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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz





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Monday, April 20, 2026

• (1100)

[English]

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

Good Monday morning to everyone. It's the last of a few winter days before, I hope, spring really starts.

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

I want to give a warm welcome to Madame Claude DeBellefeuille.

[Translation]

Welcome.

[English]

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and the members today.

Participants in the room, I know you've heard this a million times, but it's always nice to have a reminder. You can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. I will let you know when you have only one minute left. Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please do not speak over each other, as it will be very hard for the interpreters to translate; it makes their job very difficult.

Of course, kindly ensure that your comments are addressed through the chair.

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

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 16, 2025, the committee is resuming its study of Canada's immigration system. Today we're focusing on the 2026 Auditor General's report "International Student Program Reforms".

I would like to now warmly welcome our witnesses for today's meeting.

We have, from the Office of the Auditor General, Karen Hogan, Auditor General of Canada.

Welcome. It's nice to meet you.

Also from the OAG, we have Gabriel Lombardi, principal, and Erin Jellinek, director. From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Ted Gallivan, deputy minister; Alexis Graham, assistant deputy minister; and Tara Lang, director general, admissibility. Finally, from the Canada Border Services Agency, we have Erin O'Gorman, president.

Thank you all for being here.

I will just finish this, and then I will go to you, I promise, Mr. Redekopp.

Up to five minutes each will be given for opening remarks. I believe we have opening remarks from both Ms. Hogan and Mr. Gallivan, after which we are going to begin rounds of questions.

Mr. Redekopp.

**Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Yes, it's just a procedural question.

Normally, these meetings are two hours. This one is an hour and a half. Is there any reason that we can't go for a full two hours today?

**The Chair:** The decision I made was as follows. Typically, we would have had this for maybe an hour and then a panel of witnesses for the immigration study. However, last week we were unsure of what was happening, and our clerk said that there wasn't enough time to put together a panel of witnesses. Because I felt this was a big issue of importance, I put it from an hour to an hour and a half. That is the reason.

**Brad Redekopp:** Then I guess I may ask the witnesses whether it would be okay if we did the full two hours rather than the 90 minutes.

Does anybody object to that?

**The Chair:** Would you all be available until one o'clock today? I believe we have resources.

Okay. Thank you. There are no objections.

[Translation]

I think that meets with your approval as well, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

[English]

That's good. Okay, we have two hours, so we get to spend far more time together.

With that, we'll begin with Ms. Hogan, please.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

**Karen Hogan (Auditor General of Canada, Office of the Auditor General):** Thank you.

Good morning, Madam Chair.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify today before the committee to discuss our report on reforms to the international student program, which was tabled last March.

I would like to acknowledge that this hearing is taking place on the traditional, unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

As part of this audit, we examined the implementation of reforms to the international student program by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. These reforms were intended to manage the program's growth and strengthen its integrity controls. Overall, we concluded that, while the department reduced the number of new study permits issued, it did not meet expectations in other key areas.

In 2024, the department issued just under 150,000 new study permits. This figure was well below projections, which stood at nearly 350,000. Some provinces, particularly those with smaller populations, were disproportionately affected. For example, Newfoundland and Labrador and Saskatchewan were both projected to see a 10% increase in the number of new study permits approved compared to the previous year. However, both saw a decrease of at least 59%.

• (1105)

[*English*]

The audit found critical weaknesses in the program's integrity controls. Although the department introduced a new tool to verify acceptance letters and had processes to identify potential fraud and student non-compliance, it did not effectively investigate or follow up when risks were flagged. For example, in 2023 and 2024, designated learning institutions identified over 153,000 potential cases of non-compliance with study permits, but the department investigated only about 4,000 of them.

Most cases could not be closed, because the students did not respond to the department's requests for more information. Further, the department's fraud detection activities identified 800 cases of fraud after permits were approved. No follow-up occurred on these cases. In most instances, individuals went on to apply for other immigration permits while in Canada. More than half of those applications have since been approved.

Our audit also identified an opportunity for better collaboration with the Canada Border Services Agency. We found that the immigration department did not collaborate with the agency to identify whether students with expired permits had left Canada. Using the immigration department's available data, we worked with the Canada Border Services Agency and found that only about 40% of the 39,500 students required to leave in 2024 had, in fact, left the country.

Ultimately, the department needs to act on the information it already has to address integrity concerns in the program, including collaborating with the Canada Border Services Agency. This is equally important once students are in Canada and applying for additional permits.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, this concludes my opening statement. We will be happy to answer any questions from committee members.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Ms. Hogan.

Next, we go to Mr. Gallivan for five minutes.

**Ted Gallivan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

In order to maximize time for questions, I'm not going to read my remarks. I'll just make a couple of quick points.

[*Translation*]

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to this committee for the report it provided last week. It contains very important insights that will assist us in this area.

[*English*]

Second, the OAG recognized three areas where the planned reforms to the student visa program had the intended effect: the overall numbers were down; the student direct stream had been wound down; and verification letters from the educational institutions had been implemented. We'll probably not spend a lot of time on those positive findings.

I will say that the negative findings, in particular the lack of follow-through on fraud, are unacceptable. We've submitted management action plans to this committee. Hopefully, you have that, or at least it's with the clerk of the committee. For me, it was important that all of those actions be completed in calendar 2026. It's important for us to address these quickly.

[*Translation*]

Madam Chair, I have finished my remarks and am ready to answer questions from committee members.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We now have an extra half an hour, so we have lots of time for questions and answers.

I want to say a huge thanks to you, Auditor General Hogan, and to your entire team. I want to point out that the work you do is extraordinarily important. We cannot have a functioning and healthy democracy if we don't have a very strong Auditor General, so thanks to you all for your great work.

We will go to rounds of questions. We start with six-minute rounds.

I believe we begin with Mr. Redekopp.

**Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses. I especially welcome Mr. Gallivan, the new deputy minister.

I want to jump right into it with the Auditor General. On the “letter of acceptance” fraud, you talked about 51 applications where fraud was suspected, and you found that the department didn't follow procedures in a quarter of those cases. Either they were approved without looking into the fraud or the fraud wasn't flagged on their files for future use.

Is that consistent with what you saw?

• (1110)

**Karen Hogan:** Absolutely. We looked at a smaller sample of those that were flagged and found that the procedures that were supposed to be followed weren't followed. This is key. Many of the subsequent applications are given a light touch because it's assumed that there's rigour at the outset, and we didn't see that in some of the cases.

**Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Gallivan, did you advise or did your department flag to the government that you needed more time and resources to thoroughly investigate frauds like this? I'm talking about prior to receiving this report.

**Ted Gallivan:** Madam Chair, it's my fourth week on the job. I wasn't here at that time, so I can't answer the question directly.

I will say that the number of high-risk cases or fraud ought to drive the budget, rather than the other way around.

In our management action plan, we are making a commitment to review all of the cases. Where it's confirmed that it's not a discrepancy but actual fraud, we need to take action. We'll have to sort out the budget implications after the fact.

**Brad Redekopp:** On that answer, are all the answers from you going to be, “I don't know. I wasn't here”? That's not going to help us in getting through this.

**Ted Gallivan:** I was asked a direct question about something that happened when I wasn't there. I couldn't answer directly. I believe I addressed the substance of the question.

**Brad Redekopp:** Did you get briefed? Do you know anything about the department? Let's start with that.

**Ted Gallivan:** Do I have information about the department? Yes.

**Brad Redekopp:** Are you briefed on this subject? Are you able to speak to it today?

**Ted Gallivan:** I'm ready to talk about this audit, absolutely.

**Brad Redekopp:** Do you know anything about the question I asked? Your answer was no, I guess. I got that answer.

**Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.):** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

This committee has found a way to work with one another in a very professional and collegial way. The deputy minister is new to

the job. It's been four weeks, as he said. I think we should allow him the space to answer questions as he wishes and not interrupt when he's trying to finish a sentence. It's just basic courtesy.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Let's allow time for responses. Know that we have right until one o'clock, so we have lots of time.

Mr. Redekopp, please continue.

**Brad Redekopp:** Feel free to ask one of your assistants if you need the information.

Did the government ask your department to be more thorough in terms of investigating fraud, prior to receiving this report?

**Ted Gallivan:** Again, we're going to have trouble with “prior to receiving this report or not”.

I would say that we do need to tighten controls. We need to act more quickly, more aggressively and more thoroughly in the face of discrepancies. The OAG pointed out a figure of 153,000. At the time of the audit, we ought to have had evidence to show that many of them were discrepancies and weren't cases of fraud. We should have been able to say, “This is the number of fraud cases that we do suspect”, and then we ought to have followed through on 100% of the cases of fraud.

**Brad Redekopp:** I recognize that you're new. I appreciate that there's a lot to swallow and understand in the department.

In terms of the last four weeks, what have you discovered in terms of the culture of fraud and detection of fraud in the organization? Would you sense that it was a really high priority or is it a gap? What's your assessment of that as a new DM?

**Ted Gallivan:** I think the department lacked what I would describe as a framework for dealing with this question of fraud in the student applications, from telling people what the rules are upfront to following up to promote voluntary compliance with something like departing the country when the visa's expired. It's practices and techniques like nudge.

I think the department hadn't thought through what interventions were required to make sure that students followed the rules and that they departed the country when their student visa expired. It's not always a removal straight to CBSA. There are a lot of things that ought to happen over the life cycle and the relationship between IR-CC and the student to promote voluntary compliance with the laws of this country.

**Brad Redekopp:** Do you get a sense that the department was being pressured by the government to process applications and maybe that was affecting some of the thoroughness that was being taken?

**Ted Gallivan:** I would describe the direction from this government as control. We control these programs. That would mean that no-risk applicants to the country get handled quickly and smoothly. People who don't meet the eligibility criteria get an intervention to ensure compliance.

My sense is that we need to demonstrate that we've turned our minds to, in this case, people with a discrepancy. We need to figure out when the discrepancy is a timing issue or an actual mistake versus real fraud. When there's real fraud, we ought to be taking action.

• (1115)

**Brad Redekopp:** I think it's safe to say, based on what the Auditor General found, that this was not being followed and there were definite gaps in the department.

I'll go back to the Auditor General.

You found that IRCC did not identify which students were expected to leave. This has to do with removal tracking after permits had expired. The report says, "We identified", which means your office. You talked about 39,500 individuals who shouldn't have been in Canada because they'd lost their status.

Was IRCC not aware of that number?

**Karen Hogan:** I think this is an example of where the department was just not acting on information it had. We had to go through their database with them to identify that there were 549,000 or so students who had expired permits, and then determine who had applied for another permit or not. That's when we identified about 39,500 who didn't apply for another permit and should have left the country, so we worked then with Canada Border Services Agency.

This collaboration is where I would expect the department to use that information to do this on a regular basis. We issued a recommendation to the immigration department, and we shared with them our analysis. I trust that they'll act on it now, going forward, with the Canada Border Services Agency.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hogan.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Before we go to our next interviewer, I'm still recuperating from some jet lag from travel I had last week, so I should have warmly welcomed our new Deputy Minister Gallivan.

Thank you for being here.

Mr. Redekopp beat me to the punch, so thanks for doing that, Mr. Redekopp.

Next, we have six minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

My first question is for you, Deputy Minister. Can you share with us your department's response to the feedback shared in the Auditor General's report? What steps will your department be taking to address these concerns?

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll start with managing the expiration of a visa because there are rules around the visas, not just for students but more generally. In 2023, IRCC started warning students up front that an overstay has repercussions, including up to a five-year ban from readmittance to the country. To go back to my earlier re-

sponse, I know I've asked the team to start pilot work around aggressively managing the end of the visa as a management control. We have IT work under way. By the end of May, we'll have an indicator in the system indicating whether somebody is present in the country or not. I found it surprising that we hadn't previously had that, but we're going to have that indicator.

That's just a step in terms of changing the culture and our operational priorities around letting people know their obligation to depart Canada when their visa expires, and this is beyond students' visas. Just in time...and we have yet to learn if it's two weeks before or a month before. However, it's communicating with people—does a phone work, does a text work, or how do you go about it?—and encouraging them saying that if they don't have another status in Canada, they ought to leave and there are consequences. It's purifying the list.

The OAG did talk about the hand-off to CBSA, but we don't want to send them a list of 100,000 people for removals when a lot of work needs to be done, first, to encourage people to do the right thing in the first instance; second, to nudge and get them to do it; and finally, to get the list down to a core number where perhaps an enforced removal is necessary.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** You mentioned encouraging people to do the right thing. If you could further elaborate on that, that would be great because to do the right thing ultimately is the right thing, but to get people to do that can sometimes be a lot easier said than done. What are some steps that you would take to encourage people to do the right thing?

**Ted Gallivan:** The first is that you can't rely on people doing the right thing totally, so there has to be a consequence past that. We have to make sure there's a full continuum, from telling people the rules and reminding them nicely to reminding them forcefully, and then we have to ensure there's a follow-through.

I know the CBSA has made efforts to increase enforced removals. Part of it is the threat of no return visa. To be really candid and direct, we have to make sure that's a real threat. We have to make sure that IRCC is applying that rigorously and then use that to nudge people to do the right thing.

To go back to the question about culture change, we can't fully rely on people to do the right thing. I think we want to create opportunities for them to do the right thing. I think we want to create an environment that incentivizes them to do the right thing, and then I think we also have to be clear that if they don't leave in the first instance, then there is a second and a third instance where more aggressive actions are taken.

• (1120)

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Perfect. Thank you.

Are you or any of the other officials from IRCC able to share with this committee what measurable improvements IRCC has observed in terms of application integrity and system integrity since certain reforms have been implemented?

**Ted Gallivan:** I think I'll turn to Tara for some of the specifics, but beyond just the straight refusal-approval rate, we've seen a change in terms of promoters and people who are incentivizing or colluding with students around some of the fraudulent applications, but maybe Tara will come in with some specifics on the improvements.

**Tara Lang (Director General, Admissibility, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

We're seeing fewer asylum claims made by former students. Fewer LOA verifications in 2025 produced no match results than in 2024, so that's suggesting the system is not only catching fraud but also deterring it. Requiring students to apply for a new study permit when they transfer schools allows us to gather up-to-date data and information, and that helps us with the student compliance pieces.

I think the pilot that the deputy was speaking about is something that will be very concrete, and we're working actively with our colleagues in CBSA.

Just to expand a little bit on what the deputy said, we're talking about letters, so the concept is to send a letter before and send a letter after, and then we would have an alert on file that would show misrepresentation. If the CBSA, again, were being constrained from an enforcement point for the removal stream, we could catch them if they ever applied for another application, and there would be more specific consequences, like the five-year bar. We're trying to be a lot more proactive—help us help you. We want to have the right people in Canada, but if they're not following the rules, then they should not be here.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** With these reforms now in place—and you talked a little bit about it before too—how is IRCC ensuring a successful international student program and balancing the stability of the system with these new integrity measures, while also ensuring that our immigration programs work efficiently to attract the best and the brightest of students and researchers to our educational institutions?

**Ted Gallivan:** I would just say that's around understanding the client and facilitating the entry of legitimate, sought-after students, and then cracking down on those who are trying to game the system.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Thank you so much, Ms. Sodhi.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for you, Madam Auditor General.

In your report, you note that, in just three investigations, the department identified 800 cases where study permits had been issued based on fraudulent documents. I imagine that, if you had conducted more investigations, you would have found more. If, in just three investigations, you found 800, one can indeed assume that the number is much higher.

**Karen Hogan:** Mrs. DeBellefeuille, I would like to clarify a few points. These investigations were not conducted by us, but by the department. Furthermore, while we received several reports, we focused on the three in which the department had identified cases of fraud, fraudulent documents, or false statements.

So, yes, it is possible that there are more, but what was more concerning was that, even though these 800 cases had been identified, no action had been taken afterward. That is where the department must act, based on the information it has in its possession.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** You are telling us that after the incident was observed and brought to our attention, no action was taken with the Canada Border Services Agency to identify the fraudsters, so that the agency could at least determine whether some of these individuals were passing through various border crossings, for example.

**Karen Hogan:** Before even sharing information with the Canada Border Services Agency, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration must take action. An alert must be placed on an individual's file.

For our part, we took steps to determine the whereabouts of these 800 individuals. We discovered that the majority of them had already filed another application for a different immigration status and that more than 50% of those applications had already been approved.

If measures had been taken initially, there might have been greater diligence, and we might have been able to prevent the approval of other immigration status applications, even before alerting the Canada Border Services Agency.

• (1125)

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Deputy Minister, you said that measures had been put in place. You have a lot of faith that, with a letter or a notice, people will respect the law and leave the country, for example. I don't know, but from experience, I have my doubts when these people have already entered the country on a fraudulent student visa. For your part, you trust these people and believe that a simple letter might encourage them to leave rather than try to find another way to stay in the country.

Do you believe that the measures you are implementing provide a strong enough framework to achieve your objective?

**Ted Gallivan:** First, I would like to set the record straight. I thought I had said that, ultimately, real consequences would be necessary, including a five-year ban from the country or a removal carried out by the CBSA. So, I want to correct the impression that was conveyed. No, we do not rely solely on letters.

Next, it is clear that, as a first step, fraud must be detected during the processing of the visa application. Second, we must assess the cases that present a high risk. It is completely unacceptable that, in these 800 cases, there was no follow-up.

I asked the team this question and was given no reasonable explanation as to why these cases were not followed up. When managing a pool of 50,000 or 20,000 applications, you always have to sort through them. You try to distinguish between errors due to simple typos and actual problems. However, when you do find actual problems, there must be follow-up. I have no excuse for the fact that there was no follow-up.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** You have a new process. Following the report, which certainly resonated widely within the community and in the media, has the process already under way yielded results? Can you give us examples of students who tried to get through the system by submitting fraudulent documents? Do you already have results to present to us?

Here, we're talking about data for the period from 2018 to 2023. Of course, you've been aware of the situation since well before the Auditor General's report was published. Your process is active and concrete. I imagine it has yielded results since 2023. Do you have any results to present to us?

**Ted Gallivan:** Yes. The very fact of cancelling a direct access program has helped. My colleagues Ms. Lang and Ms. Graham could elaborate on my answer by discussing the approval process.

We already reject a high percentage of applications. The first line of defence is the detailed review of visa applications. That is done initially. Then, secondly, we require the so-called letters of acceptance from an educational institution. So, in a second step, we verify that students are indeed enrolled in an educational program. It is at this stage—that is, the follow-up regarding these letters—that we have fallen short.

We have committed to intervening, starting this summer, in 100% of cases where the letters present a problem. Let's be clear: Not all issues are serious. Sometimes it's simply a matter of transferring schools, but in other cases, it involves fraud. There should be follow-up.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** When you say "this summer," are you referring to the coming summer?

**Ted Gallivan:** Yes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** I see. You could say that the process was still a long one before you changed your practices.

**Ted Gallivan:** I don't know the timeline, but I would say that following the Auditor General's report, it was important for us to take action this year, in 2026, to address all of its recommendations.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** All right.

Madam Chair, I believe I only have a few seconds left, don't I?

**The Chair:** That's right, you only have 10 seconds left.

Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille and Mr. Gallivan.

[English]

We now will begin our second round.

We have Mr. Menegakis for five minutes.

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

Thank you and welcome to our committee. It's very kind of you to spend two full hours with us today.

Mr. Gallivan, of the 800 confirmed issued permit holders who either used fraudulent documentation or misrepresented information on their applications, 105 were approved for permanent residency. What was the government's justification for rewarding fraudulent study permit holders with PR?

**Ted Gallivan:** I'm going to turn to Tara to explain the demographic and the analysis of the 800. As I said in French previously, I have obtained no explanation for why the 800 were not pursued. I don't know, but I do know going forward that these kinds of cases will be acted on.

Tara, can you talk about the 800?

• (1130)

**Tara Lang:** Not having seen the detailed cases themselves, I would have to assume.... Let's back up.

The 800 were investigations that were a result of a quality assurance exercise. As the deputy explained, we take a snapshot of a number of cases and do a review. That found that 800—most of them were student direct stream applicants—had some kind of fraudulent document as part of their application.

On the question of how they would become permanent residents, the officer who would have reviewed the permanent resident application would have had a conversation, a back-and-forth—what's called a procedural fairness letter—with the client to ask for the situation of the document and would have made a finding that either their response was acceptable or they got a new document. I wouldn't be able to postulate on each case, on the basis of its merit.

I don't know that it's a reward, but there are checks and balances, especially when we move into a PR stream, to check on the validity of those documents.

**Costas Menegakis:** Were these 105 PR grants reviewed for relocation once the original misrepresentation was confirmed?

**Tara Lang:** I do not know. I do know that now every single case does have an info alert placed on it, and they are being reviewed currently.

**Costas Menegakis:** The Auditor General found that 110 of these permit holders filed asylum claims.

Given the department's backlog on asylum claimants, are these individuals now receiving taxpayer-funded health and housing benefits despite their pre-existing record of misrepresentation?

**Ted Gallivan:** The IRCC would flag in our system when there is a case of misrepresentation, and let's be clear about the misrepresentation we're talking about. It's academic credential fraud. Someone claimed to have science degree or a master's degree when they had a bachelor's, so let's understand that.

Our reaction is to flag the applicants account with an indicator. As Tara explained, that indicator gives rise to questioning. Through the questioning, the decision-maker satisfies themselves with the answer to that question. My sense of the process is that a flag is placed on the system, indicating that there has been misrepresentation, which alerts people to ask better questions.

**Costas Menegakis:** I'd like to turn to our Auditor General. Would you agree that these are just small misrepresentations, as the deputy minister just said, or would you think that the problem is a bit more egregious than that?

**Karen Hogan:** The applications in question didn't have any flags, so none of this exchange would have occurred on these. What I'm hearing from the deputy minister and other officials from the immigration department is that this is their position now, but in these 800 cases we did not see any flag appear on these files.

**Costas Menegakis:** I want to ask you something, Mr. Gallivan, about the communication between your department and CBSA. In previous committee meetings here, we've had the CBSA testify that your department overruled decisions that they had made. Specifically, when they had identified somebody who needs to be deported from the country, the department overruled the determination that the CBSA had made.

Can you explain why your department feels that they should have that right to overrule the law enforcement agency that is on the front line, where people come into the country?

**Ted Gallivan:** I have more than three and a half years sitting in that chair as the associate deputy minister at the CBSA, and not to dodge the question, but I do have questions about the legal standard.

I would just offer that it is a question that I'm actively pursuing. I do believe part of the longer answer, which I can't give now, relates to legal standards, thresholds and what information people have. However, I too share the concern, and if the concern is broader than the authorities that I have now, then I'll certainly make the representation to foster some kind of change.

I appreciate the question. I appreciate the concern.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan, although we can continue with the answer in other questions.

We now have Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the officials for being here.

Auditor General, it's good to see you again.

Mr. Gallivan, congratulations again on your new role.

I will begin with you, Mr. Gallivan. Conservative friends are free to litigate the past if they want to. That's fine, but Canadians live in the present and they're concerned about the future. With respect to the immigration system, you talked about control in a previous exchange. You talked about.... You didn't use the word "integrity", but ultimately that's what you're talking about. I want to ask a general question relating to those points.

How is the government moving ahead to ensure control and integrity generally in the system? Can you point to some examples?

• (1135)

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll start with the student visa program, which I think is an example of what's happening more broadly. You can see hard caps and a decline in numbers, so there are fewer people across a broad range of categories, which allows for greater focus and a reduction in numbers. Second, I think there's a hard cap, from around 1% to 5%, in terms of the total number of people being accepted or in the country at any one given time, so that we have managed sustainable migration into this country, because that's essential. I would say that again, proper to this audit, there was the discontinuation of a direct program that was seen to be open for abuse and targeted for abuse by others, and you saw that program being cancelled.

With the recently introduced Bill C-12, you could see a process in which thresholds are being established around claiming asylum at the 12-month or one-year mark, and rapid action on that. In fact, there was a significant amount of media attention that, just days after receiving royal assent, IRCC began taking action.

I have more than 30 years in public service, and it was one of the first times I can recall being criticized or taken to task for acting too quickly on the implementation of legislation. We want to be compassionate. We want to be fair, but in cases in which there is abuse—I think I've given you some examples of that happening—proper to this report, again, when you have a large number of flags, you have a responsibility to parse them and put them into buckets. To go back to the earlier question, no, the 110, the 800 or the 150,000 are neither all small typographical errors nor all cases of people with a propensity to violence. There's a mixture, but it's our responsibility to more methodically put them into categories and then give the right treatment. That's what the OAG didn't find when she arrived at IRCC.

The crux of our management action plan in response to this audit is that by the end of this calendar year, we will show that we understand the categorization of the people who are being flagged and will apply the right response. Taking no no action is rarely the right response. It's certainly not the right response when it's flagged as high risk.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** I will go into that.

As a matter of fact, you talked about categorization. Ultimately, you're talking about responding to the concerns raised by the Auditor General.

How exactly from an administrative point of view will you be moving ahead? What areas of the report and which flags raised by the Auditor General are you most seized with responding to? How will the department respond?

**Ted Gallivan:** I would talk about managing the end of a visa as a management objective and something for IRCC to validate. It's to be more proactive, aggressive and thorough on the expiration of a visa.

Simply put, we need to know whether people are leaving or not. It's our responsibility to seek that information and to build a picture of whether people are leaving or not. I think it's our job to manage towards that goal. Yes, we'll try the lighter-touch efforts but in complement with tougher consequences. I would say managing the end of the visa process more proactively and systematically would be one that is a key shift in terms of how IRCC is looking at this problem.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Just very quickly, do you plan on looking at what other countries, for example, G7 partners or like-minded countries, have been doing to ensure integrity in their systems? I'm speaking specifically here on this point about visas.

**Ted Gallivan:** That work is already ongoing and, yes, we continue.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

[Translation]

Mrs. DeBellefeuille, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I want to congratulate the interpreters, who are here in person today. It makes a big difference for me, since I always rely 100% on the earpiece. I really want to thank them for being here. It makes things much better.

Ms. O'Gorman, usually I ask you questions about container clearance at small ports. We're going to change the subject today. I'm sure you're pleased about that.

I'm having a little trouble understanding your connection to the study. The Canada Border Services Agency isn't necessarily the subject of the Auditor General's report, but it is an important partner of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

I know from personal experience that there are students who are unable to cross the border, even when they have their study permits, because the agency sometimes detects fraud at border crossings.

Can you tell us what your role is in relation to what we are examining today? Are you awaiting best practices from the department? What can you do to improve the department's response in the matter we are discussing today?

• (1140)

**Erin O'Gorman (President, Canada Border Services Agency):** Certainly, we are partners. Everyone who enters Canada must go through our officers. So, if someone has a study permit and we

detect something, we can take action. Ultimately, if that person is not supposed to be here, we can send them back.

[English]

As Mr. Gallivan has said, we are partners, but we're along a continuum. What IRCC is doing is putting more rigour into the system of student visas. Sometimes people who are on student visas also find themselves with serious inadmissibility, and I won't overstate those numbers. They're not significant, but we have seen people involved in extortion, so they do become a priority for removal by CBSA. Some of them will make an asylum claim and, if they are not successful, they will become a priority for the CBSA.

Also in terms of entry-exit data, we will work in partnership with IRCC in terms of determining who's here. We can do that on the bulk review of names of people who might be on expired visas and continue to be here. As Mr. Gallivan said, with the reforms they're putting in place, those numbers should get smaller as they put more things into the system to bring people into compliance or proactively identify people who are out of compliance.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mrs. DeBellefeuille.

[English]

Now we have five minutes for Mr. Davies.

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

Auditor General, on the answer Ms. O'Gorman gave about that, do you have any comments or additions to make?

**Karen Hogan:** The only thing I would add is that the Canada Border Services Agency wasn't part of our original audit, because our intention was to look at the reforms that the immigration department was bringing to the student visas. We can't ignore when we find weaknesses. That's why we ended up going to Canada Border Services Agency to determine what was happening with individuals who hadn't left the country when their permits expired. We felt like we had a gap, and we were trying to fill it.

We can't issue a recommendation to an entity that's not in our audit, but I'm very happy to see CBSA here to help support a good study of this.

**Fred Davies:** Would you suggest additional audit capacity?

**Karen Hogan:** If you mean for us to do an audit on this, I feel like we took this one right to the end. We identified a gap where there wasn't a sharing of information, information that was clearly in the possession of the immigration department. It's now for the two entities to establish a good process to decide when action is needed.

It's important to note that hundreds of thousands of students are here, and they are genuine students. However, when there is information that flags they should leave the country or are not here under genuine pretenses, then some action should be taken.

**Fred Davies:** Thank you for that.

Mr. Gallivan, I want to follow up on that.

You said there's a five-year ban. You want to use a soft touch. Regarding the threat of a five-year ban, is there a threshold? If somebody exceeds their visa, do they automatically get the five-year ban?

**Ted Gallivan:** I'm not sure of the technical answer. I don't know if my colleagues do.

**Tara Lang:** They don't.

**Ted Gallivan:** They don't. It's not automatic.

**Fred Davies:** Maybe Ms. Lang can answer this.

Is there a threshold? Is there an analysis that you would go through? If somebody overextends their stay, I'm sure if it's accidental.... I can't imagine how it could be accidental—if they're coming to the country, they know what the term limits are—but what are the areas that would exempt somebody from a five-year ban?

**Tara Lang:** A lot of it does have to do with those types of questions, such as a misunderstanding of the deadline for leaving, or other applications that could be in process to regularize their stay in other areas. The officer would be looking at those types of situations, but there is no sliding scale.

• (1145)

**Fred Davies:** It's somewhat subjective. Is that correct?

**Tara Lang:** Either it's five years, or you regularize your status.

**Fred Davies:** Ms. O'Gorman, are you adequately resourced for the system in place now?

**Erin O'Gorman:** The thing about CBSA is that there are always more narcotics to catch, there are always more people to remove and there are always more organized crime members exploiting the border. This is a hard question to answer. We would put any additional officers to good use.

In terms of the study today, what Mr. Gallivan has outlined are the efforts they will make to bring people back into compliance and/or identify fraud, nudge people and have consequences for people. Those people for whom that doesn't work become our clients in our removal inventory, and we will remove them as we remove other individuals.

The fewer the people who come into our removals inventory because they're out of compliance, the better it is for the system. It's an expensive prospect to have a CBSA officer find somebody to remove them. We prioritize serious inadmissibility and failed claimants, but we also remove people who are out of compliance.

On some of the integrity measures that IRCC will be putting in place, I think we will see a big impact from that. Students seeing the consequence of not being able to come back for five years will view that as severe, and that will lead to some of the behaviours we would like to see.

**Fred Davies:** I have limited time, so I may follow up on this later.

On March 9, I asked Mr. Bush a question about holding detention capacity at the border crossings. I should have expanded the question to include immigration holding centres, because he committed to getting back to me, saying that capacity at the ports of entry had not changed.

Has capacity at immigration holding centres decreased or changed in the last year?

**Erin O'Gorman:** Not in the last year.... Well, it's increased in the last year. At one point three years ago, we had access to provincial facilities, and when we lost that, we lost a significant amount of our capacity. Since then, we've been building up capacity. We have now a footprint in a federal institution. We have added staff to our three immigration holding centres.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Zahid.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee.

Before I go to my questions, I would like to congratulate the deputy minister, Mr. Gallivan, for taking this position and this important file. We wish you all the best.

My first question is for IRCC.

Mr. Gallivan, what concrete steps has IRCC taken to understand the unexpected drop in study permit approval rates, and how is that analysis now improving the forecasting and the decision-making process?

**Ted Gallivan:** Thank you for the question, and I may turn to Alexis to add a bit. I would say that in the 2025 allocation in January 2024, for example, IRCC adjusted the provincial allocations to better reflect the feedback from the initial year.

I think our go-forward plan is to meet with them this spring to talk about ways to tweak the model. We've also begun to share more detailed, rich data packages with the jurisdictions themselves. As you may know, the provinces aren't using the full allocation that we're providing them, so we have a responsibility to get the provincial allocations right. Then the provinces need to further divide that within their jurisdictions. We will be providing them better data to enable them to do that more effectively and then a follow-up session in the fall to see if there's additional tweaking.

Alexis, is there anything you would add to that?

**Alexis Graham (Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** There's not too much more to add. The audit did find that IRCC's approval rates are aligned with regional and country-specific risk assessments. I think a lot of this has to do with transitioning from one highly facilitated regime to one where we have more controls and more discipline. It takes time for various actors to adjust to that.

As the deputy said, we have lots of engagement points with them and plan to enhance that in the future, so hopefully that will enable provinces to use more of those allocations and support their planning purposes as well.

**Salma Zahid:** How is IRCC improving clarity and consistency in the financial documentation requirements so applicants better understand what is expected of them?

• (1150)

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll maybe turn to colleagues on that, but I want to come back to a point raised about the five-year ban. In 2023, IRCC started to make more clear to students the consequence of an overstay. I can appreciate that the five-year ban is subjective and subject to judgment, but I think the table was set back in 2023 in terms of making the rules of the game pretty clear.

Alexis, is there anything more on this?

**Alexis Graham:** I'll note that the financial requirement has been now increased from \$10,000 to \$20,000 for students. That is intended to ensure that they meet the low-income cut-off so that they can support themselves here. Our officers do a verification to ensure that they have that amount of money to ensure that they're not falling through the cracks while they're in Canada.

**Ted Gallivan:** I did take careful note of the committee report suggesting that we revisit upward that financial threshold and also the concern on the extension—how do we dive deep or not—so we will be taking back how we handle a check on the financial solvency of the student during the renewal process.

**Salma Zahid:** How is IRCC working with the provinces in making decisions? Are you doing some research on the market trends or the needs in the market? Some colleges have concerns that some programs are being cut, so are you working with the provinces on that, or are the decisions being made just by the provinces?

**Alexis Graham:** We work very closely with provinces. The way that it works for the student program, of course, is that we set the national cap, and then each province is provided an allocation based on historical approval rates, capacity and things like that. We definitely need to work very closely with them to understand how this change is transpiring in their jurisdiction to see if we can tailor

things and, as the deputy said, tweak in a way that's going to maximize the number of those quality and genuine students we see within each jurisdiction.

**Salma Zahid:** Can you explain quickly how the letter of acceptance and verification system are strengthening the program integrity, and what is being done to ensure all flagged cases are investigated?

**Ted Gallivan:** I think, up front, it would have had a deterrent effect. Just the presence of a letter would encourage people to do the right thing. Where we are now, as said previously, is that we have to manage the exceptions and the discrepancies that those letters are identifying and follow through on them and audit the institutions to make sure they're compliant.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Next, we're starting our third round of questioning. It's going by very quickly this Monday morning.

We will have five minutes with Mr. Ho.

**Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

My questions will be for Ms. Hogan.

In your Auditor General report on international students, you found 153,000 potentially non-compliant international students in 2023 and 2024, but the immigration department launched only 4,000 investigations. Would it be fair to say that the immigration department was receiving warning signs at scale and largely not acting on them?

**Karen Hogan:** It wasn't our audit that flagged the 153,000 cases. It was actually the department that flagged it. This is an example of their having information and needing to act on it. This is where learning institutions must report whether or not they believe the student is complying—so full-time studies. We saw that only 4,000 cases were investigated in the two years that we looked at. What the department explained to us is that it was for lack of funding.

While I understand the funding aspect, I would have expected that when the 4,000 cases were investigated, they would have taken them right to the end. We saw that about 40% of those were closed, even though the student just stopped communicating. That isn't determining whether or not the individual is following the conditions of their permit. I would expect them to take it right to the end when they do the investigations, even with limited funding.

**Vincent Ho:** With what you've just said, do you feel that the government has the international student program under control?

**Karen Hogan:** I think they should act on the information they have now before they decide if they need more funding or how they want to move things about. The majority of students are here for a genuine reason. We're talking about a few 100,000 cases where there is some potential concern. You need to give the students the time to clarify, and then if not, take appropriate action.

Having all of this data and not acting on it is not acceptable.

• (1155)

**Vincent Ho:** It sounds like they need to get their priorities in check.

In your report on international student permits, you describe a “light touch” approach used by the immigration department to study permit extensions.

Could you expand on what you meant by “light touch”?

**Karen Hogan:** “Light touch” was not as rigorous as an initial application should have been. The concern here is that many of the extensions came through the student direct stream, which was a “light touch” stream. When you look at the data of who was applying through that stream, a significant portion came from one country that had been identified as high risk.

We saw a disconnect between the risk rating of a country and the light touch applied in the initial application, and then doubling down on a light touch in the subsequent application. We flagged concerns there. It's important to know that the direct stream is now cancelled, but now you need to not just do a light touch on every single extension. You have to go back and decide if they were high risk and not treated with enough rigour at the front end.

**Vincent Ho:** Do you think this so-called “light touch” approach has contributed to the non-compliance issues we've witnessed?

**Karen Hogan:** I think that's a difficult one to answer. I would expect that a light touch would apply to countries with lower risk ratings, and we saw an inconsistency there. As I mentioned, that's been closed.

A light touch is good for expediting applications.

**Vincent Ho:** You did see some high-risk countries where a light touch was inappropriately used.

**Karen Hogan:** Yes, when we flagged those through the student direct stream...but as I mentioned, in 2024, that stream was closed. That means you need to apply rigour on anyone who came through that stream when they apply for another immigration status.

**Vincent Ho:** You found in your report that of the roughly 549,000 people whose study permits expired in 2024, about 93% were allowed to remain in Canada. Although 39,500 of those appeared to have no status, a whopping 60% of those 39,500 still remain in Canada.

Does that indicate a major gap between the permits expiring and actually enforcing the rules that are attached to them?

**Karen Hogan:** I think this indicates that rigour was applied maybe at the front end of the application process, but that the department needs to do a better job once people are in the country and clearly identify whether they're complying at the end of a permit. I've heard the deputy talk about the reforms they're going to bring there, but we didn't see it during our audit period.

**Vincent Ho:** In my last few seconds, Ms. Hogan, do you think the immigration department under this government has been far too reactive and fragmented?

**Karen Hogan:** That's a very difficult question for me to answer, given I looked at just the international student program.

**Vincent Ho:** In this specific instance, is it too fragmented and reactive?

**Karen Hogan:** I think here they responded to their main goal, which was to reduce the number of international students in the country, but they failed to act on information they had in their possession and maintain the integrity of the program throughout all steps.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Hogan.

Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

**Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to begin by congratulating Deputy Minister Gallivan on his new position.

Thank you for being here.

My first questions are for the chair of the Canada Border Services Agency.

[*English*]

We've heard a fair amount about removals and the message being passed from IRCC to CBSA around removals.

Can you walk us through the process? How are those removal orders actually implemented at the CBSA level, including by front-line officers?

**Erin O'Gorman:** Stepping back, broadly speaking, for all removal orders, when somebody does not have status in Canada because they have an expired permit that's not in an application, they have not been granted refugee status or they have serious inadmissibility, CBSA will issue a removal order and must execute the removal as soon as possible.

People can have removal orders while they're still going through processes, in which case they're not enforceable. There are many people with removal orders who might be appealing to the Federal Court or might be appealing to the refugee division, so we won't act on those. When a removal order becomes actionable, it goes into our removals in process, and they're actioned by the officers.

• (1200)

**Sameer Zuberi:** That makes sense. As long as there are procedures left to follow by the applicant, it makes complete sense that they would not be removed from Canada until they've exhausted all of their possible avenues, including a pre-removal risk assessment, etc.

We hear so much about what's happening south of the border—for those who are listening and paying attention—with ICE, etc. At the same time, we do have to enforce the law and remove people who are not supposed to be on our soil.

How do you do that? For those who don't know much about this, because we're hearing so much about what's happening south of the border, what is our way of upholding the law while doing it respectfully?

**Erin O’Gorman:** As IRCC, we have procedural fairness. We want people to voluntarily leave the country. That’s the law, and that’s the law that people must be following. When they don’t, the CBSA officers will invite them in for a pre-removal interview. We’ll go through the processes. We’ll discuss their personal circumstances, and then we’ll facilitate that removal with them. People do abscond.

If I may go back to the question of our capacity in immigration holding facilities, I spoke about our people capacity, but our actual physical capacity has decreased. I want to make sure I was clear in answering that question.

We have investigators who find people who don’t want to be found or who have absconded. If we feel they are a flight risk, we will hold them in detention and they will be removed. By and large, we seek to make the arrangements voluntarily with people, having regard for their circumstances.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Those circumstances in detention are well monitored, and we ensure that everyone is respected while in that process. Is that correct?

**Erin O’Gorman:** Yes, and after 48 hours, the decision to detain people is transferred to the Immigration and Refugee Board. If it believes the person is a threat to public safety or if we feel they are a flight risk, CBSA will make that representation to the Immigration and Refugee Board, but it’s actually the board that determines whether the person will continue to be detained or not.

**Sameer Zuberi:** What happens when somebody in detention makes an allegation they’ve been mistreated? How do you end up handling that?

**Erin O’Gorman:** There are several ways, depending on what that is.

We have the Red Cross that comes in and does regular reviews of our detention. It has access to whatever it wants access to. Depending on the nature of the investigation, we will do it ourselves or we will have another body come and do that.

We don’t want to keep people in detention. If they have more processes that they can follow through on and they’re not a risk to public safety, we don’t want them in detention. By definition, they’re not going to be a flight risk, because they might have an appeal to the Federal Court.

We want to remove from the country those who are on a removal order and are a risk to public safety. We don’t actually want to have people detained for long periods of time, and the IRB oversees that quite rigorously.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. O’Gorman.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

Members, the white lights were flashing. It was just because the House was suspended. I think it’s now back in session.

[*Translation*]

Welcome, Mr. Champoux. You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Martin Champoux (Drummond, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First, I will pick up where my colleague left off earlier.

I would like to clarify something, Ms. Hogan. In your investigation, you identified 153,000 suspected cases—that is, cases likely to be non-compliant—between 2023 and 2024. Of that number, only 4,057 were investigated.

Can you confirm that this is indeed the case? Are these the correct figures?

**Karen Hogan:** Yes, those are the correct figures.

**Martin Champoux:** Is it common not to conduct more investigations? The sample they decided to examine was small. Ultimately, some 98% of cases were not investigated by the department. Is this common? Is this acceptable, in your opinion?

**Karen Hogan:** We asked this question, and the department told us it was due to budget constraints. I would have expected that at least the 4,000 investigations would have been pursued to completion, but we found that over 40% had been closed due to a lack of communication with the students. This does not answer the question of whether the individual is studying full-time and complying with the conditions of their permit.

• (1205)

**Martin Champoux:** So, the department decided that, since these individuals were not responding or co-operating, it would drop the matter. Given that they didn’t have the budget to continue, they decided to drop it.

Mr. Gallivan, can you confirm that you simply decided, due to a lack of communication, not to pursue obtaining information that I believe would be quite important to have in cases of claims that could be described as outright fraudulent?

**Ted Gallivan:** I would say that’s where the weaknesses begin. The work was done after Ms. Hogan’s report was submitted, and I can now confirm that, in 78% of cases, there is some explanation; the person has legal status. That still leaves 33,000 cases that we should have followed up on. As I explained before you arrived, it is the number of suspicious cases that should determine the level of our efforts, not budget constraints. Budgets are not unlimited, but if there is a case presenting a risk, we should address it. To my knowledge, yes, there are cases where we received no response. In my opinion, that indicates a high risk, and we should have been more proactive, but ultimately, as Ms. Hogan said, we closed the case, which I find unacceptable.

**Martin Champoux:** What does it take to reopen the case? As you yourself say, this is unacceptable. There is a high risk, and we are leaving these people in irregular situations without doing anything, if I understand correctly.

**Ted Gallivan:** Exactly. Our department will take several steps to find a way to control the system. We need to address the issue of individuals who are not responding.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Next, we start the list again over on the Conservative side.

We have five minutes for Mr. Redekopp.

**Brad Redekopp:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Hogan, in your report there are lots of mentions of fraud and a large volume of files to process. The department missed a lot of things. That's kind of the gist of a lot of it. Do you think that the large volume of applications that the department was faced with in the last few years took the focus away from things like fraud and being able to fully investigate things?

**Karen Hogan:** It's a difficult question to answer. I would tell you that every application that comes in they must treat. We did see them go through all of those files, but they need to do a better job of managing risk once individuals are in Canada. It did appear to be that the focus was on getting through the applications, but then more rigour is needed throughout the entire process, and then as well at the end. This is all information they have. It's just information that they need to compile and then act on.

**Brad Redekopp:** That is consistent with what you were talking about with the 4,000 cases. They didn't seem to, number one, investigate more than 4,000, and even out of those, they didn't finish. The reason was budgetary constraints, but as you point out, maybe that shouldn't have been the overall thing. I would say that they have a \$6 billion budget with over 10,000 employees. It's a priority issue. Would you agree with that?

**Karen Hogan:** I agree that budget constraints rule every action that any department takes, but if you're going to investigate only a small portion, then you should do that effectively. I am hearing that the deputy is going to take steps to improve that going forward.

**Brad Redekopp:** On that then, the overall tone of the report was that there was fraud. The department missed a bunch of stuff, and as we're hearing today, it was kind of like, "Oops, we missed that, but we got this. We're going to fix it."

Do you think they have this? How are you feeling about the path forward here?

**Karen Hogan:** I haven't seen a detailed action plan yet. Normally, we would see that when the department comes to a committee. I look forward to seeing the actions that will be taken. I'll have the opportunity to follow up on these recommendations.

My office is starting a new process this year where we're waiting three years after our audit report, and then we're going to go in and start following up on recommendations so that we can actually see if action is happening. Again, it's about managing risk, and I would expect that the higher-risk items are acted upon to the fullest extent, given that there are limited resources across all departments.

**Brad Redekopp:** One of the other things that we've heard a lot at this committee is something that we're hearing a little bit today, and I think you might have seen some of this in looking at the department. It's that the IRCC will say, "It's not our job to remove people from the country", and the CBSA will say, "We can't remove people if we don't know that they need to leave", and then we also have the IRB over here saying, "We are our own independent agency. You can't tell us what to do." We have these three groups that struggle to work together, and you discovered some of that in your investigation.

Given that we have these different departments, should there be an overall systems approach to auditing the system that we have, from application to approval, removal or going into the asylum system? To get away from this finger pointing, would it make sense to have a look at it system-wide?

• (1210)

**Karen Hogan:** I think that's a luxury that our office enjoys, in that we can take a step back and look at a process from start to finish. As I said here, we set out to just look at the reforms, but we didn't ignore a gap when we saw it.

I think that if you look at what a Canadian will see when they look at their government, they see us all in one big box together and they don't see all of these silos into which we like to divide up work. I would have expected better collaboration, which is exactly why we issued a recommendation to do that—to share information among the federal family so that cases that need to be acted on can be acted on.

**Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Gallivan, you said you need to know whether visas have expired and people are leaving, which I think is important, but it also implies that the IRCC didn't know if people were leaving. Is that a fair statement?

**Ted Gallivan:** I would describe the prior approach as more reactive and as acting on an exceptions basis if they thought there was a problem. I would also describe the amount of time. It was an annual process versus acting before the person's visa expired. I would say that both the timeliness and the thoroughness weren't where they needed to be.

**Brad Redekopp:** The reality is that the department didn't pay a lot of attention to whether people were leaving. That's what the Auditor General found. You didn't know.

**Ted Gallivan:** Again, I'll share a small symbolic statement: In our IT systems, we didn't have an IT indicator showing whether somebody was in the country or not.

**Brad Redekopp:** Ms. O'Gorman said that now they will have consequences. She was referring to people who are abusing the system. Do you agree that people will now have consequences as a result of some of the things you're talking about?

**Ted Gallivan:** I think it's essential, actually.

Going back to a theme that a number of members have explored, the soft touch, the nudge, only works if people know there's a real consequence. In order for the polite request of "Please leave, because your visa has expired" to work, there has to be a real consequence, or else they're just hollow words. I think tough consequences are not just appropriate but also essential to making the other interventions effective.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

We have just seven seconds left.

**Brad Redekopp:** Could I say something quick?

**The Chair:** Okay. You have seven seconds.

**Brad Redekopp:** The important thing in that answer is that there were no consequences before. That's the implication in your answer. I think it's important that people know that, because that's what has caused a lot of these problems.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

I want to alert everyone that the clerk just received the IRCC's detailed management action plan for addressing the audit on international student programs. That should be in your inboxes momentarily.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to turn to you, Ms. O'Gorman. I was wondering if you can tell the committee how recent reforms to the international student program improved the CBSA's ability to verify that students entering Canada meet their study permit conditions.

**Erin O'Gorman:** What the deputy has outlined is collaboration in determining who's still here, whether people whose student visas expired have left and whether further action doesn't now need to be taken. That's the collaboration that will take place between the two organizations in looking to see who's still here.

The CBSA maintains the entry-exit system. We have that information, and it can be examined at a greater rate than IRCC.... The IRCC can go in and look at individuals, whereas we can run bigger inventories against that. That's a collaboration that's happening and will continue to happen.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** What trends are you seeing in compliance rates among international students upon entry, compared to previous years?

**Erin O'Gorman:** I think it's a bit early to answer that question.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Okay.

How are frontline officers trained to apply updated program rules while ensuring a fair and efficient experience for legitimate students?

**Erin O'Gorman:** As international students arrive at the port of entry, our officers are very adept at detecting any fraud. In some cases, before IRCC issues a student visa, the individual will be subject to a security screening. That's conducted in part by the CBSA, so I should have started with that.

Sometimes before a student visa is issued, the applicant is subject to security screening. When they are issued a student visa and they come to the port of entry, the officers examine that. As I said, officers are very adept at detecting fraud and can pose questions if they think there are any issues.

• (1215)

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Let me know if it is too early to answer this question as well: Have you seen any early indicators that the reforms are helping to deter bad actors from attempting to exploit our system?

**Erin O'Gorman:** The cancellation of the program was quite important for the CBSA, so in that sense, yes. The audit makes the point about high-risk countries that were subject to that program, so I will say that in that context, it did have a positive impact.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** IRCC has committed to providing the CBSA annually with a list of individuals whose study permits have expired and who have not transitioned to another immigration status. When you receive that list from IRCC, how quickly do you anticipate your agency will be able to match it against entry and exit records to identify who has departed and who might still be in Canada without status?

Mr. Gallivan, if you need to answer that, you can too.

**Ted Gallivan:** I don't want to speak for Ms. O'Gorman, but I think there's been some refinement in our thinking. There's going to be a lot more active effort before that list is provided to the CBSA. In other words, we're going to seek to determine whether people have left the country in the first instance, and then we're going to try to influence them before that deadline occurs. Then we might have a couple of attempts afterwards.

In other words, we want to bring the numbers down and try to manage the population so that they do leave the country before we have to pass it over to the CBSA for active enforcement action.

**Erin O'Gorman:** We said it would be annually, but there's nothing holding us to annually, quarterly or semi-annually. We will get to a cadence that makes the most sense.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** For individuals who are confirmed to be in Canada without valid status, how will your agency prioritize follow-up, and how does the international student population fit within the broader enforcement priorities that the CBSA might have?

**Erin O'Gorman:** That's what makes the IRCC's work that Mr. Gallivan has outlined so important.

The CBSA prioritizes serious inadmissibilities, war crimes, serious criminality and terrorism. We also prioritize failed asylum claimants, and then everybody else. People will move between those categories. Most students are genuine and will remove themselves on the basis of the work that's being discussed today. Some have come for the wrong reason, and they may find themselves in our serious inadmissibility category. Every year, as a matter of course, we do remove individuals who are out of compliance with their immigration status, and we'll continue to do that.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

That completes our third round of questions. I feel like we're in a boxing match, but this is a friendly one.

We're in our fourth round. We'll begin with the very friendly and happy Mr. Menegakis.

**Costas Menegakis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to address my first questions to you, Ms. Hogan.

There seems to be a disconnect between the government's attitude that Conservatives want to talk about the past but Canadians want to talk about the future, and what is actually happening on the ground and what we are actually hearing from Canadians on a daily basis.

I represent a community in the greater Toronto area that is home to a large segment of Canadians of Iranian descent. There's a lot of concern in the community about the reported 700 IRGC operatives, if not more, who are living in our community and threatening Canadians, permanent residents and people with temporary visas on a daily basis.

I want to touch on the light touch in the file review process. I'm wondering if you would consider doing a deeper dive in auditing a process that has historically and very recently allowed people like IRGC operatives into our communities, because they're not just the past. They're present, and they will be an issue in the future unless this is addressed.

**Karen Hogan:** My office has done work in the past on removals, but it has been quite some time. As we sit down and look at what audits to do in a coming year, we always debate when to go back to certain things. As I mentioned, it is our intention to start following up on recommendations in a much more rigorous fashion every year, so those might eventually get scooped in.

I can't tell you whether I will do an audit. I'll definitely make sure it gets added to our list of things to consider as we move forward.

• (1220)

**Costas Menegakis:** I would deeply appreciate it if you gave it some serious consideration.

I understand Mr. Gallivan is new to the job, and admittedly he has inherited a mess. I can understand why he has to focus on implementing things that will change the way the department has functioned and focus on the future.

The 153,000 number is astounding, given that only 2,000 people per year were looked into over two years because there was a budgeting issue. At that rate, children in day care today would be 80 years old before you get through the list of the 153,000. All kinds of people could be in the country in the meantime, creating, in some instances, havoc. Admittedly, not all are major issues, but some are, and they seem to have found a way to game the system.

Your report found that 1,600 investigations into non-compliant students were simply dropped because the individuals failed to respond. IRCC's policy is to make just two contact attempts over six months before marking the file inconclusive. Does this mean, in your opinion, that for a student looking to evade the law, the most effective strategy would be to simply not respond to the government's emails or the government's requests?

**Karen Hogan:** I think young individuals today would say this is "ghosting". Ghosting the department seemed to have no consequences, but I am hearing very clearly that the deputy minister is intending to make sure that there are consequences with follow-ups, so time will tell whether that changes going forward.

**Costas Menegakis:** When these 1,600 individuals didn't respond, did you find that IRCC took any enforcement action, or were they allowed to keep their permits and remain in Canada, despite being under active investigation for non-compliance?

**Karen Hogan:** I don't think it was active investigation. The files were closed when communication stopped, and then no further action was taken.

That isn't actually what the investigation was supposed to do. The investigation was supposed to identify whether or not the person was complying with the terms of their study permit. In this case, it would mean studying full-time. It's very likely that there are some who are genuine students, and they need to be given the opportunity to demonstrate that. However, when they're not, then an action should be taken.

**Costas Menegakis:** You also said that there are clearly tools in the tool kit, things they can do when fraudulent documentation was used or when a student isn't following the conditions of their permit. You said we didn't see them consider doing that in these 800 cases. What are those tools, and why do you think the government wasn't willing to use them?

**Karen Hogan:** We've heard the deputy minister talk about some of those tools. There could have been a flag placed on the file to ensure that in any subsequent immigration application, it would have to be contemplated and considered that the initial application used fraudulent documentation. They could work through the process and ban an individual. They could cancel their permit and take whatever action was needed to remove them.

Those are elements that are in the tool kit, but we saw in these 800 cases that none of them had been considered.

**Costas Menegakis:** Then it is our hope, Mr. Gallivan, that you will take all of this into consideration, because it is a mess that you have inherited, sir, and it's going to take a lot of work to fix it.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Menegakis, and thank you to everyone who responded.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Gallivan, you already referenced the report that this committee worked on. Thank you very much for looking at it, for reading it. It's an important report that committee members worked on together, and I'd say quite well.

Can you explore the issue of the provinces? I know the provincial role has been touched on by Ms. Graham here today, at least in brief, but what we heard in those various hearings was the critical role that the provinces play with respect to the international student program.

I think one of the things that somehow transpired over the previous years is the blame, and no one's hiding from it. There were very serious issues that came up—challenges that came up, mistakes that were made—that led to where we are now. However, this was placed entirely on the previous federal government's shoulders, and the provinces have a very important role in all of this and in what transpired.

How is IRCC engaging provinces to ensure better outcomes that ultimately aim at integrity?

**Ted Gallivan:** There are a number of formal and informal mechanisms.

I've had bilateral meetings with three or four of my provincial colleagues, and I will meet all of them in short order. There's also a multilateral forum at the ministerial level. I think our next meeting is in June, so there is an ongoing dialogue with all of the provinces around their needs.

I also think the educational institutions are active stakeholders. I have met with representatives of Universities Canada, and a number of other individual institutions have reached out. I do think the stakeholders are ready to speak, and it's our role in the department to take those meetings. We'll always listen. Maybe we don't always agree, but we keep that feedback in mind. Sharing information is really important. People can only make decisions and recommendations based on the information they have.

Alexis may want to add to this, but I think giving them data about their own programs and provincial responsibilities in the area of education is vitally important, so I did take careful note that this is something that we need to be better at.

I know Alexis has had a couple of meetings with Ontario already. Alexis, do you want to add anything in terms of provinces?

• (1225)

**Alexis Graham:** Sure.

There are, as the deputy mentioned, many ways, formal and informal, that we engage provinces and territories. We are starting to work with them on an overall engagement plan that takes into consideration the priorities that they would like to discuss, rather than having us simply impose an agenda. We're really taking this work quite seriously and trying to develop a more robust set of discussions that bring all of our programming into that conversation so that links can be made between programs and we can explore how we can complement each other's work and use all of our various levers together.

When it comes to this program specifically, there are a number of working groups, both at senior levels and at working levels, to work through the details. Part of that is empowering ourselves with data and being more transparent around that in terms of who's in which location on which type of permit. Those are all things that are ahead and are planned for the subsequent discussions we're having with them shortly.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you very much.

I have about a minute left and I have a question that's not simple. I think there's another round that we'll probably get to, so I might follow up there.

Mr. Gallivan, you mentioned the U15 universities. As a result of changes that have happened, they have continued questions about the place of the international student program and what the federal government's message is. What is a message that you would put forward to universities, whether it's to those in the U15 or to all post-secondary institutions in general, not just universities, on the direction forward?

I represent London. That's where Western is, so this question comes from that point of view.

**Ted Gallivan:** I think there's short term and medium term. Short term is probably what the game plan is for 2027, and then the medium term is beyond. My ask of them was to set an agenda for both. It's a little tight for the 2027 plan. We'll consult on that and even more ambitiously on 2028 and onwards.

Very transparently, I open the door to talking about a regime that seems to make sense. It feels a little bit like an accounting exercise in terms of the pockets and the numbers and the rules, and maybe a little bit of simplification would be good so that legitimate students could get through it a little more quickly and we could focus on those people who are trying to game the system.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

[*Translation*]

It's your turn, Mr. Champoux. You have two and a half minutes.

**Martin Champoux:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Ms. O'Gorman, is the Canada Border Services Agency involved in the process at any point, before all resources are exhausted? At what point is the agency informed that there is an investigation, for example into possible cases of people in an irregular situation, and at what point can it provide support to the department? Is the agency involved in any way?

**Erin O'Gorman:** We are not involved in the processes Mr. Gallivan mentioned, namely pressuring people to co-operate and informing them of the possible consequences if they do not, including the fact that they will not be able to return to Canada for five years.

I think the most effective approach for us would be to let IRCC manage the program. As we have said, we can search our data to determine whether certain individuals are in the country. However, we really want the shortest list possible, after the department has done all its work.

• (1230)

**Martin Champoux:** Let's take, however, a case like the one Mr. Gallivan mentioned earlier, where we're trying to contact students because they're suspected of providing fraudulent information to obtain their permits. Why isn't the agency immediately called upon when people don't respond? Otherwise, we're forced to abandon investigating them, for all sorts of reasons. Couldn't the Canada Border Services Agency be called in at that point?

The department could tell you when it has trouble locating certain people and they aren't providing answers. That way, it would be clear: Either you track them down and send them to the department so they can get answers, or we kick them out. At some point, people need to talk to each other so we can have a little more leverage in cases like this. Don't you agree?

**Erin O'Gorman:** Yes, but I would say that we are no better positioned than IRCC to pursue these people, up to a certain point in the process. If the department really can't find them and has done everything it can, then we have a role to play—I absolutely agree. However, if we don't have any numbers—

**Martin Champoux:** Ah, okay, so these people really do disappear from the scene.

Mr. Gallivan, I see you want to speak.

**Ted Gallivan:** I think one of the points we agree on is that we need to communicate information better. There could be a flag in the system so that, if the person we're trying to reach attempts to cross the border, a conversation can take place.

**Martin Champoux:** Are you already doing this, or do you think it would be a good idea to do it better?

**Ted Gallivan:** We are considering doing this going forward. It is not a process that is currently in place.

**Martin Champoux:** Why hasn't there been, historically—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champoux. Your two and a half minutes are up.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Davies.

**Fred Davies:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Gallivan, I'm going to follow up on a series of questions from previous meetings about housing for refugees. For whatever reason, there are a number of students who try to follow the asylum process if they don't want to leave the country. If they do that, what kind of housing funding do they get?

I'm in the Niagara region, so I'm in both a border community and a tourism community. A number of hotels were taken over in Niagara Falls and used for about 18 months. The minister assured me that there are no more hotels being paid for for asylum claimants.

I have been talking to people in my community. There have been other motels and hotels that have been converted to apartments, technically. I'm just wondering if there's a housing allowance given to those people.

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll start an answer. I'm happy to go off-line to make sure we get a precise answer because it's an important question.

There had been an ask. The federal government funds other orders of government. There was a soft ask to cease the hotel program. I understand that was upgraded to a hard and fast rule—no more hotels. That process should be working its way to where the funding, even if it's passed from another order of government, doesn't end up in a hotel.

The conversion is a new issue to me. Unless my officials happen to know, I'm going to have to follow up off-line to give you a clear answer.

**Fred Davies:** I know I don't have a whole lot of time, but the federal government just dedicated \$40 million to buying a hotel here in Ottawa for asylum claimants. Is that going to be a regular occurrence across the country?

**Ted Gallivan:** Again, my understanding of the progression of the decisions was an ask of those people in receipt of federal funds to cease the use of hotels, followed up by a hard condition and the terms and conditions through which the money flows. I had understood there was a tightening and a moving away from hotels.

You're talking about a conversion and now a second instance, a hotel in Ottawa. That seems to be inconsistent with the brief I've received. I don't think I have the right officials here to answer your question. I'm happy to provide a written answer.

**Fred Davies:** Mr. Harris had testified to that previously at committee.

Can I follow up with Ms. O'Gorman, please? Again, because I'm in a border community, I spend a lot of time in the Fort Erie area. I see some of the issues that are affecting CBSA. When we get into a non-compliance situation, the CBSA inherits that because you are the enforcement arm when people need to be removed. I asked the question earlier, but are you funded sufficiently? Is your capacity...?

The Minister of Public Safety said he was hiring 1,000 new agents across the country and that the first cohort had graduated recently. Do you know how many people actually graduated from that first cohort?

• (1235)

**Erin O'Gorman:** We have 42 people who have graduated. By June, we'll have had 100, and in June, we will have 180 at our college in Rigaud. We do them in three class chunks. At any one time, there are three classes. There are people who have just started, those midway through and those graduating.

**Fred Davies:** Is that a normal yearly cohort?

**Erin O'Gorman:** Those are people we are hiring as a result of the commitment and the funding to hire 1,000 officers.

**Fred Davies:** Over the last five years, let's say, would that be the equivalent number that you would have hired on a yearly basis ?

**Erin O'Gorman:** No.

**Fred Davies:** With your turnover rate and retirements, how many of that first cohort are just filling lost capacity?

**Erin O'Gorman:** None. We are tagging people as people who are replacing attrition, either people who are retiring or people who are leaving their position for an inland job or a promotion. Our attrition overall has been down a little bit over the last three years. We will know in the coming months who we are putting through the college for attrition and who we are putting and tagging as the 1,000 officers.

**Fred Davies:** Ms. O'Gorman, you may not have the numbers with you, but I'm looking for a net number. The minister made it sound like hiring 1,000 officers is going to solve the problem. I don't think it's going to come anywhere near solving the problem or giving you the capacity you need to deal with the ever-evolving situation of people who are required to leave the country.

If you're now investigating and being responsible for removing people, I think you need more agents. You need more investigative agents. You need more capacity. Would you agree with that?

**Erin O'Gorman:** As I said, the work of the CBSA never ends. There is no magic number.

We will put those 1,000 officers to good use. They will be net new officers. We will have the capacity in our college and we're hiring people directly, hiring trade officers who won't go through the college, so not every one of those 1,000 officers will need to be trained at Rigaud. I'd say about 80% of them will. It's just that we're hiring trade officers for different skill sets.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davies. You are way over.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Zahid.

**Salma Zahid:** Thank you.

My next question is for Ms. O'Gorman.

What progress has been made in working with IRCC to make sure that you track whether students leave Canada after their permits have expired?

**Erin O'Gorman:** I think Mr. Gallivan has nicely enumerated the work that IRCC will be doing.

To the question, we don't need the CBSA to be involved too early on, because then we will be spending our resources on people who may not have realized that their student visa has just expired or who may have another application. We need IRCC to determine who is now out of compliance and is not being brought into compliance.

As Mr. Gallivan said, there's regular communication among us, and we will be providing data and information to IRCC in terms of people who have left the country. I think it is important that we divide up our work so that we're not overlapping and bringing enforcement officers to a case that IRCC can ably either bring back to compliance or determine has left the country.

**Salma Zahid:** My next question is for Mr. Gallivan.

What lessons has IRCC learned from the issues that were identified with the student direct stream, and how are those lessons shaping your current policies?

**Ted Gallivan:** First, to clarify something about the student direct stream, Iran wasn't an eligible country. I think there were legitimate concerns about representatives of the regime in the country. The "light touch", as it was described under the student direct stream, couldn't have been a source, because that program wasn't open to Iran.

To go back to the idea of control and managing risk, merely skipping steps for everybody creates a vacuum that attracts fraudsters and people who want to take advantage. The automation and digitization taking place in IRCC are going to allow us to ingest information and do data analytics to set up our officers to make better decisions from cleaner data. Rather than limiting everybody a 30-minute review, I think the facts of somebody's circumstances and the facts of the country should dictate that.

In your report that I read last week, one of your recommendations is a cap on countries where a large percentage or a large number of the student visa seekers turn around and claim asylum. That's a really important point. Going forward, IRCC should be managing the countries that, on a per capita ratio basis, generate the most asylum claims. Then, what are the attributes of those claims, and how can we find them?

Again, I think the vision we're trying to convey and the commitments we're making for 2026 are that instead of just waving a bunch of things through with a lighter touch, we're actually going to use data and analytics to understand what the threat is. If people from certain countries have a propensity to claim asylum, what are the attributes of those claims? What are the facts we should be looking for? Then we can use the machine and our agents to find those files and deny the visas in the first instance.

● (1240)

**Salma Zahid:** That's a good segue to my next question. How is IRCC developing goals and measurable indicators to track progress on diversifying the international student population rather than them being from just a few countries?

[*Translation*]

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll start, and then my colleagues can continue.

Personally, I think Africa is a rich source of French speakers. Since we have new thresholds for attracting French-speaking immigrants, this is an interesting avenue for us. We really need to focus on French-speaking Africa, because it is a rich source of people who can come and settle here.

Would you like to add anything, Ms. Graham?

[English]

**Alexis Graham:** The francophone minority student pilot was launched in 2024. Pilot participants essentially arrive as study permit holders and then become eligible for permanent residence upon graduation, along with their dependents. That is one of the main things we're trying to do to remove some of the barriers that we've seen for francophone minority source countries in this particular program. It is a pilot, so we do need to assess the results. It's still in the early days, but I think it's a rather promising track.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Ho.

**Vincent Ho:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll go back to you, Ms. Hogan.

Your report mentions 52 cases where people linked to fraudulent documentation or misrepresentation later received international study permit extensions. In your professional view, does that point to an immigration system that was too permissive after these fraud indicators were known?

**Karen Hogan:** This points to one of my key findings. IRCC had a lot of information at their disposal, and they didn't effectively follow up when their own processes identified fraud indicators. We would expect that those kinds of things would not be ignored.

**Vincent Ho:** In practical terms, on a high level from your audit, do you think the Liberal government is addressing only the symptoms of this immigration crisis, or are they addressing some of the causes as well?

**Karen Hogan:** The international student program was one of the programs meant to help contribute to lowering the immigration level. There was a goal set to reduce the number of temporary residents. Reducing the number of international study permits was a key contributor to getting there. The goal was achieved, but that decline was much sharper than expected.

**Vincent Ho:** Do you think the goal of restoring the integrity of the immigration system was achieved?

**Karen Hogan:** Again, I can't speak to the whole immigration system.

**Vincent Ho:** I mean on this program.

**Karen Hogan:** We focused on the international student programs.

They added some measures to improve the integrity—verifying that the letters of acceptance from the universities were authentic. We cited many instances where they had information and did not act on these integrity concerns. That's why we provided recommendations to improve the integrity process. The reforms were meant to reduce the numbers but also to improve integrity, and there's work left to be done on the latter.

**Vincent Ho:** My next set of questions are for the officials of the IRCC.

How long does an investigation into an international student fraud case take, on average?

**Ted Gallivan:** It would vary. In some cases, it could be seconds, because we confirm that the person has status. In other cases, it could be quite extensive. The facts would vary. It would be a range.

I'll go back to the 153,000 cases. In a few months, we've been able to say that 78% of these people have a normalized status in the country. Some of them are quite quick. Others can be quite slow.

• (1245)

**Vincent Ho:** For the other 22%, how long would that be on average, roughly speaking? Is it years, months or longer?

**Ted Gallivan:** This year, our commitment is to put them into better buckets. Out of the 33,000 or so who are left, some will have left the country. For others, once we begin the research, we might find answers. The commitment would be, for this calendar year, to at least know that we're down to a smaller number who require more aggressive treatment. Those cases can be quite long.

**Vincent Ho:** When an international student permit has expired and an individual decides to overstay their visa, how long would it take for your department to figure that out?

**Ted Gallivan:** I can't answer in terms of how long it would take the department.

Going back to earlier testimony, our game plan going forward is to talk to people before the expiry, because they should have purchased tickets and made plans to leave the country before they fall out of status. They would therefore be renewing as a student, transferring to a different status or purchasing a plane ticket. Our plan, then, is to talk to them before that day arrives.

**Vincent Ho:** Okay. Once that process plays out and individuals continue to overstay their visas, how long will it take before they're ordered deported if the individuals have exhausted all of their appeals process?

**Ted Gallivan:** Some people do have appeal rights throughout the whole continuum, but in the case of somebody with an expired visa, our intention is to act immediately to contact people before that expiration date, and then once—

**Vincent Ho:** You don't know how long it will take on average, then. Okay—

**Ted Gallivan:** We have not yet implemented the program, so it would be difficult for me to talk about a sweet spot in terms of referral to CBSA or not.

**Vincent Ho:** My last question is for the CBSA officials here.

Once someone has been ordered deported and referred to the CBSA but still refuses to leave voluntarily, how long will it take for your department, on average, to remove this individual?

**Erin O'Gorman:** I'm going to say the same thing. It depends. We will call them in for an interview, and then we will talk about their circumstances and we will work with them to leave the country—

**Vincent Ho:** On average, how long will it take?

**Erin O'Gorman:** There's no average. There are people who leave immediately. There are people who—

**Vincent Ho:** There's no average...? There has to be an average.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Thank you, Ms. O'Gorman.

That is time.

Please remember not to speak over each other, as it is hard for our interpreters.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here.

I want to continue with the IRCC representatives. I've gone through the Auditor General's report, and I know that you have a diversification strategy for international students, which has been showing some progress in the last years.

When you see the tables relating to 2023, 2024 and 2025, there is progress being made, but in our offices and constituencies, we still hear regularly about student wait times being uneven, with uneven wait times for the evaluation of student visas. There are still some comparatives being made by people originating from different countries that there doesn't seem to be an even-handed approach.

Are you seized by this question, number one, about wait times, and number two, about making sure there is an even-handed approach when it comes to people from different countries with respect to student admissions and visas within Canada?

**Ted Gallivan:** I'll first start by quickly going back to the exchange we just had to remind the committee that the OAG report was delivered in March. That was the previous month.

We have preliminary plans. We've started to take action, but if I don't have a full and complete answer in terms of how long it takes to do something, it's because I'm acting on a report that we received last month. I hope to do better next time. I sense the frustration, but this is a report that landed weeks ago, and we're in the early phases of implementing an action plan.

In terms of wait times, back to that concept of control, the OAG audited management controls. Did management have the information it needed to make decisions? Did it have the right procedures, practices and IT systems in place? I do believe that DPM, an iterative IT system that we're building, will give us better information both to act more quickly on legitimate claims and then to flag aside the claims that aren't legitimate. Imagine machine learning that's scanning the integrity of documents. We'll learn what a diploma from a certain university is supposed to look like, and we'll be able to detect if it's been doctored.

I do think that some of the investments we continue to make in IT and this idea of control lets us pass the legitimate students through more quickly, which we need to do, and at the same time flag those who deserve greater scrutiny.

• (1250)

**Sameer Zuberi:** When you see unevenness between neighbouring countries, let's say, with respect to wait times—gross differences—do you take note of that and do you start putting in resources to make sure those differences don't exist?

**Ted Gallivan:** I think the first step is to understand the driver for that. Is there a greater propensity to fraud? Is it a system that we're just not familiar with? I think we first have to understand why there is a discrepancy.

When there's a discrepancy in a claim and it's not deliberate fraud or evasion, but just a mistake, again, we have IT systems that we can update on a weekly basis. Maybe we're not asking the question clearly or maybe we need to reframe how the form is designed. We now have IT systems that can do that.

Again, I think it depends on the reason for the discrepancy. If it's because we're not clear in our instructions or there's some kind of linguistic barrier that we have to overcome—

**Sameer Zuberi:** Certainly, and I hope that the chair indulges me a bit, given that my time was taken up by a question that wasn't my own.

I hope that you're live to this issue about the differences from here on in, if you aren't already. Is that correct? I'm assuming there was interplay between IRCC and CBSA in terms of the evaluation of these visas, because there is some screening that must be done by CBSA before a student visa is issued.

**Ted Gallivan:** I appreciate that there's a question behind the question, that there's a concern with discrepancies between certain countries. I'm happy to take that back and take action on it.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Thank you.

I want to now quickly ask one last question. If you are live to the concerns around foreign interference and influence as you are screening for students, please explain to the committee how you are actually live to those concerns.

**Ted Gallivan:** Our visa officers would have all kinds of indicia and indicators. They would have training. We're working on certification of our staff. There would be a series of discretionary and mandatory referrals across the suite of visa streams, and then they would make referrals to more expert security partners when those thresholds are met. Again, some of them are binary, yes-no, and others are more subjective.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Go ahead, Mr. Champoux. You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Martin Champoux:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Earlier, I touched on something that really interested me. I was going to ask you, Mr. Gallivan, why there hasn't been greater cooperation for so many years. It seems logical to me, at least when it comes to the sharing of such important information about people who are in the country without permanent residence or Canadian citizenship and who are awaiting status. I don't understand why there hasn't been greater collaboration between CBSA and IRCC. Can you explain to me why that has never been the case?

**Ted Gallivan:** As I understand it, the culture of the department I inherited was really focused on facilitating the arrival process and handling all the work related to it. There was a strong emphasis on the arrival itself, and that was where it ended. There was no further interest afterward.

There are also exceptions, but when we look at the percentages, we see that they constitute a small portion. Although it is a small percentage, action will have to be taken in these cases from now on.

**Martin Champoux:** Okay.

I just want to go back to one point. You said you received the report a month ago, so you're defending yourself for not taking more action. I just want to point out that you've been aware of the gist of the issue since 2023. The information in this report therefore wasn't a big surprise when it was submitted in March. You already knew about it.

Do you think your department has made enough progress since it has had the information, that is, since long before the publication of Ms. Hogan's report?

**Ted Gallivan:** In 2023, a four-year plan was implemented to restore rigour to the student visa program. The Office of the Auditor General came in at the halfway point in the process.

As I said at the outset, the Auditor General recognized that there had been progress from a numerical standpoint. As for the program where there were loopholes, that has been closed. With respect to letters of acceptance, the verification work has begun.

So I think there has been progress over the first two years. That said, there are still two years left in the mandate the department has set for itself.

• (1255)

**Martin Champoux:** Okay.

I'll be quick, because I don't have much time left.

Among the 153,000 cases that were fraudulent, appeared to be fraudulent, or raised concerns—some of which were investigated—was there any consistency or pattern that suggested the existence of an organized network or a coordinated fraud scheme? Are you able to say whether they originated from a particular region of the world, for example, or whether there were more cases concentrated in a specific area, which would allow you to be more vigilant with respect to these applications in the future? Have you drawn any lessons from this information, if such information exists?

**Ted Gallivan:** I don't think our work was sophisticated enough for me to be able to answer the question adequately. We would need to analyze the files in a more thorough and broader way in order to be able to respond properly to your question.

**Martin Champoux:** So there was no consistency. To your knowledge, there was no—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

We will have one and a half minutes for Mr. Redekopp and one and a half minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos, please.

**Brad Redekopp:** Ms. Hogan, you've had a chance to look under the hood and see into the inner workings of IRCC. Are there other areas that should be looked at?

**Karen Hogan:** Within the immigration department, I would expect that the department would take some of the findings here and say, "We should act on integrity information we already know." There are some really good systems. They have a great risk assessment unit, but they're not really acting on the information that comes out of it. I would hope that they would expand that and use it throughout the whole department so that the next time I come in and look at something, they'll be acting on integrity from start to finish.

**Brad Redekopp:** Honestly, I think Mr. Gallivan should be ashamed and embarrassed that it took you and your team coming in and highlighting all of these situations and issues, which Canadians have known about for years, frankly, to actually find these problems and force the department to make some changes. I'm glad to hear there are changes coming.

Thank you, guys, for your work. I appreciate this. It's very enlightening. Of course, it's not just you. It's your team. You get all the glory, and they do all the work. I know how that works, but I appreciate you guys. Thank you for doing this.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Ms. Hogan.

Mr. Fragiskatos.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you to all of you for your public service. I'll leave it at that.

I'm not sure that people being shamed and called out like that is very constructive to the purpose of this committee. Regardless, I have a minute and a half.

Mr. Gallivan, I was going to come back to the issue of universities, but I think you were clear in that answer. I want to go in another direction, in fact.

You talked about data and, specifically, analytics. Can you talk a bit further about how a focus on that realm will ensure greater system integrity in our immigration system?

**Ted Gallivan:** Briefly, one of the frustrations I have about the cases we didn't follow up on is that they are a rich source of criteria to apply to the screen up front. In other words, cases of suspected fraud that we didn't follow up on to understand the methodology or the pattern were intel that we couldn't put into the analytics system the Auditor General just said was quite good. We have definitely missed that opportunity.

That's an example of how analytics can work. We take any case of identified fraud that we find and follow up on, and we unpack it and then we put it in the front end so that all new visas going forward are screened against that fact pattern. If we find somebody trying to do the same thing.... Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice.... We're trying to stop the "fool me twice" cases.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

[*Translation*]

I'd like to thank today's witnesses.

[*English*]

This is the end of our two hours of questioning.

I want to echo the thanks. Thank you, Ms. Hogan, Ms. O'Gorman, Mr. Gallivan and your respective teams, for the excellent and important work you all do and the important contributions you've made today to our study. Thank you for your patience in answering our questions.

Thanks, colleagues, for the great questions.

Before I adjourn our meeting, our meeting on Wednesday is going to have witnesses for our continued immigration study. Please make sure that you know there's a room change. It's in Wellington Building, room 415. Do not come here.

That is it. Thank you.

This meeting is adjourned.

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