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Chair: Ms. Marilyn Gladu



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• (1115)

[English]

The Chair (Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC)): I will call this meeting to order.

Everyone, welcome the meeting number 29 of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. The committee meeting today will be in hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of January 25. The proceedings will be made available on the House of Commons website. We are continuing our study on women living in rural communities, and the second panel today will be on women's unpaid work.

For the benefit of the witnesses, when you're ready to speak, just click on your microphone icon to activate your mike and address your comments through the chair. If you want interpretation, it's at the bottom of your screen. You can select English or French. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you're not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Now, I'd like to welcome our witnesses, who will each have five minutes for opening remarks. I don't know if you're going to share or not.

From Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, we have Shealah Hart, national youth council member; and Traci Anderson, from BGC Kamloops, executive director.

Shealah, if you want to start, you have five minutes.

Ms. Shealah Hart (National Youth Council Member, BGC Canada): Thank you, first of all, for that kind welcome.

Traci and I have prepared to share our five minutes. If we have your permission to do so, we will proceed that way. If we have a little bit of wiggle room, perhaps we can go ahead with that.

The Chair: Perfect. Go ahead.

Ms. Shealah Hart: I will pass it over to Traci, because she will begin our presentation for you all today.

Here you go, Traci. Thank you.

Ms. Traci Anderson (Executive Director, BGC Kamloops): Thank you, Shealah.

Clubs support 200,000 children, youth and families in 775 communities across Canada, including rural communities from coast to coast. Clubs play an important role in building social safety nets for so many Canadians and their families. Clubs across the country offer equity, acceptance, support and opportunity, and opportunity changes everything.

Whether it's homework help or a homeless shelter, a quick snack after school or the only meal of the day for some of our youth, a high-five or a one-to-one mental health check-in, our clubs offer everything a young person needs, including access to opportunities they might not find outside our walls, opportunities that change lives.

My name is Traci. I'm the executive director of the BGC Kamloops in British Columbia, with a population of over 100,000. I'm also the acting director of the BGC Williams Lake in the heart of Cariboo, with a population of 12,000.

I'll pass it over to Shealah.

Ms. Shealah Hart: I'm Shealah, a youth from Northern Arm, Newfoundland and Labrador, with a population of just 426. Today, I'm here representing my club in the neighbouring community of Botwood, Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as BGC Canada as a member of their national youth council. Thank you so much for having us here today to speak to you all.

Traci and I would like to highlight three intersecting issues that affect women in rural communities. First is access to Internet. Second is employment, and third is child care. First, we'll briefly highlight the issues as we see them, and then give our recommendations for action.

One of the largest barriers in rural communities is unreliable Internet access, which has become especially problematic during the ongoing pandemic and the transition to online learning, particularly for post-secondary students across the country. Without Internet access, I would have had to delay pursuing my post-secondary degree, yet with access to Internet, I still experience and have experienced disconnections during lectures.

I rely on the homes of friends and family in neighbouring communities to complete my exams or to upload assignments. In fact, I'm here today connecting in a neighbouring community, not only due to the fear that my Internet will cut out, but also because the Internet speed in my rural community is not fast enough to support both my sister and me learning online at the same time.

Another struggle that those of us living in rural communities face is obtaining employment. In my community, there are only a handful of places to work, each providing minimum wage, and \$12 an hour doesn't exactly pay the bills or put food on the table. As a youth who so dearly loves her rural community, I want to be able to continue to call Northern Arm my home. However, without strong Internet access, educational opportunities for myself and future children, and a job that allows me to fulfill my passions, I'll be forced to leave the place that I know as home.

Ms. Traci Anderson: On child care, we applaud the recently announced commitment to a national child care program within the federal budget.

Child care issues, as you know, are complex, and for those in rural communities the challenges are compounded. As a leading national not-for-profit child care provider, Clubs knows the benefit that access to quality-enriching child care can have on the lives of children; yet for some, it simply isn't accessible.

Child care is key to the economic stability of Canada and to getting people back to work. Not-for-profit providers are key partners to ensuring that every community can have access to child care and before- and after-school programs.

We see first-hand the effects that systemic problems such as poor access to Internet, employment and child care have within rural communities and the impact this has on women's access to opportunities. We know that the solution needs to be systemic. We need a system of wraparound supports that addresses all of the intersecting issues to sustain rural communities and their prosperity in the long term.

We have four recommendations for this committee.

- (1120)

Ms. Shealah Hart: First, we were pleased to see the inclusion of a universal broadband fund within Budget 2021.

Our first recommendation is to focus on affordable options. Canadian service providers must be required—be mandated by government—to service areas that are currently struggling with Internet accessibility and to put a system in place such that prices are not higher in smaller communities for poorer service.

Our second recommendation is to work with provincial and territorial governments to provide support so that rural communities are able to build their economies. Incredible things can happen in small communities, but we need this support. We see this throughout the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, in tiny communities with small populations that have made incredible income from tourism. We need help, however, to get those things off the ground and get them started.

It's also integral that we continue to find ways for people to work from home. Improving Internet access, of course, is a huge part of that.

Ms. Traci Anderson: Our third recommendation focuses on child care. We know from our clubs and our members across the country that a one-size-fits-all approach will not suit the diversity we see in families across the country. Some families are looking for child care to be colocated within schools, whereas others prefer

child care in the community to allow participation in skills-based learning and recreational activities.

Our final recommendation is to focus on higher and more equitable wages to stabilize the child care sector. We know there needs to be effort to attract people to the child care workforce equal to that for reducing fees for parents. We cannot increase child care spaces without staff to care for children.

We are experiencing critical staffing shortages, and our wait-lists continue to grow. This forces parents to place unborn children on wait-lists in hopes that they can access space.

Ninety-five per cent of child care staff are women, and they continue to be paid low wages, often resulting in their leaving the sector to further their careers and to earn higher wages. Without stable child care, women who want to enter the workforce simply cannot.

We wish to thank the committee members for providing us with this opportunity to speak with you, and we look forward to your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good.

I apologize for the delays we had at the start from the votes, but thanks so much for being here.

We'll start our first round of questions with Ms. Sahota for six minutes.

Ms. Jag Sahota (Calgary Skyview, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and for your testimony.

I want to touch on what you just said, Ms. Anderson, about child care.

There is universal child care being proposed by the government. I'm wondering whether you can talk about some of the challenges that rural communities will face and about how child care needs may not be met under this universal child care proposal.

Ms. Traci Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

The situation in rural communities is very similar to that in some larger centres. It's just a question of quality access to care. Simply, in rural communities there aren't child care providers, for one thing. This means that families have to leave their community to bring their children to reliable child care.

Some of the recommendations that BGC has regarding the national child care program include really thinking about it holistically and including all ages. It's not just zero-to-five, but also school-age children who need to be able to access child care. This is really challenging rural communities.

Then, our key issue is the fact that we do not have enough staff. There are some pretty regulated circumstances in which you can hire staff for child care, which relate to quality in hiring early childhood educators. We simply don't have enough staffing resources. That's compounded in rural communities. We are thus really interested and want to work with the government regarding their plans for the universal child care program.

• (1125)

Ms. Jag Sahota: To build on that, Ms. Anderson, you spoke about some of the challenges. I'm wondering if you can give me your thoughts on universal child care. What's being proposed has a cookie-cutter kind of approach, and it will look exactly the same from coast to coast to coast. What are some of the challenges that may be faced by rural communities? The child care spaces—well not so much the spaces, but the child care facilities—will be separated and further away. Also, women don't necessarily work nine-to-five jobs and this will be nine to five.

What about parental choice and not being able to leave the children with grandparents, for example? How important is parental choice in that?

Ms. Traci Anderson: Parental choices are absolutely very important. To have a cookie-cutter approach across the country, from coast to coast to coast, does not make sense. Every community in Canada is a bit different, and the program needs to have flexibility so that child care can fit the needs of our communities.

As for BGCs across Canada, if you've been in one BGC, you've been in one BGC. That's something our CEO always says, because we really do work to fit the needs of our communities. I think that's integral for this plan. As it rolls out, it really needs to be diverse. There needs to be inclusion for flexible child care. Parents don't work nine to five, and especially since the pandemic, we're learning that there are a lot of flexible work schedules now, so child care needs to work to fit that. We absolutely believe that it can't be a one-size-fits-all approach, and as I said, things are compounded for rural communities.

Ms. Jag Sahota: Ms. Hart, you spoke about some of the challenges you are facing as a young woman in a rural community. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a bit on that. How do women in rural and remote areas integrate into the local and regional economies, given there are Internet challenges and that broadband is not readily available?

Ms. Shealah Hart: I can only speak from my perspective, of course, and I recognize and understand that challenges are different in different rural communities throughout my province and throughout the country. I've been faced with some challenges with

Internet inaccessibility over the course of the past year or so with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In my community, there is one Internet provider, so there is no other option to go with a different provider. It is what it is. However, with that provider, the quality of Internet we're receiving is very poor. We can't seem to get anything done about that, and the costs are high for the services we're receiving.

I've been trying to take advantage of new opportunities to learn, grow and develop, despite being stuck at home at this time. However, it's become quite difficult to attend things like the Daughters of the Vote summit and YWCA's women's summit, which I was able to attend this past March, although I had to come to a neighbouring community.

The Chair: Very good. That's the end of your time.

Ms. Shealah Hart: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go now to Ms. Hutchings [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

Ms. Gudie Hutchings (Long Range Mountains, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for being here today. I'll say a special hello to Botwood from Little Rapids. That's where I am today, Shealah.

Thank you both for your comments. As my colleagues know, I speak about really rural parts of Canada. As you know, Shealah, I'm in a really rural area as well. I agree with you all on your comments about connectivity. Connectivity was an issue long before COVID-19 hit, but it ripped off the band-aid.

I'm sure you have heard our commitments. We're well under way to have 98% of Canada connected by 2026. I hope I can count on my colleagues here to support the budget, because we added \$1 billion to the universal broadband fund, which is making a difference.

One of the criteria under the new universal broadband fund—and part of it is in the rapid response stream—is affordability. That is one of the criteria boxes. I'm looking forward to rolling out more and more applications across the country, and I encourage people to apply, because we are well under way to reach our goal and connect more Canadians. We know that this is such an important component, especially as women recover and as small businesses recover in rural Canada everywhere.

It's interesting to see that people are coming to the rural parts of Canada—nothing against my colleagues in urban centres. They are coming to rural centres for fresher air, a better quality of life and bigger, open spaces, and we know how important the connectivity piece is there.

I welcome your comments, Ms. Anderson, on the child care piece. We are building the footprint for this now. There is no cookie cutter for it. It's about working with the provinces and territories on how it needs to be implemented, and it needs to be different in rural.

Ms. Anderson, I'd love your comments on that. If there were two pieces of advice.... You gave us one: It needs to be more flexible. What else would you say as we develop the child care piece for rural areas—and I mean really rural areas—across the country? What couple of criteria would you love to see in that piece as it gets [*Technical difficulty—Editor*], along with flexibility?

• (1130)

Ms. Traci Anderson: I believe one of the challenges facing very rural communities is access to quality staff. I recommend some flexibility around training opportunities for people entering the workforce into child care. Of course, to match that we need to see some equitable wages—wages that would draw some people in—and some other benefits.

We have talked a bit nationally with BGCs about an opportunity for training that's like the training for trades. You would enter into the field and hit the ground working. You could get right into the field and then learn as you go, like the apprenticeship approach.

We really feel that education for early childhood education needs to be reimaged in a creative way that would draw more people into the sector.

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: I'm familiar with the Boys and Girls Club in St. Anthony, which does phenomenal work for all ages. I love your model because it's welcoming. It's not just for the preschool kids. It's a welcoming environment, and the work you do there is phenomenal.

On your comments regarding community infrastructure and playing a role there, I find that a lot of times the smaller communities don't always have access to and knowledge of the programs out there. There are phenomenal programs out there, but, again, it's about helping people apply. It's about helping the small communities that may have a town clerk who's sorting the mail one day, shovelling the snow another day and sending out tax bills another day. Do they have the time to apply for a funding program?

In the rapid response stream of the universal broadband fund, we have what we call the pathfinder service. It is a 1-800 number and an email that any small community or any small Internet service provider can contact if they have a question.

Do you think something like that should be in the broader scheme so that communities have a resource they could go to for rural economic development if they have a question? If they need to build a playground or need to look at some accessible funding, there would be a place. There's lots of information online, but sometimes you don't have the time to sift through everything to see

if your community could avail itself of funding for a new town hall or a new seniors centre.

Shealah, do you think it would help to have some regional economic development coordinators to quarterback with these communities to help in finding the applications and to help them through the process?

Ms. Shealah Hart: I definitely believe that would be incredibly helpful. As a post-secondary student, I know about, say, trying to apply for scholarships. There are so many scholarships out there for students to avail themselves of, but we can't find them. I imagine it's much the same for people looking for monies in rural communities for different initiatives, projects and such. They don't know where to begin. If you do a Google search, two or three things come up, but they're not what you're looking for. You don't really know how to get from point A to point B.

I believe the suggestion you're offering could be incredibly helpful to those of us in rural communities who are looking to make a difference, improve things and benefit from what is out there.

• (1135)

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: In our part of the world, it's ACOA, and there's FedNor. There are different groups across the country. I wonder sometimes if we need to give them a few more resources that they are then able to get out and help the smaller communities.

But like you said—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hutchings. You're out of time.

[*English*]

Ms. Gudie Hutchings: Thanks, Marilyn.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Larouche, you may go ahead. You have six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the two witnesses, Ms. Anderson and Ms. Hart, for their participation today. They did a good job highlighting the differences between rural and urban communities.

One of their recommendations focused on child care, an area in which Quebec was a pioneer. In Quebec, we have certainly seen the impact child care has had on the labour market and women. It's quite clear that access to child care has put better-paying jobs and a wider variety of jobs within the reach of more women.

If Canada wishes to follow in Quebec's footsteps, we can only be supportive, but we hope that our achievement and expertise in the area will be recognized. Quebec should receive full compensation and the right to opt out, with no strings attached. That is what we want, and we hope that a similar initiative helps you as well.

You talked a lot about Internet access, particularly for business owners and students. I know many young people want to get into farming, which now relies a lot on new technology. Farms these days are connected to the Internet. You said you were pleased to see that the universal broadband fund was included in the recent budget.

I would like to hear from Ms. Hart first, followed by Ms. Anderson.

Given your preliminary analysis of the budget, do you think the fund will help communities considering how great the need is all over Canada and even Quebec?

[English]

Ms. Shealah Hart: Based on what I've read so far of the budget—of course, it's a very long document—and knowing what I know about rural communities and lack of access to the Internet, I think affordability is probably the biggest piece for people. In rural communities, we often struggle financially from household to household, from families to family, so getting Internet access in the first place is an expensive thing to do.

In rural communities, we're also paying more money for fewer services from the same companies that our friends and families are paying in larger areas. I know that's true for myself living here in Northern Arm. My parents are paying more money for way poorer quality Internet than what I was paying in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. That's definitely a humongous problem that we're seeing people face.

I think having options available that are still good Internet access...because everybody wants Internet where they can actually use it to do the things they enjoy. Whether it's streaming a TV show or doing homework or attending a Zoom call, you want to be able to do multiple things at once without having to worry about disconnecting.

It's being able to do those things while also being able to put food on the table for your family each day, being able to take your children to school in the car because you have enough money to put gas in the car, while still having that very vital—in the world we're living in today—access to the Internet. I think affordability is key, having services that people can afford to pay for.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Ms. Anderson, do you have anything to add?

[English]

Ms. Traci Anderson: To add in regard to child care, for rural communities, I think there needs to be that consideration for flexible care and then giving parents choice to have access...and I think also just recognizing that care in rural communities is going to look very different from care in urban communities. I feel that there needs to be that consideration.

Clubs across Canada look very different. At one club, there's a real focus on just giving kids access to sports and skill-based activities, whereas in other communities it's about educational opportunities.

I just feel like it needs to be very considerate of a parent's choice, and then also having the flexibility around models of child care and ensuring that it's age appropriate. I think that is key as well. Of course, affordable child care is very helpful, which Quebec has pioneered and led the way on.

Thank you.

● (1140)

[Translation]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I also gather from your comments that every effort should be made to recognize Internet service as an essential service, as evidenced by the pandemic. Ms. Hart, in particular, discussed the importance of employment. You brought up the tourism sector and the need for support programs to help the sector get back on its feet, especially since, for many communities, tourism will be one of the last sectors to get going again. Therefore, support programs need to be extended until the pandemic is behind us.

It's obvious that both of you are very dynamic, but it's also clear that some entrepreneurship programs are ill-suited to women with smaller businesses. These women are sometimes overburdened. Young business owners where I'm from bemoan the fact that some programs have cut-off dates. In many cases, they find out about a program and go online to get more information, only to learn that all of the funding has already been handed out. More flexible programs would be more helpful to them.

[English]

The Chair: Unfortunately, that's the end of your time.

We're going to Ms. Mathysen, for six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate what the witnesses have brought forward today.

One of the issues that my colleague Ms. Hutchings talked about is the provision of additional supports to help some of the organizations sorting through all of these projects and the funding that could potentially exist. Interestingly, one thing I heard directly from many groups within the not-for-profit sector is that they've been struggling because the traditional fundraising opportunities they have had to rely upon to supplement the funding they receive in other ways have been cut. They've also told me that what they really need is operational-based funding that is consistent—core funding. It ensures that, whether you have to deal with an emergency like a pandemic or just the day-to-day, you know there is a consistent amount of money coming forward that you can rely upon. You won't have to go out and search for all these different projects and won't have to change the potential activities or operations that you provide to your clients based on what a government has outlined for a project.

Could you talk about the necessity for core and operational-based funding?

Ms. Traci Anderson: I can answer that.

I've worked in the non-profit sector for 28 years now, and it has been very interesting to see the evolution of funding for non-profits.

Now more than ever we need operational funding. When financial investments are made in non-profits, we are nimble. We're able to develop things really quickly and respond really quickly. When we can connect to operational funding, there's so much more we can do. We're more efficient and we're able to respond in a more concrete way. Some people still believe that non-profits are run by volunteers, but we are a business. We're a not-for-profit business but we are a business.

We value having operational funding in a variety of different aspects. The landscape has changed, and donors are few and far between right now, so it's very challenging. We often call fundraisers in my community “friendraisers”, because they really don't raise funds. They're really just about building friendships and connections in communities so that people can see the value and we can demonstrate what we do in a great way. We're very fiscally responsible and we're very transparent about our operations.

• (1145)

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Well, you absolutely have to be to keep that not-for-profit designation.

Of course, core funding would also come with the ability for you to ensure that the incredible experts within your field are properly employed. You spoke about this in terms of child care as well.

Could you talk about the importance of investments in the educational side?

Also, what I've heard from a lot of child care providers—and we've spoken about it in other panels for other studies—is the idea that child care work is seen as women's work, and is therefore not as valued.

Could you talk about the importance of ensuring a decent wage, a higher wage, for those workers?

Ms. Traci Anderson: Yes. Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

We know there needs to be an investment in increasing wages and making them more equitable for those in similar sectors, especially for women since those jobs are filled primarily by women, although there is the odd male. It is extremely important that we be able to offer those.

There is a sense that the sector is not a professional one, so people will often get the educational components so they can further their career. It's sort of a stepping stone. We really need to reimagine the training for early childhood education and then also ensure that the wages are equitable.

Different governments in different provinces across the country are doing different things around that, but until there is a little bit of a stronger systemic sort of approach to child care, it is going to continue to be a challenge to recruit and retain women and men into the sector.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: I will just squeeze this in. I know, Madam Chair.

I was hoping you could talk quickly about the national food strategy. You've probably seen a lot of students in terms of that need. Could you talk about that and the focus on that as well?

Ms. Traci Anderson: Is that for Sheelah? That's just on the food strategy...?

In every single one of BGC's programs, we provide food. It's very key to ensuring that people have access to programs and access to services. Honestly, I haven't read a lot about the food, but I know that it's 100% important.

The Chair: That's okay—you're out of time anyway.

We'll have to go next to our second round of questioning, with Ms. Shin for five minutes.

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

I'd like to thank our witnesses today for being here and giving us insight on the impact of COVID on women in rural areas.

I understand it is very important for women to be financially autonomous, seeing as sometimes it is that financial dependence on spouses that perpetuates things like domestic violence and makes it difficult for them to escape.

Part of that is to be able to access jobs that can make them more autonomous. My understanding is that because the kinds of industries that can be in rural areas are pretty much established there and set and defined, economic development is quite difficult, so what are some viable areas for economic development that would be able to open doors for more women to find work in their rural communities?

Ms. Shealah Hart: Of course, I can speak only from my own experience in my rural community, but, as I said before, we have only a handful of places to work right now: a convenience store, a bar, and the town hall. There are very few positions, so having more jobs particularly for women would be favourable. Oftentimes we know that women are the ones who are expected to stay home and take care of young children. They are the ones who are expected to be there when the kids get off the bus and, on top of that, they're often responsible for all of those household duties like cooking and cleaning and helping with homework and those kinds of things.

Given that, when women have to take on those responsibilities, having work that is flexible is no doubt a really big thing. Where my mind goes with that question, of course, is right back to the Internet. If we have stable Internet access in our rural communities, women are able to work from home.

The pandemic has proven just how many industries and how many kinds of jobs can be adapted to an at-home online environment. Further to that, there are lots of women, especially in small communities like my own, who have taken action to begin their own small businesses. Whether it be selling beauty products they have made themselves or selling crafts or offering a service, they are doing these things from home, more and more, of course, with the onset of the pandemic.

That brings us to what Traci has been discussing throughout the duration of our conversation today, which is, of course, child care. If we have women who are able to work from home because they have, say, Internet access that is stable and reliable, they now need someone to watch their children while they are working from home. I am sure many of you have experienced what it's like to try to get your work done from home with children under your feet or pets or someone getting hurt or fights breaking out between the two children. My own mom struggled with that. We're both grown adults, and she still had a hard time working from home at the beginning of the pandemic.

Having child care options available—whether that means somebody coming into your home or your children going to somebody else's home, or maybe there's a centre or a community centre they are going to—goes right back to flexibility and having options, because life is different for everybody. Everyone's circumstances are different and, of course, in rural communities things look vastly different than they do in larger urban centres.

Everything goes back to Internet and flexibility.

• (1150)

Ms. Nelly Shin: I appreciate that answer.

Traci, do you want to add anything to that?

Ms. Traci Anderson: Yes. I would add that I think women in rural communities need access to opportunities, which could include tools to support entrepreneurship, as Shealah mentioned, for people opening their own businesses and doing things of that nature. I think that would support women.

Then, of course, my platform is child care. Access to affordable child care would help ease that burden for women. Also, I think tourism is another really great opportunity for women.

Yes, I would add access to opportunity, in a variety of ways, and tools to assist them to think outside that box of roles.

Ms. Nelly Shin: Thank you very much.

I think you've touched on something there that now is resonating with me—the education piece. What is already out there and available for women in rural areas and allows them to access education and grow as entrepreneurs in fields that can be accessed remotely? Many people are working remotely right now. Could you speak to that?

Ms. Traci Anderson: Thank you for the question.

Go ahead, Shealah.

Ms. Shealah Hart: No, you can go, Traci. That's fine.

Ms. Traci Anderson: I was just going to say I think we've seen a real shift in online access to educational opportunities, but of course that's very challenging for women in rural communities when there is no reliable access to Internet.

The Chair: Very good.

Now, before I go to Ms. Zahid, I understand that we're going to hear the bells ringing shortly for a second vote, so I will need the unanimous consent of the committee to continue when that happens. Do I have the unanimous consent of the committee?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Very good.

Okay. We'll go to Ms. Zahid for five minutes, and after that we will suspend to do the sound checks for the next panel.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to both witnesses for appearing before the committee and highlighting some of the issues facing women in rural communities.

My first question is for Ms. Anderson.

What are some of the main challenges that you think women face in your communities? Have you gathered some data or seen that there are more and further challenges for women from new immigrant families or racialized communities and indigenous communities? Could you please talk about some of those challenges?

• (1155)

Ms. Traci Anderson: Yes, for new immigrants, indigenous communities and women in those communities, I think it's very challenging. Again, I think back to the lack of opportunities and being defined in those traditional roles.

Aside from our platform around child care and Internet, I feel that there need to be better opportunities for those women, such as jobs, connections to culture and just opportunities to connect into communities. I think of a project that we're doing locally here where we're providing recreational activities for youth, children and their moms who identify as immigrants in Canada.

I don't know, Shealah, if you would want to touch on that.

Ms. Shealah Hart: Sure, Traci.

I believe, of course, that we look at someone's identity and we start looking at the intersections, and that of course things like race and language present barriers for families. Whether they're indigenous folks or immigrants or they belong to a racialized population, we see even more struggles for those people than we do for the people who don't have those identities.

I think that in rural communities sometimes those people are further marginalized than they would be in urban centres. I think there's sometimes more wariness about new people coming into the community. Sometimes it's difficult to fit in or to be accepted when people seem so different from you. I think we definitely see more struggles when it comes to those populations, and we need to work hard to ensure that people who belong to those groups have the same opportunities that others in our rural communities have available to them.

As well, I think we need to pay special attention when we're considering the opportunities we're creating in our rural communities to make sure that they are fitting with the needs of unique families with unique circumstances and backgrounds, not only in recognizing their uniqueness as a wonderful thing, but in looking at those families and those individuals and saying, "Hey, we're going to help you, and what can you do to help us?" How can they both benefit so that they have a great learning exchange there, with everyone benefiting, growing and taking something incredible away from the opportunities that their partnerships are able to create?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Ms. Hart.

I have one more question.

Are there any gaps between the support services which are offered in the rural areas and the urban areas? Also, could you throw some light on how health care services for women living in rural areas could be improved, because that's also one of the very big issues.

Maybe Ms. Anderson wants to talk, or—

Ms. Traci Anderson: Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

We are seeing a big increase in some mental health challenges. There are definitely gaps in rural communities around women accessing...and primary health as well.

My community is 100,000 and people are on wait-lists for doctors, so I can only imagine it in smaller communities. Some of them are travelling four or five hours to get access just to primary care.

We definitely are seeing a huge increase, especially in young women, around mental health concerns. That's also due to the pandemic. We are seeing some youth who are really losing hope around their future. That's very challenging and disheartening to see happening. There are not a lot of resources and access to supports in rural communities, mental-health wise and primary care.

The Chair: I think that was an excellent point to leave on.

Thank you so much to our witnesses for your help with our study today.

For the information of committee members, we'll suspend, because I think we can get the opening remarks in by all of the people coming on the next panel before we go to vote. After the vote, I think we'll have time for a full round. That's the plan.

Let's suspend now and do the sound checks for our next panel.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We are now back.

We are continuing our study on women's unpaid work.

We have three witnesses joining us. Welcome.

First, we have Aline Lechaume, a research professor at Université Laval, in the faculty of social sciences.

[*English*]

From the Punjabi Community Health Services, we have Puneet Dhillon, who is the communications and research analyst.

[*Translation*]

Lastly, we have Yasmina Chouakri, a coordinator with Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec.

You will each have five minutes for your presentation.

We will start with you, Ms. Lechaume.

Ms. Aline Lechaume (Research Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Université Laval, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon.

Distinguished members of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women, thank you for this opportunity to discuss key aspects of the challenges of the invisible work done by immigrant women.

For the past 20-odd years, my research has focused on the social and occupational integration of immigrants to Canada, specifically, Quebec. I will be discussing the unpaid work of immigrant women through that lens, explaining how invisible work is a major barrier to the integration of immigrant women and how policies could better support them.

It does not take long to realize that many of the main barriers to the social and occupational integration of women immigrants are tied to the invisible work done by women. Take, for example, the administration and paperwork required to immigrate to and settle in Canada, including the various applications to access housing and enrol children in school. Think about the process to have credentials recognized or degrees compared and assessed, including sometimes having to redo courses or take qualifying exams. Think about learning to speak English or French, or going through the French integration process in Quebec. Building a network is another consideration—getting involved in the host community, doing volunteer work and so on. Of course, let's not forget the work-life balance, which usually pushes these women to accept unsteady part-time jobs in order to accommodate family obligations.

The mental burden on these women is huge. They shoulder the triple responsibility of integration, the family's successful immigration and the children's positive outcomes. Significantly increasing the burden of invisible work, these numerous responsibilities hinder the women's integration in the workforce.

Today, I will focus on three aspects: access to language learning, access to child care and the lack of networks.

I'll start with language learning. For those women who do not speak English or French when they come to Canada, the challenge is compounded. They must successfully learn one of the two official languages to not only get a job, but also help their children as they negotiate the school system. When it comes to integrating in Quebec in French, these women often fall short given the enormity of the task. Some even feel guilty for not speaking French well, because it impedes their integration in the workforce and in society more broadly.

I'll now turn to access to child care. This issue is of particular concern to women with temporary status and mother refugee claimants because they have little or no access to child care, especially reduced-contribution programs. The lack of child care is a major barrier to language training and employment when children are not yet of school age, of course.

Lastly, the lack of networks is an issue for many immigrant women because they are isolated while carrying the load of all their invisible work. What is already challenging for most Canadian families can be insurmountable for a woman who has just arrived here with her family and must see to the family's settlement. Just imagine not having a support system and having to go through the process of applying for health care coverage, opening a bank account, finding day care, enrolling your children in school, ensuring your family has warm clothes for the winter, feeding your family in a

new environment for less money, and figuring out where to turn for various resources and supports.

Before wrapping up, I want to point out that the pandemic has exacerbated many aspects of the unpaid work immigrant women do. Specifically, I'm talking about the mental burden that comes from being responsible for following the public health guidelines and helping children do their schooling at home, all without a solid understanding of the language in which the children are being taught, a grasp of technology or the ability to afford a home computer.

In conclusion, invisible work is a millstone around the necks of immigrant women, especially those in vulnerable positions. Unfortunately, however, that work is underestimated because the women are treated as invisible.

I have four recommendations to share with the committee.

- (1210)

The first recommendation is to improve access to child care, regardless of the women's status.

The second recommendation is to expand access to both full-time and part-time language training, in coordination with child care for preschool-age children.

The third recommendation is to better coordinate community-based services and expand access to all immigrant women, regardless of their status.

The fourth and final recommendation is to promote initiatives aimed at building networks and ending isolation.

Thank you. I am, of course, available to answer any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Now we go to Dr. Dhillon for five minutes.

Dr. Puneet Dhillon (Communications and Research Analyst, Punjabi Community Health Services): Hi, everyone.

Thank you so much for giving me an opportunity.

My name is Puneet Dhillon, and I am the communications and research analyst with Punjabi Community Health Services.

The points I am going to share today are coming not only from an academic perspective to help reform the policy and practice, but are also based on my lived experience of over a decade of unpaid work, all of which I enjoyed believing it was normal, and the major part of it I did not.

Gender-based division of labour has existed for a very long time. In countries and societies with socially endorsed and legally protected male domination, it is practised and presented as normal. Women in such places are forced to manage homes and children, even if they are doctors, engineers, scientists and holding Ph.D.'s. It is the part of the deal of a happy family.

In countries like Canada, at least in legislative framework and in public policy, women are considered equal and not assumed to be managing homes and children while men go out and fend for families. However, within Canada there are social spaces and contexts where, ironically, gender-based division of labour is not only practised, but is collectively forced on women, such as South Asian communities.

This does not mean that women in such situations and contexts are not allowed to work and pursue their careers. They are. But they are expected to manage homes and children as well. While doing that latter part of the job, the work is neither recognized nor compensated and is not accounted for in the GDP.

Today I'm talking about such situations and those women who are overburdened with the necessity of paid work and are under social pressure of doing the unpaid work on a daily basis.

According to the United Nations, women's unpaid caregiving contribution ranges from 10% to 39% of national GDPs in different countries. This is more than the manufacturing and transportation sectors. As compared to men, women do 75% of the unpaid work in every household every day.

The working hours of a full-time employed man in a day are 7.5 hours. For a woman you add 90 minutes to that. For an immigrant housebound woman you add another 90 minutes. For a single mother with no social support of an extended family you add another 90 minutes.

Stats Canada and other agencies working for women have lots of data-based evidence to support the above point. Therefore, I will not throw more data at you. I will instead share with you less visible, less reported and less projected patterns and practices of unpaid work, and what can be done about this.

Immigrant women, after coming to Canada, face many challenges. The major one is looking for work, any work, even if this is a career demotion, or does not align with their skills. Then after a long day's work they come home, cook, manage children and manage houses.

With immigrant women, there is a segment of single parents who are the focus of my conversation today.

Single women parents certainly have 13-to-14-hour-long working day, and over the weekend they work even more in unpaid work to catch up on essential chores to keep the house and kids in order.

With COVID-19-related remote work now, the little space for their own small moments, which they used to plop in-between meetings for lunch or a tea break, have completely disappeared. Kids do not have day care to go to, or the families cannot afford it, or kids are attending schools from home, and, hence, the mother continues to multi-task. The overall drill adds to their burnout, impacting their physical, mental and emotional health.

I will present a set of five recommendations, the first being that when we talk about the unpaid work, we refer to the three Rs—recognize, reduce, redistribute—but we should also recognize a fourth R, which is reward.

While recognizing the unpaid work, I will urge you to recognize the specific segment of the population of women, the single mother-led households, who need a more equitable support system.

After the two above, the segment ought to be offered incentives, such as treating them with a different tax bracket, offering them child care rates geared to income, subsidized insurance—home, auto and others, if applicable—and dignified wages.

The fourth one is that you should consider making seven hours of work the full day for this group. That is actually the case with many jobs that are common to both men and women, but not in the private sector, and certainly not in the non-profit social sector. This half hour would go a long way in keeping single women parents healthy in many ways.

To help the above policy steps succeed, there must be education of communities and employers to make them fully aware of the additional work and valuable contributions of women in general, but particularly of single working moms.

I'm happy to elaborate more on this concept in follow-up correspondence, and I'm happy to answer any questions.

Thank you for listening to me.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Will now hear from Ms. Chouakri.

You may go ahead. You have five minutes.

• (1220)

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri (Coordinator, Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec): I, too, will be discussing immigrant women and their invisible work, which nevertheless has significant consequences.

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: On a point of order, Madam Chair, we have only four minutes left until the vote.

The Chair: Yes, I will cut her off exactly when it's time to vote, and we will suspend.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Okay, thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Ms. Chouakri, you may carry on.

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri: All right.

The two previous witnesses did a good job of highlighting the key issues, so I will not go over them again. I will, however, add a few things.

Although all women in Quebec and Canada likely perform invisible work and carry a heavier mental load than men, the phenomenon is certainly magnified among immigrant women, especially newcomers. These women are in a new environment and may run into barriers because of their immigration status. They may be family class immigrants, refugee claimants and refugees. They tend to have more difficulty speaking the language and to be in a position of dependency, vis-à-vis a spouse who is sponsoring them or immigration authorities who make determinations affecting temporary immigrants, refugee claimants and women with other types of immigration status.

Why is it so important to specifically address women who are newcomers? Because, on top of the housework and child care responsibilities assumed by women overall, newcomers experience unique circumstances. The integration of the husband or spouse tends to take precedence, so that means the husband is the one to learn the language or go back to school, for instance. The women come second. In the past few years, we've seen an ever-increasing number of women newcomers in these types of vulnerable situations. By that, I mean women refugees and women who are family class immigrants, and all those in similar circumstances, such as some temporary workers. Women whose immigration status is precarious really have a much harder time than women with other types of immigration status.

What's more, women immigrants with small children often put off learning the language. In some cases, they focus on finding a job first, out of necessity, so they can look after their families. They run into another problem as far as learning the language is concerned. We've seen it happen in Quebec, with French integration. Once the French language classes are over, these women don't necessarily come away being able to speak French. They don't have opportunities to go to places—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry—

Ms. Sonia Sidhu (Brampton South, Lib.): I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry to stop you there, but we really have to go to vote.

I will give you a couple of minutes when we come back, but we're going to suspend right now to go to vote. It should take about 10 minutes or so, and then everyone will come back, and we'll pick it up there. Thanks.

• (1220) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1235)

The Chair: Very good. We'll start again.

[Translation]

Ms. Chouakri, you still have a few minutes to finish your presentation.

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri: When we left off, I was talking about the challenges concerning French integration. In many cases, immigrant women do not have access to, or know of, places where they can practise speaking French.

What's more, they face challenges in trying to understand how the host society works, especially when it comes to the labour market, the school system, and health and social services. The loss of their support network, their children's education and access to child care pose further challenges. These women also experience discrimination and racism, whether it be not having their prior learning and foreign credentials recognized, being subjected to employment discrimination or being required to have work experience in Quebec or Canada.

I'd like to revisit an issue that has already been raised, single parenthood, which is especially challenging for immigrant women. Being an immigrant and a single mother at the same time is even more difficult. Keep in mind that 84% of single-parent immigrants are women, so it is mostly women at the head of single-parent immigrant households.

Naturally, balancing work, family and learning also comes into play.

In conclusion, my main recommendation is simply this: remove the structural barriers that immigrant women face. All of the challenges I just listed represent structural barriers, including certain types of immigration status that make these women vulnerable and the notable gap in access to affordable child care.

My second recommendation is to recognize the invisible work these women do and its financial worth, at least providing recognition of all the work they carry out. Invisible work and the mental burden are significant challenges for all women, but they are even greater for immigrant women.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Very good. Thank you so much.

We'll now go into our first round of questions, starting with Ms. Wong for six minutes.

Hon. Alice Wong (Richmond Centre, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank all of the witnesses. Your testimony has brought back some memories for me, some foreign, some unforgettable from when I first arrived as an immigrant woman myself more than 40 years ago. I went through all the challenges you mentioned, such as having my foreign credentials not recognized and then having to go to UBC to finish my BA and MBA and then all the way to a Ph.D. So I've been there and done that, and I definitely understand the challenges that all of our immigrant women, no matter where they are right now, have been experiencing.

Then there is recognition; that's the most important. That is exactly why our committee is studying the unpaid work of women.

My question is addressed to all of you, actually to whomever feels comfortable answering. My riding of Richmond Centre is the most diversified. It means that we have lots more immigrants than the rest of the country does. Therefore, I have been able to meet a lot of ethnic communities.

Regarding child care, many of you did mention that there's no one model that fits all. What would you recommend having in order to provide flexibility in child care for these immigrants, especially women immigrants?

Why don't we start with Professor Aline Lechaume?

● (1240)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aline Lechaume: That's a very important question. There is no single child care model that works for everyone, but what should be universal is affordable access. That isn't the case now. Child care services vary significantly from one province to another and from one territory to another; the differences are also pronounced in rural versus urban communities, not to mention when you factor in a person's immigration status.

Immigrant women with temporary or precarious status, especially refugee claimants, have no access to reduced-contribution child care and, in some cases, no child care access at all. The extremely limited availability of child care undermines the integration of immigrant women in every way, impeding their participation in society overall—when it comes to building support networks—their ability to enter the workforce and their access to language training. All of those things suffer mainly because of a lack of access to child care.

As a society, we all benefit when immigrant children have access to day care, which contributes to their socialization at a very early age and supports early learning.

[*English*]

Hon. Alice Wong: Ms. Dhillon.

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: Thank you so much.

That's a very important question. I would just like to answer it in two ways.

First, with regard to single mothers and immigrant women, it's really important for them to get integrated into their society in two aspects. First is the job aspect, and the second is the social aspect. These are both compromised when they do not have proper child care in place.

Then there is another sector that we have not talked about yet, which is the international students. Sometimes they also have problems because they do not have the status, and do not have other privileges. They also face these barriers, and this affects the purpose for which they have come here: studies. Secondly, it affects their further job integration in this land of opportunities, and then, next, their social integration or any other sorts of advances they make when coming to Canada. These are really important.

I will talk from my lived experience as a single immigrant woman. It is really difficult for you to manage the child care, being it very expensive, and sometimes there's a huge wait-list, which total-

ly makes everything very meaningless. You just keep on waiting from one month to two months. I think it should be more equitable and more accessible, and there should be some reduced prices. This is what I suggest.

Hon. Alice Wong: Madam Chouakri.

Excuse my French. That's my challenge: learning French.

Would you like to add something?

● (1245)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri: I think everything has been said, but I want to point out that the challenge is even greater for immigrant women who head single-parent families. They already have relatively precarious jobs and may not have access to affordable child care. This certainly represents a barrier that I call structural and is one of the other barriers that are serious enough to prevent real integration for these women.

[*English*]

The Chair: Very good.

Now we'll go to Ms. Sidhu for six minutes.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I know that Punjabi Community Health Services is providing important services to Bramptonians. Thank you for that.

I would like to direct my question to Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Dhillon, we live in the same community. We see the impact of the pandemic every day in Brampton. We have heard in this committee how racialized communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. How can we ensure that they have access to health services and are supported as we recover economically?

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu. This is a very important and much-needed question at this time. I'll try to answer it to the best of my capacities.

First, what I see as the solution to the problem that we Torontonians are all facing is that one barrier to accessing the services could be a lack of awareness about the resources that are present.

Another important barrier is lack of knowledge of the language, because most South Asian women who are homebound and are working at home and do not have access to any of those language instruction classes have very big barriers. Being a South Asian woman myself, I have also met many others who do not even know how to navigate with a GPS, how to connect to these resources, or even how to make a phone call, so language has become a huge barrier.

A third barrier, which has come since COVID-19, is mobility, because when we come here as immigrants, the major problem is that there is always a barrier to mobility, both from a financial point of view and physically. Sometimes South Asian women, especially Punjabi women, who want to go from here to there have to depend on their male counterparts in the family. They have to wait for them to come home from work and then for them to take them somewhere. This is one of the problems. I think awareness and education about all the resources available are the key. More connection between the community service organizations and the communities and a more diverse touch to these types of services will help us remove at least some of these barriers. This is my belief.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: Thank you.

You raised an important point on access to child care. One of the long-term consequences of establishing a national early learning and child care system as proposed in Budget 2021 is the opportunity for more women to take on full-time careers, as opposed to part-time work, in addition to looking after children. How do you believe this will impact women's careers once the system is implemented?

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: That is an excellent step that has been taken. I really appreciate it, and in fact, I think in my heart of hearts that we have all been looking forward to it, especially the immigrant single mothers. It is really, really important, as I mentioned earlier in my presentation, that when an immigrant starts their life in Canada, they look for a job, any job. If it is a career demotion, they do not care. If it does not match their skill set, they generally do not care. I think this is a very important step when we realize that when this step is integrated or brought into practice, it will help many women to pursue their careers of choice, something that matches their skill set and interests.

This will also help with respect to the vulnerability of our women, because when there is any type of crisis, whether it is a financial crunch or family violence, women tend to become more vulnerable compared with other members of the family. The moment you are in an abusive relationship or realize you are being abused, you become very vulnerable to these things. The first thing is the financial burden. "What would I do with my kids?", "What would I do with my part-time job?" I think it is a very nice step, and I really appreciate the step. It will really help especially immigrant women.

• (1250)

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: You know quite well that many seniors in the South Asian communities have real language barriers. Do you believe they are at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing any services, such as health care services or vaccination services? What is your advice on that? How can all levels of government bridge the barrier?

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: Thank you, Ms. Sidhu, for giving me an opportunity to answer this question, because seniors definitely feel kind of abandoned or alienated in a society where the language is a big barrier. We often come across senior clients who drop in or who call in because they do not understand. Sometimes, it's even worse. They do not want to pick up the phone to call. They do not know what language the phone operator on the other end will use. I think more culturally competent services and more linguistically appropriate services are required for seniors. There has definitely been a

huge barrier, and in fact, there have been many cultural taboos around vaccine. There have been many myths. We try our best in our languages to get those myths resolved and to give proper answers about those myths, but still they do not reach those targeted areas in a targeted language. We need a more culturally and linguistically sensitive approach to reach out to our seniors.

Ms. Sonia Sidhu: With the increased use of telehealth and virtual patient care, what kinds of challenges have you witnessed diverse communities facing, from your line of work?

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: It was actually difficult initially for the service providers. As employees, it was very difficult to get used to the technology, or get our hands on Zoom meetings and providing telecare to our clients. If we talk about it from the client perspective, it is very difficult for us to expect an abused woman to call in and to understand how to meet on Zoom.

For our Punjabi seniors, our South Asian seniors, it's really difficult for them to become familiar with the technology, especially when somebody is in a situation. Anybody who has a problem in their social life, financial or any other status, will call in to PCHS for services. When that person is experiencing a problem, we cannot expect them to follow this technology and this very, very complicated process of reaching out to PCHS. Then there is a huge wait-list and a huge language barrier.

I often come across many seniors who call me and ask, do you speak Punjabi? "Oh, thank God you speak Punjabi. You are just like my daughter." They then try to connect to you in that cultural way. Otherwise, sometimes what I feel about these calls is that if the person is speaking in some other language, they don't open up; they don't talk about their problems.

The Chair: I'm so sorry. That's the end of your time for that question.

Now we're going to move to Madame Larouche.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being with us today to talk about the realities of women in our country, and specifically the experience of immigrant women and the different realities they face depending on whether they are settling in a rural or urban setting.

First, I would like to hear more about invisible work. As we know, invisible work is already disproportionately taken on by women. All three of you have addressed this issue in your own way.

Ms. Chouakri, can you tell us in what ways this reality manifests itself more for immigrant and racialized women?

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri: As I said, they share the same problems as all women in terms of invisible work, that is, all of the domestic tasks, and child care or care for a dependent relative; however, all of the barriers they face increase this invisible work and the mental burden that comes with it. This is especially true for newcomers, women who have been in the country for less than five years. For them, there is also the obligation to understand the functioning of the host society, the labour market, the francization system or the education system, for example, if they want to return to school. They have to deal with all of this, while they have lost the traditional support network they had in their country of origin. Often the traditional networks are based on an extended family model or a larger family structure, where raising children is not the responsibility of one couple, but of the whole family. They have lost all that and have not had time to rebuild a new support network. They don't necessarily know the networks that are in place, either.

At the Réseau d'action pour l'égalité des femmes immigrées et racisées du Québec, the organization I work for, we conducted an investigation about the impact of the pandemic on immigrant women.

In the first instance, several immigrant women reported that they found it extremely difficult and burdensome to cope with the family overload of caring for children and schooling at home, especially during the total lockdown. These women were in great need of respite and support from the school system, child care, homework help, and so on. They were not necessarily prepared to live with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I would like to highlight another of the most important findings that came out of our survey. This was briefly discussed earlier. In fact, many immigrant women who are not fluent in the host country's language told the stakeholders we interviewed that they do not have access to information about resources available in their language. Thus, the only information they can get is from a family member, which does not guarantee access to the right information. Many of these women therefore made a joint request. Since these women often have not yet had the opportunity to learn the language of the host country, they would like to have access to information in languages other than French and English about the range of resources that are available to them, whether it is government assistance or resources that are available to them if they are ever abused, for example.

• (1255)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: This is one more reason to highlight the work of organizations in my riding such as Solidarité ethnique régionale de la Yamaska, which helps women with francization, or Valcourt 2030, which helps out-of-town workers and works to integrate not only the workers, but also the families, in order to create this famous network.

You also talked a lot about how important it is for immigrant women to recreate a network. This is true in urban areas, but it is even truer in rural areas. We know that the lottery system put in place by the federal government to reunite families is not working. So resources should be given back to Quebec to really capitalize on this family reunification and manage to decrease the invisible work and mental burden on women.

In addition, there is a lot of talk about the cumbersome administration at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, a situation that we deplore. Speeding up the immigration process would allow immigrant women to obtain full status more quickly, which would then help them access all services.

Ms. Yasmina Chouakri: This could certainly play a role, but I think increasing the number of affordable child care spaces is a priority. That's just as important as making it easier to reunite families.

[English]

The Chair: Very good.

Now we will go to Ms. Mathysen for the final six minutes.

Ms. Lindsay Mathysen: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would love to continue on that path set forward by Madame Larouche. I know from my constituency office that we have been bombarded with calls. People are frustrated. I know that it's during COVID and that things are different right now, but they're frustrated with the status of their own or their loved one's immigration case file. Oftentimes, we have heard from them that they are even more isolated here. They are so saddened, and there's the mental health stress of not being able to have those supports with them here in Canada. Maybe you could talk about that.

I also wanted to add that I have this incredible community in my riding—and they are exactly what you described—of a group of women who are of Southeast Asian background or descent. They cannot go anywhere without the support of their husbands. They are away from our community in the city, in a new neighbourhood, and they don't have access to traditional transportation and all of those things.

Could you expand on that as well, Ms. Dhillon, and talk about the needs and what we can do to increase the supports, whether it's through subsidized transportation from the feds to municipalities or what have you? It's all linked together, I think.

• (1300)

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: Thank you so much.

I'll begin by answering my question with the manifestations of all of these problems. This is a three-level intersectional problem of being a minority within a minority. I call immigrants minorities. Then I call women minorities within a minority, and single women become a minority within a minority within a minority. Therefore, there are three tiers of minorities when we talk about single immigrant women. It also manifests at three levels. First it manifests at the mental level and then in the social and physical levels. The mental one definitely affects the services. The social one affects the social integration of our society. Then, physically, it does affect the health system of our country.

It's really about looking into providing more accessible and equitable resources, and definitely with subsidized public transport and other things. Definitely, we can also look into the fourth R, which I mentioned previously—reward—which could be given by offering a different tax bracket for these women and definitely offering child care rates geared to income and also, then, subsidized insurance to single women. This may be my view but women definitely are responsible drivers, and if we have that subsidized insurance on homes, auto and other things that are applicable, that would be great.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Does anyone else want to add anything on that immigration piece? We certainly have seen that there's a suburban system, and the lottery system that came forward didn't necessarily work. What supports for citizenship and immigration need to occur? That's for any of the witnesses.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aline Lechaume: I would like to add that, in terms of access to all of the services discussed, one of the major problems remains the significant divide between those who have permanent residence and those who do not. Women with temporary status are in a much more precarious situation, whether they are international students, temporary foreign workers, people in the process of family reunification, asylum seekers, or people who do not even have that status.

Making access to these services universal, that is, making them available to all immigrant women regardless of status, would be a fundamental element. If we want access to employment and integration into the workforce to be beneficial to these women, we must act at the beginning of the integration process, because once you enter the spiral of precariousness, you stay there. It then becomes very difficult to get out and successfully integrate into the labour market as well as into society in general.

The earlier we act to make access to these services universal, the more beneficial it will be for these women and for society as a whole.

[*English*]

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Ms. Dhillon, you talked about international students. I know there is a very large contingent in my riding who are really frustrated about the fact they pay exorbitant fees. They support our post-secondary education system financially maybe more than they should be required to, but then they also don't have the ability to access traditional employment within our communities. Could you talk about some of the things we could do to remove those barriers?

• (1305)

The Chair: Reply in 20 seconds, please.

Dr. Puneet Dhillon: I'll try.

Definitely international students need assistance, which 100% needs to be more equitable and in their own language, so I think services need to be provided from wherever they originate.

One more thing that needs to be addressed is access to services and pre-arrival orientation of international students, so that when they come here, they are better informed about the laws—laws around work, and any other information about the nation they are arriving in. So pre-arrival orientation of students definitely would be fundamental to helping these students integrate better into society.

The Chair: That's a very good point to end on.

Now I think, Ms. Mathyssen, you had a point of order? Do you want me to thank the witnesses first or do you want to go to your point of order?

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: You go ahead, yes.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for helping us finish our unpaid work study. Your testimony was very helpful to us, so I appreciate that very much.

Ms. Mathyssen, we'll move over to you.

Ms. Lindsay Mathyssen: Thank you.

It's not so much a point of order. I just want to give notice that I will be moving a motion at the next meeting, as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study of midwifery services across Canada of not less than three meetings including the ramifications of the elimination of Laurentian University's midwifery program and strategies to ensure that access to health services are maintained.

The Chair: That's perfect.

As the committee knows, Thursday is committee business. We have a number of things to talk about, including drafting instructions for reports, etc., but the pay equity report did come to you. If we have time, we can start consideration of that, so get ready for that.

At this time, I would ask if it's the pleasure of the committee to adjourn?

Seeing that you all agree, the meeting is adjourned.

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