

Gender Equality

Background

At the current rate of progress, Canada will not close the gender gap until the year 2240.¹ The pace of change over the past two decades has been glacial. While the gap between women's and men's participation in higher education has closed, the gaps between their earnings and their representation in senior management ranks hasn't shifted, nor have levels of violence against women decreased.² This isn't just a problem for women. Violence against women costs Canada more than \$9.3 billion a year and if the gap between men's and women's employment continues at its present rate, Canada could lose as much as 8% in GDP growth over the next twenty years.³

Current Issues

Women's work

Women's economic well-being has not increased appreciably over the past five years. They continue to have lower incomes than their male peers, in spite of increased levels of education and training. They are over-represented in minimum-wage and part-time jobs, their access to EI has declined, and their participation in the labour force has been stagnant. The gender gap in labour force participation did close slightly during this period, but that was the result of a de-

cline in male labour force participation, not a rise in female participation.

As shown in *Table 10*, employment levels are still lower among some groups of women, including immigrant and Aboriginal women. Women with disabilities who are able to work and who are in the labour force have even lower levels of employment.⁴

Women's full-time employment rates, for those aged 25 to 64, have held steady over the past five years at 57%, compared to 76% of men aged 25 to 64 years.⁶ The nature of work done by employed women is distinct from that of men. Women continue to be three times as likely as men to hold part-time jobs — with 15% of women aged 25–64 working part-time, compared to 5% of men.⁷

The standard explanation for women being over-represented in part-time work and under-represented in full-time work is that they choose to work part-time or not at all. However, the percentage of women aged 25–64 who work part-time by choice has held steady at 5% over the past decade.⁸ The percentage of women who identify business conditions and the lack of full-time jobs as the reason for working part-time is also 5%,⁹ which is double the percentage of men who identify these reasons for continuing to work part-time.¹⁰ These data suggest that women are persistently underemployed and that discriminatory hiring practices are a significant factor in their underemployment.

TABLE 10 Employment Rates, Canada (%)⁵

	Males (25 to 64)	Females (25 to 64)
Aboriginal Identity	65.3	60.1
Non-Aboriginal Identity	80.3	71.4
Immigrant	80.1	65.7
Non-Immigrant	79.9	72.9
Visible Minority	79.8	64.4
Non-Visible Minority	80.7	68.1

Increasing access to full-time work for the two-thirds of women who are not choosing to work part-time is important to them, their families, and the economy. Women's increased participation in paid work in Canada has been "the mainstay of per capita real income growth over the last decade," according to the OECD.¹¹ OECD projections conclude that narrowing the gap between men's and women's levels of employment by 50% would increase the GDP per capita annual growth rate by 0.2 percentage points in Canada, thus contributing an additional \$3.9 billion dollars to the economy in 2014 alone.¹²

The 2013 Federal Budget set out policies intended to "Connect Canadians with Available Jobs."¹³ It estimates that there will be an additional 319,000 jobs in the construction sector and approximately 200,000 jobs in extractive industries by 2020. Women currently make up less than 20% of the workers in these industries. Yet in spite of a need for a large number of new workers, only 15% of extractive industry employers have recruitment policies targeted at women.¹⁴ If women's participation rates in these industries were increased to just 25%, there

would be 188,650 new workers to help fill the shortfall.

Some industry experts speculate that women don't work in these sectors because they don't want to. Yet a recent survey finds no lack of interest. Rather, women seeking work in the extractive industry identify the same barriers as women in every other industry: a lack of child care, a lack of flexible work practices, and the low levels of women in management positions.¹⁵

Any economic plan to connect Canadians with jobs must address these barriers. More than 70% of all women with children under the age of five participate in the paid workforce. Women are 20 times as likely as men to cite child care as a reason for not participating in full-time work.¹⁶ The current cost of having one child in daycare in large metropolitan centres such as Toronto and Vancouver is up to half of the median income of working women in those cities. It is little wonder, then, that by 2008 Quebec's subsidized childcare program had directly contributed to a 3.8% increase in women's labour force participation. The program also provided a broad economic benefit to

TABLE 11 Median Employment Incomes, Canada²

	Male (25 to 54)	Female (25 to 54)
Aboriginal Identity	37,617	33,871
Non-Aboriginal Identity	47,895	34,112
Visible Minority	38,676	29,157
Non-Visible Minority	49,789	34,963
First Generation Immigrant	40,962	29,758
Non-Immigrant	49,611	35,099

Quebec's population, increasing Quebec's GDP by 1.7%.¹⁷

Yet, rather than investing in much-needed child care, current federal economic policies provide incentives for women with children to stay out of the labour force – whether they want to or not. A recent analysis shows that the Universal Child Care Benefit has reduced the labour force participation of women overall, and reduced the participation of women with lower educational attainment by 3.3%.¹⁸ The women who are losing access to paid work are those who can least afford it.

There are significant long-term costs for women who spend time out of the paid workforce. Due to the high cost of unsubsidized child care and the fact that women on average earn less than men, when Canadians have children it is usually the female parent who reduces her hours of paid work to look after them. This has an adverse effect on their long-term economic security. The longer women stay out of paid work, the lower their average earnings are when they return to work – a pay gap that they never close.¹⁹ While women are out of paid work they do not contribute directly to pen-

sion funds or to EI, and when they return to work they have less access to EI because they have banked fewer hours of paid employment. This creates a cycle of lower-income employment – where women take lower-paying, less secure jobs because they have less access to EI while they are looking for work. This pattern contributes to the disproportionately higher numbers of older women living in poverty.

Women's wages

As shown in *Table 11*, unequal rates of pay for working women continue to undermine their economic security in the short and long terms. Women's median employment incomes are 34% less than men's incomes.²⁰ For some groups of working women, the picture is even worse. Visible minority women earn 17% less than non-visible minority women and 25% less than visible minority men. First-generation immigrant women earn 15% less than non-immigrant women and 25% less than immigrant men. Aboriginal women's median incomes are nearly the same as those of non-Aboriginal women, but lag 10% behind the earnings of

Aboriginal men and 31% behind the earnings of non-Aboriginal men.

The gap between what women and men earn isn't wholly the result of women's lower rates of full-time employment. Women working full-time still earn 20% less than men working full-time in Canada,²² and the majority of minimum wage earners are women.²³ Among the women employed in minimum-wage or low-wage jobs, single women, racialized women, and immigrant women are further over-represented.

The combination of low wages and lower levels of paid work contributes to women's increased levels of poverty.²⁴ Nearly 150,000 more working-age women live in poverty than do working-age men.²⁵ Poverty rates are higher in households that depend on female earners — whether they are single females, single female parents, or dual-parent families where the female parent is the sole income earner.²⁶ Closing the pay gap means moving women and their families out of poverty.

The high cost of violence

Unequal levels of pay and promotion and unaffordable child care are not the only barriers to well-being for women in Canada. Economic security cannot be achieved in isolation from physical security, and levels of spousal and sexual violence remain high: 1.8 million Canadians have experienced one of these forms of violence in the past five years alone.²⁷ These forms of violence account for more than 25% of all police-reported violent crime in Canada.²⁸

Women of all economic groups experience sexual and spousal violence. In the aftermath of that violence, however, even women from high-income households experience significant economic insecurity.²⁹ For lower-income women, the cost of food and housing often drives them to return to the abusive household.³⁰ Ensuring women's economic security is a key step toward ensuring women's personal security and overall well-being. It is also important to the economic well-being of the country.

The annual cost of intimate-partner violence and sexual assault in Canada is \$334 per person.³¹ This compares to the cost of the use of illegal drugs (an estimated \$262 per person) and the cost of smoking (an estimated \$541 per person).³² In spite of the profound personal, social, and economic costs of violence against women, the federal government spends only \$2.77 per person annually on programs and services related to intimate-partner violence and sexual assault.³³

Clearly, the cost of violence outstrips public spending to address that violence. To ensure an effective and coherent strategy to end violence against women, further investments are needed in prevention efforts and services for survivors of violence. A well-funded national action plan would ensure that Canada's efforts to end violence against women are coherent, coordinated, and effective.

Beyond the glass ceiling

Twenty years ago, Canada was ranked first for its level of progress toward gender equality by the United Nations.³⁴ But that prog-

ress has nearly ground to a halt. If Canada continues on its current path, we will not close its gender gap for another 228 years.³⁵

Gender inequality is a crucial barrier to growth, good governance, and well-being. Investing political and financial resources in increased economic and personal security for women will pay huge dividends, not only in the quality of life of Canadians but also in the economic stability of the country. Canada cannot afford to wait two centuries to realize these benefits.

AFB Actions

The AFB will:

- Invest in a National Action Plan to Address Violence Against Women (cost: \$498 million annually).³⁶ Components of the plan will include:
 - funding for annual, detailed national surveys on violence against women
 - support for an office to provide federal coordination
 - increased funding for prevention programs
 - increased funding for victims' services, including long-term housing
 - funding to support uniform access to specialized social, legal and health services, including domestic violence courts, sexual-assault nurse examiners, and crisis centres.
- Increase funding for Status of Women Canada and restore its mandate to fund women's groups to conduct independent policy research and advocacy (cost: \$100 million annually).³⁷
- Invest in social infrastructure, including a federal childcare program (see the Child Care and Early Learning chapter).
- Increase women's access to jobs in growth sectors through training, education, and increased access to child care.
- Provide adequate and accessible income supports and improve the earnings and working conditions of those in the low-wage workforce (see the chapter on Income Inequality, Poverty, and Wealth).
- Proactively ensure equal pay for work of equal value by repealing the Public Service Equitable Compensation Act, establishing proactive pay equity legislation, and implementing the recommendations of the 2004 Pay Equity Task Force (cost: \$10 million/year).
- Eliminate tax policies that exacerbate women's economic insecurity and reduce women's labour force participation, such as the UCCB (see the chapter on Income Inequality, Poverty, and Wealth), pension income-splitting measures, retirement compensation arrangements and tax-free savings accounts (see the Taxation chapter).

Notes

¹ McInturff, Kate. (2013). *Closing Canada's Gender Gap: Year 2240 Here We Come!* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

² McInturff, Kate. (2013). *The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; OECD. (2012). "Table I.A3.1. Projected average annual growth rate in GDP and GDP per

- capita in USD 2005 PPP, percentage, 2011–30.” *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- 3** McInturff, Kate. (2013). *Closing Canada's Gender Gap: Year 2240 Here We Come!* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Sinha, Maire. (2013). *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends, 2011*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 4** Galameau, Diane, and Marian Radulescu. (2009). “Employment Among the Disabled.” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 5** National Household Survey 2011. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 6** “CAN-SIM Table: Table 282-0002: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and detailed age group.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 7** “CAN-SIM Table: Table 282-0002: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and detailed age group.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 8** “CAN-SIM Table 282-0014: Labour Force Survey Estimates (LFS), Part-Time Employment By Reason For Part-Time Work, Sex And Age Group Annual.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 9** “CAN-SIM Table 282-0014: Labour Force Survey Estimates (LFS), Part-Time Employment By Reason For Part-Time Work, Sex And Age Group Annual.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 10** “CAN-SIM Table 282-0014: Labour Force Survey Estimates (LFS), Part-Time Employment By Reason For Part-Time Work, Sex And Age Group Annual.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 11** Bibbee, Alexandra. (2008). “Tax Reform for Efficiency and Fairness in Canada: Economics Department Working Paper No. 631.” Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
- 12** OECD. (2012). “Table I.A3.1. Projected average annual growth rate in GDP and GDP per capita in USD 2005 PPP, percentage, 2011–30.” *Closing the Gender Gap: Act Now*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- 13** *Jobs, Growth and Long-Term Prosperity: Economic Action Plan 2013*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.
- 14** Catalyst. (2012). *Women in Gas, Mining & Oil in Australia, Canada, & the U.S.*
- 15** Women in Mining Canada. (2010). *Ramp Up: A Study on the Status of Women in Canada's Mining and Exploration Sector*.
- 16** “CAN-SIM Table 282-0014: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), part-time employment by reason for part-time work, sex and age group.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 17** Fortin, Pierre, et al. (2012). *Impact of Quebec's Universal Low-Fee Child-care Program on Female Labour Force Participation, Domestic Income and Government Budgets*. Sherbrooke: Research Chair in Taxation and Public Finance, University of Sherbrooke.
- 18** Schirle, Tammy. (2013). “The Effect of Universal Child Benefits on Labour Supply.” Canadian Labour Market and Skills Researcher Network: Working Paper No. 125.
- 19** Zhang, Xuelin. (2009). “Earnings of Women With and Without Children.” *Perspectives on Labour and Income*. Vol. 10.3. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 20** “CAN-SIM Table 202-0102: Average female and male earnings, and female-to-male earnings ratio, by work activity, 2011 constant dollars, annual.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 21** National Household Survey 2011. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 22** “Employment Income Statistics in 2010 (7), Sex (3), Work Activity in 2010 (3), Highest Certificate, Diploma or Degree (6) and Industry – North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 2007 (104) for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2011 National Household Survey.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 23** “Employees earning minimum wage or less by gender and marital status for Canada and the provinces.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada. Custom tabulations from Labour Force Survey microdata.
- 24** Poverty is defined here as those with incomes below the after-tax Low Income Measure (LIM).
- 25** “CAN-SIM Table 202-0802: Persons in low income families.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 26** “CAN-SIM Table 202-0804: Persons in low income, by economic family type, annually.” Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 27** Sinha, Maire. (2013). *Measuring Violence Against Women: Statistical Trends, 2011*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 28** Sinha, Maire. (2012). *Family Violence In Canada: A Statistical Profile, 2010*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- 29** Varcoe, Colleen, et al. (2011). “Attributing Selected Costs to Intimate Partner Violence in a Sample of Women Who Have Left Abusive Partners.” *Canadian Public Policy*, vol. 37.3.
- 30** Tutty, Leslie. (2006). *Effective Practices in Sheltering Women Leaving Violence in Intimate Relationships*. Toronto: YWCA Canada.
- 31** Based on total estimated costs for 2009 in Zang, Tingh, et al. (2012). *An Estimation of the Economic Impact of Spousal Violence in Canada*. Ottawa: Justice Canada; and McInturff, Kate. (2013). *The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Per capita for population aged 15 and over in 2009 (as incidents are only for population aged 15 and over and rates of incidence are based primarily on the 2009 General Social Survey).
- 32** Rehm, Jurgen, et al. (2007). “The Costs of Alcohol, Illegal Drugs, and Tobacco in Canada, 2002.” *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*. November 2007.
- 33** McInturff, Kate. (2013). *The Gap in the Gender Gap: Violence Against Women*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 34** United Nations Development Program. (1994). *Human Development Report 1994*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- 35** McInturff, Kate. (2013). *Closing Canada's Gender Gap: Year 2240 Here We Come!* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- 36** Bringing federal per capita spending to the same level as current levels of provincial per capita spending.
- 37** This represents a 200% increase in the current annual budget for Status of Women Canada, to support the resumption of funding of research and advocacy.