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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1640)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): Good afternoon. I call this meeting to order. Welcome to meeting number 30 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

The Board of Internal Economy requires that the committee 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, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of this meeting, and I thank everyone for their co-operation.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to House orders of January 25. 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 hear floor audio in English or French. With the latest Zoom version, you do not need to select the corresponding language channel before speaking. The “raise hand” feature is on the main toolbar. Should you wish to speak, 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 speakers list for all members.

Today we will be hearing from IRCC officials. They will be giving a briefing on the pathway to permanent residency for essential temporary workers and international graduates. They are appearing before the committee and will respond to questions on the new pathway program as well as respond to any questions on broader immigration figures.

I would like to welcome, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy, and Daniel Mills, assistant deputy minister, operations.

Thank you both for appearing before the committee today, and for all of the hard work that you do on behalf of all Canadians. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will go to a round of questions.

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

[Translation]

I will take a few moments to make some opening remarks, and after that, we would be happy to take your questions.

As the committee is aware, immigration is crucial to Canada's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and to our country's long-term prosperity. The importance of immigration for Canada underlines the need for an agile and responsive immigration system.

As you know, last fall, our minister announced an immigration levels plan for 2020-22 that aims to increase admissions to 1.2 million over three years.

• (1645)

[English]

At the time, and acknowledging uncertainty, we were optimistic that admissions would be supported by entrants from abroad, with the easing of border measures restricting travel for approved permanent residents. However, given the ongoing need for our current border and travel restrictions to protect the health and safety of people in Canada, the government is looking at some creative additional measures that aim to capitalize on the talent and contributions of immigrants who are already in Canada.

We have in fact known for years that temporary residents make good candidates for permanent residence, as many have formed community ties that help them make a seamless transition to permanent resident status. Accordingly, the government made a decision to use public policies to launch, on May 6, a one-time pathway to permanent residence for over 90,000 temporary residents already in Canada.

This initiative focuses on three particular groups. The first is the group of health care and some other essential workers who have been on the front line of getting us through the pandemic. The second group are international student graduates who have recently graduated from Canadian institutions, given the tremendous contribution these graduates make to our economy and our society. Third are French-speaking candidates who we hope will settle in and support the vitality of francophone minority communities outside Quebec.

These public policies will end on November 5, 2021, or once the program stream has reached its maximum intake limit. Those limits are 40,000 applications for international student graduates, 20,000 applications for temporary foreign workers in health care, and 30,000 applications for temporary foreign workers in other selected essential occupations. As noted, we have established streams for French-speaking applicants in these three groups. We have not set a limit on the number of applications we will take in these streams.

In terms of reaction to these initiatives, the stream for international graduates reached its capacity at midday on May 7, about 25 hours after it opened. We are monitoring the other streams. Information on the number of applications we are receiving is available in real time on the IRCC website.

Madam Chair, this pathway to permanent residence acknowledges the extraordinary service of newcomers to Canada throughout the pandemic.

[*Translation*]

On a wider level, it aims to both engage immigrants who are already here and to provide Canada with the workforce it needs for its economic recovery from the pandemic.

I hope this gives the committee some background regarding our recent actions.

We would now be happy to answer your questions.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Campbell Jarvis.

We will now go to our six-minute round of questions.

Mr. Hallan, we will start with you. Please go ahead for six minutes.

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

I want to take this time to really thank you, officials, not only for coming here on such short notice but also for making yourselves so available and doing such great work throughout this entire pandemic. Thank you again from all of us.

There are some immediate questions that come up for most people. First, given the big number of applications that are being accepted, do we have the capacity or resources with our current resources in order to handle the processing of these applications?

• (1650)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good afternoon, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the member for his question.

Yes, we are facing a significant challenge when it comes to processing capacity. However, we are convinced that we can process the applications we received last week. The department plans to process 35,000 to 44,000 of the applications received last week by December 31.

As you know, we focus our efforts on clients already in Canada. The fact that they are here makes it easier to process their applications. For applicants outside the country, the approach is different and a bit more complex. In addition, restrictions vary by country.

We have no doubt that we can achieve—

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Mills, but can you please move the microphone a little above your upper lip? The interpreters were having a bit of a problem.

You can start, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Would you like me to start over?

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead from where I interrupted you.

Mr. Daniel Mills: Okay, perfect.

[*Translation*]

To wrap up, I was saying that, with our current processing capacity, we are confident that we will be able to process between 35,000 and 44,000 applications by December 31 of this year.

[*English*]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Obviously, there are already so many problems with backlogs—and we hear this continually—especially when it comes to programs like family reunification, and we know the amount of mental stress the backlogs are causing.

Are we pulling resources away from other programs in order to process these applications first, or are we hiring new resources? Can you please elaborate?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

Yes, the department has redirected resources to prioritize family class applications, as previously announced. That is a top priority for us. I'm happy to report that we have made tremendous progress on those applications in recent months. We have processed more than 28,000 applications since January 1, a major increase in the past four months over previous years.

To support processing capacity, we hired staff to handle applications in Canada and we also reallocated resources in certain lines of business such as the visitor class. As you know, international visitors are not allowed to travel because of the current border restrictions, so we shifted resources away from that area to help us make progress in other lines of business, including the family class and the Canadian experience class, and to support other departmental priorities.

[English]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you very much, but this raises the same question: Are we pulling resources from another program? We heard that you're prioritizing, but I think you said you're prioritizing family. How about the program with 90,000 applications?

Second, please elaborate on where these 90,000 applications are going to be processed.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: With the border closures and resulting slowdown in the line of business that processes visitor and temporary resident applications, we reallocated those resources to other key priorities and business lines.

You asked where the processing would take place. Currently, applications are being processed in Canada. With our integrated system, officers across the country are able to process applications that fall under the priority line of business. Applications are not processed in a particular region, but through an integrated system.

• (1655)

[English]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Just to clarify, do you feel there will be any hindrance in clearing the backlog because of this new program?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: We are cutting down on processing time and reducing the backlog in most lines of business. A few months ago, we received additional funding in the supplementary estimates, so thank you. We used that funding to hire people—

[English]

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

Mr. Sidhu, you have six minutes. Please proceed.

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

I want to thank the whole department for all of your hard work.

Mr. Mills and Ms. Campbell Jarvis, we really appreciate your taking the time to join us here today.

I know the announcement of the new pathway to permanent residency for 90,000 was very well received by so many.

Ms. Campbell Jarvis, you mentioned that this pathway applies to three groups—health care workers, essential workers and international students—as well as French-speaking candidates. You also

mentioned that the international student pathway filled up really quickly. Would you be able to provide some feedback or insight into what the update would be for the other groups? As I understand it, the uptake has not been as strong. Also, can you please provide some info on why you think the other groups have less uptake, in your opinion?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: There's always a lot for us to assess in terms of client behaviour when we start a new program. I think one of the reasons why we saw such a strong uptake by the international graduates is that we've already seen quite a strong uptake in the past. What I mean by that is that, if we look at 2019 data, we know that a number of temporary residents transitioned to permanent residents. A large portion of those people were, in fact, international students. There's a bit of a known pathway there, unlike the one for the health care workers in particular and the essential worker stream. Those pathways might not be quite as clear or as known. We certainly do have other workers than those in an essential stream or in a health care stream who have made that transition. Typically with some of the other pilots that we've run in the past, sometimes it can take a little bit longer for a more innovative pathway to take root. We've had these pathways open for six months to allow time for essential workers and health care workers to submit their applications. That's why we've allowed that six-month window until November 5.

We'll see about client behaviour. I know that colleagues here in the department are watching this transition of temporary workers to permanent residents. We know that we'll also learn a lot through the process, as well as bring in permanent residents who are already here and already contributing to Canada's economy, which will help bolster our economic recovery and our society going forward.

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: Thank you for that very detailed response.

I feel like a lot of international graduates would appreciate, should those spots not be used by the November deadline.... Maybe they can be opened up for some of the international graduates should the health care workers and essential workers not be able to fill up the capacity there.

We were just talking about capacity in terms of processing and backlog. I know that in the budget there was some funding for making the immigration system more efficient. Can you speak in more detail about that?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Certainly. I'll begin, and I think my colleague, Mr. Mills, may have some comments on the efficiency.

The pandemic has really encouraged a lot of innovation, some of it forced by necessity. As I think the deputy minister noted before CIMM, a lot of those innovations and efficiencies we're hoping to carry on afterwards. Some really good examples are virtual citizenship ceremonies online and the budget investments that are helping in the client support centre, as well as in the digital platform modernization, which is to modernize the legacy system here at IRCC. We wish to move beyond the paper-based processing onto a digital program, which will help us better meet the needs of clients and provide that service going forward.

Mr. Mills, I don't know if there's anything specific that you wish to add.

• (1700)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you.

I'd like to add to what my colleague said about paper-based processing. We are digitizing applications so they can be processed remotely, given the restrictions in place throughout the world.

Digitization gives us the ability to process applications that would have normally been processed in a specific region either outside the country or in Canada. By digitizing, we can adjust processing capacity. That's one of the efficiencies that has resulted from the pandemic, one that is very beneficial to clients.

[English]

Mr. Maninder Sidhu: I appreciate that. The minister is working really hard, I know, in terms of efficiencies and, obviously, adding more capacity.

Thank you guys for your tireless work. It definitely has been a challenging time, and I really want to commend the whole department.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sidhu.

We will now proceed to Madame Normandin.

You will have six minutes.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the senior officials for being here on such short notice. The information they provide is always of great value.

I should start by saying that, since the program relates to Canada, not Quebec, I have just one or two questions. I will be giving the rest of my time to Mr. Manly, who is here today.

I am mainly interested in the applicants under the francophone stream of the program. We heard that spots for French language proficiency testing filled up quite quickly.

I was wondering whether you did any monitoring, given the number of people who have requested French testing in order to apply to the program.

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

[English]

I'd like to respond to a couple of points.

We have indeed included a francophone stream in the new pathway. We are watching this very closely to see the level of interest, and we're certainly hopeful that the response will be strong.

Unlike the other pathways, we have not put in a cap. Part of the reason is that we do want it to be open, and we want those numbers to be as strong as possible to really help meet the target that our minister has set towards a francophone target of 4.4% by 2023.

We will continue to monitor, and we will look forward to keeping the committee updated over time as those results come in.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

As far as the other streams are concerned, applications will close in November, or once all of the spots are taken, whichever comes first.

The testing requirement for the francophone stream could lead to delays. If no testing spots are available, it could take longer. Do you have any plans to open up spots to French speakers after November?

• (1705)

[English]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Those are some interesting suggestions and ideas from the honourable member.

At the moment, the pathways are a special one-time, six-month measure. In terms of processing those for this year, that's something to which my colleague Mr. Mills could speak, but I would certainly share with the committee that part of the thinking behind this measure is to maximize the level space for 2021, given the borders being closed.

However, we're not only thinking about this year. We're also looking ahead to 2022 and beyond to 2023. All the levers we have to support strong immigration in Canada are ones that are being looked at, and the francophone targets are of great importance to the minister.

Mr. Mills, I don't know if you would like to add just a couple of comments on the processing.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you.

I just want to add that we do follow up, keeping a very close eye on the applications that come in.

I mentioned earlier that we were getting ready to process between 35,000 and 44,000 applications this year. We will be making sure the various streams are fairly represented, despite the low volume of applications.

That said, as my colleague mentioned, we are always monitoring the situation and we will make adjustments as needed. We ensure the processing of francophone and anglophone applications is fair.

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

Mr. Manly can have the rest of my time.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Manly (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, GP): Thank you very much, Madame Normandin, for sharing your time.

Thank you to Mr. Mills and Madame Jarvis for being here today.

I'm sorry I missed the first part of this, but I do have some questions.

In terms of the temporary foreign workers coming here who are going to receive this exemption, is there something to help them bring their families here? A lot of workers come here on a seasonal basis year after year after year, and I'm wondering if there's a pathway for family members to join them.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Certainly the way we are looking at this pathway is that the principal applicant is here in Canada. We will be looking at the subsequent family pathways.

As I think committee members know, there is always a lot of interest in family reunification streams, and through the pandemic, the department has put priority processing on family. A number of the department's immigration streams support family reunification—

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Jarvis. The time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much to all the officials for being here today.

The program explicitly excludes undocumented workers and those who are without status. What advice did the officials give to the minister to exclude them?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I don't know that it's a question so much of exclusion, versus inclusion and what was going to be the focus. If we look at the context we're in, we know that the borders are closed and there's an emphasis being placed on the in-Canada population. The minister noted, a few times, that temporary residents who are here—international graduates, health care workers, essential workers—are contributing.

One of the pieces we also thought about was that if there were those who were here without status or authorization, we didn't want to be penalizing those who had taken the necessary steps to secure their status. So there's a bit of a sense of fairness and a level playing field in this.

• (1710)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: With the exception of this, of course: The guardian angels program actually included people without status, but for this program, it excluded them. I would urge the officials to consider including them. It is about exclusion. When you don't include people in this process, it does exclude them.

Many of the folks I'm talking about are people who are already here. Some of them lost their status as a result of the pandemic, because they have an employer-specific work permit for which they were not able to secure another LMIA in order to regain their status. These are real issues that are happening on the ground with people.

I would urge the officials to consider that, and to give that advice to the minister to include those individuals.

With respect to the digitizing process, what is the timeline for all the applications to be digitized?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'll turn to my colleague on the processing dimension, but just to note, the application process is digital from the outset, and that's to—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, I don't mean for this program, I mean overall, because that's part of the process that the ministry is undertaking right now.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Mr. Mills, I'll ask you to speak to the timeline for the digitization that we've been doing on the paper-based program.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

We made a strategic decision at the beginning of the year with respect to digitization. To date, more than 30,000 applications for various classes have been digitized, ranging from—

[*English*]

the caregiver, parents and grandparents, Quebec-selected skilled workers, overseas family class and in-Canada family class. Those applications that we had in our offices were sent to a third party organization

[*Translation*]

to be digitized.

We are working closely with a number of partners to increase that pace, but we first had to make sure that all the requirements were met.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry for interrupting.

Do you have a date when you expect the applications in the different streams would be completed in this digitizing process?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes.

For some classes, including the family class, the process is complete or will be by the end of June. All of our records at the department will be digitized. For family caregivers, the remaining applications will be digitized by late July or early August. Staff across the country will then be able to process them.

To answer your question, I would say, yes, we have a timetable for certain classes and we are making very good progress already.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Does that include making the intake digital, which is what it was referred to in the budget?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I would like to thank the member for her question.

At the beginning of May, we launched a pilot to support the digital intake of applications for certain lines of business.

The Atlantic immigration pilot and the agri-food pilot, among other programs, were integrated into the pilot project right away. Over the summer, we will be expanding the number of programs until all of them have a digital intake process.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, maybe I can ask the officials to table to the committee all the different streams and what their timelines are, including the digital intake as well as the applications that have already been submitted in paper form.

With respect to the new program, one of the concerns is that there is an unfair disadvantage for some of the TFWs who do not have access to Internet. They've already expressed that they don't have access to the equipment or the broadband in order to submit their application. Has the ministry considered this and—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up. You can ask this question when your turn comes next.

• (1715)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe I can get that answer in writing from the officials.

The Chair: Mr. Seeback, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning.

Just before you start, I see the analyst, Martin, has raised his hand.

Mr. Martin McCallum (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I just want to double-check with the official. Are you confirming that you will take up that undertaking? Sometimes we have confusion about which undertakings are agreed to and which ones are not, so if I could clarify with the official in this case, we would appreciate it from our end.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I think I understood the last question from the honourable member. There were two questions. One was about the timelines and the digitization across the stream, and then the second undertaking was the question we ran out of time for, which was about access to Internet and whether had that been considered.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, those are the questions. For the TFWs who are not able to submit an application online because they don't have access to the equipment or have Internet problems because they're out in rural communities and so on, how will we address that from the department's perspective to ensure equitable access?

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I was just wondering if the department knows what the intake status is of each of the three streams, the health care workers, the temporary workers and the international students?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'll turn to Mr. Mills, who has his finger on the pulse. The international graduate stream is full.

Mr. Mills, I wonder if you have the latest update on the other two streams.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for the question.

Here are the numbers that were posted at 3:08 p.m. on our website.

We have received 1,172 applications for health care workers in Canada and 6,737 applications for essential non-health care workers, out of a maximum allowable number of 30,000.

If you wish, I can also give you the numbers for the French-speaking stream. We have received 16 applications from French-speaking health care workers, as well as 293 applications from French-speaking essential non-health care workers. Finally, we have received 117 applications from French-speaking international graduates of Canadian educational institutions.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

Those numbers seem fairly low, given that when you look at things like family reunification and parent and grandparent, those categories close within a couple of hours of being opened. I'm going to leave it to somebody else on the committee to ask if there are insights as to why this has been slow in those categories so far.

I want to go back to what Ms. Kwan was talking about with the undocumented workers. There's a huge number of undocumented construction workers in the GTA in the Portuguese community. I've been approached by members of the Portuguese community numerous times about this.

Other than fairness, is there a rationale as to why we would not have wanted to expand the program to people like them? They've been gainfully employed in the construction industry, sometimes for 20 or 25 years. This, to me, seems like it would be a perfect pathway for them to become documented.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Certainly it is a complex and challenging population to reach. There are numerous pathways and perhaps I will speak to a few of them.

As the honourable member Ms. Kwan noted, the minister is certainly proud of the so-called “guardian angels” pathway for the essential health care workers on the front line. Some of those people had fallen out of status. They were asylum seekers whose claims might not have been successful. That was one that was undertaken.

The department also has a pilot pathway for construction workers in the greater Toronto area. We've learned a lot about the population there.

In terms of the temporary resident to permanent resident pathway that was just announced, I think it was really a sense of what the objective is. The core objective of that is really an economic pathway. That economic pathway is about ensuring that Canada is well positioned—or as well positioned as it can be—for economic recovery through the pandemic.

The pathways were open to international graduates, who we know have strong human capital, good language proficiency and Canadian work experience. It's also to recognize the breadth and depth of Canada's economy with health care workers, who we know are critical right now. We want to recognize and acknowledge their contributions in the pandemic, as well as those of other essential workers on the front line.

I think there are many lessons from COVID-19. One of them is underscoring the range of jobs that are absolutely essential and critical to Canada's economy. That's what these temporary residence pathways were about and facilitating and recognizing those who are here now contributing to Canada's economy and going forward.

I hope that helps.

• (1720)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Sure. Thank you.

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

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

I want to thank the officials for their great work. This announcement on the pathway was made well in advance, but it wasn't clear what documents and information the applicants were required to be prepared to submit, which may have led to small errors and omissions in their applications.

Even today we can see that those two categories are not full, so I would suggest to the officials that instead of just rejecting those applications, they should be given a fair chance and sent a procedural fairness letter to address those concerns, instead of just taking that application out. That is my suggestion.

Secondly, Madam Campbell Jarvis was talking about essential work. When you go to many small restaurants, you see those NOC code 6513 and NOC code 6711 food and beverage servers, food counter attendants and kitchen helpers. I go to a small restaurant. Those food servers are the ones who greet people and seat them. They take the orders, serve the food and then at the end clean up the table. They work as cashiers.

I personally feel that category should be part of that essential workers stream. I request that you, the officials—and also, through you, the minister—see if we can include those NOC codes in those categories. Those essential positions are still at 7,637 out of the 30,000.

Many people have expressed frustration and confusion regarding the eligible NOC codes. There is conflicting information around that. Could officials please provide to this committee, in writing, the list of all eligible NOC codes for the six separate streams and also the ones they can include?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you, Madam Chair. There are some really excellent questions there.

Just to take them in turn, with respect to the disparity in how quickly some of the applications are coming in, I think it really does come back to that client behaviour. We know that international graduates often seek that pathway. A number have made the transition before, so it wasn't surprising to us that they were first out of the gate, but it's still really early days on the other ones.

We have put forward that six-month runway to really allow time for other essential workers and health care workers and franco-phone speakers to have that time to apply. I think we're going to see some changes over the next couple of months, and there's still time left, so I don't think we need to worry yet.

With respect to the question and comment about small restaurant owners, one thing in putting this together is that the minister had a lot of things to consider and a lot of priorities to balance. By selecting particular NOC codes for “essential”, it certainly doesn't mean that other positions aren't essential, but we did hear from stakeholders, and when we look at employment data—in particular, that provided by the labour council—we know that there are certain areas where there are a number of Canadians who are ready to work, so we weren't looking at codes where there would already be high unemployment rates. Certainly, the contributions of restaurant workers are really important in Canada and to Canada's economy, but there was a lot of thought put behind the balance of that.

One of the other points I wanted to mention is that all of the other pathways still exist: the provincial nominee program, the rural and northern immigration pilot and the Atlantic immigration pilot. All of those pathways still exist alongside this special temporary public policy that was put in place, so there will be opportunities above and beyond this pathway.

I think I heard that the last question was on an undertaking in writing for the NOC codes that are part of this, as well as the ones that aren't. Certainly, we've made note of that. I would warn, Madam Chair, that the NOC code list is fairly extensive, but we'd certainly do our best with that.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Normandin, you will have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: As I stated previously, I will give my time to Mr. Manly.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Manly.

Mr. Paul Manly: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to follow up on the undocumented workers who are already here. Has the government or the department considered putting out an amnesty?

In terms of having an amnesty and offering a pathway to citizenship, if these are workers who you're saying are difficult to reach and if some of these workers have been working here for a long time, I'm sure they would love to be documented and to have that ability to have citizenship so that they can come and go without the fear of losing their ability to return to the country.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's certainly a very complex area, and a number of considerations are behind that one. That is a policy choice question, which would be one for the minister.

Mr. Paul Manly: With the graduates program, how many spaces were available for that? Are those graduates, if they fit into other categories but may not yet have experience in those categories, able to apply through other pathways?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: There were 40,000 spaces for international graduates in this particular program. The other pathways do continue, and we know that international graduates tend to do very well in express entry under the Canada experience class, for example.

In terms of who may apply to the other pathways, if a student had the required health care experience, they may apply under that stream. Quite similarly, if an international graduate happened to be an essential worker and met the criteria for that program, then we may see people in that space.

Certainly—

• (1730)

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

We will proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

For the applicants whose work permit may have expired after they made the application, will they have implied status or would there be a process of bridging work permits put in place for them?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's a good question and one that we are looking at.

As per the terms of public policy, people do need to be in status and currently working. However, for those who apply and whose

work permit may expire after they've applied, they can certainly reapply, as the honourable member said, to retain that status.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Are you saying that if your work permit expires after you've made the application under this stream and you are not able to resecure status that you would be disqualified?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: In that particular instance, we would have to look at that particular situation. That's one thing we are considering now. According to the requirements of the public policy, one must be in status when they apply. I think the hope is that applicants would avail themselves of the facilitative measures that are in place now to renew their status.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, but there are some individuals who may not be able to reapply because they might be on an LMIA work-specific permit. If they can't secure another LMIA, they'll be out of status. In that instance, are you saying that those individuals would be disqualified? I think this is actually quite a critical point, because I've been asked this question numerous times by applicants and people dealing with the situation.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: As always in the immigration space, there are all sorts of individual circumstances that can arise. I would need to follow up on that particular instance.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to actually get a response for the committee, if I could, from the officials on that, because I think we need clarity on that question.

With respect to issues around people having a disadvantage because of the language requirement, some of the testing organizations are not able to book people in—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Saroya.

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

Thank you to Madam Jarvis and Mr. Mills. I've been dealing with you for the last five years on and off, and you've always been gracious, and I hear the best from your side.

The student stream was filled up within 24 hours. There were 40,000 applications. Am I correct that it was done within 24 hours? That's what we call low-hanging fruit. These are the young and the educated, and they speak the languages. I think we should look more into these students.

Madam Jarvis, on another question, each application costs \$1,000. A number of people who are qualified were left behind due to the language testing. The language schools are all closed and nothing is available. They couldn't apply for it because there was no language test available. They didn't apply for it because they didn't want to lose a thousand bucks.

Is there any other way? Is there any incentive for them to apply tomorrow under either of the two streams that are available? They're qualified, and it's not their fault. It's just either that the department overlooked this situation.... What is your opinion on it?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: With respect to the language test, we know the capacity and we know that over 100,000 tests have been booked recently. I would say that, for international students, certainly it would always be an asset to have that language result under their belt. Language test results are valid for two years and that would facilitate their application through many of the other pathways and economic streams that are available, in addition to the special TR to PR pathway.

• (1735)

Mr. Bob Saroya: My next question comes from the Canadian Franchise Association. They knew you were coming and this is what they asked me to ask you.

During COVID-19, hospitality workers have been there for Canadians. People getting back from long shifts are travelling in subways or on buses; they're taking a risk to serve Canadians. Hospitality workers, just like other essential workers, are out there serving Canadians during the lockdown.

Why did the government choose not to include hospitality in the essential non-health care stream?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The essential workers stream is quite open. The language level is CLB 4, which makes it fairly accessible, and there's a huge range of occupations. In addition, with the way the hours are calculated, many seasonal agricultural workers could actually be eligible. For example, if they've earned the equivalent of one year of experience over multiple seasons, they may be eligible.

It is the same for part-time workers. The requirements for this pathway are not restricted to full-time workers. It's open to seasonal and part-time workers, and the requirement is to meet that one year of experience over the last three years. The pathway is fairly open and facilitative to support the different range of economic positions.

Mr. Bob Saroya: I'll go back to the construction workers who are in the system. I met a Portuguese lawyer who has represented a number of people. They have people who have been working under the table for 25 years—

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

Ms. Dhillon, you have five minutes.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, on a point of order, I have other things scheduled. Could you give me an idea how much longer this committee meeting will run?

The Chair: It runs until 6:30 p.m.

Ms. Dhillon, sorry for the interruption. Please proceed.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): It's not a problem.

My question is for either one of our witnesses.

[Translation]

Can you please explain why people who intend to settle in Quebec are ineligible to apply to this program?

Have you discussed this issue with Quebec when you were setting up the program?

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

Quebec is, of course, aware of the program. As we know, Quebec has its own areas of jurisdiction, especially when it comes to economic programs, and that's why this special program is offered outside of Quebec.

Allow me to highlight an important criterion for the program.

• (1740)

[English]

People must have the intent to reside outside Quebec.

[Translation]

Therefore, it is clear to Quebec that the program is aimed at the other provinces.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Okay.

Can you please tell us if Quebec was given the opportunity to opt in?

[English]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Certainly, if it was of interest to Quebec, that is something that could be explored. We work very closely with our colleagues in the Quebec ministry. We keep them apprised of our developments, and we work very closely with them on their priorities.

[Translation]

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you, that's perfect.

Some Quebecers are worried that this new program will slow down processing times for applications from qualified workers in Quebec.

Will it have a negative impact on processing times?

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

I will turn to my colleague, Mr. Mills so that he can provide an answer.

Mr. Daniel Mills: We are actively processing files for qualified workers in Quebec. We handled more than 7,500 applications for the Quebec qualified workers class between January and April. I can assure you we are giving this our full attention. We will continue to process applications with the same speed.

We are currently on the way to hitting the targets that were set. We are working very hard on this. There's no need to worry, the resources won't be going anywhere.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: Thank you, Mr. Mills.

You stated you had scanned many files.

Can you tell the members of the committee what impact this will have on file processing, especially the files of qualified workers selected by Quebec?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for the question.

As I stated earlier, in terms of scanning the files for qualified workers in Quebec, we have a contract with an organization that will provide the service. We sent out more than 10,000 applications to be scanned. We have received 2,700 digitized applications up until now, and we expect to receive others over the next few weeks.

That will allow us to have a decent amount of digitized files which will help us with the processing...

[*English*]

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

We will now proceed to our third round of questioning, and we will start with Mr. Allison.

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

I want to go back to what Mr. Saroya was saying in terms of availability under the essential worker category, Ms. Jarvis. Did I hear you say that there was the ability for food service people?

I see a category of labourers in food and beverage processing. I'm not sure if that's the category or if there is something more specific for hospitality and restaurants in that second category of essential.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The occupations set out were very carefully calibrated against labour market information. We had to find that balance between recognizing the occupations that were absolutely essential and critical over the course of the pandemic and recognizing that people who were already employed would be able to apply. At the same time, we wanted to assure Canadians who have been hard hit with unemployment rates across the country over the course of the pandemic that this wouldn't be a displacement, but, in fact, a reinforcement. That's the very careful balance that went into the thinking behind this measure.

• (1745)

Mr. Dean Allison: Thank you. That's fair enough.

My original question was asked by one of my colleagues, Mr. Seeback, in terms of there not having been as much uptake, obviously, as the student program. Do you have any thoughts as to why that may be the case? I guess maybe people aren't actually in the country who have the ability; they're already applying through other programs. Is there any thought process on that? I know that the student one is a particularly large one because they don't quite have the experience they need and this works out well. I know that they're trying to look at other methods, either through management or whatever the case may be. Do you have any thoughts on maybe why there hasn't been the same kind of uptake in the first two programs?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The uptake may be a more gradual trajectory as people learn about it, as they hear about it. For example, our experience in the agricultural pilot was that it took a little bit of time for some uptake there. For most of the pilots when we try something new or leading edge, it can take a bit more time. Caregivers are the exception; there's been a really strong demand right from the outset. However, with regard to the other pilots, we see a more gradual ramp-up. I think that's the same here. It's still early days, and as people have the time to hear about it and put together their applications, I think we're going to see a stronger uptake as time goes on.

Mr. Dean Allison: Sure. That makes sense. I guess the program is open until November—I read that somewhere.

It is interesting because students are always talking to each other. There are a hundred different ways they're always trying to figure out how to get in, so it makes sense that students intuitively would always be aware of that program up front. I could see why that would have filled up fairly quickly.

I'm grateful for some of the categories. There's certainly a fairly broad range under "essential", so I commend them for that. I just hope that as you make recommendations, should this happen in the future, we could look at maybe expanding some of the categories and looking for other ways. I always love to see when we're talking about essential workers. We've heard a lot during our study on temporary foreign workers about the issues in food processing. I see they're in there; that's a category. I really do appreciate that.

If it wasn't filled up by the other two categories, would you consider—or is that a ministerial decision—expanding the student program?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Indeed, that is likely a ministerial question.

Mr. Dean Allison: Okay. You could pass along our suggestion here from the committee that it would be great that they consider that as well—you know, if the uptake isn't there over time.

Madam Chair, those are all the questions I have, and I see that my time is pretty much up.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Allison.

Mr. Schiefke, you have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us this afternoon.

The programs announced for francophones outside of Quebec were well received by the representatives of minority francophone groups outside of Quebec.

Do you work with francophone organizations outside of Quebec to ensure that potential candidates are made aware of the initiative and to help meet the target of increasing francophone immigration in minority populations?

[English]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Certainly, there is a communications effort under way. We are really pleased with the francophone stream offering, and we are really hoping for a strong response to bolster language minority communities outside of Quebec. We will be watching with great interest. We've seen a fair amount of Twitter chatter and other communications and social media about the francophone stream. As that word continues to reverberate, we look forward to a strong uptake.

• (1750)

Mr. Peter Schiefke: The next question I have is with regard to international students. Could you perhaps speak about what kind of an impact this is going to have on communities, on businesses, which are going to have more stability, which are now going to know that these dynamic young newcomers they've hired are actually going to be able to stay and work at these companies and so forth?

Can you speak a little bit about the impact that the stream for international students is going to have on small businesses, communities and Canada in general?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The international graduate stream, I think, will have a number of ripple effects that we're expecting. One is likely the recognition by other international students around the world as to the desirability of Canada and the pathway in Canada. Certainly, prior to this temporary pathway, we saw a number of international students graduate into the post-graduate work permit, and then choose to stay and live in Canada.

We know that international students are well positioned with strong human capital from official language levels, an education in Canada and Canadian work experience. We see the vitality and the vibrancy across the disciplines, whether it's from some of the scientific...spurring on innovation. In communities, we hear from universities and colleges about the super-clustering that happens from college to university to local labour markets. I think this will be a glimmer and a bolster of that confidence in the economy of Canada as it seeks to recover from the pandemic. At least that's the intent.

Mr. Peter Schiefke: Thank you very much.

Now it's a pleasure for me actually to turn it over to Mr. Manly and provide him with one last question before I think it's time for us to end the session.

Mr. Paul Manly: Thank you, Mr. Schiefke.

Madam Chair, I hear from a lot of people who are applying for refugee status in Canada that the process is slow. Their relatives are trying to help them get here. I know this is a program for inside Canada, but I'm just wondering if this process is slowing down the application process for people who need to come here as refugees and for people who are applying to come to Canada as refugees if they have these skills. Is there a pathway for them to expedite the process for the skilled workers who need to get out of the situations they're in, in other parts of the world?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I'm pleased to report that the minister has certainly underlined the importance of Canada upholding its international obligations. Over the course of the pandemic, Canada has in fact settled a number of urgent protection cases. We continue to have referrals from the UNHCR and government-assisted refugees, as well as privately sponsored refugees, as border restrictions have allowed.

We have actually welcomed a small number, but refugees have—

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

We will now proceed to Madam Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, unsurprisingly, I am giving my time to Mr. Manly. He will be able to ask his questions.

[English]

Mr. Paul Manly: I've actually run out of questions. Thank you all.

I'll pass the baton.

The Chair: Madam Normandin, do you want to take your time? Do you have any questions?

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, if that is the case, I will ask a few questions.

I am curious given that the program does not apply to persons who are in Quebec, and that applicants have to undertake to settle outside of Quebec.

What will happen if applicants don't keep their promise?

• (1755)

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

[English]

Certainly, there is a Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada. We have a mobility clause, and people are free to move around in Canada. The emphasis and expectation set out in the application is that people intend to reside outside Quebec.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: If the conditions required for permanent residency included an undertaking to settle outside of Quebec and that promise was not kept, could permanent residency be revoked?

[English]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I think the expectation has been set, and that's the expectation and part of the application process that will be assessed.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Madam Chair, if I still have a bit more time, I would like to know if there is a set period of time that those people...

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to touch on the 90,000 figure, which is tied to the number targets. The application process is such that it's based on intake versus accepted applications. Why is that? Assuming the government wants to achieve the 90,000 figure, what if many people have applied and they don't qualify. Why not take accepted application numbers instead of the intake number?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's an excellent question. I think my colleague, Daniel Mills, may wish to comment on this as well. I'll make a couple of remarks at the outset.

The program was designed for intake, and that's because of the careful balance that needs to be set in the operational strategy across the department. If it were set at approved or accepted applications, that would require us to process all of those applications before we could determine the number.

Mr. Mills might wish to comment more carefully on the processing strategy.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I thank my colleague.

I will add that each application will be evaluated individually. An application can also include other persons. One single application can allow two or three people to ultimately come to Canada. We can therefore hit the target of 90,000. It does not necessarily depend on the number of applications, but the number of people involved.

[English]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I see. So the announcement is actually not really accurate because it makes people think it's 90,000 applications, and you're actually talking about 90,000 individuals. There's a discrepancy there with respect to that.

I want to go back to the language question. What about people who can't get their language test done? Maybe that's why your numbers are low. What's the government doing about that?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: We know that there is a capacity challenge there. The language testing is really important. We know that the research and the data show that people settle more strongly—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

Ms. Kwan, your time is up.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: What's the government going to do to fix that problem when you can't get access to—

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

With that, our panel comes to an end. I want to thank Mr. Mills and Ms. Jarvis for appearing before the committee today. I know it was on short notice, but I really appreciate you taking the time out to appear before the committee.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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