

Women's economic security: Securing the future of Canada's economy ^[1]

Report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

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Summary

Over the past half a century, the economic security and participation of women in the Canadian economy has undergone an incredible transformation. Women's workforce participation increased steadily, from around 24% in 1953 to 76% in 1990. By 2016, women made up approximately 47.3% of the Canadian labour force. While this evolution has been advantageous to Canadian women and to the economy as a whole, there remain significant challenges to women's full and equal participation in the Canadian economy. Improving women's economic security is essential as it contributes significantly to the maintenance and growth of the Canadian economy.

For this reason, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (the Committee) agreed on 14 November 2016 to undertake a study on the economic security of women in Canada. The Committee held 22 meetings from 2 February to 9 November 2017 and received testimony from 108 witnesses, 19 of whom appeared as individuals, and the remainder representing 69 organizations. As well, the Committee was briefed by officials from 11 government departments and agencies. In addition, the Committee received written briefs from a number of organizations, along with written speaking notes and follow-up responses to questions from the Committee members.

Throughout the hearings, the Committee was told about both the progress made and the challenges remaining regarding women's economic security and economic leadership in Canada. Specifically, the key themes that emerged during the course of the study were:

- 1) factors contributing to women's economic insecurity;
- 2) measures to increase women's economic security; and
- 3) measures to increase women's economic leadership.

Factors contributing to women's economic insecurity are numerous and include systemic and structural barriers in the economy; bias, discrimination and sexism; gender-based harassment and violence; the gender wage gap; a lack of investment in social infrastructure; precarious and part-time employment; insufficient comprehensive support services; and the burden and effects of unpaid work. The Committee recognizes that while these factors may affect all women, certain women are particularly at risk of economic insecurity, for instance Indigenous women, women living in rural and remote communities, single mothers, immigrant and refugee women, women living with disabilities, and elderly women.

Witnesses identified a variety of potential measures to help increase women's economic security and economic leadership. Regarding women's economic security, the Committee agreed with witnesses that measures related to improving childcare, Employment Insurance, maternity and parental leave, pay equity, access to education, income security, retirement and pension security, and gender-sensitive economic policy-making, are recommended for increasing women's economic security.

Other measures that the Committee believes can have a positive influence on women's economic leadership include implementing workplace policies for women, and increasing women's representation in traditionally male-dominated professions, in senior management positions and on corporate boards.

The Committee intends this report to provide guidance to the federal government on efforts and initiatives that can be implemented to improve women's economic security. The 86 recommendations presented in this study provide a path towards achieving full equality for women through improving women's economic security and participation in Canada.

Recommendations relating to childcare

Recommendation 29 That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, and in consultation with relevant not-for-profit organizations, increase its funding to subsidized language training, including accompanying childcare services, for immigrant and refugee women.

Recommendation 37 That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, ensure that all childcare investments are accompanied by reporting mechanisms and indicators for long-term data collection that will provide all levels of government with appropriate forecasting and analysis tools to improve childcare services, with the goal of achieving high-quality, universal, accessible, flexible, affordable and inclusive childcare.

Recommendation 38 That the Government of Canada, when investing in childcare, recognize the specific and unique needs of: children in rural, remote, northern and urban communities; children from low-income families; children from single-parent families; children of different cultural backgrounds, including new immigrants; children with different abilities; and Indigenous children.

Recommendation 39 That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, provide childcare options, including care in the home, for parents working irregular hours and shift work.

Recommendation 40 That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, collect national data about the availability of subsidized childcare on post-secondary education institutions' campuses.

Recommendation 43 That the Government of Canada examine domestic and international parental leave best practices, with the goal of promoting the equitable sharing of child-rearing responsibilities between men and women and increasing men's participation in childcare.

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