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• (1630)

[English]

The Chair (Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

I want to welcome everyone to meeting number 19 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, so I have some administrative details, as we always begin these meetings with. They are really for those who are online and for our visitors today.

For those on Zoom, kindly click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those who are joining us virtually, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, please make sure to use your earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will let everyone know when they have one minute left.

To everyone, please kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

Just a reminder, because we have interpretation—we're blessed to have them, and they work really hard—I'm going to ask everyone to please not speak over each other. It's very hard for our interpreters to interpret, and it makes their job difficult overall.

Please address all your comments through the chair. All compliments throughout the next two hours will be very welcome and appreciated. I'm joking, but please address all your comments through the chair.

Members, please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can.

I thank you all in advance for your co-operation.

I also want to say a warm welcome to both Mr. Kram and Mr. Ho. I know that you are going to be contributing and will be positive additions to our conversation today.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 16, 2025, the committee is resuming its study on Canada's immigration system.

I would like to warmly welcome our witnesses for today.

By video conference, as an individual, we have Audrey Macklin, professor and chair in human rights law, faculty of law at the University of Toronto. Welcome.

In person, we have two representatives from The Refugee Centre. We have Eva Gracia-Turgeon, director, Quebec government relations; and Alina Murad, director, federal government relations.

Both groups will have five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I'm going to start online, if that's okay, with Professor Macklin for five minutes.

Audrey Macklin (Professor and Chair in Human Rights Law, Faculty of Law, University of Toronto, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon. I thank you for this opportunity to address the committee. My remarks will focus on the Canada-U.S. safe third country agreement, the STCA.

As you know, the legal prerequisite for the STCA is that both the U.S. and Canada are safe countries in which to seek and to obtain refugee protection. If the United States is not safe, Canada violates the charter and international law by returning refugee claimants to the United States.

Under the STCA and the legislation implementing it, the U.S. will be unsafe if it sends refugees back to countries where they will not be protected from persecution or from onward deportation to a country where they have a well-founded fear of persecution. This is known as refoulement.

The United States will also be unsafe if it subjects refugee claimants to arbitrary human rights violations on U.S. territory, including arbitrary detention and other forms of abuse.

In mid-2023, the Supreme Court of Canada found that the United States, at that time, was a safe country. It did so by overturning findings of fact made by the trial judge at the first hearing of the STCA case, and in particular, findings that refugee claimants were subject to arbitrary detention in abusive circumstances. The Supreme Court found that detention was not routine for asylum seekers and that detention conditions amounting to abuse could not have been reasonably foreseen by Canadian officials.

This judgment about the United States is only as durable as the underlying facts upon which it's based, so if the facts about the United States have changed, the conclusions of the Supreme Court of Canada will no longer be valid in the present.

What's been happening in the United States since January 2025? Let me give you some examples.

First, the United States has barred all asylum claims made at the Mexico-U.S. border. To bar asylum claims directly violates the United States' obligations under the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which obliges states to extend protection to those who meet the definition of a refugee at or within their borders.

Second, the United States has entered into several agreements with other states to which it will send asylum seekers. These are not necessarily countries that asylum seekers have passed through en route to the United States; they are random third countries. Many of these countries have abysmal human rights records and are not safe. They include Sudan, Eswatini, Honduras and Rwanda, among other countries. People deported there face imprisonment, human rights abuses and possibly removal to face persecution in their countries of origin.

Third, the U.S. government now uses those third country agreements as the basis for terminating asylum claims already made in the United States. It does so through a process known as pretermis-sion. This is one of several strategies the United States government has deployed to deny asylum seekers access to a fair process in the United States and to deport them to countries where they may face persecution on site or refoulement—being returned to their country of origin to face a well-founded fear of persecution.

Turning to conditions of human rights for asylum seekers within the United States, I'll give you the example of detention. If you'll recall, the Supreme Court of Canada found that detention was not automatic and not abusive. Today, one year after President Trump entered his second term, the use of detention is now mandatory and automatic for people in what is called expedited removal, many of whom are asylum seekers.

So far, over 70,000 people have been detained in the United States, which is a 75% increase over one year. Over 90% of this growth is in detention of people—including children—with no criminal convictions.

• (1635)

Detention conditions are widely reported to violate fundamental human rights—physical, sexual and psychological rights, rights against child abuse—with inadequate food, medical neglect, poor sanitation, etc. Thirty-eight people have died in U.S. immigration detention in the last year. All evidence points incontrovertibly to the conclusion that the United States is not presently a safe country in which to seek or to obtain refugee protection.

Meanwhile, the current Canadian government has redoubled its efforts to enforce the STCA. It refuses to publicly explain why it continues to enforce the agreement in the face of overwhelming evidence that the United States is not safe. Efforts to seek accountability through the courts are stonewalled.

This is my ask, my request to you: I call on you, as a committee, to require the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and the deputy minister to justify, with evidence, the continued designation of the United States as a safe country in which to seek and

to obtain refugee protection. In the absence of this justification, Canada must withdraw from the STCA immediately and divert re-sources to safe, regular and orderly processing of refugee claimants at Canadian ports of entry along the Canada-U.S. border.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Professor Macklin.

We'll go to The Refugee Centre for five minutes, please.

Alina Murad (Director, Federal Government Relations, The Refugee Centre): Madam Chair and honourable members, thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you today.

My name is Alina Murad. I am the director of federal govern-ment relations, and I will be speaking in English.

Eva Gracia-Turgeon (Director, Quebec Government Rela-tions, The Refugee Centre): Hi. My name is Eva Gracia-Turgeon. I am the director of Quebec government relations, and I'll be speak-ing in French.

[*Translation*]

We are here from The Refugee Centre, a community organiza-tion that works directly with refugee claimants every day and wit-nesses both the promise they bring and the systemic barriers that prevent them from rebuilding their lives in safety.

• (1640)

[*English*]

Alina Murad: Our message today is simple. Canada's asylum system can be both efficient and humane, through feasible policy changes, if we begin to see refugee claimants as a benefit rather than a burden. The Refugee Centre has seen how bureaucratic inef-ficiencies directly impact the lives of future citizens. Delayed docu-mentation, inaccessible legal aid and limited economic pathways are compounded to hinder the otherwise successful settlement of refugee claimants.

The first priority is modernizing documentation issuance. Today, refugee claimants rely on paper documents that are frequently de-layed, lost or misunderstood by service providers. We propose adopting a secure ID card with a QR code on the back, allowing work permits, eligibility status and health assessments to be upload-ed automatically, based on a model being used in Sweden. This would significantly reduce processing and mailing delays, restore dignity to claimants accessing services and accelerate entry into the labour market.

At present, some claimants wait up to two years for an initial work permit, not because they are ineligible but because of administrative bottlenecks. This delay directly increases pressure on provincial social assistance systems and shelters while depriving the economy of workers who are ready and willing to contribute. Evidence shows that refugee claimants are already reporting higher earnings than those in other categories; in some provinces, their earnings approach those of economic migrants. Faster documentation means faster integration and stronger economic outcomes.

[Translation]

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Second, we must standardize legal aid access for refugee claimants across Canada.

Access to justice should not depend on the province of arrival. Yet legal aid coverage, compensation models and the availability of mandated lawyers vary widely.

In Quebec, fragmented fee structures deter lawyers from taking legal aid files.

In Ontario, hourly compensation has proven to be a success. The result is predictable: claimants are overcharged, misadvised or exploited by bad actors—and governments pay later through increased appeals, judicial reviews and abandoned claims.

A federal-provincial cost-shared envelope, paired with standardized compensation models, would improve representation, reduce downstream costs and support Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's, or IRCC's, priorities, such as francophone and rural mobility.

[English]

Alina Murad: Third, it is essential to safeguard procedural fairness mechanisms.

The data is clear. In the first nine months of 2025, the acceptance rate for refugee claims reached 78%, of which less than 1% were fraudulent claims. Also, only 30% of appeals filed in 2024 were allowed. This tells us that the initial decision-making is generally sound. The Immigration and Refugee Board's independence and procedural fairness safeguards are not obstacles; they are what protect charter compliance, public trust and system integrity. Weakening them would increase appeals and judicial reviews, not reduce them.

[Translation]

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Fourth, Canada must continue to expand complementary pathways that allow people to arrive safely, without risking their lives.

Programs like the economic mobility pathways pilot demonstrate that protection and economic contribution are not competing objectives.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Complementary pathways reduce pressure on the asylum system, address labour shortages and allow newcomers to integrate more quickly. Extending these pathways across economic, labour and education streams is a pragmatic response to both humanitarian and workforce realities.

[English]

Alina Murad: In closing, I'll say that Canada's asylum system does not fail because refugee claimants lack potential. It falters when bureaucracy delays work and legal stability for people who are neighbours, workers and taxpayers.

Madam Chair, the recommendations before you are practical, targeted and backed by years of frontline experience. They would reduce administrative pressure, uphold Canada's legal obligations and unlock the immense potential of refugee claimants in this country.

Canada has the capacity and responsibility to build an asylum system that is fair and functional and that recognizes the talents and contributions of refugee claimants. By exploring these recommendations, not only will our defining values as a country be upheld but our crucial and foundational institutions will also be strengthened.

[Translation]

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Great job. Thank you.

Thanks to our speakers for their five minutes.

I am going to move to the first round of questions.

We will start with Mr. Davies for six minutes.

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

The Chair: You're welcome.

Fred Davies: It's my first time in the first round.

The Chair: Yes, I'm very excited too.

• (1645)

Fred Davies: Thank you to the presenters for the information you've given us.

I want to dig in a bit, if you don't mind, on the refugee side of things. Are you tracking, do you have any intelligence on or do you monitor or dive into the data on the number of refugees who seem to have disappeared into the fabric of the country, so we don't really know where they are right now?

Alina Murad: I'm sorry. Could I ask for a little bit more clarification on that?

Fred Davies: Well, let me give you an example. In the city of Niagara Falls, over a period of 18 months, we had a majority of the hotel rooms given to refugee claimants. They have since ceased being given funds for housing in those hotel rooms, but I want to know where they went.

[Translation]

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: That's a very good question.

We would love to be able to collect data to conduct follow-up and to know where people are going. It's a goal, but unfortunately we don't have the funding to do it. However, according to our estimates, about half of refugee claimants will go to their network, whether it's their family or the people they met during their migration journey. The other half are people who will instead need to go through shelters, which may or may not be government-run, depending on the provincial context.

For our part, The Refugee Centre has a transitional housing program. Our organization has developed this expertise. What we raised in our brief is that housing is not sufficiently funded, unfortunately, and that the expertise really lies within the community sector. On our end, we are still able to offer this housing, at a cost that is three times lower than that of the hotel rooms subsidized by the federal government at the time, in Niagara Falls.

[English]

Fred Davies: Thank you for that.

Let me dig into the transitional funding side of things. Where does that funding come from? You said cities or provinces.

[Translation]

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: The interim housing assistance program, or IHAP, is the federal program that funds these transitional housing services. However, right now, that funding is only given directly to provinces or municipalities. That's what was used to pay for hotels, for example.

[English]

Fred Davies: Are there no federal funds at all allocated to housing for refugees who have previously been housed in hotel rooms?

[Translation]

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Are you talking about refugees who have been—

[English]

I'll answer in English. It will be easier.

They had previously been housed in hotels in the sense.... Do you mean afterwards?

Fred Davies: Over the last 18 months, there have been thousands of refugees housed in hotel rooms paid at a daily rate. I found in my investigation that many refugees who have ceased to have per diem funding for housing have moved into other hotels that have transitioned from the classification of hotel rooms to apartments. I'm trying to find out who pays for that and where the money comes from.

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Okay.

There are different systems. Certain funds are private...if some organizations are able to provide that service. It's the case at The Refugee Centre, because there is no provincial or federal funding for that. We find funds elsewhere to provide for it. The transitional housing offered is always in a trajectory that allows people to go to an apartment afterwards.

Fred Davies: Who pays for the apartment?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: The claimants themselves pay.

Fred Davies: Are they allowed to work during this period?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Yes, as—

Fred Davies: Are all the refugee claimants assigned a social insurance number?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Yes.

Fred Davies: Do you know of any statistics on refugee claimants who have disappeared into the economy, who are working and not proceeding through the refugee claimant process?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Do you mean that they abandon their claim?

Fred Davies: Yes. Have there been many who may have abandoned their claim and are just using the social insurance number that was allocated by the federal government?

Alina Murad: No, that's not something we have seen on the ground at The Refugee Centre. Largely, for the rest of Canada, regarding reports that we have read and been a part of, that is not something we have seen occurring.

• (1650)

The Chair: You have one minute.

Fred Davies: You mentioned a bureaucratic backlog. In your estimation, how long is it going to take to clear that backlog?

That's a question on things that may happen again. We may see an influx of Haitian refugees. Are you anticipating a problem with that?

Alina Murad: The backlog problem is always going to be a problem until the backlog is dealt with.

Unfortunately, I cannot answer how long that will take. I think IRCC would be better suited to answer that question.

I would not say that the influx of Haitian migrants specifically would pose a concern to the backlog. The reality is that as long as socio-political conditions in countries of origin continue to worsen and go down the path they are going down, people will continue to seek refuge.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Ms. Murad.

Before we go to our first six-minute round on the Liberal side, I would like to warmly welcome the participants of the parliamentary officers' study program, who are here to observe our meeting.

Thank you, and I offer a warm welcome.

Mr. Zuberi, you have six minutes.

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you to all the witnesses for being here in person and by Zoom.

Professor Macklin, you were speaking to a fair degree about the safe third country agreement and what's happening in the United States right now. We've all been watching the news and seeing how people of colour, to be frank, are being rounded up and asked about what their immigration status is and whether they're citizens. We've all seen what's happened in Minneapolis with the tragedies there.

You mentioned that the dynamics have changed. I think it's obvious to any objective, fair-minded person that dynamics have changed.

Can you dive more into what has happened with respect to Canadians? Have any Canadians been impacted by what's happened in the last weeks and months in the United States?

Audrey Macklin: I'm not sure I can give you a detailed response, except to say that we all know that there are Canadian citizens who have been swept up in the dragnet of this U.S. campaign to deport non-citizens.

I probably know the same as you, based on what is reported in the media and in anecdotes, about Canadians taken into detention and then disappeared for periods of time. These things didn't happen in the past. This underscores that we have entered a fundamentally different phase of conduct in the United States. It is certainly racialized; there's no doubt about that. The fact that Canadians have been swept up in it, including Canadians who are racialized as white, tells us something about how expansive this campaign is.

Sameer Zuberi: To your knowledge, have any American citizens been mistakenly arrested by ICE?

Audrey Macklin: They have been, many times.

There is, in fact, a separate detention unit in many of these detention centres, as you will have heard about, in which they detain U.S. citizens. They know they're detaining U.S. citizens, and they put them in a separate part of the facility pending their ultimate release. It's no secret that U.S. citizens have also been apprehended—kidnapped, if you will—and arbitrarily and unlawfully detained.

Sameer Zuberi: I'd like to open the same questions to Ms. Murad and Ms. Gracia-Turgeon.

[*Translation*]

If you have any comments to add, you may do so.

[*English*]

Alina Murad: Ms. Macklin summarized it very well. This is definitely an issue that Canadians are impacted by, as she highlighted.

When it comes to the agreement and returning people to the U.S., a situation that we should definitely be considering is whether returning people to the U.S. under these conditions is the safest option.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

Has what you're describing right now been a dynamic change from when the Supreme Court looked at the case in 2023?

Audrey Macklin: Absolutely.

I'm sorry. Did you direct that at me?

Sameer Zuberi: Please feel free to elaborate further.

Audrey Macklin: Okay. I'll jump in.

The trial judge in the Supreme Court of Canada case found that one litigant in particular had been subject to arbitrary detention, was at risk of removal to her country of origin and was detained in the United States in frigid conditions. There is actually a term for this in the United States: putting detainees in detention and then turning down the temperature. It's called, in Spanish, “the fridge”. The Supreme Court of Canada said this was probably not typical, it didn't happen all the time and there was no reason to think that asylum seekers were routinely detained.

On that basis, they concluded that the United States as a whole was not an unsafe place to seek or obtain refugee protection and, further, that there was no reason Canada ought to have known of perhaps exceptional circumstances and cases or anomalous events such as this. Canada said this about the United States in 2023, but that finding, of course, is only as stable as the facts upon which the finding is based. I hope that I don't have to persuade any of you who have been paying attention to what's happening in the United States that those things no longer apply.

I also want to emphasize that these are not just random events. In fact, one of the executive orders by President Trump imposes mandatory indefinite detention on people who are subject to what they call “expedited removal”, and within that category are people seeking asylum. This is dramatic change. It is automatic detention in abusive conditions for asylum seekers under expedited removal. That's a significant change.

• (1655)

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly.

In your initial five minutes, Professor Macklin, you mentioned that the United States is currently deporting people to countries like Sudan and other states.

Was that the case in 2023 when the Supreme Court opined, as you explained to us, that those third states were places people in the United States were being deported to?

Audrey Macklin: The short answer is no.

The longer answer is that under the first Trump administration, President Trump entered into agreements with three countries in Central America—I think it was Honduras and maybe El Salvador and Guatemala—to do something like this: third country removals of asylum seekers. Those agreements were swiftly undone when President Biden came into office and were no longer in force in 2023 when the Supreme Court of Canada made its decision.

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

Thank you, Professor Macklin.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here with us today.

I have helped people who have been subject to a removal order a number of times, even though they have been in the country for a long time. We sometimes manage to get them off the plane, literally. It's happened to me. In some cases, it took three, four or five years to process their asylum claim.

We often talk about the difficulty asylum seekers have in finding housing and accessing legal aid, as well as the difficulties related to funding for the organizations that look after them.

Instead of trying to put out fires all the time, shouldn't we be looking at processing times for asylum claims? Isn't that the crux of the problem, at the core?

If we managed to reduce those delays in order to reach a threshold that makes sense, wouldn't that solve a lot of problems?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Yes. That's a very good point.

Processing times are a major issue, including in the asylum process itself. Sometimes, there are not only processing delays for one party, but also a lot of things are postponed, such as the hearing. So there are a lot of changes at the last minute. These are all communicated through email as well. So there is a literacy issue at play, because not everyone is accustomed to using technology.

Beyond the delays, we can also talk about the difficulty in accessing justice and good representation. It's one of the problems faced by people you may have encountered on the ground who found themselves subject to a removal order. We see a lot of fraud. There are people who, having been unable to access legal aid, will go to less suitable representatives or who are simply not competent. They will send batches of documents and copied-and-pasted applications. In those cases, it's certain that the person will quickly be subject to a removal order, because they haven't been properly defended. It's much more costly to go back and fix things. You're aware of that.

So you're absolutely right, and those two things have to be taken into account at the same time.

• (1700)

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You just raised the issue of immigration consultants, who are ultimately not governed by any rules. It's the wild west, and there's a lot of exploitation of people who are completely vulnerable. There are outright networks that are set up. So, even if we want to intervene, if false information has been provided by the consultant, we're left high and dry, and it becomes difficult to act.

However, the fact remains that the issue of delays is of great interest to me, because I think it could really be a game changer, as my friends on this side of the Ottawa River say. Often, the context can change. If a person makes an asylum claim, which is processed four years later, perhaps the problematic situation that led them to flee their country no longer exists. Conversely, a person may no longer be able to return to their country since they arrived, because the context has changed.

Doesn't that clearly show the relevance of asking the federal government to make investments to quickly and radically reduce processing times for asylum claims?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: Absolutely. This is certainly a request that the sector has been making for some time, and our colleague Ms. Macklin could probably comment on that as well. Indeed, the longer the delays, the greater the chance that the situation will change, that more work will have to be done on the person's file and that the person will simply have to adapt to a new reality. That's for sure.

In addition, this also applies to other processing times. We're talking about asylum claims right now, but we also mentioned processing times for work permit applications. In Quebec, in 2024, when the wait time was much more reasonable—two months—we saw a 60% reduction in social assistance claims from asylum seekers. So people aren't there to beg.

People want to work and be independent. Obviously, what they want is faster processing times. The feeling of helplessness and waiting is the worst feeling for asylum seekers.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your opening remarks, you proposed that the federal government, the provinces and Quebec share the bill for asylum claims.

Is that right?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: I was talking about legal aid.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Okay.

We know that international conventions are signed by the federal government alone and that asylum seekers and refugees fall strictly under federal jurisdiction. I don't see why the provinces, which depend on the federal government's signature, should foot a bill that ultimately falls to the federal government. The federal government is the sole responsible party. I don't know whether you agree. This proposal relates to yours.

I would also like to hear your comments on the distribution of asylum seekers across Canada. Some provinces really aren't pulling their weight, compared to Ontario and Quebec, for example.

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: First, concerning the division of costs between the provinces and the federal government, I would say that this is already somewhat the case in practice, even if it isn't in theory. The federal government must indeed meet these needs. However, last year, the funding fell \$10 million short of the actual cost of legal aid services across Canada. The provinces then cover these additional costs. This is happening because a need exists. This shows that access to better representation up front helps to avoid issues down the line, as we say.

Lastly, a clearer agreement on this topic, which both parties would understand, could help to provide better services and proper legal representation up front. Unfortunately, this isn't happening right now. This may also be one reason why—

The Chair: Sorry, but time's up.

Thank you, Ms. Gracia-Turgeon and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[English]

Next we have five-minute rounds. We're going to start with Mr. Ho for five minutes.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for the team at The Refugee Centre from Montreal.

If I'm not mistaken, your agency is funded by federal dollars. Is that correct?

Alina Murad: No, we actually diversify our funding. We have private funding, as well as grants from private foundations.

• (1705)

Vincent Ho: Do you have some government funding as well, or is it mostly or all private funding?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: We have some federal funding, but it's absolutely not the majority.

Vincent Ho: Okay.

Your agency has been around since 2015. Is that correct? Have you seen an increase in the number of refugees you've been serving in that time frame? Has there been a spike in any of those years?

Alina Murad: I've been at the centre for four and a half years, and I would say the influx we see is fairly steady. The only thing I have noticed is that when policies change in either the U.S. or other countries of origin, or if a political situation changes in the countries of origin, we tend to see a demographic shift with that.

Vincent Ho: Do you track employment outcomes in your agency? What are the success rates in six months or 12 months, or whatever metric you use to track employment outcomes?

Alina Murad: The tracking is relatively new. We have a sector within our centre that pairs refugee claimants with employment. Of course, the main goal is to make sure that people are autonomous and self-sustaining. I would say that typically, we are able to match refugees and empower them to get employment within six to 12 months. It's a large range, but as I said, the tracking is fairly new.

Vincent Ho: What percentage would not be able to find employment within six to 12 months?

Alina Murad: It's a very small percentage. I would say it's under 10%.

Vincent Ho: What about official language proficiency? What are you seeing in terms of those rates coming out of your centre?

Alina Murad: It depends on the demographic. Of course, Haitians come knowing French. There are potentially some literacy issues at that end, but they are very easily solvable.

When it comes to being based in Quebec, French is the language that refugee claimants need to learn. There are provincial classes for French, but the wait times are quite long. They go past six months.

At the centre, we provide both English and French classes. I would say the majority of our clients, if not all, speak both languages.

Vincent Ho: You mentioned something about the bureaucratic mess you see from Ottawa. Do you get any targets or coordination from Ottawa in terms of resources or a heads-up on the influx you see, or are you going in blind most of the time?

Alina Murad: Yes, we're going in blind. Through different networking opportunities, we can potentially ask questions, but yes, we're going in blind.

Vincent Ho: That's one more challenge. You have to have a cocktail in order to get that information out of them. It's a complete mess.

Just out of curiosity, if a refugee came to your centre and they had been charged with a crime or convicted of a crime in Canada—not back in their home country—and you knew about it, would your centre still provide services to that refugee?

Alina Murad: We've been fortunate enough not to be faced with this problem, so unfortunately, I cannot give you an answer from experience on that.

Vincent Ho: If you knew about a refugee who had received a criminal charge or been convicted of a crime, would you still provide services to them?

Alina Murad: There would be a lot of questions for that person before we could decide whether to take on the case.

Vincent Ho: It's not a hard no.

Alina Murad: We'd have to know the nature of the crime and if it had actually been committed, instead of a wrongful charge.

Vincent Ho: What about crimes like extortion or robbery, or something like that? Would you consider taking on a refugee—

Alina Murad: I don't think I can give you a full answer on that, unfortunately. Our legal clinic would make the decision on that.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Vincent Ho: Would you still provide resources and legal clinic services to that refugee?

Alina Murad: Providing legal services would be up to the legal clinic. When it comes to other services, we don't necessarily look at people's criminal records when we provide them with language classes, for example.

Vincent Ho: This is my last question. Do you provide criminal defence services to refugees by any chance?

Alina Murad: No.

Vincent Ho: No. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murad.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Salma Zahid.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

My first question is for Madam Macklin. Thanks for coming.

We have seen in recent years an erosion of public support for immigration here in Canada and for what we used to call the immigration consensus among Canadians. What do you suggest this committee recommend to help rebuild that consensus and to restore trust in the system? How can we help rebuild public support for immigration in Canada and the important role that immigrants can play in helping to build and grow Canada's economy?

• (1710)

Audrey Macklin: That's a great question.

This is a real opportunity for leadership. There are always going to be anti-immigrant narratives circulating in public discourse. They're always there—good times, bad times. The real question is who picks them up and who exploits them—or who makes an effort to counter them. That's the job of political leadership.

I encourage, from the top down, the government and all those in Parliament to take steps to counter the dehumanization of non-citizens—allegations that are ultimately weak. For example, they can challenge that newcomers are responsible for housing shortages. Housing shortages need a very complicated economic account of the financialization, among other things, of the housing industry. Think about countering the blaming, for example, of international students for doing what international students do, which is study and, to some extent, work and reside in communities.

It is really important to not just take the existence of anti-immigrant narratives, or things that blame newcomers for problems that are broad social and complicated economic issues, and run with them for political advantage. Rather, it is important to show leadership. There are moments when the government has done that in the past, and I think it can do it again.

With respect to the safe third country agreement, I think it's time for the government to step up. If we're all alarmed, as we should be, by what is being done in the United States to non-citizens, and if we think we are a better country in our attitudes and treatment of non-citizens, then it's time to actually step up and demonstrate that by revoking the safe third country agreement. Instead of investing resources, for example, of \$1 billion into CBSA to militarize our border, we should invest that into enabling safe, regular and orderly entry of asylum seekers at the land borders in a way that is efficient and that serves the needs of both Canadians and asylum seekers.

Thank you very much for the question.

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Ms. Murad, would you like to add something to this?

Alina Murad: My colleague said it beautifully. I don't have anything to add.

Salma Zahid: The next question is for you, and then maybe we can ask Ms. Macklin to add to it.

How can a government balance the need for a stable and safer asylum system with our international and moral obligations to assist those facing persecution and ensure everybody is treated with fairness and respect?

Alina Murad: I would like to call attention to one of the recommendations we spoke about today, which is the creation of additional complementary pathways. The idea behind this is to prevent

people from having to risk their lives in order to get to Canada, as well as to pair these people with our labour market needs. This is a mutually beneficial agreement that would limit the amount of danger and trauma that people have to go through. It would benefit Canada as well.

Salma Zahid: Ms. Macklin, would you like to add to this?

Audrey Macklin: There are two things: We could reopen and invigorate the refugee sponsorship program, because not only was it good for refugees, but it was really good for Canadians, for Canada. The government has cut the number of refugee sponsorships available, so this would be a really positive initiative.

In addition, as I said, the government can think about how to infuse enough resources into our asylum system so that rather than having a problem of backlogs, we are moving it forward as best we can. The difficulty—I'll emphasize this, and I understand the concern—is that we don't control what happens in the world that makes people have to seek refugee protection. In that sense, we cannot control exactly how many people are going to be seeking refugee protection from Canada at any given moment. However, that's not the fault of those seeking protection, and it's not a weakness of Canada. It's not a failure of sovereignty. It is a situation that calls for creativity and flexibility in response to changing conditions worldwide.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Professor Macklin and Ms. Zahid.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

What would be the main challenges for organizations such as yours that are currently helping asylum seekers, apart from funding?

Do organizations such as yours face other major challenges?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: In our proposals, the documentation issue is certainly a major challenge. We talked about the time it takes to obtain documents. However, another concern is the recognition of these documents.

We agree that our immigration system is a bit complex. However, various government institutions, such as hospitals or schools, lack knowledge and staff. In addition, everything changes very quickly for these people, who are unable to keep up to date. As a result, many of them are denied the services that would normally be available.

However, the situation is poorly understood, the documents aren't consistent or standardized and many small documents add up, an issue that could be resolved by a card with a QR code that groups all these documents together. This means that we often need to accompany people to their appointments to ensure that they can access the services available to them. All this creates a major barrier.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You referred to systems that already exist in Sweden, as you specified. We could draw inspiration from practices in other parts of the world.

Do you have many clients who were exploited by organized crime groups in their efforts to cross the border illegally?

Are you getting a growing sense of this? We often hear about networks that prey in particular on Haitians, who must flee because they're living in fear in the United States?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: We haven't necessarily seen these examples at The Refugee Centre. However, we've heard about them. It certainly makes sense, given the closure of Roxham Road. The more borders are closed, the more access is denied, the more vulnerable people become. People are forced to take steps that they wouldn't normally consider, but that serve as a last resort to gain access to the country. I'm not speaking from personal experience, but this does indeed happen.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gracia-Turgeon and Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[English]

We now have five minutes for Mr. Redekopp.

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

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Macklin, I want to pick up on something my colleague Mr. Ho was talking about. For example, there was a trial for three men in Abbotsford who murdered an elderly couple, Arnold and Joanne De Jong. It started last month. One of the accused is an Indian national who is in Canada on a student visa.

If someone like him chooses to make an asylum claim after the fact, once they've been charged with this, do you believe that they should be eligible to claim asylum, or should Canada be able to deport someone like that?

Audrey Macklin: Under Canadian law as it currently exists, that person would be ineligible to seek refugee protection.

Brad Redekopp: We've seen this happen. For example, just last month in B.C., a dozen people were charged with extortion, I believe in Surrey. They all turned around and claimed asylum.

Audrey Macklin: If they are convicted, they are ineligible to make refugee claims.

Brad Redekopp: They weren't convicted yet, but in the case of these 12, they clearly feared that.

Do you think it's right for them to be able to claim asylum after being in the country for a while?

Audrey Macklin: They can claim asylum. I don't know that it's right or wrong for them to be able to claim asylum, but they're not going to be eligible if they are convicted.

Brad Redekopp: They're going to go through the process. It's going to take a number of years. They're going to claim a bunch of resources. They're going to be protected in Canada while they do that.

Do you think that's fair to the rest of the citizens of Canada?

Audrey Macklin: I think you are misstating what is likely to happen. They've been charged with extortion. They will be tried for that offence. If they are convicted of that offence, they will be ineligible because the eligibility requirements make them ineligible.

I don't think it would take years to determine eligibility. What may take time—and I don't know how long it would take—is the criminal process regarding extortion.

Brad Redekopp: Let's follow that through and say that, yes, they were deemed ineligible. In your experience, do people like that leave the country?

• (1720)

Audrey Macklin: Certainly, if people have been convicted of offences, they are likely to be deported because they're in custody. For example, what typically happens is this: If they are given a custodial sentence, they are subject to removal from Canada, virtually on the date of release from the custodial sentence. They tend to be removed.

Brad Redekopp: We all know that the CBSA can only remove so many people. A very limited number of people are removed.

In your experience, do people hang around until they're removed, or do they voluntarily leave the country?

Audrey Macklin: In the situation you describe, if somebody is subject to a custodial sentence, they don't hang around. Historically, CBSA has prioritized people who are serving criminal sentences because, frankly, they're easy to find. They don't get released. They often end up being put immediately into immigration detention, which may or may not be, in fact, in a jail or a detention centre.

Actually, they are the people who are probably most likely to be deported.

Brad Redekopp: Not that long ago, we saw a report saying there were 34,000 people with this status who were in our country and had not been deported yet.

Do you recognize—

Audrey Macklin: I'm sorry; what status do you mean? Do you mean people who have been convicted of criminal offences?

Brad Redekopp: I mean people who needed to be deported but weren't.

Audrey Macklin: “People who need to be deported” is a very large category. Most of those people have never been charged or convicted of a criminal offence; they're just people who have been found not to have any legal status anymore, for one reason or another.

One challenge about that 34,000 number, though, is that Canada, like most countries, doesn't actually have exit controls. The government may say that there are 34,000 people subject to removal—that is, removal notices have been issued. What the government doesn't know, typically, is how many of those people have actually left of their own accord, because they don't check in with the government to tell them they're leaving.

Some number of those, for sure, will be in Canada—

Brad Redekopp: Can I interrupt for a second? We're going to run out of time.

Do you think the government should be tracking who leaves the country?

Audrey Macklin: I'm not sure it's feasible. The most the government currently does is track the people who leave overland from Canada to the United States. How do they do that? The United States documents people who enter the United States and then shares that information with Canada. That's how Canada registers who leaves.

Brad Redekopp: It's not possible for Canada to have the technology or the capability to do that. Is that what you're saying?

Audrey Macklin: It's probably increasing—

Brad Redekopp: This is a better question: Is it necessary?

Audrey Macklin: The truth is, I don't have a strong opinion about it. If Canada wants to invest in the technology to detect who leaves the country through airports and land borders, it's certainly possible to do it. Whether it's worth the investment is a question to which I haven't given enough thought to give a definitive answer, but—

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Macklin.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Now, to end this round, we'll go to Mr. Zuberi for five minutes.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

To the witnesses, this time I'll put my questions to The Refugee Centre.

I have a few questions for you.

Ms. Murad, I know you've written about narratives and how important it is to have accurate narratives around immigrants and refugees. You replied to my colleague MP Zahid about narratives, but I'd like to pick up on the contributions. Could you talk a bit about the contributions that refugees and asylum seekers make to Canada and our society?

Alina Murad: Absolutely. Thank you for the question.

When most people think of the contributions to Canada that refugee claimants can make, they think of the labour force, and that is definitely an undeniable fact. Refugee claimants do, in fact, support Canada through taxes and their labour.

Refugee claimants are actually very competitive, especially in the province of Quebec, with economic migrants. Refugee claimants are more likely to be entrepreneurs and start their own

businesses in Canada, bringing new cultures and new perspectives. This is definitely a benefit to Canada.

A story that everyone may be familiar with is that of Peace by Chocolate. That is definitely a success story and a great narrative to call attention to here.

Thank you.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

I've seen Peace by Chocolate in different bookstores in the West Island of Montreal. I'm sure it's in many different places around the country. It's a really interesting business.

I want to rewind a bit. Could we take a moment to imagine, all of us, how it is for somebody who is seeking your resources and enters your offices? Can you share with us the energy and the situation of the people when they first come to you and then how you help them understand the system and give them confidence in our Canadian system? Can you share a bit about their energy and how you help them along the way and educate them?

• (1725)

Alina Murad: Absolutely.

Their energy changes, of course. There is a wide range, from being very excited at the opportunities that being in Canada can bring to being very nervous, maybe, and bringing past traumas with them through the door.

Certain things are very difficult for people to shake. Paranoia is definitely present.

On the ways we help people navigate the system, we have many different portal workshops that help them understand what the system is and how it functions. Of course, there are barriers with this, so we try our best to overcome them. They are barriers like digital literacy, for example; the majority of the process is online.

Having people at the centre to help them and show them how it works and what the goal is here is a definite benefit to them.

Sameer Zuberi: You describe people who are deeply vulnerable and coming with trauma. You see that much more than in comparison to the average Canadian.

Alina Murad: Absolutely.

Sameer Zuberi: When it comes to services like housing....

[*Translation*]

You spoke about legal aid and other services.

How do you help clients access these various services?

Eva Gracia-Turgeon: When it comes to accommodation in particular, we have an organization in Quebec that serves as a type of reception centre. This isn't available in all the other provinces. The organization is called the Regional Program for the Settlement and Integration of Asylum Seekers, or PRAIDA. It provides accommodation for asylum seekers when they arrive. Unfortunately, certain restrictions apply and not everyone is eligible. However, the main idea is to provide this accommodation until the asylum seekers receive their first social assistance cheque.

Our centre offers asylum seekers transitional accommodation by providing shared apartments all over the island of Montreal for six months. People can use this service to obtain a credit history, because that's often an issue. Property owners don't want to rent an apartment to an immigrant who has just arrived and who has no credit history or experience with another tenant or landlord. The goal is to give them these six months of shared accommodation experience as well as a credit history.

At the same time, we support them in the job search process. When they move out of an apartment and into their own place, they can also pay for it with their employment income. At this point, they really do have all the tools necessary to become self-sufficient and to fully participate in society.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gracia-Turgeon.
[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

That ends our first panel for today. I want to thank all the witnesses for your time. I want to thank you for your important contribution to the study today.

We are now going to suspend for five to 10 minutes so that we can have the current witnesses leave and we can set up for the second panel.

• (1725) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1735)

The Chair: Welcome back.

[*Translation*]

I call the meeting back to order.

[*English*]

Just to let everyone know, because a few people have mentioned this to me, we will have a hard stop at 6:30. For those who have hot dates or have to meet planes, do not fret.

I will make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses. For those on Zoom—hello, Mr. Oldman—kindly click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. As well, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French.

For those in the room, you all know that you can use your ear-piece and select the desired channel. Kindly, as always, please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. All comments should be addressed through the chair.

I would now like to warmly welcome our witnesses for the second panel.

As an individual, we have Professor Christopher Worswick, professor, department of economics, Carleton University.

Welcome, Professor Worswick.

By video conference, on behalf of the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, we have Mr. Jonathan Oldman, chief executive officer.

We warmly welcome you.

Finally, last but not least, we have, for the Immigrants Working Centre, the executive director, Mr. Luc Bonaventure Amoussou.

[*Translation*]

Welcome.

[*English*]

Each one of you will be given five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I will start with Professor Worswick for five minutes, please.

Christopher Worswick (Professor, Department of Economics, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you.

I'm a professor in the department of economics at Carleton University. My research is on the economics of immigration.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting me to present on the topic of immigration processes in Canada.

This is a very broad topic. Given that I have five minutes for an opening statement, I'm just going to focus on what I think is the most pressing question related to the economic immigration process, specifically, the selection of economic principal applicants.

Since the late 1960s, Canada has mainly employed a human capital-based model of immigrant selection. Specifically, we have chosen economic principal applicants who have had education and language fluency, which makes them likely to have high earnings—perhaps not in the first year or two in Canada after arrival, but within a reasonable time frame.

I co-authored a 2025 study with Matt Doyle and Mikal Skuterud, published in the *Canadian Journal of Economics*, in which we make the case that if one wants to maximize economic welfare—usually measured, by economists at least, as GDP per capita—one would select economic principal applicants whose earnings, 10 years after arrival in Canada, are expected to be above the population average. As a rule of thumb, this is a sensible way to approach economic immigration.

Can it be done? I am certain that it can if we take immigrant selection seriously. If we look at the immigrant applicants and rank them based on factors such as education and language fluency, and then drill down into key details of education such as field of study, we will have much better outcomes for the strong applicants we would select. We might end up with a smaller economic intake, but it would be a much more successful one.

Many of you may be thinking that this is more or less what we do, but I would argue that we have shifted a long way from that. The category-based selection system allows governments to move away from prioritizing the highest-earning immigrants so as to pursue other policy options. Similarly, the growing provincial nominee numbers are too often focused on lower-skilled economic immigrants. This is another way in which we are seeing significant drift from our former human capital-based model.

While the potential pool of people wanting to come to Canada to live is arguably very large, many of them lack the language fluency and education needed to have higher earnings in Canada. What does this mean in practice?

Fundamental to economics is the idea of making choice under scarcity. We need to start thinking about highly skilled economic principal applicants as being scarce. Only when we do that will we see the layering on of other policy objectives, such as francophone targets for economic immigrants settling outside Quebec or prioritizing economic immigrants who will settle in small communities under provincial nominee programs. Layering these on top of the human capital model is pushing us away from our fundamental goal of raising GDP per capita, and this is costing our economy.

I thought I would try a couple of quick analogies. Prime Minister Carney often uses hockey analogies, so I thought I would try one, just to lighten things up. We are heading into the winter Olympics. Let's say that we had decided that the women's hockey team, rather than being based on the best available players, was based on the best available players while ensuring that at least one player comes from each province and territory. That might have value as a policy, as these individual women would be great role models for people in their communities, but I think everyone realizes that it would probably reduce the chances—perhaps dramatically—of winning Olympic gold.

There is no serious discussion of that, but I would argue that this is in the same spirit as our provincial nominee programs.

• (1740)

Similarly, what if the Government of Canada required that professional baseball players needed to be bilingual? It's pretty extreme. I was thinking English-French, not English-Spanish, so it's even more extreme. This policy would greatly limit the choices the Blue Jays organization would have and greatly reduce the chances of winning the World Series.

I would argue that this is in the same spirit as our francophone targets outside Quebec. To be clear, settling francophone immigrants inside Quebec makes perfect sense. I'm not critical of that.

For economic immigrants settling outside Quebec, restricting some fraction to being francophone is very unlikely to have any im-

act on those communities, yet to achieve this, we may have to divert away from outstanding unilingual anglophone or allophone applicants.

Ideally, the selection of economic principal applicants should be focused on individuals who will have above-average earnings in Canada within, say, 10 years of arrival. When other policy objectives are introduced, we should expect lower earning performance of the immigrants selected. We should also be honest and upfront about the trade-offs involved.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Worswick.

Now we'll turn to Mr. Oldman, who is from the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia.

You have five minutes.

Jonathan Oldman (Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members. Thank you for the opportunity to present to you today.

I'm speaking to you as CEO of the Immigrant Services Society of BC, or ISSofBC, as a founding member of an initiative called "the Canada we believe in" and as a first-generation immigrant myself.

For 50 years, ISSofBC has helped newcomers build lives in Canada. Each year, thousands turn to us to find work, settle into local communities and improve their language skills. We're part of a vibrant settlement sector rooted in communities right across the country.

Today, however, we collectively face uncertainty and skepticism. Public discourse has shifted from healthy debate based on underlying consensus to being increasingly divisive. The narrative is highly focused on themes of control and security, and our system is too often framed as literally broken. Pressures on social infrastructure are frequently presented in an oversimplified way that inaccurately attributes them wholly to immigration. We're even seeing anti-immigration rhetoric imported from outside Canada that undermines our values and targets newcomer communities.

Public opinion data paints a picture of reducing confidence in economic and social capacity, as well as in support for refugees and newcomer integration. However, research also shows that the more people know about the facts behind immigration, the less concerned they are. Fundamentally, Canadians believe in the positive impact of immigration.

What's missing to help Canadians regain confidence? For many of us, it's a renewed positive vision for immigration—one that reaffirms how a successful immigration strategy is central to Canada's future prosperity, diversity and sustainability.

Nearly 200 diverse civil society, business and community organizations from across the country endorsed the call from “the Canada we believe in” for just such a renewed vision. It's grounded in five key principles.

The first is clearer, more streamlined immigration programs that drive economic growth. Today, our system is still confusing and too fragmented. Meanwhile, in British Columbia, for example, with slow immigration and population growth, labour demand is now projected to exceed supply by nearly 170,000 people over the coming decade.

The second is whole-of-government coordination to align immigration with demographic trends and labour force demand, as well as ensuring the necessary community investment. Today, we are still treating these things as separate conversations when they are deeply intertwined.

The third is the repudiation of divisive and counterfactual anti-immigration rhetoric. In Canada, we may speak many languages and come from many places, but across our differences, we look out for each other.

The fourth is a recommitment to strong humanitarian programs that continue to transform lives and uphold our international standing. Today, too many Canadians are unclear about how different refugee streams work, how we meet our goals and obligations, and how supporting refugees brings communities together.

Lastly and importantly are transparent measures of success that establish clear economic, social and global impacts, with outcomes reported to Canadians. Success defined predominantly in terms of total arrivals and population rates isn't sufficient anymore.

Launched last April, our call is even more urgent today.

Over the course of these hearings, you've heard different specific policy suggestions. However, you've also heard from others, as well as from an increasing number of voices in media, policy and business circles, that now is the moment for a bigger conversation on immigration. We also hear this in day-to-day conversations with ordinary Canadians.

We urge the committee to make two baseline recommendations. First, transform the current levels plan process to a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach that coordinates and aligns all the strategic elements and stakeholders. Second, endorse the five principles of “the Canada we believe in” as the baseline for a renewed vision. The time for a reset is now. Canada's future depends on it.

To end, let me tell you about Ebrahim, who is a young refugee from Yemen and a protected person here in Canada. Presented in a certain light, these few words about him may create very particular images and judgments.

What we also need to know about Ebrahim is that he's a software developer, a budding entrepreneur and a community volunteer. “I

left everything behind”, he told me when we spoke recently, but he believed that Canada “could be a place where [he] could build a life again.” We owe Ebrahim a similarly positive vision.

Thank you.

• (1745)

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

Last but not least, we have Monsieur Amoussou.

[*Translation*]

You have the floor for five minutes.

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou (Executive Director, Immigrants Working Centre): Thank you.

[*English*]

Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Luc Amoussou. I am the executive director of the Immigrants Working Centre and vice-president of L'Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario. It is an honour to appear before you today on behalf of the city of Hamilton and the Immigrants Working Centre, an organization that has supported newcomers for more than 38 years.

I speak to you today not only as a leader in the settlement sector but also as someone who has lived the Canadian immigration story. With over 25 years of experience in international mobility, including experience at the UN, I can say with confidence that Canada remains one of the most welcoming and attractive destinations in the world.

From the perspective of IWC, immigration is much more than a social success; it is an economic necessity for Canada. According to IRCC's projections, immigration will account for almost 100% of Canada's labour force growth by 2030, and by 2032, it will account for 100% of our population growth. Immigration is not optional for Hamilton or for Canada; it is essential to our economic future.

The question today is no longer whether Canada can welcome newcomers but how we welcome them. It's how we ensure that they are not blamed for broader societal challenges and how we help them integrate successfully into our communities and labour market. However, our capacity to support newcomers is being tested. While the stabilization of immigration levels announced in November 2024 is understandable, the budget cuts introduced in April 2025 have placed our sector and our clients under immense strain. These cuts have weakened essential services and amplified the mental health pressures faced by newcomers.

We must be clear on one point: Immigration is permanent. The funding that supports integration must also be permanent. Project-based funding creates gaps, staff turnover and service instability. Essential services cannot depend on short-term pilots. We strongly recommend a return to five-year funding cycles for the settlement sector, along with adding two more years to the current agreements.

As a frontline organization working with thousands of newcomers each year, we see first-hand how Canada's immigration processes shape their early experiences. Newcomers regularly face complex documentation requirements, unclear instructions, digital barriers and long processing timelines. Even small errors can delay applications by months, leading to job loss, financial hardship, family separation and serious impacts on mental health. In recent months, we have seen a significant rise in mental vulnerability among our clients. Settlement agencies like ours play a crucial role in helping newcomers navigate these challenges.

• (1750)

Stronger collaboration between IRCC and the settlement sector would help address some important issues. Four areas to address are reducing digital and language barriers, improving communication with frontline partners, reviewing the impact of AI-based processing tools and ensuring that application instructions are clear, complete and consistent.

Settlement organizations are not only providers; we are also partners. The IRCC and the settlement sector can work to make Canada's system more efficient.

Let me end by saying that Canada's economic success depends on immigration, and immigration success depends on strong, stable and properly funded settlement services. When newcomers succeed, Canada succeeds with them.

Thank you very much.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amoussou.

[English]

Thank you to everyone for their opening comments.

We are now going to go to rounds of questions.

We'll begin with Mr. Redekopp for six minutes.

Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing today.

I'm going to start with Professor Worswick.

You talked about the way the government has gone towards category-based selection. You then talked further about how it has added other factors, such as language.

Is it fair to summarize your initial comments by saying we're doing it wrong?

Christopher Worswick: We are moving in the wrong direction on immigrant selection. I think that's fair to say.

I've focused on category-based selection and provincial nominee programs. We had a model that was working quite well, and it was in place through 2015, let's say. The changes since then, in general, have been problematic in terms of selecting economic immigrants.

Brad Redekopp: I'm curious about language. I understand what you're saying, that we have a lower score based on which language we speak.

How do you integrate, for example, the French language into the selection of people, based on using what you talked about, which was greater than average earnings, or whatever category? How do you integrate language into something like that?

Christopher Worswick: We have a comprehensive ranking system that applies to many, but not all economic programs. That needs to be updated. There was meant to be a rolling update process, but when it was originally created, economists at StatsCan, I believe, looked at earnings of immigrants up to that point and asked, "What factors seem to affect earnings performance?"

You could go back and do that again. If you find that French language fluency raises earnings appreciably in Vancouver, that should be part of the process, but it should be a data-driven exercise.

What a skill is has become controversial. What economists think about human capital is usually measured in terms of earnings. I would suggest that we could take a lot of the politics out of it by agreeing on what the policy goals are—and then let the data drive it.

Brad Redekopp: About three years ago, I saw an article that you wrote in which you essentially warned the government that a crisis was coming.

Am I correct in that, and what was the logic of it?

Christopher Worswick: The article I referenced before was with Mikal Skuterud and Matthew Doyle. It was something we started around that time, so it's possible it was an early version of the paper.

We were concerned about the growing levels of permanent immigration. What ended up becoming a bigger problem was the extraordinary growth of temporary migration. Both changes combined really led to a surge in the population, which is really unprecedented—since the fifties, anyway. I think it strained our ability to settle.

I am sympathetic to the challenges of my colleague here. It must be extremely difficult. It's a mixture of levels, which I know is a different part of the study. However, it is also selection.

My colleague mentioned, completely correctly, that labour force growth is going to come from immigration, but it's not just the number of workers that matters. It's also earnings. If we're trying to fund social programs, it's not the number of people but how successful they are.

I want to make it really clear that I am talking about economic programs. I strongly support refugee programs. We need services to support refugees and family class. I'd just like us to need them less for economic immigrants.

• (1755)

Brad Redekopp: You mentioned levels, so let's talk a bit about that.

Do you think our levels should be constrained by housing availability and those types of things?

Christopher Worswick: The short answer is yes, it should, but we should be able to build housing and build health care to match immigration. We've struggled to do that, certainly, in the last 20 years.

As I said, one rule of thumb that we've come up with is to look at the pool of applicants. If you take the economic principal, do you think that applicants, 10 years from now, are going to have earnings above average? That assumes that you can build homes if there is a large number of people. If you can't, you would trim back the level—not cut drastically, but you'd have an adjustment factor.

Brad Redekopp: Mr. Amoussou, we have approximately three million temporary residents in our country right now. The government has plans to essentially expire their paperwork, and it expects them to leave the country.

In your experience, when the paperwork of temporary residents essentially expires, do they leave the country or do you run into folks who hang around after their paperwork has expired?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: If they have a temporary resident permit, what ends up happening most of the time is that they tend not to leave, but when compelled, they do so. Most of the time, they will try to fight and claim that they have a right to stay here.

As a rule of thumb for IWC, we encourage them to abide by the rules, meaning that when it is time to leave and they have no more means they can use to appeal—

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: —they should just leave.

Brad Redekopp: From a realistic perspective, is it realistic for the government to expect these people to leave the country, or as you said, are just going to try to find a way to stay?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: They should go by the rules, so the expectation is that if they have exhausted that, they should leave.

Brad Redekopp: Right. They should, but in your experience, will they?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: Yes, they do. Some do.

Brad Redekopp: Some, but not all?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: Most of the time they won't do it, but some will.

Brad Redekopp: Most won't....

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Mr. Amoussou.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Peter Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): Thank you—

The Chair: I'm so sorry. You have six minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos: That's fine, Madam Chair. It's no problem.

Professor Worswick, thank you very much for being here today.

I think you'll be pleasantly surprised. I think we're all hockey fans at this table. It's a very Canadian game, obviously, by definition.

Analogies have their place, but if I take your analogy to its logical conclusion, you're ultimately talking about differences of degree and not kind. What I mean, if we're going to continue down the path of the analogy, is that a right winger and a centreman are different, but not really. In the end, they're hockey players.

If we're thinking about the economy and the place of the immigration system in helping to build it up, when individuals can't be sourced domestically—I'm talking about skills—then your analogy and, frankly, your overall argument, might be out of place.

Just tell me a little more, because I'm a bit confused on the rationale. I say this with great respect. If we're trying to address skills gaps in the economy, we're obviously going to want people of various backgrounds, including income types. The trades are a challenge. It's hard to source people in the trades, to give one example. Also, you can talk to business owners in rural and remote communities. They have a very difficult time finding people.

If we're going to source people of only one income type, or in a certain category of income, if you like, then I think we're going to run into problems. The immigration system should serve the economy first and foremost.

• (1800)

Christopher Worswick: May I say something?

Peter Fragiskatos: Yes, of course.

Christopher Worswick: Really quickly, as I know there's not a lot of time.... In the absence of an immigration program, when there's excess demand for workers, the wages should rise. That's what Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations*. My experience is that if a job has chronic labour shortages, it's usually because there's something to do with the job that people don't like. The idea that we should have immigrants do the jobs that Canadians don't want to do is a huge mistake, because the wages will never rise if that's the case.

My colleague Mikal Skuterud has put out numbers on construction. Everyone's always saying that there are construction shortages, but we do not see wages rising rapidly in construction—

Peter Fragiskatos: Sir, I have limited time. I don't want to interrupt you. In fact, I'd be quite happy to follow up after the meeting.

Christopher Worswick: Sure.

Peter Fragiskatos: What would you tell members of Parliament from Atlantic Canada who, to give you an example, have fish-processing plants in their communities? The problem with the plants is not that they're not getting orders. They're getting many orders from across Canada and from across the world. They can't fill those orders because they have such a challenge getting access to workers.

Christopher Worswick: I'm sure they feel that way, but the way—

Peter Fragiskatos: It's—

Christopher Worswick: Let me answer, please.

Peter Fragiskatos: It's not that they feel that way. This is an objective fact.

Christopher Worswick: Can I answer the question? You keep interrupting me.

Peter Fragiskatos: I'm just putting facts on the record.

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, please allow the witness to respond.

Christopher Worswick: The wages should rise until local people, people from Ontario or people from B.C. want to move there to do the jobs, or the companies should invest in new technology. The fish plants and companies.... We have temporary foreign workers coming to work in fast-food restaurants in Toronto. Are there not workers in Toronto? The wages have to rise, and this raises wages for low-income Canadians and reduces income inequality.

Peter Fragiskatos: I take your point, sir, on Toronto and, in particular, the fast-food sector.

You're telling me that in the fish plant example I gave, we're going to tell the entrepreneurs who run those places that they should wait for Canadian workers from Ontario to move out there—

Christopher Worswick: I started by saying—

Peter Fragiskatos: At some point, they'll realize that they suddenly want to go and work in Atlantic Canada in a fish-processing plant.

Christopher Worswick: I said local workers could take the jobs first.

Peter Fragiskatos: That's the challenge.

Christopher Worswick: That is because the wage hasn't risen yet.

Peter Fragiskatos: That's the answer to this: Increase wages and everything will magically fall in place.

Christopher Worswick: That is the answer. That's what we did in Canada for the first 100 years. We didn't have temporary foreign worker programs.

On your other question about left wing, right wing and centre, today I had a look on the public use census file for 2021, and I restricted it to economic immigrants in Canada. If you compare economic immigrants who work in French in Canada outside Quebec to all other economic immigrants who work in any other language, their earnings are 20% lower. That's straight from the census.

There are real costs to the policies we're laying overtop. This means they're paying less taxes; they may need more services. This is costing Canadians.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

As I said, Professor Worswick, I'm happy to follow up with you afterwards.

[*Translation*]

We're a bilingual country. We're quite proud of this. That much is clear.

Mr. Amoussou, do you think that the immigration system plays a significant role in this vision?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: Absolutely. Since Canada is an officially bilingual country, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, promotes both languages. There are programs that provide language courses, such as Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, or LINC, and other programs for learning French.

This is an exceptional opportunity for Canada to invest in language training for newcomers. It's important. I always tell people that we should all try to become bilingual or multilingual. IRCC's willingness to consider training in the country's two official languages is a positive step.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Amoussou.

[*English*]

Next, we have six minutes for Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll stick to the hockey analogies. The Prime Minister of Canada and all his Liberal troops used the expression “elbows up” during the most recent election campaign. This expression translates into French as “*lever le coude*”.

That said, the expression “elbows up” in English means to protect yourself in hockey. In French, “*lever le coude*” means “to have a drink” or “to drink alcohol excessively” in our neck of the woods. As you can see, the differences between English and French make it worthwhile to point out the variety of words. Even when expressions are translated word for word, they don't necessarily mean the same thing.

Mr. Worswick, in your opening remarks, you said that criteria such as francophone immigration outside Quebec would take us further away from our economic objectives.

Is that right? I may have misunderstood.

• (1805)

[English]

Christopher Worswick: Could you repeat the question? I'm sorry.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: In your opening remarks, you said, for example, that criteria such as francophone immigration outside Quebec would take us further away from our economic objectives for newcomers in the economic class.

Is that right?

[English]

Christopher Worswick: My concern is that it would lead to an intake of economic immigrants to Canada, but not in Quebec, and they would have lower human capital on average. They would have lower earnings. They would pay less in taxes. That's what I'm getting at.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Do you believe in the vitality of francophone communities outside Quebec?

[English]

Christopher Worswick: Yes, I think it's important, but I'm far from confident that the policy would help. That's my concern.

We're not able to target permanent immigrants to particular spots. With temporary migrants, we have more control. You might bring someone to Toronto who is a francophone. They may not interact very much with other francophones or individuals wanting to speak French. They then have the right to move to Montreal or Quebec City because they're permanent residents. These are my concerns about that.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I understand your point. This doesn't mean that we agree, but I understand.

In that case, would the opposite be true?

Would anglophone immigration to Quebec undermine our economic objectives? As the saying goes, “what's good for the goose is good for the gander”. Good luck with that.

[English]

Christopher Worswick: I think I understand your question, sir.

I wasn't planning to talk about the Quebec selection system today. I'm not suggesting—

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You really did say, roughly speaking, that francophone immigration outside Quebec was undermining our economic objectives.

I'm asking you whether the opposite is true. Would anglophone immigration to Quebec undermine our economic objectives?

[English]

Christopher Worswick: I think I understand your question.

I would say that it would be if the anglophones going to Quebec under the federal system—I'm guessing—were to have lower earnings.

I'm agnostic on the language issue. The federal program should be geared to generating immigrants' earnings, 10 years out, that are above average. If that's not happening, then I would agree that it's a problem.

[Translation]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I would humbly suggest—take it as you will—that you keep certain things in mind when you give these types of remarks. Language is a highly sensitive topic, especially in minority communities outside Quebec. For francophones outside Quebec, francophone immigration is extremely important, even vital, for the survival and growth of their communities.

In that case, it isn't just a matter of looking at things from an economic perspective. In my view, it also has good economic potential, in any event. Take it as you will. Honestly, I'm not passing any judgment. It's just a suggestion. In a country that claims to have two official languages, it's important to support minority language communities.

This brings me to you, Mr. Amoussou. Unfortunately, my time is running out. I would have liked to ask you more questions.

What are the main barriers faced by newcomers in the early stages of the immigration process?

• (1810)

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: First, the main barrier for newcomers is basically the difficulty of finding a job that really matches their skills and that makes them feel valued. They always start by finding precarious work that doesn't pay well. It takes them time to reach their full potential.

Second, at this time, especially in Ontario, housing has become an issue. Without any credit, it's hard to get accepted by landlords. This is becoming a real issue. We find that people are increasingly being asked to pay a deposit that sometimes amounts to six months' rent before they can get a place to live.

Third, another major barrier for francophones in general and for allophones is the language learning process. We've had many people come here from other countries. It takes at least four years to really acquire a functional level of English. Some people don't want to do so, but this only delays their economic integration and their success.

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

[*English*]

That ends our first round.

Our second round is five minutes. We will begin with Mr. Fred Davies.

Fred Davies: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Professor, I'd like to follow up on a couple of things that have piqued my interest in your thesis on how wages need to rise in order to attract labour.

In your view—and you've looked at the current Canadian immigration policy—is the policy, as it's being delivered now, on a broad basis, suppressing wages?

Christopher Worswick: An argument could be made.... I have another paper from 2020 in the Canadian Journal of Economics that looked at the temporary foreign worker program. It used data from around the time of the Harper government, not from the most recent period. We came up with a theoretical model and empirical evidence that suggested the temporary foreign worker program could be suppressing and lowering wages.

I think the bigger concern, probably, is whether we see wage growth. Are we stopping the wage growth? Is it lowering wages? I'm not so sure. However, I would be concerned that wages are not growing, that so-called labour shortages are becoming chronic and that we're relying on temporary foreign worker programs and on less-skilled permanent immigration to solve a problem that is addressed in many countries just through wage growth.

At the same time, I hear well-intentioned people complaining about poverty rates and income inequality. The best way to fix these problems is through wage growth. I'll stop there.

Fred Davies: It's okay.

I want to cover a couple of areas, but I have limited time.

Christopher Worswick: I get that. Sure, of course.

Fred Davies: Do you see any regional differences in the way wages are growing or not growing? Do you see a disproportionate...?

Christopher Worswick: That's a good question.

Off the top of my head, I'm guessing wages are probably growing faster in Alberta because of the strength of the resource sector there. I'd have to look at the numbers to know for sure.

Fred Davies: One of you mentioned skills gaps. I hope you've been following what's been happening in the post-secondary sector, in which there have been puppy mills of temporary students coming into the country, as the committee has studied in quite some depth. One of the issues and problems I have seen is that the government changed how graduates can get and maintain a job and a path to permanent residency. It's effectively stopped now.

In my riding, I have Niagara College, a very significant educational institution. They have a world-class culinary arts program, brewing program and distilling program, and there are two-, three- and four-year programs. It used to be the case that you could get a work permit for the equivalency of the time you were in school; now, if you graduate, you have to leave.

I happen to own a brewery, so I'm looking for brewers all the time. I can't get them now, especially in this program, because the people who graduate have to leave. However, the person who gets a.... Not to disrespect the liberal arts, but if you have a degree in sociology, you can still stay for the equivalent time of your education. Do you see that as a problem? Would you make recommendations to change that?

• (1815)

Christopher Worswick: I have written a few Globe and Mail opinion pieces on these issues, and I'm happy to chat afterwards.

I think I'm pretty consistent on this: International students are great for Canada, but we have to get the design and the balance right. Whether someone stays or not, I would use the same criteria I've been talking about for the economic immigration program. At least permanently.... An international student should stay as an economic immigrant if we think that, 10 years from now, their earnings are going to be above average. This is going to be true of some college programs; it's going to be true of some—but not all—university programs. I think it's the fair way to do it. Otherwise, you're going to say, "You're a university professor; you're favouring universities." I think we should let the data drive it.

Fred Davies: Anecdotally, because I can tell you you're absolutely right about the impact of wage growth, we have seen substantial growth in wages in the sector I'm in simply because we can't find the labour. You end up paying more for labour, and it then attracts people, who do get paid more. As you mentioned, your research suggests immigration policy should provide a 10-year above average of the current wages.

Christopher Worswick: A 10-year period—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Sorry, Professor Worswick, we're over time. You can answer the next one, if that's okay.

We have five minutes from Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi: I'll start off with Professor Worswick.

I'm wondering if you are familiar with the context of Quebec and employment for immigrants.

Christopher Worswick: I've lost the last sentence.

Sameer Zuberi: I'm curious, are you familiar with the context in Quebec as it relates to immigrant communities and employment?

Christopher Worswick: I'm somewhat aware, but probably not as well aware as for the rest of the country.

Sameer Zuberi: I can appreciate that, given where you're situated.

Would you say you are familiar with the headlines and broad strokes?

Christopher Worswick: I think so.

Sameer Zuberi: Are you familiar with numerous studies indicating that those who are Maghribi or North African in origin have a very high unemployment rate as compared to the average immigrant and the average person in the population of Quebec?

Christopher Worswick: I haven't seen numbers, but it doesn't surprise me to hear that, sadly.

Sameer Zuberi: You're not....

Christopher Worswick: I'm sorry?

Sameer Zuberi: I'm assuming you're not familiar with that.

Christopher Worswick: I haven't seen the numbers recently.

Sameer Zuberi: The only reason I mention this is that I wanted to pivot, maybe to Monsieur Amoussou.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Amoussou, we're racialized people. We know that diverse communities face barriers that other communities don't encounter. One example concerns the emphasis on and recognition of education and professional skills. This phenomenon occurs across the country, not just in one province.

[*English*]

Have you seen this phenomenon in existence? Is it something you've seen in your practice??

[*Translation*]

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: Yes. We must acknowledge that, no matter what people say, we aren't all in the same boat. Everything is becoming much more difficult. We're immigrants and we're a new generation here. We've noticed that it takes newcomers 10 years to catch up with people born in Canada. As soon as they set foot in Canada, they're 10 years behind, regardless of their level of education.

As part of our integration process, we're trying to shorten this time frame from 10 years to 5 years if we can. However, it's still a major challenge. A newcomer born in Algeria or Benin needs 10 years to catch up, especially in terms of salaries, compared to a person born here. This is despite the fact that the newcomer has the same education and credentials.

Unlike the professor, I wouldn't want to reduce immigration to Canada for economic purposes. Yes, we want to succeed economi-

cally, but there's also a human side. The process must be simplified so that the person coming here can make a substantial contribution to Canada's economy. You shouldn't say that you'll choose a person only because that person can make \$100,000, and that a person who will never make \$60,000 should go home. I believe that this is wrong and that it doesn't reflect well on a country.

• (1820)

[*English*]

Sameer Zuberi: We're all paying taxes, whoever is working: A salaried employee, regardless of income, is still paying taxes.

I'd like to go to Mr. Oldman and ask—very briefly, because I have another question to ask you—simply, do you agree with what you just heard in terms of the testimony that was given?

Jonathan Oldman: There has been some really interesting debate, and it illustrates the fact that a bigger conversation about immigration is required. There are some complicated issues here. I think there are some limitations to an approach to economic migration that is simply based on maximizing earnings.

I think about our health care system—in British Columbia and, I think, across the country—in which one-quarter of health care workers across the country, I believe, are foreign-trained or born overseas. When you think about the average per capita salary of Canadians, as well as care aide and home support workers and the shortage we have in those groups, raising those wages is not a practical solution. Raising wages is not a practical solution to demographics and population projections. You can offer to pay people as much as you want, but if population—the working population—is declining, then we have a demographic problem. I appreciate the economic arguments and the theories the professor is putting forward, and I think they have a place, but I don't think it's the entire equation.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Oldman.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Amoussou, I'm from Lac-Saint-Jean, a fairly remote region in northern Quebec. More and more newcomers are coming to our territory, and we're happy to welcome them. Many people come to complain to the MP's office, which has become an extension of IR-CC, because they can't get through to anyone.

Sometimes, these people are lost in the process. This is what we're here to talk about.

Isn't there an obvious issue when people get lost in the various immigration processes in Canada and when they can't simply receive guidance from the federal government because they don't have access to direct services?

Doesn't the problem lie there?

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: It's a major problem that has become even more prevalent recently with the use of artificial intelligence. People talk to machines, not humans. They fill in forms, but any error results in everything being returned to them.

Nowadays, even a person from an organization such as ours, which works directly with IRCC, can call an officer and wait for four hours without anyone answering. This is frustrating enough for partner organizations such as ours. Imagine the frustration of a client who calls directly and who doesn't get any answer.

I think that we're moving towards an automated artificial intelligence system. However, the human side is essential.

Economic class immigrants aside, there are vulnerable people who may face language barriers and who must talk to chatbots or an artificial intelligence interface. It's really unfortunate. We need a balanced approach.

[*English*]

Brad Redekopp: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm sorry; we have a point of order.

Brad Redekopp: The camera is not working properly.

I don't know if we need to knock the guys back there to wake them up, but it's not showing the witness.

The Chair: I can see the witness.

Brad Redekopp: No, it's the camera.

The Chair: Oh, it's the camera.

Brad Redekopp: It was on the lovely Liberal group there.

The Chair: Okay, I think that's changed now.

Thank you.

We'll give you back the time and still finish at 6:30.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You're absolutely right, Mr. Amoussou. IRCC should be the most compassionate department, but we're hearing that it's the least compassionate of all.

Back in the day, it was possible to visit department offices in the regions. There were also offices for unemployed people.

We sometimes think that we can make progress only by moving forward. However, couldn't we go back to the good practices of the past and draw inspiration from them in order to find solutions?

• (1825)

Luc Bonaventure Amoussou: Yes, because some vulnerable clients face language challenges. Speaking with a person helps more than speaking with artificial intelligence or a chatbot.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Amoussou.

Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*English*]

We have only four minutes left, so I will give two minutes to Mr. Kram and two minutes to Ms. Tesser Derksen.

Go ahead, Mr. Kram.

Michael Kram (Regina—Wascana, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Professor Worswick, we don't have much time, so let's hop right into it.

I read with interest a mainstream media article last fall about temporary foreign workers in which you were quoted quite a few times. The article said you raised the concern about the “growing reliance on temporary workers [having] long-term consequences, including wage suppression.”

Can you elaborate on how the TFW program can suppress wages?

Christopher Worswick: Concerning the temporary foreign worker program, the way it's supposed to work is that a firm advertises a job. If they advertise a job at the market wage rate and they're unsuccessful, they can ask the federal government to bring in a temporary foreign worker. This seems innocuous, but the reality is that job searches fail all the time, and this could lead to a situation whereby.... There's an incredible supply, sadly, of lower-wage workers around the world who are willing to come, so one could think of it as flattening the labour supply curve, effectively, through that.

The other thing that could happen is that firms could anticipate this, because temporary foreign workers tend to be older than teenage workers in Canada, and they care a lot more about the job. If they lose the job, they probably have to go back to their home country—whereas an immigrant, for example, a permanent resident, can move to another job in Canada. There's a power imbalance.

Our research suggests that this type of program is likely to lead to lower wage offers by firms.

Michael Kram: A spoiler alert is that, at the end of the article, you had a recommendation about what should be done with the temporary foreign worker program.

Would you like to elaborate on that today?

Christopher Worswick: We should eliminate the temporary foreign worker program. We should have permanent immigration, and the economic component should be focused on high-income individuals. Then we should train permanent residents and Canadian citizens to do other jobs if there are shortages.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

Thank you, Mr. Kram.

The last two minutes go to you, Ms. Tesser Derksen.

Kristina Tesser Derksen (Milton East—Halton Hills South, Lib.): Thanks so much, Madam Chair.

Thanks, everyone, for letting me sit in as a guest and indulging me by allowing me to ask a question.

Mr. Oldman, you mentioned in your opening remarks that you had two recommendations. One of them was—and I'm paraphrasing—to transform the levels plan so that it becomes more holistic.

Could you expand a bit on what you meant by that?

Jonathan Oldman: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity.

The levels plan process today takes in a lot of feedback, but we're hearing conversations across communities and across different sectors that a longer-term, cross-government process could be considered, one that is—and you've heard this from other witnesses at other meetings as well—coordinating the line across government, not just IRCC, the different immigration streams are complementary in alignment and there's a more structured and influential whole-of-society input into levels planning.

Right now, there is extensive consultation done by IRCC, but it's not a whole-of-government or a whole-of-society process. What we see in the coverage and the communication of the levels plan is that it's frequently reduced to two numbers. One of the recommendations in our “the Canada we believe in” initiative sets much clearer strategic objectives for different economic, humanitarian and other streams of immigration.

The Chair: I think that's time.

Thank you so much, Ms. Tesser Derksen and Mr. Oldman.

I want to thank all the witnesses for both their time and their important contributions. Based on this excellent conversation, there may be some additional things you want to submit to the committee. I encourage all three of you to do that. Thanks again.

Before we adjourn—because I know that Monsieur Brunelle-Duceppe wants to run out the door—for your information, version two of the draft report for the international student study should be distributed on Friday, February 20. In order to have time to review, we're scheduling the first meeting to review it on Wednesday, February 25. We plan to invite witnesses for the immigration study between now and then.

I just wanted to make sure you know that this is the current proposal.

● (1830)

With that, it is now 6:30.

This meeting is adjourned.

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