

Pandemic threatens decades of women's labour force gains ^[1]

COVID downturn sees job losses eclipse those of any other recession

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Excerpted for introduction

Canada has been roiled by a recession unlike any other – one distinguished not just by the overall magnitude of damage it has inflicted on the economy but by the specific, unprecedented blow it has dealt to women. In a matter of months, the COVID 19 pandemic knocked women's participation in the labour force down from a historic high to its lowest level in over 30 years.

Beyond the strain these job losses have placed on families and individual women – who have borne the brunt of child-rearing responsibilities as schools and daycares close – their impact on Canada's overall economic growth has been severe. The uneven and slow economic recovery in the second half of the year will leave Canada's economy 5% smaller than before the crisis. With women's employment recovering more slowly than men's, it will likely have a more significant impact on the hit to GDP.

Worryingly, the outsized role women play in the industries hardest hit by this recession, together with ongoing uncertainties about availability of school and childcare in the fall mean this lost ground won't easily be recovered. As our previous research highlighted, women's increased participation in the labour market has provided an enormous lift to the economy's performance. And this year's recovery likely won't be enough to restore women's participation rate to pre-COVID levels – a factor that carries significant economic consequences. It is imperative that this proves a short-term diversion.

Region: Canada ^[4]

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