



SKILLSNEXT

Economic Equality In A Changing World: Removing Barriers To Employment For Women

SEPTEMBER 2020

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The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

Canadians' needs for skills training are changing rapidly. Through Skills Next, the Public Policy Forum and the Diversity Institute—in its role as a research lead for the Future Skills Centre—are publishing a series of reports that explore a number of the most important issues currently impacting the skills ecosystem in Canada. Each report focuses on one issue, reviews the existing state of knowledge on this topic, and identifies areas in need of additional research. This strong foundation is intended to help support further research and strengthen policymaking. A diverse set of authors who are engaged in the skills ecosystem through various roles, including through research, activism and policymaking, have been carefully selected to provide a broad range of perspectives while also foregrounding the Canadian context. Their varied backgrounds, experiences and expertise have shaped their individual perspectives, their analyses of the current skills ecosystem, and the reports they have authored.

MAJOR THEMES EXPLORED IN SKILLS NEXT INCLUDE

- Digital skills and training;
- Barriers to employment for specific groups and demographics;
- Alternative approaches to skills & training; and
- Offering readers a primer on what we know, what we don't know, and how we can dig deeper on skills training & the future of work.

- Indigenous skills and employment training;
- Competency frameworks and essential skills;
- Technology-enabled innovations in the skills and employment ecosystem;
- Understanding gig work and the experience of gig work in Canada;
- Barriers to employment based on gender; and
- Skills in small- and medium-sized enterprises.

RELEASES JANUARY 2020

- See the [eight Skills Next papers](#) from the winter 2020 release and the [full series](#).



About the Authors



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Executive Vice-President, Public Policy Forum

Julie is an accomplished leader and academic with expertise in higher education leadership and governance. As Executive Vice-President of Public Policy Forum, Julie builds bridges and enhances the profile and visibility of the PPF while directing its research, external partnership and membership teams. She takes a lead role in projects about democracy and governance, reconciliation, innovation and growth.

In her previous role as Chief of Staff to two presidents at the University of Ottawa, Julie worked closely with the senior executive team to develop and advance strategic initiatives. Julie was chosen as one of the delegates for the Governor General's Canadian Leadership Conference in 2012, and was honoured in 2010 as one of Ottawa's top 40 under 40. The Canadian Council for the Advancement in Education chose her as one of Canada's rising stars in higher education in 2000.

Julie is very passionate about diversity and the promotion of women in leadership roles. She is the inspiration behind cafleycommittee.org, an initiative designed to encourage the nomination and promotion of female leaders. Deeply committed to her community and to the world around her, Julie also lends her support to initiatives tackling poverty and literacy. She currently serves on the Board of Directors of Parkinson Canada.

Julie holds a PhD in education leadership from the University of Ottawa. She also holds a MEd, which examined organizational change in the higher education sector, a BEd and a BA.



KATIE DAVEY

Policy Lead, Public Policy Forum

Katie joined PPF in March 2020. Katie has served as Director of Policy and Stakeholder Relation at the Office of the Official Opposition in New Brunswick, Senior Advisor for Policy and Stakeholder Engagement in the New Brunswick Premier's Office, and President of the University of New Brunswick Student Union.

Feeling like the conversation around inclusive and diverse decision making was lacking on the East Coast in Canada, Katie Davey created *Femme Wonk* – a policy and current affairs podcast that seeks to discuss both innovative and traditional public policy through a gender and inclusion lens.

Through Femme Wonk, she also speaks, consults, and hosts a book club. Once called “the feminist money girl,” Katie advocates for the integration of economic and social policy.

Katie holds a Degree in Political Science from the University of New Brunswick and a Master of Applied Politics at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a member of the Youth Working Group on Gender Equality for the Government of Canada, and a 2019/20 Action Canada Fellow.



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Tania Saba is a professor at the School of Industrial Relations at the University of Montreal. She holds the BMO Chair in Diversity and Governance at the Université de Montréal.

Tania Saba is an expert on issues of diversity management, workforce aging, intergenerational value differences and knowledge transfer. Over the course of her career, she has contributed to more than sixty book chapters and scientific articles. She collaborates on major research projects with public and private organizations on issues of integration and adaptation in employment of disadvantaged groups.

In addition to her academic career, Tania Saba has held important executive and officer positions at the Université de Montréal. From 2008 to 2010, she became the first female director of the School of Industrial Relations. She was Associate Dean of Undergraduate Studies from 2010 to 2012 and then Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and External Affairs in the Faculty of Arts and Science at the Université de Montréal from 2012 to 2015. From 2015 to 2017, she was Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Tania Saba is a researcher affiliated with the Centre de recherche interuniversitaire sur la mondialisation et le travail (CRIMT) and the Centre d'études et de recherches internationales de l'Université de Montréal (CÉRIUM). She is also a member of the Centre d'études ethniques des universités montréalaises (CEETUM).



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Simon Blanchette has been a research associate with the Diversity Institute for several years working on the organization's seminal DiversityLeads project, the Diversity Assessment of the Superclusters for Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED), as well as a range of projects for the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub and the Future Skills Centre.

He has presented his work in prestigious international conferences, such as the Academy of Management Annual Meeting and the European Group on Organization Studies Annual International Colloquium. Simon is a lecturer in management in the Desautels Faculty of Management at McGill University. He is the coauthor of several recent studies on women and work as well as training gaps and skills gaps in SMEs, and also has previous experience as a consultant.

He holds a Bachelor of Commerce from McGill University and Master of Science in Management (specialized in Strategy) from HEC Montreal, where his thesis focused on creative ideation and innovation.



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Ruby Latif is a Doctor of Social Science candidate at Royal Roads University. She has over 15 years' experience building strategic partnerships having cultivated relationships with over 1,000 community organizations across Ontario, and engaged with over 500 ethnic media outlets. She is a sought-after political strategist who has worked with senior leadership at all 3-levels of government.

As a Research Associate at the Diversity Institute, her research focuses on workplace diversity using an intersectional lens that goes beyond gender. Her Doctoral research seeks to understand how Muslim women in Canada construct their identities in their professional lives, and how they navigate those identities in the workplace. Her work has been published in academic journals and she has contributed to government policy documents. She hopes to use her experience and academic pursuits to drive policy change.

Ruby is a former Young Women of Distinction recipient, a Zonta Young Women in Public Affairs Award recipient and has been named one of the most influential South Asian Canadians by South Asian Generations Next magazine and has been featured nationally for her work in Canadian politics.



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Valentina is a researcher whose focus is on ecosystem skills development and gender issues. Her background includes Master's degrees from McMaster University (MA - English) and Brock University (MEd – Social and Cultural Contexts). Previously, her research in adult education with marginalized groups led to The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded research, focusing on post-secondary education and skills training for marginalized and previously-incarcerated women. Additionally, she has been involved in longitudinal research with adolescents and Theory of Mind at Brock University.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Along with technology and sustainability, inequality is one of the three dimensions that shape the economic landscape of the 21st century.

Persistent inequality leads to marginalization, exclusion from growing economic sectors and erosion of the capacity for economic and social development.

Studies on the economic impact of gender gaps assume men and women are likely to be born with the same potential, but disparities in access to education, health care, finances and technology, along with legal rights and social and cultural factors, prevent women from realizing this potential.¹

The direct result is reduced productivity and lower economic growth. Women's lack of economic empowerment costs the economy anywhere from 10 percent of GDP in advanced economies to over 30 percent in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.² While Canadian women have made some progress in the labour market in recent decades, barriers to their full participation remain, thus significantly reducing the pool of talent available to employers.³

Where there is equality, growth is stronger and more sustainable—the correlation is undisputable.⁴ **Action is needed to alleviate gender barriers: Good intentions are no longer enough.**

¹ Kochhar, K., Jain-Chandra, S. and Newiak, M. (2017). [Women, work, and economic growth: Leveling the playing field](#).

² Dabla-Norris, E. and Kochhar, K. (2019). [Closing the gender gap](#).

³ Kochhar, K., Jain-Chandra, S. and Newiak, M. (2017). [Women, work, and economic growth: Leveling the playing field](#).

⁴ Eswaran, V. (2019). [The business case for diversity is now overwhelming. Here's why](#).

The first objective of this paper is to summarize existing research and take stock of prevailing issues surrounding gender inequality.

Despite good intentions and policy interventions, the following issues persist:



The wage gap



The underrepresentation of women in STEM



The underrepresentation of women in management positions



Women's slow access to entrepreneurship and business ownership



There is a **gap of 58 percent in reported revenues between men and women running small businesses; closing the gap could **unlock \$88.2 billion** for the Canadian economy.**

These are all well-documented factors that are interconnected and thus aggravated. We examine them in turn by highlighting the gender inequalities they generate⁵ and we present the most recent statistics as well as the explanatory determinants of these various considerations.

In portraying gender inequalities, we pay close attention to the intersectionality of the grounds of discrimination. Therefore, when available, other identity and socio-demographic characteristics such as race, immigration status, ethnicity, disability, mental health, age and income level are considered as they raise additional challenges and complexities.

The second objective is to focus on inequities made more salient by the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the related agreed measures that have stymied our economy and confined many families to their homes while also performing the vital function of limiting transmission of COVID-19. Many women face additional difficulties due to their over-representation in front-line work, including low-paid, precarious and care work.⁶ The overwhelming burden associated with the unequal distribution of support has further exposed women's socio-economic vulnerabilities, with women in dual-earning households having been more likely to lose their jobs as a result of the pandemic and less likely to recover them in early stimulus and re-hiring initiatives.⁷

Based on the findings of the first two objectives, the third objective is to present targeted initiatives to inform strategies to reduce gender inequalities and, in particular, to develop a research agenda on skills and employment that integrates a gender perspective.



Studies on the economic impact of gender gaps assume men and women are likely to be born with the same potential, but disparities in access to education, health care, finances and technology, along with legal rights and social and cultural factors, prevent women from realizing this potential.



⁵ Bertay, A., Dordevic, L. and Sever, C. (2018). [Gender inequality and economic growth: Evidence from industry-level data](#).

⁶ Alon et al. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality](#); Walker, K. (May 20, 2020). [Domestic homicides increase nationwide during pandemic; Maritimers among victims](#).

⁷ Statistics Canada. (2020d). [Labour force survey, June 2020](#).

DEFINITIONS: GENDER AND IDENTITY

For the purpose of this paper, we focus on a discussion of ciswomen, recognizing that gender is a social construction and there are many more layers of gender identity and sexual orientation. We mainly do so because the vast majority of data that has been collected on women has not differentiated between the experiences of transwomen and cisgender women. While there is no question amongst authors that transwomen are women, it would be inaccurate to assume that the experiences of all self-identified women are equal when we realize that (where data is available) transwomen experience discrimination, prejudice, rates of violence, and pay gaps because they are transwomen, and therefore it is vitally important to understand how their experiences differ in order to plan policies accordingly.^{8, 9}

Ciswomen or cisgender people are those whose gender identity and expression matches the biological sex they were assigned at birth.¹⁰ An intersectional approach considers ways in which other aspects of identity may result in multiple and overlapping layers of discrimination or disadvantage. In Canada, while disaggregated data are often lacking, we know the experiences of women are different for those who are immigrants, racialized and/or from different ethnic backgrounds, Indigenous, people with disabilities, or have diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. There is also evidence that age has an impact, as does geography (rural women face additional barriers). Differences within groups also play a role, for example, racialized immigrant women face compound workplace barriers as compared to those faced by non-racialized women, or racialized immigrant men. Among racialized people, there are significant differences for women who identify as being of Chinese origin, South Asian origin or Black Canadian. Even within groups self-identifying as Black Canadian there are differences. Additionally, there are differences among Indigenous Peoples of Canada, with varying lived realities of First Nations, Métis and Inuit-people and further differences between those living on and off reserve. However, the lack of data limits our ability to reflect the true nature of this intersectionality.

⁸ Waite, S. (2020). [Should I stay or should I go? Employment discrimination and workplace harassment against transgender and other minority employees in Canada's Federal Public Service.](#)

⁹ Bucik, A. (2016). [Canada: Discrimination and violence against lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and gender diverse and Two Spirit people on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.](#)

¹⁰ McIntyre, J. (n.d.). [Explainer: What does it mean to be "cisgender"?](#)

EXPLAINING GENDER GAPS: INTERPLAY BETWEEN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

Overview

Gender inequality is both an issue of social justice and an equally compelling economic priority. If women participated in the labour force at a rate equal to men, this would amount to an economic output of about \$100 billion per year.¹¹ Further, gender inclusion has a direct correlation in terms of performance, innovation and the improvement of economic equality.

Of note, according to the available data from Statistics Canada (June 2020):

- Women make up almost half of Canada's core employed working-age population (ages 25 to 54 years), or almost 12 million people.¹²
- As of June 2020, in this core working age group, women participated in the labour force at a rate of 82.1 percent. Before COVID-19, their participation rate surpassed employed men among 15- to 24-year-olds.¹³
- In June 2020, the participation rate (people in the labour force or actively seeking work) for 15- to 24-year-old men was 68.6 percent, versus 67.3 percent for women, and the employment rate (people currently employed) for 15- to 24-year-old men was 50.1 percent, versus 48.4 percent for women.^{14,15}

¹¹ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).

¹² Statistics Canada. (2020b). [Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, monthly, unadjusted for seasonality](#).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The employment rate refers to members of the total population who are employed. The participation rate refers to those who are employed and/or actively seeking work, including those who are unemployed and receiving financial supports such as the CERB while they seek the opportunity to find other work.

Historically, unemployment has been higher for women than for men. However, while unemployment rates today are still slightly higher for women than for men, the difference has been decreasing and in 1983 the gap virtually disappeared.¹⁶ In 2020, however, the economic impact of COVID-19 has turned back the clock on women's employment gains, reversing the trends and once again widening the gap between women and men.¹⁷

Despite a situation that is slowly improving, women are disproportionately employed in jobs with poorer working conditions, making women workers more vulnerable to lower wages and job loss.¹⁸ Moreover, even in sectors where women do the same work and have the same level of education, they earn less than their male counterparts.¹⁹

As women generally spend less time in the paid labour market, they receive lower pensions and are more exposed to the risk of poverty in retirement.²⁰ Further, the participation rate among women workers aged 65 and over is growing, and their average retirement age is reaching that of men, whereas historically it has been lower.²¹

Among those who are working, fewer women than men are moving into management positions or starting their own businesses.^{22,23} Women also take on a greater share of unpaid work within the family, including childcare and domestic tasks, which limits their opportunities and options for paid work.²⁴

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2018a). [2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016365](#).

¹⁷ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).

¹⁸ International Labour Organization. (2017). [The gender gap in employment: What's holding women back?](#)

¹⁹ Chamberlain, A. (2016). [Demystifying the gender pay gap: Evidence from Glassdoor salary data](#).

²⁰ Canadian Labour Congress. (2015). [Did you know senior women are twice as likely to live in poverty as men?](#)

²¹ Thune, K. (2020). [Retirement age for women: How retiring earlier affects planning and saving](#).

²² Ligaya, A. and Deschamps, T. (2018). [Fewer women leading Canada's corporations today than 5 years ago](#).

²³ Thune, K. (2020). [Retirement age for women: How retiring earlier affects planning and saving](#).

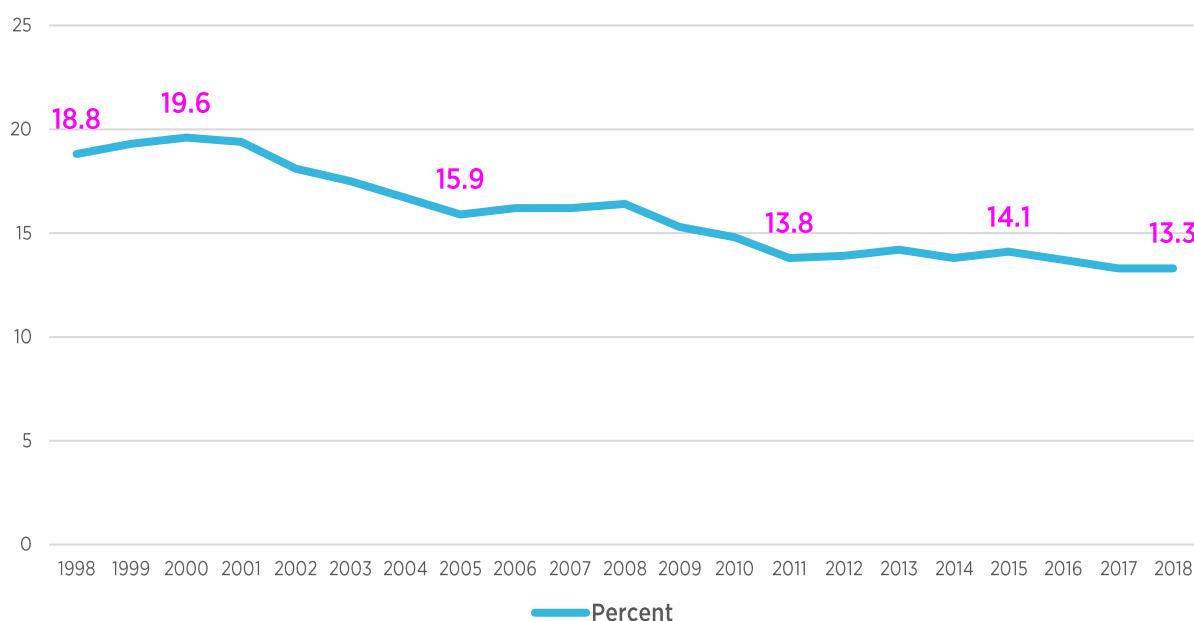
²⁴ Ibid.

The Wage Gap

The facts

The wage gap for Canadian women has narrowed, but it persists and stood at 13.3 percent as of 2018, based on Statistics Canada data (see Figure 1).²⁵ A 2020 report by Catalyst shows a comparable depiction: Between 1999 and 2019, women's average full-time weekly wages rose from 77 percent to 84.2 percent of that of men.

Figure 1: Gender wage gap among employees aged 25 to 54 between 1998 and 2018



(Source: Pelletier, R., Patterson, M. and Moyser, M. (2019). [The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998 to 2018](#).)

Even when adjusted for full-time compared to part-time work, women earn 87.9 percent of what men earn based on average hourly wage rates, and 78.2 percent of what men earn based on average weekly wage rates.²⁶ Higher education notwithstanding, Canada continues to have one of the highest gender wage gaps among Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries.²⁷

²⁵ Pelletier, R., Patterson, M. and Moyser, M. (2019). [The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998-2018](#).

²⁶ Catalyst. (March 2, 2020). [Women's earnings – the pay gap: Quick take](#).

²⁷ Finance Canada. (2017). [Budget 2017](#).

Higher education notwithstanding, Canada continues to have one of the highest gender wage gaps among Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) countries.



Further substantiating the gap, on average, women are better educated than men. Women have made substantial gains in educational attainment over the past three decades by increasingly acquiring both undergraduate and graduate university degrees, and at a much faster pace than men. Research shows that in 2015, 35.1 percent of Canadian women had university degrees, compared to 13.7 percent in 1990.²⁸ Over the same period, the number for men increased at half that pace, to 28.6 percent from 17.1 percent.²⁹ Educational attainment, paired with higher rates of public-sector work and unionization (which is more prevalent in the public sector), explains the decrease of the wage gap. Without this significant progress on the education front, the gap of \$4.13 per hour would have been higher.³⁰

The wage gap for racialized people, immigrants, Indigenous people and persons with disabilities is even more severe.³¹ According to the 2016 census data, based on median total income for full-time workers, racialized Canadian women earned 56.7 percent of what all men earned, and 79.7 percent of what racialized Canadian men earned, highlighting the intersectionality of being both a woman and racialized.³²

Factors explaining the wage gap

Researchers have examined different factors to understand what drives the wage gap. While bias and discrimination are undoubtedly at play, there is

²⁸ Moyser, M. (2017). [Women and paid work](#).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Pelletier, R., Patterson, M. and Moyser, M. (2019). [The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998-2018](#).

³¹ Gagnon, S. and Cukier, W. (2017). Equity, diversity and inclusion in Canada: Prepared for the OECD country diversity reports initiative.

³² Catalyst. (March 2, 2020). [Women's earnings - The pay gap: quick take](#).

also evidence of systemic inequalities in the labour market. Understanding and examining the difference between the causes of the gender wage gap and equal pay is important.

The causes of the gender wage gap are complex and inter-related. The highest paid sectors are dominated consistently by men. Women are underrepresented in management positions. Occupational segregation and higher rates of part-time work for women also explain why they receive lower wages than men.

The pay gap between men and women due to level of education, field of study, work experience, seniority in the enterprise, full-time or part-time employment, union density, size of enterprise and type of industry explain only part of the gender pay gap. Beyond that, there are inequalities related to the structure of the labour market, and not directly in terms of wage discrimination.

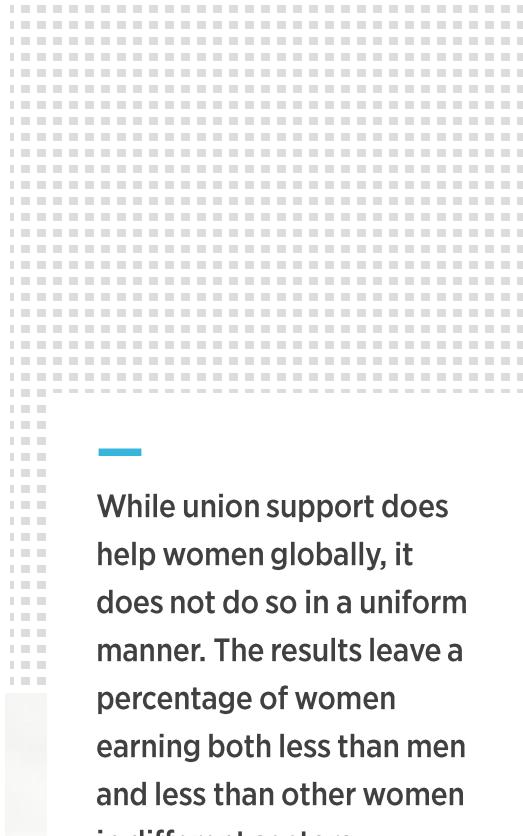
Women are more likely to be in the lower earnings categories (under \$50,000). Additionally, while 14.3 percent of men have annual earnings of \$100,000 or more, only 4.8 percent of women claim the equivalent earnings.³³



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Women and men in Canada work nearly the same number of hours per day, based on an eight-hour day. However, women work approximately **3.7 additional hours of unpaid work daily, compared to **2.5** hours for men.**

³³Moyser, M. (2019). [Measuring and analyzing the gender pay gap: A conceptual and methodological overview](#). Catalogue no. 45200002.



While union support does help women globally, it does not do so in a uniform manner. The results leave a percentage of women earning both less than men and less than other women in different sectors.

Industries and occupations with lower displacement rates are less risky and often associated with lower earnings growth. Empirical evidence supports the notion that women self-select into these employment sectors (e.g. social services, hospitals, education services, etc.), and avoid high-risk occupations (e.g. construction, mining, business, etc.).³⁴ Preliminary quantitative results suggest this could explain up to 15 percent of gender occupational segregation observed.³⁵

Changes in occupational and industrial distribution have played a strong role in explaining the evolution of the gender wage gap. For instance, differences in work experiences between men and women illustrate that women tend to have fewer total years of experience. While research exists regarding the wage gaps between immigrants and those born in Canada, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, there is a need to further investigate gender wage gaps within such sub-groups to obtain a more granular understanding intersectional lens.³⁶

Additional complexities arise when looking at wage gaps within separate groups. As an example, studies in Canada consistently find that unions tend to reduce wage inequality among men. However, while union support does help women globally, it does not do so in a uniform manner. The results leave a percentage of women earning both less than men and less than other women in different sectors.³⁷

³⁴ Dan, I. (2010). [Gender based self-selection into industries and occupations, pp.1-52.](#)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Pelletier, R., Patterson, M. and Moyser, M. (2019). [The gender wage gap in Canada: 1998-2018.](#)

³⁷ Card, D., Lemieux, T. and Riddell, C. (2020). [Unions and wage inequality: the roles of gender, skill and public sector employment, p. 140-173.](#)

Women bear the majority of unpaid work, including childcare, volunteerism and other household management and tasks. According to the OECD, women and men in Canada work nearly the same number of hours per day, based on an eight-hour day. However, women work approximately 3.7 additional hours of unpaid work daily, compared to 2.5 hours for men, highlighting the fact that women bear the burden of domestic and family responsibilities, even when working full time.³⁸

In addition, those in a middle-income bracket need to leverage childcare costs, which are not subsidized in most cases, against salary. Many argue that the Quebec childcare model, described later in this report, allows a greater number of women (who are often primary caregivers) to participate in the workforce. Simultaneously, recent studies indicate that current cohorts of women have stronger attachments to the labour market than their predecessors, as demonstrated by their overcoming of traditional barriers: returning to work after maternity/parental leave, being employed when they have young children, and working while they are caregivers to other family members.³⁹

Wage discrimination occurs in two cases: when different pay is given for the same job, which goes hand in hand with the entry of women into traditionally men's professions; and when jobs, different in content but equal in value, receive different remuneration. The main causes of pay discrimination are prejudice and stereotypes, traditional job evaluation methods, pay systems and bargaining power.⁴⁰

Wage discrimination is attributed to evaluation systems in organizations, which—despite technological advances—have been based on the criteria of occupations dominated by men and continue to undervalue or not fully consider the requirements of occupations dominated by women. Companies set wages for an occupation based on the market rate, but the market average reproduces bias and is itself discriminatory. With respect to pay structures, pay scales for occupations dominated by women are lower than those for men.⁴¹ As a result, the time it takes to reach a given pay level is much longer for women, perpetuating wage discrimination to a certain extent.

The Underrepresentation of Women in STEM

The facts

Sectoral analysis shows that women have made inroads into highly paid professions such as medicine and law, but they remain underrepresented in the lucrative fields of engineering and computer science.

³⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2020). [Employment: time spent in paid and unpaid work by sex](#).

³⁹ Moyser, M. (2019). [Measuring and analyzing the gender pay gap: A conceptual and methodological overview](#).

⁴⁰ Chicha, M.T. (2006). [A comparative analysis of promoting pay equity: Models and impacts](#).

⁴¹ Vincent, C. (2013). [Why do women earn less than men? A synthesis of findings from Canadian microdata](#). CRDCN Synthesis Series.

Indeed, despite years of advocacy, there are fewer women in computer science and only marginally more in engineering today than 30 years ago.⁴²

Technological skills could be in the greatest demand across sectors by 2030, rising by 55 percent and representing 17 percent of hours worked, up from 11 percent in 2016. The result could be an increase in demand for basic digital skills, as well as advanced technological skills such as programming and artificial intelligence (AI). Yet a recent study by the World Economic Forum, in collaboration with LinkedIn, found that only 24 percent of AI professionals in Canada are women.⁴³

Growing occupations in the professional, scientific, and technical services sector could contribute to more than 400,000 jobs by 2030. However, among the top five occupations that could have the most net growth in this sector, women, on average, account for approximately 30 percent of the employment today. This is largely driven by their high representation in non-technology occupations. In the high-growth and high-paying occupations of software engineering and computer programming, women only make up 14 and 13 percent, respectively.⁴⁴ The exclusion of women from high-paid sectors such as resources and technology has a compounding impact on earnings.⁴⁵



Among women who choose to pursue a degree in STEM, most do so in biology or science programs, resulting in even fewer women in engineering, computer science and mathematics programs.



⁴² Cukier, W. (Dec. 3, 2019). [Women in engineering: Barriers remain 30 years after École Polytechnique shooting](#).

⁴³ World Economic Forum. (2020a). [The global gender gap report 2020](#).

⁴⁴ Devillard et al. (2019). [Women matter: The present and future of women at work in Canada](#), p. 1-92.

⁴⁵ Diversity Institute. (2019). [Diversity leads: Women and racialized people in senior leadership positions: Greater Montréal Area](#).

Factors explaining why women are underrepresented in STEM

Industry rhetoric highlights the lack of qualified workers and skilled talent; however, it does not recognize the number of people who have the skills in demand yet remain underutilized.

Research shows that there are jurisdictions making advances in driving diversity and inclusion across sectors, which tells us there is not a lack of qualified candidates, but rather a lack of intentional strategies.⁴⁶ Occupations within some of the high-growth and high-income sectors reveal the disparity between men and women trying to advance in STEM (**science, technology, engineering and mathematics**) fields, with women generally filling lower-level jobs compared to their higher-level men counterparts.

In Canada, provincial jurisdiction over education and occupational qualifications has created multiple barriers in the labour market. Since each province has its own standards and systems of schooling, some employers and universities will not accept qualifications from other provinces. Furthermore, provinces regulate professional occupations and licensing. Positively, legislation governing these professions has been introduced and amended at various times in each province to help decrease barriers.⁴⁷

The Leadership Gap

The facts

A recent annual survey by the Globe and Mail's Report on Business Magazine⁴⁸ shows that a relatively small number of organizations are coming close to gender parity; only 15 companies out of 73 (20.54 percent) have a woman CEO or equivalent and, of those, only one is in a company with over \$5 billion in revenue.



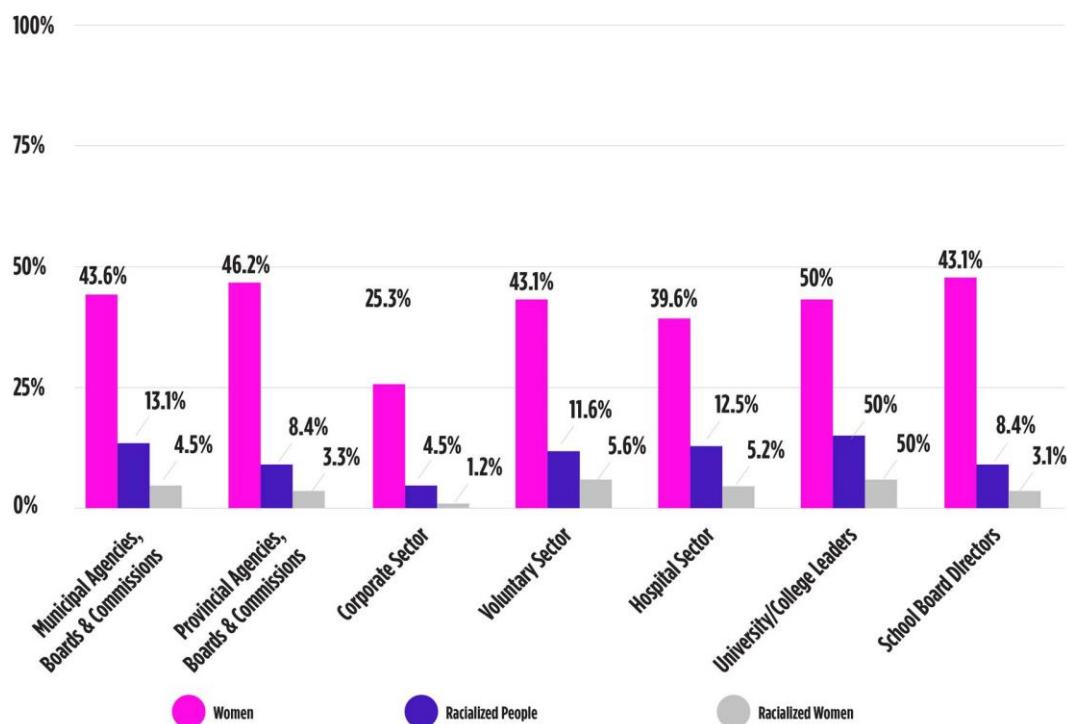
⁴⁶ Cukier, W. (2019). [Disruptive processes and skills mismatches in the new economy: Theorizing social inclusion and innovation as solutions, p. 211-225.](#)

⁴⁷ Marsden, L.R. (2012). [Canadian women & the struggle for equality.](#)

⁴⁸ Globe and Mail. (March 27, 2020). [Women lead here: Introducing the Women Lead Here 2020 honourees.](#)

A 2018–2019 review by the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University assessed 15,996 individuals for diverse representation in leadership positions in eight Canadian cities (Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Halifax, Hamilton, London, and Ottawa). It found that women are still underrepresented in senior leadership positions (see Figure 2).⁴⁹ This is particularly noted on corporation boards, where women account for a mere 25.3 percent (1.2 percent for racialized women) of board members. The fact that women are well represented in the workforce in many sectors underscores that the issue is not the pool of candidates, but rather corporate policies and practices, and a need for outreach to racialized people.

Figure 2: Overall representation on boards of directors across sectors



(Source: Diversity Institute. (2020). [Diverse representation in leadership: A review of eight Canadian cities](#).)

Other research and studies have well documented the underrepresentation of women in executive positions and on boards.⁵⁰ They also show that while representation is improving, it is doing so at a glacial pace; and some would argue it is stagnating. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles has

⁴⁹Diversity Institute. (2020). [Diverse representation in leadership: A review of eight Canadian cities](#).

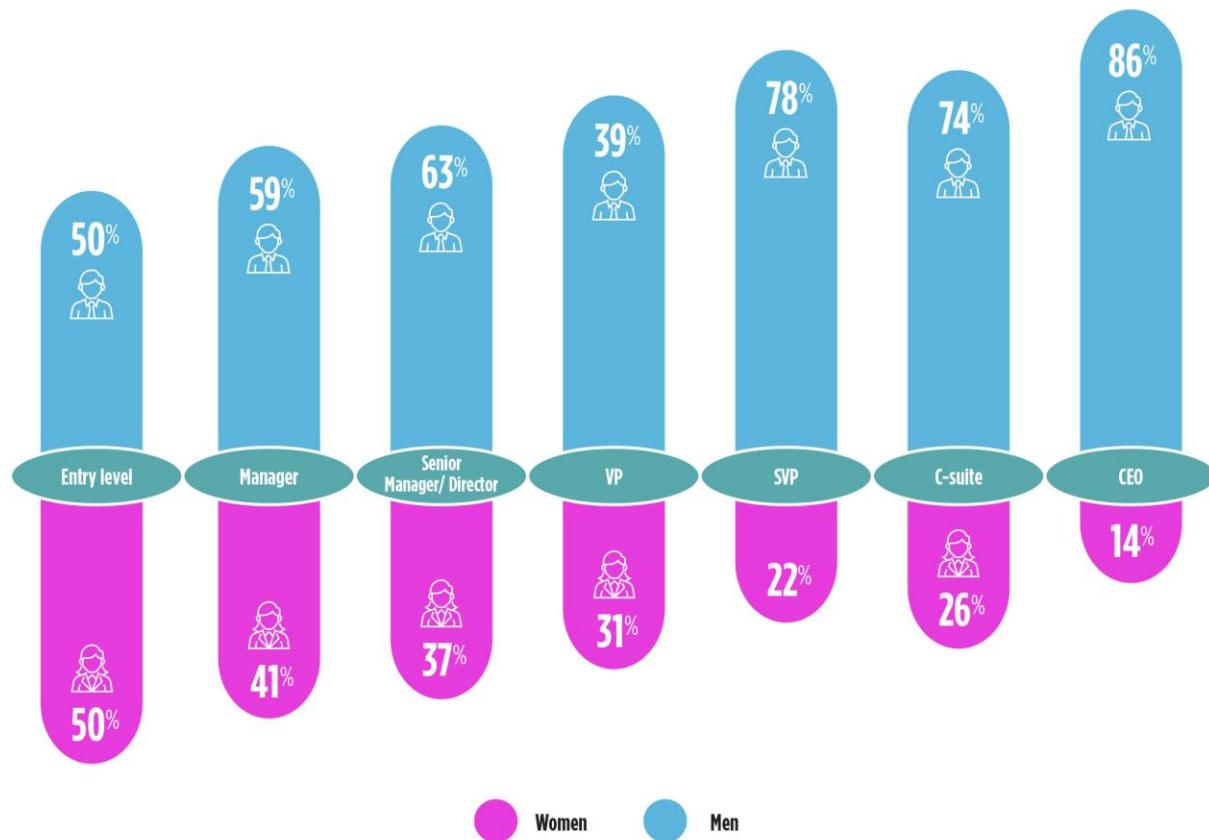
⁵⁰ Diversity Institute. (2019). [Diversity leads: Women and racialized people in senior leadership positions: Greater Montréal Area](#). [Diversity Institute](#).

profound impacts on the wage gap, but it also impacts societal expectations for women and shapes aspirations of young women.

Factors explaining the leadership gap

The first bottleneck for women's advancement appears to occur between the entry and manager levels, and the second between director and vice-president levels, where men advance three times more than women (see Figure 3). The loss of women's talent along the pipeline is not due to lack of ambition or higher attrition; women aspire to promotions at a similar rate and leave at a lower rate than their male counterparts.⁵¹

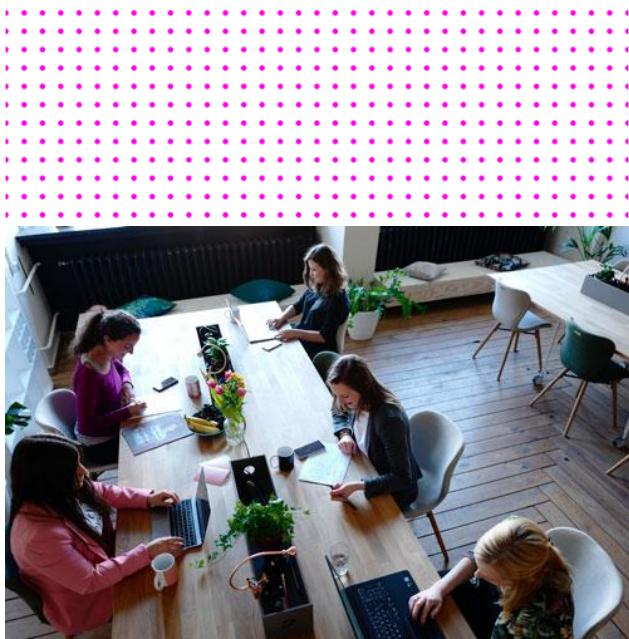
Figure 3: Percentage of Men and Women by level of position



(Source: Devillard et al. (2019). [Women matter: The present and future of women at work in Canada](#).)

⁵¹Devillard et al. (2019). [Women matter: The present and future of women at work in Canada](#).

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles has profound impacts on the wage gap, but it also impacts societal expectations for women and shapes aspirations of young women.



Women remain significantly underrepresented across the talent pipeline although there has been modest progress toward gender equality, especially at the entry level, since 2017. Among Canadian organizations surveyed in 2019, women accounted for 50 percent of employees at the entry level, an increase of three percent since 2017. Women's representation across the talent pipeline increased by two percentage points over the same period. However, a significant gap still exists between the representation of men and women beyond the entry level.⁵²

To achieve social equity, there needs to be more diversity and greater representation of women and racialized people in leadership roles. A significant portion of the gender wage gap is a function of the underrepresentation of women in the highest paid roles in the country. For example, a recent Financial Post article on the 100 highest paid CEOs included only four women.⁵³

⁵² Devillard et al. (2019). [Women matter: The present and future of women at work in Canada](#).

⁵³ Lewin, B. (January 2, 2020). [Top CEOs made as much as average Canadian worker earns in a year by mid-morning today](#).

The Entrepreneurship and Business Ownership Gap

The facts

Women currently represent 15.6 percent of owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with more than one employee in Canada.⁵⁴ While women own a larger percentage of new businesses, their companies are smaller. Indeed, there is a gap of 58 percent in reported revenues between men and women running small businesses; closing the gap could unlock \$88.2 billion for the Canadian economy.

Factors explaining the entrepreneurship gap

In Canada, women entrepreneurs face numerous barriers:

- They are less **likely to receive financing** when they apply, in part because of bias and in part because supports are structured for SMEs with employees;
- They **face barriers in business support services** and incubators and accelerators designed to support small businesses; and
- They have **less access to mentorship, sponsorship, and coaching**.

Women are a small percentage of venture capitalists (VCs). International research shows that 90 percent of VCs are men and 87 percent of VC funding goes to all-men founding teams, while only two percent goes to women-founded ventures and 10 percent to mixed-gender founding teams.⁵⁵

Gender also plays a role in whether an immigrant considers entrepreneurship as a viable career path, with immigrant women being less likely to become entrepreneurs than immigrant men.⁵⁶ Additionally, they face other barriers, for example making a “pitch” for financing or other resources disadvantages women and those from other cultures.^{57,58,59} Asian women entering the traditionally male-dominated sectors of Internet and mobile startup entrepreneurship find their career progression, their participation in entrepreneurship, and their roles within the nascent companies are strongly influenced by gender

⁵⁴ Paypal Canada and Barraza & Associates. (2018). [Women's entrepreneurship study](#).

⁵⁵ Liesch, K. (Oct. 31, 2019). [How is venture capital failing to fund a gender equal future?](#).

⁵⁶ Wayland, S.V. (2011). [Immigrant self-employment and entrepreneurship in the GTA: Literature, data, and program review](#).

⁵⁷ Balachandra et al. (2013). [Pitch like a man: Gender stereotypes and entrepreneur pitch success](#). p. 1-16.

⁵⁸ Clark, C. (2008). [The impact of entrepreneurs' oral 'pitch' presentation skills on business angels' initial screening investment decisions](#).

⁵⁹ Huang, L., Frideger, M. and Pearce, J.L. (2013). [Political skill: Explaining the effects of non-native accent on managerial hiring and entrepreneurial investment decisions](#). p. 1005-1017.

discourse. Furthermore, when women participate as business owners or workers, they often take up gendered roles or focus on products aimed at a gender-specific market.⁶⁰

Women also account for over 35 percent of self-employed Canadians. Gendered structural differences (as detailed previously) remain, with women entrepreneurs more likely to be in services and social ventures and less likely to be in manufacturing and information technology.

Women are more likely than men to be solo entrepreneurs who employ sub-contractors, meaning that SME business supports designed to help business owners recruit and retain staff through economic downturns does not benefit women business owners as substantially.⁶¹ Research shows that the impact of COVID-19 has hurt businesses with less than 20 employees the most, and hurt businesses in services sectors—where you find more women-led business—more than those in technology sectors.⁶² Women are less likely than men to be in business with a research and development, and technological innovation business focus, so do not benefit as much from support programs targeting those kinds of business initiatives. Also, due to the proportionately smaller size of women’s businesses, they need different kinds of supports than many businesses owned by men.

The top challenge noted by women entrepreneurs in starting a business is ‘finding the tools to grow and manage a business’ (32%), followed by the challenge of ‘growing as fast’ as is required (23%) and then ‘raising capital/funding’ (22%).⁶³ While men reported that raising capital/funding was a greater challenge than women, women reported that finding the tools to grow and manage a business to be much more challenging than men. In terms of financing, women entrepreneurs are more likely than men entrepreneurs to self-finance their businesses (73% of women self-fund) and only 14% of women entrepreneurs access a business loan as compared with 20% of men.⁶⁴ Finally, 37% of women entrepreneurs reported finding it difficult to obtain funding for start-up costs.

⁶⁰ Leung, W.F. (2019). [Girls in tech: Progress and barriers in a gendered culture](#), p. 85-123.

⁶¹ Statistics Canada. (2019b). [Study: Self-employed Canadians: Who and why?](#).

⁶² Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs](#).

⁶³ Visa. (2019). [The state of Canadian women’s entrepreneurship](#).

⁶⁴ Ibid.

GENDERED IMPACTS OF COVID-19 IN CANADA

To amplify an already stark reality, it is now acknowledged that women are bearing the brunt of COVID-19 impacts on a global scale.⁶⁵ Governments need to strive to apply a gender-based analysis to all their COVID-19-related research.⁶⁶

Poverty

Examining numbers from the OECD, women are less likely to work full time than men, more likely to occupy lower-paying jobs, and less likely to progress in their career.⁶⁷ These factors contribute to the persistence of the gender pay gap and to women being more susceptible to living in poverty, especially for single mothers and senior women. The phenomenon is exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. In addition to being more likely to experience poverty, women and girls are more at risk for violence and harassment, which can be amplified by stay-at-home orders.⁶⁸

It has been found that about 47% of women who lost their jobs between February and June 2020 typically earned \$2000/month or less, meaning that their lost incomes would be fully accounted for by the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) if they chose to access it. For lower-and middle-income mothers, there is an economic disincentive to return to work if they need to access childcare in order to enable their return.⁶⁹ Women's often disproportionately low wages and the high cost of childcare in Canada result in there being weak economic rationality to foregoing the government support in order to return to work and to accessing care for children, if it is even available.

Caregiving

Women business owners and entrepreneurs also face additional pressures due to school closures as they are largely responsible for childcare. The burden of unpaid work falls primarily to women and the pandemic has led to a dramatic increase in their responsibilities related to care labour and domestic labour, affecting their employment or business as they have had to figure out how to balance

⁶⁵ World Economic Forum. (2020b). [Why we need women's leadership in the COVID-19 response](#).

⁶⁶ Ravanera, C. (2020). [Primer on the gendered impacts of COVID-19](#).

⁶⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (2020). [Employment: Time spent in paid and unpaid work by Sex](#).

⁶⁸ Finance Canada. (2017). [Budget 2017](#).

⁶⁹ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).

workloads.^{70,71,72,73} Furthermore, the closure of schools is particularly challenging for women, as single mothers make up 81 percent of single-parent families.⁷⁴ Similarly, women are more likely to be caregivers to elderly parents, seniors, etc.⁷⁵ The burden of the COVID-19 crisis on women is so strong that the Financial Times went so far as to ask whether the coronavirus crisis was bringing women back to the 1950s.⁷⁶

The disproportionate rate at which women shoulder parenting responsibilities has had a direct impact on women's participation and employment rates. Between February and May 2020, employment rates for women with young children fell 7%, compared to a decline of 4% among fathers of young children.⁷⁷ This effect was even more pronounced for single mothers, with employment among single mothers with young children down 12% from February to June (contrasted with a 7% decline among single fathers). Given national uncertainty surrounding the nature of children's return to school in the fall, some mothers dropped out of the workforce, choosing not to seek out new work because their child required at-home childcare.



The burden of the COVID-19 crisis on women is so strong that the Financial Times went so far as to ask whether the coronavirus crisis was bringing women back to the 1950s.

⁷⁰ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs](#).

⁷¹ Alon et al. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality](#).

⁷² Dunham, J. (April 22, 2020). [Women disproportionately 'bearing the brunt' of coronavirus crisis, advocates say](#).

⁷³ Dupon, V. (June 21, 2020). [Why women bear the brunt of virus fallout in workplace](#).

⁷⁴ Statistics Canada. (2015). [Lone-parent families](#).

⁷⁵ Ravanera, C. (2020). [Primer on the gendered impacts of COVID-19](#).

⁷⁶ Jacobs, A. and Noonan, L. (June 13, 2020). [Is the coronavirus crisis taking women back to the 1950s?](#)

⁷⁷ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).



Employment and Wages

The current global economic spiral that is occurring as a result of COVID-19 has highlighted structural inequality in Canada.⁷⁸ According to the Labour Force Survey (March 2020), there were more job losses among women than men in the core population (those aged 25 to 54).⁷⁹ Among core population workers, the monthly decline in employment for women (a decrease of 298,500 workers or five percent) was more than twice that of men (a decrease of 127,600 workers or two percent).⁸⁰ Of the decrease among women, nearly half was caused by loss of part-time employment.⁸¹ The number of core-aged women who lost all or most of their usual hours increased by 885,000 workers, or 433.3 percent, from February to March (not adjusted for seasonality).⁸² This represents 19.2 percent of employed women in this age group.⁸³

⁷⁸ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs](#).

⁷⁹ Statistics Canada. (2020c). [Labour force survey, March 2020](#).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

For employed men in this age group, 637,000 men lost all or most of their usual hours (an increase of 280 percent), which resulted in 13.9 percent of this group being affected.⁸⁴ There were 162,000 (55.8 percent) more core-aged women unemployed in March than in February, raising their unemployment rate 2.8 percentage points to 7.4 percent.⁸⁵ For men in this age group, unemployment increased by 71,300 workers (21.8 percent) bringing the rate up 1.1 percentage points to 5.9 percent.⁸⁶ Of all workers in this age group who recently worked and wanted a job but did not search in March, approximately two-thirds (67.0 percent or 99,400 workers) were women (not adjusted for seasonality).⁸⁷ Including this group of marginally attached workers with the unemployed would result in a supplemental unemployment rate of 8.7 percent for women, and 7.6 percent for men (not adjusted for seasonality).⁸⁸

More recent recessions have seen higher unemployment rates for men than for women, but as the statistics have shown, the current pandemic-related economic crisis has been appropriately dubbed a “she-cession”, with women bearing the brunt of the impact.^{89,90} The effect of COVID-19 has been attenuated because of occupational segregation—women are most likely to be the majority of caregivers, for example, increasing their risk of exposure.^{91,92}

Most job losses in sectors such as accommodation and food services or wholesale and retail trade—typically work that cannot be done remotely—are precarious and low paying and are dominated by women.⁹³ These conditions resulted in women being particularly vulnerable to job loss or work hour reduction, and caused women’s unemployment rate to surpass men’s for the first time in three decades. Since only 29% of women in double-income families are primary earners, many women were also compelled to voluntarily forego work, with the majority of secondary-earner women scaling back hours or pulling out of the labour force to perform family and household tasks.⁹⁴

⁸⁴ Statistics Canada. (2020b). [Labour force survey, March 2020](#).

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Armine Yalnizyan in Vermes, J. (2020). [Without more support for child care, economic recovery will be slow, says expert](#).

⁹⁰ Dunham, J. (April 22, 2020). [Women disproportionately 'bearing the brunt' of coronavirus crisis, advocates say](#).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² World Economic Forum. (2020b). [Why we need women's leadership in the COVID-19 response](#).

⁹³ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH). (2020). [COVID-19: Gender and diversity analysis of impacts and interventions](#).

⁹⁴ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).



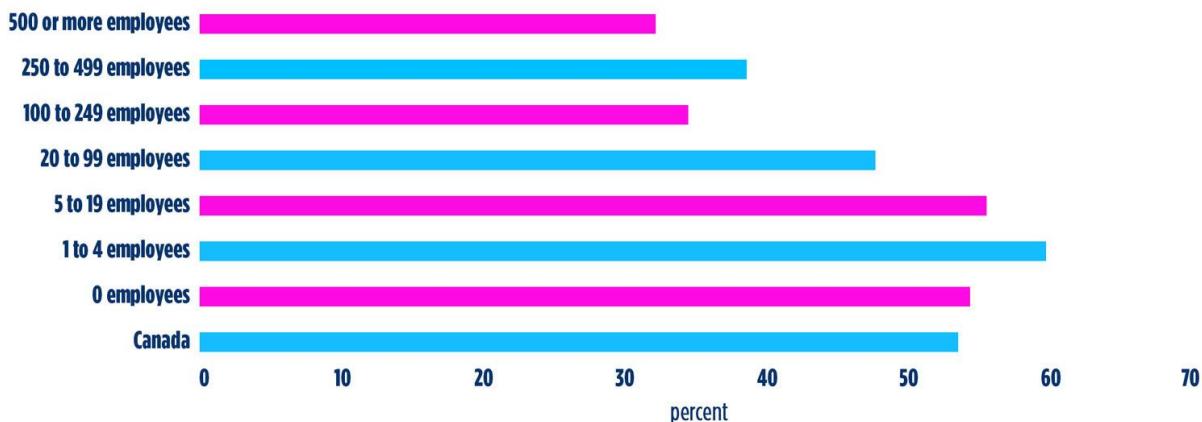
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Most programs are designed to support SMEs with employees rather than microbusinesses (only one employee) and the self-employed, where women are overrepresented

Business Ownership and Entrepreneurship

The COVID-19 crisis has been particularly hard for small businesses (see Figure 4) and has disproportionately impacted women. Most programs are designed to support SMEs with employees rather than microbusinesses (only one employee) and the self-employed, where women are overrepresented.^{95,96} This results in many women being unable to obtain much-needed support.

Figure 4: Percentage of businesses reporting that revenues from the first quarter of 2020 were down by 20 percent or more from the same quarter a year earlier



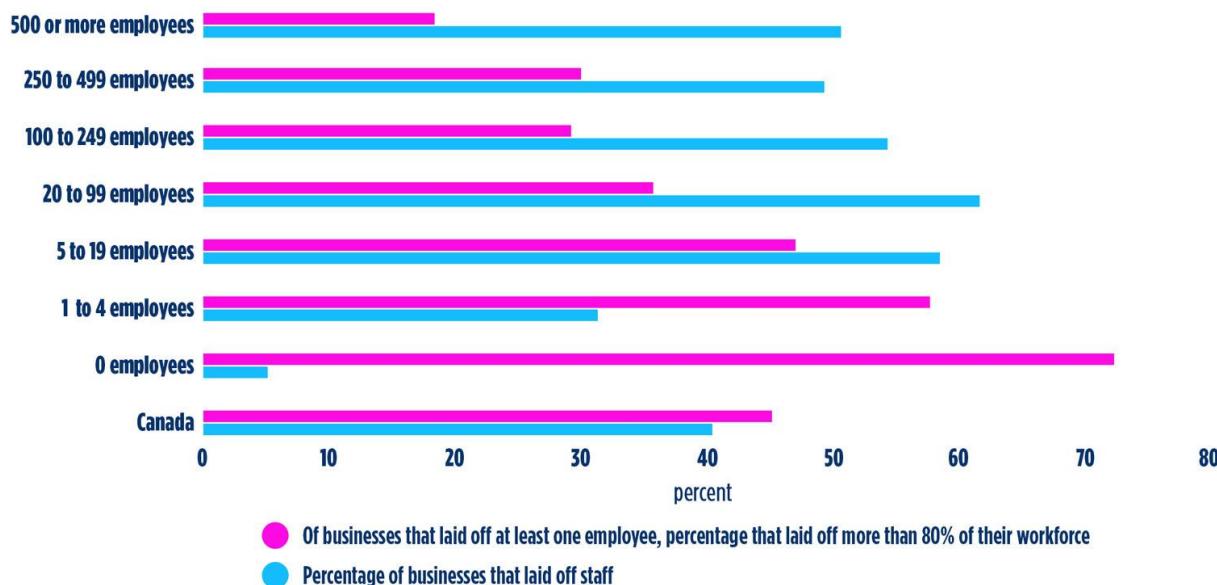
(Source: Statistics Canada. (2020a). [Impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Canada](#).)

⁹⁵ Statistics Canada. (2020a). [Impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Canada](#).

⁹⁶ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH). (2020). [COVID-19: Gender and diversity analysis of impacts and interventions](#).

As a result of decreased revenue, many businesses had to lay off employees, and the smaller the business, the more severe the impact. For instance, for small businesses with less than 100 employees, if layoffs were required, those layoffs were more likely to affect more than 80 percent of the company's workforce (see Figure 5). This impact represented 58 percent of small businesses with one to four employees, compared to a 45-percent average for all business sizes.

Figure 5: Staffing changes and staff layoffs greater than 80 percent



(Source: Statistics Canada. (2020a). [Impact of COVID-19 on small businesses in Canada](#).)

Women business owners and entrepreneurs are also disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 due to its exacerbation of existing challenges. Women business owners and/or entrepreneurs face compounded effects of this virus, as they are often among the least capitalized and most vulnerable to failure.⁹⁷ This is echoed by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which states women face more discrimination than men when trying to access credit (which is crucial to the survival of their businesses).⁹⁸ As mentioned previously, women are also overrepresented in the most vulnerable and impacted sectors and industries, such as goods and services and retail.⁹⁹ The challenge in accessing credit is also experienced by racialized entrepreneurs, who have smaller networks and less "financial backing from friends and family compared to their white counterparts."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Beckton, C. and McDonald, J. (2020). [Government needs to better support women entrepreneurs](#).

⁹⁸ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). (2019). [Mainstreaming gender in trade policy](#).

⁹⁹ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs](#).

¹⁰⁰ Gassam, J. (March 22, 2020). [13 entrepreneurs of color share how COVID-19 has impacted their business](#).

A recent survey led by Femmessor in Quebec indicated two-thirds of women entrepreneurs reported a 50-percent or more decline in their productivity.¹⁰¹ In the same study, one of the five main expectations of respondents regarding the economic recovery was better measures to help conciliate work and family; another was better digital skills. Indeed, the impacts of the pandemic have forced technology to accelerate and businesses—if they want to survive—need to digitalize.¹⁰² However, women entrepreneurs are less likely to be in the technology sector and less likely to have the technology skills needed to transition.¹⁰³



¹⁰¹ Saba, T., Cachat-Rosset, G. et Femmessor. (2020). [Regard sur l'entrepreneuriat féminin en période de Covid-19](#).

¹⁰² Bowditch, J. (2020). [The pros and cons of teleworking COVID-19 made us all realize](#).

¹⁰³ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). [The impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs](#).

TOWARDS AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY

Women's economic inclusion is affected by interacting factors at the individual, organizational and societal levels.¹⁰⁴ It is important to acknowledge that societal factors including government policies, cultural stereotypes and media representation play a critical role. Organizational policies and practices play an equally critical role, whether in the recruitment, retention and advancement of women employees, or in the supports for women entrepreneurs. Another vital aspect is the individual attitudes, beliefs and behaviours shaping women's aspirations and achievements, and the ways they are treated by others. Evidence abounds, way before the #metoo movement,¹⁰⁵ of toxic environments for women.



Societal Level

The societal level shapes the environment in which organizations and individuals work and is influenced by legislation, the media and societal stereotypes on diversity and inclusion. There is evidence that the Canada Employment Equity Act has had an impact and contributes to federally regulated corporations such as banks and telecommunications companies having higher levels of women in leadership than other sectors.¹⁰⁶ New legislation such as Bill C-25, an Act to amend the Canada Business Corporations Act (among others), covers 55 percent of Canada's corporations and affects reporting on the representation of women, racialized people, Indigenous people and persons with disabilities, as well as strategies to advance inclusion.¹⁰⁷ Recent expansion of parental leave has also been important and, with the COVID-19 crisis, there is renewed pressure to consider childcare as key to economic recovery.

Many underrepresented groups, including women, face barriers because of deeply embedded societal and cultural stereotypes that reinforce exclusion and "otherness." Organizations do not exist in a vacuum

¹⁰⁴ Cukier et al. (2014). [A \[critical\] ecological model to enabling change: Promoting diversity and inclusion](#), p. 245-275.

¹⁰⁵ History & Vision. (2018). [Me too movement](#).

¹⁰⁶ Gagnon, S. and Ng, E. [Barriers to employment: Who is left behind?](#).

¹⁰⁷ Cukier, W., Gagnon, S. and Latif, R. (2020, Forthcoming). Shaping legislation to advance diversity on boards in Canada: Bill C-25.

and gender equality in the work environment is inextricably linked to gender equality in society.¹⁰⁸ Despite barriers, initiatives to advance women's employment outcomes have made inroads.

Recent initiatives have included renewed focus on pay equity and the principle of equal pay for equal work, which is included in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda under Goal 8, "decent work and economic growth."¹⁰⁹ Canada has introduced new pay equity legislation at the federal level and is in the process of implementing it. Both federal and provincial governments apply Gender-based Analysis and Gender-based Analysis Plus programs when considering budgets, as a way to make diversity and inclusion mainstream.¹¹⁰ These programs are analytical tools that assess gender-specific impacts of policies, legislation and programs on men and women, thereby assisting policymakers in considering gender differences and implications.¹¹¹

Many researchers and advocates alike have suggested that the progress women have made in Quebec has surpassed those in other parts of Canada because of access to affordable childcare. The Quebec childcare model includes subsidies to centre-based, non-profit *Centres de la petite enfance*, commonly known as CPEs. The fee structure allows middle-income bracket earners, particularly on the lower end, where women are often overrepresented, to find affordable childcare. Quebec's childcare policy seems to be effective: between 1996 and 2016, the percentage of women in the workforce whose youngest child was under three years old rose to 80 percent from 61 percent; in Ontario, the percentage rose to only 70 percent from 66 percent.¹¹²

Efforts have also focused on combatting gendered stereotypes and trying to reduce the occupational segregation of women through targeted programs aimed at women in trades and technology, as well as

¹⁰⁸ Devillard et al. (2019). [Women matter: the present and future of women at work in Canada](#), p. 1-92.

¹⁰⁹ Moyser, M. (2019). [Measuring and analyzing the gender pay gap: A conceptual and methodological overview](#), p. 5.

¹¹⁰ Neville, A. (2005). [Gender-based analysis: Building blocks for success. Report of the standing committee on status of women](#)

¹¹¹ Cheng, N. (2015). [Implementing gender-based analysis. Report 1 – 2015 Fall Report of the Auditor General of Canada](#); Gagnon, S. Cukier, W. (2017). Equity, diversity and inclusion in Canada: Prepared for the OECD country diversity reports initiative.

¹¹² Moyser, M. and Milan, A. (2018). [Fertility rates and labour force participation among women in Quebec and Ontario](#).

Many researchers and advocates alike have suggested that the progress women have made in Quebec has surpassed those in other parts of Canada because of access to affordable childcare.



initiatives focused on advancing women in leadership and on boards.¹¹³ Business-led initiatives such as the 30% Club, where CEOs pledge to commit to 30 percent women on boards, not only have practical effects on their companies, but help shape broader societal discourse.¹¹⁴

Media both shape and reflect culture, attitudes and values. This, in turn, influences behaviour. There is evidence that gendered news media coverage is common in North America generally, and in Canada more specifically.¹¹⁵ Gendered news media coverage creates inequities in media representation, and the biased media coverage more readily investigates the personal lives of women (thus undermining their credentials).¹¹⁶ Across all major news broadcasters analyzed, women are less likely to be portrayed positively in leadership positions, and empirical evidence finds that women are not only underrepresented as an overall average of news broadcast appearances, but also with regard to holding key roles and platforms. Substantive, meaningful representation of women proportionate to that of men in key leadership positions is lacking. One study further concludes that 42 percent of the women analyzed on television appearances were far less likely than men to have substantive and meaningful representation in expert or leadership roles.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC). (2019). [Women and the workplace – How employers can advance equality and diversity – Report from the Symposium on Women and the Workplace](#).

¹¹⁴ 30% Club. (n.d.). [Who We Are](#).

¹¹⁵ Bashevkin, S.B. (2009). [Women, power, politics: The hidden story of Canada's unfinished democracy](#); Cukier, W., Elmi, M., and Gagnon, S. (2019). [Content Analysis: Examining Representation in Broadcast News](#); Goodyear-Grant, E. (2013). [Gendered news: Media coverage and electoral politics in Canada](#); Gidengil, E. and Everitt, J. (2003). [Talking tough: Gender and reported speech in campaign news coverage](#), p. 209-232; Cukier, W., Latif, R. and Hannan, C. (2020). [Media discourses of women in politics in Canada, 2011-2017: The ecstasy and the agony](#).

¹¹⁶ Goodyear-Grant, E. (2013). [Gendered news: Media coverage and electoral politics in Canada](#).

¹¹⁷ Cukier et al. (2016). [Representing women? Leadership roles and women in Canadian broadcast news](#), p. 374-395.

Substantive representation requires the opportunity for visual appearances and direct quotations, which are tied to perceptions of legitimacy. Featuring qualified women economists or STEM researchers as voices of authority can work to affirm women's roles in traditional and non-traditional fields and sends a signal as to who can be conceived of as a leader, thus working to change the effects of stereotyping and discrimination towards women more broadly.¹¹⁸

The pandemic has also revealed some interesting workplace and labour force attachment trends. Women who are primary earners are more likely than men to be able to transition to teleworking conditions because of the nature of their work.¹¹⁹ Further, women with university degrees were less likely than men in this cohort to lose their jobs from February to May 2020. Women who did lose their jobs were no more likely than men to fall out of the labour force completely, meaning that they may have reduced their hours, found new jobs, or were actively seeking new work.

Organizational Level

Organizational processes and policies have a significant impact on representation and inclusion through:

- **Leadership and governance, including tone and leadership at the top in support of diversity initiatives;**
- **HR practices, including recruitment, development and management of diverse employees;**
- **Organizational culture, which reinforces belonging and inclusion;**
- **Measurement, which sets targets and tracks the effects of policies and practices;**
- **Mainstreaming diversity through the value chain, including procurement, research, product development, sales, marketing and service; and**
- **Integrated strategies, which develop the pipeline and include outreach, government relations and philanthropic initiatives.**

¹¹⁸ Cukier et al. (2016). [Representing women? Leadership roles and women in Canadian broadcast news](#), p. 374-395.

¹¹⁹ Desjardins, D., Freestone, C. and Powell, N. (2020). [Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains](#).

Based on a collaborative study by the OECD,¹²⁰ results show that implementing measures and policies focused on the key goals of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) depend on the motivations and the means used to achieve them. Four objectives can be considered:¹²¹

Attract new skills and renew the workforce. Organizations adopting EDI practices achieve their goals through a combination of inseparable reasons. They seek equity of treatment, not just to meet legal and regulatory requirements, and look to diversifying recruitment pools to meet skill requirements, particularly when labour is scarce. Organizations aim to ensure that diversity contributes to organizational performance by stimulating creativity. It therefore becomes imperative to integrate these parameters into the organizational culture and values and ensure they are respected. Doing so avoids the perception of diversity as an instrument used solely to fill skills in a situation of labour scarcity.

Identify and remove biases in individuals and systems. Barriers to the introduction of EDI measures remain high and need to be addressed. Conscious or unconscious discriminatory biases against underrepresented groups limit their attraction, hiring, promotion and retention. Measures to identify, raise awareness and provide training to reduce the effects of biases in both individuals and systems are needed. Sometimes subtler forms of discrimination, such as micro-aggressions, can deter the full participation of underrepresented groups. Leadership support and accountability by decision-makers is essential. Additionally, an examination of so-called neutral human resource management practices (designed based on the characteristics of traditional workers) can reduce systemic biases.

Aim for a strategic organizational EDI plan, not a scattered approach. Much attention has been focused on advancing organizational practices to create more diverse and inclusive work environments. These begin with leadership. Research has

Measures to identify, raise awareness and provide training to reduce the effects of biases in both individuals and systems are needed.



¹²⁰Saba, T. (2019). [HR diversity survey](#).

¹²¹Saba, T. (2020). [Pour des organisations inclusives dans la grappe aérospatiale du Québec : Miser sur des compétences diversifiées et des pratiques équitables](#).

demonstrated that CEO commitment to organizational diversity efforts is crucial for implementing diversity management practices. These efforts must be mirrored by HR managers and implemented top-down through the workplace. Diversity benefits by being an integral part of organizational strategy, rather than what is often done—scattered initiatives that touch on just one or two components of an EDI program. The strategy it is not about granting exceptions or preferential treatment to underrepresented groups, it is about building strong confidence in the ability of all members to contribute fully to the performance of the organization.

Strengthen expertise in managing EDI. The lack of expertise in EDI management was identified as an obstacle to achieving objectives. Addressing the lack of expertise is an essential step in making organizations more equitable and inclusive. Since diversity is everyone's business, training for all employees is an effective way to achieve this goal. In addition, it is important to establish EDI objectives and evaluation methods that are both quantitative and qualitative. Conducting internal surveys, evaluating changes in practices and observing adaptations to standards and procedures allow for a better consideration of the voice of employees and greater efficiency in achieving EDI objectives. Further, organizational management should prioritize suppliers who demonstrate a commitment to diversity. For SMEs, sharing EDI services through an internal sector structure or knowledge portal would allow all organizations to have access to EDI expertise and share knowledge, training platforms and networks. Businesses in the sector will be able to access communities of practice that are useful and relevant to the sector.¹²²

¹²² Saba, T. (2019). [Gestion de la diversité, de l'équité et de l'inclusion \(GÉDI\) : Remettre les pendules à l'heure.](#)

Individual Level

Individual attitudes, behaviours, and choices also shape opportunities and need to be better understood. After 30 years of good intentions, there are fewer women in computer science and only marginally more in engineering, in part because women self-select out of programs as a result of complex intersectional issues.¹²³ Individual biases and actions, including being a bystander, allow exclusion and discrimination to persist. This is an uphill battle.

Within organizations and broader society, individual actions can have a profound effect on diversity and inclusion. For real change to occur, everyone in an organization must contribute to diversity and inclusion practices—top down, bottom up and middle out. Creating workplace, family, and societal cultures where each bystander feels empowered to call in, call out or simply question issues of diversity and inclusion is essential for change to occur. Every person needs to play a role in delivering on diversity and inclusion practices.



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¹²³Cukier, W. (Dec. 3, 2019). [Women in engineering: Barriers remain 30 years after École Polytechnique shooting.](#)



CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Efforts to advance women's economic inclusion continue to be hampered by a lack of access to information. While Statistics Canada has increased the availability of data disaggregated by gender and race, more is needed. Gender wage gaps are only partly explained by human capital, job attributes, occupations across industry and demographics. Future research and analysis are needed to better understand this disparity and implement effective strategies for women in the labour marketplace.

In addition, extensive gender and diversity analyses across ecosystems is critical to understanding the impact of programs and who benefits from them. More research on what works is also important. There are many well-intentioned efforts that do not produce results and other strategic levers, such as procurement and measurement, that can change behaviour quickly.

In all sectors, awareness and commitment to gender equality have increased. However, good intentions are not always matched with actions, transparency, and accountability. Consequently, more objective assessments of benchmarks and progress against them is critically important. Diversity and inclusion are and should be treated as a business imperative that are measurable.

Research that challenges basic assumptions and definitions is also key, as many of the structures that shape our understanding of the world are highly gendered. More research is needed on the gendered nature of skills definitions and assessment and the valorization of STEM over “soft skills,” which has historically privileged men.

Even the core assumption about who women are needs to be better elaborated in the research if we are to get a complete picture of gender equity in Canada. Much of the data collected on transwomen,

transmen or non-binary people is difficult to tease out of the broad-based research on women and women's experiences. Why? The reporting on women outside the traditional gender binary is often the result of self-identification—not concerted efforts to understand the employment status of these women relative to other ciswomen and cismen. For this reason, it is not always possible or advisable to meaningfully expand insights that are true for ciswomen to transwomen without considering the impact of the differences in workplace experience for transwomen.¹²⁴

That said, in July 2020 Statistics Canada announced that Census 2021 will ask questions both about sex at birth and gender to capture data about gender-diverse Canadians.¹²⁵ This announcement corresponds with the introduction of *Bill C-16* in Parliament, which added gender expression and identity as protected grounds under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code. Further, it responds to the 2018 federal budget funding allocation to create a research centre, the Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics, with the aim of collecting more data about non-binary and transgender Canadians. Accessing this data will help researchers and policy makers better understand how to close gaps and address inequities that may exist between the experiences of non-binary, transgender and cisgender Canadians.

Another important research area in need of exploration is the impact of broad trends (e.g. technological disruption, the aging population, the gig economy, climate change, etc.) on women's employment. Further work is also needed to examine the full effects of COVID-19 from a gender-employment lens. As some large Canadian companies such as Shopify change to a full-time, work-at-home model, does this further disadvantage women? Or, when choice is offered regarding work-at-home options, will women choose disproportionately to work from home, thus reverting traditional office space to being more dominated by men? The impacts of COVID-19 will be felt for many months and years. It will be important to ensure that our so-called new normal is not one that reduces the gains of women and other equity-seeking groups.

¹²⁴ Beauregard et al. (2016). [Listen Carefully: Transgender voices in the workplace](#); Thoroughgood, C.N., Sawyer, K.B., and Webster, J.R. (2020, March 1). [Creating a Trans-Inclusive Workplace](#).

¹²⁵ Statistics Canada. (2020e). [Updated content for the 2021 census of population: Family and demographic concepts, and activities of daily living](#).

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