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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

EVIDENCE

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Thursday, March 3, 2022

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Co-Chairs: Mr. Jasraj Singh HallanMrs. Salma Zahid





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• (1105)

[English]

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

I call the meeting to order.

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

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 either floor, English or French audio. 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.

Today, we will be considering the supplementary estimates (C) for the year 2021-22.

On behalf of the committee members, I would like to welcome the Honourable Sean Fraser, Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, as well as officials from the IRCC.

We are joined today by Madam Catrina Tapley, deputy minister; Madam Marian Campbell Jarvis, senior assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Mr. Daniel Mills, senior assistant deputy minister, operations; Madam Jennifer MacIntyre, assistant deputy minister, Afghanistan; and Mr. Hughes St-Pierre, assistant deputy minister, finance, security and administration.

Thank you, Minister, for joining us today. I hope you are feeling well.

Before we go to hearing from the minister, I have just 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. I remind everyone that all comments should be addressed through the Chair. Interpretation in this video conference will work very much as it does in a regular committee meeting. When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Witnesses have five minutes for opening remarks. I will be giving you a warning with a one-minute card, a 30-second card, and then a red card showing that the time is up.

With that, I would like to welcome Minister Fraser, who will begin our discussion with five minutes of opening remarks. We will then go into a round of questions.

Thank you, Minister, for appearing before the committee, once again, and I hope you are feeling well. I now turn the floor over to you.

**Hon. Sean Fraser (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship):** Thank you, Chair. You're so very kind.

Good morning, everyone.

Before I begin, I just learned, moments ago, that one of our new committee members, Garnett Genuis, has had an additional child, and I want to extend my hearty congratulations. As a parent, I can assure everyone that there's no greater joy in the world. That's fantastic news.

I'm so pleased to be here and to once again—there have been a few times in just a few weeks—have the opportunity to come and join you before the parliamentary standing committee. I really appreciate the invitation to join you.

[Translation]

As I said previously, I aim to work with all committee members, as we endeavour to make Canada's immigration system the best in the world.

[English]

Together, we have the ability to ensure that Canada remains a top destination of choice for the world's most talented and skilled people and to welcome newcomers to our country to make our communities more vibrant and dynamic places to live.

As this committee is well aware, Canada aims to continue attracting record numbers of skilled workers, including those who will help our economic recovery from the pandemic. We also continue to prioritize family reunification and helping the world's most vulnerable. In support of these commitments, I'm pleased to present to the committee some of the key allocations in IRCC's supplementary estimates (C), which total \$174.3 million.

The most significant allocation, you'll be pleased to know, is \$118 million to support IRCC's operating expenditures. This includes funding to process temporary resident visas for workers, students and visitors, for temporary accommodations for unvaccinated and asymptomatic asylum seekers who do not have a suitable quarantine plan, and for proof-of-vaccination credentials.

[Translation]

IRCC is also seeking \$46.8 million for the Canada-Quebec Accord on Immigration.

As the committee is aware, under this accord, the Government of Quebec maintains responsibility for immigrant settlement and integration services in return for an annual grant.

[English]

Also included in these estimates is \$4 million to extend the racialized newcomer women pilot. The aim of this pilot is to increase the employment supports and services for newcomer women, to help them find jobs and support their career advancement. We've already seen good success with this pilot, and that's why we'll be extending it for at least another year.

[Translation]

We want to ensure all newcomers can successfully integrate and contribute to the economy and their communities, and this includes immigrant women.

• (1110)

[English]

We want our immigration system to meet the needs of all newcomers and serve the interests of Canadians.

Madam Chair, the estimates we're discussing today will help us advance those goals.

Once again, I thank you for this opportunity to address the committee today, and I'd be more than pleased to answer any questions you may have.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister, for your remarks. You took only two and a half minutes.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

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

First and foremost, Minister, we all wish you a speedy recovery. We hope to see you in this room again very soon, joining us in person.

I've been contacted by many Ukrainians, Canadians and Canadians who are of Ukrainian heritage. Many of the opposition MPs have been calling for the same thing. The calls that I am getting are saying that the programs that were announced today did not go far enough. A motion was passed on Tuesday in this committee, and it was with reluctance. The Liberals voted against it. This was a motion that included visa-free travel for Ukrainians. Will you accept

the will of this committee with the motion that was passed to offer visa-free travel for Ukrainians?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First let me thank my critic with Her Majesty's loyal opposition for his question and for the conversations we've had over the last couple of days. Today's announcement, for those who are not aware, is positioning Canada to welcome an unlimited number of Ukrainians who are fleeing the war. The mechanism that we're using is designed to get people here as fast as possible.

With respect to the issue of visa-free travel, that's one of the first things that I looked into, because my inclination was to say that might be the quickest way to get people here. When I dug in, I realized that certain regulatory changes would need to be made and certain updates to our IT systems internal to our department would need to be made, potentially with Canadian airlines as well. The timeline to implement that would take 12 to 14 weeks, and I didn't think we had 12 to 14 weeks. We'll be able to stand up a new system much faster.

In addition, there are certain security concerns that we want to protect against. In particular, there are fighters and agitators who have been in the Donbass fighting against Ukraine for the past eight years and whom we want to screen out. We've taken the advanced step of positioning biometric kits in Vienna, Warsaw and Bucharest, and we have 30 additional units throughout Europe that will be able to process people for security as quickly as possible. In my discussions for today—

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Minister. I have only a limited amount of time, so I'll move on to my next question since it wasn't clear whether it was a yes or no.

On the PR program that was announced for the Ukrainians, a pathway for them, what is the timeline on when this will be executed? On what date do you think this will be implemented?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I can't give you a date because I need to complete consultations with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and I won't prejudge the consultations that we undertake, but it will be advanced as quickly as possible. I will remind you that people who are eligible will be able to come to Canada on a temporary basis and apply from here. There will be no delay for the people fleeing the war to arrive safely in Canada.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Respectfully, we're still seeing some of those delays. People are still calling the hotline and being told that either they're not going to return back to Ukraine... Some of them are stuck in this loophole whereby they're being told that, if they applied for a visa a year or two ago, they're not considered under the priority program.

Moving on, you announced that about 6,000 applications were approved since January. How many of those people were already in Canada?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** The number of 6,131, as of yesterday, is not applications that are approved. That's people who have arrived in Canada since January 1.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Were none of those already in Canada?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** All of those are people who are in Canada. Jasraj, I'm not sure I understand the question. Could you just clarify for me?

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Was the number you gave—about 6,000, or whatever number you gave—for applications that you said were approved...? Was that for people who were already in Canada, or are these people who were approved outside of Canada and then came here?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Those are our arrivals. If you would like me to provide documents to back up who has come here under what stream, on the back end of today's committee meeting, I think we could supply that.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** It would be appreciated if you could table that for this committee.

Moving on, I've been getting a lot of calls, Minister, about the difference that people are seeing between Ukraine and Afghan interpreters. Respectfully, I've been getting a lot of concerns that Afghans aren't being treated the same way as the Ukrainian community has been treated. Could you please answer those concerns?

• (1115)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Thank you. This is an important question.

Let me start by saying our commitment to Afghans who served alongside Canada or who qualify for our programs is unwavering. It's one of the most substantial commitments globally, and we will not waiver. There are now more than 8,500 Afghan refugees who have been resettled. The difference is really a factor of the situation on the ground, not our decision to treat anyone differently.

With respect to Ukraine, people have the ability to leave west of Ukraine through countries we've secured agreements with to provide safe passage—

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Respectfully, Minister, would you agree that even though your department should have been prepared and were briefed in January 2021 that Kabul was going to fall, they didn't take any action? We hear this repeatedly from the Afghanistan committee, that they were not prepared.

We're seeing the same kind of thing now, and we're not seeing any kind of urgency for those Afghans who are supposed to come here.

I'll just give another quick example, of the Sikh, Hindu and Hazara communities, which are still stuck wherever they are with no hope in sight. The WSO, the World Sikh Organization of Canada, and the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation have been working for years to get those people here. Now they see absolutely no hope, because it looks like you've completely abandoned those Afghan refugees.

I sponsored a family in 2015, and it took four years to bring that family here. What do you say to those organizations who see no hope anymore?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Very quickly, I would say that we are working every day to accelerate the arrival of each of the groups you mentioned, including our work with the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation to bring Afghan Sikhs to Canada. This issue has my full attention and we are going to work every day to ensure we can resettle people safely in Canada.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister. Time is up.

We will now proceed to you, Mr. Dhaliwal, and you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please proceed.

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

Minister, I want to commend you for announcing two new immigration streams for Ukrainians instead of waiting for weeks for this visa-free travel. Could you please touch on how your plans for bringing these Ukrainian people to Canada in this difficult time during a humanitarian crisis would not affect negatively the other immigration streams that already exist.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First of all, thank you very much, Sukh, for the question.

We started preparing for this in mid-January, January 19 to be more specific. I required us to set up essential infrastructure in the area by moving biometric kits to regions, ensuring we had the personnel on hand to deal with the potential influx of people who were seeking to come to Canada.

We then introduced new measures to make it easier for people already in Canada to stay and work.

Today, we announced additional measures for Ukrainians who are seeking to flee the war and who can come to Canada. We tried to make it as simple as possible and used a model based on the existing temporary stream, which has incredible horsepower and is used to process up to two million people a year already.

We targeted a tool that was on the shelf, pared down the administrative burdens that usually lead to refusals, and tried to accelerate the process of getting people here. We've done it in a way that I think will minimize the impact on other streams, but to be clear, any time you ask an immigration system to do more, it's going to result in certain pressures on different streams. We expect, at least in the short term, that it will have some resources dedicated to Ukraine who would be the same people who would ordinarily process certain other cases, but we will be able to fill in resources on the back end, so over the long term we'll be able to play catch up.

It was the right thing to do to respond to the most important humanitarian crisis in the moment, but I think we have to continue to advance the other measures in Afghanistan, continue to settle refugees from other parts of the world, and continue to process our ordinary lines of business for economic and family unification purposes as best we can.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Minister, you also touched on this new racialized newcomer women pilot program that was introduced by the Liberal government. Could you please touch on the types of activities that are funded by the pilot project and the success of the program since it was introduced?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Thanks very much, and I'm glad you asked this question because I find this issue often flies under the radar.

When we look at resettling people, it's one thing to say we can bring a lot of people here and that's important. Our communities need to continue to grow, but we have to make sure that we set people up for success when they arrive as well. The racialized newcomer women pilot is going to help ensure that people adjust to life in their community and allow them the skills to not just do well, but to gain employment and to advance their careers when they're here.

The response that we're seeing from stakeholders who benefited from this is that it's actually working. The reason I raised it in my remarks today is because there's additional funding, including in the supplementary estimates (C), that allows us to extend this program for at least another year.

One of the things we need to continue to do is assess whether our pilot programs are working and, if they are, look at extending and making them permanent. We did it recently with the Atlantic immigration pilot program, which is now permanent, and now we're extending the racialized women newcomer pilot because we're experiencing success with those who tapped into the benefits of the program.

• (1120)

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** I've been approached by local Sikh gurdwara leaders regarding concerns over visa requirements and immigration policies for religious workers. Could you please touch on some of the measures being considered to help gurdwaras that rely on religious workers from abroad?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First of all, Sukh, thank you for raising this. Let me just thank the religious workers and members of gurdwaras across Canada for their service to our communities over the course of this pandemic. Their generosity has been astounding, and I am so grateful for their presence in our communities.

There's a particular issue facing religious workers, who've had a hard time coming because of the way travel was impacted during the pandemic. It impacted the usual practice of having a rotational basis whereby these workers come to Canada, leave and are replaced by new religious workers to continue to meet the demands of these important religious institutions in our communities.

What we've ended up doing is working to identify any of the religious workers who were destined to come to work in our gurdwaras across Canada, to ensure that they're processed in an expeditious way. We now have quite a few approvals for folks who have applications in the inventory, and I expect that in the next few weeks we're going to see additional arrivals in time for a very busy season. I think you can appreciate that this is going to be necessary just weeks from now.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Minister, your predecessor was able to bring in Sikh and Hindu refugees from Afghanistan who were set-

led or parked in India. I'm sure you are very passionate and working hard on this project as well.

Could you please elaborate a bit, if you weren't able to finish Mr. Hallan's question?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** In the 30 seconds or so I have to answer the question, I won't do it justice. There are a number of organizations that are working to bring people from the different communities that you've referenced. I mentioned specifically the Manmeet Singh Bhullar Foundation, which has been working with our team to see if we can bring more Afghan Sikhs to Canada.

We expect that we're going to continue to see more arrivals in the fairly short term. As these numbers continue to grow—now at more than 8,500 Afghan refugees with more arriving every week—I anticipate that our partnerships with some of these organizations, which are not just seeking to bring people here but are willing to support them when they arrive, are going to lead to a very successful settlement outcome in the very short term.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. You have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome, Mr. Minister. It's great to see you again. I think you're becoming a committee pet. I certainly wish you a speedy recovery.

I have a question about the motion before this committee to propose the lifting of visas, which the Liberals opposed. The arguments raised by your political party were specifically related to security issues. We were only told about security issues.

Can you explain to me how a biometric test could prevent a pro-Russian Ukrainian from being approved, after the administrative process, to come to Canada? I'm not sure I understand.

[*English*]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** This is really important, and it's something I've become acutely aware of in the context of our effort to resettle Afghan refugees. It's obviously come up again.

For those who aren't aware, 80% or so of the cases that are inadmissible by virtue of security reasons are uncovered through biometric analysis. We are able to partner with like-minded countries around the world, because we share intelligence with them about individuals who potentially pose a security threat to Canada. By tapping into our partners' databases of individuals who may be part of foreign fighting forces, for example, we can understand with a greater degree of certainty who these individuals are and deny them access to Canada if they present a security threat to Canada.

• (1125)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Mr. Minister, you're telling me that 80% of pro-Russian Ukrainians are detected through biometric tests. That's what I understood.

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** No.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay. That's not what's being said.

How could a biometric test prevent a pro-Russian Ukrainian from coming to Canada? I don't think that would change anything.

So what is the difference between having a biometric test done abroad and having it done in Canada?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** To be clear, the statistic that you've described is a misinterpretation of what I said. I said 80% of the cases that are deemed inadmissible are discovered by biometrics, not 80% of the Ukrainian pro-Russian fighters. It's a very different point that I'm making.

When we have the ability to have a person's fingerprints, photographs and so on, and we can run them through a database that we have in partnership with other international partners, we can better identify people who present a security threat to Canada. It will reduce the number of people coming who pose a security threat.

To be clear, a primary motivation for the path that we've established is speed as well. Setting up a different opportunity for visa-free travel would have delayed things by a few months, and that was unacceptable to me.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I don't think we understand each other, but we'll come back to it later.

Your government has prioritized Ukraine-related applications, and I applaud that. However, Mr. Minister, I'm wondering where you're getting the human resources to process these applications. Are you taking them from within the department or have you hired new people?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** With respect to Ukraine, let's not forget that the further Russian invasion into Ukraine sovereign territory started seven days ago. We responded immediately, and in fact in advance, with the resources we had.

We will be looking to profile additional resources to help out with the effort to make sure that our other lines of business are not impacted more than is necessary. In the short term, you're right, it requires us to put people who are already on deck to help out with the emergency, but over the long term we intend to make sure that the resources are put in place so we continue to meet the goals we've set for our department to resettle newcomers in accordance

with the standards we hope to achieve. There will be short-term pressures, though.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Don't you think that puts the processing of other applications a bit at risk? I'm thinking of Afghanistan in particular, but also of foreign workers, students and family reunification cases.

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I don't expect it will have a significant impact on Afghanistan because that's a separate humanitarian effort, and we're using something more akin to a temporary residence visa stream.

There is the potential for a shorter-term impact on some of our lines of business around other temporary resident visas, around the work permits and around study permits, which we're also processing for Ukrainians. There might be some impact on other lines of business, but we intend to deploy the resources that were recently made available and I am hopeful we'll still be able to see progress.

For what it's worth, just for the awareness of the committee, as a result of some of the investments we've made—including the 500 staff we hired not too long ago—there have now been more than 100,000 approvals for permanent residency in January and February of this year; the process has picked up pace, but we expect there will be some impact as a result of Ukraine.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** You've set up a hotline reserved for Ukraine-related applications that accepts collect calls. Is that correct?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Is it the same line as the one for Afghanistan-related applications?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** No.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay. So it's a different line.

Do you have any idea of the costs that will be incurred by this line and by the staff assigned to it?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I don't have that figure in front of me. We can probably provide that after the meeting—

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay. You can provide this for us for information.

I'll move on quickly.

At the Special Committee on Afghanistan, witnesses told us that it would be good to send more staff to Pakistan to deal with Afghan refugees. Do you intend to do this?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Madam Chair, I'm out of time, but we'll do whatever is necessary to process people as quickly as possible. We'll need to work with our partners in the region, including Pakistan in this instance, but I don't have time to complete an answer, given that I've been shown the red card.

**The Chair:** Yes, maybe when we come to the second round you will get an opportunity.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you have six minutes. You can please proceed.

• (1130)

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

Thank you to the minister. I also hope that you will have a speedy recovery.

The Safi family fled the Taliban and were in the refugee camp in Ukraine. With the unprovoked invasion from Russia, they find themselves fleeing once again. They have just given birth to a daughter. The Safi family made numerous attempts to cross to the Slovakian border. At one point they were told that the border was open to everyone except Afghans, while they noted that others were allowed to cross without passports or any sort of identification.

Given the outright discriminatory practices the Safi family experienced, will the minister provide targeted supports and work with the Minister of Foreign Affairs to use diplomatic channels to ensure that ethnic minorities, such as Afghan, Indian and African students who have faced discrimination in their attempts to flee Putin's war in Ukraine, have equal access to reach and cross borders?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** It's an important question. Any kind of discrimination based on a person's skin colour or country of origin is completely unacceptable to me. I was pleased to see a statement issued by the Ukrainian foreign minister to similar effect, to insist that safe passage be provided to everyone fleeing the war.

We're also interested in looking at what Canada may do for people who may not qualify for an easy return to their own country, who had some kind of permanent status in Ukraine and who may be discriminated against in this fashion.

Let me just be unequivocal in calling upon those who are working at the borders to the west of Ukraine...that discrimination against a person based on their country of origin or skin colour cannot be accepted.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Yes. That's exactly the problem. The laws prohibit it, but the practice is different. That is critical. I hope Canada will step up pressure in that regard to make sure that discrimination is not taking place at the border there.

Ms. Safi's family are seeking to come to Canada as refugees. They have sent documents to IRCC, but to date there has not even been an acknowledgement from IRCC. Will the minister look into this case and help this family and others like them come to Canada expeditiously?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Certainly. We can't discuss the specifics of any case. I'm happy to look into whatever sensitive cases may come

across our desk. A number of people have come from Afghanistan through Ukraine to Canada already. To the extent that there are others who are there—obviously every file is unique and I can't state perfect timelines for everyone—and to the extent that we can look at specific files, we're always happy to do that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll be sending a letter, then, with detailed information on this case to the minister. As well, though, I would urge that additional support be given to those who are in the refugee camps in Ukraine. They need assistance to get to safety. It is absolutely paramount that Canada opens its borders to welcome them as well.

I'm glad to see the minister announce that biometrics will be collected in neighbouring countries for those fleeing Putin's war today. Will the minister do the same, as witnesses at the Afghanistan special committee suggested, for Afghans? These are unprecedented times and therefore call for unprecedented action.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We've been working to try to set up that kind of arrangement for some time. If we could secure biometrics in-country, that would be ideal. One of the challenges we run into, though, remains securing safe passage for individuals outside of Afghanistan. To the extent that they could get outside of Afghanistan, absolutely we would be willing to provide biometrics in third countries.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** NGOs at the Afghanistan committee actually offered to provide on-the-ground assistance to the government to help people get to a third country, including those who are retired military personnel. I would urge the minister to look into those options and to work with NGOs on the ground to do exactly that.

Will the minister expand the extended family sponsorship measure announced this morning for Ukrainians to Afghans as well?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We are working to extend family reunification models for folks who worked as interpreters and who have made it to Canada previously. I'm interested in how this is going to go with the family sponsorship pathway. I think we have a bit of work to do.

I'm not prepared to make a new announcement today, beyond the one I made just a couple of hours ago, but it strikes me that family sponsorship is an innovative opportunity for us to bring people to Canada and, as I said before in a different context, to ensure that they not just get here but also are supported. I'm very interested to see how this plays out. I think it provides an opportunity for further consideration in the future.



**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I can tell the minister that allowing for extended families to be sponsored to come to Canada is a successful immigration measure. Some may say that I'm not that successful, but I am a family member who was sponsored by an extended family to come to Canada more than...well, many years ago, let's just say. I think this needs to be put in place, not just at a time of humanitarian crises but regularly for immigration measures. I urge the minister to undertake that. Time is of the essence. We need to move forward with Afghans as well and not wait to see how a pilot goes. They don't have the time to wait.

Will the minister increase the levels for privately sponsored refugees and expedite processing so that Canadians who are able to and wish to help in this humanitarian crisis are able to do so?

• (1135)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I am interested in leveraging the private sponsorship model and increasing humanitarian levels, as evidenced by the recent immigration levels plan. At a certain point in time, we run into the ability of our department to process an unlimited number of people seeking to come to Canada as refugees.

My interest is in leveraging whatever tools we have to bring people here in large numbers, to do the right thing for the world but also to maintain a focus on both economics and family reunification. It's a tricky exercise when you're trying to establish that levels plan and meet all of the needs of our communities, but the answer to your question is, yes, I'm interested in continuing to grow our private sponsorship models in Canada.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On the issue around—

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

We will now proceed to our second round.

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

**Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC):** Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks for being here, Minister.

I just wanted to mention that I met with Edward Galabaya in my office last week. He was very thankful about being allowed to stay in Canada. I appreciated your last-minute help, but hopefully in the future your department can respond a bit more quickly in cases like this.

I want to talk about the student direct stream. I wrote to you on December 2 last year about including Bangladesh in the student direct stream. It's proven that this is a much more reliable pathway to increase approval rates for students. It's been three months and I've not heard an answer from you.

The High Commissioner of Bangladesh appeared at this committee in February and implored us to make a recommendation that his country be included in the SDS. You have many Bangladeshis watching these proceedings right now. The high commissioner is very engaged in this. Students in Bangladesh are very interested. They're the brightest and the best that Bangladesh has to offer, and it is willing to share them with us. They bring great benefits to our country.

My question for you is this: Do you support Bangladesh being included in the student direct stream, and will you immediately instruct your officials to make this happen?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First of all, I'm not going to immediately make directions or instruction in this committee, but I am very open to expanding the student direct stream to different countries. I think where it has been implemented it has been shown to have an incredible success rate.

The reason I don't want to do things immediately is that we see it's successful because of the legwork that goes into its implementation before the announcements are made. We want to make sure we give our officials and department staff the opportunity to partner with financial institutions and organizations on the ground in different countries, so that we don't make an announcement that is set up for failure. If we do the legwork first and figure out that we can find partners who will allow us to have the programs succeed, I'm certainly open to it.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** What sort of a timeline are we looking at? Pakistan was added in 2019. Are we talking about a week, a month, a year, 10 years? What's the timeline?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I don't have a specific date for you, I'm afraid. In the second half of the meeting, if you wanted to speak with the officials about some of the steps that would be involved to achieve that kind of progress, I think they would be able to describe for you what would go into it, to give you a better sense of what's involved.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Regarding Ukraine and these new programs you have put in place, you have said that there's no limit to the number of applicants who are going to be able to apply from Ukraine. Does that mean that your overall numbers for the year are going to be increasing?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** No, and I think there's a really important distinction. Our immigration levels plan refers to permanent residents. What we're doing is a very innovative thing with the response to Ukraine. We're leveraging a temporary stream but extending the time for which people are allowed to remain in Canada to up to two years, then providing them with an open work permit. It's a different program that doesn't impact our overall immigration levels.

One of the reasons we chose this pathway is because it leverages one of the most powerful streams that exists in our immigration system, which is used to process up to two million people a year who may come as tourists, for example, and it won't have an impact on our immigration levels plan.

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Maybe to look at it a different way, you said you're going to shift the resources from different countries or from different streams—I'm not exactly sure. Are some countries going to be losing out in the short term because of this shift?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Not specific countries. Think of it this way: The people who are working to process temporary residency visas today are some of the same people who will be processing applications under this new express authority to travel to Canada from Ukraine. To the extent that there are people who have applications to come visit Canada as a tourist, there could be some impact.

I think we can mitigate these impacts over time with further investments to backstop the changes we have made, and by not pulling them out of certain other programs I think we can protect against a significant impact on some of the permanent residency streams. If we had the same people processing these new applications as were processing temporary residence visas, work permits and study permits.... There will be some impact, but we're doing everything we can to mitigate the extent of that impact.

• (1140)

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** In response to Mr. Dhaliwal's questions about resources, you mentioned that biometric kits were being moved to eastern Europe.

What is the capacity of our embassies and consulates in eastern Europe to process these applications, and how much time will the biometrics burden add to the processing time?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** It won't necessarily add anything, because we can process biometrics in parallel to the processing of the application for the new travel document. The average processing time for a biometrics assessment is a few days, maybe five days or so. That can be done within the period in which the other application is being processed, but just to give you a sense of the scale of what our capacity is—

**Mr. Brad Redekopp:** Could I interrupt? I think there's another important question.

There are Russians who are forced to fight for Putin, and they are now surrendering as prisoners. What is the plan for these guys who might want asylum in Canada?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Right now the program we have announced applies to Ukrainian nationals who are fleeing the war. To the extent that new facts emerge, we have to be very cautious in how we proceed, because we want to make sure that we're not sparing any effort.

We can revisit this question when we have more time, but this is a phenomenon that has emerged literally in the last number of hours and days. I would hate to prejudge what—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. El-Khoury.

Mr. El-Khoury, you will have five minutes. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Minister, thank you very much for generously agreeing to meet with us to provide the committee with explanations and information during this difficult time.

[*English*]

Minister, there are many desperate people around the world. Their hope rests on your shoulders in this difficult time, because they are experiencing a difficult life in Ukraine, Afghanistan and other countries in the world. Thanks for your effort.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Minister, can you clarify the objectives for which additional funding of \$15.8 million is being requested to process temporary resident visa applications for workers, students, and visitors?

Could you also give us some details about the Canada-Quebec accord in the case of Ukraine?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First of all, I want to thank the hon. member for his question and his concern for vulnerable people around the world.

[*English*]

Your questions were for the expenditures relating to operating costs and for the Canada-Quebec Accord. It's important that we understand that the system can do what it's funded to do.

In my remarks, I indicated, for the operating expenditures, a much larger figure even than you cited, Mr. El-Khoury. It's \$118 million for IRCC's operating expenditures for the kinds of lines of business that you've seen.

I described in detail during our last meeting some of the impacts of the pandemic on our processing capacity at the department. We're starting to see the results of these kinds of expenditures. In addition to hiring 500 new staff, to increasing our levels plan, in addition to the \$85 million that will be invested as a result of the economic and fiscal update and the digitization measures, we're starting to see that these investments are taking hold in a very meaningful way.

In the first two months of this year, there were 100,000 approvals for permanent residency, which is an extraordinary pace. We're seeing that people are going to be able to come here, including from Ukraine, and apply to receive open work permits that will allow them to work more effectively.

I know you'll have more questions. I want to address your question about the Canada-Quebec Accord on immigration. The supplementary estimates profile \$46.8 million into this agreement.

[*Translation*]

Quebec has an immigration program that is unique in Canada. Elsewhere in the country, the system depends on investments in immigrant settlement agencies. In the province of Quebec, the situation is different; Quebec controls the selection of newcomers and provides financial support to settlement agencies to help newcomers settle.

Under the Canada-Quebec accord, Canada transfers funds to the Province of Quebec for immigration services.

• (1145)

[English]

It's a unique situation that we have when it comes to Quebec's control of their own immigration system, and our job is to fund it. It's essential that they have the ability to set their immigration levels in accordance with their demographic weight, plus 5% under the accord, so they can maintain control and set their immigration levels at a stage that works for them.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Thank you. That's excellent.

[Translation]

Mr. Minister, if the Racialized Newcomer Women Pilot initiative was successful, would you welcome such a program to help other marginalized groups?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** There's a huge opportunity to do this. One thing we've learned over the last number of years across government departments is that when we started applying gender-based analysis plus to all of our spending decisions in government, the intersectionalities a person lives with impact the outcomes they experience with government programs. When we start to look at what impacts these investments have on francophone Canadians, on women, on racialized women, on people who live with these different needable characteristics about themselves, we can target investments that improve the social outcomes they experience.

I think this program is a recipe for success. If we start to apply it for people who live with different intersectionalities, we can enhance the quality of life they get to enjoy when they arrive in Canada, and increasing the quality of life for Canadians is what government is all about.

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Could you explain the mechanism behind the recognition of professional qualifications?

If this measure is successful, could it be introduced in other sectors?

[English]

**The Chair:** You may get an opportunity in the other round. The time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Thank you, Mr. Minister.

[English]

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Minister, I did a quick search and found that the line for Afghanistan and the line for Ukraine have the same number. So how can you say that there are two different lines?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We've been tracking separately the calls that are coming in, and we have dedicated staff...

I can give a quick answer now, but for more questions, my officials can give more details. We have dedicated staff who are reserved specifically for Ukraine and are providing services.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Fine. That's okay, I don't want to spend too much time on that. If it's the same number, it's not two different lines. In fact, maybe I'm teaching you that. Anyway, you can check that.

I would now like to talk about the proposal made by the Bloc Québécois, at the beginning of the conflict, to automatically extend the residence permit of Ukrainians who are already in Canada by at least six months, and perhaps even two years. Am I to understand that this is part of your plan?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Yes, we will be extending open work permits on the same terms for people who arrive who are in Ukraine now.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Perfect. That's a great example of parties working together. I am very pleased to hear that.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Yes, absolutely.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** The Government of Quebec said it wanted to do its part. I believe you had discussions with Mr. Boulet.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Yes.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** How will this collaboration between Ottawa and Quebec translate into concrete action?

Quebec is likely to want to do its part to help refugees from Ukraine.

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** First, let me say thank you to the provinces, including the Province of Quebec. There are details to be worked out as to exactly how they're going to deal with this. I've tried to point them in the direction of an organization that represents francophone Ukrainians, but we have the opportunity to work with them if they want to put their hand up and invite people to come to Quebec. We're willing to work with them.

I think you can appreciate, since the invasion began only days ago, that there are some details to be worked out, but we want to capitalize on the goodwill of Quebec and of all the provincial governments we've been connecting with.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'd like to quickly go back to the question about biometrics.

Earlier, you said that 80% of refusals were based on biometrics. That's extraordinary. What I'm interested in is the percentage that those refusals represent if all the applications are considered. Do you have that figure?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** I don't have that figure in front of me, I'm afraid.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** If it could be provided to the committee, that would be good, Mr. Minister.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, your time is up.

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Did you say yes, Mr. Minister?

[English]

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** If we have the information to provide, I'm happy to provide whatever we can.

• (1150)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Perfect, thank you.

[English]

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

Ms. Kwan, you have two and a half minutes. You can please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Mohammed Alzaza, at age 15, suffered from serious injuries as a result of a drone strike in Gaza. Though he survived, he suffered from serious injuries, but he's managed to make his way to Turkey seeking asylum. A Vancouver East church group submitted a private sponsorship application in January 2021, and they were approved. Given Mohammed's health condition—and his mental health, by the way, is deteriorating rapidly—will the minister look into expediting this urgent application?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We're happy to look into whichever cases, as I mentioned in my previous answer, and the reality is that we want to do as much as we can to help some of the world's most vulnerable. I think it's a challenge, obviously, when you're dealing with so many crises around the world, trying to leverage every tool we have, but to the extent there are particularly urgent cases, we can always look into them.

Of course, there are unique features of each case that I don't want to prejudge while I'm sitting at committee here today, but it's the same offer as before: If you want to send details, we'll be happy to take a look.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you. I've sent a letter on this case to the minister before, and I will resend it, and hopefully the minister and his office will look at this seriously, help and do what they can.

With respect to the issue around caregivers, many caregivers have been impacted, and IRCC's quota for the cap for caregivers has already been reached. Many of them will have children who will age out as a result of that, and that means that by the time they

get a PR application process in and it's accepted, they will not be able to bring their children here.

Will the minister consider changing the policy to allow for caregivers' children's applications to be considered at the age they were when the caregiver first started working in Canada under their work permit?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** That's a unique issue and a clever proposal, I must say. I'll have to make sure I do my homework, because I've not had the opportunity to seek advice on this very specific issue that you've raised. I think that's something unique, because we don't want to be in the business of separating families; we want to be in the business of bringing them together. I'd be happy to consider it, but I don't want to prejudge what lessons I may learn when I do my homework.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'd be more than happy to provide any assistance or information to the minister and his officials in this situation to help with that.

Related to this, many caregivers have not been able to pass their English language test to the level that is required for PR, and they're also not able to meet the education—

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

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll follow up with the minister separately on this.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed to Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you will have five minutes. You can please proceed.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for your service in this critically important area for our country.

I want to pick up on some of the questions from Ms. Kwan about private sponsorship. I hear regularly from stakeholders from different communities about the need to improve and strengthen our private sponsorship system.

Minister, I've been disappointed that you have lied to the House of Commons on a number of occasions about Conservative proposals on refugee policy.

For instance, on February 14, you said this to my colleague:

I remind him that he campaigned, during the election he spoke about, to bring precisely zero Afghan refugees here. Moreover, if we look at their platform, we will see that they campaigned on a commitment to end the government-assisted refugee stream altogether, which has resettled thousands of Afghan refugees who now call Canada home.

That's a quotation from you.

Here's what the Conservative platform actually said. On page 129, the platform said this:

We will: Replace public, government-assisted refugee places with more private and joint sponsorship places. All refugees arriving in Canada will do so under private or joint sponsorship programs, with exceptions in cases of emergency...

Again, there are exceptions in cases of emergency.

The paragraph goes on to say:

This does not mean a reduced financial commitment to refugee sponsorship or lower overall numbers of protected persons. It means that public dollars will be directed through joint sponsorship programs where newcomers benefit from community support and the better outcomes associated with private sponsorship.

Minister, if we're going to have an honest conversation about the changes that need to happen around private refugee sponsorship, we need to be honest about what we each are proposing. It's fair to disagree and it's fair to have those conversations.

Will you commit today to stop lying about Conservative proposals and have an honest conversation about the steps we can take to improve private sponsorship?

• (1155)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let me start by reiterating my congratulations to the member on the recent addition.

I must say, the comments he made at the beginning of his question about service during this crisis are appreciated. They characterize, frankly, the cross-partisan support I've seen on—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Minister. There's a point of order from Mr. El-Khoury.

I've stopped the clock.

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** There was some word like “lying” or something expressed by our colleague.

We would like to apologize to the minister, because it's not an appropriate or parliamentary word to be said in a meeting like this.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury, for raising that.

I would request that all members please be polite with the witnesses and make sure that we don't use any unparliamentary language.

[Translation]

**Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury:** Madam Chair, I insist that the person concerned apologize to our minister.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. El-Khoury, for raising that. I'll remind the member again.

I would request that the minister please proceed.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My interest is in proceeding with the business of government. To the extent that opposition members wish to frame their questions in a particular way, know that it rolls off my back.

With respect to the Conservative campaign commitment, I think the way it's been framed could lead to a helpful debate around how the role of something like the BVOR model, joint sponsorship or the private sponsorship of refugees could be meaningfully advanced. That's a healthy conversation to have.

The reality is that the campaign commitment you've just discussed suggests that there would be an end to the government-as-

sisted refugee stream. Even in non-emergency situations, I don't think it is a good idea to end that program altogether. One reason is that this program allows us to target the most vulnerable, not just those who have a connection to Canada. It allows us to respond to urgent situations that may not constitute an emergency.

I don't think the commitment would have served the interests of the world's most vulnerable, whom Canada's system of refugee resettlement has been designed to support.

That said, I think it is a helpful opportunity for us to continue to work with settlement organizations, sponsorship agreement holders and organizations who have a history of settling successfully, through the BVOR stream, for example, people who now live in the communities that I come from and right across Canada. We believe that private sponsorship can lead to superior outcomes in many instances.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Minister.

On the substantive policy question, I would counter that private organizations do an excellent job of identifying the most vulnerable. In any event, if the government wishes to prioritize certain communities of highly vulnerable people, it would make sense for it to engage with private organizations on a joint sponsorship basis, because we know that refugees who come here, through not just the financial support but also the social and community support of private sponsorship, have many advantages in terms of the success they experience when they get here. We can put government dollars behind it, but let's leverage the advantages of both of those streams.

In any event, Minister, it sounds like you are acknowledging that the comment you made to the House of Commons alleging that our commitment would have resulted in precisely zero Afghan refugees is inaccurate. Do you acknowledge that it was an inaccurate statement you made to the House?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** No. I have yet to see the Conservative pledge to settle any particular number of Afghan refugees.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We were explicit about it, sir, but it's in the platform, on page 129, so please just review that before you make these kinds of comments in the future.

**The Chair:** Mr. Genuis, your time is up.

We will now end our first panel with Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for joining us. Thank you for your hard work, especially in the current situation.

Minister, in some recent correspondence, the High Commissioner of Pakistan raised a couple of issues. He pointed out that on the IRCC website the processing time for visa applications for Pakistan was 399 days—more than 13 months—whereas for applications from other countries in the region it was between 34 and 70 days.

He also pointed out that in the student direct stream, the number of Pakistani student visas had not increased, and the processing time target of two weeks had not been achieved.

Minister, can you assure us that this situation is going to improve?

• (1200)

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We're going to do everything we can to improve the processing time for study permits and for immigration more broadly.

There are certainly frustrations that I appreciate exist, but we are working every day to make sure that we're advancing measures that will improve these processing times.

One of the things I think we need to do as well is update our processing times on our website to better reflect what's happening on the ground. I think it's one area of improvement, because sometimes we broadcast what service standards say, but it doesn't reflect the situation on the ground, because the system has been hit so hard by pressures over the course of the pandemic.

I am certainly willing to work with you to improve not just transparency in what we say about processing times, but also the results for applications, including from the area of concern that you've raised.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you, Minister.

I will continue a question that one of my colleagues asked about Afghan refugees and the visa processing centres doing it from Pakistan. You didn't have enough time to complete your response on that one. Would you kindly elaborate on that, please?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** One of the things I'm interested in doing as we move to a more digitized and modernized immigration system is to create the capability for us to leverage our entire global network of processing. When we are able to deal with applications that come in in a digital format, it creates an opportunity, when an office in London or New Delhi may be slow, to allow them to take on additional volumes that will be able to process people who otherwise would traditionally have to go to a particular office to deal with a paper application.

By digitizing the system and modernizing it, and then leveraging the global network of offices, we're going to have the opportunity to boost our processing capacity overall.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you, Minister.

One of my constituents happens to represent a mosque in my constituency. They actually reached out to me last night. One of their imams comes during Ramadan. He has been coming for many years.

They applied for his visa and it showed a processing time of 80-plus days—that's from India—but Ramadan comes in 30 days.

This is a religious worker. Would you provide any preference for those sorts of applications that might be made under special circumstances?

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** We will look at, for different reasons, prioritizing certain applications if there's a certain urgency to them. I think you can appreciate, between personal events in a person's life or different circumstances like this, there are competing pressures, so I don't want to commit to anything in public before I've had the opportunity to look into it.

If you send me the file we'd be happy to take a look purposefully, but I should point out that we want to encourage anyone else who is thinking of coming to Canada to apply as early as possible to allow us to avoid these kinds of circumstances. At a certain point in time, when there are so many applications that come in and need to be expedited, you will run into processing challenges that don't let you prioritize everything, because if you prioritize everything you prioritize nothing.

I would encourage anyone listening to apply as early as possible. For urgent situations that are unforeseeable, sometimes we are able to expedite application processing.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you.

Since I have a few seconds left, if you want to add something else, the time is yours.

Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Maybe I'll conclude with this thought. I want to say thank you to each of my opposition critics, to my Parliamentary Secretary and to my caucus colleagues as well.

I've had the opportunity to engage with folks over the past few days, and I've never seen such a collaborative spirit as I have in the past week over the situation in Ukraine, whether it's my conversations around family sponsorship, the urgent need to get people here or making sure we do it in a way that keeps people safe. I just want to say how much I appreciate it and to let you know that our conversations have directly informed some of the decisions that I've made. I hope that on issues going forward we're able to continue to pursue that collaborative approach to advance the well-being of Canadians and some of the vulnerable people we're trying to get here.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

Thank you all for your co-operation. It's a pleasure to work with you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I want to thank you for appearing before the committee.

I want to thank you for all the work you are doing on behalf of all Canadians in these unprecedented times. Thanks once again.

We will suspend the meeting briefly so that we can have the officials do the sound checks, and then we will resume with our second panel.

Thank you, Minister.

**Hon. Sean Fraser:** Thanks, everyone. I look forward to seeing you in person again soon.

**The Chair:** I think officials have done their sound checks, so we can begin if the officials are ready.

Are we good to go, Madam Tapley?

We will go directly into our round of questioning. We will start with Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Genuis, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. Please begin.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to pick up on some of the questions around private sponsorship of a bit more of a technical nature.

If I or a group I was part of were to file a private sponsorship application today, how long would it take to process that application? When could I reasonably expect to see the family that I was sponsoring arrive here on Canadian soil?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thanks, Madam Chair. Congratulations on your re-election.

If you were sponsoring a group under a private sponsorship stream now, given the inventory that we have of applications that are there, I think it would probably be close to three years before they would arrive.

Mr. Mills, do you want to add anything to that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Right now, we are talking about 35 months, or three years, for processing applications in this category. It's really due to our backlog of applications, plus all the other situations we manage in parallel with that.

[English]

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Is the government working on structural changes to try to bring that down, or are we just accepting that as an okay situation?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** No. We're working hard to make improvements to that, both to bring our processing times down on this, as well as to look at what supports we are offering to groups who are coming together to sponsor. We're making sure that we're conscious of vulnerabilities with respect to people coming, so that PSR groups, groups who want to sponsor, have the capacity to live through that one-year commitment.

That's a long answer to your question. Yes.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** We can talk about the capacity once people arrive and so forth afterwards, but I want to really focus on the backlog.

What measures are you putting in place to try to reduce that three-year timeline? Do you have a target for what you think is an acceptable amount of time for a private sponsor to wait?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Part of this is using some of those monies from the 2021 government budget. They are now starting to make their way through the estimates process to be able to hire additional people to process this.

Last year we overachieved on some of our PSR targets, in finalizing the decisions that were there. However, we have had a number of obstacles over the last year and a half in getting people here. It's not just the ability to come into the country; it's the capacity of other countries to issue exit permits and it's getting into camps to be able to do the interviews that are necessary. The system has not been our friend in the last year and a half, so being able to now pick up, to come back and look at this, and to get our standards down is really important.

The other thing to remember is that when we have urgent protection cases, we have a system that can move through them a little more quickly. To answer your question on what's ideal in terms of private sponsorship, it would be great if that came down to about a year. That's my opinion.

• (1210)

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Yes. I appreciate the aspiration there. From my perspective, we need to do so much better in this area.

We have situations where you have community groups and church groups that are funding the survival of people in other countries while they wait for years to have their application processed. It's such a delay for them and it's so much more expensive for the folks here in Canada who are trying to help them, when these people are in potentially dangerous situations. They are being sponsored and they are waiting in a queue. It costs everybody more, so it's critically important that we address this.

Let me move to another issue. The minister spoke about housing for unvaccinated asylum seekers. Can you share a bit more about how that works?

Are those asylum seekers expected to pay some proportion of the cost? What are the individual and public commitments? How does that process work to provide housing to people in that situation?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** For asylum seekers who enter Canada and are claiming asylum—maybe we will look at the situation around Roxham Road on this—for those who have a clear plan.... First of all, those who are vaccinated or who have a clear plan for quarantine are processed and are on their way.

For those who are not vaccinated and do not have a quarantine plan, we have rooms in hotels, where we place them until their quarantine period is complete and they are able to move into other social housing systems.

No, we don't charge people for the time in the hotel.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** To clarify, because I'm also out of time, the Government of Canada is paying for hotel rooms for pending asylum claimants who are unvaccinated.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** You are correct.

**Mr. Garnett Genuis:** Okay.

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

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga. You have six minutes. Please proceed.

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

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today.

I want to start my questions around the racialized newcomer women pilot. My first question is around the \$4.2 million allocated to support these women in addressing the barriers they may face.

Can the department officials share some of the understanding they have around the barriers that these women face? How much of that money is specifically allocated to francophone racialized women coming to Canada?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** On the percentage that's allocated to francophone service provider organizations that deliver these programs, I think we're going to have to get back to you, unless one of my colleagues wants to chime in on that one, broken down by linguistic barriers.

In terms of the type of programming that's offered, I'm going to ask Ms. Campbell Jarvis if she would like to add to that.

**Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis (Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Though the program provides a range of different services and supports, including women-only employment, language support and child care, what is particularly important is the women-targeted mentoring and the social connections. They really create that sense of community and enable women to gain exposure and sponsorship in finding employment and other social connections. There is also a dimension that provides some gender-based violence support for families, which is really important for traumatized women.

It's quite an all-encompassing program that we're really quite proud of.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you. It's really good to hear that there is some gender-based violence support for women. Especially if they're asylum seekers and they're coming from war-torn countries, there's probably that need.

I do, however, want to push a little more on that question. I didn't really fully understand what portion of it is allocated for francophone women who are in this program. Maybe I will restructure my question and ask how many of these women, in this pilot project, are francophone women?

• (1215)

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Madam Chair, we're going to have to get back on that. I don't have those numbers at my fingertips, which of our francophone service provider organizations are participating in

the pilot and then what percentage of clients would be francophone under that. We'll have to get back to the committee on that.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm not looking to get an idea of which francophone organizations are involved. I want to get a general idea of how many women who are involved in this program are of francophone background.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** I wish I had the number at my fingertips, Madam Chair. We will have to get back to the committee on the number of francophone women.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

You are at three minutes, 19 seconds.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** My questions are going to be centred around the francophone part, so I don't know how much they can answer if they have to get back to the committee with that.

Maybe they can comment on the knowledge of some of the barriers that women are facing in this pilot program and how much information they have to be able to have an informed response through this program.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

The program looks at a number of things, and Ms. Campbell Jarvis has highlighted this. One I'll speak about was a conversation I had with a woman in Vancouver who runs a part of this. It was with respect to entrepreneurs, so looking at being able to use this pilot on racialized women who are coming in and doing better training around entrepreneurialism and starting their own small business. It looks at some of the barriers that are specific to the women who are there and their ability to overcome these barriers.

A lot of it related to network; a lot of it related to links in the community and being able to get people in contact with the right people who were there. She was particularly happy about the results they had had.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Madam Chair, I have a comment on this.

My question really centres around the idea I want to bring to the committee that there are a number of refugee women who are of francophone background and we have targets to increase our francophone immigration. I think it would be important for us to know what the numbers are on that target and how much we're allocating the space to include francophone women. There are so many avenues that we could work on to increase francophone immigration across the country of Canada.

I also want to advocate for the francophone women to be included in such projects as this, to help them get into the workforce and start businesses as they settle here in Canada. That's where my question was.

I'll just ask one last question, if they could comment. With the youth employment and skills strategy that we've committed to young people, what kinds of barriers are they facing? I'm sure we'll get some answers around how many of those young people, as well, are of francophone background.



**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** First, Madam Chair, just let me say we agree, completely, on the need to make sure that these programs are available to francophone women, to francophone refugees, to francophone youth. We know that's happening; I just don't have the number that's happening right now and that we'll have to come back on.

I think that was a red card for me to stop.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Yes, if you can submit the information to the committee, it would be really great.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

You will have six minutes and you can please proceed.

[Translation]

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

Once again, I would like to welcome all the witnesses. I'm delighted that they are with us today to provide us with information and answer our questions.

We learned yesterday that 25,000 skilled workers in Quebec were waiting for an answer from your department. Some have been waiting since 2018. We even learned that immigration lawyers were going to be suing your department. It seems to me that the time has come to resolve this issue.

Do you think it's normal that people have been waiting for an answer since 2018?

The question is open to everyone.

• (1220)

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** I'd like to thank the honourable member for the question.

Is the immigration system meeting its objectives? The answer is no, our service standards aren't being met. That said, two important aspects need to be considered in order to solve the problem.

One of the problems we have is the number of places available in the immigration levels plan, and that's an issue with the Province of Quebec.

The other problem is our ability to process applications. I'll ask Mr. Mills to elaborate on that.

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Thank you very much for the question.

The honourable member is right that there are a lot of applications pending for skilled workers in Quebec. We are working hard to reduce the backlog as much as possible.

I am really proud to say that in the first two months of the year, we finalized more than 7,500 applications for skilled workers in Quebec. We are working very hard to reduce that backlog.

It is true that we were behind last year because of the pandemic. A lot of these applications were in paper format, so we put processes in place to move those forms to an electronic format. So we've been scanning the applications and then transferring them to our staff across Canada, so they could process more files and help us resolve the situation.

As the deputy minister mentioned, the number of applications we can process each year is also limited by the number of places that are provided in Quebec's reference levels.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** However, in 2020, there weren't a lot of applications to process, and you could have cleared the entire backlog. Be that as it may, we won't repeat history. I am very pleased to hear you say that things are progressing well. I hope you won't be in court for too long with our friends the immigration lawyers.

Would anyone be able to tell me what the total cost was to receive refugee protection claimants at Roxham Road in 2022? Do we have any figures on that?

Maybe that's too specific a question. If you could provide the committee with that information, I'd appreciate it.

Can someone tell me if that will be done?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** I think we have those figures.

Dr. Giles, do you have those figures?

**Dr. Nicole Giles (Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** I don't have them at the moment, but our chief financial officer might have them. If not, we can provide them to you later.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** It would be nice if we had those numbers, yes. Thank you for your work.

The Prime Minister's webpage states that IRCC is increasing its service capacity in the region for Ukrainian nationals. I am thinking of the neighbouring countries in Europe, especially Poland.

Does this mean that more staff are being hired?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We have indeed increased the number of staff in the region, but we have also increased the capacity of the system in that region, particularly with regard to biometric data kits. So we have increased the capacity to apply in the region.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Congratulations on that, by the way. It's a good decision.

Now, why not do the same thing by sending more staff to Pakistan to help our Afghan refugee friends? If we are able to do it in Ukraine, what is stopping us from doing it in Pakistan?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Thank you again for the question.

In fact, we have sent more people to Pakistan to help refugees.

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Okay. We'll check the numbers and see if it's on the same scale as in Ukraine and if the situation is taken as seriously as in Ukraine.

I don't have much time left, but I'd like to ask one last question.

In 2021, the approval rate for international students at McGill University was 90%, whereas it was 21% at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. It's your department that is responsible for these refusals and approvals.

Do you think it's normal to have such rates?

• (1225)

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Could you answer that question, Mr. Mills?

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Thank you for the question.

I don't have the exact figures in front of me, but I can say—

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** I'll give them to you: the approval rate for international students in 2021 was 90% for McGill University and 21% for the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Basically, we have to look at where the applications come from—

[English]

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

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** So it's normal.

Thank you.

[English]

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

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes. Please proceed.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you very much to the officials.

To what extent has IRCC processed the emails that Afghans were directed to send to the government? In other words, how many of those emails have received a response from IRCC, and how many are being processed? By response, I don't mean the automatic response they get.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

I'm going to try to work my way through. A significant number of emails came into the department during the time. There were about 300,000. We've worked our way through that number.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'm sorry, but if I could just get the numbers, that would be great.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We have worked our way through all of those emails, which means they've had a response of one kind or another. From an email perspective, that's what we've done in our department. Perhaps I'm not understanding the question well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** The response that people get is a stock answer that basically says, "Thank you very much," and, "We have received your email," but where are we with the processing of the cases that come with those emails?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** In terms of the processing of the cases, I'm going to divide them into a couple of different groups. If I look at those who had a connection to Canada, those who served Canada in one form or another, we've processed about 14,000 applications. On top of that, we had the commitment that the minister announced last summer of around 15 spaces as either government-assisted refugees or privately sponsored refugees, and those were Afghans outside of Afghanistan. On that, we have about half of those applications in and they're in process. I can tell you the numbers of those who have arrived—

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Perhaps I can get the officials to send those numbers in. It's taking a long time for us to get these numbers, and I don't have that much time. If I can get in detail for the committee the numbers for how many applications have been processed, how many of them have been completed, and how many of them are still waiting for completion, I would appreciate it.

The deputy minister mentioned that it's for those who have a connection. What about the applications for people who are not interpreters or collaborators, which is to say those who may have family members who are here in Canada and who have connections that way? If any of those are being processed at all, how many are? Thank you.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We look at this in three groups. One of those three groups includes interpreters who came to Canada in 2009 and 2012 and their extended families. We have the first slightly more than 1,000 applications in for those now. Those are being processed. The second group is those who are privately sponsored or government-assisted outside of the group under SIMs. About half of those applications are in. All the spaces are allocated, but half are in.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Thank you. If I could get those specific numbers, not "half" but exact numbers and under which category, that would be appreciated. Perhaps those could be submitted to the committee then.

I'd like to move on to the next question.

How many applications under the HCCP and HSWP that were submitted by mail in 2018 and 2019 have not been processed to date? If the officials can send that information to the committee in writing I would appreciate it.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We're happy to do it. I think Mr. Mills may have an answer for you though.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Okay, could you answer very quickly?

• (1230)

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** I thank the honourable member for her question.

I don't have the details of each category, but I can tell you that right now there are still 250 people in the queue who applied in 2018.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Perhaps I could I get the information in writing, because that's what I need to know.

While some caregivers' applications have received their PR under the TR to PR stream, others have not received an AOR. In this instance, can the officials provide information on how many applications are processed and how many are still stuck in the system? This is the TR to PR for caregivers.

[Translation]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** We'll have to provide the committee with the answer to that question later.

[English]

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** All right. Perhaps we can also, then, get the detailed information under the TR to PR stream broken down by the categories of individuals—how many have been processed and how many are still waiting to be processed—for caregivers as well as other professions.

As mentioned to the minister, the lock-in date for dependent children for caregivers means that they will age out. Given that the HC-CP cap has been reached already, as early as January 17, 2022, that means they will have to wait another 12 months to even make an application. In the meantime, much of their documentation—medicals, language test results, security checks, etc.—will likely expire. Will the ministry consider extending the validity dates for these documents?

**Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis:** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question.

May I say that I was quite intrigued by the member's earlier comments about the aging out—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting. Maybe you can come back to that in the next round. The time is up for Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Hallan, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here.

I want to follow up on a question from my Bloc colleague in regard to the resources for the hotline being used by Afghans and Ukrainians. He noted that the number is the same. Are the resources the same for both?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Let me clarify that the number may be the same, but once you call the number, you get options. One of the options is Ukraine. One of the options is Afghanistan. There are specific resources devoted to that Ukrainian hotline. There are specific resources devoted to Afghanistan.

We have also reached out to other departments to beef up our capacity to be able to make sure that we can continue to do that in a timely manner.

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

The minister noted that it would take 12 to 14 weeks to implement visa-free travel. That seems a bit unreasonable. Why would it take so long to do this?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Imposing or lifting a visa on a country is a complicated business. It involves a number of steps. It involves a memorandum to cabinet. It involves regulatory change. It involves changes to our system. It involves changes to the systems of our partners there. Those steps take some time.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I know someone who has called the Ukrainian hotline twice now, trying to get his parents here. The application was filed about a year ago. Both times he's called, they've

said, both times, that there is no priority on his case because it's an older case. He's trying to bring his parents from Ukraine. Is there something being done to address this issue?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Madam Chair, I'm really glad the honourable member has raised this, because, first, I think that's a bit of disinformation. We'll go back to the call line and we'll make sure that's corrected.

The commitment that the government made is that we are putting a priority on all our applications in the system from Ukrainian nationals. That includes those for sponsorship, exactly as he has recommended.

Thanks for bringing that to our attention. We'll make sure that's corrected.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** I appreciate that.

With regard to the new measures that were implemented today, especially the pathway to PR for Ukrainians, will people who have current applications in have to reapply?

• (1235)

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** No. People who have current applications in will not have to reapply. What I think the minister made an announcement on this morning will be a special dedicated or expanded family sponsorship pathway. We're just sorting out the program details for that now.

People who have applications in under other streams should absolutely keep those applications there. They will not need to reapply. We'll continue to put an emphasis on and drag those applications to the front of the queue.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Given that we have seen what we would say is a failure in Afghanistan and that now we see the situation in Ukraine, would that visa-free travel be something that could be implemented in the future or be ready to go by the department later, just in case this happens in other countries?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** That is visa-free travel for which countries? Sorry, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** The system cannot handle that right now. Is there something we can do within our infrastructure to have that ready to go for other countries if a war broke out in other countries?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Madam Chair, I will come back to the fact that there are lots of reasons we have a visa on specific countries, so we will come back to looking at security issues in a country and looking at their rate of immigration violations. We have a framework that looks at visas there. It's a pretty transparent framework, and I'm happy to share with the committee the issues we look at and how we do that or how we would even move to something like the eTA 2.0 that we have with Brazil.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Can we also get the officials, Madam Chair, to table.... There were applications that were pending and just stuck from Afghanistan, not just for interpreters but for the Sikh, Hindu and Hazara communities prior to the fall of Kabul.

I asked the minister previously as well. Those people do not see any hope of coming to Canada anymore, because they don't see any priority given to Afghans.

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

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Can we please have the numbers tabled?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Of course, Madam Chair.

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

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Tapley.

Time is up. We will now proceed to MP Ali for five minutes.

MP Ali, please proceed.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here.

I have one question. Could you please walk us through visa applications from Pakistan and refugee applications from Afghanistan? In which countries are those processed, and would you give any consideration to moving those visa services back to the Islamabad office, please?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** One of the beauties of having electronic applications is that we can move those applications throughout our system, so if we have some spare capacity in Beijing or some spare capacity in Ottawa, Mississauga, Sydney or wherever in our network, we're able to absolutely be the most efficient possible in terms of how we process those applications. Having all applications for a particular area in a particular spot makes it more difficult for us to do that.

There are some reasons for needing local expertise on specific applications. There may be reasons for interviews around that, where we want to move it in. It's just a little more complicated than simply saying that we should process all applications from X country in X spot. Just giving us the flexibility to do that really helps us better meet our service standards.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Through Madam Chair, I have a follow-up on the same question. We have a facility in Islamabad. Why is it not being used? If we're going electronic, then why do we have different visa offices in different countries?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Madam Chair, I want to assure the honourable member that we are using our facilities in Islamabad. We have an office in Islamabad. We have 13 Canada-based officers there, I believe. We are processing there, but we are also processing those applications elsewhere. We are using it to our full capacity.

The other thing we use in Islamabad is our visa application centre, so we're able to collect biometrics and we're able to do other things there. Those things all work in concert together.

• (1240)

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you.

I have one more brief follow-up question. Do we do the interviews there as well, in Islamabad, or do the applicants have to travel to different countries?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** No, we do interviews in Islamabad. We have done some interviews virtually during the pandemic. That has worked out very well. I think it provides much better client service, but we would do interviews in Islamabad, absolutely.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you so much.

One of my constituents is from Afghanistan. He has three brothers who live close to Kabul. They have applied under the refugee stream given the current situation, but they haven't received any response from IRCC. My office tried to reach out to IRCC. We can't get any answer from them.

Would you please walk us through whether there's anything we can do for people who have close relations in Afghanistan?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Madam Chair, we have our existing programs and we work through those. However, in terms of special programming for Afghanistan and what we've done, we have a big commitment around those who served Canada either with the military or with Global Affairs who were there. We have a second commitment that's focused on government-assisted refugees and privately sponsored refugees of Afghans who have fled and who are outside of Afghanistan.

We also have, as I think the honourable member has noted, a considerable existing inventory of Afghans seeking protection, who are there and seeking to come through those streams.

The third is the family reunification stream that we've stood up for individuals who came out in 2009 and 2012.

Those are the three streams that we're looking at for Afghans—

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you.

I have only 30 seconds, so it's a quick question.

What mechanisms were in place and what additional effort went into achieving the immigration level for 2021?

Can you respond to that quickly, please?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We used a lot of innovative practices. It came down to focusing on what was achievable and what was possible. That was looking at landings for many who were already in Canada—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry for interrupting, Ms. Tapley. The time is up for Mr. Ali.

**Mr. Shafqat Ali:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will now proceed with Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

Thank you again to the witnesses for being with us.

When you point out the problem of the backlog of 25,000 skilled workers who are still waiting for a response, for which even lawyers are suing you, you make excuses.

When you are told that using artificial intelligence really does pose risks of discrimination for francophones, you say you are comfortable with that. That's what we heard at a previous meeting.

When you are told that the approval rate for international students is 90% for McGill University, but that it is 21% for the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, 29% for the Université du Québec à Rimouski, 40% for the Université du Québec à Chicoutimi and around 55% for Université Laval, you still seem to want to find excuses that make sense to you.

In light of all that, I wonder if the problem in your department isn't rather its inability to recognize that there are problems. First and foremost, you have to recognize and name the problems if you want to address them. I get the impression that everything is excused, that there are always reasons that you think are rational and valid.

I'd like someone to tell me whether there's an issue with recognizing the problems within your department.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Thank you for the question.

[English]

I have to say that I struggle with that question.

You have to ask yourself what we are looking at when we approve student applications. The first thing we're looking at is if this person really wants to come to Canada to study. Where is their acceptance from the institution? Is this a legitimate student application?

The second thing we look at is whether this student can support themselves when they're in Canada. They have to be able to show us that they're able to support themselves when they're here. We have heard stories about this. Student fees are high. The average student fee for an international student is \$34,000 a year. If they can't demonstrate to us that they're able to support themselves, then they're open to big vulnerability.

• (1245)

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Excuse me, Madam Chair.

Once again, I'm being told that the students who want to study at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières are unable to support themselves, while students who want to study at McGill University can. That answer makes no sense, Madam Chair. Again, it's an irrational answer.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Actually, it depends on the country of origin.

[English]

There are different approval rates for different countries, but we're looking at the same things when we go through this.

Can you support yourself? Are you showing us an intention that if things don't work out for you in Canada, you're prepared to go home at the end?

[Translation]

**Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe:** Excuse me, Madam Chair, but if—

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you. Sorry for interrupting, Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe. Your time is up.

Sorry, Madam Tapley. We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'd like to give 30 seconds to Ms. Jarvis to answer my last question.

**Ms. Marian Campbell Jarvis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

In order to respond, there are a couple of points I wanted to clarify. Madam Chair, I would be very interested in receiving information from Ms. Kwan about the issue of children aging out. My understanding is exactly that of Ms. Kwan, the member, that the families are assessed at the time of application and moved forward in that pace. That aging out issue is an unfamiliar one to me. I would be very interested to learn a bit more about that.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll be happy to send information to your officials and to the minister.

Moving on to the next issue, from previous immigration committee studies, witnesses have suggested that the government look at changing the education and language testing requirements for caregivers. Has the minister done any work on this?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** Thank you. Yes. The quick answer is that we are always looking at ways we can improve the program and, frankly, at ways the pilot has told us the program doesn't work. We'll continue to examine that, and we'll continue to push on that. I'd just encourage the honourable member to reach out to us as well with the information that she has in this particular area. It's helpful to us in terms of how we assess this finding.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Absolutely, I will be happy to bring forth that information. We've studied this issue. Witnesses have raised it continually. If the ministry is looking at this, we actually need the change to be done, because people are not meeting it and there are those who are in the system for years. Because of the language testing requirements, they are not able to fulfill the PR application requirements. I'll be happy to follow up with the ministry and with Ms. Tapley directly on this.

Due to the strain of separation, many migrant caregivers, mostly women, end up separating from their spouses. In the past, Immigration accepted separation agreements to exclude a spouse in their PR application. However, this policy has now changed. They are now required to provide divorce papers or legal separation documents, which are lengthy and expensive. Will the ministry consider going back to the previous system and accepting separation agreements? This is particularly important in the Philippines, because the process is very long and very expensive.

Can I just get a quick answer—yes or no?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** We'll have to come back on that one.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I'll follow up with you on that as well, then. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. Based on the time left, we will have two minutes for Mr. Benzen and then two minutes for Mr. Dhaliwal. Then we will go into a vote on the supplementary estimates.

Mr. Benzen, you have two minutes. Please proceed.

**Mr. Bob Benzen (Calgary Heritage, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you witnesses.

I guess I'll just ask one quick question on the estimates here.

You requested \$8 million for the initiative on the issuance of proof of vaccination credentials for international travel. I still have constituents calling me saying that they're sometimes having issues getting other countries to accept their vaccination credentials. Could you talk a little about where you are in that initiative, the status of it right now and some of the challenges you face having Canadian vaccination credentials accepted in other countries?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** On this one, the monies that are there, we worked heavily with the provinces and territories, and I think the system we have is very user friendly at the end.

I live in Ontario, so if I look at my Ontario proof of vaccination credential that was issued by the provincial government and shows my vaccine record, there's a little Government of Canada wordmark at the top. It's that little Government of Canada wordmark that helps us have that consistent standard, so that other countries should be recognizing what we're providing and what we're doing there.

If there are specific countries where there are particular problems, I am happy to take that back and talk to my colleagues, both at the Public Health Agency and at Health Canada to make sure that those roadblocks aren't there, because the system that was put in place with the PTs should absolutely work.

● (1250)

**Mr. Bob Benzen:** That's good, and the \$8 million that you requested is a limit. You don't need more than that. Has everything been accomplished at that point?

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** I think there will probably be more that comes through in mains and supplementary estimates around this in future years, but I believe that's covered.

**Mr. Bob Benzen:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Benzen, your time is up.

We will now end our panel with Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have two minutes. You can please begin.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, I want to thank the IRCC call centre as well as the MED for the number of calls they get from our office and the service that they provide to our constituents with their help.

My question is on the super visa. Madam Chair, every month I get tons of calls on the super visa. Parents are waiting for over a year. There's a need for those parents to be united with their kids here. I'm just wondering what the department is doing to deal with that situation of waiting for a visa for over a year.

**Ms. Catrina Tapley:** That's part of our backlog reduction strategy, to be able to bring the timelines for that super visa way back down into our service standards. Now that the border has reopened for discretionary travel and parents and grandparents are able to come on that super visa, we need to get that number down. That's the backlog reduction strategy that's focused both on new applications that are coming in and existing applications that are already there.

Mr. Mills, would you like to comment?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Daniel Mills:** Thank you very much for the question.

The information that the honourable member is referring to is correct, that the processing time was indeed over 10 or 11 months, but it is now about six months. We have worked hard to significantly reduce processing times, and we'll continue our efforts in the coming weeks and months to reduce the super visa backlog.

[*English*]

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

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** With this, our round of questioning comes to an end.

We need to vote on the supplementary estimates (C) 2021-22.

**Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan:** Madam Chair, can we adopt on division?

**The Chair:** Yes. We will go one by one.

DEPARTMENT OF CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Vote 1c—Operating expenditures.....\$118,830,700

Vote 10c—Grants and contributions.....\$52,410,000

Vote 15c—Forgiveness of an immigration loan.....\$1

Vote 20c—Debt write-off—immigration loans .....\$172,941

(Votes 1c, 10c, 15c and 20c agreed to on division)

## IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Vote 1c—Program expenditures.....\$1,608,006

(Vote 1c agreed to on division)

**The Chair:** Shall I report the votes on the supplementary estimates (C) 2021-22 to the House?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Before we adjourn, there are a few things I need to bring to the attention of all the members.

On March 22, we will commence our study on differential outcomes. On March 24, the minister will appear for the first hour on differential outcomes, with officials for the second hour.

The appearance on the mains will be scheduled based on the committee's schedule and the availability of the minister.

To inform all the members, tomorrow we have an additional meeting so that we can give drafting instructions to our analyst. This meeting will be held from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. I hope everyone has the Zoom link for that. There will be arrangements to have the meeting in person for those who want to attend in person.

Ms. Kwan.

• (1255)

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

Before you adjourn, I'd like to just raise a point of order.

I don't know if this is a problem with other MPs, but when some of the officials were speaking it seemed to me that there was a loud

echo going on. I don't know if that was happening, or if it was just on my own earset. If this is happening, then I would ask that we look into that. I'm sure it's problematic for the interpreters, as they have to continually deal with this.

**The Chair:** If any members hear an echo during the meeting, please interrupt and let me know, and we can always check.

Go ahead, Mr. Dhaliwal.

**Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal:** I had the same issue as Madam Kwan.

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

Go ahead, Madame Lalonde.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** I did not experience that same situation.

**The Chair:** If there is any issue during the committee, please let me know. We will make sure we look into the issue of interpretation and the sound.

With that, I will take a moment, on behalf of all members of the committee, to thank all of the officials for appearing before the committee. Thanks a lot for your time in this busy schedule. Thanks for all the efforts and the work you are doing to make sure programs can be rolled out on a moment's notice. With all that's happening around the world, you have been under a lot of pressure. On behalf of all of the members, thank you for all the work you do.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** The meeting is adjourned.







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