

Activity Script FOR FACILITATORS

UNDERSTANDING GBA PLUS INTERACTIVE ACTIVITY

TO BEGIN

Ask all participants to form a circle where they are positioned without any gaps or openings.

Hand out to each participant:

- 1 envelope full of coloured cards and Historical Fact(s)
- 1 Character Description

WELCOME EVERYONE TO THE SESSION

Explain that today's activity will explore both the progress made in Canada to date on gender equality for women in the workplace, as well as the work that remains still to be done. Each participant in the activity will be asked to step into the lived reality of a different woman in the Canadian workforce in the early 2020s.

CONTENT WARNING!

This activity shares statistics and true-to-life scenarios on gender-based sexual assault, harassment and general violence that may be triggering for some. If you need to leave the activity or the room at any point, please do so, and do not feel pressured to rejoin the group. A facilitator will come to notify you when the activity is over. Due to the potentially triggering nature of the activity content, it is recommended that a trained, trauma-informed mental health professional is either present or easily reachable during the activity.

Let participants know that this activity will involve standing for extended periods. If participants need to sit or grab a chair to continue participating, please encourage them to do so.

If you are delivering the activity to a group whose work is funded by IRCC or another federal government department, explain that the Government of Canada is “committed to advancing equality with respect to sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression through the inclusion of people of all genders in Canada’s economic, social and political life”¹.

Explain that UN Women defines the term “gender equality” as “equal rights, responsibilities, and access to opportunities for all genders”².

Explain that The Canadian Encyclopedia defines the term “feminism” as referring to “political, social, and intellectual movements working toward the goal of equality for all genders”³.

DEFINING TERMS

Now that everyone has heard some examples of definitions, let's take a moment to explore the different meanings that gender equality and feminism may have for us as individuals. **Asking** participants to contribute only if they feel comfortable, call on 3-4 participants to

¹ Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada, Women and Gender Equality Canada

² Canadian Women's Foundation: The Facts on Gender-Based Issues | Canadian Women's Foundation

³ The Canadian Encyclopedia, Feminism | The Canadian Encyclopedia

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share what the terms “**gender equality**” and “**feminism**” mean for them personally and how they would define those terms.

In response to asking this question, you may receive replies that argue against a societal need for feminism and equity initiatives. Encourage everyone to share their perspective.

After everyone has shared, state that what they learn over the course of the activity is intended to challenge engrained patterns of thinking and encourage all participants to look at the world from perspectives different from their own.

Asking participants to contribute only if they feel comfortable, call on 2-3 participants to define what the terms “equality” and “equity” mean for them personally and explain the difference between the two concepts.

Explain that the concept of “equality” ensures that all people have access to the same resources and opportunities. **This is why the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says that all people are equal before the law**⁴. “Equity”, however, is a different concept. Equity is “**the promotion of fairness and justice for each individual that considers historical, social, systemic, and structural issues that impact a person’s experience and needs**”⁵.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Explain that the Character Descriptions they have received reflect both the diversity of professional roles that women play in Canada’s workforce as well as the societal roles they occupy more broadly. Give each participant 2-3 minutes to read their own Character Description.

ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

Ask participants to take their coloured cards out of the envelope and take note of which colours they have and of which of their cards are marked with an ✕, ●, or ■.

Inform participants that together, **their group collectively represents the 81.6%⁶ of women who participated in the Canadian workforce (in any capacity) in 2022.**

Ask each participant to read their Character Description aloud to the group.

Explain to participants that the diversity of Character Descriptions that have just been read aloud as well as the unbroken circle which they have all come together to form represent the progress women have made in the Canadian workforce over the past century.

Explain that (some) women have made great strides in societal participation over the last 100 years. **We will now explore some of those milestones together.**

⁴ Government of Canada, Charterpedia - Section 15 – Equality rights (justice.gc.ca)

⁵ University of Toronto, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion | VPRI (utoronto.ca)

⁶ Statistics Canada, Women aged 25-64, Measuring the value of women’s contribution to the Canadian economy: New insights based on recent work (statcan.gc.ca)

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DO WE STILL NEED FEMINISM?

Explain that each participant has (an) additional piece(s) of paper inside their envelope that features fact(s) listed in the Historical Facts on Gender Equality section. **Ask** participants to read the Historical Facts aloud in the order that they are written in that section.

There are some in Canada who would look at these milestones and say that the progress women have already made in Canadian society is sufficient. Functionally, these people might say, women enjoy all the same rights as men, and no longer face active discrimination in or exclusion from society. These people might go on to say that **the brand of feminism associated with the second half of the 20th century and key figures like Margaret Atwood, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Angela Davis, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Maya Angelou is no longer needed** – and even potentially alienating - in today's world where women already enjoy so many freedoms.

However, in today's activity, we are going to explore several scenarios that clearly illustrate a continuing need to work towards gender parity in Canada. The scenarios will explore diverse realities of the workforce for women in Canada today, as well as ongoing instances of gender discrimination that continue to prevent women's full economic participation in society.

MALE-DOMINATED PROFESSIONS

If you have a **yellow card**, raise your hand. The yellow cards represent women in traditionally male-dominated professions. If you have a yellow card with an "✘", please hold it up. You are a grain farmer who has successfully managed operations on your own for more than a decade. When you go into town to look into refinancing some equipment one day, you suspect that the bank is not offering you the best available terms on a loan. When you send your brother the following week to look into the situation at the same bank, **he is offered a larger loan at a lower fixed interest rate.** Take one step back and away from the circle.

GENDERED ASPECTS OF WORK

If you have a **light green card**, raise your hand. The light green cards represent the gendered aspect of workplace tasks that many women still confront at their jobs. **Explain** that all participants have light green cards. The purpose of this is to show that there are gendered aspects to all work, as well as different expectations for women in the workplace.

If you have a **light green card with an "✘"**, please hold it up. You and a male colleague with the same title and job description are selected to attend an important client meeting with your boss. When you arrive at the meeting, your boss invites your colleague to deliver the presentation you both prepared.

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When you ask your boss why your colleague was selected instead of you, he says that your colleague is easier to understand because he doesn't have an accent – and anyway, women are just so much better at taking notes. Take two steps backwards and away from the circle.

WOMEN IN S.T.E.M.

If you have a **purple card**, raise your hand. The purple cards represent women in STEM (Science, Technology, Mathematics, Engineering) fields. If you have a **purple card with an “x”**, please hold it up. Although you are a software engineer who earns a good salary and has mostly enjoyed strong job security, you walked into a room a month ago and found your male coworkers ranking you and the other women in your department by your bra cup size. You have reported the sexual harassment but nothing has been done. As this is not the first time you have dealt with harassment at a job, you decide to resign and switch to a different line of work. **You become one of the 30% of women with an engineering degree who leave the field entirely citing poor organizational culture and do not return**⁷. Please take three steps backwards and away from the circle.

DISABILITY

If you have a **dark blue card**, raise your hand. The dark blue cards represent women

living with a disability. If you have a **dark blue card with an “x”**, please hold it up. You are one of the approximately 180,000 women in Canada who identify as culturally Deaf⁸. Your first language is American Sign Language. You can speak some English and were able to participate in the interview for your new job without relying on an ASL Interpreter. When you arrive for your first day of work, however, your boss pulls you aside and says they didn't realize “the full extent to which your disability limits you”. Because you will need to communicate with the public in your job, **your boss says they have no choice but to lay you off and look for another candidate**. Take four steps back and away from the circle.

OVER-REPRESENTATION IN HELPING PROFESSIONS

If you have a **grey card**, raise your hand. The grey cards stand for the over-representation of women in “helping” professions (social workers, teachers, daycare workers, etc)⁹. If your **card has an “x”**, please hold it up. You have worked in daycares for over a decade and love your job – there is nothing you would rather do. However, the contract with your current employer is coming to an end. Despite your experience, you are making only a few dollars above minimum wage. **You know that because many people assume women are happy to work with children primarily for the emotional fulfillment it brings**, there is

⁷Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Retention | Engineers Canada

⁸Canadian Association of the Deaf, Statistics on Deaf Canadians - Canadian Association of the Deaf - Association des Sourds du Canada (cad-asc.ca)

⁹Other examples include care aides and employees of nonprofits and charities.

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a high chance that any other job you would qualify for would also be precarious and underpaid. Despite the passion you have for your job, you decide to go back to school and retrain for something with better pay and more security. Take three steps back and away from the circle.

OLDER WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

If you have a **dark green card**, raise your hand. The dark green cards represent older women in the workforce. If your **card has an “x”**, please hold it up. You have been an Office Administrator for forty years and have always received good performance reviews. However, your office has recently fully digitized their appointments and filing systems. You are struggling to grasp how all the new processes work. You do not have post-secondary education or training that would qualify you for a different job. When you were young, most women who worked became secretaries or nurses and it was not as common for women to seek alternate formal education. **You have been placed on a PIP (Performance Improvement Plan) and are afraid of losing your job and health insurance.** Take two steps back and away from the circle.

EMPLOYED SINGLE MOTHERS

If you have a **white card**, raise your hand. The white cards represent the 69% of single mothers who are employed in Canada¹⁰. If

your **card has an “x”**, please hold it up. You are offered a promotion to a management role that comes with a substantial raise effective immediately, but the new job requires frequent travel. You do not have access to back-up childcare and there are no daycare spots open in your area. Eventually, **you see no way forward but to decline the promotion.** Please take two steps back and away from the circle.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

If you have a **pink card**, raise your hand. The pink cards represent women in management and leadership positions. According to the Reykjavik Index for Leadership, which measures the extent to which societies are comfortable with women in power across the G7, men continue to be perceived as more naturally suited to leadership than women are¹¹. If your **card has an “x”**, please hold it up. The “x” means you recently interviewed for a job as a department head at the university you work for. The others selected to interview for the position were all men. Because you are an Asian woman, your boss assumes you are too docile, eager to please, and lacking in the assertiveness and decisiveness needed to succeed in the head position. Despite being the most qualified candidate, the job goes to another applicant. **Please take four steps back and away from the circle.**

¹⁰Statistics Canada, Lone-parent families (statcan.gc.ca)

¹¹University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Women Political Leaders - Reykjavik Index for Leadership • Women, Law and Leadership • Penn Carey Law (upenn.edu)

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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

If you have a **beige card**, raise your hand. If your **card has an “x”**, please hold it up. The beige cards represent Gender-Based Violence (GBV). You are a fourth-year mechanical engineering student attending classes at a university in Montréal, QC. In only a few short weeks, you are set to graduate as a mechanical engineer and start your first job. You are listening to one of your classmates give a presentation when a man with a rifle enters the room. He orders the men to one side of the room, and the women to the other. The man says that he is strongly against women attending school for the kinds of jobs that rightfully belong to men. After telling the sixty men from your class to leave the room, the man opens fire on the remaining ten women, yourself included. You are one of only two survivors from the events of that day. **Take five steps back and away from the circle.**

INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE

If you have a **red card**, raise your hand. The red cards represent Indigenous women in the Canadian workforce.

- If your card has an “x”, please hold it up. A colleague you started out on good terms with becomes obsessed with you over time and starts following you home from work. One day, he forces his way inside your home. When you decline his sexual overtures, he becomes irrational, angry,

and eventually, violent. The “x” means that you are among the 490 Indigenous women murdered between 2009 and 2021 at a rate six times higher than that of non-Indigenous women¹². **Please leave the circle and sit on the sidelines.**

- If your card has an “●” on it, please hold it up. The “●” means that you have been laid off from your job. Although you submit evidence of having enough savings to provide for your children while looking for another job, it is decided that your children are better off in foster care than with an Indigenous single mother who is unemployed, even temporarily. **Your children join other Indigenous children who make up 53.8% of all children in foster care nation-wide**¹³. The trauma of losing your children severely impacts your mental health, to the extent that you are unable to look for another job. Please take five steps back and away from the circle.
- If your card has a “■” on it, please hold it up. Call to Action #23 in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada calls for an increase in Indigenous representation in the healthcare sector¹⁴. The “■” on your card represents the **3% of Registered Nurses in Canada who are Indigenous** (as of 2016)¹⁵. One day, an Inuit man is admitted to one of the inpatient programs at the rehabilitation center you work for. You notice that two of your non-Indigenous

¹²Statistics Canada, The Daily — Court outcomes in homicides of Indigenous women and girls, 2009 to 2021 (statcan.gc.ca)

¹³Government of Canada, Reducing the number of Indigenous children in care (sac-isc.gc.ca)

¹⁴Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Health (rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca)

¹⁵University of Saskatchewan College of Nursing, AboriginalRNWorkforceFactsheet.pdf (usask.ca)

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coworkers are polite to the man and his family when they are in the room but that your coworkers refer to him as “just another drunk Indian” when just the two of them are talking later on. It’s not the first time you’ve seen such behaviour at work. You begin to wonder if you should leave nursing and pursue your art career full-time. **It would be harder to support your family, but at least you would be able to better isolate yourself from overtly racist behaviour.** Please take four steps back and away from the circle.

GENDER WAGE GAP

If you have an **orange card**, raise your hand. The orange cards represent the negative impacts of the gender wage gap. **Explain** that all participants have orange cards to show that the negative impacts of the wage gap are far reaching, even if individual women have “good” jobs. **As of 2022, women in Canada make 90 cents on average for every dollar earned by men¹⁶.** This number is much lower for specific groups, including racialized women and women with disabilities. **The Canadian Women’s Foundation estimates that it will take 268 years to close the gender wage gap if current trends in employment and compensation continue¹⁷.**

- If your card has an “✘”, please hold it up. You and your husband are both specialist doctors in similar fields, who receive offers of promotion and salary increases within

the same time frame. However, the nature of both of your promotions means more irregular hours of work and an increased reliance on childcare. Because your husband received the higher raise and the cost of professional childcare is so high, **you decide to stay at home with the children for the next 2-3 years.** This is a hard decision for you to make as you would have been the first Black woman to work as chief of surgery at your hospital if you had accepted the promotion. Take three steps back and away from the circle.

TRANSPHOBIA

If you have a **brown card**, raise your hand. The brown card represents transphobia. While you are on a waitlist, it starts to become well known in your small town that you will be having gender confirming surgery. One day, both your home and constituency office are broken into and vandalized. Among the broken windows, kicked in door and graffiti are the words **“No fucking shemale is going to represent our town”.** You are so upset by these developments that you resign your legislative seat and begin making plans to move. Take five steps back and away from the circle.

OVER-REPRESENTATION IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY

If you have a **black card**, raise your hand. The black cards stand for the over-representation of women in low wage service industry jobs¹⁸. If your card has an “✘”, raise

¹⁶Canadian Women’s Foundation: The Gender Pay Gap | Pay Gap in Canada | The Facts (canadianwomen.org)

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸The Labour Market Information Council, Women in Recovery: COVID-19 and Women’s Labour Market Participation — LMIC-CIMT

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your hand. You are currently unemployed after being let go from your job at a call center. You did not work enough hours in the past year to qualify for EI, **so you need another job immediately so that you can support your family.** You take the first job you are offered as a Sales Associate at a clothing store in a mall. It pays less than your old job, but at least it's something. Take two steps backwards and away from the circle. If your card has a "●", raise your hand. You are a cashier at a grocery store. Although you work full time, you often struggle to pay rent because you live alone and have a low hourly wage. You have been trying to get promoted to a floor lead or assistant manager position, but have found the process challenging. The last three times your store hired for those positions, **the jobs went to friends of the general manager, who is White and grew up in Canada.** Take three steps back and away from the circle.

WOMEN IN COVID-19

If you have a **light blue card**, raise your hand. The light blue cards represent the nearly **100,000 Canadian women aged 20 and over who left the workforce during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic**¹⁹. Many of these women cited caregiving responsibilities as their primary reason for leaving. If your card has an "✕", please hold it up. You were forced to leave your job to homeschool your children during Covid. You

do not have a partner, so the majority of the caregiving work fell to you with some support from extended family. **During the first year of Covid, women in some provinces left their jobs at a rate ten times higher than that of men**²⁰. It was only in early 2022 that you were able to go back to work full time, resulting in significant lost wages despite the government benefits that were provided.

CONCLUSION

After all the different card colours have been identified and explained, **invite participants to look around the room at where everyone has ended up and how the composition of the circle has changed from when the activity started.**

Refer to the Discussion Questions Sheet. Lead a 5–10-minute group discussion on the activity. **Encourage participants to share new things they have learned and ways that the activity has compelled them to change their thought patterns.**

¹⁹RBC Economics, Covid Further Clouded the Outlook for Canadian Women at Risk of Disruption - RBC Economics

²⁰Chartered Professionals in Human Resources Saskatchewan: Addressing Effects Of The Pandemic On Women In The Workforce - CPHR Saskatchewan (cphrsk.ca)