which Premier Francois Legault's government announced in its action plan "Grand chantier pour les families" to create 37,000 new spaces in 2021.[120],

Initial reception to the national plan has been positive, considering the impact the first wave of the pandemic had on businesses and, in particularly, women in the workforce after those deemed non-essential were sent home. As outlined in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce's 2020 The She-Covery Project: Confronting the Gendered Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario, in March of that year women between the ages of 25 and 54 lost twice as many jobs as men in Ontario – noting the impact was more acute for women from minority backgrounds and other intersectional groups such as single mothers, mothers with disabilities, Indigenous and rural women.[121],

Economists believed when the national plan was unveiled it would not only put money in the pockets of many parents but also incentivize them – particularly women – to return to the workforce when restrictions were finally eased.[122], There have been some positive signs according to a Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey released in January of this year which indicated that Canadian women are 'bouncing back' after 81% between the ages of 24 to 54 were employed on average over the course of 2022 – the highest on record since 1976 and higher than 2019.[123], The survey also noted the employment rate for women with children under the age of six was 75.2% in 2022, representing a 3.3% increase over 2019. Flexible and remote work arrangements have been credited as the prime source for this uptick in the employment rate, but there are many sectors – including hospitality, food services, healthcare, construction, and manufacturing - where this type of flexibility is nearly impossible.

However, even with a move to providing more flexibility, those wishing to return to work now face growing child-care wait lists due to a shortage of spaces. Statistics show that nationwide 48% of children not yet of kindergarten age live in an area where they are competing with at least three or more children for every licensed child-care space. In some provinces – with the exceptions of PEI and Quebec in which less than 11% of children fall into this category - this percentage is much higher, such as Newfoundland and Labrador where it is 79%, or Saskatchewan where it is 92%. As well, a severe shortage of child-care spaces has been noted in rural areas versus urban regions in most provinces.[124],

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[120] https://shorturl.at/achOY
[121] 2.'How to Create early childhood spaces: lessons from Quebec' – May 2023, Institute
[122] for Research on Public Policy
[123] https://shorturl.at/gzFSV
[124] 3.'The She-Covery Project: Confronting the Gendered Economic Impacts of COVID-19 in Ontario' – Sept. 2020, Ontario Chamber of Commerce