

Issue Sheet 1

Women and Unions: *The Benefits*

(Hint: it's not just wages!)

Approximately, one in three, or, 34% of Canadians belong to a labour union. Over the past three decades unionization among female workers has risen considerably. Last year, *nearly two-thirds of new union members were women* - who now represent 51% of union membership in Canada: An all-time high!

By organizing together through their unions, women workers have improved their lives and their working conditions. Labour unions were in the forefront of the struggles for public health care, public education, public child care, minimum wages (and minimum wage increases), human and civil rights, harassment/discrimination measures, employment conditions. In fact, it was the labour movement that helped develop maternity/parental leave, Employment Insurance, overtime pay premiums, the 40-hour work week, pay equity legislation, work accommodation arrangements, and the Canadian Pension Plan.

Census Canada data shows that unionized jobs generally provide **higher wages, greater non-wage working benefits**, and in many respects, **a better working arrangement** than other non-unionized jobs.

It is clear that unionized employment offers many benefits to its affiliates; however, belonging to a union also has its advantages that are specific to women.

In the workplace, unions are the best bet - for raising women's wages and benefits, for protection against harassment and discrimination, for job security, for ways to balance work and family, and for pushing for social programs and a better world. Women, with their specific needs, are represented within Canadian unions. Are you one of them?

Turn this page to see what unionized employment can offer you!

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Here are the Facts!

- Average **hourly wages** of a unionized worker in Canada are higher than those of non-union members. This is true for both full-time employees (\$21.01 versus \$17.71) and part-time employees (\$17.74 versus \$10.71).
- Union membership has monetary advantages for **racialized women**. In 2007, African Canadian women salaries showed that they earned an extra \$186.00 per week compared to their non-union counterparts. Likewise, on a weekly basis, Aboriginal women earned \$179.00 more, and Latinas earned \$227.00 more than their non-unionized sisters.
- Women, on average, continue to earn a mere 70.5% of the wages men earn. The labour movement has pushed for **pay equity provisions** to help overcome this large pay gap. As a result, unionized women earn 93% of every dollar a man earns, a 22.5% improvement from the Canadian average.
- In addition to having higher hourly earnings, unionized part-time employees usually work more hours each week than their non-unionized counterparts (19.3 hours versus 16.8). As a result, their **average weekly earnings are nearly double** (\$350.89 versus \$183.99).
- Studies show 84% of union members are entitled to **paid vacation leave** compared to only 64% of non-unionized workers. In addition, the average annual vacation entitlement is longer for union members (21 days versus 15 days)
- Unionized employees are more likely to have a **job sharing arrangement** (15% versus 6%). This is especially significant as this allows Canadian women an opportunity to better balance work and family. Job sharing arrangements can also be beneficial in cases of employer lay-offs as it allows employees to share working hours without a complete loss of work and non-wage benefits.
- Union members are twice as likely as non-unionized workers to enjoy **non-wage benefits**. These benefits could include coverage in an employer-sponsored pension plan or group RRSP, maternity/parental leave top-up, health care plan, dental plan, or paid sick-leave entitlement. For each of these non-wage benefits, coverage for a unionized worker is 80% compared to the 40% among non-unionized workers. Non-wage benefits generally offer advantages also to an employee's family.
- Unionized employees are more likely than non-unionized employees to receive **paid overtime** each week (18% versus 12%). They are also more likely to receive premium pay for this work: about 78% of unionized workers enjoyed time-and-a-half or double time, compared with only 56% of the latter.
- Thanks to numerous **affirmative action** campaigns, many minorities such as women of colour, women with a disability, Aboriginal women, and lesbian, bisexual and transwomen have an opportunity to have their voices heard through collective bargaining. In addition, numerous committees have been formed specifically to ensure that the detailed needs of equity seeking groups are being addressed within the workplace to help **eliminate harassment and discrimination**.
- Unionized employees also enjoy some **advantages in work arrangements**. Union members are slightly more likely to be in a permanent job (91% versus 84%) and a slightly smaller proportion of unionized employees (5% versus 8%) work both weekend days. These advantages are further opportunities to help women achieve equality.