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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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**Thursday, November 30, 2017**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Robert Oliphant**



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• (0850)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):** Good morning. I call to order this 88th meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. This is our third meeting, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), to consider resettlement issues related to Yazidi women and girls and associated topics that have been coming to the committee's attention.

Our hope is to provide an update to Parliament on the government's process in bringing Yazidi refugees to Canada, as well as how the refugees are doing in Canada. Even though we have been doing this project for a very short period of time, we feel it's important to update Parliament on this topic.

We'll also go into other related topics. As topics arose in our first two meetings, members of the committee suggested other witnesses who may shed some light to help us understand why there are some settlement issues and how we can help the government do better.

We'll begin with a video conference from Calgary. Thank you for getting up very early in Calgary. We're going to start with Shannon Smith.

**Ms. Shannon Smith (As an Individual):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you.

I met the Morad family earlier this spring. They're a Yazidi family. It's a seven-member household headed by Gule, who is in her early thirties. She is responsible for an elderly mother, a severely disabled adult sister, and four girls between the ages of five and 13.

Gule herself was held captive by ISIS and horrifically abused, as was her young daughter. All the male members of their household were murdered: her husband, her father, her brother, her uncle, and her infant nephew. They witnessed many of these murders. One surviving male family member, Gule's brother, is now in northern Iraq in a refugee camp waiting to come to Canada. He is desperate to come and help them.

Because of all this trauma and current stress, I've seen little or no progress in Gule's ability to learn English over the last seven months or so. She's been taking classes. She's been attending regularly and trying very hard, but I believe the stress and the trauma are preventing her from learning English.

Her oldest daughter in particular is struggling as well. She loves school, but she's filled with anxiety. On the first day of school in

September, she was attending a new junior high school. She had to walk several blocks and take two buses to get there, and she became very overwhelmed. She and her mother decided she would no longer be put through that, and so she stopped attending school after the first day. Just before Thanksgiving in October, I happened to stop by the house during the day and found the 13-year-old at home. I asked Dunia what she was doing at home. She told me the situation. I asked her if she wanted to go to school. She fell to her knees crying and shaking and saying she wanted to go to school but didn't know how.

I immediately went back to work and phoned the principal of the school, who was absolutely amazing. He was mortified that this had happened and called an emergency meeting that evening. The next morning and every day since, Dunia has been picked up by a taxi and taken to and from school. But she went 40 days without attending school, crying at home, and nobody noticed. There were no calls from the school. I don't say this to criticize the school. They handled it very well in the end, but I don't understand how that happened to this little girl.

They have some wonderful volunteers in their lives who have done a really good job of taking them on outings, but it's very difficult. One of the issues is that the severely disabled sister, who has some form of cerebral palsy it seems, cannot walk, cannot communicate. She's absolutely housebound. They've been here for seven to nine months, and there is no wheelchair access in or out of the home. It's up to these very slight women to try to carry her down cement steps in and out of the house. I don't understand how that happened. I'm working with volunteers to try to get a ramp installed.

Gule was sold hourly as a slave to members of ISIS for months. She is very traumatized. The daughter is very traumatized. They wake up in the night crying and screaming. When I go to visit, the elderly mother spends much of her time weeping with her apron over her head. She has flashbacks. She relives memories over and over. I'm really uncertain as to the kind of mental health help this family is getting. I know there were some group sessions early on—Gule told me that—but translation services were cut off for the family six months after they arrived here, so mostly how I communicate with them now is through pictures and acting things out. I've seen very little progress in mental health as well. Kifshe, the elderly mother, will not leave her disabled daughter's side, so she is not getting out either.

I asked Gule what she would like me to tell the committee. She said, "Please, please, my sister and my mother need fresh air. They need to get outside. We need a ramp. We need help." The other thing she told me was, "Please, why is my brother not allowed to come to Canada?" It's almost a year that he's been waiting, and I don't have a good answer for her as to why this fully capable, willing-hearted, adult man has not been brought to help this family.

I asked the 13-year-old daughter, Dunia, what she would like me to tell the committee. She said, "Please bring my uncle. We need help. My mom needs help." She said, "Please bring my father as well", which alarmed me, because I knew that Dunia knew her father had died. I asked Gule why she was asking to bring her father. Gule told me that she's not doing well. From what I can tell, Dunia is really deteriorating. She's regressing. Gule doesn't really know how to express this to me, so please forgive these words, but this is what Gule said to me, "Please, I'm crazy. My daughter is crazy. We need help." I know they're not crazy, but I know that's the only way she knows how to express herself. They realize they are in mental distress, and they do need help.

•(0855)

**The Chair:** I'm going to need you to draw to a close very quickly.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Okay.

One of their sources of help is a very elderly neighbour, who is really ill-equipped to help them.

I have so many questions. Why have they had no opportunity to gather with other Yazidi families? Why are mental health needs not being met? Why is this home not wheelchair accessible? Why isn't the brother able to come? How is she going to learn English with all this trauma and stress?

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

I think you'll get a chance during the question period to add comments.

We'll go now to Mohamed Al-Adeimi in London, Ontario, who is joining us via video conference as well.

You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Mohamed Al-Adeimi (Director, Newcomer Settlement Services, South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre):** Good morning. *Bonjour*, everybody.

My name is Mohamed Al-Adeimi, and I'm the director of settlement services at the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre. The South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre is one of the largest neighbourhood resource centres that supports families in London.

I was contacted yesterday to be a witness with regard to the support and services that are available for the Yazidi women and girls, but I'll be speaking with regard to the support we put in place immediately after the Yazidi families who are survivors of Daesh came to our notice.

The honourable minister came to London and met with all the agencies to be equipped and ready for the families that would be

coming to London. Immediately before their arrival, we put in place a kind of wraparound team with the support that we get through IRCC funding. We make sure that the settlement staff are aware of the atrocities and hardships that the Yazidi women and their families have undergone. On the arrival of the Yazidi families, we were aware that they were in the schools in the neighbourhood.

I'll be talking today about one family. The family consists of a mother with eight children. The first contact of the mom with the settlement worker in the school was in the summer before the school closed for summer vacation. The SWIS worker immediately talked to the mom, who was reluctant at the beginning, but with the help of the ESL teacher at the school, she was able to meet with her and listen to her complaints, through an interpreter, initially.

Later on, after understanding the difficulties that the mom was undergoing, and knowing that the kids also had a lot of distress that they'd been through.... We are lucky that we have strong partnerships with mental health agencies within our neighbourhood for the youth, as well as for the adults.

The first issue that the settlement worker started to work on was connecting the whole family with two agencies that provide mental health services for children below the age of 12 and also for youth: Vanier Children's Services and Craigwood. We also partnered with a project that is in London called the RBC Centre for the mental health of immigrants and refugees. We have been working with the London Health Sciences Centre for the past three years, and they are also in our centre. We connect those families who are having mild to severe mental health issues.

The other part of the service that we have put in place for addressing the mental health of the family is giving a chance for the mom to spend quality time and go shopping or meet with other women in the neighbourhood. We connected with many moms. It's a centre where they provide a day of respite for the kids to play and have fun, and the mom can also spend some time.

The families are also wait-listed with another agency dealing with mental health. It's called Family Service Thames Valley.

•(0900)

This is the area of mental health that we thought was essential to address from the very beginning. The other part is to deal with basic needs. The family is in an area where there are lots of services that are delivered in a holistic manner in a centre that runs over 85 programs and services. We feel that this mom, who has been through so much, is still struggling. It's similar to the same story that the previous witness just spoke about, and I don't want to repeat the same story.

We made sure that the issues of transportation, interpretation, and other basic needs that the whole family requires.... I'm sure that through IRCC, the RAP.... Initially, on arrival, they were provided with basic needs with regard to furniture and clothing, etc. As the winter started to get closer, they were connected to centres that we have been partnering with for the last 30 or 40 years—churches, faith groups—and also in the last two years, with other faith groups that have put together services to provide basic needs to refugees and immigrants.

We have also put in place...so that the kids get recreational activities. During the whole summer they were connected to the Boys and Girls Club, for example, and to the YMCA sports and day camps. The main issue that we faced initially was that we were not funded to support this family, but since we are already funded through the settlement workers in schools programs... also providing orientation and information as well as community connections. All of these services were already in place when we responded to the influx of the Syrians who came to London. London, as you know, has received one of the largest Syrian communities.

We already—

● (0905)

**The Chair:** I'm going to need you to wrap up fairly quickly.

**Mr. Mohamed Al-Adeimi:** Okay.

Recently we have had the opportunity to hire one support settlement worker to reach out to most, if not all, of the Yazidi families and do a wrap-around program that we are anticipating to make sure that they [*Inaudible—Editor*]. Will we be able to succeed? I say this is going to be an ongoing support and it's not a one-time shot. We hope that we will continue serving.

I have a chart that I will send to the committee, Mr. Chair, if that's okay.

**The Chair:** That would be very good.

I'm afraid I need to end it there. I'm sure you will get an opportunity to get a little more in when questions are asked. Anything you or any other witness would like to submit to the committee would be very appropriate and helpful.

We'll go to Mr. Khoudeida as our next witness.

You have seven minutes as well. Thank you.

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida (As an Individual):** Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

My name is Omar Khoudeida, and I am both an activist in the Yazidi community in London, Ontario, and an employee of the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. Thank you for inviting me to attend this committee and to give an update on the Yazidis who resettled in London this year.

As we all know, on August 3, 2014, ISIS committed the worst crime against the Yazidi population in Iraq. However, this crime, like many others before it, is not isolated. In 2017, the Canadian government committed itself to resettle 1,200 Yazidis this year. Since February 2017, London has received 68 families—170 individuals.

Since their arrival and up until now, the Yazidi community has been working with the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre to provide all the services and immediate needs for the new arrivals, including but not limited to short-term accommodation; permanent accommodation; facilitation of needed documents, such as PR cards and OHIP cards; applying for child benefits; interim federal health and life skills supports; access to information, orientation, and education sessions; access to on-site medical care in partnership with our local community health centre; intensive, time-sensitive, and specialized case management; needs assessment, referrals, case coordination, home visits, and referrals to many agencies; settlement

counselling and access to short-term on-site counselling; on-site child minding; language assessment and referrals to LINC and ESL programs; participation in social, therapeutic, language, and skills-based groups; and matching families with volunteers in the community.

We have identified some single mothers with children who face additional settlement challenges and who are in need of longer-term support. Furthermore, the London community has experienced an influx of government-assisted refugees who have transferred from Toronto and other cities due to affordability and a connection to local community.

We have been supporting 12 transferred families with 46 members. We have also worked with the Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre to collaborate on an art therapy group for Yazidi children. Allowing children space to be children and allowing creative experience and focus on recovery and resilience has proven efficacious for children affected by armed conflict.

There are many survivors of the Yazidi genocide and sexual enslavement who remain in the refugee camps in the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq, with further displaced...who are willing and waiting to be resettled. Many are unwilling or unable to return home due to the instability in the region, with no local durable solutions.

We implore you to extend the commitment of this committee, to encourage and engage private sponsors, and to give them access to refugee camps in northern Iraq. Continue to provide federal funding to support the services that are being offered to this community and to others who are both marginalized and displaced.

Throughout history, the Yazidi people have been marginalized and treated like second-class if not third-class citizens. I am very confident that today you all will agree that upon arriving in Canada they are made to feel welcome and confident in their identity and that they will not be marginalized again.

Your continued support and services addressing settlement success, mental health, and well-being will foster recovery, resilience, and empowerment for a successful transition to Canadian life and its values.

● (0910)

London and the Cross Cultural Learner Centre have a long-standing history of resettlement for many refugee communities and have the capacity and the resources to take in and support more Yazidi refugees.

I thank you very much, and God bless you.

**The Chair:** Thank you as well, Mr. Khoudeida.

We'll now go to Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities. We have Mr. Chacon and Ms. Tabet. Did I pronounce that correctly?

**Ms. Rania Tabet (Services Manager, Interpretation and Translation Services, Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities):** Yes.

**The Chair:** Together, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon (Executive Director, Interpretation Services, Cultural Interpretation Services for Our Communities):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee, guests, and witnesses, for the opportunity to profile our organization and the challenges we face evaluating and recruiting interpreters for languages of lesser diffusion.

CISOC is a local organization. It was created in 1993. The purpose of the organization is to provide interpretation and translation services, language fluency assessment, and training for interpreters who work in the community. The organization is a charity; it's non-profit.

Some of the challenges we face, of course, are in identifying languages that need to be created and tested. Currently, we train interpreters all across the country, and we evaluate fluency for those interpreters in 50 languages. One of the challenges we face is often funding to develop new languages. At the moment, we already have a test for Kermanji. This is the Kurdish version, but of course, one of the difficulties we're facing with the community that has arrived in Canada is that many of them speak different dialects. Often we need to develop assessments for those dialects in order to better represent them.

As I mentioned, we have organizations that we support all across the country. The process we follow to locate interpreters is to ensure first that they have the fluency necessary to be able to provide the services in the communities. We need to provide the training necessary to educate them and to ensure that they follow the protocols we have put in place here in Canada, as well as build vocabulary in the different areas such as medical, legal, and social environments.

It is a bit of an involved process, but it's very efficient. One of the major difficulties, of course, is developing assessments for those languages that are in less need or less demand. Since we are a charity, we generate revenue ourselves to develop these assessments; thus, we tend to often go for languages where we feel that there is high demand and that we can recover some of the expenses we invest.

If we were to create assessments for all the different languages needed in Canada, it is doable, but we will need some type of support from the community to be able to develop these assessments.

All our training is online, so it is accessible from any province. That makes it much easier, and we are building a stronger capacity in the country.

Unless you have any questions, I think that summarizes what we do. Hopefully, we can collaborate.

Thank you.

● (0915)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. Also, thank you for providing Kermanji interpretation services for this committee. We know it's not easy to find and you have been very helpful, so thank you.

We're going now to questioning, beginning with Mr. Sarai for a seven-minute round.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

First, thank you to all of you for coming, and thank you for your good work. I know it's a challenging file, and services in Canada are quite limited due to specifically the language barriers. The type of trauma that these individuals, particularly women, have faced is probably some of the most severe that anybody has ever seen.

Ms. Smith, can you comment on any challenges associated with finding interpreters for small-scale languages such as Kermanji?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** It has been a real challenge to find translation. As an individual, I've been scouring my networks to find translation.

I was a journalist for 20 years. I worked with refugees for five years. I've worked for international NGOs. I have many contacts. It has been extremely challenging to find translation, especially here in Calgary.

Last week, by luck and prayer, a friend of mine managed to connect me with a Kermanji speaker from Aleppo, Syria, and her family. Thankfully, I'm now able to communicate with the family and have translation, but really there was no process to go through. That was just leveraging the contacts I have that most people probably would not have.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** This committee heard from a psychologist last year who said that Yazidis don't have words in Kurdish that can express depression or trauma. He kind of stated also that very specially trained translators are needed.

Are you working with any special translators that have figured out this comfort level, or technology or techniques to assist in that type of language?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** No, and I think that's very evident in what I was telling you about the language they're using. They're saying, "I'm crazy. My daughter is crazy." These are harmful things, but you can feel her desperation in that she doesn't know how to express their deep needs and her daughter's deep needs. Labels, like "crazy", are obviously very difficult because the 13-year-old daughter now labels herself that way. When I ask, "Are you okay, Dunia, today? How are you feeling?", she says, "I'm crazy." As a mother of five, that's really hard to hear.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Have you been able to get psychologists who are not...or Kermanji speakers who are able to help develop language, terminology, or ways of communicating some of that trauma? Has there been any effective translation of services or technologies? It's kind of like ESL learning where sometimes you don't have the basics, but you need to learn the conversational language if that other person doesn't have any written language. There may be some sort of... I'm not an expert in it, but I'm just curious as to whether there have been any efforts made.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Yes, thank you for asking that, Mr. Sarai.

I taught English for many years as a volunteer, and I was actually really involved with helping the pre-beginner Syrian refugees who came a year and a half ago, developing classes for them. This is just a challenge that's very unique. I've been talking to friends. As I said, being a journalist for 20 years gives you the opportunity to meet thousands of people. I've leveraged all my contacts to try to discuss this problem with them. As you said, it's a challenge.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I'm sorry, but I have to consider the time I have to ask questions.

Are clergy or chaplain-type services.... I'm not overly familiar with how religious services work in a Yazidi community. Can that help? Has there been any connection to root them with faith?

I'll ask you that, Mr. Koudeida.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** That's a fantastic question and a really interesting one because I, myself, have a deep Christian faith. Because that's part of my life, I've asked if I could pray with them, which they were very excited about because prayer is part of their culture as well. We were able to do things like pray together, and I could see a calming effect. What's really interesting, too, is that they live across the street from a Catholic church. One day in desperation, they did walk over and knocked on the Catholic church's door, and a priest came. They've been praying with that Catholic priest.

They're very loving, very open, very receptive people to all faiths, which I deeply appreciate. It's a very important part of their lives. But because they're not connecting with other Yazidi families in the city, I'm relying on Internet research to find out what their beliefs are to try to talk to them. Again, the language is a barrier. Am I connecting with these people—

● (0920)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** I'd like to hear from Mr. Koudeida as well before I run out of time.

Have you found that there are other ways, perhaps through priests or religious services, to help counsel the grief because, obviously, our psychologists and trauma experts in the language are very limited?

**Mr. Omar Koudeida:** Yes, in London, we have difficulties, but not as many as maybe in Calgary because our community is large in London. We support them in language. I think we're good with that. When it comes to praying, most of them pray at home. Myself, I don't know how to pray because I left the country a long time ago. I asked them. They pray at home. The community is large there, so they are well connected.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Am I still good for time?

**The Chair:** You have half a minute.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Okay.

This question is for the South London Neighbourhood Resource Centre.

What difficulties do Yazidi children face in the Canadian school system? Are there services required by the Yazidi community in London that your organization is struggling to provide?

**Mr. Mohamed Al-Adeimi:** For the children, just keep in mind that they have not had schooling for most of their lives, either due to the war or because in the past, also, other internal conflicts were happening in Iraq.

As we have seen on a daily basis, the first time the children arrive, they are not eager to go to school because they have no idea exactly what it means to be in a school. When they are in the classrooms, most of the time they can't sit. They move around. They suddenly just drift and leave the classroom.

SWIS, the settlement workers in schools program, which is funded by IRCC, has been very supportive of the initial arrival of the Yazidis in the school systems in London. Most of the schools in London are provided with this type of support service.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to cut you off there. I'm sure you'll get more chances.

One note I want to give to the committee regarding terminology, and it's partly out of respect for those who sit in our booth, is just a reminder that “translation” is the function of the written word; “interpretation” has to do with what people do verbally. These are interpreters. Translators do written work. Then there's a third professional designation, called “terminology”. You have three different functions in this industry, in this profession. I just want to make sure you're aware of that. It's not that we don't need all three when you're dealing with non-widely disseminated languages, but we've been talking in particular about interpretation because that's how we engage human to human. I mention that just out of respect for the people who diligently serve in our booth as interpreters.

Ms. Rempel.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Koudeida, it's my understanding that the entire population of the community of Yazidis in Canada is about 1,000, or was 1,000 before this, and it's primarily centred in Toronto, London, and Winnipeg. Would that be correct?

**Mr. Omar Koudeida:** Yes. London is the largest community, and Winnipeg and Toronto.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** What we've heard from witnesses in this study and other studies as well is that part of the challenge of reintegrating the cohort of Yazidi refugees who are coming to the country is twofold: it's the extreme level of trauma that has been experienced, but also the community is very small in Canada. Would you say that would be an accurate characterization of the larger problem?

● (0925)

**Mr. Omar Koudeida:** Compared to Canada, it is small, but our community in London is around 500 people right now.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Sure.

We've heard some recommendations in terms of going forward, given the fact that the community is smaller compared to other populations that have been tasked with supporting refugees in the last few years and the trauma. The first recommendation would be that we need to have some type of novel or innovative and more nimble response network, specifically with the provision of transportation and interpretation services for the Yazidi refugees who are arriving. That is a gap in all the centres where Yazidis have been resettled. Would you deem that to be correct?

**Mr. Omar Koudeida:** To a certain point, yes, in terms of interpretation, we need to train more Yazidis who speak the direct language to help them, to support them.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Great.

Ms. Smith, would you agree with that?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Yes, absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Ms. Smith, given your experience in Calgary, would you also suggest that in the future, families coming to Canada be resettled into larger communities in London as opposed to Calgary? We've had a lot of questions about why families were sent to Calgary when there wasn't a lot of existing support there.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** The case I'm involved with is a bit different because there's an adult with a severe disability, which also hampers their ability to leave the home and to connect with other families, so that's an issue.

I feel a little uncomfortable actually saying where I think they should be settled, but I did present the question to Gule. I said, "Would you have preferred to have been around other families?" Her response was interesting. She seems to be lost in a netherworld. She said she would rather be in a community where there's a larger Yazidi population, yet her background is rural, so one of her favourite things to do is to look at pictures of my family's farm in northeastern Saskatchewan because she misses the rural community. She has the worst of both worlds here. She's in a large centre.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Okay. Thank you.

Something else that I've heard from people who have come into my office from London, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Calgary is that there really isn't any cohesive network nationally right now to coordinate best practice. It sounds like London is doing very well because there's an existing population there. Winnipeg is kind of struggling but getting through. Toronto would be a similar scenario.

Would you suggest that one of the recommendations the committee could make to the government is to provide funding for a conference to bring service providers together to discuss best practice?

Mr. Khoudeida.

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** It would be a good idea. If Toronto is struggling, then maybe we should meet with them and educate them on how to provide better services to newcomers. If they don't have enough interpreters, we suggest they spread the word to other communities. We can interpret over the phone if needed.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Ms. Smith.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Yes, absolutely.

I'm very encouraged to hear how well some of the other cities are doing, because I would like to be clear that I am in no way saying that I don't think the Yazidi population should be here or that we shouldn't bring more of these vulnerable women to our country. Yes, I think that it's sad that some communities seem to be doing really well and others aren't. It's the Yazidi people who are suffering for it.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** With regard to continued efforts to bring Yazidis to Canada, we've heard two very specific recommendations.

One is that the cap on private sponsorship for people from northern Iraq be lifted, with the specific aim of allowing more Yazidi families to come into the country.

The second is that the government should be encouraging the United Nations to prioritize genocide survivors, specifically Yazidis, in terms of referral to Canada as part of the GAR program.

Mr. Khoudeida, would you agree with that?

• (0930)

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** Yes.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** I would absolutely agree with that.

They need to be made a priority. Their needs are great, but their contributions are amazing too. They're going to make our country richer and better.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I just want to comment briefly, because the topic of religion was broached. In order to stop the genocide from being perpetuated, it's very important that in Canada we are also allowing the Yazidis who are coming here to preserve their faith, so the genocide isn't completed upon arrival in Canada.

Is that something, Ms. Smith and Mr. Khoudeida, that you would agree with?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** I would definitely agree with that. I'm going to broach a controversial subject here, because I feel it's very important.

Dunia, the 13-year-old daughter, told me that she feels she hasn't made a single friend in school, even though she is a friendly, outgoing girl. She said that she lives in a northeast community where there's a large Muslim population. Speaking Arabic is a trigger for Dunia, because her captors spoke Arabic. She tends to stay away from the Arabic children.

Because of her physical appearance, though, many non-Muslim children assume she is Muslim. They kind of push her towards being with the Muslim children. She feels very rejected by both Muslim and non-Muslim schoolchildren.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan.

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

Thank you, witnesses, not just for your presentations today, but for the good work you do in our community.

There's no question the situation with the Yazidis is very challenging. It seems to me that there is a great need to build up some infrastructure and supports. In the communities where there is better infrastructure, they seem to be doing better, but in others, not so much.

To that end, Ms. Smith, I would like to start with you.

In terms of the infrastructure needs in your community, can you name the top three things the government can do to support your efforts and those of others like you in this work most importantly to support the families that are in need?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Yes, I can easily do that.

The first one is interpretation services that extend beyond six months, because communication is a barrier to all the other issues, such as transportation and mental health services, which would be my next two priorities: interpretation and access to personalized, individualized mental health care, not in a group setting, but in their homes.



This is extreme sexual trauma, even for children, and it's very difficult for them—outside the comfort of their home and a trusting, private relationship—to really, fully express what they've been through. I believe that's why they continue to relive it.

Transportation is a major issue, particularly in Calgary where there is cold and snow, where we have a woman who is confined to a wheelchair and an elderly mother who will never leave her side. She was nine months in the country and I just figured out that Gule did not even have a grocery cart, so she was carrying eight to 10 bags on each arm when we couldn't help her get groceries. Through the snow and the cold, she was bringing groceries home, trying to feed this family of seven people. How is she supposed to carry enough groceries? Transportation is a huge issue for getting the daughter to school, as well. These things are very overwhelming when you're already traumatized and cannot speak the language. For us, getting on the bus might be simple. For them, it's not.

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

I'm going to turn to you, Mr. Chacon, on the issue around the interpretation and translation work you do through your agency.

You talked about the lack of funding, because as these different languages emerge, you may not have the already built-up capacity to develop and train people in this regard. Can you tell the committee what kinds of resources you need from the government to work in collaboration with you, so that we can actually build up this capacity to do the work that is so critically important?

• (0935)

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan, for the question.

To begin, we actually have begun training interpreters in Calgary, and I think they can be accessed through different organizations in the city. One of the difficulties, I believe, is connections and communication between different cities to ensure there is capacity in those locations.

To answer your question, we've already developed an assessment for Kermanji, but one of the difficulties with the Yazidi community is that they speak several dialects. In order to meet their requirements and have people with capacity to help them, we need to develop new assessments to ensure that they have the fluency.

As for costs and funding, as I mentioned, we are a charity. We are able to generate and create assessments ourselves, but with the limited resources that we have, we only have a small capacity. Assistance from the government would be amazing if we could—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** What do you need from the government on this specific question?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** We need funding.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** How much?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** I would say \$100,000 would go a long way to develop as many languages as possible in all the different communities.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Could you provide something written in terms of those needs and submit that to our committee, so we can actually have that information on record?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** Yes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On the issue around bringing other Yazidis here to Canada under the refugee program, I and others have advocated for it to be a special measure. That is to say, out of the government's allotted refugee number—which is 7,500 by the way—for the upcoming 2018 numbers I and others are advocating for the Yazidi program to come above and beyond the 7,500, so we don't displace other refugees who are in need as well.

I'm wondering whether or not you would agree with this being a special measure. I had always envisioned that even the 1,200 the government committed to was supposed to be a special measure, but it turned out it wasn't. It took away the existing numbers of refugees that we were accepting in Canada. Would you agree that this should be a special measure?

I'm going to start with the folks who are here, and then we'll go to the folks on the—

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** Yes, we need to bring more, because our communities suffered the most, and most of the people are displaced. It's been three years, and they still live in refugee camps. The ones who come here always ask if the government is going to bring more. They say they need their family members to come here too, because they are free here. They go to school. They have access to services like education.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** To that question, would you agree that there should be a special measure above and beyond the 7,500 refugees that we currently target to bring in out of our 2018 level numbers?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** Yes.

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

I don't know if our other two witnesses would have an opinion on this question.

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** Probably it's—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, interpretation is your thing.

We'll go to the folks on the screen. Ms. Smith, we'll start with you.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Absolutely. These are genocide victims. As part of the world community, we can't in good conscience turn them away. Yes, we need to be able to look back at this and say that we did everything we could, that we gave it our best and we cared.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay.

Mr. Al-Adeimi.

**Mr. Mohamed Al-Adeimi:** That is absolutely correct. With what the Yazidi families have undergone in 2016 and 2017, and there are still others who are suffering, the humanitarian aspect that the Government of Canada has committed to the United Nations is absolutely something that can reflect the values that our citizens and country have shown to the international community.

**The Chair:** Thank you. I'm afraid I need to cut you off once again. Sorry about that. We're at eight minutes.

Ms. Zahid.

• (0940)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair, and thanks to all of you for coming today.

Mr. Khoudeida, based on the work you have done with the Yazidi communities, we heard some testimony about the difficulty of access to interpretation services for the newly arrived Yazidi refugees. To the best of your knowledge, how many qualified Yazidi interpreters are there in Canada?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** I can't give you a number for Canada, because I work only in London. I'm based in London. We have certified 10 of us, working for the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. We took the training in the centre and we work with the ladies and all the newcomers. We have girls specially trained to work with the women, for family doctors, for referrals, because they feel more comfortable with the ladies.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Could you discuss what role settlement agencies and other organizations are playing to help connect Yazidi newcomers with the existing Yazidi communities in London? You mentioned that there are about 500 people in London. What types of things do you do to connect the communities?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** As soon as the announcement was made this year, London Cross Cultural Learner Centre connected with us right away. They came to us and asked for our help. We answered and got involved. We got trained for interpretation. We took the courses there, and since that day, we've been involved with them. We connect families to other agencies. We connect them to anything they need.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Do you know of any programs in place for youth, some after-school programs or some programs on the weekends, to help the youth connect with each other?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** We do have a youth program, and we always encourage all the children to attend it. We have programs for the women, such as sewing or computer programs, to attend after school and on the weekends, too.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are many Yazidi youth and women coming to these programs?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** Yes.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** What lessons can we learn so that we are well prepared to welcome the new refugees? What needs to be done?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** Just bring them here, and give them the second chance they need in life. These people have lost faith in humanity in general. By coming here, they get involved in the community. They attend school. They are learning their way. They're integrating, but it's going to take them a bit longer than other communities because of what they went through. However, they are doing well. They are integrating.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are there any specific issues with the youth that you have heard about?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** No, I don't have any large issues. From talking to them on a daily basis, I can say they are going to school. They're doing well. They're learning the language. That's their first goal, to learn the language, because they said, "Without the language, we're still blind." They are working very hard. Most of them take extra classes and get involved in volunteering just to learn the language.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Ms. Smith, how many Yazidi families do you think there are in Calgary?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** I can't actually say for certain, but I hear from other connections I have made in the community that there are about seven families. I asked Gule if she's been in touch with any of them. She said she has talked with them on the phone a bit, but no, she has not had the opportunity to even meet with them.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are there any opportunities, or has anyone thought about how we can connect those seven families with each other? Maybe they could meet sometimes on the weekends or something.

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** Yes, that will be made a little simpler now that I have identified a woman in the community who speaks Kermanji. I really hope to be able to facilitate that. Having said that, I work full time and am a mother of five children myself. It's difficult sometimes, but it's something I desperately would like to see happen.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** What lessons do you think we have learned so that we can help other Yazidi families who will be coming to Canada to integrate better?

**Ms. Shannon Smith:** As I mentioned before, we cannot treat this community as we have been treating other newcomers. There are some very unique needs that we need to acknowledge.

As Omar said, it might take a bit longer, but that doesn't mean it's not worthwhile. Interpretation services might need to be made available a bit longer. Mental health services may need to last a bit longer and be a bit more in depth. We're doing some of the right things, but not for long enough periods of time and not in the deep and meaningful ways they need to happen.

I think we're heading in the right direction, I really and truly do, but we need to take a closer look at how to make this work better, because right now it is broken.

● (0945)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Mr. Chacon or Ms. Tabet, would you like to add anything about the lessons we have learned and how we can make the integration of newcomers better in Canada?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** For certain. One of the lessons—something we underestimated—was that when we knew they were coming, all we knew was that they spoke Kermanji. Understanding all the different languages and dialects they speak is also very important in order to address their needs. Better communication often would be much more useful. We take steps, but sometimes we miss.

One of the difficulties we are finding here in this city is that often they are mislabelled. They assume, because the Yazidis come from the borders of Syria or Iraq, that they speak Arabic, so they send Arabic interpreters. In a way, that is insulting to them because of all the baggage they are carrying. Better education is needed among the centres, as well as ensuring we have the linguistic capacity to be able to assist....

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** How different are those dialects? About how many dialects are spoken?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** The Kurdish language breaks down into two main dialects. Kermanji, I think, breaks down into about 12 different regions. Some of them are only spoken, not written, so one of the biggest challenges is trying to identify the communities, where they come from in the region, and what kind of dialect they speak, in order to address their needs.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Mr. Khoudeida, you mentioned there are about 10 qualified interpreters in London. Are they from the same dialect, or are they different?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** They are from the Kermanji. Most of them are Yazidis, and they are all from the same dialect.

**The Chair:** Can I just clarify the qualification process for interpreters? You used the word “qualified”, and I’m concerned about that word, because we are dealing with highly specialized issues of terminology and mental health. What is the test that is done to qualify as an interpreter?

**Mr. Omar Khoudeida:** We have a program at the London Cross Cultural Learner Centre. They take a program there. They train them specially for these cases in which confidentiality is the biggest thing, on what to say and what not to say. They go through that course and learn what they need to say.

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** From our point of view, we begin by ensuring that they are fluent in the languages they need to interpret. That would be the first step. Second, we need to focus on the protocols that are followed in the community. Last, we also train in terminology, especially for the medical environment. We don’t get involved in their specifics, because that is for the experts. We only provide the linguistics.

**The Chair:** Would you agree that there’s a difference between being bilingual and being an interpreter?

**Mr. Benjamin Chacon:** Yes.

**The Chair:** I think that’s very important. Thank you.

That ends our first panel. We’ll take a moment’s break, and then we’ll go to the second one.

• (0945) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (0950)

**The Chair:** I will call the meeting back to order.

We’re going to begin with Ms. Bendana in Toronto, from Multi-Languages Corporation.

I don’t know if you heard any of our first hour, but we’ve been on this topic now for a little while. We are talking about some of the language issues related to settling a community that has a non-widely disseminated language, and some of the difficulties in finding qualified interpreters to work with them. However, you can do whatever you want with us.

We’ll begin for seven minutes with Ms. Bendana.

• (0955)

**Ms. Lola Bendana (Director, Multi-Languages Corporation):** Good morning, Mr. Chair, and honourable members. Thank you for inviting me to present to you about this very important topic.

Thank you to the interpreters who will be making sure our voice is heard in French as well.

Besides Multi-Languages, I have been working for the past 30 years with different non-profit organizations and associations that have created standards of practice, the language interpreter training program, and recently an accreditation system for community interpreters in Ontario, which is basically the base of professionalization.

Why do we want professional interpreters? Why is it important to support accreditation, training, and testing for interpreters?

I would like to start by sharing a very brief story that can actually clarify what I’m going to be sharing soon afterwards.

A man called 911, and the police arrived. He said his wife was acting crazy and that she was jumping up and down on her bed. The officer went into the room and saw that the woman was agitated and unable to tell her what was going on. The officer decided to call an interpreter, who introduced herself and reassured both parties that she would interpret accurately, and that everything would remain confidential.

Slowly the woman calmed down and, through the interpreter, the police found out that the woman had been brutally sexually assaulted. Her agitation was a result of her intense pain. They were able to get her medical help. The woman conveyed accurately that she felt safe doing so. This is the difference when you have professional interpreters.

There are countless examples of this difference. We see it on a daily basis in health care and the legal and social services fields. With high-needs refugee populations, if they receive the help they need in a timely manner from a professional interpreter, there will be less need for health care services, fewer mental health issues, and a lowering of costs in all levels of government.

As a background, as you can see from this very simple example, we know that language and cultural differences are among the main barriers to accessing public services in Canada where, as we know, more than 200 languages are spoken. We also understand that ethnocultural communities have a lower rate of participation in any public program. We understand the healthy immigrant effect with regard to language barriers, and that interpreters are basically a bridge to limit that language barrier. Therefore, contracting professional interpreters is essential to providing equal access to public services to all Canadians, especially in sensitive areas such as health care, legal settings, immigration, social services, settlement services, and so on.

I’ll provide a little background on how we have worked over the last 25 to 30 years in Canada, and specifically in certain sections in Ontario.

Back in 2007, we published our “National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services”. This was a large milestone. These standards have been used nationally and internationally to create further certification for agencies and accreditation for community interpreters. We have language interpreting tests that are mainly used in Ontario but are also being used outside of the province. They're called the ILSAT and the CILISAT, and I believe you just learned about them in the previous session. Both exams actually evaluate the competencies of interpreters in terms of consecutive interpretation and sight translation. The tests are available in over 70 languages.

We also have a college program, which is post-secondary training that lasts 180 hours. It was implemented in 2006 and is now being offered in multiple colleges across Ontario. Currently it can be taken within one year. Originally it was designed for two years. There is also a program at York University, and it also takes one year.

One of the last initiatives I'll mention, which is more recent than the training and standards, is the accreditation of interpreters launched by the Ontario Council on Community Interpreting, or OCCI. OCCI is a multi-stakeholder council of organizations that represent the different sectors, such as interpreters, colleges and training institutions, purchasers of services, agencies, and so on. They developed this accreditation to set a benchmark and in response to the constant need for quality interpretation services in Canada. The ACI credential was created to support all languages that currently offer a language interpreting test.

•(1000)

There are several risks and costs that we know in not providing interpretation services at the professional level. Poor communication due to language barriers can leave organizations open to legal challenges, and can increase long-term health costs for newcomers and the health care sector. The social cost of unhealthy immigrants is very high: escalated health care costs, time off work, short and long-term disability, decreased productivity, unemployment, poverty, etc.

Given the adverse impact of poor interpretation on individuals with limited English proficiency, municipal, provincial, and federal governments may have a challenge in keeping their mandate to provide equal access to services to all Canadians, as guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canada Health Act, and Ontario's Human Rights Code.

Even though we have advanced by creating standards for training and accreditation, we still have several challenges to work with, such as the lack of funding to update the already 10-year-old curriculum and to support the ACI accreditation process. Interpreters working in community sectors basically have very poor working conditions, poor hourly rates, and so on.

There are several recommendations that our sector has come up with. First, support the accreditation. Second, support the language testing. Third, make sure that there is a collaboration between governments and the associations to advance the agenda of community interpreting as a profession rather than an occupation, and to ensure that a professional interpreter is provided every time the life of someone is on the line.

We would definitely like to see the support, and thank you for your time.

**The Chair:** That's very good, and it's exactly on seven minutes. I need to commend you.

We go now to Ms. Labman from the University of Manitoba.

**Ms. Shauna Labman (Assistant Professor, University of Manitoba, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and honourable members, for the opportunity to appear before the committee.

I don't profess to be an expert on the Yazidi crisis or their particular resettlement to date in Canada. I view my role here today as providing a broader overview on the context of Canada's resettlement program linked to some of the witnesses you've heard so far, and I want to make three connected points.

One point relates to the settlement needs of the Yazidis, which might be heightened, but they are representative of challenges faced by all newly arrived refugees. The second is that the response to date seems to be relatively an ad hoc privatization of that support by volunteer groups here in Canada. The connection of this to private sponsorship needs to be addressed. Finally, it's important to ensure that there is a global focus of Canada's resettlement program.

In reviewing the issues raised to the committee by other witnesses, these are issues that you've talked about this morning in terms of translation. Connection to the Yazidi community already in Canada, housing, delay in child benefit payments, case worker overload, and trauma support are challenges and issues that need to be addressed for all arriving refugees.

None of these issues is unique to Yazidi refugees, and they're a challenging component of resettlement. What the witnesses made apparent to me is the degree to which the government resettlement is dependent on Canadian volunteer support. One Free World International's brief noted that they're working to “bridge the gap in services” in Toronto. The work of both Project Abraham, also in the GTA, and Operation Ezra in Winnipeg seem to confirm this gap-filling need.

For me, while commending the amazing work of these organizations, it does raise concerns where volunteer gap fillers are not present. Even with Operation Ezra in Winnipeg, which I'm more familiar with, and the phenomenal work they are doing, the consequence is very differential treatment and support of Yazidi refugees they are working with than refugees, both government and privately sponsored, from other regions arriving in our community.

The result is an ad hoc and differential treatment of resettled refugees under both the government and privately sponsored programs, as well as the blended visa office-referred program. Project Abraham's plea for the government to “make use of us” needs to be structured in a way that supports are not contingent on location or the strength and organization of this volunteer capacity.

One option here, I think, is a broader examination of the expansion and promotion of the joint assistance program. Project Abraham noted that they were struggling to access the JAS program. When individuals at Operation Ezra, already assisting 12 government-assisted refugee families, noted to me that they were advocating for a hybrid model of GAR support, I likewise raised the issue of the JAS program, which had not been immediately apparent to them.

The second point to make here is that these initiatives are illustrating a privatization of settlement support by Canadian volunteers. There's a connection to this, as it moves beyond private sponsorship. I think this is significant, particularly given the shifts in focus between government and private sponsorship already happening in Canada's resettlement program.

In the last few years we've seen private sponsorship at higher numbers than government resettlement refugees, which is a reversal from past years. In the projection for the immigration levels for the incoming three years, we see private sponsorship numbers at more than double the government-assisted refugees. Given these increased numbers to private sponsorship moving forward, it's important to recognize the pull of privatized Canadian support and to assess what this may do to the gap-filling capacity of private Canadians, as has been articulated with respect to the Yazidi refugees and their settlement.

It's also very likely that the so-called echo effect will play out here as resettled Yazidi refugees work to bring over their extended families and friends. You have heard indications of this from previous witnesses. Operation Ezra made note of the need for more sponsorship agreement holder spots for Yazidis, and other witnesses commented on the need to facilitate family reunification. This will most commonly occur through private sponsorship, although UNHCR has indicated it's receiving names directly from Canadian NGOs which would funnel into the GAR program. Thus, while only 60 Yazidis have come through PSR, these numbers are likely to increase.

Finally, as my third point, I want to reiterate comments you heard by the UNHCR representative.

• (1005)

The UNHCR has 17.2 million refugees under its mandate, and 189,000 were resettled in 2016. The UNHCR's 2018 projected global resettlement need is 1.2 million persons. Syrians compose 40% of this need, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo, at 12%, and the Central African Republic at 8%. Africa is the region with the highest resettlement needs, with over half a million refugees in need of resettlement from 34 different countries.

Meanwhile, the UNHCR has seen significant drops in resettlement commitments from the United States and some European states. While there is at times a need to focus on regions or groups in particular need, it's incumbent on Canada to maintain a global resettlement plan that relies on UNHCR needs prioritization to select those refugees most in need of resettlement.

It's important to note here that privately sponsored refugees do not necessarily come through UNHCR referrals, nor do they fall into these criteria-based selections.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Taylor.

**Ms. Louisa Taylor (Director, Refugee 613):** Thank you for the invitation to speak to you today, Mr. Chairman, and honourable members.

Like the previous speaker, I am here not as an expert on the Yazidi community. As far as I know, in Ottawa, we have received very few, if any Yazidi community members. I'm here as someone representing the thousands of community members across Canada, particularly here in Ottawa, who have mobilized to welcome refugees particularly since the Syrian resettlement project.

Refugee 613 was created in 2015 in direct response to the overwhelming public interest in supporting refugees. The Syrians brought us together, we like to say, but we're here for refugees from all countries. The existing settlement infrastructure designed to serve newcomers was not ready for the overwhelming public interest in sponsoring, donating, and volunteering with the Syrian refugees. There were gaps in communication and information that made it hard for the public to know how they could get involved, get involved in a safe way, and to be connected and understand their role.

This is where we come in as Refugee 613. We don't provide front-line service, but we support the people who do, with information, connection, and mobilization tools. That's everything from newsletters to convening tables; social media; making presentations in schools, in public arenas; helping anyone who wants to support refugees to connect with the resources and the partners to help them do it. We were created by a network in Ottawa of refugee resettlement agencies, school boards, food banks, city hall, and individuals acting in support of refugees.

We believe that welcoming refugees makes a community stronger, and a more informed community is a more welcoming community. We welcome refugees because we know they bring new skills and perspectives and are the citizens of the future, but also because refugee resettlement creates opportunities for Canadians to work together in collective action. Because of the Syrian project, we know that neighbours know each other better, know the city better, know organizations better, and also know more about the rest of the world. In addition to the obvious humanitarian impulse to welcome refugees, we see it as a community-building approach.

The key is to ensure everyone feels at home, including our newest residents. How do you create that with a population like the Yazidis, who have experienced so much trauma? As the previous speaker noted, and others as well, it's a highly vulnerable population. However, we also know that Canada has received very vulnerable populations before, and they have the same challenges, to a different degree. Language, housing, interpretation, social connection are all challenges that refugees, no matter where they come from, are vulnerable to.

We believe it's really important to prioritize letting the community set their agenda in many ways, give them a voice, and listen to them. Obviously, with this population, it's important to invest in mental health support, but I would say mental health investment is important for every category of refugee. To be dislocated from your home against your will is a trauma, no matter what. It's something that we've seen particularly in the Syrian population. We need to invest in creative and flexible mental health support that can get over the cultural stigma of seeking out support. We know that money spent now will protect precious lives in the future.

We also think it's important to understand and accommodate the full diversity of the population. Not everyone will approach integration the same way and have the same challenges, so it's important to avoid investing in cookie-cutter programming that locks clients into a specific pathway.

I was listening to the earlier panel and wanted to underline the importance of investing in developing best practices from settlement professionals on the ground, and community members, and helping them share across the communities where the Yazidis are being settled.

Canadians want to help, and this impulse is the root of social integration. However, we learned very clearly with the Syrian project that volunteer help is not always needed, or it's not always offered in the best way or channelled in the best way. We believe it's important to take advantage of that energy and to train people, and it's extremely important in the case of a sensitive population like the Yazidis.

● (1010)

We believe it's important to invest in programs that give receiving communities the tools and support to develop relationships with the newcomers. Fund volunteer matching programs that train volunteers in trauma care and culturally appropriate behaviour, match them with newcomer families, and support them to nurture healthy relationships. That's how you build belonging and you build a second chance at life.

Another way to do that is to invest in information to help the receiving community better understand the newcomers. We heard an example earlier of a young girl in Calgary feeling pushed between two groups. If you can, do some quiet, well-informed, targeted education for those working with these groups in schools—medical staff, service providers. Don't assume that all settlement staff will understand this group. They won't have worked with them before, and they need education too. It will make their experience of integrating that much easier.

To sum up, I would definitely echo what has been said before in terms of the levels plan and making the Yazidis a category above and beyond current levels. Anyone working with refugees is concerned about the government's levels of government-assisted refugees in the next three years and the reliance on private sponsorship. We work with private sponsors a lot. We have great faith in them. We believe it's a tremendous vehicle and a global innovation, but they're not the only answer to sponsorship and they need more support.

Just last month, I had the good fortune to travel to Europe, attend conferences, and meet with European civil society leaders. Very often, all we hear from Europe is about the xenophobes. It was amazing to be in rooms full of European civil society leaders who are working hard to welcome refugees, and to see how much work they're doing. They are still looking to us in Canada to show global leadership. They are still looking to us to share our best practices, to connect with them, give them ideas, give them moral support, and to show the example that we cannot leave our vulnerable neighbours to suffer.

Now is not the time to slow down or lowball our efforts. I believe that we should continue to commit to supporting the Yazidi community, and other vulnerable communities, as previous speakers have noted, around the world who are also suffering.

I'll stop there.

● (1015)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Anandasangaree.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the panel for being here.

I want to step back for a second and pick up on the comments by Professor Labman.

You indicated—and I think this is also reflected in your statement, Ms. Taylor—that there are 1.2 million refugees requiring resettlement in 2018.

One difficult question is on how you prioritize. How would you advise the government to prioritize both GARs and, to a lesser extent, privately sponsored refugees, given the number of conflicts out there that are at catastrophic levels? There are things happening in Myanmar, in Bangladesh. You indicated the number of African countries where conflict has resulted in millions of refugees.

What framework would you use to assess and prioritize how Canada should engage in bringing in refugees?

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** In my previous life, I worked for UNHCR as a consultant in Delhi. The UNHCR has resettlement criteria. They funnel in those with needs. I think one thing to recognize is that the UNHCR is doing needs-based assessment out of their global population of refugees into those in resettlement need. They're already categorizing who has needs, based on legal and physical protection needs, survivors of violence and torture, medical needs, women at risk, and so forth.

Our government program of resettlement relies on those UNHCR referrals; our private sponsorship program does not necessarily. There have been moves in recent years to somewhat contain that with the blended visa-office referred program, with limitations to groups of five needing to resettle recognized refugees.

However, the broader scope of private sponsorship tends to be extended family reunification or community-based. That's the echo effect, that these Yazidis we're now bringing in are going to have others in their communities who they'll want to bring, and the people who those individuals want to bring are not necessarily going to be within the parameters of UNHCR's criteria.

What private sponsorship does beautifully is it gives that expanded valve to bring in more, above and beyond, in complement. But what we're seeing, and I think this is problematic, is an increasing overreliance on private sponsorship to do the majority of our refugee selection, and we're losing focus on that needs-based criteria.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Then I guess, just to pick up on that, how would you...? One thing that UNHCR doesn't do is categorize people by ethnicity or by religion, as far as we're told. How would you micro-target areas of vulnerability and be able to target refugees, the Yazidis, for example? It's not a group that UNHCR has typically categorized as a group.

• (1020)

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** My understanding of that, the Yazidi population for Canada's particularized interest, is that Canada worked with UNHCR to target this group, but this is outside of UNHCR's typical norm. As was said by the previous speaker, I do think it is an approach to approach these particularized groups as being above and beyond our current resettlement quotas or targets and ambitions. When you are moving into those groups, you're basing it on a desire within the Canadian public, a particularized protection need that is absolutely there. But if that is outside the realm of what our government resettlement is, reliant on UNHCR's actual needs assessment, that should be a differential category. We should separate that out.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Okay.

Ms. Taylor, would you like to comment on that?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** No, I think she covered it.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Moving on to our longer-term view in the next few years, when the next crisis hits and we have a highly vulnerable population, how would you like the government to react? Is there a particular outlet or engagement that we need to do to have an alert system where we're automatically reacting to situations with refugee resettlement?

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** Is this question for me?

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** Yes.

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** I think we saw this with the Syrian crisis, particularly in 2015-16, when the recognition was there, and the government acted swiftly. There was lots of messaging from the United Nations prior to that that arguably we could have acted much more quickly. That's not in my realm of expertise in any way, but I think it's a matter of being responsive to messaging from the global community.

Private sponsors are, in fact, sometimes closer to the pulse on the ground of protection needs. Having that valve through private sponsorship does work well for those sort of immediate protection needs. It's just having a government that is responsive to both global messaging, geo-messaging, and the Canadian public's messaging on protection importance.

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** I'll just add to that.

We've learned a lot in the last two years about the importance of good communication channels and of good information. It's really important for a government to get out in front of an issue, to explain to people who the population is and why it's important to continue to welcome them. Keeping good information out there fosters healthy public discourse, and it's really, really valuable.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** I think I have about 30 seconds left.

**The Chair:** You do.

**Mr. Gary Anandasangaree:** With respect to language support, interpretation support, once an individual or a family is here, what is a reasonable time frame for government support to exist for the transition?

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** Could you expand a little bit more about what you mean by government support?

One of the points that was mentioned was that, without communication, there is no integration for these refugees. There is no way you can provide health care services or welcoming services without language access.

Now the point is, how do we train in these emerging languages? That is the main question. We may have enough interpreters for the major languages, languages that are established in Canada, because they have been training for many years.

In terms of the time frame, what exactly are you looking for? Do you want a fully accredited interpreter, or do you want express training? That is something that is already being tried by some non-profit organizations working with refugees right now in terms of providing some emergency training or express training for these emerging languages.

Instead of waiting the full one year that the regular training will take, they can do it faster, like maybe in a two- or three-month period. For the full training, to keep the level of standardization that we want, we have to make sure that the people who are trained are capable of doing the job at the level that we want.

**The Chair:** I'm afraid I need to interrupt you there. We've just come to the end of Mr. Anandasangaree's time.

Mr. Kmiec.

• (1025)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to start with Refugee 613, and I want to bring it back to the update on the resettlement of Yazidi people and girls.

When I came to Canada, I didn't speak French or English and I started school five months later. It was quick. You had to pick it up really quickly just to get started. The previous witnesses who came here mentioned a lady, Gule, whom I met in Calgary. She explained to me the difficulties she had in getting the right services, but her problems, and I think for all the Yazidi population, are a bit broader. You mentioned communication.

When the government decided to bring in tens of thousands of refugees from the region, and then specifically Yazidis, in my view they should have forecast that they would need interpreters who were comfortable in Kermanji, but also Sorani, Zaza, Gorani, or the languages of the region. They should have understood that there are different dialects of the Kurdish language that are spoken differently depending on where you are from. Then they should have communicated that.

You mentioned communication and how important that is for volunteer organizations on the ground. Government can't do everything, and in my experience—and I've been to Calgary; I've been to Operation Ezra in Winnipeg, and I've been to Toronto—there was very little communication even with the different Kurdish community associations in the different cities.

What communications do you have with those community groups to find...? Maybe they're not qualified interpreters, but they could maybe bridge that gap for the first few weeks. They can maybe help you understand where the refugees are from, what they need, and what types of services they're looking for. Do you communicate with Kurdish associations and Kurdish groups on the ground on an ad hoc basis, or do you have some type of fixed operation?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Here in Ottawa we don't have relationships with Kurdish organizations as such. We have relationships with individuals because Refugee 613 isn't providing direct service.

For the Syrian community we had all kinds of volunteer interpreters come to us who said they spoke Arabic and they wanted to help. We helped to set up training just to get them through the initial wave, with the understanding that professional interpreters are always the best practice and what you really want to see for so many reasons, but that in an emergency response situation you can take people who have the language and equip them with an understanding that ethics and confidentiality matter, and that they really should be interpreting and not advising and guiding.

But we don't have the experience that you're looking for an answer on.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Did you get no forewarning? Was no government official or direction or information provided to an organization like yours?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** In the Syrian case?

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** The Syrian and the Yazidi cases, let's say Rojava Kurds.

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Just to clarify, we haven't been involved in any Yazidi resettlement.

With the Syrians and with other groups we know that language group is coming. We always want more information. Our settlement partners get a lot of information and they always want more.

Is it a recommendation to have more information given to people on the ground about exactly who is coming and what their needs are? Absolutely.

I know that with the Syrian population everything was happening so fast, everybody did the best they could, and we know that our counterparts at IRCC were working around the clock. We could always see the room for more.

What matters is to continue to invest in the language and also simultaneous language acquisition and employment opportunities so people are not forced to choose between the two and can have a dual track integration.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** On that there is something called LINC, the language services. Resettlement services typically teach up to LINC level five, which is even below conversational ability in English or French.

Gule, for instance, or someone in her particular situation, and many other Yazidis I've met have that ability but still prefer to bring a friend or someone they trust. Other times I've called Kurdish residents and I've asked them if they could find me someone who speaks that particular dialect, and if they are comfortable to interpret for me so I can understand what they're trying to say.

I think you've pinpointed the issue here. There is interpretation, which is the beginning, and then the acquisition of the language, but also the ability to work in the language.

What are you finding with the refugees you're working with? Are they acquiring the language? Are they doing so thanks to resettlement services or are they just doing it on their own by watching TV and trying to learn it through their smart phones?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** The uptake of language training has been enormous. I've heard very few stories of refugees declining to take language training offered to them. Most are maxing out every opportunity. The problem in some cases has been availability.

• (1030)

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** It's not enough?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Yes. Then there are people who just want to work. I've had people say to me, "I've been in a camp for four years. I've been twiddling my thumbs, and I want to move on with my life. I want to work." They want to take a survival job, and that becomes a whole discussion about the long-term implications of that. But, absolutely, my experience is that most people will take up the language training offered to them.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** There are just not enough services provided at this point—

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** That's right.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** —to go from LINC level five to, say, a LINC level eight, where you're comfortable working in the language.



**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Yes. I would also just point out—and my colleagues who know more about language than I do may be able to pipe in—my understanding is that LINC classes are only available to you as long as you are not a citizen. Once you take up citizenship, that door is closed to you. That's been a persistent problem that predates the Syrian and Yazidi arrivals. For people who've maybe taken the survival job and done some language training, but really could use more, that pathway isn't open to them anymore.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** A minute?

**The Chair:** No, you have a minute and a half, because I gave the Liberals a little bit more.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** You're so kind. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Bendana, can I ask you about interpretation services?

Obviously, everybody would prefer to have a qualified interpreter to really get the meaning of the words, not just a direct translation word for word. You want the interpreter to tell you basically the meaning of the combination of the words being provided so you get the full meaning they're trying to communicate to you. How long, in your view, should that last? A refugee, a person who is coming, at some point should be able to acquire the language. In your view, how long should the provision of interpretation services last before someone should reasonably acquire the language, having the support, obviously, of government and private organizations helping them?

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** That will depend pretty much on the setting when the person needs to move on. We know people who have been here for 20 years, have jobs, and function perfectly on the job, but when they have to go to a hospital for a cardiac interaction, they cannot function in the language.

There are different levels of language. Everyday language definitely can be acquired sometimes in a couple of years, a year. It really depends on the community, the person, and their accessibility to lessons. However, you cannot really state that within this period of time, this person should know English at any level. If you're going to court, even though you may not need interpretation services to work, you may need them at the court level. Or, if you have mental health issues, you may not be comfortable communicating in the language.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** Regarding the interpreters who get qualified, are you finding that a lot of them are from the region, that they're individuals who were born there, or they're second generation who have a natural affinity—

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** Yes.

**Mr. Tom Kmiec:** —or ability in the language? They feel most comfortable, and then they just raise it up to the level where they're truly able to interpret word for word.

From my experiences in my family, I would have to interpret between English to French, English to Polish, in different languages, but I'm not qualified to do that. I can do conversational, but I can't do what you're talking about, your court, legal, medical....

**The Chair:** I can hear your affirmation of the member's question, so we'll note that, but I need to move to Mr. Cannings, who's had a lot of time to prepare for our committee, I would assume.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming before us today.

I want to pick up on Mr. Kmiec's line of questioning on the language issues.

My daughter, until very recently, taught English as a second language to Syrian refugees and all other immigrants in a setting in British Columbia. It was functioning on federal government grants, and unfortunately, the budget every year was cut back and back and back. As we took in thousands of Syrian refugees, her class sizes got larger, her hours got fewer, and the amount of money for the refugee settlements became less and less, so they couldn't offer day care to parents who had children. My daughter eventually quit her job because it got to the point where she couldn't live on that salary.

I'm wondering if all three of you could comment on that situation of wanting to bring in more refugees, but not offering them the necessary supports and skills for them to get integrated into our communities.

Perhaps Ms. Taylor could start.

● (1035)

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** I'm looking at the others for more expertise. Yes, we always think there could be more services, and particularly in language, and particularly creative approaches, for example language acquisition in the workplace, working with employers to improve and increase those options, coming up with innovative models so that someone is.... Being employed is so connected to a sense of dignity and a sense of belonging, but doing that at the expense of your long-term success in a community. As we heard, people can live here for 20 years and get by, but they don't have the language to improve their career prospects.

I think you'll find everybody in the service sector and the community sector saying yes, they need more services. You go abroad and you hear people are stunned at the level of investment we have in Canada in settlement infrastructure and the attitudes we have toward welcoming immigrants.

We tend to be very critical of ourselves and see where we can see all the room for improvement, so I fall in both camps. I see how much we're doing and how valuable it is, and I see the benefits of it. I see the people every day who have used language services or employment counselling or trauma counselling, but I also see the people who can't get in because there are wait-lists or who can't get the specific flexibility in programming that they're looking for.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Could any of you on video comment on this ironic situation that it seems the more immigrants and refugees we bring in, the less budget we assign to settlement?

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** I can comment.

I always get quite nervous in conversations about integration and settlement because of my desire to see refugee protection focus on protection. The danger in these conversations about services and integration and how much money is required to settle refugees successfully always risks a consequence of fewer numbers coming in.

Canada, to date, has been very generous and very great. I agree with the previous speaker that we have a model that is above and beyond the sink or swim model you would see in the United States or life vest models you'd see elsewhere. We do give a wholehearted level of support that, as we're seeing, is still inadequate.

Yet the balance has to be we don't want to be measuring which refugees we select for resettlement based on how cost-effectively we can resettle them. There's a dangerous risk of focus away from protection. This is where the Canadian public is so amazing in volunteering and providing. I think one of the things you see with Operation Ezra in Winnipeg is they're doing language programming for their sponsored refugees and government-assisted refugees are now invited in as well and benefiting from it, so there's supplemental support. I would like to see more articulation and organization in that public support for government-protected refugees.

**The Chair:** You have another minute.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Okay.

For the last minute, do any one of you want to comment on the Yazidi situation and the fact that 65 million people globally are forcibly displaced? I wonder if you could comment on the NDP's hope that any help for the Yazidis would be a measure above and beyond Canada's normal intake of refugees.

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** I want to share that some of the settlement organizations, specifically in Toronto, have adopted some strategies to train some of the refugees as interpreters. One of the challenges is that they have a hard time finishing the training because there has to be a bridge to teach them the language skills in English, bring their education level a little over to be able to function in that capacity.

Also, one very important point is they need to heal from trauma before they can function properly as interpreters. The settlement agencies are working on this, and obviously one of the challenges is the lack of funding to do so because that would be a six-month program, then full training as interpreters. It's a way of dealing with the challenges of languages of lesser diffusion such as in this case.

• (1040)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** The last round Mr. Tabbara and Mr. Whalen are sharing.

Mr. Whalen.

**Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We've heard a lot, obviously, about the need for additional resources, capacity, or infrastructure to make sure that if we're going to be accepting up to a target next year of 43,000 refugees and protected persons, that we have the necessary government supports in place.

Starting with language, Mr. Khoudeida was here in the previous panel. He's been in Canada, I believe, for 17 years. He provides interpretation services now, but it took him a long time. He says it takes years to settle, become bilingual, and then become an interpreter.

**Ms. Bendana,** what can the federal government do to help support language interpretation capacity development? We may see a need to help other Rohingya. Would we be ready to provide interpretation for Rohingya? How many? What's the ramp-up period? It seems that a slow, measured approach has some benefits, but it looks like we need to anticipate some of these problems. How can the federal government help anticipate the next crisis?

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** Absolutely. There are organizations that are working to support the express training that I previously mentioned. I briefly mentioned the Ontario Council on Community Interpreting. This council involves members of the different stakeholders, including several settlement agencies across Ontario. We have communication with some organizations outside of Ontario as well.

We are working together with the OCCI on that express training which will not be the one full year of training, but will be to assess the needs of those in common and emerging languages who may need something to be done right away. Of course, there will be a need of funding in order to do that, so keeping the communication.... Also, I would think an identification process to understand what is required for a person to properly interpret—

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** That's very interesting, Ms. Bendana. In terms of the existing Yazidi integration process, have we done all that we need to do on that front or do we still need some additional assessment? Do we have a good handle on what the problem is, and we just need more interpreters?

**Ms. Lola Bendana:** Yes, absolutely.

One thing one of the other speakers mentioned.... I'm not an expert on the Yazidi community but I know for a fact that in Ontario, in the different associations, there are only two or three interpreters registered for those languages, which obviously is not enough. I would confirm with the council where several associations that are members of the council would be able to help and to work on that integration.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Taylor,** in terms of infrastructure needs for the settlement program agencies that you deal with through Refugee 613, what additional measurable supports and infrastructure do your organizations need in order to meet the needs of not only the Yazidis who are coming in, but all the additional refugees we expect to accept under the levels plan?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** I think they need more of what they get now, so more funding for settlement counselling, particularly employment counselling; reaching out to Canadian employers to help them understand the value that refugees can bring, the skill sets, and how to make the best use of them; and more understanding of cross-cultural practices.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Are we taking newcomers and refugees as fast as we can take them? Are we taking them too fast? Do we have the right capacity levels, or are we a bit behind on the amount of capacity that we have?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Wow, I feel really on the hot seat there.

I would say that the Syrian experience was about as fast as people could manage, and it was an unsustainable pace. It was one that everyone undertook with great enthusiasm, and no one would ever say they wish they hadn't done it, but the capacity to accept more refugees is only limited by our ability or our willingness to invest in welcoming them. We have the funds and we have the will. If we want to put those investments in those places, we can bring in far more refugees than we are.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Sorry, I'll just hand it to Mr. Tabbara. We're running out of time.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you.

I want to build on Mr. Whalen's point about resources needed.

Ms. Labman, you mentioned that the Africa region has the highest needs, and there are drops in the U.S. and the EU taking in immigrants.

Has Canada's initiative been well received globally? What other resources do we need here to reach our target for 2018 of 43,000 immigrants?

•(1045)

**Ms. Shauna Labman:** I can speak to some of that. I'm not sure I can speak to the latter half of your question.

Canada has always historically been a leader in refugee resettlement. We've been one of the top three since before we signed the refugee convention, and really not until the late 1980s did we even see ourselves as a country of first asylum, because our focus was on this overseas resettlement. Canada has a good reputation on that. At this point, Canada is now busily extending our capacity and knowledge on private sponsorship to European countries and elsewhere that are looking at different ways of dealing with refugee flows in Europe, which is a very different situation than we're facing here.

In that sense, I think Canada is commendable. I think we have to look at our entire process. We have to look at our protection of inland refugees who come here and claim protection. I think we have to look at government resettlement, and on private sponsorship, while it's absolutely incredible to see this level of willingness of the Canadian public to bring in refugees, we have to recognize that the individuals they are bringing in through that program are not

necessarily always the refugees in need of protection as identified by UNHCR, and that's problematic when our levels increase to that.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** I'll ask Ms. Taylor one last question. You mentioned in your testimony how you build belonging, and I believe it's through housing, employment, and education. One of our recent announcements was our 10-year, \$40-billion housing strategy that I think will help create more belonging for a lot of individuals in Canada and also for immigrants and refugees. Can you comment on how we can build belonging? Do you agree that those three measures are a good way to build belonging for new immigrants and refugees?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** Absolutely, and I would put housing at the top of the list. In Ottawa we have a lot of problems with affordable housing, and refugees are among the most vulnerable to that. We're looking forward to seeing the details of that initiative and how it works out.

But even when you have a house, you have job, and you can speak the language, if you don't have any friends, if you don't know your neighbours, it's very hard to feel like you belong. Where we come from is believing that the sense of belonging quite often does not happen organically. You need to foster it, and you need to create pathways for people to engage through volunteer initiatives, through helping people understand Canadian culture and navigate it, and just generally build those bridges that don't necessarily happen overnight and by themselves.

**The Chair:** Mr. Whalen, you can thank Mr. Cannings, who gave me 20 seconds extra, so you can have it.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Ms. Taylor, earlier you used the word "stunned" and, of course, in a transcript when the Europeans are stunned at how much we're doing, it's not necessarily clear if they're happy that we're doing so much. Could you clarify that comment for us?

**Ms. Louisa Taylor:** I think it depends on who you're talking to in Europe. The civil society folks who I'm talking to are extremely jealous. There is definitely a comprehension gap in how we activate civil society in Canada. They expect the government to do everything, and in Canada, we activate civil society. It takes a while for them to wrap their heads around that and understand that it's not necessarily outsourcing or privatizing settlement, although there is that danger, as has been alluded to in this panel. For the most part, they wish that they had the philosophy and the welcoming approach that Canada has.

**Mr. Nick Whalen:** Thank you for clarifying that.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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