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• (1100)

[English]

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

[Translation]

I now call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 31 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses today.

I think everybody in the room has done this many times, so I don't have to go into full detail. I'll just remind everyone who is speaking that I'll do my best to provide you a one-minute warning before your time ends. Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. Please do not speak over each other, as it will be hard for our translators to translate. It makes their job difficult. Of course, please ensure that all of your comments are addressed through the chair. Members, kindly raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can. Thanks, everyone, for your co-operation.

I should also say that I know we have some new members here. I want to warmly welcome them.

[Translation]

I would also like to welcome Mr. Natilien Joseph.

[English]

Welcome to Mr. Matt Jeneroux, and welcome to Ms. Doly Begum. Welcome to our committee.

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. This is our 15th session on this study.

For this first hour, we are focused on the 2026 report of the Auditor General on the international student program reforms.

I'd like to warmly welcome our two guests this morning. We have with us the Honourable Lena Metlege Diab, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, and our new-ish deputy minister, Ted Gallivan, from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Again, we give a warm welcome to both of you.

Minister, you have five minutes for opening remarks. Your time begins now.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Chair.

Colleagues, good morning.

We're here to discuss the international student program and the Auditor General's report. As I said the last time I appeared at this committee, we welcome the auditor's report that the international student program must have stronger oversight to eliminate fraud. The report covered a period starting from January 2023 and spanning the first year and a half of a four-year-plus reform plan that had already been initiated by the department. The final years of our multi-year reforms to strengthen the integrity of the program will benefit from the auditor's recommendations.

The report found important improvements. It showed that the new arrivals dropped by more than 60% in 2025, that the letter of acceptance verification system is preventing fraud and that the cancellation of the student direct stream, which was a high source of fraudulent activity, was very effective.

However, the issues raised by the Auditor General are being taken seriously. Officers are expected to flag, investigate and report suspected cases of potential fraud. Our teams will review all cases in the program flagged by the report by the end of 2026. Anyone who has submitted a fraudulent document in the past will have a note on their file for future border and immigration decisions.

[Translation]

We're also addressing study permit renewals. We've implemented an advanced analytics model to triage permit extensions and to assign them based on risk profile.

Extensions for those who came through the student direct stream are receiving additional scrutiny. By the fall, we expect to complete our audit of the permit extensions in the report.

[English]

Recognizing the improvements that were made and that more work is needed, I want to clarify the cases that were flagged as potentially non-compliant in the auditor's report. There were 153,000 cases that were flagged by schools for potential non-compliance. The department has since broken down that number, and 78% were cleared. The students were compliant or they transferred to another school or applied to another stream. The rest, 22%, were presumed to have left the country but may have overstayed their permits. To avoid this issue repeating, we're working on a process to identify and confirm when students with expired permits and no other applications in progress have left Canada.

• (1105)

[Translation]

This will also help the CBSA, the Canada Border Services Agency, with potential enforcement action.

Again, we expect to implement this system by the end of the year. We're also following up on 100% of flagged cases.

We continue regular consultations on program allocations with partners, including provinces and territories. This helps ensure provinces and territories have flexibility to align permits with their labour market needs—

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute.

[Translation]

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —and priorities, and the capacities of institutions and communities.

[English]

The bottom line is that, by the end of this year, we will review all cases flagged in the Auditor General's report. We will have added measures to strengthen program integrity, and we will remain on track to meet the planned four-year reforms.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Minister. Thank you for staying within your five minutes.

I want to get in as many questioners as possible, so I'm going to be very strict on time today.

We will begin our first round of questions for six minutes.

We begin with Mr. Redekopp.

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

Thank you to the witnesses, the minister and the deputy minister, for being here.

Minister, it's been six weeks since the Auditor General tabled her report. Speaking of the 800 fraudsters you allowed to enter Canada, how many of them are still in the country as of today?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: With regard to the 800, what I can tell you is that IRCC has established a process whereby those who

have misrepresented themselves on a document are flagged and can be deported, so—

Brad Redekopp: I am going to interrupt, because we have very limited time.

I understand there's a process. I know you have that laid out in your departmental plan. However, the process is one thing, but the actual people are another. As of today, in terms of the people, how many of them are still in the country? Do you know? If you don't know, that's fine.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't have that information.

Brad Redekopp: All right.

Do you know how many of those 800 fraudsters made asylum claims?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We do know the number of those who have made asylum claims, but I don't have the number out of the 800.

Brad Redekopp: You have it, then. Is that something you can provide to the committee?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We know that 14% of the total 153,000 made asylum claims.

Brad Redekopp: That's different from the 800 fraudsters, but okay.

As for the 800 fraudsters your department didn't investigate, do you know where they are now?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, by the end of the year... The department has an action plan, which has already been submitted to the committee. My officials here will speak to that. There's also a lot of progress being made to ensure that we work collaboratively and closer with CBSA.

Brad Redekopp: We've seen the plan. I understand that. What you are saying is that, as of right now, you don't know where those fraudsters are, and it's something that will be done in the future.

Paragraph 64 of the Auditor General's report talked about the 39,500 individuals who shouldn't be in Canada anymore. How many of them still have valid permits?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The 22%, which is 33,000, that was the number of people who were flagged because their status expired.

Brad Redekopp: You're talking about a different one.

This is the problem with CBSA. It's about the ones who have lost their status and should have been sent out of the country. They are the 39,500 people identified in the Auditor General's report.

Do you know how many of them still have valid permits?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't have that number right now.

Brad Redekopp: Do you know how many of them claimed asylum?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, we know that 14% of the total of 153,000 claimed asylum.

Brad Redekopp: The 153,000 is a different number. These are the ones who.... I can see the confusion. This actually points to a lot of the confusion between CBSA and IRCC, because this is the point where IRCC is not communicating properly with CBSA.

Do you know how many of these 39,500 people the Auditor General found...? Just to remind you, this is when the Auditor General had to work with you guys because you didn't know the status of these people. You assumed they had left the country, and CBSA found that they didn't. Do you know how many of them left voluntarily?

• (1110)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: May I ask the official?

Brad Redekopp: If you have those numbers, you could table them with the committee.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I don't have that number with me.

Brad Redekopp: All right.

Can you locate those 39,500 people? Do you know where they are?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There is ongoing work with the department, as well as with CBSA, to clarify all of these. There's an action plan happening. There's also a pilot in progress that will work toward looking at the entry and exit or departures—not just of these students but of any temporary residents.

Brad Redekopp: Could you table, within three weeks, a breakdown of this 153,000 number, the 800 number, which is another one, and the 39,500, just to let us know what the current status is of those people?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes. We will provide you with the details that we have available.

Brad Redekopp: Okay, that would be good.

Since the Auditor General's report, has IRCC signed any new protocol, service standard or agreement with CBSA to ensure that fraud, misrepresentation, inadmissibility and removal files are tracked from referral to actual removal?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There has been a lot of communication back and forth between IRCC and CBSA.

Brad Redekopp: Have new protocols been agreed to?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There certainly has been.... If you would like to have the information, I can have the official talk about that.

Brad Redekopp: Go ahead, very briefly.

Ted Gallivan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): On both security screening inventories and managing the departure, entry/exit, there have been discussions with CBSA jointly on the way forward. We've agreed on the way forward.

Brad Redekopp: Do discussions equal a protocol, or is that something to come?

Ted Gallivan: There were detailed discussions. There were decks. I think we understand in detail the priority we need to apply to this.

Brad Redekopp: Madam Chair, I'm going to pass the remainder of my time to Mr. Davies.

The Chair: You have one minute.

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

Roughly 21,420 would represent the percentage of what you've just identified. Do you know how many of those people are staying in the new hotels the government has just funded?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We don't have any hotels. The IRCC doesn't run any hotels.

Fred Davies: You funded hotels in Ottawa and in Pickering through your housing program. There was \$40 million for Ottawa and \$22-odd million for Pickering. Those communities have purchased hotels.

Do you know how many of these students who have claimed asylum are living in those hotels?

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, may I?

The Chair: Please go ahead, Mr. Gallivan.

Ted Gallivan: IRCC does provide funding to other orders of government to arrange for housing. There's been an active discussion about how that's used, particularly around the question of using hotels. As per my prior testimony—

Fred Davies: Does that include purchasing real estate?

Ted Gallivan: We're writing the question of hotels into the terms and agreements of the funding that we provide to other orders of government and—

Fred Davies: I only have a second. Does—

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Gallivan and Mr. Davies, but that is the time.

Next, we go to Ms. Sodhi for six minutes.

Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, for attending today.

Minister, I have two questions.

First, I understand that IRCC has prepared a response to the Auditor General's report. I know you mentioned a little bit about it in your opening remarks as well. Are you able to detail for us what that response will look like and why it's so important to have that response?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much. I appreciate the question.

As we know, the Auditor General's report on international student program reforms found some really good things. We are here now to talk about the ones that were found to be not so good, because we, too, care about combatting fraud, and we care about having strong oversight in our programs—not just in the student program, but in all the streams we have.

With regard to the reforms that have been introduced—since late 2023, actually—to give confidence to the system, we've already reduced the overall volumes. We've strengthened the front-end verification through the letter of acceptance offers that come to IRCC from the educational institutions. Moreover, we had already eliminated the student direct stream, which was the stream that was causing the issues, in order to strengthen the program.

We have also brought in an action plan, which has been shared publicly. I believe the deputy spoke about that when he appeared at a committee. I don't know if it was this committee or another committee. I would request that he elaborate a little bit more to the committee here about that action plan.

• (1115)

Ted Gallivan: Going back to the questions about the numbers, those were symptoms of the fact that IRCC didn't manage an entry/exit regime, full stop. In the action plan, we're building an indicator of “in the country” or “not in the country”. In fact, the initial system implementation is in May.

I think those numbers are symptomatic of the fact that IRCC didn't have a game plan or even an intention to manage the departure of people at the expiration of their visas. We've now taken responsibility for managing that, in collaboration with the CBSA. We're beginning pilots next month on what techniques work and when we should intervene with a student.

We've also taken responsibility to expand that to other visa streams, because the same thing can exist with visitor visas and work visas. This is a paradigm shift, I think, for IRCC, where we agree with the concern that Canadians have, which is that we're not sure who is in or out of the country. We're doing the work, from both an IT perspective and a management perspective, to manage that more effectively.

Amandeep Sodhi: We've also heard this figure of 153,000 students a few times and their potentially being non-compliant. What can you tell us about this group of individuals, and what do we know about whether or not these are actual cases of non-compliance?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Let me break it down a bit, if we have more time. I know we did a bit with the first question.

The 153,000 cases were reviewed. They were flagged as potentially non-compliant. Of the 153,000, it was determined that 64% still had valid status in Canada, and 14% had submitted an asylum claim, as I said, and they were no longer subject to the student compliance measures. This is why Bill C-12 was introduced. Hopefully, it will largely accommodate that issue, along with many other border integrity issues. Taken together, those 78% of the cases were identified as no longer requiring follow-up on the program for the period of 2023-24.

The remaining 22%, which is something like 33,000, involved individuals whose status had expired. Some of those individuals would have left the country. We don't have the exact number today. Some may have remained in Canada without applying for a new permit. Because we don't know the exact specifics of the remaining 22%, we've implemented a pilot initiative, which will be the beginning of the process of an exit system to strengthen compliance within the temporary resident program, including not just international students, but all temporary resident programs.

If there's time, I can have the deputy elaborate a bit more on that specific program.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ted Gallivan: There's been a long-standing question about whether Canada ought to have an entry/exit regime. We have parts of it. There's data within the CBSA. There's data within the IRCC. What's under way is a stringing together of that information so that both organizations have a comprehensive, real-time picture of who is in the country and who isn't. That's the IT aspect, and then there is the work of contacting people and ensuring that they depart the country when their visa expires.

Amandeep Sodhi: I have 20 seconds, so I'll use it to say thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan and Minister.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lis-tuguj, BQ): Good morning, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

Good morning, Minister. Thank you for being here.

I would like to return to the 153,000 cases. I am somewhat surprised because, as we saw in the Auditor General's report, around 2,000 investigations were being carried out each year. If I understand you correctly, Minister, you were able to verify all 153,000 cases.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much for your question regarding the 153,000 non-compliant cases.

There were three cohorts of students among the 153,000 non-compliant cases. Of these, 64% still have valid status in Canada and 14% have submitted an application for asylum. Today, 78% of cases no longer require program-related follow-up. For the remaining 22%, IRCC has carried out compliance program follow-up to determine whether the students have left Canada or remained in the country.

Allow me to ask the deputy minister to provide you with details on this pilot project.

• (1120)

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, the work should have been done when the Auditor General arrived. We should have had an answer to explain that many students had changed schools. We should have verified this fact and had this figure in a timely manner.

So, to add to the discussion, I would say that several of these steps were aimed at eliminating cases where non-compliance was linked to missing documents. However, there are now genuine cases of non-compliance that need to be investigated. Regarding the 2,000 cases, our intention is to investigate all cases of fraud. There should be no artificial limit on the number of cases that are genuine instances of fraud or that involve people remaining in the country after their visas have expired. There should therefore be better management of the raw figures and more proactive action on the figures that are truly unobservable.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Ms. Diab, I would still like to return to the 153,000 cases of potential non-compliance identified. You tell us that 64% of these people have a study permit that is still valid, but that is not what I am asking you.

How many of the 153,000 cases were you actually able to investigate to verify whether there was indeed non-compliance?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Each of the 153,000 cases has been investigated. By the end of 2026, all these cases will have been investigated. That is why we have put an action plan in place. We are reviewing the cases presented in the report.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Ms. Diab.

So, you have managed to verify the 153,000 cases over the last three weeks.

Ted Gallivan: I would like to clarify something, Madam Chair.

We have resolved all concerns in 78% of cases, as the minister said, but the remaining 22% require further work. This figure will be reduced, because we will confirm the departure of a certain percentage of these people, and that is when the real work will begin. We will have to launch investigations and proceed with removals.

Alexis Deschênes: Mr. Gallivan, you say that 64% of these 153,000 students have valid status. Have you checked whether they were complying with the conditions of their permits?

Ted Gallivan: We have confirmed that they are indeed enrolled students. As for other aspects, such as financial requirements, I cannot comment on that, but we have indeed confirmed that they have valid student status in this country.

Alexis Deschênes: However, have you checked whether there was any non-compliance? I understand that they may have a study permit, but it is possible that they are not complying with the conditions of their permit. That is essentially what the auditor was suggesting to you.

Have you been able to check that?

Ted Gallivan: Initially, we confirmed that they were indeed students with valid visas, and that is where we stand. As for the question you are asking me, regarding whether our department should ensure compliance with the conditions, that is another avenue to ex-

plore. We are committed to checking more frequently that people with status in Canada are complying with the conditions of their visas. This is something that was not done comprehensively, but only on an exceptional basis. So, we are committed to being more proactive in confirming compliance with visa conditions after a visa has been issued.

• (1125)

Alexis Deschênes: So, you identified the cases, but you did not check whether these individuals were actually complying with the conditions of their permits.

Ted Gallivan: Once again, the first step was to sort the 153,000 files into batches. For example, we checked whether people had a visa and whether further investigations were needed. So, I would say we are still in the process of sorting them out.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gallivan. I'm very sorry. I have to cut you off. I am being strict on time today.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

That ends our first round.

We now begin our second round.

Mr. Menegakis, you have the first five minutes.

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

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

Minister, admittedly, the Auditor General's report found big-time problems in screening within your department. We've talked a bit this morning about the 153,000 flagged applications. How many of those have ties to terrorist organizations, like the IRGC?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: To my understanding, none.

Costas Menegakis: Do you know that? Have you met with them? Have you gone through the process? Have you done the background checks? You only looked at, according to your—

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I said, of the 153,000, 78% were already eliminated, because we know who they are and whether they have status, including the 14% who have claimed asylum. Yes, the department would know. On the 22%, work is ongoing to determine how many have left the country.

Costas Menegakis: It's a little hard to believe that on March 23 the Auditor General found 153,000 people and then, boom, magically, within a month or so, the problem seems to have been resolved on your end. Still, there are 21,420 people you're looking into, and there's concern about people being in our communities.

Astoundingly, Mr. Gallivan testified that there was no entry/exit system in place in your department. The question is why. The government has been in power for 11 years now. This is the 11th year. Canadians want to know, and we want to know, why there would be no entry/exit system in place.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Well, that's a good question. I wondered the same thing. But that's how Canada has been throughout its history. This is nothing new. Canada has never, ever had that, ever since Canada was created.

I agree with you. We should have it. We are working toward it, which is the good news. I agree with you.

Costas Menegakis: You let in record numbers of people—millions and millions of people—over the past 11 years with no control, no record and no way of having an entry/exit system. I'm glad you agree with me, because it's obviously a major failure of the government over the past 11 years. That's who you're representing here today.

I'll pass the rest of my time to Mr. Ho.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Minister, according to the AG report, 549,000 study permits expired in 2024, and 39,500 people appeared to have no status, with only 16,000 confirmed departures. Do you know where the rest of them are?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, that is exactly why we've implemented what we have, in order to determine each case in terms of where they are. Those who have departed are gone. Those who have not will have their cases flagged with CBSA for deportation—

Vincent Ho: You weren't tracking them, then.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —but also with IRCC so that if they apply for anything at all, it will be there. They would be subject to deportation—

Vincent Ho: So you weren't tracking them at all.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —and non-entry to Canada for five years.

Vincent Ho: Basically, you weren't tracking them at all.

How many of the 23,500 people remaining, who are still in Canada with no status, as found in the AG report, have ties to any terrorist-linked entities?

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, may I answer that?

The Chair: Please go ahead.

Ted Gallivan: These applicants are security-screened before they enter into the country. While imperfect, that screen would have been applied for people coming in. To the extent that the security screening apparatus is effective, that is the control.

Vincent Ho: So there's none, then.

I'd like to get the answer from the minister.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Please ask your question again.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Vincent Ho: How many of the 23,500 people have ties to terrorist entities?

• (1130)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They were all security-screened prior to entering Canada in the first place.

Vincent Ho: Minister, your department used a blanket light-touch approach to study permit extensions, even when the AG said a few weeks ago that it should not have used it for high-risk countries. How can Canadians know that terrorists, like the one you let in just last week, didn't slip through the cracks?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There are a lot of checks and balances in our immigration system. Pre-arrival, before people land, when they are at the border, the system is being enhanced—

Vincent Ho: Are the checks and balances working?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: They are. They are working.

Vincent Ho: Oh, is that right? Of the 153,000 non-compliant study permits, you said earlier that 14% have claimed asylum, so about 21,000 people. How many of these are IRGC or regime-linked individuals? Are you tracking that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, as I said before, these students, or former students, were all screened prior to being admitted as students on student visas, prior to entry to Canada.

Vincent Ho: So you're confident that none of them are.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Ho. That is time.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Jeneroux.

Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here.

It's not that I don't trust you, Madam Chair, but I'm going to put on my own timer.

Minister, I'm new to the committee here. I've been trying to catch up on some of the numbers you've given, including the 153,000 non-compliance cases raised in the Auditor General report. Of those, 78% have been cleared and 22% have left the country.

I think there were some valid questions raised on the other side about things like fraud. I'm hoping that you or perhaps Mr. Gallivan can share what's been done to address some of that fraud. I don't think I necessarily heard an answer to that.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We have submitted a detailed management action plan. It's a public action plan for between now and the end of 2026. A number of steps will be done to better monitor expiring permits, including reviewing all cases that are presented in the report to create alerts on the files where applicable.

The work with enforcement partners to review and improve internal processes is not only ongoing, but it has been strengthened. There have already been a number of meetings that are happening to ensure that's done. By the way, that's not just for student applications. That is for any applications that we have.

We're providing CBSA annually with a list of individuals with expired permits who have not applied for or received an extension or applied for or transitioned to permanent residency. Obviously, if you've transitioned to permanent residency, then you're further looked at again, or you have a valid immigration status.

We're also updating our guidance on misrepresentation, in terms of anybody who has provided any documents that are fraudulent. We're optimizing our tools and the compliance processes. Again, I talked about misrepresentation. Where fraud is being detected through letters of acceptance verification, we are expanding our functions to have better collaboration with CBSA and with the institutions.

Again, we will continue to work with the provinces and territories when we're talking about admissions of students, because they are the ones who, with the educational institutions, are sort of determining where to go. In terms of broadening the list of countries, again, IRCC does not control that; that is something that the colleges, universities and post-secondary institutions are doing.

Again, we will be conducting compliance investigations on study permit extension applications that are identified as high-risk. With an initial study permit application process, we will initially do all of those that were under the student direct stream. There are a number of items that are being done to ensure that there's better management, better monitoring and better control of the system.

I will come back to the question of my friend on my right, which was why some of these things were not done before, such as an entry/exit system. You know, Canada was established in 1867, and certainly, for generations, immigrants have been coming to Canada to build this country. I think a lot of us around the table are immigrants, or the sons and daughters of immigrants, or the grandchildren of immigrants. The country was built by immigrants, built for Canadians. We want to ensure that we keep it that way.

The system has grown to an extent in the last few years after COVID. It just got to a point where many people were coming because the system allowed them to come because they fit the criteria. There were no temporary resident caps, whether for students or for work permits. That was instituted in 2024. That is why Canadians and the country are seeing a decline in the number of workers who are coming on temporary status, as well as students. It is a shock to

the system, to a lot of them. We are revamping. In fact, there have been a lot of things that have been done.

Thank you so much.

• (1135)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Diab, let us discuss the 800 study permits which, according to the Auditor General, were granted on the basis of information that was either fraudulent or inaccurate. You mentioned earlier that a note will be added to their files.

Am I to understand that you have successfully identified these 800 individuals?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes. My deputy minister confirms that we have identified these individuals.

Alexis Deschênes: A note has therefore been added to the file of each of these individuals.

The Auditor General tells us that most of these 800 people subsequently obtained other immigration permits.

So, what happens to these people, apart from a note being added to their file? Are there any sanctions?

Ted Gallivan: That is the important question.

There will be an investigation into these cases to determine whether we will revoke these individuals' status in Canada or recommend its revocation. If their status is revoked, there will be a removal process for these individuals. For us, it is also a matter of learning from these scenarios to adjust our licensing process and better target this type of individual in the future.

So, our testimony is that, in 100% of cases, there will be an investigation to determine whether we will revoke the licence or recommend its revocation, if we do not have the power to revoke it. If it is revoked, we will proceed with removal.

Alexis Deschênes: How long do you expect it to take to complete the analysis of these 800 cases?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We want this to be done by the end of 2026.

Ted Gallivan: I would like to clarify that the aim is to launch all investigations by the end of 2026. If there is an individual who is difficult to locate, we understand that it could take longer. However, our commitment is to reach a decision in 2026 on all cases.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

Next, we have five minutes for Ms. Rempel Garner.

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

To recap some of your answers, of the 800 cases of fraud the Auditor General reported, you don't know where those people are right now.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We've identified the 800 individuals.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Could you tell us where they are?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I wouldn't have that information right here at the desk.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: All right. You don't know whether or not they're still in the country.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The 800 cases are in Canada.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. You haven't removed them from Canada.

To be clear, you don't have a functioning entry/exit tracking system yet. Is that correct?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The system is in development—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: That's a no.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —but, as I said before, this is a function from 1867.

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, if you'll allow me, I think the entry regime is much more mature than the exit regime.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The entry is there.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. You don't know if people leave. Thank you for clarifying that.

Minister, you also said that there were no caps on this program until 2024. Is that correct?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I said that Canada's system did not have an appropriate cap on temporary resident applications for people coming into the country.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: To be clear, have you revoked the ability of colleges that issued permits to fraudulent applicants to issue new permits? Have you said no to any of the colleges that were—

• (1140)

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That was absolutely done prior to my being the minister. That was ongoing in the last number of years.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Which ones did you revoke?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, I am a former minister of labour and advanced education, provincially. I know how it works from a provincial perspective.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'm asking about your purview right now.

Which colleges have you revoked access to?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Provinces and territories have a large role to play in designating learning institutions. A number of those were dedesignated. I know that for sure.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Which ones?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We can get you the information, in terms of names.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: My colleague brought up the question of the light-touch system, which had a lot of that fraud.

Have you abolished it?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There is no such thing, in terms of the way you're describing it.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: It's the file system.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We have many systems in place to take care of those.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay.

To be clear, you said that 14% of the cases of fraud that were identified by the Auditor General—which, by my math, is about 21,400 people—claimed asylum. Is that correct?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's 14% of 153,000, so that's correct.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Do you know what the cost to taxpayers was, in terms of providing social services to people let in to the country—potentially fraudulently—who then went on to make asylum claims? Have you done that analysis?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's exactly why we brought in Bill C-12, in order to curb that practice, because that is not the way to gain entry into Canada's immigration system.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: You still don't know where these people are. You still don't know if they've left the country.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Those who have put in asylum claims, Canada knows who they are. There are claims before the—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: This is my question. There are a lot of gaps in the system, yet your government is on track to issue roughly 215,000 new permits, between foreign students and temporary foreign workers. Why are you letting in so many more temporary foreign labourers when you don't have a way to track people whose permits might have expired? Why are you doing that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I've travelled across the country. Businesses and communities in all parts of the country need temporary workers—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, but what about Canadian kids?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —for many different sectors in our economy—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: What about Canadians?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: —and we do have a great system. We know that the people who are coming in are security-cleared. We know where they're working—

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I guess I'm just wondering, if you can't track whether people who aren't supposed to be here are leaving, why you would be issuing new permits and potentially taking away jobs from Canadian youth in the middle of a jobs crisis, but I digress.

This is pretty bad. Even a lot of folks in the media brought out that this is pretty bad. Has the Prime Minister called you at all to discuss maybe speeding up the implementation of some of these things, given that you're issuing over 200,000 new permits? Has he called you into his office and said, “What the heck?”

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I have constant meetings with the Prime Minister when we develop our immigration levels plan. That was tabled on November 5.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: When was the last time you met with him?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We have discussions all the time. I see the Prime Minister on a weekly basis.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Did he talk to you specifically about the AG report and implementing fixes faster?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: That's exactly what we're doing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Yes, but did he meet with you? Has he specifically asked you to do that?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: As I said, I meet with the Prime Minister. We meet weekly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Okay. He has full confidence in you, is what you're saying.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I have confidence in Canadians, and I believe Canadians have confidence in this government and in the work we are doing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I'll take that as a yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you have five minutes.

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

Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister.

Good morning, everyone.

We are well aware that the Auditor General's report is a cause for concern, but your hard work has paid off. I congratulate you, Minister. Keep up the good work.

In Quebec, we have distinct immigration needs, particularly when it comes to skilled workers in the regions. Last March, our government introduced measures that gave Quebec the flexibility it needed.

Can you give us some details and tell us how these temporary measures will help our Quebec businesses?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Thank you very much, Mr. Joseph. I welcome you to this committee, which is crucial to Canada's economy.

As regards Quebec, we are working closely with our counterparts in Quebec, but also with all MPs representing Quebec. I have travelled throughout Canada, including Quebec. There is also the Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, which gives Quebec significant responsibilities in the area of immigration.

As regards collaboration with the Government of Quebec, it is for this reason that we have introduced a temporary measure that will allow a targeted number of foreign workers to extend their work permits and contribute to the Quebec economy. As I told you, we have worked extensively with the Government of Quebec and the Quebec Minister of Immigration, but also with Quebec's representative here at the federal government. I also organized a round table with many Quebec businesses, and we heard very clearly that such a measure was necessary. This was an exceptional but limited measure, reserved for temporary foreign workers who, as you said, are addressing labour shortages in essential sectors where employers have indicated they wish to work on a long-term basis. We will continue to listen and work with the Quebec government, as well as with employers and the people of Quebec.

I invite you to contact me if you have any needs in your regions as well.

• (1145)

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Minister. I can assure you that this is a great boon to Quebec businesses.

I understand that some of the students highlighted in the Auditor General's report have applied for asylum. As you know, the number of asylum seekers is a crucial issue in Quebec.

Can you explain the trends observed in recent years regarding asylum applications, particularly here in Quebec?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes, of course.

Allow me to ask my deputy minister to provide you with an explanation.

Ted Gallivan: Over the last two years, the number of asylum claims has fallen by 70% to 75%. So, there has been a sharp reduction in the number of new arrivals.

However, some have already arrived. Can the Quebec system accommodate them all? Are there other provinces or territories that might be interested? This question still needs to be addressed.

Natilien Joseph: I would like to ask one final question, as it is very important.

We know that the minister has done an extraordinary job of reversing this trend. Can you tell us what policy has been put in place to reverse this trend?

Ted Gallivan: The Safe Third Country Agreement is one example, and Bill C-12 is another. For Canada, it is a matter of enacting the necessary laws and regulations to demonstrate control and subsequently implementing them.

Natilien Joseph: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

[English]

Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

Next, we go for five minutes to Mr. Redekopp, who I believe is sharing with Mr. Davies. Then we go to Ms. Sodhi for five minutes, and then we wrap up.

Thank you.

Brad Redekopp: Minister, I'm still a bit confused about the light touch. In the Auditor General's report, she mentioned a number of times this idea of light touch, where the department doesn't do its normal due process.

The question I'm asking you is, has the department eliminated the light touch across the board?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, there are two processes going on. Are we talking about the student stream or are we talking about the Immigration and Refugee Board?

Brad Redekopp: I'm talking about the student stream in the IRCC department.

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, there are two light touches mentioned in the OAG report. The first is the student direct stream, which has been discontinued, so that stopped the go-forward. We still have the people who came while that program existed. The second is—

Brad Redekopp: On that one, she also mentioned that if a file was re-looked at down the road, that would still apply a light touch to that file.

• (1150)

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, the member is correct.

As always, in terms of precision, there's a second light touch that was described in the OAG report, on the renewal. Once somebody has been a student for two years, when we were renewing it, there was an absence of going back to check the financials, in particular. The department has taken the responsibility, particularly with those who came in through the student direct stream in the first instance.... They're a higher risk. When those people are renewed, we need to dig into the financials and ensure that the same controls we have for all students now exist.

Brad Redekopp: There's no light touch done in IRCC anymore. Is that what you're saying?

Ted Gallivan: Of the two light touches described by the OAG, one was discontinued in 2024, and the other is—

Brad Redekopp: Okay, fair enough.

Are there other light touches that were not described that are still happening?

Ted Gallivan: That's the reference to.... It's out of my responsibility. The IRB had a paper process—

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

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos has a point of order.

Peter Fragiskatos: The deputy minister was trying to get a full answer on the record. I don't believe he was able to do so.

The Chair: Let's continue.

Brad Redekopp: I'm happy to hear the answer, but what are the other light touches that are being used in the department?

Ted Gallivan: The other process that I believe has been described as a light touch is one by the IRB where there was a paper process rather than an in-person interview. I believe the IRB has suspended that process under review to make sure that they have all the appropriate controls.

That was the third program that I was aware of that was described as light-touch.

Brad Redekopp: Would you say that when Chinook determines things and an agent then has a very brief look at it to confirm Chinook, that is also a light touch?

Ted Gallivan: I wouldn't comment. I'm describing other people's use of the words "light touch". I, myself, might not use those words in any instance.

Brad Redekopp: I'll pass my time over to Mr. Davies.

The Chair: You have two and a half minutes.

Fred Davies: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister, you have said to me several times during this committee that IRCC is no longer paying for hotel rooms. You reiterated that today. Do you agree that municipalities should be using taxpayers' money to purchase real estate? Isn't that just a backdoor way, a sort of bait and switch, to spend taxpayers' money to house refugee claimants?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: I did say that, and that is correct. There was a system in place where hotels had been used for asylum—

Fred Davies: They're still being used, Minister. Instead of you paying them directly, you're giving money to municipalities.

Is there a contribution agreement attached to that funding?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Yes, absolutely.

Fred Davies: Does it allow them to buy real estate with taxpayers' money?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: There is an agreement. Of course, there's an agreement in place.

Fred Davies: Does it allow them to use taxpayers' dollars to buy real estate to house asylum claimants?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's not for asylum claimants.

Fred Davies: Well, who is it for?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: It's for the population.

Fred Davies: What population?

The Chair: I think, Mr. Gallivan, you want to come in.

Ted Gallivan: Madam Chair, I have asked the team at IRCC to tell me what instrument needs to be modified to address this question. I would like to know how we write into the terms and conditions a prohibition, so I've asked for that information. I believe conversations were had about not doing it, and now I've asked for the hard rule that would prohibit it.

Fred Davies: When the minister says “the population”, I'm not sure what's meant by that, but let's move beyond that.

You've allowed taxpayers' dollars to be transferred to municipalities under a contribution agreement to buy hotels to house asylum claimants. That is what I've been led to believe.

When you sell the building, who gets the proceeds, the taxes? Do you get the money back after the municipalities sell the hotels? Is there interest payable on the assets that municipalities are purchasing? I want to know. Do they get the money for free after the program is done?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: So, again, there was housing—

Fred Davies: No, I'm talking about the purchase of the real estate. If the municipality decides to sell the real estate, who gets the proceeds?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, money was transferred to the municipality for housing costs.

Fred Davies: When the real estate is no longer useful under that program and is sold, who gets the money?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: We'll take a look at the agreement, as the deputy said.

Fred Davies: Can I have a copy of the contribution agreement?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Gallivan.

We now have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Minister and Deputy Minister, there have been some mentions about “light touch”, and I'd like to give both of you, or one of you, the opportunity to clarify anything you might like to say about this system.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, that is not a term that I personally use, but a term that was used in the Auditor General's report in relation to the student direct stream. This was eliminated a while ago, prior to my coming in. The entire student direct stream was eliminated as part of strengthening our...before the audit was even completed.

Deputy, would you mind speaking about the second one that people might be referring to as such?

• (1155)

Ted Gallivan: Sure. The question revolves around people who came in under the student direct stream, which was identified to more quickly provide positive decisions to students from certain countries. I would note that Iran wasn't a country participating in

the stream, and so I think that would reduce the circle of risk around that.

On the student direct stream, having wound down the program to stop any future instances, the question is what we are doing about the people who came in while the program did exist. The OAG focused on the particular question of a student who was then extending. If we didn't do a rigorous check of their financials to make sure that they weren't studying merely for the purposes of working, we really did need to do a more thorough review on the renewal of student visas for anybody who originally came in on this. They would have a higher risk profile, and we need to do extra due diligence, particularly around the financial bona fides of those students.

Amandeep Sodhi: That's perfect.

I just want to talk a little bit about the provincial allocation model. The Auditor General's report acknowledges that the department recognized that smaller provinces were being disproportionately affected by the international student reform. The government took corrective action by providing allocation top-ups to certain provinces in April 2024, and also by updating the model for 2025 to use province-specific historical approval rates, rather than a single national estimate.

Can you walk us through how the department updated the allocation model for 2025, how it was influenced by the outcomes of 2024, and how it better accounts for the unique circumstances of smaller provinces and their needs?

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: The department works in close collaboration with the provinces and territories when it does the allocation of the number of students. Federally, there is one global number for all of Canada, and then that's divided among the provinces and territories. Again, there's quite a bit of collaboration. The provinces and territories then make the decisions around how to allocate, to whom, and how many to allocate to each of their designated learning institutions—universities, colleges and other post-secondary educational institutions.

I've met a lot with colleges, universities and other institutions, both with their national bodies and, for a number of them, on the provincial side as well. There's been a lot of volatility in the system since 2024. A lot of change has happened. A lot of it has affected the number of people they can recruit, obviously, with their financial situation—

The Chair: You have one minute.

Hon. Lena Metlege Diab: Again, that's provincial and territorial jurisdiction, when we talk about that. We are there as a federal government and a department to assist them in international recruitment missions, helping them on the francophone side with Destination Canada, going over and ensuring that Canada has the reputation it deserves and has in the world, in order to bring top talent here.

We've also processed Ph.D. students in a 14-day time frame, which is great because we're looking for global talent to come here. That is part of the initiative we have taken in the last number of months. It is the same with researchers who are coming to our institutions so that we can grow our country's economy.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

That concludes the first hour of our meeting today.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: I have a point of clarification.

The Chair: We have a point of order.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: Could you reiterate the undertakings the department agreed to today?

The Chair: I don't have a full list of them.

Do you have a full list of them, Mr. Clerk?

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: One is the names of the DLIs that have been banned from issuing new permits.

Mr. Redekopp, I think you had a couple of others.

Brad Redekopp: It was about the 800 fraudsters, the 153,000 cases of potential non-compliance and the 39,500 who should not be in Canada anymore.

• (1200)

Fred Davies: I requested the contribution agreements between the federal government and municipalities for the allocation of funds for the purchase of real estate.

The Chair: What an excellent team effort. Thank you.

That's on the record. Thank you for that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner: We come prepared, even if they don't.

The Chair: I want to thank the witnesses for their excellent testimony and for being patient with our questions.

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

We're going to suspend for five minutes so the witnesses can leave. We will come back in camera to discuss the future report on Canada's immigration systems and our calendar.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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