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POUR LES FEMMES

## Improving Economic Security for Women

YWCA Canada  
Brief to the House Standing Committee on Status of Women  
Study on Women's Economic Security

March 14, 2017

Improving the economic security of women is a priority direction for YWCA Canada, the nation's oldest and largest women's multi-service association. In addition to labour market access and conditions, and access to affordable, quality childcare, discussed here, YWCA Canada sees addressing violence against women, affordable housing and women's homelessness as essential to women's economic security.

Steady increases in women's participation in the labour force since the 1950s have created a labour force that is virtually gender-balanced in numbers. The number of women employed in Canada more than doubled between 1976 and 2016, and for the last decade, women have consistently comprised more than 47% of people employed in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Women today are more educated than men: 69% of women aged 25-64 hold a university, college, or trade degree, diploma or certificate, compared to 64% of men. Though better educated, women still have less access to full-time work and lower average incomes, and are consequently less economically secure.<sup>2</sup> Reducing the gender income disparity, and enhancing women's economic security, requires specific policy responses, as well as continuing monitoring and research.

### **Intersectional Gender Based Analysis (GBA+)**

All federal policy development needs comprehensive application of intersectional gender-based analysis (GBA+) at the earliest stages of priority-setting and policy development to ensure policies, programs and spending initiatives respond to the needs of women, girls and gender non-conforming people, and address structural factors contributing to their poverty. Public infrastructure spending needs to be gender-balanced in effect, and include social infrastructure initiatives such as early learning and child care.

### **Pay Gap and Pay Equity**

Canada has a significant gender pay gap. Women working full time, year-round earn 24-28% less than men in comparable jobs.<sup>3</sup> This wage gap is intensified for Indigenous women, racialized women, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and trans\* people.<sup>4 5 6</sup> Legislated pay equity,

framed as a human right can “close the unacceptable gap in pay between men and women which contributes to income inequality and discriminate against women.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Precarious Work**

Canadian women are more likely to be engaged in precarious, non-standard employment than men. Women are 60% of minimum wage workers and three-quarters of part-time workers.<sup>8</sup> This is especially true for young women. Approximately 20% of women aged 25-54 work part-time, compared to 5-6% of men.<sup>9</sup> The feminization of occupations and industries characterized by job tenure insecurity, low wages, and lack of benefits, contribute to rates of high labour force insecurity of women compared to men.<sup>10</sup> Labour market policies at federal and provincial levels need to provide increased access to secure, permanent, full-time work with benefits.

### **Access to Affordable, Quality Child Care**

Access to the labour force, and progressive advancement within it, require access to affordable quality child care for women and their families. Broad access to low-cost child care is an effective social policy tool to increase economic security for women with children, in particular for women raising children on their own because. As evidenced in Quebec, it improves mothers' access to the workforce. In that province, between the introduction of broad access to child care in 1996, and 2008, employment rates for mothers with children under the age of six increased 22%. The number of single mothers on social assistance was reduced by more than half - from 99,000 to 45,000 - and their after-tax median income rose by 81%.<sup>11</sup>

### **Social Infrastructure and Assistance Spending**

Declines in social spending disproportionately impact women. The federal budget must remain sufficiently substantial to address violence against women, and lack of access to safe, affordable housing for women, girls and gender non-conforming and to trauma-informed services including Indigenous healing centres.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) Ensure that gender-based plus analysis (GBA+) with an intersectional gender lens is applied at the earliest stages of priority-setting and policy development.
- 2) Ensure coordination of the National Housing Strategy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, and the Federal Strategy on Gender-Based Violence.
- 3) Implement proactive federal pay equity legislation for both the public and private sectors, in line with the recommendations of the 2004 Pay Equity Task Force.
- 4) Raise the federal minimum wage to reach a living wage and urge provincial and territorial governments to do the same.
- 5) Increase access to Employment Insurance benefits for temporary, short-term and part-time workers.
- 6) Ensure federally regulated workplaces are safe for women, free of harassment and violence.
- 7) Support initiatives addressing domestic violence in the workplace, and strengthen employment and labour standard legislation to protect women in the workplace.
- 8) Establish broad national access to low-cost child care through the promised Early Learning and Child Care Framework with an equity lens and development of strategy for and First Nations children working with National Aboriginal Organizations including the Native

Women's Association of Canada.

9) Maintain the Canada Child Benefit as a permanent transfer indexed to inflation.



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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Women's Employment 1976-2016 (15+ years), Labour Force Survey, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, CAN-SIM Table 202-0102: Average female and male earnings, and female-to-male earnings ratio, by work activity, 2011 constant dollars, annual, as cited in *Making Women Count: The Unequal Economics of Women's Work*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) and Oxfam Canada, March 2016  
<https://www.oxfam.ca/sites/default/files/making-women-count-report-2016.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, CAN-SIM Table 202-0102: as cited in *Making Women Count: The Unequal Economics of Women's Work*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Oxfam Canada, March 2016

<sup>4</sup> *Making Women Count*, CCPA and Oxfam Canada, 2016

<sup>5</sup> Paula Arriagada, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Women, Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada, 2016

<sup>6</sup> Tina Chui, *Immigrant Women, Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada, 2016

<sup>7</sup> Opposition Day Motion on Pay Equity, February 3, 2016

<sup>8</sup> V. Ferrao, *Paid Work: Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada, 2009, and M. Moyser, *Women and Paid Work: Women in Canada: A Gender-based Statistical Report*, Statistics Canada, 2017

<sup>9</sup> Ferrao, *Paid Work*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Cranford, Leah F. Vosko with contributions from Katherine Laxer, *Conceptual Guide to the Precarious Employment Module*, gender and work database

<sup>11</sup> Fortin et al, *The Impact of Low Cost Child Care on Women's Employment and Overall Economy*, University of Sherbrook, 2012.