

# INVESTING IN A FEMINIST GREEN COVID-19 RECOVERY

OXFAM CANADA'S RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR BUDGET 2021



## Oxfam Canada briefing paper

The COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped our society and economy forever. The pandemic has resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and millions of lost livelihoods, and is exacerbating almost every existing inequality around the world.

The effects of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted women, especially those who belong to Black, Indigenous or racialized communities, (im)migrants and refugees, women living with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQ+ communities. In line with the federal government's commitments, a feminist approach to response and recovery efforts is needed. This includes linking economic recovery to poverty reduction in Canada and globally, putting gender equality and feminist leadership at the heart of response and recovery efforts, and adequately resourcing the promises laid out in the 2020 Throne Speech. Budget 2021 has the opportunity to not only provide solutions to this current crisis, but to invest in the foundations of a feminist economic transformation that reverses long-standing inequalities in Canada and around the world. This brief outlines the key investments the federal government should make to put women and marginalized groups at the centre of the pandemic response.

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This paper is part of a series of papers written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS



## Invest in the Care Sector

- **ALLOCATE** \$2.5 billion emergency funding for early learning and child care in federal transfers to the provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to ensure the sustainability of the sector and the safety of children and workers during the pandemic.
- **ALLOCATE** \$2 billion for early learning and child care in budget 2021/2022 (and an increase of \$2 billion each year after) to publicly fund a child care system in partnership with the provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments. Transfers to the provinces should include measurable targets in accessibility, affordability, quality, and inclusiveness.
- **ALLOCATE** adequate resources to the federal early learning and child care secretariat to provide leadership on the development of a national child care system and legislation grounding child care in universality, quality, and comprehensiveness, as well as a workforce strategy to ensure caregivers have decent work that pays living wages.
- **LAUNCH** a federal taskforce 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.



## Invest in Social Protection and Decent Work for Women

- **EXPAND** women's access to unemployment insurance (EI) by modernizing key gaps in the existing EI system. Adopt best practices from the CERB delivery, turn EI into a more agile delivery mechanism that gets benefits out quickly, expand access to more people active in Canada's labour market, require lower thresholds, and improved benefits that meet income adequacy standards – especially for low paid workers.
- **RAISE** the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage. Ensure paid sick leave is expanded to cover all workers and continues after emergency benefits have come to an end. Invest adequate resources in fully implementing the Pay Equity Commissioner's mandate, including outreach and education.
- **INVEST** in social infrastructure and sectors that predominantly employ women as part of economic stimulus packages, prioritizing the care sector. Apply intersectional gender based analysis (GBA+) to all federal stimulus spending to direct public investments towards projects that will reduce gender inequality and respond to the needs of marginalized populations.
- **INVEST** in women's entrepreneurship programs and funds with dedicated funding for research and programming that further addresses the barriers to entrepreneurship for women and marginalized groups - including access to financing, improved mentorship, and dismantling institutional bias.
- **RESOURCE** the development of the recently announced Action Plan for Women in the Economy and ensure a whole of government approach by locating it within the Department of Finance or the Prime Minister's Office. Ensure the taskforce includes civil society experts working on economic justice, has a strong intersectional and equity lens, and focuses on women's work (paid and unpaid), including income security.



## Invest in the Green Economy

- **ESTABLISH** targeted federal programs for women and gender-diverse people to access green jobs and green business development opportunities, particularly those who are already experiencing economic insecurity and marginalization due to race, age, disability, and Indigenous identity.
- **COMMIT** to contributing Canada's fair share to international climate financing, at least \$1.8 billion of bilateral climate finance annually, given our economic status and carbon impacts, to assist developing countries with the climate crisis.
- **SET AND LEGISLATE** a wealth tax on the wealthiest individuals in Canada to address economic inequality and help reduce carbon emissions from the wealthiest one percent.
- **COMMIT** to increasing the price of carbon in Canada significantly in future years, and enacting federal climate accountability legislation to require governments to live within carbon budgets. Direct regional development agencies to focus on diversification and energy transition planning in regions of Canada where workers and communities have become overly dependent on fossil fuel extraction.
- **ELIMINATE** all federal subsidies to the fossil fuel extraction industries, including legislating a ban on fossil fuel sector support from Export Development Canada, Business Development Canada, and regional economic development agencies.



## Invest in Ending Gender-Based Violence

- **DISPERSE** long-term, sustainable, and core funding to women's shelters, sexual assault centres, and women's rights organizations so that they can remain open and meet the increased demand resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Ensure services and resources are not diverted towards a general health response.
- **FAST-TRACK** the National Action Plan on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)/ Gender Based Violence (GBV), including a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement and an accountability framework with time-bound goals. Ensure sufficient funding for roll-out and implementation, in close consultation with domestic women's rights and feminist organizations.
- **ENSURE** a separate National Action Plan and resources for Indigenous women and girls that proposes concrete actions to implement the recommendations of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in consultation with Indigenous women's organizations, networks, and communities.



## Invest in Global Recovery

- **INVEST** \$2 billion globally for COVID-19 response and recovery interventions focusing on standalone feminist programming (Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), VAWG/GBV, care, feminist leadership) and ensuring all global investments are gender-responsive, to ensure gains on gender equality are sustained.
- **INCREASE** ODA investments to fast track implementation of the Feminist International Assistance Policy, doubling it from \$6.2 billion to \$12.4 billion over five years.
- **INCREASE** funding to Canadian humanitarian organizations and local organizations, prioritizing women's rights organizations, in addition to the \$159.5 million funding support announced for multilateral agencies as part of COVID-19 humanitarian response efforts.
- **INCREASE** standalone funding for VAWG/GBV programming, particularly initiatives focused on child, early and forced marriage, sexual violence during crises, and intimate partner violence and femicide.
- **EXPAND** the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI+) to include debt cancellation, binding debt relief mechanisms for private creditors, and an extension of the initiative until the end of 2022. Canada should lead on debt relief for poorer countries by using a new approach to debt sustainability that has SDGs, human rights, gender justice, and climate vulnerabilities as its focus.



## Invest in Feminist Leadership

- **PROVIDE** long-term, flexible, core funding to women's rights organizations so that they can weather the pandemic and shore up resources to survive any future crises. Prioritize women's rights organizations domestically and globally as partners of choice for gender equality programming funded by the Government of Canada.
- **ENSURE** members of Canada's women's rights sector have access to the relevant policy spaces and are consulted decision-makers in any recovery strategies – specifically in the 2021/22 [Federal Budget Consultations](#), and the recently announced National Action Plan for Women in the Economy. Ensure that the Federal Task Force on COVID-19 brings in perspectives and voices of diverse women.
- **STRENGTHEN** the government's gender budgeting process, providing better guidelines and training, and improve intersectional data collection. Make gender budgeting more participatory by convening an advisory group of women's rights organizations and feminist economists to provide insights and direction, including on the revenue side of the budget.

# INTRODUCTION

2020 was meant to be a year for celebrating and accelerating progress on gender equality, as world leaders marked the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. However, by the time one of the largest global gatherings of women’s rights actors—the annual UN Commission on the Status of Women—was meant to take place in March 2020, the world came to an abrupt standstill. Borders closed, and gatherings were canceled to curb the spread of an unknown new virus, that would within months, claim hundreds of thousands of lives and affect millions of people’s livelihoods. COVID-19 has changed the world, and its impacts will shape our society for years, and potentially generations, to come.

The coronavirus knows no borders and does not discriminate. But in a world marked by extreme inequality, there is no doubt that particular populations are impacted more profoundly. In every country around the world, it is the poor and marginalized that have been hit hardest. COVID-19 is threatening to push millions into starvation<sup>1</sup> and extreme poverty.<sup>2</sup> It is also quickly unraveling decades of progress towards gender equality.<sup>3</sup> The economic, health, and social fallout of the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women worldwide, including here in Canada, and those who belong to Black, Indigenous or racialized communities, (im)migrants and refugees, women living with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ+ communities have been hardest hit.

Women are at the frontlines of this pandemic as essential workers, making up 70% of health care workers globally.<sup>4</sup> They have also seen the most significant job losses - women make up 70% of all job losses in Canada.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has exacerbated women’s unpaid care work, with schools closed and limited care and recreational services available. The triple duty of homeschooling, child and elder care, and paid work is leaving women depleted. In a survey conducted by Oxfam Canada in June 2020, 71% of women in Canada reported feeling more anxious, depressed, isolated, overworked, and ill because of increased unpaid care work.<sup>6</sup> Those who lost their jobs struggle to get back into the labour market due to care responsibilities. Women’s labour force participation has fallen to 55% in Canada, the lowest in over 30 years.<sup>7</sup>

For these reasons, experts have labelled the pandemic-induced recession a “she-cession” and are calling for a feminist recovery.<sup>8</sup> A feminist recovery plan will prioritize investments in decent work for sectors predominantly occupied by women, particularly the care sector. Now more than ever, the right to care must be at the centre of economic recovery and the work agenda’s future. People watched in horror as the virus spread like wildfire, and health and care sectors were ill-equipped to respond. Decades of underspending have left the health and care sectors in a state of dysfunction and inadequacy.

A feminist recovery is not only critical for our economies, but also for our planet. A recovery plan cannot ignore the impact of our current economic model on climate change and the environment. Hundreds of millions of people around the world will experience displacement as a result of climate change over the coming decades, and the scope and scale of human climate-induced migration will test the limits of national and global leadership and cooperation.<sup>9</sup> By embedding social and economic inclusion into climate action strategies, we are building a more resilient economy that will help communities mitigate and adapt to climate impacts. Investing in the care sector as part of Canada’s just transition has the triple benefit of ensuring progress on gender equality and creating decent jobs - all with a low carbon footprint.<sup>10</sup> As one of the highest carbon polluters in the world, Canada must also pay its fair share to help communities around the world cope with the impacts of climate change.

As the news headlines are filled with impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, a ‘shadow pandemic’, much less visible, continues to wreak havoc in women’s and gender diverse people’s lives. In Canada, increases in reports of domestic violence have ranged from 20-30%, and up to 60% in some locations.<sup>11</sup> Vulnerable and marginalized women and girls—Black, Indigenous, racialized, refugee, immigrant, and low-income women and girls—have been most impacted in both public and private spaces. Globally, experts estimate a shocking increase of 61 million cases of violence and femicides over the next year.<sup>12</sup> Tackling GBV/VAWG both at home and globally must be central to a feminist recovery plan. The need to ensure women and gender-diverse people have a place to be safe is more important now than ever.

A feminist recovery must have racial justice at its heart. Racialized communities have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways and require distinct supports based on pre-existing inequalities and discrimination. Canada’s long history of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism has meant that these communities have faced generations of economic, political, and social disadvantages, leaving them particularly vulnerable. For example, 20.8% of racialized people are low-income compared to 12.2% of non-racialized people.<sup>13</sup> Black women are twice as likely as white women to live in poverty.<sup>14</sup> Indigenous communities have a hard time accessing quality health services even in the best of times. A feminist recovery must put the voices and solutions developed and driven by Indigenous and Black communities at the centre.

Actions to mitigate and recover from the pandemic cannot stop at Canada’s border. The pandemic is of global proportions and requires global commitments and solutions. But much of the response will be delivered through local actors. Local women’s rights and gender justice organizations must have the capacity and resources to roll out comprehensive, intersectional, and gender-transformative responses tailored to their own communities. It is local feminist organizations that are the first to respond, yet the last to receive funding. They need support now to tackle the impacts of this pandemic. As a global gender champion, now more than ever, Canada can make a difference in the lives of millions of women and gender-diverse people who are bearing the brunt of the pandemic through its ground-breaking Feminist International Assistance Policy. Leadership requires resources, and now is the time to invest in our global response to ensure decades of progress on gender equality are sustained.

The pandemic will undoubtedly transform the way we live and the structures that underpin how our societies function. But there is reason for hope. Crises, while devastating, can open up opportunities for transformation. History has shown that gender inequality holds back progress on governance, peace, economic performance, food security, health, wellbeing, environmental protection, and social progress. The security and stability of the future world literally depend on the status of women. If we prioritize women’s leadership and gender justice now, we have a chance to end up with a world that is safer, more equal, and inclusive for all.

# 1. INVEST IN THE CARE SECTOR

COVID-19 has laid bare how essential care is to our society, but also how fragile our care systems are. Care is a critical social good and a fundamental human right, yet it is not adequately prioritized by governments. Investing in the care sector is the smartest move Canada can make considering its multitude of benefits. Investing in care boosts economic growth, as women who were caring for family members will be able to enter the workforce. Investing in care has the potential to generate millions of jobs. The care sector can also be a key a building block of the low carbon economy, given its low carbon footprint, and provides essential public services that support social wellbeing. Ultimately, it accelerates progress on gender equality, and improves the lives of women through a more equal distribution of unpaid care work and boosts the economy. Without significant investments in the care sector, Canada is set for an unnecessarily slow economic recovery.<sup>15</sup>

It has taken a pandemic for the government to recognize the essential role that child care plays in people's lives, society at large, and the economy. Never has child care been this essential, and yet so inaccessible and vulnerable. With a sector that has been underfunded for decades, without continuous revenues of parent fees, many daycare centres fear for their survival. A recent survey of licensed child care centres in Canada found that "70% laid off all or part of their workforce and more than one-third of the centres across Canada are uncertain about reopening."<sup>16</sup> The government's commitment to a "significant, long-term, sustained investment to create a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system" in the Throne Speech comes at a critical time, to ensure families can rest assured their children receive the care they need. Canada needs a public child care system, and federal leadership is needed to realize it. The Affordable Child Care for ALL Plan, proposed by the child care movement, lays out the necessary steps for the government to take.<sup>17</sup>

## Recommendations

- **ALLOCATE** \$2.5 billion emergency funding for early learning and child care in federal transfers to the provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to ensure the sustainability of the sector and the safety of children and workers during the pandemic.
- **ALLOCATE** \$2 billion for early learning and child care in budget 2021/2022 (and an increase of \$2 billion each year after) to publicly fund a child care system in partnership with the provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments. Transfers to the provinces should include measurable targets in accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness.
- **ALLOCATE** adequate resources to the federal early learning and child care secretariat to provide leadership on the development of a national child care system and legislation grounding child care in universality, quality and comprehensiveness, as well as a workforce strategy to ensure caregivers have decent work that pays living wages.
- **LAUNCH** a federal taskforce 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.



## 2. INVEST IN SOCIAL PROTECTION AND DECENT WORK FOR WOMEN

The economic fallout of COVID-19 has exacerbated existing economic inequalities. Women earn less than men across all sectors and education levels in every country of the world. In Canada, the greater participation of women in the workforce has accounted for about one-third of the country's economic growth over the last 40 years.<sup>18</sup> Despite this progress, the gender wage gap persists, leaving women – particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, and/or (im)migrant<sup>19</sup> – at a disadvantage. Data shows that women earn 74 cents for every dollar men make, and women are paid less in 468 out of 500 occupations monitored by Statistics Canada. The Pay Equity Act of 2018 established the Office of the Federal Pay Equity Commissioner to oversee progress towards pay equity.<sup>20</sup> However, this initiative will be unnecessarily slow without serious investment. Budgets 2019 and 2020 did not deliver any

additional financing, despite the Pay Equity Coalition estimating that \$80 million dollars a year, in addition to 50 dedicated pay equity support officers, are needed to fulfill the Commissioner's mandate.<sup>21</sup>

COVID-19 has also made clear that too many women are stuck in jobs that are considered “essential,” yet are precarious, low-paid, and lack benefits such as paid sick leave. It is no coincidence that Black, Indigenous, and racialized women, including recent immigrants, are overrepresented in these jobs. Because of the precariousness of their employment, many women have difficulty accessing employment insurance or receive such low levels that they are forced to move from one low paid job to another. In a COVID-19 context, this means the transition from benefits like CERB to an “expanded” employment insurance program must address challenges in access and accessibility.

### Recommendations

- **EXPAND** women's access to unemployment insurance (EI) by modernizing key gaps in the existing EI system. Adopt best practices from the CERB delivery, turn EI into a more agile delivery mechanism that gets benefits out quickly, expand access to more people active in Canada's labour market, and require lower thresholds and improved benefits that meet income adequacy standards – especially for low paid workers.<sup>22</sup>
- **RAISE** the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage. Ensure paid sick leave is expanded to cover all workers and continues after emergency benefits have come to an end. Invest adequate resources in fully implementing the Pay Equity Commissioner's mandate, including outreach and education.
- **INVEST** in social infrastructure and sectors that predominantly employ women as part of economic stimulus packages, prioritizing the care sector. Apply intersectional gender based analysis (GBA+) to all federal stimulus spending to direct public investments towards projects that will reduce gender inequality and respond to the needs of marginalized populations.
- **INVEST** in women's entrepreneurship programs and funds with dedicated funding for research and programming that further addresses the barriers to entrepreneurship for women and marginalized groups - including access to financing, improved mentorship and dismantling institutional bias.
- **RESOURCE** the development of the recently announced Action Plan for Women in the Economy and ensure a whole of government approach by locating it within the Department of Finance or Prime Minister's Office. Ensure the taskforce includes civil society experts working on economic justice, has a strong intersectional and equity lens, and focuses on women's work (paid and unpaid) including income security.

# 3. INVEST IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

Investing in a feminist recovery is equally important for our economy and our planet. Despite the short-term drop in global greenhouse gas emissions due to pandemic lockdown measures, the climate crisis is far from being tackled. The federal budget should direct economic stimulus spending towards sectors and projects that will continue to lower Canada’s greenhouse gas emissions while expanding our social safety net and promoting the circular economy. By embedding social and

economic inclusion into climate action strategies, we can build a more resilient economy that will help Canadians reduce carbon emissions and adapt to unavoidable climate impacts. Canada should also invest in climate action internationally, guided by our Feminist International Assistance Policy’s commitment to gender equality, to ensure international climate finance reaches the poorest and most vulnerable whose lives are already being disrupted and harmed by the climate crisis.

## Recommendations

- **ESTABLISH** targeted federal programs for women and gender-diverse people to access green jobs and green business development opportunities, particularly those who are already experiencing economic insecurity and marginalization due to race, age, disability and Indigenous identity.
- **COMMIT** to contributing Canada’s fair share to international climate financing, at least \$1.8 billion of bilateral climate finance annually, given our economic status and carbon impacts, to assist developing countries with the climate crisis.<sup>23</sup>
- **SET AND LEGISLATE** a wealth tax on the wealthiest individuals in Canada to address economic inequality and help reduce carbon emissions from the wealthiest one percent.<sup>24</sup>
- **COMMIT** to increasing the price of carbon in Canada significantly in future years, and enacting federal climate accountability legislation to require governments to live within carbon budgets.<sup>25</sup> Direct regional development agencies to focus on diversification and energy transition planning in regions of Canada where workers and communities have become overly dependent on fossil fuel extraction.
- **ELIMINATE** all federal subsidies to the fossil fuel extraction industries, including legislating a ban on fossil fuel sector support from Export Development Canada, Business Development Canada, and regional economic development agencies.<sup>26</sup>

## 4. INVEST IN ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE / VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Gender-Based Violence (GBV), and in particular, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), has yet again proven to be one of the most prevalent of abuses that billions continue to face in Canada and around the world. According to independent advocacy groups and United Nations agencies, sharp increases in domestic violence and femicides have been reported in virtually every region of the globe since the start of the global lockdowns. In Canada, shelters, service providers, and hotlines have been inundated with calls from women fleeing violence – even as they face

closures due to shrinking funding. Pre-COVID, it was estimated that intimate partner violence and sexual violence cost the Canadian economy \$12.2 billion annually.<sup>27</sup> The government has been quick to respond and has thus far has invested \$100 million in emergency funds to address GBV, dispersed to women’s rights organizations across the country.<sup>28</sup> Now is the time to fast-track the development of national action plans and to further strengthen the capacity of agencies to respond and to lay the ground for long-term reduction strategies.

### Recommendations

- **DISPERSE** long-term, sustainable, and core funding to women’s shelters, sexual assault centres, and women’s rights organizations so that they can remain open and meet the increased demand resulting from the pandemic. Ensure services and resources are not diverted towards a general health response.
- **FAST-TRACK** the National Action Plan on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls/ Gender-Based Violence, including a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement and an accountability framework with time-bound goals. Ensure sufficient funding for roll-out and implementation, in close consultation with domestic women’s rights and feminist organizations.
- **ENSURE** a separate National Action Plan and resources for Indigenous women and girls that proposes concrete actions to implement the recommendations of the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in consultation with Indigenous women’s organizations, networks, and communities.

# 5. INVEST IN GLOBAL RECOVERY

Extreme inequality has been out of control for years, and the pandemic is threatening to undo decades of progress towards poverty reduction. Hundreds of millions of people are on the brink of starvation, as governments struggle to provide social protection and supply chains are interrupted. Already, 168 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, many of them in fragile and conflict-affected states. UNCTAD has called for USD 500 billion in aid to support poorer countries in dealing with the crisis, as well as USD 1 trillion in debt cancellation. But donor pledges continue to fall short. Canada has contributed to global efforts to address the public health crisis and looming economic fallout, but more is needed as countries continue to struggle with further and more detrimental waves of the pandemic. The pandemic has impacted every single country in the world, and no one is safe until everyone is safe.

Canada has a chance to make a unique contribution to global recovery by playing to its strength and focusing its assistance on feminist interventions, filling critical gender gaps, and holding the line on gender equality. This includes investments in paid and unpaid care, securing sexual and reproductive health and rights, addressing gender-based violence, and providing gender-responsive humanitarian assistance. Women in all their diversity are disproportionately impacted everywhere, and their specific needs are often ignored in crisis. Through its Feminist International Assistance Policy, Canada is well placed to play a leadership role in putting women, girls, and gender-diverse people at the centre of recovery efforts and ensuring women's rights and feminist organizations are able to deliver services and sustain themselves.

## Recommendations

- **INVEST** \$2 billion globally for COVID-19 response and recovery interventions focusing on standalone feminist programming (SRHR, VAWG/GBV, care, feminist leadership) and ensuring all global investments are gender-responsive, to ensure gains on gender equality are sustained.
- **INCREASE** ODA investments to fast track implementation of the Feminist International Assistance Policy, doubling it from \$6.2 billion to \$12.4 billion over five years.
- **INCREASE** funding to Canadian humanitarian organizations and local organizations, prioritizing women's rights organizations, in addition to the \$159.5 million funding support announced for multilateral agencies as part of COVID-19 humanitarian response efforts.
- **INCREASE** standalone funding for VAWG/GBV programming, particularly initiatives focused on child, early and forced marriage, sexual violence during crises, and intimate partner violence and femicide.
- **EXPAND** the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI+) to include debt cancellation, binding debt relief mechanisms for private creditors, and an extension of the initiative until the end of 2022. Canada should lead on debt relief for poorer countries by using a new approach to debt sustainability that has SDGs, human rights, gender justice, and climate vulnerabilities as its focus.

## 6. INVEST IN FEMINIST LEADERSHIP

Women's rights organizations and feminist leaders play a crucial role in society by providing critical services, expanding our understanding of the differentiated experiences on marginalized communities, and spearheading community-based solutions. Investing in women's organizations delivers results: twenty years of research in 70 countries confirms that feminist movements are the catalyst for advancing gender equality.<sup>29</sup> Yet, they are often underfunded and undervalued. While steady increases to the WAGE Women's Program have translated into an increased capacity for organizations since 2015, challenges remain. Organizations are still struggling to secure core funding and lack resources for advocacy, public

engagement, and organizing. The pandemic has added to these challenges and this already precarious sector is once again fearing for its survival. Current funding mechanisms, based on project grants, make it difficult for organizations to grow reserves and to cope with changes necessary to adapt to new challenges like a pandemic. A strong women's rights and feminist movement is needed to drive transformative change on gender justice and to support the rising needs of vulnerable populations during and post-pandemic.<sup>30</sup> It is clear that feminist organizations are at the forefront of providing tangible solutions on equality—especially during a pandemic—and they must be funded and consulted accordingly.

### Recommendations

- **PROVIDE** long-term, flexible, core funding to women's rights organizations so that they can weather the pandemic and shore up resources to survive any future crises. Prioritize women's rights organizations domestically and globally as partners of choice for gender equality programming funded by the Government of Canada.
- **ENSURE** members of Canada's women's rights sector have access to the relevant policy spaces and are consulted decision-makers in any recovery strategies – specifically in the 2021/22 [Federal Budget Consultations](#), and the recently announced National Action Plan for Women in the Economy. Ensure that the Federal Task Force on COVID-19 brings in perspectives and voices of diverse women.
- **STRENGTHEN** the government's gender budgeting process, providing better guidelines and training and improve intersectional data collection. Make gender budgeting more participatory by convening an advisory group of women's rights organizations and feminist economists to provide insights and direction, including on the revenue side of the budget.

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