



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

CIMM • NUMBER 025 • 1st SESSION • 39th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

—
Chair

Mr. Norman Doyle

Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca>

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

• (0900)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Before we welcome witnesses there are a couple of minor housekeeping items we should deal with.

You have a copy of the budget before you. You can see the amount there. We need to get this approved. We have witnesses coming on the 28th, so we'll need some extra moneys approved to get these witnesses before us.

Could I have a motion to approve our budget?

An hon. member: So moved.

(Motion agreed to) [See *Minutes of Proceedings*]

Also, the Canadian Council for Refugees, as you're aware, are having their fall consultation on the weekend coming. I think most of our members will be going down to Montreal for the meeting. Just to remind you, we have an informal meeting set with Mr. Charkaoui, which is going to be held at 5 p.m. in the parlour adjacent to the chair's room. I guess the clerk will inform you a little bit more about that as time goes on. I look forward to that meeting in Montreal.

We're working on the draft report—for December 5, is it, Mr. Clerk—or starting on the fifth and subsequent meetings thereafter. The officials want to appear before then.

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. William Farrell): The officials are supposed to appear on November 23, but because of the conference, I'm wondering whether we could hear from the officials on December 5, and then the draft report can be the next three meetings.

The Chair: That's the next three meetings after we meet with the officials on December 5. You are so informed.

We want to welcome witnesses from the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance who are with us today. We have two hours for presentation and discussion.

We welcome you here today. Maybe I'll pass it over to you to begin your presentation. We have two hours, so we'll have questions and discussion afterwards.

Thank you.

• (0905)

Ms. Wai Young (Executive Director, Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (CISSA)): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My name is Wai Young, and I'm with the Ottawa secretariat of the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance, which is a national umbrella organization for the 450 settlement agencies across Canada. Our vision is that CISSA, which is our acronym, harnesses the expertise of the immigrant settlement sector and is the sector's national voice to help build a Canadian society in which all immigrants and refugees are able to participate fully.

CISSA's mission is to advance public policies and programs that facilitate the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees to Canada. You probably know that some of our agencies have been providing services and programs within their communities across Canada, some for 30, 40, 50 years. Our members are currently the provincial umbrella organizations from across Canada, as well as some national groups, such as the Canadian Council for Refugees, the sponsorship agreement holders, etc.

We're here today again to present ourselves as a national body, to identify issues, and to respond to any questions the committee has arising out of a letter we wrote requesting that the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration undertake three different studies.

One study is to do comparative study of services in the national immigration settlement programs across Canada. As committee members know, the immigration department provides a variety of programs across Canada. It is our understanding that there is a huge diversity in the kinds as well as the levels of programs and services that currently exist.

Specifically, in B.C., if you were waiting for a language training program right now, you would be waiting anywhere from eight to twelve months on a wait list before you could enter a language training program. If you were waiting in Ontario, you would be waiting six weeks. In addition to that, in B.C., if you were in that program, you would be able to get, free of cost, up to level three language training in English. If you were in Ontario, it would be level eight.

These kinds of disparities we feel need to be addressed in a national program such as this, and thus we are requesting that the standing committee undertake a white paper on comparative services across Canada.

This is just one example of the kind of disparity and variety found across Canada in programs and services, and we feel it creates a huge challenge for immigrants' and refugees' settlement and integration, depending upon where they enter and where they integrate and settle in Canada, which we feel is an issue.

Secondly, we've asked the committee to undertake a study on the outcomes of immigrant and refugee children and youth. As you've all read in the paper this summer, as well as over the last year, huge issues have now been identified regarding the integration outcomes of children and youth.

For example, in the city of Toronto, immigrant youth are dropping out at rates of up to 70%, much higher than the rates for their Canadian counterparts. Obviously, as refugee youth come through the system, they've witnessed war and all kinds of horrible situations, and the programs and services within our current programs do not address the kinds of trauma that currently children and youth are witnessing and experiencing abroad prior to coming.

We believe this program again needs to be updated. It's been a while since the refugee and immigrant service programs have been expanded to include the kinds of trauma and the kinds of issues that youth face today, in the 21st century. That's why we requested again another study on this.

• (0910)

Thirdly, we requested a study on smaller centres. As you know, many of our cities across Canada are experiencing population loss, as well as aging. This is a huge concern to the Canadian Federation of Municipalities, who have written us a letter requesting to work with CISSA in the areas of attraction and retention of immigrants and refugees to their smaller city centres. So we would again like to request the committee to undertake some work in assisting these smaller communities on how they can attract to and retain newcomers and citizens resident in their communities.

Having said that, now I would like to turn the microphone over to my colleague, Morteza Jafarpour, who is from Hamilton, Ontario. He will speak a little bit about himself, his personal as well as his professional experiences, and what he brings to the table today.

Thank you.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour (Member, Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (CISSA)): Good morning. My name is Morteza Jafarpour. This is a very interesting coincidence for me, because 17 years ago today I arrived in Canada as a refugee claimant. It was the day I came to safety, but at the same time there was a big shift in my career from being a medical doctor to becoming a pizza driver.

As Wai mentioned earlier, I am a member of CISSA and I also chair the Ontario caucus of CISSA. In real life, I am executive director of an organization with the long name of the Settlement and Integration Services Organization, with the short name SISO. We provide a variety of services for immigrants and refugees that include settlement services, volunteer services, a host program, a language assessment centre, and also employment services.

With regard to the kinds of newcomers we serve in our organization, around 80% of our clients are landed immigrants or independent immigrants or family class. Also, 20% of the clients we see are refugees. We have around 320 to 350 government-assisted refugees and we have been involved with many different groups who have come. Especially after changes in legislation, we have seen government-assisted refugees with different kinds of needs and history from what we used to see.

One of the interesting parts of being in southern Ontario is the number of refugee claimants we have seen in the last few years, although after the safe third country agreement we have seen a drop in that regard. But being close to Fort Erie, by the year 2003, almost 60% of our clients were refugee claimants. We also have worked very closely with a sponsoring group regarding the private sponsorship group. We have been involved in all these areas. Our agency has a staff of 60 coming from 45 different ethnic and country backgrounds. Our staff has the ability to talk in more than 50 languages right now.

Before I turn to Fariborz, I need to highlight one thing. Historically, the vision of the role of settlement services has been that their job is to settle and integrate immigrants or refugees. Settlement integration is a personal journey. The role of any institution is not to settle individuals. In fact, the role the settlement sector and CISSA is advocating is about creating conditions for immigrant refugees to settle and integrate. And creating that condition is providing services, working with emerging and existing interracial communities, and working with mainstream cultural organizations to make sure their services are accessible and available for new citizens and new immigrants, public education and definitely dialogue, and working in the public policy area.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian (Member, Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance (CISSA)): Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, good morning. Thank you very much for the opportunity. It's a great opportunity and an honour to be here to express the work we do and maybe influence some of the decisions you're going to be making.

Like Morteza, I was fortunate to come to Canada in 1988 as a government-sponsored refugee. Since then I have been involved with refugee work and immigration. I went back to my past experience to give back what I received from Canada. It has made me devote my life to volunteer work, and I very much enjoy what I do.

I'm the executive director of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society. We have a staff of about 160, and 800 volunteers. We offer about 62 programs, and annually serve about 8,000 people in Calgary. As you know, Calgary is becoming a destination of choice, breaking the trend of everybody going to Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. Now people are also looking at Calgary as quite an exciting place to be. It's quite an exciting time for us in Calgary.

I'm also involved with the Prairie Centre of Excellence that does all the research on immigration and integration. We strongly believe in immigration in our community, so we have taken an initiative to start the immigration council in Calgary. It brings everybody together to make sure that when people come to our city they know where they are, and the community becomes involved in their settlement.

We also started an initiative a few years ago with Mr. Joe Clark, who was our MP in Calgary Centre, for a call to action. We feel very strongly that integration is the final key and the reason why people come here. We have to take it much more seriously than we have. As a result we have a task force in Calgary to try to see what happens. What are the trends and challenges? What is the involvement? What does it take, when people come to a city like Calgary or any other city, to make people feel they're part of that city?

So we have about 16 organizations as partners. We have identified health, education, justice, civic participation, and employment as the six major areas, and the leaders and decision-makers in those areas need to really be involved in the settlement and integration process, otherwise it will be difficult in the future.

Learning from other countries, I think Canada has done a great job of allowing people to come to this country, bringing immigrants and refugees here, and having great community support for immigrants and refugees.

As mentioned by my colleagues, we have tried to organize ourselves. I'm the chair of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies. We have 20 organizations across Alberta, and the prime mandate is to settle immigrants and refugees in Alberta. I have the privilege of working with CISSA representing Alberta.

There are two very important issues: the initial settlement when people come here, and long-term integration. Most of the programs that member agencies, including my own organization, provide are basically to make that happen. The fact that a single agency in Calgary has 800 volunteers shows the interest of our community in making immigration a positive experience for people who come to our city, as well as the community itself.

We get about 1,100 refugees in Calgary and about 2,000 or 3,000 refugees in Alberta overall, so we have really good support from the community. You heard about the number of people on waiting lists. That was very unfortunate, because the budget for the settlement services was very much static for the past eight years. I have to recognize, on behalf of the sector, that the recent announcement of a funding increase is going to be a great help. Thank you very much to all of you for putting that on the agenda and recognizing the importance of settlement integration.

We have a lot of challenges. We bring in 265,000 people, I'm sure that in the future we're going to increase that because all the studies show we need more people. We need to really look at settlement and integration as a social science. We bring in so many people from 120 different countries and you expect them to become a part of your community, become Canadian. That takes a lot of work with the newcomers, and it's a lot of work for people who live in this country.

There's a lot of good news in what we do. There's the history of refugees coming to this country. Some of you are probably the grandchildren or the children of refugees who came to this country. The reputation and the positive face it puts on Canada internationally, and all those positive experiences we have with the settlement of refugees and immigration—that's why I think so many people want to come to Canada.

● (0915)

However, as you probably recognize, there's huge competition for the kind of people you're looking for. From a recent symposium in Canada, I learned that the Australians are doing a little bit better in competition with Canada and other countries.

So to make it work, I think we all have to work together. And good things are happening.

I'd like to stop here and hopefully get into a discussion.

Thank you.

● (0920)

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

We have a lot of interest in this particular topic, so I think we'll go to questions right away.

Madame Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Merci, Monsieur le Président.

I'd like to welcome you to Ottawa, although this is not the first time you've been here.

First of all, let me say that I am fully endorsing the requests you have made to this committee on the three points—the comparative services for refugees, the study on refugee and immigrant children and youth, and the indicators for smaller cities in Canada.

To my first question, perhaps you would give me a fairly short answer, because I do have other questions. My question has to do with these three points, in particular the smaller cities in Canada. This is a big problem, which every province is dealing with. For instance, how do you manage to get people to come to your province or to the smaller towns in your province? Once they are there, how do you manage to retain them, not have them leave? Do you have any suggestions on how we're going to do this? I know you've suggested that we do a study, but on the other hand, very often the people who ask these things usually have some suggestions.

Again, I'd really appreciate a short answer on this. I do have two more questions.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: I'd like to respond to that.

When you look at the distribution of immigrants across the country, obviously you start with the provinces. We have three provinces across the country—Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia—that get the bulk of people, and I think that's where we have to start. If we want to do anything to change that trend, we have to take initiatives on a provincial basis.

Again, there is good news. I was at a conference recently in Atlantic Canada, and this is on the table. I think the provinces are getting the warning and are realizing the importance. They are quite involved in recruitment and attraction.

When you go overseas and ask people about Canada, basically what they know is Ontario, B.C., and Quebec. They would hardly know Saskatchewan or Manitoba. So the first step should be to market those provinces, because they have a lot to offer. When you look at what the Atlantic provinces have done in the past few years, obviously you see signs of success there. Manitoba is also a success; you know about Winnipeg. So I think we have to start from there.

In the provinces, yes, you get people coming to Ontario, but Ontario still has the same problem, in that 80% or 90% go to five different centres. In the case of Alberta, 95% of people go to either Edmonton or Calgary. That in itself could be quite unhealthy.

In terms of next steps, the communities have to take the initiative. In Alberta, for instance, Brooks or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or Olds have to understand why they need people to go there and what it takes to retain them. We have to make sure that the cities or municipalities are involved in their target-setting. Again, Brooks is a good example. I'm sure you've heard about it. They have about 3,000 people living there who weren't living there five or six years ago. Obviously the city was not prepared. I was quite involved with that, and I know it took some time for the city to get prepared. That's a good example we can learn from in terms of increasing the numbers in, let's say, Olds, a small centre in Alberta that has a lot to offer.

So I think we need community involvement, community recognition of the need for new people, and some serious institutional changes. If you are sending people from Africa, from Sudan, to Brooks, it shouldn't take five years for the school board to realize that these people are their customers. They should realize that even before they go there. Unfortunately, we always react to issues.

So I think the small communities have to be more proactive. We need them to be the ones to say that they want immigrants, and I think we should let them do the settlement.

• (0925)

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Thank you very much.

I certainly agree with what you've just said. I was in Winnipeg recently, and last year in Saskatchewan, and this is the kind of thing they are looking forward to.

You talked about community leadership. This is something I very much believe in. I wonder whether we can go further with community involvement and talk about community private sponsorship of refugees or immigrants. This is something I'd like to be more involved in, because I've had requests from people in my riding, either as a community or a church, to sponsor a number of families, not one family, in countries such as Iran. These families could be refugees on the grounds of religious persecution.

Do you have any suggestions we could make to the government to make it easier for such groups to sponsor several families at a time, or these kinds of immigrants or refugees—which is what I'll call them for the time being? Do you have any strong suggestions to make? This is an important topic for me particularly.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: First of all, I'm sure you're aware of the sponsorship agreement holder arrangements. At the agency I work with, we are a sponsorship agreement holder.

I think of the Alberta situation. There are not many sponsorship agreement holders in our smaller communities. In Medicine Hat, Red Deer, and Brooks, there are a few organizations. So I think a lot of communities don't even know about that. I think you have to find people, and that's actually what we have done in a project called "Touching the Hearts of Albertans". We went around Alberta and talked about refugee sponsorship.

I agree with you. It is fantastic. I think the positive response we get is amazing. However, people really need to realize this process exists. There should be community awareness. A lot of them don't know. At my agency, I sign on behalf of Bishop Henry—which is an honour—but we also do sponsorship for southern Alberta. I know in southern Alberta there are only three or four groups that do that. They could have 50 groups doing that.

I think the issue for the communities is to campaign, basically, and to raise awareness that this exists. And then there obviously needs to be the training and support to make sure they are able to do it.

Again, historically, the religious faith organizations have been leaders, and I think they are still the best to become a champion in smaller communities.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Can you make recommendations as to how the system could be made better in order to bring more people into this country faster?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: We know about the backlog and the problem we have with the backlog. At this point I think we have about maybe 6,000 or 7,000 or 8,000 sponsorship calls every year, and only about half of them come to Canada. It takes a really long time. With the waiting lists, for instance, in Russia, if somebody's an Afghani in Russia or there is somebody in Turkey, it takes about three years to come here. So I think we really have to change that. Again, this is a system issue. I think we have a backlog. I think there has been a lack of resources for the past eight or ten years. The CIC has really reduced their staffing overseas. Now, hopefully, they will increase it.

So what they need to do, basically, is to make sure.... In our case, we submit about 200 applications for refugees coming from overseas. It probably takes—and we are one of the luckiest ones—

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I'm talking about sponsorship here.

The Chair: We have to go to our next one.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: We'll talk about it later.

The Chair: We're down to eight and a half minutes.

Madame Faillie, please.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faillie (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Your presentations, this morning, have been very interesting. Of course, the province of Quebec has a different approach because of the Canada-Quebec Agreement, but I would like you to tell us about criteria. In Quebec, newcomers get different services from other immigrants on a five-year basis. Newcomers in the province are entitled to certain services for a five-year period. After that, they will be offered other services. It is not the same range of services.

Did you undertake a study to determine what services should be offered as a priority, from the beginning, and which ones should be offered on a longer term, as well as to determine where are the major gaps?

• (0930)

[English]

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: I think there's a continuum of services, from initial services and settlement to settlement, integration, and civic participation. Initial settlement is really a physical thing. It's about housing, schooling, getting a bank account, learning how to drive here or getting a driver's licence, getting all the documentation, health issues—all those things that happen in the first six months. After that the issue is how they are going to get engaged, especially entering the labour market. That is huge. In all the studies we have done, the top three priorities are English or French language, employment services, and services related to children and youth.

Initial services are well established. There are community organizations like ours that help them find apartments and schools. We help them with the initial challenges they have. There are two different ways to thinking across the country. In Quebec I know you have a particular system, but we really don't believe they should be separated from the mainstream. After the initial services and some special services they need, we really need to make sure our institutions have the ability to serve newcomers, at least after they've been here for six months. So we really need to look again at two-tier services for newcomers, because over five years we get almost 1.2 million people in this country, and our main institutions should be able to serve them.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: As concerns immigration services, 80% of immigrants settle in urban centres and 20% in rural communities. The province of Quebec has made huge efforts to regionalize immigration.

Do you think that the relationship between the newcomer and the department, and the fact that services are offered in urban centres are discouraging quite a few people to rapidly settle outside major centres?

[English]

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Lack of services is one of the reasons. There are a number of issues with people not going to smaller centres. We have to recognize that we're bringing people from countries where they're used to living in cities of more than eight million people, so they like to go where people are. Services and readiness of the community can help. We also have to really market secondary migration among people who have been here for some time, and look at the opportunities they may have in the smaller centres.

Ms. Wai Young: May I also respond to that?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Yes.

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: Certain initiatives have been undertaken in some areas that really outline that where a community is welcoming and provides some of the necessary things immigrants need, such as good jobs, immigrants are willing to move and settle. I'll give you an example. An organization in Vancouver called SUCCESS hosted a job fair on behalf of a large gas company in Fort St. John, which is in the northern part of B.C. It's a very small community. But because of the good job opportunities there, something like 1,200 people went to the job fair to apply for those jobs. People were willing to move to that community.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: I entirely agree with you. We necessarily have doctors outside large centres as we want to attract them in areas where there is a lack of physicians. However, when someone from the north of the province must go for an interview to Gatineau because this is where services are offered, it raises a problem. When you have to travel long distances, you can see that Quebec is a big province. A doctor must lose several days of work and hospitals cannot afford that luxury. Furthermore, when the appointments are postponed, he must make one more trip. It is quite discouraging for our professionals or our technical specialists.

I have a last question. At the beginning of his mandate, the minister announced an \$18 million investment to simplify the process for foreign credentials recognition.

What role do you play in that respect? Is that issue progressing satisfactorily?

• (0935)

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: We have actually had several meetings with the new Foreign Accreditation Agency. They have established it as primarily a referral agency to provincial organizations. A lot of the foreign accreditations happen at a provincial level.

We have been watching with great interest how they have been setting up the system in a very, very quick way. I think they plan to be operational by March of this year. To go from zero to operational is quite an impressive feat. We would of course be interested in playing a more active role in that.

At this point in time, it's very much been a department-driven initiative. However, we do believe their approach is very positive. It has great possibilities for success. Having said that, because this is a federal system where professional immigrants can start their accreditation process from abroad, there still needs to be much work done at a provincial level with those foreign accreditation bodies. They vary across Canada.

I think there still is a need for a great number of resources to assist and support and help those foreign accreditation bodies, as Fariborz was saying, become more welcoming. They need to look at their red tape, their bureaucracy, and their processes as well. In many of the different professions, there's a lot of red tape associated with becoming accredited. Some of that may be outdated.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: But, up to now, you haven't had any official meeting with the minister or the department.

[English]

The Chair: We have to pick it up, probably on the second round. We've gone over.

Mr. Siksay.

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

It's good to see you folks again, and, Mr. Jafarpour, on your anniversary of arrival in Canada, no less. That's an exciting day to remember.

You mentioned the change in the kinds of refugees who are coming, and people with different needs. I wonder if you could expand on that. I know that has been a significant change recently, in terms of our refugee resettlement program.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Historically, the process to determine who came to Canada as a government-assisted refugee was identical to the immigrant process. It was almost the same as a point system. The education or work experience people had, the level of their English or French, and how fast they would adapt to Canadian society were criteria to determine who would come to Canada, not their need for protection.

With the new legislation in 2003, I believe there were changes in that regard. Changes were requested with our international partners, such as IOM, International Organization for Migration, and UNHCR. It was a very positive step forward. One of the issues was that we needed to bring in people in most need of protection. In many cases, this means people who cannot return to the country or city where they are living. We end up with people who have lived in refugee camps for a long time.

We did a pilot project on 420 Somali refugees. Many of them lived in refugee camps for 15 to 20 years. Their children were born in refugee camps. In some cases, when they arrived at the refugee camps, they were two to three years old. They were even born there, and they had their own children in the refugee camp.

Living in those conditions definitely had a huge impact on their understanding of some issues, and also their skills. With every society you come to, you need to have a new set of skills. Living in refugee camp conditions, many of the children had never been to the regular school system. For many parents, it was just day-to-day survival.

We did a shorter study on the impact of culture shock. In fact, I did a presentation for the department. Many refugees arrived in Canada with information that wasn't accurate. We saw refugees who had culture shock, because their expectations were different. Again, not going into the details—the department has that—skills, setting new goals, or living in different conditions, from the weather climate

to the cultural climate to the social interaction climate, all have an impact on how they perceive their new town and how they settle.

● (0940)

Mr. Bill Siksay: My understanding is that there was a change, in that we were receiving more government-sponsored refugees who had health problems, disability problems we might not have seen in the past. Can you talk a bit about that?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Definitely. Again, in the experience of our agency—and I think other organizations have identical experiences—for example, in Hamilton, 80% of government-assisted refugees are children. Eighty percent. I believe that's a great investment for Canada, by the way.

But at the same time, the parents or the children we have seen are coming with some health challenges, from nutrition and diet to other issues. Right now, you can come to Canada if you are HIV-positive. We have seen people who have come here. A specific case is a mother with ten children; the mother had cancer, and I think to bring them here is a great initiative. Part of the challenge always has been the current health system, but at the same time language barriers and other barriers make it more challenging. Some of the refugees we have seen have different levels of bridging health needs.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Are the organizations helping with the settlement of refugees getting the kind of information they need prior to the folks' arrival? I spoke with an agency once that said it can get a phone call from the airport telling them people are here, but they have no idea about their needs when they get there, even for things as basic as a wheelchair. So they haven't been able to arrange appropriate housing because wheelchair access is not usually accommodated in the kind of housing that refugees to Canada first find. Is that still a problem or an ongoing issue?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: This is part of the problem. I think any system goes through crisis. Any system you set up to deal in a proactive way has to have a component to deal with crisis. I always define the work we do in settlement as organized chaos, and that's very often the way you end up, especially when dealing with refugees. There is a system in place. Organizations are supposed to receive at least two weeks' notice of a family coming with children and all these things. It doesn't provide you with lots of information. It doesn't provide any information at all about their health. It doesn't provide any information about their immediate needs, but there are many factors, and very often, for example, they are moving the refugees from their primary camp to the secondary camp to the airport, and any issue may stop them from travelling.

That's why sometimes we expect 20 people and three people show up, or sometimes we don't expect people and suddenly they show up. It's not supposed to be a part of the process, but there is no choice and it happens.

With regard to health information, there is still a challenge. Apparently, refugees receive a package and need to share it and there is a combination of issues, from the refugees' understanding of the package and how they should deliver it, to the issue of the Privacy Act. Who should access that information? These are the challenges. I think that's a part of the ongoing work.

• (0945)

The Chair: One fast question, then we'll move to Mr. Komarnicki. Just wrap up, Bill.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

Is there an issue around interpretation and language services? My understanding from some agencies is that they're often dealing with language groups. There are no interpreters available in the communities folks are being settled in. Maybe that's not such a big issue in Toronto, which is our biggest city, but are you noticing in other areas of the country that that's a problem?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: We have a department that provides interpretation and that's not funded by any government department, provincial or federal. That's self-funded. I could say around 70% of all our requests are medical requests that are not covered by the medical community, and when you talk about government-assisted refugees with health issues, it becomes a serious barrier. The interpretation is, regardless of whether you're in Toronto or Calgary, any place, especially in the medical area, is a major issue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, for your indulgence.

I certainly appreciate the members appearing before this committee again. I think we all agree that the three areas of study you proposed certainly need to be undertaken and that we need to get the information.

I have several questions, three in particular. As I look at the various issues that are raised, we have the involvement of the provinces in provincial-federal agreements that affect the types of services that maybe are rendered, and so on. We have the provinces, which perhaps compete, or might compete, with one another for the purposes of attracting newcomers to their areas, and which may have some incentives separate and apart from federal funding and involvement. And you've got, of course, communities themselves, with some more proactive than others and interested in trying to attract newcomers. Of course, your umbrella groups are involved on the ground in day-to-day operations in the various provinces.

What would be your suggestion or proposal in terms of how the study in each of these areas should involve those particular elements and groups in a big picture way? How do you suggest they should be engaged in this process?

That's the first question, and I'll come back to the other two.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Thank you.

In looking at influencing the regulatory bodies to respond to the need we have, I think there's another step before that, which is the type of selection we have. As you know, we're selecting based on

human capital. So unless we address that issue, which is going to be very hard and not an easy thing to address, we have to recognize that if we are bringing in 35,000 engineers to this country and only have 5,000 engineering jobs, regardless of what we do, we're still going to have 30,000 or 27,000 foreign-trained engineers who can't go to work in a so-called professional engineering job. This is a challenge that every country has, including Canada. So if we want to address that, we have to go back to address the selection process.

If we cannot change that, then it comes down to an issue of really utilizing transferable skills, not focusing so much or only on accreditation. I was a ship captain. When I came to Canada, obviously there was no sea or boats on the prairies. I had to do something. Obviously, if I'd have been able to manage a ship with a crew of 300, I should be able to manage a restaurant or a small plant or a small organization. I think that is the shift in thinking we need to make and focus on how we are going to utilize the skills we have.

Also, we should really recognize that regulatory bodies have great roles to play. You can look at APEGGA in Alberta, which has done a great job. Part of that is because of the supply and demand we are facing in Calgary. So I think in going to the associations they really have to accredit these people. But you have to recognize they're representing their membership, so there are challenges we have. But we definitely, definitely have lots of room for improvement. I think they have to open their doors; there should be a lot of bridging of support for people to be able to access that. Some of that is happening. For instance, if you're a nurse overseas, you don't even have to come to Canada; you can even start your process before coming to Canada. These are very good, positive steps we have had in place now for the past few years. Also, we need to support these people; we expect people to come here and the next day to get a job and the next day to become a taxpayer. But it's not going to be easy for them, so we have to allow bridging programs.

The universities have to get involved. If you look at those partnerships, one piece that's missing is our training and educational institutions; they are not part of this. You can't find any university in Canada that will say, okay, if you're a doctor, now you have to do two years to become a doctor. That doesn't exist.

So expecting the regulatory bodies to do that is going to be challenging, but I think that with the new initiatives done in the past five years, obviously we're learning better and better how to utilize them.

• (0950)

Ms. Wai Young: Could I also respond?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Yes, sure.

Ms. Wai Young: I think one part of your question was also regarding the comparative services study, and that with the issue of the federal-provincial immigration agreements, how does one look at that or achieve that.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: With the other community groups and various organizations and the municipalities as well, how do you see them integrating in the study you propose?

Ms. Wai Young: The overall question the committee has to ask itself, or Canadians have to ask ourselves, is should we have national standards for some of these national programs. If the answer to that is yes, then is it acceptable to us as Canadians that regardless of which community or which province you immigrate to or choose to settle in, whether it's Regina or Windsor or Duncan, B.C., you can access English language training within a certain number of weeks and get comparable English language services up to certain levels of what you need in Canada?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In terms of involving your umbrella groups, how do you see them being involved in the study? In the issue of the allocation of funding, where should those funds go and to which types of programs? How do you see that working? And if you have time, the other issue I was interested in is that refugees and newcomers have similarities, but there are also differences in some areas. In particular, you mentioned the area of culture shock and the effects of war and terror. Maybe we haven't addressed the differences and maybe some programming needs to be done there.

If you're able to get to that area, fine. Otherwise, I'll ask that question in the second round. But for the first round, how do you see your group interacting in the issue of the allocation of funding, where it should go, and in the study in general?

Ms. Wai Young: Currently we are not and the sector is not consulted in the area of funding or federal-provincial immigration agreements. These are all technical things that happen between the two departments, federal and provincial.

However, I believe there is a role for community groups and for groups such as ours, who have the expertise and knowledge in certain areas, to be included in that or at least to be considered. Some of the issues we raised here and have talked about are critical issues to settlement in Canada and how, as Fariborz was saying, we use our human capital we are bringing here through immigrants to Canada and how we capture that more effectively through better outcomes and also through national standards and better programs and services, that kind of thing.

I don't believe that is happening. I think if these agreements were more centred around client outcomes and in gathering the necessary expertise to be at the table to negotiate these agreements, that would be an important first step.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Good morning, and thank you for coming.

The work you do is excellent.

I have a couple of questions for you. Can you please tell us about extra settlement funding in the last five years? Has there been a growth in funding for settlement services?

Ms. Wai Young: There's been no growth in funding for settlement services. It remained static in the previous 12 years prior to the announcement in April of this year from this government, and we are now beginning to see those funds roll out.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Are there any restrictions on how those funds are distributed? Is there a caveat to it?

Ms. Wai Young: As we were saying earlier, the caveat is immigration agreements that do or don't exist with certain provinces. For example, the minister was in B.C. announcing these new funds to British Columbia, but because they're going to go to the province and because of the B.C. and federal immigration agreement, those funds go into general revenue.

Only 47% of immigration settlement funds in B.C. go to programs and services for immigrants. The rest is distributed through general revenue.

• (0955)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Just general revenue.

Ms. Wai Young: Exactly, and we're very concerned about that. This is a prime example of what we believe is something the federal government needs to take another look at in terms of how we fence in those dollars.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: What about in Ontario?

Ms. Wai Young: In Ontario there's a completely different federal-provincial agreement. Fortunately for immigrants who come to Ontario, federal government programs are still delivered through the federal department.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Community partners?

Ms. Wai Young: Yes.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: I think the system in Ontario of the agreement signed last year is one of the very positive agreement models, at least from the community perspective. I believe the federal and provincial governments have shared the same opinion on that. There is a limitation in that regard, but overall it works, because right now 80% of the funding goes to the language training, and 20% of that goes to the other settlement services that communities need.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Would you be aware of how much more funding has gone to Ontario over the last year?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Based on the agreement, it was supposed to be \$50 million last year, and this year I believe \$175 million, but there has been some delay. The information is that the money is going to be there this year.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Have you been hearing anything from your community partners and your members about whether new individuals can access these funds, or is it the same people who have programs that were there before who are accessing the funding?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Actually, before new money came in, the Ontario region developed a new system, and as a part of that system right now there is a call for submitting a letter of interest. Basically they have asked individuals, private organizations, community groups, municipalities, and umbrella organizations that they send by November 30 a letter of interest with a series of criteria that determine if these organizations or groups are going to be eligible to access. Apparently they're going to evaluate these and choose a number of the groups and—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Morteza, have you been hearing from any of your community partners, any of your members? Has there been any dissatisfaction as to the way this system is functioning right now?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: There is a hope it's going to improve in the near future. I'll put it this way. Yes, the current system has limitations because of the money and because of a number of issues, and because 90-something organizations in Ontario deliver it, but the new system they are implementing right now was developed with involvement of the sector. Hopefully it's going to improve that.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Can you share with us some of the dissatisfaction or some of the disgruntlement that you've been hearing on the ground?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Yes. One is the limitation of the money the last few years. There never was an increase in the money, although there was an increase in the number of the newcomers who are coming. Also, there is the issue of the new immigrants or the refugees who may need more advanced services. One is in that area.

The second area is that one of the concerns has always been that any federal funding has the criteria—

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Morteza, let me just get back to it again, please. Have you heard any specifics that you can share with us?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: I am talking about specifics. For example, eligibility criteria for refugee claimants, they cannot access this through the federal government funded services.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I have heard on the ground that some organizations are turning people away if they don't belong to "that particular community". If you are from another ethnicity, and you go to that particular organization, you get turned away. Have you heard anything like that?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: I haven't heard. But is that a possibility? Yes, because we have some organizations that were funded based on the ethnic-racial specific community they are supposed to serve, but that criterion has changed. It should not happen. Is it possible that it happened? Yes.

The Chair: Okay. It's almost six minutes.

We'll have to go to Ms. Grewal.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for your time and your presentations.

Ms. Young, you mentioned in your presentation that it takes about eight to twelve months in B.C. for language training, and six weeks in Ontario. Please, could you explain why there is a difference?

• (1000)

Ms. Wai Young: The difference, as I was saying, was due to the federal-provincial immigration agreements—

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Yes.

Ms. Wai Young: —and the fact that in B.C. only 47% of the funds that B.C. receives actually go to direct settlement funding. Therefore, the other 53% of funding goes into general revenues. For example, those funds then can build a road in B.C., or be put into Whistler, or whatever. Because those dollars are never fenced in, as we say, they are therefore not specifically dedicated to providing those programs and services to immigrants in B.C. Therefore the wait lists expand as the numbers increase, as the demand increases in B.C. As you know, Vancouver is a very choice destination for new

immigrants and refugees; therefore the wait lists get longer and longer.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: I see.

Are there any particular challenges involved in the settlement of refugees as compared to new immigrants? Could you please explain that?

Ms. Wai Young: Absolutely. I think the settlement and integration of new immigrants and of refugees are very different, based on, obviously, the education, where the person comes from, and whether they have family and friends at their destination. That has been shown in many studies to be a critical factor in settlement and integration. So those critical factors are very important. Access to immediate programs and services is very important.

If you are a government-sponsored refugee, for example, and you are only government-sponsored here in Canada for up to a year of programs and services, if you have to wait for eight months on a wait list to get English language training, then obviously your integration and your settlement services are going to be drastically slowed down. That is a big challenge and a big hurdle for that particular group of people. So you can see how this plays out in terms of having repercussions all the way down the line.

The other issue, one of the reasons we're asking for this study on refugee and immigrant children and youth, is again that their needs are very different. The refugee youth, some of whom, as Fariborz was saying earlier, have lived in camps all their lives, have no frame of reference for what sitting in a classroom is like and what that would mean, or anything. So for us as a society to have that expectation and for them to be thrown into those classrooms without some kind of specialized programming and support services, and so on, is really not going to provide us with the outcomes that we would want as a country in successful integration and settlement.

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Thank you.

The Chair: You have a few minutes left.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): I just want to follow up on that one question that Nina asked and you responded to, Ms. Young, on the idea of those provincial agreements on immigration. Is that going to be applying now to the new funding in particular?

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you for asking that question.

We as a sector, of course, and particularly our B.C. colleagues, are extremely concerned about that. In fact, AMSSA, which is the umbrella organization in B.C., has requested a meeting with the minister who is responsible for immigration there, Wally Oppal, as well as with the finance minister, Carole Taylor. They have declined meeting with them. In fact, I happen to know Wally personally, but anyway, he has said they're not going to address that question. So I think that's a really big indicator as to where that's going.

In addition, if I may follow up on Mr. Karygiannis's question, there are different systems for how agencies access funding across the country as well, which is what we hope is going to be addressed in this study too.

Let me give you an example. In B.C., the immigration ministry has implemented an RFP process for how those settlement agencies get funded. Let me describe to you how completely devastating that is, because you're not selling widgets here. It's not like an RFP process where we are going to be buying x boxes of paper, and therefore who is going to provide the cheaper service or be more effective? What has happened in B.C., in fact, through this RFP process is that agencies are being asked to compete to provide those programs and services. What you are doing then is setting up a community to move from a collaborative, partnership, supportive model—because, believe me, as a non-profit agency, providing settlement services, you need as much partnership and collaboration within those communities as you can get—to one now where the government is saying we want you guys to compete, to bid on the ability to get funded for these services. So it is in fact ripping the communities apart, ripping the agencies apart, because now it's a competitive bid process. In certain areas and in certain federal government departments and programs, we think that is a completely inappropriate mechanism to fund settlement services.

• (1005)

The Chair: Okay, thank you, Ms. Young.

Madame Deschanps.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I have a specific question. I am the M.P. for a very large area in the province of Quebec: the Laurentian area, north of Montreal. You are saying that 80% of immigrants, refugees or newcomers are always going to three large centres: Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

What could the government do to encourage newcomers or refugees to go to areas like mine where there are very few resources and no immigration officer close to the community to welcome and support them? People from another culture must have an incredible willpower and courage to settle in areas where they are greatly needed. You just need to think about the farming community where there is a huge succession issue. These people could probably be an added value for our area, but they have no access to services.

Newcomers must also learn a new language. In most cases, they don't speak French or English. They must then be supported by community agencies that have very few or no resources. They are directed towards literacy groups. Yet, we know that the government is intending to cut into these resources. Newcomers must then depend on voluntary agencies.

Do you think that the government could put citizenship and immigration officers in our Service Canada offices? These officers could go there as required to help people who would like to settle in our area.

[*English*]

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you so much for that question, and it's a pleasure to be here today.

One of the things we are aware of happening in Quebec is that, again, they have not had their level of settlement funding increased for many years. In fact, some of the agencies are operating with a

very weak infrastructure, as you have of course noted, as well as very old equipment. Some of the computers they're using are so outdated they can't even download the current.... That is a source of frustration and inefficiencies.

One of the members of our organization is La Table, which is the provincial umbrella organization, as you know, for Quebec. And they're very concerned as well in terms of how these new settlement funds are going to be applied to Quebec. Apparently they're under negotiations now, so they don't have a sum that has been established.

Secondly, the Quebec agencies really need a lot of support and an injection of resources. By that I'm not just saying money—money is not everything. However, money can supply certain things like efficiencies, things like training, as you mentioned. Earlier on we talked about various programs that can be expanded, I believe, to make smaller centres more successful in attracting and retaining newcomers, such as the sponsorship agreement holders.

We saw in the 1990s, with the Vietnamese boat people, a huge success story in Canada, where immigrants did go to many smaller centres across Canada and were successfully retained. I can name so many communities across Canada that now have a small Vietnamese community of people who have now lived there for 20 and 30 years, and I think that you all can as well. Why did that happen? Why are we not learning from that?

This is partly why we as an organization are coming to you and saying we need to study what's happening in our smaller centres so that we can learn from those things and capture that knowledge, because we know it works. We know it has worked here in this country. We know we do have programs in place like the sponsorship agreement holders that we can use as mechanisms to help these smaller centres. So it's a matter of developing more of a national approach to working towards this.

Earlier on I mentioned the fact that we are planning to work with the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. This is obviously an issue and a concern with them. So if we were able to get resources to develop a national approach on this, I think it would be a very strong initiative for Canada to undertake to help smaller communities like yours.

• (1010)

The Chair: Did you have a wrap-up question? You're at about five minutes there, so one fast question will do it, sure.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faillie: The government is a very large employer for all kind of professions. Could it hire more people from these minorities?

[*English*]

Ms. Wai Young: I think with the population aging, with people retiring and the huge succession issue the government will be facing, they may not have a choice. However, absolutely, the government can definitely be doing more. I don't know where the employment equity program is. I know that the glass ceiling certainly still exists. When you go to most major management, whether it's the cities, the government, or the provincial governments, wherever they are, some of those key jobs and the more stable well-paying jobs are obviously still going to—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Komarnicki, and Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: To finish on the last question I asked and didn't get an answer to, it was particularly with respect to refugee youth and the youth and young people, in particular, in terms of the programs that perhaps ought to be there and aren't there. Maybe you could elaborate on what you'd like to see and what you see the deficiencies are and some of the problems facing that culture in that area—whoever wants to take that question.

Ms. Wai Young: Again, we know that our immigrant and refugee youth are facing tremendous pressures and facing tremendous differences in our 21st century culture in the achievements and the things that are expected of them. In addition to that, when you combine that with the cultural expectations, let me give you one example of my own culture. I'm Chinese. I'm in the Chinese culture. It's very much expected that one seeks professional training, education, and some kind of profession. Well, in Canada, as we know, the trades are an excellent profession. You could get paid well. You have a lot of flexibility. This is not something that culturally, within my culture, parents know they should direct their children toward, whereas it's something that, frankly, within the Canadian system would be a very positive thing.

When you look at what's happening within different cultural groups and their knowledge and expertise of what professions are even available in Canada, and what would provide a good income and a solid job for their children, there isn't enough awareness in certain first and second generation communities. That's one thing.

Secondly, as we mentioned earlier, a lot of refugee youth come with having experienced much more trauma than we've seen before in the past. That itself requires specialized programs and services, and I don't think we need to go into the detail of that.

When you combine that along with the large numbers that are happening in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, and Toronto, then you're beginning to see cracks in the system. The reason I'm putting it that way is because then you have a Canadian school board system that is very used to providing the kinds of services and the kinds of teaching styles, etc., that they've been providing for the last 20 to 30 years.

The Canadian School Boards Association itself has this summer recently released a report on what they see as being the needs within the system, because they see this as an issue as well.

What I think needs to happen at the same time is to have settlement agencies across Canada busy working away with their local school boards—the Vancouver School Board, the Richmond School Board, the Hamilton one—to develop programs and services to assist and support these children. But it's still very much of a piecemeal approach. This is sort of happening in some communities and not happening in others. For example, if the school board is not open to that approach, not open to working in partnership, there's no directive that says they must. Therefore, some programs and services may not happen.

What we're calling for in our request for this study is some baseline information. We need to know what is going on out there in Canada for our immigrant and refugee children and youth, because these are our children; it's the next generation. These are our future

citizens and taxpayers and voters, etc. If we're not doing a good job in terms of positive outcomes for them currently, with the kinds of resources, technology, information, studies, and researches that we have available to us, then I don't think we're doing as well as we can.

• (1015)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: There's no question that probably the same issues apply not just to youth and the young culture, but to others who are affected. Particular communities may have issues. It has become more random and depends on the involvement of a particular community. There's perhaps a need for some national voice or some uniformity in what's happening across the country, because the problems are probably similar. They just need to be addressed in a constructive way. Of course, your settlement agencies are across the country, so you're in a unique position to be able to tap into what's necessary.

Do you have a database structure or a computer structure or an integration of infrastructure amongst not only the provinces, but the sub-agencies in each of the provinces on the ground? Do you have that kind of a network in place? Are you going toward it? It seems to me that you're the logical central point to tackle this issue and this problem.

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you.

We have struck a virtual information management committee that is looking at developing a sector-wide information management system, because we do believe this is critical and very important for this day and age.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: We have given you an extra \$307 million for the first time in ten years.

Ms. Wai Young: Thank you, Mr. Komarnicki. We'll be writing some letters, I'm sure.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: But carry on. Don't let that bother you.

The Chair: Your time is up, so I'll have to cut you off there.

Are you finished your answer, Ms. Young?

Ms. Wai Young: If I may just say one more thing, in addition to the study that we're requesting from the standing committee, we are also wanting to work on a national approach for refugee and immigrant children and youth. By “national approach”, what we mean is that right now this is a group that has fallen between the cracks. There's no single view on how we, as a nation, are providing programs and services to increase the outcomes of this group.

We are going to the different departments that have some kind of funding or resources or mandate for children and youth, and we're working with them to identify how we can all come together in a national dialogue that we plan to host in the spring of 2008, to develop national policy programs and services for specifically this. We're meeting with the Departments of Justice, Health, Heritage, Immigration, of course, and any other major departments, in the hope that we can look at the various aspects of this. As you know, youth get themselves into trouble, so the Department of Justice is involved. Health is of a concern, as are all of these things. So we are working on this at a macro level.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

I think Mr. Birjandian has a comment.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Thank you.

Just as a comment about youth and children, I think the major problem we have is resources. When you look at the school boards and the challenges they have, they are now fully recognizing that these are special needs kids, and that as boards they have to do some initial work with them. But really, the problem is for them to set priorities with the resources they have.

The role the federal government can play is in providing those resources and by letting them access those resources. There is enough expertise and partnership in the community that they can make differences, but the way I understand the school boards, they are struggling with a lack of resources.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

I want to come back to the question I was asking before about interpretation services. You mentioned that interpretation is often a real problem, especially in medical situations. I'm wondering if you can expand a bit on the kinds of difficulties you face. I'm also curious about how the organizations cover interpretation services if no one's funding them. How effectively do you think that issue is covered off?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: The kind of problem we are seeing... and I'm not talking about the people who have been in Canada for 20 years; I'm talking about the people who arrived one month ago. If you ask the individual doctors, very often they don't have money for it and they say it's not their responsibility to provide interpretation; it's the responsibility of the patient to bring somebody with them. That's a huge challenge. If you come with your children or family members, there's the issue of confidentiality and of how much you want to disclose in front of your children. Very often, if that's the case, they learn faster than their parents.

Also, in the bigger institutions, like hospitals, very often they don't have a budget for it; it's not part of their annual budget to include interpretation. Interestingly enough, most of the hospitals do have budgets for sign language interpretation; there is a policy there. But when it comes to language interpretation, there's a lack of resources or even a lack of planning to include it. We have seen people be denied from going into the operating room. We have seen cases of where it has jeopardized a pregnant woman's health, and there have been a number of other issues we have seen because of the lack of these things.

I believe in some provinces they have different approaches, but in Ontario what we have seen is a combination of using volunteers.... And I'm talking about just our agency, not a huge city like Hamilton. We get around 5,000 immigrants per year. We provide 1,000 interpretations. You're talking about 600 to 700 interpretations per month for medical reasons, and how much professional, volunteer-based interpretation are you going to do to provide that?

Some departments and some hospitals have some resources there, and some don't. It's very inconsistent right now.

● (1020)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I would assume that interpreting in a medical situation is a pretty specialized interpretation function. I would think that poses particular difficulties in itself.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: One of the suggestions we have heard, a recommendation we have had that we are hoping we're going to see a positive response to with new money, is to include interpretation as part of the budget. Also, we advocate, we work with the other partners to say that language interpretation is a part of their responsibility in making their services accessible.

Mr. Bill Siksay: What is health coverage like for our newly arriving refugees? Is it comprehensive? Do people get into provincial medicare programs quickly? What's covered and what's not covered? Is dental, for instance, covered? Can you talk a little bit about the health situation of new refugees?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: For refugees, I think in the first year there is an agreement between provinces and the federal government that they provide basically what's needed. But it's not very comprehensive at all. I can tell you, for instance, they are not really covering any dental work. If a refugee coming here has a small problem with their tooth, they have to take it out. There is no provision to pay for filling it. As well, I think there are very limited provisions for any supplements. These are the issues we have actually communicated with Health Canada on and that they are working on. There is very little provision for hearing aids or glasses. It's very limited in that area.

Basically, although they have access, it's not really enough. I think that is an area we can look at again, because it's going to help people to settle faster. That's the challenge.

Mr. Bill Siksay: That first year is a federal program with the provinces, but it's not full medicare coverage like a long-term resident would have. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: It depends on the different provinces, but yes, they do have full access to doctors and hospitals. But when it comes to the drugs or dental or other special needs, it is very limited what they can access.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I understand that contraception is one thing that's not covered as well. Is that your understanding?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Yes.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Also, in terms of trauma counselling, is there special trauma counselling available? I was just speaking with a settlement worker in my home city the other day, and she was talking about a woman who she has been visiting for a long time who finally opened up to her and told her what she went through in her country of origin, which included absolutely horrific acts that she was forced to commit. It was just so out of the experience of the settlement worker and of any of the counsellors who are available in the community.

Could you talk a little bit about what's available that way?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: That has been a challenge, because again, as was mentioned, there's been a real lack of resources for the past 12 years. They didn't get anything extra, so whatever money they had, amid the rising costs of operation, they really didn't have—

Recently there has been some movement. Across the country there are programs for survivors of torture. We try to serve most of those people with extremely few resources. I think the mental health organizations across the country are starting to look at it. In maybe the past year they have been becoming involved. But for them too, there's a lack of resources, and also expertise, because in that line of work one has to really understand the background. Even the language has been a big issue. We've had about 12,000 Sudanese refugees in Calgary, and we know there's not even one Sudanese doctor, not one Sudanese psychologist. This is really a challenge.

•(1025)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

I will now go to Mr. Telegdi.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Birjandian, you made a very interesting comment when you referred to us letting in 35,000 engineers when we only need five. We really don't have a way for legally allowing people that the economy actually needs, such as tradespeople. We have a desperate need for them. We essentially reduce them to being guest workers, if you will, which is a horrific, scary thought as to what it does to a country in the long term. All one has to do is look at France and see what happened with their guest worker programs, where you keep two sets of—

Ms. Raymonde Folco: No, no, I'm sorry. We didn't have guest worker programs. That was Germany.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Well, Germany has a guest worker program too. But essentially, it means that you have trouble integrating.

One of the interesting things I noticed back in 1999 is the settling of people outside of major communities. Thunder Bay made huge preparations to accept the Kosovars. The whole town got behind it. They had their place set up and everything else. Nobody came. They preferred Toronto and being around their group. So there's a limit to what communities can do.

When I go to low-density areas in the province, I notice all sorts of Vietnamese. I see Sikhs. They're starting businesses and working at businesses. As much as the Chinese at one point used to run the variety stores, now there are different groups. The newcomers are the ones who fit in. They do that for business opportunities.

You mentioned that we should have same levels of service. Obviously a small community is not going to have the same service as a major urban centre. They don't have physicians for the general population, or many of the other services. I'm wondering how you would try to bridge that divide. The sponsoring groups have come to this committee and said they don't get all the people they could to sponsor as refugees. If they were doing the sponsoring to under-served areas, more than likely they would have a network to support them in the smaller communities. I wonder if you have given that any thought—that maybe they could actually specialize in doing that.

Ms. Wai Young: I was the chair of the B.C. refugee committee for the Mennonite Central Committee. I actually sat on the Mennonite Central Committee board of directors, as well as a binational

Mennonite Central Committee, in Akron. We did a lot of this work in both countries. So absolutely, I would say yes, that's definitely a strategy Canada should be looking at and embracing. As I said earlier, it has proven to have worked.

Again, as we said earlier, the sponsorship agreement holder situation is precarious, at best. When you pull together a family or a church or whatever to sponsor a refugee family, those people get very, very excited. It's like Christmas. They go out and prepare, etc. But when that family does not actually arrive for three years, you can imagine what happens to the support, the sense of community, and the bringing together of that group. Unfortunately, that all begins to dissipate.

I think this is a huge program, which Canada can capitalize on. We're actually not using it as effectively as we can, primarily due to resources abroad. The reason it's taking so long for these refugees to arrive in Canada is basically resources overseas—the visa officers doing the security clearances and all that is needed. If they were told that this is a priority and/or that we're going to expand the numbers there... Really, this is an effective, effective program for Canada. It's not costing us very much. These families are so welcoming and so happy to have them, and the refugees are so happy to arrive.

The second part is that many, many of these refugees who are sponsored, as you know, then want to turn around and sponsor their family. Unfortunately, their families are not designated as being primary family because they're not the wife or the child, etc. If you are a refugee, and the only family member you have on this earth is your brother or your sister, well, I think that person is family, in my books. It doesn't matter that they're not your wife or primary family according to our western definition.

If we know these people have settled, and many of them have across Canada, and that they want to bring their families to settle with them, why are we as a country saying no? Because that is inevitably happening.

•(1030)

The Chair: Madame Deschamps, you have a couple of questions. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: You said earlier that the program for children and youth was not really tailored to young refugees who have experienced a trauma in the country they left. When they settle in smaller centres they face a double challenge because unfortunately like us, they are also faced with issues such as the dropout rate.

In the short or medium term, we might perhaps create a committee to study these issues. That committee should be composed of psychologists, people with whom young people could relate effectively.

How could we adapt our programs so that they respond to the psychological distress of these young people?

[English]

Ms. Wai Young: I'd like to respond to that by saying that I was a foster parent for 18 years and raised four refugee youth from the camps, two from Malaysia and a couple from the Philippines. I want to say that this is an issue that's very close to my heart, because I still keep in touch with some of those youth. I'm a foster grandmother, as a matter of fact.

One of the key things that I also did was develop the foster parent training program in British Columbia. I want to say that many of these youth experience, as you know, culture shock, but they also experience the typical intergenerational rebellion and that kind of thing. But this is doubled, because in addition to their own experiences, now they're embracing Canadian life, the norms and the standards of what their friends are allowed to do, such as go out till midnight on a Friday night or whatever, whereas that might be an issue for their parents because they are very strict or very traditional or have religious beliefs or whatever it is. What we're seeing in the care system across the different provinces is that there is actually a higher incidence of immigrant and refugee youth who also go into care. I'd also like to say that there are also some youth who are refugee claimants who also go into care, for the province.

These children who end up in care do not get, again, any specialized programs, services, etc., despite the fact that many of them have experienced trauma. Again, that's why we are saying that we need to look at this as a country, because we are losing these youth otherwise, and that is such a shame. So absolutely, there are things that can be put in place.

For myself, because I'm familiar with the system, I'm an advocate for my child and I was able to help some of my own foster children get through some of that. For example, one of my foster children is now doing her master's in German, in Bonn, Germany. She speaks five different languages. She has now been in international exchange programs across the world. She has succeeded as nobody would have thought, coming from a refugee camp in Thailand. But this is an exception rather than the rule. I would like to say that these children all deserve a chance and they deserve whatever kinds of programs and services we need to be able to give them, to build our second generation.

•(1035)

The Chair: I think Mr. Jafarpour had a comment he wanted to make.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Let me highlight one issue. Historically, meeting the needs of children and youth wasn't part of the package of services for newcomers. The issue is not that there is a system that doesn't work. There wasn't one. It wasn't recognized. The idea was because they go to school, they'll learn the language and they'll adapt. I think that recently with a number of issues, we have recognized as a country there is a challenge there, because we bring a high number of children and youth and we don't have services to help them to integrate in that regard.

What's happening right now is that a number of initiatives are undertaken by independent organizations or settlement agencies. That's why we are asking for a study to look at what is there.

Also, I want you to look at that. The scope is not one thing. We have seen the kids. At the age of five, six, seven years old, they have

been raped in refugee camps, and we bring them here, and as I always say, there cannot be ten days between the refugee camp and happily ever after. How do you send those kids to school without enough support? Right now more and more we are talking about bridging classes and bridging services that can help. We had in the past children who came here whose fathers were killed but they didn't know that.

Also you have seen the other part—the access to summer camps, sports activities, and all these things. That is the wide range of the areas, and we believe we need to start to look at that—what the gap is and how we can cover it. That's why we are asking for that study.

The Chair: I'm going to go to Mr. Komarnicki and Mr. Siksay.

We have to be out of here at five minutes to the hour, because a committee will be coming in.

Mr. Komarnicki, maybe we can keep our questions and answers a little brief in order to get to everyone on our list here.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Further to your last comment with respect to family membership and refugees, some of the difficulties that are experienced are perhaps more unique to the refugee system than they are to other newcomers. I'd like clarification on that.

You'll be happy to know the refugee sponsorship program admittance number totals have increased this year from previous years and are perhaps at their highest level.

Resources were one of the concerns you had overseas. Are there any other issues you see that could help to implement it in a more constructive way?

Have you noted any differences between in-Canada applicants for refugees as opposed to those who are asylum seekers or are brought in from refugee camps? Are there any differences between the two groups of people or the two types of applicants, or are the issues the same?

I noticed that in our home province of Saskatchewan, Regina took 200 or thereabouts of Karen refugees, which was a remarkable event for a city in Saskatchewan. Are there any support services you provided for those communities? Do you have any sense of how they're doing?

Ms. Wai Young: I'll try to keep this brief.

The Chair: That's a relative question. Is that right?

Ms. Wai Young: Absolutely.

Mr. Darcy Dietrich runs the Regina Open Door Society, and he's very excited about the Karen refugees who have come. He's working full steam ahead to provide services for them. The Karen refugees can talk about that in greater detail.

In terms of the sponsorship agreement holders, yes, there is always something we can do. The sponsorship agreement holders is currently a program that is self-funded through churches and through groups themselves. The Canadian government does not provide any particular funds for them, except for some kind of training program so they know what kinds of people to apply for, etc.

But you have to understand, as I said, unfortunately, due to our program restrictions, we actually restrict the kinds of people we allow in because we say they have to be primary dependants, etc.

These are things in terms of making the program more effective for us to be able to use it as a mechanism for attraction and retention. I think we should then be looking at how we can expand some of the criteria within the program to make it a broader and more welcoming program for smaller centres.

I personally believe it can be a very successful program.

• (1040)

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: In fact, it might be one way of attracting refugees and newcomers to smaller communities, who might have otherwise come to larger centres.

Ms. Wai Young: That's exactly right.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Going back to the question I asked, do you notice a difference between the two types of refugees, in-Canada and otherwise? Maybe you want to comment or somebody might want to comment on that.

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Let me comment on that.

I would really suggest that we increase the numbers. I mean, we have a number problem. We used to get 14,000 government-sponsored refugees 15 years ago. Today we're getting about 6,000. The refugee situation has not improved worldwide.

I think it also goes with the sponsorship agreement holders numbers. If you set numbers, I think the community will meet those numbers for us.

The difference is basically very clear: 80% of the people we sponsor to the sponsorship agreement holders have some connection in Canada. The composition is quite different. You don't see many children. It is mostly singles or couples with one or two children. For government-sponsored refugees, you see large families with lots of children.

I think it is really hard to compare the settlement process, because you're dealing with two different target groups.

The Chair: I'm going to try to get in the last three, Mr. Siksay, Madam Folco, and Mr. Karygiannis.

Let's begin, Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

Could you comment on the fee structure for refugees? I know the Parkdale legal clinic in Toronto had a campaign to try to eliminate the need for refugees who are determined in Canada to pay the fee for a permanent resident application. I know if you're determined outside Canada, you don't have to pay the fee. Could you comment on the fee structure and any other issues that might arise around the fees and charges that refugees face when they come to Canada?

Ms. Wai Young: I think it's critical that Canada be consistent in its programs and services, and that is obviously an area in which it's not. In addition, you must know that this fee really poses an undue hardship for these refugees, many of whom are working at menial jobs, low-paying jobs, if they're working at all. So it's really a barrier to their concluding their processing. And sometimes it drags on for years because they just cannot come up with the funds. So in fact if

we are calling this a humanitarian program, which I believe our refugee program is, then that is part of it. I think we should abolish that particular fee.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Have you bumped into children who arrive here on their own, as refugees, and then have problems sponsoring their parents? I know that's been problematic in the past. I wonder if you can comment on those situations, if you've ever encountered them, or if you know how prevalent they are.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: We haven't experienced that as an organization. But when the safe third country issue came, it was one of the concerns, if we were going to see high numbers of people. There is no evidence of that. We have seen high numbers of people. However, under the government assistance program, you may end up with a mother who comes with ten dependants who are not necessarily her children; they are grown up, sometimes they are even over 18, and sometimes even proving that she's their parent becomes a huge challenge.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Are there particular physical infrastructure needs that refugee- and immigrant-serving agencies are facing? I know there isn't money for that kind of stuff, or hasn't been traditionally for capital projects, but can you comment on that circumstance or that situation?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: I think historically these organizations have been community-based organizations, but because of the task and the complexity of the settlement, we've become quite professional organizations. It goes back to resources. It has always been a challenge for us. The rates of salaries are quite low among agencies. I use the Calgary scenario as an example. I have a problem with my staff going to other institutions, because they always get job offers. This is really serious. The salaries are quite low. Also, because of the physical structure, the physical capacity is also a challenge all the time. We do fundraising. We have good community support. But really the issues are quite horrendous. I will give you an example. The rent has gone up in some areas by 300% in the past ten years. When you look at our funding, it probably hasn't even doubled. So the structure is always a challenge.

• (1045)

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Folco.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: You have brought us a lot of detail from three people who have on-the-ground experience. It's extremely important for us to hear you.

I would like to ask a question that is completely apart from the subject today. I would like to ask it particularly to Mr. Jafarpour, as a medical doctor. I read in the paper today, in the *Ottawa Citizen*, that the Canadian government gives visas or accelerates visas to people overseas who are willing to donate an organ. In fact, if you wish to donate an organ to a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, visa officers are advised to assess the applications.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: On a point of order, I wonder if any of this has any relevance to the refugee issue that we're studying. I wonder if the member issues a visa relative to people who are here in respect of the—

The Chair: I think we'll hear the question, and we'll try to determine from there if it's relevant to refugee issues. I haven't heard the question yet.

Do you feel it's relevant to the refugee issue, Madam Folco?

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Chair, it's relevant to what I think each person in the panel has lived through, what I suppose each has lived through, and particularly Mr. Jafarpour, who is a medical doctor. I wanted to hear from Mr. Jafarpour, with his experience as a medical doctor and particularly his experience as a former refugee and now a Canadian citizen, how he reacts to this, because he's seen both ends of the scale, if you like.

The Chair: Okay. A point of order was on the floor. I don't believe it's a point of order, really. I'll just leave it up to the doctor whether he feels comfortable answering that question.

I'll leave it to you, sir.

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: Let me answer maybe not your question, but I'll answer in this way. I came here as a refugee. I gave up my medical degree. I paid \$34,000 with my family, with my sister and her three children to a smuggler to come here. And I know many people are going to give up both kidneys to take their children to safety. I don't know how true that story about these things is. I think the unfortunate part is that there are people living in such conditions that even to bring their children to safety, they're going to pay an extreme cost. Whenever there are stories like that, I always wonder what it's really going to cost for refugees to come here and who's going to benefit in that regard.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: May I ask you a personal thing? Have you known of anyone who has done this—without naming names, of course?

Mr. Morteza Jafarpour: I am not aware of any.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Madame Young.

Ms. Wai Young: If I may respond—

The Chair: Just quickly, because the last five minutes are allocated.

Ms. Wai Young: I have not heard of this. Recently I attended a medical panel with the donation people, and they have very clearly stated that for people to donate any kind of organ in Canada and to receive any kind of compensation for it is highly illegal in Canada. I have not heard of it.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Karygiannis.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Just to follow up on some of the questions you've been asked, I want to talk to you about the length of time it takes to process paperwork within Canada and the length of time it takes to process a family from overseas. Over the last few years we've been noticing that the length of time has certainly increased, especially in Vegreville. Can you comment on what your people have been experiencing?

Ms. Wai Young: I think this is a direct result of 9/11. The lengthened processing time is because they have spent more time in the last number of years on security. That's one reason, processing the security aspects of the application.

We were recently in a meeting with the director of operations responsible for processing. He said it's basically a numbers issue again and a resource issue. Obviously if we wanted to decrease the length of time, it's a matter assigning more case officers towards the processing.

• (1050)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: On the numbers issue, I don't think we're getting more or fewer refugees than we were ten years ago or one or two years ago, but the length of time certainly seems to have increased. I just got a fax from Vegreville the other day, saying they were dealing with that particular day. It's not consistent with what it was like a year or two years ago.

Has the length of time it takes doubled in the last year?

Ms. Wai Young: I think it's primarily due to the complexity of where the camps are, where the refugees are coming from, and getting the documentation.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: I'm talking about processing time inside Canada.

Ms. Wai Young: Did you want to comment?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Even inside Canada.... I'll give you one story. I know of one lady who came as a refugee to the United States and married a gentleman who came here to Canada as a refugee. Actually she's in Canada, as they're married now. The Canadian government expects the Iranian government to give clearance to this young lady who left because of religious issues, because she was not a Muslim and had escaped Iran. That itself has delayed the issue.

Security or security clearance is something we understand is important. But sometimes we are asking people to do things that are really.... I can't believe it. That particular letter has to come from the Government of Iran; otherwise they won't process the case here. It could take up to two years for them to settle that.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: In your experience and in working with your community partners, would you say the length of time it takes to do things over the last year has doubled, or increased by 30% or 25%? What would you estimate?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Again, it's hard for me to say for the past year, because I really don't have a study done in the past year. But I would say that in the past five or six years, the length of time or waiting time has gone up for all of them—for citizenship applications.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: So it has been increasing; it hasn't decreased. Can you see any decrease in the near future?

Mr. Fariborz Birjandian: Again, with the new funding, we don't know. It may happen, hopefully, because we are hearing there is going to be more investment. I hope as a result of that, the waiting list will decrease. I hope, but we don't know yet.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Okay.

The Chair: We're doing very well on time, and that will allow the 30-second question Andrew wanted. We'll wrap up at five to eleven.

Hon. Andrew Telegdi: Just to finish off, Ms. Young, the discussion about family members being able to join people, particularly in small communities, essentially what you're talking about is trying to get some kind of critical mass so that people will stay and feel welcome.

Ms. Wai Young: I want you to know that all studies regarding settlement and integration, and therefore retention, indicate that the key reason people go there and stay there is family members or friends. So if you have somebody who is established within a community and if you are a new immigrant or refugee who comes to that community, there's an extremely high retention rate.

The Chair: Thank you for your presence here today. It's very much appreciated.

Your request for a study is noted. We have an agenda that will take us right into Christmas break, but our subcommittee will be meeting to talk about our agenda early in the new year, so it's possible it might be put on that agenda.

Thank you very much.

I want to thank the committee members for coming this morning.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

**Also available on the Parliament of Canada Web Site at the following address:
Aussi disponible sur le site Web du Parlement du Canada à l'adresse suivante :
<http://www.parl.gc.ca>**

The Speaker of the House hereby grants permission to reproduce this document, in whole or in part, for use in schools and for other purposes such as private study, research, criticism, review or newspaper summary. Any commercial or other use or reproduction of this publication requires the express prior written authorization of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Le Président de la Chambre des communes accorde, par la présente, l'autorisation de reproduire la totalité ou une partie de ce document à des fins éducatives et à des fins d'étude privée, de recherche, de critique, de compte rendu ou en vue d'en préparer un résumé de journal. Toute reproduction de ce document à des fins commerciales ou autres nécessite l'obtention au préalable d'une autorisation écrite du Président.