



**Submission to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against  
Women for the 65<sup>th</sup> Session**

**Submission Raising Issues Related to Articles 2, 3, 11, and 14**

Submitted by Canada Without Poverty

**3 October 2016**

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	Overview of Women and Poverty in Canada.....	2
III.	Rights-Based Canada Poverty Reduction Strategy .....	4
IV.	Economic Empowerment: the Right to Work.....	5
	a) The Wage Gap.....	5
	b) Minimum Wage, Non-Discrimination, and Equality .....	5
	c) Rights-Based National Childcare Framework.....	6
V.	Economic Empowerment: Social Security .....	7
	d) Restrictions of Access to Welfare Benefits for Refugees .....	7
	e) Inadequate Social Assistance Rates .....	7
VI.	Economic Empowerment: The Right to Food .....	8
VII.	Economic Empowerment: Housing and Homelessness.....	9

**I. INTRODUCTION**

Canada Without Poverty (CWP) submits this brief to the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the Committee) in preparation for the review of Canada under the International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee.

Founded in 1971 and operating as a leading national anti-poverty organization, CWP has represented low-income populations in Canada for over 40 years. Many of CWP’s members are living in poverty and our Board of Directors is comprised of people with direct, personal experience of poverty, both past and present. CWP has sought to provide meaningful and effective representation of people living in poverty. We promote a better understanding of the lived experience of poverty in Canada and work to address problems of stigmatization and discrimination against people living in poverty.

Under our former name, the National Anti-Poverty Organization, **CWP was the first NGO to undertake an oral presentation before a UN Treaty Body in 1993.** CWP continues to promote the implementation of human rights as the fundamental basis for the eradication of poverty and acts as a central resource point on poverty and human rights in Canada.

**Further to this written report, CWP will be present at the informal public meeting on 24 October 2016 at the 65<sup>th</sup> session of the Committee.**

## II. Overview of Women and Poverty in Canada

**Many of the underlying conditions of inequality as experienced by women are rooted in the failure of governments in Canada to implement women’s social and economic rights.**

1. In Canada, women experience significant levels of poverty, inadequate housing, homelessness, and hunger that are disproportionate to Canada’s relative economic wealth.
2. The Government of Canada’s past approach to these issues has been piecemeal and based on emergency responses to short-term manifestations of poverty. For example, instead of creating a rights-based food strategy to prevent food insecurity experienced by women – including single parent families led by women<sup>1</sup> – the government has relied on a patchwork of emergency services such as foodbanks which are principally supported through individual and institutional donors.<sup>2</sup>
3. In 2008, this Committee was gravely concerned with “the fact that poverty is widespread among women, in particular aboriginal women, minority women and single mothers”<sup>3</sup>. In 2016, women to continue to experience disparities in poverty, hunger, and homelessness – this is particularly true for women who experience intersectional disadvantage.
4. **Indigenous peoples** in Canada experience the highest levels of poverty: **A shocking 4 in 10 of Canada’s Indigenous children live in poverty.** 36% of **First Nations women** living off reserves experience poverty and **23% of Métis and Inuit women** (as measured in Canada’s provinces) live in poverty.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Foodbanks Canada, “Hunger Count 2015”, (2015), p. 5. Available here:

[https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/FoodBanks/MediaLibrary/HungerCount/HungerCount2015\\_singles.pdf](https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/FoodBanks/MediaLibrary/HungerCount/HungerCount2015_singles.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Foodbanks Canada, “Stimulating Canada’s Charitable Sector: A Tax Incentive Plan for Charitable Food Donations”, (2012), Available here: [https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/3940f0c5-9363-4512-9852-b5ecf9b5e5b5/Stim--Charitable-Food-Donations\\_Feb2012.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf](https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/3940f0c5-9363-4512-9852-b5ecf9b5e5b5/Stim--Charitable-Food-Donations_Feb2012.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> CEDAW, Concluding Observations, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Women’s Foundation, “Fact Sheet Women and Poverty in Canada”, Available here: <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-women-and-poverty>.

5. **Women with disabilities** continue to experience marginalization, violence, and discrimination in the workplace and a disproportionate level of poverty. **33% of women with disabilities live in poverty in Canada.**<sup>5</sup>
6. Poverty rates are higher for single senior women (14%) than for elderly couples (1%) as well as for single senior men (13%). **Elderly women make up 73% of all poor seniors in Canada who are living alone.**<sup>6</sup>
7. **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.**<sup>7</sup> 23% of children in female lone-parent families are living in poverty compared to only 6% of children living in two parent families.<sup>8</sup>
8. **The majority of racialized persons (66%) living in poverty are immigrants.** Almost two-thirds of the racialized immigrants living in poverty came to Canada in the previous ten years – among these individuals, 70% had been in Canada for 5 years or less. **Racialized and immigrant women both experience poverty at high rates, with 20% of immigrant women and 28% of visible minority women living in poverty.**<sup>9</sup>
9. The experience of socio-economic disadvantage disproportionately experienced by women is highlighted by the above statistics – and is the direct result of laws, policies, and programs which fail to recognize an adequate standard of living as a human right and which fail to take a gendered, human rights approach to addressing poverty, hunger, and homelessness.
10. Recent initiatives including commitment to the creation of a National Housing Strategy, increased funding to Status of Women Canada, the re-instatement of the long-form census and commitment to the creation of a Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy are all steps the federal government has taken that could be in keeping with their international human rights obligations under CEDAW. However, most of these initiatives do not incorporate a rights-based or gendered approach and there is resistance to do so. **There remains a disconnect between Canada’s recognition of economic and social rights and the development and implementation of domestic policies.**

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg, “Poor Women in Rich Countries: the Feminization of Poverty”, (2009), Available here: [https://books.google.ca/books?id=ky\\_iBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT164&lpg=PT164&dq=Elderly+women+make+up+73%25+of+all+poor+seniors+in+Canada+who+are+living+alone.&source=bl&ots=mP6BMH1k14&sig=-.Wc\\_2QYiurSItmleMtbokCQhM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi\\_sL-Q-qnKAhUMFj4KHcb5Dq4Q6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.ca/books?id=ky_iBwAAQBAJ&pg=PT164&lpg=PT164&dq=Elderly+women+make+up+73%25+of+all+poor+seniors+in+Canada+who+are+living+alone.&source=bl&ots=mP6BMH1k14&sig=-.Wc_2QYiurSItmleMtbokCQhM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwi_sL-Q-qnKAhUMFj4KHcb5Dq4Q6AEIjAB#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>7</sup> Williams, Cara, “Women in Canada, A Gender-based Statistical Report. Economic Well-being”, (2010), Statistics Canada p.9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid* p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Canadian Women’s Foundation, “Fact Sheet Women and Poverty in Canada”, Available here: <http://www.canadianwomen.org/facts-about-women-and-poverty>.

11. The Government of Canada is not honouring its obligation to take reasonable steps to protect the economic equality of women, particularly the rights contained in Articles 2, 3, 11, and 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA UNDERTAKE A COMPREHENSIVE HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING AND EDUCATION PROGRAM WITH ALL THOSE EXERCISING GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY WITH RESPECT TO THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL POLICY IN CANADA TO ENSURE THEY ARE WELL APPRISED OF CANADA'S INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS AND THE CONNECTION BETWEEN POLICY MAKING AND PROGRAM DELIVERY AND THOSE OBLIGATIONS.**

**III. Rights-Based Canada Poverty Reduction Strategy**

12. With the disproportionate number of women living in poverty in Canada, it is imperative that Canada create and implement a rights-based Canadian poverty reduction strategy. We are encouraged by a recent “mandate letter”, publically released by the Prime Minister instructing the Minister of Children, Families and Social Development to create a national anti-poverty strategy.
13. **We are concerned, however, that this strategy may not be based in Canada's human rights obligations and commitments.**
14. The Minister's mandate letter suggests that the national poverty strategy be fashioned in coordination with provincial/territorial poverty plans. As it stands, however, none of these plans are rights-based, and none (save for Québec) include any reference to international human rights principles or standards. Additionally, none of these strategies take a gendered approach to understand economic inequality as a cause of poverty. Considerable leadership by the federal government is required in this regard.
15. None of the existing poverty strategies at the provincial or territorial level comply with the full complement of human rights or gendered criteria. Without reference to human rights, many of these strategies have remained ineffective documents and have failed to create substantive change.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY URGENTLY RESPOND TO DISPROPORTIONATE LEVELS OF POVERTY EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN BY DEVELOPING A HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER-BASED NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PROVINCES, TERRITORIES, AND INUIT LAND CLAIM ORGANIZATIONS, FIRST NATIONS, AND MÉTIS GOVERNMENTS, AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS.**

#### IV. Economic Empowerment: the Right to Work

##### a) The Wage Gap

16. The gender wage gap in Canada for full-time work is currently increasing rather than reducing. In 2009, women earned 78% of what men earned, in 2010 it was 77.6%, and in 2011 it was 76.7%.<sup>10</sup>
17. The wage gap is particularly acute for some groups of women. Indigenous women earn 10% less than Indigenous men (working full-time) and 26% less than non-Indigenous men.<sup>11</sup> Racialized women earn 21% less than racialized men and 32% less than non-racialized men. Immigrant women earn 25% less than immigrant men and 28% less than non-immigrant men.<sup>12</sup> The wage gap actually gets bigger for Indigenous, racialized, and immigrant women with university degrees. Indigenous women with a university degree earn 24% less than Indigenous men with a university degree and 33% less than non-Indigenous men with a university degree.<sup>13</sup>

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY TAKE STEPS TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE, PROACTIVE PAY EQUITY LEGISLATION IS IN PLACE WITHIN THEIR JURISDICTION THAT WILL ADDRESS AND CORRECT THE LOWER PAY ASSIGNED TO WOMEN'S WORK.**

##### b) Minimum Wage, Non-Discrimination, and Equality

18. Laws and policies which regulate minimum wage requirements fail to take a gendered and human rights approach to address the disproportionate number of women in positions that pay only minimum wage. **In 2009, women represented over 60% of minimum-wage workers, although they made up one-half of employees.**<sup>14</sup> Though there has been an upward trend recently in Alberta, for example, minimum wages across the country continue to fall well below acceptable standards to ensure that women have access to decent living conditions.
19. It is no longer the case in Canada that employment leads to economic security and social well-being for women. In fact, most jobs being created in Canada are low-paying, part-time, temporary or contract and without long-term benefits. **1 in 4 workers in Ontario earns below the poverty line. This number is higher for women overall (31%) and for racialized women (38%).**<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Statistics Canada, "CAN-SIM Table 282-0072: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), wages of employees by type of work, North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), sex and age group, annual." Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Kate McInturff, "All your wage gap questions answered", *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, (February 2016). Available here: <http://behindthenumbers.ca/2015/02/26/all-your-wage-gap-questions-answered/>.

<sup>12</sup> *2011 National Household Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>13</sup> *2011 National Household Survey*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. See also: McInturff, Kate and Paul Tulloch, "Narrowing the Gap: The Difference the Public Sector Makes", *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, (2014), Available here: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/narrowing-gap>.

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada, "Minimum Wage", Available here: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/topics-sujets/minimumwage-salaireminimum/minimumwage-salaireminimum-2009-eng.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Colour of Poverty, "Understanding the Racialization of Poverty in Ontario", (2007), Available here: <http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/material/PovertyFactSheets-aug07.pdf>.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY TAKE STEPS TO SET NATIONAL WAGE STANDARDS AND ENCOURAGE SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS (PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES) TO ENSURE MINIMUM WAGES ARE CONSISTENT WITH INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS SO THAT THEY ARE SET AT ADEQUATE RATES TO ENSURE THE ENJOYMENT OF AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING AND EQUALITY FOR WOMEN.**

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY REVIEW AND ESTABLISH JOB CREATION PROGRAMS TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO STABLE, FULL-TIME JOBS WITH SOCIAL BENEFITS AND THAT PAY A LIVING WAGE.**

**c) Rights-Based National Childcare Framework**

20. There is an interconnection between poverty, the right to work for women – particularly single mothers – and childcare. With the exception of Québec’s \$7 per day childcare program, the rest of the country lags behind in ensuring accessible and affordable childcare spaces. **Affordable childcare in Québec, access to better-paid parental leave, and leave for both parents has resulted in greater participation in the paid work force by women in that province.**<sup>16</sup>
21. In 2008, the Committee noted the connection between poverty and childcare and recommended that Canada **“step up its efforts to provide a sufficient number of affordable childcare spaces and affordable and adequate housing options, including in aboriginal communities, with priority being given to low-income women, who are particularly disadvantaged in those areas.”**<sup>17</sup>
22. Currently, in Canada, there are only enough regulated childcare spaces for just over 20% of young children, despite the fact that more than 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid labour force.<sup>18</sup> Canada’s public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world’s rich countries at only 0.25%<sup>19</sup> of GDP – about one-third the OECD average (0.7%).<sup>20</sup>
23. In November 2015, the Government of Canada committed to the creation of a **“National Early Learning and Childcare Framework as a first step towards delivering affordable, high-quality, flexible and fully inclusive child care.”**<sup>21</sup> **There has been no**

---

<sup>16</sup> Kate McInturff With Courtney Lockhart, “The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015”, (2015), Available here: [https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2015/07/Best\\_and\\_Worst\\_Places\\_to\\_Be\\_a\\_Woman2015.pdf](https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2015/07/Best_and_Worst_Places_to_Be_a_Woman2015.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> CEDAW Concluding Observations, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> Martha Friendly et al. “Early childhood education and care in Canada 2012”, (2012), Available here: [http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/CRRU\\_ECEC\\_2012\\_revised\\_dec2013.pdf](http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/CRRU_ECEC_2012_revised_dec2013.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, “The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education and care in economically advanced countries”, Available here: [http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8\\_eng.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/rc8_eng.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> John Bennett “Benchmarks for Early Childhood Services in OECD Countries”, Available here: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ucf/inwopa/inwopa08-51.html>.

<sup>21</sup> Minister of Families, “Children and Social Development Mandate Letter”, (2016), Available here: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-families-children-and-social-development-mandate-letter>.

**mention of whether the Childcare Framework will be based in Canada's international human rights obligations.** Additionally, it is unclear whether childcare will be universally accessible to all women in Canada, or whether the approach will be piecemeal and only address the needs of particular, targeted groups.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY DEVELOP – IN COLLABORATION WITH THE PROVINCES, TERRITORIES, AND INUIT LAND CLAIM ORGANIZATIONS, FIRST NATIONS AND MÉTIS GOVERNMENTS – A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN BASED IN HUMAN RIGHTS, FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A HIGH-QUALITY, UNIVERSAL, PUBLICLY-FUNDED AND MANAGED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AGED 0 TO 5 YEARS AND FOR SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN UP TO AGE 12.**

**V. Economic Empowerment: Social Security**

**d) Restrictions of Access to Welfare Benefits for Refugees**

24. Canada recently removed protections for vulnerable persons to access social assistance benefits. In December 2014, the national government passed Bill C-43, provisions 172 and 173 of which remove a key national standard, which protected refugees from a requirement that they be residents for a period of time before applying for social assistance. **The Bill was recognized as having serious and discriminatory implications for refugee women, particularly those fleeing violence and arriving in Canada without financial resources.**<sup>22</sup> By removing this protection for refugees to access social assistance, the national government acted retrogressively in terms of its responsibilities to ensure women, particularly vulnerable women, have equal access to benefits.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY REINSTATE THE NATIONAL STANDARD PROTECTING REFUGEES FROM A MINIMUM RESIDENCY REQUIREMENT TO ENSURE ALL REFUGEE WOMEN HAVE ACCESS TO SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS, PRIOR TO DETERMINATION OF THEIR STATUS.**

**e) Inadequate Social Assistance Rates**

25. **Welfare incomes continue to fall well below any measure of poverty used in Canada.** Most welfare recipients are worse off than recipients in previous decades because welfare incomes have not been adjusted for inflation. In many cases, rates are 20% lower than in the past.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Schlifer Clinic, "Bill C-43 (The Conservative Budget Bill Which Includes Provisions To Deny Social Assistance To Refugee Claimants) Is Another Erosion Of Supports For Women Facing Violence", (2014), Available here: <http://schliferclinic.com/bill-c-43-the-conservative-budget-bill-which-includes-provisions-to-deny-social-assistance-to-refugee-claimants-is-another-erosion-of-supports-for-women-facing-violence/>.

<sup>23</sup> National Council of Welfare, "Welfare Incomes 2009", Vol. 129, Winter 2010, p. viii.

26. Social assistance rates across the country are so woefully inadequate for single-parent families that **only in Newfoundland and Labrador can these families receive assistance that is sufficient to bring them above the poverty line. All other social assistance rates for lone-parent mothers ensure a life of abject poverty.**<sup>24</sup>
27. In 2008, this Committee recognized the significant gap between the cost of living and social assistance rates for women. It was recommended that Canada conduct a study into the economic empowerment of women with a “special focus on low-income women, taking into account the amount of social assistance they receive from the State compared with the actual cost of living, including housing and childcare”<sup>25</sup>. To our knowledge no such study was conducted.
28. For single women living in poverty, rates remain woefully inadequate. In some cases, the gap between welfare rates and the cost of living is so significant that women are forced into situations where children may be apprehended. For example, in **Vancouver, British Columbia** a single mother with two children receives \$1036 per month<sup>26</sup>, which includes \$660 for housing and \$376 for basic needs.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the current average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Canada’s most expensive city is \$1345 per month,<sup>28</sup> almost twice as much as what is provided by social assistance for housing. For many women, the gap between rental rates and income supports can lead to living rough or in an emergency shelter, leading to her children being seized from her care.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY IMMEDIATELY INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF TRANSFER PAYMENTS TO PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES; EARMARK SUFFICIENT FUNDS SPECIFICALLY FOR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE; AND DESIGNATE THAT TRANSFER PAYMENTS BE CONDITIONAL ON PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES SETTING THEIR SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES AT LEVELS THAT RECOGNIZE HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING AND PREVENT DISCRIMINATORY EFFECTS OF INADEQUATE INCOMES FOR WOMEN.**

## **VI. Economic Empowerment: The Right to Food**

29. As mentioned above, the State Party’s current approach to food insecurity is based on short-term, emergency solutions such as the establishment of food banks, which often denies the dignity of the user. **Over 850,000 people across Canada have no choice but to use food banks each month in order to make ends meet. More than**

<sup>24</sup> Tweddle, A., Battle, K., & Torjman, S., “Canada Social Report Welfare in Canada, 2012”, (2013, December), p. 53., Available here: <http://www.caedoninst.org/Publications/PDF/1031ENG.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> CEDAW, Concluding Observations, 2008.

<sup>26</sup> All dollar figures are Canadian currency. Government of British Columbia Ministry of Social Development, “Increases to Income Assistance Rates Table”, (2008), Available here: [http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2007/increase\\_table.htm](http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/factsheets/2007/increase_table.htm).

<sup>27</sup> Government of British Columbia Ministry of Social Development, “BC Employment and Assistance Rate Tables”, Available here: <http://www.hsd.gov.bc.ca/mhr/ia.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, “Rental Market Report, British Columbia Highlights”, Housing Market Information, Spring 2015, p.4., Available here: [http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487\\_2015\\_B01.pdf](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/odpub/esub/64487/64487_2015_B01.pdf).



**one-third of those helped by a food bank are children.**<sup>29</sup> In 2014, 48.1% of food bank users across Canada were women.<sup>30</sup> In Northern Canada, food insecurity is very prevalent for women and children. For example, a shocking 7 in 10 Inuit preschoolers in Nunavut live in food insecure households.<sup>31</sup>

30. **Women and young persons are more likely to live in households with food insecurity** and households with children experience the highest rates of food insecurity.<sup>32</sup> Canada has failed to take measures to ensure that women have continuous access to nutritious and culturally appropriate food, as required under international human rights law.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY TAKE IMMEDIATE STEPS TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO FOOD WHO VISITED CANADA ON AN OFFICIAL MISSION IN MAY 2012, WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO WOMEN'S DISPROPORTIONATE EXPERIENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY – PARTICULARLY FOR WOMEN IN NORTHERN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES.**

## **VII. Economic Empowerment: Housing and Homelessness**

31. The United Nations has described housing and **homelessness** in Canada as a “**national emergency**.”<sup>33</sup> Though this was some time ago, the housing and homelessness conditions have not improved since then.
32. UN treaty bodies, as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing have strongly recommended that Canada implement a national housing and homelessness strategy with clear goals and timelines, independent accountability, and complaints mechanisms. In 2008, the Committee noted that it “regre[tte]d the absence of a national housing strategy and [were concerned] at the current severe housing shortage, in particular in aboriginal communities, and at the high costs of rent and the impact thereof on women”<sup>34</sup>.
33. According to Government of Canada measurements, 150,000 people are homeless each year, a figure which only covers those using emergency shelters. Other estimates put the number of homeless individuals at over **235,000 people**, which

---

<sup>29</sup> Food Banks Canada, “Hunger Count 2015” (2015), Available here: <https://www.foodbanksCanada.ca/hungercount2015>.

<sup>30</sup> Food Banks Canada, “Hunger Count Canada 2014” (2014), Available here: [https://www.foodbanksCanada.ca/getmedia/d8b36130-cc83-46ba-8183-d33d484c7591/HungerCount2014\\_revised.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf](https://www.foodbanksCanada.ca/getmedia/d8b36130-cc83-46ba-8183-d33d484c7591/HungerCount2014_revised.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Statistics Canada, “Household food insecurity, 2011-2012”, Available here: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-625-x/2013001/article/11889-eng.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Review of Canada 1996, 2008 and UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Mission Report on Canada, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> CEDAW Concluding Observations, 2008.

includes those in shelters and in temporary housing (e.g.: motels).<sup>35</sup> Neither figure includes the hidden homeless: thousands of individuals (particularly women and youth) and families doubled up with friends, family, or neighbours.

34. Of course, many homeless women do not resort to shelters for a number of reasons, including a lack of available spaces. On any given day, more than 4,000 women and over 2,000 children will reside in a domestic violence shelter.<sup>36</sup> More than 500 women and children are turned away from shelters on a typical day, with overcrowding being the primary reason, forcing them back into situations of violence.<sup>37</sup>
35. In November 2015, the Government of Canada outlined a number of initiatives regarding housing. For example, among other commitments, the Prime Minister has indicated that Canada will “provid[e] communities the money they need for Housing First initiatives that help homeless Canadians find stable housing.”<sup>38</sup>
36. The Housing First approach demonstrates a lack of consideration in public policy of homelessness as experienced by women, in particular those women escaping domestic violence. For example, case studies have demonstrated that if a Housing First program (which targets long-term, chronically homeless individuals) does not use a human rights or gendered approach, those experiencing hidden homelessness – predominantly women – are left out of the program.<sup>39</sup>
37. We are pleased that the Government has begun to create a National Housing Strategy. However, there has been no mention of whether the Strategy will take a rights-based or gendered approach to housing and homelessness. Without consideration of Canada’s human rights obligations in a National Housing Strategy, we are deeply concerned that marginalized women will face discrimination and will be left out of the housing policies, laws, and programs.

**WE RECOMMEND THAT THE STATE PARTY ENSURE THAT CANADA’S NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN BY USING A RIGHTS AND GENDER-BASED APPROACH AND ENSURING HUMAN RIGHTS OUTCOMES.**

---

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Gaetz, Tanya Gulliver & Tim Richter, “The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014”, Available here: <http://www.homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/SOHC2014.pdf>.

<sup>36</sup> Canadian Network of Women’s Shelters and Transition Houses, “Shelter Voices”, (2014).

<sup>37</sup> Hutchins, Hope and Sara Beattie, “Shelters for Abused Women 2014”, (2015), Ottawa: Statistics Canada.

<sup>38</sup> Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Mandate Letter, (2016), Available here: <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/minister-families-children-and-social-development-mandate-letter>

<sup>39</sup> Heffernan, T., Todorow, M., & Luu, H., “Why Housing First won’t end homelessness”, (2015, July 7), Available here: <http://rabble.ca/blogs/bloggers/views-expressed/2015/07/why-housing-first-wont-end-homelessness>