



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 007

Thursday, February 17, 2022

Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number seven of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

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 resuming the study on recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Welcome, Minister. Thanks for coming for the second time this week.

The minister is joined by officials from the IRCC. I would like to welcome Marian Campbell Jarvis, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Daniel Mills, senior assistant deputy minister, operations; Corinne Prince, acting assistant deputy minister, settlement and integration sector; and Pemi Gill, director general, international network.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses today.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Witnesses will have five minutes for opening remarks. During the rounds of questions, I will raise coloured time cards to the screen to indicate when one minute is remaining, then 30 seconds, and then a stop sign asking you to wrap up.

With that, I would like to welcome Minister Fraser. He will begin our discussions in this panel with five minutes of opening remarks, followed by a round of questions.

Welcome, Minister. The floor is yours.

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

Good morning, everyone. It's good to be back and to be back so soon.

I will have a particular focus on francophone international students during my remarks, but I'm happy to take questions on whichever issue you'd like.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that I'm joining you here from the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

Francophone international students are a key source of talent to help support Canada's future economic growth and counteract the country's aging demographic and shrinking labour markets. They also strengthen our ongoing efforts to reach the target of 4.4% French-speaking immigrant admissions by 2023.

[English]

Our efforts to open doors to francophone international students are part of a larger study to increase opportunities for French-speaking and bilingual newcomers to settle in and contribute to our communities throughout the country.

[Translation]

Francophone and bilingual immigration is key to our future, and we advance this priority at every opportunity. In 2020, French-speaking admissions represented 3.6% of all immigrants admitted to Canada outside Quebec, in comparison with 2.8% in 2019.

[English]

We're actively pursuing now the 4.4% target for French-speaking immigrants outside of Quebec. We have introduced targeted measures, such as awarding more points for francophone candidates in the express entry system, investing in francophone settlement services to support attraction and retention, and developing an uncapped stream for French-speaking essential workers and students in last year's temporary resident to permanent resident program, which resulted in 7,000 applications.

Immigration is a shared jurisdiction, and at least seven different jurisdictions have a francophone target or a provincial nominee program stream specifically dedicated to attracting francophone and bilingual talent.

[Translation]

International students are excellent candidates for permanent residency. We have increased our targeted efforts overseas to promote and attract francophone students and immigrants to Canada.

[English]

We've also launched the student direct stream, which offers an expedited study permit process in countries such as Morocco and Senegal. We're also looking into expanding this program to more countries—where we are able to—to make easier the process of applying to become an international student in Canada.

Our efforts are starting to have an impact, but I'm going to be the first to acknowledge that we're always going to have more to do. I'm currently examining additional ways to improve pathways to permanent residency, as was required by my mandate letter, for international students and for francophone candidates, including by developing more flexible selection tools through the express entry system.

[Translation]

It is enormously important for potential students—and for our country—that the Government of Canada and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, ensure that each application is treated fairly and without discrimination.

[English]

I want to assure members of this committee that applicants are always given the opportunity to provide documents and any other relevant information to support their application. A decision is made only after all of the factors have been considered.

[Translation]

Among the requirements, study permit applicants must show that they have the financial resources to pay for their studies and support themselves in Canada. Applications from non-genuine students and the submission of fraudulent documents are also major concerns.

• (1110)

[English]

We've been taking steps to address this issue. IRCC engages in outreach with partners and at public events around the world to better explain our visa requirements. In particular, we've been working closely with the Quebec bureau in Senegal and Morocco, which I mentioned previously, to promote studies in Quebec for prospective students from West Africa and the Maghreb.

[Translation]

Although acceptance and refusal rates can fluctuate, I can say that the refusal rates for study permits issued to francophone candidates dropped in 2021 compared with the previous year, both within and outside Quebec.

[English]

We have a proud tradition of welcoming students in our country, and we're working to improve programs and application outcomes for students.

In several of my conversations with Minister Boulet in Quebec in particular, and indeed with several members of this committee, we've had the opportunity to discuss some of the issues, such as compliance reporting and proof-of-funds requirements. I'm always open to feedback and ideas on how to identify roadblocks—and to identify solutions as well—in order to achieve our goals more effectively.

[Translation]

To conclude, I want to again assure members of the committee that the government is committed to an equitable application of immigration procedures, in all of our programs. We will continue to assess all study permit applications from around the world against the same criteria, on the individual merits of each case.

[English]

I very much look forward to receiving the recommendations from this committee to inform the work that we're undertaking and to attract and retain French-speaking students, which is an important component of our broader strategy to grow francophone immigration and better protect the demographic weight of francophones in Canada.

Thank you, Madam Chair. My colleagues from the department and I would be pleased to answer the committee's questions.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go into our rounds of questions. We will start our first round with Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you will have six minutes. You can proceed, please.

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

Thank you, Minister, for showing up here in person. I appreciate that.

I first want to raise with you the case of Edward Galabaya, who is in my riding. I've written on an urgent basis to your colleague, the Minister of Public Safety, who has issued a deportation order to Uganda for Mr. Galabaya. Mr. Galabaya is a gay man, and because he is gay, he faces an arrest warrant upon his immediate return to Uganda next week. He will go to prison.

Your government expresses compassion for gay and lesbian refugees, so I would implore you to talk directly to your colleague, Minister Mendicino, on this for me. Can you commit to doing everything within your power? I have a file here for you to look at.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, I won't pass judgment on a specific case. If you send the details to me electronically, or leave it with me at the end of the meeting, I'd be more than happy to take a look and specifically dig into the file.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you so much.

Madam Chair, I'll pass the rest of my time to Mrs. Falk.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here for two meetings in a row. I've sat on other committees where other ministers haven't made themselves so available, so I hope this is a trend and you will continue to make yourself available to this committee.

At our last meeting, on Tuesday, you shared with this committee that the department is back to service standards for processing times. What became clear and more evident to the committee is that this applies only to new applications. Minister, I'm wondering if you can clarify for this committee the expected processing times for existing backlogged applications in each respective immigration and visa stream.

Hon. Sean Fraser: There are many immigration streams. It would probably take the duration of the meeting—and I'd have to rely on the advice of my officials—to get you specific timelines—

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Would you just provide them to the committee by March 1?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We'll provide whatever information we can on each of the specific streams and the expected wait times that are available. In fact, I'd point out that I announced a couple of weeks ago that we're going to be broadcasting the actual service standard times for programs on our website.

Right now, there's a problem because the service standard is reflected but not the actual processing times and, as everyone knows, we've been significantly impacted by the pandemic. We plan to proactively share that information, and to the extent that we can provide it to the committee, we will.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Perfect. Yes, if it will be online, I would absolutely—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

All questions should be directed through the chair.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Through the chair, I would absolutely appreciate it if you would provide any information that's going out to the community, or online, to our committee as well.

Through you, Chair, to the minister, what direction, if any, has been given to the department from you to address those backlogged applicants?

Hon. Sean Fraser: It's to address the processing times and the inventory of cases as quickly as we possibly can. It's essential, though, to reflect on the fact that you can't snap your fingers and make things happen more quickly without resources. We have been working with the Minister of Finance, and have successfully achieved \$85 million in the recent economic and fiscal update. We'll continue to pursue the resources necessary to expedite all of the cases in the inventory, to the extent possible.

• (1115)

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: So is it fair to say that the government, because they have given a dollar figure, believe this will fix the situation? I'm just looking for direct.... I mean, we all know that if there's no direction given, through ideas of action and that type of thing, there will not be.... Is the department just hiring more people? What are the resources? We talk about monetary resources, but what are we actually doing to achieve the alleviation of backlogs?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look, that's a really good question. To boost processing, 500 staff have been added to the department. The \$85 million will have different impacts on five different specific streams. Work permits, study permits and PR cards are all going to be back to a service standard this year, and probably sooner than the end of this year. I can commit to that specifically. We're going to see improvements on proof of citizenship as well as on the processing of temporary resident visas. I don't have a specific, exact time at which different standards will be, but to the extent we can provide clarity, we will.

I want to point out that, in addition, some of the resources will be going to expedite the deployment of certain digital functionalities, such as the PR case tracker that just came online and the digital intake for 17 different lines of business by this summer. I could go on, but I don't want to take your time.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

I do know that in the announcement of January 31, it was indicated that the IRCC is expanding the use of advanced data analytics. I'm not sure if you're following this committee at all and the meetings that we've had, but we have heard serious concerns from witnesses in this study about the current use of the Chinook software in the processing of visa applications.

With these concerns about discrimination and lack of oversight, what justification is there at this specific time to expand the use of artificial intelligence?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I have one minute. If this comes up again, and I expect it may, I can elaborate more.

I do follow the committee very closely. I thank you for your work and for highlighting this. I have two points. One, we have to make a decision on whether we're going to embrace digital technologies in the immigration system. I think we should. Then I think we should take great care to make sure those are deployed in an effective and equitable way.

The Chinook system, however, is not a very complicated system that uses artificial intelligence; it's a spreadsheet. It's a Microsoft Excel-based visual aid that provides the same information that IRCC officers would otherwise have to dig into in either a paper file or eight different windows on a computer. We've seen an increase in productivity of 18% to 30% based on the ability to have all the same information on one screen.

To be absolutely clear, it's a human being, an officer, who still makes the decision on the basis of the same information they would have with or without Chinook.

Mrs. Rosemarie Falk: Thank you.

The Chair: Time is up.

I would like to remind all members that today the appearance of the minister is in regard to the study we are undertaking on the recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students in Quebec and Canada. I hope everyone stays within the scope of the study.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga for six minutes.

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

Through you, I'd like to thank the minister for taking the time to be here and for responding to our questions in committee. I also want to congratulate him on what he tabled in the House this week on immigration.

My first question around the study we've been doing is with respect to African students from francophone countries. I know that our government has had a strong plan to increase francophone immigration across Canada. Given that 60% of francophones are in Africa, what are your thoughts on the rate of refusals for African students in French-speaking countries? Given the numbers we've seen, what plans would we have moving forward to correct that?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you for the question.

This is necessary to increase the number of francophone newcomers, in my opinion. I think that we can increase the number of international students if we have a strategy for international students from Africa.

[*English*]

When I look at the numbers, I think we have an opportunity to welcome more people who can bring talent and make immense contributions to Canada as students and frankly as permanent residents. When I look at some of the numbers, one thing I want to point out is the difference between students who come from African nations to Quebec and those who do not go to Quebec. There's a 2% gap. They're similar. Between students who come from French-speaking nations in certain regions of Africa and anglophone students who come from similar regions in Africa the gap is small, but it is about 5%.

There's an issue we can look at. It's not as big as I originally thought when I first read coverage on this, but when I look at it, I think we can make massive improvements, because the experience... I mentioned Morocco and Senegal during my opening remarks not by coincidence. When we introduced the student direct stream, we saw a significant increase in the approval rates for students who came from those west African French-speaking nations.

When I talk to Minister Boulet or my francophone colleagues, they want me to do more because we have to protect the demographic weight of Quebec in Canada, francophones in Canada, and this is a grand opportunity for us to advance those ends.

• (1120)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Thank you.

In recent years, Canada has been attracting a growing number of international students due to their confidence in our education system. Through you, Madam Chair, I'd like to ask the minister what his thoughts are on the proposal of extending the 20 hours of work per week for international students, particularly in this time when we're facing labour shortages in different parts of the country.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Before I answer, Madam Chair, there might be a bit of a problem with the sound that came through. I did hear the question, but vocally, not through the system. I'll answer the question, though, and if it's a problem, I'll let you know.

In the short term, I think this is something we need to be looking at to help contribute to the solutions to the labour shortage. We have not made an official decision, but I think we need all hands on deck to deal with the economic opportunity if we fill these jobs so we can have an even stronger economic recovery than we've already seen.

In the long term, I want to be careful, though, because it's really important that we issue study permits for people who are coming to study and not promote people who are seeking to use a study permit stream to come for economic purposes when there are streams that exist specifically for economic purposes.

There's a particular issue, though, that I'm deeply concerned about with students who might benefit from co-op placements or work-integrated learning placements. I don't want our rules around a limit on hours of work to jeopardize the learning opportunities through these institutions.

I do want to maintain a focus on study permits for students who are coming for the primary purpose of studying, but in the short term, I do think we need to look at every solution we can to help solve the labour shortage. I very much appreciate this particular proposal you've raised, but I need to do a little more thinking on it before we make a final decision.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Through you, Madam Chair, what are the minister's thoughts on including international students in the summer jobs program, as suggested by a witness from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, since they follow the same curriculum and acquire the same knowledge and expertise while they're in school?

Hon. Sean Fraser: My answer is similar to my last response. If there are unique or innovative solutions whereby we can get more people working in jobs....

One of the problems we're facing in the Canadian economy right now is potentially also the biggest opportunity we've had in my lifetime. We've had literally one of the strongest economic recoveries from COVID out of all developed economies in the world. At the same time, though, while we have more people working than we did before the pandemic and the GDP has exceeded prepandemic levels, we still have the largest labour gap we have had in my lifetime. There were 900,000 jobs available at the end of the year.

If we want to protect the livelihoods of not just these people who would be coming to work but also Canadians who are working for businesses and who have been sitting worrying about whether their employer will survive COVID-19, we need to look at getting that labour here as quickly as possible to make sure that we grow our economy to provide the services we count on, but also to protect the jobs of Canadians who are working in those businesses now.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Through you, Madam Chair, does the minister think they should have the same access to settlement services that PR holders have in order to ensure a smooth transition?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I think in some instances we need to do more to provide strong settlement services. There's a unique issue around international students.

I'm out of time, so I'll just say that we also need to partner with institutions and provincial governments, which have responsibilities for them. I think there's room to improve, but there are some unique considerations for students in particular.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: This will be my last question.

A number of witnesses talked about racism and said that they think there's some racism involved in the high refusal rates for African students. Do you think they're right in their comments?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Look—

The Chair: Your time is up, but maybe you will have an opportunity in the second round.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

[Translation]

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

Good morning, Minister. I am very happy to see you here again before this committee.

Last spring, a special report by the Information Commissioner showed that IRCC received three times as many access to information requests as all other federal institutions combined.

I'll cut straight to the chase. Do you think that your department is transparent, Minister?

• (1125)

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm sorry. I heard a statement but not a question.

The Chair: One second, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. They are having a problem with the interpretation.

It's better now.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please start from the beginning.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

Minister, last spring, a special report by the Information Commissioner showed that IRCC received three times as many access to information requests as all other federal institutions combined.

I'll cut straight to the chase. Do you think that your department is transparent, Minister?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I think it's a factor that results from the fact that we deal with a lot more people at IRCC than all other departments. We deal with millions of people.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That doesn't answer my question. I asked you if you thought that your department was transparent.

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes. However, I do think there are some capacity constraints that we need to improve upon.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Will you release the directives given to agents and the numbers on acceptance rates for applications for study permits and student visas?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'd be happy to share any information about acceptance and refusal rates for programs.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Will you release the directives given to agents and the acceptance criteria for study permits?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: As long as they don't compromise the integrity of the process and the ability of the system to function or the privacy details, I believe we should proactively share whatever information we can that doesn't compromise our ability to have a functioning system.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: That's perfect. I'll keep that in mind.

Minister, does their intention to remain in Canada harm prospective foreign students?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: There's a unique issue here—and I appreciate that it was a very short question. I think there's a good reason for why the rule exists, but I think we need to pursue certain changes, specifically flexibility in the express entry system and partnership with certain provinces so that we can establish a pathway to permanent residency for those we want to stay.

There is a good reason why we have a need to return when you're applying to come to Canada on a temporary basis.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: And yet, subsection 22(2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, or IRPA, states that:

An intention by a foreign national to become a permanent resident does not preclude them from becoming a temporary resident if the officer is satisfied that they will leave Canada by the end of the period authorized for their stay.

Pursuant to the act, the intention must not harm. You are telling us that foreign students are important for the country, but they are still refused if they declare their intention to stay. I'm a bit confused.

Can you explain this to me?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: If we look at international students in particular, there's a unique issue. If I understand the question, and stop me if I'm off track here—

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Don't worry, I'll stop you.

[Translation]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I know, thank you very much.

[English]

The issue right now is that we have somewhere in the ballpark of 8,000 valid study permits at any given time. We have 432,000 spaces for permanent residents. We can't have every single international student automatically qualify for permanent residence.

I want a lot of them to stay, because they have incredible economic, cultural and social outcomes. One of the issues is that we have to select from amongst the pool to make sure that we have space for other economic streams. I think we need to improve the pathway to permanent residency for those who want to stay, but it's not possible for us to have every single student qualify for permanent residence.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Minister, I must interrupt you.

There is proof about francophone foreign students, particularly those from West Africa. You mentioned students from Senegal and Morocco, but you could have included those from French-speaking Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, who have been given various grounds for refusal, application after application. One of the common grounds for refusal is the fear that the student will not return to their country of origin after finishing their studies.

I know that you want to do as much as possible, but it's a major challenge for these students right now. It hurts francophone educational institutions in Quebec, but also those outside of Quebec, which are fighting to bring over students and would love to have them stay in their communities after finishing their studies.

In short, I think that we will need to work together on this.

• (1130)

You said that you have followed the committee sittings attentively and you are eager to hear our recommendations. I believe that you are sincere in this regard.

That being said, a dozen or so witnesses have told us that they would welcome the creation of an ombudsman position at IRCC. I asked you the question last Tuesday. I don't know whether you have had time to reflect on the idea in the meantime.

Do you support the creation of this position, yes or no?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I want to see what this committee reports back at the conclusion of the study. I don't want to prejudge what other testimony they may hear. I'll take every recommendation of this committee seriously, including what you decide about an ombudsperson. I'm not prepared to commit to one decision or another before the committee has had the benefit of all the evidence that may come forward, let alone me having the benefit of that same evidence myself.

I look forward to what recommendations you may have.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If the committee makes a recommendation to this effect, will you make it a priority?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: On an automatic basis, I don't just implement whatever recommendations other parliamentarians make to me. I take them seriously and consider them, but I need to take that consideration.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

You talk about processing applications fairly.

How do you explain the data from your own department that demonstrate that, in Quebec, a disparity exists between francophone and anglophone educational institutions with respect to the refusal rates for study permits?

[English]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I think I'm out of time. Perhaps I can clarify this in the second round.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, could we come back to this question later?

[English]

The Chair: The time is up.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In that case, you can provide a response to the committee in writing. We would be happy to receive it.

Hon. Sean Fraser: That is possible. Thank you.

[English]

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

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

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

Thank you to the minister for coming to our committee.

On pages 11 and 12 of the Pollara report on anti-racism, it indicates that there is “[w]idespread...reference to certain African nations [by officials] as ‘the dirty 30’...[s]tereotyping Nigerians as particularly corrupt or untrustworthy.” On page 13 of the report, there are concerns that racism impacts the outcome of decisions on immigration applicants by officers. It cites “discriminatory rules” of assessing immigration applicants that are different from those of other nations. Additional financial requirements for Nigeria are one example that was cited.

Based on this, is the minister concerned that the Canada student direct stream requires students to have a guaranteed income certificate of \$10,000, but the new Nigeria express program requires a student to have \$30,000 in their account for six months?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Thank you for this important question.

First of all, any sort of systemic racism or bias within any government operation is completely unacceptable. The results of that Pollara study are deeply concerning to me. They were the result of a proactive exercise from the department to figure out whether there was internal discrimination, and we're doing what we can to root out racism within the department—not just internal to the department, but as the effect of our policies, which is what your question touches on.

When I learned of this issue, I was quite concerned, but I've received an answer that is satisfactory to me. In Nigeria, the higher threshold is actually a lower total than students from other nations are required to provide. Though it's \$10,000, they also need to make good on proof of funds for the cost of their tuition, the average of which—my officials can correct me if I'm off—is a total of \$43,000. However, the issue is that we don't necessarily have financial partners on the ground in Nigeria, so having the proof of funds of \$30,000 is more equitable when you look across the requirements in other countries, where you have not only \$10,000, but also the proof of funds to cover the cost of an international student's tuition.

I looked into this when I learned about it, because I was quite concerned, but I saw that it wasn't quite the problem that I thought it was when I first learned of the details.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Why didn't the officials or the government just add Nigeria to the student direct stream, with the same level playing field of requirements as other nations?

Hon. Sean Fraser: To use the student direct stream, we need to work with financial institutions on the ground, and we don't necessarily have partners of similar strength in every nation across the world. I'm very bullish on the use of the student direct stream to improve the quality of the application process for international students. To the extent that we can find those partners and expand the student direct stream to other countries, it's something I actively want to pursue, because I've seen very real success in the increase of approval rates in jurisdictions where we have been able to deploy it. I'd describe it as a work in progress.

• (1135)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The rate of approval for Nigerian students is at 12%, Minister, compared to the top 10 source countries, so it is nowhere near.... There are applications where students have met the onerous financial requirements but were rejected because it was as-

sumed that somehow the authenticity of the bank statements was false, even when students presented documentation from the bank verifying the amount of dollars they had in the system.

The answer that the minister provided is still concerning. It doesn't answer all my questions, but I don't have time right now to get into all of it. I would love to sit down with the minister and the officials to further explore this.

Hon. Sean Fraser: That would be a healthy exercise, Ms. Kwan. I would be willing to have a meeting with you on that issue.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

At the beginning, after you were appointed, you also offered meetings on a couple of issues that were priorities for me. I sent in that information right away, requesting a meeting, and it never happened. I didn't even get a response from you or your officials with respect to that, so I hope this will actually will be followed up on.

On the Chinook tool that was developed by officials internally without consultation with stakeholders, is the minister concerned that the racist attitudes cited in the Pollara report could be incorporated into the development of the Chinook tool?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Not with respect to Chinook, but I'm very concerned about the potential for racism to creep into any Government of Canada operations, including in my department.

Just to be clear on what Chinook is, and what Chinook isn't, Chinook doesn't have—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Minister, I don't need to know that. I already know, but let me ask another question.

The Chinook system was introduced in 2018. It presents risk factors or word flags for applications. Could the minister provide those word flags to the committee?

Hon. Sean Fraser: There is nothing that Chinook presents that isn't already presented in ordinary files. It's a display tool for IRCC officers to see all of the information they would normally have access to, so I'm unclear what red flags you are referring to in the Chinook system.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: My understanding is that the Chinook system uses word flags for certain things. Maybe I'll ask that question of the officials. They might be more familiar with it.

Let me ask the minister a question about dual intent. Witnesses have indicated that the dual intent provision is confounding and contradictory. It says to the students, “You need to identify if you have an intent to stay.” Then, if they identify that, they will often get a rejection of their application, because the officials would cite that they feared the applicant would not return.

Does the minister agree that this doesn't actually make any sense?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I would not agree that it doesn't make any sense.

I'm being told to stop.

I think there is room for improvement, and that's why in my mandate letter there is a requirement that I establish a pathway to permanent residency for international students, which I am very excited about and would be happy to discuss further with this committee.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

We will now go to our second round of questioning.

I will remind members that all questions should be directed through the chair.

Mr. Seeback, you have five minutes.

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

Minister, I'd like to pick up where Ms. Kwan left off.

When you look at rejection rates... In particular, I'm going to talk about Nigeria. The approval rate was 40% in 2015. It's now at 12% in 2020. Today, you said you thought things were getting better. For people in Nigeria, in fact, it's getting much worse. When we look at the fact that the Chinook tool came in in 2018, this acceleration of rejections seems to have increased. Earlier today in your testimony, you said you're doing what you can to try to fix this. I think you might be trying, but it's not working.

I want to understand, and this committee needs to understand for this report, exactly what the Chinook tool does. We have had people come to this committee saying they're trying to figure out what it does, but they're not 100% sure. Will the minister, today, commit to tabling a document that explains exactly how the Chinook tool works, what it assesses, what key terms or key flags are used, and if the department has studied whether or not rejection rates have continued to increase since the implementation of Chinook?

• (1140)

Hon. Sean Fraser: I think it would be a very healthy thing, given this conversation, to give whatever information we can about how Chinook operates and, to the extent that we can, answer all the questions you just laid out. I think it's a fair ask of you to have us table some kind of a document explaining what Chinook does.

I may take the liberty to explain what it does not do, because it's clear that there's a lot of concern around the use of artificial intelligence and potential discrimination. To the extent that this committee learns there is systematic discrimination with any of the tools we use, I want you to point it out to me, because that's not okay. I

don't believe that the Chinook tool in particular is there, but I would be more than pleased to provide whatever information we can on Chinook.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

Minister, one other thing that seems to be going on is that there is a bit of an issue with educational consultants around the world allegedly helping to process these applications. In one of the reports submitted to the committee... There was a study done in Australia and 50% of the small agencies that were being used to do these applications accounted for only 2% of the successfully delivered enrollments. There's a problem.

Many have come to this committee and said that we need to establish a framework of oversight for education agents around the world, and one person suggested that they could be linked to reputable law firms, etc. Is the department doing anything about this issue, and if so, what?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The answer to your question is yes. For folks who work within Canada, we have the recently established College of Immigration and Citizenship Consultants.

I think you can appreciate that providing oversight to foreign actors who are setting up these cottage industries, which frankly leads to the abuse of certain students who are treated completely unfairly without the support they need... We are working on the ground to provide as much information as we can to potential applicants.

To the extent that you have suggestions, it would be a very helpful point for the committee to do its work and to provide recommendations on what we can do to boost oversight. Frankly, I am disturbed by the abuse by people trying to defraud the immigration system in Canada to make a few quick bucks, at the cost of students who are suffering greatly. It's not fair. We need to end it and protect these vulnerable students, and that's something that we absolutely must do together.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: The committee certainly is going to look into that, but I'd like to know whether the department has started to look into it. Do you have a plan to try to create some kind of framework to oversee these education agents?

Hon. Sean Fraser: The answer is yes. Within Canada, the same institutions—

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That's not where the big problem is, Minister. The big problem is outside of Canada. That's where people are giving \$1,500 to them to process an application. It's an incredible amount of money, and with the 2% success rate, this is a problem. Is the department going to look at establishing a framework to deal with overseas agents?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes—I got partway through my answer.

For people who are overseas, right now the opportunities that we have are to work with prospective applicants to share information to warn them about this practice. As you can appreciate, we don't have the legal authority to establish a framework to regulate a profession that is physically located in another country.

If there are strategies that come out of this study, this is one area I am watching, because some of the behaviour I see is disgusting. People don't just defraud the system; there are fraudulent letters that go out so people can then get a commission at a private college that has a much higher tuition. This is a very real problem that is impacting real people in real communities. I want to solve it, and I could use your help.

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

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you will have five minutes for your round of questioning. You can please begin.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Minister, thank you for your generosity in agreeing to come to testify before us and to elucidate the situation for all the members of the committee.

Canada is recognized for processing any kind of file. We do not consider skin colour, religion, or country of origin. I was very pleased to hear you confirm that a few minutes ago.

First, I know that it is an absolute priority for you, as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, to make sure that all officers in all embassies adhere to that principle. It is Canada's priority too.

Second, my colleagues have raised the issue of financial considerations in connection with applications from foreign students. One of the criteria for accepting an application for a student visa is about the financial wherewithal.

So that the matter is very clear, could you explain, once and for all, the way in which the department manages and analyzes the financial criterion and does not discriminate against students from Africa?

• (1145)

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: First, Mr. El-Khoury, thank you for describing the reputation and attitude that I think Canadians have taken, but it's not enough that we don't see the colour of another person's skin. We need to understand, by looking at the fact that people who don't look like me are treated differently, that we have to put in unique measures to prevent that systemic discrimination.

I think it's really important that we actively consider how people who may live with different intersectionalities are discriminated against in a different way, introduce policies that overcome that discrimination, and not assume that the exact same treatment treats everyone the same, because we know it does not. That's why we have to introduce particular measures to prevent this kind of systemic discrimination in every department in the Government of Canada.

With respect to your question about the proof of funds for students who are coming from Africa, we work with provinces to identify what proof of funds they will need in order to get by within their community. We need to know that they can cover their tuition

and expenses in a way that allows them to live. We don't want to create a system that promotes people to come to Canada only to see them fail when they get here.

The methods we use vary by country, based sometimes on the relationship we have with financial institutions in those countries. We've seen massive success with the student direct stream, because it allows for quicker and more accurate verifying of the financial capacity of students who are coming here. Those who can meet those eligibility criteria have their applications approved more quickly.

Partnering with financial institutions in countries where we don't have as strong a relationship.... It can significantly delay the process of application and lead to a higher refusal rate if we don't have certainty that people have the means to succeed once they land in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Mr. Minister, do you believe that the number of allowable work hours for foreign students should be increased? How could we balance those work hours with their needs, and not have them work more in order to earn more money?

I can tell you that I personally knew students in that situation when I was at university. I had some close friends in the same faculty. They began to neglect their studies as soon as they began to earn more money.

If, at the committee's suggestion, you decide to increase the number of allowable work hours for foreign students, will you take that into consideration?

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: This is really important. I'm glad you brought your personal experience to bear. I think it illustrates the question that I wrestle with every day on this particular issue.

The purpose of a study permit is to bring people who want to study at a legitimate learning institution so that they can develop their skills and potentially even apply to become a permanent resident subsequently. If we increase or remove the cap on hours altogether through a study permit, I expect that we would see a lot of people then try to come in not for the purpose of studying but for the purpose of working. We have other immigration streams that are designed specifically to allow for people to come here to work.

I do think that because of the urgent nature of dealing with the labour shortage, we need to look at all options to get people to work in the short term, but I think we have to maintain our focus to ensure that whatever we do on the limit of hours worked, it's to promote that person's ability to gain a quality education in Canada so that we can protect the integrity of the international student program. In particular, I have concerns on work-integrated learning opportunities—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. I have to interrupt.

Hon. Sean Fraser: I'm being cut off, but you can tell this is an issue I have a lot to say about.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Most witnesses and most officials from higher education institutions have confirmed to us that, if a foreign student's visa is refused after they paid their university tuition, it is impossible for them to have those tuition fees reimbursed.

Do you agree with that type of practice, Mr. Minister?

• (1150)

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: In the vast majority of instances, they don't need to pay their tuition before they're able to come here to study. There was a unique situation during the pandemic where people were allowed to begin their studies overseas because of some of the challenges around travel. I want to make sure we protect students' interests and don't start collecting money from people who don't get to study. I think if you have examples—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Because IRCC takes too long, those students begin their studies before they find out whether they are accepted or not. If the department refuses their study permits, they are not reimbursed.

This is a problem. The universities are collecting the money but the students are not getting their study permits.

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: If the issue is about delays in processing, we bent over backwards last year as a department and got 99% of the study permit applications processed on time to allow people to study. We put some of that \$85 million I've referred to towards expediting study permits so students can get here, to prevent this kind of issue from ever coming up. To the extent that there are problems in the system with specific rules that we need to change, I'd be interested if the committee could point them out in their report.

[*Translation*]

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

Earlier, you mentioned the target of 4.4% for French-speaking immigrants to be admitted to Canada. Today, I met with officials from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA. They told me that the target has never been achieved since it was set in 2003.

Can you explain how you will manage to hit a target that has never been hit in 20 years?

[*English*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: Sure. Look, certain things have been done around the express entry system to increase the points you get if you can speak French or are a francophone.

[*Translation*]

I feel that the Express Entry system can be improved in numerous ways, particularly by making it more flexible.

[*English*]

Right now there are approximately 26,000 francophones in the inventory in our system. If we create flexibility, boost settlement support services in francophone communities, and have the flexibility that would allow us to specifically increase that, I would treat 4.4% not as the ceiling but as the basement that we should achieve, so we can continue to increase the number—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Yes, we have to aim higher than that, because—

[*English*]

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes. Please go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I want to quickly go back to the issue of dual intent. The minister said he's looking into that. What specific measures is he considering to address the dual intent concerns?

Hon. Sean Fraser: We have some policy work to do to identify the right solution going forward, and we are considering working with provinces to identify students whom they may wish to have stay. Again, if we look at flexibility in the express entry system for people who are studying now and whom we could have come here, I do have some concerns and some issues that I have not yet solved. For students who may need to come to study, we need to prevent a lot of students coming with the purpose of staying permanently by claiming asylum, for example, when we have different streams for people who are coming for purposes other than studying.

So we do have some policy work to do to solve this problem. That policy work is not yet done, but it's something we're working on now.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When does the minister expect that the work will be completed? Will he share with the committee the information on what he's looking at and what some of those difficulties are?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I don't have a date for an announcement scheduled or anything like that, because I don't want to presuppose the process when I haven't actually conducted the full-throated consultation that is necessary to do something like this.

It's a mandate letter commitment for me to establish a pipeline to permanent residency for international students. The particular question of dual intent is going to be a part of it, but I don't want to presuppose what I'm going to hear from the consultation I'm going to have to conduct before I've had the opportunity to talk to stakeholder organizations.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The minister just said that he has identified some concerns that he has not yet resolved. I am wondering if he can share that information, but it doesn't sound as though he's going to. Perhaps he will share that with stakeholders.

Let me ask the minister this question. To ensure that this Chinook tool is fair, will the minister commit to doing an independent assessment of it?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I think that a healthy starting point would be to make good on the commitment I made to Mr. Seeback in this meeting, to have this committee do the independent assessment by providing you with all the information we have. I think that would be a really healthy exercise.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Well, actually, having committees look at this and therefore look at some of the issues and concerns would certainly be within the scope of this study, but an in-depth independent assessment of the Chinook tool should be done by someone who's trained to do that work, not by members of Parliament.

Will the minister commit to ensuring that there will be an independent assessment of the Chinook tool?

• (1155)

Hon. Sean Fraser: Before I commit to having a third party do an independent assessment, I need to have demonstrated to me that there is in fact a statistically significant increase in refusal rates as a result of the use of the tool. If the committee concludes that in fact there is discrimination based on the use of Chinook and I agree with that assessment, then I will be in a position to say, yes, we should look at that, but until I see that assessment—

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

We will now end our round of questioning with Mr. Hallan for three minutes, and then the Liberals for three minutes. That will end our first panel.

Mr. Hallan, you have three minutes for your round of questions.

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

Madam Chair, through you, I wanted to touch on a point that Ms. Kwan brought up and continue with it. It's something that I hear about all the time. I get thousands of emails about trust and leadership within this minister's department.

There was a report that came out last year about racism. We haven't heard much about any action being taken on it.

One point that Ms. Kwan brought up is about the ignoring of emails and any contact with the minister or the department. We've heard from Afghans who have said the same thing. There are just ignored emails and autoreplies. Veterans groups and retired generals have been reaching out. Everything has been ignored when it comes to backlogs, and there is no real communication on what's going on.

I've raised questions in question period, Madam Chair, about the frustrations that my constituents and the people who have been contacting me have faced, and we've gotten replies from the minister that these are theatrics or this is just made up or a falsified kind of theatre that we're doing. What we're doing is actually venting the frustrations that we feel constantly because of the failure of leadership within the department of IRCC and any response from this minister.

I've gotten a few responses after seeing the minister's replies, even in question period. Those are the questions that I have to raise again. There's this anti-racism committee that we've heard nothing about and people are concerned. People are concerned that nothing is being taken seriously and it is being brushed off.

I will ask this question again, because I think it's very fair that people have lost faith in the Liberal government over the last six years when it comes to immigration. We've heard many times that money is being thrown at things, but things have not improved, and we can see that by the backlog being at almost two million now. People have serious questions that they are asking on how seriously this government takes racism when they could not address blackface from the Prime Minister himself and we are not seeing any changes from this anti-racism report that was already tabled.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I take it that I have the remaining minute to answer this lengthy question.

First, on your question about people losing faith in the government over immigration, I'd point out that we have embraced immigration in a way that no government in Canada's history ever has. Literally on Monday of this week, I tabled the most ambitious immigration levels plan in the history of our government, and we're going to make good on it.

An hon. member: A plan to [*Inaudible—Editor*].

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I believe I have the floor, and I'd ask the honourable member to give me the opportunity to answer. I'll take the extra few seconds in which I've been interrupted.

On processing times and transparency, I literally made a public announcement just a couple of weeks ago to lay out in specific detail all of the measures. Your colleagues have thanked me here for showing up in person twice this week, and I believe I'm here on supplementary estimates in a couple of weeks again. I'm going to keep showing up in the spirit of transparency.

If you'll allow me the few extra seconds, I'll extend my stay to provide a fulsome answer, Madam Chair, because the member raises a real issue around dealing with racism in the department. I was really stunned by the results of that survey. It's deeply upsetting, because when we have—

The Chair: The question time is up. I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up. We will have to proceed to our next—

An hon. member: Can't he stay?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Madam Chair, I can stay to finish the answer. I'm at the will of the committee if you'd like to hear the answer.

The Chair: Okay. Please go ahead.

Hon. Sean Fraser: Okay.

On this issue, I think it's important that we know where this came from. It's a real problem when I see statements that people have experienced racism from within the department. The study that people have referred to, the Pollara survey, came from a position where, after the murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis, the department wanted to do something to understand if they, too, had systemic discrimination. They put out the employee survey and they learned that there were very real problems. They established an anti-racism task force within the department.

It's clear that you have concerns and you'd like to have more details about what that task force is doing, and I think it's fair that we should provide those details when we have more than 30 seconds to get into them. This has to be addressed seriously, not just internal to the department, but the outward-facing politics. Internal to the department, if people believe they're going to have a culture where they can't be accepted, we are losing out on some of the best talent that Canada has to offer. It's not just unfair to those employees. It's also unfair to those employees that the work of the Government of Canada suffers if we don't have equitable places of work.

This is something that I am completely committed to. I have asked for regular updates from the department, and I would be happy to provide information in writing at some point to explain what—

• (1200)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can we have those findings tabled in this committee by March?

Hon. Sean Fraser: Yes, there's no final report of the task force yet, but I think it would be helpful if we provided a summary on where we're at.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: The question is that no one has been reprimanded, no one has been disciplined and people don't know of any updates. That's what I just wanted to add.

The Chair: We have to proceed to our next member. Maybe at the end, we will provide you another opportunity if there's anything that needs to be cleared up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal. In the spirit of fairness, we will give you four minutes for your round of questioning.

Please go ahead.

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

First of all, I want to congratulate the minister for the 7,000 applications that he mentioned under the new pathway to permanent residency for francophone students, or the Francophonie community. I can tell you that the Francophonie community in B.C. has received that announcement and the path very well.

Is the minister planning to make this pathway permanent for all francophones, rather than just essential workers already in Canada who want to request permanent residency?

Hon. Sean Fraser: I, too, was enthusiastically in support of the TR to PR program. It was a response to a particular moment in time when we couldn't welcome people from outside of Canada. We had to make sure that we could meet the needs of our communities and our economy during the pandemic, when our border was closed to protect the public against the spread of COVID-19.

We learned some really interesting lessons and are continuing to do an analysis on these kinds of programs. There are lessons to be learned when I go forward with my pathway to establish permanent residency for people who are here on a temporary basis and people who are here to study. There are some unique lessons we can learn, particularly in welcoming more francophone international students through a similar mechanism. We haven't yet nailed down the precise mechanism to make sure that happens, but we're looking at those lessons to see if we can repeat the success to some degree as we establish a permanent program going forward.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, the minister also mentioned the 4% francophone immigrant target. It's my understanding that this has never been attained. How is the minister planning to achieve that goal? Will he set a more ambitious target for the francophone immigrants outside of Quebec?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Sean Fraser: In my view, it is essential to increase the number of French-speaking newcomers. Canada's cultural identity includes anglophones and francophones.

[English]

It's really important that we do this to protect and promote the demographic weight of francophones in Canada. This is part of who we are as a people.

Right now, we have an existing goal of 4.4%. As I said to Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe, I don't treat this as a ceiling. What we're doing is boosting settlement services in francophone communities to make sure that when people get here, they are more likely to stay. We're looking for flexibility in the express entry system, working with our partners in the province of Quebec and with provinces outside of Quebec to help them develop some of the specific immigration streams for francophones.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: A point of order, Madam Chair.

Speaking of francophones, I can tell you that we no longer have the interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Let's check.

Okay, we're good.

Please proceed.

[Translation]

Hon. Sean Fraser: I will try to speak French. Let me take this opportunity to thank my Bloc Québécois colleague for his French lessons.

It is both essential and necessary to improve the quality and the services and to increase the number of French-speaking newcomers, whether they be foreign students, or anything else. The Express Entry system must become much more flexible so that the government can welcome many French-speaking newcomers.

● (1205)

[English]

There are many measures that we can take. There are many things I'm thinking about. There are some things that we have done. This is a good subject for another conversation with the committee, as I see the chair is flagging that I have only a few seconds remaining.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, the minister mentioned settlement services. It's my understanding that they're only available to people who have PR. The B.C. francophone community is concerned about the other visa holders who are in British Columbia.

Is the minister planning to offer those settlement services to people without PR?

Hon. Sean Fraser: This is a question that requires partnership with provincial governments, which deal with a lot of that, particularly when we're dealing with international students, who are the subject of this study. There are areas where we can co-operate with some of the provinces, but institutions also have an important role to play.

I'm being shown that I've run out of time completely here, Mr. Dhaliwal. If you wish a follow-up, I would be more than happy to

provide information on what supports we can provide for folks who are here for a lengthy period of time and who may not qualify for existing settlement services.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry for interrupting you many times. It was just to make sure that everyone got a fair chance to ask you questions.

On behalf of the committee members, I really want to thank you for appearing before this committee and for taking time from your busy schedule to be here twice this week. We really appreciate that.

Thank you once again for presenting the levels plan in Parliament this week. I think we need immigrants to make sure that we can look into those labour shortage issues we've been having.

With that, I will suspend the meeting to allow the officials to do a sound check before we proceed with the next round.

Thank you, Minister.

● (1205)

(Pause)

● (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

For this panel, I would like to welcome officials from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration: Marian Campbell Jarvis, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Daniel Mills, senior assistant deputy minister, operations; Corinne Prince, acting assistant deputy minister, settlement and integration sector; and Pemi Gill, director general, international network.

On behalf of all the members, I would like to welcome the officials appearing before this committee for the second time in a week.

Our first round of questioning will start with Mr. Seeback.

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

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the generous allocation of six minutes.

I've gone through and looked at some of the approval rates for student visas—for example, Angola at 12%, Burundi at 3%, Chad at 13%, Congo at 13%, Kenya at 26% and Ghana at 10%. I think you can understand where I'm going with this. We know that there is an issue with visa acceptance rates in African countries. The minister has said that we're trying to improve this.

I'm wondering if someone in the department can tell me what exact steps are taking place to try to deal with this extremely high rejection rate from predominantly African countries. What are the specific steps? What plan has been implemented? Is there a review, for example?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Madam Chair, thank you very much for the question.

The department has undertaken a number of efforts. I will turn to Ms. Gill to outline the specifics in Africa, because we do have quite a bit under way.

I would also note that the nature of the problem, and the challenge, has really changed as well. We've had tremendous volume and interest. The situations around the world are different in different contexts.

I'll turn to Ms. Gill to provide some of the specifics in the action plan.

Ms. Pemi Gill (Director General, International Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

The department is very much committed to facilitating the mobility of bona fide students. The most common reason for refusal is that the applicant was not able to show the officer that they were able to support themselves while in Canada and thus demonstrate that they would be leaving Canada at the end of their stay. Oftentimes, this is seen inasmuch as the applicant is not able to show that their studies are affordable for themselves and their family. We note that in Africa in particular that is often a core reason for refusal, and is a space that the department is working to improve.

In terms of specifically what the department is doing, we are looking for opportunities to improve outcomes. Programs like the student direct stream and the Nigeria express stream are ways for clients to demonstrate that they have the funds and therefore demonstrate that they would be able to support their studies in Canada.

In addition to that, we do active promotion and outreach within the continent. In 2021, we had over 20 webinars and sessions with potential clients to make sure they understood the legitimate requirements for coming to Canada and understood what was required to be submitted. We also provide training to our employees. All of our decision-makers do unconscious bias training. In addition, for Africa we also have them do cultural studies such that they have an awareness of the local culture and the socio-economic conditions within various countries.

• (1215)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I want to pick up on one of the things that you said. It seems to me that you actually track reasons for rejection because you said the number one reason for refusal, particularly in African countries, is students not being able to support themselves.

Do you track the reasons for rejections of student visas?

Ms. Pemi Gill: That is correct. For student permits writ large, globally, the most common reason for refusal is that they're not able to demonstrate that they can support themselves while in Canada. That leads to the conclusion around not being able...the dual intent of not departing at the end of their stay as well.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm going to ask you to please table what the reasons for rejection are, the statistics on that, and if possible to break those out for franco-African nations.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I will gladly send the committee the refusal rates per country, as you asked.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Just to be clear, it's not the refusal rates—we have those—but the reasons for the refusal.

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Mills: I will gladly send that information.

There are some technical difficulties on our end. That's why I answered for Ms. Gill.

[English]

Mr. Kyle Seeback: That's fine.

A curiosity that I have is with respect to Nigeria. We know that the acceptance rate has gone from 40% in 2015 to 12% in 2020.

I know there's now a Nigerian student express stream, but there's also an English-language proficiency requirement for that, the IELTS test. My understanding is that Nigeria has English as its educational language, including in post-secondary institutions, so why would there be the requirement to take this test in order to take advantage of that stream?

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Seeback. Your time is up. Maybe you will get an opportunity in the second round to get your answer.

We will now proceed to MP Ali.

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

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

Thank you to the officials for being here.

My question is about the student direct stream program, which appears to have been very successful. The committee heard from the High Commissioner of Bangladesh about the desire to have that program available for students from Bangladesh.

Can the committee expect a rapid expansion of that program to many other countries?

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

Indeed, the student direct stream has been really beneficial in providing students with faster processing because they're providing more detailed information. It is something that we're actively looking at—at the expansion—and considering next steps on that.

• (1220)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Could you assist the committee in understanding the difference in the financial requirements between the Nigerian student express stream and the student direct stream for Nigerian students?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an excellent question, and I'll turn to Ms. Gill in a moment for some of those specific details.

One piece that's really important to note is that we engaged in the Nigerian express because we could see that it was an important market and this country had different conditions than other partners in the student direct stream, so a special dedicated effort was undertaken there.

Ms. Gill, perhaps you would like to give some of the highlights to respond to the question more specifically.

Ms. Pemi Gill: Certainly I can do so.

All international students, regardless of which stream under the international student program they are applying through, must demonstrate that they have proof of financial support for their first year of studies. That includes both tuition and living expenses.

In the SDS program, students show that by demonstrating that they paid the first year of tuition with their education institution in Canada and the GIC of \$10,000. In Nigeria, we were unable to have a financial institution with a product comparable to a GIC. Given what my colleague Marian Campbell Jarvis said, that this is a key market for us with a significant volume of student applications, we are exploring alternate pathways to improve outcomes for Nigerian students.

The Nigerian student express stream allows for students to demonstrate that they have the full suite of funds for their first-year tuition and living expenses; however, it's not a GIC, and we don't ask them to hold it in a bank. It is simply proof of it that is verified with the local financial institution. It has, in 2021, shown remarkable improvement in acceptance rates for international students out of Nigeria. Nigerian students who applied through this program in 2021 had an acceptance rate of 50%.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

My next question is regarding a co-op and work permit. Students are often required to engage in a co-op or internship program as an integral part of their program of studies. Yesterday I met with students representing the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. One of their requests was to allow international students to participate in co-op programs without requiring them to apply for a separate work permit.

If the committee were to recommend the elimination of that requirement, do you have any suggestions as to how we might frame those recommendations to be readily implemented by the department?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: That is something that we, too, have heard from some of our stakeholders.

I would note that part of the challenge arises when students have not sought the work permit at the same time as the study permit, and that's why they sometimes have challenges as they go forward.

We are thinking about issues facing international students, as the minister outlined, to support the delivery of his mandate commitment on the pathway to permanent residency and some of the ways that we can facilitate important markets. As the minister noted,

we'd be very interested in recommendations that the committee may offer us in that regard.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: I'll go quickly.

We compete for international students by offering high-quality education and by creating a path for permanent residents and citizenship after they complete their studies. The committee has heard from witnesses about immigration officers rejecting study permit applications on the basis that the officer is not satisfied that the student will leave Canada after completing their studies.

If this committee were looking for a way to eliminate or substantially reduce the rate of refusal based on the intent to stay in Canada following the completion of studies, would you have any recommendation on how this could be accomplished?

• (1225)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: One of the aspects that I would like—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Campbell. The time is up for Mr. Ali. We will have to proceed to our next member. Maybe in the second round someone will have the opportunity to ask the question again.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

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

[Translation]

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

Once more, let me welcome the wonderful witnesses to our wonderful Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Let me start with a question that is bothering me a little. I'm not the best with technology—I only recently learned how to send an attachment.

At our last meeting, you told us that the Chinook program does not include artificial intelligence. However, the members of my team have told me that Microsoft introduces Excel as follows:

Excel is a smart solution for experts and beginners alike. It identifies patterns in your data in order to organize them for you and save you time.

So the application finds patterns in our data.

Is that not artificial intelligence? If not, is it false advertising on Microsoft's part?

What can you tell us about that?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for the question.

At the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we use the Chinook application to transfer information directly into our case management system. The information is transferred in an Excel file that we use so that all the information is on the same page. The goal is to make the file easier for our officers to review.

As the minister mentioned, we will be glad to provide you with the details of what the Chinook application contains. In that way, we will be able to better provide committee members with what you need.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: According to Microsoft, Excel transfers information that is generated by artificial intelligence. So there seems to be artificial intelligence. As I understand it, artificial intelligence is built into the Chinook system because of the Excel software. Fine, you can send us the details.

Let's change the subject. According to a document we obtained through the Access to Information Act, an automated system was implemented in 2017. Currently, the average time to process applications for temporary residency is 11 minutes. I gather that your department would like automation to reduce that average processing time to six minutes.

Given that applications for temporary residency in Canada contain an average of 100 to 150 pages, do you believe that 11 minutes, let alone six minutes, will be enough to process them?

Will it then be possible for the processing to be fair and equitable for all applicants?

Mr. Daniel Mills: Thank you for the question.

I can't really give you an answer to that question because I don't know the details of the analysis you are referring to. However, I will gladly check that information.

Of course, the fact that applicants can now submit applications electronically makes the work a lot easier. As you know, before 2017, all applications were received on paper. For temporary residency applications, everything is now done electronically. It's no longer necessary to go through all the documents, one page at a time. The technology allows for the various attachments to be found in a file or on the screen. So the information can be checked more quickly.

However, I will gladly check the analysis you mentioned.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

Mr. Daniel Mills: So we will take another look at that issue.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I will be happy to send you the information I received from your department.

An examination of the recent Federal Court case law shows that a growing number of applicants whose applications for temporary residency were refused are turning to the court to challenge the decisions on their files. A significant percentage of those applicants win their cases. The officers are simply no longer looking at the contents of the files in detail. That is clear in the responses they send out, which are increasingly general and uniform. Clearly, the use of automated and artificial intelligence programs is helping to dehumanize the immigration process.

Is the Department of Citizenship and Immigration aware that, currently, the Department of Justice is overwhelmed by the number of lawsuits on matters like study permit applications?

● (1230)

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

The department is certainly aware of the risk of discrimination or partiality inherent in artificial intelligence systems. We are comfortable following the guidelines from the Treasury Board Secretariat.

I'm sorry, but I am having technical difficulties.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On a point of order, Madam Chair, I'm not getting translation.

The Chair: We'll take a minute to check.

Can someone else answer the question for Ms. Campbell Jarvis, because there is some issue with her Internet?

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, please go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Chair, I believe that, at the beginning of her answer, Ms. Campbell Jarvis said that the department was aware of the discrimination caused by artificial intelligence.

Did I understand correctly?

[*English*]

The Chair: Perhaps Mr. Mills can clarify.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: Unfortunately, we are having a lot of problems with Internet access at the moment. The sequence probably became a little disjointed.

I'll try to come back to the question.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Let me ask the question again, Mr. Mills.

Madam Chair, given the technical problems, can you give me a little more time?

[*English*]

The Chair: We will give you an extra minute, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: More and more files are ending up in court. There is a sense that this is because IRCC officers are no longer looking at the contents of files in detail.

This is clear in the responses that the applicants receive, which are increasingly general and uniform. The use of automated and artificial intelligence programs is helping to dehumanize the immigration process.

Mr. Mills, are you aware that the Department of Justice is currently overwhelmed by the amount of litigation over applications that your department has processed, specifically study permit applications?

Mr. Daniel Mills: We work in close collaboration with the Department of Justice and we are certainly aware that they are receiving many requests about our files.

As I mentioned before, the Chinook computer system does not generate decisions. All the decisions on our immigration files are made by our officers. They are highly qualified, very thorough and trained to make those decisions one by one.

The reasons given for the refusals are often the same because we have consolidated our procedures and processes so that the response sent to each of the clients uses the same format and wording. So the wording is standardized and has been designed with the industry and the clients so that they can understand and interpret it easily.

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So you do think that 11 minutes is enough time to process a document of 150 pages. Earlier, you told me that the software takes care of it.

[English]

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the officials.

Could the officials table the data on how many applications were accepted and rejected, broken down by year, stream, and country of origin? Please include the top five reasons for the rejection cited prior to the use of Chinook, starting in 2015.

• (1235)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, we've received the request. We will certainly do our best.

One point of clarification is that Chinook would not be a reason. Chinook is a tool that our officers use. That part of the question wouldn't really correspond, but we did note the rates of rejection by country and then the top five reasons.

We'll do our best there, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I don't know if the official misheard. I said "prior to the use of Chinook". I did not cite Chinook as a reason for rejection. I said to provide the top five reasons for rejection.

I think it would be critical for the committee to get this work, because the minister just said it would be up to the committee to de-

termine whether there are biases within the system. If we don't get this data, we cannot properly understand what is going on.

In conjunction with this data, could the official also table the data on how many applications the Chinook tool was used to help assess, broken down by the visa office, stream, country of application and year? Of those applications, please include how many were accepted or rejected, broken down by the year, the top five reasons for the rejection, the visa office, the stream and the country of application.

That would be starting when the Chinook tool was implemented and used by officials.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, thank you for the clarification around the Chinook tool and the usage.

We've noted that and we'll take that down.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

When the Chinook tool is being used, are officers' working notes related to individual factual assessments retained or deleted from the system?

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

I'll turn to Ms. Gill to respond directly to that.

Ms. Pemi Gill: Thank you.

In terms of the data for any officer review, whether they are doing so in Chinook, in GCMS or on paper, the determinations they've made and the notes of their decision are recorded in the global case management system. That is also where the refusal ground and the refusal letter are retained as well.

We do not delete any of the determinations of the officers or the rationale for their decision.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Do you delete the working notes?

Ms. Pemi Gill: Could you clarify what the working notes would be?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: They are the working notes related to an individual's application. I assume that when officials look at these applications, they take notes with respect to what they're receiving. Are there working notes kept in the system or are they deleted?

Ms. Pemi Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

Any notes that an officer takes that are in support of assessing the application and such are recorded in GCMS. Officers may write down something on the side, like on a piece of paper. However, if it is at all pertinent to the decision, it is in the system and that is also part of the refusal grounds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Can the officials provide data on how many rejected applications have gone to the Federal Court since 2015, broken down by year, stream and country of origin, how many actually went to a hearing, and the outcome of the Federal Court decision?

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

I'm not certain we have all of that data. I would need to confirm that with respect to the Federal Court. That may more properly be with the Department of Justice, so I'd have to confirm what we have, Madam Chair.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. If your department doesn't have it, is it possible for you to request that information from Justice and provide it to the committee? The reason I ask is that this is critical information for us to assess the entire situation of what's going on. We have had witnesses indicate that, for example, in one area they looked into 26 applications that were rejected by IRCC and went to the Federal Court, and 23 of them were later accepted. Some of them did not even go to a hearing. I think it would be really important for us to get this information from the officials.

Ms. Campbell Jarvis told us at committee that there is an IRCC playbook used as a level of oversight for bias in IRCC. Could the officials table this playbook and also provide documentation or information on how it is being used by officials?

• (1240)

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

The playbook is something we have under development. It's still a draft. What we're using it for is a bit of a frame and a checklist to help guide how we use digital tools. It sets out a number of points for consideration, from bias to privacy and other considerations. We would be pleased to share that with the committee, keeping in mind that it's a working draft.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

The Chinook tool is able to truncate the information into a processing of somewhere around six minutes. That means that the official is not really reading all the documents. They are relying on flag words used by the Chinook tool—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan. Your time is up. Maybe you will get an opportunity in the second round to ask the question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, maybe I can ask the officials to table those flag words for the committee.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan for five minutes. Please begin.

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

Thank you to the officials for once again being here with us.

Witnesses have testified multiple times now at this committee that the refusal rates for African students are really high and unacceptable. There is an undertone of racism and discrimination at IRCC.

Earlier in this meeting, the Minister of Immigration also indicated that Chinook is just a tool to organize case information. He mentioned something about it being a spreadsheet.

If an IRCC officer is not being influenced in their decision by Chinook, and if there are no algorithms in Chinook, then does the issue lie in IRCC officers being discriminatory or racist?

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

Certainly, as the minister emphasized earlier this morning, racism and discrimination are something that the department is taking very seriously. Our staff are trained, and we have all taken hidden bias training. We also have efforts under way with the department-wide anti-racism task force, which is addressing work across recruitment and looking at our programs and policies and our service delivery as well. We also have a number of networks, including in Africa.

I would be pleased to turn to Ms. Gill for more details on how we are taking a pan-African approach to our work. We have a lot under way, and we are very committed to addressing systemic racism.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: To the officials, with all due respect, the public has not seen any difference since that report was publicized, and neither were any documents given to the public stating that this issue has been tackled.

Have there been any changes since that report was made public? Were there any changes in how people were being trained? Is there anything that's been happening since that report was tabled?

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

As the minister noted this morning, the events around George Floyd were really a wake-up call for many of us. I think we were awake prior to that as well, but that was really a call to action. We set up an anti-racism task force, which you've been hearing about, and we've been tracking. The survey you're speaking about is the first one we've undertaken. That really is a baseline. That shows us that there are some concerns and some challenges.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Were there any results from that first report? If this anti-racism committee has been struck, were there any results? Have you seen any?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: In terms of results, there are a few things that we have put in place already, and we also have a number of areas where we've launched work.

• (1245)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can we please have those tabled?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, we are looking at our evaluation practices, our data frameworks and our policy frameworks. There is GBA+ analysis. We've developed a tool that we're piloting to help us assess systemic racism through our policy.

There are some areas that my colleagues in operations.... Perhaps Mr. Mills would like to allude to his space, operations, where we have also advanced significant work.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Can we have that information tabled? I want to move on to other questions. Can we please have that tabled, about what kinds of changes were made after that report was done, what's currently being worked on and how? I think that's very important to note.

When it comes to Chinook, we've heard over and over again that it seems like a very discriminatory kind of program. Specifically, were any consultations done at all, and with whom, before Chinook was implemented?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I'll turn to Ms. Gill to give us some information on the Chinook system.

Ms. Pemi Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

As mentioned in earlier testimony, Chinook is an Excel-based software. Since Excel is used widely and for a variety of purposes across the department, it has not changed how applications are processed. We don't actually provide lists of the software right now. It's not a processing or automated decision-making tool; it is a different way to view information—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have five minutes. Please proceed.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you, Madam Chair.

It is important to differentiate between francophone immigration in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. I would like the senior assistant deputy minister to explain the major points of the francophone immigration plan outside of Quebec.

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

I'm delighted that Ms. Corinne Prince is here with us. I know she would like to speak about the francophone immigration strategy we have under way.

[Translation]

Ms. Corinne Prince (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for the question.

[English]

In fact, in 2019, the department developed a comprehensive francophone immigration strategy, which incorporates elements along the entire immigration continuum. We start with promotion and attraction in our overseas missions, focusing on francophone source

countries, with Destination Canada, which has a *foire d'emploi* every year to promote Canada as a destination of choice.

That then moves on through the continuum to our selection tools. Our minister and my colleagues have mentioned several times express entry, which is an important tool for economic streams. We know that over the past years, it has been demonstrated that economic streams bear the most fruit. If we want to bring in more and more francophone immigrants, then we need to use economic streams to do it. That is why, in 2020, we raised the points for both francophone applicants and bilingual applicants in express entry. In fact, that simple change raised the invitations to apply to 8.8% in November of that year. That was a full 3.8% higher than in October of that year, so in just one month, the applications increased significantly.

We are looking at embedding francophone immigration in our regional pilots: the Atlantic immigration pilot, the rural and northern immigration pilot. As colleagues in the department are developing the municipal nominee program with provinces and territories, we are looking at embedding francophone immigration in that upcoming pilot as well.

I won't forget to note that provincial nominee programs are extremely important in attracting and landing francophone candidates. Many of our provincial jurisdictions have targets, so we are working closely with them and encouraging them to use their provincial nominee programs to bring in more and more francophone candidates. In fact, in the recent levels plan that was tabled by our minister on Monday of this week, you will see an increase in PNP spaces. We hope that provinces will rise to the challenge to bring in more and more francophones.

Right through to settlement and integration services, which is an area of expertise, I can tell you that we have increased the tool box over the past several years. We have moved from funding 50 francophone organizations to funding over 80 francophone organizations outside of Quebec. That includes spending of at least \$61 million on francophone services. We have worked closely with the francophone community to establish 14 welcoming francophone communities across the country. I'm very proud that we did that by asking the communities themselves to determine which community they would want to be a welcoming community. This was not determined by the department or the government. It was in fact a recommendation from the francophone communities themselves. That, I think, is a model in terms of stakeholder consultations.

In addition, we have implemented a pre-arrival program for francophone entrance. This is a project that is working with five francophone organizations, representing all areas of the country outside of Quebec. This has increased the arrival of francophone candidates who are up to date in terms of what Canada offers, understanding the labour market much better, and we have—

• (1250)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Prince—

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Madam Chair, I was able to ask only one question. If I can ask the panel to submit in writing...because she mentioned the PNP.

In B.C., Madam Chair, there is—

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal, your time is up. Would you like the officials to table something?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Yes.

The Chair: Okay, if the officials can—

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: But I want the officials.... They mentioned the provincial nominee program. When we talk about B.C., the vast majority of francophone immigrants are in B.C. Can the officials table what they are going to do to provide them with resettlement services, which are only offered to PR applicants right now?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal.

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.

Ms. Campbell Jarvis, you were saying something very interesting just before the technical difficulties. We checked to be sure about what you said; I will quote you word for word. You said: "The department is certainly aware of the risk of discrimination inherent in artificial intelligence systems." Right afterwards, you said: "We are comfortable" with that.

In all honesty, Ms. Campbell Jarvis, I wonder about this question.

How can we be comfortable when there is a risk of discrimination in a department? I have difficulty understanding you when you say that. I don't follow.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the opportunity to participate once more. My apologies for the technical difficulties.

No, we are not comfortable with discrimination. However, we are certainly comfortable following the guidelines from the Treasury Board Secretariat.

[*English*]

They have established a set of guidelines for managing AI projects. I'm proud to say that IRCC was one of the first departments to sign on with TBS's AI guidelines, and that's what we're following.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You really did say that you are aware of the risk of discrimination inherent in artificial intelligence. Right afterwards, you said that you are comfortable with that risk. That's what we understood.

That scares me a little. We felt that there was a risk of discrimination, and now we have clear evidence of it. It's not even a risk anymore.

That means that the department is, to an extent, accepting a risk of discrimination. As I have just told you, we have evidence of it. There are huge disparities in the acceptance rates of French-speaking students from certain countries in West Africa.

If we are comfortable with the risk of discrimination, a lot of students from West Africa listening to you will wonder whether it's worth the trouble to apply to Canada. They will look to another country instead.

• (1255)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: There are a number of aspects to your question.

First, we are very aware of the risks inherent in technology or artificial intelligence. Partiality, discrimination, is clearly one of those risks. We take steps to avoid that risk and reduce it to a minimum.

There is another factor in the process with respect to international students. I will ask Ms. Gill to talk about that process—

[*English*]

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Before I was cut off in the last round, I was asking officials for the word flags in the Chinook tool. Could the officials please confirm that they can provide the committee with what those word flags are?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I would turn to my colleague Ms. Gill to speak about the operationalization of the Chinook system and your question about red flags.

Ms. Pemi Gill: Whether an officer is reviewing an application in Chinook, in GCMS or on paper, we always indicate factual information for the officers' awareness. For example, a flag is not necessarily a negative statement; it could be positive as well. Word indicators could be things like that the person is coming for a wedding or a funeral. Another example is if they're coming for a set conference such that there is awareness for officers of a conference—we do that even in the global case management system—and for officers to be aware of the information that the client has presented.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could the officials table those word indicators or word flags for the committee's consideration and information?

It's a yes-or-no answer, really.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: We will see what it is possible to disclose, because we must consider the integrity of the programs. So we will look at the indicators to see what we can share with members of the committee.

[*English*]

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm particularly interested in the word flags that are being used in the Chinook system, because it will also advise the committee or give a sense to the committee of whether those particular word flags could have biases incorporated in them, especially in light of the Pollara report indicating that racist and stereotype attitudes have been displayed by officials. Since it was officials who developed the Chinook tool, and they did not consult with outsiders—it was an internal system—how it was developed and what word flags have been used to flag applications, whether for approval or rejection, would be important to note so that we can see whether those word flags have any indication toward issues of stereotypical and racist attitudes.

I would ask officials to please table that information.

I would also like to ask officials to what extent assumptions about the home country, the family who might be coming and the economic conditions of the country they're leaving prejudice the decision.

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

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, perhaps I can ask the officials to table that information for the committee.

Can I get confirmation from officials that they would table that information?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I'm not sure that we have information that could be tabled in the way that the question was asked of us.

• (1300)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Maybe you could answer the question in writing to the committee, then.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Redekopp, do you have a question?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Yes, thank you.

There's been a significant amount of discussion around racism in this meeting and in previous meetings, so I have a motion I would like to move, Madam Chair:

Whereas, officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have appeared at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on the dates of February 15 and February 17, 2022. The committee send for all briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials, prepared for the Minister and Deputy Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship regarding biases or racism within the department; and action plan and/or timelines to

address said biases or racism; that the committee receive the information no later than Wednesday, March 30, 2022; that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons and that these documents be posted on the committee's web page.

I've submitted this to the clerk, and there is translation as well.

The Chair: Have all the members received the motion in both official languages?

Go ahead, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would certainly support the motion that's being tabled. I think it is important for us to get this information to have a better understanding of what's going on within the IRCC and the concerns that I think we all share.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. El-Khoury.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Madam Chair, I would like to have the motion in both official languages.

[*English*]

The Chair: Yes, the clerk of the committee is emailing it to all the members.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I would just like to add that I want to have the motion in French.

• (1305)

[*English*]

The Chair: We will suspend the meeting for two minutes so that everyone can read the motion.

• (1305)

(Pause)

• (1305)

The Chair: I think we can proceed.

Mr. El-Khoury, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Madam Chair, we do not have a lot of time left and we need to study this important motion in order to come to the right decision. I personally have other parliamentary commitments, so I am asking you to postpone our study of this motion to our next meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This motion essentially asks for information. Given the gravity of the situation, I think it is very important for us to obtain that information so we can properly assess it and incorporate that understanding into the work of this committee.

I would absolutely support this motion.

The Chair: Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Chair, we could excuse our witnesses. They have been so kind to us and have had a hard day. We don't really have to force them to listen to our debate on a motion that does not concern them.

As for the motion, whether we discuss it at the next meeting or today, most members seem to be inclined to support it. I could very well accept it today, which would bring the matter to a close. Actually, I see that the NDP, the Conservatives and the Bloc Québécois agree with the motion, which I too see as an important one.

The motion will undoubtedly be passed. So let's vote right away and be done with it. At the same time, our witnesses could go and get a little rest.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, go ahead.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like a recorded vote on the motion, please.

The Chair: Okay.

Madam Clerk, please proceed with the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 11; nays 0)

The Chair: The motion is adopted. I will read the motion:

Whereas, officials from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have appeared at the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration on the dates of February 15 and February 17, 2022. The committee send for all briefing notes, memos and emails from senior officials, prepared for the Minister and Deputy Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship regarding biases or racism within the department; and action plan and/or timelines to address said biases or racism; that the committee receive the information no later than Wednesday, March 30, 2022; that matters of Cabinet confidence and national security be excluded from the request; and that any redactions to protect the privacy of Canadian citizens and permanent residents whose names and personal information may be included in the documents, as well as public servants who have been providing assistance on this matter, be made by the Office of the Law Clerk and Parliamentary Counsel of the House of Commons and that these documents be posted on the committee's web page.

I would like to thank our officials for appearing before the committee today.

There are just a few reminders for members of the committee.

On March 1, we will conclude this study with one last panel and then the drafting instructions. The minister has kindly confirmed that he is available to appear for the estimates on Thursday, March 3. As mentioned in the last meeting, the minister will return on March 24 on the study of differential outcomes. A prioritized witness list for the study on differential outcomes is due tomorrow to the clerk of the committee.

Is it the pleasure of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. The meeting is adjourned.

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