

Child Care Now's submission to United Nations emphasizes need for investment and systemic reform of the care sector ^[1]

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Next month, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women will convene in Geneva for its 89th session. The Committee is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that Canada ratified in 1981.

Child Care Now recently joined forces with the Canadian Labour Congress, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women to make a submission to the UN committee on Canada's implementation of Article 11 of the convention in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic recovery.

Article 11 asserts that states shall "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights" including measures to "prevent discrimination against women on the grounds of marriage or maternity".

Women's employment trends continue to fluctuate following pandemic lows

Our joint submission notes that in 2019, prior to the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, women's employment was at 58.5%, almost equal to its peak of 58.9% in 2008. Women's employment dropped by 10% at the beginning of the pandemic and, despite some gains, many groups of women continue to face barriers to entering the labour market, with young women's employment in July 2024 at 5% below the pre-pandemic levels.

Employment and income inequalities remain

Importantly, our report notes that marginalized workers – namely immigrant women, racialized women and Indigenous women continue to be underrepresented in the Canadian labour market. First Nations and Inuit women face the largest employment barriers.

Even with government initiatives to increase the pay of low-paid workers, the gender pay gap in 2022 is reported at 69.8%, or a difference of \$14,400. Citing the 2022 Canadian Income Survey, the report shows that the market income for racialized women was 94.1% of non-racialized women, yet only 64.4% of non-racialized men. Women with disabilities brought home only 74% of the income of women without disabilities, and 51.2% of the income of men without disabilities.

Gender inequality in employment is driven by unequal distribution of unpaid work

Our submission highlights that "a major contributor to the gap in men's and women's wages in the unequal distribution of unpaid work." Although the pandemic brought to light the unequal gendered distribution of care work, recent data shows there has been little change. Occupational segregation continues, with women working in industries where women are overrepresented and underpaid.

In 2021, 54% of women were employed in just 20 occupations, all involving the "5 Cs" of caring, clerical, catering, cashiering and cleaning.

Early learning and child care highlighted as a barrier to employment and economic security

Our report explains how early childhood education and care remains a key barrier to advancing women's employment and economic security. While the early successes of the CWELCC agreements are applauded – notably the commitment to reduce fees and build a primarily public and not-for-profit child care system -, the submission emphasizes that new spaces are not being created quickly enough to meet demand.

A key piece of the expansion puzzle is strengthening the early childhood workforce. With poor wages and working conditions, there is a shortage of early childhood educators.

Child care is one part of the care crisis

This shortage of early childhood workers is attributed to the undervaluation of the care workforce more broadly, including care for the elderly and people with disabilities. Our report highlights how the care crisis is a result of a lack of public expenditure on social services, combined with an aging population with increased care needs.

The pathwork of care in both the child care and other care sectors play a key role in women's barriers to paid employment. Thus, women's employment and economic security relies on greater investment in all care sectors. This care crisis is exacerbated by the privatization of care services. What is needed, our report states, is "a forward-thinking, integrated care strategy to support care workers and strengthen Canada's care economy."

More public initiatives needed

Our report demonstrates there is much more to be done to deliver on the initiatives and fulfill women's rights under Article 11 of the Convention.

"Canada must implement labour market reforms that remove institutional barriers to decent work [...] It is time to undertake systemic reform of available benefits and related employment standards to better support caregiving across the life course."

The full submission including recommendations is available [here](#) [2]

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