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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1040)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number five of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

To begin, I would like to thank all of the members for being here once again today. I also would like to thank the vice-chairs, sub-committee members and staff for working diligently to prepare for today's meeting.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline the rules.

Occupational health and safety staff have requested that we limit our movement in the room and wear masks unless seated. Floor markings indicate the path of travel, which goes counter-clockwise around the table. Individuals should respect physical distancing and remain two metres apart from one another. Seats and microphones have been placed in a manner such that everybody is properly physically distanced. To minimize health risks, we are allowing one staffer today. Other staff members are able to get on via calls.

You will note that no paper documents have been distributed. All documents that you will find or any conversations that you need to have go through FEWO@parl.gc.ca.

Today we're going to be studying the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. We will be accepting briefs from the general public at any time up to July 30. We are asking for them to be two to three pages in length. If people have questions regarding those briefings that they would like to put forward, please contact the clerk at FEWO@parl.gc.ca.

During the questioning of witnesses, there will be a six-minute first round. Round 1 questioning will be as follows: Conservative, Liberal and Bloc, followed by the NDP. For the second and subsequent rounds, the order and time for questioning will be as follows: Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberals, five minutes; Conservative Party, five minutes; Liberal Party, five minutes; Bloc, two and a half minutes; and, New Democratic Party, two and a half minutes.

On this, because we recognize that our time is so sensitive and also that both ministers would like to be at the committee of the whole today, I'm asking that everybody be very aware of their timing. If you are provided six minutes, you will be cut off at six minutes. If you are provided two and a half minutes, you will be cut off at two minutes and 31 seconds—that's for you, Lindsay. I want to make sure that everybody recognizes that time is of the essence

right now. Please always respect the time that we are using today so we can get all of the information and all of the questions that we have from all individuals sitting at this table and we can move forward.

I am also honoured to welcome today the Honourable Maryam Monsef, member of Parliament and Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, as well as the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. Minister Monsef is accompanied by Guylaine Roy, deputy minister, Women and Gender Equality Canada, and Nancy Gardiner, assistant deputy minister, Women and Gender Equality Canada. Minister Qualtrough is accompanied by Catherine Adam, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and service policy branch; Andrew Brown, director general, employment insurance policy; and, Philippe Massé, director general, temporary foreign workers program.

I invite the ministers to now make their opening remarks. Your remarks will be for 10 minutes. At that time, I will be cutting you off.

I would like to welcome to the floor the Honourable Maryam Monsef for her 10 minutes.

Welcome, Maryam.

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

Hello, colleagues. *Boozoo. Aaniin. As-salaam alaikum.* I hope you're well. I hope you're safe. I wish the same for your loved ones and for your teams.

Given that this is my first time in front of a committee in our post-COVID world, let me take this opportunity to thank the public service of Canada for all the ways that you've put everything on the line. We are truly blessed to have the world's best public service moving Canada forward during this difficult time. Also, of course, it's wonderful to be here with Minister Qualtrough, who has been moving some significant pieces forward, not the least of which is the CERB program.

Madam Chair, I am very much looking forward to the response that comes from your committee as we navigate the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on the most vulnerable, on women and on the path to recovery. I want to thank you for the work there.

I'll talk about our government's response to COVID. I would like to spend a bit of time talking about the impact on women and the road to recovery, but first let me talk about this book. Those of you from Winnipeg and those of you who have been around the last little while know that *Runaway Wives and Rogue Feminists* is a book that tells the story of the women's shelter movement in Canada. Maybe I'll start with that.

In 1971, the Liberal government of the day introduced the local initiatives programs and the opportunities for youth program. These programs were to support those who were experiencing particular vulnerabilities during a time of severe economic downturn. The programs encouraged Canadians, particularly women and young people, to find solutions to pressing local challenges and receive a modest amount of funding from the federal government to help turn those ideas and solutions into action.

Among the many ideas that came forward was one put together by young women across the country. They came together in the early seventies and started women's shelters in Canada, the very first women's shelters in Canada. Today, there are some 600 women's shelters in Canada because a group of young women came together to ensure that battered women and their children had a place to go in their hour of need. In 1996, my family and I were able to stay at one of those shelters.

Because of a decision that was made in 1971 and because of investments made in 1971, people today are benefiting from the thoughts, the creativity and the opportunities that have been created. We are going to see young people seize opportunities to propose solutions that we haven't thought of, and the story of the shelter movement in Canada is a really good reminder of the opportunities that can be seized in times of difficulty.

When the pandemic hit, one of our immediate responses was to provide \$50 million to organizations that are providing support to those experiencing increased rates of gender-based violence due to the isolation measures in Canada. Today, some one thousand organizations have been able to keep their doors open, have been able to keep their staff paid and have been able to keep their buildings clean and provide a place of refuge for women and children in really dark hours.

We started our efforts by focusing on shelters and sexual assault centres, and then we were able to flow funds in a new way, in a way that we hadn't done before, to organizations that provide gender-based violence supports but do so without having the specific mandate of being a shelter or sexual assault centre. This includes a range of organizations that, for example, are doing work in the Downtown Eastside, organizations that are working in smaller rural communities and, of course, organizations that are providing supports to victims of human trafficking.

There is more to do. There is more to come. We are moving forward with the plan to develop Canada's first national action plan on gender-based violence, and I will have more to say very soon about our efforts to support victims of human trafficking in this country.

• (1045)

From the very beginning, we recognized that those who were most vulnerable would be hardest hit by COVID, and every step

we've taken has taken that into account. The intersectional gendered lens that the Government of Canada applies has been applied to all of our efforts. I am happy to talk more about that.

There has also been a recognition that women have been hardest hit by COVID, with jobs lost and their work on the front lines and the care responsibilities they taken on because schools and day cares have been closed and because elders have needed help—as well as the shadow pandemic of gender-based violence. Women have been hardest hit, and if we're going to get out of this “she-cession”, we're going to have to support women in their need to get back to work and to ensure that we remove barriers. Otherwise, we lose the hard-won gains that so many before us have fought for.

Our focus on the vulnerable has led to millions of Canadians being supported.

The thousand organizations that we were able to support with gender-based violence funds have an impact in supporting some three million women and children in this country.

The CERB has benefited over eight million Canadians. The CEWS, or the wage subsidy, has supported close to three million workers. The Canada child benefit top-up has supported 3.7 million families with kids. The GST credit top-up has supported 12 million low- and modest-income individuals and families. The CESB has supported some 600,000 students. The OAS and GIS top-ups have supported 6.7 million elders in our country, and they will be receiving the top-up this week. The CEBA loans have supported 688,000 businesses, and there are additional supports for those businesses being worked out.

Madam Chair, the road to recovery from this unprecedented global pandemic will be hard. We are still in the middle of the pandemic. There's still a lot that we don't know about the virus, including how it spreads. I am proud of the way that Canadians have come together in shared sacrifice to protect the most vulnerable.

I am grateful to everyone who has been on the front lines of this work, particularly the women, who have put everything on the line. Some have had to have some really difficult conversations with their loved ones about why they can't be in the same house with them because they do work on the front lines. I'm talking about front-line workers.

The road to recovery has to include supporting women and the most vulnerable. There is an opportunity here too. The pandemic has revealed strengths in our system: for example, the public service of Canada; for example, our democratic institutions; and, for example, our universal health care system. It has also exposed cracks in our system that make too many vulnerable. We have an opportunity in the path to recovery, in the reimagining of our country and these systems, to rebuild back better. It's going to take every single one of us to work together to make that happen.

I want to thank you again for giving me a space. I want to thank everybody who has worked so hard to make this different way of doing business and doing Parliament possible.

I'll hand it back over to you, Madam Chair. I look forward to the conversation we are to have.

• (1050)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Monsef.

I'm now going to move to Minister Qualtrough.

Minister, you have the floor for 10 minutes.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough (Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good morning, everyone.

I'm pleased to be here with you today to speak about the emergency measures taken within the portfolio of Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, to support Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also want to talk about their impact on the situation of women and on gender equality.

These emergency measures, like all the measures implemented by the Government of Canada, reflect our commitment to equality, fairness, inclusiveness and diversity.

[*English*]

Let me get right into it. Given the speed of the severity by which the pandemic struck our country, we made a decision to act as quickly as possible in order to assist Canadians by issuing financial assistance immediately. We lost no time. We acted swiftly and promptly with the CERB, the student benefit, wage subsidies and other measures. We accepted that our response would not be perfect, but we were committed to being quick and ensuring we could deliver. Canadians were relying on us, and we would be there for them.

We know that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, putting them at greater risk of job loss, poverty, food insecurity, loss of housing and domestic violence, and I'd like to provide an overview of some of our measures.

As the pandemic made its way to Canada and began having tremendous impacts on our economy and our daily lives, our government acted quickly to create the Canada emergency response benefit. This benefit was created to help all Canadians who stopped working due to COVID-19.

I'll be honest with you: the CERB was conceived of, designed, approved, funded and legislated within a week. This was a massive new program being delivered to millions of Canadians, and the timelines were quite extraordinary. In this incredible timeline, there was no formal GBA+ study done. I say this because I want to be frank with you, but this in no way meant that we did not consider the needs and impacts on women at every decision point.

There were things that we absolutely knew. By delivering the CERB outside the EI system, we knew that we would be supporting

Canadians with precarious work and Canadians who weren't eligible for EI. This meant that the most vulnerable workers, including women and persons with disabilities, would be supported—Canadians who would not have been supported through EI.

We also knew that people would not be able to work for reasons other than job loss, such as sickness or quarantine, elder care and child care. We knew that women would be the most impacted if the income support did not take into consideration these broader realities. We knew that women are generally overrepresented in minimum wage and low-paying occupations, such as educational services and food services, which we anticipated would be the hardest hit by the pandemic, and we knew how important it was to deliver a benefit that addressed the pandemic reality for every worker—women in particular.

[*Translation*]

This benefit ensures that all eligible workers receive \$500 per week. The Canada emergency response benefit, or CERB, supports workers who have lost their jobs or who are unable to work because they are ill, they must self-isolate, or they need to take care of children or dependants as a result of the pandemic.

[*English*]

It also provides financial support to workers who are still employed but making under \$1,000 every four weeks. To give you a sense of the scope of the need, more than 8 million workers have been paid more than \$53 billion in benefits through the CERB. Fifty-one per cent of CERB recipients are men, 48% are women and 1% identify as gender diverse.

We recently extended the CERB by eight weeks to a maximum of 24 weeks. This is to ensure Canadians continue to get the support they need as the economy reopens. This is particularly important for women, who are facing the reality this summer of not being able to work even if they have a job to go back to, due to a lack of child care or summer camps. We recognize that our best strength for a recovery is getting people back into the labour force. This is why, with the extension of the CERB, we are encouraging workers who are able to return to work to do so, provided it's reasonable based on their individual circumstances. We are very realistic about the barriers being faced by women as they return to work.

Now, to go over to students and youth, we also know and have known from the beginning that this pandemic would have an impact on younger Canadians, and we had to think of innovative and targeted ways to support them. One significant way was helping students and youth through the Canada emergency student benefit. Students who are not receiving the CERB could be eligible to receive \$1,250 per month during these important summer months that so many of them count on for financial stability.

[Translation]

As we know, women may account for almost two-thirds of the student population in universities in Canada. As a result, this financial support significantly helps women.

• (1055)

[English]

Keeping in line with our GBA+ lens, we decided that students with permanent disabilities and students with dependants would receive an additional \$750 per month. This recognizes the additional expenses being incurred by students who are parents and by students with disabilities, as well as the additional barriers to employment being faced by female students, including the already mentioned lack of child care options this summer.

The CERB and the CESB have been providing much-needed support to millions of Canadians and to millions of Canadian women. Let me now highlight two other initiatives that are benefiting women in particular.

First, to help families, as was said, our government provided a one-time enhancement of \$300 per child for families receiving the CCB. Starting on July 20, the CCB will be increased once again to keep up with the cost of living.

Second, recognizing the particular vulnerability of our seniors in this pandemic and understanding that 54% of the Canadian population over 65 are women, we are providing a one-time tax-free payment of \$300 for seniors who are eligible for old age security, with an additional \$200 for seniors who are eligible for the GIS. Eligible seniors, as my colleague said, are receiving this one-time payment this week, and I know that this will be a welcome support for seniors in Canada.

I'll turn now to persons with disabilities. In addition to women facing heightened barriers and challenges during this pandemic, persons with disabilities are also disproportionately impacted.

[Translation]

According to the latest available data, more women than men have disabilities in Canada. The ratio is 2.1 million women to 1.7 million men. Currently, women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable because they very likely work in the hardest hit sectors of the economy. In addition, 60% of them are victims of violence.

[English]

We've been working with the disability community since the beginning. In the spirit of "nothing without us" and the Accessible Canada Act, and to support Canadians with disabilities, we established the COVID-19 disability advisory group.

The advisory group has raised key issues that affect Canadians with disabilities in the areas of health care, employment and social services, to name a few. They put an intersectional disability lens on the pandemic. They worked with the Public Health Agency on guidelines to ensure that people with disabilities are protected, listened to, supported and accommodated as necessary during this pandemic. They raised issues about triage and visitor policies with the health minister, who in turn brought these concerns to her

provincial and territorial counterparts, which resulted in significant policy changes.

[Translation]

Thanks in part to the advice—

[English]

The Chair: Minister Qualtrough, could you hold for one minute, please?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Yes.

The Chair: Minister Qualtrough, they are having difficulty hearing you at translation, so we're looking at this for just a moment here. I'm stopping your time.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Nobody has ever accused me of being quiet.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I understand that, Minister Qualtrough. You and I have the same problem, I think.

We're just checking into this. I've stopped your time, so let's see where we're going.

Minister Qualtrough, we are asking you to speak slowly so they can work through all of this. If you want to pick up from where you were—

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: People have asked me that before, so that's fine. Okay.

The Chair: Oh gosh, it's the same with me.

If you could just continue, we'll go from there so translation can work through it. Okay? Go ahead.

• (1100)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Excellent. Okay.

[Translation]

Thanks in part to the group's advice, we recognized that persons with disabilities had to incur some extraordinary costs during the pandemic. On June 5, the Prime Minister announced that, effective June 1, 2020, individuals who hold a disability tax credit certificate would receive a one-time payment of \$600.

[English]

As you know, our government's effort to pass legislation to support implementation of this payment did not proceed as intended. Parties could not agree on the legislation. Therefore, the process to roll out this benefit has been delayed. However, I emphasize the "delayed" part. We remain committed to finding a solution that delivers this supplement to Canadians with disabilities.

Madam Chair, our government has been working relentlessly to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus and protect Canadians' health and financial security during this pandemic. However, we know there is more work to be done. As we emerge from this crisis, we have an opportunity to design approaches to recovery that promote gender equality and a more inclusive society. That's what our government intends to keep doing.

To help ensure we leave no one behind, we commit absolutely to conducting rigorous GBA+ analysis as we gradually take measures to reopen the economy. My department is proud of its GBA+ centre of expertise, which has evolved over the years and will play a key role in ensuring that GBA+ is incorporated into our programs, policies and initiatives as we move forward.

Thank you. As well, I'd be happy to answer your questions.

The Chair: That's wonderful, and thank you very much, Minister Qualtrough.

As I indicated, time is really of the essence right now. We're one minute behind already.

I'm going to be passing the floor to members. I will be cutting everybody off as soon as their time is done in the first round at six minutes each.

We will be starting with our first CPC member.

Jag Sahota, you have the floor for six.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Minister Qualtrough, on June 10, during the COVID special committee, I asked why GBA+ was not conducted on the programs that were rolled out by your government. You said:

My goodness, Madam Chair. I'll say again how important it was from the very beginning that we took into account the needs of women and girls, and as we move forward into the economic recovery phase, how completely we make women at the core of every decision.

But we know this was not the case. Yesterday we heard from several witnesses that GBA+ was not conducted on the programs that were rolled out, as you just acknowledged, and that women could not have been core to every decision because of the significant gaps in the programs as they relate to women specifically.

If women and girls had been at the core of every decision as you said, how were there so many oversights and gaps relating to maternity leave and EI benefits? We heard yesterday that 50% of women-owned businesses are ineligible for the CEBA. There are obviously massive gaps. What steps is the government taking to ensure that more businesses can access the CEBA? May I have a short response, please.

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you. I stand by my words weeks ago and today that we have considered the needs and interests of women. As we've rolled out things extremely quickly, we've responded, I think, very quickly to any gaps that have been identified. Some are more complicated, admittedly, than others.

As a cabinet we're committed to ensuring that gender-based analysis is taken into consideration. My honest comment in my opening remarks had to deal with the formality of that process, but as I said, we have never.... The needs of women and taking into consideration that unique perspective have been fundamental to how we've responded in this crisis.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Thank you.

Minister Monsef, I'd like to ask about the disturbing decision of your government to fund PACE, a Vancouver centre that promotes sex work as a choice, while refusing to fund the London Abused

Women's Centre, an organization that has been steadfast in assisting women and girls who are being trafficked against their will.

We heard witness testimony yesterday that described these cuts, and the fact that human trafficking is not addressed in any of the COVID-19 economic relief programs, as devastating, a betrayal, and that people in their community are appalled. Women and girls are facing unprecedented rates of violence, and human trafficking has only increased during COVID.

Can you explain to Canadians why you've turned your backs on the community organizations that are integral to helping save lives? Again, a short answer, please.

• (1105)

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, let me correct the record. The organizations mentioned, including the London Abused Women's Centre, have received funding. There is more funding to come, which the organization and many other excellent organizations will be eligible for. Some thousand organizations have received emergency COVID funding in a very short period of time, in addition to the 500 that were receiving multi-year funding before the pandemic hit.

Madam Chair, I want to also acknowledge that when I started as the Minister for Women, the department had about \$20 million to give out in funding to organizations. This year it's close to \$120 million.

We believe that those organizations that are on the front lines are the most effective way to advance gender equality. We appreciate their incredible work. We know we have more work to do together.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Okay. Thank you.

Despite letters from opposition members, follow-ups by our offices and calls from community organizations, the government still has not replaced the funding lost under the measures to address prostitution initiative.

New funding through Public Safety has been announced, but is nowhere near being delivered. In fact, the government is currently cherry-picking organizations to solicit applications for future funding, none of which include the organizations that have been left in the lurch by the cuts to MAPI. The most recent call for proposals was done pretty much behind closed doors.

It seems pretty clear that the silence of the government on this issue speaks volumes. How can your government stand by and claim to be open and transparent while it strikes backroom deals with groups on issues as important as human trafficking?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, human trafficking is a heinous crime. We have a \$75-million strategy, a hotline and supports for women's organizations. There is work to be done to prevent it, and we recognize that we need to do more as a country to address this. Half of the human trafficking victims are indigenous women and girls. That came out clearly in the MMIWG calls for justice.

There were no cuts; a program sunsetted, and we are moving into a new program. In addition, there was no cherry-picking. We worked with provinces, territories and organizations on the ground to come up with a list of organizations. Those organizations received funding directly deposited into their bank accounts. A thousand organizations receiving funding directly into their bank accounts has never happened before. We did that because we appreciate their work.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Monsef.

The member's time has expired. We're now going to move over to Salma Zahid.

Salma, the floor is yours for six minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister Qualtrough and Minister Monsef, for all the work you are doing on behalf of all Canadians, as we all try to navigate these unprecedented times.

My first question is for Minister Qualtrough. Thank you for all you have done during this pandemic.

Throughout the COVID pandemic, I've been hearing from many of my constituents with disabilities who live on limited fixed incomes that they are facing increased costs but haven't qualified for programs, such as the CERB. They were pleased when we announced the one-time, non-taxable payment of \$600 to those eligible for the disability tax credit, but they are confused about why the opposition did not allow Parliament to debate this bill and what the status of this program is now.

I know that women with disabilities, in particular, need this support. Can you please help us understand just what happened and how we are going to get this support to those who need it, especially the women who are living with disabilities?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I thank you for your really important question.

People with disabilities have faced and are facing extraordinary expenses specific to COVID and additional barriers to getting the support and services they need. We wanted to ensure that we provided a supplement as opposed to an employment income replacement, as we did with seniors, that would ensure that these extraordinary expenses were the focus of this assistance.

We knew there was a gap in terms of... We were able to provide...children with disabilities through CCB, seniors, students, low-income Canadians with disabilities through the GST, but there were significant cohorts.

What this pandemic has revealed is a gap in our system and a weakness in our policy and programs. We can't easily identify a

group of Canadians with disabilities to connect with directly. The best group we had was disability tax credit claimants, but we needed legislation to allow the DTC data to be shared with my department in order to deliver this benefit. That's what the legislation would have done, unlock that data to allow us to deliver this supplement.

As I said in my opening remarks, I'm not in any way going to let this go. We are going to find a way to deliver this. I'm baffled, given the all-party support we had for the Accessible Canada Act, that we couldn't get all-party support, even when we took the disability piece out and tried to put it forth on its own, but I am no less committed. In fact, we are more resolved to deliver this, and we're going to find a way, hopefully, through legislation. That's the most inclusive and accessible way. If not, we're working on other options.

● (1110)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: My next question is for Minister Monsef.

As a member of Parliament for Scarborough Centre, I represent one of the most diverse ridings in Canada. I know many newcomer and visible minority women who already found it difficult to find work in their field, even before this pandemic hit us. They often ended up in precarious and low-income jobs. This has only worsened during the COVID-19 situation.

In the COVID support programs your department is managing, have you ensured that a GBA+ lens was applied to those programs so that the unique challenges being faced by diversity-seeking women are recognized and addressed?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: One reality that COVID has highlighted is that in our economy, the care work that's done is disproportionately borne on the shoulders of racialized women and newcomer women, women whose work is essential to our survival, yet whose work is not compensated according to the incredible amount of labour that we ask of them. The precarity of their situations means that personal support workers, for example, have to have two or three jobs to try to manage, to make ends meet.

We can do better in Canada. The work that my department has been doing over the past few years, as well as our government as a whole, is to recognize that there are groups of Canadians across the country who are underserved and under-represented. Not only is that unfair, but unless we maximize the potential of those who have been on the margins of our societies and economies for too long, Canada won't reach its full potential.

We did begin to take into account and measure things. For example, 20% of our funds support women in rural communities. Also, a portion of our funds supports indigenous women and those organizations that are supporting them. We are doing more to dig deeper and figure out what percentage is supporting black women's organizations, indigenous women's organizations and racialized women's organizations, but we have so much more work to do.

Perhaps one positive outcome of COVID has been a recognition across the country that, unless the data that we collect as a nation in different orders of government is disaggregated by gender, race and other identity factors, we're not going to be able to count every single person and measure our impact.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Monsef. The time has expired.

We'll now move to Andréanne Larouche, for six minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to thank Ms. Monsef and Ms. Qualtrough for joining us today.

However, I regret that I was unable to hear some of Ms. Qualtrough's comments when they were translated by the interpreters. In a committee studying an issue as important as the status of women, I wish that the technology had enabled us to hear everything that she was saying.

That said, I'll ask Ms. Qualtrough my first question.

Ms. Qualtrough, it would be extremely counterproductive to apply fiscal restraint at the expense of pay equity. Some people are concerned about what will happen next. I want to know the challenges involved in implementing the Pay Equity Act and how you intend to address them. What still needs to be done? What makes this significant, especially if we're talking about a second wave? We've really seen the importance of improving the economic empowerment of women to help them get through a crisis such as the one that we've just experienced.

• (1115)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for the question.

For our government, pay equity is one of the most significant challenges. The absolute necessity to continue working on this issue is, in a way, a legacy of the pandemic. If women continue to receive lower wages, we'll never achieve equity. This is part of equity. It isn't the only part, but it's fundamental.

This isn't my file. I apologize for not being able to be more specific. However, perhaps Minister Monsef could describe the situation and give you more details on the issue. That said, as a lawyer, I find that human rights are fundamental. I'm working on this issue with my colleague, Minister Tassi.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Ms. Qualtrough.

Ms. Monsef, can you talk to us about pay equity?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for the question, Ms. Larouche.

[*English*]

As I just mentioned to MP Zahid, our economy, particularly the care work that's been done, unpaid care work, underpaid care work at best, has been done by women and women of diverse backgrounds. Pay equity is certainly a priority for us. We have put forward pay equity legislation. The work around addressing the gender wage gaps also includes ensuring that gender-based violence is addressed. If this most prevalent human rights violation is not addressed, women will not reach their full potential. If women are not supported, those who choose to go into fields that are often male-dominated, but also pay better, we're not going to reach pay equity, but I also agree that we need to work as a country to ensure that women get paid equally for work of equal value in the fields they choose to be in.

COVID has heightened just how important women's work is, how important care work in particular is, and how we all need to do better to compensate those who are doing this work. The pandemic pay that our government put forward to support provinces and territories is an example of just how much we believe that this needs to happen, for the sake of it being the right thing to do, but also, if we don't pay people fair wages, they're not likely to stay in those fields where we need them, and that's going to create a whole other set of challenges, as we have seen throughout COVID.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You made a very useful connection by saying that not only do we need to increase women's wages, but we also need to encourage women to enter into sectors involving non-traditional occupations. Since we're talking about non-traditional occupations, I want to point out that we're in politics, which can be considered a male-dominated world. There's evidence that women are still finding it difficult to enter into this world.

I want you to tell us about the national action plan on gender-based violence and how this violence affects the integration of women into certain sectors. Is there a time frame?

The current crisis gives us some ways to develop this action plan. I have an article in front of me that describes a situation that I deplore. Lenore Zann, a member of Parliament from Nova Scotia, was the victim of misogynistic threats, simply for wanting to defend the gun registry. She spoke out on this issue, and she was the victim of misogynistic comments.

How can these types of comments cause harm and perhaps discourage young girls who see this issue from entering into politics?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Without a doubt, this is a male-dominated sector. Without a doubt, it is harder for women, racialized women, young women and women with disabilities and exceptionalities to get into politics, to get their name on a ballot, and then to win and stay once they get here.

Representation matters. Minister Qualtrough talked about the considerations that were taken into account in very short order in the development of, say, the CERB. The fact that we have people around the cabinet table who had been homeless, the fact that we had people who had lived in poverty and different backgrounds, allowed us to make those calculations very quickly. Representation matters.

When little girls and boys and gender-diverse people see us women around these tables, they begin to see themselves in those fields as well.

Every time there has been movement forward for equality for women's rights, there has been push-back. There was push-back when we got the right to vote. There was push-back when we entered the workforce, and there's certainly push-back now that we are in politics. Just look at any one of our Twitter feeds to see just how harsh and how toxic that push-back is. Certainly, we play a role in supporting one another to show that women can work together and do politics differently. Certainly, our allies, particularly male colleagues, play a role.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Monsef.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: There's so much more to say.

The Chair: Thank you so much. I gave you a few extra seconds there for translation.

We're going to move our time over to Lindsay Mathyssen for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you.

Thank you to both ministers for appearing today.

My first question is for Minister Monsef.

Throughout COVID, and you acknowledged it too, there's been a rise in domestic violence. We also know and heard yesterday that there's chronic underfunding of shelters. In 2019 Women's Shelters Canada published a report on how they are constantly doing more with less. Specifically now, with COVID, they cannot rely on fundraisers, and that money has evaporated.

Yesterday we heard again from those organizations that the short-term, project-based funding model simply is not getting the job done, and it hasn't for many, many years.

Do you have intentions, in terms of your government, to provide reliable, predictable core funding that allows organizations to deal with a potential second wave or any future crises or emergencies? Will your government commit to converting the capacity-building fund grants to permanent core funding, allowing those women's organizations to break down the systemic barriers that they face?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: You are right; women's shelters and women's organizations, particularly over the past few decades, have had to find creative ways to make ends meet. They've been able to maintain their services despite the whims and the values of the various governments of the day.

We came in, in 2015, and one of our first steps forward on that front was providing supports to support and maintain 7,000 shelter units. We also carved out one-third of the national housing strategy so that women who are staying in shelters could then move into affordable housing, so that they could free up spaces but also piece back together and rebuild their lives. To date, about 29% of the national housing strategy has supported builds for women.

In addition to that, we were able to put forward funding to support shelters through capacity-building funds, through the gender-based violence program. During the COVID response, one of the first calls was to Lise Martin of Women's Shelters Canada. In partnership with her and her team, we were able to get money directly into the bank accounts of some 500 shelters in Canada to respond to COVID.

There is absolutely more work to do. We know that the work around operations for these women's organizations and equality-seeking organizations has to be in conjunction and co-operation with provinces and territories. The national action plan for gender-based violence is going to create an opportunity to further support these organizations.

MP Mathyssen, I look forward to your continued advocacy and partnership to ensure greater sustainability for these essential services for Canadians.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Great. Thank you.

The other thing that we heard from every single witness yesterday was the need for affordable, reliable child care. In fact, the economist Armine Yalnizyan said that without child care, without women going back to work, the economy cannot recover and that we would not only see a recession but we would actually see a depression. The key here is that those spaces not only are available, but they are safe, they are licensed and they are affordable, they are publicly funded.

Is your government committed or willing to commit to ensuring that children and parents have equal access, no matter where they live in Canada, to that high-quality early learning child care? Much like it's enshrined within the Canada Health Act that everyone has access to health care, they could have access to affordable, publicly funded child care.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The short answer is yes. We are working with provinces and territories, with the safe restart agreement, with the \$14 billion that's on the table, to support the safe reopening of day cares so that parents can go to work knowing that their little ones are safe.

We also know that the child care system in Canada is not yet fully a system. We can't get back to a strong economy if we don't address the labour force attachments that women need. There is a link between gender-based violence, economic security, child care and pay equity. These things are all related. When women are able to stand on their own feet, to earn a good income, to participate in the economy, they are less vulnerable to gender-based violence—not totally 100% safe and free, but it makes a difference.

We are committed to that work. We do look forward to coming to agreement with our provinces and territories. It's mid-July. Parents are nervous, and rightfully so. We need women to get back to work so that we can restart the engines of our economy.

• (1125)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to quickly shift to Minister Qualtrough. You had acknowledged that you did not do the gender-based analysis on the CERB program. Now that you've had more time, your government still insists on shifting towards a more penalizing system of the CERB. How do you think that's going to impact the most marginalized, especially women? Have you done a gender-based analysis on this new policy?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I really want to emphasize that we are not going after the most vulnerable by penalizing CERB fraudsters. We're actually going after the people who prey on the most vulnerable. I truly believe that.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Qualtrough. Our time has expired. I am now going to move over to Raquel Dancho.

Raquel, you have five minutes for this round.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ministers, for joining us this morning to help the committee study the impacts of COVID-19 on women. We greatly appreciate you being here virtually.

We know that it has been 131 days since this committee last met, and I think all committee members recognize the importance of this opportunity for parliamentarians to study the unique impacts on women of this pandemic and, critically, the government's response to it.

Committee members are also well aware that women make up the overwhelming majority of students in this country—over 60%. However, like in many other sectors, they do not occupy many of the senior positions, such as Ph.D. programs and faculty positions, and all of this despite making up the majority of undergraduate students for the last 30 years. I think this is quite a concern.

As a result, the summer months are critical in helping women students work to afford tuition and continue their academic careers. I know this because I was a student who was a waitress and worked for many years to help pay for my education.

I will make reference to some of the Manitoba statistics that I believe are relevant to this.

The restaurant, hotel and retail sector, which is dominated by young people, particularly student women, represented 43.5% of

job losses. Younger Manitobans aged 15 to 24 accounted for 35.3% of job losses. Fifty-six per cent of Manitoba job losses were women's.

The Canada student service grant is in fact a response to these alarming statistics, as I'm sure you would agree, and I have to say that I do applaud the government for thinking in innovative ways to support students who have been unable to find summer work. Frankly, this grant would have been a great help to me a decade ago.

With that in mind, Minister Qualtrough, would you permit me to ask a few quick questions about the grant, given that it's on the minds of Canadians and students?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Absolutely. Understanding that it's not my file, I can give you the most information that I have and refer you to a colleague to give you feedback if I can't provide too many of the details.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Minister. I do appreciate that.

My understanding was that this grant did in fact fall under your department. Is that not the case?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: It's technically under the Department of ESDC, but under the responsibilities of the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. So it was not one of your officials who recommended the WE Charity to run the program?

• (1130)

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Again, I'm not trying to be difficult, but I was not the program lead on this. It would have of course been ESDC officials who supported Minister Chagger in the development of this program, yes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay.

Minister, can you confirm if there were other organizations that in that department were considered before the decision was made to award the \$900-million sole-source contract to the WE Charity, and did that include any women-led organizations?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I'm not privy to that information. I do understand that part of the decision-making rationale was the speed with which it had to be rolled out, but again, my colleague is much better positioned to answer that specificity, and we can get that information for you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, I'd appreciate that. I do remember the announcement. It was \$9 billion in total for students—I believe on April 22, was it?—and then it did take about two months to roll out the program. I'm sure you would agree it was a bit of a disaster of a rollout. I do believe that this grant is very important, so I'm very keen to see it be successful, but I am concerned.

Was this decision brought forward at all to cabinet so that the women and gender equality minister could provide her feedback regarding the impact on women or the GBA+? Are you aware of any of that?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I cannot of course divulge cabinet confidence, but as a matter of process, the cabinet does have such discussions.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you confirm—or maybe Minister Monsef can confirm—if she provided feedback regarding the sole-source contract to WE and the impact on women?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you for sharing a bit of your own personal story. As someone who worked in a restaurant for five years, I appreciate it.

As Minister Qualtrough said, we obviously can't divulge cabinet matters, but let me be very clear. The purpose of these programs is to support students who are ready to step up and to do things in their communities that make a difference, that ease suffering, and we remain committed to that—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: For sure. I'm sorry, Minister. We have to move on. I only have half a minute left.

I'll just get right to it. I'm just looking for confirmation from either of you in any of your involvement on this, and particularly Minister Monsef, with the approval and the women angle.

Minister Qualtrough, can you confirm that your department will turn over all documentation and make witnesses involved in this WE “scam”, as it has been called, available to the Ethics Commissioner for the investigation, and will your department fully co-operate with the Auditor General and the procurement ombudsman?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I can absolutely confirm that we will work with the Auditor General and comply with any such requests.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to Marc Serré.

Marc, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I want to thank Minister Qualtrough and Minister Monsef for their presentations and for their work in assisting organizations in Canada, particularly during the pandemic.

My first question is for Minister Monsef. It concerns the \$50 million in funding to help women's shelters and to combat domestic violence.

[*English*]

When I was speaking to local organizations, I spoke with Linda Lafantaisie Renaud, the executive director of the Horizon Women's Centre in West Nipissing, and with the executive director of the YWCA in greater Sudbury, Marlene Gorman. They're very, very thankful for the support during this pandemic, especially the support related to the women being quarantined. There is additional support, so organizations don't have to worry about the pandemic and can focus on the support for women and the flexibility in the funds. Madame Lafantaisie mentioned that she was so relieved

about the work done in partnership between the federal government and the Province of Ontario, with Premier Ford. Earlier the opposition mentioned cherry-picking, but the organizations were really supportive. They were really thankful that the federal government and the provincial government are working together to make sure that we support women's organizations.

I wanted to give you an opportunity, Minister Monsef, to elaborate on the partnership that you've been working on closely with Premier Ford in Ontario to support women's organizations across the province.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: MP Serré, it's wonderful to see you well.

When the pandemic hit, the moment that really hit home for my team and I was when the Prime Minister had to self-isolate. At that time, we got on the phone with women's organizations, our partners across the country. In the next 48 hours there was a series of phone calls. Organizations all said the same thing when we asked them what we should do first: The last place that women will go when they need help is shelters and sexual assault centres, so we better make sure that when she knocks on the door, it is open to her and she's safe.

We've been very fortunate to have very positive relationships with all of our partners across the country, the other ministers responsible for women and gender equality in every province and territory. We realized that the rate of response was key. We had to get the money out very quickly. Flexibility was also going to be key, and we knew that to ensure there was no overlap of our funds, as resources are always limited, we had to make sure there weren't gaps created in the supports we were providing to organizations across the community. In that regard, working very closely with our provincial and territorial counterparts would be key.

After we came up with a list of partnerships with women's organizations, including Women's Shelters Canada and the Canadian Women's Foundation, we were able to share it with provincial and territorial partners, which then went through it and added to it, and told us who was getting funding already. When we rolled out the funds, they went out in a coordinated fashion to organizations that are providing support to some three million women and children across the country.

Those partnerships are going to be key not only in the ongoing efforts to respond to COVID, but also in the work that will need to happen with the national action plan.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you, Minister Monsef, for your response.

I have one minute left, so I will combine my questions.

The issue of Internet access in rural areas is important to our rural communities, and not just during the pandemic. Issues concerning support for our indigenous communities, first nations and women are equally important.

[English]

In the minute I have left, Minister Monsef, I want to give you an opportunity to talk about rural connectivity and the importance of the Internet and about our support to indigenous communities. This is really important in my riding of Nickel Belt.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: High-speed Internet is an essential service that Canadians deserve access to. While 87% of Canadians have that access, first nations communities and those in rural parts of our country disproportionately do not. We're moving into the world of telework and telehealth, and we are staying connected to our loved ones more and more online. While some 400,000 households are and will be connected to high-speed Internet because of our government's support, too many, some two million, have yet to have that connectivity.

The universal broadband fund, which we'll have more to say about, has the goal of connecting 100% of Canadians to this essential service. This is a matter of fairness, productivity and having a competitive advantage for our country.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister Monsef. The time has expired.

Now we're moving over to Nelly Shin for five minutes.

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

Minister Monsef, the most haunting statement I heard from the witnesses yesterday was from Lorraine Whitman, an elder with the Glooscap First Nation in Nova Scotia, and president of the Native Women's Association of Canada. Essentially she said that the indigenous community is hurt because they made themselves vulnerable by telling their stories in good faith that the government was going to follow through with their promise of action on the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls, but didn't. There's deep disappointment.

It's simply wrong to toy with people's pain and make them relive their trauma over and over as they retell their story, and then crush their hope by not following through. This is another barrier that brings us backward in the process of reconciliation. Indigenous communities already struggle with hope. We see it in the high cases of youth suicide.

The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was meant to be released in June, and the government has used COVID as an excuse to delay the release. What is the government's plan if we get a second wave? This is a matter of justice, restoring trust and being serious about reconciliation. When can these communities expect the final report?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: I was a student activist when the Prime Minister of Canada in the previous government said that the issue of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls was not a priority; that was crushing.

We are moving forward to respond to the calls for justice. My colleagues, including Minister Bennett and me, have been working with indigenous communities across the country. We held virtual gatherings, with Yukon, with Manitoba, for example. The work is ongoing. COVID has changed things, but we heard clearly from families, from survivors, from indigenous leaders, "nothing about us without us", and we are co-developing that response.

We didn't wait to respond. We've already invested historic amounts in women's organizations supporting indigenous communities across the country. We are already working to close gaps. The K-to-12 education gap, for example, the cap on funding, that was removed. Over half the boil water advisories have been removed. Sex discrimination in the Indian Act has been removed. We put forward legislation around indigenous languages and supports for children in care and restoring those rights to those families. Some hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested directly—

● (1140)

Ms. Nelly Shin: Sorry, Minister—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We have a long way to go, and more will be done.

Ms. Nelly Shin: I'd like to ask another very important question.

How will the minister protect indigenous women and children in abusive homes now and if there's a second wave, because many have repeatedly said they're more afraid of domestic violence than they are of COVID?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: They have every reason to be afraid. They are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, and we, as a country, are going to benefit when our communities are safer for indigenous women and girls.

MP Shin, it's not if there will be a second wave, it's how the second wave or the third wave will look and where it will hit hardest. In indigenous communities where there have been containment efforts, where communities have been in charge of their own health services, able to share their data, they've been able to respond really effectively. I want to thank them for that.

We are going to continue to support those who are providing shelters for indigenous women and girls on and off reserve. We are going to continue to ensure they are at the table and that we are hearing directly from them, and we are going to continue to ensure that they benefit from the various government supports in place right now so they are not made even more vulnerable because of COVID. Provinces and territories are also committed to this work, and I'm grateful to see multi-party support for this work in 2020 because indigenous communities have been let down by government for too long. We can do better, and we will.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you for that.

What is the long-term plan for the next wave; what will that look like? This cycle needs to be broken.

The Chair: Unfortunately we are out of time.

We are going to move to Sonia for five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister Monsef, Minister Qualtrough, for being here with us today. Thank you for the work you are doing for all Canadians.

My first question is to Minister Monsef. Minister, yesterday at committee we heard that women have been hit hard by COVID-19. One key to restarting our economy will be to ensure that there's proper child care—I know that question was asked before, but my question's a bit different—so that women can return to the workforce.

Some of the industries that have been affected the most by COVID-19 are made up mostly of women: as examples, we heard that 91% of nurses are women; 76% of teachers are women; and 56% of those in food and accommodations services are women. As well, we are seeing that the majority of jobs coming back recently are being filled by men, not women.

How is the government looking to address child care in collaboration with the provinces?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Thank you so much for that important question. We were already working to support the creation of some 40,000 child care spaces in the country. Minister Hussen and I have a joint mandate, from the Prime Minister, to develop an early learning and child care secretariat. That work is under way.

Ninety-seven per cent of early learning and child care workers are women. The wages that they're paid, and the way the different provinces and territories treat early learning and child care affect them.

I've been working with the Canadian Teachers' Federation very closely for the past few months—and a shout-out to Cassie Hallett. They're having their AGM this week. These women, these teachers were expected to look after their own kids while coming up with online modules for children across the country. They've endured incredible hardships, and we thank them for stepping up.

We are working very closely with provinces and territories. Minister Freeland and the Prime Minister have had weekly meetings, first ministers meetings with provinces and territories, with the premiers. Of the many initiatives that we are working together on to ensure a safe restart to our economy, child care is one of them. It has to be one of them.

This sector was hard hit before COVID. The sector needed support before that. COVID has changed their entire business model. We owe it to them, to our children and to our economy to get it right. Those negotiations are ongoing, and more needs to be done.

I do look forward to one of the other good things coming out of COVID, being a stronger, more whole system of early learning and child care.

• (1145)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: In the Region of Peel we've had an increase in human trafficking. We already had discussions on that many times, but there's a concern that these young women are more vulnerable due to COVID-19. As well, we have heard that domestic violence is on the rise during this pandemic. How is the government working to ensure that young girls and women are feeling safe during COVID-19 and moving forward?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The rates of online violence are increasing, particularly rates of sexual exploitation of children. We know that human trafficking affects children. People say girls under the age of 18 are being trafficked. Those women under the age of 18 are children. That is something we can talk about differently, only to raise the alarm.

We are expecting, and paying very close attention to what front lines are telling us: there is a surge in supports being sought by those who experience increased rates of gender-based violence during the pandemic, when we were in phase one, during the isolation measures. We are preparing for that increase with 1,000-plus organizations across the country.

On human trafficking, the hotline hours are restored and the hotline is open 24-7. There's additional funding coming, too, very soon, in partnership with Minister Blair and Public Safety, to provide those organizations that are doing really important work an opportunity to apply and seek greater supports.

This is a heinous crime.

It's also part of our response to the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls inquiry, the calls for justice. It's our daughters.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Monsef.

We're now going to move over to Andréanne.

Andréanne, you have two and a half minutes. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I hope that the ministers will give me concrete and brief answers.

The pandemic has demonstrated that women are more likely to hold precarious and part-time jobs. This brings me to a question regarding employment insurance.

Ms. Qualtrough, do you acknowledge that the current employment insurance system really discriminates against women? If so, how do you plan to address this issue in a concrete manner when the pandemic is over?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: Thank you for your question.

In concrete terms, I can assure you that we've learned many lessons from the employment insurance situation during this pandemic and that we'll work hard to modernize this program. This will be part of the legacy of this crisis. It's true that not all part-time workers are receiving the same services from this program. We're looking at how to address this issue. I can guarantee that this will be part of the solution.

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Okay. I want to come back to Ms. Monsef.

Ms. Monsef, do you have a time frame for the national action plan on gender-based violence?

I also want to speak to you about projects that were set up in my region during the pandemic to work on the issue of sexual exploitation, and about the sexual assault centres, or CALACS. Yesterday, I met with the director of one centre. Your department has made investments. However, in Quebec, only three CALACS out of seven have received financial support. The other centres weren't eligible.

Wouldn't assisting these centres be a way to help more women find a way out of this sexual exploitation situation?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Madam Chair, I'm afraid I didn't get the translation there. Could you repeat the translation, please?

The Chair: Andr anne, go ahead.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Monsef, do you have a time frame for the national action plan on gender-based violence?

[English]

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We do not, but I will say that we are working very closely with the provinces and territories. Those conversations have begun, and it is in my mandate—

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Okay.

I want to wrap up this topic and ask another question that the interpreter didn't have the opportunity to translate.

We're talking a great deal about sexual exploitation and the importance of helping women find a way out of it. I was saying that, in my constituency, only three out of seven CALACS have managed to receive funding from you. Four CALACS haven't received funding and are working hard to break the cycle of violence against women.

Wouldn't it be possible to give these centres more help or to make the criteria for support measures more flexible?

• (1150)

[English]

The Chair: Okay, we are already 20 seconds over time, even with the translation. I'm going to have to move on.

Lindsay, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you.

Minister Qualtrough, many pregnant women who would have been entitled to maternity benefits have found out that, because of losing their jobs during the pandemic, they won't have collected enough hours at work to qualify for EI, and they were counting on that money.

In April, you stated that they will have full access to their maternity and parental entitlements and that there isn't a scenario where this won't be made right for people. Now it's July, so can you tell us how you have made this right for people? Have you done that yet? What's the delay for the benefits that these parents are counting on?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: In April, I was referring to the challenge within the CERB system of people not having access to CERB and maternity and parental benefits. That has been remedied, so people will have access. They won't be penalized in any way for any time or any systemic issues.

In terms of the reality, there are many workers who are concerned that they have not met minimal requirements to qualify for EI regular or special benefits. In particular, women are worried about their inability to access maternity, special and parental benefits. Of course, the timelines for giving birth are fixed, and there's much uncertainty.

I can tell you that this is my number one priority. We are working on a solution that will assist many women, and in the coming days—and when I say “in the coming days”, I mean it—I will be announcing a path forward on this very issue.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I'm glad to hear that.

I'd like to quickly address the issue of unpaid work, which so many women are obviously facing, and the recognition of that unpaid work. Certainly one of the things we can move forward on, in terms of progress on this, is something like paid sick leave and recognizing the need for that across the board, which your government has promised, and we're looking forward to seeing action on that.

Can you address ways that you believe your government could better recognize women's unpaid work? I specifically point to ILO conventions C190 and C189. Has your government talked about the ratification of those conventions?

Hon. Carla Qualtrough: I apologize; I don't know the details of those conventions. However, I can assure you that we need...and we talk very often about recognizing, certainly, the unpaid work done by women. Sorry, my brain is working faster than my mouth. As my colleague Minister Monsef said, if nothing else, this pandemic has highlighted the need to recognize unpaid care and the myriad of—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister Qualtrough. Our time is just so short.

We will go on to our final round. Due to equality, we'll give three minutes to the CPC and three minutes to the government.

I will pass the floor over to Raquel for three minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Chair.

Before I get into my questions, I want to mention that I had some questions that didn't get answered. The Bloc also had some really great questions that we ran out of time for. I'm wondering if the ministers would commit to getting us our answers in writing as soon as possible. I see nodding. Thank you very much. I think that would be great.

I'm also wondering whether we could get the ministers to commit to returning to the committee. We had a good discussion yesterday. We may very well be at this again in the fall, to expand on our study, and we'd very much appreciate it if both ministers would join us again then, if they are available. I see more nodding. Okay, perfect.

For my final questions, I want to ask a little bit more about the GBA+. I completely understand that everything was rolled out extremely quickly. I do recognize that. I do have some concerns, though, particularly for women entrepreneurs. Many of them don't use chequing accounts. They aren't able to access any of the business-centred programs your government rolled out in very rapid succession. I do believe that a GBA+ applied then, or applied now, would show that.

Minister Monsef, could you commit to bringing that to your cabinet colleagues so that we can get some amendments to these business programs in favour of entrepreneurial women?

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We are working on that, absolutely, on the women entrepreneurship program on its own. I also want to say that shortly after things were rolled out in the first phase, we established a GBA+ task force that combed through all the measures the government had introduced. This was after the first month. It was able to provide that intersectional gendered lens and do the analysis as well as provide guidance.

That task force is working very closely with the Minister of Finance, as well as every other government department, because we recognize that the vulnerable have been hit the hardest.

• (1155)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, absolutely. I do appreciate that. When you're working with that task force, perhaps you could also look at the Canada commercial rent assist program. That one in particular seems not to be going very well for women. If you could really home in on those, it would mean a lot to the women in my riding who own small businesses.

I'll just end off quickly—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Do you want me to respond on the rent assist, MP Dancho?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: No. If you could just commit to looking at it, that would be great.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We're working on it with the provinces and territories. They have the most levers there.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Great.

Finally, with regard to LAWC, the London Abused Women's Centre, I do recognize, from your definition, that it wasn't a cut and the funding was up, but I am very disappointed that you, as the minister of this department, did not renew it. I think they were doing really good work—really good, non-partisan work—and I still

can't really understand why you didn't deem them to be a good organization to fund. I really can't understand that.

If you could commit to looking at that funding model, particularly under your new funding under Public Safety, and commit to looking at the London Abused Women's Centre, really looking at funding them and very seriously taking that back to your desk, I'd appreciate it.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: The London Abused Women's Centre has received funding from the department—

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Not specifically for human trafficking—

Hon. Maryam Monsef: They have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Our time is over.

Anju, you have the floor for three minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our ministers for being here today.

GBA is administered by each respective department. Does WAGE give common guidelines on how each department should do their GBA evaluations? Can you please talk to us a little bit about why GBA+ was not conducted on programs that were rolled out during the pandemic?

If there's time, perhaps you could also talk to us a little bit about the GBA task force.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: Yes, WAGE provides those guidelines. We also, in the past years, have hit it over to the training of the public service at the Canada School of Public Service. We work very closely with them.

We have applied an intersectional gender lens to everything you'll see in the economic snapshot, and you'll see just how thorough we've been. It's really quite historic. In the first week or two of the pandemic, as Minister Qualtrough mentioned, our job was to take into account the most vulnerable, to use what we knew and to rely on our public servants for their guidance to ensure that the most vulnerable were supported. The focus was on rapid response and ensuring that the most vulnerable were supported.

Then, very quickly, we restored processes that were in place around GBA+. We set up a task force. The task force worked with every government department. When the Black Lives Matter protests particularly escalated, we partnered with anti-racism secretariats and other departments to further fine-tune GBA+. I want to assure you that this work is being done, because it has to be done. When it's not done, in the formal kind of way, we rely on the intellect, experience and wisdom of those around the table to move us forward, and of course on our amazing partners across the country who keep us accountable and informed.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: In 2009 and 2015, the Auditor General's reports stated that the Conservative government's use of gender-based analysis was lacking. Could you tell us how this government and your department specifically have embedded gender-based analysis in the development of policies, legislative programs and initiatives?

Thank you.

Hon. Maryam Monsef: We returned the word “gender” to our foreign policy. We put forward a feminist international assistance policy. In addition to that, we opened 12 out of 16—

The Chair: Thank you very much. Our time has expired.

On behalf of the committee, I would greatly like to thank Minister Qualtrough, Minister Monsef and all the department officials for coming today. I'm afraid we didn't get to speak to the excellent staff with you both today, but we do know that there's a very important committee of the whole today that we need to attend.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you all. This has been a wonderful time.

Andréanne, do you have a question?

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Yes, Madam Chair.

I asked a question that doesn't even seem to have been translated. The minister didn't respond to my question about CALACS and the program that supports organizations that provide assistance to victims who want to find a way out of sexual exploitation. I explained that, in my constituency—

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much. Just recognizing the time, I do need to make sure that we are able to go forward.

We are asking that, if there are any questions that were asked and, due to the time frames, were not responded to, both Minister Qualtrough and Minister Monsef write those responses, and that is greatly appreciated. I know both ministers have been addressed and they said yes.

Once again, on behalf of all women in Canada, I would like to thank everybody for putting the time forward and making sure that we're here today to discuss these extremely important issues. It's better for all Canadians when we're doing our work, so thank you very much.

Today's meeting is adjourned.

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