



Brief submitted to the Status of Women Committee for their *Study on the Economic Security of Women in Canada*

To the Attention of: Danielle Widmer, Clerk of the Standing Committee on  
Status of Women (FEWO@parl.gc.ca)  
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## Summary:

Women in Canada have made great strides towards achieving equality over the last several decades. More women than ever are participating in paid work and women now represent the majority of university students in most fields. Despite these gains, there are many issues and barriers that women continue to face. These barriers prevent them from realizing true equality in outcomes, particularly in terms of economic security and equal participation in the Canadian economy. Three main factors contribute to women's economic inequality and their higher incidence of poverty in Canada: the distribution of unpaid work, the undervaluing of traditionally female areas of work, and the social norms, which see men being offered higher wages and more opportunities for promotion.

CFUW is a national, non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization with over 100 CFUW Clubs, located in every province across Canada. We work to improve the status of women and to promote human rights, public education, social justice, and peace. Every year, CFUW and its Clubs award close to \$1 million to women to help them pursue post-secondary studies.

According to Catalyst Canada, the gender wage gap in Canada is twice the global average.<sup>i</sup> Fewer Canadian women are employed than men and women are more likely to be employed in part-time, precarious positions. How is this possible, when more women than men are attaining higher levels of education? Irrespective of educational attainment, women working full-time, year round, continue to earn on **average 28.7% less than men.**<sup>ii</sup>

Part of the wage gap can be explained by women's under-representation in some of the most lucrative and in-demand jobs, such as in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. As of 2012, women accounted for only 2.7% of professionals in the top-five most populated trades.<sup>iii</sup> We encourage the federal government to increase funding and support for women entering STEM fields, through mentorship, training programs and grants.

Women are earning less than men in part because they shoulder a disproportionate share of the care burden. On average, Canadian women perform two-thirds of all unpaid work, which has an estimated yearly value of \$319 billion. When a woman must prioritize the care of her children, parent or other relation, she is prevented from fully participating in the economy. The lack of pay for much of the work women do has direct and serious implications for the economic security, health and economic opportunities available to women.<sup>iv</sup>

Traditionally female-dominated fields such as healthcare, social work and education, continue to be undervalued by society. The Federal Government has the opportunity to lead a paradigm shift in how Canadians view and value work by investing in fields

dominated by women. There is also a need to develop specific plans to recruit and retain more women in under-represented fields by addressing the barriers they face, such as **discrimination in the workplace, lack of flexible working arrangements, sexual harassment and access to affordable childcare.**<sup>v</sup>

Among industrialized countries, Canada has one of the lowest childcare access rates and invests significantly less in childcare than our OECD counterparts. For example, only 40% of Canadian children under age six are enrolled in childcare, lagging behind OECD standards.<sup>vi</sup> Canada's childcare costs are among the highest of OECD countries, making it particularly difficult for single parents to find affordable care.<sup>vii</sup>

There is compelling evidence that investing in childcare services offers among the broadest benefits of any policy strategy a nation can adopt. Economic studies repeatedly show the multi-generational benefits of focused, accountable investments in early learning and childcare outweigh the costs by at least two to one.<sup>viii</sup> Further, access to quality early learning and childcare promotes health, advances women's equality, reduces crime, addresses child and family poverty and deepens community social inclusion.<sup>ix</sup>

Quebec's experience<sup>1</sup> confirms the findings of cross-country studies conducted by the OECD and others: subsidized childcare boosts women's participation in the work force.<sup>x</sup> Investing in childcare is one of the biggest returns on investment that a government can receive. The opportunity is here for a meaningful investment in Canadian women, children and families. It's time for a national early learning and childcare system.

While some federal measures have helped improve the economic well-being of low income women, particularly the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) for elderly women, far too many continue to live in poverty and struggle to find and/or keep affordable housing. It is therefore imperative to increase women's access to social and educational supports/programs, good job opportunities, and improve their access to safe, affordable and secure housing.

**With more women attaining higher education than ever before, there needs to be a sustained commitment by the Canadian government to promote and support their entry into STEM fields. However, until the underlying causes of the wage gap are addressed, women in all fields will remain economically insecure. Today, Canada finds itself at a crossroads. With the right policies, Canada can become a leader in protecting the economic security of women, children and families. The first step is to conduct a gender-based analysis of all Government programs and funding to determine how the programs impact women and childcare.**

**We urge the Government to:**

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<sup>1</sup> Twenty years after Quebec's childcare program was introduced in 1996, **70,000 more mothers had entered the workforce**, adding **\$5.1 billion** to Quebec's gross provincial income.<sup>1</sup>

1. Develop both a short- and long-term strategy to finance a national affordable and quality childcare system in collaboration with provinces and territories;
2. Work with provincial and territorial governments and business, labour, and industry associations to develop a national strategy to promote the recruitment and retention of women in skilled trades and other occupations, where women are currently underrepresented (e.g. sciences, engineering);
3. Invest in female-dominated fields, such as healthcare, education and social work.

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<sup>i</sup> Beach, Mary. "Gender Pay Gap in Canada More than Twice Global Average, Study Shows." *The Globe and Mail*. VANCOUVER – The Globe and Mail, 05 May 2015.

<sup>ii</sup> Status of Women Canada. (2012).

<sup>iii</sup> Statistics Canada (2014). Registered Apprenticeship Information System (RAIS). Registered apprenticeship training, completions, by age groups, sex and major trade groups. <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a05?searchTypeByValue=1&lang=eng&id=4770054&pattern=4770054>

<sup>iv</sup> <http://ipolitics.ca/2013/09/27/putting-a-value-on-womens-work/>

<sup>v</sup> McLean, D (2003). Workplaces that Work: Creating A Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women. Retrieved from: <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/workplaces-that-work.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Finn, Ed, (December 1, 2012). "Inequality At Its Worst". *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/inequality-its-worst>

<sup>vii</sup> D'Aliesio, Renata, (May 24, 2011). "Canadians Can't Complain: Better Life Index", *The Globe and Mail*. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/canadians-cant-complain-better-life-index/article580753/>

<sup>viii</sup> Dallaire, Jody and Anderson, Lynell, (April 2009), "The Fight for a Publicly-Funded Child Care System in Canada". *Policy Alternatives*, p. 26. Retrieved from: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2009/04/The%20Fight%20for%20a%20Publicly%20Funded%20Child%20Care%20System.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Dallaire, Jody and Anderson, Lynell, (April 2009), "The Fight for a Publicly-Funded Child Care System in Canada". *Policy Alternatives*, p. 26. Retrieved from: <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2009/04/The%20Fight%20for%20a%20Publicly%20Funded%20Child%20Care%20System.pdf>

<sup>x</sup> Fortin et al, (2012). L'Impact des services de garde à contribution réduite du Québec sur le taux d'activité féminine, le revenu intérieur et les budgets gouvernementaux, Université de Sherbrooke.