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**BRIEFING NOTE**

# Tracking the SDGs in Canadian Cities: SDG 1

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October 2017

In 2011, 81 per cent of Canadians lived in urban centres (Statistics Canada, 2011). Cities are the epicentres of arts and culture as well as hubs for business and economic growth, and as such they are important stakeholders in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. To ensure that cities are on track to contribute to these goals, assessments of indicators aligned with the SDG framework are necessary to identify what is working and where more attention should be devoted. IISD's SGD Indicator Portal tracks SDG progress in 13 cities across Canada. The first brief in this series provides an overview of SDG 1—ending poverty in all its forms everywhere—across cities in Canada.



## End poverty in all its forms everywhere

For SDG 1, based on the recommendation of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDGs indicators (IAEG-SDGs), the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) suggested assessing progress using 12 indicators. Drawing on the recommended indicators and data available for Canadian cities from Statistics Canada (2015) and collaborative data sharing platforms such as the Local Government Performance Index (LGPI) (Frontier Centre for Public Policy, n.d.), we have identified four indicators that can be used to track progress for SDG 1 (Table 1).



**Table 1. Comparison of SDG 1 indicators suggested by UNSC and corresponding indicators for Canadian cities based on data availability**

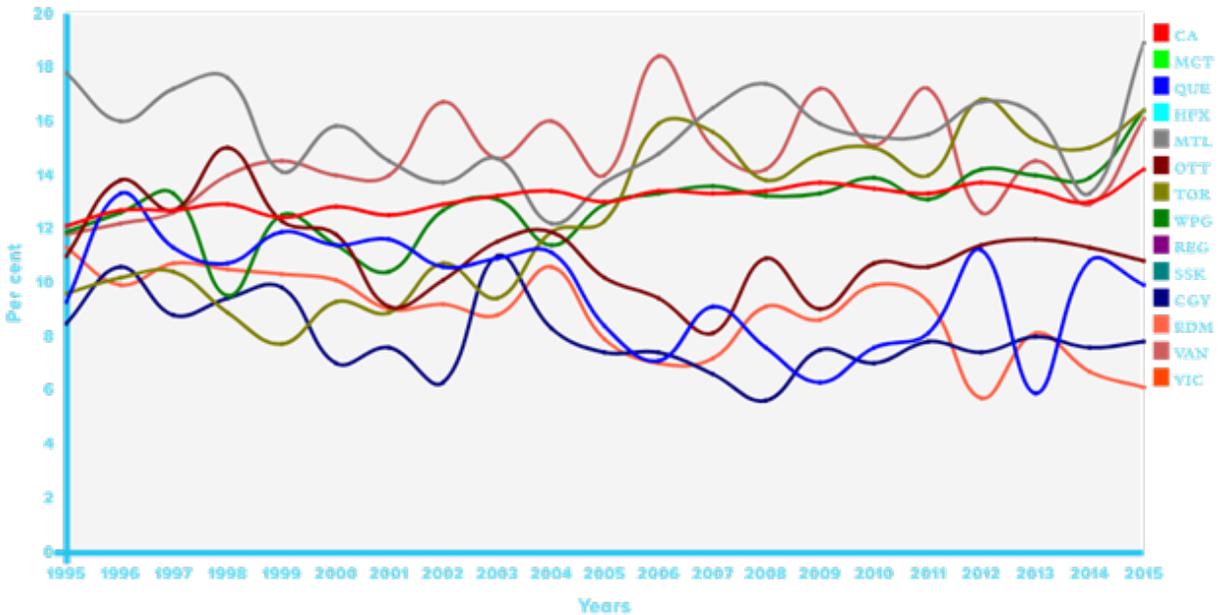
	UN Indicator	Corresponding Indicator for Canadian Cities
1.2.1	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age	Proportion of individuals below the Low Income Measure (after tax)
1.2.2	Proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	Proportion of children below the Low Income Measure
1.3.1	Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims and the poor and the vulnerable	Proportion of the population accessing social protection (Employment Insurance)
1.a.1	Proportion of domestically generated resources allocated by the government directly to poverty reduction programs	Proportion of reported resources allocated to social service programs from the total budget (health, social and family services, social housing)

## Trends in Achieving SDG 1 in Canadian Cities

### HIGHLIGHTS FOR SDG 1 INDICATORS

- 1.2.1 While Edmonton has made significant progress in reducing the city's poverty rates, overall poverty rates have increased slightly in most cities tracked in the SDG indicator portal.
- 1.2.2 Child poverty rates are decreasing across most cities; however, Winnipeg has had the smallest successes and has had the highest child poverty rates since 2010.
- 1.3.1 Since 2000, rates of individuals receiving social assistance have increased slightly across all cities with the exception of Saskatoon. Coverage of social assistance programs reaches approximately half of the population in cities included in the SDG Indicator Portal.
- 1.a.1 The amount of resources cities allocate to social programs is varied. This is dependent on factors such as jurisdictional responsibilities, financial reporting methods and municipal priorities.

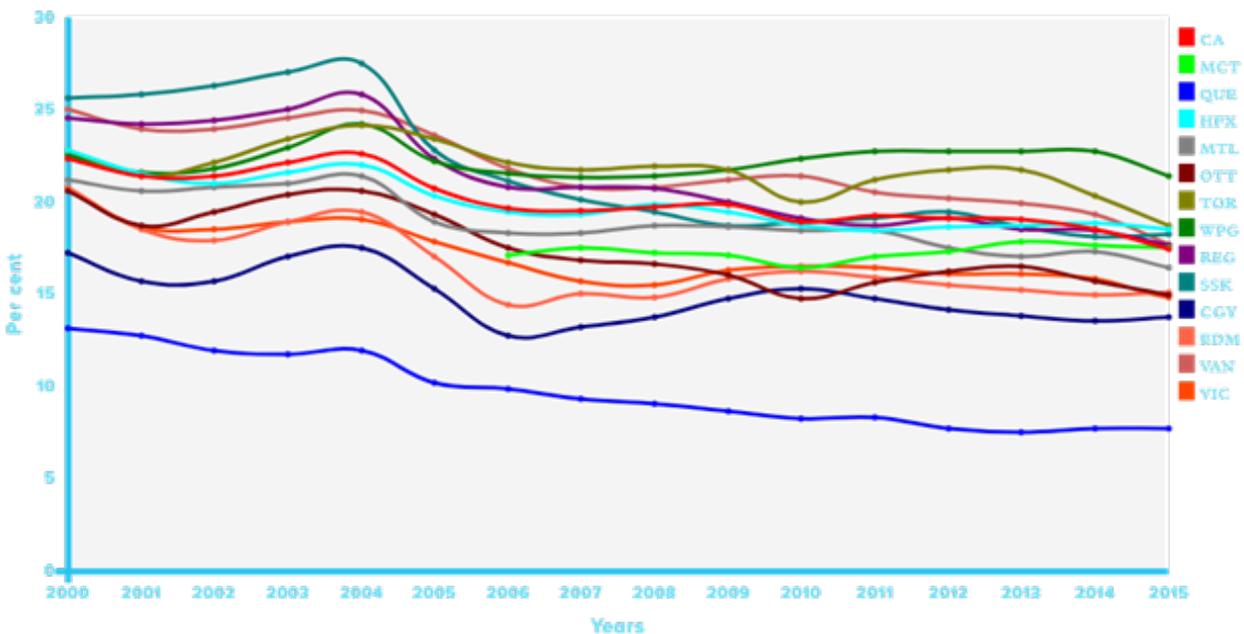
Target 1.2 aims to reduce poverty for all people by at least half by 2030. Measured using national poverty definitions, data show that overall poverty rates, or the after-tax Low Income Measure (indicator 1.2.1), has been volatile over the past 20 years and slowly increasing over time for most cities. This is a deviation away from the 2030 target. Between 1995 and 2015, the Canadian average increased slightly from 12.1 per cent in 1995 to 14.2 per cent in 2015. During the same period, the growth rates of people with a low income increased by 70.8 per cent in Toronto and by 37.8 per cent in Winnipeg. In 2015, the proportion in both cities was 16.4 per cent, which is above the national average. Vancouver also saw an increase in this time period (11.8 per cent in 1995 versus 16.1 per cent in 2015). Edmonton has made the most progress in reducing instances of poverty and currently has the lowest proportion at 6.1 per cent. More recently, between 2014 and 2015, poverty rates in Montreal were the highest among the 13 cities, increasing from 13.3 to 18.9 per cent (Figure 1).



**Figure 1. 1.2.1 Individuals living below the Low Income Measure in Canadian cities (%)**

Source: SDG Indicator Portal (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD], n.d.)

Indicator 1.2.2 is measured as the percentage of children below the Low Income Measure. Child poverty in Canadian cities has been declining since 2000, however rates are still higher than individuals living in low income. The Canadian average was 17.4 per cent in 2015, with most cities experiencing a decrease over the past 15 years. In Quebec City, proportions have dropped significantly from 13.1 per cent in 2000 to 7.7 per cent in 2015 and are currently the lowest of all cities measured. Winnipeg rates have only dropped by 4.9 per cent between 2000 and 2015, and they have remained the highest across the cities covered since 2010 (Figure 2).

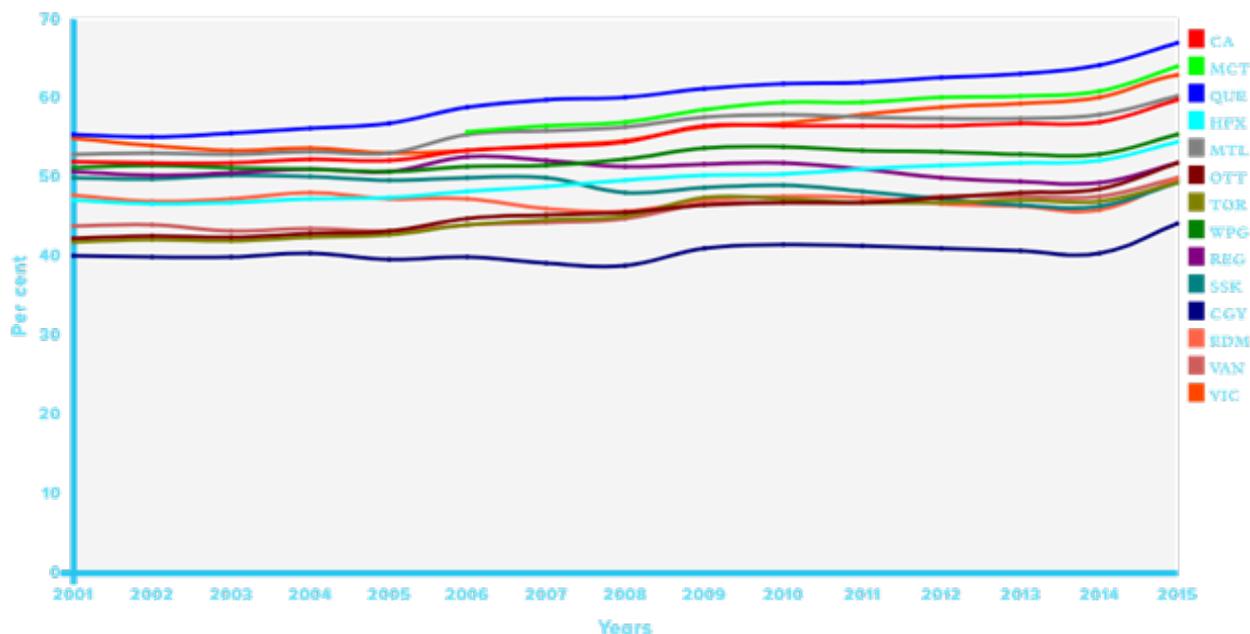


**Figure 2. 1.2.2 Children below the Low Income Measure in Canadian cities (%)**

Source: SDG Indicator Portal (IISD, n.d.)



Indicator 1.3.1 tracks the proportion of the population covered by social protection.<sup>1</sup> This indicator is connected to target 1.3, which aims to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems that provide substantial coverage for the poor and vulnerable. The proportion of the population receiving social assistance tracks the proportion of individuals who receive social assistance from at least one program such as employment insurance, old age security, Canada and Quebec pension plans, Canada child tax benefit, workers' compensation and social assistance. Between 2001 and 2015, the percentage of individuals receiving social assistance increased across all cities except Saskatoon. The Canadian average increased from 51.9 per cent in 2001 to 59.7 per cent of the population in 2015. Quebec City had the highest proportion of recipients, 67 per cent, and Calgary had the lowest, with 44.9 per cent in 2015 (Figure 3).

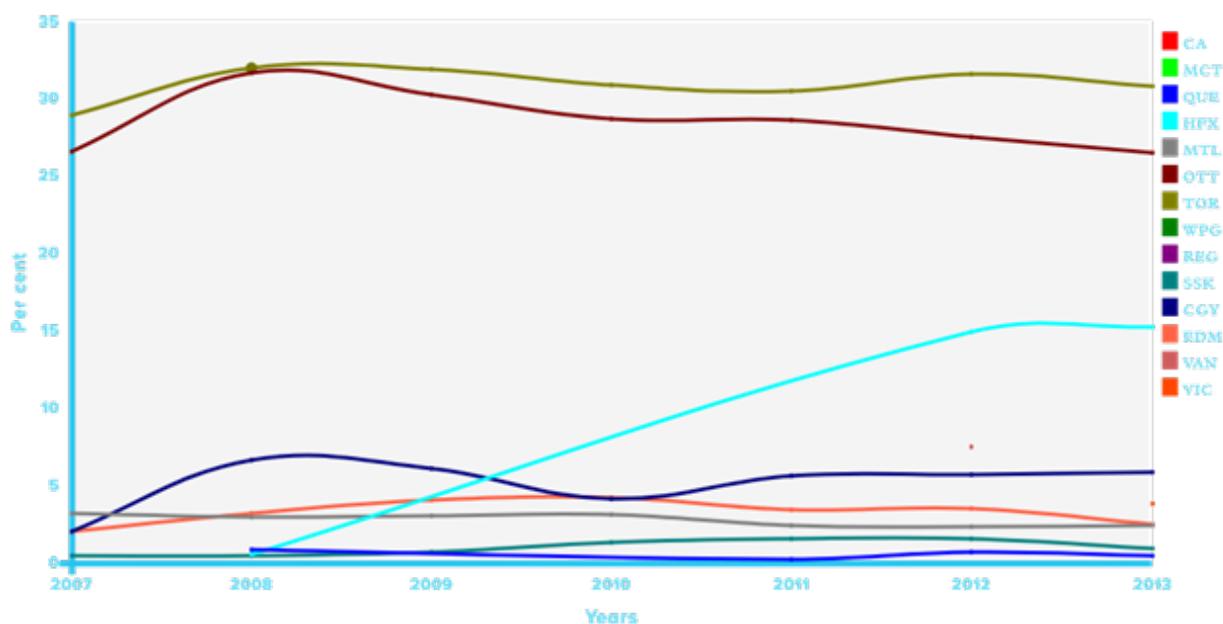


**Figure 3. 1.3.1 Proportion of the population receiving social assistance (%)**

Source: SDG Indicator Portal (IISD, n.d.)

Indicator 1.a.1 is linked to target 1.a: to ensure that there are sufficient government resources mobilized to implement programs and policies aimed to end poverty. This indicator shows the proportion of the government's annual budget allocated to social services. In Ontario, in 2013, Toronto dedicated 30.8 per cent of its total budget to social spending, while Ottawa dedicated 26.5 per cent. This percentage has been a constant trend since 2007. In Ontario, social spending included health, social and family services, and social housing. Calgary contributed 5.8 per cent and Edmonton contributed 2.5 per cent of their total budgets to social service-related budget lines in 2013. In Alberta, Calgary includes social housing programs and miscellaneous social programs while Edmonton includes social and family services and social housing in their social services budget lines. Quebec City and Saskatoon both allocated less than 1 per cent of their total budgets to social services in 2013. Data for indicator 1.a.1 is sourced from the Local Government Performance Index (Frontier Centre for Public Policy, n.d.) (Figure 4).

<sup>1</sup> For decades Canada has had government-funded, universally accessible social assistance programs to support Canadians in need. This indicator shows the coverage of the population accessing these supports. While increasing or decreasing trends does not necessarily indicate movement toward or away from target 1.3.1, too small a number may indicate that the programs are not providing sufficient coverage to the population and very high percentages may indicate an overly large burden on the system, creating an unsustainable program.



**Figure 4. 1.a.1 Proportion of resources allocated by government to social service programs in Canadian cities (%)**

Source: SDG Indicator Portal (IISD, n.d.)

## Conclusions

Since the early 2000s, Canadian cities have been making progress on some areas of poverty alleviation. Child poverty has been reduced and social assistance is universally available to those who need it. There is, however, a need to improve overall poverty levels and increase funding for social programs that target poverty reduction and overall well-being. Currently we are not able to assess progress on some aspects of SDG 1, such as indicators connected target 1.5, to improve the resilience of vulnerable populations to climate-related extreme events and other social and environmental shocks and disasters. In addition, there is less need to monitor land tenure rights<sup>2</sup> and access to basic services<sup>3</sup> in Canadian cities (indicators 1.4.1 and 1.4.2). Finally, none of the SDG targets can be achieved in isolation from each other—progress in one area will have an impact on progress in others. When addressing SDG 1, cities can work with other SDGs to address poverty—SDG 5 focuses on gender equality and the value of unpaid work; SDG 8 highlights sustainable economic growth and decent work; and SDG 10 aims to reduce inequality within countries.

<sup>2</sup> All lands in Canada are demarcated and recorded using the Canadian Lands Survey System. This system is overseen by the federal government and helps to enable efficient property rights within provincial and territorial jurisdictions (Natural Resources Canada, 2017). This system, along with provincial land titles acts, protects rights and access to public and private lands through government land registries.

<sup>3</sup> A total of 89 per cent of Canadians receive water from municipal or other water distribution systems. Of these, 94 per cent use treated water (Ormecci, 2015).



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