



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

Standing Committee on the Status of Women

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 006

Tuesday, November 24, 2020

Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1130)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of September 23, 2020. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

I'd like to welcome Minister Monsef. I'm very glad to have her here today.

To ensure an orderly meeting, there are a few rules. Members and witnesses can speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available. You can choose at the bottom of your screen “floor”, “English” or “French”. For members participating in person, you can proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in the committee room. Keep in mind the directives of the Board of Internal Economy regarding masking and health protocols. This includes wearing a mask when circulating in the room and whenever social distancing is not possible.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating virtually, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as normal by the proceedings and verification officer.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair, and when speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

I had a request from the committee, a suggestion for improvement. In the past, we've had some brilliant questions which unfortunately occupied the entire time and there was no room for the answer. Therefore, when you get within a minute of your time, you will get the yellow card, and when you get within 20 seconds of your time, you will get the red card. Then you will be cut off gently and kindly at the end of that time.

With that, we will start in. We're really happy to have, as I said, Minister Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality; and the officers from her department. We have Guylaine Roy,

who is the deputy minister, and Nancy Gardiner, the assistant deputy minister, in this first panel.

I invite the minister to begin her comments and then we'll go into our rounds of questions.

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Hello, colleagues. *Bonjour. Aaaniin. As-salaam alaikum.*

I join you live from my basement in Peterborough—Kawartha on traditional Michi Saagiig territory, covered by the Williams Treaties. I want to thank you all for the very important work you're doing, the study that you've begun and the study that you've just wrapped up, which is critical in providing guidance on next steps for an even recovery as well as in response to COVID.

I want to congratulate the newer members to this committee. This is a really productive group of people who come together, find common ground and move good things forward. I can think of our federal gender-based violence strategy, which was so well informed by the work that this group had done.

I want to congratulate you, Madam Chair, on returning to the chair and also on your recent book launch. It should be a fun read over Christmas break.

Colleagues, I will spend a few minutes this morning talking about COVID, about where we are since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women tabled its historic report in the House of Commons, and then about connections.

COVID has, without a doubt, hit women hardest. It's hit the most vulnerable, those in rural communities, those with disabilities, trans women, indigenous women and Black and racialized women particularly hardest. Those with children and care responsibilities for adults in their lives are doing double or triple duty. Those who are on the front lines, whether in our health care system, long-term care system or responding to victims and survivors of gender-based violence, all have taken on additional responsibilities.

You know too well the job losses that women have experienced over the course of COVID. I know this committee is aware that if we are not united and strategic in our response to COVID and the recovery post-COVID, we stand a very real chance of losing hard-won gains.

Our government, right from the start, took decisive action. We put people at the centre of our response. We've applied an intersectional feminist lens to every aspect of our response. Whether it is support for the women's sector, which has received a 70% increase in funds over the past five years if you combine everything provided to them in the previous five years, the more than \$1 billion in support for early learning and child care this year, the support for women entrepreneurs, and our supports to provinces and territories to enable them to carry out their responsibilities, our government recognized from the beginning that supporting women would be critical to our response and recovery from COVID.

In fact, CARE recently pointed out that Canada is the only country that fully accounted for gender in its response. We take this recognition with a lot of humility. We are committed to doing even more to ensure that on the other side of COVID, Canada is even stronger than when COVID began.

I realize that COVID has been hard in many ways on those Canadians and on colleagues who are grieving the loss of loved ones. You are not alone. I hope that you have the strength you need to get through this difficult time.

Looking ahead to December, we will mark 50 years since the Royal Commission on the Status of Women tabled its historic report in the House of Commons. We have an obligation to those who came before us to ensure that we build on the momentum, build on the progress and not allow the clock to be turned back. Those connections—women's connections to the labour force, to one another through broadband and cell service, and through conversations like this and those you're engaged in, Madam Chair, in the course of your studies—will be vital to ensuring we build on that progress.

● (1135)

I look forward to the conversation today. I have my binder and a bunch of papers here. My wonderful officials are here as well to ensure that you have the information you need to keep moving forward.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you, Minister.

Now we'll begin our round of six-minute round of questions with Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Minister, for being here, and thank you for that presentation.

You spoke about gender-based violence. In 2017 the government announced a national strategy on gender-based violence. The Liberal election platform in 2019 said that a Liberal government would develop a national action plan.

In a recent briefing provided to me by your department, the officials mentioned that stakeholders have been calling on the government to develop a national action plan, yet the department was still evaluating how to develop one.

Minister, we're coming to the end of 2020. When can we expect the national action plan so that we can start addressing this issue?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Your question is an important one.

When we launched the federal strategy in 2017, it was the first time that the Government of Canada had brought the various efforts it was undertaking under one umbrella. It started to coordinate amongst different departments, but also with provinces and territories, who, frankly, at the time were leaps and bounds ahead of the federal government in what they were doing.

In the five years we've been in office, we've been able to provide historic funding to women's organizations. We've reopened shuttered women's organization support centres across the country.

The federal strategy did three things. It provided supports for survivors and their families. It invested in prevention efforts. It also put forward ways in which our justice systems could be more responsive to victims and survivors. A lot of progress has been made, for example, in clarifying the definition of consent and in building capacity for front-line organizations.

The national action plan takes that work one step further. We are, as you so rightly mentioned, in the process of working out in the middle of COVID what the best ways forward would be.

You can rest assured that supports for survivors and their families will continue to be number one.

● (1140)

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you.

Your mandate letter states that you are to develop and work with your cabinet colleagues and their departments on ensuring that government programs and funding go through a gender-based analysis. You spoke about putting people at the centre of everything here. However, we have heard around this committee and from our stakeholders that when the pandemic hit, many of the government programs did not address the many challenges women faced, such as that faced by pregnant women who had been laid off as a result of the pandemic and had a challenge in collecting the government support.

Minister, with a budget of more than \$100 million a year and over 100 staff, Canadians expected more and are sorely disappointed. How, if at all, have you addressed these failures in your departments to ensure that in future, government funding and programs are properly reviewed by a gender-based analysis?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I will correct the record. We have actually been recognized as having the best intersectional gendered lens to our COVID response of all countries. In the early days of COVID, as you know we were dealing with a disease that none of us really knew. We acted quickly to provide immediate supports to Canadians who needed it the most. Millions of Canadians received income supports.

Businesses received the supports that we could provide in the early days. Ever since, we have pivoted, because we have listened and have tweaked our measures to ensure that they meet the real needs.

I will say, concerning supports for pregnant women, that my colleague, Minister Qualtrough, who was before this committee in the summer, I think it was, spoke about how she's working to address the challenge around maternity leave. Just a few weeks ago she announced that we are providing a credit of, I think, 420 hours for pregnant women who perhaps were not able to accumulate the hours they needed for their parental leave, their mat leave. This is significant, and it's backdated to March 15.

There is much more to do. I am proud of our government's record on this, but as I said in my opening remarks, we come to this with humility, knowing that we can always strengthen our response. If colleagues have suggestions for ways we can do so, this committee is certainly a forum for them, as are the follow-ups and the conversations between and among committees.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you.

In the previous Parliament, your government passed a piece of legislation that required boards to be made up of a diverse group of people, including women. Can you please update the committee on how this is going?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Absolutely. Thank you for that question.

The bill that Minister Bains put forward did require a comply or explain model. We've seen some progress on the federal boards. As you have also heard, a couple of weeks ago, Minister Bains announced a 50-30 initiative to take the progress that was made and to build upon it. That work is ongoing.

On the Government of Canada appointments, I can say that we've been able to increase the representation of qualified women to 50%. We've seen increases in diversity appointments too, but that's another area that we're going to continue to be diligent on.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you.

The Chair: That's the end of your time.

[*Translation*]

Now we go to Mr. Serré and Ms. Dhillon, who will share speaking time.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

Minister, I just want to say thank you. I'm really grateful for all your ongoing dedication and focus to ensuring that all government

decisions have a GBA+ and a rural lens. You are not only the Minister for Women and Gender Equality, but also the Minister of Rural Economic Development as well.

Thank you for your time on Zoom town halls in northern Ontario over the past two weeks. We know that the needs of women in rural communities are different from those of women in urban and suburban communities. There are more barriers to accessing help.

Earlier this month you announced the launch of the universal broadband fund. Minister, can you expand on how this will help women experiencing domestic violence, and how the government is ensuring that women receive reliable services via the Internet?

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Mr. Serré.

[*English*]

I'll be honest. Rural Canada never fully recovered from the 2008 recession, and women with children never recovered.

It's wonderful to have you back on this committee, as well.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, connections are vital to our ability not only to respond to COVID, but also to recover from it. Connections can mean conversations like this. How vital has it been for us as professionals to be able to stay connected to our colleagues, to our work? That high-speed Internet access has been a lifeline.

Parents are providing double and triple duty. Caring for their kids, particularly with online learning, and staying connected with their parents in long-term care homes are vital connections. Yet, about two-thirds of indigenous communities don't have this access. About 60% of rural communities don't have access, and about 2% of folks living in urban ridings, urban communities don't have high-speed access.

We responded to Canadians with a plan that they asked for. The plan is the single largest investment in connectivity. It includes a rapid response stream for connections that can be improved over the next year. It includes investments in cell service as well as fibre. It includes transparency.

It includes a partnership with Stats Canada to ensure that we are following the progress of this investment. Of course, it also includes a concierge service. It's a one-stop shop for rural communities that don't have the capacity to navigate this complex ecosystem on their own. They can pick up the phone and reach out to smart engineers and project managers on the other end of the line who can help them navigate the process to get connected, so Canada's recovery can be complete.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Minister, for that response.

At the onset of the pandemic, our government recognized that we asked Canadians to stay at home, but not every home is safe. Alongside the Prime Minister, you announced \$50 million to support organizations serving women and their families who are fleeing violence. Earlier this fall, you announced an additional \$50 million. In my riding of Nickel Belt, funding organizations that serve women's centres, like the centre in Sudbury and the West Nipissing Community Health Centre, stay open to accommodate serving women fleeing domestic violence.

Minister, can you provide us with organizations and how much money was provided nationally to support these organizations?

Thank you.

The Chair: Let me just interrupt you. Did you still want to share your time? You're over your half of it.

Mr. Marc Serré: We have a minute.

The Chair: Minister.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Regarding organizations like the centre in Sudbury and the West Nipissing Community Health Centre, let me, on behalf of the Government of Canada, thank them for their tireless work and for supporting women and children in their hour of need. As you said, not every home is a safe home, and that \$50 million response was immediate. It came within hours of the pandemic being declared. We were able to partner with Women's Shelters Canada and the Canadian Women's Foundation, and funds were able to flow directly into the bank accounts of these organizations to do exactly those things that you mentioned, MP Serré.

We also were able to top up that amount with an additional \$50 million. We'll be rolling that out very soon. The pandemic is far from over and the winter is going to be long and difficult. We will be there for our partners on the ground just as they are there for Canadians in their most difficult hours.

The Chair: Ms. Dhillon, you have one minute.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Minister, for being here. Since there's a lack of time, I will quickly get to it.

Gender-based violence is a horrendous reality in all communities across Canada. There's social harm related to it, not just in a social way but in an economic way. Our government developed the national action plan on gender-based violence. Would you please give us a quick update on the development of this plan?

Thank you so much.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: You are right, MP Dhillon. The scars that are caused by gender-based violence, including sexual violence, never fully heal. The best we can do is be there for those who

experience it and do what survivors have asked us to do, which is work to prevent these violations from happening to others. Since the pandemic began, we have not only responded with emergency supports, but we've also engaged in hundreds of conversations with experts who are providing us with necessary feedback to shape the national action plan.

I'm happy, Madam Chair, to keep this committee in the loop with that information on the progress we're making.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, you have six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Good morning, Madam Minister, and thank you very much for being with us today.

I find this symbolic, all the more so because tomorrow we begin 12 days of action on violence against women. It lasts until December 6, a key date to be particularly commemorated in Quebec because it's the anniversary of the Polytechnique femicides.

You have just paved the way, and I had already asked you the question in the summer when we studied the issue. Violence against women has worsened during the pandemic. I feel this is a good opportunity to introduce the action plan on violence against women. I asked you about it this summer and my colleague also asked you earlier.

Do we have a date? Do we know when the plan is going to be rolled out?

Since you just began working to update the action plan, could you give me a few of the measures we are likely to see included in it?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

I'm pleased to say that at that federal-provincial-territorial table, colleagues, despite our differences, we are united in a belief that we need to do more, that we can do more and that all Canadians expect us to do just that.

You're absolutely right. The 16 days of activism to address and prevent violence against women are upon us, this year with a particularly sombre tone as we're not able to come together on December 6 in vigils to light candles and to lay roses as we would have in previous years.

This year is particularly important, as I said, because December 6 and all the sadness that it comes with is followed by December 7, the 50th anniversary of the tabling of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada report in the House of Commons, which was the beginning of a series of significant gains for women and gender-diverse peoples.

In terms of where we are with the national action plan, we have been connecting with labour groups and with indigenous leaders. Later today I'm meeting with disability activists and folks, themselves, with disabilities and exceptionalities. We have reached out to rural communities. My brilliant parliamentary secretary, Gudie Hutchings, has been working with the justice system, with police services across the country and with victim support services.

The reason we are having these very methodical conversations almost at the community level, including the Federation of Canadian Municipalities as well as provinces and territories, is that Ottawa will come up with a plan based on what we hear from experts and survivors on the ground. However, it will be up to communities to implement that plan.

We need to ensure two things: first, that the national action plan is reinforced and working in parallel with the response to the calls for justice around the MMIWG inquiry; and second, that we understand what communities need in order to be able to implement their own community safety plans. We are, of course, working very closely with Quebec and other provinces and territories to make sure that they are on board and to make sure that the framework that we've put in place meets their realities.

Again, the process is methodical and careful, but there's a recognition across the country that we have to move with urgency.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

I didn't understand what you said earlier. Who would have thought Canada was the only country with a feminist lens on economic measures during the pandemic?

I'd like to bring to your attention that some economic measures were not necessarily suited to women. I am thinking of the emergency account in particular. Some women had trouble gaining access, for they had more personal accounts because they run very small businesses. Women in my constituency have contacted me to tell me about the difficulties they encountered gaining access to certain economic measures.

I'd like to hear from you about this.

[*English*]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: It was CARE International. They are of course a very well-respected organization nationally and domestically. Your point about supports for women entrepreneurs is an important one. First, the partnership with the regional development agencies that provided funding through, for example, Community Futures Development Corporation has been able to provide targeted supports to entrepreneurs.

My colleague Minister Ng was able to secure an additional \$15 million for women entrepreneurs across the country. Most recently our finance minister was able to put forward additional measures that provided small businesses with additional supports for their fixed costs. It was great to see it move forward earlier this week; I think it was yesterday. I'm very much looking forward to ensuring that those businesses that can remain viable stay so, and those businesses that are so critical to the character and the vitality of our communities have the supports they need to make it through a difficult winter.

As we approach Christmas, as we approach the holiday season, I know all of us are going to do our part as MPs to encourage buy local measures, particularly in smaller and rural communities where those entrepreneurs are doing everything they can to keep their doors open. They need to know that we'll be there for them just as we've been since the beginning of the pandemic.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathyssen, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for appearing today.

I just want to continue on with the line of questioning from my colleague from the Bloc. With all due respect to CARE—they are a wonderful organization, absolutely—but considering that we heard from a majority of witnesses throughout our study about how COVID has impacted women, I find it difficult to hear that so many women have fallen through the cracks, especially when the government was pushed on the fact that when CERB was provided, there wasn't an actual GBA+ lens applied to it. If in fact that is the case, in terms of the new programs for EI, the caregiving benefit, the paid sick leave and so on, do we have your assurance that, moving forward, a GBA+ lens will be absolutely applied?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for that very important question.

COVID has highlighted challenges that existed before the pandemic. Structural, systemic challenges that were hurting communities pre-COVID are in sharp focus now. It may be difficult to consider that CARE has recognized Canada as having the best intersectional gendered response, but it's true, and it doesn't mean that we don't have more work to do. On those three measures that you referred to as well as the new CERB—EI, the caregiving benefit, sick leave—an intersectional gendered lens was applied.

I think we can all agree that those particular measures are going to disproportionately benefit women, disproportionately benefit racialized women, disproportionately benefit those who perhaps did not have these care benefits before COVID, but now don't have to make the difficult choice between staying home when they or a loved one is sick or going to work and risking the spread of this very cruel disease.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

In 2018, after a lot of pressure and work from the New Democrats, which we're very proud of, your government introduced the pay equity legislation. However, a few weeks ago, the PBO published a report saying that the government hadn't actually implemented the act. We have the law, but I'm hoping to know when pay equity will actually be a reality. They also stated that the government would need to invest \$621 million per year. For women, that's \$621 million that women have been short-changed in terms of pay equity.

I'm hoping to have a commitment from you today, Minister, that the inequality served will be addressed in the upcoming 2021 budget.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: That's another really important question.

Pay equity is about ultimately valuing the work that is predominantly done by women. It's not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do. As you mentioned, the legislation is put forward, and we are working on implementation.

As you know, Karen Jansen has been appointed to serve as Canada's first pay equity commissioner. She's developing tools and resources for employers to be able to support employees with the implementation. In light of the need for many workplaces to focus on COVID-19 over the last number of months, we have slightly delayed the publication of the regulations for a later time, with the potential of coming into force in 2021. We want to get this right, and Minister Tassi, the minister tasked with the implementation, is absolutely on it.

• (1200)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I didn't quite hear that this money would be included in the 2021 budget. Is that a commitment you're willing to make?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think that's a very good question to ask our finance minister, who is working very hard on ensuring that the fall economic statement on the 30th moves forward, and then she'll be focusing her attention on the budget.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'm sure you have some influence with her, so I'm hoping that will take place.

Additionally, one of the things that we spoke about and that I certainly asked you about in July was child care. I know this isn't directly within your purview and your portfolio. However, we have certainly heard time after time from witnesses in every field that a universal, affordable child care strategy is key.

I'm wondering again whether you've had conversations with both the Minister of Finance and your colleague, Minister Hussen, the Minister for Families, Children, and Social Development. Will the money that was promised by the House in a unanimous consent motion, the \$2 billion, as well as what witnesses and stakeholders in child care are asking for—\$10 million over the next five years—be in the 2021 budget?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Early learning and child care are critical to a full recovery from COVID. In July we were able to announce \$625 million in federal supports for the child care sector, to ensure that it was safe and that the spaces could stay open. In addition

to the bilateral agreements on early learning and child care, this investment means that this year alone the Government of Canada has invested \$1.2 billion in child care. That's a 67% increase over the next highest year in history. Because of our investments, over 40,000 child care spaces have been created.

Absolutely, Minister Hussen is working diligently, and we are supporting him to do just that.

The keyword that I've learned from Professor Kate Bezanson is "system". Canada needs a child care system.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we will go into our second round.

We'll start with Ms. Jag Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I asked you about gender-based analysis and if the programs had that lens applied. Women were being left out of some programs where they couldn't get financial support. You said that Minister Qualtrough was fixing the programs, or had fixed the problems so women could get support.

How and why did we get to the stage where the program needed to be fixed? Your mandate letter requires you to apply the gender-based analysis lens before the programs are rolled out, not two, four, six or eight months later when women have already lost their jobs and feel the financial impact.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I think every Canadian appreciates that we are in the middle of an unprecedented crisis and that the pandemic is something that we have been working on since the beginning of the year. I think Canadians also appreciate that their government listens. When they say something needs to be improved, when they say something is better, I think Canadians expect the government to listen, and we've done just that.

In addition to the supports we've put forward around parental leave and mat leave, we were able to put forward a credit—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Minister, my question is this: Why wasn't the gender analysis lens applied before the programs were rolled out, such that we needed to fix those programs afterwards?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We were able to put forward a historic number of programs and deliver them in record time. Canadians told us to focus on speed and to perfect the programs after they had been rolled out. We did just that.

Canadians can rest assured that we'll continue to be there for them throughout COVID and post-COVID. We will take what they have to say seriously and respond to their needs. Members of Parliament have played a really big role in providing those eyes and ears on the ground to ensure that the decisions we make in such tight timelines, in a matter of months compared with years, take into account lived realities, as well.

• (1205)

Ms. Jag Sahota: You still didn't answer my question, but I'll try a different question and hope for an answer.

Minister, your departmental plan states that WAGE will focus on "reducing the wage gap".

Recently the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report entitled "Fiscal Analysis of Federal Pay Equity". The purpose of this report was to examine the cost of closing the wage gap, which is a concept that we support. However, the government would not release the information requested by the PBO so that he could make a proper assessment and a report. Additionally, he noted that over \$49 million had been allocated to research and setting up an office.

Minister, can you please tell the committee why the government believes it needs to spend \$49 million to research an issue that we already have significant studies on? What is the government hiding? Why won't it release the information requested by a non-partisan independent parliamentary officer?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: With due respect, gender is not mentioned even once in Mr. O'Toole's leadership platform. Equality doesn't come up once. Women, when they're mentioned, are mentioned in their traditional roles—

Ms. Jag Sahota: Can you answer the question, Minister, please?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Absolutely. And there is no mention of gender-based violence in your leader's platform.

We will do everything we can to respond—

Ms. Jag Sahota: My question is addressed to you. Why is the information not being released to a non-partisan independent parliamentary officer?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We will do everything we can to respond to the very real needs of Canadian women in this difficult time.

I will add that your party has not stepped up. It has not put it in writing. It is not in your leader's platform. I'd appreciate some of your activism being directed towards your own leader and your own party.

Ms. Jag Sahota: It was just that I am not getting any answers from you. I am going to try another question in the hope of getting an answer.

In the 2020-21 departmental plan it states that WAGE will develop a guaranteed paid family leave program.

Can you please advise this committee when we can see a proposed program?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I'm going to direct this question to my deputy minister, the wonderful Guylaine Roy.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Good morning, everybody.

I believe that the honourable member is referring to support we would give to another department, the department led by Minister Qualtrough.

WAGE has a mandate for gender equality, but we also have a mandate of supporting other departments on key initiatives that are important levers to support women and gender equality. I believe your reference is about.... When you talk about a guaranteed paid leave program, it's probably a program that doesn't belong, per se, to WAGE, but we are in support of other departments.

The Chair: Very good, and that's your time.

Now we're going to Mrs. Zahid and Ms. Sidhu, who will be sharing their time.

You have five minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will take this opportunity to thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee and for all the work you are doing to support women and girls across Canada. I really appreciate it.

One important topic which we all hear about—one of my colleagues, Ms. Mathysen, also started on it—is child care. We have heard from many witnesses that child care is an essential part of getting women back into the economy, not just getting back to normal, but building back even better and stronger than before.

Child care is a topic of interest within the media, for policy experts and, of course, for my constituents and for moms and dads who know that child care is essential to growing our economy and giving our children the best start in life.

Minister, can you please speak to why a child care strategy is important to a she-recovery, and how it will contribute towards gender equality?

• (1210)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, MP Zahid, for your very important work as chair of immigration and citizenship.

One of your witnesses, Armine Yalnizyan, said that there will be no she-recovery without early learning and child care. She is absolutely right.

The Prime Minister very clearly referred to it in the Speech from the Throne and ensured that it was recognized as one of the key ways of moving women and our economy forward. The alternative is to roll back the clock decades and decades.

Early learning and child care are one of the 167 recommendations that came from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women's report. This piece around paid and unpaid work, and the care work traditionally done by women which is just expected to be done for free has held our economy together. I think what COVID has allowed us to see is just how much care is core to who we are and to our economy.

Minister Hussen is working diligently to develop the framework that we hope will have buy-in from our colleagues in provinces and territories.

The Chair: Ms. Sidhu.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for coming back to our committee, Minister. I am happy to recognize your work for women from diverse communities across Canada, including organizations in Peel, which you met with I think two weeks ago.

December 7, 2020, marks the 50th anniversary of the tabling in Parliament of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. It is incredible to look back at this report to see the differences made in the past 50 years for women. We know there is still more work to do.

Minister, can you speak to the progress that has been made over the past 50 years and what our government is doing to commemorate this anniversary?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much, MP Sidhu, for your work as vice-chair of FEWO. It's very important for us and for those diverse communities such as those in your community. I was happy to connect with folks like those at Pink Attitude. Their voices were echoed by many we've heard in Black, indigenous and racialized communities across the country during COVID.

We have seen progress over the past 50 years. When the police are called to a case of domestic violence now, they respond. Fifty-plus years ago, they would see it as a matter between a man and his wife and let it be. Women can now apply for a mortgage and be qualified to do so without needing their husband's signature on the application form. There's a department within the Government of Canada responsible for women and gender equality. This didn't exist 50-plus years ago. That is all a testament to the tireless advocacy, the pain and the suffering, frankly, of those who've come before us who pushed for these changes and who found creative ways to make them happen.

As you mentioned, that progress is not carved in stone. On December 7 we will do what we can to celebrate the milestones achieved over the past 50 years, and look ahead to the very difficult road to a full recovery from COVID. I encourage colleagues to convene if they can, virtually or by telephone. They can shine a light on the work women and leaders in their own communities have done, because the best way we can move forward from here on is to stay connected with grassroots movements across the country and let them know that the Government of Canada has their back.

The Chair: That is very good.

[Translation]

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much.

The Chair: I'm sorry, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Oh, I was happy.

Ms. Monsef, you mentioned that you were currently meeting with indigenous leaders for your action plan. I'd like to know how

the national action plan you are introducing will address the calls for justice that came out of the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and also the calls for action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

How will your meeting with indigenous leaders fit into your national plan?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

[English]

It's critical that the two work hand in hand. Minister Bennett has been leading our government's efforts. Over the past several months, she has brought together, per province and per territory, survivors, their families, experts and leaders to ensure that their responses are taken into account in the development of the action plan.

We are, first and foremost, ensuring that we commemorate and remember the stories of those missing and those who are gone. There are about 100 projects across the country commemorating our stolen sisters.

Second, we've heard "nothing for us without us" from indigenous leaders and representatives, so they are at the table. They're at the table on the gender-based violence advisory council, which advises me. They are at the table when we gather for federal, provincial and territorial annual meetings. Also, of course, much of what they share around prevention, support for survivors and a responsive justice system is taken into consideration, both with the calls for justice and the national action plan. You've also seen, in our COVID response, additional supports for shelters on reserve and off reserve, as one example.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Perfect.

You talked about working with Minister Bennett. Recently in Quebec, we saw the Minister of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity working with the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women to review certain labour laws.

How could you work with your colleague the Minister of Labour to review things like the whole issue of employment insurance, and also capitalize on the economic recovery, which will need to be pro-women, to ensure that the Employment Insurance Act makes more women eligible for EI?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: On the gender-based violence file, my colleague in Quebec and I have a very close working relationship. We're in regular conversation. I know that Minister Qualtrough has an equally close relationship with her counterparts in Quebec.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we go to Ms. Mathysen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

One thing I have mentioned before is that CERB left many people falling through the cracks. You have talked about looking forward and moving forward with additional programs and ensuring that a gender lens would be applied. However, we're pushing for the CERB to be universal. Ultimately that would ensure no one would fall through the cracks. It would ensure that no matter your gender or position, it certainly would cover it. I was upset that unfortunately the government didn't move in that way.

I would also like to ask you, though, about ensuring that systems and programs that are put into place are in fact universal. I think about child care being universal and affordable.

Would your government be willing to put forward a child care act that is much like the Canada Health Act, by way of ensuring that no matter where you are, you have access to it and that it's affordable and universal?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Mathysen, in his Speech from the Throne the Prime Minister referred to a universal early learning and child care system that is affordable, accessible and of high quality, so that no matter where children and parents are they have access to similar supports. Minister Hussen is best fit to answer that question.

On your point about CERB, I will say that millions of Canadians have received it. Women have disproportionately benefited from it. For others who need additional support, thousands of organizations across the country in the charitable and non-profit sector have received direct support so that they can continue to provide supports to the most vulnerable in their communities.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

I also have to mention that I realize I said "millions" in my last question, and I meant billions. Hopefully the blues will correct that for me.

In addition, we've also talked a lot about the need for core funding. We know that the project-based funding model doesn't work; it has let women's organizations down. We've seen that absolutely in terms of COVID.

I'm wondering whether your government will commit to converting the capacity-building funds grants to permanent core funding. Will you deliver and commit to that in the upcoming budget?

The Chair: I'm sorry, but that's your time.

We will go now to Ms. Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I just need "yes".

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, when I asked you about the information that was requested by the PBO, you deflected and made comments about how Erin O'Toole's platform doesn't address gender. You did that while commenting towards me, a woman of colour coming from a minority background.

We know that the Liberals say many words, do a lot of writing and not much action. The reverse is true on this side, and I'm the example.

I'm going to ask you again. Will you commit to releasing the information that the PBO is requesting so that we can get a fulsome report?

• (1220)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: There are two parts to your question, MP Sahota.

Ms. Jag Sahota: The first was a comment.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: The question is, will you release—

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Chair, on a point of order, can the witness answer the question? It has been asked a few times now.

Ms. Jag Sahota: I'm clarifying the question, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Absolutely, the witness should answer the questions and not the comments.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: My response, Madam Chair, was to highlight that it's important for all parties to be on the same page about the role and the importance of women and of that intersectional gendered lens. None of what I said was personal in any way. In fact, as I've spoken with MP Sahota in the past, I look forward to working with her.

Yes, racialized women like us do need to stick together, because there are a lot of communities counting on us to speak on their behalf, communities that have not traditionally had a voice and position in places of power such as Parliament Hill.

I will say, though, that my deputy has answered that question. We are committed to transparency and openness with the work we have done.

When officers of Parliament provided recommendations to us on how to improve GBA+, for example, we were there. We rolled up our sleeves and we improved the way that we apply that intersectional gendered lens.

My department and I will follow up with you directly. I have pages and pages here about the departmental results framework, and I'm happy to share that with the committee through you, Madam Chair, and of course directly with MP Sahota.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Minister.

Maybe I will make the question a bit shorter. When can they expect this information to be released to them?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I will ask my wonderful deputy minister to respond.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: I want to have a clarification. Are you referring to federal pay equity and a request from the PBO relating to the federal pay equity legislation?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Yes.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: You're referring to that.

As a point of clarification, Minister Tassi would have the lead on that piece of legislation and the follow-up to the PBO request.

Minister, if you agree, we could follow up with the department that is responsible for this and then provide an answer as a follow-up.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Sahota, does that meet your needs? Is that sufficient?

Ms. Jag Sahota: It does as long as I get the answer.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Okay.

Ms. Guylaine F. Roy: We will follow up.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We will follow up.

Thank you, deputy.

Ms. Jag Sahota: In the 42nd Parliament, this committee published two reports: “Taking Action to End Violence Against Young Women and Girls in Canada” and “Women's Economic Security: Securing the Future of Canada's Economy”.

Can you please give this committee an update on the progress made towards each of the reports' recommendations?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: As I mentioned earlier, in our gender-based violence federal strategy, we were able to make significant strides. One example is that, for the first time ever, the Government of Canada started collecting intersectional gender disaggregated data around gender-based violence. We were able to take this committee's recommendations into consideration in its development.

Regarding your question about women's economic security, of course progress was made. That progress has been halted by COVID, but we are not deterred.

As we speak, MP Sahota, I'm working on a response to this committee specifically on the question of women's economic security and what we have gleaned from the 40-plus projects we supported to advance women's economic security in the past five years.

That report and that response are coming to you in short order.

• (1225)

The Chair: Excellent.

Now we go to Ms. Hutchings for five minutes.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, it's always great to see you. Thank you for acknowledging the important work that this committee does for all women.

Minister, I want to talk about a specific form of gender-based violence: sexual violence. It was three years ago when the #MeToo movement sparked real change around the world. Women from all walks of life came forward with their experiences of sexual violence. Many of us saw friends and celebrities identifying themselves as survivors of sexual violence. Soon after that came #MeToo, #TimesUp, and before that there was #BeenRapedNeverReported.

Minister, can you speak specifically to how Canada has reacted and taken positive steps to end this terrible form of gender-based violence and to end gender-based violence in all forms?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you, MP Hutchings. It's truly a privilege to get to work with you on this file, as well as the connectivity file.

I'm always mindful, when we're talking about sexual violence, if the room is filled with more than three women, chances are somebody in the room has experienced sexual violence. I recognize that.

To those who are listening, if you are experiencing sexual violence or domestic violence, know that you are not alone. Know that there are thousands of organizations across the country whose doors are open. Talk to someone you trust. Reach out to them. They'll make sure that you and your loved ones are safe, even during this pandemic.

As you mentioned, MP Hutchings, it takes a certain level of courage to say “me too”. It takes a certain level of courage to put yourself out there with the stigma and the vulnerability that unfortunately comes with that kind of disclosure, but what those silence-breakers did was give courage to other survivors, and it give courage to decision-makers to accelerate the pace of change.

We were able to review tens of thousands of unfounded cases of sexual assault, where those few who actually came forward to report but weren't believed had the opportunity to have their cases reassessed. We were able to hear from front lines that every time one of these hashtags comes out, the demand for their services goes up. We were able to deploy dollars very quickly so that they could keep their doors open, keep their institutions and organizations safe and keep their staff paid.

We were also able to work with our partners to develop a framework for safety on campuses. You know, 41% of sexual assault cases in Canada are reported by those in post-secondary institutions. We also heard from men and boys who want to, and can, play a really important role in not just being a bystander, but addressing some of the harmful attitudes and behaviours that lead to rape and sexual assault and the trauma that follows. We've been able to work with dozens of organizations across the country, not only working to heal men, but also supporting men who are working with other men to address those problematic attitudes.

The issues of sexual violence and gender-based violence will not be solved easily. It will take generations of work, and that's the kind of work that I know this committee and this Parliament, and of course our government, are committed to continuing.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thank you, Minister.

I'm sure you'll agree that no one will ever forget what 2020 has been. There have been struggles and pains. There's been resilience, strength, innovation and resistance, and our country has come together. We've made sacrifices to flatten the curve, and we've been innovative in supporting folks.

It's also been a year that we've celebrated differently, too. I have always looked forward to the many pride parades throughout my riding, and this year, of course, it was different as many of the events were virtual. Our commitment to stand with our LGBTQ friends, family, neighbours and communities is very important to me.

Minister, can you speak on the steps our government has taken to demonstrate our unwavering support for all Canadians.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Hutchings, you're making me feel nostalgic at the end of this very terrible year. I think for LGBTQ2 Canadians and the organizations that support them, knowing that the Government of Canada and, frankly, all parties in the House are with them after decades and decades of advocacy is really, really important and we should continue that.

Minister Chagger will be working to roll out millions of dollars for LGBTQ2 organizations. This is the first fund of its kind. Knowing her and the Prime Minister, certainly not the last. We've had bills passed in the previous Parliament that provided protection for trans and LGBTQ2 Canadians, which did not exist before. Of course, we're taking their realities into consideration, both with the response to COVID and specifically in the gender-based violence strategy, because we know that they are disproportionately affected by violence, especially in these very difficult times.

● (1230)

The Chair: Minister, thank you so much. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you and Ms. Roy, your deputy, for appearing today. We absolutely must work together. The women of Canada are counting on us to continue to pursue their causes.

At this point, we're going to switch to the second panel, which is the other department officials, so I'll introduce them.

We have Nancy Gardiner who is the assistant deputy minister and was here for the first part of our meeting. We also have Lisa Smylie, who's the director general of the communications and public affairs branch, research, results and delivery branch. We have Danielle Bélanger who is the director general of gender-based violence policy. We have Suzanne Cooper, director of strategic policy, policy and external relations directorate.

I'm not sure how many of you or who will be starting off to speak for the five-minute summary, but I will let you jump in.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Good morning.

There is no five-minute summary. We're just going to jump right into the questions and answers, if that's okay.

The Chair: That is no problem at all.

We are going to start, then, with our six-minute round of questions.

We have Ms. Shin.

Ms. Nelly Shin (Port Moody—Coquitlam, CPC): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the minister and the department for joining us today to brief us and answer our questions. I think we're all here with the common desire to see more help for women, especially during this time of the pandemic.

As you know, November 25 is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and starting tomorrow Canadians will observe 16 days of activism against gender-based violence until December 10.

At the forefront of my mind today, on the issue of violence against women, is domestic violence and human trafficking.

Concerning domestic violence, as you are aware, COVID-19 has caused a hike in incidents. Although there has been an increase, we're not seeing all the numbers. Because of social isolation and lockdowns, perpetrators have been empowered to exercise greater control over their intimate partners' use of phones and computers, so women are unable to access their communication devices to cry for help and report their incidents.

In our last committee meeting, we heard that tragic barriers have prevented the protection of victims and prevented helping them escape from their perpetrators. For example, court closures prevent access to court orders, and in some regions limited access to public transportation and closures of community support agencies have greatly hindered exit strategies. In some cases, public health service workers lack trauma sensitivity and were sending victims of domestic violence back to their perpetrators because they were inaccurately assessing the victims' need for help and their need to leave.

The Liberal government has intervened across governmental jurisdictions to provide emergency COVID support. Victims' need for support and escape from domestic violence is daunting.

What has the department done to improve exit strategies for victims of domestic violence, in this unprecedented context of lockdowns and social distancing? Will the government be willing to provide intergovernmental support and work with other ministries, such as public safety, the provinces and regions, to make sure roadblocks are cleared for victims to have viable exit strategies?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thank you very much for your questions.

I'll begin by reiterating some of the pieces that we've put into the response for COVID, in terms of what WAGE has actually put forward.

The minister mentioned earlier there has been an investment of \$50 million in women's shelters, sexual assault centres and organizations providing critical services to support women and children fleeing violence during this really critical time.

As of earlier this year, 432 women's shelters across the country received support. Also, 93 sexual assault centres and 167 women's shelters and organizations in Quebec have received funding to support the critical work they've done to support women and children who are fleeing violence during this crisis.

There was an announcement recently of another \$50 million that we're working on and will provide to organizations to allow them to continue this important work.

Finally, in terms of the first amount of money, in May an additional \$10 million was provided to organizations supporting critical services to women, beyond shelters and sexual assault centres.

I'll turn to my colleague Danielle Bélanger to add any additional comments on that.

• (1235)

Ms. Danielle Bélanger (Director General, Gender Based Violence Policy, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you, Nancy.

With the emergency funding, a number of testimonials have come to us from a number of organizations. COVID has certainly exacerbated a lot of what we knew before the pandemic, and a number of organizations have told us that that emergency funding was really critical for what they could do to respond to the emergency, such as providing more emergency planning and an emergency response, having a number of people on the ground to help with the sanitary measures required within a shelter and being able to put counselling services online, for instance, when they used to be face to face. These are the things we've heard from a lot of organizations across the country.

To add to that, with COVID, and even pre-pandemic, we've been working on the gender-based violence national action plan. This was mentioned earlier in some of the questions with the minister. We have engaged hundreds of stakeholders, GBV sector organizations and indigenous partners across the country to help us come up with a really solid evidence-based path forward with our stakeholders to identify how we can actually respond to the number of recommendations that are coming forward. As the minister mentioned earlier, in the justice systems, with police, with support for families and survivors and on prevention, we are working closely with our partners and the provinces and territories to respond to that.

Ms. Nelly Shin: My second question has to do with human trafficking.

With lockdowns, the world moving online to virtual meetings and the excessive time spent on social media, young girls have become prey to predators scoping out victims for human trafficking. It's not just young girls either, but because we're on the topic of women, I'm focusing on them. Canada has a wide border to the south which makes our country a stomping ground for human trafficking.

What is the government doing to educate children, indigenous girls and youth who come from abusive and challenging home environments on how to protect themselves?

The Chair: I'm sorry. That's an excellent question, but you're out of time.

We'll go to Ms. Dhillon for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Good afternoon to our witnesses and officials. Thank you for being here today.

My first question is about something the minister mentioned. She said that in 2008, women hardly recovered from the economic crisis.

Ms. Gardiner, can you speak to us a bit more about that and how during the pandemic we've seen similar things that are again affecting women negatively?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thanks very much for the question. I'm going to turn to my colleague Lisa Smylie, who will respond to it.

Ms. Lisa Smylie (Director General, Communications and Public Affairs Branch, Research, Results and Delivery Branch, Department for Women and Gender Equality): We know that in economic crises women are disproportionately affected. As the minister pointed out in the last hour, we saw it in the 2008 recession and we're seeing it now.

I can give you some examples of how that's happening now. In March when we saw lockdowns, women experienced job losses at twice the rate of men, and in May, when we started to open the economy back up and jobs started coming back, men gained employment at twice the rate of women.

There are certain groups of women that are disproportionately affected. In fact, younger women are still 11% away from their pre-COVID employment rate. They have not gained back their employment. These are young women between the ages of 15 and 24. They are newcomer women, immigrant women and visible minority women. On that latter point in particular, visible minority women are 11% away from their pre-COVID employment rate. Indigenous women are only at 88.4% of their pre-pandemic employment rate. We know that this is in part because of care work and in part because of industry segregation and the sectors women tend to be overrepresented in.

These are some of the ways women have been impacted economically and some of the reasons why.

• (1240)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you for that answer.

I read something last week with one of the organizations regarding women fleeing situations of domestic violence or being unable to do so. We see there are children who are witnesses to that violence. There are children who are susceptible to that violence. Have you seen a lot more of an impact on children who are vicariously experiencing that violence through their mothers, those who are victimized by abusive partners?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thank you so much for that question. It's a really important point that you're raising.

As we have been working with the organizations that have been providing support during COVID, children have been a really critical part of that response. We know that the organizations that we have been supporting used some of the support to actually look at what they need for the children that are going to be part of their centre their shelter. We know that these organizations, with the support that we've provided, were able to access funding to allow them to get special services, materials for kids if they're actually in school, and things like that. It's a recognized need that has been demonstrated throughout the pandemic, for sure. We're hearing that.

Minister Monsef held a number of round tables in line with what's been happening for gender-based violence and the national action plan, focusing on keeping kids safe during COVID. We learned that a lot has taken place with other government departments, but mostly in terms of the shelter support network. It's been a priority focus for that group as well.

I'll turn to my colleague, Danielle.

Was there anything else to add on that?

Ms. Danielle Bélanger: We've also heard that the online sexual exploitation of children tip line saw a 66% increase in reports. We find that to be very troubling, and it's certainly something that we should be turning our minds to in the next little while.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you so much for bringing us that very important statistic. That's a very significant jump in the reporting of sexual trafficking.

Can you please explain to us what could be leading to this type of jump in statistics when it comes to trafficking and the vulnerability and victimization of children?

Ms. Danielle Bélanger: Thank you for that question.

During lockdown, and especially with children being at home and not in schools very much at the beginning of pandemic, that's where there was a noticeable increase. Lots of children were online. That definitely increases the vulnerability of children. Potentially with parents who are either essential workers and not in the home at the time, or if they're in the home working during those hours, that could have contributed. That's just my own opinion at this point.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to come back to the gender-based violence issue. The 2020-21 main estimates provide transfer payments of approximately \$13.5 million for Women and Gender Equality Canada's gender-based violence program.

What types of projects would be likely to receive grants and contributions under the gender-based violence program?

• (1245)

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: In terms of the federal strategy on gender-based violence that we have under way right now, we are funding about 60 projects in the department for just over \$50 million. These projects are actually working towards providing the supports and pieces that need to be in place to end gender-based violence in Canada and to support individuals. I have a number of projects at my fingertips, but I will name just a couple.

The project at the YWCA in Montreal is one example. It involves looking at some of the models available to support individuals coming into Canada and the services available to newly arrived immigrants who are survivors of gender-based violence. There are a couple of other examples. In Ontario, the Family Transition Place in Orangeville provides support for rural responses, promising

practices to support survivors and their families. Another project I would highlight is one through the DisAbled Women's Network Canada. It looks at evaluating peer support of promising practices for women with disabilities who have experienced violence.

As I said, a number of these projects that are under way look at approaches that can be piloted and what we can learn from those projects so we can implement programming across the country.

We're in the very initial stages of this initiative, the wage portion of the federal strategy on gender-based violence. A lot of these projects have just started within the last year and they're multi-year projects. There are three or four projects really looking at a longer-term analysis, the results of which could inform our future programming.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: All right.

How will the department allocate and distribute resources from the gender-based violence program?

What commitments can the department make to evaluating projects and programs included in the program?

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: That's an excellent question. We have programming, as you know. We have the gender-based violence program. We have the women's program capacity-building fund. Through a number of other programs, we're supporting about 650 projects across Canada, distributed across the country, depending on which organizations apply and depending on the needs in certain parts of Canada.

Often when we have a call-for-proposals process, we look at what applications are coming in and we determine whether there are gaps. In some cases if we didn't see projects in Atlantic Canada or in our territories, we would work with stakeholders on the ground to determine whether there were initiatives that they felt needed to be supported and see how we could actually help them ensure that some of these projects were submitted for application and review. We just want to make sure there is no part of the country that does not have the support and programming required, which is why we pay particular attention to that type of distribution.

Earlier, with regard to the national action plan on gender-based violence, the minister mentioned working very closely with the provinces and territories. That has been very key for us. We have excellent working relationships with our provincial and territorial colleagues across the country on not only gender-based violence programming but all programming that supports women. We're often in close contact with them when we have a call-for-proposals process to ensure that proposals coming in are in line with some of the projects they've seen or with the needs they've seen in their province or territory.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Those folks are better versed in what is happening on their turf. For example, Quebec's needs are not the same as British Columbia's. Regional differences became apparent during the crisis.

If I understand correctly, the department intends to take into account these partnerships with Quebec and the provinces and be more attentive to what is happening on the ground for the future and for this action plan.

• (1250)

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Absolutely. For the COVID response, with the original amount that I talked about for shelters and sexual assault centres and other organizations assisting women fleeing violence, we worked in partnership with the Province of Quebec and provided support to the Province of Quebec for that government to provide support to the organizations on the ground. As you said, knowing exactly what was happening was really critical for us, and working with the province was great.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Your time is up.

[English]

Now we go to Ms. Mathysen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

We heard from the minister, with regard to the gender-based violence action plan, that there are many consultations still taking place and that she will be coming up with a plan. There weren't any concrete dates, and I think many of the questions were actually about specific deadlines.

Have you been given any expectations from the minister about those specific delivery dates or deadlines?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: As the minister pointed out and Danielle referenced earlier, we are in the process right now of looking at, working on and participating in a number of engagements across the country. The Speech from the Throne reiterated the need to have a national action plan for gender-based violence. We are continuing that work, and that work will inform us as to the pieces that absolutely must be included in a national action plan.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: This has been going on for a number of years now. Do you have any sense of a potential closing date by

which we could actually expect an action plan to be announced, a specific date?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: I don't have a specific date, but I can tell you that the national action plan is something that was reiterated in the Speech from the Throne.

We do have a federal gender-based violence strategy, and I'm going to turn to Danielle to highlight some pieces of that. We're building on the federal strategy, informing a national action plan and working with the provinces and territories—because that's a really key part of the national action plan—as well as with our indigenous partners.

Danielle.

Ms. Danielle B langer: Thank you for that, Nancy.

The national action plan was reiterated recently, but on the federal strategy we have been working for a few years now. In 2017-18, there was an investment and a commitment of \$200 million over five years and \$40 million ongoing. We're working with key departments, federal departments, including the Public Health Agency, Public Safety, Immigration and Refugees Canada and the RCMP, and we're starting to see some early results.

We do have a GBV federal strategy annual report. We have already released two annual reports and we have a third coming up that will demonstrate some of those accomplishments to date.

As we mentioned earlier, engagements are happening across the country because we know there are many recommendations for an integrated national action plan with our provinces and territories. That is something we're working on in parallel with the federal strategy. That is going to be happening over the course of the coming months.

Thanks.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: When talking about the capacity-building fund, I believe you said there are 650 projects funded under that. I know that a lot of women's organizations continually talk about the need for core funding. I tried to address this with the minister, and I'm wondering if they've also approached you with regard to that need for core funding.

Has the department explored converting that capacity-building fund into permanent programming that could deliver that core funding for women's organizations?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: To clarify, out of the capacity-building fund, 250 projects are specifically focused on that program or that element of our programming.

You're right. We do hear that there's a lot of support for the capacity-building fund and we know that organizations really are in need of that type of support to continue their important services. We are really happy that we were able to support over 250 projects of those organizations that applied and to provide them with continuing essential supports for women and those who use the services of those organizations.

• (1255)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: You said these organizations come to you and express a need for that core funding. How do you think that could help them with future planning, especially when we see projections of how COVID-19 might not be the only pandemic that we will see?

Going forward, how would that core funding help organizations that help women?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: I totally recognize your point. The support through the capacity-building fund allowed these organizations to have multi-year funding, which is something that is relatively recent for some of these women's organizations, as well. Even that enabled them to do planning for three to four years to support the work that they're doing. It also allowed them to diversify some of their funding sources, not just from governments, federal, provincial and other.

We understand that during COVID that's been a huge issue for these organizations. The support that we were able to provide to organizations during the COVID period gave them just that additional amount they needed, because there were limited amounts of availability for fundraising and things like that.

The Chair: That's your time. I'm sorry.

Now we will go into our second round of questioning, beginning with the honourable Alice Wong for five minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the deputy minister and her staff for coming to answer some of our very tough questions.

I'd like to ask whether the deputy minister could send my office a list of projects they have approved in the City of Richmond, which is the most diversified in the whole nation. Perhaps you could direct whoever is in charge to send me a list of the projects and the funding for women's organizations. As you said, they are dying for funding and yet fundraising is such a challenge. In fact, they asked me if I could help. Of course, as the MP, I'm trying my best. This is one request.

I want to get back to some really burning questions. Long-term care homes have been hard hit by COVID. Elderly women, especially those living in those seniors homes, probably need a lot of help, and need different departments to work together. I'm wondering if you could shed some light on whether there are any intergovernmental or interdepartmental efforts to handle these challenges in long-term care home situations.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thank you very much for your question.

We've worked together before in other departments, and we've spoken a lot about this issue, for sure. We often work very closely with our ESDC colleagues, because in that department they have a lot of support for some of the programming you're speaking about. One example is the \$9 million that was provided through the United Way to support services for Canadian seniors.

When we are talking about some of these difficult issues, we work interdepartmentally to see which department can look after

which need. During COVID, we've been working very closely with colleagues at ISC and CIRNAC, ESDC, Public Safety and many departments to see where we can actually get programming that's going to meet the needs of our vulnerable populations.

Specifically for us, at Women and Gender Equality, we provide support and funding for organizations that are providing direct services to women and children, particularly around the COVID response. Your point is very well taken in terms of our working better and more closely with our interdepartmental colleagues to ensure we're meeting the needs of all of these folks, depending on the department's priority.

• (1300)

Hon. Alice Wong: Thank you very much. I'm glad to hear that, especially about the United Way's 211. I was the first minister, during my time as the minister, to initiate that. I'm glad that finally, after all these years...because I was no longer in the office after 2015. Thank you very much for that.

Still, it's not all national yet. There are still regions where 211 is not available. I'm hoping your department will keep working on that so that more seniors and the volunteers who are helping seniors can start using that line.

My other question is about caring for the caregivers. We know that a lot of women are caregivers, formally and informally, especially those who are actually doing unpaid jobs, like helping to look after a sick kid or helping to look after seniors at home. Some of them are now reluctant to send their seniors to long-term care because of the death toll. They need physical and/or mental support, as well. Is there any specific funding? I know there's a tax credit, but that doesn't meet all their needs. Could you, again, tell us what else your department can do to help these informal family caregivers?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: As we talked about earlier, we at WAGE for sure have been able to provide supports for organizations that are providing critical services, specifically, though, for those individuals fleeing violence. However, there has been a lot of support provided for women's organizations to enhance their capacity.

We'll check. That is part of our mandate. Specific support to care workers or for those individuals providing that particular function is not within our area of work, but we can check to see what other sources could be available to you, or maybe we could—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Your time is up.

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thank you.

[Translation]

The Chair: I now give the floor to Mr. Serré for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses, who have been working diligently behind the scenes for several years, even decades, for gender equality.

I thank you for your commitment and your ongoing work in the field.

[English]

My first question is on GBA+. It has been around for 25 years, but governments weren't utilizing it. In the 2016 fall economic statement of our government, we committed to utilize it as an all-of-government approach. Our budget 2017 was the first budget ever in Canadian history that had a gender chapter in the budget itself.

We heard from witnesses. They may not be aware of what our government has done regarding the analysis, so I want the opportunity here for you to explain a bit about the process you undertake with all other departments to ensure that our legislation, budgets and programs have a GBA+ lens to them.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: I'm going to let my colleague Lisa Smylie answer that question for you.

Thanks very much.

Ms. Lisa Smylie: Thank you for the question.

I'll start by talking about what GBA+ is and what GBA+ is not.

GBA+ is a tool that we use to take a look at how people are impacted by issues differently, how different groups are impacted differently, so that we can develop tailored, targeted policies, programs and other initiatives. It's also a tool we use to take a look at our programs for barriers or unintended negative impacts so that we can help mitigate them.

GBA+ is not a once-and-done analysis. You don't do GBA+ at the beginning to develop a program and then forget about it. In fact, you do GBA+ throughout your implementation. You're constantly looking at your programs and monitoring them, and re-evaluating and pivoting your programs, to respond to different impacts.

That is really important, because doing GBA+ on a program that exists, like the CERB, for example, once it's been implemented, is not an indicator of failure. It means we're doing GBA+ as we should be doing it.

In terms of how we go about doing GBA+ and our department's role in it, we developed a set of tools and training for other departments so that they can implement GBA+ as they are developing and implementing their initiatives in the context of COVID.

Here at WAGE, we developed a tiger team. Early in the pandemic, we took a look at gendered and intersectional impacts. We collected all of that evidence and we shared it with other federal departments so that they could use it in developing and tailoring their programs. We developed a set of tools to guide their GBA+. Then,

as you pointed out, the GBA+s were published in the economic and fiscal update 2020.

WAGE is responsible for supporting Finance Canada in the gender analysis of the budget and the GBA+ process in gender budgeting.

● (1305)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you.

[English]

I want to ask two questions. I know I have a minute left, Madam Chair. I'm going to ask one question that you could answer in a written submission afterwards.

I want to understand this. First, in 2015, what was the overall budget for Status of Women? Second, what was the overall budget in 2019 for Status of Women? Third, what is the overall budget for 2020 because of COVID? Are you able to provide us later on with those three numbers on the revenue side to help us with our study?

My last question here, in 30 seconds, is on men and boys. We announced a budget of \$1.8 million in 2018. What are we doing and what can we do more of to get men and boys involved?

I think we have 15 seconds before Madam Chair says anything.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: We'll come back to you with your first question, if that's okay. We'll provide some written documentation on that.

Yes, the men and boys area has been a very critical area of our engagement in terms of the gender-based violence national action plan. We were able to—

[Translation]

The Chair: Forgive me for interrupting you, but your time is up.

Ms. Larouche, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank our witnesses for being here today.

It's always interesting to have the opportunity to speak with you.

A women's entrepreneurship program was announced this past September. As we have seen during the pandemic, it is still too difficult for women to get into business and be true women entrepreneurs.

Have you had discussions with Ms. Joly's and Ms. Ng's departments to see if the program could be adapted?

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: Thank you for your question.

Yes, as you have just indicated, the women's entrepreneurship strategy is not a strategy that falls within WAGE but is very critical to some of the success, obviously, of women small business owners. There's an investment at this point of nearly \$5 billion. We work very closely with our interdepartmental colleagues, as one of your colleagues mentioned earlier, just to make sure we have that connection on the ground.

We know that the women's entrepreneurship fund has invested approximately \$30 million directly in women-owned and -operated businesses. We know that a lot of this response is really important around the COVID crisis because of the large numbers of women who actually own and operate small businesses.

I'm going to check with my colleagues to see if there's anything further to add.

We're okay.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Gender equality tends to be lacking in SMEs. A lot of women still need to find their place and be encouraged through various programs.

We also know that the 2021 budget includes transfer payments of \$57.5 million for women's programs from Women and Gender Equality Canada.

What types of projects and programs will receive grants and contributions under the women's program?

• (1310)

[English]

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: It does not fall within Women and Gender Equality's mandate. We would have to go back to the Department of ISED for specifics on some of the details related to those projects.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Now we'll go to Ms. Mathysen for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Many provinces have domestic violence leave. However, the federal government does not have an overarching leave strategy for women who are experiencing domestic violence. I'm wondering if there are any conversations, plans, planning projects or what have you to explore the idea of federal domestic violence leave, and specifically paid domestic violence leave.

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: I'll turn to my colleague.

Ms. Danielle B elanger: Thank you for the question.

The government did change the laws to provide five days of paid leave to workers in federally regulated workplaces for survivors of family violence or for the parent of a child who is a victim of family violence. Over time, that is something that has come into place.

In provinces and territories, I know there are some discussions ongoing. We recognize that there is some uneven application. However, in terms of the Government of Canada, we certainly wanted to ensure that those laws of five days of paid leave were implemented for federally regulated workplaces.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: In terms of pay equity, as was discussed, we know that even though legislation was passed in 2018, the PBO in a report said that nothing had actually been implemented.

I would like to know about the plans or timelines, if you have them, for implementing the legislation and achieving the actual pay equity that so many women have been yearning for, for so long.

Ms. Suzanne Cooper (Director, Strategic Policy, Policy and External Relations Directorate, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thanks for your question. It's nice to speak to the committee today.

As the minister mentioned, the government is currently in the process of implementation. This, in fact—I'm not evading the question—is well under the purview of the Minister of Labour, which should probably answer that.

We're certainly happy to come back to the committee and to go to our colleagues at the department of labour to answer some of these questions, to the extent that we can.

The Chair: Thank you.

Now we'll go to Ms. Sahota and Ms. Shin, who I believe are sharing their five minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Ms. Smylie, or anybody else who wants to answer.

Ms. Smylie, on the GBA+ analysis, you talked about the process and how you apply the GBA+ lens at the beginning, in the middle, towards the end. Basically you continue to apply the lens.

Considering the problems we saw with the initial programs at the beginning of the pandemic, which are now being fixed, was a GBA+ analysis done at the beginning? If so, were the issues, such as women going on maternity leave or small business owners who are women and not having chequing accounts, flagged and addressed prior to the rollout of these programs?

Ms. Lisa Smylie: Our work at WAGE doesn't involve us being intimately familiar with all of the discussions that go on as part of the GBA+ process, so I'm not able to speak to any specific initiative that is the purview of another department.

In terms of whether GBA+ was applied at the beginning, the middle or the end, my answer is that it depends. For new programs that were developed, you can see in the economic and fiscal update that in many of those, the GBA+ was done at the beginning. For initiatives that leveraged existing programs, the GBA+, in the context of COVID, would have been done in the midst of implementing that program. It existed pre-COVID.

The answer is that it depends on what initiative was being leveraged, whether it was a new program or an existing program, in terms of what point in time that GBA+ was done.

• (1315)

The Chair: Now we'll go to Ms. Shin.

Ms. Shin, your camera....

Ms. Sahota, did you have another question then?

Ms. Jag Sahota: Not really.

The Chair: Okay, no problem.

Hon. Alice Wong: I can take that.

The Chair: Alice.

Hon. Alice Wong: Going back to the women entrepreneurship program—again, I know this belongs to another department—women definitely need extra help because they have to balance between family and business.

Is there any specific funding from your department which could help women entrepreneurs to balance between family and business?

That's my question. Thank you.

Ms. Suzanne Cooper: As we mentioned previously, of course we do have the women's program. One of the pillars of the women's program is economic security and prosperity, so some of our projects certainly can focus on that particular work.

I will also say, because I know you're quite interested in inter-departmental collaboration, that one of the things we've done at WAGE is to co-chair the Equity-Seeking Communities COVID-19 Taskforce, with PCH.

The purpose of that particular group, which, by the way, represents 25 departments across the government, including ISED, ES-DC and Health, is to share information, align strategies, policy and initiatives, and engage with equity-seeking communities to make sure we adapt the federal response to the realities of those people on the ground.

We have a chance to discuss a lot of the issues you raise here with colleagues across the federal family. These issues have come up. In fact, we've had discussions around women entrepreneurs. We have had some presentations, in fact, from Black women entrepreneurs who have talked about the struggles they are facing and about how programs need to be adapted with regard to those.

I know our colleagues at ISED, for example, heard that loudly and clearly, so I just want to highlight that work for you as well.

The Chair: All right.

We'll go now to Ms. Sidhu for five minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here today.

This pandemic has made the need for shelters and the needs of those fleeing gender-based violence much clearer. My region of Peel in the GTA has a high rate of domestic-related homicides involving a family member or partner. Your department has invested \$40 million to support shelters and sexual assault centres. Can you tell us how this funding has been distributed to shelters and sexual assault centres? Do you have any examples of the impact that funding has made?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: As I mentioned earlier, we have distributed, through Women's Shelters Canada, support to 432 women's shelters across the country, specifically to assist them during the COVID crisis.

We have received a number of testimonials from specific organizations saying what this money and this funding has meant to them. In Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Interval House said it usually has to fundraise to get the support it needs and it is usually able to do that but that this year doing that has been a problem. It used that money and the support we were able to provide it to keep its doors open and provide programming for the women who actually need that support.

They also used this money to support families. They had had limited numbers of spaces but they were able to expand their spaces in terms of short-term accommodation. They were able to purchase equipment and programming for their clients. They were able to provide an unbelievable amount of support to help those women fleeing the violence in their area.

There's another testimonial by Alice House in Nova Scotia. The quick receipt of funding from WAGE Canada allowed them to have vital services and resources to respond to the increased risk of violence against women in that province.

I could read on and on. A number of these testimonials that came in from these shelters really demonstrated the need they had to get the money, the funding support, and to get it as quickly as they could in order to respond with the critical care and support that women and children fleeing violence have needed during this pandemic.

Those are just a few examples.

• (1320)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you for all the great work you're doing.

Can you table those testimonials for us and send them to us?

Many of the government services that people interact with on a day-to-day basis are provincially and locally run, like schools, health care services and social services. Considering that most provinces and territories have a ministry for the status of women, can you speak to any collaboration between your department and your provincial counterparts? Can you highlight some examples of how the federal government has stepped up to provide direct support, for example, to schools, social services and any others?

Ms. Nancy Gardiner: I'll start and then I'll turn to my colleague, and actually Danielle as well, regarding the work we're doing with our provincial and territorial colleagues.

As we're developing the national action plan for gender-based violence, the work we have under way with our provincial and territorial colleagues is really critical. We are defining the priorities across the country, working very closely with them to actually determine where the needs are greatest and some of the things this national action plan needs to have in place.

Danielle chairs a provincial-territorial-federal working group. I'll just get her to highlight some of the work that's been going on with that group.

Ms. Danielle Bélanger: Thanks, Nancy.

Certainly, some of the work started back in December 2019 when FPT ministers responsible for the status of women agreed to explore how to engage and collaborate on some national actions to end gender-based violence. That was the last time they met in person. That was really the beginning of our co-operation and collaboration with our PT colleagues. Then again in September, just recently—virtually, of course—they endorsed a frame for the national action plan, which outlines visions, goals, principles and pillars for the national action plan.

We certainly have been working together. As you rightly point out, jurisdictional issues around gender-based violence services are in the provincial and territorial purview. However, there are some things that PTs can learn from one another, as well as the federal government, so we are diving a bit deeper into what are the types of things provinces and territories have been doing around prevention or support for families and survivors. We see very much that provinces are learning from each other, especially during COVID right now, in terms of some of the strategies they're putting in place.

As we alluded to earlier around the COVID emergency funding, we did work closely with our PT colleagues in order to identify where are the areas of greatest need and where are some of the gaps, and that collaboration has paved a really good way for us to continue working together on a national action plan.

The Chair: Excellent.

Unfortunately, that's our time today.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Chair, I just want to request that they table their testimonies, please.

The Chair: Yes, please. If you could table that testimony, that would be marvellous.

I want to thank the witnesses from the department for coming today and for all of their hard work to help the women of Canada.

As you know, our discussion today was about the estimates. We will vote on the estimates and report them to the House.

DEPARTMENT FOR WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Vote 1—Operating expenditures.....\$45,882,680

(Vote 1 agreed to)

Vote 5—Grants and contributions.....\$79,443,977

(Vote 5 agreed to)

The Chair: Finally, shall I report the main estimates 2020-21 to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Very good.

Our subcommittee will meet on Thursday, November 26, at 11 o'clock to select the subject of the next study and to prioritize the studies going forward. Based on that, if we end up wanting to begin the study we pick the following week, then we'll be asking for witness lists by Friday at the end of the day.

We shall see you Thursday, steering team, and I call this meeting adjourned.

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