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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

I call meeting number 11 of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to order.

Before we proceed, I have the following health and safety reminder for everyone. I remind all attendees in the room to physically distance yourselves from others by at least two metres and to wear a mask unless you are seated and more than two metres from anyone else.

This is a hybrid meeting. Some members are appearing in person in the parliamentary precinct, and the others are appearing remotely.

Please speak at slow enough pace for interpretation to keep up. The clerk will be tracking raised hands and keeping a list for the chair. All questions shall be decided by a recorded vote, except for those decided unanimously or on division, based on the order adopted by the House of Commons on September 23. The meeting is being webcast and is available on ParlVu.

We now have our first panel of witnesses today on the impact of COVID-19 on the immigration system. In the second panel, we will have the IRCC officials.

In our first panel, we have Usman Mahmood, barrister and solicitor, appearing as an individual; the Saint Mary's University Students' Association, represented by the president, Bryn de Chastelain; and the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia, represented by the chief executive officer, Jennifer Watts.

On behalf of all members, I welcome the witnesses to today's important meeting as we end our hearings on our study of the impact of COVID-19 on the immigration system.

All of the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will go into the round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Usman Mahmood.

Mr. Mahmood, you can please start. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Usman Mahmood (Barrister and Solicitor, As an Individual): Good afternoon. My name is Usman Mahmood. I'm a practising lawyer with CKM Law in Calgary, Alberta. I would like to begin by thanking you for having me this afternoon, as it is an honour to be speaking to you all today.

The focus of my practice is mainly immigration litigation, including but not limited to refugee claims by victims of religious and political persecution, most importantly, the Ahmadis, Shias and Christians in Pakistan, for which the Canadian government must hold such countries accountable.

I am speaking regarding the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, October 20. The first point was about the application backlogs. In my opinion, the application backlogs have increased significantly with the COVID closures. The case processing centres in Canada and the visa offices abroad remained closed for more than three months.

With spousal sponsorship applications, applicants are expected to provide original police clearance certificates, for example, and other original documents. However, this expectation is unrealistic at this time due to the closures and how access has been affected globally.

Processing times for temporary resident visas are presently showing a wait of about 230 days. This is exceptionally long. I am personally affected by this in that I had recently invited my mother, a resident of the U.K. with a Pakistani passport, who is in her sixties, to visit me, as I am not able to leave my work to visit my aging parents. This isolation has been impacting their mental well-being.

Obviously the solution for such problems would be maybe be creating a triage system for visitors visas where the applications could be accepted on a per stage basis, case by case. If it's not something they can process, it should be rejected straight off the bat. Reopen the visa application centres globally, but obviously with health and safety in mind. Implement by-appointment-only visitors. Any interviews regarding spousal applications can be held by virtual means—by MS Teams or Zoom—and all of these different facilities can be taken into account. Implement online submission of document packages for spousal sponsorship by e-post, for example. We have to move away from paper-based applications. It's taking too long, and I'm sure it costs the government a lot of money as well.

The second part was about the lottery system and its introduction for parents' and grandparents' visas. In this lottery system, you must wait months, literally—at the moment, six months—to see if you have been picked to sponsor your parents. This is without having submitted any financial information, but only acknowledging that you are a citizen or a resident of Canada and what country your parents are residing in. There is no clarification as to what the criteria are for selection, so we are unclear about this. The minimum necessary income was reduced to match the low-income cut-off. However, if the situation remains the same around the world, this should continue for the next year, and possibly the year after that, in light of the number of job losses due to the pandemic.

A possible reply to this program is to maybe go back to the initial application process and have everyone submit their packages as they once did in 2014 and 2015. I suggest that IRCC implement more efficient and effective ways to process them. A solution may be to eliminate the lottery system and revert back to the old system. A second could be to give unsuccessful candidates not selected in the year's cut-off a queue for the next year's submissions. If someone is unsuccessful, then just refuse them straight off the bat, as opposed to making them wait for years and years. Keep the low-income cut-off income amounts in place for at least two more years, as I suggested earlier, to recover from the current economic situation.

The last point is about the temporary resident visa processing delays. The temporary resident visa, TRV, processing application centres must reopen fully, and biometric collection must resume for temporary resident visa applications, including for students and foreign workers.

• (1540)

The most common issue currently faced by students is the fact their acceptance letters can only be issued a certain amount of time before their entry into Canada.

The Chair: Mr. Mahmood, I am sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

We will now move to our second witness, Mr. Bryn de Chastelain, the president of Saint Mary's University Student Association.

Mr. de Chastelain, the floor is yours. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain (President, Saint Mary's University Student Association): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, esteemed committee members and fellow witnesses. I would like to begin my statement today by acknowledging that I speak to you from Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

My name is Bryn de Chastelain. I'm the president of the Saint Mary's University Student Association and a fourth-year student pursuing a bachelor of arts degree with a double major in political science and economics.

This year I'm also the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that represents over 275,000 students at colleges, polytechnics and universities from coast to coast to coast. Through a formal partnership with

the Union étudiante du Québec, CASA is a truly national student voice.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to speak today on this particularly important issue, the impact of COVID-19 on international students studying in Canada. As a representative of 1,700 international students at Saint Mary's University and more than 700,000 international students studying across Canada, it is clear to me that they have been overlooked during this unprecedented crisis. International students are a critical part of the post-secondary community in Canada, as well as significant contributors to their regional economies. The international student community in Canada has grown considerably over the past 20 years, outstripping domestic enrolment and bringing much-needed diversity to post-secondary campuses across the country.

As of 2018, there were 721,000 international students studying in Canada, supporting nearly 170,000 jobs and contributing \$21.6 billion to the national GDP. This is in part due to the fantastic quality of education offered by Canadian post-secondary institutions—like my school, Saint Mary's—but also due to Canada's reputation as a safe and tolerant country with accessible pathways to permanent residency.

According to a 2018 survey conducted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education, 60% of international students said they plan to remain and work in Canada once they graduate. Seeing this, international students have been heavily recruited and governments across the country are increasingly keen on prioritizing international student retention as a key pillar of future economic growth. That being said, while governments across the country recognize the importance of international students, they have been reluctant to provide support to those stranded in Canada as well as to those struggling to cope abroad. Despite their higher tuition fees and study permit work restrictions, international students were shut out of pandemic aid programs for students, such as the Canada emergency student benefit, and the expanded Canada summer jobs program.

Furthermore, international students with valid or approved study permits abroad were left without proper support and communication from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Many were forced to continue attending virtual classes in the middle of the night to ensure that they remained eligible for a post-graduate work permit in Canada. International students needed and still need support, but governments across the country have let them down while hoping that they stay and work after graduation. These problems were exacerbated in Atlantic Canada by the demographic realities underscoring the need for skilled immigration, as well as the over-reliance of many local post-secondary institutions on international student tuition fees.

For example, international students make up over 30% of full-time post-secondary students in Nova Scotia, but almost 11% chose not to return this year due to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who remained enrolled were consumed by anxiety and uncertainty as they waited months for clarity on things like post-graduate work permits, non-discretionary travel restrictions and institutional COVID-19 readiness plans.

More recently, students returning to Canada under a designated learning institution's COVID-19 readiness plan have been misinformed and relegated to substandard housing where they are forced to quarantine for 14 days. I'm thinking specifically about what has been happening around Cape Breton University in Sydney, Nova Scotia. International students attending CBU have been slowly returning to the community and are being faced with an inadequate housing supply at a time when they are also being forced to stay inside and quarantine. Similarly, students returning to institutions in Halifax are having to pay up to \$2,000 out of pocket to quarantine in university-overseen accommodations, in addition to their rent for housing that they are unable to use.

These situations are tragic and have led many international students to believe their well-being is not a priority for the government. Given this lack of support, it's possible that some international students may choose to return home or attend post-secondary in another country rather than commit to Canada as their new home.

Moving forward, it's important for the federal government to support international students. From opening up the Canada summer jobs program to allowing international students to participate in an internship or co-op under their existing study permit, there are countless opportunities for the federal government to show international students they truly care.

With that, I would like to thank the committee once again for the invitation to speak and represent the voices of students at Saint Mary's University and across Canada.

- (1545)

I look forward to answering any questions you might have.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Madam Jennifer Watts, chief executive officer of Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia.

Madam Watts, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Ms. Jennifer Watts (Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia): Thank you for the invitation to speak to the committee today.

I'm also speaking from Mi'kma'ki and would like to recognize that I am on the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

I am the CEO of the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia. We're a full-service delivery agency that offers settlement services, language training, employment services, business development, employer support and many wonderful community integration programs. We have served newcomers in our province for over four decades. Last year we served 10,000 clients and delivered both pre- and post-arrival programs.

I'd like to offer you the perspective of the impact of COVID on a settlement agency.

The first thing I'd like to speak about is the critical role of technology in rapidly disseminating information and continuing the delivery of service to our clients. We were able to pivot and offer practically all of our programs virtually and we have identified many interesting, new, emerging and promising practices. However, there are vulnerable populations that will be left behind because of the lack of digital literacy skills, access to tech equipment and lack of access to Internet either due to cost or simply because it does not exist in rural or small centres.

Access to high-speed Internet needs to be identified as a fundamental necessity and right to keep one's family and community safe, to further education and to find a job. Suggestions within the settlement sector are to develop a multi-dimensional national plan to support at-risk newcomer populations with low digital literacy and no access to technology.

There's also a call to create a national technology capital replacement budget for the settlement sector to ensure that current service providers have the capacity to continue and to expand a hybrid approach to service delivery.

The second thing I would like to highlight is that we've seen an increase in racism and racist attacks particularly focused on Asian and Black populations. It's increased their vulnerability. Engagement of all levels of government is needed. The double impact of racism and COVID is becoming clearer and is very concerning. In the settlement sector, we recognize the need to increase our capacity and further develop skills to respond to increasing racism. It points to the need for us to really develop a national capacity-building approach that includes training and tools to increase settlement staff's ability to appropriately support newcomers experiencing racism.

The third point is the increase in gender-based violence and domestic violence. We're seeing it happening in our country. This is happening across all segments of Canadian society. IRCC has seen the importance of this issue and is supportive in developing specific programs. We would like to highlight and make clear how important this area of work is for furthering our capacity and resources, particularly in the communities we're engaged with.

The fourth area is the importance of family reunification through the family class process. It strengthens the family unit and the family's integration success in Canada and more spaces are welcome. Family class reunification supports families who arrive under all immigration pathways. It not only supports the family, but it also supports Canada's economy and the integration of many people into the labour market. We see, particularly during a crisis such as the pandemic, how important family connections are.

The fifth area is the impact of COVID on privately sponsored refugees and their sponsors. ISANS is a sponsorship agreement holder, and we receive about 100 spots a year. We support that through family reunification with people who are here in our province.

We have heard from co-sponsors of the many painful impacts that have resulted from the closures of visa posts overseas, from the difficulties of people in refugee camps receiving documentation who sometimes have to travel long distances and are unable to get back to camps to people here who are co-sponsors and have been holding apartments for months on end, anticipating that people will arrive, but they have not been able to travel.

There is a whole series of things impacting the privately sponsored refugee network. We would encourage the government to continue to support this very important area of humanitarian response and to continue to work with the co-sponsors and with the sponsorship agreement holder network to resolve these problems.

• (1550)

We'd also like to raise the principle of additionality. Although we certainly support privately sponsored refugees, the very important and continued support for government-assisted refugees is an area that really responds to Canada's humanitarian responsibilities and obligations. Certainly we want to see those numbers continue to be supported, particularly during this time of COVID. We have been receiving GARs since July. It's been a very important commitment on our part and, we think, the federal Government of Canada.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Madam Watts, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go into the round of questioning.

With this, now we will start our first round of questioning, beginning start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have six minutes.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

Mr. Mahmood, you touched on a few points that I think are very important. You talked about your own experience with delays getting your mother here, who is obviously elderly, and about the effects of it on mental health.

We've heard from many witnesses heartbreaking, gut-wrenching experiences that have caused mental health issues such as depression and suicidal thoughts. They're all due to the delays in the process.

In your experience, how do you think Canadians are being affected by these delays, the processing times in relation to family reunification, both permanent immigration and temporary residents, and what kinds of solutions do you think are available?

• (1555)

Mr. Usman Mahmood: Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

I think I've already touched on the problems that we're currently facing as a country overall.

Canada is an immigration-friendly country. When I say that, it means we pride ourselves on being one of the best countries attracting immigrants from all across the world. However, this pandemic has shown that we are not ready for it, unfortunately. Family members are not being united with each other. There was the complete seizure and close-down of offices around the world. Visa centres closed down. The Immigration and Refugee Board, for the time being, was on a halt. Our system was completely shut down.

These problems may come again in our lifetime and we should be ready for them. We have no excuse not to be ready for them. I think what this committee and the government can do is to implement planning that can, in the future, avoid such types of issues. For example, I had spoken about the triage system. We can fast-track some applications and we can put some applications through the normal process. Obviously, we should reopen all visa centres across the globe and make sure that health and safety is a priority there.

Also, spousal application interviews can be held by webcam, the same way as we are currently conducting those meetings. We can certainly have online submissions of packages. We're still sending paper-based applications. This is so twentieth century. I think we can move with the times, and online submissions can take place for spousal applications as well.

I could certainly go on and on about it, but I'm mindful of the time of this committee.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you for that.

Continuing with you, Mr. Mahmood, we saw delays with grandparents and parents sponsorship before the pandemic. The program was put on pause. We saw it being reintroduced as basically the exact-same thing. There was really no difference in it. Right now I have many constituents and people from Canada asking me about this program because they're experiencing so much anxiety. No one knows what stage we are at and when they are going to start being contacted.

In your experience, what is your opinion on this impact with the current lottery system in regard to the grandparents and parents sponsorship applications?

Mr. Usman Mahmood: To begin with, that's a very bad name—"lottery system". Certainly people are very fortunate to be in Canada, but what are we trying to impose on people? Is it that there's a lottery system in Canada, and are you all ready to try your luck at it?

I would suggest, obviously, that we should revise the name and start calling it something else. That certainly would put some respect into people's lives—people who are bringing in their parents and grandparents.

It's very unfortunate, Mr. Hallan, that you've spoken about that because I know of circumstances or incidents where applicants passed away whilst they were waiting for their applications to be processed. That is very sad, and we must take this upon ourselves as a country. We could have done better than processing parents and grandparents visa applications in years. In some cases people were waiting for their applications for a decade.

So, maybe eliminate the lottery system and take it back to the old way, where everyone submits an application. Unfortunately, we're going to have to triage this process. We're going to have to find innovative ways of eliminating the extra time it takes and get these parents and grandparents to come and see their children and grandchildren in Canada.

• (1600)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

Do you know what? It's unfortunate that we couldn't get any real answers on timelines from the ministers or the officials.

Moving on, you touched base and talked about a few different countries. Are there cases that you have come across from certain countries where the government can assist in different ways?

Mr. Usman Mahmood: As I said earlier, a major part of my practice is dealing with immigration litigation, which is refugee hearings and refugee appeals. The affected minorities that come to mind immediately are, obviously, the Ahmadis of Pakistan, Christians of Pakistan, and Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan.

For example, Afghanistan Sikhs are targeted for their faith. Their places of worship are destroyed.

The Chair: Mr. Mahmood, I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up. We will now have to move on to the next member.

Mr. Regan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. The floor is yours.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm delighted that we have two witnesses from Mi'kma'ki, where I am as well.

Ms. Watts, I'd like to ask you a few questions. First of all, in your work at ISANS, you mentioned that during the COVID pandemic you've been able to pivot. Can you tell us about the changes and accommodations that were brought about in your organization, those that were most beneficial to newcomers, and are there any of them that you think you will keep afterwards?

Also, what ways do you think ISANS has adapted most helpfully in the case of the pandemic?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Thank you.

Because we had experience with delivering programs virtually, we were able to pivot fairly quickly, and it was amazing that many of our programs were able to move in that direction.

We developed specific programs for people who had low digital literacy skills and low literacy skills generally, with specific training for them to be able to understand how to use computers.

Someone referred to earlier the incredible negative impact that the pandemic has had on people's mental health. We also developed groups and delivered programs, particularly around mental health, to offer online wellness sessions and opportunities for people to gather in programming.

Staff were able to up their digital skills to be able to deliver the programs that they thought they might not have been able to, but also, we were working very much with our clients to really assist them to be able to access the technology and learn how to use the technology. It was hard enough once they got it to be able to actually deliver the programming.

We did go back to delivering in-person service and we brought back the people who were most vulnerable first—people with the lowest literacy skills were able to come back. However, in the past couple of weeks, because we had the spike again, we've had to go back to virtual delivery as well.

Hon. Geoff Regan: When you speak of help from government on digital literacy for newcomers, what do you envisage? Can you lay that out a bit?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Help would come in a couple of ways. Number one, we really appreciated having critical health information that's accessible, using infographics in plain language and in translation.

At the Public Health Agency, that was not available at the beginning, but both the provincial and federal government became much better about that. I think that is the key thing. Being able to deliver their message directly to clients would be very helpful, rather than us having to figure that out and double check with them.

We were able to get IRCC to access PPE, particularly when we were receiving government-assisted refugees. That was scary for us at the beginning. We did not have access to PPE, so it was a very large and important intervention on the part of IRCC staff to assist us with that.

I would say the biggest challenge right now, and I would really like to underline it, for us and probably across Canada for settlement agencies, is access to affordable housing. When people are coming in, it is critical to find that. I know that the federal government is working on that, but it cannot be underscored how difficult it is for us to effectively settle people in our country when there isn't affordable housing or there's housing inaffordability.

That goes across the huge spectrum of people coming in as refugees, but also coming in as provincial nominees or under any economic stream. The housing situation is critical.

Dealing with that issue around housing affordability would be a huge assistance to us in terms of support for settling people.

Hon. Geoff Regan: As you know, the government is looking for innovative approaches that might assist newcomers in looking at how to better support the integration process.

As you deal with issues such as you mentioned with regard to capacity, the need for capacity-building to support people dealing with COVID and racism, how do you see the government dealing with that to assist you?

Also, in your view, is increasing employment support and leveraging new technology the right path forward for IRCC and the government?

What are your thoughts on that?

• (1605)

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I just got off a phone call in which there was a discussion on anti-racism with the National Settlement Council. It was an amazing conversation. It was historic for us as a settlement community that was assisted by the settlement agencies and IRCC, so I'm very excited to see the potential resources from that. The funding for that is very important.

There is also a very interesting program.... Certainly for us, the Atlantic immigration pilot has been very important, but so is move to the economic mobility program where you're seeing refugees being able to come into the country through existing economic streams. That's not through the refugee stream, but through these regular economic programs, because they have the skills and experience and there is some assistance and administrative support to access these programs. That is a really critical and very interesting area in which we see the federal government offering some support.

I would also say that any support around technology is huge, as I said, in helping us to develop, increase and maintain our capacity. But just generally, really supporting access to broadband Internet across the country is key. It's fundamental that people have that ability to access those resources, especially when we see things like the libraries and public places where people might go to in non-COVID times not being available. When these are not available, people's access to information from their government and from the resource groups in the community is effectively shut down.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Just very quickly, to what degree does putting a citizenship test and ceremonies online assist?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: That would be fabulous, absolutely. Thank you.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thank you.

That is my time.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

We will now move on to Madame Normandin.

Madam Normandin, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Mr. de Chastelain.

You said that, according to a survey, 60% of students want to remain in Canada after graduation. I gather that these students must be matched with the labour market, which also wants to tap into this skilled and well-integrated workforce. However, several witnesses have told our committee that francophones, particularly from Africa, have been refused student visas on the grounds that, given their financial resources in their country of origin, they wouldn't return to that country after graduation. This is a little ironic.

I want to know whether you've heard of any similar cases. If so, do you think that we should change the criteria for granting student visas, since we want these students to remain here after their temporary visas have expired?

[English]

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: This is an extremely important topic in ensuring that international students who are keen to and able to stay in Canada are given opportunities to do so.

In terms of the specific example you mentioned, it's not something that I was necessarily aware of, although I'm very keen to connect with some of our colleagues from the Union d'étudiante du Québec with regard to what they've heard on challenges for French-speaking international students who are attempting to stay in Canada.

There's something we can do. Study permits and the post-graduate work permit process can be very technical, but it is important to ensure that we're thinking about making that option for international students to stay as accessible as possible to ensure that we are remaining competitive next to countries like Australia and the United Kingdom in attracting international students in the first place.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I now want to ask Mr. Mahmood some questions.

Regarding the lottery for sponsoring parents and grandparents, some witnesses have brought up the possibility of completely eliminating the financial criterion. We're talking about situations where, even though the families don't have the financial capacity to take them in, the grandparents or parents could simply be very helpful and could serve as an indirect resource, so to speak.

I want to hear your thoughts on this matter. Should we review the need for the financial criterion?

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Mahmood, you are on mute.

● (1610)

Mr. Usman Mahmood: Thank you.

If I understand it correctly, your question is whether there are parents and grandparents who could be sponsored here without any income qualifications. Is that your question?

Ms. Christine Normandin: Yes.

Mr. Usman Mahmood: Thank you very much.

I do understand the problem with it, in that Canada wants to make sure that it's protecting the people who are coming into the country and they are being supported by the family who are already here while they are also taking care of their family who is there.

I don't think that's our biggest concern. It's not our biggest challenge at the moment. There are people out there who are willing to support their families and are able to bring their families.

However, what we can do is reduce the low-income cut-off, which I think the government has done. That is a great job on their part, and we had no choice because currently with the pandemic, a lot of people have lost their jobs in various parts of the country. The problem really is the timeline and the issue is the complexity. That's something the government needs to work on.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Let's say that we should keep assessing the financial capacity of sponsors. You spoke about eliminating the lottery system. In this case, should we conduct an initial and very broad screening based on the financial capacity of sponsors? That way, we could immediately notify people who certainly wouldn't qualify. This would make it possible to prioritize the people who are more likely to qualify.

[English]

Mr. Usman Mahmood: As far as the financial capacity is concerned, I think that's going to be a challenge for everyone at the moment, but reducing the low-income cut-off would certainly help, and that needs to be seen.

The government needs to streamline the applications that are currently in process, and this lottery system, the number of entries that we're going to get, is going to further exacerbate the timeline and the lack of resources the government has at the moment.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I have one last question for you. It's about using epost to provide documentation online.

Should the original documentation be provided only upon request? In other words, throughout the process, only copies would

be provided. If necessary, at the end, original documentation would be provided, for example, at the interview.

[English]

Mr. Usman Mahmood: Certainly, as for the original documentation and the verification of it, I highly doubt how much that helps given the current system and how things are being processed with the fast-paced nature of the business.

I don't think that the original is such a huge deal, so—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Mahmood. The time is up.

We will now move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and to all of the witnesses for your presentations.

I'm going to go first to Mr. de Chastelain.

With respect to students—particularly international students whose postgrad work permits are coming to expiration or may have expired—given that we're in a COVID environment, many of them may not be able to secure employment to meet the requirements to apply for permanent residency. What do you think the government should do? Should it automatically provide an extension to these students?

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: I think that would definitely be one option.

I think that postgraduate work permits are extremely technical. To be safe, I'd be happy to provide comments to the committee in writing to make sure that there are details that are being included and considered. I think the bottom line is that many international students have struggled to meet the requirements needed for a postgraduate work permit, whether they've been studying abroad in their home country and thinking that they'd be unable to count certain parts of their degree towards that work permit, or struggling to be able to secure Canadian employment opportunities that would satisfy requirements.

I think an extension would go a long way in terms of providing some flexibility for international students, especially at a time when we have to consider that the primary concern for most students right now is the health of themselves and their families, and ensuring that they can start to set up their lives and their careers. I think an extension could go a long way towards supporting that, and I'd be happy to provide some detailed comments on that as well.

● (1615)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It would be very helpful if you could provide additional information.

For the students who are already here, whose postgrad work permit may be expiring or has expired, because their work permit is not allowed to be renewed, and given their situation, they basically have no choice but to leave the country. That would mean that Canada would lose all of the talent we have with these students.

Are you aware of any students who might have had their work permits expire or whose permits are about to expire?

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: I can tell you that at my home institution here in Halifax, I am aware of a few students I've met throughout my degree who have gone home and are not planning on coming back to Canada based on complications around their postgrad work permits. It's similar to the examples that you've mentioned. I think there are a number of concerns here in terms of the decisions that international students or recent graduates are making at this time, in terms of what the impact is going to be on Canada's ability to retain these students.

I think the disappointing component of all of this is that many international students, the vast majority that I've had the pleasure of knowing, would like to be able to stay in the communities that they're studying in or to stay in Canada more broadly. I think the example that you're raising is definitely something that we've heard of, and it's disappointing in terms of what it's going to mean for the future of those students and potentially the loss for the country, as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: One of the things the minister said repeatedly was that no one would be impacted with their work permits and they would not be deported because of COVID. I put this question to both the minister and the deputy last week, to see whether or not they would indeed be willing to extend the work permit for postgrad students in this set of circumstances. There seemed to be some indication that they're looking into it. If you come across anyone whose work permit may be expiring or has expired, I think it would be very important that they reach out to the government and perhaps to their member of Parliament to ensure that there are provisions for them to be able to stay in Canada. I get it that some people might have left already, but there may be others who might not have left and are caught out in this situation right now. It's important for the government to hear from these individuals so that we can find a path forward for them.

If I may, I'd like to turn to you, Mr. Mahmood, on the parents and grandparents sponsorship. You're absolutely right that there are no other immigration streams in which people's ability to reunite with their loved ones is based on the luck of the draw. It's really shocking to me that this is where we're at with this application. Now, of course, in the face of COVID, and even without COVID, the high threshold on the financial requirements is very taxing. It means that you can only reunite with your loved ones if you have the ability to pay. That just strikes me as wrong.

In your personal set of circumstances, you were saying that with the sponsorship of your parents, you've been able to get in a sponsorship lottery, and you'll be waiting for at least six months before you hear from the government on what the next process is. Did I hear you correctly on that?

Mr. Usman Mahmood: No. As far as my personal circumstance is concerned, it's actually my mother. She is not a British citizen or a Canadian citizen, and because of that, she needed a visa to come to Canada. She's applied for it, but the current wait time, if you go on the IRCC website, is about six to nine months, if I'm not wrong. That keeps changing every day.

I think that's really long in the current circumstances, especially for family reunification.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. I'm sorry, I thought you meant you actually had a lottery. I gather you don't have a lottery, then.

Mr. Usman Mahmood: I'm not that lucky.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How long have you been waiting to try to reunite with your mom?

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan, but your time is up.

We will now move to our second round of questioning. Based on the time we have left for this panel, we will have four minutes each for Mr. Saroya and Mr. Dhaliwal and two minutes each for Ms. Kwan and Madam Normandin.

Mr. Saroya, you can start. You have four minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Saroya, you are on mute.

● (1620)

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): You're right. I was on mute.

Am I good now?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you so much.

Ms. Watts, racism is a dirty word. People like me, who came here back in the 1970s, have gone through the racism you talk about on the east coast. I have seen it in recent months in Markham—Unionville. I'll tell you about one incident. A 57-year-old Caucasian man was yelling at an Asian kid, "You're bringing the disease to this country." A passerby intervened. The 57-year-old man noted that adult's licence number, and as soon as the adult passed by, he scratched the person's car.

I have done town hall meetings. I have done many, many other things. What do you think can be done? It's never acceptable. It was never acceptable in the past. It's never acceptable today. What can we do, Ms. Watts? What would you like to see us do? How can we stand up to these thugs?

Ms. Jennifer Watts: It was great to hear about the secretariat of the federal government and its work, and understanding also what provincial governments are doing, but I think the very big thing is for all of us to understand our role and responsibility. There are many, many actions that need to be taking place. I think it's important that there's funding to support and empower groups who are experiencing this racism, so that they are able to speak their truth and talk about what that experience has been. I think it takes just a huge, huge education effort on the part of all of us, wherever we may be working.

Here in Nova Scotia, I've been working with some folks in Halifax and with other provincial partners on a positive messaging campaign—not waiting for the negativity and not always being on the back foot and having to respond, but being very proactive in supporting communities that welcome people and bring them together, and speak about that positivity. I say this because if we're always dealing from a negative starting point, that is giving too much power away.

I guess there's a variety of things we need to be doing and be engaged in, and federal support and funding, particularly for groups that are directly impacted, is key.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Thank you so much.

Mr. de Chastelain, this question is for you. You mentioned 170,000 international students working for our economy in 2018. What can be done to ensure their pathway to immigration in coming years? What are the suggestions you have, and anybody can take it? I would like especially to start with Bryn and Saint Mary's University.

We need these people who speak the language and understand the system. They're educated, they're young and they're hungry to get in. What can we do from this angle, as federal MPs, to make sure they're successful in their pathway to immigration in the coming years?

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: I'm happy to jump in on that. I think, when we speak specifically to employment for international students, there have been a number of concerns relating to the number of hours that international students are able to work under their study visas or study permits, which limits their ability to develop connections with employers and really develop important networks that will allow them to start careers. That was implemented by the government earlier in April and May in terms of some of the initial pandemic funding and programs and—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up.

We will now have to move on to our next member, Mr. Dhaliwal.

You have four minutes for your round of questioning. You can proceed, please, Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank all of the presenters. In particular, I would like to thank Mr. Mahmood for bringing up the minority issues around the globe, and I'm sure you know the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation from your own town. We have many Sikhs and Hindus too...from Afghanistan. Thank you for that.

Madam Chair, I'm going to carry on with the questioning. My good friend Bob Saroya on the other side was talking about students. International students contribute greatly to Canada, and as a result, make excellent candidates to transition from student to permanent resident to citizenship. Approximately 11,000 students became permanent residents last year.

What more can be done with regard to finding pathways to PR, and from PR to citizenship for these international students?

Anyone can start.

• (1625)

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: I'm happy to jump in and wrap up my comments on allowing students to make stronger connections with employers during their time at post-secondary institutions. I think that we're seeing more and more students beginning to understand the value of utilizing connections in order to be able to find jobs and to build careers. I think that international students are currently at a disadvantage to our domestic students in being able to access all components of post-secondary institutions at this time.

Increasing the opportunities for international students to engage in co-op or work-integrated learning programs is going to be critical, as will be expanding things like the Canada summer jobs program to include international students. That will, I think, go a long way toward international students' being able to see their lives and careers taking place in Canada.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: I'd also like to add that one of the things the settlement sector has been very clear about is the fact that we're not funded by the IRCC unless you already have PR status. So, for us, if we were able to work with international students and refugee claimants and migrant workers, that would open up a huge opportunity for them to access the considerable services, expertise and staff that we have to support them. That is something that we've been asking IRCC and the government to look at and open up that eligibility so that we're able to work with people with temporary resident or work permits.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: The students could only work 20 hours, and we made it an unlimited time for them, to help them. Did those unlimited hours help students? Is there anything else besides this that we can do? You mentioned summer jobs.

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: Yes, I think the unlimited hours have been extremely helpful. This is obviously a very challenging time for young people to find employment, but the opportunity for international students to be able to pursue jobs and career options that they otherwise weren't able to has been extremely helpful. I think continuing to expand those opportunities to allow international students to develop connections through summer job programs and additional funding will be extremely important moving forward.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: We have also credited them with 50% of the time they spend overseas doing their online studies, for a total credit of up to one year. Do you also see that as helping the whole system, or are there pros and cons to that?

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: I think it's definitely been well received. It's alleviated some of the immediate concerns that we've been hearing about from international students—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, but the time is up. Thank you.

We will now move on to Madame Normandin.

Madame Normandin, you will have two minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I'll continue with my questions for Mr. de Chastelain.

I want to know whether students or even potential employers have spoken to you about issues related to internships. The process is long, and it involves a great deal of paperwork. Sometimes, it's necessary to obtain a closed work permit and to conduct a labour market impact assessment. This makes you a little less competitive for long-term internships, for example.

I want to know whether you've heard about this issue from people on the ground. If so, do you have any recommendations?

[English]

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: Yes, this is a very important question, and I thank you for raising this topic. We've heard very often from international students. It's very challenging to secure internships within your field of study as a student, but we've heard from international students—good friends of mine—who have had opportunities to work at provincial legislatures but who've barely been able to receive the paperwork in time to take part in those internships. Something that the federal government can do moving forward is to ensure that international students have access to co-ops, internships and other work-integrated learning opportunities underneath their study permits to eliminate any of this additional paperwork or time required to receive an additional work permit to take part in these activities.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I want to quickly discuss biometrics.

A number of countries don't have a biometric data collection centre. Should we facilitate the collection of biometric data from people when they arrive in Canada, if the collection isn't possible in their country of origin?

[English]

Mr. Bryn de Chastelain: In terms of biometrics, it's not a topic I'm necessarily an expert on, but what I can tell you is that it is a barrier for international students who are looking to come to Canada. I think, as a country, we should be doing everything we can to allow international students to come here to study if they're willing and able to do so.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I saw Mr. Mahmood nodding his head. I don't know whether he has time to respond.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Madame Normandin, but your time is up.

We will now have our last round of questioning by Ms. Kwan, who will have two minutes. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Going back quickly to Mr. Mahmood, you were just finishing. How long have you been waiting for your family to reunite?

Mr. Usman Mahmood: It's been about a month since I've applied, but the current timeline is about six to nine months.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: This is the first time that you've tried for the lottery.

Mr. Usman Mahmood: No, I have not applied for a lottery. I only applied for a visitor visa.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

I'm going to move on to Ms. Watts. On the issue of racism, in my own riding, in and around Chinatown, we've had some horrible incidents where the Chinese cultural centre's window have been smashed and the centre defaced. There's been a whole variety of activities happening. One issue that people have raised is that people are often not comfortable going to the police and reporting this. In particular, suggestions were made that people could perhaps go to an NGO in the riding and perhaps in the community so that they could do the reporting that way.

I wonder what your thoughts are on this and whether or not the government should make it easier for people to report those kinds of hate crimes.

Ms. Jennifer Watts: Yes, absolutely. One of the programs that we did, particularly after the killing of George Floyd and the emergence of Black Lives Matter... In Halifax, we have quite a strong and historic African Nova Scotian community that was also impacted by this. We set up opportunities for people to gather, particularly mothers and parents who were very concerned about their children. I think it's incumbent on us as settlement agencies to offer safe spaces so people can come together, and we did mobilize that. It was difficult because we were doing that virtually, but we did do it. I also think it about discussing it and engaging with your local police authority and officials on a regular basis, and understanding the reporting of racism. Sometimes what we found is that people say, "This incident happened to me" and the response was, "Did you work with a police officer?", to which the person replied, "I did, but I don't really know what happened"—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Watts, but the time is up.

With this, our first panel comes to an end. On behalf of all members, I thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing your important testimony. If there is anything further you would like to bring to the committee's notice, you can send it in writing if you didn't get an opportunity to speak about it.

Thank you once again, and with this, I will suspend the meeting for a minute to allow for a sound check for one of the panellists on the second panel.

The meeting is suspended for a minute and we will come back. Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

In this panel we will be hearing from the officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. I would like to welcome Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Fraser Valentine, assistant deputy minister, settlement and integration; and Mr. Daniel Mills, assistant deputy minister, operations.

Thank you to all of the officials for appearing before the committee. We have been keeping you quite busy. I think this is your third appearance in the last two weeks, so thank you for being here.

We will start with Marian Campbell Jarvis.

You have five minutes to give your opening remarks. Please start.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and members of the committee.

As officials at IRCC, we have responded, adapted and transformed our work since the beginning of the pandemic in order to serve our clients better while protecting the health and safety of our communities and of our staff.

[*Translation*]

We had to quickly equip our workforce at home so that they could continue their important work remotely. The processing of files never stopped. For many of our employees, especially in the area of operations, this adjustment was complex. For our employees who work with settlement agencies—

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Saroya: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm hearing sound doubling up, and I'm not getting anything.

The Chair: Okay, we'll have a look.

Mr. Clerk, can you check on the interpretation?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune): Ms. Campbell Jarvis, sorry to interrupt, but when you're speaking in English, could you please make sure that the language of interpretation is set to English, and when you speak in French, make sure that the language of interpretation is set to French, if possible. This should improve the sound at our end, if you could.

Thank you so much.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I apologize, Madam Chair and Clerk. I had actually pressed the button to French when I spoke French. I will press it again and hope for the best.

[*Translation*]

I'm really sorry.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I pressed the button for the French channel. I want to continue my presentation. Is that okay?

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Perfect.

For our employees who work with settlement agencies, we quickly innovated to create an electronic signature tool. This made

it possible to finalize funding negotiations and ensure continuity of service for newcomers.

Our call centre agents needed to use new software or new hardware at home in order to continue to do their work effectively.

Our work included prioritizing the applications to help Canadians who needed to return to the country; the applications from vulnerable populations; and the applications from essential workers, including agricultural workers, who are crucial to maintaining Canada's food supply.

I won't describe in detail the work accomplished. However, I can say that we simplified the application process, took facilitative measures and sped up the processing system.

It should be noted, from a client service perspective, that no applications in progress were closed or refused because of missing documents or because the application process wasn't completed on time. This also means that processing may take longer and that the files may be reviewed more times than under normal circumstances.

● (1640)

[*English*]

The minister and deputy minister have had the opportunity at this committee to share some of the facilitative measures we have put in place. Today, I would just quickly highlight a few that have helped us move the yardsticks ahead while keeping our staff and our clients safe.

Among them is the creation of a public policy to allow in-Canada asylum claims via email, which removes the need to apply in person. Second is exempting key essential populations from biometric collection, given the closure of the VACs. Another is creating a temporary public policy that allows visitors to apply for work permits without having to leave Canada.

We've also had in-Canada virtual landing, meaning those already in Canada and ready to become permanent residents could be landed without an interview. We have provided extra flexibility and funding stability to ensure that settlement organizations could deliver services remotely. Many settlement providers shifted to online or remote delivery, which we all agree will become a permanent feature of the settlement program going forward.

We have also helped to procure personal protection equipment for settlement agencies.

We talked a little bit about our virtual citizenship ceremonies for over 43,000 candidates for citizenship between April and November of this year. Just a couple of weeks ago we moved to offering online citizenship testing to accommodate those who have been waiting to take the knowledge test to become Canadian citizens.

These initiatives, along with a number of facilitative measures for international students and the designated learning institutions in Canada that rely on them, exemptions from travel restrictions that allow family members of Canadian citizens and permanent residents to enter Canada for non-discretionary reasons—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Jarvis. Your time is up. You will get an opportunity during the round of questioning to touch further on these.

We will start our first round of questioning with Ms. Dancho.

Ms. Dancho, you have six minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the officials for all of your hard work over the last number of weeks and months. I really appreciate you being here again for the third time in the last number of weeks.

I have a number of questions today for you about the parents and grandparents program. The committee has heard several expert witnesses and their feedback on this lottery. There are a lot of different opinions of how it could be changed.

I'm wondering if the department has the technological capacity to create a weighted grandparents and parents lottery system or otherwise—we'll use the lottery as an example—that can consider if people have applied three, four or five times.

Right now we're seeing that new applicants are being treated the same as those who have been hoping to get their parents into the country for years. I'm just wondering if you have the capacity to do that.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

There is always a lot of interest in the parents and grandparents program.

That's a very interesting suggestion by the member about weighting and taking into account past applications. I actually don't know the answer to the question, but I think it's a really interesting one that I will look into further.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you. I appreciate that. I think it would be great news for grandparents and parents if that could be considered.

I am just switching gears here a little bit. Regarding the extended family reunification scheme that was brought forward a few months ago to service those separated by Canada-U.S. closures in particular, can you tell me how many applicants applied during those October 8 and 9 dates? Of those, how many are awaiting processing?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's another good question. I know that the government was very pleased to be able to offer that possibility of extended members. As for the exact number, I'm go-

ing to turn to my colleague, Mr. Mills, who will have the processing figures for you.

Mr. Mills.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

I do not have the figures for October 8 and 9. However, I can tell you that, up to now, we have received more than 60,000 applications in connection with the travel restriction exemptions for members of the immediate or extended family, depending on the definition. In 80% of those cases, we have processed the application in 14 days, as we committed to do.

● (1645)

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: You said that 60,000 applied. Was that 60,000 individual applications? I know that at times people were panicking a little and weren't hearing back, so they would reapply every day. They're probably still doing it. Do you know if that's 60,000 specific people or just 60,000 applications that went through and could be duplicates.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes, there were 60,000 applications, or actually, we received 60,000 emails. Some of those applications are duplicates or triplicates. Some others came from those who have already submitted an application but are providing information that was missing from their files. On average, we estimate that about 40,000 individuals have submitted applications to us for travel authorizations.

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, I wasn't able to do the math, but if you processed 80% of the 60,000 who applied, then exactly how many are remaining? Who will be the 20% of that 60,000? Maybe someone on the committee is better at quicker math than me. What would that be?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I do not have the number of outstanding applications at hand, but I can confirm that we have received 60,000 requests. We estimate that this means about 40,000 individual applications. To date, we have approved 28,000 applications.

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay, so 40,000 applied and then 80% were approved. A little less than 10,000 are outstanding. It's more like 6,000 or 7,000. Is that about correct?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I would say we have between 8,000 and 10,000 applications still to process.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Okay. That's about 8,000. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

I wanted to ask about adoption with the remaining minute and a bit that I have here. I brought the Muth family to your attention a few times, and there were other complicated adoption cases. The Muths specifically weren't able to get on that repatriation flight back to Canada in May and were stranded.

Then their daughter had terrible medical needs and was dying, and they had to go to Barbados. Thankfully, Barbados took them in. They were stuck there until last week. That was about eight or nine months.

I have concerns about that and if that's how Canadians are going to be treated when they go abroad to adopt children. This child was sick. I would like confirmation from you about how we can improve that process, and that you are looking to ensure that this never happens again.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I will turn to my colleague Mr. Mills on the adoption question, but it's certainly a process that we do care about, and we are looking into these situations and learning from them.

Mr. Mills, would you wish to add anything?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: All I can do is repeat my colleague's comments. We care very much about adoption. We learn lessons from each case we process. To answer your question, unfortunately—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Mills, but your time is up.

We will now move to Mr. Dhaliwal. You have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Madam Campbell Jarvis, for your presentation.

I'm going to continue with the PGP, the parents and grandparents program. If I recall, prior to 2015 when the Conservatives were in power, 5,000 applications were taken. It was first-come, first-served, and people sometimes had to line up for weeks before the application deadline in Mississauga. Therefore, people with more money and easy accessibility had a chance to cut into the line and get to those 5,000 applications.

Since then, when we came forward, if I look at the average number of applications that your department—or the government—has promised to accept, it is accepting four times more applications. Could you give me the difference between the system in 2015 and the system now?

• (1650)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I would have to look back at the precise numbers, but the member is correct. The parents and grandparents program has certainly been through a number of different iterations. We have tried a number of different approaches, and the demand for the program has always been quite significant and continues to grow as people seek to bring parents and grandparents with them. We can return with some of the numbers to show that pattern, and I can follow up.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: In terms of its accessibility and responsible program management, do you see any differences between then and now, or would you come back on that one as well?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I could come back with further details on some of the structure and the approach if that is helpful.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

When the minister was here he mentioned that the departmental capacity went from 38% to 90%. What choices had to be made to make sure that our immigration system could still function along the crucial lines of business?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you. I'll turn to Mr. Mills.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you. I will answer the question.

What made it possible for us to increase the processing capacity of our employees from 38% to 90%, is the fact that we provided them with all the equipment they need to work from home. As you know, at the beginning of the pandemic, our priority was to ensure the health and safety of our employees. In order to do that, we had to provide them with the technology they needed at home. That was one of the things that allowed us to increase our processing capacity in the subsequent months. We also provided our employees with training. In addition, we have developed processes that are much more linear and that mean that some files can be digitized, in order to make remote processing easier.

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

First of all, I'm very grateful to the IRCC employees, whether they are in Montreal or anywhere else, because our office is considered the busiest in all of Canada. Thank you for that.

One problem that we are facing right now is that when the people fill out their application, it is not necessarily lawyers or experts who fill in the applications. It is someone else who fills it in for them and they forget to answer just one tick mark or question: Have you ever been rejected for a visa by any other country? Then they forget to tick that, because it wasn't Canada; it might be England, Australia or the U.S.A. It was my understanding that the department brought in a policy that a minor error or mistake like that would not result in their getting a five-year ban, but I still see many of those applications being given a five-year ban. Would you comment on that, the policy moving forward and how we can resolve that particular little mistake on the application form without penalizing those candidates.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you. That's a really important question into how we're processing. I'm going to ask Mr. Mills to answer how we're handling that and, in particular, how during COVID we've made some adjustments, which he will tell you about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: During the pandemic, we established various procedures so that we were not returning forms that were missing information. We don't return the forms and we don't reject any application because documents or pieces of information are missing. Certainly, processing deadlines will be—

• (1655)

[*English*]

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting, Mr. Mills, but the time is up.

We will now move on to Madame Normandin, who has six minutes for her round of questioning.

You may please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the senior officials once more. Not only is this the third time that they have testified before us, but they also provide us with clear responses each time. They give us a lot of information about what is happening. That allows us to provide our constituents with better answers and explanations. In some cases it may even be a salve for their impatience.

That leads me to my first question. Do you believe that, in the future, it would be a good thing for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to be more transparent as to what is going on in the department? There might even be a way to use members of Parliament to communicate information better.

One example comes to mind. In one go, 60,000 applications came in on IMM 0006 forms on October 8 and 9. That is a lot. Perhaps you were not expecting it. If we had been in the loop from the beginning, perhaps we would have been able to explain the situation to our constituents better, and lower their expectations as a result.

Do you think that it would be a good idea, in the future, if we were more in the loop and if there were a little more transparency about the various issues that IRCC is dealing with?

[*English*]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

[*Translation*]

I really like the spirit behind that question.

We are pleased and proud to appear before the committee for a third time. We try to provide clear and transparent information.

We have a lot of respect for the role of Parliament and of all its members. I hope that the information we are providing to you will be of assistance to the committee in the next stages of its study. I personally am looking forward to reading the committee's report and recommendations.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Speaking of recommendations, I would like to know what you are hoping for from our study. Basically, there can be two distinct ways of going about it. Would it be more useful for your work if parliamentarians drafted the broad strokes of the objectives to be achieved, or if we focused a little more specifically on what should change at IRCC? Perhaps you would like it to be a bit of both.

For example, section 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations has come up in discussion. If we say that section 179(b) must be amended, that is a specific objective. If we say that issuing visas must be made easier in general, that's a broader objective.

Which of those approaches would you prefer?

[*English*]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Really, we are interested in what the committee deemed useful and look forward to reading the report and the findings. In the meantime, we hope to the best of our ability that we've been able to convey the innovation, the effort and the adaptation that IRCC has undertaken throughout the pandemic to better respond to our clients.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

The committee has often suggested that moving to an online system would help matters in the future. It would also have been of great assistance during the crisis.

In general, what is your level of confidence with implementing an online system? How long could that take? Basically, are we to expect all areas of IRCC activity to be supported by an online system?

Can you give us an idea of your intentions, in terms of migrating to a digital system?

• (1700)

[English]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: There's a lot of dynamism at play in the system, both in terms of travel as well as the IRCC system.

I will turn to my colleague, Mr. Mills, for additional information on that subject.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes, indeed, we would really like to have an integrated digital, electronic process at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

As Ms. Normandin mentioned, during the pandemic, having to handle a lot of documents and applications on paper did limit our capacity to process them quickly. We were forced to adapt. As the deputy minister mentioned last week, we have started to digitize some files so that we can process those applications virtually, anywhere in the world.

We are certainly examining that possibility for various areas of IRCC activity. We are working very hard to make sure that we have systems that will allow us to process all the different applications using computerized and electronic processes, in the short, medium and long terms.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up.

We will now move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I know that some witnesses suggested the idea of a weighted system for the parents and grandparents lottery. I just want to point out that back in 2017, for example, when the lottery system first was introduced, 100,000 people submitted their interest to apply. If we go to a weighted system, and because there are only so many slots, you could theoretically create a scenario where only the people who apply would be able to enter the draw. That means there would be no new applications that would be allowed for submission.

I appreciate the sentiment, but, really, the best option going forward, in my view, is to make sure that there is no cap. Otherwise, you effectively go back to the previous system that the Conservatives did—basically, capping the number of applications with the weighted system—and I don't think that's really what we want to achieve.

I'd like to ask the officials this question. Last year, 68,800 spouses, common-law partners and children were admitted to Canada, and this year the minister's target is 49,000 decisions for the same stream. Does that mean that...? Could the officials advise us on whether this 49,000 includes both negative and positive decisions?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'll turn to Mr. Mills to respond to that on the decision-making piece.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: It means that IRCC officers will have made final decisions on 49,000 applications by December 31.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Those are positive decisions only then.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I will have to confirm that information for the committee later, if I may, but, as I understand it, it means 40,000 decisions, either positive or negative.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay, thank you. That will make a difference, whether or not they are positive or negative, because otherwise it would mean that the overall number of admissions would likely be lower if it includes negative decisions as well.

I wonder if the officials know the percentage of the applications in the system that are being processed right now that are inland applications versus outland applications.

• (1705)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'll turn to Mr. Mills if we have that percentage, and if not, Madam Chair, we'd be pleased to follow up on the member's question.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: At the moment, about 40% of the applications are made here in Canada, while 60% are made from another country.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Of the applications being processed, how many are inland, and how many are outland?

Maybe I can get those numbers from the officials. If I can get the breakdown, both in percentage and in actual numbers, of how many have been received by IRCC and how many have been processed, that would be very helpful.

I'll turn to the issue of dual intent. If someone applies with dual intent, they can't be denied simply on the grounds of having dual intent. However, it is possible that by virtue of having dual intent, the bar to convince an immigration officer that they will leave Canada according to paragraph 179(b) is more difficult. That seems to be playing out in the evidence given the number of families that have been rejected.

Dual intent does nothing to negate paragraph 179(b). If you have a loved one in Canada, would that not put you at a disadvantage in trying to convince the officer that you will indeed leave Canada after your visa is due?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: With respect to dual intent, it is recognized as the member has noted that it's perfectly reasonable to have a dual intent. Many people come as temporary residents with the hope to stay. The issue, though, is that in law there has to be a strong commitment to leave at the end. We need to know that the temporary resident, if they are not successful in their permanent residence application, would leave. In terms of the grounds that the member has raised, the agent will assess the full range of measures, not one particular instance.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if IRCC has any stats, historically or previously, to show that people who have dual intent and receive their TRV then ended up not leaving the country.

Do you have stats to that effect that you can share with the committee?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I do not have those stats at my fingertips. I would be pleased to take that back and see what we have available.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes. I think that would be very helpful, because the—

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

Ms. Jarvis, yes, we would appreciate it if you could provide the numbers that the member has requested.

We will now—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Madam Chair. Can I just interject for one second?

Could I also have those numbers broken down by country as well?

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our second round of questioning.

Ms. Dancho, you have five minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Could I have the committee's confirmation that any data they provide to individual members of the committee are provided to all members of the committee?

The Chair: The data, whatever the officials provide, will come to the clerk and will be distributed to all the members.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: That's perfect. I appreciate that.

Let's talk about expired COPRs for a little while. From the last couple of times we've spoken about this, my understanding is that there are about 10,000 abroad that are expired, 6,000 have been contacted by the department, 1,000 of those have been provided travel documents, and about 675 of that 1,000 have actually travelled.

I'm sure that has been updated since last week, but that's approximately my understanding of the issue.

Is that correct?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That does sound very familiar, but I will turn to Mr. Mills for further confirmation.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Ms. Dancho's figures are correct. However, the total number of expired Confirmations of Permanent Residence is about 14,000 at the moment

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sorry, was that 14,000 rather than 10,000?

Okay, then there are a few more than we thought. There are about 14,000 abroad that are expired and are certainly in this troubling situation.

I was just reviewing a letter submitted by an advocacy group that started up for these individuals. They pointed out, and I just want confirmation on this, that you've been contacting all of these approximately 14,000 folks. However, my understanding is that they've also been asked by your government, first and foremost, to apply through this web form and then they are contacted.

Can you just run through for me why that is?

If they've applied on the web form, why do they need to be contacted to confirm whether they want to come. I am just thinking that they probably wouldn't have applied with the web form if they didn't want to come. I wonder whether that's an additional step that's unneeded.

• (1710)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you. That's a good question.

I think this reflects this whole new line of business for us since COVID, which is uncharted territory.

Mr. Mills, would you like to provide further details on the actual process, please?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes, this really is a new area. We had to adapt very quickly to respond to the needs of the clients, while keeping in mind the health and safety of Canadians in this country.

When people who want to come to Canada send their applications through the electronic form and are ready, we are very happy to welcome them and we want to do so as quickly as possible. However, we must make sure that they have a suitable quarantine plan and that their various travel documents, such as medical exams and passports, are still valid. We communicate with them to check that information before we send the letter of confirmation.

[English]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you, Mr. Mills.

I remember from last time we spoke that you did mention the medical application they sort of have to reapprove. My understanding is that the medical part can be very costly. I think I asked last time if you would consider, since they had good health nine months ago, given the extraordinary circumstances whether we could just use their former one even if it's a bit expired. I'm not sure you're considering that.

Further on in this letter that they wrote to our committee and to you, they mentioned that when you contact them you ask for a lot of additional information. They mentioned you want documents showing where they live, the address, lease agreement, plans to work in Canada, proposed travel itinerary, and the additional medical re-examination as you mentioned. It sounds as though they're being asked all the same questions that they would have already provided information on before, and I'm just wondering if that's part of the problem. If they applied and were approved, can't we just take their approved applications from before and approve them now and allow them to come?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, that's a good question. One contextual point is that as we have these COPRs, it actually means that the permit has expired a year ago. Quite a bit of time may have passed. In the context of the pandemic, we are wanting to verify that we have the relevant detail to protect the health of everybody involved.

Mr. Mills, I don't know if there are further comments you wish to make to help answer the member's question.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: As my colleague mentioned, some Confirmations of Permanent Residence were processed about a year ago, or have expired. We want to make sure that the information supplied to us a number of months ago is still valid. Once again, we want to protect the health and safety of Canadians. We want to make sure that, when these people arrive in the country, they will have a suitable quarantine plan.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mills. The time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Dhillon, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me start by asking you this question.

At the start of the pandemic, a lot of newcomers or potential newcomers were caught in a really difficult situation. They either had permanent resident status or they had been given a Confirmation of Permanent Residence. However, because of the pandemic, they could not travel. Time went by and those Confirmations of Permanent Residence ended up expiring.

What are you doing to make sure that people like that are protected? What choices have you made to help them in that situation?

• (1715)

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes, indeed, with the Confirmations of Permanent Residence, we had to react quickly during the pandemic and adapt our various processes.

First, in April and May, we reviewed the Confirmations of Permanent Residence for which the medical exams were about to expire. We looked at the various files and we proactively extended the validity period of some medical exams by 6 to 12 months, so that those permanent residents could travel to Canada.

As I mentioned, since April, almost 14,000 Confirmations of Permanent Residence have reached their expiry date. Of that number, we have contacted 6,000 people to explain to them that they are still able to come to Canada because we have proactively extended the validity period of the medical exams. We still have to communicate with approximately another 4,000 people. We are doing that in a rigorous manner. Last week, we reached 500 people and we will do the same this week.

We are working at a very good rhythm. We hope that we will be moving forward quickly and communicating with everyone in a very reasonable time period.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Mills.

Now I would like to talk about how effective your activities are.

We know that our government analyzes all possible approaches, as it has done in the past, to avoid the duplication of work.

Can you tell us what you did in August to allow visitors to apply for a work permit without leaving the country? Has that approach been used in other aspects of immigration?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

I will let my colleague Mr. Mills answer it for you.

Mr. Daniel Mills: As we got close to September, for example, we established a two-stage process for students, so that they could start their studies remotely. So the approval process was done in two stages. The first stage was to establish their eligibility to come to Canada. We sent more than 62,000 applications or letters to students so that they could start their studies in Canada remotely. After that, processing those applications proceeded normally.

This was one aspect of our activity where we had to adapt quickly. We innovated in order to make sure that, in terms of customer service, it was positive both for Canadian universities and for the international students who wanted to come to Canada.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mills.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin.

You have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning. You may proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Let me give you a very concrete example. After phoning some IRCC officers, I found out that the application for permanent residence of one of my constituents had been accepted last July 6. Five months later, however, he still has not received a Confirmation of Permanent Residence.

To your knowledge, are many files currently in that same situation?

The application has clearly been accepted. Even though we know that there will be no interview upon arrival, that the process will be done entirely by means of a letter, and that the steps in obtaining the permanent residence card will then take their course, people are not being given any information at all.

• (1720)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

I will let my colleague Mr. Mills tell you about applications and about processing files.

Mr. Daniel Mills: I will be very honest with you, I am not aware of cases like that. I hope that it's an isolated case, but I will be happy to follow up on it.

According to our process, each time that an application is approved, we communicate with the applicant to inform them about the situation. At the beginning of the pandemic, we began to allow virtual admissions. We do communicate with people whose permanent resident applications have been approved. Though there is no interview in person, we communicate with them in order to admit them virtually.

I am surprised at the situation you are describing, but I will be happy to follow up on it.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much. So I will be able to come back to that later.

We had some questions about visas, because the subject has come up on a number of occasions. Visas are needed for some countries, while for others, only an electronic travel authorization is needed.

Are the criteria often reviewed with a view to removing the visa requirement for some countries or imposing it on others? What is the justification for a visa to be required for one country but not for another?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

A number of factors must be considered in determining whether a visa is required or not. Certainly the relationship between the countries—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Jarvis, but the time is up.

Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Just to clarify the last question on data, could the officials provide TRVs, approved versus denied, for applications with dual intent, and the same thing for applications without dual intent, going back the last 10 years and broken down by year and country, please?

On a different issue, the deputy minister previously confirmed that permit holders wouldn't be deported or lose status, but there has been no indication from IRCC that this is in fact the case. Does someone with an expired postgraduate work permit have implied status even though it can't be extended in the vast majority of cases? For those who are in Canada with an expired or expiring PGWP, what are their options if someone is interested in hiring them? Are they out of luck if their work permit has expired? What happens if they have a job but their PGWP has already expired?

I noted that there's a difference as well for those who are in Quebec. I wonder if the officials can answer the same question for people both in Quebec and outside Quebec.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: There's a lot in that question. I would like to raise a few things to help respond to it.

First, we are seized with this situation that has arisen as a result of the pandemic. As the minister noted, the immigration-level targets, the interest in international students, the calibre of students becoming permanent residents—that was certainly noted by the minister. We've taken note.

In terms of the expiration of the postgraduate work permit, that is a one-time permit, as I think the member knows, but there are a few things in the interim. We have encouraged a person approaching the end of their expiration to consider applying as a visitor, as a temporary foreign worker. That could be under the international mobility program or the temporary foreign worker program. Those are some options that do exist.

To stay in the country, one of the flexibilities we introduced was the revocation period. That would allow somebody a bit more time to reapply to have status and to perhaps pursue other options.

Madam Chair, as I think the member noted, this is something we are very seized with. We are looking into this.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Jarvis.

Mr. Allison, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please start.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to continue on that note. One thing I always hear from people is that when they're here, sometimes the timing doesn't work out with a job offer or that kind of stuff. Would you review again what their options are?

• (1725)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: As I noted, we are seized with this new situation that we find ourselves in as a result of the pandemic. There are certainly some options in the interim. Somebody could apply for a temporary foreign worker position that would require a labour market impact assessment, an LMIA, through our colleagues at ESDC. There is also the international mobility program with employer-specific and open work permits. There may also be opportunities, depending on the status of the state—there are so many different individual variables here—for application to, say, one of the pilots or the provincial nominee program.

So there are some pathways that are open. We are continuing to look into the situation going forward.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you very much.

I know this is probably more of a long thing because there are provincial nominee programs and multiple pathways, but one of the things I hear from business quite a bit is that there is a lack of a coordinated effort. I just wonder if, in the future, it would be possible try to help people understand some of the agencies, with maybe a whole-of-government approach.

I realize that the provinces may have an option. I see it all the time when we have kids who are graduating from college and university and they end up heading out to Newfoundland and Labrador or to any other parts of Canada where their point total could be higher if they were in that particular area.

My question is as follows. I would like to know what the chances are of a whole-of-government approach when certain industries would be able to look at their need and maybe come to government and say, “Listen, we’re experiencing a shortage of 40,000 or 50,000 or 60,000 employees. Would we be able to work with you to help to try to figure that out, versus trying to apply to one little program here and one there?” It becomes a bit of a complicated mess for businesses trying to fill jobs and roles that they have.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The government has certainly focused on regional and some sectoral requirements and we really see that through the pilots: the Atlantic immigration pilot, the rural and northern immigration pilot and the provincial nominee program.

A number of these economic programs really allow tailoring of the specific need in that area. The member noted Labrador and Newfoundland, so looking at what might be the specific labour market requirements, the provincial nominee program does enable that kind of targeting and tailoring, that perfect match between immigration and labour market needs.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you.

I have one last question as we move forward here.

I mentioned this to the officials the last time they were here and I ran out of time. I have a number of technical operations in my riding, such as greenhouses, and some of them have been deemed essential services during this pandemic. I would guess that all jobs would be essential services at some point.

My question is the following. As we continue to loosen up and things continue to move a little bit, when applications are made for

temporary visas for technical purposes, would there be some consideration given if they involved new technology required by the business for them to understand and implement, or if they required some type of knowledge base because of equipment bought in from outside of the country? If not, would the government consider all of those things essential as we move forward?

I realize that if it was food-related, it was definitely essential. Sometimes it took a little bit of time to get that to work, but essentially, when people were investing in new plants and new equipment, it was to hire more people down the road and to be more productive.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: In terms of essential services, on the Public Safety Canada website, there is an extensive list of critical and essential infrastructure. As well, most provinces and territories have their own lists of essential services. Those are triaged accordingly.

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting, Mr. Allison. We will have to move to our next member.

We will end this panel with five minutes from Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have five minutes for your round of questioning, and then this panel will come to an end.

• (1730)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Madam Chair, may I make a point of order before we go to the questions?

The Chair: Yes, please, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thanks.

I just want to make sure that I got a confirmation on the data request from officials so that the committee could receive it.

The Chair: Yes, Ms. Campbell Jarvis has indicated that they will provide us the data.

Ms. Campbell Jarvis, if you could send the requested information to the clerk of the committee, it will then be distributed among all the members.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, we have taken note of the member's request and the detailed breakdown of what is being sought. We will endeavour to provide that information.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Campbell Jarvis.

We will now proceed with the round of questioning by Madame Martinez Ferrada.

You can please start.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all the IRCC officials who have joined us this evening and who are giving generously of their time to our committee.

Before I move to a few questions that I want to ask, I would like to go back to the issue of educational institutions. They had to establish measures to ensure the same level of service during the pandemic. As we now understand, the pandemic is not yet over. In 2021, those institutions will have to continue to apply measures in order to ensure that they are providing the same level of service.

Are you too going to continue to apply the same measures to support educational institutions, whether that be financial support or support for activities, so that they can continue to provide the same services in 2021? Are you currently working on any measures to support educational institutions during the pandemic?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

We had to transform or adapt a considerable number of things because of the pandemic. We are currently studying the pros and cons in each case. We intend to keep everything that improved our processes, approaches, policies and activities.

Take the citizenship ceremonies as an example. They are now conducted virtually. I feel that is a very effective approach. Our clients' comments show that they prefer a virtual system. Personally, I was a little afraid that it might become impersonal. However, our clients like the efficiency of the system.

We are very interested in keeping all new measures that are effective and that improve services for our clients.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: If any department has experienced a lot of transformation and innovation, it is certainly IRCC. The pandemic required you to get out of what we might call a comfort zone and transform ways of doing things that had been the same for years. IRCC had to quickly change its processes and become innovative, with biometrics, for example. You have also extended the duration of permanent residencies and you have begun to conduct interviews and citizenship ceremonies virtually. Not to mention the entire issue of digitizing the files, which you have already begun.

In your view, which of those changes would be most important to keep in order to increase the effectiveness of immigration processes?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

A number of changes have proved to be very effective. Our decision to keep any of those changes is made in terms of the advantages they represent for our clients.

I will ask my colleague Daniel Mills to add some examples to illustrate the way in which those transformations can help us to improve our activities.

• (1735)

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you.

Let me expand on one of the points my colleague has just mentioned by telling you about the citizenship test, which is now administered online. We launched it only about a week ago and the results are excellent. It will be more practical for people, because they will no longer need to appear in person to take the citizenship test. They will be able to do it wherever they are in Canada. They will also be able to do it at their own speed. I mean that they have a set time in which to do the exam—

[*English*]

The Chair: Sorry to interrupt, Mr. Mills, but your time is up.

With that, our panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I want to thank Ms. Jarvis, Mr. Mills and Mr. Valentine for appearing. I hope to receive the information that members have requested from you.

Thank you for all of the hard work you always do on behalf of all Canadians, especially during this very difficult year.

With today's news that soon we will have some vaccines on the shores of this great country, I hope and pray that the next year will be a better year for all of us.

Merry Christmas and happy holidays. Please pass this on to all of the officials at IRCC.

With this, we come to the end of this meeting.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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