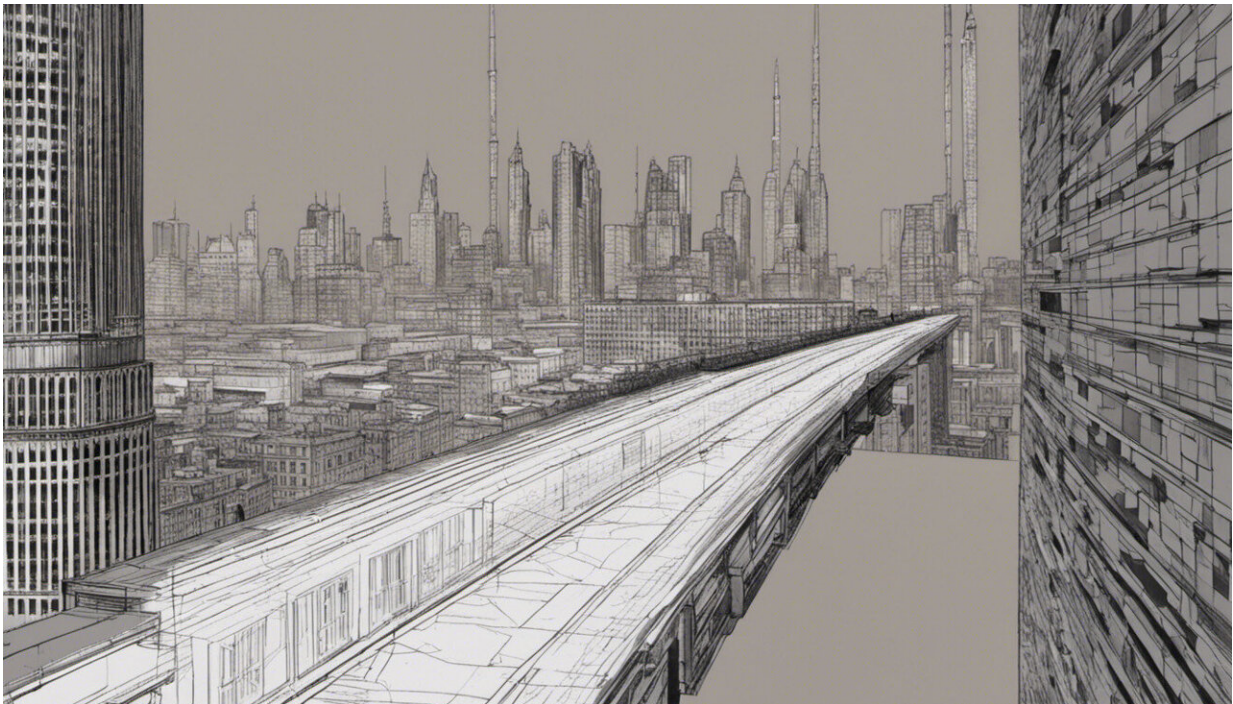


Women are struggling to regain lost ground in the workforce after COVID-19

November 21 2022, by Claudine Mangen



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated social and economic inequalities [between men and women](#) in Canada.

At the start of the [pandemic](#), many women stopped looking for work. Data from Statistics Canada shows that by April 2020, [55 percent of](#)

[women remained in the workforce](#), down from 61 percent in January 2020. As an RBC report pointed out, women's workforce participation [hadn't been that low since the 1980s](#).

In 2020, the [Canadian Human Rights Commission warned](#) that the pandemic could "erase the gains that have been made towards gender equality in Canada." Over two and a half years after the start of the pandemic, the situation is still dire. Women have been slow to recover their lost ground in the workforce compared to men.

Growing gender inequality

To shed light on the recovery process, I use data from Statistics Canada to analyze the gender gap in workforce participation during the pandemic. This gender gap reflects the difference in workforce participation between women and men.

The [Statistics Canada data](#) shows that while many women entered the workforce during the pandemic, even more men joined. Women's participation rose to 62 percent in August 2022 from 61 percent in January 2020. Men's workforce participation increased by more, from 69 percent in January 2020 to 71 percent in August 2022.

This means that women are now trying to close a gender gap in workforce participation that is wider than before the pandemic. And this gender gap was large to begin with: in January 2020, 965,800 fewer women than men looked for work. By August, the gender gap surpassed the one million mark, as 1,168,000 fewer women than men looked for work.

Similarly, the gender gap in unemployment shifted substantially during the pandemic. By August 2022, 6.8 percent of women were unemployed, up from 5.3 in January 2020. In contrast, the [unemployment rate](#) for

men dropped to 5.3 percent in August 2022, down from 6.5 percent in January 2020.

This shows that the women face a very new gender gap in unemployment. This gender gap is not small either: In August 2022, 82,100 more women than men were unemployed. Before the pandemic, women were substantially less unemployed than men: 182,000 more women than men were employed in January 2020.

The data on these gender gaps support other findings that show how women face more hurdles in the workplace than men, and many of these hurdles have become steeper during the pandemic. Women [experienced severe job losses from COVID-19](#)—especially in [hospitality sectors](#)—[because of burnout](#) and [unpaid caregiving and domestic labor duties](#).

The burden of caregiving

When men and women do hold jobs, they don't do the same type of work.

In August 2022, fewer women than men worked [full-time](#), even though more women were working full-time [before the pandemic](#). For [part-time](#) work, the reverse is true: more women than men worked part-time in August 2022, even though less women were working part-time in January 2020.

Historically, women have [done more part-time work](#) because of unpaid caregiving, which they are expected to do. Canadian women [spend an average of 3.9 hours per day on housework](#), including [child care](#), compared to 2.4 hours per day for men. The early stages of the pandemic illustrated this [gender gap](#) in caregiving.

Full-time work has traditionally not accommodated caregiving. A

woman leader I interviewed for [research on gender inequalities in organizations](#) had a woman employee who considered quitting because handling full-time work and caregiving for her kids had become overwhelming.

Together, they reviewed the employee's work routine so that she could work from home on Fridays, which was a game changer for her. The employee avoided two hours of commute, which enabled her to pack carework into her full work day.

The pandemic has underlined the importance of flexibility, showing [how remote working removes many costs of in-person work](#), including lengthy commutes, and allows time for other activities. Many employees now are [ready to change jobs](#) unless they can work remotely.

Evolution on the care front

When asked why they took on part-time work, [the most common answer given by women aged 25 to 54 was caregiving](#). Caregiving as a reason for part-time work rose faster for men than women. In August 2022, 28 percent of women aged 25 to 54 worked part-time because they cared for children, up from 25 percent in January 2020.

In comparison, seven percent of men aged 25 to 54 worked part-time because of child care, up from four percent in January 2020. Women thus still remain substantially more involved in child care: As of August 2022, 248,300 women worked part-time because of child care, more than 10 times the 22,400 men.

Nevertheless, the increase in men becoming involved in [caregiving](#) bodes well for shifting rigid [gender](#) norms surrounding child care. Doing so [benefits women and men](#) by freeing [women](#) to do full-time paid work, while enabling men to also do care work for their children.

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