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• (0850)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):
Good morning, everyone.

I call to order the third meeting of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Today we have a briefing by officials from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, including Dr. Harpreet Kochhar, assistant deputy minister, operations; Marian Campbell Jarvis, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Fraser Valentine, assistant deputy minister, settlement and integration; and Daniel Mills, assistant deputy minister and chief financial officer.

Welcome, everyone.

We have requested that the officials have opening remarks of about 30 minutes. I hope everyone is okay with that. After their opening remarks we will go into rounds of questioning.

I thank the officials from the department for coming to give us an overview of the different programs and to update us on the activities of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. We really look forward to hearing from you before we embark on our important work for the 43rd Parliament.

Welcome. I turn it over to you the witnesses.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

[Translation]

Good morning, everyone.

Even though it's winter, we're very happy to be here with you.

Our intention this morning is to present an overview of the department's responsibilities as well as some information of a technical nature. I know that our minister, the Hon. Marco Mendicino, will have other opportunities to present his priorities and mandate to you.

[English]

We are really pleased to be here this morning to present to you some information about the programs in the department.

I'm going to start with slide 3 to give you a bit of an introduction to the department and our responsibilities at Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees Canada.

One of the most important features of Canada's immigration system is the managed migration model. What that really means is that we have legal pathways for permanent and temporary residents, but we also have a plan, and the plan allows us to set levels and manage migration into Canada.

Every year we set a plan that's a rolling three-year model of levels of humanitarian and compassionate grounds, economic immigration and, of course, the family class. We can control the intake of some of those applications, which allows us to prepare and plan and better settle immigrants coming into the country.

We consider as future Canadian citizens all permanent residents who come to Canada and want to settle, and that pathway is really important. We will talk a little bit more about the temporary residents later in the presentation.

[Translation]

It is clear that immigration means more than just facilitating the movement of people. Several elements are linked to it.

First, there's economic development. Given our demographic trends, it is important to have the talent, growth and skills needed not only to fill the gaps in the labour market, but also to grow the economy.

Second, it's about nation-building. Immigration is truly a societal project to enrich the country and diversity, and also to reunite families. Last year, 85,000 people were reunited with their families.

Third, there's the global reach. Globally, the managed approach—which I mentioned earlier—has become a model.

Finally, there are the elements of national security. It's always important to balance openness with the security of the country and Canadians.

Our department is the only federal government department that issues trusted identity documents, such as the permanent resident card.

[English]

It's important to note on slide 5 the legal framework that guides the department. You've probably heard a fair amount about the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, known by its acronym, IR-PA. It's a thick tome, not necessarily light reading. It's very technical, very prescriptive, but it's the framework that guides all of the department's actions in organizing immigration to Canada, refugee protection and enforcement.

This act also provides the guidance and the framework for the Immigration and Refugee Board.

We have a Citizenship Act that describes the pathways to citizenship, who can acquire citizenship, how citizenship can be revoked, the proof of citizenship and what is recognized as such.

The Canadian passport order provides direction on how passports can be issued.

The Department of Citizenship and Immigration Act is the enabling legislation for the department. Of course, there is also a huge framework of international law that guides, for example, protected persons and refugees.

All of that, taken together, is the framework that provides direction and guidance to the department.

Turning to slide 6, one of the features that the OECD has noted about Canada's immigration system is that it's nimble and adaptable and able to take into account the challenges of the changing world. One element that we like to think about is that the system works as a continuum, from the decision to migrate or Canada's decisions on selection all the way through to settlement and ultimately a pathway to citizenship.

The system is evidence-based. What we mean by that is that we collect performance data on programs and our activities. The data allows us to further undertake research and undertake evaluation. We use the information to allow the programs and the policies to continuously improve and also to adapt.

Continuous improvement is obvious, but it's important for a few reasons. One is that Canada's immigration system needs to adapt to changing migration patterns globally. We're certainly seeing more and more people on the move. Some of this movement is due to economic migration, but it is also due to the deteriorating state around the world and rogue states and people fleeing violence.

Not only do we wish or need to adapt to changing migration patterns. We're also looking at the changing economic patterns and at what skills and competencies can support Canada's economy, but also the changing expectations of citizens as technology improves and people's expectations for client service and quality change. The department is attuned to those things as well.

Next is slide 7. Here, there are really two main pathways that we think about in coming to Canada.

The first is that of the temporary residents; that is, the range of visitors. There are people who are coming as tourists or for business purposes or to visit family. The second group is international students. We're seeing the number of students increase. More and

more students are wanting to come to Canadian universities and colleges to study. The category of temporary foreign workers is really a mixed range. We have those highly skilled in IT, engineers and agricultural workers. There is a real range of skills and competencies that fit the needs of the Canadian economy and labour market.

The second pathway includes the permanent residents. These are people who wish to come to Canada to settle. A large percentage of our permanent residents, about 80%, will ultimately seek citizenship. That demonstrates a real attachment to Canada.

Permanent residents come in three categories as well: the economic immigrants—people who wish to work and contribute in that way to Canada's labour market and economy—spouses and family members, people who are joining economic immigrants or permanent residents or Canadian citizens who are already here; and of course refugees and protected persons who are needing protection and a safe harbour in Canada to start a new life.

For a little bit more information, we'll dive a little deeper into who the temporary residents are. Regarding visitors, the majority—these are business travellers or tourists—are allowed to stay for six months. Unless otherwise specified, temporary visitors require a visa or an electronic travel authorization to come to the country.

Students hold study permits. If you're coming from abroad, you require a study permit, which is normally aligned with the designated learning institution in Canada. It's the provinces that designate their learning institution. The student can amend the permit if they decide their program of study isn't for them and they decide to change schools.

- (0855)

If you are a student with a study permit, you are able to work part time in Canada, and there are different hours, whether you're working on campus or off campus.

Work permits for temporary foreign workers and others are tied normally to a particular employer, but we also have open permits that allow holders of such permits permission to work in Canada and the flexibility often to work in the same sector but perhaps through a different employer.

Even though temporary residents are temporary in nature, they have rights in Canada. They are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and they have access to some government benefits and programs.

On slide 9, we dive a little deeper into the subject of permanent residents. As you can see from the pie chart, more than half of the permanent residents—shown by the blue, yellow and green pieces of the pie—are economic immigrants. However, not all of these people are economic immigrants per se, because the economic immigrant would be the principal applicant and they are able to bring their immediate family with them. That accounts for those three slices of the pie.

The next largest piece of the pie is the family reunification, in purple, representing 27%. In 2019, there were over 91,000 admissions in the family class. This is a combination of spouses and children, but also parents and grandparents. Canada is one of the few countries that has a parent and grandparent reunification class.

The last two slices are in grey and in black, representing the refugees and the protected persons, as well as the humanitarian and compassionate class. The humanitarian and compassionate class is a very narrow slice that's used in very unique situations, normally when someone is otherwise inadmissible, but for humanitarian and compassionate grounds, that is waived.

The proportions of the pie have held largely consistent over the years, and this is fairly typical, except I would note between 2015 and 2017, when, due to Operation Syria, the refugee category expanded when Canada resettled over 26,000 Syrian refugees.

I mentioned already the immigration levels plan, which we describe in slide 10. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act requires that the minister table an annual report in Parliament, part of which is the immigration levels plan. In 2017, the minister began a three-year rolling plan, which we have found to be a more effective way to prepare the country for our managed migration and to plan and organize our settlement services and our own operations. Everybody is transparent and everybody in the country knows what the plan is going forward.

The annual plan is normally tabled in the fall, by November. However, with the election this past year and the new Parliament, the plan will be tabled by mid-March, so you can expect that soon.

In the immigration levels plan, the government sets targets for economic immigration, for family reunification and for resettled refugees and protected persons. That helps us plan and prepare, as noted, for settlement in our operations.

On slide 11, there's a bit more about some of the programs that support those categories of permanent residents. In the economic category, there are a number of programs that target specific needs, such as the federal skilled workers program and the federal business immigration programs.

• (0900)

There are also a number of pilots that the government has launched: a target geographic or sectoral immigration pilot to spread the benefits of immigration beyond, for example, Canada's largest cities, or pilots to address particular needs and sectors—for example, the agricultural pilot.

As for the family category, I've already noted the two pathways there: the spouses and partners and children, and then the parents and grandparents.

As to the protected persons and refugees, we have a few classes of refugees. There are the government-assisted refugees, who are selected, normally from overseas camps, by the UNHCR and come to Canada as permanent residents.

The second class is something that I think Canada is quite proud of internationally. It's the class of privately sponsored refugees, whereby groups of Canadians sponsor refugees to come to Canada.

This was really a sign of Canadians wanting to help. This program has been in place for over 40 years.

The blended visa office-referred refugees, which is a very unintuitive name, come under a blended program, which is a combination of government sponsorship and private sponsorship. These refugees are normally complex cases referred by the UNHCR.

I spoke earlier about the humanitarian and compassionate grounds.

I'll now turn to my colleague, Fraser Valentine, who will provide a little bit more information on settlement.

• (0905)

Mr. Fraser Valentine (Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):
Thanks, Marian.

Good morning, everybody.

One thing that sets Canada's immigration program apart from many other programs in the world is, as Marian highlighted, the front end. We spend a lot of time thinking about selection: who, how many and why we invite them to the country.

The other unique feature is the settlement program at the back end of the program. I thought I would highlight four things that set our settlement program apart. It is recognized internationally and was recently recognized by the OECD.

The first is the structure of the program. We have those two pillars. What's unique is that we calibrate the settlement program and the funding available to that program against the levels plan. If levels go up, then the size of the envelope available for settlement services across the country goes up as well.

With respect to funding, you'll see on slide 12 that in 2019-20, \$779 million was available to distribute across the country. That funding does not flow to provinces; it is allocated to each provincial jurisdiction based on actual landings from the three previous years. The funding, however, flows to community-based organizations.

That's the other unique feature about the program, the delivery. It really is a partnership that exists between the Government of Canada, our provincial and territorial colleagues and civil society and community-based organizations. We fund approximately 500 organizations across the country, and they deliver the suite of services shown on the right-hand side of that slide, which I'd really break down into three areas.

The first is what I think of as enabling services, such as information, referral and orientation programs and getting people to the services they need so that they can be successful in their communities and the labour market.

The second grouping is direct services, such as language training and employment supports. That's the biggest part of the program.

The last is indirect or capacity-building supports. We fund a range of settlement organizations and umbrella organizations so that they can come together and represent the sector but also have conversations with government.

I should just note as well that with respect to Quebec there is a separate allocation, which is provided to Quebec under the Canada-Québec Accord. In 2019-20, \$529 million was transferred. Quebec is solely responsible for both selection and settlement; the Government of Canada does not play in that space.

Finally, with respect to clients, all permanent residents and protected persons can access all settlement services for as long as they have that status as a protected person or a permanent resident. Once you become a citizen, you can no longer access settlement services.

In 2018-19, 520,000 unique clients accessed services. Many clients will access a number of different services; the term "unique client" counts the actual absolute number. This represented about a 14% increase from the previous year, which isn't a surprise, because we're bringing more people into the country.

I'll end just by giving you a sense of the breakdown of folks who are accessing those services.

Of those 520,000, 43% came through our economic programming. The majority of them are spouses and dependents, not the principal applicant—which makes sense, given our selection approach; some 29% are refugees, and they tend to be the longest users of settlement services; finally, 23% are sponsored family members.

I'll stop there. Of course, I am happy to answer questions.

● (0910)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I'll pick up where Fraser left off.

[Translation]

Once again, we are here with you to give you an overview of the programs, but also of service delivery.

[English]

My job as an ADM of operations is to oversee many operational components, so I'll go a little bit deep into the operational realities of the department.

I'll start with the fact that as immigration happens, we want to protect and safeguard the health, safety and security of Canadians; that is of utmost importance to us. Immigration screening is thus a critical tool used to manage the entry to Canada.

Screening happens to ensure that the travellers are genuine, to protect the health, safety and security of Canadians as the immigrants enter, as well as to maintain public confidence among Canadians in immigration. That's of prime importance for both temporary and permanent residents.

They undergo a different kind of screening when they come to Canada. It depends upon the level of screening required or the level of risk posed by a visitor, which is currently also determined by their nationality. Also, screening for security, criminality and crimes against humanity is performed, in partnership with Canada Border Services Agency. We'll talk about that a little later.

[Translation]

On this slide we describe some very important things. For example, we describe who we're talking about and what we're talking about, which is temporary residents, the temporary resident visa and the electronic travel authorization. Then we describe the places we're talking about: overseas, at the border, and in Canada.

[English]

Most of what is happening is aimed at providing or getting from the clients information that is important for us to screen; for example, biographic information—fingerprints, facial recognition and that kind of stuff, information that is held by trusted partners such as the RCMP, M5 partners and so on. There is also information already existing in our system—for example, if somebody has applied earlier. There are also certain additional screening aspects that are needed.

Next is an important piece, in that very few are aware that we are in the business of screening and monitoring the health of immigrants in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The immigration medical exam applies to all foreign nationals who plan to be in Canada for more than six months. If you're coming here for more than six months, the immigration medical exam will be done, or if you're coming here permanently, an immigration medical exam will be needed from you. This exam screens for any danger to public health, such as active tuberculosis and other diseases, and danger to public safety; for example, severe mental health issues and excessive demand...

This health screening helps us to protect Canada against the arrival of infectious diseases. Also, the department itself is very much involved in another program that is an off-shoot of the migration health program, which is the interim federal health program. The interim federal health program provides temporary funding or health care coverage to those in need—refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable populations—until they become further eligible for provincial or territorial health coverage. That is an important part in which the department plays a big role.

In terms of Canadians, what my colleague Marian referred to is that when we bring in permanent residents, the ultimate impact is that they are going to become citizens at one point and then holders of a Canadian passport.

Citizenship is an important aspect. IRCC is not simply about bringing people from abroad; it is also to help them attain Canadian citizenship as well as Canadian values. Citizenship is granted to those who are born in Canada, those whose parents were born here, or those naturalized, which is the group I described. There is a process in which we go through different stages: residency requirements, a language test, another test of citizenship values, and that's when we get to the citizenship point.

We're proud that Canada is a country in which, according to the 2016 Census 86% of eligible adult permanent residents have transferred their status to citizenship. This is among the highest naturalization rates of all countries.

- (0915)

Canadian citizenship means a lot to new Canadians. If you have ever been to a citizenship ceremony, you will have seen a range of emotions when new immigrants become Canadians.

There is also another aspect where eligibility is concerned that the IRCC is responsible for. Canadian citizens in some circumstances may lose or renounce their citizenship. That part is also something that rests with the IRCC. Citizenship may be revoked from naturalized Canadians if obtained as a result of fraud or misrepresentation and in some other circumstances. That's a part that also rests with the IRCC.

Our next slide is on passports. The next natural step from citizenship is getting a passport. A passport, actually, is a foundational identity document. This document is required for Canadians to travel internationally. Again we are proud that 66% of Canadians at this time hold a valid passport. This means almost 24 million passports in circulation.

The IRCC is responsible for granting different types of passports or travel documents to Canadians. One thing that is very much in our purview is that passport service delivery is done in collaboration with two other partners. One is ESDC or Service Canada, which does the domestic delivery. Global Affairs does it in terms of our services abroad through the consular services.

The IRCC itself also handles special passports—for example, diplomatic passports, travel documents for non-Canadians, and so on. That itself is very much a security matter that maintains Canadian passport security and integrity. The value of the Canadian passport is that it allows unrestricted entry to the more than 120 countries who respect it.

Among our key partners I mentioned a few earlier—the RCMP, GAC, and ESDC. We do a lot of our work in partnership. We're dependent on our partners. That is our biggest friend and biggest value, too.

The Canada Border Services Agency is the main co-delivery partner for IRPA, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which manages the flow of travel of Canadians at the port of entry. We are not at the port of entry; the CBSA is. They provide intelligence on security matters and also manage irregular migration at borders.

Similarly, as I mentioned, ESDC, which provides services through Service Canada for passports, is also responsible for the

labour market impact assessment, which is necessary for temporary foreign workers.

As for Global Affairs, as I mentioned earlier we have our missions abroad, from which we operate as well as deliver passports.

I also mentioned the Public Health Agency of Canada, which is responsible for giving us direction for medical screening.

I would be remiss if I did not mention, on slide 18, the key partners, which are the provinces and territories, who play a very important part. The FPT landscape in immigration has been very solid. Every year there is a set-up for the way we can have a shared federal, provincial and territorial playing field in immigration.

Provinces and territories leverage immigration to meet their economic needs and provide social services to newcomers in their jurisdictions. The only exception, which we mention on the slide, is Quebec. Quebec and Canada have a distinct relationship: they have the Canada–Quebec Accord, which allows Quebec to publish its own immigration level annually and decide how the selection of immigrants will happen.

I will move on to slide 19 on international relationships. Again, our international relationships are very important to our success. The U.S., Mexico and M5 are the partners with whom we've worked very closely.

The two partners that we have listed here under “international organizations”—the IOM, the International Organization for Migration, and UNHCR—operate in the field of refugee claims determination. Without their collaboration, we would be unable to provide the services we do in partnership with them. It's a very valued partnership between us and UNHCR and IOM.

- (0920)

The next area is the delivery of our services. One thing I want to put some focus on is that the department, as structurally described here, also has the portfolio organization of the Immigration and Refugee Board. That is, as you know, an independent administrative tribunal that is accountable to Parliament and reports to the IRCC minister as a separate entity. I also want to draw your attention to the college of immigration and citizenship consultants, created just to provide oversight. The college doesn't actually exist, per se, but implementation is anticipated later on in this year. This is just to make sure you see the whole landscape under the IRCC minister.

I might be a little repetitive on the delivery of our services, but I want to give you an idea of the reach of IRCC. Our domestic and settlement offices handle complex decision-making as well as routine citizenship, humanitarian and compassionate cases. There are around 23 client-facing offices across all provinces. There are case processing centres in Sydney, Ottawa, Mississauga and Edmonton for specifically centralized intakes of applications and processing. For example, in Mississauga it's for parents and grandparents, spouses and partners. Similarly, the central intake office in Sydney is for federal skilled workers.

We do have a call centre—as we call it, our “client support centre”—in Montreal. It provides client-centric services. Our operations support centre is another place where we provide a 24-7 service on biometrics and resettlement operations that help us with assessing the resettlement situations. On passports, again, I won't put more emphasis than I already have. Passports are delivered through our partner Service Canada, and that's all over Canada.

On page 22 you will see a pictorial diagram. The black circles represent where IRCC domestic and settlement offices are. The green circles show the number of passport service locations. They show you how wide the network is. In terms of the delivery of our services through the operational network abroad, an important part of our intake abroad is done through the 161 visa application centres, commonly referred to as “VACs”, in 108 countries. They are our way to intake all the applications. These visa application centres are where temporary resident applications and student and work permits are received. We process them, whether they are done in Canada or abroad. We have a footprint, although in fewer places—60 places—but almost 212 missions abroad provide services in terms of passports.

The last slide gives you an idea of our international footprint. There is a lot of work done, and our reach is beyond Canada. We cover almost all the area globally.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for your time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thanks a lot to all of you for providing this important information.

We will start our first round of questioning.

Mr. Kent, you have six minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to all for providing a briefing for those of us who have never sat on this committee before. It is a very intricate and complicated file. I think this briefing sets the table for us as we go forward. I know that there are some topics you would refer to the minister and deputy minister's appearance before us in a couple of weeks, but I do have a number of questions.

You were just mentioning Passport Canada. Are Service Canada and Global Affairs considered agents of Immigration Canada, or are the services they provide budgeted within their specific agencies or departments?

• (0925)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Service Canada is a delivery arm, as is Global Affairs Canada, in terms of passport services. The passport funding still resides with IRCC. The policies that decide how the passport program will run, the passport program, are still IRCC responsibilities.

Hon. Peter Kent: What is the budgetary dollar total on an annual basis?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I will defer to my colleague on that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills (Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Financial Officer, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you.

The Passport Program has a revolving fund based on a 10-year cycle, and all revenues generated annually can be respent during the 10-year cycle. As my colleague mentioned, we have a reciprocal agreement with Service Canada, which means that Service Canada charges us annually for the fees associated with issuing passports.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: So the cost recovery is a wash in terms of—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: At the end of the 10-year cycle, the Passport Program must be balanced.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Mills: For the first few years, we collect money when people pay for their passports. Then, as the volume of applications fluctuates, we can spend that money.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Kent: With regard to humanitarian and compassionate cases, there was the very small number of 4,710 cases in 2019, I guess. Who makes the majority of decisions in those compassionate and humanitarian cases? Are those ministerial exemptions only, or are there other processes?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Most of the decisions are taken based on the value or the vulnerability of the people who are applying for that. There is a decision-making process that seeks out what the risks and vulnerabilities are. Accordingly, we make a decision. There is a provision with the minister if he wants to have his privileges invoked. That's also a possibility.

Hon. Peter Kent: Can you tell me how many ministerial exemptions were decided last year?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I don't have that data on hand, but we can provide it to you later.

Hon. Peter Kent: Perhaps the deputy minister could bring that for our next meeting.

Madam Chair, how is my time?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent: I will cede my time to Mr. Seeback. I have many more questions, but...

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Great. Thank you.

I want to take a quick dive into the parent and grandparent category. I have some documents that I got from the Citizenship and Immigration website. One talks about the reduction in the backlog from 2011 to 2018, from 167,000 down to 25,800. That is a backlog reduction of 84%. When you take a deeper dive into the numbers, you see that it actually declined, from 2011 to 2015, from 167,000 to 50,661, and that in fact from 2015 to 2018 it only declined by 24,861. So 70% of the reduction in the backlog was from 2011 to 2015, and 14% of the reduction happened from 2015 to 2018.

Why did the reduction in the backlog drop significantly from 2015 to 2018?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: With regard to 2015 to 2018, I'll drill it back a little bit. There was a plan in place, as my colleague described, in terms of our ability to control backlogs and processing times. We needed to have a controlled intake, so we produced a mechanism by which we were limiting the intake of all who could apply. There was a gap of around 17,000 or 20,000 last year, which allowed us to accept those many applications, keep the working inventory going, and make sure this was doable in that time. This is a working inventory.

• (0930)

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will go on to Ms. Dhillon for six minutes.

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.): Good morning. Welcome to our witnesses.

Any one of you can answer my questions. My first one is about temporary foreign workers. Problems have come up for individuals under this program. Employers have threatened some workers or overworked or exploited them. The foreign workers don't feel they can speak up because they'll get expelled from the country, or the employer will say, "If you don't do what I ask, I'm going to ask Immigration Canada to revoke your temporary foreign worker permit."

Has anyone denounced these issues to your department? If so, do you have any safeguards in place? Have there been any changes in your program to protect these often vulnerable workers?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Regarding temporary foreign workers and compliance and worker protection, a few measures have been put in place to respond to some of these abusive situations that have been brought to the government's attention. There's the temporary foreign worker program and the international mobility program. The temporary foreign worker program is led by Minister Qualtrough at Employment and Social Development Canada. We collaborate on that program. The international mobility program is one that IRCC leads. Employers who do not comply with the program requirements are subject to financial penalties or banned from hiring foreign nationals. In budget 2018, \$194 million

was provided to support the enforcement of and compliance with this regime.

Secondly, since June 2019 foreign workers who found themselves in an abusive situation could apply for an open work permit. They would no longer be tied to that employer. This allowed workers to find a new employment situation fairly quickly and leave that abusive situation. IRCC offers priority processing for that situation and does not charge any service fees. That has really enabled people to leave any situation like that.

Ms. Anju Dhillon: My next question is regarding visitor visas. A significant amount of my constituents complain that when they ask for a visitor visa for one of their relatives to come for a wedding or a birthday or a funeral, these visas sometimes seem to be randomly refused. The refusal letters are pro forma. There are no details in them. They just say, "We think you're not going to go back", or "We don't think you have the financial means". There's a lot of frustration regarding this issue. I think it's very important to address, maybe in these letters, the details of why requests are being refused. They fulfilled all the criteria. All the documents are there. But some other people do receive the visas. It looks very random.

Could you delve into that a little bit? What are the criteria for visitor visas? Why are these letters pro forma and not detailed? I think people have a right to know why they're refused.

Thank you.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll very briefly describe the temporary resident and visitor visa process. When a person applies, they are supposed to submit all of the supporting documents. These include their ability to demonstrate that they are capable financially, that they have a valid reason to travel, and that they have solid roots to assure us that this will be a temporary visit and that this is their intent. We do take into consideration family events and other things. A visa officer determines both their eligibility, in terms of their having a valid reason to go, and their admissibility, in terms their having no serious criminality or any other piece there. Finally, an assessment is based on all of the information available and the risk parameters that have been developed. We determine whether the person will be able to get a visa or not.

When we are unable to give a visa, or when we are refusing to grant a visa, we try to be very explicit about the specific reasons. I would say, with great confidence, they include those parameters that do not go into extreme detail. For example, a visa refusal might indicate that the person's financial ability to support themselves during the time they want to be in Canada is not clear to us. If documents are lacking, the visa officer cannot assess financial stability. At other times, we say there is no previous history of travel that gives us the confidence that.... For example, if the requested visa is tourism-related and the person wants to visit Canada for that reason, we ask if they have ever attempted to visit a country nearer their own.

So we take into consideration a multitude of things. Our visa officers take a lot of time.

• (0935)

The Chair: Your time is up.

Ms. Normandin, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My first question concerns the situation in Cuba. I'd like an update. For example, in my riding there have been situations where requests for interviews and medical examinations have had to be done outside the country. This requires, in some cases, that the person applying for sponsorship, among other things, must travel twice. It appears that paper visa applications are still not being processed in Cuba. Could we get an update on the situation there?

[*English*]

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, let me start by saying that recently we have seen a situation developing in Cuba that prompted us and our partners at Global Affairs Canada not to have a footprint in Havana. There were some health-related issues that we had to react to for the safety and security of Canadians abroad. We moved our work to a location outside of Cuba, which is Mexico.

Let me mention this, Madam Chair. When dealing with situations where they have to leave their country for biometric testing, in case they are applying for permanent residency or anything else, we have tried to mitigate the risk of their having to travel twice, by converging the medical and the biometric trips into one, so that they don't have to go twice. That provides them with an opportunity so that they only travel once.

Obviously, we have another Cuba-specific issues that we are trying to address. We do not have a panel physician who can provide the immigration medical exam in Cuba. We are in the advanced stages of finalization of that panel physician. Once that is done, the people from Cuba will not need to travel abroad and will be able to get the services in Cuba.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: With regard to my second question, I would like an update on the moratorium on deportations to Haiti. My understanding is that there has been a temporary moratorium since February 2019.

Are there discussions to make this a permanent moratorium? What is the status of the moratorium on deportations to Haiti?

[*English*]

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'm sorry. I could not really hear that.

The Chair: Could you please repeat it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: My question was about the moratorium on deportations to Haiti. There is currently a temporary moratorium, and the decision on this was taken in February 2019. Where are IRCC and the Canada Border Services Agency, the CBSA, on this file? I believe they were working together on this. What are the things we can expect? What are the discussions concerning the moratorium on deportations to Haiti?

• (0940)

[*English*]

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, this specific aspect is very much related to the role that CBSA plays, in terms of the moratorium, and our department has no specific information that we can share at this point.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: I have a long preamble to this question.

It is common in sponsorship and other applications that the file is sent out and then returned because a signature is missing, without the officer checking for other missing documents. The file is returned and then it comes back again. Then it has to be started again, because, given the two or three months that have elapsed, new forms have to be used, as the old ones are no longer up to date.

Is there an internal willingness to address this issue at the source by, for example, instructing officers to check the entire file before returning it? Would it be possible to provide advance notice when new forms are being prepared, so that counsel can prepare and, in some cases, perhaps act more quickly to prevent the file from being returned due to a lack of up-to-date forms? I know that there is usually a period of about a month when a new form is sent out, but with all the delay factors, including mail processing, it is not uncommon for the file to take four to five months before it is finally complete for initial analysis.

[*English*]

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, in that context I must say that our department has started to look into more client-centric approaches. We have started to look at situations where there is some information missing. Instead of sending the file back for completion, we can get that information either by contacting the applicant by phone or by other means and then fulfilling those requirements in-house. That part of it is beginning as we ramp up in getting that information to our clients. Those are the things we are putting in place so we can assist the client.

In terms of any change in forms or any change in direction, we first put it on our website, so if the clients are able to check the website frequently, there's nothing that is not in sync with when we changed the forms. These are also available on the website. That help them to prepare their forms accordingly.

We generally have a very good way of reaching out to clients in case there is any missing information.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will go to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials.

I would like to follow up on that. In fact, I have two constituency cases right now where people sent in their applications for their work permits to be renewed two months well in advance of the expiry of their work permits. Then they even followed up with IRCC to make sure the latter received these and that everything was in order. They got the following response:

...all the required documents and information have been received by the responsible office for the moment. Rest assured that you will be informed as soon as a decision is reached or if additional information is needed.

The next thing they knew, their applications were sent back to them. One was told their application was missing a signature. Another was told that a wrong certificate had been sent in. By the time they received their application back, their work permit had expired and, therefore, they don't have implied status anymore.

This is an issue that was raised at this committee. We studied it in the last Parliament. Part of the request asked if IRCC could just phone people and tell them they're missing a signature on this form or they're missing or have the wrong form or certificate. That didn't happen.

In this instance, first, it needs to be rectified. Second, I have written to IRCC asking them to reconsider their processing with implied status because otherwise these people will lose their work, right? I don't think this is how we want to proceed.

I want to table this for the officials to look into this situation. I know you can't talk about specific cases, but I will follow up with you separately with the various consents required in the specific cases. I do want to flag for you that what you say is working is actually not working.

On a second question, I have a series of questions, if I may.

On the interim pathway for caregivers program, which started in October 2019, and two new pilots for caregivers, could you advise how many applications you have received under those three different streams, how many have been accepted, how many have been rejected, and for what reason? If you don't have those figures with you, I understand. They are detailed questions. If you can give those figures to the committee, that would be great.

Can I get a yes, you could give the information to the committee?

• (0945)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, we will get that information back to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I would also like to ask a question about the groups of five refugee status requirements.

The group of five sponsorship category requires that refugee status be determined by the UNHCR. The UNHCR seeker certificate, otherwise known as UNHCR registration, is not good enough, but this is not a requirement for the SAH or BVOR cases. In fact, in 2017, when the group of five applications for sponsorship were initiated, this was also not a requirement from the government, but this has since changed.

For refugees in areas where the UNHCR presence is not available, it makes it impossible for people to sponsor groups of five in those communities. Why was there a change? That is my question. Can we go back to what it used to be in 2017 when that was not required?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, regarding the question of refugee status and the partnership arrangements with the UNHCR, some of that would probably be a good discussion to have with the minister when he attends, but some of the background on that requirement was that it is really to help inform processing that the refugee is recognized and validated as a refugee by the UNHCR. It's a tool to help inform the processing.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I understand that, but I do want to point out that this is not a requirement for other sponsorship programs, the SAH or the BVOR, and is a requirement only for a group of five. In 2017, with the Syrian refugee initiative, the government did not require this either, so I don't know why all of a sudden there is a change in this program. Frankly, it doesn't make any sense. The presentation began by talking about how generous Canadians are, and they are, and they continue to do the great work they started back in 2017, but this is hampering their work. So, yes, I will certainly raise this with the minister.

Do I still have time?

The Chair: You have one minute.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I want to get back to the question about caregivers.

Is proof of funds required for people applying for permanent residence under the new pilots? If yes, what type of proof of funds is required?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, I'll start by saying that if you are applying at the very beginning for permanent residency, there are certain specific requirements, but they're not specific to the funding—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, I know I'm out of time on that.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will go to our second round of questioning and to Mr. Seeback for five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'm going to pass that along.

Go ahead.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to the panel for coming in today.

I have a question in regard to spousal sponsorships. Previously there was a program in place where there was a two-year probation period for sponsored spouses and partners. That program was repealed by the current government. I just want to know from you guys why that probation period was put in place.

• (0950)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, the probation at times was a way of getting a sign of confidence—I wouldn't want to use the term “guarantee”—in the sponsor's ability to support the newcomer in the Canadian fold. That was originally the intent, but the spousal program has undergone many changes, and there is an up-front requirement that allows us to assess the applications differently now.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

The reason I'm asking is that I've had a really large number of constituents approach my office on these types alleged marriage frauds, I guess you could call them, that coincide with the probation period. Do we have any type of information or investigation numbers since the probation period was repealed? Have they gone up or is there any impact at all in regard to alleged marriage frauds?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, we pay a lot of attention to marriages of convenience. That is the term we use in our lingo for marriage fraud. Let me just mention this. Concerning the risk factors or any specific risk parameters that will point towards a possible marriage fraud or marriage of convenience, our local officers abroad as well as over here use that particular risk lens to have an in-person interview to assess that, and they also assess further documentary proof. This allows them to make a robust decision.

We generally see a certain percentage of marriages of convenience that we obviously refuse. I don't have the data handy as such, but I have not seen in previous iterations with my colleagues and visa officers an increase in marriages of convenience as such.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I'd love to get the data on that, please, if that's possible.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Okay.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: My second question is regarding people with disability. I've had some cases come into my office where a person with a disability gets married abroad. When they want to sponsor their spouse, it seems like this is automatically put into an appeal process, and in some of the lines of questioning, it seems that a level of dignity isn't kept for those people with disabilities.

I want to see if we can get some numbers on the cases that are applied for and how many go straight into appeal or get denied immediately. Can you comment on that, please?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: The department doesn't keep records, as such, for the category of those with disabilities who have applied to sponsor someone. I can assure the member that proper attention is paid to all of the other parameters. This is not something we are looking at, in any way, shape or form, to penalize anyone or to have any of those conversations based on how or whether their disability would be a disadvantage for any of the processes.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you.

The Chair: We will go to Mr. Regan for five minutes.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much for being here this morning. My constituency office does quite a bit of immigration work. It doesn't compare, perhaps, with a downtown Toronto or downtown Vancouver riding, but I think it does as much as or perhaps more than any other constituency office in Atlantic Canada just because of the diversity of the riding of Halifax West. One thing that my assistant who does most of this work for me says is that she's seen a slowing in the number of applications under the Atlantic immigration pilot and the express entry program over the past year or so. The process seems to have slowed down. It seems to her, at least, that the six-month targets are often not being met, and sometimes they're as much as 18 months.

Can you tell me about what's happening there? What would cause that kind of fluctuation?

• (0955)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll start first with the Atlantic immigration pilot. The Atlantic immigration pilot is certainly a successful pilot, which is managing the timelines grosso modo between the six-month time frame. We also see a lot of things that come through in terms of express entry, international experience and federal skilled worker. Most of our targets with regard to the service centre—80% in six months, for example—we are pretty close to meeting, but to be truthful, we are missing a couple of points. For example, we would do around 78% last year instead of 80%. There is a multitude of factors here. It includes the ability for the department to make those assessments when the documentary proof is lacking or there is more information needed.

We strive to stay within the time periods promised. We have made efforts to actually reduce that gap. We want higher than 80%, closer to 90%, of the applications processed in six months' time. That's what we are striving for.

Hon. Geoff Regan: I don't know, Madam Chair, if we'll ever have an opportunity as a committee to visit one of the processing centres. I haven't done that before. Having dealt with immigration cases for many years, I've often envisaged a processing officer sitting at their desk with a pile of files up to the ceiling. But I don't think it works like that.

I'm curious to know how many applications for immigration and for citizenship you receive in a year. How many officers do you have assessing them? What are the numbers like?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll give you the quantum, as such. This year there were 341,000 landings for permanent residence. We had to process almost 412,000 applications. Obviously, landing means the number of people who actually landed in Canada and are physically in Canada. To do that, we produced the visas. So 412,000 applications were assessed. My workforce includes in the magnitude of roughly 1,200 to 1,300 people abroad. In Canada we have around 2,900 folks who are doing various aspects of processing.

I do want to bring attention back to how this is a complex process where we also depend a lot on our partners, such as the RCMP, CSIS and CBSA, for providing those admissibility decisions. There are certain aspects that are beyond our control, and those do sometimes have an impact on our processing times.

Hon. Geoff Regan: The other area in which we notice a slow-down is in relation to applications for citizenship in cases where a residency questionnaire has been sent out. The department has some questions about the resident—i.e., whether they have been in Canada for the required time on a continuous basis or to the degree required. That seems to have slowed down since last year, let's say, for applications that began in 2018. Are you aware of that? Is that something you are seeing? One riding office isn't telling us about the whole country.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Okay.

The answer to that is twofold. One is that with Bill C-6, we have a double cohort of citizenship applications. Secondly, in terms of residency requirements, we have prepared a little card that allows people to self-assess and do that—

The Chair: I'm sorry to interrupt. Time is up. Maybe you'll get another opportunity.

Mr. Chiu, you have five minutes.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Steveston—Richmond East, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for coming and explaining to us how our immigration system works. I have a list of questions that I need to ask you guys.

You gave a 30-minute overview of how our immigration system works. In an ideal situation in terms of current operations, I would say great job and everything seems to be running very smoothly—if we knew that were the case. We know there are problems. We have a problem with irregular—or illegal, I would say—border crossers. The provinces and municipalities are shouldering an unfair portion of the expenses in enforcing the law. We have unrealistic backlog and processing times for family reunification and visitor visas. Employers are requiring more labourers and skilled labourers, and they can't get enough. We have a failed family reunification system, with a backlog. There are also cases of visitors breaking their visa conditions. Related to visitors, particularly in my riding of Steveston—Richmond East in Richmond, B.C., we have an epidemic of birth tourism. Visitors are coming and giving birth with the explicit intention of seeking Canadian citizenship for their newborns.

These are the problems that we can see on the ground. What problems are you dealing with in terms of priorities? I'd like to

know if you have any solutions for these problems that we see and perhaps others.

• (1000)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll try to answer in a couple of ways. In terms of our backlogs and our processing times, I do want to assure you that we've been constantly reducing the backlogs based on controlled intake and our processing ability to do that.

On family reunification, we have stood by the words that we will try to be in the frame of a 12-month processing time. We are very close to that 12 months, at 80% of that. Actually, the departmental results framework will tell you that we are at almost 78% as of 2019.

We do have a constant kind of assessment done on our irregular migration, for which, obviously, we are not shifting any of our resources. That is with the Immigration and Refugee Board, which is where the assessment is done. That does not take away our capacity to process the regular visitors or the permanent residents.

I am also very cognizant of the fact that given the need for bringing highly skilled people into Canada, we have flagship programs like global skills strategy and others in which we can bring innovative folks. They are actually working well.

On the birth tourism aspect you raised, I'll pass that on to my colleague.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you.

You set out very well a number of the challenges and opportunities facing the immigration system. There are labour market shortages. In some categories, more people want to come to Canada than we have space or settlement capacity for. You noted the challenges that provinces and municipalities face.

I think when the minister comes before the committee and shares with you his mandate priorities and his mandate commitments, that will set up the committee for a really good discussion on some of those trends and challenges that we see.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: As a follow-up question, I wonder if the department has sufficient resources to do its job and to do it properly. This is a question that I've been asked by my constituents frequently. Just so that I can give you my questions and response all in one, I have—

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: My request is... Thank you for the service you have provided to MPs like me to help our constituents, but we need you to consider urgent humanitarian requests. Sometimes dying parents want to see their children, and in the last minute, we need to have humanitarian urgent visas granted. Sometimes it's very difficult.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will go on to Mr. Tabbara for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): I thank the witnesses for their statements.

[*English*]

I have four questions, if I can get to them.

Mr. Hallan mentioned the two-year conditional PR status for spousal sponsorship. Wasn't the reason our government looked into that and removed it the vulnerability of a lot of certain spouses, particularly females, who would end up being in an abusive relationship with their spouse? They would have to be there under a certain condition because they feared their citizenship or PR status being repealed, so they ended up being in these conditions.

Did you not see that in some of the files that were presented to your department?

• (1005)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, that is exactly correct. There were instances where the abusive relationships existed because of that two-year condition. So that is also an important criterion.

On another note, as I mentioned earlier, there has been enough emphasis put on upfront risk assessment at the time of the assessment, which allows us to get a better idea if something is going to be a marriage of convenience; but on the other hand, that's a separate issue in terms of the two-year time frame.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I can't speak about particular cases, but I did have two cases in my office that had been refused the first time because the officials thought it was marriage of convenience, but then they reappplied. Under the new structure, you'd get a response within 12 months. They had submitted additional documents showing their true relationship, and maybe the first time their application wasn't as solid. They provided that, and both cases got approved. That's just for your information.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Good. I'm happy to hear it.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: My next is about Venezuela. We all know the situation and the instability in Venezuela. Technically, it's in our backyard. I've had files in my office where it's been very difficult for Venezuelans to get supporting documentation to renew their work permits or their student visas, and in turn, it's made it hard for them to renew their status here in Canada. Have we been cognizant of the instability in Venezuela?

Second, are we considering those fleeing Venezuela refugees at this point? That may be something for UNHCR, but I'll let you....

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, I'll try to answer the first question. Yes, we are very cognizant of the Venezuelan situation. In fact, Global Affairs and IRCC have mentioned multiple times that someone's implied status will continue if their documents are out of date or they cannot procure those documents, and we continue to allow them to be in Canada, even their time has expired. This has continued in that context.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, if I may just add to the last part of the question, we are watching the situation in Venezuela with care, and at the moment with the current system, we feel is able to handle the situation there.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'll put my third and last question together really quickly. I only have a minute left.

For temporary resident visas, when we look at individuals who may have a low income but have land, a farm and assets, is that taken into consideration when they're trying to visit Canada? I'm often getting people who maybe live in rural areas and are not showing substantive income week by week or month by month, but they do have a lot of assets. The families that are here are generally well established and can look after them for the TRV, so is that a criterion you look at when approving or denying these TRVs?

The Chair: I'll need a quick 30-second answer.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, we do look at the whole gamut of things, including immovable property. In certain situations, if we see that we cannot confirm those land holdings—the titles, and others—and they are not into... A family of six children, and one part of that belongs to you.... It is very hard for assessment purposes at that point. More importantly, we cannot get the proper documentation at times, but we do weigh into our assessment that they may have a fixed asset that might be generating income, and we take that into consideration during our visa process.

• (1010)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will go to Ms. Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: For people applying for citizenship, the cost of the application is generally not an issue for economic immigrants. However, for immigrants who are refugees, for example, the cost of obtaining citizenship can increase from \$100 to \$630 for two adults.

Have you considered offering alternatives to low-income people seeking citizenship, such as a refundable tax credit or lower costs?

Mrs. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for the question.

Currently, the frameworks and structures for these fees are already in place, but this may be a question to ask the minister in the future.

Ms. Christine Normandin: I'm continuing on the issue of obtaining citizenship. We note that illiterate mother-tongue francophones, for example, have difficulty obtaining citizenship, particularly since there are new language proficiency requirements that require proof of knowledge of French. This may be a diploma or proof of passing a test.

We find that illiterate people often don't have a diploma. As far as tests are concerned, several problems arise since part of the tests are often written or, again, French tests are prepared in France. The scenarios do not correspond at all to the reality in Quebec or to the reality of Canadian francophones outside Quebec.

Are you aware of this situation? If so, are there any measures to correct these problems?

[English]

The Chair: Please give a quick 30-second answer.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Briefly, I would like to bring to your attention Bill C-6, where we have added requirements to lower the age requirement for this undertaking.

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up. Maybe you can come back.

Ms. Kwan, you are next for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to follow up my last question on the new pilots for the caregiver stream. Can the officials provide the committee with a list of the criteria for eligibility in detail? I don't think I got an answer to my last question. I would really appreciate answers on the eligibility of the program. If we receive that in writing via the Chair, for distribution to the rest of the committee, I would appreciate it.

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, I'd be happy to do that very quickly.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, I only have two and a half minutes. Thank you.

How many H and C applications are in the backlog, and what is the average processing time for those applications?

While you are looking for the answer, I'm going to ask my next question.

According to the media, at least 70 applicants were given spots to sponsor parents and grandparents in return for dropping lawsuits that claimed that the contentious online application process to reunite immigrant families was flawed and unfair. Is this true? If so, how many applications were offered through this settlement? Were there others? How many?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, regarding the H and C data, we'll have to get back to you. I don't have it ready with me.

In terms of the parents and grandparents, the question is probably related to the applications that were.... I don't have any information handy on that either, neither the numbers nor the specifics of that at this point.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could you undertake to get us that information?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, could I get the specific question we're trying to answer?

• (1015)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Were there side settlements for the parents and grandparents stream that were made available to people who

threatened to sue the government as a result of the online fiasco that took place?

CBC reported that 70 cases were offered spots that they did not access through the online process, but were offered as a result of the threat of a lawsuit. Is that true? If so, in how many cases were spots offered? Beyond this offering of spots because of the threat of a lawsuit, were there other cases as well, and how many?

The Chair: Please submit the information.

We will now go on to Mr. Seeback, and it will be for five minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Can you let me know when I have 30 seconds left? I'm going to share my time with Mr. Chiu.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I have some questions that I'm going to ask quickly because I know we have limited time, and I know you won't have the answers. I want to pick up on Ms. Dhillon's talking about visitors visas.

What was the visitor visa acceptance rate in Chandigarh in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018? I'd like to know the number of visitor visas that were issued in those years as well. I would also like to see what the visitor visa acceptance rate was in Delhi for those same years and how many visas were issued.

Quickly, to pick up on what Ms. Dhillon was saying, there is a gross inconsistency in the acceptance of visitors visas. I know of cases in my own constituency where someone has a visa to travel to the United States and applied to come to Canada for a wedding, and he was denied the visitors visa. One of the boxes that was checked said "no travel history", which is in direct contravention of what was applied for. The evidence of a travel visa to the U.S. and trips to the U.S. shows very clearly that they have a travel history.

Does any review take place of visa officers who are clearly making mistakes when they reject a temporary resident visa, and is there a procedure for a member of Parliament or an individual to raise that issue to see if there is any redress that would happen in the department?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll try to mention this. I don't have the information ready on the visitor visas from Chandigarh.

I do want to mention quickly that we do not process visa applications in Chandigarh; everything is now done in Delhi. That has been happening for a couple of years. The decision-making has shifted from Chandigarh to Delhi. Only complex cases are done in Chandigarh, but most of the decision-making has shifted to Delhi.

In terms of the inconsistency, I do believe that we have programs that take into consideration every kind of travel. For example, it is very open that we have a CAN+ program. If you have a visa for the U.S. or for other M5 countries, we take that into consideration and give due credit for that.

In terms of procedure, there are times when the applications are submitted with a U.S. visa but there is no actual travel. Having a visa in there does not help us to gauge that there is travel. I do accept that at times there are mistakes. There are ways.... We regularly do a quality control check on our applications. We have an internal system for doing that, and clients are more than welcome to reapply. We will reconsider that if they reapply.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Is that review an internal document that cannot be shared, or can it be shared? If it can be shared, can it be shared with the committee?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: This routine is built within our way of doing stuff. Quality control is something that is built into our program, and we continue to do it regularly. It's not tracked as a separate thing. It's not something that which we have a separate way of assessing.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Picking up again on parents and grandparents—and you may not know this—what is the processing time for someone in the backlog? How long will it take for their application to be processed? Second, is there any plan or program in place with respect to specific reductions to take place in the parent and grandparent backlog? From my question before, we see there been a significant slowing in how quickly the backlog is being eliminated in the last number of years.

• (1020)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Great.

I would ask you to maybe share the answer with the committee.

I'll give my time to Mr. Chiu.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have several questions. I would appreciate it if you would provide some written answers to them.

I'm interested in what you mentioned about biometrics in terms of the day and age that we're in. Please let us know how you're enforcing biometrics verification and also the auto-verification process on applicants' demographic, marital, educational and professional claims. I'd also be interested to hear about the metrics on any loss of citizenship to non-naturalized citizens.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will move on to Ms. Martinez Ferrada for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I have three questions. I will try to be brief.

The first question is about what you were talking about earlier. Temporary employees, who had a licence tied to an employer and who were in a situation of abuse or who had poor terms and condi-

tions of employment, could also apply for a program by sector and be mobile within a sector of employment, as I understand it. I would just like to have more details on this program. How many employees took advantage of it? What sector was it in?

The second question deals with francophone immigration outside Quebec. I know that there are objectives to achieve greater francophone immigration outside Quebec. I would like to have more details on the program. Are there any strategies in place at the moment?

The third issue concerns economic immigration to Canada as opposed to immigration of temporary employees who, while also meeting an economic need, are not under the purview of the department. Are there any commonalities? Is there any discussion on that? How does it all fit together? How is it complementary? Where are the needs, in fact?

How do you work with your colleagues at Employment and Social Development Canada to ensure that, in an effort to address a labour shortage, these two programs are linked by the same objectives?

Mrs. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Thank you for these questions.

On the issue of economic immigration and its relation to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, or TFWP, there is certainly a link.

In terms of the program, the Department of Employment and Social Development has conducted a labour market assessment to ensure that there is a real need and that their work matches the needs of the market. I find that there is a good mix of skills that exist, for example, in the agriculture sector or the technology sector. The two programs, the TFWP and the International Mobility Program, or IMP, match those needs.

With respect to the question regarding the increase in the number of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec...

Mr. Fraser Valentine: Excuse me, Ms. Jarvis. We have to keep our answers brief because we have limited time. We can send a document to the committee with more details.

In 2019, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship launched a strategy for francophone immigration. It aims to achieve three main objectives, which are to increase francophone immigration outside Quebec, to support the immigration and retention of French-speaking newcomers and, finally, to strengthen the capacity of francophone communities.

We have taken action on each of these objectives. We can share these measures with you as well as the funds associated with each.

• (1025)

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: Do I still have time, Madam Chair?

[English]

The Chair: You have one minute and 10 seconds.

[Translation]

Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada: I would just like to come back to the issue of francophone immigration mentioned in the documents. The terms “increase,” “support” and “strengthen” are used. However, I believe that there is still a challenge in terms of achieving the objectives.

I know that the department responsible for official languages has transferred funds to support integration programs, for example. My question is about the gateway. How do we increase immigration and open up access to the country? What strategies have been developed with other countries around the world? Who are the countries? What relationships do we have to promote francophone immigration to the country?

[English]

The Chair: You have 30 seconds to answer.

Mr. Fraser Valentine: The department has launched a really comprehensive recruitment and promotional campaign called Destination Canada. It's centred in Paris. We work with a number of francophone countries in the E.U. and we've just expanded this initiative to North Africa and to Morocco in particular. In addition, we've just created a port of entry at Pearson that provides francophone services to all folks who come. Certainly, promotion is a key area.

On the policy side, we've done a number of initiatives, such as our express entry system.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Next, we'll go on to Mr. Kent for five minutes.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you, Chair.

With regard to the almost quarter of a million international students who receive visas every year, there is abundant anecdotal evidence in a number of communities of international students who get their visas and arrive via a number of means and then either attend somewhat less than the body of classes that one would expect an international student to attend or don't attend classes at all.

Does the department audit or keep track of those international students who, in many cases, and again from certain communities, seem to be arriving in Canada to actually work, not study?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, although it has significantly increased, we have started to put some emphasis on making sure they actually are in their classes. We have a little pilot at designated learning institutes for them to give us the information when they grant the letter of acceptance, which helps us to make sure that it is a genuine student who comes in.

Secondly, as soon as the folks arrive, we do get a yearly kind of score card—this is specific to all provinces other than Quebec—from which we see how many of those students have actually been in the enrolment phase at the same institute. The caveat with that is that if you change your institute during study, that is not captured and it shows up as a gap. It has just started and we are putting some

more attention on the compliance aspects of that. It is an important issue for us.

Hon. Peter Kent: You don't have any numbers?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I don't have numbers to share at this point.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

With regard to the increasing backlog of asylum claims, the divergence since about April last year shows that processing is dropping rather significantly and sharply, while the number of asylum claimants is actually increasing at a steady pace. It would seem that the only way to reduce this huge backlog—over 80,000 in the fall of 2019—would be to increase processing and processing times. Is that something that the department is attempting to correct?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, as I mentioned earlier, the processing of those asylum claimants rests with the Immigration and Refugee Board. We don't, as such, do the processing.

Hon. Peter Kent: The responsibility is entirely beyond the department?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Do you want to answer?

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Madam Chair, the department works with the IRB and CBSA from a policy perspective and for guidance on the programs, but the actual processing is done by the IRB.

I would note that there are many efforts to control volumes before asylum claimants enter the country. Some of those measures were set out in last year's budget, as well as some funding. There is always a very tricky balance between when volumes go up and processing, but a number of measures were taken by the IRB to improve their processing efficiency.

I can speak to one that was set out in the last budget. It was actually a pilot undertaken by CBSA and IRCC called the integrated claims assessment centre. The IRCC and CBSA are working together to put together case-ready files when the claims are made and to do some streamlining, so when the cases are provided to the IRB, they are ready to go. That's an example of efficiency that the department, with CBSA, has undertaken, funded by last year's budget.

• (1030)

Hon. Peter Kent: You brought up the CBSA, and the fact is that order paper questions have revealed that the actual rate of removal of unworthy claimants or refused claimants is a tiny fraction of the number of removals ordered. These claimants seem either to have overworked the appeal system or have disappeared into society.

I'm just wondering if the department tracks those refugee claimants so that they know, when a removal order is issued, where those people are, which would support CBSA, because CBSA is apparently challenged in trying to execute those removal orders.

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Kent.

Hon. Peter Kent: Perhaps the minister and deputy minister could arrive with those answers.

The Chair: We will go on to Mr. Maloney for five minutes.

Mr. James Maloney (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I'm not a member of this committee, so this has been very informative to me.

People who are involved in the immigration process have a big challenge on their hands navigating the system, and they come to us, and we have a challenge as well trying to help them navigate the process, so learning some of this information is quite valuable.

I have a few questions.

I just texted my office while we were sitting here and asked what the burning questions are. The answer I got wasn't surprising; it was processing times and communication. People typically contact my office when they're well into the process and are close to the time when they've been told they should be receiving a response or are just past it. I think I heard you say that you are about satisfying the processing times in about 80% of cases.

How do you get to 100%, and who sets these time frames anyway? If you submit an application for permanent residency or anything else, you're told that the expected time will be a certain number of months or whatnot. Who sets those times, and how do we bring those down?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, it is a Treasury Board guideline in which there's a consultation that happens, and the department sets those specific standards in consultation with the provinces, territories and other partners. That is published on our website.

We strive to achieve those service standards in our processing world. As I mentioned earlier, there are certain dependencies and reliance on certain things, but I fully take the point on board that we need to understand more of a client's behaviour by communicating with them at appropriate times so that they do not get anxious during the processing time, because at times we will get right up to the very end of the expected time frame of processing—and we will get there, but in-between that, the anxiety rises.

We are working toward making sure that we understand client behaviour and that we communicate accordingly with them.

Mr. James Maloney: A big part of what we do is to try to calm people down, because they apply, and online it says it will take 18 months. They get to 17 and a half or 18 and a half months, and they call my office and say, "I'm not getting a response; they won't tell me what's going on". Communication would probably make things a little bit easier.

For my next question, I want to go back to this visa letter application process. A number of times I've had people contact me and tell me that their cousin, sister or aunt got turned down, and they send over the form letter, and the box "not enough evidence you are going to return home" is ticked, or whatever the case may be. The problem happens when they reapply. I've had cases where they reapply two, three or four times, and they try to address the issue that's been raised in that letter, and then they get the same letter

back with the same box ticked, which is no help at all. It doesn't help them perfect the application or improve it to satisfy whatever it is that's been deemed to be deficient.

Is there any way—I don't know if you have to change the system or if you have to empower the people who are signing those letters and ticking those boxes—to particularize the deemed inadequacies of the application so that, when people reapply a second, third fourth time.... I had one case where it was seven times. I had cases where I've made a call and tried to get some information on what the perceived deficiency was. I go back and try to help the applicant with it, and then a number of weeks later they get the same letter back. It's really frustrating.

There has to be some... Again, maybe it comes down to communication.

• (1035)

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, with visa processing we are trying to be a little more granular on the specifics of what the situations are that pertain to a specific case, instead of the regular five or six conditions, and get it be a little bit more descriptive about. We are working towards that.

In essence, we do believe that if there is a change in somebody's situation—whether they were unable to provide us with documents or their situation has changed—that prompts them to reapply, we'll certainly look at it, but not the same visa officer.

The Chair: Your time is up. Sorry for interrupting, but we have a tight schedule.

We will go to Ms. Normandin for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

I'm going to give Ms. Jarvis the opportunity to answer my last question, which I'll rephrase.

Among the criteria for obtaining citizenship is knowledge of spoken French, both in terms of expression and comprehension. The problem is that, with the new requirements, it often happens that a person whose mother tongue is French but who is illiterate does not pass the tests, whereas a person who can read and write but has a level 4 knowledge of French passes.

What measures do you think can be put in place to alleviate this problem?

[*English*]

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: I apologize, Madam Chair. I don't actually have the answer to that question.

[*Translation*]

I'm not sure what the answer is. I'm sorry.

Ms. Christine Normandin: My next question is about the telephone line for MPs who want information on citizens' committees. It is very difficult, if not impossible, for a team to talk to file processing officers. People are usually redirected to information officers, and people get different answers depending on whom they speak to. Are you aware of this situation?

Would it be possible to ensure that the dedicated lines for MPs direct us to file processing officers rather than to clerks when we need specific information?

[English]

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Madam Chair, as to our ability to provide MPs and senators with more of a concierge service, we do have a client support centre with a dedicated phone line that caters to specific questions by MPs. We have put in resources to cater exclusively to those specific comments. We are trying very hard to make sure that if there are any specific questions, we actually get the information from the case analysts to you, through that same channel. It allows us to maintain the integrity of the system by making sure there is a comprehensive analysis done of the case, and then providing you with the information.

The Chair: Your time is up.

We will go now to Ms. Kwan for the last round of questioning. You have two and a half minutes, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Can I just get a quick confirmation from officials in response to my last question that they will provide information to the clerk?

Yes? Thank you.

On a separate topic, with respect to privately sponsored refugee applications, under all of the different streams could the officials endeavour to get the information on how many are in the backlog under each stream and the average processing time for each stream?

• (1040)

Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis: Just to confirm, are those CSs and G5s, Madam Chair?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Correct, I mean all of the different privately sponsored refugee streams.

Okay, that's a yes. That's information we can obtain.

On visitor visa rejections, could we get the information on the rejections by country of origin? Could it be broken down to the categories of the boxes that were ticked, such as lack of travel history, financial reasons, or whatever the boxes are in those typical letters that get sent? Could we get that information for the last 10 years for a comparison, so that we can see what's going on? I think this is of interest to every MP.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I can assure you that we can get the visa application and refusal statistics. We don't, as such, do any data mining on what caused the condition. That is a huge database. We don't really get that information on that basis.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: But you can break it down by country of origin.

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: Yes, we can do that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right.

On the issue around immigration streams, do you have a breakdown of the economic class based on professions that have received permanent residence status in Canada over the last 10 years?

Dr. Harpreet Kochhar: I'll have to go back. We do have information about economic...not specifically which are the different categories.

The Chair: This brings us to the end of this meeting.

Thanks a lot to our officials for coming before the committee today. We look forward to the information that you have committed to provide to the committee.

Before we adjourn the meeting, I want to remind all members that the deadline to provide their witness lists to the clerk for the study on economic immigration and the labour shortage is Friday, February 28, by 5 p.m. The official breakdown has been provided by the clerk.

Yes, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Before we adjourn, Madam Chair, we didn't quite finish dealing with all of the motions from our last meeting. I'm just wondering if we will have another opportunity to deal with those at the committee or if we have to try to find the opportunity on our own.

The Chair: We can either hold a subcommittee meeting or have committee business at the other meeting. I will work it out and let you know.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Just as one last point, Madam Chair, I'm somebody who has a big problem dealing with paper. I would appreciate it if digital files like this could be provided to our web binder, if possible.

The Chair: They will be.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Normandin: To continue in the same vein, would it be possible to obtain these documents in advance? In some cases, we may need to be replaced and questions will need to be prepared for the person who will be replacing us. If we have no idea what is going to happen at committee, what issues are going to be addressed, who the witnesses are going to be and so on, it makes it a little more complicated. So I'm asking for that, if that's possible.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for raising it.

The meeting is adjourned.

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