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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. Good morning, everyone.

Welcome to meeting number 11 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today, the committee is beginning its study on differential outcomes in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada decisions.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately and we will ensure that interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair.

Before we begin, I have a few administrative matters to raise with the committee. First of all, we have received a request from OCASI, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, to appear on this study. OCASI is an umbrella organization for the immigrant and refugee-serving sector in Ontario and is the largest of its kind in Canada.

Is it the will of the committee to extend an invitation to OCASI to appear on the study of differential outcomes?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We can extend an invitation, Madam Clerk, to OCASI to appear on the study of differential outcomes.

There is one more thing before we get into the witnesses for today. We received a large volume of useful data and evidence during the committee's recent study of recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students. The analysts have confirmed that pertinent data could inform our current study on differential outcomes.

Is it the will of the committee that the evidence and documentation received by the committee during the study of recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students be taken into consideration by the committee during the study of differential outcomes in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada decisions?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Now we will begin our study on differential outcomes in Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada decisions.

It is my pleasure to introduce the first witnesses of this important study.

In our first panel, we have Steven Meurrens, an immigration lawyer coming here as an individual. We have Jennifer Miedema, executive director of Remember Ministries. We have Dr. Gideon Christian, president of the African Scholars Initiative.

I would like to welcome all the witnesses who are appearing before the committee today.

I would like to take a few moments for the benefit of the witnesses. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

With that, all of the witnesses will have five minutes for opening remarks. After those opening remarks, we will proceed to rounds of questioning.

We will begin with Mr. Steven Meurrens, immigration lawyer.

• (1105)

Mr. Steven Meurrens (Immigration Lawyer, As an Individual): Thank you.

First, I want to say that it is an honour to participate in your study of differential outcomes in Canadian visa officer decisions.

When I look at the subtopics in this study, I can't help but think that a significant portion of the relevant data and information to these topics has only been obtained through Access to Information Act results that private individuals have shared online.

Given this, I want to focus my presentation today on transparency.

The only way that one can properly review whether there is systemic bias in Canada's immigration programs is if the relevant information is easily available to the public. I want to suggest a few ways to achieve this.

First, prior to 2016, IRCC posted quarterly processing times and approval rates for all of its programs, by visa office. The information showed what actually had occurred at a given office and was very useful. IRCC stopped doing this after 2015. The government's website currently says that they stopped doing this because IRCC wanted to post only global information. While IRCC may have a goal that all applications are processed the same regardless of visa office, I think everyone knows that this is not the case in practice. I would suggest that IRCC bring back the visa office specific quarterly updates.

Second, IRCC should publish as downloadable PDFs Access to Information Act results that pertain to internal manuals, visa office specific training guides on assessing the genuineness of a marriage, and other similar documents. Right now it is possible for the public to search the titles of previous completed requests, but then the individuals have to wait for them to be emailed, which can take several weeks. Again, I don't think most of the public knows that this is possible. The British Columbia government, meanwhile, publishes as downloadable PDFs all non-individual specific, previously disclosed freedom of information releases. This approach is a model for transparency that I believe IRCC should follow.

Third, IRCC should, in my opinion, publish detailed explanations and reports of how its artificial intelligence triaging and new processing tools work in practice. Almost everything public to date has been obtained through Access to Information results that are heavily redacted and which I don't believe present the whole picture. For example, in late 2020 it was revealed through ATIP that all visitor visa applications from China and India have gone through an AI triage since at least 2018. It is not clear how this AI triage works.

I shared an online internal IRCC document from 2018 about the triage of these applications from India and China. It stated that while AI triaged files, visa officers were not told why a file was triaged a certain way, so that officers still reviewed applications. The document then had a 2020 footnote that stated that officers are now provided with key facts about the client to reduce the time spent searching for information. The implication seems to be that the department does not want officers reading entire applications, and there needs to be more transparency about this.

IRCC presents the Chinook processing tool and to a lesser extent AI as just an Excel spreadsheet and a change in process. However, the Pollara Strategic Insight final report says that an IRCC employee, or employees, expressed "Concern that increased automation of processing will embed racially discriminatory practices in a way that will be harder to see over time." It is not clear why an Excel spreadsheet would do that. It would be great to hear more from the person or people who said this to learn what they are seeing on the ground.

Now, their concerns and mine may not be fully accurate, but in the absence of increased transparency, concerns like this are only growing.

To conclude, in order for this committee to provide ongoing, meaningful insight and oversight into whether there are differential outcomes in decisions based on race and region, the department needs to be more transparent and publish information that reflects

what is actually happening rather than what the government's or the department's goals are.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Meurrens.

We will now proceed to Madam Jennifer Miedema, executive director for Remember Ministries.

Ms. Miedema, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please proceed.

Ms. Jennifer Miedema (Executive Director, Remember Ministries, As an Individual): Good morning, Madam Chair and committee members.

I am thankful to be able to join you today to speak on behalf of the refugees I work with and serve.

I am the founder and director of Remember Ministries, a charitable organization focused on sponsoring refugees to Canada, particularly those who have been persecuted for their faith and religious activities. I have been very involved for the past seven years in sponsoring refugees through Canada's private refugee sponsorship program and in helping others do the same.

I want to say that the private refugee sponsorship program is an amazing and worthwhile program. I know many people in Canada who are enormously thankful to be empowered to help refugees in this way. It harnesses the generosity of Canadians and encourages the spirit of welcome in our communities. It makes our country stronger.

I know the committee is studying systemic discrimination leading to differential outcomes in IRCC decisions. I can't speak about any of the technology used in the application process; I can only speak about what I know. When I've asked newcomers and refugees if they had experienced any overt discrimination from the IRCC or visa office workers, they all said no.

However, that is not to say that there is not systemic discrimination within IRCC processes or in how our government chooses to prioritize certain refugee populations over others.

This seems to be the case because of the expediting of some populations of refugees and the long wait times for others. Allocation of resources tells you where priorities are placed or who favoured populations are. Resources do not seem to go towards the processing of private refugee sponsorships, which leads one to believe that those refugees are not a priority.

Current processing times for privately sponsored refugees in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan and South Africa are 31 to 37 months. For refugees in Malaysia and Thailand, it's 37 months. For those in Pakistan, it's 38 months. For those in Lebanon, it is 46 months—almost four years. That's a country where the citizens are experiencing terrible fuel, medicine and food shortages, so imagine what it is like for refugees there.

For those refugees who go through the proper procedure and are fortunate enough to have sponsors in Canada providing finances and support upon their arrival here, it will take them three to four years for their paperwork to be processed.

I don't have words in this short testimony to explain how damaging these wait times are. Members of these refugee families die while waiting. Children are not in school during crucial years of their lives.

Of course, one will naturally compare these wait times with the situation for Ukrainian refugees being welcomed now through an expedited visa process, and with Afghan refugees, some of whom the IRCC expedited applications for as they tried to meet their promised numbers. We remember the prioritization of Syrian refugees when the war broke out. Please do not think that I am being critical of expediting those people in immediate danger and need. None of us would argue against helping these refugees in the most compassionate and efficient way.

What I question is the reallocation of resources away from other refugees who have been waiting for months and years. I question reducing the numbers of other refugees being welcomed in the same year so that more of one population can be welcomed.

What is needed is the ability to find new resources to help people in the current crisis and to never put some people in a favoured category over others. We need to increase the total number of refugees welcomed when there is a crisis, not renege on welcoming others whose applications are already waiting.

Eritreans have been fleeing one of the most repressive regimes on the planet for years. It is a continuous flow of refugees, yet a special program is never put in place for them. A special program has never been put in place for any African refugee group that I know of.

It is good for this committee to examine what is happening in all manner of processes within the IRCC. It is good to ask if Canada's value of equality is being properly represented by government mandates to the IRCC and by the IRCC systems themselves. Vulnerable people are vulnerable people. It shouldn't be a popularity contest between refugees.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our last witness for this panel, Dr. Christian, president of the African Scholars Initiative.

Dr. Christian, you can begin, please. You will have five minutes.

Mr. Gideon Christian (President, African Scholars Initiative): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of this committee,

for inviting the African Scholars Initiative, ASI-Canada, to make this submission on your study.

I will limit my opening remarks to two main issues: first, the differential outcomes on study visa decisions by IRCC relating to applications from Africa; and second, the growing use of artificial intelligence technology by IRCC in visa processing.

Data on study visa refusals from IRCC clearly show that countries in sub-Saharan Africa are most adversely impacted by differential outcomes on study visa decisions by IRCC. The Pollara report revealed that systemic bias, discrimination and racism account for this, from outright reference to African countries as “the dirty 30” by IRCC visa officers to outright branding of Nigerians as corrupt and untrustworthy.

IRCC study visa policies have been designed in ways that make it ever more difficult for people from Africa to be able to secure study visas to pursue education in Canada. In my appearance before this committee on February 8, 2022, I highlighted these discriminatory policies by comparing two visa application programs, the student direct stream, or SDS, and the Nigerian student express, or NSE, especially the differential or discriminatory financial requirements under the NSE program.

In addition, I will also note the language requirement under the NSE program, which requires a Nigerian study visa applicant to undertake English-language proficiency to prove to the visa officer that they are proficient in the English language. This requirement is imposed notwithstanding that English is the only official language in Nigeria. It is the official language of instruction in all formal academic institutions in Nigeria. Foreign students from Nigeria are exempted from English-language proficiency by all academic institutions in Canada, but not by IRCC. These subtle, biased, discriminatory and differential study visa requirements inevitably result in adverse differential outcomes in decisions, not just for Nigeria but for Africa.

My second submission relates to the growing use of computer software and artificial intelligence technology by IRCC in visa processing. ASI-Canada is not opposed to some use of AI technologies by IRCC. IRCC has in its possession a great deal of historical data that can enable it to train AI and automate its visa application processes, but there are serious concerns here. External study of IRCC, especially the Pollara report, has revealed system bias, racism and discrimination in IRCC processing of immigration applications. Inevitably, this historical data in possession of IRCC is tainted by this same systematic bias, racism and discrimination.

The problem is that the use of this tainted data to train any AI algorithm will inevitably result in algorithmic racism—racist AI making immigration decisions. As an assistant professor of AI and law at the University of Calgary Faculty of Law, I have spent the last three years researching algorithmic racism, and I can confidently state that the concerns raised here are legitimate and real. Any use of AI technology by IRCC should be subject to external scrutiny. IRCC should be subject to the oversight that will ensure and enhance transparency and fairness in the use of AI.

In conclusion, we recommend an independent oversight of IRCC in two ways: one, an independent ombudsperson to oversee decisions of IRCC visa officers; and two, the establishment of an independent body of experts to oversee IRCC's use of advanced analytics and artificial intelligence technology in visa processing.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions on the issues that I have raised, as well as any other questions you may have on differential outcomes in IRCC decisions.

• (1120)

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Christian.

Thanks to all the witnesses for their opening remarks.

We will now start our round of questioning. We will begin with Mr. Hallan.

You will have six minutes. Please begin.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is to Mr. Meurrens. We've heard the testimony. We've heard out of the Pollara report the disturbing cases of how people from African communities are being treated and the employees of IRCC are being treated. There is systemic racism going on at IRCC.

In your experience, do you see any current safeguards in the way things are right now?

Mr. Steven Meurrens: I don't see any safeguards beyond the fact that individuals who may have experienced refusals can, of course, challenge them. However, there isn't anything like an ombudsperson, let's say, that exists where people can express concern if they do feel like they've experienced bad treatment.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

To each one of the witnesses today, do you think that a task force is enough to tackle these issues?

Mr. Gideon Christian: The only recourse now seems to be the Federal Court. The problem here now is that the Federal Court is being overwhelmed with judicial review applications involving IRCC. The last time I checked, which was a couple of days ago, 72% of judicial review applications before the Federal Court involved IRCC, most of them were about decisions made by IRCC.

I think having that independent ombudsperson will go a long way in not just dealing with this issue, but also reducing the workload before the Federal Court relating to decisions from IRCC. It's very important to have an independent ombudsperson where individuals who have experienced discrimination or adverse decisions from IRCC can complain without necessarily having to take the very expensive process of going through the Federal Court and thus overburdening the Federal Court with decisions, or sometimes mostly unreasonable decisions, made by IRCC visa officers.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

Could I hear from the other witnesses, please?

Mr. Steven Meurrens: What I'd like to add is, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, that the Pollara strategic insight report contains statements such as IRCC employees expressing concerns that AI will perpetuate systemic bias, and, as Professor Christian noted, there was a reference to at least one person referring to the "dirty 30" from Africa.

In terms of a task force of some form, I think it would be great to see follow-up because right now these sentences and allegations in the Pollara Strategic Insights report are just hanging there. It would be great to see follow-up with those people, whether through a task force or through this committee to learn more about what is going on.

Ms. Jennifer Miedema: I would concur with the other two witnesses. Certainly a task force would be a good starting point and an ombudsman certainly sounds like something that would be good. More needs to be investigated to see what the situation is.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you so much.

To your point, Mr. Meurrens, to date we know that no one has been reprimanded or fired for any of the allegations that have been taking place. It seems like things are dragging on without any action to date.

Again, to each one of the witnesses, do you feel that racism within IRCC is contributing to this historic, almost two million, in backlog in immigration?

• (1125)

Mr. Gideon Christian: We don't have data or statistics before us to be able to pinpoint whether racism is the reason, but the fact is that when you go to the Pollara report, that report is very damning on IRCC when it comes to racism. That report makes it very clear that racism plays a role in immigration decisions. If we go by that fact, then of course it would not be too far-fetched to say that racism could also play a role in the backlog we are currently having. It would be very difficult to say that racism is the sole reason for the backlog, but if racism is endemic the way it has been portrayed in the Pollara report, then definitely it contributes or it could be a contributing factor to the backlog, even though it might not be the sole factor for the backlog.

Mr. Steven Meurrens: I was thinking about the question, and I think the main cause of the backlog was just the department opening up several new applications and one large express entry draw. I think that was the main cause of the backlog. I don't, at least thinking about it now, view systemic racism as being a great contributing factor to it.

Ms. Jennifer Miedema: Yes, I don't think it was the main factor. It certainly could be a factor, but there would be such complex reasons behind these huge wait times right now, with COVID and the other actions the government took to bring in groups of refugees.

I don't have the knowledge to be able to answer that question any better.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

I'll use the rest of my time to ask if each one of the witnesses could table any data or information they have in that regard that would help this report to address the systemic racism in IRCC.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hallan.

Mr. El-Khoury, you have six minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I welcome the witnesses and thank them very much for being here today.

My first question is for Mrs. Miedema.

I'm truly humbled by your work and your commitment. The human race needs people like you, who help others having trouble getting respect in the country where they live. What a wonderful mission.

Can you describe some of the issues your organization faces in general? You named a lot of countries where application processing times can vary. Can you provide more detail on the applications of francophone students from Africa?

[*English*]

Ms. Jennifer Miedema: Thank you for your comments. I appreciate that.

I don't deal with students, so I can't address what you said about the French-speaking students. I am helping refugees from all over the world connect with communities, volunteers and churches in Canada that can sponsor them.

In terms of the issues I see in the work that I do, certainly it's these long wait times that are extraordinarily difficult for refugees. It is a sacred thing to raise the hopes of a refugee. Once they are raised, once you submit their application, for them to go through months, and then a year or two years, without any contact from the visa office, and to have to wait three years, or close to that time, for an interview—it is very, very difficult for their mental health. It affects their physical health. It affects their family dynamics, marriages and so many things.

One of the issues we had as well was that one of my refugees was accepted just before COVID hit. We had to place that on hold. He was an Eritrean refugee in South Sudan. We didn't hear any communication. I had to ask my member of Parliament to please check on the case. For months we still didn't know. We found out in late 2021 that his medical had expired in February 2021, but nobody had told him. Nobody had told anybody. That visa office didn't communicate. He was told to try to get a new medical, but there are no panel-approved physicians in South Sudan. We have been in a difficult situation, with no medicals provided and yet an expired medical.

There are sometimes things that make you feel like there's some disorganization at the visa office level, a lack of communication with the refugees themselves, and COVID-caused chaos on many levels, but I think this disorganization exists even outside of that. I would just ask that more resources be put toward visa offices and more communication be given to refugees, or an ability to sign in online and see the status of their application.

An ombudsperson would be very helpful when there is an issue. We don't really have anybody we can go to when there's a problem at a visa office. We just have to wait.

Thank you.

• (1130)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

My second question is for Mr. Meurrens.

When a student is granted a visa, they must come here to study full-time. If they subsequently study part-time, they lose their student status.

However, not all institutions define what constitutes full-time studies in the same way. Can you give us more information on this issue?

There is another issue: How can the department be sure that students will stay and study here?

[*English*]

Mr. Steven Meurrens: The requirement that students study full time is one that was brought in around 2014. The department treats all designated learning institutions the same, as far as that requirement goes. For post-graduate work permits, which is the ability to work in Canada after graduating, students have to have studied full time.

There's little sympathy given right now to students who may have to study part time because of family needs or mental health issues. The big issue that arises is that to get a post-graduate work permit, a student must have studied full time in every semester except for the final semester. It's always been a bit unfair to students who, say, study part time in one semester of year two of a four-year degree, for whatever reason. Those students will not be able to stay in Canada to work after graduating, while those who study full time, except for the last semester, can.

It's something I'd like to see changed.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. El-Khoury.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. You have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today for this extremely important study.

I will get right to it because I don't have a lot of time.

Mr. Christian, I really enjoyed your opening remarks. I have a question for you.

The department seems to be having trouble talking about racism at IRCC. Instead, they use the term unconscious bias when referring to IRCC staff. However, when one learns that people are referring to African countries as the 30 corrupt nations, or that certain managers are saying that Latinos come to Canada just to get social insurance benefits, one realizes that we're far from unconscious bias.

Do you agree with me about that, Mr. Christian?

• (1135)

[English]

Mr. Gideon Christian: I think the expressions used in those reports are a clear case of outright bias, not unconscious bias. When you look at those terms, individuals from particular countries are being branded as untrustworthy and corrupt, some as coming to Canada for social security benefits, and then the greater part of the continent is being referred to as dirty. This is not unconscious bias. This is conscious bias or discrimination. It is explicit racism, not unconscious racism.

I'm not saying that there are not cases of unconscious bias, but if you go by the terms used here, these are deliberate terms that are used by individuals. It is irrespective of what the individual might be thinking. Anybody who's looking at it from a reasonable perspective would know that this is inappropriate, even from government managers in a government department.

It is unfortunate that there are some individuals who will now have to sit down and consider the applications from the same people who have been referred to as being corrupt, untrustworthy or from a continent that has been referred to as being dirty.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you agree with me, Mr. Christian, that we need to call a spade a spade: There is racism at IRCC, that's all there is to it.

[English]

Mr. Gideon Christian: I know it's very uncomfortable raising the issue of racism, but the fact is that we need to call racism out for what it is. As uncomfortable as it might be, that is the only way we can identify the problem and address the problem. Running away from or trying to whitewash the problem doesn't solve it.

Yes, this is a clear case of racism and we should call it that. We should be having conversations around this problem, with a clear framework of how to address it. The problem is there. We shouldn't run away from it.

I'm not running away from it. I'm very happy to discuss it and offer up solutions as to how we can deal with it, even at the IRCC level.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I agree with you wholeheartedly, Mr. Christian. My mother always says that if you want to solve a problem, first and foremost you have to be able to identify it. You have just demonstrated it once again, and I thank you for that.

In your opening remarks, you offered two solutions. You talked about an independent ombudsperson and an independent panel of experts that could look into specific issues, respectively.

What do you think of the proposed ombudsperson position at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada? It would bring your two suggestions together under the ombudsperson's purview. If a position like this were created in the department, people would be protected.

Do you feel it's a good idea?

[English]

Mr. Gideon Christian: I agree with the appointment of an ombudsperson, but the two areas that I have highlighted are two different areas. It would be very difficult to have an individual who would be able to deal with these two areas.

When it comes to issues relating to the use of artificial intelligence, you need a body of experts who specialize in that field. That's a very technical field. You need a body of experts who specialize in that particular field to deal with the problems unique to IRCC's use of artificial intelligence technology. Even IRCC's internal documents show that there's a problem with regard to the use of historical data and policies that perpetuate bias. But this document does not actually indicate how to deal with the problem.

Now, when it comes to the problems relating to visa refusals, the individuals dealing with the use of AI may not be knowledgeable with regard to issues relating to visa refusals. That's why we suggested having a two-pronged approach in terms of a solution: an independent ombudsperson to deal with the visa refusal issues; and then an independent body of experts to deal with the technical aspects. Those have to do with the use of artificial intelligence, computer software and advanced analysis by experts—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. Christian, but I only have one minute left and I'd like to hear what Mr. Meurrens has to say as well.

Mr. Meurrens, in your speech, you talked about being opaque and not being transparent.

How much of a problem is the lack of transparency in this department?

[English]

Mr. Steven Meurrens: Right now it's huge. The processing times stated on the IRCC website are inaccurate. The website itself says they're inaccurate. Again, only through Access to Information Act results have we learned that almost no caregiver files have been processed since 2019. Pretty much everything we've learned about artificial intelligence and its usage at IRCC has been through Access to Information Act results. It's surprising to me. There have been Federal Court decisions regarding TRV refusals from China and India, and not a single one has mentioned the use of artificial intelligence, because no one knew that it was playing a large role in the determination process.

The lack of transparency right now is huge.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you.

Time is up, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Meurrens, just to carry on with your comments about the lack of transparency. In particular, based on the information that you have secured, whether through ATIP and freedom of information or other processes, can you share with us what you have learned or what your concerns are with respect to the Chinook system?

Mr. Steven Meurrens: As far as I can tell, Chinook is basically an Excel spreadsheet that allows for the bulk processing of applications. I have two main concerns with Chinook. Number one is whether or not it is enabling officers to quickly process files, possibly in bulk, without actually reading the entirety of applications. My second concern is that, thus far, to date, IRCC has refused, even in the judicial review context, to provide the screenshots or documentation regarding how a file was processed in Chinook or what priority flags might have been raised by Chinook.

So I guess my two main concerns are that it's enabling, or I suspect that it's enabling, bulk processing of applications without reading the files, and then a lack of transparency as to how files are being assessed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Building on that issue, it is using a system that sort of helps in processing more expeditiously, I suppose, in terms of applications. But in light of that process, and in light of the Pollara report, where there is explicit discrimination as well as internal biases and attitudes within IRCC, when you put those two things together, and the fact that Chinook is actually created and developed by staff within IRCC, what concerns would you have, then, in the application of Chinook having embedded discriminatory views and biases in its development?

I'm going to ask that question to Professor Christian, please.

Mr. Gideon Christian: The problem [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] advanced analytics has been an absolute lack of transparency. Most of the information we know about these technologies is information that has been obtained through access to information requests. It's not information that was made available by IRCC.

Now, I can't even say exactly what Chinook is. We're told it's a computer software—an Excel sheet—but I have seen cases where some immigration lawyers did Access to Information requests and some aspects of Chinook were actually exempted from disclosure under section 15(1) of the Access to Information Act. Section 15 deals with international affairs and defence.

The problem I'm having then is, if Chinook is an ordinary Excel spreadsheet, why are they withholding disclosure of some information on Chinook based on section 15 of the Access to Information Act, which deals with international affairs and defence?

I think there is more to Chinook than we know and than IRCC is willing to disclose. That is the transparency issue we are talking about. If this matter is actually covered by national defence, let's have an independent body of experts analyze this and, of course, know what should be made available to the public and what should be withheld.

IRCC seems to be the judge and jury in their own matters and that lacks transparency.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Meurrens, I have the same question for you.

Mr. Steven Meurrens: My overall criticism and concern with Chinook is perhaps actually best summarized by an ATIP response that I received from an IRCC manager in the United States. They considered using Chinook in the United States. Those visa offices in the United States tend to process criminal rehabilitation applications or visas from people from a multitude of countries.

The United States program manager said that their office is not suitable for Chinook use, given each application presents unique circumstances that need to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. The manager later said that unlike visa offices, their caseload was not homogenous.

I think my concern with Chinook being used in some countries is that it's clear that IRCC views applications from China or India, for example, as being homogenous and people don't necessarily need to have their individual circumstances reviewed, unlike, say, people from the United States—at least as per that program manager.

• (1145)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: As Professor Christian suggested, should there be a dedicated, independent review of the Chinook system by specialists?

Mr. Meurrens.

Mr. Steven Meurrens: Yes, I for sure think that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Earlier, people talked about a task force. What do you think the mandate should be for the task force to review internal racism within IRCC?

That is for Mr. Meurrens and then Professor Christian.

Mr. Steven Meurrens: I think the mandate should be similar to what the committee is studying now. I don't know how it would work in practice, but it should have the ability to directly interview employees at IRCC who may be able to shed more light on what is actually happening, as opposed to what the department's goals are.

Mr. Gideon Christian: I would agree with—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but the time is up for Ms. Kwan. Maybe you will have an opportunity in the second round.

We will now proceed to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Meurrens, this committee has specific powers respecting the ability to send for documents. Those powers are completely unfettered and that's a core principle of our constitutional reality. In the midst of hearing about the problems of transparency, the committee actually has within its power to take some steps to concretely help you solve them.

I've just been wordsmithing on the fly here a possible draft motion that we could consider at a later date. I wonder if you can clarify specifically the data you want because then we can request and publish that data as a committee.

It sounds like you're looking for rates of acceptance and refusal broken down by country and subnational regions of application and what kinds of visas are being applied for, dating back to 2015.

Is that correct? Is there any other information that you would like us to send for and publish?

Mr. Steven Meurrens: No. The refusal and approval rates based on visa office can be obtained through Access to Information Act requests. What I would like to see is somehow learning from the actual people who process these files how they are processing them in practice, and then Professor Christian, who is an expert in AI, might be able to speak more to something that would show what the keywords are in the AI triaging that goes on, based on visa office.

How does the AI actually work in Chinook? What are the keywords that are being input to flag files, and how do things actually work on the ground with regard to the processing of applications?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

Just because of time limitations, what I'd ask all our witnesses to do, then, is to send a follow-up in writing, the specific information, whether it's Chinook keywords or whatever it is, that the committee should request and publish so that we can ensure that you have the information going forward and we have that information as well.

Professor Christian, Mr. Meurrens and Ms. Miedema, would you maybe nod to confirm that you're able to do that in the next little while, to send us that information and we will work on getting a motion adopted at this committee with respect to that?

Okay. Thank you.

I will say as well, even information that's available through ATIP. Given issues of redaction and access, I think it's still worthwhile for the committee to include some of that information as part of a document request motion in order to publish that on our website and have ease of access.

Ms. Miedema, thank you for the incredible work you're doing with respect to refugees and for your testimony today. It has been an ongoing frustration for me in talking to those involved with private sponsorship, the piling on of challenges, of red tape, of additional burdens. It seems as though continually the approach is how do we squeeze private sponsors, instead of empowering them and facilitating the great work that they do.

It also seems to me that the fairest system and the way we welcome the most refugees is for the government to spend as much of its time, energy and resources as possible in getting behind private sponsors, including through more joint sponsorship programs. If we moved away from this public and private model separately and put all those resources behind joint sponsorship, we could welcome more refugees, and those who are coming as refugees would benefit from being welcomed by a community. Privately sponsored refugees have a huge advantage in terms of coming into existing communities of love and support whereas government-sponsored refugees have a level of financial support but don't have the kind of psychosocial support that comes with being part of a community.

Do you share those ideas and concerns, and could you speak more to how we should be shifting from the current mentality, which is piling barriers on private sponsors, and talk about the things we can do to empower, strengthen and get more people saying yes to being involved in this work?

• (1150)

Mrs. Jennifer Miedema: Yes. Thank you for your comments. You are bang on in everything you're saying.

There are some opportunities for partnership between government and private groups with the blended visa office-referred sponsorships, which are great, but really we need more spots.

There are many private sponsors ready to submit applications every year, and everybody is always fighting for spots. I don't know why this is, because private people are bringing their own funds and willing to provide that settlement support for the first year, so yes, you're right about more sponsors.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes. It's absolutely insane that we stop people who want to help refugees and pay for it themselves.

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga.

You will have five minutes for your round of questioning.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll start by thanking our witnesses for being here today.

I will go directly to Mr. Christian. You talked about the discrimination that you see in AI collection. My understanding is that it collects data and provides it to decision-makers who are humans.

What other barriers do you see that are showing in the system of collecting that data and providing it to a human person who makes those decisions when it comes to refusal rates for African countries?

Mr. Gideon Christian: As artificial intelligence is being used by IRCC now, based on internal documents obtained, we are getting to the stage where IRCC is using AI to automate visa refusals, so we have a case of block processing of visa applications. Steven made reference to this earlier, the lack of individuality to this area. There is a lack of individuality in treating applications. Applications seem to be homogeneous, which is not often the case.

My major concern with the use of this technology by IRCC is the fact that to train an AI algorithm, you need huge amounts of data. IRCC inevitably has data from a historical collection of data. The problem is that, historically, you have been collecting data that seems to be biased against a particular group of people or a particular continent. When you use that data to train an AI algorithm, what the AI algorithm does is simply regurgitate those biases. This time it's even more difficult, because it becomes more difficult to be able to identify this problem.

The problem we have here, which I'm trying to highlight, is that if IRCC uses these data to train AI algorithms—which I believe it is doing now—without adequately trying to address the bias issue, we are going to have a situation where the problem we have identified in the Pollara report is now embedded into technology and it becomes more difficult to identify.

This will continue to perpetuate the discrimination we have highlighted against people from the sub-Saharan African continent, especially with study visa applications coming from that part of the world. That is of great concern to us at ASI Canada.

• (1155)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: That goes right into my next question.

Given that there is a higher rate of refusals in both English-speaking and French-speaking African countries, I wonder if you're aware that Ghana, for example, serves about 13 countries. What suggestions would you make for IRCC to improve that?

It's easier to talk about AI that is collecting data that goes directly to a human decision-maker. Is there a resource issue in this situation?

Mr. Gideon Christian: AI is an amazing technology. It performs tasks in a fraction of the time that it would take humans to perform those tasks, so in terms of efficiency, yes, AI will make tasks efficient. It will result in greater processing of a greater number of applications in a fraction of the time it would take humans to do it.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'm sorry, Mr. Christian. My question is around the resources for visa offices and increasing the number of offices on the continent. Ghana processes about 13 countries and oversees 26 other countries. What are your comments on that?

Mr. Gideon Christian: I would say that if we can have more visa offices processing these applications—especially localized visa offices—with more resources and more humans doing the work, rather than trying to outsource the work to technology, it will go a long way in addressing it. The humans who would be making these decisions should be those who are trained to be able to identify conscious and unconscious bias when they see it.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: What would that training entail? Let's say someone who is processing visa applications in Ghana is processing a visa application from Kenya. How can they make that de-

cision? What recommendations would you make for someone who is a little bit farther away making those decisions? What would you want them to know?

If we were to increase those resources to make sure that they're accurate, what kinds of recommendations would you make on that?

Mr. Gideon Christian: The individuals making those decisions should be very conscious of the individual circumstances of the applicants as they relate to where they are coming from. Being able to understand the cultural and individual circumstances of the applicants will go a long way in addressing this bias and seeing individuals as being corrupt, just because of the area or the part of the world they're coming from.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: That means you're aware, Mr. Christian, that these decisions are finally made by a human and not AI—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank the witnesses participating in today's meeting. We will benefit from their expertise as we draft this report and make our recommendations. I thank them very much.

I'd like to ask a question to Mr. Meurrens, who is an immigration lawyer.

I'm going to hypothesize. Is it possible that underfunding of IRCC offices that have to process applications is resulting in faster and less thorough processing of applications?

Let's take the example of an officer working in an understaffed IRCC office. If they see the caseload growing every day, could that influence their decisions? The decision to refuse an application may be made quickly, while the decision to accept one may take longer.

Could understaffing be part of the problem?

[*English*]

Mr. Steven Meurrens: Oh, for sure it is. I'm critical of the fact that applications aren't being reviewed in their entirety, but I also recognize that it's impossible, given current staffing levels, for all applications to be reviewed in their entirety. I don't know what the solution is, and it's a challenging question, but with the sheer volume....

I can't imagine the work that a visa officer does in terms of the sheer number of pages that they are legally expected to read in a given day.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Mr. Christian, since I only have one minute left, I will leave the closing remarks to you.

If you were to include a recommendation in the report we're about to write, what would your top priority be?

[English]

Mr. Gideon Christian: My number one recommendation concerns the fact that the IRCC is using and will continue to use artificial intelligence technology. That is inevitable. Therefore, we should have an independent body of experts to oversee IRCC's use of artificial intelligence technology.

That would be my number one recommendation, and I'm making that recommendation based on lack of transparency surrounding IRCC's use of that technology.

As someone who works in that area, I'm really concerned about that lack of transparency, and I believe many immigration lawyers in Canada are really concerned about IRCC's lack of transparency with regard to its use of computer technologies and artificial intelligence technology.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you. We will now end our first panel with Ms. Kwan.

You will have two and a half minutes. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to go back to Professor Christian on my last question, around the mandate. Could you answer that question, please?

Mr. Gideon Christian: Can you please repeat the question? I can't remember it.

Are you talking about the mandate of the committee or the mandates of the [Technical difficulty—Editor] I suggested?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Madam Chair. Could I save my time on this? It seems there were some technical difficulties. I couldn't actually hear Dr. Christian's answer and I don't think he heard my question.

The Chair: He wanted clarification on what the question was. Can you just provide him with what exactly you're asking?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes.

My question is with respect to a mandate for a review of the AI system as it relates to the Pollara report and to try to get at inherent discrimination as well as discrimination within IRCC. What should the mandate of that review be?

Mr. Gideon Christian: The first mandate should be to have safeguards around the use of historical data in training AI being used by IRCC; and secondly, being able to determine what aspect of the IRCC visa processing is appropriate for use of artificial intelligence technology.

Thirdly, AI should not be making immigration decisions. AI should be providing visa officers with information they need to make the decision themselves, but that decision should not be made by AI.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Professor Christian, on the issue around overall discrimination within IRCC, with the information that has been provided from the Pollara report, what is your number one recommendation to the government in terms of taking action to address this situation?

Mr. Gideon Christian: My number one recommendation would be to further study the issue that was raised by the Pollara report, interview individuals, more individuals in IRCC, to be able to identify the full extent of the problem of racism in IRCC, and have a clear framework for addressing the issue of bias in processing of immigration applications in IRCC.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Meurrens, could you answer the same question?

Mr. Steven Meurrens: Especially when it comes to the processing of visas from Africa, my recommendation is for complete new training or some sort of review of staffing to figure out why the approval rates are as low as they are.

The Chair: Thank you. With that, our first panel comes to an end. On behalf of all members of the committee, I will take a moment to thank all three witnesses for appearing before the committee as we start an important study.

I see our second panel is here. I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so the clerk can do the sound checks for them.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

For this panel, I would like to welcome Beba Svigir, chief executive officer for the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association.

We are also joined by Anila Lee Yuen, president and chief executive officer for the Centre for Newcomers.

Our third witness for this panel is Fatima Filippi, executive director for the Rexdale Women's Centre.

Thank you for taking time to appear before the committee.

All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks and then we will proceed to our round of questioning. We will begin with Ms. Svigir, the chief executive officer for the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please begin.

• (1210)

Ms. Beba Svigir (Chief Executive Officer, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association): Thank you.

The Calgary Immigrant Women's Association has worked with a total of about 23 officers over the years. I believe about 27% of them were racialized. We believe that as a settlement agency, the highest level of helpfulness that we can provide in relation to the study is the extent of differential outcomes for our racialized clients.

The IRCC survey report indicates that many of the surveyed employees were in Canada by virtue of immigration, and were grateful to be able to contribute to the work and mandate of IRCC. This is in line with our agency's experiences as well. Over 90% of our clients are racialized, as are 76% of our staff and leadership team. By extension, when working with CIWA, IRCC is working with approximately 12,000 racialized immigrant women annually. Our statements on differential outcomes are based on decisions around program funding, client service and policy.

On the issue of discriminatory rules for processing immigration applications from some countries that are different than for others, this has been observed and voiced by some CIWA clients on study permits through different streams. The student direct stream takes up to 20 days for the currently listed 14 countries on IRCC's web page, while processing times under the regular study permit can take from anywhere between 90 and 300 days.

We have observed that clients who come on a student visa from Nigeria typically do not bring their children with them, as there is a higher rate of refusal when children are included in their study permit application. They access CIWA for supports with applications to bring their families to join them after they themselves make their way to Canada. As a result of such delays caused by differential processing times, we have to deal with additional stressors arising from delayed family reunification, including parenting challenges and family conflict, both of which have far-reaching effects on families.

An extreme example around the notion of regional experiences is the case of a Sudanese CIWA client who sought private refugee sponsorship for her daughter and eight children. The application has been in the queue in Nairobi since December 2020, and will cost the private sponsoring group \$80,000. The sponsoring group already spent over \$15,000 last year on food, medicine, a mud hut home and schooling for children during that wait period.

While some VISA offices in other countries processed applications throughout COVID, Kenya's office was closed. Private refugee sponsorship, a point of Canadian pride, will falter under these high costs caused by uneven times.

An example of differential funding decisions by IRCC is the federal government's decision at the end of 2018 to invest in specialized employment programs for racialized immigrant women across Canada. Agencies were invited to apply for a 28-month project to facilitate employment bridging programs. After the federal election in 2019, the same government that enacted the funding decided to rescind the funding decision, cutting the project after only 16 months. Widely perceived as an election promise to attract voters and capture the ears of newcomers at that time, we felt that this decision could be perceived as hugely differential. Due to our capacity and other funding supports that we had to access at that time, we did complete the project in line with our original time frame of 28 months.

In relation to the increased automation of processing embedding racially discriminatory practices in a way that will be harder to see over time, this is really close to our heart, because we believe we know a lot about the risks associated with this. High-level decisions by IRCC in relation to service delivery improvements directly af-

fect service provider organizations and clients. These decisions should be executed after formal consultation and research with stakeholder engagement. Unanticipated outcomes need to be heard and mitigated. Negative outcomes of rushed automation decisions will definitely affect highly barriered newcomers, including those who are racialized.

We recognize that process- and analytics-driven approaches are necessary to deal with backlogs. However, automation in processing vulnerable populations should be called an improvement only if it has well-defined exceptions—

• (1215)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Svigir. Your time is up. You'll get an opportunity to talk further when we get to the round of questioning.

We will now turn to Ms. Yuen.

Ms. Yuen, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen (President and Chief Executive Officer, Centre for Newcomers): Thank you so much.

I really appreciate being here today from the traditional land of Treaty No. 7 in Calgary, Alberta, whose Blackfoot name is Mohkinstsis.

I am the president and chief executive officer at the Centre for Newcomers. I have five points that I want to bring up in relation to racism, discrimination and systemic barriers in terms of IRCC. Although some really wonderful things have happened over the last few years, including our indigenous education for newcomers as a priority, and more priority on LGBT+ and racialized communities and other things, I thought I would use this time to speak to some of the things that we see as barriers and where we would like to see some changes.

The first is what is true and also perceived in the general public as differential actions for displaced peoples that are dependent on where they come from. We see this much more broadly, especially right now, where we are still reeling, as settlement agencies, from the acceptance of and assistance to Afghan refugees. That has been, of course, as it is for all displaced people in war, very difficult in terms of that, in terms of the community—but we're seeing much easier ways of coming to Canada for Ukraine and for Ukrainian citizens. That is problematic in what we say to our clients and what we say to the community in terms of why there was a difference between racialized communities—whether they were Syrian, whether they were Iraqi, whether they were coming from Colombia in South America or from anywhere else, or Punjabi if they were coming potentially as political refugees from India—and all these different places that are racialized.

As much as we do support the Ukrainian community, and support every community, there is a huge difference. The only one we can see visibly is race. That is really problematic in terms of the work we do.

The other piece that's related to that is differential treatment based on immigration status. We have a very legal mechanism of claiming asylum once people come to Canada, yet they are not allowed any of the services or any of the settlement support while they are going through their process of becoming permanent residents. This also has detrimental effects on their longevity. Many studies show that children and grandchildren will continue to be in that trauma state because their parents did not receive the kinds of services...until a few years in, when they received their refugee status. That is also problematic.

We see this also in terms of what we're going to do with those Ukrainians. Currently, they are being marked as temporary residents. What are we going to do if they seek asylum and they choose to stay, or if they cannot go back? What kinds of services will we be able to offer? Currently, IRCC does not allow us as settlement agencies to offer services to temporary residents or refugee claimants. This is problematic in terms of how these communities are going to be able to get assistance.

One of the things we learned during the COVID response was that we were the group that was responsible for a 99% vaccination rate, the first in Canada, and most certainly in Alberta, from the lowest to the highest in northeast Calgary, which is a highly racialized newcomer community space. We were able to prove that for people in times of crisis, whatever that crisis is, even if they speak English or French fluently, you provide them with dignity when you provide them with the ability to speak in their first language. That is another thing that we think is extremely important in terms of all the services that are offered. They should not only be in English and French. We should make a concerted effort, especially in times of crisis, to be able to give first language support.

One thing we saw through COVID was that IRCC officers were not designated as essential workers. The offices were closed. If they had been essential workers, we wouldn't have seen such a disparity between the services offered for newcomers and immigrants as compared with other communities.

Finally, in maybe the last decade, funding has typically excluded ethnocultural community groups. In terms of being natural supports to our community, we think we really need to look at more funding options for ethnocultural community groups.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Yuen.

We will now proceed to Fatima Filippi, executive director of Rexdale Women's Centre.

Ms. Filippi, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

Ms. Fatima Filippi (Executive Director, Rexdale Women's Centre): Thank you for having me here today. I'm a little bit nervous, so please bear with me.

I just wanted to talk on a little bit of a more personal level about my experience with the organization and IRCC.

Our organization was established in 1978. We assist newcomer, immigrant and refugee women and their families to overcome the challenges they face when integrating into Canada. Last year, we provided services to well over 8,000 individuals during the pandemic.

I would also like to state that since 2019, I've been the co-chair of the women's caucus of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, which is an umbrella organization of immigrant-serving organizations in Ontario.

Like many of our sector colleagues, we were angered and saddened by the findings of the Pollara report, yet as much as we are angered, we are not surprised by the findings.

I would like to start off by relating some of my organization's experience in working with racialized women's communities and IRCC.

We have experienced differential treatment in budget negotiations. Ms. Yuen talked a little bit about funding options being more open and that's one of the things we wanted to talk about. As a women's organization working with racialized women's communities, we have been asked to provide additional details that other sector providers have not had to provide. An example is a detailed breakdown of administrative budget costs when other sector providers were not required to do so. We were also asked for this information to justify the administrative percentage being requested under IRCC even though the contracts clearly state that we can claim up to 15%.

We now comprehend that if the settlement officer was from a racialized community—in this case this officer was—they needed to provide additional due diligence in order to substantiate their recommendation and to provide proof of effectively managing our contract agreement and our file.

I have heard from one settlement officer who has now left the department that upon returning to the office from visiting my agency, he was chided and was asked how it felt to work with a women's organization, as though our portfolio was somehow demeaning and of lesser value in comparison to managing other portfolios.

It is concerning for us how we see that racialized staff are being passed over for promotions and having to work harder to justify their decisions. Their decisions are being questioned when working with sector service organizations. Thus, we are equally concerned for how this reflects on decisions on how racialized communities are being allowed into Canada.

I have heard from our agency settlement counsellors that our racialized clients must undergo additional steps in order to fulfill the requirements in the application process. I know Dr. Christian spoke at length about that in the Chinook process.

We've seen a great many clients being requested to do DNA testing for family members, which is a costly process that is often difficult to obtain in some countries. It causes extraordinary delays. Security clearances are also expensive and difficult to obtain. Specific countries having visa requirements is an additional financial burden.

We have also now started to hear from our female Muslim clients that they are being asked questions of sexual nature with regard to their relationship with male spouses and to provide proof of marriage under the family sponsorship program.

We ask ourselves whether these procedures and questions are being asked of all potential newcomers and immigrants or whether it is only a select few.

I would also like to take this opportunity to present some recommendations in my role as the co-chair of the OCASI women's caucus.

First, we recommend a comprehensive racial equity review of Canada's immigration and refugee system, including legislation, regulations, policies and practices.

Legislation, regulation and policies are written carefully with a view to eliminating racial bias. Meanwhile, even racial bias regulations can have a disproportionate impact on certain people and communities because of a deeply rooted global history of colonialism and patriarchy, the impact of the transatlantic slave trade and genocide, as well as the ongoing colonialism and systemic racism within Canada.

For example, Canada has visa requirements for countries primarily in the global south. These are also countries with racialized populations. The visa requirement makes family visits from parents and grandparents and family reunification more difficult for racialized residents of Canada.

In practice, IRCC has reportedly hyper-scrutinized family sponsorship applications primarily from racialized applicants. We've heard that from Dr. Christian. Spousal sponsorship applications for India are hyper-scrutinized for the existence of marriage fraud. Child sponsorship applications for China and many African countries are scrutinized for genuine parent-child relationships. Applicants are often asked to provide a DNA proof of relationships.

• (1225)

While laws, regulations and policies are neutral, their application is subject to bias and prejudice. These concerns were highlighted by the IRCC employees in the 2021 focus group and IRCC employee groups.

Two, we recommend collection of data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and faith, as well as gender and other demographic factors on which IRCC currently collects data.

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

With that, we will now proceed to our round of questioning, starting with Mr. Redekopp for six minutes.

Mr. Redekopp, please begin.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all three witnesses. You're doing amazing work in the organizations that you run. Congratulations on that.

I also want to point out, Ms. Lee Yuen, that your Centre for Newcomers is actually in Calgary Forest Lawn, the riding of my colleague Jasraj Singh Hallan. That's interesting.

Ms. Filippi, could you just continue and quickly give us the second and third recommendations? You got cut off there.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Sure. I won't go into great detail. I'll just give the recommendations and not the background.

We recommend the collection of data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and faith, as well as gender and other demographic factors on which IRCC currently collects data.

Third, we recommend an independent review and ongoing oversight of IRCC's Chinook system, and any future AI or technology use for pre-screening and processing, as well as full sharing of case-processing data disaggregated by race, ethnicity and faith, as well as other demographics currently collected by IRCC.

Lastly, we recommend that anti-racism training with a gender-based lens be mandatory for all employees; the establishment of an independent, adequately resourced ombudsperson office for IRCC; and anti-racism legislation for Canada, which would give the anti-racism secretariat a legislative foundation and strengthen its work and as part of the act subject all government legislation and regulations to a racial equity review similar to what was undertaken under the Canadian Gender Budgeting Act of 2018.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

I want to continue with you on the issue of family. I know in my own riding we've often had cases where people aren't able to reunite their families and it can be a very stressful thing.

Are you seeing some trends there in terms of genuineness of the relationship? What are the factors that are used? Can you comment more on that?

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Where we're working with families, bringing in children primarily or their parents or grandparents, it becomes really difficult in terms of the process for applying, asking for additional requirements for the DNA testing and security clearances.

If children are nearing the age when they're no longer going to be considered dependants, that becomes an additional problem for the family. If they don't start soon enough within the process, and it takes a long time given all the hurdles and barriers that they have to overcome, they outgrow the time. Then they have to come as independent applicants, and families are despondent by that whole process and it becomes very difficult.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Those things are typical of all, but can you point to any racism in that? Are there certain countries or—

Ms. Fatima Filippi: If you're talking about which countries that comes under, certainly; if you're asking for DNA data, if you're talking about proof from African countries, that's another issue. We have Somali clients who have to provide proof about their children. We saw a bit of it with the Syrian refugees, but not too many. I'm not sure if the situation is similar with the Afghan refugees who are coming in right now. There are highly scrutinized women coming from India, needing proof of relationship in their marriage. These are racialized women.

You have Muslim women now having to provide information about the sexual nature of their relationship with their spouses. That's not something that people are comfortable talking about. Of course, that's happening with certain racial communities. We're seeing that happening more and more often.

• (1230)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Right.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: The concern for our clients is that if they don't start soon enough in that process, their children will outgrow the time and become independent.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: One of the other things I've witnessed in my riding is when the IRCC makes decisions about a client, about a person, it's often the CBSA that has to enforce that. I've had issues in my riding of Saskatoon West where I had to intervene with a minister to stop the deportation of a Ugandan man. He was a refugee fleeing because he was gay. It seems like the CBSA only saw a Black person.

In your experience, can you correlate racism to some of the actions that are then taken by the CBSA?

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Certainly. It's inherent in the fact that we've heard that these groups are just trying to scam the system, they're liars, or they're trying to jump the queue. We've heard comments such as this. It becomes problematic when we're dealing with certain officers within certain regions, within Ontario, trying to get them to overcome those bias issues that they bring with them. Yes, these become problematic.

It's not just one point of the system; it's somehow within the whole gamut of the system where things become problematic. Differential treatment doesn't start just in one place and stop at another level. It goes right through the system and we're seeing that happen.

When you have people then getting lawyers, it becomes an expensive process for Canada. I can certainly talk about the AI example. They often lose their cases. It becomes very expensive to administer that, in having to overturn and going through the court system, and so on, but it's also expensive for the client. The concern is

why certain groups are being asked certain levels of questions throughout the whole system, and not others.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Ms. Svirig, I notice that you have a Filipino program in your organization. Of course, we have a big Filipino community in my riding. I had a case where a woman with terminal breast cancer ended up getting deported. She was trying to seek sanctuary but she wasn't.... Have you had experiences with this as well, with deportation and racism going together?

Ms. Beba Svirig: Yes, absolutely, for many of our clients. The Filipino community has been very unique in terms of trepidations and concerns about being engaged with any kind of social system and, certainly, government supports, because of their inherent experiences with the system.

Our primary focus of the Filipino program is to work with the school boards in Calgary and with the Filipino community, including faith establishments, to ensure the comfort—

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Lalonde.

Ms. Lalonde, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.): Thank you very much.

I first want to say thank you to all our wonderful witnesses who are here today. I really want to reinforce how extraordinary your work has been, and actually quite challenging, I know, in particular because of COVID impacting you and all your staff. On behalf of this committee, I want to say thank you for everything you've done.

My question is for the three of you, and I would certainly like to have this conversation. It's very specific to when you're working with your clients. Does anything stand out as recurring barriers to racialized newcomers specifically, and how can IRCC address these barriers?

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: I can begin.

Just very quickly, in terms of recurring barriers, one of the things we saw, of course, recurring through COVID, was really around a disconnect among the multiple levels of government. Whenever we have anything coming from IRCC, because of the way our system is built in terms of the federation, there needs to be a really big connection with the provincial governments as well. When that isn't necessarily there and there isn't as much communication happening, this potentially can become a big issue.

In terms of barriers, we see not enough language support specifically for newcomer communities and racialized communities. Also, there's a lack of infrastructure, like I said, specifically when people are brand new and they are not permanent residents yet, even though we do have multiple pathways and we know they're going to become permanent residents.

I will leave it to my colleagues to continue.

• (1235)

Ms. Beba Svirig: I can continue.

When it comes to barriers and racialized populations, our agency can add gender to the context of this discussion. I'm quite sure that Fatima can support it, and Anila, obviously; they also serve women. When you add those three components and connect them with the value of equity and fairness we should be utilizing when supporting our clients, from the funding decisions to all of us who work with clients directly, you can appreciate that there is a huge quantity issue and quality issue when working with racialized immigrant women.

When I talk about quantity, I'm talking about the number of services that exist and that are being funded by IRCC specifically for women. In line with that, there is the quality component, which is the value of equity and customized adjusted services, from child care to all kinds of other issues, including family violence issues that we have been increasingly dealing with. There is the fact that there are a limited number of organizations that exist to provide services for the most vulnerable women who are racialized as well, and the full understanding of that fairness component that every individual IRCC brings to Canada should deserve and should receive as part of their successful integration and how that affects the well-being of those children they bring up to be responsible citizens of this country.

That issue in itself speaks about a huge lack of attention to the gender issues. Globally, all women and in particular [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] on IRCC funding decisions. We are probably the biggest settlement agency with a gender-specific focus in Canada, and we have tons of different bridging programs that support immigrant women for equitable employment. We have offered those program models' outcome measurement frameworks—vetted programs models—to IRCC to spread across Canada, so that all the other centres can use those programs. However, very few of them have been reciprocated.

What can you do with 30 clients you serve through any of those bridging programs when there are 3,000 women who should have access to those programs, and that's maybe even in the city of Calgary—forget about other cities?

So race, coupled with gender, is a big issue that has been very poorly dealt with by IRCC historically.

I will allow Fatima to....

Ms. Fatima Filippi: I support that.

I think one of the concerns we've had for the women-serving community is that there are no disaggregated data on the level of funding for women's organizations across Canada. We've been asking this of IRCC for the last two years, almost three years, and still don't have it.

When you talk about the differential treatments in terms of funding, for example, the funding cap at 15% for administrative costs in an organization doesn't go very far when you have a budget of a \$1-million grant. When you have an organization that has a \$10-million budget under IRCC and 15% administrative costs, you can see the difference in how that's going to impact on the capacity of the

organization to be effective in addressing the administration of the contract and being able to serve clients, because the dollars are going to be able to serve clients.

What I'd like to add is on the digital divide that we've seen existing, particularly with women who are in the lower-income brackets in my community. We are having high-speed Internet access to services that are available through the processing program, on the applications, or even, for example, citizenship testing, and we've had to create a special citizenship—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Filippi. The time is up for Ms. Lalonde.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Yuen, Ms. Svirig and Ms. Filippi, it's so important that you are here with us today. What you are telling us will help us write up our report and recommendations. I'm extremely humbled by what you have told us today.

I would like to hear from all three of you on what I am about to say.

IRCC tells us that there is unconscious bias within the department. Do you agree that if we want to get to the root of the problem, we need to be able to properly identify it? I see a difference between saying that unconscious bias exists and saying that there is outright racism and, as you have told us, sexism within IRCC. Do you believe, as I do, that these things need to be called out?

• (1240)

[*English*]

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: Thank you so much for speaking to that, because I think that is one of the problems. Often in polite society we will talk about unconscious bias. We will talk about cultural competency. We will say all of these kinds of words that we make sound very nice and very flowery but really what we are experiencing and what we have seen and what the Polaris report has stated and what we have heard in incidental conversations with IRCC staff and other colleagues is that there is real racism. There is real discrimination, and if we don't name it and we don't utilize the appropriate measures..., just as for any other type of action, if we want to change it, we absolutely need to be able to have those people in the room.

When we look at things through an equity lens, we're not asking for proportional representation. We're asking for equitable representation, which means in all levels of IRCC there needs to be much more proportional and equitable representation of the BIPOC community. There also needs to be, in my humble opinion, a lot more anti-racism training and discussion of something that everybody is scared to name. It's really interesting—back in the 1990s nobody was scared to say this, but now nobody wants to talk about white privilege anymore. Back in the 1990s it was something we could talk about and we could see as something real that we needed to address, but these days it's very difficult to talk about that.

I'm really grateful for the question that you asked, because I agree with you 100%.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'd like to quickly hear from the other witnesses.

Then I will ask all three of you one final question.

[English]

Ms. Beba Svigir: I will jump in and add very quickly that unconscious bias is a phenomenon about which we all need to have knowledge. It comes from a lack of education and understanding of the issue. Some of us are more educated in one area and more experienced in one area and some of us are not as well informed in some areas.

The problem is that the last entity of the federal government that should ever claim the benefit of or the right to exhibit unconscious bias is IRCC. IRCC exists to work with us, the settlement sector and all the other partners, to provide equitable services for newcomers. I would say they do a very good job of talking to us and of asking about our experiences. I would like to believe that they appreciate our feedback. However, they have to take responsibility for their own lack of knowledge and the message they are sending through this report. The core of Canadian philosophy about newcomers—equity and acceptance—lies in their ability and proficiency to understand the issue, and they are making decisions about millions of people who have come to Canada over the years. I don't think anybody can be excused for not being well aware of the issues of racism, discrimination and sexism, gender issues as they relate to immigration, and the benefits this country receives from immigration in terms of both nation building and labour market needs.

Immigration is essential to this country. In the third quarter of 2020 there was zero population growth in Canada, so those who make tough decisions about immigration cannot allow biases.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I believe my time is almost up, but Ms. Filippi, since you didn't have time to answer, I'm going to ask you another question directly.

In meeting after meeting, we're told that there is a huge lack of transparency in this department. We're also seeing racism and sexism within IRCC. Is that not a disastrous combination for immigrants?

• (1245)

[English]

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Absolutely it is disastrous. It speaks to how funding is allocated based on that, and, of course, it has disastrous impacts and effects on the communities that are potentially being served by the organizations that are under-resourced to provide those services. I think we have to recognize that there is a relationship between the two, and when you think about all of that, yes, it is disastrous. You're saying, "Welcome to our Canada. We're an open society. We're multicultural" and then—surprise!—when you walk in and you hit the reality, when you hit the ground running, it's very different, and people experience differential treatments and begin to question the dynamic and ask themselves whether they have made the right decision—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Filippi. The time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. You can please proceed.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations and for the work they do in our communities.

In terms of the differential treatment, embedded racism and explicit racism that exist within IRCC, and therefore in the policies that are associated with it, do you feel that there are any concerns with racism and differential treatment within IRCC policies?

For example, a lot of people get their rejections from IRCC on the basis that it is not believed that they will return to their home country, and when you look at those home countries, you see displayed certain countries that are particularly heightened in terms of that kind of refusal—the African countries, the global south countries.

Do you think embedded racism, as well as implicit and explicit racism, exist in those policies that result in those kinds of outcomes? I'd like to ask all the witnesses that question, please.

Ms. Beba Svigir: Maybe Fatima could start this time.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Okay. Thank you.

Yes, that is a concern for us. We know it exists. We've seen it repeatedly. We have studies that have shown it. We have reports that have shown this. Their own IRCC staff has stated that this is a problem, yet we haven't been able to begin to address it. How do we start to address that?

We've seen it. We've had people denied their visas to visit dying family members because IRCC was afraid that they were not going to return to the country or were going to file an inland claim for refugee status or somehow disappear into the system.

I think those are grave concerns when you have families who are dependent, who need that support to care for someone who is here in Canada, for example, someone who is very ill, and who are being denied that visa or being denied that entry into the country. We are concerned. Also, this grows when you're having denials and having to provide more data. We've talked about the DNA testing, the security clearances and sometimes, where an office doesn't exist, having to travel to where that office exists to make sure that we can get the application process.

There are all those things, as well as not having access to Internet in certain countries where it's unaffordable, so yes, disproportionately, communities that are racialized and that tend to be low-income are being greatly impacted by this. It is concerning for us. As women, we know that our reliance on being able to support our families is really important. Not having those support systems creates additional family problems and additional societal issues here in Canada as well as in other places back home.

Go ahead, Beba.

Ms. Beba Svigir: I can add a little bit to that.

The notion of policies is very important, because they guide all of us, right? They guide the funding decisions, and they guide the funding implementation for all of us.

However, the world is not black and white, and this might be an unfortunate.... Weddings and funerals are not happening every day in our lives. The grey, complicated circumstances that affect those days are the reality of our lives, so policies in relation to vulnerable populations should always be accommodated and evaluated based on the number of—for lack of a better word—intelligent exceptions that have to exist when working with humans.

Whenever I see the notion of IT and processing and everything in relation to vulnerable populations.... Some women who come to us have never held a pen in their lives, and then we are responsible, as the agencies, to transition them to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] life in Canada, so sometimes the number of exceptions to the policies when you're working with humans should be the measure of our ability to understand the life around us and should be the measure for the politicians in high positions to actually position their policies towards acceptance.

We exist, the settlement sector, and the government purchases our services because they cannot serve all the newcomers they bring to Canada. Our services are equitable, culturally sensitive, immigrant based and understanding, so that people receive customized supports if they need customized supports.

Policies have to be based on the knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. It's a huge context, and the government, to a high level, appreciates that they should depend on our advice, all of us—

• (1250)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry. I'm going to interrupt. I have only one minute left, and I really want to get at the heart of the question. Now that we have established that there are policy issues embedded with discrimination within IRCC, what can we do about it? What needs to be done about it?

Would you support the call for an ombudsperson to review government policies so that we can address the issue of racism within IRCC? I'd like a quick yes-or-no answer from all three witnesses.

Ms. Beba Svigir: Yes. I'm absolutely in favour of that.

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: Yes. Absolutely. I'm in agreement with that.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Yes. It was one of my recommendations. An ombudsperson would make a great resource.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to our second round. Based on the time, we will have three minutes each for Mr. Benzen and Mr. Ali, and one and a half minutes each for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Benzen, you have three minutes. Please begin.

Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today and for all the great work that you do.

We've had an interesting conversation here today. I'm interested in the balance between the human resources and technology. We're talking about immigration, and we know that we don't have enough human resources. In some cases, those human resources are biased. So we bring in technology to help us out and speed up the files, thinking that it won't be biased. We have online applications. We have artificial intelligence. But we've heard today that the artificial intelligence is somewhat tainted also. So it's not perfect. It's somewhat biased.

How do we get the right balance between human resources and technology to eliminate any bias at all in our immigration? If all three of you could give me your perspectives on that, I'd really appreciate it.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Questions are being developed by humans. We have to vet those questions. We have to ask, "Are there inherent biases in the way we're asking the question, or the words we're using as part of the question? Is that the understanding that we're trying to get at?" We need to talk to IRCC staff who are racialized, or communities through focus groups, and say, "This is our intent. Is that what the question is asking?" I think we need to look at that. Maybe there are certain words within that context that have inherent biases that are not necessarily picked up by us, because there's some privilege where we're standing, as opposed to someone who is receiving that question and not understanding it in the same way we do.

I'll give you an example. When we say to our clients, "We're doing an intake with you", some of our clients will look at us and say, "Are you going to make me eat something—like, ingest something?" I have to say, "No, no, it's a process of filling out an application form so that you understand that we collect data." Sometimes language doesn't translate in other cultures in the same way that it would translate for us, such as our understanding of where we're at within that system or within the sector, for example. It's a simple example but a really clear one of how language fails to translate effectively into different languages.

• (1255)

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: I can add to that. I think before we even get to that piece, it's about what the intent is. One piece that is consistently baffling to many of us is that if we know we don't have enough people to thrive as Canadians, then what's the reason that we are putting so many barriers on people who actually want to live here and work here and create lives here?

I think that's some of the bias in that, in terms of the humans who are putting those questions together. We need to look at what the overall intent is. Are we trying to create a thriving community or are we trying to keep people out? Often what ends up happening with all of these rules is that we keep more people out than we actually bring in, and our overall intent is to bring in people who actually want to be here.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: It seems that the system is focusing more on catching. It's focusing on the negative as opposed to the positive. It's concerning how much energy is being put into that as opposed to the opposite.

A voice: Yes. Is the country—

The Chair: I'm sorry. The time is up for Mr. Benzen.

Mr. Ali, you have three minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. Through you, I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here.

My [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] elaborate on your recommendation for an ombudsman. How would this differ from the process available to clients through the Federal Court? Can you point to any other example within provincial or federal governments where there is an ombudsperson with a role similar to the one you're recommending?

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Sure. I think it avoids an extensive process for both the client and the government, number one. It's an independent body. It's difficult to have an independent review within the department itself, and it's hard not to get an independent review, given the circumstances and the interrelationships with staff and supervisors and with government and so forth within the system. So I think, yes, we can look at the Ontario ombudsperson for human rights, for example. There's an ombudsperson even within the city of Toronto.

We would create mandates at different levels to address what the oversight would be. That would definitely provide more confidence within the community that the system is impartial and that the review is impartial, and the perception that people who are going there are going to be heard fairly as opposed to being heard within a department and being concerned that there are already biases there and that the outcome is predetermined. So, yes, having an independent ombudsman is very doable, and it would be very easy for Canada to adopt that and to look at what the oversight and parameters would be with regard to discriminatory practices that exist.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

To all three witnesses, you each have decades of experience in offering settlement services to newcomer women. Could you give us some ideas of the changes you have experienced in your ability to offer those services over those decades? Are there trajectories of positive change that we can assist in measuring?

Ms. Beba Svirig: I can offer my thoughts on that. I mentioned that we are probably the biggest settlement agency in Canada. Fifteen years ago, CIWA's capacity—obviously, that is always defined by the budget—was \$1.5 million. We are now approaching \$19 million in funding. Based on that, in black and white, we look like an example of a beautiful understanding by IRCC of investment and the benefit of that investment for immigrant women.

However, we are a tiny micro component of the whole country that should be multiplied one hundredfold. There should be 100 agencies in this country doing this, and there are many that are doing this. So for a sample of the investment, I'm quite sure that IRCC could use all the women's agencies in Canada and get the disaggregated data and see the benefits. We actually have longitudinal studies we have done that have been reported on around the world about this.

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for one and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the witnesses, let me say that you have been exceptional. Thank you very much.

I'm going to leave you the last word to tell us what your top priority would be.

Let's start with Ms. Yuen, and then Ms. Filippi and Ms. Svirig can respond.

• (1300)

[*English*]

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: It is to stop the discrimination between immigration levels, between temporary residents and refugee claimants versus permanent residents, because with our funding we are allowed to serve only permanent residents, and that does not help us along the entire spectrum.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

How about you, Ms. Filippi?

[*English*]

Ms. Fatima Filippi: If you're talking about the situation within IRCC for us—and I support Ms. Lee Yuen—I would recommend having a comprehensive racial equity review of Canada's immigration and refugee system, including the legislation, regulations, policies and practices, and how those apply across all levels within IRCC and not just within one department.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much. You stayed within the time limit perfectly, by the way.

What would your priority be, Ms. Svirig?

[*English*]

Ms. Beba Svirig: I support both Anila and Fatima in what they have said. Racial discrimination coupled with gender discrimination has always been and will always be our priority. We want Canada to be sensitive towards racialized immigrant women who come our way.

The Chair: Time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. We will now end our panel with Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have one and a half minutes. Please begin.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Ms. Yuen, you began your presentation today talking about differential treatment by the government in terms of special immigration measures for those in crisis or who are faced with a humanitarian crisis.

Should the government extend the special immigration measures they have offered to Ukrainians to those from other countries that are faced with humanitarian crises, such as Afghanistan, Hong Kong, Syria and so on, and extend the immigration measures to allow for extended family sponsorships and special visa applications for those from those other regions?

I'll start with you, Ms. Yuen.

Ms. Anila Lee Yuen: Yes, absolutely. They should do this, 100%. This is one of our biggest recommendations. We fully support this, with the caveat that people cannot be coming in as temporary residents without the opportunity to very quickly transition into permanent residents once they are here. Without that, currently, IRCC will not provide us the funding to support people who are not permanent residents.

We can bring in all of these displaced people, but none of the settlement agencies are able to provide services to them. That's a huge disconnect.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Ms. Fatima Filippi, please answer the same question.

Ms. Fatima Filippi: Yes. Look at what's happening in Yemen, for example. A war has been raging on there forever, and they're not being allowed in. We have Afghan refugees displaced in Pakistan who are going through enormous challenges to file their applications and not having them approved, even though they've found a safe haven out of Afghanistan.

We understand that airports are not as accessible right now as they may have been in Ukraine, but in other countries, where we're seeing the ability to be able to leave the country, the opportunities are not being applied in the same way.

We need to look at that and create opportunities for when they land here, in order to be able to support them.

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

Thanks a lot for appearing before the committee and for your important recommendations and testimonies. On behalf of all members of the committee, I really want to thank you for all the work that you are doing for the new immigrants, especially for marginalized women.

Before we finish, if any of the witnesses have some recommendations or something they would like to bring to the committee's attention as we continue our study, you can always send it in writing to the clerk of the committee. It will be circulated to all members of the committee.

With this, today's meeting comes to an end. Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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