



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 033**

Monday, May 25, 2026

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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz





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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 33 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. I would like to make a few comments for the benefits of the witnesses and members.

[*English*]

There are just a few rules, as always. You have all memorized them by now. I'm going to do a test next time.

For this time, I will just remind you to please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those who are on Zoom, kindly click on the microphone icon to activate your microphone, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. As well, you can also select the appropriate channel for interpretation, whether you would like it to be in English or in French. For those in the room—and we do have two of our guests in the room today—you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I want to remind all of the witnesses that the committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you will need to take full advantage of the time.

Mr. Joseph.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.):** There is no interpretation.

**The Chair:** Okay. We will look into this. Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

[*English*]

Maybe while we're waiting, I'll just take a minute to warmly welcome Mr. Wade Chang, a new member of our committee.

It's a pleasure to have you here. I know that we had another member substitute while you were finishing off a report, so welcome.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, are you getting the interpretation?

**Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Lestiguj, BQ):** Madam Chair, I wasn't listening to the interpretation so I cannot say. I can try to listen.

**The Chair:** Mr. Joseph has informed me that it's working properly now. Excellent. We will continue.

[*English*]

I will just remind you, witnesses, that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece. Select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allocated for questions and answers. Of course, please ensure that all of your comments are addressed through the chair.

Members, you are all superstars. I'm just going to remind you, though, to please raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best as we can. Please do not speak over each other. It's hard for our interpreters to translate, and it makes their job difficult.

I will do my best to let both witnesses and members know when they have one minute left. I want to thank you all in advance for your co-operation.

I will just remind everyone that we do have a vote at one o'clock. Once the bells ring, we'll at that point decide whether or not we want an extra 15 minutes before we go upstairs.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 27, 2026, the committee is commencing its study of the provincial distribution of asylum seekers in Canada.

Before I introduce the witness, we have to adopt a budget for the study and another budget at the same time.

The first budget is \$28,250 for the study on asylum seekers, which begins today. Can I have someone move that we approve that?

• (1105)

**Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes, do you have any issues with the budget allocated for this study?

**Alexis Deschênes:** No, it's fine.

**The Chair:** For the second budget, it's \$55,000 for the study on attracting and empowering global talent.

Who will move it?

**Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.):** I so move.

(Motion agreed to)

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes, is it okay?

**Alexis Deschênes:** Yes.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Okay.

[*English*]

Everyone has agreed. Thank you.

I would now like to get to the main reason for this meeting today and welcome our witnesses for our first hour.

As an individual, back by popular demand, we have Mr. Barutciski, who is a professor at York University. We also have Anita Stellinga, who is the chief executive officer of COSTI Immigrant Services.

Welcome to both of you. Thank you for coming in person. It's always nice to see people in person.

We are also very pleased to warmly welcome Steve Jacques, the commissioner of human services for Peel Region, who is joining us by video conference.

Up to five minutes will be given to each of you for your opening remarks, after which we will proceed to the rounds of questions. I'm going to start off with Mr. Barutciski for five minutes. We'll follow with Ms. Stellinga, and then we'll round it out with Mr. Jacques.

Mr. Barutciski, you have five minutes, and it starts now.

[*Translation*]

**Michael Barutciski (Professor, York University, As an Individual):** Madam Chair, thank you for inviting me.

I spend my time analyzing immigration policies and laws, so I am very pleased to be here. I am impressed by the quality of the work done by the members of the three parties who are here. The very fact that you are studying the issue of the interprovincial distribution of asylum seekers is a positive sign.

The division of responsibilities has always been a complicated issue. I began working on this issue 33 years ago. I was part of a team of researchers funded by major American foundations. Here is the lesson I learned from that experience, which may be relevant to you: proposals from the academic sector focus on the demands of human rights advocates; they do not take into account political constraints or the limitations of government action. You are in the best position to determine what is realistic—or even necessary—because you know the voters in your ridings.

[*English*]

I continued to work on burden sharing when I was asked by the UNHCR to be a member of the independent commission on the Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999. The lesson I learned was that governments were ready to share the responsibilities, but human rights

advocates would not accept involuntary transfers. They insisted on consent, and that led to even bigger problems.

Albanians from Kosovo started choosing the country they preferred in terms of socio-economic conditions, despite the ongoing crisis. They could have gone to neighbouring Albania, where NATO-built camps were waiting, empty, but they actually wanted to go to rich countries like Germany. The 5,000 who came here did so as their second or third choice. There were flights organized by the Canadian government that people simply did not show up for because they had better options.

The CBC/Radio-Canada correspondent on the ground didn't understand that a bigger regional crisis was averted, thanks in part to neighbouring Greece, which accepted involuntary transfers when the chaotic frontline reception at the Kosovo border was destabilizing the whole region.

[*Translation*]

Regarding this concept of consent, two months ago, the committee asked the Director General of Asylum Policy at the department a simple question. He replied that the Canadian Charter guarantees that asylum seekers "have the right to live wherever they wish." However, it's clear that he is mistaken. Read section 6 of the charter, which is unambiguous. The right to move or take up residence in any province is guaranteed only to citizens and permanent residents. As temporary residents, asylum seekers do not have this right.

It's astounding that this kind of misconception is circulating within the department. If you believe consent is required, in my view, there is no point in undertaking this study. Asylum seekers will simply head to major urban centres.

The next question to address is whether to proceed with transfers using a generalized system that applies to all asylum seekers, as in Germany. The alternative would be to have a system that applies only in emergency situations, such as the sea crossings currently affecting Greece or Italy, or the crossings at Roxham Road, which have disproportionately affected Quebec.

• (1110)

[*English*]

The next step would be to determine the distribution formula. For example, Italy has adopted a quota for municipalities with more than 1,000 residents.

Germany calculates according to tax revenues and population size for each of its federal states. I was in Germany 10 days ago. When a migrant claims asylum, a software algorithm automatically assigns a reception centre in a specific land. Berlin, for example, is supposed to get 5% of all asylum seekers this year.

To summarize, Canada could address the issue of provincial distribution of asylum seekers in a more equitable way if, firstly, responsibility sharing becomes mandatory; secondly, the distribution is part of the standard response—in other words, it applies to all asylum seekers—and thirdly, we establish a distribution formula that takes into account the socio-economic situation of the partners in the federation.

[*Translation*]

If you have any questions, I'd be happy to answer them during the question period.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Barutciski.

Next we have Ms. Stellinga for five minutes. Your five minutes start now.

**Anita Stellinga (Chief Executive Officer, COSTI Immigrant Services):** Good morning, Madam Chair and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you.

My name is Anita Stellinga. I'm the chief executive officer of COSTI Immigrant Services. For almost 75 years, COSTI has provided employment, education, settlement, housing, language, mental health and social supports to newcomers and their families across the greater Toronto area. We welcome this study because, in our view, the provincial distribution of asylum seekers is less a question of fairness among jurisdictions and more whether the system produces the right outcomes.

The test of any new approach is practical. Does it help people stabilize faster, move into housing sooner, enter the labour market more quickly and reduce avoidable pressure on shelters, health systems and municipalities? Yes, Ontario and Quebec continue to receive the largest shares of asylum claims in Canada. The issue is not simply where people first arrive. It is whether Canada has the reception, housing and settlement infrastructure to support people after they make a claim.

At COSTI, we see, every day, that housing instability is not a side issue in the asylum system. Housing is the hub of the settlement wheel, and around it are the elements that allow a person or family to move from survival to stability. Health care, education, language training, employment services, legal navigation, social connection and community—without these supports, housing is only a roof. That distinction matters because Canada should be aiming to not only locate and house asylum seekers, but to help people build a home.

A home is more than a physical address. It includes community, dignity, agency and belonging. The benefits of immigration—social cohesion, labour market participation and long-term contribution—depend on that connection to community. That is why we urge caution about models that distribute asylum seekers primarily by population share, fixed quotas or administrative allocation.

A formula may look fair on paper, but it does not tell us whether housing exists, whether employment pathways are realistic or whether a community is ready to welcome people well. Moving

people without that foundation simply moves pressure around the country. Access to services, supports and pathways can vary, depending on where someone first arrives, where they are referred and which provincial or municipal systems they encounter. Communities differ in their labour markets, housing conditions, service networks and cultural connections. Newcomers should be able to consider those differences when deciding where to build their lives. Equity should not mean assigning people to places. Equity requires informed choices and reliable access to the supports that allow people to build a home, to contribute and to belong.

Many newcomers, understandably, navigate toward large urban centres, like Toronto and Montreal, because they assume that large cities offer more jobs, more services and a better chance of success. Sometimes they do, but large cities can also have high housing costs, stretched services and difficult labour markets. This study should not only ask where people land, but ask where people are able to stay, work, build community and set down roots. If newcomers can assess housing, employment, education, health navigation, language and community supports before choosing where to build their lives, they are more likely to make choices that last and have better outcomes. If they arrive, only to discover that supports are unavailable, housing is out of reach or jobs are harder to access than expected, then the system has not served them or the municipalities and the communities asked to welcome them.

Rather than creating a system that restricts movement, Canada should create one that coordinates funding, service navigation and outcomes across jurisdictions. In practical terms, that means a multi-year intergovernmental national asylum and housing strategy that codifies the respective roles and funding responsibilities of federal, provincial and municipal governments.

We need a single framework for reception and referral that is characterized by collaboration and coordination across all levels of government and that is supported by shared data infrastructure. The goal would not be to track people in order to control their movement. The goal would be to ensure continuity of support, to prevent duplication, to reduce service gaps, to avoid overwhelming local systems and to give newcomers reliable information about their options, which encourages geographic distribution.

• (1115)

A national system could help identify where housing pathways, services and community networks already exist and where additional capacity could be developed to make more communities realistic choices for settlement. It could also help governments and service providers measure outcomes across jurisdictions: time to housing, time to work authorization, time to employment, school enrolment, health navigation and connection to community.

In closing, COSTI recommends that the committee support a national asylum and housing model built on four principles—mobility, not restriction; informed choice, not administrative assignment; coordinated funding, not fragmented responses; and measurable outcomes, not crisis management.

COSTI stands ready to—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. You're well over time. Thank you for that. In the questions, we might be able to have you make your final points.

Mr. Jacques, it's now your turn. You have five minutes.

**Steve Jacques (Commissioner of Human Services, Region of Peel):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me here today.

My name is Steve Jacques. I'm the commissioner of human services in the region of Peel in Ontario, which encompasses three municipalities—the city of Brampton, the town of Caledon and the city of Mississauga. I'm here today to share Peel's response to the needs of homeless asylum claimants.

Peel reflects Canada's long-standing commitment to immigration. More than half our residents were born outside of Canada. We are home to Pearson International Airport, the country's primary gateway. As a result, Peel and the greater Toronto area receive a significant share of asylum claimants, many of whom arrive in need of immediate shelter, supports and help navigating complex systems.

Beginning in 2023, we saw an unprecedented surge in asylum claimants in need of homelessness support. By the fall, our shelter system was operating at nearly 400% capacity and nearing collapse. At the peak, nearly three-quarters of shelter residents were asylum claimants. Since then, Peel has supported 8,500 homeless asylum claimants. The surge occurred within an already strained system. Peel has more than 37,000 households on the affordable housing wait-list. Shelters were already full prior to this increase.

Since 2001 homelessness has risen 223%, with asylum claimants accounting for a significant portion of that growth. At the same time, affordability has worsened. It now takes the equivalent of three full-time minimum-wage jobs to afford the average rent in Peel. Many households remain priced out of home ownership.

While supports like the Canada-Ontario housing benefit are essential, our allocation is exhausted each year due to high demand. Additional funding of \$2.1 million in 2023-24 helped approximately 180 asylum claimant households, but ongoing supports have not kept pace with need and no additional allocations for asylum claimants have been issued.

Despite these pressures, Peel has acted. As a municipality primarily funded through property tax and unable to run deficits, we are not designed to sustain a national asylum system, but between 2023 and by the end of 2026, Peel will have committed more than \$13 million from local tax reserves to maintain services. Working with the federal government and community organizers, we established the Peel Reception Centre, one of the largest dedicated asylum claimant shelters in Canada. It provides wraparound supports that include settlement services, housing assistance, health services, legal aid, language training, and income and employment support, all focused on helping individuals transition to stable housing.

This model is working. With federal support through the interim housing assistance program, more than 60% of clients have moved into housing, and more than half have remained in the region of Peel. However, this work remains more difficult as mental health needs among asylum claimants are increasing, rental costs continue to rise, and affordable housing, especially shared housing, is extremely limited. At the same time, work permit delays limit employment opportunities for newcomers. Compounded, these pressures make it hard for municipalities to meet both operational demands and contractual obligations.

The evidence is clear: The current model places disproportionate operational and financial pressures on municipalities. That pressure is no longer sustainable. Therefore, we offer four recommendations for the committee's consideration.

First, supporting asylum claimants must be recognized as a coordinated national function with predictable, stable funding. Municipalities cannot continue to fund federal immigration responsibilities through local tax reserves.

Second, housing benefits must be integrated into the national housing strategy through a permanent allocation for asylum claimants. This is a structural need, not a temporary pressure.

Third, Canada needs a more balanced national hub-and-spoke system that distributes arrivals across the country based on labour markets, housing availability and community readiness. The funding should follow the claimant regardless of where they settle.

• (1120)

Fourth, until such a system exists, the federal government must invest in gateway communities, such as Peel, at levels that respect the scale and reality of the demand they are absorbing.

There is a growing gap between responsibility and resources. Canada is not overwhelmed by those seeking refuge. We are under-invested in the municipalities that support them every day. If we want an asylum system that is fair, effective and built to last, then closing the gap isn't optional; it's essential.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Jacques.

Thanks, everyone, for your opening remarks.

Now, we are going to our rounds of questions. Our first round is six minutes for each member. Our first questioner is Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Menegakis, you have six minutes.

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

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

Mr. Barutciski, you recently wrote, “Foreigners who are unlawfully present in the country should always be treated in a humane manner, but they have to accept the consequences of their illegal actions.” Can you give some examples of immigration pathways commonly being abused?

**Michael Barutciski:** An effective and sustainable asylum policy always has to try to balance the humane treatment of asylum seekers and the legitimate interests of the state. What we've seen is that even just claiming asylum could arguably be seen as... Even the previous minister admitted that some people who are here on different temporary statuses claim asylum just to stay longer. If someone has a student visa and has been here for a number of years, it does raise potential problems if asylum is the—

**Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC):** I have a point of order.

The video doesn't seem to be working. The camera has been pointed at you the whole time.

**The Chair:** Well, that's because I should be the centre of attention, always.

**Voices:** Oh, oh!

**The Chair:** Hold on. Let's check the video. I'm joking.

[*Translation*]

It was a joke, Mr. Deschênes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Yes, that's why I'm laughing.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Please do not point the camera at me. Please point it at our witness.

Now we can see the room. I think we're good, Mr. Ho.

Mr. Menegakis, we stopped your time. We are going to restart.

Professor Barutciski, go ahead, please.

**Michael Barutciski:** I was talking about changing statuses. Sometimes there could be problems with that.

Part of the balance we're trying to attain is with the factors that my colleague mentioned. Housing, work and integrating into the community have to be balanced with the other side. The government does have an interest in controlling this, particularly for asylum seekers who are here to claim asylum. We don't know if they will be staying in the long term, so it is a bit of a tricky question.

• (1125)

**Costas Menegakis:** You mentioned that they should also accept the consequences of their illegal actions. What do you believe the consequences of their illegal actions should be?

**Michael Barutciski:** As I just said about control, if someone is not respecting immigration laws, then there should be consequences. We do have procedures, so they have to be enforced.

**Costas Menegakis:** Recently, we've seen judges give preferential treatment to folks to protect their immigration status. Let's put it that way.

Do you agree that non-citizen immigrants should be treated differently from Canadian citizens for committing the same crime?

**Michael Barutciski:** I understand the good intentions behind that, but part of the leitmotif behind what I'm saying is that we have to be careful not to overcompensate and not to be overly generous in how we interpret the rights. That was one of the points I made in my initial statement. I think we do that a lot. In my view, that is one reason we have found ourselves in the current predicament.

For example, a surge happened at the Toronto international airport a couple of years ago. It was not by chance. There were policies that led to a lot of claims at the airport.

**Costas Menegakis:** Most Canadians believe that if you commit a crime, you should get the same sentence, no matter who commits the crime. It doesn't matter what your status is.

By letting asylum claims drag on for years, hasn't the government's strategic incompetence turned a backlogged asylum system into a ticket to residency?

**Michael Barutciski:** Indirectly, that's the effect. We have procedures that are complicated and that are used in ways that are unmanageable. We also have high numbers of claims, even now, compared to what we had 10 years ago.

**Costas Menegakis:** There's no question about that.

I want to talk about the IRB backlogs. You commented on this and suggested completely abolishing the tribunal, which is quite a strong stance to take. I'm sure you would agree.

What did the Liberals do to make you believe that this would be the best path forward?

**Michael Barutciski:** I didn't actually say that we should abolish. I said we should consider. I don't think, particularly, the government—

**Costas Menegakis:** What led you to believe that?

**Michael Barutciski:** I don't think it's necessarily what the governing party has done over the last few years. It's actually the IRB. We, or you, the Parliament, gave it an independent mandate. I have observed the IRB since it was created in 1989, and it's actually taking a lot of these powers. In its procedures, it's going back to the theme we were just talking about a few moments ago. It's interpreting all the norms in, I would say, the most open way possible. That's good and I understand the intentions behind that, but it does lead to complications.

You're highlighting one of them. We have procedures that drag on forever and, obviously, that changes the status of someone. You can't be doing an asylum procedure for three, four, five or six years without acknowledging that the person needs to be integrated into the local community. We've created a system that is, I would say, not sustainable. Parliament should consider the powers it gave to this agency, including changing them, because the models we have around the world are quite different.

**Costas Menegakis:** Mr. Jacques, I'd like to move over to you, if I may, sir.

You mentioned that Peel Region is doing more than its fair share of accommodating asylum claimants in our country. Can you elaborate a little bit on what effect the tremendous backlogs we see continuing to grow in the asylum system have had on Peel Region specifically?

**Steve Jacques:** Thank you for the question.

As far as the backlog goes, we process and work with individuals who come through. On average, through our reception centre, we can house and work with 592 individuals. They're usually there for about 90 days. That's the length of stay that IRCC has suggested in order to work them through, with Ms. Stellinga and her team, to get them the health care they need coming into the country and their employment status, as well as any other training. We run job fairs and the rest.

It takes around 90 days, on average, for those individuals to get to a point where they can start to make decisions about where they'll go. That length of stay has increased, based on the complexities of the market. That's gone to well over 110 days per individual who comes in.

**Costas Menegakis:** Where do you house them, sir?

• (1130)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Menegakis. That is time, but you could continue in the next round.

Now, we have six minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

**Amandeep Sodhi (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today.

I'd like to ask my first set of questions of Ms. Stellinga.

COSTI has been the service delivery partner at Peel Reception Centre since it opened. The work you do speaks volumes and truly does make a difference in our communities.

Can you describe what federally funded support looks like on the ground for newcomers in Brampton and in the Peel region as a whole? How does federal investment translate into real outcomes for families that are struggling in times of need?

**Anita Stellinga:** As I was saying earlier in my comments, it's essential that newcomers are supported in order for them to settle successfully and to achieve those outcomes that are their dreams and their aspirations. People come here because they want to start a new life and have a new beginning for them, their family and so on. Federal funding in regard to the asylum claimants flows through the municipality—Peel Region—to us as a service provider at the shelter site in Mississauga in the Peel region.

We're able to provide a variety of supports. It's everything from shelter to assistance finding housing, language, employment, mental health and trauma supports, and assistance navigating the community. All of those things are critical for them and their families to begin their days here. We know that those outcomes are incredibly important. Those supports are really important because that drives the success in the community.

The other part is that the funding allows the community and the region to be accessible in terms of having a system and an infrastructure in place that is welcoming and that supports individuals. That is essential, because without that partnership and coordination between federal, regional and municipal, we would not be able to provide the supports and services that enable people to begin their lives successfully here.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Thank you for the answer.

Canada welcomes thousands of newcomers every year. They all end up settling in different parts of the country for all different kinds of reasons. Can you explain how that process works? What factors influence where asylum seekers and refugees tend to settle?

**Anita Stellinga:** What we're seeing, in the premise of the study, is that people are mainly going to larger urban centres, like Toronto and Montreal, because they are ports of entry and because there's an assumption that these urban centres have greater access to jobs, housing, supports and the cultural communities that individuals may be associated with. That's an important part of where people will choose to live.

Our point is that if we want to have distribution across the country into different parts, we have to ensure that the system is coordinated and in partnership with all levels of government to ensure that supports on the ground are available. It would be entirely unfair if we were to take people and put them in places where there are no supports, where communities are not welcoming, where there isn't the infrastructure and where, more importantly, there isn't the coordination that is really necessary to ensure that people are accessing services, that we're reducing service gaps and duplication and that we're really setting people up for success.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** You've also highlighted the need to counter harmful narratives about immigration. In your experience at COSTI, serving Brampton's and the Peel region's newcomer communities, what are some of the concrete stories of contribution and success that you want the committee or Canadians to hear more of?

**Anita Stellinga:** Without a doubt, we see that people come here looking to start their lives. They are extremely inspired and motivated to be successful for themselves and for their families. They do not want to be in a shelter. They do not want to be living.... This shelter in Mississauga is a dorm-style shelter, where they can stay for 90 days. It is not the best place to be in. They want to move out. They want to go into the community. They want to start their own lives.

We have many such stories of people who have come in and accessed those supports. They've been able to stand on their own feet. They've been able to go to language classes and get jobs.

We had a beautiful story recently. A young woman who had arrived was supported by our shelter and given language classes. She accessed supports and went out and became a teacher. She came back to the community and was teaching at the school next door to the shelter site. She came back to the shelter and told her story. It was a beautiful full circle of how she was now contributing and giving back to the community where she had been supported and where the doors opened up for her in the first place.

We have tons of stories and outcomes like that.

• (1135)

**Amandeep Sodhi:** That's amazing. I think it shows what we can actually do if we help and empower one another.

We heard in the opening remarks that there was an influx, a surge, in asylum seekers and refugees, predominantly in the Peel area. After a period of rapid growth, our new government is working to restore stability and balance in the immigration system. The government's first immigration levels plan saw a return to more sustainable levels, and we are also seeing the temporary resident population decline.

As a settlement service provider for newcomers in the GTA, can you tell this committee how sustainability and predictability in programs are important for the critical work you do?

**Anita Stellinga:** We're focused on outcomes for our country, our region and our neighbourhoods. In order to have those successful outcomes, the settlement sector, which is the sector that my agency and I are a part of, along with many partners and municipal governments contributing to those supports and services, knows it is just as important as the physical infrastructure. Just as we think about

roads, bridges, schools and hospitals, settlement supports and supports for newcomers are essential because we are driving people-focused outcomes. We are driving those outcomes with the support of the federal, provincial and regional governments to ensure that people have access to services, without which it would be very difficult for people to succeed.

The predictability for the sector, which enables us to know we can count on the funding to deliver that and to know we have qualified, professional staff who are trained and accountable—

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

**Anita Stellinga:** —and we have accountability reports in place to drive that, is an important part.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Stellinga. I'm sorry. We've run out of time.

Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes for six minutes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank all my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for agreeing to consider this important study motion from the Bloc Québécois, which aims to explore ways to distribute asylum seekers more equitably among the provinces.

Quebec represents 22% of the Canadian population and, according to the latest figures, we receive 37% of all asylum seekers in Canada. Quebec is certainly a welcoming society, but asylum seekers must be properly integrated, and that costs money. There is also the issue of French. According to the French language commissioner, more than a third of asylum seekers do not speak French upon arrival.

That's why we want to explore solutions to ensure equitable distribution. We note that the European Union has concluded a pact to better distribute asylum seekers, which will come into effect in June 2026, and Denmark and Germany have implemented a solution as well.

Mr. Barutciski, thank you for joining us.

First of all, since you gave Germany as an example, can you tell me what motivated Germany to implement a process for transferring asylum seekers?

**Michael Barutciski:** The German experience has been an issue for several years. Many asylum seekers from various European countries were trying to make their way to Germany. As a result, Germany ended up with a much higher proportion of asylum seekers. In that sense, it's perhaps a bit like the situation in Quebec. However, Germany is not a point of entry nor the first country asylum seekers enter. You could say it's a secondary migration. They pass through other countries. Germany wanted responsibilities to be shared with other European partners, because migrants and asylum seekers inevitably had to cross through other countries, but they ended up in Germany. That is why Germany wanted this system to be changed.

As I said, this was an ongoing problem for several years. Now, according to the government and the public, they have too many asylum seekers. That's why they are seeking to encourage their European partners to distribute these asylum seekers.

**Alexis Deschênes:** We will now turn to the German formula. I would like you to explain it to the committee.

Earlier, you mentioned a question I had asked a senior official at the Department of Immigration, namely whether asylum seekers could be transferred. He replied that, under section 6 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the right to freedom of movement would prevent that. However, when I read Section 6, I interpret it the same way you do: This section applies only to citizens and permanent residents.

In your opinion, was this perception by a senior official at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada incorrect?

• (1140)

**Michael Barutciski:** Yes. As I have written on several occasions, in my view, this is clearly incorrect.

I would go a step further and say that it's somewhat surprising that this kind of idea is circulating within the department. I understand why we want to promote rights and why we want to protect migrants, but we don't want to go too far either. That's what I was saying earlier. We want to find a reasonable balance. Claiming that there is a right that does not exist in the charter—I think that's an example of the problems we've faced in recent years. We exaggerate rights, and that inevitably leads to problems, I would say. If the Europeans—

**Alexis Deschênes:** The key point is that section 6 is clear. It explicitly states that every Canadian citizen and every person with permanent resident status in Canada has the right to move and earn a living in any province.

In your opinion, regarding the legality of a process to fairly distribute asylum seekers, you do not see any legal issues under Canadian law. Is that correct?

**Michael Barutciski:** With regard to an asylum seeker's freedom of movement, there may be other equality-related concerns, but when it comes to the ability to move or work in another province, I think section 6 is perfectly clear. It couldn't be any clearer than that.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Perfect.

We have one minute and thirty seconds left. Tell us about the German formula. You mentioned the weighting between the integration capacity and the economic strength of the *Länder*. How does this formula work? What results have we seen so far?

**Michael Barutciski:** As I've already suggested, I think this is an interesting model that warrants further study. The idea is that when an asylum seeker arrives, a computer program will determine which *Land* the person should go to. That is where the reception services, which my colleague mentioned, are waiting for that person. It is an indirect way of not forcing, but rather encouraging and guiding asylum seekers to go to certain regions. The idea is to distribute asylum seekers so that they do not all end up in large urban centres, as I had suggested. We want to distribute them across the regions. So they're not just in Berlin; they're also in Brandenburg or Thuringia, where services are waiting for them. We're trying to distribute them. The Germans suggest that the public feels more comfortable with having control over its asylum seekers, and this allows the government to keep the doors open, so to speak.

**Alexis Deschênes:** In 10 seconds, can you tell me how that works?

**Michael Barutciski:** It's hard to be categorical, but to a certain extent, I think it works well enough in this context to warrant our attention. If we want to develop a model, we absolutely must look at this German example.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Mr. Barutciski.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Deschênes and Professor Barutciski.  
[English]

That completes our first round of questions.

We now move to the second round of questions, which is for five minutes each. First, we have Mr. Ho.

Mr. Ho, your five minutes start now.

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

My questions are for Mr. Jacques at Peel Region.

Mr. Jacques, what sorts of services does the region of Peel provide to asylum claimants?

**Steve Jacques:** We hire organizations such as COSTI to provide those services, but we also provide health care services. From a public health perspective, there's a doctor, nurses and public health officials on site to make sure that all the vaccinations are up to speed.

We provide employment counselling as well as employment opportunities. We bring in companies such as Tim Hortons, for example, to run job fairs for individuals. We work with them on housing and housing navigation to understand what housing opportunities are available for them, and there are career opportunities for them—

**Vincent Ho:** Does that include providing three meals a day for asylum claimants?

**Steve Jacques:** Yes, our reception centre—

**Vincent Ho:** Does that include providing services like shelters, hotels and other housing accommodations temporarily?

**Steve Jacques:** Yes, it does for families. For individuals—

**Vincent Ho:** Who pays for these hotels?

**Steve Jacques:** It's a cost shared between the federal government and the municipality.

**Vincent Ho:** What money does Peel receive from the federal government through the interim housing assistance program?

**Steve Jacques:** For eligible costs for 2025-26, we received 95% of eligible costs for transitional housing in the reception centre from the federal government, with Peel responsible for 5%.

**Vincent Ho:** How much is that in dollar value?

**Steve Jacques:** In dollar value in 2025, the federal contribution was \$29.8 million, and the regional contribution was \$2.3 million.

• (1145)

**Vincent Ho:** Wow.

These services are being provided before a confirmation of eligibility from the federal government has been provided. Is that correct?

**Steve Jacques:** I believe so.

**Vincent Ho:** That means a fraudulent asylum claimant could potentially receive these services. Is that correct?

**Steve Jacques:** Potentially.

**Vincent Ho:** According to the government website, it says:

Historically, asylum claimants made up just 4 to 5% of the shelter population. By late 2023, they accounted for approximately 71%, nearly three out of every four individuals in the system. This surge pushed Peel's shelter capacity to over 400%, requiring Peel Region to secure overflow hotel spaces to meet the growing demand.

Is it correct that Peel has had to use overflow hotel spaces because the shelter system was overwhelmed by the sharp increase in asylum claimants?

**Steve Jacques:** In 2023, we rectified that. We separated the domestic homeless population from the asylum claimant homeless population. We converted a commercial building to congregate living for individuals. It can accommodate up to 590-some individuals in that centre, so those two are separated. We do use hotels for families.

**Vincent Ho:** For that facility you talked about, how much federal money did you receive to build that facility?

**Steve Jacques:** We received \$22 million, of which we spent only \$20 million.

**Vincent Ho:** Does local homelessness still exist in the region of Peel?

**Steve Jacques:** Absolutely.

**Vincent Ho:** Essentially the government is housing asylum claimants, but there's still local homelessness for Canadians in Peel. Does that mean that the asylum seekers are pushing out local Canadians who are facing homelessness? Is that a fair characterization?

**Steve Jacques:** No, not in our system, because we separated the two populations. We have a dedicated centre, the Peel Reception Centre, for asylum claimants. We have hotels dedicated for family asylum claimants, and we have a separate shelter system for the homeless.

**Vincent Ho:** Do you normally do criminal background checks prior to serving asylum claimants and giving them hotel accommodations? I'm talking about local criminal background checks if they've committed a crime in Canada.

**Steve Jacques:** I don't believe so.

**Vincent Ho:** What you're saying is that someone who's a convicted criminal, who has been convicted of a crime anywhere here in Canada, still has your door open to them?

**Steve Jacques:** Yes.

**Vincent Ho:** To finish off, the federal Liberal government has lost control of our immigration system. We've seen a pattern of this on this committee. Local Peel residents are paying the price locally for private shelters, hotel costs and pressures on frontline services. Is that a fair characterization?

**Steve Jacques:** It's added to the complexity of the services provided, yes.

**Vincent Ho:** Is it putting a strain on the services for local Peel residents?

**Steve Jacques:** Yes.

**Vincent Ho:** Do you think the Liberal government, this federal government, has mismanaged the immigration system at all in any way?

**Steve Jacques:** I'm not qualified to respond as to whether it's mismanagement. They've stepped up when we've identified issues and cost issues and provided solutions through funding.

**Vincent Ho:** They're not doing enough. They're not doing enough to help the local municipality. Is that correct?

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

Thank you, Mr. Jacques.

Next, we have Mr. Zuberi for five minutes.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here today. I'd like to continue with Mr. Jacques.

I will give you a moment if you have any further comments about people settling in Canada. Also, on the housing issue, with respect to using hotels and how that factors in for asylum seekers—for families and individuals as they use hotels—would you like to elaborate further on that point?

**Steve Jacques:** Thank you.

Yes. In the region of Peel, we needed to separate the two populations—domestic homelessness and the asylum claimants—and we did that. We converted a commercial building to create 592 spaces for individuals in a congregate care setting.

For families, because it's not a compatible use to put families in with single individuals, we have hotels. We are in the process of creating a family shelter for asylum claimants in the region of Peel. In those instances, we have dedicated spots for asylum claimants so that they are not taking spaces away from the homeless indigenous population in Peel.

It really helps us to focus our resources, because the needs of individuals coming in, as Ms. Stellinga has indicated, are very specific. We can focus in on those and we can focus on the resources that we have to deal with our domestic homeless.

• (1150)

**Sameer Zuberi:** I'd like to ask Ms. Stellinga about relocating asylum claimants and the specific consequences for those asylum claimants if they're away from their cultural communities, for example, or their linguistic networks or potential social and family ties.

How does it impact their integration and their ability to contribute to Canadian society in the future when they aren't close to their support networks? Do you want to comment a bit about that?

**Anita Stellinga:** Thank you.

It makes a huge difference. People are drawn to people and networks where they can feel like they connect, like they belong, and where there is integration and there are community supports. We know first-hand that those experiences and those opportunities make a huge, vast difference. We know that when people are in places where there aren't networks or there aren't supports, they're not going to be successful. They will return to other communities, where they may find larger networks or the perception of larger networks and access to jobs. That is critical. It's essential to have those community supports.

That was my point earlier. When we are looking at people across Canada, those communities, those regions, need to be set up in ways that provide those supports that are critical for successful integration.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Certainly, and for the settlement services that we've been discussing so far, to what extent do they play an important role or a role in an asylum seeker choosing to settle in one region or another?

On the existence of these settlement services, such as we have heard about and that are being provided, to what extent do they factor into that decision-making?

**Anita Stellinga:** They do because the assumption on their part is that because those services are there, they will be successful. They will have a better chance of finding housing, a better chance of finding language supports and a better chance of getting employment. That's the draw for them. There are also probably community networks for them in terms of their own cultural communities and backgrounds and the shops, businesses and networks that exist and help them.

We know that through settlement support the outcomes are far more positive. That does exist and that is a draw. It's an important part of how people feel they can connect and be successful in the communities where they live.

**Sameer Zuberi:** You testified earlier that large centres like Toronto and Montreal tend to attract asylum seekers. Are you seeing any trends where asylum seekers are moving outside of the metropolitan centres to more suburban or rural areas? Do you want to comment a bit about that?

**Anita Stellinga:** They are. We know that there are communities in Kitchener, London, York region and other parts of Ontario and across Canada where people are looking to settle.

I think the point is that if we can provide them with information about what exists and what the opportunities are for success, and if we can provide that access, they will be more successful and they will be more willing to go. If they don't have that information or have misleading information or perceptions about certain communities, and if that's not clearly visible to them or understood, what happens is that there's a greater chance of failure in terms of settlement.

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

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes for two and a half minutes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Barutciski, let's continue the discussion so we can fully understand how Germany went about this, because it could be a suggestion we might make in Canada.

First, please describe the distribution process to us. In Germany, there are *Länder*, and a formula was created so that each *Land* receives a number of asylum seekers that it is capable of accommodating. How was this formula developed?

**Michael Barutciski:** As I understand it, two-thirds of the allocation is based on tax revenue, and the remaining third on population size. That's how it works.

**Alexis Deschênes:** So, based on these two criteria, an integration capacity is determined.

**Michael Barutciski:** Correct.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Next, when asylum seekers arrive in the country, what happens? As I understand it, they'll be assigned to one of these *Länder* and will be required to stay there for three years. Is that correct?

**Michael Barutciski:** Services will be provided in that *Land*. So individuals will be encouraged and helped to settle there. The idea is to distribute asylum seekers fairly throughout Germany.

• (1155)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Based on what you know, is this a requirement, or can asylum seekers choose to live in Berlin, for example?

**Michael Barutciski:** My impression is that the German authorities are much more subtle in their approach. It's not that they're insisting that consent isn't important; it's just that they strongly encourage asylum seekers to relocate, and they're not the only European government to do so. Services are offered in a specific *Land*. So, if an individual doesn't want to go there, there will be a whole series of administrative problems. It is therefore coercive, in a way. I see it as a kind of coercive administrative measure.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Based on observable data, does this method work?

**Michael Barutciski:** As for the distribution, I think it's working pretty well. We're seeing a real distribution. I've been to Berlin and a few other places, and you can see service centres being set up there. This encourages communities outside major urban centres to take the reality of forced migration into account. So it's becoming a national debate that strikes me as much healthier and more balanced, insofar as the central government in Berlin is providing resources to the various *Länder* so they can properly house and welcome these people.

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

Thank you, Professor Barutciski.

[English]

We have only a few minutes left. I'll give two minutes to Mr. Redekopp and two minutes to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Go ahead, Mr. Redekopp.

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

The minister expects about two million temporary residents to leave Canada this year. That's about 160,000 per month, which in the area of Peel is probably tens of thousands per month.

Mr. Jacques, are you seeing that on the ground? Are you seeing tens of thousands of people leave the country once their permits expire?

**Steve Jacques:** We wouldn't have evidence of that. We don't track whether they leave the country or not. Once they qualify and they've registered, it's up to IRCC to track their movement within.

**Brad Redekopp:** Ms. Stellinga, have you seen even anecdotal evidence of people leaving in the thousands and tens of thousands to achieve the number the minister is expecting?

**Anita Stellinga:** We've certainly heard from individuals and families that they are considering going back home or to other places because they've not been successful here or they've not found the opportunities they thought they might find.

**Brad Redekopp:** Are you seeing thousands and thousands of people leaving every month?

**Anita Stellinga:** No. I don't have that—

**Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Barutciski, there's kind of an assumption here, I think, that we have all these people coming into our country and we need to find solutions for them, but I think we also need to back up and ask whether there are some things we're doing to attract people here that maybe we should be doing differently. We've talked about not allowing claims from people transiting safe coun-

tries or from people abandoning claims when they've returned home, for example.

Do you think we need to be working at that end of it too in order to curb the number of people who are coming to our country?

**Michael Barutciski:** If we're concerned about the number of asylum seekers, and I think we should be, I think the inadmissibility provision, section 101 of the immigration act, should be reconsidered and maybe enlarged along the lines of what you suggest. There are certain kinds of claims and certain kinds of people who are able to claim asylum in Canada but could not in Europe, for example, at the moment. You can't just travel around a whole bunch of safe countries and then claim asylum in the last country you transited.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

The two minutes for you, Mr. Fragiskatos, begin now.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

In fact, I think that while on the face of it there could be a gap between what Ms. Stellinga has offered the committee and what you have offered, Mr. Barutciski, there is some overlap.

For example, Ms. Stellinga, you're talking about ultimately ensuring that we have a sustainable system whereby those who are in the process of claiming asylum can go to communities that can accommodate them, where they can find the chance for integration and services won't be overwhelmed.

Mr. Barutciski, I see you nodding. You do agree with that principle.

I want to learn more about the German model. All of that seems to be predicated on buy-in, not just from the federal side in Germany but from the regional *Länder* governments that you're referring to. The same would have to come into being here in this country if, ultimately, we were to see a move toward what both of you are suggesting in terms of the ability of communities to integrate, accommodate and ensure that services are not overwhelmed.

Would you say that's a fair characterization, Mr. Barutciski?

• (1200)

**Michael Barutciski:** Yes. I'd say the various *Länder* do actually try to negotiate to get help from Berlin.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Okay.

What is your key recommendation to this committee in a sentence or two?

That's for Mr. Barutciski and then Ms. Stellinga.

**Michael Barutciski:** As I was suggesting in my opening statement, I think we have to get the basic principles straight. We have to think hard about what we are trying to do.

I would add that we want to distinguish asylum seekers from all the other immigrants—they're not in the same category—because we want to make sure there aren't future problems. If we want a more equitable federation, one where we're addressing a lot of the concerns raised by my colleague here, I think it is a smart idea to distribute it.

**The Chair:** Ms. Stellinga, you have 15 seconds. Then we have to wrap up.

Ms. Stellinga.

**Anita Stellinga:** We are recommending a multi-year intergovernmental national asylum and housing strategy that is coordinated and links reception, shelter capacity and pathways to success for positive outcomes; has coordinated supports to reduce duplication; has a shortened time in temporary accommodation; and helps people move toward work and independence sooner.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you.

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

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

I want to thank all the witnesses today. That was excellent testimony and an excellent conversation.

Thanks to all my colleagues for the great questions. I want to thank everyone for their time today.

We're going to suspend for about five minutes, so the current group of witnesses can leave. We'll come back with the second panel.

• (1200) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1210)

**The Chair:** This session is back in order. We are now going to begin our second panel.

I will make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

All of you are joining us hybrid. You will notice, at the bottom of your screen, that you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation, either English or French. You will each be given five minutes for opening remarks. I will let you know when you have one minute left. Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I remind you that all comments need to be made through the chair.

Now, I'd like to warmly welcome all witnesses for the second panel.

[Translation]

First, we welcome Pierre Fortin, professor, Department of Economics, Université du Québec à Montréal.

Next, we have Héléna Roulet, director general, Carrefour le Moutier, and Olive Mukamana, coordinator of services for newcomers from the same organization.

[English]

We also have David Clinton, the editor of TheAudit.ca.

Again, up to five minutes will be given to each of you for opening remarks, and then we will proceed with rounds of questions.

[Translation]

Professor Fortin, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Pierre Fortin (Professor, Department of Economics, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning to the committee members. I am extremely honoured by your lovely invitation to speak.

[English]

Following Prime Minister Harper, I shall start in French and end in English.

[Translation]

I feel comfortable appearing before your committee for two reasons. First, my own family is almost entirely made up of immigrants. All but one of my 15 children, stepchildren, and grandchildren are first or second-generation immigrants. Second, at the invitation of the Quebec immigration department, I have prepared two research reports on immigration policy since 2022. I am also a member of the national advisory committee on immigration at the C.D. Howe Institute in Toronto.

From 2016 to 2024, Canada's annual immigration rate quadrupled. In 2024, Prime Minister Trudeau decided to slow the pace in light of the pressure—which he described as unsustainable—on housing and public services. This shift in Canada's immigration policy, now in effect, is fully consistent with research published on the economic effects of the 2016–2024 period. There is no doubt that this is a step in the right direction.

[English]

On asylum demands specifically, Statistics Canada has estimated that in January of this year, there were over half a million asylum seekers residing in Canada, some 85% of them in Ontario and Quebec. These two provinces must therefore carry a disproportionate load of the provincial public services offered to the seekers, much of it due to social assistance expenditures.

I'm not at all an expert on asylum demands, but one does not need a Ph.D. in management to understand that a sensible approach to this problem should include the following—and by “sensible”, I mean a rigorous and humane equilibrium.

One, immediately reject claims that are obviously undeserving at the time they show up at the gate. Two, minimize all kinds of internal administrative delays in the department. Three, simplify and accelerate the currently cumbersome and lengthy hearing process. Four, make sure rejected candidates leave Canada without delay. Five, explore means of making provinces other than Ontario and Quebec more attractive to asylum seekers. Six, reach a reasonable agreement with receiving provinces for quick reimbursements of allowable expenses.

For foreign inspiration, I urge you to look carefully at the phases of the asylum procedure that Denmark and Germany's social democratic governments currently apply.

Beyond the matter of asylum demands, I would make the following additional suggestions.

Firstly, align immigration policy along the lines that the Canadian population wants, and do not be misled by the errors of business lobbies that reject any moderation of immigration.

- (1215)

Secondly, as recommended by our C.D. Howe committee, let immigration be guided by the rigorous building of the long-term human capital base of the economy, and not by short-term fixes that prioritize lower-skilled workers or by non-economic objectives such as increasing francophone immigration outside of Quebec.

Thirdly, avoid denying that the use of French is declining in Quebec and claiming that the English minority is under threat in the province.

Lastly, give Quebec full control over management of the international mobility program in the province.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Fortin.

[*Translation*]

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

**Hélène Roulet (Director General, Carrefour le Moutier):** Thank you. I will be sharing my speaking time with my colleague, Olive Mukamana.

Good morning. On behalf of Carrefour le Moutier, its team, and the people we support on a daily basis, I would like to thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak today about the reality faced by asylum seekers, particularly in our case, within the Longueuil metropolitan area on the South Shore, across from Montreal.

Let me briefly explain who we are. Carrefour le Moutier is a frontline community organization whose mission is to welcome, listen to, and empower anyone going through a difficult time or a period of transition, so that they can regain their strength and ability to take action. We are mandated by the Quebec ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration to support asylum seekers during their settlement and search for housing.

Over the past year, through all our initiatives, we have supported more than 1,105 asylum seekers with their settlement process, access to their rights, administrative procedures and addressing their

many needs. Over the past three years, we have seen an average increase of 20% in the number of asylum seekers we support.

I will now turn the floor over to my colleague, Ms. Mukamana, to talk about the issues.

**Olive Mukamana (Coordinator of Services for Newcomers, Carrefour le Moutier):** Thank you, Ms. Roulet.

Today we are sharing our first-hand accounts of the realities we regularly encounter in our work with asylum seekers.

One of the main issues we want to talk about today is access to housing. We know that there is constant pressure on the rental market and that affordable housing is in short supply. Asylum seekers also face barriers such as discrimination and a lack of awareness of their status, requiring them to provide things they cannot provide because they are newcomers, such as their credit history. All of this limits their access to housing in general.

Then there is access to services, including legal services, which are difficult to access for immigrants in general, and more particularly for asylum seekers. Since their journey involves legal matters, they need legal representation.

Access to health and social services is also difficult. Like any vulnerable person whose journey is quite complex, these people have physical and psychological needs, but their access to health services is often limited because of a lack of knowledge or understanding of the coverage offered by the interim federal health program.

As a frontline organization, we act as a facilitator of access to care and as a community actor in an intercultural context. Sometimes we provide training to service providers so that they better understand the services that this medical coverage can provide access to, but there are still barriers to access that are simply related to a lack of knowledge of this coverage.

On the other hand, as a community organization, we are constantly adapting. While resources are limited, whether human resources or financial resources, we are forced to adapt to meet the significant needs of people in vulnerable situations, including asylum seekers. This situation, where community organizations have to adapt and do a lot with little, can't last. They need stable financial support.

- (1220)

**The Chair:** You have one minute left, Ms. Mukamana.

**Olive Mukamana:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to pass it back to Ms. Roulet.

**Hélène Roulet:** Thank you.

Our recommendations are as follows.

In addition to our expertise in the field, we support the position of our Quebec coalition, the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes. According to this position, any distribution of asylum seekers among the provinces must be carried out with a view to respecting the fundamental rights of asylum seekers, ensuring access to adequate legal services, involving community organizations in the distribution strategy, and eliminating barriers to integration and inclusion, particularly regarding language learning, employability, and access to social support programs, as well as funding tailored to the realities and needs of community organizations on the ground that support these individuals.

In fact, we strongly advocate for an approach focused on prevention, coordination and collaboration among the various actors and stakeholders. In our view, such an approach not only facilitates a smoother transition for individuals but also recognizes the social contribution of each of them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Roulet and Ms. Mukamana.

[English]

We now have five minutes for Mr. Clinton of TheAudit.ca, starting now.

**David Clinton (Publisher, TheAudit.ca):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I really appreciate the opportunity to participate today.

To make myself useful, I'll try to bring some data that provides a bit of background and context and speaks to what's happening and where we might want to move going forward.

In a way, reallocation is already happening. According to Statistics Canada, the proportion of asylum seekers has been growing a lot faster in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It's growing everywhere in Ontario. The growth from the third quarter of 2023 to the first quarter of 2026 was 179%, or something like that. There's significant growth in the refugee population, but in those provinces—New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and Manitoba—the growth has been much faster. They're small numbers when you look at them as raw numbers, but it's a trend that is steady and persistent. Perhaps it's worth trying to understand why that's happening and to see if we can encourage it and make it grow.

We also have data tracking tax filers from their postadmission years—that is, the five or six years after they're admitted as permanent residents—and in which province they file their taxes. I don't know how much income they report—I wouldn't have access to that, obviously—but I know in which province they're filing their taxes.

We see that there is stability, by and large. As a predictor of how refugee and then permanent resident populations will move, for most provinces, 80% or so will stay in the province of admission. There isn't a lot of mobility. There are exceptions, and when there

are exceptions, they tend to move to Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia. That really echoes how interprovincial migration happens in the population in general. They tend to move away from Quebec. If there's any large movement away from a province, it's from Quebec. Again, that isn't directly relevant to what we're talking about here today, but perhaps that behaviour is a predictor of how populations move in the country.

Mr. Jacques reported the extent of the refugee population within homeless shelters in Peel a few years ago, at least. I have data. The most recently available data from the City of Toronto from the first quarter of 2026 is that in Toronto, where they apparently have not separated out the two populations in the municipal shelters, the refugee population makes up 39% of the beds in Toronto shelters. That is unsustainable. Aside from the cost, it is clearly pushing local homeless people out of shelters. There is obviously federal money coming in to support the system to some degree, but I don't know if money is the solution there. There is a drain on the system.

In general, I think we could all agree—I think it's obvious—that the underlying base problem that's driving these stresses is the backlog of IRB decisions. There are 500,000 people waiting in the system for a resolution to their applications, and there's no mathematical way that the IRB members could ever process them in a meaningful period of time. For context, in 2025, there were 395 active IRB members. By “active”, the reporting I saw said anybody who's delivered 20 or more decisions in the past year is considered active, so there are only 395 active members.

● (1225)

It's not possible for them to process...so you want to triage. There are two triage approaches we might use. One is speeding up credential recognition. All provinces and the federal government have stood behind the idea of allowing foreign professionals in high-need areas to get in quickly. This is a great way to do that. Two is integrating AI models with human review so that you can quickly flag obvious decisions—this applicant will definitely come in, but that applicant would definitely be rejected—for human review.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Clinton.

That completes all the opening witness statements. We are going to begin the rounds of questions. We'll begin with six-minute rounds.

Mr. Ho, you'll begin with six minutes. It starts now.

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

My questions are for Mr. Clinton at TheAudit.ca.

Mr. Clinton, you previously talked about how immigration levels may be shaped by political incentives and stakeholder pressure. Could you elaborate a little more on this point?

**David Clinton:** It's obvious that all governments react to the loudest, squeakiest wheel. The people motivated to squeak louder and provide political pressure are always going to get an audience, I suppose. That's fair, and that's part of the system.

I can't think, offhand, of any concrete examples of specific mechanisms through which these voices might have skewed the system. The system certainly seems to have been skewed, though.

**Vincent Ho:** We've seen an influx of over a million temporary residents over recent years, let in by the Liberal government.

Do you think that's based more on ideology or more on evidence?

**David Clinton:** I haven't seen much evidence of evidence. Beyond the obvious and universally agreed-upon principle that we want to help people around the world who need us—I think everybody agrees with that—I haven't seen evidence that more strategic thinking is being applied.

- (1230)

**Vincent Ho:** Of course, immigration policy should serve the national interest and the interest of Canadians.

We've seen immigration officials and the Liberal immigration minister testify that there were no caps on temporary residents. In an article, you said, "the Refugee Law Data site data apparently found a strong correlation between low recognition rates and briefer employment at the IRB. In other words, members who say 'yes' [and approve more applications] more often last longer in their jobs."

Do you believe IRB officials are letting asylum claimants stay due to fear of repercussions surrounding their job?

**David Clinton:** That's an important point.

I should say that I read that report. I can't independently confirm it, but it seems to make sense that there are obviously incentives inside IRB to move things quickly. We're the ones putting pressure on them. The country and the government are putting pressure on the IRB to move quickly. It makes sense that individual members of the IRB would feel pressure to expedite the process.

The risk, of course, is that there won't be due process and that people who should be caught before being approved won't be. I would be surprised if there weren't such pressures. Is that correlation between tenure and the number of recognitions they provide real? I can't say for sure that it is real, but it's possible.

**Vincent Ho:** It's possible that asylum claimants who would not otherwise be approved are slipping in because of these pressures.

**David Clinton:** I would be surprised if they weren't. There's no way any government or organization can handle 500,000 human beings in a real-world situation.

**Vincent Ho:** Right.

Do you think there's a real risk that perhaps we're admitting criminals into the country because of this pressure?

**David Clinton:** I'd say it's obvious that we already have and we continue to. Whether that's an acceptable level of risk, I don't know. It could be that's an acceptable risk. No system is perfect, but it certainly happens.

**Vincent Ho:** I'll turn the page a bit, Mr. Clinton. You've written about the temporary foreign worker program, and you question whether it's still being used to address genuine labour shortages. In your view, has the Liberal government allowed the program to drift from filling genuine shortages into supplying low-cost labour, thus suppressing wages for Canadian workers?

**David Clinton:** I'm actually of two minds on that. On the one hand, in looking at the regular reports that various government agencies are releasing, it seems that they are still trying to monitor the actual labour situation and trying to be responsive to it in their policy. It does seem that it is still.... Well, it's being applied and, hopefully, it's working. I don't know. Is it really in sync with the real situation on the ground? I don't know. I don't have enough insight or data to know that. I know that one of my sons keeps complaining about the labour—

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Vincent Ho:** We're seeing unemployment at almost 15%. These are recessionary levels, and in urban centres it's much higher. Do you think the Liberal government has mismanaged this program?

**David Clinton:** It's possible, or it may not even be at a government level. It may be at a ministry level or at an agency level. I'm not sure, but there are pressures and it's very likely that the TFWP is contributing to those pressures.

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

Thank you, Mr. Ho.

Next, we have six minutes for Mr. Chang.

Mr. Chang, your six minutes begin now.

**Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first set of questions will be for Ms. Roulet.

Thank you for being here today. Your organization works on the ground, directly, with asylum seekers and newcomers every day. Could you share how rapid increases in asylum claims in recent years have affected your organization's capacity for staffing and housing support and your ability to provide quality settlement services?

[*Translation*]

**Hélène Roulet:** Thank you, Mr. Chang.

I'll give time to my colleague, Ms. Mukamana, to add to that.

We are already seeing pressure on housing for the entire population. There are certainly still challenges. As we said at the outset, where we see even greater challenges is in terms of housing accessibility and understanding the legal status of asylum seekers. Landlords may find it difficult to understand the reality of these individuals' situations. We therefore have a lot of awareness-raising to do in this regard to ensure that newcomers have access to housing. Since they have no credit history, this creates difficulties when it comes to obtaining credit.

As for the reality on the ground, depending on the number of people who arrive at Carrefour le Moutier, we are always concerned with meeting their needs. We consistently work in collaboration with other organizations to address the various essential needs of these individuals. Once housing is found, for example, we work with other organizations to find the means to furnish it.

Over the past two years, during periods of higher arrival numbers, we received additional support from government departments, which helped us. That is how we were able to manage the situation. Thanks to this funding opportunity, we created a position dedicated exclusively to serving all individuals. When someone walks through our doors, we truly want to offer them a social safety net as part of a comprehensive approach.

My colleague Ms. Mukamana would like to add something on this topic.

• (1235)

**Olive Mukamana:** We have also noticed an increase in requests for information or training from our partners in the community and other sectors who want to better understand what asylum seeker status entails, what services asylum seekers have access to, and what their reality is.

When a large number of newcomers arrived in our region, which led to the creation of emergency response teams, we looked to various sectors to try to determine how to address needs that reflect the possibility of shared responsibility in the face of a particular challenge. We then observed a mobilization, for which we were very grateful.

That said, we have nonetheless seen an increase in discourse that links various social problems to the arrival of people with a migration background or who are seeking asylum, more specifically.

For our part, we condemn this type of discourse and believe that structural and social issues, such as access to health care, education and housing, are problems already present in society. When new people arrive, these problems sometimes become more noticeable, but that is no reason to say that asylum seekers are the cause of these problems.

These are the kinds of arguments that certain groups and our organization have observed. Others have come together to counter this type of rhetoric, because it undermines social cohesion. We have also seen that it exacerbates the stigmatization of these individuals, most of whom are in vulnerable situations.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Maybe I'll just stop the time for a minute. I'm noticing that the bells have gone. I will need unanimous consent to continue.

Should we just complete this first round of questions? That would take us to around 12:45, or actually, a little bit beforehand. Do you want to do a second round?

If we go 10 more minutes, that would take us to 10 minutes to one. We'll go until 1.50 p.m. if that's okay?

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, did you want to add something?

**Alexis Deschênes:** Yes, I would even suggest that we continue the meeting until 1:00 p.m., so that we can benefit from the insights of all these witnesses, who are so enlightening. According to my calculations, the vote is at 1:08 p.m.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I don't have any other information. I thought it was one o'clock.

Monsieur Joseph.

[*Translation*]

**Natilien Joseph:** Madam Chair, I don't think it's a good idea to continue until 1:00 p.m. My colleague may be able to vote using his phone, but that might not be the case for everyone around this table.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can we check to see if the vote is at 1:08?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Rémi Bourgault):** It just started so it's certainly the 30-minute bell.

**The Chair:** If it's okay with everyone, we'll go to one o'clock.

Mr. Fragiskatos...?

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Sure.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes, is it okay with you if we continue the session until 1:00 p.m.? All right.

[*English*]

**Sameer Zuberi:** Hold on, we should at least have 10 minutes.

**The Chair:** Okay. We will finish at 12.58, so that'll give us 10 minutes.

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Mr. Deschênes, I hope that's okay.

Thank you. We will continue.

Mr. Chang, you have 55 seconds to finish up.

**Wade Chang:** Ms. Roulet, the federal government has emphasized restoring balance and sustainability to the immigration system, and Quebec has recently seen a significant decline in asylum claims.

From the perspective of a service provider, how important are predictable and manageable intake levels in helping newcomers receive the support they need to settle successfully?

[*Translation*]

**Hélène Roulet:** That's a good question.

Certainly, when it comes to having a comprehensive view, other organizations such as the Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes could tell you more about this.

For our part, we note that there have been no emergency shelters in the region for several months now. At this point, we are able to support people. It is true that there are always increasingly complex needs. That is what, I think, adds to the equation. There is indeed the issue of housing, which is always and obviously important. It is the foundation; it is an essential need. However, we really want to see the person as a whole. This is where we need to invest more to better understand, so that the community can truly be of help.

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

[*English*]

Thank you so much, Mr. Chang.

[*Translation*]

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

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Fortin, I am very pleased that you have agreed to take part in our important study on the provincial distribution of asylum seekers in Canada and that you can share your expertise with us.

I read that, in 2025, you submitted a report to the Government of Quebec. In that report, you proposed reducing the number of asylum seekers accepted in Quebec. According to the latest figures on the current situation, Quebec accounts for 22% of Canada's population, but it accepts up to 37% of asylum seekers.

You proposed reducing the number of asylum seekers in Quebec by nearly half over the course of a few years. Why did you make this proposal?

**Pierre Fortin:** I did so in a general context where government policy in Ottawa and Quebec City is to slow down the pace of immigration.

First, it's quite clear that, compared to countries like those Mr. Barutciski referred to—namely, Germany and Denmark—Canada has a higher proportion of people arriving here as asylum seekers.

Second, over the past year and a half, over half a million more asylum seekers have arrived in Canada.

So I made this proposal in a general context where the pace has to be slowed down, not only in Quebec—I know you're particularly concerned about the issue in Quebec—but also in Ontario. Quebec and Ontario take in 85% of all asylum seekers in Canada.

So I proposed two things to the Government of Quebec. On the one hand, I proposed that asylum claims be moderated at the same pace as other sources of temporary immigration. Second, I suggested that, to the extent possible—I'm not an expert in this area—there be better interprovincial distribution.

• (1245)

**Alexis Deschênes:** You're an economist, so I'd like to hear your comments about the impact on Quebec of receiving a number of asylum seekers that's much larger than its demographic weight. What impact have you observed on Quebec's economy and public finances, and on the integration of asylum seekers and the French language?

**Pierre Fortin:** First of all, it's very important to understand that the problem of housing shortages and housing affordability is compounded by the fact that the number of asylum seekers is very high compared to the number of people involved in other forms of temporary or permanent immigration. We're seeing reluctance on the part of landlords. If a landlord is told that an asylum seeker would like to rent a unit, the landlord will wonder how long they will rent for and about the risk of losing that tenant within six months, a year or a year and a half. Therefore, landlords are naturally more reluctant to accept asylum seekers than other types of immigrants.

**Alexis Deschênes:** I have only two minutes left with you.

What's the impact on Quebec's public finances of receiving a significant share of Canada's asylum seekers?

**Pierre Fortin:** The largest portion of public services that a provincial government such as Quebec's or Ontario's has to absorb is social assistance, the safety net. For example, the Quebec government's most recent request to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada sought a \$750-million reimbursement to cover the cost of social assistance.

**The Chair:** There's one minute left.

**Pierre Fortin:** To give you an idea, in the Greater Montreal area, it's estimated that 55% of welfare recipients are immigrants.

**Alexis Deschênes:** You say that Quebec is asking the federal government to reimburse it for more than \$700 million of public services provided to asylum seekers. As an economist, do you believe that this request from the Quebec government is justified?

• (1250)

**Pierre Fortin:** Yes. The sole responsibility for asylum claims lies with the federal government, not the provincial governments. Therefore, if public services are provided by the provinces, whether it's in Saskatchewan, Ontario or Quebec, it's only natural to expect the federal government to reimburse them as quickly as possible for the amounts they spend to serve this federal objective of managing asylum claims. It's a matter of logic, not the Constitution.

**Alexis Deschênes:** That's right.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Fortin.

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

I'm sorry. We're over time.

We have three minutes for Mr. Menegakis, three minutes for Mr. Joseph and one minute for you to finish up, Mr. Deschênes.

Go ahead, Mr. Menegakis.

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

Mr. Clinton, we saw an increase in quarter four of 2025 in the asylum claim backlogs. Why do you believe that's happening?

**David Clinton:** The first reason is that the IRB simply can't handle the flow.

The second reason, obviously, is that whatever controls there could be on who gets to claim and the circumstances in which they get to claim are too loose. How easy it is to fix all those, I don't know.

**Costas Menegakis:** Do you believe that the long processing times are probably costing taxpayers more, given the extra benefits that the asylum claimants get, such as accommodations or better health benefits than Canadians get?

**David Clinton:** I'm sure that's driving costs up, certainly.

**Costas Menegakis:** You wrote, sir, that some IRB officials are better at resisting the pressure than others.

Can you please expand on where that pressure may be coming from?

**David Clinton:** I think it's from two directions, below and above.

From below, the pressures that are being faced by municipalities, by neighbourhoods and by all Canadians are well known, I'm sure, to the people in the IRB. I'm not a mind reader, but I would expect that they are sensitive to those pressures and they're trying to speed up.

From above, no doubt, there's political pressure to make the system work better, and I can't blame anybody for wanting such an outcome. It's natural that the IRB members will feel that they have to push harder, and it's an easy-to-predict risk that they'll push too hard.

**Costas Menegakis:** You mentioned the backlog of 500,000 people. In your testimony, sir, you also said that people who should be caught won't necessarily be caught. It's obvious that we're accepting some people into the country who are criminals. Do you not see a danger in that?

**David Clinton:** Yes, there is obviously danger. The question is, I suppose, how you assess what risk level is acceptable. Obviously, any large system is going to have holes, and some people are going to get through the holes. We have prisons for a reason. The question that only a government can answer is how wide those holes can be before the system has to be reconfigured.

**Costas Menegakis:** Do you agree that Canadians expect the government to have a very robust system in place to ensure that anyone who's accepted into our country is safe to be around our families, our communities and our children, and safe to be around community centres and schools, walking the streets and living next door to us?

**David Clinton:** As a Canadian, I would certainly appreciate that. I also recognize that perfection is impossible, but I'd like to be closer to perfection, if possible.

**Costas Menegakis:** Thank you.

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

Thank you, Mr. Clinton.

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph, you now have the floor for three minutes.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I wanted to congratulate both Ms. Mukamana and Ms. Roulet for being with us today. They are from my riding.

I have a question about asylum seekers. Not long ago, a witness from the Îles de la Madeleine, in my colleague Mr. Deschênes' beautiful riding, told us the Tim Hortons was going to close due to the labour shortage.

Ms. Mukamana, I have a question for you. Are asylum seekers entitled to a work permit once their claim is submitted?

• (1255)

**Olive Mukamana:** Yes, they are entitled to a work permit, even initially. As soon as their claim is submitted, the permit must be issued while their claim is being processed.

**Natilien Joseph:** Okay.

Do you think it would be a good idea to send—I won't say send because they have a work permit and the right to move about, so I won't say that. Do you think it would be a good thing if asylum seekers who hold work permits could fill the gaps caused by the labour shortage? I'm thinking of the Tim Hortons on the Îles de la Madeleine, which is going to shut down for lack of staff.

**Olive Mukamana:** Yes.

We note that the majority of requests for administrative support, across various processes, are about obtaining a work permit, especially renewals, given that people wait a long time for their claim to be processed. All of these people are working or want to work. Every asylum seeker has access to an open work permit, and this doesn't limit access to the labour market at all. It's more a matter of employer openness and the language barrier. Francization here in Quebec takes time to be acquired and accessible.

**The Chair:** You have one minute.

**Natilien Joseph:** Let me stop you there, Ms. Mukamana. Earlier, you mentioned the conflation. Can you tell us more about that? Can you tell us how this could harm the public?

**Olive Mukamana:** Yes.

When we look at all these social issues—access to housing, health care and education—and we attribute them to the increase in immigrants in the country, that is a conflation that greatly oversimplifies these social issues and attributes them largely to the arrival of asylum seekers. This, of course, leads to what we're seeing on the ground: further erosion of our social safety net. Social cohesion is greatly weakened by this kind of rhetoric. It doesn't help either when it comes to including and integrating these individuals, whether in terms of housing or in the workplace. So, ultimately, it doesn't help anyone.

**Natilien Joseph:** Thank you very much.

If I understand correctly, it undermines social cohesion—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Joseph. Thank you, Ms. Mukamana.

There's one minute left for Mr. Deschênes.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Professor Fortin, let's continue with the Government of Quebec's request for \$700 million to offset the cost of hosting asylum seekers. Let's take it a step further.

Could the fact that Quebec receives a very large number of asylum seekers limit its ability to provide them with good integration services?

**Pierre Fortin:** Clearly, the more asylum seekers there are, the more services will need to be provided. As a result, the capacity—which is already under significant strain—to provide these services eventually becomes insufficient. It's important to understand the impact of how efficiently and quickly the federal government is able to process cases. As a result, the shorter the wait times, the lower the costs for the Government of Quebec, the Government of Ontario, or others. Consequently, there is a federal responsibility here to expedite the process efficiently.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Professor Fortin.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

That completes our second panel for today.

[Translation]

Thank you to all the witnesses today.

[English]

Thank you for your excellent responses. Thank you for your contribution to the study.

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 27. A notice has been published.

I am now going to adjourn the meeting so that we can go vote.

Thank you.





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