

# Progress on Women's rights: Missing in action <sup>[1]</sup>

A shadow report on Canada's implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

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## AVAILABILITY

Full report in PDF <sup>[2]</sup>

Section on child care (pgs 34-37)

## Introduction:

Twenty years ago, thousands of activists, diplomats and world leaders, hundreds of Canadians among them, travelled to Beijing to articulate their vision of a world in which women and men - regardless of race, class, sexual orientation and ability - could live full and equal lives together. The result was a declaration that outlined some of the greatest barriers to gender equality and a platform for action that provided the tools for overcoming them.

In Canada, as in most high-income countries, women had already achieved high levels of health and education by the mid 1990s. Women in Canada continue to have some of the highest healthy life expectancies in the world and their life expectancies are consistently on par with those of men. The last twenty years have also seen a six percent increase in the number of women completing some form of tertiary education, with 31 percent of women (and men) in Canada now holding a post-secondary certificate or diploma. However, these high levels are not shared equally among women in Canada, nor have they translated to economic equality or equal representation in leadership roles.

In spite of their gains in education, women continue to make up only one in four senior managers. In the political arena, the numbers are much the same. The last federal election saw the first significant increase in the percentage of female members of parliament in twenty years, rising from 6 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives 22 percent to 25 percent. Again the gains made here are not shared equally among women.

Progress in health and education has not produced an equally steady level of progress in women's economic security. The percentage of women living in poverty has actually increased over the past twenty years to over 13 percent today and has remained consistently higher than men's levels of poverty - with Aboriginal and racialized women and women with disabilities further over-represented. Women's employment levels increased in the first few years following 1995, but have been stagnant over the past decade and remained consistently below the level of men's employment.

In the same period, there has been little change in the levels of violence women in Canada experience. Over a million women in Canada report having experienced either sexual assault or intimate partner violence in the past five years. Rates of intimate partner violence have fallen by a mere one per cent over the past two decades, with 6.2 percent of the population reporting having experienced intimate partner violence today compared to 7.4 percent in 1999. Rates of sexual assault have increased slightly, from 2.1 percent in 1999 to 2.4 percent today. Aboriginal women and girls experience three times the rates of violent victimization as do non-Aboriginal women. The violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls has been so persistent and so disproportionate that it has spurred visits from several multilateral bodies.

Worryingly, the pace of progress towards gender equality slowed over the past decade. Twenty years ago Canada ranked first amongst nations in international measures of gender equality. In 2013, Canada had fallen to twentieth place in the Global Gender Gap rankings, and twenty-third place in the UN Gender Inequality Index. Nor can the slowdown in progress be ascribed to the global economic crisis. Canada's economy was among the least affected among developed economies. Yet as Canada's gender equality rank fell, some of the countries hardest hit by the global economic crisis demonstrated progress. Iceland, for example, experienced massive economic shocks following the global crisis, yet it has consistently achieved a higher score than Canada in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report and its score climbed at a faster pace than did Canada's score in the period following 2008.

What follows is a detailed view of Canada's progress towards equality over the past five years. The report addresses the priority areas of concern identified in 1995, but provides additional information about emerging areas of concern. While each section examines the unique factors that contribute to Progress on Women's Rights: Missing in Action inequality, these factors intersect and impact each other. There are also some striking commonalities. Common themes include a marked slowdown in the rate of progress towards closing the gap between the well-being of women and men. The report also documents important and persistent differences between different groups of women, with Aboriginal, racialized, and immigrant women, as well as women with disabilities, all

suffering a disproportionate burden of inequality. Finally, there has been a notable shrinking of the federal government's role in addressing the barriers to gender equality both at home and as part of its international commitments.

With miles to go before we meet the goals set out in Beijing in 1995, this report, in itself, is a testament to the resilience of our contributors and the communities in which they work. It is a testament to an unbowed commitment to achieving gender equality in Canada

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** gender <sup>[4]</sup>

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