

The pathway to women's economic recovery is through the nonprofit and charitable sector

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The national Action Plan for Women in the Economy must include strategies and supports for sectors that are historically and traditionally overrepresented with women, like the nonprofit sector. When a sector is women-majority, it is undervalued and underfunded which undermines decent work and stalls women's economic recovery overall. With meaningful investments in women-majority sectors, the plan can achieve its goal of women's economic equality.

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to share the perspectives of women¹ working in nonprofits to inform advocacy work on the national Action Plan for Women in the Economy.

In this brief you will find:

- Recommendations for the task force and action plan
- Context and key messages
- Ideas of how gender equity advocates across Canada and ONN can work together

Recommendations for creating the task force and developing the action plan

ONN echoes the voices of gender equity advocates and organizations at the forefront of influencing the national action plan. In particular, we support recommendations for an all-of-government and intersectional approach to the task force and action plan. We agree that the plan should focus on both paid and unpaid women's work, including care work and care jobs.

For the past four years, ONN has been building a movement for decent work for women in Ontario's nonprofit sector. We conducted a comprehensive literature review, a series of learning circles, and a survey through a gender-based intersectional lens (GBA+) to better understand barriers to economic equality faced by women working in the nonprofit sector. We then took action by implementing solutions to break down these barriers at the policy, network, and organizational levels. Drawing on this work, ONN additionally recommends that:

1. Perspectives and voices of women working in nonprofits are represented on the taskforce.
2. Strategies and supports that take into account the perspectives and voices of women working in nonprofits and other women-majority sectors are key parts of the action plan.

¹ ONN uses an inclusive definition of women that recognizes and welcomes trans women, queer women and nonbinary people.

Expanding the way we think about women's economic recovery

For the Action Plan to meaningfully move the needle on women's economic equality, it must include strategies and supports for women-majority sectors, like the nonprofit sector. Women's economic recovery will not happen if only industries, sectors, and occupations in which women are underrepresented are targeted. This can be done through initiatives such as more women joining boards of directors of companies, in entrepreneurship or high-paying business jobs, or working in science, technology, engineering, math and trades.

There is a serious risk of taking "business, boards, and STEM" as the only pathway to women's economic recovery: it does not impact most women nor does it solve the undervaluing of work in which women are concentrated. Historically and traditionally, women have either been concentrated in or represent the majority of workers in industries and occupations that are aligned with their traditional gender roles, namely care work.² Black, immigrant, migrant and undocumented women are particularly concentrated in care work. As a result, these industries and occupations lack decent work and are low-valued, which significantly drives down women's economic equality overall. Many of these industries and occupations are found in the nonprofit sector.³ Therefore, to support women in the economy, the action plan must also lift women working in nonprofits.

Investments in nonprofits will not only lift women workers, but have a cascading impact across the economy, environment, and communities. For instance, modelling from Australia shows what investing in the care economy would mean: 900,000 unpaid care workers would be able to transition to paid care jobs with decent work; increased revenue from their labour market participation would offset 80 per cent of government investment; and GDP would increase by \$30 billion annually.⁴ Similarly, research from the UK forecasts that investing in care rather than construction would create 2.7 times as many jobs, increase overall employment rates by 5 per cent, enable 50 per cent to be recouped by the Treasury in direct and indirect tax revenue, and produce 30% less greenhouse gas emissions.⁵

Real impact will come from the national action plan carving out and supporting multiple pathways to women's economic recovery.

Nonprofit sector is a women-majority sector that lacks decent work for women

Across Canada, there are over 171,000 diverse nonprofits and charities engaging in public benefit activities. The sector plays a vital role as an economic driver, generating more than 7 per cent of Canada's GDP and employing over 2 million people. Nonprofits receive less than half of their revenues from government. This means they can leverage public investments - via business activities, donations, and the contributions of volunteers - into significantly higher value in the services they deliver, all the while creating jobs locally.

² Ontario Nonprofit Network [Decent Work for Women - A literature review of women working in Ontario's nonprofit sector](#) (2018)

³ Canadian Women's Foundation, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Fay Faraday and Ontario Nonprofit Network [Resetting Normal: Women, Decent Work and Canada's Fractured Care Economy](#) (2020); Canadian Women's Foundation, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Kathleen Lahey [Resetting Normal: Funding a Thriving Women's Sector](#) (2020)

⁴ National Foundation for [Australian Women NFAW independent modelling shows Economic Boost from increased funding in the care sector](#) (2020)

⁵ Women's Budget Group [A Care-Led Recovery from Coronavirus](#) (2020)

Nonprofits are also at the forefront of fighting the COVID-19 pandemic as many of our frontline workers are considered essential workers in essential services. This includes long-term care homes, community health, mental health, homeless and women's shelters, food security programs, developmental disability services, and organizations working with those who have come into conflict with the law. The pandemic has especially highlighted the way in which care work and the care economy overlaps with the sector.

Eighty per cent of the nonprofit sector labour force consists of women workers. That's approximately 1.6 million women workers across Canada. Although there is lack of data on the demographics of women workers in nonprofits, anecdotally we know many of them are Black and immigrant women. Indigenous women, women from the LGBTQ2SI community, and women with disabilities are concentrated in particular subsectors, including Indigenous-led or women's organizations. Because so many women work in the sector, particularly Black and immigrant women, it is undervalued, underfunded, and underestimated. This undermines decent work.⁶ In particular, nonprofit work is perceived through negative gender stereotypes such as dependent, emotional, unintelligent and unskilled, and inferior to traditionally masculine work. This has real consequences for the sector, its women workers and the communities it serves.

Women workers in the nonprofit sector are experiencing the same barriers to economic empowerment women face in other sectors. The difference is that the barriers women face in nonprofits manifest in unique ways and the sector lacks supports to eradicate them. This is because of the sector's unique traits and characteristics. Barriers include racialized and gendered glass ceilings; a gender wage gap; discrimination based on sex, race, ability, and age; bullying; and sexual harassment.⁷

COVID-19 has set back nonprofits, impacting 1.6 million women

ONN conducted two surveys in the first few months of the pandemic to understand the impact of the pandemic on Ontario's nonprofit sector and the effectiveness of public policy and supports provided by provincial and federal governments. In the most recent June 2020 survey, of the 1,100 organizations⁸ that responded, findings show that:

- Demand is up while revenues are down: 40 percent of nonprofits continue to experience an increase in demand for services while \$90 million in financial losses are estimated for respondents
- 3/10 nonprofits have had to lay off staff: Estimated 3,000 job losses among respondents, for an average of 2.65 jobs per organization
- Government supports are not reaching nonprofits: Three-quarters of nonprofits surveyed did not benefit from provincial funding measures and two-thirds did not benefit from any federal relief measures.

If nonprofits are impacted by the pandemic and resulting economic downturn, women workers are impacted. Decreased supports and any closures will mean decrease in decent work and job losses for women.

⁶ Ontario Nonprofit Network [Women's Voices - Stories about working in Ontario's Nonprofit sector](#) (2018)

⁷ Ontario Nonprofit Network [Women's Voices - Stories about working in Ontario's Nonprofit sector](#) (2018)

⁸ Ontario Nonprofit Network [Risk, resilience, and rebuilding communities: The state of Ontario nonprofits three months into the pandemic](#) (2020)

Every time we talk about women's economic recovery, let's make it clear we also mean women working in nonprofits

Here are some ways to do this:

1. Learn more about our policy recommendations for women's economic recovery:
 - [Recovery through Equality: Developing an Inclusive Action Plan for Women in the Economy](#) (2020)
 - [Submission to Ontario's Long-Term Care COVID-19 Commission: Recommendations](#) (2020)
 - [Stimulating Gender Equality: A GBA+ Approach to Economic Recovery](#) (2020)
 - [Modernizing Maternity and Parental Employment Insurance Benefits: A Policy Brief](#) (2019)
2. Share key policy recommendations and messages in your advocacy, government relations, and communications work:
 - To support women in the economy, we need to lift women workers in nonprofits/care work/women-majority sectors.
 - Investing in women-majority sectors is equally as important as getting more women into non-traditional sectors.
 - Women should have decent work in whichever industry and occupation they choose to work in.
 - Women's economic justice is only possible when women are offered decent work in nonprofits.
3. Amplify the [decent work for women story](#)
4. Join coalition work:
 - [Open Letter to PM Trudeau and Minister Freeland on COVID-19](#) (2020)