



## **Improving Women's Economic Security in Canada: Provincial and Territorial Perspectives**

**Submitted by Co-Chairperson Mari Basiletti,  
National Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women**

**March 15, 2017**

**Improving Women’s Economic Security in Canada: Provincial and Territorial Perspectives  
Submission to FEWO from the Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the  
Status of Women**

“When women do well, everyone does better,” said Madeleine Kunin, making a simple truism out of the complex conclusions of the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the United Nations<sup>1</sup>. However, women’s economic security and economic empowerment are not only “smart economics,” but are fundamental human rights, and governments have a responsibility for ensuring these rights.

This submission will include recommendations to diminish high incidences of poverty among women in Canada. According to Canadian women’s organizations, the key to addressing economic inequality is *investment in social infrastructure*.

Women who are moving out of poverty consistently identify the need for similar wraparound supports to enable them to pursue education, training, and work. These are especially necessary for those wishing to enter new fields of work, including fields where women are, or traditionally have been, under-represented; and to access part-time and precarious work.

The supports these women identify relate to social infrastructure: **supports for caregiving**, including maternity and parental leave and benefits, child care, elder care, and respite for caregivers; **transportation**, especially affordable and accessible public transit; **supports for personal safety** and freedom from all forms violence, abuse, and harassment at home and in the workplace. Affordable, accessible, appropriate housing is essential for stable income. It is critical that improvements to both physical and social infrastructure take into consideration the needs and eliminate barriers for historically under-represented populations. These include women with disabilities, Indigenous women, racialized women, and trans-women. We recommend

- that the Government of Canada work swiftly to meet the election commitment of “a child care framework that meets the needs of Canadian families, wherever they live,” and the promise to “meet with provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to begin work on a new National Early Learning and Child Care Framework, to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families.”
- that in a changing world of work, the Government of Canada explore ways to deliver maternity and parental benefits to women and men who are not eligible for Employment Insurance.
- that the Government of Canada continue to develop and invest in national strategies and national policies that relate to social infrastructure – whether housing, transit, literacy, food, or poverty reduction – apply a robust gender and diversity (GBA+) lens with sensitivity to the gendered and racialized aspects and effects of poverty.
- that national strategies related to gender, including the national strategy on Gender-Based Violence and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, likewise apply an income security lens in their analysis. It is particularly important to us that Indigenous women’s economic security be examined as a factor in the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and that recommendations and solutions from the National Inquiry make the vital connections between women’s economic security and their personal security. The effects of patriarchy, discrimination, and colonialization that affect women’s incomes also profoundly affect their bodies and their lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/madeleine-m-kunin/when-women-do-well-everyo\\_b\\_2951166.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/madeleine-m-kunin/when-women-do-well-everyo_b_2951166.html)

It is essential to consider gender and other diversity factors in economic development planning for Canada. Projects in the natural resource and extractive industries are subject to intense scrutiny for environmental and economic impacts, but as a country we are only beginning to reckon with social and cultural impacts. These effects are experienced differently by different genders. A community experiencing a boom in a male-dominated industry experiences other effects that disproportionately affect women. These can be, for example, an increase in male violence against women; an increase in demand for sex workers in regions that may have few established services and supports for them; or an increase in unplanned pregnancies and in households that are led by a lone parent for all or part of the year. These effects lead us to recommend

- that economic development plans and individual economic projects in resource and extractive industries be subject to social and cultural impact assessments with a gender and diversity lens.

A gender wage gap remains a reality in Canada, with full-time female workers earning an average of 74 cents for every dollar earned by men (2014 Statistics). This gap has effects on women's earnings every hour and every week. It affects income-based benefits including Employment Insurance (and maternity and parental benefits) and pension income. Working in a public sector job should be a protective factor against unequal pay, because public employers have vital roles and responsibilities in establishing model practices for pay equity.

Therefore, we recommend

- that the Government of Canada be a model and a leader in investing in people to deliver public services and that the Government enact a new, updated, and proactive pay equity law.

Women's entry, participation, retention, and representation in economic leadership positions is of great interest to our Advisory Councils. Despite the evidence that greater gender parity and diversity on decision-making bodies leads to better decisions and better results, the under-representation of women at all levels of decision-making persists in Canada in the private and public sectors. A review of good practices undertaken as part of a *Status of Women Canada-funded project on Equity in Governance* concludes that voluntary practices alone (formal board gender and diversity policies, measurable targets, nomination committees, recruitment strategies, and term limits) are not sufficient to increase gender parity and diversity in governance bodies. Regulatory practices such as requiring boards to "comply or explain" with diversity targets are relatively recent in Canada, but have yet to prove their effectiveness. Financial and other incentives and disincentives would go farther than requiring compliance with a regulation or an explanation of failure to comply. However, most effective are legislative practices such as quotas. Therefore we recommend

- that the Government of Canada examine international best practices for applying unapologetic quotas for women and diverse groups and women from diverse groups in governance bodies and develop legislation that supports equity in governance.

As leaders of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women, we call on the Government of Canada to continue to work closely with provincial and territorial governments on issues of women's equality, including women's economic security, and therefore recommend

- that the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments continue to consult with and include women's advisory bodies in discussions of poverty and income security so that women's advisory bodies can co-create solutions that will work for women and all genders, for the benefit of all Canadians.

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Improving Women’s Economic Security in Canada: Provincial and Territorial Perspectives**

1. That the Government of Canada work swiftly to meet the election commitment of “a child care framework that meets the needs of Canadian families, wherever they live,” and the promise to “meet with provinces, territories, and Indigenous communities to begin work on a new National Early Learning and Child Care Framework, to deliver affordable, high-quality, flexible, and fully inclusive child care for Canadian families.”
2. That in a changing world of work, the Government of Canada explore ways to deliver maternity and parental benefits to women and men who are not eligible for Employment Insurance.
3. That the Government of Canada continue to develop and invest in national strategies and national policies that relate to social infrastructure – whether housing, transit, literacy, food, or poverty reduction – apply a robust gender and diversity (GBA+) lens with sensitivity to the gendered and racialized aspects and effects of poverty.
4. That national strategies related to gender, including the national strategy on Gender-Based Violence and the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, likewise apply an income security lens in their analysis. It is particularly important to us that Indigenous women’s economic security be examined as a factor in the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and that recommendations and solutions from the National Inquiry make the vital connections between women’s economic security and their personal security. The effects of patriarchy, discrimination, and colonialization that affect women’s incomes also profoundly affect their bodies and their lives.
5. That economic development plans and individual economic projects in resource and extractive industries be subject to social and cultural impact assessments with a gender and diversity lens.
6. That the Government of Canada be a model and a leader in investing in people to deliver public services and that the Government enact a new, updated, and proactive pay equity law.
7. That the Government of Canada examine international best practices for applying unapologetic quotas for women and diverse groups and women from diverse groups in governance bodies and develop legislation that supports equity in governance.
8. That the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments continue to consult with and include women’s advisory bodies in discussions of poverty and income security so that women’s advisory bodies can co-create solutions that will work for women and all genders, for the benefit of all Canadians.



### **The National Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women**

The National Coalition of Provincial and Territorial Advisory Councils on the Status of Women was formed in 1995 when the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women ceased. The National Coalition provides a venue for strategic action on issues of concern to Canadian women. Members are representatives of provincial and territorial advisory bodies on the status of women. The National Coalition communicates regularly and meets annually to share and discuss issues related to women's equality across the country as well as to highlight how the Coalition can advance the interests of women.

The current co-chairs of the National Coalition are Linda Ross, President and CEO of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women of Newfoundland and Labrador, and Mari Basiletti, Chairperson of the PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women.