



Immigration, Refugees  
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés  
et Citoyenneté Canada

Deputy Minister

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Mr. John Williamson  
Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts  
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Dear Chair:

Thank you for your correspondence of January 10, 2023, requesting additional information pertaining to Recommendation 1 made in Report 70 – Call Centres.

As the Committee acknowledges, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) operational context, including that of the Client Support Centre (CSC), has changed considerably since the Report 70, as a result of the continued impacts from the global COVID-19 pandemic and the recent humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. Please find enclosed information from IRCC with additional details concerning the CSC's call rate and IRCC's plans to continuously improve the experience of our clients, as requested in your correspondence.

I hope that this information is of assistance to you in meeting your important mandate.

Yours sincerely,

Christiane Fox

Enclosures

# PACP – Call centres

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## Question

Your department provided information to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts in May pertaining to recommendations made in Report 70 – Call Centres.

The Committee would like some additional information regarding Recommendation 1. Although the Committee acknowledges that the conflicts in various parts of the world have an effect on the Department, in light of various funding increases and new practices, has the call answer rate improved since the report was presented in the House, and what measures are being taken by the department to improve it?

## Response

Our previous response to House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Accounts in May 2022, highlighted that in 2021-2022, the volume of telephone enquiries increased by 103% and similarly, the number of emails increased by 26% over the previous year.

Based on the volume of activity to date in 2022-2023 (April 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023), there is still an increasing demand for client support for most channels:

- IRCC has received 6.9M calls through its *regular* telephone channel requesting assistance from an agent, representing an additional 57% year-over-year increase, from the 4.4M calls received for the same period in 2021-22.
- The Ministerial Centre for Members of Parliament and Senators (MCMPS), which responds to enquiries via telephone and email, processed 405K enquiries this year compared to 234K for the same period in 2021-2022, representing a 73% increase.
- IRCC's dedicated crisis support for Afghanistan and Ukraine has received 233K calls in 2022-2023, up from 99K calls in 2021-22 and 205K emails in 2022-2023, compared to 340K emails in 2021-2022 (enquiries for 2021-22 reflect the period from August 2021 to March 31<sup>st</sup> 2022 only, as crisis support opened in August 2021).

### Client Service Centre (CSC) performance and the call answer rate

The overall call answer rate for all our service channels, including the *regular* telephone channel and dedicated crisis support for Afghanistan and Ukraine in 2022-23 (April 2022 to February 28, 2023) is 12.7%. However, over the last few weeks, the call answer rate has improved, increasing to approximately 26% for the week ending March 17<sup>th</sup>. This increase is due to recent budgetary investments in newly hired agents and new technology in place at the Client Support Centre.

For the CSC *regular* telephone channel, which was the focus of Recommendation 1, the call answer rate has decreased to 10.9% in 2022-2023 (April 2022 to February 28, 2023). This call answer rate is a reflection of the volume increases highlighted above which continue to exceed the capacity of the CSC.

IRCC has responded to fewer calls on the *regular* telephone channel as resources were aligned to deliver on the Government's priority to ensure clients facing urgent humanitarian crises have timely access to personalized support on a priority basis. The rapid shift of agents from regular operations (telephone and



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email) to respond to enquiries for Afghanistan and Ukraine resulted in better performance for the dedicated crisis support channel with call answer rates of 61.9% for Afghanistan support and 74.0% for Ukraine support for 2022-2023 year to date (April 1, 2022 to February 28, 2023).

As part of the Department's lessons learned following the pandemic and two unprecedented global humanitarian crises back-to-back, we are exploring a variety of possible opportunities to establish dedicated resources to help stabilize performance when faced surges during crises.

### Measures to improve CSC performance, including the answer rate

The Department acknowledges that further improvements are needed to meet client expectations and is using a multi-pronged approach to improve the call answer rate. This includes increasing client support capacity through the use of Budget 2022 funding support, and the implementation of new online tools and practices to improve access to personalized support across all support channels at the CSC (telephone, email, MCMPS and crisis support channels).

### *Client Support Funding*

Budget 2022 announced \$187.3M over 5 years and \$37.2M ongoing to permanently retain full-time equivalent resources (FTEs) at the CSC that were temporarily hired as a result of Budget 2019 and 2021 funding, and hire additional 107 incremental FTEs to continue responding to a rapidly growing volume of enquiries. These investments have allowed IRCC to maintain priority operations, in particular the CSC's abuse line (for example, vulnerable workers, forced marriage, etc.), MCMPS, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Employer Portal and Victims of Air Disasters inboxes in light of volume increases.

Budget 2022 funding has allowed IRCC to focus on recruiting, hiring and training employees to increase the capacity at the CSC to make sure that agents are prepared to provide quality support in response to enquiries from clients and improve performance results in 2023-2024. With the injection of this funding and efforts made to hire and train new agents, the call answer rate is on an increasing trend: 16.2% for the month of February 2023 and 26.2% for the week ending March 17<sup>th</sup>. IRCC expects that this trend will continue and the year-to-date call answer rate will increase to 30% by the end of 2023-2024 while continuing to maintain an unprecedented answer rate on Afghanistan and Ukraine channels as well as the MCMPS.

Additionally, IRCC is using this investment to stabilize the technology and tools used at the CSC to mitigate the risk of failing technologies supporting operations until the time that the Department implements modern technology through its Digital Platform Modernization (DPM) Program.

### *Addressing client enquiries upstream*

IRCC continues to put efforts into understanding clients' needs through conducting surveys regularly with clients of key immigration and citizenship programs. Based on insights provided by the Client Experience Survey, IRCC has been working to offset the impact of rising enquiry volumes, through initiatives that



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improve the services offered to our clients and address the cause of enquiries upstream by better managing client expectations.

IRCC is implementing actions to relieve the pressures on services faced in the passport, citizenship, temporary resident and permanent resident programs, with a particular focus on short term measures to be implemented by March 2023. To that end, IRCC has moved a number of key services online to support clients, including confirming permanent residence status online, digitizing various types of applications, and introducing online citizenship testing and citizenship ceremonies.

IRCC understands that clients are seeking reassurance about their applications as a result of delays in application processing. The majority of enquiries are from clients wanting to know the status of their application. Following the successful launch of the Citizenship Grant Application Status Tracker and Permanent Residence Application Status Tracker for family class spousal, common law, and dependent clients, IRCC continues to launch additional trackers allowing clients to easily track the status of their application information online. As of February 2023, all Express Entry (Canadian Experience Class, Federal Skilled Work Class, Federal Skilled Trade Class and Provincial Nominee Program) clients have access to the Application Status Tracker. IRCC plans to further expand the Application Status Tracker to additional lines of business (e.g. Temporary Resident Study Permit (SP) visa, Temporary Resident Work Permit (WP) visa and Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) by the end of March 2023.

Additionally, IRCC continues to produce a high volume of final decisions across all business lines. Between January and December 2022, IRCC made 5.1M final decisions for permanent residents, temporary residents (excluding Electronic Travel Authorizations) and citizenship. In 2023 (January and February), IRCC made 1.1 million final decisions, which is 74% higher than the same period for 2022. More decisions means less clients that will require client support services.

### *Digital Platform Modernization (DPM)*

While advancements have been made in the short-term to improve client services, IRCC recognizes that longer term, fundamental changes are required in order to modernize programs and services to better meet client expectations and needs.

IRCC conducts comprehensive assessments of the client experience based on information provided through its annual client surveys as well as direct client feedback. This has allowed the Department to prioritize key business capabilities needed to address client needs which has influenced the development of a new Client Experience Platform (CXP) as part of DPM. Once completed, it will provide the tools and capabilities needed to offer a seamless client experience, enable IRCC to personalize services to clients, and replace existing outdated and/or standalone client-facing portals and tools. The DPM Programme is on track to procure and implement the CXP later this summer, and begin to deliver benefits to some clients as early as the next fiscal year (2023-2024).

As part of IRCC's DPM Phase 3, the Department will begin to replace outdated client support tools and technology with client relationship management capabilities which will bring greater efficiency and reliability to client support service delivery. With modernized technology capabilities, it is anticipated that



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IRCC's tools would be resilient and withstand future surges in client volumes; providing more reliability and stability to service operations. It is also anticipated that improved tools and technology, particularly those that empower clients to self-serve on non-complex tasks, could reduce the dependency on IRCC's personalized support channels.

IRCC remains committed to improving our services for clients in the short term, and moving into the future.

