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CANADA

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CANADA

**Report of the Standing Committee on the Status
of Women**

Shelby Kramp-Neuman, Chair

**JUNE 2024
44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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the Status of Women**

**Shelby Kramp-Neuman
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committees presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

has the honour to present its

ELEVENTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied women's economic empowerment and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

Achieving gender equality and creating inclusive economic growth are crucial to women's economic empowerment. The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (the Committee) heard that in recent decades, women's participation in the labour force has increased. Although gender parity has not been reached in certain sectors of the labour force, there are more women in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as the trades and science, technology, engineering and mathematics, in entrepreneurship, as well as in leadership positions, when compared to the past.

Despite these gains, women in Canada continue to face barriers and challenges to their economic participation and empowerment. These barriers include: exclusionary and biased workplace and social cultures; gender-based violence; challenges in accessing financial support; a lack of access to education and skills training; availability of child care services; and access to other relevant supports and services.

Witnesses spoke to the Committee about ways to support women's economic empowerment in Canada. They focused on poverty reduction supports and services, initiatives to change workplace and social cultures, opportunities for networking and mentorship, changes to financing and funding structures, improving data collection and access to new and diverse markets. The Committee provides 12 recommendations to the Government of Canada, with the goal of supporting women's economic empowerment in Canada.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada support the growth and expansion of women entrepreneurs' businesses by:

- **continuing to invest in the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and increasing awareness of the Strategy's supports and programs for women entrepreneurs;**
- **ensuring that women entrepreneurs are meaningfully included and consulted in the development and implementation of federal supports targeting them;**
- **identifying and removing regulatory barriers that disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs, including racialized women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse gender and sexual identity communities; and**
- **improving women entrepreneurs' access to new markets, as well as international trade and export opportunities. 13**

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada ensure that policy makers always conduct a gender-based analysis and early consultations with Indigenous peoples when enacting policy that disproportionately impacts women-owned businesses. 13

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples and through partnerships between relevant federal departments and

agencies and financial institutions, implement measures ensuring women entrepreneurs' equitable access to capital and financial support in Canada, such as providing low-interest loans, identifying grants and venture capital specifically for women-owned businesses, and flexibility in requirements for credit checks in loan and grant applications. 21

Recommendation 4

That the government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, promote awareness of resources available through Business Development Bank of Canada for women entrepreneurs. 22

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada ensure that Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence includes initiatives that facilitate survivors' access to entrepreneurship-related resources and supports as well as their access to flexible business financing options, so that they are empowered to pursue entrepreneurship if they wish to do so. 22

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, bolster women's economic empowerment and participation in the labour force, by supporting education and training initiatives, including:

- language training and other specialized employment training programs to facilitate and accelerate the credential recognition process for immigrant women;
- access to re-skilling and upskilling programs for women; and
- education campaigns or other initiatives for school-aged children, that raise awareness, and encourage pursuit, of various education and career pathways..... 24

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, adequately value the care sector by continuing to invest in affordable, flexible and inclusive child care services across Canada through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system, and through the child care agreements between the federal and provincial or territorial governments, support the retention of employees in the child care and early childhood education sector by ensuring adequate compensation for these workers..... 27

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, continue to implement measures to reduce poverty as well as the gender pay gap in Canada, by encouraging the adoption of pay equity policies across all workplaces as well as a liveable wage, and continuing to invest in safe, accessible and affordable housing, particularly for women, and consider other poverty-reduction strategies, such as implementing a guaranteed liveable basic income..... 30

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada improve awareness campaigns that promote the implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion workplace policies, with the goal of fostering gender-sensitive and inclusive workplaces that are flexible, supportive and free of harassment and discrimination. 32

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada support businesses owned by, and entrepreneurs who are, members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse gender and sexual identity communities, by launching an awareness campaign to combat hate, harassment and discrimination against these communities..... 32

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, expand existing federal programs, such as the Women

Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund, as well as support women entrepreneurs’ mentorship and networking opportunities by creating other formal networking and mentorship programs to enable different groups of women’s professional advancement in various fields – including racialized and immigrant women – and consider providing these program activities during paid work hours. 34

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, expand the existing Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub to address gaps in data, and fund and support the collection of data disaggregated by gender and other identity factors, such as race, Indigeneity and disability, about women entrepreneurs, women in fields traditionally dominated by men, including skilled trades, and women in leadership at all levels, with the goal of improving policies aiming to support women pursuing these careers..... 35



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Achieving gender equality and creating inclusive economic growth are crucial to women's economic empowerment. Women's participation in the labour force has increased across recent decades, but despite these improvements, women in Canada continue to encounter barriers and challenges to their economic participation and empowerment. Recognizing the barriers and challenges facing women in Canada, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (the Committee or FEWO) undertook a study on women's economic empowerment in Canada. Between 6 November 2023 and 29 February 2024, the Committee heard from 30 witnesses and received three written submissions. Witnesses included the Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business, representatives from Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, and many other expert witnesses from various sectors of the labour force, as well as individuals and representatives from organizations working to advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The following report presents an overview of the testimony and submissions received by the Committee, focusing on existing initiatives in Canada that support women's economic empowerment, women's experiences in the labour force in various sectors, the barriers and challenges that women may encounter in their economic participation and empowerment, as well as possible avenues for supporting women's economic empowerment in Canada. The Committee's recommendations to the Government of Canada highlight the ways in which women's economic empowerment may be supported and improved through new and existing initiatives.

OVERVIEW

The Committee heard a diversity of opinions and experiences regarding the state of women's economic empowerment in Canada. Economic empowerment is one of the Government of Canada's gender equality goals and witnesses have substantially highlighted the importance of supporting women's economic empowerment, whether it is through employment or entrepreneurship. Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, pointed out that women's economic safety and security – including women's fundamental right for secure housing and sufficient



income to meet basic needs – is critical to women’s economic empowerment.¹ Different themes were covered by the study, such as access to funding and markets, access to childcare and other services, workplace culture and mental health as well as networking and mentorship. In this report, the terminology “women entrepreneurs” is used and encompasses women business owners, women who are self-employed, as well as businesses that are majority-owned by women. When referring to women in leadership positions, it is understood that the term includes women in politics as well as women in leadership positions in the private and the public sector.

Existing Federal Programs and Funding

The Committee heard about different federal programs that aim to support women’s economic empowerment and women entrepreneurs. Various witnesses talked about the Women’s Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES), a program introduced in 2018 by the Government of Canada.² The strategy is organized around three pillars:

- 1) Providing capital to women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses.
- 2) Investing in the WES Ecosystem Fund to support women entrepreneurs with guidance, mentorship and networking opportunities.
- 3) Gathering data and information through the Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) to continue improving the resources and services offered to women entrepreneurs.³

The WES represents \$7 billion in investments and commitments and aims to increase access to funding and to networks for women-owned businesses through different programs.⁴ Budget 2021 created the Women Entrepreneurship Loan Fund by allocating \$55 million to this program, which offers loans of up to \$50,000 to women entrepreneurs. According to the Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business:

1 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women’s Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

2 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

[A]s part of the overall investment, \$165 million has been committed to the WES ecosystem fund to help non-profit, third party organizations strengthen capacity within the entrepreneurship ecosystem and offer business supports to women entrepreneurs.⁵

The WES also allocated \$17 million to the WEKH, a program led by the Toronto Metropolitan University which addresses the knowledge gap and offers data and best practices for women entrepreneurship through 10 regional hubs across Canada.⁶

The Minister described other Government of Canada programs that can support women entrepreneurs with intersectional identities. For example, the Black Entrepreneurship Program has granted over \$25 million in loans to help address systemic barriers faced by Black entrepreneurs, 20% of which were approved for women. In June 2023, the Government of Canada announced the 2SLGBTQI+ Entrepreneurship Program to address the barriers faced by entrepreneurs who identify as Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and other gender and sexual identities (2SLGBTQI+). Furthermore, the Government of Canada supports the Indigenous Women's Entrepreneur Program, which provides tailored mentorship, resources and funding opportunities to empower Indigenous women entrepreneurs.⁷

In addition to these programs, witnesses discussed the 50-30 challenge, an initiative which encourages organizations to commit to attain gender parity (50%) and 30% representation of other equity-deserving groups on their boards and in senior management positions.⁸ As of 7 February 2024, 2,450 organizations of various sizes had already signed up for the challenge.⁹ These federal programs and the ways in which they support women entrepreneurs will be discussed in further detail in other sections of the report.

WOMEN IN THE LABOUR FORCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Various witnesses spoke about the experiences of women entering and advancing in the workforce, many of whom acknowledged women's persistent underrepresentation in the labour force generally as well as in specific sectors. Access to employment income is often an integral aspect of women's economic empowerment.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Jennifer Lusby, Chairperson, Manitoba Possible, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024; and Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, *Evidence*, 15 February 2024.

9 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, *Evidence*, 15 February 2024.



While women are under-represented in some sectors, they are overrepresented in others and are adversely affected when these sectors are struggling. For example, witnesses referenced the impacts of the pandemic for women who have been “more adversely affected by all the shutdowns and closures ... because so many women are part of the service industry, which was the one hit hardest.”¹⁰ Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation, further added that “women, particularly Black, racialized, migrant and low-income women, bore the brunt of economic losses in the pandemic.”¹¹

Women in Fields Traditionally Dominated by Men

One issue that was acknowledged by witnesses was women’s limited access to, and representation in, fields that have been historically dominated by men, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the trades, as well as leadership positions and entrepreneurship. According to Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Hamilton, jobs in fields traditionally dominated by men generally pay good wages and are relatively more secure; these factors mean that jobs in these fields are typically in high demand. Despite the appeal and benefits of jobs in these fields, progress in women’s pursuit of and representation in these positions has been slow.¹²

Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

The Committee was told by various witnesses that the underrepresentation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is a long-standing problem.¹³ According to Statistics Canada, women represented only 23% of STEM workers among Canadians aged 25 to 64 in 2016.¹⁴ Penny Wise, Vice President of 3M Canada, shared that approximately “24% of women who started in a STEM career changed roles.”¹⁵

10 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

11 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

12 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

13 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; and Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

14 Katherine Wall, “[Persistence and Representation of Women in STEM programs](#),” *Insights on Canadian Society*, 2 May 2019.

15 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

Immigrant women face specific barriers in the STEM fields, which affect their economic empowerment. For example, Saadia Muzaffar, President of TechGirls Canada, noted that immigrant women make up 52% of the women working in STEM in Canada.¹⁶ Despite this proportion and the important contribution of women in the STEM field, “on average immigrant women in STEM earn 55 cents to every dollar that non-immigrant men with the same qualifications earn.”¹⁷ A change in workplace culture is needed to make these fields more inclusive. Increasing women’s representation in these fields can benefit women’s economic empowerment overall.

Women in Trades

Representation of women in trades remains low; Statistics Canada reports that women represented 7.4% of people employed in trades, transport and equipment operators and related occupations in 2022.¹⁸ One witness noted that ongoing efforts to recruit more women into the skilled trades has seen some success.¹⁹

Jamie McMillan, Founder of Made in the Trades, believes that the recruitment of women in trades is not an issue; rather, retention represents the more pressing challenge.²⁰ However, she noted that the lack of opportunity for women in the skilled trades can create a recruitment challenge and may make it more difficult to improve the representation of women in the field.²¹ The trades represent lucrative career paths that would support women’s economic empowerment.

Women in Leadership Positions

Women are generally under-represented in leadership positions, whether it is in the public, the private or the not-for-profit sectors.²² For example, Statistics Canada data indicates that women occupied approximately 20.5% of the 17,996 seats on boards of directors in 2020. Furthermore, the majority (59.7%) of boards included in Statistics

16 Saadia Muzaffar, President, TechGirls Canada, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

17 Ibid.

18 Statistics Canada, “[Table 14-10-0335-02 Proportion of women and men employed in occupations, annual, inactive](#),” Database, accessed 8 March 2024.

19 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023.

20 Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, *Evidence*, 6 February 2024.

21 Ibid.

22 Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., *Evidence*, 27 February 2024; and Jennifer Lusby, Chairperson, Manitoba Possible, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.



Canada's dataset were composed only of men.²³ Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications at the Prosperity Project, highlighted some results compiled in the Prosperity Project 2023 Annual Report Card. Notably, the report showed "a significant year-over-year drop in women in the pipeline to leadership."²⁴ Additionally, Caitlin Morrison asserted that these statistics are even more troubling if we look at Black women, Indigenous women, racialized women, women with disabilities and 2SLGBTQI+ women and individuals.²⁵ The Committee was told that the lack of women in leadership positions remains, "despite efforts to promote gender diversity." Therefore, there is a "need for ongoing, proactive measures to address these inequalities."²⁶

Women Entrepreneurs

Through this study, some witnesses emphasized the significant and growing importance of women-owned businesses for driving innovation and for the economy of Canada.²⁷ However, only 16.8% of small and medium-sized businesses are majority-owned by women in Canada.²⁸ The Committee heard that Canada lost 61,000 women-owned businesses between 2018 and 2022.²⁹ One witness also informed the Committee that women-owned businesses are often smaller than those owned by men. Jules Gorham, Director, Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Canadian Health Food Association, explained that "it is a well-known fact that women have been historically neglected in research. There is a scarcity of data on women." She underscored the importance of applying gender-based analysis to federal initiatives and decisions, such as to Health Canada's regulatory reforms for Natural Health Products, to ensure that any negative effects of these measures are identified.³⁰ Greater efforts are needed to support women entrepreneurs

23 Statistics Canada, "[Representation of Women on Boards of Directors and in Officer Positions, 2020](#)," *The Daily*, Released 29 May 2023.

24 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

25 Ibid.

26 Jennifer Lusby, Chairperson, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

27 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

28 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

29 Ruth Vachon, Chief Executive Officer, Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

30 Jules Gorham, Director, Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Canadian Health Food Association, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

to access markets and supply chains to grow their businesses.³¹ The Committee heard about different entrepreneurship avenues, such as direct selling,³² as well as independent businesses in child care and in the trades.³³ The following section explains some of the barriers that can undermine women's economic empowerment. Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada support the growth and expansion of women entrepreneurs' businesses by:

- **continuing to invest in the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy and increasing awareness of the Strategy's supports and programs for women entrepreneurs;**
- **ensuring that women entrepreneurs are meaningfully included and consulted in the development and implementation of federal supports targeting them;**
- **identifying and removing regulatory barriers that disproportionately affect women entrepreneurs, including racialized women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse gender and sexual identity communities; and**
- **improving women entrepreneurs' access to new markets, as well as international trade and export opportunities.**

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada ensure that policy makers always conduct a gender-based analysis and early consultations with Indigenous peoples when enacting policy that disproportionately impacts women-owned businesses.

31 Ibid.

32 [Direct selling](#) is "the sale of consumer products or services, person-to-person, away from a fixed retail location. ... Driven by independent sales consultants, direct selling is also called social, network or personal selling."

33 Peter Maddox, President, Direct Sellers Association of Canada, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.



BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The Committee heard about many factors affecting women's economic empowerment. Among those factors with a negative impact were workplace and social cultures, a lack of access to various programs, supports and opportunities, as well as the persistence of gender-based violence. These barriers are discussed in the following sections. Karen Campbell stated:

Despite significant gains in women's educational attainment, many of the barriers to entry and advancement that we saw in the 1990s remain. Representation is still woefully inadequate in the tech and trade sectors. The gender pay gap persists; workplace violence and sexual harassment occur at alarming rates; not enough workplaces have embraced flexible work schedules to accommodate caregiving needs; and sexist workplace cultures persist, hindering women's economic empowerment.³⁴

Workplace and Social Cultures

Gender-based stereotypes and biases, which can lead to discrimination, inequalities and inequities, persist in Canada despite ongoing efforts to reduce and address these issues. The Committee heard several ways in which gendered stereotypes and biases, as well as discrimination, have affected women's economic participation and empowerment. For example, Karen Campbell explained that women "go into the workforce and experience hostile work environments. They experience discrimination, violence and harassment in the workplace."³⁵ These experiences can be amplified for individuals with intersecting identities, like racialized women and 2SLGBTQI+ people. Witnesses further noted that as a result of these experiences, women and gender diverse people may leave their place of employment;³⁶ entrepreneurship can provide women with an opportunity to overcome the barriers and discriminatory workplace cultures they have encountered in the labour force.³⁷

Hostile and exclusionary environments can exist across sectors and workplaces. As noted previously, witnesses explained that many women in STEM do not perceive these fields as

34 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

35 Ibid.

36 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024; Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

37 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; and Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

inclusive, due to systemic barriers, biases³⁸ and toxic work environments.³⁹ Medora Uppal agreed, telling the Committee that in addition to “horrible stories of discrimination and no space being created” in these fields, there are “quiet forms of discrimination” and a lack of leadership on these issues “at the top.”⁴⁰

In speaking about the trades specifically, Jamie McMillan stated:

Overcoming challenges and barriers in the trades is a huge thing, but this is not about the workplace. Harassment, bullying and all of those things exist outside of the skilled trades. These are human issues. They are not specific to the skilled trades or to any other workplace. I want that to be very clear, because the issues we face in the skilled trades are everywhere. It's not just women who deal with these issues. It is men as well.

She further acknowledged the need for a culture change in the industry and added that people need to be “held accountable for the behaviours that happen in the workplace.” She highlighted that beyond convincing people that the trades are “lucrative pathways,” some of the “problems we have are that, yes, women are under-represented in this industry.” According to her, women in the trades “really do love our career. That’s what we excel in. Sometimes it’s just the toxic work environment that really discourages us.”⁴¹

While some women may not experience a hostile work environment, they still may not feel like they belong in their workplace.⁴² Witnesses identified the lack of inclusive and supportive work environments as a barrier to women and gender diverse individuals’ retention and progress in the workplace. Caitlin Morrison argued that a supportive workplace is an important factor encouraging women to take on leadership roles.⁴³ Supportive workplaces can include “embracing EDI [equity, diversity and inclusion] ...workplaces that are engaging [and] recognizing of flexibility.”⁴⁴

When describing inclusive workplaces, access to washrooms for women and gender diverse individuals was acknowledged by several witnesses. Jamie McMillan noted that for women in the trades, access to adequate washroom spaces on job sites may be a

38 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

39 Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

40 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

41 Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

42 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

43 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

44 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.



challenge.⁴⁵ Karen Campbell agreed that in many workplaces, adequate washrooms for women and gender diverse people are “difficult to come by.”⁴⁶

For gender diverse and transgender people, not only are workplaces lacking inclusivity, but as Fae Johnstone explained, people from 2SLGBTQI+ communities may experience elevated levels of intolerance, hate and risks of violence, as entrepreneurs or in their workplaces.⁴⁷ Karen Campbell added that “backlash towards trans communities” does not contribute to an inclusive workspace.⁴⁸ These experiences of hate, as well as other experiences of gender-based violence, and their effects on economic empowerment and employment are discussed in the section entitled Gender-based Violence.

Barriers to women’s economic empowerment, such as a lack of inclusivity, hostile work environments, a lack of support in the workplace, as well as difficulty accessing supports and services in rural and remote contexts, can lead to significant negative effects on women’s mental health including, stress and burnout, low self-esteem and a lack of confidence. These consequences of barriers to women’s economic empowerment can become barriers themselves; witnesses told the Committee that when women do not feel equally valued, respected and supported in the workplace, they often do not have the confidence or enthusiasm to advocate for their own promotions and advancement. In addition, feeling undervalued in combination with a lack of work-life balance and insufficient support – at work and/or at home – can lead to stress and burnout. These negative mental health outcomes can have significant impacts on women’s economic participation and empowerment.⁴⁹

Gender-Based Violence

The Committee heard about the various ways in which economic empowerment is affected and hindered by the persistence of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, online harassment and targeted hate.

45 Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

46 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

47 Fae Johnstone, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

48 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

49 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Lohifa Pogoson Acker, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024; Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; and Fae Johnstone, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

Some groups of women may experience higher rates of violence. For example, the Committee was told that women with disabilities experience some of the highest rates of gender-based violence, including economic abuse, of all women in Canada. Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD women's Network of Canada, concluded that this high rate of violence is a significant contributor to the high rates of poverty for women with disabilities.⁵⁰

Intimate Partner Violence

Survivors of intimate partner violence often experience some form of financial coercion or economic abuse.⁵¹ This financial coercion or economic abuse leverages money as a form of power and control, which can include: limiting and controlling an individual's access to their own money; the close monitoring of an individual's spending; and/or forcing an individual to leave their employment, further isolating them and often creating a financial dependency on the intimate partner.⁵² Meseret Haileyesus asserted that loss of income, of employment and of financial stability, as well as experiences of poverty, are common for women who exit situations of intimate partner violence.⁵³ The financial dependency created by this economic abuse can impede women from exiting abusive situations, reducing their ability to obtain and retain employment and further perpetuating the cycle of financial instability and dependency,⁵⁴ which in turn keeps them in a cycle of violence.

When survivors do successfully exit situations of intimate partner violence, they may experience poverty and homelessness and often require access to social services. Witnesses noted that demand from survivors outstrips the very limited supply of emergency shelters and transitional housing in Canada. However, stable housing, as well as counselling and employment services, are imperative for survivors' healing and for rebuilding independence.⁵⁵

50 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women's Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

51 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023; Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

52 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

53 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

54 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

55 Ibid.



According to Catherine Miller, mayor of the Township of Pelee, there are even fewer social and emergency shelter services in rural areas than urban ones, and women in rural communities need access to health care and social support providers who can safely address the needs of women in crisis.⁵⁶ Furthermore, in rural and remote contexts women may feel unsafe because their communities are more isolated and police forces may not be located in the region. As such, police may not be able to respond immediately or quickly to a crisis; women may not call the police, instead they may “carry on and hope for the best.”⁵⁷

Online Harassment, Targeted Hate and the Media

The Committee learned about the effects of online harassment, targeted hate and media portrayal of this harassment and hate, on women’s economic empowerment. As well, these effects can affect women’s representation in leadership positions. For example, in the context of women in politics, Catherine Miller explained that the “extremely partisan or personal attacks” that may occur at the federal level, can be represented in “toxic and aggressive” media headlines that are not focused on the political issues, and that this can trickle down into other levels of politics. These types of headlines, and the ways that women politicians are treated by their peers and the media, can deter women from pursuing leadership positions.⁵⁸ With regards to bullying online and on social media that women in politics and leadership positions often face, Catherine Miller explained that there are very few ways in which women can address this behaviour, particularly on social media.⁵⁹

Fae Johnstone shared her own experience of being the subject of online and media hate and violence, speaking about the impact of targeted hate on 2SLGBTQI+ people and their economic empowerment. She said that the risk of experiencing hate “for some in our communities [...] is heightened.” She described her recent experience of becoming a target for this hate, following her participation in a Hershey Canada International Women’s Day campaign:

In response, Canada’s dear friend Tucker Carlson did a segment on me on Fox News, and it ran across the Fox News syndicate. Over the course of the next three weeks, I had hundreds of death threats, hateful comments and other horrible things said and written about me, including private information about my family and my personal life published

56 Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee, as an individual, *Evidence*, 6 February 2024.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

for the world to see. I still have not recovered from that experience. I broke down on my partner's shoulder time and time again. I had security guards in front of my home for seven days straight who had to make sure that no one came up to my home who was not pre-approved...We underestimate both the economic impact and the mental health impact of an environment where hate is normal again.⁶⁰

The “staggering rise in hate” toward 2SLGBTQI+ people in society can have both negative economic outcomes, as outlined above, as well as negative mental health effects for these individuals.⁶¹ As noted earlier in this report, poor mental health itself may become a barrier to economic empowerment.

Access to Financial Support

The Committee heard that a significant challenge for women entrepreneurs is access to capital to start and grow their businesses.⁶² The Honourable Rechie Valdez explained that:

In Canada, only 16.8% of small and medium-sized enterprises are majority-owned by women. It's 37% if you include self-employed women. Women have a hard time getting credit through financial institutions because they may not qualify... the average amount of financing for men-owned businesses is more than double that for women-owned businesses.⁶³

Further to the challenges in accessing financing, Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, explained that most often a credit score is the “barometer of the creditworthiness of an entrepreneur,” but noted that oftentimes a bad credit score is the result of an incident, such as a “breakdown in a relationship” or a “period of poor health.” Alternatively, the person may be a newcomer to Canada who has not had the opportunity to build credit. She added that as well, women's businesses are often service-based and they tend not to “have the security to put behind a business loan... [and being service-based] they don't have equipment or a

60 Fae Johnstone, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

61 Ibid.

62 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023; Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; and Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

63 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.



building they can use as security.”⁶⁴ As such, women entrepreneurs often do not secure financing to start or grow their businesses.

Regarding business investments and sizes of Canadian enterprises, Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers school of management, as an individual, explained that in Canada, large businesses account for 10% of private-sector employment, whereas small and medium sized enterprises account for 90%. Therefore, she argued that business investments and financing in Canada should be “laser focused” on small and medium enterprises.⁶⁵

According to Emily Whetung-MacInnes, Chief Emerita, as an individual, unique barriers affect the ability of First Nations women to acquire loans and financing. She explained that “under the *Indian Act*, women—Indigenous people—can't borrow against the equity in their homes. We can't leverage any property that's held by a status Indian on Indian reserve land.” As a result, individuals living on reserve lack the ability to “explore options that other women in Canada have the opportunity to pursue.”⁶⁶

The Committee heard about current federal initiatives related to fostering inclusivity in funding for entrepreneurs, including the Women’s Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, the creation of the women entrepreneurship loan fund, the inclusive venture capital initiative, and the Black entrepreneurship program.⁶⁷ Despite federal initiatives for more inclusive funding for entrepreneurs, witnesses highlighted various additional barriers to accessing capital for women, including:

- A lack of time, support and guidance to prepare applications for loans, funding and other financing;
- Women’s perceptions that their applications for financing would not be approved,⁶⁸ particularly among Indigenous and racialized women;⁶⁹

64 Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

65 Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

66 Emily Whetung-MacInnes, Chief Emerita, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

67 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

68 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

69 Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

- A limited access to, or awareness of, alternative funding options;
- Experiences of intimate partner and gender-based violence;
- The effects, and intersections, of gender-bias and racial discrimination in financial institutions and lending practices;⁷⁰
- Intimidation in approaching financial institutions due to inaccessibility of “financial jargon;”⁷¹ and
- The existing funding “ecosystem”⁷² not responding to women’s needs or aligning with their values, such as sustainability and social responsibility.⁷³

Without access to financing and capital, women entrepreneurs must seek alternative funding options to support their businesses. A recent research survey and report about the experiences of women entrepreneurs in Canada found that of survey respondents, 50% indicated that their sole source of financing were personal savings and/or credit cards.⁷⁴ According to Alison Kirkland, the depletion of personal savings or the use of credit cards to start or grow a business can have long-term effects “that may not be fully appreciated at the time that they are used.”⁷⁵

Therefore, the Committee recommends that:

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples and through partnerships between relevant federal departments and agencies and financial

70 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women’s Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023; and Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

71 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

72 Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

73 Meltem Kilicaslan, Project Manager, ELLEvate, YES Employment and Entrepreneurship, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

74 Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

75 Ibid.



institutions, implement measures ensuring women entrepreneurs’ equitable access to capital and financial support in Canada, such as providing low-interest loans, identifying grants and venture capital specifically for women-owned businesses, and flexibility in requirements for credit checks in loan and grant applications.

Recommendation 4

That the government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, promote awareness of resources available through Business Development Bank of Canada for women entrepreneurs.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada ensure that Canada’s Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-based Violence includes initiatives that facilitate survivors’ access to entrepreneurship-related resources and supports as well as their access to flexible business financing options, so that they are empowered to pursue entrepreneurship if they wish to do so.

Funding for Non-Profit Sector

Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer of Manitoba Possible, explained that the “chronic under-resourcing” of the non-profit sector, particularly organizations providing care and social services, sends the message that these sectors are not valuable. As such, a “cycle of devaluation” is perpetuated, which reinforces the barriers to women’s representation in leadership and their career development. She added that granting bodies, including the federal government, have “policies that fail to cover the reasonable administrative and overhead costs ... [meaning that] essential supports, such as professional development, access to upgrading and formal mentorship are out of reach.”⁷⁶ Medora Uppal stated that investment in the non-profit sector and in women’s organizations is “really critical” for the wellbeing of the sector and its workers, but that currently the sector’s funding is insufficient for these organizations to pay appropriate wages.⁷⁷

Access to Education and Skills Training

When speaking about education and skills training, witnesses noted that there have been “significant gains in women’s educational attainment” since the 1990s; however,

76 Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

77 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

they highlighted several issues that persist.⁷⁸ Firstly, the gender gap in STEM education continues to exist. Penny Wise noted that a “tremendous dropout rate” of women in STEM in their second year of university has been observed in research studies.⁷⁹ She added that STEM degrees remain some of the most expensive degrees to obtain, which can be a barrier for women’s participation in these programs. Finally, she suggested that accessibility remains an issue in engaging students in STEM across Canada, including the physical accessibility of STEM labs and the accessibility of the ways in which people are being taught these subjects.⁸⁰

Secondly, the Committee heard that re-skilling, upskilling and educational upgrade programs need to be flexible and innovative to help women return to the labour market or access different employment.⁸¹ Lindsey Cooke suggested that workplaces should be sufficiently resourced to be able to provide “formal upgrading programs...during paid work time,” emphasizing that the supports and programs should be “built into” workplace structures.⁸² Kathy Slotsve, Director Communications and Stakeholder Engagement at YES Employment and Entrepreneurship, added that for women who are entrepreneurs, skills training opportunities must be flexible and fit into these women’s schedules. Offering online learning platforms, for example, can be an important option.⁸³

When speaking about barriers to education for members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, Fae Johnstone highlighted poverty and homelessness. According to her, 48% of trans and gender-diverse people in Canada earn less than \$30,000 annually and 25% to 40% of the “homeless young people in this country...identify as members of the queer and trans community.” She added that homelessness “immediately curtail[s]” the economic opportunities for these people, as they cannot access education, university, and will not know about any available federal programs “on government websites.”⁸⁴

Finally, for many immigrant and newcomer women, language training is imperative to their success in the Canadian labour force. Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer of S.U.C.C.E.S.S., underscored the importance of providing these women with access to

78 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

79 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

80 Ibid.

81 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

82 Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

83 Kathy Slotsve, Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, YES Employment and Entrepreneurship, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

84 Fae Johnstone, Executive Director, Wisdom2Action, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.



language training that is occupation-specific so that a pathway to their professional career is expedited.⁸⁵ Saadia Muzaffar spoke about additional barriers to accessing the labour force and achieving economic empowerment that immigrant women may face upon arrival to Canada. She explained that in the application process, immigrant women are identifying their skills and qualifications, but when they arrive in Canada, they are “having trouble getting into their fields of work.”⁸⁶ She suggested that changes to credential recognition processes could be beneficial. An option could be allowing women to undertake the required credentialing work while they’re in their home countries – where they have social support networks – instead of requiring them to undertake this extra work upon arrival in Canada, “to get to do the jobs that they’re qualified to do already.”⁸⁷

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, bolster women’s economic empowerment and participation in the labour force, by supporting education and training initiatives, including:

- **language training and other specialized employment training programs to facilitate and accelerate the credential recognition process for immigrant women;**
- **access to re-skilling and upskilling programs for women; and**
- **education campaigns or other initiatives for school-aged children, that raise awareness, and encourage pursuit, of various education and career pathways.**

The Care Economy and Access to Child Care

The Committee heard from many witnesses that a significant barrier to women’s economic empowerment is a lack of access to adequate and affordable child care. Specifically, child care must meet the diverse needs of women and their families across

85 Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

86 Saadia Muzaffar, President, TechGirls Canada, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

87 Ibid.

Canada.⁸⁸ Many witnesses acknowledged the recent Early Learning and Child Care Plan (the Plan). Several of these witnesses expressed appreciation for the efforts to create affordable child care for families across Canada and provided some suggestions to improve this program. Other witnesses highlighted the ways in which the Plan is not working for some families in Canada and some suggested alternative approaches. More details on these concerns are discussed later in this section. Of the suggestions provided to improve the Plan, witnesses highlighted the following:

- Expanding access to the program and incentivizing jurisdictions to increase the availability of spots;⁸⁹
- Improving compensation and benefits and working conditions in jobs in the care sector;⁹⁰
- Changes to ensure sufficient and affordable access in rural and remote communities;⁹¹ and
- Funding to provide resources for child care facilities that “cater to part-time workers and parents with atypical schedules.”⁹²

The Committee heard about some of the challenges that may hinder the expansion of services and spaces provided under the Plan. In particular, several witnesses spoke about the difficulty in staff recruitment and retention in the care sector, including child care and early childhood education. In speaking about the care sector, Lindsey Cooke told the Committee that “the work that the care economy does is critical and underpins the rest of the Canadian economy, allowing others to work and contribute.”⁹³ However, Medora Uppal expressed the view that the care sector is undervalued and underfunded,

88 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Andrea Hannen, Executive Director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; and Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

89 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

90 Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

91 Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

92 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

93 Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.



which affects the compensation – and economic empowerment — of the employees, who are predominantly women.⁹⁴ She cautioned that the intended “expansion...and roll out” of the Strategy “will take a lot longer or not happen at all” because non-profit child care centres cannot afford to pay employees a living wage.⁹⁵ Caitlin Morrison noted that to “draw more people to the early childhood career” they must be properly compensated for their work.⁹⁶

Certain groups of women and their families face unique barriers to accessing adequate child care. Witnesses emphasized the importance of integrating these diverse needs into the provision of child care in Canada. For example, Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, noted that for Inuit women in northern regions, the challenge in providing child care lies in a lack of infrastructure, in both child care facilities, as well as housing.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Bonnie Brayton asserted that the current Plan does not adequately serve women and children with disabilities. She said that the needs of children with disabilities should be met by child care services provided under the Plan, which is not currently the case. Additionally, she told the Committee that parents who do not work “9 to 5” need flexibility in the care they access.⁹⁸

Finally, Andrea Hannen, Executive Director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, spoke about women entrepreneurs who operate day care services in Ontario, including the ways in which the Plan may affect their businesses and their economic empowerment. She explained that the “vast majority of child care entrepreneurs are women” and that these women “want to offer the kind of care they wish they could have found for their own children.” However, she shared her view that the Plan and a “government-run system” may replace and/or limit “the expansion of [child care entrepreneur’s] centres that are independently owned as licensed businesses.” Specifically, she told the Committee that “a hard cap on the expansion of the sector,” such as the one in Ontario, indicates to financial institutions, insurance companies, landlords and equipment suppliers “that there is no growth potential for this group of clients.”⁹⁹

94 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

95 Ibid.

96 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

97 Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

98 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

99 Andrea Hannen, Executive Director, Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, adequately value the care sector by continuing to invest in affordable, flexible and inclusive child care services across Canada through the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care system, and through the child care agreements between the federal and provincial or territorial governments, support the retention of employees in the child care and early childhood education sector by ensuring adequate compensation for these workers.

Access to Other Relevant Supports and Services

In addition to accessible, flexible and high-quality daycare and early childhood education services, the Committee heard about various support services that can be beneficial for women's economic empowerment. Among those mentioned were the following:

- Improved mental health and psychological services for all women in Canada;¹⁰⁰
- Integration of mentorship supports into existing federal initiatives;¹⁰¹
- Affordable housing and other poverty reduction supports,¹⁰² including funding for the Canada Disability Benefit;¹⁰³

100 Cadleen Désir, Social Entrepreneur, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

101 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

102 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023; Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; BC Coalition of Experiential Communities, "[Brief to the Status of Women Committee](#)," Brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, March 2024.

103 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.



- Improved and increased access to broadband and connectivity services across Canada, as well as programs to provide access to adequate technology for education and entrepreneurship needs;¹⁰⁴
- Recognizing the “substantial financial burden of fertility care” in Canada, and ease this burden through improved funding and equitable access for fertility treatments to support those seeking to have children, including 2SLGBTQI+ people and single individuals;¹⁰⁵
- Simplification of access and increased awareness of existing programs and supports for women entrepreneurs in Canada;¹⁰⁶ and
- Accessible and affordable transportation across Canada in rural, remote and urban settings, including for women with disabilities.¹⁰⁷

Witnesses emphasized to the Committee that meaningful consultation and collaboration with various groups of women in Canada, such as women entrepreneurs, women in trades or women with disabilities, is integral to developing programs and services that will meet the needs and support the economic empowerment of these women.¹⁰⁸ The following section discusses some possible avenues to improve and increase support for women’s economic empowerment in Canada.

104 Peter Maddox, President, Direct Sellers Association of Canada, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; and Kathy Slotsve, Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, YES Employment and Entrepreneurship, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

105 Fertility Matters Canada, “[Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women](#),” Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 28 February 2024

106 Lohifa Pogoson Acker, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024; and Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

107 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

108 Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer, DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024; and Lohifa Pogoson Acker, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN CANADA

During its study, the Committee heard various recommendations made by witnesses to better support women's economic empowerment in Canada, ranging from poverty reduction strategies, changes to workplace cultures and increased access to mentorship and financial support, to data collection and improved access to new and diverse markets.

Poverty Reduction Supports and Services

Witnesses explained that experiences of poverty and insecure housing can impede women's economic empowerment. Different measures have been discussed by witnesses to address structural factors that make women and other marginalized groups more likely to live in poverty. The Committee heard from various witnesses about the need to invest in and expand access to affordable housing in Canada to support women's economic empowerment.¹⁰⁹ Meseret Haileyesus added that poverty and homelessness are significant barriers to women re-entering the workforce, starting a business, or pursuing education and skills training. She suggested that initiatives to support affordable and accessible housing in Canada, as well as a livable income are crucial to support women's economic empowerment and participation.¹¹⁰

Medora Uppal encouraged the federal government to "continue to recommit 25% of the national housing strategy to women."¹¹¹ The Committee was told that the housing issue is even more critical when women are trying to leave abusive and violent relationships. Medora Uppal expressed that "women cannot be expected to focus on building financial independence when they are facing daily threats of violence."¹¹² The Committee was then told that YWCAs across Canada urge the federal government to reinvest \$600 million in the women's shelter and transitional housing initiative as a way to offer affordable housing with access to services for women to heal and rebuild safety and independence.¹¹³ Karen Campbell also supported the idea that the creation of affordable housing specifically targeted to women is essential as part of the efforts to support individual and women's

109 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, *Evidence*, 6 November 2023.

110 Ibid.

111 Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, *Evidence*, 27 February 2024.

112 Ibid.

113 Ibid.



economic empowerment.¹¹⁴ Rosemary Cooper identified the need to provide better access to safe and affordable housing for Inuit, considering that it is central to the health and well-being of Inuit women.¹¹⁵

Some witnesses also discussed the idea of establishing a guaranteed livable basic income to reduce poverty and improve women’s economic empowerment. Meseret Haileyesus explained that

“[e]conomic abuse impacts 95% to 99% of domestic violence survivors. Women survivors report losing sources of income due to domestic violence, yet they have no way of pursuing business ventures because of the strict background checks, including credit score checks.”¹¹⁶

As such, she agreed that having a program around guaranteed livable basic income in place “would definitely encourage women to secure more income, go back to the workforce and to build their businesses.”¹¹⁷ When asked about guaranteed livable basic income, Catherine Miller said that it’s a measure that would assist in counteracting the issues around child care and access to other care services in rural and remote communities.¹¹⁸

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, continue to implement measures to reduce poverty as well as the gender pay gap in Canada, by encouraging the adoption of pay equity policies across all workplaces as well as a liveable wage, and continuing to invest in safe, accessible and affordable housing, particularly for women, and consider other poverty-reduction strategies, such as implementing a guaranteed liveable basic income.

114 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

115 Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

116 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women’s Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

117 Ibid.

118 Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

Changes to Workplace Culture and Social Attitudes

Witnesses told the Committee that creating work environments that are more inclusive and less harmful toward women and various marginalized groups is central to supporting women's economic empowerment. The Committee was informed that workplace culture needs to be reformed at the structural level to foster accountability and address and prevent violence, harassment and discrimination in the workplace.¹¹⁹

Saadia Muzaffar added that a cultural change in our institutions is needed, specifically when it comes to immigrant women facing discrimination when trying to access their fields despite having the required qualifications.¹²⁰ It was mentioned that supporting immigrant women in receiving credentials and accessing the workforce in positions that they are qualified for would be beneficial for Canada's economy and would avoid their de-skilling.¹²¹ Finally, Jamie McMillan argued that social attitudes need to be changed around potential successful career pathways through education and that "normalizing gender equality in the trades is very important, just normalizing that women are here and under-represented groups are here."¹²²

As mentioned previously, the 50-30 challenge is a measure to bring more women and under-represented groups into the workforce and leadership positions, which can contribute to changing attitudes and the culture in the workplace. Cadleen Désir, Social Entrepreneur, as an individual, confirmed that the systemic challenges she faced "being a woman, and the only person of colour on the executive team of a large SME, pushed me to burnout," which ultimately led to her changing career paths.¹²³ As Penny Wise said, including people with different opinions, educations, life experiences, points of view, and ways of thinking is central in bringing new ideas, making people think more broadly and designing better solutions.¹²⁴ As a result, workplace culture could improve through exposure and better representation.

119 Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024; Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; and Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

120 Saadia Muzaffar, President, TechGirls Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

121 Ibid.

122 Jamie McMillan, Founder, Made in the Trades, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

123 Cadleen Désir, Social Entrepreneur, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

124 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.



Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada improve awareness campaigns that promote the implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion workplace policies, with the goal of fostering gender-sensitive and inclusive workplaces that are flexible, supportive and free of harassment and discrimination.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada support businesses owned by, and entrepreneurs who are, members of the Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other diverse gender and sexual identity communities, by launching an awareness campaign to combat hate, harassment and discrimination against these communities.

Networking and Mentorship Opportunities

Many women entrepreneurs have shared the importance of being able to access networking and mentorship opportunities for their professional development. Witnesses mentioned that mentorship helps women overcome challenges and barriers and “is one of the key elements to ensuring women’s career growth and economic empowerment.”¹²⁵ Mentors can not only act as role models but can also lift women entrepreneurs up.¹²⁶ Having a mentor and support when applying for funding can also help women entrepreneurs in successfully receiving the funding.¹²⁷

Regarding networking, connection and community support for entrepreneurs, Lohifa Pogoso Acker, Business owner, as an individual, underscored the importance of increasing awareness and knowledge sharing. She told the Committee that she had never heard of many of the federal programs and “ecosystems” for women entrepreneurs, and that “the only ecosystems I know are the ones I created in my small community.” She asserted that knowledge and awareness of these government initiatives and programs must be increased, and she insisted that the government must “use us to help us.” She suggested that the government connect and collaborate with communities who are “ready to do the work...connect with each other and really just be

125 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

126 Penny Wise, Vice President, 3M Canada, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

127 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

a community, but if we don't have the leverage of knowledge and the support to do that...we just end up existing in silos, lonely and frustrated."¹²⁸ Similarly, Paula Huntley, Business owner, as an individual, agreed that connecting with an "economic partner," even through a 1-800 number support system, would have been very beneficial for "help[ing] me with ways to look at grants [and] ideas for creativity."¹²⁹

Networking and mentorship have also been described as opportunities for immigrant women to receive emotional support.¹³⁰ Furthermore, the Committee was told that organizations should have formal upgrading programs and mentorship programs that are accessible during paid work time.¹³¹ Finally, Cadleen Désir explained that her experience as a racialized woman entrepreneur is not unique, and that Black and racialized women entrepreneurs need access to specific supports, including role models and opportunities to network and gather.¹³²

Some witnesses recommended that more investment should be granted, and more support should be given for mentorship opportunities.¹³³ The Honourable Rechie Valdez told the Committee that WEKH has given the opportunity to 22,000 women to participate in mentorship and networking events.¹³⁴ Apart from the need to offer more mentorship opportunities, it was also noted that people acting as mentors might need support. For example, the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada offers "resources, professional development supports and events that are specifically designed for those who advise, guide, mentor and counsel women and non-binary entrepreneurs" which helps advisors having "the knowledge and experience to support the entrepreneurs in the best possible way."¹³⁵ Finally, Paula Huntley suggested that "gett[ing] into schools" is an important way to provide students with access to mentorship and support early on, which can "open their minds and show them where the possibilities are."¹³⁶

128 Lohifa Pogoson Acker, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

129 Paula Huntley, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

130 Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

131 Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer, Manitoba Possible, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

132 Cadleen Désir, Social Entrepreneur, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

133 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023; and Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

134 Honourable Rechie Valdez, P.C., M.P., Minister of Small Business, [Evidence](#), 15 February 2024.

135 Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada, [Evidence](#), 27 February 2024.

136 Paula Huntley, Business Owner, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.



Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, expand existing federal programs, such as the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy Ecosystem Fund, as well as support women entrepreneurs’ mentorship and networking opportunities by creating other formal networking and mentorship programs to enable different groups of women’s professional advancement in various fields – including racialized and immigrant women – and consider providing these program activities during paid work hours.

Changes to Financial Support and Funding Structures

Witnesses called for changes to the ways in which banking, business financing and federal funding programs are structured and dispersed, to achieve more equitable access to these supports. Wendy Cukier emphasized the need to remove “barriers in mainstream funding” for women entrepreneurs.¹³⁷ Among the proposed changes were:

- Ensuring secure financial practices that are affordable, free from discrimination and that meet women’s needs, including low-interest loans, loan approval without credit checks, and grants and venture capital earmarked for women and racialized women-owned businesses;
- Establishing clear guidelines for “disentangling joint bank accounts following separation or divorce;”
- Investing in a collective federal strategy with financial institutions to remove regulatory barriers and provide trauma-informed microenterprise or entrepreneurship programs;¹³⁸

137 Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management, as an individual, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

138 Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women’s Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

- Considering changes to funding structures to ensure that programs and projects targeting specific groups are eligible for these funds, such as removing the focus on business “scalability” as criteria.¹³⁹

Improving Data Collection

The creation of inclusive public policy depends on the availability of disaggregated data and research, because “one cannot fix a problem of inequity unless one can detect it.”¹⁴⁰ Jules Gorham agreed, pointing to a “scarcity of data on women,” and as a result, this data gap can lead to regulatory and policy changes that can negatively affect women.¹⁴¹ As such, witnesses called for investments to improve disaggregated data collection in Canada related to women entrepreneurship, leadership and economic empowerment.¹⁴²

Therefore, the Committee recommends:

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada, respecting the jurisdiction of, and in consultation and collaboration with, provinces, territories and Indigenous peoples, expand the existing Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub to address gaps in data, and fund and support the collection of data disaggregated by gender and other identity factors, such as race, Indigeneity and disability, about women entrepreneurs, women in fields traditionally dominated by men, including skilled trades, and women in leadership at all levels, with the goal of improving policies aiming to support women pursuing these careers.

Access to New and Diverse Markets

For women entrepreneurs, access to new and diverse markets is an important step toward growth and the success of their business. Ruth Vachon, Chief Executive Officer of Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec, explained that as women-owned businesses

139 Kathy Slotsve, Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement, YES Employment and Entrepreneurship, [Evidence](#), 29 February 2024.

140 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

141 Jules Gorham, Director, Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Canadian Health Food Association, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

142 Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications, The Prosperity Project, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024; and Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women's Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.



are often smaller, they need support in accessing markets and the supply chain.¹⁴³ Meseret Haileysus agreed, and urged the Committee to consider initiatives that create international trade and export opportunities for women-owned businesses, through trade agreements, education and access to global markets. She noted that racialized women should also be supported in accessing increased import and export opportunities.¹⁴⁴ Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, shared a success story with the Committee, highlighting Tina Singh who created Bold Helmets, which “really struck a chord across the market and around the world. She is now exporting her helmets for Sikh children to be able to wear. She’s now exporting to the U.K., as well as to the U.S.”¹⁴⁵

Peter Maddox, President of Direct Sellers Association of Canada, reminded the Committee that “federal regulations must not hinder the ability of entrepreneurs to operate successfully” and cited Health Canada’s proposed establishment of fees on natural health products as an example.¹⁴⁶ Peter Maddox reiterated that “as the government endeavours to empower women and create economic activity, they must consider the impact of fees and bureaucracy on opportunity and participation.”¹⁴⁷ Jules Gorham agreed and stated that the “barrier to entry is too high” for natural health products and the Canadian Health Food Association recommended that “the Minister of Health must work with industry to re-examine their approach” and “develop policies that are well-informed, balanced, and in the best interest of Canadians.”¹⁴⁸

CONCLUSION

During this study, the Committee heard that women still face various barriers and challenges that hamper their economic empowerment, whether they are in the workforce or entrepreneurs. These barriers range from access to education, financial support, child care services, to gender-based violence, and social cultures. In its report,

143 Ruth Vachon, Chief Executive Officer, Réseau des Femmes d’affaires du Québec, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024.

144 Meseret Haileysus, Executive Director, Canadian Centre for Women’s Empowerment, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

145 Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development, City of Brampton, [Evidence](#), 6 November 2023.

146 Peter Maddox, President, Direct Sellers Association of Canada, [Evidence](#), 6 February 2024.

147 Ibid.

148 Jules Gorham, Director, Regulatory Affairs and Policy, Canadian Health Food Association, [Evidence](#), 13 February 2024; and Canadian Food Health Association, “[Submission to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women \(FEWO\)](#),” Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women, March 2024.

the Committee recognizes that women's economic empowerment is central to gender equality and that workplace culture and social attitudes need to be changed to achieve true equality.

The testimony presented important ways to support women's economic empowerment in Canada related to poverty reduction, workplace culture, networking and mentorship, funding structures and financial supports, data collection, and access to new markets. The Committee makes 12 recommendations to the Government of Canada to achieve these goals.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Cadleen Désir, Social Entrepreneur	2023/11/06	85
Canadian Center for Women's Empowerment Meseret Haileyesus, Executive Director	2023/11/06	85
City of Brampton Clare Barnett, Director, Economic Development	2023/11/06	85
As an individual Catherine Miller, Mayor, Township of Pelee	2024/02/06	94
Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario Andrea Hannen, Executive Director	2024/02/06	94
Canadian Women's Foundation Karen Campbell, Senior Director, Community Initiatives	2024/02/06	94
Direct Sellers Association of Canada Peter Maddox, President	2024/02/06	94
Made in the Trades Jamie McMillan, Founder	2024/02/06	94
The Prosperity Project Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications	2024/02/06	94
3M Canada Penny Wise, President	2024/02/13	96

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Canadian Health Food Association Jules Gorham, Director Regulatory Affairs and Policy	2024/02/13	96
Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec Ruth Vachon, Chief Executive Officer	2024/02/13	96
As an individual Lohifa Pogoson Acker, Business Owner	2024/02/15	97
Department of Industry Hon. Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business Francis Bilodeau, Associate Deputy Minister, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada Etienne-René Massie, Assistant Deputy Minister, Small Business, Tourism and Marketplace Services	2024/02/15	97
Wisdom2Action Fae Johnstone, Executive Director	2024/02/15	97
DisAbled Women's Network of Canada Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer	2024/02/27	98
Manitoba Possible Lindsey Cooke, Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Lusby, Chairperson	2024/02/27	98
S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Queenie Choo, Chief Executive Officer	2024/02/27	98
TechGirls Canada Saadia Muzaffar, President	2024/02/27	98
Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada Alison Kirkland, Chief Executive Officer	2024/02/27	98
YWCA Hamilton Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer	2024/02/27	98

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Wendy Cukier, Founder and Academic Director, Diversity Institute, Ted Rogers School of Management Paula Huntley, Business Owner Emily Whetung-MacInnes, Chief Emerita	2024/02/29	99
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director	2024/02/29	99
YES Employment and Entrepreneurship Meltem Kilicaslan, Project Manager, ELLEvate Kathy Slotsve, Director, Communications and Stakeholder Engagement	2024/02/29	99

APPENDIX B: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

BC Coalition of Experiential Communities

Canadian Health Food Association

Fertility Matters Canada

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 85, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 103, 105, 106, 108 and 109](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Shelby Kramp-Neuman
Chair

Report on Women’s Economic Empowerment: Conservative Dissenting Report

This Supplemental Report reflects the views of the Conservative Members of Parliament who serve on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (“FEWO”): MP Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough–Kawartha), MP Anna Roberts (King–Vaughan), and MP Dominique Vien (Bellechasse–Les Etchemins–Lévis).

Introduction

As referenced in the report, the study examined women’s economic empowerment with a focus on gender gaps, participation, and retention of women in the labour sector, access to financing, mentorship, training, and empowering businesses owned and operated by women.

The Conservative members of this committee supported and actively participated in the pursuit of this study given its critical importance to ensure that the Government of Canada properly acknowledge and act upon barriers to women’s economic empowerment. The Conservative interest in this study also stemmed from a need to review the Government of Canada’s rollout of its Canada Wide Early Learning and Childcare System to ensure it is upholding the economic prosperity of women across Canada.

In 2021, when the Government of Canada rolled out its national Early Learning and Childcare program, one of the fundamental pillars it presented was making it easier for women to return to the labour force. However, the reality is quite the contrary, “women entrepreneurs are being targeted for extinction”¹, childcare operators are closing down, parents lack choice and face long waitlists, and women’s participation in the labour force is on the decline.

Observations

While we appreciate the work of the committee in the pursuit of this study, this report fails to address many of the shortcomings faced by women entrepreneurs in the rollout of the Canada Wide Early Learning & Child Care System as expressed by witnesses at the committee.

¹ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

No Private Representation

With regard to the Canada Wide Early Learning & Child Care agreements, while Conservatives are receptive to developing Canada's childcare sector, we are dismayed that the failures of the rollout of these agreements are not fully understood nor adequately reflected in this report.

While the report acknowledges that there is a lack of access to adequate and affordable childcare and that it must meet the needs of women and their families across Canada, it fails to acknowledge the exclusion of private childcare operators from the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreements signed with the provinces and territories.

This was echoed in witness testimony during the committee's study of Women's Economic Empowerment. Specifically, Andrea Hannen, Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario when she stated, "the question many of Canada's child care entrepreneurs are asking is whether they have a place in Canada's child care program or a future in child care at all."² Furthermore, Rosemary Cooper, Executive Director of Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, stated, "we're still very dependent and reliant on home day care providers to ensure that Inuit women are participating in the workforce".³

The guiding principle of *Bill C-35, An Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada* centres on favouring access to public and not for profit over any other type of childcare. Quality childcare comes in all shapes and sizes, and the Federal government should not dictate what childcare is best for families.

The absence of this from the report is incredibly concerning given that, "a majority of private childcare entrepreneurs are women."⁴ The thought that a committee study on Women's Economic Empowerment would exclude direct evidence of barriers is detrimental to the integrity of the study.

Women Entrepreneurs Being Targeted for Extinction

Women entrepreneurs in Canada are at risk of disappearing and going extinct, due to federal policies implemented in recent years.

In her testimony, Andrea Hannen, the Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario stated, "Canada's childcare entrepreneurs are asking whether they have a place in Canada's national childcare program or in the future of childcare at all"⁵.

² FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

³ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Rosemary Cooper)

⁴ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

⁵ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

With more than 95% of childcare workers being women⁶, and the majority of daycare centers being owned by women⁷, the childcare entrepreneurs being negatively affected are largely women.

Only 17% of small and medium-sized businesses in Canada being owned by female entrepreneurs as is⁸. The last thing Canadian women entrepreneurs need is to be squeezed out of one of their only dominated sectors. This sentiment has been emulated in recent witness testimony by Andrea Hannen when she was quoted saying “It’s to the detriment of all women that child care entrepreneurs are being targeted for extinction through the nationalization of Canada’s child care sector.”⁹.

The committee’s report glosses over the assertive and powerful language used by witnesses of the committee including Ms. Hannen and does not acknowledge the fact that women entrepreneurs are being targeted for extinction. Childcare is no longer a field in which women entrepreneurs can excel and thrive. Because of this government’s policy, they are instead being pushed out of a field to which they have previously participated in for decades.

The Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements fail to take into account how these women-owned and operated businesses will be affected, let alone take measures to mitigate the negative effects they face as a direct result of its rollout.

Conservative members of the committee recognize the crucial role that Canada’s women child care entrepreneurs play in facilitating affordable and accessible child care for all. The Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements directly target their businesses and is therefore detrimental to women’s economic empowerment.

Childcare Providers are Closing Down

Conservative committee members acknowledge that the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements not only have an impact on private childcare operators but also all childcare operators including not-for-profit and public.

Throughout the committee’s study, members of the committee heard from witnesses that expressed their concerns that the goal of \$10 a day childcare for all Canadian families would take longer than the deadline of 2026, if this goal was even met at all. Despite this, the

⁶ statistics Canada website, June 25, 2021, [Evidence](#)

⁷Stats Canada, 2021, August 25. [Evidence](#)

⁸ Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, 2024, April 3, [Evidence](#)

⁹ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

committee's report fails to recognize that child care operators are at risk of or are closing down as a result of the rollout of Canada's childcare program.

In her testimony, Medora Uppal, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Hamilton, stated, "we're already starting to see non-profit child care providers looking at closing down, not stepping up to open additional spaces, or shutting down their infant care programs, which are so critical within the child care sector, because they can't afford to operate. They can't hire people and they can't pay the bills."¹⁰ Not for profit and public child care providers that are able to access funding are on a fixed budget and cannot afford to hire more staff or in some cases be able to stay open.

Conservative members of the committee recognize that in order to alleviate some of the burden placed on not for profit and public child care providers, private child care operators must be included. By including private child care operators, not only do women entrepreneurs benefit, but all childcare operators and families will too through more accessibility.

Labour Force Participation of Women Not Rising

One of the pillars of implementing the Canada Wide Early Learning and Childcare Agreements was to assist women in joining the workforce. Unfortunately, this has come far from reaching fruition much to the detriment of women's economic empowerment.

In April 2015, labour force participation amongst working age women was 66.2 %¹¹. In 2024, after the implementation of the Government of Canada's national child care program, the participation rate for women in the workforce has declined. In April 2024, labour force participation amongst working age women was 65.4%¹².

The Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements failed to meet the goal of having an impact in women's participation in the workforce. Not only has women's participation not increased, but it has actually decreased by .8%.

Conservative members of the committee recognize that women's labour force participation amongst working age women is on the decline and has in fact not increased as alluded to in the committee's report. The Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements have continuously failed for years to advance women's economic empowerment.

¹⁰ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Medora Uppal)

¹¹ Statistics Canada, May 23, 2024, [Evidence](#)

¹² Statistics Canada, May 23, 2024, [Evidence](#)

No Flexibility

Through the rollout of the nationalization of Canada's childcare program, the Government of Canada signed individual agreements with each province and territory across Canada. When these agreements were signed there were ideological shackles put on both the provinces and territories with no room for flexibility to amend the agreements.

Given the above-mentioned concerns that directly impact women's economic empowerment, Conservative members of the committee are alarmed at the inability for the Government of Canada to work with the provinces and territories to improve women's economic empowerment through the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements.

In some provinces, private operators represent a significant portion of the childcare sector resulting in disproportionate consequences. In Nova Scotia, private operators make up 55% of the province's childcare sector.¹³ However, when the provincial government approached the federal government to express their concerns they were rejected by the Government of Canada.¹⁴

Although the committee report highlights a few of the concerns raised by witnesses on the Early Learning and Child Care plan, it falls short of putting any responsibility on the Government of Canada to work with the provinces, territories, and childcare providers to provide better flexibility. Specifically, as it pertains to improving the collaboration with women entrepreneurs and ensuring that more women are able to re-enter the workforce.

In her testimony to the committee, Bonnie Brayton, Chief Executive Officer of the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada elaborated upon this when she stated, "there has been no focus on ensuring that this is an opportunity to rethink child care,"¹⁵ citing that it does not work for all women including, those who need family care, 24-hour care and the women who do not work nine to five.¹⁶

Conservative members of the committee believe the committee report's neglect to acknowledge the Government of Canada's role in ensuring they work with the provinces and territories to enhance flexibility within these Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements provides a significant barrier in adequately addressing the shortfalls of this program.

¹³ CBC News, May 3, 2024, [Evidence](#)

¹⁴ CBC News, May 3, 2024, [Evidence](#)

¹⁵ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Bonnie Brayton)

¹⁶ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Bonnie Brayton)

No Choice for Parents

Conservative members of the committee recognize that Canadian families should have access to affordable and quality childcare and should be able to choose childcare providers that best suit their family's needs.

The committee's report correctly points out that many witnesses stated that a significant barrier to women's economic empowerment is a lack of access to adequate and affordable child care. However, it does not address the fact that the current framework of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements is not adequate to increase the choice that is offered to parents and families in need of childcare.

In her testimony, Andrea Hannen, Executive Director of the Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario stated, "the question many of Canada's child care entrepreneurs are asking is whether they have a place in Canada's national child care program or a future at all,"¹⁷ there is a whole section of Canada's childcare sector that is wanting to help alleviate the challenges of finding affordable and accessible childcare. However, due to the ideological stance of the government, they are restricted from being able to participate in doing so.

Caitlin Morrison, Director of Operations and Communications for the Prosperity Project further elaborated on the lack of access to child care for parents when she stated, "we believe encouraging more access to child care among some of the provinces would be a very helpful thing in order for women to continue to seek leadership roles."¹⁸

The reality is that Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care has decreased parental choice and made it harder for parents to access childcare. According to Statistics Canada, the percentage of families reporting difficulty finding spaces for their children increased from 36.4% in 2019 to 46.4% in 2023.¹⁹ Moreover, in 2022, 19% of parents with children aged 0-5 years who were not using childcare said they had a child on a waiting list, up to 26% in 2023.²⁰

Conservative members of the committee are deeply concerned with the Government of Canada's approach to the rollout of the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Agreements which limits parental choice and, therefore, is detrimental to ensuring women's economic empowerment.

¹⁷ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Andrea Hannen)

¹⁸ FEWO- [Evidence](#), February 16, 2024 (Caitlin Morrison)

¹⁹ Statistics Canada, May 12, 2023, [Evidence](#)

²⁰ Statistics Canada, May 12, 2023, [Evidence](#)

Supplementary Recommendations

Given these observations, the conservative members of this committee recommend that the following recommendation be added to the committee's report:

The Government of Canada should endorse all types of childcares to facilitate women's economic empowerment and participation in the workforce, benefitting both childcare providers and mothers seeking to enter employment.

Conclusion:

In providing our observations and supplementary recommendations, the Conservatives committee members would like to thank the House of Commons analysts and clerks for their hard work in adding to the completion of this report. This supplemental report is by no means a way to cast doubt on their work but rather to highlight the shortcoming of the report adopted by a majority of committee members. Despite the committee failing to address many of our observations, we hope that this supplementary report provides the Government of Canada with insight as it moves forward with the rollout of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Childcare Agreements.

Respectfully,

Michelle Ferreri, MP
Peterborough–Kawartha

Anna Roberts, MP
King–Vaughan

Dominique Vien, MP
Bellechasse–Les Etchemins–Lévis

Complementary opinion of the Bloc Québécois

First and foremost, the Bloc Québécois reaffirms its fears about positive discrimination and labelling in the workplace, which could exclude some and stigmatize others.

Nevertheless, the Bloc Québécois is deeply in favor of upstream prevention and awareness-raising in the face of the systemic economic obstacles that women encounter in their daily lives. This can be perfectly complementary to downstream actions when specific situations are encountered.

As far as training programs and education are concerned, the Bloc Québécois reiterates that these are Quebec's responsibilities, notably via a 1997 federal-provincial agreement on manpower training. No one can deny that the introduction of the federal government into what falls under Quebec's jurisdiction can lead systemically to a form of interference. The fact that the Government of Canada claims to act "with respect for the jurisdictions of the provinces, territories and aboriginal peoples" is clearly no guarantee.

As for the low-cost daycare system, Quebec has been a forerunner since 1977. The federal government must assume an asymmetrical agreement by not encroaching on training or the introduction of new daycare programs. Quebec has CPEs and is asking the federal government to transfer the money to the Quebec government without any conditions.

