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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1105)

[English]

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

I call the meeting to order. This is meeting number six of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

As the bells are ringing, is there unanimous consent to start the meeting? I am proposing that we have the minister's opening remarks, then suspend for a few minutes so that everyone can vote through the app, and then resume the meeting.

Is everyone okay with this plan?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We have unanimous consent to proceed. We will have the opening remarks by the minister, and then we will suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

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 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.

Today we are here to receive a briefing on current and projected processing timelines and acceptance rates at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

I would like to welcome the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship. Welcome, Minister, and thanks for appearing before the committee.

He is joined by IRCC officials Marian Campbell Jarvis, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; and Daniel Mills, senior assistant deputy minister, operations.

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. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular meeting. When speaking,

please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Witnesses will have five minutes for opening remarks. During the rounds of questioning, I will raise coloured time cards to the screen to indicate when one minute is left. We'll be using a one-minute card, a 30-second card, and a stop sign. I hope everyone takes due consideration of this.

With that, I would like to welcome Minister Fraser, who will begin our discussions with five minutes of opening remarks.

Minister, the floor is yours. You can begin, please.

Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you so much, Madam Chair, and thank you, colleagues.

It's a pleasure to be here. As someone who has spent the first six years as a member of Parliament sitting on parliamentary committees, let me communicate the respect that I have for the work we do at committees. I look forward to seeing what recommendations you may have to offer.

[Translation]

Thank you for inviting me to appear today before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

Folks, I have a 10-minute speech, and five minutes to give it. Let me begin.

[Translation]

As the Committee is aware, the pandemic has caused application processing delays and backlogs. In the Prime Minister's mandate letter to me, he indicated that one of my priorities is to reduce these processing times and delays brought on by COVID-19.

I apologize, but I hope you will agree with me making my remarks in English.

[English]

It's just to save some time.

Folks, it's not lost on me that there are challenges when it comes to processing in the immigration system, and I look forward to implementing some of the measures we are planning on, because I think we can make a significant difference.

Before we understand how those measures are going to make a positive difference, it's essential that we understand how the challenges we're facing came to be.

When I look at the circumstances around the pandemic, it's very clear to me that IRCC's operations have been impacted as much as any department in the Government of Canada.

For those who might not be aware of the challenges we are facing, they arise primarily from the fact that during the pandemic the Government of Canada made a decision to pivot its operations to welcome more newcomers as permanent residents who were already in Canada, in order to protect the public from the spread of COVID-19 when our borders were closed. In addition, the pandemic around the world has impacted some of our operations in Canada and in our global locations, causing certain offices to be closed for a period of time.

At the same time we were welcoming people who were located in Canada already, we continued to see a significant number of applications that were coming in from people who were overseas. This built up a significant number of cases for people who would like to come to Canada who were not already here. I do believe it was the right thing to do at the time so we could achieve our goal of welcoming the most new permanent residents in any year in Canada's history last year, but we knew it would come with certain consequences that we now need to deal with.

To the folks who have made applications and who are overseas, I want to say this: I understand the frustration you've been experiencing with some of the application processes, but we are working very hard to alleviate some of the challenges you're facing. I'm very excited about it.

Perhaps the place to start is the immigration levels plan that I tabled yesterday. You'll note that a target of 432,000 permanent residents next year is the highest number of permanent residents that Canada will have ever welcomed, by a significant margin, more than the 405,000 that we achieved this past year.

That is going to help reduce the number of people who are waiting to come to Canada, because we'll be able to welcome more of those who already have an application in the system. However, there are other measures we're putting in place that are going to make a dramatic difference to actually improve the quality of the experience while people are going through the application process.

I note in particular the \$85-million investment included in the economic and fiscal update this past fall, which includes finances for work permit processing, for study permit processing, for proof of citizenship cards, to reduce the inventory of permanent resident cards and to expedite the processing of temporary residency visas.

In addition to these measures that we're going to see improvements on, we are going to have some major functionalities of the new digital platform we are working on that are going to boost the productivity of our department over time and improve the quality of the user experience.

In particular I note that the citizenship process has moved to a digital application process, and at the end of the citizenship process, we have moved to virtual ceremonies. We're looking now at addi-

tional options that will allow for an electronic oath for people who would like to expedite the finalization of their citizenship process, when the last thing they need to do is swear the oath in order to become Canadian citizens and they might choose to celebrate their citizenship at a later time.

There are other functionalities that have come online recently, such as digital intake for different lines of business. By this summer, there will be up to 17 different lines of business within IRCC's operations that will allow for a digital intake process for those who are applying to come to Canada.

We also have a PR application process near the final stages that will allow you to take part in it electronically. Over the course of this pandemic, we've seen more than 200,000 people avail themselves of this opportunity. One of the benefits really driven home for me with this one is that during a time when a lot of in-person services have been compromised as a result of COVID-19, we....

I'm at the end of my time. I didn't see the one-minute warning. I'll finish very quickly by saying that, between the digital intake, the application processes for PR and the new permanent residence case tracker for family unification purposes, we're seeing people being able to get real-time information about their files. These digital functions are going to continue to come online, which will result in an improved experience with Canada's immigration process.

● (1110)

I'm thrilled to be here today to discuss some of these measures, and I look forward to answering whatever questions you might have.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, everyone.

I'm pleased to appear before the committee today.

[*English*]

I appreciate your time very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The voting app will be opening soon. We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that everyone can vote.

We will go into our round of questioning as soon as everyone has voted on the app. Thank you.

● (1110)

(Pause)

● (1120)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

All the members have voted. Madame Lalonde might have to go and verify, so she will do that.

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

Mr. Hallan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can begin, please.

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

Minister, thank you for showing up, and in person. It's great to see you.

Last night at our Special Committee on Afghanistan, we had two retired major-generals. They testified that they sent a letter to IRCC back in July 2021, asking for a pipeline to get those refugees who were interpreters here. Obviously, they had no response. You had 23 of your own Liberal colleagues write a letter in December 2020, and, again, it fell on deaf ears. The UNHCR testified, at that same committee, that they had a plan to evacuate vulnerable Afghans back in early 2021, and again there was no response.

I've written many letters to your office—to you directly—without getting a response.

Thousands of Afghan interpreters and Afghan nationals are stranded in Afghanistan. What everyone wants to know is, what tangible steps are you or your department taking to bring those refugees here? No one has seen a proper plan yet.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, thanks very much, through you to the member, for this important question.

The situation in Afghanistan is what justified us making what I would suggest is one of the most substantial commitments—to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees—of any country in the world, and certainly on a per capita basis. The circumstance the member has described is precisely why we have established not just an ordinary stream for humanitarian refugee resettlement out of Afghanistan, but—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully—

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I believe I have the same amount of time as the member.

The Chair: Mr. Hallan, please let the member give the answer.

Hon. Sean Fraser: That's specifically why we established the special immigration measures, to target those folks who made a significant and enduring contribution to Canada. The steps we are taking to welcome them here include working with referral partners in DND and Global Affairs Canada to make sure we know who worked with the Government of Canada so we can bring them here.

There are challenges on the ground that we are sorting out with partners—state partners, partners in the region and international organizations—to help facilitate the safe passage of those folks who have not yet left Afghanistan. I would share, Madam Chair, that with now more than 7,500 Afghan refugees in Canada, we're seeing a regular pace of arrivals, and it's very encouraging to me in this position.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, what are the metrics, then? What kind of monthly metrics are we looking at? How many people do you think you're going to bring in a month?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The effort is not to measure a particular number of people every single month. If you were to do the math, you would see that the commitment of 40,000 by next year is what the publicly stated target has been. That would put you in the ballpark of somewhere around 1,250 to 1,500, depending on the month.

That doesn't mean that the same number is there every month. Some months it will be more; some months it will be less.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Minister, can you please table with the committee what numbers you think are going to be coming in?

Hon. Sean Fraser: If you're asking for a written response to rough timelines of folks, it won't specify, every single month, the exact number that's scheduled, because there are circumstances that require flexibility month to month.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: One of the issues in bringing people over here is biometrics. We know other countries are able to do that for those Afghan refugees. Again, this ties in with the backlog issue. What is being done for this biometrics issue?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Just as a point of clarity, if the honourable member is aware of countries that have access to biometrics inside Afghanistan, I would like to know which countries he's referring to, because I would call them immediately.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: For example, Pakistan—as one of the witnesses said—can do that, but the issue is also getting people into Pakistan safely. That's what people want to know. Instead of us, you should be sorting this out. It's been quite a while now.

Hon. Sean Fraser: With great respect, Madam Chair—and I know the question is filled only with good intentions—we have had conversations with Pakistan, the UAE, Qatar, the United States, the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and private sector partners, all of whom have the ability to offer biometrics outside of the country. If people can get outside of the country, Canada can perform the biometrics outside of the country.

The challenge is not for the humanitarian cases or for special immigration measures applicants who are already outside of Afghanistan. When it comes to biometrics, the challenge is for people who are inside Afghanistan. As you can appreciate, the Taliban—a listed terror organization in Canadian law—has seized control of Afghanistan, and they are not interested in facilitating Canadian processing staff to do their job inside Afghanistan—

• (1125)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, Minister, I think that also ties back into the fact that Canada was not prepared, and, on top of that, an unnecessary election was called, and that totally threw everything off.

One of the generals yesterday made a very interesting statement: “Stop sending emails. Be transparent with the Afghan applicants and start talking to them person to person. Great Britain, the United States, France and Ukraine sent people into Kabul to grab people out of the country. Canada sent an email.”

It's true, because I hear this in my office all the time. When will these auto replies and no responses stop? When can we show some real transparency to these refugees who are so desperate to get out?

Hon. Sean Fraser: You raised two issues with that question, one with respect to the timing of the evacuation, and the second on communication with applicants.

Madam Chair, I can't see what flag you're holding.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Okay.

Very quickly, at the time Kabul fell, Canada had not had a military mission with the logistics capacity of moving people since 2014—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Was an election necessary, then?

I would just like to say that—

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I believe the floor is mine and not the member's—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Respectfully, I would just like to say that's why that happened.

The Chair: We'll have one person at a time. Let him finish, and then we will come to you.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Was an election plan more important than an evacuation plan? Can you please answer that, yes or no?

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

I would request that all members, if they ask a question, please allow the minister to answer the question. Only one person should speak at a time, and all questions should be directed through the chair. Please make sure that, if members are asking questions, time be given to the minister to answer the question. Thank you.

Now we will proceed to MP Ali.

MP Ali, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

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

Thank you, Minister, for your time.

There are approximately one million vacant jobs in Canada. As a result, more companies are looking beyond our borders for talent. What can I tell businesses in my riding that need workers about what our government is doing to ensure that they have the workers they need in a timely manner?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Just to put it into perspective, the economic recovery from COVID-19 in Canada has been as strong as in any developed nation in the world. Before the omicron variant landed in our communities, we saw 107% of the jobs lost during the pandemic recovered. GDP had exceeded prepandemic levels, and our labour force participation rate had hit an all-time high.

That said, we still had, at the end of the year, about 900,000 job vacancies in the Canadian economy. We need to adopt policies that will foster economic growth, and immigration is going to help drive the growth we need.

The immigration levels plan that I tabled yesterday has a strong economic focus, and it's designed to help ensure that we can get as many workers here as our system allows to fill those gaps in the labour force. We're talking about workers in our health care sector and our transportation sector. Go down any main street and talk to a restaurant owner, or go to a machine shop to see if they have talent on the shop floor to fill the orders that they otherwise could fill.

Immigration is going to play a major role, and with yesterday's levels plan that I tabled, we now have one of the strongest tools that we've ever had in our history to get workers here on a permanent basis. However, this only scratches the surface, because we also have the opportunity to use our demand-driven temporary immigration programs to get workers here more quickly who might not be needed in the long term as permanent residents.

The combined impact of the levels plan with our temporary programs is going to give us the tools we need to leverage immigration to get workers here to fill those jobs where business owners can't find Canadians in their own community to fill the jobs they need to maximize the economic growth potential.

I'll leave my answer there, but I think you can appreciate, Madam Chair, that I could spend several hours on this subject.

• (1130)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair, Minister, many of my constituents have immigrated from Pakistan. They see that student applications from some neighbouring countries have approval rates of 75% to 85%, but student applications from Pakistan have an approval rate of 21% or 22%. Often my constituents wonder if this is because student visa processing is not done in Pakistan but farmed out to processing centres in other countries.

Minister, can you tell me how you might help increase approval rates to an equitable level in Pakistan?

Thank you.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

It is important that we don't just pursue large numbers of immigrants, which is essential, but that we also pursue fairness in the system, so people trust that the decisions made under the system are done in an equitable way, free from treating people from one country of origin differently than those from another.

We're looking for talent. We're looking for people who meet the eligibility criteria. One of the bright spots that I would point the honourable member to is what we've seen in the student direct stream, a program that's used to facilitate and expedite the welcoming of international students to Canada for the purposes of study. We've seen an increase in Pakistan with the student direct stream to, I believe, 46%—if I'm off from memory, I'll follow up with the member personally. That is going to be part of the path forward.

We are also seeing that in countries that have had more refusals, it's often a result of the fact that we're seeing so many applications coming in, and not necessarily that they're being treated differently than they have been treated before.

This is a huge opportunity to expand the student direct stream across different jurisdictions, so we can have a higher rate of acceptance, but more importantly, we can welcome more and more students here, because international students who settle in Canada show extraordinary social, economic, and cultural outcomes over the long term and have the opportunity, in my personal opinion, to make excellent permanent residents should they end up staying in Canada beyond their period of study.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Minister.

Family reunification is really important, and families have been waiting for a long time during the pandemic. Can you tell me how long families can expect to wait if they are applying to sponsor a spouse today?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'll give you the short answer first, and if time allows I'll give you the long answer.

The Chair: You have one minute, Minister.

Hon. Sean Fraser: The short answer is 12 months. We are back to the service standard for processing times when it comes to family reunification. There are some real frustrations for people who got caught during that challenge I described in my opening remarks, about how the pandemic prevented us from welcoming as many people from other countries as would normally have come in.

Through the changes and investments we've made in the system, including the hiring of 500 staff, we now have the capacity to process new applications in family reunification streams in 12 months, in accordance with the service standard that existed before the pandemic.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds, MP Ali.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'm going to give 15 more seconds to the minister.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm glad you did, because I want to add something.

I just remembered that I skipped over one of your previous questions about local processing facilities. My own view is that we can have local expertise to facilitate the information and the understanding of local cultures and populations, but I do believe that by leveraging our global network, we have the opportunity to take advantage of certain offices that have the capacity to boost the productivity for countries all over the world.

That short answer didn't do it justice.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Time is up.

We will now proceed to MP Brunelle-Duceppe. Because the members attending virtually cannot see the cards, I will just interrupt at one minute and at 30 seconds.

MP Brunelle-Duceppe, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): I want to raise a point of order before starting my round. I was just about to say that I can't see your cards and that I don't know how much time I have left. I just want to be clear and make sure that the time I took to say this won't be deducted from my six minutes. I will now start my round.

Hello, Minister, thank you for being here with us today.

As I just said, I don't have much time, and so I may interrupt you, but please don't take it personally. The answers to many of my questions can be a yes or a no.

During your most recent press conference, you said that the 85 million dollars injected into your department would lead to wait times returning to normal within a year. Do you still think so today?

• (1135)

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, we need to be a bit more specific in our language.

The \$85 million should get us back to the service standard processing time for work permits and study permits. It will allow us to get the PR card inventory back to a wait time of one to two weeks.

For proof of citizenship and TRVs, I can't say specifically when we'll achieve the exact service standard, but we'll see a marked improvement.

With temporary residence visas, it will allow us to process people more quickly. As you can appreciate, depending on who's applying and where they're coming from, the specific amount of time may be different for individual cases, but we will see a marked improvement with the \$85 million.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That doesn't necessarily mean that backlogs will be eliminated in a year in Quebec, but that maybe we'll get back to a wait time that makes sense for people asking for a study permit.

Am I given to understand that the issue of 40 000 Afghan refugees promised by your government will be resolved by this time next year?

Minister, does that also mean that we will eliminate wait times for temporary foreign workers, which can be up to eight months?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Just for the sake of clarity, there are a couple of different issues you've raised that are distinct from the \$85 million you raised before. The 40,000 Afghan refugees are at a pace such that we expect they will all be resettled in Canada by the end of next year.

With respect to the processing times for temporary foreign workers in Quebec, I would point out that Quebec is actually the jurisdiction where we process work permits more quickly than in every other jurisdiction. There is, of course, a challenge, because there are different documents that need to precede the processing of the work permits with respect to the equivalent of an LMIA, for example, and the particular document that's an equivalent in Quebec.

I appreciate that there were three or four questions there, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Do you want me to clarify? I'd be happy to expand on my answer.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Minister.

Your French is improving, and I'm very happy to see it.

The Bloc Québécois received your briefing note after making an access to information request. What's strange is that the staff from your own department said that the number of requests to be processed is at its highest peak for this decade, which will impact the forecasts for 2022 and lead to longer processing delays and long wait times that will continue well beyond the full resumption of operations.

That's what the employees from your department said, and that is included in your briefing notes. Last week, during your press conference, you seemed much more optimistic than your own staff.

Are we to believe the minister's optimism or the briefing note from the department's employees?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, I'm an optimist by nature, but I'm optimistic not just out of my natural attitude: It's because we have some very good news that has been put forward.

With respect to requests for information, I think there are a lot of people who are probably very frustrated because they've been seeking updates on their particular case. One example of how the measures we announced recently at a press conference will make a really serious difference is the introduction of the PR case tracker, for example. Eighty per cent of the cases that come through the MP line, which you'll be familiar with, are simply seeking a status update. If we go upstream and we proactively provide that information to people on their own device, they won't need to call IRCC. They won't need to call their member of Parliament's office. They won't have to wait months for an update, because it will be in their pocket.

The statistics you were citing, I believe, precede the impact that the \$85 million and the new digital measures are going to have. To

the extent that I'm mistaken about that, I would invite my officials to offer clarification in this regard.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I will nevertheless circle the date on my calendar. In a year, I'll know if you had reason to be optimistic.

You mentioned that applications have to be treated fairly. How do you explain the data from your own department, which shows a certain disparity between francophones and anglophones, especially for the international student program?

This is a fundamental issue not only for Quebec, but for francophone communities outside of Quebec.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm pleased to provide you with some clarifications about this.

The situation in Quebec is very different...

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute left.

[Translation]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Quebec selects all of the immigrants that wish to settle in Quebec.

[English]

It's difficult listening to my own translation in my ear.

For international students, I think this is really important, because I think they offer one of the greatest opportunities for us to increase the number of francophone newcomers.

• (1140)

[Translation]

We intend to increase the number of francophone newcomers, and I think that welcoming international students is the best opportunity to do it.

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left. I'm sorry for interrupting.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Again, we have seen real positive experiences with the student direct stream in countries like Senegal and Morocco, which have seen an increase in the approval rates.

There are still challenges when I look at some of the numbers in certain other countries—I'm thinking about Côte d'Ivoire, for example—which we can continue to look at, but when I look at the approval rate for francophones and anglophones coming from within those regions or certain countries, the difference is not enormous. To the extent that we can continue to work to close that gap, I think it's essential that we do, because I think it's good for our country, and I think it's good for the province of Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: One thing is clear: the rate of refusal is higher for francophones than anglophones.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe. The time is up. We will have to proceed to the next member.

Ms. Kwan will have six minutes for her round of questioning.

Ms. Kwan, you can begin, please.

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

Thank you to the minister for coming to the committee.

I want to follow up on the Afghanistan resettlement issue. Two years to resettle 40,000 Afghanistan refugees is a long time. For some, they may not be able to make it, due to the urgency of the situation. Many people are saying that they are having difficulty in accessing or being able to produce the various documentations that IRCC requires.

My first question is this: Will the minister agree to waive the documentation requirements for Afghans fleeing persecution, including the need to obtain biometrics, until they're safely on Canadian soil?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We don't have plans, currently, to waive the requirement of biometrics. I think this is really important, because 80% of the pieces of information we learn about that render someone inadmissible—for security purposes, for example—come from biometric requirements. I think it would be inappropriate for us to waive that requirement, given the circumstances that we're dealing with. That said, we are doing whatever we can to expedite the resettlement.

I would point out—I don't think time will allow, Madam Chair, and I want to respect my colleague's time—that the timelines we're talking about to resettle 40,000 Afghan refugees far exceed the performance of virtually every other country in the world. I think there are some mistaken conflations between the opportunity we had to settle large numbers of refugees from Syria as opposed to Afghanistan. The circumstances were very different. If time allows in a subsequent question, I'd be happy to clarify why that's the case.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe the minister can submit that information to the committee in writing. However, I don't accept that, because I believe that the government can waive the requirements. That's not to say that they won't have security checks; when they are on Canadian soil, once they are safely on the ground here, you can then proceed with all of that work.

I'm going to leave that with the minister to ponder, and I urge him to reconsider.

Will the minister waive the refugee determination requirements for Afghan refugees, especially for those under the group of five private sponsorship stream?

Hon. Sean Fraser: For a bit of clarity, for folks who are inside Afghanistan, we established an extraordinary measure through the special immigration program so that we do not require a refugee

status determination for those who've qualified because they have served Canada in some capacity and qualify for our programs.

I would point out, as well, that if you're operating through the private sponsorship streams for the sponsorship agreement holders—if you're working with a sponsorship agreement holder—there's no requirement for a refugee status determination, which I think is a pretty important feature.

The member has asked about the G5 and community sponsorship pieces—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, and that's exactly the point. Is the G5 refugee determination requirement...? Why require that for the G5?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I haven't taken any solutions off the table. I sense, when I look at the data, that the success rate and the ability to process applications more quickly and with a higher degree of success... If we focus on the sponsorship agreement holders, we tend to see far more people being approved far more quickly.

To the extent that there are other solutions that members would like to put on the table, of course, I'll consider them in good faith and I have not taken any solution off the table.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Minister. I've written to you about this and I haven't had a response, so please respond and please take action.

There are a number of internationally educated nurses who have worked hard to meet Canadian standards and are licensed to practise here in Canada, but are unable to do so because they do not have an open work permit and their PR application is stuck with lengthy delays.

Will the minister immediately issue a bridging open work permit to those waiting for their PR application to be processed, and expedite their PR applications?

Hon. Sean Fraser: For people who have PR applications and who are health care professionals, we are already expediting applications. There's a unique issue around internationally educated nurses that I think we can make progress on, but the reasons why one person may be delayed could be very different from why other people are delayed. Some of them have come through different programs where they are specifically approved to come to Canada to work as caregivers, for example; others may not be.

People who are here in Canada now can simultaneously make an application for permanent residence to come in through a different stream. However, we need to continue to work with provinces, which have jurisdiction over the regulating bodies that manage the qualifications a person is required to have in order to practise in their given field. That's something that I'm looking forward to continuing in my conversations with every province in Canada, because I think it presents an excellent opportunity to increase the number of health care workers in Canada.

• (1145)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The issue is not the qualifications. They have met all the requirements. Their problem is that the only thing that's impeding them from practising their craft and their profession is immigration. That is the issue. I've written to the minister about that. Please read that letter, respond to it and address the issue.

With respect to caregivers, there have already been significant delays in processing. Many have waited for almost two years without any update on their files beyond a confirmation that their application has been received. There aren't even processing standards for this stream. As of January 17, 2022, IRCC has indicated that the home child care provider pilot is closed to new applicants.

Yesterday's announcement on levels does not address this issue. What will the government do to ensure that more caregivers get into the stream?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I believe we're out of time. I'll answer very quickly.

We processed more than 6,000 files last year. We're in the middle of a pilot program for caregivers, for both child care providers and personal care workers.

I think that, because of the limitation on time and the need to respect other members' time, I'd have to follow up with the member to provide a fulsome answer.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wrote to the minister on this issue as well.

Minister, please read the letter and respond to me in writing.

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

Based on the time we have with the minister, for the second round we will have four minutes each for Mr. Redekopp and Mr. Dhaliwal. Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Kwan will have two minutes each.

With that, we will start our second round with Mr. Redekopp.

You have four minutes for your round of questioning.

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

Minister, I witnessed remarkable callousness from you and your officials toward immigrants and refugees who are trying to come to Canada. My office has contacted your ministerial inquiries unit on multiple cases for immigrants where the correction of simple paperwork errors or a bit of compassion would actually save the lives of people from overseas trying to come into Saskatoon.

I wrote to you directly about Bawa Bhalla, a Canadian citizen, his wife Anterpreet Kaur, and their infant daughter Brahmjot, who

is also Canadian. You're refusing to allow Madame Kaur into Canada on the basis that she's not expecting to leave the country. Well, that's exactly the point. She needs to come to Canada to be with her Canadian husband and her Canadian daughter. She has a legitimate path to permanent residency.

I want to know why you guys have so harshly refused Madame Kaur's application to be with her Canadian husband and daughter.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Just to clarify, I won't get into the specifics of individual case files. There are obviously privacy concerns, and I don't have the file in front of me in any event.

I think the member raises a really good point. There are people who would make excellent permanent residents based on their connections to folks who are already here. One of my mandate letter commitments that we're working on developing the policy to support right now is to establish a temporary resident visa for people who are awaiting a decision on their spousal reunification files.

When I hear about these cases.... They're in my constituency, too. Families being kept apart because they can't qualify for a TRV on the basis that they won't return home is something that we have to take a look at. I'm glad that I've been mandated to do it. I look forward to working with members of this House who've seen this concern in their constituencies.

I think we have an opportunity to make a major correction that will improve the quality of life for a lot of people who want to come to Canada.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Another example is Manpreet Kaur's case. As you're aware, Manpreet Kaur and her husband are permanent residents who live in my riding of Saskatoon. She wishes to return to India to say goodbye to her mother before she passes away, as she's very sick. As of today, her PR card is 66 days overdue and she can't leave the country. You just said that they're typically one to two weeks behind. Here's a case where it's 66 days.

Your department's reply said, "the application cannot be processed faster at this time.... There is...no urgent procedure for new PRs.... If your applicant wishes to find out how long it may take to process their first PR card, please visit the processing times page. We hope this information is helpful."

It's not helpful. What would be helpful is to have the PR card done in a reasonable time.

Is this a systematic failure based upon incompetence, or are you maliciously blocking PR cards for people who want to see their dying parents?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, I will pass on commenting on whether there is malicious intent behind any of these files.

I can reassure all members of this House that any challenges we are facing are due to the circumstances tied to the pressures that COVID-19 has put on Canada's immigration system, including on PR cards, which typically require somebody to show up for an in-person appointment. Many of the offices have been closed down and there hasn't been that opportunity for face-to-face engagement.

That said, I think there's a huge opportunity to make progress on this specific piece. When I referred to a one- to two-week inventory in a mailroom on PR cards, that is the result of the \$85 million that was recently announced. When that is fully deployed, it's going to allow us to reduce the inventory to that reasonable amount of time.

I don't think that under normal circumstances a 66-day wait is appropriate for a PR card. That's why we're making these investments, so we can get back to what's reasonable after the pandemic has had such a dramatic impact on our day-to-day operations for these kinds of in-person appointments.

• (1150)

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Is there any plan to get back to in-person offices? When will that be happening in, for example, Saskatoon?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The specific locations will depend on the public health situation in a given jurisdiction. The answer for Saskatoon may be different from Halifax, which may be different from New Delhi.

We have tried to pivot to virtual services wherever possible and equip staff to work from home. There are some offices globally where that capacity does not exist.

Madam Chair, I saw the warning that we're just about out of time, so I'd be happy to elaborate further on a subsequent question.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

You have four minutes for your round of questioning. You can begin, please.

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

I'll split my time with Ms. Kayabaga, for two minutes each.

Minister, first of all, thank you for coming here. Thank you for the \$85 million and the steps you're taking.

I'm at the busiest office in Canada. Your department can tell you that. These numbers are not going to help people like those Mr. Ali mentioned, the temporary foreign workers most of these small businesses need.

I'll give you a particular example of the Maharaja Restaurant in my constituency. It took two ministers. I even took your predecessor for a tour of the restaurant. They spent millions of dollars, and they couldn't even open up the restaurant during the last minister-ship, or even today. It's because they applied for temporary permits for cooks, and those have not yet been processed.

How do you think your plan with help businesses like those, which are going through a tremendous amount of stress, with millions and millions of dollars in investments at stake?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thanks very much.

There are different issues that are at play for this kind of circumstance. Let me just clarify the difference.

For general work permit processing, the \$85 million that I referred to is actually going to make a significant difference and should allow us to get back to the service standard.

There's a unique issue impacting people who are coming from India in particular, because of the impact of COVID-19 on our operations. I mentioned in my previous response that there are certain areas where we have not been able to allow people to work from home. The New Delhi office is one of those particular areas.

All of that said, I'm very optimistic. I'm working with Minister Qualtrough, who's responsible for employment and workforce development, to see how we can leverage the programs that we have shared custody over to facilitate and expedite the welcoming of temporary workers and potentially future permanent residents to Canada, and deal with the very acute labour shortage we're wrestling with right across the country.

The Chair: We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for coming to our committee and responding to a lot of the questions that we have. I think a lot of my questions have already been answered through the other questions that people have asked.

One of the recurring issues in my riding is family reunification and refugee sponsorship processing times. Minister, I've had many conversations with members of my community who are concerned about the length of time that their family reunifications are taking.

Can you speak on how long families can expect to wait if they're applying to sponsor their spouses today?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, thank you.

This came up in a previous question as well.

This was one line of business that, like every other, was impacted significantly by the pressures of COVID-19. Thankfully, family reunification is one of the areas where I think there's been the greatest amount of progress. Someone who applies today should expect a 12-month return, which is back to the service standard.

In addition, the new PR case tracker is available today for family reunification cases. This is one of the things that are going to make a big difference for the user experience. Someone who's not just worried about how long it's going to take to get here, but doesn't know where their application is in the process, now has the ability to log in to get specific information on their file and not just see generic information about what the standard processing time would be in a non-pandemic situation. This is going to make a major difference and relieve a lot of anxieties for people who are worried about not knowing where their case is.

• (1155)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

I don't know if I have time to ask any other questions.

The Chair: Your time is almost up now. Thank you.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm back on Thursday, too.

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have two minutes.

[Translation]

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

More than once, the committee has been told that setting up an Immigration Ombudsperson could help to better protect people from delays that they are sometimes subjected to during the processing of their applications. I even think that some are currently prosecuting your department because of the unreasonable wait times they've been subjected to.

I'd like to know what you think about the possibility of setting up an Immigration Ombudsperson.

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: As I said before, I'm not someone to take any different ideas off the table. The idea of an ombudsperson is not something I've been mandated to implement in my mandate letter from the Prime Minister. One thing that I think is important, though, is that there are different facets that ensure procedural fairness for individual applicants through the immigration system today. Of course, people who are applying to come on a temporary basis—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'll have to interrupt you, Minister. I just wanted to know if you agreed with the idea of creating an Ombudsperson position or not. You seem ambivalent about it, but that's fine.

As I'm sure you know, the Special Committee on Afghanistan has been looking for solutions to the crisis in that country for a few weeks. We were focused on the humanitarian aspect yesterday, but this affects your department because, as you know, your government promised to bring in 40 000 Afghan refugees.

Yesterday, I offered retired Major-General David Fraser the opportunity to ask a question through me. Mr. Fraser's question was this: Minister, what is the plan to evacuate these people?

Why aren't you doing what the United Kingdom, the United States or France are doing? They're talking to people directly instead of sending emails.

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: There are some people who are making their way outside of Afghanistan for onward settlement to Canada now. Some of them are here already.

We're continuing to work with organizations that have a presence in the region or on the ground to ensure that, to the extent we can secure safe passage for Afghan refugees outside of the country and onward travel to Canada, we're doing everything we can.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, the major-general just wanted to know why you aren't talking to them directly, like the United States, Great Britain and France, instead of using email.

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: We do plan to reach out to everybody who is going to be eligible for our program to ensure that they're able to be resettled into Canada. I think it's essential that we do everything we can to give them real-time—

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If our allies are doing it, why aren't we able to do it? That's what I don't understand.

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe; the time is up.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

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

You can proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Volleyball Canada CEO and representatives of FIVB, IOC and Pro Bono Canada would like to meet with the minister to discuss the plan to assist the Afghan women's volleyball team to come to Canada safely. Would the minister be willing to meet with them?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm willing to meet with many groups. As you can appreciate, there are hundreds—probably thousands—of meeting requests that we're trying to wade through to make sure we're giving attention to those who may qualify for our programs.

I'll work with my team to look at where my time is best spent to make sure that we're able to work with groups that have the best chance of getting Afghans who qualify for our programs to resettle in Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I didn't hear a "yes" to that question.

The minister has just said they'll look at it. Perhaps he can assign staff to work with me with respect to this meeting request.

The backlog for outbound family reunification applications is significant. Is the minister saying that the 12-month processing time would apply to outbound family reunification applications as well?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Member—I may need to extend by a minute—could you clarify the difference between which streams you're talking about?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm talking about outbound family reunification spousal sponsorship applications.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Do you mean people outside of Canada now who are applying to come into Canada?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct. The spouses are outside of Canada.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, my understanding is that the 12-month service standard will remain for those applicants.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How long would it take for the ministry to process all the backlogs?

• (1200)

Hon. Sean Fraser: It's a difficult question, because there are large numbers of applications that continue to come in. Even if you were processing cases in real time and everything was in the service standard, you're still going to have hundreds of thousands of cases that are pending at any given point in time. It would depend on which stream you're talking about. It would depend on what you would like to reduce a level to.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm talking about the same stream that we've been discussing—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: —applications for outbound spousal sponsorship. Maybe the minister can submit that answer.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm happy to work with our officials to give whatever information we can after my committee appearance today.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

With this, our first panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I would like to thank Minister Fraser for appearing before the committee today to talk about the important work he is doing to make sure that our country remains open to new immigrants.

Thank you, Minister.

The members will be really looking forward to seeing you again on Thursday.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'll be back.

Thanks so much, folks. I really appreciate your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow the officials to come back. There will be no opening remarks. We will go into rounds of questions after that.

I will suspend the meeting for two or three minutes, and then we will come back.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

For this panel, we are joined by the IRCC officials. I would like to welcome Marian Campbell Jarvis, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; and Daniel Mills, senior assistant deputy minister, operations.

We will proceed directly to the round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Seeback, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

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

When we look at the backlogs, there have been a number of reports and others that have listed what these numbers are: for example, 548,000 permanent resident applications, including 112,392 refugee applications; 775,000 temporary resident applications, study permits, work permits, etc.; and 468,000 Canadian citizenship applications.

The minister came before committee today. He suggested that the injection of \$85 million is going to resolve this situation and get everything back to normal processing times. When I look at these kinds of numbers, I find that to be an extraordinary statement.

I have a couple of questions. Number one, on what did he base his answer? Number two, what are the metrics being relied upon?

Is there an internal document that was prepared for the minister for his appearance today to say that this \$85 million will have this result? If there is such a document, can you please produce it today, in addition to the answer you're going to give me now?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for your question.

As the minister mentioned, the 85 million dollars won't be able to reduce the backlog in all lines of business. The 85 million coming to the department and its partners will help to reduce processing times for study permits, work permits and permanent resident cards. This is what we have committed to by the end of the year. It means coming back to normal processing times, specifically 60 days for study permits and work permits, and 61 days for permanent resident cards.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: You just said that the \$85 million is for students, but then you said permanent residency. Is the \$85 million being applied to deal with the backlog of half a million permanent resident applications?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: The 85 million dollars announced at the beginning of December will help us reestablish normal processing times for study permits, work permits and permanent resident cards.

As for permanent residents, we have different processing times based on our service standards. As the minister said, for all family member sponsorship applications, we've already come back to a 12 month processing time.

The 85 million dollars will therefore not improve all processing times for permanent residents, but it will allow us to develop other tools so that permanent residents can apply electronically and have different tools to better follow their applications. The 85 million dollars will be used for several lines of business.

Our commitment is to come back to processing times that meet our service standards for students, temporary workers and permanent resident cards.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm not sure I understand. Is there a plan in place, with dollars attached, that is going to deal with the backlog of 548,000 permanent resident applications, including 112,000 refugee applications, and 468,000 Canadian citizenship applications? Is there a specific plan, and are there dollars earmarked to reduce those backlogs?

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you again for your question.

What is important to know about permanent residents is that we are subject to the annual immigration levels plan. That means I cannot process a higher number of files than that permitted by the plan. Last year, for example, to get to 401 000 permanent residents, we had to process over half a million applicant files. This allowed us to reach our immigration level.

As the minister said, for next year, we've increased the number of permanent residents that Canada can welcome to 432 000. To maintain this annual immigration level, the department will have to make decisions about 550 000 or 560 000 applicant files.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I don't think I'm getting an answer to my question.

I'll go back to the first question about the \$85 million in funding that is supposed to improve some aspect of processing times. Has there been an internal document prepared to show where these monies are going to be allocated and the anticipated result of these monies?

The minister has stated, and you've now stated, that this is going to improve things. I can't imagine that this has just been done because you allocated some money and imagined that it would work.

The Chair: Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Seeback. Your time is up. Maybe you can come back in the second round.

We will now proceed to MP El-Khoury.

MP El-Khoury, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to welcome our guests.

My first question is for all the witnesses.

How do you see the Canada's commitment, its role, on the ground over there? How do you compare this role to that of other countries? Do they, like Canada, have a sponsorship program? Could you give us more details about it?

[English]

The Chair: Ms. Campbell, you are muted.

[Translation]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

If I correctly understood the question, I would say that Canada is certainly aware of results achieved by other countries, especially England, Australia, the United States and France.

I'm sorry, Madam Chair, but I'm not sure if the question is focused on a specific area.

[English]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Okay, I will ask it in English.

[Translation]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That's not necessary. I did understand what you said. It's just that at the beginning of your question, there was an impression of retroactivity. I'm sorry.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Okay. Is your answer finished? I was asking how you compare Canada's role to that of other countries. Do they have sponsorship programs to help Afghan refugees, like those in Canada? That's what I would like to know.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for clarifying.

In terms of sponsoring refugees, Canada is currently a real leader, along with countries like Australia and Great Britain, certainly. It's clear that Canada is a model in this area. It's one of our strengths.

How do we assess this? Our program is evaluated every three to five years. The goal is to assess the performance of our process and our system.

• (1215)

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: In Afghanistan, as you know, women and girls live in terrible conditions. As part of your operations in Afghanistan, are there programs that specifically focus on supporting the rights of women and girls? For example, women don't have the right to work. Furthermore, reports reveal that parents are negotiating the sale of their daughters because they need money.

Are you considering a plan that, through Canada's involvement, could put an end to this?

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

The government definitely puts the emphasis on women's situations in Afghanistan, but also on that of other vulnerable populations.

I'd like to mention two things. First, women are a priority in the refugee program. Second, the government has launched a program to defend human rights. This is also the case for Afghanistan. It's an important aspect for vulnerable people, but especially for women.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: You're aware that Afghanistan's geography makes working conditions difficult.

In your opinion, is the Taliban meeting international requirements to facilitate your work on the ground over there?

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

Of course, I agree that the situation in Afghanistan is very complex, but I think that the other part of the question should be directed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: How do you see Canadian efforts to bring over these refugees?

I think that your department has deployed efforts that were well received and that Canada is working to bring these people over as quickly as possible, but the complexity of the process and problems on the ground make it difficult.

How can we accelerate the process and bring these people here to Canada?

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

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up. Maybe you will get another opportunity to answer that.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here with us today for this important committee meeting. We greatly appreciate it.

On February 1st, we were told that an advanced data analysis system would be used more broadly to sort visitors' visa applications.

Which criteria did you base yourselves on to develop this software?

Mr. Daniel Mills: We based ourselves on a great deal of data collected in the past, which allowed us to sort visitor applications and process them more quickly.

Different factors were taken into consideration. Unfortunately, for security reasons and to ensure the integrity of the process we've put in place, I can't say more about the content or nature of elements taken into consideration. However, rest assured that the criteria are reviewed sporadically so that we adapt to the constantly changing reality of our operations.

• (1220)

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Is there a legal framework for this software?

I would imagine you can talk about that.

Mr. Daniel Mills: The design of the advanced analytical system is very strictly based on Treasury Board's policy. We also conducted privacy impact assessments, which were also overseen, and they established the framework we can use. Our legal experts and the Department of Justice were all involved in this process, and that's why we published different components on our website.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand, then, that the parameters can't be made public in order to protect privacy.

Mr. Daniel Mills: Actually, we cannot reveal or make public the elements that allow the advanced analytical system to process one application faster than another. The goal is to not only uphold the integrity of the process, but to protect people's privacy as well.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your data, have you noticed any differences in application processing, aside from volume?

Have you noticed any anomalies, for instance?

Mr. Daniel Mills: If you're referring to visitor permits, the component for processing these applications has existed since 2018. That means it was already being used in the department for applications coming from India and China.

In early February, we extrapolated this component to all visitor applications overseen by the department.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We know that certain applications like Chinook, which you are surely aware of, is being used to process international student applications, are causing biases to crystallize. Even though these biases existed before the application was introduced, they have now only been exacerbated. For example, we have to wonder if the application criteria for francophone African students are making a difference, unfortunately for them.

Mr. Daniel Mills: I'm not sure if that was more of a statement than a question. To be honest, I'm not sure if I know exactly what it was.

However, with respect to the Chinook application, it is Excel-based, but it doesn't make decisions. It's really an Excel file that simply extracts information from our global case management system, converts it to a—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So it doesn't use an algorithm. However, the instructions are in English only from what we've been told. That's a bit of a shame for francophone public servants.

Earlier, we heard about Afghanistan. Major General Fraser told us yesterday that Canada is one of the only countries with no personnel on the ground, which can exacerbate processing delays.

Would you like to see Canadian representatives on the ground to help shorten processing times for Afghans who want to come to Canada?

Mr. Daniel Mills: With respect to people on the ground in Afghanistan, I feel that should be assessed and reviewed with our colleagues at Global Affairs Canada.

[*English*]

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Absolutely, but I'd like to know if your department would like to see Global Affairs put more personnel on the ground, because the issue affects your department.

I imagine that that would support your work in the department.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. You will get another opportunity.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

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

• (1225)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair; and thank you to the officials for being here today.

Could the officials please table with the committee by the end of the month how many applications are in the backlog, broken down by each of the streams?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Which backlog are you referring to exactly?

[*English*]

Are you talking about all lines of business or about a specific line of business?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm asking about all of the streams. For each of the streams, how much backlog exists?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I will be happy to provide that information because I have it here on hand. If the member has specific questions, I can answer them.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, I do.

Could the official also provide to the committee by the end of the month a breakdown of the \$85 million announced in the fall economic update that has been allocated to IRCC, with a detailed breakdown of where it is being spent and what stream would be utilized for the purposes of reducing backlogs? Also, what is the projected outcome with that injection of resources in reducing the backlog?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, we will certainly look at that question. We'll have discussions with our CFO and do our best to respond to that question in writing.

Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, please.

Along with that, could officials also provide the number of FTEs that have been assigned in each of the streams during this period in comparison to the pre-COVID period, so that we can have an understanding of where things are at in terms of actual staffing resources?

With respect to the injection of \$85 million, could you provide the additional staffing resources that would be put in place? How many additional FTEs would be added to which stream? Can we have that information as well?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, we'd be pleased to do our best, but I do want to caution you about a few things with that question.

My colleague may be pleased to speak about it, but we did do a significant number of transformations over the course of COVID, so we might not really be comparing apples to apples.

My colleague, Mr. Mills, would perhaps like to elaborate on that, if that's helpful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Yes. Thank you very much.

[*English*]

We will do our best to provide the member with the details. One thing that we have to take into consideration is that we are operating under a global network, so we are moving people around in all of our lines of business.

[*Translation*]

Especially with COVID-19, it's been even more common due to the various conditions in countries. To protect their health and safety, we've had to move some employees to other lines of business in our operations. If we compare using a fixed date, that might be like comparing apples to oranges.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

If the committee could receive information on which offices have actually had resources impacted and how many staffing resources have been impacted as a result of COVID, that will also give us a sense of the lay of the land. The reality right now is that we don't really know. No one really knows what's going on. All people are seeing is a humongous backlog and delay in their applications. Shedding some light and providing some transparency to the situation would be very helpful. I will be looking forward to receiving that information.

The minister said that outbound spousal sponsorship applications are meeting the 12-month processing requirement standards, yet I hear from families all the time that they are in the system for two or three years, indiscriminately. There are just so many people whose applications are stuck in the backlog. These are for outbound spousal sponsorship applications.

Could the officials please confirm that indeed the IRCC is processing these applications within the 12-month standard processing period?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you very much for your question.

[*English*]

I'd like to clarify that, as the minister mentioned, the 12 months applies for people who are submitting an application in February 2022. They will be processed in 12 months. However, we do have to work on the backlog—the inventory—that we have. That's what we are doing.

[*Translation*]

In January, we processed over 8,000 family class applications.

• (1230)

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's misleading, actually, to say that you'll be at the 12-month processing time starting February 2022. That means all the applications and all the people who have been stuck in the backlog are not going to see the light of day with their processing.

Frankly, I find that the statement from the minister is misleading. I'm sorry. Getting the data would be very useful to find out exactly how many people are stuck in the backlog and the projected time when the applications will actually be processed.

We learned from committee witnesses the other day that Canada is not meeting its standard for francophone immigration outside Quebec, which is 4.4%. Is there any plan from IRCC to address this growing crisis that's been happening year after year?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, for the question.

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Campbell Jarvis. The time is up for Ms. Kwan, so maybe when we come back to her you can answer that question.

We will now proceed to our second round. We will start that with Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Falk, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here today.

We heard the minister say in his opening remarks that backlogs will be reduced. That is what he said. I'm actually very concerned with what MP Kwan just brought up. I heard you, as the officials, say that applicants as of this month, February 2022, will have the service standard of 12 months.

What is happening to all the backlogs previous to this? What is the time frame to clean these backlogs up?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

I'd like to make a clarification.

As of January, the processing time for family class applications is now 12 months. Earlier, I mentioned February, but that was only an example.

[*English*]

If someone is applying today, they will be processed within 12 months.

[*Translation*]

The new standard for processing applications within 12 months has been in effect since January.

As far as the processing inventory goes, it depends on the category. For example, in Canada, 35,000 applications are currently being processed in the “family” class. As I mentioned earlier, in January alone, 8,000 applications were processed in the same class, and that includes applications from Canada and abroad.

Public servants and my team are working very hard to significantly reduce inventory.

[*English*]

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you, but I didn't hear an answer on the backlog. I'm going to make the assumption that when you say January, you're saying January 2022, which was just last month. What about all the backlogs previous to that? What direction has the minister given the department to clean up these backlogs? The excuse I'm hearing for the delayed processing times is COVID. What action or what direction has been given by the minister to the department?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

As I just mentioned, the department is really working towards reducing the inventory. For the people who have been in the inventory for the last year, two years or a bit more than two years, we are processing them as quickly as we can.

As I said, in January alone we made over 8,000 final decisions on the family class line of business. If you compare this with January 2020, it was around 6,000 per month, which was right before the pandemic. We are actually reducing and processing more applications per month than we were before COVID.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: How is that being achieved? What are the metrics that are being used? I'm hearing from the minister that, for example, there are offices that are still closed and people are working virtually. I represent a rural riding. I know that a lot of new Canadians don't necessarily have access to the Internet and that type of thing.

So how is this being achieved? I'm hearing numbers—i.e., this is being processed, this is being achieved—but I'm not hearing how we are meeting that. Is it through new hires? What is this \$85 million being used for? How is it increasing efficiencies?

How is it being achieved?

• (1235)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

Several factors explain this.

First, we've digitized various records since the beginning of the pandemic. The paper applications sent to various offices have now been digitized. This allows us to access applications from the global case management system. It also allows us to use our footprint internationally and in various locations across Canada to facilitate processing of those applications electronically. That's one thing we've done.

Second, as the Minister mentioned earlier, we've introduced a system that lets people submit their applications electronically. We're currently conducting a pilot project with 17 lines of business. In December 2022, people will be able to submit their applications electronically. Again, this allows us to process applications from Canada or from our global network—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Mills. Time is up. We have to proceed to the next member.

Ms. Lalonde, you have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[Translation]

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

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here. We're pleased to welcome you.

My question has to do with citizenship, and it comes from people in my riding, Orléans.

[English]

We hear a lot about the backlog or the delay in processing the citizenship applications dating from 2020. I'd like to hear from you about what's being done to address this particular situation, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you very much for your question.

I am very pleased to report to the committee that we've done a tremendous amount of work over the past 24 months as a result of the pandemic.

As you know, initially all IRCC operations were done with paper forms, and examinations and citizenship ceremonies were conducted in person. Over the past 24 months, we've introduced virtual citizenship ceremonies. That way, people don't have to go anywhere and we're capitalizing on the technology. We ensure the integrity of the program and we verify identity. It's all done properly.

This year, more than 133,000 individuals became new Canadian citizens at virtual citizenship ceremonies. In addition, knowledge of Canada testing is now being conducted online. Clients are invited to take the test online, which means they get their results faster. We rolled out the system in November 2020, so we've been using it for over a year. We're now inviting over 5,000 people per week to take the test, and that number is higher than it was before COVID-19. So we've truly improved our performance.

We've made a third change to IRCC operations: We now let applicants 18 years and over submit their application online. We no longer use paper forms, and this allows us to work remotely and process applications directly in our global case management system. In the event of disruption in some cities due to COVID-19, people can work from home because the records are now electronic.

• (1240)

Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you very much for that detailed response.

[English]

We know that we've also seen an increase in applications in certain streams.

Can I hear from you about the changes that have been made during this pandemic to achieve better processing times?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I'll make a few introductory comments and then turn to my colleague, Daniel Mills.

There were a number of adjustments that we made during COVID. We did a number of facilitations that were important on the policy side to enable people to extend their stays and international students to come. That allowed temporary foreign workers and international students to come through the pandemic. It also affected business in some ways, because we were fuelling a huge demand at the same time as managing other pressures in the system. My colleague, Daniel Mills, led his team to really transform the way we were undertaking processing.

One other piece of context that might be important to note is that those facilitation measures that the department undertook also meant we had to touch applications multiple times. That, too, has created an additional workload burden.

Perhaps I'll turn to Mr. Mills to give some of the highlights of the—

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

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

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, go ahead.

[Translation]

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

Do you know how long it takes right now to obtain permanent residency in Quebec?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

It depends on the category in which you're applying for permanent residency. Processing times vary from category to category. For example, processing times are different in the economic immigrant category than they are for the family class.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: According to my numbers, the average time is 28 months, compared to much shorter processing times in the rest of Canada.

So, Quebec sends you a long list of immigrants we're ready to receive, and it's radio silence in your department.

Do you think that makes sense?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

I'm a little surprised at the member's question, because last year we admitted over 50,000 permanent residents to Quebec, which was very close to Quebec's immigration target.

As you know, immigration is a shared responsibility with Quebec and the provinces set their own immigration targets. Canada issues the permits to meet that target.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If that's true, how could you possibly not have met the 2020 target on your end? You were 12,000 cases short.

Mr. Daniel Mills: I can't confirm the 12,000 cases, but I don't know where that number came from.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm confirming it for you.

Mr. Daniel Mills: We admitted 50,000 permanent residents to Quebec and the provincial immigration target was around 53,000, if memory serves. Therefore, we missed the target by about 1,500 applications. I can't confirm the 12,000.

I will be happy to get back to the members if we get more information.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, because we really don't have the same numbers. For 2020, we're short 12,000 cases. You should get back to us because we don't want to mislead the public.

I'd like to come back to the question you did not have time to answer.

Would you like to see Global Affairs Canada put people on the ground in Afghanistan to assist—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up. We will come back to you later.

Now we will proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and a half minutes. Please proceed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Just to follow up on the last question I was asking, I wonder if officials can table their response to the committee for me, so that we can receive that information by the end of the month.

I'd like to ask another question of the officials.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it loud and clear just how much Canada relies on TFWs to keep our economy moving. The pandemic put an even bigger spotlight on the contributions of TFWs and the treatment they received while they were here. I'm dismayed at the Auditor General's report, which found that the department assessed almost all employers as compliant with COVID-19 regulations "despite having little or no evidence to demonstrate this."

I'd like the officials to advise how this is even possible. What is being done to address this shameful situation?

• (1245)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I'd first like to acknowledge the request for a written response. It was with respect to francophone immigration and the target, so we have noted that.

With respect to temporary foreign workers, indeed, temporary foreign workers coming to Canada over the course of the pandemic underlines their importance, and the department is very mindful of some of the vulnerable situations. That is one of the reasons why access to the open work permit has become so important.

With respect to this specific question, that is actually under Minister Qualtrough's purview to do the enforcement and oversight of the temporary foreign worker regulations, so that question would be best placed to Minister Qualtrough and her officials.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

For temporary residents and the TR to PR program pathway system, there are individuals who've been rejected on the basis of a departmental error. A group of 60 individuals, despite applying through the English stream, were rejected based on the French-language requirements.

I understand that errors occur. What is being done to address this situation for those people who have been impacted?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, thank you for the question.

With respect to the specific situation, I am going to—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mills, I want to talk about specifics in terms of wait times. I asked the minister about Madame Kaur in my riding, who has received her permanent residency but is at 66 days overdue, and counting, for her card. This is a common problem.

When can we expect PR cards to be on time?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

With respect to permanent residency cards, we're doing a tremendous amount of work right now to dramatically reduce the number of applications that need to be processed over the next few months.

As the Minister mentioned, we've made a firm commitment to significantly reduce processing times for permanent residency cards.

I don't have the information with me as to the specific date on which we will reach the 61-day processing time. However, as we mentioned earlier, we expect to be back to normal by the end of the year, and we continue to work hard to significantly reduce the number of applications to be processed.

[English]

Mr. Brad Redekopp: So the answer is that you will get down to a certain number of days, which you can't define, and a certain number of months, which you're not sure of. That's not terribly helpful.

Following Ms. Kwan and her request, I have one as well on behalf of the committee.

You can provide this afterwards. We're having trouble getting answers looking forward, so I'm going to look backwards, which should be much easier for you. Starting in 2015-16, please provide the committee with the breakdown by fiscal year of the number of permanent resident cards that were delivered late, the average time they were delivered late, the reasons they were delivered late, and what steps the department is taking to meet its expected delivery times. I'll give you until March 10 to provide that information to the committee. That would be appreciated.

I want to switch gears to talk about compassion, specifically the lack of compassion my colleagues and myself have seen when dealing with people. "Mechanical", "inhuman", "emotionless", "insensitive", "callous" and "unwilling to listen" are the words that I hear as an MP when people tell me about their loved ones who can't enter Canada because of immigration cases. Many decisions are based on simple paperwork errors or things that were forgotten. There is a ruthless application of the rules and denials.

How do you ensure that there is some level of compassion in your department? Is there any sensitivity training that you put your officials through, Mr. Mills?

• (1250)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I will turn to Daniel Mills to further respond about some of the specifics in the operation category, but we would like to note that everyone in the department is very motivated to support Canadians, our clients overseas and here in Canada. The team here is very passionate, professional and committed.

We undertake training for bias as well as cultural sensitivity. We have recently expedited work on anti-racism and discrimination. We are very committed to our gender-based analysis and accessibility provision.

Mr. Mills, is there anything you'd like to add?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: You mentioned racism, and I would like to speak about that, too. We've heard testimony throughout the past several weeks about the racism that seems to be built into the culture of IRCC through policies and practices.

For example, the failure rate in the student direct stream from francophone countries like Senegal and Morocco is in the high 80% to 90% compared to English-speaking SDS applicants from Asia, which are much lower. Another example was the discriminatory monetary amounts that Nigerian students have to put up, \$30,000, compared to other countries.

What have you done as a senior manager, given that this committee has heard testimony about racial profiling travelling in your department? What have you done as a senior manager to weed out this behaviour? Is there an action plan? Are there timelines?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That's a very complex, overreaching question and one that we welcome.

We're very proud of the work that we have under way to address discrimination and bias. Systemic racism, as noted, is rooted in history, and it's very complex to look at. We are moving forward with developing a lens—

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Is there a plan?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'm sorry, but the screen is buffering on me.

Madam Chair, can you hear me?

The Chair: Yes, we can hear you.

Time is up, but I will allow Mr. Redekopp to proceed.

Maybe we can go back 30 seconds, if you didn't hear the question.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: I'm specifically asking about the plan. What is the plan?

I understand that it's there. What's the plan to get rid of it?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: The plan is multipronged, Madam Chair.

We are looking at policy, at service, at our staffing. We are developing an equity lens to assess our programs and policies. We are pursuing—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

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

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I would like to thank both senior assistant deputy ministers for appearing.

I would also love to thank the IRCC and the MED call centres. They are the busiest offices. The way they have served us over the last six years or so is tremendously appreciated.

I'm going to follow on from the very important question of Ms. Kwan regarding whether the applicants ticked "French" by mistake or perhaps it was a departmental mistake.

How is the department going to fix the French and English dilemma that happened?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, thank you very much for the question.

First, I'd like to note our commitment to the francophone immigration strategy to reach the target of 4.4% by 2023. We've undertaken a number of measures to increase francophone immigration going forward, for example changes in express entry where we have increased the points for francophone applicants, those who are bilingual or French-speaking. We think we are going to see some progress there.

There are other measures under way, for example with international students and with recruiting students. We work very closely with Global Affairs and Mobilité Francophone to support and enable francophone students to apply.

I hope that's helpful, Madam Chair.

• (1255)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, I don't think the assistant deputy minister got the question from either Ms. Kwan or me.

The question that we raised was that, either by mistake or by error of the department, some people applied for TR to PR under the French stream instead of the English stream. There are only a bunch of those applications.

How is the department going to fix that? That was my question, and I'm sure that was Ms. Kwan's question as well.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'm sorry, Madam Chair.

I thought I was responding to the other question that had been raised.

With respect to the case that has just been raised about the 60 students, this is something I will look into with my colleagues, unless Mr. Mills has more information about that. Certainly, we will be looking into that.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, kindly.

Madam Chair, I'm going to talk about the Delhi office.

I hear everything in India is open, but all I hear from the department is that they have only two immigration officers there and the embassy is closed. I'm hearing all those things.

I would like to know at what capacity the Delhi office is running right now.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for your question.

With respect to Delhi, I don't have the exact figures in front of me, but I know that everyone there can work at the mission or remotely. The only unit still affected by COVID-19 is the one made up of locally hired staff.

[English]

Those folks, depending on where they are in the country, may not be able to come to the office, for obvious reasons. They also cannot work from home. We have limited capacity on that front, but rest assured that all the other employees are doing their best and working from home where possible. We have also redirected some workload from India to other parts of the world in order to help in our integrated network.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, earlier I asked this question of the minister. Some of the ethnic cooks are not available here in Canada. I have seen many restaurants, and in fact the association, looking for cooks. They made those applications almost two years ago, and they have not heard from the department.

How can they manage spending millions of dollars on their [Inaudible—Editor] and not opening those restaurants?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Certainly, the department is actively working to process all temporary worker applications. In 2021 alone, we processed over 600,000 temporary worker applications. That's really a—

[English]

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

This completes our second round of questioning. Because of the delay in voting, we have the services available to go on until 1:10, so we can have a third round of four minutes for Mr. Hallan and Mr. Ali, and two minutes for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan.

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

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

Thank you to the officials for being here.

My question is based on the racism report. Was anyone fired after that report came out?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

To my knowledge, no, but one thing I would note is that when we set up processes for complaints, often complaints do increase, and that starts to form a baseline for us to take action.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Will this anti-racism report be made public?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I believe the report is on the Library and Archives website.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: No, I mean the.... You said that a task force was set up. Will findings in that report be made public?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: We have lots of information that we're looking at, and we'd be pleased to share our efforts, Madam Chair.

• (1300)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can we please have that tabled with the committee so that we know what's going on with that report? It was a very concerning report, and then we hear of the same type of racism being carried out in the Chinook program.

One of the officials mentioned that there is training going on for cultural sensitivity. Is that also put into the algorithms, which, as some people would say, have that racism built into them?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, thank you very much for the question.

We may need a little bit more precision about the reports. We're certainly pleased to make information available about our anti-racism task force and our efforts under way.

With respect to the question about algorithms, I'm pleased to note that IRCC was one of the first departments, along with Treasury Board Secretariat, to develop a policy for advanced analytics. We have developed a playbook, and in that playbook we have a number of areas that we look at, including privacy as well as gender-based analysis.

On bias, we are very aware of—

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: With all due respect, we're hearing completely different testimony from witnesses who have appeared at this committee and who are saying that there is obvious racism that is being targeted toward those francophone people who are applying from Africa. It seems like those algorithms that are built in are obviously discriminating against them.

What layers of oversight are there for that Chinook program? Every one of the witnesses is calling for it to be paused.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, with respect to that question....

I'm sorry. Is the member still speaking? My screen is corrupted.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Madam Chair, please let me answer the question.

As I mentioned, the Chinook tool does not use any advanced analytics.

[English]

It's not making any decisions.

[Translation]

Chinook is an application that simply rearranges information already in the system onto one page so that our employees don't need to click on multiple screens. It's not a tool that makes decisions. It does not use advanced analytics.

[English]

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Was any consulting done? All the witnesses had the same complaint that no consulting was done before the Chinook program was introduced.

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

We will now proceed to MP Ali.

Mr. Ali, you have four minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, I will be taking his time.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I asked this question in the last Parliament, and I'll ask it again now. In 2020, there were PGP, or parents and grandparents, applications where expressions of interest were taken. Out of that, 10,000 applications were processed in 2020, and 30,000 in 2021. Can the officials tell me how many more applications are left in that stream, where people expressed that interest, so that I can see how long it would take to fill in that gap?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you very much.

We're having IT issues, so the sound quality was not great for me.

I believe the member was talking about applications in the parents and grandparents stream. In fall 2021, we sent out an invitation to submit applications for the month of December. The department received the applications, and we're currently looking at them. Please be aware that we already had an inventory of applications for parents and grandparents that we will need to address before we process these new applications received in the fall.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, could the senior assistant deputy minister table the number of people who expressed interest and who are already taken care of, and how many are waiting in the queue out of that expression of interest they had in the fall?

Next, I noticed the new number of 431,645 who will be taken this year. When I look at the numbers from last year, particularly in the family class, usually the number of immigrants who come in under family class is around 25%. There was a shortfall last year. Only 20% were welcomed under the family class.

How is this gap going to be filled when we only invited 24% this year?

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

That's a two-part question.

[English]

First, last year, it is true, the number of people who arrived in Canada was lower than our projection. But one thing we have to take into consideration is the fact of COVID and travel restrictions, not just in Canada but also around the world. In our landing inventory, or in our inventory of people who were allowed to travel but who decided not to, we had a lot of people.

[Translation]

At one point, the department tried to link the number of decisions we make the number of admissions. In some cases, people might decide to take more time to travel before resettling in Canada. This affects the overall annual percentage. We're monitoring this very closely and are confident that for 2022 we will successfully meet the target proposed yesterday.

[English]

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

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

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please begin.

[Translation]

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

I really need to be transparent here. Several witnesses criticized the department at committee for its lack of clarity and transparency.

We do not have the same numbers at all for 2020, Deputy Minister. What I have says that targets were not met for Quebec. Quebec had a target of 43,000 to 44,500 immigrants, but the federal government was able to process only about 25,000 cases. For economic immigration, Quebec's target was around 26,000 immigrants admitted, and 14,000 to 17,000 were admitted. For skilled workers, the target was 22,000, and only 12,000 were admitted.

We definitely do not have the same numbers. I'd like you to explain why this situation occurred in 2020.

Mr. Daniel Mills: I am sorry, please accept my apologies.

Earlier, I was talking about the 2021 figures. I had not realized that the member was talking about the 2020 figures.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: We're on the same page now.

How did this happen? Quebec's target was 43,000 to 44,500 cases, but only 25,000 were processed.

Mr. Daniel Mills: You have to take into consideration that we didn't achieve immigration targets across Canada for 2020. So this doesn't apply only to Quebec, but to all of Canada. As mentioned earlier, the main factor behind this is COVID-19 and travel restrictions.

When the pandemic began in March and April 2020, both domestic and international operations were hit hard. This was primarily because department staff did not have everything they needed to work remotely. So for a time, we had to equip our employees to—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In that case, why didn't you process the—

[English]

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan. We will end this panel with two minutes from Ms. Kwan.

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

• (1310)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: IRCC is keeping private any public policies related to special immigration measures being taken for Afghan refugees. Advocates in the sectors, of course, say that this is a critical time for them to have this information. Otherwise, how would they know what is being applied, and under what circumstances would those who are in grave danger know about these different immigration measures?

This is my question to the officials: Is the minister still exercising his authority to bring in special procedures secretly?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: As I think the minister outlined, there are special immigration measures being taken in the dynamic environment that we find ourselves in. He also outlined the commitment that he is advancing to bring 40,000 Afghans safely to Canada.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, but I'm being very specific. I'm not talking about general immigration measures. There are some specific actions that the ministry is taking that are not made public. People do not know what those specific actions might be, what it would look like or whom it would apply to. Is that still being done by the ministry right now?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: We'll take the feedback that we've been given, note that and relay that to the minister.

Thank you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would like to get a response then from the minister or from the department with respect to that. This is a critical issue, and the public needs to know; advocates need to know, and families need to know, so they can be aware of what special measures under what special circumstances that would apply to.

I'm not talking about the 40,000 refugee resettlement measure. I'm talking about other measures the minister is making decisions on around public policy that's not made available to the public.

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

With that, our panel comes to an end.

I would like to thank Mr. Mills and Ms. Campbell Jarvis for appearing before the committee today, and for all the work they are doing in these challenging times on behalf of all Canadians.

Before we adjourn, I would like to remind all the members of the committee that the prioritized witness lists for the study of differential outcomes are to be sent to the clerk by Friday at 4 p.m. Please make sure that the lists are submitted to the clerk. As well, the draft calendar has been circulated to all the members. You will see, in the

draft calendar, that the minister has confirmed that he and his officials will be available to appear for this important study on March 24.

Is it okay with all the members that we schedule a meeting with the minister and the officials on the study of differential outcomes for March 24? Okay.

With that, thanks once again. Thanks to all the members for cooperating and keeping in mind the time constraints. Thank you once again to our officials.

The meeting is adjourned.

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