

December 2020

Honourable Filomena Tassi
Minister of Employment and Social Development
Government of Canada

Dear Minister Tassi

Re: Impact of Precarious Employment (“Gig Economy”) on Workers

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) is a non-profit non-governmental organization (NGO) currently composed of Local Councils in cities from Halifax to Vancouver, Provincial Councils in Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia, and several Nationally Organized Societies. For the past 127 years, the NCWC has worked to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families in Canada.

On behalf of the members of the National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC), I am writing to express our concerns over the increased use of contract and part time workers in Canada.

While the onset and ongoing conditions imposed by COVID-19 have been unprecedented, the issue of temporary work is not new. The increase in non- standardized employment by all levels of government, corporations, and large sections of the service industry has grown faster than permanent employment.

The impact of this poorly paid, unsecured, unprotected ‘gig’ employment on individuals and families is a critical issue that is negatively impacting Canadian social values. We need only look at the devastating effects of this practice in long-term care facilities when the pandemic struck. Despite their good intentions and compassionate nature, these workers were placed in untenable positions due to the nature of their employment. Many of them were forced to work in two or more facilities to provide for their families. A report by the Canadian military, who were called in to assist in the homes, deemed this transitory nature of this work force to be a major reason for the rapid transmission of the disease to this most vulnerable portion of the population.

The health effects of precarious employment resulting from insufficient income is a significant concern. High levels of stress related tensions, constant search for new work, and the resulting adaptation to new experiences, periods of unemployment, the practice of call-in hours, food insecurity, sub-standard housing, limited rights, and access to traditional vehicles of representation, and working conditions takes a toll on the physical and mental health of both individuals and families. There is also solid evidence these concerns have resulted in a dramatic increase in violence against women as these precarious employment experiences negatively impact family life.

Your government promised greater labour protection for ‘gig’ workers but made no mention of this in the recent throne speech. Currently, the ‘gig’ economy is solely in the hands of employers who base decisions on profits, even though they threaten the very lives of workers who are victims of circumstances beyond their control. Many of these workers are considered essential, and 70% of them are women.

There must be a swift implementation of employment standards that address the issue by ensuring that these workers are eligible to benefit from labour representation that offers protection and expanding pension options. Action must be taken now to improve conditions for these workers and put the intended positive spin on the term ‘gig’.

Sincerely

Patricia Leson, President
National Council of Women of Canada

The National Council of Women of Canada (NCWC) works in the spirit of truth and reconciliation, acknowledging Canada is the traditional territory of Indigenous and Metis People. We are grateful to join with others in peace and hope, advocating for an improved quality of life for women, children, families, and society.

*Text prepared by Monica Cullum, NCWC Convenor

cc: Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister of Women and Gender Equality
Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
Kathryn Wilkinson, President Canadian Federation of University Women
Karin Gorgerat, President Business and Professional Women of Canada