



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

Ottawa K1A 1L1

Mr. John Williamson, M.P.
Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts
House of Commons
John.Williamson@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Williamson:

Thank you for your correspondence dated April 4, 2022, requesting additional information stemming from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC's) government response to [Report 10 \(43rd Parliament, 2nd Session\), Request for Government Response to the 69th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, Processing of Asylum Claims, Report 2 of the 2019 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada](#) and [Report 11 \(43rd Parliament, 2nd Session\), Request for Government Response to the 70th Report from the 42nd Parliament, 1st Session, Call Centres, Report 1 of the 2019 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada](#).

Please find below information from IRCC concerning parts 1 and 3 of your most recent correspondence.

“Regarding Recommendation 1, the response did not provide many details about the new Temporary Resident Funding Model, which was to be implemented in April 2022. The Committee would like to have more information about the pilot project, in particular on how it will help IRCC to access additional funding from central agencies quickly to better match shifting volumes of asylum claims. The Committee would like to receive this information no later than 13 May 2022.”

Specific details concerning the Temporary Resident Funding Model cannot be disclosed as they are subject to Cabinet confidence.

IRCC intends to utilize the permanent funding approved through Budget 2022 to efficiently and effectively deliver on Temporary Resident programs. In terms of applicability of this model to the asylum system and addressing asylum claims, the main differences in application are 1) no revenue is generated from asylum claimants, 2) forecasts of intake for Temporary Residents are relatively more stable and benchmarked against industry (travel, economic recovery, etc.) and 3) IRCC has the authority to collect fees from Temporary Resident applicants.

Budget 2022 provided \$1.3 billion over the next five years and \$331.2 million in ongoing funding to support the long-term stability and integrity of the asylum system for IRCC, the Canada Border Services Agency, the Immigration and Refugee Board and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. This funding allows for a temporary increase in the number of claims that can be processed by the asylum system, above the baseline capacity.

“Regarding Recommendation 1, IRCC’s response stated that its call answer rate increased from 25% in 2018–2019 to 44% in 2019–2020. Although this is an improvement, it is still a far cry from 100%. IRCC also reported that a pilot project on the impact of extended hours on the call answer rate was on hold due to COVID-19. The Committee would like to receive an update on the 2020–2021 call answer rate, actions taken to improve the call answer rate, and the status of the pilot project on the impact of extended hours on the call answer rate. The Committee would like to receive this information no later than 13 May 2022.”

In 2020-21, IRCC’s Client Support Centre (CSC) received a total of 5.94 million enquiries, of which 4.2 million were calls (2.6 million callers requested to talk to an agent) and 1.5 million were email enquiries. IRCC’s call answer rate fell to 40% in 2020-21 due to the service disruptions associated with the global pandemic.

The CSC is a critical stop gap for the Department’s organizational resiliency to facilitate service in the COVID-19 context. COVID-19 disrupted services provided by the Department, resulting in an increase in the number of enquiries received at the CSC, particularly by email, as a result of suspended or delayed processing. In 2020-21, the number of emails increased by 53% over the previous year.

Despite the efforts put in place up to March 31, 2021, to increase the call answer rate and the email processing times, service disruptions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic were significant and caused ripple effects to global migration and the immigration system writ large, including for client support. When there are pressures in the immigration system – be it lengthy processing times; complex processes; or rising volumes – pressure on entry points, like the CSC, increase. Clients contacted the CSC seeking information about IRCC programs and services, their ability to travel, an update on the status of their application and processing times, or support during emergency situations.

COVID-19 also increased the complexity of support interactions as clients want to know how departmental policies applied to their unique circumstances. To properly reassure clients, many of whom are facing vulnerable circumstances, agents required more time to explain COVID policies and facilitation measures put in place, ensuring clients receive clear and complete information to help alleviate their anxiety and help them take the appropriate next steps.

Improving access to the personalized support offered by the CSC by telephone is and has been a priority for the Department in the last few years and was achieved by an increased number of agents available to respond to enquiries (full-time equivalent (FTE) resources), reducing the average handle time of each enquiry by improving agent tools, training and technology and by implementing initiatives that address the root causes of why clients seek out support (see Other Measures to Improve Client Service).

In IRCC’s detailed action plan to respond to the Auditor General of Canada’s recommendations on the Spring 2019 Audit of Federal Government Call Centers, one of IRCC’s action plan commitments was to increase the call answer rate from 25% to 50% (proportion of clients able to speak to an agent).

Temporary investments announced in Budget 2019 (of \$42.9 million for 2019-2020 and 2020-2021) and Budget 2021 (of \$74.4 million for 2021-2022, 2022-2023 and 2023-2024) allowed for the hiring and retention of 237.4 additional FTEs at the CSC. The increase in full-time equivalent resources enabled the Department to move towards attaining its publicly communicated service standard of a call answer rate of 50% by March 2021 and email processing times of three business days. Prior to these investments, IRCC's CSC had a call answer rate of 25% and email processing times exceeded 10 business days in 2018-19. To support efforts to reduce processing times, the Budget 2019 investment also resulted in the implementation of a number of first contact resolution initiatives at the CSC, aimed at resolving client issues at the first point that the client contacts the Department. While not suitable for all client issues, first contact resolution has led to more efficient and faster service for clients, and has in some cases resulted in efficiency gains because clients' issues were resolved during their first interaction. Examples of two such types of issues that are now responded to more quickly are: changes of address, and resending client correspondence.

However, the pandemic, as well as global crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine, has resulted in the volume of enquiries and demand for support at the CSC exceeding the Department's forecast. The demand is expected to continue growing at a significant rate. In 2021-22, the CSC received 8.6M calls, a more than 100% increase from the previous year. Online (or email) enquiries rose to 1.9M, and enquiries at the Ministerial Centre for Members of Parliament and Senators rose to 272K, for a total of nearly 11 million inquiries in 2021-22. Budget 2022 provided IRCC's CSC with \$187.3 million over five years and \$37.2 million to improve its capacity to respond to a growing volume of enquiries and to invest in the technology and tools required to better support people using our services.

In addition to investments directly to the CSC, IRCC is also focusing on reducing the root cause of enquiries by better managing client expectations regarding processing times in the COVID and post-COVID context (e.g. improving the transparency of the expected timeframe to receive an acknowledgement of receipt and a final decision), implementing the use of proactive notifications to reduce the volume of enquiries, improving the clarity of client communication (e.g. usability testing), and addressing the current email inventory to reduce the rate of repeat enquiries (which creates a duplication of efforts).

In May 2021, the Department introduced the Citizenship Application Tracker, which allows clients to check their application status in real-time, see the next steps they need to take, verify the progress of their application and the timeline of their citizenship grant application history. On February 3, 2022, IRCC introduced a new Permanent Residence Application Tracker for family class spousal, common law, and dependent clients, allowing them to easily track the status of their application information online. IRCC plans to launch additional application status tools for other lines of business in the future.

On March 31, 2022, IRCC updated its online processing times tool for permanent residence and citizenship services to give clients more accurate estimates of how long it will take to process their application. Updates to the processing times tool are done on a weekly basis.

These initiatives are aimed at mitigating the volume of enquiries received by the Department (including the CSC) and the Department will be monitoring their impact with a view of trying to meet client expectations for accessible and timely client support.

Following Budget 2019, IRCC had committed to implementing a pilot to extend the hours of the CSC to improve accessibility, quality and timeliness of client support. IRCC was in the process of proceeding with a pilot to measure the impact of extended hours on the call answer rate in June 2020. Due to the COVID situation, the CSC changed course and instead focused its operations on critical functions to ensure business continuity. Subsequently, the pilot was paused.

In late 2020, IRCC reassessed the feasibility of the pilot in light of the continuing operational impact of the pandemic. The analysis revealed that a further expansion of the CSC's hours of operation would risk negatively impacting service levels (the call answer rate) during regular hours, which is when the majority of calls are received. To ensure the stability of regular hours of operation, IRCC decided not to proceed with the pilot and rather standardized the CSC's hours of operation beginning in August 2020. This change ensures fair accessibility across all Canadian time zones during hours of business, from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm.

At this time, no further expansion of the hours of operation at the CSC is being considered, with the exception of expanding hours on an ad hoc basis for exceptional humanitarian crises. IRCC has done this a number of times over the past several years for crises such as Syria, earthquakes in Haiti and Nepal, the Fort McMurray fires, air disaster PS752, and the situations in Afghanistan and Ukraine. For example, at the beginning of the Afghanistan crisis, the line opened at 4am EST to 7pm during weekdays to accommodate clients due to the time difference, and both the Afghanistan and Ukraine lines have been opened during weekends.

IRCC's response to Part 2 of your correspondence will be delivered no later than September 30, 2022, as requested.

I hope that this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Xavier
Acting Deputy Minister
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada