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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everybody. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 27 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration.

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities, as well as the directive from the Board of Internal Economy of Thursday, November 25, 2021, to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person are to maintain a two-metre physical distancing and must wear a non-medical mask when circulating in the room. It is highly recommended that the mask be worn at all times. Members must maintain proper hand hygiene by using the provided hand sanitizer in the room and are asked to refrain from coming to the room if they are symptomatic.

This is a reminder that all comments should be addressed through the chair. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute and your camera must be on.

Pursuant to the order of reference of Wednesday, May 4, 2022, we will resume consideration of Bill C-242, an Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, regarding temporary resident visas for parents and grandparents. Today, we will be hearing from witnesses in this first panel on Bill C-242.

On behalf of the members of the committee, I would like to welcome our witnesses for today's meeting. We are joined by Howard Ramos, professor and chair of the department of sociology from Western University; and Arthur Sweetman, professor, McMaster University.

Each witness will have five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will go into rounds of questioning.

Professor Ramos, you may begin. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Dr. Howard Ramos (Professor, Chair of the Department of Sociology, Western University, As an Individual): Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to present to this committee.

The remarks I will share with you are based on research that I conducted on parent and grandparent immigrants, published in the Canadian Ethnic Studies journal in 2012, and it looks at what parents and grandparents contribute as well as some observations on demographic and policy issues related to newcomers and their extended families.

In talking with you, there are three basic points that I would like to share. The first is that parents and grandparents make significant economic contributions to Canadian society as well as non-economic ones that are often overlooked in the discussion. Second, newcomers are highly mobile and skilled. Offering a viable means for them to be with their elders and extended family will anchor them in their communities. Three, when considering improving access to family through super visas, it's important to consider the pragmatics of the visa option versus more long-term options to gain permanent residency.

Let me expand on each of these three points.

First, the research I conducted with Madine VanderPlaat and Yoko Yoshida that was published in the Canadian Ethnic Studies journal recognizes that Canada has increasingly favoured immigration policies based on human capital theory as well as economic outcomes, often at the cost of other pathways. While immigration is on the increase, there has been a downward trend in the number of family class entrants admitted to the country over the last few decades. The group most affected is sponsored parents and/or grandparents, who are also the most vulnerable to criticism against family class immigration.

Largely, the discussion on family class immigration is centred on the perceived lack of potential economic contributions of these immigrants. Such a focus, however, overlooks the feminized nature of this type of migration and the many non-economic contributions that immigrants make.

Using the multinomial logistic regression of the longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada, we examined both the economic and non-economic impacts and contributions of sponsored parents and grandparents compared to immigrants of a similar age migrating under other immigration categories.

What we found was that sponsored parents and grandparents make significant economic contributions to Canadian society as well as non-economic ones. Many of the parents and grandparents take up paid employment, and this increases over their duration in Canada. We also found that parents and grandparents make a number of non-economic contributions such as caring for family and offering related family supports. This is in line with other research that shows that family migrants help with emotional support, child care, elder care and helping the household more generally and, in the case of small business, they often help out with small businesses as well.

Our research also showed that parent and grandparent immigrants are younger than most people expect. The average age was roughly 60 years old for both the parents and the grandparents combined. What this means is that many of the parents who come to Canada are in their fifties, and some are even in their mid to late forties when newcomers are younger. This means that they have quite a bit of working life left in their careers, if they choose to pursue them.

The second point that I want to emphasize is that, given the supportive roles that parents and grandparents offer newcomers, they potentially play an anchoring role that will help newcomers put down more long-term roots in their communities. Research shows that, once a person has migrated, they are more likely to migrate again. Canada attracts highly skilled newcomers who have options to move within Canada, but they are also highly mobile and have the option to move outside of Canada. As people age and their parents and grandparents also age, this creates a pull factor for newcomers to leave the country to tend to their parents and/or grandparents.

Having the opportunity to have parents or grandparents join newcomers creates an anchor effect. It removes that pull factor that might draw them out of the country. It is also an anchor in that parents and grandparents are often less mobile than their children because of their age and other socio-economic factors. This can potentially play an important role in anchoring newcomers to communities that experience high rates of out-migration such as those in Atlantic Canada, the Prairies, rural communities or even in the north.

• (1110)

The third point that I wanted to expand on is something that you already know, which is that sponsoring and connecting with family is one of the biggest concerns newcomers face after they arrive in Canada—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, Mr. Ramos. Your time is up. You will have an opportunity to talk further in the rounds of questioning.

We will now proceed to Mr. Sweetman, professor at McMaster University.

Mr. Sweetman, please begin. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Professor Arthur Sweetman (Professor, McMaster University, As an Individual): Thank you for inviting me to address this committee.

Allowing parents and grandparents to travel to Canada is clearly beneficial to their families. My comments today, therefore, focus on a few insurance-related issues that will likely need to be addressed, or at least considered, assuming this bill moves forward. The matters I will raise are forward looking and concern implementation.

My comments focus on the health insurance required by current ministerial instruction, although this may have implications for other aspects of the bill.

The insurance focuses on emergency care and is required to be valid for at least one year from the date of entry. My understanding is that, in practice, it's difficult to purchase this insurance at present for a period of longer than one year. If a stay lasts longer than one year, the insurance needs to be renewed or new insurance needs to be purchased. At present, as I understand it, the federal government does not monitor renewals and related issues.

The purpose of insurance is to pool payments and costs so as to reduce risk. However, one risk that's not mitigated in the current framework is the year-to-year risk. Although we hope this does not occur, if, for example, a parent or a grandparent experiences an expensive health event in the first year of a stay, the price of insurance in the second year would almost certainly be much higher. This risk is, perhaps, manageable for a two-year stay, but if the duration of the stay is increased, the risk of a very large year-to-year increase in health insurance prices grows. If the length of stay is to be increased, the non-trivial risk associated with large price increases for insurance renewal needs to be considered now.

One option would be to require a longer minimum period of coverage. Indeed, the coverage could be for the full length of the stay, with an opt-out clause for parents and grandparents who decide to return home early. Of course, payment need not be up front. I can imagine various alternative sets of requirements regarding the structure of multi-year contracts. Perhaps, for example, minimum price increases across the years could be required as a prerequisite for ministerial approval.

This would give some amount of multi-year certainty to the sponsoring families, as well as their parents and grandparents. Obviously, this goes well beyond the text of the legislation, but the issues—even if you disagree with my points for discussion—are ramifications of the proposed legislation. They're likely going to be quite important for some families and are best considered in advance.

As an economist, I'm all in favour of competition to bring down prices for the benefit of consumers. A key issue in expanding health insurance purchase options to include international competitors is to ensure that the change achieves its desired goal with minimal negative side effects. As a health economist, I recognize that one of the strengths of Canadian health care is that it has modest administrative costs. If the new extended-stay super visa insurance market is not well designed and regulated, the associated administrative costs might increase noticeably and the legislation's goal of reducing insurance costs for consumers might be partly or even largely undone.

In particular, one way that insurers in some jurisdictions seek to keep insurance prices low is to—how shall I say this—interact rather aggressively with health care providers. Canadian hospitals and other health care providers have limited experience with aggressive insurance providers. Such activities increase administrative costs. In considering implementation, someone needs to think very carefully about guidelines for the minister-approved list of insurers that are appropriate for the Canadian context so as not to generate excessive administrative costs. This is because, in the end, I expect that those buying insurance for parents and grandparents and/or Canadian taxpayers would need to pay such administrative costs.

Finally, my expectation is that adding insurance companies to the proposed ministerial list of approved firms will not be nearly as difficult as removing such companies for cause. Anyone developing guidelines for adding insurers to some approved list needs to think carefully and, again, in advance about the process of removing insurers from the list. One challenge is that this requires monitoring non-payment and related issues, which requires the co-operation of provincial governments.

Of course, any insurance guidelines for foreign insurers, especially American and Mexican, need to meet all the requirements of USMCA and other trade agreements. This could also have important implications for Canadian insurers.

• (1115)

In conclusion, my view is that good intentions do not, on their own, make good policy. Careful and diligent advanced planning and high-quality execution are also usually required. I am attempting to think about some of the challenges that might arise where advanced planning can improve outcomes.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sweetman.

We will now proceed to our round of questioning. We will begin our first round with Mr. Seeback.

Mr. Seeback, please begin. You have six minutes.

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. Ramos, when you talk about the significant economic benefits of parents and grandparents and then look at the low-income cut-off, which seems to suggest that parents and grandparents are, in fact, an economic burden on Canadian society, what would you say about that?

Dr. Howard Ramos: I am so glad you asked that question, because that was part of the third point I wasn't able to share. One of the assumptions we make about parents and grandparents is that they're dependent, whereas when we look at the migrants who are coming, we see that they're often coming from upper middle-class backgrounds and professional backgrounds, often with parents of a considerable degree of wealth.

We need to begin to question whether or not we should be looking at the sponsor alone or also at the wealth and viability of the parents when they come. For many of the parents, especially for migrants coming from India or China, they have considerable wealth before they come to Canada. I think it's important to look at both sides of the equation and not look at simply the assumption that the newcomer is going to be sponsoring their parent. That parent actually could be sponsoring the newcomer as much as the other way around.

• (1120)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Part of what this bill, I hope, looks at is that, when someone is very new to Canada, they may have not achieved the economic success of others. They're the people, I think, who are most affected by the low-income cut-off. I really want to get your view. Do you think the low-income cut-off actually provides any protection to Canadians? Is Canada at risk if a family has a \$30,000 annual income, and they bring a parent or grandparent here?

Dr. Howard Ramos: That's a very important point to make, which is that newcomers face a labour market disruption when they land in Canada, and it often takes a number of years to overcome that gap.

One of the issues with the LICO is that it's also pinned to the number of people in the household. The more people you have in the household, the more restrictive that becomes. I think it's very prudent to begin to question whether that's an appropriate check and balance. As I was saying before, I think one of the ways to look at that is to look at the wealth of the actual parent migrating as well.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you for that.

I have one other thing, and I'm wondering if you looked at this. I haven't had the pleasure of reading any of your papers.

New Canadians across the cultural spectrum will often make remittances back to their home countries. In fact, I know there are significant remittances. I was having a discussion with the ambassador from Kosovo last night, and I think he said that somewhere in the nature of \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year comes back into Kosovo from remittances outside the country.

I'm sure that's happening here in Canada. Have you ever factored in the fact that having parents and grandparents here for extended periods of time would mean those remittances are not going back to the country of origin, and therefore there's an additional economic benefit here in Canada by keeping those funds here?

Dr. Howard Ramos: In my own research I haven't looked at remittances, but I would say that the logic you present would be a strong hypothesis that I think would be shown to be correct if we were able to look at that. Part of the difficulty in looking at remittances is largely how we construct our data. We largely look at people once they're here, rather than looking at flows with their broader family abroad as well as their flows in and out of Canada. I can only speculate, but I suspect you'd probably find that would be true.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sweetman, you're talking about some insurance-related issues, but if I were to take the gist of what you're saying it is that prudent planning by the government would resolve most, if not all, of the concerns you raised in your opening statement.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: Yes, I think that's true. My advocacy is for that kind of prudent advance planning.

If I can go back to your first question to Mr. Ramos, I think my first main point addresses that question directly. The one-year term for insurance right now imposes very substantial risk on low-income families. By virtue of having one-year insurance, the major cost increase they might experience in a second, third or fourth year of a visit would be a very substantial increase in the insurance premium they need to pay. That's exactly the kind of risk I'd like to mitigate so that people know right from the beginning how much they need to pay for the entire length of the stay.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Right now, many of these risks exist, as you pointed out. If someone had one year of insurance and stayed for two years, that risk currently exists. Under the current super visa, that two-year stay can be extended.

The risk of having a longer stay, which is what's proposed in my bill, substantially already exists. Would you agree with that?

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: It does to some extent. At the renewal, I think you need to prove insurance once again, if I'm not mistaken, so there is a verification of insurance at a certain point.

This risk is, in some sense, about protecting the parents, grandparents and their sponsors and pooling risk to their advantage.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will proceed to Mr. El-Khoury.

You have six minutes. Please begin.

[Translation]

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

I welcome the witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Sweetman.

Mr. Sweetman, you said in your presentation that you were in favour of more competition, internationally, among insurance companies that don't require payment in advance, which would have a positive impact on consumers' wallets.

How do you think you can find a balance? Would there be many well rated international companies that would agree not to be paid in advance? How can you balance that out?

• (1125)

[English]

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: You are raising exactly the questions that I was raising. Striking that balance is not something we're going to solve in a half-hour discussion now. It's going to take a lot of work by people who are specialists.

I think we can do that. In my view, the minister should have his staff in the department set up potential guidelines—criteria, if you like—for any insurance company anywhere to meet in order to be on this approved list of qualified insurance companies for this purpose. In part, it's not only about criteria for being on the list. It's also the simultaneous process or the criteria for being removed from the list.

I don't actually think we should go out and solicit companies. We should rather post criteria and any that meet the criteria could potentially be on the list. The goal is to intelligently and carefully design those criteria for the benefit of Canadians and the super visa holders when they visit Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Mr. Sweetman, based on your knowledge in the field, what do you think are the obstacles to accepting a wider range of health insurance coverage options outside Canada?

What do you think are the major obstacles to coming up with a solution?

[English]

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: I mentioned one of the barriers, which is that some insurance companies in some jurisdictions—and we only need to look a little bit further south of us to see that in practice—are very active in telling hospitals and other health care providers what they should be doing. That's not part of the Canadian norm and that would be a real shock for our health care system.

Similarly, some providers debate whether or not certain payments should be made. Again, those increase administrative costs, so we need to be very careful about designing a system that minimizes those types of debates. We also need to be worried about the credibility, the size and the respectability of the insurance companies in question.

Again, I think there are appropriate mechanisms that could be put in place to assure that kind of quality for insurance companies from many places around the world.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

Mr. Ramos, Bill C-242 apparently aims to address the issue of the financial stability of people benefiting from these measures.

Do you think the bill has effective and reasonable provisions for that?

[English]

Dr. Howard Ramos: Thank you for that question.

It's important in the conversation to really think about the demographics of those who would be able to access the super visas. I think it's a very viable solution for people who have citizenship or whose parents and grandparents have citizenship in countries that do not allow dual citizenship. I think it's a very viable process for families who have wealth on both sides, from the newcomer as well as the family.

That's the piece of the puzzle that seems to be a little bit missed, which is to think about changing the narrative to begin to consider the benefits that the parents and grandparents are bringing, rather than just the deficits. I think the deficits overlook a lot of the positive aspects that parents and grandparents would bring.

[Translation]

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Mr. Sweetman and Mr. Ramos, I would like to get your general opinion on this bill. Generally speaking, do you think this bill will have positive or negative impacts?

• (1130)

[English]

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: Why don't you go first?

Dr. Howard Ramos: I would say that there is a potential for much positive impact. As I mentioned before, the anchoring that can happen for newcomers would be a huge positive impact in terms of supporting families and bringing them together.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: My view is in the closing part of my opening statement. This bill is well intentioned, but good intentions are not sufficient for good policy. I think that this bill could be beneficial, if it's well implemented and carefully thought through. It's all in the execution.

Mr. Fayçal El-Khoury: Thank you.

My time is finished.

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up for Mr. El-Khoury.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you will have six minutes. You can begin, please.

[Translation]

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

I want to first acknowledge the witnesses who are joining us.

Mr. Sweetman, what you are saying is very interesting. I have been listening to you, and I see that a lot of work will need to be done concerning parameters for regulating foreign insurers. In that context, are we not putting the cart before the horse?

Shouldn't foreign insurers already be regulated? Shouldn't those parameters be established before this bill is adopted? Do you think a step is being skipped?

[English]

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: I don't know what you mean by "adopt the bill", since you're only talking about passing it in the House. It needs to be proclaimed. I presume that prior to its being proclaimed, there would be appropriate background material and appropriate guidelines put in place—or I hope, at least. Rather than saying I assume, I hope and I would advocate for proper guidelines being put in place before the bill is proclaimed.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: The bill will not be adopted right away, but what you are telling me is that upstream work needs to be done before the bill is adopted. What you just told me is very thought-provoking, and you answered my question.

Mr. Ramos, the length of stay provided by that super visa will help apply for permanent residence in better conditions. That is at least what we are being told. However, the bill stipulates that it must be ensured that the family member will leave Canada voluntarily after their visit.

Is that a case of dual intent? Don't you see an issue there with the Canadian immigration system?

On the one hand, we are being told that it will be easier for super visa holders to apply for permanent residence, but on the other hand, we are being told that the super visa will be granted on the condition of the individual providing assurance they will return home.

Don't you think that is contradictory?

[English]

Dr. Howard Ramos: That's a very good question.

One consideration is to really think about how the super visa works in concert with more permanent pathways for family. I think it's important to begin to think about who the people are who could transition into a more permanent element. There certainly are contradictions in the current version of the draft.

Another consideration that's very much related is how you can apply for that super visa. My understanding is that it can only be applied for outside of the country. I think that if the goal is to truly free up...then it's also to allow for people who may be on another type of visa or who may be in the country through the six-month allowance, which many countries have with Canada, to apply as well.

I think more thought could be offered in terms of how it relates to permanent pathways, and not just in isolation. I think that's an important consideration.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for that answer.

I will turn to you again, Mr. Ramos. Some people are claiming that the IRCC is too demanding, as it expects a family's income not to fluctuate from one year to another and never to drop below the required minimum during recession periods. That may be problematic for some families.

How do you think the requirements for producing reports created by clauses 4 and 5 of Bill C-242 resolve this issue?

• (1135)

[English]

Dr. Howard Ramos: I think it's very hard to think in terms of the implications at different points of implementation.

Certainly in a recession, newcomers face unique obstacles and so would their family, but I think it is important for us to also not be short-sighted and only look at the immediate. It's important to recognize that this is a potential long-term investment.

This is a stopgap that potentially can help a lot of families and can help smaller regions maintain their newcomers, if it means that families are more likely to stay in regions that have high out-migration and if it's a policy that helps curb the current system for permanent sponsorship. That permanent sponsorship, I believe, has about 25,000 slots for parents and grandparents at this point, which is tiny when you contrast that against the 400,000 newcomers we admit a year and you compound that over many years.

It's important for us to not only look at the immediate points of recession or ups and downturns in an economy that might be a year or two, but also to think of what it means if we keep families in regions for the long term and invest in them. It's really their children and their grandchildren who will be the true benefit to Canada and Quebec.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Mr. Ramos, in 2016, a lawyer pointed out to the committee that it was difficult for widows to come here with a super visa, as visa officers were less likely to be convinced that parents and grandparents will leave after the authorized period of stay. That lawyer recommended removing the obligation to leave.

Considering that the bill we are discussing extends the authorized period of stay to five years, what do you think will be the impacts on super visa applicants who are already widowed or other vulnerable individuals?

I have 30 seconds left.

[English]

Dr. Howard Ramos: It's too difficult a question to answer in 30 seconds. I would say that this is echoing Mr. Sweetman in why thorough investigation before implementation is needed to work out some of these considerations.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: I thank the witnesses.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you will have six minutes for your round of questioning. You can please begin.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for their presentations.

The super visa program, of course, was a program brought about by the previous administration as a means to allow for parents and grandparents to reunite, because they could not get permanent resident status. That's the reality. The program is set up in such a way so that, ostensibly, Canada would not be deemed to have to pay for or support these parents and grandparents, hence the barriers that exist, whether they be the income barrier or the insurance requirements, which are extremely onerous for a lot of families. That is the reality.

Mr. Seeback here is trying to address some of those shortfalls with his bill to make it a little bit more palatable, I guess, for parents and grandparents and more affordable for them to be able to utilize the stream to come to Canada to be reunited with their loved ones. It is not without problems, but that being said, a lot of people welcome this opportunity because otherwise they would not have any opportunity at all to reunite with their loved ones.

From that perspective, one thing I have taken issue with for a very long time now is this. Despite many requests in previous CIMM committees... We've asked the government to evaluate and conduct research into the contributions of parents and grandparents beyond the dollar figure, such as their contributions in terms of cultural, social support and even economic support here in Canada. They come as visitors, they spend money here and they do all kinds of things here that, I would argue, contribute to our economy.

From that perspective, I guess my first question is to Mr. Ramos.

What are your thoughts on that in terms of that calculation and those contributions that are not accounted for? Should the government be undertaking this work to make sure that we account for that and that it is an offset towards the costs that are being applied to them in this super visa program?

Dr. Howard Ramos: In short, yes, there is a deep need for research on this front. I think we often tend to focus on economic issues. On that front, we can do some investigation using the data linked to the IMDB data, but there isn't another longitudinal study of immigrants, such as the one that I used in 2012, that offers some insights.

The qualitative research that's out there, done by academics, shows that there is much mental health support, language support, child care support and elder care support. The work we did showed some evidence of care and support, but it didn't break it down. In this sense, it's really important to do this.

One of the obstacles researchers face, however, is that most of the datasets are based on individual newcomers, rather than thinking about newcomers as family units. It makes it not only difficult to try to see what the relationship is to parents and grandparents, but also to see the relationship with the children of newcomers who are here in Canada. In my view, it would be good to invest in better research into families as a whole, both for newcomers and for those who are Canadian by birth as well.

• (1140)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you for that response.

This question was put to officials when they were before the committee about needing to conduct that research. Their response generally centred around how difficult it is, so they haven't done it. Is that a lame excuse?

Dr. Howard Ramos: I think it's a legitimate excuse but, at the same time, it will always be an excuse unless investments are made to build the data to do that research.

From a pragmatic sense, can it be done quickly tomorrow? No. There are the obstacles that I mentioned. However, is it something worth investing in if we're going to be attracting 400,000 newcomers a year and thinking holistically about different interventions, rather than in the short term? Yes. This is an investment that's worth making.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: This study was done in the 2015 term. This was asked of the government five or six years ago now. I'm pretty sure that before my time, this was requested of the government and it still that hasn't been done. It's fair enough to say that successive governments have not undertaken this work.

As long as the idea is that it's difficult to achieve so we're not going to do it, as long as that perspective persists, we will never get the data and we will always be walking around in a circle with respect to that. I don't know how many more years will have to pass before we do the work that is so necessary.

My final question for you, Mr. Ramos, is this. Can you tell us if it is possible for this work to be done?

Dr. Howard Ramos: It is certainly possible for the work to be done. I think there is some stuff that can be done more immediately, looking at some of the economic impacts and some of the high-level caring impacts, as was done in the research we published in 2012. However, I think that it is a matter of investing in looking at holistic measures and well-being and, as the pandemic has shown us, the intersections that exist across different dimensions of society.

It's time for us to stop looking at just the economic factors of migration and start looking at the other dimensions as well.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'd like to turn to Mr. Sweetman for a minute with respect to insurance coverage.

You spoke about insurance coverage by providers outside of the country, but there is a question to be asked about insurance potentially being provided by the provinces. That is to say, for the parent or grandparent to purchase insurance coverage with the respective province or territory....

My time is up. I guess I'll have to come back.

The Chair: Ms. Kwan, your time is up.

We will now go back to Mr. Seeback.

You have five minutes. Please begin.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Mr. Sweetman, first of all, I'll give you the opportunity to answer Ms. Kwan's question.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: I think that's an interesting possibility. The one thing I would say is that it's usually the case that someone says what she said at a committee like this, which is that the provinces should do it. If you want to offer that insurance, the federal government could equally offer that insurance. In fact, in many ways, it would be more natural and easier, and perhaps have fewer administrative costs, if the federal government offered the insurance, instead of the province.

If I can go a bit beyond that, the real question with the super visa is who pays for health care. If someone comes under the parent and grandparent scheme, all of Canada pays for health care. Under the super visa, the sponsoring family and the parents and grandparents themselves pay for health care. It doesn't need to be 0:1. It could be somewhere in between. There are other options we could consider as a society, somewhere in-between the government paying 100% or the government paying 0%.

There is a range of things we could think about. I'm not sure that we've been very creative.

• (1145)

Mr. Kyle Seeback: Thanks for that. I really appreciate your insights on the insurance. My goal in this is to try to find ways to make it more affordable, so I have appreciated your comments.

I want to ask you this one thing, though. The bill says, "A health insurance policy purchased from an insurance company outside Canada that is approved by the Minister".

You were saying that, before this is proclaimed in force, they could get all this straightened out, but in fact they wouldn't have to do it before it was proclaimed in force. If it's not approved by the minister, they could approve nothing, or they could take six months after it's proclaimed or they could take two years to make sure that they got it right.

Would you agree with that?

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: That's true. They can take as long as they want. It's not clear under USMCA and other trade agreements what happens once you pass this legislation that allows international competition. Then, if the minister says that the only people we're going to continue to allow—because I'm presuming you're not going to shut down the program while we wait for the minister—are Canadian firms, you might find yourself facing several complaints from, for example, American and Mexican insurers very quickly if the minister delays.

Again, I'm not a trade expert. I'm not a trade lawyer. I think you would need to talk to a trade lawyer about this, but you might find yourself running afoul of USMCA if the minister took too long to produce a list once the legislation had passed.

Mr. Kyle Seeback: I'll share my time with Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Seeback.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Ramos, I was really intrigued through this broader discussion of the economic benefits of non-economic immigration categories. It's sort of odd, in some ways, the way we think about immigration, which is that we have the economic stream for economic benefit and then we have the family stream and we have the refugee stream. Each of them have clear, specific benefits, but I don't know that we've discussed enough or acknowledged the fact that one category can also achieve objectives in another category. You can have a refugee who comes for economic reasons but is also seeking refuge, and how those things go together.

I wonder if you would build on your comments about the economic benefits of parents and grandparents. Are there specific determinants that lead to some individuals providing more economic benefit than others? Could we be thinking bigger about hybrid categories that draw on benefits in multiple streams instead of just thinking you're either in one stream or another?

Dr. Howard Ramos: I definitely think that it's important to think of people as complete people rather than labels and the pathway by which they got to Canada. The more we begin to do that, the better policy we will have.

Certainly I think some of the variables that come into play are language ability, education and experience in different environments, and age is also a calculation when you look at some of the research.

There are some reports that have looked at the economic outcomes of newcomer refugees. There's a little bit of work on the family, which we've done. I think this is the cutting edge of where research is right now, looking at different landing categories and looking at the outcomes economically.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Okay, thank you.

With respect to—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Dhaliwal, you will have five minutes. You can begin.

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

Madam Chair, I would like to thank the witnesses for their input into this committee.

I also would love to congratulate Mr. Seeback for bringing this bill forward, because it opened up a very important conversation we should have that was long overdue.

As Madam Kwan mentioned, I have some concerns about this bill as well. The main concern that I have about this bill is that, in fact, it calls for super visa conditions to be carved into the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, which will be very difficult to bring changes to if we want those changes in future, because that all has to be done by legislation.

I would like to ask the witnesses: Would it not be a better idea that this be brought through the ministerial instructions, as that would allow the IRCC to make changes as we go?

• (1150)

Dr. Howard Ramos: It is beyond my expertise to offer an adequate answer. I pass to Mr. Sweetman, who may be able to offer a better answer than I could.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: Ministerial instructions, in my view, are a very powerful instrument of government. They're very fast. My assumption is that the reason for this bill is that the minister has been unwilling or unable to issue a ministerial instruction. If the minister were willing to, then that's a very fast and easy way to make changes.

Having said that, one thing the bill does that ministerial instruction doesn't do is it ties the hands of future ministers. If the goal of the committee and Parliament is to tie the hands of the ministers, then you need legislation. There are advantages to tying the minister's hands, and there are advantages to giving the minister discretion. It depends on how much you trust and agree with the minister, and all future ministers.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: One thing, you agree, is that, if it is brought through ministerial instruction, then we can bring in changes faster as well as the implementation.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: Certainly, and there are big advantages. As much as I'm talking about pros and cons, there are big advantages to the ministerial instructions. They're easier to change if something dramatic changes in the future. They have some real advantages as well as some deficits if you disagree with the minister.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Ramos, you talked about the economic impact of parents and grandparents. A perfect example is my case. My parents came here. If they weren't here, then both my brother and I would probably not have been able to go through our degrees at university. After getting our engineering degrees, my brother has been working for a Canadian international firm for years, and I have set up my own business employing almost 20 people.

They not only helped us there, but culturally...and in child care as well. My wife and I were able to work because my parents took care of our children, and they were better raised. My daughters still say that when my dad was picking them up he would be more on time than I would be. Sometimes I would get occupied with my work. Then, at the end, my dad looked after my business for all of those years. My mom is still considered a better campaigner than I am when I'm on the campaign trail.

It's not only in my case. I see hundreds and thousands of those families who have brought a positive impact. I'm a big supporter of permanent immigration compared to this super visa option.

What would be your comments about that?

Dr. Howard Ramos: I think it's important to still have permanent pathways, and the super visa cannot be a replacement of permanent pathways. It's important, as the super visa's brought in, to try to offer immediate solutions for newcomers where it will work. It's equally important for us as a country to consider family migration as a viable option in the mix of our portfolio of pathways.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Thank you.

I think I have only 13 seconds left.

I just want to thank the witnesses again, and of course Mr. See-back himself.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe, you can begin.

[*Translation*]

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

It's interesting that my friend Sukh Dhaliwal talked about child care. We know that Canada and Quebec are currently experiencing a labour shortage, especially in child care.

Mr. Ramos, do you think Bill C-242 is something of a solution to the lack of child care spaces? Could we see it like that? Couldn't it be a bit of a precarious solution?

• (1155)

[*English*]

Dr. Howard Ramos: I wouldn't say it's a solution to child care needs as a whole, but one of the benefits, which much of the qualitative research has shown, and to some extent the work that we did, is that caring is an offshoot that comes. I think it's not adequate to see it as a replacement for child care or an investment in child care and early childhood learning, but it's seen as a value-added that supplements that.

I think that's the important thing to change in our conversation. It's to move from either-or positions to really seeing the supplementary and hybrid positions that are the new reality newcomers face.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your answer.

Do you have amendments to propose for this bill? Mr. Ramos, what would you change if you could make a single amendment?

Mr. Sweetman could then answer my question if there is enough time.

[*English*]

Dr. Howard Ramos: I can't say that I have specific amendments to the bill as it is, though I would stress that thinking about the LI-CO and being as creative as possible and thinking about the wealth that the parents bring is an important consideration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: What do you think, Mr. Sweetman?

[*English*]

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: I'm not sure what amendment I would make. I might phase in the extension of the length of the super visa, the new stay in Canada. At the moment it's two years. Rather than going immediately to five, I might slowly phase it in over time—but not that slowly.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: My time is up, but I want to thank you for joining us in committee. Your contribution will definitely help us in our work.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now proceed to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Kwan, you can go for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to ask about an appeal process because right now there isn't one. I've had people who have had their applications for their parents or grandparents in the PR stream be rejected because they missed one month of their income requirement, after having waited three years and having been lucky enough to get the draw so they can actually get into the system.

My question is for both witnesses, maybe starting with Mr. Ramos first. Should the government embed into the system an appeal system, or should we, as a committee, make an amendment to this bill to allow for an appeal system?

Dr. Howard Ramos: It's difficult to answer that in the sense that an appeal system could potentially drag out the process even longer. It could be quite costly versus having an ability to just reapply for another visa. I think it's a matter of balancing out the two to see which is the quicker solution for the newcomer.

Certainly an ability to reapply would be quite important.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Instead of making people go to Federal Court for the appeal, which would be very onerous and expensive, if the government set up a system so that the officer can reconsider or even the minister can reconsider the application, that would be a cheaper way. If you make a person reapply again only to be rejected again, what is the point?

I'd like to come back to Mr. Ramos before I run out of time on that front. Should we have an appeal system that is simpler and less onerous so that people have a chance to appeal their case to consider extenuating circumstances?

Dr. Howard Ramos: Thank you for that clarification. I would agree that it would be a viable solution and something to consider with adequate checks and balances so it doesn't hinge on just one officer or the minister, but maybe have a review by another officer. I think that would be an effective way to create that wiggle room.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Sweetman, you have 10 seconds on that answer I'm told.

Prof. Arthur Sweetman: My sense is that you're asking two questions in one. There is an appeal process where the same criteria are imposed and we are only looking for mistakes by the officer who made the decision, and then there is a compassionate appeal where we are looking for someone to make an exception to the current criteria, to let someone in despite the current criteria. I think you lean towards the second of the two, which is a very different process than a judicial type of review, which imposes the same criteria. I think your fundamental concern is with the criteria for admission.

I'm not saying you don't want an appeal. Appeals are useful, but I think your fundamental concern is with the criteria rather than the appeal itself.

• (1200)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: There's that, but then there should be a provision to consider extenuating circumstances, which there isn't right now.

The Chair: Thank you. Time is up.

With that, our panel comes to an end. On behalf of all the members of the committee, I want to take this opportunity to thank both witnesses for appearing before this committee and providing important testimony towards Bill C-242.

This panel comes to an end. We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes to allow the witnesses for the second panel to come in.

Thank you.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 1, 2022, we will resume the study of application backlogs and processing times.

We have three witnesses for this panel today. We have Mr. Ravi Jain, steering committee member for the Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association, who is joining us virtually. We have Saeed Shajjan, founder and lawyer from Shajjan & Associates, who is here with us in person. He has travelled all the way from Toronto. We are also joined by Kyle Hyndman, chair, immigration law section, from the Canadian Bar Association.

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee. All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks and then we will go into our rounds of questioning.

I would start with Mr. Jain.

The floor is yours. You can begin, please.

Mr. Ravi Jain (Steering Committee Member, Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association): It's nice to see you again.

Thank you, Madam Chair and the clerk of the committee, for inviting the Canadian Immigration Lawyers Association to appear before you. We comprise over 400 members of the bar from across Canada. One of our mandates is to improve immigration legislation, policy and operations.

I want to first acknowledge and thank my CILA colleague, Betsy Kane, who was initially scheduled to attend, for sharing her initial notes with me.

The backlog is having an enormous effect. First, it makes it difficult for Canada to bring people in based on humanitarian reasons. Family class and economic immigrants are also in dire need of attention. Prepandemic, I had family class cases going in as little as four months, but the current state of processing time is 12 months. It's actually closer to 20. For spouses and common-law partners, a week can feel like an eternity.

Many Canadian companies are not operating at capacity, as they don't have the human resources they need. The unemployment rate's extremely low, with 800,000 vacancies, yet the backlog includes 189,000 work permits and 235,000 economic category PRs as of April 29, which are just waiting to be processed.

The last census tells us that we're not so much an aging population—we're aged. Over 40% of Canadians are now old or getting there with 19% aged 65 or older and 22% between 55 and 64. The fertility rate is 1.4 children per woman, yet the replacement rate is 2.1. Bringing in people efficiently is critical to our economic recovery, but it was already the case that we needed immigrants for Canada's long-term economic survival. We just need more working-age people to pay tax.

The other problem with delayed applications is that the greater the backlog, the harder it is to climb out of it. We now write demand letters, followed 30 days later by Federal Court applications. People are resubmitting applications, which was encouraged at the Delhi office.

I believe the government must answer for this backlog of two million. When I was in Kyle's chair—that's chair of the CBA immigration section during the pandemic—I asked a rather impolite question. It was this: How many officers are actually working and are they finding solutions so that people could work from home? I got a vague answer. It was revealed later that 80% were on leave at major case processing centres for extended periods.

We need to know exactly what the productivity was year by year, pre-pandemic, during the pandemic and now. Why did the TR to PR pathway, for instance, result in more applications than intended? Why didn't the cap work? Now it's cannibalizing express entry spots for this year and next. We should analyze whether it's wise to even have cap-free programs like for the Ukrainians, though I understand the instinct.

The 2021 economic and fiscal update proposed \$85 million. In the most recent federal budget, it was \$2.1 billion and \$376 million more and ongoing. How will this address backlogs? Where are the priorities? We need a detailed plan for scrutiny. We need greater transparency on processing times, stages of applications and reasons for refusals.

IRCC could invest in emergency preparedness so that we can respond to the next war or natural disaster and so that officers need not be redeployed away from programs we need.

Accountability is key. Look at the Service Fees Act, which exempted all PR and most TR applications. We need accountability. It's unacceptable to shut down communication with applicants, their lawyers and MPs even, as was done with the excuses of Afghanistan and Ukraine.

The program manager in Delhi currently replies with an email saying to use the web form to ensure there's no "false impression of privileged access" and that any further emails sent to them will be deleted with no response. We've also been excluded altogether from new digital platforms developed by IRCC, with the excuse that they need to be rolled out quickly.

Immigration lawyers are treated very poorly in this country. I've heard from top managers at visa posts and PNPs about high levels of fraud and negligence by consultants. This has led to reps being shut out generally. The website of IRCC lumps us in with non-lawyer consultants, with a warning to the public about fraudulent reps. Denying access to proper counsel prejudices many of those who don't have the sophistication, technological know-how or access to the Internet. It's counter to the rule of law and our Canadian culture, where people regularly hire lawyers and similar professionals such as accountants, given what's at stake.

Immigration lawyers are best able to strategize and provide complete applications that are often time-sensitive, such that a returned application will mean the applicant no longer qualifies. Many of us volunteer significant time and effort to assist the department gener-

ally, as well as provide pro bono services to the vulnerable public. We deserve more respect.

Finally, IRCC should have designated officers as essential workers during the pandemic so that this backlog was not allowed to develop. I'll speak about that later.

Those are my opening comments. Thank you.

• (1210)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jain.

We will now proceed to Mr. Shajjan, founder and lawyer from Shajjan & Associates.

You will have five minutes. You can please begin.

Mr. Saeq Shajjan (Founder and Lawyer, Shajjan & Associates): Thank you.

Honourable Chair, honourable vice-chairs, honourable members of the committee, thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity to be here and share my struggles of the past 10 months with you.

I would also like to take the opportunity to appreciate and thank the Canadian government and the Canadian people for opening their arms and receiving us with such warmth and love, for which we are all very grateful.

I would like to begin by telling you a little bit about myself and what I was doing in Afghanistan.

In 2010, when I finished studying at Harvard Law School, I had the opportunity to stay in the States, but I thought that in Afghanistan I could be more useful. I could make a difference to the lives of many people. I decided to go back to Afghanistan.

After some time I started my law practice. Very soon the firm that I started by myself was established as one of the best in the country. It was ranked internationally as the best law firm in Afghanistan.

In addition to the routine legal services that we were providing, we were doing so many wonderful things, because we believed in a better future for all Afghans. We were providing pro bono legal services to indigent people. At the same time my colleagues and I were very much focused on helping the next generation of lawyers, because we believed that a strong and better pool of educated lawyers would definitely make a difference in the country. That's why we were involved in so much training, by ourselves, to lawyers and to law schools. We were sponsoring different events. We were providing opportunities to the students in Afghanistan, and at the same time we were providing some internship opportunities for both female and male lawyers in the country.

Then there was a time when we saw that our dreams for a better Afghanistan were shattered. We saw that there was no hope. Not only that, but we found ourselves to be in danger. That is the time I heard about Canada's evacuation plan.

I got in touch with several people I used to work with. They were all very kind and supportive. They said that yes, of course, I and my people would fall under the definition of an "enduring relationship with the Government of Canada", and I should apply as soon as I can.

We asked for the necessary recommendation letters. We got them very soon. I believe I applied around July 29, but I did not hear anything until we had this very dark day in the history of Afghanistan, August 15, where we could literally see that everyone could be persecuted by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

I started calling everyone I knew, but unfortunately no one was really in a position to do something. They were saying that they had done what they could. They had referred the issue to the relevant authorities, and hopefully we'd hear soon from them.

I was lucky that I had some very good friends in the United States who got me out of Afghanistan, for which I am grateful. Otherwise, I'm sure I would not be here today. They got me out with my extended family. We made it to Doha, and then from Doha we started again getting in touch with different embassies of Canada, and we made it on September 3 to Canada.

From the time I have been here I thought I could do what I really needed to do to save the lives of those who served in the Canadian mission in Afghanistan with me from 2013 until this very moment. Even as of now I receive emails from different vendors, landlords asking about different issues they have with the Embassy of Canada to Afghanistan. To this date, there is no progress from the government side.

In October I decided that I should take this issue to the media, so hopefully I could have some sort of attention and would get the desired results. I had an interview with Matt Galloway on CBC, which was heard by many people. Lots of people called me. They offered to help me in different ways—to a lot of them I say thanks.

Out of this, Kristin Taylor, from Cassels Brock & Blackwell LLP, heard it and she invited me. They offered to support me. I thank them, and I have been struggling.

I have been writing to many people, including many honourable members on this committee, some of whom have been extremely supportive, trying to raise a voice. The unfortunate thing is that, despite the fact that we have the best enduring relationship with the Government of Canada and we were publicly known for our relationship with the Government of Canada, my colleagues are still in danger. We have not heard anything from the IRCC.

I think I will stop here. I have a lot to share. I'm sure that during the questions....

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shajjan. You will get an opportunity to talk further in your round of questioning.

We will proceed to Mr. Kyle Hyndman, chair, immigration law section, from the Canadian Bar Association.

Mr. Hyndman, you will have five minutes for your opening remarks. Please begin.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Kyle Hyndman (Chair, Immigration Law Section, The Canadian Bar Association): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Honourable members of the committee, good morning. I also want to acknowledge the other witnesses. My name is Kyle Hyndman, and I am chair of the Immigration Law Section at the Canadian Bar Association, which brings together more than 36,000 legal experts in the country. The association's main objectives are the improvement of law and the administration of justice.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today from Vancouver, the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh nations.

[*English*]

One of the most important points I'd like to make is that backlogs are about much more than waiting. The impacts of delayed processing are profound, personal and sometimes permanent and unfixable, and they're often about a loss of rights.

Today, I'd like to highlight solutions in three main areas: Number one is completeness checks, number two is transparency and predictability, and number three is equity.

I'll turn first to completeness checks. When anyone files an immigration application, as many of you know, the first step in processing is that IRCC conducts a completeness check under section 10 of the regulations. Applications that are deemed complete are entered into the queue for processing. Those that are deemed incomplete, no matter how trivial the apparent deficiency, are returned unprocessed and are treated in legal terms as though they were never filed. Applicants are then required to start all over again. Completeness checks are only fair and effective when they're done quickly and accurately. When they take up to a year, as they sometimes do now, the impacts can be serious and sometimes permanent.

I'll give you an example of a spousal sponsorship filed from within Canada where the applicant has a work permit that's expiring soon and, let's say, a 21-year-old son overseas. Filing her permanent residence application along with an open work application allows her to remain in Canada and keep working, and it also locks in her son as a dependant. The cut-off is his 22nd birthday.

If this applicant's PR application were returned for incompleteness a week later, she could simply correct any deficiencies and refile the application. The consequences would be relatively minimal, but if it were returned after seven months, let's say, the consequences could be very serious and very permanent.

First of all, because her application has been returned, her work permit application is also refused and she is now out of status and well beyond the 90-day restoration period. Her options are to leave Canada and be separated from her spouse, remain in Canada illegally or apply for a temporary resident permit, which is a highly discretionary application with a low approval rate.

In the meantime, many of her documents have expired. More seriously, her son has now turned 22 and is permanently excluded from the family unit. She can never sponsor him to come to Canada and she'll have to make the impossible choice between permanent separation from her spouse or from her son.

This situation may also lead to a cascade of resource-intensive applications to try to fix the situation, creating more work for IRCC, the courts, the CBSA and other departments.

There are two main recommendations on this point. One is to allocate more resources—whether electronic or human—specifically to reviewing applications for completeness, opening files and assigning file numbers quickly. Number two is giving applicants the opportunity to correct minor deficiencies rather than returning applications. The second point is about transparency and predictability for applicants.

We have three recommendations that we believe will help lower anxiety, increase confidence in the immigration system and reduce follow-up communications that consume IRCC resources. Number one, set reasonable service standards for responding to inquiries and ensure that they're met. Number two, inform applicants or their counsel where their applications are being processed and post information about the circumstances in which applications are transferred. Number three, provide accurate individualized information about the progress of applications.

The final point is about equity. We need an immigration system that both meets Canada's economic, demographic and humanitarian needs but is also administered in a way that reflects Canadian values of equity and fairness. Our current system fails to do this consistently, particularly when it comes to processing times, which vary wildly across IRCC's international network.

We've made three recommendations to address this. Number one, allocate more resources to offices that face unusually long processing times, such as New Delhi and Abu Dhabi. Number two, make better use of IRCC's global delivery network to reallocate files to other offices. Number three, post more accurate processing times online.

Those are my introductory remarks. I would welcome any questions from members of the committee.

Thank you.

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will proceed to our first round of questioning, beginning with Mr. Hallan.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Shajjan, you worked for the embassy. Is that correct?

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: Yes. My law firm had an agreement, in fact several, from 2015 until December 2021.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: What was your experience during that time? Can you explain a little bit about when Kabul was falling? Perhaps we can get a little bit more information on what your experience was dealing with IRCC before the fall and then after the fall.

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: Honestly, I have no words to describe that. All I would say is that there was no transparency and there was no clarity in the process. I know the country very well. I know who was working with the embassy in Afghanistan. I could literally see people or organizations that were established as early as two years back from the time of collapse, or even less than that, who got out on those evacuation flights from Afghanistan.

• (1225)

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: When was that?

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: This was happening right from the beginning of August until I believe August 27. People who had received a small amount of donation or funding from the Government of Canada and Afghanistan back in 2008 or 2012, they were getting out. For us, we were publicly known. I have the reference letters that would confirm that we were publicly known for our affiliation and representation of the Embassy of Canada. To this date we have not heard anything from the IRCC.

It was not only me, but so many of my colleagues were representing the embassy before different ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Interior, the Presidential Palace, National Security Council, and local courts and municipalities in Afghanistan, dealing with landlords, local vendors. We are all publicly known. This is a time where you cannot really trust anyone. They can go to the Taliban and report you, say that they know this guy and he was working with the Canadian embassy in Afghanistan.

Here we are. As I said, there are people who had no ties with the Canadian government in Afghanistan, and they're already out, or at least they've received G numbers. In our case, there are those poor people who are still in hiding, and it's been 10 months. I'm not talking about normal routine immigration things, which I understand are time-consuming and need a lot of work. People's lives are at risk. They're in danger, and they've been in hiding for 10 months. I'm afraid they will not be able to do this for too much longer.

As I said, honestly, I have no words. How it is done, who is getting out based on what, what is really the criteria, how the decisions are made—I have no answers for that.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: Thank you for that.

That's something that we keep hearing. You mentioned about no transparency. This is a huge issue for the translators and the people who served Canada—the Afghans who served Canada. This is what we keep hearing.

We know through testimony in the Afghan committee that UN-HCR had prepped or at least told the government that the fall was imminent, that it was going to happen, and the government didn't take any steps towards that. Did you hear about anything in your time there before August about any type of an evacuation, or if something was going to happen? Did you see any preparations being done by the government there, the embassy, for an evacuation?

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: I found out about that late. I think it was in July when I heard from different colleagues who we were working within the Canadian embassy that this was what the Government of Canada was doing. This is the time that I inquired from different contacts we were working with whether we would be eligible or not under this.

I understand that there was this evacuation going.... Again, I don't have the answer to what the definition is of “enduring relationship”. That was relayed so many times by two different ministers—that priority would be given to those who had an “enduring relationship with the Government of Canada”. I thought that we would be the best people under that category, because oftentimes we were representing the embassy more than the local staff and even, at times, more than the diplomats. For security reasons often they would not go out, so it was us who went to engage with different municipalities, with local courts and local offices within the Government of Afghanistan.

We are publicly known, so I thought that we would be the right people under this definition. Again, here it is 10 months, and I'm asking you people to be my voice. Let's get these people who really served the Canadian mission in Afghanistan and bring them to safety.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: I think you raised a really good point. That's why I asked in the beginning if you worked for the embassy. In my opinion, you're clearly someone who should have fallen under that program.

In your opinion, given the timeline and now the record of this government, do you see that there is a timeline or a hope for the other people who are stuck? We see that only about 36% of the people who they promised are here. We see the immigration minister patting himself on the back for that, but we hear different stories from the people who are stuck there or running from the Taliban.

In your opinion, what do you say about the timeline of people getting here? Do you see hope for the rest of the people?

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: I'm afraid I am losing my hope for the rest of the people right now.

With regard to the timeline, there was a time when I saw many people, who shared their documents with me, submit their application on, let's say, August 17 and they got their G number and everything on August 19 or 20—within two or three days. Within a week or so they were on their way out of Afghanistan. I can tell that they did not have the kind of relationship than we have had with the Em-

bassy of Canada. They were out within two weeks maximum during August.

Certain cases like ours, we are still waiting and it has been 10 months.

Mr. Jasraj Singh Hallan: We, and certain veterans groups, have been calling on single-journey documents for people to help speed up this process, because we know there's a bureaucratic mess right now in IRCC, caused by the government.

Do you think it would help for people to get here?

• (1230)

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting.

Your time is up, Mr. Hallan.

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: May I just give a short answer?

The Chair: Quickly, you have 10 seconds.

Mr. Saeeq Shajjan: Definitely there are many ways. Of course the way the government is going right now, it is not really helping, unfortunately.

There are many ways that we can really help—

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

We will now proceed to Mr. Ali.

You will have six minutes. You can begin, please.

Mr. Shafqat Ali (Brampton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madame Chair.

Thank you to all witnesses for being here and for your time.

My question is to Mr. Hyndman.

The Canadian Bar Association immigration law section's brief on the modernization of client service delivery, in its section on program issues, “recommends implementing a system for routine requests for additional information on intake and triage, with reasonable deadlines to facilitate processing rather than unnecessary refusal of the applications.” It is suggesting that this “would assist in reducing inefficiencies.”

Could you expand on this issue? Could you give us examples of situations where this might arise? How would this approach work in practical terms? What efficiencies might this generate?

There are three or four questions in there, so I just want you to expand on it, please.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: Thank you, Mr. Ali.

Just to clarify, we're really talking about returns of applications, not just refusals of applications. These are the regulation 10 completeness checks that have very severe impacts on people. These checks are fairly ruthless. The most trivial apparent deficiencies result in applications being returned, which means that they were never legally filed.

Allowing applicants even a very short-fuse opportunity to correct minor deficiencies or sometimes perceived deficiencies—maybe the document is in there or it's not there for a specific reason—would avoid a lot of grief for applicants and also avoid a lot of spinoff applications and other steps that applicants need to take if an application is returned.

Looking for examples, the one I noted in my intro is a very real-life example. I have experienced in my practice, as have many of my colleagues, where people have permanently lost rights to include children or they no longer qualify for a program because an application has been returned many months after filing. That, in turn, creates a cascade of other applications to try to address the issues.

It's really about targeting resources—not necessarily even about applying more resources—to limit those completeness check returns. Doing them more quickly would actually reduce work in the long run for IRCC.

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you, Mr. Hyndman.

The Canadian Bar Association immigration law section's brief on modernization also referred to the situation of application refusal letters that are “very cursory on the reasons for refusal”. They recommend “more specific refusal letters”.

Could you expand on this issue? What would be the possible benefits of having these officers provide more fulsome reasons for refusals? Are there any efficiencies that could result?

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: Certainly. Currently, most refusals are pro forma. They're a form letter, perhaps with something checked off, but often with nothing checked off, so applicants are really given no insight into why their applications were refused. This means that they don't have an opportunity to address whatever the perceived deficiency was.

If they decide to file another application, if they even have a right to file another application, they may not be addressing whatever deficiency there was without, for example, doing an access to information request and getting a copy of the GCMS notes. There are all kinds of extra steps that applicants need to do and those extra steps take resources from IRCC.

Giving clear and complete reasons for refusals will reduce some of those extra steps and may actually reduce follow-up applications if the people genuinely don't qualify. It will reduce people going to Federal Court. I am aware of lawyers who will go to Federal Court simply to get the reasons for refusal. Obviously that is incredibly resource intensive for the courts and for IRCC, and not a good use of anyone's resources. Certainly there are efficiencies to be found there.

• (1235)

Mr. Shafqat Ali: Thank you.

Mr. Hyndman, the Canadian Bar Association immigration law section's brief on processing time recommends that IRCC prioritize the reduction of lengthy processing times for work permit applications at visa offices, such as New Delhi and Abu Dhabi, by increasing staff or mobilizing IRCC processing resources in other loca-

tions to eliminate processing time disparities regionally and to ensure that processing times remain standard globally.

Could you expand on this? What gave rise to this recommendation?

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: A number of things gave rise to that. Certainly we've seen, I think, really difficult to justify disparities in processing times for work permits and for other types of applications across the global network.

There are some real equity issues there, which I alluded to in my opening statement. New Delhi is a sort of chronic offender here, with extremely long processing times for work permits. As Mr. Jain alluded to, there's really no way of communicating with the visa office on these long-delayed applications. It creates anxiety and often constant follow-ups and, as you mentioned, sometimes even mandamus applications in Federal Court to try to get applications moving.

That's where this comes from.

In terms of addressing it, the global network is supposed to be able to distribute applications in a way that spreads out the processing times and uses resources more efficiently. Therefore, we would certainly advocate for more of that, both for—

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. You can complete your sentence, please.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: —efficiency and for equity reasons.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

You can please begin, and you will have six minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I thank all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Shajjan, your story is embarrassing for Canada, as a G7 country. I want to thank you in particular for being here today.

As you are one of the rare people who have experienced something so difficult and you are here with us in committee, I want to ask you what you think Canada knew before the fall of Kabul, and what it did not do even though it had that information.

[*English*]

Mr. Saeq Shajjan: What Canada knew about it is a very difficult question to answer, but I'm sure there were embassies where they knew that things were going to be very different and difficult in Afghanistan. We could also understand that there were reports coming in that things could be very difficult in Afghanistan, because the Taliban were making advances in different provinces outside of Kabul.

Still, there was hope that at least Kabul would stand and resist for some time. However, all of a sudden we saw that Kabul fell, and honestly no one was really prepared. I think the Government of Canada would be no different on that.

At the same time, when we're talking about how things are really getting tighter on people who assisted the Canadian mission in Afghanistan, I think that was the right time to kind of... When they saw that, in July, I think it was not late.

At the same time, we could have continued. We can still do much better than what is going on right now to really help those people, to get them out and to make sure they're not in danger. Unfortunately, I do not see that. Of course, the Government of Canada is doing...but it's not really enough.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: You told us much about what should have been done and was not. Is there anything else you would like to share with the committee?

What should have been done when it comes to Afghan refugees?

[*English*]

Mr. Saeed Shajjan: What could have been done was.... It was announced that it would be 40,000 visas for Afghans who had an enduring relationship with the Government of Canada. The way it was announced the priority would be given to those people. Honestly, we do not see that.

If you look at IRCC's website right now, the figures that you see there for people who had an enduring relationship are far less than the number of people who were brought to safety on humanitarian grounds. I think this is not really serving the purpose.

Of course, you need to help many people from different communities. That needs to be done, but at the same time, priority should have been given in the way that it was announced. A legitimate expectation was given to the people that if they had this enduring relationship, they would be helped by the Government of Canada. That's what, unfortunately, we are not seeing.

We are seeing now that the sum is limited to only 18,000, which I think needs to be increased to 40,000, as it was announced. Priority should not only be given to those, but most of that 40,000 should be given to people who had an enduring relationship with the Government of Canada. Of course, there are many other people from different sectors of life in Afghanistan who are in danger. They deserve to be helped. Of course, that needs to continue, but at the same time, people like us, people who served the Canadian military in Afghanistan, are in danger, as you can imagine.

I am here. I'm raising my voice. I'm doing whatever I can. Honourable MP Kwan raised this issue on May 2 with Minister Joly. I thank her for that. Minister Joly said that it has been referred to the IRCC. Still we do not have anything from IRCC.

Honourable MP Chong asked a question of the Prime Minister on May 11 about what happened to these people. Still we haven't heard. So many other honourable MPs have been supportive.

That's the level that I can get here, and still there's no progress on my case. What about those people who are in Afghanistan right

now? They do not have access to the Internet. They cannot get in touch with anyone. They have no means of raising their voices to people in Canada to get the necessary support.

You can imagine how difficult it is for those people by the way I have been struggling for the past 10 months. Even with all the support I have from counsels, from honourable MPs in this House, I get nothing done.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you for your answer.

Mr. Hyndman and Mr. Jain, you just heard Mr. Shajjan's story. Meeting after meeting, regardless of the study we are conducting, many people have been saying that an immigration ombudsman is needed.

Do you agree with that? Wouldn't that solve a number of issues?

I would like to hear your opinion on this. You have 30 seconds each.

[*English*]

Mr. Ravi Jain: I can go first, I guess.

My interpretation is not working but I did take French immersion, though I didn't understand your question. I take it to be about an ombudsperson. I do think that's a good idea. So far we've been talking about applications—not returning them, returning them more quickly if need be and with more fulsome reasons. These are things that generically have been problematic with the system for many years.

Today we're talking about backlogs. We need to understand how this backlog was able to be created in the first place. We're talking about a ridiculous number of officers who were on leave, 80% were on leave for over a year. Why was that allowed to happen? That's my question. We need to have more accountability, more transparency, etc.

I'll pass it over to you, Kyle.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: Thanks. I agree with what Mr. Jain has said. Certainly, backlogs are a real problem now, but they're not new. I've been practising immigration law for 22 years, and there has not been a time during my career when there have not been major delays and backlogs under every government.

We really want to focus on solutions. That comes partly from more resources but also from applying resources more intelligently. It's not so much a rethink of the whole immigration system, but it's certainly a rethink of where and how resources are allocated.

The Chair: Thank you. The time is up for Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe.

We will now go to Ms. Kwan.

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

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

I'd like to ask my first question to Mr. Shajjan.

As I understand it, your colleagues have been left behind even though their files, their applications, have been referred by GAC to IRCC, and to date, you have received no information, no response from IRCC whatsoever, and it's been 10 months. Their lives are in danger, as you've indicated.

Given that this is where we are in the government's 40,000 applications, those numbers are getting filled up as time passes. For the people who have been left behind, would you support the government extending the immigration measures and expanding them to ensure that all of those who have enduring relationships with Canada and their extended family members will be able to come to Canada to safety?

Mr. Saeq Shajjan: Thank you so much. I would say yes. The way it was announced initially, I think if I'm not wrong, it was said that there were at least 40,000. There were the words "at least" 40,000, and I think it's time that we need to stick to getting at least 40,000. That's the very first thing.

The second thing is that most of those 40,000 need to be provided to those who have this enduring relationship with the Government of Canada. If we are helping families of people, those should be in some way in a different category of reunification visas. They shouldn't be under those 40,000. I think we are already, as you said, filling those 40,000 and there are thousands of people who have been left behind who are in danger and their only hope is to be brought to safety here in Canada.

The situation, unfortunately, is worse than what is being reported in Afghanistan. People can be literally slaughtered like animals. I'm sorry to say that. There's no rule of law. There's no political order. There is no judicial order in the country anywhere. Any one of the Taliban members is the judge, the police, the prosecutor. They do whatever they do. If they simply find out that you have this relationship, you can be killed on the spot.

• (1245)

Ms. Jenny Kwan: GAC-referred files are lost in the system with IRCC. The Department of National Defence files are lost within the system of IRCC. People's lives are lost, from the Canadian government's point of view, and those who served the country.

At this juncture, one of the issues that people have told me is a huge barrier is biometrics. It's impossible for people to do biometrics in Afghanistan. What's your recommendation to address that issue? Should the Canadian government bring people to safety and then do the biometrics in Canada?

Mr. Saeq Shajjan: I think that's what many other countries are doing. I think that's very easy. If there is a will, there is always a way of doing it right.

We see countries that are taking people out of Afghanistan to a third country, to Pakistan. They're taking them out to Doha. They're

taking them out to UAE. Why is the Canadian government not doing the same? Get those people out to safety. Once they are out of Afghanistan, then, honestly, I would not be really concerned about how long it is going to take to bring them to Canada, because we're not talking about a routine immigration process.

We are talking about the safety of people. I think that's very important and it's already kind of late on that. The Government of Canada needs to start working with different countries in the region and make sure they get people out of Afghanistan as soon as they can, and, again, the way it was announced, priority would be given to those who have this enduring relationship with the Government of Canada. Help those first, and then helping people on other grounds of course will also be welcomed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

I don't have that much time, so I'd like to turn my questions to processing delays. One of the issues that were raised was that IRCC officials return an application when it is missing something. In fact, I actually have a constituent who applied in July for a post-grad work permit. In November, he got a response rejecting his application because it was missing his certificate of confirmation. He immediately reapplied and has not heard back. It's been six months since then. Now, because of the delays, he's lost a job that he was being offered.

This is an issue that's come up over and over at IRCC. Should the government stop refusing applications? Should they actually just pick up the phone or email the people who are missing the document, missing a signature or whatever else, contact them and get that information before they issue a rejection?

That is for both witnesses.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: Thanks, Ms. Kwan.

Certainly it's our position that IRCC should be providing applicants with an opportunity to correct minor deficiencies or perceived deficiencies. As I said, sometimes they're not even deficiencies. There may be a legal or practical reason why a particular document hasn't been included, or it may have been a minor oversight that could be corrected in minutes. Giving applicants an opportunity to correct those deficiencies, as you noted, by picking up the phone or sending an email with even a short deadline to correct it or to explain why it's not there would save resources in the long run by preventing the cascade of additional steps that would need to be taken to fix it.

Mr. Ravi Jain: I agree with everything Kyle just said, and, yes, you're absolutely right. The point made is a beautiful one. We live in an age of instant communication. We have all kinds of access to email, phone, etc., so why don't they use this? Absolutely.

The reason it's taking as long as it's taking now is that up to 80% of people, officers, were not at work for extended periods of time. The government indicates on Public Safety Canada's website that Canada's national strategy classifies critical infrastructure in Canada under 10 sectors. One is government—

• (1250)

The Chair: Mr. Jain, the time is up for Ms. Kwan.

We will now proceed to Mr. Redekopp.

Mr. Redekopp, you will have three minutes for your round of questioning. You can please begin.

Mr. Brad Redekopp (Saskatoon West, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Let's pick up with Mr. Jain.

If you want to finish what you were just saying, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Ravi Jain: Thank you.

What I was saying was that, if you look at Public Safety Canada's website, it declares what's essential. For the pandemic, we were looking at what areas are critical infrastructure for Canada. One of them is government. Within that government heading are listed "Workers supporting...permanent residency...visas".

The Canadian visa officers and immigration officers throughout Canada should have been declared essential. They should have been made to go back to work, with proper protocols, masking, etc., so that this backlog was not allowed to be created. It affects our ability to respond to humanitarian crises. It affects our ability to reunite families. It affects Canada's competitiveness in terms of our economy.

It's a huge impact across the whole country, and this should never have been allowed to develop.

Mr. Brad Redekopp: Thank you.

I want to touch on the issue of the scope of the problem in terms of the backlog. In the departmental plan, Minister Fraser mentioned that the plan is for between 360,000 and 445,000 new permanent residents for 2022. However, if you look at the same departmental plan, on page 22, it shows that every year we have failed to achieve our targets by 100,000-plus people. They did kick in a bit of extra money for that, but that was to deal with the backlogs that are going to be created, not the existing one.

I asked the minister about this, and of course he didn't deny these because they're facts, but he said it's normal to have hundreds of thousands of people.... His quote was, "I hesitate to describe as a backlog, because it's normal to have an inventory of cases."

Mr. Hyndman, from your perspective, working on the ground with people, do we have a normal inventory of cases, at two million? Is the government looking at these as cases and not people? Are we trying to do too much? What's going on here?

Mr. Ravi Jain: Kyle can't get off mute. Would you like me to jump in?

Mr. Brad Redekopp: You can go ahead if you like.

Mr. Ravi Jain: I was in Kyle's role just a couple of years ago as chair of the CBA immigration section, and I can tell you that it is absolutely abnormal to have this number of people in.... I call it a backlog. The government may call it inventory, but it's a backlog of over two million people.

This is unprecedented. I think there are major reasons, real reasons, for why this was allowed to happen. As I said, there were people not working. I also think it relates to the government not trusting our representatives, and I think it's because we're lumped in with immigration consultants. That's a whole other issue, and it's a problem. There needs to be greater communication and transparency—all those things.

This is something that is really affecting the country in every way I described. It's very problematic.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jain.

The time is up, Mr. Redekopp.

We will now proceed to Ms. Kayabaga for three minutes.

Ms. Kayabaga, you can please begin.

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

I also want to start by thanking our witnesses for taking the time to be here to answer our questions. My first question will go to both Mr. Hyndman and Mr. Jain.

I'll start with Mr. Jain, actually.

You talked about transparency and accountability. We note that our government has increased the funding for IRCC. We've increased staff. When you talk about accountability and transparency, what does that look like for you?

Mr. Ravi Jain: We need to know how the money is going to be spent. I do applaud the government for that. There was significant spending for modernizing the GCMS, global case management system, in particular, so that files can move around. Delhi is overwhelmed. They can move it to other visa posts. I think that's great, but it's going to take a long time for that money to translate into a new platform for the government to really modernize in a way that allows greater efficiencies.

For accountability particularly, I want to understand how many officers were working, before, during the pandemic, right after and now that things are more stabilized. Why weren't they declared essential? As I said, Public Safety's website said they were essential, so why weren't they declared essential? Why weren't they told they had to go into the office and process paper applications?

While they were modernizing it and digitizing.... I know there was a digitization process so that things could be pushed abroad, but I can tell you that the private bar had to pivot like that. We had people with their kids running around—

• (1255)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'm sorry. I apologize for cutting you off. It's just because I have very limited time and I want to ask another question.

That's a very interesting response on what transparency and accountability look like for you.

I'm curious to know what your thoughts are on what other tools we can use to address the long processing times. We have hired more staff and the system has gone back to its full service since earlier this year, and there are still longer processing times because there are more applications and because we had a pandemic. What other tools would you suggest we use?

I want to add to that. You did talk about IT. Some people have said that IT is not a tool that we should be using. What are your comments on that? Do you believe that we should be using IT systems or actually continuing to increase the staff?

Mr. Ravi Jain: It's both. You're right. Part of the issue is that there actually are more applications. I see that in Delhi, for instance. Year after year, there are more and more applications—

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: What are your thoughts on the problems we have heard about that are discriminatory through the IT process?

Mr. Ravi Jain: I think you're talking about AI. I think that's absolutely right. AI can be a useful tool, but you have to make sure there's not discrimination happening and that there are not these criteria that are being implemented in a way that leads to unfairness. I think there needs to be careful attention paid to that, but I think it could be a way to help get through the mounds of applications that are being processed.

The Chair: Your time is up, Ms. Kayabaga.

We will now proceed to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for one and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

A minute and a half is very little time. So I will use it to thank the witnesses who are using the Zoom platform.

I would like to thank Mr. Shajjan, to whom I will give *carte blanche*.

Mr. Shajjan, you have the remainder of my time to say what you have not had a chance to point out to the committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Saeq Shajjan: Thank you so much. I'm really grateful.

On what I would like to ask for, IRCC needs to pay urgent attention to the files of my colleagues and to issue them case numbers as soon as it is possible. Then we will see how, we ourselves, with the support that I have gathered in Canada, can find ways to support the Canadian government to bring them to safety from Afghanistan. I think that's the very first thing that I would be asking for.

Second, I think the number of visas is limited to some 18,000. I think that is unfair. The way the expectation was given to those people was that they had an enduring relationship with the Government of Canada. That number needs to be increased as much as possible. We thought that of the initial 40,000, at least 35,000 visas or something like that would be given to those who had enduring relationships with the Government of Canada, and then the remaining visas could be provided on humanitarian grounds, but right now we are seeing that only 18,000 are provided to people who have this relationship with the Government of Canada.

We are seeing that people are brought in from different cases, but they're counted under this 40,000. Again, I think that is unfair. That needs to stop, and we need to take immediate action to make sure that we really bring to safety those people who are in danger in Afghanistan just because of their relationship and services to the Government of Canada.

Thank you, sir.

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

We will now proceed with Ms. Kwan for one and a half minutes and then end the panel.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'd like to ask whether or not, through your experiences, the situation with the caregiver stream.... To my understanding from caregivers, their applications basically have not really moved forward and been processed since 2019. The backlog is inordinate and significant. I wonder whether or not the Canadian Bar Association has experienced that or what you can share with this committee in terms of the backlog and the delays for caregivers.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: Certainly, and thank you, Ms. Kwan.

There have been very serious delays in the caregiver program. In terms of allocating resources to that program, we've certainly advocated that the first step of getting to the work permit be done more quickly. Again, it's about allocating resources where it makes the biggest difference to applicants. It's not just about pouring more resources into overall processing. Getting people to that work permit stage in 90 days rather than in a year would make a huge difference to their ability to work, as well as locking in qualifying and other aspects.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, or maybe just processing the application within the standard, which, I would say, is no more than 12 months.

The other question I'd like to ask is this one. A lot of folks actually had their status expire because of COVID and other implications, so they're here and actually in Canada. In the meantime, the government is issuing more permits to bring in temporary foreign workers. Shouldn't they actually be offering permanent resident status to the people who are already here to fill those labour and skill shortages? Could I just get a quick answer from—

● (1300)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Mr. Kyle Hyndman: I think that's probably a better question for the minister than for us.

The Chair: Thank you. With that, this panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all the members of this committee, I would like to thank all three witnesses for appearing before the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Genuis.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Chair, just before we adjourn, can I ask a quick question about the report that we have received a draft of? Can we get a timeline from the clerk or the analyst that would show, if we were to try to have this done by the end of June and worked back from there, what we would be required to do in order to meet that timeline? Does my question make sense?

The Chair: Can you please repeat it?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: We have a draft report. If we want to table that draft report before we break for the summer, assuming we break at the regular time, I'm wondering if that's possible at all and what kinds of benchmarks or timelines we have to be aware of in order to have it ready in that timeline.

The Chair: Are you referring to the differential outcomes?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Yes, exactly.

The Chair: Just for the information of all the members, Thursday's meeting is scheduled to be clause-by-clause on Bill C-242. Then, the week after—the week of June 13, 16 and 18—we will be going through the consideration of the draft report, so it will be up to the members how long they take.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: If we don't have the answer now to my question, can we maybe just receive it in advance, so that we know hypothetically, the day we would have to finish that review by if we want to see the report tabled before we break for the summer?

The Chair: I'll find out and get back to you next time. We have a hard stop now.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: That's fair enough.

The Chair: We have to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting is adjourned.

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