

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)



What is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights?

ICESCR is a multilateral treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966. It guarantees the right of all people to **social and economic security and dignity**. Social and economic rights are recognized in many international human rights documents, including the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**.



ICESCR guarantees:

- the right of **self-determination**
- the **equal right of men and women** to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights
- the right of a people to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources, based upon the principle of mutual benefit
- the right to **social protection**
- the right to an **adequate standard of living**
- the right to **work**
- The right of everyone to form **trade unions** and join a trade union
- the right to **social security**, including social insurance
- the right to an **adequate standard of living**, including adequate food, clothing and housing
- the right of everyone to be **free from hunger**
- the right to the highest attainable standards of **physical and mental health**
- the right to **education**
- the right to take part in **cultural life**
- the right to enjoyment of the benefits of **scientific progress**.

Monitoring: Compliance with ICESCR is monitored by the ICESCR Committee. Any country that has ratified ICESCR must submit a report to the Committee every five years on how the rights are being implemented. The Committee examines each report and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the State party in the form of “concluding observations”.

Civil society participation: Civil society organizations can make written and oral submissions to the Committee. They can submit their own ‘shadow reports’ and they can submit additional evidence of compliance or non-compliance directly to the Committee.

FAFIA fact sheet

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What is Canada's record of upholding social and economic rights?

Canada has ratified ICESCR and a number of other treaties that recognize these rights. While these covenants and conventions cannot be invoked directly in courts and tribunals, Federal and Provincial governments have promised to ensure that the rights are protected in domestic law, and that public policy and decision-making will be consistent with these rights. In recent years Canadian governments have come under increasing criticism from United Nations' human-rights bodies for failing to ensure that all Canadians can realize their social and economic rights. In 1993 and 1998, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights criticized Canada for its poor record of upholding these rights. The Committee's concerns included:

- the elimination of national standards for social programs
- cuts to social assistance and inadequate social assistance rates
- inadequate legal protections for women's rights
- inadequate minimum wages
- unfair treatment of Convention Refugees
- widespread poverty and inequality among Aboriginal communities
- cuts to services for people with disabilities
- the crisis of homelessness in Canadian communities, particularly among youth and young families
- tightened eligibility requirements for unemployment insurance
- the "claw-back" of the National Child Benefit Supplement from families receiving social assistance

For more information

For the full text of the ICESCR:
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/cescr.pdf>

FAFIA:
www.fafia-afai.org

Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation:
www.equalityrights.org

Social Rights Advocacy Centre:
www.socialrights.ca

