



INVESTING IN A FEMINIST FUTURE

Oxfam Canada's Recommendations for Budget 2020

Rajendra Shaw / Oxfam

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Over the past four years, Canada has taken leadership to advance women's rights and gender equality on several fronts, and laid the ground for further progress through critical investments. Now is the time to build on the momentum and tackle remaining gaps. Federal Budget 2020 is the opportunity for Canada to signal its renewed commitment to meeting the targets set out in the Beijing Platform for Action through ambitious and targeted investments. Women around the world are looking to Canada as a steadfast ally, particularly at a time of a rising backlash against women's rights and attempts by anti-rights movements to reverse historical gains. This brief outlines key investments the federal government should make to advance women's rights in Canada and contribute to global progress.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest in a just and sustainable economy

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC JUSTICE:

- **INVEST \$1 billion in child care in 2020 and move towards universal child care** by setting a 10-year timetable to reach the OECD target of 1% of GDP. Enact national legislation grounding child care in universality, quality and comprehensiveness, and include a workforce strategy to ensure caregivers have decent work that pays living wages.
- **EXPAND women's access to employment insurance by modernizing the employment insurance system** to lower the universal threshold and ensure an eligibility requirement for low-wage workers to help tie access, level and duration to need rather than just earnings.
- **RAISE the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage.** Use federal government procurement to support women-led businesses and favour companies that pay living wages and protect labour rights, particularly freedom of association and collective bargaining.

CLIMATE JUSTICE:

- **SET AND LEGISLATE new and more ambitious national commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions** to keep global average temperature rise below 1.5°C.
- **ELIMINATE fossil fuel subsidies and stop using public funds**, including financing, to support oil and gas companies.
- **INVEST in green jobs and support a just transition for workers**, applying a gender analysis to this transition.

TAX JUSTICE:

- **ELIMINATE unfair loopholes allowing corporations and high-income earners to pay lower rates of tax** than the rest of the population, including regressive income tax measures that hurt women, such as pension income splitting.
- **RESTORE corporate tax rates to 21% and increase the top marginal income tax rate** on incomes over \$1 million from 33% to 37%.
- **INTRODUCE stronger laws, enforcements and penalties to prevent offshore tax evasion and avoidance** by corporations and wealthy individuals.

Invest in women's movements, end gender-based violence and uphold sexual and reproductive rights

COLLECTIVE ORGANIZING:

- **INCREASE** funding for core operational costs and advocacy for women's movements and diverse feminist and women's rights organizations, and make funding more accessible for small organizations.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:

- **ALLOCATE** sufficient resources to implement a **National Action Plan to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence**, that has buy-in from and resources for the provinces and territories, so women everywhere in Canada have access to the same services.
- **PROVIDE** adequate and significant funding for the **National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTIQ2 people**. The NAP should outline time bound commitments to implement all 231 Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in full partnership and with funding allocated to Indigenous women, their chosen representatives, their governments and service agencies.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS:

- **WITHHOLD** funding transfers for provinces and territories failing to ensure the availability and accessibility of abortion services.
- **LAUNCH** a \$20 million dollar, 5-year national campaign on healthy relationships and sexuality based on the updated Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.
- **COMMIT** to universal cost coverage for contraceptives as part of a national public drug plan. By one estimate, this would cost \$157 per person per year and result in millions of dollars in savings to the healthcare system.¹

Demonstrate global leadership on women's rights and gender equality

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE:

- **DEVELOP** a 10-year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income, ensuring private finance for development is additional to official development assistance.
- **INCREASE** investments to accelerate the implementation of the **Feminist International Assistance Policy** focusing specifically on sexual and gender-based violence, the rights of LGBTQ2 persons, and paid and unpaid care.

CLIMATE FINANCE:

- **INCREASE** contributions to international climate financing, in particular for the least developed countries, and achieve a 50-50 balance for funding adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Funding should be in the form of grants, not loans.
- **PRIORITIZE** gender equality in international climate finance by ensuring gender equality objectives and considerations apply to all of Canada's climate finance. Ensure at least 15% of all bilateral international climate finance has gender equality as a principal purpose.²

HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT:

- **INCREASE** the number of refugees to be resettled in Canada, prioritizing groups or individuals who are most vulnerable to harm, such as women, children, survivors of gender-based violence, and sexual and gender minorities—through conventional, complementary and urgent resettlement pathways. Continue to support LGBTQ2-inclusive refugee policies and urgent protection for human rights defenders. Fund projects in countries of asylum that protect the safety and rights of LGBTQ2 asylum seekers.
- **ESTABLISH** a \$120M dedicated pool of funding for women's rights in fragile and conflict-affected states. This pool should provide long-term, flexible and sustainable funding, particularly for local women's rights actors bridging humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 is a critical year for women's rights as world leaders will gather for the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action to assess and accelerate progress towards gender equality. There is no doubt progress has been made, but it is uneven and is under threat by anti-rights movements attempting to roll back important women's rights advancements. The 1995 Beijing Platform was groundbreaking and similarly, 2020 can be a breakthrough year for women's rights and gender equality. Progress requires leadership and resources, and Federal Budget 2020 can lay the ground for Canada to shine on the world stage by making significant gender equality commitments that also address cross-cutting challenges faced by humanity – extreme inequality, the climate crisis, displacement and conflict.

Recent Federal Budgets tabled major investments and measures to tackle inequality and advance women's rights, including supporting women's movements, pro-active pay equity legislation, second caregiver leave and gender budgeting legislation. Globally, Canada championed women's rights and gender equality through commitments to increase foreign aid, fund neglected but urgent priorities such as sexual and reproductive rights, grassroots LGBTIQ2 movements and women's rights organizations. These investments are welcome and confirm the government's commitment to levelling the playing field for women and other equality-seeking groups in Canada and abroad. However, significant gaps remain (see [Oxfam Canada's 2019 Feminist Scorecard](#)).

Gaps are particularly marked for the most marginalized, including Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant women, members of the LGBTIQ2 community, and women living with disabilities. For far too many, poverty, gender-based violence and lack of access to sexual and reproductive services is a daily reality. The economy remains stacked against women, who continue to earn less than men do and are concentrated in the most precarious sectors. Care responsibilities are a major hurdle for women to pursue decent work and employment opportunities.

Underpinning all of these challenges is extreme inequality and the climate crisis. Economic inequality, gender inequality and the climate emergency are interrelated challenges that reinforce each other. The government must address these in tandem, and do so urgently. As we reach this critical moment in history, with only a few years left to find lasting solutions to the climate emergency, transforming the economy must be a top priority. A just transition to a low carbon economy will only succeed if it is rooted in environmental, economic and gender justice.

At the start of this new mandate, and in this critical anniversary year of the Beijing Platform for Action, the federal government has an opportunity to take bold actions to tackle economic and gender inequality, invest in transformative feminist initiatives and support feminist movements and organizations. Strengthening its gender budgeting approach and framework through robust implementation of the Gender Budgeting Act of 2018 must remain a priority. The government should specifically support women who are most systematically marginalized – Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities and LGBTIQ2 people – to participate in budget processes so policies are responsive to their realities and address their unique challenges.

1. INVEST IN A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

Women's economic justice

In every country in the world, women earn less than men. Sexism and gendered social norms affect the jobs women have access to, the money they earn, and the way society values their work. Women's work continues to be considered less valuable than that of men. Around the world and in Canada alike, women share a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care, which limits their ability to find decent work. Investing in measures to level the playing field for women would have the triple benefit of stimulating employment, contributing to more inclusive growth and increasing gender equality.

Child care is the smartest investment the government can make to ensure Canada is more inclusive, equal, and prosperous. At the same time, too many women are stuck in precarious, low-paid and unsafe jobs. Women make up 70% of part-time, casual and temporary workers³ and 60% of minimum wage earners.⁴ Because of the precariousness of their employment, many women have difficulty accessing employment insurance or receive such low levels they are forced to move from one low paid job to another.

- **INVEST \$1 billion in child care in 2020 and move towards universal child care** by setting a 10-year timetable to reach the OECD target of 1% of GDP. Enact national legislation grounding child care in universality, quality and comprehensiveness, and include a workforce strategy to ensure caregivers have decent work that pays living wages.

- **EXPAND women's access to employment insurance by modernizing the employment insurance system** to lower the universal threshold and ensure an eligibility requirement for low-wage workers to help tie access, level and duration to need rather than just earnings.
- **RAISE the minimum wage for workers under federal jurisdiction to a living wage.** Use federal government procurement to support women-led businesses and favour companies that pay living wages and protect labour rights, particularly freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Climate justice

Climate scientists have issued a dire warning: the world has only 12 years to avert runaway climate change. Domestically, Canada needs to lock-in the progress made on climate action, specifically on the implementation of the Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Growth. This includes strengthening the federal carbon tax framework by eliminating the preferences for large emitters, eliminating fossil fuel subsidies and investing in programs to support climate justice.⁵

Rich countries are fuelling the global climate emergency, and Canada is warming twice as fast

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as the global average.⁶ The climate crisis will hurt the most vulnerable communities, particularly in the Global South and Canadian North, the hardest. Women are already hardest hit by floods, droughts, tsunamis and fires⁷ and simultaneously at the forefront of providing solutions and adapting to changes. Canada has a role to play by doing its fair share and building momentum through action at home while simultaneously using diplomatic channels to ensure the global community achieves the Paris Agreement.

- **INVEST in green jobs and support a just transition for workers**, applying a gender analysis to this transition.

Tax justice

Around the world, the underfunding of public services and a general failure to crack down on tax dodging by large corporations and the wealthy have fueled inequality for decades. Women and girls are doubly hit by rising economic inequality as they lose access to essential public services and are left to fill these gaps with many hours of

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unpaid care work. In Canada, tax cuts over the past two decades have reduced federal revenues by \$50 billion annually.⁸ Canada's system of income tax expenditures and loopholes is expensive – costing over \$100 billion annually – and predominantly rewards wealthy men.⁹

- **INTRODUCE stronger laws, enforcements and penalties to prevent offshore tax evasion and avoidance** by corporations and wealthy individuals.

2. INVEST IN WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS, END GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND UPHOLD SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Collective organizing

After more than a decade of underfunding and cuts to women's rights institutions, movements and organizations in Canada, a turnaround began in 2015. Steady increases to the WAGE Women's Program have translated into increased capacity and resources for feminist movements. These investments were welcomed and needed, but challenges remain as organizations are struggling to secure core funding and lack resources for advocacy, public engagement and organizing.

This is particularly pertinent as anti-rights movements continue to grow in Canada and around the world. A whopping 46 anti-choice MPs were elected in the last election. Twenty years of research in 70 countries confirms the most effective strategy for combating violence against women is to support a strong feminist movement.¹⁰ Feminist organizations are at the forefront of providing tangible solutions to equality and they must be funded accordingly.

- **INCREASE funding for core operational costs and advocacy for women's movements** and diverse feminist and women's rights organizations, and make funding more accessible for small organizations.

Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a global crisis of epidemic proportions. Globally, one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. Violence against women and girls knows no boundaries of geography or culture, but those living in poverty face higher levels of abuse.¹¹ Indigenous women are six times more likely to be killed than non-Indigenous women. Other populations, such as transgender people, women with disabilities and elderly women, are also at higher risk.¹² While progress has been made through the implementation of the Federal Strategy on Gender-Based Violence, reach is limited to federal jurisdiction and therefore cannot fill critical and ongoing gaps in access to services and protection for women across the country. In Canada, it is estimated that intimate partner

violence and sexual violence costs the Canadian economy \$12.2 billion annually.¹³ The government has outlined its commitment to build on the federal strategy with \$30 million for the development of a National Action Plan on GBV. The development of the plan must include a formal mechanism for stakeholder engagement and an accountability framework with time bound goals. \$30 million to develop the plan is important, but sufficient resources for implementation must follow and adequately reach the provinces and territories. This is critical for provincial and territorial buy-in and for a truly national plan that would ensure women can access the necessary services and protections no matter where they live—with the culturally-relevant and trauma-informed care they need, rooted in community and culture.

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- **PROVIDE** adequate and significant funding for the National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and LGBTIQ2 people. The NAP should outline time bound commitments to implement all 231 Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, in full partnership and with funding allocated to Indigenous women, their chosen representatives, their governments and service agencies.

Sexual and reproductive rights

Women’s access to sexual and reproductive services remains uneven across Canada. Abortion access, in particular, is challenging for women living in rural or remote regions. The only freestanding abortion clinic in New Brunswick is about to close its doors because the provincial government will not cover the cost of abortion outside of hospitals. Comprehensive sex education across Canada is lacking and yet it would contribute to healthy relationships and have positive impacts on individual health, public health and gender equality. While education is a provincial jurisdiction, the federal government has

a role to play in eliminating discrepancies across jurisdictions and increasing access. At the same time, access to contraception is fundamental to the right to health and to gender equality, and can also reduce public health care costs and increase women’s labour force participation and economic empowerment. Canada’s international assistance includes support for access to contraceptives; however, in Canada, significant barriers remain. The current patchwork of private insurance plans and compassionate programs to cover contraceptives is not adequately and equally available to all who need it.

- **WITHHOLD** funding transfers for provinces and territories failing to ensure the availability and accessibility of abortion services.
- **LAUNCH** a \$20 million dollar, 5-year national campaign on healthy relationships and sexuality based on the updated Guidelines for Sexual Health Education.

- **COMMIT** to universal cost coverage for contraceptives as part of a national public drug plan. By one estimate, this would cost \$157 per person per year and result in millions of dollars in savings to the healthcare system.¹⁴

3. DEMONSTRATE GLOBAL LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY

International assistance

The world is looking to Canada for leadership on gender equality. In an era of political backlash against hard-won women's rights, Canadian governments of different political stripes have made headlines with their commitments to women's rights and gender equality. From the Muskoka Initiative in maternal newborn and child health in 2010 to the more recent Feminist International Assistance Policy and investments in sexual and reproductive health and rights and global LGBTIQ2 movements, Canada demonstrates

it is a global gender equality champion. All the while, Canada's international assistance budget is at its lowest in the past half-century. The aid budget needs to increase if Canada is going to live up to the recent announcement of \$1.4 billion per year for women and children's health without driving down spending in other critical areas. Expectations are high for global leaders to step up on this 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

- **DEVELOP** a 10-year plan to achieve the UN aid target of 0.7% of gross national income, ensuring private finance for development is additional to official development assistance.

- **INCREASE** investments to accelerate the implementation of the Feminist International Assistance Policy focusing specifically on sexual and gender-based violence, the rights of LGBTIQ2 persons, and paid and unpaid care.

Climate finance

With climate change threatening to push an additional 100 million people into extreme poverty by 2030, Canadian aid should increase support for gender-responsive adaptation initiatives, recognizing climate change affects women and girls the most and women's rights organizations are often at the forefront of adaptation initiatives.

Canada, which is among the largest per capita emitters, must do its fair share to help the most vulnerable adapt while simultaneously reducing its emissions. As Canada looks to renew its global climate finance commitment, it is essential that Canada invest a significant portion of its climate finance package in gender equality initiatives.

- **INCREASE** contributions to international climate financing, in particular for the least developed countries, and achieve a 50-50 balance for funding adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Funding should be in the form of grants, not loans.

- **PRIORITIZE** gender equality in international climate finance by ensuring gender equality objectives and considerations apply to all of Canada's climate finance. Ensure at least 15% of all bilateral international climate finance has gender equality as a principal purpose.¹⁵

Humanitarian action and refugee resettlement

At the end of 2018, 70.8 million people were displaced – the highest number ever. Violence, persecution and extreme weather events led to unprecedented levels of displacement and humanitarian crisis. Similar to the push back on global women’s rights, sexual and gender minorities have also seen new laws and acts of violence globally. In recent years, Canada has played a more active and constructive role in supporting the global protection and realization of the fundamental rights of refugees, including LGBTIQ2 people around the world. Already an ally to refugees and LGBTIQ2 communities, Canada can take additional positive steps to protect the rights of refugees, including LGBTIQ2 people, globally,

through conventional resettlement pathways and by working to develop effective complementary pathways to facilitate their safety.

Canadian humanitarian organizations and their partners find it difficult to secure funding for gender-focused programming in emergency contexts. Yet, protracted humanitarian emergencies present opportunities for addressing acute, immediate needs in ways promoting long-term gender equality. Local women’s rights actors are crucial players: they deliver assistance in culturally appropriate ways and can integrate their humanitarian work with their long-term efforts to achieve gender equality.

- **INCREASE the number of refugees to be resettled in Canada**, prioritizing groups or individuals who are most vulnerable to harm, such as women, children, survivors of gender-based violence, and sexual and gender minorities—through conventional, complementary and urgent resettlement pathways. Continue to support LGBTIQ2-inclusive refugee policies and urgent protection for human rights defenders. Fund projects in countries of asylum that protect the safety and rights of LGBTIQ2 asylum seekers.

- **ESTABLISH a \$120M dedicated pool of funding for women’s rights** in fragile and conflict-affected states. This pool should provide long-term, flexible and sustainable funding, particularly for local women’s rights actors bridging humanitarian, development and peacebuilding work.

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