

Trudeau government is behind on pay equity, women's employment: Oxfam report ^[1]

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While the Liberal government is working to advance gender equality in Canada and abroad, progress is "lacking" on pay equity and women's employment, states a new report from Oxfam Canada.

Oxfam Canada issued its second annual scorecard called Turning Feminist Promises into Progress, in advance of International Women's Day. The report grades the government on its progress in eight policy areas over the past year and uses traffic lights to indicate how much progress has been made.

"Under this government's watch, gender equality has moved from being a side issue to a priority," said Diana Sarosi, Oxfam Canada's policy manager, in a release.

Sarosi said the "hemorrhage" in the foreign aid budget has been stopped for the first time in more than a decade. She also cited Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy and championing the Gender Action Plan at the UN climate change summit as examples of commitments to advance women's rights.

But while three categories: women's leadership and representation, global development and climate change, received a "green" rating, a key area that affects Canada, "jobs and pay equity" remains red.

"Too many women in Canada and around the world remain stuck in precarious, low-paying jobs, and their salaries are still well below what men earn. Add to that difficulty finding affordable and accessible child care, and no wonder female labour force participation remains an issue," said Sarosi.

A spokesperson for Employment Minister Patty Hajdu said that "women deserve equal pay for work of equal value," in an email, and cited the government's plan to implement proactive pay equity legislation and pay transparency requirements in federally regulated workplaces.

"To ensure more women can succeed in the workforce, we've helped more women get paid work placements in STEM through the Student Work Placements program, increased the number of women in senior leadership positions and made more financial help available to female entrepreneurs," said spokesperson Matt Pascuzzo.

Sarosi also said that with the election on the horizon, this is the last year for the Liberal government to follow through on their "ambitious feminist priorities."

Sarosi acknowledged that the federal budget proposes to introduce pay equity legislation and tackle gender-based violence, but that Oxfam Canada wants to see the situation for women, particularly those living in poverty, improve.

The categories gender-based violence, tax, and conflict and crises, earned a yellow rating.

Julie Delahanty, the executive director of Oxfam Canada, acknowledged that the report is being launched at a time when Oxfam is "grappling" with how the organization deals with issues of sexual misconduct.

Delahanty wrote in the introduction of the report that Oxfam thought about whether it was appropriate to assess the government's progress on women's right when Oxfam has "much reflection and work to do on these issues ourselves."

She said Oxfam's supporters made it clear that while the organization has to change its culture, they're expected to continue their work.

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