

BRIEF TO

**Consultations on Employability in Canada
The House of Commons Standing Committee
on Human Resources, Social Development and
the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

October 24, 2006
Halifax, Nova Scotia

**SUBMITTED BY
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA**

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BACKGROUND ON THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN OF CANADA

Founded in 1893, NCWC is a non-profit, non-partisan organization of women's groups representing a very large section of our population, with diverse occupation, language, origin and culture, and reflecting a cross-section of public opinion. NCWC is composed of 18 local councils, 5 provincial councils and 28 nationally organized societies.

NCWC policy is formulated by means of local council initiative. Policy additions and changes are proposed, circulated and voted upon by the general membership. Council members may speak only on existing policy when contacting the government, the media, and the public. Thus, this brief is the united voice of the federated membership of the National Council of Women of Canada.

NCWC, with the exception of one full-time employee in our national office, is entirely staffed by volunteers who often use their own after-tax dollars to help fund NCWC's work. In order to ensure broad grassroots participation, membership dues are purposely low. This brief is submitted, therefore, without the cost projections which would lend significant weight to our policy recommendations, as funds are not available to hire necessary research staff.

NCWC holds consultative status (Category II) with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). In addition, NCWC is a federate of the International Council of Women (ICW), an international non-governmental organization holding consultative status (Category I) with ECOSOC. Founded in 1888, ICW is composed of National Councils in 74 countries, bringing together women of all nations, races, creeds, and cultural traditions. NCWC is a Participating Non-Governmental Organization, working with the Women's Commission of the Organization of American States.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) appreciates the opportunity to participate in these Consultations on Employability in Canada.

As per the criteria we received from the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, we address the following issues, in no particular order:

- Recognition of foreign credentials
- Equal benefits for part-time workers
- Appointment of women to federal decision-making bodies in proportionate numbers
- Apprentice training in Canada
- Training programs for women
- Pay Equity
- Position of the sole parent under the Adult Occupational Training Act
- Child-care deductions for people on unemployment insurance, in training programs
- Child-care
- Adult literacy, workplace literacy
- Job sharing and unemployment
- Persons with disabilities
- Older workers

Equal Opportunity is defined through www.equalopportunity.on.ca as:

1. The absence of discrimination, as in the workplace, based on race, colour, age, gender, national origin, religion, or mental or physical disability;
2. Freedom from discrimination (as in employment) on the basis of race, colour, disability, age, or sometimes sexual orientation; and
3. The right to equivalent opportunities for employment regardless of race or colour or sex or national origin.

As we look at a variety of issues in this Brief, inequities in employment must also be addressed. For example, women earn on average approximately 72 cents for each dollar that a man makes for work of equal value. While freedom from discrimination has been legislated, along with pay equity, the fact remains that discrimination still exists, as does pay inequity.

Twenty-five years ago, Canada signed and ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and during the election, Stephen Harper signed the CEDAW pledge (as did all other party leaders.) However, he has now cut funding to the operating budget for Status of Women Canada. SWC has been an instrumental aid for women's progress toward gender equality, as have many women's organizations. The Harper government has also recently let women's groups know that they will no longer receive funding from SWC for the advocacy, lobbying, and research work that they do. How can Canadian women now ensure that they will continue to progress toward complete gender equality.

A. PAY EQUITY

In 1977 the federal government passed the Human Rights Act guaranteeing equal pay for work of equal value, and in September 1977 set up the Human Rights Commission to administer the Act. However, not all employed women currently receive equal pay for work of equal value.

We urge the federal government to:

- a) replace the existing federal pay equity scheme with comprehensive and proactive pay equity legislation,
- b) affirm that pay equity is a fundamental human right protected under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and international human rights law,
- c) devise effective methodology for job evaluations, job comparisons, wage adjustments, and the timing of corrective payments, and
- d) have easily accessible procedures for non-unionized women, as well as part-time, casual, seasonal, and contractual workers. (The Canadian Taxpayer has already invested in the necessary equivalence figures which were developed by Status of Women Canada.)

B. EQUAL BENEFITS FOR PART-TIME WORKERS

There are many employees who will never attain full employment, either by choice or because of barriers to their participation. Over the past several years, the fastest-growing segment of the labour force has been part-time workers. They are usually the first to be laid off, they have no job security, and, therefore, are at more risk of becoming unemployed and even homeless.

Whereas the majority of part-time workers are women; and whereas Canada and the provinces agreed to support and implement the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and whereas the Canada Labour Code covers only federal employees, leaving all other workers to be governed by provincial/territorial labour standards legislation, NCWC urges the government of Canada to:

- a) define and regulate, in legislation and regulation, the various types of work including but not necessarily limited to full-time, part-time, temporary, and contract work, and
- b) amend the regulations of the Canada Labour Code and all other relevant legislation and regulations so that all types of part-time workers receive the same protection, rights and benefits (on a pro-rated basis) as those guaranteed full-time workers, and
- c) honour the commitment to abide by and implement economic equality for women, based on the principles of CEDAW.

C. RECOGNITION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIALS

At the present time in Canada, there is a significant shortage of health care professionals such as nurses and doctors. Although qualified foreign-trained professionals could provide a partial answer to this shortage, they face a lack of recognition of their credentials. In order to ensure a level of competence for health care professionals across Canada, standard tests for accreditation have been set up, but fees for these qualifying exams are high and they often find it difficult to obtain Canadian experience. At HRSDC, the budget for language training has been cut, and this particularly penalizes immigrant women.

The process of accreditation of health-care professionals trained in other countries should be made more accessible, while ensuring that a uniform standard of competence is maintained across Canada. We urge the government of Canada to work with provincial governments, professional organizations and licensing bodies to:

- a) ensure loans and other resources are available for qualifying examinations and upgrading,
- b) develop academic assessment tools and testing,
- c) ensure re-testing is accessible and affordable,
- d) increase the opportunities for foreign-trained professionals to acquire more Canadian experience under supervision, and
- e) accelerate the accreditation and re-training process through English and French language training, including long-term and/or immersion language training where needed.

D. CHILD CARE

While a few parents have the luxury of choice and may decide to have one parent stay at home with their children through their first years, the reality is that most parents have to work. In two-parent households, both work in most cases because of economic necessity. In one-parent households, there is very seldom a choice. Adequate, flexible, and affordable child care to meet the needs of all parents and children, with special emphasis on early childhood education is an absolute necessity. These programs provide children with valuable social interaction and learning skills while providing a smoother transition to full-time schooling.

Flexible child care is an important component in the mix because so many people must work shifts, evenings, and/or weekends. For them a "9 to 5" day care does not fulfil their needs and puts even more strain on families as they struggle to make a living while seeing that their children are well cared for. Locally-accessible quality

child care is an asset not only to the working parent, but also the employer, which ultimately results in helping to improve Canadian per capita productivity.

E. JOB SHARING

Job sharing is an employment option which would be attractive to a number of people at different times in their life to meet specific career and personal needs. We ask the federal government to develop a policy on job sharing within the federal government and its Crown corporations, and to implement, whenever possible, requests for job sharing with pro-rated benefits at all levels in the federal Public Service. We also urge the government to encourage business to adopt a similar policy with respect to job sharing. We ask the government to develop, through Labour Canada, an information package on job sharing, and to adapt the Canada Labour Code and taxation regulations to accommodate job sharing.

F. ADULT LITERACY/WORKPLACE LITERACY

We urge the government of Canada to ensure Canada-wide access to literacy programs, to institute literacy programs in federally controlled workplaces and in correctional institutions for both men and women, and to encourage workplace literacy programs everywhere in Canada. At HRSDC, note that literacy programs have been cut and this particularly penalizes immigrant and illiterate women.

G. MATERNITY/PARENTAL LEAVE BENEFITS

We support maternity and parental leave benefits, however, it has to be recognized that only some mothers qualify because this benefit is directly tied into Employment Insurance (EI). Self-employed women and women who had too few hours of paid employment during a specified period do not qualify. Therefore, this "benefit" is by no means universal or inclusive, and many women will continue to be excluded until, and unless, maternity benefits are determined separately from Employment Insurance.

H. SUPPORT FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

NCWC believes that education and skills development should be given an increased emphasis, but is concerned about the seeming lack of accountability to the federal government on the part of the provinces for funding received for post secondary education and training and for social assistance programs.

We urge the government of Canada, in co-operation with the provincial/territorial governments and employers to plan and provide appropriate programs for women, to designate training dollars for women proportionate to women's participation in the labour force, and to ensure that adequate child care is provided during such training. We also urge the government to amend the Income Tax Act to allow the deduction of child care expenses against unemployment insurance benefits for single parents attending school.

We also urge the federal government to encourage the provincial/territorial governments to broaden areas or categories of work where apprentice training could be provided, to develop programs to attract a larger number of female applicants, and to publicize the availability of existing and proposed apprentice training programs.

I. APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN IN PROPORTIONATE NUMBERS

It is the policy of the National Council of Women of Canada to support the appointment of qualified women to decision-making bodies. We strongly urge the government of Canada to appoint women in proportionate numbers to federal decision-making bodies such as the Senate, the Bench, and boards and commissions.

J. SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

The need for an adequate tax base is underlined when research and development are considered. Helping Canadian business become more innovative will be one of the big challenges of the next century. The development of new environmental technologies is essential. Technology must not only stimulate economic growth, but must play a major role in producing a healthier environment.

K. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Government of Canada has developed programs to assist Canadians with disabilities to participate fully as citizens in the workplace and the community, but there is a need to monitor those services, and improve policies and practices to meet the needs, and to enhance the participation, of Canadians with disabilities.

L. OLDER WORKERS

Many older workers these days are worried and stressed because they often face being made redundant before they are ready to retire, with little or no financial compensation. Many, in fact, most, workers in our society will not get a company/ government pension at retirement. *[I refer to government pensions here in the context of someone who was an employee of a municipal/provincial/federal government department or agency or corporation.]*

Many will have spent their lives as the “working poor” and will thus only have their CPP/QPP and OAS to live on in retirement, supplemented by the Guaranteed Income Supplement at a rate based on their gross income. Many people, especially women, have had to take time away from their careers to care for children or elderly parents, resulting in years when they were not able to contribute to the CPP or RRSP’s. The result is that they are compelled to live out their days on a fixed and inadequate income, or are forced to find part-time work to supplement their retirement.

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70.4	Taxation of Income Below the Poverty Line
75.13	Income Tax Exemption for Interest on Private Home Mortgages
76.12	Tax Exemption on Incomes below Minimum Poverty Levels
76.4	Homemakers and the Canada Pension Plan
79.1	Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value
81.1	Pension Reform Retirement Income
81.2	Improving Pensions for Women
82.13EM	Canadian Housing Crises
83.5	Amendments to Unemployment Insurance Act – re: Maternity Benefits
86.9	Legalization of Midwifery
86.2	Equal Benefits for Part-time Workers
86.17EM	Child Care
87.11EM	Child Care
88.1	Housing: A National Emergency
88.4	Minimum Wage and Unemployment
89.5	National Objectives of Child Care
89.7	Environment
90.4	Government Clawback of Old Age Security Pensions/Family Allowances
90.13EM	Global Warming
91.1	Eliminating Child Poverty
92.19PU	Child Care
92.20PU	Housing
93.5	Changes to the Income Tax Act
93.12PU	Equality of Health Care Services for Canadians
94.4	Incentives for Workplace Childcare
94.5	Review of the Role and Functions of Social Programs
94.6	Income Tax Act/Stay-at-Home Parents
95.11PU	Tax Benefits for Child Care
95.14EM	Social Assistance Standards
96.12PU	Child Care Deductions
96.13PU	The Seniors Benefits
96.14PU	Women as Family Caregivers
96.6	Old Age Security
93.5	Changes to the Income Tax Act
97.1	Retaining the Canada Pension Plan
97.2	Support for the Family Caregiver
97.4	Protecting Canada's Environment
97.9 PU	Social Assistance Standards
97.12PU	Eliminating Child Poverty in Canada
00.1PU	Child Care
00.4	Needs of Canadians with Disabilities
00.3PU	Child Poverty and Benefits
01.1 PU	Federal Government Role in Health Care
01.4PU	Equal Benefits for Part-time Workers