

WOMEN AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY

The Big Picture

In Canada

- Total working time is similar for women and men. However, there is a distinct division of labour between the sexes. On average, women spend more of their time on unpaid work, especially when there are children, while men spend the majority of their time on paid work.
- On average, women's earnings and incomes are continuing to rise but they still tend to be lower than men's. Women are often in precarious jobs and sectors and also have less access to social security provisions and private benefit plans.
- Although the majority of women are employed and most have one full-time paid job, the number working in non-standard arrangements, including part-time, temporary, multiple jobs and self-employment, has grown over the past decade.
- As society ages, an emerging issue is the "sandwich generation" — parents looking after their own children and also caring for their own aging parents, further adding to the time crunch of Canadian women as these duties fall disproportionately on them.
- Among women, there are significant differences and thus progress has been uneven with some women even falling behind. Women who face barriers due to factors such as race, ethnicity, Aboriginal status, disability, marital breakdown or the experience of violence and abuse, often do not compare favourably to other women or to men within their population.

Around the World

- Representing over half the world's population, women are critical to the achievement of sustainable economic development. Women's participation in trade and investment as workers, entrepreneurs, consumers and investors contributes to the achievement of sustained economic growth.
- Over the past two decades, the number of women employed in the paid labour force has increased substantially. Globally, the increase in women's overall share of the labour force has been particularly marked in export-oriented sectors, where women comprise as much as 3/4 of the workforce. Moreover, women's contributions to the informal sector, and to the unpaid work of society constitute major contributions to the economy and economic growth.
- The gender effect of globalization is complex and its effects are mixed. Overall, globalization to date has done little to address gender inequalities over the long term. While in some circumstances it has reduced inequality with increased participation of women in the labour force, in other cases it has intensified them.
- There is also increasing need to examine the gender-dimension of international trade. This was raised during an Expert Workshop on Trade, Sustainable Development and Gender convened by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in July 1999. Moreover, women's organizations are advocating that the World Trade Organization (WTO), the primary trade regulator for the world's major trading nations, ensure that its policies reflect gender concerns.
- There is also increasing need for gender sensitive policies, for modernization of social security systems and for the engendering of economics to enable women to participate in the economy on an equal footing with men and to ensure that women's needs and priorities are included in national development.



Facts and Figures

Statistics and figures below are from Statistics Canada unless otherwise noted.

In Canada

- Women are now starting businesses at twice the rate of men, with women starting half of all new businesses. Women own 1/3 of small- and medium-sized businesses. In 1997, women created more jobs than Canada's top 100 companies.
- In 1998, women spent an average of 2.8 hours daily on paid work and 4.4 hours on unpaid work, whereas the situation for men was the reverse. Men spent 4.5 hours on paid work and 2.7 hours on unpaid work. In 1996, 15% of all women between the ages of 25-54 provided unpaid child care and care or assistance to a senior, in comparison to only 9% of men in this age range.
- Between 1986 and 1995, women's income from all sources compared to men's, rose 8 percentage points. By 1997, it was up to 61.8%. The male-female earnings ratio for full-year, full-time employment is higher at 72.5% but there has been little change in the past five years. Earnings are the majority of women's income but pensions, child support and other sources of income are more important to women than men. The tax system also had a positive effect on gender equality with women's after-tax income higher than before tax. (*Economic Gender Equality Indicators*, Canada, 1997)
- In 1999, women made up 45.7% of the overall workforce. The unemployment rate for women and men over 25 years is currently 5.6%; in 1993, the rate was 9.8% for women. The participation rate for women over 25 has increased to about 60% (compared to 74% for men) today from 46%, 20 years ago. Most employed women return to their jobs within six months of having a child.
- In 1999, 41% of employed women aged 15-64 had a non-standard employment arrangement (up from 35% in 1989) compared to 20% of men; 12.9% of women were self-employed (20.3% of men), compared to 9.9% of women in 1990 (17.4% of men).
- In 1999, women accounted for 52.1% of part-time workers aged 15-24 (men 37.6%), 27% of women aged 25-44 (men 4.5%), 22.1% of those 45-54 (men 4.3%) and 31.4% of those 55-64 (men 10.2%).
- In 1998, women accounted for 40% of regular Employment Insurance (EI) beneficiaries. However, women accounted for 98% of EI maternity/parental benefit recipients and 59% of those receiving sickness benefits. In contrast, women accounted for only 40% of those receiving self-employment assistance benefits, 38% of those receiving training benefits, 38% of those getting job-creation benefits and 34% of those involved in work-sharing arrangements.
- Canadian demographics are changing, with a more diverse population and varied family arrangements; the proportions of women who are lone parents are increasing, as are dual-income families, common-law relationships and women living alone. Difficulty in obtaining child support, access to pensions and ways to combine employment and family responsibilities continue to remain important issues for women.

Around the World

- Over the past twenty years, women have provided the bulk of new labour supply in developed and developing countries alike. In every region except Africa, the proportion of women in the labour force has grown substantially. (*World Employment Report 1998-99: Women And Training In The Global Economy*, ILO, 1998).
- Despite rapidly increasing rates of female education and participation in the workforce worldwide, most women continue to suffer from occupational segregation in the workplace and rarely break through the so-called "glass ceiling" separating them from top-level management and professional positions (*Breaking through the Glass Ceiling: Women in Management*, ILO, 1997)
- Around the world, an increasing number of women are launching their own enterprises. National estimates indicate that 10% of the new enterprises in North Africa, 33% in North America and 40% in the former East Germany were created by women; the figure for the United States surpasses 60%. Women predictably face more difficulties than men when first entering business

or attempting to expand. (*World Employment Report 1998-99: Women and training in the global economy*, ILO, 1998)

- Although some countries have modified laws related to property rights and access to other productive assets, women still do not have equal access to the resources and benefits of development, including land, education and training and credit.
- Women around the world earn anywhere from 50-92 cents for every dollar a man earns (UNICEF, 1995)
- Despite the increase in jobs for women brought about by globalization, women still face discrimination, low wages, poor working conditions and high insecurity. (*Human Development Report 1999*)

Towards Equality

In Canada

- Under the *Employment Insurance Act*, parental benefits are available to both biological and adoptive parents. These benefits can be claimed by either parent or shared. As of December 31, 2000, parental benefits will be increased from 10 to 35 weeks in addition to 15 weeks of maternity benefits available for birth mothers.
- For families caring for children with severe difficulties, the 2000 federal budget provides additional tax assistance through a supplement to the Disability Tax Credit. This builds on other initiatives since Beijing such as the infirm dependent credit and caregiver credit which provide tax assistance for the care of low-income, infirm dependent adult relatives seniors. The medical expense tax credit has also been positive. It provides assistance including respite care and home modifications for those with severe mobility impairments.
- Over the past five years, a number of tax measures for families with children, have been introduced to improve the economic situation of Canadians and support gender equality. General tax reductions will assist women as low-income earners and increases to the Child Care Expense Deduction better enable parents, especially women, to meet their income and family care needs. The Canada Child Tax Benefit which provides income support to low- and middle-income families based on number of children, has been continuously enriched. The cheques go to the mother.
- The Canada Pension Plan has features that are particularly important to women such as the survivor benefit, the child-rearing drop-out provision, credit-splitting and full indexation. These features recognize that women's pattern of unpaid work, employment and remuneration is still very different from those of men.
- Also since Beijing, the Government of Canada introduced a child support reform package to improve fairness for children following separation and divorce. It includes guidelines for the setting of awards, enforcement measures and taxation changes. As women are the majority of custodial parents and may spend many years as lone parents, these changes are important to their economic well-being.
- In 1996, Canada's employment equity legislation was strengthened and expanded. Major pay equity adjustments have since been made to several categories of federal public service employees.
- In 1999, Canada also made a commitment to make workplace policies of federally regulated employees more family friendly.
- In 1997, Canadian Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women launched the Economic Gender Equality Indicators – the first gender-sensitive economic indicators.
- In 2001, the Canadian Census of Population questions on unpaid work, developed for the first time in 1996, will again be included. They focus on dependent care as a critical issue of public policy interest.

Around the World

- The Government of Canada works actively to support women business owners. In June 1998, Canada launched the Businesswomen in Trade Web site, which allows women business owners to learn more about government services and how to export successfully. It also allows them to network on-line, learn about financing and insurance services, and locate foreign business opportunities.

- The Trade Research Coalition, under the direction of 20 Canadian businesswomen, academics and government representatives, launched a major research project in September 1998. The research surveyed 254 women business owners, and examined their export patterns and export service requirements. The results, contained in the document *Beyond Borders: Canadian Businesswomen in International Trade*, provided the main substance of the policy elements discussed at the Canada-U.S. Women's Trade Summit, which took place in 1999. The Summit involved 300 Canadian and American businesswomen within small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and provided participants with an opportunity to discuss trade impediments between the two countries, particularly as experienced by businesswomen and researched by the Trade Research Coalition; and allowed new deals to be formed through organized networking events.
 - The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) supports a number of projects including:
 - a Structural Adjustment and Gender project in Africa bringing together African researchers, academics and government decision-makers to dialogue, research, share information and advocate on gender issues. They have contributed to the design of structural adjustment programs and worked to ensure that gender considerations are taken into account in all policies and programs implemented by national governments and donors;
 - Proshika Kendra, a local organization in Bangladesh that specifically targets the central role of the exploitation of women in perpetuating poverty. It provides training in that relationship for self-help groups as well as providing skills training and credit for microenterprise; and
 - Grupo Factor X in Mexico, a labour organization that established a women's centre offering health services, legal counselling on labour rights, and training to mobilize women activists to defend the rights of women workers in the maquiladoras and free trade zones.
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