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Chair: Mrs. Karen Vecchio



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• (1610)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 56 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

I see that we do have some witnesses online. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mike, and please mute your mike when you are not speaking. For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French, and for those in the room, use the translation on the earpiece.

Members, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. The clerk and I will manage the speaking list.

In accordance with the committee's routine proceedings, all witnesses appearing virtually have completed the required connection tests in advance of today's meeting.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted on Tuesday, February 1, 2022, the committee will resume its study on human trafficking of women, girls and gender diverse people.

Before we welcome our witnesses, I would like to provide a trigger warning. As Jenna has said, we do trigger warnings here, it seems. This will be a difficult study. We will be discussing experiences related to abuse. They will be potentially triggering for viewers, members or staff with similar experiences. If you feel distressed or you need help, please reach out to the clerk or me.

It's 10 minutes after four right now. We will be doing today's meeting until six o'clock, so we won't be going the full two hours. It's straight until six o'clock. My only concern is that we'll see what the second panel is looking like, so I will probably be taking five minutes off here and five minutes off there, so don't mind me, but I have my math. I know ABC today.

I would now like to welcome our first panel.

We have, from the Department for Women and Gender Equality, Crystal Garrett-Baird, director general for gender-based violence.

From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Alexis Graham, director, social and discretionary policy and pro-

grams, social and temporary migration branch; and Sarah Hayward, director, visitors, permits and horizontal initiatives, immigration program guidance branch.

From the Department of Justice, we have Nathalie Levman, senior counsel, criminal law policy section.

The witnesses will be given five minutes each. I'll be starting off with the Department for Women and Gender Equality for five minutes.

You have the floor, Crystal.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird (Director General, Gender-Based Violence, Department for Women and Gender Equality): Good day, and thank you.

My name is Crystal Garrett-Baird. I am the director general responsible for working to address gender-based violence at Women and Gender Equality Canada.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that the land I am coming to you from is the traditional and unceded territory of the Abegweit Mi'kmaq first nation.

[Translation]

I want to thank this committee for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Women and Gender Equality Canada concerning human trafficking—a form of gender-based violence.

[English]

Many people experience violence because of their sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender. This is gender-based violence.

Data shows that human trafficking is a gendered crime. Police-reported incidents between 2011 and 2021 show that 96% of all detected victims were women and girls, 71% of whom were under the age of 25. Human trafficking also disproportionately impacts indigenous women and girls, 2SLGBTQI+ individuals as well as their families and communities.

[Translation]

The Government of Canada is taking action to address gender-based violence through initiatives including the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking 2019-2024 and the recently launched National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

Led by Public Safety Canada, the National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking brings together federal efforts under one strategic framework in a comprehensive, coordinated and multi-faceted approach.

[English]

As part of the national strategy, Women and Gender Equality Canada is funding 42 projects for a total of nearly \$14 million. These projects in communities across Canada are allocated through open calls for proposals and are led by civil society partners who represent various geographic, demographic, and lived experiences.

The projects are designed to prevent and address human trafficking and support at-risk populations, victims and survivors, who are among the thousands of people reached through WAGE-funded projects.

In addition to this work, budget 2021 provided an investment of \$601.3 million over five years to address gender-based violence. Of this funding, Women and Gender Equality Canada received \$105 million to enhance the gender-based violence program. Some of this funding is supporting initiatives to stop human trafficking and enhance supports for at-risk populations.

As part of budget 2021 funding, the department also received \$30 million for crisis hotlines to support the urgent needs of Canadians experiencing gender-based violence. Crisis lines can be a lifeline to victims and survivors, and their funding is essential in ensuring survivors and their families have access to the help they need, when they need it, including those who are victims of human trafficking.

Budget 2022 committed \$539.3 million to support the provinces and territories in their efforts to implement the national action plan to end gender-based violence. This plan was launched in November 2022 by the federal, provincial, and territorial ministers responsible for the status of women. The national action plan was informed by over 1,000 recommendations through years of engagement.

• (1615)

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: The plan provides a framework through which federal, provincial, and territorial governments will have a Canada free of gender-based violence which supports victims, survivors, and their families. The plan is aligned with and complements the national strategy to combat human trafficking, along with the missing and murdered indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people national action plan and the federal pathway.

[Translation]

The national action plan is built on a number of pillars: support for victims, survivors and their families; prevention; responsive justice system; implementing indigenous-led approaches; social infrastructure and enabling environment based on a foundation of leadership, coordination and engagement; data, research and knowledge mobilization; and reporting and monitoring.

[English]

The national action plan helps federal, provincial and territorial governments to build on existing initiatives and continues to work with victims and survivors, indigenous partners, direct service

providers, civil society organizations, experts, and researchers to prevent and address gender-based violence in Canada, including human trafficking.

[Translation]

Thank you for your time.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to pass it over to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

Alexis Graham, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Alexis Graham (Director, Social and Discretionary Policy and Programs, Social and Temporary Migration Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good afternoon, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, honourable members of the House of Commons and the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

[English]

My name is Alexis Graham, and I am responsible for social and discretionary policy and programs at IRCC. Joining me is my colleague, Sarah Hayward, from the operations sector.

[Translation]

I am pleased to be talking to you about an important issue that affects the vulnerability of individuals, and as specifically regards my department—Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC—the vulnerability of immigrants. I am talking about human trafficking.

[English]

IRCC plays a small but important role in the governmental architecture associated with this serious issue of trafficking in persons. Specifically, the department is responsible for helping protect out-of-status foreign national victims of trafficking.

This role has been made more visible since the Government of Canada's implementation of the horizontal national strategy to combat human trafficking in 2019. The strategy, led by Public Safety Canada, is composed of five pillars. Protection is the pillar under which IRCC's work falls; however, IRCC has, in fact, been involved in this protection role since 2006. The way we carry out this responsibility is to issue victims a special temporary resident permit. We call these permits VTIP TRPs—forgive the acronym—and they are issued at an officer's discretion.

VTIP TRPs are critical in helping victims secure immigration status in order to give them the possibility to decide on their next steps. This enables victims to escape the influence of their traffickers and start their recovery from the physical and mental trauma they may have experienced. They provide access to health care under the interim federal health program, including coverage for medical and psychological services. They also allow victims to apply for an open work permit.

These special permits may also be issued to victims' dependent family members in Canada. It is important to note that it is not necessary for victims to testify against their trafficker to benefit from this measure.

An initial VTIP TRP is typically issued for a period of 180 days and is fee exempt. A victim may also apply for a subsequent TRP if they wish to remain in Canada for longer. This can be issued for up to three years.

They can also apply for permanent residence, including on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, or claim asylum if they're in need of refugee protection.

Victims are generally referred to IRCC by law enforcement or non-governmental organizations, but they can also self-identify.

IRCC has processes already in place to ensure that applications made by victims of human trafficking are easily identified and are quickly assigned to an officer. These applications are also processed on a priority basis, taking precedence over applications of a less urgent nature.

• (1620)

[Translation]

IRCC also conducts administrative investigations to identify facilitators of human trafficking and, thus, try to disrupt human trafficking networks. IRCC often works in close co-operation with law enforcement agencies, such as the Canada Border Services Agency, or CBSA, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, or RCMP.

[English]

Overall, the number of VTIP TRPs issued by the department is low; however, in recent years, numbers have been increasing. To illustrate, while fewer than 100 of these VTIP TRPs were issued per year up to and including 2018, in 2019, 238 were approved. Most recently, in 2022, 155 VTIP TRPs were provided to victims and their dependents.

In terms of client gender, more VTIP TRPs have been issued to males in recent years. From 2019 to 2022, approximately 60% of VTIP TRPs were issued to males and approximately 40% to females.

[Translation]

In closing, I would like to point out that IRCC continues to monitor human trafficking cases brought to its attention, and to engage with partners and stakeholders in order to ensure that the department is able to effectively carry out its mandate of protecting victims of human trafficking.

[English]

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We're going to turn it over to the Department of Justice and Nathalie Levman.

Nathalie, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Nathalie Levman (Senior Counsel, Criminal Law Policy Section, Department of Justice): Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee on human trafficking. I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I'm speaking from the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe nation.

I propose to provide a brief overview of the relevant international legal framework, Canada's criminal law framework addressing human trafficking and relevant jurisprudence. I will also highlight some of the department's work supporting implementation.

Canada ratified the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons in 2002. This treaty includes a definition of "trafficking in persons" in article 3, which requires three elements to be present: an act, such as recruiting, transporting or harbouring another person, which is effected through specific means, such as coercion, abduction, deception or the abuse of a position of vulnerability, and for the specific purpose of exploiting that person. Rather than defining "exploitation", article 3 gives examples of exploitative conduct, such as sexual exploitation or forced labour, which require proof of coercive practices.

In 2002, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act was amended to include a human trafficking-specific offence that applies in transnational cases only. It is in subsection 118(1). This offence does not require proof of an exploitative purpose. Rather, the offence only requires proof that the accused committed a specific act, such as recruiting, transporting or harbouring a person through specified illicit means, such as abduction, deception, force or coercion.

In 2005, the Criminal Code was amended to include trafficking in persons-specific offences in sections 279.01 to 279.03. The main trafficking offences don't require proof that the act element was effected through illicit means. Rather, the offence only requires proof that the accused committed a specific act, such as recruiting, transporting or harbouring a person for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation is defined, given that criminal provisions require clarity. Specifically, exploitation occurs where a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances would believe that their physical or psychological safety were threatened if they failed to provide the labour or services required of them.

Relevant Ontario Court of Appeal jurisprudence clarifies that the definition of exploitation does not require proof that the victim was actually afraid—only that a reasonable person in the victim's circumstances would be. The court also explains that exploitation is to be interpreted broadly and that it captures both physical and psychological forms.

In a subsequent decision, the court upheld the accused's conviction in a case that involved abuse of power, but no violence or threats, and found that a broad range of factors are relevant when assessing whether conduct amounts to exploitation as defined in the Criminal Code. These factors include any power imbalance between the accused and the victim, victim vulnerability due to age or personal circumstances and the conduct employed by the accused to extract labour or services from the victim, such as physical or psychological coercion, deception, directive behaviour, control of finances or monitoring the victim's communications with others. Other appellate courts have followed this jurisprudence.

It is well established that human trafficking offences can be difficult to prove regardless of how they are framed. As noted in Statistics Canada's 2020 human trafficking juristat, prosecutors may struggle to secure convictions, including because the trauma to which victims are subjected may create difficulties in recalling the relevant events, resulting in victims being perceived as less credible. Victim support and trauma-informed care, therefore, are critical to both healing and successful prosecutions.

To assist with implementation, justice officials regularly train law enforcement on the legislative framework, as well as related issues, such as victim vulnerability and the importance of fostering relationships of trust.

• (1625)

This is done in the context of the RCMP's Canadian Police College human trafficking investigator's course. It's a 10-day course. Justice officials are also working with their provincial and territorial counterparts to update the 2015 federal, provincial and territorial publication, *A Handbook for Criminal Justice Practitioners on Trafficking in Persons*. It's anticipated that the updated version will be ready for public release by the end of 2023.

That concludes my remarks. I welcome any questions you may have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will get started with our rounds of questioning. We will be starting with six-minute rounds.

I will be passing it over to Dominique Vien.

Dominique, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies, thank you for making the time to speak with us about this very far-reaching issue. It's clear that human trafficking exploits victims not only sexually, but also economically. That's what I've come to understand and what I've heard since the committee began its study.

Ms. Levman, 90% of the time, the victims of human trafficking are women and girls. Do you know the exact number of women who have been victims of human trafficking in Canada? Do I need to specify victims who have been sexually exploited? Is it neces-

sary to examine the different facets of the issue separately? Do you already have an overall picture of who those victims are?

[*English*]

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Thank you for the question.

I'd like to direct you to Statistics Canada's juristats. The two most recent ones were released in 2022 and 2021. Both of them have criminal justice statistics with the types of numbers you're looking for.

Human trafficking is a complex crime and often difficult to detect. In terms of the data we have on it more generally, a range of data sources are required to give us a picture of how human trafficking manifests. It's not just the Statistics Canada juristats that we look to to figure out what it looks like in Canada.

You raised the difference between forced labour and sex trafficking. One issue we do have is that human trafficking provisions don't make that distinction. They apply regardless of the type of labour or service that is at issue.

What we do know from the human trafficking juristats is that the majority of cases that are going through our courts concern sexual exploitation, although forced labour cases do appear to be on the rise.

Those reports, I think, will be very useful for you in terms of understanding what human trafficking looks like in Canada.

Those juristats also refer to qualitative data, and that might help the committee as well. Qualitative data indicates that traffickers recruit and groom potential victims. They target vulnerable individuals such as those who are socially or emotionally isolated or financially desperate, and they manipulate them, including by building trust through false promises and deception.

Once victims come to rely on traffickers for their basic needs, they are very easy to manipulate.

• (1630)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: At the Department of Justice, how many women do you manage to help every year? Of those women, how many are being trafficked?

[*English*]

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Maybe I need to explain what our role is.

I'm from the criminal law policy section. We are responsible, from a policy perspective, for the Criminal Code. That includes developing legislation to amend it.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: I have a point of order, Madam Chair. I'm missing a lot of what's being said because the interpretation is cutting out.

[*English*]

The Chair: Dominique, as I'm speaking, can you hear me? You can. Okay.

Perhaps we can go back. I'll just pause that again. Do we need to start at the beginning of the answer? Where did you need us to start, Dominique? Was it at the question?

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Actually, this was my question: Do you know how many women in Canada are victims of human trafficking?

[English]

Ms. Nathalie Levman: As I said, what we know is from the juristats. The juristats do provide numbers on the number of victims each year in each individual human trafficking case. I don't have them memorized right now, but that should help you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Dominique Vien: Thank you.

Ms. Graham, unfortunately it's very likely that people are being trafficked across our border. You said earlier that you conducted investigations. What kinds of investigations do you carry out? What kinds of situations do you come across involving immigrants who were brought here against their will? Do you have any data based on your investigations that you can share with us?

Ms. Alexis Graham: I'm going to let Ms. Hayward answer that.

[English]

Ms. Sarah Hayward (Director, Visitors, Permits and Horizontal Initiatives, Immigration Program Guidance Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): IRCC works very closely with our partners in Public Safety, all the police services and the RCMP.

We do what's called an administrative investigation, which means that we use our database, GCMS. It helps us look for trends and strange anomalies, and then we share this information with our partners who actually do the physical investigation.

• (1635)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'm going to pass it over to Sonia Sidhu.

Sonia, you have six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being with us.

My first question is for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

What efforts are in place to ensure that newcomers, international students and other groups are protected and know what resources are available for them?

Ms. Alexis Graham: In terms of the specific measure we have in place to support victims of trafficking or people who may become victims of trafficking, it really is quite focused on that out-of-status national population. It is designed that way because out-of-status nationals really are within the scope of IRCC's mandate. We can confer that status and help alleviate that vulnerability, because if people are out of status, they are particularly vulnerable to ex-

ploitation and are likely to be fearful of deportation as well. The specific measure, that VTIP TRP, is really focused on that particular population.

That being said, obviously we know that there are in-status individuals who are also vulnerable, so there are a few measures in place to help support them as well. One is specific to temporary foreign workers. There's an open work permit for vulnerable workers who are in Canada on a closed work permit. The closed work permit is essentially tied to a specific employer. They can apply for this open work permit and be given the labour mobility that enables them to move out of those abusive situations they may be experiencing.

In terms of international students specifically, there's no measure we have that focuses on them, but there may be....

Go ahead, Sarah.

Ms. Sarah Hayward: It's not really to do with trafficking, but it does because information is key for everyone and vulnerable people, so IRCC does a lot of outreach to international students abroad. Our website is full of all kinds of information about possible nefarious traffickers or agents and explains how you can apply without anyone's assistance.

We also, in some areas of the world where we know there are a lot of nefarious agents, do a lot of outreach, explaining, for instance, the international student program and what they can expect. We also have some publicity and advertising campaigns in some parts of the world that we have more issues with.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question is for the Department of Justice.

How can we educate and equip children so they recognize the signs of human trafficking and can prevent themselves from being victimized?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: That's an excellent question. It's a bit outside my expertise, since I deal with the criminal laws that apply to human trafficking in the human trafficking context.

On Monday, you had my colleague from Public Safety before you. She explained the public awareness measures Public Safety is developing. Justice does the same for certain types of legal issues.

That type of information can be very empowering for people at risk of becoming trafficked. We want to ensure they know their rights in Canada, that it is never okay to be exploited here and that when it occurs, they can come forward and access law enforcement. Part of what we do is train law enforcement. We don't do trauma-informed training—we have experts who do that—but, as I said, we do train on victim vulnerability, the importance of fostering relationships of trust with victims and repairing those relationships so they feel safe and comfortable coming forward to police, who can be seen as people who will help them.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Garrett-Baird.

What specific challenges do women, girls and gender diverse people face when it comes to preventing and escaping human trafficking, and how does your department work collaboratively across government to address this issue?

• (1640)

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Thank you for the question.

As mentioned, we recently launched our national action plan on ending gender-based violence. That is a federal, provincial and territorial plan that enables us to work collaboratively not only at the FPT level but also with indigenous partners, civil society organizations, researchers, frontline service providers and other experts, as well as victims or survivors and their families. It's not only to address gender-based violence but also to end it. There is a preventative element. It is a 10-year plan that contains five pillars. Within those, one of the target groups is, as you mentioned, immigrant women and girls. We know that is one of the vulnerable groups.

That is the focus of the plan. As we move forward and work with our federal, provincial and territorial counterparts to establish bilateral funding agreements and implementation plans, we will also be working with them to ensure there are targeted measures.

The Chair: That's fantastic.

I'll let you all see this thing that shows 30 seconds and it says, "Thank you". Instead of saying, "We're done", it says, "Thank you". When you see that you're at 30 seconds, start wrapping it up.

Andréanne, you have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today for this important study. This issue is deeply concerning to me, not just as my party's status of women critic, but also as co-chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group to End Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking. I pay close attention to all of these issues.

This is for all the witnesses. In 2012, the government launched the first national strategy and adopted another in 2019. However, the figures show that the number of human trafficking victims is still on the rise.

Women, girls and marginalized groups are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking. Today, we were reminded of the latest

Statistics Canada figures on the subject, and they show that 96% of the victims are women and girls. That's a startling statistic, and I'm deeply disturbed every single time I hear it.

Even though we began the study only a little while ago, it's becoming clear that what we're hearing is just the tip of the iceberg. Getting an accurate sense of the full picture is tough. This is a very sensitive issue, so women and girls who are victims find it hard to speak up against their traffickers. Not only do victims lack trust in the process of accessing support after speaking out, but also the idea of coming forward is terrifying to them.

Given the roles and responsibilities of your respective departments, are you able to comment on that? When victims distrust the system and the institutions that deal with human trafficking, what is going wrong?

You can go first, Ms. Levman.

[English]

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Thank you.

I think that was for me.

There is a variety of reasons for a lack of trust and low reporting. You mentioned juristat. There are a lot of references to the research on those important issues as to why that might be the case. It notes, for example, that victims may be unwilling or unable to report due to trauma they've suffered or pre-existing vulnerabilities. They may have general distrust of authorities. It may be because traffickers have told them to distrust police. Traffickers may also have involved them in criminal activity in order to maintain this type of control over them, threats that police may use the criminal law against them rather than to protect them as the laws' objective states.

In the training that Justice officials provide through the Canadian Police College's human trafficking investigator's course, these issues are studied and discussed so that police are aware that they are dealing with vulnerable, traumatized people who require a special kind of support and that they might need to interact with them many times. In fact, there's research that shows it may take several interventions by law enforcement before that trust is built and the victim will come forward to denounce the trafficker.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Graham or Ms. Hayward, do you have anything to add regarding immigration and your department's role in the distrust victims have?

[English]

Ms. Alexis Graham: Thank you so much for the opportunity to comment on that question.

Madam Levman raised some very important points about the reasons that people feel uncertain about coming forward. Those reasons are applicable, I think, to migrants as well.

In particular for migrants, there may also be additional barriers. Migrants face things like language barriers. They may have been subjected to trauma in a variety of different contexts, not just in Canada but in their home countries. They are sometimes in a particular situation of precarity where they may not have permanent residence status or are living in a difficult set of circumstances. That precarity adds to those complex dimensions of their feeling like they don't necessarily have the agency to come forward.

Also, if you come from a different country, you may not be as familiar with the rights and laws of Canada as a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, someone who is well established. That may add yet another barrier that migrants face in coming forward in these types of circumstances.

Sarah, do you want to add anything in addition to that?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: What we do with our VTIP TRP is help to address some of that uncertainty. It gives people the chance to take a breath and know that they are not going to be deported. We give them the status for six months so that they can sit back and figure out what their next steps are without having to worry about being deported.

[Translation]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: Ms. Garrett-Baird, your department is already familiar with the difficulties women who experience violence face. I would think it's even worse when someone is from another country.

What does the Department of Women and Gender Equality do to overcome that distrust?

[English]

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: I have a couple of quick comments.

First, under the national action plan, there is a pillar for responsive justice systems. That's to recognize the challenges and work with our partners to have a responsive justice system to support those who are subjected to gender-based violence, including human trafficking.

Concerning the federal GBV strategy, our IRCC colleagues are a partner under that. We work with them across the government along with the Department of Justice on initiatives to support this.

I would also like to point to some of the human trafficking projects that are being funded by WAGE to focus on promising practices in supporting at-risk populations.

There are 42 projects we are currently funding, including ones like the Women's Centre for Social Justice, which is developing and implementing promising intervention practices to advance knowledge and enhance empowerment supports for at-risk populations and survivors of human trafficking in Ontario, Alberta, Yukon, B.C. and Quebec.

We also have the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of BC, which is developing and implementing indigenous-led, community-based, culturally rooted anti-human trafficking approaches, practices and materials to advance and enhance empowerment supports for at-risk indigenous populations and survivors of human trafficking throughout British Columbia.

We're really taking a multipronged approach. There's certainly many more project examples, but those are just some to demonstrate what we're doing to get to those issues.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you so much, Chair.

Thank you so much for coming to committee today.

My first question is for Madam Garrett-Baird.

At the beginning of your presentation you spoke about the government's investment in gender-based violence strategies. You also mentioned the most at-risk populations being indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, 2SLGBTQIA+. I've raised this issue many times. It's of deep concern to me. I put forward an Order Paper question. I just resubmitted it.

In 2020, the present government put in \$724.1 million for a violence prevention strategy. It's now 2023. Only 5% has been spent: \$37.1 million. Not one new shelter or transition home has been built. We're at three years. We know that one of the ways to protect all women, girls and gender-diverse populations is first having a safe place. Are there plans to expedite spending the money?

This is costing lives, certainly in Winnipeg. It's been in the news: The two women who they're searching for in a landfill were staying in a shelter not housed for women. I believe that if they'd had this housing, they would still be with us today—right?—that and a guaranteed livable basic income.

I'm wondering what the plan is to speed up the spending of that money.

• (1650)

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Thank you for the question.

In budget 2021, as I mentioned, \$601.3 million was provided, including funding for WAGE to deliver on a number of items. One of these was actually providing COVID emergency funding.

Since April 2020, the department has provided over \$259 million in COVID emergency funding to 1,400 organizations, including women's shelters, sexual assault centres and other organizations providing critical supports and services to those experiencing gender-based violence. We are also currently funding—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Yes, I appreciate that, but that's not actually my question. I know what the allocation is. It sounds great, but it's not being spent. What is the plan to get that money out the door?

I share this as well because in the 2022 budget around addressing the crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls, there was a zero budgetary allocation. As we sit on the money from 2020, I think it's holding up other necessary monies that will save lives.

What is the plan to get that money out the door? That's really what my question is.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Thanks.

The funding that WAGE has received has been sent out the door to those emergency shelters, and that has impacted a significant number of women.

In addition, we are working with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation on the national housing strategy and with Infrastructure Canada on reaching homes under pillar five of the national action plan to end gender-based violence. This pillar is about social infrastructure and enabling environment. There are potential opportunities for action here as well to build on investments, shelter and transitional housing supports and affordable long-term housing, with support for operating costs—

Ms. Leah Gazan: Could you submit to the committee how much funding has been allocated and how much funding has been spent to date? It's just because I have limited time and I want to move on to other questions.

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Yes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much.

My next question is for Alexis Graham or Sarah Hayward in terms of IRCC.

A member from the CBSA was here during the last meeting, and one of the things he said was, "You should ask the IRCC." You are here, so I will ask you.

We know that a lot of migrant workers, even sex workers, won't come forward because of fear of deportation. A 2015 article by the CBC indicated that IRCC should provide permanent residency for migrant sex workers caught up in sex trafficking investigations, because if they're not worried about their status, they're more likely to report violence.

Where is the IRCC in terms of heeding that call? It was an article written by the CBC on May 8, 2015. What steps has IRCC taken in terms of offering permanent residency to protect people who are being swept up in the human trafficking investigation?

• (1655)

Ms. Alexis Graham: The first step is the VTIP TRP in order to get people who are in urgent need out of those precarious situations. Following the issuance of that first permit, a person can apply for a subsequent permit for up to three years and stay in Canada for that duration of time. They can also apply for permanent residence programs, such as family sponsorship programs. They can also apply under our economic programs and our humanitarian and compassionate programs.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We are going to our next round. I'm going to reduce this round. We'll go five, five, two and a half, two and a half, and cut off the last two.

We'll start with Anna for five minutes.

You can share your time if you wish.

Mrs. Anna Roberts (King—Vaughan, CPC): Thank you Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to start with Ms. Graham and Ms. Hayward.

Do we have any stats on foreign national victims? Do you have any numbers for us?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: On the types of citizenships, do you mean the people who would have the...?

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Let me explain the reason I am asking this question.

I have been doing some research with a police officer who worked directly with human trafficking. I have been told these numbers are increasing. Foreign students are coming from abroad. Foreign perpetrators are coming from abroad illegally. They find that it's easy for them in Canada to have a business of human trafficking, because the sentences don't match the crime, whereas with drug dealers, it's a little different. They get a stiffer penalty.

How many perpetrators have been convicted? How many foreign victims have you come across? Do we have the stats for that?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: We do not have stats on the perpetrators. Currently, we only have stats for the people who were issued VTIP TRPs. As we said, that's a very small portion of human trafficking. It's people who did not have status when they came to our attention. I have stats on that. In 2022, we saw citizenships from Mexico, the Philippines, Guatemala, Jamaica and Ukraine. Those were some of the citizenships we saw when we issued the VTIP TRPs.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Were these victims?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: Yes. They were all victims.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: How many of them were there?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: In 2022, we issued 155 VTIP TRPs.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Out of those 155 victims, how many perpetrators were arrested?

Ms. Sarah Hayward: I can't comment on that, because that would not be our department.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Ms. Levman, can you give us a number on how many perpetrators, of the 155 victims, were either convicted or arrested?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: All I can do is refer you back to the human trafficking juristat, which provides the numbers for both accused and victims.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: I'm a little—

The Chair: I'm going to interrupt.

Can you make sure that we are linked to that juristat? We don't have that access. Can you ensure that this committee gets that information? We have zero numbers right now, so we need that information.

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I will ensure that it is sent to you.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you. I will move on to my next question.

You mentioned a website that has a lot of information. Would you say that from this website, you can gather information of perpetrators and victims?

What I'm trying to get at is that any police officers I've spoken with—and I'm going to be attending a forum back home—are telling me that the numbers are increasing. The victims are increasing, and the perpetrators are increasing.

If we don't have numbers, how can we attack the problem? How can we fight this issue, so we can protect our young people and protect the citizens of this country?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I understand that Statistics Canada officials are to come before you in April. I'm very happy to send you the juristats. It would be worth your while to take a quick read through them before they arrive.

You can ask them all of these questions. They may have more information than we do.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: My next question is for Crystal.

You mentioned funding to help these victims. I'm not sure if you've come across a young lady by the name of Timea. She was denied funding for a program where she was able to assist 300 victims and over 500 human trafficked individuals.

Why would she not continue to have funding if she has such a successful program which helps these victims?

I don't know if you heard the question. Do you need me to repeat it?

• (1700)

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Could you repeat it, please?

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Timea Nagy is an individual who has helped in over 500 human trafficking investigations, and she has been cut off from funding. Can you tell me why?

Ms. Crystal Garrett-Baird: Women and Gender Equality Canada does not provide frontline services. We provide support and funding to civil society organizations to enable them to support individuals and at-risk groups.

I don't have any details with me of the case you're referencing.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to pass it over to Jenna.

Jenna, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Jenna Sudds (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses who have joined us today.

I'm going to start with Ms. Levman with a very basic question to ensure a clear understanding.

What are the punishments under the Criminal Code for human traffickers?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I assume that you mean what the penalties are in the code.

There are technically six offences. There's a main trafficking offence, and that has a maximum penalty of 14 years or life, depending on whether aggravated assault, aggravated sexual assault or kidnapping was also committed. That bumps it up to life. There are mandatory minimum penalties of four years and five years, depending on whether it's 14-year max or life.

Then there is a child-specific offence, section 279.011, and the maximum penalties are the same. Obviously there's no higher penalty than life. The mandatory minimum penalties are slightly higher: five years and six years.

There's a material benefit offence. That offence has a maximum penalty of 14 years when the victim is a child and 10 years when the victim is an adult. When the victim is a child, there are mandatory minimum penalties.

There's a documents offence for withholding or destroying documents for the purposes of facilitating trafficking. It doesn't matter if the documents are valid or forged. That offence has a 10-year max when the victim is a child, with a mandatory minimum penalty and a five-year max when the victim is an adult.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you for clarifying that and laying that out for us.

What must prosecutors prove in order to get a conviction for human trafficking?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: That was part of my introductory remarks.

They need to prove the act element, which is recruiting, transporting or harbouring someone, and they need to prove that the act element was done for the purposes of exploiting the victim, meaning that the person doing it is the one exploiting them or for the purposes of facilitating their exploitation by someone else. It captures a very broad range of conduct.

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Thank you very much.

I have a bit more specific question around sharing of or threatening to share intimate images, or sextortion. We know that this has become more of a phenomenon. It is on the rise and has absolutely devastating impacts for victims. I am wondering what steps have been or could be taken to address this growing crime.

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Do you mean in the context of human trafficking?

• (1705)

Ms. Jenna Sudds: Yes.

Ms. Nathalie Levman: One thing I can note that the committee might find interesting is that human trafficking cases often involve a significant number of charges, many more charges than regular cases. That will be in your human trafficking juristat, which I'll ensure you get links to.

We see a wide range of different offences. This is because trafficking is an ongoing or course of conduct offence during which incident-based offences tend to be committed along the way, usually to control the victim. That's what you are stating. You're stating the phenomenon of, "If you don't perform this labour or service, then I am going to share intimate images I've taken of you with" person X, the world or whatnot.

We do have cases where we see different charges being laid. Section 162.1, which is the non-consensual distribution of intimate images offence, can be used in that context.

Extortion is the offence of extorting sexual favours. We have very good case law on that offence. It's clear that extorting sexual favours, extorting money or whatnot by threats of releasing pictures is extortion. Extortion is a very serious offence with a maximum penalty of life.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're going to pass it over for two and a half minutes to Andr anne.

Andr anne, you have the floor.

[*Translation*]

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

Ladies, thank you again for being here today. I'm going to pick up where I left off in the first round.

In 2019, the federal government implemented a series of measures in the form of a national strategy. The evidence the committee has heard this week from representatives of various departments and organizations has made us realize how important it is to coordinate efforts. It's a crucial element, but one that is lacking. That is

just as true for prevention, investigations and prosecutions as it is for victim protection. However, government efforts fall short in a number of ways, especially when it comes to protecting victims, as the U.S. Department of State noted in its report.

What is your view on interdepartmental coordination? From a coordination standpoint, what can be done to better protect victims of human trafficking?

The immigration officials can go first, followed by the women and gender equality official.

[*English*]

Ms. Alexis Graham: Collaboration is a huge part of the work we do in this national strategy to address human trafficking. I think Public Safety is probably the best placed to give you that overarching perspective on how that collaboration all fits together under the national strategy, but I can say, in terms of Immigration's role, we do collaborate quite closely with law enforcement agencies through our investigations. As Sarah was saying earlier, we provide that support of information intelligence that goes into those enforcement actions. That is one connection point that is very close for us.

I don't know, Sarah, if you want to add more on that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andr anne Larouche: I have just 30 seconds left. I'd like to hear what Ms. Levman, from the justice department, and Ms. Garrett-Baird think.

You can each have 15 seconds. Please be as quick as you can.

[*English*]

Ms. Nathalie Levman: I would just note that the human trafficking task force, which is run by Public Safety, brings all of the implicated departments together on a regular basis so that we're sharing information regularly and assisting each other in the work we do, as appropriate.

The Chair: We're going to pass it over to Leah Gazan.

Leah, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

My last question is for Madam Levman.

You spoke about trust in policing and building trusting relationships. I would differ in that we know that particularly the RCMP is riddled with systemic racism and has a history of over- or under-policing, as we saw in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. That provided very specific calls for justice to address this.

I don't think this is best served with policing. That's my bias. I think it's best addressed by frontline community organizations that address safety issues with women, girls, 2SLGBTQIA who may be being sex trafficked, or just sex workers, in terms of reporting.

Does your department support community-based independently run agencies and organizations to serve on the front lines and be advocates for people should they become sex trafficked or need protection as sex workers?

• (1710)

Ms. Nathalie Levman: Justice Canada has a victims fund, and it has an ongoing annual allocation of \$1 million available to victim-serving organizations delivering specialized supports and services for victims and survivors of human trafficking, so we do some of that funding. I would say, though, in relation to the substance of your concerns, that partnerships are incredibly important. Policing is very complex in Canada, because there are so many different police forces. I know that many police forces have specialized units that deal with human trafficking with embedded support services.

Ms. Leah Gazan: I'm looking at the research. For example, Butterfly talks about the need to resource communities and divest from policing, because a lot of people don't feel safe going to police, including for reasons of being deported. It's overlap.

Is your department looking at putting greater funding into frontline organizations rather than policing to address this?

Ms. Nathalie Levman: That's part of what that \$1 million that I explained is for—

Ms. Leah Gazan: That's very small, \$1 million, but thank you.

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll end this panel in a second, but before you leave, I have a question for the IRCC.

You talked earlier about the VTIPs and TRPs, and you indicated countries. If you could give us a list of those countries, with the ages and genders of those victims who received those VTIPs, I would really appreciate that. Could you please send that to the committee?

Thank you so much.

We'll now do a switch-up. We'll be bringing the people who are online back on, but I would really like to thank the four of you for coming to provide this information to our committee.

We'll suspend and then get right back to work.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

The Chair: I'd like to welcome everybody back. We have quite a bit of work to get done, and six o'clock is our deadline.

I will introduce our next three panellists.

From the Aboriginal Women's Action Network, we have Fay Blaney, the lead matriarch.

No. She's not here. Maybe next time.

From the Ontario Native Women's Association, we have Coralee McGuire-Cyrette, executive director.

I would like to say thank you so much to Coralee. We're going to give her a lot of space, because this beautiful woman searched all over New York to make sure she had a headset. She got her headset approved just moments ago.

Thank you so much for making sure, Coralee. It's important.

From Women of the Métis Nation, we have Melanie Omeniho.

Thank you to both of you. I will give you both five minutes for your opening statements.

I'll pass it over to Coralee first.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette (Executive Director, Ontario Native Women's Association): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is Coralee McGuire-Cyrette and I am the executive director of the Ontario Native Women's Association. ONWA is the largest and oldest indigenous women's organization in Canada and has the largest indigenous-led anti-human trafficking program. In the last 10 months, we have helped support 426 women and girls in safely exiting human trafficking. I want to acknowledge the bravery, wisdom and leadership of all survivors, as they are the experts. Their advice informs all aspects of our trafficking work.

Today, my testimony will focus on the ways we can prevent and address the trafficking of indigenous women and girls, and the ways we can improve law enforcement's ability to identify and hold offenders accountable.

In 2018, ONWA released a report called “Journey to Safe Spaces”. It is based on intensive engagement with over 3,300 community members and service providers, as well as 250 self-identified survivors of human trafficking. Now and historically, indigenous women have the poorest outcomes in the 16 most acceptable social determinants of health in the country. To prevent the trafficking of indigenous women and girls, we must first address the risk factors that create the conditions that make them more vulnerable and targeted by human traffickers, such as income security, lack of social and cultural supports, and lack of equitable access to health care, to name a few.

We all know colonization has significantly influenced the current landscape of indigenous women and girls being trafficked in Canada. They are vulnerable to violence because they are both under- and over-policed. Often, they are not believed and further victimized by the systems mandated to protect them. They experience multiple barriers, inequality, systemic discrimination, racism and lateral violence, and they are excluded from nation-to-nation policy engagements.

If we want sustainable change, we need to deconstruct the current systems and reconstruct indigenous women's leadership, voices, honour and empowerment. Governments at all levels must implement a distinctions-based plus approach in alignment with article 18 of UNDRIP. They must also support indigenous organizations through core funding, so these can provide safe spaces that are survivor-centred, culturally grounded, and designed and led by indigenous women. Indigenous women's lives are not projects. We cannot address systemic change through project-based funding. It is difficult to work towards reconciliation when indigenous women are not safe in our country. To date, there has been an abundance of education, training and public awareness campaigns, but not an abundance of core funding to support prevention-based services.

Not all provinces in Canada have prioritized human trafficking. Many still do not have strategies to address or eliminate the trafficking of indigenous women and girls. It is critical to understand that indigenous women's voices have been left out and silenced in conversation. This has impacted their safety, well-being and livelihoods, and this is why ONWA advocates for a distinctions-based plus approach. We cannot afford to continue leaving indigenous women out of the conversation while we are six times more likely than non-indigenous women to be murdered.

The issue of police accountability is a conversation that needs to be addressed at many levels. All police forces must acknowledge the systemic racism embedded in their systems and work towards change. They need to build trust with indigenous women's organizations, so indigenous survivors of human trafficking feel safe enough to report the exploitation to them. Clear policing standards and training would assist police in identifying victims of human trafficking. After identification, police investigations need to be trauma informed and done without discrimination or bias. All police forces across Canada should review and ensure they have implemented all recommendations in the 2018 “Broken Trust” report, in order to make sure their organizational behaviour aligns with addressing and eliminating systemic racism and does not perpetuate it.

Today, we still have governments quick to dismiss the notion that human trafficking exists in our community, because it's difficult to hear what indigenous women and girls negotiate every day just to survive.

In closing, I would like to encourage the committee to review our “Reconciliation with Indigenous Women” report and our “Journey to Safe Spaces” strategy in full. They both provide a comprehensive road map to keeping indigenous women and girls safe from human trafficking and supporting them in rebuilding their lives.

Meegwetch.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'll now turn it over to Melanie Omeniho from Women of the Métis Nation.

Melanie, you have the floor.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho (President, Women of the Métis Nation - Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak): Thank you, Chair, and committee members for making space for Women of the Métis Nation - Les Femmes Michif Otipemisiwak, to come and present today.

Human trafficking is of great concern to all of us. I'm presenting to you from the motherland of the Métis nation and Treaty 6 territory in Edmonton, Alberta.

The impacts of Métis displacement from their homeland, the harms experienced through issues like residential school systems, their loss of culture, the abuse experienced from our communities within the child welfare system and the sixties scoop means that many of our families and communities struggle and are disconnected from their culture and their ability to heal within their communities.

Violence is a part of our lives each and every day. We really appreciate organizations like ONWA which have brought statistics to you. However, many of the Métis have no statistics, and the data is not tracked. We don't know what our numbers are. We do understand that systemic causes have led to the devaluation of Métis women and gender diverse people. Further, we see a horrific normalization of sexual violence within our country.

Métis women, girls and gender diverse people are more vulnerable to traffickers because of colonialism, intergenerational trauma, histories of unresolved physical and sexual abuse and diversabilities. Mental health and poverty also form some of the reasons why many of our women are vulnerable to being human trafficked.

Women have always been specifically targeted for violence through federal policies and legislation, such as strict policies, marriage laws and the rights to property that were created to undermine family, community and the political structures that existed within our communities.

We further acknowledge our vulnerabilities that lead to trafficking by age. Children from zero to six.... We even have them on birth alerts. We're aware of just how our communities are susceptible to the kinds of vulnerabilities that are created by such things.

Youth may be experiencing a loss of their culture and identity. They are doing unhealthy sexual behaviours, because of the experiences they have from being disconnected from their communities, families, and structures.

Into early adulthood, traffickers might recruit Métis youth from across our Métis nation motherland with a promise of a glamorous life, which adds to further isolating them from their communities. We see vulnerabilities in youth aging out of care, those involved with the justice system, or those otherwise disconnected from their family and community.

No reports exist on Métis perspectives of human trafficking and anti-human trafficking. We need to be able to form pathways for healing, and support survivor engagement to ensure Métis-specific strategies are addressing the unique realities of Métis women and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Human traffickers follow the money by luring girls and women into areas where they're very close to their resource-based industries or camps where young men are there to find ways to exploit them. There are several corridors in human trafficking where our girls have been noticed, from Thunder Bay to Toronto, down to Minnesota, from Winnipeg to North Dakota, and from Vancouver to Washington. Alberta has also been a favourite destination in recent years with Calgary and Edmonton as long-time hot spots. Secondary routes lead to resource towns, such as Fort McMurray, Alberta, in providing isolation and protection away from anti-trafficking initiatives.

Formal statistics reflecting the number of Métis women and 2SLGBTQ people, who are trafficked, are inadequate for many reasons, including the underground nature of the industry and the under-reporting by victims due to fear, coercion and the movement of those being trafficked.

We would like to make some recommendations that we're hoping this committee, with its study, would be able to do.

• (1725)

The national—

The Chair: Melanie, your five minutes are up now.

Our time is so tight tonight. Melanie, could you make sure that we get those recommendations? We need to get them on the record, because I know you have a lot to offer, but I want to ensure that everybody on the committee gets their chance to ask questions as well. I'm going to cut you off now, but I'm going to ask you for those recommendations in writing, if you don't mind.

I'm going to pass it over and start our rounds of questioning. For questioning, we'll have 30 minutes total.

I'm going to start off with the six minutes and pass it over to Michelle Ferreri.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri (Peterborough—Kawartha, CPC): Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

Thank you both for being here. It's a powerful, important conversation.

If I may start with you, Ms. McGuire-Cyrette, I read a stat, and I know you quoted it, but I don't think I wrote it down quickly enough.

While indigenous women only make up 4% of the Canadian population, they make up roughly 50% of trafficking victims. While this is heartbreaking, obviously, thoughts and prayers are not solving this issue.

Do you think the government is doing enough today to protect indigenous women and girls from being trafficked?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Thank you for the question.

Definitely, when you're looking at statistics, I know they're all over the place. I was listening to the earlier session around the lack of data around this issue because of.... It's the tip of the iceberg in the stats we're seeing. In some communities, I would imagine the numbers are probably even substantially higher.

Our statistics, for instance, are showing.... In our program alone, which is the largest indigenous anti-human trafficking program in Canada, from 2017 to 2022, we helped support 858 exits of human trafficking through 12,000 contacts. This is our own data that we're tracking with the women we've been working with. There is definitely some.... The communities that have indigenous women have either higher rates than 50% in some of the smaller communities....

I think as long as this issue continues to exist, we're failing. We're failing indigenous women as a community, as a society and as a system. We need to be doing more to keep indigenous women safe. There's a connection between missing and murdered indigenous women and girls and human trafficking. There's a direct correlation between missing girls, missing children and missing women and a connection to human trafficking, and—

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: I'm sorry. I hate interrupting you, but we only have so much time.

You answered my next question and segued perfectly into where I was going, with that correlation between murdered and missing indigenous women and human trafficking. You spoke about what we heard in the last panel with the lack of data. It was appalling, actually, but I also don't know the answer.

I'd be curious to hear your thoughts, because the reality is.... In my experience of seeing...in my community, we have women working and also being trafficked, but it's not being reported. How do you collect data if you don't know what those numbers are?

I'm going back to murdered and missing indigenous women. When these women were left as nothing and they weren't accounted for in the system, how do we know the true data and how do we solve it?

Do you have any insight on how we can do that when it's not reported?

• (1730)

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Yes, definitely. I think if we get down to the root cause of it, we need to invest in indigenous women's safety. That's the bottom line.

We know that the issue is there. We know there are business cases to be built. We know there's data and there's a lack of data, particularly when you're looking at the root cause of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls in that we don't have the data around the entire story, like the death story, for instance. How many women have died? Who killed them? What were the causes of death? All of those things would lead to policy change at a systemic level.

The same thing goes when you're look at addressing human trafficking or violence against indigenous women. We have seen the data show that non-indigenous women continue to have their safety increase, and it's because of the investments into them and into their systems. Their systems do not work for us as indigenous women. We need to see investments into indigenous women's physical safety immediately, really looking at that as the systemic approach we have to start to address.

We need that core sustainable funding for indigenous women's agencies. That hasn't happened here in Canada, and there has to be that long-term, sustainable funding to support indigenous women's safety.

Ms. Michelle Ferreri: Thank you so much for that.

I guess I'll give the opportunity to.... I'm going to say your last name wrong, so I'm going to say "Melanie", if you're okay with that, Melanie.

It's a chicken-and-egg situation because the way that a lot of funding works is that you show the data to get the funding for a program. How do we invest in something? Well, we have this many, and we need this much, and we need this many resources.

What's your suggestion on the best way to collect data when so many of these women are not reporting? The victims aren't reporting it because they're full of shame or they live in fear of their perpetrator, so how do we collect this data?

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: I believe that part of what needs to happen is creating safety for women to be able to report. Police are not a safe place for women at this point in time. It's a shame, but that's the reality of the story that we live. We need to create spaces that are safe for people to report, so that when they are reporting, they don't become victims of the systems that are supposed to be there supporting them.

I would tell you that the other issue is racism. It's an issue in this country and that's evident whether we're talking about human trafficking or missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. People don't want to see the numbers. They're afraid.

Look at what happened when the report came out about the 215 graves in Kelowna. Everybody was so surprisingly shocked. There had been a truth and reconciliation report that had clearly identified that this had been going on. Story after story had been told to the TRC. Why should it have shocked anybody, if they had been paying attention? It's because people don't want to really acknowledge the numbers, even the information from the police, and then reporting and tracking isn't happening.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Melanie. I hate cutting you off, especially when we're talking about such an important topic. I'm trying to be polite with the "thank you".

I'm going to pass it to Emmanuella.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Thank you.

First of all, thank you to both of our witnesses for being here and providing amazing and very helpful testimony for our study.

I'm going to start with Ms. McGuire-Cyrette.

You said that your organization has helped 850 people out of trafficking over the last few years through 12,000 contacts. That's your anti-human trafficking program.

Considering the fact that we're trying to find a way to better the situation of human trafficking in Canada, can you give us some of the key takeaways of this program that you would want to share with other organizations that are trying to do similar work?

What's made it successful in helping bring 850 people out of it?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Yes, definitely. First and foremost, it was designed and led by survivors. We went to the women who are the experts on this issue. They've designed and developed the entire strategy. It's a survivor-led strategy within the province.

It was comprehensive: We included everybody in our engagements. We engaged with service providers. We engaged with community members and survivors of human trafficking. That's the approach we took, which is recognizing that they know what's best. They know where the gaps are and what's needed.

We created our "Journey to Safe Spaces" report. Our report really is that road map of what survivors have said that they needed. We share our report freely. It's on our website; anybody can access our report.

You can really see that what's in there is how to create a safe space strategy where you need to have barrier-free access to programming and services. You need to create systemic change. You need to be able to address this issue from a policy level, an education level, a service level—from every level. It's across departments and across ministries because the issue is so intersectional with so many different issues. It's not just dealing with a "one bad man" type of thing.

Here in Canada, it really is that the sexualization of indigenous women and girls is so normalized in our communities and our behaviour that the trafficking of our children continues. We have to be able to break down that normalization.

How you do it is through comprehensive investments that will actually meet the need through long-term, sustainable funding.

• (1735)

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you.

Earlier, we were talking with IRCC and with other government departments about certain pathways for women who are not from Canada. They were saying that very often women are reluctant to come out. Of course, many of them face deportation, but in general, women may feel unsafe to report themselves and to say they are being trafficked.

Through your program, what have you heard from some of the victims? What is it that helped them feel safe and often comfortable enough to come out? Do you think we should be taking a more proactive approach in order to get people to talk about it more openly and to get help when they're in these situations?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Yes. The survivors have told us that they need barrier-free access to services, and to the services where it's safe for them to have these conversations. This is why, when you're looking at indigenous women's agencies and when you're going to an indigenous women's agency that has cultural programs and supports that have been designed and developed by you, for you, that's the change piece right there. They're more able to talk together to build that community of care, that community of support.

The biggest part of our program in what we do is that we walk the healing journey with the woman. We don't walk it for her. We're here as support, and as long-term support, because for so many of the women and girls who we work with, sometimes in the system you can work with a woman or girl for maybe only 48 hours or 72 hours. They put these barriers of time on it. For us, it's, "No, we're still walking that healing journey with them for one to two years, for however long they need us to be there with them."

If you can just imagine that somebody you know has come to you and is experiencing this, it hits you. It changes you, because every single one of these women and girls is a beloved mother, daughter, auntie and/or sister, and just being able to care for them, to believe their stories...because there are many stories where systems are not believing the violence that these girls are facing. We start off by first and foremost believing that their story is their story is their story, and that's their truth.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thank you very much. I appreciate your responses.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to switch over, and we're going to have six minutes and six minutes. I'm going to give you an additional few seconds on top of that for both the Bloc and the NDP, and then we'll come back for one minute of questions from the Conservatives and the Liberals.

I'll pass it over to Andréanne Larouche for about six-ish minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here and for sharing the views of indigenous women on this issue. Indigenous women are unfortunately part of the statistics and are more often targeted by traffickers. Thank you for your comments.

You mentioned the importance of working with the various departments that are involved. Earlier this week, the committee heard from CBSA, Public Safety Canada and RCMP officials. After listening to what they had to say, I was a bit surprised. If the committee were to rely strictly on them to combat human trafficking, we wouldn't get very far, in my view.

I realize that human trafficking happens in the shadows and that people are deceived by so-called good Samaritans whose true intentions are malicious. As a result, victims are isolated. The federal officials I mentioned told the committee that it was almost impossible to know whether a person was being smuggled across the border.

You work with victims. I understand that it's important to tackle the issue proactively, through education and the like, and to respond after the fact by helping victims. What happens, though, between the two? What have you learned in speaking with these women? What has your experience working with them taught you? How do they feel about police involvement?

Those answers could help the committee come up with recommendations for the RCMP, police services or CBSA, in terms of where they could make improvements. Where should they step up efforts or pull back?

I'd like all of you to comment from both the prevention and response standpoints. How can we do a better job of detecting cases of human trafficking? Please answer in whatever order you'd like.

• (1740)

[*English*]

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Thank you.

Definitely, the first thing that policing needs to do is believe the woman and provide that trauma-informed response to her. They have to be able to do that. But we're also dealing with a systemically racist system, and that's where we have to look at changing that system and breaking down and removing that bias and racism, so they're able to respond to the women and girls and connect them to programming and services in the community that would be able to help support them.

One issue is around project-based funding. The supports and resources for women in the community may or may not be there, because it's based on short-term funding. It's not a long-term response. It's being able to build that response in the community to support them. How do we get the data, in a good way, on what's happening on the ground with the policing and the services in order to be able to look at it holistically and respond to this issue?

Experts are saying about 10% of HT victims report working better with frontline agencies. Sometimes it's not safe to go through the justice system. Women have told us that there is no justice in the justice system for them. The biggest part that women want to work on is their healing. We need to really look at where the healing supports are for indigenous women. That's a key piece that's missing here.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Omeniho, would you like to add anything? You were cut off earlier just as you were about to share some recommendations with the committee. I know the chair asked you to send them to us in writing, but you can have a bit of time to discuss them now if you'd like.

We are looking for tangible solutions. Where could we make improvements?

[English]

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

I do support what Cora was saying. We need to have indigenous services that are available on the ground to women. We need to help build those. In fact, one of our recommendations would be building a Métis anti-human-trafficking strategy, with the victims themselves helping to develop that strategy. Moving forward, it's through the lessons that have been learned from them that we're able to do that.

The second piece in the recommendations, which I know hasn't been mentioned in the time that I've been here and listening today, is the fact that online processes are making our people very vulnerable, especially our very young people, to human trafficking. The laws in this country have not caught up to what the Internet is doing. We need to be able to establish and create laws to protect our young people from the perpetrators who are out soliciting them and trying to romanticize them to come to places that are making them victims.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You talked about online violence and cybercrime. As we saw, human trafficking didn't stop during the pandemic. It just adapted. Is that what you observed?

Are you talking about the transition to cybercrime and the need to tackle online violence? Things can seem a lot more appealing in the online world, which makes it so easy to deceive people now.

• (1745)

[English]

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: Thank you.

That's exactly what I mean. Many of our young people especially during COVID-19 were isolated and put into positions where they were looking for their networks and community attachments through things like the Internet. This made them very vulnerable to strangers who were out there to exploit them.

Violence is a real thing in our communities. It's been so normalized that people don't realize that when these young people are being sexualized through the Internet, they become victims and fall

prey to people who are trying to exploit them. We've heard many stories—I know they haven't been in the news—where many of our young people have been brought out of their homes and taken to other cities, even into other countries, and have been exploited. They're very hard to find. Our indigenous young women don't get sought after like a non-indigenous person who's gone missing.

The Chair: Melanie, thank you so much.

I'll now pass it over to Leah.

Leah, you have six minutes.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you so much, Chair.

It's so good to see both of you here today. I want to thank you for your work.

One thing that I along with advocates have been pushing for is to immediately put in place a red dress alert for indigenous women and girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ who go missing, like the Amber Alert they have for children. Both of you brought up issues around systemic racism and policing, and issues of over-policing and under-policing. One of the suggestions that I and advocates have made is that it must be led, in terms of jurisdiction and who has control over it, by families of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. These programs and systems are often put in place without our input.

Do you agree with me that a red dress alert would save lives? Do you agree with the need for it to be indigenous-led and indigenous-driven in terms of decisions on how it's executed?

I'll start with you, Madam Omeniho.

Can you please share that in maybe 30 seconds? Then I'll move to Madam McGuire-Cyrette.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: Actually, I would support a red dress alert. I think that's a fabulous idea. If there were more tools put into the tool kit to help our families when women go missing or when we believe people are vulnerable, I do believe that a lot fewer women would be lost to us permanently.

Thank you.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you for answering that part.

In terms of jurisdiction, Madam McGuire-Cyrette, you spoke a lot about the need for it to be led by survivors and led by families. Do you agree with me that in terms of jurisdiction, it needs to be led by indigenous women and girls and families and survivors?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: I do agree with you. I agree with Melanie and you that this is a tool that's needed. I think it's a great idea. It's something that we would support in the implementation.

Particularly around jurisdiction, I think we have to remember that violence doesn't know jurisdictional bounds, whether it's first nation, whether it's urban, whether it's rural or whether it's across the province or across Canada. There are no jurisdictional bounds for this type of violence or any type of violence, particularly for indigenous women. It would have to be implemented across and those barriers removed.

Ms. Leah Gazan: My next question is related to a guaranteed livable basic income.

I put forward a bill in support of a guaranteed livable basic income in response to call for justice 4.5 of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and two-spirit people.

Do you agree that a guaranteed livable basic income is a necessary step to mitigate this ongoing genocide against indigenous women and girls and diverse-gendered people?

• (1750)

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: I believe a basic livable income would change a lot of factors for many women who are vulnerable and who end up putting themselves into situations that put them at risk. I believe if we had a basic livable income, it would make sure that women are not as vulnerable as they are today.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Madam McGuire-Cyrette, you spoke about we are not a program. I asked a question in the last round and noted the zero dollars that were put in the 2022 budget to address the crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women and girls because of what you both indicated, normalized violence against indigenous women and girls and diverse-gendered people.

How is the failure of consecutive governments, all levels of government but particularly the federal, because we're here, to provide sustainable funding costing lives?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Definitely. When we look at the situation referenced out of Winnipeg, I think.... That's most recently on our minds. It shows evidence that we haven't invested enough in indigenous women's safety, and it's not acceptable. We have to make this change now.

It has to be long-term, sustainable funding. When we ask for core funding for indigenous women's agencies, so we can do this type of work, a lot of the time—Melanie and I talk quite a bit about first nations women's councils and urban indigenous women's agencies—you have to fundraise to keep your doors open, or you do project-based funding, which is piecemeal funding. You're then held to a level of account.... Non-indigenous women's agencies have had sustainable core funding many times and are provided with the resources to ensure the best programming and services are available. The funding doesn't allow you to have, for instance, an executive director, a finance director and a human resources manager. The funding also isn't there for data or to have the policy that supports it.

When we're looking at making changes, I think this is something that would make a huge impact relatively quickly: providing indigenous women with sustainable core funding.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Thank you.

I think it was you, Melanie, who spoke about displacement and resources. We just did a study on the connection between violence and the resource-extractive industries.

How is displacement from lands connected with sex trafficking?

May I have a quick response? I'm sorry, but I'm running out of time.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: People who don't have their communities, families and the land they came from, where they learned to survive, become very vulnerable. They become victims of things like sex crimes, especially in our oil and gas sector, as much as nobody wants to admit that.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We're now down to one minute each. I'm going to pass it to Anna for one minute, then Anita for one minute.

Anna, go for it.

Mrs. Anna Roberts: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask this question of Melanie. I can't remember if it was Melanie or Coralee who made a comment about barrier-free access to service.

I can't remember which one of you made that comment. Can you explain that to me in detail?

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: I think that was me.

When we look at barrier-free access, when the woman needs the service, she gets the service. We have to change our systems to meet her needs, as opposed to her meeting our needs.

A lot of times, when you need help, support or access to a service, and when there are multiple things involved, you get a referral. As an agency, we created a centralized intake office. The woman will call into that centralized intake office and we have to figure out who in our system is best able to support her so she doesn't have to tell that story repeatedly. It's up to us to make that change, make sure it's as barrier-free as possible and meets her needs.

• (1755)

The Chair: Thanks so much, Coralee.

I'm going to pass it over to Anita.

You have one minute.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Ms. Omeniho, you didn't get a chance to complete your opening remarks, so I'll give you the minute to do that.

Ms. Melanie Omeniho: Actually, I mostly got to complete them. I never got to do all the notes they gave me.

The reality is we need to make sure there are services by indigenous women for indigenous women, developed by the victims of human trafficking, so they are best suited for the people they were designed for.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Coralee, I'm wondering whether you have any final remarks.

Ms. Coralee McGuire-Cyrette: Definitely. I think one piece I would like to see is a 24-7 response for indigenous women. That's what's needed in this country.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, I would greatly like to thank you both, Melanie and Coralee, for coming here and providing this testimony. It will be very useful when we're doing our study, so thank you. You may carry on.

Members, I have about three minutes of work that we need to do before we leave for the day. This has to do with some committee business.

On Wednesday, March 22, a proposed study budget in the amount of \$39,600 was circulated to all the members for their consideration.

Shall this budget be adopted? I'm looking for a motion to adopt our budget.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: On Wednesday, March 22, SBLI agreed to grant FEWO a travel budget of \$73,878. Earlier, the House adopted a motion authorizing FEWO to travel and we will be going—Marc, you and I will have to discuss this more—to Vancouver, Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Sault Ste. Marie, Halifax and Dartmouth in the spring of 2023. We are looking at the week of April 10.

I'm going to explain. This was something Marc came to talk to me about. We talked about regions, so when we're talking about the Peel region, we needed to break that down into cities, which would be Brampton and Mississauga. That's why it looks big-city focused, but it was a regional approach when we were looking at that.

There was the choice between Sault Ste. Marie and Sudbury, and Sault Ste. Marie was chosen. That's why it's looking like that.

Ms. Anita Vandenberg: Could you repeat the cities?

The Chair: We'd go to Vancouver and then Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton—that's kind of the GTA—Sault Ste. Marie, Halifax and Dartmouth. They might be just across the river, but they're two different destinations. That's why, when you're looking at Halifax and Dartmouth, we have to put it that way.

Yes, Leah?

Ms. Leah Gazan: Will we be finished by the 14th?

The Chair: It's April 10 through 14. That is correct.

Ms. Leah Gazan: Then we can go home before we have to go back to the dungeon.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I will take you home myself. I know what you call it.

Anyway, I want to give you a few more pieces of advice. A few questions had been asked.

In terms of travel, there was whether or not it can be a division of different people travelling from the committee.

In terms of travel, a member can be replaced partway through by another member or even multiple members in different cities. However, the expense is only incurred once by the committee. Any additional expenses to get a replacement to and from a city may not

be covered by the travel budget of FEWO. Members are free to join the committee travel, i.e., a member may choose to participate in his or her riding, and the cost for travel would be borne by the member.

Would that mean that we could put it in our MOB? Is that correct? If I'm travelling out to meet somebody and start, that could be part of my MOB, could it not?

We will make sure we have that answer for you, because I know there are some discussions. I was thinking, for instance, that Sonia may pick us up in Brampton as we're right there.

We'll work this all out. I will make sure over the next couple of days that we have all of this information. I am looking at meeting with the vice-chairs so that we can discuss this further, because there's a lot of information that we need to go through.

The proposed dates for travel are from Monday, April 10 to Friday, April 14. Seven members are going to be authorized to travel. We do not know who is travelling. I know we need to discuss amongst our own, but that is just some information if you want to split it up.

There are going to be questionnaires sent out to those who are travelling asking, for example, where you are travelling from. That kind of information will need to be known. They'll probably want to know what we can and cannot eat and that kind of important stuff. Is that correct?

Okay. Are there any questions before we go further?

Go ahead, Sonia.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Madam Chair, can we have a draft itinerary? If we can make it before—

• (1800)

The Chair: Absolutely. I'm going to be reaching out to you, Leah, Dominique and Andréanne to come up with a solution of what this may look like, and then we'll send that proposal out to everybody.

What we're looking for right now is... We don't need to approve anything. We can discuss the travel plans. I'll start with a letter and then send it out to all of us to communicate through our parties, if that's okay.

Are there any other questions on that?

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: How many people did you say would be travelling?

The Chair: There will be seven in total. That will be three Liberals, two Conservatives, Andréanne and Leah. There will be one NDP, one Bloc, two Conservatives and three Liberals.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: [Inaudible—Editor]

The Chair: That's okay. That's fine. We weren't planning on going. That is what the total would be.

Are there any questions?

Seeing no questions, can I get a motion to adjourn?

I have a motion from Anita.

That's all done. Fantastic.

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