



Retention and Promotion of Women in Skilled Trades and Non-Traditional Occupations

Recommendations

The Government of Canada should work with provincial/territorial levels of government, as well as industry, business and labour stakeholders to develop and implement a national strategy to address the underrepresentation and lack of retention of women in skilled trades and other non-traditional occupations. Such a strategy should seek to create workplace cultures that are inclusive of women and addresses the barriers to their successful entry and advancement by including plans to:

- Identify and provide the necessary supports to encourage women to enter and remain in non-traditional fields throughout their education, training and careers;
- Encourage behavioural/cultural change within workplaces, driven by industry leaders including trade and business associations;
- Encourage all employers to review their HR policies to identify and address any systemic barriers to the employment and retention of women, including altering workplace policies, if necessary, to create more inclusive, welcoming environments (e.g. ensuring “family friendly” and pay equity policies are in place);
- Encourage educational institutions and related stakeholders to identify and address barriers for girls and women in non-traditional fields of study;
- Develop mechanisms to support the implementation of these policies; and
- Provide sustainable funding to ensure implementation.

***These recommendations are based on policy adopted at CFUW’s 2012 Annual General Meeting**

Background

- Women remain a minority among professionals employed in the sciences, mathematics, engineering, trades and technology representing an average of 22% of professionals in these occupations, up marginally from 20% in 1987. According to 2006 census, the participation rate of women in the engineering field alone averaged 13% (1).
- The Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology (CCWESTT) data on 2007 female apprentices in the trades demonstrates that women represent an average of 3% of registered apprenticeships in building construction, electrical, metal fabricating, heavy equipment, industrial and mechanical trades. Female completions of apprenticeships were even lower at 1.6% (2).
- “Workplaces that Work”, a study prepared in 2003 for Provincial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women concluded that women in skilled trades do not find workplace cultures inclusive. Cited as major barriers were work conditions filled with stereotypes, safety issues, and lack of opportunity for advancement and work-family balance (3). Similar issues were also identified by the Canadian Women’s Foundation in 2007 for women in occupations within the science, engineering, trades and technology fields (4).
- According a 2010 report by NSERC entitled “Women in Science and Engineering in Canada” the problem starts early on in the schools, but leadership and policy development within industry itself have also been major factors in the failure to attract and retain women in greater numbers. According to NSERC, a lack of female role models, combined with a “chilly” industry climate towards gender diversity has provided little incentive for women to pursue careers in engineering for example (5).
- In 2007 the Conference Board of Canada pointed to the alarming trend of skilled trades’ shortages and reported that within the next two decades Canada will be short about one million workers, in part due to a lack of replacement workers with the right skills. This situation further emphasizes the need to bring more women into these traditionally male dominated occupations (6).

CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization of close to 9,000 women university graduates, students and Associate Members in 110 Clubs across Canada that works to improve the status of women and human rights, education, social justice, and peace. For more information visit www.cfuw.org

(1) McMullen, K., et al (2010). Women in Non-traditional Occupations and Fields of Study. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010001/article/11151-eng.htm#note2>

(2) Canadian Coalition of Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology. Female Apprentices in Trades. 2008

(3) Retrieved from: <http://www.ccwestt.org/Portals/0/publications/QuickStats%20No10%20May%202011.pdf>

(4) McLean, D (2003). Workplaces that Work: Creating A Workplace Culture that Attracts, Retains and Promotes Women. Retrieved from: <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/workplaces-that-work.pdf>

(5) Hill, Diane Elizabeth. 2007. Environmental Scan - An Overview of Income, Labour Market and Demographic Trends Related to Women’s Economic Development. Canadian Women’s Foundation. Retrieved from: <http://www.canadianwomen.org/sites/canadianwomen.org/files/PDF%20-%20ED%20resource%20-%20EnvironmentalScan-2007.pdf>

(6) NSERC (2010). “Women in Science and Engineering in Canada” Retrieve from: http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/doc/Reports-Rapports/Women_Science_Engineering_e.pdf