



Unifor represents more than 310,000 members in all sectors of the economy. In addition to being the largest Canadian union in the private sector and in federally regulated industries, Unifor also has significant representation in the public sector. Unifor advocates for and defends the economic and social rights of working people so that all Canadians can achieve economic and social security, and live with dignity.



Unifor priorities

The effects of the global financial crisis serve to underpin the structural changes in the way work is organized, contracted, performed and compensated in Canada. More Canadians are in part-time and precarious jobs, union membership and collective bargaining coverage has stagnated, support programs have been eroded and existing employment standards have not adequately protected workers. Canadians are simply falling behind, which is why the federal government needs to take bold action to help Canadians attain good quality jobs and provide the support they need to get there.

With the realities of today's labour market, our labour laws need to be modernized, which includes recognizing the importance of unionization in the economy and preventing the exploitation of young, precariously employed and other vulnerable workers. Federal programs need to adequately support unemployed workers as they seek new work and/or look to upgrade their skills or credentials. Changes are desperately needed to bring fairness to our society, by ensuring that federal laws and programs are there to protect and support Canadians.



Specific issues and policy recommendations

Improving labour laws

The last decade saw an unprecedented attack on workers and collective organizing by the previous Conservative government. Bills C-377 and C-525 were direct attacks on unions that were ideologically charged and ignored the fundamental role that unions play in growing the middle class in this country. The omnibus Bill C-4 also contained substantial changes that undermine collective bargaining rights and weaken health and safety provisions without proper consultation with the labour movement. With a new government, the labour movement is looking for federal leadership in re-establishing a sense of fairness and balance with Canada's labour laws. This would follow the government's campaign commitments to rely on evidence, rather than ideology, to improve Canada's labour laws while acknowledging the important role that unions play in our economy and communities.

The labour movement is expecting the government to follow through on its commitments to repeal the problematic Bills C-377 and C-525, in addition to re-examining and consulting with organized labour on the changes made in Bill C-4. The government also now has an important opportunity to examine anti-scab legislation, which protects the collective rights of workers while promoting labour harmony. Unifor recommends:

- Fulfilling the election campaign promise to repeal Bills C-377 and C-525.

- Reviewing changes made to collective bargaining rights and health and safety provisions in Bill C-4 (Economic Action Plan 2013 Act No. 2) through a transparent process and consultation with Canada's labour movement.
- Introducing anti-scab legislation.

Federal wage policy

Canadians understand that fair wages and good jobs benefit their families, communities and the economy as a whole. While the provinces and territories have minimum wage benchmarks and policies, there has not been a federal minimum wage policy in the last two decades. Wages have not kept up with the cost of living over the last few decades and families are struggling to meet their needs in an economy that is increasingly relying on part-time and precarious jobs. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that increasing minimum wages not only improves people's standard of living, but also makes good economic sense. Higher wages boost individual spending power, which helps create jobs – since a large proportion of the economy is fueled by consumer spending – and strengthens our communities through a growing economy.

The government did acknowledge the importance of fair wages during the 2015 election campaign by committing to a modernized fair wages policy for federal procurement. This would be a good first step, but should be just part of a larger initiative that would establish a federal minimum wage. Unifor recommends:

- Implementing a federal minimum wage of \$15 per hour.
- Fulfilling the election campaign promise to reinstate a modernized and inclusive fair wages policy for federal procurement, in consultation with Canada's labour movement.

Employment insurance

Employment Insurance (EI) was a social program originally designed to be an economic stabilizer during recessionary periods by providing financial support for unemployed workers and their communities. Since the 1990s, EI changes reduced accessibility and the level and the duration of benefits. In 2012, the Harper Conservative Government made substantial and drastic changes to EI that were opaque, unfair and punitive. Today, EI is not aligned with the labour market reality of precarious, contract and part-time employment, while youth, immigrants and parents returning to the labour market are especially vulnerable. As a stabilizing tool to help individuals and communities during tough economic times, EI benefits need to be enhanced and made more accessible. Unifor recommends:

- Fulfilling the election campaign promises to make EI more accessible by:
 - Immediately eliminating the 910 hour new/re-entrant penalty.
 - Immediately reducing the 2 week waiting period to 1 week.
 - Ensure higher service standards for EI processing so that benefits are delivered more quickly and reliably by increasing the staffing levels at Service Canada.
 - Ensure EI contributions are only used to fund the EI program.
- Fulfilling the campaign promise to make parental EI benefits more flexible – including receiving benefits in blocks of time over an 18-month period and taking longer leave up to 18 months when combined with maternity benefits.

- Fulfilling the campaign promise to make the EI Compassionate Care Benefit more flexible, inclusive and easier to access.
- Repealing the Conservative government's 2012 changes:
 - Immediately rescind the unfair and punitive practice of categorizing claimants.
 - Immediately restore the definition of "suitable work" and "reasonable job search" expectations to the pre-2012 definitions that applied equally to all claimants.
 - Without justification, the previous government dismantled a fair, efficient and transparent appeal system and replaced it with the secretive Social Security Tribunal (SST).
 - Take action to immediately add transparency to the SST.
 - With input and consultation from the stakeholders review the SST appointment process and the appeal procedures with the goal of moving towards a fair, transparent, less intimidating and more human system.
- Ensuring that any EI initiatives, including any 2015 election campaign promises, that require review and/or consultation include input from labour.
- If the federal changes to EI programs related to parental leave and compassionate care are implemented:
 - Working with the provinces and territories to ensure that their labour codes reflect these federal benefit changes.
 - Consulting with labour unions to examine how the leave provisions fit within the collective bargaining framework and the federal and provincial/territorial labour codes.

Unpaid labour

In recent years, the exploitation of unpaid workers – often classified as “interns” – has been revealed as a widespread practice that violates provincial and federal labour laws. Any person who is performing work – including training – should be paid and have protections related to occupational health and safety, hours of work, vacations and holidays, and work-related illness and injury, among others. Instead of addressing the exploitation of unpaid labour, the previous government took the exact opposite approach. In the 2015 Budget Implementation Bill, the previous government created a new class of unpaid workers into law through exclusion from the labour standards in the *Canada Labour Code*. This change has reversed the clock when it comes to protecting workers' rights and needs to be reversed as a first step to address the plight of exploited workers – and in this case, young workers in particular. Unifor recommends:

- Reversing the changes made to the *Canada Labour Code* in the 2015 Budget Implementation Bill (*Economic Action Plan 2015 Act, No.1* – Sections 87 to 92) that created a new class of unpaid workers into law through exclusion from the labour standards in the Code.
- Introducing legislation that makes it abundantly clear in the *Canada Labour Code* that any employee – whether they are classified by their employer as an “intern” or any similar nomenclature – is protected by the labour standards in the Code.

Temporary foreign workers

Unifor does not favour any program of labour migration that fosters a climate of precariousness and fear for a large segment of Canada's workforce. As such, the union recognizes that that the core tenets of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) are flawed. A comprehensive reassessment of the TFWP is needed with

meaningful consultation and an evidence-based approach to reform. Real change requires the government to view the TFWP through a progressive lens – one that emphasizes equitable rights and protections for migrant workers and a well-designed program that is coherent with Canada’s immigration processes. Unifor recommends:

- Undertaking a comprehensive reassessment of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) through an approach that emphasizes equitable rights and protections for migrant workers and appropriate integration with Canadian immigration processes.

Skills training

Canada’s economy continues to rapidly change, which requires our federal and provincial/territorial programs to adequately meet the needs of employers and workers. More Canadians are working in part-time and precarious jobs, while there is an increasing need for many to improve their skills and upgrade their credentials. The government made commitments in the federal election to boost funding for skills training programs, which are badly needed. However, it is important to stress the link between these programs and increased EI benefits and accessibility. In addition to boosting funding for skills training, the success of these programs relies on meaningful participation from stakeholders that include labour unions. Establishing a formal role for stakeholders to help shape and guide these programs would provide accountability while creating opportunities to develop effective labour market tools to ensure their success. Unifor recommends:

- Fulfilling election campaign promises to help Canadians get the training they need to find and keep good jobs:
 - \$500 million more each year in provincial and territorial Labour Market Development Agreements.
 - \$200 million more each year in provincial and territorial Labour Market Agreements for those who do not qualify for EI.
 - \$50 million in funding for the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Strategy.
 - \$25 million each year for training facilities, delivered in partnership with labour unions.
- Establishing federal and provincial/territorial Labour Market Partners’ Forums.
 - These forums would bring together stakeholders – employers, labour, government and educators – to shape and guide current skills training programs.
 - These bodies would be instructive in ensuring the needs of employers and workers by focusing on transparency, accountability, accurate labour market information and meaningful consultation with stakeholders.

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