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Chair: Robert Morrissey



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• (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.)): Good afternoon, members. We will begin the meeting.

Pursuant to the motion adopted on Thursday, September 18, the HUMA committee is meeting on youth employment in Canada. Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. Members are attending in person in the room as well as on Zoom.

I want to remind all members to please turn their devices to silent mode and refrain from tapping the boom of the mic for the protection of the translators. You have the option to participate in this meeting in the official language of your choice. For those in the room, make sure you familiarize yourself with the interpretation and the headset so that you're on the right channel to participate. For those appearing virtually, choose the globe icon at the bottom of your screen. Choose the official language of your choice. If there's an interruption in translation services, please get my attention and we'll suspend while it's being corrected. If you're in the room, raise your hand. If you're here virtually, use the "raise hand" icon. Please direct all questions and comments through the chair. Wait until I recognize you before you begin.

I would like to advise you that one of the witnesses failed the technology test today, which means we'll have only two in the first panel. Madam Gessesse did not pass the sound quality test for the interpretation. All others have been approved.

I would like to welcome our witnesses for this afternoon's first panel. Appearing virtually is Mr. Robert Henderson, president, BioTalent Canada. In the room with us is Dr. Valerie Walker, chief executive officer, Business and Higher Education Roundtable.

As I indicated, the third witness did not pass the sound test. She will be scheduled for a later meeting.

Rosemarie Falk (Battlefords—Lloydminster—Meadow Lake, CPC): Mr. Chair, can I ask what threshold she didn't meet for the sound test?

The Clerk of the Committee (Alexandre Longpré): She didn't have her headset.

Rosemarie Falk: Was one sent?

The Clerk: It was.

She is being rescheduled.

Rosemarie Falk: Perfect. Thank you.

The Chair: We will begin the five-minute presentations with Mr. Henderson.

Mr. Henderson, you have the floor.

• (1535)

Robert Henderson (President, BioTalent Canada): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you this afternoon.

[*English*]

My name is Rob Henderson, and I serve as president and CEO of BioTalent Canada, a national non-profit organization that works to strengthen Canada's bio-science sector by providing valuable, evidence-based labour market information and the best job-ready human resources available.

We are one of 14 or 15 national sectoral associations across Canada.

Our role is to connect employers with skilled people, and just as importantly, to connect students and new graduates with their first meaningful work experiences. Much of that work happens through the student work placement program, SWPP, which BioTalent Canada has proudly helped deliver since 2017, as one of the inaugural service providers.

Let me start with the challenge this committee is studying: youth employment. We know that while the overall labour market remains tight, our young people are being hit the hardest. Over the past year, youth unemployment has risen faster than any other demographic. At the same time, employers are reporting record difficulty filling entry-level roles, particularly in technical and science-based fields.

That disconnect is widening. Students are graduating without the work experiences employers expect, while employers hesitate to hire workers who lack that experience—a cycle that leaves both sides frustrated.

The situation is even more acute for under-represented youth. Without targeted support, these groups risk being permanently excluded from high-growth industries that urgently need their skills.

In short, the problem of youth unemployment is getting worse, and if we don't address it we risk losing the next generation of innovators, entrepreneurs and skilled workers that Canada needs to compete.

The student work placement program is an important part of that solution. SWPP helps employers create paid, career-relevant placements for students before they graduate, giving young people experience, income and confidence, while giving businesses access to the talent they need to innovate and grow.

The government's investment in SWPP and in the broader network of sectoral-academic partnerships that deliver it has also fostered innovation and proven itself as a conduit for national and industrial economic recovery. During COVID-19, these partnerships helped sustain key industries and connect employers with urgently needed talent. That same infrastructure can serve as the delivery mechanism for future talent pipelines and targeted economic investments aligned with national priorities.

Since 2017, BioTalent Canada alone as an association has facilitated over 16,000 student placements across every province and territory. To understand the impact, there are only 200,000 people employed in Canada's bio-economy, so student placements represent 8% of the entire employment capacity of Canada's bio-tech industry. Nationally, there are 17 delivery partners doing similar work in other sectors—from digital technology to manufacturing to finance.

The majority of employers participating, about 70%, are small and medium-sized enterprises. These are the drivers, as we all know, with huge growth opportunities of employment now and in the future. Those placements simply would not exist without SWPP.

The results of SWPP are measurable and consistent. SWPP and the innovative work-integrated learning program have been incredibly effective at delivering student placements, because they're deeply connected to Canada's small and medium-sized businesses. These programs have allowed for the creation of long-standing relationships with tens of thousands of employers, which is why satisfaction is so high. In fact, 98% of employers report being satisfied with the SWPP program. One-third of employers say the position would not even exist without the program, and another 6% expanded their hiring because of it.

Beyond the numbers, the program delivers what governments often seek but rarely achieve—immediate, scalable impact.

The benefits ripple well beyond individual placements. By linking post-secondary institutions with industry, SWPP helps align education with labour market needs directly. It exposes employers to the next generation of talent and gives students a pathway to permanent work. Many go on to be hired full-time after their placements end.

In communities across the country it builds local capacity, keeps young Canadians in their regions and strengthens our innovation ecosystem.

• (1540)

The risk of letting the SWPP program lapse is significant. The infrastructure that makes it effective, like employer networks, post-secondary partnerships and digital systems, cannot be turned on and off without serious cost. If support is interrupted, students lose opportunities, employers lose confidence and the country loses momentum in closing the youth employment gap.

Mr. Chair and members, the government has committed to double down on what works in youth employment and skills development. SWPP has proven in almost every network that it works. It's cost-effective, measurable and directly tied to job creation. It ensures that young Canadians are ready for the workforce and that the workforce is ready for them.

Making the student work placement program a permanent and predictably funded part of, and the foundation of, Canada's youth employment strategy would not only help thousands more young people launch their careers, but it would strengthen Canada's resilience, productivity and competitiveness for the long term.

I thank you for your attention to this matter. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Henderson.

Dr. Walker, go ahead for five minutes, please.

Valerie Walker (Chief Executive Officer, Business and Higher Education Roundtable): Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.

I'm Val Walker, and I'm the CEO at the Business and Higher Education Roundtable, BHER.

We're the only organization in Canada that brings together leaders from the country's top companies and post-secondary institutions to work on critical issues together to create a better social and economic future.

As Canada's leading cross-sectoral convenor and driver of change, we collaborate with our members to tackle some of the country's biggest skills, talent, innovation and productivity challenges.

Since 2019, we've played a critical role in helping post-secondary institutions and businesses create work experiences for students before they finish school. With federal support starting in 2019, we at BHER and our funded partners have created more than 70,000 work-integrated learning opportunities for students. We've created more than 100 partnerships and built an employer network of nearly 12,000 companies across the country, so we know what works on the ground.

Today, we're here to talk about the challenges young people are facing when it comes to accessing employment. Behind the current crisis-level numbers are young people doing a lot of things right. They're earning credentials, they're gaining skills and they're working hard to find work, but they're still struggling for that first and lasting foothold in the labour market.

At the same time, we know for certain that employers need talent, especially in big fields like AI, health care, the skilled trades and the energy sector, to name only a few. At BHER, we know that connecting young people to employers early and getting them experience and exposure—not just to work, but to how work works—is the most effective way to create career pathways for young people and to build the skilled talent pipelines that enable Canada's businesses to be productive, be innovative and grow.

I'll focus here on three practical actions to turn around our current challenge with youth unemployment and widen the on-ramps to work for every young person in Canada.

The first is to help youth name and prove their skills. Give young people simple tools to identify and describe what they can do. For example, at post-secondary institutions, every course or program should include plain language skills statements so learners can point to the exact skills they have, rather than vague course titles. Well-designed microcredentials do this already. Our friends and collaborators at eCampusOntario are leading the charge on this in Ontario and on behalf of the federal government by connecting users of Canada's job bank to microcredentials at accredited public post-secondary institutions.

On the employer side of things, they should focus job postings on skills—not just credentials or job titles—that help young people see themselves in the job and show their value faster and help employers spot talent sooner.

The second is to guide youth to where there's the biggest demand for jobs. Targeted workforce development means clear, guided pathways to real jobs. Young people need to see a six- or 12-month opportunity map by region and sector, including openings, wages and skills. We can then distribute those maps through schools, post-secondary institutions and job platforms so youth can see where work is growing and where opportunities are.

On the post-secondary side, they can convert those signals into two- to three-step routes from a microcredential to a short work placement to an entry-level job. Employers should be co-creating these programs and paid experiences with post-secondaries tied specifically to vacancies, demand and growth. They should also be investing in supervisor training and flexible schedules and sharing quarterly demand data, ideally through organizations like ours.

The third, and most important, is to make work-integrated learning the default on-ramp to jobs. Work-integrated learning, WIL, is more than just co-ops and internships; it's short projects, microconsulting, hackathons and case competitions, but it can also be improved employee onboarding or on-the-job upskilling. This is critical. Through WIL, young people learn how work works, employers get early access to talent and, in our programs, two-thirds of employers report productivity gains as a result of their student.

The challenge is, like my fellow witness has said, there's not enough access to WIL yet, so how do we solve this? We need more flexible programming within our post-secondary institutions. This means more short-cycle work experiences and, where possible, flipping the balance between in-class and on-the-job training. Apprenticeship-style learning can't just be for the skilled trades anymore.

• (1545)

Maybe most importantly, to reach the goal of getting every student work experience before they graduate so they can be secure in that first job, Canada needs the largest employers at the table. It needs the kinds of companies BHER works with. The challenge here is that these companies come for scale and simplicity and they don't come for wage subsidies.

In closing, what we're looking at is partnership and capacity building between post-secondaries and industry. The bottom line is that when businesses and post-secondaries partner, we create more opportunities for young people and our productivity rises. That's what we were built to do. That's what we're here to help you do.

I would be very happy to answer any questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Dr. Walker.

We'll now begin the first six-minute round with Mr. Genuis.

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

Thank you to both the witnesses. I'll probably bob back and forth between the two of you.

To start with, would both of you agree that we are currently in a youth jobs crisis? Is that an accurate way of describing the challenge in front of us?

Robert Henderson: I can start the response, if you'd like. Certainly, all numbers point toward that. It's—

Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you.

Go ahead, Dr. Walker.

Valerie Walker: Yes, it's a big challenge for sure.

Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you.

Dr. Walker, I was intrigued by your comments about guiding youth to where the jobs are. I've talked to a lot of employers in my time in this role as our shadow minister for employment, and some of them complain a bit about guidance counsellors. Their perception is that students are maybe steered in some directions that aren't reflective of the skills required by the labour market.

I'm sure everybody in that profession is doing the best they can, but how do you see us being able to push more information about the immediate needs of the labour market basically to people as young as possible so they have that information and are ready to use it?

Valerie Walker: It's a great question. I'll be clear: I wasn't speaking about guidance counsellors. I was looking specifically at ways to target real-time labour market information to the students or youth who are looking for where industry is growing the most. I would argue it is actually through organizations like Rob's and others, which are the ones directly connecting with employers to get that real-time data, and not necessarily looking to StatsCan or other groups, which are looking backward and collecting labour market statistics that, by the time they're published, are already out of date.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I am going to ask this question to our other witness who isn't able to be here, but I'll ask you as well. It's regarding labour information getting to young people.

I met with a group of young people this morning who were talking about how sometimes in immigrant communities the expectation that parents have is that university is the best path. I wonder if you think there are ways we can get more information, even as part of settlement services welcoming people to Canada, to see that we do have colleges and there are trades opportunities. There's a broad range of different opportunities people could consider that would provide them with good opportunities as well.

• (1550)

Valerie Walker: I agree with that. One example I can give you is from one of our member organizations, Passage. It has data looking at who comes here from other countries to study. It's not the international student issue; the primary group is those who are pretty well off in their home country in order to meet the minimum requirements these days.

Those folks who come here, whose families have rallied around them to send them to Canada for school, are less likely in coming in to be interested in those careers, often because in their home country the money one can make in a career like that is significantly limited. Broadening the types of people who can come to Canada and providing the microloans or what they need to get a foothold would be one way to increase the number of people interested in the skilled trades.

Garnett Genuis: Okay.

Mr. Henderson, the program you're talking about, SWPP, is a wage subsidy program, correct?

Robert Henderson: Wage subsidies are only a part of this. There are employer supports given through the student work placement program. Many of the delivery agents like my own offer training as well. As well, because many of these organizations are

SMEs and don't have dedicated HR support, we also give them support in instituting mentorship programs, things like DEI policies, etc., so it's only one—

Garnett Genuis: I appreciate that. I'm going to try to get a couple of quick questions in before the time runs out.

For the wage subsidy component, what percentage of the wage is subsidized and for how long a period?

Robert Henderson: It's no more than 50%.

It depends on whether the student is a first-year student or in an equity-deserving group. It can go up to \$5,000 to \$7,000 for a 16-week period.

Garnett Genuis: Perfect. If you want to follow up with more detailed information because I'm not giving you enough time, you can always provide that in writing. We have to stick within the parameters.

One question I've heard about with regard to wage subsidy programs is the continuation piece. The goal is to give young people an opportunity to start in a job where they'll be able to continue in that field and use that experience, but there are instances where the company and the individual benefit from the wage subsidy but then they stop working there once the wage subsidy ends.

Do you have data on what proportion of people are able to continue after the program ends? What advice would you give the committee on the structure of wage subsidy programs leading to permanence as opposed to the job ending when the subsidy ends?

Robert Henderson: Biotech companies are looking for that swan...between three to five years. They can't find them. There are just not enough of them, so they have to create them. The student work placement program right now has a 98% satisfaction rate. One-third of employers said they wouldn't even have been able to create the job without the employer supports, including the wage subsidy as part of that. That's a very key component.

Since 70% of them have no human resources expertise, the wage subsidy alleviates the biggest pain they have, which is onboarding and training a brand new, green employee within the industry. This would simply not happen, let alone the connections my fellow witness was also talking about. The connections among academia are the source of the talent. That has been incredibly important. From our employers, more than 50% of the positions have continued after the subsidy ends.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Ms. Fancy, you have six minutes.

Jessica Fancy (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Henderson and Dr. Walker for coming today.

I'd like to begin by welcoming everybody with a sincere thank you. I'd also like to welcome our colleague Ms. Royer who is able to tune in with us today.

As a mom of a teenager, a former educator and a new member of Parliament, I've spent a lot of time talking with youth over the last two decades, especially in my riding of South Shore—St. Margarets, talking about some of the struggles that youth are facing, whether it's finding that first-time job, securing stable hours or being able to access the right training and supports to help build a meaningful career.

I'm going to tag-team between Mr. Henderson and Dr. Walker today.

Dr. Walker, you're at the forefront of connecting with employers and post-secondary institutions to create more work integration and learning opportunities. Based on your experience, what are some of the most effective ways in which we can expand these types of partnerships, particularly in smaller rural areas, so that all Canadians have equitable access to building a career?

• (1555)

Valerie Walker: We also have talked to people all across the country, including youth, educators and employers. We hear every time, “Our region is unique. It's different from everywhere else in Canada. We need a customized solution for this place.” Despite that, it turns out that about 80% of the needs, whether helping with the mentoring of a student or helping with the training of an HR manager, are consistent.

There's an opportunity, which is what we do with money from the federal government, to build the capacity, the tools and resources—the 80% that is common across the country for folks in rural Canada as well as those in big urban centres—and then work with those people to help them customize for their particular need, whether it's a certain industry, a certain region in our country or a certain student demographic in that last 20%. There's a huge opportunity to get a gain in scale through programs like that.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you so much for your rural-centric lens and being able to regionalize different programs and services.

Mr. Henderson, I'm so glad you spoke today about the importance of partnerships—like your fellow colleagues speaking with us today—between government, employers and educational institutions to address some of these skill gaps.

From your perspective, how can we strengthen these partnerships to ensure that youth across Canada, including those in rural and smaller communities, have access to the same high-quality training in employment opportunities in these fast-growing sectors?

Robert Henderson: I think the student work placement program has shown itself to be an effective delivery method for work-integrated learning and connecting students to employers.

Now it can go into a next stage of evolution where, as Dr. Walker was saying, there are things like microcredentialing and other ways of identifying the practical skills competencies that students require. There could be more criteria attributed to work-integrated learning programs and student work placement programs to encourage SMEs to adopt innovative training around artificial intelligence and other means that are going to be absolutely critical to, as Dr. Walker said, 80% of the needs that are common.

Artificial intelligence is industry agnostic. Every single industry is going to have to adopt it in the future. The student work placement program could be an exceptionally successful delivery mechanism—and it already is—for some government priorities around training, microcredentialing, skills delivery and practical skills that sometimes evade post-secondary institutions. As we all know, our country is second to none in the delivery of academic training, but sometimes practical business training is more challenging. A program that already has work-integrated learning is a perfect delivery mechanism for those skills and priorities that the government needs to inculcate in our young people.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you so much, Mr. Henderson.

Dr. Walker, you've spoken about the importance of collaboration across all of these sectors to prepare youth for the rapidly changing economy.

From your perspective, what more can we as a federal government do to help encourage stronger engagement from both private and public sectors, as well as through non-profit organizations, to help address these skill gaps in supporting youth in their transition to meaningful work?

Valerie Walker: It sounds really easy, but the answer is more dialogue between employers and educators.

We are in the midst of a year-long initiative looking at what post-secondary reform could be in this country to set us up so that post-secondaries by 2035 are active contributors to Canada's GDP and not drawers upon GDP.

This is a provincial-level issue. There is a need right now to talk amongst each other, and not just talk, but make it possible to create the incentives and levers for leaders within the post-secondary systems to update and change their means of teaching and learning to allow more connectivity and fluidity between school and work earlier in a student's degree or diploma and throughout one's career.

It's a lot of work, but that has to start with dialogue.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Gill, go ahead, please, for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill (Côte-Nord—Kawawachikamach—Nitassinan, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Henderson and Ms. Walker for their testimony.

First, since you both represent organizations that make the connection between employers and graduates who want to enter the workforce, I'd like to know what you're seeing, especially among young people. Once people finish their studies, they can theoretically enter the workforce, but some graduates can't find jobs. What's the gap or need that explains that? We're dealing precisely with the issue of unemployment here.

Also, why aren't employers managing to recruit employees? What respective connections are you able to make, given the very different natures of your two organizations?

[English]

Valerie Walker: There are several things that matter, but I will speak to one in the interest of time.

There is a huge opportunity to help students articulate the skills they have and make it easier for them to draw a connection to the job an employer is looking to fill.

I can give you an example in my own life. I have a Ph.D. in heart physiology, but that does not matter in my job and it did not matter in any of my jobs. What did matter was my resilience, problem-solving, critical thinking and all of those skills.

You need to learn how to talk about what skills you have, not just the stuff you know. There's a very big opportunity for them, on the student side, to make that connection quicker and easier.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Is that really what you're doing, Ms. Walker? You talked about lesson plans in schools, for example. I was a higher-education teacher myself. We're talking about the skills recorded with the students. They know what they're going to learn and how it will be useful to them. As you said, it's about taking know-how into account, not just knowledge.

You're talking about educational institutions, but I don't like to talk about them as much, since they fall under provincial jurisdiction—Quebec, in my case. However, if we set aside knowledge, what young people are really lacking is an understanding of what they're capable of doing. What about on the employer side?

Thank you.

[English]

Valerie Walker: Specifically on the potential federal role—and we're in early stages of doing this ourselves—my answer is to create a microcredential specifically for work-integrated learning. We know that students with WIL have more of those connections to the workplace, but if you could create a digital badge or a microcredential that very specifically outlines the knowledge, skills and competencies a student gains as a result of that WIL, and then let them put it on their LinkedIn profile, CV or résumé so they clearly know what that is and can talk about it with the employer, I'm quite confident that this is a specific example of how we could make that transition from school to work a lot smoother for our youth.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Do you think that's one of the reasons for unemployment, particularly among young graduates?

[English]

Valerie Walker: I think their inability to make those connections is part of the problem. I wouldn't classify that as the primary reason.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Thank you very much, Ms. Walker.

I would like Mr. Henderson to answer the same questions.

[English]

Robert Henderson: As my colleague said, especially where there are small and medium-sized enterprises, which hire the most students, our research has indicated that 50% don't use social media, job boards or anything in order to recruit these students. They simply call some of their peers, who are also not connected. Work-integrated learning allows a student a connection through academia directly to employers who would never know that their talents exist.

Going back to what we were talking about before and what we called the soft skills—we would say success skills—the federal government has funded, there is no better way to inculcate those skills than through the practical application of them in business. Those are simply the skills that are most valuable. Our labour market research says that those soft skills—things like what we are doing today with presentation skills—can't be learned from a book. You have to do these things to then be able to do them, and you can only do that on the job.

We're finding that those soft skills are even more valuable in my vertical of biotechnology, which is one of the highest-educated verticals in the world. Those soft skills are absolutely critical for small and medium-sized enterprises, which have so few employees that they're doing way more than just what their job title and job description entail. The student placement program has given the connection to employers who didn't know this job market even existed, and it immediately gets them those soft skills that are really challenging for colleges and universities to inculcate.

• (1605)

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Your work actually bridges employers and students, but that means there's a gap on the employer side and on the educational institution side. That's why a bridge can't be built. That's more or less what you're saying, isn't it? I certainly don't want to minimize your work, not at all.

Obviously, I imagine that universities want to meet the needs of the workforce and that employers should also go to universities.

I'm wondering if there's a gap there as well. I'm not saying that it's up to you to fill it or that you aren't doing so, but I believe that's more or less what you're telling us today.

[*English*]

Robert Henderson: Yes, I think that is exactly it, which is why we're so passionate about work-integrated learning. It's because the universities' job, even in the funding model, is to get them an education; it's not necessarily to get them a job. The employers are looking toward this program and those bridges we provide to bridge that gulf between what academia provides and what the employers need.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Madame Gill.

We'll go to Mr. Reynolds for five minutes.

Colin Reynolds (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses for coming in today. My first question is for Mr. Henderson.

There is a lot of talk about microcredentialing. Can you explain that?

Robert Henderson: Microcredentialing is essentially microskills certification. Some of the words meld into the others. It is a combination of a practical application and measurable application of a skill combined with an academic credential. Sometimes they're very specific. In my industry, for example, the difference between manufacturing and biomanufacturing is essentially a skill called good manufacturing practices, but that's a very practical application of it. It can't be taught only theoretically; it has to be shown within a laboratory setting. There have been many, not only academic institutions but also private sector companies that are looking to apply a microcredential allowing you to say you have enough education, because there is an educational component that's required for it, combined with the practical application and measurability of that skill. Then you can say you have a microcredential in, for example, good manufacturing practices.

This is a bridge between what the previous committee member was mentioning, where academia credentialing ends and the practical application begins. Just because somebody has a B.Sc. in biology or biochemistry does not necessarily mean they are ready to work in the lab in bioprocessing or in a biomanufacturing position. That's where these microcredentials, as technology advances, become a really great opportunity for the country, for those companies that require not a broad array of skills but sometimes very specific skills that are critical to their success.

Colin Reynolds: It's essentially like a trades apprenticeship, in which you have a combination of academic and hands-on training.

Robert Henderson: Sure, but it's probably much more focused on the types of skills that employers require. That is really what's been lacking and the gap that I think academic institutions and organizations such as ours are trying to fill.

Colin Reynolds: Thank you.

My next question is for Dr. Walker.

What industry sectors do you see as having the biggest demand to fill jobs that just aren't being filled?

Valerie Walker: I will state that I'm not a labour market economist, but—

Colin Reynolds: In your experience, of course.

Valerie Walker: —we just hosted a meeting with leading CEOs, and we brought them together around three key industry sectors. The first was AI. That is not a big surprise. The second was the energy sector, with both renewables—clean energy—and our traditional energy. The third was the defence sector and space.

Those are three very recent examples. CEOs from all three of those industry groups talked about the need, in some cases, to drastically increase the number of people working in those sectors.

• (1610)

Colin Reynolds: When you talk about the defence sector, are you talking manufacturing of defence equipment or are you talking about people signing up for the military?

Valerie Walker: In this meeting it was both.

Colin Reynolds: In our current job market, are there a lot of jobs available? We're talking about youth unemployment. Are they jobs that people don't want, or is it just that there aren't a lot of jobs or that they're jobs they're not trained for?

Valerie Walker: That is the question.

There are significant numbers of job vacancies right now; at the same time, there are high levels of youth and general unemployment. The nuance, with the regional and industry breakdown, as well as skills qualifications for people, very quickly complicates the question as to why those jobs can't be filled with people who are looking for jobs when they need them.

Colin Reynolds: Are there lots available?

Valerie Walker: Yes.

Colin Reynolds: Do you think post-secondary institutions are in tune with the modern job market?

Valerie Walker: I will not paint all post-secondary institutions with the same brush, but one of the reasons we have initiated this transformation and higher education initiative is that there is definitely opportunity for them to be more in tune with employer needs, the needs of their students and the labour market writ large.

Colin Reynolds: Would you say that's something that would be industry-driven, or do you think that would be government-driven?

Valerie Walker: I would argue that it needs to be industry-driven. I would suggest that, both provincially and federally, there is a role for government in terms of providing incentives in certain places to drive certain behaviours, but the drive itself for where employees are needed the most and where there's the greatest potential for earnings or economic growth has to come from industry.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Desrochers, you have the floor for five minutes.

Caroline Desrochers (Trois-Rivières, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the participants for joining us today. We're very grateful to them.

[*English*]

This is the first meeting in which we are actually focusing on youth unemployment and what is at the root of it. It's a very constructive conversation, so thank you for this.

Maybe I'll start with Mrs. Walker. I just want you to expand a little. How much of this gap that we've been talking about, between talent and opportunity, is at the root of youth unemployment versus general unemployment? I'm not expecting a scientific answer from you.

Valerie Walker: I think there are three buckets: There's that ability for students to transition from school into work; there's general unemployment; and then there are youth not in education or employment, the so-called NEET youth.

The student needs are high, of course. We talk about the wilderness time—the time between graduating and getting that first job—that's lost productivity. It's equally true, though, for those not coming through traditional post-secondary. There need to be the same types of incentives or supports for them to get those jobs. For those individuals, it would happen at an earlier stage, whether that's in high school or through some other community organization that provides that opportunity. It's part, but certainly not the whole thing.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

I'd like to hear from Mr. Henderson on the same question.

Robert Henderson: Our labour market research indicates that the biggest demand among employers is the lack of talent with the available skills. During COVID and pre COVID, the need for the access to capital, which is just money to hire, usually outweighed the lack of available talent and skills. COVID flipped that on its ear. Soon afterward, they were saying that now it's just a lack of people with the skills that they require. This is why some of the programs we were talking about, which bridge that gap between post-secondary and employers, are so critical.

Caroline Desrochers: If I can continue with you for a minute, what do you think are some of the features of the current program that are helping bridge that gap? Then, how do we scale it? You talked about some pretty good successes, so how do we scale that? Do we bring more employers? Ms. Walker referred to bigger employers earlier and some of the navigation of the bureaucracy and systems around that.

We can start with you, and go to Ms. Walker after.

• (1615)

Robert Henderson: Sure. I'm not speaking for only the biotech sector, but almost universally the student work placement program runs out of placements every year. In other words, demand has far exceeded supply. That wasn't just during COVID; that's been ever

since. Small and medium-sized enterprises really like the program because it alleviates the pain of onboarding the only available talent they have—students—to try to groom them to become, then, future employees. The experienced employees simply aren't available to them, or there's too much competition for them.

Now, the scalability of the—

Caroline Desrochers: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but can I just follow up? I'm going back to something you said earlier, that about 50% of employers keep.... The programs are successful, in your opinion, not necessarily because of the wage subsidy that is offered but because they are bridging the gap, connecting.

Robert Henderson: That's right, but because the access to capital for small and medium-sized enterprises follows closely behind the access to talent, it fills two fundamental needs: It alleviates the pain for onboarding, but, more importantly, it connects them, through the academic institutions, to the most available source of talent that they need.

I can go on to your question about scalability, if that's okay.

Caroline Desrochers: Yes. Go ahead quickly, because I'd like to hear from Ms. Walker as well. You have, maybe, 20 seconds.

Robert Henderson: Because, like mine, there are sectoral associations that provide the program, the scalability can be very much that, if the government's priority is among some of the things—like agriculture, aviation, manufacturing or other sectors—that have been hit by tariffs, the student work placement program can be, as was shown during COVID, a highly effective delivery mechanism for economic stimulus.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you so much.

Go ahead, Ms. Walker.

Valerie Walker: I would just say that the large employers, like I said off the top, need to be at the table. They hire a ton of students, and they are not in a position to want, nor frankly should they have, public subsidies to offset the cost of students.

Student wages, for even a lot of small and medium-sized companies, aren't prohibitive. I agree with Rob that there are other supports needed, but looking at scale, I'll just say we did 70,000 WILs, and we do not provide subsidies to the employers. The employers pay the students themselves, and our money goes to the institutions.

The Chair: Thank you, Madam Desrochers.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Gill, you have two and a half minutes.

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I was wondering if that was more specific to the science sector. The Quebec education system, which I know well because it's my specialty, is a little different. For example, we have attestations of collegial studies, diplomas of college studies and diplomas of vocational studies in most trades. There's also university. There are internships everywhere, not only at the end of the educational process, but also sometimes during the process. That gives everyone the opportunity to know an employer. Students sometimes go back home or just stay there. We see it everywhere.

Mr. Henderson, you're in the field of artificial intelligence, and you talked about the defence field and somewhat specialized training in science.

Is that mainly where there's a need to establish a connection between the employer, the workforce and students?

[English]

Valerie Walker: Just so I understand, do you mean in those sectors. Is that where...?

I would argue every sector. I would say, in addition to the student to employer, it's the employer and the educator, so that connection can also happen as well, and that would be equally beneficial, no matter what industry sector we're talking about.

Robert Henderson: If I could supplement with the Quebec question—

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: I'm sorry, but you could send us your answer in writing. That said, I didn't understand what you said about the educator. There has to be a connection with the young person's employer, but also with the educator, right? We also have people who oversee internships—we call them intern supervisors. They also have a connection with businesses. They're already in place.

What you were saying maybe had more to do with science, since you talked about biotechnology, for example. However, you're saying that it would really be everywhere in the rest of Canada.

● (1620)

[English]

Valerie Walker: No, it's a really good question. Traditionally, work-integrated learning has been focused in the STEM disciplines: science, technology, engineering and math. We have data, as do others, showing that in every field of study, students benefit from connections to employers no matter what, whether that's social science and humanities or the sciences.

It is critical for the educator to be a part of that, so that they can adapt their curricula and their training to align with the needs of the employer.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: I'll let you answer, Mr. Henderson.

[English]

Robert Henderson: I couldn't agree more.

The other thing we have to remember is that these are businesses. One of the biggest gaps and the biggest needs, our market research has indicated, is things in marketing, needs in marketing, sales, fi-

nance. These are all industry-agnostic professions, all highly educated.

I think we have to be careful, because we have to understand that in biotechnology we don't only do science; we have to commercialize, and that requires sales, marketing, business development, etc. As Dr. Walker mentioned, these are required in every sector.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Gill.

Ms. Falk, you have five minutes.

Rosemarie Falk: Thank you very much, Chair, and thank you to both of the witnesses for being here today.

My questions at the moment will be directed to Dr. Walker. This committee has studied the Accessible Canada Act, which has the stated goal of creating a barrier-free Canada by 2040, and in the previous Parliament it also examined the progress that was made on this front. We heard repeatedly in the study that significant barriers persist.

Given your organization's stated goal of promoting accessibility, but also from what we've heard thus far in this current study of the dignity of the person, this assists with a sense of purpose. Having someone or something, like a workplace, that needs that person, that employee, and having that employee contribute not only to the workplace but also to co-workers contributes to that sense of self, a sense of purpose and a sense of dignity. From your perspective, what are the main barriers that Canadians with disabilities face when trying to enter or remain in the workforce?

Valerie Walker: We're actually doing a study looking at exactly that right now, funded by ESDC through their skills for success program. We're looking specifically at the barriers for employers in hiring students with disabilities, and a lot of the findings apply equally, of course, to persons with disabilities.

To answer that fundamental question, students with disabilities graduate on par with students across Canada, yet their employment rate drops significantly relative to the population. In our early explorations and in order to make sure employers are in line with that new legislation in federally regulated industries, we've identified several barriers that employers have at all stages of that onboarding procedure, from how they look to recruit people into the workplace to how they interview, how they onboard and then how they develop those people once they're in the workplace. The way we're looking at breaking that down is to identify particular interventions at each step.

I will come back to the skills articulation piece in terms of the early stages and helping students with disabilities understand those social and emotional skills, the resilience and the problem-solving that they've gone through because they are a student with a disability in and of itself. If they know how to talk about that and articulate their value and their perseverance, sometimes it helps employers understand the benefits and the immense value that persons with disabilities bring to the workplace.

Rosemarie Falk: I also took note in your opening remarks of the importance of helping youth identify or name their skills. Plain language is something that society definitely is missing out on. It's better for everybody. It's easier to understand and easier to navigate. You aren't making assumptions, and we all know what that means when we're assuming something. It just makes the whole process easier.

When will that study be completed? Will we be able to access that information?

Valerie Walker: Yes, absolutely. We have an interim report that is due by March of next year, although we'll have early findings before that. The full study will conclude in March 2027, but we have interim reports coming out in the meantime, and we'd be happy to share them with this committee.

• (1625)

Rosemarie Falk: For sure. You mentioned that your study so far has identified barriers that employers have with maybe retaining or hiring people who have disabilities. Has your study come across any examples of successful initiatives or best practices that have helped reduce barriers?

Valerie Walker: Yes, and primarily those exist right now in the large companies. They're the ones with the internal resources to work on some of these things. One—and it sounds easy, again, but it's not—is to do awareness-raising within the company itself, especially about the different types of disabilities. People might be more familiar with working with someone or accommodating someone with a physical injury that happened on the job versus a congenital or sometimes hidden disability. The HR teams often aren't connected to the actual managers and making it easier for them to share, talk and discuss instead of trying to solve these problems in silos.

Rosemarie Falk: What we heard, too, during that study was about invisible disabilities. There's this assumption people have that a disability means you need a wheelchair or walker or that you're immobile, when actually there are invisible disabilities where people may not even know somebody has a disability. I think that awareness is key.

Valerie Walker: It's a perceived stigma still on the part of the people with disabilities, who worry about disclosing sometimes. They can't get the accommodation they need because they're afraid that disclosing might cause some kind of negative consequence. That, again, is a culture shift, because that's a very hard thing to do in practice, but we need to break that down and start to make it easier for them to disclose.

Rosemarie Falk: For sure. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Falk.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have five minutes.

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Walker, thank you for appearing before the committee.

We know that young people who manage to find an unpaid internship to further their learning are immersed in a real work envi-

ronment. Unfortunately, the tasks performed at work aren't always suited to achieving real educational objectives.

In addition, there are employers who don't trust young people or who ask for an unrealistic number of years of experience. Those are issues that our young people are facing.

What mechanisms have helped your organization ensure that federal investments lead to measurable results in promoting youth employment?

[*English*]

Valerie Walker: Our WIL program, which is federally funded through Innovation, Science and Economic Development, currently requires us to create.... To be eligible, it needs to either provide a paid placement in the private sector or be clearly associated with a course credit. We ensure, as a requirement, and we put these requirements into our master funding agreements with any partner, that they have one or the other.

We don't fund anything where we can't guarantee, to the government and our funder, that it's being paid by the employer—as I said, our money doesn't go to pay the wages of the student—or that the placement is a quality placement directly related to a credential or program completion for the student as part of their academic journey.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

I also have a quick question for you. How is federal support a key factor in the collaboration between employees and post-secondary educational institutions?

[*English*]

Valerie Walker: It helps organizations like ours create the resources and tools that make that.... We can help bring them together. Then we need to be able to give them the tools they need in order to work better together.

“Collaboration” is a word that's used a lot these days. In order to create the circumstances for real, genuine, material collaboration to lead to a new program with students getting jobs, there is a public investment that, well placed, can actually lead to quality placement as a result. It's not always a huge amount of money, but the convening power that the government has is huge.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Walker.

Mr. Henderson, despite the government's investments and numerous initiatives to promote youth employment, many young people continue to face challenges related to job integration, particularly young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

How do you explain that? What mechanisms are organizations putting in place to address those persistent inequalities?

• (1630)

[English]

Robert Henderson: Sure.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question.

[English]

When the student work placement program that I represent was created about eight or 10 years ago, the only mechanism we did for equity-deserving groups was that they got a higher amount of wage subsidy or an employer's support to do that. That mechanism hasn't changed for the last eight years. Neither has the definition of an equity-deserving group changed. There are some groups that we don't even measure, such as LGBTQ+, etc., as they were not covered in the original agreement. That agreement has only been extended as it is, identically, for the next eight years.

Through the work-integrated learning program and the student work placement program, I believe you have an ability to evolve not only the definition of what we think is an equity-deserving group but also what our expectations are for a successful work-integrated learning placement. Beyond the fact that, as we mentioned, all of our subsidies are paid subsidies as well, there is simply an incentive, not a requirement, to hire a certain proportion of equity-deserving students, such as Canadians with disabilities, the indigenous and newcomers. That condition could be added and better tracked to the program as it goes forward.

The thousands of employers who are already familiar with the program are expecting the program to evolve. They're actually surprised that it has not over the last eight or nine years, with the exception of scale. I think there's a great opportunity here to raise the expectations on the average employer in terms of the use of diversity and inclusion policies, mentorship programs, onboarding that includes cultural awareness, and buddy systems, so that not only students but also underprivileged equity-deserving groups get more attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Monsieur Joseph.

That concludes the first hour.

Thank you to the witnesses.

We'll suspend for a couple of moments while we onboard the witnesses for the last hour.

• (1630)

(Pause)

• (1635)

The Chair: Committee members, if you could take your places, we will begin the second hour of witness testimony on this study.

I would like to welcome the witnesses here with us in the room and appearing virtually.

As a reminder, you participate in the official language of your choice. Make sure you have your headset on the right channel. For those appearing virtually, click on the globe icon at the bottom and choose the language of your choice to participate.

Please direct all questions through me, the chair, and wait until I recognize you before you speak.

I would like to welcome, as an individual, Mr. Richard Dias, global macrostrategist. He is here virtually.

As well, in the room we have Ms. Delaney Krieger, senior manager, career services, Build a Dream. Welcome.

From the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations—we want to hear from them—are Mr. Abdul Abbasi, chair of the board of directors, and Ms. Wasiimah Joomun, executive director.

Each of you will have five minutes for an opening statement.

We'll begin with Mr. Dias for five minutes or less.

Mr. Dias, you can begin.

• (1640)

Richard Dias (Global Macro Strategist, As an Individual): Thank you very much for having me. I appreciate all of the hard work. Bear with me as I read this statement. I'll be happy to answer questions later.

Canada's recent immigration turn was, perhaps, the single worst policy error in Canadian history. It was sold as an all-purpose growth strategy, but tripling population growth, via immigration, of mostly younger, low-skilled and low-wage people, has had significant second-order impacts that have wide-ranging negative impacts on housing, health care, productivity growth and, of course, youth unemployment.

According to the Bank of Canada's 2025 staff paper, by Champagne, Long and Poulin-Moore, the policy design quietly shifted labour market risk onto the youngest workers, deepening wage pressures and, by extension, worsening youth unemployment and disenfranchising Canada's working class.

The pivot is compositional. Since 2025, and dramatically in 2023 and 2024, non-permanent residents replaced permanent residents as the main driver of population growth, fuelled by international mobility program permits and a surge in study permits. In the labour force survey of micro data that was referred to in this paper, NPR workers have become markedly younger and less experienced. The share of NPRs who are students hit 16.4% in 2023-24, and the average potential experience fell to 11.5 years. At the same time, their footprint shifted towards lower-productivity service-sector jobs, exactly the rungs that young Canadians traditionally climb first.

There was a price effect. The average nominal wage between NPRs and Canadian-born workers more than doubled, from -9.5% in 2006-14 to -22.6% in 2023-24. The authors of the paper I cited talk about how the widening gap is almost entirely explained by observable traits—less experience, different industries, occupation, and birth region effects—meaning it's structural and not a mirage.

How did this translate into youth unemployment and underemployment? First, it intensified competition in hiring at the margin. Employers, facing a glut of young temporary workers with open work or LMIA-exempt status, can fill schedules flexibly and cheaply, reducing the incentives to invest in training or create stable junior roles. Second, wage compression at the bottom rungs lowers search efficiencies. Third, there were credential downgrading spreads. When university students and recent graduates, domestic and international, crowd into low-skilled positions, substitution pushes other young workers out or into shorter shifts. Finally, churn begets churn.

I want to be clear: None of this is an indictment on the immigrants. My parents were both immigrants to Canada. This is an indictment on a government policy mix that prioritized volume and administrative ease over labour market integration, wage floors and the basic inability to consider the second-order effects of immigration policy.

The bank's paper quietly concludes that the composition matters. Canada's chosen composition has pushed down the ladder where young workers stand, and that's not an accident. It was a policy horror, because it was predicted in a committee just like this one.

My conclusion is that the immigration policy was, in effect, a transfer of wealth from the young and working class to the old and rich. Now, supply-and-demand dynamics affect all kinds of markets. Naturally, this is true for labour markets. Increase supply, and prices—or, in this case, wages—will fall. The opposite is also true. This forces us to consider the counterfactual. Persistent labour market vacancies, especially for low-skilled, low-wage earners, would have led to higher wages, which would have forced businesses to invest more in training, retention and capital expenditures more generally, which would have increased productivity growth. This would have benefited all Canadians and reduced inequality. The immigration policy we've suffered has done the exact opposite.

If we don't want opportunity to become a euphemism for young people, we need to change the plumbing. We need to throttle LMIA-exempt channels to genuine public interest cases. We need to align international student intake with housing—which we're sort of doing, I guess—and enforce the sectoral wage and our standards aggressively. We need to tie employer access to demonstrable training investments and convert more temporary pathways into stable permanent residency, so that firms have a reason to upskill young new hires rather than replacing them.

Thank you. I'm available for questions.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dias.

We now go to Ms. Krieger for five minutes.

Delaney Krieger (Senior Manager, Career Services, Build a Dream to Empower Women): Thank you.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and honourable members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today

My name is Delaney, and I started my career through an apprenticeship in the construction industry. Since obtaining my Red Seal, I have transitioned into a role in which I can bring the insights and knowledge I gained through that experience to address some of the barriers that I and so many Canadians have faced and continue to face in our workforce.

I currently serve as senior manager of career services at Build a Dream, a national non-profit organization that works to advance women and under-represented groups in careers such as the skilled trades, STEM and emergency response.

I was born and raised in Windsor, Ontario, a city that has consistently had the highest unemployment rates in the country, and I now live in Calgary, Alberta, where we're seeing similar challenges for youth entering the workforce.

For me, this issue is deeply personal. I've seen first-hand how difficult it can be for young people, especially women, to find meaningful, stable work, even in regions with strong labour demand.

The recent rise in youth unemployment is not simply a short-term fluctuation. It reflects multiple structural challenges, shaping Canada's labour market.

First, we are seeing a shift in retirement patterns. Baby boomers are delaying retirement or remaining in the workforce while drawing pensions. According to Statistics Canada, the median age of retirement rose from 64.5 in 2020 to 65.1 in 2024, and the share of paid workers covered by registered pension plans continues to increase. While this speaks to longevity and engagement, it also creates a bottleneck. Younger generations are struggling to advance through their careers, and leadership transitions are stalling. This delay in turnover limits upward mobility and results in many mid-career professionals' being overqualified for lower-level jobs, which pushes youth out of the entry-level labour market altogether. Compounding this, there's often no structured transfer of knowledge from senior workers to younger ones. In my experience in the skilled trades, I often worked under supervisors who were eligible for retirement but stayed on because of financial pressures and a lack of qualified successors.

Second, as has been covered in this committee in previous meetings, Canada's immigration and credentialing systems are unintentionally contributing to labour mismatches. The 2021 census found that 25.8% of immigrants with foreign degrees were working in jobs requiring, at most, a high school diploma, which was more than twice the rate of overqualification among Canadian-born workers. Not only does this lead to underutilization of skilled talent, but it also increases competition for entry-level jobs that would otherwise be accessible to youth. At Build a Dream, we've heard this echoed by both employers and workers. Newcomers are eager to contribute, but they are held back by credential barriers and limited recognition of prior experience.

Third, the rising cost of living is forcing more people to work multiple jobs. Statistics Canada reports that 6.6% of youth aged 15 to 24 now hold more than one job, for the highest rate of any age group. This trend is especially pronounced among women, racialized Canadians and newcomers, who are overrepresented in low-wage and part-time industries. When older mid-career workers take on secondary employment, the number of available part-time and entry-level opportunities for youth declines even further.

These structural pressures are converging to create a cycle in which young people are shut out of meaningful first jobs, newcomers are underemployed, and experienced workers are unable to retire. To break that cycle, we need a holistic approach—one that looks beyond job creation and focuses on career progression, equity and retention across the workforce.

At Build a Dream, our work is focused on building pathways that don't stop at career exploration. They lead to long-term success. We work with employers through such initiatives as our trades skills incubator and career discovery expos. We help youth, especially young women, explore high-demand careers in sectors such as construction, manufacturing and technology.

Exploration is just the first step. To ensure that interest translates into sustainable employment, our workforce initiative network and career support services provide ongoing mentorship, upskilling opportunities and wraparound supports. Together, these programs not only help young people enter the workforce but also ensure their retention, advancement and long-term success, addressing the bottlenecks we're seeing in entry-level positions across Canada.

As part of the solution, I would recommend, first, supporting intergenerational knowledge transfers in such sectors as the skilled trades, ensuring that mid-level workers and qualified immigrants are trained and ready to step into leadership roles; second, investing in credential recognition and upskilling programs to ensure that immigrants can contribute fully to their fields and open entry-level roles for entry-level workers, such as youth; and third, developing targeted incentives and mentorship initiatives to support women and under-represented youth in transitioning into higher-paying, secure careers.

The youth employment challenge is not just about economics; it's about fairness and future opportunity. If we don't act now, we risk losing a generation of talent that Canada's workforce urgently needs.

Thank you for your time and commitment to this issue. I look forward to your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Krieger.

Now, Mr. Abbasi, you have five minutes, please.

Abdul Abbasi (Chair of the Board of Directors, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): Good afternoon. My name is Abdul Abbasi. I'm here on behalf of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, or CASA for short. We represent more than 410,000 post-secondary students across Canada. I also serve as the vice-president, external, for the University of Alberta Students' Union. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

This committee has heard from a range of stakeholders on the rise in youth unemployment. I would like to highlight how this crisis is particularly affecting post-secondary students. This past summer, we saw the highest unemployment rate for students since 1999, excluding the COVID years. While the long-term benefits of post-secondary education remain clear, we're increasingly concerned about the short-term employment challenges students face.

Post-secondary graduates experience low unemployment in their prime working years, with unemployment among 25- to 29-year-olds being approximately 40% lower for college and university graduates than those with a high school diploma, but we are finding that it is work during study and immediately after graduation that students are struggling with the most. The unemployment rate for 15- to 24-year-olds is roughly twice as high as core age employment. Our focus is on identifying targeted measures to support this vulnerable group at a critical point in their educational and professional journeys.

Other witnesses before this committee have highlighted a skills mismatch. We believe it is less that the wrong skills are being taught; rather, employers expect a more complete skill set, including having workplace experience. From what we have heard—ask any student, and they will also tell you—entry-level positions frequently require prior experience, making it increasingly difficult to get a foot in the door.

CASA understands the position that employers are in. We think a large factor in this year's rise in youth unemployment is due to a rise in business uncertainty, linked largely with geopolitical risk. For many businesses, short-term positions are the easiest to eliminate in times of economic uncertainty, especially when training investments made during a two- or four-month summer job or co-op position won't remain at a company, but these short-term hires are essential for building the skills that employers expect for early-career workers. When these opportunities are limited, it not only affects individual career trajectories; it also poses a risk to Canada's long-term economic competitiveness. It is generally understood that employers will underinvest in training relative to the economic optimum.

CASA believes that to address the student unemployment crisis, work-integrated learning is critical. Getting students entry-level experience is something that will require economic incentive to reduce employers' perceived risks.

In its platform, the current government committed to provide funding for youth employment programs, including the student work placement program, or SWPP. We know that SWPP is an excellent tool to promote high-quality work-integrated learning placement and has added flexibility to provide opportunities outside of just the summer. In fact, an evaluation of SWPP in 2022 found 95% satisfaction with the program for both students and employers. While the program in 2023-24 was supporting about 60,000 young students annually, it has shrunk to 40,000 this year. That does not help in addressing the unemployment crisis. We therefore would like to see longer-term commitments to funding for 60,000 positions. We believe greater predictability in funding will be welcomed by businesses that rely on the program to support talent development and workforce planning.

Work-integrated learning is a chance to improve educational quality and workforce preparedness. Students are gaining skills that will increase their future employability, and they are earning while they learn. Employment helps students afford essentials like tuition and rent. Around a quarter of students struggle to pay rent. Half say they skip meals to make ends meet. Providing students with paying positions is one way to reduce this hardship. An assessment of SWPP participants by the Information and Communications Technolo-

gy Council in 2023 found that students received significantly more in income than their next best employment option, and employers gained net value from the program despite their required wage contribution to the students.

This is just one of the tools we see at the government's disposal to build a higher-skilled and productive workforce, but it is an important one.

We look forward to a wider-ranging discussion and your questions.

Thank you.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Abbasi.

We will now begin the first questioning, with Mr. Genuis for six minutes.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. This is very revealing testimony today.

Mr. Dias, you spoke about how Liberal immigration policy has been way out of whack with Canada's economic interests. You spoke about levels being too high but also about the mix. You informed us about how the mix has tilted towards those coming into entry-level positions and said that has had particular effects exacerbating economic divisions and inequality in our country. That is, having an immigration system that skews towards people taking entry-level positions has been to the advantage of the wealthy, and it's particularly hurt the young and the working class.

I wonder if you could share a bit more about how the choices in terms of the mix and the particular immigration programs have impacted young people and the working class in particular. Then, also, could you share more about the solutions? What should we be doing now, in light of what has happened in the last 10 years and particularly the last five, to put our immigration system on a better footing?

Richard Dias: I mean, you said it's been against economic interests. I don't think that's quite true. Many people have benefited from this immigration, in my view. Genuinely, I honest to goodness believe it is the single worst policy error ever. Between 1980 and 2015, total population growth in Canada was 319,000, and in the last three years running consecutively it was 900,000, the vast majority of whom are immigrants and the vast majority of whom are young, low-skilled and low-wage immigrants.

When we look at the youth unemployment rate, that's where it begins and ends. Other people who came to this committee and warned about this in 2014 and 2015 were ignored, obviously. They basically said this exact thing would happen. I would suggest that the committee members go back and listen to those speeches and read those committee submissions. It's simple supply and demand. If you import a lot of young and desperate people, they will displace the young and desperate people who are incumbent to this economy.

The other thing that I think is really important and we often forget about is that it doesn't force businesses to adjust and invest in the workers who are here. I was listening to the previous statements, and they said we need to improve training and we need to encourage businesses to support the training, education and retention of young people. Nothing does that better than having a significant contraction in supply, which is what we were entering into in 2014-15. For the exact reasons those corporations were complaining about having too many vacancies, the attitude from the government should have been, "Tough luck; do something about it," and those companies would have been forced to do all of the suggestions I heard those well-respected and well-spoken contributors say just a half an hour ago, which is talking about training, retention and providing pathways to secure long-term roles.

Going forward, we need to basically end all of those programs and allow the market to clear. Unfortunately, there's really no fix. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying. It will take a long time—many years—for this to unwind.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I'd like to share the balance of my time with Ms. Cobena.

Sandra Cobena (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): My question is for Mr. Dias as well.

Economists often speak about intergenerational equity. Would you agree that today's high deficits and debt represent a form of intergenerational burden whereby younger workers and families are left to pay for yesterday's overspending?

Richard Dias: Yes. I don't believe in.... I don't like the word "equity", but I do think.... When I say that there was a transfer of wealth from the young and, in particular, working class.... We often forget about that. It's not just youth unemployment. It's the unemployed or discouraged workers—people who are less educated, who would have also been competing against those low-wage, low-skilled immigrants.

In a scenario where you don't have that labour market supply, the demand, if it's consistent, will push up wages, which would basically get rid of inequality to some degree, certainly at the margin. You would have high labour demand at the low-skill, low-wage position, which is largely the working class and young people. You would have a much higher wage growth at that part.

Unfortunately, the opposite happened. Obviously, if you're low-wage and low-skilled, and you're in the working class, you're spending more and more of your income on rent. Of course, what do international students and low-wage, low-skilled immigrants do? They rent. What do old, rich people do? They buy.

It was literally the worst possible way to improve your labour market. Instead of being progressive, which is what I think most policies should be, it was actually regressive. It was a transfer of wealth from the young and working class to the old and wealthy, and to corporations.

• (1700)

Sandra Cobena: Thank you for that.

The Chair: We'll now move to Ms. Desrochers for six minutes.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see that we didn't stay too long on the topic of youth unemployment. We quickly veered to the topic of immigration. I find it quite appalling that this forum is being used to express these kinds of anti-immigrant views, when our country was built on immigrants.

I would just like to remind you that our previous panel talked about the root of youth unemployment, which is really what we're trying to do here with this study. We're trying to better understand what's at the root of youth unemployment and how some of the programs we have, if any, are supporting youth gaining meaningful employment—what we could do better and what we could change.

I'd like to focus my time on that. I do invite members to.... I will leave it at that.

Congratulations, first of all, to our witnesses here in the room. Thank you for taking your time. Thank you for putting your thoughts together and sharing this with us.

You talked about the importance of integrated work and learning—learning on site. Out of the federally supported programs that are currently supporting this, could you expand a bit on what works well and what we should try to preserve?

Maybe we can start with Mr. Abbasi, and then we can move to the other witnesses.

Abdul Abbasi: Something that previous witnesses have also touched on, and we have seen working well, is the student work placement program. In recent talent shortage surveys, 77% of Canadian companies struggle to find qualified workers. That is essentially what student work placement programs help address, making sure that, again, companies like biotechs are helping train those students, so that when they go to the workforce, they have those skills. There is a need to fund that, and going from 40,000 students to 60,000 students, especially considering the youth unemployment situation we're in.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

Ms. Krieger.

Delaney Krieger: Thank you for the question. It's an excellent one to really focus on and highlight what's been working.

Something we at Build a Dream have really found is that our investment into our retention and advancement has alleviated a bit of what I was speaking about, how that mid-level worker is what's really pushing. On the heavy end of things, on the retirement side of things, there are a lot of individuals, especially if you're working for a small and medium-sized business.... I can't even begin to describe how many times I've worked with employers who have fewer than 20 people, and there's an employee who's highly skilled and highly trained but unable to retire because they are the only person who holds that knowledge. You have that person on one end, and then you have these young, eager high school students on the other end.

The issue is that because nobody's supporting these young, eager students and youth, etc., through that mid-level phase in transitioning into that leadership pipeline, the more senior workers who are close to retirement are actually unable to leave. They want to enjoy retirement, more often than not, but because they can't rely on the youth and the students to, within three months, pick up all of the skills and knowledge that took 20 years to build, we're seeing that big gap there.

Definitely more investment into the retention supports and the advancement supports would help ensure that those individuals—the youth and anybody in these more entry-level jobs—are able to progress through into mid-level careers without leaving the industry entirely.

• (1705)

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

Ms. Joomun, do you want to add anything on this?

Wasiimah Joomun (Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): No, thank you.

Caroline Desrochers: I'll just go back to Mr. Abbasi.

We have programs like the FSWEP and co-op programs, which help students get meaningful experience while they're studying.

In your view and in your engagement with all of your students nationally, does that help them continue that employment afterward? Do they fare better in finding a job afterward because of those experiences?

Abdul Abbasi: As you have mentioned, work-integrated learning is something that is really important and prepares students for the workforce that they will be going into. We have heard that if they have those work-integrated learning skills and experiences beforehand and if they have those experiences, it really helps them to keep that job or get a job afterward.

Coming back to SWPP, only about a quarter of the employers that hired students through SWPP said they would have hired otherwise. That also means that 75% of the jobs that were created would never have been created. With the student population increasing and with youth unemployment increasing, I think there is a need for more opportunities like that.

When students have those co-op and internship opportunities.... The expectation that employers have is that after you graduate you need to have a year or some experience in the job market in your field, in an entry-level job. It's getting really hard, and these co-op

or internship opportunities really help bridge that gap, so students can have those jobs.

Caroline Desrochers: Thank you.

The Chair: You have six seconds.

Caroline Desrochers: I'll ask my question, and maybe you can write about it.

Since you're all young and we talk about the mismatch between what young people are learning and what the labour market needs, if you can send us anything on that, it would be very helpful.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Desrochers.

Ms. Gill, go ahead for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses who are with us today. It's good to hear from young people too as part of this study.

You obviously have professional experience, given your positions, but also less formal experience, because you also interact with young people. I'm very interested in this topic, and I won't have time to ask all my questions, but you can answer them in writing, if necessary.

First, I'd like to know what you think are the various causes of youth unemployment. I've heard a lot about expectations from businesses, for example. Ms. Krieger could then talk more about the issue of women. Lastly, I'd like you to tell me whether unemployment can also be harmful to young people's education plans.

I would like to hear your thoughts on those three issues, in whatever order you wish.

Wasiimah Joomun: Last month, we visited 22 campuses across Canada and spoke with students. The main concern that has been raised, as Mr. Abbasi mentioned, is that students who apply for a job are being asked to have one or two years of experience. Most of the students we spoke to said that it deprives them of income during their studies and of the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to re-enter the workforce after graduation.

Work-integrated learning, then, helps students gain that experience and develop the confidence needed to start working.

• (1710)

Marilène Gill: Thank you.

Ms. Krieger, go ahead.

[*English*]

Delaney Krieger: Personally, I want to make it very clear that young people want to work. Young people are the most determined and resilient individuals I have worked with in the last bit here.

The issue, and that disconnect, comes when they are put into positions they are ill-equipped to navigate, handle and manage. A great example of this is that here, in Ontario, we have OYAP, the Ontario youth apprenticeship program. Many times, when I was on job sites, we would have an OYAP student there. I think it's a great opportunity, similar to the work-integrated learning we've been on the topic of. With an OYAP student, there are extra precautions that employers need to take in order to ensure that the student is safe and able to get the best of that experience. I think a lot of it comes down to that gap. It's great to put that student there, but if we can't support them there, I guess that investment is being lost. We see that in student placements, but we also see that in other programs as well.

I think the biggest thing is the inability to retain individuals there. We can get them there, and that's great. They are resilient. They want to work. They will often work much further past when they wanted to, or past the point at which they wanted to leave the industry, just to stick it out, but because there is a lack of those wraparound supports that truly support them to thrive in their environment, that's more often than not what it comes down to.

[*Translation*]

Marilène Gill: Thank you very much.

I agree with what you're saying, because I have a 20-year-old son and an 18-year-old daughter who want to work, even while they're studying.

I still have a lot more questions for you.

Is unemployment putting students' education at risk? They don't all come from a family that can pay for everything. Sometimes they come from remote areas. That involves sacrifice, and I know what I'm talking about. Can the fact that it isn't always accessible and that there's no social safety net be harmful to young people? We know the cost of living, the cost of housing, the cost of university.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Wasiimah Joomun: Thank you for the question.

There's a narrative that students who want to work while they're studying just want to do so for pocket money, or they don't want to study. That narrative has to change. There are people who aren't financially supported by their parents, as you said. Work is a way for them to get money. However, I think work-integrated learning is a good tool to help students develop skills all while enabling them to have a little money to support themselves. We have to move away from the narrative that students go to school only to work and not to study.

We conducted a study of working-age Canadians over the summer, and 73% of them said that their education helped them acquire the skills they needed to start working and to prepare themselves for success during their working lives.

It's important to change the narrative and understand that, these days, working while in school isn't a luxury but a necessity, as much for money as for experience and the opportunity to enter the workforce after school.

Marilène Gill: Should students have access to employment insurance?

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Gill.

Marilène Gill: You can get back to me in writing.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Ms. Goodridge, you have five minutes.

Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'm going to start out with Mr. Abbasi. It's wonderful to have a University of Alberta student, and especially one who came from Augustana campus. I went to Campus Saint-Jean, and having someone from one of the campuses is always wonderful to see.

It was reported, back in March, that the University of Alberta's food bank had a 600% increase in usage over the last five years. Do you think the youth employment crisis is one of the reasons that food bank saw such a high increase?

Abdul Abbasi: It's always good to see university grads and Campus Saint-Jean grads.

I think, as was mentioned before, students who are doing work integration get a lot of those skills while, at the same time, they're earning while they learn. A lot of the time, if they don't have any other supports or parents to support them, this is where they are earning some money that can help them pay for their groceries, keep a roof over their head and make sure they have enough time to put towards their studies. We have heard from many students who are working two part-time jobs to make ends meet. That means they don't have time to study, and that affects their grades; they don't get scholarships, and then they have to work more to make ends meet, so it is a circle.

• (1715)

Laila Goodridge: The cost of living crisis is having a massive impact on student well-being overall. Is that correct?

Abdul Abbasi: Yes. We have been hearing from students that it has become hard to afford education, and it's important that education remains a right instead of a privilege.

Laila Goodridge: Thank you. I'm now going to switch to Ms. Krieger.

It's awesome to see a kick-butt tradesperson sitting there, especially a female. I am the proud daughter of two tradespeople, and they taught me that it is something that you don't step away from.

Simply, do you believe that skilled trades are talked about enough in general?

Delaney Krieger: Thank you so much for that question, because it's something that I often grapple with.

Sometimes I feel they're talked about but oftentimes sugar-coated. The harsh realities and the current state of them are veered away from, and I truly believe that boils down to a lack of actual boots-on-the-ground knowledge. There aren't a lot of individuals who get into the skilled trades and stay there, know the environment inside and out and are able to sit at this table and advocate for that.

I believe they are talked about, but I feel there are a lot of misconceptions, one of them being retirement and that there are all these individuals in the skilled trades who are retiring. That is true, and it is going to affect us. However, at this current moment, we are not seeing the retirement rates that were originally projected.

Laila Goodridge: I think that's a critical part of this.

Do you think we have enough RAPs, or registered apprenticeship programs, to get young people into the trades? I grew up in Fort McMurray, and we have had RAPs since before I was born. It shocks me when I find out it's not really common. Even in Fort McMurray, where we are a super-duper trades town—probably not dissimilar to Windsor—it still was, “If you're smart, you should go to university and not go into the trades.”

What would you say to a young, smart woman today?

Delaney Krieger: I often say that smart people need to build buildings. That is a pretty point-blank statement there.

To your point about how we've always had these apprenticeship programs, we have apprenticeship registration programs, and we have individuals entering this industry. However, bringing it back to the retention and advancement piece, that's where we're lacking. We can have recruitment all we want, but if we are not going to protect that investment by investing in the retention and advancement of these individuals, we are going to consistently keep seeing this revolving door where we are losing money.

I have a couple of stats here to speak about this. Only 30% of women who begin apprenticeship programs complete them, in comparison to 45% of men. Also, 45% of men do not complete an apprenticeship program. This is not just speaking about under-represented groups; this is speaking about all apprentices all across the board. Again, to that point, when we talk about skilled trades, people are interested and people are excited to go into the skilled trades. I was excited to go into the skilled trades. Growing up in Windsor, I drove down Riverside Drive where all the nice houses were, and I knew that all of those houses belonged to tradespeople, so it was an idealized career for me, but once I got into it, it was not the shiny glamour that I had originally been promised.

Laila Goodridge: Yes, it's a lot of hard work. My parents were very proud; they both had apprentices regularly, and they would highlight their apprentices and really do that mentorship.

I really want to thank you for highlighting the lack of mentorship that sometimes exists in that space.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Goodridge. Good questioning.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have five minutes.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to congratulate our young people and thank them for being here. It's always a pleasure to meet them here in Ottawa, at the heart of our democracy.

I have a message for them: They must not let themselves be intimidated and must not give up.

My question is for you, Mr. Abdul.

In your experience, what government initiatives and supports have actually had a positive impact on students' pathways to employment? How do you think we can strengthen those initiatives and supports to help more young students balance work and studies better?

● (1720)

[*English*]

Abdul Abbasi: I touched on some of the things that have worked. We have seen the student work placement program work out for students. Again, the number has shrunk from 60,000 in 2022-23 to 40,000 now, but it's something that we have seen work. It's important that we have more funding put into this.

To touch on more stuff the government can do to help students out, and to touch a bit on apprentices, we take a holistic view of education and training. With the federal government focus on major projects and infrastructure, CASA is pushing for the government to establish that 10% of the hours on those projects in infrastructure, major projects and housing are hours being worked by apprentices. This is something we have seen in provinces like Alberta and across some other provinces in the country. In the U.S. between 2012 and 2022, the apprenticeship number went up by 64%, but in Alberta it decreased by 48%. How do we find those apprenticeship trainers who can help students through their journey to get those skills?

I would say that the student work placement program and apprenticeship hours would be two aspects where government could help.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Mr. Chair, my next question is for Ms. Joomun.

Mr. Abbasi talked about Alberta and other provinces. What role do provincial governments play in complementing federal student employment initiatives?

Wasiimah Joomun: Thank you for the question.

The solution is to support students. All the witnesses talked about preparing students to enter the workforce. However, the problem is that they can't even get through the door.

I know students who have applied for 20, 30 or even 50 jobs and haven't gotten a response. Employers require experience on entry, which limits their chances of getting a job and, as a result, acquiring the necessary skills.

What we're asking the government to do, as Mr. Abbasi said, is to provide more employment opportunities. The program plans to reduce the number of positions from 60,000 to 40,000, which represents a loss of 20,000 positions. That means 20,000 fewer students will be employed.

For that reason, we're asking the government to make a longer-term commitment to the innovative work-integrated learning initiative to support students across the country, in all provinces.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The rest of my time can go to Ms. Desrochers, or anyone else.

[English]

Jessica Fancy: Thank you for the time.

I have a quick question for you, Ms. Krieger. We talked earlier about vulnerability. You have your 75%. They have the supportive parents, they have the background, they have the money and they have the support system. What about the 25% of students who come from vulnerable demographics? Can you expand on that?

Delaney Krieger: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this a little further.

It boils down to resilience. That's the number one word there. Nobody is more resilient than students and individuals, youth, young people, whether they be individuals with disabilities or from racialized communities. Nobody will be more resilient in a workforce than a vulnerable community. That's why they're such a key aspect when we look at jobs like apprenticeships. Speaking to a structure that currently doesn't have a lot of those supports, I often say that nobody is going to work harder at an apprenticeship than a single mom trying to provide for her kids.

When we invest in the apprenticeship structure, we need to have a focus on equity priority groups and these vulnerable communities to ensure that they are set up for success. At the end of the day, when we speak to employers and we ask them what they need from qualified workers or from skilled workers, they need resilience. They need the ability to pivot quickly to keep up with an ever-changing workforce and things like that.

At the end of the day, I think that's a huge point. Thank you so much for raising it.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Gill, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A witness from the National Council of Unemployed Workers told us that the federal government had cut 2,000 student jobs in the public service.

Do you think the government could find another way to support students right now, given the rise in youth unemployment?

Wasiimah Joomun: Thank you for the question.

You highlighted the main points.

We've recently seen a decrease in employment opportunities for students as well as an increase in the unemployment rate within that group.

We would like to see some more opportunities for students, because everybody wants to work, as you said. Students want to gain experience and earn an income.

I think the government should look at options such as work-integrated learning or other options such as Canada summer jobs, to see how it could expand existing programs and provide more opportunities and support for students.

Marilène Gill: You said that, thanks to the Canada summer jobs program, young people across Canada could get a job.

Ms. Krieger, do you have any comments on that?

[English]

Delaney Krieger: I would definitely say that one of the things we're seeing a lot of is heavy funding in the recruitment and awareness side of things—I'm sounding like a broken record here—but there's a lack of supports when it comes to those retention and advancement pieces.

Looking at one of these stats from BuildForce, we see that women accounted for just 4.8% of construction trade apprenticeships nationally, but only about 2% completed their apprenticeship in construction sectors. That speaks volumes as to how many individuals get into the trades. The recruitment and awareness investments are working, but they need to be supplemented with the long-term holistic approach that wraparound support and holistic-based programs can provide.

[Translation]

Marilène Gill: My question may have less to do with your area of specialization, but I'll ask it anyway.

There's a gap between the time when people finish their studies and the time when they want to work and when employers want employees who aren't just qualified, as you are, but experienced. Is that a shift you're seeing everywhere?

Someone can't be expected to have two or three years of experience when they start a job.

Could that prolong your training and impoverish young people in a way?

Are employers shirking their responsibility to provide the support that they too should maybe be giving workers?

I know I asked three questions, but you can send us your answer in writing so that we can take it into account.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. You can provide a written answer.

We're going to end with two five-minute rounds, right on the five minutes.

We will go to Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you, Chair.

I need to start by responding to what Ms. Desrochers said.

We have a globally recognized economic investment expert here who has given us an economic and data-driven critique of bad Liberal immigration policy because of its impact on youth unemployment. This Liberal MP has characterized that expert reflection as being “anti-immigrant”. She did not engage with the data Mr. Dias presented, and she didn't even give him a chance to respond during her round of questioning. I think it's important for people to notice that this is precisely the way Liberals have tried to shut down substantive debate about immigration.

All of us recognize that this country has benefited from immigration, and we also recognize that we need to have thoughtful conversations about the particular policy mix, about whether or not the policies of the government are working or not in this regard and about how they are impacting our country. This is a necessary policy conversation about holding the government accountable for government decision-making.

For Liberals to dismiss disagreement with their bad policies and dismiss expert analysis based on data exposing the failures of their policies as “anti-immigrant” is a political tactic aimed at covering their own failures and the impacts those failures have had on working-class people and young people.

Those are my comments on it, but, Mr. Dias, I want to give you the courtesy that Ms. Desrochers did not give you and allow you to respond to some of her slanders against your testimony, particularly if you want to offer further support for your position. I'll give you the time to do that now.

• (1730)

Richard Dias: Thank you.

I want to be very clear that I am not anti-immigrant, because I can't be anti-my mom and I sure as heck can't be anti-my dad either. I'm an extremely proud child of immigrants. I grew up in a country that offered my parents the opportunities they would never have been afforded in their countries. They're extremely proud Canadians, and I would never, ever shy away from that.

I was asked to discuss the root of youth unemployment. Whether you look at the Bank of Canada's paper—and I would submit to you that the Bank of Canada is not politically charged; we can agree it's an independent source—or whether you look at the labour force survey of July where it discusses the increase in youth unemployment, the issue is that we flooded a labour market. What I mean by flooded is the population of people aged 15 to 24 in 2021 was about 4.38 million people. It is now at 5 million on the button. That's 600,000 new people in that age cohort.

In that same time frame—I'm looking at the data right in front of me, from the labour force survey of Statistics Canada—in 2022, there were 2.5 million jobs for that same age cohort, and now there are 2.7 million jobs.

We can dink and dither about whether it's polite to say this or that, but the reality is that the reason youth unemployment is so high—it's the highest it's been ex-COVID since 1977—is a poorly thought-out immigration policy that directly affected it.

I have one more point. One of the problems that other witnesses mentioned was that businesses are always asking for experience. That credentialism is exactly what the Bank of Canada cited as one of the issues with flooding a labour market with low-skilled, low-wage workers.

Garnett Genuis: Thank you.

I note, Ms. Krieger, that you also had some comments about the immigration system. You spoke as well about the importance of credential recognition—how, when there's a failure of credential recognition, you have newcomers who could be in a higher-skilled area who are actually in a position where they're competing with young people for entry-level positions.

I wanted to give you the 30 seconds I have left to share anything else you want to add on the immigration issue specifically.

Delaney Krieger: Thank you so much. I really appreciate it.

To echo what Mr. Dias said, it's a situation where nobody really wins. If we're not able to support immigrants who are coming to Canada to work in highly skilled, highly educated positions, it's doing a disservice to them and it's doing a disservice to us.

Honestly, the only people who are winning here are big corporations and big employers, who are benefiting from paying them lower wages and things like that.

Garnett Genuis: Right on.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis.

Now we'll go to Ms. Fancy for five minutes.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much, Chair.

I'd like to begin my five minutes by saying we have to remember what committee we are actually on right now. We are the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. This is not an immigration committee, although it factors into some of the workings that we're dealing with.

The Chair: Just a moment.

What is your point of order, Mrs. Goodridge? Clearly state your point of order.

Laila Goodridge: My point of order is that this is devolving into a....

The Chair: That is not a point of order.

Ms. Fancy, you have the floor.

Jessica Fancy: To my colleague from across the way, I was saying that this is not the immigration committee; however, there is a piece of the pie at play in regard to immigration.

Another larger societal piece I'd like to talk about is something Ms. Krieger mentioned earlier. We have one generationally larger population, with some of the younger people today.... I also want to say thank you so much for actually having the youth here for a youth study.

Ms. Krieger mentioned the boomers earlier, let's say, and how this larger demographic of people who would have typically retired is staying longer on the job. You mentioned succession planning or the lack thereof.

I wanted to give you an opportunity today to talk about this much larger piece of the pie.

Thank you.

• (1735)

Delaney Krieger: I think it really does come down to a lot of moving pieces and moving parts. We're looking at youth, so it seems counterintuitive to look at mid-career and end-of-career individuals, but there are so many moving pieces that you really do have to factor everything in.

With regard to the boomer population, we've all seen the forecasts saying that x amount of the skilled trades workplace belongs to that baby boomer generation and that they will be exiting. That's what was forecast, but that's not what's happening, due to a lack of succession planning. One of the main barriers to succession planning that I've spoken to before is this lack of mid-level population. Whether it's generation X or the millennial generation, a lot of them are leaving the workplace due to violence and harassment or to a lack of support and things like that.

That also brings in the immigration piece: Highly skilled immigrant workers come in and are unable to get their credentials recognized. They would be entering at that mid level, which is where we need them. Again, to my point, it's a disservice to us and to them not to recognize their credentials and put them in at that mid-level range, so that the boomers can do succession planning.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you, Ms. Krieger.

Can you also expand on the piece you discussed about mentorship with an older demographic and an incoming younger demographic?

Delaney Krieger: I can definitely speak to the skilled trades industry as a whole.

The boomer demographic that built the workforce is often predominantly white and male. Part of the issue with this is that when we see a younger and more diverse demographic moving into the workplace, there's a lot of resiliency that the younger demographic is facing and showing in that braveness in showing up to a place where nobody looks like you.

However, they stay there for only so long. We see that from the retention statistics. Oftentimes companies are holding on to these more senior-level individuals, and these more senior-level individuals are passing that rhetoric down. It's essentially just training generation after generation that you have to endure violence and harassment on a daily basis to pay your dues and to expand and excel in the workplace.

I think that gap of succession is more or less going from zero to 100 very quickly. We're going from a predominantly white and male workforce in the baby boomer generation, which makes up the majority of the skilled trades industry specifically, to a very diverse workforce of youth coming in, and that's caused a lot of issues within.

Jessica Fancy: Thank you very much, Ms. Krieger.

At the end of this, I also want to highlight a non-profit organization in Nova Scotia that I was a part of, called Techsploration. Their sole mission and vision was to have female skilled trades or STEAM or STEM mentors with different positions take on young girls and fulfill mentorships with them to let them have experience, especially within those vulnerable demographics.

Thank you all for coming today. It's really appreciated.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fancy. That concludes the second round.

Thank you to the witnesses for appearing here today.

Given that we've gone beyond the two hours, the committee will adjourn and reconvene on October 21.

The meeting is adjourned.

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