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Mr. Robert Oliphant

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● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): While you were out, the committee adopted the scope for the study in which we will be engaging over the next couple of months. It's a broad-scope study of migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century and it will—I'm going to read a bit of it to you: "The Committee will study the global context of unprecedented levels of forced and voluntary migration, starting with the root causes, and leading to recommendations for an appropriate Canadian response."

We are bumping ourselves up to a little bit of a higher-level study to look at the factors going on in the world. Lots has been written about this of late. We wanted to start the committee off with the UNHCR and officials from the department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to give us a start.

We thank you both, Mr. Beuze and Mr. Casasola, for once again coming to us. We think this is your part-time job.

I'll turn it over to you. I'd like you to dig in. We can't guarantee that you won't be invited back on this study, because we're starting with the high level. There's a good chance we're going to want to dig in more on some of the determination processes and those issues, but right now, it's your time.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze (Representative in Canada, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. We are delighted to come back to this committee.

Thank you very much for the attention you are giving to the issue of forced displacement.

As a UN refugee agency I will not speak to the issue of migration, but I will focus immediately on forcible displacement. We are distributing some handouts, in French and in English, which contain a lot of data. I will introduce the main points now.

Let's start with the big number. We have 68.5 million forcibly displaced as we speak. That has doubled since 2012. Among them we have 25 million refugees, or those who have been displaced and who crossed an international border to seek safety in a different country. This is an increase of three million between 2016 and 2017. We went from 22 million in 2016 to 25 million in 2017. It's the largest increase in refugees ever witnessed in a single year. It shows the magnitude of the problem.

To look at the root causes, let me look at the five largest countries producing refugees: Syria, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Myanmar and Somalia. What they certainly have in common is that they are all plagued by generalized violence and conflict: political, ethnic and interfaith conflict. Some situations are very old. With Afghanistan, we are speaking about the 1970s and 1980s; with Somalia, the 1990s. Some are far more recent. South Sudan gained its independence in 2011. There was a lot of hope, and now we are witnessing major.... One-third of the population in South Sudan has been displaced. If we look at Myanmar, the root causes of statelessness are found in the 1960s, but we have seen an increase in August and September of last year of 700,000 Rohingya who crossed into Bangladesh. We have protracted crises and we have more recent situations.

If you look at the countries hosting those refugees, the top three are Turkey, Pakistan and Uganda. The Syrian situation has biased our optics on the situation a little and made us often forget that the majority of the displaced are still in sub-Saharan Africa. It is also interesting that among the top 10 countries, the first OECD country you will find is Germany, at number six, in terms of the number of refugees that country has received. However, although the media and some of the policies at the international level are very driven by a western approach, 85% of the refugees remain in the global south, and remain in the countries neighbouring conflict situations.

I want to draw the attention of the committee to situations that are a bit closer to home: the north of Central America. At the end of 2017, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras had more than 300,000 asylum seekers and refugees in the region. It's a shocking increase of 58% from the previous year. What may be even more important to know is that the United States has a backlog of 790,000 claims for asylum, of which the overwhelming majority are from those three countries in the north of Central America.

If we look at more recent events, we also have Venezuela. Since 2015, 1.5 million Venezuelans have left their country for different reasons, including some related to violence and protection risks. The Venezuelan situation is growing. Five thousand people leave the country every day, as we speak. It's putting a lot of pressure on the neighbouring countries, Colombia and Brazil, and now it has gone south to Peru.

Nicaragua is another situation of political instability that we are looking at. It's driving out a large number of Nicaraguans, particularly to Costa Rica.

Those situations of conflict and generalized violence should not make us forget that refugees can be individuals in non-conflict situations who are persecuted because of who they are or what they do. Here, we are speaking about journalists who may be reporting about corruption in their countries. We are speaking about human rights defenders. We are speaking about indigenous leaders, political opponents and the LGBTI community, but also about ethnic and religious minorities and, simply, women at risk who are not able to gain the safety they deserve when they are survivors of domestic violence or rape and they turn to the authorities of their country—police or judicial authorities—and do not receive the protections they are entitled to.

To look at the refugee situation, we need to also look at the 44 million who are internally displaced, those who have been forced to move from their homes but have not crossed an international border. Here, I think it's very important to show that some of the countries are the same as the ones I mentioned before in terms of refugees—Syria, Iraq, Somalia—but some are completely different.

The number one country with the largest internally displaced population is Colombia. There, we are really speaking about a long-term conflict between the FARC and the government and other non-state actors.

We are also speaking about Ukraine, a country that is important in Canada and is the number 10 country in terms of internal displacement. We don't see a lot of Ukrainian refugees, but we see a lot of internal displacement in Ukraine.

Yemen is an interesting case, because in Yemen you don't have a lot of Yemeni refugees. It's extremely difficult to leave Yemen. For those here who have the map, you can see that they don't have a lot of opportunities to get out. We don't have so many IDPs, internally displaced people, at two million, but we have 22 million people who depend on United Nations and NGO support to survive.

We need to always keep in mind that there's a correlation between internal displacement and refugee situations, but we have to go a bit deeper to see that in some of those situations people are not displaced. Either they don't even have the means to be displaced, or the generalization of the conflict, which at any point can create forcible movement of the population, does not allow them to move, but they're still in need of humanitarian assistance.

Because we have appeared before this committee, you know well what are the role and function of UNHCR. I've provided in the briefing some examples about Uganda, where some of you went, and our responses in Bangladesh and in Tanzania for the Burundians. We address all aspects of the lives of refugees: maternal health, birth registration, SGBV survivors, water, sanitation, education, shelter and so on. For the internally displaced, our mandate, as divided within the United Nations, is restricted to protection, shelter and the management of the sites where the IDPs are located.

All of that has a cost. For the first time in the history of UNHCR, we went up to an $8-billion ask in terms of our funding requirement. We usually receive 50% of the money. We will probably get, at the end of the year, around $4 billion, which means that one out of two needs can be addressed. Eighty-seven per cent of the money comes from voluntary contributions from member states. I think it's important here to note that we have three main donors that account for 60% of the budget of UNHCR: the United States, Germany and the European Union.

It's important also to dig a bit into the numbers in terms of understanding the forcible displacement because, depending on the location of the crisis, the funding differs a lot. The Syria-Iraq operation received approximately 60% of the funding that is required. When you go to sub-Saharan Africa, we receive between 30% and 40% of the funding. In some of those operations, it doesn't go up to 20%, such as with the Burundians in Tanzania. If you go to Central America, which is a growing crisis with Venezuela, Nicaragua and the north of Central America, we always end the year at around 20% of the funding we need to assist the people.

● (1545)

That has no influence, because if people are not assisted in the first country where they find asylum, you can well imagine they will continue their route to get to another country where they will have access to medical care, be able to put their children in school, and have proper shelter.

If we briefly turn to the solutions we have, the situation is pretty grim. Between 1996 and 2005, we had approximately 30 million refugees who were able to go back home. We are speaking about Afghanistan, where after 2002 some 3.5 million people returned. I was posted to Afghanistan in 2008. By 2008 the return had stopped because, again, there was an increased level of violence, particularly in the south of the country.

Referring to Liberia and Angola, we saw a peaceful transition of power where people were able to return. If you look at the period 2007-17, it's only four million refugees who have been able to return home, so it dropped to one-third of the previous decade. This is mainly because the international community has been unable to broker peace, and to re-establish functioning societies and authorities which would mean that refugees would feel confident to go back home.

Interestingly, we have recently seen efforts between Eritrea and Ethiopia to resume diplomatic relations. What is interesting in that case is that you would imagine that a number of Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia would have returned to Eritrea; however, it is actually the opposite. What we have seen is an increase of women and children crossing into Ethiopia because they want to be reunited with their families. Before, it was extremely dangerous for those categories of people to cross into Ethiopia. Ultimately, if the peace holds, and if investment is made in Eritrea in terms of the forced military service and so on, we know—we have already asked—the Eritrean refugees would want to go back, so there is the prospect for return.

In terms of local integration, accepting refugees who are in your territory to become citizens of your country is less and less an option. The new prime minister of Pakistan recently made an announcement that he would consider giving Pakistani nationality to 1.2 million Afghans. That didn't last more than 24 hours. There was a political backlash and the Afghan refugees will remain Afghan refugees. Some 60% of the Afghan refugees were either born in Pakistan or they came to Pakistan before the age of 12. That was the rationale for the prime minister to say that since those people have known only Pakistan in their lives, they would be given nationality, but it is something that does not happen very much these days, except perhaps in Latin America. In 2014 we had some naturalization in Tanzania for some Burundians, but that has also stopped.

The last solution is, of course, resettlement. We are extremely grateful to Canada for its leadership in providing this solution. We do resettle refugees based on their extreme urgent needs. Here we are really speaking about people who have a protection concern, maybe people who are at risk of being arrested, or being sent back to their country of origin where they may be at risk of torture, arbitrary detention, and so on. We are speaking about SGBV and torture survivors, or children and women who may be at risk of not being able to survive in the country where they first found asylum.

We have identified 1.4 million out of the 25 million who need to be resettled to a third country such as Canada. Based on the identification of UNHCR, Canada will resettle 10,000 of those refugees this year. We need to flag here that the need for resettlement, with the increase of the refugee population, has also increased in a parallel fashion. We have doubled since 2014, but between 2016 and 2017 we have lost 50% of the spaces due to the fact that the U.S. has reduced drastically the number of people to be resettled to the United States.

● (1550)

To go back to my initial point, let's not forget that while the Syrians are the largest nationality in need of resettlement, if you look at geographical groups, it's the sub-Saharan Africans who account for 45% of all the resettlement needs. You will see that in your handout we have also put our latest op-ed, which was issued by Maclean's a few days ago with the honourable Minister Bibeau and Minister Hussen, which explains a bit how the international community is now looking at providing solutions to refugees through what is called the global compact on refugees, which has been presented by the commissioner to the General Assembly as we speak and which we trust will be adopted before the end of the year. I'll stop there.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

● (1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much. I just think about the UNHCR staff around the world—some I've met—and extend our thanks to them, through you. These data come from real people on the ground, collecting real information and hearing real stories, so thank you.

We'll start our questioning now.

Ms. Zahid, you have seven minutes.

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for all the work you are doing for the internally displaced people and for the refugees. As you mentioned, with 68.5 million forcefully displaced people worldwide, resettlement is not an answer, and this issue cannot be solved through resettlement.

What can we in Canada do to support the countries who are hosting those refugees, the countries who are on the front line? Other than resettlement, what else can we do?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: One of the main issues is really the funding. The $8 billion that I've indicated, as the chairman has mentioned, is based on data that are collected on a daily basis by all our staff in 130 countries. Therefore, it's an objective assessment and a prioritization of the needs of the refugees in terms of their access to health, to education, to decent shelter, to livelihood opportunities, access to cash and safe shelter for SGBV survivors and so on and so forth. As long as we do not have the entire amount of money that we need to address their needs, those people will remain at risk of being forced to continue moving. The first solution is definitely through the funding.

Canada is one of our top 10 donors. We have received, as we speak, something like $73 million American. I am always speaking in American dollars; sorry about that. We have received approximately $73 million American, but we need more money.

What we need also to do is to engage other actors. We need to engage the World Bank and the regional development banks in providing loans or different financing mechanisms for the host country to be able to develop the infrastructure that is necessary for those refugees and the host communities, which are often the poorest within those countries, to cope with the added demographic pressure on the water system, electricity, school, and so on and so forth.

We need also to engage the private sector. I think there is a lot of potential with Canadian private businesses; a number of them have businesses abroad. We need to engage them beyond just corporate social responsibility in a philanthropic manner of viewing the refugees as economic agents who can be recruited and therefore become economically self-reliant and not need to depend anymore on the UN and the NGOs to get food and water. I think we need to engage the private sector in Canada to also invest in refugees abroad.

We should also look at finding opportunities for some of those enterprises who have a deficit in certain skills to see whether they could, through the economic pathways to Canada, get some of the refugees to Canada.

● (1600)

Mrs. Salma Zahid: You mentioned in your comments that you have assessed that 1.4 million need to be resettled. Are they from one geographical area?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Forty-five per cent are from sub-Saharan Africa. We are speaking about Somalian, South Sudanese, Congolese, Burundians—

Mr. Michael Casasola (Senior Resettlement Officer, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees): —and Eritreans.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: —and Eritreans. That's 45% of the need.

I would say that you have another one-third that are from Syria, who are currently located in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt mainly. The rest are from other regions of Asia and Central or Latin America.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Does it include more women and girls in this number, specifically?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: One thing that I should have said in my presentation, and it's an important point to note, is that children represent 50% of the refugees. If you look at non-displaced populations, children below 18 represent only 30% of the world's population. If you add the women, 75% of our population of refugees and displaced are women and children, so you find exactly the same proportion in those in need of resettlement.

We have a few categories which are specifically focusing on the needs of women. For example, it may be survivors of sexual violence. It's also women and widows, with a large number of children, who have no means to survive but to go into prostitution or what we call survival sex. Those are specifically targeted. That's where we are very grateful to see the call of the high commissioner for a focus by Canada on women who are in need of those solutions, so that they be well received by Canada. We have an additional 1,000 women who are going to be processed by our friends from IRCC to come to Canada under this program.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: How do you deal with the safety and health concerns while people are travelling and when they are in the host countries?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's an important point because unfortunately, we don't, based on the financial situation. We have absolutely no means to provide for any chronic disease medication. In the country of first asylum, in the Middle East, Africa or elsewhere, we cannot provide medication for heart conditions, dialysis, cancer, and so on and so forth. Those people are extremely at risk and are in need of third country solutions, such as resettlement.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have just begun to look at the draft of the global compact for migration.

First of all, I'd like to look at objective six, “Facilitate fair and ethical recruitment and safeguard conditions that ensure decent work”.

In paragraph 22(g), one of the principles would be to “develop and strengthen labour migration and fair and ethical recruitment processes that allow migrants to change employers and modify the conditions or length of their stay with minimal administrative burden, while promoting greater opportunities for decent work and respect for international human rights and labour law”

Are there any parts of Canada's temporary foreign worker program that you feel would be incompatible with that particular principle?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: The UNHCR has been mandated by the General Assembly to look at the global compact on refugees. I'm not in a position to comment on the global compact for migration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: This is the work of the UN Secretary-General's special representative, Louise Arbour, supported by the IOM, the International Organization of Migration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: If our committee was going to have someone from your organization within Canada to answer questions on the global compact for migration, who would that be?

● (1605)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It would be the IOM.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. That's fantastic.

With regard to some of the resettlement processes that the UN uses, you and I have had several interchanges on the selection process used. Have you made any progress, recommendations or suggested anything as a result of some of the committee testimony that we've raised with regard to the selection, or the failure to select, Yazidi women in the Syrian refugee initiative?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: We have taken note of your concern. In some instances, as you know, we are not necessarily agreeing with the concerns that were raised. For example, we have shared with this committee two letters on the selection process for the LGBTQ and what has been done for refugees who are in need of resettlement, and what, from the training to the complaints mechanisms, is available to them.

We think, for example, that the concerns we heard were not necessarily things that needed a change of the policies and the practice.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure. The fact is that the UN didn't really refer any Yazidis out of the roughly 30,000 people it referred to Canada. Did you not feel that needed to change?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I am not sure what we are speaking about, because the 1,200 Yazidis and all the survivors of Daesh who came to Canada—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: —were processed through the UNHCR.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I meant the initial tranche.

The motion to have the special program came about because there were no genocide survivors, or maybe there were five or six referred in the initial tranche, prior to the motion being passed in the House of Commons, which precipitated a special program.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: As you know, the resettlement program is for refugees. Those you are speaking about were still in their country of origin, northern Iraq, Kurdistan in other terms, and were still under the jurisdiction of their own government.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Sure, so I'll ask again, because we've been through the reasons. For example, you've just stated it. These are genocide survivors who have difficulty making it to one of your camps and have testified that they—

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: No, I didn't say that. I said they have chosen to remain in Iraq, in northern Iraq, and some of them are crossing into Turkey. Some of them had decided to go to Lebanon. I met some of them there. It's their choice where they...if they felt safe in northern Iraq, that was their decision. There they were supported by UNHCR and the Kurdistan authorities—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Would you characterize northern Iraq during the ISIS genocide of the Yazidis as a safe place for Yazidis?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: By the time they had reached northern Iraq, it was a safe place, yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: We are looking at the period between—

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: They were receiving appropriate medical treatment. Some of them had special needs, which required—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: To clarify, I'm looking at the period from approximately August 2014 to November 2016. Are you suggesting that during that period, Yazidis were safe in northern Iraq?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I'm not suggesting that. I said that by the time there was a request to the UNHCR to see whether a program could be established for specific cases, they were in northern Iraq, which had been stabilized and where they were receiving care, perhaps not sufficient care but care nonetheless, from the Kurdistan authorities, the UN and the NGO community.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Was the UN aware of the humanitarian situation facing the Yazidi people in northern Iraq during the period I just specified?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Yes, we have approximately 600 colleagues on the ground.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How is it that the United Nations did not provide a recommendation for special programming to help or identify victims of genocide to be referred to Canada as part of the 30,000, or whatever the number was for the Syrian refugee initiative, given that a lot of these women were actually incarcerated and held captive in Syria?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Let me clarify again that the resettlement program to Canada is for refugees, so it's for those who have crossed—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I understand that there's a technical term —

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Let me just—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I do. I understand that there's a technical term, that you have a technical term on refugees and IDP. I am questioning whether your selection process helps those who are most in need—

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Yes, and that's going to be my response.

We are not looking at whether a woman has been raped as part of genocide or has been raped in another context. A rape survivor is a rape survivor. If she needs to be resettled to have access to medical care, we are not going to look—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How could one of those women...? You're suggesting they had a choice. How could a woman who escaped sexual slavery get to one of your camps and get into the process that was used to select these people to come to Canada?

● (1610)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: In the cases of Syria and Iraq, all the people who arrive in a third country, like Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon, are processed through a registration system.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How could they have gotten to your camp, after they had survived sexual slavery? How could they have gotten into your selection process?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: *Alors*, first of all, most of the refugees and the displaced do not live in camps. There is no such concept as camps.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I know. I understand that.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: We have offices—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How do they get selected—

The Chair: I need to end it there, sorry. You'll get another round.

Next is Mr. Garrison.

I don't know what committee you're normally on, but I'm sure this is an upgrade.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Saanich—Sooke, NDP): It's national defence.

Thanks very much. I am pleased to be at this committee today for several reasons. One, of course, is that as a gay man, I am someone who came to Canada when I would not have been recognized as a refugee, but I was a refugee. The second reason is that last Thursday, I was with the Gorge Tillicum refugee sponsorship group in my riding, which is a group of 30 citizens who are sponsoring the reunification of a Somali family of eight by raising $90,000 in my community to do that. So there is an interest in my constituency among the public. We have now, I think, 171 sponsorship groups operating in and around my riding. While a lot of times in the media we hear the concerns about migration and refugees, what I see on the ground in my riding is a very Canadian spirit to help.

I appreciate the work of the UNHCR. Previous to being a member of Parliament, I did international work in conflict zones, and I've often worked with UNHCR staff, who risk their lives as well.

It's a great description of the challenge that's facing the entire world with refugees. I think we—certainly, my party—appreciate the concern about the limited resettlement opportunities. I was pleased to hear you talking about resettlement on the basis of urgent need or urgent threat to safety.

I am going to talk about the LGBT community in particular. My colleague from Vancouver East, when she was with the committee in Uganda, heard some disturbing statements from people about LGBTI refugees: they simply need not flaunt their sexuality and they won't be in danger and that it's unfair for LGBTQ or LGBTI refugees to jump the queue.

In terms of evaluating vulnerability of the refugee populations, how do you do that when it comes to the LGBTI community?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: You were not there, but maybe the letters with all the information that I shared previously to the committee could be shared. I'm happy to share it again.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: We have training for all of our staff. In most of our operations we have dedicated staff to receive LGBTQ. I always give the example of the operation in Lebanon. We had made sure that the LGBTQ community had a code when they were arriving at our registration centre. If they said "*tulipe*", they would be screened differently and sent to dedicated staff to review what their needs were, because we needed to be extremely sensitive about how the questions were being asked to identify the LGBTQ community.

Not all LGBTQ refugees are in need of resettlement. In a number of countries, in a number of situations, which may depend also on their socio-economic levels and their level of education, they can have a normal life as a refugee, which is never a normal life, in the first country. But for some of them, there is a risk of arrest, of being returned, of being discriminated against in terms of access to livelihood, including a risk of having only as a survival means to go into survival sex. Those are therefore prioritized by us for resettlement to a country like Canada.

In particular, if we look at Central America, we have a specific situation with trans women who are particularly targeted by the maras, the criminal gangs, and when they come to a third country in the subregion, remain at risk of forced prostitution and so on. They have difficulties in getting access to hormonal treatment. Those are prioritized for resettlement. I met one of them recently in Vancouver, for example.

● (1615)

Mr. Randall Garrison: I appreciate what you've said about some not needing to be resettled, but in a world where over 70 countries still criminalize based on sexual orientation and where the risk of violence is quite high for my community in over 100 countries, I just want to stress that those resettlement opportunities are also small. When people do need resettlement, there aren't very many countries that will accept the claims based on sexual orientation. How many countries will do that?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: In terms of resettlement, I think the overwhelming majority of the 33 countries that are doing resettlement absolutely recognize LGBTQ, sexual orientation and gender diversity as a ground—

Mr. Randall Garrison: The majority of the 33, you're saying, you think—

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thirty-three or 32.9? Thirty-three countries.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Okay.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: No, I'm pretty sure, all of them.

Mr. Michael Casasola: For sure.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: For sure.

Mr. Randall Garrison: You say that, in your selection process, you have a separate screening and a separate path.

One of the things that I've been working on since the Liberal government was elected is trying to get the Government of Canada to recognize that saying LGBTI people aren't discriminated against and can access all our services on the same basis as everyone else is not a reality for most of the LGBTI community.

I've been asking the government, and I'm repeating that request today, to set aside and make a special path available beyond our normal resettlement that would have staff on the ground who would be trained specifically to deal with the LGBTI community.

Do you think that would be a good idea? Is there a need for that?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: As UNHCR, we will not say that there is a specific need, because they are already, in comparison to global resettlement criteria, one of the categories that need to be prioritized. What we need not only from Canada but from the world is a larger number of options for those LGBTQ, rape survivors, journalists at risk, indigenous leaders, and human rights defenders to be able to be protected through the solution, which is very particular, of being resettled to a third country.

It would be extremely difficult for UNHCR to discriminate between an LGBTQ person who has been raped and a heterosexual person who has been raped. Why would we do that?

Mr. Randall Garrison: I think we're out of time.

The Chair: Mr. Sarai.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you for being here. It's always a pleasure to have you here and get some insight from you.

My riding of Surrey Centre probably has one of the highest concentrations of Syrian refugees in the recent settlement. I have close to 1,000 in my riding, and I often have them come into my office. The biggest concern and biggest stress they have is bigger than the stress of adjusting into Canada. It's that they know they have siblings and relatives still in different camps.

Can you let us know how your settlement of UNHCR-recognized refugees happens? Does the fact that they have family or siblings play into that? Is there a higher chance to get settled into Canada for those who already have siblings here? We did a study here before which showed that those who have family who join us have a higher chance of success in Canada and a higher success at integration. It's also the same, I think, for refugee families. Could you elaborate on how that plays into the process?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I will leave it in the hands of IRCC colleagues to explain why that's a different option for resettled refugees to bring their other family members to Canada.

What I want to stress is that, when we do the resettlement of refugees, we ensure that the nuclear family, the composition of the family, is guaranteed.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Sorry, but I will add that one of the things we advocate with resettlement countries is where there is a sense of a de facto family relationship. For example, we deal oftentimes with reconstituted families. We try to encourage resettlement countries to accept all of them together.

Where family links come up most often is where we're going to destine the person, where we're going to destine the referral. It may come up that we've identified you based on the fact that you're a refugee woman at risk, but now the question comes up of whose door we knock on. Do we knock on Finland's door, Canada's door or Australia's door? If there's a family member in Canada, then we're more than likely to knock on the Canadian door.

● (1620)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: When we speak about families, it sometimes may not be only blood-related family. In the case of children, when we can demonstrate that the child was in the care.... We have a case with MP Whalen where the child, a minor, was in the care of a person who was being resettled to Canada, and this child was also taken into consideration.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I see.

As you know, many of my colleagues visited Africa and visited some of these camps. One of the things I heard, which was a little shocking for me, was that safety at the camps, particularly for women when the power or lights would go out, was at risk. There's a very high chance that they would be sexually assaulted.

Is there any initiative to address that, or is it due just to a lack of funding that we can't have secure, safe lighting, solar-powered battery backup, generators, etc., particularly for those high-risk areas where women should be able to feel safe, so that they're not assaulted?

It seems from what I heard from my colleague's testimony here that it was epidemic. It was systemic. It was repeated. It was not isolated. It was over and over again. I can't imagine how countries would not answer that call. I know there are a lot of big asks when you're dealing with refugees, but this is just to ensure safety and security within a camp or a settlement place like in Uganda, to ensure that at least power and lighting be secure.

I know power is difficult there, but lighting should be secure. Are there ways or best practices so security can be improved?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: We have a lot of practices in this respect. There are issues, also, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, of where the boreholes have being drilled so that women do not have to do a long commute between their house and where they will fetch water, separate toilets for girls in schools, and lighting, as you have mentioned.

You would be surprised to hear that the sexual and gender-based violence, SGBV, sector that responds to those needs—and we know how to better protect women and girls—is always one of the two or three least funded of all sectors. The least one is always health. I had a question earlier about what we do to provide health assistance, but the SGBV sector is critically underfunded.

We know how to, but we don't always receive the means from the international community, from the donors, to deliver the result for women and girls.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: As you've heard from my colleague across the way, IDPs are a big concern. Several communities have IDPs. In my Sikh community, Afghan Sikhs within Afghanistan have that challenge. There are people all over the world. They're not the only ones.

Have you heard of dialogue at the United Nations to perhaps change the definition of what a refugee is, and to constitute IDPs as refugees as well? As we saw in the Yazidi case as well, it requires special measures to help an IDP versus the same person who has crossed the boundary and gone to a similar camp on the other side of the border. They are considered refugees, but when they're in the same protective zone under the UNHCR within the country, they unfortunately cannot be resettled or assisted other than just giving financial means.

Is there a conversation going on at the UN or the UNHCR to change this age-old definition, as the world has changed?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: No, there's no discussion on that because the world has changed, but the IDPs were also present in 1951 when those legal concepts were drafted.

The refugee definition is really based on the fact that an individual is not able to avail himself or herself of the protection of his or her state. That's the definition, and therefore this person is at risk because there is no state to protect that person. The IDPs are still within the jurisdiction of their country and it's still the responsibility—that's a human rights framework—of this country to protect them.

Now the persecution, we acknowledge, can come both from state agents or non-state actors. When it's a non-state actor, it's still the responsibility of that state. We are speaking here about Central America, for example, providing the safety, the security and judicial remedies to people at risk of violation of their rights by those armed groups and so on.

● (1625)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Usually they are—

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end there. I'm sorry.

Ms. Rempel and Mr. Maguire. I'm not sure who's first.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'll be very brief.

I just want to go back to some of my comments.

I believe that the comment you made was that people had a choice to leave the country.

I'm just wondering what somebody who is, let's say Yazidi, who underwent the massacre at Sinjar, would have had to do to make it on the initial list of resettlement after the massacre.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: In the case of the Yazidis in the north of Iraq, just to be very specific, the overwhelming majority of them didn't want to leave Iraq because there was a relative, whether a child or a male adult—brother, husband, father—who was still in captivity. It was extremely difficult for them to make the choice of moving across an international border because they were afraid of never being able to be reunited.

You well know, Ms. Rempel, that was one of the issues when we identified a number of Yazidis to come to Canada, and some actually rejected the offer because they wanted to remain close by so that they would be reunited with their loved ones.

When they cross into another country, we do register them, and we do try to elicit information about their vulnerabilities. As you can well understand, it's extremely difficult for women the first time—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How did you know that people didn't want to relocate if they weren't put on that list?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: We have individual conversations and focus groups with all of them on a daily basis.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: After the massacre, how did you gather whether or not they wanted to be on the resettlement list?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: In all our operations, through our partners, whether government or non-government organizations, and also with our own UNHCR staff, we hold those focus group consultations. We call them participatory assessments.

Of course, it's extremely difficult for those women to come with a story of having been sexually abused.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you. I'll move on.

There are a number of Yazidis who are in Canada now. I have several cases on my desk. Many dozens said that they were told by your agents that they would be able to bring their children to Canada. I know that IRCC is responsible for reunification, but many of them have had their applications rejected. In the community, they are saying that they were lied to. They were told just to get there and that their family could follow.

What sort of information was given to this community? How did you determine, in this special situation, how they were being rejected?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: That was an issue, as I just mentioned.

A number of Yazidi women and girls rejected the offer to be resettled.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No. You rejected their family reunion applications recently.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's not us. We are not responsible for the secondary movement of family members.

Mr. Michael Casasola: Sorry. If I may, I'll just say that all the counselling that was given, in terms of the questions and answers and counselling guidance, we developed for our people with IRCC before this operation began.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It was made clear to the person that we could not guarantee when a family member would resurface or whether this person would be able to come. As you know, there is screening on security concerns as well.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Go ahead, Larry.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you.

You mentioned the dollars and the private sponsorships.

Of all the countries in the world, are there really private refugee sponsorship models or methods that work better with the UNHCR?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: The private sponsorship model of Canada is quite unique.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Are there better ones anywhere that we can work with?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: No.

Our priority is really the government-assisted refugees or what we call here the GARs. They are based on a selection by UNHCR within this 1.4 million.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Would there be any red tape or systemic barriers that we could look at?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's a very robust system in Canada. There is a close co-operation between the UNHCR, IOM, IRCC, and the visa officer, to select the most vulnerable and bring them here, where they get a good program to support their socio-economic integration into Canada.

● (1630)

Mr. Michael Casasola: Jean-Nicolas highlighted the fact that our focus is primarily on the people of concern. We have been working with IRCC, for example, to see ways that we can engage civil society to help out those refugees who come through and whom we identify. There are indications that the involvement of civil society tends to lead to better integration outcomes. Whatever way we can leverage volunteers in communities to help refugees, including the refugees we've identified, we would welcome, of course.

The Chair: You're at the end of your time, but I'm going to give you an extra minute, just because you're so nice to me.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have just one more question.

Can you give us any examples or any specific recommendations on how we could improve and enhance Canada's handling of the process of getting private sponsors for refugees?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: With regard to private sponsors, we are trying to see to what extent we can engage, for example, the disability movement or the health charities to resettle refugees through private sponsorship, not based on family links, but really on those affinities of sharing a common characteristic with the refugees, so based on the vulnerability rather than a family link. Because of the numbers that we have, we need resettlement as a survival option.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for again being here at our committee and really providing us with up-to-date information on migration flows.

Just for the record, I want to put out there that in August 2014 when the massacre was happening in northern Iraq, there were only three Yazidis brought in by the previous government, whereas under our government, under our leadership, there were over 1,200 Yazidi women and girls who were subject to this violence and other minorities in northern Iraq who were brought in. I just want to put that on the record.

You spoke in your testimony about solutions, and you talked about four million who were returned to their country of origin. How do you determine when a country is safe? For example, in South Sudan, the former vice-president—I believe his name is Machar—and the president, Salva Kiir, recently talked about a peace agreement, and they formed a peace agreement not too long ago. When does the UN determine that it is safe to return to that country when the country has returned to stability in all aspects of the country to ensure that citizens can be there in a safe manner?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: The return is always based on the voluntariness and the choice by the refugees themselves. What is important is that refugees are given the option and the information to assess for themselves whether it's safe to return and whether they will be able to return in a dignified manner. Here we have to draw the attention of the committee to the fact that it's not only a peace agreement that determines whether the people go back or not. It's also the resumption of basic services in the country of origin. The bombs stop, but you need also to make sure that you will have access to electricity, water, schools, health centres and, equally important, livelihood opportunities before deciding to return home. This is a choice that we give to the refugees.

When they indicate that they want to do it, we will support their return and their reintegration because our job does not finish when refugees cross back into their country of origin. It's also about the reintegration in their home.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: You mentioned the top five countries that have the most refugees, and South Sudan was one of them. When we went to Uganda, we met with refugees just in and around Uganda, whether they were Somalian, South Sudanese, Congolese. How can Canada help when refugees want to return to their country of origin where, as with the example of South Sudan, there is a peace agreement? How can Canada help not only just in terms of funding, but also in terms of brokering a peace deal and working with the UN so that we can have a stable country where we won't see an uprising of violence and people being uprooted again to different places so that we'd basically be back to the same point where we are?

● (1635)

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: It's actually a very important point. In addition to funding to be able to stabilize the population that returns, which goes through all the elements that I have mentioned, health, education, etc., you rightly point out the fact that we need reconciliation. We need transitional justice. We need a truth and reconciliation commission so that people start to be able to live side by side again. That's part of the work of the United Nations and the UNHCR, and also of partners like the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN Development Programme, with the support of Canada. That goes also into accountability mechanisms, justice mechanisms.

Canada is a champion for the ICC, the International Criminal Court, and that may be, depending on the timing, a measure to ensure that people return with the confidence that the atrocities of the past have been addressed and will not be repeated.

It's extremely important because when people return and are displaced for a second time outside their country of origin, as we have seen recently with the Rohingya, for example, it takes far more time for them to ever return to their country of origin because the second time they have concerns of a repeat.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: How much is the UN short of funds now with the withdrawal of funding from other nations?

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: I can only speak for UNHCR. We have not been affected by the withdrawal of funding by the United States. The United States is still providing $1.4 billion to UNHCR this year.

The Chair: That ends this section of our meeting.

To put you on notice, I wouldn't be at all surprised if the committee wanted you back. We'll just put you on hold. Thank you for now. Again, thank you for the work you continue to do with UNHCR and Canada.

Mr. Jean-Nicolas Beuze: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll take a few minutes to set up our next witnesses.

● (Pause)

● (1640)

The Chair: I'm going to call us back to order.

For this second hour, we've invited officials from IRCC to join us, and to help us scope out our study from a high-level position.

T hank you very much for coming.

I'm going to be generous with time, making sure you have time to present.

We're going to begin with Mr. de Vlieger.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger (Director General, Strategic Policy and Planning, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Good afternoon and thank you for having us as part of this study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada. I appreciate your opening remarks and the sense of the scope of the study.

My name is Matt de Vlieger. I'm the Director General of Strategic Policy at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. I'm joined today by Glen Linder. He's the Director General of International and Intergovernmental Relations. From our international network, we have the Director General, Mark Giralt. We also have Jean-Marc Gionet, who is the Senior Director of Refugee Operations. They're both well-positioned to answer questions you might have about our international operations and resettlement.

We'll keep our remarks brief, given the scope of your study is quite broad. I understand the questions you might have might come from various angles.

I'll turn to my colleague, Glen Linder, to first address some of the global migration trends. You've heard a little bit from UNHCR on that just now. I'll spend some time at the end on the implications and the opportunities these might present for Canada.

Mr. Glen Linder (Director General, International and Intergovernmental Relations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thanks, Matt.

The committee will have often heard it said that migration is on the rise or that it's at an all-time high. Today I'll share some numbers and some context behind those statements.

Worldwide migration has grown by 49% since 2000. According to the UN, there are now an estimated 258 million international migrants globally, which represents approximately 3.4% of the world's population. Of these, 25.9 million, or about 10%, are refugees.

What are the drivers for so much movement? There are many, but among the most notable are the drive to seek better economic opportunities; family reunification; concerns about public security and criminality in migrants' country of birth; and to escape humanitarian crises, persecution, instability and war. All this is facilitated by lower international travel costs and easy availability of information, and sometimes misinformation, online and through social media about migration.

In terms of where international migrants are going, Europe and Asia each hosted around 31% of all international migrants in 2015, according to the UN. These regions were followed by North America, with 22% of the global migrant stock, Africa at 9%, Latin America and the Caribbean at 4%, and Oceania at 3%.

Migration is a defining feature of the world today. It's not a new trend, and it's not something that we expect will stop anytime soon. The United States has been the main country of destination for international migrants since the 1970s. In terms of the top countries of destination for 2015, the U.S. is followed by Germany, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and then Canada, in seventh place.

Where are international migrants coming from? In 2015, the top five countries of origin worldwide were India, Mexico, Russia, China and Bangladesh.

It's worthwhile recognizing that migration between countries located in the same region is also increasing. In fact, south-south migration has now surpassed south-north migration. According to the UN, more than 50% of migrants from developing countries move to another developing country, and largely within their region. In Africa most international migration is voluntary, regular and within the continent. This is also a trend between rich countries, as about half of all immigrants to high-income countries come from other high-income countries.

The international community has recognized that increased international human migration is the new normal and has responded with the development of new tools. The United Nations is currently concluding two parallel processes to develop two global compacts: one on refugees and one on migration. Although non-binding, they represent an opportunity for the international community to put in place objectives and best practices in terms of addressing flows of refugees and migrants.

The refugee compact aims to encourage states to share responsibility for refugees more equitably and predictably, and to be better prepared to respond to refugee crises. One primary objective is to facilitate access to durable solutions, along with supporting host countries, building resilience and promoting conditions for sustainable return. It also highlights the role played by countries on the front lines, which host the majority of refugees.

The global compact for migration aims to address all other dimensions of migration, such as regular migration pathways, human rights, trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling, border management, and integration. It emphasizes the positive contributions of migrants and the benefits of comprehensive, well-managed migration systems, while also acknowledging and drawing attention to the serious challenges that irregular migration poses.

Canada is actively engaged in the development of these new tools, and has been constructively engaged in discussions on them, for the promise they hold in terms of encouraging states to take a more managed approach to migration and to take advantage of the opportunities that regular, rules-based migration can have for countries of destination.

● (1645)

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Obviously, the broader migration trends that have been highlighted by my colleague and highlighted earlier by the UNHCR have impacts for Canada. They also present opportunities. At IRCC, we are seeing higher volumes in virtually all areas that we manage.

In terms of permanent residents, those who apply to be immigrants to Canada—that includes resettled refugees who are selected to come to Canada—the government announced last year a three-year plan for immigration levels growth. The plan grows to 310,000 permanent resident admissions this year. Next year, it goes to 330,000 permanent resident admissions, and then in 2020 to 340,000.

Despite that increased growth, the applications demand outstrips the space afforded in that levels plan in virtually all categories. I'll give one example. In our express entry application management system—that's the system that manages our high-skilled economic programs—we have a pool of candidates that sits at about 90,000 today. Every two weeks, there's a round where there are invitations to apply. That's a round of about 3,000, but there are twice the number of profiles filled out every two weeks. You can see that the demand is significant for our immigration pathways.

The increased mobility that my colleague spoke about a bit earlier is also contributing to significantly higher volumes of applicants for temporary visas. These are visitors to Canada, like tourists and business travellers, but also student permits and temporary workers. This year, we expect to process about 3.4 million of these visas. This is up from 3.1 million last year, and 2.7 million the year before. By next year, we're likely to be at roughly 3.9 million applications. Again, this is not out of step with international trends, but Canada is increasingly a popular destination of choice.

Also, as this committee knows well, asylum claims have increased in recent years, some from the irregular movement, but overall as well. In 2017, there were 50,000 asylum claims made, which is the highest we've seen in about 15 years. About 60% of that was in the regular manner at regular ports of entry.

Canada, like most of the world, is seeing higher volumes from these immigration trends. One of the advantages that Canada has in the face of this is that we have—I think it's fair to say—a long history and a well-established system for managing migration. By system, what I mean is that we have a defined set of legal pathways through which applicants are assessed and enter our country.

As the committee proceeds—and it was helpful, Chair, to hear of the scope of your study—you might want to consider the extent to which having a system like this can be an opportunity for Canada, both in helping the government manage and adjust the changes for the benefit of Canada, but also internationally, as one of many examples of how other countries might want to advance their approaches.

Thank you, Chair. We welcome your questions.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you very much.

Thank you for testifying at the committee.

I have in front of me an international migration report. It talks about where migrants are going and where they've gone through many years. In 2000, there were 173 million migrants going around the world, and in 2010, there were 220 million. In 2017, we now have 258 million migrants. As you mentioned in your testimony, they're leaving for primarily economic opportunities, for family reunification. There's also war, displacement.

We did a study here on family reunification, and we've been trying to reduce the backlog that was present in certain areas. For example, for parents and grandparents, there were 167,000 backlogged and we're down to around 25,000. There are a lot of people on the move.

It's in an article too, from The Economist. I'll read a paragraph:

> More broadly, because immigration boosts the diversity of skills and ideas, a 1% rise in the immigrant share of the population, low- or high-skilled, tends to raise incomes per person by 2%.

You mentioned that with the express entry there were 90,000 applications. How does that impact Canada? As I mentioned here, it raises incomes by 2% per person.

Going forward, how will that impact our society, and will it be a net benefit to us?

● (1650)

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Thank you for the question.

I'm not aware of the particular study you're citing, but certainly when we're looking at immigration and immigration levels, we look at it from various perspectives.

One of the perspectives is that it's a long-time commitment. We're looking at permanent residents, so people who will be making an impact upon entry to the country, but then for their lifetime and for generations. The outcomes of immigrants are very well researched. We look at things longitudinally. We look at entry earnings and we look at earnings over time. There are very solid outcomes that we see from recent immigrants to Canada, certainly in the economic categories, but across the categories.

When you're looking across all the categories of immigrants and talking about family reunification and also the refugee class, immigrants catch up to the Canadian average after 10 years. But if you're looking at the economic classes, they're already starting out, in terms of entry earnings, higher than the Canadian average.

One of the things you're looking at is the long-term benefits because of this group being permanent residents to Canada.

Another thing you're looking at is the second generation, and the outcomes of the second generation in terms of educational attainment, by far, outstrip the Canadian average. That's another angle you're looking at.

Those are more longer-term concerns. There are demographic aspects to growth. Immigration contributes a lot to labour force growth. I think about 75% of Canada's labour force growth is contributed by immigration, currently. That trend is likely to continue with the aging population.

Then there are shorter-term benefits. There are employers looking for high human capital talent right now, and the fact that through some of our immigration streams—like express entry, where there is a six-month processing time, which is quite competitive internationally, and actually quite quick for our department—employers can access that kind of talent and skill set quite quickly.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Could you explain the difference between express entry and the new global skills strategy?

You mentioned that express entry is a six-month process, but the global skills strategy can be up to two weeks for a highly skilled individual.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Yes, the primary difference is that express entry relates to the permanent movement, so for people to become immigrants and permanent residents of Canada. There is a different kind of application process that we're looking at there versus the global skills strategy, where we're looking at temporary entry to Canada, so some of the temporary worker streams. That allows companies that are looking to scale up in Canada and bring over some high human capital talent quite quickly to bring them in, as you said, within a two-week processing standard. The big difference is temporary versus permanent.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: How competitive is Canada compared to other immigrant-receiving countries?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: May I ask, in which way? Do you mean processing times, outcomes?

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Yes, processing and getting those skilled migrants coming in for high-skilled jobs and low-skilled jobs as well.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: We know that with our application volumes, which have increased in pretty much all categories, but certainly in the economic categories, that Canada is a destination of choice, certainly.

When we look at processing times we are very competitive with our comparator countries, certainly Australia, the U.K., the U.S., both on the temporary side and on the permanent side.

● (1655)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: With the increase—and you mentioned the intake of immigrants was rising from 310,000 to 330,000, eventually getting to 340,000—what was determined, based on that increase?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: What went into the determination?

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Yes.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: I think the government would have been looking at several factors, and I mentioned some of them. They would have been looking at the long-term contributions that immigrants will make, based on historical track record of outcomes, so looking at things like population.

We certainly work with Stats Canada. They do a lot of modelling about the aging population of the country, and worker-to-retiree ratios, so looking at some of those long-term impacts in terms of the overall number. There's also looking at some of the short-term needs. There is always a long consultation process, quite comprehensive, with the provinces and territories, with stakeholders across the country, where the—

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Where there are shortages?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Government would have heard about sectors that are in shortage, employer groups that are looking to access high human capital talent, and not always high human capital, but often of intermediate skill as well. Then the government would have looked at the various pathways in the immigration levels plan and determined which categories would need to grow.

The other aspect that a government would look at is things like processing times and trying to balance where the demand is in terms of applications, whether it's in the family reunification categories, or in the private sponsorship categories that we spoke about earlier, and trying to balance the demand there with the output through the levels plan.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Some of the media have reported recently that the number of visas granted, the percentage of the number of visas, is down. Is that correct?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: I might turn to my colleague in the international network on that one.

Mr. Mark Giralt (Director General, International Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): If I understand the question, you're talking about acceptance rates and refusal rates.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, and I can tell you, in my riding the number of people who come to my office asking for letters of recommendation—and I review them—has substantially increased. Yet, they come back and tell me that they are being rejected. Quite frankly, the reasons are questionable. Then I read in one of the media outlets—I can't remember which one—that the number of visas that have been denied, the percentage has increased.

Mr. Mark Giralt: To answer your question, Mr. Chair, I would comment as follows. In the initial presentation we talked about the substantial growth we've had over a number of years. This year will be no different in terms of the volume. The percentage of cases that we see and are refused hasn't changed very much. It's fairly constant, but obviously, the number of real cases, because the volumes have gone up significantly—about a half million more cases this year over last year—represents more clients that don't have their applications approved. They will generate more transactions or more contacts.

The criteria have remained constant. We look at, in different categories, different criteria. Certainly, in the temporary entry or visitor category, we're looking to make sure that people meet our security and health requirements before entering Canada, what we would refer to as admissibility and criminality screenings. We also look at factors such as—

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, I'm aware of what you look at.

Have you put out directives, because there are too many visas, because the volume has increased, that perhaps we should be more vigilant?

I'm only speaking from my personal experience in my office. People bring in letters, and I, quite frankly, don't really understand why they've been rejected. There's no way of pursuing that, or very rarely is there a way of pursuing that. The thought occurred to me as to whether the department has been giving instructions around the planet to be a bit more challenging for all those seeking visas.

● (1700)

Mr. Mark Giralt: That's a fair question. Certainly, it's one that we receive often.

We don't have new instructions to refuse cases. Refusal of applications creates, actually, more work for us. Generally speaking, I think people—

Mr. David Tilson: Well, not really. The people reviewing an application, in whatever state it is, just reject them—

Mr. Mark Giralt: From our standpoint that's not—

Mr. David Tilson: —because they haven't travelled or they don't have sufficient assets or whatever.

Even when they do meet those core requirements—and I'm just speaking personally from observations that I've made. I'm not even in a city. I'm partially out of a city, and I get a lot of these applications.

Mr. Mark Giralt: I would just reiterate that for us, when people are refused, they do generate more effort on the parts of officers. Officers will document the reasons they feel the applicant doesn't meet the requirements.

Again, our rates have not significantly changed in terms of refusals. The volumes of applications we are seeing in temporary categories have gone up significantly, and that would generate more individuals who have been refused. Canada continues to receive more visitors through these categories, and more people are issued visas now than ever.

Mr. David Tilson: Returning to your comment, you indicated there's a higher volume with everything, visas, internally displaced persons, everything. Is the funding being increased, or are you prioritizing certain categories?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: I give the example of the immigration levels plan that we spoke about. That's the plan that grows to 310,000 permanent resident admissions this year. That was accompanied at the time—I think it was in the fall economic statement, or budget 2018—with the accompanying resources that relate to immigration levels, resources for the department and its partners to process those applications, and also resources for settlement after those permanent residents have come to Canada.

There's a formula-driven basis for the funding. When there's an increase, the department is resourced to deliver that.

Mr. David Tilson: Part of what the committee has seen in recent times is the problem of internally displaced persons who are not generally covered by refugee mechanisms, but who are, nonetheless, deserving of our assistance. What should Canada's policy be with respect to internally displaced persons?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet (Senior Director, International Network, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you for the question.

With respect to Canada's resettlement program, as you heard from the previous witness, the primary focus in the structure is on refugees. That said, there are mechanisms in the legislation that allow for special measures to be taken. We saw that implemented for survivors of Daesh. Again, with the number of refugees in need of resettlement at 1.4 million, we see that there's a great need and we work very closely with partners such as the UNHCR and private sponsors to provide solutions to those persons.

The Chair: I'm afraid that's the end of the seven minutes.

I'll just follow up with Mr. Tilson so that he doesn't think he's the only member facing this issue. Members on the government side are having some of the experiences and anecdotal....

Mr. David Tilson: I'm sure you are.

The Chair: I'm not quite sure I'm going to ask for it today, but just to put you on notice, I think that for this study, the committee will need data on both the numbers of applications by category and by region, rates of acceptance and rejection, and any appeal process that happens after that, because sometimes there's a second consideration. If we could have a comparative between...I don't know exactly what year I'd like to pick, but I believe that what Mr. Tilson is saying is occurring more than in Orangeville.

● (1705)

Mr. David Tilson: The centre of the universe.

The Chair: I think we're all hearing it.

The rejections may create more work at IRCC, but it has doubled the work in constituency offices, which serve as branch plant offices for IRCC every day.

That's not overstated is it, committee?

We may formulate that. I can get back to you about the kind of data we need, but I think we do need that here.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: We'd be happy to take that as an undertaking.

The Chair: Now we will hear from Mr. Garrison.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the officials for being here today.

I'm going to ask about LGBTQ refugees for several reasons. One is of course that they are a group that is high risk. They are often survivors of sexual violence before they arrive as refugees, and because of homophobia or transphobia they most often lack support networks available to other refugees. I acknowledge that there are other high-risk refugees. I'm not saying it's the only group.

I have approached two ministers of immigration in the Liberal government. In concert with Egale, Canada's human rights trust, with a proposal for what Egale calls a coordinated response to LGBTQ refugees—and I may not have the right people here—I'm going to ask, was that presented to the department for evaluation?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: It might have been but I'm not familiar, off the top, if that's come across my desk.

Mr. Randall Garrison: That's the kind of answer I expected, and it's the answer that concerns me. If it was given serious consideration, I would expect the group we have here would actually have seen it.

Minister McCallum and Minister Hussen wrote back very similar letters to me, after I approached both of them, which essentially said what I think is the problem here. They said that there is no discrimination, that they treat LGBTQ refugees exactly the same as everyone else. That's the problem. There are special needs here as high-risk refugees, both in terms of trying to access our system abroad and the services received here.

I want to say that there have been some improvements. Certainly, the Immigration and Refugee Board has a better set of guidelines for evaluating claims. That's a big step forward. On an emergency basis, your department has often been quite responsive. I think, in particular, to nothing less than a pogrom against gay men in Chechnya, where the department was very responsive. I'm not saying that you've never done the right thing. I'm saying quite often you do.

In countries in conflict—and this is where it first came up for us—like Syria, or in the surrounding countries that are taking in most of the refugees, how would an LGBTQ refugee access our system? How do they know they can make a claim based on sexual orientation, and how do they actually do that safely?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I think there are a couple of parts to that question.

I think the previous witnesses touched on accessing the UNHCR in terms of getting a referral for resettlement to Canada. Again, just to restate what was said earlier, when we do engage with the UNHCR to determine what cases we need from which part of the world, we do it, as the UNHCR mentioned, based on vulnerability: What is the protection need and the resettlement need based on in that particular country at that particular point, whether that be physical or legal protection needs for LGBTQ persons or survivors of torture or whatnot?

Again, it varies greatly from country to country in terms of the NGO network that is in place to support them. In some instances, that does not exist.

One of the programs we have at IRCC as well is the rainbow refugee resettlement assistance program, whereby we provide some funding to private sponsors who do choose to sponsor LGBTQ refugees. That program was recently renewed until 2020. Again, I think part of it is the community here in Canada reaching out and building the networks on the ground where these conflicts occur to make those in need aware of the solutions.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Certainly the funding for the rainbow refugee assistance program has been very welcome, although I will note it's still temporary funding. The LGBTQ community is not going away anytime soon, so I have trouble understanding why it remains a temporary program.

We know that accessing the system abroad is a difficult problem. Most LGBTQ refugees are not in camps because camps are not safe places for them in places like Syria or Turkey. They do have difficulty, because a lot of the selection is done through the camp process.

One of the things we were suggesting in the coordinated response was identifying local agencies that would be safe places where people could go to make an initial contact. We've had numerous examples, especially in the Kakuma camp in Kenya, where people who made claims based on sexual orientation were subsequently subject to violence because the confidentiality was not maintained.

Is there any special training on dealing with claims from the LGBTQ community that is given to Canadian personnel abroad who might receive asylum claims? Are they often local hires?

● (1710)

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I can certainly speak to the staff who are Canada-based and who go overseas. My colleague might be able to add a bit more on the local side.

Certainly each year there's a training program for officers who go out to deal with resettled refugee cases, and a component of that training deals with how to appropriately treat with sensitivity claims that are brought to them or applications that are brought to them from the LGBTQ2 community.

Mr. Mark Giralt: I would add that in our offices abroad, our program managers are ultimately responsible for the delivery of our programs. Part of what they will do is evaluate circumstances in which having our locally engaged staff involved in the processing of an application may add risk or may not be prudent, not just for the applicant but also for the employees. We'll take special measures and the Canada-based officer will do more than they would maybe normally do in the processing to protect the integrity of the process and make sure everybody's able to be processed without a problem.

Mr. Randall Garrison: In terms of settlement services on this side, anecdotally one of the things we found with the large number of Syrians who came was, first of all, there appeared to be very few LGBTQ refugees among the 25,000 Syrians when we should have expected, by numbers, 500 to 1,000. There doesn't seem to have been anywhere near that volume. That, to me, indicates a problem in the selection process. When they came, there was a tendency to assign settlement services to Syrians. The problem for LGBTQ refugees, those few who I do know in that category, for instance, was that they were assigned a language class which their identity made impossible to attend.

Is there any acknowledgement right now that LGBTQ refugees, once they get here, quite often require some different services or specific services? Again, to the second part of my question, there was, I think, a generalized failure to acknowledge that the trauma level might be different for LGBTQ refugees than for others.

The Chair: I need to cut you off there.

Mr. Whelan, you have seven minutes. That's maybe even a little generous.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. As long as it matches up with Mr. Garrison's time, we should be okay.

There's a few things I'd like to cover. The first is ODA.

My understanding is that last year the OECD Development Assistance Committee changed some of the rules around measuring ODA to include government expenditures on the first year of settlement services provided for refugees in the host country. I'm wondering if you guys are tracking that this year, and roughly where Canada might be in this additional classification of ODA.

Mr. Glen Linder: We don't have that information. I know that what we reported is obviously covered under what's called the ODAAA, and we report on that. Obviously, when there's a change, we adapt to that. That is something that's more within the purview of our colleagues at Global Affairs. We can look into that further if that's helpful.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, I'd love to get a sense of that. Maybe you can respond later about how much is being spent, and whether or not we're able to count things like privately sponsored classes, things that other countries might not have or that count towards these targets, and how that might add to an increase in what Canada considers an ODA for next year.

In terms of the levels plan, it looks like we're trending toward about 1% of the population. Is there any magic or policy to that number or any considerations that have gone into what appears to be a progression towards that target?

● (1715)

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: No. All levels targets would be, in a sense, arbitrary. They're choices by governments. Certainly the 1% figure has been advocated by several stakeholders. It's a bit of a clear marker, and people like a clear marker. In terms of some of the questions that your colleague had asked about contributions to GDP or to population growth, 1.1% versus 0.9% wouldn't turn the dial. There's no magic around the 1%.

Mr. Nick Whalen: In the Atlantic immigration pilot study that was done last year, we tend to see a trend towards immigrants to Canada going from more rural areas to more urban areas, even when they arrive here. There's more direct migration straight towards urban areas. Has any thought or consideration been given towards increasing the amount of immigration that would be targeted *ab initio* towards rural areas, understanding that half of those people will move to an urban area within five years, so that growth due to immigration across the country would be more balanced?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: There's been quite an evolution in the immigration program over some 20 years. Part of that was the advent of the provincial nominee program in 1998. You used to see Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver having 95% of Canada's immigrant landings. That's shifted considerably in the last 20 years. The immigrant admissions of the Prairies and Atlantic Canada have doubled in that time.

The Atlantic pilot that you mentioned is another example of an attempt to really refine that, with more *ab initio* reception in communities, but also working specifically with those communities and with the employers in those communities to have a specific settlement plan with those immigrants. The idea of retention is a core component. We're always experimenting with new ways of programming different pathways. There's been an evolution, and the Atlantic pilot is a good example of the latest evolution.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Within our immigration plan, it looks like refugee class or humanitarian assistance class is roughly 15% of the total. It appears that a lot of that is heavily weighted towards reunification and privately sponsored. In terms of our international commitments or being good international partners, and in your discussions with your colleagues at other foreign departments and with other bureaucrats, what's the sense about whether or not Canada should be allowing more UNHCR-directed immigration in the refugee class versus the way we've measured it? Are there any particular comments on how that's going and how that evolves?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Maybe I'll start, and then turn to my colleague.

You're right in mentioning the levels plan. The targets for the refugee resettlement category trend upwards over that three-year plan. Internationally, we are a leader in terms of the numbers of resettled refugees referred to us by the UNHCR. The previous witnesses talked about Canada's numbers there. That's significant.

We do have even more significant growth in the private sponsorship category. That's because of some of the demand that's out there. There's quite an outpouring of goodwill in this country, and so there's a large inventory of applications for people wanting to sponsor legitimate refugees.

Mr. Nick Whalen: When privately sponsored people come in, are they also principally coming from the UNHCR list or are they from a broader category?

When you say people who are in desperate or dire need, would that be their definition or the Canadians' definition, or does it meet the UNHCR definition of their 1.4 million of the 25 million?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: The difference between those two categories is that the government-assisted ones are referred to us specifically by the UNHCR versus privately sponsored, but those privately sponsored ones are refugees. They meet the convention definition of refugees.

Mr. Nick Whalen: But they're not from that subcategory, necessarily, of the 1.4 million who are in dire need of resettlement.

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: There may be an overlap. It's a bit difficult to ascertain in terms of how many of the cases would be on the UNHCR priority list for resettlement, but we know that sometimes we find that there is a privately sponsored case that would also be a UNHCR-referred case.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I may be shifting gears for a second, but this is great. We're just trying to get a sense. Maybe we could get some data if you guys have some estimates or statistics on what that overlap might look like, even from some moderate sample size. It might be nice to know.

With respect to internally displaced people, obviously it's a touchy subject. If there are internally displaced people due to some failure of the rule of law in a country, there's not going to be a lot of willingness from that source country to want to do some type of deal that would allow those people to come to Canada.

Has there been any experimentation or discussion around offering places like Ukraine, Colombia or Venezuela, countries that Canada has traditionally taken refugees from in the past, where we've said, "We understand that you're experiencing this trouble. We will make immigration available to your country, to many thousands of people, referred and assessed through Canadian diplomatic channels, to help relieve the pressure in your home country and encourage other countries to do the same"? Those people might come to Canada as permanent residents, but there might also be a high likelihood that, when things stabilize, they return. It might be a way to help address this much larger problem of 40 million internally displaced people worldwide.

What sort of plans might exist there?

● (1720)

The Chair: Briefly.

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: I would say that those conversations happen proactively. There are situations such as the survivors and the plans that we implemented after the Haitian earthquake a couple of years back.

As I indicated earlier and as UNHCR stated as well, the focus of the program is, from a resettlement perspective for refugees, that there are instances where we can, with the collaboration of the host government, implement special measures for internally displaced people.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask a bunch of random questions related to strategic policy and planning.

One of the first things is that the minister had in his mandate letter a visa framework review. Has your department been directed to complete this review, and if yes, when do you anticipate it coming out?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: I understand the visa review has been conducted over the last number of months, and there should be an announcement within weeks to months.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Colleagues of mine filed an ATIP request that was received by your department on April 3, 2018, specifically related to the global compact for migration. It is now September 27, nearly six months after this request was submitted, and there is still no response.

How are we supposed to get through a study like this if it's taking six months to get information on an ATIP request? Is that typical of the response time in your department?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: We can follow up on that ATIP request.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: It ranges by complexity, in terms of how long it takes to respond to one.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: My colleague can answer questions on that, on the compact.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Perfect. We'll get to that.

The other thing that our committee did was undertake a significant piece of work earlier in this Parliament around fraudulent immigration consultants and a review of the governing body that manages complaints, etc., related to that profession.

Has the government given you any direction to come up with a solution to that particular problem?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: The department is reviewing that report very carefully and will be coming forward with options and recommendations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When do you anticipate that coming forward?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Within the coming months.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many months?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: I couldn't say.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Have options been presented?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: They're reviewing the recommendations.

The Chair: I want to remind the member to keep within the scope of this current study.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The scope is pretty broad, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: It's pretty broad, and the first two questions were within scope, but this one is just pushing it. This is a gentle reminder.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: You did allow quite a generous scope in this—

The Chair: —big, generous scope.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: —which I will take advantage of copiously in the next few weeks.

The other trend that we've been hearing more of and getting more casework on is reports of abuse of international student visas. Schools might be set up, or something that would be deemed to be a school, and then student visas are issued to the school. People who are entering the country through this are going on to other areas of employment, essentially, working under the table.

Has your department been tasked with examining this?

● (1725)

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: Not to my knowledge, not specifically. Certainly, looking at the growing student volumes, we work a lot with the accreditation bodies of university and college communities, and provinces and territories. We certainly have a lot of engagement with them. But to my knowledge there has not been any specific direction on that point.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay.

I wanted to pick up on some of the questions that both of my colleagues asked with regard to processing and wait times. One of the things that I've noticed over the course of my parliamentary career, and certainly in the last couple of years, is that the.... I wish there was a day when MPs didn't have to do casework because it would be wonderful if it just happened so wonderfully and smoothly within your department.

I'm wondering what the average response time to MP case inquiries is today versus this time last year.

Mr. Mark Giralt: I don't have that information with me.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Would you be able to table that with the committee?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: We can follow up with the information, both about our call centre largely out of Montreal, but also the MP call line.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: One of the recommendations that came out of a study that we did earlier this year with regard to best practices on resettlement and integration for a specific cohort of refugees was related to family reunification. In looking at best practices for people to integrate into the Canadian social and economic fabric after they've been resettled in Canada, one of the things that came out was family reunification specific to the Yazidi community. We have many cases on my desk where we're being told that the wait times are 30-plus months for potential family reunification for genocide survivors.

Has the government tasked you to look at reducing wait times for that particular cohort?

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: With the family reunification cohort, I think we're looking at spouses, partners and children. There's been a lot of progress in bringing down those processing and wait times. There was a big effort in 2016 to bring down the backlog, to the point where—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I appreciate that. I'm looking specifically at that cohort.

Has the government directed you to look at ways to reduce the processing time for family reunification around Yazidi genocide survivors, especially given that this committee had recommendations that suggested that would be beneficial?

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: To add to what my colleague has indicated, we've been indicating and have been prioritizing cases that fall under the one-year window, for example. I think we've seen the cases being processed in a couple of months, not the 30 months that is the average for the one-year window category.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Please table with the committee the number of outstanding cases for family reunification requests specific to the Yazidi cohort.

Mr. Jean-Marc Gionet: Yes.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

The Chair: I think that's the end.

Mr. Sarai, you have about three minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I have a couple of questions since we're doing this on migration and perhaps trying to compare other migration.

Has IRCC ever done a study to see what the success is of the three bulk categories of immigrants we have, those being economic immigrants, family reunification and refugees? Has there been a longer study over 10 or 20 years to see what their success is and to see if they are actually different in terms of not just the financial index, but in happiness and health and the indexes that are out there, and to see how they fare in comparison to others?

I think it would be very helpful for us on this migration study to see different patterns and different success rates, and to see if they overlap. For example, how do a single person or a couple who migrate as economic immigrants fit into a community versus when they get family reunification and have other members of their family here? How did they settle? How are their happiness or well-being and their success in a neighbourhood?

I'm not expecting you to have the answers, but if you have those studies, it would be very helpful if you could provide those to the chair.

I have a second question.

Have you looked at best practices of other OECD countries, developed countries, in terms of their settlement of global migrants, not just for refugees, but also for economic migrants and family reunification in terms of seeing how those models may have been successful or not successful and what to avoid?

As we've seen in Europe in some places, migration and immigration have not been successful. Why was it unsuccessful there whereas it has been much more successful here in Canada?

● (1730)

Mr. Matt de Vlieger: On the first question about outcomes, we would certainly be happy to share with the committee data on outcomes. We are able to do a lot of longitudinal data tracking. We're able to link our landings data: immigrants who come to this country, from where, and their profile with the tax filer data. There's a two-year lag time, but certainly on the economic front you will see by economic category, various economic programs and even the Atlantic immigration pilot where they will be in terms of employment and employment earnings and that sort of thing. Also, there is social data. We will undertake to provide the committee some information like that.

Your second question is about best practices of the OECD. With the OECD, Canada is a pretty active member at the migration table. A lot of sharing of best practices happens there. Specifically, in the last couple of years, because the OECD is so heavy with European members, they have been studying that cohort of Middle East movement, Syrian movement, and sharing best practices. I think they have some good reports from the last couple of years that you might want to take a look at in terms of that very question about what kinds of settlement practices work in Germany versus a comparison to Canada.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I would ask if the analysts would be able to get the OECD ones, and for the ones you have, if you could provide those to the chair for our purposes.

Thank you.

The Chair: That's perfect.

Thank you again. We may call you back.

The meeting is adjourned.