



Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P8

Shelby Kramp-Neuman
Chair of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A4

Dear Ms. Kramp-Neuman,

As the Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs, and on behalf of the Government of Canada, I am pleased to respond to the tenth report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) entitled, *Act Now: Preventing Human Trafficking of Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People in Canada*, tabled in the House of Commons on February 29, 2024.

Human trafficking is a heinous crime which can have profound and long-lasting physical, mental and emotional impacts on victims and survivors. I commend the Committee for its efforts to examine human trafficking of women, girls and gender diverse people in Canada. The Government of Canada supports the Committee's recommendations and acknowledges the important role of federal efforts to combat this issue.

The *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* (National Strategy), launched in 2019, brings together federal efforts to counter human trafficking under one strategic plan. The National Strategy is victim-centered, survivor-informed and gender-responsive. It aligns with the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships, and further expands on these pillars by incorporating an empowerment pillar, which focuses on helping victims and survivors heal from their trafficking experience and reclaim their lives.

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that its efforts to address human trafficking are informed by insights and guidance from victims and survivors, partners, and all stakeholders who are at the forefront. Together, through coordinated efforts and steadfast determination, we will continue to work towards eradicating human trafficking and supporting victims and survivors.

Thank you to the members of the Standing Committee, the witnesses and those who submitted written briefs for your work and dedication. Our Government's response to the 22 recommendations is attached.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. LeBlanc'.

The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, P.C., K.C.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE TENTH REPORT OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN (FEWO) – ACT NOW: PREVENTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN, GIRLS AND GENDER DIVERSE PEOPLE IN CANADA

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Canada thanks the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) for its report, “Act Now: Preventing Human Trafficking of Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People in Canada” (the Report), tabled in the House of Commons on February 29, 2024. The Government of Canada also extends its appreciation to the witnesses and those who submitted briefs for sharing their time and expertise in support of the Committee’s study on human trafficking of women, girls and gender diverse people.

The Government of Canada welcomes the Committee’s recommendations and is advancing work, particularly under the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* (National Strategy), that supports a comprehensive, whole of government approach to combatting human trafficking in Canada. The Government of Canada works in partnership with other levels of government, civil society organizations, private sector and international partners in several areas noted by the Committee. The response provides greater details on these efforts, and where there are recommendations made on a similar topic, the response groups them together.

Criminal law’s response to trafficking in persons - recommendations 1 and 2:

Recommendations 1 and 2 call for the differentiation between consensual sex work, sex trafficking and sexual exploitation of minors in anti-trafficking laws and policies. The Government of Canada recognizes the Committee’s concerns and emphasizes our ongoing commitment to a robust criminal law framework that effectively addresses human trafficking.

The *Criminal Code* contains six trafficking-specific offences: trafficking in adults (section 279.01), child trafficking (section 279.011), materially benefitting from trafficking (subsection 279.02(2)), materially benefitting from child trafficking (subsection 279.02(2)), withholding or destroying identity documents to facilitate trafficking (subsection 279.03(1)), and withholding or destroying identity documents to facilitate child trafficking (subsection 279.03(2)). These offences carry severe penalties of up to life imprisonment and distinguish between trafficking in adults and child trafficking by imposing more severe penalties where the victim is a child. Human trafficking offences do not apply unless individuals, including sexual service providers, are subjected to coercive practices, because securing a conviction under these offences requires evidence of such practices. In particular, the evidence must show that the accused intended to exploit the victim or to facilitate their exploitation by someone else. Exploitation is defined as engaging in conduct that would cause a reasonable person in the victim’s circumstances to believe that their physical or psychological safety would be threatened if they fail to provide any type of labour or services, including sexual services (subsection 279.04(1)). These offences have been interpreted broadly by appellate courts to include cases that involve subtler forms of exploitation that do not include physical or sexual violence.

These provisions have been strengthened a number of times since they were first enacted in 2005. Most recently, in 2019, former Bill C-75, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code, the Youth Criminal Justice Act and other Acts and to make consequential amendments to Other Acts*, brought into force reforms originally proposed by former Private Member's Bill C-452, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (exploitation and trafficking in persons)*. These reforms include: an evidentiary presumption to facilitate proving human trafficking offences by allowing prosecutors to adduce evidence that the accused lived with or was habitually in the company of an exploited person as proof of one of the elements of the trafficking offence (subsection 279.01(3)); and, imposing a reverse onus for forfeiture of proceeds of crime on those convicted of human trafficking offences (section 462.37).

The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* also contains a human trafficking specific offence that prohibits organizing the coming into Canada of one or more persons by means of abduction, fraud, deception or use/threat of force or coercion (section 118) with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment.

The *Criminal Code* also contains sex trade offences. Enacted in 2014 in response to the Supreme Court of Canada's 2013 *Bedford* decision, which struck down three now-repealed "prostitution" offences, the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA) created new *Criminal Code* offences that criminalize purchasing sexual services (section 286.1), receiving a material benefit from others' sexual services (section 286.2), procuring others to provide sexual services (section 286.3), and advertising others' sexual services (section 286.4), while ensuring that sexual service providers cannot be held criminally liable for the role they play in any of these offences with respect to the sale of their own sexual services (section 286.5). These provisions reflect a "Nordic" approach to the sex trade, which was first implemented in Sweden in 1999 and subsequently in a number of other countries. The PCEPA also enacted a new *Criminal Code* offence that criminalizes communicating in public places that are near school grounds, playgrounds or daycare centres for the purposes of selling sexual services (subsection 213(1.1)).

In its 2013 *Bedford* decision, the Supreme Court of Canada struck down now-repealed paragraph 213(1)(c), which criminalized communicating in public places for the purposes of either purchasing or selling sexual services, on the basis that the offence deprived sexual services providers of the ability to screen customers. The PCEPA repealed this offence. Two other section 213 offences, which were not challenged in the *Bedford* case, are still in force: stopping or attempting to stop motor vehicles and impeding the free flow of pedestrian or vehicular traffic in public places for the purpose of either purchasing or selling sexual services (paragraphs 213(1)(a) and (b)). These offences, along with subsection 213(1.1), which the PCEPA brought into force as described above, are all summary conviction offences that are, or used to be, applicable to sexual service providers.

All of these sex trade offences (sections 286.1 to 286.4 and 213) were upheld as consistent with the *Charter* in the Ontario Superior Court of Justice's September 2023 *Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform* decision. The Court of Appeal for Ontario upheld sections 286.2 to 286.4 in its 2022 *NS* decision and the Alberta Court of Appeal upheld sections 286.2 and 286.3 in its

2023 *Kloubakov* decision. The *Kloubakov* decision has been appealed as of right to the Supreme Court of Canada, which is expected to hear the matter in 2024. The constitutionality of all the *Criminal Code*'s sex trade offences is therefore currently before the courts.

The Government of Canada recognizes that the issue of which legislative framework ought to apply to the sex trade is divisive and engenders strongly held views. The Government of Canada commits to continuing to study these complex issues, which includes continuing to assess the impact of the existing legislative framework, continuing to examine ways to strengthen the criminal law's response to violence and exploitation, and continuing to support sexual service providers, including through services that are appropriate to their diverse needs and through efforts to prevent exploitation and violence, as described below.

Data collection - recommendations 3, 4 and 14:

These recommendations call for the improvement of data collection, the establishment of a national human trafficking database on perpetrators, and the provision of sustainable funding to non-profit organizations conducting data collection on human trafficking. The Government of Canada is committed to collecting and sharing data about the nature and prevalence of human trafficking in Canada.

Statistics Canada's Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics (CCJCSS) publishes information about police-reported incidents of human trafficking and court outcomes using data from the Uniform Crime Reporting Survey and the Integrated Criminal Court Survey (for example, *Trafficking in persons in Canada, 2022*). Work is underway to ensure data collected from police services across the country will contain Indigenous and racialized identity information. With these added variables, Statistics Canada will be better positioned to release disaggregated data.

In addition, the CCJCSS, with funding from Public Safety Canada (PS), is taking steps to ensure that the data collected from police services is robust through the development of additional training tools. The Canadian Human Trafficking Hotline, managed by the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking and supported by PS, shares non-identifying, aggregated data where possible, such as gender, age, geographic location, and trafficking typology, that can offer insight into the experiences of victims and survivors, including the most needed services and supports. Further, the *Survey of Residential Facilities for Victims of Abuse* captures information on victims and survivors who may be residing in shelters.

The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of having strong data on human trafficking and is committed to improving how data is collected and shared across jurisdictions. The Government of Canada relies on these sources of information, and others, that offer evidence and insight into evolving nature of this often complex, ongoing and underreported type of crime and will continue to explore, with partners, how best to support organizations that undertake this work, including if and how a national database could strengthen these efforts.

Support for youth - recommendation 5 and 19:

These recommendations call for support to organizations that provide youth education and awareness, and work with youth involved in the child welfare and foster care system, to develop materials and provide services that are culturally relevant.

The Government of Canada is supporting organizations that work with youth to ensure that they receive culturally appropriate and trauma-informed services that meet their needs and reduce their vulnerability to becoming victims of human trafficking. In 2019, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) invested \$10 million over 5 years, and \$2 million ongoing for the Human Trafficking Initiative to support organizations in developing and implementing promising prevention or intervention practices dedicated to at-risk populations and survivors of human trafficking. Since 2020, WAGE funded 42 projects that are addressing the needs of Indigenous women and girls, as well as youth through prevention and intervention supports.

Public Safety Canada (PS) is also providing support, and is currently funding seven projects for at-risk youth, which have reached over 23,000 individuals, provided them with knowledge and tools to recognize and prevent human trafficking, and produced over 500 knowledge products. Further, PS's initiatives under the *National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation* provides youth education and awareness on online child sexual exploitation, including a digital advertising campaign targeting parents and caregivers, and in-person experiences for grade 7 and 8 students.

Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) is funding support services to assist youth aging out of care and young adults formerly in care across Canada, by providing housing, food, employment and mental health services. ISC is also ensuring that culturally appropriate and needs-based child and family services are delivered in accordance with *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, which protects the well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families by affirming Indigenous communities' jurisdiction over child and family services. ISC also provides funding for First Nations elementary and secondary education on reserve, to enable First Nations to determine educational priorities such as culturally relevant and age-appropriate programming related to online safety, healthy relationships and consent. The First Nations, Inuit and Métis Nation post-secondary education strategies are available for eligible youth and adults, and particularly impact Indigenous women, ISC's post-secondary education programming also provides funding for Indigenous post-secondary institutions. Additionally, ISC's Family Violence Prevention Program funds a range of supports for Indigenous women, girls, children, families, and Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people facing family violence, including activities that address empowerment, vulnerability, engagement of Indigenous men and boys, and prevention of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring our youth have the tools and resources they need, and will continue to support organizations providing culturally appropriate, trauma-informed education, awareness, and services, that foster environments where youth feel safe from human trafficking and exploitation.

Red Dress Alert - recommendation 6:

Recommendation 6 calls for the implementation of a Red Dress Alert for missing Indigenous women, girls and two-Spirit people. Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs (CIRNAC) collaborates with federal partners, provinces and territories, Indigenous partners, families, survivors and advocates to accelerate the 2021 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ People National Action Plan (MMIWG2S+National Action Plan) and complementary Federal Pathway, the Government of Canada's contribution.

In May 2023, the House of Commons unanimously supported a motion to declare the murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls a Canada-wide emergency and called on the Government of Canada to fund a Red Dress Alert, an alert to notify the public when an Indigenous woman, girl or two-spirit person goes missing. Since then, CIRNAC has been actively working to understand the most effective and culturally appropriate way to develop and implement a system that effectively addresses gaps in public alerts and awareness surrounding the MMIWG2S+ national crisis.

Budget 2023 allocated \$2.5 million over five years to facilitate and coordinate work on advancing the MMIWG2S+National Action Plan by establishing the Indigenous Federal-Provincial-Territorial Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQI+ People. In February 2024, the Roundtable included discussions on "a Red Dress Alert".

To help keep Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people safe, Budget 2024 proposes a new investment of \$1.3 million over three years, starting in 2024-25, to co-develop with Indigenous partners, on a priority first phase, a regional Red Dress Alert system.

CIRNAC continues to engage and collaborate with provincial, federal, and Indigenous partners to determine the next steps to develop a Red Dress Alert pilot. The proposed investment of \$1.3 million over three years is intended to support Indigenous partners through Grants and Contributions, to co-develop a regional pilot for a Red Dress Alert, as well as an assessment following the conclusion of the pilot.

Subsequently, on May 3, 2024, ahead of Red Dress Day on May 5, the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba announced their partnership to co-develop a Red Dress Alert together with Indigenous partners.

Indigenous partners have indicated that wrap around services are a key element for any alert system. Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) Mental Wellness Program supports access to a network of community-based trauma-informed emotional and cultural support workers, as well as mental health counsellors, for those impacted by the issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people. This includes access to Elders, Knowledge Holders and Traditional Healers, peer counsellors, and community-based health workers. Further, survivors, family members, and others affected can access immediate emotional support 24/7 by calling the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Crisis Line at 1-844-413-6649. Additionally, ISC's Family Violence Prevention Program supports Indigenous-led violence prevention initiatives, including culturally appropriate supports, to

enhance the safety and security of Indigenous women, children, families and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals facing gender-based violence.

The Government of Canada recognizes that Indigenous women, girls, and Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people continue to go missing and are murdered at alarming rates and is committed to addressing this national crisis.

Public awareness – recommendation 7, 12, and 22:

These recommendations call for increasing public awareness and education about the signs of human trafficking and to ensure the distribution of educational resources and training programs to at-risk populations, law enforcement agencies, and frontline service providers.

The Government of Canada is supporting public awareness and education initiatives. For example, as part of the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* (National Strategy), Public Safety Canada (PS) is supporting the Canadian Centre to End Human Trafficking in its awareness raising efforts. PS will also continue to implement the “*It’s not what it seems*” campaign to raise public awareness and education. This campaign targeted at the general public, including youth and parents has demonstrated an 8% increase in public knowledge of reporting procedures between 2019 and 2022.

In 2023-24, the campaign’s advertising flight included digital banner ads in six languages (Arabic, Hindi, Punjabi, Spanish, Tagalog, and Ukrainian), in an effort to reach newcomers and migrants. Educational material is available to download for free on the campaign website. Additionally, the development of campaign materials to better reach Indigenous youth and parents is underway. PS also hosts webinars to raise awareness and share information and best practices. Summaries of the webinars can be found on PS’s website. In 2024, the series showcased culturally relevant and gender-responsive awareness and training tools for front-line services providers and targeted groups from a variety of sectors.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) delivers awareness presentations to various stakeholders, including law enforcement, government agencies, community organizations, the private sector, and youth. These presentations aim to enhance understanding of the types, stages, and indicators of human trafficking, as well as its profound impact on victims and survivors. The RCMP has partnered with the private sector to provide survivor-led human trafficking training, and is collaborating with Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami on prevention initiatives for the trafficking of Inuit women and girls.

Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), through its Human Trafficking Initiative and Gender-based Violence Program, funds organizations that are developing and implementing promising practices for the prevention of human trafficking. For instance, the Action Coalition on Human Trafficking Alberta Association is receiving funding to prevent and respond to human trafficking, through extensive outreach, education, and partnership development in priority regions.

The Government of Canada will provide ongoing funding under the National Strategy to support awareness campaigns about human trafficking, so that Canadians can better understand the signs, and that front-line staff are better able to identify, detect, and protect victims and survivors. The Government of Canada will also ensure that public awareness campaigns are targeted, accessible, and reach those most at risk of being trafficked.

Migrant workers - recommendation 8:

Recommendation 8 calls on the implementation of measures aimed at further protecting migrant workers with irregular immigration status from human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. The Government of Canada recognizes the importance of protecting migrant workers from human trafficking and exploitation and continues to support several measures that align with this recommendation.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship (IRCC) has programs designed to support victims of trafficking and vulnerable workers. IRCC issues Temporary Resident Permits (TRPs) to foreign national victims of human trafficking who are out-of-status and their dependents in Canada. This allows them to apply for a work permit or study permit and access health care under the Interim Federal Health Program. As part of its ongoing commitment to protect temporary foreign workers, IRCC introduced the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers (OWP-V) initiative in June 2019. The OWP-V provides temporary foreign workers in Canada on valid employer-specific work permits the ability to apply for an open work permit if they are experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, abuse in their job. This permit allows them to quickly exit the abusive situation and to look for new work with a different employer. The OWP-V is facilitative and expedient in nature, and has a lower burden of proof and evidentiary requirements, acknowledging that abuse may be difficult to prove. Employers of employer-specific work permit holders are also subject to an employer compliance regime, which seeks to ensure the protection of foreign workers through a suite of regulatory obligations. This aims to promote safe and fair working conditions for temporary foreign workers.

Further, IRCC is exploring options to regularize undocumented migrants contributing socially and economically to Canadian society. Recognizing the vulnerabilities and barriers that a lack of status creates for undocumented migrants, IRCC is committed to ongoing consultations with stakeholders, academics and those with lived experience to inform its initiatives. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), in collaboration with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) and IRCC, are reviewing immigration enforcement and admissibility frameworks under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and Regulations (IRPR). This review aims to enhance protections for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, including human trafficking, and consider amendments to IRPR provisions that may place foreign national sexual service providers at risk of removal or deportation.

Both the International Mobility Program and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program have a regulation under the IRPR that requires employers to make reasonable efforts to provide a workplace that is free of abuse, which would include anti-human trafficking efforts. The penalty for not adhering to this regulation, falls within the most egregious category of non-compliance.

ESDC and IRCC are also jointly working to deliver on the Budget 2022 announcement to create a new streamlined foreign worker program for agricultural and fish processing employers which includes increased worker mobility within the primary agriculture, and fish and food processing sectors. The new program will help to strengthen worker protections and help to ensure Canada's food producers have access to a stable and reliable supply of labour.

The Government of Canada will continue to explore and implement effective strategies to safeguard migrant workers from exploitation and trafficking.

Poverty reduction - recommendation 9:

Recommendation 9 calls on measures to reduce poverty and meet individuals' basic needs, by considering measures such as a guaranteed annual livable income or other financial supports, safe and accessible housing and investing in long-term funding for culturally appropriate and trauma-informed programs and services. In 2018, the Government of Canada released *Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy*, bringing together significant investments to support the social and economic well-being of all Canadians. These investments include financial supports for key poverty reduction initiatives such as the Canada Child Benefit for families with children, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement for seniors, the Goods and Services/Harmonized Sales Tax credit for low-income Canadians, and the Canada Workers Benefit for low-income individuals with labour market attachment. Recent federal budgets have also introduced programs that will help make life more affordable for Canadians, such as the Canada Disability Benefit, the Canada-wide early learning and child care system and the Canadian Dental Care Plan.

It is important to acknowledge that income security is a shared responsibility across different orders of government and these programs exist alongside provincial and territorial social assistance programs. The Government of Canada also recognized the importance of working with the provinces and territories to find solution to common challenges. In response to a request from PEI's Minister of Social Development, the Honourable Barb Ramsay, proposing a joint Canada-PEI working group to demonstrate and assess the expected impacts of introducing a Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) across PEI, the Honourable Jenna Suds, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, expressed the federal government's willingness to explore the creation of a working group composed of department officials with the intention of exchanging federal-level administrative data in support of PEI's work to evaluate a GBI. The Government will continue to collaborate with provinces and territories that are interested in exploring such an avenue.

Specifically addressing housing challenges, the *National Housing Strategy* (NHS) is a comprehensive, 10-year, \$82+ billion plan to address housing affordability and accessibility issues across Canada. The NHS supports responsive intervention and preventative strategies to keep people out of homelessness and house those currently experiencing it, such as the Rapid Housing Initiative, the Housing Accelerator Fund, the Affordable Housing Fund, and Reaching Home. In efforts to reduce Inuit homelessness by 2030 and support Inuit experiencing or at risk of homelessness across Canada, ISC supports the development of distinctions-based approaches

to housing for Indigenous women through the Inuit-Crown Partnership Committee Homelessness Working Group and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami.

To combat gender-based violence and its intersection with poverty, the 2020 Fall Economic Statement committed \$724.1 million to establish a *Violence Prevention Strategy* to expand culturally relevant supports for Indigenous peoples facing gender-based violence; and support new emergency shelters and transitional (second-stage) housing across the country, including in the North and in urban centres. As a result of this strategy, the Indigenous Shelter and Transitional Housing Initiative was launched in 2021 to establish 38 emergency shelters and 50 transition homes for Indigenous women, children, and Two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people escaping family violence, including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

Finally, the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence (NAP to End GBV), launched in November 2022, is a 10-year Federal-Provincial-Territorial framework aimed at addressing the root causes to end gender-based violence in Canada, with pillar five, Social Structure and Enabling Environment, identifying opportunities for action to address poverty, such as developing and building on existing initiatives to increase the financial security of low-income individuals and families, or building on initiatives to improve food security. Through Budget 2022, the Government of Canada allocated \$539.3 million over five years to support provinces and territories in implementing the NAP to End GBV, through flexible bilateral agreements. Further to this funding, since 2017, Women and Gender Equality Canada has invested over \$308.9 million directly to organizations working to prevent and address gender-based violence, including dedicated funding to address gaps in support for Indigenous women and girls as well as populations who are underserved when experiencing gender-based violence.

Budget 2024 and Canada's Housing Plan lay out the government's bold strategy to unlock 3.87 million new homes by 2031. Further, it proposes to provide \$976 million over five years, starting in 2024-25, and \$24 million in future years, to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation to launch a new Rapid Housing stream under the Affordable Housing Fund to build affordable housing, supportive housing, and shelters for our most vulnerable.

The Government of Canada is committed to reducing poverty in Canada and reaching its legislated target of a 50% reduction in poverty by 2030, relative to 2015 levels.

Support for victim services - recommendations 10 and 11:

These recommendations call for continued investment in victim support services, including trauma-informed counseling and safe housing, as well as funding for organizations supporting individuals in the sex trade with access to legal, health and justice services.

The Justice Canada Victims Fund makes grants and contributions funding available to provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other eligible recipients for the creation and enhancement of services for victims of crime and to enhance the knowledge and capacity of those who work with victims of crime so that these professionals and volunteers can better meet victims' needs. Justice Canada is supporting 16 projects in 2023-2024 through a commitment of approximately \$1.9 million.

Additionally, in 2020, the Government of Canada, through the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, committed up to \$22.4 million over four years, for 63 organizations across Canada to help prevent human trafficking and support at-risk populations and survivors. These organizations provide a spectrum of services including, providing transition and second stage housing, mental health, employment and legal aid, as well as training, tools and assistance to gain financial independence. Several of the organizations that received funding are Indigenous-led and/or provide support to Indigenous populations. For example, the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, funded through Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), is developing and implementing an Indigenous-led, culturally relevant prevention training and education program that will advance knowledge, awareness and empower at-risk Indigenous youth and Indigenous survivors of human trafficking in Alberta.

The Government of Canada has also invested significantly to improve mental wellness in Indigenous communities, with an annual investment of approximately \$650 million in 2023-24 through the Mental Wellness Program. This investment supports a network of community-based, trauma-informed health and cultural support workers providing accessible health and wellness services accessible to Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors of colonial sources of trauma, including MMIWG2S, Indian Residential Schools, and Federal Indian Day Schools.

The Government of Canada is committed to continuing to support victim services and will continue to work closely with provinces and territories in this respect.

Calls for Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls - recommendation 13:

Recommendation 13 calls for the full implementation of Calls for Justice from the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and draws attention to 5 of the Calls for Justice in particular. The Federal Pathway Annual Progress Report, published each June, describes the work of the Government of Canada towards commitments outlined in the Federal Pathway to Address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People and outlines how each initiative is advancing the Calls for Justice they are connected to.

The Government of Canada is implementing a number of programs and initiatives that address many of the root causes of violence and the Calls for Justice, including those outlined in the recommendation. Please note that the following information does not outline any of the work undertaken by other jurisdictions, such as provinces and territories. Through Budget 2021, the Government of Canada provided \$55 million over five years to Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) to support Indigenous women's and 2SLGBTQI+ organizations addressing root causes of violence. Additional programming is delivered by Innovation Science and Economic Development Canada to support Indigenous women and those with intersectional identities start and scale up their own businesses. The Government of Canada is also taking action to combat poverty in First Nation communities through Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) on-reserve Income Assistance Program, including through new investments beginning in 2024-25 to ensure Income Assistance clients with disabilities are better able to cover their essential living expenses

and participate in the social and economic life of their communities.

Health Canada received \$14.9 million over three years through Budget 2021 to establish the *Addressing Racism and Discrimination in Canada's Health Systems Program*. The program provides funding to support Indigenous-led community and regional initiatives that aim to strengthen cultural safety and address systemic racism in health systems as well as support capacity development to enable Indigenous partners to engage on their health priorities. The Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada's Health Systems initiative addresses the prevention of, and redress for, experiences of violence in health care. As part of this initiative, ISC provided \$3.9 million in funding to three National Indigenous Women's Organizations and the National Council of Indigenous Midwives over 3 years to support key priorities including: sexual and reproductive health, including the issue of forced and coerced sterilization of Indigenous women; maternal and child health, including restoring Indigenous midwifery; and parental supports, social support, wrap-around services. Through this initiative, ISC also provided \$26.5 million in funding to Indigenous communities and organizations to expand Indigenous midwifery and doula education pathways, create new services and infrastructure.

The Government of Canada has also made significant recent investments to improve mental wellness in Indigenous communities, with an approximate annual investment of approximately \$650 million in 2023-24 through the Mental Wellness Program at ISC. These investments are made to meet the immediate mental wellness needs of communities, and support a network of community-based trauma-informed health and cultural support workers providing health and wellness services accessible to Survivors and Intergenerational Survivors of colonial sources of trauma including MMIWG2S, Indian Residential Schools and Federal Indian Day Schools. This includes access to cultural support (i.e. Elders, Knowledge Holders and Traditional Healers), to all Indigenous people.

ISC's Co-development of Distinctions-Based Indigenous Health Legislation initiative provides funding to First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and intersectional partners, including organizations that represent Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people, to participate in engagement and co-development processes related to improving access to high-quality and culturally relevant health services. Although the initiative has not yet led to additional funding for services, the engagement and co-development processes allowed for partners to identify priorities for health and wellness services to inform future investments.

The Government of Canada continues to work with First Nations partners to make the on-reserve Income Assistance program more responsive to the needs of Income Assistance clients and dependents and remains committed to ending the violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQI+ people, and will continue to work with Indigenous partners, provinces and territories to achieve this goal. This includes the recent Budget 2024 proposed investments in areas linked to the Calls for Justice, such as: Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism in Health Systems, mental wellness, Child and Family Services, Indigenous policing, Indigenous Justice Strategy, Indigenous languages and Income Assistance On-Reserve.

The Government of Canada recognizes that the Calls for Justice are broad and call upon federal, provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments, social service providers, industry,

the media, and all Canadians. The Government of Canada acknowledges that the transformative change required to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA+ people will require sustained efforts and is committed to the continued evolution of this work with all partners. Further, we will continue to monitor research around basic income and work with provincial and territorial counterparts to find solutions to common challenges as income support is an area of shared jurisdiction.

Training - recommendations 15 and 18:

These recommendations call for the provision of training programs for professionals and law enforcement, emphasizing trauma-informed approaches and awareness of the distinction between sex work and human trafficking.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), in consultation with various stakeholders, including law enforcement, lawyers, and service providers, has established a partnership with the Canadian Police Knowledge Network to facilitate training sessions. These sessions equip Canadian law enforcement with a comprehensive understanding of human trafficking and the human-rights focused approaches needed to assist victims. The RCMP offers bilingual training courses, such as “Introduction to Human Trafficking” designed to provide frontline police officers with foundational knowledge on human trafficking including legislation, victim assistance, basic investigative techniques, and referral mechanisms. Another course, “Survivor-led Human Trafficking Detection” is also available, highlighting the significance of survivor insights in enhancing detection and response strategies.

The Department of Justice Canada, through the Victims Fund, is supporting organizations to deliver projects and activities that provide trauma-informed services and training to enhance and promote the physical, psychological, and social well-being of victims and survivors of human trafficking. They also support the development and delivery of trauma-informed training for prosecutors and first responders, including police officers, immigration officers, and medical professionals to enhance the detection, investigation, and prosecution of human trafficking incidents.

The *Handbook for Criminal Justice Practitioners on Trafficking in Persons*, recently updated by the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Coordinating Committee of Senior Officials – Criminal Justice Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, is designed to assist front-line personnel and improve the ability of the criminal justice system to bring traffickers to justice while fully respecting the rights and needs of victims. The updated Handbook, which was publicly released in April 2024, reflects a number of developments, including legislative changes, updated jurisprudence, research on trauma informed care and victim-centered approaches, and available services for victims and survivors (see: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/tp/hcjpotp2-gtpupjp2/index.html>).

Women and Gender Equality Canada, through the Feminist Response and Recovery Fund invested in a 30-month program that will develop, pilot, deliver and expand the Brave Spaces Public Education curriculum to address the root causes of gender-based violence. This will include a focus on the institutions of criminal justice, policing systems, healthcare, psychiatry,

clinical mental health, systems of work and labour (sex work). It will pilot workshops and education resources, deliver a public education program to community members and service providers, and expand the curriculum which includes trauma-informed approaches on how to recognize the difference between sex work and human trafficking.

Finally, under the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, Public Safety Canada supports the development of guidelines for front-line workers across Canada with client-centered and trauma-informed approaches to supporting victims and survivors of forced labour and sexual exploitation.

The Government of Canada is committed to ensuring that front-line professionals are equipped to effectively address human trafficking. Doing so will continue to ensure that victims and survivors have access to tailored, trauma-informed services that meet their specific needs.

The National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking - recommendation 16:

Recommendation 16 calls for the renewal of the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* (National Strategy), to ensure that it is intersectional, includes sustainable funding for victim-centered programs, addresses structural and systemic barriers, and implements prevention and awareness campaigns. The National Strategy, released in 2019, brings together all federal efforts to counter human trafficking through a victim-centered, survivor-informed and gender-responsive lens. It is supported by an investment of \$57.22 million (2019-2024) and \$10.28 million ongoing. The National Strategy is aligned with the internationally recognized pillars of prevention, protection, prosecution and partnerships, and incorporates an empowerment pillar to enhance supports and services for victims and survivors.

Through the National Strategy, Public Safety Canada delivers a national public awareness campaign, provides funding for organizations supporting victims and survivors, supports initiatives such as the development of guidelines for front-line workers and the release of police-reported and court-related data on human trafficking. Women and Gender Equality Canada supports organizations to enhance empowerment supports for at-risk populations and survivors of human trafficking. Public Services and Procurement Canada addresses human trafficking and forced labour risks in federal procurement supply chains, including through the development of a worker-centered approach to due diligence efforts. The Canada Border Services Agency reviews and updates relevant policies and practices to enhance protection for victims and survivors of gender-based violence. The Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada produces financial intelligence related to human trafficking through Project Protect and similar initiatives, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's activities include the issuance of temporary resident permits to foreign national victims of human trafficking and their dependents in Canada, and conducting investigations.

The Government of Canada remains committed to addressing human trafficking in Canada and will renew the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking* to ensure that Canada's approach remains modern, adaptable, and responsive to the changing environment.

Criminal Code section 213 - recommendation 17:

This recommendation suggests studying a potential process for expunging pre-2014 convictions related to consensual sex work and calls for a review of the application of the *Criminal Code*'s section 213.

In June 2018, the *Expungement of Historically Unjust Convictions Act* (EHUCA) came into force through former Bill C-66, creating a mechanism for permanently destroying records of conviction for historically unjust convictions - convictions for activities that should never have been criminalized. As such, when expungement is ordered, the person previously convicted is deemed to never have been convicted of that specific offence. Section 23 of the EHUCA authorizes the Governor in Council (GIC) to, by order, add offences to the Schedule if the activity no longer constitutes an offence under an Act of Parliament, and the GIC is of the opinion that the criminalization of the activity constitutes a historical injustice.

The Government of Canada remains committed to expanding the expungement regime and recognizes the impacts of unjust convictions that have historically targeted vulnerable, marginalized, and racialized communities.

Protection of women and girls - recommendation 20:

Recommendation 20 calls on the Government of Canada to report on its plan and future actions to prevent sexual exploitation of women, girls and gender diverse people.

The Women and Gender Equality Canada-led federal Gender-Based Violence Strategy (federal GBV Strategy), *It's Time: Canada's Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence*, is the Government of Canada's response to all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation, human trafficking and addressing harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Announced in June 2017, it builds on current federal initiatives, coordinates existing programs, and lays the foundation for greater action on GBV. Seven federal departments and agencies have received funding for specific initiatives under the federal GBV Strategy: Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE); Public Safety Canada; Public Health Agency of Canada; Department of National Defence; Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; and Department of Justice Canada. Overall, the Government of Canada has invested over \$800 million and \$44 million per year ongoing in the federal GBV Strategy since 2017–18, and annual progress reports have been published on Women and Gender Equality Canada's website.

Building on the foundation laid by the federal GBV Strategy and on existing federal-provincial-territorial approaches and strategies, the 10-year *National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence* (NAP to End GBV) was launched in November, 2022. It is a strategic framework for action, within and across jurisdictions, to support victims, survivors and their families, no matter where they live. Bilateral agreements with all 13 provinces and territories were announced as of December 2023 to support each jurisdictions' implementation of the NAP to End GBV.¹ As part

¹ Gender-based violence is a priority for the Government of Québec, which has invested significant funds to end violence against women. However, although it supports the overall objectives of the NAP to End GBV, the

of the NAP to End GBV's implementation, federal, provincial, and territorial governments are working together to monitor the results and impacts of actions. A national report, outlining advancements under the NAP to End GBV, will be publicly available on an annual basis starting in fall 2024. The federal GBV Strategy serves as the federal government's contribution to the NAP to End GBV.

The Government of Canada remains committed to ending gender-based violence in Canada and will continue to share gender-based violence expertise and work collaboratively with other government departments and partners to achieve this goal.

Prevention measures - recommendation 21:

Recommendation 21 calls for the Government of Canada to continue supporting the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA) and provide support to evidence-based prevention community initiatives focused on children and youth vulnerable to exploitation. The Government of Canada is supporting organizations delivering community-based initiatives focused on children and youth vulnerable to exploitation; for instance, as part of the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*, Public Safety Canada (PS) supported seven projects for at-risk youth; and, through, PS's initiatives under the *National Strategy for the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation*, youth education and awareness on online child sexual exploitation, including a digital advertising campaign targeting parents and caregivers, and in-person experiences for grade 7 and 8 students is supported. PS is also implementing the "It's not what it seems" campaign to raise public awareness and education. This campaign is targeted at the general public, including youth and parents.

The Government of Canada acknowledges the importance of developing and supporting evidence-based prevention community initiatives aimed at protecting children and youth from 6 to 18 years of age from human trafficking, and will consider the unique vulnerabilities of young people in the context of human trafficking when it renews the *National Strategy to Combat Human Trafficking*.

Government of Québec cannot adhere to it because it intends to retain its full responsibility in this area on its territory.