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CANADA

IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN

Report of the Standing Committee on the Status
of Women

Marilyn Gladu, Chair

MARCH 2021
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

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ON WOMEN**

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**Marilyn Gladu
Chair**

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43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION

NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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43rd PARLIAMENT – 1st SESSION

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

has the honour to present its

SIXTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the committee has studied the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and has agreed to report the following:

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SUMMARY

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been profound and far-reaching. Beyond endangering the health of Canadians, the pandemic has worsened inequalities among groups of people. Women, girls and gender-diverse people have faced unique challenges during the pandemic.

During its hearings held in July, October and November 2020, the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (the Committee) received testimony and written submissions from diverse witnesses. Witnesses brought expertise in the areas of women's rights and equality; education; paid and unpaid caregiving; senior's rights and wellbeing; gender-based violence; human trafficking; and women's participation in the labour force and in specific sectors. The Committee also heard from the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, and the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion.

Witnesses provided an overview of gender-based concerns in the context of COVID-19. Three main themes emerged from the testimony: women's health and wellbeing; women's work and economic security; and women's physical safety and security.

With respect to women's health and wellbeing, witnesses explained that women tend to be overrepresented in several frontline workforces. For example, more women than men work in the care, education and retail sectors. These women on the frontlines face an elevated risk of contracting COVID-19. Women also take on a disproportionate share of unpaid care responsibilities, which may also increase this risk. Also, competing demands from domestic responsibilities, childcare and online schooling, and paid employment, have had negative impacts on women's mental health. Certain groups of women, including women living in long-term care facilities and women living with disabilities, have required additional care supports during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee heard that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drastic reduction in women's labour force participation. When schools and daycares closed, many families needed to provide more childcare and domestic labour than usual. Women took on most of this unpaid labour. For this reason and others, more women than men left the paid workforce during the first wave of the pandemic. Also, fewer women than men have returned to paid work since the first wave. Women who own businesses, work in long-term care facilities or perform consensual sex work have faced unique financial hardships. Many women now face a greater risk of poverty. Witnesses proposed

strategies to decrease unpaid care work for women, enable more women to join the paid workforce and increase women's economic security.

For some women, public health guidelines about physical distancing have been dangerous. For example, some women experiencing domestic violence have had to stay at home with their abusers. This situation has made it difficult to access domestic violence-related services. In addition, services such as shelters and transition houses for women have been accepting fewer women as a result of public health guidelines. Finally, the Committee heard that human trafficking has not disappeared during the COVID-19 pandemic. Witnesses provided different perspectives on the levels of human trafficking in Canada. Witnesses agreed that supports and services for survivors of human trafficking are essential.

Witnesses provided some suggestions related to the federal government's emergency response to COVID-19. The Canada Emergency Response Benefit, the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance and the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy, as well as the Canada Emergency Business Account were discussed.

The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada take various actions to assist women, girls and gender-diverse people during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Many recommendations relate to improving women's health and labour force participation. Some recommendations focus specifically on women's paid and unpaid care work. The Committee also recommends interventions to help reduce trafficking and violence against women.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada continue to work with provincial and territorial governments and health partners to ensure that all frontline workers have access to properly fitting personal protective equipment while working..... 15

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada continue to implement measures, such as the Wellness Together Canada portal, to help ensure that women, girls and gender-diverse people across Canada are able to access adequate and secure online mental health services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to invest in programs to support broadband Internet access, recognized as an essential service. 15

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada continue to work in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, in accordance with their respective jurisdictions, to help ensure that women with disabilities, girls with disabilities and gender-diverse people with disabilities are able to access health supports that meet their needs, such as access to support persons and caregivers, medical supports and physiotherapy, during and after the pandemic..... 15

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provinces and territories, ensure that women, especially women who own small and medium-sized enterprises, have effective access to adequate and improved business supports and training to maximize their capacity to recover and prosper in the post-pandemic economy..... 27

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories in accordance with their respective jurisdictions, with the goal of increasing women’s labour force participation, improving the quality of health and social services available to Canadians and stimulating the economy, to support the care sector¹ by:

- **considering investments in the care sector in the pandemic economic recovery plan; and**
- **considering initiatives, such as the creation of a federal care economy commission, to direct future actions for the care sector..... 27**

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories, recognizing that women disproportionately work in industries hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and have therefore experienced significant pandemic-related economic insecurity, evaluate how to support employees in industries where women work such as, but not limited to, the retail, hospitality, food services, non-profit and care sectors..... 27

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada is to review that federal income support programs, including supports for seniors and individuals with disabilities, meet Canadians’ needs during and after the pandemic..... 27

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to ensure development of national standards related to health and safety, and working conditions and labour supply, in long-term care facilities that are consistent and are being met by facilities across the country, regardless of geographic location, in accordance with their respective jurisdictions..... 27

1 The scope of “care sector” was not clearly defined in testimony received by the Committee. However, witnesses indicated that the care sector can include diverse types of care, including but not limited to childcare, elder care, care for people living with a disability, long-term care and home care.

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada implement measures to protect the rights and reduce stigmatization of vulnerable Canadians, such as:

- conducting a review of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, ensuring that sex workers are consulted in this review process;
- examining measures to decriminalize sex work;
- providing funding for peer-led community support and referral for support services for sex workers and other vulnerable Canadians; and
- ensuring that consensual sex workers and other vulnerable Canadians are eligible for federal income and emergency supports. 28

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of recognizing the value of unpaid caregiving work, including caring for spouses, children, grandchildren, and seniors:

- ensure that current federal supports and tax credits for caregivers meet the needs of individuals providing this unpaid care with a multicultural perspective, recognizing that different communities and cultures in Canada have different styles of caregiving; and
- explore initiatives, including with employers, to improve recognition and compensation (including tax credits) for individuals performing unpaid care work. 28

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, with the goal of ensuring that all Canadian families have access to high-quality, safe, flexible, affordable and inclusive childcare services:

- **continue to support the safe reopening of childcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic;**
- **explore strategies to expand access to various types² of childcare services during and after the pandemic, such as increasing payments to parents, and consider expanding funding to develop and implement a national early learning and childcare system; and**
- **work to ensure that sufficient spaces are provided during the pandemic with capacity to expand after. 28**

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, with the goal of providing all women and children affected by gender-based violence and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation with access to comparable levels of services during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that:

- **provinces and territories ensure that women seeking access to shelters and transition houses have access to COVID-19 testing;**
- **survivors of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation have access to the appropriate support services and to financial supports during a public health crisis;**

2 Different families prefer different childcare arrangements. For example, in some communities, families may prefer that children are cared for by their own parents or grandparents in order to pass on culture, language and tradition, instead of placing children in public childcare spaces.

- women and children, particularly Indigenous women and children living in urban, rural and remote communities, have access to comprehensive and culturally appropriate services and continuing support to meet their particular needs;
- shelters serving women and children affected by violence and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation continue to have access to long-term, appropriate and stable operational funding, and that this funding goes through the provinces and territories; and
- shelters and sexual assault services are able to raise awareness about the services they provide to their communities. 37

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada encourage provinces and territories to deem shelters serving women and children affected by violence and human trafficking to be essential services. 38

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada continue its efforts to create a national action plan to address issues raised in the report *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* as soon as possible..... 38

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada continue to develop and implement, in collaboration with provinces and territories and civil society, a national action plan on gender-based violence that is harmonized with the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and that this action plan include:

- inclusive and accessible gender-based violence supports and services;
- supports for children who have witnessed gender-based violence;

- multi-year funding to address gender-based violence, including for frontline service providers specifically; and
- measures to ensure that the judicial system in Canada supports survivors of gender-based violence..... 38

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada continue to provide funding specifically dedicated to helping organizations deliver programming to help victims and survivors of human trafficking. 39

Observation 1

The Committee believes that to holistically address and reduce sexual exploitation in Canada the following initiatives could be beneficial:

- continuing the work of the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, including by providing law enforcement, prosecutors and criminal justice practitioners with trauma-informed comprehensive training on recognizing and responding to human trafficking and exploitation; and
- encouraging provinces and territories to conduct gender-based analysis plus of education curricula related to sexual education, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, consent and healthy relationships. 39

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada apply gender-based analysis plus to all decisions and the development of all policies, and emergency relief and recovery programs related to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that these policies and programs address the specific needs of, and do not have unintended negative impacts on, all people in Canada, including women, girls and gender-diverse people, from diverse backgrounds. 42

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada ensure that programs and policies to assist small and medium-sized enterprises respond to the COVID-19 pandemic reflect the needs of businesses owned by diverse groups of women – including Indigenous women, women with disabilities and newcomers to Canada – and encourage the uptake of existing programs that could support women entrepreneurs. 43

Recommendation 19

That the Government of Canada improve accessibility to its emergency relief benefits for the pandemic by simplifying the administrative mechanisms to access these programs..... 43

Recommendation 20

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of eliminating income insecurity and financially empowering women, consider replacing existing emergency benefits with a permanent universal basic income program..... 43

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Canada collect and disseminate timely data, disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, about the uptake of emergency relief programs, including programs that have concluded, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, as well as programs that are currently active, such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, to ensure that programs are meeting the needs of the Canadians they aim to assist, including women, girls and gender-diverse people, and to support decision-making for future recovery from the pandemic..... 43



IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

In Canada, inequalities exist among groups of people with diverse and intersecting identity factors including gender, race and disability. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated these existing inequalities, including gender inequality in Canada.¹ The House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women (the Committee) heard from witnesses and received submitted briefs between 7 July 2020 and 19 November 2020 about the particular impacts of COVID-19 on women and girls in Canada. Testimony and briefs were received from organizations and individuals who work on women’s rights and equality; education; paid and unpaid caregiving; senior’s rights and wellbeing; gender-based violence; human trafficking; and women’s participation in the labour force as well as in business and in specific sectors. In addition to this testimony, the committee heard from the Honourable Maryam Monsef, Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development, and the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, on 8 July 2020 to hear about the federal government’s support for women and girls during the pandemic.

Witnesses emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic has both exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities in Canada, particularly for women, members of Indigenous and racialized communities, and individuals at the intersections of several marginalized identity factors. In general, witnesses’ concerns regarding the effects of the pandemic on women and girls in Canada related to three main themes that are discussed: women’s health and wellbeing; women’s work and economic security; and women’s physical safety and security. As well, certain federal government programs and supports released in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are outlined and discussed.

In addition, the Committee has provided recommendations, based on witness testimony, which focus on the ways in which the federal government may ensure that the voices,

1 See for example: Tracy Smith-Carrier and Chloe Halpenny, “[Basic Income: Making the Case for Women & Gender Equity](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020; and Amnesty International, “[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.



needs and concerns of women from diverse backgrounds are represented in the economic and social recovery.

WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“The virus itself doesn’t discriminate based on gender or sex, but its systems and sectors that we have created and designed are discriminatory. COVID-19 is the flashlight illuminating all of the cracks of inequality in our system.”

Canadian Equality Consulting²

Health Risks in Women’s Paid and Unpaid Work Settings

The Committee heard that in certain situations, the direct and indirect health impacts of the pandemic affect women more than men. For example, the workforces of many frontline or essential services, where the risk of exposure to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 is particularly elevated, are primarily composed of women; women represent the majority of the workforce in health care, personal support care, janitorial services, retail services as well as the non-profit and charitable sector.³ Racialized and migrant women make up a large portion of the care workforce.⁴ In addition, women in these sectors and frontline workplaces may be more exposed than men to the virus because of a lack of appropriately fitting personal protective equipment (PPE), which tends to be

2 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

3 Ibid.; FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1725 (Anita Khanna, National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada); and DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, “[The Impact of COVID-19 on Women living with Disabilities in Canada](#),” *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

4 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation); Tracy Smith-Carrier and Chloe Halpenny, “[Basic Income: Making the Case for Women & Gender Equity](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

too large, on average, for women's bodies.⁵ Witnesses noted that staff working in frontline positions during the pandemic may also experience exhaustion and burnout.⁶

While some women's frontline employment places them at risk of being directly exposed to the coronavirus, women may also face elevated risks of exposure to the virus while performing unpaid work at home. Women working from home often perform this unpaid work in addition to their paid work responsibilities.⁷ Witnesses noted that women are responsible for a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic labour and care work in comparison to men. In the context of the pandemic, women's unpaid care and domestic responsibilities have increased; these responsibilities may include childcare and children's education, caring for sick family members, as well as general domestic labour tasks.⁸ Women may be directly exposed to the coronavirus during their domestic and care roles as they care for sick family members and access public spaces such as grocery stores.⁹

In a brief to the Committee, the Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale noted that while women have been at the forefront of the response to the pandemic, both in their paid and unpaid work roles, they did not feel adequately included in the decision-making process regarding pandemic response and support measures.¹⁰

Risks for Women's Mental Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative repercussions on the mental health of Canadians. For example, Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor at King's University College at Western University, noted that women's mental health levels have been

5 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

6 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1405 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1730 (Anita Khanna, National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada).

7 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

8 Ibid.; and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

9 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1720 (Anita Khanna, National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada).

10 Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale, "[Brief submitted to the parliamentary committee on the status of women and gender equality as part of its meetings on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women](#)," *Submitted Brief*, July 2020.



lower, and stress levels higher, than men's since the beginning of the pandemic.¹¹ Witnesses noted that women's disproportionate share of pandemic-related domestic responsibilities, such as maintaining safe and clean homes and providing education support to children, on top of the pandemic-related lockdowns, have affected women's mental health as well as labour force participation in the pandemic; some witnesses have seen an increase in requests for mental health and addiction supports.¹² Sharon Williston, Executive Director of the Bay St. George Status of Women Council, discussed the need to identify creative and collaborative ways to address the mental health aspects of the pandemic, including suicide intervention and prevention. Access to these services should be provided by phone, but also on the ground in communities, particularly rural communities, and should include culturally appropriate supports for Indigenous communities.¹³

Health and Care Supports for Certain Groups of Women

Witnesses highlighted that certain groups of people may require specific supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, women caring for children with disabilities, especially those living in rural areas.¹⁴ In a submitted brief, the DisAbled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN) explained that prior to the pandemic, women with disabilities faced discrimination and barriers in health care services that interfered with their needs being adequately met by these services. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, DAWN asserted that the COVID-19 response has not been accessible and pointed to a lack of a disability lens in COVID-19 policy development. For example, DAWN argued that the one-time non-taxable non-refundable payment of up to \$600 for Canadians with disabilities is insufficient, and also these funds are tied to eligibility for the Disability Tax Credit, so many individuals with disabilities are left out of this relief program.¹⁵

11 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King's University College at Western University, as an individual).

12 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1105 (Sharon Williston, Executive Director, Bay St. George Status of Women Council); and FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1120 (Kevin McCreadie, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Investment Officer, AGF Management Limited).

13 Ibid.

14 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1415 (Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director, Child Care Now).

15 DisAbled Women's Network of Canada, "[The Impact of COVID-19 on Women living with Disabilities in Canada](#)," *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

In addition, individuals living in long-term care (LTC) facilities in Canada face heightened risks related to COVID-19; the Committee heard that the death rate in these facilities in Canada is among the highest in Western countries.¹⁶ Witnesses explained that LTC residents are often very vulnerable with complex needs, such as dementia-related care; the majority of LTC residents are women (approximately 65-70%), however, these women are not a homogeneous group.¹⁷ Carole Estabrooks, professor at the University of Alberta, noted that a positive effect of successful aging-in-place programs is that women are remaining in their homes for longer. As such, women are arriving in LTC in older age and with more complex medical and social needs, particularly for individuals with dementia. The COVID-19 pandemic can have particularly negative effects on individuals living with dementia in LTC, as communication can be challenging generally, but residents' fear and confusion may be heightened by the necessary medical masks and protective clothing required for medical care during the pandemic.¹⁸

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada continue to work with provincial and territorial governments and health partners to ensure that all frontline workers have access to properly fitting personal protective equipment while working.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada continue to implement measures, such as the Wellness Together Canada portal, to help ensure that women, girls and gender-diverse people across Canada are able to access adequate and secure online mental health services during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to invest in programs to support broadband Internet access, recognized as an essential service.

Recommendation 3

That the Government of Canada continue to work in collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, in accordance with their respective jurisdictions, to help ensure that women with disabilities, girls with disabilities and gender-diverse people with

16 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1440 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

17 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); and FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1115 (Jodi Hall, Chair, Canadian Association of Long-Term Care).

18 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1135 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta).



disabilities are able to access health supports that meet their needs, such as access to support persons and caregivers, medical supports and physiotherapy, during and after the pandemic.

WOMEN'S WORK AND ECONOMIC SECURITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“Getting women back into the paid labour force is critical to women's economic security, but increasing women's labour force participation is also crucial to a sustainable economic recovery for everyone.”

Morna Ballantyne,
Executive Director, Child Care Now¹⁹

Women's Paid Work

The Committee heard from several witnesses that rates of job losses were higher for women than for men; witnesses provided statistics demonstrating the scale of these inequalities. Women lost their jobs at approximately twice the rate of men in the first month of the pandemic. Mothers represented 57% of parents who lost their jobs or most of their hours “by the end of May,” and single mothers were more likely to lose work than mothers in two-parent families.²⁰ One witness attributed this disproportionate job loss in part to the fact that Canadian women disproportionately work in the sectors hit hardest by the pandemic, such as the retail and service sectors.²¹ However, Rhonda Barnet, President and Chief Operating Officer of Avit Manufacturing noted on 7 July 2020 that, even in the manufacturing sector, “women have seen greater job losses and fewer recovered jobs, possibly on a voluntary basis. In our sector, women might have put their hands up because they had to out of a direct need to care for children and aging parents.”²² In addition, several witnesses observed that a higher

19 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1410 (Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director, Child Care Now).

20 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

21 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King's University College at Western University, as individual).

22 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1740 (Rhonda Barnet, President and Chief Operating Officer, Avit Manufacturing).

proportion of men than women have returned to jobs lost at the beginning of the pandemic.²³

Women performing low-wage and precarious work, and Black, Indigenous and racialized women, migrant and newcomer women and women with disabilities, have been particularly hard hit by pandemic job losses.²⁴ For instance, Jaspreet Sandhu from Pink Attitude Evolution noted that the unemployment rate for women of South Asian descent in Canada was nearly double the rate of the general population in July 2020; more specifically, the unemployment rate was 20.4% for women of South Asian descent versus 11.3% for the general population in Canada. The group called for intersectional analysis to ensure that diverse groups of women benefit from the economic recovery.²⁵

The Committee heard that women who own businesses have been more negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic than men who own businesses. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, businesses owned by women were less likely than businesses owned by men to be fully open, fully staffed, or experiencing normal levels of sales “as of early November” 2020. Women who own businesses were also more likely than men to be worried about a possible long-term reduction in consumer spending, mounting debt, business cash flow and stress.²⁶ Witnesses attributed these differences in part to the fact that businesses owned by women tend to be more concentrated in service-related sectors, which are also the sectors most vulnerable to pandemic-related closures.²⁷

Witnesses commented that some women entrepreneurs face barriers to accessing funding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses owned by women tend to be newer

23 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1745 (Armine Yalnizyan, as an individual); FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1110 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).

24 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1110 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).

25 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1105 (Jaspreet Sandhu, Executive Producer and Officer, National Research Study, Pink Attitude Evolution).

26 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1200 (Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President, National Affairs and Partnerships, Canadian Federation of Independent Business).

27 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1630 (Jill Earchy, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Centre); FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1205 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femmessor).



and smaller than those owned by men.²⁸ Women entrepreneurs are less likely than men to receive private financing.²⁹ According to several witnesses, women entrepreneurs have also been less likely to apply for and receive certain federal emergency supports for businesses during COVID-19 than men entrepreneurs.³⁰ The Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute noted in a brief that entrepreneurs with other marginalized identities, such as Black entrepreneurs, face additional barriers to accessing federal funding.³¹ Several witnesses asserted that increased support for small businesses owned by women would lead to increased economic growth.³²

The Committee heard that workers in long-term care facilities, especially personal support workers or care aides, have faced unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. These long-term care workers are mostly women; many are also racialized, middle-aged or older and/or immigrants.³³ Witnesses reported that long-term care workers faced a variety of challenges even before the pandemic, including low pay and access to part-time work only,³⁴ excessive workload due to insufficient staffing ratios, and poor working conditions with risk of violence, racism, sexual harassment and accidental injury as well as grief upon the deaths of residents.³⁵ Many long-term care

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- 28 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1200 (Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President, National Affairs and Partnerships, Canadian Federation of Independent Business); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1205 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femessor).
- 29 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1510 (Vicki Saunders, Founder, SheEO); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1230 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femessor).
- 30 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1130 (Kevin McCreadie, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Investment Officer, AGF Management Limited); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1135 (Leah Nord, Senior Director, Workforce Strategies and Inclusive Growth, Canadian Chamber of Commerce).
- 31 Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, "[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Women](#)," *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.
- 32 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1130 (Kevin McCreadie, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Investment Officer, AGF Management Limited); Women's Enterprise Centre, "[Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Entrepreneurs](#)," *Submitted Brief*, July 2020.
- 33 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1105 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta).
- 34 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1205 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).
- 35 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1105 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University).

workers also provide unpaid care to residents as well as their own children and aging relatives, which may constitute additional strain.³⁶ Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology at York University, observed that the pandemic has exacerbated many of these poor working conditions.³⁷ Carole Estabrooks, Professor at the University of Alberta, added that many workers are now facing serious mental health challenges related to the pandemic, including anxiety, insomnia, depression, substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder.³⁸ In addition, witnesses explained that the precarity of work in the long-term care sector, which often requires workers to work in multiple homes in order to earn full pay, increased the spread of the novel coronavirus among workers and their families, as well as among long-term care residents.³⁹

Witnesses called for reforms to the long-term care sector, including many related to working conditions. Pat Armstrong recommended implementing standardized minimum staffing levels, higher wages, an increased proportion of full-time positions to enable staff to work in only one facility, increased recruitment and improved training.⁴⁰ Jodi Hall, Chair of the Canadian Association of Long-Term Care, advocated for the development of a pan-Canadian health and human resources strategy to address the labour shortage in senior care.⁴¹ Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights at the Canadian Labour Congress suggested a federal care economy commission.⁴² More generally, witnesses called for greater recognition and valuation of the skilled work performed in long-term care homes and of the people who live there.⁴³ Witnesses

36 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1135 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1120 (Jodi Hall, Chair, Canadian Association of Long-Term Care).

37 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1105 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University).

38 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta).

39 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1105 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1205 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).

40 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1130 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University).

41 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1125 (Jodi Hall, Chair, Canadian Association of Long-Term Care).

42 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1110 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).

43 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1210 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).



cautioned against the launch of new reports and studies, calling instead for evidence-based action.⁴⁴ Finally, witnesses called for increased federal investment in and oversight of the sector, in collaboration with the provinces and territories.⁴⁵ Several witnesses recommended that federal funding for long-term care be made contingent on compliance with a set of national standards;⁴⁶ Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder of Protect People in Long-Term Care, added that these standards should be accompanied by an action plan and a timeline.⁴⁷ Witnesses called for expanded data collection and usage to assess and compare practices and to inform standards.⁴⁸ In contrast, Gisèle Tassé-Goodman and Philippe Poirier-Monette, of Réseau FADOQ, said that long-term care falls under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. As such, Réseau FADOQ advocated for the federal government to support long-term care centres by increasing health transfers to the provinces and territories.⁴⁹

The COVID-19 pandemic has created and exacerbated challenges for sex workers as well. In the context of this report, the term sex work is understood to mean consensual sex work; therefore this section refers to workers who consensually engage in sex work. Witnesses told the committee that many sex workers lost work as a result of adult entertainment facility closures or stopped providing direct-contact sex work in order to

44 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1130 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University).

45 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1120 (Jodi Hall, Chair, Canadian Association of Long-Term Care); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1130 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1205 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).

46 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1130 (Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, York University); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1140 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1205 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).

47 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1220 (Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder, Protect People in Long-Term Care, as an individual).

48 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1110 (Carole Estabrooks, Professor, University of Alberta); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1125 (Jodi Hall, Chair, Canadian Association of Long-Term Care).

49 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1125 (Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, President, Provincial Secretariat, Réseau FADOQ); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1125 (Philippe Poirier-Monette, Collective Rights Advisor, Provincial Secretariat, Réseau FADOQ).

comply with physical distancing guidelines.⁵⁰ Witnesses reported that although sex workers are eligible for the Canada Emergency Response Benefit or other federal income supports, because of the nature of their work they sometimes lack the required documentation to be eligible for these benefits due to fear of filing their taxes.⁵¹ Sex workers also face reduced access to washrooms, shelters, meal services and other community services during the pandemic.⁵² Jenny Duffy, Board Chair of Maggie’s: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project (Maggie’s), noted that many sex workers, especially Indigenous sex workers, lack access to a stable Internet connection, which is a barrier to accessing services that have been moved online because of the pandemic.⁵³ In a brief, Amnesty International called for “emergency income supports to sex workers during the pandemic” and a “moratorium on the enforcement of Canada’s sex work laws.”⁵⁴

Women’s Unpaid Work

The Committee heard that the pandemic has exacerbated the gendered division of unpaid labour. Women living with men have long performed a disproportionate share of domestic work, including childcare, relative to men in addition to working in full-time paid employment.⁵⁵ As the first wave of COVID-19 necessitated the closure of schools, childcare centres and summer camps, many women also became the primary person

50 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1245 (Julie Bauman, Co-founder and Executive Director, Safe Space London); Amnesty International, [“Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19,” Submitted Brief](#), October 2020.

51 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1230 (Jenny Duffy, Board Chair, Maggie’s: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project); Amnesty International, [“Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19,” Submitted Brief](#), October 2020.

52 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1200 (Jenny Duffy, Board Chair, Maggie’s: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project).

53 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1200 (Jenny Duffy, Board Chair, Maggie’s: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project).

54 Amnesty International, [“Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19,” Submitted Brief](#), October 2020.

55 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual); FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decker, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation).



responsible for home-schooling their children.⁵⁶ Ann Decter, the Director of Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation, characterized this phenomenon as a new “triple burden.”⁵⁷ School closures also displaced the labour of providing supports and services for many children and youth with disabilities⁵⁸ and created household competition for computer access, limiting caregivers’ ability to work and study remotely.⁵⁹ Other witnesses observed that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased unpaid labour in other ways as well, as aging relatives have required increased care and public health measures have required more cleaning and sanitizing; women have performed a disproportionate share of this labour relative to men.⁶⁰ Jaspreet Sandhu from Pink Attitude Evolution added that physical distancing measures have limited many parents’ ability to rely on family networks for childcare.⁶¹ The Committee heard that recognizing the value of and compensating unpaid care work is integral to achieving gender equality.⁶²

Many witnesses reported that this pandemic-related increase in unpaid labour is a major cause of women’s greater job losses and lower recovery of jobs, relative to that of men, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶³ For instance, Agricultrices du Québec found, based on a small survey, that women farmers who are parents were more likely than their male counterparts to reduce their hours of work in response to daycare

56 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1425 (Hélène Cornellier, Coordinator of Action Plan and Communications, Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale).

57 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

58 DisAbleD Women’s Network of Canada, [“The Impact of COVID-19 on Women living with Disabilities in Canada,” Submitted Brief](#), November 2020.

59 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1635 (Linda Gavsie, Senior Vice President, Universal Learning Institute).

60 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1635 (Linda Gavsie, Senior Vice President, Universal Learning Institute).

61 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1140 (Jaspreet Sandhu, Executive Producer and Officer, National Research Study, Pink Attitude Evolution).

62 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1420 (Hélène Cornellier, Coordinator of Action Plan and Communications, Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale).

63 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1740 (Rhonda Barnet, President and Chief Operating Officer, Avit Manufacturing); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1110 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).

closures in rural areas of Quebec.⁶⁴ Cindy David, Chair of the Board at the Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting, added that women with precarious or low-income work have been most negatively affected by the pandemic-related increase in unpaid labour.⁶⁵

Many witnesses highlighted childcare as an issue that required improvement in Canada even before the pandemic. Amnesty International wrote in a brief that, due to the gendered division of unpaid labour, more women than men need access to childcare in order to participate in paid work.⁶⁶ Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow at Cardus, a not-for-profit think tank, cited Statistics Canada research findings that almost two-thirds of parents report no difficulty in securing childcare.⁶⁷ However, other witnesses pointed out that some low-income families cannot afford childcare, adding that a lack of access to childcare is a barrier to labour market access for some Black, Indigenous, racialized and newcomer women.⁶⁸ Other witnesses identified other challenges within the childcare sector, such as low wages for the predominantly female workforce, high costs for parents, and shortcomings in meeting the needs of children with disabilities, children who live in rural and remote areas, and children whose parents work non-standard hours.⁶⁹

Several witnesses stated that the COVID-19 pandemic has further reduced access to childcare. Armine Yalnizyan, an Economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, who appeared as an individual, stated on 7 July 2020 that some families who have lost income as a result of the pandemic have withdrawn their children from childcare facilities and predicted that childcare costs would increase because of new requirements for physical distancing.⁷⁰ Vicky Smallman from the Canadian Labour

64 Agricultrices du Québec, "[Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women](#)," *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

65 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1115 (Cindy David, Chair of the Board, Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting).

66 Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

67 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1215 (Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow, Cardus).

68 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1410 (Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director, Child Care Now); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1135 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1150 (Leah Nord, Senior Director, Workforce Strategies and Inclusive Growth, Canadian Chamber of Commerce).

69 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1135 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1410 (Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director, Child Care Now).

70 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1745 (Armine Yalnizyan, as an individual).



Congress observed on 3 November 2020 that some childcare spaces have closed due to lack of resources.⁷¹ However, Andrea Mrozek from Cardus pointed to low occupancy rates in childcare centres that have re-opened during the pandemic in some regions as evidence that lack of access to childcare is not the only factor preventing some mothers from returning to paid work. For example, she provided statistics for two regions: “In Ontario, 93% of day cares were back in operation by the end of September, but in places like Brampton, for example, only 20% of those spaces are occupied. I have the data for Alberta. They reported that 94% of day cares were back in operation, with an enrolment rate of about 50%.”⁷²

Some witnesses discussed Quebec’s universal daycare system as a possible model for the rest of Canada. Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer of Femmessor, reported that the temporary closure of daycares during the pandemic was “a disaster” for women entrepreneurs in Quebec and concluded that, if universal daycare programs are not already available in the rest of Canada, they are “absolutely essential.”⁷³ Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Canada, cited research by Quebec economist Pierre Fortin which found that the Quebec government’s investments in childcare caused tax revenue and workforce participation to increase.⁷⁴ However, Andrea Mrozek from Cardus said that the Quebec model lacks quality and universality, pointing out that only 30% of children in Quebec have access to childcare spaces covered by the program. Ms. Mrozek also expressed doubt that a nation-wide system could accommodate the full diversity of ways that Canadians want to raise their children.⁷⁵

Many witnesses called for new investments in childcare to be part of the federal economic recovery plan.⁷⁶ Some witnesses cited studies showing the economic returns

71 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1140 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).

72 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1215 (Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow, Cardus).

73 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1235 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femmessor).

74 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1135 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada).

75 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1225 (Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow, Cardus).

76 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1725 (Anita Khanna, National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1105 (Penny Wise, President, 3M Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1135 (Anjum Sultana, National Director, Public Policy and Strategic Communications, YWCA Canada).

of investments in childcare.⁷⁷ Armine Yalnizyan concluded that “there will be no recovery without a she-covey and no she-covey without childcare. Let me be really clear. If we don't do this, we are actually voting to move towards economic depression—and not a recession but a prolonged contraction of GDP—by policy design.”⁷⁸ Some witnesses called for universal public childcare.⁷⁹ However, Andrea Mrozek, representing Cardus, stated that the existing system offers a valuable diversity of care options. She cautioned that a universal public childcare system may not benefit all children and families equitably, and could harm the “existing ecosystem of parental and non-parental child care” options in Canada.⁸⁰

Women’s Economic Security

In Canada, women are more likely than men to work in precarious and minimum-wage jobs.⁸¹ Witnesses reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these economic inequalities.⁸² For example, Sévrine Labelle of Femmessor explained that women entrepreneurs were “hard-hit” by the COVID-19 pandemic and as women entrepreneurs tend to own smaller businesses, they may have limited financial resources to address this type of crisis. In addition, women business owners may struggle, or hesitate, to access federal or provincial emergency funding programs.⁸³ Jaspreet Sandhu from Pink Attitude Evolution cited statistics showing that the

77 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1135 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada); and Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, “[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Women](#),” *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

78 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1745 (Armine Yalnizyan, as an individual).

79 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1415 (Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director, Child Care Now); FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1425 (Hélène Cornellier, Coordinator of Action Plan and Communications, Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale).

80 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1215 (Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow, Cardus).

81 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual); FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

82 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1520 (Sara Wolfe, Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada); and Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, “[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Women](#),” *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

83 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1205 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femmessor).



unemployment rate for women of South Asian descent was 20.4% in July 2020, or nearly double the national unemployment rate of 11.3%. Ms. Sandhu added that this trend was confusing because “South Asian women are a decade younger than their counterparts at a median age of 33, and 37% of South Asian women have a university degree, which is the highest in comparison to any other group of women, including both visible and non-visible minorities.”⁸⁴

Women in Canada are more likely than men to experience poverty.⁸⁵ Witnesses indicated that poverty rates among Indigenous, Black and racialized women, newcomer women and women with disabilities are high relative to rates in the general population.⁸⁶ Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation reported “A historic downturn in women’s employment, compounded by uncertainty over the capacity of our fragile child care sector to fully reopen, is a potential perfect storm for women’s economic security.”⁸⁷ Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, President, Provincial Secretariat at Réseau FADOQ added that senior women, who have typically contributed less than men to public and private pension programs and often rely solely on Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, have been made even more financially vulnerable due to pandemic-related increases in expenses.⁸⁸ Some witnesses called for the implementation of a universally accessible basic income plan, which they argued would eliminate income insecurity, improve access to health care, childcare, housing and food, empower women to flee violence, and provide women with the flexibility to seek high-quality work, pursue education or provide unpaid care.⁸⁹

84 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1105 (Jaspreet Sandhu, Executive Producer and Officer, National Research Study, Pink Attitude Evolution).

85 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

86 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual).

87 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1400 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation).

88 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1110 (Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, President, Provincial Secretariat, Réseau FADOQ).

89 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1200 (Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor, King’s University College at Western University, as individual); Tracy Smith-Carrier and Chloe Halpenny, “[Basic Income: Making the Case for Women & Gender Equity](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020; Amnesty International, “[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

Recommendation 4

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with provinces and territories, ensure that women, especially women who own small and medium-sized enterprises, have effective access to adequate and improved business supports and training to maximize their capacity to recover and prosper in the post-pandemic economy.

Recommendation 5

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories in accordance with their respective jurisdictions, with the goal of increasing women's labour force participation, improving the quality of health and social services available to Canadians and stimulating the economy, to support the care sector⁹⁰ by:

- **considering investments in the care sector in the pandemic economic recovery plan; and**
- **considering initiatives, such as the creation of a federal care economy commission, to direct future actions for the care sector.**

Recommendation 6

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories, recognizing that women disproportionately work in industries hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and have therefore experienced significant pandemic-related economic insecurity, evaluate how to support employees in industries where women work such as, but not limited to, the retail, hospitality, food services, non-profit and care sectors.

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada is to review that federal income support programs, including supports for seniors and individuals with disabilities, meet Canadians' needs during and after the pandemic.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to ensure development of national standards related to health and safety, and working conditions

90 The scope of "care sector" was not clearly defined in testimony received by the Committee. However, witnesses indicated that the care sector can include diverse types of care, including but not limited to childcare, elder care, care for people living with a disability, long-term care and home care.



and labour supply, in long-term care facilities that are consistent and are being met by facilities across the country, regardless of geographic location, in accordance with their respective jurisdictions.

Recommendation 9

That the Government of Canada implement measures to protect the rights and reduce stigmatization of vulnerable Canadians, such as:

- conducting a review of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, ensuring that sex workers are consulted in this review process;
- examining measures to decriminalize sex work;
- providing funding for peer-led community support and referral for support services for sex workers and other vulnerable Canadians; and
- ensuring that consensual sex workers and other vulnerable Canadians are eligible for federal income and emergency supports.

Recommendation 10

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of recognizing the value of unpaid caregiving work, including caring for spouses, children, grandchildren, and seniors:

- ensure that current federal supports and tax credits for caregivers meet the needs of individuals providing this unpaid care with a multicultural perspective, recognizing that different communities and cultures in Canada have different styles of caregiving; and
- explore initiatives, including with employers, to improve recognition and compensation (including tax credits) for individuals performing unpaid care work.

Recommendation 11

That the Government of Canada, in partnership with the provinces and territories, with the goal of ensuring that all Canadian families have access to high-quality, safe, flexible, affordable and inclusive childcare services:

- **continue to support the safe reopening of childcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic;**
- **explore strategies to expand access to various types⁹¹ of childcare services during and after the pandemic, such as increasing payments to parents, and consider expanding funding to develop and implement a national early learning and childcare system; and**
- **work to ensure that sufficient spaces are provided during the pandemic with capacity to expand after.**

WOMEN'S PHYSICAL SAFETY AND SECURITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“Before the COVID pandemic arrived in Canada, things were already bleak for women fleeing violence. In fact, many have called violence against women [...] the pandemic within the pandemic.”

Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich,
Communications and Development Manager,
Women's Shelters Canada⁹²

The Committee heard that while Canada has made progress towards addressing gender-based violence (GBV) through initiatives such as the federal government's GBV strategy, and forthcoming national action plan, as well as the provision of paid domestic violence leave in many workplaces, there remains work to be done.⁹³ Additionally, the risks of experiencing the devastating effects of GBV, domestic violence, intimate partner

91 Different families prefer different childcare arrangements. For example, in some communities, families may prefer that children are cared for by their own parents or grandparents in order to pass on culture, language and tradition, instead of placing children in public childcare spaces.

92 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada).

93 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1130 (Vicky Smallman, National Director, Human Rights, Canadian Labour Congress).



violence (IPV) and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation (trafficking), may be aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹⁴

Gender-Based Violence

Marcie Hawranik of Canadian Equality Consulting noted that in the past, rates of GBV have increased during economic downturns.⁹⁵ According to a brief submitted by Amnesty International, this trend is being witnessed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic as well.⁹⁶ Research has indicated that factors such as stress, job loss, alcohol intake and mental health struggles can contribute to environments of domestic violence and GBV.⁹⁷ Furthermore, survey results have concluded that there is a correlation between the financial impacts of the pandemic and rates of domestic violence against Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.⁹⁸

Several witnesses spoke about Indigenous women's experiences of violence, both in general as well as during the pandemic.⁹⁹ In a survey conducted by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) on Indigenous women's experiences during the pandemic, many Indigenous women in Canada reported that they are more concerned about domestic violence and GBV than COVID-19 itself.¹⁰⁰ Witnesses called for improvements to increase the availability of culturally appropriate and safe services

94 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1520 (Sara Wolfe, Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada).

95 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

96 Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

97 *Ibid.*; FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada).

98 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1620 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's Association of Canada); and Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

99 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1520 (Sara Wolfe, Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1620 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

100 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1620 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

for Indigenous people, in particular for Indigenous women and girls.¹⁰¹ The services highlighted by witnesses included those related to homelessness, sexual health, mental health and addiction, as well as violence and trafficking.¹⁰²

Noting its urgent importance, several witnesses also expressed the need for a national action plan on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls that implements the calls to action of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.¹⁰³ Lorraine Whitman, the President of NWAC, stated that “the federal government has so far not delivered on its promise” and urged the government to move ahead with a “living document that is enhanced over time. It does not have to be perfect when it’s first delivered. It just needs to be the start of the end of the violence that the inquiry labelled a genocide.”¹⁰⁴

The DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada (DAWN) cited Statistics Canada findings that 24% of women in Canada report having a disability. DAWN reported that Statistics Canada found that women living with disabilities in Canada experience relatively high rates of violence and abuse, including robbery and both physical and sexual assault. The risk of experiencing violence and abuse for women living with disabilities increases with the addition of intersecting identity factors. DAWN further reported that Statistics Canada research indicates that among Canadian women living with disabilities, 44% report their abuser is a friend, acquaintance or neighbour and 39% have experienced spousal violence. As COVID-19 has restricted services, such as home and personal care support, women living with disabilities have had to rely on their informal support networks for care, which can include their potential abusers.¹⁰⁵

Amnesty International highlighted a lack of comprehensive data collection related to GBV and femicide in Canada, adding that often police-reported violence does not

101 Ibid, 1705.; and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1405 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

102 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1605 (Sara Wolfe, Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada).

103 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1430 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1535 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1620 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

104 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1620 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's Association of Canada).

105 DisAbled Women’s Network of Canada, [“The Impact of COVID-19 on Women living with Disabilities in Canada,” Submitted Brief](#), November 2020.



accurately reflect the scope of GBV as many women, transgender and non-binary people do not report this violence to police.¹⁰⁶

Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager at Women's Shelters Canada, indicated to the Committee on 7 July 2020 that across Canada, there had been reports of a 20-30% increase in rates of domestic violence at the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁰⁷ Marcie Hawranik from Canadian Equality Consulting added that certain police forces have noted an increase in domestic violence-related calls.¹⁰⁸ However, other witnesses highlighted that in some regions, in particular rural regions, police have found a decrease in reporting of violence against women.¹⁰⁹

Shelters serving women who are affected by violence in some regions have seen a significant drop in calls for support during the pandemic;¹¹⁰ Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich from Women's Shelters Canada emphasized that this decrease in calls for support is alarming, as it likely indicates that women facing violence at home are not able to seek support.¹¹¹ Witnesses suggested that stay-at-home orders that are introduced as public health measures may force women to remain isolated with their abusers, placing them at risk of experiencing violence more often and with escalating severity.¹¹² In addition, being isolated with their abusers can impede women's ability to access online or phone support services; Marcie Hawranik from Canadian Equality Consulting explained that as physical distancing restrictions eased, shelters saw a spike in women accessing various

106 Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

107 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada).

108 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

109 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1110 (Sharon Williston, Executive Director, Bay St. George Status of Women Council); and Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

110 Ibid.

111 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1530 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women's Shelters Canada); and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1235 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

112 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1245 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1705 (Lorraine Whitman, President, Native Women's of Association Canada); and Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, "[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Women](#)," *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

shelter services.¹¹³ Ann Decter, Director of Community Initiatives at the Canadian Women’s Foundation, explained:

Stay-at-home orders increase the risk of domestic violence and decrease women’s abilities to leave abusive homes for the safety of shelters—highlighting the importance of the violence prevention sector—while placing additional strain on already taxed anti-violence services. Closure of physical spaces and the shift to remote services created unique access barriers to sexual assault centres.¹¹⁴

The Committee heard anecdotal evidence that some women are exiting violent relationships and starting over during the pandemic. For example, the Bay St. George Women’s Council has observed increases in demand for different referral services, such as furniture and new home starter kits, which may indicate women are leaving abusive relationships.¹¹⁵

Despite some witnesses seeing evidence of women leaving their abusers and starting over during the pandemic, others identified several barriers women face when attempting to leave these situations, including public health restrictions and a lack of gender- and trauma-informed public health messaging and pandemic responses.¹¹⁶ For example, Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Canada, agreed that at the beginning of the pandemic, there was an increase in women leaving abusive relationships; but as the second wave approached, women struggled to receive protection orders as courts had closed.¹¹⁷ In addition, in a submitted brief, Constable Rejeanne Caron highlighted that proposals to consider releasing certain incarcerated individuals to reduce the spread of COVID-19 could be concerning if prisoners charged with violent offences, particularly in cases of domestic abuse and IPV, are released.¹¹⁸

113 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting); and Amnesty International, “[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#),” *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

114 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1405 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation).

115 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1105 (Sharon Williston, Executive Director, Bay St. George Status of Women Council).

116 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1130 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada).

117 Ibid.

118 Rejeanne Caron, “[Status of Women – Rejeanne Caron brief COVID-19](#),” *Submitted Brief*, 25 November 2020.



COVID-19 policies related to shelters for women fleeing violence vary across provinces and territories.¹¹⁹ Women’s Shelters Canada explained that the results of a survey of selected shelters in Canada indicated that not all shelters are deemed essential services by their provincial or territorial governments, nor have they all been able to provide the necessary cleaning and personal protective equipment, the space for physical distancing, or support for staff despite funding increases related to the pandemic.¹²⁰ Because of this situation, some witnesses suggested that women using shelters may increase their risk of exposure to the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.¹²¹ Some shelters in Canada have voiced concerns that their operating funding will eventually be clawed back as a result of increased government funding during the pandemic.¹²²

Witnesses suggested that shelters in general are under-funded and need additional resources in order to meet the demands for services and support.¹²³ Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich from Women’s Shelters Canada explained to the Committee that the COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted shelters’ abilities to fundraise; without fundraising dollars, shelters are further under-resourced.¹²⁴ Witnesses agreed that gaps persist in access to and availability of appropriate services and supports for women fleeing violence, including women living with disabilities and Indigenous women.¹²⁵ Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich from Women’s Shelters Canada underscored the need for core funding for shelters.¹²⁶ In addition, witnesses highlighted a lack of transitional housing and affordable housing units for women who are survivors of domestic violence and trafficking.¹²⁷

119 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1535 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada).

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 1555; and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1720 (Anita Khanna, National Director, Public Policy and Government Relations, United Way Centraide Canada).

122 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1535 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada).

123 Ibid.; and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1245 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women’s Centre).

124 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1600 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada).

125 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1405 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation).

126 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1535 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada).

127 Ibid.; and FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1245 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women’s Centre).

Human Trafficking

According to the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, human trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transferring, receiving, holding, concealing or harbouring of a person, or exercising control or direction over their movements to exploit them or assist in facilitating their exploitation.”¹²⁸ Julia Drydyk, the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking, emphasized that while human trafficking exists within the commercial sex market, there is a distinction between trafficking and consensual sex work.¹²⁹

Julia Drydyk specified that there is no one demographic profile that designates a higher risk of being trafficked; the risk may be exacerbated by factors such as social isolation, emotional vulnerability and rural environments because fewer people are present to intervene.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, Sara Wolfe, Director of Indigenous Innovation Initiatives at Grand Challenges Canada, reiterated conclusions from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls noting that Indigenous women and girls are disproportionately affected by domestic violence and human trafficking.¹³¹

The Committee heard that human trafficking, including trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, has not disappeared or decreased during the pandemic.¹³² Julia Drydyk stated that the volume of calls received by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking remained stable over the six-month period from the start of the pandemic and, based on its data, “ from a national snapshot perspective, we can't reasonably make [the] claim [that trafficking is increasing in the pandemic].”¹³³ Furthermore, there are no evidence-based trends to confirm that trafficking is being pushed underground at the national level.¹³⁴

128 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1230 (Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking).

129 Ibid., 1210.

130 Ibid., 1255 and 1300.

131 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1520 (Sara Wolfe, Director, Indigenous Innovation Initiatives, Grand Challenges Canada).

132 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1205 (Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking).

133 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1240 (Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking).

134 Ibid., 1215.



Different regions and organizations have different experiences of the levels of human trafficking that has been occurring during the pandemic.¹³⁵ For example, Megan Walker, Executive Director of the London Abused Women’s Centre, noted a 37% increase in calls to their organization for support and services related to human trafficking during the pandemic and speculated that the pandemic may aggravate risks of online exploitation.¹³⁶ Similarly, Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer of YWCA Canada, argued that there has been an increase in human trafficking and exploitation.¹³⁷ Finally, in a written brief, Constable Rejeanne Caron noted that in the case of missing women, these women may be at greater risk of becoming victims of various kinds of crime or exploitation while they are missing.¹³⁸

Services for survivors of sex trafficking are integral to their recovery. However, Julia Drydyk from the Centre indicated that in April and May, approximately 22% of services typically available to trafficking survivors were not in service or accepting new referrals due to the pandemic. Similarly, of those organizations providing services and accepting referrals, a majority had implemented reduced service hours and changes to service provision (for example, prioritizing crisis referrals over non-urgent referrals in some cases).¹³⁹

Services for women in situations of human trafficking in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic require specific considerations as well as creativity in the use of digital tools to increase survivors’ access to supports.¹⁴⁰ For example, women in situations of human trafficking may need financial assistance, but may fall through the cracks of federal emergency benefits programs because the women may not have a formal employment history and cannot make claims.¹⁴¹ As a result of strict isolation and public health guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic, trafficking survivors may have difficulty accessing or remaining in emergency housing or shelters because of reduced capacity in these services. Furthermore, trafficking survivors may experience re-traumatization

135 Ibid., 1205 and 1215.

136 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1245 and 1255 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women’s Centre).

137 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1120 (Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canada).

138 Rejeanne Caron, “[Status of Women – Rejeanne Caron brief COVID-19](#),” *Submitted Brief*, 25 November 2020.

139 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1205 (Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking).

140 Ibid.

141 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1320 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women’s Centre).

when accessing shelter and housing services, as restrictive shelter rules, with the addition of pandemic-related public health guidelines, may echo experiences of being trafficked and controlled.¹⁴²

Julia Drydyk suggested that federal and provincial-territorial governments work collaboratively to implement long-term and sustainable solutions to address human trafficking in Canada. Authorities and the those working in the judicial system need to understand the experiences of human trafficking victims; for survivors of human trafficking, reporting their experiences to authorities can be retraumatizing so many survivors do not report them.¹⁴³ Canada's legal system is heavily reliant on victim testimony, but is not designed to support victims and survivors of sexual violence, including trafficking. A lack of training and education for judges regarding sex trafficking and sexual violence can lead to victim blaming in the reporting and judicial process. This process can be harmful to victims, as they question their own experiences and can be retraumatized in this process.¹⁴⁴ The Committee was told that GBV funding must continue to include funding for women who experience human trafficking.¹⁴⁵

Recommendation 12

That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, with the goal of providing all women and children affected by gender-based violence and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation with access to comparable levels of services during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that:

- **provinces and territories ensure that women seeking access to shelters and transition houses have access to COVID-19 testing;**
- **survivors of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation have access to the appropriate support services and to financial supports during a public health crisis;**
- **women and children, particularly Indigenous women and children living in urban, rural and remote communities, have access to comprehensive**

142 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1205 and 1220 (Julia Drydyk, Executive Director, Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking).

143 *Ibid.*, 1240.

144 *Ibid.*

145 *Ibid.*; and FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1255 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre).



and culturally appropriate services and continuing support to meet their particular needs;

- **shelters serving women and children affected by violence and human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation continue to have access to long-term, appropriate and stable operational funding, and that this funding goes through the provinces and territories; and**
- **shelters and sexual assault services are able to raise awareness about the services they provide to their communities.**

Recommendation 13

That the Government of Canada encourage provinces and territories to deem shelters serving women and children affected by violence and human trafficking to be essential services.

Recommendation 14

That the Government of Canada continue its efforts to create a national action plan to address issues raised in the report *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* as soon as possible.

Recommendation 15

That the Government of Canada continue to develop and implement, in collaboration with provinces and territories and civil society, a national action plan on gender-based violence that is harmonized with the Calls for Justice from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and that this action plan include:

- **inclusive and accessible gender-based violence supports and services;**
- **supports for children who have witnessed gender-based violence;**
- **multi-year funding to address gender-based violence, including for frontline service providers specifically; and**
- **measures to ensure that the judicial system in Canada supports survivors of gender-based violence.**

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada continue to provide funding specifically dedicated to helping organizations deliver programming to help victims and survivors of human trafficking.

Observation 1

The Committee believes that to holistically address and reduce sexual exploitation in Canada the following initiatives could be beneficial:

- continuing the work of the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, including by providing law enforcement, prosecutors and criminal justice practitioners with trauma-informed comprehensive training on recognizing and responding to human trafficking and exploitation; and
- encouraging provinces and territories to conduct gender-based analysis plus of education curricula related to sexual education, gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, consent and healthy relationships.

FEDERAL SUPPORTS FOR WOMEN FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Ministers Monsef and Qualtrough informed the Committee about the federal government's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic prior to their appearance on 8 July 2020. With a view to identifying approaches for the future, witnesses commented on some of these responses, noting how they have been beneficial while identifying some gaps. Witnesses underscored the importance of integrating gender and other intersecting identity considerations into the federal government's COVID-19 response.¹⁴⁶

Several witnesses commended the speed of implementation of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and its effectiveness and identified several points related to

146 See for example: FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 19 November 2020, 1200 (Anjum Sultana, National Director, Public Policy and Strategic Communications, YWCA Canada); FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1105 (Jaspreet Sandhu, Executive Producer and Officer, National Research Study, Pink Attitude Evolution); and Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.



gender impacts for consideration.¹⁴⁷ The CERB was introduced to ensure that workers who lost their jobs, or who were unable to work for various reasons related to the pandemic, received \$500 per week;¹⁴⁸ the CERB has now concluded and has been replaced by other programs, including the Canada Recovery Benefit, the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit and the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, among others. Minister Qualtrough noted that gender-based analysis plus was not formally applied to the development of the CERB, although she insisted that “this in no way meant that we did not consider the needs and impacts on women at every decision point.”¹⁴⁹ Marcie Hawranik of Canadian Equality Consulting noted that in heterosexual couples, women earn less, on average, than their spouses. Accordingly, the CERB may have influenced more women than men to leave paid employment to take care of households and children; these stoppages may have long-term negative impacts on women’s careers and future earning power.¹⁵⁰ In a brief to the Committee, the Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute noted that for lower- and middle-income mothers who lost their jobs during the pandemic, the CERB may have fully covered their lost income, which may have created a disincentive to return to the workplace if they needed to access and pay for childcare in order to return to work.¹⁵¹

The Committee learned that the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), which provides eligible businesses with a subsidy to cover part of employee wages, was announced on 8 April 2020. The CEWS was supporting nearly three million workers at the time of the Ministers’ appearance on 8 July 2020.¹⁵² Witnesses identified ways to improve this subsidy, such as introducing a simpler administrative system, ensuring that the needs of women who own businesses are considered, for example by extending the

147 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1440 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1640 (Linda Gavsie, Senior Vice President, Universal Learning Institute); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 and 1315 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

148 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 8 July 2020, 1050 (Hon. Carla Qualtrough, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion, Department of Employment and Social Development).

149 Ibid.

150 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1240 (Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President, Canadian Equality Consulting).

151 Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, “[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Women](#),” *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

152 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 8 July 2020, 1045 (Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality).

subsidy to include the cost of hiring childcare, ensuring that small and seasonal businesses are eligible and introducing sector-specific adaptations.¹⁵³ The CEWS has been extended to June 2021.

Minister Monsef noted that the government was working with provinces and territories on the implementation of the Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance (CECRA), which provided assistance, through landlords, to reduce rents for small businesses affected by the pandemic.¹⁵⁴ A witness who testified on 7 July 2020 explained that while the CECRA was still active, the program could better support female entrepreneurs if there was more encouragement provided to landlords to apply for the assistance.¹⁵⁵ Starting 27 September 2020, the CECRA program was replaced by the Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy, which does not require landlord participation. The Canadian Federation of Independent Business suggested that the government consider retroactive payments to businesses that would have qualified for the CECRA program, but did not receive payments because their landlords did not apply for support.¹⁵⁶

The Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) provides an interest-free loan of up to \$60,000, increased from \$40,000 on 4 December 2020, to small businesses and not-for-profits. Witnesses reported that some groups of people face obstacles to accessing the CEBA loan for Canadian businesses. The Women’s Enterprise Centre stated in a brief that many women entrepreneurs did not qualify for these loans because of the small size of their businesses as well as their limited capacity and willingness to take on more debt.¹⁵⁷ Other witnesses indicated that some women were discouraged by the

153 See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1405 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women's Foundation); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1205 (Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President, National Affairs and Partnerships, Canadian Federation of Independent Business); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1515 (Vicki Saunders, Founder, SheEO); FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 3 November 2020, 1105 (Penny Wise, President, 3M Canada); and [Agricultrices du Québec, "Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women," Submitted Brief](#), November 2020.

154 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 8 July 2020, 1155 (Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality).

155 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1650 (Jill Earchy, Interim Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Enterprise Centre).

156 FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1205 (Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President, National Affairs and Partnerships, Canadian Federation of Independent Business).

157 Women’s Enterprise Centre, ["Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women Entrepreneurs," Submitted Brief](#), July 2020.



administrative burden of applying for assistance such as the CEBA loans.¹⁵⁸ The Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute reported that these barriers are amplified for entrepreneurs with additional marginalized identities, such as Black entrepreneurs.”¹⁵⁹ CEBA has been extended to March 2021.

The Committee heard from Minister Monsef that plans are underway to develop Canada’s first National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence.¹⁶⁰ Several witnesses expressed support for such an action plan and urged that it should begin “without delay.”¹⁶¹ Having heard testimony from organizations that work with victims of human trafficking, this action plan should consider the needs of diverse groups of women in Canada, including the most vulnerable.

The Committee agrees with witnesses that the COVID-19 pandemic has magnified pre-existing inequalities faced by many women in Canada. COVID-19-related impacts of particular concern include threats to women’s physical and mental health; rollbacks in women’s paid employment and economic security; increases in women’s unpaid labour; and worsening gender-based violence. These impacts have disproportionately harmed women with multiple marginalized identities. Federal emergency measures have provided support to many Canadians, but have not prevented the pandemic from creating the conditions for a major setback in progress toward gender equality in Canada. The Committee urges the Government of Canada to ensure that the needs of women from diverse backgrounds are properly considered in all future pandemic and post-pandemic recovery programs and policies.

Recommendation 17

That the Government of Canada apply gender-based analysis plus to all decisions and the development of all policies, and emergency relief and recovery programs related to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that these policies and programs address the specific

158 FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1230 (Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer, Femmessor); FEWO, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 17 November 2020, 1200 (Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President, National Affairs and Partnerships, Canadian Federation of Independent Business).

159 Ted Rogers School of Management Ryerson University Diversity Institute, “[Submission to The Standing Committee on the Status of Women: Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women](#),” *Submitted Brief*, November 2020.

160 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 8 July 2020, 1040 (Hon. Maryam Monsef, Minister, Department for Women and Gender Equality).

161 FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1535 (Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager, Women’s Shelters Canada); FEWO, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, 7 July 2020, 1430 (Ann Decter, Director, Community Initiatives, Canadian Women’s Foundation).

needs of, and do not have unintended negative impacts on, all people in Canada, including women, girls and gender-diverse people, from diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 18

That the Government of Canada ensure that programs and policies to assist small and medium-sized enterprises respond to the COVID-19 pandemic reflect the needs of businesses owned by diverse groups of women – including Indigenous women, women with disabilities and newcomers to Canada – and encourage the uptake of existing programs that could support women entrepreneurs.

Recommendation 19

That the Government of Canada improve accessibility to its emergency relief benefits for the pandemic by simplifying the administrative mechanisms to access these programs.

Recommendation 20

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of eliminating income insecurity and financially empowering women, consider replacing existing emergency benefits with a permanent universal basic income program.

Recommendation 21

That the Government of Canada collect and disseminate timely data, disaggregated by gender and ethnicity, about the uptake of emergency relief programs, including programs that have concluded, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, as well as programs that are currently active, such as the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, to ensure that programs are meeting the needs of the Canadians they aim to assist, including women, girls and gender-diverse people, and to support decision-making for future recovery from the pandemic.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual	2020/10/27	2
Pat Armstrong, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology York University		
Carole Estabrooks, Professor University of Alberta		
Canadian Association for Long Term Care	2020/10/27	2
Jodi Hall, Chair		
Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking	2020/10/27	2
Julia Drydyk, Executive Director		
Maggie's: The Toronto Sex Workers Action Project	2020/10/27	2
Jenny Duffy, Board Chair		
SafeSpace London	2020/10/27	2
Julie Bauman, Co-Founder and Executive Director		
3M Canada	2020/11/03	3
Penny Wise, President		
AGF Management Limited	2020/11/03	3
Kevin McCreddie, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Investment Officer		
As an individual	2020/11/03	3
Tracy Smith-Carrier, Associate Professor King’s University College at Western University		
Michelle van Beusekom, Co-Founder Protect People in Long-Term Care		

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Canadian Chamber of Commerce Leah Nord, Senior Director Workforce Strategies and Inclusive Growth	2020/11/03	3
Canadian Labour Congress Vicky Smallman, National Director Human Rights	2020/11/03	3
Canadian Federation of Independent Business Corinne Pohlmann, Senior Vice-President National Affairs and Partnerships	2020/11/17	4
Femmessor Sévrine Labelle, President and Chief Executive Officer	2020/11/17	4
Pink Attitude Evolution Ruby Dhillon, Founder, President and Board Chairperson Jaspreet Sandhu, Executive Producer and Officer National Research Study	2020/11/17	4
Réseau FADOQ Philippe Poirier-Monette, Collective Rights Advisor Provincial Secretariat Gisèle Tassé-Goodman, President Provincial Secretariat	2020/11/17	4
Bay St. George Status of Women Council Sharon Williston, Executive Director	2020/11/19	5
Canadian Childcare Network Kate Tennier, Advocate	2020/11/19	5
Cardus Andrea Mrozek, Senior Fellow	2020/11/19	5
Conference for Advanced Life Underwriting Cindy David, Chair of the Board	2020/11/19	5
YWCA Canada Maya Roy, Chief Executive Officer Anjum Sultana, National Director Public Policy and Strategic Communications	2020/11/19	5

APPENDIX B: LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

43rd Parliament – 1st Session

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
As an individual Armine Yalnizyan, Economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers	2020/07/07	4
Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale Hélène Cornellier, Coordinator of Action Plan and Communications	2020/07/07	4
Avit Manufacturing Rhonda Barnet, President and Chief Operating Officer	2020/07/07	4
Canadian Equality Consulting Marcie Hawranik, Founder and President	2020/07/07	4
Canadian Women's Foundation Ann Decter, Director Community Initiatives	2020/07/07	4
Child Care Now Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director	2020/07/07	4
Grand Challenges Canada Sara Wolfe, Director Indigenous Innovation Initiatives	2020/07/07	4
London Abused Women's Centre Megan Walker, Executive Director	2020/07/07	4
Native Women's Association of Canada Lorraine Whitman, President	2020/07/07	4

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
SheEO Vicki Saunders, Founder	2020/07/07	4
United Way Centraide Canada Anita Khanna, National Director Public Policy and Government Relations	2020/07/07	4
Universal Learning Institute Linda Gavsie, Senior Vice President	2020/07/07	4
Women's Enterprise Centre Jill Earthy, Interim Chief Executive Officer	2020/07/07	4
Women's Shelters Canada Kaitlin Geiger-Bardswich, Communications and Development Manager	2020/07/07	4
Department for Women and Gender Equality Nancy Gardiner, Assistant Deputy Minister Hon. Maryam Monsef, P.C., M.P., Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Rural Economic Development Guylaine F. Roy, Deputy Minister	2020/07/08	5
Department of Employment and Social Development Catherine Adam, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister Strategic and Service Policy Branch Andrew Brown, Director General Employment Insurance Policy, Skills and Employment Branch Philippe Massé, Director General Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Skills and Employment Branch Hon. Carla Qualtrough, P.C. M.P., Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion	2020/07/08	5

APPENDIX C: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Amnesty International Canada

Cardus

Caron, Rejeanne

DisAbled Women's Network of Canada

Diversity Institute at Ryerson University

Engineers Canada

Fédération des agricultrices du Québec

Halpenny, Chloe

Réseau FADOQ

Smith-Carrier, Tracy

APPENDIX D: LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

43rd Parliament – 1st Session

Association féminine d'éducation et d'action sociale

Women's Enterprise Centre

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 4 and 5](#)) from the 43rd Parliament, 1st Session and ([Meetings Nos. 2 to 5, 11, 12, 14, 15, 17 and 20](#)) from the 43rd Parliament, 2nd Session is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Gladu
Chair

Dissenting Report from the Conservative Party of Canada

The Conservative Party agrees that the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound and far-reaching. We also agree with the general findings of the report that the pandemic has highlighted and increased structural inequalities between men and women. We want to thank all the witnesses for appearing before committee and those who submitted written briefs on this very important issue.

Women's Paid Work **Sex Work & Sex Workers**

The Committee heard from Julie Bauman, the co-founder and executive director for SafeSpace London and Jenny Duffy, the board chair for Maggie's Toronto. The witnesses shared with the Committee their opinions that sex workers are unable to access federal support programs, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit because the nature of their work they choose not to file their taxes.¹ They explained that they wanted Parliament to conduct a review of *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* and to fully legalize prostitution.²

In 2015, because of the *Attorney General of Canada v. Bedford* Supreme Court of Canada case, our Conservative Government introduced Bill C-36, *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, which among protecting those who are victims of human trafficking and are often sexually exploited, included the legalization of the sale of consensual sex services. The Conservative Party strongly disagrees with the assertion that those who work in the sex industry are unable to access federal support programs because of their industry. Not only has certain acts of sex work been legalized but as pointed out by the witnesses, those who work in the industry choose not to file their taxes³. It is the opinion of the Conservatives that had these individuals filed their 2019 income tax they would have been eligible to access the federal emergency support programs.

The Conservatives completely disagree with Recommendation 9 and the request to review the *Act* as it falls outside of the scope of the study.

¹ See for example: FEWO, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, 27 October 2020, 1245 (Julie Bauman, Co-founder and Executive Director, Safe Space London); Amnesty International, "[Amnesty International Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women on Gender and Human Rights During COVID-19](#)," *Submitted Brief*, October 2020.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Recommendations

Recommendation 7

That the Government of Canada is to review that federal income support programs, including supports for seniors and individuals with disabilities, meet Canadians' needs during and after the pandemic.

Seniors helped build this country and deserve to be treated by their government with dignity and respect. However, the recommendation included meeting their needs after the pandemic. As the study had to do with COVID-19 and its current impacts on women it is our view that this part of the recommendation is outside of the scope of the committee.

Recommendation 8

That the Government of Canada work with the provinces and territories to ensure development of national standards related to health and safety, and working conditions and labour supply, in long-term care facilities that are consistent and are being met by facilities across the country, regardless of geographic location, in accordance with their respective jurisdictions.

The "Ottawa knows best" approach is the wrong one for dealing with the crisis in long-term care, which dates back decades but has been laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic. As Conservatives we will partner with the provinces including respecting Quebec's unique place in Confederation to assist them but will not take a top-down approach and therefore completely disagrees with this recommendation.

Recommendations 14 & 15

Both recommendations refer to the government continuing to develop a plan. The Conservatives disagree with the assertion that the committee recommends that the Government continues. We have heard from numerous witnesses that they felt the government was failing them as there had been little to no movement on these files.

Recommendation 16

That the Government of Canada continue to provide funding specifically dedicated to helping organizations deliver programming to help victims and survivors of human trafficking.

The Conservatives reject the notion that the Government of Canada continue to provide funding. We heard from witnesses that under this Liberal government funding dedicated to helping organizations deliver programming to help victims and survivors of human trafficking had been cut.⁴

⁴ FEWO, Evidence 4, 1st Session, 43rd Parliament, July 7, 2020, 1255 (Megan Walker, Executive Director, London Abused Women's Centre)

Recommendation 20

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of eliminating income insecurity and financially empowering women, consider replacing existing emergency benefits with a permanent universal basic income program.

The Conservatives don't accept this recommendation on the basis that it was outside of the scope of the study.

Solutions adapted to the women of Québec

Supplementary opinion from the du Bloc Québécois

Since last spring, we have known that the COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures taken in response to it would affect the lives of women and alter our perception of the status of women. The pandemic would also highlight the realities of women's social role, such as the fact that they hold the majority of jobs in the health care and family support fields.

It was natural that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women would address the issue of the pandemic's impact on women in greater depth. We participated fully in this exercise and want to acknowledge the indispensable contribution of the many witnesses who allowed the Committee to deepen its understanding of the phenomenon while exploring the entire range of situations that women and girls have experienced in the past year.

COVID-19 has been a societal challenge that has required every sector of society to adapt. That being said, it is incumbent upon us, while we fight day to day against the virus, to sincerely, humbly and with full hearts thank those who take care of us. We are thinking of those who nurse us, those who look after our elderly, those who take care of their loved ones and those who are working so hard to counteract the pandemic's effects on the education and instruction of our young people.

The pandemic has hurt millions of women and girls around the world. It is essential that we evaluate this impact. The fact that the pandemic affects women and men in different ways is now common knowledge, because the facts and figures speak for themselves.

In Quebec, women have the highest COVID-19 infection rate, somewhere between 54% and 60%. Women are more affected because they are more exposed. They represent 79% of infections among health care staff.

In Quebec last year, 120,000 women lost their jobs, while 55,100 men did so. In November 2020, 84% of women got their job back, while the figure for men was 89%.

But women's work extends beyond the statistical realm, and confinement has added new burdens in the domestic sphere. Mothers attest to it in both opinion polls and personal testimonies: caring for children while teleworking is exhausting.

Nor can we ignore one of the most alarming consequences: we are facing a marked and observable increase in acts of violence against women and girls. In Canada, one violent crime out of four reported to the police is a case of conjugal violence. Confinement exacerbates the danger of isolation, and isolation amplifies the violence.

In short, the impacts are many and varied. They must be properly analysed, and the authorities must take them into account in their response to the pandemic and their future restoration efforts.

The Bloc Québécois sees the main contribution from the Committee being the expansion of the knowledge of women's reality during a pandemic and the greater understanding that Parliamentarians can derive from that. Government interventions must focus on women who work directly with the public: professionals in the health care network, teachers and educators, and community workers, as well as women's groups.

While the pandemic has affected women in various ways, in terms of physical and mental health, work and economic security, and personal physical security, the majority of the most direct public assistance has come through the health and social services sectors.

In Quebec, this aid is provided in a complementary fashion by the public health care system and partners in the community sector who work directly with clients. So, most of the women who are on the front lines providing care are in Quebec's public sector.

Many of the recommendations to the Government developed by the Committee are solutions that may be appropriate for Canada but that are not necessarily adapted to Quebec, often because Quebec has already developed a response to the problem in question. Quebec has developed its own programs and policies in the areas where the Constitution gives it jurisdiction.

In reality, in the areas of family policy, social policy and the structure of its social support network, Quebec is in a class by itself. Quebec has a single, coherent and integrated network of health care services and social programs, and uniform federal policies often duplicate and complicate the application of Quebec's programs in areas where the Government of Quebec does not have sole jurisdiction.

This reality must be acknowledged and considered in order to design a federal response that is both effective and respectful of the Quebec's uniqueness. Recognizing Quebec's special nature is consubstantial with a federal response that works for Quebec and for the women and girls of Quebec.

Quebec has opted for social solidarity. Although middle-class families with children pay more taxes, when their benefits are taken into consideration, they end up with more in their pockets than families elsewhere in Canada. Quebec still has less income inequality than any other jurisdiction in North America.

A family policy that encourages women to participate in the labour market

A number of the Committee's recommendations do not really relate to Quebec, whose family policy is radically different from that of Canada.

Consider daycare services. According to the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OCED):

Quebec "has launched one of the most ambitious early education and care policies in North America. (...) [N]one of these [Canadian] provinces showed the same clarity of vision as Quebec in addressing the needs of young children and families."¹

We understand the Committee's calling for Canadian measures inspired by those that the women of Quebec already enjoy. Provided that Quebec is completely exempt from any federal interference, we can only support their approach.

In fact, Quebec's family policy has had a spectacular effect on women's participation in the labour market. The employment rate for Quebec women of childbearing age (25-44 years) rose by 10% between 1997 (year in which the early childhood centres were created) and 2015, from 69.7% to 79.3%. During that time, the rate increased by only 3% in Ontario, from 72.8% to 75.9%.

And there is parental leave.

In Canada, maternal leave (offered to women) and parental leave (which can be taken by either parent) takes the form of a special employment insurance benefit. Not everyone has access to it, and the benefit is not very high.

So, after many years of struggle led in large part by women's groups, Quebec succeeded in withdrawing from the Canadian plan 15 years ago, in 2006, to create the Québec Parental Insurance Plan (QPIP).

More accessible and more generous, Quebec's plan bore fruit. More women in Quebec benefit from a paid maternity leave than in Canada (97.3% versus 83.1%) and it lasts six weeks longer on average (45.4 weeks versus 39.6).²

¹ Early Childhood Education and Care Policy; OECD Directorate for Education

² <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-008-x/2012002/article/11697-eng.pdf>

No to interference; yes to federal programs adapted to the reality of women in Quebec

It was only by withdrawing Quebec from federal programs that Quebecers were able to make these advances. And that is the main reason that the Bloc Québécois systematically opposes federal interference and pan-Canadian standards. The freer our society is, the better it is for the people of Quebec.

However, in the areas under federal jurisdiction, the least that Ottawa can do is to stop penalizing Quebec when it makes different and feminist choices.

At present, access to the employment insurance plan is based on the number of hours worked in the previous year. With the one year of maternity leave that we have in Quebec, the women of Quebec are systematically excluded from employment insurance if they lose their job during their leave. The federal government should adjust its program to the reality of Quebec's women rather than discriminating against them.

This simple measure is obviously not a replacement for the needed overhaul of employment insurance. The plan, which was designed in the industrial era, is simply not adapted to the current reality of the labour market. Women suffer the effects more profoundly. More women work in atypical jobs and thus have less access to the plan than men do. More than 60% of women who lose their job do not have access to employment insurance and are at risk of falling into poverty.

Paying its fair share for health care

The federal government can and must act to attenuate COVID-19's harmful effects on women. The best way to do so is to assume its responsibilities in its areas of jurisdiction.

In the area of health care, the federal responsibility is to pay its part of the funding, which has gone from 50% in the 1960s to 22% today. It is imperative that the federal government respond to the provinces' common front and increase the Canada Health Transfers (CHT). The Bloc Québécois is calling for the federal contribution to increase to 35% of costs this year.

The Government must also stop trying to impose national standards on the programs that it puts in place. The parliamentarians of the Bloc Québécois are opposed to the federal Government's effort to claim the right to dictate to Quebec and the provinces what is good for their people. This hierarchic vision of the Canadian federation is paternalistic and contrary to the principle of asymmetric federalism.

Long-term health care establishments do not need standards; they need resources. National standards do not take into account regional characteristics and provinces' specific needs.

Equal pay for equal work

The federal government must act on pay equity. Canada adopted its first *Pay Equity Act* in 2018, which applies to the federal public sector and to the private sector under federal regulation, but it has not yet come into force. We are still waiting for government regulations.

The wage gap between the sexes is not the same in Quebec and Canada. In Quebec, women earn on average 90% of men's salaries; outside Quebec the figure is 78%. This gap can be explained in large part by the fact that, in Quebec, pay equity is a right that has been provided for in the *Pay Equity Act* since 1996.

All workers in Quebec should enjoy the same rights. The federal government should act to ensure that women working in sectors under its jurisdiction are no longer subject to a wage gap.

The Bloc Québécois is proactive about an inclusive relaunch

The Bloc Québécois is working hard to make sure its proposals hit the mark. Our expectations for the upcoming budget focus on responding to women's real needs, providing elderly women with assistance as quickly as possible and supporting everyone else, particularly in the regions of Quebec, in their personal commitment to relaunching our economy.

The post-pandemic revival is an opportunity to make full use of our assets as a nation, which includes a leadership role for the women of Quebec and their full participation in public decision-making.

While we work relentlessly to keep constructing our model of society in order to reduce poverty and reinforce societal equality, we also wish the best for the women and girls of Canada, who must also be able to count on institutions and policies that establish equality of opportunity and have a real positive effect on their well-being.

SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

INTRODUCTION

The NDP is appreciative to the Committee members, staff, analysts, and the witnesses who participated in this study of the Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women.

This pandemic has hurt many Canadians, this is especially true for the most vulnerable in our country. It is incumbent on us as Members of Parliament to make sure people don't fall between the cracks; to make sure government programs address the realities and needs of many diverse communities. Women are disproportionately affected by every economic downturn or public health crisis and of course, COVID-19 has impacted women, but additionally women from racialized groups, newcomer communities, Indigenous women, and those with disabilities are even more marginalized.

The government continuously rejected New Democrats' calls to make the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) universal, however because support programs are not universal, those who are more at-risk are the ones who are least supported. Sadly, the government's targets will continue to exclude the most vulnerable in our society and continue to leave many women behind.

CHILD CARE

Child care experts, economists, business owners and many parents agree, Canada's economic recovery is dependent upon an affordable, quality, universal child care system. The vast majority of witnesses during this study agreed that,

"Child care can indeed play a threefold role in recovery. Beyond simply facilitating women's return to work and indeed being a source of employment, the decision to ensure that childcare is affordable, and that high-quality early learning is accessible to all families is going to maximize the future of the next generation of Canadian children... That would lower public spending and increase revenues for governments and society. It pays for itself in the short term and in the long term" (Ms. Armine Yalnizyan - Economist and Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers).

As businesses and the economy re-open, it is essential that child care providers get the financial support they need in order to provide child care services in safe conditions for children. It is crucial that we do everything in our power to keep educators and child care workers safe and healthy. This requires reduced capacity at care centre facilities and enhanced staff to child ratios.

For far too long, under-investment by successive Liberal and Conservative governments has failed to ensure working Canadians can get access to child care. Child care is the second biggest

expense for families after housing. Working families shouldn't have to choose between going to work and taking care of their children. Parents need quality, affordable childcare.

While this report does recognize the need for investments in child care it doesn't acknowledge that the program needs to be universal in order for it to be accessible. Liberals and Conservatives continue to push for means tested programs that will leave women and families behind and let people fall between the cracks.

NDP Recommendation 1:

That the Government of Canada implement measures that will create a national, universal, affordable child care system by:

- **Immediately investing \$2.5 billion into child care to recover the spaces lost because of the pandemic**
- **Investing an additional \$10 billion over four years into child care**
- **Working with the provinces, territories, and Indigenous governments to establish a national, universal, affordable early learning child care system.**
- **Enshrining this commitment to quality, affordable publicly funded child care into law, and set out the principles, conditions, and requirements for federal transfer payments to provinces (like the Canada Health Act) with a right for Quebec to opt out with compensation.**
- **To commit \$10 million right away to an Affordable Child Care Action Fund and create a national childcare secretariat.**

SEX WORK

The Liberal governments definition of work is based on the idea that sex work isn't work. They created support programs that continue to overlook people who don't fit their definition of work. While the Employment Insurance program and other credit measures were expanded, the reality remains that these programs have traditionally and continues to overlook sex workers.

With the government financial supports not applicable to sex workers, this means giving up any income that they might have. That is why New Democrats called for a universal and less administratively complicated approach to financial support during the crisis.

NDP Recommendation 2:

That the Government of Canada implement measures to protect the rights and reduce stigmatization of sex workers, such as:

- **conducting a review of the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, ensuring that sex workers are consulted in this review process;**
- **examining measures to decriminalize sex work;**

- **providing funding for peer-led community support and referral services for sex workers; and**
- **ensuring that sex workers are eligible for federal income and emergency supports when they cannot generate an income including during a public health crisis.**

UNPAID WORK

New Democrats believe that the federal government has an important role to play in making work better, fairer, and more secure for everyone. Many women take on the role of caregiver to a loved one or rely on the caregiving of family members. Women lost their jobs at approximately twice the rate of men in the first month of the pandemic, often having to take on more unpaid care work. Even with the economy opening back up in parts of Canada, many women still can't return to work because of these care needs. Women accounted for only 29% of job recoveries.

NDP Recommendation 3:

That the Government of Canada, with the goal of recognizing the value of unpaid caregiving work, including caring for spouses, children, grandchildren, and seniors, ensure that current federal supports and tax credits for caregivers meet the needs of individuals providing this unpaid care and explore initiatives to improve recognition and compensation for individuals performing unpaid care work.

In order to help make life a little more affordable for caregivers, who are overwhelmingly women, the government of Canada must make the Canada Caregiver Tax Credit refundable. This will provide thousands of dollars to the most low-income caregivers, many of whom have given up work completely to care for a loved one.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

As we emerge from lockdown, millions of Canadians will not have jobs to which they can return; many will not see their incomes recover to what they were before. Like previous recessions, there will be fewer middle-class jobs and more low-pay jobs, and the end of CERB, and the federal government clawback of these benefits will leave millions of Canadians worse off.

New Democrats are happy that this report calls on the Government of Canada, with the goal of eliminating income insecurity and financially empowering women, to consider replacing existing emergency benefits with a permanent universal basic income program.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the New Democratic Party of Canada.

