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Chair

Mr. David Tilson

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• (0855)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC)):
We'll call the meeting to order.

This is the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, meeting number 40, Tuesday, March 10, 2015. The committee is studying the promotion of economic prosperity through settlement services.

We have three witnesses before us this morning.

I want to welcome all of you on behalf of the committee.

We have Kim Allen who is the chief executive officer of Engineers Canada. Good morning to you, sir.

We have Kelly Pollack who is the executive director of the Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia.

We have Kristyn Frank who is appearing on her own behalf.

Welcome to you all. You each have up to eight minutes to make a presentation. At the conclusion of those eight minutes, members of the committee will, I expect, have some questions for you.

Mr. Allen, you may start.

Mr. Kim Allen (Chief Executive Officer, Engineers Canada):
Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear.

As mentioned, I am here in the capacity of chief executive officer of Engineers Canada. We're the national body of the provincial and territorial regulators of the engineering profession. I'm also here as a member of the panel on employment challenges of new Canadians.

Canada's success requires skilled immigrants. Ensuring that new Canadians reach their full potential is a complex social policy challenge. In our multicultural, democratic, market-driven country, addressing these challenges requires multi-stakeholder action to get the best outcomes for all involved.

We've all heard about a professional from abroad who comes to Canada and can only find work well below his or her economic potential. For the engineering profession, this is a particular tragedy. In most regions of the country we are experiencing a shortage of engineers with five to ten years of experience or specialized skills. By 2020 we expect about 70,000 new engineering grads to be entered into the workforce, and about 50,000 qualified newcomers. This is a significant number of engineers. We cannot let their skills and knowledge be underutilized.

Engineering is a very broad field offering a variety of career options. These skills are in high demand in many areas of our economy. While many engineering graduates practise engineering, even more become entrepreneurs and business executives and enter fields like information technology, marketing, banking, or consulting. In fact, by mid-career two-thirds of engineering graduates are applying their skills more broadly than practising engineering in traditional and emerging disciplines where public accountability is required.

Attention needs to be focused by the profession, employers, academia, and government now to address this problem.

For over a decade Engineers Canada and the engineering regulators have been working with government, immigrants, academia, and others to address the chronic problem of newcomers underutilizing their skills and knowledge. Much of what we have learned from international engineering grads, industry, and regulators is consistent with what my colleagues on the panel on employment challenges of new Canadians learned through our meetings with over 160 stakeholders last fall.

The good news is that there is a variety of programs and information sources available through many organizations that can help engineers and others find their way. The bad news is that it is still a very confusing landscape, especially for those who wish to work in a regulated profession.

Regulated professions such as engineering have improved the available information on how to navigate the licensure process. The federal government's express entry system and the requirements for assessment of academic educational credentials for certain economic classes of immigrants will help immigrants understand where their skills and knowledge fit into the Canadian economy.

Engineers Canada's road map to engineering in Canada provides guidance on the licensure process and provides potential immigrants with the sense of whether their academic qualifications will make them eligible to apply for licensure. It also provides some information on building resumés and on understanding the engineering job market.

We hope to be able to successfully link this rich information with the educational credential assessment process as part of the express entry system. But there is more to do beyond connecting regulated professions with immigration processes. We're continually working to improve the quality and detail of information to newcomers upon arrival and pre-arrival in the decision-making phase.

Immigrants need to have clear, concise, easily accessible information about the regulatory landscape and foreign credential recognition so they can plan for their success in Canada. Beyond licensure, immigrants need to know more about the economic landscape as well. Our labour market data shows that demand for engineers is higher in some parts of the country than in others. The jobs that can improve the economic outcomes for newcomers may not be in the communities they would intuitively want to immigrate to. Helping newcomers make realistic decisions about plans in Canada requires consistent detailed labour market information that is easily accessible and current. Immigrants and newcomers should not have to cobble together a picture of where best the opportunities in their fields exist.

Up to 16,000 new engineering jobs will be created in Canada between now and 2020. Employers, regulators, academia, and governments have the responsibility to provide newcomers with information on where those jobs are most likely to be located and what skills and competencies are going to be most in demand.

As I said at the outset, the panel travelled across the country and received many submissions.

The good news is that there is a stakeholder community made up of immigrant-serving agencies—and we're going to hear from those a little later—regulators, academia, federal, provincial and municipal governments, and other community groups ready and willing to help newcomers succeed. The more we all can work together to provide the best information on guidance to new Canadians at all stages of their journey, the better outcomes immigrants and the engineering profession in Canada as a whole will have.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I'd be very happy to answer any of your questions.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation, Mr. Allen.

Ms. Pollack.

Ms. Kelly Pollack (Chief Executive Officer, Immigrant Employment Council of British Columbia): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a privilege to be here with you today.

Given that my colleague Mr. Allen was so succinct, I will try to be the same.

I've been in the business of helping immigrants attach to the labour market for longer than I usually care to admit publicly, almost 20 years. I helped to found the Immigrant Employment Council of B.C., and before that I was the director of employment and language programs for MOSAIC, which is one of the largest settlement agencies in B.C.

Our province predicts that 265,000 international workers will be necessary to meet its human capital needs by 2020, yet we continue to experience the ongoing issue of immigrant unemployment and

underemployment, just as Mr. Allen mentioned. It's a complete waste of talent, a waste of the people who we bring to Canada.

In creating IEC-BC, our primary objective was and continues to be addressing this issue. Our mission is integrating immigrants into the labour force, which builds B.C.'s community and its economy. With that, we all win. Our role is to work directly with employers.

As our country moves and refines our immigration system to become more demand driven, so too must we refine our settlement services to engage more employers in the system. Express entry and the Canada jobs bank are key tools in the new system, but in order for employers to use these tools, they have to be informed, educated, and supported. Ultimately, they have to be willing to hire more immigrants into meaningful employment.

In my brief time with you today, I'll speak a little bit more about the Immigrant Employment Council and our work. I'll touch briefly on the ways we're making a difference. Finally, I'll conclude with talking about going forward.

I was going to use the story about a taxi cab being the best place to have a heart attack, but I think Mr. Allen pre-empted me on that one.

While part of this issue is about qualifications recognition, there's more to it. For me, a lot of the issue—and again, I date myself by going back to my many years in this field—is that Canada's employers are not hiring immigrants to the extent they could be. They're still not.

That's why the IEC-BC came into being. Our roots date back to 1997, when a group of us in the field recognized that many immigrants, many professionals, just weren't getting good jobs and that often when they got a job, they were radically underemployed. Upon closer examination, it was clear that a significant gap existed. While there were many organizations working directly with immigrants, there was no organization devoted solely to working with employers to help them connect with skilled immigrant talent and to build their capacity for an immigrant workforce.

Fast-forward to October 2008. At a summit on immigrant employment held in partnership with the Vancouver Foundation and the City of Vancouver, IEC-BC came into being.

Our first and immediate call to action was clear: we needed to engage employers.

We also knew three things from the outset. Our scope and reach needed to be provincial. Immigrants to B.C., as is true across Canada, tend to land and stay in the large urban areas, so labour and skill shortages are typically outside this region. Interestingly enough, in the work we've done, we've found far more appetite in the smaller communities to develop strategies to attract and retain immigrants than what we've often found within greater Vancouver.

We also knew that we needed to work with employers, industry, and business associations to develop initiatives that were employer focused, not just immigrant focused, and that were based on best practices. We also needed to continue to engage policy-makers on why this issue continued, why immigrant unemployment and underemployment remained, and that evidence-based strategies and programs were the way forward.

Our focus is threefold: ensuring that employers across B.C. understand the changes and opportunities available to them as Canada moves to a more demand-driven immigration system; working with smaller communities, as I mentioned, so they're ready to meet the needs of the businesses in their communities in finding skilled talent; and continuing to work with our partners, which is how we really focus our work. We work with those such as the BC Chamber of Commerce and the Human Resources Management Association to develop new strategic initiatives.

What are some of the ways we do this? Much of our work is about understanding immigrant employment through the employers' eyes. Only by understanding their needs can we connect them to skilled immigrant talent.

In 2012 we realized, as IEC-BC had first launched, that we needed to really get a better grasp of what was happening around our province. In partnership with local chambers, boards of trade, and economic development organizations, we embarked on what we call the B.C. employer consultation. This included 15 focus groups across seven communities and eight industry sectors with more than 150 participating employers. What did we learn?

● (0900)

We heard first-hand about the challenges that employers, particularly those in smaller regions, face in hiring immigrants. Many we knew, but some were new to us. We gained an understanding of the overall employment picture in B.C., and we achieved a clear understanding of the human resources practices and workplace culture that impact immigrant employment. We engaged industry and business associations. For us, those are key partners who remain champions of immigrant employment today. We discovered promising practices already being used by some employers, and those we're now sharing across the province.

The one thing we heard repeatedly from mostly small and medium-sized business owners, to which over 95% of B.C. businesses belong, is that small business feels overwhelmed when it comes to hiring immigrants. What we learned from this was critical in helping us move forward.

Over the years, another way we've come to better understand the needs of B.C. employers is by convening stakeholders. From 2012 to 2014, IEC-BC and its partner organizations in northern B.C. convened three community forums on immigrant employment. These were strategically targeted in communities facing skill shortages, communities that identified that they want to attract more people to live in their towns. There were also regions where major economic development initiatives were either proposed or already under way, including the B.C. government's plans to develop an LNG industry, B.C. Hydro's site C clean energy project, and other large resource projects.

There are many outcomes from the forums, but a key one that I'd like to share is the Prince George Chamber of Commerce, along with Initiatives Prince George, the city's economic development arm, that implemented an ongoing campaign to attract immigrants to their region, called Welcome PG. They combined this with engaging their business members in a virtual career fair targeted at unemployed immigrants in the Lower Mainland. Today these two business organizations remain champions for immigrant employment and continue to engage and influence their members.

These are the types of local place-based solutions that IEC-BC strives to influence.

Beyond consulting with and bringing stakeholders together in opportunities like these forums, we've been bridging connections and building partnerships to realize our work. How do we do this? We connect immigrants to employers in smaller communities. We build partnerships with business and industry associations and grow their capacity to work with their members. We engage in partnerships with settlement organizations and broker connections to the business community. We broaden the immigrant talent pool for employers by connecting them to professional immigrant networks, and we expand the professional networks of newcomers through our programs.

● (0905)

The Chair: Could you perhaps wind up, Ms. Pollack.

Ms. Kelly Pollack: Absolutely.

In my perfect world there would be no need for immigrant employment councils. In my perfect world Canada would continue to attract skilled people from around the globe. These newcomers would bring their energy and their innovation to our provinces. Employers would have moved past their insistence for Canadian work experience and moved beyond screening out resumés because of an international education. They would easily hire these talented people. That's in my perfect world. We're not there yet.

IEC-BC believes that developing a B.C.-specific strategic immigrant talent plan to address our province's need for skilled workers is paramount. This plan should align with B.C.'s other human capital strategies. We're committed to supporting the Canadian government, the B.C. government, and other key stakeholders in developing and executing this plan.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Frank, it's your turn.

Ms. Kristyn Frank (As an Individual): I'd like to thank the committee for inviting me to contribute to this discussion.

I've been conducting research on immigrant integration for about 10 years now, with a particular concentration on economic integration of immigrants. Today I'd like to expand on some of the findings from a study that I conducted at the University of Waterloo. I outlined the main results of this study in a brief that I submitted to the committee, so I'm just going to expand upon this and address five of the main issues that came up from that research.

The first is with respect to the results regarding immigrants' education levels. Overall, I found that immigrants who held degrees at master's level or higher were more likely to obtain employment in their desired occupation than were those who held a bachelor's degree. This may be due to the hiring practices of employers. We've heard a bit about this already. To potential employers, a higher-level degree often acts as a market signal indicating the abilities of a potential employee. Immigrants with a level of education higher than a bachelor's degree may be more desirable because their credentials basically signify increased specialization, which may translate into a greater ability to learn certain technical or social requirements of a particular occupation. Even though a bachelor's degree may represent the skill level required for a particular occupation, immigrants with higher-level degrees may be given preference for these reasons. Previous research has also found that foreign bachelor's degrees are less recognized by employers than are higher-level degrees. Moreover, immigrants with higher-level degrees have less competition in the job market. Individuals with a bachelor's degree have more competition because of the increased supply of bachelor's degree holders who were educated in Canada and a preference among employers for Canadian degrees. This circumstance may contribute to some of the difficulties that immigrants with a bachelor's degree experience in the labour market.

Second, my findings support many previous studies that have found that greater proficiency in English or French leads to greater success in the Canadian labour market. The results show that higher proficiency in an official language is associated with a greater likelihood of obtaining employment in an immigrant's intended occupation, and a faster rate of doing so. Although official language training is a key focus of immigrant settlement services, previous research has indicated that there is a need for greater access to language education programs, particularly in smaller communities, and among certain types of immigrants. For example, a higher proportion of immigrant women than of immigrant men report language barriers as their greatest difficulty in finding a job. Immigrant women often have greater difficulty accessing these language services. Researchers have found that immigrant women are hindered by a number of factors with respect to this issue. They're hindered by their status as dependants, their household responsibilities, or even a lack of access to transportation to these programs. However, there have been some improvements in recent years in providing more flexible language training, particularly for immigrant women who do not immigrate under the skilled worker category.

Third, and similar to what we've heard already today, I found that immigrants living in the major census metropolitan areas, CMAs—those being Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver—experience less employment success than do those living in smaller communities. Previous research looking at differences in earnings among different communities has also found this. Although immigrants may move to

major CMAs due to the large number of employment opportunities available, they may be at a disadvantage given the strong competition for jobs by new Canadian-born labour market entrants in these areas. It is also possible that immigrants integrate into less urbanized areas more quickly. There has been research suggesting that immigrants living in a smaller community may have greater opportunities to establish social networks within the local community and experience greater pressure to become more proficient in English or French. It's also possible that employers' responsiveness to immigrants varies among these areas. Smaller communities often voice concern about their economic survival, and because immigrants are typically identified as a source of new and highly educated workers, they may in fact be seen as a valuable resource for the economies of smaller cities. It is also possible that immigrants who migrate to non-CMAs may be more likely to have prearranged employment. When I tested for this in my research, I actually didn't find any significant results indicating this. There's obviously a more complex answer to these findings, and further research is needed, although I think we heard from both of the other speakers that this is an important issue.

● (0910)

My fourth point is with respect to the role of foreign work experience and immigrants' labour market integration. A lot of earlier studies have found that foreign work experience is not recognized in the Canadian labour market. Many researchers assess this by looking at the potential years of experience that immigrants had in their source countries as opposed to looking at the type of work experience they had. The results that I found indicated that immigrants whose jobs prior to migration matched their stated intended occupations in Canada had greater success in obtaining their desired employment following migration. While this doesn't necessarily indicate that employers formally recognize immigrants' foreign experience, it does indicate that this type of experience provides immigrants with some type of advantage in the Canadian labour market. This may be due to the type of knowledge that they develop with experience in their occupations, which they then may draw upon when identifying strategies to obtain employment they wish to pursue in a particular field. Immigrants with previous experience in the occupation may also have better familiarity with the types of companies or industries that are more likely to employ individuals in their fields of interest. Knowledge derived from previous experience may also help in the process of foreign credential recognition, or facilitate their retraining efforts.

Last, I want to talk about the finding that immigrants who were seeking higher-status occupations experienced less employment success than those seeking lower-status occupations. This suggests that immigrants looking for higher-status occupations may face more exclusionary practices than those seeking lower-status occupations. This type of closure may in part be due to the process of credential recognition or certification that is required for many higher-status occupations. Since the higher-status occupations typically require specific qualifications, training, or licensing within Canada, immigrants often have to undergo additional testing and training. Seeking employment in these types of occupations is likely to take longer. It will be a longer process than the employment process of immigrants who seek employment in lower-status occupations.

In conclusion I hope that the results I presented here are helpful in informing your study. I'd be happy to answer any questions regarding my research.

Thank you.

• (0915)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Frank.

Now, we will have a dialogue with our members of the committee and yourselves.

We'll start with Mr. Menegakis.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Thank you to our panellists for appearing before us today. We appreciate the time you took to join us and share your experiences with us.

Our government has tripled settlement funding since we formed the government back in 2006. It's a very important aspect, as far as we're concerned, in assisting newcomers to our country to integrate into Canadian society, into the Canadian economy, and obviously have better, more successful outcomes. It's very important to continue this. That's why this committee and the government have brought forth this study.

I'm going to start my questions with you, Ms. Pollack.

I'm very pleased and somewhat surprised that you've been involved for 20 years in the field. Obviously things have changed over the 20 years. We've sustained the highest levels of immigration in this country over the last nine or ten years. Can you comment on how the labour market has changed for immigrants over those 20 years?

Ms. Kelly Pollack: That's going back in my memory then, sir. Where I've seen a difference in my province...there are a couple of things.

One of the things is that unfortunately in British Columbia the numbers for immigration are dropping. From my perspective that is detrimental to British Columbia. That may be because of changes in the labour market. Unfortunately, the reasons why aren't really tested.

From the beginning I was in the area of employment and language, helping immigrants increase their ability to grow their language skills and to find jobs. What I have seen in my time in the field is that there is more appetite from the business community, there's more of an understanding of what we refer to as the business case for hiring immigrants, and yet at the same time we still don't see as many employers actively engaging in changing their hiring practices so that immigrants get through the door. It's often because they just don't know what they don't know. They don't realize that they're actively screening people out in their hiring process, or that continuing to only use traditional means of hiring such as ads on Workopolis, for example, may not be what will best get them to skilled people in immigrant communities.

The education of the business community, while I do believe it has changed and I do believe the appetite has grown, hasn't to the degree that I would have thought it would have in 20 years. One of the things I often say is that, unfortunately, employers don't change until

their backs are against the wall, until there is absolutely a critical need for labour.

Thank you.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: We're keenly aware of the good work that is being done by the Immigrant Employment Council of B.C., which you're representing today.

Of course, Vancouver is a major urban centre. Some of the phenomena that we see in Vancouver are very similar to what we see in other urban centres in the country, but you mentioned some partner organizations as part of your presentation to us today. I just want to confirm that you do work with partner organizations. If so, can you perhaps tell us what are some of those that you work with?

• (0920)

Ms. Kelly Pollack: Absolutely, and as a matter of fact that is one of our key strategic focuses. We do all our work through partner organizations, whether that is some of the settlement agencies around the province, most of which are in the Lower Mainland, but there are a couple outside in the smaller regional areas, and we work with them to connect them to business organizations, employers, business, and industry.

Key partners for us are the BC Chamber of Commerce, the Human Resources Management Association of British Columbia, small chambers around the province that we use as partners in reaching out to their members. Frankly, we're a small organization and to get to scope and scale, I always knew that the only way we'd be able to do our work was through partnerships.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: We certainly have the same objective; we like to work with partners as well. There's no way the government alone could provide these services, which is why we reach out to settlement service providers across the country and assist them to the degree that we do. The goal is the same, to assist newcomers in integrating and contributing fully to the Canadian economy, to their communities, and of course ultimately to their objective, to their families, and moving forward.

I'm wondering if you track some of the immigrants you provide services to.

Ms. Kelly Pollack: That's always a more difficult question for us, because we don't provide services to immigrants. We provide services to employers. How we track is through our partner organizations in B.C. such as S.U.C.C.E.S.S., MOSAIC, and ISS. They track specifically through programs that they deliver in partnership with us, a mentoring program, a connector program that we've developed. That's how numbers get tracked.

What I can tell you is how many business partners we have, how many employers we work with, and how many of them we have tried to influence to change their hiring practices in hiring immigrants.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: In your experience, what has been the outcome of the services that you work with, that you're partners with, to provide to immigrants?

Ms. Kelly Pollack: The outcomes in terms of—

Mr. Costas Menegakis: In terms of the success rate for the actual newcomers, the immigrants.

Ms. Kelly Pollack: It is incredibly high. I'll speak to one, and again what I'd like to preface that with is I'm not taking complete attribution because when your work is done in partnership, everyone plays a role.

I'll give the example of the mentoring program that we have had under way now for three years. The mentoring program is done across the country through immigrant employment councils and settlement agencies. Later today I believe you're going to be meeting with Margaret Eaton with TRIEC. Her organization in Toronto originally started the program. There is an over 85% success rate of the immigrants who go through the mentoring program who work directly with a British Columbia professional and who find employment in their field. That's the key. It's the meaningful employment in their field or directly related to their field that's important. There's a very high success rate.

The Chair: Thank you. We have to move on.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe, go ahead.

• (0925)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): I would like to sincerely thank the witnesses for accepting our invitation to be here.

My question is for all three of you, but I'll start with Ms. Frank.

Ms. Frank, you spoke specifically about the challenges that women face when they arrive in Canada and want to enter the labour market. I would like to give you an opportunity to speak further about the challenges, but also about the solutions and things that can be put in place.

What else can we do to help more women enter the labour market successfully?

[English]

Ms. Kristyn Frank: I am in a position where, in terms of specific policy advice, I feel that I haven't really done policy evaluation, but I can give you some ideas of what's been discussed by immigrants themselves within different contexts in the literature and research.

A lot of times with immigrant women what we see is that they have skills. They come to Canada with education and skills, but they aren't able to access the same kinds of services that others access due to their status often as family members, dependants. Some of what immigrant women have talked about in terms of accessing these services is quite different from what immigrant men would say.

One example is that they feel they don't have access to services at the times when they would most likely be able to go to take courses, for example. Some women would prefer programs that are available on the weekends. Some women have suggested that they'd prefer language training within schools their children go to, during school hours, so they don't have to worry about child care issues. Transportation comes up relatively frequently, both in terms of accessibility and affordability, to get to these programs.

In that context with immigrant women, a lot of times their situations are very different in terms of accessing these programs. Part of the issue overall is there is such heterogeneity within our

immigrant population that there are a lot of issues that need to be addressed for different groups. Of course, it's hard to have an umbrella program that helps everyone in the same way, but I think greater flexibility of programs in terms of accessibility and programs offered might be helpful.

With respect to language programs in particular, a lot of times there is discussion about more specific programs, maybe directed at learning technical languages for specific occupations or even softer skills, in terms of communicating with team members if they're working in groups and that sort of thing. There are a lot of different dynamics as well that immigrants are interested in learning, particularly with respect to language, and also in terms of just going to an interview, how that interaction happens, and what they need to communicate to the employer.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: You spoke briefly about child care services.

Could having access to better child care services at a low cost help immigrant women enter the labour market?

[English]

Ms. Kristyn Frank: Often that is one of the main things immigrant women cite when they talk about difficulties in accessing programs and services, so based on what immigrant women themselves have said, I would imagine that would be helpful.

Obviously, their main priority is within the household in terms of taking care of their children, and often that's prioritized over other things. Family decisions that are made are sometimes detrimental, in terms of immigrant women being more focused on maintaining the household and trying to create stability in that realm, so they aren't necessarily able to access services due to their other responsibilities.

So the answer is yes.

• (0930)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Ms. Pollack, do you have anything to add about women entering the labour market?

[English]

Ms. Kelly Pollack: Thank you, yes, I do.

To add to what Kristyn just said, I was lucky when I was with MOSAIC and running our language centre for over 10 years that we had a licensed child care centre. I will tell you that in those 10 years, it was constantly oversubscribed. There were never enough spaces for the immigrant women who wanted to be in the language programs and be able to leave their children in our child care.

While we tried to expand.... It was a combination of both space and funding, quite frankly, but we knew there was the opportunity to probably double or triple what we were delivering in terms of child care for immigrant women in language classes.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: That's very interesting.

During the last meeting on this same study, representatives from Citizenship and Immigration Canada acknowledged that it was an obstacle and said that there were child care services. But you are saying that, even though there are, they aren't enough. Your opinion is that this type of service should definitely be increased.

Is that correct?

[*English*]

The Chair: We have to move on. I'm sorry.

Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Welcome to our guests.

My first question is for Mr. Allen.

In terms of the mismatch between foreign engineers and jobs in Canada, I think the federal government's powers are limited in the area of professional credentials, but at a minimum it seems to me that the people coming here should be informed before arrival as to what is in store for them or what the needs are in terms of credentials.

I remember being briefed by the engineers association and being impressed by the information through the websites that you are providing to foreign engineers before they immigrate to Canada.

My question for you is on whether we can do more in this area. Do you think there's a greater role the federal government could play, either in better informing people in advance, or perhaps in helping them to acquire those credentials before they get here?

Mr. Kim Allen: Absolutely, I think there's a lot more to do, and I think we need to do it working together with those ones.

One of the initiatives we're looking at is becoming designated under the express entry program as an educational credential assessment provider. With that designation, anyone who would be coming to Canada and would be required to have an engineering educational credential assessment would actually be forced to go through the rich information that we have.

One of the challenges we have is that fewer than one in five folks coming to Canada claiming to have engineering credentials actually end up applying to any of the engineering regulators.

When we talked with them, even with our panellists going around to see how many of these highly skilled people actually have a plan of what they're going to do when they come to Canada, we learned the number is shockingly low. It is very, very small. Before they have to spend a penny coming, we want to actually go through a little quiz and provide lots of information about what is required and how engineering should be practised in Canada, and say that if they want to practise engineering in Canada, these are the types of things they have to do.

It really becomes a mandatory part that they actually understand those. My belief is that engineers around the world can put together that plan on how people can best meet those credentials, if they know what they are.

A number of the regulators currently offer assessments from abroad, and it has been a real challenge to get people to apply. There are very few that apply from abroad to do those ones. Some of them

allow them to start writing exams while they are still abroad. I think it's that whole movement of how much we can do of pre-assessment, pre-qualification for people who are still in their home country as part of their plan, and then when they hit Canada the time until they can become licensed is much shorter.

One of the big misinformations with engineers around the world is that they all believe they have to have a licence to work in Canada. They can become part of the engineering team without a licence. We want to tell them they are well on their path and show them how to start building their portfolio so they can come into it and understand the types of jobs that they are actually applying for. We think all that information is better preparing the individuals, and then other organizations can help them when they hit the ground to find that specific job.

• (0935)

Hon. John McCallum: Thank you.

I think both Ms. Pollack and Ms. Frank said similar things, if I understood you right, in the sense that it's sometimes easier for immigrants to get jobs outside the major cities than in places like Vancouver, greater Toronto, etc. I guess that poses a problem, because often the bulk of the communities of the new immigrants are in these larger cities and yet the jobs are more outside of the major cities, for some reason. I wonder how we can get around that challenge.

Perhaps I could ask a more general question. What can the federal government do better in terms of assisting immigrants to settle? You could say give more money, but other than that, what sort of initiatives do you think would be helpful, possibly focusing on smaller centres, or other ways?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: I would say that, since we are seeing this issue where smaller communities seem to be quite interested in bringing in educated immigrants, just providing immigrants with that information prior to coming here might be helpful, just to make them aware that there might be more opportunities in communities that maybe they hadn't considered moving to in the first place.

Hon. John McCallum: If I could interrupt for one second, I think that's one of the advantages often given to provincial nominee programs. I know particularly for Manitoba that they often target the smaller communities and then they get a certain critical mass of immigrants who go there and establish themselves well. I'm not necessarily saying more provincial nominees, but maybe the federal government could somehow replicate that focus on smaller communities that we see from the provinces.

The Chair: Thank you. We are way over time, Mr. McCallum, I'm sorry, unless you have a very brief answer, Ms. Pollack.

Ms. Kelly Pollack: I would agree. Very quickly, I would focus on pre-arrival, restructuring settlement so there is more pre-arrival and less post-arrival.

To your point, Mr. McCallum, I would focus on building the capacity of those smaller communities to help them track. It could be through the Manitoba example of the provincial nominee, but also through putting some of the onus on the communities to develop their own plans. I think there are lots of examples of that being done right now.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Allen, some members of the medical profession tell me that some people coming to this country don't meet the standards to become a practising doctor or practising medical person. Does that apply to the engineering profession, and to what percentage of people coming here does that apply?

Mr. Kim Allen: The short answer is yes, it does apply to the engineering profession. On the percentage, again, we don't know, because we don't see all of those who claim to have engineering credentials. Of the 20% who actually apply for a licence, over 80% of them actually meet the requirements for licensure.

Part of the process we're talking about is that we'd like to think that there should be a third step in the whole immigration process. We call it the pre-decision. Before the immigrant makes the decision to come to Canada, they should know if they're actually eligible to apply for a licence, or know if their education is so far off that they should be looking, if they're interested in coming to Canada, at perhaps another career.

As well, if they call themselves an engineer in their own country, that definition is used broadly around the world. It could be vastly different from what we call an engineer in Canada. Maybe they'd fit into part of the engineering team as a technician, technologist, or some other one in there.

The Chair: Just so I'm clear, in the legal profession, in the medical profession, they decide whether someone qualifies to practise in those professions.

Mr. Kim Allen: Yes.

The Chair: Does the engineering association determine—

Mr. Kim Allen: Absolutely. Just as it is for lawyers and doctors, it's regulated provincially. It's province by province. We're the national body that works with the provinces. We work with the associations to have common standards across the board.

The Chair: The provincial associations determine—

● (0940)

Mr. Kim Allen: —if they actually need a licence. As I mentioned in my testimony, you can practise engineering, be part of the engineering team, without a licence. We need people to understand where they fit in. It's only when you need to be publicly accountable for that work that you actually need to have a licence in place. You would have to do that through the provincial associations.

That's why we think it's important that people understand where they want to go. They should apply to the provincial association where they're most likely to end up working. If it is in a smaller community in B.C., they should be applying to the B.C. association rather than applying to some other association. They all have slightly different processes. They all have the same standards, but the

processes are slightly different. They should become licensed in the jurisdiction where they intend to go.

The Chair: Mr. Leung.

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): I don't wish to belabour the point, Mr. Allen, but I would ask you to elaborate a bit on the work you're doing with the education credential assessment project. Perhaps you could elaborate on how it has changed over time.

Let me share with you a personal example. I received my undergraduate degree in Canada. I got international experience overseas. I did a master's at the University of Southern California in engineering. I returned to Canada. It was assessed that my degree was a foreign engineering degree, and because my name was not a common English name, I was asked to take an English test. At the time I was a little bit disappointed, but I understand that the engineering profession, as you indicated, is provincially regulated, and therefore that difference might have caused some of their requests. I was told that if I wanted to practise in Canada, I would have to be re-educated in Canada, which I didn't really want to do.

Let me share with you my other profession. I was in public accounting. I'm glad to see that today, whether you are a CGA, CA, or CMA, you're a chartered professional accountant. As we move forward, can we structure the engineering profession, or can we have a situation in Canada where it vastly improves the ability of immigrant engineers, or engineers like me, who are educated in another country even though it was English speaking, to be gainfully employed in Canada?

Perhaps you could share from your experience how the education credential assessment will achieve that goal eventually.

Mr. Kim Allen: I mentioned our engineering road map for coming into Canada, so it's certainly vastly improved from the days when you may have gone through that process. You can go there and click on the online educational assessment tool, and if you have a certain type of degree, it will give you a pretty good indication of how quickly that degree will be recognized. We're members of a number of international ones since we have mutual recognition agreements with a number of countries.

We're also one of the founding members of the Washington Accord. The Washington Accord now has 17 signatory countries that recognize each other's accreditation system. A Canadian grad would be treated equally in Australia or New Zealand. India just came into the Washington Accord with their accreditation system this past year.

I would say it's a global pool. We're trying to say that we know that engineers are very mobile and they're going to work around the world, so how do we do a better job of recognizing those credentials? We're very much tapped into it.

With Engineers Canada we have a database and there are thousands of different engineering programs from around the world. We try to build that bridge information so when the provincial bodies do the assessment it's a decision tool for them. They can dig out and find the information about those various different engineering programs and compare where they stack up and how they stack up to a Canadian program.

The long story around the educational credential assessment... The doctors and the pharmacists are already designated professions under ECA, so if somebody is coming in under two NOC codes for doctors and one of the NOC codes for pharmacists, they are directed to those two professions. With engineering there are 14 different NOC codes that require professional engineers, so they would come in and they would be directed to us and we would then have that filter to have a look at it to see if they are actually eligible to apply, where their education stacks in terms of Canadian education.

What we think is very important is providing that bridge information, so if it doesn't work for them or they may have bigger gaps in their programs, they can take additional courses or write additional exams. All those things will let them understand how they can become part of that engineering team while they're increasing those.... So provide those bridges and ladders so they can actually become fully licensed to work in the Canadian environment.

• (0945)

Mr. Chungsen Leung: I'm pleased to hear there is that vast improvement so that one who was educated in the United States does not have to take an English test again.

Let me direct my next question to Ms. Frank.

Given the circumstances of my personal experience, how would you be better matching the immigrant with the job, with someone who has U.S. education experience, who has a master's in engineering but still cannot find a job in Canada in engineering?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: There have been immigrants who have said they would be interested in things like job shadowing programs, programs that match people with individuals in a particular occupation. Of course there needs to be a coordinated effort, obviously, between professional organizations in getting mentors and getting people who would....

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Does the express entry solve this problem on a pre-arrival basis?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: I can't comment on that. I don't have sufficient background.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: You don't know how the express entry system works, do you?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: I'm not a policy evaluation person. I'm kind of in a situation where I can't speak specifically about policy recommendations. I'm sorry.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Let me ask this, then. You mentioned that for people who have higher degrees like a master's or a Ph.D., it's easier for them to get jobs. But obviously in many jobs the immigrant feels they are underemployed when they come in with a higher degree and what they're allowed to participate in. Certainly I would say that was one of my feelings when I returned to Canada in the early eighties.

Ms. Kristyn Frank: Yes, in the research I've done it's very broad in terms of looking at skill levels, looking at whether somebody is employed in the same skill level as what they intended. It's basically a university degree in terms of how the national occupational classification defines it.

Mr. Chungsen Leung: In your research did you find a reason that international experience especially is not as highly valued here as it is internationally?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: The only thing I can point to is that I know there has been some work in Australia where they did some foreign credential recognition prior to arrival. I know there is a program in place there that's been successful where people had their credentials assessed prior to arriving in the country and they were more successful. They had higher success rates after that was implemented. I know that's something that goes on in some other countries.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Leung.

We started late, so I think, Mr. Sandhu, we'll give you five minutes.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Great, thank you very much.

Witnesses, welcome to the committee. Thank you for being here.

I want to follow up on the question regarding child care. You talked about child care at programs where women could come in and take these various language programs and all that. Ms. Pollack, you probably have more experience in regard to if there is a hindrance to women's ability to find a job after they've gone through the training. Would child care programs help them in order to access employment?

Ms. Kelly Pollack: I think that issue is true across the country, unfortunately. Lack of child care or the ability to access child care is a hindrance. Sometimes, though, I'd have to add that there are cultural implications to that. There may be women from cultures where it isn't appropriate for them to leave their children in "public" child care. Maybe it's more of a culture where you're used to leaving your children with family, and if you don't have family or a more extended network in your new community, that becomes a very difficult obstacle to overcome.

Layered onto that, though, is also transportation. Sometimes getting transportation to the language classes or to the child care space—hopefully they're together—is also a barrier particularly for many of the refugee women who we'd see at our language centre.

• (0950)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: You haven't talked about what role racism plays for immigrants to access the job market.

Ms. Kelly Pollack: Wow, that's a big question. I am not going to give a long, involved answer to that. What I would say to you is that we do know that in hiring practices there is systemic bias, not in all businesses, of course, not with all employers, but there is systemic bias built into many hiring practices.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Ms. Frank, do you have a comment on that?

Ms. Kristyn Frank: I did look generally at visible minority status in my research, and yes, even after controlling for education and all sorts of different characteristics, there does seem to be a disadvantage for visible minorities in the labour market. As Kelly pointed out, it's often entangled in other things. There are a lot of different factors: region of origin, quality of education, or perceived quality of education from region of origin. There's a very complex thing that goes on, I think, and it's difficult to disentangle, but yes, I have found evidence for that, though.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Ms. Pollack, you mentioned that the best place to have a heart attack is in a taxi cab, and I actually know a number of doctors who drove taxis in British Columbia, especially in the Vancouver area. How can the federal government help with that situation?

Ms. Kelly Pollack: Again, that's another complex question, sir, but one that I will try to answer.

Mr. Allen spoke to the process of regulation and foreign qualification recognition. It is an extraordinarily complex one in this country. We have hundreds of regulators across Canada who are provincially regulated, who have different practices in terms of assessing qualifications. For newcomers, it is a challenge. There are many progressive regulators, and not just because he's sitting here, but I will say that engineers have been one of the most progressive regulators in our country; the medical profession from my experience, and I've done a fair bit of work looking at foreign qualification recognition, perhaps not so much.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Should maybe the federal government take a lead in uniting the provinces to come up with a national standard?

Ms. Kelly Pollack: That goes back a little bit to what I spoke to earlier today when I talked about in my perfect world, yes.

The Chair: That's it. Thank you, sir.

I want to thank the three of you for your presentations to the committee. They've been very helpful in preparing our report. Thank you for coming.

We will suspend.

• (0950)

(Pause)

• (0955)

The Chair: We'll call the meeting back to order.

I'd like to welcome Robert Henderson, who is the president and chief executive officer of BioTalent Canada, and Margaret Eaton, who is the executive director of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council.

Good morning to you both.

Mr. Henderson, we'll start with you. You have up to eight minutes to make your presentation, followed by Ms. Eaton, and then we'll enter into a dialogue with members of the committee.

Mr. Robert Henderson (President and Chief Executive Officer, BioTalent Canada): Wonderful. Thanks.

On behalf of BioTalent Canada and its network of members and partners, I'd like to thank the members of the committee for the invitation and the opportunity to present to you today.

BioTalent Canada is a national non-profit association that strives to ensure that Canada's bioeconomy has access to the most skilled people available. Through labour market research that we perform, we work with federal government programs and our network of corporate industry partners to identify and address skill deficits which left unchecked could stall Canada's biotech industry as a key driver of the national economy.

As you know, we define Canada's bioeconomy as the invention, development, production, and use of products and processes that are based primarily on biological resources. As such, the bioeconomy cuts across health, energy, agriculture, and chemical and materials industries. An industry that has evolved rapidly due to scientific innovation, the Canadian biotech sector can be divided into four broad subsectors: biohealth, which includes medical devices and biopharmaceuticals; agri-biotech; bioenergy; and bioindustrial. Under this definition, the bioeconomy is responsible for roughly 7% of Canada's current GDP.

In terms of labour, 80% of Canadian biotech companies land in the SME or small to mid-size range, with fewer than 50 employees, and it is here that most of the jobs are created. Certainly biotech includes the widely known large pharmaceutical firms, but SMEs, growing contract research facilities, and academic partnerships also form important components.

In our most recent labour market research intelligence report, the majority of biotech CEOs surveyed stated as their two greatest barriers to success access to capital, which comes out strongly as number one, and access to talent.

I cannot stress enough how vociferous BioTalent Canada's national and provincial industry association partners are in their view that the single greatest barrier for biotech companies to overcome in becoming an employer of choice for immigrants is access to capital. Any improvement in Canadian policy that alleviates this pain point is universally and strongly recommended. Investment burn rates are inordinately high for biotech firms, causing CEOs to spend the bulk of their time seeking investment to sustain their operations instead of seeking talent to grow their business.

The bioeconomy is among the most educated industries, meaning that most individuals are late in their youth when they enter the workforce. In addition, new biotech products can take as long as 10 years to reach commercialization. This fact alone is hugely disadvantageous in attracting investors.

While the products made by the industry are highly regulated, you should know that the majority of jobs within the bioeconomy are not, with the exception of pharmacists and some of the medical professions. As a result, the bioeconomy could be a fertile landing place for immigrants with scientific backgrounds looking for primary or alternative scientific career paths.

The challenge is to expose those career paths to them early enough, at the right time, to give them access to the tools to enter, and to introduce them as viable options to the SMEs that are hiring. Newcomers with science backgrounds who are forced to wait or who fail in obtaining licensure in a regulated profession must be presented with alternative careers within a year at most, so that their science skills remain current and marketable.

Our research indicates that biotech employers who employ newcomers experience enhanced innovation, productivity, and even enhanced access to new markets and new investors. These competitive advantages can form compelling arguments why biotech companies should actively pursue newcomers as a strategic employment market.

Having been named to the ESDC panel on employment challenges of new Canadians by Minister Jason Kenney last fall, I was privileged to hear from regulators, immigrant-serving agencies, and newcomers across Canada about the major hurdles they face in their endeavours. Many of these have been echoed by BioTalent Canada in the past. They include that Canadian regulators currently have no incentive or mandate to present failed licensee candidates with alternative career paths. BioTalent Canada has a model skill transfer program that could introduce health professionals into the bioeconomy, but the regulators we have approached will not refer candidates to our resources.

Immigrant-serving agencies, especially in larger urban areas, do not coordinate efforts to place newcomers, meaning that access to networks and resources is not shared effectively.

Accurate and timely labour market information is not centralized, or even easily accessible to newcomers pre- and post-arrival.

Finally, smaller urban centres, many of which house viable biotech clusters, suffer from retention difficulties in which acclimatizing efforts for newcomers that would be taken on by cultural communities in larger urban centres fall to small employers, who are ill-equipped to take these on.

The biotech community also has a very large youth unemployment rate. Our partner, Life Sciences Ontario, in their study released this month cites it to be 18.9% for Ontario alone. This serves as direct competition for newcomers. Combined with the perceived risk that a small company takes in hiring any employee, the perception that newcomers and their employers will have to overcome linguistic or cultural barriers also serves to heighten the perceived risk.

- (1000)

This is the landscape in which the Canadian bioeconomy finds itself; a proud industry with a strong history of Canadian innovation disadvantaged by its own business cycle. It's need for capital investment trumps all else. It has clearly identified skills gaps where newcomers are recognized as a competitively advantageous market, but where systemic and policy limitations impede their introduction to productive and valuable jobs.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Henderson.

Ms. Eaton.

Ms. Margaret Eaton (Executive Director, Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council): Thank you very much. It's a great pleasure to be here before you today.

I'm the executive director of the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council, or TRIEC.

As you heard from Kelly earlier today, immigrant employment councils were set up around the country to address the problem of the internationally educated doctor driving a cab. I know you've already heard it's best to have a heart attack in a cab. There was even a movie made about this last fall, *Dr. Cabbie*, which is about an Indian gentleman who comes to Canada, cannot get licensed, and ends up running his medical practice out of his cab. I challenge you

to talk to any cab driver in the city and ask, "What did you do before you came to Canada?"

In the greater Toronto area we know that the unemployment rate for recent immigrants is double the rate for those born in Canada with similar education. There's still a lot of work to be done. TRIEC was the first immigrant employment council. We were set up in 2003 to address the issue of the lack of progress of immigrants in being matched with jobs that fit their experience and their education. TRIEC is partially funded by CIC through the settlement envelope of funding.

As TRIEC has grown, so have other immigrant employment councils across the country, taking our learning and applying it to their own regions, as well as coming up with their own innovative solutions.

I want to talk to you today about what makes TRIEC unique in the GTA and also about the common factor that makes other immigrant employment councils so unique in their regions. It really comes down to connections. TRIEC started as a council by bringing all the stakeholders that had a part of this problem together to create solutions. We're a small organization, but we've extended our reach and deepened our impact through our partnerships. It's the strength of those relationships that makes it work.

Traditionally, immigrant employment councils have been distinct from other organizations working in immigrant employment in that we do not provide services directly to immigrants. We don't do credential assessment, occupation-specific training, or recruitment services. This is our unique value proposition because lasting change cannot be achieved if you're only working on the supply side, meaning if you're just working on equipping immigrants to adjust to the market. We firmly believe that the market must also adjust to the immigrant.

The stark truth is that people who immigrate to Canada will never be fully integrated into society no matter how hard they try if the attitudes of Canadian-born employers do not change. Finding work where your skills and experiences are fully valued is the one thing that will really make an immigrant feel like a contributing citizen. It is pivotal to the effect of integration of newcomers into their new home. This is where TRIEC comes in.

With our strong connections to a range of companies, employers, and organizations across the region, we have that leverage to start a dialogue about changing attitudes and practices. The way that we do that is also unique. We know that the best way to achieve change is not by criticizing or preaching. We promote the business case for an immigrant inclusive workplace. We understand the huge potential that immigrants bring to our region, and we work with employers to get them to see it too. Hiring from an international talent pool brings innovation and new ideas, and gives you access to a global market.

Once an employer is sold on the need for inclusion, we have proven practical solutions that we can tailor to help the employer on the journey to an inclusive workplace. For example, we have solutions like the TRIEC campus, which is an e-learning resource with easy to use and engaging tools that managers and team members can use to improve their own cultural competence. RBC has added these campus tools to their internal intranet, and they have made it part of their staff training. Those tools are available across the country to all RBC employees.

Another way we have achieved change is through the mentoring partnership. You've heard a little bit about the power of mentoring. The program places skilled immigrants in mentoring relationships with established professionals in their field. Mentoring is transformational and not just for the mentee. We find that 76% of mentees gain employment in their field within six months of completion of the program, but it really changes the mentor. There is a direct social contact with someone who is in your profession, but from a different cultural background. That changes attitudes in a way that campaigning or lecturing never could. The results speak for themselves, and 95% of our mentors are more likely to interview or hire a skilled immigrant after participating in the program.

In the next five years we plan to grow our mentoring work significantly. We've been chosen by LEAP: The Centre for Social Impact to try to expand our mentoring from the 1,300 mentor matches we do in the GTA annually to 6,000 mentor matches. We work with a suite of sector partners, including the Boston Consulting Group, Ernst and Young, The Offord Group, Cossette, and McCarthy Tetrault. This is a massive opportunity for skilled immigrants.

•(1005)

We'll also be working with our fellow IECs to take the program nationally. This strategy of change will work on a national level only if we all truly collaborate and combine our efforts. At TRIEC we're not afraid to seek out unexplored possibilities for growth. We're always searching for new and innovative ways of making a difference.

We are forging connections not just with employers, although they are key to our success, but also with our communities. Once again, the mentoring partnership partners with 15 service delivery agencies that provide the connection to the mentees and help us manage the program. We couldn't do it without those settlement agencies providing that support.

Also, we are forging connections between communities. We work with 55 immigrant-led associations. We connect those skilled immigrants to employers and to each other so they can build their capacity and strengthen their voices.

As I said, we're not a service provider. We're really a facilitator of strong connections and relationships that lead to real and lasting change.

I want to close by saying that undeniably there are many different groups in Canada today that need support to gain meaningful employment, but the case for hiring immigrants is specific, so it requires cross-sectoral efforts and tailored solutions. TRIEC and our fellow immigrant employment councils across the country offer

those tailored solutions to employers that lead to a successful working life for skilled immigrants.

We thank the Government of Canada, through Citizenship and Immigration, for supporting our work.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Eaton and Mr. Henderson.

We now have some questions from my colleagues.

Mr. Menegakis, please.

•(1010)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Thanks to both of you for appearing before us today and sharing your opening remarks with us.

I represent a very multicultural riding, a very diverse riding, in the greater Toronto area, the riding of Richmond Hill, which is probably one of the more diverse ridings in the country, being in such a big urban centre, if you will. I'm keenly aware of the good work that TRIEC does for immigrants. I run across a lot of that on pretty much a daily basis.

I know that TRIEC comprises many organizations working together for newcomers. Can you tell us what are some of the partner organizations you work with and how important these partnerships are in the successful integration of immigrants?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Yes, Richmond Hill is one of the most diverse areas, and our reach extends out into that York region. It's a pleasure to serve.

In the mentoring partnership, we have 20 employer partners. We have RBC, Scotiabank, and Bank of Montreal. We're just adding Sun Life, Manulife, KPMG, and Deloitte. A lot of the larger organizations have stepped up to provide thousands of mentors to our program. On the community side, as I mentioned, we have 15 service delivery agencies. These include groups like COSTI, ACCES Employment, and JVS, which support our work in coming together.

We also, through our council, represent government. We have the Toronto Public Library as one of our sponsors and supporters. We work with the regulators with the Office of the Fairness Commissioner.

We really do try to present a broad spectrum of the whole immigration picture, because we find that bringing everyone together to the table is the most effective thing to make change.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: In your work, what do you believe are the key factors to the successful integration of immigrants?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: There was a very interesting question earlier about racism. I think one of the biggest issues is to try to get at what we're now calling hidden bias, or unconscious bias, this idea that we all have biases. In a very interesting study done by a Harvard professor recently, she's come up with a way of measuring bias. It turns out that everyone has some kind of bias. Sometimes it's about a preference for young people over old, or for men over women.

The way to really get past that unconscious bias, I believe, is to meet and work with a skilled immigrant. We're constantly hearing from employers about how they didn't realize there was so much skilled talent out there. I think a lot of people may have a notion that skilled immigrants are the people who are running the corner store or something like that, or the guy in the taxi, without realizing that those immigrants probably came here with perhaps more degrees than they have.

I think changing those perceptions is really important, so the more we can bring skilled immigrants together with employers, the more we'll make a lasting change.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Mr. Henderson, can you expand on how BioTalent helps immigrants succeed in Canada in the biotech industry?

Mr. Robert Henderson: Sure. As I said before, a lot of the professions within the biotech industry are not regulated, so credentialing often does not work in our industry in terms of gauging that level of talent. What we do very successfully is a process of skills mapping where we've been able to take 38 common professions within the biotech industry and map the skills that are required in order for them to succeed.

We have a bio skills recognition program, which is a skills transfer program. For example, doctors, veterinarians, nurses, or pharmacists who either fail or have inordinate delays in obtaining their licence here in Canada, sometimes possess 80% to 100% of the skills that are necessary within those programs. We have an online tool that allows them to map those skills, and they suddenly realize that they are qualified for several different professions within the bioeconomy, or they find they need very little training or very little professional development to bring them up to par.

Those skills can also be verified. We have a committee of professionals within the different professions that we've mapped, where the skills are mapped, who verify professional resumés and curricula vitae. The committee can say that yes, it verifies that according to what they've stated, they are bio ready—which is our label—to enter the profession among these skills. It's a unique platform. We think it has actually served as a model for other professions, medical and radiology technicians, etc. It works very well for industries that are not highly regulated, where as I mentioned, credentialing does not work.

●(1015)

Mr. Costas Menegakis: Do you have a sense of how many immigrants BioTalent works with in a given year?

Mr. Robert Henderson: How many immigrants? I can say that we have more than 20,000 registered for our job board online, and the vast majority of those are immigrants. That should give you an idea of how many people want to work with us, or at least are very interested in us. Some of them are within Canada and some of them,

of course, are international. We serve as an information source as to which jobs are available and what the Canadian bioeconomy is looking for in terms of talent.

Mr. Costas Menegakis: What would be some of the barriers that immigrants would face going through the BioTalent system, which you would see as difficult for them?

Mr. Robert Henderson: The barriers they face through the BioTalent system largely are, as I said, that small and medium-sized enterprises themselves aren't spending their time looking for talent, but when they are, for example, some of the labour market information we've seen says that 40% of the average generic recruiters use social media to find talent the majority of the time, but 4% do in the bioeconomy. They're not using the mechanisms that immigrants and all job seekers are using to look for jobs. A lot of the time they're talking to their own circle of network contacts in terms of trying to reach the appropriate professional. You have a network of small and medium-sized enterprises where human resources as a term is an oxymoron. They find it is a pain point more than they feel it is an opportunity, and when they are looking for it, they're not expanding their search to include the huge potential of newcomers that exists out there.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Mathysen.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Thank you very much, Ms. Eaton and Mr. Henderson. I appreciate very much the expertise you bring to this discussion and to this study.

I was interested in a number of things that were said, and I'm just going to frame it and ask both of you to answer or interject in any way that's appropriate.

Regarding your comment, Mr. Henderson and Ms. Eaton, about that incredible pool of talent out there, some years ago, probably in the mid-1990s, I was supporting a group called the Council of Canadian Immigrants in London, Ontario. These were people who brought incredible talents, but they couldn't find work and they were doing things that were far below their skill sets. We tried to talk to government at that time about the connections we could make. These very talented people knew business people, entrepreneurs, and professionals in their country of origin and we could make connections, whether it was through trade or the exchange of information, expertise, research, but there was no interest.

Have things improved in 2015? Have we come past that uninterest? Is there hope that these kinds of professionals and these kinds of connections can enhance our relationships internationally?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Absolutely. One of our partners, Scotiabank, considers itself to be the most international of banks. It has locations in 55 countries around the world. It is interested in participating in our mentoring partnership primarily, for example, because it wants to give its staff the opportunity to work with people from other cultures. Doing that is very important to Scotiabank, because it's primary to its business success.

If you're training a new leader, that person goes into the mentoring program and they learn about how to deal with someone from another culture, because no doubt in their job they are going to have to deal with someone in another country. It could be a colleague or it could be a client. On the employer side, the business side, I think there is a real recognition that the immigrant provides a tremendous connection to global success. I think there has been a change, absolutely.

Mr. Robert Henderson: I'd like to echo that.

Last year we did a study specifically on internationally educated professionals. The majority of the companies responding that had hired or that had internationally educated professionals on staff reported enhanced innovation, access to markets, etc. I think globalization from an industrial standpoint is driving this. Everybody understands that it's no longer a question of NIMBY, not in my backyard, of us simply looking to our own domestic market for both our business and our talent.

Can we enhance that? Are there mechanisms we can use to enhance that? Of course. But I think they have no choice but to recognize that. Sometimes there may be kicking and screaming, but they do recognize it.

• (1020)

Ms. Irene Mathysen: Thank you.

Is the leadership more from the business, the employer level than from other levels? I ask that because I was part of a government that brought forward an employment equity program basically because of the recognition that if you reflect the community, your business will be stronger. Unfortunately all of that was thrown out in 1995. It was completely dismantled. I think we suffer because of that.

There was a reference to racism, and certainly we know that over the years there have been waves of immigration. My grandfather was an Italian immigrant. He had to change his name and pretend that he was not Italian in order to get a job. That was just the reality. We've seen that in the waves of immigration.

Is there still some of that present? I ask that because I have a real sense that given the fears Canadians have with regard to security, there may still be remnants of racism that apply to Canadians who might be coming from the Middle East or northern Africa. Do you have you any sense of that?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Yes, absolutely.

If we look at the path that immigrants of the last 10 to 20 years have experienced versus that for immigrants from 50 or 100 years ago, we know that immigrants coming from Europe and Australia have had a much easier time than have immigrants coming from our key countries right now, which are India, China, and the Philippines. I think even just anecdotally you can see that it is different. If you come in and English isn't your first language or if your skin colour is not white, it is much harder.

I was just reading in your Ottawa *Metro* this morning that there is a campaign now to meet a Muslim family. I thought that was a very interesting initiative for someone to go in and see that Muslims are just like you and me. I think we still have to come a long way in Canadian society and culture to really embrace the multiculturalism

that we say we are so fond of in Canada. The practical lived experience is that there still is discrimination.

Ms. Irene Mathysen: With regard to successful programs that really take advantage of the incredible talent pool that comes from new Canadians, newcomers, or immigrants, are there any shortfalls? I'm wondering about the kinds of services a family would need, such as child care and access to transportation. What can we do in those kinds of areas to make things better and to help ourselves in the long run?

Mr. Robert Henderson: It's interesting that you say that.

When we were on the panel going across Canada, we found, obviously in the less concentrated urban centres, that a lot of those services would fall to the employer to make up for the cultural community that may not be present there. Sometimes they were ill-equipped to do so.

With the larger employers... I remember that we spoke in Halifax at one point with Irving Oil, which was very interesting. They took it upon themselves. They felt that enhancing their cultural diversity was a corporate objective. They felt this was something that all businesses, urban or rural, were going to have to face. As the workforce diversifies and as immigrants become more and more crucial as a talent pool for these businesses, they are going to have to incorporate into their HR culture the idea of making sure that they indoctrinate and help not just the placement, but the family to be more comfortable.

Certainly some of the clusters that I represent in biotech in P.E.I., which has a vibrant cluster of biotech companies, have had big issues. With some of the skills in biotech that may be required, sometimes there are two people in Europe who have the skill. When they bring them in, it's not the fact that the workplace is not accommodating, that they can't work there; it's the fact that the spouse can't find a job; it's about the kids not feeling that they are part of the community.

That is why the placement or the employment fails many times in those communities. Your point is well taken.

• (1025)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Mathysen.

Mr. McCallum.

Hon. John McCallum: Welcome to the witnesses.

My first question is for Ms. Eaton, about this stereotype of doctors driving taxis.

I'm wondering what the federal government can do about it because by and large the credential decisions are in the hands of provincial governments. I would have thought at a minimum that the federal government should ensure that people know what they're getting into before they come to Canada, and if possible, have a chance to secure their credentials before they come here.

I'm wondering at a practical level, given the limitations of the powers of the federal government, what you think we can do.

Ms. Margaret Eaton: That's a great question.

In Ontario there were 2,000 internationally educated doctors who came to try to get licensure. Oftentimes they find their path. They can get their licence, but the piece they can't get is residency. There are only 200 positions in residency for Ontario doctors, yet we know that Ontario needs more doctors. There isn't the funding for them.

As one of our colleagues on the panel, Christine Nielsen, said, doctors are paid like seamstresses. They're paid on a piecemeal kind of basis, and doctors have not wanted to expand the number of people coming in to share that work.

There are systems within our health care structure that mitigate against inviting more new players into the health care field and into becoming doctors. That is one of the issues.

Certainly, though, on your point about pre-arrival, having people understand what the situation is before they come here I think is absolutely imperative. One of the great successes of the very good programs, the overseas program run by colleges, the CIIP, is in directing people to the appropriate city. People may be thinking if they are going to be doctors, they will come to Toronto. What the program tries to do is say the person might have an easier time by going to P.E.I. instead. I think that pre-arrival piece is key.

Hon. John McCallum: Actually that is similar to what we heard from the last group, that it is often easier for immigrants to get jobs outside of the biggest cities. That's perhaps especially true for doctors.

Mr. Henderson, I have experience in my own riding that sort of backs up what you said in terms of a multicultural labour force being good for profit. This was the case where a company was competing for a global mandate with other parts of a U.S.-controlled enterprise. The fact that they had people originating in places like Korea gave them inside knowledge of how to produce good products for that market.

My question is a broader one, for you or for Ms. Eaton.

Given that experience, what can the federal government do more generally to help successful immigration settlement practices? Don't just say give more money; I know we could do that, but other than that—

Mr. Robert Henderson: We've seen some very good models. The Halifax model of the multi-stakeholder group, where you see regulators coming together with immigrant-serving agencies, coming together with employer outreach....

We've seen a huge gulf. Often the two black holes that exist within that entire chain that needs to come together for immigrants to be exposed, to understand the cultural differences, and to be welcomed exist between the regulators—and I go back to your first question on the regulators—where their responsibility stops at either licensing or not licensing the person, and that is the end of their mandate. That is a huge issue, because they have the people there and they're not passing them on. That's number one. Number two is often between the immigrant-serving agencies and the employers.

Anything that the federal government can do either to encourage, through its funding mechanisms for the immigrant-serving agencies.... I'm not saying more money; I'm saying change the conditions on which you grant it to encourage less of a silo mentality within the

larger urban centres, because some of the smaller urban centres are doing this quite effectively, and it's not about money. It's simply bringing the right people to the right table and everybody having a vested interest in this, as opposed to saying that it's not their mandate, that really, they get paid only if they place the immigrant, so they're not really worried whether the other places the immigrant.

I don't know, Margaret, if you have something to add, but that's what we saw as something that would make a huge difference.

• (1030)

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Rob and I both sat on this panel, which Kim Allen was on as well. One of the areas we looked at was foreign credential recognition. This was also brought up by previous panel members, this idea that every province is responsible for licensure of their particular profession. Some licensures have become national, pan-Canadian. There was a pan-Canadian framework to try to encourage regulators to think more broadly about their work.

If an immigrant coming in knew that there was one standard and they could quickly access that information, as opposed to, for example, the accounting profession, where prior to the merger to one designation there were 42 different regulators across the country.... What a mess of different requirements for anyone coming new to the country and trying to figure out whether if they go to New Brunswick, it might be different from if they go to Alberta, and how it might be different. The pan-Canadian framework tried to address that, but it has not been implemented.

If the federal government could have some influence with the provinces to encourage the regulators to make a change, that would go a long way.

The Chair: Thank you, sir, and Ms. Eaton.

Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our witnesses as well.

Let me start by saying I'm very happy that when I shared the story of a taxi driver in Parliament a couple of years ago, in one of my speeches and a couple of my committees, the message got across.

One of the reasons I got.... I'm an immigrant, by the way. I went through all this mess of foreign credential recognition myself, so I have lived through it. I know what it is, and I know how big this problem was and how big it still is. I have been working on this issue for almost 10 years. I am happy with one thing. The federal government, understanding that this is a provincial jurisdiction, has done some work on it. In 2008 our government came up with \$50 million for this pan-Canadian framework, encouraging all the provinces to come up with a program that is acceptable throughout Canada, and we've had some success. There is no issue on that.

I am very optimistic about this express entry visa program as well, as it has an element of foreign credential evaluation before an application is made. That will help, in my view at least, some potential immigrants to come to Canada and be successful.

I'm looking at this discussion from a different angle. We all talk about what the government's role is, what the employer's role is. From my own experience, I strongly believe that along with economic integration, social integration is very important for newcomers. There is a great role to be played by the new immigrant to be successful in our society.

Would you agree with me, to start with?

Mr. Robert Henderson: I totally agree with you. I think one of the issues that we have and one of the things that we applaud about the new express entry system is the fact that there is more onus on the newcomer to educate themselves in terms of labour market research and their destination. We hope that goes even further.

There was a lot of talk in terms of our panel discussions of plan B: what happens if you want to come here and become a physician or you want to become a nurse, depending on what your education is, and if that doesn't work out what are you going to do? Some of those conversations have to occur and some of that research has to occur beforehand. I think the express entry system and the fact that it awards points for some of that knowledge and some of that information that the newcomer can gather before getting here goes a long way. I certainly applaud that.

There's a sense of shock and awe both from an employment standpoint as well as from a cultural standpoint. The issue we have found is that there's a huge change between the urban centres and the non-urban centres in terms of what you were talking about, which is acclimatization to the culture. Because there's a cultural community that's very visible and very active, the large urban centres act as a very large pillow as a landing area for a lot of those families. That's a big issue for us because it's some of the small urban centres that are experiencing the most growth and require that talent.

•(1035)

Mr. Devinder Shory: Ms. Eaton, do you want to make some comments?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Yes, I would echo that. I absolutely agree that creating the welcoming community is so important. Robert mentioned earlier this idea that you must settle the whole family, not just the principal applicant or the person with the job.

One of the things we heard from one of the cities that we visited, which shall remain nameless, is that they were very good about bringing people in but they couldn't keep them. It was all about what other supports you're providing to them as community members. People would come in, get their permanent residency, and then after three years they were gone. They went back to the big city to get their job.

Keeping people in those regions that really need that talent is a very pressing issue. The great tradition we have in Toronto, a 100-year-old tradition of welcoming immigrants and creating robust settlement agencies to support them, that work is only beginning to happen in some of the other centres that really need those supports.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Let me ask you this. On the one hand we heard today from numerous witnesses, including you, that there are more opportunities in smaller towns, but on the other hand, when new Canadians come, they love to live in silos. I see this day in and

day out. One of the reasons the whole family is not integrated economically or socially is that they live in silos.

How do you encourage them to get out of those silos and get integrated into smaller communities where they have more opportunities, more success, and they have more chances to get involved in social activities, whether it is volunteering or other civil society issues?

Mr. Robert Henderson: I think some of our research shows that we have to stop treating hiring newcomers as a charitable activity. It's a competitively advantageous activity. The issue with a lot of employers is that they've been able to employ and recruit from the monochromatic WASP community around Canada for so long that they forget that they have to adapt their human resources culture to be competitively advantageous.

The way you stop being siloed is to make sure of their needs and an understanding of welcoming them. Introducing them not only to the corporate culture but to the larger recreational, religious, etc., cultures falls to the employer. You don't do it because it would be nice for you to do that and it's kind of important for Canada. You do it because you're going to get better innovation; you're going to get access to new markets, and you're doing something that your competitors are not that will give your company an advantage. There are tons of statistics that we're starting to find out that they do exactly that.

We're doing it the wrong way. It's a question where their HR cultures will adapt because they want to be competitive in attracting immigrants. We just have to give them more reasons as to why they should.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blanchette-Lamothe.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Thank you for being here today.

We spoke briefly about the express entry system. Of course, it seems to be interesting, even though we don't yet have all the details, particularly about the challenges related to this new system.

We know that it isn't the skilled workers, but rather the refugees and sponsored individuals, largely women, who face the greatest number of obstacles when it comes to entering the labour market. These people are not recruited to come to Canada for their experience, but for other reasons.

Do you have any comments about the needs of these individuals who arrive in Canada and who have particular difficulty in entering the labour market, as well as about the specific action that could be taken to help them?

[*English*]

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Our work does not particularly address refugees, except that we know that many refugees in fact are skilled immigrants. Just because you're coming with that sort of status doesn't mean you are not a skilled worker, so we certainly see refugees through our work.

They face many more barriers, though, especially if they have been victims of trauma, and integrating their whole family into Canadian society, including getting them a job, can sometimes be even harder, and so we really rely on the settlement agencies that work primarily with refugees to help them get job ready. For them getting job ready might be slightly different, because it does mean dealing with some of the trauma, the fears, and the upheaval that comes when you've chosen our country. You've arrived quickly. You've taken a long road to get here, but suddenly you're in a very different culture and society. That's where, as I say, we really rely on those agencies to support the refugees so that they can enter into our programs to actually get to that point of hiring, but it's a longer and generally a more tortuous path to get there.

• (1040)

Mr. Robert Henderson: I don't have too much to add on the subject of refugees, except to echo Ms. Eaton's comments.

On the subject of women, the other group that you were mentioning specifically, our statistics show that in biotech, 60% of biotechnology graduates currently in Canada are women. Employment of women within biotech firms has fallen by 11% over the last five years.

It's very interesting. One of the things we know anecdotally is because we're such an educated vertical, many of the graduates who enter into the market are in their late twenties. These are the reproductive years for families, and it's also the time when the most enhanced career paths and career jumps occur within biotechnology, which means that a lot of times women feel disadvantaged in the biotech sector, in the bioeconomy. Many times it's because they do not have mentors, because of the lack of C-suite and executive female role models, and a lot of times because biotech, especially in Canada, is arranged in clusters. Some of them are not in major urban areas; some of them are very active in the less concentrated areas. There's a lack of networking among women.

We are doing things to try to remedy that, for again the same reason that we're trying to introduce a lot of the reasons to make sure that biotech companies are welcoming to immigrants, not because it's a nice thing to do, but because it's a competitively advantageous thing to do. The fact that we are not currently, it seems, looked at as an employer of choice by women is competitively disadvantageous for the industry, and Canada is losing as a result. Anything that we can do to offset that and to ensure that young women who are graduating and want to enter the market, who want to have a complete life, can do so with a career in biotech.... We are trying to do that by introducing them to and letting them network with as many women who are doing just that.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: For example, could the federal government implement certain measures that would help women or refugees integrate?

[English]

Mr. Robert Henderson: The good news for us is they are. We're currently doing a project with Status of Women Canada, whereby in three major clusters across Canada, we are putting in mentoring programs and networking programs for women.

The good news as well is that this is falling upon very receptive ears. It's one of our most popular programs. The good news is that the biotech industry, similar to the perception changes of hiring immigrants, is realizing this is competitively advantageous, and for the bioeconomy to grow, women have to be looked at as a very important market from a concept of employment.

The Chair: Thank you.

I have a brief question, and it has to do with the obligations of the employer. Is it right to ask the provincial governments and the federal government to get more involved? In other words, many of these people who want to come to this country look around at different countries—there's something called the Internet—to see what the requirements are to become an engineer, a doctor, or any professional. Don't they have an obligation themselves to research what the culture is in a particular area of the country—the culture is different in cities, as opposed to outside the cities—the different professions, and our different qualifications? Are we asking the governments to take on something that perhaps is the obligation of these new immigrants to look up themselves?

Ms. Margaret Eaton: That's a very interesting question.

If you're making a big life change and deciding to come to a different country, there is absolutely an onus on you to research and find out what you're coming to.

I think part of the issue around that is that the information is widely distributed. It's scattered in many different places. If you're coming from another country, you don't understand that Canada's divided into 13 different provinces and territories and what the requirements are for each of those locations. It can be very daunting, if you're an immigrant, to try to figure out how all of that works.

I would also say that our reputation is such that people assume, "Well, Canada's open. I can just go and it will all work out for me. I'm hard-working." In some ways, that reputation works against us, because people just assume Canada is so friendly to immigrants, and they think, "Of course there'll be jobs for me. I've read in the paper they need doctors. I'll go to Canada."

I would say, too, that other countries are catching up to us in that way, and it has become much more competitive. We have visits from Germany all the time. I was just in Finland talking to them about how they can approach attracting more immigrants. Australia is doing a bang-up job of attracting new immigrants. It's going to be much more competitive for that global talent.

There are things we can do to smooth the path to make it easier for people to figure out what's really going on and also to give them really clear labour market information. There's a dearth of good labour market information for an immigrant to draw on. We should do anything we can to make it simpler and clearer so that they can make the choice to say, "You know what? Maybe it would be better if I didn't go to Canada. Maybe it would be better that I go to Australia or the United Kingdom instead. It might be better for all of us."

•(1045)

The Chair: Mr. Aspin, I've taken your time, but you have a few minutes to ask some questions.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have one quick question .

Thank you both for participating in our study.

I was just wondering about mentorship programs. Do you feel they're important programs for immigrants? Could I have a comment from both of you on that?

Mr. Robert Henderson: Yes, certainly our partner associations, the life science industries provincially, find mentorship programs tremendously important generally, not specifically for newcomers, but generally within the biotech industry. A lot of people understand the science of biotech; a lot of people don't understand necessarily the Canadian business of biotech, so that's specifically for the industry, as well.

From an immigration standpoint, certainly the idea of mentorship, I think again, is much more important in terms of the less concentrated urban centres, back to making sure that the families

and these people feel comfortable beyond their own employment. That's certainly what we've seen.

In the biotech industry it fits within a larger framework, but there has been much more import put on the whole concept of mentorship and mentorship programs in all the clusters.

Ms. Margaret Eaton: Only about 80% of jobs are ever advertised, so we all rely on our personal networks in order to get that next job or promotion. Immigrants can arrive with all of the qualifications, credentials, and work experience, but unless they have an entry through an individual to their actual sector, oftentimes they find they cannot take advantage of it. One of the best things that happens in mentoring is that you build that professional network, and that's what gets you the job.

The Chair: Our time has expired.

I want to thank you, Ms. Eaton and Mr. Henderson, for contributing to the committee in their preparation of their report. On behalf of the group, I'd like thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

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