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• (1530)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 25 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome.

Based on the Board of Internal Economy, I would like all the members to adhere to the following health protocols. Maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others. Wear a non-medical mask unless seated, and preferably wear a mask at all times, including when seated. Maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided in the committee room, and regularly wash your hands well with soap.

As the chair of this committee, I will enforce these measures. I thank you all for your co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House of Commons order of January 25, 2021. I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You may speak in the official language of your choice. At the bottom of your screen you may choose to have floor audio, or English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you do not need to select a corresponding language channel before speaking. The “raise hand” feature is on the main toolbar, should you wish to speak.

I'll remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be muted. The committee clerk and I will maintain a speaking list for all the members.

Today, we will be resuming our study on the labour market impact assessment under the temporary foreign workers program. We will be hearing from witnesses.

Today with this panel we will be hearing from the Manitoba Trucking Association, represented by Terry Shaw, executive director. We have Greg Arndt, vice-president of Jade Transport Limited, and Scott Kinley, chief executive officer of Gladstone Transfer Limited.

We will be hearing from Desloges Law Group Professional Corporation, represented by Andrew Carvajal, lawyer and partner.

We will also be hearing from l'Union des producteurs agricoles, represented by Marcel Groleau, general president, and Denis Roy, treasurer and director of finances and workforces.

I will take this opportunity to welcome all the witnesses today on behalf of all the members. All the witnesses will be given five minutes for their opening remarks. Then we will go into the round of questions.

With that, I would request that the Manitoba Trucking Association please proceed. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Terry Shaw (Executive Director, Manitoba Trucking Association): Thank you, Madam Chair. If my colleagues are okay with it, I will go first.

Thank you very much to everybody for having us today.

My name is Terry Shaw. I'm the executive director of the Manitoba Trucking Association, which represents over 300 companies in the Manitoba trucking industry, and the MTA is a proud member of the Canadian Trucking Alliance, which represents over 4,500 companies in the Canadian trucking industry.

On behalf of the board and membership of the MTA and the CTA, I appreciate being afforded the time today to address the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration so we can provide some insight into labour market impact assessments and the temporary foreign worker program.

In opening today, I would also like to acknowledge the partnership that the MTA and all CTA members have with Trucking Human Resources Canada, or THRC, the national sector council for the trucking and logistics workforce in Canada.

Much of the labour market information I hope to be speaking to today came to us from THRC, and of special note to today's discussion I refer all committee members to THRC's temporary foreign worker program review of August 2018. While the report was published a couple of years ago, the themes and recommendations contained within the report remain relevant today. A copy of the report was sent to our committee contacts in advance of today's discussion.

High-level feedback captured on the program during those discussions came under the following headings: processing times, consistency of service, processing fees, work permit renewable times and application requirements. From those high-level feedback categories, the following recommendations were suggested.

The first key recommendation was for a trusted employer or fast-tracking process. A consistent point across the country was the need for a trusted employer vetting process to expedite and streamline the LMIA process.

The second key recommendation was for the applications to reflect the realities of the trucking industry. The application form and content are not reflective of the realities of the Canadian trucking industry. Notable issues with the application included the compensation structure and reporting requirements, the job advertisement and recruiting requirements, and the complexity of the application process, which leads many employers to seek legal aid and third party advisement.

The third key recommendation was process improvements. Some of those have been made since the report was published, so we want to acknowledge that and thank those involved for making those process improvements. Some outstanding suggested improvements are ensuring that program officers are familiar with the trucking industry, setting realistic and standardized processing times for program applications, linking processing fees to service standards and considering a set fee per application rather than per number of positions.

The last recommendation, which again was consistent across the country's round table sessions, was related to inconsistencies at the provincial level regarding provincial nominee programs that support a path to permanent residency. It is being proposed that the federal government, with our provincial government partners, take a lead in supporting a streamlined and consistent approach to permanent residency for foreign workers at the national level.

So that I don't utilize all our time, I will end this by leaving the committee with this thought. Making the above changes will not just benefit the Canadian trucking industry. It will benefit those whom our industry seeks to employ. It will benefit our government partners tasked with oversight of this program. Most importantly, process improvements that happen to benefit trucking benefit the entire Canadian supply chain, which is the foundation of our country's economic success.

I leave you with that to conclude my opening remarks, and I thank you, folks.

• (1535)

The Chair: You have a minute left. Would someone else from the Manitoba Trucking Association like to speak?

Mr. Scott Kinley (Chief Executive Officer, Gladstone Transfer Ltd, Manitoba Trucking Association): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon. My name is Scott Kinley. I'm the CEO of Gladstone Transfer Ltd., a rural Manitoba-based trucking company in Gladstone, Manitoba.

My company was started in 1947 by my grandfather, and incorporated in 1973, making me the third generation at the helm of the company.

As you are aware, our industry is struggling to fill seats with drivers. The profession of a class 1 over-the-road driver is not a profession that the youth of today in Canada are embracing. Over-

seas, there are significantly more people content with the profession as a professional driver. These drivers from overseas are looking for opportunities to bring their families and settle in Canada. This helps both the employee and the employer.

I see a few challenges with the current LMIA program, the first being advertising criteria. The 30-day advertising requirement is redundant in terms of what we do as a company year-round. This adds 30 more days to the application process.

The fee of \$1,000 per application is fine, but it should come with some sort of guarantee, as each—

The Chair: Mr. Kinley, I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go to rounds of questions. If for any reason there is something at the end that you think you have not been able to say, you can always send us a written submission.

We will move on to the Desloges Law Group Professional Corporation, and I would request that Mr. Andrew Carvajal please take the floor.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal (Lawyer and Partner, Desloges Law Group Professional Corporation): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the committee for inviting me today.

I'm an immigration lawyer and partner at Desloges Law Group, a firm dedicated to the exclusive practice of Canadian immigration, refugee and citizenship law. I'm appearing today to speak about the temporary foreign worker program as someone who has been helping employers of all sizes navigate this program for almost a decade.

I want to start by saying that I value the role played by labour market impact assessments in Canada. However, while foreign workers are crucial to our economy and labour force, I agree that Canadians should have first choice of domestic job opportunities.

I'm thankful for the work of Service Canada employees in processing these applications, and I have been particularly impressed that during COVID-19, Service Canada employees were able to quickly go back to regular processing times and even improve on them recently with the rollout of the online submission pilot. The painful part of bringing a foreign worker here these days, as far as processing times are concerned, is mainly visa processing, not the LMIA stage.

I want to address three things that could be improved to make it easier for employers to staff positions that lack the right talent in Canada.

The first is transparency in LMIA guidelines and decision-making. Unlike the IRCC, which publishes incredibly detailed manuals and instructions, online LMIA guides include very basic information that makes it exceedingly difficult for self-represented employers to navigate this process. I know this because we are often retained to represent employers who have failed on their own.

LMIA's are some of the most technical applications that we work on. I have learned the art of preparing them from trial and error, from hearing about experiences of immigration colleagues and from reading ESDC's heavily redacted internal guidelines when they are made available through access to information and privacy requests.

The ESDC website makes LMIA's look like a simple process that allows the employer to make many decisions, but in reality, officers follow incredibly detailed scripts and guidelines telling them what an employer should and should not do. These manuals should be accessible to the public to make this process more transparent.

My second suggestion has to do with LMIA's from an employer who is looking to retain a worker in the same position after the expiry of the work permit. Right now, employers are required to start the process from scratch and advertise a position like they did before. Perhaps we can develop a system where employers in certain industries known for continuous labour shortages can apply for a simplified LMIA for the same position and employee. I like the trusted employer program that many witnesses have been discussing.

Something that would also assist significantly in this regard is extending the duration of a single LMIA work permit to two years. Right now, for most low-wage LMIA's, the work permits are limited to one year, forcing employers to invest significant resources in the same process every year. In addition, if an employee is eligible and intends to transition to permanent residence, the one-year work permit never provides sufficient time to apply.

On the topic of transition to permanent residence, I want to make my third suggestion. Most federal and provincial economic programs for permanent residence are designed for individuals with professional or technical work experience, yet more than 70% of LMIA work permits are issued to low-skilled workers. This means that the workers we lack most in Canada have no path to permanent residence.

On April 14, the government made one of the most exciting announcements I remember as an immigration lawyer. It was the introduction of new temporary permanent residence pathways for essential workers and international graduates. However, the rollout of these programs could have been more responsible and organized. All we found out was that new programs will open in less than one month, with very limited quotas and no information on the required documents or forms that will need to be submitted. This has resulted in a complete frenzy of people booking English tests and medical exams and ordering police certificates, not knowing if they will be required or not, just to try to make the quota before it fills up.

Because of this, there are no more available English tests in Ontario until December 2021. This means that the only individuals who will get to apply under these new programs are those who had

the luck to book a language test right away because they could afford to look for one all day, or those who already had a test result before because they were preparing to submit an application under another program or already had an application in progress. The very coveted spots will therefore likely be taken by people who already had other paths to permanent residence, not the agricultural workers, the truckers, the cleaners, the grocery store attendants and other semi-skilled workers.

The worst part is that this affects not only those who will not be able to apply in time, but also others who need to book English tests or medical exams for other immigration programs. If this had been planned better and released earlier with clear instructions, this exciting announcement would not have been so bittersweet.

Once again, I'm very thankful for the opportunity to speak to this important subject as a professional in the field.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carvajal, for your opening remarks.

We will now move on to Mr. Groleau, general president of l'Union des producteurs agricoles.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Groleau (General President, Union des producteurs agricoles): Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Marcel Groleau, and I am the general president of the Union des producteurs agricoles, or UPA, which represents Quebec's 29,000 farms. Joining me is Denis Roy, an immigration consultant at the UPA.

From the outset, we want the Government of Canada to understand one thing: temporary foreign farm workers are essential workers not only for Canada's agri-food sector but also for the food security of Canadians. The pandemic has made clear to everyone just how important they are. I think every federal department and agency in the country now understands that.

In responding to the pandemic's many challenges and in making decisions, the government has regularly failed to take foreign farm workers into account. To this day, numerous problems persist when it comes to COVID 19 testing, which farm workers must self-administer while in quarantine. The decision to use a Toronto-based company to serve people in Quebec has had disastrous consequences. We hope that Ms. Bibeau's announcement today will remedy the situation, which has been very hard on farm employers in Quebec and on foreign workers.

Now that I have made that important point, I will turn to the labour market impact assessments, or LMIA's, and the application process.

The UPA operates 12 agricultural employment centres across Quebec, which, every single day, help 2,500 farmers find workers to alleviate the labour shortage.

Until 2015, the UPA had been the federal government's partner for 40 years, receiving all LMIA applications from farm employers in Quebec. Today, the UPA helps 1,500 employers overcome the administrative complexities of filling out 3,000 LMIA applications a year. We are thoroughly familiar with the process.

The unemployment rate in Quebec is currently 6.4%, the lowest in the country. Agricultural production is growing annually by 8.7%. In regions like Chaudière-Appalaches, a farming area in central Quebec, the unemployment rate is close to 4%. The labour shortage is expected to last for at least the next decade. It is no surprise that the number of temporary foreign workers in Quebec is increasing 10% annually. That number will only go up, so it's time to reconsider the administrative requirements of the seasonal agricultural workers program.

Employers prefer to hire the same workers, those who come back every year at the same time to do the same work. Why not allow those employers to submit LMIA applications for work permits that would be valid for two seasons, two years? That would be an easy way to reduce the red tape for employers, workers and public servants, one that would make a real difference. A change like that would cut down on processing time and the valuable time lost with each of the many steps in the process. All that extra time compounds the stress farmers are already under. Every hiccup along the way can delay the desired arrival of the foreign worker, or worse, jeopardize their arrival.

Bear in mind that a farmer's work depends on the weather, a factor they have no control over.

With respect to a more streamlined process, we submitted recommendations to the department in 2019 to simplify the LMIA application. We identified at least 24 questions that could be removed from applications involving the agricultural sector. That would shorten the form from 12 to six pages.

Currently, employers and workers have to negotiate three different programs. In Quebec, our position is clear: reforms should be based on the farm stream program. We therefore recommend simplifying the process by removing the list of agricultural products eligible under the program and referring to the definition of primary agriculture set out in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations. It took at least 10 years for maple syrup production to be added to the list.

Must we remind the government that Canada's agricultural sector includes a multitude of family farms? The UPA works actively to help preserve and develop sustainable human-scale farms.

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge these small businesses face is accessing enough labour to meet their production needs. Small farms are not in a position to offer a worker 40 or 50 hours a week. The government needs to change farm program rules to allow sev-

eral farmers to share a single worker. Such a measure could easily be implemented on dairy or livestock farms, for instance. A farm worker could split their time between two farms, as per the employers' needs and priorities; they could do the morning milking shift on one farm and the night milking shift on another. Of course, the farms would have to be close to one another.

• (1550)

Of course, the farms would have to be close to one another.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: In conclusion, I would say that farm workers are absolutely essential, and they must be taken into consideration by all federal departments and agencies.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: These programs need to be simplified.

[English]

The Chair: You will get an opportunity to talk further in the round of questioning.

We will move to our first round of questioning.

Mr. Saroya, please proceed for six minutes.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for coming forward with your issues.

My first question is for any of you. On the one hand, the government is saying we will fast-track immigration for TFWs like farm workers. Many blue-collar categories are also on the so-called expedited list for permanent residence. On the other hand, they are declining applications, citing the concern that applicants may not return to their country. Are your clients experiencing similar situations?

This is for anybody, from the large law firm to anybody else.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: I can certainly address that, Madam Chair, if you wish.

Yes, there are definitely programs in place to sometimes make the LMIA process faster for some essential occupations when it comes to recruitment and also the processing of the work permits. However, we are seeing, as MP Saroya is pointing out, many issues with refusals of work permits, particularly in some visa offices. Applications are sent, for instance, from countries such as India, Pakistan and some of the other Southeast Asian countries. Many times it is because of this issue of fear. The officer is concerned that the applicant might not return to their home country after the expiry of their work permit.

If there were clearer paths to permanent residence for these individuals, then I think it would be easier to make an argument that there is a way for them to stay and this should not be a concern. I think that's one way this could be addressed.

Also, it really depends on the visa office. We find in some visa offices that often what you need to show to be able to have a work permit approved seems to be much more than in others. Whether it should be that way, it's hard for me to tell. There are some countries where a lot of people might include documentation that might be falsified or that tends to be documents that are not as legitimate as in other places.

I agree, though, that it's a constant concern that people are not going to leave Canada at the end of the stay. If we need these people and we need them continuously, then we should create programs for them to stay. Officers then wouldn't be concerned about this as much.

• (1555)

Mr. Bob Saroya: Andrew, thank you.

Does anybody else have any thoughts on the same question?

Okay. I will go on to something else.

Andrew, maybe you can answer this question as well. Immigration outposts are ignoring the fact that farmers have gone through an LMIA process. They are using extended powers to ask identical or extended questions in the immigration process. Are your clients experiencing anything similar?

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: That's an excellent point. I'm glad that you are bringing this to the attention of the committee and that it has been brought to your attention. We are seeing that. We are seeing some visa posts asking for documentation from the employer. This is not only agricultural; it's in trucking a lot as well. There are lots of documents from the employer, lots of financials and evidence of whether they are operating or not.

These are things that should have been dealt with at the LMIA stage. That's not to mention that a lot of employers don't feel comfortable providing this to an employee to then send with their work permit application. We have been noticing this a lot, especially in some visa offices.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'll move on to a different question. Two of the transportation companies called me from the GTA earlier this morning. They're saying that the LMIA program simply doesn't work. Most of the time, the applications are denied. It's too costly. It's too long. At the end of the day, the result is the same. Most of the time they end up hiring student drivers—the international stu-

dents who get their AZ licences, I suppose—and their insurance has gone through the roof. They are having a difficult time hiring drivers with experience and having the mature people who can help them.

Do you have any thoughts on that issue, please?

Andrew, you can answer that question.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: I'm sorry—was that for me, or was it for the people from the trucking industry?

Mr. Bob Saroya: Anybody can answer it. Your situation is similar to theirs. You can answer it.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: Sure. I wouldn't know much about what trucking employers need to do. We've done a few LMIA's for trucking. We have been successful in those. I find that the most challenging part with those kinds of applications is actually the work permit from wherever we're bringing people. I think probably my colleagues who are from these industries might be able to speak more about this.

Mr. Bob Saroya: Anybody from the trucking association can answer it, if they're finding a similar situation.

Terry, go ahead, please.

Mr. Terry Shaw: Thank you very much.

We would echo those comments. We understand that there needs to be some rigour within the system, and we don't dispute that at all, but once you're in, again, that trusted employer concept should be put in place as well. Mr. Carvajal spoke to it very succinctly. The process itself is overly complex—it's very complex, which again—

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

We will now move to Mr. Sidhu.

Mr. Sidhu, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu (Brampton East, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

Mr. Kinley, your time was cut short, and I'm very interested to hear your thoughts and recommendations, so if you'd like to take a couple of minutes to finish off your thoughts, I wouldn't mind hearing what you have to say.

Mr. Scott Kinley: Thank you very much, Mr. Sidhu.

My comments echoed what Mr. Shaw had said in his opening remarks, with respect to, for example, advertising criteria. The 30-day advertising requirement is redundant in terms of what we as trucking companies do throughout the year. That simply adds 30 more days to the application process. The fee of \$1,000 is fine for application; however, it should come with some form of a guarantee or some coaching along the way to make more positive outcomes for the LMIA's.

A good suggestion would be to have a bank of applications—for example, for one to 10 drivers, \$4,000 or some set fee. Application processing times can be in excess of a year. The last successful LMIA we had was done 18 months prior to COVID. Status updates would be a great idea. People need to clear up loose ends in their home countries. Drivers who are coming from overseas need to sell their homes and deal with the contracts they're under for employment, cars, families, etc., so some form of status update would be greatly appreciated.

Last of all is the matter of audits and turnaround time. My company has been subject to three audits over the years, which have been very welcomed by our company. They are what keeps us above board. The first was a challenge due to the officer's lack of knowledge of transportation, so perhaps there could be individuals with a greater background in transportation doing these audits. The second went without a hitch. It was a very simple process, but that officer had a family member who was a truck driver, so she was very well versed in transportation.

Our third audit has been pending for over a year. COVID, of course, came into play with that, but also we have had zero guidance or help, and we don't know where to go or who to contact to see if this is being worked on, so we're at a standstill again. Our advertising keeps lapsing and then we have to start from scratch again.

The audit process needs to be streamlined to help us move forward. In the end, we have a great opportunity in Canada to strengthen our workforce by fine-tuning the program and bringing over to Canada people who want to be part of our great country.

Thank you.

• (1600)

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Kinley, for sharing your thoughts.

My question is for the Manitoba Trucking Association. Can you please detail what concerns, if any, your associates might have if, hypothetically, the program were switched to a more sectoral approach under which TFWs were not necessarily tied to an employer? Are there any thoughts on that?

That's for Mr. Shaw or Mr. Kinley.

Mr. Terry Shaw: I would defer to Mr. Kinley or Mr. Arndt. I would suggest there's a fine balance. We want to bring over employees who will connect with not only our industry but also the employer who brings them over, who hosts them. That said, we understand the need for transition.

I don't have a really firm answer in that regard. Perhaps Greg or Scott might have some information they'd like to share on that. That is a challenging situation, sir.

Mr. Greg Arndt (Vice-President, Jade Transport Ltd, Manitoba Trucking Association): I'm not sure I understood the question. I will try to help out with that if I can.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: That's okay. Mr. Kinley has his hand up.

I'm running out of time. I just want to make sure we get it on the record.

Mr. Scott Kinley: Being tied to an employer would be part and parcel of the investment that our company or any company in Manitoba or Canada would be making by investing in these people to come over. The costs of flights and training, especially with our mandatory entry-level training program for obtaining a class 1 licence in Manitoba, can mean costs in excess of \$8,000 to get a driver's licence. When we lay out contracts with TFWs coming over using the one-year or two-year model, it's an opportunity for that company to bring some value to that investment from that person.

The ability for a successful LMIA or TFW to jump ship as soon as they get to Canada really puts an economic strain on the trucking companies that have invested in these people to come over.

Thank you. That's a great question.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that, Mr. Kinley.

How much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Okay. This question is a long one, but I just want to address Mr. Groleau's concerns about what's happening in terms of the testing of farm workers.

I know Minister Bibeau and Minister Mendicino are working extremely hard in their respective portfolios. I agree with Mr. Groleau that Minister Bibeau's announcement today is very welcome. It's in regard to a new provider, Dynacare, which is already established in Quebec, helping with testing services for TFWs. I just wanted to put that there as well.

Thank you so much for the time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

We will now move to Madame Normandin.

Madame Normandin, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can proceed, please.

• (1605)

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us.

My questions will be mainly for Mr. Groleau and the UPA representative.

Mr. Groleau, I can't help but come back to the issue of quarantines. They've lasted much longer than the expected 14 days, and have extended in some cases to 25 and even 30 days.

In this context, is the \$1,500 given to farmers enough to cover the costs associated with quarantine?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: When you factor in all the costs incurred by the farmers and the time workers have to wait to get to the work site, that amount doesn't cover all the expenses. Isolation must also be considered, because workers must be isolated in bubbles.

So we're even more surprised by the announcement in the last budget that the \$1,500 will be reduced to \$750 per worker starting June 15. We find this difficult to understand given the current situation.

Ms. Christine Normandin: You said that the duration of labour market impact studies and work visas should be increased to two years. A Bloc Québécois member even suggested that, in some cases, it should be three years.

Since it's almost always the same companies that use the same workers for the same type of work, in the same unemployment context, there is no reason why the duration should be limited to one year, given the predictability of labour demand.

Is this correct?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: That's correct.

When these programs began, the intent was to ensure that the workers didn't take jobs away from Quebec or Canadian workers. It was perfectly legitimate.

Today, because of the unemployment rate in our regions, there are no employees available for jobs on farms. Everywhere, companies are posting "We're hiring". There's a real labour shortage in our regions.

So what was justified then isn't justified now. We need to simplify the processes and reduce the administrative requirements, because these workers aren't replacing Quebec workers, they're filling vacancies.

We need to adopt a different attitude to the management of the temporary foreign worker program. As you said, these workers regularly return to the same workplace for two, three, even five and six years to perform the same work.

In addition, we also use seasonal workers in agriculture. Whether we hire a seasonal worker or a temporary foreign worker, the administrative burden is the same. These types of workers are hired under two different programs, which have different functions. The administrative burden associated with these programs must be lightened.

Ms. Christine Normandin: With respect to work permit flexibility, you said that some small businesses don't necessarily have the capacity to accommodate employees for 40 hours a week. However, I've heard from companies that their season is short and they need labour, some for apple tree pruning and some for asparagus harvesting a month later.

Couldn't we then consider an exchange of labour between different companies?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes. In fact, this is already done, but workers have to have a second permit to work in a business in another agricultural sector.

Again, some automatism should be possible. We believe that workers who come back year after year should be able to benefit from a program similar to NEXUS, which allows Americans and Canadians to move easily from one country to the other. The procedure could therefore be considerably streamlined for employers in order to facilitate the transfer of an employee to another company and the return of the same workers, year after year.

Ms. Christine Normandin: You mentioned that the UPA helps some 1,500 employers process 3,000 LMIA's a year, which is quite an impressive workload.

Could agricultural producers benefit from more support and more training in the foreign worker recruitment process?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Actually, producers already have their hands full with all the administrative burden they have to deal with today. It's not just about labour, but also health, the environment and many things. For those producers who have to deal with this burden, they are very happy to be able to count on the services of the Union des producteurs agricoles. If we could reduce that burden, producers would benefit.

• (1610)

Ms. Christine Normandin: We also heard in committee from some workers that they would like to have the opportunity to upgrade their skills and obtain additional diplomas, which work permits don't currently allow. If they are more qualified, workers might even obtain permanent residency more easily.

Would you look favourably on work permits to also allow for specialization in certain fields?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes, absolutely.

Currently, producers offer these workers training. For pesticide management, for example, workers are trained to handle these products safely. When they're working on dairy, hog or other farms, they get training on how to handle animals safely. So it would be good to be able to provide them with training.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much, Mr. Groleau.

[English]

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Madam Normandin. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can please proceed.

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

We heard from some employers in previous panels that the temporary foreign worker would come in year after year, so there's a sense that perhaps what the government should do is actually create a system whereby people can come in permanently. Canada used to have a program in the immigration stream that would allow for high-skilled, low-skilled and medium-skilled folks, the full range, to come into Canada.

Would you support the government's bringing back an immigration stream that would allow the full range of work skills for people to get into Canada, allowing for repeat temporary foreign workers, for example, to access permanent residency?

Perhaps I can start with Andrew on this first question.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: I fully agree with that. One thing I find most problematic is that when you look at the breakdown of the employers who are getting LMIA's, and the positions, they're mainly for occupations that are low-skilled. Unfortunately, all the economic programs at the federal level are for skilled individuals, as are most of the provincial programs. There's that big disconnect.

There have been programs created for caregivers, for instance, and now there is the new pathway program, which I think is an excellent start to do this. We need more of those, so those people can stay, because they're very valuable to the Canadian labour force.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With respect to temporary foreign worker programs, one of the issues is that the government recently announced that there would be a new application process for 90,000 spots for people outside of the different streams, and who are already here in Canada, divided up among the different professions. Those spots are going to be highly sought after and will be filled up very quickly. I wonder if you have any thoughts about what the government should do with respect to that.

There's also confusion in the community as to how that process will work. In the case of caregivers, for example, some of them are already in a permanent residence application process, although it is very slow. Now they hear this, so they're actually withdrawing from the other application and jumping into this program, but there's no guarantee they will actually get into this program. We're going to create all kinds of chaos and problems in the community.

With respect to that, what do you think the government should do? Should it specifically allocate certain spots for certain streams? In the event that people withdraw from one process to go into the other one, thinking it will be faster, what is the recourse if they don't get in?

Andrew, perhaps I can go to you.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: Advance notice would have made a big difference. If we had known and our clients had known they had to write English tests in advance and they were able to get... This is the first time we've seen non-skilled people able to apply for permanent residence. Unfortunately, it's impossible for them to go and write an English test in three weeks. The people who are going to end up applying are the ones who already applied under another program, or who were already going to apply under another program.

Notice would have been crucial, telling us a bit about what is going to be included in the application, so people are not hoarding resources like medical tests and things like that.

Also, maybe do what you're suggesting, which is, for pilots such as for these new programs, make it so that if they've already applied under another program, they're not eligible unless they withdraw their application. That way we don't find the 40,000 spots for international graduates or the 30,000 spots for essential workers taken by people who already applied under something else but are taking chances to see whether this happens faster. I have many clients who are going to be doing that.

• (1615)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I have a huge worry for people who withdraw from the other program, because they think they've been.... In the case of caregivers, by the way, the government has not prioritized their processing. That is the truth of the matter, and people have been waiting desperately to reunite with their loved ones. Now, they may actually be out of luck at both ends if they withdraw from the other program.

There has to be some sort of process to ensure these people don't end up getting caught out in that way. From that perspective, if people did withdraw and tried to get into the new one, and they couldn't get into the new one, what sort of recourse do you think the government should provide them?

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: It would be a difficult one, but mainly it would be restricting these programs from people who might have been able to apply under others, or maybe just doing quotas, as you were mentioning, by occupation. That way, at least we could protect different occupations, because I'm afraid that all those essential workers—many of whom are very important, like agricultural workers, truckers and people who work at convenience stores or grocery stores—are going to have their spots taken by the ones who are probably professional and had a chance to apply under other programs.

That is one way the inventory could be managed in a way that would allow opportunities for those who didn't have them before.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The Canadian Horticultural Council has reported difficulties for temporary foreign workers crossing the border in order to get a hold of Switch Health, the company contracted by the federal government to administer the day 10 COVID tests after arrival. This forces them to quarantine for an additional two weeks and prevents them from working.

From the clients you represent, Andrew, have you—

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

We will now move to Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Seeback, you will have four minutes for your round of questioning. We have to end this panel at 4:30.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I have so many questions but so little time.

Terry, you talked about the trusted employer vetting, and that's been brought up by a number of other people. Tell me how that looks, because from my experience, being a member of Parliament dealing with many immigration cases, this is of critical importance to many employers.

How would you actually envision this being run? Andrew, maybe you could also comment.

Mr. Terry Shaw: Again, without getting into superspecific detail, what I can suggest is that all our members deal with banks, and once they go through the initial credit application process, they don't redo it every time they want to access their line of credit.

CBSA and other federal government-run programs have trusted-trader type programs whereby, once you go through the initial vetting process, you don't redo it every time you cross the border. There are annual or regular audits. If something changes with your business, you have to make a new submission or alter your information, but you shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel every time you make an application.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: The way I see it, employers are already put through the wringer when they're doing an LMIA application—in terms of proving they have the money to pay for the person, that they're legitimate and that they're operating—and they have to do recruitment, too, right?

If they have to go through this again, especially if it is done in a way whereby specific industries are allowed to have this simplified procedure, we already have guarantees that the employer is legitimate. We know those industries have a lack of people. There could even be a built-in audit process like there is for the global talent stream, where employers have gone through this and have been vetted, so it's much easier for them to just apply again.

That's the way I see it. Again, it can be specific to certain industries, like the way the global talent stream works.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Right.

Terry, I see you've put up your hand. Do you want to jump back in?

Mr. Terry Shaw: Thank you. I have one last quick point.

Again, there are other independent agencies that you can utilize to help determine best practice: employer of choice, your Trucking HR Canada; trusted trader programs through the federal government; a certificate of recognition; and safety standards. All of those speak to corporate culture and can help inform a trusted employer style of program.

• (1620)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I have very little time and you might have commented on this, but people are talking about the challenges with the one year and the renewal.

If you were to build this program, how long would you want this LMIA to last before you had to reapply, and if it's the same person you want to keep, what should that look like?

Mr. Terry Shaw: Andrew.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: Sure.

They give three years to international graduates after they finish their studies, which would then open a work permit for any employer. Why not give three years to people who have an employer and have demonstrated a need in Canada?

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Marcel, I see you have your hand up as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: My comment is along the same lines as the previous comments, the permit should be for at least two years. There could also be a simplified renewal process when the same worker returns to work for the same company. If we want to keep track of the number of workers, a simplified procedure and a renewal every three years would be a solution.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I would add, and a path to PR, which I think all of us can agree on—a simplified path.

That's great. I think I'm probably out of time.

The Chair: You are at 10 seconds.

We will now proceed to Mr. Schiefke.

Mr. Schiefke, you will have four minutes for your round of questioning. You can please proceed.

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

[English]

I add my thanks to the witnesses for being here today and for lending their thoughts to a very important study.

I'll begin my questioning with Mr. Shaw. Truckers make our country run, and I think the pandemic has truly shown the importance of truckers in our country, and how important they are.

You were talking about the composition structure and the reporting requirements for the process that's currently in place, as well as some complexity issues.

We really want to hear some concrete examples of how we can improve the system, and I think your feedback would be valuable. I wonder if, in one minute or less, you have any concrete examples on how we can improve the composition, the structure and the reporting requirements, and perhaps reduce some of the complexity.

Mr. Terry Shaw: I'll commit to providing a written submission on that, because I can't get into it in one minute or less. I would also defer to my colleagues, Scott and Greg.

Just to answer your question, it would be some kind of help desk or user desk, something like that to help people through the process. People such as Mr. Carvajal are welcome and a good resource, but it shouldn't take involving a lawyer to get through the process. That's where I'll leave it in the time I have.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Okay. Thank you for submitting the document you're going to submit with all your ideas included in it. It will be very helpful.

[Translation]

Mr. Groleau, thank you for telling us about the situation for Quebec farmers, especially given that the unemployment rate is 6% in that province and the growth rate is 8% in the agriculture sector. The problem needs to be corrected.

First, you talked about one way to improve the process, which is to extend the validity of the work permit to two years.

Why are you proposing two years instead of three or five years? Is the number fixed or are you just looking to increase the number of years?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: What I'd like to see is an increase in the number of years. In other words, the LMIA and work permits should be valid for two, three or five years.

There should be a way to streamline the process used to control the movement of temporary foreign workers, especially in the agricultural sector. These are seasonal workers, who come here for six to eight months. I understand that the government wants to have some control over their movements, but the process currently in place is far too cumbersome. It can and should be simplified.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: I find the idea very interesting.

I have another question for you. You mentioned that the working group felt that 24 questions could easily be removed from the LMIA application form to simplify it. You shared this with the Government of Quebec. Have you done the same for the Government of Canada?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes. We shared it with them, too. The working group was mandated to simplify the form.

• (1625)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you very much.

[English]

My last—

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: I apologize for taking your time, but this is probably the last time I'll be able to speak. So I'd just like to mention to the committee that foreign workers aren't goods that we import. They're humans. We are welcoming humans into our country, and they should be treated as such.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Mr. Groleau.

[English]

This is my last line of questioning, and I don't know how much time I have left.

This is for you, Mr. Carvajal. First of all, thank you for speaking to some of the challenges with the recent announcement that was made. We very much appreciate that and look forward to rectifying that for future announcements and to perhaps working with you and others across the country to do that.

I was wondering if you could talk a bit about some of the things in—

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

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: We will now move on to Madame Normandin.

You will have two minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Groleau, I'll give you a little more time to answer the questions. I would also invite you, if you wish, to submit in writing the list of questions that could be removed from the LMIA application form. This could be part of the recommendations we'll make in the report.

You talked about workplace audits being done to ensure worker safety. We know that money was announced in the last budget to enhance oversight. In Quebec, however, jurisdiction for these audits is shared.

Is it correct to say that in some cases there is duplication and that it's not necessarily to the benefit of employers or employees?

Mr. Marcel Groleau: You raise a very good point. We'd like there to be an agreement between both governments so that only one is responsible for these audits. Ideally, for us, it would be the Government of Quebec that would assume that responsibility.

Ms. Christine Normandin: In a minute, I'd like you to tell us about the flexibility of work permits. Is it a good idea to analyze the possibility of having permits that aren't necessarily tied to the employer, but that would be tied to a sector, that is, by type of work or by region?

As you mentioned, the Bellechasse region has a much lower unemployment rate than other regions.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: In the case of farm workers, we are very much in favour of having the permit apply to more than one company. It would then be a sectoral permit. It would simplify things a lot and would avoid the need for a second permit.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Ultimately, the permit could be regional in some cases, with a maximum number.

Mr. Marcel Groleau: Yes. Here, some employees come to pick apples and then go to prune Christmas trees. Others arrive earlier, and they pick asparagus before going to other agricultural sectors. In agriculture, some seasons are relatively short, depending on the production. So that the workers—

[English]

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

We will now end our first panel with Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thanks very much.

I'll just quickly go to Andrew to finish my last question. I wonder whether or not he has seen industries that he has represented face the issues that I raised.

Then I'll go to Mr. Shaw on a different question.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: I'm sorry, MP Kwan. I don't remember the question, but if it's related specifically to agriculture, perhaps Monsieur Groleau might be better at answering that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: My question was basically about the problems with the border and that experience. I wonder whether or not the problem with regard to Switch Health has been fixed.

Mr. Andrew Carvajal: I wouldn't be able to speak so much about that.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Groleau: We'll know more later this week. We'll get details of the agreement with the new company for services in Quebec late this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

We are hopeful that this will go much better than with Switch Health.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay, thank you.

I have one quick question for Mr. Shaw.

We all talked about pathways. I think what is needed, though, is actually a permanent residence status initiative or stream from the government that targets the whole range of skills: high, medium and low skills.

I wonder if Mr. Shaw can speak to that.

Mr. Terry Shaw: The only comment I would make is we agree. Again, the vast majority of our industry that utilizes the program doesn't do so on a temporary or seasonal basis. The people we are bringing to Canada we are hoping to keep here in Canada as permanent employees.

I would agree that despite the skill level of transport truck driver under the NOC system, we are trying to bring these people here, so a consistent and more effective path to permanent residency for these temporary foreign workers is desired for our industry, absolutely.

• (1630)

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, your time is up. We will end our first panel here.

Thank you to all the witnesses for providing your important input towards this study. If there is anything you were not able to bring

today, you can always send a written submission to the clerk of the committee and we will take that into consideration.

I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that we can allow the witnesses for the second panel to please log in. Thank you.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1630)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

Good afternoon, everyone, and thanks to the witnesses for appearing before the committee today. I welcome you to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks today.

We have Vilma Pagaduan appearing as an individual. She's an advocate for caregivers and settlement workers. We are also hearing today from the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council, being represented by Mark Chambers, co-chair of the agriculture and agri-food labour task force; and Mr. Cyr Couturier, the chair. We also have today, from Lehal Law, Kamaljit Lehal, barrister and solicitor.

On behalf of all the members, I welcome all the witnesses today.

We will start with Vilma Pagaduan. Please proceed. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

• (1635)

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan (Advocate for Caregivers and Settlement Workers, As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Vilma Pagaduan, and I thank you so much for this privilege.

I came to Canada in August 2007 under the live-in caregiver program. My experience of having gone through the system myself has led me to become an advocate for men and women when their voices can't be heard.

I am a settlement worker and most recently have been working with farm workers. I have been seeing the most unthinkable experiences that migrant workers are going through, which has been further compounded with the pandemic. I have been organizing many town hall events relating to immigration and been engaged in a variety of IRCC consultation meetings for policy change.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to share my recommendations with you today.

Only a fraction of employers are exempted from LMIAs. The majority of employers still have to provide an LMIA. Caregivers who are already in Canada should not be required to obtain a new LMIA if they wish to extend or renew their work permit and they're working for the same employer. My recommendation is to completely remove the LMIA for applicants applying for an extension of their work permit when working for the same employer.

I find the education and English criteria very discriminatory. If you notice, the agri-food immigration pilot program and the Atlantic program are in the low-skilled level and NOC C category, the same as for caregivers, but these two pilot programs require only secondary education, whereas the caregiver program requires at least one year of post-secondary education. The two pilots require an English level of only CLB 4, whereas caregivers are required to have CLB 5. Most of these caregivers are women, women of colour and women from Southeast Asian countries. My recommendation is to remove these two criteria for PR applications. Open a separate public policy program for caregivers.

I strongly suggest that IRCC open a pathway, similar to an interim pathway, that will accommodate those who fall through the cracks, and open it for longer than one year so they will have time to gather documents from overseas.

Many who were already here before the opening of the new pilot program will not be able to meet the criteria. These are men and women who are working in hospital settings and nursing homes. They are frontline workers during the COVID pandemic, day in and day out, never getting a day off because of employment restrictions given by the employer. Some of these applicants have been in the caregiver program for four or five years, but have no pathway to permanent residence where they and their family members can be reunited. H and C is not an option because families, especially children, will be left behind. My recommendation is that IRCC remove the cap and that the processing time be six months only.

I have a question about the cap of 2,750 for the home child care program. Who determines that cap? Did they conduct a study on that cap, and what basis do they have? Is that based on the numbers of caregivers coming to Canada?

Applicants from February 2019 under the interim pathway finally received their first acknowledgement of receipt when IRCC sent out massive AORs in mid-March. My recommendation is that they be given an open work permit as soon as they open the application. This was the rule previously. When an LCP applicant submitted their application, they were issued an open work permit so they could continue to work while their application was in process. This way, vulnerable temporary foreign workers can continue to work without the risk of being exploited because they do not have money to cover basic necessities like food and shelter.

Currently there are many employers and other third parties who are exploiting these vulnerable workers because they need to maintain ties with an employer or because they have no other option for work. Note that these workers' health insurance also expires with their work permit, so they also do not have access to health care in these COVID times. Open work permits should also be granted to spouses and children whose PR application has already been submitted to the IRCC, to demonstrate that Canada is indeed serious about family reunification.

If the government is serious about meeting the shortage of manpower, my recommendation is that it give amnesty to undocumented individuals who are already in Canada. They are working in farms, factories and malls. They even clean government offices. Let them pay taxes for all the years they have been here in Canada.

Make a payment plan. Canada should follow the example of France, where applicants are given status and even citizenship.

• (1640)

Whether they be CLB 4 or CLB 5, IRCC should consider the application if the applicant is able to achieve the band score of CLB 4 or 5, even if it is not the exact same composition based on the equivalency chart. We have clients whose family members passed away during the pandemic, and studying after long work hours, dealing with the loss of the family member and dealing with their own dilemma in Canada makes it so hard for them to study. My recommendation—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Pagaduan. Your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go into the round of questioning.

We will now go to Ms. Lehal.

Ms. Lehal, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You may please proceed.

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal (Barrister and Solicitor, Lehal Law): Thank you.

I'm a lawyer. My primary area of practice is immigration law. Many of the immigration clients I represent are the most vulnerable in our community. For instance, I have advocated on behalf of out-of-status women, along with other stakeholders, at policy round tables created by this government. Recommendations were made for a fast-track process for these victims of violence. These were accepted, and we now have the expedited TRP for victims of violence. My personal contribution was the coding "FV" to help recognize and expedite these applications.

I welcome the opportunity today to collaborate for the betterment of those who are the most vulnerable in our community. I'd like to share with you a couple of scenarios that my office has seen or heard of that pertain to the topic of LMIA's. The first is regarding fees for LMIA's, and the second is regarding foreign workers who are injured while in Canada with a Canadian employer and the effect on their work permit status.

On the first issue, what I'm about to share is not new, but it is important because, essentially, on a regular basis, my office receives phone calls from foreign nationals who have been charged illegal and extravagant fees to obtain an LMIA. We hear the all-too-familiar scenario of foreign nationals having paid fees in the tens of thousands of dollars, averaging around \$40,000 to \$50,000 and upwards. It is usually an employer or a consultant cohort that has charged these sorts of fees. The monies are paid in cash, making it very difficult to prove that they were received by these individuals.

After paying these monies, as we've heard from the people who are calling in, some of them are still being charged by the employer for the monthly employer remittances or made to work long hours to cover these remittances. Some are told there is no work, and they end up being compelled out of desperation into a fraudulent scheme whereby employer remittances are made but no actual work is done. The immigrant gets caught in a web of deceit by unscrupulous persons who are taking advantage of a system that places a lot of power and control in their hands.

What is the recourse for these individuals, who are usually in low-paying and low-skilled jobs? There is a complaints process to, for example, the consultant disciplinary body, but unfortunately there are not a lot of teeth to that body in terms of being able to do anything.

Many immigrants are too afraid to report the complaint for fear of deportation or fear for their own safety. We recently had an individual share an account with us of the employer showing him a gun to discourage him from bringing forward any complaints about what has been happening to him.

We have seen recent enforcement efforts being made by the CB-SA to crack down on employers and consultants.

I just want to pause here and say that there are many good employers, but there are a few who are taking advantage of the most vulnerable workers coming into Canada. These people are sophisticated, so even if there is a crackdown and they're caught, what we are hearing is that they are simply opening shop again under a different banner, to try to prey again like vultures. Perhaps this time, however, there are criminal proceedings being brought, and there will be more of a deterrent effect. However, the concern I see is that while we have an enforcement process, this process is time-consuming in terms of investigative time, and is reactive in responding to a crisis scenario.

In my opinion, we need something that is more proactive—something that will take away control from unscrupulous consultants and employers. For instance, one of the local organizations in B.C., the Hope Welfare Society, approached me to suggest a novel idea of the ESDC perhaps taking an inventory of foreign immigrants who are already in Canada and looking for work, to match them with genuine employers who are looking for workers. This would eliminate the front-end extortion by unscrupulous individuals and help those who are already in Canada.

I'm not sure if there is capacity to create something like this, and I would see it benefiting low-skilled individuals and workers, but I think it's helpful to start rethinking how we're tackling this issue, brainstorming, and finding a way that's more proactive to dismantle the illegal and opportunistic scheming that a few individuals are utilizing.

- (1645)

I know I have only a few more minutes. I just want to raise another scenario that I've seen. It's foreign workers who have been injured while working in Canada with a Canadian employer. These individuals end up in a workers' compensation process, where they are usually helped to find work, rehabilitate and get skills to get back into the workforce. However, if they're not able to return to

their pre-injury employer due to permanent functional impairments, they have to find another employer. Being disabled, it's harder for them to find an employer who is willing to go to the effort of obtaining an LMIA.

The Chair: Ms. Lehal, your time is up. You will get an opportunity to talk further when we go into our round of questioning.

We will now move to the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council. Mr. Chambers and Mr. Couturier will share the time.

You will both have, together, five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please start.

Mr. Cyr Couturier (Chair, Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council): Thank you. My name is Cyr Couturier, and I'm the chair of the Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council.

I'm an aquaculture scientist and chair of the aquaculture programs at Memorial University, as well as the director on many industry associations, including the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. I'm also a past president of some other national farmer associations, providing about \$3 billion in GDP and 30,000 jobs to middle-class Canadians.

The workforce needs in Canada's agriculture industry are something that CAHRC has been examining for more than 10 years. Through our focused labour market intelligence research, it's clear that the industry cannot continue to produce healthy, safe and affordable food for Canadians and for global consumers without ensuring that workers are secured and in place to do their jobs. The COVID pandemic has put a greater spotlight on this.

I can confirm that there's no more time to waste. We must work towards longer-term and systemic solutions to the persistent labour shortages that the agriculture industry is facing.

CAHRC's labour market research has clarified that job vacancies are exceptionally high in agriculture compared to other industries. For example, they resulted, in 2018, according to our LMI research, in a loss of \$3 billion in revenue to farmers. The inability of farmers to fill all of their vacant positions with either Canadian or foreign workers makes the business of food production in Canada very stressful and difficult. International workers come to Canada to work on farms and fill positions when Canadians can't be found. Although approximately 60,000 foreign workers are brought in each year, thousands of vacancies still persist. There were 16,500 vacancies in 2018. In fact, workforce shortages are doubling every 10 years.

The latest assessment indicates that the labour gap of Canadians available to work in this sector is 63,000 a year. It's expected to grow to 123,000 by 2029. Businesses that are unable to fill the vacancies face excessive stress and production losses. Many report delaying expansion plans and forgoing operations. Securing a full team of workers is challenging for farmers at any time. It's especially challenging during a pandemic, yet the pandemic has highlighted that food production is part of Canada's critical infrastructure in maintaining the ability for food businesses to operate effectively, even during a global health crisis. It's critically important to us all. Food businesses continue to operate through the pandemic, and thankfully have been designated as essential workplaces, so that Canadian families can continue to eat homegrown fruits, vegetables, meat, seafood, dairy and grains.

However, keeping agriculture businesses operational has not been easy for either industry or government due to extensive labour shortages and unique workforce management challenges. COVID has highlighted not only how complex it is to maintain public health during a pandemic but also just how important and complex it is to manage workforce issues in this sector of the Canadian industry.

Labour-related shortages were exacerbated in 2020 due to the pandemic. Our recently released study on the impacts of COVID-19 on labour was shown to cost primary agriculture \$2.9 billion in lost revenue last year, simply owing to COVID-19 impacts. I can forward that report if you're interested.

COVID has certainly put a spotlight on the need for focused attention to address the persistent and pervasive issues of workforce shortages that continue to undermine the industry's ability to operate at full capacity. Industry continues to stress the need for stabilizing worker availability and providing support for farm business owners through the pandemic and beyond.

The industry relies on temporary foreign worker programs to fill position vacancies when Canadian workers are unavailable, so the efficiency of Canada's temporary foreign worker program is critical.

Since the workforce challenges facing the agriculture and agri-food sector are not temporary, the sector needs an integrated, permanent solution to this long-standing and growing problem—one that includes workable immigration pathways for agriculture and agri-food workers. The proposed pathway to permanency announced by the government just a few weeks ago may provide part of the solution for agriculture and agri-food labour shortages. However, other solutions may be needed.

I'd like to introduce my colleague, Mr. Mark Chambers. He is the co-chair of Canada's agriculture and agri-food labour task force, as well as vice-president of Canadian pork production at Sunterra Farms Limited, a family-owned business that focuses on pig production and meat processing in Alberta, serving Canadian and global customers.

Mr. Chambers.

• (1650)

Mr. Mark Chambers (Co-Chair, Agriculture and Agri-Food Labour Task Force, Canadian Agricultural Human Resource Council): Thank you, Cyr.

Thank you to everyone for allowing us to meet with you this afternoon and discuss this very important issue.

During COVID, farms and food businesses have been struggling with expensive uncertainty about meeting their staff needs—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Chambers. Your time is up. We allow five minutes to all witnesses to provide their opening remarks. You can talk further as we go into our round of questioning.

Now we will start with our first round of questioning, which is for six minutes each. We will start with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Allison, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

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

That's always the way it is with partners: someone gets all time and the other guy doesn't get any time at all.

Mark, don't take all my time, but do you want to take a few seconds to say what you wanted to leave with us? What was your message?

Mr. Mark Chambers: Well, my message is very similar to Cyr's. It's not a temporary issue that we have with agriculture and agri-food. It's a permanent labour shortage, and we need to create permanent solutions for this.

What I mean by this is that is we rely on the foreign worker program. Overseas workers who come in augment the Canadian workforce, so we need to have good pathways to ensure that we can fill that labour need and have a solid Canadian food production system in Canada. We don't want to necessarily rely on imports. We have a massive land base in Canada and we know that we either have to produce the protein here or we have to export that production and someone else is going to produce it. The idea would be to keep that production in Canada and ensure that we have a workforce that can grow those crops, raise those animals and process that meat when it comes to the end.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thanks, Mark.

I was going to point that out. This is not a first-time shortage for labour. This has been a permanent shortage all along. The challenge I have, or the suggestions that I need you guys to give us, is that we're talking about the food security of our country, and we really do need to figure this out.

Cyr, you talked about a loss of \$3 billion, but I guess the challenge is that when we start talking about food production, you guys are on the front lines. At the end of the day, if we don't figure out the labour piece.... If you don't put food in the ground, you can't harvest it, and if you don't produce more pork, fish or salmon, whatever it is.... You don't get to harvest that if you don't have the resources needed to put it in. That's a pretty fair assessment. It's not just a loss of dollars, but a complete loss of production that down the road could lead to shortages. Is that correct?

Mr. Mark Chambers: Yes, it's absolutely correct. The past 12 months during COVID have really sent the message home to me.

I don't know if any of you have driven around car dealerships lately and tried to look at buying a new vehicle—a new truck or something—but they have very little on the lot. We're relying on those cars being manufactured in Mexico or assembled in the U.S. or wherever and coming to Canada, but during COVID, with all the slowdowns and border issues, we've not been able to bring those in.

Luckily, the borders have remained open to let food move north and south, but if we ever run into an issue where food cannot move north and south, we're going to be in real trouble if we don't have a solid, food-secure system in Canada.

• (1655)

Mr. Cyr Couturier: Yes, and the labour force.

Mr. Mark Chambers: Right, and the labour force.

Mr. Dean Allison: Absolutely, and listen, I couldn't agree more. Food security is one of those things that we need to be looking at and we should be doing.

You guys talked about this in some of your other briefings. I don't know if you've mentioned it here, but I have seen in some of your previous briefings a dedicated workforce program per se. Once again, you're suggesting that there would be something in place. We've had a lot of industries, quite frankly, that have said, listen, it's the same thing, and we go for it every year, back and forth, because this is a very critical industry.

You're looking at something that would be helpful specifically for your industry. You talked about the “pathway to permanency”, which we can talk about in a second, but explain what you're thinking about in terms of a dedicated workforce program.

Mr. Mark Chambers: Well, we want to try to lose the stigma. There are two parts to agriculture and agri-food. There is the seasonal program, which is seasonal due to the nature of the business. The crops are planted in the spring. They grow through the summer. They're harvested in the fall. That's a season. A lot of seasonal workers come. There's a need for that program, but there's also the year-round work that we have: year-round on the fisheries side, year-round on the livestock side, and year-round on the meat-processing side. That's a program we need. We've talked about this in the past. A few years ago, when I testified, we talked about a dedicated agriculture and agri-food workforce program whereby we'd lose the stigma of the “temporary”. It's not temporary.

Our goal is to bring folks here, and if they like Canada and we like them, we create a pathway for them to become a permanent resident, year-round, in Canada. On the agriculture side there are some programs available, especially in light of the new one that just

recently opened up as well. The challenge on the meat-processing side is that we have a cap on the percentage of farm workers we can have. That really inhibits the ability to grow or maintain consistent production. The company I work for, Sunterra Farms, has a meat-processing plant in rural Alberta, in Trochu. It's a small town. It's difficult to attract people to rural Canada, period. When we bring in workers, they come and they settle in that community. They've grown that community. It's been a big benefit. Then, once they're there for a year or two, they find that it's home, so they stay there. Trying to get people to move from a city to rural Canada is really difficult.

Our goal is to make sure we have a program that doesn't impede the ability of the businesses to grow or succeed. We grow hogs as well. A lot of hogs we send across the border and grow in the U.S. We'd like to grow more in Canada, but we can't raise more in Canada because we won't be able to process them in our plant. It's already at maximum capacity. We can't grow that plant because we can't hire more workers from overseas; we're already at the 20% cap.

Our goal is to be able to bring those people in, and as soon as they all have a pathway to permanency as quickly as possible, we would no longer count them in terms of the cap, and we would continue to focus that way.

Mr. Dean Allison: Thanks. I'll just note that I think it's very important that if we're going to patrol and protect our supply chains, we need to look at a way we can actually do that in Canada. Production is one of those things. We sell a lot of raw products out of this country, but I think we need to do a better job with in-country production.

Thanks, guys.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

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

Thank you to all the presenters.

Ms. Lehal, you mentioned all those things to do with the LMIA fraud and the money-gouging schemes that you are hearing about. I'm hearing the same things. I update the minister from time to time. You mentioned ESDC. Any time the employer is involved, I personally believe that no matter what we do, they're going to find a way to gouge money from these vulnerable people. I am sure you will agree with that as well, because this is how they found out.

In terms of how to stop it, we as a government have taken some positive steps. We put up \$40 million to incorporate a body that will govern those consultants you talked about, just as you are governed by the law society, I am governed as a professional engineer and B.C. landscapers are governed by their own peers.

We also brought in 27,232 through the express entry draw, for which the point level was dropped to 75. Almost everyone under the age of 30 with one year of experience will get in. They don't need all those LMIAs. There are 90,000 others, including 40,000 students, who don't need LMIAs; 30,000 essential workers, which include farm workers all the way to professionals; and 20,000 health care professionals, starting with housekeeping workers and going all the way to doctors.

There are some obstacles. How do you see that a policy like this will help those vulnerable individuals? What should government be doing moving forward? Should we bring in further policies like this? Also, how can we improve the LMIA process?

• (1700)

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal: I acknowledge that there have been a number of initiatives by the government to address individuals who are struggling to find a pathway. We saw the situation where the marks to get in under the express entry were lowered.

The difficulty that we find as counsel is that these initiatives spring up, and we're not given much notice, and then we have clients scrambling and trying to figure out who is going to fit in what scenario. There is a real panic, trying to reach out to clients to say, "Okay, we think you qualify under this one or this one."

My concern is that while the numbers are.... You've said the "90,000" pathway. Those numbers are going to fill up very quickly, and there is still a huge group of people who are left out of it. I think one of the speakers spoke about undocumented workers. Unfortunately, because they have been caught up in this scheming process, they end up being undocumented; otherwise, they were well-intentioned individuals. I'm not exactly sure what options are available to them, but they need to be addressed.

I take note of the active enforcement steps that have been taken by the government, but we still need to think out of the box and come up with something that's more proactive.

I hear you, Mr. Dhaliwal, that unscrupulous employers will still find ways to sabotage the system, but part of that is educating people who are coming from regions.... I believe, for example, if we look at the students who come in, the bulk of the students come from India and China. I've travelled to India, and I've seen the big signs up there about "Get to Canada". They're huge, and people are being misled. Some front-end work in shedding the light on what the truth is in terms of options for emigrating to Canada is important. Then, for the workers we have here who have become stuck in

these schemes or who otherwise are not getting work, why not use them by matching them up with some good employers—some sort of system? One system I was suggesting was using the ESDC to match these potential workers with genuine employers.

Good work has been done, but there are still a lot of gaps that need to be addressed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: You mentioned undocumented workers. Before the COVID-19 situation escalated, Ms. Dhillon and I met with some refugee claimants from Montreal. They came and met us on the Hill. They were able to speak perfect French and perfect English. They've been working here for the last 10, 15 or 20 years, but their cases weren't finalized.

I'm sure you are getting similar cases. Would you suggest that the government have a plan, similar to the one we brought in for 90,000 people, to deal with refugee claimants who have been here for a very long time?

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal: I understand the conundrum of the government. We see this in some decisions, where comments are made that they've stayed under the radar and they've misused our immigration process. However, many of these people have been giving back, but have been taken advantage of because they are undocumented. There should be a pathway available to them to get some status in Canada.

We have the agency applications, of course, and they take a long time. Many of these people don't want to risk going that route, because then they become known, and they're worried about being deported.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: How about the caregivers? We are bringing in a program to fast-track 6,000 applications. Do you have enough time for them to get organized?

Also, on the 90,000—

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

We will now move on to Madame Normandin. You will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being with us today.

My first questions are for Mr. Chambers and you, Mr. Couturier, if the people you represent also work in processing and not just in agricultural production.

Mr. Chambers, you mentioned that the 10% or 20% limit on foreign workers is a barrier. You also said that we could solve this problem by granting permanent residence more quickly. However, I'd like you to tell us about the speed of the process.

Would it be a good idea to raise the limit, especially in some regions where the unemployment rate is very low, for instance?

• (1705)

[English]

Mr. Cyr Couturier: It would be a good idea to raise that limit, especially in areas where there's low unemployment, but also in areas of high unemployment. The reality is that in animal processing or food processing, there are shortages in many parts of the country. There's lots of unemployment as well. How can we encourage Canadians to go there? That's going to be part of the solution.

I'll let Mark talk about the limit.

Mr. Mark Chambers: Increasing the limit is important. It's a way to get more folks in from overseas and get them on a pathway to permanency. It's very difficult when just a small percentage of folks come in. They have to learn the Canadian system, take their English test, do a lot of different things and assimilate into Canadian communities. Having a small cap makes it very difficult to get enough people through that. However, I don't think it should be a free-for-all so that it's wide open and there's no intent to create a pathway to permanency. Our goal has always been.... The foreign worker program has always been a stepping stone to a pathway to permanent residency, but the cap has restricted the ability to get enough people through there.

We've always worked on that premise, and we know we're not going to keep everyone. Rural Canada is not for everyone, but if we can, we'll keep a lot of people. Some of those folks will move to other sectors and work in other sectors, and those are the jobs we need to fill. As our goal, if we can get people landed in rural Canada and not have restrictions such as a cap that prevents us from getting enough people there, raising the cap.... Before, something like 50% was much more workable and gave us the ability to transition a lot more people through to permanent residency, grow the business and continue to keep the small, rural Canadian communities sustainable.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

We sometimes hear comments that this shouldn't become an open bar to prevent abuse and that foreign workers are seen as cheap labour. It's complicated to bring in foreign labour, and there's a lot of paperwork to deal with.

Generally speaking, companies prefer using Canadian labour when it's available. Is that true?

[English]

Mr. Mark Chambers: That's true, but there's a myth there. You made a comment about cheap labour. The myth is not true. A lot of the meat plants today are unionized. Our plant is unionized as well, so the wages are set for all Canadians and all workers that come in to the plant, regardless of which country they're coming from. It's not cheap labour. A new foreign worker who arrives is hired the same way as a Canadian who arrives, and as they progress through their skill set and learn things, they move equally, whether they're a Canadian or a worker from overseas. The other part is that when you bring in a foreign worker, you're burdened with more costs—a pile of them—than you would have for a Canadian.

The myth people keep thinking, that workers coming from overseas are cheap, is completely misunderstood. It's very expensive to bring people here from overseas when you have to pay their flight, set up their house and make sure you get their banking, SIN numbers and health cards sorted out. There's a huge cost to that.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Cyr Couturier: I would add that this is very true, but it's not only that. For example, in Mr. Dhaliwal's riding, we have seafood processing plants that are probably going to be closed. Most of the folks there have become Canadians or permanent residents, and they're very well paid.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Ms. Lehal, workers are sometimes held hostage by employers. These workers can't easily find another job because the work permits are closed.

If workers were allowed to work at another location for a certain period of time without penalty, say for 30 days, would that be a good way to limit this hostage-taking and provide more security for workers?

• (1710)

[English]

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal: Well, we already have the open work permit for vulnerable workers option available, but it takes time.

I hear what you're saying. If there were some immediate measure or step that someone could take to get out because the processing in the other vulnerable worker route takes time, it would be helpful—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Lehal. The time is up for Madame Normandin.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can proceed, please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I will go Vilma, please.

Before I get you to finish up what you have to say, I'd like to ask you this first question.

With respect to the announcement the government made about two weeks ago on the PR process for caregivers, I wonder what your thoughts are, especially with respect to the question around the cap.

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: The cap for caregivers is 2,750 for home child care providers. Recently, on April 8, they made an announcement that the cap is almost reached and the IRCC is encouraging caregivers to apply for the new public policy.

Unfortunately, this new public policy is very disproportionately distributed. As you can see, 40,000 goes to international students. For the 20,000 cap, there are 40 different occupations fighting for this stream. For the 30,000, 95 different occupations are also fighting for the stream. If the international student is working as a cashier under NOC 6611 in stream A and she's also working as a retail salesperson under stream B, NOC 6421, in reality these programs qualify the international student, whereas caregivers cannot qualify for all these streams. This is disproportionately distributed, especially for vulnerable migrant workers.

I was talking to the advocates in P.E.I. For farm workers in P.E.I., their employment is located too far away from language testing. The employment for caregivers in Nunavut is also far from language testing. They have to fly from their place of employment to the testing centre.

Nowadays, because of the pandemic, the libraries are closed. The community centres are closed. These migrant workers are living or working in the middle of nowhere. They don't have access to a computer or to the Internet and they are fighting to get into this program. They are competing with doctors, pharmacists and highly skilled and tech-savvy people. We're talking about international students who are young professionals working nowadays in organizations or corporations, with the Internet and a computer.

Also, the first-in and first-out rule really excludes migrant workers in this program, because whoever is in the city with all these technologies can actually apply right away. When it opens on May 6, I'm sure the system will crash. When the announcement was made on April 14, the following day the websites of IELTS and CELPIP crashed. When they opened it and restored the website, the next available schedule for IELTS was September and the next available for CELPIP was December.

How can these migrant workers compete with doctors and pharmacists and highly skilled people? Obviously, this program is not for migrant workers.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Would you propose, then, that the government actually bring in a separate immigration stream for caregivers?

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On that, I know the communities have called for landed status on arrival for some time now. I wonder if you want to comment on what the permanent program for landed status on arrival for caregivers should look like.

• (1715)

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: We've been advocating that all those applying from outside and overseas should be given permanent residency upon arrival. Nowadays, when applicants from outside are applying for this program, they have to wait for one year. It should not be the case.

Most of the time, these applicants from outside... We never heard of anybody coming into Canada because of the restrictions of the language and education and those criteria. Also, they have to spend more money outside for the educational credentials. They're paying dollars and they're working and earning pesos. More caregivers are being refused outside, and we don't see anyone coming into Canada compared to years ago, when the LCP was introduced.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With respect to a permanent program, first, the government should provide a permanent residence on arrival program for caregivers, with a specific allocation of spots and no requirements for language and all those things that the government has put in place that have now become a barrier.

With respect to the caregivers who are already here, because now it would perhaps be difficult for those individuals to compete for the spots that are available with the announcement, what should the government do?

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: They should open different pathways for them, exclusively for caregivers, because they have been here for such a long time and they're still waiting for their permanent residency. The pathways should be exclusive to caregivers, with no cap, and accessible. The English language test should be removed, because this is clearly a barrier for them—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan. You have four minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

Ms. Pagaduan, this caregivers program is something that in my experience, through my own office, has seemed so delayed, even until this recent announcement. A lot of people are suffering.

Can you speak a little more to this 12-month wait period? It seems a really long time and it's not very specific.

Suppose someone doesn't have all their documents and didn't put in the application or something is missing. It doesn't specify where the 12 months start from, or where the 12 months end.

Can you please give a little more information on how you see that and what requirements it should have in it?

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: Actually, that's the same question we asked the former IRCC minister, Ahmed Hussen, because during the announcement of the introduction of the interim pathway and the new program, he said there was going to be one year of processing for these PR applications.

When the interim pathway opened in February 2019, and in the fall, he said the processing time was one year. However, the caregivers received their first AOR, or acknowledgement of receipt, only this mid-March, from March 2019.

Where does the 12 months of processing start? We don't know, because until now, they're still waiting. They applied in February 2019 and only received the AOR in March of this year.

The government really has to give attention to the caregivers and the migrant workers because of the long separation of the family. The family reunification is not there. Canada's promise of family reunification is not being addressed. Many caregivers' families are passing because of COVID, and they have to deal with that issue.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Vilma, thank you so much for sharing with us.

Ms. Lehal, you mentioned that these announcements have been causing a lot of uncertainty and a bunch of panic for a lot of people. People are given English tests. They're overwhelmed right now because of these announcements that come out of nowhere.

We've seen this over and over again, where they throw a bunch of a money, millions and billions of dollars, into a program, but it doesn't really solve the actual issue.

You brought up an issue of these consultants. They give cash, and these consultants can go around even after being caught. How do you see this loophole being fixed? What do you see that would help the most vulnerable people who come here?

• (1720)

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal: Fixing that is the golden question. We've been trying that for years.

As I said, it would be some sort of front-end approach. What we're trying to do right now is put a lot of money and resources into investigating individuals who we suspect are abusing the system and taking advantage of workers. That's a lot of back-end stuff now happening after the fact.

There's definitely good work, but it's a lot of time and resources into investigations, and then we'll have trials in the court.

What I'm suggesting is something more at the front end, along the lines of some type of matching system. I've mentioned a suggestion from one of the community organizations. I don't know if it's doable, but it's a thought, and let's get the thoughts out there. They suggest something where the ESDC takes control over, perhaps, workers who are already in Canada looking for employment, and matches them up with employers.

We've heard from the agriculture industry that they're desperate. They're looking for people, and we have workers who are looking for employers. Is there a possibility of creating a system where we can match the two?

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much for that. Continuing on, Ms. Lehal, when we see all these announcements—these 27,000 new ones—at the same time, we're still dealing in all of our offices with these great backlogs that—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Hallan. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Regan.

Mr. Regan, you will have four minutes for your round of questioning. You can please proceed.

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

Mr. Couturier, I think you are in St. John's, Newfoundland. I am in Nova Scotia right now, but I expect you're probably very familiar

with the Atlantic immigration pilot. I know you folks are talking about the importance of an integrated, permanent solution to the issues of the workforce in agriculture, and I appreciate that. That may well make it into the committee's report.

However, let me ask you about the Atlantic immigration pilot, the rural and northern immigration pilot and the other pilots that have been put in place. For instance, for the Atlantic immigration pilot, a labour market impact assessment is not required. Do you feel that that kind of idea should be expanded more broadly? If so, with which partners? Of course, the pilot here in Atlantic Canada is with the provincial governments. What's your view on that?

Mr. Cyr Couturier: The pilot seems to be working, so if you want to expand it to other partners and other provinces, then that would be a good thing, rather than just restricting it to agri-food or agriculture.

Hon. Geoff Regan: My question is this: It's with the provinces, right, but should it be with sectors instead, or with certain other kinds of organizations in some fashion?

Mr. Cyr Couturier: I guess it could be with ESDC or with CAHRC, for example, which represents a sector, or another sort of group that represents a sector, if that's the will of the government. CAHRC, for example, has great credibility in the sector with governments all across the country, so for agriculture and agri-food it would make more sense. We are supported by ESDC in our research in particular.

I think that's a good idea, Mr. Regan, that it be some other group that takes that on.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Does that current model there work, or should there be, for example, sector-specific LMIA's?

Second, of all the various pilot programs, if you were to choose one of them, which one would you like to see become permanent?

Mr. Cyr Couturier: I'm going to be biased and say that the agriculture and agri-food one should become permanent. That's the sector I work in—and so does Mr. Chambers—and that's what CAHRC serves across the country, so I would say that would be a good idea.

Ms. Lehal mentioned that ESDC could help. I just want to mention in that context that ESDC could have a sort of job-matching program in different sectors as well. CAHRC already has a job-matching program for a number of new Canadians and people who are eligible to work, so we could get more involved in that.

It's different from the Atlantic immigration pilot, but I'm just saying there are ways of doing this outside of government, I guess, and working with governments.

• (1725)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Thanks very much.

I'd ask more, but I have about 10 seconds left, so it's back to you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Regan.

We will now proceed to Madam Normandin.

You will have two minutes for your round of questions. You can please proceed.

[*Translation*]

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

My question is for Ms. Lehal, but then I'll have another one for Mr. Couturier and Mr. Chambers.

Ms. Lehal, foreign workers are somewhat limited when it comes to training since they only have a work permit, not a study permit, which prevents them from upgrading their skills and gaining easier access to permanent residence.

Should we make it easier for them to access training?

[*English*]

Ms. Kamaljit Lehal: I would say they should be encouraged, especially since many of the pathways require, for example, a certain level of English, which I have concerns with because I'm not sure if those levels of English are required in any event. However, if that is going to be a criterion at some level, then why not encourage these workers to take on English courses or some other training that will increase their skill sets and benefit Canada even further?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Couturier, people sometimes tell us that one of their workers is exceptional and that they'd like to offer him the opportunity to work in another position. If the worker doesn't have all the qualifications, they can't train him.

Would making it easier for workers to access training be helpful for employers?

[*English*]

Mr. Cyr Couturier: I can answer that quickly.

Yes, in actual fact, CAHRC already has partnerships with certain sectors of the agricultural industry, whereby the employer can provide that training, in many different languages, to their employees, whether they're temporary foreign workers or working towards a pathway to permanency. We need to build upon that aspect and provide that—

The Chair: Can you please move your microphone closer to your mouth?

Mr. Cyr Couturier: I'm sorry again.

Yes, we already had those sorts of tools available through CAHRC for farmers to upgrade the skills of and provide those skills to their employees, whether Canadian or not, and to help them move up. This is available in some commodities in the Canadian agriculture sector. We need to expand that program, for sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Mr. Chambers, do you have anything to add?

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Normandin. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I only have two minutes left, so I'm going to give my time to Vilma to finish up her presentation, because I think she had other points that she didn't get a chance to make.

Ms. Vilma Pagaduan: I also would like to recommend that IRCC develop an online application system for the caregiver program. It will be a lot easier. They could have an AOR right away and hopefully receive an open work permit as soon as the application is open.

Caregivers outside of Canada must have an open work permit, and the processing time should be less than a year—approximately six months is my recommendation—so that they can have a life here in Canada as soon as possible.

Also, we have an issue with the mail, because so many applications are being lost. If IRCC had a global case management system whereby IRCC staff working from home had access to the database wherever they are in Canada....

Also, there are IRCC officers with inconsistent positions on applications. There are many health caregivers who have taken the exam several times and cannot apply for PR because they do not meet the English language requirement. Most IRCC officers nowadays, during the pandemic, have been refusing the applications and sending them directly to the H and C office in Vancouver.

Before the pandemic, caregivers with a language problem were applying for PR with a submission, and most officers considered the application and sent it to London. Most of our applicants were okay; they got their PR applications approved. Nowadays, however, during the pandemic, officers forward their applications to H and C.

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you.

You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I just want to say thank you to all the presenters. I think what we need to do, from the government side, is make some substantive changes and really recognize the value of these temporary foreign workers, especially the caregivers, and give them landed status upon arrival.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Thanks to all the witnesses for providing important input to the study we have undertaken. If there is anything you would like to submit in writing, if you were not able to discuss it today because of the lack of time, you can always do so. You can send your written submission to the clerk of the committee, and it will be circulated to all the members.

On behalf of all the members, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for giving us the time.

I see a hand raised by Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, before we adjourn I wonder whether you can advise committee members when we will be looking at the report for the Hong Kong study. We have done and completed that work already, so we should actually get on to writing the report. I see that it is not in the updated schedule that we just received. Before we slot too many other witnesses into the LMIA/caregiver study, could you advise when we will be studying the report and completing that time?

The Chair: I thank all the witnesses for appearing.

Before we adjourn, I would like to provide a clarification in respect to the question raised by Ms. Kwan.

We will be receiving the draft report on the Hong Kong measures on May 14. That is the date the analysts have given to us, when the draft report will be circulated to all the members.

Once the report is done, we will schedule a meeting to go through consideration of the draft report. I will work on that basis. It was not started because we are waiting for the draft report. Once we have it, this will definitely be put into the calendar.

With this, today's meeting comes to an end.

If it is the will of the committee, we will adjourn the meeting.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, could I ask one other thing?

One of our witnesses, Ms. Pagaduan, actually asked a number of questions. They pertained to IRCC.

Is it possible for committee members to receive those answers as we consider the work of this study?

The Chair: I will ask the clerk. Is that possible?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune): If I understand correctly, Ms. Kwan, are you asking if the questions raised by Ms. Pagaduan will be responded to by IRCC, and the responses provided to the committee?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes. Could we submit those questions to IRCC, so we can get the responses to the questions she raised as we consider the study?

The Clerk: I would propose that once the blues for today's meetings are published, I can extract the questions raised by Ms. Pagaduan and bring them to your attention. If you're in agreement with the wording, then I would be happy to forward them to IRCC and ask if it would provide written responses to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That would be fantastic. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, thanks for raising this question. I will get clarification on whether that is possible and whether witnesses can request that the IRCC provide some information. I will definitely look into it and provide further clarification when we meet next time.

The meeting is adjourned.

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