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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Monday, November 16, 2020

• (1610)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call meeting number five of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration to order. Good afternoon, everyone.

We will continue with the study of the impact of COVID-19 on immigration.

Before we begin, I just want to remind all attendees about the health and safety measures that need to be taken.

To all the attendees in the room, physically distance yourselves from others by at least two metres, and wear a mask until you are seated and more than two metres away from anyone else. This is a hybrid meeting. Some members are appearing in person in the parliamentary precinct, and the other members are appearing remotely.

As a reminder to members, please speak at a slow enough pace for interpretation to keep up.

The clerk is tracking the raised hands and keeping a speaking list, if needed. All questions should be decided by a recorded vote, except for those decided unanimously or on division. This is based on the order adopted by the House on September 23. The meeting is being webcast and is available on ParlVU.

We are continuing to listen to witnesses on the impact of COVID-19 on the immigration system.

I want to welcome all the witnesses today. Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing your important testimony.

We will be hearing today from Universities Canada. They are being represented by Paul Davidson, president and chief executive officer; as well as Wendy Therrien, director, external relations and research. We also have Colleges and Institutes Canada, being represented by Denise Amyot, president and chief executive officer. I also welcome Debbie Douglas, executive director for the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants. On behalf of Alliance Canada Hong Kong, we will hear from Robert Falconer, research associate, immigration and refugee policy, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary, and also Starus Chan, representative from Alliance Canada Hong Kong.

As individuals, we have appearing before us today Emmanuelle Bergeron, as well as Jatin Shory, lawyer for Shory Law.

We will proceed with our first panel. All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks.

I will start with Colleges and Institutes Canada. I would request Denise Amyot, president and chief executive officer, to please start.

You have five minutes for your opening remarks. The floor is yours.

**Ms. Denise Amyot (President and Chief Executive Officer, Colleges and Institutes Canada):** Thank you, Madame Chair.

*Bonjour* and good afternoon, everybody.

Canada's colleges, institutes, polytechnics and CEGEPs are helping international students become ideal candidates for permanent residency and citizenship. They graduate with Canadian educational qualifications and in-demand skills, and are proficient in at least one of our official languages. International students are key in achieving the historic immigration target recently announced by Minister Mendicino.

[Translation]

Navigating this pandemic has led to some remarkable collaborations and innovations. The implementation, for example, of a two-stage process for the review of study permit applications provided students the certainty they needed to begin—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Mr. Clerk, there's no interpretation.

Now we'll resume.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** I'll just continue from where I was.

[Translation]

Still, more needs to be done. Though Canada has again begun to welcome new international students, visa application centres in India, Brazil and Mexico remain closed, making it impossible for students to provide their biometrics and obtain study permit approval. We predict that the global mobility of students will take two to five years to reach pre-pandemic levels.

For Canada to remain competitive, we must continue to innovate and invest in improving the student experience and in streamlining systems—

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Madam Chair, on a similar point of order before we begin, I wonder if the witness's channel is switched onto the French channel as well. I'm hearing both the French and the interpretation coming across just as loudly as the other. It's very hard to hear one voice over the other.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Should I put it on "off"?

**The Chair:** Ms. Amyot, if you are speaking in French, then you should have "French" on. If you are speaking in English, then you should have "English" on.

[Translation]

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** All right. I will repeat the last sentence.

For Canada to remain competitive, we must continue to innovate and invest in improving the student experience and in streamlining systems to attract those students and future citizens.

• (1615)

[English]

Colleges and institutes represent the fastest-growing level of study for international students in Canada, accounting for just under half of all study permit holders at the post-secondary level in 2019. This is in part because colleges are deeply connected to their communities and responsive to local labour markets.

Colleges and institutes embody Canadian values and often act as service hubs for newcomers. They are vectors through which temporary and permanent residents gain the language skills and the Canadian education and experience necessary for their successful integration. As Canada recovers, our network of publicly supported colleges and institutes is instrumental in helping to develop, attract and retain talent. In fact, 95% of Canada's population lives within 50 kilometres of a college or institute campus. This means that our members play a key role in bringing the benefits of immigration to communities and local economies.

With that in mind, I'd like to focus the committee's attention on the following five recommendations:

The first recommendation relates to short-term measures to remain competitive and attract students. Canada should allow for the collection of biometric data at the point of entry for students from countries where visa application centres remain closed, and immediately extend to the end of 2021 the two-stage study permit application process and the provisions that allow for time spent studying online to count towards a post-graduate work permit.

Second, IRCC should work collaboratively with CICan and other stakeholders to develop and implement an information-sharing mechanism that would allow visa officers and designated learning institutions to share information in real time related to admissions and study permit outcomes.

Third, in support of Canada's evolving labour market needs, express entry must emphasize points for post-secondary education with in-demand technical and professional skills.

Fourth, the provision of settlement services should be extended to international students interested in making Canada their home.

Fifth, further investment should be made in promoting Canada as a place to study, work and live, to ensure that colleges and institutes can welcome students and potential new immigrants from a diverse set of countries.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now move on to Ms. Douglas, representing the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.

Ms. Douglas, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Ms. Debbie Douglas (Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants):** Thank you, Chair and committee members.

I appreciate this opportunity to contribute to the study. As many of you know, OCASI is the umbrella organization for agencies working with immigrants and other newcomers here in Ontario, where I'm located.

It comes as no surprise that there have been many delays in all immigration, refugee, international student and migrant worker streams. For many, the delays existed even before the pandemic.

A big concern for all streams is that dependent children would age out and become ineligible to be sponsored. We recommend that the age of dependent children be locked in as of March 1, 2020, so that regardless of when the application is reopened, these children are included in the application.

Family members who are approved for sponsorship still cannot travel into Canada in most cases because of travel bans or difficulty in arranging travel. Many families overseas have not been able to find out what will happen when the visa to land in Canada expires, or how and when a new one would be issued to allow them to land. We recommend that all landing dates be extended at least until the borders are fully opened and travel fully resumes, or IRCC should land overseas applicants via email, as they are beginning to do now for people already in Canada. That would allow them to come here as permanent residents regardless of current travel restrictions.

Permanent resident card renewals are also delayed. Some permanent residents whose cards expired are stranded outside Canada with no hope of being able to return. Most if not all embassies are still closed, and stranded permanent residents have nowhere to turn for help. We are recommending that the Canadian government issue a public communication so that those overseas and/or their families here will know that those with PR will continue to be recognized as permanent residents in spite of the expiration of their PR cards.

As for refugees, IRCC's level for family members of refugees accepted in Canada is far lower than the number of people who are awaiting family reunification. The combination of low numbers, existing processing delays and COVID-related delays will only make people wait longer for family reunification. We recommend that the total number of refugee family reunifications be increased.

There are gaps and delays in communications from IRCC. The only information is what is being posted on the website. That is sometimes unclear and doesn't speak to the specific situations people are facing because of COVID. We appreciate that IRCC has tried to keep the public informed of most measures, but there is still a need for consistent, clear and more comprehensive information about migration offices overseas, as well as local offices here, as to exactly what is available and what is not. Inadequate communication is one of the biggest concerns we have heard from our member agencies and their clients. We recommend that IRCC show more flexibility and compassion during this extraordinary period.

Before I move on to my last point, I am sure you've all been receiving emails from many sponsored spouses. We've been hearing story after story of months and months, sometimes as long as 28 months, which is the last story I saw this morning in an email from a spouse. There is no information, and people want to know when they can have their spouses here in Canada.

On parents and grandparents, we appreciate the government's recent announcement to expedite spousal sponsorship, to allow the entry of extended family and to temporarily ease the minimum necessary income requirement.

Introduction of the minimum necessary income and the later 30% increase have been a tremendous hardship for many Canadian residents. Until Canada dismantles structural disadvantage and ends income inequality, racialized Canadians, especially racialized immigrant women, will be disproportionately excluded from family reunification. This has been over the last six to seven years.

• (1620)

For this reason, we are again recommending that the minimum necessary income be eliminated to make the immigration system both fair and equitable—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Douglas, but your time is up. You will get an opportunity to raise the issues you want to raise in our round of questioning.

Ms. Douglas, are you there?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Sorry, Chair; I don't know what happened there.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Madam Chair, on a point of order, I don't know if others experienced the same problems that I did, but basically during the last two minutes or so of Ms. Douglas' comments, I couldn't hear her. The audio was kind of in and out, and I don't exactly know what she said. I wonder if she could just repeat perhaps the last two minutes or so.

**The Chair:** Just one second.

Mr. Clerk, are we getting the signal from Ms. Douglas clearly, or is there some connection problem?

**The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Leif-Erik Aune):** I'm not certain, but I noticed the lag, so the possibility exists that the witness's Internet was lagging or the connection was lagging.

• (1625)

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Yes, I just saw a sign saying that my Internet connection was unstable, and as you can tell, I disappeared. I lost you for about 30 seconds.

**The Chair:** Okay, so would you have an idea? If we gave you your last two minutes, which were not clear to everyone, could you repeat?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Just for the last two minutes there was a problem, so I'll give you two minutes to give us some of those remarks.

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** As I said, we continue to bring this recommendation forward about the minimum necessary income. We have pointed out that the introduction of the MNI and later the 30% increase have caused tremendous hardship for many Canadian residents. In particular, racialized Canadians, as we all know, tend to be overrepresented in low-wage jobs or in low income, and they have been disproportionately impacted by the MNI rule.

Until Canada dismantles structural disadvantage and ends income inequality, racialized Canadians—especially racialized immigrant women—will be disproportionately excluded from family reunification. We recommend that the MNI be eliminated to make the immigration system more fair and equitable and consistent with an anti-racism and feminist approach.

We welcome the opening of the parents and grandparents sponsorship program, but the number of spaces is too low. Many families have been waiting for years to reunite their family. In some cases, parents and grandparents have died and dependent family members have aged out. The cap on parents and grandparents sponsorship, rather than the lottery, is unfair, and it takes a heavy toll on families. We are, therefore, recommending that the cap be removed and that more resources be put into processing so that everyone who wants to reunite with parents and grandparents and who meets the criteria can apply and expect to get a decision within a reasonable amount of time.

I will hold off on discussing international students, since my colleagues from CIC and from the association of university teachers are here.

Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Douglas.

Now we will move on to Universities Canada. It is being represented by Mr. Davidson and Ms. Therrien.

Mr. Davidson, you have five minutes for your opening remarks, and I think you are sharing your time with Ms. Therrien.

The floor is yours.

**Mr. Paul Davidson (President and Chief Executive Officer, Universities Canada):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you for the invitation, for conducting the study and for the extraordinary work that all parliamentarians are doing during this challenging time.

I'd especially like to welcome the newer members to this committee. Of course, immigration is one of Canada's great competitive strengths, and the work of this committee is important in ensuring that this asset remains.

With me today is Wendy Therrien, who leads our public policy and public affairs efforts. She'll be particularly available for questions the committee may have.

As you may know, Universities Canada represents all 96 universities across the country. Taken together, Canada's universities are a \$38-billion enterprise that is a significant driver of economic prosperity. Universities provide employment for over 310,000 people. In many cases, universities are the largest employer in their community. As well, we are the talent engines for Canada.

It's great to be here with my colleague, Denise Amyot. I very much support her comments earlier today. We work together, particularly on matters of immigration and success for international students.

Canada's universities are an integral part of the team Canada approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, from mitigating the risk to the

search for a vaccine and cure and accelerating Canada's economy into recovery. We appreciate the challenge now facing the government and all of us: that of restarting the Canadian economy while continuing the health measures necessary to keep COVID-19 at bay.

We've greatly appreciated the steps the government has taken to support our sector, including ensuring international students can continue their studies, whether online or in person. As these measures take effect, I want to highlight the role that universities, and international students specifically, can have in our recovery from COVID-19.

Canada's need to attract skilled talent predates the pandemic. As our population ages and the labour force shrinks, our future prosperity depends on our ability to welcome immigrants from around the world. Universities are an integral part of Canada's immigration system, welcoming well over 200,000 international students per year. Once in Canada, these students are able to take advantage of government pathways to immigration.

Our institutions can be key partners in attracting, training and retaining skilled talent. At all levels of study, international students bring new perspectives, ideas and valuable human connections abroad. As students, they contribute over \$22 billion to the Canadian economy annually.

As graduates, many become highly skilled individuals, contributing to local Canadian communities, or they return home with an appreciation for what Canada has to offer as a society and as a business partner.

While they are here, international students play a crucial part in our research and innovation ecosystem. Our ability to conduct research and to make new discoveries that strengthen our economy is dependent on a steady flow of international talent. International graduate students in particular are the arms and legs of our research enterprise.

However, as Denise was mentioning, international student recruitment has been hampered by COVID-19. Federal measures to accommodate online learning for international students and to provide a pathway for their safe return to Canada have been very helpful, but after five years of an average of 10% growth annually, international student enrolment at universities this year was down 2%. While these aggregate numbers might not seem so bad, given the circumstances, it's important to note that 51 universities saw a decline in international students compared to last year. Of these universities, 26 saw a decline of over 10% and 14 saw a decline of over 20%. This is having an impact not just for the universities, but also for grocery stores, car dealerships and families renting a room to international students. It is a loss that will be felt for at least the next four years.

The good news is that, given events in other countries, Canada's brand remains strong. We've seen federal investment in regaining traditional markets as well as in building our relationship with emerging markets, such as Vietnam and the Philippines. With these strategic investments, Canada can actually leapfrog competitor countries and build back stronger relationships with key sources for international students. As the speech from the throne outlined, these investments will ensure that Canada remains a destination of choice for top talent. These international students, many of them graduate students, will help grow our economy and stabilize the recovery of the post-secondary education sector.

We appreciate the work that all the members of the committee have done to help Canada recover from COVID-19 and we look forward to partnering to build a stronger Canada.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear.

• (1630)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Davidson.

Now we will move to our round of questioning. If, because of time constraints, any of the witnesses were not able to bring forward everything they wanted to, they can send their submissions in writing to the clerk of the committee and those submissions will also be considered.

Now we will move to Mr. Allison.

Mr. Allison, you have six minutes. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Witnesses, it is great to see you. I know I have seen some of you in other committees. I'm on a new committee. Paul, you come to mind. I've known you for many years on the Hill, as well as Wendy and certainly Denise. I have seen you in other committees.

I have some tough questions. I understand and appreciate how important our foreign students are. I look at the spat we had with Saudi Arabia back in 2018. Based on the numbers in 2016, Saudi Arabia was probably about 10% of what we get in terms of people and students from China.

I'm going to ask some questions and these may not be easy questions, but I think they are absolutely something we need to consider. We have issues around Hong Kong, Huawei, the two Michaels.

Are you guys concerned about what the Chinese may do in retaliation? It's a very delicate balance. My last numbers in 2016 had us at almost 150,000 short-term and long-term students from China. I would be interested, Paul or Wendy, what those numbers are today. I know we've had a bit of a decline because of COVID and [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] how important students are in terms of immigration, revenue, etc.

Can you elaborate on that relationship with China? It's a very delicate one.

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** I'd be happy to start, and Wendy may be able to have the most up-to-date enrolment numbers from China. International student enrolment has grown both for colleges and universities over the last decade. China has been a significant source, and so has India. China is the largest source for universities.

That said, for a number of years we've been working to diversify the source countries, and we are very actively doing that to make sure we don't become overly dependent on one particular market.

There are some differences between the Saudi situation and the China situation, in that most Chinese students are self-financed, whereas in the Saudi situation they were scholarship students sponsored by the Saudi government. So there are some differences there. Frankly, both Canada and China recognize the value of having the flow of students from China to Canada and from Canada to China.

You are right that we are in a period of change in political dynamics. We're quite mindful of those dynamics, but we also know that universities play an important role in keeping channels of communication open when other channels are not open, and also the people-to-people contacts can develop and contribute lasting benefit to Canada.

• (1635)

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Okay, thank you. I know that recently the minister was questioned on what would happen, given what's going on in Hong Kong. Would they consider restricting some people of influence? What's your thought on restricting Chinese students as a result of their parents and who they are and their connections? That's another delicate balance you guys may need to look at.

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** Welcome to the committee. These are terrific questions.

Because over the years we have worked together on a number of issues and all parties have worked on building and strengthening the relationship with China and increasing the flow of students from China, I think we're all committed to trying to find solutions that reflect the current reality. One stream is to diversify our sources of students.

With regard to the situation in Hong Kong, our universities take those situations very seriously because universities believe in the free flow of people and ideas. There are a number of challenges with regard to the situation in Hong Kong and with the new legislative frameworks that have been introduced.

That said, we want to make sure we have a careful, calm and dispassionate conversation about these challenges. One of the benefits of Canada's approach to these matters and immigration matters is that it has been largely non-partisan. We're really encouraging that kind of dialogue, where we look at what the changing dynamics are, what the changing security challenges are and what the changing realities are in the realigning geopolitical movement.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Thanks, Paul.

The last question—and I apologize for giving you guys a hard time at my first meeting here—but China has a tremendous amount of influence and we've seen article after article on how they influence not only our institutions but individuals here. What do you guys do? You guys have to be aware of this, that once again it's going to be a delicate balance in how you deal with that stuff. How do you deal with the influence that China has over people here on the ground, as well as its influence in trying to influence our institutions?

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** We do a whole number of things, and there may be other venues and opportunities that describe them in greater detail. I want to assure the members of the committee that universities and other actors take the challenges of political dynamics very seriously. We're in regular dialogue with government officials across multiple departments and agencies to make sure we have the most reliable and up-to-date information in order to better manage the outcome in the interests of Canada and in the interests of the students.

**Mr. Dean Allison:** Perfect. Thank you very much, Paul. I appreciate having you guys here today.

I understand completely how important our foreign students are. I have Brock University as well as Niagara College. I met with both of them recently, and we talked about the challenges they have in terms of being able to get students from all across the country.

I apologize, Denise, that I didn't get to you. I'm almost out of time, but I'll see if we can catch you in a subsequent round.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Allison.

Madame Dhillon, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Anju Dhillon (Dorval—Lachine—LaSalle, Lib.):** Ms. Amyot, you mentioned the new immigration targets announced by the Minister of Immigration.

Can you tell us why you support those targets?

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Thank you very much for the question. I would be happy to explain.

Our institutions pay close attention to what employers in their regions are saying, not to mention national bodies that represent business and industry. They are all lamenting the skills shortage, which we know will continue to be a problem in the recovery phase. We also know that immigration is the solution to the problem and that international students make ideal immigrants, because they speak the language and have studied here. Many of them have also gained work experience in Canada.

Consider the Cégep de Sherbrooke, an institution that is working with other sectors to address the problem. The Cégep de Sherbrooke formed partnerships with eight regional county municipalities in the region. The institution delivers training and support to the international students, while the regional county municipalities provide accommodations, work placements and jobs for international graduates.

I could also mention the Cégep de Matane and the Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, both of which have told us repeatedly that, without international students, the local mining industry would be struggling. Why? Because international students tend to choose areas of study that local students do not.

I will end with this: the benefits are numerous when it comes to encouraging international students to come here in larger numbers and expediting the status recognition process so they can become immigrants.

• (1640)

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you for your answer.

My next question is also about students. In my riding, many students aren't able to reunite with their spouses because their applications for an open work permit are denied over and over again, to say nothing of the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Do you think that, during the pandemic, the rejection of those applications could affect the number of international students who choose to study in Canada? After all, they have to wait three years or more before being reunited with their spouses.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Is that question for me?

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Yes, Ms. Amyot.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Yes, it could have an impact. I would say Canada ought to be competitive by making it easier for international students to come to the country. Right now, as we know, overseas offices are closed, preventing students from coming to Canada. They can't, for example, provide their biometric data, so we should be looking at ways to fix that.

Certainly, spouses are an important consideration, so we should also be making it easier for them to come to Canada and join the workforce.

**Ms. Anju Dhillon:** Thank you for your answer, Ms. Amyot.



My next question is for Ms. Douglas.

[*English*]

Ms. Douglas, you spoke a bit before about the impact of COVID and immigration, especially on women. Do you believe that women are having a tougher time getting temporary resident visas because they don't have children or they don't have a husband, so they're considered to not have any ties back home and nothing to go back to? Can you talk to us a little bit about what you think about the requirements on this segment of society?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** That's a very interesting question.

No, our experience has shown that the folks who tend to have a very difficult time getting temporary resident visas tend to be racialized—and that would include racialized women—for a number of reasons. One of the things I wanted to speak to, given the government comment on issues of race and commitment to addressing racism, is putting forward a recommendation about this, which fits really well into your question. We're recommending that the government collect and publish disaggregated race- and gender-based data for all classes of immigration, including those seeking TRV—

• (1645)

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting, Ms. Douglas. We'll have to end here. The time is up.

Madame Normandin, you have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their opening statements.

My first question is for you, Ms. Amyot. You brought up the closure of biometric data collection centres in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the problems that has created. That is an issue I was hearing about even before the pandemic. For instance, the Cégep de Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu was dealing with that because students from Réunion Island did not have access to such a centre at home. These are people who help alleviate the labour shortage in the biomedical field, in particular. We want to attract those students, and we don't want to see programs cancelled because of a lack of enrolment.

Once the pandemic is behind us, will people in countries without biometric data collection centres be able to provide their biometrics here?

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** You really hit a nerve because that is a very serious issue.

All of our members are complaining to us about that right now. Certain French-speaking countries in Africa are especially affected. A solution has to be found. I know the department initiated a pilot project around a mobile biometrics system at one point, but the project was disrupted, so I don't know what came of it.

As you suggested, people in the affected countries could submit to biometric data collection when they enter Canada. I completely agree with you. We are seeing a decrease in international student enrolment among our membership. I wish I could tell you enrol-

ment was down 2%, as in Mr. Davidson's case, but it's much more for our members. That holds true for spring, summer and fall enrolment. The situation isn't looking any better for the winter, so we have to find solutions.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** I'm going to keep the ball rolling with a follow-up question.

Do you think that is making it harder to attract French-speaking students?

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Yes, I definitely do. In our experience, French-speaking international students are often from African countries, so everything goes through Paris or Senegal, depending on where they are from.

We've had discussions with the people in Senegal, and they are doing what they can to put something in place, but they lack the resources.

If the government is serious about attracting both English-speaking and French-speaking students, it has to find solutions—lasting ones.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you very much.

My next question is for Mr. Davidson and Ms. Therrien.

You mentioned online learning, so I would like to put that into perspective. Online classes are fine during a pandemic, but they may not be the way to go in normal circumstances. Keep in mind the different time zones and the fact that other universities do not recognize certain courses. Furthermore, if the idea is to keep those students here, they first need to be here.

I would like you to comment on the relevance of online learning and the need to offer it in normal circumstances.

[*English*]

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** Thank you, Madame Normandin.

I will say a few words, and then I'll ask Wendy to follow up.

First of all, in terms of the online experience, Canada's universities moved 1.4 million learners online in 10 days. It was a remarkable achievement and students were able to complete their course work in the winter, and then in the spring and summer terms we've been investing heavily to improve the online experience for students. It's particularly important for international students, and it was a key feature that distinguishes Canada from other jurisdictions. It enabled international students to register online to continue their studies, and to be eligible for the immigration benefits of study in Canada.

I'll turn now to Wendy Therrien just to describe some of the other dimensions of the online experience for international students and for Canadian students as well.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Wendy Therrien (Director, External Relations and Research, Universities Canada):** Good afternoon, Ms. Normandin. Thank you for your question.

You raise a very important point. Certainly, the goal of every international student is to come to Canada. That's why they— [Translation]

• (1650)

[English]

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting. I think there's a lot of echo.

I will ask you, Mr. Clerk, to look into it. We can recheck.

**The Clerk:** Yes, I will look into that right now.

[Translation]

**Ms. Wendy Therrien:** Should I turn to the French channel?

[English]

**The Chair:** On the interpretation, if you are speaking in French, please check the French version. If you are speaking in English, please check the English version. I think you have to change. That might be the issue, because there's a lot of echo.

[Translation]

**Ms. Wendy Therrien:** I switched channels.

[English]

**The Chair:** Okay.

[Translation]

**Ms. Wendy Therrien:** I was saying that every international student's goal is to come to Canada.

As for the immigration of international students, their coming to Canada is one of our goals as a country. As Mr. Davidson said, online learning is hugely important, precisely because international students were able to begin their studies. Without that virtual option, we could have lost a whole crop of students.

It will be important, however, to help all of the students who moved online transition to in-person learning, so they can get more out of their learning experience, and we as well.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Ms. Therrien.

Do I have a bit of time left?

[English]

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

[Translation]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Ms. Amyot, you talked about making sure Canada was competitive in the international marketplace.

Is it a good idea to offer exchange programs with the benefit of streamlined processing?

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Yes. That is actually one of our recommendations to Minister Mendicino. Providing direct and immediate access to the information is essential, eliminating the need for intermediaries, who just push the files along from office to office. We don't have time for that. This is 2020, and we have shown—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** —that we are able to operate in an online environment.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will now have to move on to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

I'm going to turn to Ms. Douglas for my first question.

Ms. Douglas, you opened with the notion that children who age out because of the pandemic and impact...and came up with an excellent suggestion about freezing the time in terms of the age. I'm also wondering... Many of the workers, such as caregivers, are required to fulfill the two-year work requirement, and through no fault of their own the pandemic has interrupted that work. Do you think the government should count this interrupted time towards their two-year work requirement so that they're not penalized through no fault of their own?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Absolutely, it is a concern we are hearing from care workers and others who are here on a pathway to permanent residence. They are very much concerned that two years down the road their children would have aged out. I think that given the 12 to 18 months of the pause we're seeing because of COVID—it's already eight months, and we don't see the second stage ending until hopefully by summer—that absolutely should be counted towards the time that caregivers are here.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

Turning to the parents and grandparents suggestions, I also appreciated your comments about the minimum wage requirements, the qualification and the impact, as well as the lottery system. As you know, the government has only just announced the parents and grandparents program. Ten months have passed since it was supposed to start in January. If Canada is to value the contributions of parents and grandparents... I believe you made a comment that the government should lift the cap and allow for the applications to come in and be processed. I wonder if you can just elaborate on the value of that, the lifting of the cap and perhaps setting standards in terms of processing time and increasing resources in timely, expeditious processing.

• (1655)

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Absolutely. With all of our recommendations, one thing that we have been trying to impress upon government is that parents and grandparents contribute to the social and economic assessment and integration of families. Grandparents, in particular, are not only cultural bridges but they also support the families in terms of unpaid child care. More than that, they become a support to the family. This is especially important for women, who are then better able to participate in the labour market. It becomes a win-win for everyone: for the children; for the sponsors, who are the children of those being sponsored; and, of course, for the parents and grandparents, who are then reunified with their families.

Removing the minimum necessary income will allow a larger group of people to be able to sponsor, and lifting the cap on parents and grandparents, and increasing the resources needed to process that, can only lead to a better program. We've heard from families time and time again who have been waiting sometimes for over 10 years and they have not been able.... Whether it's the lottery system or, as you know, with the cap by January 1 end of day, before the 10-month pause that we had, all of the numbers would have been taken up. Time and time again folks were unable to get their application in, and with the lottery system it is the luck of the draw.

What we are saying is to lift the cap and have people who want to sponsor put in an application. Let's invest the resources to be able to process those applications in a timely manner, because, after all, parents and grandparents do contribute economically and socially.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you.

The Migrant Workers Alliance for Change has made a host of recommendations to support migrant workers. As we know, some of them have actually died in support of Canadians and putting food on our table. The government is only coming with a half measure, I would say, that applies to health care workers so they can have access to landed status on arrival.

Would you agree that the government should change their immigration policy to allow for migrant workers to have landed status on arrival? Given the fact that we're not going to meet our immigration level numbers this year at all—we're not going to even come close to it—should we be extending landed status to migrant workers who are already here and to other undocumented workers?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Yes. We've had a number of discussions with Minister Mendicino on this, especially since this is the time we believe Canadians will be very supportive of putting in place a regularization program. We have a number of folks here who are undocumented or with precarious immigration status, especially migrant workers, not only those working in the health care field.

Even with the announcement of that program, what we have impressed on the minister and IRCC is that we're not only speaking about nurses and doctors. We also need to look at the orderlies and the cleaners who are keeping our hospitals and our long-term care homes going, who absolutely should have access to permanent residency; and also the people who are feeding us, the farm workers and other agricultural workers, the meat cutters and all of those—

**The Chair:** Pardon me for interrupting, Ms. Douglas. The time is up.

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** So yes to landed arrivals for migrant workers—

**The Chair:** Ms. Douglas, your time is up.

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** With that, the first round comes to an end.

We will now move on to the second round. We have a little time constraint. We will end this panel at 5:10, so I would give Mr. Aboultaif and Mr. Regan four minutes each. We will have Ms. Kwan and Ms. Normandin with two minutes each. We will readjust the timing so that we can end the first panel at 5:10.

We will move on to Mr. Aboultaif.

Mr. Aboultaif, you have four minutes for your round of questioning.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Ms. Amyot, Ms. Douglas, Ms. Therrien and Mr. Davidson. I would appreciate input from all of you on my first question.

We know that there is Chinese intimidation on campuses of students. It's something that I believe will be increasing and won't be getting better. Is there a government plan to prevent that? If you are aware of one, we would appreciate your advising us on it.

I guess I'll start with you, Mr. Davidson.

• (1700)

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** Sure. I'm happy to answer the question. I really welcome the opportunity to discuss the changing geopolitical nature of these matters.

The work that's being done on campus is to make sure that all students feel safe and secure in a whole range of areas. Campuses have been working with their international students, with consular officials from a variety of countries and with student support folk on the staff of campuses to identify what is actually happening, what's being alleged to happen, and what are the best paths forward on that.

I think it's a worthwhile conversation for members of Parliament to have and for others to have but not lose sight of the fact that the vast majority of international students are active, productive citizens and students on campuses and they have a very successful experience while they're in Canada.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Ms. Amyot.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** For us, it's important that we provide access for all. It's very important that all students have the chance to study in Canada and be supported. If on campuses the administration or students witness intimidation, it's up to them to mention this. Then measures are taken. We support everybody, no matter who they are and no matter where they come from. I think that's very important. It's important not to single out any specific group.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Ms. Douglas.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Madam Chair, I have a brief point of order.

I would ask that Ms. Amyot bring her microphone closer to her mouth because the interpreters can't hear what she is saying, unfortunately.

[*English*]

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Our member agencies that provide services are very mindful of creating safe spaces for all of their clients. They create an opportunity for clients who may be vulnerable to exploitation to be able to reach out in case they're feeling a need for support.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Ms. Therrien.

**Ms. Wendy Therrien:** I believe Paul spoke well on the points that we would make as Universities Canada.

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** Okay.

Again to Mr. Davidson, what is the significant...of significance of a government policy or plan to really combat the intimidation and to be able to really provide the protection we need for our international students?

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** I'm not sure I heard the question fully. Could I ask you to repeat it?

**Mr. Ziad Aboultaif:** The question is this: What is the significant plan...what do you see as significant in the government plan to prevent intimidation, to help prevent the situation from becoming more severe and—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

We will now move on to Mr. Regan.

Mr. Regan, you have four minutes for your round of questioning.

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

Ms. Douglas, first of all, thank you for staying a few more minutes past the time you planned to leave. I hope you can stay for perhaps the next five minutes or so.

You will know, of course, from the recent annual report of the department about its plan to pivot to immigration as an economic driver, as part of the COVID recovery plan of the government for Canada. What are your thoughts on this decision? How would you suggest that the government could better co-operate with settlement services to implement this plan as efficiently as possible?

• (1705)

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** That's a very good question. Thanks very much.

As I was saying, given the restrictions on travel due to COVID and the closing of embassies, what we are strongly encouraging the government to do is to look internally to identify the folks who are here with a precarious immigration status and those who are undocumented and to create a pathway for them to have their status regularized.

Settlement services are ready to act as proxy. We know that there will be some hesitation in terms of the people coming forward unless there are clear guarantees that they will not be deported before they have a fair trial and hearing. We expect the government to put clear guidance in place and, as I said, to work with our community-based organizations, which will work to support the individuals but also to support the government in reaching those communities.

We absolutely support the government focus on immigration as a response, an economic response. That has always been true. It will continue to be true for Canada, both economically and demographically speaking.

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in our long-term care homes  
[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but I think there are some connectivity issues.

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in Canada and we believe that this is important.

I have an unstable connection.

We believe the time is right for the government to put in place some sort of regularization program.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** Thank you very much, Ms. Douglas.

I appreciate your appearing through this difficulty with the technology and the connection. Mostly you're coming through clearly, although there were pauses at times, so I want to stick with you for a moment.

You'll be aware, I think, that Minister Mendicino directed his department to use creative ways to harness residents already in the country, to increased levels. One example of this is that people temporarily in Canada have been or are being encouraged to transition to permanent residency. How do you see those models working out?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** We have experience of this in Canada. I believe the last regularization program was in the early to mid-1980s. It was a huge success.

As I said, we have a number of folks here who want to stay in Canada, including those in the seasonal agricultural workers program, who have been coming in and out of Canada for sometimes 15 or 20 years. We have folks who are refugee claimants and have been waiting. The process should be expedited for them. We have temporary foreign workers working in our health field. They also want permanent residency. We have caregivers, as we spoke about earlier with MP Kwan, who want the process regularized.

We have a number of folks who are here. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] with a clear process, with the support of community-based organizations, including faith communities, I believe that the time is right for us to put a regularization program in place to meet our immigration numbers that were recently announced by Minister Mendicino.

**Hon. Geoff Regan:** That's my time.

**The Chair:** Thank you. We will now move to Ms. Normandin.

Ms. Normandin, you have two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Both Ms. Therrien and Ms. Amyot can answer this next question.

It is often said that it is harder for French-speaking students to come to Quebec. Even if they have a Quebec acceptance certificate, a scholarship and a spot waiting for them, the federal government can say no and refuse to issue a permit or visa.

Should the federal government award more points or issue a permit more readily when Quebec has already granted a student's application?

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** I think the permit application process should be expedited, which would require the government to implement certain measures. Earlier I brought up the ongoing problem with biometrics collection. Often, the problem arises because the acceptance comes halfway through the trimester, so it's too late. French-speaking countries need to make sure offices are operational in every respect. Otherwise, we will not achieve the immigration targets. Bear in mind that international students who come to Canada contribute \$22 billion to the economy. That is more than the auto industry and the forest industry, making it a major industry.

• (1710)

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Sorry to cut you off, but I would like Ms. Therrien to have a few moments to answer.

**Ms. Denise Amyot:** Of course. My apologies.

**Ms. Wendy Therrien:** Thank you, Ms. Normandin.

Building on Ms. Amyot's answer, I would say that it's also important for the two levels of government to work well together and for both systems—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting. The time is up.

Now we will move to our last round of questioning.

Ms. Douglas, were you saying something?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** I was about to leave.

**The Chair:** Can you stay for two more minutes?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Sure, that will be great.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, you have two minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Ms. Douglas, I'll quickly ask you this question.

With respect to refugees, right now we have the border restrictions, so many of the refugees are not able to enter into Canada. Do

you think that Canada should lift...or provide exemptions to refugees, and then also apply the health measures in terms of quarantine and what have you, to ensure that Canadians are safe?

**Ms. Debbie Douglas:** Absolutely. We've said to the minister that folks who are in search of safe haven or seeking asylum need asylum, regardless of the pandemic. We're asking the government to allow folks to come in, especially those who are government-sponsored.

We've seen that the few who have trickled in over the last eight months have been able to quarantine safely in hotel spaces or refugee houses where there's space. The folks who are providing the services are very mindful in terms of our health protocols.

I think that we have to open our borders to government-assisted refugees as well as privately sponsored refugees. COVID cannot be an excuse for closing our borders to asylum seekers.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm going to quickly turn to Mr. Davidson.

On the post-secondary education side and the international students, many of the postgrad students who are already here are having a tough time because of the time-restricted postgrad work permit, which requires them to complete 12 to 24 months of high-wage or high-skilled work. Because of the pandemic, that work has been clearly impacted. Some of them are going to run out of time and their work permit is going to expire.

Do you think the government should automatically renew their work permit so they can have the extra time to complete their work requirements?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan, but your time is up.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Can I just get a quick yes or no?

**Mr. Paul Davidson:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Sorry about that.

With this, our first panel comes to an end.

Thank you to all the witnesses, and a special thanks to Ms. Douglas. I know you had to leave, but we really appreciate your staying longer with us.

You can stay with us, but if any people on the first panel have to leave, they can leave also.

Now we will move to our second panel.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

**The Chair:** We will resume. I call the meeting to order.

Now we will start with our second panel. Thanks to all the witnesses for appearing before us today as we do the important work on the study of the impact of COVID-19 on the immigration system.

We will start with our first witness, Madame Bergeron.

Madame Bergeron, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron (As an Individual):** My story is one that thousands of Canadians share. My name is Emmanuelle Bergeron, and I never expected to fall in love with a man who lived in another country. On July 7, 2017, I met Ernesto Davalos Urbizo. From that point on, I flew to see him as much as I could as our relationship grew. The periods of separation have always been filled with emotional conversations online.

In February 2018, I was thrilled to be able to tell him that he was going to be a father. Being in my early 40s, I no longer thought that dream possible. We were excited about our plans for the future and we met with a lawyer to apply for a temporary visa. We were applying so that my partner could be here for the birth of our son. I was planning to go back to Cuba when the baby was two months old for my maternity leave. That would give us time to work on the application for permanent residence through sponsorship. We submitted all of the necessary proof and documentation, but in 2018, we were shocked to learn that the application had been refused under subsection 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations.

On July 11, 2018, in front of family and friends in Varadero, I promised not just to cherish Ernesto, but also to do everything in my power to reunite our whole family under one roof. A few days later, we found out that another application had been refused, this one for a visitor visa so that Ernesto could be with me for the birth of our son. I was six months' pregnant and a soon-to-be mother—my heart was broken. I could no longer hold back tears at the airport, where I once again had to say goodbye to my husband. It is thanks to the support of family and friends that I was able to return to Canada without him. The government refused his basic right to be present for the birth of his son on the pretext that he had family ties here, in Canada, and had not convinced the immigration officer that he would return to his country.

On July 30, 2018, I filled out and submitted the application and paid the required fees. My son Lucas was born on October 1, 2018, and his father, Ernesto, learned that he had become a father a few minutes later by video conference. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, opened our sponsorship application on November 28, 2018. The interminable wait had begun. During the long months of not hearing from the department other than to receive requests for updated documents and forms, my son and I travelled to see his father. Ernesto held his son in his arms for the first time when Lucas was two years old.

On July 28, 2019, a year after submitting the application, we received a request to complete a medical exam and permission to apply for a Quebec selection certificate. Applicants are supposed to receive an answer within 25 business days, but I did not receive it

until December 4, 2019, five months later. That was yet another document that delayed the processing of our application.

As time went on, visits grew further apart and finances became strained. After 18 months of waiting, we received a letter from IRCC asking us to prove that our love was a genuine, bona fide and public relationship. A month later, on February 8, 2020, we received a letter welcoming my husband to Canada. We cried tears of joy. We were happy and we thought it was over, but alas, it was not. On March 19, 2020, we received another letter notifying us that the medical exam results had been lost. I was angry. My spouse had taken the medical exam in Trinidad and Tobago on August 26, 2019.

Since Cuba no longer had a panel physician following service cuts at the Canadian embassy in Havana, I had to pay for the trip, something I had not budgeted for. It cost me about \$4,000. Since then, I have submitted the supporting document provided by the clinic three times, but it doesn't show up in my IRCC account. After calling the clinic where the exam was conducted, I was told by the secretary that the results did indeed appear in IRCC's online system. She sent everything by fax and email to Mexico City. What happened to the results? We will never know because IRCC never responds to our inquiries.

COVID-19 blindsided the entire planet, causing countries to close their borders. Frankly, I am worn out. I don't think I can make it through another goodbye at the airport. In the past two years, Ernesto was able to cuddle, rock and hold his son for all of 15 weeks. We have been waiting for 27 months. We have submitted all of the required documents, we have met the Quebec selection certificate criteria and we have paid all the fees.

The last time Ernesto held his son in his arms was January 5, 2020, more than 315 days ago. I am worn out and on the brink of depression. I cry every time my two-year-old son brings me the telephone saying "daddy, daddy" because he wants to see his father. I cry every morning because my husband is so far away. I feel like the government has robbed me of the most precious moments of my life, moments I will never get back. I have moved past anger. I want to cry foul when I see the government issue visas to people who submitted their applications after I did and who do not have children. How a country built on family values can turn its back on us like this is beyond me.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of all the women who have and who will give birth to their child without their spouse by their side.

Would Mr. Mendicino or Mr. Trudeau stand for being separated from their wives at a time as important as the birth of their child?

• (1720)

On what basis can an immigration officer decide to deny a father his fundamental right to see the birth of his child?

Thousands of Canadian families are living with the lack of transparency, the inconsistency and the unfairness caused by the discretionary power of officers. As a result, we remain uncertain about the future of our family.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Madame Bergeron. The time is up. You will get an opportunity in the rounds of questioning to speak further on the issue.

Now we will move on to Mr. Jatin Shory.

Mr. Shory, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Jatin Shory (Lawyer, Shory Law, As an Individual):** Madam Chair and honourable committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration this afternoon.

My name is Jatin Shory, and I am an immigration and refugee lawyer working at Shory Law in Calgary, Alberta.

It is my understanding that the committee is currently studying the impact of COVID-19 on Canada's immigration system. I believe this inquiry is an important step in the right direction, and I suspect that the committee members have received a variety of perspectives and suggestions over the course of this exercise.

It was only seven months ago when the Canadian government began to announce significant steps to contain and manage, in a predictable timeline, the global COVID-19 pandemic. In my world, that of immigration, it began with significant border closures and restrictions on travel, resulting in thousands of families becoming separated. Internally, application processing was halted, and hearings at various courts and tribunals paused.

The world of immigration law subsequently became a process of staying up to date with further directions from the government, policy announcements and interpreting orders in council being issued, at times on a weekly basis.

Around that time, I had just won a matter at the immigration appeal division by consent from the minister's council. My client had sponsored his wife, and this application had been refused. He was a father of three, and his family application had been refused in an interview of his wife that he did not even get the chance to participate in.

After this win, of course, my client was ecstatic. His wife's file, however, was being managed at the High Commission of Canada office out of London. Then COVID hit, and his file remains at a standstill today. My client had three children with his wife, and yet the genuineness of his marriage was still being questioned. He has now been waiting for almost three years for his family to reunite in Canada.

Most of the phone calls or advice I gave for the first few months following the lockdowns were largely around how to bring back a spouse, how to reunite with a partner and why they're not letting family work when they have all the documentation the government says they need.

It became clear that family reunification, which is among the objectives of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, would need to become a priority. This left a lasting impression on me as a professional, and I continue to observe what solutions the government is presenting for the future of immigration in Canada.

Family reunification is at the forefront for many Canadians and permanent residents. There have been homegrown movements by Canadians and permanent residents demanding more transparency on why their application to reunite with their loved ones has been halted, and this was covered extensively by the media and continues to be today as well.

The government responded by confirming the allocation of more resources to the processing of overseas applications. I applaud these efforts. Many of my clients who were in the final stages of their processing are now beginning to receive their passport requests. However, what will happen to the thousands of families who have been picked for interviews that, in reality, have no specified timeline to resume?

One of my clients came out of a very abusive relationship. She had a child out of this relationship. Culturally, she struggled with getting independence and confidence to move forward in her life in these conditions. She found a life partner and overcame the adversity faced by women in her circumstances. We were told that interviews were going to be set for the summer of 2020. Obviously that did not happen, and my client remains lost as to when she can begin the next chapter of her life.

In a time when Canada is beginning to evaluate a more efficient system of processing applications that maintains integrity, I believe it is imperative that IRCC also take this as an opportunity to go back to the drawing board on how overseas applications are being processed and selected for interviews. It is imperative that IRCC take this opportunity to consider the following reforms.

One is speeding up the interview and application process, and two is introducing new forms of training for immigration officers to make them more attuned to the parties' physical and mental conditions as well as their social and cultural backgrounds.

The backlog of file processing would definitely result in families being separated for unjustifiable periods because of the current system. The movement towards electronic solutions is apparently required in 2020; however, some of the family reunification pathways available today continue with the status quo from previous years: the paper filing of humanitarian and compassionate applications, other sponsorship applications and even temporary resident permits, and the need for wet signatures.

The use of technology can be further instilled in the interview process. Virtual interviews are a solution to an anticipated backlog of processing. It is a process that has been smoothly incorporated at the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. If we can introduce artificial intelligence at various visa processing centres overseas, why can we not bring forward a solution like this as well?

Canada is a leader when it comes to global immigration. We need to continue to demonstrate that through this pandemic.

Thank you again, and I invite questions.

• (1725)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Shory, for your opening remarks.

Now we will move on to Mr. Falconer, representing Alliance Canada Hong Kong.

Mr. Falconer, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. I assume you are sharing your time with Ms. Chan.

**Mr. Robert Falconer (Research Associate, Immigration and Refugee Policy, School of Public Policy, University of Calgary, Alliance Canada Hong Kong):** Thank you to the committee for inviting me. It's an honour and a pleasure to present with Starus and Alliance Canada Hong Kong.

The topic of today actually goes along with Mr. Shory, about the idea of timeliness and flexibility when it comes to the processing of applications for refugee claimants, immigrants and others. While we do come here as a group that's focused on Hong Kongers, the recommendations we make would be very similar, and would broadly impact the larger immigrant and refugee community.

Historically, our *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* has not been very flexible. Since 2000, we've had three periods where large numbers of claims were made in Canada, and each time it has taken several years for the Immigration and Refugee Board to catch up and process those claims. This is, by the way, the same with the most recent rise in refugee numbers since about 2016, and still our system continues to try to catch up.

With the advent of COVID-19, the faults in the processing pipeline, as it were, continue to have real human impacts. I was looking at some data today, and it was quite apparent that since March 2020, about 44% of all refugee claims have been referred to the IRB for a hearing date. That's in comparison to *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* per cent in the same period last year. While we can certainly understand why the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic would exacerbate the ability to process and refer refugee claims, we have to understand there are human lives in the mix here. They are unable to access work permits, attain status in Canada and access social services. They are all impacted by those wait times.

Likewise, it prevents *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* especially the provinces, which, rightfully so, have to *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* lives of refugee claimants while their claims are being processed.

In addition to this, international students have found it very difficult to make the transition from graduation into the Canadian economic immigration system. Graduates of an education program will find that *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* study in Canada to excel academically and to find work afterwards, through no fault of their own but only because of the economic circumstances that surround them, they will be unable to gain the points necessary to qualify for the economic immigration system.

With that, we would like to make several recommendations.

The first would be that Canada develop a five-year post-graduate work permit, similar to the Australian model that was adopted for Hong Kongers. This would allow international students in Canada, who have graduated from our system, more time to gain work experience in Canada.

The second, for those who are fleeing or who are here from countries with oppressive regimes, as in the situation in Hong Kong right now, is to provide them more safety in Canada, and if need be, access to the refugee claim system.

Finally, it would be the transition to an interim visa program. Right now, refugee claimants, students or workers who are transitioning out of one permit to another whose permit expires in the meantime...on an implied status that is *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* many employers *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* students and workers themselves. The new *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* offers an interim visa program that, immediately upon applying for an extension or a change of status in the visa, issues them an interim visa that would last until the government gets back to them with their new work, study or visitor permit.

In addition, *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* into our immigration and refugee system would pay dividends both in humanitarian *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* as well as to the management of our immigration and refugee system.

The *[Technical difficulty—Editor]* aspect will be presented by my associate, Starus. The delays in the processing of work permits, study permits, and refugee claim referrals have a real impact, causing stress, financial difficulties, and inability to access social services.

I'll pass the time over to Starus.

• (1730)

**The Chair:** You have 45 seconds.

**Ms. Starus Chan (Alliance Canada Hong Kong):** Thank you for letting me speak here today.

I'm an international student from Hong Kong, and also a student activist for the democratic movement. I'm here to speak about my experience.

We all know that Hong Kong is not safe for student activists anymore. However, here in Canada, Tibetans, Uighurs and Hong Kong student activists are being intimidated and harassed by pro-*[Technical difficulty—Editor]* supporters. We worry that our activities are being documented, and that this may lead to potential prosecution for us and our families.

We sincerely hope that the government will implement immigration and asylum measures as soon as possible. It's stressful for international students and their families to tackle COVID-19, Canada's immigration system, and also worry about their safety at the same time.

I wanted to go back—

**The Chair:** Ms. Chan, sorry for interrupting, but your time is up. During the round of questioning you will get an opportunity to speak about the issues you want to raise.

With that, I thank all the witnesses for their opening testimony. We will now move on to our first round of questioning, starting with Ms. Dancho.



Ms. Dancho, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. It's great to see these expert opinions on the witness stand today. We greatly appreciate your time.

Ms. Chan, I'd like you to elaborate a little on what you were just touching on when your time ran out. Specifically, has the government really made any promises or had any communications with you regarding when or if they're going to bring forward a more robust asylum and refugee program in response to the rapidly deteriorating situation in Hong Kong?

Mr. Falconer, you can chime in on this as well.

• (1735)

**Ms. Starus Chan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I think the new policy for the Hong Kongers, a more efficient policy, personally would help me to obtain a PR here. However, the policy is also unclear, as many Hong Kongers have been inquiring about the measure. I urge the government to clarify the details of it.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Mr. Falconer, do you have anything to add to that? Are you aware of anything upcoming or have they communicated with you anything about a possible refugee or asylum system for Hong Kongers that wasn't announced last week?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Not as of yet.

So far, they're...early in the coming year. I agree with Ms. Chan that, especially with regard to this situation, clear communication needs to be had with regard to who is eligible and when this program will roll out.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you.

Are you concerned that the government's recent announcement for Hong Kong leaves out, say, grandparents or older individuals who do not have post-secondary education, or perhaps those who don't have the economic means to obtain a post-secondary education?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Yes, absolutely.

I wasn't [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. I noted when I read the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. While I think the announcement is a first step, it's an insufficient one.

With regard to humanitarian intervention, which is really what this is, I can understand the desire of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for highly qualified students. Again, I applaud those measures, but it leaves a very large gap for grandparents and for extended family members who might not qualify and for those not having post-secondary education within the recent past.

I don't know the exact time, but I believe the recent graduate qualification for these programs is that within the past five years they would have had to [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a program.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** That's correct.

Thank you for that. I appreciate that.

I want to get your comments on actions from other countries concerning Hong Kong. How do you feel the recent Canadian im-

migration announcement compares to actions taken by U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Certainly, the U.K. has a more robust program, with regard to a special type of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] that certain Hong Kongers hold who are able to qualify for Britain.

One thing to note, similar to the Canadian program, is that there has been no specific [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] on behalf of the U.K. government about when they're going to move forward on a lot of these immigration measures. The group that the program [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] again is a lot more expansive compared to the Canadian immigration program.

I would say, though, that the big thing here is not having clear details about when this program is going to roll out, and its much more limited focus on the groups that are eligible for it under the Canadian system.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you.

Further to that, the government has promised expedited service for Hong Kong nationals.

Do you think it's important that they commit to service standards, for example, publicly? Given that we've heard a lot on this committee alone today about the delays, do you think it's important that they commit to deadlines for the announcement they made?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** I would say, yes, service standards are absolutely vital. Other research around other jurisdictions, various migration agencies and other allies and friends of Canada have shown that service standards do help improve timeliness, but the big thing as well is that there needs to be an upfront investment in staff training and sufficient staff capacity in order to process these claims.

One thing [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] made in my opening testimony here is that we have a very reactive refugee claim system that tends to play catch-up. That's not specific to any government; it's actually something that has been consistent over the past 20 years. There has been a spike in claims during this period and we've played catch-up for about two years. That [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] again has a fiscal impact as well on the [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Falconer. We have about a minute and a half left.

My understanding is that a number of individuals have had their travel documents seized in Hong Kong. What do you believe can be done for them? That was not mentioned or included at all in the Liberal announcement last week.

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** One of the members of the committee, Ms. Kwan, recommended the revival of the source country system. This is an older refugee resettlement program that would help what we call IDPs, or internally displaced persons, people who are in places like Hong Kong, or let's say there was an [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] family trapped within Iraq or elsewhere. It allows us to resettle them in Canada. With that refugee system comes something very important: We're able to issue travel documents for an individual, which would [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] a passport. I think short-term, and maybe long-term [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the source country refugee resettlement system to provide them with travel documents to come to Canada.

● (1740)

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Thank you, Mr. Falconer.

Ms. Chan, did you have anything to add? We have about 20 seconds left.

**Ms. Starus Chan:** I would like to take 20 seconds to talk about my story. Many international students have spoken up already. There is a lack of clear information about immigration rules and policies, and as migrants, when we miss deadlines the consequences are very serious. As a student from Hong Kong, I benefit from the new measure; however—

**The Chair:** Ms. Chan, sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

We will now move on to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the presenters.

My questions will go to Jatin.

Jatin, first of all, my apologies that I was not part of your wedding celebration, even though your auntie, my wife, Roni, was there. I wish all the best to you and your wife in the coming years.

Jatin, in the business you are in and the area you are coming from, I'm sure you are hearing the same things that I do. If we look prior to 2015 and moving forward to 2021, when it comes to parents and grandparents, the number of applications we can take has increased sixfold, from 5,000 applications all the way to 30,000 applications, and we have increased the age of a dependent child from 18 to 22. Last year, in 2019, the number of spouses, parents and grandparents...27% of the immigration was from that category.

When it comes to wait times, they have gone from several years to two years for parents and grandparents, and from almost over two years to one year for spousal applications. That is the reduction in the wait times. To reduce these wait times, which were historically inherited and are because of COVID, we're going to process 49,000 spousal applications by the end of December.

Jatin, I would like you to comment on how you see these developments for reducing the backlog that was inherited historically and because of COVID, and also comment on the number of applications we are going to accept.

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** Mr. Dhaliwal, sir, thank you for the question. You were missed at the wedding as well, so no worries there.

I'll speak about the parents and grandparents first, and then I'll talk about the spousal sponsorship applications.

With respect to the parents and grandparents applications right now, it's great that they're still being accepted. It's great that the procedure is still being...and the program is still in play. However, it's a bit confusing for me. Last year, we had the "first-come, first-served" situation, and it was pretty obvious, I think.... Within seven minutes, the entire portal shut down. It was quite devastating for a lot of our clients, as well, who were trying to get some help. It was really devastating for people who didn't have an adequate Internet connection, people who couldn't type as quickly as other people.

It's my understanding that the government had to settle a number of cases, as well, due to human rights concerns that were brought up, so I can understand why the government may have decided this year to revert back to the lottery system. It is a system that I think prior to last year's program was a system that ultimately had some form of consistency based on programs that existed before. This year I guess it is 10,000 applications or interest to sponsor forms that will be selected, and I guess it's 30,000 next year. I'm not too sure if that is the best system moving forward.

I know that this is not the first committee meeting. I know there have been a number of suggestions by senior colleagues in the space, suggestions for weighted lottery systems, for example. That's something that should probably be explored in today's day and age. It's something that even clients have asked us when they come in talking about the different types of ways that they have been considered, people who have been waiting five to 10 years just to sponsor their parents.

With respect to the spousal sponsorship applications, frankly, I'm really confused. Of the 49,000 spousal sponsorship applications being processed, how many are going to be successful? What kinds of mechanisms and safeguards are being put into evaluating the way the discretion of visa officers is being exercised and the way they're actually looking into and evaluating the genuineness of marriage or the primary purpose of the application? Ms. Bergeron's story is, unfortunately, not unique. It's something that a number of my clients come in the door sharing with us. I'm curious to see how that plays out.

Again, those are my concerns here today.

● (1745)

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** The second question I'm going to ask you is about the temporary workers who are here. Every day I'm in the constituency or on the media—a radio station or a TV station—one question is asked. They have a petition going, and they want to see if we can increase the number of permanent immigrants from these temporary work permits, even though 22% of the immigration in 2019 was from this category.

Would you have suggestions as to how the government can improve so that those people can be given a chance to become permanent Canadians?

**The Chair:** Give a quick 30-second answer, please.

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** Sure.

I'm not a policy guy. Ultimately, 2019 numbers are pre-COVID, and post-COVID... I think that was the purpose of this study from the get-go. I don't know if I have any suggestions necessarily, but again, I know a lot of colleagues, lawyers and non-lawyers, can see that the obvious solution here is looking at our friends, our neighbours, people who are here already, and just figuring out quicker ways of helping them achieve that status.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** I would like to ask—

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dhaliwal. Your time is up.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Can I request something from the panellist, please?

**The Chair:** Your time is up. We have to move to the next person.

Ms. Normandin, you have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

Many of my questions are for Ms. Bergeron. We have the opportunity to meet with someone who really went through the whole process.

As counsel, I've seen a few cases. However, Ms. Bergeron, I think that it's worthwhile to let you speak about what you've been through.

I'll start by asking you the following question. When you were told that the visas had been refused, were you sent a generic response or a response explaining why certain documents were taken into consideration while others were not?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** It was a generic response, which referred to paragraph 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations.

The visa application was refused on the grounds that my husband had ties here in Canada and that he didn't have enough money in his bank account. This wasn't true. I deposited money into his bank account to make sure that he had the amount required by Canada. I was also told that he had never travelled. They don't take into account the fact that people from Cuba can't travel. The same reasons are given in the two refusal letters.

For our second application, counsel put together a very good case. The plane tickets were purchased in advance and everything was done according to Canada's requirements. We provided proof that he was making the trip for the birth of his son. The application was refused.

On what basis can an officer prevent a father from seeing the birth of his child? I have thousands of questions for the people at immigration. I don't understand why you prevented this. What's happening? Why can't a father see the birth of his child?

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** When you receive pre-packaged responses, how do you feel about the transparency and seriousness of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** There isn't any. I've lost confidence in the system.

When I went to the embassy in Havana to pick up the second refusal, I was five months pregnant. I threw a pregnant woman tantrum so that I could go in and speak to an officer.

When I finally managed to meet with an officer who spoke some English, he explained to me that what wasn't written was that my case had been refused because I hadn't paid the application for permanent residence fee. The \$1,200 fee was the issue. I told the officer that my husband was being prevented from seeing the birth of his child because I hadn't yet paid the \$1,200, which I planned to pay shortly, and that this was why the case was refused.

He said that they were putting this note in the case file. He suggested that I submit the application for permanent residence and then apply for a visitor's visa. I asked him whether he knew how much each application cost. I told him that I had accumulated over \$10,000 in immigration-related debt. This included all the paperwork and translations. It's incredibly expensive.

● (1750)

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** You said that one reason provided was that, once the visa had expired, Ernesto may not return to Cuba. Would you have encouraged him to stay here when the visa expired?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** No. The goal was to spend my maternity leave with the family so that they could meet the little one and to give the application for permanent residence the chance to run its course. We really wanted to go through the process so that we could be allowed to travel between the two countries.

Our greatest asset at this time is to have the opportunity to raise our child in a mix of cultures and to travel the world. It's good that my child can spend time in both Cuba and Canada and that we can travel between the two countries.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Ernesto doesn't have the chance to travel to Canada and experience his relationship with you here. However, you're still asked to show the seriousness of your relationship at the end of the process. Do you think that the fact that you can experience your relationship only abroad is making it harder for you to do so?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** Yes.

Our relationship is much more complicated. We must admit it.

At the age of 40, I may have wanted a second child. I turned 41 two weeks ago, and I'm too old for this. The immigration system ensured that I won't have a second child. I'm 41 years old. By the time Ernesto arrives, I'll be too old to get pregnant again. Not only was he denied the opportunity to attend the birth of the first child, but I won't have other children.

You choose people's future and you have unbelievable control over it, while people live in uncertainty. I also don't even know whether that future will happen.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** My next question concerns the fact that IRCC lost the medical record.

The doctors who did the test could still send it. However, the issue is that the medical record is expiring and will no longer be valid. Could the IRCC officials have admitted fault and decided to extend the validity of the medical record?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** The medical record hasn't been valid since August. I haven't received any response from IRCC regarding whether they're giving me an extension. I have no idea what's happening. They aren't answering my questions.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** There's a lack of transparency.

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** They're saying not to bother them right now and that the officers at the visa office in Mexico City are overwhelmed.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** I have one last question.

Usually, we don't ask questions when we don't know the answer. I don't know the answer at all, but I'm asking you the question anyway.

If you had known from the start everything involved in the process, would you have gone through it anyway? What would you have done differently?

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** Yes. I would have gone through it.

I don't think that I would have done anything differently. I did everything by the book. I did everything that the government requested. I travelled as much as I could. I gave everything that I could. I did everything that I could financially. I would go through it again and repeat the process, knowing that Ernesto will be with us eventually.

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Bergeron.

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Now we will move on to Ms. Kwan.

You have six minutes for your round of questioning.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for their presentations.

I'm first going to go to Mr. Falconer and Mr. Chan. On the issue around Hong Kongers who are trying to get to safety, the government actually made an announcement last week. However, in that announcement there are no provisions or measures, if you will, for people who are in Hong Kong right now to seek refuge in Canada. There's no refugee stream that was announced by the minister.

Would you say that it is absolutely essential, given the dire situation of Hong Kong, that the government bring in a special measure for the people of Hong Kong through the refugee stream?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Yes, absolutely, and I would go back to the example of something like a source country measure whereby we are able to recognize somebody's refugee status within their home country to come to Canada. I would say there's actually

precedent. The biggest example from recent years was the Rainbow Railroad program, which allowed Canada to resettle LGBTQ individuals from places like Chechnya and Iran to come directly to Canada and find safety here. Something that either exempts them under a policy option or creates a new streamlined [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] refugee resettlement is absolutely essential to help Hong Kongers and others who may be trapped in their own countries and unable to access travel documents to come to Canada.

• (1755)

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much.

With respect to the people in Hong Kong, the minister actually mentioned family reunification. As we know, family reunifications are restricted to spouse and dependants, or partners and dependants if you will, and, in a very limited capacity, parents and grandparents, and we already know that is with the luck of the draw. This year that avenue is already closed, so it would not apply to people in Hong Kong in any event.

We used to have a program under which extended family members could sponsor each other to come. In fact, my own family was sponsored by my aunt to come to Canada.

Would you say the government should expand the family reunification stream to go beyond spouses or partners and dependants, and to allow for siblings and other extended family to sponsor each other to come to Canada?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Yes. Absolutely. I'm [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] this year and share my own family's experience. My own father was a refugee resettled [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in the 1970s to Canada, and members of our family were able to come to Canada under a similar program.

I think this takes a longer-term view of what immigration and refugee status should look like in Canada for Hong Kongers and for others. I see a justifiable public [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] or even a humanitarian [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] preventing the application and admission of extended family members. I think it would be to the benefit of those families, and to Hong Kongers and people more generally, to have extended families here supporting each other in child support, helping each other out and providing a refuge.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm going to turn now to the student stream, the government's program centred primarily on students, which is extremely restrictive. For example, they have completely left out young people who might not be engaged in the post-secondary education system.

I'm aware that some of the students faced with potential persecution are, in fact, in high school, and, of course, there are those who are not engaged in the system at all in terms of post-secondary education. That doesn't mean they won't face persecution.

To that end, what do you think the government should do to ensure that those who also face the same kind of persecution as post-secondary education students would have access and means to come to Canada for safety?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** It sounds a bit like a broken record here, but I think it is a good question. [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] international students, again, is the ability to recognize in-country asylum, that source country stream, and to provide exemptions through public policy from current regulations that exist here in Canada.

There is the very specific example of Hong Kong students who recently tried to flee to Taiwan by boat and were intercepted by law enforcement [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to Canada. These are young students who [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] whether they were fleeing on boat, which is something we are very familiar with here in Canada [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] resettling refugees from countries who had to do that.

I think any new measures are good. I applaud the current government for doing that, but I think we need to look at the major gaps that are left, for students with less formal education and for students who might be past that five-year period, and their extended family members.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The government's website notes that with regard to taking part in the Hong Kong protests, there's no guarantee that charges for rioting that are laid or arrests that are laid would not apply or would not disqualify them from accessing the immigration process here in Canada.

Should the Canadian government also exempt other potential criminality issues such as rioting or protesting in peaceful assembly prior to the national security law?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** Yes, I think we need to understand the circumstances of that protest, especially what we might call “rioting” and we might call—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Falconer. The time is up. We will have to move now to the second round of questioning.

In order to end the session around 6:10, we will have, in the second round, four minutes each for Mr. Hallan and Ms. Martinez Ferrada, and two minutes each for Ms. Normandin and Ms. Kwan. We will start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have four minutes for your round of questioning.

• (1800)

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan (Calgary Forest Lawn, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for coming before our meeting today.

Ms. Bergeron, let me just start by saying thank you for the courage it took to share your experience. We've heard through our offices many heart-breaking and gut-wrenching stories, unfortunately, that are much the same.

I want to ask you, Ms. Bergeron, if you ever tried reaching out to your MP in regard to the situation. If you did, would you mind sharing what kind of experience you had, what they said and who they are?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Emmanuelle Bergeron:** I tried four times to contact my MP, Mr. Lametti, the member for Lasalle—Émard—Verdun. Not much came of these attempts. In the end, I received very cold responses. He told me that he couldn't help me because he represent-

ed the executive branch and that he was sincerely sorry for my situation. That's all. I received responses of this nature four times.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I'm sorry to hear that was your experience with the MP's office. Thank you again for sharing your experience with us.

I again want to highlight the family reunification. Now more than ever, especially now that we're seeing so many advocacy groups doing so much amazing work to bring it to light, and with the pandemic and the current system, there's so much urgency in getting people reunified.

Mr. Shory, you highlighted some points about families who get picked for interviews without any specific timeline. We heard through Ms. Bergeron's statement that these delays have a real-life impact on people's personal lives—such as missed birthdays and holidays. Mental and physical health are so important now, and they're being impacted by all these delays. With your experience, can you share some of the experiences of other people and what you think we can do to improve these interviews?

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** Yes, absolutely. Thank you, sir, for the question.

Very quickly, when we go to the immigration appeal division, for example, to appeal some of these decisions, we get records. I think everything should be recorded, even at the visa offices. I think it would really help streamline and clarify where the issues were at the interview and would allow people like us and the minister's counsel to come to a resolution more quickly.

The second issue is that I don't understand why we don't have video conferencing technology available yet. I'd that say 90% of my clients, especially where the spouse who sponsored is in Canada, just don't have the means to go for the interview. Ultimately, their testimony and their opinions—where perhaps they could have clarified certain issues—are just left out.

I think those are two very quick and obvious responses that could ultimately help to make this process a little more efficient and ultimately help families to reunite. We're around the corner from Christmas, and a lot of families... I just celebrated Diwali this weekend with my family, and I couldn't imagine what it would be like to not be able to celebrate that with my family members if I were in a position similar to theirs.

I think those are just two quick solutions that exist and that are really easy to implement.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you for that, Mr. Shory.

I also wanted to ask you about the spousal sponsorship program, which has been criticized for its delays—even prior to the pandemic—for the past five years. Some people are in very vulnerable positions. Would you like to share what you would recommend to this government in order to address some of these really impactful delays on spousal sponsorships?

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** Sure. I think that being more transparent with the applicants or their authorized representative helps. The number of times we've emailed—

**The Chair:** Mr. Shory, I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up.

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** No problem. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Now we will move on to Ms. Martinez Ferrada.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have four minutes.

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

I'll do this in English so that we can probably do this better, because I think we have an issue with translation.

My first question will be for Mr. Shory.

Could you give us your opinion on the dual intent instructions given to the visa officers, which we did two weeks ago? Can you tell us how you think the system will respond to these updates? I think it will be something that Ms. Bergeron will also be interested in. Please keep it short so that I can ask a question of Mr. Falconer after that.

Thank you.

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** My short answer is that I'm not too sure what the expectation was in releasing those instructions, because, ultimately, dual intent has been in the law for quite some time now. If anything, for me as a lawyer, this further confirmed what I already knew in terms of how dual intent is assessed.

One of the questions asked is about your intention and whether you can prove that you can go back home or prove that you will go back home if your application for permanent residency is denied. There is nothing novel in bringing forward these delivery instructions. It's something that has existed for a long time.

I'll leave it at that.

• (1805)

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Okay, I hope you read the instructions we gave out two weeks ago.

Thank you again, all of you, for your testimony.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Bergeron, thank you for your presentation today. I'm glad to have heard it.

[*English*]

Mr. Falconer, one of the motivating factors in choosing these measures for Hong Kongers was that we saw the Hong Kong applications for work and study permits greatly increasing over time. The choices to strengthen those paths are already being used by Hong Kongers. As well as providing the choice to remain permanently, we are deliberating providing what we call parallel aid.

Are these additional ways you have seen Immigration taking action to help the people of Hong Kong? Are there other things you see that we should be doing?

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** To be very short, I would look toward what we are doing internally here in Canada to help Hong Kongers and others who are currently in Canada who may be at risk of losing their status.

Currently, Canada only offers up to a three-year postgraduate work permit program. There is good reason to suggest that, given the current economic circumstances and the uncertain situation in Hong Kong, we might want to extend that to a five-year postgraduate work permit process, similar to the Australian model.

Two would be to adopt the interim visa policy of New Zealand. What that means is that currently, when somebody applies for an extension or change in their immigration status, if their current permit expires in the meantime, they are under what's called an implied status, meaning they are here in Canada with status but there isn't necessarily a clear record of that. In New Zealand, when somebody does that, the New Zealand government automatically issues them a paper interim permit that provides proof to their employer, proof to themselves, etc.

Those would be the ones I would look to here in Canada: the extension of the postgraduate work permit period and also to help them be able to find work that both sustains their livelihood and adds to their points for long-term eligibility for the economic immigration system, and as a last-ditch effort it also keeps the door open for our refugee claim system, should they feel the need to—

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** I think we lost Mr. Falconer.

How much time do I have left, Madam Chair?

**The Chair:** You have 20 seconds.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Sorry, Mr. Falconer, we lost you there.

I wanted to have your thoughts about the package of measures we announced a couple of days ago, but we won't have time for your answer.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but the time is up, so we'll have to end this.

Now we will move on to Ms. Normandin for two minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

My question is for Mr. Falconer.

I want to build on what Ms. Kwan had started to address.

I'll make a comparison. Carles Puigdemont, a Catalan elected official, didn't receive his electronic travel authorization because he was arrested for helping to organize a purely political referendum. People from Hong Kong can also be arrested for protesting a political issue, namely, the national security law.

I want to hear your comments, Mr. Falconer. Is there a concern that people in Hong Kong may not be able to receive their electronic travel authorization? Are the measures announced by the government to help the people currently in Hong Kong more symbolic than effective?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Mr. Falconer, you are on mute.

**Mr. Robert Falconer:** That's the 2020 motto.

The answer to the first question is yes. For inadmissibility, the potential to be barred from Canada for participating in, let's say, a riot, which another government might call it, is absolutely a concern of the Hong Kong community. Many others in the world [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] are charged because their government deems their political activity to be in contravention of their laws.

That is one of the measures we consider more generally, that not all countries are going to have an equal interpretation of illegal political participation, whether in Hong Kong or elsewhere. We do have the precedent that we judge criminal activity based on our own activities, and activities that are happening in Hong Kong would not be held against them.

The second answer—

• (1810)

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Falconer. Your time is up.

Now we will move to Ms. Kwan. With that, we will end the round of questioning.

Ms. Kwan, you have two minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm actually going to Mr. Shory for a minute.

We're talking about the dual intent issue and what was published on the website. My office actually phoned the ministerial enquiries division and spoke to an agent. He said he knows that it's essentially an internal memo issued by IRCC. It provides clarification to assist in interpreting dual intent, but is not considered an actual policy. It's a suggested practice and a guide to understand what dual intent is, but it is not there to help make a decision. Ultimately it's up to the officer to make the decision and to the applicant to still convince the officer that they will leave once the visa expires.

That's how I read that as well, and I think that's your understanding of it. If there's any interpretation or somehow there's a directive or policy from the government, I think it's incorrect.

Given that that is the case, and given Ms. Bergeron's experience and many like her who are stuck in the system and the government and the officer do not believe that their loved ones would actually return, what do you think the government should do? Should they suspend the use of 179(b), so that people can in fact bring their loved ones here? Should they also bring in a program or a special measure so that people can in fact bring their loved ones here to Canada?

**Mr. Jatin Shory:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan, for that question.

To quickly respond to the member's previous question, I did get a chance to read the PDI on this, and I agree wholeheartedly with everything that you've said today. It is just a clarification of something that has existed for a very long time. There is nothing novel about dual intent that I saw in the PDI that was issued.

In terms of answering the second question, I know fiancé visas existed a long time ago. I don't know if that's a solution today. Understanding that we're in an unprecedented time, I don't see anything wrong with opening the door for things like spousal visas or TRVs.

In the same way—

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Shory. Our time is up.

Sorry, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, Ms. Dancho.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Can the committee allow Ms. Chan to submit her testimony to our study? I don't believe she was an official witness, so I would just like confirmation that she could do that.

**The Chair:** Can I ask the clerk to please clarify this?

**The Clerk:** Yes, Ms. Dancho. Whose testimony did you want?

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** I want Ms. Chan's. She didn't quite get the chance to finish her story. I think it's pretty important for the study and for the members to know.

**The Clerk:** Yes, the committee can take receipt of it as a brief, or if the committee wishes we can have it appended to the blues directly.

**Ms. Raquel Dancho:** Ms. Chan, you have that option. If you'd like to, we would encourage you to do that, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Madam Chair, I have a point of order as well.

For this particular meeting, we had a lot of technical difficulty with people's sound is not coming through very clearly. I'm not sure what the problem is, but there are bits of sentences where we can't really hear what they're saying, although I think we can sort of string the ideas together.

For the purpose of Hansard, I think it would be very difficult to string that together. They're going to have to blank it out. I'm just wondering if, when we have the Hansard blues available, we can send the blues to the witnesses so they can review what they were trying to put on the record. Then they can correct the information and fill in the bits that did not get recorded, so that we actually have an accurate representation of what we're trying to achieve here.

• (1815)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan, for raising that. I will discuss it with the clerk and the analyst to see what we can do to that end.

I want to apologize to all of the members, as well as the witnesses. I think there were some connectivity issues and some echoes, and at times it was very difficult to understand. I have raised that with the clerk of the committee, and that will be looked into by the committee logistics team also. We will try our best to make sure we don't have these issues in our meetings going forward.

I just want to emphasize for all of the witnesses that if there is anything you would want to raise to the committee members and you have not been able to raise it today because of time constraint or the connectivity issue, you can submit your briefs to the committee as we continue our study on the impact of COVID-19 on the immigration system.

With that, I would thank all of the witnesses for appearing before the committee, and thanks for the understanding and flexibility. Because of the votes, we were not able to start the meeting at 3:30. I want to apologize for that to all of the witnesses. Thanks for being flexible and for being with us as we have gone beyond 5:30.

With that, we will end the meeting. Thanks to all of the members also. We will see you on Wednesday as we continue our study.

The meeting is adjourned.

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