



report

Roundtable on the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence

November 18, 2020

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 11 Component and 3 affiliate unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 390,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

Larry Brown, President

Bert Blundon, Secretary-Treasurer

The issue of gender-based violence is an ongoing and persistent issue in Canadian society. The physical and mental impacts of these violent acts directed against women and persons of other gender identities cannot be underestimated. It also must be added that the societal costs are widespread and far reaching.

However, we have seen some progress made in recent years in preventing and addressing gender-based violence. The federal government, in 2020, committed to invest \$200 million to expand and coordinate their efforts against gender-based violence. However, considerably more must be done, including the development of a National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

There was a significant development in February 2015, when over 20 civil society organizations collaborated to develop [*A Blueprint for Canada's National Action Plan on Violence against Women*](#). The organizations included Women's Shelters Canada and the Canadian Labour Congress. The Blueprint presents an important step forward in developing a coordinated and effective plan to address gender-based violence.

This was further expanded upon in June 2017, when the federal government announced its Strategy to Address and Prevent Gender-Based Violence. Unfortunately, the strategy deals only with federal institutions. What is needed are coordinated and effective efforts across all levels of government to ensure women in all areas of Canada have access to comparable levels of services and protections.

In June 2020, it was felt that there was need to [reissue the call for a National Action Plan on Violence against Women](#). The call for an action plan stressed that, given the impacts of COVID-19, which include an increase in domestic violence and gender-based violence, government action is needed now. The National Union, along with endorsing the original blueprint, also endorsed the reissued call.

In response to continued pressure by unions and women's organizations, Minister Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, requested the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) coordinate a roundtable as part of her consultation toward the National Action Plan on Gender-based Violence.

The roundtable was held (virtually) on November 18, 2020, with representatives from across Canada. Minister Filomena Tassi, Minister of Labour, was in attendance. Labour representatives included members from unions across Canada. Every province was represented, as was the Northwest Territories. In total, there were 32 participants. MGEU President Michelle Gawronski attended the roundtable, representing the National Union. She provided the following report.

CLC Secretary-Treasurer, Marie Clarke Walker opened the meeting with a brief introduction to the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. She advised that Minister Monsef has been mandated to "build on the foundation laid by the Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence and move forward to develop a National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence, with a focus on ensuring that anyone

facing gender-based violence has reliable and timely access to protection and services.” This will require actions that cut across government jurisdictions.

Ministers Monsef and Tassi spoke about the mandate and the need to have all levels of governments working together. They noted that all levels of government need to work with all Canadians to end gender-based violence. They shared that the Government of Canada has also committed to developing a national action plan to end violence against Indigenous women, girls, and LGBTQ and Two Spirit people. The intent is that the 2 gender-based violence-related action plans will align and complement each other.

The discussion began on actions to prevent, address, and respond to gender-based violence in the work world. Based on their expertise and experience, participants were asked to share their thoughts on what actions they would recommend the federal government take to prevent, respond, and address gender-based violence at work, such as best practices, effective interventions, and programming.

Recommendations included

- The introduction of a federal living wage. When money is an issue, gender-based abuse is much more common. This has been evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic: when many Canadians’ income has been drastically reduced, the incidents of violence in the home and workplace have increased.
- Shelters and transition houses must be federally funded and managed to ensure proper staff and sufficient resources. It was shared that, during the pandemic, 19,000 times every month someone is being turned away from a shelter due to the lack of space because of requirements to social distance. It was pointed out that the isolation caused by the pandemic has resulted in abused people, mainly women, going back to the abusive home because of lack of mental and emotional supports.
- Mental health concerns must be recognized and the resources need to be put in place to address mental health issues within family dynamics as well as in the workplace.

The roundtable continued with a request for participants to share their thoughts on how the federal government could better support the work that they do, and what results the federal government should be working towards.

President Gawronski made the following recommendations, based on what the National Union and its Components have been advocating for:

- The federal government needs to hold provincial governments accountable for federal funding. Federal dollars should come with “strings attached” to ensure that the funds are being used for what they were intended.

- Federal health standards are needed across all areas of health care. The federal government must ensure that staffing levels, equipment, and supplies that are needed are adequate and available.
- Long-term care across Canada must be overseen by the federal government, and funds provided for long-term care must not be supporting private long-term care facilities.
- The federal government needs to ensure that all employers across Canada recognize gender-based violence in the workplace and ensure it is being addressed.

The meeting adjourned with a promise from the Ministers to meet with anyone who would like to share further thoughts and recommendations. The Ministers both extended an “open door” to reach out any time they can be of any assistance. The hope is that another meeting will be called again soon to continue discussions.

APPENDIX

NUPGE's Recent Work on Domestic Violence

In September, NUPGE released a report entitled *Domestic Violence and the Workplace: How Non-Canadian Jurisdictions Have Implemented Workplace Protections for Victims of Violence*. The report provides an international comparison of workplace protections for victims of domestic abuse in other countries. The aim of the report is to identify existing issues and gaps internationally, as well as best practices that might help to inform advocacy in the Canadian context.

One of the key measures to assist victims in escaping violence is domestic violence leave. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of different arrangements in a variety of countries, with a breakdown by specific characteristics, including whether the leave is paid or unpaid, and the eligibility requirements, such as the length of time the worker has to have been employed in order to qualify. Also noted in the report is the issue of workers being unaware that protections even exist.

The report confirms what advocates in Canada have said, that domestic violence leave should be paid leave, should be accessible to all workers, and should be dedicated to situations of domestic violence.

The report also looks at other types of protections, including

- access to flexible working arrangements;
- anti-discrimination laws that prohibit employment discrimination against victims of domestic violence;
- workplace gender equality plans which governments can mandate;
- collective bargaining, and how negotiating specific clauses on domestic violence might help to provide some of these different protections, whether or not they are included in laws.

This report follows a backgrounder that NUPGE issued early this year entitled [Domestic Violence, Workers, and Workplaces](#). It provides an overview of the prevalence of domestic violence, its impact on workers and workplaces in Canada, and supports for those affected. Based on the information gathered from both of these documents, a list of 8 recommendations have been developed and are included at the conclusion of [Domestic Violence and the Workplace: How Non-Canadian Jurisdictions Have Implemented Workplace Protections for Victims of Violence](#).

The National Union has written the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, Maryam Monsef, as well as the provincial and territorial premiers, outlining its recommendations.

NUPGE and its Advisory Committee on Women's Issues continues to support Women's Shelters Canada (WSC). NUPGE gave a financial contribution to WSC to support the 7th annual *Shelter Voices*. It has provided financial support since 2012 for the WSC's Shelter Voices survey. It also posted [a story](#) on the report by WSC on second-stage shelters and the issues they are facing within the pandemic and with the ongoing issue of lack of sustainable funding.

NUPGE continues to highlight the need for Canada to ratify ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment (No. 190). President Brown wrote a [letter](#) to the Prime Minister in December, stressing the importance of Canada ratifying Convention 190.

NUPGE's Gender Equality Week [website story](#) focused on the gendered impacts of the pandemic, which include the increased risk of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

The National Union's [statement](#) for International Women's Day focused on gender-based violence.



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- Health Sciences Association of British Columbia (HSABC)
- Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)
- Saskatchewan Government and General Employees' Union (SGEU)
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union (MGEU)
- Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU)
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- Nova Scotia Government and General Employees Union (NSGEU)
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