

Jagmeet Singh, Elizabeth May urge Trudeau to help women and immigrants hurt by COVID-19 ^[1]

Author: Meyer, Carl

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EXCERPTS

Recent immigrants saw jobs disappear quicker and rebound more slowly than Canadian-born people this spring, while child-care centre closures meant that women dealt with more unpaid work at home and saw their job performance suffer, according to a new federal analysis out Wednesday.

The analysis was released as part of the federal government's "economic and fiscal snapshot" of its pandemic relief efforts. The findings demonstrate that, across a range of different indicators, women, women with children under 18 years, and recent immigrants were all disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus pandemic in Canada.

"We know that people, to get back to work, need child care, and this is a crisis moment for a lot of people," said NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, the MP for Burnaby South, in remarks to media on Wednesday morning before Finance Minister Bill Morneau presented the snapshot.

"We know that the pandemic has hit women more than men, and the recovery will mean that more men will go back to work, and less women, unless we address this issue of child care."

Green Party Parliamentary Leader Elizabeth May, MP for Saanich—Gulf Islands, also noted that "it is evident that Finance Canada understands that economic recovery will depend on secure and affordable child care and better paid sick leave." She called on the government to continue spending levels and "keep partisanship out of this."

Morneau acknowledged Wednesday that women have been "harder hit" through the course of the pandemic, "and our measures therefore need to consider that challenge," including through child care. He said the government was in talks with provinces about a safe restart.

Families, Children and Social Development Minister Ahmed Hussen said in Parliament that the government was committed to helping parents access "safe, affordable, accessible and quality child care," and that it wants to create 250,000 additional child-care spaces in before- and after-school programs.

5.5 million Canadians lost jobs or saw hours cut

The government said 5.5 million Canadians, or 30 per cent of the workforce, either lost their jobs or "saw their hours significantly scaled back over March and April" before employment rebounded by 290,000 in May.

But while COVID-19 affected all Canadians in some form, the impacts vary widely across demographics. Recent immigrants, for example, "have been hit hard by the labour market impacts of COVID-19," stated the government's snapshot document.

Recent immigrants saw jobs disappear quicker, rebound more slowly than Canadian-born people this spring, while child care closures meant that women dealt with more unpaid work at home and saw their job performance suffer, says a new federal analysis:

Just under a quarter of landed immigrants applied for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit between mid-March and mid-May, it said, compared to less than a fifth of those born in Canada.

As well, from February to April, employment among recent immigrants dropped more dramatically than those born in Canada, and while Canadian-born people saw employment rise again in May, there was no such rebound for those who have been in Canada five years or less.

A crowdsourced survey over May and June revealed that 34 per cent of people who identify as white said they lost their jobs, or had their hours cut, compared to 40 per cent of those identifying as Southeast Asian, 40 per cent Korean, 42 per cent Filipino, and 47 per cent West Asian.

In the context of a health crisis like COVID-19, it means women, immigrants and racialized people are more exposed. Nurse aides and orderlies, for example, are overwhelmingly women, at 86 per cent, and more likely to be immigrants and racialized than other occupations, in particular Black and Filipino.

There is “early evidence” from some cities that racialized people are overrepresented among COVID-19 cases, the government said. As an example, it pointed to Ottawa Public Health’s confirmation that 66 per cent of the cases in Ottawa since early May are from racialized groups.

\$343-billion projected deficit this year

Women are also “leading the charge as front-line workers in many settings, including in hospitals and long-term care homes, although this comes with a greater risk of contracting COVID-19,” it said.

While women and men basically split cumulative job losses between February and April, “employment increased more than twice as fast among men than among women” in May, the analysis stated.

Almost a fifth of women, 18 per cent, who are in the core age group of 25 to 54, with children under 18 years, worked less than half their typical hours compared with 14 per cent of men.

The trend seen in pre-COVID-19 Canadian society, that women take on a larger share of unpaid work at home caring for children, appears not to have changed during the pandemic.

“Closures of schools and child-care services during COVID-19 increased the amount of unpaid work in the home, which is disproportionately carried out by women,” the document stated.

“There is evidence that this has greatly affected employed women’s job performance for those teleworking, as well as unemployed women’s ability to return to work or find work, especially when child care is unavailable.”

The government’s fiscal “snapshot” showed that the federal deficit was projected to be \$343 billion this year. Government figures showed Ottawa has committed least \$212 billion in “direct support” to businesses and individuals, alongside another \$85 billion in taxes and customs deferrals, and other programs.

Federal ministers argued the government’s emergency benefit and wage subsidy helped 11 million Canadians after businesses shuttered nationwide as a result of public health orders.

“When the pandemic first hit, a lot of people lost their jobs overnight. They didn’t know how they were going to feed their families or pay their bills. Faced with this unprecedented challenge, our government had two options,” said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Wednesday morning.

“We could sit back, let Canadians fend for themselves, and hope it would all be over soon, or we could swiftly and substantially choose to support Canadians. We chose to support Canadians.”

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