

Addressing gender-based discrimination in the *Employment Insurance Act*

Published March 2026

Barriers to Employment Insurance (EI) are gendered

To qualify for EI, a person must accumulate 420 – 700 hours of insurable work, typically in the preceding 52 weeks. EI provides a 55% income replacement benefit, capped at \$729/week.

People in part-time or irregular employment face barriers to accessing EI because they accumulate fewer hours worked. For those who do qualify, EI's income replacement rate is often not sufficient — especially if their employment was low-waged.

Because women are overrepresented in part-time¹ and low waged work,² this amounts to gender-based discrimination.

In addition, people who receive parental and maternity benefits who then lose their jobs during or soon after parental leave are denied EI regular benefits — a denial that almost exclusively impacts women.³

Key Stats: women, care work, and employment in Canada

- In 2019, the economic value of unpaid household work in Canada was between \$516.9 billion and \$860.2 billion — which amounts to 25.2% - 37.2% of Canada's GDP that same year.⁸
- Women spend more time on household and family care work than men do.⁹
- Women are nearly twice as likely to be working part-time¹⁰ than men and are more likely to earn below the low pay threshold.¹¹
- Indigenous, racialized, disabled, and migrant women experience worse labour market outcomes than their peers, including lower employment and earnings.¹²
- Following job separation, men are more likely to receive regular Employment Insurance (EI) benefits than women.¹³

Women and unpaid care work

While lack of access to full-time employment contributes to women's overrepresentation in part-time work, women are five times more likely than men to cite childcare, personal, or family responsibilities as their primary reason for working part-time⁴ — with lack of affordable child care being a related barrier.⁵

In 2025, women accounted for 74% of workers who left their jobs for “personal or family reasons”,⁶ which disqualifies them from receiving any EI regular benefits.⁷

Women should not be penalized for taking on the lion's share of family care work. LEAF urges the federal government to update the *Employment Insurance Act (Act)* to reflect the gendered realities of work, and to ensure that all workers in Canada receive sufficient income support following job separation.

LEAF's recommendations

1. Adopt the Interprovincial EI Working Group's [2025 EI Roadmap](#). The roadmap's recommendations are critical to ensuring that EI supports are accessible and adequate.
2. Address gender-based discrimination in EI by:
 - a. Creating a hybrid eligibility requirement for EI regular benefits with two ways to qualify: hours worked or weeks worked. A week would be counted if it includes at least 14 hours or earnings equal to 20% of the maximum insurable earnings.¹⁴
 - b. Allowing parents to access EI regular benefits if they lose their jobs while on parental leave. Specifically:
 - i. Repeal Subsection 12(6) of the *Act* to remove the 50 week cap on combining EI regular benefits and special benefits for maternity or parental leave.
 - ii. Amend Subsection 10(10) of the *Act* to add maternity and parental leave benefits as a reason to extend the benefit period to 104 weeks.
 - c. Eliminating the total disqualification for voluntary resignation at subsection 30(1) of the *Act*.