**Submission to Standing Committee on the Status of Women
On the Economic Security of Women in Canada**

**By
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Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change
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Based on studies that have analyzed Census data, the Canadian Income Survey and the Labour Force survey, we assert that Indigenous women, racialized women, refugee and immigrant women are over-represented among low-wage earners, in precarious employment and those who are low-income. The intersectional identities of racialization and immigration status combined will have the greatest impact in excluding women from stable and well-paying jobs and access to income security.

Statistics on visible minority (VM) women shows[1]: those living in poverty outnumber men by a ratio of 52% to 48%; they have lower participation in the labour force and a higher unemployment rate; they are paid significantly less than non-VM men and women.[1] The 2011 National Household Survey reported VM women had a median income of $39,330 compared to $42,848 for non-VM women, despite the fact that over 30% of VM women had a university degree compared to 19.5% for non-VM women. Immigrant VM women earned the lowest overall.

The Statistics Canada submission to this Committee notes that immigrant women and visible minority (VM) women are among those who are at higher risk of falling into low income.

Migrant workers are particularly disadvantaged in Canada's labour market as a result of legal and policy barriers that excluded them from many of the protections and benefits all other workers enjoy, despite paying into the same programs. Further, their precarious immigration status is a major impediment to accessing even the basic protections they are allowed. Migrant workers in agriculture, service and caregiving sectors are typically low-waged, and the majority are racialized. Caregivers are predominantly racialized women.

In light of these conclusions, we would like to propose the following policy remedies:

1. Employment Equity

Recommendation: Federal employment equity should be effectively implemented such that the named groups benefit equitably from hiring and compensation, as well as retention and promotion; and integrated in all public physical capital and social infrastructure investments (including public transit, roads and highways, housing, water and waste-water, renewable energy, green economy, arts and culture, and more) through the creative use of conditional transfers, Community Benefits Agreements and other appropriate legislative tools and program delivery mechanisms. Further, encourage Provincial and territorial governments to adopt a similar, mandatory law.

Federal employment equity legislation has increased employment opportunities for women in the federally regulated sectors. However, given the disparities evident in earnings and labour market data, women – and particularly racialized immigrant women – are yet to reach wage or labour market parity in federally regulated sectors, and are yet to achieve equitable promotion and retention.

The legislation covers only federally regulated employers—which include about 500 private-sector employers, 30 Crown corporations and 5 other federal organizations with a combined workforce of over 760 000 employees. The majority of the Canadian labour force is not subject to mandatory employment equity legislation.

2. Disaggregated Data Collection

Recommendation: Implement disaggregated data collection across the federal government so that we are better able to identify and plan for targeted labour market participation, and ensure equitable participation in federal income security programs such as Employment Insurance and the Working Income Tax Benefit; as well as develop the capacity to better quantify the impact of gender-equity initiatives on racialized and racialized refugee and immigrant women.

3. Migrant Workers

Recommendation: All migrant workers should have permanent resident status upon arrival. In the interim, restore Employment Insurance (EI) benefits to all migrant workers to allow them access to pensions, parental benefits, EI and supports after injuries even after they leave Canada. Additionally, in the interim all migrant workers should be allowed to convert to open work permits that allow them to maintain status even if they leave an egregious employer.

Migrant workers are over-represented in low-wage work in Canada. Their precarious immigration status has made them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by employers and recruiters. Workers who are trying to transition to permanent resident status – such as live-in caregivers – face long processing delays which lead to precarity in their work and residence status as well as impact access to healthcare coverage and other services.

4. Universal/affordable Childcare

Recommendation: Provide universal and affordable national childcare. It will benefit all women, but specially low-income and working poor families of racialized and immigrant backgrounds.

Ontario – the province with the highest childcare fees[i] also has gender wage gap that is higher than the Canadian median, and employment rates for women at lower than the national average[ii]. The disparities are greater for racialized and immigrant and refugee women. Having to take care of children and high childcare costs is the key reason women take involuntary part-time work. Racialized and immigrant women are more likely to be in part-time work.

5. Family sponsorship

Recommendation: Make the sponsorship of family members more accessible and affordable by reducing fees and revising income criteria to include low-income applicants.

All immigrant families will benefit from a more affordable and accessible immigration sponsorship process. Low-income families will gain the most benefit from family reunification in Canada with parents and grandparents both economically and socially and in terms of wellbeing, and yet they are the very families that may not have access because of high sponsorship fees and income criteria. Racialized immigrant women are over-represented among those who are excluded because they are low-income.

[i] Henessy, Trish. Better Child Care for Ontario. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. January 2017.
[ii] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm