HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

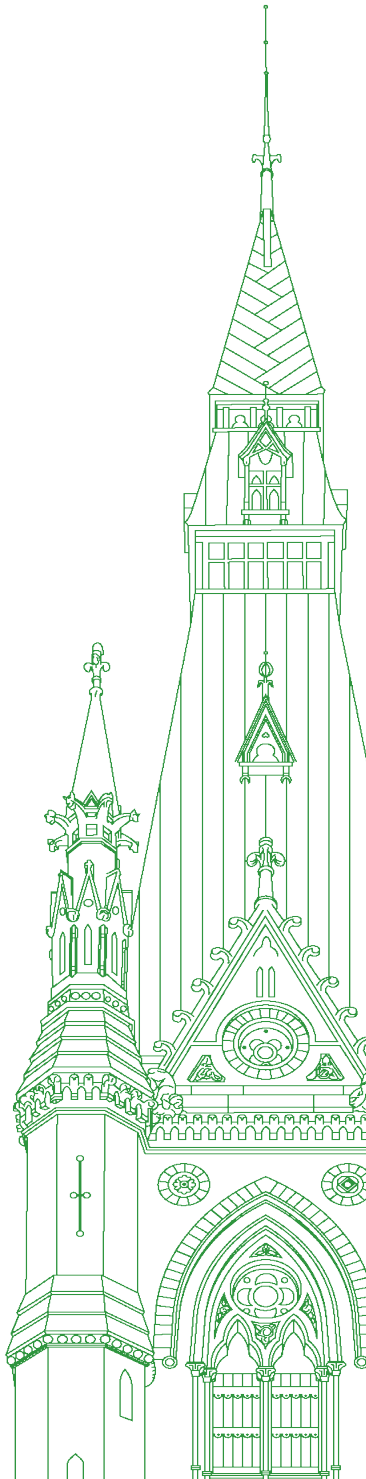
45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 036

Wednesday, June 3, 2026



Chair: Julie Dzerowicz

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Wednesday, June 3, 2026

● (1630)

[*English*]

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

Before I go any further, I would like to note that there are a few members being replaced today.

[*Translation*]

I would like to welcome Linda Lapointe, who is replacing Matt Jeneroux, as well as Mario Beaulieu, who is replacing Alexis Deschênes.

[*English*]

We also have Kyle Seeback joining us as part of the Conservative team.

I'd like to warmly welcome you as well.

[*Translation*]

Welcome to meeting number 36 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format.

[*English*]

I would now like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and members.

As always, before speaking, kindly wait until I recognize you by name.

For those on Zoom, kindly click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. On Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation—either English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

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

Members, please do not forget to raise your hand if you wish to speak. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best as we can. I will remind everyone to please not speak over each other, as it will be hard for our interpreters to translate and it makes their jobs difficult.

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

[*Translation*]

Thank you all for your co-operation.

[*English*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on May 6, 2026, the committee is commencing its study of attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

[*Translation*]

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

[*English*]

We have three witnesses today from two organizations.

From the Building Trades of Alberta, joining us by video conference, we have Terry Parker, executive director.

Welcome, Mr. Parker.

[*Translation*]

From the Council of Canadian Innovators, we have Laurent Carbonneau, vice-president, policy and advocacy, as well as Daniel Perry, director, federal affairs.

[*English*]

Welcome to everyone.

Up to five minutes will be given to the Building Trades of Alberta and the Council of Canadian Innovators for opening remarks, after which we'll proceed with rounds of questions.

Mr. Parker, I now invite you to begin your opening statement. Your five minutes begin right now.

Terry Parker (Executive Director, Building Trades of Alberta): Thank you very much for allowing me to speak today.

My name is Terry Parker. I'm the executive director of the Building Trades of Alberta.

We advocate for over 60,000 unionized skilled trades workers across the residential, commercial, industrial and maintenance sectors in Alberta. Our priority is having a strong, safe and sustainable construction industry in Alberta that provides quality careers for Canadian workers while addressing genuine labour needs. We support well-managed immigration as a complement, not a substitute, to investing in domestic workers.

Alberta is in a unique position due to the lack of work for young Albertans. With all the talk of perceived labour shortages, we don't see it in the building trades of Alberta. At points in the last few months, we've seen up to 40% unemployment among our unionized affiliates.

Do not get me wrong. We believe in diversity. We want to bring more young Canadians, more indigenous people, more women and more new Canadians into the trades, but what we're seeing out there currently is that a lot of abuse is happening with the temporary foreign worker program.

Temporary foreign workers are coming into the country, working in the agriculture sector or other sectors and then moving into the construction industry. We're also seeing undocumented workers coming into the country. That is creating wage suppression and making it very hard for our contractors to compete with the unscrupulous contractors who are doing this. We're seeing more safety risks and the displacement of Canadian workers—i.e., our members.

We don't disagree with having temporary foreign workers. At points, we actually utilize them through what we call our ACTIMS program, whereby we work with owners and our contractors to bring in temporary foreign workers at peak periods in order to help us and our contractors fulfill their obligations. However, as I said, we are seeing a number of abuses out there currently.

What we need to see that hasn't been happening is more labour-market opinions and surveys that go back to our contractors and our affiliated unions. They will give more information back to the federal government in order to stop a lot of the practices that are currently happening. We need more oversight by the federal government and the provincial government, more audits, and more monitoring of unscrupulous contractors.

I hope that helps. I'm open to any questions.

Thank you.

● (1635)

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

We'll now turn to the Council of Canadian Innovators.

Mr. Perry, your five minutes begin now.

Daniel Perry (Director, Federal Affairs, Council of Canadian Innovators): Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today.

My name is Daniel Perry. I'm the director of federal affairs at the Council of Canadian Innovators. I am joined by my colleague Laurent Carbonneau, vice-president of policy and advocacy.

The Council of Canadian Innovators is Canada's 21st-century business council. We represent over 175 Canadian-headquartered, high-growth technology firms that are operating in sectors including artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, advanced manufacturing, dual-use and defence.

The global race for highly skilled talent is fierce. For Canadian innovators, the challenge is simple: If they are unable to hire the right people, they cannot scale. This means that the jobs, companies and economic value that they are creating here in Canada are at risk of moving elsewhere.

Canada's immigration system must reflect this new reality. It needs to be fast, focused and agile, while also maintaining high standards and system integrity. Skilled immigration plays an important role for filling gaps and mismatched parts of our workforce. Seventy per cent of Canadian businesses in the tech sector have identified the shortage of skilled workers as a major barrier to their success. Bringing in specialized talent does not displace Canadians. Instead, it helps Canadian companies compete, grow and ultimately create more opportunity here in Canada.

Upscaling matters, but it cannot replace the challenges that we're currently seeing in the labour market. The people applying to come to Canada through the global talent stream and Canada's start-up visa are programmers, engineers, innovators and entrepreneurs. They are the people powering the 21st-century economy, and we need more of them in order for our economy to be successful.

CCI was a founding member of and is a current referral partner in the global talent stream. This program is one of the most practical tools allowing high-growth companies to access the specialized talent they need in order to succeed. Since the program's inception in 2017, over 32,000 highly skilled individuals have come to Canada to support these companies.

We might ask what this program means for Canadian innovators. One expert or one leader can shape whether a product makes it to market in time. It defines if they're able to win more customers and ultimately allows their team to grow here in Canada.

The global talent stream is a targeted and regulated program. It is used sparingly in comparison to other immigration channels. From 2017 to the first quarter of 2025, it represented just 2.6% of all positive labour market assessments.

As the government re-evaluates its immigration policies, the program should remain available for Canadian firms, with strong oversight. One area that does warrant closer scrutiny is how the program is being used by foreign multinationals. For instance, between 2017 and the first quarter of 2025, Amazon received nearly 1,500 positive global talent stream assessments. For context, this represents 22% of all global talent stream applications filed in British Columbia. The government should ensure that these requests are legitimate and that we do not have talent here in Canada that would be able to fill these openings.

At the same time, programs like the Canadian start-up visa are right in spirit but are effectively not capturing international entrepreneurs so they can come to Canada. As the government is considering the renewal of this program, it is important to understand what structural reform is needed in order to make it successful.

The Council of Canadian Innovators recommends a two-stage hybrid model where successful applications are first moved through temporary residency with a clear pathway to permanent residency if they meet measured business outcomes. This would move the program away from rigid upfront requirements and would allow IRCC to process applications faster and help prevent the significant backlog that has undermined the program to date.

Canada should also look at tax policy as part of its immigration strategy. Canada has a “missing” province of nearly 850,000 Canadians who live in the United States, many of whom are leaders in business, technology and industry. We should be competitive, and we should be just as ambitious as the United States when it comes to attracting the world's best and brightest minds, while also retaining our minds here in Canada. Canada should introduce a tax incentive that is modelled on America's qualified small business stock exemption. This tool helps incentivize entrepreneurs and brings capital into Canada.

Canada's immigration system and our talent have a strong foundation, but the challenge now is how we protect and sharpen the tools we have at our disposal to help Canadian firms that need highly skilled individuals to come to Canada so these companies can scale, compete and ultimately compete globally.

With that, I'd like to thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1640)

The Chair: You should become a politician, Mr. Perry. That was almost right on the dot of five minutes. Excellent job.

Thanks to both of you for the opening remarks.

Now we are going to move to our rounds of questions. We are going to begin with Mr. Seeback for six minutes.

Your time begins now.

Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thanks very much, Madam Chair.

Terry, it's great to see you again. I want to pick up on some of your comments about temporary foreign workers.

One thing I came across is that up until 2018, for the LMIA process, there was union consultation through the TFW process. The Liberal government cancelled it and removed that safeguard in 2018. I've asked both the immigration minister and the jobs minister if they think there have been negative consequences because of that and they didn't answer.

I'm going to put that question to you, but I'll also ask you if you think it should be reinstated. I've asked the ministers about that, but they didn't respond.

Terry Parker: First of all, it's great to see you again as well, Kyle.

Yes, I think it should be reinstated. I've been in this position for nine years in Alberta and 12 years in Saskatchewan, and I remember back in the day when our union affiliates used to be contacted—I wouldn't say on a weekly basis, but almost on a monthly basis—and asked questions on what the labour supply looked like and whether there was a need for temporary foreign workers in certain fields. Sometimes it would be needed. Other times, it wouldn't be needed. There are contractors that would rather bring in temporary foreign workers than utilize Canadians, and sometimes—I'm not saying always—they can be abused and mistreated or will not be paid the correct rates.

When we're being consulted, we can actually talk with the government and say, “There's an employer out there doing this”, or say that we need more ironworkers, pipefitters or electricians. We could also say that we don't need them, because we might have 2,000 electricians sitting on the board.

We have connections right across Canada with the building trades. We are connected throughout the country. If we have people working in Alberta, we can look to Saskatchewan, British Columbia or Nova Scotia. Over the last decade, we've brought in tens of thousands of people from across the country to help us on projects so that the Canadian economy is moving forward.

● (1645)

Kyle Seeback: I did a bit of digging, and what I discovered was that in 2025, 127,000 Canadians with trade certificates were unemployed, but at the same time, 126,000 temporary foreign workers came into Canada in TEERs zero to three, which include the skilled trades. It seems to me that this is illustrative of the problem.

I've suggested that the government might want to conduct an investigation into that. Do you find that for those numbers, going with what your experience has been, this program is being abused by employers to get low-wage labour?

Terry Parker: Yes, I do.

I've been talking to some tradespeople in the last year. Some of them may have only worked eight to 12 weeks out of the year, which is unacceptable for, let's say, the pipefitters out there, who have given me that example. When we're bringing in temporary foreign workers, that should not be occurring. We should make sure that, first and foremost, Canadians are working, and then we can utilize in the trades young Canadians, new Canadians who have already come into the country and women.

There's so much opportunity. We need to grow our domestic pool of labour and help them first and foremost before we start looking to bring in temporary foreign workers to displace our membership or Canadians.

Kyle Seeback: The final part to this puzzle that I've discovered is the illegal work that's taking place on construction sites. In fact, my understanding is that for some construction projects in Alberta that are receiving federal tax dollars, there's illegal labour working on those projects. I wonder if you could comment on that. What do you think the government needs to do to prevent this from happening in the future?

Terry Parker: One thing we get is undocumented workers or TFWs who have moved over from the agriculture sector into the construction sector. They come into our office, sometimes in large groups of 20 or 30, because they feel more comfortable talking to us that way. They are working—not always, but sometimes—on government-funded projects. Sometimes they get paid in cash because one contractor will get the work and then subcontract it to another contractor. That subcontractor subcontracts it off again, and the general contractor doesn't even know who is on a site properly.

Then we're seeing fake documents—fake Red Seal tickets coming in and fake safety certificates appearing. Sometimes they are utilized by members who say they are on a job, and they're not on that job. Someone else has taken their identity, has posed as them and then has been paid in cash under the table to work on construction sites right across Alberta.

This is not just a one-off. We are seeing this with thousands of undocumented workers working in Edmonton and Calgary. This is just one example happening here in Alberta. It's happening right across the country where this illegal workforce is moving forward.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Thank you very much, Mr. Parker.

Now we have six minutes for Mr. Chang.

Your six minutes start now.

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

Let's come back to the study on global talent.

My questions are for Mr. Perry and Mr. Carbonneau.

What are the biggest barriers related to credential recognition, work authorization and talent mobility, and how can the federal government address them?

Laurent Carbonneau (Vice-President, Policy and Advocacy, Council of Canadian Innovators): I'll just speak to what we deal with more on a day-to-day basis.

Just to recap a little of what my colleague was saying, we represent 175 companies that are scaling—Canadian-headquartered technology companies. The way we tend to analyze this is that they face four principal barriers to scaling: access to talent, to capital, to customers and to the right marketplace frameworks.

When it comes to talent, we see immigration and skilled immigration as a really useful part of filling the gaps that otherwise occur. In reality, these are usually highly technical fields where the number of research personnel and engineering personnel is quite small by global standards.

To give a little sense of perspective, I always like this stat: The Chinese university system graduates six million people a year, which is, by Canadian, American or any other standards, really tremendous. That's not to say that everyone is hiring from China. It's just to say that the number of advanced engineering and research grads coming from outside of Canada is much higher than the number from inside of Canada.

The global talent stream is a system that a lot of our members use. That's worked quite well for them. They identify the talent they need, and they're able to, within a very short amount of time, in a trusted framework, bring those folks to Canada.

There are, of course, teething issues, as there always are with any program, but this is a program that we feel very strongly works for Canada and for the interests of growing and scaling Canadian companies here. As my colleague Daniel said, this isn't about displacing Canadian jobs; it's about scaling companies that are going to create more jobs in Canada for Canadians down the line. I just wanted to speak to the centrality and utility of that tool to fill this specific need.

On your specific questions about credentials recognition, I would say it's not an issue we've heard crop up a lot in this specific context, but I'd be very happy to check back with our membership to see if this is an issue that's occurred for them.

● (1650)

Wade Chang: My riding of Burnaby Central is home to BCIT and a thriving clean technology ecosystem. How can federal immigration policy better support emerging sectors like AI, clean technology and advanced manufacturing?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a great question.

First of all, keeping programs like the global talent stream in operation is really essential. I'm not deaf. I'm listening to the conversation about the TFW program nationally, and of course, I have my personal views. think it would be a real tragedy if this particular program—the global talent stream—were a casualty of a broader backlash against the temporary foreign worker program, which I don't want to comment on more broadly than that.

Keep that channel open. In the grand scheme of things, it's quite a small component. As Daniel was saying, it's 2.6% overall. I think that translates to about 32,000 over the last 10-odd years. It's not a huge number, but these are all really critical folks at the end of the day. These folks are really enabling companies to take a leap to the next level and are going to unlock some kind of technological or industrial barrier for them, so we think that program is really critical.

Daniel mentioned two others. For the start-up visa program, we saw the rollout as quite troubled initially. There is a clear reason for that, which is that it was initially tied to permanent residency. You created what was essentially a very high reward for this program, and the amount of scrutiny that went into applications ensured that it was going to be a very slow process. It didn't really meet the standards of similar global programs, which meant that Canada wasn't really competitive.

What we've proposed is to keep that program, reform it a bit and ensure that it affords temporary status at first, with a pathway to permanent residency tied to outcomes. I think that would solve a lot of these issues, keep the backlog to a much more manageable level and volume of applications, and help attract more talent to Canada that is going to be building businesses in advanced industries.

Wade Chang: To what extent does Canada's commitment to diversity and to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusion influence the decisions of highly skilled workers when they choose where to live, work or innovate?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a great question. I don't know that I can speak to it incredibly precisely, but I will say that for a lot of our members, Canada is a place where folks want to come. It is an incentive for them to say, “We're a Canadian company operating in Canada.” It's a plus. To the extent that Canada has a great global brand, let's keep that up.

I certainly think there's a lot of work to do. This is Parliament, and we have a lot of work to do on lots of things to make sure that that's the case for our kids and grandkids, but that's an asset, and we see it that way.

Wade Chang: Canada competes globally for highly skilled talent. Where are we succeeding and where are we falling behind?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a fantastic question.

We're doing quite well, and historically have done quite well, at attracting research talent, which is wonderful. To some extent, as I've described, through the global talent stream and other streams, it's about engineering and research talent. That's more commercial rather than research in the post-secondary system.

Where I think we have more difficulty is in keeping industrialists here. When you look at the stats around the number of grads from Canadian universities who leave to work in the U.S., in the Bay Area, it's quite high, especially those from top schools. It's a real brain-drain that Canada simply cannot afford over the long term.

People talk a lot about the U.S.-Canada productivity and GDP per capita gap. If you look at those stats in close detail, the vast majority of that gap is made up of the top 10% of the income distribution. That is to say that the U.S. economy in this new, intangible, data-driven economy we live in is being driven by a small number of companies that are generating huge economic returns for the country. Canada doesn't have enough of those, which is our job to solve to some extent and our job to help you solve.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Carbonneau and Mr. Chang. That was a great exchange.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Beaulieu, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, the Bloc Québécois would like to point out that credential recognition falls under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces and therefore Quebec. Thanks to the 1991 Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, Quebec exercises its full jurisdiction over the selection of economic immigrants. The federal role is limited to the final verification of eligibility and the granting of permanent residence.

I'll now turn to the Council of Canadian Innovators.

Have you seen situations where asylum seekers or refugees with technology or engineering qualifications remain underemployed because of delays related to credential recognition?

Laurent Carbonneau: Thank you for the question.

Honestly, I have never heard of such a case among our members.

[*English*]

I would be happy to go back and see if we have heard of any such cases among our membership, but it's not something I've heard of to this point.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

If Quebec, for example, had the power to grant permanent residence itself and conduct the final eligibility check, do you think that would allow for faster credential recognition and more effective integration of talent?

Laurent Carbonneau: Thank you for the question.

[*English*]

At the end of the day, our concern is always whether companies are getting the talent they need when they need it. As Daniel was saying, this is often an existential question for them. I'm open-minded about whatever system can make that happen, and I think we have lots of companies in Quebec that are very proud to be there and very proud to be based all over the province.

Is that the best tool to make sure that these companies are getting the talent they need when they need it? I'm very happy to have that conversation. I would say that I'm agnostic on the question, but I'm very happy to have that conversation at greater length.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Have you never seen asylum seekers or highly skilled workers who had trouble finding a job because their credentials were not recognized?

[*English*]

Laurent Carbonneau: I would say no, not to my knowledge among our membership.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Do you think changes could be made to the existing program to give better results? If so, what would they be?

Laurent Carbonneau: Absolutely.

[*English*]

In the context of the start-up visa in particular, this is where we have seen more difficulties. From what we hear, the global talent stream works reasonably well most of the time. I accept that government programs are never going to be batting a thousand, so that's okay. We can always do a bit better.

On the start-up visa, there was a serious problem where demand greatly outstripped IRCC's capacity to actually analyze the applications. As I mentioned, that's very much a consequence of it being tied to permanent residency. In a situation where that isn't the case, you're going to see a much more measured uptake. There will be a much more realistic uptake for IRCC to manage and also for us to process.

If I have a granular suggestion, it would be to do that. It would be a huge improvement to the program. It would help us bring entrepreneurs here who then may very well choose to make their lives in Canada. We could actually get them through the door first.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: My next question is for Terry Parker.

You said you were in favour of using temporary workers, but only in periods when there is a real shortage of resources. Do you think that's what's happening, or are there too many temporary workers?

I imagine that the issue of credential recognition concerns them less, but what do you think? What is the situation?

[*English*]

Terry Parker: We see temporary foreign workers on construction sites on a daily basis, but what we're seeing a bit more of, as I said, are undocumented workers who are also coming in through illegal means into Alberta.

We are looking for more oversight so we know that everyone is being monitored and followed out there and that people are not being mistreated, are getting paid fair rates of pay and are being protected.

We're not against bringing in new Canadians. We want to make sure that everything is documented and being done above board and that everyone is being treated fairly throughout the construction industry. I was talking to my counterparts, and today it's happening from B.C. right across to the Maritimes. We are seeing a misuse of the temporary foreign worker program.

● (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: In your sector, have you ever seen something like Drivers Inc., where drivers are given fake driver's licences? That causes all kinds of problems, including cases of dangerous driving.

Does that kind of thing happen in your sector?

[*English*]

Terry Parker: We've seen something similar to that where people are coming to sites with cards and safety credentials that were not actually issued by a safety provider. They are forgeries. We're seeing forgeries happen. We've also seen forgeries happen for Red Seal tickets for some of the trades. It doesn't happen all the time, but we are seeing it on some of the major industrial sites across Alberta.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parker.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[*English*]

We will begin our second round, which is for five minutes.

Mr. Ho, we'll begin with you for five minutes.

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

My first questions are for Mr. Terry Parker.

Your organization warned that the temporary foreign worker program and the use of undocumented foreign workers, sometimes even workers using fraudulent documents, have contributed to wage suppression in the trades, descaling of trades work and weaker workplace protections. Those are some pretty serious warnings.

Could you share with this committee some stories that you're hearing on the ground?

Terry Parker: In one situation, we had a number of people coming in from South America—if I'm not mistaken, it was Colombia—to work in the country. They came in on tourist visas and as tourists and then worked in Alberta. One of those individuals got hurt and came to our office. He had twisted his arm or cut his arm in some way, and he had been sitting in a hotel room.

Finally, the employer, who didn't want to deal with it because he didn't have workers' compensation, decided to ship this individual back. Later we heard that he actually lost his arm because of a workplace injury that was not treated because the employer did not want the individual going to a hospital, did not want to report it to workers' compensation and decided the best thing to do was to ship this individual out of the country.

This is an extreme situation, but there are individuals who get hurt on job sites throughout the year. Some of them are undocumented and some of them are temporary foreign workers who are not legally supposed to be working in the construction industry. They do get hurt on these sites. We do hear these types of stories. We heard about that situation directly from the individual as well, so it was not from a third party that we were hearing it. It was directly from the individual.

Vincent Ho: This is pretty damning.

When employers can access cheap temporary foreign labour and sometimes even access undocumented workers or foreign workers who using fake documentation, does that reduce pressure to raise wages and reduce incentives to hire Canadians?

Terry Parker: It definitely does.

When our contractors are competing with other contractors who are charging half of or a third less than that of our contractors, obviously a contract is going to go to the contractor who is charging less and is using undocumented or inappropriate temporary foreign workers.

Vincent Ho: It's very troubling to hear the stories on the ground.

The Liberals' latest press release on their costly credit card budget says that they are investing in skilled trades. Is there a contradiction in telling young Canadians to pursue the trades while simultaneously allowing employers to bypass them through temporary and sometimes even illegal labour streams?

Terry Parker: Both the Building Trades of Alberta and the government are investing in trying to bring in more apprentices. We see a lot of retirements happening. We see a lot of projects being proposed that will happen in the future. Obviously, we are projecting.

However, in the current situation, there is not as much work as expected. We want the situation to get better. We want to have more young Canadians working in the trades. We want to have more indigenous people and want to see more women, and we obviously want to see even more new Canadians working in the construction industry, but that's not the current situation. Sure, we need to train, but the system is balanced for when the work happens. We'll then be able to bring more people in. We need more jobs in the construction sector before we start bringing more people into the construction sector.

Yes, we need to invest in it, but we have to do it at scale as well.

● (1705)

Vincent Ho: It's a pretty simple concept to put Canadians first.

My next set of questions is for Mr. Perry and Mr. Carbonneau

The Liberal government keeps using words like “talent attraction”, but we've seen the Liberals flood our economy with low-skilled labour in recent years. Are you confident that there are enough safeguards in place to ensure that employers who use the immigration stream that attracts high-skilled workers have adequately exhausted their search for Canadian workers before resorting to foreign skilled labour, especially when the companies are headquartered elsewhere?

Laurent Carbonneau: I'll take that question, really quickly.

I would say that in general, we are broadly satisfied with the state of the global talent stream. From a broader economic perspective, I would say that it definitely does hurt to have Amazon and others as very heavy users of these programs. Especially when we're competing globally on talent, it doesn't seem as though the federal government—

Vincent Ho: Do you think Canadian-owned companies and Canadian-headquartered companies should have priority?

Laurent Carbonneau: I definitely think so, yes.

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

Thank you, Mr. Carbonneau.

Next we have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

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

My first question is for you, Mr. Parker.

As Canada's new government works to invest in major infrastructure projects across the country to ultimately grow a stronger economy, what recommendations do you have in terms of how Canada's immigration system can better complement federal investments in apprenticeships and domestic training to ensure we have the workforce necessary to build these major projects?

Terry Parker: We definitely want to see investment happening in young people. We want to see investment happening in Canadians, but there needs to be oversight. There need to be audits happening, and there needs to be monitoring of the system currently.

We don't need to be bringing in temporary and foreign workers when we have high unemployment rates among young people and among Canadians. We need to be focused, and we need to build Canada. There's no question about that, but we need to do this with a balanced approach.

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you for your answer.

I'll go to Mr. Perry or Mr. Carbonneau, whoever would like to answer, since you guys are from the same organization.

You mentioned in your opening remarks that around 70% of Canadian tech businesses cite a shortage of skilled workers as a major barrier to their success. What does that mean in practical terms for Canadian start-ups and scale-ups trying to compete globally? Part two of that question is, what opportunities are being lost because these positions can't be filled?

Daniel Perry: You are right that one of the challenges our members face is finding the right talent at the right time. When they're unable to access it, they simply leave. When you can't find the right people to build your business, you take your business elsewhere where you have the environment to allow you to build and be successful.

The global talent stream has been a very useful tool to not only find highly skilled individuals but to also get them through the immigration process in a timely manner so they're able to contribute. We recently saw someone who was successful in hiring another software developer, and that's allowing them to scale here. They've been able to increase their revenue, and they've been able to hire more Canadians, so it really does have a positive effect.

Amandeep Sodhi: Do you believe there are any key lessons the government can take from the global talent stream that can inform the overall talent attraction strategy we have?

Daniel Perry: Definitely. What we see as very successful in the global talent stream are the referral partners. Something we recommend for the start-up visa program is to allow incubators, venture capitalists and others in the ecosystem to be more integrated into the process.

As it currently stands, IRCC is reviewing all the applications. With respect to the IRCC, they do many things very well, but understanding how business works, what innovation looks like and what will succeed are not always top on the list. Having private sectors come in and work with them will take a bit off the plate of the IRCC, combined with our other recommendations of temporary residency and moving that path forward to help reduce the burden on the system.

● (1710)

Amandeep Sodhi: In your opening remarks, you also noted that approximately 850,000 Canadians live in the United States, including businesspeople and technical and industrial leaders. You've also suggested that Canada should consider a tax exemption modelled on the U.S. qualified small business stock exemption. Why do you believe that a similar measure would benefit Canada's innovation economy?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a great question.

I mentioned the “missing” province, and I'll give you some personal background here. I grew up in the U.S. I'm Canadian by birth and chose to come back here, but lots of Canadians see huge opportunities south of the border, and the reality is that we are in a competition for talent with them each and every day. I think a lot of Canadians—and we can't blame them and can't think that's a bad move for them—see more opportunity for themselves on that side of the border than this one.

We need to see how we can be as attractive as the U.S. as a baseline for folks who are entrepreneurial, want to work hard, want to invest in Canada and want to build businesses here. Really, how should we be making ourselves a better place to grow and scale a business than the U.S.? It needs to be absolutely at the heart of how we approach any serious conversation around talent.

Amandeep Sodhi: How would you respond to the concerns that this proposal could disproportionately benefit founders and investors rather than the broader workforce?

Laurent Carbonneau: Folks who are founders and investors are putting a lot of skin in the game. As I mentioned, we have to see the competition of the U.S. as our baseline and the water we're swimming in. If we aren't really taking that seriously, we're going to lose out on a generation of entrepreneurial talent. It's a huge loss for us economically, especially when data-driven and IP-driven businesses generate such huge returns for their home economies.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sodhi.

Thank you, Mr. Carbonneau.

[*Translation*]

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

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Carbonneau, in your opinion, is the problem with highly specialized labour related to recruitment or retention?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a great question.

I think both of those aspects are possible. We definitely have a recruitment problem at the national level.

As I said, in general, when we look at all the specialized fields and sub-fields related to research, engineering and so on, we see one thing. We just don't have enough graduates in Canada to fill the labour shortages across the country. I don't think it's really feasible, so we have to look elsewhere.

It's also due to the fact that we are losing a lot of young Canadians in particular. We also lose people in mid-career or late-career. They go to the United States or elsewhere because they find the conditions there more attractive. Both sides see this as a very serious problem.

As I said, comparing the situation to the United States is not always fair, but that's the comparison people make every day to decide whether they're going to live here or move there.

Mario Beaulieu: A lot of the recruitment actually has to be done by the companies themselves.

How could the federal government help significantly improve recruitment?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a very good question.

The global talent stream program works quite well, but not always perfectly. We have sometimes seen cases of researchers or engineers who wait a very long time before receiving government approval for their application. It doesn't happen very often, but it does happen. Generally speaking, if the program were working at full capacity, it would be a real asset for Canada.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Mr. Parker, you said that temporary workers work with fake documents.

What do you think would be the best way to combat this problem?

[*English*]

Terry Parker: The best means of countering that problem is to have a universal safety standard right across the country. That way, we could actually prove it. Right now, you have different safety companies from different provinces all producing different tickets that are supposed to be enforced. However, there's no Canadian authentication on safety standards. On the Red Seal there is, and when we saw a fake Red Seal ticket come through, we knew right away that it was fake. What we need is a universal safety standard for all of Canada. It would help the situation.

● (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parker.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[*English*]

Next we have five minutes for Mr. Davies.

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

Mr. Carbonneau and Mr. Perry, I want to dig a bit into the SUV program. You've mentioned it a few times today.

You mentioned in your comments that the program has rigid upfront requirements. Can you elaborate on that briefly?

Laurent Carbonneau: Is that the start-up visa?

Fred Davies: Yes.

Laurent Carbonneau: Essentially, the problem with the start-up visa, which I've hinted at, is that because we've set up a pathway to permanent residency right off the bat, we're creating a huge incentive for people to apply even if they don't really meet the requirements. That requires....

I see you have a follow-up question.

Fred Davies: They have to meet the requirements because they go through designated organizations, incubators or angel investment funds where the due diligence is done and letters of support are granted.

Laurent Carbonneau: Indeed.

Fred Davies: I'm trying to get to the words you said. They go through due diligence before they come to Canada, so while it is a pathway to residency, they have determined, to a large degree, the commercial viability of their concepts. Is that correct?

Laurent Carbonneau: To be clear, our members are usually more established companies and aren't availing themselves of this directly. What we heard from the ecosystem is that the backlog at IRCC that this program generated basically made it unworkable. What—

Fred Davies: Was that backlog a result of too many qualified companies or IRCC not being able to go through the application process, or were there other problems, such as, for example, designated organizations that were effectively selling letters of support?

Laurent Carbonneau: Without having any evidence of option C, I would probably point to option B. I think they didn't have the capacity and were applying very strict scrutiny standards because of what was on offer.

I take your point around the organizations. I haven't heard any allegations to that effect.

Fred Davies: I've heard lots.

Laurent Carbonneau: Yes, that's a very good question.

Fred Davies: You recommended that a solution would be temporary status at first, but with temporary status, how is somebody going to dedicate the amount of capital...? Who's going to invest in a company that comes to Canada that only has temporary status? If I'm an investor in the start-up ecosystem, the last place I would put my money is in a company that doesn't have status.

Laurent Carbonneau: It's a fair question. If the choice is between having a program that's non-functional and a program where there are some trade-offs, I'd rather have the trade-offs. If you create a window that's workable, these are solvable problems, but what we saw in the first iteration of this program wasn't really functional.

Fred Davies: I'm not so sure that the iteration was dysfunctional, as it became problematic for organizations that were doing due diligence outside of IRCC. IRCC didn't have any role other than approving designated organizations, angel funds or incubators. The program itself is fine. It's just that a massive number of companies were coming to Canada.

The bigger issue now is that we have a 10-year backlog. If you go to the IRCC website now, it says there's a 10-year wait for a start-up visa. Who's even going to consider coming to Canada when they know right up front that it's a 10-year wait?

Laurent Carbonneau: I completely agree with you. I think that's totally unworkable. Frankly, you should have done the start-up at that point if you were going to be waiting 10 years anyway.

I completely hear you. That's exactly the concern we're worried about as well.

Fred Davies: One of the other comments you made was about retaining talent in Canada, and I agree with you completely. One of the biggest problems we have is the exodus of our brightest and best. People go where capital is. Our biggest problem in Canada, in my view, is that we have failed to provide adequate access to capital to commercialize start-ups and innovative companies. Would you agree with that?

Laurent Carbonneau: I would completely agree with that. I mentioned earlier that Canada is really good at attracting researchers and really bright people in the commercial space and in the research post-secondary space—all true—but we really struggle to grow these companies. That's a huge problem for our ecosystem.

In Canada, we like to tell ourselves the myth that we punch above our weight. I think in lots of real ways we punch below our weight. We have so many smart people, and what we can accomplish with those smart people is a lot less than it should be. Our access to capital problem is a huge part of that.

● (1720)

Fred Davies: Do you have a suggested solution to that? I know I don't have a lot of time, but capital is the biggest pain point here in Canada. What would you recommend we do as a government, as a society or as investors?

Laurent Carbonneau: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds.

Laurent Carbonneau: Oh boy.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Laurent Carbonneau: We had a really great report out last year, “A Mandate to Innovate”, that addressed the big four issues that we talk about. I would refer you to that. I would be happy to come back and talk about it.

The Chair: Feel free to follow up with a letter with suggestions to Mr. Davies' question. I think it's an excellent one.

Laurent Carbonneau: We can certainly do that as well.

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

The Chair: It will help us get to some of the answers we're looking for.

[*Translation*]

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

Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's a great pleasure to be with you today. I am happy to replace my colleague.

Good afternoon to all the witnesses.

Mr. Carbonneau, when you referred to temporary foreign workers, you mentioned the figure of 2.6%.

Did I understand correctly?

Laurent Carbonneau: Yes.

Linda Lapointe: Can you explain to me a little more what that figure represents?

[*English*]

Laurent Carbonneau: Yes, absolutely. That was the percentage of total labour market impact assessments, out of the whole TFW program, that the global talent stream represents.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Okay. Thank you.

What do you think this program means for the Canadian economy as a whole?

[*English*]

Laurent Carbonneau: If we're bringing in people to work for a short time, these are probably the best people in the world to do those jobs in the sense that they are helping Canadian companies scale, grow, launch their operations, export abroad, do research, hire more Canadians here, ultimately, and create more long-term economic growth.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

Earlier, you surprised me a bit when you compared Canada's situation with that of the United States, specifically when it comes to very specialized workers, who are highly skilled. You said that they were, in a way, more attracted to the United States than to Canada. Knowing what's happening south of the border, I can say that's not what I've heard.

Explain to me what we should be changing. We've all heard comments about what's happening south of the border.

You talked about the situation, but can you explain to me a little more why it's like that?

What should we be doing to retain that talent?

Laurent Carbonneau: Sure.

I grew up in the United States. My parents are still there. In fact, one of them is returning to Canada this year. It's kind of for the reasons you mentioned.

[*English*]

Their economy is the biggest in the world. It's the richest consumer market in the world. It has the best universities and the deepest capital markets. I could go on.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Yes, but we have McGill University, the Université de Montréal and others.

[*English*]

Laurent Carbonneau: We have great universities—don't get me wrong—but density matters.

When we talk about talent, we're not taking seriously the reality that there is a very rich country right next to us that takes this very seriously. If the United States of America could be said to have had an industrial policy for the last 50 or 60 years, it's this: They've very wisely said, “If we take the world's best and brightest and give them the opportunity to build what they want, the rest will solve itself.” Do they still have problems? Yes, they do. However, we have to take very seriously the notion that we are competing with a country that sees attracting the world's best and brightest as a very high priority.

We're very quick to congratulate ourselves sometimes on how nice it is to be Canadian and to live in Canada. I love it here. I live here, but when people have the pick of the litter, when they're the best minds and can write a ticket to anywhere they want, are they going to pick Canada every time? Many people do.

We talk to our companies all the time, and we ask them, “Why are you building in Canada?” People ask them this all the time—it's not just us—because it would be easier to go elsewhere. They say, “It's important for me to do it here because my family is here. I care about my community. I care about my ecosystem.” That's great. That's a laudable sentiment and I'm really glad they do it, but I want the answer to be, “This is the best place on earth for me to grow my business and to grow it into what I want it to be, which is a global enterprise that employs thousands of people and creates tons of jobs.” That, to me, is what we're not quite getting in the conversation.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: Thank you for that.

I'll use Quebec as an example, as my colleague did earlier. You know that we have major universities in the Montreal area and throughout the province of Quebec. We are attracting talent, and we need to keep it. Artificial intelligence and aerospace are industries that are mainly located in the Montreal region.

Looking at Quebec, are there any difficulties or differences that should be raised in connection with our immigration system?

Laurent Carbonneau: That's a very good question.

[*English*]

That's one I would have to go back to members on in order to see if they've heard anything specific. I have not necessarily heard anything to indicate that there are Quebec-specific difficulties regarding talent attraction.

I will say that, certainly—

● (1725)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: There's one minute left.

[*English*]

Laurent Carbonneau: Okay.

Certainly, we heard this in the context of recent changes to the language laws. I think most people appreciate that French is the language of business in Quebec. That's not a problem, but the recent changes created, I think, a bit of a chill among people looking at their options from outside the province, who said, “This seems complicated.” You're never going to see a statistic anywhere of people who have looked at that situation and decided they didn't want to deal with it, but it is real and we hear about it. It affects investment decisions. It affects people's relocation decisions and all kinds of things.

Once again, I really want to underline my respect for the fact that French is the language of business in Quebec. That's totally the case, and I wouldn't want it otherwise. It is just a reality we deal with.

[*Translation*]

Linda Lapointe: We can attract the French, the Belgians, the Africans and other francophones.

Laurent Carbonneau: Absolutely.

Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Madame Lapointe and Mr. Carbonneau.

We have just a few minutes left, so I'm going to give a minute and a half to Mr. Menegakis and a minute and a half to Mr. Fragiskatos.

Mr. Menegakis, go ahead, please.

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

Mr. Parker, do you believe the temporary foreign worker program has been used by employers to avoid raising wages and investing in training Canadian tradespeople?

Terry Parker: Yes, I do. It's simple.

We have a lot of apprentices willing to go to work. I have lists and lists of people who are interested in going into the trades. Any day of the week, I can pull out hundreds who would like to get involved in the trades, but they can't because there are misuses happening out there in the system. There's not enough work for all these individuals. It's this competition happening that is undermining our system.

Costas Menegakis: We see youth unemployment spiking. Are there young Canadians who want to enter the trades but are being crowded out because employers would rather access temporary foreign labour than invest in training them?

Terry Parker: Roughly, we currently have 16% to 17% youth unemployment in Alberta. That's unacceptable. We need to put Canadians first.

Costas Menegakis: Do you believe one of the many reasons we see high youth unemployment is that employers stopped investing in Canadians the moment the government handed them a cheaper labour pipeline?

Terry Parker: I'm not saying this is the sole cause. However, when an employer is faced with getting labour for half the price, they sometimes take that option to find a way to lower their costs and increase their profit. It's as simple as that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Parker and Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead for one and a half minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all witnesses for being here today.

I have one minute, so I'm going to direct my questions to Mr. Carbonneau—or Mr. Perry, if he wishes.

Is the relative challenge we have—the youth unemployment issue that was just mentioned—caused by the temporary foreign worker program?

Laurent Carbonneau: I'm not a macroeconomist, so I don't think I know enough to say anything on the broader question there.

Peter Fragiskatos: Okay. I'll stay with that issue.

If I take your main point to be that the program is important for the Canadian economy, reforms are needed. You mentioned the example of Amazon. I would agree with that. We can think of other companies that are engaged in practices that would be inappropriate from the perspective of most Canadians.

We sometimes hear calls from friends in the opposition to cancel the program outright. What do you think of that?

Laurent Carbonneau: As I mentioned, I can only really speak for the global talent stream. I think that program is really valuable. We've talked around it a bit.

There are certainly issues with the temporary foreign worker program. I don't know enough about it to say at a super high level what should be done, but I can tell you with great certainty that it would be an absolute tragedy to lose the global talent stream if it were to be lost.

Peter Fragiskatos: I think they want to get rid of that as well.

Thank you very much for putting on the record a very reasonable point of view.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Thank you, Mr. Carbonneau.

Before I thank you formally, I know there's some follow-up from the question Mr. Davies asked, if I could just put that on the record.

Also, you mentioned that you represent 175 companies. If you happen to have data on the skill and labour needs they have, that might be helpful to this committee, as we're looking at how to identify that.

This is the last thing. You were talking about how it's hard to keep industrialists here in Canada. It would be good if you could define that a bit. It will help us in identifying the solutions.

With that, I want to thank all of the witnesses for today.

We are now going to suspend for about five to 10 minutes so the current witnesses can leave and we can get back with the second panel of witnesses.

Thank you.

● (1730)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1735)

The Chair: Welcome to the second panel of today's meeting.

It's nice to see that everybody is here with us in person. It's always a pleasure to welcome everyone, but it's nice to have people in the room.

As I did before, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our new witnesses. Kindly wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. I will let you know when you have one minute left. If you would like to listen in a different language, please make sure you're selecting it before you get started. Finally, I'll remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Now I would like to formally welcome our witnesses on the second panel.

As an individual, we have Mr. Ethan Miranda. Welcome.

From the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, we have Michael Casasola, senior resettlement and complementary pathways officer, and Sandra Elgersma, resettlement and complementary pathways officer, durable solutions, labour mobility. That's a great title. Welcome to you both.

From the World University Service of Canada, we have Mr. Steve Mason, chief executive officer.

It's such a pleasure to warmly welcome all of you.

Each organization will have up to five minutes. We're going to begin with Mr. Miranda.

Your five minutes begin now.

[*Translation*]

Ethan Miranda (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the committee for inviting me to take part in this meeting.

[*English*]

My name is Ethan Miranda. I'm a 25-year-old software engineer from Scarborough, in the east end of Toronto. I graduated from the University of Western Ontario in June 2024.

After graduating, I spent almost two years unemployed. In that time, I applied to over 500 positions and spent countless hours going through the interview process at various companies, rarely even receiving the courtesy of a rejection letter. All I was able to get was a part-time volunteer position as a software engineer at a Vancouver-based charity and a 20-hour-a-week position at a small tech start-up. I only successfully found full-time employment when I shifted my focus away from software engineering.

My story is not unique. Since graduating, I have personally spoken to dozens of other recent graduates in software engineering and computer science who are struggling to find employment, many of them for extended periods of time, due to a lack of entry level positions in tech.

My experience led me to ask a simple question: If highly educated Canadian graduates cannot find a pathway into the tech industry, how will Canada develop the experienced workforce it needs in the future? If Canadian graduates are unable to gain that experience at home, many may look elsewhere for opportunities, resulting in a potential loss of talent that Canada has already invested heavily in educating.

As such, I am here today to express my concern that efforts to attract highly skilled tech talent from abroad are not being matched by equivalent efforts to develop Canadian graduates. While it is true that there is a lot of demand for senior tech workers in Canada, particularly in AI, machine learning, data science, cybersecurity and cloud computing, there is no shortage of talented young Canadian software engineers who are eager and willing to fill this demand. The issue is not a lack of talent, but a lack of experience and the opportunity to gain it.

Youth unemployment has risen steadily in the past few years, from 9% in June 2022 to 14.3% in April 2026. Many of these unemployed young people are graduates in engineering, computer science and other tech disciplines. According to the Indeed Hiring Lab, postings for junior and standard tech roles in Canada have dropped 25% compared to pre-pandemic levels, while postings for senior and manager roles are above pre-pandemic levels.

While this problem is not specific to AI and can be found even in web development and application development, roles tied directly to AI, such as machine learning engineers, data engineers and data centre technicians, continue to show elevated demand. These are areas in which Canadian universities already provide education, but unfortunately they are still not accessible to new graduates, as they often require years of experience. In fact, even many roles labelled as entry-level require prior experience, effectively removing the first step on the career ladder for new graduates.

As a result of the mismatch between entry-level supply and experienced labour demand, efforts to address senior talent shortages entirely through immigration may unintentionally increase competition in the early career job market for Canadian graduates if not carefully designed. If we flood the market with senior engineers from abroad, then employers have no incentive to hire and train Canadian new grads because they have easy and cheap access to foreign senior engineers who can hit the ground running, as opposed to investing the time and money into training a junior engineer from Canada who may take a few years to ramp up.

Canada's skilled immigration policy should complement domestic talent pipelines, not replace them. Every senior engineer, AI specialist, cybersecurity expert and technology leader began as a junior employee who was given an opportunity.

If Canada wants a strong technology sector in 10 years, we must ensure that today's graduates have a chance to build the experience right now that future demands will require. I strongly believe Canada can be a global leader in technology, but this cannot come at the expense of an entire generation of Canadian graduates. I respectfully ask that you advocate for policies that incentivize companies to hire and train junior Canadian engineers, invest in graduate upskilling programs in fields like AI and cybersecurity and ensure that efforts to attract global talent are matched by equally strong investments in developing Canada's domestic talent pipeline.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

● (1740)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have five minutes for Mr. Casasola.

Your five minutes begin now.

Michael Casasola (Senior Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Thank you, Madam Chair.

UNHCR is pleased to appear as part of the committee's study on attracting global talent.

Refugees represent an untapped talent pool that Canadian employers have only recently been able to reach, thanks to the economic mobility pathways pilot, or EMPP, introduced in 2018, which has provided an additional option for refugees with the commensurate skills to access Canada. UNHCR welcomed the EMPP and looks forward to Canada delivering on its pledge at the Global Refugee Forum to make the EMPP a permanent program.

Back in 2018, Canada was a pioneer, testing the extent to which refugees could access permanent economic immigration programs without changing human capital requirements. This testing found that refugees have the skills and experience, but may face barriers related to their displacement, such as the inability to provide a valid passport.

The EMPP was designed so that refugees could overcome these barriers and access economic immigration on a level playing field. Thanks to IRCC, NGO partners and employers, more than 1,300 refugees have immigrated to Canada through the EMPP to date. The key learning has been constant: When given a chance, refugees can compete with other economic immigrants to provide much-needed talent that allows businesses to maintain operations or expand.

From the outset, Canada has been clear that refugee labour mobility does not replace resettlement or asylum, but instead offers an additional opportunity for refugees who meet the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act's economic objectives. UNHCR affirms this approach, particularly in the global context of record levels of forced displacement and shrinking solution opportunities for refugees. Creative partnerships with civil society and the private sector are needed, as set out in the Global Compact for Refugees.

The private sector is critical to the EMPP, as most applications have been anchored with a job offer. We'd like to acknowledge employers such as Glen Haven Manor, St. Joseph's Care Group, Tri-County Mennonite Homes, Newfoundland and Labrador Health Services, Chancellor Park, Ice River Springs and IKO Industries, among many others. These employers have made refugee recruitment an integral part of their international talent strategies, sometimes travelling to refugee camps for recruitment missions. As a result, refugees are on the job in communities such as Pictou County, Nova Scotia, and Thunder Bay, as well as in Canada's major cities.

Just like other economic programs, the EMPP needs to work smoothly for employers. We've heard their concerns about processing times and predictability. The EMPP has been affected by limited space in the annual levels plan and the inventory of applications, leading to long processing times. While this situation is similar for other economic immigrant streams, refugees have difficulty meeting the requirements for temporary work permits that would allow them to start work while their permanent resident application is processed. We look forward to learning how IRCC will address this issue, informed by the evaluation of the pilot that is under way.

Our own research shows that the EMPP has delivered results. Our surveys found that EMPP alumni have a high rate of staying with their employer and/or sector, and many experience career progression. UNHCR has also organized focus groups with EMPP alumni. What stands out is their drive and eagerness to invest in themselves through ongoing training and upskilling. Alumni expressed gratitude for the opportunity and would recommend immigrating through EMPP to other refugees.

Our research also uncovered that those arriving through the EMPP have struggled with credential recognition, just like other economic immigrants. With partners, UNHCR is interested in how these issues can be addressed at a system, rather than individual, level.

The Nova Scotia Pharmacy Regulator provides a great example. Their Jordan pharmacy licensure pathway fast-tracked the pathway to practise for immigrants trained in Jordan, following a thorough evaluation of the pharmacy education programs, meeting with the Government of Jordan, and the assessment and recruitment of candidates. The initial cohort recruited through this initiative and now working as pharmacists in Nova Scotia includes 11 refugees and six Jordanian nationals.

With the EMPP as a permanent program, ideally with faster processing times and significant spaces, refugee inclusion could be mainstreamed. A reliable immigration pathway could unlock potential. It would allow employers looking for cohorts of skilled refugees to move forward with recruiting and would allow regulators looking for systemic partnerships to proceed, confident that the immigration route will facilitate them. For our part, UNHCR is confident that the next nurse, roofer and French immersion teacher in refugee circumstances is just waiting for the opportunity to put their skills to use and in turn help meet Canada's unmet employment needs.

Thank you.

● (1745)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Casasola.

Next we have five minutes for Mr. Mason.

Your five minutes start now.

Steve Mason (Chief Executive Officer, World University Service of Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I represent WUSC, a global development organization headquartered in Canada that aims to catalyze positive education and economic opportunities for young people. Since our founding over 100 years ago, we have had a consistent focus on addressing the unique education and economic needs of refugees and displaced people. In Canada, we support refugee resettlement through education and employment pathways, including through our flagship student refugee program, which is now in its 48th year.

Today I will focus on our support for labour mobility pathways for skilled refugees to relocate to Canada to strengthen our economy. These are not temporary pathways. All individuals arrive in Canada as permanent residents. I will speak to what we have learned, the opportunities we see and our recommendations for the government.

In brief, our experience has demonstrated that supporting smart, targeted labour mobility for refugee populations is a classic win-win. It enables Canada to fill critical labour gaps while providing a durable solution to refugee populations with few other options. It allows Canada to deliver on the pledges it made at the Global Refugee Forum in 2023, while also strengthening our economy. I'd like to provide two examples.

First, under the economic mobility pathways pilot, WUSC has been supporting the tourism and hospitality sector in western Canada to address critical labour shortages by connecting employers with refugee talent. Through consultations with employers, we heard a consistent message: Businesses, especially in rural and remote communities, struggle to find stable, year-round workers. Resort communities have traditionally relied on temporary labour, but employers emphasize the need for a more consistent workforce to sustain growth in the sector. There has been limited availability and interest of Canadians to fill these roles, leaving persistent gaps in a key economic sector.

Since 2020, we have matched more than 100 refugee youth from Kenya and Malawi with tourism and hospitality jobs across B.C. and Alberta. The results have been significant. Employers report retention rates of over 90% after one year, dramatically reducing recruitment and training costs while improving workforce stability and performance.

One example is Ramla, originally from Burundi. She spent years in limbo in refugee camps without access to employment. In 2023, she arrived in Canada and began working as a housekeeper in Tofino. The opportunity gave her financial stability, independence and a path forward through permanent residency. Within a short time frame, she was promoted to front desk agent. Her employer has become a champion of the EMPP, noting that it has created a wealth of benefits for the team, their leaders and the company as a whole.

The second example I'd like to provide is in Nova Scotia, where we are working with provincial regulators, employers and Dalhousie University to address the critical shortage of pharmacists in the province. We identified a group of trained Syrian pharmacists living as refugees in Jordan and supported the creation of a streamlined licensure pathway so they could work in Canada. As a result, these professionals moved from arrival to full licensure in approximately three months, as compared with the typical two- to three-year time frame.

This demonstrates a simple but powerful point that applies across sectors: It's not the lack of talent that is the problem; it's the alignment of systems of immigration, credential recognition and labour markets. When those systems work together, labour shortages can be addressed quickly and effectively. Refugee talent becomes a powerful part of Canada's economic strategy.

I have three recommendations for the government.

First, we welcome IRCC's commitment to making the economic mobility pathways pilot a permanent program, while we also acknowledge that it needs adjustment in order to function in the reliable manner that employers reasonably require. This includes a commitment to processing permanent residency applications within a six-month time frame and streamlining the application process by allocating a predetermined number of spaces under the program to trusted partners. This will ensure predictable intake and avoid system delays.

My second recommendation is that, while the EMPP is an important pathway that should be sustained, federal and provincial governments should ensure that existing immigration pathways are accessible to refugee populations. Working through such initiatives as the provincial nominee program or the francophone community immigration pilot also provides significant potential. The two conditions that are essential for these pathways to work effectively are a processing time of six months or less to build employer confidence and a flexibility on settlement fund requirements, which many refugees cannot meet.

Third, we encourage stronger coordination across federal departments, whose collaboration would accelerate this work. Global Affairs Canada, ESDC and the regional development agencies all play a role in necessary systems alignment. There is, for example, a real and pragmatic opportunity to leverage overseas training, funded by GAC, to support Canadian labour needs.

Refugee labour mobility is not a humanitarian initiative. It is a practical economic strategy driven by provincial and employer needs and the skills of talented individuals who just happen to be refugees in need of a fresh start. It is an economic cake with humanitarian icing.

Thank you.

● (1750)

The Chair: That's great. You had one second left in the five minutes. Thank you, Mr. Mason.

To all witnesses, they were excellent presentations. Thank you.

We now have our first round of questions and answers, which is for six minutes each.

We begin with Mr. Genuis.

Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): It's a pleasure to be visiting the immigration committee. I serve as our Conservative shadow minister for employment.

My questions are primarily for Mr. Miranda.

We have been pursuing for a long time this issue of the metastasizing youth unemployment crisis in this country. As you mentioned, 14.3% is the current youth unemployment figure. In many ways, that unemployment figure understates the nature of the crisis, because we also have declining labour force participation among young people. We're seeing many instances of young people struggling to find employment in their field. It sounds like this is part of your story as well. They study and develop expertise in a particular field and eventually find a job, but it's outside of the field they trained for.

It's so important that you're here and it's so important that we hear directly from young people who are affected by this crisis. The nature of how certain groups are represented by coordinated organizations has led to a dynamic in which we in Parliament in particular haven't heard enough from young graduates who are grappling with this issue in real time. To you and to others who are listening, I'll say that we as parliamentarians need to hear more from that perspective.

Often, the discussion here shifts to how we attract talent. Many young people I talk to are asking a different question: How do we get investments and opportunities to align with the talent we already have here and the talent that is looking for opportunities so we can put that talent to work and give them a chance?

I wonder if you have reflections on the state of discourse around this issue and on how we need to hear more about having opportunities available for existing talent rather than just focusing on attracting more talent that may compete with existing talent.

● (1755)

Ethan Miranda: That's the primary reason I'm here. All too often in Canada, the conversation is about how to attract high-skilled immigrants. I think that's an important conversation, but an equally important conversation is how we can help young Canadians who are highly skilled and have degrees in things like engineering, but who are struggling to find a job in this job market, especially in entry-level positions. That's an important conversation that needs to be had way more. That's the reason I'm here.

Garnett Genuis: On the issue of training versus positions that are available, do you find, for yourself and other young people you talk to, that there are unmet expectations? You're encouraged to pursue study in a particular field with expectations that there is work available, and then it's very difficult to find a position in that particular high-skilled field. You have acquired skills that aren't as labour-market relevant as you were initially led to believe.

Ethan Miranda: Yes, that's absolutely the case, especially with software engineering. I was told when I started that I would have a job instantly. Even now, when I talk to people who aren't software engineers, especially older people, and I tell them I'm a software engineer, the first thing they say is, “You're going to get a job right away; you're going to have no problem.” That's not the case anymore. We definitely need to have a conversation about that.

Garnett Genuis: The Canadian Federation of Independent Business recently put out a really interesting report called “Work in Progress: Bridging the Gap Between Small Businesses and Canada's Youth”. They surveyed young people. They also talked to businesses. It's a really good report for identifying some of the gaps where there are clearly frustrations on the part of small business owners who are struggling to meet their needs. There's also a lot of frustration on the part of young people.

One of the things they identify is, “Existing government supports for small businesses to hire youth are often overly complex and administratively burdensome”. Meanwhile, they've called for action that would reduce the costs of hiring, for instance by proposing things like training supports and EI premium relief.

I wonder if you have an impression about what policy interventions are needed to help close the gap between businesses and young people and to make it easier for businesses to give opportunities to young people.

Ethan Miranda: I'm not sure I can speak to particular policies. I'm not a policy expert. I definitely think that incentivizing businesses to hire and train young people is important, because they don't seem willing to do that anymore.

Garnett Genuis: Yes, there's a training cost associated with hiring new workers, but there are other ways we can provide relief to businesses. Basically, we need this to happen between businesses and young people in the workplace.

It comes back to our view that we need to encourage a more competitive economy, because businesses are more likely to hire young people if they're optimistic about the future and if they're growing. If we have a competitive economy, it creates an opportunity for existing talent. The biggest gaps we're seeing right now aren't because of talent recruitment from abroad. They're about being able to deploy the existing talent we have in this country.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Genuis and Mr. Miranda. That was six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Natilien Joseph (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. I see that time is really limited.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us.

Mr. Casasola, Canada is often cited as a model for refugee resettlement, particularly for its ability to reconcile humanitarianism with successful integration.

In your experience, what components of the Canadian model remain international best practices today?

● (1800)

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: Canada's integration experience is desired by many other countries. One thing I've always argued that Canada does well is that, while it can be very difficult to start off, the situation gets better and better year over year. Our background is around refugees. I can't speak to the experience of all immigrants, but I'm sure a similar case could be made there. Part of this relates to key elements. It's not just about the programs and supports provided, or the strength of character of these individuals. It's also about the opportunity for things like permanent residency and citizenship.

We have been looking at census data and trying to understand the integration experience of refugees. What we're finding is that refugees are more likely to work in areas Canada needs, such as health care, manufacturing and the trades. Refugees, on average, tend to be younger than the overall population, and they're ready to work.

I said that those first 10 years are difficult, but the point is that they never plateau. It gets better and better. Within those first 10 years, while their incomes can be quite low, they increase by 31% and such.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Mr. Casasola.

Mr. Mason, I'd like to hear your comments on that.

[*English*]

Steve Mason: Sure. I'm happy to.

In our experience, Canada has been a leader in complementary pathways for refugee resettlement, a model that we at WUSC have been supporting other countries around the world to emulate, specifically through education pathways and economic pathways. As Michael said, we opened up these pathways for refugees to have permanent residency in Canada and to contribute through the education system and economically.

As for our experience, we've been running the student refugee program for almost 50 years, and there are thousands of success stories of refugees who came to Canada as first-year undergraduate students and are now pillars of Canadian society and core contributors to our economy.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Okay.

Speaking of refugees, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has frequently highlighted the importance of complementary pathways for refugees to access skills-based employment, education and mobility opportunities.

What measures could Canada consider to further strengthen complementary pathways while maintaining its commitment to refugee protection?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: Do you want to take that, Sandra?

Sandra Elgersma (Resettlement and Complementary Pathways Officer, Durable Solutions, Labour Mobility, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Sure.

This is a new area. Canada was a leader with the economic mobility pathways pilot. It was one of the first countries to implement a program for refugees coming in on labour pathways. We have certain principles set out.

It's important that these programs are in addition to other forms of protection, like resettlement and asylum. It's important that people have the opportunity to make independent decisions. There are certain protection considerations and that kind of thing, but the whole idea is to have more opportunity for refugees.

Canada has been very strong on this and made a very promising commitment at the Global Refugee Forum to turn the pilot it started into a permanent program.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, Ms. Elgersma.

My next question is about the Global Refugee Forum.

To your knowledge, are there any programs or models implemented in other countries that make it easier to integrate skilled refugees into the labour market and that could inspire Canadian decision-makers?

[*English*]

Steve Mason: In our experience, Canada has really been a leader, especially on the labour mobility pathways for refugees. We're actually inspiring other countries to look at what we're doing there and at how Canada is doing refugee integration.

To add to what Sandra was saying earlier, this program really does rely on standard and regular processing times for permanent residency. One of the challenges with the employment mobility pathway as structured is that the time frame for processing permanent residency started getting longer, trickling into a year and 18 months. For an employer who's making a hire, that's an unreasonable time to wait to get an employee on board. The recommendation we have is to tighten up that time frame to a six-month window.

● (1805)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: I don't have much time left, but I'm going to take the opportunity to ask you one last question.

In your opinion, how can governments, educational institutions and employees work together more effectively to enable newcomers to fully leverage their skills and contribute to Canada's economic growth?

[*English*]

Steve Mason: I'm happy to take an initial stab at that.

The pilots that we currently have in place are all heading in the right direction to allow that to happen. One of our experiences, just to say this really quickly, is that of working very closely through provincial authorities and provincial regulators, because at the provincial level they have a very strong knowledge of the core labour market needs and of where we cannot find Canadian talent to meet those needs.

This increased work at the provincial level through these programs, such as the provincial nominee program, is an essential tool in the tool box.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mason.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Joseph.

Mr. Beaulieu, you now have the floor for six minutes.

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This committee did a study on the fair distribution of asylum seekers. There was a lot of push-back from business owners. They said that the distribution idea was not acceptable, even though there are glaring labour needs in a number of regions.

Mr. Casasola, you say it's interesting in this regard, because it highlights the importance of a multipronged approach. I think your ideas are similar to those in the European migration pact in Europe, for example. I'm also thinking of the German model, whereby the distribution formula takes into account labour-related needs and the integration capacity of the various regions within the country. That's my understanding.

Would you agree that there should be a distribution of refugees that would take into account their training and the labour needs of the various regions of Canada?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: UNHCR was not part of the study that was recently conducted by the committee on this. I believe some of our remarks in relation to the study on Bill C-12 did refer to this.

In principle, the idea of relocation is not something we are opposed to, but again, there are all sorts of qualifiers. It would be better if one of my other colleagues—one of my legal colleagues—would provide you feedback on that. If you like, we could provide you feedback in writing.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: That would give us other points of view on this.

In your opinion, do refugees and asylum seekers face more barriers than other types of immigrants, such as those selected in economic programs, when it comes to having their qualifications recognized?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: Unfortunately, we don't have a line of sight on that. We're not service providers in Canada, and I can't really provide you feedback on the issues or challenges that refugee claimants or protected persons face. We do know statistically that with time, the situation does improve, but as for credential recognition, I'm not aware.

Steve Mason: Perhaps I'll add quickly to that.

In our work, we don't work with asylum seekers in Canada. We're working on bringing refugees into Canada as permanent residents. What we've learned on credential recognition is that the big benefit comes when you don't work at the level of the individual refugee but look at the upstream credential alignment.

Under that Nova Scotia pharmacy pilot, for example, the provincial regulator went to Jordan and assessed and accredited the training program the refugees had gone through in Jordan so that they would know that anybody who had gone through that program would have the necessary credentials to work in Canada after a three-month upskilling program. There was an immediate ability for them to have that credential recognized.

That's where you really need the input of the provincial government and the provincial regulator, whatever the sector may be, to ensure that can happen and that we avoid lengthy upskilling and retraining process times.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Has it ever happened that the credentials of the people you support were not recognized once they got here?

● (1810)

[*English*]

Steve Mason: We have not had that experience. Our pilots are all very new, but because the credentials are being recognized in advance from the regulator, there's a certainty. The first cohort, for example, came into Nova Scotia earlier this year, and they're all already working as full-time pharmacists in rural communities.

Michael Casasola: If I may add, this may be the next evolution in this model. We've seen it, for example, in Jordan. We've also seen similar examples in Kenya and in other places we're looking, where Canadian credentials are already being recognized by the institutions that are providing the training and trying to recruit from graduates of that program.

We're trying to ensure that refugees have access to these programs so they can apply on an equal playing field with other newcomers.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: In your opinion, could refugees who are already in the country, who have arrived for all kinds of reasons, constitute an attractive pool for skilled labour?

If so, is the problem of credential recognition important?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: What we're interested in and what the EMPP is about are unmet needs. Certainly, we're all in favour of the opportunities for refugees, refugee claimants or even permanent residents who came to Canada as refugees to find success in Canada. As for whether that would be a potential pool, again, it would depend on the circumstances.

A lot of the sectors that we've seen recruiting through the EMPP have been in the areas of health care.... I think almost half of the refugees came through working in health care, manufacturing and the skilled trades. These have been areas of chronic needs.

For training and upskilling, there are wonderful organizations, like Refugee Jumpstart, that are trying to help refugees in Canada, whether they are refugee claimants, protected persons or permanent residents, to make a liaison to where there are gaps in the economy.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Casasola.

Next we're going to the second round of questions and answers, which will be five minutes.

We will begin with Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today.

My questions are for you today, Mr. Miranda. I'm hugely impressed that you're here. You're here as an individual to talk to us about this very important topic.

In my mind, in my view, you did everything right. You went to high school, got good grades, applied to a good university in a very competitive program—the University of Western Ontario—and graduated from it. You did everything you were asked to do, and when you tried to enter the workforce, it took you two years and over 500 applications to get an entry-level job in this country.

How do you feel when you hear that the government is bringing in more foreign tech workers who are filling entry-level jobs?

Ethan Miranda: It's quite concerning, because I've seen how difficult it is for me and my fellow recent graduates to find a job. When I see more people coming in to compete for the jobs that I'm trying to apply for, it's a bit concerning, for sure.

Costas Menegakis: Would you agree that instead of importing talent, the Liberal government should incentivize companies to train young talent like you who are already here in Canada for these entry-level roles?

Ethan Miranda: Yes, I would.

Costas Menegakis: As we heard earlier, Canada's youth unemployment rate has spiked to about 14.3% nationally. In fact, in the greater Toronto area, where I live, it's pushing around 20%. Do you believe that immigration policy in Canada is currently aligned with helping young Canadians like you find work?

Ethan Miranda: It's certainly having an impact. I'm not really sure whether immigration policy is the main driver of the issue that I'm facing in particular, but when I see the government investigating whether or not they should bring in more foreign tech workers, that's a bit concerning to me because I think it could worsen the situation.

Costas Menegakis: You testified that you're making a low wage at a start-up currently, despite having an engineering degree from one of the prominent universities in the country. Do you believe the massive influx of foreign tech talent is keeping entry-level wages and jobs depressed for young talent like you?

● (1815)

Ethan Miranda: It's definitely having an impact. The degree to which it's affecting things, I'm not really sure. I haven't studied it, but I would say that it's definitely having an impact and is certainly making it harder for people like me to find a job.

Costas Menegakis: The Prime Minister spoke about the sacrifices that our youth will have to make. What sacrifices do you feel you and your peers are making?

Ethan Miranda: When I graduated university, I wanted to be a software developer and work in tech, on the engineering side. Since I graduated, I've realized that it's not really going to be possible for me. I've had to pivot and try to use other skills to get a position. This is the main sacrifice that I've made.

Costas Menegakis: Do you think it would be beneficial for our committee to invite more young people like you to hear stories directly from the young Canadians who are affected? We hear from a lot of experts here and a lot of organizations. Do you think it would be beneficial to hear from more young people like you?

Ethan Miranda: Yes, it would, because I think you'll see the scale of the issue. I'm just one person, but there are many more people like me who will tell you the exact same thing, especially in software engineering.

Costas Menegakis: Let me ask you this, if I may. If you could tell the Prime Minister one thing, what would you tell him?

Ethan Miranda: I would ask him to make sure that Canada's immigration policy is stress-tested to make sure that it doesn't worsen the job market for young people.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Thank you, Mr. Miranda.

Next we have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

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

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today.

I can appreciate some of your story, Mr. Miranda, because when I was a university student a long time ago, I ended up having a challenging time finding a job. That was over 20 years ago, so I appreciate your story and testimony today.

Our study, though, is about refugees, the system and how we can make it better. It is about jobs, the future and building our country, but it's focused on that in particular.

Mr. Casasola, I want to ask about the program that you were speaking about—the EMPP. You spoke about its success in helping refugees land in Canada. Are there any other best practices that you've seen in other countries that can help us improve the existing program, which you testified is very good already?

Michael Casasola: I'll invite Sandra to respond.

Sandra Elgersma: Thank you.

As has been mentioned, one thing we hear about from employers and hiring partners is predictability and speed. This is the same for hiring a refugee to fill your gap as it would be for another type of economic immigrant. That is an important feature that we also see in other countries.

In the early days, Canada was a pioneer, and there were only so many refugees being matched with jobs. However, once the U.K., Australia and others came along, you would have a refugee with a job offer at more than one place, and the quicker country often won the candidate, as it were. It's an important consideration.

As to other great practices, Steve was talking about being rooted in community. We've seen small communities where you have young people leaving and where there's ongoing trouble finding workers. That's where the EMPP has been very successful.

Those are some of the key things I'd highlight.

Sameer Zuberi: Through the EMPP and refugee system in general, we welcome people who are deeply vulnerable and who have a potential threat to their life or safety. This is part of our international obligations in respect of the refugee convention of 1951, which Canada has incorporated into the IRPA. The Supreme Court has said that this fulfills our responsibilities towards that particular international covenant. We're talking about this today to situate the conversation again.

You testified earlier that to have a more rapid speed, having people pass through in six months would be ideal. You noted that this would help those who are deeply vulnerable to be well-employed, land here and be integrated.

I open this up to you too, Mr. Mason. When these qualified people cannot avail themselves of this program, what happens to them? What differentiates them from those who do use the EMPP?

● (1820)

Michael Casasola: Please go ahead, Steve, if you have something to add.

To be clear, as you noted, Canada plays an important role in terms of having an asylum system that protects people who seek its protection, as per the convention. Also, it's a leading resettlement country for refugees who are among the most vulnerable and who have the greatest, most acute protection problems. This is a way to access the economic immigration program for other refugees who have the skills that Canada is looking for. This is additional. It's been a really important thing, but it's not for all refugees, of course.

Sameer Zuberi: Certainly, and nor should it be for all refugees, because as you pointed out, we fulfill the obligations independent of the economic landing of these people, who are deeply vulnerable.

I'd like to open up the last 20 seconds to get any further comments from one person.

Steve Mason: I'll just say quickly, as I said earlier, that the EMPP is a really important program. We would love to unlock the potential of the rest of the immigration system so that it's more open and accessible to refugees, because there are significant barriers. We're working through programs like the provincial nominee program to see how that may be possible so we can take more advantage of the refugee talent that is going to waste because, in their current context, they usually have no ability to access jobs or work.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mason.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

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

Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Overall, I'd like to keep going a bit on the issue of application processing times. In our constituency offices, we have a lot of problems. The processing times for asylum claims are several years.

Are you having those challenges as well?

We talked about a six-month processing time. That would be fantastic, but is it possible to get there?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: When we're referring to the asylum process, it's quite different from when we're talking about the selection of persons overseas.

I need to distinguish the people going before the Immigration and Refugee Board who make an initial claim and are waiting for a hearing but are able to work once they receive their work permit. What we're concerned about is when an employer in Canada wants to offer the possibility for a refugee to enter through an economic immigration program. When that wait is longer than six months, sometimes the employer is not interested anymore, and we lose that potential solution. That's our underlying concern.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: In terms of processing times for work permit renewal applications, there are all kinds of really absurd cases. Workers have been recruited by a company, and they're waiting for their work permit to be renewed. Almost every time, there are delays and problems.

Have you also seen this situation?

[*English*]

Michael Casasola: Unfortunately, I can't offer any comment on that because we don't work in that space.

Steve Mason: To add a point of clarification, we're really talking about people coming in and getting permanent residency status. The work permit is not one of the tools they're using to access these jobs. We don't work in that space of work permits or renewing work permits, because the pathway is a pathway to permanent residency.

[*Translation*]

Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, you talked about a pilot project in which you put businesses in contact with refugees who could meet their needs.

Can you tell us a bit more about that?

[*English*]

Steve Mason: We have a few examples. Just to reiterate it, the pharmacy pilot is the most promising example we have right now. The situation in Nova Scotia is such that there's a gap of around 250 pharmacy jobs. They've tried various strategies to fill them domestically, including through significant signing bonuses, but they can't find talent locally. The pathway to identify refugees who have the skill set that Nova Scotia needs and bring them over has been an immediate solution to the gaps, and it is now allowing pharmacies in rural communities to operate where before they could not.

● (1825)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mason.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

[*English*]

Since we have only about five minutes left, I'm going to give two and a half minutes to Mr. Davies and two and a half minutes to Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Davies, you have two and a half minutes.

Fred Davies: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to be really quick.

Mr. Mason, I'm really interested in how you have done the due diligence up front. The people coming into Canada are already on a pathway to permanent residency. We have a shortage of doctors in Canada—a serious shortage of doctors. Are you competing with other countries to find them? Have you had any people in the medical field who could have been brought here? Is there a competitiveness with other countries in the ecosystem?

Steve Mason: I think there is an increasing competitiveness as more countries get into this game. For example, the German government has been very aggressive on some aspects of labour mobility. They don't offer permanent residency, so Canada has a value-add that the German government doesn't have.

Fred Davies: Have you come across many medical doctors?

Steve Mason: There certainly is a cohort of trained medical doctors in the refugee community who could be targets. One of the things we're looking at right now is working at the provincial level to identify where the needs are and where they can't be filled domestically and figuring that out.

Fred Davies: Thank you.

I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Vincent Ho: Thank you.

We have the United Nations at this committee today. We have federally funded and taxpayer-funded organizations at this committee that are advocating to bring more refugees into Canada. Their testimony advocates for reducing backlogs and reducing the processing of high-skilled refugee applications from two years to two months.

Ethan, you're a 24-year-old computer science graduate from a reputable university. You've been looking for a job in your field for two years. Do you think the government's focus should instead be on reducing the time for you to get a job from two years to two months?

Ethan Miranda: Certainly, the government should be focusing on making sure that young Canadians can get entry-level positions where they can improve their skills.

Vincent Ho: Absolutely.

Months ago, the Liberal Prime Minister spoke to a room full of Canadian university students, and he told them to make more “sacrifices”. All the while, the Liberals, in their last budget, announced billions of dollars to attract foreign talent to Canada with absolutely nothing to address the youth unemployment crisis.

Do you think that you, your classmates and your friends have sacrificed enough?

Ethan Miranda: I don't really want to comment too much on how much I've sacrificed or how much other people have sacrificed, but I would definitely say that it's hard to be a recent graduate right now.

Vincent Ho: Do you think you've been left behind?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Miranda.

Thank you, Mr. Ho.

I was wrong. We have Mr. Fragiskatos for two and a half minutes.

You have two and a half minutes, please.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Miranda, I'm not just saying this because you're a Western graduate. I think you've handled yourself very well today. Unfortunately, you've been put in a position a few times where it's difficult for you to respond. You've been put in an awkward position in some ways, with all due respect to my colleagues. However, I'll leave that aside.

Are you working now?

Ethan Miranda: I am working right now, yes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Okay. That's great.

Ethan Miranda: I'm not working as a software engineer, though.

Peter Fragiskatos: I understand that, but at least with the time you've devoted to your studies—and with a lot of talent, I'm sure—I'm glad to hear that you are employed. I wish we could talk more. Maybe we could talk off-line, but I have limited time.

I'm going to move over to Mr. Casasola. It's actually the same question for Ms. Elgersma and Mr. Mason.

There's a bit of subtext to some of the arguments that have been presented here today. It's subtext we should do away with, and we should be very direct and ask.... I'll ask the direct question: Are refugees responsible for stopping Canadians from getting jobs?

Mr. Casasola, go ahead.

Michael Casasola: To be clear, refugees are permanent residents. Some are citizens. Canada has welcomed refugees as part of its history. It's part of Canada's DNA.

I don't know if any sort of correlation can be made between the experience of refugees finding employment...versus other sectors of the economy. We know they work hard, like everybody else. They contribute to Canada and they welcome citizenship.

● (1830)

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, sir. I have maybe 45 seconds left, but the point about contribution is an important one.

Go ahead, Mr. Mason and Ms. Elgersma, if there's an opportunity.

Steve Mason: I'll just say this is not an either-or situation; it's a yes-and situation.

Of course, we need to do both. We need to ensure that young Canadians have the opportunities they need. There are still going to be critical labour shortages in this country. We're not trying to manufacture these. These are driven by employers and the provinces, which know where their labour needs are. Those need to be filled.

We need to do both. We're not in opposition here; we're in agreement.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you.

Ms. Elgersma.

Sandra Elgersma: I would just add that our approach to this topic of global talent and attracting it is about how refugees can be included in that and participate on a level playing field with immigrants from other places, in essence.

Peter Fragiskatos: I think I have 20 seconds.

This does not have to be to the detriment of Canada. Canada can be a welcoming place. It always has been. I should be careful about that. We have seen real advances made in decades past, and we welcome people from all across the world.

There are challenges, certainly, in the Canadian economy, but as to the either-or, as you put it, Mr. Mason, it would be misplaced if we focused the conversation within that framework. Is that accurate?

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Fragiskatos. You're way over.

Thank you, Mr. Mason.

Peter Fragiskatos: I'll note that he nodded his head.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos.

Feel free to send in the answer to that. Anything formal can be sent in by letter and will be considered by this committee.

With that, I want to say a huge thank you to the excellent witnesses of the second panel. I also want to thank my colleagues for their excellent questions.

That ends this meeting today. Thank you.