

## Country Update

# Canada

(February 18, 2021)

### **Context and government response:**

As of February 18, 2021, Canada has registered 839,155 cases of COVID-19, including 21,439 deaths. On March 18, 2020 Canada implemented a ban on foreign nationals from all countries and closed the Canada-U.S. border to all non-essential travel. To replace the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) that closed in December 2020, the Canadian government introduced the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) for those who do not qualify for Employment Insurance (EI).

As a part of the COVID-19 Economic Response Plan, the federal government has also announced additional support for women and children fleeing violence by providing up to \$50 million to women's shelters and sexual assault centres including funding for facilities in Indigenous communities.

### **Summary of impact:**

Since the 2 million jobs lost last April, Canada saw its worst job decline in January with 212,800 jobs lost due to lockdowns and school closures. As of January, the unemployment rate was at 12%. Employment declined at a faster rate for core-aged women, particularly for those with children in elementary school. In the core working ages of 25 to 54, the rate of decline for jobs held by women was more than twice that of men.



In Canada, the majority of federal and provincial public health leaders are women, including Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer of Canada. Women leaders, such as chief medical officers, are playing a visible and powerful role in Canada's response, however women are also leading in areas such as frontline healthcare, community-based responses and the service industry. Women faced an increased unpaid care burden at home due to school closures and in healthcare settings since they are the majority of workers, as well as increased prevalence of domestic violence due to the lockdown measures. According to Statistics Canada crowdsourced survey, young women aged 15 to 24, were significantly more likely to report that they were very or extremely anxious about the possibility of violence in the home (12%), relative to men in the same age group (8%).

Within the first two months into the pandemic, 1.5 million Canadian women had lost their jobs. Due to school and daycare closures, primarily women have had to bear the burden of staying home with their young children for which they have received no government assistance. Women's participation in the Canadian labour force has hit an all-time low in 30 years, according to Statistics Canada. Indeed, those with young children will unfortunately be the slowest to recover financially. Between February and May of 2020, the employment rate of women with young children dropped by 7%, while that of men with young children only dropped by 4%.

#### **Responses led by women peacebuilders:**

Women's civil society organizations such as YWCA Canada are also advocating for a feminist approach to the COVID-19 response. They are calling on municipal, provincial and federal governments to implement policies such as universal paid sick leave for workers and emergency childcare for essential workers, to take a gendered approach to addressing homeless during the pandemic and to provide additional emergency funding to charities and non-profits. Advocates for gender equality are also raising awareness that more must be done to ensure women's needs are addressed in the government's COVID-19 response, and that the government must adopt an intersectional lens by taking into account race, age and socio-economic status.



After the outbreak of the pandemic, the Canadian Women's Foundation launched the Tireless Together Fund: a national emergency fund to ensure the provision of critical support to women and girls during the COVID-19 crisis by helping essential service providers reach women and girls and continue the operation of their services. Many programs that aim to build confidence, resilience and leaderships skills of girls, as well as trans, Two-Spirit and non-binary youth funded by the Foundation's Girls' Fund have also switched to an online format to continue engaging participants in discussions and community activities. Some programs are even going beyond their mandates and providing support not only to the girls, but also their families who are potentially dealing with stressful situations at home such as food insecurity, domestic violence or unemployment during the pandemic. They are working to lend laptops to girls who do not have access and to meet the needs of their families by providing accurate information on emergency support.

Canadian Ambassador for Women Peace and Security Jacqueline O'Neill has expressed concern that authoritarian regimes will take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to further marginalize women and LGBTQ2+ people. Human rights organizations and women peacebuilders have been targets of attacks in pre-pandemic times, but are not facing existential threats due to authoritarian responses to the global health crisis.

