

WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY



The *Beijing Platform for Action* (PfA) identifies “inequality in economic structures and policies in all forms of productive activities and in access to resources” as a critical area of concern. The PfA contains strategies and actions to: promote women’s economic rights, independence and control over economic resources; facilitate equal access to resources, employment, markets and trade; strengthen women’s economic capacity; eliminate employment discrimination; and, promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities.

PATTERNS AND TRENDS*

- On average, women’s total workload, paid and unpaid, is higher than men’s. However, the gap narrowed between 1992 and 1998.
- In 1998, women did 62% as much paid work as men, up from 59% in 1992, while women’s unpaid work dropped from 189% of men’s to 156% in 1998.
- Parents are reporting more medium to high work/family conflict – for mothers, up from 44% in 1991 to 54% in 2001, and up from 37% to 47% for fathers.
- In 2004, women made up almost half of Canada’s paid labour force at 47%. Among women 25-44 years of age, 82.3% participated in the labour force.
- In 2001, the participation rate among women aged 25-44 was 80% for immigrants, 73% for visible minorities and 69% for Aboriginal women. Women aged 25-54 with a disability had a rate of 46%.
- Most women worked full-time, with 28% of women compared to 11% of men working part-time in 2003. About 11% of women and 19% of men were self-employed that year.
- Female lone-parents with children under 16 were less likely than mothers in two-parent families to be employed at 68% compared to 72%.
- In 2003, 70% of employed women were working in traditionally female-dominated occupations such as teaching, nursing, clerical work or sales, down from 74% in 1987.
- The ratio of women’s to men’s earnings for those aged 18-64 was 58% in 2002, up from 54% in 1997.

- The ratio of women’s to men’s total income (e.g., earnings, child benefits, child support, pensions) for all those 16 and over was 62% in 2002, up from 59% in 1997. The ratio for total income after tax was higher at 66% in 2002, up from 64% in 1997.
- Women’s average total income after tax in 2002 was \$20,400 and men’s was \$30,700.

TOWARDS EQUALITY

Examples of federal government support for economic gender equality include:

- the federal government and most provincial and territorial governments have employment equity and pay equity laws and policies in place;
- following a review of the *Employment Equity Act*, the Government of Canada initiated a pilot Workplace Integration Strategy for Persons with Disabilities in 2003-04;
- Employment Insurance (EI) provides income support during job loss. In 2002-03, women comprised 46% of total income benefit recipients and were over 44% of participants in other EI measures that help participants gain work experience, improve skills, access employment services and start new businesses;
- EI parental benefits were extended in 2000 – from 10 to 35 weeks – for a combined maternity/parental benefit period of one year. The two-week waiting period for the second parent was removed and parents are also now allowed to work while receiving benefits;

- among supports for self-employed women is the Business Development Bank of Canada's \$25 million fund aimed at increasing the availability of financing for fast-growing, women-owned firms. Provinces and territories also provide various supports and loans for women entrepreneurs;
- the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS) helps Aboriginal people prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. From 1999-2003, it supported over 37,000 Aboriginal women returning to work (44% of all return-to-work clients), over 13,000 women returning to school (54% of clients) and it created over 7,500 child care spaces;
- federal supports that are important for women to combine earning and caring include: the Canada Child Tax Benefit (paid monthly, usually to the mother); measures to reduce income taxes (e.g., deduction for child care expenses, credits that help lone parents, individuals with a disability and caregivers); and federal transfer funds to provinces and territories for social programs including early childhood development and early learning and child care;
- a 2002 review of the 1997 Child Support Guidelines shows that support amounts are fairer and more predictable, ensuring children receive the financial support they need from both divorcing parents; and
- the Canada (and Quebec) Pension Plans (C/QPP) and Old Age Security (OAS) have features important to gender equality. The child-rearing drop-out clause helps increase women's CPP/QPP retirement income and the OAS does not depend on having had paid employment.

Planning Guide and a new Canadian Women's Innovation Award.

- The AHRDS was recently renewed until 2009 with an investment of \$125 million.
- In 2004, the Government of Canada committed to put in place the foundations of a national early learning and child care system based on the principles of quality, universal accessibility and development (QUAD), to be developed in partnership with provinces and territories.

* The source for data is Statistics Canada unless otherwise mentioned. Work and income indicators are based on *Economic Gender Equality Indicators* developed by Statistics Canada for Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women. Also, please note that *Women in Canada 2005: a gender-based statistical report* is being developed by Statistics Canada for publication in the fall of 2005.

RECENT INITIATIVES

- Since 2004, six weeks of EI Compassionate Care benefits are available for temporary absences from work to provide care for a critically ill child, parent, spouse or common-law partner. Job protection for eight weeks is provided for federally-regulated employees under the *Canada Labour Code*.
- Recent initiatives for women entrepreneurs include an Aboriginal Women's Business