

# Bridging the Gaps

## Gender Equity & Economic Security

A Series of Tools for Employers in Restigouche (New Brunswick) and Avignon (Quebec)

March 2024

This project was created to help advance the economic recovery of women and gender minorities in our communities as we rebuild from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Tool #1:

### The Gendered Economic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Restigouche, NB and Avignon, QC

12 Minute read



This project has been funded by



Women and Gender  
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité  
des genres Canada

Canada

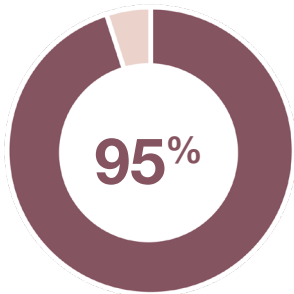
Delivered by



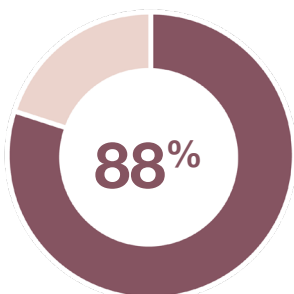
## The Gendered Economic Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Our region was hard hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. A multitude of intersecting social, geographic, and political factors contributed to this:

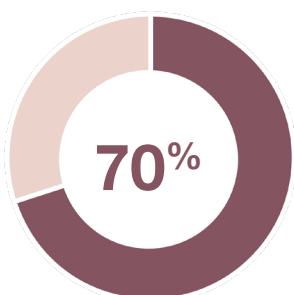
- The pandemic negatively impacted the Restigouche/Avignon region more than it did other border areas in New Brunswick due to the region's **highly integrated and co-dependent economy**.
- The Restigouche region **has twice as many workers from other provinces** compared to Edmundston and 3.5 times more than Westmorland, making the closure/monitoring of the bridge particularly disruptive.<sup>1</sup>
- In October 2021, the Campbellton region (Zone 5) registered the **highest mortality rates in the country**, according to Health Canada (35.7/100,000 deaths over a two-week period). An already fragile healthcare system was pushed to its limits.<sup>2</sup>
- Indigenous residents of the region experienced an **increase in racial profiling and harassment**, especially when dealing with the border-crossing protocol or accessing health services and essential goods in New Brunswick.<sup>3</sup>
- According to an Atlantic Canada-wide survey of the Two-Spirit Indigenous community, which has reported significant negative impacts since the onset of the pandemic:



of respondents said they **were worried about their mental health**,



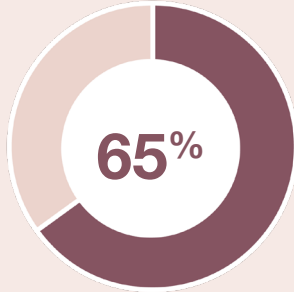
of respondents were **worried about access to healthcare**,



of respondents were worried about the **long-term impacts of the increased racism they were experiencing**.<sup>4</sup>

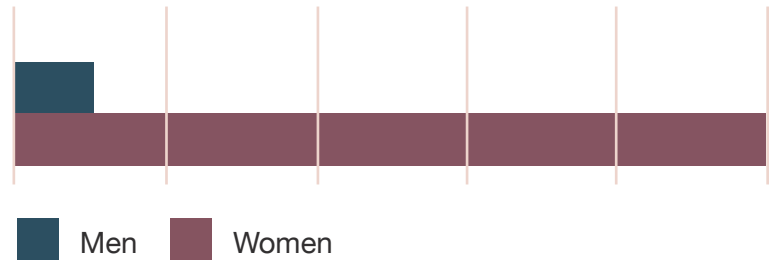
# How is this a gender issue?

In March 2020,

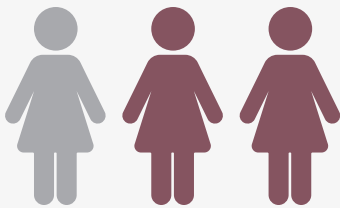


of job losses were experienced by women in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

In 2020-2021, during the pandemic, **nearly 100,000 women left the labour market** in Canada (compared to 10,000 men during the same period).<sup>6</sup> **Women-identifying parents were more likely to lose or leave their employment.** A loss of formal childcare and an increase in informal care at home or in the community significantly contributed to women's economic insecurity.<sup>7</sup>



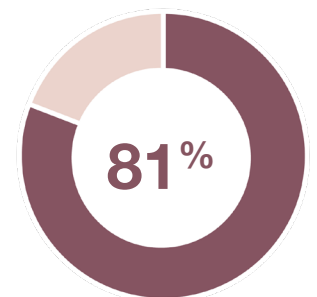
**Women's participation in the Canadian economy fell** to levels not seen in over 30 years. Many women-dominated industries, such as care work, beauty and wellness as well as tourism, were permanently or severely impacted.<sup>8</sup>

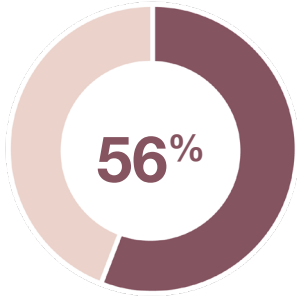


**Women are disproportionately affected by burnout, stress and exhaustion** compared to their male counterparts and **1 in 3 women said they have considered downshifting their career or leaving the workforce altogether.**<sup>9</sup>

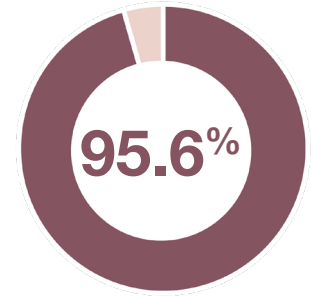
**Women are more likely to be informal caregivers** for children, older family members and more broadly in the community.<sup>10</sup> During the first lockdown in March 2020, among Canadian parents of children under age 15, "the number of hours spent per week caring for children increased by 27 for mothers, to a total of 95 hours, compared to an increase of 13 hours for fathers, to a total of 46 hours."<sup>11</sup>

**Women are more likely to be formal caregivers** and to work in homecare, nursing homes or hospital settings, all of which were more heavily impacted by the pandemic.<sup>12</sup> In Canada, **women make up 81% of the healthcare and social assistance workforces.**<sup>13</sup>

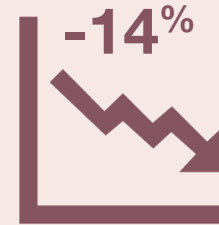




Approximately **56% of Canadian women work in the 5 C's (caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning, and clerical)**; many of these jobs were considered essential during the pandemic.<sup>14</sup> For example, **women in NB make up 95.6% of early childhood workers.**<sup>15</sup> Positions that were considered essential and posed a higher risk were more often held by women, especially in low-paying jobs.<sup>16</sup>



The Quebec government reported that **overall gender equity** in the province dropped by 14% from 2019 to 2021.<sup>17</sup>

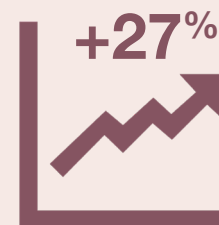


**The impact of unpaid sick days on workers is high.** For the lowest-earning workers in NB, losing one day of wages might mean not being able to pay the rent or buy groceries. Economic precarity can impact women in specific or heightened ways: lone-parent women are the group most likely to experience food insecurity; **48% of them are living below the poverty line.**<sup>18</sup>

**Racialized women in NB are disproportionately employed in lower-paying jobs,** making them particularly vulnerable to economic precarity.<sup>19</sup>



**Gender-based violence has increased since the onset of the pandemic** and has had a spillover effect on Canadian workplaces.<sup>20</sup> For example, the killing of women and girls by men increased by 27% in 2022, compared to 2019.<sup>21</sup>










*The pandemic did not affect all women and gender-diverse people in the same ways. Inequalities were exacerbated for groups such as racialized, immigrant and Indigenous women, as well as single parents, women with disabilities and residents of rural areas.*<sup>22</sup>

# What did regional residents and employers have to say?

To better understand the gendered economic impacts of the pandemic, **CBDC Restigouche** surveyed regional employers (55) and residents (207) about their experiences, as part of a situational analysis report (available upon request). In terms of gender representation, most respondents (85%) were women-identifying and of working age (35-65 years old). The surveys were completed between October and December 2022.

## Residents reported that they:

	<b>Lost hours, wages, or work</b> , either temporarily or permanently.
Experienced an increase in mental health symptoms, including <b>stress (51%), anxiety (43%) and depression (20%)</b> .	
	Had difficulty <b>juggling their employment duties and caring for their families</b> .
Witnessed how the bridge monitoring <b>led to racial profiling of Indigenous members of our communities</b> .	
	Frequently needed to <b>use their sick days/flex time/vacation days</b> due to illness or caretaking.
Had concerns about the <b>steady rise in costs of essential goods</b> like groceries, gas, housing, and daycare.	
	Faced daily challenges due to <b>fast-changing regulations and bridge closures/monitoring</b> that impacted their commute or workplace.



*Note: Most respondents said they were still affected by some of those impacts of the pandemic when they answered the survey in 2022.*



## Employers reported that:



The **bridge closure/monitoring created stress and confusion** for businesses due to changing regulations, testing and paperwork, long waits, and discrimination.

**Personal life barriers** for their employees had an increased spillover effect on the workplace (e.g., childcare issues).



They (58% of respondents) had to **modify their hours of operation or close down** due to the pandemic.

The changes they faced extended to supply chain prices, consumer demand and barriers getting equipment/supplies.



They (75% of respondents) **relied on financial support from government or other sources** (e.g. CBDC loans, CERB, HHBRP).

Challenges among their employees (e.g., care work issues) **disproportionately affected women and gender minorities**.



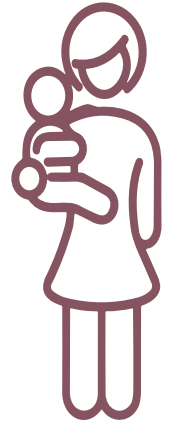
They needed to rely on **new technology**, moving to **hybrid/online formats**.

# Where do we stand now?

Today, in 2024, we are aware of the serious and gendered impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on communities across Canada. We know that women-identifying Canadians in particular, took on more of the community and family care workload that the pandemic required. We have also learned that these issues seem to be ongoing; women-identifying Canadians are still more impacted as we move into the recovery phase. For example, **the number of hours of work missed due to personal or family obligations is at least three times higher for women than it is for men across the country.**<sup>23</sup>

In **2023**, the New Brunswick government reported that there were **seven times as many females working part-time for childcare-related reasons compared to males.**<sup>24</sup> There were two-and-a-half times as many mothers not in the labour force compared to fathers; this figure rises steeply for families with young children under the age of five. In addition, four times as many females reported being absent from work for personal/family reasons compared to males.<sup>25</sup>

**Mental health impacts are also of concern, particularly for women.** In the province of Quebec, psychological impacts are higher among women, with 65% saying they felt more stressed than before the pandemic; they also reported more eating disorders, psychological distress, and increased use of anti-depressants.<sup>26</sup> Among all age groups in Quebec, serious suicidal thoughts have also doubled since the onset of the pandemic (6.4% in 2021 vs. 2.8% in 2015).<sup>27</sup> Quebec women reported taking on most of the childcare, homeschooling and care work more broadly; this was particularly true for Black and Filipino women.<sup>28</sup>



It is important to note that **COVID-19 continues to directly impact the workplace today.** Employee burnout is one of the largest stressors currently affecting Canadian women.<sup>29</sup> While many of the public health and organizational restrictions related to COVID-19 have been lifted, **one in two Canadians are still affected by COVID-19 at any given moment**, due to being actively sick, caring for someone who is actively sick or dealing with long-COVID symptoms of some kind.<sup>30</sup>

In the following tools, you will find strategies on topics including employee recruitment and retention, fostering inclusive and equitable workplace environments, and preparing for other unexpected future events, based on best practices that stem from our research. **These strategies are designed to alleviate some of the challenges faced by women and gender diverse people, primarily in the workplace.**



## Endnotes

---

- 1 Desjardins, Pierre-Marcel. 2021. “L’économie des régions frontalières du Nouveau-Brunswick : La région de Campbellton.”
- 2 Radio Canada. 2021. “COVID-19 : la zone 5 affiche le taux de mortalité le plus élevé au Canada.” Radio Canada. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1834371/retablissement-cas-hospitalisation-vaccin-ecoles-garderie-test-rapide>. Retrieved November 24, 2022.
- 3 Leger, Isabelle. 2020. “Listuguj students march into N.B. to protest barrier to school.” CBC News. [https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/sugarloaf-high-school-campbellton-listuguj-protest-1.5819375?fbclid=IwAR3gy0S9qQmOU\\_CgYKfYFV-MSISf6PEVYuANmElyf3WsKiJr5dmDx32hvS4](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/sugarloaf-high-school-campbellton-listuguj-protest-1.5819375?fbclid=IwAR3gy0S9qQmOU_CgYKfYFV-MSISf6PEVYuANmElyf3WsKiJr5dmDx32hvS4). Retrieved December 1, 2022.
- 4 Wabanaki Two Spirit Alliance. 2021. “Final Report: Survey on Covid-19 Impacts with the Two-Spirit Community of Wabanaki, 2021”. <http://www.w2sa.ca/node/38>. Retrieved January 19, 2024.
- 5 Sultana, A. & Ravanera, C. 2020. A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone. The Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) and YWCA Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.feministrecovery.ca/>
- 6 Carmichael, Kevin. 2021. “Low-paid women have been hurt most by the recession, and they risk being left behind by the recovery.” Financial Post. <https://financialpost.com/news/economy/low-paid-women-have-been-hurt-most-by-the-recession-and-they-risk-being-left-behind-by-the-recovery>. Retrieved March 18, 2021.
- 7 Canadian Women’s Foundation. 2020. “Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada’s Fractured Care Economy.” <https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ResettingNormal-Women-Decent-Work-and-Care-EN.pdf>
- 8 CUPE. 2020. “The Gendered Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic.” <https://cupe.ca/gendered-impact-covid-19-pandemic>. Retrieved March 18, 2021.
- 9 McKinsey Institute. 2023. “Women in the Workplace.” <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>. Retrieved December 2, 2023
- 10 Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. 2020. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs.” Retrieved August 1, 2022. [https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WEKH\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_Women\\_Entrepreneurs.pdf](https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WEKH_The_Impact_of_COVID-19_on_Women_Entrepreneurs.pdf)
- 11 Government of Quebec. 2023. “Stratégie gouvernementale pour l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2022-2027.” <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/SCF/publications/plans-strategiques/STR-strategie-egalite-femme-homme-2022-2027-EN-SCF.pdf>. Retrieved February 20, 2024.
- 12 Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. 2020. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs.” Retrieved August 1, 2022. [https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WEKH\\_The\\_Impact\\_of\\_COVID-19\\_on\\_Women\\_Entrepreneurs.pdf](https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WEKH_The_Impact_of_COVID-19_on_Women_Entrepreneurs.pdf)
- 13 Sultana, A. & Ravanera, C. 2020. A Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Canada: Making the Economy Work for Everyone. The Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) and YWCA Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.feministrecovery.ca/>
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Government of New Brunswick. 2021. “Gender Impact Statement 2021.” <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/fin/pdf/Budget/2021-2022/gender-impact-statement-2021.pdf>. Retrieved March 17, 2021.
- 16 Canadian Women’s Foundation. 2020. “Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada’s Fractured Care Economy.” <https://canadianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ResettingNormal-Women-Decent-Work-and-Care-EN.pdf>
- 17 Government of Quebec. 2023. “Stratégie gouvernementale pour l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2022-2027.” <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/SCF/publications/plans-strategiques/STR-strategie-egalite-femme-homme-2022-2027-EN-SCF.pdf>. Retrieved February 20, 2024.
- 18 New Brunswick Women’s Council. 2023. Sick leave in the Employment Standard Act. [https://www.nbwomenscouncil.ca/content/dam/vnbw-vfnb/pdf/briefs\\_submissions/sick-leave-nbwc.pdf](https://www.nbwomenscouncil.ca/content/dam/vnbw-vfnb/pdf/briefs_submissions/sick-leave-nbwc.pdf)
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Previous work by CBDC Restigouche was done on the impacts of GBV in the workplace and in remote work settings. These reports are available upon request.



- 21 Senior, Paulette. 2023. "Gender must not be an afterthought in emergency preparedness," TVO. <https://www.tvo.org/article/gender-must-not-be-an-afterthought-in-emergency-preparedness>.
- 22 Dessanti, Claudia. 2020. The she-covey project: Confronting the gendered economic impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario. Ontario Chamber of Commerce. <https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCC-shecovery-final.pdf>
- 23 Government of Quebec. 2023. "Stratégie gouvernementale pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2022-2027." <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/SCF/publications/plans-strategiques/STR-strategie-egalite-femme-homme-2022-2027-EN-SCF.pdf>. Retrieved February 20, 2024.
- 24 Government of New Brunswick. 2023. "Gender Impact Statement 2023." <https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/fin/pdf/Budget/2023-2024/gender-impact-statement-2023.pdf>. Retrieved November 28, 2023.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Government of Quebec. 2023. "Stratégie gouvernementale pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2022-2027." <https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/org/SCF/publications/plans-strategiques/STR-strategie-egalite-femme-homme-2022-2027-EN-SCF.pdf>. Retrieved February 20, 2024.
- 27 Brousseau-Pouliot, Vincent. 2022. "Deux ans de pandémie : Comment les Québécois ont changé." <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/covid-19/2022-03-17/deux-ans-de-pandemie/comment-les-quebecois-ont-change.php>. Retrieved February 28, 2024.
- 28 Torres, Sandy and Héloïse Michaud. 2022. Les femmes moins nanties pendant la pandémie : répercussions, besoins et perspectives, Montréal, Observatoire québécois des inégalités. <https://politique.uqam.ca/babillard/les-femmes-moins-nanties-pendant-la-pandemie/>. Retrieved February 28, 2024.
- 29 McKinsey Institute. 2023. "Women in the Workplace." <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace>. Retrieved December 2, 2023
- 30 Future Skills Centre. 2023. "The Lingering Effects of COVID-19." <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/covid-19-effects-survey/>. Retrieved January 15, 2024.