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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1145)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number two of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today the committee is beginning its study on the recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students.

It's my pleasure to introduce the first three witnesses as we start this important study. I would like to welcome Larissa Bezo, president and chief executive officer, Canadian Bureau for International Education. We also have Francis Brown Mastropaolo, director, international affairs, Fédération des cégeps. As well, from Universities Canada, we have Paul Davidson, president and chief executive officer, and Marc LeBlanc, senior government and international relations officer.

Before we begin I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of all 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. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

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

I would like to welcome all our witnesses who will begin our discussions with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by the round of questioning.

We will now proceed first to Madame Bezo, president and chief executive officer for the Canadian Bureau for International Education.

Madame Bezo, the floor is yours.

Ms. Larissa Bezo (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Bureau for International Education): Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to contribute to these important deliberations. I'm connecting to you virtually from Ottawa, the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe.

CBE 150-plus member institutions reflect the full spectrum of Canada's international education from K to 12 to FTS.D.s, spanning almost two million students. We are immensely proud of Canada's status as the destination of choice for international students, and we

are acutely aware of the need to protect, maintain and, where possible, enhance Canada's standing in a fiercely competitive global market.

Accordingly, we commend the committee's interest in shedding light on how student visa applications are processed, including why rejection rates differ across Canadian visa offices and how we can do better to keep these rejection rates as low as possible.

Because each rejection letter is not only personally devastating for the student who has successfully qualified for admission to a Canadian institution, each rejection also arguably represents a failure of process, a waste of resources for the student and the host institution, a loss of opportunity for the community where the student planned to study, and fewer chances to leverage the people-to-people ties that come through education to promote Canada's long-term global engagement and future prosperity.

The problem is growing. Canada's rejection rate for student visa applications has increased in recent years. It is especially concerning in specific country and regional contexts; Africa, and francophone Africa in particular.

We need to be mindful that these failures of process do not end up being interpreted by potential international student candidates as failures of respect. The reputational risks for the Canada brand are significant.

Canada's IE sector has seen exponential growth in recent years, increasing by some 135% since 2009. This has occurred against the backdrop of an increasingly ambitious immigration program and, more recently, the pandemic.

To cope, ICC has had to change gears and increase its reliance on technology to help process applications. Unfortunately, student visa rejection rates have increased in lockstep with this growth, from 31% overall in 2016 to 53% in 2020. The growing disconnect between policy ambition and processing capacity is hard to ignore.

While it's important to pay attention to rejection rates for study permits, we strongly encourage the committee to consider the interconnectedness of this problem with the wider issues of policy coherence and integration across Canada's international education sector.

There are three issues I want to touch on very briefly. The first is what we are hearing from our institutions, that there are some troubling disconnects in the current system. We are aware that many well-qualified students have had their permit applications rejected, over half a million since 2016. Student study permit approval rates in some Canadian visa processing centres overseas have been and remain extremely low despite official policy direction through the international education strategy that Canada should diversify its source countries for international students.

Discretion is clearly being exercised, as it should be, given Canada's legitimate national interest concerns and to select students who have the best chance of succeeding, but where and how this discretion is being exercised is often opaque.

At a minimum, we need to ensure some level of consistency across visa centres so that we can test and validate that, where discretion is being applied, it is being done fairly and in a way that reflects Canadian values and Government of Canada priorities.

Second, with regard to dual intent, we encourage the committee to take a strong position on this issue. Dual intent is a simple concept that acknowledges the reality that many international students might want to both complete their study programs in Canada and then remain here to live and work. It lets them declare up front their plans to do so without creating the perverse incentives our current system has for them to misrepresent their intentions.

Indeed, if it is the stated policy of the Government of Canada to address our demographic deficit through immigration and to attract the best and brightest young immigrants to Canada, let us create a program that formally acknowledges and encourages this type of candidate.

With regard to dual intent, there is a broader need for a more integrated—

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): On a point of order, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: I will interrupt you, Ms. Bezo.

Go ahead, Madam Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'm sorry to interrupt the witness, but there are problems with the interpretation. Unfortunately, it is inaudible.

[*English*]

The Chair: Okay, we will just have a look.

Madam Bezo, you can please proceed. We will give you a minute to finish your presentation.

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My final point is that we need to be more up front about our intentions about how we better inform student visa screening processes. We need ESDC to engage more effectively with industry,

provinces, territories and community service organizations to identify labour market priorities that improve and inform those policies.

As we move ahead, we need IRCC to take some practical steps to improve its training, including placing an explicit focus on intercultural competence training, meaningfully assessing algorithms currently being used for screening applicants for unintended bias, and explore the confluence of factors that explain why some visa offices have high refusal rates.

In closing, we would really encourage the committee to explore benefits and risks about implementing an entirely new pathway for international students that allows those who want to both study in Canada and eventually stay after graduation. Simply tweaking the current temporary visa framework is not enough. We need some bold and innovative thinking here that complements our immigration goals and something that makes a strong statement that it's not "business as usual" in Canada. Our members are keen to engage on this issue.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Bezo.

We will now proceed to Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo.

Mr. Mastropaolo, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo (Director, International Affairs, Fédération des cégeps): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of the committee for inviting me to appear today.

I am here on behalf of the 48 CEGEPs in Quebec. These are public institutions of higher learning that are attended by 195,000 students. Of these, more than 7,000 are international students and 30% of them come from French-speaking African countries.

Hosting international students is a priority for CEGEPs. In fact, the number of international students increases by about 15% each year. CEGEPs are thus contributing to Canada's international attraction goals.

According to a recent study, our members consider immigration procedures to be the main obstacle to international recruitment. This is especially true for students from the main recruitment pools in francophone Africa.

The CEGEPs note that, for several years, the study permit rate of refusal for applicants from these countries has been very high and is even tending to increase, which blocks the way to thousands of students who have nevertheless been admitted to our institutions.

Between 2015 and 2020, the highest refusal rates observable were for applications from 13 francophone African countries. For several of these countries, refusal rates reached 80%. The regional average remained above 65%. No other region in the world compares. For example, the important recruitment pools of India and China had average refusal rates of 35% and 17% respectively.

These exceptional refusal rates tell us that unfavourable treatment is applied in the case of applicants from French-speaking Africa, on the one hand, and in the case of applicants who want to study in a CEGEP, on the other. Indeed, for this same region, the refusal rates by level of education show a clear trend: they are clearly higher for CEGEPs, while they decrease for universities.

The year 2020 was of particular concern for CEGEPs, as application refusal rates ranged from 85% to 100% for the majority of sub-Saharan African countries.

CEGEPs feel that they suffer, firstly, from an immigration process that perceives these countries in a systemic way, but also from a lack of understanding of the Canadian higher education system.

To be clear, federation members question whether there are biases in the processing of applications or problems in the operation of the immigration system. This could explain such a disastrous result. Indeed, the recent increase in refusal rates forces us to question the use of automated systems such as the Chinook system. Furthermore, it appears to us that the redistribution, in 2020, of files from francophone Africa to processing centres outside that region has contributed to the increase in refusal rates.

The situation has significant implications for CEGEPs as well as for the broader communities in which they are located. First, CEGEPs are investing human and financial resources in vain. Furthermore, all Quebec CEGEPs, and even more so those located outside the major centres, need international students to fulfil their educational mission and to ensure the social, cultural and economic development of our country. Finally, communities are deprived of the direct benefits derived from the presence of these students.

There are also consequences related to the inconsistency between the denial of study permits and other government initiatives. Canada invests roughly \$7 million a year just to promote the country as a study destination. Quebec, on the other hand, invests close to \$15 million in attraction measures and scholarships for international students at the CEGEP level alone. Although it is the institution's management that proceeds with the admission of students after a serious analysis, it is more often the immigration officer who pronounces on the validity of the individual's background.

Finally, the situation also has implications for Canada's reputation. It prides itself on being an accessible and welcoming study destination, but treats students differently depending on their country of origin. Image-based diplomacy is just for show and has its limits, especially with young people who will quickly be asked to look elsewhere.

In conclusion, while the problem of study permit refusal rates is a national one, it is particularly damaging for CEGEPs and for the Canadian francophonie as a whole.

It seems that the actor responsible for immigration procedures is, on his own, capable of thwarting the efforts of governments, institutions, and above all, francophone African students.

We believe it is essential that the processing of study permit applications be fair, just and transparent for all individuals, regardless of their country of origin, language or intended level of training.

We invite the committee to shed light on current processes and to analyze the reasons behind the refusal rates of applications from French-speaking African students, for example by checking whether these students are victims of prejudice, as has been mentioned.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, wants to integrate new permit application processing systems. It is extremely important that these do not have the same flaws as the current system; this must be made a priority.

We remain willing to work with the committee and with IRCC on these issues. We want to be involved when solutions are proposed to address the issue we are raising here today.

Thank you.

• (1155)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

I now welcome Paul Davidson. He is the president of Universities Canada.

Welcome, Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Paul Davidson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Universities Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the IT team of the House of Commons for getting me online so well.

It's great to be with you today. On behalf of Universities Canada and our members, thank you for the invitation to speak with you.

Thanks also to every member of this committee for the extraordinary work that all parliamentarians are continuing to do in these very challenging times.

With me today is Marc LeBlanc, who leads our international relations work.

I had the pleasure of appearing before this committee last April to discuss the temporary foreign worker program. As you may recall, Universities Canada represents 96 universities across the country. Taken together, Canada's universities are a \$38-billion enterprise employing over 300,000 people, and universities are often the largest employer in their communities. Universities are a social and economic anchor in these difficult times and they are catalysts.

Canada's universities are an integral part of the Team Canada approach to responding to COVID-19, from mitigating risk to developing a vaccine, and accelerating Canada's social and economic recovery.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Now that the borders are reopening and Canada is once again welcoming international students, we look forward to working with this committee to ensure that the country remains a prized destination for top talent.

I want to talk to you today about the role of universities in attracting the talent that will drive economic recovery.

[English]

During my last committee appearance, I mentioned that today's global competition for talent is the 21st century gold rush.

[Translation]

Global competition is intensifying, and while Canada has a good reputation, it will take a greater effort to attract the brightest minds.

[English]

We have taken steps like the international student program to make coming to Canada attractive to highly skilled individuals. International students contribute over \$22 billion to the Canadian economy and support over 218,000 jobs. They also play a fundamental role in building Canada's highly skilled talent pipeline.

For international students, borders are reopening around the world, providing more choice than even just two years ago. Canada has a global brand of being diverse and welcoming with world-class institutions, and we're seeing more international students arriving from emerging markets. These strengths must be leveraged as the global competition heats up. It will also be critical that our immigration system remains competitive.

In the coming months, we look forward to working with this committee to ensure timely and accurate visa processing in key markets and building a more applicant-friendly experience.

A more urgent challenge we need to address is the high visa refusal rates in many of our priority markets, particularly in francophone Africa. We greatly appreciate the work of this committee to examine this issue in greater detail. On average, the largest international source countries for university enrolment see about an 80% approval rate, with some countries as high as 95%. However, some of the top African source countries for Canadian university students show lower approval rates for study permits.

In 2019, the visa approval rates for undergraduate students from Morocco and Senegal, two of our priority countries for francophone

student recruitment, were 55% and 20% respectively, versus 85% and 95% in other markets.

High refusal rates have a direct impact on our recruitment efforts and on Canada's brand as a welcoming place to study and build a life. We recognize that universities have a role to play in addressing this issue, and we're ready to work with the federal government, provincial governments and others to help ensure our prospective students meet the necessary requirements to receive favourable decisions on their study permits.

[Translation]

To succeed, the federal government, provincial governments and universities must take a collaborative approach to attracting the best and brightest students to Canada. By working together, we can ensure that enrolment at Canadian institutions remains sustainable, allowing them to benefit from students from around the world.

We are grateful for all the work the committee is doing to help Canada recover from the pandemic. We look forward to continuing this partnership to build a strong Canada.

[English]

Thank you again for the opportunity to be with you. We look forward to working with this committee throughout this Parliament, as Canada remains a top destination for international students from around the world.

• (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

We have heard from all three witnesses, so we will proceed to our round of questioning. We'll start our first round with MP Godin, for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I find it quite interesting to be at the committee this morning.

My first question is for Mr. Brown Mastropaolo.

Mr. Brown Mastropaolo, you said in your introduction that countries of origin influence the decision. My question will be very clear. The country of origin may have its influence, but is there another criterion that influences the decision? Is language a factor that delays the processing of applications? If so, on the one hand, this would have economic repercussions. Indeed, Mr. Davidson from Universities Canada mentioned the economic impact on that side. On the other hand, we are interested in fostering the development of the French language in Canada, so there would be consequences on that front as well.

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Your question is interesting.

Based on the statistics obtained, we note that refusal rates are less related to the language of the individual than to the language of use in their country of origin. As to whether this causes additional delays, the question would have to be put directly to the IRCC.

In any case, we see in all cases a bias related to country of origin as well as an impact on the refusal rate of applications that involve CEGEP studies. The refusal rate is problematic for our entire network, which includes not only French-language CEGEPs, but also some English-language CEGEPs. That said, the refusal rate is slightly more problematic for French-language CEGEPs.

Mr. Joël Godin: Let me ask another question: which countries are we competing with when we try to attract foreign students here in Canada to both French and English educational institutions?

Mr. Davidson referred to the race for international students as the gold rush of the 21st century. Now we are competing.

Could you indicate who you are competing with when trying to attract international students to Canada?

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: First of all, there is competition internally, in Canada, among colleges and universities for undergraduates, depending on the profile of the student and what they are looking for, of course, because you also have to adapt to the individual.

Secondly, with regard to international competition, France has far greater means than Canada, because it invests much more than Canada in international promotion. We are also talking about other European destinations such as Belgium, Switzerland and Germany. These countries are our direct competitors.

Mr. Joël Godin: My next question is for Mr. Davidson.

Mr. Davidson, as you mentioned, attracting international students to help develop Canada is the gold rush of the 21st century. If you were working at IRCC tomorrow morning, what would be the first thing you would do to address the weaknesses in the system?

[English]

Mr. Paul Davidson: To build from your last question, France is obviously a very key competitor country with regard to the francophone market—

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I can't hear the interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Davidson, I'll just stop you. There are some interpretation issues. We'll have a look.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond): Mr. Davidson, please continue.

Mr. Paul Davidson: I was just building on the previous question, before Mr. Godin, that France is absolutely a competitive nation for us in terms of attracting francophone students. It has a very powerful brand and historic roots. It is very aggressive in attracting francophone students to France.

It's important for all of Canada's universities as well, in Quebec and beyond Quebec, to attract French-speaking students. In minori-

ty francophone communities across the country, French-speaking students are a very valuable asset not only to the educational enterprise, but also to the economic growth of the region.

With regard to the broader competition in anglophone markets, the U.S., the U.K. and Australia are our biggest competition and they spend vastly larger sums on marketing their brands.

We are in regular dialogue with IRCC on a number of issues. One is how we build a stronger Canadian brand, because people think of nation first when they're thinking of where they want to study.

Second, we have a very positive, non-partisan, all-partisan policy environment that welcomes international students. We have good policies. We need to improve our operational realities on the ground in the markets we're trying to attract students from. Therefore, we are working with IRCC in key markets in terms of how we improve their staff's knowledge of the work that's being done and how we ensure that we have high-quality, high-integrity and quick visa processing. It's really important.

I mentioned some of the refusal rates that our prospective students have encountered. Universities go to a great deal of effort and expense to raise their profile and recruit these students, and if they're refused for head-scratching reasons, we've lost investment. We've lost the potential of that student.

We want to make sure that we have world-class student attraction.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

In your presentation, you mentioned that, for reasons that remain unclear, many applications from Morocco and Senegal were rejected. What is your interpretation of the situation, in terms of French?

In fact, as the study shows, there is a massive rejection of applications from African francophones. I would like to hear your comments on this phenomenon. I would like you to tell me how you experience this problem on the ground and how it can be resolved.

[English]

The Chair: MP Godin, I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up. Maybe you'll have to hear back in the next round of questioning.

We will now proceed to MP El-Khoury.

You have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

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

I'd like to welcome the witnesses.

My first question is also for Mr. Brown Mastropaolo.

As you know, Mr. Brown Mastropaolo, any application by a foreign student to study in Canada must meet certain financial criteria.

You know very well that, in accordance with the Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, the Quebec government determines the financial resources required for a student to be eligible for a study permit. In Quebec, a student 18 years of age or older must provide proof that he or she will have funds of more than \$13,000 per year of study, while elsewhere in Canada it is \$10,000.

First, do you believe this has an impact on the approval rate of applications from international students who want to study at Quebec post-secondary institutions?

Secondly, I would like to know if you, on your side, have approached the Quebec government to address this issue by asking them to agree to set the criteria at \$10,000 instead of \$13,000.

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Thank you for the question.

In fact, it would be important not to gloss over the real reasons behind the high rejection rates. Talking about the financial capabilities of applicants, whether it's \$10,000 or \$13,000, is unfortunately not part of the battle to be fought, in my opinion.

Let me explain the situation concretely. First, the difference between these two amounts is minimal. Second, we see that the same refusal rate applies to students who are awarded scholarships by the Quebec government, including merit scholarships, in which case the scholarship recipients receive \$14,000 per year in living expenses for the duration of their studies and are exempt from tuition fees. Despite the fact that they are scholarship recipients from the Quebec government and have been selected by CEGEPs after analysis of their file, these students are also denied a study permit.

So I don't think that the issue of students' financial capacity is the priority battle to be fought.

We have statistics on refusal rates for CEGEP studies based on countries of origin. We are able to make all the necessary comparisons. We know what the most popular reasons are for refusing a study permit. In light of the refusal rates and the reasons that accompany these refusals, sometimes numerous for the same student, I believe that our priority, as a nation, should be to look at the immigration system and the analysis that is done. On the one hand, how well do immigration officials know our higher education system in Canada, as well as the reality of those young people who wish to study abroad? On the other hand, why are the refusal rates higher for certain institutions?

Based on these statistics, we must begin to establish a precise and complete diagnosis of the situation, before looking at a slightly more operational mechanism that relates to a shared jurisdiction between the federal and provincial levels.

• (1215)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

My second question is for Ms. Bezo.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several visa applications for international students are still being processed. For comparison, can you tell us what the processing times were before COVID-19, and what they were after the pandemic began?

According to Statistics Canada data, the cost of tuition for an international student enrolled in university is about three times that of a Canadian student. This may be a barrier for some international students. Have you approached Canadian universities to reduce their tuition fees for international students?

[*English*]

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Yes, in terms of looking at the trends and the experiences pre-pandemic versus throughout this pandemic period, there are some notable differences. As I mentioned in my opening comments, from a processing standpoint, given public health measures and limitations in being able to access visa processing centres and supporting documentation, we saw a slowing down and, in fact, a halting of the processing of those applications in the early days of the pandemic. There has been an effort to ramp it up since that time.

Based on the numbers that we are seeing, our international education sector has recovered in the overall numbers that we saw pre-pandemic, at the end of 2019.

From that perspective, we are very much encouraged. However, as I mentioned, half a million who have applied through those processes have been rejected since 2016.

I concur with my colleagues, Paul and Francis. There is more work operationally to be done to clear those pathways, address some of those issues and perhaps unpack any systemic issues that may be standing in the way of that.

With respect to the tuition fees, yes, this is an area of sensitivity. We have been working with institutions, not only in trying to think about those talent pipelines and ways in which we could move students into the Canadian context, but trying to be sensitive in the ways in which the value of that Canadian education is positioned.

I can share with you CBIE's most recent international student survey. In December 2019, it received 40,000-plus international student responses from those who are currently in Canada. They continue to cite the high quality of the Canadian education system as one of the most desirable elements—

The Chair: Wrap up, please. Your time is up.

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

[*Translation*]

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

First of all, I thank the witnesses for appearing this morning. This is a very important study that is very close to my heart, as we know.

I have heard the Conservatives talk about competition and the Liberals blame the Quebec government in their first questions. I, for one, think that we are here to find solutions, because there is indeed a problem. On the one hand, human beings who are given a dream are having it ripped out of their hands in the most impersonal way possible. On the other hand, there is a crystallization of unfair treatment for French speakers in this country, regardless of their origin. This study is therefore important, and I hope that we will readjust our aim in order to find concrete solutions, because the start of the school year in September 2022 is coming up quite quickly.

Mr. Brown Mastropaolo, I loved your opening presentation. In our study, there will be a lot of talk about statistics, but we must not forget that behind them there are human faces.

It would be nice if you could describe to us the typical journey of a French-speaking African student who has been refused a study permit. Can you list the steps he would have taken, for example?

• (1220)

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Thank you for asking me the question and thereby giving me the opportunity to tell you about what international students have to go through, which is sometimes described as an obstacle course.

I will use a student from Cameroon as an example. Let's call her Amina. She is about to graduate from high school. She goes to an EduCanada fair in Cameroon, where she meets officials from Global Affairs Canada and some representatives from CEGEPs. They give her advice and help her to complete her application, which she submits promptly. She is accepted. Given the quality of her record, she receives an academic scholarship from the Quebec government. As I mentioned, the scholarship provides \$14,000 for living expenses and also waives tuition. After obtaining her Certificat d'acceptation du Québec, Amina is able to submit her complete application for a study permit to the Canadian visa office around the end of April. For 20 weeks, Amina receives no news from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC. The CEGEP tries to reassure her as best they can. For CEGEPs, the school year starts sometime between August 20 and 25. Amina receives an answer from IRCC between September 5 and 10. The answer is a refusal.

What are the typical reasons for a refusal? First, the officer is not convinced that Amina will return to Cameroon when she finishes her studies in Canada. Second, the officer does not feel that the proposed program of study is reasonable, given her career path or other educational opportunities available to her locally. Those are the reasons often given.

At this point, let's ask some questions. First, how can an immigration officer judge whether or not Amina will return to Cameroon, especially when the various levels of government have established a wide range of incentives for temporary residents, especially international students, to become permanent residents? Then, how is an immigration officer an appropriate substitute for the authority of an institution of higher learning in expressing an opinion on someone's academic career? And finally, is it an immigration officer's role to assess the validity of the education system in Canada, or, in this case, in Cameroon?

In total, Amina spent 10 months of her year convincing her parents, gathering some extra funds, preparing for her stay and obtaining a scholarship. Basically, she has to abandon her plans and she does not really understand why. The CEGEP cancels her stay, also without really understanding why.

That's the basic problem: no one understands why. CEGEPs meet with many quality candidates and, after reviewing their files, decide to award them scholarships because they believe that they have what it takes to succeed. So why are they being turned down?

Amina will continue to talk about Canada, as will her parents, but the discourse will change. It will no longer be to dream of the maple leaf; it will no longer be about the snow, the cultural experience, or the quality of the education. Instead, Canada will become a synonym for dashed hopes, an obstacle course with traps everywhere.

Amina's story is the story of thousands of French-speaking students from Africa whom we in the CEGEPs meet every year when we are taking part in various recruitment activities, including the EduCanada fairs.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

Do I have any time left, Madam Chair? I thought it was important to let Mr. Brown Mastropaolo answer the question at length.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes. You have one minute and 15 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's great, thank you.

Mr. Brown Mastropaolo, you talked about the impact on students from francophone Africa when study permits are refused. Could you tell us about the impact on Canada's reputation and on the education provided by CEGEPs in Quebec?

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Very quickly, I would say that the consequence for Canada's reputation is the lack of trust that is created. Our strategy then has to be to re-establish our reputation, rather than to attract the attention of more international students in the countries we are talking about.

CEGEPs are questioning their participation in the Canadian government's initiatives to attract international students because the results are not there. Why would they invest thousands of dollars in them for so few results?

Then you wanted to know about the impact on CEGEPs. Although international students represent only 3% of our student population, without them, 37 programs in 20 CEGEPs would be at risk. In other words, those programs would not be offered if the international students were not there.

The challenge is not to attract students, especially from France. The problem comes when we want to increase the number of international students and diversify—

• (1225)

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Can you please wrap up?

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: In short, the consequences are in the teaching: program options decrease and courses are in jeopardy, especially outside the major centres.

In addition, from a cultural perspective, we are not able to diversify where the international students on our campuses come from.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: We will now proceed to MP Kwan.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for their expertise and presentations.

I'd like to put my first question to you, Ms. Bezo. You mentioned in your opening remarks the issue of dual intent. Indeed, dual intent exists factually for family reunification, but yet, even in that stream, we're seeing a lot of rejections on the premise that the immigration officials who assess the applications deem the visits from the spouse such that they would not return to their home country, because of dual intent. With respect to students, in this instance, yes, students want to come and study, and some may want to stay, but it does not necessarily mean that they would violate their immigration requirements and not return home.

From that perspective, as IRCC takes these items into consideration, would you suggest that the government should actually make it clear that unless there is a history of violation of immigration rules, the person should not be automatically rejected because somehow IRCC officials deem that they would not return home?

Ms. Larissa Bezo: I guess from our perspective, if we're really thinking about the strategic potential that comes from that pathway and that pipeline, we would strongly recommend that we think outside the box on this. Rather than working within that temporary visa framework that exists, we could think about that pathway for those who may choose to stay and for whom Canada would want to open the door to that possibility. Looking at perhaps an entirely

new pathway that would allow us to explore an explicit opportunity for students who want to both study and then remain after graduation, would be, from our perspective, much more strategic. It would allow us as a country to really identify those gaps in those areas.

We hear very clearly, for example, from our business leaders that we need to be recruiting and growing new talent to be competitive globally. We're hearing that the viability of our research institutions, knowledge industries and key sectors depend on an influx of that top global talent. We're hearing from ESDC that we're facing severe skill shortages in critical growth sectors. From our perspective, we see this as a very strategic moment in time, in thinking about our country's future prosperity and our future global connectedness, to really step outside of that existing framework and say, no, in fact we'd like to open the door to a more explicit framework; there's space.

I think our institutions are certainly keen to be part of that solution and think about how we innovate around this and create a much bolder pathway that aligns with and complements our nation's overall immigration goals. I think it's critically important to really think about this from a much more strategic standpoint and the future—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Perhaps I can jump in here. Do you mean to say that IRCC should bring in a new stream for international students, not only to study here but to stay here, to get permanent resident status? Is that what you mean?

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Yes. I think there's absolute merit in considering that and not applying that much more limiting temporary framework. I think we need to think very differently and much more boldly about how we chart that future path for the country. This would signal that significantly.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Some have argued that what students should be able to attain is this principle of "good enough to study here, good enough to stay". Is that what you're suggesting?

Ms. Larissa Bezo: I think they're great to study here and it is absolutely in our strategic interest for them to stay. Let us think strategically about how we create that path. I think our education institutions are keen to innovate around this, and I think we have a unique opportunity as a country in this moment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Mastropaolo, I'd like to ask you the same question on the issue around dual intent and the issue around rejection, saying that IRCC should not automatically judge because they think someone would not return even if there's no history of a violation of immigration rules.

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Yes, for us, refusing permits on the grounds of dual intent makes absolutely no sense in several respects. First, it just looks like a pretty easy way to reject candidates. Second, we have a whole range of incentives for them to stay here after they graduate. In fact, right from the start, their ability to come to Canada temporarily is reviewed as if they were coming permanently.

Dual intent became an issue when, for example, there was concern that a person would later claim refugee protection. However, when we look at the data, we see that the students who claim refugee protection are mostly from India and China, meaning that they are mostly people who come here to study in English. The students claiming refugee protection are not really from the countries where the CEGEPs recruit.

At this point in the analysis, then, I feel that the dual intent issue is irrelevant.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

Ms. Bezo was saying that IRCC should bring forward a new immigration stream for students who come and then also provide them with permanent resident status as a new stream. Is that something you would call for or support?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: We need to look at that a little more. The solution is not actually one-dimensional, in our view. It's not a matter of doing one program or making adjustments. After an analysis by the stakeholders, especially IRCC and the educational institutions, we need to establish how best to increase approval rates in this regard.

So I would not venture to say that it would be the solution.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, your time is up.

We will now proceed to our second round of questioning.

Mr. Seeback, the floor is yours for five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm actually going to give my time to Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, my dear colleague.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to ask all three witnesses a question.

The topic of our study is the recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students in Quebec and Canada. It was probably motivated by a somewhat negative picture of the situation.

In your opinion, is Canada losing its leadership and its appeal in the education of international students, and more particularly with francophone students?

Ms. Bezo, you can answer first. Then Mr. Davidson and Mr. Brown Mastropaolo can answer as well.

[*English*]

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Yes. In fact, with the rates of rejection that we are seeing in particular much more prevalently in Africa and francophone Africa, that's certainly serving as a limitation in terms of that pathway for students to come and to study. That's not even to speak about further pathways that might exist post-graduation. This does represent a lost opportunity. As I had shared initially, broadly speaking, we are speaking about a half a million rejections since 2016. This is a very substantive number of prospective individuals who have the opportunity to make a difference, whether in a Canadian community or an international community context.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Bezo. I apologize for stopping you, but I have very little time. I understand the point you are making.

Mr. Davidson, do you have a quick answer? I would like to ask another question afterwards.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Davidson: We are in a very competitive world, so we have to be at our absolute top of the game. We have two things to keep in mind. One is that Africa is still an emerging market for many countries. We have an opportunity to be best in class and to attract the best students we can.

The second thing I just want to underscore, because it came up earlier, was to keep in mind that international students create opportunities for Canadian students. They broaden the choice of programs that they can study. They broaden the opportunities for Canadians students to learn. It's in our economic interest, our education interest, to make sure we have the best student attraction system we can.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you want to add anything, Mr. Brown Mastropaolo?

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Yes, I would like to give a quick answer.

Canada really is losing its leadership in attracting international students. You just have to look at some of the things that are happening in terms of student recruitment, such as the diversification of countries of origin or the refusal rates for applications from French-speaking Africa. As Mr. Davidson mentioned, we are talking about emerging countries that are in the midst of redesigning or reforming their education systems. We are talking about a large youth population that is demanding to be educated.

I do feel that we are losing our leadership, particularly with those countries in Africa, but also with other French-speaking regions.

• (1235)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Brown Mastropaolo. So you all agree.

Now I would like anyone to jump in with an answer.

How do we stop the bleeding? Let's say you had the power to make decisions in the matter. What immediate steps would you take?

Let's start with Ms. Bezo.

[*English*]

Ms. Larissa Bezo: I think there are some practical operational issues that need to be addressed. The question about really unpacking what is happening with the discretionary aspect of decision-making certainly needs to be explored.

As I mentioned in my comments initially, I think there needs to be [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] algorithms that we're currently using to screen candidates to make sure that there is no—

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Further, as we look at the processes related to how we're engaging, I think there is more work to be done to make sure that there isn't any kind of structural bias within those kinds of processes. There are some concrete solutions we can use to address that, through blind review, and looking at ways in which we can compare identical cases across visa centres to make sure that we are staying with a consistent approach and one that is in alignment with Canadian values across the globe.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Bezo.

Mr. Davidson, I don't know whether this question can be answered in a few words, but do you have a short answer for us?

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Davidson: I would concur with Larissa's comments about the frontline operational realities. It's very important that we invest in that, very important that we train in that and very important that we align with the policy intent.

The additional comment I would make is that we—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: Madam Chair, I cannot hear the interpretation anymore.

I can hear it now.

[*English*]

The Chair: Could you just repeat the last few sentences? I think there was some interpretation issue. Please go ahead.

Mr. Paul Davidson: I want to concur with what Larissa has just said about the frontline operational issues. We need to invest in those front lines, we need to train on those front lines, and we need to make sure that they're aligned with the policy intent of the Government of Canada.

The other thing I want to illustrate is that, over the decades, the higher education sector, working together with the federal government and provincial governments, has demonstrated that we can attract students from new markets in a big way, and in particular, francophone Africa. This is an opportunity for all of Canada to realize.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP Ali.

MP Ali, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

My question is to all witnesses.

As you know, Canada is in a competition to entice people from around the world to come to study in Canada. We ask them to spend an enormous amount of money to do so. Among the inducements we offer them to study in Canada is the opportunity to work part time while studying and the opportunity to stay in Canada after completing their studies and to work in Canada as part of a pathway to permanent residence and ultimately citizenship.

Recently, a couple of cases of applicants from Pakistan came to my attention. IRCC refused one of the applications on the grounds that it was not satisfied that the student would leave Canada following their studies, based on four reasons, namely “the limited employment prospect in your country of residence; your current employment situation; the purpose of your visit; your family ties in Canada and in your country of residence”.

Isn't this exactly the type of person we expect to respond to our recruitment efforts?

In the other case, the applicant had completed a B.A. in business and wanted to come to Canada to study for an M.B.A. The IRCC officer wrote, “Submissions...do not provide a compelling explanation of why the applicant seeks to pursue Masters Management for future career path”. The officer's notes also state that the applicant “seeks study at a Christian university when the passport of applicant states religion as Islam, and submissions of applicant does not address the divergence of religious beliefs”.

In Ontario, it is not considered unusual that some non-Catholic families, including some Muslim families, prefer to send their children to Catholic separate schools.

Doesn't it seem as though sometimes we are sabotaging our own effort to attract international students? What would you suggest to address these issues?

• (1240)

Mr. Paul Davidson: I'll jump in, and I'm sure Larissa and Francis will want to join as well.

I think those very real-life examples are very pertinent to the committee. Of course, we're not going to comment on individual circumstances, but to go back to an earlier question in this conversation, they give you a flavour of what students are experiencing.

Again, what this comes back to is that we can have political commitment, and we do, because all parties in the House are supportive of positive immigration for Canada, which is really a good thing and a competitive thing. Therefore, we have political support. We have policy support in that we have a very attractive pathway for international students to come to Canada, to study, to work and to stay. International competitors are looking at our tools, and they're copying them and they're making them more generous. We have to stay competitive.

Then we have the operational realities of visa processing times. We want to ensure the integrity of the process, but the decision-making authority of the frontline immigration officer is real. We have to make sure that all staff representing Canada are well trained and have been invested in what we're trying to achieve as a country, because there was a time—and I've been in the field for over two decades now—where we wanted all international students to return to their country of origin. If you even expressed a hint that you wanted to stay, you'd be immediately rejected. Now I think we have a much more flexible approach and one that works for Canada's advantage and also for the countries of origin.

Those real-life examples are searing, and I'm glad the committee is doing this study and will be asking IRCC about how they would respond to those kinds of challenges.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Would any other witness like to jump in?

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Sure. Perhaps I'll add to what Paul has shared.

I agree. Similar to the example you shared, we have examples of Afghan students who have applied from a third country and were told that they're being rejected because they cannot prove that they're going to return to their home country—which from a sensitivity standpoint as a country that has opened up a pathway for resettlement is problematic, and there is a very direct human impact.

We know of examples, many of them, where students are applying and these are multi-year processes, where some have applied even seven or eight times and have continually been rejected. We need to put those students and these opportunities in context such that our values—

The Chair: Could you please wrap up.

Ms. Larissa Bezo: —*[Inaudible-Editor]* we were able to be fair and consistent, but we were also treating those students with respect and making sure that the way in which we do this contributes to that Canadian brand and reputation abroad.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

The Chair: MP Brunelle-Duceppe, you have two and a half minutes. You can please proceed.

[Translation]

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

I hope you cannot hear the horns too much; my office looks out on to Wellington Street.

Yesterday afternoon, we received the government's response to our written questions on the topic we are dealing with in this meeting. I will summarize what it says. I would like to hear Mr. Mastropaolo's comments. The other witnesses can add to that if they wish.

Here are some of the findings. First, the refusal rates for temporary permits are significantly higher for students who want to study in Quebec than for those who want to study elsewhere in Canada. Second, processing times are typically longer in Quebec than in the rest of Canada for all types of permanent immigration files. Third, the acceptance rate for study permits for English-language universities is higher than for French-language universities.

So, at the end of the day, what is the source of the problem? Is it because of a discriminatory process? Does our immigration system inherently discriminate against foreign students, especially francophones?

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Let me react to that question.

Yes, it is a valid question: is there discrimination based on country of origin, language or even the level of education sought? We see it in the statistics for CEGEPs: they have the highest refusal rates of all levels of education, especially for students from French-speaking countries, Western Europe excluded. For us, the refusal rates at the CEGEP level are problematic. The trend is clear. The trend actually existed even before the pandemic and before the automated processing system went into operation.

The same is true for processing times. They are far too long. As I mentioned earlier, people hear nothing for weeks on end. Minister Fraser responded by adding resources. That is a good thing, we welcome the gesture, but the mechanisms are still reactive. Are we always going to wait until we have a backlog of 1.8 million files before anything is done? Yet institutions have been complaining about the situation for three, four or five years.

Finally, it is true that acceptance rates are higher on the English side than on the French side, according to the available data.

• (1245)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What you are really saying is that Quebec is penalized because it has a different education system from the rest of Canada.

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: That is our assumption, yes. On the one hand, it's because our higher education system is different. On the other hand—

[English]

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

We will now proceed to MP Kwan.

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

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

My question is for Mr. Davidson.

One of the issues, of course, for university institutions is to attract new talent. Then, of course, I think part of it is to retain the new talent, as well. To that end, there's the idea of bringing forward a new immigration measure that would not only attract students but also provide them with permanent resident status as a stream, particularly in this case for francophone Africans, or students, if you will, because we also need to attract and retain francophone speakers in Quebec as well as outside of Quebec. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Paul Davidson: I'm really glad you raised the issue of attracting and retaining students.

Again, Canada's done some remarkably innovative things over recent years to increase the eligibility to work while you're a student, which not only provides income but gives you work experience and work-integrated learning opportunities while you're here. We've also extended, through the post-graduate work permits, the opportunities for people to really plan to be in Canada for a period of time, and frankly to put down roots while they're here.

There are also some really innovative programs in conjunction with the private sector. I think of the Halifax Partnership in Nova Scotia, which works with international students from the day they arrive in Canada to show them the opportunities and benefits of staying in Canada. We've also benefited over the last several years from the alignment of federal and provincial governments in Atlantic Canada to really make international students an engine for economic renewal in Atlantic Canada. In fact, I've heard some people speak of Canada's universities as being the Pier 21 of the 21st century. They're not only attracting people, but integrating them into Canadian life and making this a very attractive place for them to live, work and raise a family.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Would you support, then, the call that Ms. Bezo was advancing, and that is the idea of creating a new immigration stream for international students in this instance that would be targeted toward the francophone African community for PR status?

Mr. Paul Davidson: We always have to be alert to new mechanisms, new policies, that will enhance our competitiveness globally on this. There are huge opportunities with regard to francophone students from francophone Africa and elsewhere.

I would note the large percentage of international students who go on with postgraduate work permits, who proceed to permanent residency. That's a good path that we've created. There may be other ways we can explore going forward. I'm delighted that this committee is so interested in the subject.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our second round of questioning with MP Godin and MP Dhaliwal. Each one of you will have four minutes.

MP Godin, please go ahead.

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to finish getting the answers to the question I asked in my last round.

Mr. Brown Mastropaolo, how do we stop the bleeding? I won't repeat the whole question because I would like to ask another one afterwards.

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Thank you for asking that question again. I'll answer it quickly.

First of all, I feel we need a fairly rigorous analysis of the mechanisms IRCC has to ensure procedural fairness. That should be built into the immigration system. But, when we look at the refusal rates, we do not see it.

The issue of transparency in our immigration system also needs to be addressed.

We are also talking about different solutions, such as the student direct stream or the new pathway to permanent residency for international students. We must all look at a set of solutions together. When IRCC works alone, we then have to sort of flounder around to make sure that things are explained properly. So we need better dialogue between the educational institutions and IRCC on the issue of international students.

• (1250)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Brown Mastropaolo.

I have a question that is really bugging me. I will give you my opinion, my personal observation, and then I'd like to hear from all three of you. You are the experts and you are the ones who have to put up with the situation.

As you know, there are economic consequences for the community, but also for your educational institutions. The fewer teachers they have, the less revenue, and when there is less revenue, programs are cut.

Isn't that a way of letting the motivation to promote French slip away?

The question goes to Ms. Bezo, Mr. Davidson and Mr. Brown Mastropaolo.

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: I will answer first.

For us, the issue is the upper limit. I wouldn't say that the motivation is slipping away, because the number of international students at our institutions is increasing. However, we are levelling off. CEGEPs are not growing fast enough to meet the demand or to allow them to build on the quality of the education they offer. They are trying to attract students from countries where young people don't just want university degrees, they also want advanced diplomas in technical or applied fields.

For us, that is a ceiling, and it is getting particularly thick.

[*English*]

Ms. Larissa Bezo: Just picking up on Francis' comments, I agree. This is complex. There are many elements to this kind of puzzle. If we really want to have an impact in our communities, and think about the critical role that our institutions can play as those anchors, social, economic and otherwise, we really need to focus on conversations that focus on better alignment.

Those conversations would focus not only on community needs and labour market needs but aligning those with IRCC's immigration goals, dealing with the operational issues around visa processing, and any potential unintended bias in terms of consistent approaches to processing. Those should not serve as barriers to our future growth and prosperity as a country, and certainly at provincial and community levels as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: I would like to hear your opinion, Mr. Davidson.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Davidson: What we have is an opportunity for communities large and small across the country. I would pick up on Larissa's point about the alignment between the federal government, the provincial governments, the local communities, and what their needs are.

You are absolutely right, Monsieur Godin, that by having international students in your community, you increase the number of opportunities for your domestic students. You can run the second lab. You can run a broader array of courses. You can encourage those students to develop relationships with people around the world. That's good for Canada; that's good for Quebec. It's good for francophone minority communities, as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: My thanks to all the witnesses. I am grateful for your answers.

I have no further questions, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now end today's panel with Mr. Dhaliwal. You have four minutes.

Yes, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before we end the meeting, I'd like to raise an issue.

The Chair: Okay.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

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

Last year, the Liberal government brought in a landmark immigration policy to help students. When you look at the 90,000 applications that were brought in and the 27,000 express applications, it was a great help. The intent of the government is to get all students into the PR stream and then into citizenship.

I still keep hearing from students from countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh about being discriminated against based on their country of origin. Their visas are rejected. We have a dual intent that the students who are going to come here to study get into the PR and citizenship streams.

Why are they being rejected and how can the government bring in a consistent policy? It was mentioned earlier that they're not going to go back to their country and they should not be rejected based on that.

Would any of you like to comment?

• (1255)

Ms. Larissa Bezo: I'm happy to jump in.

There are some very concrete, operational elements that could be introduced to address some of the concerns that you raised about perceived barriers or perceived systemic challenges.

One simple way of assessing if there are systemic problems in some of those visa offices and some of the country samples that you cited is to have IRCC analysts from other regions complete a blind review of a sample of applications that have been either favourably or unfavourably processed, to ensure that there's concordance on the findings.

Another option could be to initiate a pilot, where you enable candidates of high rejection regions—even thinking about colleagues in francophone Africa—to appeal decisions where there are obvious errors of fact. There are instances when scholarship holders are told that they lack the financial resources to pay for their stay. That's one example. Simply requiring candidates to resubmit their applications is not enough.

Another option would be regularly having IRCC analysts from across a number of regions review identical cases and compare outcomes. If there is no consensus on the result, this highlights that there is a need for new types of training on intercultural confidence and perhaps other areas of processing where discretion is factored into these decisions.

These are very simple examples, but ways in which we can really move some of this forward in constructive ways.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Brown Mastropaolo.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: If I may, I would like to add to that answer.

I completely agree with Ms. Bezo. Canada receives a lot of applications; in fact, the number is increasing. So does IRCC have the resources they need or are the immigration officers overwhelmed and therefore straying from their mandate? That question needs to be asked.

I think an independent cross-check mechanism should be seriously considered, in order to ensure that the process is fair.

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Brown Mastropaolo: Finally, there is also the issue of training. We have to make sure that the officers understand where these students are and what type of system they are in. This is to avoid the pitfalls that we have seen in francophone Africa, but also in Bangladesh, in Pakistan and in other countries.

[English]

Mr. Paul Davidson: I'll quickly jump in here. I know the time is short.

I want to concur with my colleague witnesses.

I also want to express thanks for the recognition of what the Government of Canada has done through the pandemic, because Canada has really done an extraordinary job against some [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] circumstances. The fact that our international pathways have remained open is almost unique in the world. It's taken a lot of work from the sector, from provinces, from public health authorities and from the federal government to iterate in real time.

Let's not lose sight of the good work that's being done, but let's set our sights even higher going forward.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: On the other hand, universities have generated a great deal of revenue from the students.

Aside from—

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

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, but I have to keep everyone on time.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before the committee today.

If there is something you would like to bring to the committee's notice and you were not able to discuss it today, you can always send written submissions to the clerk of the committee. Those submissions can be considered by the members when we go through the report.

Before we adjourn, there is a quick question from Ms. Kwan.

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

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

Based on the presentations from the witnesses and the nature of our study, I think it would be very helpful if the clerk or the ana-

lysts could reach out to IRCC and to the ministry to obtain some statistics and the breakdown of the rejection rates as it relates to our study. I think it would be very useful for us to have that information for consideration as we move forward.

We received some statistics from individual presenters but I think we should have a holistic picture from IRCC. And since Ms. Bezo used the date 2016 in terms of the 500,000 rejection rates I think that maybe we can start with data starting from 2016 and the rejection rates of the breakdown of the countries and where those rejection rates are and then, specifically related to Quebec, how many of those are in Quebec.

I think that would really help us as we move forward with this study.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We'll go quickly to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Let me say that the Bloc Québécois is always ready to help our friends from other parties.

In fact, the written answers we received to our questions on the Order Paper on this topic include those statistics. So I will gladly share them with my colleagues on the committee.

• (1300)

[English]

The Chair: Thanks, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, for your offer.

Mr. Ali.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity.

I just wanted to raise one concern. When a witness is talking I think we should have a better way of informing them, rather than cutting them off. Maybe we can have a watch or something that indicates how many minutes are left. I'll leave it at that.

Thank you.

The Chair: I can give a warning to everyone. I'll have some two-minute, one-minute, 30-second cards to show everyone.

Thank you, everyone.

On Ms. Kwan's suggestion, I will work with the clerk to see what data we can get from the department. Whatever information we get, we will circulate it among the members.

To our witnesses, thank you for appearing before the committee and for giving your input in regard to the study we have started.

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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