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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order. This is the 142nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Welcome, witnesses, as we begin our second meeting to study settlement services in Canada. Thank you for joining us.

Before we begin, I want to update the committee on a couple of meeting announcements. As members will remember from the last meeting, I undertook to schedule some meetings. We have just been able to finally get them scheduled. For your calendars, today and Thursday we will do our settlement services study. They will be the second and third meetings of this study, which will be a minimum of seven meetings, as per your motion. There is no meeting on Monday, February 18, as in Ontario that is Family Day. On February 20 we will have a meeting on supplementary estimates (B), which you have asked me to do.

I approached both Minister Hussen and Minister Blair and we tried to schedule meetings. Mr. Blair is being requested at public safety as well, and we have very limited days. As you will know, a number of opposition days are being called. The reporting back could happen even earlier than by the end of March, or we would be deemed as having received them. Both ministers have agreed to change schedules and be available on February 20. They will be given a short period of time to speak, five minutes each, to give the committee enough time to question them on supplementary estimates (B).

For your further noting, on February 25 and 27 we will return to the migration study. You have requested three more meetings on that. We will have one on the 25th and one on the 27th. As well, just to alert you, I will be trying to schedule a special meeting of the committee to accomplish the three meetings you have requested before we have the two-week break so that the analysts can continue working on the evidence and get ready for a meeting where you would give instructions for the writing of the report when we come back in March.

Again, February 4 and 6 will be settlement services; February 18 there is no meeting; February 20 will be two ministers for supplementary estimates (B); and February 25 and 27 will be back to the migration study, with probably a third meeting that week, which we will try to schedule with as few conflicts as possible.

Are there any questions?

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Will the ministers be appearing at separate panels or in one panel?

The Chair: They will appear in one panel. The supplementary estimates are actually the budgetary responsibility of only one minister, and that's Minister Hussen. That is his responsibility. Minister Blair will be here on the policy questions with respect to irregular migration, because he has that file but he doesn't have budgetary responsibility for it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To be clear, does Minister Blair not have any responsibility for allocating resources that he is in charge of?

The Chair: I will ask you to ask him that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: But you just said that.

The Chair: I know that the fiduciary responsibility is to the minister of IRCC with respect to the budget of IRCC. How that gets played out between ministers I don't know, but I do know that the responsibility technically falls to that minister.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Will the departments appear at separate times?

The Chair: The department officials will be with them, as is our custom. They will then stay for an additional hour following the ministers.

Mr. David Tilson: Will both departments be on at the same time?

The Chair: I would have to confirm, but I believe there's only one department, and that's IRCC. Mr. Blair doesn't have a department.

Mr. David Tilson: Okay.

The Chair: Very good.

Let's welcome our guests.

I'll begin with you, Mr. Hussein. Welcome. After your presentation we will go to the two witnesses joining us by video conference from Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

Mr. Hussein, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Ahmed Hussein (Executive Director, The Neighbourhood Organization): Thank you.

Good afternoon. I'm delighted to be here. My name is Ahmed Hussein. I'm the executive director of TNO, The Neighbourhood Organization, which is a settlement agency in Toronto. I would like to speak on the range of settlement services provided.

It's important to do a needs assessment for all newcomers who come to our organization or to a similar organization that provides settlement services. Basically, it's for the whole family or some of the family. It's really to identify their needs, their priorities and their expectations, and to set up goals. Group information sessions cover a large number of things that a large number of people need—employment information, parks and recreation information, school information and those kinds of things.

Another component that has really become more and more important now is community connections, which is really about connecting them with established Canadians. It became quite effective during the time of the Syrian refugees. A number of private sponsors sponsored and actually enhanced community connections. It was about facilitating their connection with somebody who could enhance their network and enhance their employment opportunities—somebody who was established, who knew employment information, and who had a large number of networks.

There are also support services such as providing childminding when workshops are happening or when language training is happening. As well, especially for GARs, government-assisted refugees, there are translation and interpretation services.

After doing all of that, and after the review of the services they need, they will get a lot of referrals to connect them with wherever the holistic needs assessment indicates. It could cover the whole family. For example, with a family of four or five, a number of things will be touched—employment, attending school, or connecting with youth recreation services and youth opportunities. It will clearly follow whatever the needs assessment plan is. One of the most important things is the access to employment, which is really about settlement. They will move forward when they're able to get employment. That's actually the most important thing. Within that process, they're also getting some sort of civic engagement. It connects them to the things that are happening in their neighbourhood and to being part of the community. That way the cohesiveness of a community or neighbourhood exists when newcomers come.

This programming format can be delivered by drop-in or group settings or online. In some cases, for the last couple of years successful settlement services have been delivered in the school setting, for example, through SWIS, the settlement workers in schools program, and in libraries, recreation places, and faith places. It's also important to have flexible hours, on weekends and evenings. A lot of people are working odd hours in some cases, and having access to services is important.

Looking at best practices, really you create a welcoming environment for them to be comfortable in. When you make them comfortable, you get more information to help them. You provide culturally appropriate services in terms of their language needs and in the geographical area where they can access the language. You also need good listening skills to see what their needs are.

●(1535)

Again, one of the other important things is really working with established Canadians so that you can really connect with them. Mentorship and community connections are critical points of their success. Those sponsored by private sponsors are actually more successful than are the GARs because they have a network that is working for them.

One of the other things is to really reinforce with them about being active citizens and engaging, because at the end of the day you want the newcomers to be settled properly, to participate and to create the harmony that we want to have in our country. Some of them are entrepreneurs and the settlement services can help with a lot of information on referrals. Now more and more people are asking for support in businesses. For example, in our area, a lot of them are actually doing catering or sewing, and selling their services to neighbours who have higher incomes compared to those in other areas. You also have to make sure that whatever you are doing, they are participating and that you are not pushing them into things that might not be important for them or things that are not helping them.

One issue that still exists is access to regulatory bodies like engineers, doctors and lawyers. It's still a challenge even though more and more improvements are happening. The other thing is that at all of these policy tables where newcomer issues are discussed, they're not there, and that needs to be recognized and built on.

●(1540)

The Chair: I'll need you to wrap up fairly quickly, please.

Mr. Ahmed Hussein: Yes. Sure.

The other part is settlement service collaboration between all governments—federal, provincial, and municipal. It's important that we work collectively together and engage newcomers because the success of newcomers will contribute to the success of the country.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

You'll have more time to continue that when the questions come.

Let's move westward and go to Ms. Hamm from the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association.

Thank you for joining us.

Ms. Jess Hamm (Executive Director, Saskatchewan Intercultural Association): Good afternoon.

As you said, my name is Jess Hamm. I'd like to thank you for the invitation to speak with you today. I believe you are experiencing what I would call nice balmy weather there in Ottawa, as we are experiencing -37°C with the wind chill today.

I am the executive director of the Saskatchewan Intercultural Association, which is an impact non-profit organization founded in 1964. I'd also like to acknowledge that our organization operates on Treaty No. 6 territory, the traditional homelands of first nations and Métis people.

Since our beginning, the SIA has been committed to supporting cultural groups to retain distinctive cultural identity, language and arts while also integrating and feeling accepted into the community they've come to. In the last 20 years SIA has focused on providing programs and services that both empower and relieve barriers for newcomers. When I say "newcomers", I mean both immigrants and refugees.

We also serve indigenous people in the areas of securing employment, language advancement and cultural understanding. An integral part of SIA has always been to provide anti-racist education and promote intercultural understanding to the general public through workshops, programming and community events.

SIA partners with many organizations in the community to offer a wide variety of programming, including employment skills training, English and heritage language classes, youth programming and performing arts entertainment. SIA works towards intercultural understanding and acceptance in our community through providing intercultural education and through committee work.

For over 20 years, SIA has offered employment training services. One of our employment programs targets internationally trained professionals with the intention of connecting these newcomers to their career fields here in Canada. This program utilizes classroom training and internship-style work placements and is funded provincially by the Government of Saskatchewan.

Another unique employment initiative that we provide serves both newcomers and indigenous youth between the ages of 18 and 30 who have little or no work experience. This program not only addresses employment barriers but is designed to break down any cultural misunderstandings and increase participants' intercultural understanding. This program provides classroom training, with allowances, and paid work placements, day care subsidies and transportation supports. It is also funded through the federal government.

SIA also offers English-language training through both federal and provincial government funding. This allows us to serve newcomers of various statuses and provide classroom training on Canadian language benchmark levels from one to eight. We offer over 24 different classes at different locations throughout the city of Saskatoon. We offer child care for all of our daytime classes and a few of our evening classes.

We also offer several youth programs in the community, with after-school and summer programming. Our summer youth program is for newcomer boys and girls aged six to 18. This program focuses on integration, education and recreation. The program provides transportation supports and is federally funded. Our after-school programs are funded through small local grants and are not restricted to just newcomers. They focus on cultural learning and sharing through partnerships with our local schools.

SIA's core has always been culture and anti-racism, so we also provide programming that values cultural difference and brings people together to learn and understand each other's values through mentoring relationships, educational sessions or forums and bridging opportunities. We also support a network of 22 language schools that provide language training in 19 different languages in our

community, as we wholeheartedly believe that staying connected to language and culture is extremely important.

SIA's overall goal is for our community to be an equitable place for all cultures, which means that we are also embracing our role in reconciliation efforts through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action. Through indigenizing our own organization, we aim to provide settlement and integration services to newcomers that are respectful of the indigenous peoples of this land, while also working to support the indigenous communities with their own growth and success. Our city, our province and ultimately our country will thrive and be more successful when our relationships are based on mutual respect, trust and understanding.

● (1545)

I'd like to now read for you just a few impact statement quotes that have been taken directly from our clients.

The first is from one of our employment programs: "I am very grateful to the help as it has assisted me to stand out as a confident and composed person who now fully understands many new cultural and social values. I am now able to exercise newly learned interpersonal skills and am pushing my way forward. During this program, I learned about many new ideas and ways to prepare for resumés, cover letters and interviews, and this has provided me also with the ability to closely interact with fellow colleagues coming from different cultural and social environments."

This one is from one of our intercultural mentoring programs: "I found this program made me feel welcome to the city, and I was matched with a good mentor who really cares about the program. They showed a real interest to learn and share the point of view about cultures, roots and social issues. By understanding each other's cultures, we have learned that we have similarities in our roots. This program has made me feel really welcome to this city and also to this country."

This is one more from an employment program: "I wouldn't be where I am today without this program. I am now seeing my daughter every second weekend, and I just bought a car. I also bought good runners that can breathe, because I need them for work. If this program hadn't helped by providing the cab so I could get to the interview or connect to my work placement and now my job, I don't know where I would be."

Last, this one is from one of our English-language programs: “I heard SIA offered English classes with child care. Luckily, I got a chance to become a CLB 3-4 student. Since I joined this class, I feel happy because I do not need to worry about my child during learning English. I came to Canada five years ago, and my first job was at a hotel. One time my manager asked me to do something, but I could not understand, and I felt embarrassed. Now, when working, I am able to answer the phone for my manager, and I can make simple conversation with customers. My English skills have improved a lot, but I still need to work hard. I will keep learning English and never give up.”

The Chair: I need you to wrap up fairly quickly, please.

Thank you.

Ms. Jess Hamm: I'm just going to do that.

In conclusion, I'd like to give the following recommendations:

First, funding for settlement and integration in Canada needs to authentically include reconciliation with indigenous people and recognize the devastating role that racism plays in creating barriers for newcomers while they settle in Canada.

Second, funding and contract decisions should more often take into consideration the local context, since wide-encompassing national decisions often leave out or discount what is needed in the smaller provinces or cities.

Third, recognize that English-language training is more than just a ticket for newcomers to receive Canadian citizenship, and cutting off access to IRCC funding afterwards prevents holistic integration. English-language training in CLBs 5 to 8 are essential for newcomers to be successful in our communities.

Last, the federal government needs to put more money into employment programming that not only educates newcomers but focuses on employers and their role in the settlement process.

I'd like to thank the committee for their time today. I am happy to answer any questions members may have.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we go to British Columbia.

Ms. Hamel, thank you for joining us. I'm glad you were able to get on video conference. That was a bit of an issue today, and I'm glad it worked out.

Ms. Jocelyne Hamel (Executive Director, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia): Yes, thank you. Thank you very much for inviting me here.

My name is Jocelyne Hamel. I am the executive director of Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, which is part of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses of British Columbia.

The focus of my presentation will be the role of neighbourhood houses in the settlement and integration of newcomers as a best practice to be looked at. Specifically, I will briefly discuss a case study in the neighbourhood house model and link some relevant research.

I am so happy to have had the opportunity to hear from my colleagues Mr. Hussein and Ms. Hamm first because I think there are some similarities. I am taking a slightly different tack with my presentation.

I want to start by sharing a short story from one of the respondents who participated in an evaluation of our food programs in 2017. Her name has been changed.

Like many immigrants, Aya found the process of adjusting to her new life in Vancouver difficult and lonely, that is, until she found her way to the cooking club program at the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House. Through participation in these peer-run cooking workshops, Aya found a new way to engage with her community, make new friends and lift herself out of isolation.

For Aya, MPNH was “*el punto de partida*”, which means “a point of departure”, to try new things and to be more comfortable with people. “It took me out of my depression, the loneliness I felt. Now I feel useful. I feel happy and I feel more connected.”

From the cooking club, Aya joined a leadership training circle and started volunteering at the neighbourhood house to gain some work experience and confidence and skills. She said that this support and her experience in the cooking club gave her the courage to volunteer to help organize an event with other parents at her children's school.

Aya is now employed in a full-time permanent position at the neighbourhood house and is “excited to be able to help others like me”, she says.

Neighbourhood houses are community-based welcoming places where all people of any age, nationality or ability can find a way to connect with others and their community. They are multi-service agencies with which newcomers find many ways of initially engaging. Once newcomers are attached, they'll participate, lead and learn through a continuum of programs and services and community building.

The neighbourhood house model applies several principles and approaches such as being neighbourhood-based and rooted in the community; providing safe and welcoming places that are open and inclusive to all; taking participant-centred and grassroots community-building approaches; addressing local concerns and fostering civic engagement; offering multi-generational and intercultural programs and services and approaches; and using strength-based and asset-based approaches that focus on capacity building and catalyzing reciprocity.

I would also like to add that in B.C., neighbourhood houses have always been at the forefront of nurturing indigenous relationships in the community because that's where we are. We're in the community and we work with the people in the community.

Because of our focus on inclusion and connection, we foster intercultural interactions between indigenous people and others, including newcomers and refugees. These lead to more awareness and acceptance of indigenous cultures and history. Neighbourhood houses are also working very strategically towards truth and reconciliation goals at this moment in time.

Newcomers have multiple needs, and research indicates that neighbourhood houses are well placed to address settlement and integration needs through multiple service points and through a holistic approach. Neighbourhood Houses in Metro Vancouver is a four-year research project funded by a SSHRC insight grant, which focuses on several aspects of the neighbourhood model as a unique service delivery approach that responds to individual and community needs.

Briefly, some selected findings of this research relate to how neighbourhood houses build capacity for newcomers. Neighbourhood houses met newcomers' immediate settlement needs for service and integration by offering programs for children and intergenerational services, as well as many other services, not all of which are specifically settlement programs.

We create safe places of connection and support that break isolation and provide a sense of well-being and connection. We use a strength-based approach, which fosters aspirations and opportunities, builds confidence and skills, and nurtures the value of community participation. We offer leadership and volunteer opportunities that often help newcomers ladder up into job opportunities.

• (1555)

The research also specifies that newcomers reported larger increases in social capacity development than did the respondents born in Canada. The research shows that social capacity development for newcomers increases as their involvement in neighbourhood houses increases in length, intensity and variety.

Many programs and services are offered by neighbourhood houses that achieve the capacity building and neighbourhood connection for newcomers. The example I gave at the beginning of this presentation is typical for many newcomers who face economic barriers and food insecurity when they first settle. They turn to community organizations like ours for support.

All neighbourhood houses have food-related programs, ranging from food distribution services to cooking clubs and community kitchens, where groups of people come together to learn, cook and eat together. Often we find that newcomers come to food programs as an entry point and find many other services and programs that meet their needs once they walk through our doors.

In 2017, Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House conducted an evaluation process that focused on the impact of cooking programs and teaching kitchens on participants. The evaluation included in-depth interviews as well as a survey. We confirmed that our food programs have proven successful in improving participants' food and nutrition skills.

A more revealing impact, however, is that food programs are much more than just being about the food. The food programs also create social connections for people. Spending time together in the kitchen has helped people to develop strong social networks and

helps them to break free from social isolation and connects them with life-enhancing supports, such as housing and lasting friendships.

We also learned that participants felt safe in practising English because they were in a welcoming environment. Even those who could not speak English at all were able to participate, because sign language was so much easier to use in a kitchen than in other areas.

The Chair: Ms. Hamel, I have to ask you to wrap up, please.

Ms. Jocelyne Hamel: Yes.

We also learned that they were supported to develop leadership skills. They took risks to become a leader and teacher in cooking classes or in other volunteer positions. Some respondents attributed their experience in the program as helping them get employment.

We learned that being involved in an inclusive and safe space provided several of our participants with the support they needed to address mental health challenges. We feel that food programs are absolutely a best practice in a community-based organization like a neighbourhood house.

That's it. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses. We're now going to the part of the meeting where we turn to the members to ask questions.

The first round is seven-minute rounds.

We'll start with Ms. Zahid.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses for coming today as we get to this important study.

Thank you, Mr. Hussein, for all the work you do. I hear about your good work all the time in Toronto. Many of my constituents use your services.

Mr. Hussein, newcomer women have some specific needs. Often, to be successful, they need some specific programming and support to be designed. What do you identify as the particular challenges faced by newcomer women and how are you addressing them through the services you provide?

Mr. Ahmed Hussein: Yes, you're absolutely right. We receive large numbers of GARs, government-assisted refugees, as well as privately sponsored refugees. What we have seen is the importance of really programming something that is relevant to them. The best option is having that holistic assessment and seeing what the real needs are. In our area, for example, there are a lot of women who are interested in doing catering, and they have been successful. They have been catering to some of the big institutions.

Supporting that is important, whether it's connecting to financial support or whether it's giving them space so they can access information and resources. Supporting the childminding piece is important for women as is the language component, because quite often, we have seen that the men speak one of the official languages—mainly English, in our area—so the language need is predominantly for women. We really targeted a number of programs geared to them, which is also relevant to economic development, entrepreneurship and in connecting to the other established women in the community.

We have developed some relationships in terms of doing some work for the Ontario Science Centre, which is in Toronto. Some newcomer women developed costumes for a show that goes all over the world. We helped them to negotiate a contract with the Ontario Science Centre. There is a lot of entrepreneurship that women bring to the table, and I think we have to really encourage them and build on that, because that will really help their integration into Canada.

• (1600)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Our government increased funding for the settlement program for 2018-19 by nearly 5%. It was increased to \$768 million. With further increases to support more newcomers under the multi-year levels plan, by the end of fiscal 2019-20, this will represent a 32% funding increase for settlement since our government took office in 2015.

Can you tell us how this additional funding is helping to improve these services for the newcomers on the ground?

Mr. Ahmed Hussein: Any increase in funding expands the reach of the people we help. We're able to hire people who are specific to certain areas. For example, recently, mental health was an issue with the Syrian refugees who came. With those resources, we were able to get mental health services or crisis services, which, incorporated into the service delivery, improves their life and makes them more ready for employment, or if they are going into business, it helps them. It also increases the number of people who go to language classes, for example. It's important that people learn the language so they can be incorporated into the labour market. Having more classrooms and reducing the number of people waiting for language programs helps a lot. In our area we have expanded the language programs and we have reduced our waiting time, so they really impact more people. More resources means more impact.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. Hamel.

With a lot of focus on language and skills training for adults in order to get into the workforce, sometimes youth are overlooked, yet newcomer families tend to lean more on their children, particularly the teenagers, to assist them with integration. How are you

addressing the pressures faced by newcomer youth? Is there anything specific you're doing?

Ms. Jocelyne Hamel: That's a really good question.

We do have youth workers who are specifically addressing working with newcomer youth who are in school or who may be straddling the age gap. At Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House we go into the schools and work with the SWIS, settlement workers in schools. We do some supports as well as anti-racism workshops, just as my colleague, Ms. Hamm, talked about. We engage them in conversations about the roles they might be playing. We're helping to support them that way, but we also have programs where they can connect with other youth outside the school, which gives them social support.

It's very challenging because we also work very closely with vulnerable populations, like the Syrian refugees, and when we have had Syrian youth join our youth programs, sometimes the parents have had to come because they needed to see that we were safe. The fact is our neighbourhood houses are very safe places. It took a little while sometimes to get buy-in from the families who were suspicious and worried about their children. That is one of the things we do. We're able to create those spaces where youth can come together with other youth and their parents are okay with it. That is one thing.

I also want to talk a little about Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House. It's related to food. They created a social entrepreneurial program, which was taking reclaimed fruit and vegetables and engaging the youth to make chutney. This is a small program that is engaging not just newcomers but many of the participants are newcomer youth. They get an opportunity to make a little income. They learn some skills. They get attached to the workforce. These kinds of grassroots initiatives are constantly being invented and innovated in organizations like ours in the neighbourhood houses because—

• (1605)

The Chair: Thanks very much. I need to end it there. That's the end of the time.

Ms. Jocelyne Hamel: Okay.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I move:

That, pursuant to Standing Orders 108(1)(a) and 108(2), the Committee meet jointly with the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to study whether gaps in the process of the security screening for persons entering Canada have arisen over the last three years, both at official points of entry and between points of entry, to identify the causes and impacts of these gaps, and propose potential solutions; that departmental officials and Ministers from both Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness be present for at least one meeting; that officials and elected representatives from the United States federal Congress and Senate be invited to attend; that these meetings be held before March 1st, 2019; that the Committee report its findings to the House; and that Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government table a comprehensive response thereto.

I want to lay out three principles for my colleagues on why I think this is timely and why it is incumbent upon our committee to look at this particular issue.

Many Canadians feel screening is a reasonable part of Canada's immigration process. Several articles have suggested problems have recently arisen with our screening process, and it is incumbent upon Parliament to study this.

The Chair: Could I just interrupt for our witnesses. We'll go right back to you after I finish this.

So you'll understand what is happening, when a member has the floor to ask questions of witnesses, it is their right, their prerogative, to move a motion. This motion has been presented to the committee in the past, so it has had 48 hours' notice. It's appropriately Ms. Rempel's opportunity to bring forward a motion.

We're going to ask you to stay with us while this goes on. We don't know how long it will take.

Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Wonderful.

I want to present to my colleagues my rationale for a joint committee meeting, which is part of Standing Order 108(1). Also, to give a perfect example, as our chair outlined at the start of this meeting, we now have a minister, Minister Blair, whose responsibility I think straddles both departments—we're not sure—and now these matters do kind of fall under the purview I think of two different committees. To me, that's important.

I want to read a quote for my colleagues from what is, I believe, a CBC article. It was from Professor Kelly Sundberg at Mount Royal University. He said:

As a Canadian I expect more, and I think other Canadians expect that our federal law enforcement, intelligence and border security agencies can work seamlessly, [and] share information seamlessly. And if there are administrative or legal hurdles, then that's something [that] Parliament needs to look at.

This comment was made with regard to an article where a foreign national entered the country illegally, subsequently claimed asylum and had an extensive criminal history and, I believe, an outstanding arrest warrant. Even though the CBSA might have raised concerns about this individual, the IRB process, which is in the purview of this committee, did not acknowledge that and still allowed this person into Canada. I believe the article states that this person may be allegedly committing crimes in Canada.

I want to go through some of the stories. Again, this is not me. This is the CBC and Global News and others.

We have a story from December 13, "Botched handling of gangster refugee claimant exposes Canada's screening weaknesses". Again, this is from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. This is a very long article that talks about potential gaps in our screening processes, potentially exacerbated by the demand on our system created by people entering at Roxham Road over the last year.

Again, on January 16 of this year, there is a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation article headlined "Person of 'national security concern' was accidentally granted permanent residency". I believe the Minister of Public Safety talked about the document that CBC obtained this information from, which was heavily redacted. I don't understand how somebody who was flagged as a national security concern was given permanent residency.

Again, it's that interface between the Canada Border Services Agency's processes, the RCMP, our intelligence agencies and our immigration processes. There seems to be a gap there.

This one was reported over a year ago by Stewart Bell from Global News: "Internal government audit finds 'gaps' in security screening of Syrian refugees". Of course, this is an audit that goes through the fact that there were many people from this cohort "who should have undergone comprehensive security checks" but "were not screened before arriving in Canada".

On February 4, there was an article in the Associated Press, which reads, "Canadian border more of a terror concern than Mexican for U.S."

I believe I saw another article on Global News today that was talking about terror threats from a certain nationality. The Americans have expressed concern that they might be self-deporting into Canada.

Look, I want to be very clear on the intention here. My concern is that these reports are piling up. Day after day, there is a story that talks about screening processes. Today in the House of Commons I rose and asked the minister if he'd be willing to come to committee. The response that we got from the government representative at the time was that everything is going fine.

When we get concerns like this day after day, I worry that if the government isn't accountable to Parliament, as Professor Sundberg talked about, the government risks allowing a narrative that we don't want to have in Canada. We need to ensure that the processes we have are working fully and robustly in every circumstance, and that there isn't an acceptable margin of error here.

● (1610)

As Professor Sundberg said, this is a matter for Parliament to study. All we're asking for here is a study. There are several instances. Any one of those headlines that I just read should be of concern to parliamentarians. The government should be accountable for this messaging. I think it is a fairly reasonable request, especially now that we have a minister who straddles both departments, that we should do this in short order.

I should also speak to the components about representatives from the United States. I'm happy to discuss that with colleagues.

There was an article that came out, I think it was about two weeks ago, where a Democratic congressman who, I believe, is now the vice-chair or chair of the equivalent committee to ours, expressed concerns about Canada's ability to screen newcomers as it relates to a relationship with the United States. Given that we share one of the longest undefended borders, I think it's incumbent on us to, at the very least, undertake a neutral parliamentary study of this matter, and also give our colleagues to the south an opportunity to appear, should they decide to. They don't have to.

I believe this is in order, in accordance with Standing Orders 108(1)(a) and 108(2). I hope my colleagues will support this motion.

Thank you.

• (1615)

The Chair: Thank you.

We have a speakers list.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Chair, as I listened to the debate on the motion, which is essentially to ask for a study on the security screening process, I think it's really important, as we enter into this debate, that the work that is to be undertaken is not done in a way that vilifies a community group or sets what I would say are presumptions of community groups, and most particularly refugees, and I would say irregular refugees, irregular border-crossing refugees.

I've become increasingly concerned as we look at these issues at how misinformation and misrepresentation is being provided. When that happens, it hurts everyone and that is very concerning to me.

I don't oppose, on the face of it, looking at the screening process to see how things have gone over the last number of years. I don't, on the face of it, oppose that, but I think we need to be very mindful of that work and how it is to be done.

I think it's very important also that we examine the resources and tools that have been provided for the security screening process. We know that there has been an increase in influx with respect to that, and we need to put that in context.

I also think that, on the question around accountability mechanisms, and particularly with CBSA, there isn't one. I think there should be one, so we can look at all of these issues in a cohesive, comprehensive way, and in such a way that does not, I hope, just scapegoat particular groups or individuals.

To that end, Mr. Chair, I would like to amend the motion by adding that the study include the examination of resources and tools provided for security screening and to examine accountability mechanisms for departments tasked with security screening, including the CBSA.

I would also like to add, Mr. Chair, in terms of officials coming to the table, that we should, in fact, invite officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, the Canada Border Services Agency, CBSA, and the Immigration and Refugee Board, IRB. I think they should all be part of this study, if we're going to embark on this process, so that we can have a cohesive look at what's going on with those departments and the resources and tools

provided to them, to ensure we have a robust system within our various departments and a good accountability measure.

I know that CBSA is the only institution of its kind that does not have an oversight mechanism, and I find that challenging, to say the least. I think that should be incorporated into this review, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: The discussion is now shifting to the amendment. Perhaps you could say it one more time, as we don't have it in writing, so that the committee can understand what you had as the amendment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would add, "to examine resources and tools provided for security screening; to examine accountability mechanisms for departments tasked with security screening, including the Canada Border Services Agency; and that department officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency, and the Immigration and Refugee Board be included as officials to be invited to come to the Committee."

• (1620)

The Chair: I have Ms. Zahid and then Ms. Rempel.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Are we debating the amendment?

The Chair: Now it's the amendment. The amendment has to do with two things, particularly about resources and capacity for the agencies doing the screening as well as accountability with respect to them. Is that fair?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: The committee has started up a new study to examine the settlement services and how the newcomers integrate here in Canada. It's a very important study. We are also doing a report on the global migration trends, so we have a lot of important work happening already in this committee.

This study we are doing right now on the settlement services is very important because it allows us to examine how Canada ensures that newcomers integrate, get jobs, learn the language skills and become important community members.

The Chair: I'm going to ask the member to speak to the amendment, not the whole motion, at this point. We'll debate the motion in a moment. Right now we just need to speak to the amendment, which is about the security, the border agencies and the accountability.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: The border agencies are not under the purview of our committee. They fall under another committee.

We are responsible for immigration, not for screening and security. Those fall under a different committee.

The Chair: Madam Zahid, you're speaking against the amendment, as the purview would be SECU as opposed to CIMM.

Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, Ms. Kwan and then Mr. Sarai.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, first of all, I'll speak in favour of the amendment. I think Ms. Kwan makes a very good case, and that's actually demonstrated by the level of redacted documents that are reported on in these stories.

I also want to echo the comments that Ms. Kwan made at the front end of her statement. I was trying to get at this with my first comments, but I think Ms. Kwan put it more succinctly, which is that the more headlines that we have like this and the less action that Parliament takes, the more room there is for misinterpretation or generalities to be spread in the community.

This is why I started the motion by talking about the fact that Parliament has the purview to hold the government to account in these instances. We have academics in these articles saying Parliament should be reviewing this, and that's what we've done here. It's a very benignly worded motion to simply examine the adequacies of these processes so we can have facts on the table, and be working from a position of fact. What we have in these articles are redacted statements, and essentially more and more stories every day. I wouldn't be surprised if tomorrow there's another story that speaks to this particular issue, in fact.

To my colleague's comments about this not being the purview of this committee, the government can't appoint a minister who's in charge of this issue and have him before both SECU and CIMM for supplementary estimates and then argue that it's not the purview of this committee to look at the interface. That's weak sauce.

Second of all, the articles that I cited, to reiterate, show gaps between the processes for collecting information on screening and how that's fed into the immigration process. For example, there's this particular story that I showed, Mr. Chair, and I can put it in the record, "Botched handling of gangster refugee claimant exposes Canada's screening weaknesses". It's Abdullahi Hashi Farah. To me, it's the perfect example of where somebody has come in; the CBSA and the RCMP have highlighted information and that has not made it into the Immigration and Refugee Board consideration process.

As a parliamentarian, and as parliamentarians here, I think it's incumbent upon us to ask why this is happening. Can we fix it? Immigration is important to this country, and people expect us to get the "how" right so that they're not questioning "if". That's what I'm asking here.

With respect, the resettlement services study is very important, as is the other study, the work that we've had, but this is an emergent issue, where every single day there is another story about it. In my estimation, this is of utmost importance to this committee.

I'm actually willing, Mr. Chair, to sit outside of regularly scheduled committee hours to do both at the same time. As parliamentarians, the public pays our salary to do work like this. I would say that we could do both. We could keep the meetings as scheduled. I'm happy to sit weekends, evenings, whenever, to get this done. I don't accept the argument that we have other things to do—it's not adequate in this place. If anything, I would say that the security of Canadians and the integrity of our border screening processes would be of utmost importance to Canadians.

Therefore, I support the amendment, and I certainly reject the arguments made by my Liberal colleague.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, in response to Ms. Zahid's comments about my amendment being outside the purview of this committee, as we know, this motion is for a joint committee to take place. We know that the screening process, the work of the CBSA, is interconnected with the work of IRCC, particularly at the borders, and there are implications. We also know that in other immigration streams as well, the work of CBSA has implications for the immigration system.

In and of itself, if I were to move a motion to say we should study this just at CIMM without public safety, I think that would be inappropriate, and I would agree with that, but because these things are so intrinsically linked, if we're going to look at this issue in a cohesive way...that's why I bring up this issue in that context. It's meant to work in collaboration with the other department and to ensure that we have a system that Canadians can trust, a system with accountability measures in place, measures which I believe are lacking at the moment.

All these issues tie into a resource question. We know that when you have a demand, you have to resource it appropriately to make sure the work is done. Hence I think it would be appropriate for us to have this joint review to look at the resource aspect as well. My colleague Matthew Dubé is on the public safety committee—they will be looking at this issue as well. He has been on that committee for some time. That said, we have an opportunity, and I think that it would be important to take this opportunity to quash the misinformation that's being spread out there. There are people—by the way, some of them are in this very room—who spread misinformation, who insist on calling asylum-seekers illegals, and I think it's important that we correct the record whenever we can.

In addition, in situations where perhaps a security screening has failed the system, it would be good to clearly examine that, so we don't create an environment where an entire class of people are being misrepresented. I think if we allowed that to happen, it would be a tremendous disservice to everyone. I hope that's not the outcome of this work. That's the reason I support the motion, if for no other reason than to clear the air and to learn from the situation, and then to ensure that we reinforce in the hearts and minds of Canadians that the Canadian process can be trusted and that if action needs to be taken, action will be taken to protect the integrity of the system and reinforce Canadians' trust and faith in the government's work on this front.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have Mr. Sarai, Mr. Tilson, Mr. Tabbara and Ms. Rempel. Before we continue, I want to advise the committee that the same motion was presented in a public meeting of the public safety and national security committee. It was defeated at that committee, so this does make our discussion about having a joint meeting somewhat moot. They have decided not to hold a joint committee meeting. I think that's important information for the committee to have.

I think it does affect both the amendment and the motion itself, so I'm going to turn to the mover of the motion first and then the mover of the amendment to see whether they want any reconsideration of that, given that information, and then we'll go to Mr. Sarai.

•(1630)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I think it's disappointing that the public security committee would not want to look at this issue. I think that, of course, our committee is master of its own domain, and I would hope that my colleagues would understand the importance of this motion, given the fact that it seems there are stories day after day, and I'm absolutely positive that more stories will be coming. I think this is an opportunity for the government to show it is taking action in a neutral, fact-based way. Frankly, if this isn't done, I'm not sure what the government has to hide and why they wouldn't want Parliament to look at this at this point.

Again, this speaks in favour of the amendment. The amendment my colleague has proposed is talking about oversight and accountability, so to me, if anything, this decision strengthens the argument to have this meeting. I believe that we should still vote on it, and I implore my colleagues to support it.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, for that information.

I also just had my staff check with my colleague at the committee. It is my understanding that the motion was defeated so quickly that my colleague Matthew Dubé did not even have a chance to move the amendments. We were moving amendments at both ends, seeing as the motion was going to be appearing at both committees, and he didn't get a chance to even move the amendment.

This motion that we're debating, with the amendment, would be different from what was defeated at the other committee. I do think that it makes a difference with my amendment in terms of looking at these accountability measures and the resources needed to do this work and, if nothing else, for the government to demonstrate that the process is strong and to provide information to Canadians to reassure Canadians. I would like to suggest that this motion is different from the other one in light of the amendment that I have moved, Mr. Chair.

I would also remind committee members of Ms. Zahid's point. It's true that the resettlement study is a very important one, but I'd just remind committee members that this resettlement study was moved on February 6, 2018, approximately a year ago. We're only just getting around to it. It got bumped, as we know, by other work. Undertaking this proposed study doesn't mean it has to bump existing work. There's always a way to figure out how we can schedule things, as has been done before. If there is willingness to work collaboratively, I'm sure we can try to find a way to deal with that accordingly.

The Chair: I have Mr. Sarai, Mr. Tilson and Mr. Tabbara.

Before we do that, witnesses, I want to give you permission to stay, if you would like. This is a public meeting, and you're welcome to stay. However, you're also welcome to not stay. I will tell you that, in my experience, this could go on for a little bit. We also have another panel that was supposed to come on at 4:30 p.m. My apologies to them. I just wanted to alert you. You're welcome to stay, but I did want to give you that option.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Chair, I just want to say, I think the amendment goes to public safety. It has already been defeated, as stated, in the other committee. I don't think it's relevant in this committee. I don't think there's any room for it. Therefore, I would ask that we put the amendment to a vote, that we vote on the amendment and move on.

The Chair: I accept the sentiment of that; however, I'm pretty sure I can't.

While I have a speakers list, if the speakers list is on the amendment and you would like to speak to the amendment, we will continue on that. If you would prefer to speak to the motion, we could deal with the amendment first.

Mr. Tilson, Mr. Tabbara and Madam Boucher.

•(1635)

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, of course, there's nothing to stop the public safety committee, when they hear our excellent arguments, from reconsidering their position and studying this. I understand what your sentiment is.

The whole issue of this thing, the motion and the amendment, is to keep our borders safe. With the myriad comments being made by the media, the media is concerned. I can tell you that people I've spoken to in my riding are concerned about the safety of our borders. The screening is part of that process, so it would be most important for both committees to study this, notwithstanding that they have rejected a similar motion, but that could be reconsidered.

To comment on Ms. Zahid's remark about resettlement services, to repeat what Ms. Kwan said, the motion was made a long, long time ago for this study to take place. This study will be the eighth time, in my memory, that settlement services have been debated. There was a report by you, Mr. Chairman, on settlement services. There was a report by your predecessor, Mr. Wrzesnewskyj, when he was chair, on settlement services. There was a report by me, when I was chairman, on settlement services, and there were a number of others. This is the eighth time.

I'm not trying to downplay the issue of settlement services. It's a most important issue that we need to talk about. But as Ms. Rempel has said, this is an emergency.

I say this to you, Ms. Zahid, on comments with respect to the amendment and indeed the motion. This is an emergency because of the concern as to whether our borders are safe. Many in this country think they're not safe and that people are coming into this country. If that's false, well, a study would reveal that. Either we need to do something about it, we need to take some action to stop the people from coming in who are up to no good, criminally or otherwise, who are terrorists, or if that is not true, we need to deal with that too. If the statements that are being made by the media are not true, we need to deal with that. So, I support the amendment and I support the motion.

The Chair: I would just remind members of the committee to attempt to address their comments to other members through me. That's a good way to do it.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I also want to agree with my colleagues that I believe the amendment and the motion would be within the confines of public safety. I think they would be able to talk more about the biometrics checks, the health checks and security checks that are rigorously put in place at our borders.

I want to quickly talk about the Conservative government. Back in 2015, there was an article on CTV News. It said, “The Conservative government announced in the recent federal budget its intention to slash 19,200 jobs from the federal public service by 2015 as part of its effort to cut \$5.2 billion in spending.” Although the Conservatives are talking about a certain situation, at the same time, when it was in their mandate, when they were in government, they cut thousands of jobs, cut millions of dollars. Also, “CBSA has been told to cut its budget by \$143 million over the next three years. More than 1,100 CBSA employees were given notice Wednesday that their jobs are now on the line.”

It's pretty rich for the Conservatives to talk about border security when they never funded—all they did was cut—border security; whereas our government has invested heavily in border security biometrics checks. You can hear that day after day in question period when our minister is taking questions and talking about all the measures that have been put in place since our government came into power in 2015.

• (1640)

[Translation]

The Chair: We will now hear from Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): No, I'm fine.

[English]

The Chair: No? Then seeing no speakers, I'm going to call a vote on the—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair, I think I was on the list, wasn't I?

First of all, again, Chair—and I'm imploring my colleagues—the Prime Minister has seen fit to appoint a minister who has appeared before our committee, for whom we've been unable to ascertain his purview, but ostensibly sits between two departments, so I do feel that, through you, Chair, the comments that my colleague made are somewhat irrelevant, especially given that there's now a minister who straddles both of these departments.

With regard to spending taxpayer dollars as a metric, to Mr. Tabbara's point, Chair, what I find is the government—he mentioned question period—often uses the taxpayer dollar as a metric. We'll ask how they are making the streets safer in Canada, and they will stand up and say that they have spent x amount of money. I am certain that the Liberal government is more expensive. I'm certain that they are spending more money. That is not in question. I think that the metric we're looking for is not how much money they can spend, but how safe Canada's streets are and how our immigration process is working. On the comment that was made, I could refer my colleague, through you, Chair, to....

First of all, I'm going to go back. I believe that a lot of the CBSA components in 2015 were programs that came to their natural conclusion. I would say that it is incumbent upon Parliament and

government to look at programs that come to their natural conclusion that might not be as effective. I think that's reasonable, but for the CBSA this year in their departmental performance report, and I'm looking to colleagues, I believe there was a metric on the number of goods and people that were detected that might pose a threat to the country. In their audit it was found that only 3% of the time the CBSA was able to do this. We have multiple news stories about gaps occurring.

My colleague's comments that using taxpayer dollars, expending more resources, and getting less results ostensibly reported by the media in terms of public safety would be problematic in terms of accounting to taxpayers, and actually proves Ms. Kwan's point on this amendment even more, that there should be accountability on how we are spending tax dollars. It is not acceptable to spend tax dollars and then get poor results in terms of anything, but specifically public safety. I have no doubt that this government thinks expensive programs are a metric in and of themselves, but what we should be looking at as a committee is whether or not the money that we're spending is actually working.

Actually, my colleague has just proved my point for me, that if the government is going to brag about spending tax dollars, going into deficit and raising taxes, then we should, as a parliamentary committee, examine whether or not things are safe.

I have a feeling, Mr. Chair, I know where this is going, given the result at SECU, given what my colleagues have said here. I think it's unfortunate that we can't, in a neutral setting, look at this issue, but I'm sure it will be a decision that will be recorded and noted in the Canadian public for some time to come.

I will rest my case on that.

The Chair: All right.

I no longer have a speakers list. I want to call the question with respect to the amendment, which is to extend the study to include border agencies and their resourcing, as well as their accountability.

(Amendment negated)

The Chair: We'll go to the main motion, and I don't see any speakers so I'm going to call—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I just want to be on the record, Chair, through you, to refute Mr. Tabbara's point. This is from CBSA president John Ossowski. The actual stat is that the previous government increased the number of CBSA border guards by 26%. Mr. Ossowski said:

One quick example to explain any drop in the estimates might be that there was project funding provided for several large projects as part of the Beyond the Border action plan. Those projects have come to completion, so as they're done and move to a steady state status, the overall budget of the agency drops.

We did increase the number of border guards by 26%. Now it's up to this government to be held accountable for their record. Today, should my colleagues vote against this motion, I would ask why they wouldn't want their government to be accountable to Canadians on the issue of screening.

•(1645)

The Chair: Can I just clarify for the record where that testimony was?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yes, that was in the public safety committee, I believe.

The Chair: It was the public safety committee.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I believe, but I can get that source for you, Chair.

The Chair: Okay.

I believe it was public safety. I used to chair it.

Mrs. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Chair, we all want to keep Canadians safe, and the safety and security of Canadians should not be subject to this politicking. This is not the time to spread fear and division by scapegoating the most vulnerable. My colleague opposite is trying to create fear among Canadians to be afraid of newcomers. The fact is, Canadians should feel that their safety and security system is very strong, and the safety of Canadians will never be compromised.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, that was very disappointing. We have in front of us a motion that my colleague from the NDP has supported, which talks about the need to talk to Canadians and assure them of the integrity of a system that underpins the support for immigration in this country, something we all support. I support immigration. I support immigration done in a lawful, orderly and compassionate manner.

By making that comment—and I want to read the wording of the motion for people who may be watching this online later. I want to read the wording of the motion one more time:

That...the Committee meet jointly with the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security to study whether gaps in the process of security screening for persons entering Canada have risen over the last three years...at official points of entry and between points of entry, to identify the causes and impacts of these gaps, and propose potential solutions; that departmental officials and Ministers from both Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness be present for at least one meeting; that officials...from the United States...be invited to attend; that these meetings be held before March 1st, 2019....

Mr. Chair, there is nothing in that motion that does what my colleague says it does. There's nothing. All it does is ask whether or not a process is working. I think, especially in this election year, we have to be very careful about separating parliamentary scrutiny of processes that underpin what has been so good for this country. We are a nation of immigrants who stand on the traditional territory of first nations people. We will always be a nation of immigrants.

The question is how, and getting to that point correctly requires Parliament in a neutral setting such as this committee to look at issues like those we have today. This isn't me saying this. The CBC wrote this article. The CBC wrote this headline "Botched handling of gangster refugee claimant exposes Canada's screening weaknesses".

If my colleague wants to make the argument that she just made, is the CBC fearmongering? Is that the accusation here?

I'm so tired of this. On behalf of Canadians who day after day write all of our offices and say, "Get it together", watching 40,000 people illegally enter our country while 65,000 privately sponsored refugees languish.... There is a question of policy here. We should be debating it. Trying to shut down debate by calling Canadians names, by trying to divide us based on that type of rhetoric is irresponsible and is actually what's leading to the polarization of our country. That is what's leading to the polarization of our country.

Through you, Chair, Ms. Zahid, that was an irresponsible statement. I look to you, through you, Chair, for an apology on that, because there is nothing in this motion that does anything you said it does. I challenge you to find one thing in that motion that says what you think it says.

This is the CBC reporting the story. It is our goal as parliamentarians to hold this government to account. I am tired of being called those names. I am. I take offence to it, and I take offence to it on behalf of every single Canadian who has these questions. They pay our salaries, Chair, to answer these questions, and voting down a parliamentary study to look at it, and calling us names....

Through you, Chair, the member opposite called us a name. That's not what we're here to do. We're here to scrutinize the government's policies, the efficacy of its objectives and taxpayer funding. We're also here, I would hope, united in having a country that welcomes immigrants, where we can have vigorous policy debates on how we do that, but that we don't move to the question of "if".

By calling Canadians names on benign motions designed to look at government policies and hold them to account for the expenditure of Canadian tax dollars, we are actually wandering into the territory of "if", and it's not this side of the table that's doing it. It's that side of the table, and that's irresponsible.

I am proud that we moved this motion today. I'm proud to do my job on behalf of Canadians by asking these questions.

•(1650)

We will not put up with that type of divisive rhetoric any longer. This committee should vote in favour of this motion. If this government has nothing to hide, if everything is rosy, then these ministers should be in front of committee telling us what they're doing to deal with these headlines. Voting against this motion is supporting something very concerning.

Chair, I will just ask, can we not, just in the spirit of collegiality and our job as parliamentarians, support a motion that asks for transparency in the government and asks for them to report on metrics and then to potentially come up with policy solutions? That's what Canadians pay us to do.

If I could get an apology, that would be great. If I could get my colleague opposite to point to one thing in this motion, in this particular motion, Chair, that's in front of us, that suggests what she said, great; otherwise, ladies and gentlemen: the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I was so hoping that we wouldn't deteriorate into this kind of situation, but I guess I was being too hopeful.

What is important here is to put things in context. The truth of the matter is that the Conservative Party has been vilifying refugees. They've been calling them illegals, even though the Canadian law is very clear. The Canadian law states that those who cross over irregularly for the purposes of making an asylum claim are not committing a criminal act.

I think it is in that context, perhaps, where that comment might have come from from Ms. Zahid, not that I want to put words in her mouth, but that's the context in which this is cast. I do worry about it in terms of this motion, that it will spin into that kind of thing to vilify refugees in that way.

That said, that's why I opened my comments by saying that I hope this is not what we're doing. I hope that, as we work together, the purpose of this is to examine our processes to make sure that the integrity of the process is protected, to make sure that it's properly resourced, to make sure that it has the tools that it needs to do its job, and then, of course, to have the accountability mechanism that is required.

We know that the CBSA is the only such institution that does not have public accountability. That, to me, is problematic, not only on the security screening, but on many other fronts as well. If we're going to look at all of these issues holistically, that is the reason I moved the amendment: to put it all in that larger context of what we're dealing with.

Mr. Chair, I want to be very clear on my intention, because I know that comments are thrown from different sides almost as a screen or a shield, for whatever purpose. I want to be very clear about the reasons I have moved my amendment and why it is important to do this work in that context. It is not my intention to allow for an approach where people can use this process to vilify a group.

Sometimes situations happen, and we need to look at that to see what has happened there to see how we can fix it. It's not to say that the idea is to close the borders, for example, as the Conservatives have suggested, by saying that we should apply the safe third country agreement to the entire Canadian border. I do not support that, categorically, and that is not the approach that I wish to see us undertake, not only for this study but for any other work we do, because when we do our work in that way, we are doing a disservice to humanity, and that is a shame for all of us.

• (1655)

The Chair: I have Mr. Ayoub and Ms. Rempel on the list.

Before you continue, I want to let you know that if this motion was only to hold a single meeting and was on the issue about CBSA and accountability, I would have ruled it out of order, because that is not the purview of this committee and it's not within our mandate. Our mandate is given to us by Parliament. It has very specific roles that we can undertake. It's not within our purview. However, because the motion called for a joint study and it is allowed that we could do a joint study on matters that do engage two committees, I did allow it.

I will repeat that the motion has been defeated by the other committee. I take Mr. Tilson's point that they could reconsider after our very brilliant arguments here. However, right now, as it stands, the other committee has declined to do this study with us and has not indicated that they would reconsider that motion.

Right now, the motion is in order. However, it would cease to be in order if it were a single study.

Is Mr. Ayoub no longer on the list?

Are you on the list, Mr. Ayoub?

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Yes, I'm on the list.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair, it's very hard to stay impassive and not say anything. I'll try to limit my comments.

I admire passion, especially that of my colleague, who prides herself on defending the interests of Canadians and says she is outraged that her motion does not seem to be moving forward. At the same time, she says that she is in favour of immigration and motherhood. Ultimately, it's all fine rhetoric. And now we are being told that for our part, we're creating division.

May I remind my colleague that there were 167,000 family reunification files waiting to be processed when we came to power. This means that members of their families in Canada were waiting on 167,000 prospective Canadians to join them. On average, these people had to wait seven years for their file to be processed.

You were talking about funding, but this is not about money. Rather, we must understand the intent that is behind this. Given these fact-based figures and statistics, one has to conclude that the government had no means to reunite these families at the time. For 10 years, immigration was certainly not a priority for your government.

For our part, however, we quadrupled the number of people who could apply. We increased that number from 5,000 to 20,000. Moreover, we decreased the wait time from seven years to two. I think the intention is quite good.

You tabled your motion while witnesses were present. I'm embarrassed for them and for the Canadians who may be watching what is going on here. We're conducting a serious study on immigration and on the settlement and integration of immigrants. We want the organizations that receive government funds to that end to explain what they are doing right. They do very good work. We want to see what more we can do, as a government.

However, you introduced a motion with no regard for collegiality. We were never apprised of this motion. In addition, you introduced it during the time allocated to debate. We are wasting the witnesses' time, when they took the trouble to travel here, and while they are still here listening to us. I thank them for that, even though I am embarrassed by this situation. You know that in the end this motion will not pass. It will not pass for the simple reason that its underlying intentions are false and do not align with the wording.

It goes without saying that we want to improve security. It was never this government's intention to neglect border security. That said, quite honestly, I need to remind you that our committee is focused on immigration. There is another committee that examines public safety issues. It will deal with these matters. We reject this motion. That committee may consider it.

We have studies to carry out. We have set our priorities, but we can't manage to do those studies. The last time Minister Hussen was here, you made us waste the whole hour. We weren't even able to put questions to the minister. This was not our fault, but yours. You were busy raising trivial issues during the time when we could have asked questions.

I'll stop here. I know others will certainly want to comment. For my part, I have to say without hesitation that I will be voting against this motion.

• (1700)

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have a few comments, Chair.

First of all, through you, Chair, my colleague mentioned that he had never heard of this before. I would advise him and his staff to perhaps become aware of the processes that we have in place through the clerk on notices of motion. He might want to become acquainted with that.

In terms of it being a waste of time for the opposition to do their job and hold the ministers to account and ask for studies on things like screening processes, I think there would be many Canadians who would take offence to that.

In terms of waiting lists, for the parents and grandparents program, in 2006, the Conservative government at the time inherited a waiting list of 100,000 cases. We put in place the super visa program and limited the number of spaces on a no-hope waiting list. When the Prime Minister came into office, Chair, the number of cases, I believe, that were on the waiting list had been reduced to about 25,000 or 26,000.

What this government has done is increase the number of spots on a no-hope waiting list, and a waiting list is not the same as access to the country.

The Chair: I'd just remind the member about relevance and to keep on this—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Well, I'm speaking to—

The Chair: You've done a very good job today of being on point.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair, you allowed him to talk about this, so it's fair to rebut. Come on.

Mr. David Tilson: You allowed him to grind on. You allowed him to go.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To my colleague's point about terminology and vilifying people, there is a policy discussion that this country needs to have. My colleague has one position on it, and I'm not sure what the Liberal government's position is on it. My colleague raised the issue of entries from the United States and whether people.... My colleague, I think, is arguing that people who

are in the United States should be able to enter Canada and claim asylum.

I would argue that people entering from the United States should not be able to claim asylum, given the safe third country agreement. I don't actually know where the Liberal government stands on this because, on one hand, the Prime Minister stands up in the House of Commons and says the safe third country agreement should apply, but on the other hand, he's allowing people to enter the country and claim asylum from the United States of America. This is a public policy discussion we need to have. We all have different positions on it.

On the point of vilification, there are large signs at every part of the border which say it is illegal to cross there. Under Canada's Customs Act, it is illegal to enter the country. The issue is whether—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If you're not claiming asylum—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Chair, decorum.

The issue is that those charges are stayed if somebody claims asylum. That's why these two discussions are so important to have together.

I do not believe, and the Conservative Party of Canada does not believe, that somebody who has reached the United States of America or upstate New York should be able to claim asylum in Canada. From what I understand—I'm not clear—the NDP believes that they should. Those are two different opinions. We can discuss that. But to articulate the action of illegally crossing the border and violating the Canada Customs Act as vilification is hyperbole.

I just wanted to point out that, just to be very clear, my colleague Mr. Ayoub said that the government wants to improve service and secure our borders. Then why would we not have this study? Why would the Liberals not want this study? If that is their goal, then why would we not be examining this process here? He said—again, it's this contradiction—“We want to do this but we're not going to review it in committee.”

At this point in Parliament, Chair, I actually thought that the Liberals would support this because this was an opportunity for them to put it out, but instead we've got this.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Zahid.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: No.

• (1705)

The Chair: Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Chair, I'm just going to make one very quick comment, so that we're all very clear on the question around illegal versus irregular. It's true that there is signage which says that crossing the border at the unofficial points of entry is illegal, and that is in the case where you cross over without the intent and the purpose of making an asylum claim.

If I crossed over to the United States today with no intention of making an asylum claim whatsoever in the United States, it would be illegal and I would be arrested. However, if I was seeking asylum for whatever reason, the Canadian law, under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, states very clearly that it is not a criminal act.

When we call those individuals who seek asylum and cross over from the United States at the irregular border crossings “illegals”, we are vilifying those asylum seekers in a way that is detrimental to humanity. That is my point, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Seeing no other speakers, I'm going to call the question now on the motion, which stands. It was not amended.

Mr. David Tilson: We want a recorded vote.

(Motion negatived: nays 5; yeas 3)

The Chair: That completes Ms. Rempel's time at 60 minutes.

We're going to take a brief pause.

I'm going to suggest that we do have time to get statements from our second panel of witnesses.

To the other panel, if you would like to hear them, that's fine, but I'm afraid we don't have time to ask you questions today.

Because we have three witnesses here who have come to join us, we'll take just a two-minute break and then we'll hear three seven-minute statements.

• (1705) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1710)

The Chair: I'm going to call the meeting back to order.

I'm going to thank our witnesses. I'm afraid there probably won't be time for questions today. However, we will get your statements read into the record, and we may call you back if the committee has questions that they would like to ask you.

Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. Ms. Rempel isn't back yet. Are we waiting or should we resume?

Mr. David Tilson: She'll be back.

The Chair: You can start. She has an important discussion out in the hall.

Thank you for being here, Mr. Tilson.

We're going to start with Mr. Dyck from the Mennonite Central Committee Canada.

Welcome.

Mr. Brian Dyck (National Migration and Resettlement Program Coordinator, Mennonite Central Committee Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to speak to this committee on the issue of immigrant settlement services in Canada.

Since 1979, Mennonite Central Committee has facilitated sponsorship and settlement of more than 10,000 refugees from

around the world. To do this, MCC and our constituent groups interact with settlement-providing organizations, or SPOs, in the five provinces from B.C. to Ontario on a regular basis. I would say that generally we, as MCC, have a good working relationship with SPOs, and we appreciate the Government of Canada's funding for immigration settlement services.

As I have talked with refugee resettlement advocates from around the world, I realize how fortunate we are to have such a well-developed immigration settlement structure. However, there are some challenges and, of course, there's always room for improvement in anything we do.

In checking with my colleagues and my MCC provincial offices, the consensus seems to be that we, as sponsors, and they, as professional settlement agencies, do not always understand each other. As a result, we don't always know what collaboration looks like.

As one who works in a faith-based organization, I was interested to see a report from Kitchener's Centre for Community Based Research last January, which talked about the relationship between faith-based organizations and settlement agencies. The report, entitled “Faith & Settlement Partnerships: Setting Immigrants and Canada Up for Success”, makes the point that many newcomers to Canada are more religious than Canadian-born residents; therefore, they often turn to a place of worship as their first connecting point and do not always connect with government-funded settlement services. The report contends that more and better relationships between faith groups and settlement agencies can be good for newcomers to Canada and the integration process.

The report found that these partnerships are already happening. The study found that 81% of settlement agencies surveyed said that they work with faith groups, and 78% of faith groups report working with settlement agencies. Nevertheless, there are barriers to these partnerships.

As I looked at the barriers identified in the report, they rang true to what I have heard from sponsoring groups over the years. I would suggest that it is not just faith groups that experience these barriers to good collaboration, and I want to highlight just a few.

To begin with, the report found what I would call a lack of understanding of each other between faith groups and settlement agencies. For example, this can be manifested in a skepticism by settlement agencies about the motives of faith groups: Whether they are just out to get more converts is perhaps a suspicion that the settlement sector may have of faith-based groups.

This lack of understanding, and even trust, can go both ways. While the report doesn't pick up on this, I have heard people in sponsoring groups question the commitment of settlement workers, because they are professional staff and perhaps not as personally invested in their clients as a volunteer might be.

I don't think that either of those perceptions is generally true. When we see those, good communication is needed so that a level of trust can be created.

A second area of possible discord has to do with the understanding about what each side brings to a partnership. Sometimes sponsors lack training. I've certainly seen that, and I've heard the frustration of settlement workers who see what one of my MCC colleagues has called "helicopter sponsors". They are sponsors who are doing everything for the newcomer and often making them more dependent rather than independent.

On the other side, sponsors can feel like their contributions are not appreciated. Sponsors have a lot to offer in volunteer time and social capital that can provide broad links to the community. That may not always be recognized or appreciated in settlement agencies.

These barriers are not insurmountable, but it takes work to develop a good working relationship. So how do we deal with these barriers?

First, good partnerships require good communication. However, there are issues of privacy which can stand in the way of good communication. Settlement workers have an obligation to keep information about their clients private. This is important and should not be eroded. Resettled refugees are often very vulnerable in their new homes. Indeed, there may be times when the settlement worker learns something about the sponsor which is problematic.

However, sponsors have an obligation to support the people they are sponsoring. Sponsors and settlement workers can each come with valuable insights into the process of integration, but they need to find a way to communicate about the challenges of developing a strategy together.

• (1715)

It would be important for IRCC to sit down with the settlement sector and representatives of sponsors to work out a protocol, making sure that important information can be shared between settlement workers and sponsors and not compromise newcomers' privacy.

Second is that good collaboration takes planning. The advice sponsors get from IRCC is to contact a settlement service as they develop their settlement plan and shortly before the arrival of the refugee. I've done this, particularly with joint assistant sponsorships where there's a clear partnership defined between the sponsors, the resettlement assistance program sponsors, the settlement-providing organization and the sponsor, and that has been a great experience. This pre-arrival meeting is an opportunity to define roles and to define tasks. However, as far as I know, meetings with sponsors do not get recorded in iCARE and there is no funding for these important meetings. I've wondered if it would be helpful if pre-arrival meetings with sponsors could be tracked in iCARE and also funding provided for the SPOs for these meetings.

Building good working relationships, partnerships, can take a lot of energy and time. Sometimes I think both sponsors and settlement workers wonder if it's worth the effort. I have wondered, though, if IRCC could act as a matchmaker between sponsors and SPOs. This may at times feel like an arranged marriage, but arranged marriages can work. It's worth the effort. It can improve this relationship, and I believe newcomers will integrate better into our communities and, in turn, our communities will benefit from the gifts and talents they bring to Canada.

Thank you.

The Chair: Very good, that was right on time.

Ms. Stachova.

Ms. Olga Stachova (Chief Executive Officer, MOSAIC): Honourable Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of MOSAIC, a B.C.-based immigrant-serving organization.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are meeting today on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

MOSAIC has been providing services to newcomers in B.C. for 42 years. Our 350-member staff, 700 volunteers and 300 contractors deliver services in person from 26 locations as well as online. We provide services to newcomers of all ages and all genders. These include settlement services, English-language and cultural competency training, employment services, interpretation and translation, community outreach, as well as specialized gender and victim support counselling services. We are also a sponsorship agreement holder and we support Canada's refugee resettlement efforts.

MOSAIC's services are part of Canada's settlement and integration system, which serves as a model for many countries around the world. We appreciate the efforts that the federal government makes to strengthen the system through setting multi-year immigration levels with corresponding funding, reallocating resources in response to emerging needs, and developing and streamlining the pre-arrival services. We are also grateful to our partnership with the Province of British Columbia in providing settlement support for newcomers with temporary status, thus ensuring universal access to services, which is a top priority for the settlement sector. However, as my colleague mentioned, there is always room for improvement. I would like to share with you recommendations that, in MOSAIC's opinion, would improve the economic outcomes of immigrants.

To meet our growing labour shortages, Canada needs immigrants. Employers across the country sound the alarm that they cannot find a workforce that is qualified, and yet immigrants in general are more likely to be in jobs that underutilize their education, skills and experience. A report done by the Conference Board of Canada estimated that immigrants would earn up to \$12.7 billion more annually if their education and experience were recognized.

MOSAIC has been delivering employment programs, in partnership with the Government of B.C. and the Government of Canada, for over 25 years. Working with thousands of employers and employees, we have learned that the most successful programs are the ones designed and delivered jointly with employers.

A lack of Canadian work experience remains one of the most significant barriers to finding commensurate employment. Many employers think it's too risky to hire someone new to Canada. There is already a robust framework in place in Canada supporting young people in gaining work experience and successfully transitioning into the labour market through co-op placements, internships and employer incentives. We would strongly recommend adopting these models to provide relevant Canadian work experience for newcomers.

Given the pace at which technological advancements are changing the nature of jobs and the skill sets required for emerging jobs, we need to recognize the role that employers will increasingly play in on-the-job training. In partnership with the B.C. Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology, MOSAIC delivered successful pilots engaging employers in the designing of training programs, augmenting technical training with training on Canadian workplace culture, followed by on-the-job experience where employers were able to test drive talent. Whether it's working with the BC Alliance for Manufacturing or the BC Care Providers Association, 85% of trainees landed full-time positions in their field at the end of the program. The short-term nature of these pilots doesn't allow for meaningful engagement of employers and for ongoing training opportunities for newcomers leading directly to jobs. We recommend creating a permanent funding envelope for this type of industry-led training responding to market needs.

Working with newcomers with complex employment needs requires a different approach. MOSAIC uses intensive case management, working with individuals to identify their skills and abilities and then finding employers who are willing to make accommodations and adapt their job requirements. We would like to underline the need for this personalized wraparound support when considering employment programs for newcomers with multiple barriers to employment.

Successful integration of newcomers requires active engagement by communities and employers. That is why settlement service providers need to not only deliver direct services but also be able to invest in outreach and in building relationships with communities and employers. Integration is a two-way process. The more awareness we are able to build among employers, the more successful newcomers will be in their economic integration.

Family reunification is crucial to the economic success of newcomers. Long delays and barriers in the processing of spouses and children, as well as parents and grandparents, leave families divided and more fragile. This is especially important for the economic integration and prosperity of newcomer women, since parents and grandparents could take on child care tasks and enable newcomer women to participate in training and in the labour force. We would like to encourage the government to continue its efforts to increase opportunities for timely family reunification.

● (1720)

Employment is a critical aspect of settlement. However, having a job doesn't mean that all settlement needs are met. It is important to have services available to address the full range of personal and family issues related to integration to ensure that newcomers can maintain their employment and progress economically.

MOSAIC has a long-standing partnership with the Law Foundation of B.C., enabling us to provide legal advocacy for immigration, poverty and family issues to augment our wide range of settlement services. MOSAIC also engages over 700 volunteers, many of whom serve as mentors by helping newcomers not only maintain employment, but also grow their careers.

One of MOSAIC's key priorities is to develop our clients into leaders, giving them a voice and creating opportunities for applying their expertise in shaping and directing services in their communities, municipalities and provinces through access to seats at advisory committees, boards of directors, taking part in community consultations or participating in political organizations.

Increasing civic engagement and involvement of newcomers requires access to training, networks and opportunities. As the committee considers the scope of settlement services, MOSAIC would like to see civic engagement as an important step in the settlement continuum.

In closing, I would like to encourage the committee to focus on recommendations that recognize immigrants not only for the education, skills and experience they bring to Canada, but also for the determination, initiative, resilience and adaptability they have demonstrated in successfully moving to a new country. There might be many things they need to learn about life in Canada, but what they can contribute if given a fair chance is much greater.

Thank you.

● (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Daoud, are you speaking on behalf of The Refugee Centre?

Mr. Abdulla Daoud (Executive Director, The Refugee Centre): Yes.

The Chair: Very good. Welcome. It's good to see you again.

Mr. Abdulla Daoud: Thank you.

Honourable Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a brief and appear on behalf of The Refugee Centre.

Over the past three years, our not-for-profit organization has been engaged with new and innovative ways to tackle integration in Canada. Before our launch in 2015, we studied the landscapes of services available to these populations and decided to contribute in our own way. Our centre operates on three main principles: academic, social and economic integration.

Through our academic integration programs, we were able to admit over 150 refugees into post-secondary educational institutions in our first year alone. We found that many refugees were missing key prerequisites to achieve a higher level of education in Montreal, and that was IELTS and TOEFL prep. As soon as we offered these classes, we were able to achieve the aforementioned numbers.

Aside from our academic solutions, we also decided to put our skills toward developing and creating technological solutions to better integration and immigration as a whole. Our two major technologies are LUNA AI and our pre-arrival services portal.

In 2017 and 2018, we developed an application called LUNA AI to aid refugee claimants by leveraging AI conversational abilities with newcomers through an interactive chatbot. Currently, claimants can chat with LUNA in any language of choice and in turn, LUNA will control the conversation in order to extract information needed from the claimant and then automatically fill out the necessary forms in French or English. This ensures that the claimants are actually filling out the necessary information and are guided towards the correct resources. LUNA's main goals are to potentially save time for refugee claimants, legal representatives and government workers.

We are currently expanding LUNA to aid more than just refugee claimants but all newcomers in many bureaucratic processes including work permit applications, health card and driver's licence applications, and immigration forms from various streams of immigration in Canada. We're aiming for LUNA to add value in terms of data integrity, automation, innovating client service delivery, collecting data trends, and eliminating fraud, as with LUNA we can better track where users are struggling or not understanding certain questions. Furthermore it provides the correct information to users as many newcomers are taken advantage of and given incorrect information as they are not aware of their legal rights nor their obligations to Canada throughout the immigration process. LUNA would therefore potentially limit the effect of crooked immigration practices throughout the country.

Our second technology that's currently being developed is our pre-arrival services portal. From our research we noticed that immigrants and sponsored refugees have anywhere between 12 and 24 months to prepare for arrival to Canada. Therefore, we've created a social network portal geared to immigrants, refugees and prospective newcomers. This web application aims to help newcomers transition into their new life in Canada before they even arrive. We aim to centralize all the services available for newcomers in one place for easy access and also to create a space where newcomers can interconnect and help one another. A user can create a profile, join communities that they're interested in, and also register for services that will be integrated directly into the web application. These services can be either governmental or non-governmental in nature.

The application will then gather data about the user and their time spent on the application. This will include tracking questions they need the most help with and the services they find the most helpful. The data will then be used to provide immigrants better choices and suggested services thus creating a proof and methodology for integration based on the data we've gathered.

We hope to also locate services that are either being underutilized, over-utilized or no longer needed. Some key advantages or examples

of the services will be the ability for them to understand what services will be available to them before they even land in Canada. Newcomers can prepare in advance for their housing situation, what schools are like, what the registration process is, and the average cost associated with their city of choice. They'll have onboarding guidance for what to expect in terms of work, labour and entrepreneurial standards, as well as financial literacy education, enabling them to know which banks better suit their financial situation and how our banking system works. In our experience dealing with newcomers, there are many services and tasks they could have done before entering Canada that would have prepared them better in terms of integration.

Last, we would like to shed light on our tech education programs through our social innovation catalyst called DevBloc. DevBloc acts as a technology and entrepreneurial lab to aid newcomers in tech education and building their own businesses alongside Canadians. In order to prepare the incoming refugee and immigrant population in Canada for the booming tech economy, we started a programming school. This programming school educates refugees and Canadians on the most in-demand coding languages available in industry today. Alongside our partners in industry, we give these workshops throughout the week. Towards the end, the teams and the classes build their own programs to either expand their own start-ups or expand their profile in industry.

• (1730)

Alongside DevBloc, we also host an annual hackathon where we team up with different organizations to tackle social issues. This past year, we teamed up with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada where the IRCC presented us with three challenges. We're happy to say that we solved all three technological challenges in just 24 hours, proving what the impact of collaboration between grassroots organizations such as ours and government can really do.

This brings us to our three recommendations.

One is for government to work more closely with grassroots organizations to improve client delivery services to newcomers. These organizations deal with the concerns more directly.

Two is to take advantage of the technological advances today to better deliver these services and track their effectiveness on the incoming population.

Three is to prepare newcomers for the upcoming economy. While the current trends are promising, it is a safer and stronger bet to tap into the entrepreneurial spirit of these newcomers. This can be done by investing in incubators and technology labs geared toward newcomers such as ours.

Thank you very much. I look forward to any questions, hopefully.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I've just used my chair's prerogative to make a decision that we'll give each party three minutes to ask a question or two.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here. Sorry that we went a little bit over time. We had less time for questions, but thank you for all the work that you do in helping newcomers succeed in our country and in our communities.

My first question will be for Brian Dyck.

What is your organization's experience when it comes to foreign credentials and newcomers' skill sets? How do you match that when a newcomer comes in? They may have had 10-plus years' experience in a certain field. What are some of the things, best practices, that you've worked on to match employees?

Mr. Brian Dyck: Generally, the people we're bringing in do not have a lot of experience. They tend to be low-skilled. Certainly, matching up jobs with the people and their skills is a challenge. I've certainly heard of credentialing problems, but we haven't dealt much with that because we haven't settled a lot of people with credentials, to be honest.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I would ask Mr. Daoud if he could comment on that as well.

Mr. Abdulla Daoud: Yes. For example, we've had a lot of people who come with tech education backgrounds, especially in the engineering sector. The problem, and this is a common problem, is industry and institutions only recognize Canadian education or North American education.

The best way of going about it is getting them into what we call one-year post-graduate degree programs or diplomas to fast-track their equivalency. They usually perform very well. It wouldn't reduce the amount of time and it would only take one year. There are our continuing education programs that are being offered in universities around us that we take advantage of as well.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Ms. Stachova, could you comment as well?

Ms. Olga Stachova: In B.C., we have a number of programs that support newcomers in, again, recognizing credentials, getting additional training and a pathway to jobs, even support on the job. They're called career paths. They're delivered jointly through the B. C. government and the support of the federal government. They are in specific areas, as there are four or five specific areas that we target.

Then there's the employment program of B.C. that has something similar for all citizens, except newcomers might not necessarily be eligible for all the services.

There are some good practices where we can provide a path in certain specifications. What we are trying to propose is a step further, the next challenge of potentially finding the employment even if the credentials were recognized, and having the opportunity to actually practise and impress the employer.

•(1735)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey (Fredericton, Lib.): Just building on that—sorry, it's rapid fire—do you have any experience in not just working with federal government but provincial governments and professional colleges or professional accrediting societies that would have a role in better recognizing foreign credentials? Even though it's not necessarily the purview of this committee, do you have any advice on that front?

Ms. Olga Stachova: We would have not necessarily credentials.... For example, in one of the programs we did with the BC Care Providers Association, we actually delivered it with a college that has designed with us and with the employers' program that a cohort would go through and then move into jobs where they actually apply on the job what they learned. That's one of the examples of working with an employer association around the common need and working with colleges.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to ask the three witnesses for comments on language training. There's evidence from the IRCC and from newcomers themselves which says that language training is failing for a large number of people. If you agree, what do you think is behind all this and what can the government do to improve the success rate for language training for newcomers?

We'll start with you, Mr. Dyck.

Mr. Brian Dyck: Language learning is different for many different people. I think developing different strategies for different learning styles is an important thing to think about. Some people learn better while they're at work. Having programs where language can be learned in a work setting is one good practice I've seen and I think should be considered. But, yes, it's certainly a challenge.

The other thing that I think volunteers and sponsors bring is a chance to interact with people who speak English or French in their community as a first language more often. That interaction, I think, can bolster anything that's in a classroom.

Mr. David Tilson: One of the problems is that there are newcomers who come to Canada who don't speak French or English. It's a serious problem. Obviously, it's being said that language training for that particular group alone is not adequate. Even young children who can't speak French or English, what are they going to do when they go to school?

Mr. Brian Dyck: This is a bit out of my area of expertise, but I understand that at least in Manitoba where I live, it's the schools that are responsible for the children's language education. But, yes, a variety of strategies need to be sought.

Mr. David Tilson: We've had groups from Syria in particular who don't speak French or English.

Ms. Stachova.

Ms. Olga Stachova: When it comes to LINC, I understand that the government introduced the portfolio-based learning approach. We've seen great results in the four language centres we are running, but you're right that there are certain groups that don't work well with this. There's a lot of pressure for them to progress. We see it with seniors. We see it with individuals who might have learning disabilities. We see it also with individuals who might have a lower level of literacy, who might not have completed education in their home countries. I believe that it would be good to look at what would work for these groups, because it's quite stressful for them to be in the regular classes. We would encourage looking at learning approaches that might better meet their needs.

Mr. David Tilson: Have you thought of recommendations as to how we can improve language training for those who don't speak either French or English or who speak one and not the other?

The Chair: Be very quick.

Ms. Olga Stachova: Not that—

Mr. David Tilson: Do I have a chance to ask Mr. Daoud?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Abdulla Daoud: I don't think you can have a blanket solution to this. Different provinces have different issues. Quebec's different from the rest of Canada on this. However, I think Quebec has proven to do quite well, actually, with their French-language program just because we have a structure in which they're incentivized to learn French by getting a stipend every week.

I think one of the problems you're facing here is the balance between getting a job or going to learn a language. They try to balance both and sometimes have to pick one or the other. When they're put into these labour jobs for which they don't need to meet a high qualification or a certain language requirement, they might put it off. Then again, here you're having to balance two different issues.

If you want to create a service, and if you're putting language as a priority, you should incentivize them. Maybe it's a stepping stone to a job, some sort of stipend per week, which is how Quebec does it.

• (1740)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to start with Ms. Stachova.

You have actually a tremendous story to tell as a newcomer who came to Canada. Prior to this role at MOSAIC you worked at Mitacs and had a significant success story there. From the lessons learned that could be transported, with your own personal experiences, what do you think the government should do by way of recommendations in supporting newcomers so they too have the chance to flourish?

Ms. Olga Stachova: Thank you.

Yes, I came to Canada 20 years ago very eager to build my life in Canada. I came with two master's degrees, a very good knowledge of English and work experience, but it took me a while to get a job. Because I knew someone who knew someone who knew someone, I landed my first job stocking shelves at Chapters. I was excited for

that opportunity, but it wasn't quite utilizing my skill set. It was only because I found someone who took a chance on me later and saw beyond my accent and lack of Canadian experience and gave me the opportunity to work. When Mitacs started, I was able to progress and build my career at Mitacs.

For me, and in our proposal, it's so important to be able to give newcomers the opportunity, even if it's a short-term internship or co-op placement, where they have a chance to prove themselves, to get their first experience and get some advice from the employers on what it is they need going forward. That would be our key recommendation.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Would it help, for example, if the government had a program whereby we had an NGO, let's say, in touch with a group of potential employers and then match the newcomers to the jobs? Would that be a program that would be useful?

Ms. Olga Stachova: It would be, and it's like three levels, for example, copying the very successful core program that exists at the universities. The structure is there. It works well. It was recognized that they not only test drive talent, but they also have an obligation to help youth gain experience, and the same model or the youth employment strategy and program could be easily applicable to newcomers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That would also help the newcomer override the chicken-and-egg problem, which is to say that you don't have Canadian experience but you can't get Canadian experience because, you know, you've never worked in Canada before.

To that end, I'm going to go to Mr. Daoud.

I visited your centre, and you showed me some of the fantastic programming that you have. One of the issues you had was, in fact, that matching, and with a tremendous success rate. As well, some of the technology that you have could help government process applications and streamline them, which would save resources on all sorts of fronts. I wonder if you could quickly comment on that.

I think we're going to run out of time, so the witnesses have any suggestions or additional information that they would like to share with our committee, please send them to the clerk so that we can consider them for recommendations to the government for action.

Mr. Abdulla Daoud: I guess you want me to touch on the LUNA application. Right now we can't launch it nationally because we're a small not-for-profit based in Montreal, and we can't afford the hosting fees.

How it works is mostly refugee claimants are able to gain information on how to fill out the application. It talks to them in their native language. We've socially engineered it in a way that the questions are short and very concise, so we get concise answers. That way the translation process is very accurate. We have worked with many lawyers on this and with our own legal staff who we've worked with. We found that it saved up to 83% of their time, given the fact they don't have to pay translators and they don't have to get additional counsel. They can get them to fill it out on a phone or an iPad.

Yes, it has various uses. The great thing about this is expansion beyond just the refugee claimant aspect. They can go beyond that for other immigration processes and also for other forms and bureaucratic processes that immigrants have to go through. It can really tie into the pre-arrival services as well. There's a unique aspect to that, which I do recommend government look at in some sense, because it can really streamline, save money, make things a bit more efficient and make things more transparent.

There are a lot of crooked immigration practices due to crooked immigration lawyers. This is something that we're facing a lot. This happens constantly, all because people are given incorrect informa-

tion, and they're misled. Having a centralized source of information, a database they can read in their language, would negate that tremendously.

• (1745)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm just going to reinforce what Ms. Kwan said. This is the second meeting of a minimum of seven on this study that will be going on. I encourage you to follow the deliberations of the committee and either add anything from your presentations or, if you see something that tweaks something you'd like to add into the conversation, please submit it.

All three of you have different perspectives. We've met before. I know a bit about the innovation you're doing and all that, and I think it's quite important. What I'm hoping the committee will get are best practices at smaller organizations doing something that can inspire us to make better programs. That's why you're all here today.

Thank you, and again our apologies for not having enough time with you. Be prepared; we may call you back.

The meeting is adjourned.

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