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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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Chair: Mrs. Salma Zahid





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Thursday, February 3, 2022

• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number three of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities as well as the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on October 19, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times, including when seated. You must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the hand sanitizer provided at the room entrance.

As the chair, I will be enforcing these measures for the duration of the meeting, and I thank members in advance for their co-operation.

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of floor, English or French. If interpretation is lost, please inform me immediately, and we will ensure interpretation is properly restored before resuming the proceedings. The “raise hand” feature at the bottom of the screen can be used at any time if you wish to speak or alert the chair.

For members participating in person, proceed as you usually would when the whole committee is meeting in person in a committee room. Keep in mind the Board of Internal Economy's guidelines for mask use and health protocols.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. For those in the room, your microphone will be controlled as it normally is by the proceedings and verification officer. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your microphone should be on mute.

All comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

Today the committee is continuing its study on the recruitment and acceptance rates of foreign students. It's my pleasure to introduce the witnesses for the first panel today.

We have three witnesses for our first panel. I would like to welcome Lou Janssen Dangzalan, immigration lawyer; Wei William Tao, Canadian immigration lawyer and co-founder of the Arenous Foundation; and our third witnesses for the first panel are Christian Fotang, chair of the board of directors, and Jared Maltais, interim executive director. They represent the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.

I would like to welcome our witnesses and thank them for appearing before this committee today as we continue our study on the recruitment and acceptance rate of foreign students.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like in a regular committee meeting.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

All witnesses will be provided with five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will go into rounds of questioning from our MPs.

With that, once again I welcome our witnesses, and I will now pass the floor to Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan, immigration lawyer.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please start.

[Translation]

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan (Immigration Lawyer, As an Individual):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Hello, my name is Lou Janssen Dangzalan, and I am speaking to you from Toronto. I acknowledge that I am in the traditional territories of the Mississaugas of New Credit.

I have provided a brief submission that includes appendices and tables that provide more detail on the data from the disclosures by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC.

I'm basing this on statistics, and I'll highlight a few key facts.

I'd like to clarify a few troubling statistics, and I refer you to appendix A of the brief.

In appendix B, there is a map of the world that shows a very high refusal trend for countries in Africa, especially in West Africa, where we find the French-speaking countries. The reason for Africa's underperformance is a mystery. I refer you again to appendix A. We have analyzed whether there is a relationship between the acceptance rate—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. I've stopped the clock.

The French and English are coming at the same time.

Mr. Dangzalan, have you selected the French language on your screen?

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** No. I selected “off” for the floor.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Stephanie Bond):** I believe it's a problem on our side. I apologize for that.

Please continue and we'll verify.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll start the paragraph over from the beginning.

We have analyzed whether there is a relationship between the acceptance rate and economic factors such as GDP per capita, with purchasing power parity considered, and yes there is a positive correlation.

However, there is a limitation to this relationship. It only applies to numbers between \$3,000 and \$15,000. That is, the rule does not apply to French-speaking African countries because the vast majority of these countries do not fall into this range. There needs to be more analysis on this, and I hope that the committee will ask IRCC to produce the data.

That is why I have tried to identify other factors that may explain the discrepancy. Here are some theories.

Media reports have suggested that Chinook, a processing tool developed by IRCC, is responsible for the decline. My colleague Wei William Tao will discuss the processing of applications in Chinook, Excel-based software used to process visa applications in bulk. You can refer to appendix C where you can see if Chinook is used in a given office.

In summary, at this point, based on our limited information, it is not clear whether or not a causal link exists between Chinook and the acceptance rate. What is clear is that we are seeing a decline in confidence in the system when talking to clients, the international students. Again, I hope that the committee will request the data from IRCC.

Are there other factors? I'm wondering if there is a lack of resources for visa offices in Africa because applications for study permits from African countries are not processed in the same country as shown in appendix C.

Conversely, applications from major source countries, including China, India, the Philippines, and the United States, are processed locally. Some of these countries even have several offices. In French-speaking Africa, however, most applications are processed in Dakar, Accra or Dar es Salaam. The majority of them are processed in Dakar.

The advantage of having an application processed in your country is that the decision-makers on site are more in tune with the realities on the ground. Moreover, it is no secret that inter-African racism exists. Mixing applications as if they were homogeneous is a big problem. Is it about racism? That's the question.

This is all against the backdrop of the recent immigration report on anti-racism. Widespread internal references to certain African nations as “the dirty 30” have been noted. The committee may wish to inquire further with IRCC to list these countries. It would be interesting to see if they are French-speaking countries.

All this exposes IRCC to costly litigation. Having study permit applications adjudicated by the courts is a waste of taxpayer dollars and judicial resources.

I have four recommendations.

First, more resources should be allocated for visa processing.

Second, race-based data should be collected, as we submitted to this committee last year.

Third, offices with high refusal rates should be automatically audited. This audit should be done by a third party. If the committee recommends the creation of an immigration ombudsman, this function can be incorporated into its mandate. Perhaps the Auditor General could be tasked by Parliament to investigate. We see that the vast majority of applications are processed in Dakar for francophone Africa, and we wonder about that. What happens in that office? Are there any measures to prevent bias? Do such measures exist?

Fourth, IRCC needs to undertake genuine public consultations on the deployment of new technologies such as Chinook and artificial intelligence. There needs to be more transparency. Stakeholder engagement is essential, and IRCC should engage with immigration and privacy lawyers.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

• (1110)

[*English*]

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

Before I go to our next witness, I just want to indicate for all the witnesses and the members that I will show you a one-minute card, a 30-second card and then a stop card. Once I show you a 30-second card, please start wrapping up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Tao. Mr. Tao is a Canadian immigration lawyer and co-founder of the Arenous Foundation.

Mr. Tao, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

**Mr. Wei William Tao (Canadian Immigration Lawyer and Co-Founder of the Arenous Foundation, As an Individual):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am presenting today from the traditional, unceded and ancestral territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh and Qayqayt nations, in Burnaby, B.C.

In my five minutes today, I will highlight the key points that I put forth in my written brief, focusing on expanding on my three recommendations.

Like Minister Fraser and a few years behind, I've only just started my French studies, but it's important for me to say the following.

[*Translation*]

We must not forget the intersectionality of French-speaking Africans. In other words, there are elements of a racial, linguistic and geographic nature, and often gender and age, which have an impact. We can't forget the importance of these problems for Quebeckers and for French-speaking Canadians, since they have disproportionately affected those communities.

[*English*]

My thesis statement today is to summarize that we have broken links between a history of anti-Black racism and discrimination, which are embedded today in a system that disproportionately discriminates against applicants from the global south. This threatens to codify itself in tomorrow's artificial intelligence-driven system.

In my paper, I discuss the historical context, but I'll first begin by emphasizing how important it is for this committee to understand the present-day context for applicants, to counterbalance IRCC's narratives of privacy, security and efficiency.

African and global south applicants have greater barriers to proving their cases, higher documentary requirements and higher rates of refusal, as my colleague Lou has just presented. Refusals are rendered on obscure financial grounds or prejudiced assumptions that applicants will not return to their home countries after their studies.

To be clear, as idealistic as I am, I do not believe we can entirely eliminate discrimination in immigration, as immigration is a process of state-endorsed discrimination based on nationality and travel document requirements. Acknowledging this, I do believe such a system needs additional safeguards and increased transparency.

Also, to expand on what Minister Fraser was asked in a recent press conference, IRCC is utilizing a tool called Chinook. We have learned so far that Chinook is being applied most frequently in the global south's high-volume visa offices. It allows for bulk refusals by the hundreds where applicants are sorted via an Excel-based tool

by country of nationality, age, gender and marital status. Officers' working notes, where individual factual assessments are often performed, are deleted. Risk flags and local visa office word flags that are not vetted by any independent expert become quasi-law.

Applicants are left with these templated refusals and have recourse only to the Federal Court which, while successful, is often cost prohibitive.

Applicants from Africa and the global south also do not have any other access to options to immigrate, either temporarily or permanently. Study permits have become the only hope, but it is one that is simultaneously being taken advantage of by recruiters and agents acting as unauthorized immigration practitioners.

This is the backdrop for IRCC's move to artificial intelligence, which threatens to further codify, make less transparent, and subject to even less scrutiny the biases and flaws of our human-created foundation. This system will have the greatest impact on applicants from Africa and the global south. The stories of suicide, financial harm and students unable to cope with Canadian immigration requirements will worsen if we are not proactive.

To this end, I have three recommendations.

First, ensure that Chinook, which I believe runs on automated processes and is artificial intelligence, goes through a proper algorithmic impact assessment or AIA and other safeguards, such as an independent race-equity review.

A more public-facing and transparent AIA process also needs to be performed before we roll out expansion of AI, which is currently used in—

• (1115)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** A point of order, Madam Chair.

There seems to be a problem with the interpretation.

Could the witness please repeat what he said in the last 30 seconds?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, I'll stop the clock and we will have a look.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** It only lasted a moment, but the sound cut out.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Can you please repeat that, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I was saying that the sound cut out for a few seconds and that it would be good for Mr. Tao to go back 30 seconds.

[English]

**The Chair:** Let us check.

There was some issue from the witness's end.

Go ahead, please.

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

To this end, I have three recommendations. First, ensure that Chinook, which I believe runs on automated processes and is artificial intelligence, goes through an algorithmic impact assessment, called an AIA, and other safeguards, such as an independent race equity review. A more public-facing transparent AIA process also needs to be performed before rolling out the expansion of AI to visa offices in Africa and the global south.

Second, I'm a proponent of the regulation of education consulting and recruitment. I take this position knowing that it is perhaps economically unpopular and jurisdictionally difficult given the role provinces also play, yet we are dealing with vulnerable youth and families, often racialized folks, with exorbitant tuition fees being offshored by agents who practise immigration without authorization. Our institutions are far too complicit in this system.

Third, we need to properly study anti-Black racism as a series of mistakes made and lessons learned to help us inform a forward-looking approach to issues such as social capital flight, colonialism and climate migration, and how this will impact immigration moving forward. We need to disaggregate the modern data we have by race and by visa office before we try new policies.

Finally, as you can see by my recommendations, I don't think we should focus solely on improving numbers by however many per cent without tackling the underlying issues. To borrow a medical term in these appropriate times, we should be treating the cause, not the symptoms of the problem.

If I were to summarize and give one overarching, good first tangible step, I would say the appointment of an independent ombudsperson or immigration commission—

• (1120)

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

You will get an opportunity to speak more during the round of questions.

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Okay.

Subject to my questions, those are my brief remarks.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** With that, we will proceed to our last witness for this panel, Mr. Fotang, representing the Canadian Alliance of Students Associations.

Mr. Fotang, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

**Mr. Christian Fotang (Chair of the Board of Directors, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations):** Thank you, and good morning, Madam Chair, esteemed committee members and fellow witnesses.

I'd like to begin my statement by acknowledging that I speak to you today from Amiskwaciy-wâskahikan, or Beaver Hill House, what is now called Edmonton, on Treaty 6 territory.

My name is Christian Fotang and I am the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, CASA. I am also the vice president, external affairs, at the University of Alberta Students' Union. I'm in my fourth year of a Bachelor of Science degree, majoring in biology and minoring in psychology. I am joined today by our interim executive director, Jared Maltais, who will be supporting me in fielding your important questions.

CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit national advocacy organization that represents students at colleges, polytechnics and universities from coast to coast to coast. Through a formal partnership with the Quebec Student Union, we are a trusted and evidence-informed voice that represents 365,000 post-secondary students across Canada.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting us to speak today on this particularly important topic, which has serious implications for the future of Canadian post-secondary education, as well as the Canadian economy at large. As you know, international students are a critical part of the post-secondary community in Canada. They enrich the educational experiences on post-secondary campuses and facilitate an international forum for the sharing of ideas, expertise, research and scholarship.

International students are also significant contributors to regional economies. Despite their much higher tuition fees, the international student community in Canada has grown at a faster rate than that of domestic students. As of 2019, there were 827,000 international students studying in Canada, supporting nearly 170,000 Canadian jobs and contributing \$21.6 billion to the national GDP. In addition to the value they inject into the Canadian economy, international students who decide to stay in Canada after their studies are essential to addressing the ongoing skilled worker shortage across the country. This issue will only become more acute as baby boomers retire and more skilled jobs go unfilled due to Canada's shrinking domestic labour pool.

Recognizing this, it's important that the Government of Canada develop a clear recruitment and retention strategy to help address the ongoing shortage of skilled Canadian labour. According to a 2018 survey, 60% of international students say they plan to remain and work in Canada once they graduate. When it comes to recruitment, it's important to recognize that Canada's post-secondary education system competes in an increasingly competitive international environment for talent. An advantage to emphasize is Canada's officially bilingual complexion and our ability to offer a high quality education to French-speaking international students around the world. It's a uniquely Canadian opportunity.

Quebec is the leading destination for many of these French-speaking international students, but there are other francophone educational institutions across the country. At Campus Saint-Jean, in Alberta, where I'm speaking to you from, we are also feeling the effects of these processing disparities. To increase the recruitment and retention of French-speaking international students, fundamental changes need to be made to the Canadian study permitting and immigration process.

As heard by this committee in late 2020, the study permit applications of French-speaking international students from Africa are disproportionately denied when compared to non-African countries. A re-evaluation of IRCC resources is needed to rebalance the system to serve international students looking to study in either of Canada's official languages.

That said, international students of both official languages face many other barriers when applying for their study permits. The process continues to be extremely onerous for any young adult unfamiliar with the Canadian immigration system to understand. CASA believes that IRCC must deploy additional capacity to study permit processing during peak season, and look to simplify their messaging to international students to make it easier to understand.

There are multiple reforms that the Government of Canada can implement immediately to make Canada a more attractive destination to international students of both official languages. This includes, first, allowing international students to participate in an internship or co-op under their existing study permit. Second, additional coordination can ensure that all study permits have consistent working conditions and that those who are eligible to work can seamlessly obtain a social insurance number without delay. Third is an increased recognition of Canadian educational experience within the express entry program. Fourth is the expansion of eligibility for off-campus employment to international students studying part-time. Finally, reform of the Canada summer jobs program would allow international students living in Canada to participate in summer employment opportunities funded by the federal government.

These recommendations are essential for making Canada a more attractive destination for international students of both official languages.

Thank you for your consideration, and I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1125)

**The Chair:** Thanks to all the witnesses for their opening remarks.

We will now proceed to our first round of questioning.

We will start with Mr. Seeback. You will have six minutes for your round of questioning.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair; and to the witnesses, thank you for your testimony here today.

I found it really interesting, and I want to talk a bit about the Chinook tool, which I'm not particularly familiar with.

What we heard in committee on Tuesday was that the rejection rates for students generally from African francophone nations has gone from around [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] since 2015 up to close to 80% or 83%. Also, from what I heard today, in 2018, the Chinook software came in. From where I'm standing, it would appear that the Chinook tool....

I can't say it's directly correlated, but it certainly seems as though it might be.

I know you've talked about getting an AIA done. What data would we need from IRCC in order to assess our belief that the Chinook tool is part of the problem?

That question is to any of the witnesses.

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Lou, I think this question might be best directed to you, because I think you have the stats first, and then I'll answer.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** I could talk about the stats, for sure, and then I'll talk about what we can seek as Mr. Seeback suggested.

You're right. The refusal rates have substantially gone up. I just disaggregated francophone Africa, and per my count, basically what we're seeing is that there's a 27%, essentially, approval rate coming in from francophone Africa from 2016 to 2020. That is in contrast to the main source countries for Canada, which are at around 70%. That division, that gap, is too big.

As to what we're looking for in terms of accountability and what Chinook is, first of all, unfortunately, I'm very sad to report that we actually don't know enough to ask the good questions. However, we do have some indications on what AI good governance could look like when we start asking questions about Chinook.

For example, during the conference at AQAADI in Montreal back in November, Richard Kurland, another immigration lawyer from Vancouver, was suggesting that there needs to be some sort of backstop, at the very least even internally at IRCC, to have some accountability for how these algorithms actually work. What's the assessment?

I'd like to make a contrast. There are two programs that I mentioned in my oral submissions: the first is Chinook; the second one is the artificial intelligence-driven advanced data analytics, which Will can talk about a little more. The latter, advanced data analytics, actually has some QA backing it, whereas with Chinook, we have absolutely no idea.

We've tried for the last 60 days to do some ATIP requests and what we're getting is a lot of push-back. We keep getting extension delays of about 180 days or even a year on our requests, essentially trying to push the issue forward. Therefore, we can't really comment as to what variables we need.

Perhaps the committee can actually get that data—

• (1130)

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Could you provide the committee with your ATIP requests, and then we can maybe pose some of those questions directly here at the committee?

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Absolutely. Thanks very much.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Mr. Tao, were you going to comment?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

I would add that, from my perspective, we do have to suss out the public-facing element of what IRCC is telling the public and putting out, like “We're not going to automate refusals; we're not going to do any of these things” versus what's going on behind the scenes via the policy playbook, which I included as part of my brief.

Internally, I think IRCC is looking to automate refusals, is looking to try to remove humans, to have no human in the loop. For me, the concerning aspect is that until we put Chinook on the table and have proper independent consultations, though possibly a commission or ombudsperson, these will be ingrained into artificial intelligence and into algorithms that then become impenetrable, and especially when you litigate and especially when we do all these tools.

If we don't have the back data, we are unable to actually pursue those processes. Therefore, I second what Lou said, and I believe this data needs to be put on the table.

It doesn't have to be public. It can be private, in a secure setting, but it needs to be put on the table in order for us to decide the next path forward with Chinook and the future replacement.

Thank you.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** I'm going to hazard a guess that this is not a new issue. It's 2022; these rates have been getting worse since 2015. Have your organizations been raising the alarm bells with the government and saying we've got a significant problem here?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Immigration actually only released the information about Chinook in a litigation case, which I peripherally was a part of, last year. September of last year is when we really started mobilizing.

So the fact that this was started in 2018 and for three years it was under wraps—and there's no single Google search on this term “Chinook”—for me was really troubling. This should have been brought to stakeholders as soon the idea came up for Chinook. That is my perspective.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** If I may, Mr. Seeback, if we're looking for historical origins of Chinook, one might want to ask Mr. Mario Belissimo in Toronto, who has done a detailed study on this. There is an origin story from the Manila visa office called *hi-raya*. We couldn't really talk about stats until the Ocran litigation came to the front.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Ali.

You have six minutes for your round of questioning.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, all.

I'd like to invite each of the witnesses to comment on three observations made in an email my office received from international student recruitment staff at an Ottawa university.

First, they had noticed the struggles for Africans to get approved for study permits in the past three years. They drew particular attention to the difficulty for francophone applicants from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Senegal. For anglophone students, they said that applicants from Nigeria faced similar difficulties.

Second, they raised a concern that there seem to be two messages to applicants, and I quote one: “we need new immigrants to Canada, and we offer the post-graduation work permit, but do not mention that you want to stay in Canada after your studies.” A lot of African students are confused by these messages.

Third, they said that African applicants believe that Canadian universities have a say in accepting or refusing applicants regarding immigration. They suggested that it could be good to advertise that the two application processes of academic and immigration are independent. Can you please comment on this?

Thank you.

• (1135)

**The Chair:** Mr. Tao, would you like to start?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to just focus on one part of the question and maybe leave some of the other witnesses to answer other parts.

I think the dual intention element is definitely of major concern. There's a provision in [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for dual intention, meaning that if I come to Canada temporarily, if I have a future permanent resident intention, that is permissible as long as I can show that I can leave Canada at the end of my authorized stay.

Unfortunately for students, the permanent residence pathway could be five, six or seven years in the future, so that dual intention is not taken into consideration by the visa offices in a very significant way.

Then there are these assumptions about the home country, the family that might be coming and the economic conditions of the country they are leaving, and that is prejudiced into a refusal decision. I think that dual intention really needs a rethink in order for this provision to be successful.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** I also wanted to touch upon dual intent, because that certainly encapsulates a lot of the issues facing a lot of African, and francophone African especially, students coming in from outside Canada to study.



It's very interesting that this is actually counterposable with the efforts that the Government of Canada is doing abroad to recruit international students. Just recently my articling student Andrew Koltun and I attended virtually a conference in Manila talking about coming to Canada, and Ambassador Peter MacArthur actually did the sales pitch to a lot of candidates to come to Canada and spend so much of their money.

Immigration also talked about how easy the process is but never talked about the possibility that this could be a very difficult path.

The dual intention issue, which was raised in the previous committee meeting, doesn't really make an assumption that the international students are going to violate the laws in Canada, but it seems to me, in terms of my handling of cases coming in from Africa, that there is that presumption more so than with those coming in from other parts of the world.

**The Chair:** Mr. Fotang, would you like to comment?

**Mr. Christian Fotang:** Yes, just to echo Mr. Dangzalan and Mr. Tao, I've heard situations from our deans here at CASA that they have been given funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to go out and recruit students in these African French-speaking countries, telling them to come to Canada and that there are opportunities and pathways for residency and citizenship. They make all these efforts, and universities use their funding to go out and recruit these students.

When the students do apply and when they do show up to apply for a study permit, they are told that we don't believe they'll go back to their home country after they're done studying, which is a completely paradoxical message to what they were told by university staff.

More transparency needs to be made by the government. More communication needs to be done between IRCC and the staff on the ground to make sure that students are getting the correct information. If not, it's really a waste of resources for the government, the universities that are going out there trying to recruit these students and us as students.

That's all I'll echo on that.

Thank you.

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

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Quickly, the program Chinook, IRCC has taken it on.

Can anyone comment on whether there was any procedure based on any studies or anything? How have they taken this program to implement it? Can anyone comment on that, please?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Very little. From all the stats we've gotten, even from the affidavits that have been filed by IRCC, there was very little legal oversight and stakeholder outreach. It's very much officer rules with all the experiences of different visa officers in different posts correlated into one. The problem is, as we know, depending on these offices, they are dealing with their own unique situations and their own prejudices. To put them all on the table without any person—

• (1140)

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

We will have to proceed to our next member.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can please go ahead for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much to the witnesses who are with us today. You know just how important this study is to international students, to our societies and to our educational institutions. I am really glad to have you here today. You know, this study is really important to me.

We're hearing a lot about the Chinook system today. I'd like to continue the discussion on this because, on Tuesday, we were told of the importance of understanding that, before Chinook, we were already seeing a difference with French-speaking African countries, especially in West Africa.

Is it possible that Chinook, by automating part of the work of IR-CC officers, has crystallized an inequity that was already there?

I'd like to hear your thoughts on this, Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your question is a very interesting one.

The way the artificial intelligence works over time is that we have the human harms framed in the automated system. As Mr. Tao has already mentioned, the problem with the way IRCC proceeds with this system is that there are no checks and balances, there is no quality audit as seen in the conduct and deployment of advanced analytics.

This is a problem because we don't have data from West Africa and, more importantly, we don't have data on how the Chinook system works.

As I mentioned earlier, all we've obtained in the last two months is email exchanges in the release of data from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

So there are more questions than answers to the point you raised, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You mentioned it in your opening remarks. There seems to be a lack of clarity, a lack of transparency at IRCC right now. Actually, it may be the cause of many of the problems.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Indeed, it's a black box, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** It keeps getting in the way of your work.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Yes, we are constantly fighting, especially when it comes to issues affecting people from West Africa. We don't have the statistics and data to know how applications are actually being processed.

We've had some clarification on the Chinook process, but we don't have much information on that right now.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Perfect. Thank you very much.

There's another subject I'd like to address. Six minutes goes by fast.

This question could be for Mr. Dangzalan and Mr. Fotang. I think Quebec spends \$15 million on scholarships for international students. I think that's twice as much as what the rest of Canada spends on student scholarships. So we can see that Quebec believes in these students and is providing the necessary resources for them to come here. In the end, these students are turned away by Ottawa.

Last week, a member of this committee suggested that it might be Quebec's fault if there are so many refusals. This seems to me to be an inference that is not based on much.

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Mr. Fotang, would you like to start?

[English]

**Mr. Christian Fotang:** I can go first, and I'll also bring in Jared to add to this.

I've talked to some students here at CASA and from the stories I've heard when they first came to study in Canada they actually went to Quebec first and they were doing some of their education in Laval before transferring to Alberta. They said that the distinction was clear, and the supports that they were afforded in Quebec were much different, more visible and helpful than what they were receiving in Alberta or in the rest of the country.

Jared might have more he can add to this as well.

**Mr. Jared Maltais (Interim Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations):** Thank you so much.

I think Christian handled it well, but I would add that there is also a resourcing issue on the ground in some of these francophone countries across Africa. We've been hearing this from students at some of our member campuses who are looking to come to Canada after applying from some of these francophone countries. As you've heard in some of the introductory statements, there is a resourcing issue in terms of outsourcing the approval of these applications to visa application centres in different countries, whereas you don't see that kind of discrepancy across other regions of the world.

In terms of the proportion of francophone international students, we are seeing it as a resource problem, on the ground principally, and a communication issue around what exactly international students need to bring to the table to prove that they are willing and financially ready to come to Canada.

What we're advocating for is more transparency and more communication around the exact needs that international students must provide at these visa application centres and for more resources on the ground. We don't have the technical expertise in the Chinook system that some of the other experts seem to have. What we're hearing from anecdotal student stories is that it is a resourcing issue on the ground.

I'll hand it over to the other witness.

• (1145)

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan for six minutes.

Please proceed, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for your presentations today.

I would first like to go to Mr. Tao.

In your presentation you were going to say something about the ombudsperson. Could you finish that thought for me, please?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Perhaps I can summarize it into overarching tangible first steps because I know the committee is looking for tangible steps.

I think the appointment of an independent ombudsperson or an immigration commission, like the human rights commission in various provinces where there's a tribunal that does the work and a commission that studies the issue, would allow for those recommendations that I've put forward to be acted upon. The importance is that separation and independence. Those who are creating the rules and creating the systems can't be the only people to review them at the same time. There needs to be some independence. There need to be experts, academics, the public media involved. All the stakeholders need to be part of that. I think an ombudsperson allows for that to happen.

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

I'll quickly go to the other witnesses on the same question.

Would you agree that IRCC needs an independent ombudsperson to be in place?

I'll go first to Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Thank you, Madam Kwan.

I absolutely agree with the idea that there should be an ombudsperson who can independently review, from time to time, the decisions that are taken in IRCC.

I'll go back to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe's point in regard to resourcing and transparency. Having that ombudsperson is very important because it will crack open that black box especially in West African countries.

For example, to clarify this, in Dakar there is only one office that deals with most of the applications coming in from West Africa. What's going on? That ombudsperson can go in there and actually find out.

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

Mr. Fotang, would you quickly respond to the same question? Then I need to ask further questions around the issue.

**Mr. Christian Fotang:** Thank you, MP Kwan. I'll go straight to it.

Similar to what Mr. Tao and Mr. Dangzalan said, I think more transparency needs to occur within IRCC. CASA always believes that more oversight is a good thing. I'll keep it at that.

It's also been said that a lot of the—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you. I have limited time, and I do want to get these other questions in.

On the Chinook issue, as I understand it, one of the issues with this artificial intelligence system is that it uses certain words or phrases to red-flag applications. Given that with the Pollara report we know that there are internal biases and stereotypical attitudes within IRCC, do you see this as a problem, with IRCC themselves having people create this artificial intelligence system, that those biases could be embedded into these systems and therefore create differential outcomes, or even, I would argue, discriminatory outcomes targeted towards certain countries?

From that perspective, Mr. Tao, what do you think are the certain words or phrases that are used and problematic within the Chinook system, especially in the case of African countries and franco-African applicants?

• (1150)

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. I'll keep my answer really short.

It's a black box. I think that's a problem, because they're saying that Chinook is not AI, and therefore it doesn't need the oversight. The process of adding risk words is [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] applying for a volunteer job. You put a name forward, or a word forward, and it's decided by an internal committee. That's it. There is no independent oversight.

I think it's highly problematic in light of the report you cited.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay.

On this issue, one of the assessments from IRCC on applications is whether or not they have close ties back home. Do they have the financial resources? What country are they from? What region are they from and so on? These are triggering aspects that generate, I think, a response that generally says they are denied on the grounds that IRCC staff do not believe they will return home at the end of their study. That's the outcome we're seeing, right? With an approval rate of only 26%, that speaks for itself.

On this note, because you're a student, because of the stage of life you're in, you may not be married. Does that not in and of itself tell you that there is an inherent bias within the system that IRCC [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] looking at?

That's for Mr. Tao, and then I'll go to Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Absolutely. I think it's actually intersectional. I highlight in my brief the young and single mobile without dependants. I think that's a very harmful speech, applying to even tell a high school graduate student or someone who is coming for first-year studies.

So yes, I agree with you, Ms. Kwan. We need to work on that. We need to figure out what the biases are behind those refusal grounds.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** I will reiterate what Mr. Tao has just said, but I will add that in the history of Chinook, we have found out, at least from snippets of emails that we've received through ATIP disclosures, that QA, or quality assurance, was actually an afterthought. They just cobbled together this software out of Excel: "Oops. We need to do QA before we get litigated."

It's funny, because Mr. Tao already highlighted that it was introduced by way of litigation. What does that say about a system?

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes. What we know, of course, is that the Chinook system really brought this to the forefront in many ways, although the government did it all behind closed doors and it took litigation for it to be exposed. I believe the same sentiments were being applied before Chinook.

Would you agree with that, Mr. Tao and Mr. Dangzalan, just very quickly?

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** Absolutely. I think the pandemic has made it worse, because the borders have served as a colour line.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** I absolutely agree with that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay.

On the—

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

Based on the time, we can have one quick question from each party before we finish this panel and go to our witnesses on the second panel. Each party can have one minute.

MP Redekopp, you have one minute for your intervention. Please proceed.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thanks.

My questions are for Mr. Fotang and Mr. Maltais.

The student direct stream is open from a variety of countries, and 56% of the students came from India and China. I'd just like to know what value you think the student direct stream brings to Canada.

**Mr. Christian Fotang:** Jared, would you like to take that?

**Mr. Jared Maltais:** Absolutely, I'd be happy to take that.

We believe that bringing international students from a variety of countries, especially through a process like the student direct stream, which obviously accelerates that process, is good for Canada. It's great for the Canadian economy at large as we're bringing in great talent and people who can contribute to the future of the Canadian economy while they're studying here and after they graduate as they look to set out on their career.

**The Chair:** Your time is up.

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal for a quick question. You have a minute.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Surrey—Newton, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I hear many sad and troubling stories of international students being victims of exploitation, trafficking and harassment. I have read these reports in the media. It's putting a lot of pressure on international students, which has led to a rise in suicide rates across Canada.

Could the witnesses tell us how the stakeholders involved, whether government, post-secondary institutions or those in the immigration field, can address this and better support these wonderful foreign students?

• (1155)

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** I can begin by answering the question really quickly.

A third to a quarter of tuition money is being offshored to agents who have no authorization to practise immigration for the services they provide. If that money was transferred into mental health support and into support at these schools, it would make a world of difference.

I would suggest that looking into that system is crucial to solving your problem.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** I would add that what's interesting is that my conversations with—

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

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have a minute to ask one quick question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I think it goes without saying that every application should be processed independently of the previous ones. I'd like to know to what extent external factors, which aren't directly related to the application, can have an impact on the refusal of the work permit application.

Since external factors come into play, does the origin of individuals not give rise to discrimination, especially in the case of applications from French-speaking African countries?

My question is for Mr. Janssen Dangzalan.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** Thank you.

External factors are very important in the analysis. The problem is that the decision-maker doesn't have the framework for the analysis of the study permit. Again, it's a black box. Unfortunately, we don't know much about this.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Madam Chair, do I have any time left?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I think we will have to proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have one minute to ask one quick question.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Section 22(2) on dual intent explicitly says that the intention to remain in Canada does not prevent a foreign national from becoming a temporary resident, upon proof that they'll have left Canada at the end of the authorized period of stay, yet the vast majority of the people rejected are rejected on the

grounds that IRCC does not believe that they will leave at the end of their stay.

Isn't that a direct contradiction of dual intent? What action needs to be taken to fix this dual intent problem?

I'll ask Mr. Tao and then Mr. Dangzalan.

**Mr. Wei William Tao:** I'll try to answer in 30 seconds.

For family ties—saying someone comes with their family members and how many family members they leave behind—and finances and all the things they need to actually study, I think that there's a mis-assessment of those factors. That's leading to dual intent refusals.

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** The problem with the dual intent analysis that they are using right now is that it's not as robust as it should be. The policy intervention is that they should revisit this. There should be input from the committee in terms of how this is actually laid out.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Sorry, when you say committee—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, I just wanted to hear Mr. Dangzalan. Did he say stakeholders?

**Mr. Lou Janssen Dangzalan:** [*Inaudible—Editor*]

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

**The Chair:** With this, our first panel comes to an end. On behalf of all the members of this committee, I would like to thank all our witnesses for providing important input.

If there is anything you would like to provide to the committee for their information and you were not able to speak about it because of the shortage of time, you can always send a written submission to the clerk of the committee. That will be circulated to all the members and we will take it into consideration while we draft our report.

With that, we will suspend the meeting for a few minutes, so that the sound checks can be done for our next panel.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1200)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order. Good morning, everyone.

We will hear from three witnesses in this panel. On behalf of all members of this committee, I would like to thank our witnesses for appearing before the committee.

We will be hearing from Alain Dupuis, director general, from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada. The second witness for today is Martin Normand, director of strategic research and international relations, representing the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne. Our third witness for this panel is Thibault Camara, president, from Le Québec c'est nous aussi.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize your name. When you are ready to speak, you can click on the microphone icon to activate your mike.

I would remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Interpretation in this video conference will work very much like a regular committee meeting.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

I welcome all our witnesses for today.

All witnesses will be provided with five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will proceed to the round of questioning.

Alain Dupuis, you have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada):** Madam Chair, honourable members, good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, to appear before the committee today.

I am speaking to you from Ottawa, on the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

The FCFA is the national and international voice for 2.7 million French-speaking Canadians living in a minority situation in nine provinces and three territories. It is also the main advocate for immigration to francophone minority communities.

Since 2002, supporting the development and vitality of our communities has been part of the objectives of Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. In 2003, the federal government set a target of 4.4% of immigrants admitted outside Quebec being French-speaking and settling in our communities. The government has never succeeded in reaching that target. According to the Commissioner of Official Languages, if Canada had given itself the tools to do so, it could have welcomed 76,000 French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec since 2008.

In fact, the demographic weight of the Canadian francophonie dropped from 4.4% in 2001 to less than 3.8% in 2016. If that trend continues, Statistics Canada estimates that this proportion will fall to 3.1% by 2036.

This observation is made at a time when the Canadian francophonie is experiencing a serious labour shortage. This shortage affects all sectors. That is what makes the problem of the refusal of applications from francophones from Africa who want to study in Canada all the more frustrating.

There is, of course, a human aspect: these people invest considerable effort and resources in these applications. For them, a refusal is both incomprehensible and bitterly disappointing. These people come from the continent where 60% of the world's French speakers live, and where the French-speaking world is set to grow dramatically by 2050. They have often attended renowned universities in their home countries. They have skills that are in demand in Canada and in our communities.

However, we are closing the doors to them. We are already creating a bottleneck. The Canadian visa office in Dakar serves a total of 16 countries and a population of 276 million people. This is one of the highest ratios for a Canadian visa office in the world.

Then there are the reasons that these applicants are given when their applications are rejected. Basically, they are told that they haven't demonstrated that they will return to their country of origin after their studies.

This approach flies in the face of the government's objectives for francophone immigration and the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It is incomprehensible that the government isn't instead trying to retain these students and encourage them to become permanent residents, so that they can enhance the vitality of the Canadian francophonie. These visa refusals are the kind of small gestures that help to erode francophone and Acadian communities, instead of contributing to their development.

It also illustrates how the 4.4% target for francophone immigration is not sufficiently part of the department's overall priorities. To achieve this target, a francophone lens with numerical targets must be applied to all potential avenues to immigration, including international students, temporary workers, refugees and family reunification.

Today, we recommend the following four elements.

First, we recommend a review of the eligibility criteria for student visas using a francophone and geographic lens, in order to identify and correct systemic discrimination that might exist against French-speaking African students.

Second, we recommend a substantial increase in visa processing capacity in French-speaking African countries to facilitate application processing.

Third, we recommend that a directive be issued to all Canadian visa offices reminding them of the government's obligations with respect to francophone immigration and the objective of encouraging the retention of these students in Canada after they graduate.

Fourth, we recommend making permanent the temporary bridge opened in 2021 between temporary and permanent residence for French-speaking people who want to settle outside Quebec.

• (1205)

Essentially, we're asking that the measures in place for processing student visas support Canada's francophone immigration objectives rather than hinder them. We're asking for consistency from the Government of Canada.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting, but your time is up.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Thank you.

[*English*]

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

Mr. Normand, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. You can please proceed.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Martin Normand (Director, Strategic Research and International Relations, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne):** Thank you.

Good afternoon, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, represents 22 francophone or bilingual post-secondary institutions located in eight provinces. Our international activities are carried out in three phases, including marketing positioning, supporting the recruitment of international clients, and reaching out to federal institutions with international mandates to promote the reality of our network of institutions.

In a statement, on December 1, 2021, we indicated that ACUFC member institutions were experiencing the same difficulties as Quebec institutions in getting French-speaking international students who had been confirmed for admission to Canada. Moreover, this situation has been documented within our network for a long time. For example, some institutions began receiving financial support from the federal government for international recruitment after 2006. However, they were quickly confronted with the problem we are discussing today. Many of the students they recruited during these events and who were given offers of admission were denied their study permits.

Institutions don't always know why their offers of admission don't materialize into registrations, unless those who have been turned down let them know, which of course not all of them do. Other avenues will have to be explored to compile this data, but the partial picture we are starting to paint is telling.

I'll give you the example of the undergraduate programs in the last five years of one of our institutions. Of all the applications for which an offer of admission was made, 77% of the applications from African countries did not translate into registrations, while the proportion fell to 39% for students from other countries. In short, African applications do not translate into registrations twice as of-

ten as those of students from other countries. The reason why the rate of conversion of offers into registrations is so low for African countries is because study permits have been refused.

One of the contentious issues in the assessment of files is the possibility of remaining in Canada after graduation. We and our institutions are encouraged by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, to promote the possibility of applying for permanent residence upon graduation, particularly to meet identified labour needs and to support government efforts to meet the francophone immigration target.

Frequently, the reason used for rejecting applications for study permits is that the applicant cannot demonstrate through their file that they intend to leave Canada at the end of their stay. You'll understand that the repeated use of this reason for refusing a study permit isn't at all consistent with the message we're being asked to convey abroad.

However, another element specific to our network of institutions must be added to this situation: its lack of knowledge in the public system. Institutions have told us that applications have been refused because the officer assessing the file didn't consider that wanting to study in French outside Quebec was a legitimate course of action. This is a substantial disadvantage that can have significant consequences for our institutions.

Reputational risks may result from this situation. On the one hand, our member institutions put their own reputations on the line when they recruit internationally, but people who engage in the process and receive admissions are refused entry. On the other hand, a lot of international recruitment is done under the umbrella of the EduCanada brand, which is part of Global Affairs Canada. This brand also carries reputational risks when people who see it as a sign of trust are disappointed and have to rethink their education plans.

Our analyses show that despite long-standing government policies and inquiry, francophone candidates wishing to study in French in Canada and post-secondary institutions in a minority francophone context [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. Only political and administrative intervention will solve this problem.

That's why we recommend that the Privy Council Office, together with Global Affairs Canada, IRCC and other relevant departments, work to implement a coherent and systemic approach to ensure substantive equality in the Canadian government's handling of applications from international students wishing to study in French at post-secondary institutions in francophone minority settings.

If the committee wishes, we would be happy to present some of the avenues to be considered in defining this approach.

Thank you.

• (1215)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Normand, for your presentation.

Mr. Camara, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara (President, Le Québec c'est nous aussi):** Good afternoon, Madam Chair. I am speaking to you from Montreal, which is located on the unceded traditional territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation.

I'd like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration for the opportunity to present the recommendations of our organization, Le Québec c'est nous aussi. We are a non-profit organization working to defend the rights and living conditions of immigrants in Quebec by voicing the concerns of our communities in a non-partisan manner, promoting immigration in Quebec society and creating the conditions needed to build a diverse and inclusive Quebec.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of people who are facing injustice, unreasonable delays and arbitrary decisions by a department that no longer seems to have the means to achieve its ambitions. My voice is surely louder and more emotional, because we live these dramas alongside members of our community, and I want to describe their distress as best I can.

Today, we're talking about the extremely high study permit refusal rates for francophone students from certain African countries. Initially, I want to focus on the underlying reason for refusal, which is that Canada does not believe these students will leave the country after their studies. Therefore, the officer applies section 179(b) of the immigration and refugee protection regulations, to the letter.

At the same time, Canada is doing everything in its power to ensure that international students remain here after graduation using tools specifically designed to support the retention of international students, such as post-graduation work permits and programs like—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Can I please ask you to stop for a second?

Mr. Camara, would you speak a bit slower, because the interpreters are having difficulty getting your speech for the interpretation. Thank you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Okay.

In 2021, the Canadian government even created an exceptional program to allow tens of thousands of francophone graduates of Canadian institutions to apply for permanent residency with no proof of employment. Finally, just this past Monday, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship himself stated that international students make excellent permanent residents. Canada is clearly committed to retaining the international students selected by these institutions.

However, when it comes to nationals [*Technical difficulty*]—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. I think there is an interpretation issue. Could you please stop for a second?

Okay, please continue.

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** The notion of dual intent clearly grants disproportionate discretion to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) officers, leaving room for discriminatory bias, as this regulation only applies to a portion of students, generally those who need a visa. By the way, this is also an issue in the processing of spousal sponsorship cases, and it always affects the same individuals.

Secondly, I want to alert the committee to the lack of transparency and the arbitrary nature of decisions made by IRCC officers. It's impossible to know precisely how study permit decisions are made, and some federal court rulings show that these decisions are sometimes not justified.

The Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association has shown that of 25 student visa refusals from the Accra, Ghana office that have been challenged in Federal Court, the court has upheld 23. That means that almost all the applications that were refused should actually have been accepted. That is just one example of the major issue we are facing today. Not every denied application should have to go to Federal Court for what should be a simple study permit application.

Concerns about transparency do not end there. The Chinook artificial intelligence system brought in to speed up application processing appears to be unobtrusively reinforcing discriminatory biases. It seems this tool was not subjected to consultation prior to usage and, while it does bring up the processing rate, it apparently leads to more refusals, with no need to justify them.

In an employee report on anti-racism report, IRCC employees were concerned that some manifestations of racism, even subtle ones, could affect the processing of immigration cases. The different refusal rates from country to country were even given as an example. This proves that racial bias has an impact on application processing and that there is discrimination based on country of residence at IRCC.

We come before you today with very significant concerns, but we can offer pragmatic and structural solutions.

Over the short term, we recommend that the Chinook software no longer be used effectively immediately, that the guidelines given to IRCC officers be clearly and explicitly released, and that a mechanism be established to reimburse the tuition fees of individuals whose study permit applications have been refused.

Over the medium term, we recommend a substantial increase in IRCC's annual budget. IRCC needs more resources to meet its own processing targets, but it must also do it humanely and decently, for both officers and applicants.

In conclusion, we recommend that legislation be introduced to create an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada ombudsperson position. Greater clarity and transparency can only serve both Canada [*Technical difficulty*] already contact the Hon. Minister of Immigration and parliamentary secretary—

• (1220)

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Camara—

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** We look forward to working together.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** —but your time is up.

We will now go to our rounds of questioning.

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

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

Thank you to all the witnesses.

My line of questioning will be for Mr. Camara. I was reading through the report. Thank you so much for what you all compiled.

My first question is with regard to the lack of resources that you stated in the report. My question is whether you think there is a link between a lack of resources and this alarming report of racism within IRCC. Might it not just be a lack of resources, but also the work environment there being toxic that could be causing some of these issues that are happening with the processing of files?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you for your question.

We recognize that lack of resources may be leading officers to process cases as quickly as possible, and with as little sensitivity and humanity as possible.

So it's not that racist behaviour is happening, but unfortunately, officers are likely making decisions with discriminatory biases because they want to do things quickly and they are not taking the time to do them properly.

We have a clear recommendation: It will take a massive investment to allow for better, more humane processing of applications, but also to give IRCC officers the time to process cases expeditiously and humanely, because they need it.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Mr. Camara.

I'm going to give you some time, because this report was quite extensive, to talk a bit more about the Chinook tool, what your recommendation is about putting it on pause for now, and anything else related to your recommendations. I'll leave the floor open to you, because I know there was a lot you wanted to cover.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you for your question about the Chinook tool.

The situation is somewhat complex at the moment because Parliament has just resumed, but we have submitted a brief to all members to read. I am always available to answer any other questions about this.

Some examples show that the Chinook tool, which has been used since 2018, lacks transparency. One article revealed that, from the outset, the Chinook tool, which was created with no legal oversight, has not kept notes about immigration officers' decisions and has not required officers to look at evidence submitted by applicants seeking temporary residency.

Our recommendation is clear. It is to immediately stop using the Chinook system to take the time to understand the algorithms they relied upon to create the artificial intelligence and make selections. Once it's proven that Chinook is bias-free, it can be used again.

We are tagging this recommendation onto a second one, and we immigrants have been asking IRCC to do this for years. We would like all rules and regulations on which officers base their decisions to be clearly released, because they are making arbitrary decisions and there's a huge lack of transparency.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you for that answer. I think you hit the nail on the head that there's a lack of transparency. In most cases it seems like the officer has too much power and too much authority without any consequences for some of the decisions that are being made.

Do you have any recommendations for solving some of these issues? These are the issues we hear about in our MPs' offices as well.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you for your question.

We do indeed have a recommendation and I am going to insist on this, because I know it has already been recommended to the committee. It is that an Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada ombudsperson position be created.

We're recommending this to foster greater clarity and transparency. It will be useful for Canada and individuals wishing to obtain temporary or permanent residency.

We have a bill, requests for meetings have been made and we look forward to working with the Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.



Creating an ombudsperson position would allow for forecasting, reviewing of decisions and decision-making without adjudication of any kind. It would save time and money. It would reduce impact on the constituency offices of all members of Parliament across Canada. It would allow for analysis and reporting of systemic issues. It would allow for an analysis of what's going on.

This will provide transparency for all members of the public and, in addition, it will address a recommendation from the committee's May 2021 report, which called for the creation of an ombudsperson position.

[English]

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Mr. Camara.

When we read your report, we realized that it's not always the francophone community from Africa that is being discrimination against. Are there other groups that you think are being discriminated against as well?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you for your question.

I do not know how much time I have left, but I will try to answer quickly.

As we understand it, multiple factors are involved. Today we are addressing the issue of francophone international students from Africa, but perhaps a more in-depth analysis should be done on how developed each country is. That would look at French-speaking African countries that are not very developed. We have examples of refusal rates—

[English]

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

We will now proceed to MP Kayabaga. You will have six minutes for your round of questions. Please proceed.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Translation]

I'd like to begin by thanking the witnesses for being here and presenting their research to us.

First, I have a question for Mr. Dupuis.

You talked about francophone immigration data. If no concrete action is taken, those numbers will continue to decline between now and 2036. Is that right?

Mr. Dupuis, in your opinion, how will the refusal rate for francophone student immigration applications affect the decline? What target do we need to set to turn the decline around?

• (1230)

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** The francophone immigration target of 4.4% was established in 2003. That was equivalent or close to the demographic weight of the francophone community in the 2001 census.

It was a mistake to set the target at 4.4%. Last fall's report from the Commissioner of Official Languages demonstrates that to keep

the demographic weight at 4.4%, we would have needed a much higher target simply to maintain the francophone population outside of Quebec.

In my opinion, this demonstrates how important it is that this target be raised. A catch-up target will need to be set. As the Commissioner said, not reaching the target in 2008, which was the primary objective, resulted in a shortage of 76,000 individuals in our communities. That's the entire francophone population of British Columbia right now. It's [*Technical difficulty*] French, which is very vibrant, that we have been unable to welcome over the past 20 years.

Clearly, these objectives must also be applied to international students. That's the situation we are denouncing today. It's as if francophone immigration targets are being ignored when we look at visa applications. The factor that often contributes to refusal is that the applicant must prove that they will return to their country. However, we would like these new graduates to stay in Canada, contribute to the vitality of our communities and find employment in fields experiencing a labour shortage.

We'd like to see policies related to visa processing aligned with our francophone immigration targets. Let's hope that comes to be. The recommendation in that respect is that IRCC conduct a formal review of the admission criteria and determine whether to change the requirement for applicants to return home. It's not at all consistent with Canada's official language objectives.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you very much.

You also mentioned earlier that 60% of the francophones were in Africa. Do you see a link between the declining francophone community in Canada and the refusal to go get that percentage of francophones in Africa?

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Absolutely. Unfortunately, we have no promotion and recruitment strategy for French-speaking countries in general, but that's especially true for Africa. As I said in my opening remarks, we don't have the capacity. The Dakar office has to process visa applications from 15 or 16 countries, which means it serves up to 276 million people. They don't have the processing capacity and the strategy for Africa lacks consistency. It's obvious.

The Francophonie will grow around the world and reach 700 million people by 2050. Most of that growth will happen in sub-Saharan Africa, but also in Maghreb. We therefore need a strategy specifically targeting international students in French-speaking Africa, but we also need a much more global strategy. The Canadian government needs adequate resources to promote immigration in Francophonie countries and, most of all, it has to be able to process visa applications to address the major labour shortage across all sectors in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, Madam Chair, there was no translation in that last part with Mr. Dupuis.

**The Chair:** For the last 15 seconds there was no interpretation.

If you could please repeat the last 15 seconds, we'll start the clock again.

• (1235)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** To sum up, I believe that the global growth of the Francophonie will be centred mainly in Africa. Therefore, we must establish a consistent strategy that takes into account the Canadian government's francophone immigration policy and objectives. That has to include student visas in French-speaking countries, but also a much more comprehensive strategy for francophone immigration, promotion, recruitment and processing in Francophonie countries around the world.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you very much, Mr. Dupuis. I appreciate your comments. To sum up what I understood, we really need to address the lack of resources in Africa. Mr. Camara, or perhaps it was you, mentioned that a visa office in Senegal currently serves 16 countries. We really must look into that situation.

Mr. Camara, you talked about the Chinook tool, which you think should be put on pause because it is creating identification issues and it encourages racism. If this tool was created by IRCC, don't you think—

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Madame Kayabaga, I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up, so we will have to proceed to our next member.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank Mr. Camara and all the witnesses for being with us today for this very significant study that's very important to me. I have listened to all three witnesses.

Mr. Camara, I really enjoyed your presentation, especially the fact that you gave the committee clear and precise recommendations. Some of them will surely be included in the committee's final report.

While the federal government is at cross-purposes with Quebec's plan to welcome francophone foreign students, potentially over the long term, we have students like Mr. Feze, whose application was refused and who had to suffer the dramatic consequences of that last week, which infuriates me. It seems to me that immigration is a shared jurisdiction, so the federal and provincial governments should be working together.

I'd like to to hear your thoughts about that.

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Brunelle Duceppe.

As you know, many French-speaking students from Africa sometimes obtain scholarships from the Quebec government. They get living expenses and they either pay no tuition or the same fees as

Quebeckers. The scholarships these students receive are therefore based on their merits.

However, we are seeing that, despite those students obtaining the scholarships in the Quebec system, the Government of Canada sometimes refuses to grant them study permits for financial reasons.

We have two questions. First, when Quebec verifies the financial situation of applicants and accepts them, why does IRCC, representing Canada, refuse the permit for financial reasons, when the application had been accepted for financial reasons? That just doesn't seem right. Second, why are students selected by designated institutions in Quebec sometimes denied permits by Canada, even though they have scholarships?

In our view, this shows a lack of consistency between Quebec's selection criteria and Canada's. If the criteria for refusing study permits were linked to criminal record checks and so on, it would be fine. However, when the refusals are linked to an officer's belief that the student will not return to their country, even though Quebec and every Canadian province have put strategies in place to retain them, it is really alarming.

We therefore propose a clear and precise recommendation: an increased dialogue between the governments of Quebec and Canada with a view to scrupulously observing each party's responsibilities under the Canada-Quebec Accord of 1991, with special emphasis on the selections made by Quebec.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you. I'm going to ask you for a quick answer to the next question, because I do not have a lot of time.

Can you explain the bilateral relationship between the recruitment agencies and IRCC? Can IRCC make requests to the recruiting offices of the educational institutions to encourage them to diversify their acceptance of international students?

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** That is an excellent question, but I'm afraid I do not have all the information I would need to answer it.

Our observation, if you were asking about recruiters—

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Yes.

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** —is that there is no clear guidance. According to some testimonies, some who recruit in African countries promise quick access to permanent residency for the students, because that is what they officers are sometimes selling. But it does not really reflect the reality.

Our recommendation is the to create a guide and regulations for the promotion of Canadian universities and educational institutions abroad that avoids broken dreams and lives destroyed by promises.

• (1240)

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you very much.

Mr. Normand, I almost fell off my chair when I was listening to your comments. I just want to make sure I understood you correctly.

Did you just say that, according to some officers, wanting to study in French outside Quebec is not a valid choice? If so, are these statements documented? Are they commonly expressed? It is discrimination, pure and simple.

**Mr. Martin Normand:** Thank you for your question.

As I was saying, for us, this significant refusal rate of study permits for applicants from Africa is a situation that our member institutions have been observing for at least the last 15 or so years. We have heard anecdotal evidence that some applications were refused because officers decided that the choice to study in French outside of Quebec was not a legitimate pathway and that there was cause to doubt the veracity of the students' intentions.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** To hear IRCC say that, in the rest of Canada, outside of Quebec, the choice to study in French is not a valid pathway, is huge. I am going to glue my chair to the floor and try not to fall off. Thank you very much, Mr. Normand.

Mr. Camara, I have one last question for you. Could you give me a little more detail on one of your flagship proposals, the position of ombudsperson?

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Having no ombudsperson at IRCC implies that there are systemic problems in the department, and that its officers are making arbitrary decisions at their own discretion. You have just pointed out that those officers believe they are in a better position than students or universities to say whether a study request is credible or not. Why is it up to an IRCC officer to do that?

Right now, we are forced to litigate everything and many cases end up in federal court to try to reverse those decisions. Aggrieved applicants are also turning to MPs. You know that almost 70% of the cases you receive in your constituency offices are immigration related. There is a lack of democratic transparency.

The creation of an ombudsperson—to carry over a request that was previously made in 2021—will allow decisions to be reviewed, the number of files that end up in constituency offices to be reduced, reports to be routinely analyzed, and transparency to be provided to the public, both Canadian and foreign...

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Camara.

The time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you so much.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for their presentations.

I'd like to follow up with Mr. Camara.

On the issue around Chinook, your recommendation is for the government to halt the use of it. What we've heard with Chinook is that there are potentially inherent biases embedded in this artificial intelligence system. Some of those biases are triggered by risk words that are identified and red-flagged [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] the large majority of the applications are rejected.

With that in mind, would you agree that with any artificial intelligence systems the government must hold extensive consultations with stakeholders, and that there must be an independent assessment of these tools?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. Your question is excellent and you are absolutely right about the Chinook system. We are calling for an immediate halt to its use in order to conduct a thorough and detailed study of its parameters and possible racist biases. I specialize in data science myself; it is my job to create risk prediction models. Since those models are supposedly based on humans, creating notions of risk reflects human behaviour.

Instead of giving ourselves the opportunity to start from scratch, we used a system to implement human reflexes instead of defining the risks from the beginning. We analyzed the human risks, we put them in the machine and we make them apply, all the while disclaiming any responsibility because the machine makes the decisions. However, we know very well what we have put into it and that the software contains inherent risks. So, we need an independent and clear study; we need to be able to know what is going on in Chinook's black box.

• (1245)

[English]

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

I'd like to just follow up on that. With respect to IRCC's work, [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] has a dual intent outlined for students and other applications as well. With that dual intent, they say that is not grounds to reject people if they may want to stay, yet the outcome is such that they reject people. On that issue, would you agree that the government also needs to revise its dual intent parameters and clearly instruct that IRCC officials should not reject applications just because people might have an intention to stay?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

Yes, we are recommending strict and rigorous enforcement of section 22(2) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which states that the intention to settle in Canada does not prevent a foreign national from becoming a temporary resident. The problem is that section 179(b) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations gives disproportionate discretion to immigration officers, who use it to discriminate against a certain segment of the population, specifically French-speaking students from Africa, and to let another segment through. It's really pernicious.

Today, we have to [*technical difficulties*] that we have all these programs to retain international students and yet we discriminate against those international students because they may wish to stay in Canada after they graduate.

So you are perfectly correct.

[*English*]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Camara, you mentioned that students have to pay tuition, especially during the pandemic. In your brief, you noted that IRCC said they can pay the tuition and enrol abroad while their application is being processed, but many of them actually got rejected [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] to which they paid the tuition. Your recommendation was to have the government take responsibility for that. Am I correct?

What exactly are you suggesting that the government should do in those instances?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** During the pandemic, there was a major change of course. IRCC actually asked students to pay tuition fees in advance, even though they had not yet obtained their study permit. Thousands of international students did just that. At the same time, IRCC continued to process applications for study permits.

The problem was that many people were denied study permits. Some had already paid \$16,000, as an example, for a year of study. But their study permits were refused in October or November, long after the academic year had begun.

IRCC created this rule and forced applicants to pay in advance, but did not offer refunds to students whose study permits were refused. Thousands of students who paid a considerable amount in anticipation of a positive response received a negative response, and they have never been reimbursed.

We recommend that IRCC establish, as quickly as possible, a mechanism to reimburse all those who paid tuition fees, at IRCC's request, before their study permits were refused. This request is important for all international students. In addition, the situation damages Canada's reputation abroad.

[*English*]

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

Like Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, I was really astounded by Mr. Normand's comment that individuals are being rejected for—

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up. We will have to proceed to our next member.

Based on the time, we will have four minutes each for Mr. Redekopp and Ms. Lalonde, and two minutes each for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe and Ms. Kwan.

Mr. Redekopp, you have four minutes. Please proceed.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Thank you.

I want to speak again about the student direct stream. This is the path that allows you to get a little quicker approval. I believe there are only two countries in Africa—Morocco and Senegal—that are part of the student direct stream. When we look at rejection rates,

I'd be curious to know the rejection rate difference between countries that are part of the student direct stream and those that are not.

Monsieur Dupuis, have you any experience that you can relate with regard to Morocco and Senegal versus other Francophone countries?

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Unfortunately, I do not have those figures at hand today.

Mr. Normand, do you have anything to add?

**Mr. Martin Normand:** Our member institutions do not provide us with that data.

Our institutions do their own recruitment in the field and support some students. We do not have that distinction between the programs that are used to try to accelerate the arrival of international students.

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Mr. Redekopp, if you wish, I can give you the numbers. In 2019, for Morocco, it was 44% refusal and in 2020, it was 46% refusal. For Senegal, it was 73% refusal in 2018 and 75% refusal in 2019. I do not have the figures for 2020.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Camara, are those numbers noticeably different from countries that are not part of the student direct stream, from your knowledge and experience?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** I will let the other witnesses answer, because I am not aware of the student direct stream. I am sorry.

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** I do not have that information either.

[*English*]

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Okay.

We heard on Tuesday that Mr. Brown Mastropaolo from Quebec CEGEPs saw that there was unfavourable treatment being applied to candidates from some of these countries. Looking at the rejection rates, that's why I was asking the question about that.

What are some of the other reasons you think that we're experiencing these high rejection rates for some of the francophone countries in Africa?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** The official reasons often given are that financial capability has not been demonstrated, and the requirement to return to one's country at the end of one's studies. Even our post-secondary institutions do not really have information on the reasons for these rejections.

We propose that there be a better exchange of information between IRCC and the institutions that want to recruit students on the reasons for refusal. Institutions often support applicants, but sometimes they are informed about the refusals only when the students do not show up. Moreover, the reason for the refusal is unfortunately not shared.

However, that important information should be made public and shared with the institutions to better support the recruitment and support of students abroad.

[English]

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Mr. Camara, would you like to add something?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** According to the Quebec Immigration Lawyers Association, the reason given, albeit very unclear, was that candidates would not leave at the end of their stay. With the use of the Chinook system, it is increasingly unclear. We were also told that it could be related to the reason for the visit.

I've also seen that it's based on real estate and financial holdings, based on ...

[English]

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

Ms. Lalonde, you have four minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

It is a real pleasure to see you again. A happy new year to you all.

I only have four minutes. I will start with Mr. Normand.

Mr. Normand, you talked about possible solutions. Could you tell us more about them? Also, knowing that Canada is becoming more and more popular as a destination for international students, which is a good thing, I would like to hear your suggestions to improve the efficiency of the process and to decrease this refusal rate that we are discussing at length today.

• (1255)

**Mr. Martin Normand:** First of all, I would suggest that IRCC make sure of the consistency between the messages that the promotion teams ask it to advertise overseas and the reasons given for refusing study permits.

IRCC asks us to add to our presentations overseas that it is possible to apply for permanent residency at the end of the studies, both for our labour needs and also with the goal of achieving [technical difficulties].

We make that effort, as do our institutions. However, our institutions are also recognizing that their efforts are being made in a number of countries with staggering refusal rates.

Given the scarcity of resources in institutions that are part of minority francophone communities, [technical difficulties] cease their promotion efforts in some countries, because they know that the return on investment will in no way be great enough. So it is no longer worthwhile to target certain countries if all the time we spend there—

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, but there is an interpretation issue. I think your Internet connection is unstable.

Are you wearing a proper headset, Mr. Normand?

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Normand:** Yes.

[English]

**The Chair:** Please continue, but speak more slowly so we can hear the interpretation clearly.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Normand:** Okay.

So there is no consistency between the reasons for refusal and the messages that the promotion teams ask us to advertise overseas.

As we started to discuss a little earlier with Mr. Brunelle Duceppe, we also have to make the network of institutions better known to the federal public service, so that there are no more occasions when an application to a course of study in one of our institutions is considered not to be credible. That in itself makes it inherently less possible to recruit overseas. [Technical difficulties] to support those students in their transition to permanent residency.

A study conducted two years ago showed that 90% of foreign students in French-speaking institutions in Canada would like to stay in Canada after their studies. So this is a major pool of potential candidates for permanent residency.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much, Mr. Normand.

Mr. Dupuis, very quickly, what effect do the refusals have on the demographics of the francophonie outside Quebec?

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Currently, student visas are not included in the 4.4% target, so a study would be needed to look at the refusal rate. However, it clearly doesn't help to achieve the target.

But I would add that, last year, a new path from temporary residency to permanent residency opened up. Seven thousand francophones outside Quebec have taken advantage of that path to permanent residency. That is a significant number of people who could stay in the country and help to achieve the 4.4% target.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

You will have two minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you. Two minutes is not a lot. So I will be quick.

In a media conference on Monday, the Minister of Immigration told us that there is nothing to fear in the matter that brings us together today. So I would like to give our three witnesses the opportunity to raise the minister's awareness in their own words.

Mr. Camara, Mr. Dupuis and Mr. Normand, go ahead, in that order.

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Thank you very much.

I will answer very quickly so that my colleagues have some time.

[*Technical difficulties*] trust in the Department of Immigration—  
[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Your voice is cutting out.

Can you speak more slowly, so we can get the interpretation?

[Translation]

**Mr. Thibault Camara:** Okay.

I was saying that there is a lot of mistrust of IRCC in the immigrant community. It is also not only students but also skilled workers, temporary workers, universities and employers. There is a lot of mistrust. We are waiting for some reassurance from the Minister of immigration. If that could start with a bill to create the post of ombudsperson, it would be great.

• (1300)

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Yes, there is a problem. The refusal rates for postsecondary institutions in the Canadian francophonie are considerable.

In closing, I have two recommendations.

First, we must study the possibility of putting an end to the requirement to prove that candidates will return to their country. This is detrimental to the goal of increasing francophone immigration to Canada.

Second, we must foster collaboration and better information sharing between post-secondary institutions and Canadian visa offices. We have seen pilot projects in some of our community colleges that have confirmed that, with the support of the institution, students have the funds they need to study in Canada. There was even a program where funds were transferred from the university while a student's visa application was being confirmed. That helped to prove the financial capability of the student. In addition, the institution provided all the required information to the visa offices in Dakar and Rabat to ensure that the files contained accurate information.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

Mr. Normand, do you have a quick answer?

[English]

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

Ms. Kwan, you have two minutes and then we will end this panel.

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

My question is for Mr. Normand.

I was just saying how shocked and disturbed I was to learn that francophone student applicants are being rejected because they're aiming to study outside of Quebec. In light of this information, would you agree that we need to have an ombudsperson to look into a variety of issues, including systemic issues, that might exist in the IRCC?

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Normand:** It is indeed an interesting solution, but ombudspersons solve problems for individuals, whereas the problems I am talking about today are problems for our institutions. So it may not be the best solution for the institutions. I completely understand that it may be in other cases.

In our particular case, it is why we must seek to better understand the reality of francophone communities, the realities of life there, and the legitimate paths that can be taken within Canadian francophone institutions.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you. Maybe I was misunderstood. I don't mean say that we need to have an ombudsperson look at individual cases. What that tells me is that there are systemic issues within IRCC that are biased against students for certain criteria, including the fact that if you are French-speaking seeking to study outside of Quebec you could be rejected. To me, that is a systemic issue. That's why I think we need an ombudsperson.

I'd like to ask Mr. Dupuis whether or not he thinks that we need to have an ombudsperson for IRCC.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** Yes, we would agree with the creation of an ombudsperson position that could study certain cases, but also, certainly, the directives given to Canadian visa offices. This would be to ensure that there is no systemic discrimination against francophones and people from Africa.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Camara, you mentioned very quickly federal outcomes and especially—

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

With that, our panel comes to an end, and on behalf of all the members of the committee—

Mr. Seeback, do you have a question?

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** No, I just wanted to raise something before you adjourn the committee. You can finish what you're doing, but I do want to raise something.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, I'll follow Mr. Seeback. I also want to raise something.

**The Chair:** On behalf of all members, I want to thank the witnesses for providing their important testimony for this study. If there is something you were not able to talk about and would like to bring to the committee's attention, you can send in a written submission to the clerk of the committee. That submission will be distributed to all the members and will be taken into account when we draft the report.

We will quickly go to Mr. Seeback.

**Mr. Kyle Seeback:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I certainly understand the difficulties with the translation of documents. We did receive the briefs for today via email at 11:18, and I'm just hoping that we can have those briefs in advance of meetings. I would have liked to have had a chance to read them. My questions would have been far more informed, and I think the study then, of course, would be better.

If at all possible, can we please get those briefs the day before or even a few hours before the meeting starts?

• (1305)

**The Chair:** Thanks for bringing that to our attention. I'll discuss it with the clerk, and we will make sure that whatever communication can be made to the members, we will do.

Ms. Kwan.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would certainly echo Mr. Seeback's request. I noted, not just for this meeting but for the last meeting as well, we received documentation for the committee meeting after the meeting had started. In my case, as I'm Zooming in, I'm looking at all kinds of different computers and checking to see what documents have come in. It would be really important for committee members to receive these documents at least a day in advance of the committee so that we can actually read them and be informed, so that we can ask questions and make the best use of our time with the witnesses.

The other issue that I want to raise, Madam Chair, is this. Throughout both of these panels, it became apparent that with the Chinook system and its usage, there is a potentially widespread problem with rejection rates, so it would be very useful for committee members to have some data to make that assessment.

I would like, through you, Madam Chair, to request of the ministry and the department to obtain this data. Since the inception of Chinook, how many applications has the system assessed, broken down by stream? How many of them have been rejected, broken down by country?

The other thing I would like to have with the Chinook system is the risk words or phrases that are utilized to flag or red-flag applications, broken down again by stream as well.

I think for us to have that information would be very useful going forward, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. I'll make sure that request is put in.

In regard to the distribution of documents for the last meeting on Tuesday, we had to first adopt the subcommittee report. The documents can only be sent after the subcommittee report is adopted.

We will make sure whatever documentation or submissions we get from the witnesses are distributed to the members in time.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** My colleagues have addressed many of the issues I wanted to raise. In fact, I agree with what they have just said.

I just want to add one thing. Madam Chair, I certainly don't want to tell you [*technical difficulties*]...

[*English*]

**The Chair:** We can't hear you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You can't hear me?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Now I can hear you.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay.

I was saying what a good job you are doing, Madam Chair. I think you are doing an incredible job. The only thing I want to say is that there could be a little less rigidity with regard to speaking time. Sometimes witnesses are just about to finish their answers and they are cut off very quickly. I would be happy, sometimes, if witnesses were allowed to finish their sentence or at least asked to finish, rather than being cut off and not being able to finish their speech properly.

Having said that, you are doing an excellent job and I am sure we will adapt.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I also want to thank the witnesses.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** I have been giving a one-minute card, a 30-second warning card and a stop card, so I hope members and the witnesses can start wrapping up when I give a warning. We have to make sure that equal opportunity and equal time is provided to all the members, so in many cases I have to interrupt.

We will see how we can work it out better.

Yes, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** If I may, Madam Chair, it is not always easy to see your cards on Zoom. It's not your fault, we are all trying to adapt. I'm just asking for a little less rigidity to allow witnesses to finish their sentences properly.

That's all I wanted to say, Madam Chair.  
[English]

**The Chair:** Okay. We will try to make sure we run this smoothly and accommodate everyone, but we have to be fair to everyone.

Thanks for bringing your concerns. We will make sure they are looked into.

With that, I once again thank all the witnesses for appearing before this committee and providing important contributions.

The meeting is now adjourned.

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