

# FEMINIST SCORECARD 2020

BOLSTERING FEMINIST ACTION  
TO TACKLE INEQUALITY  
AND INJUSTICE



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## Bolstering Feminist action to tackle inequality and injustice

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Oxfam is a global movement of people working to end injustice and poverty. Our mission is to build lasting solutions to poverty and injustice while improving the lives and promoting the rights of women and girls.

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# INTRODUCTION

When the Liberal government took power in November 2015, it laid out a bold feminist vision to transform the lives of women and girls through feminist policy-making and inclusive growth. This vision, if well executed, had strong potential to tackle the twin struggles of gender and economic inequality, both in Canada and abroad. As an organization deeply committed to these issues, Oxfam Canada decided to launch its annual Feminist Scorecard to track the government's progress toward delivering on its ambitious agenda.

Feminist Scorecard 2020 is the fourth edition in this Oxfam Canada series. It assesses the steps the government took between March 2019 and February 2020 to make meaningful progress toward achieving women's rights and gender equality. This year's scorecard tracks two new areas—poverty and the rights of Indigenous women—along the usual eight policy areas: representation and leadership; global development; gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights; care work; conflict and crisis; climate change and extractives; tax; and jobs and pay equity.

Over the past year, the Liberal government made some historic announcements and enacted policy changes – earning applause from feminists in Canada and around the world. This included the largest-ever investments by the Canadian government in sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as in women's rights organizations and feminist movements worldwide. The government also appointed Canada's first Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security, launched Global Affairs Canada's Feminist Humanitarian Assistance Policy, and recommitted to a gender-balanced Cabinet following the 2019 federal election.

However, progress has been uneven across the ten policy areas assessed in this scorecard. Gaps are particularly marked for the most marginalized, including Indigenous, racialized and immigrant

women, members of the LGBTIQ2 community, and women living with disabilities. In areas such as climate change and extractives, decent work for women, the rights of Indigenous women, and progressive taxation, there have been too few tangible policy and spending decisions to meaningfully move the needle on gender equality.

The economy remains stacked against women, who earn less than men, work in the most precarious sectors and struggle to balance work and care responsibilities. Economic inequality, gender inequality and climate change are interrelated challenges that reinforce each other. The government must address these in tandem, and do so urgently in the face of a growing climate crisis. Transforming the economy must be a top priority, and environmental, economic, and gender justice as well as reconciliation must be at the heart of a just transition to a low-carbon economy.

2020 is a critical year for feminists worldwide as leaders gather for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global blueprint for advancing women's rights, to assess and accelerate progress toward gender equality. For many women, growing backlash and threats are a daily reality as anti-rights movements attempt to roll back important women's rights gains. Canada has the opportunity to shine on the world stage by making significant gender equality commitments that simultaneously address the biggest challenges faced by humanity: extreme inequality, the climate crisis, displacement and conflict.

## METHODOLOGY

No single change will transform the lives of women living in poverty and struggling to realize their rights. The barriers that women face and the opportunities they lack stem from complex and long-entrenched systems of inequality and discrimination. A holistic approach that addresses this myriad of interconnected factors is therefore required in order to make real progress toward gender equality.

Oxfam Canada's Feminist Scorecard 2020 presents an assessment of the Canadian government's progress on gender equality and women's rights over the past year. It assesses ten policy areas:

- 1 Representation and Leadership: Investing in women's leadership and gender-based analysis
- 2 Global Development: Global leadership on women's rights
- 3 Poverty: Reducing poverty for the most marginalized women
- 4 Gender-based Violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Ending gender-based violence and ensuring women's bodily autonomy
- 5 Care work: Investing in the care economy
- 6 Conflict and crisis: Responding to humanitarian crises and building lasting peace
- 7 Indigenous women: Upholding the rights of Indigenous women
- 8 Climate change and extractives: Tackling climate change and regulating extractive industries
- 9 Tax: Building a progressive tax system
- 10 Work and pay equity: Addressing the unequal economics of women's work

Each of the policy areas includes an analysis of three key indicators according to which progress has been assessed.

Feminist Scorecard 2020 does not offer a comprehensive analysis of every policy decision this government has made that has an impact on women and gender equality, nor does it reflect the state of women's rights in Canada or globally. Rather, it presents an assessment of government actions that have, or have not, been taken in these ten policy areas. It is, in the simplest of terms, a snapshot of the volume and quality of action by the federal government during this specific time period.

Policy areas are rated using a traffic light range (red, yellow, green) indicating very little, some or significant progress. In recognition that meaningful change requires time and sustained investments, key recommendations for action are outlined at the end of the sections on each policy area.

In-depth analyses of the policy areas covered by the Feminist Scorecard, in addition to an articulation of the feminist principles that guide Oxfam Canada's work, can be found in a number of recent publications, including:

- [Investing in a Feminist Future: Federal Budget Brief 2020](#) (2020)
- [Time to Care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis](#) (2020)
- [Making Gender-Transformative Humanitarian Action a Reality](#) (2019)
- [Who Cares? Why Canada needs a public child care system](#) (2019)
- [Feminist Aid: A Call for G7 leaders to beat inequality](#) (2019)
- [Advancing Canada's Global Leadership on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights](#) (2019)
- [A Feminist Approach to Localization: How Canada Can Support the Leadership of Women's Rights Actors in Humanitarian Action](#) (2018)
- [Oxfam Canada's Feminist Principles: What they are and how they serve as a guidepost for our work](#) (2018)
- [Tackling Inequalities in the Global Economy: Making Canada's foreign policy work for women](#) (2017)



GREEN = SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS



YELLOW = SOME PROGRESS



RED = LITTLE PROGRESS

# FEMINIST SCORECARD

2020



**WHAT ACTION has THE GOVERNMENT TAKEN to ADVANCE WOMEN'S RIGHTS and GENDER EQUALITY?**



## REPRESENTATION & LEADERSHIP

The Liberal government Cabinet continues to be gender-balanced, and more women were elected to the House of Commons. The government continues to expand and strengthen its application of GBA+. Budget 2019 saw historic investments in Canadian women's rights organizations but core funding is needed in order to strengthen the women's movement.



## GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Canada made groundbreaking funding announcements this year, committing historic investments for sexual and reproductive health and rights and for feminist and women's rights organizations globally. Now the government needs to step up to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income.



## POVERTY

Canada is making important efforts to tackle poverty. In 2019, the government passed several historic pieces of legislation on poverty reduction, housing and disability in order to tackle poverty. These must be followed by action and strategic investments to ensure that the most vulnerable do not continue to fall through the cracks.



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Canada announced new resources to develop the National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and to create new shelter spaces for women. The government also recognized the intersectionality of violence and funded groups who suffer disproportionately. Now, Canada should work to eliminate discrepancies in access to abortion, contraceptives and sexuality education – all critical to preventing gender-based violence.



## CARE WORK

Unpaid care work remains one of the biggest barriers to women's economic security everywhere. Families in Canada are struggling to access affordable and quality child care, and it is often women who step back from work to provide care. The government has made incremental progress to address the child care crisis, but greater investments are needed in order to put in place a publicly managed national child care system.



## CONFLICT & CRISIS

Canada has solidified its reputation as a leader on women, peace and security, and has invested in gender-responsive humanitarian action. However, Canada has backtracked on its commitments to refugees, and still sells arms to Saudi Arabia – despite the war these weapons are fueling in neighboring Yemen and the harm that war is doing to women.



## INDIGENOUS WOMEN

First Nations, Inuit and Métis women and LGBTQ2 peoples face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination, yet remain resilient and continue to stand up to demand the full realization of their rights. The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls articulated 231 Calls for Justice to address this crisis. It is now time for the government to act.



## CLIMATE CHANGE & EXTRACTIVES

The climate crisis is a priority for Canadians but the government has yet to take the hard decisions to accelerate emissions reductions, end fossil fuel subsidies and contribute Canada's fair share to support low-income countries with climate adaptation and mitigation. Human rights abuses related to Canadian corporate activity abroad will not be curbed without an independent ombudsperson office with teeth, as well as important legislative reforms of our export credit agency.



## TAX

Canada is making progress in incorporating gender-based analysis into the federal budget process. However, this year saw limited progress on closing tax loopholes and making wealthy individuals and corporations pay their fair share. Raising corporate income tax rates and delivering on a promise to tax stock options more fairly could provide billions of dollars to invest in public services that would reduce poverty and gender inequality.



## WORK & PAY EQUITY

The long-awaited federal Pay Equity Act is ready to come into force, but it will be years before women will be equally compensated. Canada also needs to do more to align with global standards on violence and harassment in the workplace, and find better ways to address labour exploitation in global supply chains.



# 1 INVESTING IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS

## Score: green

Public policies are best when they are informed by the people they affect, yet women and other marginalized groups are underrepresented in politics and decision-making around the world. This continued underrepresentation results in policies and public spending decisions that disregard gender-differentiated impacts or, worse, contribute to reinforcing women's economic inequality and social marginalization. Globally, only 25% of all parliamentary seats are held by women, a figure that drops to 21% at the Cabinet or ministerial level. Canada has a ways to go in achieving gender parity in political representation. In the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, Canada ranks 25th in the world for political empowerment.<sup>2</sup> A gender-balanced Cabinet sends the right signal, but more is needed in order to increase the number of women in Parliament.

Feminist and women's rights organizations have been critical drivers of progressive change and are responsible for many of the hard-earned gains for women's rights worldwide. Despite doing the heavy lifting, they continue to be chronically underfunded. In Canada, deep funding cuts under the previous government severely undermined the capacity of feminist and women's organizations to mobilize, offer frontline services, and get at the root causes of discrimination and inequality. Funding has significantly grown since 2015, but gaps persist.



Advancing gender equality and supporting women's organizations and movements in Canada and globally are at the core of our government's work, and we are in this to make long-term, systemic change that endures.

— Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality, 2019.<sup>1</sup>



## REPRESENTATION & LEADERSHIP

The Liberal government maintained a gender-balanced Cabinet following the 2019 federal election, but the percentage of female MPs only grew slightly, making up 29% of the House of Commons. More action is needed in order to address barriers facing women in political life, including gender-based harassment. The introduction of maternity and parental benefits for Parliamentarians was a welcome step forward this year. The government's commitment to gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) needs to be strengthened across departments. Federal investments in the Canadian women's movement continue to grow, but core funding remains scarce.

## Walking the talk:

**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:** Since coming to power in 2015, the government has promoted women's leadership in Parliament and across the federal government. Prime Minister Trudeau appointed Canada's first gender-balanced Cabinet in 2015, and maintained gender balance throughout subsequent Cabinet shuffles and following the 2019 election. Despite the substantive and symbolic importance of this decision, women still currently account for only 29% of Members of Parliament, up from 27% before the election. At the current rate of progress, it will take decades to hit gender parity in the House of Commons.<sup>3</sup> The Senate is closer to achieving gender balance; women have made up nearly 60% of appointments since 2015 and women's representation stands close to 45%.<sup>4</sup> While definitive and repeated studies show that Canadians do not discriminate against women at the polls,<sup>5</sup> research has also shown that women are more likely to find themselves running in hard-to-win-ridings.<sup>6</sup> Parties should ensure local nomination races include female candidates, including in winnable ridings, and provide female candidates with the support they need to be successful.

Female Parliamentarians in Canada continue to face high levels of gender-based harassment and threats, particularly on social media. A 2019 Parliamentary committee report identified seven significant factors deterring women from entering and staying in politics, including gender-based violence and harassment, gender bias in the media, absence of family-friendly workplaces, and insufficient efforts to recruit female candidates.<sup>7</sup> A positive change in 2019 was the adoption of a new set of regulations in the House of Commons, giving members access to paid maternity and parental leave, thus removing a serious barrier to women's participation in elected life. MPs, who were previously excluded from maternity and parental benefits, can now take leave starting four weeks prior to the baby's due date and until up to 12 months after the child is born.<sup>8</sup> This applies to MPs caring for a newborn or a newly adopted child.

The federal government is using a new merit-based, open, and transparent approach to select high-quality candidates for approximately 4,000 Governor in Council and ministerial appointments on commissions, boards, Crown corporations, agencies, and tribunals across the country. The government has also appointed women to key leadership positions such as Government House Leader, RCMP Commissioner, Commandant of NATO Defense College and Judge Advocate General.<sup>9</sup>

**GENDER-BASED ANALYSIS:** In December 2018, the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) became a full government department with a broadened focus on gender equality that includes sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.<sup>10</sup> It is positive that the department's mandate includes a strong intersectional lens recognizing the full range of sexual and gender diversity. At the same time, the department should not lose sight of women's particular challenges and the intersecting barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their social, political and economic rights. Minister Monsef's new mandate letter reiterates a commitment to develop a Federal Plan for Gender Equality that builds on the Gender Results Framework and other international agreements.

The commitment to applying gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) across all government operations is progressing, but only slowly. Internal documents from WAGE have identified that in 2019, fewer than half of all federal departments tracked how GBA+ is being applied, and many lack the internal mechanisms to apply it.<sup>11</sup> GBA+, which Prime Minister Trudeau has mandated in Memos to Cabinet and in Treasury Board Submissions, can ensure that spending and policy decisions do not negatively impact women or other groups, such as Indigenous women or LGBTIQ2 people. The government must do more to entrench GBA+ into the machinery of government, establish quality control, and improve intersectionality to capture the full diversity of Canadian society.

WAGE committed to publishing the first biennial report on the state of gender equality in 2019-2020. This report, which will be developed with Statistics Canada and the Department of Finance,<sup>12</sup> could be a significant contributor to a country-wide analysis

of women's rights and gender equality, and help inform future government strategy. Civil society enthusiastically awaits its publication.

**SUPPORT FOR FEMINIST AND WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS AND ORGANIZATIONS:** Budget 2018 announced \$100 million over five years to support feminist and women's rights organizations in Canada. This represents significant progress: until recently, there was virtually no federal funding for feminist and women's rights organizations. Despite the significant increase to the Women's Program over the past two years, too many organizations are scrambling to do their work without having access to core funds to sustain their operations. Feminist and women's rights organizations and movements require core institutional support to strengthen their organizational capacity and ensure their sustainability. The funding model of dispersing grants based on project cycles is not sustainable and leaves organizations vulnerable to financial shortages in between projects. It is also essential that feminist and women's rights organizations have access to funding to support their policy and advocacy work as well as resources to organize and mobilize for change.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Develop a federal plan, with clear timelines and targets, to implement the recommendations of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women report titled "Elect Her: A Roadmap for Improving the Representation of Women in Canadian Politics."<sup>13</sup>
- Encourage the recruitment of women in politics by enacting regulatory measures to oblige political parties to increase the number of women candidates, including in winnable ridings.
- Ensure that policies are in place throughout the government to recruit and appoint women to leadership positions within the bureaucracy, particularly for women from underrepresented groups such as Indigenous women, women of colour, immigrant women, LGBTQ2 people and women with disabilities.
- Improve the quality and consistency of GBA+ implementation across government through capacity building within the federal bureaucracy, particularly on the intersectional components.
- Increase WAGE's Women's Program budget by an additional \$50 million a year, and create a funding stream to ensure support for core and operational expenses.

## 2 GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

### Score: green

There have been numerous advances in gender equality worldwide since the launch of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995. Political and economic shifts, however, are undermining gains and endangering further progress. These shifts are fueled by sexist economic models that value the wealth of the privileged few, mostly men, at the expense of the majority of the world and the planet. Much of this wealth is built on the backs of women, who provide 12 billion hours of unpaid and underpaid care each day.<sup>15</sup> Patriarchal and discriminatory agendas, driven by anti-rights movements, are also on the rise, threatening hard-won gains. Ending poverty and inequality will only be possible when women and girls around the world can realize their rights. This requires continued action, leadership and resources.

This year, Canada made significant policy and financial commitments to advance a feminist approach to development through its Feminist International Assistance Policy. Given the state of our world, this leadership is crucial, but the resources required in order to deliver on the ambition of this policy must not be underestimated. 2020 is a critical year for women's rights as world leaders gather for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to assess and accelerate progress toward gender equality. Canada, with its Feminist International Assistance Policy is well positioned to make significant gender equality commitments addressing the cross-cutting challenges faced by humanity.



Every time there is progress in advancing women's rights and gender equality, there is push back. What this investment does is protect progress made to the best of our abilities, provide support to those places where needs are greatest and listen to what the movement has been saying for decades upon decades.

— Maryam Monsef, Minister of International Development, 2019<sup>14</sup>



### GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT

Gender inequality is one of the oldest and most pervasive forms of inequality in the world. This year, Canada continued to show global leadership through its Feminist International Assistance Policy and used the Women Deliver conference in Vancouver to make significant financial commitments to advancing gender equality worldwide. However, Canada's aid investments continue to be lower than those of its global peers. Canada also needs a coherent feminist foreign policy to ensure that gender equality is at the heart of all its global engagements.

## Walking the talk:

**FEMINIST AID AND FOREIGN POLICY:** In June, Canada hosted Women Deliver, the world's largest conference on gender equality and the health, rights and wellbeing of girls and women. Minister Monsef announced that the Government of Canada would provide \$300 million to the Equality Fund,<sup>16</sup> a unique partnership to catalyze new investments in support of gender equality and women's rights. This was the largest announcement of funding for women's organizations in history, a crucial commitment given evidence that change on gender equality is driven by feminist activism and the strength of local women's organizations.<sup>17</sup>

In June 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs launched a refreshed version of Canada's guidelines to support human rights defenders. This new version includes appendices on the risks faced by specific groups of defenders, including women, LGBTIQ2 people and Indigenous human rights defenders. It also calls for Canadian diplomats to take a more feminist and intersectional approach to promoting the rights of human rights defenders. These are positive developments, and civil society looks forward to seeing a comprehensive implementation plan.

While Canada made ground-breaking aid announcements this year, progress was uneven in other areas of foreign policy. For example, the new United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) falls significantly short of meeting Canada's original gender objectives. Canada entered negotiations with the goal of securing a gender chapter, but dropped it when faced with resistance.<sup>18</sup> This underscores the importance of having a formal feminist foreign policy that provides consistency and coherence across aid, trade, defence and diplomacy. Last month, Foreign Affairs Minister François-Philippe Champagne committed to working with civil society to launch a white paper on Canada's feminist foreign policy, which will provide much-needed clarity and direction.

## SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS:

In June, Prime Minister Trudeau used Women Deliver as a platform to announce \$700 million per year in funding for sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) globally by 2023. This came as part of an annual commitment of \$1.4 billion for women and girls' health around the world over ten years. The announcement was particularly noteworthy because of its commitment to fund programs in the most neglected areas, including comprehensive sexuality education, safe abortion, advocacy and SRHR in emergency settings. The announcement came as restrictions on funding for SRHR in other parts of the world are fueling a looming crisis. Canada's leadership will help ensure that women's hard-won gains are not lost and that the services women rely on continue. Going forward, it will be important to develop an accountability framework to ensure that the money is indeed spent on the most neglected areas of SRHR that sorely need support.

After the government positioned itself as a prominent defender of international LGBTIQ2 rights during its first mandate (by announcing \$30 million over five years for LGBTIQ2 rights in February 2019, for example), LGBTIQ2 advocates were puzzled that the mandate letter for the Minister of International Development did not include concrete commitments to advance LGBTIQ2 rights. In the new ministerial mandate letters, most LGBTIQ2-related goals are assigned to the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and the Minister for Women and Gender Equality. Yet Canada's role as a global champion of LGBTIQ2 rights is still desperately needed: 70 countries worldwide still criminalize same-sex sexual activity between consenting adults, and several punish it by death.<sup>19</sup> Canada must continue to speak out in diplomatic spaces and support the work of LGBTIQ2 organizations globally.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE BUDGET:

Even with the historic funding announcements made in June 2019, Canada's Official Development Assistance (ODA) currently sits at 0.28% of gross national income (GNI), below the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average of 0.31%. Canada's bold Feminist International Assistance policy will fail to deliver on its promise

if it continues to be inadequately resourced. Furthermore, low levels of ODA will affect Canada's credibility on the world stage in the race for a UN Security Council seat in 2021. The many OECD countries outperforming Canada on ODA include Canada's two competitors, Ireland and Norway, both of which have either surpassed or committed to reaching the globally agreed ODA target of 0.7%.<sup>20</sup>

Budget 2019 announced an additional \$700 million in 2023-2024 to the International Assistance Envelope. While this is welcome, closer scrutiny reveals that only \$100 million of this will be new money – the rest maintains international assistance at the level reached through previously announced commitments in 2018.<sup>21</sup> This means that Canada's ODA will be at 0.26% of GNI through 2023-24,<sup>22</sup> the lowest of any Canadian government in the past 50 years.<sup>23</sup>

New resources are needed to ensure the Minister of International Development can deliver on her mandate letter commitment to grow programming in unpaid and paid care and climate adaptation. More resources are also needed to increase programming to end violence against women and gender-based violence as tackling this pandemic is critical to advancing progress in all action areas of the Feminist International Assistance Policy.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Release a feminist foreign policy that is rights-based and coherent across aid, diplomacy, trade and defence.
- Implement an inclusive trade agenda by conducting human rights and gender equality assessments of current and future trade agreements, and include gender chapters in all trade agreements.
- Establish a global policy on SRHR and continue to demonstrate leadership on SRHR in intergovernmental, donor-led and diplomatic spaces. Develop a robust and transparent accountability framework and clear targets for the \$700 million investment.
- Double ODA by 2025, by adding approximately \$6 billion to the annual envelope over five years.
- Increase funding for the advancement and rights of LGBTQ2 people to \$20 million per year, and advocate for their rights in diplomatic spaces.
- Announce new and additional resources for standalone programming on care work, and integrate a care-sensitive approach within existing Canada-funded programming.
- Invest in standalone funding in gender-based violence and violence against women and girls (GBV/VAWG) to ensure progress in all other action areas.
- Play a leadership role in at least one of the Beijing+25 Action Coalitions, with significant commitments and investments, and participate in all other action coalitions.

### 3 TACKLING POVERTY FOR THE MOST MARGINALIZED WOMEN

#### Score: green

Nearly one in seven Canadians live in poverty. Homelessness, one of the most extreme results of poverty, carries high risks for women: women without safe homes live at high risk of physical and sexual assault and are 10 times more likely to die than women with homes.<sup>25</sup> In addition to putting women at increased risk of violence, homelessness costs Canada billions of dollars each year. These billions are spent on treatment for substance abuse, emergency and hospital admissions, and policing.<sup>26</sup> But these funds would be better spent tackling the things that cause homelessness in the first place: domestic violence and gaps in public services and social protection for vulnerable groups.

Systemic discrimination means that poverty is concentrated in certain groups. For example, 20.8% of racialized people are low-income compared to 12.2% of non-racialized people.<sup>27</sup> Women in this group are doubly disadvantaged, facing both gender and racial discrimination. It is no surprise, then, that immigrant and visible minority women are among those at highest risk of falling into poverty.<sup>28</sup> Women with disabilities are another group facing high levels of poverty. Of all Canadians living in poverty, 26% to 33% are women with disabilities.<sup>29</sup> Many spend over half of their income on housing, putting them at a higher risk of eviction.<sup>30</sup> A staggering 46% of women who have been homeless have a disability.<sup>31</sup>



Having a job isn't just about making an economic contribution to Canada, it's also about providing a sense of dignity and belonging. Newcomers—especially visible minority women—often face multiple barriers to employment including discrimination and lack of affordable childcare.

— Ahmed Hussen, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, 2018<sup>24</sup>



#### POVERTY

Nearly five million people in Canada currently live in poverty. Racialized, immigrant, Indigenous, elderly and trans women, women living with disabilities, and single mothers are disproportionately represented among the poor. Poverty costs Canada billions of dollars annually and takes a toll on our economic, healthcare and criminal justice systems. This year, Canada passed several historic pieces of legislation on poverty reduction, housing and disability. However, the government can do more to ensure that the most vulnerable do not fall through the cracks.

The government of Canada committed to tackling these unacceptable realities in Canada's first ever Poverty Reduction Strategy, which aims to reduce poverty by 50% by 2030.<sup>32</sup> This ambitious target is laudable, but will still see Canada fall short of the UN Sustainable Development Goal to end all poverty by 2030.

## Walking the talk:

**POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS:** The government made several key moves to fight poverty and homelessness this year. In June 2019, it implemented legislation – the Poverty Reduction Act – to ensure that its poverty reduction strategy would stand the test of time. This legislation is commendable and must now be followed by immediate action and new investments to achieve results.<sup>33</sup> The government also introduced the National Housing Strategy Act, which recognizes housing as a fundamental human right. This historic legislation creates accountability mechanisms such as a federal Housing Advocate and a National Housing Council, to ensure compliance with the commitment to realize the right to housing for all.<sup>34</sup> In his throne speech, the Prime Minister also promised to implement national pharmacare. This will help women, who are more likely to be in part-time or contract positions without drug coverage, afford the cost of essential medication.

In February 2019, the government released data showing record-low poverty levels in Canada.<sup>35</sup> This represents meaningful progress. However, experts point out that the government's methodology to measure poverty is flawed and poverty reduction rates are likely inflated. The government uses the Market Basket Measure (MBM), which assesses the threshold of poverty based on the cost of a "basket" of basic needs. Statistics Canada is in the process of updating the MBM to reflect the current costs of these items, which means the numbers currently being used are outdated. The measurement is also not applicable to Canadian territories and First Nations reserves, leaving out communities with some of the highest poverty rates in the country.<sup>36</sup>

**WOMEN OF COLOUR:** In June 2019, Canada launched its new Anti-Racism Strategy, shaped by extensive consultations with racialized communities and Indigenous peoples. The Anti-Racism Strategy is primarily a description of various government initiatives under the banner of anti-racism, highlighting \$45 million of existing, redirected and new federal funding. One of the initiatives it highlights is the Poverty Reduction Strategy and its efforts to reduce poverty for racialized groups. These include a promise to implement pay transparency to hold federally regulated employers accountable for wage gaps that affect racialized communities, and a pilot program to support newcomer racialized women. Overall, the Anti-Racism Strategy is a good summary of the federal government's efforts, but it could have outlined more concrete goals, actions and timelines for combating racial discrimination in Canada and included a stronger gender lens.<sup>37</sup>

Some of the racialized groups that are particularly susceptible to poverty are people with precarious immigration status who are excluded from key supports. For example, in 2017, the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) prevented 684,340 children under 18 from living in poverty. However, parents with precarious immigration status are denied access – even if their children are born in Canada.<sup>38</sup> The women and children who are excluded from the CCB on the basis of their immigration status are precisely those who are most in need: those who will see the harmful impacts of sexism, racism and xenophobia reduce their life chances and earning opportunities.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, this exclusion makes it difficult for women who are living in situations of violence, but receiving the CCB because of their partner's status, to leave violent relationships.<sup>40</sup>

Black women are also disproportionately affected by poverty, with poverty rates two times higher than white women.<sup>41</sup> Discrimination in the workforce, and the growth in precarious employment, means that employment does not prevent many Black women from falling into poverty. While Canada has made some efforts to promote inclusion and diversity in employment, it needs more intentional measures to recognize and combat anti-Black racism specifically.<sup>42</sup>

**WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES:** In June 2019, the Accessible Canada Act was signed into law. This historic piece of legislation, which enshrines the rights of Canadians living with disabilities, is particularly noteworthy because it recognizes that factors such as gender, sexual orientation and race create additional barriers for some Canadians with disabilities. From here on, all laws, policies, programs, services and structures will be required to consider this.<sup>43</sup>

Barriers to workforce participation are among the main drivers of poverty for people living with disabilities. In the mandate letter to the new Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, the government commits to tackling discrimination and stigma in the workforce and creating a workplace accessibility fund to increase accommodations for people with disabilities,<sup>44</sup> while also doubling the Child Disability Benefit. This is important since women are more likely than men to take time off work to care for family members with a disability, jeopardizing their own long-term economic security.<sup>45</sup>

There is a strong link between disability and gender-based violence. Women with disabilities are two times more likely than able-bodied women to experience domestic violence, violent crime and sexual assault.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, new data and research show that women are becoming disabled through violence. Over 276,000 women in Canada experience traumatic brain injuries every year as a result of intimate partner violence.<sup>47</sup> Disabled women experiencing domestic violence cannot easily leave relationships due to financial dependence on their partners and the inaccessibility of many shelters. The federal and provincial governments must provide more stable funding for shelters to help them invest in accessibility.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Strengthen the Poverty Reduction Strategy through strategic investments to meet more ambitious poverty reduction targets, faster.
- Ensure that all plans to combat poverty use a human rights framework and consider the particular and diverse realities of women with disabilities and women of colour – particularly Black women.
- Measure poverty through the Census Family Low Income Measure, which is more inclusive than the Market Basket Measure and allows policy makers to track groups at risk of social exclusion.
- Increase funding for the National Housing Strategy, and ensure that the accountability mechanisms enshrined within it are independent and fully resourced.
- Allow parents with precarious immigration status to qualify for the Canada Child Benefit.
- Follow through on the promise to implement national pharmacare, starting with legislation and budget commitments in 2020. Ensure that it is universal, comprehensive and public – and that it does not exclude Canadian residents on the basis of immigration status.
- Review all federal and provincial housing and shelter policies to identify gaps for people with disabilities, and revise these policies accordingly.

## 4 ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND ENSURING WOMEN'S BODILY AUTONOMY

Score: yellow

There is an urgent need for concrete action and investments to end violence against women and girls and gender-based violence (VAWG/GBV), both domestically and globally. Twenty-five years ago, the Beijing Platform for Action mandated states to “take integrated measures to prevent and eliminate violence against women.” Yet, VAWG/GBV remains a global epidemic. Global research shows that 35% of women have experienced violence in their lives.<sup>49</sup> Every day, 137 women are killed by a partner or a family member.<sup>50</sup> Here in Canada, the situation is not much better. In Canada in 2018, a woman or girl was killed every 2.5 days,<sup>51</sup> often by a former or current partner.<sup>52</sup> People with disabilities, members of the LGBTQI2 community, the elderly, and Indigenous women and girls experience intersecting forms of discrimination and higher rates of violence. Strategies to tackle VAWG/GBV must address these differences in order to tailor appropriate and targeted responses to different groups.

Sexual and reproductive health and rights are important in their own right and also promote bodily autonomy and women's economic empowerment, thus addressing the root causes of VAWG/GBV. For example, women's ability to decide whether and when to have children – by means of access to contraception and safe abortion – is key to their health, autonomy and labour force participation. Likewise, comprehensive sexuality education can help keep LGBTQI2 people safe and promote healthy relationships by teaching about tolerance for sexual diversity, and raising awareness about bullying, cyber-bullying and the importance of consent.<sup>53</sup> Yet, access



The Government will take greater steps to address gender-based violence in Canada, building on the Gender-Based Violence Strategy and working with partners to develop a National Action Plan.

— Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Speech from the Throne, 2019<sup>48</sup>



### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE & SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS

Access to education on sexual and reproductive health and rights is key to ending gender-based violence and violence against women and girls, and lack of access is in fact one of the root causes of this global pandemic of violence. People who do not have access to sexual and reproductive health information, and to an understanding of their rights, are more vulnerable to abuse and violence.

to sexual and reproductive services remains uneven across Canada, and is under threat globally by anti-rights movements.

## Walking the talk:

**ENDING VAWG/GBV:** Canada made progress towards ending VAWG/GBV this year. Verbal commitments from the Prime Minister and various ministers have kept this issue at the forefront of domestic discourse. The government made a commitment to develop a National Action Plan (NAP) to End Gender-Based Violence, and announced an investment of \$30 million in the Liberal Party's 2019 election platform. This money, expected to be allocated in Budget 2020, will serve to develop the plan itself, an important first step. However, to date, the government has not given any indication of a budget for the actual roll-out and implementation of the NAP. Domestic women's rights organizations have developed a blueprint for the National Action Plan,<sup>54</sup> with a ballpark recommended budget allocation of \$500 million annually, specifying the need for formalized, ongoing and meaningful participation of non-governmental stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the NAP, and for clearly-defined, time-bound goals measured against detailed baseline data.<sup>55</sup>

**ACCESS TO ABORTION, CONTRACEPTION AND SEX EDUCATION:** Abortion in Canada is legal and free; however, many access barriers exist. For example, the only freestanding abortion clinic in New Brunswick is about to close its doors because the provincial government will not cover the cost of abortion outside of hospitals – a stance that contravenes the Canada Health Act. Furthermore, although the “abortion pill” became available in Canada in 2017,<sup>56</sup> and Health Canada removed the ultrasound requirement last year,<sup>57</sup> many primary care providers are still reluctant to prescribe it.<sup>58</sup> The federal government has a role to play in addressing these persistent barriers, and the Minister of Health's mandate letter, which calls on the minister to “ensure that Canadians have access to the full suite of reproductive services and medications across the country” is grounds for further progress.<sup>59</sup>

Significant barriers to accessing contraceptives also remain a reality in Canada. The current patchwork of private insurance plans and compassionate programs to cover contraceptives is not available to all who need it. This lack of cost coverage disproportionately affects the health outcomes of some groups more than others, creating inequality and discrimination. It is problematic that the Minister of Health has not been mandated to include contraceptives when designing a national universal pharmacare program.

Sex education across Canada is uneven, and is completely absent in some locations.<sup>60</sup> Comprehensive Canada-wide sex education would contribute to healthy relationships and have positive impacts on individual health, public health and gender equality. While education falls under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has a role to play in eliminating discrepancies across jurisdictions and increasing access. In 2019, the Public Health Agency of Canada funded the revision of the official Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education to ensure they reflect the latest expertise on LGBTIQ2 issues, consent, sexual and gender-based violence, and the use of technology.<sup>61</sup> The government should ensure that educators are mandated to apply these guidelines and, working with the provinces and territories, improve access to evidence-based information and overcome some of the barriers created by unequal access to sexuality education across jurisdictions.

### **INTERSECTIONALITY AND LGBTIQ2 RIGHTS:**

In another positive step, the government's 2018-2019 progress report on its Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender Based Violence recognized the intersectionality of violence. It stated that there are growing concerns domestically about the increasing rate of violence against Indigenous women and girls; violence and harassment against LGBTIQ2, non-binary and racialized people; and violence against older women.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, for the first time in history, Budget 2019 also announced \$20 million over two years to help address the unique needs and persisting discrimination against LGBTIQ2 people in Canada.<sup>63</sup> The Minister of Diversity, Inclusion and Youth has been mandated to promote LGBTIQ2 rights and equality, expand services and lay the groundwork for an LGBTIQ2 action plan to guide the federal government.<sup>64</sup> This

action plan should coordinate Canada's national and global efforts to promote and protect LGBTIQ2 rights.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Commit \$500 million annually to implement the soon-to-be-developed National Action Plan to End Gender Based Violence, and commit to engaging non-governmental stakeholders.
- Withhold funding transfers under the Canada Health Act from provinces and territories failing to ensure the availability and accessibility of abortion services.
- Commit to universal cost coverage for contraceptives as part of national pharmacare.
- Have the Public Health Agency of Canada, together with the Department of Women and Gender Equality, co-develop a national campaign on healthy relationships and sexuality based on the 2019 Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.
- Ensure the federal action plan to protect LGBTIQ2 rights includes support for LGBTIQ2 rights internationally and coordinates across ministries responsible for promoting the health, rights and safety of LGBTIQ2 communities, rights defenders and their organizations.

## 5 INVESTING IN THE CARE ECONOMY

### Score: yellow

Globally, women do more than three-quarters of all unpaid care work. In richer countries, that gap is smaller, but nowhere in the world do men do as much unpaid work as women. Women often have to work reduced hours or drop out of the workforce because of their care workload. Globally, 42% of women cannot get jobs because they are responsible for all the caregiving, compared to just 6% of men. Women also make up two-thirds of the paid care workforce. Jobs such as child care and domestic work are often poorly paid, provide scant benefits, impose irregular hours and can take a physical and emotional toll. The world is facing a looming care crisis as societies age. An estimated 2.3 billion people will be in need of care by 2030 — an increase of 200 million from 2015. Investing in women's economic security requires investments in the care economy. This includes investing in public services and social protection, and providing universal and affordable access to care services.

Across Canada, families with young children struggle to make ends meet due to rising child care costs. This struggle is particularly pronounced for women: lack of affordable, accessible and quality child care is the biggest contributor to the gap between men's and women's labour force participation and to the gender wage gap, and disproportionately affects women living in poverty. It hurts women's earnings and opportunities, and has major implications for the Canadian economy. Making affordable, high-quality child care available to all families will grow the economy, promote gender equality, increase women's labour force participation and enhance children's well-being. Yet, Canada has some of the highest child care costs and some of the lowest public investments among OECD countries.<sup>66</sup>



### CARE WORK

Women continue to carry a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work in Canada and around the world, making it difficult for them to pursue employment and educational opportunities. The government has made some incremental progress toward an affordable, accessible, inclusive and high-quality child care system. However, greater leadership and investment is needed in order to move towards an early learning and child care system that supports all families in Canada, and ensures decent working conditions for caregivers.



Every child from coast to coast to coast deserves access to quality early learning and child care.

— Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, 2019<sup>65</sup>

## Walking the talk:

**CHILD CARE:** Since 2015, the government has committed \$7 billion in funding for early childhood education and care over an 11 year period, launched the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework, and an Indigenous Framework, and signed three-year bilateral agreements with the provinces. In August 2019, the National Progress Report on Early Learning and Child Care cited that an additional 21,205 affordable child care spaces were made available across Canada over 2017-18, putting the government on track to meet the target of up to 40,000 more spaces by March 2020.<sup>67</sup> New commitments were made in several ministerial mandate letters following the 2019 election, including the creation of 250,000 before- and after-school child care spaces for children under 10 and the establishment of a national secretariat to lay the groundwork for a pan-Canadian child care system. The government also announced funding for data and research under the guidance of an expert panel that includes knowledgeable child care advocates. While these measures are meaningful and lay the ground for further progress, they still fall short of addressing families' immediate need to access a child care spot they can afford. Increased investments are required, as well as greater accountability for transfers to the provinces and territories to ensure they meet specific goals and timelines or risk losing funding.

**SHIFTING THE CARE BURDEN:** As of March 2019, parents can receive extra weeks of Employment Insurance after giving birth or adopting a child. The extra weeks are intended to be a gender-equality-seeking measure, aiming to better distribute the work involved in caring for babies. A second parent is eligible for either five or eight weeks of leave, and must use it or lose it. These are welcome changes as paternity leave plays an important role in redistributing unpaid care work in the household and shifting traditional gender norms.<sup>68</sup> However, the low levels of benefits represent a barrier to accessibility that will likely hamper success. The

federal government should follow Quebec's lead by increasing the benefits for all leave-takers (70% of earnings, capped at a maximum annual insurable earning of \$76,500). Other positive steps included in the mandate letter of the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour are: ensuring tax-free delivery of Employment Insurance benefits for parental leave; providing a 15 week leave for adoptive parents, including for LBGTIQ2 families, in addition to the 35 week parental leave to which they were already entitled; and a guaranteed income during a child's first year of life.<sup>69</sup>

**DECENT WORK FOR CAREGIVERS:** Of the roughly 190,000 people who make up Canada's care workforce, 96% are women.<sup>70</sup> These are some of the lowest paid workers in Canada, working long hours with little job security and few benefits. Racialized immigrant and migrant women, including non-status workers, fill the labour shortages in the care sector. Advocates are calling for regulation to give these workers an opportunity to apply for legal status, which would give them access to the same types of resources and government assistance as other workers in Canada.<sup>71</sup>

Building on the success of the 5-year pilot Temporary Foreign Worker Program that allows migrant care workers to bring their families and apply for permanent residency, the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour has been mandated to "improve the current pilot project for seasonal workers with a permanent program that provides consistent and reliable benefits." This is a positive step forward, but it is critical that other stringent requirements, such as 12 months of service with a single employer, a valid job, advanced language skills and a high school education, also be removed. Considering domestic workers are at highest risk of exploitation, the government must work with the provinces and territories to ratify the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers. The Convention protects the rights of domestic workers by ensuring decent work conditions such as rest time, minimum wage, protective measures against violence, and choice with regard to housing and leave time.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Commit to a \$1 billion investment in child care in Budget 2020, and an increase by \$1 billion each subsequent year until total spending on early learning and child care reaches the international benchmark of at least 1% of GDP and the goals of universally accessible, affordable, inclusive, high-quality child care are met. The federal government should also adopt a workforce strategy and legislation that lay the foundation for a national child care system based on the principles of universality, quality and comprehensiveness.
- Launch a federal task force on care work and care jobs in Canada to examine paid and unpaid care work, develop a federal strategy to meet the increasing demands for care, and create a labour market strategy for care jobs.
- Increase parental leave benefits in line with rates provided in Quebec.
- Ratify ILO Convention 189 on the protection of domestic workers, and improve access to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program for caregivers and their families, which provides pathways to permanent residency and access to justice, basic services and supports.

## 6 RESPONDING TO HUMANITARIAN CRISES AND BUILDING LASTING PEACE

**Score: yellow**

By the end of 2018, a record 70.8 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced by war, persecution and extreme weather events.<sup>73</sup> The UN estimates that a staggering 168 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2020. This is the equivalent of approximately one in 45 people in the world, and represents the highest number in decades.<sup>74</sup> Conflict and climate change are the biggest drivers of displacement and humanitarian need, and are often intricately interconnected. The global humanitarian situation will only deteriorate unless these root causes are addressed.

Humanitarian crises and displacement are particularly difficult for women and girls, who face an increased risk of violence and lack control over decisions that affect their lives and their bodies. Yet women are often the first responders in crises, and they play a central role in supporting families and communities during these difficult times. When women receive support to realize their rights, and are able to thrive, they work tirelessly to ensure that their families and communities are too. Indeed,



We know that women and girls are disproportionately affected by crises and are often the primary targets of conflict. We also know that women and girls are powerful agents of change, yet their voices and interests are too often ignored. Canada will support women and girls' empowerment and will work to ensure that they are heard and their leadership is taken into account in every step of the way.

— Maryam Monsef, Minister of International Development, 2019<sup>72</sup>



### CONFLICT & CRISIS

Canada has solidified its reputation globally as a leader on women, peace and security, and has invested significantly in gender-responsive humanitarian action. However, the government has backtracked on its support for refugees, and has stripped refugee claimants, including women fleeing domestic violence, of crucial human rights protections. The government also needs to do more to ensure that Canada's trade and defence policies – selling weapons to Saudi Arabia for example – do not undermine progress in peacebuilding.

evidence shows that the empowerment of women is the foundation of long-term peace and stability.

This year, the Government of Canada showed global leadership on women, peace and security and on advancing more feminist humanitarian approaches. However, ongoing arms sales to Saudi Arabia, a country with a terrible women's rights record and engaged in a devastating war on Yemen, continue to undermine Canada's feminist agenda. Canada must also do more to help the world's most vulnerable seek the protection they deserve within our borders.

## Walking the talk:

**PEACE AND SECURITY:** This year, Canada continued to champion the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda. The government appointed Canada's first Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security, a move welcomed by civil society. Furthermore, Canada assumed the role of co-chair of the WPS Focal Points Network, a cross-regional space to share experiences and best practices on the implementation of the WPS agenda. This, together, with the 20th anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, means that Canada will have many opportunities to show its leadership on WPS this year.

Canada has also been a strong voice for justice and accountability in Myanmar, where Rohingya women and girls experienced systematic sexual violence in the fall of 2017. The Honourable Bob Rae, Canada's Special Envoy to Myanmar, attended the International Court of Justice proceedings against Myanmar and is exploring ways to support the case. As the case moves ahead, Canada's leadership will be critical to ensure that accountability for sexual and gender-based violence is a top priority.

In October 2019, Canada formally joined the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) – an international effort to regulate the flow of weapons to countries where they could be misused. While joining the ATT was an important milestone for Canada, it will regrettably not affect pre-existing arms deals, such as the one with Saudi Arabia. Selling weapons to Saudi

Arabia, a country engaged in a devastating war on Yemen that has taken an enormous toll on women, undermines Canada's feminist agenda. Yemen is home to the world's worst humanitarian crisis and the war has reversed women's fragile gains in education and employment. Canada has certainly made efforts to support women in Yemen, announcing a threefold humanitarian funding increase for Yemen in 2019, including for sexual and reproductive health and rights. This funding is welcome, but it is hypocritical for Canada to focus its international assistance on women in Yemen while selling weapons that directly and indirectly destroy women's lives and communities.

**STANDING WITH REFUGEES:** Refugee advocates were dismayed when the government announced significant changes to the refugee determination system in March 2019. These changes, buried deep inside the budget implementation bill (Bill C-97), mean that refugee claimants will be denied access to full and independent hearings if they have previously filed a claim in the United States and certain other countries. This could have life-changing implications for legitimate refugee claimants, decreasing their chances of finding a safe haven in Canada. It will also affect women specifically, since domestic violence is grounds for protection in Canada but not in the United States. Gender-based persecution is the top reason female refugee claimants seek asylum in Canada. Nearly half of these women are fleeing domestic violence.<sup>75</sup> This change significantly undermines Canada's feminist approach and commitments to uphold the human rights of the most vulnerable women and girls.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to 2015, the mandate letter for the new Minister for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship contains few commitments to expand Canada's intake of refugees. The main new commitment is a dedicated refugee stream to provide safe haven for up to 250 human rights advocates, journalists and humanitarian workers at risk each year.<sup>77</sup> This is a commendable move since human rights defenders often face imminent danger due to their work.<sup>78</sup> However, Canada must further step up its broader resettlement efforts given the huge gap between resettlement needs and places available worldwide. In 2019, only 4.5% of refugees globally identified as being in urgent need

of resettlement were actually resettled.<sup>79</sup> After showing strong leadership in 2016 by resettling 45,000 Syrian refugees, Canada has reverted to low Government-Assisted Refugee targets. Its target for 2019 was just 9,300 people.<sup>80</sup>

**HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE:** In April, the Minister of International Development announced Canada's new humanitarian policy, *A Feminist Approach: Gender Equality in Humanitarian Action*.<sup>81</sup> The document reflects input from civil society and contains several notable commitments. It affirms the importance of an intersectional feminist approach, strives to pursue gender-transformative humanitarian action where and when possible, commits to supporting local women's rights groups, and prioritizes sexual and reproductive health and rights and ending sexual and gender-based violence. Despite this encouraging progress, the document lacks details on the new ways of working and funding that will be necessary to make these ambitions a reality. Canadian organizations and their partners still struggle to secure funding for programming that tackles the root causes of gender inequality in emergency contexts. Canada prioritizes proposals that align with the main sectors of humanitarian action, such as health, protection, water and shelter. Stand-alone gender programming is not a category. Canada also funds far too few local women's rights actors in humanitarian interventions. Yet these organizations are crucial: they deliver assistance in culturally appropriate ways and can integrate their humanitarian work with their long-term efforts to achieve gender equality.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Announce dedicated and additional resources to ensure the impact and success of Canada's National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.
- Launch a major initiative in support of women peacebuilders for the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325.
- Include an Institute for Women, Peace and Security in the new Canadian Centre for Peace, Order and Good Government.
- Immediately suspend arms exports to Saudi Arabia in view of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Yemen and the risks that Canadian exports will be used to harm civilians.
- Repeal the changes made to the refugee determination system in Bill C-97 and increase the number of government-assisted refugees, prioritizing those most vulnerable to harm, such as women, children and members of the LGBTQ2 community. This assistance should go alongside efforts to speed up family reunification and repeal the Safe Third Country Agreement with the USA.
- Ensure that 15% of humanitarian financing is dedicated for local women's rights organizations and programming that is focused on advancing gender equality.

# 7 UPHOLDING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN

## Score: red

Indigenous women and LGBTQ2 peoples continue to thrive as leaders and agents of change, despite institutionalized discrimination and egregious human rights abuses that limit their right to self-determination. Their advocacy is making a difference, despite resistance. For decades, Indigenous women demanded that the federal government remove sex-based discrimination in the Indian Act. In 2019, it finally happened. First Nations women now have the same rights as men to pass on their status to family.<sup>83</sup>

Indigenous women are targets of racialized and gendered violence. They are 12 times more likely to be missing or murdered than any other demographic in Canada—16 times more likely than white women—and constitute 25% of all female homicide victims in Canada.<sup>84</sup> Many Indigenous women do not have access to basic human rights such as adequate housing, clean drinking water and food security. They are also more likely to live in poverty than non-Indigenous women and Indigenous men.<sup>85</sup>

The government must take serious cross-sector action to address the issues afflicting Indigenous communities wherever they reside, including off reserves and in urban areas. Reconciliation requires open dialogue



## INDIGENOUS WOMEN

First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples have diverse cultures and rich ties to their lands and traditional knowledge, despite the ongoing violations of their human rights by colonial power structures and systemic discrimination. Indigenous women and LGBTQ2 peoples have unique lived experiences and face multiple and compounding forms of discrimination, yet continue to stand up to demand the full realization of their rights. The government needs to do more to advance reconciliation and dismantle colonial practices, laws, structures and beliefs, and to ensure that Indigenous women live a life of dignity.



Skeptics will be fearful and will complain that the financial cost of rebuilding is too great, that enough has been done, that enough money has been spent. To them I say, we as a nation cannot afford not to rebuild. Otherwise, we all knowingly enable the continuation of genocide in our own country.

— Marion Buller, Chief Commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019<sup>82</sup>

and free, prior and informed consent. Consultations must occur with all Indigenous-appointed representatives, governments, organizations and grassroots Indigenous groups to ensure that their voices are heard and meaningfully included. Representation from First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, youth and LGBTIQ2 people is essential, as their experiences vary and require different policies and programs. Indigenous women's organizations need independent funding and seats at decision-making tables to account for their unique lived experiences and priorities. While the federal government made some progress in 2019, countless barriers remain.

## Walking the talk:

**NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND GIRLS:** In 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) systematically documented and shared the horrific truths of racialized and gendered violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls. The Inquiry described the situation as a genocide against Indigenous peoples. It put forward 231 Calls for Justice framed as legal imperatives rather than recommendations, since they “arise from international and domestic human and Indigenous rights laws, including the Charter, the Constitution, and the Honour of the Crown.”<sup>86</sup>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau agreed that Canada had committed genocide against Indigenous peoples, but used the past tense and thereby failed to recognize ongoing violations. For accountability and meaningful reconciliation, the government must acknowledge that ongoing human rights violations and systemic discrimination are still fueling a genocide. The government's response to the Inquiry was insufficient for many of the advocates, women and families who testified. The government denied the Inquiry's request for an extension and knew the Inquiry would conclude in 2019, but failed to allocate any funding in the federal budget to implement the Inquiry's findings. The government

has committed to launching a National Action Plan to end violence against Indigenous women and girls by June 2020 and WAGE launched a commemoration fund of \$13 million for over 100 commemoration events to honour the lives and legacies of MMIWG. While these are important steps, they fall short of addressing the root causes of the violence.<sup>87</sup>

Shortly after the Inquiry, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women released a report stating that the violence faced by Indigenous women is caused by “institutional, systemic, multiple intersecting forms of discrimination not addressed adequately by the State.”<sup>88</sup> Canada must not wait to address these atrocities and must use the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation to address the crisis.

The Prime Minister's mandate letters following the 2019 federal election directed the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations to co-develop legislation to implement UNDRIP by the end of 2020.<sup>89</sup> He also called on the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations to lead the development of a National Action Plan in response to the Inquiry and implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Since 2015, only nine of the 94 Calls to Action have been completed.<sup>90</sup>

**FORCED AND COERCED STERILIZATION:** In August 2019, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health called on the federal government to investigate horrific cases of Indigenous women allegedly being forced or coerced into sterilization.<sup>91</sup> The full extent of this is still unknown and the committee called on the government for urgent action to address the harms and implement preventative measures. This is following the United Nations Committee Against Torture's 2018 findings which state that forced or coerced sterilization needs to be considered a form of torture. The committee called on Canada to criminalize the practice and investigate the scope of the issue. Thus far, the government has refused to change the Criminal Code to act accordingly. Ending this form of torture against Indigenous women must be a priority, otherwise our healthcare system will serve as a vehicle for continued colonization.

**HIGH INCARCERATION RATES:** Indigenous women now account for 42% of Canada’s female prison population, the highest rate to date.<sup>92</sup> Colonial legacies, intergenerational trauma and socio-economic inequalities, among other factors, contribute to the overrepresentation of Indigenous women in prisons. They are also more likely to be placed in solitary confinement, which has detrimental psychological impacts—especially for Indigenous women who often have histories of trauma and abuse.<sup>93</sup> Canada’s Correctional Investigator noted that Canada’s correctional system seems resistant to change and is “unresponsive to the needs, histories and social realities behind high rates of Indigenous offending.”<sup>94</sup> The Government of Canada must urgently respond to this crisis and ensure that incarcerated Indigenous women can access culturally-appropriate programming, services and community supports which improve outcomes, healing and rehabilitation while lowering recidivism rates.<sup>95</sup>

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Provide adequate funding to develop and implement a National Action Plan (NAP) to address violence against Indigenous women, girls and LGBTIQ2 people. The NAP should outline time-bound commitments to implement all 231 Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into MMIWG. Indigenous women, their chosen representatives, and their governments and service agencies should lead the implementation of the NAP.
- Investigate allegations of forced or coerced sterilization in Canada, paying particular attention to cases involving Indigenous women and girls. Once the investigation is complete, the Government of Canada should take steps to ensure accountability, provide compensation to survivors and families and criminalize the practice.
- In line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, obtain free, prior and informed consent from Indigenous people and their communities on all policies, decisions and initiatives that may affect them.
- Provide stable and adequate funding to Indigenous women’s rights organizations and for Indigenous-designed and -led service delivery to eliminate the systemic barriers restricting Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and to meet their needs in all regions.

## 8 TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE AND REGULATING EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

### Score: red

As the climate crisis accelerates at unprecedented speed, scientists warn that the next ten years will be decisive. In 2019, millions of people took to the streets to mobilize for climate justice. Women and girls are leading many of the social movements to end our society's fossil fuel dependence and usher in a more just and inclusive economy. Canada, as the ninth largest net emitter of greenhouse gases globally, must prioritize a transition to a low-carbon economy. Plans such as the Feminist Green New Deal can provide a blueprint for the transition to ensure it is rooted in economic, Indigenous, gender and climate justice.<sup>97</sup>

The extractive global economy – built on oil and gas extraction, mining, overfishing and deforestation – not only drives the climate crisis but also concentrates wealth and power in the hands of a few economic elites. Mining is likely to increase, as electric vehicles, solar panels and wind turbines create greater demand for cobalt, lithium, copper and other critical energy minerals. In the race to access and control the earth's dwindling resources, land and environmental rights defenders are on the frontlines protecting their communities and pushing back against corporate greed and impunity. Canada, as home to the majority of the world's mining companies, should do more to end human rights violations associated with resource extraction and support inclusive natural resource management.



Canada's children and grandchildren will judge this generation by its action – or inaction – on the defining challenge of the time: climate change.

– Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada, Speech from the Throne, 2019<sup>96</sup>



### CLIMATE CHANGE & EXTRACTIVES

Our global economy is wrecking the planet and we have reached a breaking point. Women are on the front lines of addressing the climate crisis while facing increased risk from our changing climate and from the harmful human rights and environmental impacts of some extractive projects. As one of the highest per-capita emitters of greenhouse gases and as a global hub for the extractive sector, Canada urgently needs to up its game on climate action and corporate accountability.

## Walking the talk:

**CLIMATE ACTION:** This year's federal commitments to climate action were undercut by the government's failure to address the largest and fastest-growing source of carbon emissions in Canada: the oil and gas industry. The federal government has no clear plan on how to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, as promised during the election. Conflicts over pipelines to export natural gas to international markets boiled over this past year. Most recently, when the RCMP arrested First Nations hereditary chiefs who opposed the construction of the Coastal Gaslink pipeline, a series of railway blockades and other solidarity actions halted rail transportation in much of the country and tested the government's promise to abide by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Progress has also been slow in eliminating federal fossil fuel subsidies.<sup>98</sup> The Commissioner of the Environment and Sustainable Development issued a scathing report in April 2019 detailing the government's lack of progress in meeting Canada's G20 commitment to eliminate inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. Export Development Canada (EDC) supported \$12.45 billion in oil and gas business in 2018 alone, compared to \$2.1 billion in clean tech sectors. EDC's new climate policy, released in 2019, phases out future investments in the coal sector but does not prohibit continued oil and gas investments and delays setting targets to reduce the carbon intensity of its portfolio.

This year, countries will need to make new commitments under the Paris Agreement and replenish their climate finance packages. Canada needs to step up on both fronts with much more ambitious commitments for emissions reductions and contributing its fair share to global efforts around climate adaptation and mitigation.<sup>99</sup> It was disappointing that, in the fall of 2019, Canada pledged only \$300 million to the UN's Green Climate Fund, the same as its 2015 contribution and less than a third of its fair share.<sup>100</sup>

Among the government's emerging priorities is supporting workers and communities to successfully transition to a low-carbon economy. The Minister of Infrastructure and Communities is mandated to increase investments in green infrastructure, while the Minister of Natural Resources is tasked with introducing a Just Transition Act in Parliament. It remains to be seen whether these new investments and legislation will reach the necessary scale and pace to build a more inclusive, low-carbon economy that is rooted in economic, environmental, Indigenous and gender justice.

**GENDER-RESPONSIVE ACTION:** Climate action is among the six action areas of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy but has received limited funding since the policy was launched in 2017, and less than 1% of climate projects have gender equality as their principal purpose.<sup>101</sup> This may change, as women's rights and climate adaptation were highlighted for additional programming in the mandate letter to the Minister of International Development. This is welcome news since Canada currently gives less than 35% of its international climate finance to adaptation efforts. Adaptation is critical for women, who are particularly vulnerable to climate change and have few resources to cope with its impacts.

At the global level, Canada continues to champion the Gender Action Plan within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the development of a Gender Action Plan for the UN's Green Climate Fund. While the overall outcomes of the COP25 climate summit in Madrid were disappointing, it was encouraging to hear new the Minister of Environment and Climate Change support the UNFCCC's five-year Enhanced Lima Work Program on Gender and the inclusion of human rights obligations in the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

The government managed to pass Bill C-69, enacting the Impact Assessment Act, before Parliament rose in June 2019, despite intense opposition from oil and gas industry lobbyists. The new law includes a groundbreaking provision requiring gender-based analysis to be considered in all federal impact assessment reviews.

## CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL EXTRACTIVE

**INDUSTRIES:** The government has been ineffective at holding Canadian companies accountable when they violate human rights overseas. Despite calls from several UN treaty bodies for Canada to do more to curb business-related human rights abuses, the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade received no direction on these matters in the mandate letter. The government's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy, last revised in 2014, is outdated and continues to rely on voluntary actions by companies.

In April 2019, the government appointed Canada's first-ever Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise. Unfortunately, the new office was not granted the independence or powers of investigation promised fifteen months earlier. This reversal prompted the mass resignation of civil society representatives from the international trade minister's multi-stakeholder advisory body on responsible business conduct.<sup>102</sup> Strong investigatory powers are at the heart of the ombudsperson function and an office without such powers will be unable to get to the bottom of allegations or provide redress to those harmed.

Each year, Export Development Canada provides billions of dollars to support the oil, gas and mining industries. EDC's new Human Rights Policy, released in May 2019, is a significant improvement, but still falls short of fulfilling the human rights obligations of its sole shareholder, the Canadian government. The year 2020 will see a once-in-a-decade review of the Export Development Act. The government should take this opportunity to modernize the Act by adding a new gender equality mandate and prohibitions around human rights abuses, corruption, and fossil-fuel-related transactions.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Bring more ambitious emission reduction targets to the next UN climate summit in November 2020 and pass climate accountability legislation to hold itself and future governments legally accountable for tracking progress and meeting emission reduction targets.
- Eliminate fossil fuel subsidies and align Canada's national energy infrastructure decision-making with its climate commitments.
- Invest in a Feminist Green New Deal for Canada that creates green jobs in low-carbon sectors, supports workers to transition out of carbon-intensive sectors, and provides decent work and wages for care work, sustainable agriculture and renewable energy.
- Contribute Canada's fair share of US \$4 billion per year toward international climate finance, divided equally between climate adaptation and mitigation. Extend financial support to developing countries through grants, not loans. Ensure that 15% of bilateral climate projects funded by Canada have gender equality as the principal objective.
- Strengthen the mandate of the Canadian Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise by making the role independent and granting it powers of investigation.
- Replace the federal government's outdated Corporate Social Responsibility Strategy with a Business and Human Rights Strategy that incorporates binding mechanisms for holding companies accountable, integrates more gender-transformative approaches and covers all business sectors.
- Add gender equality to the mandate of Export Development Canada, prohibit business activities that violate human rights or exacerbate gender inequalities, and continue to expand women's representation and leadership within the organization.

## 9 BUILDING A PROGRESSIVE TAX SYSTEM

### Score: red

Women, especially those from more marginalized groups, are more likely to live in poverty than men are. For that reason, fiscal policy should be informed by robust gender analysis. Unfair tax policies that favour the top 1% are a double threat to women's economic equality. Tax avoidance by wealthy individuals and corporations starves public budgets and reduces public services, such as child and elder care, that could boost women's economic security. Women are often left to fill these service gaps through hours of unpaid care work, reducing their ability to pursue decent work and locking them further into poverty. Gender budgeting lies at the heart of a feminist agenda to ensure fiscal policy contributes to leveling the playing field for those struggling to escape poverty, and raising public revenue to invest in equality enhancing public services. While the government continues to strengthen its gender budgeting approach, this is undermined by a lack of progress in building a fairer tax system.

Tax evasion and avoidance must be tackled at the global level to stop a race to the bottom on corporate tax policy. Over the past two decades, the global average rate of corporate income tax has fallen from over 29% in 2000 to under 24% in 2018.<sup>104</sup> Multinational corporations shift as much as 40% of their foreign profits to tax havens.<sup>105</sup> Corporate income tax is essential for raising public revenue in low-income countries, which are particularly exposed to profit shifting and tax competition. Rampant tax evasion in developing countries deprives them of their tax base and prevents them from being able to offer basic services, such as healthcare and education, to their populations.



We have worked hard to make our tax system fair for all Canadians. In simple terms, the economy cannot work for everyone when not everyone pays their fair share.

— Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance, 2018<sup>103</sup>



### TAX

Tax policy can be a powerful tool for reducing inequality and ending poverty. Gender-based analysis has become standard practice in the federal budget process, and there is a commitment to deepen the intersectional analysis in future years. The government has made less progress on closing tax loopholes and making wealthy individuals and corporations pay their fair share. Corporate income tax rates remain low in Canada and preferential tax rates for stock options were not implemented. At the global level, Canada has taken some positions that are holding back international tax reform efforts.

## Walking the talk:

**GENDER BUDGETING:** Budget 2019 included a gender equality appendix that provided Canadians with valuable information on how gender-based analysis (GBA+) was applied to key budget measures. In future budgets, the government should provide more detailed intersectional data on how government initiatives will impact people differently, and ensure those impacts are addressed. The government should also expand GBA+ to tax measures. Gender discrimination is built into the federal tax system in various ways. Tax laws structured around “joint” or “household” units, including some provisions related to caregiving, can exacerbate inequalities. By one estimate, if all adults in Canada had been taxed as single individuals in 2016, women would have had \$33.9 billion more net after-tax income.<sup>106</sup> Finance Canada’s gender-based analysis of existing personal income tax measures in 2019 revealed which tax measures contribute the most to such inequalities.<sup>107</sup> The upcoming review of government spending and tax expenditures promised in the Finance Minister’s mandate letter should involve independent experts with expertise in gender-based analysis to expose these systematic inequalities.

Fortunately, the Finance Minister’s mandate letter explicitly calls on the Department of Finance and the Department of Women and Gender Equality to deepen the scope and quality GBA+ in the federal budget process. Gender budgeting processes that are participatory and evidence-based can better address the realities of women in all their diversity. The government should build more internal expertise on intersectional gender analysis, including around data collection, and increase efforts to engage women’s rights groups, Indigenous women’s organizations, and feminist economists and academics in the federal budgeting process. Public consultations on the federal budget, led by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, should prioritize the participation of such groups and include gender-related questions in the overall framing.

### PROGRESSIVE TAXATION AND TAX LOOPHOLES:

Over the past two decades, the Canadian tax system has become less progressive as governments of various political stripes have cut corporate taxes, failed to close tax loopholes and introduced tax credits to micro-target key voting demographics. The Liberal government made bold promises in 2015 to crack down on tax avoidance and close tax loopholes, but has dragged its feet and scaled back commitments in the face of vigorous business lobbying. For example, Budget 2019 included a commitment to address a major tax loophole related to stock option deductions that costs public coffers \$1.3 billion annually. However, the budget implementation bill did not include any such provision. Instead, the Department of Finance launched public consultations in June on the proposal to limit stock option deductions at a preferential rate. In December, the department quietly announced that the changes would not come into effect on January 1, 2020, and would be delayed.<sup>108</sup>

The government’s first order of business when Parliament resumed in December 2019 was to introduce a new tax measure promised during the election: to gradually raise the threshold of income exempt from federal income tax (called the basic personal amount) to \$15,000. Targeting Canadians who earn less than \$147,000, this move aims to reduce taxes paid by lower- and middle-income Canadians. The Parliamentary Budget Officer estimates that this will reduce government revenues by \$21 billion over the next five years as a result. Analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows the exemption particularly benefits dual-earning upper-middle-class families making between \$100,000 and \$200,000 in family income.<sup>109</sup> Opposition parties criticized the measure for not being worth such a massive budget reduction and for not being more targeted to low-income Canadians.<sup>110</sup>

The Liberals’ 2019 election platform contained several commitments on tax reform. These included cracking down on corporate tax loopholes, preventing multinational companies from creating complex corporate structures between countries to secure

lower taxes, making multinational tech giants pay corporate tax on the revenues generated in Canada, and improving whistleblower programs to help expose tax avoidance. Finance Minister Bill Morneau has been tasked with delivering on these promises in his ministerial mandate letter.<sup>111</sup> The government launched consultations in February 2020 on creating a publicly accessible national registry on beneficial ownership. This will create more transparency around who enjoys the benefits of property or security ownership and will help uncover money launderers and tax evaders who use opaque corporate entities to disguise their actions and profits.

#### **REFORMING THE INTERNATIONAL TAX SYSTEM:**

At the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Canada and other industrialized countries are currently negotiating reforms to the international tax system under the Base Erosion and Profit Shifting 2.0 Plan. Unfortunately, on several occasions, Canadian government negotiators have blocked much-needed changes to the international tax framework, in particular the introduction of a minimum effective tax rate. Canada should play a more constructive role and adopt positions in the negotiations that enable fair taxation and domestic resource mobilization in developing countries.

## **Looking forward, the government should:**

- Deepen the scope and quality of gender-based analysis applied to the federal budget, and ensure that the federal budget consultation processes are inclusive and accessible to women's rights organizations and other equity-seeking groups.
- Appoint an independent expert panel with the skills and expertise to apply comprehensive gender-based analysis with an intersectional lens in the promised review of government spending and tax expenditures. Set firm timelines for this review to conclude within the first two years of this government's mandate (before October 2021), and to share the findings and recommendations publicly.
- Fulfill all election promises to close tax loopholes and tackle tax avoidance within the first year of the government's mandate, and increase the transparency of corporate structures by creating a publicly accessible national registry of beneficial ownership.
- Increase public revenues by raising the corporate tax rate from 15% to 21%.
- Demonstrate global leadership on tax policy by adopting more progressive negotiating positions in the OECD's tax reform process.

# 10 ADDRESSING THE UNEQUAL ECONOMICS OF WOMEN'S WORK

## Score: red

Canada ranks 30th in terms of women's economic participation in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2020, a decline from the previous year.<sup>113</sup> The gender wage gap in Canada is still staggering, hovering at 31% for both full and part time workers and at 29% to 54% for Indigenous women, racialized women, immigrant women and women with disabilities.<sup>114</sup> One significant factor contributing to women's economic inequality is their concentration in part-time work. In Canada, over 670,000 women who want to work full-time are stuck in part-time, casual and temporary jobs,<sup>115</sup> citing care responsibilities as their main barrier to full-time employment.<sup>116</sup> Equal pay initiatives must address the fact that women and men continue to be concentrated in different jobs, given that jobs in which women are overrepresented tend to offer lower pay.

Little progress has been made to hold Canadian companies operating abroad accountable for labour rights violations in their global business operations and supply chains. The global garment sector, for example, has seen little to no progress on providing living wages, ending gender-based violence or improving workplace health and safety since the anti-sweatshop campaigns of the 1990s. Our sexist economies are subsidized by women's cheap and free labour. Women contribute so much to economic growth and yet reap very few benefits. Investing in sectors where women work, such as the care sector, should be a priority for the government.

Proactive pay equity isn't just the right thing to do — it's the smart thing to do, because when people are treated fairly and given an equal opportunity to succeed, we all win.

— Patty Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour, 2019<sup>112</sup>



## WORK & PAY EQUITY

Women in Canada and around the world are concentrated in the lowest-paid and most undervalued jobs. Multiple layers of discrimination further exacerbate the economic insecurity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant and refugee women, LGBTIQ2 people, and women with disabilities. The new federal Pay Equity Act is expected to come into force in 2020, but it will be years before women are compensated for equal pay violations. Canada needs to align its legislation with new global standards, such as the ILO's Violence and Harassment in the Workplace Convention, and find better ways to address labour rights violations in global supply chains.

## Walking the talk:

**LIVING WAGES AND PAY EQUITY:** The new federal proactive Pay Equity Act is expected to come into force in 2020 but still awaits its accompanying regulations and budget.<sup>117</sup> While the Act is certainly an important milestone, advocates have flagged several shortcomings. For example, it prioritizes employers' needs over employees' human right to equal pay for work of equal value.<sup>118</sup> Pay equity advocates also worry it will be years before women actually receive compensation for equal pay violations.

In June 2019, the Expert Panel on Modern Federal Labour Standards released its report to review issues not resolved during the latest review of the federal standards within the Canada Labour Code in 2018, including the federal minimum wage, labour standards for workers in non-standard employment, and collective voice for non-unionized workers. While the panel applied GBA+ to their research and analysis, none of the 39 recommendations addresses the specific situations women face.

Both the Governor General's Speech from the Throne and the mandate letter to the Minister of Labour announced the government's intention to increase the federal minimum wage,<sup>119</sup> which would apply to the 6% of the Canadian workforce employed in federally regulated sectors.<sup>120</sup> This welcome commitment sends a strong signal for provinces and territories to follow suit and improve wages for their lowest-paid workers. The federal government should now work towards a commitment to paying living wages, as two provinces, Alberta<sup>121</sup> and British Columbia,<sup>122</sup> have done in recent years.

### **VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AT WORK:**

Amendments to the Canada Labour Code in 2018 strengthened the framework for preventing harassment and violence, including sexual harassment and sexual violence, in federally regulated workplaces.<sup>123</sup> Several provinces have established paid and unpaid leave for survivors

of domestic violence. Racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women, LGBTIQ2 people, and women with disabilities are at greater risk of violence, and specific strategies are required to address their unique situations. Canada's Labour Minister is tasked to work with the provinces and territories to ratify ILO Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work, which was adopted in June 2019.<sup>124</sup> The Convention defines workers broadly and, importantly, applies to the public and private sectors and the formal and informal economy. It also adopts a broad definition of violence, covering a range of behaviours and forms of communications, such as e-mails. Given the current state of workplace violence and harassment, and the public awareness generated by the #MeToo movement, its adoption could not be more timely and should happen swiftly.

### **MANDATORY HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE IN SUPPLY CHAINS:**

The government has done little to hold Canadian companies to account for violating human rights and international labour standards in their global supply chains. A 2017 Parliamentary committee study on child labour in supply chains included several recommendations for government action through international assistance, trade negotiations, procurement policies, engagement with Canadian business, and policy and legal measures. In February 2019, the government responded to the committee, largely agreeing with the recommendations and then conducted consultations on possible supply chain legislation and ways to address labour exploitation in global supply chains. It is now unclear what the government's next steps are, as none of the ministerial mandate letters include specific directives on this issue. Canada lags far behind other jurisdictions—such as France, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and California—on supply chain or human rights due diligence legislation. Canada should catch up by enacting human rights due diligence legislation that covers a wide range of industries, addresses all human rights, is mandatory, ensures transparency and liability for harm, and includes an effective enforcement mechanism.

## Looking forward, the government should:

- Raise the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage.
- Strengthen labour standards to ensure all workers – regardless of whether they are full-time or part-time, temporary or casual – have equal terms, conditions and opportunities at work, and access to equitable wages and benefits.
- Dedicate resources to ensure swift implementation of the Pay Equity Act.
- Invest in the sectors where women work, ensuring that job stimulus and infrastructure spending equitably benefit women in the labour force. Enact workforce strategies for female-dominated sectors that offer low wages and poor working conditions, such as early childhood education and home-based care.
- Support workers' right to organize by prioritizing unionized businesses and living wage employers in federal government procurement.
- Pass legislation requiring Canadian companies operating abroad to undertake mandatory human rights due diligence throughout the entirety of their business operations and supply chains. Ensure that legislation includes remedy and recourse for human rights violations.

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