

Briefing Note: POVERTY AND HOMELESSNESS IN CANADA

Produced by: Canada Without Poverty & The Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation

I. OVERVIEW

1. While Canada is one of the wealthiest countries in the world Canada is experiencing consistently **increasing inequality between rich and poor populations**. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) noted that inequality is growing in Canada more rapidly than in other countries.
2. **Between 3.2 and 4.4 million people in Canada were living in poverty, including over half a million children under the age of 17. According to UNICEF, Canada now ranks 24th out of 35 countries in terms of child poverty. A shocking 1 in 4 Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal, Métis, Inuit), are living in poverty. Close to 15% of people with disabilities are living in poverty, 59% of whom are women.**
3. **Female lone-parent families are significantly poorer than all other household types in Canada. 21% of all single mothers are low income compared to just 5.5% of married couples.** Women are also more likely to be poor¹, and generally earn less than men. This earning gap actually increased between 2007 and 2008.
4. **Racialized communities face high levels of poverty.** The 2006 census (the most recent data available) showed that the overall poverty rate for non-racialized persons in Canada was 11% **but for racialized persons it was 22%. The majority of racialized persons (66%) living in poverty are immigrants.**
5. **Welfare incomes continue to fall well below any measure of poverty used in Canada.** For example, in **Vancouver, British Columbia** a single mother with two children receives \$1036/mos. Meanwhile, the current average rent for a two bedroom apartment in Canada's most expensive city is: \$1219/mos. Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-Off After-Tax (LICO-AT) measure indicates that social assistance rates would have to be 48% higher just to meet that poverty measure.
6. **In 2011, the youth unemployment rate (for those aged 15 – 24) was a whopping 14% – double the national average.**
7. **Housing and Homelessness:** The United Nations has described housing and homelessness in Canada as a “national emergency”. **An estimated 250,000 people are homeless, with another 1.5 million living in inadequate housing, and/or facing a serious financial burden which threatens their housing security.**
8. **Food Security:** Close to 900,000 people in Canada have no choice but to use foodbanks each month in order to make ends meet. This is a 26% increase since 2008 and the second highest usage rate in the history of food bank usage in Canada. Over 50% of the individuals using foodbanks are in receipt of social assistance (an obvious indicator that social assistance rates are simply too low)
9. **In Nunavut, an Inuit Territory in the North of Canada, 68.6% of adults are food insecure, six times higher than the national average.** Olivier De Schutter, the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, on his first trip to Canada in May 2012, observed that there is a widening inequality gap that is affecting food security across the country. Not surprisingly this gap parallels the ever-growing discrepancy between Canada's international commitments and current domestic social policy.

¹ Ibid p.20.

II. Canada's commitments to UP1

10. Canada committed to “continue to address socio-economic disparities and inequalities that persist across the country”, stating that it will continue “to explore ways to enhance efforts to address poverty and housing issues, in collaboration with provinces and territories”.
11. **Canada agreed to “[c]onsider taking on board the recommendation of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing**, and committed itself to intensifying the efforts already undertaken to better ensure the right to adequate housing, especially for vulnerable groups and low income families.

III. What has the GOC done since UPR1 to address poverty and homelessness in Canada?

12. We have seen no legislative or policy developments to indicate that the government is interested in addressing poverty or homelessness. They have not acted on any of the recommendations found in the above two mentioned reports. **In fact, the GOC has, since the last UPR, undertaken a number of retrogressive measures including:**
13. **The defunding and closing down of the National Council of Welfare (NCW) in the June 2012 budget. The loss of important information gathering will leave a noticeable gap in the current knowledge regarding the depth and breadth of poverty in Canada.**
14. **Refusal to support proposed framework legislation to address poverty and homelessness in Canada in keeping with our international human rights obligations.** Bill C-400, *An Act to Ensure Secure, Adequate, Accessible and Affordable Housing for Canadians*, and Bill C-233, *An Act to Eliminate Poverty in Canada*, have been reintroduced into this parliamentary session. Despite huge support across the country including all opposition parties for a national housing strategy, the Government recently voted down Bill C-400.
15. **Changes to Employment Insurance (EI) as part of the June 2012 budget will force individuals loosely deemed as repeat offenders to accept paid work at 30% less of their current income that is also farther from home.**
16. The Government of Canada has demonstrated active **hostility toward the UN human rights system, in particular by insulting the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food** whilst he was on mission to Canada in 2012, **and impugning the Committee on the Rights of the Child because the Syrian racial heritage of one of its experts.** Canada's behavior and attitude toward the UN has created a “chill”, no doubt causing the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty to postpone her mission to Canada until she can be guaranteed respectful engagement by Canada.