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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz





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Monday, June 8, 2026

• (1100)

[English]

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

[Translation]

Welcome to meeting number 37 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

[English]

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, but our first panel for the first hour is in person.

I'd like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses and our members. These are just reminders, but I think it's always helpful.

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

[Translation]

I would remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

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

[English]

I will also remind everyone to please not speak over each other. It's hard for our interpreters to interpret, and it makes their jobs difficult.

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

Thank you for your co-operation.

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

I would now like to warmly welcome the witnesses for today's meeting. From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have with us Alexis Graham, acting assistant deputy minister, economic programs; and Carol McQueen, director general, settlement and integration policy.

Thank you both for being here today, and thank you very much for your service to our country.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, after which we'll proceed with rounds of questions.

I'll now invite Ms. Graham to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Please, go ahead. Your five minutes starts now.

**Alexis Graham (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Economic Programs, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for the invitation to appear.

Canada's ability to attract and retain global talent is an important part of building a strong economy, as outlined by the motion, but our approach needs to be targeted and thoughtful. It must support sustainable immigration levels, respond to labour market needs and complement the skills and potential of people who are already here in the country. That balance is especially important today.

We're seeing youth and newcomers face higher unemployment rates, while employers in key sectors report ongoing difficulty finding workers with the right skills and experience. Economic immigration is not a substitute for developing our domestic workforce, but rather it's another tool to advance priorities that directly benefit Canadians, including in the areas of housing, health care, infrastructure, defence and broader economic security.

• (1105)

[Translation]

All over the world, changing trade patterns and socio-economic conditions are creating both uncertainty and opportunities. It is vital that we position Canada so that it can be competitive when it comes to attracting highly skilled talent.

That is why budget 2025 launched the international talent attraction strategy. This strategy recognizes that people with high-demand skills are mobile. They are looking not only for opportunities for career advancement and competitive compensation, but also for places where they can put their skills to good use and build a good life.

[English]

In this context, immigration pathways are an enabler and an important one. Where processes are slow or overly complex, they can create friction. IRCC's role is to try to make the system as straightforward and responsive as possible. We want talented people to choose Canada with confidence.

Our permanent economic pathways have a fairly strong track record. From 2023 to 2025, express entry brought in more than 20,000 health care professionals and 48,000 skilled tradespeople. From 2024 to 2025, approximately 26,000 admissions were in digital technology and artificial intelligence-related occupations. We also introduced new express-entry categories in 2026 to bring in physicians, senior managers and researchers with Canadian work experience. These are intended to complement existing category-based selection in STEM fields, skilled trades, education, transportation, health care and social services.

We issued 391 invitations to apply to this physician category in the first draw. In addition, provinces and territories can use up to 5,000 federal admissions spaces to meet their need for more physicians.

[Translation]

Temporary pathways are also designed to facilitate the arrival of skilled workers in Canada. For example, in 2025, under the international mobility program, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or the IRCC, issued over 5,000 work permits for AI-related occupations.

[English]

We're continuing to refine our approaches. We're assessing lessons learned from complementary pathways, such as the economic mobility for skilled refugees. We're also exploring updates to express entry.

Canada is already a destination for highly skilled talent, and we believe these steps will help further strengthen our position in an increasingly competitive landscape. I would like to close by acknowledging that this work is a shared effort and that we are constantly trying to improve these approaches based on evidence, feedback and the lived experiences of newcomers, employers and communities.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your remarks, Ms. Graham.

We will now begin the first round of questions and answers, which will be six minutes.

First up is Ms. Rempel Garner, please.

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

Ms. Graham, in the last year, per the lobbying registry, Universities Canada, the U15 and multiple other universities repeatedly met with your former boss, who is now the associate deputy minister of economic programs. After this lobbying, in this year's immigration levels plan, there's now no limit on how many graduate students universities can bring into Canada. There's also no longer a requirement for an attestation letter from the provinces, and even though the Auditor General recently found rampant gaps in your screening, your department has reduced processing times for some of these permits down to 14 days. All of this happened in the middle of a massive youth unemployment crisis.

Why did you create a full exemption for public university graduate students from the study permit cap rather than simply slot them into overall allocations, which still include diploma mills that are rife with abuse?

• (1110)

**Alexis Graham:** In terms of the exemptions, what I can say is that the goal here is to really focus on those high-quality, highly skilled students who have potential to contribute to Canada over the long term through permanent residence programs.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

You talk about high-quality, highly skilled students. I think there are a lot of high-quality, highly skilled Canadian students who would love to have those graduate student spots and that funding. Are you saying that those highly skilled Canadian spots should just automatically go into a no-cap permit program for foreign students? That's what it seems like with this change.

**Alexis Graham:** The purpose of providing that exemption is to ensure that we're not missing talent or leaving talent on the table, and not able to capitalize on the benefits of those international students at the highly skilled—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** There are a lot of Canadian students who don't see it that way. I see it like a bit of a shell game where Canadian youth are the losers. Provinces cap tuition. The universities come to your department and lobby you really hard. They ask for more international students to juice their revenue, and then you remove the cap on graduate students.

With AI technological disruption, why wouldn't you just push to train or re-skill more Canadian kids instead of lift the cap on graduate students?

**Alexis Graham:** Maybe I'll just note that right now, as already studied by the committee, only 44% of the cap is actually being met. There are many allocations that are not being taken advantage of by universities. Those student numbers are quite low compared to several years ago.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Don't you think that universities and their lobbyists, which are very powerful, would have more impetus to lobby for a better upskill training program if you didn't just lift the cap in the middle of a youth jobs crisis?

**Alexis Graham:** There is certainly space for domestic workforce strategies and a focus on younger people. This is more the role of ESDC rather than an IRCC question.

In terms of the techniques and the approaches to that, there may be other people who could better answer that question.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** In 2025—about a year ago—you personally met with Restaurants Canada. They lobbied you on temporary foreign worker programs.

How many labour unions have you or your former boss personally met with to counterbalance the universities' influence on your public policy, as well as groups like Restaurants Canada?

**Alexis Graham:** I wouldn't have that right off the top of my mind, but I'd certainly be happy to go back into—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Do you remember any trade unions? How about individual kids?

**Alexis Graham:** We've met with the construction sector, with Restaurants Canada.... We've met with tourism as well.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Did you meet with anybody who said, "Hey, you're bringing in too many people and a bunch of our workers can't find jobs now," or was it just people who were advocating for more foreign labour to depress wages?

**Alexis Graham:** The majority of the conversations are around what the gaps are within these particular industries and focused more on what type of talent they are struggling with obtaining.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** The conversations are bringing in more foreign labour, as opposed to upskilling for Canadians. Is that correct?

**Alexis Graham:** The conversations can be a mix of things. Sometimes it is, of course, focused on how to tap into international markets—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** You've been in your role for a while now. Have you personally met with any out-of-work Canadian graduate students? We had one at our committee last.... Have you proactively reached out to union leaders and said, "Hey, we might not have a balance in terms of lobbying," or are you just taking the universities' shell game lobbying into your no-cap policies?

**Alexis Graham:** I think that's an excellent suggestion and I appreciate it. I have been in this role for about three months now, so I have been trying to figure out what the right engagement is. I do take your point and appreciate that.

• (1115)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** You didn't consult with any trades unions. You guys have mostly met with universities. Do you think there should be a set amount or a set requirement...?

I'll put it this way. Would you recommend to the federal government that instead of lifting the cap on graduate students, we abolish the diploma mill spots for foreign student visas, which are still rife with abuse?

**Alexis Graham:** Maybe I'll start with the meetings we have. We do meet with a variety of different industry stakeholders and labour unions. Again, I can go through our schedules of people we've met with and see if there needs to be greater diversity. I think that's a valid point to raise.

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

Thank you, Ms. Rempel Garner.

We will next go for six minutes to Ms. Sodhi.

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

Thank you to our officials for appearing before the committee today.

My first question is for Ms. Graham.

Ms. McQueen, if you would like to add in, you're more than welcome to.

Canada is facing increasing competition from other countries for highly skilled workers, researchers and innovators. At the same time, global uncertainty has created new opportunities for countries that can offer stability, opportunity and an overall welcoming immigration system like ours. How is the government's new talent attraction strategy positioning Canada to compete for the world's best and brightest?

**Alexis Graham:** The international talent strategy is really a set of actions that is designed to facilitate and retain highly skilled immigrants as a complement to the domestic workforce. In this case, the overarching objective is to really increase that share of highly skilled or top talent within that reduced overall immigration envelope to support areas like STEM, AI infrastructure and major projects—all the things I outlined in my opening remarks.

In terms of what we've done so far in terms of enhancing that, we have tried to ensure that all of those international talent strategy occupations are included in express entry categories. That means that the way we do the selection prioritizes those key occupations. We've also introduced 14-day processing for Ph.D. students and their families and facilitated, on an expedited basis, the first wave of research chairs, post-docs and Ph.D. students participating in Global Impact+, which is the research initiative being currently led by ISED.

We're also preparing to launch a targeted advertising campaign internationally so that people are aware of what's available in Canada and so there can be those closer links to the great life and opportunities here, and links to employers as well. We are seeing pretty good results so far, although, of course, there's always a lot more that we're going to be monitoring to see if the strategy is working. Right now, about 27.8% of the federal skilled permanent resident arrivals have these intended occupations that fall under that category. The target is 30%, so we're meeting that.

In terms of international students' arrivals in public-designated learning institutions at the master's level or above, we have 13.4%, and the target is 13%. We are seeing a promising trajectory in the work we're doing in this space. Of course, this does complement our existing pathways. There's the global skills strategy already in place. There is express entry. I mentioned category-based selection tools and things like that.

I hope that gives a bit of an overview.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** That was a great answer. Thank you for that.

I wonder if you're able to update the committee on IRCC's efforts to attract H-1B visa holders from the United States, for people who may be looking at Canada as an attractive option at the moment.

**Alexis Graham:** This is an interesting cohort, and there's a lot of reporting in the news around the increased fees and what that could mean. We are working very closely with colleagues abroad, in the United States and our network, to conduct targeted outreach, engagement and promotional activities within the U.S. to ensure that those with talent are aware of these opportunities. We work closely with Global Affairs on that. We have migration outreach officers as well.

The most common holders of H-1B visas already work in occupations that can fairly easily access expedited work permits through the global skill strategy and the global talent stream that is run by ESDC. The pathways are in place. That doesn't necessarily mean that we're not analyzing options. In fact, we are, but no decisions on further actions have been made to date. It is definitely an area of interest, and we do see Americans and H-1B visa holders who are already able to come to Canada.

• (1120)

**Amandeep Sodhi:** As we know, AI is growing fast. The CBC recently reported that the global talent stream could be useful in furthering Canada's economic and industry development in the field of AI.

Are you able to speak further to this? We have 40 seconds.

**Alexis Graham:** I would say that many of these occupations already fall, again, within these global skills strategy pathways that we have, like software developers, data scientists and computer engineers. These are all occupations that have access to those expedited pathways.

To give you some stats, since we're running short on time, in 2025, we admitted over 9,700 permanent residents intending to work in occupations associated with AI, and an additional 5,000 work permits were issued for those occupations.

**Amandeep Sodhi:** Thank you so much.

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

Thank you, Ms. Graham.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have six minutes.

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

Hello everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with you.

I thank the witnesses for joining us.

Mr. Graham, I want to begin by asking a few questions about the economic mobility pathways pilot, or EMPP.

Can you tell us a little bit about how that worked?

**Alexis Graham:** I'm sorry. What pilot project are you asking about?

**Alexis Deschênes:** I'm talking about the economic mobility pathways pilot project.

**Alexis Graham:** Okay. You're talking about the EMPP.

**Carol McQueen (Director General, Settlement and Integration Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you very much for the question.

That project has been very successful to date. Since 2019, we have attracted approximately 1,300 people, including principal applicants and their families. As you know, we worked very closely with non-governmental organizations to facilitate job matching as part of this pilot project. So far, there has been a very high placement rate in several key sectors, including the health care sector, so the pilot project worked very well.

**Alexis Deschênes:** What do you mean by a "high placement rate"?

**Carol McQueen:** There was an almost 100% placement rate since NGOS found jobs for the people who came to Canada as part of this pilot project before they arrived.

**Alexis Deschênes:** In what regions of Canada was the pilot project offered?

**Carol McQueen:** It was available all across Canada, so the provinces could choose candidates from among the refugees who were part of the pilot project. However, there was also a federal pathway that was open across the country.

**Alexis Deschênes:** So it was available across the country.

Were the provinces the ones recruiting people through this program or was it employers?

**Carol McQueen:** As for how the pilot project worked, technically, the people who were arriving had to have a job offer and NGOs helped them to secure such an offer. The NGOs served as intermediaries between the employer and the people abroad.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Was the pilot project aimed at people abroad or asylum seekers?

**Carol McQueen:** It was not aimed at asylum seekers. It was aimed at refugees abroad.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Are we talking about refugees in other countries who did not go through the process here?

**Carol McQueen:** The economic mobility pathways pilot was aimed at refugees abroad.

• (1125)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Did the work the NGOs were doing in the other countries involve making a list of the refugees' skills and experience?

**Carol McQueen:** Yes, they also helped to connect those refugees with Canadian employers.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Is there a similar program for asylum seekers and refugees who are here in Canada?

**Carol McQueen:** For asylum seekers who are here, the IRCC worked for a time, in 2024 and 2025, with a few major employers across Canada, including Tim Hortons, to try to place people.

However, these days, we generally leave that work up to other organizations.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Who is responsible for doing that work now?

**Carol McQueen:** We are continuing to work with our partners, such as Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, and others, but it is mainly up to the provinces to do that work. Since asylum seekers are mainly taken care of by the provinces, this falls primarily under their purview.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Are you checking to see whether the provinces are actually funding services to help asylum seekers find employment?

**Carol McQueen:** We have a general idea because we work with the provinces. We have an idea of the types of services that they offer. However, we issue work permits to asylum seekers, so that they can get a job in Canada.

**Alexis Deschênes:** What is happening with the services offered by the provinces?

**Carol McQueen:** I can't comment on that because the situation varies from province to province. However, we know that some provinces provide emergency housing for asylum seekers, as well as language training and other services.

**Alexis Deschênes:** As far as you know, are the provinces providing funding for employment integration services?

**Carol McQueen:** I can't answer that question because it deals with provincial services.

**Alexis Deschênes:** When I do the rounds of my riding and talk to groups that work with immigrants of all kinds, they tell me that the funding is aimed more at helping people get permanent residency. I am told that it is more difficult for asylum seekers to get help.

**Carol McQueen:** It is also important to note that, when asylum seekers receive a decision from the board and become protected persons in Canada, they then have access to federal settlement services. At that point, we can provide them with some support in preparing to work in Canada and so on.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. McQueen and Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

That completes our first round.

We will now move on to our second round of five minutes for questions and answers. We will begin with Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses.

Ms. Graham, you talked about an advertising program for international students coming to Canada. How much is being spent on that advertising?

**Alexis Graham:** The advertising campaign that I referred to is actually a broader campaign than for just students. It's for talent attraction more universally.

**Brad Redekopp:** Do you have the numbers? Do you have the cost of that?

**Alexis Graham:** I—

**Brad Redekopp:** If you don't have it, you can table it with us later.

**Alexis Graham:** Let me not mislead you. I don't have that number in front of me.

**Brad Redekopp:** Perhaps you can table it with us.

**Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

I want to come back to the grad students being exempt from the caps issue. Stats Canada shows that international bachelor's and master's graduates have significantly lower rates of jobs matching their education level compared with equivalent Canadian grads.

Why exempt grad streams from caps when your own labour market data suggests that many will compete with unemployed young Canadians rather than fill unique shortages?

**Alexis Graham:** I'm happy to table it, yes.

**Alexis Graham:** The logic behind this is that people who have master's-level and Ph.D.-level experience typically do well in the labour market and have skills that can contribute to Canada over the long term. I'm just going—

**Brad Redekopp:** Stats Canada says there are 431,000 unemployed youth in Canada right now, and there are 660,000 open study permits in Canada at the same time. What do you tell an unemployed young person when they see that you're aggressively looking to bring in people to compete with them for jobs?

**Alexis Graham:** I do very much understand. I don't want to downplay the challenges around youth unemployment. This is a very pressing issue and something that a lot of people are concerned about—

• (1130)

**Brad Redekopp:** The actions you're taking are directly impacting those youth who are looking for jobs.

**Alexis Graham:** I would say that this is a very complex issue, and immigration has a role to play in this. That is why there has been sustained effort to bring down those numbers over time. Yes, there are exemptions to the cap, but the numbers around students in general have decreased significantly over the past year.

**Brad Redekopp:** The number of students is still higher than the number of unemployed youth in Canada, which is a problem.

I want to go to the Auditor General's report. She flagged weaknesses in IRCC's response to the study permit fraud and to non-compliance. With this program, you've removed a key control—that is, the provincial attestation letters aren't required for these grad students.

Plus, you're committing to process these files in 14 days. My office has files that take months and years to process from IRCC. What shortcuts are being taken by the department to get the processing down to 14 days?

**Alexis Graham:** In terms of the integrity measures that are being taken, there still is integrity associated with these applications. We have a letter of acceptance and a compliance mechanism where that needs to be validated. That still happens.

**Brad Redekopp:** Are there security checks done?

**Alexis Graham:** There are security checks, yes, with all applications.

**Brad Redekopp:** Just on that, you can do a security check in 14 days, when it takes months or years to do one for other files. How does that work?

**Alexis Graham:** I'm not an expert on the security validation elements of these particular applications, so again, I'll refrain from misleading the committee by—

**Brad Redekopp:** Fair enough, but you're a senior person of this department working on these programs. Were these questions not asked? To me, this seems like an obvious question that would be discussed.

**Alexis Graham:** Again, I'm sorry that I don't have that answer. I have been in this role for three months, and I'm still going on a learning curve related to the student program in particular.

**Brad Redekopp:** Could you maybe table with the committee the information on how you've integrated security screening into this 14-day process?

**Alexis Graham:** I would be happy to do that, of course.

**Brad Redekopp:** All right.

How do you ensure that rapid approvals don't compromise security screening or genuine academic intent, especially when the lobbying registry shows heavy pressure from education stakeholders who benefit from volume?

**Alexis Graham:** Could you repeat that question? I'm sorry. I'm deaf in my left ear, and I missed that first part.

**Brad Redekopp:** Let me ask you a different question.

A lot of the costs for education come from the provinces. When you implemented this no-cap system on grad students, did you discuss that with the provinces ahead of time?

**Alexis Graham:** There were engagements done at the time to discuss the no-cap situation, yes. I wasn't there, so I couldn't tell you exactly what that engagement entailed.

**Brad Redekopp:** Can you table some of that information with us?

**Alexis Graham:** Yes, I believe we can.

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

Thank you, Ms. Graham.

Next, we proceed to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Your five minutes begins now.

**Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.):** Chair, thank you very much.

Thank you, Ms. Graham and Ms. McQueen, for being here.

Ms. Graham, you've touched on this a few times in your testimony, but I wonder if you can offer to the committee what the numbers are with respect to international students. There has been a decline. Do you have information on that? I think it's quite relevant for the discussion.

**Alexis Graham:** Let me just take a peek and see if I can find a statistic exactly for you in this space. I do have one here. I can say that in January 2026, the number of arrivals of people with student permits was down 37% compared to January 2025. That's just a month-to-month comparison, one year apart. That is a significant decrease in terms of the number of arrivals.

As you know, in terms of the utilization rates of the allocations within provinces, even though there is a cap, this is not being fully utilized. Last year, 44% was being used, which means there's still a significant number more that universities and provinces would have available to them to fill those spots.

• (1135)

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

This is another point that I hope you can elaborate on. Here, too, you've also touched on it. That is the point about the post-secondary system in general. I believe we can do both things. We can attract talent because doing so is fundamentally important for the economy, but supporting domestic students, Canadian students, is also fundamentally important for the economy. Beyond that, it's just the right thing to do.

Can you elaborate on that point?

**Alexis Graham:** International students have always been an important part of the system. They provide different perspectives as well. They contribute different types of knowledge, not only from an economic perspective but also from a social perspective. The way the programs are designed is to have a focus on this idea of a quality student, ensuring that they come in and then are offered opportunities, potentially, to stay, as long as they're in compliance with all of the rules and regulations, in jobs that are aligned with our labour market needs.

Once they have those experiences in our labour market, temporarily, they have an opportunity to apply through express entry. Not everybody who comes to Canada temporarily is intended to stay. Not everybody wants to stay. Not every international student wants to stay, even, but this is part of how the system is designed to enable that continuum from student to permanent resident when there is that alignment of skills and experience that will contribute to our labour market over the long term.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Okay.

You also spoke about the fact that many international students, while spots have been made available, aren't taking these up. You offered that either in the opening testimony or in response to one of the questions. Can you expand on that?

**Alexis Graham:** The federal government sets a national cap, and then each of the provinces is allowed an allocation. They are the ones that determine where those allocations go in terms of which designated learning institutions and the numbers. What we're seeing is that those allocations aren't all being used, which means that universities are not recruiting the full number they have within that allocation.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Thank you very much. That's also a very important context.

I'd like to ask about a point about the temporary foreign worker program that came up.

Are you able to share with the committee the percentage of the overall workforce in Canada composed of temporary foreign workers?

**Alexis Graham:** I don't have that particular statistic on me, but I'll be very happy to table that with the committee.

**Peter Fragiskatos:** Please do. I believe it's around 1%, but getting that update would be important.

Finally, in the 45 seconds I have left, what message do you want to leave the committee with today? What do you think is fundamental for us to understand about the work the department is doing?

**Alexis Graham:** The fundamental work right now is around facilitation, navigation and supporting those who have this talent and wish to come, in a way that's going to be as expeditious and as good a client experience as possible while making sure we are maintaining discipline within the overall immigration system.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Mr. Fragiskatos and Ms. Graham.

[*Translation*]

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

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

Under the Canada-Quebec Accord, Quebec is responsible for all matters relating to the selection criteria for economic immigrants. Under the Constitution, Quebec is also responsible for managing education and prior learning assessments.

Does that complicate things for you?

**Alexis Graham:** That's an interesting question.

I'm going to answer in English so that I can express myself more clearly.

[*English*]

There are very clear roles and responsibilities based on the Canada-Quebec accord. I wouldn't necessarily characterize it as complicating things for us. It is just another set of rules we apply and another relationship that is very important in terms of engagement so that we have close collaboration with MIFI and others in Quebec, and so that we can be responsive to those needs and work within the avenues we have available to us.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

**Alexis Deschênes:** There is still a need for coordination though.

Wouldn't it be easier to just repatriate all immigration powers to Quebec?

From what I understand, Quebec and Ottawa have to hold discussions, and things don't always go smoothly when it comes to coordination between the two.

[*English*]

**Alexis Graham:** Coordination is key, but this is not unique. It is something we need to do with all provinces and territories. While Quebec has a very specific selection authority and operates their program differently, there are provincial nominee programs and selection authorities that are similarly distinct from those of other provinces.

I think your point is about being very well coordinated and having close engagement to ensure that everybody is getting the outcomes intended with immigration. This is where we are always open to new ideas and to working with our colleagues in different ways in order to enhance that facilitation and get the labour market outcomes that are good for Quebec and good for Canada.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[English]

We have five minutes for Mr. Menegakis, beginning right now.

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

Thank you, officials, for appearing before us today.

Ms. Graham, you spoke about missing talent. You also mentioned launching an international advertising campaign to try to attract people.

How many young Canadians did you meet with before making a decision like that?

**Alexis Graham:** How many young Canadians have I personally met with?

**Costas Menegakis:** Yes. Here's the situation: There are young Canadians in this country who are going to good universities, one of whom appeared before us in the last meeting we had. They've done everything right. They went to school. This particular gentleman went to an excellent university and graduated from a very competitive program. He's a very intelligent young man. He had to make 500 applications and ended up finding a job outside his field, barely making above minimum wage. You're launching an international campaign to draw more people into the country who are going to compete against our Canadian youth.

I'm wondering whether you have met with any Canadian youth. Have you heard their concerns?

**Alexis Graham:** I have not, personally, in my three months in this role, met with Canadian youth, but I very much understand your point and think it's a great idea. I would be very happy to put that on my list of things.

I will just say that the reality for these people is difficult. We're sympathetic. This is a very complex issue, but overall the numbers are going down.

**Costas Menegakis:** I have limited time.

I know you want to say that the numbers are going down. Here's where they're not going down: The number of Canadian youth trying to find employment is not going down. Canadian youth unemployment is going up, largely due, in part, to the decisions your department has made under the auspices and guidance of the Liberal government that's in place.

I have another question for you.

We know youth unemployment is high. They're underemployed. Low-wage LMIA approvals went from 15,000 in 2020 to 50,000 in

2024. These are entry-level jobs. Recently, Tim Hortons, which is renowned for using IRCC as a human resources department, decided to hire 10,000 Canadians.

If a corporation can flip a switch and find Canadian workers, doesn't that show that the TFW program is less about labour shortages and more about the influence lobbyists have when they meet people from your department?

**Alexis Graham:** I just want to clarify that the temporary foreign worker program is actually run by ESDC. The design parameters of those labour market impact assessments and the tightening measures around who has access and which types of employers in which regions are all the responsibilities of that particular department.

**Costas Menegakis:** Thank you for highlighting that.

You understand that lobbyists have money. They can lobby pretty hard because they're being paid to lobby the government. They have objectives that are not necessarily the same objectives we should have here in Parliament or that you should have in your department: bring in labour, lower costs and find cheaper labour. When we bring in these folks, they take jobs from Canadians. Canadian youth don't have that kind of money.

Do you think it's right for lobbyists to even speak with IRCC officials? I believe it's totally wrong.

If you really want to know what's happening on the ground, meet with Canadians or have a bipartisan meeting with all parliamentarians to be more informed about what we're hearing from Canadians in our offices every single day, including—I might add—over last weekend when I was back home. There's a lot of information that would be very useful for you. We're not paid by lobbyists or representing lobbyists. Lobbyists are representing people who want to reduce their costs.

• (1145)

**Alexis Graham:** There are many people we meet with at the officials level—ministers all across the system who—

**Costas Menegakis:** I've been here for a year. Nobody has ever called me to say, "Mr. Menegakis, you're a member of Parliament. What are you hearing?" I would think this is something you should be doing.

Would you agree or disagree that you should converse with parliamentarians?

**Alexis Graham:** Of course. We always very much enjoy these committee experiences where we get to converse with you.

You're right. There are a lot of dimensions to these complex issues, and the more voices we can hear the more we're able to triangulate to solutions that are going to be beneficial.

**Costas Menegakis:** What would you say to Canadian youth today who are struggling to work even in entry-level jobs? How about that young man—somebody who went to university, got their training and expects to have some kind of entry-level job in the field for which they studied?

What do you have to say to them when they know you are being lobbied heavily to bring in talent from outside the country while we have an abundance of Canadian talent right here that can fill those jobs?

**Alexis Graham:** I would start by saying that these issues are real and very complex. I would also say that immigration continues to have a role to play in this economy, in particular in building certain sectors. There are real labour market shortages that cannot be filled by Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much, Ms. Graham and Mr. Menegakis.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

**Costas Menegakis:** Thank you.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to refocus what we're actually speaking about today. We had a motion that was adopted by this committee, and we're here to talk about the strategies to attract global talent in order to make our immigration policies help build the country and support the Canadian economy. I know you're getting a lot of questions that relate to ESDC, which are completely not in your purview. I thank you for entertaining those questions, although I'm sure they should be redirected to ESDC directly instead of to you.

To focus on some of what we've heard already, there have been some comments brought forth about lobbying as it relates to immigration policies, in particular to grad students and our policies regarding grad students. Could you flesh out a little bit how you actually make decisions when it comes to policies relating to grad students and immigration?

Is lobbying the only input that you're taking in, or are there other inputs when you create those policies?

**Alexis Graham:** We look at a variety of different inputs, of course, when making decisions.

Let me also remind committee members of the process. It is the department that brings different information sources and meets with a variety of different types of stakeholders and lobbyists. There are people who fall within that formal definition of "lobbyist", but they, by far, are not the most substantial number of people we meet with.

We have advisory bodies, like the council of newcomers. We talk to employers directly. We talk to employees directly. There is a variety of different engagements we have. We talk to provinces and territories, communities, all of these types of organizations and actors within the system. We also look at research, and we have research done for us on specific questions to see what the right policy approach is. Then we compile advice. Often, we provide a series of options for the minister to consider. Then it is the minister who makes the final decision on any particular issue.

• (1150)

**Sameer Zuberi:** I appreciate how you have so many different inputs before creating any policy. Therefore, the suggestion that lob-

byists alone are directing the policy of immigration is really unfounded.

We heard some feedback in this committee about whether you are listening to members. When we are having our committee sessions, are department officials looking at what we are doing here each and every meeting?

**Alexis Graham:** The answer is yes. We are very happy that they're televised, to be able to track the information. We have people who come to these sessions on a regular basis to observe and provide reports about the nature of the discussions and the nature of the witnesses, the people who are here. We definitely pay close attention to what you're doing.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Each and every member would be well heard when they're asking questions.

**Alexis Graham:** I would like to think yes.

**Sameer Zuberi:** I want to focus on the economic mobility pathways pilot in the minute and a half that's left. What are the lessons you have learned and what are the main takeaways from the EMPP program during its time? What is your intent for this program into the future?

**Carol McQueen:** I think it's an amazing program because it has proved that refugees around the world have capacities, work experience and abilities that can enable them to qualify for some of our economic programs, so it gives them another pathway to be able to potentially come to Canada. It was a pilot, so we're studying how it has worked. We see very much that having the NGOs that helped with the job matching was a very critical component of the program. We were also very pleased to see that we could in fact attract high-quality immigrants in some of the health sectors and nurses and things like that, where we were able to fill certain labour market gaps, most notably in some more remote areas in the health sector.

So far it's been a success. However, it's a fairly labour-intensive program, so we're still studying the results of it.

**Sameer Zuberi:** Does it help fulfill international obligations towards refugees?

**Carol McQueen:** Yes, certainly, in part because, as you probably know, the actual spaces for refugees around the world are in quite serious decline. Canada is a world leader in terms of the number of refugees it takes in, but finding alternative pathways for skilled refugees gives some hope of opportunities where they can qualify for other types of legal migration pathways.

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

Thank you, Ms. McQueen.

Because we have limited time left, I'll be giving three and a half minutes to the Conservatives and three and a half minutes to the Liberals.

Mr. Redekopp, your three and a half minutes start now.

**Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

Ms. Graham, we've been speaking a lot about attracting foreigners to come to Canada to study different things. Has the department ever conducted a comparative cost-benefit analysis of investing in equivalent resources? We have entire departments advertising programs and whatever. It's the difference between investing equivalent resources into Canadian skills training and getting Canadian students into university, rather than going to the international markets.

**Alexis Graham:** In terms of workforce development investments, that's more of an ESDC lead. Actually, it's entirely ESDC-led.

**Brad Redekopp:** Just to be clear, has your department done any cost-benefit analysis on attracting Canadian students rather than going internationally?

**Alexis Graham:** I do not know the answer to that question.

**Brad Redekopp:** All right.

Given that the lobbying registry showed you've taken a significant number of meetings with businesses and organizations that want more foreign student permits, how can you assure this committee that no policy decisions on exemptions were influenced by the volume of university meetings versus those with worker representation?

**Alexis Graham:** We engage with so many different stakeholders. What you see on the lobbying registry is a snapshot from that particular group of individuals, that particular cohort. I would just note that universities are obviously a key player in this ecosystem. They're important actors. I understand your point around financial gain and the importance of international students for the survival of some of their organizations, but they do provide essential education to Canadians and to international students in support of filling those labour market gaps.

• (1155)

**Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

On this exemption that we've been speaking about, what measurable labour market outcomes will IRCC track to evaluate whether the graduate exemption was the right choice?

**Alexis Graham:** In terms of measurement, we would look at what labour market fields those graduates enter into. For example, if one of those individuals is going into a health care field, from our perspective we would consider that a success, because that is a field where there is a long-term labour market shortage in Canada.

**Brad Redekopp:** Is it something that the department monitors on a regular basis, then?

**Alexis Graham:** We are starting to come up with those frameworks in terms of what those measurable outcomes are, and those are things that are evergreen. We look at measurement frameworks, and we revise them on a regular basis. Some of them are part of our departmental reporting frameworks and our program information profiles. Other parts of that end up being reported on websites.

We are very interested in measuring the outcomes and do look at those on a regular basis to see how we really are able to tell that story to Canadians and to make sure that we are trying to achieve those objectives.

**Brad Redekopp:** I would like to circle back because you said in my previous round that you could give us some undertakings. Just to clarify it from a time perspective, it would be nice if we could have those in four weeks or something like that. Does that seem reasonable to you?

**Alexis Graham:** I believe that seems reasonable, yes.

**Brad Redekopp:** How much time do I have left?

**The Chair:** You have two seconds. Thank you, Mr. Redekopp.

Thank you, Ms. Graham.

Next, we have three and a half minutes for Mr. Jeneroux.

Mr. Jeneroux, your time starts now.

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

I have two quick questions. I want to talk to a bit about the global talent stream when it comes to the recently announced AI strategy. Before getting to that, I'm hoping that you can give a bit of an update on the efforts to attract the H-1B visa holders from the U.S., who might be looking at Canada as an attractive opportunity at this moment.

**Alexis Graham:** Maybe I can describe a little bit about how the missions work.

We have a number of missions based in the United States. They are based in major cities. We have immigration officers there. We also have the trade commissioner service. We work in those markets to try to provide information to employers, to individuals and to industries that may have these H-1B visa holders, to let them know that if they're interested in coming to Canada, we have fast pathways for them to do that. The global skills strategy is the one that kind of comes to mind, but we also have complementary permanent resident pathways that would likely enable a lot of these people to compete for those permanent resident spots, given their experience and background, etc.

We work with that kind of group and that network of individuals in those missions to get that information out and continue to promote Canada as a destination of choice. Most of those visa holders would be in these occupations that can have that fast lane in both the temporary and permanent spaces.

**Matt Jeneroux:** For the global talent stream, it was reported just last week that the newly announced AI strategy could be helpful in the economic and industry development field of AI. I'm hoping that you could speak a little bit about that goal and the global talent stream.

**Alexis Graham:** Yes, that was part of the AI strategy, and that would be an expansion of the global talent stream. The global talent stream is a list that is administered by ESDC. On that list is a fast lane for certain occupations that are in high demand and that are able to contribute to those key industries and key government priorities. We will see what the occupations will be in terms of that expansion. Immigration is there to support from a work permit processing perspective. Then again, we will try to facilitate those who wish to stay if they meet the very competitive bar that we have through express entry.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux, and thank you, Ms. Graham.

That wraps up our first hour of testimony for today's meeting.

I want to thank the witnesses for their time and for their excellent contributions.

I want to thank all my colleagues for their great questions. I think we put a lot of excellent testimony on the record for our study.

We're now going to suspend so our current witnesses can leave, and then we'll come back for our second round.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

**The Chair:** Welcome back, everyone, to hour two of our immigration committee today.

[*Translation*]

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

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

[*English*]

On Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: 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*]

I will also do my best to let you know when you have one minute left.

This is a reminder that all comments should be directed through the chair.

I would now like to formally welcome our witnesses.

From HVACR Workers of Ontario, UA Local 787, I'd like to warmly welcome Mr. Andrew Tarr, business manager and financial secretary. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

From L'Hirondelle, Welcoming and Integration Services for Immigrants, we welcome Manel Rekik, general director, who is appearing by video conference.

[*English*]

From U15 Canada, we have James Hammond, director of public affairs. You are warmly welcomed as well.

Each one of you will have up to five minutes to give opening remarks, after which we will proceed with rounds of questions.

I'm now going to begin with Mr. Tarr.

I invite you, Mr. Tarr, to start your opening statements for five minutes. Your time begins now.

**Andrew Tarr (Business Manager and Financial Secretary, HVACR Workers of Ontario, UA Local 787):** Good afternoon. I'm Andrew Tarr, business manager with HVACR Workers of Ontario, UA Local 787.

I represent 5,538 building service professionals—313A refrigeration and air-conditioning mechanics, and 313D residential air-conditioning mechanics, pipe welders and gas technicians. I've been in this position for 14 years. Prior to this, I was a business agent for three years. I worked within the joint union-management training department for another three years with apprenticeships. Our main office is in Brampton, but we represent refrigeration workers right across Ontario.

Today I hope to provide a quick insight into what is happening at the ground level with immigration, particularly work permits. It's no secret that there's a feared labour shortage and that governments at all levels are working to make sure people are aware of the trades. Unfortunately, with all the hard work, there's a major disconnect between the levels of government and failures in the work permit system.

I've attached with my submission two examples of issues—not the most recent, but the easiest ones to find. They're work permits that have been supplied to me of people who are trying to get into the union.

The first work permit is an open work permit. The person who has that work permit can't get work other than in the sex trades, and they're limited in taking any training. The second work permit was issued to a person who I believe was sponsored here by a company. They come from Australia, and they claim that they are experienced in the field. They got the work permit, but they had to stay with the company within Ontario.

On the first work permit, the person claimed they had experience in Ontario, but they'd never been registered as an apprentice. They claimed they had experience to work in the trade. They never were registered as an apprentice, but they'd taken a gas course. It says quite clearly on their work permit that they're not allowed to take training. When I asked the person if they were able to take training, they said they didn't have any paperwork to support taking training. They had a résumé, which I couldn't find, that showed they had experience in Ontario working as an HVAC installer.

The second permit was for a person from Australia. They claimed that they had experience. They had about 15 years' experience in Australia. When they came to Ontario to work with their work permit, they were supposed to register with Skilled Trades Ontario. There's a process. Ontario is one of the few provinces that has a process where you have to register right away and sign up for equivalency. This person failed to do that. After a year, they came to us through an organizing drive. We found out that they didn't follow through with their promise. As a union, we tried training them, but we're limited in what we can do, because they have training restrictions on their work permit.

Work permits are a big problem. As I said, people coming here don't understand what they are. They don't understand the limitations. Right now, Local 787 has 53 people with what we call "900" SINS, or social insurance numbers. Those are people on work permits. All of them are unable to train. They came to us through organizing drives. They signed up before I was aware of what 900 SINS were. The Government of Ontario had sent out a notice about two years ago that those people could not take apprenticeship programs. The only people with 900 numbers who could take apprenticeship programs were in the refugee stream, I believe.

It's becoming an issue. On work permit number one, the person had taken training at one of the colleges, I would say one of the private colleges, and had obviously supplied a résumé that he had been working in Ontario unlicensed. People like him can't get into the union. We don't bring in 900 numbers because we can't train them. They end up in the non-union world, typically working for cash and undermining our system.

• (1210)

That's really all I have to say: that we need to fix the work permit issue. There needs to be better follow-up with regard to work permits. If people come here on a work permit, people should be making sure that they're following the rules, and they should be making sure that, if they come here through a sponsor, they're following the rules as a tradesperson and getting their equivalencies before they start working in Ontario.

Thanks.

• (1215)

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

[*Translation*]

I now invite Ms. Rekik to give her opening statement.

Ms. Rekik, you have a maximum of five minutes.

**Manel Rekik (General Director, L'Hirondelle, Welcoming and Integration Services for Immigrants):** Madam Chair, members of the committee, I thank you for having me here today.

I am speaking in my capacity as the general director of L'Hirondelle, Welcoming and Integration Services for Immigrants, a Montreal-based organization that has been helping immigrants for nearly 50 years.

Every year, we help thousands of people to learn French, integrate into society and, most importantly, enter the workforce,

thanks to financial support from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Employment and Social Development Canada.

For five decades, we have been a privileged observer of integration. What we are seeing on the ground is a situation that deserves your full attention.

Canada selects immigrants for their skills, experience and economic potential. They go through a demanding and costly process with the legitimate hope of fully contributing to their host society.

However, upon their arrival, many people run up against a brick wall. They find it difficult to get their foreign credentials recognized. Their experience is underestimated and they are asked to provide proof of work experience in Canada, which they have not yet had the opportunity to acquire.

As a result, it is not uncommon, at least in our experience, to see engineers or health care professionals driving taxis. Highly qualified professionals remain underemployed for years. This isn't an individual integration problem. It is a systemic problem related to the use of talent.

Beyond the individual experience, this is actually a major economic issue. Canada is investing to attract talent, but it is losing some of the return on its investment once those people arrive.

From our experience, here are four priorities that warrant attention.

First, the government must recognize that the underutilization of skills works directly against productivity and economic growth. Underutilized talent is a loss for the individual and for the Canadian economy.

Second, the government must accelerate and simplify the recognition of foreign credentials and experience, while further aligning procedures among the provinces to facilitate labour mobility across Canada.

Third, the government must improve access to employment support services. Workforce integration does not happen on its own. It requires support from a professional network and real opportunities from employers. This issue is particularly important in a context of regionalization. From our experience, it is difficult to ask someone who has just been uprooted for the first time to immediately move again. We cannot talk about sustainable regionalization without advance preparation. Establishing connections with employers in the regions earlier, even before newcomers arrive in Canada, can make a huge difference.

We also see that some workers are finding themselves in vulnerable and precarious situations, particularly when the program rules change part way through the process. The instability of these pathways not only leaves individuals in a precarious position, but it also makes Canada less attractive to international applicants.

In this context, the community network plays a vital role. Specialized organizations across the country act as a bridge between talent and employers. We prepare the candidates, support businesses and build real networks. We turn potential into real employment.

Fourth, it is essential to provide better support for employers when it comes to inclusive recruitment and onboarding practices. Onboarding does not end with hiring. It is also about retention.

In closing, Canada does not just have to attract talent. It has to ensure that the talent it welcomes can quickly and fully contribute to society, because the talent is already here. In that regard, we recommend speeding up the recognition of credentials, investing more in job search support and strengthening the bridge between employers and international talent before those individuals arrive in Canada, especially in the case of regionalization.

In our opinion, workforce integration is not an expenditure. It is a strategic investment that enables us to turn human potential into a sustainable lever of economic growth for Canada.

Thank you.

● (1220)

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

[*English*]

Next, I will invite Mr. Hammond to make an opening statement of up to five minutes.

Your five minutes start now.

**James Hammond (Director, Public Affairs, U15 Canada):** Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of U15 Canada.

U15 is the association of Canada's leading research universities. Together, our institutions conduct more than 75% of all university research in Canada, enrol 70% of the country's full-time doctoral students and generate much of the country's innovation. Our universities are national assets: anchors of talent, research and innovation.

We appreciate the committee undertaking this important study into strategies to attract top global talent. After all, talent is the foundation of a successful, prosperous and resilient economy. At this uncertain moment, Canada's ability to attract, develop and retain highly qualified people who drive innovation, create new opportunities and provide the expertise Canadian businesses and communities need will be vital to our future success.

At present, however, Canada is facing a talent gap. We rank 25th in the OECD for the share of the working-age population with a graduate degree, and last in the G7. This leaves Canada at a disadvantage in the innovative, knowledge-driven sectors that will define the future economy. Anchoring world-class research talent here in Canada will be crucial if we are to continue to lead in future technologies.

Canada's leading research universities play a fundamental role in developing this talent. There are 700,000 students enrolled annually at U15 universities. They are attracted by the opportunity to work with renowned experts, access world-class facilities and graduate from internationally recognized programs. This matters, because we know that, at the advanced level, talent is highly mobile. The race to attract talented researchers is global and deeply competitive.

That is why any reforms to the international student program should be pursued with the goal of attracting the best and brightest students to Canada. A high-quality, managed system that recognizes excellence and rewards responsible institutions can help achieve the shared goal of a well-functioning study permit program that attracts the talent Canada needs.

Therefore, we welcomed the government's move to exempt graduate students from study permit caps and to commit to a two-week processing time for doctoral students. Continuing to focus on the high-quality education and research experience at U15 universities while reducing processing delays for study permits will help Canada to rebuild its reputation as a top destination for global talent.

It is also important to emphasize that attracting global talent and developing Canadian talent here at home are not competing objectives. They are mutually reinforcing. International graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and world-class faculty help extend Canada's research capacity, support Canadian students and strengthen innovation ecosystems across the country. The government's new Impact+ talent attraction initiative is a particularly important part of this strategy.

Launched in budget 2025 with the clear goal of attracting world-class researchers, this initiative is helping Canada to cultivate exceptional talent, support bold ideas and position itself for long-term success. Over recent months, leading research universities have moved quickly and diligently to recruit outstanding researchers because of this program. While we await the results of the first round, this timely initiative demonstrates what can be achieved when government and universities work together with the shared goal of securing global talent for the benefit of all Canadians.

In a similar spirit, we welcome the government's indication that it is exploring reforms to the express entry program to better align selection criteria with economic outcomes. We know that earning a degree from a leading research university in Canada remains one of the strongest predictors of future success. On average, Canadians with doctoral degrees earn double the average salary.

U15 Canada encourages the government to preserve recognition of Canadian education within express entry, particularly for undergraduate and graduate students, who form an important part of the country's highly qualified talent pipeline. U15 is ready to continue working closely with government and all partners to ensure that Canada has the people it needs to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Thank you.

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

That wraps up our opening statements. Now we move to rounds of questions and answers. The first round is six minutes each.

We will begin with Mr. Ho for six minutes.

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

My questions are for the representative at U15.

Mr. Hammond, what you left out in your opening remarks is that U15 is a registered lobbyist and a prolific lobby group that represents the interests of the ever-expanding and bloated university bureaucracy. Your organization lobbied the federal government 936 times in the last 14 years, averaging 66 times per year.

In a press release, U15 welcomed the exemption of foreign master's and Ph.D students from the 2026 Liberal so-called study permit cap as “an important step” and said it was “vital”. However, when you put an exemption to a cap, then it's not a cap at all. What the Liberals have ultimately done, after you lobbied them, is create this back door to letting in unlimited numbers of foreign international students.

Why did U15 push for a broad exemption for a cap on foreign graduate students rather than a narrower policy targeted only to verified labour shortages or critical research fields?

● (1225)

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

Firstly, I want to start by emphasizing that our universities are absolutely committed to creating opportunities for all Canadians. As I said in my opening remarks, a degree from a U15 university remains one of the best guarantees of opportunities for any Canadian who pursues education at a U15 university. At the same time, as we know, advanced talent is highly mobile, and the competitive nature of attracting that talent is very hard—

**Vincent Ho:** Mr. Hammond, I find it really hard to believe the words that are coming out of your mouth right now—that you're advocating for Canadian students.

You're at the immigration committee right now. You lobbied the federal government 936 times. You met with IRCC officials. How is talking to the immigration department of the federal government advocating for Canadian students? How does immigration policy affect...?

Maybe if you wanted to talk to the science committee or if you wanted to talk to the National Research Council to advocate for more research funds, that would be understandable. How does advocating at the immigration committee advance the interests of Canadian students?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

Graduate students, especially doctoral students, make a massive contribution to Canada's research capacity and to the innovation capacity in this country. They work in labs with Canadian researchers. They support Canadian research projects. They contribute to discoveries and innovations that help grow the Canadian economy and create opportunities for all Canadians. We felt that exemption was important because it recognizes that graduate students play a crucial role that goes well beyond their own teaching and learning ex-

perience and contributes to the wider research ecosystem in Canada.

**Vincent Ho:** Following up on the back door—you call it an exemption, but it's really a back door—the U15 and its members had access to senior IRCC officials during the 2026 Liberal policy development of a back door to unlimited international students.

How many meetings did U15 hold with organizations representing unemployed Canadian youth, underemployed graduates or Canadian students competing for research opportunities during that same time period?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

We heard often from student union groups. We engage closely with graduate students who are working at Canadian universities. We remain committed to ensuring, like I said, that U15 universities support opportunities for all Canadians who go through our universities in—

**Vincent Ho:** On that note, do you represent students, or do you represent the university bureaucracies, which are ever expanding?

**James Hammond:** U15 Canada represents Canada's leading research universities, which help drive the innovation ecosystem beyond just the work that happens on campus.

It's also important to note that graduate students help perform federally funded research grants. They help work closely with Canadian businesses and industries that are looking to drive innovation—

**Vincent Ho:** You don't represent the students.

**James Hammond:** U15 Canada is an association of Canada's leading research universities.

**Vincent Ho:** That's what I thought. When I look at the “About Us” page on your website, nowhere does it mention students. The word “student” isn't even mentioned.

U15 says this Liberal backdoor exemption to unlimited foreign students helped Canada attract the “world's best and brightest”. Your member universities also charge international students much higher tuition than domestic students.

How do you respond to the criticism that this lobbying was as much about protecting university revenue as it was about attracting talent?

**James Hammond:** As I said, graduate students directly contribute to the research projects that Canadian researchers and Canadian faculty are engaged in. They form innovation partnerships. They help with the training of other highly qualified personnel.

Allowing graduate students to enter Canada is really about creating a global pool of knowledge here in Canada that will help create opportunities for all Canadians.

**Vincent Ho:** On that point, let me ask you this: Honestly, can most Canadian universities survive without international students, yes or no?

**James Hammond:** I can't speak to that question. I only represent the U15 leading research universities here in Canada. As I mentioned, our mandate is focused on the research capacity of our universities and, beyond that, the research ecosystem in Canada.

As I mentioned, the role that graduate students play is vitally necessary to the broader economic opportunities in Canada, ensuring that we continue to lead in the development and the advancement of new technologies that will create opportunities for all Canadians, and—

• (1230)

**Vincent Ho:** We've seen the headlines time and time again over the past couple of years about universities and colleges failing because of a so-called lack of international student uptake, to which your organization is advocating for a back door.

What is U15's position on giving Canadian graduates priority access to research positions and funding currently filled by international students? Would you advocate for a position where you reserve a minimum percentage of graduate spaces for Canadian students?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, I don't believe that this is a question of either-or. Creating a rich, vibrant and diverse research ecosystem is key to ensuring opportunities for all researchers, international or Canadian. At the same time, it's essential, and U15 has been absolutely—

**Vincent Ho:** I think the Canadian people have heard enough of your reading off talking points.

Thank you.

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

Thank you, Mr. Hammond.

Next, we'll go to Mr. Chang for six minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Chang.

**Wade Chang (Burnaby Central, Lib.):** My first question is for U15.

Burnaby is home to BCIT and Simon Fraser University. I know they are not members of U15, but you might consider adding them.

My first question for you is this: Canada's research universities attract some of the world's brightest students and researchers. How does this strengthen Canadian students' ability to do research and enhance Canada's innovation economy?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, one of the great successes of Canada's research ecosystem has long been our ability to attract top global talent and create, therefore, a rich research ecosystem that drives innovation, helps the advancement of new technologies and creates opportunities for Canadian students engaged in research as well.

We know that a lot of graduate students work in laboratories on research projects that are federally funded and, therefore, are helping to advance priorities that the federal government has identified

through the research granting councils. They're essential to tackling some of the biggest challenges that Canadians are facing and to creating new opportunities. We've seen, in a number of sectors, where Canada has helped lead the world in innovation and technological development, and a lot of that has been thanks to wise immigration policies that have helped attract the very best and brightest talent.

As I mentioned in my opening remarks, any reforms that we see to the international study permit program moving forward should be focused on how we get to a system that is managed and responsible but is focused on attracting the best and brightest to Canada and will create opportunities for all Canadians—a system that recognizes excellence and rewards responsible institutions.

We're really pleased to see the government moving forward with initiatives. I mentioned the changes that are being looked at in express entry. Also, the Impact+ research talent initiative demonstrates what can be achieved when Canada meets the moment and goes out and recruits world-class researchers who are going to build opportunities for Canadians here, help grow the economy and address challenges that Canadians, Canadian organizations, Canadian businesses and Canadian communities are looking for help on.

**Wade Chang:** Can you say that international talent directly benefits Canadian students and the Canadian economy?

**James Hammond:** Absolutely.

As I mentioned, I think one of the great successes of Canada's research ecosystem has been our ability to create those research environments. Graduate students who are domestic and international are working together in labs and libraries as we speak on some of the biggest challenges facing Canadians and creating new opportunities.

It's key that Canada remains internationally engaged so that we understand the latest global knowledge and the latest advancements and innovations that are happening around the world and so that we have access to the latest understanding. We can see, in areas like artificial intelligence and quantum technology, just how quickly technologies are moving and how competitive that space is to attract top global talent.

Continuing to cultivate an environment, as I said, that is managed and focused on the best and brightest will help all Canadians benefit from the research that's taking place at U15 universities and beyond.

**Wade Chang:** Thank you.

As global competition for international talent intensifies, what are the key factors that determine whether leading researchers and graduate students choose Canada over other countries?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

In my opening remarks, I mentioned processing delays for permits, especially at the advanced level. Talent is highly mobile. They have competing offers from other institutions. U15 universities are competing with some of the best universities around the world, so delays in processing create a disruption that does damage Canada's reputation over the long run.

We were really pleased to see the government move forward with the commitment of a two-week processing period for doctoral students. That's excellent. We'll continue to monitor to ensure that IRCC is able to meet that target, which will be really important. Our understanding, as well, is with the Impact+ strategy, there will, again, be efforts to ensure that those processing delays are not a barrier to getting some of that world-class research into Canada. As I said, that uncertainty about whether they can accept an offer from a top Canadian university or not can be a real barrier.

• (1235)

**Wade Chang:** What roles do international students play in Canada's talent pipeline and future workforce?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

This is key, and it's why I mentioned it's really important to look at the entirety of the talent continuum.

We talked about graduate students a lot, but post-doctoral researchers are key to supporting research leads in their labs and libraries. Also, undergraduate and master's level students are key parts of Canada's talent pipeline. Our ability to create pathways toward permanent residency, especially through the express entry program—and it's why we welcome the new category for researchers—has been key to ensuring that we can anchor this top talent and create this pathway to ensure that these researchers grow their ideas, innovate and advance new technologies here in Canada to the betterment of all Canadians.

**Wade Chang:** Looking at Canada's talent attraction strategy, which measures have the greatest potential to help our universities attract and retain world-class researchers and innovators?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question, Madam Chair.

I mentioned Impact+ in my initial remarks. This is a timely initiative. It's helping Canada meet the moment when there's a lot of uncertainty in the broader scientific ecosystem.

It's been well designed in that, as I was mentioning, it looks at the entirety of that talent continuum. There is funding there to attract top post-doc and graduate researchers all the way through to world-class researchers.

It's also key to stress to this committee—because I think it has heard earlier testimony about some of the challenges with a brain drain, especially to the U.S., that Canada has experienced in the past—that Impact+ is also designed to welcome back Canadian researchers who maybe moved overseas in the past. That's something we really want to stress. Now is a great moment to come back to

Canada to do your work here, to advance your ideas here and to work with Canadians here.

Like I said, our universities have been working very proactively to encourage world-class researchers to come to Canada and advance their ideas here, thanks to this timely initiative.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chang.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, you have six minutes.

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

I thank the witnesses for being here with us.

Ms. Rekik, I had the chance to visit your organization and see what you do. I also want to take a few seconds to tell all the committee members what a great example you are of successful integration. You just arrived here a few years ago and now you're the general director of L'Hirondelle. That's really something.

That said, let's talk about the clients that you help at L'Hirondelle. Earlier, a senior official explained to us that the federal government funds services for people who are recognized as refugees, but it does not fund services for asylum seekers.

What happens to this group of people? There are a lot of them.

**Manel Rekik:** That ties into what I was saying earlier in my speech. These people are left to fend for themselves; yet they represent a workforce that is right here and that has potential. We tend to think that asylum seekers do not necessarily have any job skills or education. However, at L'Hirondelle, we help people who are very highly educated. They have university degrees, but they do not have access to any employment support.

That is a real problem because these people immediately find themselves in a very vulnerable situation. For example, we deal with cases of homelessness and extreme vulnerability. Those are the kinds of situations that we are currently dealing with on the ground. People who are left to fend for themselves do not have access to services that are essential to their workforce integration and their economic contribution.

**Alexis Deschênes:** What impact does this situation have on these individuals and on society in general?

The way the process works, for these asylum seekers to be recognized as refugees, it may take two—

**Manel Rekik:** It takes a very long time.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Depending on the timing, it can take two or three years. Right now, we know that 80% of asylum seekers are ultimately recognized as refugees. During that two- to three-year period, there is no federal government funding and no services for these people.

What impact does that have on these individuals?

**Manel Rekik:** These people have a hard time finding work, entering the labour force and contributing. They become a burden for the host society, but not by choice. They came here with the hope of contributing to society and working, but they do not have the tools, means and support to do so.

• (1240)

**Alexis Deschênes:** Earlier, the senior official said that the federal government issues these individuals work permits. It's true that they are given access to open work permits, as if that were enough.

Why do they need support?

**Manel Rekik:** They need support because they are in a completely new environment. Finding a job requires knowledge of the job market, a professional network and matching with employers. It is not enough to simply issue these people a work permit. They must also be given the means and tools they need to enter the job market more easily.

What is more, the work permits are not issued quickly. It takes time. Getting a work permit is a long process.

**Alexis Deschênes:** If you had federal government funding to help asylum seekers, exactly what kind of services would you offer?

**Manel Rekik:** We would offer full support, including preparation, knowledge of the job market and matching and communication with employers.

We could also help meet needs that employers have already identified. We play sort of an anchoring role. We also play an essential role in establishing connections between these people and the job market.

**Alexis Deschênes:** We are currently in a situation where the number of new temporary foreign workers has dropped significantly over the past two years. There are currently about 70% fewer new temporary foreign workers.

Would better integration services for asylum seekers not provide a kind of accessible workforce made up of people who want to work and who could meet the needs of some businesses that need temporary foreign workers, now that there are no such workers available?

**Manel Rekik:** Yes, absolutely.

As I mentioned earlier, these asylum seekers have skills and degrees so they can fully contribute. That is all they're asking for, all they're waiting for.

They left their country because they were facing difficult circumstances. When they arrive here, they are looking for social and economic security, so yes, this is a workforce that is available here and that just needs some support.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Do you know whether there is any data on that? Do you have any?

Based on your experience, can you tell us about the unemployment rate among asylum seekers?

**Manel Rekik:** I don't have any exact numbers, but I can send you that information.

The unemployment rate among asylum seekers is obviously higher than among people who have a work permit or who received their permanent residency.

**Alexis Deschênes:** Earlier, I was talking to you about the statistics we have been given that show that the number of temporary foreign workers has dropped. However, that is also the case for asylum seekers. According to the government, there has been a drop of about 60% in asylum seekers over the past two years.

Have you noticed a drop in demand at your organization?

**Manel Rekik:** We have not seen a drop in demand. We are seeing a lot more people in extremely vulnerable situations asking for help.

It is important to know that, because these people have to wait, they end up experiencing situational homelessness, as I was saying earlier. That means that, instead of working proactively and providing support, we have to solve even more serious problems related to homelessness.

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

Thank you, Ms. Rekik.

[English]

We have now finished our first round of questions. We now move to our second round of questions.

We begin with five minutes for Mr. Davies.

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

I'm fairly new around this table.

With all due respect, Mr. Hammond, what I heard from you today was something that you could have written for the Minister of Finance to be included in the budget speech. You completely blew me away on the narrative that you have been saying over and over again about wanting to attract innovation to Canada, and that you represent....

First of all, are you a registered lobbyist?

**James Hammond:** Yes.

**Fred Davies:** Okay.

You get paid by the universities to come here and advocate for a specific policy option that you want to see the government initiate.

**James Hammond:** That's correct. U15 Canada represents the leading research universities. Yes.

**Fred Davies:** In your opening remarks and during questions, you made reference to Canada needing to rebuild its reputation.

If you could go back to your remarks, you had made a comment about Canada being—

• (1245)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I have a point of order. I note that my colleague is not being....

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Rempel Garner, the clerk is trying to address this issue. There you go.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** The camera is on you now. It'll get to Mr. Davies in a minute.

Please proceed, Mr. Davies.

**Fred Davies:** Mr. Hammond, could you go back to your original notes and tell me what you said about Canada's ranking for innovation in the G7?

**James Hammond:** Certainly, yes.

That was a ranking in terms of the share of the adult population with advanced degrees—master's and doctoral-level degrees. At present, we rank 25th in the OECD for the share of the adult population that has a graduate degree in that way. For instance, we would need around 500,000 more Canadians with advanced degrees to be at an equal share to the United States, so it is a major barrier to our innovative capacity as a country.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I have a point of order. Can someone wake up in the tech booth and make the camera work?

**Peter Fragiskatos:** On the same point of order, Madam Chair, I'm on ParlVU now. It is following the conversation. Mr. Davies is on camera, and Mr. Hammond is replying. ParlVu is working.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos, for pointing that out.

We did stop your time during this intervention.

**Fred Davies:** That's fine.

The biggest problem that we have had in Canada is the brain drain. You made reference to the brain drain.

**James Hammond:** Yes.

**Fred Davies:** A lot of our graduates can't stay in Canada because they can't get funding in a postgraduate research capacity, in starting a business or for innovation. Do you follow anything in the ecosystem when we're looking at internationally qualified people coming to Canada to actually start a business?

What's your comment about the start-up visa program being cancelled? There are 44,000 people now stuck in that innovation ecosystem that you made reference to. We can't even get the people who have been approved and have already invested money in Canada to come into Canada.

How do you expect Canada to be able to sustain...to attract other people in the innovation sector when we can't even get our current structure in line?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question. This is really important.

The start-up visa program does offer opportunities, as you say, to attract entrepreneurial talent that can start companies, grow the economy and create opportunities—

**Fred Davies:** I know what the program is. I'm asking for your opinion on how it is that we have 44,000 people stuck in bureaucratic purgatory. These are the innovative people that you so want to come to Canada, but we can't get them out of the system.

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

U15 universities have renowned programs when it comes to supporting entrepreneurs, incubator hubs.... There are a lot of opportunities there, I think, to look at how research universities can help support—to your point—a targeted program that ensures we're bringing in the best entrepreneurial talent and that they're being sponsored with the best opportunities for Canadians.

**Fred Davies:** Once again, that is outside the confines of the question I asked you.

Again, I made reference earlier to the biggest problem that we have in this country: access to capital to finance innovation. Would you agree that Canada ranks probably at the lowest level in the G20 for investment in innovation in the private sector?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, historically, Canada has struggled to grow business investment in research and development. U15 universities do play an outsized role in the Canadian research ecosystem compared to other G7 countries, but also, U15 universities do a lot of research in partnership with Canadian businesses, normally around the \$800-million mark. Universities are trying their best to work closely with industry to advance some of the research needs of Canadian businesses.

**Fred Davies:** You want to work with innovators to commercialize new ideas.

**James Hammond:** Absolutely.

**Fred Davies:** You want to bring people to Canada to post-secondary institutions, people who are at the Ph.D. and the master's levels, but if we can't find the capital for them, they're still going to leave for greener pastures. If Canada is ranked that much lower, is your organization actively engaged in finding ways to grow capital access through either angel funds or venture capital funds? Are you aligning these institutions with those capital access points?

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

As I mentioned, a lot of our universities do have incubator programs where they work to pair up.... All of our universities have tech transfer offices, where they encourage researchers to commercialize their technology and they connect them with potential business funders, but there are, of course, a number of barriers to Canada's innovation ecosystem. One of them absolutely is capital, but talent is also really key.

Finding ways that we can grow that talent pool of really highly qualified advanced talent that's innovative and knows how to perform that research is another key step, and that is really the part that U15 universities are trying to support. That's core to our mandate, which is education.

• (1250)

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

Thank you, Mr. Davies.

Next, we have five minutes for Mr. Jeneroux.

**Matt Jeneroux:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all three witnesses for being here today.

I do want to come to you, Mr. Hammond, about a couple of things. I'd love to talk to you about competitiveness, but before getting to that, I think we've seen—and correct me if I'm wrong—a significant decrease in international students in the last few years. In particular, I think the number that was quoted in the last panel was, January over January, a reduction of 37%. I think it's probably important to get some of your thoughts on record about some of the policy changes as to why that has happened.

I'll follow up with some competitiveness questions.

**James Hammond:** Thank you for the question.

Yes, you're absolutely right. There has been a significant decline in the volume of international students. There are many reasons for that: a number of the reforms that were undertaken by the government around study permits, etc.

I will add there was also damage done to Canada's international brand, the reputation that we have overseas as a destination for top talent, and that is why, I think, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, at U15 we're really keen to stress that we would support reforms that build a more managed and a more focused international recruitment strategy that is really built around attracting the best and brightest researchers and talent to Canada.

That's a really important opportunity, I think—to focus on the quality students, the quality talent that Canada will need to grow the economy, to create opportunities and to drive innovation. A system that is managed, recognizes excellence and rewards responsible institutions is a really key way that this government can move forward to rebuild that international student system in a way that focuses on the top talent Canada needs.

**Matt Jeneroux:** In recruiting that talent, I presume, as you've said, that it's very competitive. A number of factors, I imagine, go into that. You've mentioned delays in processing as one of them. Could you give us some other factors that would be reasons why people wouldn't choose Canada over other countries?

**James Hammond:** I will stress that the process in question is really key, especially when we're talking about advanced talent, as I mentioned. It's a highly competitive space. Researchers are looking at offers from multiple institutions, and the ability to move at speed and be competitive in that matter is really key.

Of course, another big piece remains: research funding. The funding that's available to researchers here in Canada has helped build a really deep and a really rich innovation ecosystem. Another key element, I think, is the ability to collaborate and work with world-class researchers and to work at world-class facilities. Canada has a great record through the federal granting councils and through the Canada Foundation for Innovation of building that ecosystem. That is why new initiatives from this government, like the Impact+ program and the talent attraction strategy, are so key. Yes, it's going to attract individual star researchers, but it's also going to create that ecosystem that is going to really attract Canadians and international talent to come and to advance ideas here in Canada.

We can see, in areas like artificial intelligence and quantum, what Canada can do when it builds those really rich ecosystems, and we can see the rewards it brings to all Canadians.

**Matt Jeneroux:** I'm curious. Have you seen a higher uptake from places like the United States in the past couple of years?

**James Hammond:** I don't have the latest data on hand, I'm afraid. Like I said, I do know that our universities have been really engaged through the Impact+ program, and there are a lot of opportunities to have conversations with U.S. researchers through that.

**Matt Jeneroux:** You talked about the ecosystem. What happens after a graduate comes here? An international student graduates and then, presumably, starts a business. That, then, has a ripple effect on the economy. I'm hoping you can highlight some of that work and what that looks like for the overall Canadian economy.

**James Hammond:** Absolutely.

It creates huge opportunities for all Canadians. I mentioned artificial intelligence as one example of where Canada has been able to attract world-class AI researchers. Individuals like Geoffrey Hinton at the University of Toronto and Yoshua Bengio at Université de Montréal have created these really rich ecosystems, and that absolutely leads to a lot of spinoff benefits. That could be the development of new IP, the creation of new technologies or graduate students who return to their home countries but create those lasting partnerships. That is also really key to Canada's ability to compete in new technologies: having that engagement with cutting-edge knowledge, with advancements in technologies.

During the pandemic, we saw just how key those international partnerships that medical researchers here in Canada had with their colleagues around the world were. That really helped us not only address growing the economy but also address public health challenges and public policy challenges.

• (1255)

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

Thank you, Mr. Jeneroux.

[Translation]

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

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

Mr. Tarr, can you tell us a little bit about your interactions, as a union, with IRCC?

[English]

**Andrew Tarr:** I've had no interactions.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Okay.

When it comes to the temporary foreign worker program, how do you think that we could get the unions more involved?

[English]

**Andrew Tarr:** The union should be asked if there are unemployed people in the area. I know we don't represent everybody. However, I can tell you with regard to the first work permit I got that the person had absolutely no experience. They were given a work permit. Before the meeting, I checked with our contractor group, which does interviews for first-year apprentices. It gets between 400 and 500 applications per year, and we only take 150. There are a lot of people wanting, and they all have to have non-900-series SIN card numbers, which means that they're Canadians.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** In Quebec, when employers want to renew an employment contract or hire a temporary foreign worker, they have to submit what is known as a labour market impact assessment. They also have to post the job opening locally for a certain period of time, which has gone from four to eight weeks.

I don't know how that works in Ontario. What is the process there?

[English]

**Andrew Tarr:** Not that I know of. I've never been asked.

[Translation]

**Alexis Deschênes:** Great.

I don't have any more questions. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

I have three minutes left. I'm going to give two minutes to Mr. Redekopp and two minutes to Mr. Joseph.

Mr. Redekopp, go ahead for two minutes.

**Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Tarr, you mentioned something that I thought was curious. You talked about working for cash. That's something I don't think we've talked about at this committee.

I assume you mean people who work for money under the table and don't report that money. That's always been going on in construction. I've been in construction. Are you saying it's gotten worse?

**Andrew Tarr:** I would think so. In the bigger city centres like Brampton and Toronto, if these people have work permits and can't get jobs, they do work for cash. It's the first question. If you own a business or a house, you get people coming out and the first thing they say ask is, "Do you want to pay cash or do you want a receipt?"

**Brad Redekopp:** You're saying that's getting worse. I assume you're implying it's because of the large immigration numbers the Liberals have had in the last few years. Is that what you're saying?

**Andrew Tarr:** I think it's a couple of things. I think a lot of these people come from a culture where cash is king. I think the other part is that we have a lot of people who are trying to make ends meet. They work a day job, and then at night they're doing cash jobs.

**Brad Redekopp:** By bringing in too many people too fast, the government has created this situation.

What's the downside of working for cash?

**Andrew Tarr:** They aren't paying taxes. They aren't paying into the system. They aren't working legally. They aren't insured. The companies that are trying to support the apprenticeship systems are losing out. Everything that we rely on—our health care, our schools, our apprenticeship systems—is paid for by taxes. If they aren't paying taxes, they aren't paying into the system, but they use the system.

**Brad Redekopp:** It's just another example of how out-of-control immigration can potentially mess up our economy.

**Andrew Tarr:** Yes.

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

[Translation]

Mr. Joseph, you have two minutes.

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

I would like to talk to Ms. Rekik through you.

Ms. Rekik, do you think that attracting top talent to our regions in Quebec is a solution to the labour shortage?

**Manel Rekik:** That might be one solution, but it doesn't end there. We really need to create a networking system to keep those workers in the regions. That is part of the problem right now. We bring talented people here, but once they arrive, they tend to gravitate toward the big cities. Once they've settled in the big cities, it's very difficult to attract them to the regions.

As I said earlier in my speech, we really need to establish connections early on. When a person has already been uprooted once, it is very difficult to get them to move again. In my opinion, we need to establish connections early on, before the person even arrives in Canada or Quebec. We need to establish connections with businesses that are looking for these kinds of workers, screen candidates, conduct interviews and have a kind of discovery process before these people even arrive.

• (1300)

**Natilien Joseph:** You talked about people being uprooted. If I understand correctly, in your view, there is no difference between sending people to other provinces and sending them to our regions here in Quebec.

Did I understand you correctly?

**Manel Rekik:** It's not about there being no difference. I'm talking about them being uprooted from their country of origin. The person is being uprooted and emigrating from their country of origin. Then, once they arrive and settle here in this country, it is very difficult to get them to move to the regions because they have already gone through the immigration process.

**Natilien Joseph:** You think it's difficult to get them to move voluntarily.

Is that it?

**Manel Rekik:** Yes, I am talking about moving voluntarily. For people who do not know anything about the regions, it is very difficult to get them to move to another region later on and keep them there. That is part of the problem right now.

**Natilien Joseph:** If I understand you correctly—

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

Thank you, Ms. Rekik.

[*English*]

That concludes our second hour.

I would like to thank our witnesses and all of my colleagues around the table for their contributions to this important study on attracting global talent to Canada.

I want to remind everyone that the notice for our meeting on Wednesday has been published. It should be a fairly short one. We're going to be talking about instructions for our asylum seeker study.

With that, we will adjourn.

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