



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

---

CIMM • NUMBER 028 • 2nd SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

---

EVIDENCE

**Monday, May 26, 2014**

—  
**Chair**

**Mr. David Tilson**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Monday, May 26, 2014

• (1530)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)):** We'll start, ladies and gentlemen. This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, on Monday, May 26, and in our orders of the day, we're studying the strengthening of the protection of women in our immigration system.

This meeting is televised. We have three guests visiting us today, two here in Ottawa and one by teleconference from Montreal.

I'm going to mess up on the pronunciation of your names, and I don't mind at all if you reprimand me.

We have with us today Mr. Shahin Mehdizadeh—

**Superintendent Shahin Mehdizadeh (Superintendent, Manitoba, "D" Division, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, As an Individual):** That's an excellent try.

**The Chair:** Well, it's a try.

He's the superintendent in Manitoba of "D" Division of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

We also have with us, from Muslims Facing Tomorrow, Ms. Raheel Raza, president.

**Ms. Raheel Raza (President, Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow):** That's perfect.

**The Chair:** By teleconference in Montreal, we have, from the Afghan Women's Centre, Makai Aref, who is the president.

Can you hear me, Madam?

**Ms. Makai Aref (President, Afghan Women's Centre of Montreal):** Yes. Hello.

**The Chair:** I'm going to let you go first, Ms. Aref. You have up to eight minutes to make a presentation to the committee.

**Ms. Makai Aref:** I am ready to read my statement. Okay?

**The Chair:** Yes, absolutely.

**Ms. Makai Aref:** But I am not sure. It may be eight minutes or it may be 10 minutes.

**The Chair:** The floor is yours.

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for coming to us.

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Okay. First of all, good afternoon to all of you. I am here, and I'm Makai Aref. I would like to thank the committee on

citizenship and immigration for allowing me the opportunity to come here today to talk about the immigrant spousal sponsorship program.

I am here today not to express my personal views on this issue but to talk about the experiences of the community of immigrant women and families that I have been working with for the last 13 years at the Afghan Women's Centre in Montreal.

My hope today is to communicate to you their concerns and their experiences on this topic. As there is a question period during which I will be happy to address any topic, I will just touch very briefly now on some of the major issues that women face, both when they are sponsored by a spouse here and when they sponsor spouses from other countries.

I would first like to note that while the majority of our clients at the Afghan Women's Centre are from Afghanistan, we do aid women from many other immigrant communities, for example, from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and India. All of the issues that I raise here, in talking about Afghanistan, apply to them as well.

From the cases and clients that I have worked with in the last 13 years, I know that the victimization of women who have been sponsored by spouses living in Canada arises from the following sponsorship situations. Almost all of the women who are sponsored from Afghanistan by spouses are financially dependent upon their husbands. They cannot speak French or English and they lack the skills needed to get a job in Canada. As newcomers, these women do not have social support systems outside of their husbands and in-laws in Canada.

Men travel to Afghanistan and marry girls much younger than they are. Within our immigrant community we have many cases of men in their fifties, sixties, and seventies travelling to Afghanistan and marrying teenaged girls. Unfortunately, this is a conscious decision by these individuals, who marry girls this young with the belief that once they come to Canada, they can be easily controlled.

Women are pressured and forced into marriages with men in Canada by their families. Afghanistan is a war-torn country where many people suffer from poverty. There is a belief there that if a daughter married a man who lives in Canada or the United States or Europe, the daughter can help the family financially later on.

Women and their families are given false information by men and their families before the marriage. They are given false information about the ages of men, their marital state, their physical health, their economic situation, and even their characters. We have many clients at the centre who came to Canada and found out that the man they had married already had other wives and children. Some found out that their husbands had psychological or physical illnesses that they were not aware of.

The results of these situations are that many women face social isolation, economic difficulties, and verbal and/or physical abuse, and because of their lack of job skills and knowledge of their rights and the resources available to them, they are trapped in these situations.

• (1535)

Some women refuse to seek help, even if help is offered, because of cultural issues. Others may refuse to leave abusive situations because they know that they do not have the economic means to support themselves and their children. There is also a great gap in services available to them in their language. They cannot communicate their situation to social workers, lawyers, and the police in English and French, and are thus barred from those avenues of aid.

While the immigration spousal sponsorship program is used by many people to sponsor spouses whom they live with very happily, I know, through my work, that it can also be used to create marriages, the results of which are too many women and young girls living in unspeakably horrific conditions of mental and physical abuse and economic and social oppression. It is my great hope that the result of our discussions today will lead to progress in helping them reclaim their voices, their hopes and dreams, and their lives.

Thank you.

• (1540)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Aref.

We have two more witnesses, and then, I expect, members of the committee will have questions for you and our two other guests. Thank you for your presentation.

I'm going to try it again, Mr. Mehdizadeh.

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you for coming, sir. You have up to eight minutes as well.

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** Thank you.

Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, my name is Shahin Mehdizadeh. I was born in Iran and left that country during the revolution in the late seventies. I lived in India for five years before immigrating to Canada in 1984. I have been a member of the RCMP for over 25 years, serving in several communities in four provinces, performing my duties in many disciplines of policing.

Today, Mr. Chair, I do not speak to this committee on behalf of the RCMP. I speak as an immigrant and a Canadian citizen, and Mr. Chair, although I am not wearing my blue serge, I will provide testimony based on the experience and knowledge I have gathered through my years as a police officer.

My goal is to provide you with some of the efforts from the policing community, non-government organizations, and most important, our citizens in support of making this country more secure for female immigrants. I will also provide my observations on some gaps. This may assist the committee.

As an immigrant, I can advise that the first few years for anyone immigrating to Canada are the most challenging and risky years. New immigrants are exposed to an environment that might be somewhat foreign to them and they need to make adjustments in a short time to fit in. These adjustments can be much harder for some compared to others.

Inasmuch as the new immigrants experience a sense of joy and accomplishment, they are also filled with other feelings such as fear and uncertainty, which naturally add to their level of stress. In the case of female immigrants, due to potential gaps in their language and other skills, they may tend to hide and choose to stay only with their own cultural groups and family as that's their comfort zone. These women may also choose to accept mistreatment by their spouses as they feel they have no other choice.

Newcomers to this country go to great lengths to achieve this goal. Conditions in some regions of the world are such that immigrating to Canada, even if it means being mistreated, outweighs what some of these women had before. In some cases the notion of leaving their families is not supported by their own relatives and friends as it may bring shame to them. That's why at times the only support offered from their close relatives is to keep relationships together at all cost.

As the honourable members of this committee have heard, there have been many cases of homicide in Canada where the family's honour has been ruled as the motive behind those despicable acts of violence. The latest of these cases, the Shafia case, attracted extensive media attention. I took part in that investigation and supported the lead agency, Kingston Police Force.

This has been the saddest case I have ever had to work on. It opened my eyes to the gaps and the need to bring more cultural awareness to the police and other supporting agencies in Canada. Increased awareness could provide them with a better vantage point when faced with situations, and allow them to execute their duties more effectively. After all, everyone's common goal is to provide security and protection to all our citizens.

Following the trial I led an initiative whereby the RCMP, in partnership with the Department of Justice, developed online introductory training on honour-based violence and forced marriages. This training is in its final audit stage and will be made available in both official languages to all RCMP officers through the RCMP's internal web-based training. This course will also be made available to other police departments through the Canadian Police Knowledge Network.

I am also aware of the other efforts being taken to develop training, one being a similar type of training on honour-based violence and forced marriage at the Ontario Police College.

I am hoping that providing more awareness to the front-line police officers on this issue will provide them with the ability to recognize and assess risks to female immigrants more effectively when responding to situations of alleged family violence and forced marriage. More importantly, an understanding of these issues will provide them with the tools to activate support systems and keep the victims safe.

Many other government departments and agencies, both federal and provincial, such as status of women, immigration, and justice have been very active in bringing more awareness to their employees and others on the topic.

• (1545)

In regard to the other organizations, I can advise the committee of efforts by the Alberta crime prevention program to develop some training on honour-based violence and forced marriages for members of different support agencies, such as nurses, social services, and teachers. I am very excited about this initiative, and hope that once the training has been developed it can be shared with similar agencies in other provinces.

Awareness is the key to helping these victims, as such crimes are grossly unreported. In most cases, the only way to detect them is through having trained individuals looking through a wider lens and knowing how to communicate effectively with the victims. These organizations' roles are critical in increasing the overall safety of women in Canada, including our immigrants.

On the third front, I am aware of several influential women's groups in Canada who are holding information sessions and conferences to discuss this important topic and bring more awareness to community members. In my opinion, this is where the real positive change can come about, which can ultimately provide a safer environment for women in Canada and within our immigration system. Such efforts will have to be supported by our organization.

Ultimately, the goal is to prevent the crimes before they are committed, as by the time the police are called to respond, it may already be too late for the victims.

All of these efforts promote a common theme, and that is to have individuals who are victims of any sort of abuse know their rights, but more important, to know what to do when they are or feel they might be victimized in the future. More education to our newcomers in this area will be extremely useful. However, language barriers make it very difficult to provide necessary information to everyone.

This gap also makes it difficult for victims to step forward and ask for help. Of course, there are many other reasons for a victim to refuse to come forward, such as fear of family, shame, and financial dependency on the abuser. There may also be fear and/or lack of trust in authorities.

Different agencies continue their efforts to build more trusting relationships with immigrants. After all, that's what we do in Canada. The key is to continue tirelessly with these efforts and to ensure that we are there for the victims when they do reach out for help. That takes a lot of collaboration and teamwork between different agencies, and I stress the "s" in agencies, as one can't do it alone.

Over the years, organizations have become much better in this area. However, there is always room for improvement. The United Kingdom has been studying the topic of forced marriages for several years and has developed many useful processes and subject matter experts in many different organizations, to combat the issue of forced marriage and honour-based violence. A closer look at the efforts in the United Kingdom might be useful to see how we can adopt some of these measures here in Canada.

Mr. Chair, and honourable members of the committee, in conclusion, I would like to thank you for allowing me to participate in your committee's important study of strengthening the security of vulnerable female immigrants in Canada. I hope the information I've provided and the responses I may have to your questions will be of some assistance.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir, for your presentation. I know members of the committee will have some questions for you after our final witness. Thank you for coming as well.

Ms. Raza, last but not least, you may begin.

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** Good afternoon. I thank this committee for the opportunity to speak on a very important issue, and I commend the Government of Canada for making it a priority to protect women and strengthen their rights.

As president of the Council for Muslims Facing Tomorrow, and a lifelong activist for women's rights, I wish to focus on the South Asian community where many of these problems occur, and where I've had the most interaction with victims of polygamy, proxy marriages, and forced and underage marriages, all at a grassroots level.

Let me begin with forced marriages. You must all be aware of the report by the South Asian Legal Clinic of Ontario, which found that parents, siblings, extended family, grandparents, and religious leaders were all involved in pushing individuals into forced marriages. I will not repeat the statistics, because they have been documented, but I will share that this is a document that came alive for me when I met a young girl at a conference in Kingston a few months ago. When she saw my card, she took me aside, and she spoke to me in my language to tell me her story, which was shocking and sad.

She came here at 16, although her age was forged on her passport to show that she was 18. She was forced by her parents to marry a Canadian citizen, whom she had never met. This was done through a mediator who took a lot of money for this arrangement, promising her a wonderful life with a wonderful man, along with instant Canadian immigration. Once here, the sponsor, who turned out to be not so wonderful, kept forcing her family to send money to him, ostensibly for her upkeep. When they refused, because they had no more to give, he physically abused her and abandoned her, keeping all her papers. She told me that she was literally on the streets, with only the clothes on her back. She did not know where to go, what to do, or where to live.

Some kind neighbours took her in and helped her find her way. They helped her start some education and apply for new documentation, which, as you know—and she told me—is extremely hard. She is still in limbo, facing depression, isolation, and fear. Her complaint, to me, was that the system did not step up to help her, when she is actually the victim. If she had known about the legal system earlier, she would not have felt so powerless.

There are many other cases like hers, and I am here because I don't want to see this happen to a single person, ever again.

With regard to polygamy, the Canadian law regarding polygamy obviously needs to be revisited. In the case of the Muslim community—and I speak of that because I am from the Muslim community—religious leaders are licensed to perform a *nikah*, which is a Muslim marriage. But they're not obligated to check and see if the woman has been forced into that marriage, or whether polygamy is involved. So I believe there needs to be stronger checks and balances, as well as much more accountability by the religious leadership.

May I point out here that some religious leaders believe that they are justified, by aspects of their faith, to perform polygamous marriages, while violating Canadian law. Therefore, the impact of sharia laws must also be examined by looking at polygamy.

In terms of forced marriages, the question is: how are we tracking forced marriages? I refer to what was mentioned by Shahin, and bring your attention to the U.K., where forced marriage was such a huge challenge. The British government's Home Office has a forced marriage unit, FMU, which has tracked that more than 5,000 people from the U.K. are forced into marriage every year. Eighty-two per cent of the cases involve female victims, and 74% of the cases involve South Asians. Last year, in September, the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act was enforced, making forced marriages a criminal offence. There is also a helpline for women, and law enforcement agencies are trained to look for signs of abuse.

In Canada, we need such a law. We need a helpline and training for our officials, which I believe has just started.

I would also recommend that when potential spouses go to the Canadian consulates outside of Canada for their paperwork, before coming to Canada, they must be made aware of their legal rights. They should be given the contact of a specific helpline, or Canadian organization, that should oversee their progress in this country and track their safety, until such time as their paperwork is complete, or they're able to stand on their own feet.

● (1550)

Upon arrival they should be given orientation with the sponsor present so that both parties are aware of Canadian laws and the rights of individuals.

I stress here both parties, because I believe it's really important, in cases where the sponsor may be a Canadian man, that he should understand that if he's sponsoring a woman to come here, she may want to be educated, she may want to work, and his cultural upbringing or background should not get in the way of her achieving these things that she has the right to do.

Furthermore, I believe the sponsor should also be made to put aside some financial support for the spouse. None of this should be left to the family or the community, which are sometimes partners in crime. Those sponsors found abusing the system should face harsh penalties as a deterrent to potential fraudsters.

I support the idea that people coming to Canada should have language ability, because that is the only way that potential victims will be able to know their rights, and more importantly, to access them.

All of this being said, there is obviously a very fine line between fraud and genuine cases of spousal sponsorship. I don't want to be seen as coming between people in a marriage, but I would like to say that while the spousal sponsorship program is being tightened up, there should be a genuine effort not to throw the baby out with the bath water.

Thank you very much.

● (1555)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Those were three excellent presentations, and now my colleagues will have some questions of clarification regarding some of the issues you've raised.

Mr. Menegakis is first.

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Thank you, sir.

Thank you to all three of our witnesses for appearing before us today. I listened with great attention to your testimonies, and I find them to be very informative and very well thought out. So thank you for that.

Mr. Mehdizadeh, you mentioned in your presentation the words “honour-based killings” or “honour killings”, and those are very disturbing to all Canadians. Certainly the Shafia trial brought that idea dangerously close to home as we all know. That was something nobody expected would be of concern to Canadians, but we found out otherwise of course.

Could you elaborate a little bit on your experience in the force with training on honour-based killing? In your opinion, is there sufficient knowledge within police services across the country to look out for that specifically?

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** I obviously followed the Shafia case. As I have talked to different police officers across the country—and believe me I have worked right across the country—throughout my years of service, I have found that there is a lack of cultural knowledge. Because Canada is such a multicultural country—there are 6.8 million immigrants in this country—it's practically impossible for police departments to actually build a perfect capacity to serve each and every community and its challenges overnight.

When I looked at the gaps, especially in relation to how the accused or the people who were committing the acts were trying to justify their actions based on family honour—which is a very despicable act but their justification for what they were doing—I felt that more education was needed. The training I spoke about is not to make people subject matter experts, because we have to walk before we start driving. It's introductory training to provide basic knowledge. The training is done online so it is available to everyone in a very simple fashion. From there we can make more strides towards developing more expertise among those specific individuals who actually have a keen interest, and we can build up that capacity within the police departments.

One good thing in Canada is that we have many police departments but they all work together, and we have really closed those gaps amongst police services. The Kingston trial was a perfect example in which we had many different agencies participating to assist Kingston police on that file. So as we build up more capacity in Canada—not just within the RCMP—I think we are going to see better results in being able to identify these kinds of cases and maybe actually get ahead of them before it's too late.

● (1600)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** The main reason we decided to do this study is because we found that there was abuse in Canada's immigration system of women primarily. It does go the other way as well with men.

We found that it was very important to focus a specific study on this issue to ensure that we close those gaps where people can use the system so they can abuse a person. For example, somebody meets a lovely young lady from another country around the world—and I'm not going to mention a country—and brings her here with the condition of PR and they get married and move forward. One of the conditions of course is that she stays in that marriage and doesn't use the system to fly from the country. But that sort of almost misbalances it in some situations as some people can abuse that and we use that as an abuse of the person they are bringing over. The person being brought over doesn't have an avenue—where do I go? I'm here because my husband brought me here and now he's abusing me. I need to go out there. I need some help.

I'm going to ask you this question. We thought that one of the ways we can reach people is to focus a little bit on those who come to Canada. We are focusing on those who are being abused but we want to focus on some of the women who came here and succeeded. I'm wondering if in your opinion, sir, you feel that these people who have come here, these women who have come primarily and thrived in our country, got jobs here, they integrated and raised their children with Canadian family values and good strong contributing Canadians, if you feel that they can be useful in a mentor capacity to women, to newcomers in Canada?

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** Absolutely. I believe the mentorship program would be an excellent idea. I know that these abuses are taking place but a lot of women are actually coming to this country and making an extremely good life for themselves, really succeeding in life.

One thing I want to say about the abuse of our immigrant women coming into the country is that some of the challenges and issues are

very similar to those of any other woman in Canada who is being abused by somebody, by their partner. The gap is that their situation is compounded by other things such as the cultural side, lack of education maybe, language skills, etc. So if there are mentors who can actually assist them and provide them with the right information and show them a way I believe that would be very helpful.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for joining us today.

I will ask my questions in French.

Ms. Aref, are you able to hear the interpretation?

[English]

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Yes we can.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** My first question is about the conditional permanent residence. That is relatively new in Canada. Sponsored spouses used to receive permanent residence when they arrived here. With this new measure, the status is conditional for two years. If the relationship ends and it is not a proven case of abuse or mistreatment, the spouse must go back to their country of origin. Many witnesses have raised questions about this conditional measure. Actually, they are afraid that this may make women more vulnerable.

Ms. Aref, you talked about women who had not received all the information about their husbands, information that they were already married or had illnesses that they had not reported. In those cases, if the woman decides to end the relationship, she could be sent back to her country of origin.

Other concerns have been expressed, particularly in terms of the responsibility of women who are abused to prove the abuse. A number of people have pointed out that verbal or psychological abuse is not always easy to prove.

I would like to hear what you have to say about the conditional aspect of permanent residence. Do you think that it might be an obstacle to the safety and protection of women?

Ms. Raza, would you like to answer that question?

● (1605)

[English]

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** Yes. From what you have explained, the onus of responsibility is put entirely on the sponsored spouse; let's say the woman in this case. The potential for abuse is wide open. Unless more responsibility is put on both sides...and this is what I had mentioned in my document. Whatever orientation, training, or education, it has to have both parties involved. Why should the sponsor not also be held responsible in this case?

I think that's something that could possibly be looked at, keeping in mind that the women who are coming from, let's say, third world countries are vulnerable, don't have the language ability, and are coming maybe from war-torn countries. There may be a sense of desperation there. I think that puts them in a very vulnerable position.

This ties in to what Shahin had said, and the gentleman mentioned honour-based violence, which is when a woman comes and decides she wants education, she wants freedom, and she wants everything every other Canadian woman has.

The sharing of responsibility is a very important component here.  
[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Thank you.

Mr. Mehdizadeh, do you have anything to add about the conditional aspect of permanent residence?

[English]

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** I'm sorry. I forgot to put my earpiece in.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Ms. Aref, do you have anything to add to that?

What do you think about the conditional aspect?

[English]

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Yes. I have an assistant. She will explain it to you very well. I would like to introduce Patmeena. She's with me. She will answer this question for you.

**The Chair:** There is no problem, if we could have her name, please.

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit (Program Assistant, Afghan Women's Centre of Montreal):** My name is Patmeena Sabit. I'm a program assistant with Ms. Aref at the Afghan Women's Centre.

One of the things I wanted to clarify, just speaking to the issue of the illness. What I think Ms. Aref was saying was that women are given wrong information, for example, by their husbands or by individuals who go there. Once these brides or these women are brought here, they realize some of the information was incorrect or misleading, that it's actually the spouses themselves, for example, that may have certain physical or mental illnesses, or may have already been married, or have other families. So, I just wanted to clear that up.

Secondly, in terms of the provisional or the conditional sponsorship or the conditional residency that's provided here, I think what Ms. Aref wants to communicate is that it does really provide a further means of certain individuals taking advantage of the system.

For example, for women that are brought here without skills, without jobs, and where they are abused either verbally, emotionally, or physically, it becomes kind of a trial period where, for example, they might not be able to reach out for help because that hangs over them. This idea that within these two years, if you don't "behave", then there is a possibility these sponsors, the people who sponsored them, can send them back.

It really does provide just a further means, one aspect of it, of people maybe further abusing the system. I think these women are very vulnerable already. It might provide a further means of vulnerability for them.

[Translation]

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Would you suggest eliminating the conditional aspect form permanent residence or would you like to make suggestions to ensure that this aspect does not make women more vulnerable?

Ms. Aref or her colleague can answer the question.

[English]

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit:** One of the things Ms. Aref sees and we see at the Afghan Women's Centre....Our experience is that the two years conditional residency or permanent residency, the way it might be addressed is if, for example, these women themselves were talked to or counselled by government workers, social workers, or aid workers to see what their point of view is.

I don't know how that would be determined if, for example, someone had taken advantage of the system and within that two years it was determined they would have to return home. I think it's very important to document their experiences and to get feedback from them as to what their experience had been within those two years.

• (1610)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sabit.

Mr. McCallum.

**Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome again to all of the witnesses.

I'd like to pursue the NDP line of questioning a little bit, in a slightly different way. I think that we have been concerned in these committee hearings about an imbalance of power between the one who is sponsored and the person doing the sponsoring. Both in terms of the conditional permanent residence for marriage.... The person being sponsored—if there's a breakdown—risks being deported, which is a clear imbalance.

I guess I'd like to repeat the question asked earlier, but ask each of you for a brief yes or no answer, because I've asked this to other witnesses. If you had a choice between keeping the status quo with the conditional permanent residence as one option, or abolishing the conditional permanent residence and going back to the old system, where the person came in automatically as a permanent resident, would you prefer the status quo or the old system?

I think the advantage of the old system is that you prevent this imbalance in power. The advantage of the status quo may be that you reduce the number of illegitimate marriages coming into the country, although that is the job of the immigration officials, to determine whether it's a legitimate marriage before they let the person in in the first place.

I wonder if you're comfortable doing this, if each of you could just say, would you like to abolish the conditional permanent residence system and go back to where we were, yes or no?

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** I can start first.

I would probably have to take a really good look at both conditions, and rules and regulations under both, to be able to answer that question. I'm not really able to answer that question.

**Hon. John McCallum:** That's a fair answer.

Ms. Raza.

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** I'm going to take the middle path, it's neither yes or no. I know that's not what you want to hear, but that is the reality. The reality is that there is an in-between course, which one of the people just mentioned, that it could be the status quo with monitoring of the sponsored spouse to see that her rights are not usurped. I think this is what I had said in my presentation as well.

I think monitoring by the Government of Canada, and tracking, is a very important component of any arrangement for spousal sponsorship.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Ms. Aref?

**Ms. Makai Aref:** My idea also, as to this, is the second part. It is for the old one, except for the second decision. But it's important to not only give them two years to be under control, but to give them information, give them training, counselling, all to how you live, how life is different from the past country, how it's different from their...and what has changed, how is it safe. Many—

**Hon. John McCallum:** Thank you. I think I'm running out of time, so maybe I could try very quickly one other issue.

We heard from Australia and New Zealand that if the marriage breaks down there's a way to get expedited permanent resident status for the person being sponsored so that he or she is not quickly and automatically sent back to the country.

I think it would be a good idea for us to reduce bureaucracy and make it a whole lot faster for one whose marriage seems to have broken down to quickly get landed immigrant status.

I just want to ask if you agree with that proposition or not.

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** I'll go first with this one.

Anything to reduce bureaucracy, any day, yes. Anything you can do to reduce bureaucracy and fast-track these issues, absolutely.

**Hon. John McCallum:** Good.

This is one of the most bureaucratic departments, so that's a good answer.

Thank you.

**Ms. Makai Aref:** May my assistant also answer you?

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit:** Yes, I think we agreed that the expedited... providing them with some kind of status so that they can stay here, and the reduction of the bureaucracy. I think that one of the biggest things that we see in the breakdown of marriages is that people believe that they can get rid of those spouses very quickly just by the fact that they're not given that residency, and that would obviously help that issue.

• (1615)

**Hon. John McCallum:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I probably used up my time.

**The Chair:** You pretty well have.

Mr. Leung.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC):** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for their testimony. It's an area where in a multicultural society when different values, either religious-based or otherwise, are brought in together to a country we have to manage it. Part of managing this diversity or these differences is a sound basis for risk management in the entire immigration system.

In risk managing our immigration system, on one hand we need to rely on people who are doing this in good faith and who are actually bringing in a spouse because there's a genuine need, because there are probably closer customs or religious ties. On the other hand it also opens it up for a certain amount of abuse by those people who want to abuse the system.

What we have thought of in this conditional permanent residence is that in order not to allow people to outright abuse the system we put in the conditional residency to allow some settling-in time, and allow us to examine the case. This is just one of the tools. What I want to hear from you is on the entire immigration process from when the application starts in the home country, to landing, to the monitoring of the marriage to see whether it's bona fide or not over these two years. What other tools do we have as a country to ensure that this is a fair and equitable process?

Let's start with Mr. Mehdizadeh, please.

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** Thank you.

Being an immigrant myself and going through the process, I can honestly say, with the thousands of immigrants coming to Canada and the few cases that we're dealing with of people who are defrauding the system or using it, bringing big changes is basically punishing the majority for the minority infractors. What I submit is that in relation to the immigration period, the one thing about the process from my perspective as an immigrant that was lacking was actually having some sort of information or even testing before you come to Canada. To become a citizen you have to participate in a test before a judge, etc.—

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Before you apply to be an immigrant, surely, you must have a desire or understanding of this country before you come here. Why would you not consider the United States, South Africa, or India? There must be some understanding and knowledge.

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** As an immigrant I submit that sometimes people are so desperate they are just going to apply for any place they can get, anything better than their own country. This is evident in our migrant vessels where people get on a ship and they may end up anywhere.

The way I look at it is if you provide them with some knowledge before coming here, at least that's a start. Because we do have testing before they get their citizenship status, before we make them Canadian citizens. Maybe some knowledge before they come here might be useful to provide them at least with what Canada is all about.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Ms. Raza, perhaps you can share with us your—

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** I agree with what Shahin is saying about this information. This is not something new, we've been lobbying for this for many years, very clear information about what Canada is, the legal system, laws, rights, responsibilities. Responsibility is very important too.

I would like to focus for a moment and mention to you that, again, I speak about third world countries, South Asia, where there are corrupt immigration officials who are selling this country to people without telling them what they're actually coming to. These are people who are doing the buying and selling of people. These are the ones who are arranging these paper marriages. There has to be a look into this part of the system as well, not everything is as simple as an application. We came on the regular system, but there are people who have sold their homes, who have become destitute just to come to Canada because a corrupt immigration official—

• (1620)

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** Are you referring to a Canadian immigration official in a foreign country or local hires?

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** There are two kinds. There are people who have Canadian citizenship, but they then go back to these home countries and become experts in Canadian immigration—not accredited, not legal, but they do this—and there are hundreds of them. They set up corner shops.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** They need to be licensed now.

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** They need to be licensed.

I come from Pakistan, where I have seen signs on roadside shacks saying, “Come to Canada”. One of the biggest cracks in the system, in my opinion, are these people who have set up shop. They don't paint a very clean picture. Of course, for money you can buy a passport and you can get paper marriages. This is something that definitely needs to be looked at as well, the back road way of coming into Canada.

**Mr. Chungsen Leung:** I also wish to hear from Ms. Aref.

Ms. Aref, could you give your comment, please?

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Yes, my assistant will explain it to you.

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit:** I think some very valid, relevant points have been made about the application process in third world countries, but I think what we wanted to talk about was the monitoring here. One of the most important things, in terms of resources or what can be provided from the Canadian side here, would be information in terms of the rights that people have once they are here. That might be during the two-year conditional or it might be after. What we see a lot over and over is that women who are sponsored—and not just women, I think that extends to men, too—are so unaware of what their rights are here, even though they're not citizens. They are unaware of what their legal rights are and what recourse they have, for example, once the marriage does fall apart. I think that's really important. That could be information that's provided before they get to Canada, but I think it can be provided here as well—that would be very important—to let them know that they do have rights.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sabit.

Ms. Sitsabaiesan.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses here today.

I want to start with Mr. Mehdizadeh.

You mentioned that within the RCMP you would like to see more training. You said for all of our police forces to be well versed in all of the different cultural sensitivity needs would be difficult—I understand—and we can get there, just not overnight. That was in a nutshell what you said in that training piece.

I want to translate that training need. The training needs to be improved so that individuals who are dealing with victims or the women who arrive have that cultural sensitivity or awareness. Do you think this training should be provided for CIC staff, as well as CBSA agents, who might be meeting these women at the airports when they arrive?

**Supt Shahin Mehdizadeh:** As I mentioned in my presentation, there are many different partners who can actually make it better for everyone's security: a school teacher or even the counsellors at the school. Absolutely, there's training that needs to be done in relation to how to approach certain topics in relation to certain immigrant groups in Canada, and how to communicate that. Even regarding the simple use of translators, who do you use for a translator? There are so many different factors that can actually add to the way we can get the right information to protect them.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Right.

When we had CIC officials here, they said that this training is already provided and that they don't really need more training.

I don't know, maybe Ms. Aref, or your assistant, or Ms. Raza, or yourself, from what you're seeing in the communities, do you find that the sensitivity is there with the agents that these women are dealing with or that they really need more?

**Ms. Makai Aref:** Okay. Can my assistant answer you?

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit:** One of the biggest issues I think is the issue of women or these spouses actually being able to approach them at all. That might have something to do with this idea that the sensitivity or just the cultural knowledge isn't there in terms of how to deal with these women once they are abused or they have reached out for help. But I think what we found from our end was that one of the issues is just making them aware of the idea that they can reach out, and also breaking down that taboo, where they feel like there is that possibility.

•(1625)

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** I would add that obviously the Canadian demographics have changed drastically in the last two decades. It is important for the training for front-line workers...definitely for that continuation of their training. The issues that we are talking about, like forced marriage, proxy marriage, honour violence, were not things that were here 30 years ago, let's say. It's keeping up with the changing demographics, the face of Canada, and the issues as they are taking place. Now, I will quickly mention that the forced marriage unit in England has trained immigration officials to look out for these signs.

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:** Sorry, I just have one more minute left. That's why I'm trying to move on.

I want to talk about the isolation of the new women who come into the country. A lot of our witnesses have spoken of this, because these women don't have access to language. One of you, I don't remember which one, mentioned that they don't necessarily have fluency in English or French when they come into this country as a spouse. Because they don't have the language training or skills to be able to enter the job market, they are usually forced into isolation within the home or within the small family unit. There have been other witnesses who have suggested mandatory language training or skills development for these people who come here as spouses.

What are your suggestions on that, Mrs. Aref or Ms. Sabit?

**Ms. Makai Aref:** My assistant will explain to you. Why did we open that centre? The centre absolutely services those women who are coming without a family, who are single. They have very big problems.

But Patmeena will explain this more.

**Ms. Patmeena Sabit:** I think the language issue that we brought up was the French and English. I think that mandatory...relates back to one of the questions that one of the committee members asked in terms of what could be done during this process. I think that the mandatory languages or skills could be applied before they arrive in Canada, but it is definitely something that is necessary before or after. It obviously contributes not only to isolation but also to their inability to reach out for help if they should need it.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Shory, you have time for a question.

**Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Quickly, the condition of permanent residency is being brought in so I will make a comment for the record that this measure was introduced after consultation across Canada. Of course, this is in line with other like-minded countries: the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. The purpose of this measure was to determine marriage frauds, and also that immigration officers would give exemptions for cases where spouses were either deceased or spousal abuse was suspected.

I am more interested today to ask the question because all three of you.... By the way—

**The Chair:** Sorry, the bells are ringing.

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** Oh dear.

**The Chair:** You can finish off.

**Mr. Devinder Shory:** Quickly, you talked about language barriers and pre-arrival and upon-arrival orientation. So I want to hear more about the language.

Ms. Raza, you talked about supporting the idea of language ability. I want to hear more about orientation upon arrival and before arrival and whether we can use the visa applications to educate the women, specifically, in more than 90 countries.

**Ms. Raheel Raza:** Absolutely, I think that you can. There are many European countries that now, before immigrants arrive, expect this mandatory orientation, so to speak, and language training because it is of benefit both to Canada and to the people coming into the country to know at least one of the official languages, and to be able to fend for themselves and know what their rights and responsibilities are. It doesn't have to be one year of education. You're talking about a very basic orientation session, which I think would work much better if it took place before they came to the country, but, if not, at least immediately upon arrival.

**The Chair:** Ms. Raza, I'm sorry, when the bells ring we have to leave, and now we have to leave.

Actually, the time is up, and I want to thank you and.... Can I call you Shahin? Thank you very much.

Ms. Aref and Ms. Sabit, I thank you all for coming to the committee and giving us your thoughts on this very important issue.

**Voices:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** We will suspend—

•(1630)

**Mr. Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Chair, just before you hit the gavel, there's just one small thing. On Wednesday, we're seeing the officials for main estimates, and the minister. We had a little timing issue, so the minister will appear in the second hour and the officials are coming in the first hour. I just wanted to let the committee know.

**The Chair:** Thank you, sir.

Shall we suspend or call it a day?

Don't leave yet, I need your help. Do you want to suspend or adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Adjourn.

**Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe:** Maybe we can adopt the report as proposed by the end of this meeting?

**The Chair:** No, I'm going to adjourn. We'll have to deal with it another time.

The meeting is adjourned.





Published under the authority of the Speaker of  
the House of Commons

---

### SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

---

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its Committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the *Copyright Act*. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a Committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the *Copyright Act*.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its Committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

---

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address: <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité  
du Président de la Chambre des communes

---

### PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

---

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la *Loi sur le droit d'auteur*.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

---

Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante : <http://www.parl.gc.ca>