



COVID-19 and Inclusivity – CRIW Virtual Roundtable

Backgrounder and Breakout Topics

May 22, 2020 | 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. Via Zoom

Collectively, we have been navigating unprecedented times as Canada (like many other countries) has closed all but essential workplaces or shifted work to home to achieve the ‘physical distancing’ needed to ‘flatten the curve’ of the transmission of COVID-19. These measures have challenged work structures and brought to the fore new challenges towards an inclusive society.

Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan targets individuals, businesses and sectors for support. For individuals this has included temporary salary top-up for low-income essential workers, an increase to the Canada Child Benefit, a special Goods and Services Tax credit payment, extra time to file income tax returns, a mortgage payment deferral program, and the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) for people facing loss of income. Special programs have been introduced to address target populations considered particularly vulnerable, including Indigenous peoples, people experiencing homelessness, women and children fleeing violence, seniors, youth, post-secondary students and recent graduates.¹ For businesses, the Canadian government has introduced the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, programs to support businesses in maintaining or extending access to credit, a program for commercial rent assistance, and enhanced incentives for creating job and training opportunities for youth.² Regarding sectors hardest hit by the effects of the pandemic, the Canadian government has introduced sector-specific support for the agriculture, agri-food, aquaculture and fisheries sector, for cultural, heritage and sports organizations, for the air transportation, tourism, energy, and non-profit and charitable sectors.³

The Province of Ontario has introduced a range of initiatives to support Ontarians through the pandemic as well. These initiatives include various forms of financial support, a prohibition on eviction orders from rental accommodations, supports for children and youth, emergency shelters, extensions on validations and deadlines, mental health and addictions supports, and support for seniors and people with disabilities.⁴ The Province’s support for business has included financial relief related to provincial taxes, payment deferrals for education property tax and Workplace Safety and Insurance Board payments, reduced electricity rates, the creation of a new infectious disease emergency leave that protects the jobs of workers, and a number of sector-specific resources and best practices.⁵ In addition, the province introduced learn at home supports for Ontario students and their parents.⁶

While the rapid development and deployment of services and programs to support individuals and businesses has been nothing short of remarkable, there have been challenges and missteps along the

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

³ <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html>

⁴ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-support-people>

⁵ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-support-businesses>

⁶ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-support-students-and-parents>

way. For example, pregnant women have experienced difficulties in accessing the CERB benefit⁷, self-employed people who did not have payroll expenses (frequently women) were ineligible for wage subsidy programs and were initially ineligible for the CERB benefit,⁸ expanded support for those experiencing homelessness or fleeing gender-based violence was not introduced until several weeks into the pandemic response,⁹ disabled individuals have had difficulty having their personal support needs met,¹⁰ Indigenous communities have been identified as particularly vulnerable to the effects of COVID-19,¹¹ and new Canadians – many of whom live in urban apartments, have found the stay at home restrictions difficult to understand and follow.¹²

Many of these oversights have arisen from an incomplete understanding on the part of decision-makers of the diversity of Canadian workers, Canadian businesses and their needs. To contribute to effective policy making efforts going forward, **this virtual forum addresses two key questions:**

1. **What are your thoughts about how various policy initiatives may differentially affect diverse workers?** (A brief discussion to set the stage)
2. **What can be done to ensure the needs of diverse workers are considered when policy is being formulated?** (An extended discussion in two parts – targeted breakout discussions followed by reporting in from each of the breakout groups). Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the following breakout discussions, based on CRIW areas of focus:
 - **COVID-19 and gender at work** (including topics such as women in caregiving jobs (nurses, personal support workers, childcare providers, etc.), parents working from home while also caring for and teaching children, single parents and work, LGBTQ+ workers, etc.)
 - **COVID-19 and immigrant participation at work** (including topics such as communicating effectively with recent immigrants, integrating internationally trained immigrants into key roles during a pandemic, self-employed immigrants, immigrants working part-time and/or in essential service roles (transportation, retail, congregant care facilities, etc.)
 - **COVID-19 and other underrepresented groups at work** (including Indigenous self-employment, Indigenous organizations and communities as workplaces, challenges for workers with disabilities, workers over age 60, youth workers, workers in remote locations, workers lacking access to reliable internet services, and others)

The focus in each breakout discussion is on proposing specific, practical, policy-oriented recommendations for how various levels of government (federal, provincial, municipal/community), not for profit and for profit organizations can develop policies and programs to support all workers.

Feel free to dream big and come prepared to share your ideas for what truly inclusive work may look like, now and in the future.

⁷ <https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/as-millions-of-workers-apply-for-help-mothers-to-be-say-they-can-t-get-cerb-1.4900753>

⁸ https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/cerb-covid-19-canada_ca_5e8e68aac5b6b371812b888b

⁹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/04/canada-announces-support-to-those-experiencing-homelessness-and-women-fleeing-gender-based-violence-during-the-coronavirus-disease-covid-19-pandemic.html>

¹⁰ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/people-disabilities-personal-support-workers-covid19-1.5554052>

¹¹ <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/covid-19-in-canada-indigenous-communities/>

¹² <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/pandemic-covid-19-ottawa-apartment-no-greenspace-1.5530502>