

# Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women

April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017

## *Economic Security of Women in Canada*



United Steel, Paper and Forestry, Rubber, Manufacturing, Energy, Allied Industrial and  
Service Workers International Union (United Steelworkers)

## United Steelworkers:

The United Steelworkers (“Steelworkers”, the “Union” or the “USW”) is an international trade union with approximately 220,000 members across Canada. Steelworkers are men and women of every social, cultural and ethnic background in every industry and job. Steelworkers represent a large number of workers in manufacturing and beyond, including universities, call-centers, retail stores, hotels, and nursing homes across the country. Since the 1980s, Women of Steel has been a force within the Steelworkers. Women Steelworkers fought for space and leadership positions within in the union, developed courses to train other women Steelworkers and continue to work in politics and the community to advance the interests of all working women.

## Overview:

### 1. Women’s Economic Insecurity

#### The Gender Wage Gap

Women are disproportionately employed in low-paid, insecure, part-time and contract employment, contributing to their economic insecurity. Women’s work is systemically undervalued and economic contributions in the paid labour force and beyond. Depending on how it is measured, the wage gap ranges from 15% to over 30% for all women.

At the federal level, **USW recommends the adoption of proactive pay equity legislation.**

Pay equity legislation on its own will not fully solve the problem or ensure women’s economic equality, but it is essential nonetheless. **We also recommend raising the federal minimum wage to \$15.00/hour.**

Ensuring women’s economic security requires comprehensive policies and practices. We must also combat insidious bias and the outright discrimination that leads to the undervaluing of women and their work, in particular for Indigenous, Black, immigrant and other women of color, LGBTQ women and [women with disabilities](#)<sup>1</sup>.

## Solutions/Recommendations

### 2. Unions:

While the wage gap remains unacceptably high for all women, unionization reduces the wage gap to 6.2% for unionized women on an hourly wage basis<sup>2</sup>.

Unionization also improves retirement security, provides more protection and better replacement rates for leaves and superior health and welfare benefits.

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<sup>1</sup> USW has provided a link to its submission on federal accessibility legislation:

<http://www.usw.ca/news/publications/policy-research-and-submissions/usw-calls-for-strong-federal-accessibility-legislation>

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, Cansim 282-0151 and 282-0073

We applaud the repeal of C-377 and C-525 and will ensure follow-through on the repeal.

**We further recommend:**

- Successor rights for all federal sector workers
- Protecting the card-check system for organizing in the federal sector

### 3. Caregiver Leaves

**To improve the leave system and to ensure that women’s lifetime earnings are not substantially reduced because of care obligations, we recommend:**

- Improving access and eligibility (making the leave program equivalent to the Quebec program)
  - Eligibility based on an income of \$2,000 during the eligibility period
  - A reduction of the hours required to 300 (the pre-1990s reform levels)
  - A longer eligibility period (looking back five years instead of one year)
- Raising income replacement for maternity and second parent leave to 70%
- Equalization of care between parents through a use-it-or-lose-it second parent leave
- Wage replacements and improved flexibility for compassionate care leaves

### 4. Child Care

**Role of the federal government:**

- Working collaboratively with the provinces and indigenous communities
- Stable funding with a separate stream in Indigenous communities
- Conditions on the funding: it must go to building a **public, accessible and affordable** child care system in the provinces
- A program must be:
  - Universal (i.e. accessible and affordable for all families and inclusive “regardless of ability, economic, cultural or linguistic circumstances, where they live in Canada or whether their parents are in or out of the workforce, studying or working non-standard hours”<sup>3</sup>)
- Culturally appropriate Indigenous early childhood education
- Provide a living wage and decent working conditions to those providing the care

### 5. Pensions and Retirement Security

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2016

### **Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement:**

OAS/GIS have played an incredibly important role in reducing the seniors' poverty rate, particularly for single senior women.

#### **We recommend:**

- The age of eligibility for OAS/GIS remains at 65
- Improvement of co-ordination with federal and provincial social assistance programs to reduce the claw-backs of OAS and GIS income

### **CPP**

The CPP provides a basic retirement income for anyone who has worked in Canada, regardless of part-time or full-time status, and includes provisions that allow dropping working years that were spent caring for children, for example. These are particularly important to women, who are more likely to have spent time out of the paid labour force and who work in part-time and casual employment at higher rates than men [in 2016, 65.6% of part-time workers were women]. We must ensure a continued **robust public pension system in Canada.**

#### **We recommend:**

- Expansion of child-rearing and disability drop-out provisions in the expanded CPP
- Further future expansions of the CPP

### **Workplace plans and private savings:**

The public pension system in Canada is only designed to replace 25% of the average industrial wage (rising to 33.3% by 2060). By design, it requires supplemental retirement income, either through workplace pensions or private savings. **To improve women's economic security in retirement, we recommend:**

- Protection of public sector defined benefit plans
- Facilitation of unionization in the federal sector and an end to contract flipping in order to build up collective agreements that ensure retirement security

## **6. Gender Segregation in Employment**

Unionization on its own does not *close* the wage gap nor does it end occupational segregation. We must encourage women's employment in historically male occupations and vice versa, in the trades, STEM and beyond. As of 2013, women only made up about 14% of those registered in apprenticeship programs and those with the highest numbers of women were hairstylists and estheticians; user-support technicians; food

service; early childhood educators and assistants, frequently some of the lowest-paid trades<sup>4</sup>.]

**We recommend:**

- Labour market assessments using a gender and equity lens and to identify skills demand<sup>5</sup>
- Targeting hiring practices: outreach to equity-seeking groups
- Collaboration between the federal government and provinces to ensure apprenticeship programs and placements aimed at equity-seeking groups

## 7. Infrastructure Programs

While we generally support infrastructure investment, we must note that much of the job creation that emerges is in male employment, especially construction. Public investments should not have the effect of exacerbating the gender wage gap.

To combat this, **we recommend:**

- Using a gender and equity lens in budget and policy decisions, including decisions about infrastructure and public spending
- Restructuring/reframing infrastructure programs to avoid *only* creating jobs in male-dominated sectors (and improve employment equity in those sectors)
- Investing in social infrastructure such as affordable housing and public transportation
- Procurement provisions and policies that meet gender and equity standards

## 8. Gender-based Violence

The disproportionate domestic and sexual violence experienced by women has negative effects on all aspects of their and their family's lives, include economic security.

**We recommend:**

- A national action plan on gender-based violence based on the Blueprint created by the Canadian Network of Women's Shelters and Transition Houses (now Women's Shelters Canada)
- Investments into shelters
- Paid and protected domestic violence leave for employees in the federal sector

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<sup>4</sup> *Registered apprenticeship training programs, 2013*. Statistics Canada

<sup>5</sup> Resource guide on gender issues in employment and labour market policies. International Labour Organization.

## **9. Action on missing and murdered Indigenous women**

Specific violence faced by Indigenous women at all levels of society contributes to economic insecurity faced by Indigenous women.

### **We recommend:**

- A national action plan on violence against Indigenous women
- Ensure funding for full provisions of services provided on reserves
- Equal access to services and programs at all levels, including off reserve (such as shelters, health care, child care...)

## **10. Health Care**

### **We recommend:**

- Investments to protect and expand the public health care system aimed at ensuring accessible services and secure, decent jobs across the sector
- A national Pharmacare program [accessible, publicly funded and publicly-delivered]
- Accessible reproductive health care services for all women in all regions of Canada