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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz



Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1100)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 29 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members.

[English]

Those who are on Zoom, please click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

[Translation]

For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: either floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will let you know when you have only one minute left.

[English]

As always, kindly wait to be recognized by me. I will recognize you by name. I will also remind everyone to please not speak over each other, as it will be hard for our interpreters to translate, and it will make their job difficult. Of course, please ensure that all your comments are addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

For members in the room, please raise your hand if you wish to speak.

[English]

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

[Translation]

Thank you for your co-operation.

[English]

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.

I would now like to warmly welcome our witnesses for our first panel today. All of them are in the room. We do not have anybody virtually for this first panel.

From Amnesty International Canada, we have Marisa Berry Méndez, campaigner, French-speaking section. From Battista Migration Law Group, we have Joycna Kang, partner. From La Passerelle-Intégration et Développement Économique, we have Léonie Tchatat, founder and executive director.

[Translation]

I'd now like to welcome all the witnesses.

[English]

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

We will begin with Ms. Méndez for five minutes.

Your five minutes begin right now.

[Translation]

Marisa Berry Méndez (Campaigner, French Speaking Section, Amnesty International Canada): Thank you very much.

Good morning, everyone.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of francophone Amnesty International Canada, a human rights organization that operates worldwide.

To contribute to the discussion surrounding Canada's immigration system, which appears to be at a crossroads, I would like to highlight some recent setbacks regarding human rights within our refugee protection system. Next, I would like to address the persistence of a systemic problem within our immigration system.

At a time when authoritarianism is on the rise worldwide, attacks on migrants and refugees are often a harbinger of broader attacks on human rights. We don't have to look far to find examples of this. We would like Canada to stand apart from these trends, but we are concerned.

Over the past few decades, Canada has built a refugee protection and resettlement system that served as a model on the international stage. Recently, however, we have observed a troubling erosion of this system and of Canada's commitment to those in need of protection.

Bill C-12, newly passed and widely criticized by advocacy groups, is a direct attack on the right to asylum. In addition to being counterproductive and unfounded, recent budget cuts to the interim federal health program, or IFHP, pose another affront to refugees' rights. The recent massive reduction in the private sponsorship of refugees program is appalling, especially since it is one of the most renowned, effective and cost-effective programs for the government. The number of refugees resettled by the government has also dropped—at a time when every country should be doing more to address global crises and conflicts.

I will now move on to my second topic: discrimination in our permanent and temporary immigration systems.

As you are no doubt aware, the points system for selecting economic immigrants, which is still in use today, was established in 1967. Among its goals was to eliminate the explicit and discretionary discrimination that characterized the immigration selection process. However, although discrimination based on race or ethnic origin is no longer explicit, Amnesty International notes that the points system itself is discriminatory.

The discrimination stems from the way temporary migration programs, such as the temporary foreign worker program, or TFWP, are used to meet certain labour needs. Most people brought in under this program—the vast majority being racialized people who come to fill so-called low-skilled positions—are excluded from permanent immigration, since work experience in low-skilled positions is not rewarded in the points system.

Yet we know that these jobs are often essential in the agri-food, manufacturing and health care sectors, among others. We need these people to meet labour demands, but rather than allowing them to immigrate, we allow them to enter the country under the TFWP, a program that fosters exploitation.

These migrant workers are not eligible for family reunification and must endure long, painful periods of separation from their families in order to work in Canada. These same migrants—who are racialized and fill low-skilled jobs—are therefore overrepresented among victims of abuse under the TFWP, while having practically no access to permanent residence or the rights associated with permanent residency status. We need these people, but we trap them in an abusive system, and their status is precarious.

To meet Canada's human rights obligations, Amnesty International recommends eliminating the eligibility criteria for economic immigration, criteria that result in discrimination against workers in so-called low-skilled positions. In other words, economic immigration should admit workers regardless of their skills. Excluding low-skilled workers is discriminatory and runs counter to Canada's international obligations.

Finally, Canada must decide what direction it wants to take. Does it want to remain a country known for its commitment to human rights and build on what we have already achieved? Or will it in-

stead allow discrimination to persist and dismantle a protection system that enriches Canadian society and profoundly changes the lives of those who find refuge here?

Amnesty International is calling on us to do everything in our power to create a Canadian immigration system that truly values human rights.

● (1105)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Kang, you have five minutes beginning now.

Joycna Kang (Partner, Battista Migration Law Group): Good morning, honourable chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I'll begin with very brief remarks about myself. I am an Ontario-based lawyer and partner at Battista Migration Law Group, a Toronto-based immigration and refugee law firm. Our firm specializes in assisting the LGBTQ+ community in navigating the immigration system.

Today, I want to focus my remarks on the immediate and on-the-ground impacts that immigration lawyers like myself are seeing and have been observing since the passage of Bill C-12.

To begin with the broader context, as of December 31 of 2025, there were just under 300,000 refugee claims pending before the IRB. There's no question that this represents a significant backlog, and I recognize that one of the primary intentions behind Bill C-12 was to reduce the number of fraudulent claims entering or remaining in the queue. However, what we have seen in practice since this legislation came into force has not been an orderly reduction in backlog, but rather a climate of confusion, urgency and, in many cases, panic.

In particular, the imposition of an arbitrary timeline has resulted in hundreds of genuine refugee claims being caught in the crossfire. Individuals with legitimate protection needs are being excluded or disadvantaged, not because their claims lack merit but because they do not conform to a rigid procedural deadline.

This has had a disproportionate impact on certain vulnerable groups. For example, claimants with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics often require time to come to terms with their identity and to feel safe in disclosing it. Many of these individuals come from places where education on this topic is so limited that they do not possess the cultural understanding or even the vocabulary to begin discussions. It is neither realistic nor humane to impose a fixed timeline on such a deeply personal and often difficult internal journey.

Bill C-12 has not actually resolved the issue of backlog. Instead, it has effectively shifted the volume of cases from one highly trained decision-maker to a much less qualified one. This shift raises serious concerns from a legal perspective. PRRA officers do not receive the same level of specialized training as IRB decision-makers do in assessing complex refugee protection claims. In my experience, there is a higher likelihood of rejection by a PRRA officer than by an IRB decision-maker due to the officers having less training and errors in applying the law. This leads to more unreasonable refusals, which in turn generate an increase in judicial review applications before the Federal Court, thereby transferring and compounding the existing backlog at another level of the system. This does not effectively target the issue of fraudulent claims.

I want to be clear, the objective of maintaining integrity in the asylum system and preventing fraud is both valid and necessary. Canada must have mechanisms in place to ensure that the refugee protection system is not abused. However, these mechanisms must be effective and proportionate. Concerningly, this new legislation unfairly punishes the masses on the basis of a few bad actors.

This is not the only example of overly broad policy aimed at curbing fraud having this type of effect. I note that in March 2025, IRCC announced the removal of points for job offers in the express entry system, citing a significant increase in fraudulent LMIA's as the issue. However, rather than introducing more stringent oversight and reporting requirements for employers seeking LMIA's, points were removed from all applications in the system, impacting thousands of highly skilled and qualified candidates who had gained those points credibly.

We are seeing these same effects with the passage of Bill C-12. The introduction of a strict one-year time limit to make a refugee claim does not meaningfully deter fraudulent claims. What it does do is capture genuine individuals who may have initially pursued other immigration pathways in good faith based on policies and promises provided by the Canadian government for a path to permanent residence.

The new refugee eligibility criteria are premised on the assumption that a genuine refugee claimant will always seek asylum at the first possible opportunity. This assumption is highly inconsistent with established jurisprudence. Canadian courts have repeatedly held that a delay in making a claim is not determinative of whether that claim is genuine.

In closing, I would urge this committee to consider whether the current legislative approach is truly addressing the challenges that it set out to solve, or whether it is instead displacing them while increasing the vulnerability of those the system is meant to protect.

Thank you.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kang.

[*Translation*]

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

Léonie Tchatat (Founder and Executive Director, La Passerelle - Intégration et Développement Économique): Good morning, Madam Chair and committee members.

My name is Léonie Tchatat. I represent La Passerelle, an organization that has been supporting francophone immigrants from Black and racialized communities for 28 years.

One central question guides my remarks this morning. Canada knows how to attract people, but does it know how to integrate them and retain them in the long term? Progress has been made, partly thanks to the 9% target for francophone immigration outside Quebec by 2026, but success depends on what happens after people arrive.

The reality on the ground is clear. Black and racialized francophone immigrants face economic, systemic and language barriers. Racialized francophone youth are two to three times more likely to live in poverty. Some groups have unemployment rates exceeding 20%. This is not due to a lack of skills. It is due to an integration problem. That must be clearly articulated. Racism is a real barrier, particularly when it comes to employment, housing and access to services. Francophone immigration will not be fully successful if racism continues to be treated as a peripheral issue.

Canada is good at selecting talent, but once people arrive, they run into several persistent obstacles, such as credential recognition, the requirement for Canadian work experience, administrative delays, or the housing crisis. The entry system is effective, but integration remains an uneven process.

In Ontario, these challenges are amplified by the minority francophone context, where access to French-language services remains limited. When the system fails to deliver, organizations step in. We support thousands of people every day at La Passerelle, but the needs far exceed our capacity.

In 2025, we opened Agapanthe, the first francophone transition house for Black refugees of African descent. This is a significant step forward, but it also highlights gaps in the system.

Moreover, the asylum system remains complex and difficult to navigate, which makes people's situations even more precarious. Yet these communities are essential to Canada's future. Nearly half of Toronto's francophones were born abroad. Their success is a strategic issue.

Today, we have an immigration strategy, but we still lack a fair integration strategy. I therefore propose four courses of action: accelerate the recognition of diplomas; invest in tailored integration models; explicitly incorporate the fight against racism as an integration and retention lever in Canada's francophone communities; and measure success through concrete results in terms of employment, housing and retention.

In closing, I would say that an immigration policy is successful when people can live with dignity and fully contribute to society. Immigration has to work for everyone.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you for your remarks.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

Mr. Davies, you have six minutes.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to all the witnesses for making the trip to Ottawa today.

Ms. Kang, you've argued that Canada's immigration system suffers from policy volatility. What specific structural reforms would prevent the recurring cycle of expansion, abuse and sudden restriction?

Joycna Kang: Thank you for the question.

I would propose more training for existing decision-makers at the IRB. The IRB already has a system to assess the genuineness of claims that are before them for determination. Hiring more highly qualified and skilled decision-makers will help make an impact on the backlog that exists and is very real. What doesn't work, in the opinion of myself and my colleagues who are seeing the impacts of this bill on the ground, is shifting that burden of decision-making to a much less qualified body or avenue. We're seeing the impacts in backlogs at the Federal Court. The court is already backlogged. I believe the court is on track to see several more immigration-related proceedings in 2026 than they did in 2025. This is a direct result of more unreasonable refusals across the scope of immigration applications.

While I understand the need for streamlined procedures and the effective use of our resources, we cannot let that overshadow Canada's international obligations to avoid sending people back to situations of violence.

Fred Davies: I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I have limited time here.

Would you agree that the system is failing because of policy design, or is it because departments like IRCC are failing to execute the existing policy effectively?

Joycna Kang: I would say it's both. I would say policy design needs to change on some level, with more discussions with key stakeholders, such as immigration lawyers and migrant rights groups. At the same time, IRCC's implementation of those policies is oftentimes not transparent and leaves a lot to the imagination in terms of why something went wrong or how somebody could resolve it.

• (1120)

Fred Davies: That leads me to a connected question. You pointed out that poor decision-making is a driver of litigation. What specific failures at IRCC or the IRB are generating these judicial reviews?

Joycna Kang: What we commonly see is a misapplication of the legal test for what makes a refugee claim genuine and what deserves protection, in Canada's eyes. Oftentimes, PRRA officers don't properly handle the evidence that is being provided to them. There are sweeping generalizations made. There's a failure to engage with evidence that contradicts their conclusions.

Fred Davies: Can I interrupt you? Do you have concrete examples of this happening? Is this systemic, or is it anecdotal?

Joycna Kang: I would say it's systemic. I deal with a lot of cases at the Federal Court that have these factors present in them. PRRA officers, and even some IRB officers, will prefer their own evidence, which leads to certain conclusions that support their findings that a claim is not warranted refugee relief, while also ignoring evidence that is tendered in the claim that directly contradicts those findings. That's a very common error that we see.

Fred Davies: That's interesting.

Where do you think Parliament should draw the line between evolving human rights protections and maintaining a manageable asylum system? Can you have both?

Joycna Kang: I think you can have both. I think it's something that isn't going to be solved very quickly or overnight. It's something that will take a lot of discussions among various stakeholders throughout the system.

I want to reiterate that I think it's important to strike that balance. Canada has limited resources, of course, and we need to make sure we're using them effectively while still balancing our obligation against non-refoulement.

Fred Davies: I think I have time for one more question.

You suggested that international students are being used as collateral damage in reforms. How do you respond to evidence that asylum claims from students have surged into the tens of thousands?

Joycna Kang: Thank you for asking that question. I wanted to talk about this in my remarks.

I think there's a bit more confusion about why that has happened. We're seeing a very big increase in claims from international students recently because of the changes to postgraduate work permit eligibility rules. A lot of these students came here on the premise, and the promise of the Canadian government, that they would receive work permits after they finished their programs.

Fred Davies: I'm sorry, but can I just follow up on that? The cohort of students who are graduating still have access to work permits. It's the newer ones coming into the country now who have limited access to postgraduate work. Do you agree with that?

Joycna Kang: No, not necessarily. If your work permit application was filed before a certain date, and I believe it was November 2024—

Fred Davies: Yes, it was 2024.

Joycna Kang: —then you continue to access the rules that were in place prior. However, for many students who have had to extend their programs or who changed programs before these new eligibility rules came into play, they did so with the understanding that their new programs or their extended programs would still qualify them for postgraduate work permit status. A lot—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kang.

Thank you, Mr. Davies. You'll have to continue in the next round.

Now, we have six minutes for Ms. Zahid, please.

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

Thanks to all the witnesses. My questions are directed towards Madame Tchatat.

Madame Tchatat, from your work at La Passerelle supporting Black and racialized francophone newcomers, how important are strong francophone immigration targets to addressing the labour shortages and also supporting the vitality of francophone minority communities outside of Quebec?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: Thank you very much.

I think there has been some real progress. If we look at the new policies currently in place, we see a rise in those that target francophone communities, despite some cutbacks.

The real issue isn't about the target, it's about integration. I work at an organization that primarily serves Black and racialized communities. People from these communities arrive with qualifications and skills, but there's a systemic flaw.

The integration process for a Black person might take 10 years, as opposed to a non-Black person. The labour market system fails to adequately provide certain services to francophone immigrants. That was proven during the 2021 crisis in Toronto, when we saw Black refugees sleeping on the streets, even though Canada is supposedly a wealthy country. We had to create the first transitional housing for Black francophone refugees because a francophone coming to Toronto who can only speak French is completely cut off from a number of services.

This means Black immigrants face numerous challenges. From the moment they arrive, they must contend with systemic racism. Furthermore, host communities are not necessarily ready to integrate these individuals. They come to Canada with tremendous potential, and if they are successfully integrated, they can quickly contribute to the country's economic development.

• (1125)

[English]

Salma Zahid: Opposition members have brought witnesses to this committee who have said that there is no value in promoting francophone immigration and it should be sharply reduced or eliminated to favour purely economic considerations.

Could you help us understand the economic and social value that francophone immigration brings to Canada?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: That's very interesting.

First of all, Canada is a bilingual country. In 2019, I led an awareness campaign called “Immigrant Means.” Immigrants and francophone communities in Canada contribute in many ways.

In terms of the broader picture, the economy and human resources, francophone immigrants contribute to every sector of the country. When it comes to bilingualism, it's fair to say that Canada is a country that cannot move forward without the French fact. I believe that failing to recognize the added value of francophone immigrants is a major mistake on Canada's part, because they contribute to every aspect of society—whether economically or in terms of social integration—at both local and international levels.

Failing to recognize francophone immigrants as an added value truly amounts to a missed strategic opportunity for Canada.

[English]

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

In your experience, are employers in francophone communities benefiting from the increased access to French-speaking talent?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: It's quite complex. I think we need to continue promoting bilingualism and bilingual talent. Employers say they're looking for bilingual talent, but in practice, they don't hire bilingual talent because they don't always have access to the channels to hire them.

Together with private employers, we have established a bilingual talent council to raise awareness among these employers about hiring bilingual francophone talent.

I think there should be more resources and greater availability to help employers promote this. We also need to change the system, because francophone immigrants—especially Black francophone immigrants—face systemic racism during the job search process. Indeed, how can we explain that despite having degrees, skills, and sometimes Canadian degrees, they cannot secure a job?

So, there is still real discrimination in the labour market, because this talent is not necessarily recognized.

[English]

Salma Zahid: Do you have any specific examples, such as for Ontario?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: Yes. At least 60% of the cases handled by the organization I work for involve people who are unemployed and looking for work. During interviews, they're told they lack Canadian experience or that they don't understand the system. It happens every day. I can share so many stories with you about talented people who come here and could contribute, but who aren't hired, sometimes because of systemic barriers on the ground.

Often, employers aren't informed or don't know where to look for this bilingual talent. Yet these people exist.

The Chair: Thank you,

[English]

Thank you, Ms. Zahid.

[Translation]

Thank you, Ms. Tchatat.

Mr. Champoux, you have six minutes.

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

I will begin by saying that I was extremely surprised by Ms. Zahid's earlier question. I have never heard anyone sitting on the opposition benches, regardless of party affiliation, make comments of this nature about francophone economic immigration. I am very curious to hear the basis for this question, because if it is true and indeed well founded, it is scandalous and unacceptable.

That said, obviously, I am here to stand in for my colleague Alexis Deschênes, who tabled a notice of motion on Friday. I would like to move this motion for debate today.

I will read the motion:

That, whereas Quebec and Ontario receive a disproportionate share of asylum seekers in Canada, while efforts to relocate them to other provinces remain minimal, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study specifically on;

- a) the impacts of this inequitable distribution on the provinces' public services and public finances;
- b) ways to make the system more equitable;
- c) practices in other countries and groups of countries, such as the European Union, for distributing asylum seekers;

that the committee invite experts, lawyers specializing in immigration and constitutional law, representatives of organizations working with asylum seekers, and any other witnesses deemed relevant to appear before it;

that the committee formulate recommendations aimed at making the asylum seeker system more equitable;

that the committee devote a minimum of three meetings to this study;

and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a full response to its report.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead.

[Translation]

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

It is clear to us that the motion is important. However, there are witnesses here, and their testimony is important to our committee. We are therefore ready to proceed to a vote.

[English]

The Chair: Would anyone else like to speak to this?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Can I just ask that it be read one more time?

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Champoux, could you please read the motion again in French?

Martin Champoux: I will be pleased to read it again.

That, whereas Quebec and Ontario receive a disproportionate share of asylum seekers in Canada, while efforts to relocate them to other provinces remain minimal, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the committee undertake a study specifically on:

- a. the impacts of this inequitable distribution on the provinces' public services and public finances;
- b. ways to make the system more equitable;
- c. on practices in other countries and groups of countries, such as the European Union, for distributing asylum seekers;

that the committee invite experts, lawyers specializing in immigration and constitutional law, representatives of organizations working with asylum seekers, and any other witnesses deemed relevant to appear before it; that the committee formulate recommendations aimed at making the asylum seeker system more equitable; that the committee devote a minimum of three meetings to this study; and that, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a full response to its report.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

Are there any other comments?

Ms. Rempel Garner, go ahead.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I would just like to put on the record that I think any statements precluding mobility rights that are protected under the charter need to be very carefully examined by the committee.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now proceed to the vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 0)

[Translation]

Mr. Champoux, you still have the floor for a minute and 10 seconds.

Martin Champoux: I'll be quick.

First, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us. The testimony is highly relevant and very interesting.

Ms. Berry Méndez, there is currently a situation in Drummondville involving temporary foreign workers. Olymel has just laid off those workers. It's a big company in Quebec. These workers are on closed work permits, and they are finding themselves unemployed. They don't want to leave the country. Employers in the region are ready to hire them but, as you know, that's not possible.

What should we do about this situation? It's not unique. It's happening in many regions of Quebec and across Canada.

• (1135)

Marisa Berry Méndez: Thank you for the question.

According to research by the French-speaking section of Amnesty International Canada and other civil society stakeholders, as well as studies conducted by parliamentary committees, employer-specific work permits are highly problematic from a human rights perspective. They are the root of systemic exploitation under temporary foreign worker programs.

Our position, and that of many other stakeholders, is that employer-specific work permits should be abolished. Anyone working in Canada should have an open work permit in order to enjoy the same mobility afforded to all other workers.

Martin Champoux: So you do agree with the time limit, but it would need to be an open work permit, correct?

It would still be a temporary worker program, but one involving an open work permit that allows for labour mobility in the event of a business closure.

Is that correct?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Berry Méndez.

Thank you, Mr. Champoux. I'm sorry to interrupt. You will be able to continue asking your questions in the next round.

[English]

Next, we have a second round of questions. We begin with five minutes for Ms. Rempel Garner.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Thank you, Chair.

I'll begin my questions with Ms. Berry Méndez.

I was interested in fleshing out some of your testimony. You made an assertion that some parts of Canada's immigration system are discriminatory. I was wondering if you were suggesting that you would be challenging criteria in Canada's points-based immigration system that are neutral on their face, such as age caps or language thresholds, as creating disproportionate impacts on grounds such as sex or family status, or analogous grounds requiring their invalidation or overhaul, using "adverse effects" discrimination under section 15 of the charter.

Marisa Berry Méndez: What we found in our research is that the people recruited for our temporary migration programs who do have issues of systemic abuse with the closed work permit are racialized people from countries in the global south overwhelmingly, but the points system doesn't recognize the work experience of those people and essentially excludes the vast majority.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm wondering if you think the argument you're making should supersede class 25 of section 91 of the Constitution Act, which gives Parliament power to set immigration laws, including criteria by which people enter and work in the country.

Marisa Berry Méndez: Our position is that governments absolutely have every discretion to develop their own policies and programs around immigration and immigrant selection as long as those policies and programs respect and are aligned with our international obligations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Have you applied for, or are you planning to apply for, funding from the court challenges program to make legal arguments to the effect that you've just set out?

Marisa Berry Méndez: As Amnesty International, we don't have plans to do that, no.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You don't have plans to do that. Okay.

I've heard more and more arguments to this effect, and support for immigration in Canada has plummeted. What I'm hearing from you is that there should be a watering down of the criteria by which some of these programs are maintained, and that this would decrease support for immigration in Canada.

Marisa Berry Méndez: I'm not sure what you mean by "watering down". We're suggesting that if... Canada has certainly always tied its immigration policy to the economy, and it has the right to do that, but let's have an immigration system that speaks to all the different needs. If there are needs in low-skilled positions, then why aren't those people eligible to immigrate?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Ms. Kang, you laid out a lot of arguments against the government's Bill C-12. I'm wondering if you are hearing that there are going to be legal challenges, or are there legal challenges to that effect under way right now?

Joycna Kang: I'm not entirely sure if there are challenges under way at this moment. I personally would not be surprised if there were. My indication is probably yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Ms. Berry Méndez, I believe your organization was actively fundraising for potential legal challenges before the passage of the bill. Is that correct?

• (1140)

Marisa Berry Méndez: For the francophone section, certainly not—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: No, I mean Amnesty International overall.

Marisa Berry Méndez: I don't believe so.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I think it's on your website. There's a fundraising letter.

Marisa Berry Méndez: I don't believe so, but if the English-speaking organization is, I'm not sure.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

Ms. Kang, based on committee testimony and whatnot, I think it would be safe to say that there will be legal challenges at some point on provisions in Bill C-12.

Joycna Kang: I wouldn't be surprised, yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

I just ask, in specific.... We have this bill that was designed to prevent, in theory, essentially fraudulent asylum claims and prevent the asylum system from being abused. What I'm hearing is that there are likely going to be significant legal challenges.

Do you think with this bill that if we're sitting here five years from now the measures will have been successful, or is it likely we're going to see a judicial ruling that will invalidate all this stuff and we'll be back to the drawing board?

Joycna Kang: I think it depends on what you see as its being successful. If the goal is to completely decrease immigration, I'm sure that's exactly what the bill will do. Whether or not it is effective in reducing fraud, I don't think it will be.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Why?

Joycna Kang: It's capturing much more than just fraud. I think there is a misconception, especially about the asylum system, that there are a great many fraudulent claims running rampant, when as a practitioner who deals with this day in and day out, that's quite the opposite of what I see and what my colleagues see when I speak with them. I think fraud gets lumped in and gets blown out of proportion. It certainly exists.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: But if somebody's been here for a year or more—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

Thank you, Ms. Kang.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I'll start my questions with you, Ms. Tchatat. I will then turn to you, Ms. Berry Méndez.

Ms. Tchatat, you do very important work to integrate newcomers here in Canada and Quebec. In your opening remarks, you talked about the challenges of integration.

Can you tell us a bit more about the tailored services you provide that respect the culture of newcomers and support their integration into Canadian society?

Léonie Tchatat: Thank you very much for the question. I think it's really important.

We have observed in particular that francophone immigrants who arrive in Ontario and settle in Toronto face a number of challenges.

To begin with, there is culture shock related to understanding Canadian culture. In response, we developed a program focused on cultural competency that helps newcomers understand the added value of Canadian culture. This training is bilateral. Not only do we train these individuals to facilitate their integration process, but we also train host communities so that they can better understand the culture and values that these immigrants bring to our society. This is what we refer to as cultural competency training.

We also created an entrepreneurship development program, because we know very well that francophone immigrants, particularly those from Black and racialized communities, have difficulty in accessing employment. These individuals often arrive with skills, training and ideas. Entrepreneurship therefore becomes an option to support their economic development. We have also designed awareness training to help employers understand the added value of hiring immigrants in terms of business growth and international perspectives.

Finally, in 2023, we launched a platform called “Resolutions: Overcoming racism together”. We invite stakeholders, organizations and politicians to take part in discussions on the key issues related to eradicating the racism experienced by Black and racialized communities. This racism continues to hinder their integration into the labour market.

Programs must be adapted and tailored, because the programs currently in place do not adequately support the integration of immigrants. Francophone Black immigrants face 10 times more difficulty in integrating into society than other immigrants, so we have to adopt tailored solutions.

• (1145)

Sameer Zuberi: Absolutely.

I imagine that most of the burden of this integration falls on the shoulders of newcomers.

Is that your experience?

Léonie Tchatat: Yes, absolutely.

By failing to integrate these immigrants as quickly as possible, Canada is losing the opportunity to benefit from what they have to offer. These immigrants end up depending on the system, and they suffer a complete loss of their value. Francophone Black and racialized immigrants arrive with degrees. How is it that Canada is unable to integrate these immigrants?

Moreover, the funding provided to organizations is often short-term and insufficient. Adequate funding is needed to enable these organizations working on the ground to effectively integrate these immigrants.

Sameer Zuberi: That integration depends on the work done by you, by newcomers and by the society that welcomes them. It's also important to ensure that people are well integrated into the labour market. It helps our economy.

Is that your experience?

Léonie Tchatat: Yes. Indeed, I think Canada pays a much higher price by failing to integrate its francophone immigrants. I think there are many opportunities to develop tailored programs, as we are doing at La Passerelle.

It is important to understand that, as long as francophone and racialized immigrants are not—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tchatat and Mr. Zuberi.

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

I asked you a question earlier, Ms. Berry Méndez, and I didn't give you time to answer it. I didn't intend to force an answer.

I was asking whether you thought it would be an acceptable solution for the temporary foreign worker program to provide open work permits with the same time limits. As I mentioned earlier, that would allow for labour mobility in the event of business closures or job cuts, such as those experienced at Olymel last week in Drummondville.

In your view, is this an acceptable solution, or does it still fall short?

Marisa Berry Méndez: For us, there are really two parts. Regarding the elimination of the closed work permit, undoubtedly some workers would like to come to the country within the time limits.

The government should set the program criteria. However, the eligibility criteria for economic immigration programs, which exclude these people, must be eliminated. We believe that these criteria are discriminatory and that there should be a gateway to permanent immigration for these people as well.

Martin Champoux: Ms. Tchatat, I'm also keen to hear what you have to say. I think that the organization that you represent, La Passerelle, is invaluable.

You saw the short debate earlier on a motion that we tabled to better distribute asylum seekers. We want to ensure that the people coming in aren't automatically pointed towards Quebec and Ontario, where the social safety nets are starting to become extremely strained. We're asking for more participation from the other provinces.

On the ground, have you seen this greater influx of asylum seekers and foreign workers who want to integrate in a perfectly honest manner and participate in society?

Are you also seeing an overflow on your end?

Léonie Tchatat: Yes, absolutely. We see it every day on the ground.

The serious issue lies in the fact that immigrants who come to this country settle in Toronto or Ottawa, in the major cities, given the greater diversity and openness in these places. In order to integrate immigrants in other regions, mechanisms must be implemented so that communities can take them in.

For example, we've seen the issue involving refugees in Toronto. Refugees were transferred to regions such as Niagara. However, they came back to Toronto because they faced a great deal of racism in these regions.

We need a two-way approach. We need to both point communities towards these regions and also develop awareness and intake mechanisms to help integrate these refugees or immigrants into these communities.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tchatat and Mr. Champoux.

Mr. Menegakis, you have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us. I'm going to start with you, Ms. Kang.

Bill C-12 allows for thousands of applications to be suspended, cancelled or modified through an order in council if it is “in the public interest”. The committee never received an answer from the minister on what “public interest” means in the bill.

Have you been able to determine what it means in this bill?

Joycna Kang: No, we have not. It is a very broadly worded piece of the legislation that is causing a lot of alarm and panic.

Costas Menegakis: What do you see as some of the dangers of allowing the government to cancel thousands of immigration applications with no process or parliamentary oversight?

Joycna Kang: I think we're going to see a lot of litigation on that point. I think it is very alarming to the rule of law when there is no transparency or due process attached to the government's being able to have those powers without having to explain why they're invoking them.

Costas Menegakis: What types of applications do you see the minister cancelling?

Joycna Kang: I would imagine it would be a lot of temporary work permits, study permits and potentially TRPs, temporary resident permits. We fear that refugee claimant documents that have been issued and claims that have been determined could be cancelled without any due process as well.

Costas Menegakis: Does your firm believe that this bill was passed as a lame attempt to clean up the asylum backlog?

Joycna Kang: It's very hard not to come to that conclusion, given the testimony that many stakeholders provided to the Senate. None of those suggestions were taken into account when the bill was passed.

Costas Menegakis: The firm where you work has published commentary on IRCC's new AI framework. Are you familiar with that?

Joycna Kang: Yes.

Costas Menegakis: What are some of the pitfalls in the government's use of AI to do security screening?

Joycna Kang: While we understand that there's a need for more efficient processes, given the volume that IRCC is dealing with, our concern with AI is that it doesn't leave enough room for human intervention.

AI, as many of us know, is made by humans, and human bias gets put into AI mechanisms. There are AI screening tools that are being used without any real human oversight. That's causing a lot of unreasonable refusals.

Costas Menegakis: I can certainly see how that is a problem.

Do you believe it will be easier for dangerous individuals to slip into Canada if AI becomes a primary security screening tool?

Joycna Kang: I do believe that this is a concern. I'm not entirely sure in terms of being able to speculate on a number or anything like that, but I do think that without human oversight over AI findings, an overreliance on AI will not have the intended effects.

Costas Menegakis: I can easily see how AI will not catch some things. For example, I represent a community that has one of the most diverse and biggest populations of Canadians of Iranian descent. These are people who came here from Iran. The government has reportedly identified at least 700 of them, if not more, as IRGC operatives.

IRGC, as you might know—I'm sure you do—is a known terrorist organization and has been identified by the Government of Canada and the Parliament of Canada as a terrorist organization. Without a personal conversation and discussion and assertion, how would AI catch somebody who was coming over here?

That is a major concern to a community of people living in Richmond Hill, where I reside. What would you have to say to those people?

Joycna Kang: Yes, I would agree with that concern. As I said, AI use without oversight from an actual decision-maker can result in overbreadth, capturing a lot of individuals who shouldn't actually be captured by security screenings and things like that.

Costas Menegakis: Would you say that the move towards AI is just a quick, simple way for the government to say that they're using AI to help them reduce their backlogs?

Joycna Kang: I would agree. I think the desire to use that technology to make the management of caseloads more effective is understandable, but again, without oversight, it doesn't actually solve the problem.

• (1155)

Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Ms. Kang.

Now, we go to Ms. Zahid for five minutes.

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

My question is for Madame Tchatat.

Canada is competing globally for French-speaking talent. In your experience, how effective are the current federal efforts to attract francophone immigrants, particularly from Africa and the Caribbean countries, and what impact have these efforts had on Ontario's economy?

[*Translation*]

Léonie Tchatat: Thank you.

I think that this is worth noting. Canada organizes many missions, but these missions often focus on French-speaking Europe. It's quite difficult to see where things stand with the missions that focus on the African continent.

We know perfectly well that the Canada of the future will be represented by diversity and that this diversity will come from the African continent. We still don't focus much on missions in Africa. It remains difficult to promote them there.

I personally have taken part in missions. However, they were in Europe, particularly in countries such as France.

As I always say, francophone immigration is an added value for the Canadian economy. I think that, when Canada can attract many more French-speaking African immigrants, it will see talented people coming in with the potential to contribute to the Canadian economy on a daily basis.

I think that we need to focus on missions in Africa. Yet we still see systemic barriers in this area. There are many challenges. Canada prioritizes white European immigration over African immigration.

[*English*]

Salma Zahid: Thank you.

You have worked extensively on integration and economic development. Can you please speak to how well-supported francophone newcomers, especially those from racialized communities, contribute to entrepreneurship, workforce participation and local economic growth?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: I'll give you a concrete example. We recently opened a transition home for African refugees. Since last June, we've taken in around 80 refugees. At least 60% of them have found jobs. They have already left the home and they're living in housing. Immigrants or refugees who come to this country want to work. They come with talent. They come here for a better life. Once they get here, they face systemic barriers and obstacles that prevent them from making real progress.

Let's look at the big picture and check the statistics. All franco-phone immigrants from Black or racialized communities who came here and who were given opportunities remain employed today. They're paying their share of taxes in Canada. Developing concrete policies and continuing to improve accessibility for these people will yield even more positive results.

I must point out that, as long as Canada fails to see Black or racialized francophone immigrants as an added value, there will always be a shortfall. Look at the next generation. Look at the young people finishing their studies. How many immigrants who have studied in this system face unemployment simply because they're Black or racialized francophones?

I think that an enormous amount of systemic work lies ahead and that we need to keep discussing this. Policies must be established early on in order to combat systemic racism.

[English]

Salma Zahid: In your opening remarks, you mentioned tailored immigration models.

Can you expand as to what types of programs you have in mind, and when you say “tailored immigration models”, how can that be done?

[Translation]

Léonie Tchatat: Take, for example, our cultural competency programs, where we help immigrants understand the Canadian system.

I'm also talking about employer awareness. It's important to see how Black and racial minority immigrants provide added value. We need tailored investments. I must point out that refugees or immigrants from developing countries in Africa don't have the same immigration path as people from Europe.

We can't design programs that directly address them, because these people come with different cultures and values. We must support them by taking into account their cultural realities. We have many program models covering areas such as cultural competency, employer awareness and tailored training to help them integrate into the job market.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tchatat and Ms. Zahid.

I would like to thank all the witnesses.

[English]

We're now going to suspend for five minutes so that the witnesses can leave and we can return with the second panel.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Welcome to panel two of today's session.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses, in case you didn't hear them the first time around.

We have someone joining us on Zoom.

Mr. Routley, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel—English, French or floor—for interpretation.

For those in the room, you have an earpiece and you can select the desired channel. I'll do my best to let you know when you have one minute left. Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Now I'd like to formally welcome the witnesses for our second panel.

Via video conference, we have Mr. Routley, domestic policy coordinator, Macdonald-Laurier Institute. Here in the room, we have Dr. Yvonne Su, professor, York University; and from Lawyers for Secure Immigration, we have Mr. Richard Kurland, lawyer and policy analyst.

We give a warm welcome to all of you. You will have five minutes to give opening remarks, and then we will proceed with rounds of questions.

Mr. Routley, we will begin with you for five minutes, and that begins now.

Sam Routley (Domestic Policy Coordinator, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to appear today. It's my pleasure to contribute to the study of Canada's immigration system.

My remarks today draw upon my research into Canadian political behaviour as well as Macdonald-Laurier Institute's own recent analysis of Canada's immigration system. I want to focus on how Canadians are responding to immigration challenges and what these shifts entail for the long-term sustainability of Canada's current immigration regime. My remarks build off of the recommendations that my colleague Peter Copeland has already provided to this committee.

As recently as 2022, 85% of Canadians believed that immigration had a positive impact on Canada's economy, while over two-thirds of respondents also rejected the claim that Canadian immigration levels were too high. As we are all well aware, this apparent consensus quickly unravelled. Today, well over half of Canadians believe that current levels strain public resources and pose integration challenges.

What has changed?

It should first be made clear that Canadians have not rejected immigration in principle. Rather, what has been uncovered is what in reality has always been a much more ambivalent attitude. Most Canadians do not embrace high rates of immigration or multiculturalism as intrinsically valuable goods in and of themselves. Instead, they are what academics Randy Besco and Erin Tolley call “conditional multiculturalists”. They are willing to support policies as long as they recognize them as being in their own and in Canada's best national interest, despite expressing some cultural reservations.

Going forward, the success of Canada's immigration regime therefore depends on the perception that the system is properly justified, publicly accountable, well managed and capable of delivering broadly shared benefits. This is something that it has increasingly struggled to demonstrate.

In recent years, rapid increases in intake levels, combined with a growing reliance on temporary migration pathways, limited alignment with housing and service capacity, and weak enforcement, have created a perception that the system is no longer operating in a coherent manner. Moreover, as MLI's own research has demonstrated, major policy changes have been introduced with minimal public transparency and limited parliamentary engagement.

An argument has been offered that current conditions reflect something of a cyclical adjustment. The relevant academic research is quite clear that periodic push-back to immigration will usually follow deteriorating economic conditions and an increase in intake numbers. Seen this way, public consensus, with some policy adjustments, may recover. If economic conditions improve and affordability pressures lessen, Canadians will adapt to higher intake levels.

This view is incorrect. The current moment reflects more deep-seated structural challenges that call for a more comprehensive reset. This is clear in two ways.

The first is a clear and ongoing decline in social trust throughout Canada. Short of being an intrinsic strength, diversity will undermine a community's cohesion unless it is matched by a binding set of norms, behaviours and shared civic purpose. Once lost, social trust is hard to regain.

The second is the emergence of more sorted and durable social divisions around immigration, defined around characteristics like income, education level and region. If not properly addressed, these divisions promise to become more inflamed and permanent.

These concerns point toward the need for a more coherent and comprehensive immigration and integration regime, firmly aligned with Canada's absorptive capacity.

Immigration levels and composition must be tied to housing, infrastructure and institutional capacity while system incentives are recalibrated to support long-term integration rather than short-term demand. This includes reducing reliance on temporary migration streams, strengthening enforcement and oversight, and ensuring that pathways to permanent residency and access to public benefits are meaningfully conditioned on integration outcomes, including labour market participation, progress toward self-sufficiency and adherence to shared civic norms.

More fundamentally, this points toward the need to re-anchor immigration policy in a clearer understanding of its economic and social purposes. Without such a realignment, public confidence will remain weakened and increasingly difficult to restore.

Thank you.

• (1210)

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

Now, we have Professor Su for five minutes.

Your time begins now.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Yvonne Su (Professor, York University, As an Individual): Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you for inviting me to appear today.

[*English*]

Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for inviting me to speak about this study.

My name is Dr. Yvonne Su. I am an associate professor at York University. I'm currently a visiting scientist at Harvard. I study asylum, migration and global governance, including how public narratives shape immigration policy.

I would like to make three points today. First, Canada's asylum system should be assessed with careful attention to legal standards and actual outcomes. Second, recent data on international students and asylum need to be interpreted within context. Third, current policy debates should be informed by Canada's longer history of exclusion.

The first point is that Canada's asylum system is neither automatic nor unrestricted. The right to apply for asylum is protected in Canadian and international law. However, claimants must still prove a well-founded fear of persecution, and many claims are indeed rejected. When the public and our policy-makers are only presented with numbers about applications, not decisions, their perceptions of the robustness of our system are rightly skewed.

For example, my analysis of IRB data on India—the main source country for asylum seekers—found that between 2021 and 2024, claims were more often rejected than accepted. The rejections are really important to highlight because they take the air out of the rhetoric that international students are applying for asylum as a secure back door to stay longer in Canada.

The second point is that the increase in claims by international students should be situated carefully. International students filed just over 20,000 asylum claims in 2024. When we look at the number alone, it looks large, but it amounts to only 2% of the almost one billion international students in Canada. That means more than 98% of international students in Canada did not apply for asylum. That is a small minority, not a massive abuse of the asylum—

• (1215)

The Chair: Professor Su, did you say one billion people applied for...?

Dr. Yvonne Su: I meant to say one million. I'm sorry about that.

The question remains: How can we prevent this?

My analysis of IRCC data found that the abuse was concentrated to a small number of places. Four colleges had more than 1,000 claims each. Three colleges had 100% of their international students claim asylum. Yes, it is shocking. This suggests that a central problem is not international students as a group, but that it is bad actors who profit from misinformation and exploitation.

My first recommendation is to penalize the bad actors. Immigration consultants and colleges are exploiting vulnerable students. They should face stronger penalties, meaningful enforcement and, where necessary, loss of designation or licence.

The second recommendation is to expedite asylum decisions for international students, which would take away any incentives for consultants or institutions to misuse the system.

Recommendation three is to better equip students by making sure they know what their options are before their study permits expire.

The third point is that I would encourage the committee to consider these debates in a historical perspective and ensure that our new caps and policies don't push us towards exclusion. I want to remind the committee of the Chinese exclusion act, which was enacted in 1923, just over 100 years ago, to effectively ban most Chinese immigration to Canada. This ban meant that Chinese people could not freely immigrate to Canada, and many families were unable to reunite here.

One of those migrants was my great-grandfather, Lou Yen. He came to Canada almost 150 years ago, but he was forced to return to China due to these exclusionary laws. My own family experienced the long shadow of exclusion through separation, constrained

opportunities and the sense that belonging in Canada was always conditional. It would take my family five generations of effort for my two children, Jack and James Ujma-Su, to be born Canadians.

I mention this history because it reminds us that immigration policy is not just administrative. It also shapes who is seen as deserving, credible and welcomed.

Catherine Clement, my friend and an award-winning community historian, wrote the book *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act* to tell the stories of those impacted by exclusion. I think this book needs to be in every school in Canada so that students can learn about these mistakes. I have brought some books for the committee members.

As the committee studies Canada's immigration system, the challenge is to respond to legitimate concerns with evidence, proportionality and historical awareness. Policies should target exploitation where it exists, while avoiding broad assumptions about entire groups. That approach could strengthen the system's integrity, while remaining consistent with Canada's legal obligations and democratic values.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Su.

You mentioned that you have research you have conducted. It would be helpful if you could submit that to the committee. I think it would be very helpful for your testimony.

Last but not least, we have Mr. Kurland.

You have five minutes, please.

Richard Kurland (Lawyer and Policy Analyst, Lawyers for Secure Immigration): Thank you.

Lawyers for Secure Immigration is an immigration advocacy organization composed of immigration lawyers and other members of the legal community. We want to see Canada continue to welcome newcomers from everywhere. We want people who will support and strengthen our Canadian democratic values and our Canadian way of life. The mission is to keep problems originating from outside Canada from entering Canada in the first place.

We can make changes, such as changes to study permit eligibility rules and to prefer the people who will be less motivated to engage in criminality on Canadian soil. We can do more to guard against theft of Canada's most sensitive world-class intellectual property. We can do more to prevent the ongoing efforts of foreign interests that are actively seeking the destabilization of Canadian society by promoting hatred based on race, colour, ancestry or religious belief.

We can create financial disincentives that will target the enablers in Canada: the employers who allow unauthorized work and the schools who allow unauthorized study. We can do more to follow the money and illuminate the complex international path of finance that has successfully brought problems from outside Canada inside Canada.

Also, because no immigration system in the world is airtight and perfect, for the people who find a way to get around our immigration safeguards, we need more effective and swift removal measures.

Here's the illustration of a typical immigration problem where security gets undervalued by government. CSIS is mandated by section 14 of the CSIS Act to provide advice and information "relating to security matters or criminal activities" to IRCC, but it is IRCC that determines who will be allowed to enter Canada temporarily to visit, work or study and who will be granted permanent residency or citizenship.

Here's the thing. The CSIS 2024 public report says, "CSIS has been actively engaged in screening foreign nationals with ties to Canada who are escaping the conflict" in Gaza. Also, "the public policy aimed to provide temporary resident status to 1,000 eligible applicants from Gaza" at the outset was "increased to 5,000 in August 2024", with no corresponding increase to the CSIS security services. CSIS says that inhabitants of Gaza, a territory dominated and governed by terrorists, present a clear and present danger to Canada and our allies.

Processing times have skyrocketed. Canadian relatives have lived with the fear of losing family members to the conflict.

• (1220)

Lawyers for Secure Immigration have supported Gazan family reunification, which can be done only with robust security safeguards: security first and compassion second.

By not resourcing security and background checks adequately, the government has delayed and continues to delay family reunification from Gaza. Only 654 people arrived under the Gaza program as of January 31, 2025. We must never do something like that again. Canada knew at the time that Gaza was dominated by Hamas, so why didn't Canada provide the necessary security resources? That's the hole in our fence.

Lawyers for Secure Immigration is a private sector organization that specifically advocates for security in the immigration system.

I am open to questions.

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

Thanks to all of the witnesses for their opening statements.

We now begin the first round of questions for six minutes, and we begin with Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Kurland, I'd like to start with you.

One of the primary responsibilities of any government, of course, is to ensure the safety and security of its citizens and, indeed, of all the law-abiding people who live in our country. You have spoken about over 17,500 individuals who applied to come to Canada and had their foreign criminal convictions forgiven.

Do we know how many of them were convicted for violent crimes?

Richard Kurland: The data is the problem. Government has it; government doesn't share it. What is shared is usually a year or two out of date, making analysis practically impossible for advocates and folks who intend to criticize.

Historically, if you have that breakdown, violent crimes that include damage to the person as well as the property typically run at 20% to 25%.

Costas Menegakis: Do we know from which countries most foreign criminal convictions are forgiven?

• (1225)

Richard Kurland: No—

Costas Menegakis: You have no—

Richard Kurland: —and every country produces criminals, like it or not.

Costas Menegakis: Of those 17,500 plus, do we have no transparency on that, either?

Richard Kurland: What you look for there is something that is beyond proportionate. If you know that most people are coming from country A to Canada, reasonably, one would expect that same proportion to apply in bad people coming to Canada from that country.

Costas Menegakis: There appears to be a two-tiered system for forgiving foreign criminals. The less-serious offences, we're told, are reviewed by IRCC officers with the right authority. The more serious cases are reviewed by the Minister of Immigration personally.

Richard Kurland: Yes.

Costas Menegakis: I have a couple of questions on that front.

Are you aware of any cases that were reviewed by the minister personally?

Richard Kurland: Yes, over a quarter of a century, that experience has come to light. The minister has a challenging position but a good position. The minister can access our intelligence information to get to the root: Is this crime a politically motivated crime in terms of foreign government enforcement? Did that foreign government create a “criminal” for their domestic purposes?

Ministers can resolve that, but ultimately it is the minister who takes responsibility for protecting the public.

Costas Menegakis: I find it difficult to ascertain why the minister would have an authority over and above the advice they're getting from their officials—at the IRCC, for example—in order to make a decision like that. Most Canadians, I would argue, would expect that people coming to the country don't have criminal records, period.

I understand that some of them may be frivolous, depending on whether they're coming from a country that doesn't have a judicial system on par with Canada's, but it is certainly very concerning. Living in a community where I've seen criminals coming into our community, walking the streets and threatening people on a daily basis, I find it is a very concerning fact.

Richard Kurland: That's correct—it's not my place to say that it's correct.

Universities have tenure. Public servants don't enjoy that luxury, and a public servant who signs off on one of these criminality cases is betting the pension.

Costas Menegakis: Let me switch gears for a moment.

You've also spoken about the many different software companies that were working in IRCC's e-filing system. How many were there?

Richard Kurland: Do you mean e-files?

Costas Menegakis: I mean the e-filing system.

Richard Kurland: Oh my goodness. It's not enough to just look at the public servants. You have to lob in the contracts to the private sector. It's a very significant, important aspect.

Costas Menegakis: I believe you said it was about 150—

Richard Kurland: That's a minimum, yes.

Costas Menegakis: —in the YouTube clip that I saw.

Were these companies all working together, or were they communicating with each other at all?

Richard Kurland: That has been the number one problem for close to 35 years of the IT delivery system at IRCC. You ended up with 150 silos, contractors not working together, all designing just one part of the elephant and not considering the whole.

Costas Menegakis: We certainly know that the immigration system, at least over the last 10 or 11 years, has been a mess, with seven immigration ministers in the last 10 years.

What are some of the common problems that applicants are experiencing when trying to file their documents, with all of the work that's been done with this new system?

Richard Kurland: It's basic, fundamental consumer protection failure—the absence of clear, consistent and simple instructions for

the most basic immigration tasks of filing—and it's repetitive, duplicative services.

If I apply for a visitor visa and then I want to apply for something else, I have to redo 50 questions instead of having one file—as CRA does with My Account—to which I add or modify pre-existing information to get the next level of service. That's duplicative effort and a waste of government money.

Also, people will make mistakes because they don't realize that they gave an answer 15 years ago that has different information from today, and they end up with an immigration problem as a result.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kurland.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos.

• (1230)

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Madam Chair.

A voice: It's six minutes.

The Chair: Oh, it's six minutes. I'm sorry. I'll increase it.

Peter Fragiskatos: I was not doubting you at all, but look at the non-partisan nature of the committee. My Conservative colleague stuck up for me.

In any case, thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

Professor Su, we had very interesting testimony from you.

Dr. Yvonne Su: Thank you.

Peter Fragiskatos: You talked about narratives in public perception. On that general point, could you elaborate?

Dr. Yvonne Su: Yes. Speaking specifically about international students, first of all, I have many in my classrooms. Not only do I see the narratives that are playing out publicly among policy-makers, but I also see how it plays out for them. A lot of those narratives are that international students are here, they're taking advantage, they're applying for asylum, they're stealing houses and they're stealing jobs. They're all extremely negative.

The reason that's the case is that they are the group with the least amount of power. They can't vote. They are easily deported. Their study permits are easily revoked. They have very little power, and as a result it's really easy to blame them.

However, if you take another second and think about it, international students are often quite poor. They've spent so much of their money to study here because the tuition is about five times more than it is for domestic students. Therefore, they're not competing for your \$1,500 or \$2,000 condos in Toronto. They're often living in bunk beds in basements that are unregulated or sharing beds with other international students for \$300 to \$500.

That is not the competition that is causing a lot of Canadians to not be able to afford their own homes.

Peter Fragiskatos: I don't mean to cut you off, but my time is limited.

Dr. Yvonne Su: Sure. Go on.

Peter Fragiskatos: Still on the subject of international students, you talked about particular colleges. I believe you said the problem was overwhelmingly concentrated in four colleges.

Could you go into that some more?

Dr. Yvonne Su: I have them here. I thought you'd ask me.

We have Seneca Polytechnic, which had 1,540. There's Niagara College, with 1,310. There's Conestoga College, with 1,090—

Peter Fragiskatos: I'm sorry to interrupt, but just for context, what do the numbers you're giving relate to?

Dr. Yvonne Su: They're the number of asylum claims.

Peter Fragiskatos: That's just for the record.

Dr. Yvonne Su: Yes. Then there's Cape Breton University. These were all over 1,000.

The thing that's clear to me is that this is all in the IRB data and the IRCC data. It didn't take me very long to look through the Excel sheets.

Then there are three that had 100% asylum rates. They took in 10, and there were 10 asylum applications that same year. Those three are the Institute of Technology Development of Canada, the Canadian Technology College and DEA Canadian College.

When you see those numbers and you look at the rates for asylum, it's very clear that something is happening at those institutions. Either the students are being coached or they're encouraged. Something is happening. It's very obvious that we should investigate them. There should be conversations, and we should not just say that it's a big problem.

There are 650 institutions that allow international students, and we're saying there are just these seven that are causing a lot of problems. Why are we not just going after these seven? Why are we painting all international students with the same brush and saying they're bad? There's been a lot of demonization.

The Chair: Professor Su, Mr. Fragiskatos, I'm just noticing that the bells are ringing.

I'll need unanimous consent to continue, and I'd like to propose that we continue until 12:45. That's 15 minutes before the vote.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: We will continue.

I'll restart your time, Mr. Fragiskatos. You have two minutes and 39 seconds.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I read your op-ed on March 9 in the Toronto Star. Among other things, in discussing immigration, you quoted Statistics Canada when you wrote, "immigrants remain deeply embedded across Canada's labour market: they make up more than a third of workers

in accommodation and food services, transportation and warehousing, and professional and technical sectors, and over one-fifth of the construction workforce. As such, a very large share of economic outputs is produced by immigrants."

With your final points, could you go into that further, less so on the data side and more so in terms of the economic contribution that immigrants continue to make in this country? The government has increased the proportion of economic migrants to 64%. There's no nation building that can happen without immigrants, as you've said.

Dr. Yvonne Su: Of course, and I would like to bring that back to my great-grandfather, who came here during the railroad time, who came to help nation build. As a result of policies, he was sent home. I think a lot of temporary workers, a lot of migrants who are coming to Canada, feel the same. They've come here. They've contributed their skills. They've sacrificed greatly. They pay taxes. They help you make money. Then, when it's not so feasible when it comes to public opinion or when it doesn't look so good, the switch is turned off, and the policies are not towards welcoming more people. Instead, these people are either sent home through their visa expirations or the lack of pathways, or go home "voluntarily"—and I put that in quotation marks because of racism, xenophobia and just having a hard time here.

• (1235)

Peter Fragiskatos: There might be a second round, and I'll be up for that.

However, what would you want to leave the committee here with in terms of your key recommendation? You've shared a few things, but what would be your key recommendation?

Dr. Yvonne Su: If I were to distill it, I think international students were a really good policy for Canada. These are people who have ambition and who have worked really hard in their own countries to get to the top to qualify to come to Canada. I think our initial policy of inviting them, of giving them an opportunity to work and contribute when they came to Canada, was really good. We do need to manage the numbers, but I think we've gone completely towards overcorrection when we're going to do 150,000 for 2026. That number is too low.

If we continue in that direction, we're cutting off talent that's coming to Canada and contributing and that can stay and be good Canadians. It is a very good pipeline, and I think we need to look at the merits of it.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Su.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

[Translation]

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

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Kurland, you're a recognized expert in immigration policy. You have been practising for a long time. You generally try to improve immigration systems by making them more fair, transparent and effective. You want to ensure that they have a direct impact on legislation and public policy.

Is that a good outline?

Richard Kurland: Yes. Thank you.

Martin Champoux: Thank you.

Mr. Kurland, I would like to talk to you today about the excessive burden imposed on Quebec in particular, and on Ontario to a certain extent, when it comes to taking in asylum seekers.

For a number of years now, Quebec has been calling for a better distribution of asylum seekers. As you know, this situation affects public policy and community services. The social safety net is under immense strain. It's extremely difficult, particularly in Quebec, to properly accommodate the large number of asylum seekers that we must take in. We've been proposing solutions for a long time.

Europe has a solution that I find noteworthy. Perhaps you can tell me whether it could work here.

A type of agreement has been reached concerning the distribution of asylum seekers among countries. However, some countries may be unable or unwilling to take in their fair share of asylum seekers. An alternative solution consists of contributing financially to help countries that agree to take in more.

Would this approach comply with Canadian legislation?

Would this approach work here, among Quebec and the provinces, to ensure a fair financial and physical distribution?

Richard Kurland: That's interesting.

[*English*]

It's important to note that Quebec, in my opinion, more than any other province, pays the highest cost socially, economically and politically for compliance with the Canadian federal structure of refugee determination. That's been the case for, literally, generations at this point.

Now, the European suggestion is interesting, and I would encourage, if that's appropriate, Quebec to use its jurisdiction to perhaps facilitate the introduction onto Canadian soil of the European solution. What's wrong with Quebec delegations going to other countries for discussions of common interests? There's nothing untoward if Quebec were to diplomatically move pieces on the chessboard to resolve the high price paid by Quebec.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: I find your comments intriguing. Quebec really does often try to make representations about its capacity to take in newcomers and also about its desire to do so.

When we talk about taking them in, we mean properly accommodating them while taking into account the capacity to fulfill the aspirations of people who want to settle here. This includes refugees, economic immigrants and immigrants of all kinds. We're an accommodating nation, but we still need the means to take them in.

I don't want to sound cynical. I certainly don't want you to share my cynicism, if that's the case. However, for a long time now, it seems that the proposals put forward by Quebec haven't been taken up by Ottawa.

Furthermore, over the years, this situation has come up again and again. We're receiving more immigration applications from asylum seekers. The Quebec government has been asking for help for generations. We could be cynical. We could think that a political agenda lies behind this.

Do you have an opinion on this?

I have one, but I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Richard Kurland: Yes, I have an opinion, and it's that there's nothing prohibiting Quebec from engaging with other countries for discussions on common interests, whether it's Quebec going to American states regarding the fishery sector or things like that. I see it as an appropriate, timely subject that Quebec may want to consider in the wider context of Quebec relations with the rest of the world, particularly given the problems we're having to the south.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: I'll be cynical again. Please tell me to move on to another topic if you don't want to get into this, Mr. Kurland.

Depending on the political situation at the time, would Ottawa be pleased if Quebec were to end up with a whole host of problems with managing issues that warrant greater sensitivity and humanity, such as asylum seekers?

We don't seem very kind when we talk about having too many. However, we aren't unkind. We're just unable to deliver services to them and to the public.

Would Ottawa be pleased, at times, to see Quebec struggling with issues of this nature?

[*English*]

Richard Kurland: They should. Ottawa should take cognizance of this. Remember, the mission here is to keep the problems originating from outside Canada from entering Canada. Go and visit Concordia University or McGill University. These are problems that originate from outside and have been imported into Quebec.

Quebec has an obligation to protect the Quebec population from external influences and foreign influences. Those can include the wider immigration context of refugee determination, but that mandate is significantly larger.

[*Translation*]

Martin Champoux: Thank you, Mr. Kurland.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Champoux.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Kurland.

We're actually going to end the round of questions now because we have to head upstairs to vote.

I would like to say a huge thanks to our witnesses.

Mr. Routley, you didn't get any questions, but please know that your testimony is part of our record and it will be part of our considerations as we do the final report.

Thanks to Mr. Kurland and Professor Su.

I very quickly want to remind my colleagues that this is now the end of meeting 13 of 15 regarding the study of Canada's immigration system. I would like to plan a deadline to receive the briefs regarding this study. I want to see what you all think about the last Monday, which is May 4. That should be the last day of our meetings regarding this study. How does Monday, May 4, at 5 p.m. sound for everyone? Does that sound good? I'm seeing a fairly good thumbs-up from everyone. Okay. That will be our date.

I thank you all. I'll see you on Wednesday, April 29. The notice has been published.

This meeting is now adjourned.

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