

More than 4.5 million Canadians living in poverty

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A report from Statistics Canada, published in late April and based on 2024 data, demonstrates that at least 11 percent of Canadians—more than 4.5 million people—now live in poverty. This is roughly equal to the entire Census Metropolitan Area of Montreal, the country’s second largest urban area.

The current poverty figures are a devastating indictment of the policies of the ruling federal Liberal government, first under Justin Trudeau and now Mark Carney. For over a decade, the Liberal-led government has overseen the impoverishment of large sections of the Canadian population, the slashing of spending on critical social programs and infrastructure, and the reckless and costly rearming of the military to secure the interests of Canadian imperialism amid a new redivision of the world between the great powers.

The growing numbers of poor also expose the consequences of decades of trade union-backed concessions on workers across all economic sectors, from auto assembly and industrial manufacturing, to public services and the service sector. Layoffs, plant shutdowns, the destruction of worker rights, wage stagnation in the face of the increasing cost of living, and a vast expansion of precarious employment have contributed to a situation in which many people cannot afford to live decent lives, even when they have a job.

Statscan introduced its Market Basket Measure (MBM) as Canada’s official poverty line in 2018. The MBM is reviewed regularly to reflect the up-to-date cost of a “basket of goods” within a modest, basic standard of living. Poverty thresholds are defined by the cost of a basket comprising a food component; clothing and footwear component; transportation component; housing and other expenses. The MBM is not a measure of comfort, let alone luxury, but of the cost of the basic needs of an individual or family in contemporary society.

The income levels needed to keep individuals and families afloat have risen sharply, particularly in the big cities and industrial centres where the lion’s share of the country’s

population lives. A family of four in Toronto would, for example, have needed an income of \$61,763 in 2024 just to be able to afford basic necessities. For Calgary the figure for the same year was \$57,840, while in Vancouver it was \$64,351, and in Montreal \$49,244.

Since 2020, Canada’s MBM-measured poverty rate has risen by four percentage-points or close to 60 percent, rising from 7 percent in 2020 and 8.1 percent in 2021, to 11.1 percent in 2023, and 11.0 percent in 2024.

The recent Statscan report also breaks down poverty rates among selected demographic groups:

- Unattached individuals 64 or younger: 26.4 percent
- Indigenous population: 18.1 percent
- Recent immigrants : 15.9 percent
- Racialized groups: 15.5 percent
- Persons with disabilities: 12.6 percent
- Children: 11.5 percent
- Seniors: 5.4 percent

The demographic figures show that the highest rate—more than one in four—was observed among so-called “unattached individuals,” or adults without a spouse or dependent children. This figure reflects the stark reality millions of workers (particularly young workers) face: chronic unemployment or underemployment, lack of job security, low wages and long hours. For many in this predicament, remaining “unattached” is less a lifestyle choice than a condition forced on them as a result of their constant struggle to survive.

A substantial portion of Canada’s indigenous population also lives below the poverty line. Many indigenous people live on Reserves, areas historically neglected and exploited by the Canadian government and ruling class and that lack basic resources and critical infrastructure. Many reserves lack clean drinking water, living under “boil-water” or “do-not-consume” advisories, in some areas for upwards of 25 years. The fact that 18 percent of Canada’s indigenous population currently lives under the poverty line is yet another devastating indictment of the Liberal government’s phony “nation to nation” native “reconciliation” policy. In

Canada's far north, poverty levels are often double the figure for the Indigenous population as a whole, reflecting the disastrous conditions facing Inuit and First Nations peoples in the country's Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

Another stark indicator of the scale of the social crisis in Canada is the rise of Deep Income Poverty (DIP). This category is defined as persons whose family disposable income is below 75 percent of the MBM threshold. Individuals in DIP often cannot afford a substantial share of the necessities included in the MBM's basket, especially proper housing. During the period of 2023 to 2024, 5.7 percent of those living in poverty—more than 250,000—lived in deep poverty.

Aside from the devastating social, psychological, and health impacts poverty is having on the millions condemned to it, the impoverishment of broad sections of the working class produced by the ruling elite's class war agenda has an important historical and political dimension. For decades following World War II, the "left-wing" of official politics—the NDP, together with the trade union bureaucracy and a broad swathe of middle-class "progressives"—portrayed Canada as a "kinder, gentler" society than the US dollar republic. This narrative was always a fraud, but for a time objective conditions appeared to lend it some veracity. The reality during this period was that due to Canadian capital's weaker position relative to its US rival, the Canadian bourgeoisie was forced to go further in the concessions it made to a militant working class upsurge that reached its peak between 1965 and 1975.

These concessions, wrenched from the hands of corporate Canada, never changed the ruthlessly exploitative character of Canadian capitalism; but they did enable significant sections of workers to obtain a higher standard of living and secure access to Medicare and other public services. However, all these conditions have long since passed into history. The open and repugnant growth of poverty and misery on a scale unprecedented since the Great Depression, combined with the disgusting increase in wealth at the very top of society, are creating the social and economic conditions for an explosion of class struggle and a revival of socialist consciousness.

StatCan's MBM model demonstrates the main factor driving poverty in Canada is the rising cost of food and shelter. The total inflation rate in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has risen by nearly 20 percent since 2020. At the same time, during some high-inflation periods, such as at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, median hourly real wages for Canadians fell by nearly 5 percent.

Core goods such as food and shelter, meanwhile, have been rising faster than overall inflation. According to Canada's Food Price Report (CFPR), overall food prices

will increase by 4 percent to 6 percent over the course of the year—significantly above the predicted general inflation rate of 2.2 percent. This is on top of what has already been a 27 percent increase in food prices over the last five years. With an increase of up to \$994.63 in 2025, the average family of four could expect to spend \$17,571.79 on food in the coming year.

On the other hand, Canada's billionaires are enriching themselves at dizzying heights. A report released in January by Oxfam Canada revealed that income inequality was at a record high in 2025. Even more significantly, economic inequality—which considers both income and wealth—has reached what Oxfam Canada rightly considers crisis levels.

"The Rise of the Super-Rich" details that in 2025, there were approximately 89 Canadian billionaires and that their wealth grew by more than 20 percent over the previous year. The country's top 40 billionaires alone increased their wealth by \$95 billion.

Meanwhile, Canada's Liberal government is pouring hundreds of billions of additional dollars into the military as part of the ruling class's drive to rearm and violently lay claim to "its share" of the spoils in the imperialist redivision of the globe. The announcement by Carney earlier this year of the government's Defence Industrial Strategy underscores the rapid transition to a wartime economy with disastrous consequences for millions of ordinary working people. The government's latest budget—passed with the support of the New Democratic Party and Greens—pledged \$81.8 billion in new defence spending.

In addition, Ottawa has pledged to ramp up defence spending to 5 percent of GDP by 2035 in what observers have noted is the largest "peacetime" military buildup in the nation's history. The eye-watering sums involved—projected to reach nearly \$160 billion annually by 2035—will exceed the size of all federal transfers to the provinces for healthcare, social welfare, post-secondary education and equalization.



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