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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1655)

[English]

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

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting 19 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that the committee adhere to the health protocols. Maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others. Wear a non-medical mask when moving in the meeting room. Preferably, wear a mask at all times, including when you are seated. Maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer at the room entrance and wash your hands well with soap regularly.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting. I thank all the members in advance for their co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of January 25, 2021. The proceedings will be made available via the House of Commons website.

The webcast will always show the person speaking rather than the entirety of the committee. I would like to take this opportunity to remind all participants of this meeting that screenshots or taking photos of your screen is not permitted.

A reminder that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

With regard to the speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do the best we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), today the committee is resuming the studies of immigration and refugee measures for the people of Hong Kong and labour market impact assessment under the temporary foreign workers program. Pursuant to the second subcommittee report adopted by the committee on February 1, today's testimony will be considered under both studies.

Today, I would like to welcome the Honourable Marco Mendicino, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before this committee. All the members really appreciate you coming for two meetings this week. Thank you on behalf of all members of this committee.

For this panel, we are also joined by officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We are joined by Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Nicole Giles, associate assistant deputy minister, operations; Pemi Gill, director general, international network; and Caroline Xavier, associate deputy minister.

The minister will be staying for the first panel. We will start with his opening remarks and then we will go into the round of questioning.

Welcome, Minister. You can please start. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Hon. Marco Mendicino (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

As we begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm joining you from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

I am pleased to first address the committee's study of labour market impact assessments as it relates to temporary foreign workers and our immigration system. After that, I'll discuss our initiatives to help more Hong Kong residents choose Canada.

• (1700)

[Translation]

As you may know, the temporary foreign worker program, or TFWP, is a demand-driven/employer-requested program that seeks to help Canadian employers access foreign workers to fill labour gaps. It features several streams, including one for the agriculture sector.

To hire through the TFWP, an employer must first apply for a labour market impact assessment, which is a key tool to protect Canadians' access to the labour market by ensuring that employers have made reasonable efforts to recruit and hire Canadian workers before trying to hire foreign nationals.

[English]

As our colleagues from Employment and Social Development Canada will explain, they manage the assessment and make decisions on LMIA applications, while IRCC issues the actual work permits. To issue the permit, we need proof of an employer's positive or neutral LMIA, which foreign nationals must submit as part of their work permit applications through the TFW program.

Canada's other work program for foreign nationals, the international mobility program, is solely the responsibility of IRCC and works differently. Its goal is to advance our nation's broad economic, cultural and social interests rather than to fill particular jobs in particular sectors. These workers are exempt from the LMIA process and include post-graduate work permit holders, youth on a working holiday and spouses of temporary residents, among others.

Madam Chair, I hope this provides some useful context on this important issue.

Now I'd like to turn to Hong Kong. In light of the recommendations made recently by the Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, the committee may have questions for me regarding the avenues for Hong Kong residents to come to Canada.

Of course, all of this takes place against the backdrop of an extremely concerning situation in Hong Kong. At this difficult moment, Canada stands shoulder to shoulder with the people of Hong Kong and shares the grave concerns of the international community over China's national security legislation.

The ties that bind Canada and Hong Kong run deep, and with many young Hong Kongers casting their eyes abroad, we want them to choose Canada. That's why I was proud to announce new opportunities, last November, for youth from Hong Kong to choose Canada as a place to work, study and settle. These complement the existing pathways already available to Hong Kong residents for economic migration and family reunification, the private sponsorship of refugees program and the government-assisted refugees program as well as our world-leading asylum system.

This new program provides open work permits for up to three years to those who have completed a degree or diploma from a designated Canadian post-secondary institution in the last five years or have an equivalent credential from an overseas institution. Eligible spouses, common-law partners and dependent children may also apply for work or study permits, and applications opened just over a month ago, on February 8.

[Translation]

In addition, the department is creating two new pathways to permanent residence, available later this year.

The first will target former Hong Kong residents who have gained a minimum of one year of authorized work experience in Canada and meet other criteria, such as minimum language and education levels.

The second will allow those who have graduated from a post-secondary institution in Canada to apply directly for permanent residence.

[English]

Before moving on, I want to be very clear about one important point. No Hong Kongers will be prevented from coming to Canada or claiming asylum because they have participated in peaceful protests. This is true whether they did so before or after the introduction of the national security law. We strongly support the right to peaceful protest, freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

The steps we have taken are in concert with those of our allies who share our grave concerns about the situation in Hong Kong.

• (1705)

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

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm happy to conclude and take questions from here.

The Chair: You'll have an opportunity to talk further when we go to the round of questioning.

Now we will start with our first round of questioning, which will be led by Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

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

Once again, thank you, Minister, for being here with us today.

A response from Public Services and Procurement Canada revealed that 86% of employees at the Beijing visa office are employees of a Chinese police-owned company.

Minister, you said that the government vets every single person in the office, but Procurement Canada says employees working for this company are vetted by VFS. Most of the employees in the visa office, which is owned by a company with ties to the Chinese regime, are not vetted by our government.

Federal employees with access to protected A, B or C forms—something as basic as a paper application for permanent residence—would require, at minimum, a reliability status check conducted by the government, yet employees of the police-owned company handle visa information and don't go through our own checks.

If the Chinese Communist Party develops a fake identity, with the intent to infiltrate our overseas visa office via espionage, and collects visa applications with applicants' backgrounds and then runs them through the hiring process for the subcontractor, how would we even know about it?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I want to thank my colleague for the question. I appreciate his concerns.

We are keenly aware of the risks of operating abroad. That's why, as I said, we have a rigorous procurement process led by PSPC, which screens for corporate security and ownership. That's why everyone who is employed by our contractors and subcontractors is screened to the same reliability status that is used for in-house government employees, at our embassies, and in our consular services.

In addition, we have video surveillance in place to monitor their work. We also ensure that we have compliance and enforcement protocols that also include audits. We will continue to manage these risks going forward and take whatever measures are necessary to maintain the security and integrity of our immigration system.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, what if a Chinese pro-democracy activist seeking to flee to Canada applies at that Beijing VAC? How can we be confident that a Chinese spy is not relaying that information to the Chinese government?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I will reiterate what I said to my colleague. We are acutely aware of the risks of operating in any foreign environment. That is why we have introduced rigorous protocols with regard to procurement; why we have strict protocols with regard to the screening and vetting of every employee who works not only for our contractors but also for our subcontractors; and why we work closely with the lead national security agencies prior to the installation of equipment that is designed to encrypt and protect the information of our immigration processes. As I said to my colleague, we closely monitor all of these protocols and will take whatever steps are necessary to manage those risks to protect the integrity of our immigration system.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: It has been alleged that the Chinese ministry of state security has, in the past, used spies in cases of foreign espionage to manipulate innocent civilians to unknowingly spy on allied nations. How do we know that the VFS employees are not compromised, as even one Chinese spy could destroy the entire functioning of the office and cause a significant security threat?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I want to assure all members of this committee that we work very closely with all of our partners across government, including lead security agencies, to ensure that there is an implementation of security protocols, including the very careful and close scrutiny and vetting of all employees who work on behalf of the government in a contractual relationship.

But we don't stop there. We also continue to monitor the compliance of those contractual arrangements, including security protocols, by conducting periodic audits. As I pointed out in my last appearance before committee, those audits ensure that we are preserving the integrity of our immigration system.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, since that last committee and since these reports have come out, have any steps or measures been taken? Right now, it's very concerning that since that article

came out, we haven't heard about anything that's gone beyond what was done in the past.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I have said on a number of occasions now, all of the work in managing the risks of operating abroad is ongoing. We undertake that work very carefully with our partners at PSPC, with lead security agencies, and indeed with partners across the government. We also ensure compliance with our primary contractor—in this case VFS—as well as with the subcontractor who operates in that foreign environment.

We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that there is adherence to those protocols.

To assure my colleague, we manage those risks every day. That work is ongoing. We will take whatever steps are necessary to protect the integrity of our immigration system.

• (1710)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, we've been calling for this contract to end. A former Canadian diplomat to China and security experts have called for the same contract to be ended. Will you take the steps to end this contract?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: What I can assure my colleague is that we will continue to work across government to protect and to preserve the integrity of our immigration system.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'll just make it quick.

The laws maintain that everyone responsible for state security and the national intelligence institutions can call upon organizations and citizens for necessary support.

Minister, are you not concerned that a Chinese police-owned company—

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, your time is up.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: —is acting under the influence of Chinese intelligence?

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Hallan, but your time is up. We will come back to you.

Ms. Dhillon, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please go ahead.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

Good evening, Minister.

It is our pleasure to welcome you to our committee today.

The francophone community is well established across the country and deserves the same dedication and the same support given to all Canadians. We want small communities and francophone immigrants to be able to prosper. To that end, the government has committed to reach the target admission rate of 4.4% for francophone immigrants outside Quebec.

Can you give us an update on the progress the government has made in this important file, as well as—

[English]

[Technical difficulty—Editor]

Is everybody hearing that?

[Translation]

I will ask my question again.

Minister, can you give us an update on the progress the government has made in this important file and tell us about the impact of the changes made to—

[English]

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune): Apologies, Madam Chair, some kind of phone audio is happening in the room.

If you wish to suspend, I'll see to it now.

The Chair: I will suspend for two minutes to make sure this is looked into.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

The Chair: We will start again now with Ms. Dhillon for six minutes. Sorry for the interruption. These technical issues do come up.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Of course, Madam Chair. Thank you.

[Translation]

Good evening, Minister.

Welcome to the committee.

The francophone community is well established across the country and deserves the same dedication and support given to all Canadians. We want small communities and francophone immigrants to be able to prosper. To that end, the government has committed to reach the target admission rate of 4.4% for francophone immigrants outside Quebec.

Can you give us an update on the progress the government has made in this important file and tell us about the impact of the changes made to immigration categories to achieve the objectives set by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question.

Our government is a champion of official languages in Canada, and it knows that immigration is essential to the vitality of our minority francophone communities. That is why it announced a mea-

sure whereby additional points were given to francophone and bilingual candidates under the express entry program.

We will continue to find new ways to attract francophones, including through the implementation of a francophone integration pathway and initiatives such as the welcoming francophone communities initiative. Our government will always be a major defender of our francophone communities across Canada.

In addition, in 2020, the admissions of French-speaking immigrants accounted for 3.61% of all immigrant admissions outside Quebec. This is good progress in terms of that important priority.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you very much, Minister.

Last Monday, we were happy to hear that the backlog in the processing of applications under Quebec's regular skilled worker program was completely eliminated. That is welcome news, as we know it is important to ensure a constant labour supply in all the provinces, especially in the current context of the pandemic.

Can you update us on what is planned for Quebec's regular skilled worker program?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I must first say that we have a good spirit of cooperation in immigration between our government and that of Quebec. I know that Quebec is looking to fill a significant labour gap.

On December 4, 2020, cases related to applications received under the qualified worker category were all open. All the applications received since January have been entered into the system. An acknowledgement of receipt has been sent to nearly 16,000 applicants in the skilled worker category. Since November 2020, amended acknowledgements of receipt have been sent daily for all the applications received up until January 2021.

We will continue to cooperate with the Government of Quebec. This is good not only for the economy, but for everyone.

• (1720)

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you.

[English]

Minister, the pandemic has created many challenges throughout the immigration system—most notably, the abrupt end to many people's work and livelihoods to protect public health. COVID-19 has made it possible for conditions not conducive to labour and workforce mobility...and in many ways, it has fractured the ability for labour shortages to be addressed quickly. Can you please explain to our committee what measures your department took to alleviate these issues?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: First, I want to thank my colleague again for her question and for her advocacy on behalf of her community. I know that, like me, she shares the concerns of assisting Canadians. Our government's record with regard to providing emergency relief to workers, to businesses, is done in tandem with the support that my department has provided to those temporary workers who are also critical to ensuring that our economy keeps going. I think about the workers who are there to ply their trades on our farms, in meat-processing plants, in the building and trades sector, and right across our economy. We need to be firing on all cylinders in order to accelerate our economic recovery.

That's why we've introduced additional work permit flexibility—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: —to extend it for those who had to stay beyond their original stay. That's why we provided greater work permit flexibility for those with LMIA's moving from one job to the other. That is why we will continue to provide this kind of innovation and support for temporary workers, who, again, are critical to keeping our economy going.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Minister, thank you very much for coming to testify before the committee and answering our questions despite all the technical difficulties.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It was my pleasure, Ms. Dhillon.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will now go to Madam Normandin.

You have six minutes. You can please proceed.

[*Translation*]

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

Minister, thank you for joining us again. We will spend a lot of time with you this week.

My first question is about people who are waiting for a decision on their permanent residence and who have submitted an application in Quebec under the economic immigration class.

According to the government's open data, the application threshold has not been reached in Quebec. Close to 12,000 applications have been processed, out of the total 26,000 applications. Many people are saying that their application for permanent residence is pending owing to very long processing times for work permits. Many have lost their job and have been unable to find another one. Others want to change their work environment, but they cannot do so.

Has the department considered the possibility of prioritizing the processing of permanent residence files of individuals who were already in Canada when the COVID-19 pandemic began?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you for the question, Ms. Normandin.

As you know, I share your concern. Programs must be created to support all workers who want to come to Canada and contribute to

our economy and to our social fabric, not only in Quebec, but across Canada.

That is why our government has invested a great deal in our department to increase resources and enhance program flexibility. The objective is to prioritize the processing of the files of workers we need. We are trying to find ways to address the labour shortage and to sustain our economy.

It is true that, in this complex situation caused by the global pandemic, we have to seize the opportunity to tap into the talent and experience of temporary workers already in the country. We can explore possibilities of facilitating their access to permanent residence.

We are doing this work with the Government of Quebec. As I said, this is good not only for Quebec, but also for Canada.

• (1725)

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Minister.

My next question is about the long processing times for work permits owing to the health crisis. According to the immigration lawyers I talked to this morning, the wait time is seven months for certain work permit categories. The newspapers have also talked about cases of refugees in the same situation. We know there are employment opportunities in health care, but people cannot get hired without a work permit. They must bring themselves to apply for social assistance.

We have noted growing pressure on the processing of work permits in the context of the health crisis.

Would it have been a good idea to take into account proposals like the one from the Bloc Québécois to implement work permits by sector?

Perhaps studies should be carried out on the impact on the sectoral labour market and on the validity period of work permits, which could be increased. Over the long term, this would reduce the pressure on application processing. What do you think about that?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Normandin, I am always open to your suggestions, but I want to point out that we have already made our system more flexible to address the labour shortage and to ensure that we meet our economic priorities.

That system enables us to issue open work permits. The system also relies on labour market impact assessments, or LMIA's, to meet the needs of a specific sector of our economy. We will continue to work toward that.

As for the processing times, this year's results have been very encouraging. In January, we processed 10% more applications than in January of the previous year. In February, we sent more than 27,000 invitations to new immigrants already in Canada who had work experience in our country, including Quebec. We will continue along that path.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

When it comes to agricultural workers, a number of farm owners in my area are starting to worry. They want to know what health measures will apply to them. The government's website states that, until March 14, temporary foreign workers will be exempted from the obligation to stay in a hotel. According to the website, other details will soon be available.

It is March 10 already.

Can you tell me what we can expect concerning agricultural workers?

Will changes be made to those workers' accommodations?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That is a very important question.

We have learned many lessons from the crisis over this past year. We have been very successful in the agricultural sector because we have found ways to support that category of workers while protecting the health of all Canadians. I want to reassure all the committee members by saying that the needed workers will be there.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. Your time is up.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the minister.

The minister says that every single person who works for the visa application centre, as well as those who are subcontracted, is vetted by the government. We learned that subcontractors owned by the Beijing police are hired by the subcontractor, and they're not vetted by the federal government.

We now learn that 86% of the staff being hired by the subcontractor doing VAC services work for Canada are owned by the Chinese police. In what world would having 86% of the staff who are employed by an arm of the police and are receiving the kind of sensitive information that VACs handle be a good idea? And this on top of the fact that the chair of that company is the party secretary and the general manager is the deputy party secretary. The truth is the entire structure stinks. This is a huge conflict of interest for the safety of applicants.

The minister keeps saying that he's sure about the VACs' security, yet the entire structure is fundamentally flawed. Given what has been uncovered, is the minister still confident about this structure or will he do something about it? If he's going to give me the same

answer that he has been giving to committee members in this meeting and the last meeting, he can say that he is comfortable with it so I can move on to my next question.

● (1730)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, I will reiterate that I understand and appreciate your concerns. I am confident in the protocols that we have put in place to manage the risks that exist in foreign environments, including in China.

I am here to explain and to shed light on how those risks are managed. The screening and the vetting, which are undertaken by our contractors, ensures that there is a standard that is applied uniformly across government to the reliability status.

As I have explained, we do not just stop there. We also ensure that in the visa application centres themselves there are rigorous security measures to closely surveil and scrutinize the work that is undertaken by our contracted employees, including the uploading of sensitive information, as part of our visa application process.

I hope that you will appreciate that we have eyes wide open on this issue. We will continue to manage these risks carefully going forward, and take whatever steps are necessary to protect the integrity of our immigration system.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The minister said "eyes wide open", but I am not assured at all. Given the structure of the system, it gives me grave concerns. I believe Canadians share those concerns.

In the United States, Mr. Dix advised there is no visa application centre in China. He told the committee that they would accept applications directly at diplomatic missions rather than using visa application centres so that they don't actually have to rely on a company that is hired and operated by the Chinese government.

Is the government still considering outsourcing this work?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Ms. Kwan, we have an arrangement that other Five Eyes allies, partners, are also engaged with. Like them, we ensure that there is a very rigorous procurement process led by PSPC, which closely examines corporate security, ownership and structure, to identify and relate to the issues that you have pointed out. It also requires that there is vetting of the individuals who work on our behalf in the contractual relationship. We continue to monitor compliance of these contractual arrangements with audits. We will continue to deploy those protocols to protect the integrity of our immigration system.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Only if it meets the satisfaction of the CCP because they approve who gets hired. That is the reality, Minister. I hope the minister realizes that.

On a different issue, the government's approach to the crisis in Hong Kong has so far been economic instead of humanitarian. In fact, Hong Kongers approved under the new work permit stream first need to get job offers before they are allowed to come to Canada, under the current restrictions. New legislation expected to pass in Hong Kong that will allow the government to deny people boarding, without providing any reason, is going to happen very quickly.

Will the minister quickly put in place a refugee stream for the people of Hong Kong who are abroad?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I said last time, I'm open to continuing to work with you on how to put in place the best policies to strengthen the ties between Canada and Hong Kong.

You're quite right that when we announced the Hong Kong initiative, there was an economic focus to attract the young and talented graduates to come and help us with our economy.

I would also point out that we have in place existing family reunification pathways. We introduced two important protections to protect those exercising their right to peaceful protest.

• (1735)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I know about those, but it's not sufficient. People are stuck abroad, and they can't come to Canada.

Can the minister confirm that Hong Kongers in the U.K. would be able to come to Canada to seek refuge, or would that be considered asylum shopping?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I said, we have numerous corridors. In fact, in the last year, we have seen a greater degree of travel from Hong Kong to Canada.

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Minister, your time is up. Maybe we'll come back later to Ms. Kwan.

We will move to our second round of questioning.

Mr. Seeback, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you stated you're comfortable with the steps taken to manage risk. Does that include cybersecurity risks?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I said that I'm confident with the protocols we have in place. We work with—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Does that include cybersecurity risks?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I was endeavouring to answer your question, Mr. Seeback.

Yes, we work with leading national security agencies prior to the installation of equipment to monitor cyber threats.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Would that include CSIS here in Canada? Would it be looking at the cybersecurity risks of these offices?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: To the best of my knowledge, this is probably a question best directed to Public Safety, but the Commu-

nications Security Establishment has the remit and the mandate to monitor cyber threats.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Do you rely on their advice in this area?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Yes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Can you explain why Richard Fadden, who was the former director of CSIS, has stated very clearly that with the set-up we have, "I cannot think of a more promising entry point for China's cyberspies."

This is a person who has extensive knowledge of the ability of China's cyberspy technology, and the systems that they would have in place. He served two prime ministers, and he is saying, very clearly and very directly, that this is an entry point for China's cyberspies.

Are you agreeing or disagreeing with this assessment, and if he's wrong, how is he wrong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I think embedded in his statement is that all departments have to work together.

I can assure you, Mr. Seeback, that is precisely what we have done in the context of this contractual arrangement. We work with PSPC, we work with leading security agencies, and we will continue to do that to manage the risks.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: We've been advised that Huawei technology has been installed there. What is the risk assessment with respect to this technology being hacked by cyberspies, because Richard Fadden is saying it's a promising entry point, and I would think that's one of them?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I've said, we will continue to work very closely with PSPC as well as leading security agencies to vet all of the equipment that we use in our visa application centres. We closely monitor the operations of that equipment.

Once visa application information is uploaded from the visa application centre to a government system, which is stored here, that information is erased. That is one of the many ways in which we protect the integrity of our systems.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Can you hazard a guess as to why someone with so much experience in cyberspying would make such a bold statement, saying this represents a very promising entry point for China's cyberspies, which is in direct contradiction to what you're saying to members of this committee?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I don't believe that it is, but more to the point, it is not for me to speak to the state of mind of Mr. Fadden or anyone else.

I am here, on the other hand, to shed light on how we screen and vet our personnel, our equipment and our procurement process. I have laid that out with some specifics.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, Canada could designate people as refugees within their country of origin.

Is this something that the government is considering in order to help the people in Hong Kong who may very shortly, as Ms. Kwan pointed out, be subject to no travel?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Your question allows me to indicate that we've put in place two new protections to offer some safeguards for those exercising the right to peaceful protest, and wishing to come from Hong Kong.

We have an asylum system that is revered around the world. Those who come will have their claims heard by experienced jurists, and where those claims have merit, they will be permitted to stay in Canada.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That wasn't my question. I was asking whether you were considering using the powers under the IRPA to designate people as refugees within their country, as part of a source country class.

Is this something you're considering doing, yes or no?

• (1740)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Mr. Seeback, as I said to Ms. Kwan, our government will keep our eyes open to options. Our fundamental objective in announcing this initiative was to create stronger people-to-people ties with economic opportunities, but also to add protections to those exercising the right to peaceful protest in that part of the world.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm trying to get a yes-or-no answer, but I don't think I'm going to do so.

Will you consider reintroducing this program? There was a program like this up until 2011. Would you consider redoing this program for Hong Kong? Why or why not?

Please answer that directly.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: In fact, that is not a yes-or-no question, but I will still endeavour to answer it. We will keep—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. The time is up. We will have to move to the next member.

Before I do, I want to remind everyone that when you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute. As another reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Thank you.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you have five minutes. Please proceed.

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

Given the way the minister is doing all these reforms, if he continues to do them over the next few years, I might, if I ever decide to retire from politics, be able to write a book on him.

Minister, let's get back to Canada. Boston Consulting Group over the last little while has done a survey of 200,000 people across 190 nations. Canada has been the number one destination and the number one desirable place to come to work.

Minister, could you please tell us some of the reforms that you're bringing in to integrate our society and our economy through immigration?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Once again thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal, for your question and for your passionate advocacy in the area of immigration. We are often in touch, and you are a great champion for your community. I firmly believe also that you appreciate the opportunities that immigration affords. I am the son of an immigrant family. I am not so far removed from what it means to come to Canada to build the next chapter of one's life and to take full advantage of the opportunities here in Canada.

I only pause to underline that, because this is the core value that underpins our immigration plan for 2021 and beyond. It's a plan that I believe will accelerate our economic recovery by our continuing to grow through immigration.

As I've laid out before, the many innovations that we have introduced in this past year are not only about creating new pathways for those who are abroad—and I recognize that we continue to operate in a very complex environment, as we are not out of the pandemic yet, and I look forward to the moment when we can get back to life as normal, as I'm sure we all do—but equally about looking at the domestic temporary talent pools that are already in Canada: the workers, the international students who are already here contributing, for example, in the health care sector.

I believe we are at a juncture at which we can provide the reinforcements—the second shift, as I've said before—to fight the second wave of the pandemic by incentivizing people who are here, who are young and who are studying very hard to apply all of the skills and the trades that they have acquired at one of our first-rate educational institutions across Canada. By doing so, we will accelerate our ability to get out of the pandemic, accelerate our economic recovery, but equally address the long-term demographic challenges, which are very sobering.

The fact of the matter is that we need immigration, and if we don't find ways to create new pathways, all of the things that brought your family and mine here—access to public health care and education and retirement security—could potentially be compromised. We don't want that. Our plan aims to preserve those values, and that's why, going forward, I am optimistic that Canada will continue to be a top destination of choice for newcomers.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, I'm coming back to international students. When I've talked to them over the last few months, they have proved very happy and have greatly benefited from the support the Prime Minister has provided to international students through CERB and also through the immigration reforms brought in by the minister. They are very happy about some of the reforms that the minister brought forward.

Moving forward, even though the minister has mentioned some of the things he has done, my intention is for him to tell us about some of the innovations he is bringing in so that international student education here in Canada will be number one and a model for the world.

• (1745)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: The international student program is a great driver of our economy. As I have indicated to the committee before, in a typical year we see over \$21 billion contributed to our economy.

It's not just about the economy. Each and every one of the international students who come to Canada to take up an education also adds to our social fabric. The innovations in that program that we've introduced have allowed international students to start their classes online abroad without any penalty to taking up work after they graduate. By introducing those twin innovations, we've kept the corridor open. We are seeing international students come, but they're coming in a manner that is safe and orderly.

That will be good for them. It will be good for our economy. It will be good for Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin. You have two and a half minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, I would like to come back to your answer concerning your openness to reviewing certain programs to make things easier for employers who need workers.

We are seeing that, even during the health crisis, the unemployment rate is high and that, despite this, labour shortage is still a concern.

Past reports from the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration have suggested to create LMIA's and to consider an accelerated process for employers with a good reputation. Another suggestion was to replace LMIA's with an approach that would be more focused on the employer.

The Bloc Québécois is also suggesting that the department carry out LMIA's focused more on regions or types of employment, ex-

pand the scope and duration of LMIA's, and increase the work permit validity period.

Considering that the suggestions in that last report have not yet been taken into account, how can the minister assure us that the suggestions made in the next report will be properly assessed?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: That is a good question, Ms. Normandin.

I remain open to ideas and suggestions.

However, I will add that we have already adopted a number of measures related to COVID-19 to support the key economic sectors. The program prioritizes the processing of applications involving professions considered essential during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Quebec, to support efforts related to the health crisis, the program is exempt from minimal requirements involving certain health care professions.

During the 2020 season, under the seasonal agricultural worker program, or SAWP, employers could request that employment be extended beyond eight months. What's more, under the SAWP and the agricultural component, employers have some flexibility in presenting housing inspection reports when the appropriate authority is unable to carry out an inspection. Those are a few examples of innovation in terms of this priority.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Minister, are you open to extending this to non-essential employment in the future?

For instance, various businesses that need welders in a region where there are none must submit an LMIA application individually.

Have you considered this aspect of the problem?

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Madame Normandin. Your time is up.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The minister said he would be happy to work with me on the Hong Kong measures. My door is wide open 24-7. I've submitted many suggestions to the minister and I'm ready to work with him at any time to get those going.

Recently, we learned of the caregiver who committed suicide after failing the language test 26 times. If a caregiver has secure employment here, clearly they're able to communicate effectively in their work. Why do we need to make them take these extra language tests?

In the U.K., for individuals who would not be entering into more technical professional fields, there is a shorter, level 2 skill test that could be used. If the government won't get rid of the language test, will the minister adopt the U.K. model?

• (1750)

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I hear you, Ms. Kwan. Obviously, my sympathies are extended to that family and all of our caregivers who have provided extraordinary contributions during the pandemic, and not during just the past year but for quite some time.

As I've said before, I engage routinely with the caregiver community. I have heard the same concerns expressed around language requirements. I continue to look for ways to have a program that welcomes caregivers, that provides flexibility, that allows them to sponsor their families. We have made tremendous progress in this pilot program. We will continue to find ways to ensure that caregivers are welcomed to Canada and can stay in Canada should they choose to.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, the minister didn't answer the question about language testing. He said he's looking for ways. Well, here's the U.K. model. That would be a way.

Previously, actually, the government used to allow for some discretion, for the official in assessing the passing of the tests, to make those decisions. Will he at least bring that back?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: As I've said, Ms. Kwan, I'm certainly open to considering any suggestion you may have on language requirements, but I was just making the point that we have, in fact, incorporated a number of suggestions to make this program stronger, to be more inviting, to be more flexible around work permits, and as well to be more flexible around family reunification, all of which has been to the good with regard to this program.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right, thank you, Minister.

On the issue around language testing, here's another suggestion. We can actually separate all the tests so that they can actually do the writing test, reading test, listening test, speaking test all separately. If they pass one it stays on the record, and they don't have to do all the tests all over again if they fail one.

On another issue with caregivers, I wrote to the minister—

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

Now we will end our second round of questioning with Mr. Hallan and Mr. Regan. Both will have two and a half minutes for their rounds of questioning.

Mr. Hallan, you can please start.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, around 300,000 Canadians live in Hong Kong. Many of them are dual nationals. More and more there are indications that the Hong Kong government is forcing dual citizens to choose one nationality, putting them in the very difficult position of whether their right to live in Hong Kong...versus access to Canadian consular assistance. What is the government doing to ensure that Canadian citizens maintain the right to access consular services?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I will take you back to the evidence that has been offered by our consul general in Hong Kong, who says that they stand at the ready to provide support for those who wish to travel to Canada. As proof of that, we have seen the numbers of people coming from Hong Kong travelling to Canada in-

crease in the past year, in the worker category and in the student permit category. This is in addition to the existing pathways that we have, as well as the historic initiative, the Hong Kong initiative, which I introduced last fall. It also included protections for those exercising their right to peaceful protest. We will continue this work in close concert with our officials on the ground in Hong Kong.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, Minister, a lot of people are left out of that program.

We have heard that Hong Kong is blocking the exit of protesters who have engaged in the pro-democracy movement. What is the government doing to ensure that Canadians will always have the right to exit Hong Kong?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, first, Mr. Hallan, Canadians do enjoy a right of return to Canada. They are able to exercise that right, obviously subject to the travel restrictions, whenever they wish.

My point to you is that for everyone else who wishes to travel to Canada, we have introduced additional protections for those exercising their rights. We will continue to work very closely with our partners in that region to ensure that they can come to Canada should they so choose.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Now, if travel documents of a Hong Kong resident are seized and they're seeking to flee to Canada, what options do they have?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Well, our consular officials are there to provide assistance. They do so with the utmost professionalism. Again, I would take you back to the evidence offered by our consul general in Hong Kong.

In addition to that, we have exceptional public servants who are working across a range of departments, not only in Public Safety but in my department at IRCC, which also has a presence there. It allows me the opportunity to shine a light on the fact that they are able to facilitate the travel of more people in the last year coming from Hong Kong to Canada, whether to work, whether to be reunited with their families, whether to study. That is proof of our progress—

• (1755)

The Chair: I am sorry for interrupting, Minister. Your time is up.

We will now end our first panel with Mr. Regan.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Minister, we've heard a fair bit about how Canada has responded to historical examples of the Chinese government's behaviour towards its citizens. It's brought up the comparison to what the government has done now, with regard to the immigration measures for the people of Hong Kong.

Can you tell us what's happening throughout the immigration system to facilitate safe relocation for people from Hong Kong? Has the Canadian government ever implemented, with this speed, measures like this in the past? Also, can you tell us about why, in your view, it was so important to make sure there were so many pathways and safeguards?

Hon. Marco Mendicino: It was important because the situation in Hong Kong is gravely concerning, as we have said on a number of occasions. That is why we have taken a very principled stand with regard to that situation, and it is one of the reasons we have created more pathways than ever. This is an unprecedented moment for us. We recognize the importance of standing shoulder to shoulder with the people of Hong Kong. One of the ways we are crystallizing that commitment is by creating those pathways, including the historic Hong Kong initiative, which I introduced last year and which has now been officially implemented. It's a program designed to attract those with experience and talent to come and start that next chapter of their life. In Hong Kong, it's one that also introduces additional protections for those who have exercised their right to peaceful protest—a value we take very seriously here in Canada. It is work we are undertaking with our officials across a range of departments in that part of the world as well as with our public servants here. As a result, I am confident that this program will indeed deepen the bonds between Canada and the people of Hong Kong.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Minister, the Atlantic immigration pilot is an important pilot program in Atlantic Canada. Over the years, this region has experienced population retention challenges that have had their own economic impacts. That program has been very successful. Can you provide an update on its status? I know we haven't got much time.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: I'm happy to do that. Of course, Mr. Regan, as you know, we just hired 62 new full-time employees in your province, in Nova Scotia. They're going to work on family reunification, on getting families and loved ones together more quickly than ever. In addition, some of that work will have a spill-off effect on the Atlantic immigration pilot, which has been a great success thanks to our partnership with business leaders right across Nova Scotia. I remember visiting your riding and going to see some of the small business owners. I look forward to being able to do that again in the future.

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Minister. The time is up, and with this, the first panel comes to an end.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister for appearing before this committee, not once but twice this week. We really appreciate all the work you are doing on behalf of all Canadians, especially during this difficult year when we have all been faced with unprecedented times. Thanks a lot for all the hard work you are doing.

Hon. Marco Mendicino: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the members of the committee.

The Chair: The officials will stay with us for the second panel. I will suspend for two minutes, so we can get the officials from Statistics Canada and the Department of Employment and Social Development logged in.

We'll suspend for two minutes.

• (1755)

(Pause)

• (1800)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

In this panel we will be hearing from Statistics Canada and also the Department of Employment and Social Development.

I would like to welcome, from Statistics Canada, Madame Josée Bégin, director general, labour market, education and socio-economic well-being.

From the Department of Employment and Social Development, we are joined by Katie Alexander, executive director, temporary foreign worker program and work-sharing program. We are also joined by Philippe Massé, director general, temporary foreign worker program, skills and employment branch, and by Caroline Harès, acting director general, temporary foreign workers program, integrity services branch.

The officials also joining us from IRCC are Marian Campbell Jarvis, Nicole Giles, Pemi Gill and Caroline Xavier.

We will start with Statistics Canada. Madam Bégin, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Josée Bégin (Director General, Labour Market, Education and Socio-Economic Well-Being, Statistics Canada): Madam Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity today to share some key observations about the Canadian labour market, and more particularly, the changing labour needs in Canada since the beginning of the pandemic.

The main source of information available at Statistics Canada to measure labour demand in detail is the Job Vacancy and Wage Survey. Since October, Statistics Canada has been releasing new monthly indicators on unmet labour demand to provide a timelier picture of employers' recruitment efforts. For example, in December, there were 478,000 vacant positions in Canada.

A more detailed analysis of quarterly job vacancies, including by occupation and subprovincial geography, will be released on March 23, 2021, on the Statistics Canada website. When we look at these data, we see that, last fall, the job vacancy rate—or the number of vacant jobs as a proportion of all vacant and occupied jobs—was about the same as before the pandemic. The vacancy rate was 3% in December, following 3.3% in November, and 3.5% in October, based on our seasonally unadjusted data.

Since October, above-average job vacancy rates have been observed both in sectors where employment has been less affected by COVID-19, such as health care and social assistance and professional, scientific and technical services, and in sectors that have been more affected, such as administrative and support services, and accommodation and food services.

The agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting sector, which employs a high number of temporary foreign workers, posted the highest job vacancy rate in October with 5.7%, but it fell by half the following month to 2.8%. In December, the job vacancy rate in this sector was 4.2%. The number of job vacancies in this sector can vary greatly depending on seasonal trends.

Provincially, British Columbia and Quebec have consistently had the highest job vacancy rates since October 2020. These provinces also had some of the highest vacancy rates prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. From October to December, job vacancy rates were among the lowest in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland and Labrador. Job vacancy rates in these provinces also tended to be among the lowest before the pandemic.

I would now like to provide a brief overview of the composition of temporary foreign workers and immigration.

Temporary foreign workers have played an increasingly important role in the Canadian labour market in recent years. Nearly 470,000 foreign nationals had a work permit that came into effect in 2019, up sharply from the 340,000 foreign nationals whose permits came into effect in 2017.

In 2017, there were approximately 550,000 foreign workers in Canada, representing 2.9% of the total number of people employed. Although this percentage was relatively low for the economy as a whole, it was particularly high in agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, where it accounted for 15.5% of employment.

In contrast, the percentage of temporary foreign workers in other goods-producing sectors was generally low, representing 1% of employment in mining, quarrying and oil and gas extraction, and 1.7% in manufacturing. In service-producing sectors, the highest proportion of temporary foreign workers was observed in accommodation and food services, where it was 7.2%.

Looking at immigration more broadly, immigration levels followed an upward trend from 2016 to 2019, with eight of every 10 people being added to the Canadian population being immigrants or non-permanent residents.

• (1805)

[English]

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left.

[Translation]

Ms. Josée Bégin: In 2018 and 2019, the majority of employment growth was attributable to immigrants. However, immigration levels fell sharply in 2020 due to the pandemic and travel restrictions.

Our projections suggest that by 2030, Canada's population growth could come exclusively from immigration.

This concludes my presentation, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Bégin.

We will now hear from the Department of Employment and Social Development.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Massé (Director General, Temporary Foreign Worker Program, Skills and Employment Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): Good day to you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Massé. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe Massé: Thank you.

My colleagues have already spoken. I will therefore briefly describe the program and its repercussions on the labour market, as well as the measures taken during the pandemic.

[English]

The objective of the temporary foreign worker program is to enable Canadian employers' access to foreign workers when qualified Canadians or permanent residents are not available, and it works to protect foreign workers during their time in Canada. The program requires employers to obtain a positive labour market impact assessment, LMIA, to establish that the employment of a temporary foreign worker would not have a negative impact on the Canadian labour market.

While the program constitutes a small proportion of the Canadian labour force, workers are a key source of labour, particularly in agriculture and agri-food. Ensuring their reliable entry and safe working conditions is key to the ongoing competitiveness of these sectors and to Canada's broader economic recovery.

[*Translation*]

As I mentioned, to ensure that Canadians and permanent residents continue to have the first opportunity at available jobs, employers must submit an application for LMIA before they are permitted to hire workers through the program.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Massé.

Can you please hold the mike closer to your mouth? The interpreters are having a bit of an issue with hearing you. Thank you.

Mr. Philippe Massé: Thank you. My apologies.

[*Translation*]

Service Canada reviews the applications to ensure that employers and job offers are genuine, and that employers have complied with the program rules and applicable labour laws. Applications are also assessed against a number of labour marker factors to ensure that the hiring of temporary foreign workers will not have a negative impact on the Canadian labour market. Among these factors, employers are required to demonstrate that they have advertised to and recruited Canadians and permanent residents, for example, through common online platforms such as Canada's Job Bank. This includes targeted efforts to reach out to underrepresented groups who may be underemployed in the labour market.

• (1810)

[*English*]

The program includes an employer compliance regime supported by inspections which serve to protect foreign workers from abuse and exploitation, and to protect the integrity of the Canadian labour market by verifying that employers comply with program rules. Penalties for non-compliance include fines ranging from \$500 to a maximum of \$100,000 per violation and \$1 million per year, with program bans as well for various lengths—from one to 10 years—and permanent bans for egregious cases.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about the program's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Early on, the government took steps to protect the health and safety of workers and the public in response to this new threat.

These included publishing guidance for employers and workers and introducing new regulations that compelled employers to meet new public health requirements. Funds were also allocated to increase capacity for inspections and enhance Service Canada's ability to receive and assess allegations of non-compliance.

Additional measures included funding migrant worker organizations to support workers affected by COVID-19, as well as new programs implemented by the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to help employers offset some of the costs related to the quarantining of workers, including improvements to accommodations to ensure public health requirements were met.

In recognition of the agriculture sector's reliance on foreign labour, ESDC has also implemented a number of administrative measures to support timely access to workers, including priority processing of applications from agriculture and agri-food employers. Conversely, we have stopped processing applications for select

occupations and industries where the pandemic caused significant unemployment, such as hospitality and food service sectors, to ensure that Canadians are considered first for those jobs.

Lastly, the government launched consultations last fall with provinces and territories and program stakeholders to establish accommodation requirements for employers who hire temporary foreign workers, focusing on ensuring better living conditions for workers. We're reviewing the input on that and we'll be informing on next steps shortly.

We are of course continuing to work with provinces and program partners to continue strengthening our approaches to the pandemic.

[*Translation*]

We continue to monitor the economic situation as well as the pandemic. We will adapt the program to ensure that it works for employers, Canadian workers and temporary foreign workers.

I will be pleased to answer any questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Massé.

Thanks to the witnesses for their opening remarks. We will now move to a round of questioning.

We will start our first round of questioning with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have six minutes for your round of questions. Please proceed.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the officials and witnesses for being here with us today.

What is the current processing time for individuals from Hong Kong who are seeking to make use of the IRCC's special immigration measures?

Ms. Caroline Xavier (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good evening, everybody.

We lost connection for a few minutes, but we are now back. If we missed something, our apologies.

With regard to Hong Kong, as was mentioned, we are doing all that is necessary to ensure people have access to be able to come to Canada, as outlined by the minister, with regard to the existing pathways as well as the additional pathways that are being added.

With regard to processing times specifically, I will ask my colleague Dr. Giles to give you a little more detail.

Dr. Nicole Giles (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I think it's important to highlight from the outset that we have prioritized the processing of all applications from Hong Kong. The way it normally works is that it's a first-in, first-out process. As an application comes in, it goes into the queue, and then it's processed accordingly. We are prioritizing all the applications coming from Hong Kong, and we have set up our system so our officers are able to identify those applications in the system and pull them out.

The exact processing times depend on the type of permit being applied for and the type of measure associated with it.

• (1815)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

Along those lines, what is the current processing time of the specific refugee resettlement applications for individuals from Hong Kong?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Thank you very much [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

The Chair: I think we've lost the connection.

Mr. Clerk, I've stopped the clock.

The Clerk: It is a connectivity issue. I'm looking into it now.

Dr. Nicole Giles: Okay, thank you.

As the associate said, we are getting messages that our connection is unstable, so our sincere apologies. We do have our IT here trying to remedy it.

The Chair: We can hear you. It's not a problem.

You can resume. I will start the clock again.

Dr. Nicole Giles: Okay, thank you very much.

Currently we do not have any refugee applications in our inventory for individuals from Hong Kong.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much.

Is there any idea of how long that processing time would take for that refugee resettlement application right now, if there are any?

Dr. Nicole Giles: Again, it depends on the circumstances, and I would flag here that we have a very important file for urgent refugee applications, which is our urgent protection program, which we work on in coordination with international partners, including UNHCR. It allows us to facilitate the urgent resettlement of refugees who are facing an immediate threat to their lives or their safety.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

I want to talk about the COVID measures for temporary foreign workers. With respect to living arrangements provided for temporary foreign workers, how many compliance inspections were conducted?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: We run this program in conjunction with our colleagues at Service Canada and ESDC, so we manage part of it for those who are exempt from LMIA, but if you are asking for those who would have needed LMIAs, who came over as tempo-

rary foreign workers, I recommend we redirect the question to my colleagues at ESDC, who will be able to speak to the compliance with this program.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Were any tips or allegations of non-compliance received?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Again, I would recommend that my ESDC colleagues answer that question.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: That's fair.

I'll move on to the LMIA—

Ms. Caroline Harès (Acting Director General, Temporary Foreign Workers Program, Integrity Services Branch, Department of Employment and Social Development): I can answer the question, Madam Chair.

With regard to the tip line that is available for the workers, we have received 749 tips and allegations since April. These were pertaining to employers or workers. These trigger inspections when we receive them. We do referrals based on the information that we get. For the egregious cases, once we have established the information and when we have analyzed the file that we received tips on, it is triggered within 48 hours.

As far as the statistics of inspections in 2020-21, since April we have launched 4,907 inspections. Of those, 2,590 were completed. These are the statistics that I have. I can say that 16% of the employers had to make corrections to be compliant.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Have there been any penalties or fines issued out of those?

Can we get a number for those?

Ms. Caroline Harès: Yes, there have been penalties issued. There have been 27 cases of non-compliance issued. Two of them were COVID-related. There was one permanent ban.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can we get a breakdown of what industries those were?

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, your time is up.

I will request that the officials provide those numbers in writing, if they can.

We will now proceed to Madam Martinez Ferrada.

Madam Martinez Ferrada, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can start, please.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank all the witnesses here with us today.

I was struck by what Ms. Bégin said earlier about the job vacancy rate, which has basically stayed the same as it was before the pandemic.

Could you talk to us about the labour shortages we've seen since the beginning of the pandemic and how the situation has evolved?

In which areas have there been the biggest changes? How could we better hone our approach on immigration whilst keeping in mind the labour requirements in different regions? Would it be possible to adopt special or innovative approaches in order to fill job vacancies and better serve our communities, for example?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I presume the question was for Ms. Bégin?

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Ms. Bégin can answer, but if other witnesses have something to say, by all means.

If I'm not mistaken, Ms. Bégin, you are a representative of ESDC, Employment and Social Development Canada?

Ms. Josée Bégin: I work at Statistics Canada.

I can indeed give you more information. My colleagues from ESDC and IRCC can talk about this as well.

I mainly talked about job vacancies from October to December in my presentation. At the start of the pandemic, Statistics Canada concentrated on programs that are essential to its mission, such as the labour force survey and the consumer price index.

Our survey, which allows us to measure labour shortages, those job vacancies, was not carried out between April and September. That's why the information I gave you only covered the months from October to December.

I will be able to provide you with more information on unemployment and employment rates per region. At the end of March, I will also be able to give you detailed information from our job vacancy and wage survey on the skills required for the vacancies, broken down by region and by industry.

If the committee believes that this information could be useful, I will be able to get it to you, but only at the end of March.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Perfect.

My next question is for the witnesses from ESDC and IRCC.

Why are we keeping the rate for foreign workers capped at 10% in Quebec?

Why is it still necessary to maintain this rate?

Could you also explain to us why the rate is still capped?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I will ask my colleagues from ESDC to answer your question.

Mr. Philippe Massé: Hello.

Thank you for your question, Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

I can tell you that the percentage of workers that can be hired in certain industries is subject to caps, especially those industries where wages are lower. In general, it is capped at 20%, which was brought down to 10% in 1994. That's why the percentage is capped at 20% for certain employers and at 10% for others. When the new measure was applied, employers who were already subject to a 20% cap stayed at that level. It is a measure that we are studying

carefully. We are aware of the arguments that have been brought forward.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Massé. Can you hold the mike closer to your mouth, please?

I'm sorry for that. You can resume.

Mr. Philippe Massé: My apologies.

[Translation]

The pandemic has created a lot of uncertainty in the labour market and we are closely monitoring the situation. We have looked at the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to protect workers' safety. Over the next weeks, we will be studying these aspects of the program more carefully as we look to economic recovery.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you.

Are there any programs or tools that the federal government and Quebec are working on jointly to alleviate labour shortages?

• (1825)

Mr. Philippe Massé: We have an excellent working relationship with Quebec. I myself have weekly meetings to discuss issues related to the program. Actually, they are bi-weekly meetings. We talk about conditions for farm workers who will be coming or are still coming here. We continue to discuss the measures that need to be taken in the future. I would like to stress that we took measures at the beginning of the pandemic to facilitate workers' access to the labour market in certain industries. We established priorities for applications and we lengthened the work periods.

We have worked to help ease the labour market shortage. The caps apply to many industries, not only agriculture. We will therefore be working with the provinces, including Quebec, when the economy picks up.

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes for your questions.

[Translation]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses who are providing us with a lot of detailed information, including data, on the current situation.

I would like to ask Ms. Bégin to provide some context.

Ms. Bégin, can you please tell me if you agree with the fact that despite the increase in unemployment during the pandemic, certain industries are still suffering from labour shortages?

Ms. Josée Bégin: I can partially answer the question.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we have indeed seen changes in the unemployment rate, which is, of course, influenced by the public health measures put in place. Some industries were hit harder than others, as well as certain segments of the population.

As I explained in my presentation, we started to publish monthly job vacancies in Canada as of October. This allows us to have indicators which, along with the labour force survey, give us an idea of what is going on on the labour market.

A quarterly analysis will be done at the end of March which will be more detailed and will provide more indicators.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Similarly, would you agree that it is almost structurally impossible to hire staff locally, even when unemployment is high in certain job categories?

Ms. Josée Bégin: Our data shows that labour shortages vary according to the region. There are factors linked to the type of industry, but it is also a question of local skills. That does not mean, however, that for a given industry, labour shortages and the skills required will be the same everywhere. It all depends on where you are in Canada.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Which brings me to my next question, which is about LMIA's.

We know that LMIA's are used, amongst other reasons, to ensure that all efforts were made to find workers locally.

Would you agree that the difficulties in recruitment, when certain jobs remain vacant even though unemployment is high, possibly make people question why LMIA's are required for certain types of jobs or certain regions?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I will ask my colleague from ESDC to answer the question.

Mr. Philippe Massé: I can only tell you that the process for LMIA's, which falls under the remit of ESDC, must be followed and that employers are required to meet certain criteria.

Our department is not able to exempt certain professions. That said, there's nothing to stop employers from making applications to get access to workers. We don't impose any caps, as a rule.

Given the current situation, there are certain caps on the food and accommodation industries. Generally speaking, however, employers do have access to workers and may submit applications. Those applications are approved if they meet the specified criteria.

• (1830)

Ms. Christine Normandin: My next question is about closed work permits. Some people have stated that they are problematic, especially in terms of labour mobility.

I have an example that illustrates this perfectly. In my riding, when a farmer falls victim to a climate catastrophe and no longer needs his workers, he can't allow them to work on the neighbouring

farm, even though that farmer might need those workers to save his crop.

In 2016, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities recommended abolishing closed work permits and encouraging the use of LMIA's. The committee recommended the use of work permits for certain industries or geographical regions. If there was a huge labour shortage in a given region, the person who had obtained a LMIA would not be required to obtain a closed work permit. Mobility would be enhanced.

What has happened with this recommendation? Is there a willingness to review the need for closed work permits?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I thank you for the question, Ms. Normandin.

Given all that we have learned during this difficult year, we have made the process more flexible over the last few months so that the workers that lose their job can find another one. We have processes in place that make it easier to apply for a new permit, so that workers can be hired by another employer.

We have also worked hard to process all the applications that we receive in that category as quickly as possible.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Madam Chair, I don't think I have enough time left to ask further questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. We will now move on to Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials.

The minister didn't answer this question, so I wonder if the officials can advise and confirm that Hong Kongers in the U.K. would be able to come to Canada to seek refugee status, or would they be considered asylum shopping under the recent provisions that the Liberal government has passed?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: As was stated, we have very grave concerns with what's going on. We are doing all we can to ensure that those who want to make their way to Canada can find various ways in which they can do so. Being able to do it through a means of asylum and seeking refugee to Canada can be done if you're in the U.K. and have not already claimed asylum in the U.K. You can do it by the UNHCR, or there are other various ways in which they can do that. If they are in Canada, they can also seek to do an in-Canada asylum claim.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Is there any work being done right now within the department in looking at how to allow for asylum status or refugee claims by Hong Kongers who are abroad and would not be able to go through the UNHCR process?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: There is more than the UNHCR process. One can also seek to be a privately sponsored refugee. We have more than one way in which you can seek refugee status.

As was mentioned by my colleague, Dr. Giles, if one needs urgent protection, there are other ways in which we can also assist as best as we can in knowing the—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could the officials table those other ways to the committee so we have the full details on what that process is?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: That would be my pleasure.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The government has indicated that it is giving priority to processing applications from Hong Kongers.

Could the officials table current and expected processing times for these applications compared to others in all of the different streams?

The timeline issue is very important given that the Hong Kong legislature is considering pending legislation that would not allow people to get on flights to leave Hong Kong.

• (1835)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Yes, we can definitely provide that information should we have it in our holdings. I would also just add that to date, as was mentioned by the minister, we continue to ensure that Hong Kongers know that, especially if they are dual citizens, they can make their way to get the necessary documents to travel to Canada. The mission has made itself available to support those in Hong Kong if that is something they wish to do.

I would add, also, that as was mentioned, we continue to do what we can to process things as quickly and effectively as possible. I just want to mention that to this point in time, we have not seen an uptick in people asking us for additional citizenship documents.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The minister said he's been looking at the issue of the language test for caregivers. What work is being done by the department at this time on this issue? Have officials looked into the feasibility of counting the COVID-interrupted time towards their 24-month work requirements under the caregiver pilots and the issue of the caregivers' children aging out?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: We continue to learn a lot from the caregiver pilot and to assess how it is going. In terms of your question, we are looking at what the implications could be for those who are in the pilot program right now and for those who may be currently unemployed or have had employment interrupted due to COVID, and whether or not they will be able to meet the timelines that are required for the program. This assessment is something we're continuing to do, including looking at the recommendations you made to our minister with regard to the language requirements. At this time, the pilot is still under way. We're using the results to be able to effectively understand and evolve the program, should doing so be required.

I will also turn to my colleague Marian Campbell Jarvis to see if she has anything further to add to help answer this question.

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

Perhaps I could add a few details to that response.

With respect to caregivers and the language issue, the pilot does run until 2024. We will be considering next steps.

I would note that—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, but could I just interrupt for one second?

That means that no changes will be made until after 2024. Is that correct?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's not exactly what I was implying, Ms. Kwan. That would be a decision and a question for the minister. I was simply noting that to add what Ms. Xavier has noted that we continue to study this as pilot and to assess how things are proceeding.

I would note that with respect to the language requirements, this program does have an almost overabundance of interest by people who are meeting the language requirements now. The program does have very high levels of response.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I just want to note that on this issue, this is a problem not just in the pilot. It's been an ongoing problem with the caregivers. Even in the last Parliament this became an issue on which witnesses came forward and raised their concerns. I just want to highlight that. I hope that the department is moving forward and expediting, making it easier for caregivers. If they are here working already, they are able to communicate with their employer, so why are we layering on so many barriers for them? Especially if they are caregivers doing work, they are not able to take the courses.

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan, but your time is up.

We will now move to our second round of questioning. We will start the second with Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Seeback, you have five minutes for your questions. Please proceed.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Forgive me if I don't know the answer to this. When we're talking about temporary foreign workers under the agricultural stream, I know that this is a big issue in my riding because we have a lot of farms. A lot of them rely on temporary foreign workers in the agricultural sector. Many of those come from the Caribbean. Flights are not coming from the Caribbean.

Could you update me on the status of what we're going to be doing with temporary foreign workers for the agricultural sector?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: As you note, seasonal agricultural workers are very important to the ongoing work we need to do to supply food to Canadians, so we work very actively with those countries from which they come, to be able to identify the various means by which they could make their way here. However, it's the employers themselves who are actually very good at trying to ensure that these workers can make their way to Canada.

For example, yes, they are using existing flights, but another way in which an employer can ensure that seasonal agriculture workers come is via charters. Charters are sometimes put in place so that they can come from Mexico, Honduras or the Caribbean, as you mentioned, directly to Canada.

Despite the restrictions we currently have, temporary foreign workers and seasonal agricultural workers are deemed essential to the supply chain, so all necessary elements are being made for those who have the work permits in hand, to be able to make their way to Canada.

• (1840)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much for that answer. That's great news.

Maybe you don't know this and it's not your department, but what quarantine protocols are going to be in place for a seasonal agricultural worker if they're able to come here? Will it be a 14-day quarantine like it was last year around this time?

I know that's certainly an issue, but they were able to adapt to that particular parameter.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Ultimately, the public health and safety of Canadians is paramount in everything we're doing as a government, and all departments are seized with this. We really want to continue to ensure that anybody travelling to Canada, whether it is for essential business or other reasons, continues to adhere to the restrictions that have been put in place at the border.

As you've mentioned, currently the temporary foreign workers, as well as seasonal agricultural workers, are not exempt from the quarantine measures that have been put in place by the Public Health Agency. For the time being, until told otherwise, they will have to adhere to those measures.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: If you don't know, that's fine and I'll move on to other areas that I want to question, but is that a 14-day quarantine or are they going to be caught up in the new mandatory hotel quarantine stays?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: For the time being, as we know it, it is 14 days of quarantine. Whether that changes or evolves has still to be confirmed.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

With respect to LMIA's, there are two issues that I hear the most. Number one is the cost, which is \$1,000.

What is the basis for the cost? Is there any decision to try to find ways to reduce that cost to the employer?

You could have a number of LMIA's that you're applying for. It's a large burden on employers.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: If I may, I will direct this question to my ESDC colleagues.

Mr. Philippe Massé: It's true that there is a fee in place. For certain parts of the program, it's important to note that employers in agriculture are currently exempt from the fee. That applies to over 60% of the positions in the program. Other employers are subject to a fee, partly to cover administrative costs. We are continuing to look at the fee and whether it's set at the appropriate level and whether adjustments need to be made in line with the cost of the program. That work is ongoing with a lot of other elements that we're looking at in the program.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I have about 30 seconds left.

How much have processing times for LMIA's been affected with respect to COVID? Do we have a large backlog; and if so, are you tracking that backlog and have a plan to reduce it?

Mr. Philippe Massé: Interestingly, the processing times have actually been reduced by about a third during the pandemic. We have been working with our Service Canada colleagues to streamline the process. We have a new online application system as well to reduce some of the burden. Those measures are starting to bear fruit in terms of our processing.

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Dong.

Mr. Dong, welcome to the CIMM committee. You will have five minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Han Dong (Don Valley North, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's always a pleasure to be on your committee. It's pretty well run. I'm happy that we have ministry officials answering questions.

I have a few concerns—well, not concerns, actually. It's an information-seeking mission, I guess.

I was very excited about the announcement about cleaning up the express entry pool, our inventory, back in the beginning of, I think it was mid-February, or the first week of February. I was really excited about that because I know over 20,000 applicants have been waiting patiently and were very anxious about the effect of COVID. They are now actually receiving a surprise invitation from the ministry. I know that over 70% of those applicants scored over 400 points, which is quite impressive. This means that they have a lot of work and study experience in Canada. It will help them integrate really well into our workforce.

I guess my concern is whether we have enough staff power to process, I think, upwards of 27,000 applications. Is it going to cause a lengthy delay or backlog in the system?

• (1845)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: As the minister stated, and as you are well aware, we have a very ambitious mandate to meet in this calendar year. We're committed to achieve it as much as we can. The call that was just put out in the express entry, as you mentioned, involved 27,000 invitations. It's definitely going to help achieve that goal.

As you've outlined, these are very qualified candidates who have been in Canada and who will be able to continue to assist us in improving our recovery and our economic prosperity.

Absolutely, we continue to see this as a priority. With regard to ensuring that we meet the levels planned, we feel comfortable that we are going to be able to continue to process those applications for those we sent the invitations to, and do so in the time necessary to be able to achieve the landings in this calendar year as per the expectation of the plan.

Mr. Han Dong: That's really good to know.

Are we expecting this type of announcement will be going forward as a normal practice by the ministry?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: At this point in time, this was a one-time draw, because of the times we're in. These are not normal times as you can all appreciate. Our hope is that the border restrictions will eventually ease because the public health measures will permit it. We will be able to resume being able to bring others from overseas to come and land in Canada. They are also feeling that their lives have been disrupted, as I know you can appreciate. At this point in time, it was a one-time draw. I do feel that our provincial and territorial colleagues who have provincial nominee programs and really want to be able to draw from those in Canada, in particular, are happy to know that this was a one-time draw.

Mr. Han Dong: That's great.

I have to recognize the incredible work that public servants like you have been doing over the last year. I say this not only because of what I've been reading or hearing in the caucus or from the ministry, but also from stakeholders. I work closely with the college in my riding. They've been repeatedly telling me that they have a very open channel with the ministry folks. That reflects in the announcements of a series of changes in recent months to help them to sustain and recruit more international students. I know we are coming to the peak season for new recruitments. Institutions are a little anxious. They know they have to get on a provincial list to show that the proper public health guidelines are followed and they have the facility to ensure the safety of all students and the general public.

They are wondering, as they go out there to recruit international students, if our officials abroad, especially from the main source countries, are ready to process those applications in time for the students to arrive.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Thank you for your question. More importantly, thank you for the compliments to us in the department.

You're absolutely right. There's so much effort going in with regard to our student processing and the work we are doing with the institutions. We continue to be committed to ensuring we have an open dialogue with the institutions and stakeholders that you mentioned. We are working very closely with them—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Madam Xavier. The time is up. We will have to now move on to our next member.

Based on the time left, all of the four parties will have two minutes each for the round of questioning.

We will start with Madam Normandin.

You will have two minutes for your questions. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you so much.

I also wanted to talk about international students, but perhaps from another angle.

We often hear about the difficulties universities face when they want to hire people, especially for practicums or co-op programs. LMIA's and work permits require a lot of paperwork. However, in this instance, the work is usual part-time and covers a short period. This makes things hard for employers who wish to keep employees that have already learned French, been trained and are integrated, as well as for students who, because of the bureaucracy-heavy programs, find us less appealing.

Have you looked at this issue?

What improvements can we hope for in the future?

● (1850)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Thank you for the question.

As you've said, international students continue to be a very important immigration source. We want to carry on encouraging these students to see Canada as an education destination. We have excellent education institutions here in Canada. We are renowned for the quality of teaching offered in our universities and our CEGEPS.

As to the application process that the students must follow, improvements could be made easily, given that applications are submitted electronically.

I don't know if I'm answering your question, so I will ask Ms. Giles to talk to you about certain restrictions. She may have more information on the subject.

[*English*]

Dr. Nicole Giles: Thank you very much.

In terms of the process for study permits, as the associate deputy minister mentioned, that is a top priority for us, and we do have the resources allocated.

I'm very pleased to note that we have been able, even in 2020 in the most difficult of circumstances—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Dr. Giles. The time is up. You can also provide written answers to the questions to the clerk.

Now we will move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two minutes for your questions. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I've written to the minister about two caregivers who were infected with COVID-19 by their employers, and I have not yet received a response from the government. I hope that the officials can follow up with my office on that. One of those caregivers was fired by the employer while she was in quarantine.

What effort is being taken to support the caregivers in these kinds of situations? Also, with regard to the employer who deliberately withheld a positive diagnosis, would it be grounds for acceptance under the vulnerable foreign workers program?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: We can definitely follow up with the correspondence that you submitted to the minister, or directly with your office in terms of the two specific cases. We can surely do that; that's no problem.

With regard to the impact to the employer in this case, I'm going to refer your question to Marian Campbell Jarvis.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Just in light of time, I wonder if we can get that response submitted to the committee so that everyone can take a look at that as well.

I'm going to move on to another question. How long does it take for IRCC...? Does IRCC envision that we will be getting back to normal processing standards with respect to AORs? This is about one year behind time. Caregivers have seen some of the most drastic increases in the number of days to receive their AORs: from 39 days to 344 days. I'm wondering when we can expect normal processing times, and what is being done about that right now? Finally, does the three-day hotel quarantine apply to caregivers?

Ms. Caroline Xavier: As has been stated, we are working really hard to ensure that we can continue to process all the applications in the business lines we are receiving. We have prioritized those where people are permitted to enter Canada for reasons of work, for example, as per the caregiver program. These continue to be priority processing.

I will ask Dr. Giles to give you a little more precision on your question, but—

The Chair: Madame Xavier, time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could we get the answers, Madam Chair, submitted to the committee?

The Chair: Dr. Giles, if you can submit the answers to the committee, that would be really great.

We will now move on to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have two minutes for your questioning. You can proceed, please.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Given that LMIA's are being refused in economic regimes where the unemployment rate exceeds 6% for certain positions in the accommodation, food and retail trade sectors, what is the projection for the number of LMIA's that will not be renewed?

• (1855)

Ms. Caroline Xavier: I would direct that question to our colleagues at ESDC.

Mr. Philippe Massé: I think it's something we'd have to get back to you on to see the implications there. I don't have those figures.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Sure.

The Chair: Those can be provided to the committee.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Of course.

Along with that, how many businesses are potentially impacted, and what types of positions will see most LMIA's refused? Perhaps you could answer these three questions together.

I'll move on to owner-operators really quickly. How many owner-operator applicants were approved in 2019 and 2020?

Mr. Philippe Massé: Again, my apologies. I don't have those detailed statistics, but we will get them to you, of course, following the meeting.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: If we could get a breakdown of the industries for that, as well, that can be tabled, that would be great. Also, how many of those were created, as in new jobs? Perhaps we can get that tabled. As well, if there is any type of comparison we can make from previous years...

Mr. Philippe Massé: Yes, we'll do our best to get you the numbers you're seeking.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Perfect, thank you.

I'll take the rest of my time to thank all the officials for all the hard work they've been doing throughout this pandemic. Thank you, everyone, for being at committee.

Madam Chair, I don't know how much time I have left.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'll just say thank you again to everyone. I hope everyone has a pleasant weekend.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

We will end this panel with Ms. Dhillon.

Ms. Dhillon, you will have two minutes for your questions.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Good evening, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

My question is going to be brief, and it's for any one of our witnesses.

Economic immigration will be integral to the recovery of the country as we look to ensuring that Canada harnesses all skill levels available to strengthen and fill labour gaps and market vulnerabilities. The new levels plan will be important to facilitating work from every skill level.

One economic stream that has been helpful in attracting high-growth companies allows Canadian employers to have access to global talent. Can you please provide us with an update on the status of the global skills strategy?

Thank you so much.

Ms. Caroline Xavier: You're absolutely correct. We continue to recognize the value of the economic programs that are in place and that permit foreign nationals to come to Canada to assist us and to render Canada even more prosperous in terms of its economy.

I'm going to turn to Marian Campbell Jarvis to answer your question.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The global skills strategy has been absolutely instrumental in attracting high-skilled talent. We have very impressive numbers, and some of this is shared with colleagues at ESDC through the global skills stream.

In terms of efforts moving forward, we look at this taken together with the start-up visa and the self-employed programs as well as some of the other economic pathways to really contribute to that economic recovery, Madam Chair, that Ms. Dhillon referred to.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You're done now.

Thank you.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you.

The Chair: With this, our panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all members of this committee, I want to take this opportunity to thank all the officials for appearing before this committee today.

Thank you to all our public servants, who have been working around the clock to adapt to different norms, and for being there for Canadians. Many Canadians are relying on you.

Thank you to all the committee members. Have a good constituency week. We will see each other on March 22.

The meeting is adjourned.

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