



FAMILY SERVICE TORONTO
For People. For Change.

Campaign
Ontario 2000



Submission to Ministry of Labour, Government of Ontario
Re the Changing Workplaces Review
September 11, 2015

By Liyu Guo & Anita Khanna
Campaign 2000

Contacts:

Anita Khanna and Liyu Guo, Campaign 2000

Family Service Toronto

128A Sterling Road, Toronto ON M6R 2B7

416-595-9230 ext. 244/250

liyugu@familyservicetoronto.org & anitakh@familyservicetoronto.org

Campaign 2000 is a national, non-partisan network of 120 national, provincial and community partner organizations committed to working together to end child and family poverty in Canada. Ontario Campaign 2000 is a provincial partner with over 70 member organizations across the province. www.campaign2000.ca

Campaign 2000 is generously hosted at Family Service Toronto, a multi-service community organization serving Torontonians for 100+ years.

INTRODUCTION

More than 25 years following the unanimous, federal all-party resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000, the most recent taxfiler data published show that 19.9% of Ontario children, or 1 in 5, lives in poverty (LIM-AT).¹ It is clear that one generation later poverty continues to rob children and adults of their dignity and potential.

Even as child and family poverty persists, Ontario Campaign 2000 believes Ontario can fix this. We know that we can resolve the problem of poverty because evidence shows that strong labour market policy and targeted social policies are effective in reducing poverty. Ontario's 2008 Poverty Reduction Strategy has further proven that targeted policies backed by investments can make a difference.

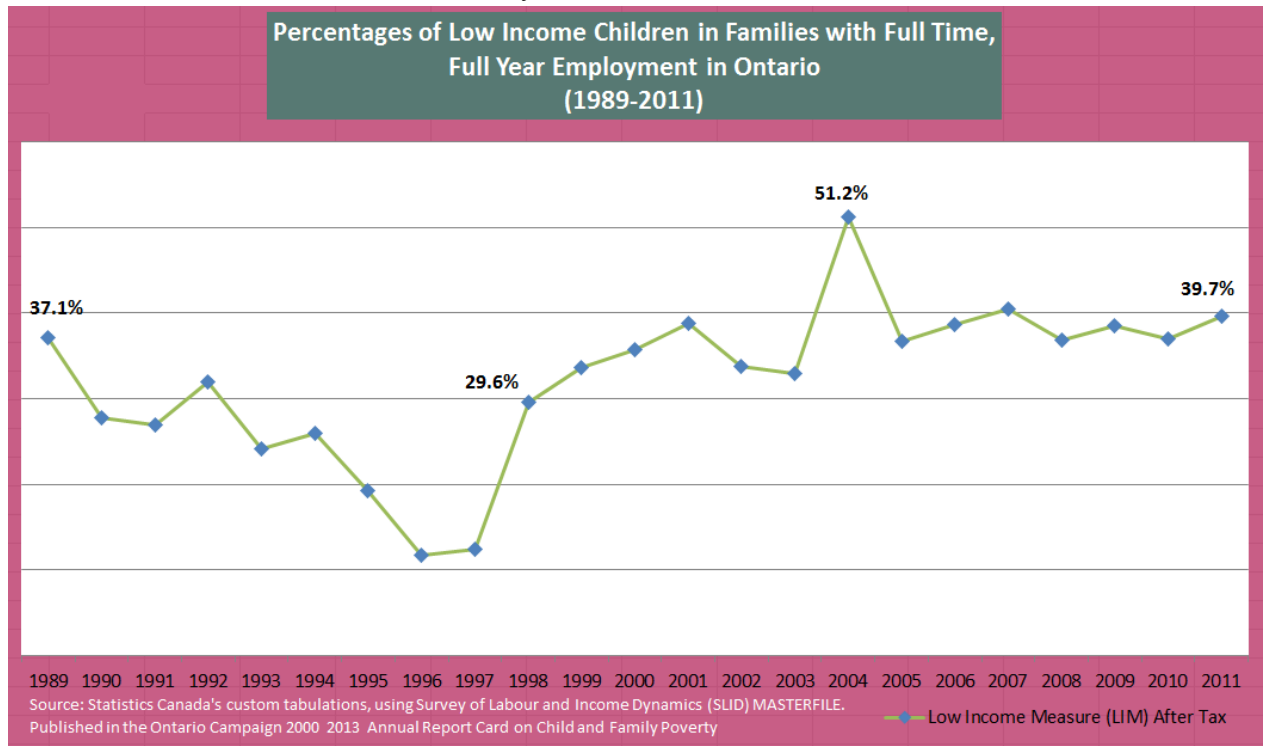
CHILD POVERTY THEN & NOW: 1989 vs 2012



THE HARD REALITIES at a glance:

- Canada's job market is becoming increasingly precarious and it is an undisputed fact that there's a sharp increase of part-time, temporary and precarious jobs, while full-time, well-paying jobs are fast disappearing across Canada. No sector is immune, including the not-for-profit sector. Recently, Campaign 2000 was able to secure modest funding for a youth project that allowed us to create a part-time, short-term position for a youth coordinator. Without a doubt, the job posting attracted a large number of applicants, some very qualified and others over qualified. It speaks to the need for all levels of government to invest in and promote the creation of good jobs and employment strategies, especially for the most vulnerable groups, including people of colour, Indigenous peoples, young people, people with disabilities and women, among others.

- Ontario's labour market is not providing the type of jobs required to lift working families out of poverty. Since 1989, the quality of employment in Ontario has declined and the growth of precarious work arrangements that are contract, short-term, shift based, part time or even full-time at minimum wage leave many children and families in poverty. The number of children coming from working poor families has increased since 1989. In 1989, 37.1% of low-income children were in families where their parent(s) worked full time, full year and yet still lived in poverty. By 2011, 39.7% of children in poverty were from families with full time, full year work.²



- Overall, Ontario has seen a 50% growth in involuntary part-time employment and 75% growth in long-term unemployment since 2009.³
- Racialized Ontarians, including people of colour, women and newcomers are all overrepresented in minimum wage jobs. According to a Wellesley Institute study published in 2013, the share of racialized employees at minimum wage was 47 percent higher than for the total population in 2011, at 13.2% as compared to 9%. Fully 19.1% of recent immigrants are working at minimum wage, more than twice that of all employees.⁴
- Racialized workers and communities face discrimination and racism every step of the way, whether in applying for jobs or in hiring and promotion.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Better enforcement of Employment Standards Act and updating of the Labour Relations Act to provide protection for all low-wage workers in all sectors of the economy**

Closing the gaps and raising the floor of minimum standards will do little if these rights are not enforced. But Ontario's current system of enforcement relies on workers to enforce rights once violations occur. Without active enforcement of minimum standards in the workplace, workers have little protection when their employers violate employment standards. Increasingly workers are being conditioned to accept substandard working conditions.

The implementation of the Act should not rely on workers raising the flag. It is a flawed system when the party with less power is responsible to alert the government. The government needs to properly fund and staff ESA offices to ensure there is proper enforcement of ESA. If workers are willing to file a claim, we need to make sure workers are properly supported, including the opportunity to speak freely in their mother tongue to ensure they are empowered to have full access to their rights as workers. In addition to enforcement of ESA, the government should also provide proactive education on the Act so that workers have better knowledge of their rights and ways to cope and protect themselves when they experience violations of ESA by their employers.

- **Continue to raise the minimum wage and discourage companies that create poverty-wage jobs.**

We know that minimum wage is not part of this Review. However, when people are working full-time and still living in poverty, it speaks to systemic issues, such as a lack of effective labour market policies and the need for employment equity. We cannot expect minimum wage workers to always speak up for their rights against their employers. They will continue to be vulnerable unless government can step in and offer them legislative protection including a minimum wage that lifts workers out of poverty.

- **Introduce targeted programs, including employment equity, for groups with disproportionately high poverty rates, including racialized Ontarians and Indigenous peoples.**

We know this is not part of the scope of the review, but we are all painfully aware there are systemic barriers that workers of colour face every day. We are happy to note the newly legislated Community Benefits Agreement will hopefully provide some relief in terms of supporting workers to find employment, especially those from high risk or high needs groups or who are chronically unemployed or underemployed. The next step is to legislate employment equity.

- **Employment standards need to address workplace discrimination and the new realities of work arrangements**, and provide protections that enforce equal pay for equal work across part-time, shift, temporary and full-time categories of workers.

CONCLUSION:

While we understand the scope of this Review is limited, we urge the Ontario government to adopt a more holistic approach to examining the issues around the Employment Standards Act and recognize the fact that in order to address some of the more systemic issues, we need a multi-pronged strategy. Such a multi-pronged strategy must tackle key related issues, such as income security; a healthy labour market; better strategies to create good jobs, including full-time jobs with decent wages and benefits; better protections for workers, enhanced access to unionization for workers in the service sector, and; affordable, accessible and high-quality child care that enables parents to work and lift their families out of poverty.

References:

¹ Ontario Campaign 2000 2014 Report Card on Child and Family Poverty (November 2014) *Child Poverty, 25 Years Later: We Can Fix This*, using Statistics Canada custom tabulation. T1 Family File. 1989 and 2012.

² Statistics Canada. (2013). Custom tabulations, using Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) Masterfile.

³ Tiessen, K. (2014 March). *Seismic Shift: Ontario's Changing Labour Market*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Ontario Office. Retrieved from: <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/seismic-shift>

⁴ Block, S. (2013). *Who Is Working for Minimum Wage in Ontario?* The Wellesley Institute. Page 3.