

Decent Work for Women Working in Ontario's Nonprofit Sector

Key findings and solutions

ONN 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 empowerment faced by women working in the nonprofit sector.

Now, we're taking action by developing and implementing solutions to break down these barriers.

Key findings

The sector is women-majority but not women-led. 80 per cent of the sector's labour force consists of women workers. However, based on women's employment share they are disproportionately concentrated in non-leadership positions and are more likely to lead smaller sized and low budget organizations. Unequal job opportunities and a glass ceiling particularly exist for immigrant and racialized women and women with disabilities, resulting in a gendered and racialized hierarchy in the labour force.

Women have lower compensation than men. Three components impact women's compensation in the sector. First is a phenomenon known as the "care penalty", where wages in the sector are lower in comparison to other sectors, despite the fact that the workforce is highly educated and experienced. Within the sector, women earn less than men, especially in senior leadership positions. Last, limited access to a pension plan, health benefits, and maternity and parental benefit top-ups particularly lower women's compensation over the course of their life.

Women experience sexism at all levels. Busting the myth that sexism doesn't exist in a women-majority sector, women experience sexism on a day-to-day basis, in the types of roles they occupy, in distribution of work, and value of that work. Board members were cited as treating their male and female executive directors unequally.

Women overwhelmingly experience bullying and some sexual harassment. Bullying was experienced from other women in similar positions and those in power, while sexual harassment was experienced in interactions with external parties such as clients.

Gender plays a significant role in the nonprofit sector. The sector is historically and traditionally feminized because it is women-majority and much of the work is considered care work and thus women's work. This particularly impacts racialized, immigrant, and Indigenous women. Consequently, nonprofits are perceived through the lens of negative gender stereotypes (e.g., dependent, emotional, inferior to traditionally masculine traits and thus other sectors, unintelligent, unskilled, in need of constant guidance and monitoring). Feminization has real consequences. For instance, patriarchal power dynamics emerge between organizations and donors/funders, or executive directors and boards of directors. The larger workforce is overworked, underpaid, and low valued in comparison to other sectors, and community needs are underfunded.

Racism and ageism are other common forms of discrimination. Identities are complex and so discrimination is experienced in multiple ways. Some women experience discrimination primarily based on gender, some at the intersection of gender and another part of their identity, such as ability or age, and others primarily because of one part of their identity that is not gender, such as race.

Read more in our [literature review](#) and [Women’s Voices](#) reports.

Solutions

We are developing and implementing eleven solutions at the organizational, network, and systemic levels using an iterative approach.

IMPACT LEVEL: SYSTEMS		
Solution	Ultimate Goal	ONN’s Work
Advocate for women’s economic empowerment policies in Ontario through networked policy advocacy.	The Government of Ontario undertakes women’s economic empowerment strategies that are informed by a nonprofit lens.	Pay Transparency Submission (2019)
		Pay Equity Brief (2019)
Support advocacy for Employment Insurance (EI) modernization that promotes gender equity.	Women’s equitable access to EI benefits are part of the federal election agenda (2019) and federal party platforms.	Policy Brief: Modernizing Maternity and Parental EI Benefits (2019)
		Supporting universal childcare

IMPACT LEVEL: NETWORK		
Solution	Ultimate Goal	ONN’s Work
Build a Financial Investment Fund for Maternity and Parental Leave Benefit Top-ups.	The nonprofit sector across Ontario pools risk and resources to provide maternity and parental benefit top-ups to workers.	With funding from the Investment Readiness Program , ONN is engaging in market analysis, financial modelling, and business planning to create a financial investment fund that nonprofits across Ontario can join to provide maternity and parental leave benefit top-ups to their employees who become parents to new children.
Support other organizations working on solutions for women working in the nonprofit sector.	A stronger networked approach to gender equity across the nonprofit sector in Ontario.	ONN is infusing its project learnings into work led by other organizations as it emerges.

Funder Strategy.	Both governmental and nongovernmental funders of Ontario nonprofits facilitate decent work with a GBA+ lens in their funding practices.	ONN uses a GBA+ lens in its campaign for funders to fund decent work.
Board Strategy.	Across the Ontario nonprofit sector, board members support a culture of decent work with a GBA+ lens in the organizations they govern.	The board strategy is in development.

IMPACT LEVEL: ORGANIZATIONAL		
Solution	Ultimate Goal	ONN's Work
Create a compensation guide for the nonprofit sector with a GBA+ lens that outlines different components of compensation, their importance, how they impact diverse women, and how to implement them.	A fair standard of compensation practices in the nonprofit sector.	Bridging the gap: How compensation practices can reduce the gender wage gap in Ontario nonprofits (2019)
Develop resources to mitigate hiring biases and integrate a GBA+ lens into leadership development.	Increase the number of leadership positions held by racialized, immigrant, and Indigenous women, women from the LGBTQ community and women with disabilities	#TimetoLead (2020)
Document maternity and parental leave top-up practices in the nonprofit sector and share stories about how nonprofits made these policies work.	Widespread adoption of maternity top-ups in the nonprofit sector.	ONN is now focused on the top-up fund described above instead.

Read more in the [phase one evaluation report](#).

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