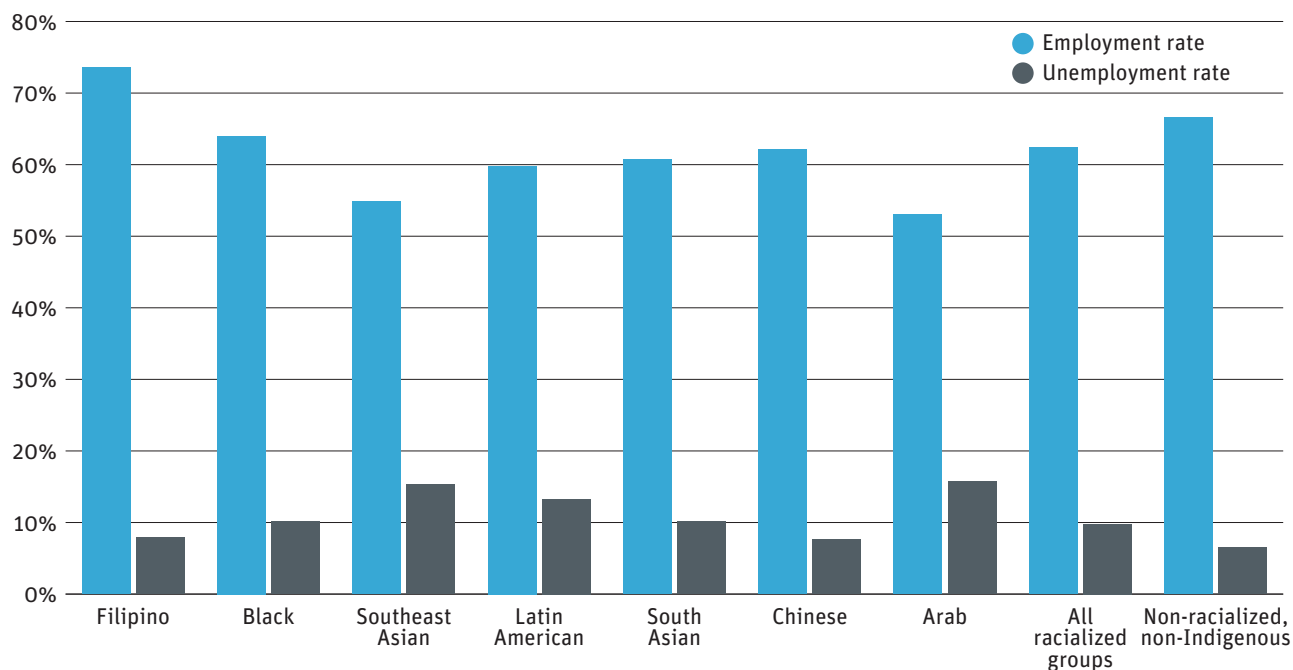
Source Feb–Nov 2020 Labour Force Survey PUMF, calculations by D. Macdonald. Seasonally adjusted.

Economic challenges acute for marginalized workers

These challenges are even more pronounced among women facing intersecting forms of discrimination. The burden of illness weigh most heavily on these groups and communities^{39, 40, 41} and their economic recovery is unfolding at a much different pace. In July 2020, there was almost a seven percentage point difference in the employment rate between racialized and non-racialized women (57.7% vs. 64.4%) and more than an eight percentage point difference in their unemployment rate (17.4% vs. 9.2%). Black, racialized, and Indigenous women working in hard-hit sectors and occupations bore the brunt of the first wave of employment losses.⁴² These gaps narrowed somewhat between July and December 2020, but they are still significant and may widen further in the wake of second wave closures.⁴³

Racialized women and men have also worked throughout the pandemic in jobs that can't be done from home, such as health care, food processing and the distribution of goods, under very difficult circumstances with scant employment protections and low rates of pay. As a result, we've seen heightened community transmission of COVID-19 in highly racialized areas,

FIGURE 8 Employment and unemployment rates among women (15–69 years) by racialized status, December 2020 (not seasonally adjusted)



Source Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Supplement, Dec 2020. Use unemployment rates for Arab, Chinese, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Black and Filipino women with caution.

such as the Peel region in Ontario⁴⁴ and the City of Surrey in B.C.’s Lower Mainland⁴⁵, where workers have been forced to work while ill in order to sustain their income—travelling on public transportation, all too often living in unsuitable, overcrowded housing. For these essential workers, economic closures have made little or no difference in the risk to their health and well-being, since they have continued to work throughout, at heightened risk of infection and economic loss.⁴⁶

The combined pressures of high unemployment and overrepresentation in low-wage, precarious, unsafe work have created heightened economic stress for racialized people and exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. In a crowdsourced survey by Statistics Canada in late May and early June 2020, respondents from racialized groups, with a few exceptions, were more likely to report strong or moderate negative financial impacts related to the pandemic, notably among Arabs, west Asians, and Filipinos (42% or higher), compared to 23% of white participants.⁴⁷

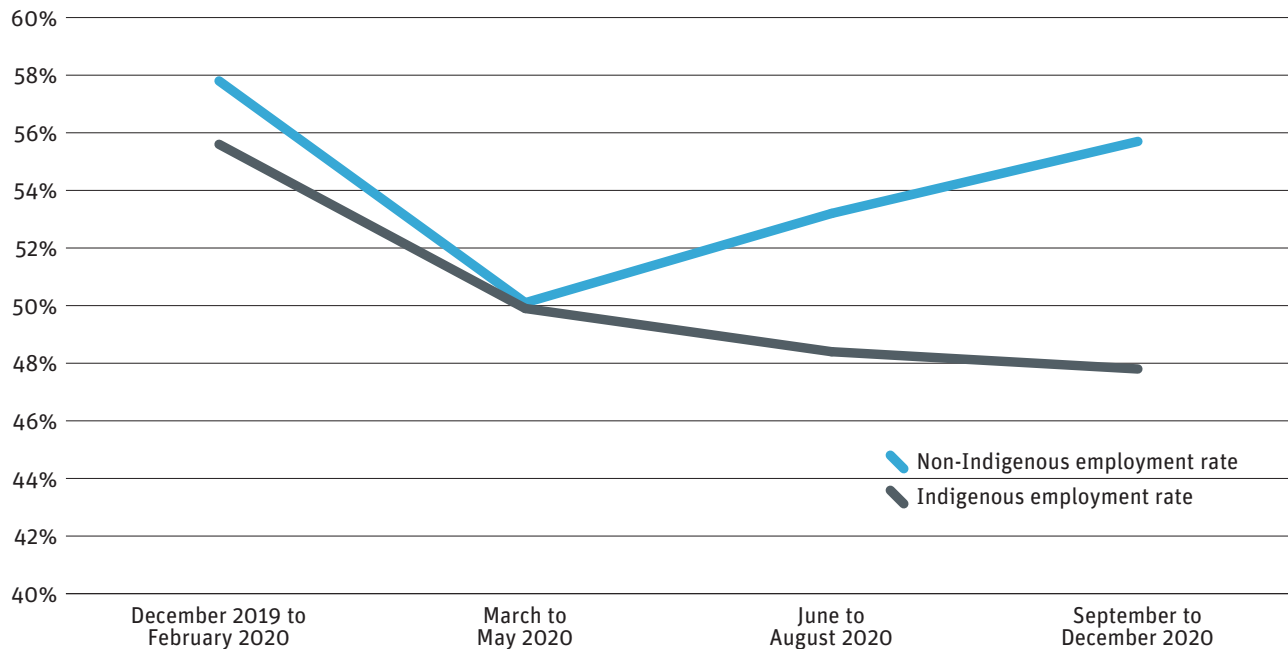
Immigrants are also more likely than Canadian-born individuals to report higher levels of concern about their financial situation (34% vs. 24%). There are large differences between Canadian-born women and immigrant women as well; 31% of immigrant women reported major or moderate negative impacts compared to 24% of Canadian-born women.⁴⁸ The pandemic has effectively derailed the settlement process for many women who experienced employment disruption, increased family pressures, and limited social support. Some recently arrived immigrants had their career starts delayed. Others lost out on training and short-term employment opportunities, the stepping-stones to desired careers and financial security. Already a challenging task, the pandemic has made it much more difficult for immigrant women to escape low-wage, low-skilled employment.⁴⁹

Indigenous peoples were also more likely than white participants to report negative economic impacts in the same survey. Over one-third (36%) of Indigenous participants reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had a strong or moderate impact on their ability to meet financial obligations or essential needs, such as rent, groceries, transportation or personal protective equipment. The corresponding rate among non-Indigenous participants was 25%.⁵⁰

The course of the economic crisis was also similar for Indigenous peoples: large initial employment losses followed by a much slower recovery compared to non-Indigenous people. Among Indigenous people living off reserve in the provinces, there were more than 60,000 fewer individuals employed between March and May 2020 compared with the three-month period ending in February 2020, driving the employment rate down to 50.7%. The employment rate among Indigenous people partially rebounded between June and August, to 51.9%, but it fell short of its pre-pandemic level (57%) and considerably short of the employment rate of non-Indigenous people (61.2%).⁵¹

Indigenous women have fared the worst. The employment rate fell from 55.6% to 49.9% among women living off reserve between the three-month period ending in February 2020 and the three-month period ending in May 2020.⁵² While Indigenous men and non-Indigenous people experienced a rebound starting in May, Indigenous women's employment rate continued to fall through the summer and fall of 2020, dropping to 47.8% by December⁵³—a reflection, in part, of their concentration in hard-hit employment sectors, as well as the heightened demands related to unpaid labour and care, particularly for mothers. The pandemic illustrates the devastating connections between gender, race and poverty and the ways in which systemic sexism, racism, and the impacts of colonialism are baked into institutions and policies that

FIGURE 9 Employment and unemployment rate among women (15+ years) by Indigenous status, three month averages



Source Amanda Bleakney, et al., (2020), Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020, Statistics Canada. Population living off reserve in the provinces.

disempower and marginalize Indigenous, Black and other racialized women and their communities.⁵⁴

The concern from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic has been over the potential of the crisis to set off a devastating feedback loop that will deepen and entrench existing inequalities.⁵⁵ Marginalized communities were at a significant disadvantage going into the crisis, with fewer resources of any type to protect and sustain their health and well-being and to bridge any loss of income, as evidenced by high levels of poverty, housing precarity and food insecurity.⁵⁶ Many months into the pandemic, there is clear evidence that these communities are being left behind.⁵⁷ Without the significant injections of emergency federal government support for household incomes, to keep workers on payrolls, and to fight the health battle against COVID-19, the economic figures reported here would have been more dire.

Women, work and COVID-19: Key drivers of gender inequality

This high-level overview of labour market trends cannot hope to capture the complexity of women's experiences, nor provide a definitive accounting of the economic impact of an event of this magnitude. It also does not address all of the critical differences between women that are essential to understanding women's inequality and experience of discrimination across Canada. This type of analysis demands disaggregation of data by gender and across multiple forms of disadvantage—information that is not readily available and is urgently needed. But it does point to important underlying issues shaping women's labour market trends and identifies areas that demand attention from policy-makers and practitioners in creating effective emergency responses that centre the experiences of the people most negatively impacted by COVID-19.

First, there is a clear link between the gendered concentration of women in highly vulnerable industries and occupations and the greater likelihood of COVID-19-related employment loss. This is especially true for racialized women, as Sheila Block's research has shown.⁵⁸ Almost one in three Black, other racialized, and Indigenous women work in sales and service occupations, which saw the largest job losses between February and December 2020—a larger share than Indigenous men as well as Black, other racialized, and white women, and a much larger share than white men.

This is also true at the provincial level. The four Atlantic provinces were able to form a joint bubble in summer of 2020, which kept the virus at bay even as the rest of the country entered the second wave.⁵⁹ But even among this group, women lost hours of employment, the result of their above-average concentration in vulnerable industries as shown in Table 1, as well as the sizable drop in demand in tourism over 10 months in 2020. These losses were particularly large in Nova Scotia, the largest province in the region.

Employment losses among women living in Western Canada can also be linked to women's concentration in hard-hit, front-facing industries and higher levels of part-time employment compared to other regions of the country. In spring 2020, women's economic precariousness was a key factor explaining above-average employment loss in British Columbia and Saskatchewan, as well as the surge in employment losses in fall 2020 in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

Another important driver in Manitoba and Alberta was also the sizable cuts to employment in health services and social assistance, a source of

TABLE 1 Women’s concentration in vulnerable industries and employment loss relative to February 2020, female workers (15+ years), by province

	Share of employment in vulnerable industries (% February 2020)	Share of total employed working part-time (% February 2020)	February–April employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–December employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–April total employment loss (%)	February–December total employment loss (%)
NL	18.4	21.9	-24.9	-23.9	-12.9	-1.2
PEI	16.0	20.7	-32.8	-23.0	-17.2	-8.1
NS	17.1	23.6	-47.7	-25.8	-18.2	-1.6
NB	13.7	18.4	-42.0	-3.4	-14.5	-0.8
QC	14.9	23.7	-39.0	-26.7	-18.4	-3.3
ON	14.6	24.6	-32.3	-12.4	-17.2	-4.2
MB	15.7	28.8	-32.2	-28.5	-15.6	-7.7
SK	18.3	25.5	-40.9	-25.5	-14.9	-5.0
AB	16.5	28.2	-39.1	-25.0	-17.7	-5.2
BC	18.5	30.1	-44.8	-3.5	-17.1	-1.5
Canada	15.7	25.5	-37.3	-17.1	-16.9	-3.7

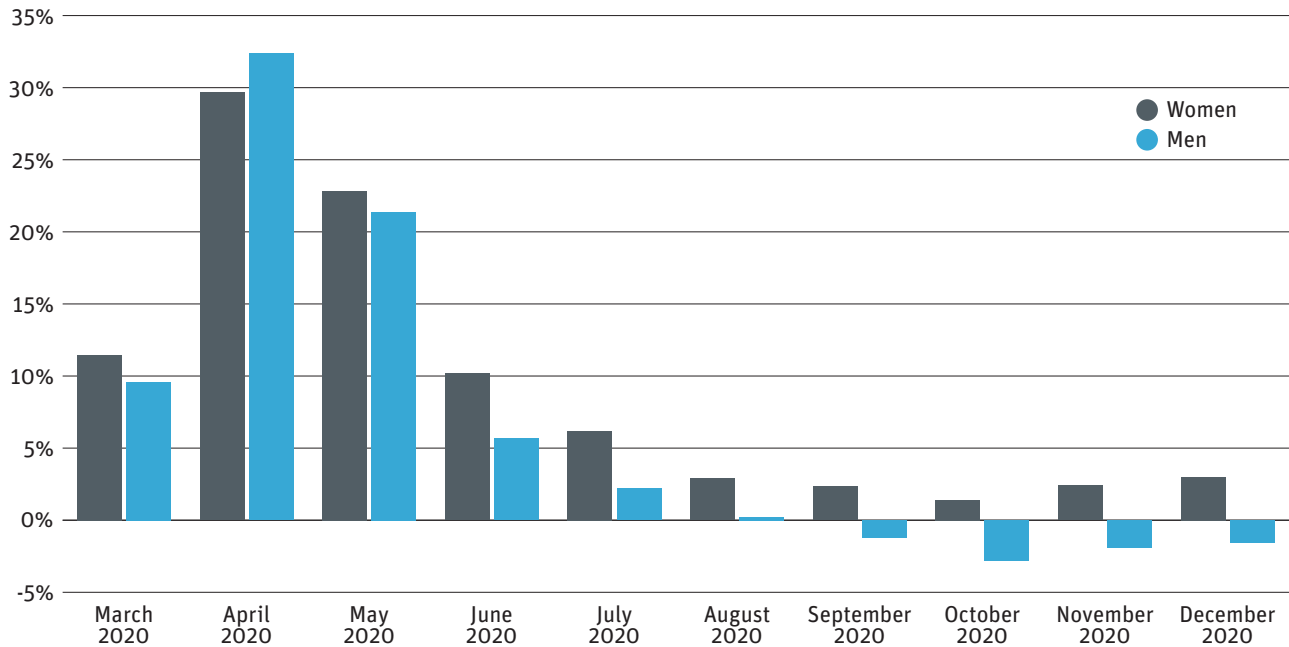
Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0022-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality. Vulnerable sectors: Accommodation & food services; Information, culture and recreation; Other services. Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01, Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months, seasonally adjusted.

historically secure and high-paid employment for women. In Manitoba, female employment in this sector dropped by -8.4% between February and December 2020. In Alberta, health sector employment is down -2.7% among women. Cuts to public administration further reduced female employment in Alberta by -8.6%, representing 3,800 lost jobs.

A second important factor upending women’s economic security is the substantial rise in unpaid caring demands, particularly as it relates to children. Following the spring closures of businesses, schools and services, close to 900,000 female workers (aged 15–64 years) left the labour market—the large majority left because there was no work at hand, others had to juggle increased family responsibilities and, for many, it was a combination of both. In two short months, women’s labour force participation rate of those aged 15 to 64 years fell from 75.6% to 68.5%—a level not seen in over 40 years. The participation rate rebounded through the summer, reaching 74.8% in August, and has since stalled.⁶⁰ In December 2020, there were 90,000 more women outside of the labour market compared to February 2020.⁶¹

Going into the pandemic, Prince Edward Island and Quebec had the smallest share of women aged 15–64 who were not in the labour market,

FIGURE 10 Change in proportion of “not in the labour force” relative to February 2020 among men and women (15–64 years)



Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01—Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle.

while Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario had the largest share, with a spread of 10 points. Ten months later, there were marked increases in the number of women no longer engaged in the paid labour market or searching for work in Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. This coincides with the lagging recovery in the Prairie provinces among mothers with school-age children, and among mothers with pre-schoolers in Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba.

The broader context is important to consider. Women are more likely than men to work in temporary or part-time arrangements, typically at lower rates of pay. This is especially true among mothers seeking to juggle care of young children and other domestic responsibilities by scaling back employment hours, taking on more flexible working arrangements or turning down advancement. Some women never work their way back up the employment or earnings ladder. Over women’s lifetime, mothers will experience an estimated 8% decrease in their earnings, even after taking into account differences in age, employment level (part-time or full-time) and education.⁶²

Mothers, especially those from marginalized communities that were battered by the economic downturn, face even more significant barriers to re-entry in the absence of critical community supports and infrastructure, such as child care. Even in a province like Quebec, where 42% of children 5 and under have access to a regulated child care space—the largest percentage in Canada⁶³—the challenge will be significant. The situation in provinces with large market-based systems is much more difficult.

Evidence from the United States suggests that mandated closures of child care centres and/or restricted class sizes have led to a higher unemployment rate of mothers of young children and that these negative effects persist once restrictions are lifted.⁶⁴ It can take significant time to reintegrate women once they have exited the labour market. In the context of COVID-19, as time passes, many more child care centres risk closing, restricting the employment of mothers even further. Canada has experienced a similar rise in unemployment and drop in labour force participation. Without intervention, it is likely that we will see these trends here as well.

Responding to women's economic crisis

We must not let the legacy of the pandemic be one of rolling back the clock on women's participation in the workforce, nor one of backtracking on the social and political gains women and allies have fought so hard to secure.

—*Federal speech from the throne, September 23, 2020*

IN MARCH 2020, with the looming crisis in view, the federal government took action to protect people and communities through a massive emergency plan of direct monetary supports and access to credit for individuals and businesses. It included programs to secure needed vaccines, medical equipment and other vital supplies, and transfers to other orders of government to limit the spread of COVID-19, ramp up needed services and build out infrastructure.⁶⁵ The provinces and territories, for their part, have concentrated on coordinating the immense health systems response to the crisis and, in some instances, providing targeted income supports to households, businesses and non-profits; boosting service funding for vulnerable communities (e.g., shelters for people fleeing violence); providing supports to Indigenous communities and municipalities; and extending protections for renters, workers and selected business sectors.⁶⁶

Collectively, these programs have played a vital role in supporting individuals and households in the face of mass unemployment and the sizable pre-existing gaps in Canada's health and social safety net. They have also

shored up employment and sustained economic activity in communities across the country throughout the crisis. Canada stands out from other peer countries in the scale and focus of its COVID-19 response, providing nearly 19% of GDP in support to keep Canadians and businesses afloat⁶⁷ and directing an above-average share of funding to households.⁶⁸ Between March and December 2020, federal and provincial governments announced 849 measures to respond to the COVID-19 crisis. The lion's share—\$343 billion, or 92%—came in the form of direct spending and transfers to the provinces and territories from the federal government and \$31 billion (8%) from the provinces and territories.⁶⁹

This section looks at the focus and scale of the Canada's COVID-19 response and whether the policies and programs that have been introduced are effectively responding to women's immediate needs, especially those most impacted by the economic fallout of the pandemic, and laying a foundation for an inclusive recovery that reverses long-standing inequalities in Canada.

Canada's COVID-19 Response

1. Income security programs

Canada, like countries around the world, responded quickly with a raft of income security tools and strategies.⁷⁰ Programs such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and its successor programs—the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB), Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit (CRCB) and Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB)—have been instrumental in financially sustaining millions of households facing COVID-19-related employment loss. Other time-limited top ups to established transfers, such as the GST Credit, Canada Child Benefit and Disability Tax Credit, have played an important role in bolstering incomes and helping to defray COVID-19 expenses.⁷¹

It was clear from the beginning of the pandemic that Employment Insurance (EI), Canada's primary social insurance system for adults facing employment loss, would not be able to respond to a crisis of this magnitude. It was not administratively up to the task of delivering timely support, and by design it didn't cover large segments of the working population,⁷² including many women.⁷³ While female workers must contribute to EI from the first dollar of their earnings, they are much less likely than male workers to receive benefits.⁷⁴ Going into the pandemic, women represented just 37.3% of regular beneficiaries, a figure that dropped to 18.9% in August 2020 as female workers turned to CERB for financial support.⁷⁵

Lacking an effective or appropriate income support program, the federal government moved quickly to create the CERB in March 2020 to pinch hit for EI, dramatically increasing the share of workers covered, making it easier to apply and offering more generous benefits to low-wage workers. Whereas the hours-based eligibility structure of EI and strict eligibility criteria have always effectively screened out many part-time, part-year workers—the majority of whom are women, the new CERB program extended vital support to this group and the self-employed. Tweaks to the benefit’s rules in April also opened the program up to workers whose hours were cut by allowing them to earn up to \$1,000 a month, a step that, again, largely benefited women.⁷⁶

The other critical feature of the CERB program for families, and mothers in particular, was the more expansive approach to providing support to parents and caregivers. The loss of child care is recognized under EI as a legitimate reason for job separation, but there are significant barriers to claiming benefits.⁷⁷ Providing ready access to income replacement in the face of recurrent shutdowns of child care and public education has been an important improvement to policy that had systemically undermined women’s economic security and a more equitable division of caring labour.

The CERB was intended to serve as a short-term fix but it was almost immediately evident that ongoing household financial support would be needed. In late August, after two extensions of the CERB program, the federal government announced temporary changes to EI to facilitate the transition of approximately three million workers from the CERB.⁷⁸ These measures eased eligibility requirements for EI, froze premiums and provided a higher benefit floor of \$500 per week to bring EI benefits in line with support provided under the CERB.⁷⁹

Three new benefits were also proposed to support the self-employed, part-time and precarious workers who fall outside of EI⁸⁰ and workers, mostly women, who have been leaving employment to provide care. The largest of the three, CRB, provides up to 26 weeks of support to workers who are not eligible for EI and are experiencing ongoing pandemic-related employment losses. The CRSB extends support to workers who are unable to work because they are sick or must self-isolate due to COVID-19 and don’t have access to paid sick leave through their employer—a group that numbers in the millions.⁸¹ The CRCB offers support to those who are unable to work because caregiving obligations.

In addition to these core income support programs, there have been several one-time support programs targeting particular populations, including seniors, students, and people with disabilities. One of the largest of

these targeted transfers was directed to 3.7 families with children under 18 through a special one-time \$300 top up of the CCB. In fall 2020, the federal government announced additional support for families with children under 6, a total of \$1,200 for families with income under \$120,000 and \$600 for those above this threshold. The overwhelming majority of single-parent families will qualify for a larger average benefit.

Provincial governments have also provided direct income support to individuals and families, but at a considerably smaller scale than the federal government. These programs represent only 4% of total federal-provincial expenditures on these programs.⁸² Many of these programs were set up early on to help people impacted by employment loss to bridge to the CERB (e.g., Nova Scotia's Worker Emergency Bridge Fund); others were one-time payments to assist with expenses (e.g., Manitoba's Disability Economic Support Program; Ontario's Support for Families payment).

British Columbia introduced the largest number of income support programs among the provinces, including the B.C. Emergency Response Benefit for Workers, Temporary Rental Supplement, and Student Emergency Financial Assistance. B.C. was also the only province to temporarily increase monthly support to people on social assistance, one of the poorest groups in Canada yet widely ignored in the emergency responses of both levels of government. This benefit is slated to end in March 2021.⁸³

Direct income supports have been the largest and most crucial economic support for women sidelined by the pandemic, especially those from marginalized communities. There have been equally large investments in businesses. For instance, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), currently scheduled to cost \$100 billion, has helped to sustain employment in hard-hit sectors, including community-based non-profits and charities delivering critical health and social services. CEWS has been paying up to 75% of wage costs for more than 350,000 businesses and non-profits that have lost revenue during the pandemic. However, there is no (publicly available) information on the employees that have received support through this program. The Fall Economic Statement notes that employers in accommodation and food services have made the greatest use of the program (60% of all employees were covered by the program in August), while the largest number of employees covered by CEWS work in the manufacturing sector. Many profitable businesses received funding, using it to pad business profits, boost executive pay and pay dividends to shareholders.⁸⁴ Calls are growing to better target funding to businesses actually in need and taking action to preserve jobs.⁸⁵

2. Investments in the care economy

Targeted investments in the care economy, largely funded by the federal government, delivered by the provinces, have also provided support to female workers impacted by the pandemic—both the workers engaged in essential care work and women who rely on these services to care for their families and support their paid employment. These include different provincial schemes to top up the wages of essential workers and investments in long-term care, selected community services and child care—all female majority sectors. Many caring services, strained by two decades of austerity measures,⁸⁶ were struggling. Some programs have been introduced to stabilize service and retain staff at a time of acute community need.

The results have been especially devastating in the long-term care sector, the virus preying on well-known vulnerabilities: a growing reliance in the sector on a subcontracted labour force whose members work multiple low-wage jobs to make ends meet, and conditions of employment that work against quality care and recruitment. Residents and workers are paying with their lives.⁸⁷ Wage top ups, full-time hours, investments in training, and improvements in working conditions are fundamental to combat the virus in the short term and create higher quality jobs in the care sector over the long term.⁸⁸ This will not only provide greater security for workers, it will promote caring relationships with residents, which is at the core of good care.⁸⁹

Canada's patchwork of child care services is also buckling under the stress of the pandemic. In March 2020, provincial and territorial emergency orders across Canada forced closures of almost three-quarters (72%) of 8,700 child care centres.⁹⁰ Child care was declared an essential service for frontline workers—the cost and accessibility of which varied across jurisdictions. Since that time, the implementation of new public health protocols and the uneven return of children have resulted in financial challenges for many providers, and made the work of over more than 200,000 early childhood educators and child care workers more precarious.⁹¹ Attracting staff back is all the more difficult, given the workload demanded and very low rates of pay, benefits and employment protections in this sector. In 2019, child care workers earned just over half (54%) of the average hourly wage.⁹²

Other non-profit organizations and charities are facing similar pressures in their efforts to support women's labour market participation and well-being. These include organizations offering counselling and referrals, employment programs, gender-based violence services, attendant care, housing support and legal aid to women and their families—80% of their own

staff complements, on average, are made up of women.⁹³ All these essential supports were fragile before the pandemic and came under acute stress as the pandemic began, due to rising demand, chronic underfunding and declining revenues.⁹⁴ Many have taken steps to change their models of delivery in order to maintain services, but as the Ontario Nonprofit Network's flash survey of non-profits found, 83% of respondents are experiencing or anticipating a disruption of services to clients and communities. In the women's sector, 82% of organizations fear they will have to close their doors.⁹⁵ Workers are reporting greater stress and fatigue.⁹⁶ Without urgent financial support, the gap in essential services will widen.

The federal and some provincial governments have stepped up with investments in the caring economy and the women who work in these vital services. While certainly not at the scale of direct income support—or adequate to the task in all areas of the country—new investments have bolstered women's employment in key sectors.

Investments include: the Essential Workers Support Fund, with an initial budget of \$3 billion from the federal government, to be matched by a \$1 billion contribution from the provinces; the Safe Return to Class Fund, \$2 billion; designated monies under the Safe Restart Agreement to address, among other things, staffing issues in long-term care and home care, \$740 million, and in the child care sector, \$625 million.⁹⁷ There have also been targeted measures for organizations serving vulnerable communities, including grants for organizations providing emergency hunger relief across Canada, \$200 million; programs and shelters serving the homeless, \$500+ million; and services for survivors of gender-based violence, \$100 million.⁹⁸

More recently, the federal government announced an additional \$1 billion over three years to help prevent the spread of infection, outbreaks and deaths in long-term care and assisted living facilities, as well as \$38.5 million to support the training of personal support workers.⁹⁹ It has committed to introduce new national standards for long-term care “to address critical gaps in long-term care facilities, including raising the working conditions of lower-wage essential workers in senior care, particularly personal support workers, who have persevered in the face of adversity.”¹⁰⁰ An additional \$420 million has been set aside to create an Early Childhood Educator Workforce Strategy, which will offer grants and bursaries to students studying early childhood education; \$75 million will be directed toward improving the quality and accessibility of Indigenous child care programs.¹⁰¹

Does Canada's Response Plan measure up?

1. Income benefits have protected women

There is no question that governments in Canada have mobilized considerable resources to bridge millions of individuals and families through the economic crisis. Income security programs have played a critical role for women, offsetting a devastating collapse in employment earnings and preventing households from having to liquidate their assets or to take on additional debt to pay for essentials;¹⁰² actions that would have thwarted any chance of recovery and further undermined their long-term economic security. Rather, individuals and families spent their benefits in their local communities, helping to boost economic activity, lower unemployment and provide for their neighbours—precisely the outcomes needed to help everyone to get through the pandemic.

Figures on program take up illustrate their broad impact. Between April and September 2020, the CERB provided an unprecedented level of support to 8.9 million individuals, including 4.3 million women (48.5% of total recipients) and 4,700 gender-diverse people (0.5%).¹⁰³ In the program's last month, 54.8% of the roughly 4 million CERB beneficiaries were women. Large numbers of new immigrants and racialized Canadians were receiving support as well, comprising 13% and 14% of total September applicants, respectively.¹⁰⁴ Recent evidence suggests that uptake was greater in cities than in rural areas, notably in areas with large numbers of racialized residents and newcomers working in hard-hit industrial sectors.¹⁰⁵

The need for ongoing support remains strong as the increase in the number of long-term unemployed confirms.¹⁰⁶ In January 2021, there were 2.2 million unemployed workers receiving EI benefits, half of which were women. This represents a significant increase in both the number of female EI beneficiaries and their share as compared to men, directly as a result of the new “temporary” eligibility rules for EI introduced in October and the new round of economic closures. Indeed: the number of female recipients in mid-January 2021 was 6.5 times higher than in February 2020—further evidence of the profound gender bias of the pre-COVID-19 EI program.¹⁰⁷ In January, the largest proportion of female EI beneficiaries (as compared to male beneficiaries) was in Ontario (54.9%) and in British Columbia (54.1%). The lowest was in Quebec (at 40.6%).

Another 1.6 million workers had received the CRB between October 2020 and January 2021, including roughly 700,000 women (45.8% of applicants),¹⁰⁸ while 354,000 workers had applied for the CRSB, notably in the Prairie

TABLE 2 Women’s share of emergency benefits

	December 2020			March–Sept	As of January 10, 2021			
	Labour force (15–64 years)	Employment (15–64 years)	Temporary employment (15+ years)	Canada Emergency Response Benefit	“Temporary” Employment Insurance	Canada Recovery Benefit	Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit	Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit
NL	48.5%	50.3%	46.4%	47.4%	41.2%	43.5%	48.1%	54.6%
PEI	48.0%	48.9%	58.2%	49.5%	44.8%	47.2%	46.9%	59.5%
NS	49.6%	50.4%	55.2%	49.0%	45.6%	45.2%	49.6%	59.5%
NB	48.3%	49.4%	47.6%	49.7%	45.4%	45.9%	48.3%	56.9%
QC	47.4%	48.1%	55.1%	45.0%	40.6%	45.7%	47.0%	55.0%
ON	47.8%	47.6%	51.9%	49.3%	54.9%	45.4%	46.6%	63.2%
MB	46.2%	46.1%	53.9%	50.1%	50.7%	45.9%	46.8%	55.8%
SK	45.7%	46.8%	55.8%	49.2%	45.6%	43.2%	48.8%	57.4%
AB	46.2%	46.5%	52.9%	49.4%	49.3%	46.9%	50.9%	65.3%
BC	48.1%	48.1%	57.1%	50.8%	54.1%	46.9%	46.7%	62.1%
Canada	47.5%	47.7%	53.5%	48.5%	49.0%	45.8%	47.7%	60.5%

Source Government of Canada. See notes.

provinces. Just under half of CSB applicants were women (47.7%).¹⁰⁹ As of January 10th, 286,000 workers had applied for the caregiver benefit since October 2020. Another 27,000 had applied by January 24th¹¹⁰ as school boards in several provinces announced closures to attempt to contain escalating community infections in the aftermath of the holiday season. All of the new recovery benefits experienced a surge in applications in the initial month. New applications were down by the end of November, this despite the rising rate of infection in western and central Canada. Since that time, the numbers applying for economic support have increased across the three programs.

These emergency measures offer important lessons for permanently strengthening income security, especially the value of expanding coverage and raising the minimum income floor for low-income workers. For women, an important feature of the CERB and the recovery benefits has been that they are targeted to individual workers and are not, unlike many other federal benefits, subject to a family income test. There is a new income test attached to the CRB (claimants need to repay some or all of the benefit if their annual net income, excluding the CRB, is over \$38,000), but it is evaluated on an individual basis. This feature has ensured that female workers impacted by COVID-19 are not excluded from receiving support, particularly for women

living in couple households where there is a sizeable difference in income between spouses, as is often the case for mothers juggling paid work and care.¹¹¹

In combination with the one-time transfers, Canada's income support programs are delivering substantive support. Numerous surveys over the past year have revealed heightened financial insecurity among already financially precarious households. Without government transfers, financially vulnerable families¹¹² would have needed, on average, \$3,500 over two months to stay above low income. Most would not have had the resources to make ends meet for even one complete month of joblessness. This was the case for over half of all single mothers (56.3%) and roughly half of Indigenous households living off reserve (46.9%) and households headed by a recent immigrant (49.7%).¹¹³ Their situation is infinitely more precarious now, in the context of the pandemic.

2. But many are still falling through the cracks

At the same time, many of the most vulnerable continue to fall through the cracks, including those who have not qualified for any direct support at all, such as the estimated 1.8 million migrant and undocumented workers working on the frontlines of the crisis¹¹⁴ or sex workers who do not qualify for CERB or other emergency income supports.¹¹⁵ They are at greater risk of contracting the virus and experiencing employment loss, yet have access to the fewest protections and resources.

Social assistance recipients have also been left to struggle on incomes substantially below the poverty line in all provinces and territories¹¹⁶—more than 1.7 million individuals and families (11% of all households), according to the 2018 Canada Income Survey.¹¹⁷ For the thousands of people with disabilities forced to rely on welfare, the experience has been harrowing: trying to secure scarce PPE and access to needed medical care, safe transportation and workplace accommodation during the pandemic.¹¹⁸ The struggle has been as difficult for single mothers trying to secure the needs of their family and maintain their own well-being in the face of reduced community supports. Advocates question why benefit levels remain so low in the comparison to the \$500 per week extended to those facing employment loss under Canada's emergency benefits: “Do our lives count for less?”¹¹⁹

Provincial and territorial governments, for their part, have offered little by way of income support. Only three have provided COVID-related income benefit to people on social assistance. Indeed, most governments partially

or fully clawed back CERB benefits from eligible recipients who lost some or all of their employment (with the exception of B.C., N.W.T. and Yukon).¹²⁰ Still others living in rent-geared-to-income housing saw their rents shoot up—by as much as \$600 per month in Ontario—when the first CERB cheque arrived.¹²¹ These actions all amounted to a huge windfall for provincial and territorial governments at the expense of the most marginalized, as caseloads dropped in provinces that introduced a partial exemption or did not choose to exempt CERB income.¹²² In Ontario, the number of people on Ontario Works fell by 16% between March and November 2020, while those on the Ontario Disability Support Program fell by 1.4%, representing a provincial saving of at least \$533 million.¹²³

There has always been a clear division in the generosity and intent of contributory income security programs, such as EI and the Canada Pension Plan/Quebec Pension Plan (CPP/QPP), and last resort or “residual” programs, such as social assistance—programs intended for the poorest of the poor.¹²⁴ These programs provide minimal income support at levels considerably below established poverty lines and are organized through punitive rules and regulations to move recipients off the system and into paid work as quickly as possible. There is a long history of inhumane and unjust treatment of social assistance recipients—people with disabilities, racialized and Indigenous people, youth aging out of care, those fleeing violence, single mothers—all of whom don’t neatly fit the “productive worker” mould and pay the price in high rates of poverty and ill health, out of view of the broader public. Women and mothers—and the importance of raising and caring for children—have disappeared in the welfare reforms of the last two decades, replaced by the gender-neutral worker whose basis of citizenship is participation in paid employment.¹²⁵ Today, those forced to rely on welfare are again out of view, overlooked in the pandemic economic responses that are largely focused on the employed.

3. Other groups are poorly served

The inability of the EI system to gear up to meet the needs of people thrown out of work speaks volumes about the biases baked into the program. It was incapable of meeting the needs of the self-employed and others with episodic work histories—such as women who drop in and out of the labour market to accommodate the caring needs of their families or young people trying to pay for their schooling—those who don’t neatly fit the “standard worker” mould. The temporary reforms have extended critical coverage, but there are

still gaps, the product of the longstanding disconnect between established programs—both old and new—and today’s labour market.¹²⁶

David Macdonald estimates that roughly three-quarters of a million CERB recipients, mostly women (56%), did not qualify for any support when the government wound down the program. A few of these people were not eligible because of the annual income cut-off that now applies to the CRB, but the large majority were those low-wage, part-time workers who made less than \$1,000 per month. The CERB was a meaningful boost to their household incomes, helping them to maintain their housing, ease financial stress and avoid taking on more debt to provide for their families. They are now ineligible for EI regular benefits or would receive only a meagre amount through EI’s working while-on-claim program.¹²⁷

The CRSB is failing also to assist many workers, as evidenced by the decline in successful applicants over the course of the fall, even as COVID-19 cases began to rise again. For months, advocates have been sounding the alarm about the flaws in the program that exclude precarious workers who are highly vulnerable to the spread of infection in their workplaces and least likely to have paid sick leave.¹²⁸ For workers who live paycheque to paycheque, the time it takes to apply for and await a separate benefit is proving to be prohibitive. The CRSB is also not designed for those who need to take just one or two days off, awaiting COVID-19 test results, for example.¹²⁹ For temporary workers and those with precarious immigration status, taking any time off is a risk. Low-income workers are choosing work over health and safety because they cannot afford to do otherwise.¹³⁰

Mandated paid sick days are the answer. But while all provinces offer some unpaid, job-protected sick days, only three jurisdictions have legislated access to statutory paid sick leave: two days in Quebec, one day in Prince Edward Island, and three days for employees in federally regulated sectors. Current campaigns are calling for at least seven permanent days, with an additional 10 during pandemics.¹³¹

Like the CRB, the new CRCB is also a more exclusive program than the CERB. The criteria for the CRCB are narrower: the child has to be under 11-years-old, the applicant must have been unable to work for at least 50% of the time that they would have otherwise worked, and the parent can’t voluntarily keep the child home. For parents juggling concerns about the health and safety of schools and the demands of paid work, there have been fewer options since September 2020. “Women may seem as if they’re making a choice to step back, but as often as not, the choice isn’t really one. It’s not

a choice to care for your children when schools are closed and child care costs as much as your take-home pay.”¹³²

4. Investments in care are hit and miss

Decades of chronically insufficient government funding have created a serious shortage of regulated, affordable, inclusive caring services in Canada.^{133, 134} While there are important differences in the organization and delivery of services such as child care, home care and long-term care—they are all “inequitably distributed, insufficiently available and of uneven quality,” staffed by a mostly female, largely racialized workforce who are “underpaid, underappreciated and inadequately supported.”¹³⁵ Barriers to access are especially high for Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, racialized groups, rural communities and women and their families reliant on precarious employment.

With the onset of the pandemic, the holes in Canada’s care economy and related social infrastructure have compounded the health care and economic crisis, and further exacerbated existing gender disparities. Increased investments in caring services and employment supports for women, tailored to need and circumstances, are essential to ensuring that women can re-enter the workforce and thrive at work, as well as protecting and advancing equality gains. But the response to the crisis in women’s employment has been uneven—falling far short of a comprehensive and inclusive approach.

The failure to address the crisis in child care has been profoundly troubling. Federal funds allocated to support the crisis (\$625 million) fell far short of the \$2.5 billion that advocates were calling for¹³⁶ to stabilize revenues, curb staff losses and enhance service delivery to meet new safety standards for children and staff. The provinces, with the exception of Nova Scotia,¹³⁷ introduced emergency child care services for essential workers. Many provided modest grants to assist with the purchase of cleaning supplies, safety equipment, and other upgrades necessary to comply with health guidelines. British Columbia made a larger contribution than most, through its Temporary Emergency Funding program for licensed child care services, providing almost \$20,000 a month to help cover operations through mandated closures in spring 2020.

Provincial funding (net federal contributions through the Safe Restart Agreement) represented 49% of total spending on pandemic-related support for child care between March and December 2020.¹³⁸ Among the provinces, British Columbia made the largest investment in its child care services (at

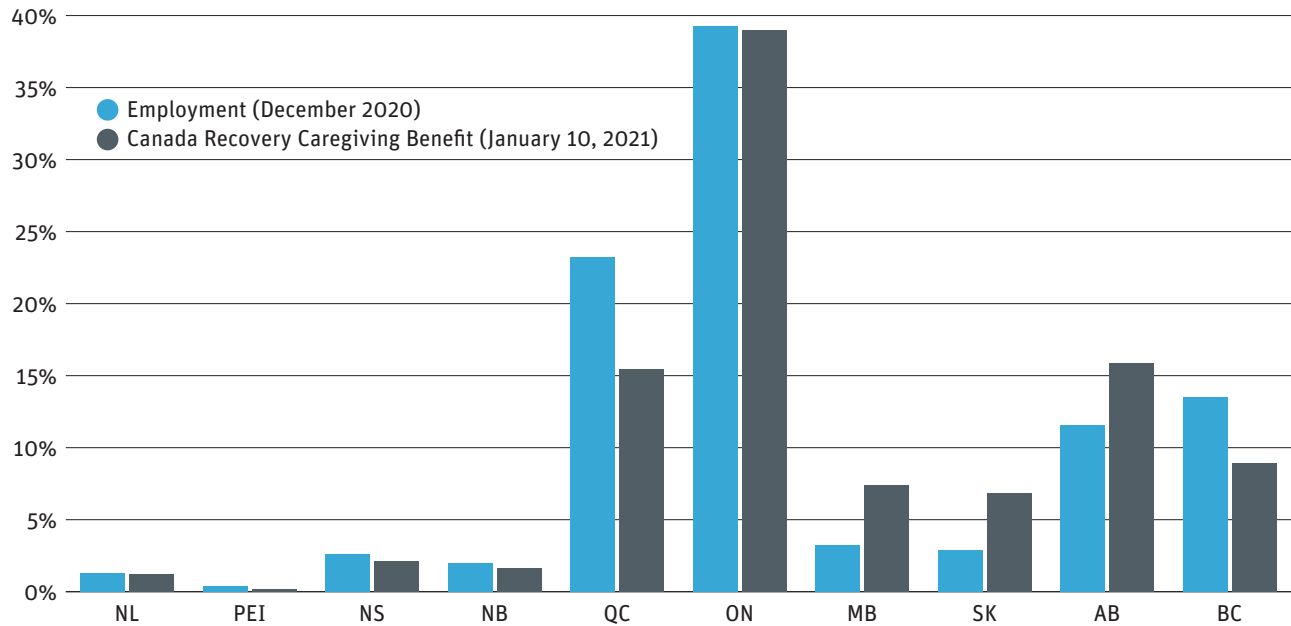
\$282 million), on top its share of available federal funding. The governments of Ontario and Nova Scotia also made significant investments, \$264 million and \$18 million, respectively. The Saskatchewan government, however, has yet to fully allocate the federal funds it received for child care,¹³⁹ while Alberta and Manitoba have contributed few of their own resources to bolster child care¹⁴⁰—despite women’s lagging employment recovery and the imminent loss of child care spaces in these provinces.

The Quebec government has drawn down its share of the federal Safe Restart Agreement funding. Its own investment in pandemic-related child care, however, was comparatively small, given the size of its established child care program budget. Quebec vastly outspends the other provinces by a margin of about five to one, and its spending as a share of GDP (0.7%) is much closer to the OECD average (0.9%).¹⁴¹ While women and families in Quebec suffered significant employment losses associated with high rates of community infection, the relative strength of the child care system helped to offset its impact on women aged 25–54 years, whose participation rate had rebounded by September and was relatively stable through the fall of 2020.

The size of Quebec’s child care system also helps to explain the relatively low take up of the CRCB among female workers, compared to their share of Canada’s workforce. In December 2020, women in Quebec accounted for 23.2% of total female employment but only 15.4% of CRCB applicants. Even as women lost their jobs or were forced to reduce their hours, many had access to child care to support their return to work.¹⁴² By contrast, the share of female applicants compared to their share of total employment was much higher in Alberta (15.9% vs. 11.6%), Manitoba (7.4% vs. 3.2%) and Saskatchewan (6.8% vs. 2.9%)—all provinces with much smaller child care systems.

Child care advocates across the country have welcomed the additional support. The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program, in particular, has been essential to keeping the doors open. But most continue to struggle financially as they attempt to deliver a safe service for children and staff with much reduced revenues. Staff retention has been a huge challenge, as the many women who staff the centres and homes juggle the care demands of their own families. Some benefited from a wage top up for a period of time through the first wave, but these subsidies have been discontinued. The very low wages and lack of benefits, such as paid sick days, that characterize female-majority caring services remain a huge barrier.¹⁴³ With the end of the wage subsidy program on the horizon, Maya Roy, chief executive officer of YWCA Canada, believes that about 50% of non-profit centres and 20% of for-profit centres are at risk of going under. “That’s bad news for a system

FIGURE 11 Distribution of employment (15–64 years) and Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit among women, by province



Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01; Government of Canada, Applications to date: Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefits.

that’s already stretched so thin that there are only enough licensed daycare spots for one in four Canadian kids.”¹⁴⁴

Essential worker top up programs have also delivered concrete support to women workers. In mid-April, as the tragedy in long-term care homes was unfolding, the federal government announced its intention to create a program to support low-wage essential workers who are working in very difficult circumstances at great personal risk. Federal funds were made available to provinces on a cost-shared basis (75% federal, 25% province) to provide wage top ups to frontline workers. The programs were designed and administered by the provinces, some providing additional funds to expand the number of workers covered and to boost funds available to individuals. The primary focus, in most instances, was on health care workers, such as personal support workers, shelter workers and child care staff. Manitoba, Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador and P.E.I. extended the designation to include selected private sector workers, such as grocery store cashiers. Top ups ranged from \$500-\$1,000 in one-time payments, as offered in Manitoba and P.E.I., to upwards of \$3,500 per month in Ontario for 16 weeks.

Quebec launched its program before the federal government's funding was announced. The province, through different programs, gave a 4% raise to more than 250,000 public and private sector health and emergency service workers, with another 4% on top of that for 55,000 workers in areas where they are likely to be exposed to the virus, like intensive care units.¹⁴⁵ By the end of December 2020, the province had paid out almost \$1.4 billion to workers, including a contribution of \$661 million from the federal government.¹⁴⁶ Quebec's contribution to its essential worker programs were larger than any of the other provinces, part of an aggressive effort to stabilize staffing and to ensure that recipients would be better off working than taking up the CERB.¹⁴⁷

The crisis in Ontario long-term care facilities was equally devastating during the first wave. After much delay and frustration on the part of workers, Ontario's Temporary Pandemic Pay Program was introduced in the summer of 2020, retroactively boosting the pay of an estimated 375,000 workers by \$4 per hour, with \$250 for those working more than 100 hours per month, for 16 weeks. In October, the government announced a new wage top up for 147,000 personal support workers in hospital and community settings.¹⁴⁸ By December 2020, the province had spent over \$1.5 billion, the majority share (62.4%) from the federal government.

Ontario's program was comparatively smaller in scale than Quebec's, but larger than other provinces. Indeed, five out of 10 provinces (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia) chose to leave federal money for essential workers on the table—a total of \$126 million. Saskatchewan, for example, matched only 5.2% of its available funding and chose not to access almost \$50 million in additional support, neglecting the opportunity to invest in Saskatchewan's majority female care workforce.¹⁴⁹ Alberta finally announced its program for essential workers in the public and private sector in February 2021, waiting nine months before confirming its support. Eligible workers will receive a flat benefit of \$1,200.¹⁵⁰

Most of the wage top-up programs have been discontinued, despite calls from labour organizations¹⁵¹ and clear evidence of pressing need in the long-term care, health and social service sectors.

In introducing the Essential Workers Support Fund in May 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said: "I think this is one of the first recessions we've ever seen that has so hard hit vulnerable workers in the service sector, particularly women and new Canadians and young people.... That's why, as a society, not only do we need to do what we are doing in the short term to give extra supports to vulnerable people, but we need to make sure that as we move forward...we think very, very carefully about how important

TABLE 3 Federal–provincial expenditures on wage top up programs for essential workers (\$ mil), April 2020–February 2021

	Federal allocation	Total expenditures	Federal contribution	Net provincial contribution	Net provincial share	Money left on the table
NL	\$53	\$66	\$52	\$14	21.1%	\$-
PEI	\$17	\$17	\$17	\$0	0.0%	\$-
NS	\$87	\$94	\$81	\$14	14.4%	\$6.4
NB	\$72	\$61	\$42	\$19	30.6%	\$30.0
QC	\$661	\$1,382	\$661	\$722	52.2%	\$-
ON	\$1,129	\$1,553	\$1,129	\$424	27.3%	\$-
MB	\$117	\$155	\$107	\$48	31.0%	\$10.5
SK	\$103	\$56	\$53	\$3	4.9%	\$49.4
AB	\$348	\$465	\$347	\$118	25.4%	\$-
BC	\$401	\$494	\$371	\$123	24.9%	\$29.8

Source David Macdonal (2021), Picking up the tab, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

the work that is being done by women and vulnerable Canadians is, and how we need to make sure we’re better supporting them.”¹⁵² The suggestion, widely expressed at the time, was that Canadians were truly seeing the extent to which society relies on the labour of essential workers, that the pandemic would herald a reckoning about the treatment of workers in the care economy, and that the nightly applause for pandemic heroes would translate into overdue improvements in pay and working conditions. These workers are still waiting.

In Ontario, even as the government brought in a wage top up for workers in long-term care settings, it failed to take action to improve working conditions and institute proven measures to halt the spread of the virus.¹⁵³ While staff movement between facilities was halted, the government did not provide a guarantee of full-time work at these facilities, as British Columbia did. The result is that personal support workers in Ontario earn a lower salary than before the pandemic, even after taking the wage top up into account.¹⁵⁴ Efforts to attract and train new workers, as well as efforts to implement comprehensive infection control strategies, have been slow to get off the ground. The provincial government has thwarted the efforts of its own commission into the catastrophic outbreaks in long-term care homes by failing to provide requested information about the government’s efforts to prevent

and contain the spread of COVID-19. A request to extend the commission's deadline for the final report—scheduled for April 30th—was denied.¹⁵⁵

Toward a gender just recovery

The coronavirus pandemic has tragically illustrated the insight of feminist economics that economies depend on their paid and unpaid care infrastructure and they neglect them at their peril.

—*Jerome De Henau and Susan Himmelweit*¹⁵⁶

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC is shaping up to be a significant setback for women's economic security, especially the most marginalized, who have suffered the most profound losses and are experiencing the greatest difficulties emerging from the crisis. This describes many women: racialized and Black women, First Nation, Métis and Inuit women, migrant and undocumented women, trans and queer women, women with disabilities and deaf women.

The pandemic has also shown the critical role that the social safety net plays, or fails to play, in times of crisis. In Canada, the response of public health care systems and the emergency income benefits have helped to reduce, but not halt, the damaging spread and economic impact of the virus. But investments in women's employment—and especially in caring services—have largely been an afterthought, exposing the systematic undervaluing of women's paid and unpaid work.

There can be no surprise that vulnerable seniors in long-term care have died in such high numbers and are still hugely at risk right now. There is excellent research available on how to deliver quality seniors' care, but

Canada has relied, instead, on a market-based system explicitly designed to siphon public money out of the service delivery through short staffing, contracting out and the suppression of wages.¹⁵⁷ There is good guidance on how to pandemic-proof child care and public education to help minimize the risk to children, educators and care workers through distancing, small groups, protocols for testing and quarantine, and supports for staff who fall ill.

But provinces have largely chosen to underinvest in needed protections and the long-term financial viability of essential caring services and community infrastructure.¹⁵⁸ These policy decisions assume that families—and, more specifically, women in those families—are available to step in to pick up the slack, to take up an even larger share of responsibilities themselves or to purchase these needed supports, such as child care, food preparation, or tutoring, from other more economically precarious women.

The failure of pandemic policy responses to forcefully address the threats to women’s economic security is consistent with at least two decades of neoliberal practice which has actively encouraged women’s labour market participation (particularly among low-wage women) while offloading collective social responsibilities, including caring labour, onto the market, community or households.¹⁵⁹ The move to provide child care to essential workers during the first wave of the pandemic was an acknowledgement of the material limits of these assumptions. If child care services were not provided, health care services would have collapsed. The near global refusal to address the untenable tension between women’s paid and unpaid work through proactive and meaningful investments in the care economy, targeting the most marginalized, suggests the challenges and hardships ahead are formidable.

The federal government, for its part, acknowledges the differential impacts of the pandemic and has used gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) tools¹⁶⁰ to assess the potential impact of the measures introduced in the July 2020 *Economic and Fiscal Snapshot* and the November 2020 *Fall Economic Statement*. But these efforts are limited in their scope, focusing on identifying important issues but stopping short of a critical reading of the problems at hand and the solutions proposed, including the framing of the issues and their systemic context.¹⁶¹ Stated another way, the federal government’s pandemic response is “gender aware”—women’s economic contribution, as well as their care work, are explicitly acknowledged—but it fails to get at the structural factors at the root of gender inequality. By contrast, the situation of women and marginalized communities barely merits a mention in Ontario’s budget¹⁶² or Alberta’s Recovery Plan.¹⁶³

As a result, provincial and federal social and economic programs continue to respond poorly to the systemic barriers that women face today—and, for women confronting intersecting forms of discrimination, they miss the mark altogether.¹⁶⁴ There remain significant gaps in income supports and public services that would facilitate the participation of different groups of women in the paid labour market and support caring labour more equitably. Indeed, for some, the expectation that women should serve as unpaid caregivers is used to justify the lack of public supports, such as home care and child care, and the expansion of exploitative market alternatives—priced beyond reach for all but high-income families.

These are precisely the ways in which government policy both reflects and reproduces disadvantage and privilege, limiting women’s economic choices and their economic security.¹⁶⁵ Recovery planning provides an opportunity to tackle the gender bias in economic thinking and public policy.

An inclusive economic recovery for women¹⁶⁶

An action plan for women’s economic recovery must address immediate needs and lay the foundation for a safer, more resilient, and gender-just future that is inclusive of all women. Collection and integration of disaggregated gender data that speaks to the realities and challenges faced by different groups of women and gender-diverse people is essential to this task. Statistics Canada’s work on the Labour Force Survey, introducing variables to track labour force trends among racialized groups, is an important start, but substantial investment is needed to fill the gaps in our understanding and our current policy responses.

Over the long term, a successful strategy for women in the economy has to create the enabling conditions for diverse women to engage in paid employment, address women’s structural disadvantages and foster the creation of decent work that delivers a fair income and enjoys employment and social protections. The goal is to ensure that wealth, work and care responsibilities are more fairly distributed, and that everyone—racialized women, women with disabilities, low-income women, gender diverse people—can engage in the economy on equitable and just terms, in ways that generate shared prosperity and well-being.

1. Overcome barriers to women’s participation in paid employment

To close the economic gap for women, especially for marginalized women, Canada needs a plan that facilitates women’s participation in paid employment and tackles the structural barriers that different women face. This includes addressing the: lack of attendant care or necessary accommodations; failure to recognize foreign credentials or related work experience; discrimination against racialized and Indigenous people; lack of child care and related family leave policies; and the reality of living in poverty or without stable housing. The pandemic has magnified all of these challenges. Solutions demand a comprehensive response that targets distinct community needs in the following areas.

Create a system of high quality child care for all: It is imperative to move ahead, finally, with child care. Now is the moment to create a system of comprehensive, high quality, publicly managed caring services across the country. Such an investment would not only extend vital support to children and their families, it would significantly boost the labour supply and hours of employment of women aged 25 to 50 (by an estimated 725,000 workers over the next decade), resulting in higher economic activity and much higher government revenues.¹⁶⁷ The fall economic statement included resources for the new Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care to coordinate efforts in building a Canada-wide system of “affordable, accessible and high-quality child care from ocean, to ocean to ocean.” The secretariat will have to work with great speed to prevent the collapse of Canada’s child care system. Federal leadership, including bold, accelerated federal spending of \$2 billion per year through the multilateral framework and bilateral agreements, is needed.

Strengthen violence against women/gender-based violence services: The pandemic has shone a much-needed spotlight on violence against women and gender-based violence in Canada. Full economic participation for women and uninterrupted access to the labour force requires safe communities, safe homes and safe workplaces. Moving ahead with a well-resourced implementation of a robust national action plan on gender-based violence is critical to women’s current and future economic security. The federal government’s announcement of significant funding—\$782 million over five years—to support “a National Action Plan for Ending Violence against Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBT and Two-Spirit People”¹⁶⁸ should spur swift completion of this key, life-saving tool.

Expand accommodation and supports: Even as whole industries have pivoted to facilitate work from home—bittersweet for women with disabilities, who have fought long and hard for these types of accommodations, to watch them roll out so effortlessly—access to needed supports has become immeasurably more difficult as service providers attempt to deliver socially distanced supports with declining revenues. The same energy is needed to tackle barriers to employment facing new immigrants, Indigenous women, other racialized women, and young women, as well as to stabilize existing support systems and to foster the creation of decent employment opportunities. Tailored supports are fundamental to enabling women’s labour market participation.

2. Create the public infrastructure necessary to spur shared prosperity

An inclusive and sustainable economy stands on a foundation of strong employment standards and protections, effective income security programs that protect against risks and mitigate income disparities, and essential community infrastructure, such as caring services and customized labour force development supports. These types of investments are not only crucial to women’s sustained economic engagement and long-term economic security, but to creating an inclusive economy.

Invest significantly in the care economy: The pandemic is highlighting how essential the care economy is to health, well-being and the economic system while exposing its low social value. This is a key piece of infrastructure needed to support women’s labour market participation, as it employs mostly women, especially racialized, Black, immigrant and migrant women, and relieves women of caregiving responsibilities so they can go to work. Recovery planning needs to prioritize moving beyond the fragmented approach of underfunding, privatization, and exploitation of those working in care sectors, propped up by systemic discrimination. Governments can seize upon this moment to create comprehensive, high quality, publicly managed caring services that take profit out of care. Investing in social infrastructure pays for itself over time through increased employment and earnings, reduced income security benefits and emergency services, and healthier communities.¹⁶⁹

Ensure decent work for those at the margins or left out of the labour market: Women, especially racialized, Black, immigrant and migrant women, are traditionally and historically overrepresented in poor quality

jobs, and have the fewest resources to juggle unpaid labour and caregiving responsibilities. Solutions include: a minimum wage that reflects a living wage, paid sick days, permanent residency for migrant workers, access to family leave, and labour protections such as proactive pay equity and pay transparency. Together, these policies can create a stronger foundation for the labour market, enhancing the economic security and well-being of all low-wage workers. Targeted employment strategies will also be needed to address the systemic barriers facing specific groups, such as Indigenous women, women with disabilities, those fleeing violence and youth aging out of care.

Expand gendered workforce development programs: Technological disruptions to the nature of work have been accelerated by the pandemic. These changes will disproportionately impact women in jobs most likely to be disrupted (low-waged, clerical, manufacturing, and retail) and jobs least likely to be disrupted (care work such as child care, home care, and long-term care).¹⁷⁰ Given established occupational and industry segregation, and historical disadvantages in the labour market, many women may not be able to access newly created jobs—many of which are being created in male-dominated industries and occupations like engineering, computer science, environmental science, and construction.¹⁷¹ To mitigate disruptions in women’s labour market participation, a training and skills-building plan is needed that prioritizes women’s access to decent work in emerging sectors (e.g., green economy), as well as those in which they are currently represented.

Modernize income security: A just recovery plan must also continue to financially support people with caring obligations and those facing the ongoing loss of employment or reduced earnings. Barring a sudden turnaround in employment, many women will exhaust their recovery benefits in the next few months’ time and won’t have recourse to regular EI or other supports. Indeed, it is highly likely that many jobs in vulnerable sectors, such as accommodation, food and personal services, won’t be coming back in the short term. Established income support programs must be redesigned to weed out gender bias and re-oriented to respond to the expected large-scale transformation of work over the next decade. The rollout of Canadian emergency measures offer important lessons for permanently strengthening income security, especially the value of expanding coverage and creating a higher minimum income floor through new programs, like the proposed Canada Disability Benefit. It will be critical to closely monitor the interaction of new and old income supports for different groups of women. It is equally critical to modernize existing programs, such as EI, to reflect current and

future labour realities, and build out the role and generosity of these programs to effectively reduce poverty and income disparities.

Conclusion

GOVERNMENTS IN CANADA have an historic opportunity to address gender inequities and position the well-being of women and gender-diverse people at the forefront of an inclusive recovery. This will require prioritizing the voices and perspectives of the most marginalized and ensuring that women, in all of their diversity, are fully and equally engaged at all levels of government and in all facets of planning and decision-making. By centring the experiences of diverse and marginalized communities in this process, we will be taking concrete action to heal past harms and to dismantle systemic barriers, laying the necessary foundation for an inclusive economy that works for everyone.

Appendix

TABLE 4 Percentage change (%) in aggregate actual hours worked at main job relative to February 2020, by province

	Female workers (15+ years)				Male workers (15+ years)			
	Apr-May 20	Aug-20	20-Nov	20-Dec	Apr-May 20	Aug-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
NL	-28.8	-10.0	-9.5	-6.1	-33.4	-9.1	-4.6	-2.6
PEI	-41.9	-24.7	-26.9	-22.2	-27.3	-11.9	-18.0	-18.8
NS	-37.7	-16.9	-11.9	-11.8	-27.0	-15.0	-12.6	-13.1
NB	-26.6	-12.7	-13.0	-9.7	-20.8	-8.2	-8.8	-6.4
QC	-32.7	-11.3	-7.3	-7.5	-33.3	-6.0	-6.7	-7.6
ON	-30.8	-12.7	-7.8	-8.5	-25.9	-10.4	-7.6	-6.9
MB	-21.3	-8.7	-15.5	-10.3	-17.3	-8.5	-10.8	-7.1
SK	-20.9	-8.6	-13.2	-7.5	-20.2	-6.6	-10.5	-6.5
AB	-25.4	-12.6	-14.2	-9.3	-21.5	-11.6	-12.2	-9.6
BC	-25.0	-14.1	-10.1	-4.0	-28.8	-17.4	-13.2	-8.9
Canada	-27.3	-12.4	-9.4	-7.9	-24.6	-10.3	-9.0	-7.7

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0032-01 Actual hours worked by job type, monthly (adjusted for seasonality).

TABLE 5 Concentration in vulnerable industries and employment loss relative to February 2020, female workers (15+ years), by province

	Share of employment in vulnerable industries (% February 2020)	Share of total employed working part-time (% February 2020)	February–April employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–December employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–April total employment loss (%)	February–December total employment loss (%)
NL	18.4	21.4	-24.9	-23.9	-12.9	-1.2
PEI	16.0	20.8	-32.8	-23.0	-17.2	-8.1
NS	17.1	23.8	-47.7	-25.8	-18.2	-1.6
NB	13.7	18.3	-42.0	-3.4	-14.5	-0.8
QC	14.9	24.0	-39.0	-26.7	-18.4	-3.3
ON	14.6	24.5	-32.3	-12.4	-17.2	-4.2
MB	15.7	28.6	-32.2	-28.5	-15.6	-7.7
SK	18.3	25.6	-40.9	-25.5	-14.9	-5.0
AB	16.5	27.9	-39.1	-25.0	-17.7	-5.2
BC	18.5	29.7	-44.8	-3.5	-17.1	-1.5
Canada	15.7	25.5	-37.3	-17.1	-16.9	-3.7

Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0022-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality. Vulnerable sectors: Accommodation & food services; Information, culture and recreation; Other services. Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01, Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months (seasonally adjusted).

TABLE 6 Concentration in vulnerable industries and employment loss relative to February 2020, male workers (15+ years), by province

	Share of employment in vulnerable industries (% February 2020)	Share of total employed working part-time (% February 2020)	February–April employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–December employment loss in vulnerable sectors (%)	February–April total employment loss (%)	February–December total employment loss (%)
NL	13.7	11.4	-30.1	5.6	-18.7	0.4
PEI	11.9	9.4	-35.6	-24.4	-11.4	-2.9
NS	13.8	15.1	-37.9	-21.1	-14.1	-3.4
NB	13.1	10.0	-18.7	-11.3	-13.0	-1.8
QC	13.2	13.8	-34.8	-24.2	-19.5	-3.3
ON	12.9	12.2	-29.4	-12.3	-13.0	-2.6
MB	12.7	14.2	-27.7	-14.1	-12.0	-4.2
SK	13.6	12.3	-18.2	-10.9	-10.8	-4.2
AB	13.5	10.5	-33.7	-21.9	-12.8	-4.8
BC	15.2	13.0	-35.9	-13.4	-14.2	-1.4
Canada	13.4	12.5	-31.8	-16.4	-14.6	-2.9

Source Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0022-01 Labour force characteristics by industry, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality. Vulnerable sectors: Accommodation & food services; Information, culture and recreation; Other services. Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01, Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months (seasonally adjusted).

TABLE 7 Population “not in the labour force”, by province (×1,000)

	Women (15–64 years)				Men (15–64 years)			
	February 2020	April 2020	August 2020	December 2020	February 2020	April 2020	August 2020	December 2020
NL	49.0	61.7	49.1	45.9	39.6	54.8	44.1	35.7
PEI	9.6	14.9	11.4	12.5	8.8	13.2	9.6	9.3
NS	71.9	109.6	81.4	76.4	60.3	84.3	67.2	63.5
NB	60.3	75.8	62.0	60.2	48.5	62.6	50.1	43.0
QC	582.1	706.1	572.7	628.8	476.6	594.1	458.6	482.8
ON	1,261.4	1,642.4	1,324.1	1,251.1	920.8	1,200.2	920.0	862.5
MB	101.2	132.7	102.9	116.7	67.7	89.8	71.5	75.0
SK	81.3	102.8	81.0	89.0	57.5	82.0	61.5	56.5
AB	349.9	468.8	369.8	378.6	226.2	320.7	221.5	246.3
BC	410.0	544.6	409.1	406.4	299.8	417.8	306.6	297.0
Canada	2,976.7	3,859.4	3,063.4	3,065.5	2,205.7	2,919.5	2,210.6	2,171.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Table: 14-10-0287-01 - Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted

Notes

- 1** Women is used in this report to include both cisgender and transgender people.
- 2** Dawn Desjardins, Andrew Agopsowicz, Carrie Freestone (2020), "[The fruits of her labour: Canadian women are reaping the rewards of their labour-market gains](#)," RBC Economics, March 2020.
- 3** This report looks at provincial and territorial policies and programs. The territories, however, are not included in the federal and provincial review of economic indicators because of gaps in available information.
- 4** Coined by economist Armine Yalnizyan, "she-cession" refers to the greater impact of the pandemic recession on women, initially evidenced by greater job loss and, now, in a slower return to work and women leaving the labour market.
- 5** Racialized groups are defined using the "visible minority" variable based on the definition included in the Employment Equity Act and used in the 2016 Census of Population. This term refers to "persons, other and Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour."
- 6** Jasmine Ramze Rezaee (2020), [An intersectional approach to COVID-19 she-recovery](#), YWCA Toronto.
- 7** Katherine Scott (2020), [COVID-19 crisis response must address gender faultlines](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 8** Fully one-third (34%) of all women workers are in "high risk" jobs—more than twice the rate of men (at 15%); the large majority work as personal support workers, home care and child care providers, cashiers and retail workers. David Macdonald (2020), [Between a rock and a hard place: Which workers are most vulnerable when their workplaces re-open amid COVID-19?](#) Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Custom tabulations.
- 9** Global Health 5050 (2020), [COVID-19 and healthcare workers](#). For example, women make up nearly 76% of infected health workers in Spain, 69% in Italy and 73% in the United States. The Canadian Institute of Health Information reported in September that as of July 2020, [health care workers represented roughly 20% of all infections](#) and that 12 health care workers had died from COVID-19. While no other information is presented, it is likely that the majority of infected workers are women.

- 10** See Sheila Block and Simran Dhunna (2020), [COVID-19: It is time to protect frontline workers](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 11** Armine Yalnizyan (2020), [After-CERB-Understanding-the-Inadequacy-of-Paid-Sick-Leave-Provisions-in-Canada](#), Atkinson Foundation Brief.
- 12** “Precarious status means forms of legal status characterized by any of the following: lack of permanent residence or permanent work authorization, limited or no social benefits, inability to sponsor relatives and deportability.” Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (2012), [The impact of precarious legal status on immigrants’ economic outcomes](#), Institute for Research in Public Policy, p. 12.
- 13** Cecelia Benoit (2020), [“COVID-19 benefits exclude sex workers in Canada,”](#) Policy Options, IRPP.
- 14** In Canada, women spend nearly two times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men. Melissa Moyser and Amanda Burlock (2018), [Time use: Total work burden, unpaid work and leisure](#), Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report, Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 89-503-X.
- 15** Dakshana Bascaramurty and Caroline Alphonso (2020), [“How race, income and ‘opportunity hoarding’ will shape Canada’s back-to-school season,”](#) The Globe and Mail.
- 16** Oxfam (2020), [Care in the time of coronavirus](#).
- 17** Brenna Owen (2020), [“Calls to Canadian domestic violence helplines jump during pandemic,”](#) CTV News.
- 18** B.C. Women’s Health Foundation (2020), Unmasking gender inequity.
- 19** Oxfam Canada, [Oxfam Omni Report](#), June 9, 2020.
- 20** George Fallis (2020), [“Scoring Canada’s COVID fight over its first three rounds of six,”](#) Financial Post, Dec. 31, 2020.
- 21** Katherine Scott (2020), [Women bearing the brunt of economic losses](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 22** David Macdonald (2020), [Canada’s job losses reach Great Depression levels](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 23** Katherine Scott, et.al. (2020), [Resetting normal: Women, decent work and Canada’s fractured care economy](#). Among the top 10% of earners, 7% of women lost employment and while employment for men in this top income group actually increased by 2%.
- 24** According to the 2016 census, 80% of immigrants who came to Canada between 2006 and 2016 were from a visible minority group. Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016191.
- 25** Statistics Canada (2020), [“Labour force survey, April 2020,”](#) The Daily.
- 26** Katherine Scott, et.al. (2020), Resetting normal.
- 27** University of Oxford, Blavatnik School of Government, [Coronavirus government response tracker](#). See also: Canadian Institute for Health Information, [COVID-19 intervention timeline in Canada](#).
- 28** Government of Canada (2020), [Coronavirus disease 2020 \(COVID-19\): Epidemiology update](#). As of December 31st, Alberta led the country with the highest rate of active cases per 100,000 (at 360.4), followed by Manitoba (329.0), Quebec (263.6), Saskatchewan (229.6), British Columbia (179) and Ontario (148.4).
- 29** See: Atlantic Provinces Economic Council (2020), [COVID-19: Key economic issues for Atlantic Canada](#).

- 30** Karine Leclerc (2020), [Caring for children: Impacts of COVID on parents](#), Statistics Canada COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 31** Statistics Canada (2020), [Labour force survey, September 2020](#), The Daily.
- 32** Statistics Canada (2020), [Labour force survey, November 2020](#), The Daily.
- 33** Dawn Desjardins and Carrie Freestone (2020), [Canadian women continue to exit the labour force](#), RBC Economics, November 19, 2020.
- 34** Angela Garbes (2020), [“The numbers don’t tell the whole story: Unemployment statistics can’t capture the full extent of what women have lost,”](#) The Cut, February 1, 2021.
- 35** Research shows that women hold more than 70% of jobs at risk of automation and a [third](#) of Indigenous workers are concentrated in industries that are at risk of automation. See: Emma Charlton (2019), [“Women’s work faces the greatest risk from automation, says new research,”](#) World Economic Forum; Canadian Council on Aboriginal Business, et.al. (2020), [Digital differences: The impact of automation on the Indigenous economy in Canada](#).
- 36** The K-shaped recovery is also evident among male workers. The proportion of women employed in vulnerable industries, however, is larger than among male workers: 15.7% vs. 13.4% in February 2020.
- 37** Alex Hemingway and Michal Rozworski (2020), [“Canadian billionaire’s wealth skyrocketing amid the pandemic,”](#) Centre for Policy Alternatives-B.C.
- 38** In February, 25.2% of female workers earned less than \$17 per hour, compared to 18.7% of male workers.
- 39** Tony Kirby (2020), [“Evidence mounts on the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on ethnic minorities”](#), The Lancet, News|Volume 8, ISSUE 6, P547-548, June 1, 2020; City of Toronto (2020), [COVID-19 infection in Toronto: Ethno-racial identity and income](#). These figures are based on reported cases as of July 2020.
- 40** D.N. Fisman, et al (2020), “Risk factors associated with mortality among residents with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in long-term care facilities in Ontario, Canada,” JAMA Network Open. 2020; 3(7):e2015957.
- 41** The communities that have been hardest hit are also those with the largest share of people from racialized communities, low-income households, the unemployed, and people living in cramped, unsuitable housing with limited access to health and social services. See: Public Health Ontario (2020), [COVID-19 in Ontario: A focus on diversity](#); Rajendra Subedi, Lawson Greenberg, and Martin Turcotte (2020), [“COVID-19 mortality in Canada’s ethno-cultural neighbourhoods,”](#) Statistics Canada COVID-19: Data Insights for a Better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 42** Almost one in three Black, Indigenous and racialized women work in sales and service occupations compared to 27% of white women. Sheila Block (2021), [Racialized and Indigenous workers are bearing the brunt of pandemic job loss](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 43** Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Supplement, July-November 2020. Not adjusted for seasonality.
- 44** Nicole Thompson (2020), [“Spread of COVID-19 in Brampton linked to systemic factors, experts say,”](#) Toronto Star, November 29, 2020.
- 45** Simran Singh (2020), [“South Asians and COVID-19 in BC: Disaggregated and racial data matters,”](#) The Daily Hive, Dec. 8, 2020.

- 46** While community transmission in high-income neighbourhoods in Toronto started to drop almost immediately in late March, reported infections in the poorest and most racialized neighbourhoods didn't begin to trend down for two months. Kate Allen, et.al. (2020), "[Lockdown worked for the rich, but not for the poor: The untold story of how COVID-19 spread across Toronto, in 7 graphics](#)," Toronto Star, August 2, 2020.
- 47** Feng Hou, Kristyn Frank, Christoph Schimmele (2020), [Economic impact of COVID-19 among visible minority groups](#), Statistics Canada, COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 48** Sébastien LaRochelle-Côté and Sharanjit Uppal (2020), [The social and economic concerns of immigrants during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," Statistics Canada, COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada, Catalogue No. 45280001.
- 49** Amrita Hari and Luciara Nardon (2020), "[Immigrant women are falling behind during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," The Conversation, Carleton University.
- 50** Paula Arriagada, Kristyn Frank, Tara Hahmann and Feng Hou (2020), [Economic impact of COVID-19 among Indigenous peoples](#), Statistics Canada, COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 51** Amanda Bleakney, Huda Masoud and Henry Robertson (2020), [Labour market impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous people: March to August 2020](#), Statistics Canada, COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 52** Ibid.
- 53** Statistics Canada, [Labour force survey—December 2020](#), The Daily.
- 54** Arjumand Siddiqi, Ryoa Chung, Jeffrey Ansloos and Paulette Senior (2021), [Addressing economic racism in Canada's pandemic response and recovery](#), Broadbent Institute.
- 55** M. Fisher and E. Bubola (2020), "As Coronavirus deepens inequality, inequality worsens its spread," New York Times, March 15, 2020.
- 56** Public Health Agency of Canada (2018), [Key health inequalities in Canada: A national portrait](#).
- 57** Anil Arora (2021), "[The pandemic has reversed our momentum on closing gaps from marginalized Canadians](#)," The Globe and Mail, Feb. 19, 2021.
- 58** Sheila Block (2020), [Racialized and Indigenous workers are bearing the brunt of pandemic losses](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 59** Julie Gordon (2020), "[Canada's Atlantic region closed out world to beat COVID-19, and the economy has done OK](#)," Reuters, October 25, 2020.
- 60** Men's labour force participation rate among those aged 15 to 64 was 82.1% in February 2020. It had fully recovered by September, reaching 82.3%, edging up again in October to 82.6%, falling back to 82.4% in November and December 2020.
- 61** This figures includes very modest female population growth of 0.2% between February and December 2020.
- 62** Michelle Budig et al. (2012), "[The Motherhood Penalty in Cross-National Perspective: The importance of work-family policies and cultural attitudes](#)," Social Politics, Vol. 19, No. 2.
- 63** Martha Friendly, et. al., (2020), [Early childhood education and care in Canada 2019](#), Child Care Resource and Research Unit, p. 241.
- 64** Chuxuan Sun and Lauren Russell (2021), "[The impact of COVID-19 childcare closures and women's labour supply](#)," VoxEU.org. See also: Lauren Russell and Chuxuan Sun (2020), "[The](#)

[effect of mandatory child care center closures on women's labor market outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," *COVID Economics* 62: 124–154.

65 The federal government has also provided support by deferring revenues (e.g., suspending fees, deferring tax collection, etc.), accelerating spending plans under established infrastructure plans and cost-shared programs such as child care, and extending supports to Indigenous communities.

66 At this time, there are considerable gaps in what is known about the coverage and impact of the different programs that have been introduced. This overview is based on a review of published sources on government expenditures, the Gender-based analysis plus summary provided in the federal [Economic and Fiscal Snapshot](#) and [Fall Economic Statement](#) and the evolving body of public policy research.

67 Government of Canada (2020), [Fall economic statement](#), p. 68.

68 Dominic Richardson, et.al. (2020), [Supporting families and children beyond COVID-19: Social protection in Southern and Eastern Europe and Central Asia](#), Innocenti Research Report, UNICEF Office of Research—Innocenti, Florence.

69 These figures refer to program spending in 2019–20 and 2021–22. See David Macdonald (2021), [Picking up the tab: A complete accounting of federal and provincial COVID-19 measures in 2020](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

70 OECD (2020), [Supporting livelihoods during the COVID-19 crisis: Closing the gaps in safety nets](#), May 2020.

71 For a discussion on income security programs introduced in Canada up until September 2020, see Vinusha Gunaseelan, Alissa Klingbaum and Thrmiga Sathiyamoorthy (2020), [Jurisdictional scan of COVID-19 income transfer programs in Canada](#), Wellesley Institute.

72 The EI system typically pays out benefits to only 40% of workers experiencing unemployment.

73 Jennifer Robson (2020), [EI failed so we made CERB: Now what should we learn?](#) Public Policy Forum.

74 After five decades, and large-scale reform in the mid-1990s, EI remains profoundly gender biased, built on the norms and patterns of a male-dominated workforce. Monica Townson and Kevin Hayes (2007), [Women and the unemployment insurance program](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

75 Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0011-01, Employment insurance beneficiaries (regular benefits) by province and territory, monthly, seasonally adjusted.

76 The majority of workers earning less than \$1,000 a month are women. With this move, an additional 550,000 women and 354,000 men were able to access CERB. David Macdonald (2020), ["Gender impact of Canada's income supports"](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

77 Jennifer Robson (2020), [EI failed so we made CERB](#).

78 Government of Canada (2020), [Supporting Canadians through the next phase of the economy re-opening: Increased access to EI and recovery benefits](#), Background.

79 The higher income floor for EI benefits and the new recovery benefits was an improvement over the original proposal of \$400 per week introduced by the Liberal government in August. This particular provision was one of the requests from the New Democratic Party to secure their support for the passage of the suite of post-CERB programs in the House of Commons.

- 80** In 2019, there were 2.9 million self-employed workers in Canada and over 2 million temporary employees (including seasonal job holders, workers on term or contract, or other forms of casual employment). The size of both of these groups fell in 2020 as a result of the pandemic.
- 81** Millions of workers remain without access to paid sick leave, through workplace plans, collective agreements or statutory protections. In 2016, over half of all employees (58%) did not have paid sick leave. Among those earning less than \$25,000 per year, over three-quarters did not have leave. Armine Yalnizyan (2020), [After CERB](#).
- 82** David Macdonald (2021), [Picking up the tab](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 83** The Ontario government provided a one-time increase of \$100 to individuals and \$200 to families in receipt of provincial social assistance (Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program) to assist with COVID-19 related expenses.
- 84** David Macdonald (2021), [The golden cushion](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 85** See: Michael Smart (2020), [News on CEWS](#), Finances of the Nation.
- 86** Simran Dhunna and Sheila Block (2020), [COVID-19: Nurses need support from next week's Ontario budget](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 87** In the first wave, Canada had the highest reported national share of COVID-19 deaths for long-term care residents in the world, with 85% of total COVID-19 deaths occurring in long-term care facilities. Carole Estabrooks, Colleen Flood and Sharon Straus (2020), "[We must act now to prevent a second wave of long-term care deaths](#)," The Globe and Mail, June 10, 2020.
- 88** ILO (2019), [New job opportunities in an aging society](#), Paper prepared for the 1st Meeting of the G20 Employment Working Group, Feb 25–27, 2019, Tokyo Japan.
- 89** Pat Armstrong and Marcy Cohen (2020), [A higher standard: Setting federal standards in long-term care and continuing care](#), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 90** Martha Friendly, Barry Fered and Rachel Vickerson (2020), Highlights of a national survey.
- 91** In February 2020, 96% of early childhood educators and assistants were women, as were 97% of home child care providers. In 2016, according to the census, visible minorities accounted for 21% of all wage earners, but they accounted for 24% of early childhood educators and assistants and 41% of home child care providers. Recent immigrants were particularly overrepresented among home child care providers, accounting for 11% of earners in this occupation, compared to only 4% of wage earners in all occupations. Government of Canada (2020), [Fall Economic Statement](#), p. 78.
- 92** Simran Dhunna (2020), [Ontario's frontline workers deserve more than applause](#), Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 93** Pamela Uppal (2018), [Decent work for women—A literature review of women working in Ontario's nonprofit sector](#), Ontario Nonprofit Network.
- 94** Thirty-seven per cent of charitable donors have reduced the value of their donations since March 2020, according to a poll conducted by the Angus Reid Institute in September. Angus Reid Institute (2020), [Philanthropy, pandemic and political scandal: COVID-19 curtails donor giving](#).
- 95** ONN (2020), [Risk, resilience, and rebuilding communities: The state of Ontario nonprofits three months into the pandemic](#).
- 96** Ending Violence Association of Canada and Anova (2020), [Pandemic meets pandemic: understanding the impacts of covid-19 on gender-based violence services and survivors in Canada](#).

- 97** Government of Canada (2020), [Safe Restart Agreement and Safe Restart Agreement response letters](#). These funds are freely available to provinces and territories that apply and provide information about their intended plans.
- 98** Government of Canada, [Canada's COVID-19 Economic response plan](#).
- 99** Government of Canada (2020), [Fall Economic Statement](#), p. 15.
- 100** Ibid., p. 16.
- 101** Ibid., p. 78.
- 102** Bertrand Achou, et.al. (2020), "Early impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on household finances in Quebec," Canadian Public Policy, Volume 46, Issue S3, October.
- 103** Government of Canada (2020), [Canada emergency response benefit statistics](#).
- 104** Government of Canada, [Fall Economic Statement](#), p. 44. Estimates are based on self-reported data from the September Labour Force Survey. The highest application rate for the CERB by industrial sector was among workers in accommodation and food services; 25.7% of those employed in the industry applied for the CERB in September (p. 157).
- 105** Jolson Lim (2021), "[A closer look at where \\$82 billion in CERB payments went at the beginning of the pandemic](#)," CBC News.
- 106** In December 2020, the rate of long-term unemployment among women was 27.6%, up from 15.2% in February. There has been an equally significant increase in long-term unemployment among men as well, rising from 16% to 29% over this period. Long-term unemployment is defined as the share of unemployed who have been unemployed for 27 or more weeks. Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0342-01 Duration of unemployment, monthly, seasonally adjusted.
- 107** Government of Canada (2021), [Employment Insurance Program Statistics](#)—January 17, 2021.
- 108** Government of Canada (2021), [Applications to date: Canada Recovery Benefit](#).
- 109** Government of Canada (2021), [Applications to date: Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit](#).
- 110** Government of Canada (2021), [Applications to date: Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit](#).
- 111** See Kathleen Lahey (2016), "Tax units in Canada and gender: Ability to pay, equity or keeping women in their place?" in Jinyan Li, et.al. (eds.), *Income tax at 100 years: Reflections on the Income War Tax Act*, Toronto: Canada Tax Foundation.
- 112** This study looked at families that relied primarily on earnings to maintain their standard of living.
- 113** Derek Messacar and Rene Morissette (2020), [Work interruptions and financial vulnerability](#), Statistics Canada COVID-19: Data to insights for a better Canada, Catalogue no. 45280001.
- 114** Carl Meyer, "[Migrant and undocumented workers plead for help during COVID-19](#)," National Observer, April 17, 2020.
- 115** Jackie Hanson (2020), "[The rights of sex workers are being ignored in the COVID-19 response](#)," Human Rights Now, Amnesty International Blog.
- 116** Anne Tweddle and Hannah Aldridge (2019), [Welfare in Canada, 2018](#), Maytree Foundation.
- 117** Statistics Canada, Income Statistics Division, Table: 11-10-0191-01—Income statistics by economic family type and income source. These figures represent all economic families and persons not in economic families who reported income from social assistance for all or a part of 2018.
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- 119** Adina Bresge (2020), “[“Do our lives count for less?’: COVID-19 exposes cracks in Canada’s disability aid,”](#) The Globe and Mail, August 12, 2020.
- 120** Laurie Monsebraaten (2020), “[Ottawa to the provinces: Don’t claw back CERB for workers on social assistance,](#)” Toronto Star, April 13, 2020.
- 121** John Stapleton (2020), [Let’s play ‘Cliffs and Clawbacks’: Sensational new board game based on the CERB,](#) Open Policy Ontario.
- 122** John Stapleton (2020), [Canada’s CERB: How an emergency benefit designed for exposed people became a giant windfall for governments,](#) Open Policy Ontario.
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- 124** Keith Banting and John Myles (eds.) (2013), Inequality and the fading of redistribution. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- 125** Shelley Gavigan and Dorothy Chunn (2007), “[From Mothers’ Allowance to Mothers Need Not Apply: Canadian welfare law as liberal and neo-liberal reform,](#)” Osgoode Hall Law Journal, Vol. 45, No. 4.
- 126** Ricardo Tranjan (2019), [Towards an inclusive economy synching EI to the reality of low-wage work,](#) Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 127** David Macdonald (2020), “[1.8 million Canadians better off with a higher EI and CRB floor](#)”, Behind the Numbers, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 128** Armine Yalnizyan (2020), [After CERB.](#)
- 129** To be eligible, workers must be unable to work at least half of their scheduled shifts because they are sick with COVID-19, because they need to self-isolate due to potential exposure or if they have an underlying health condition that puts them at heightened risk if they catch the virus.
- 130** Rosa Saba (2020), “[Front-line and low-income workers would benefit most from paid sick leave, advocates say,](#)” Toronto Star, November 19, 2020.
- 131** Ryan Patrick Jones, “[Federal sickness benefits fall short of paid sick leave protections, advocates say,](#)” CBC News, January 14, 2021.
- 132** Angela Garbes (2021), “[The numbers don’t tell the whole story: Unemployment statistics can’t capture the full extent of what women have lost,](#)” The Cut, February 1, 2021.
- 133** Canada ranks poorly by international standards. Canada ranked 34 out of 36 OECD countries in 2015 with respect to spending on family services, including child care, at 0.2% of GDP—below the United States (at 0.6%) and leader Iceland (at 2.4%). OECD, [Family database: Public policies for families and children.](#)
- 134** Canada is also a below-average spender on long-term care. Total government spending on long-term care for both health services and community care supports accounted for 1.3% of GDP in 2017, compared to the OECD benchmark of 1.7%. OECD, [OECD Health Statistics.](#)
- 135** Martha Friendly et.al. (2020), [Early childhood education and care in Canada 2019,](#) Child Care Resource and Research Unit, p. xiii.
- 136** See Martha Friendly, Morna Ballantyne and Lynell Anderson (2020), [Rebuilding childcare in Canada must include a national strategy,](#) Policy Options, Institute for Research on Public Policy.

- 137** Michael Gorman (2020), "[Nova Scotia to reassess child-care needs of essential workers](#)," CBC News.
- 138** These figures represent funds that have been allocated to support child care in the current fiscal year (2020–21) and the next (2021–22).
- 139** Government of Saskatchewan (2020), [News release: Child care facilities receiving nearly \\$2 million for COVID-19 safety measures](#), December 14, 2020. Child care staff received a salary top up of \$400 per month between March 15 and July 4, 2020.
- 140** David Macdonald (2021), [Picking up the tab](#).
- 141** Gabriel Arsenault, Olivier Jacques and Antonia Maioni (2018), "[Why have provinces not adopted more robust child care policies?](#)" Canadian Political Science Association, annual conference, June 1, 2018.
- 142** The pressure to expand the system of \$8.35/day child care continues. There are 40,000 children on the waiting list for these centres. Over 300 programs have been submitted for funding—representing almost 18,000 spaces—but funding is still pending. Patrice Bergeron (2021), "[Daycare network wants to create more spots than Quebec will authorize](#)," Montreal Gazette, February 9, 2021.
- 143** Brendan Kennedy (2020), "[Ontario's child care sector needs more support to survive COVID second wave, advocates say](#)," Toronto Star, Jan 13, 2021.
- 144** Vanessa Milne (2020), "[Will your kid's daycare survive COVID-19](#)," Today's Parent, Dec. 18, 2020.
- 145** Ryan Tumilty (2020), "[Are you an essential worker? In Canada, it depends on where you live](#)," National Post, July 18, 2020.
- 146** David Macdonald (2021), [Picking up the tab](#).
- 147** Benjamin Schlinger (2020), "[Quebec offers low wage essential workers extra \\$100 per weekly to stay on the job](#)," CBC News, April 3, 2020.
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