

MONITOR

Progressive news, views and ideas



CANADIAN CENTRE
for POLICY ALTERNATIVES
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Founded in 1980, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) is a registered charitable research institute and Canada's leading source of progressive policy ideas, with offices in Ottawa, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto and Halifax. The CCPA founded the *Monitor* magazine in 1994 to share and promote its progressive research and ideas, as well as those of like-minded Canadian and international voices.

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ANDREA PIERCE

Imagining a sustainable Black recovery

COVID-19 didn't create this crisis

A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN today is more likely to be poor and make less income in Canada than her mother and grandmother, despite having higher educational levels, according to 2016 Statistics Canada census data. In Canada, time and data tells the story. Black women are the only group that has seen a consistent decrease in income compared to all other groups. Statistics Canada's 2016 data shows that the after-tax income of Black women after three or more generations in Canada has declined to \$25,919, despite 28% of Black women having a university certificate, diploma or degree at bachelor level or above. This same trend persists for the rate of low income in Black women, now at a rate of over 200% than of non-visible minority women.¹

The intersection of race and gender means that Black women face a dual penalty. They have lower lifetime earning power than both other visible minority and non-visible minority women and men. The Colour of Poverty reports, "racialized women earned 58 cents, and racialized men earned 76 cents, for every dollar a white man earned in Ontario in 2015," the province where over 50% of Canada's Black population resides. Black women remain underpaid and under-represented in the workforce and significantly more so in leadership positions, even when accounting for levels of education.

Labour force data disaggregated by race reveals that unemployment rates are consistently higher among Black Canadians than the rest of Canada's working-age population. Even among Black Canadians with a post-secondary education,

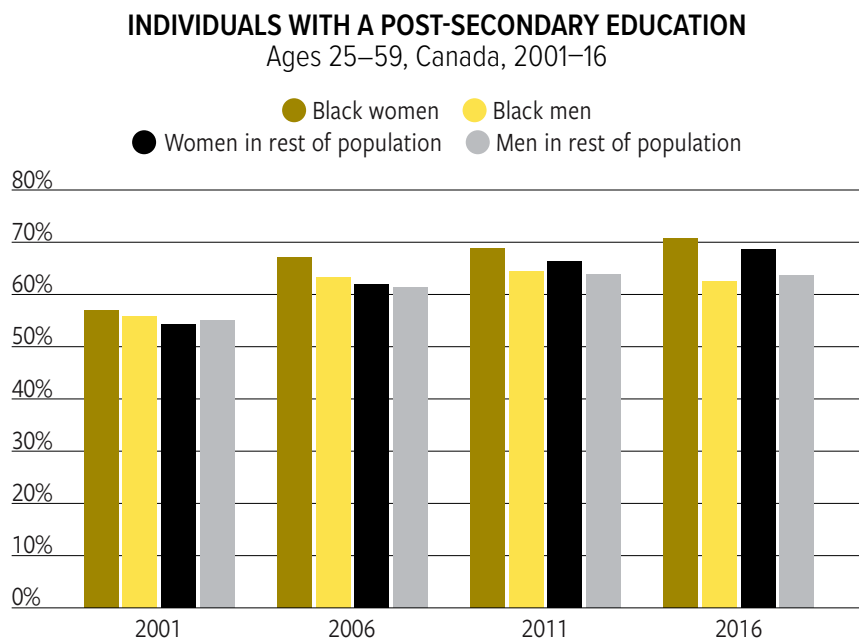
the unemployment rate in 2016 was 173% that of the rest of the population. When investigating this persistent gap, Statistics Canada researchers have conceded that other factors, not measured by the census, may be affecting the disproportionate unemployment rates of Black Canadians.

I recently attended a meeting of Black federal employees, where a researcher asked audience members if they had personally experienced racism at work to stand. More than 90% of the room stood up, including me. The next question was: how many had family members who experienced racism at work. The entire audience was now standing. Even I found that frightening as I looked around the room. It speaks to the systemic nature of racism in Canada. Studies have shown that Black women are more likely than any other demographic group to

experience microaggressions in the workplace, including having their experiences and expertise questioned and being held to higher levels of competence. Statistics Canada in their report *Canada's Black population: Education, labour and resilience* stated that 20% of Black women reported having experienced unfair treatment or discrimination at work in the 12 months prior to the survey.

The deep-seated inequality in Canada's labour market has made the impact of the pandemic disproportionately more severe for Black Canadians, particularly Black women. They are more likely to have been laid off than their white counterparts and the lower-wage sectors where they are more likely to be employed have been slower to rebound.

In their analysis of the gendered impacts of the pandemic, McKinsey



SOURCES: STATISTICS CANADA, CENSUSES OF POPULATION 2001, 2006 AND 2016; 2011 NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY. [HTTPS://WWW150.STATCAN.GC.CA/N1/PUB/89-657-X/89-657-X2020002-ENG.HTM](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2020002-eng.htm)

& Company reported, “By our calculation, women’s jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men’s jobs. Women make up 39% of global employment but account for 54% of overall job losses. One reason for this greater effect on women is that the virus is significantly increasing the burden of unpaid care, which is disproportionately carried by women. This, among other factors, means that women’s employment is dropping faster than average, even accounting for the fact that women and men work in different sectors.” The pandemic has had an even greater impact on Black women, as they are more likely to be physical and emotional caretakers, and front line health and child care workers overseeing the well-being of not only their families but communities as well. The pandemic has been particularly challenging for single parents, and heads of single-income households, 30% of whom fall below the poverty line.

According to Colour of Poverty, over 50% of racialized households in Canada are living in housing that is unaffordable, inadequate (needing repair), and/or unsuitable, compared to 28% of non-racialized

households in similar housing crises. Inadequate housing can, has and will continue to contribute to higher rates of COVID-19 within racialized communities. In the neighbourhoods with the some of the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases in Toronto: Thistletown Beaumont Heights, Mount Olive-Silverstone-Jamestown, and Humbermede, the percentage of residents living in inappropriate housing in 2016 (as described above) in these neighbourhoods was 54.7%, 78.6%, and 68.4%. The percentage of the neighbourhoods’ populations identified as visible minorities was 64.3%, 86.7%, and 77.1%, respectively. Simply put, access to safe, appropriate, affordable housing is both a racial equity issue and public health issue.

Last summer, the CBC broke the story that, despite only making up 9% of Toronto’s overall population, Black residents accounted for 21% of the city’s reported COVID-19 infections. Since then, new research from University of Toronto PhD student Shen Lin has further revealed that foreign-born Black Canadians are nearly twice as likely than white Canadians to have multiple medical conditions that

put them at higher risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19. The pandemic is allowing us to experience the social determinants of health in real time, to witness, with startling clarity, how intersecting identities intensify the disadvantages faced by Black Canadians, particularly Black women. Investments and interventions must be holistic in addressing the effects of multiple interactive factors, to appropriately address the challenges faced by Black Canadians; in particular, women.

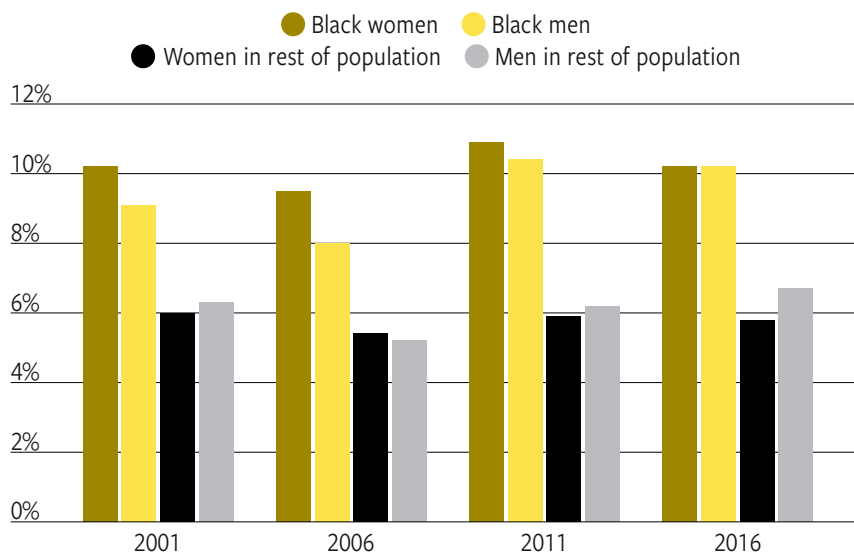
Building a sustainable Black recovery

COVID-19 has multiplied the penalty on Black Canadians and brought to the public’s attention the devastating impact of this crisis on marginalized communities, including Black Canadians. Black Canadians, pre-pandemic, were already in a leaking boat that has essentially been torpedoed by COVID-19. The Black businesses on board this boat were already frail and, after a year of closures, are on life support, with no guarantee of a recovery.

Building an equitable recovery for Black communities requires addressing inequality and barriers in both the public and private sectors.

The *Employment Equity Act* came into force in October 1996, yet the underrepresentation of Black Canadians in the federal public services management and on Agencies, Boards and Commissions (ABCs) should make us hang our heads in shame. At the end of 2020, a group of federal public service workers who identify as Black, Caribbean or of African descent launched a class action lawsuit against the federal government of Canada “for the wrongful failure to promote Black employees in the public service, and for unjustly subjecting class members to the systemic, unlawful practice of Black employee exclusion.” Given the under-representation of Black Canadians in places where appointments are made, it seems a logical

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES, AGES 25–59
Canada, 2001–16



SOURCES: STATISTICS CANADA, CENSUSES OF POPULATION 2001, 2006 AND 2016; 2011 NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY.
[HTTPS://WWW150.STATCAN.GC.CA/N1/PUB/89-657-X/89-657-X2020002-ENG.HTM](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2020002-eng.htm)

outcome of that structure is that Black Canadians are under-represented in ABCs.

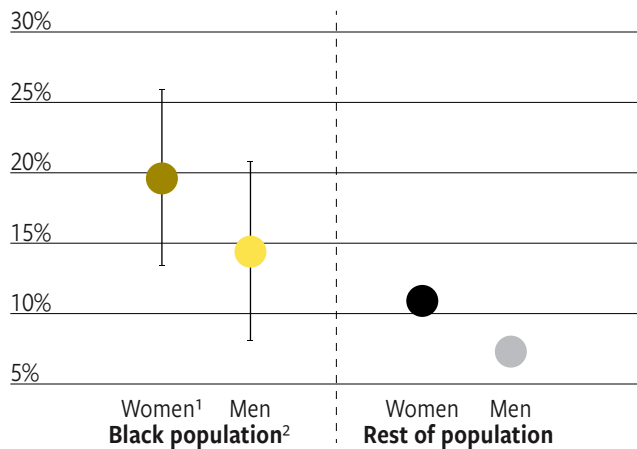
The 2018 Innovation Science and Economic Development Canada report *SME Profile: Canadian start-ups—A perspective based upon the 2014 survey on financing and growth of small and medium enterprises*, states that “both immigrant and visible-minority owners were more likely to start firms than non-immigrant and non-visible-minority owners and startup owners, were better educated than non-startup owners.” But once these businesses are started, they struggle to find support from the government and banks. As the recent lockdowns in Ontario have shown, struggling small businesses were left to shutter indefinitely while big box businesses struck a deal to stay open. Small businesses are the backbone of Black communities, and investments focused specifically on helping these businesses recover from the pandemic will be vital to their survival.

COVID-19 has severely impacted the lives of Black Canadians. We face the very real possibility that many of our small businesses in our communities will disappear if they do not receive targeted help. I propose the following recommendations for addressing these barriers and creating a more equitable recovery for all Canadians, including Black Canadians:

1. Mandate that the federal government departments set targets for diversity in its management, agencies, boards, commissions, and procurements/supply chain.
2. Mandate entities receiving federal contracts and grants have a number of Black members on their boards and in management and include Black-owned businesses in their supply chain.
3. Collaborate with Black stakeholders and other under-represented groups in the implementation of Bill C-25.
4. Amend the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and *Canada Labour Code* to include racism as a form of workplace injury, workplace harassment and violence prevention.
5. Increase the number of child care subsidies and extend the hours to provide 24x7 child care to address work hours of Black and other marginalized women, many who work outside standard hours.
6. Fund the proposed National Black Women Entrepreneurship Hub.
7. Increase affordable housing and subsidies to support for Black women.
8. Target Black women in the federal government gender strategy and Black women-owned business in social finance funding.

EXPERIENCE OF UNFAIR TREATMENT OR DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

Working population, ages 15+, Canada, 2016



LINES SHOW 95% LOWER AND UPPER CONFIDENCE INTERVALS. NOTES: 1. SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT FROM THE REST OF THE POPULATION (P < 0.05); 2. USE WITH CAUTION. SOURCE: STATISTICS CANADA, GENERAL SOCIAL SURVEY (CANADIANS AT WORK AND HOME), 2016. [HTTPS://WWW150.STATCAN.GC.CA/N1/PUB/89-657-X/89-657-X2020002-ENG.HTM](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-657-x/89-657-x2020002-eng.htm)

9. Undertake a comprehensive review to change policies and laws that discriminate against Black and racialized Canadians.

10. Mandate that Statistics Canada link the census data to other data sets to understand the impact of race and share the data with the public while respecting privacy laws and regulations.

The path forward

Racism in Canada is insidious, subtle and systemic. But, much like the virus that we have spent the last year fighting, just because something is difficult to comprehend does not make it unworthy of the fight. In this United Nations International Decade of People of African Descent (UNDPAD), to which Canada is a signatory, we should honour this commitment.

Current policy interventions aimed at supporting Black Canadians are inadequate. There is a need to build holistic programming to create supportive community and business environments. It’s time to undertake a comprehensive policy and legal review with a view to identifying and ending provisions that entail direct or indirect discrimination, adopt and strengthen comprehensive policies in collaboration with Black Canadians. COVID-19 has underscored how gender equality and economic growth must go hand-in-hand to ensure a just recovery. Let’s expand on that with some much needed intersectionality of race, abilities, and beyond to ensure that when Canada reopens, it’s a country that works for everyone who calls Canada home. **M**

1. While the *Monitor* and the author use the descriptors Black and racialized, Statistics Canada and the dataset referenced use the term visible minority with Blacks being a subset of the visible minority population within the dataset.