



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 083

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Tuesday, November 7, 2023

Chair: Mr. John Williamson



Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Tuesday, November 7, 2023

• (1100)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick South-west, CPC)): Good morning, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 83 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), the committee is meeting today on its follow-up study of report number 3, “Follow-up Audit of Gender-Based Analysis Plus”, which can be found in reports 1 to 4 of the Auditor General of Canada published in 2022.

[English]

I would now like to welcome all of our witnesses.

From the Office of the Auditor General, we have Andrew Hayes, deputy auditor general; and Carey Agnew, principal.

From the Department of Women and Gender Equality, we have Frances McRae, deputy minister; and Leïla Boussaïd, director general, research, data and intersectionality. From the Privy Council Office, we have Kaili Levesque, deputy secretary to the cabinet, operations; and Jennifer Miller, assistant secretary to the cabinet, social development policy.

The fourth group is Treasury Board Secretariat. With us are Graham Flack, secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada; and Annie Boudreau, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector.

Good day, everyone.

I overheard someone saying that they hadn't been in a committee room in a little while, so it's great to have you all here. I appreciate your coming in today. It's certainly our preference that, when witnesses are in the national capital region, they come in, so I thank you all.

Each group here will have up to a five-minute opening presentation, and I'll begin with Mr. Hayes.

It's good to see you again, sir.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Andrew Hayes (Deputy Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General): Mr. Chair, thank you for this opportunity to discuss our follow-up report on gender-based analysis plus, which was tabled in Parliament on May 31, 2022.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people.

Joining me today is Carey Agnew who was responsible for this audit.

As you are aware, gender-based analysis plus—orGBA+—is the main tool used by the government to consider how gender and other identity factors can impact the way Canadians experience the delivery of programs and services.

Many demographic factors beyond our gender can impact how we experience life and how we access government programs and services. For example, a person may be part of a visible minority, be Indigenous, be old or young, have a disability, live in a rural setting, or be a newcomer to Canada. Using GBA+, the government should be taking identity factors into account when developing, implementing, or adjusting programs and services.

We found that long-standing challenges that we previously identified continue to hinder the full implementation of GBA+ across government. For this audit, we again included the Privy Council Office, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, and Women and Gender Equality Canada. Although the lead organizations have addressed some of the recommendations from our 2015 audit, many others date back to our first audit of gender-based analysis in 2009.

[English]

Despite our previous work and recommendations, it is still unclear whether actions are achieving better gender equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes. We found that the actions taken to identify and address the challenges of undertaking GBA+ did not go far enough.

The Privy Council Office and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat fell short in using their knowledge and the results of their challenge function to advance GBA+ implementation across government.

We also found that there was no approach to sharing information between the central agencies and Women and Gender Equality Canada to track progress of GBA+ implementation throughout government over time. Women and Gender Equality Canada took action by developing tools and delivering training to build capacity across government to perform GBA+.

Despite this, departments and agencies still face challenges that limit the meaningful application of GBA+, such as resources and training on developing GBA+ analyses, but more importantly, the availability of disaggregated data. Without disaggregated data, it is impossible to understand how diverse groups experience inequality.

All three of the organizations we audited identified this issue as a significant challenge. The Privy Council Office, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, and Women and Gender Equality Canada need to better collaborate and ensure that all departments and agencies fully integrate GBA+ in a way that produces real results for all Canadians.

We would be pleased to answer any questions that the committee may have. Thank you.

• (1105)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Hayes. I'm sure we'll have questions for you in a few minutes.

We'll turn now to the Department for Women and Gender Equality.

Deputy Minister McRae, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Frances McRae (Deputy Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that I am here on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people. It's where I live and work.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for your invitation to discuss our work that we have under way in response to the Auditor General's 2022 report on the implementation of gender-based analysis plus.

[Translation]

Joining me today from Women and Gender Equality Canada is my colleague Leila Boussaid, Director General, Research, Data and Intersectionality Branch.

I would like to thank the Auditor General and her Office for their work on GBA+. Canada is one of the few countries that have benefited from regular audits on its approach to gender equality mainstreaming.

[English]

Created as a full department in 2018, WAGE's role in GBA+ is twofold. We act as a convener, a knowledge broker and a capacity builder as it relates to women's equality and equality for gender-diverse people; to the application of GBA+ and its evolution to intersectional approaches that take into account the different experiences and interactions that diverse groups of men, women, and gender-diverse people have with systems, structures and institutions.

As our colleagues from the Office of the Auditor General have noted, interest and capacity for GBA+ have grown steadily with time. Canada is becoming more diverse, as we know, which means that we must continue to evolve our approaches to make sure that we remain relevant to the people we serve. For example, Statistics Canada estimates, based on the 2021 census, that approximately 25% of Canadians are racialized and that, 18 years from now, it will be around 40%. That's about two in five Canadians. Based on the 2017 Canadian survey on disability, approximately one in five people in Canada aged 15 years and over, 24% of women and 20% of men, report having a disability.

[Translation]

Based on our responsibility to evolve to meet the needs of Canada and Canadians, and feedback received from the OAG audits, as well as the March 2022 Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology report on the role of GBA+ in the policy process, WAGE has been implementing recommendations to ensure that the impacts of an enhanced GBA+ analysis continue to be felt.

• (1110)

[English]

WAGE has taken action to promote a greater understanding of intersectionality by clarifying methodology, updating training and developing a new suite of tools for federal public servants. In addition, we've leveraged GBA+ awareness week, an annual event, to promote greater understanding of intersectionality. The 2023 iteration was selected to reinforce GBA+'s intersectional design. As part of these events, two panels on intersectional approaches were held with deputy ministers leading, and they drew over 2,000 participants.

[Translation]

We continue to support opportunities for collaboration and peer-to-peer learning, enabling GBA+ practitioners to share best practices, and become leaders within their communities of practice and continue to build competency across the federal government, including working with others inside and outside government on ensuring we are building awareness of culturally relevant analysis, using tools that communities with lived experience have developed.

We've also built more robust governance structures, including key colleagues at the deputy minister level whose organizational mandates include cross-government leadership in areas such as anti-racism, disability inclusion, and relations with Indigenous peoples, to facilitate strategic coordination.

[English]

We're also in the process of revising the cross-government GBA+ implementation survey to address some methodological limitations—including some raised by the Office of the Auditor General, the Senate committee and other experts—because we want to use it to improve our monitoring and public reporting on the application and impacts of GBA+.

We are learning from other countries, as well, as they evolve their approaches. Many other countries at earlier stages of thinking are also learning from Canada.

[Translation]

We're moving in the right direction, and we are committed to continuing this work because it is about better serving Canadians today, and tomorrow.

Merci.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Next, from the Privy Council Office, we have Ms. Levesque.

You have the floor for up to five minutes.

Ms. Kaili Levesque (Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet, Operations, Privy Council Office): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

I'm very pleased to have the opportunity to provide you with an update on the steps we have taken in response to the Auditor General's follow-up report on GBA+. I'm joined by my colleague Jennifer Miller, who is the assistant secretary to the cabinet, social development policy.

[Translation]

The Privy Council Office plays a supporting role to the Department of Women and Gender Equality, which leads on the strategic direction of GBA+, as Ms. McRae has just explained.

The main roles of the Privy Council Office are to provide public service support to the Prime Minister, to ministers within the Prime Minister's portfolio, and to the cabinet to facilitate the smooth and effective operation of the government of Canada.

In the context of supporting cabinet, we provide advice to departments and agencies on policy proposals that their ministers recommend to cabinet.

In exercising our main roles, we are working to enhance the application of GBA+ to help produce better outcomes for Canadians.

[English]

The effort to strengthen the application of GBA+ has been undertaken in line with the recommendations in the 2022 report on the matter by the Office of the Auditor General. Our enhancement efforts are summarized in the joint WAGE, PCO and Treasury Board Secretariat management response action plan, MRAP.

For example, to enact the report's recommendations, PCO developed better tools and systems to document the challenge function.

The “challenge function” refers to the role PCO plays in advising and refining products for cabinet, including memoranda to cabinet, MCs. As described in the MRAP, PCO developed a new process for supporting the application of GBA+ in those MCs. The new process encourages the early integration of GBA+ into policy development, helping to counter long-standing concerns that GBA+ is applied too late in the policy process to be impactful.

[Translation]

PCO also developed new tools to guide the integration of GBA+ considerations and disaggregated data into cabinet memoranda. These tools have been finalized in line with set timelines and will be updated regularly to ensure continuous improvement.

Further, to advance the quality and use of disaggregated data in GBA+, PCO continues to co-chair with Statistics Canada a government-wide assistant deputy minister-level advisory committee on disaggregated data. This committee's role is to strengthen and support the use of disaggregated data across whole-of-government.

In addition, we are leveraging the central position of PCO to encourage the adoption of GBA+ frameworks by all federal departments.

• (1115)

[English]

PCO is leading by example. We will be publishing our own GBA+ framework later this month.

One of the key observations made by the Office of the Auditor General concerned the lack of formal coordination among WAGE, TBS and PCO. I am very pleased to report that significant progress has been made towards greater formalization of our existing collaboration and coordination roles on GBA+ among the three organizations. We've also developed a regularized approach to sharing information concerning the implementation of GBA+ in MCs with WAGE. We participate regularly in WAGE-led governance bodies in support of that GBA+ implementation and enhancement. In partnership with TBS and WAGE, we will continue to strengthen our information-sharing practices and systems.

[Translation]

Despite considerable progress, we recognize that further work remains. We are committed to ensuring the rigorous application of gender-based analysis plus in support of sound decision-making.

This concludes my presentation. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions the committee may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Flack from the Treasury Board Secretariat, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Graham Flack (Secretary of the Treasury Board of Canada, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank Mr. Hayes and his team for their work.

We agree with the Auditor General's recommendations, of course, and we are implementing them through a number of key measures, which I will discuss.

Earlier this fall, we shared our observations with WAGE, along with the Privy Council Office, on progress in integrating GBA+ into decision-making processes and areas for improvement. Although there had been exchanges between departments for a long time, that process made those exchanges more official, particularly by putting them in writing.

We indicated that more and more Treasury Board submissions are backing up their proposals with disaggregated data, but some still do not have a plan to track or mitigate the impact of GBA+. This information sharing will become an annual practice and will help identify systemic barriers to the achievement or quality of GBA+.

[English]

Disaggregated data is key to planning and understanding the impact of GBA+. This is why TBS continues to strengthen the tools and guidance to encourage the use of disaggregated data where feasible and appropriate.

For example, this past July, we published a privacy information notice to support departments as they plan their data collection for program monitoring, evaluation and reporting. This helps to address concerns that another officer of Parliament, the Privacy Commissioner, raises around the appropriate protection of privacy and information.

TBS will also continue to review and refine the guidance for departmental results reports to ensure that meaningful information is made available to decision-makers and the public.

In addition, TBS publishes best practices on GBA+ program impacts based on a review of the supplementary information tables in the departmental results report. We did this in 2021 and 2022, and next month we intend to publish an update that's significantly more comprehensive in terms of best practices. As part of this update, we will also be providing a new analysis on government-wide program impacts on gender and diversity, and we'll be building on this in further updates.

[Translation]

This will provide a baseline for other departments in terms of their reporting requirements as outlined in the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act, as well as hold the government accountable for the impacts of its programs.

The entire public service must ensure that GBA+ is an important consideration at all stages of the legislative, policy, and program process, not just an add-on.

Significant progress has been made through the use of GBA+. However, the capacity building required for data collection and analytical work is still ongoing and will take time.

● (1120)

[English]

I'd be pleased to answer any questions.

The Chair: Thank you all very much.

We'll begin our first round with Ms. Vecchio.

You have the floor for six minutes, please.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thanks so much for having me here today and bringing forward this report. I think it's very important that we look at it to see what has happened over the last eight years.

I would like to reflect on this because I've been part of the status of women committee, and I've had the chance to work with many of you. I know that we are trying to do good work at the status of women committee when we talk about GBA+.

In 2016 there was a requirement to "include gender-based analysis plus in Memoranda to Cabinet and Treasury Board submissions."

In 2018, status of women became a full department. In 2019, cabinet ministers were mandated "to consider gender-based analysis plus". It seems like we are telling people to do things, but we are finding that long-standing challenges that we previously identified continue to hinder the full implementation. Despite our previous work and recommendations, it's still unclear whether actions are achieving better gender equality, diversity and inclusion outcomes.

Carey, I want to ask you specifically about this because you've have a chance to go through all of this. Where did you find some of the greatest holes? Were they in departments?

Ms. Carey Agnew (Principal, Office of the Auditor General): There were areas or main themes that we found, and we reported on these.

One we talked about was capacity building, along with training and tools. Despite the work undertaken, there were still gaps, and more work needed to be done.

We've heard a lot today about the availability of disaggregated data, its collection and its use. We found that there was much more work to be done on that front.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you so much.

Perhaps I can go over to Frances because we talk about disaggregated data all the time. A lot of the policies we're implementing, whether you're living in rural Alberta.... We had a great conversation about that just yesterday, on carbon tax and the fact that policies do impact different people in different parts of the country, and recognizing those regional differences is really important.

Frances, can you share with me some of the challenges when you enter those departments to say, "We have great tools, so now start using them"?

Ms. Frances McRae: I'll just go back to the two points that Carey raised. One was on capacity.

We find that we are building quite strong capacity throughout the system. Our finding, though, is that it can't be just a small group of experts. I think, in the past, there was a view that if you had a few GBA experts in your organization, you could manage. I think, with the pace of government and business, there's been a strong recognition that we really need to have everyone who is doing policy and program work understand this, particularly, as I mentioned, given the changing nature of Canada.

With intersectionality, on the capacity piece, it's numbers, but I think it's really competency. It's that intersectional competency, which is another thing the Auditor General raised in her comments; we were not focusing enough on intersectionality.

On disaggregated data, I would commend to you Statistics Canada's work on this. Since the time of the audit, they have done tremendous work, and they have a public annual report that they published last year on disaggregated data.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Absolutely, and I know disaggregated data is really important, but I'm looking at it and, seeing that we just finished Bill C-22, the disability act, I'm wondering how there have been zero reviews. It says, "The Gender Results Framework lacked disaggregated data to monitor progress in advancing gender equality".

We've just passed a huge bill, yet there has been no framework for disability. I just sit there and think, "what a disconnect". These are things that are extremely important for those who are most vulnerable.

Switching over to the Privy Council, I think it's really important when we're looking at legislation and policies that there is a GBA put on this, specifically, when I'm looking at women's safety, and those are vulnerable populations.

Can you share me what is being done to ensure, when you're looking at pieces of legislation, especially in the public safety realm, that the GBA lens is being applied?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: I could not agree with you more. That's exactly what our team does here at PCO, both in social development policy and in legislation and House planning. We have a GBA+ focal point here, but we also start early with the department. If a mandate letter commitment comes forward or a bill is moving through,

we look at how we can immediately get involved, from day one, with our GBA+ focal point, and work with WAGE and with others to inform that from the get-go.

• (1125)

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's fantastic.

As we're looking at this, as a person who works on women and gender equality, we are seeing extraordinary violence in our communities. Whether it's intimate partner violence or domestic violence—we're looking at that—or whether it's random acts of violence that are happening to vulnerable populations, we're continuing to see those escalate.

Can you share with me whether GBA+ has been done on important pieces of legislation, such as Bill C-75, which was in the 42nd Parliament, or on something like our bail reform? Has a GBA lens actually been put on those?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: I would have to confirm on specific pieces of legislation, but I can tell you for certain that when it comes forward, from when we do that analysis here, we absolutely.... Otherwise, it will be sent back to the department if it's without a GBA+. It's a mandatory element.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I'm sorry, but we're seeing pieces of legislation that are passing and that are making women unsafe. How are those passing through when we know, at the end of the day, it is actually having a negative impact? How is the GBA+ failing safety for women?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: It's an excellent question, and I'm not trying to be evasive because it depends on the origin of the bills as well, where they're developed and how the process works itself through. Truly, when we see proposals from departments, if they are not adequate in that space.... Frances and I worked together, also, on gender-based violence in addition to GBA+. It is one of our proposals, the Mass Casualty Commission response, and that work is under way. That is absolutely the thrust that's being brought. Intersectionality is key to that, because it's, as you say, not only the question of violence in and of itself but also the question of collocation, rurality, access to resources, local policing, etc. Those all feed into that part and parcel.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Yip, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Jean Yip (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Thank you for coming. It's so nice to see so many witnesses for this important report.

I'll begin with Ms. McRae.

For the benefit of Canadians watching this, can you explain what GBA+ is and why it's important?

Ms. Frances McRae: I'd be pleased to explain GBA+.

Gender-based analysis plus is an important tool for us to be advancing equality in Canada. Some of you will be aware that we started with the term GBA, and the plus was added over the years. That was partly because what we're actually asking people to do on gender-based analysis is think about a whole range of issues; it's not only gender.

The concept has evolved quite a bit over the years to encompass an assessment of the various factors that we need to consider in order to design policies, programs and legislation—any initiatives—that reflect the lived experiences and the real lives of Canadians.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Mr. Flack, who is responsible for monitoring and reporting GBA+ implementation in a department's operations?

Mr. Graham Flack: Departments are ultimately responsible for that, but we provide them with guidance on how to do that, and we have updated the guidance over time in response to what we found in terms of weaknesses. Ultimately, it's departments that will do the reporting, though it's within a frame that we provide to them.

Ms. Jean Yip: Can you provide some examples of the kind of guidance you've just mentioned?

Mr. Graham Flack: Sure. We're fortunate to have Annie here, who actually manages the team that does this, so she can give you the real-world application of it.

Ms. Annie Boudreau (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you very much. It's a very important question.

We provide guidance to departments and agencies on a regular basis. We issue guidance on what we call the departmental plans, DP, as well as departmental results reports. They have to provide those every year. In between, we also meet with all people involved in that process to make sure that they understand the requirements that we have.

Since 2017, we have included in those two documents specificities surrounding GBA+. This has been sent for six years. It is very important, so they understand what is included. Again, we meet with them all the time and they have the chance to come back to us with questions and exchanges. It's a large community, and we are all learning from each other.

Those are really the two main pieces of guidance that we have. All of that is accessible to all departments and agencies.

• (1130)

Ms. Jean Yip: Do you have an action plan for the guidance you're giving out?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: The guidance is an evergreen document. It changes every year. Every time we learn something new from PCO or something new from WAGE, we integrate all of that in the guidance. It is a document that is evolving all the time. As I was saying, since 2017, we have had specificities in the GBA+.

As well, we're going to be issuing before the end of the calendar year a report that will highlight best practices that we have seen in departmental results reports—the supplementary information table, SIT—with all the good examples of GBA+. We're going to be showcasing those examples of GBA+ to make sure that everybody

is aware of what people are doing out there, and we can always have exchanges among ourselves.

Ms. Jean Yip: It's great that you're able to give examples and a chart that will showcase those, but how can we ensure that this continues?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: I really like that question, because my group is in charge of reviewing and challenging Treasury Board submissions. We review roughly 15 Treasury Board submissions every week, so every week there is interaction with departments and organizations to discuss what is missing in their plans, whether it is data collection, results or outcomes-based information.

We have the privilege at Treasury Board of being able to work with all of them and, again, to be able to make sure that with Treasury Board submissions—implementation plans and the policy on results—we have something concrete to show Canadians.

Ms. Jean Yip: That's good to hear.

This is all part of your response to the Auditor General's recommendations. Is that right?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: Yes, that is correct.

Ms. Jean Yip: Thank you.

Ms. McRae, can you detail changes in the uptake of GBA+ by federal public servants?

Ms. Frances McRae: Maybe just before I talk about some numbers around uptake, I'd like to talk about a couple of very specific examples that you asked about, around whether we are seeing intersectionality being incorporated.

MP Vecchio mentioned, for example, rurality. What we're working on to incorporate rural voices in the federal government is a collaboration with the centre for rural economic development. We're trying to ensure that our advisers who are living and working in communities are gathering local data, evidence, lived experience, to bring back into the federal public service to ensure that rurality is being considered.

We've had tremendous uptake in our training. We mentioned the GBA awareness week, where we had over 2,000 public servants online. We have well over I think 250,000 to 300,000 public servants, parliamentarians and ministers' staff who have been trained on GBA+ courses that we work with the Canada School of Public Service to deliver. We've prepared a range of new products for folks on intersectionality. We did some work with people around COVID to make sure that the programs that were being developed during COVID were also applying a GBA+ lens.

We are seeing tremendous interest all across the system in our work. We have no shortage of folks who are either referred to us from Treasury Board and the Privy Council Office or who come to us for advice and assistance in terms of building their knowledge base.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné now has the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné (Terrebonne, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to all the witnesses for joining us today.

To the representatives from the Office of the Auditor General, thank you for conducting several audits on this subject. If I'm not mistaken, the 2022 audit is the third, coming after the 2009 audit and the 2015 audit. Gender equality is obviously a very important topic. This is about what the government can do to address the gaps that exist, whether we like it or not, in society.

In your last report, Mr. Hayes, you indicated that the audit identified significant gaps in several departments, particularly in the data they collect to track efforts and improve.

The audit report deals with another element that I would like to ask you to clarify. If I understand correctly, you revealed that some departments were not sufficiently focused on results and on improving gender equality within their organization and, by extension, throughout society.

In your opinion, what are the causes of these problems?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that one of the primary causes is the underuse of disaggregated data. In many cases, this data exists, but it is not sufficiently used in the analyses that are so important in developing and implementing measures and policies.

We also noted in our report the importance of training. Intentional actions would be one way in which several problems could be resolved.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Had these problems already been raised during your previous audit, the one done in 2015?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Yes. When we look at the findings of this audit in light of the two previous reports, we see that some gaps are similar and persistent. I would add that the audit report tabled by the Auditor General a month ago also cites examples of the consequences of these shortcomings.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: I will come back to the consequences later.

First, I would like to know why, in your opinion, the issue of including disaggregated data has not been resolved in eight years. What's going on in the departments?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'm not sure what the reason is.

Based on our observation of the situation, the information should be included in the analyses so that the people who have to make decisions have the best information possible to do so.

I don't know why the situation is the way it is. Perhaps Ms. Agnew has an answer to that question.

Ms. Carey Agnew: I would add that, seven years later, there are still departments and agencies that have not implemented a GBA+ framework. It consists of six essential elements—

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can you name those departments, please?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: Can you repeat the question?

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can you name the departments that have not yet implemented a GBA+ framework after all these years?

Ms. Carey Agnew: Yes. There was a survey, which was forwarded to us by WAGE.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

Can you name the departments that have not yet implemented a GBA+ framework? You just said that a number of departments have not yet done so.

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I think that's something that WAGE could give you more information on.

I would say that, in general, given all the findings listed in our report, departments can still improve their process regarding the preparation and use of GBA+.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Okay.

Let's go back to the main issue, which is disaggregated data. We know that a number of departments have not implemented practical solutions.

First, what practical solutions could the departments have implemented? Second, how long should it have taken? Finally, why didn't they do it?

Can you give us a quick answer to those questions?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I think it has to do with action plans. WAGE plays a supporting role with departments by conducting these analyses.

• (1140)

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: So the Department for Women and Gender Equality is there to support the other departments.

Should I infer from that that the department has not done enough to support the others?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that it is also a question of skills within the departments. That's one of the reasons we raised the need for training.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: What do you mean by "skills"?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: As the deputy minister said, there are a few experts within the departments, but possibly not enough. We need other qualified people to work on GBA+.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Can the Department for Women and Gender Equality not train people from the other departments and make sure that the other departments have the necessary skills to implement the GBA+ framework?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I think that question is one for the deputy minister.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: So what do you think, Ms. McRae?

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

We talked earlier about the training we provide. In that regard, we work very closely with the Canada School of Public Service. As you know, some departments are very large and have offices across the country. At the Department for Women and Gender Equality, we play a role in building their capacity.

I will ask Ms. Leïla Boussaïd to give you specific data on training.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné allocated time does not allow for another answer. However, it is quite likely that we will be asking you to provide us with those details in a few minutes.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor for six minutes, please

Mr. Blake Desjarlais (Edmonton Griesbach, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. I understand how difficult this work is.

It's not every day at this committee that we have the opportunity to talk about very broad applicable policies. From Canada's own perspective, this is really important, considering our own history, the state that Canada is in, and the fact that we're still trying to create a democracy that includes everyone, that creates systems that include everyone and that has policies that include everyone.

It's an immensely difficult and challenging job. It's one that I want to thank you for, given the fact that we're in the circumstances of auditing this work. Of course, we're talking a lot about the deficiencies of that work today, but there are leaps and bounds that have been made for Canadians, for generations, towards this better understanding. You are following in the footsteps of that work, so thank you for that. Thank you for your service in making sure today's audit and today's findings are possible.

It's a really important question when we ask ourselves about GBA+. For many Canadians, when they are faced with this question, there's sometimes a response that is echoed, why is it important? It's important, because we have to find ways to demonstrate to Canadians that it's a matter of inclusivity. It's a matter of how one spends taxpayers' dollars, who's included in those expenditures, and who is ultimately included in the benefit that a program, particularly a national public service program, ought to entitle people.

It's an incredibly important question, particularly to members of Parliament who are sitting around the room, as well. I'm sitting across from many parties, including the House of Commons and legislatures across the country, because it also means that if people

don't feel included in the expenditures on policy, why would they want to vote? This is a tangible issue directly related to apathy in our country, democracy in our country and whether or not these folks will ever feel included.

I'll share a personal story for a quick moment. My mom was born at a time when indigenous people could not vote. She was born not seeing anyone vote in her lifetime. Her grandparents weren't allowed to vote. The Gradual Enfranchisement Act in Canada had not yet passed. Indigenous people were the last people in our country who got the right to vote. That was in 1960.

It's unquestionable to think that a democracy would do something like that, to exclude such a voice, the founding voice of our country, for so many years. However, those are the consequences of not ensuring GBA+ analysis in our policies. It's a devastating outcome that still has impacts related to apathy and trust. It still has impacts related to people's ability to see Canada as a good, welcoming and diverse place for many people.

I want to ground my questions on that real-life experience, because it's something that we're still feeling, and something that community members across the country, right across the GBA+ analysis, are still continuing to deal with. It breaks those people's hearts, and my heart, as well, to know that this audit has demonstrated, in many ways, that continued pattern of what I would perceive as, perhaps, the neglect of some of these issues.

It could be because of capacity. It could be for various kinds of reasons. That's what I'm here to find out. Why is it that, for example, the three organizations here that responded to the Office of the Auditor General's recommendations responded to the recommendations by "continuing to" undertake the actions recommended? It implies that in the prior audit, you were continuing to do those actions at that time. However, they don't necessarily seem to have been proven in this audit.

I suppose my question is direct. I'd like to know—and a response from all three departments would be helpful—do you not fully agree with the Office of the Auditor General's findings?

● (1145)

Ms. Frances McRae: We do, in fact, agree with the Auditor General's findings.

I would talk a bit about the evolution of GBA+. It is not something that is static. We need to continue to evolve our approaches to GBA+. I think what you would have seen—and certainly we could table with the committee the report of the Auditor General—is a timeline there that demonstrates concerted actions over a 30-year period.

I want to comment on the question of Canada's leadership here, though. I was looking back at the OECD report that Canada asked to have prepared on our work with GBA. I would like to refer to the news release that the OECD issued at the end of the report that was completed in 2018.

The first line states:

Canada has made significant progress on gender equality in the last few years, developing institutions, policies, tools and accountability structures that position it as a leader in an area increasingly seen as a cornerstone of inclusive growth, according to a new OECD Review.

I really do believe we are continuing to improve. It is becoming better. You are seeing the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act, which required quite a lot of rigour.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I'm sorry, but I have to interrupt because of timing.

I appreciate your comments, but I want to be able to give time for the other witnesses to respond to the question of whether or not they agree with the OAG's findings.

I want to preface my question, not with the fact that you're not doing good work—to the previous speaker, I understand that—but today's meeting is to ensure that the MPs understand the deficiencies—

The Chair: Mr. Desjarlais, I'm going to cut you off so we can hear from the other witnesses briefly. The time has expired.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: I think it was an important point.

The Chair: I want to hear the answers from Treasury as well as PCO.

Go ahead, please.

Mr. Graham Flack: I'll give a specific example to show how we agree and how that's consistent with continuing to...and it's around disaggregated data.

At the time of the first report, there was some disaggregated data, but major investments had not been made in many areas. They are needed to do additional linking of data, for example, to StatsCan databases on individual programs. Progress has been made on that.

When we say “continue to”, as Frances indicated, Statistics Canada has made some major investments to upgrade the capability of departments to interact with their site. We are not yet at a point where 100% of programs all have disaggregated data. There are reasons for why it's going to be challenging to get there. They include privacy concerns—

The Chair: I'm going to cut you off there. I'm sure someone will come back to that.

I'll go to the PCO, please, if you would like to respond to Mr. Desjarlais briefly. Thank you.

Ms. Kaili Levesque: In short, yes, I agree, but also, the work continues specifically on the application of rigour—the development. When I say “continue to”, it is about continuing the rigorous evolution, and it is also about the reflection, as Frances said, of the changing population of Canada.

I'll leave it there for now.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're beginning our second round now.

We're going to go to Ms. Vecchio.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I would like to give my time to Kelly.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): That's wonderful. Thanks.

Thanks, everyone.

Mr. Hayes, do you feel the government has been successful in this process, considering that we look at 2015 and the other reports and here it is eight years later?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that the government has made some steps since our 2016 report. I can point to the fact that gender-based analysis plus is a requirement for MCs and TBS subs, but I would say—

• (1150)

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I'm going to interrupt you.

You said it's a requirement, but it doesn't seem to be a requirement that the government is following. That's why I want to ask whether you believe it's successful. If we have a requirement, are these requirements being followed?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I would say that the analyses are being done. The question about how strong the analyses are is an open question. What is important is that ministers, decision-makers, get the best information possible to weigh the intersectionality factors that should be at play in their decisions.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Do you think they are?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: We identified opportunities for improvement in our audit that we delivered about a month ago on inclusivity in the public service, particularly with data.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: The short answer is no, then.

Ms. Boudreau, I will ask you the same question.

Do you believe that the results framework is being successfully followed? Who ultimately is responsible? I think they're saying that if everyone is responsible, no one is responsible. It sounds like Treasury Board, like everything else, sets framework and then walks away and it's not being followed. Treasury Board is saying, “Well, it's the departments.”

Who should be accountable for this? Not everyone can be accountable. Someone has to be in charge to follow up that this is happening.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: You are completely right. We have a challenge function at Treasury Board, and we do so in Treasury Board's submissions, as an example.

To go back to your question, we do a lot of back and forth with departments and agencies when we are not comfortable with what we are receiving in terms of implementation.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: For eight years, then, the framework hasn't been properly implemented.

What's the back-and-forth from Treasury Board for eight years? I can see a new program rolling out and it takes a little while, but we're eight years in now.

Ms. Annie Boudreau: The framework is evolving and we have programs that are becoming more and more complicated. We don't have a solution that fits all, so we really need to work in collaboration with departments to make sure we are doing the right analysis at the right level.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I want to follow up on an important question that Ms. Vecchio had. It was overlooked in the report, I believe. It's how we look at legislation through a GBA+ lens in relation to vulnerable people.

I want to bring up a hurtful issue that happened in Edmonton. It was in April. A mother and her child were murdered by someone while he was released on bail after assaulting someone else, while released on bail for assaulting a child, while out on bail for stabbing someone at a bus stop.

Would Bill C-75 have gone through a GBA+ analysis?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: It would have absolutely gone through—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Would you provide the committee with that analysis, please?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: That would be part of a memorandum to cabinet, so those are considered in our cabinet confidence, sir.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: How are parliamentarians expected to judge the effectiveness? That's not your fault, obviously.

A mother and her child were brutally murdered. This guy just drove up, stabbed them to death, got in a car and drove away after being released half a dozen times on similar assaults, and we're being told it's cabinet confidence.

Ms. Kaili Levesque: Absolutely. Not to conflate the heartbreaking tragedy that you mentioned, sir—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: No, I know. Here is an extreme example, but it's a real one from my community and we're not able to provide oversight on whether GBA was done.

Ms. Kaili Levesque: An important part of the committee process, as legislation moves through the House, is the gender-based considerations of legislation as it goes forward. We do the—

Mr. Kelly McCauley: I don't think that's committee's responsibility.

The Chair: Mr. McCauley, the time is up.

I'm going to exercise my chair's prerogative. I am concerned about this. I want to ask a question.

Is there a GBA+ review of legislation or is it done only at the cabinet level?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: A GBA+ is done on every MC that goes forward, so that would include the government response to private members' bills as well.

The Chair: That's at the cabinet level.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Khalid, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

• (1155)

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thanks very much, Chair.

I want to follow up on a number of the points that Mr. McCauley made.

I know that Bill C-75 had a reverse onus on intimate partner violence. To me, that's a result of a gender-based analysis plus application of how legislation is impacted.

I want to talk a little bit about data and how that impacts different departments and their GBA lens.

First and foremost, perhaps Mr. Hayes would be the best to answer this question.

Is the same analysis applied across all departments?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I'm sorry. I might suggest that some of the other witnesses add to this answer.

A form is provided as a guidance tool, but it's for each department to analyze how its programs, policies and actions are going to be engaging with the intersectional characteristics that are at play in a GBA+.

I wouldn't say one size fits all, but perhaps some of my colleagues might want to answer or add.

Mr. Graham Flack: I'm happy to jump in and follow up.

I have run three big departments before Treasury Board. There's huge diversity in the programs and actions they're taking.

Treasury Board, for example, would see a cement procurement. The data analysis and GBA+ done around a procurement like that is going to be completely different in its intensity and nature than, for example, the launch of a major new social program.

Data is critical to all of those, but with the data, I have found across departments that there's no one size fits all to these things. In many cases, you don't have data to start with. You have to devote resources to collecting it. Important investments have been made on that front to do that, but it's not that you can do it with just one spend. You have to customize it to each program to figure out what the data is. In some programs you may want to focus particularly on some aspects of the GBA+ where you know that it's much more important for the program.

When you ask if we can collect the data, another huge barrier historically has been privacy. I remember the time when parliamentarians criticized ESDC for creating what was then called a “big brother” database to try to link datasets—even though it was anonymized—to attempt to get better disaggregated data. That's why we have issued the guidance on how people can act in the privacy space.

Lastly, there may be cases where the communities and the GBA+ sectors themselves would be quite uncomfortable with us collecting the data. I will give a concrete example for you.

Parks Canada has a reservation service to reserve a park site. From a disaggregated data perspective, it would probably be very useful for us to know the racialized status and the sexual orientation of each individual who's applying, to understand if the service is being experienced the same by everyone. You can imagine that some of those communities might object to the notion that in order to reserve a park site, they have to provide all that information.

Those would be cases where it's actually not appropriate, at the end of the day, to collect the data. That will create some data gaps.

I think part of the challenge in the progress is that it has to be done on a program-by-program level in a quite customized way to be consistent. That's what has taken a lot of time.

That's why, as Andrew said, it's not a one-size-fits-all thing.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Exactly. I appreciate your highlighting that. I use the Public Health Agency of Canada as another example to show that women's health is very different from cisgender white men's health, potentially.

How do you overcome those challenges? Obviously, the better the data you have, the better the policy government can make. What are some of these challenges? I know you highlighted a few of them. What are some of those solutions, as well?

Mr. Andrew Hayes: I will start by saying that data is one of the major components we look at in almost every audit, because we hope we'll be able to provide some value-added to the departments and agencies as they conceive their programs. Quite frankly, if you're thinking about the data you will need to report and to serve Canadians, it will help you to customize the collection mechanism at the beginning. It drives the way you're thinking about your policy development.

I know Mr. Flack has a ton of experience doing exactly this.

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Would you like to comment?

Mr. Graham Flack: I'll give you an example from an audit from the previous auditor general.

It was around an indigenous skills training program, where the programming was provided to indigenous communities. The question was, what happened to the people five years later? We didn't have data on that, because the communities themselves were not able, necessarily, to track those individuals, as they had left the community. The solution was a highly complex, anonymized use of tax data linked to individuals in a very delicate transaction, in order to maintain privacy. That allowed us, at an aggregate level, to track those individuals and the results over five years. It was not a

straightforward process. We had to comply with the Income Tax Act.

That's an example of a specific program where you can't just ask the community to collect the data, because, if the individuals have moved, they won't be able to. I find we have to do it at this transaction-by-transaction level, which is why Andy's team is always pushing departments on how they can improve each one. I understand why it takes time.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sinclair-Desgagné, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Could you briefly explain why, in eight years, we have not managed to put a plan in place? I'm actually being generous when I say eight years, because it's been almost 30 years since the government committed to using GBA+. Obviously, things have changed since then.

We heard your previous answers, but I would like to know why, several years later, we still haven't managed to implement this in all the departments.

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

First of all, I would say that there are a number of things that need to be done. There is no single solution to this challenge. One of the things the Auditor General mentioned in her previous report was capacity, skills, intersectionality, and disaggregated data, which we've talked a lot about.

There have been plans to address those gaps. I will stress, however, that the problem continues to evolve. Even according to the United Nations, intersectionality is certainly not a solution that can last for many years. It's always evolving.

The plans that have been put in place over the years have addressed the deficiencies to a certain extent. However, other gaps continue to be identified based on the current situation.

Ms. Nathalie Sinclair-Desgagné: Many of you already know that I am an economist who specializes in incorporating environmental and social issues into economic analysis. I'll give you an example. The European Union, which is a much more complex structure than Canada, has been able to develop, in order to conduct cost-benefit analyses of all public policies, a methodology that provides weighted measures of various scenarios for infrastructure projects. This methodology is used for all projects in a country when it applies for subsidies to the European Commission.

How is it that the European Union is able to put this in place in about five years, when Canada is lagging on things that should have been put in place and that are, let's be frank, simpler?

The Chair: I would ask you to be brief, please.

Ms. Frances McRae: We're learning a lot from the European Union. It certainly sets a very high standard.

That said, as the OECD has stated, Canada continues to make progress in this area. We are indeed one of the leaders in the world.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[English]

Mr. Desjarlais, you have the floor again, for two and a half minutes, please.

Mr. Blake Desjarlais: Thank you so much.

I'll ask my last question in relation to what I previously spoke about, which was the Office of the Auditor General's recommendations to each of you. On those recommendations, in many cases you replied to those recommendations with "continue to". I'm trying to get to the intersection, I guess you can say, between understanding our function, which is accountability and understanding where those deficiencies lie, and ensuring that those things are properly addressed.

I can't tell for certain if replying to the recommendations under "continuing to" is in fact doing that, so I'd like to know specifically if you are already doing those actions that the Auditor General had outlined, which you said you would continue to do and that you're already doing. Why did the Office of the Auditor General find the deficiencies that were outlined in the audit?

Maybe we'll spend 20 seconds each in your responses to that.

• (1205)

Ms. Frances McRae: I can start with that, if you'd like.

From the perspective of Women and Gender Equality Canada, we are on track with our actions with respect to the audit. We don't dispute that we have more work to do, and we certainly have undertaken new initiatives as a result of the audit that are outlined in our action plan.

Mr. Graham Flack: I'll go back to the disaggregated data example. There has been progress. There has been progress even since the Auditor General's report, and we recognize that they're right and that there needs to be more.

We've taken concrete steps, for example, with the privacy notice to help move this forward, but it's going to take considerable time to get all programs through that process. "Continue to" is that

there's been action in this area, but we accept the Auditor General's view that there's a journey that needs to continue to get to where we want to get.

Ms. Kaili Levesque: I mentioned continuing the deepening of rigour, and that's something that I wanted to come back to. It's really about the maturity of the process in and of itself and that deepening of rigour.

It's specifically further documenting how we do deep dives with Women and Gender Equality on individual feedback that is provided around specific policy proposals and the types of analyses that underpin that. It's also building up the disaggregated data capacity of the programs and policies that are under consideration, especially if it's a brand new one versus an existing one that has a significant database on which to draw.

Finally, I just think it's that continuous improvement that we bring forward.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Vecchio, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: Thank you very much.

I really want to go back to the GBA+ and how it is being applied to legislation because, to me, when we're seeing the outcomes, I'm really concerned about the failures that we may be leading into.

I want to go back to you, Ms. Levesque. You talked about these being cabinet memorandums. With anything that has a GBA+, all of this is done, and it's confidentially owned by cabinet at this time. As legislators, we are trying to make the best decisions, but there's a small group that seems to have all of the knowledge.

Would it not be beneficial to us, as legislators, to know the ins and outs and the quirks that may be occurring in legislation, rather than just keeping it to a small group?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: With regard to the specifics around GBA+, we do our challenge function and it goes back to the sponsoring minister in each individual department as the legislation advances. The minister then brings that proposal forward to all of cabinet to consider, so that once it goes through, that is ultimately the purview of cabinet.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I fully respect that, but, as legislators, how can we make laws when we don't have all of the information? How can we debate things if the knowledge is not provided to us but is kept in cabinet?

I note here, under the Privy Council and the Treasury Board of Canada, that under section 5 of the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act, there's supposed to be a report done annually. Now, in this report, I see some of it, but it seems rather high level. Do you get into the quirks of this, things that are not working when you're doing an analysis, or is it just providing information and not the solutions? Can you provide me some information on that?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: You are correct. We have already published two reports, and the third one will be published before the end of this calendar year. That report will be way more comprehensive because we have seen progress lately by departments in terms of data collection and capacity. We want to report on what we have seen—best practices—and we also know that there are still things to improve. We want to make sure that the document that you're going to find on the website will include those two components.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I really appreciate this. As I've gone through here, I've seen some examples, but are there departments that we do not have examples for because we have not done a GBA+ on this when it comes to either the Treasury Board or making some legislation?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: GBA+ is mandatory for all Treasury Board submissions, depending on the program.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: So, “mandatory”.... Is it a check box, or is it actually very fulfilling? That's one of the biggest things. I have a lot of checklists at home, and I know when to buy my flour and milk. Is GBA+ just a check mark? How in-depth is it on the analysis?

• (1210)

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It is a big annex that departments need to look at with the perspective of outcome-based results. It's also part of the policy on results.

If it is a new program, obviously the analysis will be very strong and detailed. If it is a renewal of a program, the analysis will be less detailed.

It is not a check box. It needs to be done.

What I would like to say, as well, is that, sometimes, if we are not comfortable with what has been brought forward, we put conditions on the departments to come back to Treasury Board in six months or a year with more robust information.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: That's perfect.

I want to put back on my hat as shadow minister for women and gender equality, specifically because of the violence that's going on right now. One of the biggest issues that we're having is with regard to the violence against women that continues to be heightened. What sorts of things is this government doing when it comes to a GBA+? I'm looking at the legislation that does not match the actions, whether it is the justice system and the bail reform—that has been a bust when it comes to allowing perpetrators back on the streets—or just looking at the whole thing. Can you share with me what the government has done, when it comes to justice and bail reform, to ensure that women are safe?

Ms. Kaili Levesque: It's truly directed to the memorandum to cabinet as they come forward and within the legislative framework as it is tabled.

To answer your question about the committee stage, I will say that amendments are proposed that go beyond the scope. It actually then would have to come back to cabinet for a follow-on conversation and analysis that would underpin that as well.

Mrs. Karen Vecchio: I appreciate that, but I can tell you that some of the legislation that has been passed by this government failed. Bill C-75, just as Mr. McCauley shared with us.... We are seeing perpetrators being released all the time. Share with me how that is safe for a child or person who is a victim of crime? I'm just wondering if it's being taken seriously enough.

I'm looking at Frances, and I know that she takes her job very seriously and does a great job. I'm concerned about the other departments, whether it's making sure that we're procuring things that women can wear when on the battlefield or making sure that the CERB program is equal for everybody across the country. As I said, the carbon tax was a good example.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Vecchio. I appreciate that. I'm going to consider that last question rhetorical.

We'll turn now to Ms. Bradford.

You have the floor for five minutes, please.

Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

With the Treasury Board Secretariat, the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act makes it mandatory that certain data in relation to GBA+ implementation is made public. Can you explain the importance of making the information public?

Ms. Annie Boudreau: It's all about sharing information. We want to make sure that best practices are being shared so that departments having problems with capacity or with data collection can learn from best practices that we are putting out there. It's not only putting information out there but also having meetings with people involved in that domain to make sure that they do understand and do exchange.

We have that all the time to make sure that information is provided, to understand the information that is being put out there, and so that we can have an informed discussion amongst ourselves because the goal is always to be able to produce more robust GBA+ analyses.

As I was saying a few minutes ago, we have already published two reports, and before the end of this calendar year, we're going to be in a position to publish the third one. The third one will be more comprehensive with more examples because we have seen improvements in the system.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: That's good to know.

Ms. McRae, why is GBA+ best applied at the departmental level, rather than through the methods of parliamentary review suggested by bills such as Bill S-218?

Ms. Frances McRae: In terms of the application of GBA+, I think Graham talked about a couple of examples of when it is very important to have the experts within the policy area in government—those who are designing and developing the initiatives—get into the question of who they're designing for, as well as issues of access to various government programs, services and legislation that may apply to them. You will know, if you've seen the report of the standing Senate committee, that they heard from experts who asked the question, “Why wouldn't you just have a few people do this across government?”

The experts and academics in the field are very clear that you need the experts to be where they are. They understand how to apply analysis to the initiatives for which they are the top advisers.

• (1215)

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you.

Mr. Flack, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that capacity building for data collection is ongoing and continues to be a challenge. I wasn't sure whether that was due to staffing issues.

Can you address that? When will it be up to speed? We heard how it's so critical to have disaggregated data available.

Mr. Graham Flack: Yes.

As I indicated in previous answers, you have to look at this on a program-by-program basis, because the data is often unique to the individual program you're looking at, in terms of the results. You can't go with some generalized data collection that isn't necessarily going to get the information you need for all the individual programs. You need a strategy for each program. That will often involve investments for the program.

One of the critical limiters has been the ability to link it to broader Statistics Canada data, so you can understand its linkages to the broader population. As Frances indicated, Statistics Canada has taken a real step forward with some major investments to allow that to happen.

There's been very steady progress on disaggregated data, but, as the Auditor General's office indicated, we aren't at the end state on this. There's still much progress that needs to come. Again, as somebody who's managed programs in departments, I know there have been some systemic barriers to this beyond the resource one I raised.

Privacy is one. Your counsel will come to you and tell you the collection of that data would be a breach of people's privacy. That's why we issued the guidance to help guide departments through that thicket.

I would say another one, as I indicated in a previous answer, is checking with the communities themselves about whether they're comfortable with the collection of the data. In some cases, they won't be. In some cases, the right answer is to not collect the data—even though it will limit our full understanding of the implications of the program—because individuals feel there would be an undue government interest in specific characteristics they have, which they don't want when they interact with the program.

Those are some of the barriers. I'd say it improves every year, but we are not, in my view, going to get to an end state where every single program has fully robust, disaggregated data. There are going to be some areas where, for that third reason I mentioned, we may not be able to get the disaggregated data.

Ms. Valerie Bradford: Thank you.

Ms. McRae, why is it important for GBA+ to be used as a policy tool for the public service?

Ms. Frances McRae: I'm really glad we're going back to the purpose of GBA+. GBA+ is a tool, as I said earlier, to improve our understanding and our ability to tailor programs and services to the needs of Canadians and the people we serve.

With the diversity of this country changing all the time, and the needs changing all the time, we do have to continue to evolve our work. If we are not designing for Canadians of today and tomorrow, really, who are we designing for? We need to understand not just the rudimentariness between, say, women and men. We need to understand what is going on with various groups of women who have other factors that affect how they experience the world and systems around them.

I do want to focus a bit on the systems. Intersectionality is often defined as a number of different identities that come together. I think one of the things we need to be careful about is ensuring that we are also looking at structures, institutions and systems that people interact with. The example that Graham mentioned, of 2SLGBTQI people perhaps not wanting data collection in certain areas, is a good example: Why is that? They may have worries of other things that they've experienced from various systems that actually create their experience of working with government.

I think it's really important that we focus not just on identity but also on the depth of the systems, institutions and structures that people interact with, and how that may be quite different from one subset of a group to another.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

I want to thank all the witnesses for coming in today. I appreciate it. We went a little over our time, but I wanted to make sure we had a thorough discussion.

I will now excuse the witnesses.

For others in the room, we will be suspending the meeting to go in camera. If you have no business before the committee in our next session, then I'd ask you to excuse yourself as well.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>