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Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1100)

[English]

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

I want to welcome everyone to meeting number 23 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. I'm obliged to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses and as a reminder to all of our members.

We don't have anybody joining us virtually. Everybody who is going to be part of our session today is here in person.

For all of those who are witnesses, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel, whether English or French, depending on how you would like to listen in. I believe it's only Madame Brassard who has five minutes, but for any of the questions and for everyone else, I will let you know when you have one minute left in your response time.

As always, kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I will remind everyone not to speak over each other, as it will be hard for our interpreters to interpret. It makes their job very difficult.

All comments and questions should be addressed through the chair.

Members, please remember to raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. Thank you so much for your co-operation.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on September 16, 2025, and on February 23, 2026, the committee is resuming its study on Canada's immigration system. As a reminder to everyone, the motion we are looking at today is part of the overall motion around Canada's immigration system. The motion we have before us is:

That, having regard for the February 23, 2026 National Post article titled, "Overwhelmed by asylum claims, Ottawa coped by ignoring security protocol," and further to its study on Canada's Immigration System, the committee invite the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada to appear before the committee, for two hours, at the earliest opportunity and no later than Wednesday, March 11, 2026.

I want to say that we're very blessed to have not only the Immigration and Refugee Board here with us today but also the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and the Canada Border Services Agency.

I want to formally welcome our witnesses for today. We have, from the Canada Border Services Agency, Brett Bush, director general, immigration and asylum policy; from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Jason Hollmann, director general, asylum policy, and Tal Elharrar, acting director general, integrity policy and programs; and from the Immigration and Refugee Board, Manon Brassard, chairperson, with Roula Eatrides, deputy chairperson, refugee protection division, and Gary Dukeshire, senior counsel, refugee protection division.

We have a five-minute introductory comment from Madame Brassard.

I would ask you to begin right now. Thank you, Madame Brassard.

[Translation]

Manon Brassard (Chairperson, Immigration and Refugee Board): Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

I will focus my intervention today on the IRB's paper-based decision-making, or file review, process.

Before I start, and in order to situate the process, let me say that every adult making a refugee claim is interviewed by an officer of IRCC or CBSA when they make their claim. This is the first step of the in-Canada asylum system towards refugee status or removal, where CBSA or IRCC decides if a claim is ineligible to be referred to the board due to security, violating human rights or international rights, serious criminality or organized criminality.

[Translation]

CBSA or IRCC questions the claimant, gathers identity and biometric information, and conducts criminal record checks through the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as well as security checks through the CBSA and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Based on the results, IRCC or CBSA decides if the claim is eligible to be referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board and, if it is eligible, whether the minister should intervene on the case.

[English]

Once a claim is referred to the IRB, our role is to decide whether it is well founded. We do not duplicate the work of IRCC or CBSA, but if at any stage of our process we detect something that should be raised to the attention of the minister, we formally notify them.

This takes me to the file review process. The file review process was not a response to the Yeates report, although recommendation 26 did suggest that paper-based decision-making should be considered in as many cases as is feasible.

The board's authority to accept asylum claims without a hearing dates back to 1993, under subsection 69.1(7.1) of the former Immigration Act. It is now found in paragraph 170(f) of IRPA.

How and when we consider triaging a claim for the file process is the other point I'd like to clarify. We start by looking for a notice that the minister intends to intervene in the case. If there is one, the file is screened to a full hearing. Then we confirm that a front-end security screening, the FESS, has been completed. If not, the file won't proceed in any stream until it is.

When we look at files for suitability in the file review process, we look at countries or claim types with an acceptance rate of 80% or higher, based on outcomes of regular hearings; those in which identity is established by reliable documents; those in which the evidence is not ambiguous about the risks faced by claimants; and those in which complex issues do not often arise at the hearing.

There then needs to be claimant-specific evidence—a passport, a birth certificate, membership cards, police reports, medical reports—in support of the claimant's specific allegations. If the requirements are met, we inform the minister of our intention to proceed, and the minister may choose to intervene. If they do, the case will proceed to a hearing. Remember, triaging is an administrative transaction, not a decision. It allows us to use our resources in proportion to the nature and complexity of the case at hand.

• (1105)

[Translation]

When a case is referred to a member for a file review, the member exercises their discretion and, if they believe it's necessary, they can refer the case to a full hearing.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Manon Brassard: In 2025, 11,700 cases were resolved following a file review; that represents roughly 10% to 12% of the 78,000 refugee claims that were resolved.

The file review process is a way to ensure faster processing of refugee claims when no security concerns are raised and the legal requirements have been met. It lets us focus on the majority of claims that are more complex and require a full hearing.

Madam Chair, I'll leave it at that and turn it back to you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much, Madame Brassard.

We will now go to rounds of questions. The first set of questions will be for six minutes each.

We'll begin with Mr. Redekopp.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Madame Brassard, I want to start with you. You said that the file review process was not related to the Auditor General's report in 2019, yet this seems to be when it was initiated. Can you clarify this for me?

Manon Brassard: As I said, the process has existed since 1993. It was called different things, and it had different names, but it has existed for a long time.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. It did not start in 2019. It started in 1993, from what you've said.

Manon Brassard: Yes, in one form or another.

Brad Redekopp: I want to focus on the low-risk part of this. In the Auditor General's report, they suggested that you optimize procedures based on low-risk countries—

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Brad Redekopp:—yet the list of countries published at the time had a lot of countries on it that, to me, are not low-risk countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, Syria, North Korea and these kinds of countries. How do you define “low risk”?

Manon Brassard: Well, I wasn't there when the list you're talking about—

Brad Redekopp: Are you responsible for the department?

Manon Brassard: I am responsible for the board, sir.

I'm really happy to.... Yes, let me go back to the list of countries and claim types.

Brad Redekopp: To repeat the question, it's not necessarily the countries that are there. The countries that I listed, to me, don't sound like low-risk countries, yet you're claiming that they are low-risk countries. Can you clarify that?

Manon Brassard: Well, you mentioned—

Brad Redekopp: North Korea....

Manon Brassard: North Korea does not have—

• (1110)

Brad Redekopp: Iraq, Syria....

Roula Eatrdes (Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Protection Division, Immigration and Refugee Board): I'm sorry. Maybe I'll step in on North Korea.

North Korea has never been a “less complex” country. We take the position that North Koreans can be considered for citizenship in South Korea, so it has never been part of the list.

Brad Redekopp: Can I interrupt? I have the list from 2019. It says “less complex claims”, and North Korea is on the list. Is this wrong? Is the document wrong?

Roula Eatrdes: We've never approved a less complex claim from North Korea. In fact, we have only two claims in our entire inventory on North Korea.

Brad Redekopp: This document from IRB was incorrect, then, is what you're saying.

Manon Brassard: It was potentially an evaluation done at the time. The evaluation may have changed over time.

Brad Redekopp: Is there a current list of countries?

Manon Brassard: We don't look at it from the list perspective. As I mentioned earlier, we look at country and claim types. We look at an acceptance rate of 80% at full hearing as a starting point. There's never a really established list. It's a guide to looking at the kinds of countries we would be considering.

Brad Redekopp: You're looking at less risk, based on what?

Manon Brassard: If the acceptance rate is 80% at the full hearing—

Brad Redekopp: Let me stop you right there: It's the acceptance rate of what—of all people?

Manon Brassard: Of the claimants from that country.

Brad Redekopp: It is country-based, then.

Manon Brassard: Well, we look at the country—

Brad Redekopp: It's either country-based or not country-based. You're telling me both things.

Manon Brassard: It's not only country-based.

Brad Redekopp: You said it's not country-based. Now you've said it's country-based. Which is it?

Manon Brassard: We look at the claims we have. Then we look at the acceptance rates. The easier way to start is country, and then it's claim types. Claim types will vary from each country and within a country. Some claim types have a high acceptance rate, and others are just about never accepted.

Brad Redekopp: What's a “claim type”?

Manon Brassard: A claim type can be, for instance, the religion. Is the group persecuted because they're Christian in the country or because they're apostate? That's a claim type.

Brad Redekopp: All Christians from Afghanistan are a certain category, and those people, as an example, would be automatically approved. Is this what you're saying?

Manon Brassard: Let's take that example. We know from documentary evidence that Christians in certain countries are facing hardship and persecution. This is a starting point to look at it. I stated four or five criteria. We need to go through all of them to decide whether the claim would effectively—

Brad Redekopp: Let's go to a different place. Under the rules of the refugee protection division, rules 26 and 27 require that an asylum hearing must be halted if issues arise relating to fraud, false identities, war crimes, serious criminality and so on. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Yes. We have to, and we do.

Brad Redekopp: Okay.

Manon Brassard: When we see something, we say something. This is why we will stop the hearing and ask the members—

Brad Redekopp: Right. This rule exists so that the Minister of Public Safety or the Minister of Immigration can intervene to protect Canada's national security if something arises during the hearing. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: When it comes up during the hearing, we inform the minister.

Brad Redekopp: Under the file review policy, refugee claims can be accepted without a hearing and without any questioning of the claim. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: That's if the minister does not intervene.

Brad Redekopp: If no hearing takes place and no questions are asked, the notification mechanism for those ministers in rules 26 and 27 cannot be triggered. Is that right?

Manon Brassard: The minister—and my colleagues can testify to this—looks at a claim before it even gets to the IRB or before they refer it to the IRB. If they detect issues around security or if they detect issues around identity, they can tell us, and they do tell us, when they decide to intervene. When that's the case, it doesn't go to the paper process.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Brassard and Mr. Redekopp.

Ms. Sodhi, you have six minutes, please.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you once again to our witnesses for being here today.

My first set of questions will be for the officials from the IRB. Whoever wishes to answer may do so.

First, a recent report made by the C.D. Howe Institute made a number of allegations concerning the file review process at the IRB. How does the IRB respond to the report? Is it accurate?

● (1115)

Manon Brassard: There were a number of allegations or affirmations made in this document. I don't pretend to nail them one by one. There were a large number of them.

One was that the policy didn't work because the backlog increased from 17,000 in 2016 to 300,000. I would say this was not a measure to diminish the backlog. Clearly, there are a limited number of cases we do this way. It is not a means by which you achieve diminution of a backlog.

It's also not a pull factor, by the way. The efforts of my colleagues at CBSA and IRCC have done a lot to reduce the intake. We will have seen it, in the last fiscal year, go from 176,000 to about 100,000 by the time the fiscal year is over in a couple of weeks. This is used to see manifestly founded claims, if I can call them that, and to make sure that the appropriate level of effort is put into each and every claim.

On the issue around security and fraud, again, security is mainly the purview of CBSA. They do a lot of work around that and around fraud as well. When we see something, we don't stream into that process, and we inform the minister. The minister can intervene at any time, and we will pull out of the paper process if they decide to intervene. Before we put it into the file process, we let them know. This is another chance the minister has to intervene prior.

It also talks about the ability of the members to assess the evidence. What this does is create a structure to frame what the legislation allows. The legislation allows the board to look at claims. When they meet all the requirements and there are no security or safety issues mentioned by the minister that mean we can't proceed, this puts a framework around it to make sure it is done appropriately.

I could go on, but I will give you a chance to ask other questions, if you want.

Amandeep Sodhi: Are you able to explain how and when the IRB arrived at the creation of the task force on less complex files?

Manon Brassard: This is what I was trying to say earlier. Since 1993, there have been a number of processes put in place. In 1993, and every time after, when there were changes from time to time, the process was modified. This was done to adjust, for instance, to the change in IRPA to what it is now, under paragraph 170(f).

Amandeep Sodhi: Can you describe what types of cases typically go through the paper review process at IRB?

Manon Brassard: First, I want to reiterate the part done by our colleagues at CBSA and IRCC, which is to screen for security and safety issues.

When we look at them, it's the second part of the asylum system. We make sure that we have what we need on file so a member could conclude that the fear is well founded, not just objectively from country conditions but also from the claimant themselves and the evidence they personally have related to their claim. This is also an important step.

Amandeep Sodhi: Last but not least, are you able to explain what the consequences would be of ending the IRB's file review process entirely?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Manon Brassard: We would lose efficiency. We're an administrative tribunal with high volumes. Like all administrative tribunals, we are usually tasked with high volumes. We are, in our law, also required to move expeditiously, so we would lose the means to do this. To us, it would mean fewer claims heard in a year and probably additional costs for interpreters. For the federal government, I suspect it would mean more costs for legal aid, because lawyers

would have to come in front of us more often to assist their clients. This is another difficulty.

I'm not an expert on programs, but presumably, refugee claimants benefit from some of them, such as the interim health program.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brassard.

[*English*]

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning to all my colleagues.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Brassard, I want you to walk me through the process so that the people watching us understand it clearly.

There's a first step for a refugee claimant, and it's claim eligibility. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: Who handles that?

Manon Brassard: If it's at the port of entry, it's handled by CBSA. If the claim is made in Canada, once the person has arrived here, it's handled by IRCC.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

What is verified at the claim eligibility stage?

Manon Brassard: We look at identity and security issues. The people who handle the claims can tell you more about each aspect of the work they do, but essentially, security checks are done and we verify that the claimant is eligible to claim refugee status. There are provisions covering that. For example, we check if they have previously claimed refugee status, if they have refugee status elsewhere, and whether they can return there. There are a number of criteria like that, in addition to the identity and security criteria.

Alexis Deschênes: That's right. Let's say it's like a coarse-mesh net. It weeds out the claims that clearly appear to be ineligible.

When the claimant passes this stage, is that when their file is sent to IRCC?

Manon Brassard: That's right.

Alexis Deschênes: At that point, how does IRCC decide whether or not to conduct in-person interviews?

Manon Brassard: On the one hand, we will look at whether the case is fully documented.

Actually, the first thing we will look at is whether the minister has indicated that they intend to intervene in the matter. When the people who process the claims go through their steps, they can notify us of the minister's intention to intervene, in which case it goes to a hearing.

Next, we will expect to receive a front-end security screening. This document is produced by CBSA, which conducts checks with other organizations. The people from the agency can tell you more about this and exactly which organizations they go to. So the RCMP, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service or other law enforcement agencies conduct security checks to ensure that people who come here and claim refugee status are eligible to do so. We check to see if they are who they say they are, but also if they have committed any crimes, particularly serious crimes.

Alexis Deschênes: That's right. These checks are done based on the written claim, aren't they?

Manon Brassard: Yes, but it's also based on all the questions that the people processing the claim are entitled to ask. That's why I'm referring you to them to explain their system.

Alexis Deschênes: That's for the first step, which is claim eligibility.

Let's continue. What happens after that?

Manon Brassard: There's now a front-end security screening on file, so we know that those checks have been done and that the individual has passed the test.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

What determines whether or not there will be an in-person hearing?

Manon Brassard: It depends how complex the case is.

First of all, if the minister has indicated that they intend to intervene, there will be an in-person hearing.

Alexis Deschênes: That's right.

In what proportion of cases does that happen, generally speaking, in your opinion?

Manon Brassard: It's 5% to 7%.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

What if the minister doesn't plan to intervene?

Manon Brassard: We will then look at what type of claims they're making. If there are complex legal and factual issues, there will be a hearing. If there are problems in the sense that the documentary evidence is not very well established or is contradictory, or if there are questions about someone's ability to avail themselves of certain protection mechanisms in their country, the case will be referred to a hearing. That's also the case when the claimant lacks proper identification or has no documents to back up their claim beyond the standard general information documents.

So we need a complete file. We do triage. Based on their experience, the member looking at the file may think that something is still missing, and the file can be screened to the regular process, namely the hearing. That's what members do 50% to 60% of the

time: They screen to a hearing. A smaller number of files will remain, and when the member is satisfied, they can proceed.

• (1125)

Alexis Deschênes: I would now ask you to explain to us where the “one-step” system comes in. That was basically the subject of the National Post article that prompted the committee to call you to appear. At what point does that come into play? What I understand is that, if the claimant comes from one of the pre-selected countries, they are automatically exempted from a hearing. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: That's a bit of a non-issue. We have to start somewhere. We look at how well founded the claim is. Of course, there are countries for which documentary evidence is clearer, and we'll start with that. However, it also depends on the claim type. Let's take a country like Haiti, for example. Abused women who have suffered persecution—

Alexis Deschênes: Okay, but I have only 20 seconds left, and I want to make sure I understand.

It says that, in some cases, when claimants come from certain preselected countries with a high acceptance rate, their case is screened to file review without an in-person hearing. Is that true, Ms. Brassard?

Manon Brassard: That's true, but you have to understand why. When—

Alexis Deschênes: So how many people were allowed to pass through without an in-person hearing?

Manon Brassard: It depends what period you're talking about.

Alexis Deschênes: I'm talking about from 2019 to date.

Manon Brassard: About 35,000.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay. So, since 2023, there have been 10,000 more.

Manon Brassard: Yes, roughly.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

Could we have the breakdown by province?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Thank you, Madame Brassard. That is time.

We will now go to our five-minute rounds of questions.

We'll start with Mr. Menegakis.

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

Thank you to all our witnesses for appearing before us today.

Madame Brassard, I'd like to start with you. What is the name of the alleged IRGC official whose identity the IRB hid, as reported on February 6, 2026?

Manon Brassard: I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

Costas Menegakis: I would like to know the name of the IRGC official who appeared before you, as was reported by Global News on February 6, 2026.

Manon Brassard: That does not ring a bell.

Costas Menegakis: A Global News report said, “A suspected high-ranking Iranian official caught living in Canada appeared at his deportation hearing on Thursday [of that week]”. The IRB deemed it necessary not to divulge his name. We'd like to know his name.

Manon Brassard: I don't know his name.

Costas Menegakis: You don't know his name. Your department was there. They were the ones—

Manon Brassard: Yes, but I don't know the name of every single person who makes a claim.

Costas Menegakis: Does this not ring a bell with you?

Manon Brassard: Well, the case does. I don't know the name.

Costas Menegakis: You don't know.

Manon Brassard: The name is confidential.

An hon. member: Why?

Costas Menegakis: Why is the IRB prioritizing the privacy, then, of an alleged member of a terrorist organization over the safety of Iranian Canadians?

Manon Brassard: You mentioned “alleged”.

Costas Menegakis: Then why hide his name?

Manon Brassard: Well, if they hypothetically—

Costas Menegakis: Let me talk facts, not hypotheticals. I represent the region that has probably the highest population of Iranian Canadians living in Canada. That's the Richmond Hill area. There are folks out there who came into the country, who should never have been allowed here in the first place and who are basically terrorizing people in the community. They should not be here. It appears that the IRB has taken a position not to disclose their names.

Does the IRB grant the same level of anonymity to other terrorist organizations, such as ISIS or al Qaeda, or is it specific to the Iranian community?

Manon Brassard: The legislation provides, generally speaking, that when someone makes a refugee claim, the claim is in camera. We have to protect the identity of refugee claimants who appear before us in all hearings. This could be the reason.

Costas Menegakis: Okay, but do you not see the need to protect the community? The community needs to know who the people walking amongst them are.

Manon Brassard: We apply the law, sir, the way it is written right now.

• (1130)

Costas Menegakis: Of the hundreds of thousands of pending asylum claims, how many belong to individuals with alleged ties to the IRGC?

Manon Brassard: I don't have a number to give you right now.

Costas Menegakis: Do we know how many are in the queue for deportation?

Manon Brassard: That would be a question for CBSA.

Costas Menegakis: The CBSA has located 26 who merit deportation hearings.

Maybe I'll ask you, Mr. Bush. How many with ties to the IRGC are in the queue for deportation?

Brett Bush (Director General, Immigration and Asylum Policy, Canada Border Services Agency): I don't have the specific data on me, but I can take that away and try to get the data for you.

Costas Menegakis: Okay.

Could one of you say why there's been only one deportation in the last almost four years?

Brett Bush: I can't. As I said, I don't have the data in front of me. It's hard to answer your question without the specific data on those cases.

Costas Menegakis: I'll go back to you, Ms. Brassard.

Is it acceptable to you to just have one person deported in four years from the list of people who you deem should be deported?

Manon Brassard: I have no comments to make on that.

You'll understand that once we've made our decision, what happens after is out of our hands.

Costas Menegakis: The CBSA found Afshin Pirnoon. This 50-year-old was not allowed in Canada, because he was deemed a political asset, yet the IRB said he did not exert significant influence and allowed him to stay. What is IRB's threshold for significant influence, if a 22-year official in the Iranian regime does not meet it?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Manon Brassard: It depends on the degree of involvement the official has in the decision-making of their government. This is very much framed by the Federal Court. That's what we apply.

Costas Menegakis: Should regime backers promoting and executing IRGC business be allowed to stay in Canada, in your opinion?

Manon Brassard: We apply the legislation as it is, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Madame Brassard.

Next, we have Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to go back to file review, Madame Brassard.

On an annual basis, what percentage of cases that come before the IRB go to file review?

Manon Brassard: I'd say we finalize between 10% and 12% in this way.

Peter Fragiskatos: This mechanism has been in place since 1993, if I understood your introductory comments.

Manon Brassard: In one form or another....

Peter Fragiskatos: I think screening is crucial to all of this. Screening happens. Every case that goes before file review has already been pre-screened by the CBSA and IRCC. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: I don't think they would characterize their work as screening. They look for specific things, and the work has been done. It touches on safety and security.

Peter Fragiskatos: Well, talk more about the process and what happens before file review, ultimately.

Manon Brassard: Maybe I can turn to Brett to talk about their process. They're here. We have the benefit of their presence. We might as well have it from them.

Peter Fragiskatos: Just before you do, Mr. Bush, I think this is important because it helps to establish a context. Failing that context, one would be left with the impression—perhaps strong impression—that any and every individual is simply rubber-stamped.

Manon Brassard: Absolutely not.

I think it is important. It's a building block. We call it the in-Canada asylum system. It starts with CBSA and IRCC, and then it comes to us. If somebody is successful, then it goes to permanent residence, and they don't redo all the work done before. They don't redo the refugee determination division, in the same way that we don't redo their safe security assessment. Then, eventually it goes to citizenship or, in opposition, to removal.

Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Bush, speak to the veracity of the process.

Brett Bush: As the chairperson has mentioned, the process doesn't start at the board. It actually starts overseas when people are applying for visas and electronic travel authorities to come to Canada. This is done by my colleagues, so I won't speak about those processes, although we also do security screening in those cases as well.

Once they arrive, we're validating people's identity, usually through biometric validation, because all the people who receive visas have their biometrics collected before they're issued a visa. Going back to one of the previous questions from your colleagues, at the port of entry, we assess their admissibility. We do interviews, collect data, search databases and do biometric confirmation searches to make sure we know as much as we can, right at the port of entry, about the person.

If they are inadmissible for a reason other than making a refugee claim, then we will do the full collection of their process. Otherwise, they go through a process, which I know you've already had conversations on, called one-touch, at CBSA. They are then funnelled into the processes for collecting their information for their claim. We initiate the security screening. We also introduce processes for evaluating, which are separate from security screening, to determine if we're going to intervene on the case. Once we've determined that, and the security screening is completed, it's then referred to the board.

At this point, I will reference Bill C-12, because I was about to say something erroneous. The intervention piece does not delay processing at the board; the security screening does. However, Bill C-12 will mean that all of those processes are completed before the board can make a decision—once the bill is in place, should it get passed by Parliament.

Once it passes over to the board, the security screening takes into account a variety of things, including partners at Public Safety and CSIS.

● (1135)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, sir. That's very clear.

This is probably more appropriate for Madame Brassard: The IRB retains the ability to raise a concern, should it notice that something may have been missed—and we're very fortunate to have excellent officials at the CBSA, IRCC, CSIS and beyond.

Manon Brassard: It's not just an ability, and yes, we absolutely do.

Peter Fragiskatos: The checks and balances are in place.

Manon Brassard: The checks and balances are there. When we see something that could trigger ineligibility, for instance, or when the presence of the minister would be helpful in the determination of the case, we let them know—just as much as we let them know even before we go to the paper process. They know we're going there, and we give them time to look at it again and—

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Brassard. It's way past time.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. Brassard, what benefit does having an in-person hearing bring to the process?

Manon Brassard: It's useful when credibility is in question or when we'd like to ask the lawyer to answer some legal questions.

Alexis Deschênes: It allows us to test their credibility, among other things.

Manon Brassard: Yes, it makes it possible to put those things to the test.

Alexis Deschênes: Earlier, you said that, since 2019, 35,000 asylum seekers—

Manon Brassard: It's 35,000 to 39,000, and 18% of them were in Quebec.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay. So that's 35,000 asylum seekers since 2019.

When was that number last updated?

Manon Brassard: In December.

Alexis Deschênes: That was December 2025. So 35,000 asylum seekers didn't have a hearing. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: That's right.

Alexis Deschênes: Then you say that 18% of them are in Quebec.

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: If a claimant comes from one of the pre-selected countries under your project for which a hearing is not required, is it still possible to refer the case to a hearing if someone sees something?

Manon Brassard: Absolutely.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

Earlier, you also said that 10% to 12% of the 78,000 claims for refugee status were based on questioning, if I'm not mistaken.

Manon Brassard: That was last year. Those are included in the 35,000 to 39,000 claimants you're talking about.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay. So 10% to 12% of all claims ultimately went to a hearing.

Manon Brassard: No, those are the ones that don't go to a hearing.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay. So 10% to 12% of claimants don't have a hearing.

• (1140)

Manon Brassard: That's correct.

As for the rest, those are cases that went to a hearing, cases where claimants have been summoned to a hearing, but then their claim has been rejected because they didn't show up for their hearing, or, in a small percentage of cases, people simply abandoned their claim or withdrew it.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

Thank you, Ms. Brassard.

[*English*]

Next we have five minutes for Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Brassard, the law under section 166 of the IRPA says that proceedings before your division must be public. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Not for the refugee claimants, it isn't.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Section 166 says that it's any division.

Manon Brassard: I don't have the act with me, but—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I do, and it does.

Here is the next thing: The story my colleague mentioned says, "Before arriving in Canada, the Iranian citizen was a senior member of his government, according to the Canada Border Services Agency, which has asked [your board] to order his expulsion."

Mr. Bush, would your agency have recommended deportation based on those grounds without significant evidence? Would you have told the IRB that this person should be deported because he was a senior member of the Iranian government if you didn't have evidence to that effect? Would you have made this up?

Brett Bush: I will tell you that the process of it all.... The officer—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's just a yes or a no. Would you have evidence?

Brett Bush: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

Ms. Brassard, in what universe would you go against section 166 of your law and withhold this person's identity from the public? Why would you do that?

Gary Dukeshire (Senior Counsel, Refugee Protection Division, Immigration and Refugee Board): Madam Chair, I can specify. Actually, section 166 of the law specifies that all proceedings before the refugee protection division and refugee appeal division are held in the absence of the public, so they are confidential. Any claim before the immigration division—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: This is a deportation hearing though, right?

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I have a point of order.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but there's a point of order.

Go ahead, Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi: I was hoping to hear the full answer from the—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm hoping to use my time.

Gary Dukeshire: Madam Chair, I'll clarify for the immigration division. All proceedings before the immigration division are also held in the absence of the public if they involve a refugee claimant or if the member orders a confidentiality order, so not all—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: All right. Here we are: This person, this member of the Iranian regime, wanted his hearing in private, and you guys granted it. Why? What possible interest would that serve for the public, whose gyms are being shot up by these guys right now? Why would it serve the public's interest?

You're saying that you don't even know who this person is, but now you can't tell us why it would be in the public interest to withhold his identity from reporters.

Manon Brassard: The legislation says that we withhold identity if the person makes a claim to refugee status.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, but why would you protect the identity of a senior Iranian government official in Canada on a deportation order requested by the CBSA? It's crazy.

Manon Brassard: Well, that's your view. The way we—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, I think it's the public's view. I think it's logic. Is it not your view?

Manon Brassard: My view is that we have to apply the legislation as it is.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No. You made a decision to hold this in private. Why?

Manon Brassard: It was the member's decision to look at the evidence.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You said you didn't even know who this guy was.

Manon Brassard: I don't need to know—

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

The Chair: Go ahead on a point of order, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: Again, we're trying to hear the answer, but we cannot.

The Chair: Let's give time for Ms. Brassard to give her response, please.

Manon Brassard: Thank you.

When the department comes and asks for somebody to—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay, I've heard enough. It's my time.

The Chair: Ms. Rempel Garner—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, it's my time.

The next thing I would like to ask is this: Ms. Brassard, would a former director under Iran's ministry of roads and urban development, who was a 22-year civil servant with ties to the Iranian regime and described as a political asset of the regime, be considered a senior official under the law and ordered to be deported?

Manon Brassard: It depends on the nature of the evidence adduced during the hearing—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you think they should be considered a senior official?

Manon Brassard: It depends on the nature of the evidence.

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Mr. Bush, would it be easier for your department to deport Iranian officials, people with ties to the regime, if the law was changed to clarify that non-citizens with ties to the regime would be deemed inadmissible if involved in regime-linked businesses, spreading propaganda or human rights abuses?

I'm thinking of such cases as the guy who was the head of the Iranian state-funded newspaper, a deputy political leader of the Friday imams policy-making council and the supreme leader's head of office in the U.A.E. He has not been deported.

Would changing the law make the job a little easier there?

• (1145)

Brett Bush: I'll leave the questions of changing the law to Parliament, but in terms—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm trying to make a suggestion to change the law, because it seems crazy to me that I'm arguing with the head of the IRB about whether we should be protecting the identity of a senior Iranian official when members of the Iranian diaspora communities are having their businesses shot up in Canada.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Thank you, Mr. Bush.

Next we go to Mr. Zuberi for five minutes.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

[*English*]

I'd like to slow down a moment, because I know there's been a bit of a charged environment in this committee.

I would like to talk about the rule of law—the IRB and its role in implementing the rule of law.

Specifically, you talked earlier about the legislation guiding you. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Sameer Zuberi: You explained how the legislation requires a certain mode of functioning with respect to claimants and how the process happens, and that means it is in camera on occasion. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Refugee claims are always in camera.

Sameer Zuberi: What exactly does “in camera” mean, for the layperson?

Manon Brassard: It's in private. It means that the hearing is not public. When we issue the decision, the names are not going to be public.

Sameer Zuberi: It's the law.

Manon Brassard: It's the law.

Sameer Zuberi: Your organization must respect the law.

Manon Brassard: Of course. We're a tribunal.

Sameer Zuberi: Let's continue with the concepts in law for the non-lawyers watching.

A claim has to be proven, an allegation has to be proven normally when it's levelled, in law. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Of course, and....

Sameer Zuberi: Let's say that somebody is making an asylum claim, and the government believes they are an unsavoury character. The claimant has to prove that they are a legitimate asylum seeker.

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Sameer Zuberi: If they do not prove they're a legitimate asylum seeker, they are deported.

Manon Brassard: Well, we come to the conclusion that they do not have a well-founded fear of persecution, and whatever removal order they have can be executed.

Sameer Zuberi: This means they'll get a removal order from IRB.

Manon Brassard: It is there; it's just suspended. Once we're done, it comes back into effect.

Sameer Zuberi: I'm trying to contextualize the charged conversation we were just having. The point I'm making is that a claimant has to prove their case. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Absolutely.

Sameer Zuberi: Let's say the government believes the claimant's claim is complete BS, and in fact, they are a threat or an unsavoury character. Does the government have to prove its claim, or can it throw the claim out there without proving it?

Manon Brassard: It has to come with sufficient evidence to establish that the claimant is actually not credible or is lying, and then it's put to the claimant. If the claimant can't establish their claim, the decision will not be favourable.

Sameer Zuberi: It's not enough to cast shade and say that person X is unsavoury. The government has to prove it.

Manon Brassard: It's like any other case. A party alleging something needs to prove it.

Sameer Zuberi: That's my understanding. I just want to make it plain for all watching and for this committee, so we can all understand as members that those are the facts and the way the law works in this country.

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Sameer Zuberi: I want to switch gears and talk about the differential between European rates of claim acceptance and Canadian rates of claim acceptance.

You have about a minute and a half. Can you explain the differential for the ordinary watcher?

Manon Brassard: The systems are often very different. Where they have a two-step process—a first process gives you a certain acceptance rate and the second level gives another acceptance rate—it's often difficult to know which is which or even to know what the total is.

Also, in Europe there are different degrees of protection. In Canada we have one. You are a convention refugee—or a protected person—or you're not. There's one protection. In European countries there are often different types of protection, temporary types of protection. You get three years or five years and then your case needs to be reviewed.

If you compare apples with apples, with the permanent protection we afford them, the difference will often be very significant.

• (1150)

Sameer Zuberi: It's the same. There would not be as stark a differential as what we are hearing about.

Manon Brassard: You need to compare apples with apples.

Sameer Zuberi: I understand. You're saying these are apples and oranges. When you compare apples and apples, the differential would be much less. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Most likely.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi. Thank you, Madame Brassard.

Next, we'll start our third round, so five minutes.

We'll start off with Mr. Davies for five minutes.

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

Mr. Bush, I'm told that up to 50% of the detention capacity at CBSA has been reduced recently. Is this true?

Brett Bush: I can't tell you the exact percentage of what the reduction is, but when provinces decided not to allow CBSA to utilize provincial facilities for holding immigration detainees, yes, we lost capacity. We also added some capacity for higher-risk detainees in a federal corrections facility in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines.

Fred Davies: I'm told an internal memo confirmed that 50% of the current capacity CBSA had for detention was reduced. Are there plans to rectify this?

Brett Bush: There's always work in trying to ensure that we have the correct capacity to detain who we need to detain.

Fred Davies: Would you undertake to table with this committee the locations and the data on capacity reductions that took place over the last year?

Brett Bush: Sure.

Fred Davies: Thank you.

Are there people who were detained, who had been on a deportation order but who were released back into the community before deportation?

Brett Bush: To go back to the process that exists for detention reviews, they're legislatively entitled to detention reviews after 48 hours, seven days and every 30 days thereafter. While I don't have the data in front of me as to the numbers, most people we're detaining are, generally speaking, for removal. I would have to believe that some people are released after we detain them the first time.

Fred Davies: To be clear, you are confirming that people who have been detained for deportation have, prior to deportation, been released back into the community.

Brett Bush: What I believe I said, Madam Chair, is that I believe this is probably true, but I don't have the data in front of me to confirm that for you.

Fred Davies: I would again ask for an undertaking from you to provide the committee with some data on the number of people who had been in detention, awaiting deportation, who were released back into the community prior to deportation.

I'd also like to follow up and ask you, do you have any data on people who had been released and were then actually deported? Otherwise, are they still at large, effectively hiding in Canada?

Brett Bush: I don't have the data on that series of questions with me today, so yes, we can undertake to get that for you.

Fred Davies: It's really important because, with the pressures on the citizenship file across the board in Canada, we are seeing a need for increased capacity, not decreased capacity.

Do you have any data on changes to holding or detention capacity at border crossings in Canada? Has this changed in the last year? That's fully within your jurisdiction. Were any detention capacities reduced at border crossings in Canada?

Brett Bush: To clarify, the question is this: Have we changed our ability at any of our border crossings to detain people while they're crossing the border?

Fred Davies: Have there been any changes to detention capacity? Let's say, for example, at the Peace Bridge, has the capacity decreased in the last year?

Brett Bush: I will simply say no, not that I'm aware of, but I'd have to take that back to confirm.

• (1155)

Fred Davies: I want to go in a different direction. The minister touted last week that the first cohort of graduates, of the new 1,000 CBSA officers, had taken place. First of all, do you know whether there were actually 1,000 people who graduated in the first cohort?

Brett Bush: I don't know the number of the cohort that graduated last week. I apologize.

Fred Davies: Would you know what the capacity is for training new CBSA officers at any given time? I would suggest it's much less than 1,000.

Brett Bush: I think that is true, but I'd have to take that away. To answer your question, I'd have to get that for you.

Fred Davies: I would appreciate it.

Within the confines of this recent graduation, would it be unfair to suggest that this cohort is simply filling gaps in the system that come up on a normal basis, year-over-year?

Brett Bush: Since I don't know the number, I can't answer the question, because the....

Fred Davies: Do you know what your turnover is every year, in pure numbers, at the CBSA?

Brett Bush: Do I know? No, I don't.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Mr. Bush.

Next we go to Ms. Sodhi for five minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to go back to our officials from the IRB. Whoever wishes to answer may do so. Are you able to provide a specific example of a case that has gone through the file review system you implemented?

Manon Brassard: I can give you claim types and examples, not a specific.... That is, of course, confidential.

When we look at China, for instance, if there was a case there, we would be looking for what kind of case it would give us. Christians, Tibetans and Uyghurs are people we could look at for types of claims to see if the evidence is there—if there is a minister's decision to intervene. If there's not, if there's a FESS and if the FESS detects anything suspicious, it would indicate that we should not go to that process.

Then we would look for the global evidence on the situation of those groups. We would also be seeking claimant-specific information to show and assure us that they are Tibetans, Christians or Uyghurs and that they have suffered and have reasons to fear persecution. There are police reports and doctors' reports from there and from here to bolster the case and make sure that it clears all the questions one might have.

If we find something wrong, we send it to the full hearing.

Amandeep Sodhi: Okay, perfect. Thank you so much.

I want to shift to the members from IRCC today as well.

Could you walk us through the basic steps of an asylum claim from arrival in Canada to a final decision?

Jason Hollmann (Director General, Asylum Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Sure.

Some of it was already alluded to, but I'll try to go in sequential order.

Somebody who is making an asylum claim can do so either at the border, when they arrive, or after they've been in Canada for some time. If they make the claim at the border, they would make it to a CBSA officer. If they make it in Canada because they may have been here already, they would apply online and then be directed to an IRCC office to finish the intake process.

We use the initial intake process to confirm somebody's identity, collect biometrics from the individual, seize travel documents and determine eligibility. As I think was mentioned before, there are multiple criteria for ineligibility, including having filed a refugee claim before and security concerns.

Once the steps are completed, the person is given a conditional removal order. This was already mentioned too. If the person doesn't really have an authorization to be here but they have filed a claim, the removal order is stayed while their claim is going through the process. They would then receive a confirmation document that indicates they are a refugee claimant, so an identity document.

Depending on the process, the claims are referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board, but security screening is conducted on 100% of the claimants. While the claim is pending, we also review those claims and triage them to find indicators either of additional security concerns or of credibility and integrity issues. This is when you hear the reference to interventions.

The intervention is basically the minister—so, staff—providing the evidence that we may have access to of those integrity or credibility questions from an IRCC perspective. This could mean they have multiple undisclosed identities; it could be something like having permanent residence or protection in another country, or it could be something we have seen in their claim information that contradicts other information in their immigration documentation. When we have concerns, we will either prepare a written intervention or prepare to go before an oral hearing to provide the information so that the decision-maker at the IRB can take this into account as the claim is being decided.

Once the claim goes through the IRB decision-making process—

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hollmann. Sorry, that is time.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Brassard, what is the current processing time for asylum claims in Canada?

Manon Brassard: For a case on which a decision is being rendered now, it's about 24 months, including 17 months at the IRB. The rest is what happens before the case gets to the IRB.

Alexis Deschênes: You're talking about the eligibility and security screening stage.

Manon Brassard: Yes, it's the eligibility and front-end security screening stage.

Alexis Deschênes: What are the processing times for Quebec in particular?

Manon Brassard: They're about the same.

[*English*]

There's no difference between Quebec and the rest, is there, Ms. Eatrídes?

Roula Eatrídes: Maybe a slight one....

[*Translation*]

Manon Brassard: There's not much difference, if any.

Alexis Deschênes: So is it 24 or 25 months? Do we have more accurate numbers?

Manon Brassard: It's maybe 23 or 24 months. We can give you figures, but they're in the same ballpark.

At the same time, we manage our workload nationally. Therefore, if a case can be heard by a member elsewhere, we will send it there. So it doesn't necessarily delay the process.

Alexis Deschênes: Okay.

I understand that every country is different, and each has its own immigration system too. However, we see that some European countries manage to process claims and render a decision in under six months.

What do we need to do to meet that target in Canada as well?

Manon Brassard: First, I would say that we have to look at how they arrive at that six-month deadline. Some countries will use a method called stop the clock, meaning that they don't count the periods where they're waiting for something. So I would say that although numbers like that seems to be quite impressive, we should perhaps take them with a grain of salt.

It's also a matter of the workload. You have to take into account the number of cases they have to deal with each year, as well as the resources and number of members they devote to them. That counts as well.

Alexis Deschênes: What it comes down to, really, is this: What would you need to do to shorten processing times here?

Manon Brassard: We continue to put a lot of effort into everything related to preparing the file. It's not the three-hour hearing that's long, but everything that has to happen before that. Under Bill C-12, we'll have a departmental due diligence process and a complete file. Right now, we have to wait, look for information and, above all, remind people that we're missing things, which takes up a lot of time and energy.

In addition, we receive files in all kinds of formats, whether by fax, on paper or by email, and we're in the process of putting in place a much more robust electronic transmission system to make our approach more systematic.

We did a review of all our processes—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Brassard.

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Next, we have Mr. Ho for five minutes.

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

My first set of questions are for the officials at the CBSA. The Globe and Mail, on March 6, reported that the CBSA was investigating 95 cases involving possible high-ranking Iranian regime officials.

Can you confirm this figure?

• (1205)

Brett Bush: I can confirm that we're investigating cases. I don't know the number offhand. I apologize, because I'm from our policy area and not from our operational area. I was here to talk about—

Vincent Ho: No worries.

Is the CBSA aware that there are senior-ranking Iranian regime officials living in Canada? There are a number of them.

Brett Bush: We are aware.

Vincent Ho: The CBSA reportedly concluded that 28 individuals were deemed inadmissible after the government announced, back in November 2022, that senior Iranian officials should be barred from Canada.

Is that correct?

Brett Bush: Again, I can't confirm the number for you today, but there are a number of cases that we have—

Vincent Ho: Okay.

We'll go to what your agency said to The Globe and Mail. Despite identifying 28 individuals who were deemed inadmissible, only one person has been removed from Canada since 2022.

Is that correct?

Brett Bush: Again, I don't have the number in front of me.

Vincent Ho: Assuming those numbers are correct, because the numbers were provided by the CBSA to the Globe and Mail, why is the enforcement rate so low?

Brett Bush: We have to keep in mind that the whole system is predicated on due process. We start with an allegation and then we write a report. It's reviewed by a senior officer to decide if there's enough evidence to refer it to the board for a determination of admissibility. It would then go to the board to be scheduled for a hearing.

I can't speak to the processes at the board. My colleagues can. If it is decided that individuals are inadmissible, then, of course, different review mechanisms exist for people. Once those are all taken care of, we would remove them from Canada.

Vincent Ho: What exactly is preventing the CBSA from removing individuals who have already gone through the IRB due process that exists and have already been ordered deported?

Brett Bush: If they've been ordered deported, you get into the mechanisms of having to be able to remove them. I can tell you that one of the big problems today, on today's date, is access to flights into Iran.

Vincent Ho: Given the escalating instability in the Middle East and the regime's global activities, is your agency concerned at all that these regime officials may attempt to seek safe haven in Canada?

Brett Bush: I think we have to take a step back and look at what mechanisms have been put in place. Global Affairs has mechanisms to sanction Iranian officials. The government has also put in place two measures under our minister's authority. There's the listing in the Criminal Code of the IRGC as a terrorist organization and then there is the designation of the regime, which your colleagues asked about previously.

All of those mechanisms exist, so when—

Vincent Ho: Are you satisfied with those measures? You listed a lot of measures. Are they rigorous enough, in your view?

Brett Bush: If you're asking for my personal opinion, that doesn't really matter for the purposes of this conversation, but a number of mechanisms exist, including—

Vincent Ho: You see a lot of this stuff. You would have an opinion. We're asking you because you see a lot of the stuff on the ground. We're asking you. Do you think there are measures that could be updated?

Brett Bush: If you're asking me whether I personally believe the—

The Chair: You have one minute.

Brett Bush: —the admissibility regime is intact to find people inadmissible to come to the country, yes I do.

Vincent Ho: You don't think any laws need to be updated.

Brett Bush: I didn't say that. You're asking me about the Iranian situation and senior officials.

Vincent Ho: If the laws were updated, would it make your job easier? Would removals be quicker, in your view, if we were to change the laws?

Brett Bush: The hypothetical would depend on what changes you are looking to make.

Vincent Ho: There could be some changes to speed up removals.

Lastly, I'm going to ask this question: Has Iran's deputy interior minister, who was found in Canada—Seyed Salman Samani—been removed yet?

• (1210)

Brett Bush: I honestly don't know.

Vincent Ho: He was ordered deported a couple of years back, and he's a pretty high profile figure. It's all over the news. Has he been deported?

Brett Bush: I think I just answered that question, Madam Chair. I don't know.

Vincent Ho: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bush.

Thank you, Mr. Ho. That's your five minutes.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bush, I'll continue with you, sir.

You just said, and I'm quoting you directly, Canada's "admissibility regime is intact". You have confidence in this. Can you expand on it?

Brett Bush: Asking me for my personal opinion is one thing...versus where the government sits.

Peter Fragiskatos: It's not a question that is seeking your opinion.

Brett Bush: With regard to the admissibility regime, there are provisions to find people who are involved in terrorism inadmissible. There are provisions to find people involved in espionage inadmissible. There are provisions for people being involved in human rights abuses, criminality, organized crime and the full gamut of inadmissibilities.

The provisions exist to be able to.... The question I believe your colleague asked was with regard to whether they will keep people and the senior officials of the Iranian regime from coming into Canada. Among all of those things, including the designation of the Iranian regime, which includes the top 50% of those officials, they will keep the decision-makers and the organizers of the regime from coming to Canada.

We also need to keep in mind that there will be challenges, as of this past week, in travelling out of the region and being able to make that move in the first place.

Peter Fragiskatos: I understand. Thank you very much, Mr. Bush.

Madame Brassard, in the exchange you had with my colleague Mr. Zuberi, this was not said directly, but it struck me as an important point. The individual before the IRB who's making a claim...the onus is on them to show that they are a legitimate refugee. Is that correct?

Manon Brassard: Absolutely. The onus of proof is on the claimant to establish their claim and all aspects of the definition of a convention refugee or a person in need of protection.

Peter Fragiskatos: These are basic facts, I understand, but with so much being said and so much being implied, it's important to clarify where the onus lies.

Manon Brassard: Absolutely.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you for that.

Let's go back to the file review, because there's been so much said and implied. You were asked about the C.D. Howe report, and you spoke to that. I want to look at other countries for a moment. Are there other countries employing a similar process that you're aware of or that colleagues of yours would be aware of?

Manon Brassard: Different countries use different processes, as I said, such as tier one and tier two decision-making and stuff. Australia has a paper process. It's for what I call "manifestly founded" claims in which a hearing wouldn't add anything to what's already in the file. Therefore, it does exist elsewhere. It uses a level of effort proportional to the need of the claim or the file so that we put in the appropriate level of resources and energy. This is generally done in administrative tribunals and elsewhere.

Peter Fragiskatos: Australia uses an approach like that, and it is a Commonwealth partner. There are presumably other countries, but we don't have to go into the specifics.

Manon Brassard: There's presumably one way or another of simplifying the process, particularly for very obvious claims. The U.K. may have something similar, but it's not necessarily exactly the way we do it, because every system is somewhat different.

Peter Fragiskatos: I think I have just a few seconds remaining.

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Peter Fragiskatos: For the purpose of the record, 90% of cases that come before the IRB are given a hearing, and 10% go to file review.

Manon Brassard: It's about 88% and 12%, but yes, it's either a full or an abandonment hearing, or they withdraw.

• (1215)

Peter Fragiskatos: Once again, all cases that go before a file review have already been looked at by the CBSA and IRCC.

Manon Brassard: Yes, and they have been given a repeat chance to intervene. When we think a file is suitable for the process, we formally advise in each and every single case so that if they have since found something, they can intervene.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos and Madame Brassard.

We are now into our last round of questioning.

Mr. Redekopp, we have you up for five minutes.

Brad Redekopp: My first question is for Mr. Bush and CBSA. We were talking about Seyed Salman Samani. You indicated previously to my colleague that you don't know if he's been deported. I think it's a very relevant question that a lot of Canadians and this committee are wondering about. I wonder if you can find an answer to the question and table it with this committee by the end of the week. It should be a fairly easy thing to find out. Is this something you can do?

Brett Bush: I can take it back to the agency and have my colleagues who are responsible for this provide a response.

Brad Redekopp: If you can provide it by the end of the week, that would be great. Thank you.

I want to go back to Madame Brassard on the list of countries, because I'm a little confused. I was looking at this list. You said there was no list, but then you told my colleague Mr. Deschênes that there is a list. Is there a list of countries that you use in the file review process?

Manon Brassard: We work with 220 countries. People come from all around the world. We have developed expertise at the IRB over the years, and we know which kinds of claims will likely have a serious—

Brad Redekopp: I'm going to interrupt you, because I have very limited time.

Specifically, on the list, are you saying your list has 220 countries on it? Is that what you're telling me?

Manon Brassard: I think what you're trying to look at is that there is a list, and if you're not on the list, you're out. We're looking for—

Brad Redekopp: It's like this one right here.

Manon Brassard: That's an old list that existed then.

Brad Redekopp: Is there an equivalent to this list today?

Manon Brassard: We look at the claims, and we know which countries have the 80% acceptance rate. That's the starting point.

Brad Redekopp: Let's pause right there.

There is a list, then. Is that the answer?

Manon Brassard: It's not necessarily a stable.... We're live to the issue. If a country stops being 80%, it will drop. We don't have a list that we keep updating. We know what we have by way of our caseload and what's coming out in the decision-making of the full hearing.

Brad Redekopp: I'm still very confused.

If I were working at your board, there would be some list that says today we're concerned about—pick a country—China. Tomorrow, it may change.

That's a list. Is it not? How does a person know which countries are subject to file review? Is there a procedure?

Manon Brassard: Do you want us to explain the procedure?

Brad Redekopp: I don't need the procedure explained. I am just wondering if there is a procedure.

Roula Eatrudes: Yes, there is a procedure. Files come in and we look at—

Brad Redekopp: Stop right there.

This sheet I have—which, I admit, is from 2019—says, “Instructions governing the streaming of less complex claims at the Refugee Protection Division”. It talks about where we get this list. I assume there's more to this document.

Is there a current document like this one?

Roula Eatrudes: No, we don't publish anything like that anymore.

Brad Redekopp: I'm not saying it's published. Does IRB have such a document for internal purposes?

Manon Brassard: If I'm able to tell you the claim types for certain countries, it's because we keep track of what we're doing.

In terms of a list or the way you see it there, we've moved on from this kind of approach.

Brad Redekopp: Let me ask you this differently, then.

Would Iran currently be considered as something under file review right now?

Manon Brassard: It has been.

Brad Redekopp: You have a claim type for Iran that would be dealt with there.

Mr. Hollmann, I'm going to ask you this question.

Do you have concerns about document accuracy, or fake documents in general?

Jason Hollmann: Part of the integrity process across all three organizations looks at the types of information people provide, including the documents they provide to support their claims.

Brad Redekopp: Do you find fake documents? Does that occur?

Jason Hollmann: I imagine that, across the system, yes, we are finding them.

Brad Redekopp: Madame Brassard, if you take a claim from, say, Iran, as an example, it might fit into “women at risk”. You would have documents from her.

How do you know those documents are correct? How do you know it's not an IRGC official trying to get his family to Canada?

• (1220)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Manon Brassard: This is why we wait for the front-end security screenings. If there's an issue there, we will know.

We also have a research directorate with sample copies of what a legitimate document should be. There are comparisons.

If we have any doubts, we don't send anything to the paper process.

Brad Redekopp: Are you confident that you have a robust way of detecting fraudulent documents?

Manon Brassard: We have a pretty solid way of finding them. It's a system issue. It's not just the board. They are just as concerned about it as we are, if not more.

I'm sorry, Chair. I get the message.

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Brassard.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Next, we'll go, for five minutes, to Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Brassard, I'd like to give you some time to elaborate on points that have been raised here in committee.

[*English*]

If you want to add or share anything, or clarify points, I'd like to give you the time.

Manon Brassard: Thank you.

Briefly, I would say that the system is a system as a whole. It starts with CBSA and IRCC, then continues with us. We are all very concerned about security issues and integrity issues, and we take these things seriously. That's why there are so many processes. It's why we look at each case so carefully.

Sameer Zuberi: Can you elaborate a bit on the process? You touched upon this already.

The question is also for Mr. Bush.

What is the process before a file gets to the IRB? You mentioned the security screening aspects. Do you want to elaborate further on those?

Brett Bush: Thank you.

As I mentioned, this starts at intake with the application and the information we collect in trying to identify admissibility concerns beyond the person not being compliant with having a visa to immigrate.

We then move into security processes involving both CBSA and CSIS to identify whether the person is a security risk. That is using all the assets we have available to us to collect; I'm not going to discuss them in detail in a public hearing. Then, for the people—which happen to be less than 1%—for whom we find security and admissibility security concerns.... I say that very specifically, because there are two pieces of legislation in play. There's the CSIS legislation, which deals with threat, and then there's the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which deals with admissibility.

Then we get into the processes around the interventions and being able to intervene at the IRB with representatives from CBSA to articulate why the person should not get protection, because one of the foundations of the UN convention is that people involved in.... I don't have the convention in front of me, so I'm not going to quote it correctly, but I think it's crimes against good order in the world or—

Manon Brassard: It's war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Brett Bush: Yes. It's war crimes, crimes against humanity and terrorism. This is how Canada defines it for the purposes of—going back to one of the earlier questions around ineligibility—keeping them from having a claim assessed at the board and using the exclusionary criteria. We argue this before the board, and the board makes a decision.

Sameer Zuberi: Picking up on this issue of screening before getting to a certain point, in previous meetings there was a conversation around one-touch.

Could you speak a bit about the process that happens before one-touch is actually happening?

We have about a minute and 45 seconds.

Brett Bush: I tried to explain it earlier.

People get interested in one-touch because they feel—

Sameer Zuberi: It's catchy.

Brett Bush: It's a catchy title, but essentially it was created by our officers in Lacolle to help them deal with the situation there.

They are having the person fill out a form to capture all the questions around all the various inadmissibilities that would have an impact on their access to the board. Then we have an interview with them to question them. This has now been nationalized, so we end up in a space in which we're trying to determine if they can go down the one-touch path.

In terms of process, about 70% of all the applicants are processed using one-touch. About 15% are found ineligible, so we complete the full process on those people—

• (1225)

Sameer Zuberi: Just before the one-touch, what's happening?

Brett Bush: The title of the process, I think, creates the illusion that there's something different going on. The only real difference is that instead of having an officer—who is being paid a significant

amount of money—sitting down and collecting all the details of their entire refugee claim, we are staying focused on the national security and admissibility issues at the port of entry.

Then, when it moves over, they'll fill out their application. It will go into the portal that IRCC administers. All the security screening and reviews I described previously will take place before the board has it, and we will decide whether we wish to intervene.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bush.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Right now, Ms. Brassard, what percentage of all asylum claims made in Canada come from Quebec?

Manon Brassard: It's 37%.

Alexis Deschênes: When was that number determined?

Manon Brassard: On December 31.

Alexis Deschênes: Ms. Brassard, you gave me a lot of statistics today, and I thank you for them, but I would ask you for a response in writing, to make sure I have correctly taken note of them.

First of all, I'd ask you to please send the number of asylum claims accepted without a hearing since 2019.

Manon Brassard: In Quebec or across the country?

Alexis Deschênes: I'd like to have the number for all of Canada first, and then the breakdown by province.

Next, I'd like to know the processing times for refugee claims, for each province, from 2015 to date.

Lastly, I'd ask you to please send us the percentage of asylum claims that came from Quebec, from 2015 to 2025.

Manon Brassard: As regards applications from the Quebec region, it is important to understand that this is based on the address provided to us. This does not mean that the applicants are still there.

Alexis Deschênes: Yes, that's subject to all reservations. I understand that they can submit their application and then change their address. I understand that there are limits to what a number can tell us, but it's better than nothing.

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Alexis Deschênes: My next question will be for Mr. Hollmann.

Why is there no distribution of asylum seekers across the provinces? For example, why does Quebec receive 37% of asylum seekers, when it accounts for only 21% or 22% of the Canadian population?

Jason Hollmann: Asylum seekers have the right to live wherever they wish. That is a right guaranteed by the charter.

There have been discussions to see if asylum seekers could be distributed a little more evenly. I believe these discussions have taken place between the minister and the deputy ministers in recent years.

Alexis Deschênes: They haven't yielded any results.

Jason Hollmann: So far, this has resulted in agreements with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia; they have each accepted a few hundred asylum seekers.

Alexis Deschênes: You say that asylum seekers have the right to mobility. To your knowledge, has this issue been tested in the courts?

Jason Hollmann: There have been internal legal reviews, but I do not know if it has been tested in court.

Alexis Deschênes: Would you like to add anything, Ms. Brassard?

Manon Brassard: I would say that the recent Supreme Court ruling on claimants' rights regarding child care centres might give you some idea.

• (1230)

Alexis Deschênes: In that case, it was more a matter of the right to equal access.

Manon Brassard: Yes, but it is linked to mobility, in a way.

Alexis Deschênes: Right.

As you can understand, the demand coming from Quebec is being repeated because, of course, there are a significant number of asylum seekers on the Quebec territory.

To your knowledge, are there still discussions under way to see how asylum seekers could be distributed more effectively, in a fairer manner?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

I'm sorry. I allowed you to go way past your time. It's because you're so charming and your questions are excellent.

[Translation]

Perhaps your question can be answered during your next turn.

[English]

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to give verbal notice of the following motion:

That, further to the testimony from the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) on March 9, 2026 related to the presence of agents of the Iranian Regime and agents of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Canada, and further to the committee's study on Canada's immigration system, and further to the imminent danger that the presence of IRGC officials and regime agents in Canada may pose to Canadian public safety, the committee report the following to the House:

1. Government officials have admitted the known presence of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) officials and regime agents residing in Canada;

2. There are gaps in legislation and procedures that may allow IRGC officials to avoid detection prior to arrival and deportation after;

3. The Government should exercise the full force of the existing law regarding the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist entity, specifically by expediting the execution of deportation orders of regime officials who are non-citizens under the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act;

4. The Government should immediately undertake a comprehensive review of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act with an eye to modernize it to prevent regime officials from avoiding deportation by:

a. Clearly ensuring non-citizens are deemed inadmissible if involved in regime-linked businesses, spreading propaganda, or human rights abuses;

b. Extend inadmissibility to immediate non-citizen family members of regime officials; and

c. Create an exemption from non-refoulement protections for inadmissible non-citizen regime officials proven to be complicit in human rights abuses.

5. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) should immediately release the name of the alleged non-citizen regime official referred to in the February 6, 2026, Global News report entitled "Latest alleged Iranian regime official found in Canada wants his identity hidden" and forthwith provide a written explanation of why the IRB banned reporters from publishing his name to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration;

6. The Government should, within 30 calendar days following the tabling of this report, table a report to Parliament explaining why it has not made public the identities of known non-citizens who are Iranian regime officials or agents who are currently present in Canada; and

7. It is imperative that the Government stop approving refugee claims from nations with regimes hostile to Canada without an in person interview being conducted first.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis. Can I ask if you are moving that or just putting it on notice?

Costas Menegakis: I'm putting the motion I just read on verbal notice.

I assume I have a little bit of time left.

The Chair: Yes. You have one minute and 52 seconds.

Costas Menegakis: That's wonderful.

My question is for you, Mr. Bush. CBSA's internal target in the last year for removals of high-priority foreign officials, including those who are inadmissible due to war crimes and security threats, was 80%. Why is it the CBSA's position that it's acceptable to allow potentially 20% of people who are security threats or who have committed war crimes to stay in Canada?

Brett Bush: The performance measures are performance measures to evaluate the efficiency of the program in question—in this case, removals. A lot of factors go into being able to remove someone from Canada. Obviously, we want to remove as many of those people as we can. Our top priority is to remove people who are inadmissible on serious grounds. The statistic I was given is that we removed over 1,000 people who were inadmissible in 2025, who fit into those categories—

• (1235)

Costas Menegakis: On your website, it says your target is 80%. This means you're okay with 20%. Is that fair?

Brett Bush: No, I don't think it's fair, because performance measurement is different from our objective. Our objective will be to remove as many of them as we can, but the reality is, not everybody is removable all at the same time.

Costas Menegakis: You had only one deportation since 2022, I believe—one—and your target is 80%.

Let me ask this: How many CBSA executives—

The Chair: Mr. Menegakis, that's time. You still have another round.

Mr. Bush, thank you very much.

Ms. Sodhi, you have five minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for the officials from IRCC.

My office has recently been overloaded with emails regarding the interim federal health program, through which asylum claimants can access health coverage while their claims are being processed.

Could you explain what this program covers and why it exists?

Jason Hollmann: The interim federal health program provides limited and temporary health care coverage for refugees and asylum seekers to help address any urgent and essential medical needs while they wait to become eligible for provincial or territorial health insurance, should they become protected persons. They receive this interim federal health care for the duration of their refugee determination process. Those who are unsuccessful will be removed. Their coverage ends once the removal orders have been enforced and they have left Canada.

The important part is that people are given access to benefits in a similar way to low-income residents. The coverage is for basic health care services, such as hospital care, physician care and laboratory services. They also receive some limited supplemental coverage on par with that offered to social assistance recipients in the provinces and territories. It's designed to ensure that we address the health care needs of this population for the time they are in Canada.

Amandeep Sodhi: How do the adjustments under this plan help ensure that IFHP remains sustainable while protecting essential health care for asylum seekers?

Jason Hollmann: The recent changes were to add a co-payment fee of four dollars for each prescription and 30% of the cost of supplemental coverage. This is designed to help address the financial sustainability of the program.

Amandeep Sodhi: Overall, what steps are being taken by IRCC to improve communication with the public about how Canada's asylum system works and what its safeguards are?

Jason Hollmann: We communicate fairly regularly, both about the system and how it works. We do this with information on our website. We also engage with frontline stakeholders, ensuring that they have information, especially when any changes are made to the system, so we can ensure that their engagements with those refugee claimants provide accurate information.

As we look to any changes, we also continue to update our website and push information out, both to claimants—giving them handouts and information—and to those organizations working with them.

Amandeep Sodhi: How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute and 50 seconds.

Amandeep Sodhi: Really quickly, are you able to inform the committee on how IRCC is working with CBSA, IRB and other public safety partners to improve the security screening process while also managing and meeting targets in the immigration levels plan?

If anyone from the IRB or the CBSA would like to jump in to answer this question, please do so.

Jason Hollmann: I would defer to CBSA on the security screening process, but you're right. All of these things are well coordinated among all three departments as we look at the asylum system. As was commented before, it is a very integrated system, with information and cases flowing among the organizations. We are continually looking for ways to streamline.

There are a number of measures under Bill C-12 that are still pending in the Senate. They will improve the asylum processes and improve some of those hand-offs between organizations.

I don't know if my CBSA colleague wants to add anything on security screening, in particular.

• (1240)

Brett Bush: If I recall, the question had to do with the levels plan and the impact on security screenings.

I think it would be fair to say that as the level of effort on the number of new permanent residents and new temporary persons coming into the country, whether to study, work or visit, is reduced because of the changes in the levels plan, obviously, the demand for services on that side of...

There are three pieces to security screening. There's temporary resident screening, permanent resident screening and asylum security screening. It will afford us time to dig into cases, maybe not more effectively, but it will help us to reduce some of the inventories we currently have.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bush.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Next we'll go into our fifth round of questions. We begin with a combination of Mr. Redekopp and Ms. Rempel Garner. Ms. Rempel Garner will go first.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Has there been any discussion in your department about advising the government to ask for a Supreme Court reference on the immigration components of Bill C-12 in light of the Supreme Court ruling that came out on Friday? Specifically, will Bill C-12 be compliant with the ruling as it pertains to the section 15 violation that the court found?

Jason Hollmann: All I can say on the Supreme Court ruling from Friday, because it is relatively recent, is that I understand the Attorney General is looking at the ruling and assessing it, as well as any impacts on federal legislation.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Does the government have any plans to ask for Supreme Court reference on any other components of immigration legislation in light of the ruling? I'm thinking about such things as the points system and other stuff people have said would now be ruled unconstitutional.

Jason Hollmann: Given that the decision was just tabled on Friday, I think it's too early for us to have a good picture of the way forward.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: In your opinion, if the immigration components of Bill C-12 are found, through a reference, to be unconstitutional, would you see that the only way to uphold those particular provisions in the bill would be through the use of section 33 of the charter?

Jason Hollmann: I wouldn't want to speculate on the way forward. My understanding, from the information I've seen, is that the Supreme Court ruling was specific to the day care system in Quebec.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you.

I'll pass it to Mr. Redekopp.

Brad Redekopp: Madame Brassard, you spoke with my colleague Mr. Deschênes about tabling some information. I have a similar request. I will give you my request and you can put the two together and make it one request.

I'd like a breakdown of the total number of claims, and separately, the total number of persons accepted using the policy of file review. I think Mr. Deschênes suggested that it be from 2015. That's fine. I'd like it broken down by country and claim type.

I think it's reasonable to expect that within about two weeks. Does this seem like a reasonable time frame?

Manon Brassard: You said the number of claims. The second one I didn't get.

Brad Redekopp: I'd like the number of persons accepted using the policy of file review, broken down by country and claim type.

I have some additional questions for you regarding the file review policy. Before it was implemented, did the Minister of Immigration approve the policy of file review?

Manon Brassard: There was no need for that.

Brad Redekopp: Did cabinet approve the policy?

Manon Brassard: There was also no need for that. We operate within the legislation.

Brad Redekopp: You did this entirely on your own authority.

Manon Brassard: Yes. Since 1993, the process has been in place internally.

• (1245)

Brad Redekopp: This is something the IRB has done within its own authority.

Manon Brassard: Yes.

Brad Redekopp: If the Minister of Immigration asked you today to end the file review process, would you do so?

Manon Brassard: The board is independent. We operate within our legislation. This practice has been mentioned and supported by both the Yeates report and an OAG report. The few times it has been put as a question to the Federal Court, the process has been supported. I see no reason for changing it.

Brad Redekopp: You are independent. You do not answer to the minister.

Manon Brassard: We answer to Parliament through the minister.

Brad Redekopp: You were pretty clear on that.

I have one question for the CBSA—for Mr. Bush.

In a different round, we were talking about the war in Iran that's happening right now. You talked about mechanisms that are in place.

Have new mechanisms been put in place since the war started?

Brett Bush: I don't know if I would say they're mechanisms. We have the designated regime, which we've talked about at some length. We have the designation in the Criminal Code on that.

To support Global Affairs Canada and the movement of Canadian citizens out of the region, we've also—

Brad Redekopp: Just to be more clear, in terms of security reviews and how you look at files, have any new mechanisms or has anything new been put in place since the war began?

Brett Bush: All I can say is that I'm not aware of anything, but I can take it back to check.

Brad Redekopp: Okay.

Is that...?

The Chair: That is it. That's perfect timing.

Next we have Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bush, you were already asked about one-touch, but I want to go down this path again. We heard about it at length at this committee, but we didn't really have an opportunity for the CBSA to put its view on the record.

I'll be very straightforward about it and use simple language. With the way that it was presented, one was almost left with the very strong feeling that one-touch was basically a "get into Canada free" kind of thing. However, based on what you shared with Mr. Zuberi, that's not the case. Based on what the CBSA has put forward in other forums, that's certainly not the case.

Can you share for us at the committee what one-touch is, how it works and whether it's based on sound security principles to ensure the public safety of Canadians?

Brett Bush: I'm going to quickly take you through a bit of the evolution of the last 10 years of refugee claims.

If we were to rewind to late 2016, early 2017, we would see that most of the increase in refugee claims was coming from the United States. It was mostly impacting a place that everybody is very familiar with: Roxham Road. The processes mostly impacted our CBSA and RCMP colleagues at Lacolle. Generally, the processes to do a full refugee intake take roughly six to eight hours, depending on what the person presents in terms of issues.

Then we moved into the pandemic. Of course, with border restrictions, the numbers of claims dropped right down because there were nowhere near as many people crossing the border. Postpandemic, the number of claimants seeking protection in Canada at the land border, at airport ports of entry and inland all started going back up. You're all very familiar with those numbers.

For our colleagues in the Quebec region, we first took an approach of deferring the examination of folks. It's a provision in the act that allows our officers to essentially reschedule the hearing. It was largely driven by the fact that when the border restrictions in place were lifted, this did not align with the provincial restrictions' being lifted, so we still were only able to have so many people in a space at any given time. For the officers' health and safety, we had to take certain steps. This led to its own problems, which we quickly had to address with IRCC. Then we moved into one-touch.

With one-touch, as I have tried to describe, we are assessing admissibility right at the port of entry. Based on all the information available to us at the port of entry, we then make a determination. These include systems like CPIC, the global case management system at IRCC and the biometric checks we do with the RCMP, as well as with our international partners, to validate identity and to validate whether there is any known information on these folks.

Please keep in mind that this is the same information we would have had available to us in the previous process. The only change is that we are not spending the time with the client to collect their claim, fill out all the paperwork and start enrolling their basis of claim. We are checking the identity based on the documents they have and based on their biometrics. We are validating the identity. This triggers the application process in the system and then the security screening and all the processes I've already explained.

Is there a comfort level amongst everybody? Colleagues from the Customs and Immigration Union have expressed concerns about this, but I think we need to be 100% clear: This was created by our officers and was brought forward as a recommendation from our officers as a way not only to manage the volumes but also to deal

with our agency's primary responsibility for the safety and security of people at the port of entry.

• (1250)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Peter Fragiskatos: In the remaining time, I'm just going to pick up on the point you made.

If I understood you, this is not a management decision coming from up high. This is a recommendation that officers gave.

Brett Bush: The officers developed this at Lacolle. They put it forward. The decision to implement it nationally came from discussion with all the regions across the country.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bush, and thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to continue the discussion with Mr. Hollmann.

I would ask you, Mr. Hollmann, to provide us with the reports and discussion papers on the possibility of a better distribution of asylum seekers across the various provinces, in written form. If you wish to respond orally straight away, I would accept that too.

Jason Hollmann: All I can say to back up the comments I have already made is that I know there have been high-level discussions to try to interest various provinces in accepting additional asylum seekers and in building a system. I know that the result—

Alexis Deschênes: Nova Scotia and New Brunswick have signed agreements. That's good. Thank you, Mr. Hollmann. If you have any written documents, I'd be interested in seeing them.

Mr. Bush, how has the outbreak of war in Iran affected the services of the Canada Border Services Agency so far?

[*English*]

Brett Bush: I will tell you what I know, and I will tell you what I do not know.

[*Translation*]

Would you like me to explain it in French?

Alexis Deschênes: Yes, I'd prefer that. Thank you.

Brett Bush: Okay.

At the start of this conflict, our organization decided to reassign its staff working outside Canada—for example, on overseas missions or in embassies—so that they could assist the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development in relocating Canadians who needed to leave the Middle East region. That is all I know at the moment.

Alexis Deschênes: Are there many refugee applications coming in?

Brett Bush: I don't yet know. As for the number of refugees, I have no idea. We can obtain this information to determine whether, since last week, there has been an increase in the number of asylum seekers coming from Iran.

Alexis Deschênes: Very well, thank you. I'd like to know.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Bush.

We have six minutes remaining. I'm going to give two and a half minutes each to the Conservatives and the Liberals.

We'll start off with Mr. Davies.

Fred Davies: Madam Chair, I'm going to be splitting my time with MP Ho.

Very quickly, today I think we verified that detention capacity has been significantly reduced in Canada at a very problematic time. We've also determined that people have been released while being on a deportation order prior to being deported.

Mr. Bush, you referred to provincial detention. Does the CBSA rely on the provinces for detention capacity? Do the provinces have independent authority to release a detainee without the CBSA's knowledge?

• (1255)

Brett Bush: For the first part, I'll make it quick. We used to use, in combination with immigration holding centres, some capacity at provincial detention facilities across the country. Provinces have systematically withdrawn from that particular activity through notifications over the last several years.

In terms of your second question, when we were using those, no. The only organization that could release them past the first detention review is sitting to my left. It's the Immigration and Refugee Board. This is the only organization that could order their release. The provinces would have no authority for that.

Fred Davies: I'll turn this over to Mr. Ho now.

Vincent Ho: I have a question for the officials. Would it be possible for you to table for this committee every version of the instructions governing the streaming of less complex claims at the RPD since 2017, the countries listed on those instructions and any communications of the IRCC, DMO or cabinet regarding creation or modification of the list, within 30 days?

A voice: Yes.

Vincent Ho: Thank you.

How much time do I have, Chair?

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Vincent Ho: I have a question for anyone on the panel. How many numbers are associated with terrorist organizations who have active claims at the IRB? Is this something you can provide as

well? You probably don't have the answer now, but could you provide it at a later date, within 30 days?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ho—

Vincent Ho: I'm sorry. Was that a yes?

The Chair: I think I saw a nod. Madame Brassard, is that okay? Thank you, Madame Brassard.

Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Lastly, to finish, we have Ms. Sodhi.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for you, Mr. Bush. As you know, Canada's new government recently introduced Bill C-12, the strengthening Canada's immigration system and borders act, to help stabilize the system and give law enforcement the tools needed to keep Canadians safe.

Can you outline what measures are included in this legislation that will specifically support the CBSA in its work to maintain security integrity in the immigration system?

Brett Bush: I've tried to reference it a couple of times, but first and foremost is the concern that all the measures for security screening and intervention work will be completed before the claim is referred to the board for a determination. That's the first piece.

The second piece is that there will be one application, so we will also be getting the basis of claim submitted by the client earlier in the process. Right now, it's a two-step process: There's the application for the refugee claim and then the submission of the basis of claim form, which is the foundation for the board's work. However, all of that information will now be provided through the application, which is also covered in Bill C-12, so we can do a security screening and determine whether we want to intervene on the full package of information that is being considered after we've finished our work at the board.

Amandeep Sodhi: Can you tell us what immediate or near-term effects you predict this legislation will have once it comes into force in terms of stabilizing the immigration system? Can an official from IRCC quickly answer that?

Jason Hollmann: My colleague from the CBSA listed a couple of them. One of the core components of the bill is a number of process changes for the asylum system. All of those are designed to address some of the areas of bottleneck that we found within the system and improve the information flow among the three organizations. They should lead to efficiency gains in how we process those claims and allow us to do more in a faster way. They will also generate some improvements for our core clients.

• (1300)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Hollmann.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

This ends our session today. I want to say a very warm thank you to all of our witnesses. It was a very full two hours. I really appreciated your patience and your important testimony.

I also want to thank all my colleagues for their very thoughtful questions.

Our next session, which is on Wednesday, March 11, will be to discuss our draft report on international students.

Thank you. This meeting is adjourned.

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