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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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EVIDENCE

**Monday, June 19, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1635)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Committee members, I would like to begin our meeting. Welcome to our guests.

Before we proceed today, I would like to take a moment to address the point of order raised by Mr. Sarai at the previous meeting regarding the divulgence of in camera decisions.

I'd like to let all members of the committee know that such matters are not taken lightly, and I've taken some time to look at the question in more depth. After reviewing the blues, it was clear that Ms. Rempel was referencing unanimous decisions made in the House, not in the committee. The chair can understand where the confusion arose, as there were a few interruptions during the last meeting. However, between Ms. Rempel's explanation and the blues, I am satisfied that no in camera decisions were referenced.

I'd like to thank Mr. Sarai for bringing this important issue to the attention of the committee, and once again I'd invite all members to be cautious when referencing matters stated at previous meetings in general. Thank you.

We'll proceed to our hearing. Pursuant to the order of reference received from the House on Wednesday, November 2, 2016, the committee will resume its study on Motion No. 39, regarding immigration to Atlantic Canada.

We have before us by video conference Mr. Adam Mugridge, product development manager with Louisbourg Seafoods Ltd. We also have appearing together in person before the committee, from the W.M. Fares Group, Mr. Wadiah Fares, president and chief executive officer, and from the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration, Suzanne Ley, executive director. From Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, we have Gerry Mills, executive director, by video conference.

Welcome to all.

Mr. Mugridge, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Adam Mugridge (Product Development Manager, Louisbourg Seafoods Ltd.):** Good afternoon, committee. Thank you for allowing me and my company the opportunity to speak about such an important topic.

I feel that, regarding the topic, our company is well qualified to speak on the matter, specifically in terms of our experiences with

labour and the shortfalls and challenges we've experienced with labour. Our company operates in rural coastal Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I was looking at recent statistics, and in our area, population changes between the years 2010 and 2014 were -4.7% to -9.9% in Cape Breton, Victoria, and Guysborough counties, where we operate.

Speaking personally on the matter, I've seen the shrinking of our population base first-hand. I am 37 years old. I'm a native Cape Bretoner, born and raised, and I feel fortunate to have been able to stay in my hometown with a good career. Many of my friends have moved on to western Canada, to northern Alberta or B.C., or to Ontario. It's very much the norm for most of my friends. The people I went to high school with or graduated with have mostly all moved on, with some exceptions, of course.

Our company, Louisbourg Seafoods, is involved in the harvest, the off-load, the processing, and the sales and marketing of seafood products. This ranges from such species as snow crab, lobster, cold-water shrimp, and groundfish like cod, haddock, halibut, and redfish. It also includes new fisheries, such as sea cucumber, whelk, and hagfish. It ranges from seaweed harvesting to aquaculture as well—mussels, kelp, oysters, and products like that. We're located in small coastal towns like Louisbourg, Glace Bay, North Sydney, and Canso.

In all, our company employs over 500 people in these places in a variety of jobs, from processing to sales to accounting and office administration. The list goes on. When we're at 500 people, we're at our peak. We are a seasonal industry. We can't escape that, even though we try to do our best to avoid the seasonality. The amount of 500 jobs is significant anywhere, but in our areas, in our communities, it's even more so. Given the small populations of the communities we live in, it's important.

To many, the fishing industry is seen as old-fashioned and as somewhat of a relic of the past. If truth be told, in some ways there are instances of this, but in many ways, and I'm fortunate to be able to say this, the fishery is unique. It's exciting. It's innovative. For me it represents such a tremendous opportunity for our region and our communities. The potential to grow the value of our industry is tremendous. To make the most out of our extremely valuable resources is our company's goal, and it should be the goal of the entire industry.

In order to do this, it all requires people. It really comes down to the people who make this happen, and this is where we run into a very big problem. For our business, we need access to reliable and productive labour. The average age in our processing plants is 58. We try to recruit younger people into our operations. We are successful in some cases, but in most cases we're not always successful.

In terms of our philosophy for our workforce and our labour force, our company is very community-minded. We view the fishery as something that should benefit the community and not just the companies that operate in the community. Good local jobs should be a part of the fishery for the community. Otherwise, we ask ourselves, why are we doing it? This really ties into the tradition, I believe, of our fisheries. The reasoning behind this is that in small, rural coastal communities, you have nothing else. That's why they were founded. That's why they exist. It's because of the fisheries. The importance of that can't be lost.

We recognized probably a decade ago the challenge that we were going to have in labour. We decided that, for us, our company would implement a structure that exists somewhat loosely in the following way. First, 33% of our workforce consists of our core workers, our local, traditional workers who since 1984 have always worked for us. They come back year after year, and they're our solid workforce.

• (1640)

We have what we'll call transient workers, or the people that come and go, essentially. This would be recruiting of young people, like high school students, who will work in the summer at the peak periods. These are short-term workers with a relatively high turnover. There's also a strategy to employ 33% of either temporary foreign workers or immigration-based labour. We've looked closely at that and have had our share of challenges. At the same time, our company embraces automation when the time is appropriate and we will make some serious decisions about investing in automation when the time is right.

We've looked at the labour situation and we recognize that we, as a company, can make changes to improve conditions and retain our workers. This doesn't apply to just the current workforce and current residents of our communities but also new immigrants.

Number one, as I had mentioned, is seasonality. Nobody wants to work for several weeks or several months and then be on employment insurance, so we've taken an approach to reduce the seasonality of our workforce. We've embraced new fisheries, such as sea cucumbers and whelk, to add shoulder seasons to our core processing season, so that people can have a full-time job.

Second is training and professionalization, investing in our workforce so that they take pride in their work and view their jobs more as a skilled tradesperson, rather than just as a fish plant worker.

**The Chair:** Mr. Mugridge, you have 20 seconds please.

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** Finally, there was increased wages and benefits. It's hard work and the labour market is competitive in some aspects. Why should they make the same doing difficult fish plant work, rather than something else? To summarize—

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Fares, I understand you'll be speaking on behalf of the witnesses before us, so you have seven minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Wadiah Fares (President and Chief Executive Officer, W. M. Fares Group):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, ladies and gentlemen.

As was mentioned, my name is Wadiah Fares. I am the president and CEO of W.M. Fares Group, a real estate design and development firm in Halifax. With me today is Suzanne Ley, executive director of Nova Scotia Office of Immigration. It is an honour and privilege to appear here today to speak on a topic near and dear to my heart: immigration.

I am an immigrant. More than 30 years ago I left Lebanon to come to Nova Scotia to study. Upon receiving my citizenship, I became a Canadian living in Nova Scotia. Today I am a Nova Scotian choosing to live and work in Nova Scotia.

I strongly believe immigrants add immediate and long-term value to our businesses and communities. They bring new points of view, new ideas, and new ways of doing things. They create a stronger, more robust economy. They help us grow our population, build our province, and make Nova Scotia a vibrant, dynamic society. For all these reasons, immigration is critical to the future success and sustainability of Nova Scotia. That is why in 2014 I accepted an invitation from Premier Stephen McNeil to co-chair his advisory council on immigration.

I am pleased to be here today to share my perspective on the opportunities, the challenges, and what action by the federal government is required to advance Nova Scotia's immigration priorities and initiatives.

We have spent a lot of time over the past couple of years in discussions with the federal government to increase the number of immigrants coming to Nova Scotia. We have met with all officials and stakeholders. We have sat with ministers and staff and all the decision-makers, and the result is that we are making progress. Together and with the strong leadership of our minister, Minister Lena Diab, and her staff, we are achieving results in Nova Scotia.

In 2016 it was a record year for immigration in Nova Scotia, and 2017 is shaping up to be another successful year. Last year we welcomed nearly 5,500 new people to our province, the highest number of immigrants since the Second World War. That increase was due to the strength of our provincial nominee program, as well as our response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Nova Scotia welcomed over 1,500 Syrian refugees through government-assisted, private, and blended sponsorships. This is a significant increase compared with previous years in which our province typically resettled only about 200 refugees.

Not only is it important that we bring more immigrants to the province, it is also important that we provide the settlement and community support to allow them to stay and integrate into the life of the province. I am pleased to say that overall, newcomers to Nova Scotia are doing well. They are twice as likely to work in their profession than in almost every other province. According to data compiled by the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, 71% of immigrant businesses in Nova Scotia will still be open after three years, compared to the Canadian average of 48%. Rates of employment insurance used by immigrants in our province are lower than in Canada overall, and about 87.5% of Nova Scotia nominees between 2011 and 2016 were employed.

We have a strong network of settlement services throughout the province to support the integration of newcomers through language, employment bridging, workplace culture, employer engagement, family crisis, and computer and technical training programs. The most recent data available in 2014 shows that 73% of people who landed in Nova Scotia between 2009 and 2013 were still living here. In the early 2000s less than half were staying. That's a big improvement, and the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration will continue to support these programs.

Another recent success was the launch of the Atlantic immigration pilot this past March. As you are aware, it is part of the federal government's Atlantic growth strategy.

•(1645)

The Atlantic pilot is a significant opportunity for Nova Scotia, which will help employers hire foreign workers and international graduates. We hear from Nova Scotia businesses that one of the main challenges they have for growth is lack of staff. The Atlantic pilot provides an opportunity for Nova Scotia businesses to address these labour gaps.

We are encouraged by the Atlantic immigration pilot and its many positive attributes: flexibility around criteria, the speed of processing, the focus on retention, and the numbers. So far, 209 employers in Nova Scotia have applied for designation, and of those, 123 have already been granted designation. We are very optimistic about the program's early success.

In my role as a premier adviser, I hear from employers that immigration is complicated and time-consuming. Some employers are not aware of immigration as a tool for addressing ongoing labour gaps. That is why the Nova Scotia Office of Immigration will assist employers in navigating the immigration system and maximizing the opportunities available with immigration. One of the unexpected benefits of the Atlantic immigration pilot is that more employers will

learn about the benefits of using immigration as a tool to fill persistent labour-market needs. All programs can benefit.

Because of the interest generated in the Atlantic immigration pilot and our provincial government's ability to work with employers—

•(1650)

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds, please.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** —on which pathway is more suitable, we are already further ahead.

Going forward, the office of immigration will assist employees and employers, but the federal government is our key partner. You have the lion's share of control to set national policies. Appearing before you today, I would urge the federal government to ensure it has sufficient resources to process all applications in a timely manner, including the new Atlantic immigration pilot and all provincial nominees.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fares.

Ms. Mills, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Gerry Mills (Executive Director, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia):** Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the House of Commons standing committee. ISANS is the only multi-service settlement agency in Nova Scotia and the largest immigrant settlement agency in the Atlantic region. We've been operating for 35 years.

I'm sure you know how critical immigration is to the province and how the demographic challenges that face us are now constantly in our public discourse. Communities are shrinking, and employers are now really hurting and in many cases unable to meet their workforce needs. We just heard that.

Increased immigration is central to our future, but please don't take away from this that immigration is not working in Nova Scotia, because it is. Our numbers are increasing. As Wadih said, our retention rate has increased from 45% in the 1990s to 73%. Employers and communities are engaged. We have a unique approach to regulated professions that has led to immigrants in Nova Scotia, as Wadih said, being twice as likely to be working in their professions. The exam pass rates for internationally educated pharmacists, physicians, and engineers is way above the national average. Economic principle applicants and family-sponsored spouses have higher earnings in Nova Scotia than immigrants nationally.

Immigration is working in Nova Scotia, but we need more and we need to keep more. Here are a few things that would help.

Firstly, resource the Atlantic immigration pilot. To bring you up to date, ISANS has developed 123 settlement plans to date, 109 outside Canada for all the four provinces, and a total of 74 for Nova Scotia both in and outside Canada. The pilot is based on the premise of the need for retention in the Atlantic provinces, and it's assumed that the added responsibilities placed on employers will increase that retention. The whole pilot has been developed with this in mind.

While we're excited about the opportunity and working really hard to make it work—in fact, determined to make it work—the process is complicated. It demands a lot from the employer, mostly SMEs who have neither experience in nor resources to respond to the settlement needs of their employees.

If we're really determined to make this work, we need to resource the pilot. The AIP is a priority for us. We've had hundreds and hundreds of calls, and to respond to employers, employees, individuals, and communities, we need some coordination around it. This is not business as usual, and if we have learned anything in the last few years in Nova Scotia, it's that our increased retention rate is due to two things: better selection and increased investment in settlement services.

In addition, we need to make settlement programs accessible to the applicant sooner. Right now we're doing needs assessments for AIP clients. We're telling them this is what you need and these are the programs you should access, but right now you can't because you're not a permanent resident and you're not eligible. For the pilot we've amended eligibility for them to allow them to receive a settlement plan before they become a PR.

I suspect the rejection rate by IRC of AIP applicants is really negligible. We know they will access these programs once they become a permanent resident. Also, we want them to integrate more quickly. We want the spouses to access the labour market sooner. We know from our research on our regular pre-arrival programs that 78% of clients are working within six months of arrival. Let's make AIP clients eligible for federally funded programs upon endorsement of their application.

Secondly, we need increased flexibility around the PNP, provincial nominee program. If we're seeking ideas how to increase and retain immigrants to the Atlantic, we know people bring people to a community and we know people keep people in a community.

In Nova Scotia, we had a very successful program that worked with the existing communities to bring people. For example, the local Jewish community worked with the province to bring Russian Jews to Nova Scotia who were finding it difficult to settle in Israel. Around 250 to 300 people came, and only one or two families left. Of course they didn't leave. They had support. The local Jewish community helped to integrate them to resources, work, schools, etc.

For various reasons, the program didn't continue. I know there have been problems in the PNP in some of the provinces. I know that Nova Scotia had its own unique challenge, but we need some flexibility. Here's a pilot ready for the making, a community-supported immigration pilot that uses some of the best elements of Canada's enormously successful privately sponsored refugee program, engagement of communities to attract, support, and retain immigrants.

Provinces don't retain people. People retain people. I'm suggesting that the federal government allow opportunity for some additional pilots outside of the AIP. Nova Scotia has demonstrated over the last few years its commitment to immigration and its ability to settle and retain immigrants. Provide us with some additional tools to do so.

Before I leave the PNP, I have to take the opportunity to speak to the caps on the provincial nominees. While I fully support the AIP, it's the nominee program that has allowed the province to significantly increase its numbers of immigrants for the past few years.

•(1655)

We currently have a cap of 1,350. We've never failed to reach that nomination number. Most of our immigrants to Nova Scotia come through the PNP stream. If the federal government is truly interested in increasing immigration to the Atlantic, raise or eliminate the caps. The arguments that I've heard against it—that people don't stay, that increasing those numbers would decrease numbers in the federal economic stream—I don't understand. Seventy-three per cent of people do stay, and certainly most PNs stay. Also, provinces know who they need in their communities and workforce. Let them nominate them, and in Atlantic Canada let's attract to retain. Eliminating those caps for a pilot for a few years would have very little impact on the overall federal economic numbers.

Finally, I'd like to talk about refugees. Refugees are just PRs who came through a different immigration stream. They're having a significant impact on our communities right across the Atlantic, and ISANS is an organization supporting increased numbers of refugees, both government-assisted and private sponsorships. We know that means increased investment up front, but immigration needs a long-time vision. We're growing a province, and we're growing our communities, not just responding to labour market shortages. If we want to increase the number of immigrants into our province, we need to look at all immigration streams.

Already, our Syrian refugees are asking how to sponsor their family members. Many are not yet in a position to do so, but they will be and we want to have an answer for them. We know that refugees who carve out a life in Canada will have the resources to sponsor family members. When they bring those family members, they don't move anywhere.

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** We also know that the children of refugees do really well and that the Syrian refugee initiative opened up opportunities. Let's not lose the momentum, the goodwill, the support, that the Syrian refugee initiative engendered in Nova Scotia.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Fraser, the floor is yours. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Colin Fraser (West Nova, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, each of you, for being here today and joining us and sharing this information, which is going to be helpful and useful to our committee as we come up with recommendations to the government on this very important issue.

I am the member of Parliament for West Nova. I know how important immigration is to not only our province but my region in particular, where we're seeing labour shortages. We're seeing out-migration of younger people, as alluded to earlier. I really appreciate the fact that you took the time today to come and share your thoughts with us.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Fares, if I could. You mentioned that you co-chair the council on Nova Scotia Immigration. I know the good work that has already been undertaken, and I appreciate that very much. As alluded to a moment ago, there are good-news stories

happening on immigration, in Nova Scotia in particular. You talked about employer engagement. I wonder if you could expand on that a little bit, especially now that we're seeing applications into the Atlantic immigration pilot project, and talk about why it's so important to engage employers and make sure that we're meeting the needs or fitting the needs of the labour force right across Nova Scotia.

•(1700)

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** At the end of the day, for any immigration program to work, the business community will have to be part of it and will have to be the main one pushing for it. Employers are the business community. In what we've done in Nova Scotia, I believe we were successful in promoting the programs that we were able to initiate ourselves as a province. Also, when the Atlantic pilot program came in, we promoted it within the business community and it's working very well.

You see, employers don't always know what's available to them. They know they have gaps or they have shortages, but they don't know what's available to them. That's what we're doing more and more in Nova Scotia. We're promoting the programs. For example, me and my co-chair, Dr. Colin Dodds, we're going out there and we're meeting face to face with the stakeholders. We have at least two or three meetings a month with different business groups to explain what's available. That's why you see the success rate from the business community using the immigration programs, and that's why we want to make sure we keep them.

**Mr. Colin Fraser:** Do you think it's important, not only to match up new immigrants to Nova Scotia with employers that have openings and obviously labour shortage issues, but also to do that work on the front end so that the retention rates of those newcomers to Nova Scotia are higher because they have jobs that are satisfactory to their skills and their abilities?

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** Obviously, for an employer to be accepted and approved, to be designated, a lot of research and assessment must go toward that application. Once the employer is approved, that means it's a good employer. We are sure that they are going to give good jobs and take care of the newcomers and the foreign workers. That's why we believe we'll be very successful.

**Mr. Colin Fraser:** Suzanne, do you see interest in the new Atlantic immigration program across Nova Scotia, not just in Halifax?

**Ms. Suzanne Ley (Executive Director, Nova Scotia Office of Immigration):** Absolutely. We've had applications for designation from every region of the province, so it's really encouraging. As Mr. Fares mentioned, we are hearing from employers who have never considered immigration as a tool to fill their market needs. It's extremely positive for us—small enterprises, very big companies, and a range of occupations and sectors across the province.

**Mr. Colin Fraser:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Mugridge, in talking about your company, Louisbourg Seafoods, you mentioned the different segments of your labour force—a third, a third, and a third—and 33% of that workforce you described as solid, long-term career employees. Can you talk a bit about why it's important to have different segments within your company to support their work? Would you be able to do it with just the 33% of employees who are there long term, without support from other people coming in?

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** No, we absolutely would not be able to meet our labour needs with that one third of the workforce. My point in mentioning why we have a third, a third, and a third of employees is that this is how the reality has been within our industry. That's how it has happened. Now, in planning for the future, what we are seeing is that there absolutely is a need for workers from elsewhere, either immigrants or temporary foreign workers, or what have you.

The unemployment rates in our areas in some cases are upwards of 30%. When we see that, we ask ourselves, "If that many people are out of work, why can't we get workers?" We've looked internally for that, and we've looked at some improvements we can make internally to make the jobs more attractive to existing workers in order to retain them, as well as to the communities that we exist in now and to the immigrant workers.

• (1705)

**Mr. Colin Fraser:** Would you agree that bringing in new immigrants with permanent residency and a proper fit in the community, and welcoming the family for the long term to eventually perhaps become Canadian citizens, would be preferable to a temporary foreign worker program for your company?

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** Yes, I would agree with that. Bringing in immigrants would solve the issues of the community first, before it solves any issues of labour that we have within our industry. I think it's more important to strengthen the community rather than solve any labour needs that a business has.

**Mr. Colin Fraser:** Great. Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Saroya, you have seven minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of you for coming and giving us your perspectives.

All of us around this table—from this side, that side, and every side—want the east coast to do well. We are all on your side. I can give you the immigrant point of view. I came to Ontario 40-plus years ago. I came to a situation similar to what you are going to go through, an absolutely white country. When the immigrants come, they are looking for jobs, nothing but the jobs. They want to work five days, six days, seven days. They want to be successful. They want to rent their own apartment. A year down the road they want to buy a car. Two years down the road they want to buy a house. This is how the economy goes. This is how we succeeded in Ontario. I'm hoping you do the same.

We heard over and over that the original population is shrinking. What are the main reasons? Is it fewer births, or people moving away? Can anybody tell us something about that?

Please, go ahead.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** The reality is that for Canadians the birth rate is not there anymore. The old families used to have four or five kids, but no more. That doesn't exist anymore. That's number one.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Right.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** We need to grow the population. We believe that immigration is one of the most important elements that we can use to grow the population.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Absolutely, and we all believe that. This is why Ontario is doing very well, because most immigrants are coming here.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** The challenge is not only in Canada but around the world. The whole world is competing for immigrants. Every country in the world is competing for immigrants.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Does this have something to do with the unemployment or the wages?

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** I've never worried about an immigrant finding a job. I'll tell you one thing. If someone decides to leave their country, their parents, their home, friends, language, and culture, and go to a strange land, they're not lazy. They have the energy. They're out there and they came here to make good, to have a good life and a more comfortable life. They're looking for opportunities. Look at us in Canada. Immigrants came in and built this country.

I can tell you that in Nova Scotia—allow me to say this about the Lebanese community, because I'm of Lebanese background—they did a study two years ago. Every Lebanese person accounts for 3.8 jobs in Halifax. This is immigration. These are immigrants. I'm not worried about them.

I worry about what Gerry said, and I agree with her. The community sponsor program is the most important program we could put in, because if I come to Canada and I have a community that I can take comfort in, I stay. This is the most important thing, because even if I have a job, what happens after five o'clock? What happens on Saturday and Sunday? You have to make immigrants and newcomers comfortable.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** But remember that immigrants are always looking for opportunities. I'll tell you that 44 years ago when I came here, the biggest and toughest part was to find a job.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** They find their own jobs. They make their own jobs.

• (1710)

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** I tell you, it took me nine months to find my first job.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** That's easy: nine months. What's nine months?

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** People who come to you or to me or anybody else, they are looking for the opportunity—

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** But nothing—

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** That was my question.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** Nothing is so easy. You have to come here and get yourself familiar with the surroundings—



**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Mr. Fares, I know this. I've gone through it. You guys came much after that. The situation was much better than in the days I came from. I want to make sure that we do—

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** I came when I was 18 years old.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:**—the study so everybody understands. We want to make sure that people go to these—

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** That's right, but allow me to say this. There are examples everywhere. I came when I was 18 years old. I didn't even speak English. I went to university. There are stories like that. What I'm saying is that immigrants prove themselves—

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Okay. Let me speak to Adam.

Adam, would you have any opinion on it?

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** Here's my opinion. Are there jobs? Absolutely, there are jobs. We can't find enough workers to fill the jobs we have right now, and we're talking about rural coastal communities. I think a question came up about why people left, and why the population is declining. You started your comment with that.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Yes.

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** There's something that I was going to say, and I can relate to it personally. Some of my friends comment that there are no “good jobs”. What is a good job? That's a relative statement, but at the time, currently, do we consider a fish plant job a good job? I think it's a good job. I think it could be improved upon, and we're making steps to make it more attractive to all workers. Certainly, yes, there is....

Even in communities that have high unemployment, I think that number is not reflective of reality. I think that just because there's a high unemployment number.... We still can't find workers. There is a labour shortage despite that number. I think it's misleading to a lot of people when they see that.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Is there anything from you, Ms. Mills?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I think people will come and will stay for three reasons: job, family, and community. If they have family there, that's going to attract them there and keep them there. As for the community, absolutely, it's incredibly important, but the most important is the job. As everybody has said, if that job is there—a good job—then the other ones will come along with it as well.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Somebody else—

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Somebody mentioned last week that more students should be coming to Atlantic Canada. When they go to school, they will learn the language. They will get educated there. They will understand the customs, etc.

Does anybody have any opinions on bringing more students to Atlantic Canada, and maybe reducing their tuition fees because it's triple that of local students?

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** We do have 7,000 international students in Nova Scotia. The international student is a big factor in our immigration programs.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Unfortunately, we're significantly over seven minutes.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

Mr. Chair, I would like to put a motion on the order paper, if I may, before I start my questions. I'll put this motion on the order paper. It is that pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(c), the committee establish a subcommittee of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to study the issue of internally displaced persons in order to determine how Canada can best respond to the increasing trend of internal displacement and the growing role of non-state actors in global displacement; that the subcommittee be comprised of seven members; and that the subcommittee report its findings to the committee.

That's the notice of motion.

I'm going to move on to questions for the rest of my minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We can resume the clock.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The issue around immigration, we've heard, has to do with immigration level numbers, as well. I know there's a special program for the Atlantic provinces, but really, as Mr. Fares was saying, we need more immigrants. The truth of the matter is that we have an aging population across the country, although that is more severe in the Atlantic provinces. We also have a situation in which people are just not having as many babies. My mom had six and I have two, case in point. That's the reality we face today.

Should we be looking at increasing the immigration level numbers? Right now the number is 300,000. Should we be looking at increasing the number for the Atlantic provinces, but more to the point, increasing that number for the rest of the country as well? It's just a quick question to get your sense of this, and then I will have a couple of other sets of questions.

Mr. Fares.

● (1715)

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** I definitely believe that we should increase the number of immigrants allowed to come into Nova Scotia under the nominee program. We always call for the cap to be lifted, as Gerry mentioned. Let us do our own thing and see what we can do. If we're successful, we'll keep going. If we're not successful, obviously we'll stop. I strongly believe that we should increase the number of immigrants to Atlantic Canada, and we should lift the cap we have to work with.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

I'll go to the folks with us by video conference.

Ms. Mills, we'll go to you.

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** Yes, we should.

As part of the settlement sector—actually we were just debating that this morning—we are going to be putting out a 2020 vision in the next few days. It will go out to the federal government as well as provincial governments. It calls for a significant increase in immigration numbers.

In terms of the Atlantic, you can't mandate people to come to the Atlantic. You have to attract people to the Atlantic. We need some of those tools. As I said, and Wadih has just said as well, allowing the caps to be eliminated.... I know that is quite a political decision, because other provinces would also request that, as well. If we're really talking about Atlantic immigration, then we need those tools, because the vast majority of people who come into our province come through the provincial nominee program.

There are other tools, such as the community identified.... Let's look at what would attract and keep people in our provinces.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

I think it's actually fair to say that we need to increase the numbers. Right now, at 300,000, I think it's deficient. In fact, the government's own special expert panel recommended 450,000, so the numbers should be increased to that end.

I'm going to park it there. You're recommending we should lift the cap on the PNP for the Atlantic provinces, to be sure, but potentially for other provinces as well.

I'm going to move to another question. There's this notion that if you're good enough to work, you're good enough to stay. That's certainly my position. Really, by extension, if you're good enough to study here, you ought to be good enough to stay. As it stands right now, our express entry system has created a problem whereby people have to compete to get points to even make an application for permanent resident status, which is really a wasted resource because they've already studied here. We should be working hard to retain them, not saying, you studied here but we don't really want you here anymore, so go away.

On that premise, do you think we should be changing our immigration policies to reflect the notion that if you're good enough to work here, you're good enough to stay, and if you're good enough to study here, you're good enough to stay, and give folks a direct pathway to permanent resident status?

I'll open it to Mr. Fares.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** I believe strongly in this, and we picked up on it in Nova Scotia. We have two different programs that deal with the international students so that after graduation they are allowed to work and apply for permanent residence. We're promoting this throughout the universities in Nova Scotia, and we've been very successful in it.

I agree with that 100%. If I had the time, I would tell you about the “mattress king”, but I don't have the time. The chairman is very strict.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I know. I have two minutes, but it will be less than two minutes now.

Can I hear from the folks on video conference—a quick word from Adam, and then maybe from Gerry as well?

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** In Nova Scotia, for example, there is a mentorship program in place offered through EduNova. It's a mentorship program for recent graduates who are immigrants, or who would like to be immigrants.

Our company has worked with five or six of them since January, and in every case they've been excellent to work with. I could see them filling a position within our company immediately in most cases. That's just a great example of some of the people who are studying in Nova Scotia, who I think could immediately move into —

• (1720)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, so you support it.

Sorry, I'm going to cut to the quick, because I have less than a minute now. I'm going to move to my next question, because I think it's essential. It's on family reunification for refugees that are already here. We have this one-year window of opportunity in the program, but it takes forever for people to process the application. As well, siblings—

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** —would not be included, by way of definition of “sibling”, in a family reunification process.

Can I just get a quick round? I'll go to Mr. Fares. Would you agree that we should broaden the definition for family reunification and also invest in resourcing and processing for that?

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** The biggest problem we have in immigration is the process.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes.

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** It takes forever to do anything when it comes to the federal government immigration process, and that's something we would like to stress, to do something about minimizing—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Make it less than 12 months, or up to one year for processing time. Would you say that really is the upper limit?

**Mr. Wadih Fares:** It should be less than 12 months. If you're going to wait two or three years, life changes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Zahid. I understand you will be splitting your time with Ms. Lockhart. You have seven minutes, please.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair. I will be sharing and she will start.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to each of the witnesses.

I want to build on the narrative we're talking about. Mr. Saroya brought it up, and Ms. Kwan talked about it as well. Why is it that we have an aging population? One of the interesting statistics I've seen recently is that the out-migration from Atlantic Canada is actually less than what it is in Toronto, but we haven't been focused on backfilling with immigration. The immigration rates are nowhere near the same. This is something that's happened over many years, and I think it would be fair to say that there wasn't a real focus on immigration as a path forward for Atlantic Canada.

The other thing to look at is the percentage of rural area in Atlantic Canada versus some of the other areas. The challenges you bring up are real, and the narrative has to change a little bit too.

You're a great panel to talk to about the processing, immigration, and retention of newcomers. How do you think we can most efficiently match potential newcomers to the actual gaps in the workforce? In some areas in our workforce we do have an ample number of people who are able to work and are filling the jobs, and in others we don't.

How do you think we can efficiently make that match?

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** I think the Atlantic pilot program is a great program that will do that. You talk directly to the employers and the employers are in control of who they want to bring in. I believe the pilot program is going to be very successful, and that's something we should probably continue down the road. That's the only way. We need to make sure that we engage the business community and promote and educate them on the tools that are available in the province so that they can fill the gap in the shortage they have, and then let the program take care of itself.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Is that a shift in the way we've approached immigration, having a bigger emphasis on businesses?

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** We were never serious about immigration. I'm going to be honest with you. I come from a province that's dear to my heart, but we were never serious about immigration. We've talked about the aging population. I've been on immigration panels for the last 15 years, and it's only about talk. It's only been the last three or four years that we've been really focused. We've said we're going to have to do something about it, or it's going to be too late.

I believe we're focusing right now and I hope that we get the results. It's not too late. I don't believe we focused. Probably Gerry or Suzanne would not agree with me, but I don't believe we focused properly on the aging population and on our population issues. Now we are focused and we're seeing results.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Thank you.

Louisbourg Seafoods, Mr. Mugridge, you talk a lot about community and how you feel it very important to engage your community in your business.

How does your community feel about immigration? That's another narrative that we hear a lot. Are communities open to newcomers? How do you feel about that?

• (1725)

**Mr. Adam Mugridge:** Yes, absolutely. The communities that we work in are very open to immigrants. I think there's a recognition that everyone looks around them and everyone knows family members and friends who used to be here, but they're not here anymore. The recognition is that we love our communities and we want to keep them going. I think the conclusion is that immigrants are really the only solution.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Okay, great.

Ms. Mills, did you want to weigh in on that as well?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** A few years ago, my phone was ringing off the hook with people asking me, "Come and speak to us about immigrants and why we need immigrants." That's not what we're talking about right now. My phone is ringing off the hook with people saying, "What can we do? What can I do? What can I do personally, as an employer, as a community?"

Communities are absolutely ready in Nova Scotia. I think there was a tipping point as well with the Syrian refugee initiative. We were really proud of how we responded to that in Nova Scotia. To date we don't hear those negative stories at all. It's not just a case of this one or two. We don't hear them. I'm not so naive to think it's not there, but it's usually drowned out by other more positive voices.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** I'd like to know a little about the community connections program. That came from the association of immigrant services. Is that correct? Can you speak to that a bit?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** I can speak to community connections. What was the question?

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Can you tell me a bit about the community connections program? How does it work? You had mentioned that additional funding is required. No...?

**Ms. Gerry Mills:** No. Community connections is a federally funded settlement program that connects people to the community. It could be through volunteers or through, for instance, people engaged in community gardens, volunteering in the community, that sort of work. I don't think I asked for additional funding.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Sorry. We were talking about two different things, then, but that's great.

**Mr. Wadiah Fares:** If I may, I believe it's a community sponsor program where a community that exists in Canada can sponsor families and bring them from overseas. They'll sponsor them. They'll support them. They'll be their guidance.

**Ms. Suzanne Ley:** Under the provincial nominee program, we used to have a program called "community identified", which Gerry spoke to earlier. The premise of the program was that we partnered with a number of organizations. At the time, they were regional development agencies and some cultural communities. Those organizations, economic or cultural, would identify somebody they knew who could reasonably attach to the labour market.

I think what Gerry is talking about is bringing something like that back—and certainly Mr. Fares as well—something that has a labour market attachment piece, but where you're bringing in somebody with a connection.

**Mrs. Alaina Lockhart:** Thank you.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'd like to thank our panel of witnesses for appearing before the committee today and providing your insights.

With that, we'll suspend for a couple of minutes and go in camera for the draft report on the pilot project on LGBTQ2 refugees.

*[Proceedings continue in camera]*









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