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The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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•(0910)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I would like to call this committee to order.

We have with us officials from the department, and they're going to be briefing committee members. I would like to welcome them to the committee. They are going to make a presentation, after which we will go into a question and answer session with members of the committee.

Mr. Dorais, could you introduce your people and start your presentation to the committee?

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Dorais (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Firstly, may I congratulate you, as well as the members of the committee, for your nomination to this committee. This is a very important committee for us. We spend a lot of time here. It is a privilege for us to have once again been convened by the committee.

Allow me to introduce the members of my team. This morning, we wanted all of the members of our team to be present. Firstly, may I introduce Diane Vincent, associate deputy minister; Diane and myself share the management of the department. Also with us is Rosaline Frith, acting assistant deputy minister, Strategic Direction and Communications; John McWhinnie, assistant deputy minister, Centralized Service Delivery and Corporate Services; Lyse Ricard, assistant deputy minister, Operations; and Daniel Jean, assistant deputy minister, Policy and Program Development.

[English]

I will come back to everyone's role in a few minutes.

Normally, Mr. Chairman, I would restrict my remarks to a very few minutes, but I understand that this morning the committee has asked for a technical briefing. With your permission, the way I would suggest we proceed is that I will go through a very brief introduction and then ask the assistant deputy ministers to present their sectors to the committee, the key elements of the areas of the department they are responsible for, and the key issues they're dealing with. Then we can start from there for questioning, if that's agreeable.

To start with, let me just say one quick word about the role of deputy ministers. Some members are very familiar with it, but others may be less familiar. As deputy ministers—and Diane is an associate deputy minister—we report to the Prime Minister via the Clerk of the

Privy Council, and our role is twofold. We're accountable for managing the department, for the administration of the department, and we also provide advice to the government and to the minister on policy issues. That nuance is very important for the committee because issues of policy are decided by ministers and by cabinet. Therefore, I would encourage members, if there are policy issues, to direct your questions to the minister, who I understand will appear before the committee next week. The civil servants supporting the minister in a role will gladly put to the committee all the facts and information we have, but policy issues are sometimes a little more difficult for us to engage in.

Let me talk a little about the context. The Department of Citizenship and Immigration is a medium-sized department, with about 5,000 people. It's highly decentralized, which means that our program is delivered in five regions in Canada; in three specialized case processing centres in Vegreville, Mississauga, and Sydney; through one consolidated call centre in Montreal; in about 150 offices distributed in various cities of the country; and at 93 international points of delivery in 79 countries. That does mean our department is present just about everywhere in the country and just about everywhere in the world. It also means our activities are directly affected by international events, whatever they are, and we have to constantly monitor what's happening there. It also means our environment is sometimes extremely complex, depending on events that are happening in the world.

The other characteristic of our department is that it deals with high volumes. You know this because sometimes you also deal with a high volume of immigration issues in your own offices. The department has somewhere around 3.2 million contacts with various clients in any given year anywhere in the world or in Canada; that's 3 million different contacts. It handles about 1 million transactions of some sort. It brings in close to half a billion dollars of revenues, which makes it a fairly big revenue-producing organization. We get about 16 million visits to our Internet site, and only 30% are from Canada; the rest come from all over the world. In some specific programs like the permanent resident card, which we can talk about later on if you want to, over the last year and a half we have seen 1.2 million people face to face. So this is a huge volume of operations.

I'm mentioning that as part of the context to make a point. When we're dealing with large volumes, there are always mistakes made; exceptions come to the surface. We're all familiar with this, and we are trying to put together means to ensure that this is limited to a minimum, but that's one of the characteristics of a large-volume operation.

Another characteristic of large volumes is what I would call unintended consequences. Sometimes, by wanting to do something good, we put together a process and then realize afterwards, because of the multiplying effect, it has all kinds of consequences.

● (0915)

The other thing associated with large-volume operations is that we need large processing machines. Any idea, anything we want to put together, necessitates a huge machine because of the volume. It's costly, and when the machine is started, it's very difficult to slow it down or stop it. So we have to be very prudent when we launch new programs or operations, because once one is started, the numbers take over and then it's very difficult to correct it at a later point.

Immigration is also very a human and very individual matter. We're dealing with people one-on-one, and everyone is different. It has a very strongly human face. This is good, and this is what I think motivates a lot of the employees working at Citizenship and Immigration.

What is not so good about it is that quite often an anecdote, the one case, makes the story, and we always have to be very careful not to let the anecdote influence the overall policy. That's very dangerous. One good example is that in your respective ridings you never see the 225,000 people who happily come to Canada, get established, come as visitors, and/or get refugee status. You see the problems, the people who are dissatisfied, the people who have problems one way or another, those for whom something went wrong. But there's a whole side there that is hidden, and those are the 225,000 very happy immigrants who have come to Canada every year for the last decade—or at least at that rhythm.

I'll mention very briefly a restructuring. Something quite important has happened at Citizenship and Immigration.

[*Translation*]

Last December 12, the government undertook an important internal reorganization and transferred a certain number of operations from Citizenship and Immigration to a new agency known as the Canada Border Services Agency.

[*English*]

During that transfer all our immigration control officers abroad were transferred from CIC to CBSA, which is the acronym for the Canada Border Services Agency. All the intelligence and enforcement functions, including removal, detention, detention centres, investigation, and what we call pre-removal risk assessment, have all been transferred to the new service agency. The same thing happened regarding the authority to stay the removal of a client; it has been transferred, and our Immigration Warrant Response Centre has also been transferred.

Most recently, on October 8, 2004, this reorganization was completed by the transfer of all the border point officers to the Canada Border Services Agency. In other words, to simplify it, I can tell you all CIC employees in uniform were transferred to the Canada Border Services Agency.

One corrective measure was taken on October 8 on the pre-removal risk assessment after representations by some of you and by interest groups: the pre-removal risk assessment was transferred back

to CIC. The rationale behind it was that the PRRA, which is the assessment we do just before removing someone from Canada, was a protection decision more than an actual enforcement decision. Although the group has stayed a completely independent group, it's been transferred back to CIC.

The other thing that happened as a consequence of the transfer on December 12, 2003, is with the security certificate. One signature was required for a security certificate, and now we're back to two signatures being required for that.

So those are the changes that have taken place, and they're important changes because they do change the mandate and the mission of the department, making it a much more focused mission.

I can describe to you in very personal terms the change that has taken place and how deep that change is. Before December 12, I would usually spend just about every morning dealing with enforcement issues in the department—who was being deported, who was being detained, what the problems were at the border—and it was normally only by noon that I had enough time to get into citizenship, immigration, and other issues in the department. I now find myself being able to plunge into that at nine in the morning, when I get in, and that illustrates the depth of the change that is taking place in the department.

● (0920)

[*Translation*]

Over the next few years, our challenge will be to restructure the department and adapt it to this much more targeted mission, a mission which is much more focused on the interests of immigrants and of the new citizens of Canada.

[*English*]

I'll terminate just by giving you this in a nutshell, in a very graphic way, to try to explain to the committee how we've organized the department along very simple lines. Then I'll ask each ADM to very quickly describe their sector.

The department is organized around four major blocks. The first block is strategic direction and communication; Rosaline is responsible for that group. This is the group that links with the outside world; it is responsible for international relations and federal-provincial relations. It does the research we do in the department and it tries to come up with ideas on where we're going. Where are we going to be five years from now and where are we going to be 10 years from now? So that's strategic direction.

The second group is headed by Daniel Jean. It's a more technical group in a sense. It helps us determine, once we've decided where to go, how we get there. They do operational policies; they put together the mechanics to make things work.

The third group is headed by Lyse Ricard. It's the largest group of the department, and I think it has somewhere around 3,000 of the 5,000 people. It's the group that makes things happen. They're responsible for the operations of the department abroad and in Canada.

The last group is headed by John McWhinnie, who has the traditional corporate affairs function that supports the entire department on budget and other administrative elements, but he is also responsible for what we call centralized services. Those are the case processing centres—they are in three locations—the call centre, and all those centralized operations that support everyone in the department.

That is in a very simple way how the department is organized. Someone looks at where we're going in the long term, someone looks at how we get there, the third ADM makes things happen, and everything is done with the support of the fourth one.

[*Translation*]

And on this, Mr. Chairman, I shall conclude my presentation. With your permission, I'm going to ask Ms. Frith to take a few minutes to explain her own sector to the committee.

Rosaline.

[*English*]

Ms. Rosaline Frith (Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic Direction and Communications, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

This sector's mandate is to ensure that our department's agenda is closely linked with broader government initiatives and to secure opportunities to advance our policy and program priorities through those horizontal linkages. To put it briefly, I can say we're into communication, collaboration, cooperation, and partnerships—building partnerships.

We're made up of six branches, and I'll describe each of those branches very summarily. The strategic policy and partnerships branch provides strategic direction on key and emerging policy files, international policy coordination, and leadership on intergovernmental and stakeholder relations, as well as a variety of corporate departmental activities. One of our key files this year is the development of a national immigration framework. It represents a major undertaking of new partnerships to improve our delivery system and immigrant outcomes. The framework must be elaborated in collaboration with provinces, territories, communities, and stakeholders, and this is the group that will coordinate that work. This will be a main topic of discussion at an upcoming immigration ministers meeting. Again, that's where this group supports those kinds of meetings.

Another key activity for the branch would be the negotiation of immigration agreements with provinces and territories. Over the last year we have renewed or extended agreements with at least five of the provinces, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and New Brunswick, and we're currently in the process of negotiating with the Province of Ontario. For the first time the negotiation involves a municipal committee, which is seeking community input into the agreement at the very initial step of the process, so that brings them together.

We're viewed as a world leader in selection and integration policies, and that results in many delegations coming to Canada to visit with our people. In early 2005 Canada will host two important international meetings, one the Puebla Process and the other IGC, both of which are co-chaired by Canada, by our deputy minister and

our associate deputy minister. Those are the kinds of international things we're involved in.

As I just pointed out, we're also involved in the department's corporate activities in terms of developing action plans for part VII of the Official Languages Act. We have training and reporting expertise on gender-based analysis for the department's policies and programs and are involved in sustainable development types of programs. There are all of those areas.

The priorities, planning, and research branch essentially works very closely with the finance group to make sure we have an integrated planning system. It essentially sets out at the beginning of the year how we will plan and how that will get linked to the government's priorities all the way through to the reporting exercise. That branch produces three main reports to Parliament: the report on plans and priorities, which for 2004-05 was tabled on October 8; the departmental performance report; and the annual report for 2003, which will be tabled very soon.

The department is also looking at how we can better plan over the longer term by having the best possible information, and we do that by working in collaboration with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and Statistics Canada to pull together information on immigrant selection and integration, then analyzing it and producing reports. You can access such reports. There is "The Monitor", which comes out on a quarterly basis, and there are facts and figures on an annual basis; they're on our website at www.cic.gc.ca. We're also responsible in that branch for continuous improvement in terms of monitoring and evaluation; that happens within that area.

The communications branch is strategically placed to provide advice to the minister and to the department on any of the initiatives that are out there in the public domain. They provide functional guidance and direction to regional communications units. Just to give you an idea of the kind of work that's done, I'll mention that over the past year they would have produced over eighty news releases, media advisories, 100 sets of media lines, questions and answers, and close to 100 speeches. They will handle from 10 to 15 calls per day from the mainstream and ethnic media, and they will produce over 100 media analyses and weekly reports on what's happening.

● (0925)

The branch handled over 10,284 publication requests last year, including the annual report to Parliament. On immigration, they dealt with over 9,000 Citizenship Week requests, and they mailed over 3.5 million pieces of information to the Canadian public.

The executive services branch handles the preparation and flow of key information to support the minister. It is the primary link between our legislative assistant and the department for all activities involving Parliament. It is also responsible for processing requests and complaints made under the Access to Information Act, the Privacy Act, and the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Over the past several years our department has received the most access to information requests of all departments. The ATIP annual report for 2003-04 was tabled on October 19 in Parliament, and it reports that in 2003-04 we processed 7,876 access requests and 5,515 privacy requests. Volumes continue to increase year after year, keeping us the most accessed of all government departments.

The Metropolis project was launched in 1996 essentially to improve policies for managing migration and diversity in major cities. It brings together academic research capacity with government research capacity and provides the information to policy-makers; it tries to link all of us together. There's a consortium now of nine federal departments and agencies that are funding the project, and we're in our second five-year phase, which goes until March 2007. There's the interdepartmental committee that is chaired by our project team, and there are five Metropolis centres of excellence across the country. They are in Atlantic Canada, Montreal, Toronto, the Prairies—in Edmonton—and Vancouver, and they collectively involve over twenty universities and several hundred affiliated researchers. We all work together on that; it's led by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and by the Metropolis group in our sector. The next conference to be held in Canada will be in October 2005 in Toronto; that will be the next major event.

The last unit within the sector is a special projects unit, and right now they're looking at client services and mechanisms for complaint resolution, etc., to try to ensure we're giving the best possible services to our clientele.

Thank you.

• (0930)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Dorais: With your permission, I will now ask Mr. Jean to take the floor.

Mr. Daniel Jean (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Program Development, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): As Mr. Dorais said, my sector of activity deals with the “how”, that is to say how we translate our strategic objectives into results. There are five main activity centres, or branches that deal with, respectively, matters of selection, refugee affairs, citizenship and integration, admissibility, and functional solutions.

Currently, our sector is also sponsoring an important technological initiative; this is a major project, the purpose of which is to create a technological information system within CIC. I am going to describe the activity centres one by one and explain what they do.

The Selection Branch, as its name indicates, deals with various matters relating to the selection of immigrants, whether we are talking about skilled workers, family reunification or business class immigrants, but also temporary residents, students, temporary workers or visitors. This branch is responsible for the coordination and functional management of immigration levels.

I want to say a few words about the important issues we deal with. Naturally, this branch plays a fairly important role in the implementation of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, and more recently, in the implementation of certain technical adjustments that were made. The committee will recall that we had a discussion on some of those adjustments last year. This branch also

recently coordinated the regulation of immigration consultants, said regulation having come into effect last April. This branch supports targeted selection efforts within the framework of specific initiatives such as regionalization initiatives or the promotion of immigration in minority communities. Finally, this branch, through pilot projects, currently tests certain initiatives involving students, such as off-campus work, the authorization to work for a second year after having obtained a diploma, and other such things.

I shall now discuss the Integration Branch. As its name implies, that branch deals with all of our policies and the management of our integration programs, whether we are talking about language courses dispensed to immigrants, help with integration or programs twinning immigrants with Canadians. This branch also deals with citizenship policies and programs.

Among the important things we do, I should mention the integration of immigrants into the labour force and in particular the matter of language classes adapted to the needs of the labour market. We work with several departments such as Human Resources and Skills Development, Health Canada and a number of others, to attempt to smooth out the obstacles that stand in the path of the integration of immigrants. The issue of language classes that are adapted to the needs of the labour market has been identified as an important obstacle. There are additional funds for the integration of clients, and we work with our provincial partners to try and make progress at that level. The branch is also involved in our efforts to modernize our citizenship programs on the administrative level, as well as examining what could be done from the legislative perspective if the government and Parliament decided to move in that direction. The branch also coordinates the strategic framework and action plans that are about to be completed and aim to promote immigration in official language minority communities.

• (0935)

[English]

The refugee branch or sector of activity deals with refugee issues; they are responsible for policies and programs related to refugees. This applies to both what we call asylum, the in-Canada refugee determination system, and also resettlement efforts overseas for government-sponsored refugees and privately sponsored refugees. They also make an important contribution to international efforts around refugees.

Recently the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has been advocating for what he calls “Convention Plus”, going beyond the Geneva Convention, and there are three groups in Canada that have been leading this. One group has come up with the first deliverable, which is a framework to govern the strategic use of resettlement as a tool for a durable solution for refugees.

The things that are important files for refugees right now.... They continue to do a lot of work pursuing some of the administrative changes to our refugee system, and they do some of the analytical work that could support efforts around refugee reform.

They're preparing for the implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement, which we signed with the United States, as you know, more than a year ago. They have also just concluded, as I said, the first pillar of that strategic use of resettlement in the context of UNHCR initiatives. They're also working closely with our private sponsors to try to see how we can improve our private sponsorship of refugees program.

The next branch or centre of activities is the admissibility branch. As indicated in Mr. Dorais' introduction, all intelligence, interdiction, and enforcement functions have been transferred to CBSA. However, CIC still has an important role to play with its PSEP—Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness—partners, CBSA, CSIS, and the RCMP, to make sure that we are approaching possible threats and that we are dealing with concerns about program integrity. This division has the responsibility for most admissibility policies with the exception of medical screening, which Madame Ricard will talk about, and also the screening policies related to security, war crimes, and organized crime, for which the policy has also been transferred to the Canada Border Services Agency.

They also have the responsibility for visa policy, determining for which countries we will or will not require a visa. It's also the branch that works with our partners to see how we could improve the integrity of the documents we issue. Not surprisingly, given their mandate, this is the branch that will be the key interlocutor of CIC with CBSA. In this context, they will be coordinating the umbrella memorandum of understanding we need with CBSA on some of the important files to make sure we receive the support we need to do the screening in our transactions, and they are also quite active in doing visa reviews.

As you probably know, since September 11 we've imposed new visa requirements on 10 countries. We've also refined the requirements for seafarers, and this year we've also made a commitment to review a number of countries. It's this branch that will be doing this activity.

Our last sector of activity or branch is our business solutions branch. This is the branch that coordinates business activities as they relate to our needs for information technology in our transformation initiative. They house corporate tools such as our manuals and they support innovation such as Government On-Line. This branch has been crucial in managing the machinery transition to CBSA. Just for the first phase of the machinery announcement in December, we had more than sixty business processes that were affected by that machinery change, and we were able to leverage on the fact that we have a business solutions branch to make these changes and ensure a fairly smooth transition for our clients.

With respect to some of their important files, as I've said before, this is also where we house our important technology project. It's a large IT project that is trying to consolidate 14 legacy computer systems into one integrated global system. It's called a global case management system.

They're completing our business changes to reflect the machinery changes, and there was a more recent announcement on October 8 that dealt with ports of entry. They also provide some support for some operational reviews we're doing in trying to improve service and deal with other issues.

In essence, that's my sector.

• (0940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Dorais: Thank you very much, Mr. Jean.

Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I'm now going to ask Ms. Ricard, who is responsible for operations in the department, to take the floor.

Ms. Lyse Ricard (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): As Mr. Dorais said, the operations sector “makes it happen”. It is responsible for making service delivery operational and for implementing the delivery of services for the immigration program. The operations sector is made up of nine branches and six regions.

[*English*]

The six regions are Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, B.C., and the international region; there are also the case management and medical services branches.

So what do we do? The domestic regions deliver integration and settlement services and citizenship processing, and they process complex immigration applications or visitor applications that are referred to them by the three case processing centres we mentioned earlier. They represent the department in a variety of activities, supporting the strategic policy group in federal-provincial relationship outreach. We work with a number of NGOs and organizations, supporting them and helping in the settlement of immigrants and refugees.

The international region, our missions and operations abroad, does permanent resident selection, temporary processing, temporary movement—which means students, visitors, and temporary workers—health screening, security and criminality screening, reporting, and liaison. We work very closely with the new Border Services Agency in the area of security. In the international region we also play a key role in coordinating some of CIC's international activities, where we represent the department in some activities in a liaison role in addition to processing the applications.

The case management branch assists us in reviewing cases that require a lot of attention, especially in areas of litigation and serious criminality.

Medical services,

[*Translation*]

as its name indicates, supports visa officers as they process immigration applications.

[English]

As Monsieur Dorais mentioned, the immigration program is present in over 100 points of service in Canada. I say the “immigration program” because now, with the creation of the Canada Border Services Agency, the number of CIC-dedicated points of service will probably be between 40 and 60 when we've completed the reorganization following that restructuring. Of course, in a number of them we will be collocated.

We are present in 94 points of service outside Canada in 79 countries. We have in our presence abroad 275 Canadian officers, 230 who are now Citizenship and Immigration employees and 45 who are Canada Border Services Agency employees dedicated to the immigration program. In addition to that, we hire approximately 1,200 locally engaged employees abroad.

Of our workforce abroad, 43% is in the Asia-Pacific area, 15% in Africa and the Middle East, 21% in Europe, and 21% in the Americas, the western hemisphere. Our workforce in China has increased by 466% since 1995, and in India we have increased our workforce by 40%.

We have approximately, after the restructuring, 67 employees in the Atlantic region. I say “approximately” because we're still working with the agency to identify all the employees who will be transferred to the Canada Border Services Agency. We have around 200 in the Quebec region, 577 in Ontario, 160 in the Prairies, and about the same number in British Columbia.

Our inventory abroad of potential immigrants is now—and this number changes every day—270,000 applications.

• (0945)

[Translation]

This meant approximately 679,000 people at the beginning of October. Each year we process between 280,000 and 300,000 applications and we issue from 200,000 to 225,000 visas to permanent residents.

In 2003, we received applications from 233,000 people. In 2004, to date, we have received 92,000 new applications representing approximately 190,000 people.

[English]

In the local offices throughout Canada we process about 10,000 permanent resident applications per year, which are those transferred from the CPCs.

In terms of temporary resident applications, which are from students, visitors, and temporary workers, in 2003 we probably received around 865,000 in-person applications and to date this year we've received 854,000 in-person applications. In 2003 we issued 526,000 temporary visitor visas, about 66,000 student visas, and 82,000 temporary worker visas. As of the end of the summer in 2004, we had issued 500,000 visitor visas, 47,000 student visas, and 69,000 temporary worker visas.

We also have the citizenship program, and right now in the local offices we have about 120,000 citizenship applications to process. We presented 170,000 citizenship grants in the 2003-04 fiscal year.

As Mr. Dorais said, it's a highly decentralized program, one that tries to be as close to the clients as possible.

[Translation]

Geographical dispersion both abroad and in Canada is a challenge for us. We have to ensure consistency in the application of the law and the management of the program. That is why our Canadian employees rotate. They are transferred from one position to another during their career and they also work in Ottawa.

[English]

We leverage on the important knowledge the locally engaged staff bring to us, their knowledge of the culture, the language, and the way the other countries work.

We are now also very busy defining our relationship with the Canada Border Services Agency because it is part of the screening of the applications with regard to security, and as Monsieur Dorais said, there is a very high volume. One of the challenges is to make sure we don't make too many mistakes, but high production like that brings exceptions. We have to look—and we are looking—at what we do and how we do it on a continuous basis, and when we do make a mistake, what's important is that we ask ourselves questions like, what went wrong, what have we learned, and how do we fix it?

Communication throughout the operation networks is very important. Feedback on what happens in Canada and how we do work abroad is important too, so that knowledge gets transferred and we can use our technology, our system, in improving our services and our processing regularly on a continuous basis.

• (0950)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Dorais: Thank you, Lyse.

[English]

With your permission, I'll ask Mr. McWhinnie to go through the last presentation.

Mr. John McWhinnie (Assistant Deputy Minister, Centralized Service Delivery and Corporate Services, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

As mentioned earlier, I have two distinct activities in my area, one being the general corporate support that supports the department and the other being centralized service delivery, which is really an operational aspect within the department. I'll briefly go through the corporate side first. It's probably a little more interesting in terms of our central processing activity.

My sector has about 1,200 people working in it and a budget of about \$120 million. In our corporate support, finance of course is fundamental. I'm the senior financial officer for the department, responsible for comptrollership and the stewardship of funds. Up until the transfer of some of our resources to the border agency, we had in excess of a \$1 billion budget, which we take quite seriously in terms of financial administration.

We've been somewhat challenged in a sense, I think, having been traditionally under-resourced in this department, going back to its creation 10 years ago, as the base was somewhat inadequate. That's been pretty much generally accepted by our colleagues in central agencies. Adding to that, we've had increasing volumes of activity, and the complexity of our programs has made some of our financial challenges somewhat unique.

We're not immune to pressures other departments are also dealing with. Expenditure review and the salary envelope reduce our flexibility in terms of our having to cap salary expenditures at what we spent in previous years. Also, we're dealing with this transition to the border agency, which central agencies like to say is cost-neutral. We're still trying to define that term. It's like a divorce. It means there's no new money on the table to create a new infrastructure for a new agency, but it has to come from somewhere, so we've been struggling with that challenge as well.

The other issue around our financial management is the fact that we do generate revenues but we get no recognition for that. They don't come back to the department; they go into the consolidated revenue fund.

With respect to administration and security, another area of corporate support, our administration has, as in any department, the managing of the day-to-day operations of a department, with things such as the procurement process, accommodations, and contracting. We also have, though, with the security aspect—it's quite important in our department in terms of looking at the security of our employees—to make threat and risk assessments quite constantly across the department.

Another major aspect is the whole business continuity and emergency preparedness, because we do have to stay in business in spite of natural disasters. We've had a few opportunities to test that capacity, particularly with the power failure in the previous year, but we're always prepared for those kinds of eventualities.

Another area of corporate support is our information management and technologies branch, which is fundamental to operating the department. We operate very much an around-the-world information system. We have approximately 8,000 desktops we have to maintain in 223 locations—over 100 of those are in missions abroad—with up to 100 different applications on those. As has been mentioned before, we're operating on a series of mainframes with what we call legacy systems, and we're in the process of transferring the data into one global case management system that would give all our employees around the world access to one database to deal with our clients. We're in the transition process of building that.

This branch also has the whole responsibility for telecommunications for the department, which is extremely important, given our diversity and spread around the world. We work very closely with our partners in Foreign Affairs, particularly as they are our landlords, if you will, for our missions abroad.

Also, there's an information management capacity to this particular branch, where we manage all our forms and manuals and the library capacity for the department.

At any one time there are all sorts of projects on the go in terms of our trying to improve our technology and our capacity and efficiency

in delivery. We have made some pretty significant progress around the GOL, the Government On-Line initiative, in terms of now being able to take some applications over the Internet and just recently being able to take payments over the Internet, which is a huge step forward for a lot of our clients, who can do it in one step when getting their applications in.

● (0955)

Another corporate aspect of responsibility for us is called the modern management office. It's very small and has just a few people, but it is very important in the sense that it works horizontally across our department to provide leadership and management excellence, helping our managers to build a capacity to operate their basic day-to-day planning around an integrated risk management framework. A lot of the business we do and decisions we take are based on risk. We provide capacity and support to our managers on how to make those kinds of decisions and put their business plans together.

There's also a very strong values and ethics component to this initiative, and CIC has been, I think, a leadership department in values and ethics, putting in place tool kits for managers and workshops. There's been a lot of dialogue around what this means for us, particularly given the business we're in and the challenges we sometimes face. This particular activity has had a fairly high profile with other departments and central agencies in the way it supports management excellence, and we're quite proud of it.

With respect to centralized service delivery—what we call a departmental delivery network—as has been mentioned before, there are three centralized processing centres, a call centre, and something we call the query response centre, which is here in Ottawa. It looks into verification of documents for people who may have lost their documents or need follow-up.

The challenge in all these operations is really the increased volumes we've met with in recent years, and of course that puts us into a situation of longer processing times. When you get into longer processing times, you often get into the frustration of people wondering where their situation is at. I'm sure you find them in your offices sometimes when they're getting frustrated.

We're putting, within the resources we have, quite an interest and effort into client service initiatives as to how we can better serve our clients with the capacity we have, particularly in the situation where we do have long inventories and large volumes, to at least get information to people as to what the real expectations are so they know where they stand.

The first processing centre I'll talk about is in Sydney, Nova Scotia. The two key business lines there are citizenship and the permanent resident card. Citizenship really has two business lines. One is for the application for citizenship grants. When people apply to receive their citizenship, all the processing work is done there in Sydney.

The other line is proofs, as we call it, and it's basically for people who are already citizens but may have lost their documentation. If they're going to get a passport, it's typically the situation that they need proof they do have citizenship, and it's a fairly significant business line as well.

The citizenship business line has increased dramatically over the last 18 months, with almost a 50% increase over the last year. In the previous year, 2003-04, we processed 235,000 applications for citizenship grants and 65,000 applications for proofs. This year we're probably getting close to 300,000 applications for grants. This is one we've been struggling with quite a bit, and we have achieved some additional resources from central agencies to deal with those inventories to be able to process citizenship within a reasonable timeframe.

The permanent resident card was a sort of temporary project, but we'll go into an ongoing mode. Where we are now, as Mr. Dorais mentioned, is that we've processed 1.2 million cards, and in every one of those cases we saw the people individually to ascertain their identity.

There are two types of cards. There are those for the new permanent residents who are processed when they arrive at a port of entry; a picture is taken and an identity check is done. They receive their card within three to four weeks, and that's quite routine. With the existing permanent residents we've got into a bit of a situation where processing times have got a bit longer, but we've sort of got into a capacity for taking urgent requests, so if people really do have travel plans and need permanent resident cards, they can get them through what we call an emergency fax line. If they can show identification and proof of travel, then we'll give them cards.

● (1000)

So we're kind of trying to balance doing routine processing with, at the same time, dealing with urgent requests. That's been a bit of a challenge, but generally the people who need to travel are getting their cards when they need them.

The Mississauga processing centre deals with family class—basically sponsorships. In the last fiscal year, 2003-04, we had 74,000 sponsorships for family reunification and only 3,500 defaults on those. The real challenge they have right now is the wait times for parents and grandparents. They are a lower priority than immediate family members, and that inventory is growing, so we're working on that challenge as we go.

Vegreville, Alberta, has the other processing centre that deals with applications within Canada. Those are generally split into two lines. One is for applications for permanent residence for immigrants, and the other is for visitors who are generally applying for extensions, whether they're students, workers, or tourists. During the past year we handled over 300,000 applications for visitors and about 45,000 applications for permanent residence. So once again, it's a processing centre that has a very high volume, and they're trying to deal with the challenges and the priority cases when they come around.

All of that is to say that when you get to the call centre, when anybody wants to know about the status of their application or is curious even about general information, we have been overwhelmed, to put it mildly, over the last year in terms of our capacity to respond

to calls to our call centre. We did have three call centres, but we have consolidated them into one to be more efficient and answer more calls. That's working quite well.

We've put the call centre in Montreal, where we have access to bilingual agents. Over the last fiscal year we had 26 million call attempts to our call centre, which is significantly over our capacity to deal with them.

So that's been a real challenge. We're working on a number of fronts to deal with that. As I said, the consolidation to one site has helped. Next month we'll be moving to a larger location, which will give us more capacity so that we can use part-time agents and put them on during peak periods, rather than having full-time agents sitting there. In call centres you generally get peak periods and then lower periods. So we'll be able to spread our workload to take more calls.

We're also using the Internet more to reduce the number of calls, directing people on how they can get the information they need from the Internet. The other aspect is that as we get some of our processing working a little better, the overall number of calls will come down and we won't get into that vicious circle that catches us up when people keep calling and calling if they can't get through the first time.

This is a huge challenge for the department. I think we're making progress. Over the past year, at times we were as low as less than 20% in being able to answer individuals who called. We're up to probably about 55% on average now, and of course the industry average is about 85%, which is what we've set as our standard. We hope to move toward that. But some people have been frustrated in trying to get through to our call centre.

The final processing centre here in Ottawa, the query response centre, really looks at the verification of records. In some cases we have to go back into microfiche documents to find people, particularly if they landed before 1973—before we had computerized systems—and need documentation or proof. This is quite a labour-intensive operation. The permanent resident card has increased a lot of activity in this unit, and there has been an increase in the number of people wanting to verify their citizenship to get passports. This has increased to the extent that there are probably over 200,000 requests a year for verification of documentation and identification.

That's the summary on the processing centre.

● (1005)

Mr. Michel Dorais: Thank you, John.

In conclusion, let me just make a few quick points. One is that I'd like to make a correction. I said we had 150 points of service in Canada—I also fell into the trap—but this included our ports of entry, which have now been transferred to CBSA. So the number of points of service in Canada is about 55, not 150. That's just a correction for the record.

Let me just mention that John is also the chief financial officer of the department. In that capacity he's accountable to the centre to verify the budget and to sign off on requests and resources issues in the department.

I also did not mention that we're advised by the employees of the Department of Justice. As you may know very well, CIC last year had something like 14,000 cases in court, so it's a highly litigious area, and we have quite a number of lawyers from the Department of Justice who advise us. The committee can call upon Justice lawyers—we have some in the room here—if there are legal issues.

The other point I'd like to make—especially on what Lyse has said—is on the numbers of the committee. All the numbers she gave you are no longer true, and that's the reality of our life. We have an operation that works 24 hours a day. I think we issue 6,000 visitor visas per day, so as we speak now the numbers are changing. That's frustrating for us and frustrating for the committee, because two months from now you may sort of read the transcript and say, those numbers don't jibe with what we are presenting today. Quite often this is one of the reasons.

The other reason is that we can count our operations in about 200 different ways. It depends on how you count. An example—and I think Lyse gave a good example—is the number of applications versus the number of people. For integration purposes we're very interested in the number of people, but for processing reasons it's the number of applications that counts, and sometimes we tend to confuse the two numbers. So it is always a challenge for us in the department and for the committee to get an accurate representation.

I should also mention that in the portfolio, the minister has the IRB—the Immigration and Refugee Board. It's an independent tribunal. Although it's in the portfolio of the minister, I would encourage the committee, if there are policy issues related to the functioning of the tribunal, to call in the chair of the tribunal, Jean-Guy Fleury, to explain their operations. They're arm's length from the department and therefore should answer the committee directly.

The very last point I want to make is about our mission in the department—we can read it in all the official documents. I describe our mission as being to encourage people to come to Canada, and to help them become Canadian citizens. That is what this department is all about, and it translates into all our activities here and abroad.

With that, Mr. Chairman, we will try to answer all the questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That was an extensive presentation. I'm hoping that maybe you can provide some flow charts and a summary of those presentations, with the numbers, for the members of the committee. I hope that in the future, when we have people come from the department, you can make that available ahead of time.

Could you also pay special attention to the Canadian Border Services Agency, the impact it has on the operation, and the changes that have happened because of that? I think that's very important for the committee to know.

I will go, for the first round of questioning and comments, to the vice-chair, Mr. Inky Mark. Let's try to keep this a quick back and forth, because we have nine members of the committee here and I'm hoping to be able to get them all in.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Mark.

• (1010)

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to all of you for being here this morning.

I've been here for over four years, and it has been a great overview that we've heard this morning. I've always had problems in the past trying to figure out whose department it was and who was supposed to solve the problem.

I also want to thank your fine staff in the field for all the good work they do. I know most of us, as members of Parliament, do a lot of casework for immigration. As you know, immigration is a huge part of Canada; and not only the present but also our future rest with immigration, so you do have a big job to do. I think a lot of our staff at home in our offices do a lot of immigration work. I can only speak for myself, but your staff in the field have certainly been very helpful. They've never renege on trying to be helpful, whether it's in Canada or overseas. I know our staff members phone offices overseas regularly, and they get the same kind of cooperation. So I applaud your staff and the department for the good work they do.

I have a question about CBSA as well, because this is the first time I've heard of the transfer of your enforcement staff to the Canadian border security agency. My first question relates to that very fact. When was this agency created, and under what legislation? How many people did you actually lose? From the people you lost to the agency, did you re-hire staff?

One of the criticisms I heard internally was the lack of staffing, going back to 1994 cutbacks, not only in Canada but also certainly in the overseas postings. Again, as you know, over the last many years the numbers have just exploded because the government is working toward that 1% target.

I'll then ask you another question.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Thank you.

I think I can answer this one fairly briefly. I thank the member for the good words, which the staff will certainly appreciate.

The transfer to CBSA happened on December 12 of last year, when the new Prime Minister came in. I think about 1,000 employees were immediately transferred at that time. Most recently, when the ports of entry were transferred, around 700 employees were transferred. The numbers are approximate at this point because we're still negotiating all the support staff transfers. Members will appreciate that in many of our offices we had one officer who did enforcement and all kinds of other jobs, so sometimes we had one-third of a person who looked after enforcement issues. We have to negotiate and calculate all of that.

Essentially we didn't lose; we lost a lot of activities as well. I would say we gained a much more focused department on service.

I have one small remark: it's not the Canadian border security agency, but the Canadian Border Services Agency. That's a very important word, because they render the service at the border on our behalf. We kept the policy and we're monitoring what they do at the border, and if we're not happy with what they do we have internal mechanisms to react there.

We'll provide the committee with information, as the chair has asked, as this unfolds.

Mr. Inky Mark: Who do they answer to? What minister?

Mr. Michel Dorais: They answer to the Minister of Public Safety....

•(1015)

Ms. Diane Vincent (Associate Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): PSEP.

Mr. Michel Dorais: The Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Madam McLellan.

Mr. Inky Mark: So you're saying that all of your staff who were previously Immigration staff at the border are now part of that agency.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Exactly.

Mr. Inky Mark: So in other words, the security concerns of the staff back then, in terms of working in a risk environment, are still there and have not changed.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Yes. They haven't changed, and they've been transferred under the Public Service Rearrangement and Transfer of Duties Act, by order in council.

Mr. Inky Mark: So this is not going to be under a new piece of legislation.

Mr. Michel Dorais: There will be legislation coming to Parliament at some point.

Mr. Inky Mark: To deal with this agency.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mark.

Now we'll go to the Bloc and Madame Faillie.

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): For the moment, I'll reserve a few more questions. I have my little flag.

[*Translation*]

I am mostly concerned with the turnaround time for processing applications, in particular applications under the family reunification program. Currently, these are mostly refugee cases. So I am talking about processing files.

I know that your systems are out of date. You had the same systems 10 years ago when I was at the department. Would it be possible for you to provide more information concerning the state of those systems and the advantages which could be derived, in your opinion, from changing and centralizing those systems? Would this improve the processing backlogs?

I would like to know what thought has been given by the department to the balance that must be struck between adding new resources and implementing a new system or new tools to help people to deliver the services.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Mr. Chairman, there are several parts to that question.

There are some considerable processing backlogs for family reunification applications involving spouses and children, and we are working on that. There is a six-month turnaround time because this is a priority. For other cases the turnaround times are longer because we give priority to certain categories.

It is important that the committee understand that the department has a target of between 220,000 and 245,000 immigrants and refugees on a yearly basis. That includes all categories. Every year, we reach that target. If we want to act in a responsible manner we can't exceed that target because if we did, integration would suffer. In other words, it would be useless to have people come to Canada and then leave them to their own devices, without any kind of integration assistance.

There aren't fifty ways to do this. We organize our systems to reach those targets, and of course if we receive a larger number of immigration applications, delays increase proportionately. In the case of economic class immigration applications, for instance, the more applications there are the longer the processing times, since we are limited to a certain number of economic immigrants.

The Global Case Management System will certainly improve things from the operational point of view. It will make our current system more coherent, as it is now completely obsolete, as you yourself pointed out. It will make it much more productive and also more flexible, so that we can adapt it to future circumstances. So this new system will improve our productivity, but it will not necessarily shorten processing times.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Do you have a follow-up question?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you.

I really liked your presentation, which contained a number of separate elements. I am particularly interested in policy and program development. You also mentioned the off-campus work initiative for foreign students.

Can you give us an overview of the current situation? Are there new initiatives being tested in the area of off-campus work for foreign students? My question is addressed to Mr. Daniel Jean.

Mr. Daniel Jean: We work closely with the education sector and with the Canadian provinces. We try to determine how we could make Canada more attractive as a destination of choice for foreign students. In that context, what can we do to make Canada more attractive? Currently, students can work on campuses throughout Canada. The education sector wanted us to evaluate the possibility of allowing them to work off-campus. As a regionalization tool, we are also assessing the possibility of allowing people to work for more than one year after having obtained a degree in their field; thus, they could work for a second year, outside of major urban centres.

We have two off-campus work pilot projects, one of which will no doubt interest you more, Mr. Clavet, because it is in Quebec. The agreement was signed recently. The project concerns locations outside Quebec and Montreal. It was put in place following negotiations with the Government of Quebec. We wanted to test the initiative and we were limited as to where we could implement it. The Quebec government was interested in seeing what could be done to promote regionalization by testing this initiative outside of major centres. We agreed that we would implement the project and assess it, so that we can make adjustments accordingly later.

• (1020)

Mr. Roger Clavet: Can you tell me how many regions have been identified?

Mr. Daniel Jean: Currently, we have various pilot projects relating to three activities: processing, work after obtaining a university degree or college diploma, and off-campus work. We signed agreements on pilot projects with all of the provinces. We have a pilot project involving off-campus work in two provinces: Quebec, and if I remember correctly, Manitoba.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank Mr. Dorais and his team for being here this morning and echo Mr. Mark's thanks to the staff who liaise with MPs' offices. Over 18 years I got to know quite a few of those folks, and almost to a person they were extremely helpful and obliging and made my job a lot easier with constituents. I can't remember the last name of the person who's currently serving in Vancouver, but Joan is fabulous as well, so I want to express my appreciation to her.

My question has more to do with the relationship with the department, and legislation that's passed by Parliament. I assume that IRPA is the key piece of legislation that you work with. As a new member of Parliament, I'm trying to figure out the work we do here and its impacts down the road, and you'll understand that where I'm going is to the refugee appeal division and its implementation.

When legislation is passed by Parliament, what is the obligation of the department to implement that, and how do those decisions get made? I realize I'm dancing around a question for the minister, as opposed to the department. How is the decision made to not go forward with the implementation of the refugee appeal division? My understanding is that was part of the original legislation that was proposed by the government, so it was a government recommendation, and I understand that the department may have had some input into that when it was developed. So I'm curious as to why that isn't going forward at the moment.

I know that the decision to not go forward has been done in the context that the minister has said there is a review of refugee programs. So exactly what's involved in that review? Is the department involved in that? What process is involved, and what is the timetable? Have consultations been held at this point in a

review of refugee programs? Is there a report forthcoming on that? What's the timetable around those kinds of things?

Mr. Michel Dorais: There is a technical answer to the question. As in many pieces of legislation that Parliament votes on, there is a clause that says the act or parts of this act will enter into force when the governor in council so decides. That is the technical answer to the question. The part you're referring to is in the act, but it's not enforced, as decided by the governor in council, which is cabinet in this case.

The essence of your question—there are two elements to it. One is the policy decision, which I would encourage you to question the minister on. The second one is the reform, which is also a policy question. Obviously the minister has said there will be a reform. She may want to elaborate for the committee on where she wants to take that reform, and the department will certainly be involved in supporting the minister on this.

• (1025)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I have some further questions. Do I still have time in my seven minutes?

I just want to ask about the caseload situation that many MPs are facing. I know some folks addressed that this morning in their presentations. Ms. Frith said something about client services and a complaint resolution project that's underway. Mr. McWhinnie talked about the call centre, the millions of calls you receive, and how 55% are being dealt with, when the industry standard is more like 80%.

I think most MPs that have significant immigrant populations are finding a significant increase in the kinds of inquiries we're getting. Some MPs are feeling like it's almost an off-loading of responsibly for dealing with complaints and concerns of the immigration process onto MPs' offices. Sometimes a full staff person—and we have pretty limited staff—is dealing with immigration concerns almost exclusively in our offices.

Could you elaborate a little more on what steps are being taken? Do you have some reflection on why this is happening? It does seem to be something that's taking place more recently, as opposed to what the case was a few years ago.

Mr. Michel Dorais: These are very pertinent questions, and they will certainly be the subject of discussion at the committee.

It is very true that not only the department and the call centres but the offices of members of Parliament are overloaded with all kinds of requests related to the immigration program.

It's a very simple issue and a very complex issue at the same time. In Canada now, one person out of five was not born in Canada. Therefore, it is normal that in many of the ridings of the country there is a lot of concern expressed on issues related to immigration. In some ridings in some areas of the country, one person out of two was not born in Canada and therefore has immigration-related issues.

Over the last decade we brought into Canada close to three million new immigrants. Therefore there are people who have concerns about immigration that the population 10 or 15 years ago did not have.

The problem of the number of requests arises from two things. One is the system we have, which is based on building huge inventories. When we have an inventory of over 600,000 people, that's a lot of inventory given the processing capacity we have, and it therefore generates long delays. People have to wait a long time to be processed. When people wait and they're on an inventory—especially if they've paid for some processing time—after a certain amount of time they complain. They phone to get their status. This is the result of that combination of things. It's a fairly recent phenomenon, and we hope to work with the committee to try to solve this problem.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will go to Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): I'd also like to thank you for your presentation and for all the work you've done. Your department does a lot of good work. As a result of that, I'm here in Canada. I came as a young boy of 13 from Macedonia with my mom and brother. My father had come previously.

I have a question about the consultants. I was at a function hosted by consultants a year ago, prior to being elected or even knowing I would run. There was one member of Parliament there, and they were salivating around him. Now I understand a little better why. It is because of the number of cases we have to deal with. Somehow they think that we're able to help them by short-circuiting that process in one way or another, which I'm not a big supporter of.

Many of the consultants I spoke to were engineers, accountants, and teachers in their homelands and were fairly new in Canada themselves. They had become immigration consultants due to the fact that they couldn't find jobs in their own fields, and they are charging people all kinds of money.

I'd like to know more about the immigration consultants. Who certifies them? How many are certified in Canada? When did this start? Can anybody be an immigration consultant? Have you heard of any wrongdoings of immigration consultants, or so-called immigration consultants?

• (1030)

Mr. Michel Dorais: This is a very important question. If I may, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to suggest that the department table for the committee the very detailed information on the initiative that was taken over a year ago, for the full information.

But let me say something. Years ago there were something like a few hundred immigration consultants, and over a very short period of time the numbers went up to something like 5,000. There was a lot of abuse, with consultants charging up to \$5,000 to fill out a form that was available on the Internet, and stuff like that.

Over a year and a half ago, the government took an initiative to regulate the people we deal with as representatives of clients of the department. A regulation was passed, and now the department deals with members of the bar, members of the *Chambre des notaires*, the

articling people in those various offices, *les stagiaires dans les bureaux de notaires*, and consultants that are registered with the Canadian Society of Immigration Consultants.

CSIC is a private organization that was formed last year. They certify consultants and test them. They're developing mechanisms to intervene in cases of malfeasance or complaints. People pay to be members of that group. That assists us in ensuring a certain quality of representatives of clients, and it protects the immigrants. There is a four-year transition period, and we're at the end of year one of that transition period. In three years from now, all the representation will have to be done by lawyers, notaries, or consultants certified by CSIC.

We'll provide the committee with the details.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Maybe we can make that a future agenda item, because we have a lot of problems with consultants, particularly overseas, providing wrong information.

Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all for giving us such an excellent briefing. Since I'm a new member of Parliament, it is really very helpful to me.

One of the pillars of immigration policy is family reunification. It seems like the waiting period is getting longer and longer. It's almost 47 months if somebody is applying from New Delhi. So it is really unacceptable. Why doesn't CIC hire more staff and provide them with more and better training?

On the other hand, some of our constituents are told to call a 1-800 number. When they call the 1-800 number to follow up on their cases, that number is not being answered. Something needs to be done about that.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Mr. Chairman, this is a very important question. The government has tabled in the House and in this committee the policy objective of maintaining a 60-40 ratio between economic migration, and family reunification and refugees. Our total number, which was around 233,000 I think last year, is composed of 60% of economic migration, plus or minus, and 40%.

In that 40% of family reunification, the government has asked us to give priority to children and spouses, which we process in about six months. Given that there is a fixed number and we give priority to certain categories there, it is absolutely correct for the member to note that some people have to wait longer. That applies to parents and grandparents, for example, who have to wait a much longer period now in order for us to be able to maintain the ratio and at the same time prioritize spouses and children.

It is the direct result of some policy choices that were shared with the committee. The committee may wish to revisit them with the minister over the next while.

• (1035)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's something we're going to have to look at in detail as a committee.

I just might point out to you folks over there—I'm sure you have read the minutes so far—that half of the permanent members of this committee were not born in Canada. We've had various experiences in the process, so it will be an interesting dialogue over the coming year.

I'd like to go to Ms. Guergis.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thanks very much, and thanks very much for your presentations this morning.

First I have a comment, and then I have a question. My riding is Simcoe—Grey. Depending on where you are in the riding, it can take up to two hours just to get to the outskirts of Toronto. We have a lot of seniors in the northern part of the riding, and my concern is about the number of passport applications that I'm taking in the office.

In my Collingwood location, I'd say 95% of the workload is just going through passport applications with people coming through the door. They're not necessarily in a rush; they just know that their MP can do it for them, and it's much easier for them to come to my office than to drive down to the city.

My Alliston location is just as busy. About 75% of the workload is passport applications, so I do have a great deal of concern when it comes to this. We have to open up the applications and take a long, hard look at them, because if there's just one error, they come back to the office and it creates even more of a workload.

So I'm looking for some suggestions on that. Perhaps we could open a passport office in the city of Barrie, which would be only a short drive.

On the 35,000 deportees that are said to still be in the country, I have received a number of questions in my office about that. In particular, a couple of people have told me that they are deportees and that they fear for their lives. They're concerned that if they are deported they'll be murdered. That's the comment they have passed to me.

What is the plan to deal with the backlog and the 35,000 deportees?

Mr. Michel Dorais: There are two elements. First, the passport office is the responsibility of the foreign affairs department, and we'll gladly pass the remarks of the members to our Foreign Affairs colleagues.

On the 35,000 that the member referred to, these are existing warrants that are now the responsibility of the Canadian Border Services Agency. We have to be very careful about that number, because we do not have an exit control in this country. Anybody can leave at any time without telling anyone. If they have a passport to take a plane, they're gone.

So when someone is supposed to leave and we give them 30 days to leave the country because they've overstayed their visa, but they

don't tell us they've left, a warrant goes into the system automatically. So these accumulate. The number quoted was for warrants that have accumulated since the early 1980s. Many of those people may have gone; we just don't know if they've gone or not.

The reason they stay on the books is that if those people are picked up for any infraction by the police, the warrants automatically come up in the system.

So the numbers do not indicate the people who are in Canada waiting to be deported, but the people who have not told us they've left the country...or they've decided something different over the course of their stay in Canada. So the number of deportees who have not been deported is very hard to determine at this stage.

The one thing the CBSA agency will certainly tell the committee is that everybody who has a criminal record is actively searched for and deported. The others are being told...to be deported. Sometimes failed refugee claimants are deported, but obviously they prioritize the action there.

• (1040)

The Chair: Mr. Mark.

Mr. Michel Dorais: May I just mention that before deportation there is the pre-removal risk assessment. This is done on a very systematic basis every time. The purpose of that operation is to establish whether there's a risk for the person if they're being deported. So that's part of the system.

Ms. Helena Guergis: They did indicate to me that they had gone through that process, but they felt that they weren't heard correctly, and they still fear for their life, just in this one particular case.

The Chair: Mr. Mark.

Mr. Inky Mark: I just want to follow up on what you said. Because we live in a world of international terrorism, security is foremost in most people's minds around the world...but certainly living beside our neighbour, the United States. Do you believe it is time we put in place an exit-entry kind of system or other elements that we need—if we need certificates and information, whether it's biometric or otherwise—to make sure the information we're getting is valid? Do you think it's long overdue? Is it worth the money to put in place an entry-exit system?

Mr. Michel Dorais: That is definitely a policy decision, but the committee may wish to look at the Australian experience, where they do have an entry-exit system. It's not a real-time one. They just accumulate statistics on who goes out and they are able to correct them.

As for other countries, I think Israel has a live entry-exit system, where they know who comes in and goes out, and they check this.

Great Britain abandoned its exit system when the tunnel was built to France, because it's much easier to implement when you're an island. Technically it is feasible. There's obviously a cost associated with these initiatives, but it's an issue of policy.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Faillie.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: About the backlog in processing refugee files, what is the role of the partners, and who are these partners? I'm talking here about people who work at the local level to help refugees integrate, who deal with these people on a daily basis and help them and support them in their integration. What is the role of your partners? How are those partners accredited? Also, what is the process for selecting those partners?

Mr. Michel Dorais: I'm going to ask Mr. Jean to answer that question.

Insofar as refugees are concerned, over the past few years we have worked with our IRB colleagues to reduce the backlog significantly. If I'm not mistaken, and the figures will have to be corroborated, in September 2001 there were some 53,000 refugee applications in our inventory. We have now reduced that to less than 30,000, which is bringing us close to our target work inventory, the figure we have to reach to ensure that applications are processed expeditiously. There has been a vast improvement in this regard. In some parts of the country such as Quebec, applications are now processed within six months and the IRB is working to reduce those processing times even further.

As for the partners, I'm going to ask Mr. Jean to reply to you.

Mr. Daniel Jean: I believe that Ms. Faille was thinking among other things about the private sponsorship of refugees. Is that what you were referring to? In fact, this year marks the 25th anniversary of this activity. We are very proud of our partnership with various groups throughout Canada, various religious groups as well as private groups that have been created to help refugees. We have a tradition in this area and we are very proud of it.

The government objective for private sponsorships is that there be between 2,500 and 4,500. We are going to provide you with the exact figures, but for the moment I am giving you approximate figures.

Throughout the past few years we have constantly increased the number of private sponsorships. Currently that program is being evaluated. All of the partners, including the coordination group, the Canadian Council for Refugees, are taking part in this evaluation, its purpose being to see how all together we can improve the program. We expect that there will be more than 3,500 cases this year. It has to be understood that as do many other programs, we receive far more applications than the government objective allows. We receive some 6,000 applications a year under that program, but the maximum objective is 4,500.

Ms. Meili Faille: When individuals or partners believe that mistakes have been made in their files, how does the department go about solving that?

• (1045)

Mr. Daniel Jean: We have ongoing discussions with our partners and the groups who represent them. This is an issue which crops up fairly regularly. It must be said that this is a protection program: people have to be in danger of being persecuted. Often, there are people who apply under this program not because they are in danger of being persecuted, but because they see it as a means of family reunification. These people don't have anyone else to turn to, such as

brothers or sisters. That is not the purpose of this program; it is not intended for those situations.

When people think that we have made a mistake, they can make representations and the file will be reviewed from the administrative perspective. Often, there have been no mistakes. Often, this is not the right program for this category of applicant.

Ms. Meili Faille: What role do groups such as Amnesty International play? Is it the same as that of the CCR?

Mr. Daniel Jean: We have ongoing consultations with these groups on our protection programs. For instance, concerning the most recent decision on machinery issues, all of these groups were consulted within the context of protection issues with regard to the machinery exercises that were carried out. Also, as we deliver our protection programs, we have ongoing discussions with those groups and with the people who work on protection matters at the local level.

Ms. Meili Faille: Do I have any time left?

[English]

The Chair: That's it. You have run out of time.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I just want to clarify something with Monsieur Jean. Did you say—it was the interpretation I wasn't quite sure of—the private sponsorship program is being used for purposes other than that for which it was intended, like family reunification?

Mr. Daniel Jean: No. I said that we're celebrating 25 years of a very proud program, and overall it has worked really well, both for Canada and in terms of protecting people and allowing the reunification of people and families who are refugees, who fear the risk of return.

The question Madame Faille asked was related to cases where people may not agree with our decision in individual cases. I said that in the program we're having some difficulties because people are sometimes using the program when there is not a protection need, and they just don't qualify under the program.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I have another question regarding reunification of family members who have made refugee claims. Once someone's accepted as a refugee in Canada, does the six-month standard apply to their family members who may still be in a refugee camp overseas? If it doesn't, why not?

Mr. Daniel Jean: As for the family reunification of dependants overseas for people who have been recognized as refugees, I think it's fair to say that in the last five years we've made a lot of progress in that. We still need to go much beyond that.

The six-month objective we spoke of before is for family reunification of people who are spouses where sponsorship has been made. In the case of refugees—once they become permanent residents—who have dependants abroad, we're trying to facilitate that as fast as we can. Sometimes the situations are not easy; the local conditions may make it very difficult, for example.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I have another question about enforcement around work permits, work visas, and people who come in to work in Canada under NAFTA. I'm wondering just what kind of follow-up or enforcement follow-up is done on those kinds of cases, and if that kind of enforcement still remains with CIC, or if it's transferred to the Canadian Border Services Agency.

My understanding is you have to have very specific educational or technical requirements to come in as a worker under NAFTA. Some folks, through the labour movement, are reporting that people are often doing work that doesn't require those kinds of standards. So I'm just wondering who enforces that.

Also on work permits, I know you work with Human Resources and Skills Development on that issue. Maybe you could tell me a bit about the process there and how that's done. The concern is that some employers in Canada are making applications and having them approved on the basis that foreign workers are cheaper than Canadian workers and that there's some economic benefit to them and their project to bring in foreign workers when there are Canadians available to do the work. It was always my understanding that wasn't possible when there were Canadians available to do the work.

So I'm just wondering about that policy and about enforcement around those issues.

• (1050)

Mr. Michel Dorais: Definitely the enforcement has been transferred to the Canadian Border Services Agency, but I'll let Mr. Jean and Madame Ricard handle the other aspects of the question.

Mr. Daniel Jean: Indeed, if a union reports that it believes employees are working illegally who are not well documented, or who may have received documents under false pretences, the investigation will be done by CBSA. If they have questions as to the eligibility, they may seek information from us, but that's what would happen.

On your second question, HRSD is the department responsible for making labour market opinions. Usually, unless it has made a labour market opinion on a given sector—as it did for the software industry when we were in the IT boom a couple of years ago—that there is a necessity for entry of a group of people, it's usually done case by case. It makes an assessment on whether or not there's an actual local domestic labour market need for that individual. It then issues an opinion on whether the person can come, under confirmation that there's a job for them. Then the case is processed overseas, or if it's an American citizen, the case may be processed at the port of entry.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have to vacate at 10:55 a.m. We have another committee coming in.

I'm going to ask a question, but prior to that, seeing that it's the 48th anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, which was four days old about this time.... I mention that because that was a watershed in Canadian government, dealing in particular with refugees. It had an impact on every wave of refugees that followed, be it from Czechoslovakia, Uganda, or Vietnam. Canada certainly undertook a much more enlightened attitude in helping out. I think for the most

part, Canada has been very well served by all the refugees who have come in, outside of the regular immigration that we have.

My question, I think, is more of a strategic planning one. Given the demographics in this country and the fact that we're not really replacing ourselves, what kinds of studies has the department done on the immigration levels needed to try to sustain a workforce that's going to be fewer in number, in terms of supporting an aging population? Is there a study going on within the department itself?

Mr. Michel Dorais: I'll ask Madame Frith to answer in detail.

We have a number of studies that tend to demonstrate—the years vary a little bit—that somewhere around 2011, 100% of the growth in the Canadian workforce will come from immigration; and around 2026, 100% of population growth will come from migration. So we have studies. We'll table the exact numbers and the results with the committee.

What we do not have is a population policy in this country yet, or we haven't made that choice. There are countries in the world that have made decisions to let their populations stabilize. Others have made decisions to let their populations grow at a certain rhythm. So far, we have not made a conscious decision to go one way or another.

Instinctively, over the last 150 years or so, since the very beginning, our country has been built on immigration. A large part of our growth in certain periods of our history—such as when we were populating the west—has been made through immigration. But we do not have a population policy, and we do not have a study that says we need x number of immigrants in order to meet certain economic or other objectives at this point.

Do you want to comment, Rosaline?

• (1055)

Ms. Rosaline Frith: Many studies have been done that looked at the growth of the labour force, or the lack thereof, as well as the population growth. As the deputy stated, between 2011 and 2016, somewhere in there, about 100% of net labour force growth will come from immigration.

Statistics Canada has done some studies. It has done some forecasts to try to look at the number of people who will be in Canada by 2017. It's working on those studies right now. We can put together a list of the studies that are available—because we're constantly looking at them—and share them with the committee.

I think what's important is that there is no one study that clearly states what the level of immigration needs to be in order to meet the labour market demands. What we have looked at is the possibility of shortages in some areas. There are studies that have been done by Statistics Canada, and by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada in those areas. As I said, we can share them.

The Chair: We look forward to that. I think it's a discussion that we will have to have. When you say there's no policy on population growth now, I think it's probably something that would be very important to look at, particularly by this committee, because we're one of the few committees that can determine the numbers.

It seems very obvious to me that if we have an aging population that's going to require more and more services, particularly in the health sector, with nursing homes, we're going to need people in those service sectors. Anyway, a debate on population policy is well worth having, and if anybody should be debating it, it should be this committee.

I want to thank you very much for appearing. I look forward to your flow charts and notes. As you can see, we're very keen around

this committee on these issues. We'll be looking forward to having you back again.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Michel Dorais: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We look forward to working with the committee.

The Chair: The committee is adjourned.

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