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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good morning, colleagues. We're going to start our session today as we continue with the study on economic security of women in Canada.

Today, for our first panel, we have two guests with us, both by video conference.

We have, from the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Ruth Halperin-Kaddari.

From the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, we have Beba Svigir.

Ruth, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Professor Ruth Halperin-Kaddari (Vice-Chair, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women): Thank you very much. I am very happy and grateful for having the opportunity to address you on behalf of CEDAW. I am Professor Ruth Halperin-Kaddari. I'm vice-president of CEDAW, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. I participated in the most recent review of Canada by the committee.

The committee is the body of independent experts who monitor the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. CEDAW consists of 23 experts on women's rights who are elected for a term of four years by states parties among their nationals and who serve in their personal capacity, consideration being given to equitable geographical distribution and to the representation of the different forms of civilization, as well as the principal legal systems.

Countries that have become party to the treaty are obliged to submit periodic reports to the committee on measures taken to ensure that the rights of the convention are implemented. During each of our sessions, the committee considers each of the state party's reports and addresses its concerns and recommendations to the state party in the form of concluding observations.

In accordance with the optional protocol to the convention, the committee is also mandated to receive communications from individuals, or groups of individuals, submitting claims of violations of rights protected under the convention and also to initiate inquiries into situations of grave or systematic violations of women's rights. These procedures are optional and are only available when the state concerned has accepted them by ratifying the said optional protocol.

As you know, Canada had indeed ratified the optional protocol and CEDAW has conducted an inquiry into the missing and murdered indigenous women in Canada. We issued our report in 2015.

During its 65th session, which took place in November of last year, the committee considered the eighth and ninth periodic reports of Canada and raised a number of concerns during the dialogue with the Canadian delegation, which are directly related to the work of your standing committee and its study on women's economic security. I want to emphasize that the dialogue, the concerns we raised, and the concluding observations, are all based on information the committee received, both from the formal delegation, the formal state's report, and the replies to the list of issues and questions, as well as on information received from civil society and international NGOs.

With respect to the economic empowerment of women, the committee noted the development of a national poverty reduction strategy and a national housing strategy. Nevertheless, we expressed our concern about the fact that women continue to experience significant levels of poverty, homelessness, and hunger in Canada, especially when it relates to indigenous women, Afro-Canadian women, women of immigrant origin, women with disabilities, older women, and single mothers. We also expressed concern about the current severe housing shortage, in particular within indigenous communities, and the high cost of rent and the impact thereof on women, especially low-income women with families.

Regarding the issue of employment, we expressed our concern about persistent gender wage gaps in both the public and private sectors which adversely affect women's career development and pension benefits, as well as the lack of effective legislation on the principle of equal pay for work of equal value at the federal level, even in the public sector, given that the Public Sector Equitable Compensation Act of 2009 has delivered practically no results, and the lack of such legislation in the private sector in most provinces and territories, as repeatedly noted by the International Labour Organization.

We were also concerned about the continuing horizontal and vertical occupational segregation and the concentration of women in part-time and low-paying jobs, which is often due to their parallel traditional child raising and caretaking responsibilities, as well as the low number of child care facilities and the low usage of parental leave by fathers.

•(1105)

Also, we were concerned by the limited access of indigenous, Afro-Canadian, migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking women as well as women with disabilities to the labour market, and the practice of issuing employer-specific closed work permits, which makes it challenging for migrant workers, including caregivers, to leave abusive employment situations.

We also addressed the root causes of violence and discrimination against indigenous women. We expressed concern about the fact that indigenous women continue to suffer from multiple forms of discrimination, in particular with regard to their access to employment, housing, education, and health care, and continue to live in poverty in Canada as reflected by very high poverty rates, poor health, inadequate housing, lack of access to safe water, and low school completion rates. We further noted with concern the low participation of indigenous women in the labour market, in particular in senior or decision-making positions, as well as their disproportionately high unemployment rates, and their lower pay compared with that of men and non-indigenous women. There is a lack of coherent plans or strategies to improve the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities, in particular indigenous women, in order to combat the root causes of their vulnerability to violence. The connection and the interaction between economic vulnerability and exposures to violence are, of course, self-evident.

In terms of access to justice, which is key to ensuring the protection of women's economic and social rights, the committee expressed its concern that financial support for civil legal aid programs had considerably diminished in the past 20 years and has become increasingly restricted, affecting women in particular as they are the primary users of civil legal aid.

We were also concerned that income tests for eligibility limit civil legal aid to women living well below the poverty line, consequently denying low-income women access to legal representation and services. The information is lacking on whether the newly reinstated court challenges program, which provided funding for equality test cases, will be expanded to cover claims under section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms so as to include economic and social equality issues relating to poverty, and whether it will fund equality rights challenges to provincial, territorial, and federal laws and preserve its community-based structure.

With regard to marriage and family relations, the committee noted with concern that the recently adopted Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interest or Rights Act does not apply to the first nations reserves that have enacted their own first nations matrimonial real property laws under the act or under the First Nations Land Management Act of 1999.

Accordingly, the committee formulated a number of recommendations directed at Canada that could, in fact, be read as a road map to further empower women and enhance their economic security. In line with our follow-up procedures, we requested that Canada provide within two years written information on the steps taken to implement the recommendations in paragraphs 21 and 27 of the concluding observations, which are related to the strengthening of the national machinery for the advancement of women and the development of a coordinated plan for the overseeing of the

implementation of the 37 recommendations we issued in the inquiry report, which I mentioned before, on the murdered and missing indigenous women.

When we continue the conversation, I can present some comparative statistics in relation to women's economic situation in Canada but, Madam Chair, I think I will stop here.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to turn to Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, and Beba Svigir.

You have 10 minutes.

•(1110)

Ms. Beba Svigir (Chief Executive Officer, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association): Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today and support the study of economic security of women in Canada. I'm appearing on behalf of the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, and my feedback will be aligned with the agency's mandate to support newcomer immigrant women in Canada, particularly in Calgary, and the specific challenges they face relative to the study.

We are the largest settlement agency in Canada with a gender-specific mandate. Our mission is to engage all immigrant women who come to Calgary, and support successful integration of their families. CIWA provides services for around 15,000 clients each year, who come to us from 100 different countries and cultures. We do that through holistic and customized programming and services offered at CIWA offices in 99 community locations in Calgary.

We offer over 50 programs and services in the areas of settlement integration, literacy and language training, family and individual counselling, civic engagement, legal and tax clinics, health, housing, and community development.

While many of the issues of equity and equality for women in Canada are prominent in our ongoing social discourse, the disparity for immigrant and refugee women is compounded. According to Statistics Canada, immigrant women have lower employment rates, work in more part-time positions, or are underemployed and have lower pay equity than Canadian-born women, despite having comparable levels of education and experience. They take longer to reach Canadian-born levels of labour force participation compared to immigrant men.

There is a lot of research and speculation around the causes of inequity and inequality faced by immigrant and refugee women, in particular the role of policy and corporate acknowledgement of foreign credentials and language proficiency in English and/or French.

While credentialing and language proficiency are and will continue to be powerful gatekeepers for successful integration and economic prosperity, they do not illustrate the complexity of the barriers faced by many immigrant and refugee women.

Our approach to addressing the economic security of the immigrant women we serve is based on two distinct client groups: professionally trained immigrant women and immigrant women with limited or interrupted education from their home countries. For both groups, we have customized our approaches, piloted innovative best practices, and achieved successful economic outcomes over the years with proven social return on investment, as well as successful integration and social participation. We offer equitable, fair supports in ensuring that all immigrant women who come to us have access to employment supports to achieve their goals and dreams in Canada.

There are both commonalities and differences in the barriers faced by professional immigrant women and those with limited education. From a micro, personal view, many immigrant families suffer tremendous shifts in family dynamics and increased familial responsibilities upon arrival to Canada.

Regardless of backgrounds, immigrant and refugee families have left their social networks in their home countries, and there are increased pressures on them to both create a stable environment and support the integration of their children, a condition for this being parental ability to successfully integrate into the workplace.

Another phenomenon we have seen repeatedly is what we call role reversal. This is the increasing pressure for women to economically support the family due to integration challenges experienced by their spouses, in addition to raising and caring for children, even though they may not have worked back at home.

Finally, this restructuring of the family unit upon arrival to Canada and the economic and social pressures of immigration correlate with increased instances of domestic abuse in families of newcomer and refugee women.

An issue that affects both groups of women is access to affordable child care so that they can work. While there are subsidies in place to help families in need of affordable day care, oftentimes finding day care can be a struggle. The availability of child care for evenings and weekends is particularly challenging, because some of the women we surveyed cited willingness to do any job, such as cleaning or food services, anywhere, but many of those jobs have shifts in the evenings and at irregular hours.

•(1115)

As we all know, many companies reduce costs significantly by offering part-time employment. On the one hand, this works for some women provided the hours offered align with their child care needs, but on the other hand, it compounds economic stresses for those who do not have access to full benefits.

For professional immigrant women in Canada, the necessity of picking up their children prior to the day care closing or caring for a sick child can influence the optics of their commitment to the company they work for.

We have 13 employment bridging programs. We work with our funders to cover child care costs and where appropriate, such as for longer-term programs, living allowances so that our clients can focus on learning and building skills for successful employment. This increases the cost of program delivery substantially, which can be a deterrent for governments and other funding bodies we approach. However, the speed of their transition to employment and job

retention rates justify that investment. They serve as an example of best practice. We bring professionals to this country willing to work and expecting to work, so we should support the transition to work for both men and women. Over \$2 billion annually is lost due to underutilization of immigrant skills in Canada.

Bridging employment can be cost-effective and successful not only for professionally trained immigrant women but also for those with limited education. I will share one example with you. One of the most innovative programs that we have at CIWA is child care training for low-literacy immigrant women. It's a full-time program for 11 months. It transitions immigrant women with limited education, who often are classified as not expected or not able to work in Canada due to lack of education, skills, and training.

Over the past nine years, women in this program were able to flourish and secure certification of employment as child care assistants. Some have started their own in-home day care. The employment and retention rate is 93% over the years. Their employers swear by them. Significant costs of programs like this one, for child care and living allowance for the duration of the program, are easily justified. The long-term savings as a result are even more significant. Around 180 clients over the years have secured employment and have been paying taxes. Without this program, the majority of these clients would be depending on social services.

We have been fortunate to work with funders in specific departments in government that recognize similar needs. Overall, there needs to be an acceptance and appreciation for the long-term outcomes that short-term investments in vulnerable people willing to work can produce.

Last, I'd like to reference the role of post-secondary institutions in the transition of immigrant and refugee women into employment. The typical path to employment for newcomers, and particularly professional ones, is to take the language training required for their profession, then transition to some academic upgrading that hopefully gets them to their fields of expertise.

For many professional immigrant women, there is a misconception that Canadian education will advance their careers and so they invest time and resources in retraining. Oftentimes it's at a master's level. However, the true barrier is opportunities for employment within their field; that is what they are lacking. Upon completing academic courses, many professional immigrant women take entry-level jobs, survival jobs in an entirely different field than their professional experience. They are never able to transfer into their original professions because their Canadian experience on their resumé typecasts them into survival industry instead.

It is hard to get that opportunity to get through the door for immigrant professionals, even after they achieve Canadian academic upgrading. Our bridging programs are offered in partnership with employers. We secure job placements for our clients for a period of 14 to 20 weeks. Many of our clients are hired by the employers we work with and employers continue working with us because it is a good and cheap hiring option for them.

Immigrant women with limited education have even more challenging and confusing options and experiences with educational institutions and industry hiring practices. As a society, we tend to value academic knowledge and traditional learning models and overlook the importance of competency development, which depends on learning skills and the ability to complete the task required on a particular job.

I'll go back to the previously mentioned child care training program.

• (1120)

The Chair: Beba, we are at our 10 minutes. We can make sure that some of those questions get asked. I'm sure there will be many questions about child care.

We have finished our two presentations and we're going to move on to our questions.

I would like to welcome Sylvie Boucher and Earl Dreeshen. They're both participating in today's discussion.

To start off, Emmanuella Lambropoulos will start her seven minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): My first question is for the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

You mentioned that marginalized women, including women who are indigenous and women of the Afro-Canadian community and others, have more difficulty accessing the labour market, and we know that this is true.

Could you speak about why you think that's the case? I'm specifically asking about people who were raised in Canada, who went to school in Canada, but who still face these barriers. What do you think are the main reasons these barriers still exist?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I can offer only my thoughts based on the information we were provided during the dialogue.

My understanding is that what we are witnessing here is the phenomenon that is often the case in many immigrant-absorbing countries in which communities of immigrants are placed or tend to

stay together in closed communities and remain in closed clusters within the absorbing country. Many of the social patterns and social practices that have characterized those communities in the countries they come from are still entrenched within their communities even after immigration.

From the work we are doing on the committee, we can sometimes see models that may be somewhat successful in managing to change cultural and social practices through education and through agents of change within the communities themselves; programs that in a sense can recruit leaders from the communities and train them to become these agents of change for their own communities.

Canada is certainly not the only country that is facing such challenges, but our impression was that the programs Canada is employing so far are really short of what Canada can do, as a welfare country and a country with resources.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: As a follow-up question to that, let's say that these people from various communities that are considered more marginalized have the same education as someone who isn't from one of those communities. Do you find that there is still less access to the labour market if they are on equal footing educationally?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Certainly there is. Education is obviously a key factor without which no social mobilization can take place, but it is a prerequisite, not the only requirement. There is a whole circle of factors, social and familial, to be overcome so as to lift the impediments preventing the second generation from being absorbed into the target society.

• (1125)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

My next question is for Calgary Immigrant Women's Association.

You mention that although post-secondary education plays a big role in allowing some of these women to have the same qualifications they would have had in their...

Actually, let's say that women come from these countries and have the qualifications that are necessary, but Canada doesn't necessarily see those qualifications as equal to the ones here. Once they have achieved academic upgrading, as you've mentioned, why are there still barriers after that point for these immigrant women?

Ms. Beba Svigir: What happens is that they take a few courses at a time, so that they can put them on their resumé, and they go and compete for jobs. In Canada, an accent can be a blessing or a curse. It's always in the eye of the beholder to take the responsibility to gauge the skills and language proficiency of people whom they are interviewing for jobs, and to assess the skills of foreign-trained people for those jobs. Very frequently, people who do interviews focus on one or the other more than is favourable for the immigrant women—and men, for that matter—to successfully compete for jobs.

Transitioning, providing culturally sensitive supports in preparing them to upgrade their skills and present them in what we call a Canadian acceptable way, is really sometimes an art. Very frequently, it takes a tiny sliver of measure by the interviewer to discard an excellent candidate with foreign training in favour of a Canadian-born candidate.

Biases experienced in interviews are documented. Obviously, nobody does it deliberately, but biases do exist. Settlement support, even for highly educated immigrants, is essential for the speed of their ability to integrate and for their expeditious involvement in the workplace.

We have clients who come to us after completing university courses to do our programs.

The Chair: Excellent, thank you very much.

We are now going to Sylvie Boucher for her seven minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello everyone.

I am very pleased to be here, sitting in for Ms. Harder today on the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. Having served as parliamentary secretary for the status of women for four and a half years, I am very familiar with the files. Moreover, I can say that not much has changed since then.

I would like to ask Ms. Svigir a question.

There has been a mass arrival of immigrants in recent months, and I do not think the current government has established a program to fully recognize the abilities of women immigrants. I remember that the former minister of immigration, Mr. Jason Kenney, had created that kind of program, but I don't think it exists any more.

With the mass arrival of immigrants, do immigrant women have more trouble finding work than immigrant men?

Does the fact that we do not recognize the skills of these women pose a long-term danger for them?

[English]

Ms. Beba Svigir: It has been a long-term risk for immigrant women and men over the decades. We are trying to address that issue by working collaboratively with the governments and the ministries. Particularly to the point in your question about whether recently it has been more difficult for immigrant women to find jobs, in Calgary, we have an economic downturn, so it has been more difficult for anyone to find jobs. We have more than 100,000 people who have been laid off in the last year or so. However, for the clients who come to us for supports for employment—and I mentioned that we have 13 clinical bridging programs—it is not.

As I mentioned, we have achieved a level of labour market involvement of our clients, overall, for all programs, of over 90%. That is because of the well-thought-out and well-executed partnerships with employers that we have for the programs we offer and the clients we serve. It is amazing that we have not had any decrease in the level of job acquisition for clients in the last two years, regardless

of the economic downturn. That speaks to the need, along with government endeavours, to put policies in place and invest in employment, and to understand the importance of customizing supports for immigrant women so that we can expedite those beautiful skills that they have brought to Canada in line with the settlement supports.

Have I answered your question?

• (1130)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes. Thank you.

Do I have any speaking time left, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have four more minutes.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: In terms of language, we all know that the situation is relatively difficult and that it varies from province to province, whether in your province, in Calgary, or in my province of Quebec.

Do you consider it a problem that the immigrant women arriving in Canada do not speak our language or have difficulty with it?

Is it increasingly more difficult for these individuals to find work?

Are we helping them by offering classes—English classes in your province—to help them get into the labour market more quickly?

[English]

Ms. Beba Svigir: Have I understood you properly? Do you mean immigrant women who speak French?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It could be either French or English. Can you tell us whether you are able to offer support so they can take classes to help them find work more easily?

[English]

Ms. Beba Svigir: Absolutely. We provide literacy training and language instruction for newcomers to Canada for over 350 women at one time in our organization. Obviously, throughout the first year the government provides support for all permanent residents. It provides financial support for those women to take language classes, as well as access to child care in parallel to those classes. However, child care spots are not equivalent to the language training spots for mothers. Therefore, many women stay behind even though they have the opportunity to take language classes, because their children don't get a spot at the child care centres which would allow the women to take full-time language training.

Actually, in the last couple of year, in Calgary we have managed to decrease considerably the wait-list for immigrants who require language training. I believe that within one month now, all of them have the opportunity to enrol in language classes. However, the access to child care prevents them from doing that.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Earl, you can take the next minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for this opportunity.

I'd just like to bring something up with Ms. Halperin-Kaddari. I was on the aboriginal affairs and northern development committee for quite some time, and we dealt with families and matrimonial property and so on. In the list, I believe you had indicated you felt there was a disconnect because at one time this would be taken over by the bands themselves, but of course that was the rationale and that was what was being asked.

That was the thing that was being asked by the bands at that time, so I'm curious as to why you feel that is a negative, or did I misinterpret what you said when you spoke about the act and the difficulties that would obtain once the bands had taken over?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I'm sorry, but I'm not sure that I'm following the question. Was that a reference to our recommendation with respect to—

• (1135)

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Families in homes on reserves who apply.

The Chair: I'm going to have to interrupt now.

Earl, what we'll do is we will come back and you will have five minutes, but I'm going to pass this on to Sheila Malcolmson, because I know this will be an extensive question and answer.

Sheila, you'll have your seven minutes and then we'll come back to Earl.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

I'm the representative for the New Democratic Party on the committee. Thank you to both witnesses for your work.

My first question is for Ms. Halperin-Kaddari from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Your report is really timely because it is only every five years that the UN looks at Canada's fulfillment of its international commitments around elimination of discrimination against women. This is a particularly helpful document for our study.

I want to focus first on the pay equity testimony and the concerns that UN CEDAW has raised about our government's failure to legislate pay equity. It was 40 years ago that our government made that commitment internationally, and it still hasn't happened. Can you elaborate on some of the statistics, where Canada sits in the world standings, and is there any hope of tightening or eliminating that gap in the absence of a legislated solution?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Some of the statistics available to us put Canada in not the best place it could be with respect to its own resources and commitment to gender equality. That commitment is evident in many of Canada's initiatives and legislation, but the gap between the commitment and the reality is really disturbing. In relation to OECD countries, Canada is either the seventh or eighth state with respect to wage gaps between women and men. The numbers for women working full-time all year run anywhere from women making 70% of what men are making on average to their making a little less than 80% of what men are making. In terms of wage gaps, this performance is well below that of the leading countries in the OECD.

When it comes to other criteria or other data, the numbers are—

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: The parliamentary secretary could listen to the testimony. He's our link to the minister, and it's very important. Thank you.

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: The data are even more worrying, because only 6% of the women employed are managers. Again, this is below the rate in many other countries, such as Australia, France, the U.K., or Iceland. The female share of seats on boards of the largest publicly listed companies is less than 20%, well below that of New Zealand, the U.K., Denmark, Finland, Italy, and France. Quotas and what we in CEDAW call temporary special measures are especially striking, because these have proven to work, although I shouldn't say easily, in other countries that have adopted them.

Concerning paid leave specifically for fathers, in 2016 there was no such legislated leave in Canada. I don't know whether this has changed since the report; I'm afraid it hasn't. We heard from the other testimony how significant a factor child-rearing responsibility is in impeding women's full integration into the job market. This again is something for the government to do federally, to legislate and ensure that the option of paid leave specifically for fathers is in place.

• (1140)

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'm going to move you to a related area. We've heard a number of witnesses say that when there is a lack of affordable child care, it is the parent who makes less money who drops out of the workforce to provide that child care. That tends to be the woman. Because we have a lack of pay equity legislation, women tend to earn less and tend to be the ones who drop out of the market because they can't access affordable child care, because we don't have a national universal child care system. That means that when they return to the workforce, they disproportionately do part-time, precarious work.

Can you describe your observations about how the lack of affordable child care access in Canada is affecting women's economic justice?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Absolutely. Again this is a universal phenomenon, and we cannot blame the individual couples or partners who are taking the most economically efficient choice they can take when their intention is simply to survive in the most economical manner they can. When Canada is, according to our numbers, investing only 25% of the OECD's recommended benchmark on child care facilities, this level of investment I think explains very well the impossible dilemma or situation—the limbo—that Canadian women and Canadian parents are faced with.

The Chair: You have 25 seconds.

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson: I'll leave it there. The report, the brief from UN CEDAW, is very strong and we'll use lots of that in our final argument. Thank you very much.

Thanks, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're now going to Eva Nassif for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would also like to thank Ms. Halperin-Kaddari and Ms. Svigir.

Based on your experience in dealing with and studying cases of refugee settlement in Canada or elsewhere in the world, what has worked well and what could be improved in terms of the help given to immigrant women to better integrate them into Canadian society and to prevent isolation and exclusion?

In short, what best practices can you share?

[*English*]

Ms. Beba Svigir: Is that a question for me?

Mrs. Eva Nassif: It's for both of you. If you can start, that would be good.

Ms. Beba Svigir: I can. Thank you.

I mentioned to you that we are the largest settlement organization with a gender-specific mandate in Canada. What has been done well in Calgary is investment into the needs assessment that we presented to the federal government. Certainly the majority of our funding in line with the portfolio of immigration comes from the federal government, including Status of Women.

We have managed as an organization to get through to the government officials and to explain the need for customized, and “customized” is really the word I would stress, approaches to supporting immigrant women so that they can expedite their integration.

I also mentioned that we have 13 different bridging programs, probably the largest number of programs in any settlement organization in Canada. That has been done well. We've received tremendous support from the federal government for our services.

Obviously, we need much more investment in our services on any given day, but every city and bigger centre that receives immigrants should have similar services, whether that's through organizations that serve only women or adding women-specific approaches in organizations that already provide settlement services.

There has been a lot of discussion about the role of academic institutions and how they complement the work that settlement organizations are doing. That's another thing that requires a little more vested analysis so that this collaboration can produce effective results and provide that social return on investment.

Child care issues and more investment into providing child care support for immigrant women while they are taking courses is absolutely essential, because immigrant women do not have natural supports in Canada. They don't have mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and uncles to help them. Access to child care is absolutely crucial for any integration success of immigrant women everywhere in Canada.

• (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Halperin-Kaddari, could you comment on what Ms. Svigir said?

[*English*]

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: The witness from Calgary mentioned the key issues that we can see from other countries that are facing similar challenges. Courses on acquiring language skills are the number one key to integration. The women who are taking these courses should be provided with adequate child care facilities and if they are pregnant, if they give birth, they should be accorded the same benefits that women in Canada are eligible for, so that they do not lose the training they've already received. Then they can return immediately after using the maternity leave to the same place they had been before, and not lose their training and their time due to child-bearing that some of them are going through during that period of time.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Ms. Kaddari, are there any indications that culture shock and unfamiliarity with the way things are done in Canada are preventing immigrant women from finding work?

[*English*]

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I do not think that's been presented with such indications in the information that we were provided with. In relation to women experiencing culture shock, at least from what we had been exposed to, the question might be better framed if we were to ask about culture shock in the male partners and the need to orient them with the norms that are very much different from the patriarchal traditional norms they may carry with them from their former countries. The challenge is more on that part of the equation than with respect to women, who may also be experiencing difficulties in transition, but my impression at least, from what we have seen and heard, is not that it impedes them, but rather that it impedes their male partners and then, of course, presents a challenge for them as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to move into our second round and we're going to start with Earl Dreesen for five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreesen: Thank you very much.

Ms. Kaddari, I'd like to go back to explain where I was going in the few minutes I had to describe what was involved with matrimonial property rights. It seemed to me you had indicated that the family home on reserves didn't apply to first nations that already had a plan. It sounded as though you were suggesting that it was okay when they were under the property rights, but as soon as they lost that or the reserves had come up with a plan, there was an issue.

Did I misunderstand what you said there?

• (1150)

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I had the chance to go back to my notes—

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I was hoping that you had.

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Can I read to you what I summarized then? I think it will explain.

What I wrote then was that first nations women now benefit from protections of the division of matrimonial property as real property under the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act equal to those of non-indigenous women resident off reserve on the occasion of family breakdown or death of a partner. However, the Family Homes on Reserves and Matrimonial Interests or Rights Act provisions do not apply to those first nations reserves that had enacted their own first nations matrimonial real property laws, so this means that there is inconsistent application in practice creating an uneven application of matrimonial property laws and emergency protection measures, most often needed by women and their children across first nations reserve communities in Canada.

At present, there are no guidelines or minimum standards of protection for women or children that must be incorporated by first nations if they create their own matrimonial property regime.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: If I could, I'll just stop you. Thank you very much for bringing that out. I appreciate the work that the UN has done to come in, as they are invited to, to investigate and talk about certain issues, but again, there has to be a sensitivity to what it is that is happening on reserves when they make these decisions that they have asked for. That is the point that I'd hoped we'd be able to flesh out on that. Many items that you have indicated are very significant, and we do have groups and organizations that no doubt will take a look at them and make decisions as to the relevancy based on what we see on the ground. Thank you very much for that.

Ms. Svigir, first of all, I'd like to acknowledge, on behalf of the Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association and Halima Ali and some great friends of mine, the great work that you have done. You mentioned a point about foreign credentials. At Red Deer College we had a number of people get together. These women—computer scientists, chemists, medical professionals—were there talking about the issues and concerns they had, and of course, they were also talking about their appreciation for the great work that CAIWA and the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association do, so you're doing amazing work.

The concerns that they had were, of course, how the accreditations are done. Men have the same issue as well. The point is that, as was mentioned earlier, they seem to be in more survival industry jobs to keep them going, which makes it more difficult for them to go and

get the accreditation. I'm wondering if you've found some unique ways of being able to help them.

Ms. Beba Svigir: Obviously, accreditation rules are being done in collaboration with employers, and they're very demanding. That's why with accredited positions it takes longer for immigrants to be processed. For accreditation, typically, the post-secondary institutions have taken it on because of the requirement for a high level of education.

We actually do work with one accredited position in our bridging program, which is accounting. Our programs offer certification as opposed to accreditation. Women that go through our programs have done so much better than the ones who came to us and spoke about, after they had received accreditation, the difficulties in actually getting into the industry with that accreditation. Those are the differences that I can speak to in this short time.

What it all boils down to is understanding the needs of immigrants and accrediting bodies, post-secondary institutions, and settlement organizations that have the capacity and skills to provide certification/accreditation working together to understand the root causes of disparity in Canada, and efficiently utilizing the skills that immigrants, in our case immigrant women, have to actually get them through the process so they can access their original professions in Canada.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We're going to move on. I gave you a few extra seconds, because you seem to have a lot of excellent information.

We're going to move to Marc Serré for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to both witnesses for all the work that you're doing and for your presentations today.

My question would be mostly directed to Ruth. I don't have much time, but on the report from the United Nations on the elimination of discrimination against women, I just wanted to confirm that the report was published in April 2015, from data, information and statistics that you had from 2014 and prior. Is that correct?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Marc Serré: Are you aware that since then, since we formed government, we've established—

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: Sorry, I think I missed one year. I think it was actually 2016 that Canada appeared before the committee. Let me just verify that.

Mr. Marc Serré: Online it says that the report was published in April 2015.

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: We're talking about two different reports. The inquiry report on the missing and murdered aboriginal women was in 2015. CEDAW's concluding observations on Canada's eighth and ninth periodic report, which is an entirely different reporting exercise, were published in November 2016.

Mr. Marc Serré: I wanted to ask whether you are aware, in the last two years, that we have launched a national child care program, investing \$7 billion over 10 years. How do you feel that will be beneficial?

I know that was part of some of the recommendations you made, so I want to get your thoughts on that. Are you aware of that initiative?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I'm hearing about it now for the first time, and I'm very glad to hear that. This is very reassuring information, and we certainly appreciate it. The next report on Canada is due, I believe, in 2020. Hopefully, it will also present itself in good outcomes on the ground.

It is certainly an indication of a good way to go. Likewise, the national inquiry committee that the new government established after the election was also a good indication of implementing the recommendation of CEDAW. We will keep monitoring this, hoping that this is the direction Canada will continue going in.

Mr. Marc Serré: I agree you made a lot of good recommendations that we are looking at. Hopefully, we can implement more.

You mentioned indigenous communities and first nations. Are you aware of Jordan's principle? We've serviced close to 20,000 indigenous children, who have been approved now. That was an issue that was debated before. Are you aware that we've done that recently?

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: No, my apologies. Our work is not one of constantly monitoring all the states that are parties to the convention. We have the opportunity to examine progress periodically, every four or five years. In the interim, there is that follow-up exercise, but it is limited to only two issues that were raised during the dialogue. As I indicated before, those issues were the national machinery on the status of women and the implementation of that inquiry report on the missing and murdered aboriginal women. It is not on all the issues that CEDAW is about.

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you. I am not sure if you're aware, but we will also be submitting pay equity legislation in 2018. I know that was part of your recommendations too.

• (1200)

Prof. Ruth Halperin-Kaddari: I'm glad to hear about that as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have now finished our time for our first two panellists.

We're going to suspend for a few minutes, and we'll come back with the other panel.

• (1200)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene now.

I would like to welcome our second group of panellists.

From the Department of Industry, we have Frances McRae, as well as Nathalie Poirier-Mizon.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, I'd like to welcome Douglas Wolfe, Jonathan Will, and Kristen Underwood.

We also have an addition, if you would introduce yourself, please.

Ms. Lori Straznicki (Executive Director, Pay Equity Task Team, Strategic Policy, Analysis and Workplace Information, Labour Program, Department of Employment and Social Development): I am Lori Straznicki, also from DESD.

The Chair: Welcome.

We're going to start with presentations of up to 10 minutes, and you can divide your time as you wish.

• (1205)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Marie-Hélène Sauv ): Is it 10 or five?

The Chair: Are we two separate groups?

We'll switch it for the first presentation coming from the Department of Industry and you have your time.

Ms. Frances McRae (Assistant Deputy Minister, Small Business, Tourism and Marketplace Services, Department of Industry): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning everyone and distinguished members. My name is Frances McRae. I am the assistant deputy minister for small business, tourism and marketplace services at the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. The acronym I will be using is ISED.

[Translation]

In French, it is ISDE.

Last February, my predecessor, Ms. Shereen Benzvy Miller, addressed this committee and outlined how ISED is supporting the economic empowerment of women. It is my pleasure to provide an update on ISED's activities since our last appearance.

[English]

Canada is a world leader on gender equality, but we do have some challenges on the economic advancement of women, as you well know. I'll talk a bit about our sense of how the situation looks for small and medium-sized enterprises and women entrepreneurs.

I have a few facts to start. Only about 15.7% of small and medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, are majority owned by women in comparison to 64.6% majority owned by men. You may have seen a recent survey of more than 900 Canadian tech firms done by a new company called MoveTheDial and MaRS Discovery District, which found that women “account for just 5 per cent of CEO roles and 13 per cent of executive team positions, while more than half—53 per cent—of tech companies have no female executives. On average, women account for 8 per cent of director roles, while 73 per cent of firms have no women on their boards.”

A study in June 2017, by McKinsey Global Institute, which you're likely familiar with, found that improving women's equality in the workforce by 2026 could increase Canadian GDP by \$150 billion.

[Translation]

As you know, the economic empowerment of Canadian women is a key component in Canada's economic prosperity and was highlighted in Budget 2017.

[English]

Women's entrepreneurship is increasingly recognized as a key source of employment creation and advancing women's equality. We have found it helpful to think about women in entrepreneurship and women in business as a continuum. They grow and develop along their entrepreneurship journey, from young girls and women needing exposure to entrepreneurship and opportunities in STEM, science, technology, engineering, math, as you well know, through accessing financing, business supports, and mentoring in order to start and grow their businesses. At the other end of the continuum are experienced business owners and leaders who need procurement and export opportunities, leadership advancement, and access to corporate boards.

I'd like to give the committee an update on activities that ISED supports to help women along this journey.

If I go back to the idea of a continuum, the first stage is exposure to entrepreneurship and STEM. For instance, CanCode is investing \$50 million over two years starting in 2017-18 to support educational opportunities for coding and digital skills development for Canadian girls and youth.

As I move along the continuum, women benefit greatly from business skills support training. For example, the regional development agencies, which are part of the ISED portfolio, fund entrepreneurship development and women-directed business training across the country.

[Translation]

Women also need financing in order to start and scale-up their businesses. For example, we indicated at our last appearance that the Business Development Bank of Canada had committed to investing \$700 million by 2018 in women-owned businesses.

I am pleased to report that BDC has exceeded this commitment. As of September 30, 2017, \$809 million had been authorized over 30 months. We surpassed the target of \$700 million that the Bank had set. The Bank's portfolio of majority women-owned businesses is now at 4,744 clients, a 41% increase from the start of the initiative.

•(1210)

[English]

Announced in November 2016, BDC's women in tech fund extends \$50 million in venture and growth capital to women-led tech firms, targeting early-stage and growing companies.

BDC will also deliver a new \$400-million venture capital catalyst initiative, which was announced in budget 2017, to provide late-stage venture capital to Canadian entrepreneurs, obviously including women entrepreneurs.

The BDC has partnerships as well. The Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba provides loans of up to \$150,000, and through a new co-lending agreement signed in June 2017 with the centre, BDC will provide an additional \$100,000 to businesses that require more capital.

Finally, BDC has also undertaken a full review of its services to women entrepreneurs. It's expected to release its findings shortly.

As women move along the growth pathway, especially women transitioning to high growth, their needs become more complex. Like all entrepreneurs, they need access to experienced business mentors and targeted supports. I'll give you a couple of examples of how ISED supports organizations that help women-owned businesses grow.

[Translation]

There is Futurpreneur, which offered business training and mandatory mentoring to over 400 young women entrepreneurs last year.

[English]

Fierce Founders, a Waterloo-based tech accelerator that is part of an industry-led innovation centre known as Communitech and funded by FedDev Ontario, is designed to provide seed funding and mentorship to women-led businesses. Since the program's launch in 2014, Communitech has seen an increase in women engaging in its start-up services, and now sees 25.9% of its active start-ups with at least one female founder.

For women with mature businesses in the last stages of the continuum—and I'll wrap up shortly on that—we seek to help them export and provide procurement opportunities. For instance, ISED recently launched Innovative Solutions Canada, a new procurement program announced in budget 2017. To maximize inclusiveness, particular effort is going to be made to encourage procurement from under-represented groups, including women.

The government has also taken steps to advance the number of women on boards and in senior management. Bill C-25, which is currently at second reading in the Senate, would require publicly traded companies under the Canada Business Corporations Act to disclose information on the gender diversity of their boards and senior management.

Finally, I will mention an initiative that we anticipate will provide recommendations along the continuum. You will recall that in February 2017, Prime Minister Trudeau and U.S. President Trump announced the creation of the Canada-United States Council for Advancement of Women Entrepreneurs and Business Leaders. The council is focusing on five areas: increasing the number of women in STEM; encouraging women to start businesses; growing women-owned businesses; increasing women's access to capital; and advancing women as leaders in the private sector. These areas align with ISED's priority areas of support for women entrepreneurs, and we anticipate seeing recommendations over the coming months.

[Translation]

To close, Canada is a world leader in gender equality. That said, there is still work to be done.

[English]

While the government supports women at various stages along the continuum, we know that we need to continue to do work in this area with other departments and with stakeholders.

Thank you for your attention today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Does the Department of Employment and Social Development have a presentation today?

Mr. Jonathan Will (Director General, Economic Policy Directorate, Strategic and Service Policy Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): No.

The Chair: Would you like to make any comments, or would you like us to go directly to questions and answers?

Mr. Jonathan Will: Questions.

The Chair: Questions and answers, fantastic.

We're going to start off with Sean Fraser for seven minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Thank you very much for the presentation.

I'll start with our guests who didn't make a presentation today, particularly because of a timely story that's in the news with respect to certain EI changes that are hot off the press. One of them is a bit personal to me, so I apologize in advance if I get a bit emotional.

A year and a half ago, my daughter was born very prematurely. She weighed just a little over two pounds, and spent about three months in the hospital. One of the programs that was a massive help to my family was the benefits for parents of critically ill children.

With today's change, I understand that the benefits will be accessible by family members who may not be parents of the child who is critically ill. Could you give us some thoughts on how this program will allow parents, and in particular new mothers who are

going through an exceptionally difficult personal time, to potentially rejoin the workforce earlier than might otherwise be the case?

• (1215)

Ms. Kristen Underwood (Acting Senior Director, Employment Insurance Policy, Department of Employment and Social Development): As you pointed out, the parents of critically ill children program was extended in budget 2017, and further announcements are being made about it now. The EI family caregiver benefit, which is the new name for the program, will provide benefits for families, as you mentioned, for parents but also other family members. It is being extended to 35 weeks. It will allow not only parents, but also aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other people to share the benefit during the benefit period and create some flexibility, so that not only parents but families are supported to look after children, if they need to.

Mr. Sean Fraser: One other area that I think we'd be remiss not to focus on is the Canada child benefit. I recognize that this may bleed into the Department of Finance's portfolio as well.

I come from a predominantly rural area, and there may not be access to physical child care centres. One thing we've heard from other witnesses who testified on the issue of access to child care in smaller communities is that having some flexibility—the extra \$20 to put towards a nanny in a private home—is something that is very helpful to women, particularly to entrepreneurs who don't have a set schedule.

Can you elaborate on the impact the Canada child benefit has had on promoting women in the economy and the workforce?

Ms. Kristen Underwood: It's not really my spot to talk about the Canada child benefit. I can say that it complements other programs.

Do you want to talk about it, Jonathan?

Mr. Jonathan Will: Thank you very much. I'll take that part of the question.

The Canada child benefit, which started in July 2016, replaced the existing Canada child tax benefit and national child care benefit supplement and the universal child care benefit with a single monthly payment for families with children under the age of 18. This benefit is simpler, more generous, and better targeted, so that nine out of 10 families are better off than under the former suite of programs.

Specifically in terms of your question about impact, this has resulted in about 300,000 fewer children living in poverty, which represents a reduction of about 40% in child poverty.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

Shifting gears to the topic of housing, right now in budget 2017 we've announced \$11 billion, I believe, towards housing. Could you highlight some of the measures that are gender-specific with respect to the housing plan? I appreciate that all the details may not be public yet, but to the extent that you can shine a light on the direction in which we're going with respect to specific gender measures in the housing strategy, that would be helpful.

Mr. Jonathan Will: I can speak to the general measures, but they benefit both men and women. Some benefit women more than men, and vice versa for others.

There are two initiatives that the government has launched. One is the national housing strategy. It has been established to ensure that more Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and that they can afford. In support of this, budget 2016 proposed to invest \$11.2 billion over 11 years, starting in 2017-18, in a variety of initiatives designed to build, renew, and repair the stock of affordable housing to ensure that Canadians have affordable housing.

In addition, through the homelessness partnership strategy, the government has announced an extension of \$2.5 billion over the next 11 years. This is a unique community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing direct support and funding to 61 designated communities in all provinces and territories.

As I said, these programs will benefit both men and women. They are not specifically gender things, but some situations women find themselves in more, and vice versa.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Building on that, we've heard testimony, I believe in this study and in one of our previous studies on gender-based violence, about the incredible negative impact a survivor of domestic violence may experience in terms of future ability to participate fully in the Canadian economy.

Will the housing strategy include specific measures designed for transition shelters, for example, to help women who have been the victims of domestic violence get their feet under them so that they can participate more fully in Canadian life?

• (1220)

Mr. Jonathan Will: I don't have that information available. We could get back to you, for sure.

Mr. Sean Fraser: I would appreciate it.

Very quickly, Ms. McRae, one thing you mentioned that jumped off the page I was following along on was the potential impact of \$150 billion in GDP if we were to promote gender equity in the Canadian economy. With some of the measures you discussed, BDC, for example, and some of our international measures and the composition of corporate boards, do you have confidence that we're going to be moving towards capitalizing on this extraordinary economic opportunity by achieving greater equity in the Canadian workforce?

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

One of the things I would like to point out is that we've been talking about an objective of increasing the numbers of women entrepreneurs. We actually have a public objective about that. We've set a target to double the number of SMEs that are majority-owned

by women to arrive at approximately 340,000 by 2025 from a baseline that we had in 2014 of 174,000. We believe that with that target we will be able to capitalize on the opportunity.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Fantastic. Thank you very much.

We're now going to Sylvie Boucher for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Hello everyone.

I have to admit I am a bit surprised. I am used to working with other committees where the work is much less partisan, so I am having a hard time getting my bearings today.

Ms. McRae, you said earlier that there are not very many women entrepreneurs. That is indeed the case. Have you ever tried to understand why these women do not want to go into business?

We know that women are much less present in business than men. Is that related to their family situation?

We also have the same problem in politics. We cannot attract women, and that is not necessarily because of the political party or some other reason. As a member of Parliament myself, I try to recruit women into politics, and I see that it is also difficult in business. Have you ever evaluated the situation or conducted a study to identify the reasons that women do not want to go into business?

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for your question.

There have been various studies on that. The truth is that there is not just one reason; there are many. We know in particular that some women have many family commitments.

I think the research by BDC will give us some very helpful answers and might explain why women do not approach the Bank as often. The research shows that women are not always aware of the available sources of support. That is part of the answer. BDC also noted that women often arrive with a very detailed business plan, but do not really want to start a business without being sure that everything is complete. The male entrepreneurs who approach the BDC, on the other hand, are more likely to be seeking help in developing a business plan. There is no specific reason for this. I think the BDC's data show there are various reasons.

• (1225)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Have you considered the fact that many women start their businesses at home and manage stand-alone businesses, as they are known?

Given the current partisan context, will the Liberal Party help these women?

Ms. Frances McRae: If I understand your question correctly, we are talking about women entrepreneurs who work from home. Is that correct?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes. Is there a program for those women?

Ms. Frances McRae: Women actually create various types of businesses. The majority of women do nonetheless create home-based businesses, primarily for lifestyle reasons. In many cases, they want to be at home to have more flexibility.

As to the support we give those women entrepreneurs, I must say that they have access to the same programs as all entrepreneurs, the purpose of which is to help them succeed in business.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Would you like to share your time? You have an additional two minutes and 13 seconds.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Do you have a question?

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you very much.

I just have a couple of comments, and perhaps I'll get an opportunity later.

I think this is really critical. I have a math and science background. I was a high school math and physics teacher for 34 years. The discussion has to do with the new opportunities, the coding, and everything else that has been described. These are things that.... I remember when I started, which was before Bill Gates.

There are a lot of different aspects to it, and things that are engaged in education. One of the critical parts right now is that as more and more people are finding ways of working from home, and with the disruptive technologies that are out there, those who are able to catch on to that new wave are the ones who are really going to excel.

My wife was so much smarter than I am, and I always wanted to make sure that she was uppermost in all the business decisions we made.

I know I don't have much time because I'm just filling in. Maybe I'll come back later.

I really think it's the mentorship part that we have to look at. Is there any comment on the types of mentorship issues or solutions that you have seen in the industry so far?

Ms. Frances McRae: I can comment on what ISED is doing to encourage more young women in science and STEM, which I think is at the root of your question. I'm going to talk about it in two aspects.

I mentioned CanCode earlier, the program that was launched. That program actually saw a very high rate of application. We had 81 applications to that program after the call for proposals. The process of making decisions about what gets funded will unfold.

I would like to comment on the science side of things. We are taking steps to deal with gender and diversity inequities in the scientific community, most recently by instituting new equity requirements into programs such as the Canada research chairs and the Canada excellence research chairs programs.

The Chair: [*Inaudible—Editor*] continue with that. He will have an additional five minutes very shortly.

As we carry on, next is Rachel Blaney for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, all, so much for being here today.

I'll start with you, Ms. McRae. Thank you so much for your presentation. There were a few things that I was curious about, though. You were talking about a lot of programs that you have. I'm just curious about the accessibility for indigenous women, and also for women in rural and remote communities.

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

First of all, let me say that this is something that's very much in our minds, the intersectionality of the group we are talking about. We know that women entrepreneurs are not a homogeneous group, and the needs will differ depending on, as you say, rural areas, women with disabilities, indigenous women, or visible minority women. We do know that this is not just one single homogeneous group.

At the moment, the data we have is not particularly sophisticated in terms of splitting out the needs. The Business Development Bank of Canada, as you may know, has done quite a lot of work in terms of expanding its reach and visibility, as well as its offices across the country, and of course partnering with organizations in much smaller communities.

They are well aware that in order to reach women with all their needs, we need to be much more visible, much more present, and work with communities. That also entails working with other financial institutions, for example indigenous financial institutions.

• (1230)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Are you collecting that data so that we will be able to look at it in the future?

Ms. Frances McRae: Yes, we are. There is a commitment that we will start collecting much more detailed data on our programming.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Okay.

When I was knocking on doors, I talked to many women who had actually quit their job or stopped their small business because they just couldn't make ends meet, specifically because of the high cost of child care. In B.C., it's very high. I'm curious, when you are working with these women—and you said that you are collecting data about the challenges that prevent them from starting a business—are you hearing about child care? Are you hearing about other things? What are the most prevalent issues that are barriers for women to start their own business?

Ms. Frances McRae: As you say, it is very complex, and there are needs that are very different across the country.

We do work with organizations, other parts of the government, like ESDC, in addressing the more holistic view of what it is we have to deal with. Clearly—

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I'm asking about the data collection. Are you collecting that information? What are the top issues that prevent women from joining business?

Ms. Frances McRae: When I talked about data collection work, we're collecting data that is much more about the use of our programs and much more sophisticated data about who uses the programs: if they don't use the programs, why don't they use the programs?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'll move over to this side of the table and ask if you're collecting that kind of data. If so, what are you learning about what is preventing women from entering the workplace or working in the workplace or starting a business?

Mr. Douglas Wolfe (Director, Strategic Policy, Analysis and Workplace Information, Labour Program, Department of Employment and Social Development): Yes. We have a lot of data on challenges with respect to women in terms of their starting a business or whether it's being in the workplace. There's really a lot of data we have with respect to questions of the reasons why women may not be in the workplace, so things like lack of access to affordable child care. Certainly we have data on this sort of thing.

There's a lot of data with respect to the gender wage gap. That's something we've been looking at a great deal in terms of the various causes of the wage gap.

I would say there's a rather large amount of data we're looking at, and certainly, we're working actively with StatsCan to increase the amount of data we have on women in general.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Good. Can this committee have access to that information?

Mr. Douglas Wolfe: Yes. I think we have quite a lot of studies done, for instance StatsCan studies, that certainly would be public. We would be happy to provide them.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I worked for many years in an immigrant-serving agency. Something else that's very close to my heart is closed work permits for temporary foreign workers. One of the challenges is specifically around women and their increased vulnerability, and being locked into a workplace where they can't get out, and they are not always safe.

What steps are you taking to address some of those issues?

Mr. Douglas Wolfe: Sorry. We don't have anyone at the table as far as I'm aware who can answer that one.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That definitely was one of the challenges. Immigration would look after one part, and they didn't often talk to your department, so people were often left hanging in the middle.

If you have nothing to say about that today, it would be great if you guys could find the information and present that.

Ms. Kristen Underwood: Perhaps I could get clarification on exactly what your question is, because we do look after the temporary foreign worker program in our area. I want to make sure I have the question.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: It's when temporary foreign workers are in a closed permit, but they are in an unsafe situation. The challenge is for them to disclose the unsafe situation without being immediately removed from the country.

I think it's really important, especially for women temporary foreign workers. How many of them are feeding their children at home and are extremely vulnerable? Imagine being in that situation. It's really important that we address that. Thank you.

I still have a little bit of time. You talked earlier about how important affordable housing is and the commitment that the government has made. Do you know how much money has actually been moved towards any kind of housing that would support employment indirectly?

• (1235)

Mr. Jonathan Will: Supporting employment?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: You talked about it so I thought I would ask.

You mentioned that there was a commitment by the government to put money into affordable housing. We're still waiting for that strategy. You talked about the \$11 billion. How much of it has actually moved into communities to build any type of housing?

Mr. Jonathan Will: I can get back to you with that information.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. I would appreciate that.

Thank you.

The Chair: You're more than welcome, Rachel.

We're going to Pam Damoff, for her seven minutes.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to both of these departments for coming back. It's very helpful for us as we're doing this study. It has been quite a lengthy study, and some of your testimony was earlier on. You were our first witnesses. It's nice to have you here again.

We've heard repeatedly through the course of the study about the need for child care and how it's critical for women to find meaningful employment. In fact, it has come up today as well during questioning.

Back in February when the department was here, it was brought up then as well, but that was prior to our government re-engaging with the provinces and committing to a significant investment in child care. It's the first time in over 10 years that the federal government has been engaged in that conversation with the provinces.

Do you have the statistics for how many subsidized child care spaces for children from zero to five this will create? If you don't have it, could you provide it to us?

Mr. Jonathan Will: A significant part of the investment that you mentioned goes towards closing data gaps that we have concerning child care, like who is getting it and who is not in various regions. In fact, there is \$95 million to close those data gaps, so that we better understand what child care looks like and more importantly, track progress on the money that is being spent.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Okay.

I understood that there were numbers available that were in the fall economic statement in terms of the number of spaces. Could you double-check for us?

Mr. Jonathan Will: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Can you also speak to the advantages of transferring the money through the province, in order for them to create programming within their provinces that meets the different needs across the country?

Mr. Jonathan Will: The federal government has a multilateral early learning and child care framework, which applies to all the provinces and territories and the federal government is negotiating individual bilateral agreements with all the provinces and territories. To date, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nunavut have reached agreement, and negotiations continue into the future on the others.

Again, that's separate from the indigenous early learning and child care, which is on a different process.

Ms. Pam Damoff: However, my question was whether there is an advantage to doing it that way, as opposed to the federal government providing the child care spaces directly.

Mr. Jonathan Will: Clearly, the advantage is the ability of the jurisdiction to target the money to meet their unique circumstances. Some places lack child care workers. Others have low pay for child care workers. Others have physical space issues. Each of the agreements with the individual provinces and territories is intended solely to ensure that there is progress on the bigger issue, but also to ensure that it meet the needs of that province or jurisdiction.

Ms. Pam Damoff: The needs in Nunavut would be very different from the needs in my riding of Oakville North—Burlington then.

Mr. Jonathan Will: Yes.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you very much.

Over to Industry, we had previous testimony from Dr. Coe, from Ryerson University, about the need to support female entrepreneurs. Specifically, it was mentioned that companies often feel good about supporting girls in STEM-type programs, but then they're not there to fund the women when they're looking to start their own companies.

I want to applaud the testimony that you've given us about what BDC is doing and I recognize that it's early going. However, again, we've heard repeated testimony about the difficulty for women to receive funding or being asked what their husband's employment situation is, while a man would not be asked what their wife does when they go in for a loan. I want to really applaud you on that.

My colleague, Mr. Fraser, asked Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters if it would be helpful for the federal government to hold consultations with private sector stakeholders in the STEM and business fields to develop corporate best practices and resources to advance the promotion of women.

Do you think that's something that would be within the realm of your department? Would it be worth looking at moving forward to do a round table with an organization like that?

•(1240)

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

The issue of advancing women in business is really a cross-government objective. It is a whole-of-government objective. There tend to be a lot of discussions. Our minister has had round tables, including with Minister Duclos on women entrepreneurship.

We would think about taking on such a round table idea, so it is not out of the realm of possibility.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I think their desire was to try to have a sharing of best practices among businesses, so that they're not reinventing the wheel each time.

Mr. Fraser touched on some of the changes that were announced today with EI. Some of those go a long way to addressing some of the other concerns we've heard here. I wonder if you could perhaps provide us with a list of some of the changes that have been made, such as extending the parental leave. We had a bit on the caregiver leave, but could you give us a bit of information about the other changes that were made?

Ms. Kristen Underwood: There have been a number of changes made to EI in 2016 and 2017. As mentioned, the EI family caregiver benefit was extended for other family members, for parents of critically ill children. That benefit was also extended for 15 weeks to the care of adult family members. We've also improved the EI caregiver benefit by allowing medical doctors and now nurse practitioners to sign medical certificates. That's particularly helpful for people in rural areas where there's less access to medical practitioners.

There are new options created around EI parental benefits to extend the parental benefits to 61 weeks over an 18-month period. That's at a 33% benefit rate. Parents can now choose between a 35-week option for parental benefits at 55%, or 61 weeks at 33%. Added to the maternity, that goes up to 18 months or a year, depending on what they've chosen. Because it's over an extended period of time, it creates more flexibility, allowing parents to have more choice in how they might share that parental leave.

Changes were also made to allow EI maternity benefits to be—

The Chair: Sorry, I was really listening there too, and I let that go way over time. I'm really sorry.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Could you just provide us with a list of those, so that the analyst has them?

The Chair: Thank you very much, and I am sorry for that. I was just listening very intently.

We're going to Earl for five minutes.

Mr. Earl Dreesen: Thanks again, Madam Chair.

There are a couple of points I wanted to talk about. There was a discussion on Bill C-25, which is now at second reading in the Senate. I was on the committee that studied that. One of the frustrations was that, as far as quotas are concerned, or decisions, it was all being left to regulation versus being affixed to the legislation that was there.

Has there been discussion within the department as to how this will be dealt with on a regulatory framework, or is it still the thought that you'll wait until it finally comes back to your department to initiate?

•(1245)

Ms. Frances McRae: To be honest, the actual work around Bill C-25 is done in another part of my department, so on that specific question about where the next steps are, I would have to come back later with that.

I will just say one thing, if you'll allow me to, on Bill C-25. We think that the lack of diversity on corporate boards and senior management is an issue, and we are placing responsibility on Canada's corporations to advance that issue.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: The other thing, as I mentioned earlier, is about making sure we have some way of taking the talent that we really have here in Canada and trying to make it more entrepreneurial. This is really critical.

We are also seeing that a lot of these folks, men and women, whom we are training are leaving the country. We're seeing a brain drain. We go to all this work and effort, and then the opportunities that are there are either picked up by Silicon Valley, Israel, or another of these different groups that really look at and nurture that kind of talent.

I'm just wondering if we're finding ways of helping, or thinking about doing so in the future. It's one thing to say we're going to train, but if we don't have the opportunities or we're putting up barriers that are causing issues.... One of the barriers that was discussed had to do with child care. Another has to do with our business climate, taxation, and the other sorts of things that are making people want to move away from Canada. I'm wondering if you're looking at strategies to try to keep homegrown talent here in Canada.

Ms. Frances McRae: For that I would go back to our notion of the continuum. We really believe that addressing the issues around women's entrepreneurship and women-owned business is not really something that can be done with any one specific initiative. In fact, we need to look at the full continuum, from school age all the way through to mature women-owned businesses, and really analyze the gaps and needs all the way along that continuum. That's really the answer. We need to be able to think about where we can support at every single stage, including the stages at which they would be looking for very important growth financing and export financing, and the question of making sure that we keep them here in Canada.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: The other point that I'd ask you to comment on, please, is about Fierce Founders, the tech accelerator that FedDev worked on. As you indicated, this project was launched in 2014. How is this increase in women's engagement in start-up services helping, and is that something that you see other regional development groups looking at?

Ms. Frances McRae: As was alluded to earlier, different parts of the country have different needs, so the regional development agencies really work with their local communities in determining the best types of tactics and what needs are manifested.

I can give you a bit of a rundown on a few things that the different regional development agencies do. We do share best practices among regional development agencies.

They all have different infrastructure. For example, FedDev, as we talked about, works with Communitech. Communitech is a very particular organization. It doesn't exist quite in that form in different parts of the country. I could go on and talk a little more about some of the agencies.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I think my time is up.

The Chair: You never know. I've been listening a lot today.

We'll go to Bernadette Jordan for five minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for appearing today.

I'm going to take a different approach. We had Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters in earlier this week. They recently finished a survey on women in STEM and women in skilled trades and why they don't stay in the manufacturing sector. The number one reason they don't stay is the sexism in the workplace and what they have to deal with. It was really an interesting report. They provided us with copies of it. They have five pillars of how to encourage more women to be involved and to stay involved. We need to increase the women in STEM and we need to provide mentorship. However, none of them addressed the issue of the sexism in the workplace, which is the reason people leave.

You have a lot of the same types of directives, of increasing the number of women in STEM and mentorship, but if women aren't getting involved because of what they face in the workplace, shouldn't we be dealing with that problem first?

•(1250)

Ms. Frances McRae: You're absolutely right that there are many reasons, and the environmental factors in the workplace culture are obviously part of what women face. We're finding that many organizations, such as Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters but also private corporations, are seeing that they have a role to play in ensuring men in the workplace are also part of the solution, whether as leaders or as peers.

I was just looking at a transcript of a conversation that Minister Duncan had at a gender summit held earlier this week. One of the things that was noted was that, for example, men in a workplace could make a big difference by just saying to a woman colleague, "There's a job opportunity; I think you'd be great for that." That respect and acknowledgement of capability goes a long way, so you're absolutely right about that.

In regard to Bill C-25, we believe one of the first important steps in addressing what's actually happening in workplaces is to have people understand what's going on in the sense of encouraging companies to think about what their numbers look like. Critical mass makes a big difference.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: That brings me to my next point. The mandatory mentoring of over 400 women entrepreneurs last year is phenomenal. I applaud that, and it's a great program. Having mentors for women is extremely important.

Maybe what we should have is women mentoring young men so that they know what it's like to walk in their shoes, so that they can see from the other side what women face in the workplace and in higher positions particularly. I know it's focused on women entrepreneurs specifically, but I'm talking more in the broader sense of women in the workplace and young men entering the workforce.

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for that suggestion. We'll take that note. It's very creative.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: You talked a bit about rural and remote communities. My colleague mentioned women working from home. One challenge we face in rural and remote communities with women working from home is their access to reliable Internet.

I'm just going to put that out as another thing that we need to consider. If we want people to work from home, we have to be able to give them the tools to do it. Women have a stronger tendency to work from home. I live in a very rural area and I know that this is definitely a barrier, so although we can have all these great programs and ways to mentor people, if we're not providing them with the basic tools they need to run their businesses, that's another issue we need to address.

Ms. Frances McRae: You're absolutely right. We have an initiative, which we can get back to you with more information on, called Connect to Innovate, which is very much connected to the notion of empowering people with the right tools and technology to build and grow.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Thank you.

The Chair: We have a few minutes left. We have two options. We can adjourn the meeting, or if there's anybody who has one or two questions left, I'd open it to the floor, if there's anyone who has yet to ask a question.

We'll go to Earl and then Rachel. Let's keep it tight.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: I'll make it very concise.

You mentioned that with CanCode there are 81 applications. I'm curious what an application means, and the results, and what it entails, so I'll ask that question.

The other thing is the point about Internet service. I was on the industry committee, and one of the studies we were doing was dealing with rural and remote Internet service. I hope that is still there. I'm on the trade committee now, but I'm curious. I'm sure it is still on.

Could you answer the question about the 81 applications and what it actually entails?

• (1255)

Ms. Frances McRae: There was a call for proposals for the CanCode program earlier this year. As I mentioned, there are 81 applications. They're from qualified organizations who could deliver this program, deliver the results we're looking for.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: What is the scope? Is it to have 100 students? Is it to—?

Ms. Frances McRae: I would say the applications would all be quite different. I would say that we've had a very broad scope of applications and have had applications from all parts of the country, including Iqaluit, and some from indigenous organizations. We're thus quite pleased with the breadth and scope of it, and the process of evaluating the proposals will no doubt be taking into consideration the various needs we'll be able to put together to make sure we have a good national program that is diverse.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Rachel.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: For me the one question is about the reality that indigenous women in Canada are the poorest of the poor within our country, which is shameful in a country as wealthy as Canada. I know there is so much work that we all have to do.

How do you make your programs accessible to indigenous women specifically? It's a general, broad question, but I'm going to ask it anyway.

Mr. Jonathan Will: To start, I'll just talk about the indigenous early learning and child care initiative which, as I mentioned, is being done through a separate process. It's designed to recognize the unique and different local community needs on indigenous reserves, among Inuit and Métis children and families, and among other indigenous off reserve.

The government is doing special agreements with these organizations in order to capture their needs. The money is not just going to the provinces and territories. There's a bit set aside—it's a separate strategy—to ensure that the ELCC agreement is culturally appropriate and takes the unique situation of the indigenous people into account.

The Chair: That's our time. We're going to Ms. Nassif for a short question as well.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif: What are the best practices in entrepreneurship around the world that are designed to help women entrepreneurs?

Ms. Frances McRae: Thank you for the question.

There are actually many practices around the world, but I could not say which are the best. The important thing is to adapt existing practices to the needs in Canada.

I will turn to Ms. Poirier-Mizon.

Ms. Poirier-Mizon, do we have information about international programs and initiatives that are used to improve the situation?

Ms. Nathalie Poirier-Mizon (Director, Small Business Financing Directorate, Department of Industry): That is something we will have to look into; it is part of our work plan. While I do not have any studies to present in this regard, we can certainly draw general lessons from international practices as regards financial and digital knowledge, or women's access to mentoring or sponsorship. Perhaps we can examine whether, in Canada, we can adapt our programs in those areas.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would really like to thank the representatives from both the Department of Industry and the Department of Employment and Social Development for coming back as we're completing this study. Thank you very much for coming out today.

We'll see you after Remembrance Week. We'll see you on Tuesday of the following week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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