

**BRIEFING NOTE FOR STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN:
Improving the Lives of Mobile Children at Risk of Poor Life Outcomes****ISSUE**

The Government of Canada is not following through on its responsibility and the commitments it has made to ensure all children receive the support and assistance they need to thrive. No matter whom children live with, or where they live in the country, all should enjoy the same entitlement to government benefits and protections but they do not due to a combination of:

- barriers to access;
- inconsistent dissemination of federal transfers by provinces and territories, and
- lack of recognition of or support for distinct groups of marginalized children.

Both domestically and internationally, the Government of Canada has made commitments on behalf of Canadian children to ensure their best interests, and to support those most marginalized. United Nations agreements to which Canada made commitments speak not only to all children (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) but also those affected by homelessness, parental addiction, and parental involvement in the Criminal Justice System (UN Guidelines for Alternative Care; the Bangkok Rules).

RATIONALE

Due to federal bureaucracy and a lack of understanding about the ability of most vulnerable and marginalized children to access the federal benefits they are entitled to is resulting in children being handicapped by circumstance. This diminishes their opportunities, with lifelong negative impacts. Further, there is significant latitude in how the Social Transfer is applied by provinces and territories, which results in significant discrepancy in the support vulnerable children receive depending on where they live in the country. Finally, the Government of Canada must follow through on its international commitments to support particularly vulnerable children so they are not further marginalized and are instead able to achieve their potential.

This issue is appropriate for the Standing Committee on the Status of Women to address and support as the majority of Canada's most vulnerable children live in female-led, impoverished households, whether those are led by mothers, grandmothers or other females.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Recognize parenting and caregiving as a consideration at the time of sentencing.

Change sentencing principles to meet the Bangkok rules so judges consider the best interest of the child and the “work” of women supporting those children. Even now, judges seldom receive information on women's parenting role supporting their family. Pre-sentencing reports routinely consider wage-earning for a family as a consideration; however, caregiving, particularly sole caregiving, is seldom recognized or reported for consideration. Stats Canada reports that 90% of women are sentenced to less than six months' incarceration.

2. Reduce formal requirements for identification and documentation to access entitled benefits and use government's capacity to do so.

Children living in less stable environments (such as informal care arrangements with family members) face barriers in accessing the federal benefits created to support them, such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) and the Canada Learning Bond (CLB). The Government of Canada should draw on the electronic information capabilities (confirmation of birth) and federal income information for caregivers to establish benefit entitlement levels.

Recognize non-profits as part of civil society that is a part of the circle of professionals and organizations able to make attestations of knowledge for things like residency. Establishing residency is extremely difficult to get for those housed within the grey economy. Current criterion like doctors, lawyers, recreation programs or schools, are out of reach for most poor children and or those in school, and don't recognize that many rural area don't have these individuals or services.

3. Recognize and provide supports for very vulnerable children.

We know from other countries that formally recognizing the challenges faced by these children, and creating specialized services and supports for them, can dramatically reduce the impact of parental incarceration on life outcomes. As a signatory of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Bangkok Rules, Canada has an unmet commitment to support these children.

4. Set standards for the delivery of benefits funded through the Social Transfer, to ensure that very vulnerable children receive the same supports to maximize their development no matter where they live in Canada.

Require all provinces and territories to provide equal supports for vulnerable children. Currently, there are wide variations in entitlements and supports offered.

IMPACTS

The proposed remedies will:

- Reduce the level of material deprivation in which children are living.
- Reduce the number of adverse life events in children's lives.
- Increase the positive life outcomes of children.