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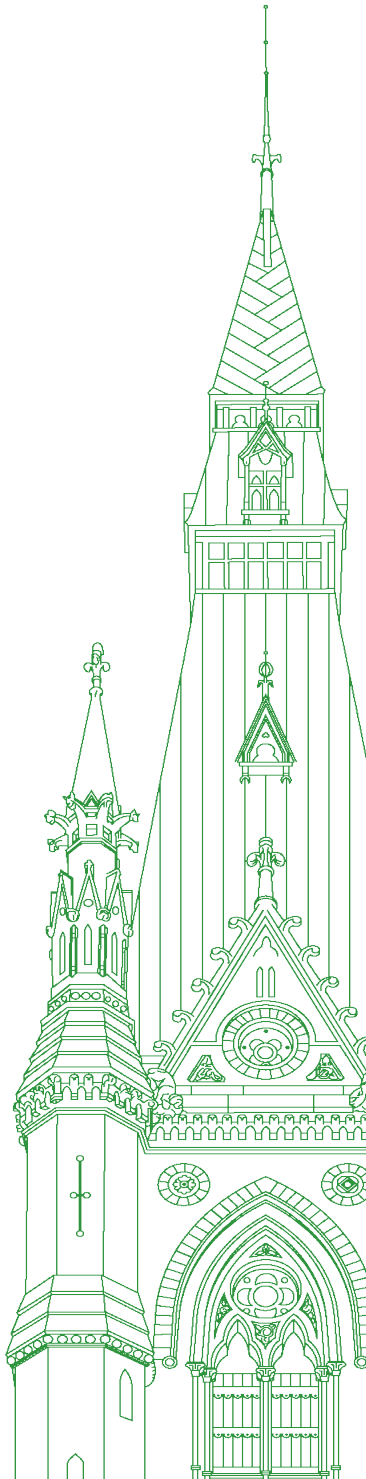
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Chair: Julie Dzerowicz

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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● (1530)

[*English*]

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

Good afternoon. Welcome to meeting number 43 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today's meeting is televised and taking place in hybrid format.

Before I have the pleasure of introducing our first panel of guests, I want to alert members to this: Regarding the study of Canada's immigration system, version two of the draft report is expected to be distributed to members this Friday. This committee is scheduled to examine the draft report next Tuesday, November 3.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes, do you have a question?

Alexis Deschênes (Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Listuguj, BQ): Yes, Madam Chair. I wanted to get a head start. Regarding the report on the distribution of asylum seekers, given that the legal no-objection notice has been received, can we also have a date for the first draft of this report?

The Chair: Do we have a date? Yes. The analyst has something to say.

Philippe Antoine Gagnon (Committee Researcher): Thank you, Madam Chair.

The report on the distribution of asylum seekers will be in your hands on Wednesday, November 18, if all goes well.

[*English*]

The Chair: If there are no other questions.... I may have another announcement at the end of our meeting, but right now I'm anxious to get into this exciting conversation. We are currently studying attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

For the first panel, we have the following witnesses.

Online, as an individual, we have Dr. David Finch, professor, Mount Royal University and research director, the productivity project. From the Labour Market Information Council, we have Rebecca Webb, executive director, and Ken Chatoor, director of research and strategic foresight. From TalentLift Canada, we have Dana Wagner, managing director.

I extend a warm welcome to all of you. Thank you for being here with us today. We'll begin with five-minute introductions. Each organization will get five minutes, after which we'll proceed with rounds of questions.

Dr. David Finch, we'll begin with you.

David Finch (Professor, Mount Royal University and Research Director, The Productivity Project, As an Individual): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Good afternoon.

[*English*]

Madam Chair, vice-chairs and honourable members of the committee, my name is David Finch. I'm a professor at Mount Royal University and the research director of the productivity project.

This committee has been tasked with a critical question: How can Canada attract and empower global talent? We believe this question should be considered as part of a much larger labour market challenge: How can we unlock Canada's potential by recognizing its invisible talent?

Consider these numbers. Canada spends roughly $168 billion annually on education, training and workforce development, and 64% of Canadians between the ages of 25 and 64 have a post-secondary credential. This is 23% higher than the OECD average. However, in 2026, 71% of employers state they have difficulty finding the skills they're looking for, and a full one-third of new Canadians with post-secondary credentials are underemployed.

This is Canada's talent paradox. We develop talent, but much of it remains invisible. This matters because hiring is a risk management exercise. Employers lack verifiable, comparable evidence of a candidate's competencies. As a result, they're forced to rely on weak proxies such as academic credentials, references or prior employment. These signals may have value, but they don't verify what a candidate can do and they aren't comparable. This information asymmetry harms market efficiency.

To unlock its economic potential, Canada must build the infrastructure that makes human capital visible, verifiable, comparable and portable. Only then will the labour market be a true marketplace.

This starts by unlocking not only the invisible competencies of learners, but also the invisible learning pathways that underpin them. We all acquire knowledge and skills throughout our lives. Much of it is in communities and at the workplace, and a fraction of it is in a classroom. We recently completed an audit of Calgary's learning ecosystem and identified 30,000 unique programs being delivered in the city. Only 8% of those programs are leading to some form of certification and recognition. This is an opportunity for Canada.

Learning involves three dimensions: teaching, assessment and recognition. Canada's labour market ecosystem remains tethered to a 19th-century model of what's called “closed recognition”. Closed recognition integrates teaching, assessment and recognition as a single process. This was critical in the 19th century. It allowed policy-makers to scale public education to deliver universal literacy. Today, we argue that it does the opposite. Closed recognition throttles labour market efficiencies, suppresses innovation and negatively impacts Canada's productivity and global competitiveness.

We all remember the rise and fall of BlackBerry. BlackBerry failed not because of technology. It failed because it failed to recognize a paradigm shift. As it kept perfecting its BlackBerry, Apple and Google redefined the market through open innovation, unlocking the latent value of millions of innovators.

The global labour market is undergoing a similar paradigm shift. Open recognition will underpin this new paradigm. Open recognition decouples learning from assessment and recognition. Open recognition doesn't judge where or how a competency was developed, but rather focuses solely on making it visible, verifiable, comparable and portable.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Canada unlocked its value by building shared infrastructure between the federal government, the provinces and other partners. These included railways, highways, seaways and energy corridors. To unlock its potential in the 21st century, Canada must build a shared labour market infrastructure, so our human capital—whether it be a young Canadian seeking their first job or a professional desiring to immigrate to Canada—is visible, verifiable, comparable and portable.

As per our brief, we recommend a three-pronged strategy to deliver this: Develop a national Canadian competency framework. Develop a Canadian labour market passport, and develop a Canadian labour market navigator.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

● (1535)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Dr. Finch.

Next, we'll go to the Labour Market Information Council.

Who would like to go?

Mr. Chatoor, please go ahead.

Ken Chatoor (Director of Research and Strategic Foresight, Labour Market Information Council): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee. I am Ken Chatoor, director of research and strategic foresight at the Labour Market Information Council, or LMIC. I'm joined by our executive director, Rebecca Webb.

LMIC was created by the Forum of Labour Market Ministers to address gaps in Canada's labour market information system. Our work with provincial and territorial labour ministries, ESDC and Statistics Canada gives us a pan-Canadian perspective that recognizes regional differences.

Canada's labour market is facing several compounding pressures. Youth unemployment reached 13% in September compared with a pre-pandemic average of 10.8%. At the same time, business closures have outpaced openings for six consecutive quarters, while businesses continue to navigate economic uncertainty, changing immigration levels and trade pressures. Canada's workforce is also aging. LMIC's analysis shows that the age replacement ratio, which compares older workers with younger workers, is particularly pronounced in the skilled trades, raising concerns about future workforce replacement.

These pressures come as governments pursue major investments in defence, mining, natural resources, the green economy, infrastructure and a sovereign AI strategy, all of which require skilled workers. Provincial and territorial labour ministries tell us that these pressures compound long-standing regional challenges related to labour mobility, retaining skilled workers and demographic change, making regional and sector-specific workforce needs especially important. Meeting Canada's workforce needs requires reliable training and immigration systems, but attracting skilled workers is only part of the challenge. Newcomers must also be able to use their qualifications.

That brings me to foreign credential recognition, or FCR. In 2025, LMIC published a report looking at information gaps and barriers in foreign credential recognition. Despite two decades of reviews and reforms, significant barriers remain. Most participants in our study were unaware of FCR before arriving in Canada. Many encountered unclear requirements, difficult-to-use digital tools, inconsistent or outdated information, lengthy processes and significant costs. Some participants completed assessments only to find that employers did not understand or recognize the results, especially in non-regulated occupations. This raises questions about the practical value of these assessments and highlights the need to better understand how employers use them when making hiring decisions.

Canada also lacks comprehensive, comparable and publicly accessible data on foreign credential recognition participation and outcomes. We need to know who applies, how long recognition takes, what it costs and whether applicants ultimately work in their fields. Some information is collected across jurisdictions, but it is not consistently available or linked to longer-term employment outcomes. We cannot evaluate what we cannot measure. Good policy depends on good information. At a time when reliable labour market data are essential, Statistics Canada has had to discontinue the Canadian survey on business conditions, which had its final release in August 2026. Through our work with labour ministries and chambers of commerce, among others, we hear how valuable this type of labour market information is for understanding changing workforce needs. Maintaining a strong labour market information system is essential to making informed decisions.

We want to offer three recommendations. First, improve FCR information and processes. Provide prospective newcomers with clear information about documentation requirements, timelines and costs before they arrive in Canada, and embrace digital and improved digital services. Ensure consistent guidance while maintaining the professional standards we need. We also need to understand how employers interpret and use credential assessments. Improving the efficiency of FCR will improve the flow of skilled labour into the labour market and help Canada achieve its ambitious domestic agenda.

Second, we need to strengthen the collection and evaluation capacity of FCR and labour market data. Federal, provincial and territorial governments, FCR regulators and Statistics Canada should work together to improve information on FCR participation, processing times, costs and longitudinal employment outcomes while also protecting statistical capacity. This will require dedicated funding and resources to build and maintain the necessary data collection and evaluation capacity.

Third, immigration policy should reflect regional and sector-specific workforce needs. The federal government should consult provinces, territories and relevant sectors before making significant changes to immigration levels, using reliable labour market information to inform those decisions. Labour ministries and sector-focused bodies across Canada produce occupational projections of labour demand at a jurisdictional and sometimes even local level that can be leveraged to make very targeted decisions.

Finally, Canada's ability to attract global talent must be matched by its ability to recognize and fully use the skills that people bring. Better information, stronger coordination and more accessible recognition processes are essential to achieving our national goals.

● (1540)

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chatoor.

Next and finally, we have Ms. Wagner from TalentLift Canada.

Your five minutes start now.

Dana Wagner (Managing Director, TalentLift Canada): Thank you.

My name is Dana, and I'm the co-founder and managing director of TalentLift. We're a Canadian charity that supports employers hiring internationally from within refugee populations. There are many talented people who are living internationally as refugees, and my remarks are about how to attract them using economic immigration pathways.

I'll begin with why we should attract this population. It's because the talent is real and it's unique. In our talent platform alone, there are 46,000 displaced people. Among them are 1,600 engineers, 3,100 welders and mechanics, and 1,600 nurses and paramedics. It goes on and on. They are a deeply creative community. Many of the professionals we support learned a new language, a new trade or a new national industry, while in precarious and underpaid work where they're living as refugees.

A second reason is moral. If it were us, how would we want another country's skilled visas to work? Imagine a hostile takeover here in Canada. If Passport Canada didn't function and bank accounts were frozen, we'd want Germany, South Africa and Colombia to recognize our skills and accommodate our displacement.

The economic mobility pathways pilot, or the EMPP, did this. It let someone apply without a passport and without funds in a bank account—not because they were displaced but in spite of that. The EMPP is a really extraordinary policy innovation, and that's why we need to improve it.

In its latest form, the EMPP had several flaws. The most fundamental and structural was that only a narrow set of economic immigration programs had EMPP accommodations, and none of those were work permit pathways. The EMPP had two streams, as you'll know, a regional stream and a federal stream. The regional stream extended accommodations to some PR pathways, including participating PNPs, the AIP and the former RNIP, but it did not apply to express entry or any work permit pathway, among others. Meanwhile, the federal stream created a dedicated pathway with its own human capital criteria.

We argue that the regional stream was too narrow, and the federal stream was actually too broad, so the emphasis should flip. I'll share two recommendations for how to do this.

First, we recommend extending an accessibility layer like the regional EMPP, with displacement accommodations, across the economic stream. TalentLift and the global migration institute at TMU identified 12 common and non-human capital barriers for displaced talent within our economic immigration programs. There are reasonable accommodations for all.

These accommodations—like accepting alternatives to a passport, alternatives to savings in a bank account and alternatives to sealed transcripts from a home university—should apply to every economic pathway and to a large segment of temporary work permits. These should include nomination-supported work permits, the global talent stream, high-wage LMIA work permits and others that position someone to have a credible pathway to PR.

If we get this broad access to the economic stream right, a separate, dedicated EMPP pathway could still add immense value to attract above and beyond for specific workforce or political goals such as responding to a crisis.

Second, we recommend implementing this accessibility layer immediately, with an interim public policy, and not wait two years or longer for a permanent EMPP program. That's because qualified people living as refugees are waiting right now to fairly compete for in-demand roles, and often, just one criteria can restrict their eligibility. We're supporting an autobody technician displaced from Venezuela with a job offer in B.C. who meets all of the B.C. PNP criteria except for a valid passport.

To close, accommodations for displaced talent across the economic stream would solve so many issues. They would solve how to balance accommodations with low immigration levels, because accommodations don't require new space. It's about levelling the field within existing space. They would also solve the utter failure of EMPP permanent residence processing times, which ballooned from a six-month service standard to a four- to six-year standard in December 2025. Instead, like any other skilled worker, displaced talent could get here quickly with a work permit or through express entry.

The EMPP is not the fastest, best route for employers to hire the skills they need. It very rarely has been. It's not the best for tech talent, agriculture talent or francophone talent. We painstakingly design so many economic programs for in-demand talent, and it's time that we let displaced folks into them.

Thank you.

● (1545)

The Chair: Thank you so much to all three of you for your excellent interventions.

Now we begin the rounds of six-minute questions.

We'll begin with Mr. Jackson.

Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

Dr. Finch, much of your research is focused on productivity, education, workforce development and skills. We know unemployment among youth is too high. In the month of September, 68,000 Canadians lost their jobs. You mentioned a statistic in your opening remarks about the percentage of your graduating students who are having a hard time finding employment. Can you repeat that for the committee?

David Finch: It wasn't in my opening remarks.

Certainly, when we look at macro-level data, it's very discipline-specific and degree-specific. We've been seeing the impact of AI on what's called “task compression” over the last three to five years, and we're starting to see a significant drop-off of what I would call traditional entry-level jobs, which supported conversion. They probably dropped off, in some disciplines, by up to 50%.

Grant Jackson: I share your concerns regarding AI. I respect your position on that, for sure.

I'm also concerned about skills. Do you think post-secondary institutions are keeping up with the changing labour market? What is the impact of that on job market accessibility for your graduating students? Do you think post-secondaries are keeping up?

David Finch: They weren't designed for speed. Adaptability and agility were not in their original design. Culturally, it's difficult to move quickly. We've seen that. It is not news.

I would argue that the most important skill, moving forward—the only skill, moving forward—is adaptive capacity: the capacity to learn how to learn. As we shift towards more technical degrees that have immediate monetary value in the labour market, we start removing some of those foundational skills from the learning process. Again, this shift may set a learner up for the first few years after graduation, but as the value of those tasks declines and depreciates, they're going to have a challenge reinventing and reimagining themselves in the future. We've seen this in the marketplace.

● (1550)

Grant Jackson: Do you think adding competition for those jobs would be a problem or a positive for graduating students?

David Finch: Here's the challenge: information asymmetry. I think all panellists today have identified the challenge of data.

My background is in marketing, so I look at this as a consumer purchasing exercise, fundamentally. The fact that we can go to Safeway and compare six cans of beans more easily than we can compare six random graduates.... It is a terrible place for most employers to be in. If we adopt the risk management lens that employers do, we have to create a mechanism that identifies the best candidate available, regardless of who they are and where they are. Right now we're making guesses, at best.

Grant Jackson: Sure. However, broadening the pool would logically be a more challenging proposition than if you prioritized a certain group—perhaps Canadians who are trained in a job. It would be easier to solve that problem, from a comparative analysis perspective, before adding in competition with foreign-trained professionals from different universities with different standards.

Am I correct?

David Finch: There is no question that with the $60 billion plus we invest every year in post-secondary education, graduates of those programs, who incur significant debt as individuals, should absolutely be given an efficient pathway to be successful. The pathway from school today, which we call the off-ramp, is terrible. We're not setting them up for success in their final year as they look for an off-ramp into the labour market.

Grant Jackson: Removing the labour market impact assessment for certain high-paying skilled jobs, in your view, would make it more challenging, not less.

David Finch: We need to make transparent data available for the key decision-makers—the individuals, the investors and often their parents—when they're deciding where the opportunities in the future are and where they should make that investment, whether that is inside or outside accredited post-secondary institutions.

As I said, I'm a big believer in the untapped capacity outside the system. This introduces a whole layer of internal compression and learning as you move forward to unlock the entire learning system.

Grant Jackson: What other steps could you recommend to post-secondary institutions as they prioritize addressing that gap? Should they be doing it with government support, if necessary?

David Finch: The government historically falls back into structured work placement programs. In theory, that sounds wonderful. Let's put co-op into every program. The challenge is that it creates a significant administrative burden on post-secondary institutions, meaning that you're, in fact, hiring a co-op coordinator to manage a cohort. You've added an administrative layer.

My argument is that we need to recognize that when these young people graduate, they have to have agency and control of their futures. We need to create opportunities through that degree or diploma—and prior to it, frankly—where they are given the tools to understand where they should invest in their future and to support their decisions from a career perspective so that it's their future, not somebody else telling them where to go on a Friday afternoon.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Grant Jackson: I'll cede my time.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jackson.

Thank you, Dr. Finch.

Next, we have six minutes for Mr. Joseph.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joseph, you may begin.

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

I will be sharing my speaking time with my colleague and friend, as time is precious.

Mr. Chatoor, let us talk about foreign talent and innovation. How does foreign talent help to strengthen Canada's capacity for innovation, research and technological development?

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: Thank you for that question.

Often when we look at needs within the labour market, we look at a few things. At LMIC, we look at imbalances within the labour market in a few ways. You can look at the vacancies of specific occupations, and you can look at the unemployment rate and whether or not the number of people who are unemployed and looking for work for a specific occupation significantly outweighs the number of vacancies.

In sectors where we have very high vacancies and we're having trouble filling in those occupations, this is often a place where, through skilled immigration pathways, we can help to fill in some of those labour gaps, specifically, I think, when it comes to research and innovation. Research, especially in the academic sphere, often tends to be a very international sector, where we have folks moving around. That mobility to bring in talent depending on the project, the research or innovation project, can be of very high value.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: If I understand correctly, there are measures that would enable Canada to remain competitive in attracting researchers and highly qualified professionals. What are these measures?

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: In the context of research and innovation, especially if we're talking about academia and advanced technologies, that tends to be a global community of expertise. That's something that Canada has historically been a good draw for.

I can't quantify that in terms of economic impact. I don't have those numbers in front of me.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds remaining.

Natilien Joseph: I shall therefore ask a very brief question relating to entrepreneurship and job creation.

Mr. Chatoor, how can foreign entrepreneurs contribute to business creation, economic growth and the creation of good jobs in Canada?

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: As I mentioned, in Canada, we have had several consecutive quarters of business decline. We've had more businesses closing than businesses registering and opening up. Small businesses make up, I believe, close to 99% of all businesses in Canada. Large corporations who employ over, I believe, 500 people are about 0.2%. Those small businesses and entrepreneurial businesses have an enormous impact on the overall Canadian economy. As I mentioned—and I know I keep repeating it—that decline in small business registration, that imbalance, is something that is now six quarters and continuing.

However, that is something that has a lot of benefit outside of just developing businesses but, as you mentioned, employment as well.

[*Translation*]

Natilien Joseph: Thank you, sir.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Zuberi, you have two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

[*English*]

I'll start with Ms. Wagner.

I really appreciated your testimony on the economic mobility pathways program. We are aware that it's right now in an evaluation stage to see about the potential for it to become permanent.

In the interim period, though, while that evaluation is happening, do you have any suggestions on how we can bridge the existing or past program with where we want to go in the future?

Dana Wagner: Thank you so much for that question.

I think it's really critical that we have something like an interim program. Of course, different things have happened in the Canadian economy in the past few years, but you may recall that the timeline for a permanent EMPP has been a bit of a moving-goalpost situation. We initially had a pledge in 2023 from a former immigration minister that it would be in place by 2025. In the evaluation that was just published a few weeks ago, it looked like it might be later in 2028. Of course these things take time, and I'm glad these deliberations are going into making it, hopefully, a really strong, permanent program. However, we have proven accommodations that can overcome some displacement-related barriers.

Like I said, Canada has been a real leader in this space. It's incredible what Canada has done globally and what that has catalyzed in other jurisdictions, including Australia, the U.K., Italy and other countries, at Canada's lead. These are things we can take great pride in.

To answer your specific question, I believe there should be an interim program that could be done relatively swiftly through interim public policy, for example. Our team would really love to see the accommodations that were pioneered under the EMPP, as well as the broader set that have been pioneered under other programs like the CUAET for Ukrainians, applied to a broader set of programs. That could be relatively easily applied across economic peer programs—

Sameer Zuberi: Do you have a suggestion for who should be evaluating this? Would it be any particular unit in IRCC? Do you have a suggestion on that?

Dana Wagner: Do you mean for who should be implementing it?

Sameer Zuberi: For the suggestions you have, who in IRCC should be doing this?

Dana Wagner: Thank you for that question.

It should live within the economic immigration programming side of IRCC, not the refugee side of things. It is a squarely economic program. Where protection and considerations come in—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wagner.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

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

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Chatoor, I have a few questions for you. I suggest we try to make good use of our time together.

At present, we are awaiting plans from the federal government, led by Mr. Carney, regarding immigration targets, which will likely be included in the budget on November 5. We also know that on the Quebec side, a plan will be tabled 15 days after Parliament resumes, so at the end of November or the beginning of December.

However, labour market needs are obviously a key consideration when setting immigration levels. What information do you have on your dashboard regarding the current situation in Quebec? What are our labour market needs?

● (1600)

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: That's a really great question.

The first thing I'll share is that LMIC has produced multiple data dashboards. We have one that's dedicated just to youth unemployment. It provides information for every province and territory in Canada where the data is available. We also have a dashboard that's just about labour market imbalances. It gets into the unemployment numbers and things like unemployment-to-vacancy ratios, which are really good measures of labour market imbalances. We also supply some sector-specific data on some of our dashboards and provide information on employer-requested demand for jobs.

We have three different dashboards that can allow you to drill down, not just by jurisdiction but, in some cases, down to the census subdivision level.

I can tell you a few things about the current Quebec unemployment rate. The youth unemployment rate is 8.2%, which is significantly below the national average, which is around 13%. With Quebec, there are a few areas where we see that there are significantly older workers in a few key occupations. For example, in Quebec, we see that we have a disproportionately older workforce in the trades, transport and equipment, manufacturing and utilities, as well as somewhat closer numbers in natural resources and agriculture.

We can take a deeper dive into the specific occupations and industries in Quebec and where we're seeing some of those imbalances. We can provide those as well.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you. That's really interesting.

In the discussion on immigration levels, there is always the question of reception capacity. I realize that the issue of capacity in terms of housing or public services falls outside your area of expertise, but what does the unemployment rate, for example, tell us about capacity in terms of labour market needs? What does it tell us about whether or not there is room for immigrants in the labour market?

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: We often describe the unemployment rate as a great starting point to understand the state of the labour market, specifically for jobseekers, but it doesn't actually tell us about employer demand.

One of the key metrics we strongly recommend that people look at, if you're trying to understand where employers are really struggling to hire people, is that vacancy rate. You can look at the vacancy rate as well as the long-term vacancy rate. The long-term vacancy rate is particularly useful because it tells you where employers are not just struggling to hire workers but also struggling for a really long time to hire workers. That can sometimes indicate we have a skills imbalance in the workforce that is not currently being addressed by the existing workforce. These can be places where we look for interventions in either the domestic labour supply or the international labour supply.

I'm happy to share the full suite of metrics we look at that can really allow you to drill down to the occupational, industry and, occasionally, local level as well.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: You also mentioned the importance of consulting the provinces. This is something that was raised recently when the Prime Minister brought up the idea of increasing immigration thresholds. The response from Quebec was that the provinces must be consulted first. Quebec has long been calling for full jurisdiction over workforce training.

Why is it important for the provinces to be consulted when federal immigration plans are being drawn up?

[*English*]

Ken Chatoor: It is of extreme paramount importance that the provinces are consulted on immigration levels. Each province and jurisdiction in Canada has a unique economy. They have unique labour market needs. They have unique training systems. Even the regulation of professions changes from province to province. It's really important, then, that we understand the local context of how a change in immigration might impact Quebec, specific provinces in Atlantic Canada or the territories.

Each of the provinces and territories produces their own projection of workforce need. The federal government, through ESDC, produces its Canadian occupational projection system, called COPS. At LMIC, we work quite closely with ESDC. ESDC also produces, internally, provincial outlooks for COPS as well.

However, I would always strongly recommend consulting with the ministries of labour, which often produce these projections; the federal government, which has multiple projection systems; and the sector councils of Canada, which also often produce their own labour market projections as well. I think that, collectively, among all of those, you can get a pretty good sense of the anticipated needs for specific jurisdictions and sectors.

● (1605)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Mr. Chatoor.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

That ends our first round.

I just wanted to note, Mr. Chatoor, that you had said you have a full suite of metrics. If you could share that with this committee, I think it would be very helpful.

If I could also just be clear, because I think that your end.... Often we hear at this committee that we need local and regional skills and labour data. I hear what you're saying. ESDC collects some. The provinces collect some. Local industry councils collect some, but we don't have that all coordinated consistently across our country. Can you verify that?

Ken Chatoor: I would say that is largely correct. Actually, it's one of the main reasons LMIC was created about a decade ago—and this is a big part of the work that we try to do—to bring the provinces and the federal government together to try to not only consolidate best practices but also share labour market information in an accessible way with the Canadian public, whether that's with career development practitioners, employers or students and their families.

The Chair: If you have recommendations about how we could do this consistently, I think it would be critical for our work.

Ken Chatoor: Yes, I have—

The Chair: Not right now, but please give it to the committee. Thank you very much.

Okay. With that, we move to the five-minute rounds of questions.

We begin with Mr. Redekopp.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Chatoor, I'm going to start with you.

You were speaking with my colleague about youth unemployment. As you said, it's around 13%, and even among university grads, it's 8% to 9%, depending on the measure. That's tens of thousands of youth who are not finding jobs.

I'm trying to figure out what's going on. I'd like to know your thoughts on this. Some people say our youth just don't want to work anymore. I don't believe that. What do you see in the market?

Ken Chatoor: I can tell you that's definitely not what I hear from the young people we speak to across the country. We actually surveyed over a thousand students who are close to graduating or have just graduated from post-secondary, as well as over 400 employers. There's no shortage of an appetite for work among young Canadians.

I will also share that the long-term unemployment rate for youth right now is actually higher than it was during the peak of the pandemic, which is quite extraordinary.

In terms of why this is happening, there are multiple compounding factors affecting the youth labour market. We have had a period of sustained inflation, which puts negative pressure on employers and businesses to be able to hire. We have also been dealing with a lot of trade uncertainty, which also contributes to employers feeling less confident. We have also had shifting immigration levels, which has all kinds of complicated downstream impacts on the labour force.

Unfortunately, historically, during periods of labour market downturns, youth are the most acutely affected. Their labour market rates, whether it's long-term unemployment or need, are often significantly higher than those of the general population.

Brad Redekopp: Would you say that the government needs to be very careful with how it sets immigration levels right now? One could argue that newcomers coming into the country could be competing for those very same jobs.

Ken Chatoor: Going back to my earlier comments, it really depends on the jurisdiction and the occupation we're talking about. We also have to differentiate between immediate labour market demand and long-term labour market demand.

I mention this in part because we have several major projects, both at the provincial level and at the federal level, that over the course of the next 10 years will require different types of specialized labour. I think it really depends on the specific occupation, the jurisdictional need and the long-term needs in terms of national projects.

Brad Redekopp: Mr. Finch, let's go with the same basic question on youth unemployment. Is it because youth don't want to work, or is there something else going on, in your opinion?

David Finch: It's certainly not because youth don't want to work.

One of the things we should observe is that the post-secondary system has always been a supply-driven business, not a demand-driven business. They produce based on the number of seats they have regardless of, generally, what's on the other side: the demand side of the marketplace.

What we're seeing from an imbalance perspective is graduates being told, “That degree is your ticket.” They continue to go for four years, and especially if they can't get full-time employment, they continue to add on to their credentials to fill that vacuum. Then they're overcredentialed, and they're in debt.

One of the cycles we're seeing is that the more credentialed you are doesn't mean you're more work-ready. I've always argued that what it in fact is a signal of is that you're avoiding the workplace.

The challenge is that they don't have.... When they join the workplace in whatever role, volunteering or paid or unpaid, what they need is better evidence, Mr. Redekopp, of the skills they've developed in the workplace. Currently, that is transparent, and what we know is that employers are looking at just a series of bachelor's degrees and trying to make a judgment call. That's difficult for any small or medium-sized enterprise or business to use as a filtering mechanism.

● (1610)

Brad Redekopp: The government is talking about increasing immigration rates. They're talking about getting rid of LMIAs for higher-skilled jobs. Do you think that's a good idea? Should there be some caution exercised there? What are your thoughts?

David Finch: I look at this not unlike how my colleagues at LMIC do. I view this as a supply chain problem. A supply chain, especially an open supply chain, works when you understand what the demand is and then you build your supply chain to prepare for it. Those are totally two separate businesses with very little relationship.

As the supply comes in, regardless of whether they're young Canadians attending post-secondary institutions or new Canadians, they're totally decoupled historically from the demand side, and there's the opportunity—

Brad Redekopp: I'm just about out of time, but on that, do you think the government understands the demand?

David Finch: No. I think the data is too convoluted. I think that's quite consistent.

Brad Redekopp: They're kind of swinging in the dark as far as picking numbers goes and how they set immigration policies from that perspective.

David Finch: All levels of government are swinging at the numbers because we're dealing with pretty poor data at all levels.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. You gave me three seconds back.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp. That was excellent.

We now have five minutes for Ms. Sodhi.

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

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Through you, Madam Chair, my first set of questions is for Mr. Chatoor.

The federal government is currently working on bringing temporary resident numbers to more sustainable levels while also maintaining a strong focus on economic immigration. In your opinion, what do you believe are the most important considerations when managing this transition without creating uncertainty for employers?

Either one of you can answer.

Ken Chatoor: To start off—and I know I keep going back to this—at LMIC we meet every month with each of the labour ministries across Canada, in addition to the federal government. Each of them has needs that are very unique.

For example, when talking about the TFW program, we've heard examples of where the sudden shift has had a negative impact, particularly in agricultural sectors, and in certain parts of the country more than others. For example, I was speaking about the age replacement ratio. It's particularly low in places like Atlantic Canada. You couple that with a significant drop in labour supply, and there's a risk of creating some shortages there.

Again, coming back to consultation with individual provinces and focusing on some of those vulnerable sectors is the best way to approach it in a way that can more carefully meet the needs of employers across Canada.

Amandeep Sodhi: Okay.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned a couple of recommendations. I believe there were two or three. Would you like to expand further on them?

Ken Chatoor: One of the key ones that I would really emphasize is the need for better data collection around foreign credential recognition. As I said in my notes, it's not just about bringing the skilled talent here. It's about making sure those skills can be put to use and doing so efficiently as well. Having exceptionally long periods where folks are coming in with credentials that they can't use is lost income for that individual, but also lost productivity for Canada.

It's very difficult to evaluate these programs without a standardized approach to data collection so that then we can, to get into the weeds a little bit, link to things like tax data or the longitudinal immigration database, which can really help us get to the granular level of some of the questions that folks are asking today.

Amandeep Sodhi: When you talk about retaining talent and people in Canada whom we genuinely need, what information do you believe the federal government should prioritize when determining which skills and occupations we should prioritize?

Ken Chatoor: I think there are ways to look at immediate need. Going back to looking at vacancies by occupation, jurisdiction and long-term vacancies, that can tell you where employers are struggling the most to hire people, but that immediate need we see in current labour market metrics does not tell us about future need, whether that's for private sector or public sector projects that are planned for the next 10 years.

That's why going to the occupational projections that are produced by each province as well as the federal government can give you a very granular look at where some of the most immediate needs are and whether the current pathways we have are actually addressing those.

● (1615)

Amandeep Sodhi: Thank you.

Ms. Wagner, I will just go over to you. TalentLift connects Canadian employers with skilled refugees and displaced people through employment opportunities and immigration pathways. You believe this approach allows employers to address skills needs while giving people who have been displaced the opportunity to build their lives and their careers.

Can you share an example of how this model has helped a Canadian employer meet a workforce need while creating a meaningful opportunity for a skilled refugee and potentially their family as well?

Dana Wagner: There are so many examples. I'll highlight one where we partner with a national roofing manufacturer. They have facilities across Canada, so they were looking for different engineering and industrial mechanic skill sets for their plants. When I say “across Canada”, I mean primarily in B.C., Alberta and Ontario, all outside of major cities. They're in Ashcroft, B.C., for example, and Madoc, Ontario.

We supported them to hire more than 30 folks with engineering backgrounds who were displaced from Venezuela. About two-thirds of them have now arrived in Canada, and they're working across the country. These are folks who, in this case, have arrived with PR with their families and are in the Canadian workplace. I think that of everyone who's arrived, only one person is no longer working because of an unfortunate health issue. We have really strong retention. Employers are finding the candidates they need.

On some of the discussion around immediate workforce needs versus future needs of employers, I agree with what my colleagues have been saying. I think also surveying employers in terms of their future hiring intentions is a really excellent way to also get a temperature check on forthcoming needs that we wouldn't see currently in vacancies.

Amandeep Sodhi: Beautiful. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you so much, Ms. Sodhi. That's perfect.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes now has the floor for two and a half minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I have some questions for you, Ms. Wagner. I understand from your pilot project on economic mobility pathways that it aims to help facilitate the settlement in Canada of skilled workers from refugee communities around the world. However, we have carried out a study here on the possibility of distributing asylum seekers amongst the provinces.

Before looking abroad, is it current practice to check whether there are asylum seekers within Canada who have qualifications? Many do. We could try to match their presence in one province with the needs in another province. Is this being done?

[*English*]

Dana Wagner: I believe colleagues on the panel right after us will be speaking to this directly, but our organization does not do this. I don't believe that there's a broad, systemic way to do this currently, to match asylum seekers who are currently in Canada with other opportunities, apart from civil society undertaking those operations. Because we're working under economic immigration programs, we're essentially bound by the same requirements in terms of labour market testing, recruiting locally, showing efforts of posting jobs and trying to fill vacancies with local talent first before hiring internationally.

I will say that we have had examples where employers thought they needed to hire internationally. They've posted, and they've had local applicants. We were like, “Our job's done here. That's great.” The system is not perfect, but it is working generally across federal and provincial programs that have labour market tests.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: A project like the one you’ve been working on, but carried out within Canada—do you think that would be useful?

[*English*]

Dana Wagner: I do, yes, very much.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What would that enable us to achieve?

[*English*]

Dana Wagner: It would hopefully provide visibility for those asylum seekers in terms of opportunities where their skills may be really needed. It would provide them with an opportunity to align their skill set with a well-paying job. If there were some type of infrastructure to support relocation and get them settled in a new community with the support of an employer, that would be an excellent model. We know people don't always land where their skill sets are immediately needed.

● (1620)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wagner and Mr. Deschênes.

Mr. Menegakis now has the floor for five minutes.

[*English*]

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

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us today.

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

Did the Liberal government ask the LMIC, prior to expanding these policy streams, to conduct an independent assessment on how the surge of temporary residents would impact domestic youth employment? You mentioned that, nationally, it's 13%. In the greater Toronto area, it's actually closer to 17% and maybe even higher in York region, where I'm from.

Ken Chatoor: LMIC is an arm's-length agency. We're funded by each of the provinces and territories, as well as by the federal government. We don't work directly with the political side of government.

Costas Menegakis: The government does not ask you for any research or information, as such. Okay.

From a straightforward economic perspective, did the rapid increase in temporary immigration expand the labour supply in a way that lowered wage growth and reduced job availability for young Canadians available to work?

Ken Chatoor: I don't have that information directly in front of me, and I don't want to give you inaccurate information.

I believe some studies have done some economic analyses, looking at the rate of immigration and potential negative impacts on wages. I can look for those research reports and share them with you.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you. If you could share them with us, it would be greatly appreciated.

I'll go to you, Dr. Finch, if I may.

Sir, based on your research on the collapse of entry-level employment, to what extent has the Liberal government's policy of letting large corporations exploit the temporary foreign worker program directly displaced young Canadians from their very first jobs?

David Finch: It's not a new thing. It's been happening over the last 30 years. What we have seen is the social contract between young people and employers dramatically change. Prior to 1990, large organizations were prepared to invest heavily in the training and development of young people. They played what I call that conversion function.

We've now seen a significant reduction. At this point, young people are in that precarious gig environment. If they're in a large organization, they get limited training and limited recognition of that training. Preparing young people to be successful is a much more challenging issue. It's really about supporting them as they transition to the workforce.

Costas Menegakis: As you know, entry-level jobs pay modest wages. If we combine suppressed wages with Liberal-driven population growth that pushes housing and rent out of reach, isn't the government effectively pricing young Canadians out of their independence?

David Finch: One of the challenges, certainly, that young Canadians are facing today is lack of confidence in being given the same opportunities their parents had. I see this all the time. Look at the number of young people—I think it's a third of people under the age of 35—still living at home. That reflects some of those challenges, and it's not good for anyone.

We have to create opportunities, build confidence and build that agency earlier in the system.

Costas Menegakis: When Liberal temporary foreign worker policies allow corporations to bypass local youth—bypass Canadians—for low-wage labour, what long-term damage is being done to an entire generation's career trajectory and earning potential?

David Finch: We all have to reflect on our first jobs. Our first jobs were not just jobs to make minimum wage. In fact, they allowed us to understand the workplace—how to work with peers and how to take constructive or maybe not-so-constructive feedback. They were part of an important transition into the labour market.

That's a challenge I've certainly seen my students have. They're walking out of a gymnasium where a thousand students are writing a multiple-choice exam. They're not prepared for their first job because they didn't have many of those same opportunities that were embedded in us as young people in Canada.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you for that answer.

In a normal, healthy market, a labour shortage forces businesses to raise wages and invest in training young domestic workers. Has the Liberals' deliberate decision to flood the entry-level market with TFWs artificially suppressed Canadian youth wages and stripped employers of any incentive to train local talent?

David Finch: I can't comment on the data and the suppression of wages tied to immigrants, but I can say that a general trend we've seen over the last few decades is that, I believe, the employer is a critical part of our education system, and they need to take greater accountability. The supports need to be given to them to be more accountable to train their people to lift all the boats in the community.

They're disincentivized right now, because what it shows is that you hire a new graduate, and they're going to last about three years at that new employer. The employer asks, “Why would I train them if, by three years' time, they're going to be moving to my competitor?” We have this cycle that's emerged in the last 20 to 30 years where, in Canada, we've seen a decline in this commitment to training young people because we have such a fluid youth labour market.

● (1625)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Dr. Finch.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Our last five minutes go to Mr. Chang.

Your five minutes start now.

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

Ms. Wagner, in your opening remarks, you mentioned that refugees bring incredible skills and professional experience; however, their economic contributions are often overlooked. Based on your experience, how can attracting skilled refugees help Canada build greater economic resilience and address our labour shortage issues?

Dana Wagner: I believe that is through broader access to all of Canada's economic immigration programs. As you all know, we have over 80 of them, and many of them are designed to fill very specific workforce needs, whether they're designed by the federal government or designed by the provinces. If we enable people who are living as refugees to have access.... Again, that's not over and above access. We're talking about equitably being able to compete for the same job opportunities as other qualified talent.

I love the wording that my colleague David used. Something that is really undervalued right now and we don't do a great job at measuring is adaptive capacity. I want us to think about this population. It's not just the technical skills that they bring but this adaptive capacity and quality. I called it creativity, but we're talking about people who have had to reinvent themselves, reimagine themselves, in just incredibly difficult conditions. We see it on the other side with settlement and long-term retention. People thrive when they're here.

Wade Chang: Thank you.

Beyond addressing our labour shortage issues, what other benefits can international talent bring to Canada, particularly in the areas of innovation, entrepreneurship and job creation?

Dana Wagner: We work with some employers who are recruiting quite early in their business, and we find that some of them are recruiting through their international networks. The potential for that to stimulate a small and growing business is pretty incredible. The company that I have in mind specifically is a textile manufacturer, where there's a certain skill set that really isn't local or domestic in terms of the particular textile manufacturing that they're hoping to bring to this country and to grow.

I'd like us to think about it, again, in a much more long-term way in terms of what people are bringing with them immediately and their ability to grow the companies that they're joining here.

Wade Chang: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chatoor, you mentioned international credential recognition in your remarks. How can better recognition of foreign credentials strengthen Canada's economic resilience?

Ken Chatoor: I think it could strengthen it a lot. We have multiple labour shortages. Many of our skilled immigration pathways are meant to address those, but often folks will need to get their credentials recognized. Part of what we and multiple ESDC evaluations have found is that the costs and time to complete these credentials are not consistent. They can often be very long, and more often than not, newcomers don't even realize they have to do FCR until they arrive in Canada.

One of the most important recommendations in our report was to start that process before newcomers even arrive. That should be one of the first pieces of information they receive—that they will need to have their credentials recognized in order to fully integrate into the Canadian labour market.

Wade Chang: Would that be part of the pre-settlement services?

Ken Chatoor: Yes, I believe it would be. That's typically housed in either IRCC or ESDC.

Wade Chang: Thank you.

As Canada is looking to diversify our trade relations and expand into new opportunities, how can international talent help Canada expand opportunities and strengthen our economic resilience?

Ken Chatoor: That's a really interesting question. To the earlier question about how research and innovation are often a very global community, where expertise and talent tend to move around, just based on the way those sectors tend to work.... I think in a similar way, potentially, with trade....

I'll admit that's not my area of expertise, so I am probably not the best to comment on that.

● (1630)

Wade Chang: Thank you very much.

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

I want to thank all of the witnesses for their excellent testimony.

I need some clarification from Mr. Chatoor. You mentioned that for long-term data in terms of occupational projections, ESDC has that for future job needs. How can that be, since ESDC gathers only some information at the federal level?

The provincial ministries of labour gather information at a different level, and then local industry councils gather it at the local level. How is ESDC able to actually have that?

Ken Chatoor: I would describe this as the nature of Canada's disaggregated data collection.

The Chair: It's an issue to be resolved.

Ken Chatoor: Yes. I think in the way ESDC approaches it at a federal level, the aims are a bit different from the provinces' or local economic development agencies', which are thinking on a more local level. ESDC's is really meant to help give federal agencies a sense of high-level demand across Canada.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I want to thank all of my colleagues, as well as our witnesses, for this excellent conversation.

Peter Fragiskatos (London Centre, Lib.): [*Inaudible—Editor*]

The Chair: Go ahead Ms. Webb.

Rebecca Webb (Executive Director, Labour Market Information Council): I was going to mention that ESDC also partners with Service Canada locations across the country to collect regional data to better support its estimates. It's not just Ottawa collecting information they think they are supposed to be collecting. It's the Service Canada locations that aid in the assistance of data collection to support the national forecast.

The Chair: That is great and very helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Fragiskatos, for pointing that out.

Thank you for that excellent contribution.

I'm going to thank our witnesses again—Dr. Finch, you as well—and I'm going to suspend for a few minutes for us to change over to the second panel.

Thank you.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order. Welcome to panel two.

I would like to warmly welcome all of our panellists for the second hour of our study on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

From the Canadian Nuclear Association, we have George Christidis, president and CEO. From the Northpine Foundation, we have Bayan Khatib, impact director for refugees, and Abdulla Daoud, head of impact systems and impact manager for refugees. From the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, we have Simran Singh Vig, senior manager of policy, and Andrea Carmona, director of public affairs.

I extend a warm welcome to all of you.

We are going to begin with five-minute interventions from each one of you.

Mr. Christidis, we're going to start off with five minutes for you.

● (1640)

George Christidis (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Nuclear Association): Great. Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you for inviting me.

Ms. Chair and honourable members of the committee, thank you again for this opportunity to contribute to this important study.

I'm George Christidis. I'm the president and CEO of the Canadian Nuclear Association.

We were founded in 1960 and we represent 200 companies from across Canada's nuclear value chain, including utilities, uranium producers, technology developers, manufacturers, researchers and service providers. We bring industry together, advise governments on policy and communicate nuclear technology's value to Canadians.

Canada's nuclear industry provides approximately 14% of Canada's electricity and supports over 89,000 jobs directly and indirectly across Canada. It's part of the key to Canada's nuclear energy strategy. We applaud the government for releasing this strategy and providing the framework by which our industry will be able to contribute to key goals, such as nuclear energy security, economic development and climate goals.

Canada's nuclear sector is positioned for significant growth over the coming decade. In addition to ongoing reactor refurbishments, new large and small reactor projects, developing uranium mines, fuel cell activities, medical isotope production and nuclear technology exports present substantial opportunities to strengthen Canada's economy and energy security and provide growth.

The growth of the nuclear sector creates tremendous opportunities for Canadians not only in terms of growth opportunities but also in terms of linking our international relations objectives. To enable this growth, the CNA has been advocating for key enabling factors, which include regulatory efficiency, nuclear financial models to de-risk projects and developing our workforce as a key strategic component for ensuring success.

Our research indicates that 20% to 31% of the current nuclear workforce is expected to retire between 2030 and 2035. Canada will need to replace a significant portion of its existing nuclear workforce, while refurbishments and new nuclear development will create additional demand for skilled workers. This is where Canada can explore targeted immigration pathways to help address demonstrated labour shortages and attract specialized talent. To ensure long-term workforce sustainability, international recruitment should be integrated with workforce planning, domestic training programs and the practical supports to ensure the successful integration and retention of workers in Canada.

We offer four recommendations.

First, to connect immigration planning to a coordinated, long-term nuclear workforce assessment, the federal government needs to work closely with the provinces, territories, employers, unions and education institutions to identify the occupations, specialized competencies and timelines required for planned projects. This assessment should account for retirements and the time needed for recruitment, training, professional licensing and security clearances. It should distinguish shortages requiring international recruitment for gaps that earlier training, succession planning or improved retention in the domestic environment could address.

Second is to improve the predictability of work permitting processing and renewals for workers filling demonstrated shortages. Members have identified specialized welders as one example of workers whose loss could delay projects and activities across a project's critical path.

When an essential worker's permit expires before a renewal is resolved, the consequences can extend beyond just the project, delaying it and raising costs. We recommend clear service standards and a dedicated escalation channel for employers facing time-sensitive permitting issues involving essential project personnel. The government should also provide clear guidance on renewal timelines and the circumstances in which workers can continue working while applications are processed.

Third is to support the successful integration and retention of international professionals. Credentials recognition, professional licensing, security screening and workplace qualifications can significantly extend onboarding. The federal government should work with provincial regulators and industry to make these steps clear, identify opportunities to complete assessments before arrival, support bridging programs and supervise work experiences where appropriate. We should also provide clear, predictable pathways for study and research into employment and permanent residence for international graduates and researchers whose expertise matches demonstrated need.

Fourth is to pair international recruitment with investment in Canadian workers and knowledge transfer. Immigration should complement a strong domestic talent pipeline. Federal training and research programs should support apprentices, co-op placements, graduate research and mentorship linked to anticipated project demand, including opportunities for indigenous people, women and other under-represented groups.

● (1645)

These investments should also help employers retain experienced workers.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Christidis. That's your five minutes.

Next, we have five minutes for the Northpine Foundation.

Bayan Khatib (Impact Director, Refugees, Northpine Foundation): Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting the Northpine Foundation.

My name is Bayan Khatib. This is my colleague, Abdulla Daoud. Together, we run the refugee portfolio at the Northpine Foundation.

Northpine is a Canadian philanthropic foundation investing in six underserved populations, including refugees. Since 2022, the refugee portfolio has invested approximately $70 million across 65 organizations, creating better outcomes for refugees in housing, employment and language training. Our partners report that 3,000 refugees have obtained meaningful employment.

Our experience shows that refugees are ready and able to contribute to our economy and social fabric, yet too often their skills and experience go unused. If Canada could see refugees for the great potential they hold, then we could create better pathways for them to contribute to Canada's economic growth.

Our first area of focus is making the economic mobility pathway pilot, or EMPP, permanent.

Introduced in 2018, the EMPP enabled skilled refugees living abroad to immigrate through Canada's economic immigration system, recognizing that displaced people may have the qualifications employers need but that they face documentation and financial barriers. The results were impressive. IRCC's July 2026 EMPP evaluation reported that of principal applicants who arrived by June 2025, nearly 92% had post-secondary education and about 91% who arrived with job offers were employed when surveyed. This was even higher than the 89% employment rate among economic-class principal applicants.

Northpine contributed $1 million to Talent Beyond Boundaries' EMPP work, expanding employer recruitment in sectors facing labour shortages, including health care and construction. Employers gained qualified workers. Refugees rebuilt careers. Communities gained people who provide essential services, build affordable housing, strengthen local communities and address rural population decline.

However, the demand quickly exceeded available spaces. By the time the EMPP closed to new applications in July 2025, projected processing times reached four to six years. Skilled refugees lost job offers while employers struggled to fill vacancies.

We welcome IRCC's recommendation to make the EMPP permanent and urge the minister, with this committee's support, to act quickly.

A permanent program for optimal benefit for Canada must include sufficient annual admission spaces, a six-month processing target, documentation and financial accommodations that ensure accessibility for displaced people, a clear plan to resolve the existing backlog and assurance that the EMPP will complement rather than replace Canada's humanitarian resettlement commitments.

Second, we must better utilize refugee talent already in Canada. A 2023 Health Canada study found that of approximately 16,700 internationally educated health care professionals admitted through refugee or humanitarian pathways, only half of those employed worked in health care, despite widespread shortages.

The problem is not a lack of talent. It's inadequate employment and licensing pathways. We recommend tying funding from the $97-million foreign credential recognition action fund to expedited pathways for relicensing, employment pathways for those without original credentials, paid bridging and placement opportunities, and involving employers early to connect training with real vacancies, leading to measurable employment and retention outcomes.

Northpine continues to invest in solutions, including in Talent Beyond Boundaries, to develop regional health care talent hubs, beginning in northern Ontario. The model integrates credential recognition, bridging training, employer recruitment and relocation support into one coordinated pathway for qualified refugees in Canada and those abroad when the EMPP reopens.

We have also invested to expand the Refugee Centre's relocation program, connecting refugees in major urban centres with verified employment and housing in smaller municipalities. This builds on our earlier pilot that achieved 92% employment retention.

Philanthropy can demonstrate what works. Government must help successful models scale and coordinate with regulators, educators and provincial partners. Canada should not measure success only by how many skilled people it attracts but also by how many are able to use their skills and talent to grow Canada.

● (1650)

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khatib.

Next, we have five minutes for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Andrea Carmona (Director of Public Affairs, Ontario Chamber of Commerce): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and esteemed members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear on behalf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

The OCC represents 60,000 members across all sectors and communities in Ontario, including over 140 local chambers of commerce and boards of trade. What we share today comes directly from that network.

Our members' experience is that Canada's edge depends as much on who we attract as on whether people can work, build a life and grow here. We see three opportunities to get those foundations right.

The first opportunity is planning immigration around workforce needs. Our member shortages are concentrated in specific sectors like health care, energy, mining and the trades, and in rural and northern communities.

The second opportunity is predictability. Employers understand that policy has to adjust, but our members describe a system that moves from crisis to crisis. Ontario's nominee allocation was cut in half in a single year from 21,500 to 10,750, and then partly restored to 14,119. A 50% swing is what an employer means by unpredictability. For a small business deciding whether to recruit or train, that uncertainty comes at a real cost.

The third opportunity is putting the talent we attract to work. Our members point to a persistent disconnect. A significant share of newcomers are trained in regulated occupations but are not working in their fields, while employers in those same fields can't fill roles. Settlement succeeds when people can work in the jobs they're trained for and when employers are supported to take on the cost and risk of that first hire.

The express entry reforms taking effect on November 3 recognize the value of Canadian work experience. As they are implemented, they need to reach the full range of shortages employers face, including in care, in the trades and in agri-food—not only in high-wage occupations.

My colleague, Simran, will outline how to get there.

Simran Singh Vig (Senior Manager of Policy, Ontario Chamber of Commerce): Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

For Ontario businesses, attracting talent is only the beginning. They need to hire the right people, help them put their skills to work and retain them over time. To achieve this objective, we recommend four practical steps.

First, continue attracting top talent in the sectors that will drive growth. The federal budget from last year committed to an international talent attraction strategy and an accelerated pathway for H-1B visa holders, recognizing needs in priority sectors like health care, research and advanced industries. As these commitments are implemented, we recommend ensuring that employers in priority sectors can access practical recruitment support and timely work permit processing.

Alongside recruitment from abroad, we have to strengthen connections between employers and international graduates already trained here in priority fields, helping them find relevant jobs and navigate existing permanent residence pathways.

Our second recommendation is to give employers greater certainty to plan. We recommend that the federal government work with the provinces and territories to bring employers, professional regulators and post-secondary institutions into talent planning early so that regional and sectoral workforce needs inform immigration decisions. Building on existing multi-year planning by publishing province-specific nomination figures further in advance, with adequate notice and transition arrangements when allocations change, will be helpful. Businesses need the predictability to plan recruitment, training and investment.

Our third recommendation is to help newcomers put their skills to work sooner and help employers retain them. As part of this, we recommend expanding federal funding for pre-arrival credential assessments and employer-connected bridging programs that help newcomers complete licensing requirements and find work in their fields. Provinces and regulators would continue to determine professional standards and licensing decisions. We also recommend that the IRCC consider verified readiness to practise when selecting candidates from regulated occupations, including meaningful progress towards licensing confirmed by the responsible regulator.

Building on the time-limited, in-Canada workers initiative, we recommend an ongoing targeted pathway to permanent residency for workers already filling demonstrated shortages in key sectors, including in rural and northern communities.

Finally, it is about strengthening the connection between evidence and immigration decisions. We recommend that the federal government work with provinces, territories and regulators to bring together existing information on labour shortages, licensing and newcomers' employment outcomes, publishing regular findings by sector and region wherever the data permits and using those findings to guide future selection and investments in employment supports.

Together, we are confident that these steps would give employers greater confidence to hire and invest, while helping newcomers build careers that match their skills.

● (1655)

The Chair: Thank you so much, Mr. Singh Vig.

Now, we'll go to our first round of questions, which is for six minutes. We'll begin with Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for appearing before us.

I'd like to start my questions with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, please.

For years, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce fought for expanded access to low-wage temporary foreign workers. Why were you so focused on helping corporate members avoid raising wages for young Ontario workers by hiring TFWs instead?

Simran Singh Vig: Let me take that question first, member.

Our members turn to international recruitment when they cannot fill roles domestically. We strongly believe that the program needs to have safeguards, and that bad actors should face the consequences. We at the OCC strongly support compliance.

Costas Menegakis: Let me expand a little bit on the point you just made.

Does the Ontario Chamber of Commerce believe that highly profitable, multinational fast-food franchises should be allowed to rely on low-wage TFWs during a national youth unemployment crisis? Tim Hortons, for example, was using this immigration stream as a hiring policy for its organization when young Canadians couldn't get jobs there.

Simran Singh Vig: Member, in our experience and from what we hear from members of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, including our local chambers across the communities in Ontario, when it comes to temporary foreign workers, there are certain communities across the province that rely on temporary foreign workers for seasonal employment. There are communities in northern Ontario that are seasonal in nature. There are agricultural communities and communities focused on tourism that rely on this predictable pathway. We continue to hear from those members that this program allows them to fill those needs now.

As I mentioned before, we are strongly of the view that bad actors should be held accountable. Compliance is important.

Costas Menegakis: Mr. Singh Vig, you're the senior manager of policy for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. You outlined for us four practical steps. In all four of them, not one was focused on Canadian youth and Canadian employees. They were focused on how you can maximize stuff coming out of immigration, when we have Canadians out of work. Youth unemployment nationally is at 13% today. In the greater Toronto area, which is the heart of the Ontario chamber's membership, youth unemployment is as high as 17%, sir.

Does the chamber acknowledge the basic economic reality that flooding entry-level markets with temporary foreign labour suppresses wages for working-class Canadians?

Simran Singh Vig: This isn't a choice between young Canadians and global talent. Our members tell us that they need both.

Costas Menegakis: It is very much a choice, and I'll tell you why. I had a group of PSWs, or personal support workers, come to me. Their hourly wage is $26 an hour. Eight of them from the same organization came to see me. They said this: One of them was a single mother of three children. Instead of her employer giving her the regular 40 hours a week, he reduced her hours to 15 hours a week because the employer replaced her and her colleagues with temporary foreign workers making the minimum wage of $17.95 an hour. What do you have to say to that mother?

Simran Singh Vig: I'm not familiar with the specific example you're mentioning, Member.

Costas Menegakis: It's one example, sir, that is a symbol. It's symptomatic right across the system. Employers are using the immigration system as a model to make more money. They're cutting the hours of qualified people, so they can pay less to bring these people in. The chamber has a responsibility as well, primarily to Canadians and immigrants who are here already and who are ready to work, rather than to continuously lobby for new people to come in under the auspices or the excuse that you can't find Canadians. I would argue that we have a lot of talent here in Canada—in Canadians and among the immigrants who are here—that can fill those jobs.

● (1700)

Simran Singh Vig: I agree with you that we have a lot of talent within the communities. As I said before, the shortages that we described that we hear about from our members and local chambers are in regions where employers haven't been able to fill jobs domestically.

That being said, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has consistently pushed to strengthen the domestic talent pipeline at the same time. We've been on the record asking for more supports when it comes to work-integrated learning opportunities and enhancements to the co-operative education tax credit. We strongly believe that when employers fill those critical roles, they grow.

Costas Menegakis: How do you monitor that, sir? You're lobbying for that left, right and centre. There's a housing crisis. There's a health care crisis, and there's a youth unemployment crisis. What you're talking about is theory. Practically, on the ground, young people can't find jobs. People who are here are losing their wages because these temporary foreign workers are taking over their jobs and their hours. A mother can't afford to put food on the table. That same mother I told you about is borrowing money from her family and her friends to pay for her rent and put food on the table. She went as far as saying that some days, she doesn't eat so her kids can eat.

That's a qualified person working who has been cut because of the same people who you are lobbying we should continue to bring large numbers of into the country under the auspices that we have to fill labour markets. In the GTA, we have 17% in youth unemployment alone.

Simran Singh Vig: I'll say two things on that.

First, when it comes to temporary foreign workers and other programs, we at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce have a very strong view of that opinion, whether it was on the announcement by the government last week on the changes to the express entry system or other programs that bring in skilled folks.

This is a pretty comprehensive and pretty complex immigration system. What we hear from our member organizations and communities across the province is that there are certain sectors—

Costas Menegakis: People come before profits, sir, I would say.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Singh Vig.

Thank you, Mr. Menegakis.

Costas Menegakis: People come before profits.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's your six minutes.

Next, we have six minutes for Mr. Zuberi.

Sameer Zuberi: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Also, thanks to the witnesses for being here today. I really appreciate your presence. I recognize how committee can sometimes be a unique experience and environment. I was once on the other side, and I appreciate what you're doing today.

I want to continue with Mr. Singh Vig.

You are sharing testimony around skilled workers. Am I right?

Simran Singh Vig: That's right.

Sameer Zuberi: We were hearing a line of questioning about a very important issue, which is youth unemployment. We're talking about, in that particular situation, those who are entering and have yet to develop their skills. Is that correct?

● (1705)

Simran Singh Vig: That's right.

Sameer Zuberi: We're not actually talking about two competing sets of people, are we?

Simran Singh Vig: No, we're not.

Sameer Zuberi: Okay. I just wanted to get that clear and on the record.

I took notes during your opening. You were speaking about the importance of international graduates—I agree with you—and of those who have international credentials to be recognized and utilized here in Canada so that we can make sure they're not underemployed people.

That will in turn help our GDP, so this is not only for those individuals to be properly employed and have a gainful income for their families and to be utilizing their education, skills and talents, but it's also to increase our GDP. Is that correct?

Simran Singh Vig: That's right.

Sameer Zuberi: You also, then, spoke about how provinces and regulators—this is completely appropriate and true—choose who can enter specific professions like law, accounting, engineering, medicine, etc. They're regulated by bodies that are regulated by provinces.

How do you connect those two things? We have those who were trained outside of Canada in their respective and multiple professions. I'm from Quebec. I know that there are at least 40-odd professions that are regulated by a provincial code. How do you remove that disconnect so those internationally trained professionals are coming here and then those regulators recognize those credentials? How do you square that circle?

Simran Singh Vig: It's a really important question that you've asked. I'll say a couple of things here.

When it comes to credentials recognition, something that we hear from our members time and time again is that we're bringing in the skilled folks who immigrate and come in with a certain skill set, with certifications, but oftentimes the time period between them getting their skills assessed and then finding a good job in their field is too long.

The process is too onerous and sometimes the costs associated with it are also pretty high. What ends up happening is that skilled immigrants who come in are not able to hit the ground running fast, and they're not able to quickly become active contributing members of the economy.

Sameer Zuberi: Do you also engage with provincial regulators—in your case, Ontario—on this specific issue, which is really in their domain? Do you engage there?

Simran Singh Vig: Yes, we do.

Sameer Zuberi: There is another thing. Do you see a gap with respect to those who could be working, even within the current regulations, with skills that are ready to be harnessed? They're ready to go, but there's just a disconnect. Do you see a level, a layer, there?

Simran Singh Vig: Absolutely. I'll say something—

Sameer Zuberi: If you do, how does the federal government help to iron that out?

Simran Singh Vig: The federal government controls selection. I think that's a lever. I believe that one of the other witnesses talked about the $97-million credential recognition action fund for occupations that IRCC selected for. We strongly believe that using that fund to target those occupations that are facing acute shortages in Ontario and across the country is important. That's a first step.

It's also about considering designing the regulated certification points. If you're able to reward candidates who start their certification process early, before they formally immigrate, it would ensure that lead-in time before they can come in and hit the ground running. We are actually considering that as part of the immigration decision as well.

Sameer Zuberi: That's where the hand-holding is. It's to help have those credentials recognized as people come here. That's where the federal government can play a role. Is that correct?

Simran Singh Vig: Absolutely.

Sameer Zuberi: Now I want to switch to Ms. Khatib and Mr. Daoud.

You were speaking to the EMPP, a very valuable program. We heard about it earlier. You shared some really interesting stats: 90% of those entering through that program are entering into the workforce. That's important for our GDP and economy.

However, can you speak to how critical that is for a refugee fleeing a dire, life-threatening situation? How impactful is it for their life? This is about money, but it's also about the human story and how important it is for them to land in their profession.

Abdulla Daoud: It's very important. It's crucial for the refugee's stability, retention, giving back to the community and building their livelihood within that community. The employer relationship is quite crucial, in our experience. In all our investments throughout Canada, employment has been key to the mental health of refugees.

Sameer Zuberi: It's about stability and mental health.

Abdulla Daoud: Exactly—it's the number one key factor.

It's funny. We met with one of the leading doctors for refugee health last week. He said that one of the greatest cures for mental health issues, when it comes to people of displacement, is employment in Canada. It's quite critical.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Daoud.

Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes now has the floor for six minutes.

Alexis Deschênes: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here.

I have some questions for the Northpine Foundation.

Firstly, as I understand it, you are a privately funded foundation and you are, to some extent, helping to make up for the lack of funding from the federal government, particularly with regard to the integration of asylum seekers and refugees. Is that correct?

● (1710)

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What sort of services do you offer to asylum seekers and refugees?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: Right now, we focus on three services: housing, employment and language.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: What are you doing to support asylum seekers and refugees?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: Right now, our interventions are particularly to help the not-for-profit organizations—or even the for-profit organizations and businesses—that help these refugees or asylum seekers integrate economically into the society they live in.

Primarily, the first thing is employment, whether it be some sort of small credentialing that needs to be done to get them a job, training to get a job or finding them a job right away.

Then we counterbalance that with housing. We invest in a lot of innovative housing solutions throughout Canada that can get them into transitional housing, and then into permanent housing.

Then it's about language, so we invest in language interventions, whether in English or French.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: To help people find jobs, what sort of staff do you employ?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: We don't do it. We invest in organizations that do it.

For example, we just made an investment in different day cares throughout Canada to help refugees who have that experience or who want to go into that field to get trained in ECE or as an ECEA, so they can work in those day care centres, because we see that as a need. They're coming to us and saying that they really want to be able to fill that need. We also do this in construction and health care.

Our equation is training and then employment.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Ms. Khatib, you briefly mentioned the results achieved. What have the results been so far?

[*English*]

Bayan Khatib: The majority of what we're funding is employment and housing outcomes. So far, we've had about 1,000 refugees obtain stable housing, and 3,000 refugees obtain meaningful employment that matches their skill and education. We're a bit of a different type of funding, because we really focus on meaningful employment. We feel that it is sustainable and will lead to good retention in employment.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: As regards asylum seekers or refugees who have found jobs, you say there are 3,000 of them. What is the success rate?

[*English*]

Bayan Khatib: That is the success rate. We have funded about 65 interventions across the country. We've spent about $70 million. This is just the refugee portfolio at Northpine. Those interventions have led to 3,000 refugees obtaining employment across Canada and 1,000 obtaining stable housing, not transitional. We put them in transitional housing and, while they are in there, we give them supports, upskilling and language training and then exit them into stable housing.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Does it work every time?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: We have about, I would say, an 85% to 90% success rate.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: Do you carry out any follow-up afterwards to make sure it’s working properly and that people are keeping their jobs?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: We study them for 12 months.

Bayan Khatib: Yes, there are 12 months of retention. The employment outcome has to come with 12 months of retention as well.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: That’s quite interesting.

So, it works, and if all asylum seekers and refugees in Quebec and Canada had access to this type of service, we can assume that it would increase their employment rate.

● (1715)

[*English*]

Bayan Khatib: This is what we hope. We hope that we, as a philanthropy foundation, can find and tweak good models that get people into employment and housing and that government will notice and then come to help scale these good models across Canada.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: How do you view the fact that the government does not currently fund this type of service?

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: I say that everyone has their part to play. For the government, they are funding stuff that's also necessary for government-assisted refugees, for example, the funding that needs to happen for their housing in their first 12 months, their mental health services and health services. These are all other factors that contribute to success. We have one small part to play, which is in employment. We feel that it's one of the gaps, and that's what we're building.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Deschênes: However, funding largely comes from the provinces. Quebec will fund initiatives, amongst other things, for the integration of permanent residents. However, when we visit groups working on the integration of asylum seekers, we often find that there is not really any funding, because the entire system for asylum seekers and refugees falls under federal jurisdiction.

Personally, I still do not understand why the federal government does not offer more support. A request has been made by Quebec. What I gather from your testimony is that if the federal government were to invest in the integration of refugees into the labour market, it would ultimately benefit, as this would lead to better integration.

[*English*]

Abdulla Daoud: Quebec's a perfect example. In Quebec, you have PRAIDA, which is a shelter for refugee claimants that I'm a big fan of. They also have one of the best outcomes for employment when it comes to asylum seekers in all of Canada. That's all because, in Quebec, the province actually invests in refugee claimants to an extent.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Daoud.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Deschênes.

[*English*]

I gave you a little extra time, Monsieur Deschênes, because there won't be time for you in this next round.

We have five minutes left for Mr. Redekopp and five minutes for Mr. Fragiskatos. Then I have to go through a routine motion. There are no surprises.

Mr. Redekopp, you have five minutes.

Brad Redekopp: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Christidis, you spoke of the federal government needing to work closely with provinces and territories and industry as well. You may know that the government is changing the express entry system. It was talked a bit about here today. It's removing the requirement for an LMIA for higher-skilled jobs. Did the government consult you or your organizations about this change?

George Christidis: We haven't been consulted, no.

Brad Redekopp: That's a good example of the government not properly consulting, and maybe they should be in order to find out if that's something you needed.

George Christidis: I don't have particulars. I suspect the government will have stakeholders it targets to have conversations with.

From our perspective—

Brad Redekopp: You weren't one of the lucky ones on that list.

George Christidis: No, not in this case.

Brad Redekopp: Ms. Carmona, you said that the government is working from crisis to crisis. You referred to the 50% cuts in the provincial nominee programs that happened a year ago or so.

Does the government have work to do to improve how they consult with provinces and other organizations?

Andrea Carmona: In our experience, the government has been quite collaborative. I think it's more about just ensuring that we are—

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Just on that, were you asking for the 50% cuts then?

Andrea Carmona: No.

Brad Redekopp: Are they not listening then? Are they asking questions but not listening?

How do you describe that as collaborative?

Andrea Carmona: I don't know the specifics of how that decision was made.

What I do know is that, since then, we have been in conversations with the government around how to create better connections to industry and ensure that industry is at the decision-making table when those decisions are made in the future.

Brad Redekopp: Do you believe the provinces have a better view of labour market needs than the federal government?

Andrea Carmona: I think they have a different view, because they have a more localized perspective and different forms of data collection. It's very important that the federal government keep the provinces around the table and that we have that collaboration with industry as well.

Brad Redekopp: In that, do you mean they should be getting their input and then making the decisions for them, or they should be maybe even allocating more positions to the provinces to let them decide how to use them?

Andrea Carmona: I think giving the provinces a bit more leeway to make those decisions is important, because they do have a much closer look at their labour market needs than the federal government does.

Brad Redekopp: Mr. Singh Vig, you spoke about the express entry changes. Specifically, they include removing the LMIA requirement for certain higher-wage jobs. Were you consulted about these changes?

● (1720)

Simran Singh Vig: No, not specifically these changes.

Brad Redekopp: All right.

As you're probably well aware, LMIA fraud was a huge problem and continues to be one. The LMIA is one of the few safeguards in the system in terms of not hiring a Canadian. Are you concerned that with these changes that are going to be coming into effect LMIA fraud could potentially grow again?

Simran Singh Vig: Again, we've not done any independent analysis, nor do we know the details beyond what has been reported—that LMIA fraud exists.

Again, as I said in part of my testimony as well, we strongly believe that bad actors should be held accountable. Compliance is important, but again, there are priority sectors that need skilled personnel across the country, including in Ontario, and that need people fast.

Brad Redekopp: You also spoke about retaining workers. As you know, right now many newcomers are finding that their work permits are expiring, forcing them to leave. Businesses lose a trained employee and possibly someone who's integrated well into the community. However, at the same time, we have asylum seekers and others who can stay in the country for a very long time as they wind their way through our very easily manipulated system.

Does that make sense to your members?

Simran Singh Vig: What our members tell us, really, is that there are communities across Ontario that have folks who came in on a temporary basis with valid permits who have actually anchored those communities, who have been there, who have grown families—

Brad Redekopp: Right, which is what I just said. Does it make sense that they would have to go and others can stay?

Simran Singh Vig: I don't think, again, that it's a choice.

Brad Redekopp: Fair enough.

Ms. Khatib, you deal with refugees and asylum seekers regularly. Do you see people with unmet needs in housing and health care?

Bayan Khatib: Yes.

Brad Redekopp: Do you think the government should have a plan to house and care for the people they're going to bring into the country? Is that an important part of deciding how many people to bring into the country?

Bayan Khatib: Yes.

Brad Redekopp: Okay. Do you think the government has done that kind of planning?

Bayan Khatib: To some extent.... I think they are getting health care, so we'll start with that one.

I think they are getting health care. I think there are some housing solutions as well—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Khatib.

Thank you, Mr. Redekopp. That's five minutes.

Mr. Fragiskatos, you have five minutes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Christidis, I'll begin with you. It's our honour to consult with you today and for you to offer this committee, at least, advice.

You mentioned in your testimony that you believe the role of the immigration system—and don't let me put words in your mouth; this is my impression of what you left us with—is to supplement the Canadian economy, to fill gaps where those exist. You said that there needs to be an emphasis on skills training and apprenticeship, particularly of young people—I don't think you said "young people", but I think that's what you mean—as the government puts in place policy and as the government engages provinces on the construction of large projects going forward. This is a vision that you endorse and the organization endorses.

George Christidis: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

Indeed, we see ourselves as foundational to the Canadian economy, and we emphasize a domestic supply chain with domestic employment. We feel that immigration strategically complements the need for our industry to grow. We're looking at significant growth with the nuclear energy strategy, including large nuclear projects in Ontario and small nuclear projects in Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and, potentially, Alberta, as well as international projects.

Our sector is very much focused on working closely with polytechnics and universities and working with women and other groups to increase representation in our workforce. There's definitely a need for an alignment with immigration policy from the perspective of specialized labour for specialized need.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

Mr. Singh Vig and Ms. Carmona, thank you for your testimony today.

On a related point, we heard in the previous session today a really interesting point, or at least I found it tremendously compelling. When we look to the immigration system to fill gaps in the economy, instead of emphasizing the unemployment rate, which is inherently unstable—a low unemployment rate today can change to a high unemployment rate and vice versa—we should instead look to vacancy rates, and in particular long-term vacancy rates in certain sectors and regions of the country. Then you can help fill gaps there.

Do you endorse that? They didn't phrase it as a recommendation, but I take it as one of the more important points and count it as a recommendation. Would you endorse that perspective?

● (1725)

Simran Singh Vig: Yes, targeted immigration is definitely something that the chamber is supportive of. As my colleague and I said as part our testimonies, there are certain sectors of the economy that require highly specialized folks. Our immigration system is pretty complex. It's comprehensive. Giving a business or an employer that flexibility to bring in someone through the proper vetted means who can hit the ground running fairly quickly allows them to plan better and ensure, sometimes, that they can remain in operation.

Peter Fragiskatos: To be very specific here, I'm talking about vacancy rates in certain sectors as compared to the unemployment rate. Do you think that's a meaningful distinction for the federal government and, frankly, all governments seized with these kinds of questions to keep in mind?

Simran Singh Vig: Yes.

Peter Fragiskatos: You'd privilege the vacancy rates above all other factors.

Simran Singh Vig: Yes.

Peter Fragiskatos: Thank you very much.

I'd like to hear some final recommendations from Ms. Khatib and Mr. Daoud.

What's the main message that you want to leave with us?

Bayan Khatib: Refugees have a lot to contribute to Canada. We just need to open up those pathways to them and provide them with the opportunities to help Canada grow.

Peter Fragiskatos: You gave numbers earlier about your success rates. How have you tabulated those?

Bayan Khatib: We fund organizations. They report back to us. We're an outcomes-based funder, so when we fund an organization, usually the outcome is that the refugee obtains employment. They retain that employment for one year and the organization reports on that. It's pretty simple.

Peter Fragiskatos: You mentioned upskilling programs earlier. How does that all work?

Bayan Khatib: We ask the organizations that we fund to develop programs that stem from employer needs. We have to start with that, because we don't want to train people for jobs that don't exist.

Do you want to add something?

Abdulla Daoud: Basically, it comes directly from the employers. We don't work only with non-profits. We work directly with for-profit employers. If they come to us saying they're willing to train because they have a shortage and there's local talent here that's willing to be trained, we make that investment.

Peter Fragiskatos: Where are the organizations you work with based?

Abdulla Daoud: They are based all over Canada. We invest in almost every province.

Peter Fragiskatos: With my final question, is there—

The Chair: Mr. Fragiskatos, I'm sorry, but it's over. You've reached your five minutes.

I want to say a huge thank you to all of our witnesses and all of my colleagues for the excellent questions and the great conversation we've had today.

We have a quick routine motion that I want to put before everyone. It's administrative. It is a routine motion regarding extending the provisions around the access to and distribution of documents. This motion would last until the end of the 45th Parliament. My understanding is all committees are passing this motion. I'm asking for unanimous consent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Deschênes. do you agree?

Alexis Deschênes: Yes.

[*English*]

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Our next meeting is scheduled for this Thursday from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. We will have our final session on our study on attracting and empowering global talent to strengthen Canada's economy.

With that, I will call this meeting adjourned.

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