Policies, initiatives and tools to promote women’s economic empowerment in the world of work in Canada
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Introduction

The EU, UN Women and ILO project “Empowering women at work through responsible business in G7 countries” (WE EMPOWER G7) aims at supporting sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth by promoting women’s economic empowerment in public and private sector in G7 countries. WE EMPOWER G7 convenes stakeholder dialogues on gender equality in the changing world of work in Canada, Japan, the United States and the EU to exchange knowledge, experiences, good practices and lessons learned.

The inception phase of this project (January-June 2018), focused on collecting data, information and knowledge on women’s economic empowerment, including policies, guidelines, tools and resources in G7 countries, in order to foster exchange of good practices.

As a result of preliminary consultations with the project stakeholders and in line with the thematic areas of the ILO’s Women at Work Centenary Initiative (pay equity, violence and harassment in the world of work and care work and care policies), three themes were selected for Canada: the gender pay gap; women in business, entrepreneurship and trade; and work-life balance and childcare.

This mapping document covers legislation, policies and initiatives on women’s economic empowerment undertaken by or of relevance to governments, employers’ and workers’ organizations of Canada. It is intended as an overview rather than as an exhaustive review. It also identifies relevant knowledge products linked to such laws, policies and initiatives. All information in this document is as of August 2018, with specific updates until June 2019.
A. Legislative Framework

1. **Act to Establish a Proactive Pay Equity Regime within the Federal Public and Private Sectors (Pay Equity Act)**
   
   **Summary of Act**
   
   In line with Budget 2018 and its focus on gender equality, the Canadian Government passed a historic proactive pay equity legislation aimed at reducing the gender wage gap and ensuring that women working in federally regulated industries, in both the public and the private sector, receive equal pay for work of equal value. The law requires employers to establish a pay equity plan, undertake compensation reviews and update their plan accordingly every five years, and submit annual statements to the Pay Equity Commissioner regarding their progress, *inter alia*. Failure of an employer to comply with the law will result in monetary penalties. The Budget Implementation Act, tabled in October 2018, included the new legislation, which received the Royal Assent to become law on 13 December 2018.

2. **Employment Equity Act**
   
   S.C. 1995, c. 44, signed into law 15 December 1995 and last amended 12 December 2017
   
   Full Legislative Text in English and French
   
   The EEA applies to federally regulated employees and requires employers to identify and eliminate unnecessary barriers that limit employment opportunities and correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and other minorities;

3. **Female Employees Equal Pay Act**
   
   S.C. 1956, c.38, signed into law in 1956
   
   This Act made wage discrimination based on sex against the law.

4. **Canada Fair Employment Practices Act**
   
   S.C. 1952-53, c.19, signed into law in 1953
   
   This act applied to the civil service aimed to eliminate discrimination by implementing fines and creating a complaints system.

5. **Fair Employment Practices Act**
   
   (S.). 1951, c.24, signed into law in 1951
   
   Ontario was the first province to pass Fair Employment legislation. The Act targeted discrimination in hiring practices and the workplace by establishing fines as well as a procedure for complaints. The rest of Canada's provinces and territories quickly followed Ontario’s lead in adopting similar provincial acts

6. **Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA)**
   
   R.S.C., 1985, c. H-6, last amended 19 June 2017
   
   The Act applies throughout Canada, but only to federally regulated activities; each province and territory has its own anti-discrimination law that applies to activities
that are not federally regulated.

B. Policies and Initiatives taken by Government

1. **Pay Equity Taskforce, appointed on October 29, 1999**
   *Implementing Actor: Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Labor.*
   
   **Objective:** A broad mandate to review relevant legislation that affects the gender pay gap.
   
   **Scope:** (i) to survey and analyze pay equity legislation in Canadian and international jurisdictions; and to examine administrative best practices and models for the implementation of pay equity legislation; (ii) to consider the experience of individuals and organizations who have been involved in processes which are designed to move towards equal pay; (iii) to take into account the implications of pay equity legislation and the frameworks for the achievement of pay equity for related legislative provisions, administrative structures and institutions like collective bargaining; (iv) to assess job evaluation and wage adjustment methodologies; and (v) to develop options and recommendations for improving the pay equity legislative framework.

2. **Equal Wages Guidelines, 1986 (SOR/86-1082)**
   *Enabling Act: Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA)*

   **Objective:** to provide guidance on the pay equity provisions of section 11 of the CHRA and to explain how they should apply to the federally-regulated private sector employers and commercial Crown Corporations.

   **Scope:** The Guidelines elaborate on the four factors used to assess the value of work (skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions); explain the concept of establishment; establish a scale to determine gender predominance; and outline reasonable factors that may justify different wages for work of equal value.

3. **Canada Labor Code (CLC), (R.S.C., 1985, c. L-2), Part III Sections 182 and 249**

   **Objective:** the CLC establishes federal labor standards, which apply to employees and employers in works, undertakings, or businesses under the legislative authority of the Parliament of Canada.

   **Scope:** the Labor Program inspectors to inspect all records of federally-regulated employers to determine whether there is discrimination in pay based on gender. If an inspector has reasonable grounds to believe that you are not taking steps to implement pay equity in your establishment, he or she is authorized to notify of this fact.
C. Policies and Initiatives taken by Employers’ Organizations

1. **Canadian Coalition to Empower Women (CCEW)**  
   *Implementing Actor: BPW Canada: Canadian Federation of Business and Professional Women*  
   *Coalition Website*

   **Objective:** CCEW was formed to advance equality between women and men, girls and boys in Canada; recognizing it is essential to build strong economies, establish more stable and just societies, and improve the quality of life for all women, men and their families in communities across Canada.  
   **Scope:** Grounded in the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and leveraging the empowerwomen.org platform, the CCEW works to: (i) start the dialogue by acknowledging that it will take all of us and all interested parties from every stakeholder group to make gender equality a reality in Canada; (ii) build partnerships with businesses of all sizes, government at all levels, and all other stakeholders including civil society, community service, business and labor organizations; (iii) explore and promote awareness of the benefits of gender equality; (iv) promote women's economic empowerment community building events and activities; (v) invite all interested parties to become signatories to the CCEW Statement of Support and (vi) introduce the UN Global Compact and UN Women CEO WEPs Statement of Support to medium and large businesses that meet the UN WEPs criteria and assist with their submission.

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**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**  
**Canadian Coalition to Empower Women**

- **WEE Community Engagement Guide**  
  **Objective:** A supporting guide on how to organize a WEE community event.  
  **Scope:** The guide outlines the background of WEE, UN Women and UN Global Compact's WEPs, and ideas for how to hold workshops to support WEE outreach and promotion in your community.  
  **Target Audience:** Leaders in industry and the private sector.  
  [Full PDF Guide](#)

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D. Policies and Initiatives taken by Workers’ Organizations

2. **Closing the Gender Gap**  
   *Implementing Actor: Canadian Labor Congress (CLC)*

   **Objective:** Work with unions, provincial, and federal governments on legislation supporting the elimination of the gender pay gap.  
   **Scope:** CLC works with unions, employers, researchers, and women’s organizations on issues affecting the gender pay gap including childcare and domestic violence.
KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS
Canadian Labor Congress

- **Domestic Violence at Work Resource Center**
  
  **Objective:** Inform all stakeholders on issues of preventing and treating domestic violence in the work place.
  
  **Scope:** Resources and information for stakeholders working on domestic violence in workers’ unions.
  
  **Target Audience:** Leaders, negotiators, and union representatives.
  
  [Center Website](#)

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### Policies and Initiatives on Women in Business, Entrepreneurship, and Trade

#### A. Legislative Framework

1. Under the Employment Insurance (EI) program (Part I), eligible apprentices are able to receive up to 55% of their average insurable weekly earnings (up to $514 / week in 2014) in EI regular benefits during periods of unemployment, including attending full-time in-class technical training.
   
   [Program in English](#)

#### B. Policies and Initiatives taken by Government

1. **Venture Capital Catalyst Initiative, 2017**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)
   
   **Objective:** BDC is a federal Crown corporation wholly owned by the Government of Canada. Its mandate is to help create and develop Canadian businesses through financing, growth and transition capital, venture capital and advisory services, with a focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. Through this initiative, the Federal government is tying investing in the innovation economy to promote gender equality.
   
   **Scope:** BDC is (i) requiring firms to explain how they are improving women’s representation within the industry when applying for VCCI funding; (ii) asking supercluster applicants to include strong representation of women and under-represented groups.
   
   [Initiative Website](#)

2. **Women Entrepreneurship Strategy**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** Innovation Science and Economic Development (ISED)
   
   **Objective:** The strategy is a comprehensive, whole-of-government plan to help women grow their businesses through access to financing, talent, networks and expertise.
   
   [Strategy Website](#)
**Scope:** Canada’s first Women Entrepreneurship Strategy is based on four key action areas to address the challenges women entrepreneurs face as they move through the phases of business development: (i) supporting women-led businesses; (ii) increasing access to capital; (iii) improving access to federal business innovation programming; and (iv) enhancing data and knowledge.

3. **Business Women in International Trade (BWIT)**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (TCS)
   
   **Program Website**
   
   **Objective:** BWIT is a national program that provides support and services to women entrepreneurs who own small and medium-sized businesses in order to connect them to international business opportunities.
   
   **Scope:** In order to be eligible for BWIT services, such as participation in trade missions, businesses must be at least 51% owned, managed, and/or controlled by one or more women and must have less than 500 employees.

4. **Women in Technology (WIT) Fund**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** Business Development Bank of Canada
   
   **Objective:** This Fund will address the disparities between women-owned tech firms who are currently under-funded and under-represented in Canada.
   
   **Scope:** BDC will invest $200 million in women led tech firms over the next five years.

5. **Women in International Trade Program**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** Business Development Bank of Canada
   
   **Objective:** This program aims to connect women with expanded export services and opportunities.
   
   **Scope:** Export Development Canada will receive $250 million over three years to provide financing and insurance solutions for women-owned and women-led businesses that trade internationally.

6. **Apprenticeship Incentive Grant for Women Program, March 2018**
   
   **Implementing Agency:** The Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship (CCDA)
   
   **Objective:** To address an impending shortage in trade workers, the Canadian federal government is allocating almost $20 million toward an apprenticeship incentive program for women enrolled in apprenticeship programs in male-dominated Red Seal trades.
   
   **Scope:** The government will provide each woman with up to $3,000 a year for a two-year apprenticeship program, as well as $2,000 upon completion of the program, for a total of $8,000.

C. Policies and Initiatives taken by Employers’ Organizations

1. **Women in Construction Engagement Strategy, June 2010**
   
   **Implementing Actor:** Buildforce Canada/ The Construction Sector Council
   
   **Full Strategy Report**
   
   **Objective:** The engagement strategy is aimed at increasing women’s participation in the construction industry.
Scope: The report has six key elements: industry leadership, apprenticeship, training, outreach recruitment and retention, policies and procedures, and partnerships.
Target Audience: government, industry, training providers, women tradespersons, women’s’ groups.

2. **Build Together, Women of the Building Trades**
Implementing Actor: Canada’s Building Trades Unions (CBTU)

Programme website

Objective: CBTU launched the “Build Together” initiative to increase diversity in Canada’s construction industry with the aim to increase the recruitment and retention of underrepresented demographics. The Women in Building Trades focuses specifically on increasing the number of women workers in the industry. The program provides resources, such as educational and training materials to create respectful workplaces, mentorship programmes, and networking events and conferences for women.

Scope: The programme creates provincial chapters of Build Together geared towards women and makes available its training/educational materials to employers online or printed for a fee.

Target Audience: Employers seeking to increase number of women employees and women workers in the construction industry looking for career advancement opportunities.

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**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**

*Buildforce Canada*

- **Report:** “Women in Construction Engagement Strategy”
Scope: This report identifies initiatives, which work to increase women’s participation in the construction industry. Principally, these efforts have focused on raising women’s awareness of these careers. There are industry led programs that have raised awareness and been successful at the local level.
Target Audience: Construction firms.
[Full Strategy Report]

- **Website:** Opportunities for Women
Scope: Resource and knowledge platform for women interested in the construction industry. The website includes testimonials and career resources.
Target Audience: Potential female construction workers.
[Full Website]
D. Policies and Initiatives taken by Workers’ Organizations

1. **CLC Ontario Region Women’s Summer School**  
   **Implementing Actor:** Canadian Labour Congress  
   
   **Objective:** A week-long excursion with for-fee courses are offered to women in unions to boost their leadership, technical skills, and awareness of issues facing other women in unions, particularly indigenous women.  
   **Scope:** Course offerings during the fee-based retreat, include “Women in Leadership 1.0”, “Facing Management Effectively for Women”, and “Using Modern Tools to Talk with Your Members”. Course fees include childcare for children under 11 years of age.  
   **Target Audience:** Women union members of Canada.

E. Initiatives by other Actors

1. **Managing Flex Initiative**  
   **Implementing Actor:** Canada Catalyst  
   **Initiative Website**  
   
   **Objective:** To support companies to implement flexible work schedules so more women and mothers can participate in the labor market.  
   **Scope:** To (i) help companies assess whether their organizational culture is supportive of all employees working flexibly; (ii) provide managers with the resources they need to have conversations with their employees about their flexible work options and to successfully manage those who work flexibly; and (iii) provide a step-by-step guide for employees who want to begin to work flexibly.  
   **Target Audience:** Leaders and employers across labor sectors.

2. **The Catalyst Accord: Accelerating the Advancement of Women**  
   **Implementing Actor:** Canada Catalyst  
   **Full Accord Details**  
   
   **Objective:** The Catalyst Accord 2022 calls on Canadian boards and CEOs to pledge to accelerate the advancement of women in business.  
   **Scope:** Accord signatories pledge to take the following actions: (i) to increase the average percentage of women on boards and women in executive positions in corporate Canada to 30% or greater by 2022 and (ii) to share key metrics with Catalyst for annual benchmarking of our collective progress.  
   **Target Audience:** Corporate executives.  
   **Impact:** The Catalyst Honours Conference awards companies with the most forward thinking policies and increase in women in corporate sector workforce.
**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**

**Catalyst Canada**

- **How-To Guide: “Flexible Work Arrangements for Organizations, Managers, and Individuals”**
  
  **Objective:** This tool helps companies assess whether their organizational culture is supportive of all employees working flexibly, and it provides strategies to implement flexible work arrangements (FWAs).
  
  **Intended Impact:** Supporting companies to adopt FWAs.
  
  **Scope:** A three-part interactive toolkit for organizations, managers, and individuals to understand and implement FWAs.
  
  **Target Audience:** Organization/company leaders.
  
  [Toolkit Website](#)

**Canadian Gender and Good Governance Alliance**

- **“Director’s Play Book”**
  
  **Objective:** The pamphlet makes the case for more gender diverse company boards and senior leadership and provides companies a toolkit of steps needed to achieve this.
  
  **Intended Impact:** Company leadership gains an understanding of the barriers to more gender diverse boards and senior leadership, the business case for achieving gender diversity and the tools to begin the process.
  
  **Target Audience:** According to the document, the Alliance that produced the document hopes to be useful to “…businesses, governments, regulators, institutional investors and other interested stakeholders who require assistance in achieving greater board gender diversity”.
  
  [Pamphlet in English and French](#)

- **“The CEO Blueprint, How to Build and Lead Gender-Balanced Organizations”**
  
  **Objective:** A short pamphlet that gives company CEOs the benefits of, and general roadmap to, increasing gender diversity at all levels of their organization. It includes a few examples of good practices as well.
  
  **Intended Impact:** CEOs are more convinced of the importance of gender diversity in their company and is better informed of the general steps needed to achieve it.
  
  **Target Audience:** Company senior leadership, particularly CEOs.
  
  [Blueprint pamphlet in English and French](#)
A. Legislative Framework

1. **Employment Insurance (EI), amended 3 December 2017**
The Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is responsible for social programs, the labour market at the federal level, and administers EI for Canadian families.
(a) EI maternity benefits are offered to biological mothers, including surrogate mothers, who cannot work because they are pregnant or have recently given birth. A maximum of 15 weeks of EI maternity benefits is available. Benefits can be paid as early as 12 weeks before the expected date of birth, and can end as late as 17 weeks after the actual date of birth. The weekly benefit rate is 55% of the claimant’s average weekly insurable earnings up to a maximum amount.
(b) Parents have the option to receive parental benefits over a longer period at a lower benefit rate.
   (1) Standard parental benefits can be paid for a maximum of 35 weeks and must be claimed within a 52-week period (12 months) after the week the child was born or placed for the purpose of adoption. The weekly benefit rate is 55% of the claimant’s average weekly insurable earnings up to a maximum amount. The two parents can share these 35 weeks of standard parental benefits.
   (2) Extended parental benefits can be paid for a maximum of 61 weeks and must be claimed within a 78-week period (18 months) after the week the child was born or placed for the purpose of adoption. The benefit rate is 33% of the claimant’s average weekly insurable earnings up to a maximum amount. The two parents can share these 61 weeks of extended parental benefits.

2. **Employment Insurance (renamed in 1996), Bill C-32 amendment, 31 December 2000**
Leave time for employed parents increased from 10 to 35 weeks. Parental leave benefits could be claimed only after the birth of the child, and the leave must be taken within 52 weeks of the birth. To qualify, parents must have worked for 600 hours in the past 52 weeks. The 35 weeks of benefits can be taken by one (qualifying) parent, or they can be split between both (qualifying) parents, with only one waiting period required between them. Maternity leave benefits, which are administered in the same way as parental benefits, can be claimed for 15 weeks by women only, and up to 8 weeks before the birth.

3. **The Unemployment Insurance Act, amended in 1990**
Ten weeks of parental leave benefits were added. These could be used by either parent or split between them.

4. **The Unemployment Insurance Act, amended in 1971**
Mothers with 20 or more insurable weeks could claim up to 15 weeks of benefits.

5. **The Unemployment Insurance Act, 7 August 1940**
It reated the foundations of what are today the EI program and the Canada Employment Insurance Commission that oversees the program’s implementation.
B. Policies and Initiatives taken by Government

1. **Multilateral Early Learning and Childcare Framework** (December 2017)
   *Implementing Agency: ESDC*
   **Objective:** Provinces and territories will use investments allocated by the Government of Canada to further build early learning and childcare systems by addressing local, regional and system priorities that have an impact on families more in need. A commitment from Governments to increase quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility and inclusivity in early learning and childcare.
   **Scope:** To (i) invest in regulated care for children under six; (ii) focus on the families most in need, including low-income, lone parent, indigenous families, those living in underserved communities, working non-standard hours, or with children with varying abilities; (iii) ensure reporting and performance measurement; and (iv) ensure spending does not replace existing early learning and childcare programs, but rather work to expand the system.

2. **Canadian Tax Reform** (1998)
   *Implementing Agency: The Canada Revenue Agency*
   **Objective:** Increase married women’s labor force participation
   **Scope:** Originally, when a married woman entered the labor market, the family’s tax payments rose equally to her husband’s marginal tax rate. After the reform, with the tax credit, this was no longer the case. This significantly reduced the “first dollar” marginal tax rate of women married to high-income husbands.
   **Impact:** The participation of women in the workplace grew and the “tax wedge” went from 35% in the early 1990s to 32% in 2015 (IMF).

C. Policies and Initiatives taken by Workers’ Organizations

1. **Rethink Childcare Campaign**
   *Implementing Actor: Canadian Union of Public Employees*
   **Campaign website**
   **Objective:** Campaign to put childcare back on the federal agenda.
   **Scope:** Providing tools and information to inform the public on economic benefits of childcare advocate for federally funded childcare.

   **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**
   Canadian Union of Public Employees

   • **Campaign:** “Rethink Childcare” (2013)
     **Objective:** This website seeks to inform those who work in unions about economic and personal benefits of childcare.
     **Scope:** The campaign site includes: (i) a calculator to estimate savings; (ii) a video; and (ii) a “how to” host a conversation in your home about childcare.
     **Target Audience:** policymakers; activists; union workers; and local and federal government officials.
     *(Campaign site in English)*
D. Initiatives by other Actors

1. **Workplaces that Work: Flexible Work Policy**  
   *Implementing Actor: HR Council for the Voluntary and Non-profit Sector*

   **Full toolkit**

   **Objective:** To support those advocating for flexible work arrangements for nonprofit workers.

   **Scope:** the HR Council outlines options for flexible work policy, which can include: (i) employee works from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. rather than from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. (i.e. staggered work schedules); (ii) compressed workweeks (i.e. four 10-hour days, or a 9-day fortnight; (iii) part-time work; and (iv) job sharing. This is a structured form of part-time work, with various models. A 50:50 split is common, but not the only option. Some employers find it best that both workers have at least one day in common, so they can share information and brief each other on current tasks and issues.

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**KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS**  
**HR Council for the Voluntary and Non-profit Sector**

- Guidelines: “Flexible Workplace”  
  **Objective:** Implementing a Flexible Work Policy.  
  **Scope:** A one pager on best practices for starting a flexible work policy at a non-profit organization.  
  **Target Audience:** Leaders in the nonprofit sector.  
  [Complete Guidelines](#)

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EMPOWERING WOMEN AT WORK IN G7 COUNTRIES