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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz



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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

I want to remind all participants of the following points. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair. Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak, whether participating in person or via Zoom. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. I want to thank you all in advance for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 16, 2025, the committee is commencing its study of the international student program and study permits.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting. We have four guests from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We have Pemi Gill, assistant deputy minister, service delivery. We have Soyoung Park, assistant deputy minister, economic programs. We have Aiesha Zafar, assistant deputy minister, migration integrity. We also have Bronwyn May, director general, international students branch.

Up to five minutes will be given for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Ms. Gill, welcome. I now invite you to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

I'll just pause for a second: Is there an order that you would prefer? Would you prefer us to go from Ms. May to Ms. Park to Ms. Gill to Ms. Zafar? How would you like to go?

Soyoung Park (Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Programs, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be providing the opening remarks.

The Chair: Then we'll ask you to start off, Ms. Park.

Thank you.

Soyoung Park: Thank you very much.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): On a point of order, is it five minutes for all of them?

The Chair: It's five minutes for each one.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I don't think that's—

The Chair: I'm sorry. It's five minutes for one.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Total.

The Chair: Yes, total.

I was so excited to hear from all of you that I had thought maybe I could slip that in, but we will do five minutes as opening remarks.

Thank you, Ms. Park.

Soyoung Park: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territories of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

[Translation]

International students make important contributions to our communities, campuses, and economy. However, the program faced unprecedented growth during 2022 and 2023, bringing new challenges and the need for reform. That's why the department has implemented a comprehensive set of reforms to the international student program.

• (1540)

[English]

To address program integrity issues, we introduced mandatory verification of acceptance letters for all student study permit applications, in order to detect and prevent fraud. This means that applications are not approved without a verified letter of acceptance from a designated learning institution. We also raised financial requirements to better reflect the cost of living in Canada, with yearly adjustments, so that students are more financially prepared to live in Canada during the period of their studies.

[Translation]

The volume of applications was too great, so we implemented an annual cap on study permits and introduced an allocation system with the provinces and territories. Provinces and territories allocate spaces to learning institutions based on community capacity and housing availability, among other factors.

[English]

Since 2024, when the cap was introduced, there has been a 21% reduction in study permit holders in Canada. The cap is working, because compared with the same period last year, Canada welcomed over 98,000 fewer international students, to better align with Canada's needs. Initial reports suggest that pressures on housing and local services are beginning to ease in communities with universities and colleges. We also tightened requirements for the work permit program, also called the PGWP, to bring greater focus on Canada's labour market needs, and introduced minimum language requirements.

In November 2024 we introduced additional program integrity measures. One, we set a new 24-hour weekly limit for off-campus work. Two, students who change learning institutions must apply for a new study permit so that we can better track where they are and the fact that they are studying. Lastly, we now have additional regulations to enforce compliance and reporting standards on learning institutions.

[Translation]

These reforms strengthen integrity and respond to the concerns of Canadians around the capacity of communities and institutions to support international students.

[English]

Through this period of change, we have worked and will continue to work closely with provinces, territories and the education sector to build a stronger and more sustainable program that will continue to welcome genuine students while preventing misuse of the program.

[Translation]

Thank you. I am happy to take your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks, Ms. Park.

We're going to begin with the first round of questions.

I did notice that Mr. Paul-Hus is here, and Mr. Davies.

Welcome to both of you. Thank you for being here with us.

I believe the first questioner will be Mr. Redekopp, please, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for Ms. May.

What advice did you provide the minister on study permits regarding the impact on housing, asylum claims, employment, food bank usage and things like that?

Soyoung Park: If I understood correctly, you want to know what advice we provided in advance of the reforms to inform—

Brad Redekopp: I'm thinking that you have a new minister. Did you provide departmental advice to them regarding the impact on study permits and things like housing and asylum claims, etc.?

Soyoung Park: As I mentioned during my opening remarks, a lot of the reform measures were introduced in 2024, therefore we're at the stage right now where we're really starting to see some of the early results of those reforms. One of the objectives of the reforms—

Brad Redekopp: I'm sorry. That's not exactly what I was looking for, but let's go in a different direction.

I do have some questions related to the department's understanding of the situation on the ground in Canada and how that impacts recommendations that are made to the minister. Regarding study permit holders and postgraduate work permit holders, what was the IRCC forecast for the number of asylum inflows attributable to study permit holders and postgraduate work permit holders?

● (1545)

Soyoung Park: In terms of the impact on asylum claims, I'm happy to report that this year alone, the overall asylum intake has actually dropped by over 30%. In that, in terms of the student numbers, there's been a corresponding decrease as well, at least until the end of July 2025.

Brad Redekopp: Does the department track the number of study permit holders and postgraduate work permit holders who claim asylum?

Soyoung Park: We would be able to track the permit or the status they held prior to the time when they claimed asylum.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Could you table that information with the committee on the number of study permit holders or postgraduate work permit holders who claim asylum by year, let's say, for the last two years?

Soyoung Park: By year? Yes. I believe that information is.... I'll get you the precise data. There were actually 48% fewer asylum claims made by students in July 2025.

Brad Redekopp: I'm looking for a number, though.

Soyoung Park: Yes. I'm giving you the number of 1,586, compared to December 2024, which was 2,640.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Of all study permits expiring in each month since January 1, 2024, what percentage of former permit holders filed asylum claims?

Soyoung Park: Well, the statistics that I just provided you would be study permit holders who claimed asylum.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Let's try this. What are the top 10 nationalities among former students or PGWP holders now claiming asylum, and what primary grounds are being cited?

Soyoung Park: We would be able to provide to you the nationality. In terms of the claim type, or the grounds of claim, that would be available through the Immigration and Refugee Board.

Brad Redekopp: Did you say that you would not be able to provide the nationality?

Soyoung Park: We would be able to.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Can you please do that? You can submit that to us after the fact.

Soyoung Park: Okay.

Brad Redekopp: That would be good information.

Since January 2024, how many removal orders have been issued to former students or PGWP holders making asylum claims? How many were stayed due to active claims or appeals, by month?

Soyoung Park: That would be under the mandate of the CBSA, but I'm not sure whether....

Aiesha Zafar (Assistant Deputy Minister, Migration Integrity, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes, as my colleague mentioned, the number of removals specific to study permits would be under the CBSA's purview. However, I understand that they did effect, overall, 18,000 removals in 2024. I don't have the percentage of those who were students.

Brad Redekopp: Are you saying that the department doesn't know how many removals were from study permit holders?

Aiesha Zafar: IRCC does not track that data, as it's the mandate of the Canada Border Services Agency.

Brad Redekopp: How many work-eligible asylum claimants who were former students or PGWP holders obtain open work permits while claims are pending?

Soyoung Park: Just to confirm, Madam Chair, PGWP is an open work permit, so I'm not sure whether I would be answering the question that's being sought.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Brad Redekopp: Okay, thank you.

Since January 2024, how many study permit holders have transitioned to postgraduate work permits, and what share have remained in the original study region versus moved to another province?

Soyoung Park: I would be able to answer part of that question. What I can tell you is that in 2024, there were 200,000 new PGWP holders. That's a decrease of 15% from the previous year.

Brad Redekopp: What share of them remained in their original study region versus moved to a different region?

Soyoung Park: I'm sorry. I didn't hear that.

Brad Redekopp: What share remained in their original study region versus moved to a different region?

The Chair: Please give a quick response.

Soyoung Park: I don't have that information.

Brad Redekopp: Does IRCC not have that, or is it that you just don't have it with you?

Soyoung Park: It would have to be a special request to obtain that information.

Brad Redekopp: Can you provide that to the committee?

• (1550)

Soyoung Park: Yes.

Brad Redekopp: Can I just confirm one thing that—

The Chair: We're at six minutes and 30 seconds.

Brad Redekopp: This is more of a point of order.

Can I ask that things the committee requests be submitted within 28 calendar days, please?

The Chair: The request can be made, and I think they'll do their best to do that within that time frame.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Ms. Park.

We'll go to our next questioner, who is Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Madam Chair, thank you very much.

Thank you, officials, for the work you're doing and for being here today.

My question will be on numbers, first of all. Where are we in terms of international students who have entered Canada in 2025 compared to 2024 and 2023?

Soyoung Park: We've actually just posted some of this information on our website. I can tell you, as I said in my opening remarks, that we've had, for students, just over 98,000 fewer arrivals this year, which means from January to July 31 of this year.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

This is the first of three meetings that we're embarking on here today on the international student program. For context, can you remind this committee of the key reforms that were put in place—under the previous government, granted—that led to the significant decreases we are seeing?

Soyoung Park: Yes, absolutely.

In recognition of some of the issues that were present in the past program, we introduced several measures.

The first was to address unsustainable volumes, and that's the intake cap that everyone's familiar with. That was introduced in January 2024. Subsequently, as part of levels planning, for the first time ever we introduced new arrival targets for temporary resident admission to coincide or to complement the intake cap.

Second, to make sure that the international student program responded better to the economic needs of Canada, which, of course, will change, we aligned the postgraduate work permit eligibility to meet those longer-term structural labour market needs and introduced a minimum level of language proficiency, because we know that language proficiency is a strong factor for success in Canada.

We also strengthened integrity by raising the financial requirement. It had not been raised in a very long time. Therefore, we raised it in January from \$10,000 and doubled it to over \$20,000. We made a yearly commitment to update it according to Stats Canada data; therefore, it was just recently updated in September to \$22,895.

Then, of course, the letter-of-verification system was also introduced at the end of 2023.

Finally, the regulatory measures that I spoke of that were brought in at the end of November 2024 were really to ensure that there is a way to deal with non-compliant educational institutions. They also instituted the 24-hour work limit.

Peter Fragiskatos: Can you reiterate for this committee the important “by 2027” and “no more than 5% of the population” provisions?

Soyoung Park: As I said, all of these measures are going to lead to part of the 5%. Of course, students are just one part of the temporary residents. There are other measures as well, but we can say that these measures are starting to have an impact on the quality of the students who are coming and on the numbers, as I've already mentioned.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much. That's very clear and encouraging.

A lot of the abuses that have unfortunately been experienced by international students relate to designated learning institutions or learning institutions that, frankly, haven't met a very good standard. As we understand it, that is in the provincial purview. A lot of this is in the provincial purview.

What is the relationship between IRCC and provincial governments with respect to the DLIs and ensuring that there is a better standard being met? There's only about a minute and a half left. What's one key measure that would point to a change that has happened to ensure a better system?

• (1555)

Soyoung Park: In order to respect the fact that the provinces and territories have jurisdiction over education and the fact that the federal government has jurisdiction over our borders, it is a joint system and we work very closely with our partners. We set the overall cap, but it is up to each province to decide how it's going to distribute those allocations. Of course, it's then up to the institutions to decide which students are going to be welcome to submit an application to study in Canada.

Peter Fragiskatos: Obviously, the provinces have a major role to play. They are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the designated learning institutions—the colleges and universities—are meeting a standard to ensure that abuses are halted entirely, we hope. They're minimized in the beginning, and we see a better outcome.

Soyoung Park: Absolutely. Provinces and territories are the ones with the authority to designate or dedesignate institutions, so we must work very closely with them as partners.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today.

When the department grants study permits to international students who have obtained a Québec Acceptance Certificate, which level of government is responsible for ensuring that those students undergo a medical examination and obtain a police certificate? That should be an easy question.

Pemi Gill (Assistant Deputy Minister, Service Delivery, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

Can I get a bit of clarification? Would it be an international student currently in Quebec who's applying for a work permit?

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I hope it won't go on like this. I don't have a lot of time.

When you grant a study permit to an international student, which level of government is responsible for asking that student for a medical certificate or a police certificate? Who has that authority?

I don't want to waste a lot of time on this, so here's the answer: the federal government. Can we therefore agree that neither the provinces nor universities are responsible for this?

Pemi Gill: Yes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Perfect, because what I just heard is that, once again, the provinces and universities are to blame for any abuses that occur.

I would imagine your department saw last week's *Enquête* episode about how an international criminal organization is using loopholes in the study permit system. Did you see it?

Pemi Gill: Yes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay. I hope I won't keep losing time like this.

IRCC's response to the report was surprising. One might even call it catastrophic. The department says provincial governments and universities are to blame, but the federal government is in charge of this permit system. At worst, someone is lying; at best, they're acting in bad faith. Which do you think it is?

Aiesha Zafar: Thank you for the question.

[English]

The IRCC is responsible for assessing the eligibility and admissibility of workers, students and other foreign nationals who want to travel to Canada. We do that in accordance with the legislated requirements for eligibility and admissibility. With the information that is available to us at the time, the officer assesses to ensure that they are not a threat to the security of Canada and the health of Canadians, and that they have no criminal background in terms of the information that's provided to us. After an assessment, the officer determines that the individual is not inadmissible.

In terms of the activities of the foreign national after arriving into Canada, compliance with the student permit or work permit is a responsibility of IRCC and a joint responsibility with ESDC with regard to work permits, but any other activity, criminal or otherwise, would be under the purview of our enforcement partners, such as CBSA or RCMP.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What we heard was that, to get into Quebec, these criminals, many of them between 20 and 30 years of age, dupe the authorities and the federal immigration department. The vast majority of them obtain study permits for universities outside of major centres. According to the detective sergeant who orchestrated the arrest of Mamadou Berthe, these fraudsters have found a loophole in the system to gain entry as students. She says word gets around.

Do you agree that there's a loophole somewhere in your department?

- (1600)

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: We do work very closely with our enforcement partners as well as police services across the country. When we are made aware of criminal activity or fraud trends that link to immigration, or that potentially link to foreign nationals coming into Canada, we're able to assess and determine whether or not we can identify those trends in future applications.

We do have measures in place now. My colleague mentioned the letter of acceptance verification. Since it's been in place, it has identified over 14,000 potentially fraudulent letters of acceptance. We were able to then refuse applicants who were not genuine students coming into Canada. We also rely on our post-secondary institutions or our provinces to tell us when students are not complying and not attending school.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Does IRCC have some kind of mechanism or tool that enables universities to notify it that a student isn't showing up for classes? Does IRCC have a tool that alerts you if that happens? If so, what is it?

Aiesha Zafar: Yes.

[English]

Absolutely. We have a student compliance regime that has been in place since 2016. In 2024 it was made mandatory. All of the provinces are on board right now. We are working with the Province of Quebec to onboard. Twice a year, all of the designated

learning institutions must let us know whether or not an individual who has entered Canada on a student permit has actually registered and is attending school. They will send us that information back, so that we can determine whether or not students are in compliance.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Once your department gets that alert from a university, does it have a way to react quickly and find the international students who aren't showing up for classes?

What we have is a gang moving more than half a billion dollars through auto theft, identity theft, romance scams, drug trafficking and so on, but you're telling us this tool is working. I kind of get the impression it isn't.

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: The vast majority of people who enter Canada as foreign nationals as students are compliant and are students, according to our spring assessment. We do the verification with the designated learning institutions twice a year. We do it in the spring and fall. According to our spring data, 91% of the students who were reported on were compliant—registered and in school—and 8% were potentially non-compliant. That means there are further activities we need to do, such as looking into whether there could be an administrative error. IRCC also conducts 2,000 investigations a year for students who are potentially non-compliant.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Duceppe. We're way over time. We're at about seven minutes.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If people take an extra 15 seconds to start their answer every time I ask a question, it goes a lot slower than exchanges in English. We need to find a solution to this problem.

Things were moving along quickly between Mr. Redekopp and the witnesses, but I've had to wait quite a while for answers to every one of my questions. I don't mind waiting to give people enough time to answer, but if I don't get extra time, that won't work. If you like, I can start keeping track of how much time I spend speaking.

[English]

The Chair: We gave you about an extra minute, and I will keep on accommodating you.

Thank you, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

We're going into our second round, and our first questioner is Mr. Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone.

My Bloc Québécois colleague asked you about this earlier. I gather you didn't see the Radio-Canada report on TV. The reporter went to Africa, specifically to Ivory Coast, to see what was going on, make connections and paint a full picture of a crime ring. I'm here today to talk about that criminal activity and the impact of the department's handling of international student files, specifically those who aren't genuine.

Ms. Zafar, you talked about the process and the second assessment. How did these processes fail to detect these criminals, who were undoubtedly already involved in criminal activity in their country of origin?

Aiesha Zafar: Thank you for the question.

• (1605)

[English]

The officer who is making the decision for admissibility into Canada is making that decision based on the information that's been provided to them. First, they will look at the application and collect biometrics—fingerprints—to identify that the individual is who they say they are. We do information sharing as well with our international partners to see if there's any derogatory information on that applicant. If there are any indicators of elevated risk—potentially, it could be criminal activity or national security concerns—that file will be referred to our public safety partners at the Canada Border Services Agency and CSIS.

The officers are doing everything in their power to make sure they are satisfied that an individual, when they're applying, is not criminally or otherwise inadmissible to Canada. Once they're in Canada, it is challenging to predict their behaviour, however.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus: How many people in Canada right now have a study permit and have been found guilty of fraud? Does the department know how many such people there are, and has their permit been revoked? What is happening with those people at this point?

Aiesha Zafar: Thank you for the question.

[English]

That's a challenging question to answer. It depends on the type of fraud we're looking at.

If the question is about fraud in the student program—that is, if they were misrepresenting themselves as students and were then found to be non-genuine students—we have that data. I don't have it in front of me right now. If there's criminal fraud, that would be a matter for which we have to rely on our police partners.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus: How many non-genuine students are there? Do you have a number?

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: We have numbers from 2023. If I recall correctly, there were about 1,500 students who were potentially implicated in fraud. Those investigations were undertaken by the CBSA. Not all of them were eventually found to have committed fraud, but it was under the....

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus: The report really focused on what Radio-Canada called the “African mafia”. I actually asked a question about this in the House of Commons today, and the Minister of Public Safety accused me of being racist because I said “African mafia” even though it's an official public safety term. This mafia exists.

We know this mafia is causing a problem, especially in Quebec because of the language. People from Ivory Coast come to Quebec, supposedly to study, but they're actually criminals. Do you have any more information to share with us about problems caused by Ivorian crime rings in Canada and specifically in Quebec?

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: I don't know if there are other areas where it occurs as frequently as you're reporting.

However, we have what we call indicator packages that our officers use. They're provided by our public safety partners. These indicator packages are specific to different regions of the world or different cohorts, and they will identify specific indicators for our officers to look for when we get applications related to that region or cohort. When we receive this type of information from our police and law enforcement partners, we update those packages for our officers.

The Chair: You have one minute, Monsieur Paul-Hus.

[Translation]

Pierre Paul-Hus: Ms. Gill, the Radio-Canada report talked about victims who tried to report fraud but got no response. I imagine step one would be to contact police. After that, is there communication that happens so Immigration and Citizenship Canada people can answer questions or make those connections? In many cases, nobody pays attention and nothing happens.

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: Generally speaking, we do have a tip line. We do have information that is provided to IRCC from either anonymized individuals or people who are bringing information forward. All of those tips are investigated. We also get information from our police partners and law enforcement partners. We take every tip or incident seriously, and we will look into that to the best of our ability.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul-Hus.

[English]

Our next questioner will be for the Liberals.

Ms. Zahid.

Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

We know that the international student program is a shared responsibility, with the federal government managing the study permits and the provinces overseeing the designated learning institutions.

In recent years, international student enrolment has grown rapidly, especially in Ontario, raising concerns about student well-being and the integrity of the program. Based on the data that I was able to get, in 2023 Ontario hosted roughly 54% of Canada's 833,920 post-secondary international students.

I would like to focus on how the federal government raised these concerns with Ontario and why federal action became necessary when the Province of Ontario did not act.

My first question for the officials is, can you tell the committee when IRCC first raised concerns with the Government of Ontario about the pace of growth in international student enrolment and what specific risks were flagged at that time?

• (1610)

Soyoung Park: I wouldn't be able to say specifically when it was raised with Ontario. We meet with our partners on a regular basis to exchange information and to make sure the system is functioning well.

I would say that there have been a lot of meetings related to how we can make everything better. We are starting to see progress. One of the things we have seen is that the rental markets are cooling down. That's one of the objectives we had when we started the reforms, in order to make sure that international students were not a burden on the housing system.

For example, the recent CMHC report showed that rental price growth slowed from 8.9% to 3.2% in Kitchener-Waterloo, and similarly in Hamilton, from 12.8% to 2.4%. They stated that it was due to lower international student numbers.

Salma Zahid: What efforts did the IRCC make to engage the Government of Ontario in strengthening the oversight of the designated learning institutions? Also, what responses did you receive from the Province of Ontario?

Soyoung Park: Ontario, naturally, given its size and population, is a province that we engage with regularly. We just recently had a meeting with all of our provincial partners to give them an update on all of the changes and what kinds of results we're seeing.

We also engaged in consultations related to the PGWP, because we know that is also something that PTs—provinces and territories—are concerned about, and we welcome their feedback.

That was part of the express entry category-based selection. They are aware that we use that information, particularly from provinces and territories, in order to inform our opinion going forward.

Salma Zahid: What tools do the provinces have for making these designated learning institutions more accountable? Has Ontario used them?

Soyoung Park: As I mentioned, it is under the authority of provinces and territories to decide which institutions to designate. They do have ultimate authority over the education sector.

Salma Zahid: Could you outline the specific tools Ontario had at its disposal, such as regulating private colleges, setting enrolment caps especially, or tightening the quality assurance that could have been used to manage the growth responsibly?

Soyoung Park: If you're referring to the situation before the reforms, I think there were a lot of long-standing funding challenges

in the education sector, which ultimately led a lot of institutions to recruit in large volumes before the caps were introduced.

The federal government then proceeded to introduce the caps, but as I mentioned earlier, each province and territory gets an allocation based on the overall numbers, and it is up to them to determine which institutions get their allocations. The only caveat we put on that is a certain percentage being reserved for graduate students, just to make sure that we continue to welcome talent.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Park.

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

• (1615)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Zafar, to clarify, do you think it's acceptable that your department's spokesperson blamed universities and the Government of Quebec for a very serious flaw in a program that you alone are in charge of?

[*English*]

Aiesha Zafar: With regard to the international student compliance program and the student program, it's a joint responsibility. There are absolutely measures that IRCC is responsible for—

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Sorry to interrupt, but let's clear something up. Is the Government of Canada's international student program run by the Government of Quebec and universities? No, it is run by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, IRCC, and nobody else. Some responsibilities are shared, but, at the end of the day, IRCC is in charge of this program.

An investigative report exposed serious flaws within your program. One of your spokespeople blamed universities and the Government of Quebec and did not even apologize on behalf of IRCC. Do you think that's acceptable?

Soyoung Park: I would like to clarify a few things.

As I've said, the federal government is not the only one in charge. Yes, we grant visas, but the provinces and learning institutions decide who—

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Sorry to interrupt.

I understand, but we need to be clear that the federal government is the only authority that can determine who gains entry to Canada and who does not. Don't try to tell me a learning institution can decide who comes in and who doesn't. That is the federal government's exclusive responsibility.

Are you able to say something that's incredibly easy to say? Every country in the world works this way. Can you say, "Yes, it's our exclusive responsibility."?

Soyoung Park: When it comes to borders and who's allowed in, we've already said that it's the federal government's responsibility.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: So how are universities responsible for one of the programs you're in charge of?

Soyoung Park: I tried to explain that learning institutions and the provinces are the ones that invite students. That's step one of the process.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you know the word "accountability"?

It is up to the federal government alone to decide who enters Canada and who doesn't. How could your departmental spokesperson blame universities and the Government of Quebec?

Soyoung Park: Madam Chair, I've tried to explain that it's a multi-step process. The federal government alone cannot decide to have a program for international students.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Then I suppose university professors are also to blame for crime rings.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Thank you, Ms. Park.

We are still in the second round. We have Mr. Menegakis for five minutes.

Costas Menegakis (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our officials for being here with us today and sharing all the information with us.

It would be helpful if you could provide us with a table of the different immigration streams, by year and by stream, for, say, the last 10 years. I'd like to see where that has gone in order to be able to understand what you're saying. If you're seeing improvements and so forth, I'd like to see where it's gone over the last 10 years, given the fact that we've had seven different immigration ministers over the last 10 years.

Would you undertake to provide that to us, please, within the next, say, 28 days?

Soyoung Park: I'd just like to confirm the request. Are you referring specifically to student programs?

Costas Menegakis: I'm referring to all the streams—economic, family, compassionate and all the streams—by year for the last, say, 10 years.

Soyoung Park: What exactly...? There is a lot of data.

Costas Menegakis: Just the total number from each stream with percentages.... Back in the day, we had measures for that. Sixty-five per cent would come through our economic streams—

• (1620)

Soyoung Park: Was that according to the levels plan?

Costas Menegakis: —and the levels and so forth. I'd like to see where that has gone over the last 10 years. I know there's some information available on the website, but if you can provide the committee with that graphic, I think that would be very useful for us.

Soyoung Park: You would like, for each year, what the levels plan has been for immigration.

Costas Menegakis: I'd like what the results were for each year.

Soyoung Park: You mean the levels plan and then the admissions against that levels plan.

Costas Menegakis: Yes. Thank you.

Can you share with us what advice you've given the government regarding the long-term strategy for managing the international student program?

Soyoung Park: In terms of the advice, as I've mentioned, we've only just embarked on all of the changes within the last 18 months. I tried to cite the time frame in which a lot of the changes were introduced, and that was to suggest that it's going to take some time for us to see some of those results and to ensure that we are making changes based on evidence. There is a certain period of time that is required in order to know whether or not we should continue on that path.

However, I will say this in terms of early results: As of July 31—and this is on our website—there were roughly 786 study permit holders in Canada compared to 995,000 at the end of 2023. That is a 21% reduction.

Costas Menegakis: Okay. This kind of leads me into my next question, if you don't mind.

How many international students are in the country right now on valid student visas?

Soyoung Park: As of July 31, 2025, it's a combination, but there are about 499,000 with just study permits. It's 200.... The total is 786,000 who have study permits and work permits.

Costas Menegakis: There are 786,000.

Soyoung Park: Yes.

Costas Menegakis: How many international student visas have been approved since last year, just in 2025?

Soyoung Park: The number of decisions taken so far this year is 174,000.

Costas Menegakis: It's 174,000. Okay. A quick Google search said that it's 437,000 for the year. Is that an accurate number?

Soyoung Park: I'm sorry. What number did you say?

Costas Menegakis: I said 437,000.

Soyoung Park: That is actually the study permit issuance target, so the number of approvals. There are several numbers. You will see that there's a number for the number of new arrivals. There's also a number for the number of approvals, which actually leads to a certain number of arrivals.

Costas Menegakis: What advice, if any, has IRCC given the government regarding institutions to take advantage of the international student program?

Soyoung Park: My colleague, Aiesha Zafar, has been outlining some of the measures that we've put in place to strengthen the integrity of the reporting system, working with our DLIs. I will recite, as well, the 14,000 letters of acceptance that we have actually intercepted. These are ones who didn't even make it here because we were able to intercept them.

Costas Menegakis: There hasn't been an investigation confirming those 14,000. If so, what action has been taken in your department or by others in the government to bring accountability to the offenders?

Aiesha Zafar: When we look at potentially 14,000 fraudulent letters of acceptance, we take the data and look at the indicators in each of those applications. Is there something that's consistent in each of those applications that identifies for us that this is a large-scale fraud or that individuals are trying to circumvent the program? We will issue reports or other types of packages for our officers, so that they can look out for those things in future applications. We've done that in other cohorts as well.

Last year, we were able to determine that there was fraud happening in the visitor program. We did the activities that I just mentioned. We were able to increase the identification of fraud and misrepresentation in that court by 241% over the course of a couple of months. That's the system that we look at. We get information from our partners, get tips, look at our own trends and look at those indicators to see how can that improve our processing and our ability to identify that fraud and abuse in the future.

• (1625)

Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

Do you agree that the number of international students let into the country impacts housing prices? You said that you thought in some communities you've seen it come down somewhat. What proof do you have that the actions you're taking are causing the housing prices or the housing market to slow down? A whole bunch of other factors affect housing prices in the country. I wonder how you identify that as being directly related to the actions you've taken.

Soyoung Park: It wasn't us who put that forward. I cited a study by CMHC that looked at some municipalities with universities. They stated that since we put in some of the measures to control volumes and some of the other measures, there has been a decrease on pressures in the housing market.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Park.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Our next questioner will be Ms. Sodhi for five minutes, please.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): First and foremost, I want to thank you guys for taking time out of your day to meet with us.

I'd like to frame my first question around international student fraud and the abuse that some of them may face. Can either one of you please outline what recent steps IRCC has taken to combat instances of fraud experienced by international students?

Aiesha Zafar: We talked about the integrity measures we've put in place and strengthened over the last couple of years. A couple of them will relate to the conditions that international students may face when they come into Canada. The first, as my colleague mentioned earlier, is the increase of the financial requirement. This ensures that students who are coming into Canada are able to support themselves financially. They will be able to house and feed themselves and then conduct their studies and go to school.

We've also put in the letter of acceptance verification program. This is key. As many members are aware, in 2023, jointly with the Canada Border Services Agency, we identified that there was a significant letter of acceptance fraud. There were international students who were victims of that fraud and didn't know that those letters of acceptance were fraudulent. Our ability now, for every single student permit, for our officers to automatically verify with the learning institution that the letter of acceptance is actually authentic, has resulted in that 14,000 number that we presented, where we've identified potentially fraudulent letters of acceptance. This protects the students as well.

In terms of student compliance, we do require, as I mentioned, designated learning institutions to confirm for us twice a year that students are actually registered. Where we see that there is no match or that they are potentially not registered or attending school, we're able to conduct our own investigation. The learning institution can follow up. We will be starting to share that data with provinces and territories as well in the spring so that they can also follow up to see whether it in fact is fraud or if there's some other reason that the student is not attending. We would be able to collectively address the gaps in that way.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you for your answer. I think it was very well detailed.

You mentioned the use of CBSA. Can you tell us how the tools that will be provided by Bill C-2 will allow IRCC to better combat immigration fraud stemming from the international student program?

Aiesha Zafar: Under Bill C-2, one of the provisions we are looking for is the ability for greater information sharing in the immigration program. Right now we do not have the legislated ability, except for the Privacy Act, to share personal immigration information for purposes other than assessing the application.

That means a couple of things. We're not able to share personal information with provinces and territories to make sure that individuals who are accessing provincial benefits, for instance, or social services are actually in status. We are not able to share certain pieces of information with our federal partners outside of the immigration stream.

Perhaps most importantly, for me, is that currently we are not able to share immigration information on applications between our business lines. That means we look at every application as an independent individual application. If somebody applies to be a temporary resident as a student and then later on applies to be a permanent resident, we're looking at those as separate applications. We can't share the information that was provided throughout their immigration process all the way until they become a permanent resident or citizen. In order to improve the integrity and fraud in the system but also help those individuals—they don't have to send us the same information, and we can omit errors this way as well—Bill C-2 will help with that information sharing.

• (1630)

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you once again.

My last question is this. How many instances of fraud has IR-CC's new PAL requirement stopped since being enacted?

Soyoung Park: I'm sorry. I think you're actually referring to the LOA system rather than the PAL system, because PAL is just the allocations given to provinces and territories.

We previously mentioned the number 14,000.

Amandeep Sodhi: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Park.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

We're starting the third round. For our next questioner, we will go to Mr. Ma for five minutes.

Michael Ma (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Madam Chair, my principal concern is the reputation of Canada as a top designation for international students through our institutions, which are ranked and esteemed globally. We are speaking of the likes of the University of Toronto, McGill and UBC, not the colleges that are housed in shopping malls and strip malls.

This is my first question. When the government issues study permits, is there a distinction between those attending premium institutions and those attending shopping mall diploma mills?

Soyoung Park: Before I invite my colleague to respond to the last part—

Michael Ma: It should be a very simple yes-or-no answer.

Soyoung Park: As we've stated, each application is going to be assessed on its merits. Part of the assessment of an application is the institution they're going to and the kinds of students it has.

Michael Ma: Is that a yes, or is that a no?

Soyoung Park: I think I have answered the question, but yes.

Michael Ma: Shopping mall diploma mills that accept international students are considered designated learning institutions, as

we discussed earlier, making them equal to our premium research universities.

From a percentage standpoint, what is the split of study permits allocated to our premium institutions versus those given to the shopping mall diploma mills?

Soyoung Park: That would be determined by each province and territory, but what I can tell you is that through the measures that were introduced, the share of university degree students has started to grow, going from 30% to 33%, and the share of college students has started to decrease, going from 44% to 40% since the cap was imposed.

Michael Ma: Ms. Park, you were part of the group that was providing strategic advice to the minister at the time of the strategy and moving forward.

Did you or your colleagues advise the minister at the time regarding the foreign student permits issued during that time? There was a massive spike in permits during that time.

Did you or any of your colleagues advise the minister not to increase permits to the level that he did?

Soyoung Park: Just as a point of correction, I did not hold this position at that time.

Michael Ma: Were you not at the time, in 2022, an ADM for the strategic and program policy sector? Therefore, you were advising—

Soyoung Park: It was not part of my portfolio.

Michael Ma: I see. You're saying you were not part of that number, but your colleagues did not recommend it to the minister either.

Soyoung Park: I cannot speak on behalf of my colleagues at that time in 2022.

Michael Ma: Can the witnesses here give a yes-or-no answer?

Soyoung Park: We would not be able to do that at this time.

• (1635)

Michael Ma: Will you be providing that information to the committee within 28 calendar days?

Soyoung Park: I'm a bit unclear on what information I'm providing.

Peter Fragiskatos: Chair, on a point of order, this 28-day point has come up a number of times.

If officials can provide it within that time, that's fine. I'd just remind colleagues that we haven't passed a motion to that effect. Timelines vary according to how easily information can be found. There are a number of factors—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos. It's not a point of order.

Peter Fragiskatos: This has come up a number of times.

The Chair: Mr. Ma, just to clarify, because you've asked a question to try to get information, you're trying to get information about whether there was advice given by an official at the department—

Michael Ma: Did the department—

The Chair: —to actually increase or decrease.... Can you just repeat the question that you would like the information for?

Michael Ma: Yes.

The question is, did the department provide the recommendation to the then minister on either increasing or decreasing the number for the foreign students program?

The Chair: That was in 2022.

Michael Ma: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Park, is it possible for you to take that away and see if you could provide information within 28 days?

Soyoung Park: I could, but I guess I would add that in 2022 there was no cap on international students, so it would not have been a point of discussion, because we were processing the applications as they were received. That's part of the reason that in 2024 we moved forward with the cap.

Michael Ma: Just to follow up on that, the department was following a process and approving without any sort of quota or targets. It was just a free flow, a free approval, and that's what caused this issue.

Soyoung Park: I would not characterize it as a free flow. I think the applications come in—

Michael Ma: You've just said that there was no limitation.

Soyoung Park: There was no cap at the time in terms of the number of applications that we would receive. We relied very heavily on the fact that there are a lot of benefits to international students as well. I don't think that we—

Michael Ma: Did that include—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Park.

Thank you, Mr. Ma. Your time is up.

Now we go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Zafar, I didn't expect to ask questions about Bill C-2 today, but I think you focused on an area of great interest for this committee.

My friend Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe is looking at me and asking how this relates to international students, I'm sure, but it does, because it does speak to the integrity of the overall system, of which the international student program is obviously a part.

Could you go over that again? I think the millions of people watching on CPAC, of course, won't necessarily pick up on the point, perhaps. This is an area that you are working in. This is your area of expertise. How does the change proposed in Bill C-2 guard against the fraud that has been an issue with international students, or some international students, in the past?

Aiesha Zafar: The information-sharing provision in Bill C-2 isn't specific to international students, but it does provide us with enhanced integrity throughout the system.

Information is key. As we've said before, the officers are able to make an assessment only for admissibility and eligibility—which is key for a foreign national entering into Canada—based on the information that is in front of them. The information in front of them is information that's provided on the application. We collect biometrics. We do criminal assessments. We share information with our partners to see if there's any derogatory information.

As I mentioned before, one of the key pieces that is missing is our ability to share between our business lines on various applications, even if we're not talking about fraud and just talking about administrative errors. An individual filling out an application for a visitor visa may have incorrectly put in a place of birth based on what their passport said or didn't say at the time. As they progress through the process, it might be different on a permanent resident application, and we want to be able to identify that throughout the system.

We also want to be able to share information with provinces and territories, so that it not only helps facilitate for clients their ability to access provincial services and benefits, but also allows the provinces to determine whether somebody is abusing the provincial services and benefits.

Also, then, while we have information-sharing agreements with our international partners, we rely on consistent use and the Privacy Act to share with our federal partners. As we mentioned before, immigration and immigration enforcement and the borders is a joint responsibility with a number of different departments in the federal government. This would allow us to do that as well.

There are also other provisions within Bill C-2. One of them would be what we refer to as “mass authorities”. Generally, it would allow, through an order in council, an order to mass cancel, suspend or alter immigration documents that have been issued, for reasons in the public interest. “Public interest” isn't defined, because there could be various reasons that the GIC would determine that it's in the public interest. For instance, there could be a cyber-attack issuing fraudulent visas. We would want to mass cancel those. We currently don't have the ability to do that under the legislation.

It would also, finally, bring efficiencies to our asylum program. As it may pertain to individuals who are claiming asylum and are non-genuine claimants, we want to make the system more efficient and fast, and it would introduce two ineligibilities with regard to that as well.

• (1640)

Peter Fragiskatos: I'm remaining, Madam Chair. I'm splitting my time with Mr. Al Soud, who is a new member and is very passionate on immigration. He's subbing in today, but I'm sharing my time.

Fares Al Soud (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): I'm proud to be subbing in.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you all for taking the time to be with us. I'm mindful of how busy you are, so I truly appreciate your taking the time.

My question is on IRCC announcing digital modernization efforts to streamline processing and client interactions. Can you tell us how these tools will improve transparency and reduce processing times?

Pemi Gill: IRCC continues to make investments in modernization with the intent of two focused outcomes. One is improving efficiencies, so we do use advanced analytics, as well, to do risk triaging and to automate some of the decision-making.

We're also looking at ways to improve client transparency. As referenced by my colleagues, there is more information in terms of the non-permanent resident cohorts who are in Canada, so our website has been updated with that frequently. We're starting to make changes to how processing times are published, so that clients can see where in the queue they are. We've recently just done this for one line of business and are piloting that.

In addition, we've recently launched what's called officer decision notes: For clients who are applying for temporary resident lines of business, at the time of their refusal letter being sent to them, we're also providing to the client the officer's notes that supported that decision for refusal. Those are being sent to them automatically as part of that process.

Those are some of the recent—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gill. I'm sorry. We've gone over. I think everybody will be rejoicing at this modernization information, so thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe is next.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

In order to solve a problem, we have to start by identifying it. An international crime ring is victimizing a lot of people in Quebec and the rest of Canada. It generates half a billion dollars from criminal activity and uses that money for things like financing terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah. This criminal organization uses Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's study permit program to achieve its goals.

I just want to know if there's a problem in your department or not.

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: I personally don't have the details of the criminal investigation that you're referring to. However, when there are indications that individuals, foreign nationals, have come into Canada and committed crimes, the CBSA, the RCMP and local police will investigate those crimes. Any information that is relayed to us—and we do have relationships with those organizations—we will then use to ensure that we don't provide permits in the future to individuals with the same characteristics.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Madam Chair, at the beginning of this meeting, I asked the witnesses if they had seen last week's episode of *Enquête*. They said they had. Now they're saying they don't know what I'm talking about.

Ms. Zafar, did you see the report or not?

• (1645)

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: I have seen the report. I don't have any specific details about the criminal investigation other than what's in the report.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: According to the one-hour *Enquête* episode, a criminal organization is using IRCC's study permit program to engage in criminal activity yielding half a billion dollars to finance Hezbollah, a terrorist organization.

My simple question is this: Is there a problem in your department?

I'm not here to attack you. I'm here to help fix the situation. If you can't admit that there's a problem in your department when a crime ring of this size is using one of your programs specifically, how can you solve that problem?

[English]

Peter Fragiskatos: I have a point of order, Chair.

I have immense respect for our colleague. He's an experienced member of this committee in particular, but he will have the opportunity to ask the minister questions that are probably more political in nature, rather than putting officials in, I think, a difficult position of having to share their opinion on policy.

The Chair: That's not a point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: May I respond to the point of order?

[English]

The Chair: Do you have another one?

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Can I respond to my colleague's point of order?

[English]

The Chair: Yes, of course.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: When an IRCC spokesperson responds to an investigative report, I think I have the right to ask questions of the people who tell that spokesperson what to say. Those people are here with us today. I think I have every right to ask them this kind of question.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. You have 30 seconds, if you want to take it.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Nobody has answered my question yet. Is there a problem or not?

Aiesha Zafar: Thank you for the question.

[English]

As a point of clarification, Madam Chair, while I'm aware of the report, I did not watch the full one-hour investigation, so I don't have all the details. I am aware of the report.

We are certainly seized with any type of abuse or fraud in our program. We take that very seriously. We do take any information we can glean, whether through open-source information, media reports or our law enforcement partners, to ensure that we are closing any gaps and addressing any future potential fraud or abuse of the immigration program.

I will say that the vast majority of individuals, whether they be students, workers, visitors or permanent residents, who do apply and enter Canada are honest, do not abuse and do not defraud the system, but where there are the small percentages who do, we take that very seriously.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Zafar.

Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

I think we're still in our third round.

Next is Ms. Rempel Garner for five minutes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Chair.

Officials, you've talked about Bill C-2 as a solve for some of these issues. Is it your opinion that Bill C-2 is charter-compliant?

Aiesha Zafar: We have gone through the necessary steps with our Justice colleagues to look at—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you provided advice to the minister that it is charter-compliant?

Aiesha Zafar: I have not looked at all the areas of Bill C-2, so I would have to—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Has anybody in your department provided advice to the minister that it's charter-compliant?

Aiesha Zafar: That would be with our Justice colleagues, so I would not be able to speak to that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You don't know.

Aiesha Zafar: At this time, I do not know.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

For example, the refugee lab at Osgoode Hall Law School argued that part 7 could violate some of the charter. It's your opinion that Bill C-2 is in fact charter-compliant and that outlets like this would be mistaken. Is that correct?

Aiesha Zafar: That is not my opinion. I am also not responsible for the asylum program, so I would need to talk to my colleagues about that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You're unclear. Okay. We're talking about Bill C-2 as a fix for this, but we're not sure if it's charter-compliant. Thank you. Very good.

You talked about study permits that have been withdrawn. How many study permits have been withdrawn because of criminal activities over the past four years?

Pemi Gill: While we could provide the total number of those that have been withdrawn, if a client is withdrawing their application we would not know for what reason they're choosing to withdraw it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You don't track this.

Pemi Gill: We would be tracking if we were looking at refusing for any concerns related to criminality. We would have that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: How many have been withdrawn or refused due to criminality in the last four years?

Pemi Gill: We don't have that statistic with us today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Can you table that with the committee? Yes? Thank you.

What specific countries has IRCC identified frauds from? Is there a predominant country?

• (1650)

Aiesha Zafar: With regard to fraud, it depends on the different streams. The one I can speak to where we did a—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I just want to know a country. I don't have a lot of time.

Aiesha Zafar: India is one of the top countries where we identify fraud.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

You also said in your testimony that 8% of students are non-compliant and have disappeared in Canada with study permits. That works out to, by my math, about 79,000, based on data from end-of-year 2024. Do you know where these people are?

Aiesha Zafar: I'd like to clarify that I mentioned that 8% of the students we asked for compliance information from were potentially non-compliant. In terms of the total number of students from whom we asked for compliance, that results in potentially 47,175.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Where are they?

Aiesha Zafar: We have not yet determined whether or not they are fully non-compliant. These are initial results that the institutions provide to us.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Could you find them if they are compliant?

Aiesha Zafar: Any foreign national in Canada would be under the purview of the Canada Border Services Agency. They have an inland investigation team.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay, so how do you know if your measures are effective?

Aiesha Zafar: We are constantly collecting that data. As I mentioned—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You share data with CBSA—

Aiesha Zafar: We do share data with CBSA.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: —but you don't know where they are, if they're compliant.

Aiesha Zafar: If they are compliant—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Or non-compliant.

Aiesha Zafar: —they would be registered in the post-secondary institution—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. I've heard enough.

How many right now are fully non-compliant?

Aiesha Zafar: I don't have that number.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Can you provide that to the committee?

Aiesha Zafar: That would be a challenging number, because once we—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: If you don't know how many are non-compliant, how can you track them and remove them?

Aiesha Zafar: The 8% are potentially non-compliant, meaning that the university or the post-secondary institution, the DLL, has reported back that they don't have information on these individuals.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Madam Chair, I'd also like to use my time to give verbal notice of a motion:

That Dr. John Tibbits, president of Conestoga College, be summoned to appear before the committee, by himself, for no less than one hour, to give testimony further to the committee's study on international student program and study permits, at a date and time to be fixed by the chair of the committee, but no less than three weeks following the adoption of this motion.

Madam Chair, I am shocked that Mr. Tibbits does not think it's important to come to this study, particularly given that Seneca—I'm sorry, but Seneca College should probably come too—given that Conestoga College has been the subject of numerous stories about abuse of foreign students. Essentially all of the media stories I've heard say that under his leadership, Conestoga College has expanded profit but forced students out into food banks and created a massive housing crisis in the region. The fact that he is ignoring this committee tells me only one thing: I am right, and we are going to have to make recommendations without him appearing.

I hope I don't have to move this motion. I think it is fairly embarrassing that he would choose not to come to this committee. It is a shot across the bow. I really hope, Madam Chair, that President Tibbits would accept the invitation to come to this committee so that we do not have to make a major media story about him choosing not to and trying to send his lobby group instead. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner. That ends your five minutes. Next on our list is Ms. Salma Zahid.

Salma Zahid: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thanks to our witnesses who are here on this important study.

I would like to ask them a question in regard to the work permits that are issued after the completion of the courses for which the international students are coming. Who is eligible for the work permits, and are there any specific courses or codes that are defined, so that only those people would be able to get work permits?

Soyoung Park: The postgraduate work permit, as I mentioned, is an open work permit. We did introduce some changes to the eligibility for that work permit on November 1, 2024. Essentially we introduced a slightly higher language requirement if you are a university student as opposed to a college student. We also said that if you were in college, then there would be a requirement that your field of study be aligned with Canada's economic needs. That's why we do the consultations on the category-based selection of express entry, to align those needs with the number of work permits that we issue to international students.

• (1655)

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Are there any specific codes? How is that decision made? Is there any research you have done that shows that work permits will be issued only for these subjects or codes?

Soyoung Park: They would have had to apply for the postgraduate work permit, and they have to be international students. We do that through the eligibility requirements.

Salma Zahid: Some institutions, like Centennial College, are saying that there are certain fields of study from which international students are not eligible to get work permits, and that's affecting the courses they are offering at their colleges.

Soyoung Park: Yes, absolutely. One of the reasons we introduced the field of study is to make sure that when international students come to Canada, they are hopefully studying in areas where they could, in the future, contribute to the economy of Canada. Now you go from being an international student to being a temporary worker. Our expectation is that it is going to be in a field or in an area where there is a labour need in Canada.

Salma Zahid: Can you tell us how IRCC has communicated the recent policy changes to international students and the post-secondary institutions so that clients and stakeholders can make informed choices and understand the system better?

Soyoung Park: There are many ways in which we have endeavoured to share that information. We know it's very important.

As I stated, there are many changes that have taken place. Of course, we use the information on our website. We also have regular updates to provinces and territories and also with national education associations and specific or individual DLIs. There are a lot more of them than us, and it makes it a bit challenging, but that is why we attempt to share as much as possible in writing.

Salma Zahid: In regard to the housing needs, since the introduction of the international student cap, what measurable benefits have we seen so far in relieving the pressure on the local housing markets? Can you point to any metrics showing these benefits?

Soyoung Park: Thank you.

I have already cited some of those benefits. Because of the cap and the reduction to international student volumes, particularly in those communities where there's a higher percentage of domestic and international students, what we have seen is that since the cap there has been a cooling down of the global market.

Salma Zahid: Do you have any data for the city of Toronto?

Soyoung Park: I don't have it specifically for Toronto, because we were citing not IRCC stats but those from CMHC as the official source, but we can endeavour to get that.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Park.

Thank you so much, Ms. Zahid.

Because we started about seven minutes late, I think we have enough time for maybe two minutes for the Conservatives and two minutes for the Liberals, and then, Monsieur Duceppe, if you would like two minutes, I can give two minutes each just to complete this section of our agenda for today.

We'll start with Mr. Davies, followed by Ms. Sodhi, and then we'll end with Monsieur Duceppe.

Mr. Davies, you have two minutes, please.

Fred Davies (Niagara South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate all of the comments that are being made here today about the intricacies of running this department, but over the course of the election campaign the thing I heard most about was that the student immigration and visa program was completely broken. We went from roughly 350,000 people in 2015 to just under a million in 2023.

Does anybody track the financial implication that this has had—this sudden shift of completely turning the program and its open-ended application process? Do you track the financial implications of this on post-secondary institutions?

• (1700)

Bronwyn May (Director General, International Students Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Yes. Global Affairs Canada has commissioned a number of studies tracking the financial implications and impact of the student program in Canada in relation to GDP and a number of other metrics. I think they're preparing to issue another update on that very shortly.

Fred Davies: Okay. Interestingly, in the fall economic statement last year, the federal government changed the law relating to the capacity or ability of post-secondary institutions to seek creditor protection or even protection under bankruptcy laws. The department

now has flip-flopped on the number of students coming in. Are you aware that that has some serious implications for financial institutions, and do you believe that the taxpayer should actually now be responsible for bailing out post-secondary institutions as a result of the failures of the student visa program?

Soyoung Park: I don't think I would be able to speak to the points that you're raising at this time.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Davies.

Ms. Sodhi, you have two minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the additional time. I'll be really quick.

Can one of you please let us know what performance measures IRCC is using to assess whether recent policy changes to the international student program are achieving their intended results? Can you update us on the progress of any of these performance indicators?

Soyoung Park: As I have indicated, because a lot of the changes were implemented either at the very end of 2023 or in most of 2024, a lot of the results would not necessarily be fully available at this time. All I can provide to you at this time are some of those early results. What you have seen is that we have been able to bring down the number of international students who are in Canada, which has resulted in a cooling of the housing market as well.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds, but you don't have to take it.

Amandeep Sodhi: I'll leave it, just because I don't think we'll have enough time for an answer.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Sodhi.

[Translation]

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you have the floor.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'll take the 50 seconds, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. I thought you'd like that.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Ms. Zafar, thank you for being here. I realize the questions have been tough.

You said you received a summary of the report, but you haven't seen the whole thing. I want you to know that *Enquête* is a very popular TV show in Quebec. The episode I'm talking about was aired last week as the show's season opener. It's a major scandal. I also want you to know that universities and the Government of Quebec certainly didn't appreciate your department's response. I would therefore encourage you to consider how you might respond to such reports in the future.

Before the episode aired, were you aware that an international criminal ring is operating on Canadian soil?

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: Yes, I am aware that there are criminal activities happening in Canada, some of those undertaken by foreign—

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I'm talking about this specific organization. Were you aware of it?

[English]

Aiesha Zafar: I was not aware of that particular network myself.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What tools do you think your department could come up with to ensure that this kind of thing doesn't happen again and to solve this problem?

Let's not forget that it was a journalist who exposed what has been going on. We have some very good journalists, and Mr. Schué did excellent work on this report.

People are looking for solutions. Think of the hundreds of people who have been victims of these organizations and have been left with nothing. Some have lost up to \$300,000 of their savings.

Aiesha Zafar: Thank you for the question.

[English]

Many of the measures we talked about today will help. Unfortunately, sometimes the negative results we see from foreign nation-

als entering Canada, if they have committed some type of fraud, happen six months to a year after the permits have been issued. There's always a lag time in terms of what we actually see resulting. From an immigration perspective, we're able to take that information and, as I mentioned, feed it back into the system so that we're not allowing foreign nationals to come in with similar intentions or characteristics.

When something like this happens, we do work very closely with our law enforcement partners. I myself attend various Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police committees. If there are immigration links, we're able to see how we can take the law enforcement or criminal information and improve our systems and processes. There is that continuous conversation.

● (1705)

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: If the department is coming up with new tools, that means there was a problem and they want to solve it.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe. I think we're at or over time.

I want to say a huge thanks to our witnesses. Boy, an hour and a half goes by very quickly. Thank you for all your work. Thank you for being here today. As you can tell, this is an area of tremendous interest and importance to our committee and to all Canadians.

What I will do right now is suspend for as short a time as possible, so that the witnesses can leave. Then, we can move in camera to discuss committee business.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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