

# Promoting the dignity and rights of children

## Make work pay, reduce time stress, enfranchise children

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# Growing labour market inequality

Three sources of inequality:

- the top 1% ... globalization, technology, corporate governance
- the top 20% ... returns to human capital and firm specific skills
- the bottom half ... decline in the return to low skilled work

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## Families, labour markets, and public policy

Family, market, and state determine the well-being of children. The capacities of families has been stretched to the limit, and there is significant time stress leaving children at risk of monetary and non-monetary poverty.

- Labour markets are more polarized, particularly for the young
- Families have adapted and changed as best as they can to shield children from poverty
  - age at first birth, marriage
  - fertility and single/teen motherhood
  - education
  - work intensity, participation of both parents and more hours
- Government policy has been neutral since the early 1990s

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## Recommendation 1: Policies to make work pay

*Institute a Guaranteed Income for the working poor by significantly increasing the Working Income Tax Benefit and integrating the Employment Insurance earnings disregard with it.*

- A job is central to material well-being, but many jobs do not pay enough to adequately support a family
- The 2007 introduction of the WITB recognizes this in principle, as does the expansion of the earnings disregard in the EI program by the recent budget
- Significantly expanding the WITB and integrating the EI program seamlessly with it is a major step toward a guaranteed income (conditional upon being employed)
- The EI earnings disregard should acknowledge the presence of children, and the benefit rates of this combined program should be set at a rate that raises families above one-half the median income



## Recommendation 2: Policies to reduce time stress

*Broaden the scope and nature of family/care-giving leave permitted under the Employment Insurance program by creating a “family leave”.*

- A job may be central to material well-being, but without additional supports children and families are under considerable time stress that detracts from well-being in general
- The introduction of maternity/parental leave and leave for care-giving through the EI program recognizes this for particular events
- Significantly expand the scope of these benefits to a “family leave” that can be taken at the discretion of the parents regardless of the age of their children

## Socio-economic rights and political voice

A “right” entails a “duty”, and therefore involves not just the right holder, but also an agent accountable for upholding the right. The right is inherent in the individual, the duty is required of the state.

- The failure to uphold civil and political rights is addressed through adjudication
- Socio-economic rights require “positive” duties from the state and are a matter of political priorities
- The value of a “rights” framework is that it encourages engagement in setting these priorities, particularly in a well-functioning democracy
- But children do not have political voice, and in particular do not have the vote

## Recommendation 3: Policies to give children political voice

*Introduce electoral reforms allowing parents to exercise the vote of every child under their guardianship.*

- This is a so-called “Demeny” vote scheme named after the demographer who formally proposed it in 1986, though the idea has been around longer than that
- Just as we transfer economic resources to parents for the benefit of children, we would transfer political resources
- Mothers, or if appropriate the custodial parent, would be given a proxy vote for each child under their guardianship
- An increased incentive for families to vote, and greater incentive for politicians to reflect their concerns in the design of public policy

# Three broad recommendations

## 1 *Make work pay*

- expand WITB and integrate EI with it at benefit levels that eliminate poverty among the working poor

## 2 *More generous leave to reduce time stress*

- complete parental discretion in the use of a “family leave” through EI

## 3 *Give children the vote*

- expand the franchise by giving parents political resources through a proxy vote for each child

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