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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant

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• (1535)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)): I'm going to call this meeting to order. This is the 139th meeting of this committee, perhaps the last one for this session, or at least until we rise for the holidays.

We continue our study of migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century. I'm just going to let folks know, because we have four statements, that I'm going to be pretty tight on the seven-minute time limit to make sure the members have some opportunities to question you.

We will follow the order that the names appear on the agenda, and start with Mr. Adam Brown, the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.

Mr. Adam Brown (Chair, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): Good morning.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, and witnesses.

[English]

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people, where we have the privilege of gathering today.

My name is Adam Brown and I am the chair of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, or CASA. I'm also the vice-president external of the University of Alberta Students' Union, and a fourth-year student completing a business degree in business economics and law.

CASA is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that represents roughly 350,000 students at colleges, universities and polytechnics across the country. Through a formal partnership with the Quebec Student Union, we are a trusted and truly national student voice. We advocate for a post-secondary system that is accessible, affordable, innovative and of the highest quality.

I would like to thank the committee for inviting CASA to participate in this important study on migration challenges and opportunities for Canada in the 21st century.

We live in a globalized world that is becoming ever more interdependent, interconnected and complex. Canada must ensure that its workforce is highly educated and equipped with the skills and

experiences necessary to contribute to and succeed in today's global realities. Diverse and cosmopolitan post-secondary experience enhanced by the presence of international students is instrumental in preparing Canada's students to work in an increasingly global community. International students also become prospective ambassadors who serve as a voice for Canada abroad, sharing Canadian interests, values and culture, while strengthening international collaboration in higher education, research, trade and diplomacy.

In addition to the cultural diversity and opportunities for global interconnectedness, international students also help to drive Canada's economic growth. They bring about \$15 billion to Canada's economy annually, which helps to create around 170,000 Canadian jobs. International students who decide to stay in Canada after their studies are also essential in addressing the ongoing and increasingly imperative issue of skilled-worker shortages in Canada.

While the opportunity that international students present for Canada's cultural and economic prosperity is great, we have identified many administrative and regulatory barriers that prevent them from easily accessing work opportunities or navigating the immigration system. As a consequence, it becomes harder for international students to stay in Canada after their studies.

With work-integrated learning opportunities becoming an integral part of a quality post-secondary education, international students should have equal access to these experiences. Unfortunately, as it stands, international students must apply for an additional work permit on top of their study permit should they decide during their studies that they would like to pursue a co-op internship, apprenticeship or other work-integrated learning opportunity. This additional permit can take up to six months to get, which prevents many bright and talented international students from partaking in work-integrated learning opportunities that come up often on very short notice during the course of their studies. In order to leverage the valuable opportunity that international students bring to growing our skilled labour force, it is vital that they have access to work opportunities that allow them to build networks in Canada and transition into the workforce after their studies. CASA therefore recommends that the federal government modify the study permit to allow international students to participate in full-time, work-integrated learning placements during their post-secondary studies.

Another barrier that hinders international students transitioning to employment following their studies is the short-term period allotted to secure employment and apply for a work permit. Currently, international students have just 90 days after graduation to find a job and apply for a work permit. This tight time frame is not reflective of the current workforce realities, or of the fact that many other life challenges occur post-graduation. In Canada it takes an average of nearly five months to find a job after graduation. While international students can apply for post-secondary work visas, this is yet another bureaucratic burden imposed on international students that could be easily avoided by modifying the work permit. Since the Government of Canada has identified international students as a key demographic for responding to the shortage of skilled labour in Canada, this government should remove unnecessary barriers that make it difficult for international students to stay in Canada after their studies. CASA recommends that the Government of Canada extend the post-graduate job-search period from 90 days to six months to better reflect the average time it takes to find a job after school, helping to keep international students in Canada.

Additionally, international students must deal with the immigration system prior to arriving in Canada and throughout their studies. Each of these steps can be complex, especially for those operating in their second or third language. With this in mind, institutions should provide a welcoming atmosphere with accessible services to set international students up for success in Canada.

However, the regulatory change brought forward in section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act in 2011 has inadvertently limited on-campus access for students to immigration information. Post-secondary staff must now obtain a special certificate, which requires 300 hours of training in the busiest months of the school year at an estimated cost of \$2,600.

Not all institutions can afford this commitment of both time and resources. I'll give you an example. Red River College in Manitoba has 1,500 international students, nine campuses, and only one certified international student adviser to serve all of them. As you can imagine, this leaves many international students without any access to on-campus immigration information.

Currently, other organizations, including religious and non-governmental organizations that do not charge a fee for this service, are exempt from requiring the additional certification. Post-secondary institutions do not charge a separate fee for this service either, and they believe it is logical that they should also fall under this exemption.

Therefore, CASA recommends that the federal government exempt post-secondary staff from the requirements established in section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

• (1540)

[Translation]

I would like to thank the committee, once again, for having given us the opportunity to present the issues international students face, as well as the opportunities we are given. I hope that we can continue to work together to make Canada one of the best post-secondary education destinations for students the world over.

[English]

Mr. Mustafa Alio (Co-Founder and Development Director, Jumpstart Refugee Talent): Thank you, Mr. Chair and esteemed members.

Until a couple of years ago, I never wanted to tell the people I met that I was a refugee claimant. I tried to justify hiding the truth about my status. I told myself that, if people knew, they might respond to me with fear, hatred or, at best, with sympathy.

A refugee is a security threat or an economic liability. A refugee is a creature who needs help. Many people, even advocates and sympathetic policy-makers, view refugees only from a humanitarian lens. They overlook them as sources of talent and opportunity. Today, as a refugee, I will talk about refugees as opportunities and power to be harnessed.

I spearheaded non-profits and sincerely worked and still do to make Canada a better place. I co-founded organizations like Jumpstart and the Syrian Canadian Foundation. Jumpstart helps hundreds of newcomer refugees from all backgrounds gain meaningful employment and improve their language skills. As a community leader, I have promoted Canada's refugee program in meetings with government representatives from Sweden, Italy and the Middle East.

I have contributed to the development of the global compact on refugees at formal consultations in Geneva as a member of the Network for Refugee Voices. I met and discussed topics with many state members from the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland, the EU and others.

With all of that, the question that still boggles my mind is why so many people shy away from the conversation about refugees' economic contributions.

Why shy away when the City of Vancouver told us that about 2,500 Syrian refugees would contribute at least \$563 million to Canada in 20 years?

Why shy away when the Penn Foundation proved that every dollar invested in refugees earned \$2 back in less than five years?

Why shy away when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued research showing that refugees gave back \$63 billion more than what they took in services in the last 10 years?

Why shy away when my organization, Jumpstart, which was founded, co-managed and run by refugees, contributes \$7.50 yearly in tax-saving contributions to Canada for every dollar invested in supporting refugees finding meaningful employment?

Why shy away when the Syrian refugees who started the company Peace by Chocolate in a Canadian town of less than 5,000 hired close to 50 local citizens?

Why shy away when a young Syrian refugee woman, Aya Hamoud, learned coding in less than six months and started working with one of the most successful Canadian start-ups at the age of 20?

Why shy away when my friend, James Madhier, who is a refugee from South Sudan, founded the Rainmaker Enterprise that employs nine Canadians and positively empowers 1,500 people in South Sudan?

Why shy away when Mr. Marty Trim from Alberta gave six acres of unused land of lost potential to two refugee families who turned it into a farm that provides Canadians with fresh local goods and the CRA with fresh tax dollars? They even donated 800 pounds of lettuce to Calgary food banks.

These examples can go on and on, so you tell me if resettling refugees and welcoming refugees is good for Canada.

My recommendation lies in the fact that there will be only two full-time working Canadians for each retiree, and this tells us that Canada is in great need of immigrants and refugees. Adopting the global compact on migration and the global compact on refugees and co-hosting global refugee forums to share best practices of inclusion and partnering with other nations is the right path to pursue.

Economic studies tell us that Canada's investments in refugees and immigrants are, above all, the smart thing to do. We had better constructively criticize and improve our settlement and resettlement efforts to be more efficient, rather than spread fear to divide this nation that was built on the shoulders of refugees and immigrants.

• (1545)

It is in Canada's interest to build on the success and the leadership of innovative programs that enable the mobility of refugees between countries, including private sponsorship, humanitarian admission, and the economic mobility pathway project, a world-leading pilot program pioneered by Canada.

Canada would benefit by realizing and advocating for refugees to be seen as legitimate contributors, as policy-makers who can themselves participate in settlement and resettlements efforts, peace-building, transitional justice, and reconstruction. Nothing about us should be without us.

Finally, I could never think of a better story to leave you with than that of Omar, a seven-year-old kid in one of the Lebanon camps. Omar kept jumping up and down, yelling, telling the camp supervisor that he is smart, and he can count and write in English, from one to 100, something he learned on his own in the camp. Not thinking, the supervisor told Omar to bring a pen and paper to show him. With a sad, thoughtful face, Omar told the supervisor to wait, and then he started running from one tent to another. Then Omar ran back to confess that he did not have a pen or paper. While confessing, Omar squatted down on the ground, dug his nails and fingers into the mud, and started tracing out the numbers. Omar is a symbol of 68 million resilient human beings who are refugees, waiting on nations like Canada to see their power and determination, and to do something.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next are Mr. Cohen and Ms. Wagner from Talent Beyond Boundaries.

Mr. Bruce Cohen (Co-Founder, Talent Beyond Boundaries): Honourable Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit a brief and appear on behalf of Talent Beyond Boundaries.

We are engaging the global private sector and national governments to provide safe and legal economic migration options for skilled refugees in addition to traditional humanitarian protection. Our goal is for skilled refugees to be able to move from places where they cannot work to companies and countries where they can do so safely and legally, to move to secure futures based on their skills, not just their status.

To do this, we are demonstrating the wide range and depth of talent among refugee populations. We're engaging private sector employers who need to fill skill gaps, and we're working with governments to identify barriers in economic immigration systems that unintentionally penalize refugees. Economic immigration streams were not designed with refugee circumstances in mind. That has led to unintended barriers to the participation of skilled refugees in economic immigration.

If allowed to compete for positions, skilled refugees can be part of the talent pipeline that fills skill gaps and fuels economic development. We know that among refugee populations there are many educated and skilled people who want to compete for international employment. In 2016, we created a first-of-its-kind, online digital platform for refugees to share with us their education, skills, work experience and language abilities.

In less than a year, more than 10,000 refugees in Lebanon and Jordan had registered and become part of a searchable talent catalogue database. They span more than 200 occupations, from engineers, IT developers and health care providers to carpenters, tailors and chefs. Across Canada, Talent Beyond Boundaries is now working with employers facing labour shortages in diverse sectors, including IT, health care and manufacturing. While these employers have embraced our mission to help open new solutions for refugees, they partnered with us because they face a critical need for skilled workers.

Let me give you a couple of examples.

Bob Collier is the president and founder of Davert Tools, an advanced manufacturer in Niagara Falls. He had long-time employees retiring and could not find anyone to fill the position of a tool and dye maker. He interviewed refugee candidates and made a job offer to a tool and dye maker who's a Syrian refugee currently residing in Lebanon.

Bonfire is a fast-growing e-procurement firm in Kitchener-Waterloo. They cannot find software developers fast enough. After a competitive recruitment process, they offered a full stack developer job to another refugee who had fled to Lebanon.

These are two successful job candidates who can immigrate to Canada with provincial nominations through economic pathways and not through a refugee stream. They can move on the basis of their skills and are headed to good jobs in sectors that need more talent.

Having successfully identified skilled refugees who can help fill skill gaps, and private sector companies that need and want them, we are now working with the Government of Canada to ensure that there is a viable economic immigration pathway for those with needed skills and the human capital.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has developed the economic mobility pathways project, EMPP, to test refugee access to federal and provincial economic pathways. We are working with them to identify barriers, and we hope to develop solutions. The EMPP does not create a new pathway to Canada. Rather, it considers refugee access to existing economic pathways. Provinces and territories taking part in this project are Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Yukon. Eligible skilled refugees are from East Africa and the Middle East.

This innovative project evidences Canada's commitment to understanding how the global refugee talent pool can fit into Canada's skilled immigration future. We believe that Canada can strengthen its economic pathways to ensure Canada's competitiveness as a country that attracts top talent from anywhere in the world, including among refugees.

• (1550)

Talent Beyond Boundaries is committed to working with the government to build on the economic mobility pathways project and to removing barriers across federal and provincial economic pathways.

Adjusting economic streams to be more equitable to skilled refugees makes sense. Labour mobility is a market-based solution that generates economic benefits while contributing to resolving a humanitarian crisis. It is complementary to traditional humanitarian resettlement and Canada's community sponsorship programs.

Canada has the opportunity to develop this new, durable solution for refugees and their families that benefits Canadian businesses and communities in need of talent.

Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, as well.

Our last witness is Muzna Dureid.

Ms. Muzna Dureid (Liaison Officer, The White Helmets): I'm going to be talking in French, so I will ask you to put your headphones on.

[Translation]

The Chair: That is not a problem. Thank you very much.

Ms. Muzna Dureid: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your invitation to appear before you. My name is Muzna Dureid and I work with the White Helmets as liaison officer. First, I would like to thank the Canadian society and the Government of Canada for their historic intervention to protect the White Helmets members who were given the opportunity to flee Syria, the country of fear and

death. Without your moral intervention, our team and their families would have died in Syria.

The life of the members of our team who remain in Syria is still in jeopardy, and they are targeted by the forces of Bashar al-Assad and Russia. A lot of them have been killed, and we lost 302 volunteers. The White Helmets were set up in 2013 to come to the assistance of the victims of war. We are also known by the name of the Syrian Civil Defence. That humanitarian organization was funded by Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Japan.

Inspired by the UN Blue Helmets and aiming to support emergency assistance, Syrian Civil Defence brings together volunteers who intervene on the ground or in prisons. There can be as many as 3,000 volunteers. We carried out approximately 200,000 rescue interventions. In Canada, the 19 White Helmet families are continuing to arrive. They now live in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia. We hope that our mission will continue; that is why we are in contact with the Canadian Red Cross and the National Search and Rescue Program. We want to integrate and serve our new country, Canada, as our new homeland. We hope to be able to continue to be active in the same way in Syria, and we would like to contribute to saving lives here, if possible. I thank you for your efforts. We are grateful for the work done by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

In 2016, the United Nations announced that it would begin to work on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration in the context of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants. This declaration came to be following the wave of migrations that led to the death of over 7,500 migrants in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 and 2016 alone. Since the year 2000, as the refugee crisis unfolded, the number of irregular immigration victims went up to over 60,000. The destination countries did not carry out rescue operations; they only countered the ocean-going migration attempts. To support the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, human rights and the protection of the most vulnerable, the compact includes among other things the establishment of a forum to review international immigration. As a follow-up mechanism, a meeting will be held every four years as of 2022. We recommend that Canada support that forum.

In that context, following up on the commitments made by the countries of the pact will be essential. That is why we are asking the UN to respect the plan described to that end in the Global Compact, which plans to include civil society organizations as stakeholders, including migrant community organizations. The Global Compact is not legally binding. There is a risk that its progressive measures will only be lip service if no leadership is shown in that regard.

Investing in refugees is an investment in the future. We are human, just like everyone else. I lost my friends to the Mediterranean Sea, people who were looking for a better life. All of those who say no to the pact are voting in favour of human trafficking, slavery, rape and the murder of all these human beings who are looking for a better future. I am an asylum seeker here in Canada. I arrived in Montreal in November 2016. I used to work with the women in the camp before I left for Canada. I used to deliver whistles and flashlights to the women simply so that they could go to the washrooms during the night. Just imagine the situation of these women in the camps. They make up 48% of the refugee population.

• (1555)

I was one of the finalists among those chosen as the 25 best immigrants in Canada after spending only one year here. I was chosen by the Quebec Ministry of Immigration, Diversity and Inclusion as a Montreal leader.

I also took part in consultations on Canada's 2017-2022 National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. I did all of that in a year and a half.

All we need is the opportunity to change our reality. You will see that we deserve it. What we don't deserve is that our lives be wasted. We should not be used as a political threat.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

I thank the witnesses for their presentations. They each took less than seven minutes and that's very good.

Ms. Zahid, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, before I start my questions, I have one request. Can we please ask our analysts to assemble the evidence we have heard in this study for when we come back after the winter recess?

• (1600)

The Chair: Does everyone agree, that we give them a holiday project?

Stop the clock for a minute.

I would like to thank the clerk and the analysts for their work last week.

I was generous to the opposition in offering to do the translation from the House. That caused quite a little bump in the process. Thanks to both the analysts and the clerk for navigating the bump. We got that done.

On the whole committee's behalf, thank you for getting that report done at the request of the committee.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I would like to notice that the opposition brought gifts for the analysts and the clerk.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): I bet the Liberals didn't do that.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It's equalization from Alberta; we're always giving. We're a giving province.

The Chair: I think we consider them from all of us, in our unanimity.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: That would be what a Liberal would do. A Conservative from Alberta would bring something to Ottawa, and then they would take it.

Merry Christmas.

Ms. Madalina Chesoi (Committee Researcher): Thank you.

Merry Christmas.

The Chair: Merry Christmas.

Thank you.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: It's alcohol.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Very well.

[*English*]

We'll start the clock over.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you to all the witnesses for coming before the committee in this important study.

My first question is for Mr. Brown.

I read the brief you prepared for the lobby day on the Hill a few weeks ago. I agree with your two asks about international students. The first one was around the co-placements, and the other one was on the IRPA section 91 concerns around campus officials offering limited immigration advice. Hopefully, IRCC is receptive to those two things and can make changes to address your concerns. I just wanted to let you know.

Now, let me ask you a broader question. What can we do to encourage more international students to stay in Canada after graduation and move on to the permanent residency and the citizenship paths?

Mr. Adam Brown: As I highlighted, I think one of the best things that the federal government can do is make the pathways to citizenship that much more accessible. Our ask with section 91 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is a solid way to make sure that international student advisers who are able to legally offer this advice are on campuses so that students can go straight to them. What we see right now is shortages on campuses, so students have to find out where else they can go; whereas they already have many well-developed relationships with international student advisers who offer different program or academic advice as well.

I would say that's one of the best ways to help encourage them to stay in the country; that is, make sure that the pathways to permanent residency and citizenship are clear and accessible and it's possible to navigate them well.

The other thing would be continuing the dialogue that there is a shortage of skilled labour in Canada and that there are places for international students here, creating a welcoming environment where they know that they have a place here and that Canada values their contributions to our country. That will also help to facilitate that dialogue with them.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Is the change to IRPA section 91 across all universities? Is it in some campuses but not in all of them?

Mr. Adam Brown: The state in which it currently exists is that any post-secondary staff who wants to be able to give this advice has to go through this training, which happens in January and September, obviously the busiest months of the school year, when many international students are asking for advice. It makes it extremely inconvenient for those staff to do that. That's why we're looking for this change, so that post-secondary staff, who would likely be in the international offices that most post-secondaries have across the country, be exempt from that so they are able to give that information, and would be supported by their post-secondary institutions in doing so.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Mr. Alio, I was interested to learn about your refugee mentoring program. I know how important mentoring is, in going through my own career. I know that the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council also has a similar successful program, and in its budget submission, has called for support for more organizations across Canada to launch mentoring programs for newcomers.

Could you please discuss how important mentoring is for newcomers looking to break into the workforce, and some of the barriers they face while getting there?

•(1605)

Mr. Mustafa Alio: The program called Welcome Talent Canada is in partnership with LinkedIn as of three weeks ago. This is going to be a national program. It's one of our Jumpstart programs. Jumpstart has five programs, and it is one of them. Mentorship in partnership with LinkedIn is going to be in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary to cover 2,400.... It's very important. A study came out of LinkedIn that 70% of job placements happened because of connections, not because companies posted jobs on websites.

Aside from the fact that it will fast-track refugees' access to meaningful employment, employment in their own fields, at the same time the personal interaction between the local Canadian citizen and refugees defeats a lot of stereotypes and a lot of stigma against refugees, what they do, what they're capable of. Those kinds of combined efforts need to happen between refugees and local citizens.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Do you have some examples where you have seen success stories for these mentoring programs?

Mr. Mustafa Alio: We piloted a program last year with 50 Syrian refugees. It was only for Syrian refugees. Right now the program is available for all refugees, including refugee claimants. Out of the 50, in six months 23 of them had found jobs. When we say "jobs", with our work, I'm talking about meaningful, good, full-time jobs in their own fields.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Thank you.

Mr. Cohen, we have heard from many witnesses during this study that refugees only turn to irregular channels of migration when regular, legal channels are closed to them, and that they would prefer a regular channel with a low chance of approval over the risk and cost of irregular migration. Does this match your experience? Are there steps we can take to encourage regular over irregular channels of migration?

Mr. Bruce Cohen: It's our hope that opening labour migration opportunities to refugees through economic pathways will provide the kinds of safe and legal alternatives that people will be able to take advantage of. That is an option. That is part of what is inspiring us to begin our program and to work on the EMPP, to open such safe and legal pathways. As they're opened in various destination countries around the world, there is a greater opportunity for legal migration to jobs. We hope that will take some of the pressure off and diminish the pressures that have led to so much illegal migration and so much—

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there. Thanks very much.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Chairman, I would like to congratulate Mr. Alio and Mr. Cohen, in particular, for the comments about the contributions that new refugees make to this country.

I can tell you that in my riding, which is a semi-rural, semi-urban community, there's a company that makes auto parts. It has told me that it is having trouble finding Canadians to work on the lines. It will pay to train new Canadians to come and work on these lines because it can't get Canadians to work on these lines. They are well-paid jobs; Canadians just don't want them.

Your observations are good about the contributions that new Canadians make to this country economically and culturally.

One of the issues that I look at, however, is that there are different types of refugees. I would like you to philosophize a little bit about this. There are well-educated, wealthy people who come to this country for different reasons. There's another group of people who aren't. They come to this country because things back home are terrible because of war, the way they have been treated, poverty, climate issues, all kinds of things, and they are in desperate shape.

We have to spend a fair bit of money to provide language training, housing and social services. It is the second group I'm talking about. I have no idea what the percentage is between those two groups.

We had the minister some time ago come forward with the levels plan as to what we should have in the future. I think he's talking about 350,000.

Is that a fair number? Should it be less? Should it be more? Knowing all the things our municipal, provincial and federal governments have to do, do you think there is a limit as to what we can sustain?

•(1610)

Mr. Mustafa Alio: I will take a first try at this. I can't really comment on whether there is enough or not. Should we get more? I'm going to be a bit biased and think about it. I think we can do 350,000, and we can do even more. The country needs more.

We're talking about only less than 1% of the Canadian population. Not only is it good to do it, but also it's smart to do it because all numbers—

Mr. David Tilson: That wasn't my question. I know it's good to do it. We have an obligation to be compassionate to groups of people around the planet.

The question is this: What can our economy sustain? How much can we sustain?

We all want to help people. We all want them to come to this country and make contributions. However, those initial programs of housing, social services, education, language, etc., cost a lot of money. I have no idea what the total cost is, but I know that if you increase it, it's going to cost more.

Mr. Mustafa Alio: Let me also make a point here that the extra spending on newcomers, refugees or immigrants basically is going back into the economy. It's not that they take the money and send it somewhere else. It increases the country's aggregate demands on physical expansion. More gets more services for actually produced and disposable income for native workers. The cost of that is not going somewhere else. It's going back to Canada and it is being spent, and that will increase it.

This country has been growing and prospering for the past 150 years. If it's going up and if the country is doing really well and is still one of the G20 and all of that, why does everything have to go up and the number of people received go down when actually the country was built on refugees and immigrants?

Mr. David Tilson: What should the levels plan be? Half a million? A million?

Mr. Mustafa Alio: I'm not really in a place to know what the cap is that we can do, but that little increase.... It used to be less than 300,000. Now we're talking about a little bit more, about around 50,000 more a year. I'm pretty sure that any country, including Canada, one of the best countries in the world, could easily get a little bit more, about 50,000 more.

Mr. David Tilson: Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Bruce Cohen: Talent Beyond Boundaries has not asked or commented on levels or level changes. Our candidates are competing within existing levels. The people we're working with are skilled refugees coming to Canada to fill jobs, to fill skill gaps and, we hope, to contribute to and grow the economy.

Mr. David Tilson: I concur with that, and I gave the example of the firm in my riding, but at the same time, there's always a cost.

Mr. Brown, can you tell me what percentage of students stay in this country?

Mr. Adam Brown: I don't have that information at hand, but I'd be happy to follow up with that.

Mr. David Tilson: Would you? Can you make a guess? Is it more return to their homes or more stay?

Mr. Adam Brown: I can't say off the top of my head. I know we have about 353,000 international students in Canada right now. I'm not sure. I can't spitball as to how many stay, but I can follow up.

•(1615)

Mr. David Tilson: You talked about how it's harder to stay, and you gave three or four examples and made recommendations. You gave the example that you need to have an extra study permit, and that the time allowed for applying for work needs to be extended from 90 days to six months. You talked about the other complex procedures.

Should we have any requirements at all?

Mr. Adam Brown: It's important for certain established regulations to be in place. They need to be reasonable and reflect what the realities are for people. For example, extending from 90 days to six months is simply addressing the reality of the current situation in Canada. It might not always have taken four and a half to five months after graduation to find a job, but that's how it is now. It's simply addressing and adjusting our laws and regulations to adapt to the current situation.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brown.

We need to move to Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank all the witnesses for their presentations today.

What I heard from the witnesses today by and large is that you're suggesting Canada and Canadians really realize the contributions refugees and newcomers make to Canada. Welcoming refugees is not just a humanitarian effort; rather, they make real and significant contributions, economically or otherwise. As Ms. Dureid mentioned, somehow there's misinformation being spread that refugees only come to take advantage of Canadian society and so on. To that end, I want to focus on exactly the contributions you talked about.

Specifically, in the presentation you made to us, Mr. Alio, you threw out a whole bunch of numbers and studies and so on. I wonder whether you can elaborate on those, and whether you can provide documentation to this committee so that it can become part of our committee's record. Those questions often get asked, and somehow people undermine them or say they don't exist. Their automatic go-to place is to say that refugees are simply a drain on our society.

Mr. Mustafa Alio: For every single number I mentioned, I'm more than happy. I even have them here with me on paper—the links and the references to the studies. I'm more than happy to send them to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

In terms of the contributions and the actual return that was cited, Mr. Cohen, you talked about bringing refugees in as immigrants through your program—not necessarily as refugees per se—and matching them up with employers so that their contribution is immediate when they land. Literally, because it's through a PNP program, it's immediate.

Can you tell me the pilot projects you're working with the government on at the moment? How many people are being targeted with this program?

Mr. Bruce Cohen: The program is the economic mobility pathways project. It is under way, so it's difficult to say how many people will be able to take advantage of the program initially. However, in its pilot phase, possibly a few dozen matches will be made to test the thesis that refugees can enter and be productive immediately.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In terms of the overall need, Canada, as was noted, is in a situation where we have a labour and skills shortage. We're in a situation where in some provinces, and particularly in the Atlantic provinces, there are more people dying than there are people being born. We need refugees. We need immigrants. We need newcomers. As was mentioned, this country was built by newcomers. To that end, it does tie into the levels.

Right now, we are receiving, in all of the different streams, 350,000, which is 1% of the overall population. The question was asked about whether or not we can absorb more. Economists would say that we can. In fact, the government had undertaken to form a special advisory group—an expert panel, if you will. It recommended half a million—450,000.

With respect to refugees, given that there is a humanitarian crisis, with 70 million people displaced across the globe, and given that we know what contributions refugees do make to our Canadian society... With respect to government programming, would you advocate for government to increase our levels? Don't give me a number, but should we increase our levels? At the moment, what Canada contributes, with all of our streams put together, is about 0.1%, in terms of our contribution to the overall global crisis. Do you think we can do more?

We'll just go down the line this way.

• (1620)

Mr. Mustafa Alio: The short answer is yes. Definitely, Canada can and should do more. There is a general sense right now in Canadian society that privately sponsored refugees are better educated than government-sponsored refugees, and that implies that government-sponsored refugees can't contribute as much.

One of the programs that Jumpstart initially started was about construction. We found out that the construction field here in Canada has a lot of shortages, and needs a lot of skills. We have a database of over 800 refugees across Canada. At that point, 60% to 70% of government-sponsored refugees who were going to hotels had a construction background. We were able to create a pilot project. As long as people were willing to think out of the box.... We partnered with over six organizations, and that was an effort led by Senator Ratna Omidvar.

The government funded a program. In the pilot, out of 94 graduates from construction.... We're talking about government-sponsored refugees who had English levels from 0 to 2 on the CLB, which goes from 0 to 8. Of the 94 graduates, over 50 found jobs. Over 40 of those were full-time jobs. Over 20 of them were unionized jobs. We're talking about people who otherwise could have stayed on welfare for a longer time.

What I'm saying is that we can do more. We proved it. If we think out of the box, and if we have the will, we can definitely do it.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Ms. Dureid, do you have anything else to add?

Ms. Muzna Dureid: My focus is human rights defenders. Canada could also create fast-tracking to protect human rights defenders under threat or at risk, as was happening with Rohingya women. That would also help all activists come to Canada by legal and faster means, and to continue their work here.

Canada could do more.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Bruce Cohen: The employers we work with would like to see more skilled employees and more opportunities. Canada is a leader in the world on these issues. The most I can say is that I would hope Canada would do all it can, because they are so compelling.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cohen.

Mr. Ayoub.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub (Thérèse-De Blainville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to ask my questions in French.

I thank all of the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Dureid, I would first like to congratulate you on your achievements. I'd like you to tell us more about the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. Countries do not sign on to that pact. They ratify it and make a voluntary commitment; there are 180 countries. Canada is one day away from ratifying it.

You focused on the importance of that pact, which made me even more of a believer. However, there are some members around this table from other political parties, particularly the Conservative Party, who are against that pact.

What are your views about that negative attitude toward the pact?

Ms. Muzna Dureid: As I mentioned, by saying no to the pact, you are saying yes to rape, slavery and human trafficking.

Why? It's because if you approach all of the problems going on in this world through legislation, you can arrive at solutions that will meet the needs of people and of governments.

The pact distributes responsibilities among the countries that agree to it. It also will allow countries to work together on developing practices.

• (1625)

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Better practices?

Ms. Muzna Dureid: Exactly, especially as concerns the mechanisms used throughout the world. It will also allow for the pooling of information, as well as of methods adopted by various countries. There are a lot of details, but generally speaking, it legalizes and distributes responsibilities so that no one can hide. It allows the states to be on the ground with the others to find solutions.

[English]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Mr. Cohen, do you want to add something?

Mr. Bruce Cohen: I do.

The program we're working on, opening up labour pathways for skilled refugees, is not compelled by the compact. It is fully consistent with the compact.

In objective (5), the provision is about enhancing the availability and flexibility of economic migration for displaced people, which is fully consistent with what we're working on in EMPP and what we're urging.

It will also, if I can echo Muzna's comments, make it possible for more countries in the world, countries that are not necessarily resettlement countries, that take resettlement cases.... The most vulnerable will be refugees. It may allow them to help share some of the burden if they were to open up their economic opportunities to refugees and displaced people, as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: If there were to be a change in government—which I hope not to see—how do you feel about the possibility that the new government might withdraw its agreement regarding this Global Compact?

What is your point of view on that, Mr. Cohen?

[English]

Mr. Bruce Cohen: I feel constrained about offering opinions to Canadians about Canadian policy. Respectfully, we believe the provisions in the compact that I have spoken about are useful and valuable, but....

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Would there be advantages to withdrawing from the compact?

[English]

Mr. Bruce Cohen: Not that I know.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Not that you know.

[Translation]

Ms. Muzna Dureid: Morally speaking, no.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: What do you think more specifically, Ms. Dureid?

Ms. Muzna Dureid: Morally speaking, we can't be used as political weapons, or as pawns, by political parties.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Mr. Alio, what do you think?

[English]

Mr. Mustafa Alio: I have one comment.

I always feel it's common sense for anyone to learn from their own journey. It's smart to learn from others' experiences.

I did negotiate drafts with state members in Geneva on the global compact. We did suggest.... One of the ironic things in the global compact is that when that started, the main issue of it was to increase and improve the resettlement. The final draft of the project actually turned not so much to this as actually sharing best practices.

When you refer to withdrawing from the agreement, for me it's withdraw from what? Is it to withdraw from actually learning from other nations that are doing something good and just not doing it and being stuck?

When I discussed topics with Germany or Ireland, it was really inspiring for them to learn what's working well in Canada and for me to learn what's working well over there, and that maybe we can share that.

We contributed to the draft the meaningful participation of refugees—Muzna and I—at that point. We contributed the fact of improving the data collection on refugees and hosting countries, and overseas.

Yet we keep saying that it's an unbinding agreement. It is an unbinding agreement. To be honest, it always boggles my mind every time I hear that someone is withdrawing from this. It's just withdrawing from learning best practices.

[Translation]

Ms. Muzna Dureid: The pact is not legally binding. I simply want that to be well understood.

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: I have barely a minute left.

Mr. Cohen, as you mentioned, there is a labour shortage. Not enough emphasis is placed on the cost of that lack of resources. The emphasis is put instead on the cost of receiving refugees or people who could eventually contribute to the Canadian economy. Accelerating their integration and their arrival would offset the shortfall in the Canadian economy.

That is important for the economy. It would develop much faster. What is your opinion on that, Mr. Cohen?

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Bruce Cohen: I believe you are accurate in your assessment.

[Translation]

Mr. Ramez Ayoub: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Dana Wagner (Canadian Partnerships Advisor, Talent Beyond Boundaries): It's our hypothesis that some of the skilled refugees we're working with upon entry into, again, meaningful, well-paid, full-time jobs will see a lot of success in really early days in Canada. It's also really worth pointing out that a big part of what we're trying to do is open up complementary pathways to Canada's existing resettlement and refugee stream. We know that even within the refugee stream, when people are not arriving with employment, it still doesn't say anything about their success, even in the near term.

For example, we know that five years, I think, after arrival, income for refugees in Canada is almost on par in terms of middle-class income with Canadians and with other immigrants. It's worth reminding ourselves that there is a lot of success for those arriving.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Wagner.

Thank you to the panel.

We'll suspend for just a moment while we bring in our second panel. Two are by video conference and one is in person.

•(1630) _____ (Pause) _____

•(1635)

The Chair: I will call the meeting back to order for our second hour.

We have two witnesses via video conference. They happen to be together, although they are from different organizations. They will each have seven minutes, as will Ms. Mina, who is here in person.

Let's begin with Ms. Abuzgaya from the Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic. Then we will go to Mr. Hussan, and then Ms. Mina.

Take it away.

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya (Staff Lawyer, Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic): Honourable Chair and committee members, We are honoured and grateful to have the opportunity to speak to you today about the gaps and challenges in Canada's refugee and immigration policies.

First, I will provide you with some background on the clinic. The Barbra Schlifer Commemorative Clinic is unique in Canada. It is the only clinic that provides specialized services for women who have experienced violence. Since 1985, the clinic has provided legal representation, counselling and language interpretation services to over 65,000 women. Over the years, we have experienced a steady increase in the number of women seeking our assistance. In 2017, we assisted 4,700 women. This year, we saw an 84% increase in service requests, assisting over 7,000 women.

Today the clinic submits that the official Canadian migration policy remains problematic, unresponsive and insensitive to the needs of vulnerable survivors of gender-based violence. Canada's refugee and immigration policies fall short of the government's international obligations and public stance in favour of gender recognition and equality.

We will focus our submissions on two broad areas. First, Canada's strict border control policies, including the safe third country agreement with the United States, impose severe barriers to entry on vulnerable women and expose women to a higher risk of being trafficked. Second, Canada's migration system perpetuates gender-based violence through its procedural aspects as well as through its impacts.

Starting with our first area of concern, female migrants fleeing gender-based violence face a number of barriers in seeking asylum in Canada.

The safe third country agreement with the U.S. is based on a presumption of safety, namely, that the U.S. is capable of resolving refugee and asylum claims. Thus, any incoming asylum seekers to Canada, subject to certain narrow exceptions, are presumed to already be safe. Given the current conduct of officials in the U.S., it may no longer be accurate to say that women fleeing gender-based violence are safe upon arrival there.

Canada is experiencing a dramatic increase in irregular border crossings from asylum seekers who are unable to enter Canada through official channels because of the safe third country

agreement. This exposes women who are fleeing gender-based violence to a higher risk of being trafficked.

We recommend the measures that serve to restrict access to Canada's borders, especially the safe third country agreement, should be abandoned effective immediately.

Next, we'll briefly highlight some of the concerns surrounding Canada's immigration system and how it perpetuates gender-based violence through its procedure and impact.

One of the most blatant forms of violence faced by migrants who enter the country irregularly is immigration detention. Female migrants fleeing gender-based violence face an increased risk of detention, as they are unlikely to be carrying identification documents, particularly when they are fleeing domestic violence.

Detention is traumatizing for survivors of gender-based violence, because detention replicates the experiences of confinement, abduction and sexual assault that led them to flee in the first place. Additionally, children are routinely detained by immigration authorities or separated from their parents, which exacerbates the powerlessness and trauma experienced by survivors and causes grave mental health consequences for children.

Another way in which Canada's refugee system unwittingly perpetuates violence against women is through the designated country of origin provisions. Under section 109 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, the minister of immigration may designate a country as one which meets the basic requirements of a democracy, also known as a DCO.

The issue with the DCO provisions is that a presumption of safety fails to account for how gender-based violence operates. Violence against women remains widespread in many countries that appear stable and democratic. Often in cases of gender-based violence, the state plays an indirect role in facilitating the violence. For example, the police may systemically fail to respond to allegations of domestic abuse or rape, or there may be excellent black letter laws in place on the books, but authorities just don't enforce them. Therefore, we submit that the presumption of safety should not apply in cases involving gender-based violence.

Another problematic provision is paragraph 117(9)(d) of the immigration and refugee protection regulations which requires that applicants for permanent residency disclose all relatives on their initial application. Any undisclosed relatives are ineligible to be sponsored in the future.

In the clinic's experience, non-disclosure is often incidental to or the result of either miscommunication, a failure to understand expectations and consequences, or pressure from external forces. Non-disclosure can jeopardize a woman's ability to sponsor her relatives in the future. To prevent these women from sponsoring their family members at a later point in their lives runs contrary to key fundamental objectives of Canadian immigration law, including family reunification, and unduly punishes women facing gender-based violence.

•(1640)

The clinic submits that the federal government should repeal paragraph 117(9)(d).

The next problematic piece of Canada's current immigration policies relates to how the caregiver program enables employers to exploit survivors of gender-based violence. Canada has had labour migration programs for live-in or home-based caregivers since the 1950s. The program was most recently restructured in November 2014. However, the restructuring maintained most of the elements of the earlier live-in caregiver program, which marginalizes migrant caregivers and introduces new challenges that create further risks of exploitation.

Migrant caregivers are able to work in Canada only on what are called tied work permits, which allow them to work only for a specific employer, doing a specific job at a specific location and for a limited time period. Any work that's done outside of those parameters is called undocumented work, which can render a migrant worker deportable or make them ineligible for future work or permanent residency.

The caregiver program enables employers to exploit migrant caregivers through wage theft, extremely long work hours and excessive work demands. Migrant caregivers are also often subject to sexual harassment or assault. The frequency of this issue has actually led the clinic to develop a specialized clinical program in advice for precarious workers who face economic coercion and sexual violence.

In February 2018 the government announced that it would be changing the current caregiver program, and it would end in November 2019. However, there have been no details as of yet regarding what that looks like.

Since 2017 the clinic has also seen a rise in the number of cases in which sponsored spouses and partners who leave relationships due to abuse and violence are investigated for marriage fraud. To penalize women for leaving abusive relationships is antithetical to Canada's continued claim to gender equality. Additionally, fraud investigations discourage women from leaving abusive situations and relationships, out of fear that they will erroneously be found guilty of fraud and deported. Sensitivity toward and an awareness of gender-based violence are necessary. Once it's determined that the spouse left the relationship because of gender-based violence, fraud investigations should cease. For these reasons, we urge Parliament to conduct a comprehensive gender-based analysis of the impact of Canada's immigration policies and procedures.

Changes to Canada's immigration regime must include a commitment to a gendered analysis, recognizing the unique pathways and drivers of migration for women, in a system that was designed with the migration patterns of men in mind.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hussan.

Mr. Syed Hussan (Coordinator, Migrant Workers Alliance for Change): Good afternoon.

My name is Syed Hussan, and I am the co-founder and coordinator of the Migrant Workers Alliance, Canada's largest migrant worker rights coalition. Our members represent almost all the self-organized migrant worker groups in Ontario. I also help steer the Migrants' Rights Network, a Canada-wide national body that aims to represent all self-organized migrant and refugee groups in the country.

On behalf of our organizations, we want to make four key recommendations that we believe this committee has not heard yet.

First, Canada must create permanent immigration programs for workers in low-wage streams. Specifically, care workers, farm workers and other temporary foreign workers in low-wage streams deemed low skilled must be allowed to come to Canada with permanent immigration status. Migrant and undocumented people already in the country must be given permanent immigration status. Levels and mixes of immigration must be revamped to ensure this change.

Second, Canada must immediately halt all deportations to Haiti and place a moratorium on deportations to countries that Canada has a travel advisory for.

Third, Canadian immigration and refugee policy must account for Canada's and its corporations' role in forced displacement, including the impact of Canadian mining companies, Canadian arms exports, and Canadian emissions on creating the conditions for migration.

Finally, we urge all political parties to not criminalize or politicize migration. We specifically call for an end to divisiveness and pitting migrants, refugees and citizens against each other.

Let me elaborate on these four recommendations.

First, it is important to note that there is nothing temporary about the temporary foreign worker program. The seasonal agricultural worker program is over half a century old. Women have been coming to perform care work in Canadian homes since Canada's very inception. So-called low-skilled work is a permanent need and part of our economy, particularly in the absence of a national care strategy. To deny permanent residency status to workers performing the essential work of raising our families, taking care of our sick and feeding our communities, and to assert simultaneously that they are temporary, is both inhumane and factually incorrect.

The caregiver program is expiring. It is a program where a pathway to permanent residency exists but is largely inaccessible. According to a study conducted by care worker organization members, which I'm submitting to the committee, the vast majority of migrant care workers are facing wage theft, labour exploitation, human rights violations, lack of dignified living arrangements, and physical and mental health deterioration due to family suppression.

A pathway is not available to many of the other migrant worker streams. This is not the case of a few bad employers. The structure of the program is such that abuse takes place. This is why care workers are calling for a federal care worker program.

A few weeks ago, director general Philippe Massé of ESDC presented to you an outline of steps taken by them to expand migrant worker rights. In my last meeting with the director general, I received information about a group of migrant Jamaican women who had been working for three straight months without a single day off, for over 12 hours a day, without full meals, working toilet facilities, breaks or livable sleeping arrangements. Upon asking for their basic rights, the employer drove them to the airport, handed them tickets, and watched them cross into customs.

Despite my sharing this information directly with the director general and his support staff, something almost no migrant worker can do, ESDC was not able to provide us with any basic guarantees or assist the workers, most of whom left. This is because the very principle aligning the temporary foreign worker program is to provide workers, deemed commodities, to employers, rather than to uphold worker rights.

The temporary foreign worker program cannot be fixed by minor tweaks or rights education. We need a fundamental restructuring away from temporariness towards permanent resident status upon arrival.

Second, Canada currently has a travel advisory issued for Haiti due to civil unrest, yet deportations to Haiti continue. This has put tremendous numbers of people at great risk. The federal government halted removals in November, but has since reinstated them. The same is true for removals to Somalia and other countries facing unrest. Canada's deportation policies must be brought into alignment with actual geopolitics. No one should be deported to places where their lives will be at risk.

Third, the global compact on migration, as you know, is a toothless, unenforceable document. After years of meetings and tremendous amounts of money spent, we deserve a global agreement that works to end displacement and ensures rights for migrants in receiving countries. The GCM fails to do both.

It is essential that immigration and refugee policies be closely linked to questions of accountability and responsibility. We cannot separate the question of Haitian refugees from that of Canada's complicity in the removal of the democratically elected President Aristide in 2004. We cannot separate the question of Filipino migrant workers from the well-documented and oft-criticized record of human rights abuses carried out by Canadian companies like OceanaGold and TVI Pacific. Neither can we separate the question of Yemeni refugees from that of Canada's arms sales or Canadian support for the Honduran government, which has impelled the migrant exodus.

•(1645)

Decisions about migration and refugees must be situated in this regard, and Canada must do more to end displacement and educate its officials and the general public about Canadian responsibility to migrant refugees' rights.

Last, we've seen political parties pit inland and overseas refugees against each other. The Conservative Party, whose actions in regard to migrant workers are a matter of public record, issued a statement in August 2018 suddenly calling for a path to permanent residency for foreign workers but insisting that we deserve status more than the Roxham Road border crossers.

We want to be absolutely clear. As a group of organizations that actually represent migrant refugees, we reject this division. As people in precarious work, we understand the ways in which poor and low-wage workers in Canada feel stretched in living from paycheque to paycheque. People are suffering economically. They need real change, and not to be riled up with xenophobia. Immigrants and refugees are not to blame for low wages, job loss or precarity. Such politics are neither responsible nor welcome.

We strongly urge all political parties to assert unity, not division, particularly as we enter the election year in 2019.

Thank you.

•(1650)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Mina.

Ms. La Trinidad Mina (Coordinator and Instructor, Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, Cowichan Intercultural Society, As an Individual): Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. It's a privilege to be part of this meeting today. Thank you very much for your invitation.

Today I'm going to share my own immigration journey to Canada and talk about the results and recommendations of my graduate student research.

My name is La Trinidad. I'm a Philippine national currently residing in Duncan, British Columbia. I hold a Master of Education in teaching English to speakers of other languages, and am currently completing my Master of Arts in language and literacy education at the University of British Columbia.

I teach immigrants and refugees in a rural setting. As a 35-year-old woman I am employed, I am advancing my education, and I am giving back to my community. I have two teenage children. My son is learning to play the violin and the flute, and my daughter has made it to her school's volleyball and basketball teams. They have been volunteering at the society and teaching new immigrant and refugee children.

My Canadian partner of almost seven years is a retired assistant school superintendent and a very loving house husband. Who do you think is taking care of the kids today? We pay our taxes. We get child care benefits. I could go on and on about how my life seems to be as mundane as everyone else's. I might as well complain about the weather, but the thing is, I wish my life had always been this boring.

Growing up in the Philippines was tough. My memories of school not only include understanding concepts and memorizing prayers, but also mastering wading through floodwaters while keeping my books dry. When I went to university, my daily 16-kilometre commute took almost two hours every day because of traffic. I dared not complain to my mother about all these things since she had survived Marcos's martial law.

My father was working in Hong Kong then so I didn't want to worry him either. We had everything we needed until somebody got sick. In the Philippines I was fighting natural, political and economic elements on a daily basis. The search for a better life outside the country seemed to come intuitively.

A few years after I finished university, I thought it was time to move out of the Philippines. I was married then. The children were still very young and the bills were piling up. We considered moving to the U.S. but the complexity and costs associated with the application process turned us off. After that we visited a Canadian immigration consultancy firm, but after we were assessed, they determined that we did not have enough points to get to Canada.

In December 2006, my husband at that time responded to a job ad to work in the United Arab Emirates, and after six weeks, he was gone. Nine months later, we arrived in Dubai as permanent residents. As you can imagine, it was extremely hot in the Emirates, but for six years, I had lots of tax-free income as a college instructor.

When my marriage ended and I found my partner, I left the U.A.E. In 2012 my partner and I moved to Thailand, and I studied Thai for a year on a student visa and then my work visa allowed me to teach English at Chiang Mai University. We had no firm plans to come to Canada until my partner was offered a job in Vancouver. I applied as an international student at UBC and then had to apply for a visa at a processing centre in Bangkok. After spending three months putting together the application, I was accepted in a diploma program at UBC, and my visa was approved in two and a half weeks. I arrived in YVR in June 2014.

I enjoyed the academic rigour at UBC and desired to stay permanently, so five months after my arrival, I lodged my PR application as a common-law partner living in Canada. Before going to classes, and between assignment submissions, I filled out more forms, collected documents, sought the help of our MP, Alistair MacGregor, and phoned the IRCC. The whole application process was a full-time job.

Finally, on May 19 of this year, I became a permanent resident and my children were able to join me in July.

• (1655)

In my master's thesis, I documented the home literacy practices of a Philippine child whose mother worked as a caregiver worker in Canada. I observed the child at home, collected artifacts and conducted some structured interviews for a period of six months.

My study aims to contribute to the literature and literacy practices of adolescent immigrants in Canada. It has a potential to provide information to parents, settlement workers in schools and classroom teachers about who these adolescents are and how to best support their needs.

The results of my study revealed a lot about the identity and community of this immigrant child. For the purposes of this meeting, let's call her Maria. She spends a lot of time studying alone at home. She's an award-winning artist and works part time to help her parents pay the bills. Her immediate community consists of Philippine friends and family living in Canada, followed by Philippine friends and family living in the Philippines, and finally, teachers and school counsellors in her school here in Canada.

It took her a while to realize what she really wanted to take at university as there was pressure to continue the path her mother had taken to become a caregiver worker just like her mother. In spring this year, she finally decided to take a degree related to medicine, but she had to delay her application to go to university because she didn't have the two prerequisite courses needed to get into the program. She had to miss a year of school, so for now she works full time at a fast-food chain.

In this study, one of my recommendations includes the strengthening of settlement programs for youth. This means giving guaranteed sufficient funding for the kind of work that settlement workers in schools do. These immigrant children are the future citizens of Canada. They should get all the support they need, including career planning, after-school and summer programs, and navigating the school and university systems in Canada.

Maria has a chance to become a very successful individual given the qualities that she already possesses. However, she's encountering setbacks that could have been avoided if she had been given timely support by settlement workers.

In summary, people's immigration to Canada can be long, painful and confusing. When they get here they need all the support to become part of the fabric of Canadian society. As I mentioned in my research, some youth need special supports so they can get reacquainted with their parents and get to know Canada.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you, witnesses, for your presentations.

We now turn to the members who will be asking you some questions.

Mr. Sarai, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): I'll start with you, Ms. Mina.

Your story seems to be an almost perfect immigrant story. You followed all the rules. Your process time seemed to be very efficient in terms of getting your student visa and getting processed here. You learned here. You moved to a town that needs people. You teach. Your family seems to be doing very well.

What advice would you have for a potential student who would want to come to study in Canada? What would be the smart things to do: hire a consultant or not hire a consultant, move in a big city versus a small city, or study in a big city versus a small city? At the end of the day, where should one settle—again big city versus small town—where one might need and appreciate you more and the cost of living is less?

I think it's imperative for people to see that. I see a lot of times that the first and only thing a student is looking at is how they can get into any place or college in Canada. Then afterwards they have to deal with the consequences of either taking electives or courses that weren't important for them or weren't helpful in finding a job.

What advice would you have?

• (1700)

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: I think as a researcher and as a graduate student, I would find a university that would support the research or the interests I would like to pursue. I think that's what pushes the research, that's what affects policy and that's what makes changes to the society.

It's also important to know where these universities are, and, of course, know their reputation in academia.

It's quite hard to make a decision on that aspect because most of the universities that are reputable are in big cities and it's hard to find affordable accommodation there. However, the communities are already settled in those places, so if a person would like to find the Chinese community in Vancouver, it's quite easy to navigate. It's quite easy to find a community, although one has to pay the consequences. You have to be able to afford to live in a place like Vancouver.

As far as immigration is concerned, I think it's important to know how to navigate the system and what the end goal is. Is the person really trying to get educated and stay, or get educated and go back to their home country? How do we navigate all those choices?

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

My second question is for Yasmine.

Yasmine, we come across a lot of cases in my constituency office, particularly with regard to marriage fraud, as well as spousal abuse. Getting that balance is very hard.

I recall that Mr. McCallum, the former immigration minister, made a choice to reverse a decision that was made by the minister of immigration prior to him, who was a Conservative, but there was a stepped process for PRs for spouses. The person would have to wait two years and then do a post interview. That was to see if that person was still around. It was to prevent marriage fraud. We saw that a lot of spouses stayed in abusive relationships in order to avoid being deported or sent back, so they were really taking a lot of abuse. For that reason, the previous minister and the department changed that.

Now you're saying that in cases of fraud investigations there are concerns. I agree with you in terms of where abuse is determined. I think that's hard for an officer to determine until a court makes a decision on whether an assault took place or not versus arbitrary evidence of he-said-she-said.

How do you balance marital fraud with abuse until you get a court decision? I would like your advice because I sincerely would like to know. We get those cases, and it's a very tough option to deal with. I also see a lot of people, men and women, duped by people who pretend to want to marry them, but as soon as they land, they leave them. We want to make sure that those people aren't abusing the system.

Do you have any ideas on that?

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: I can't really speak to that, but I can tell you what we see often in the clinic. At least in our experience there, we often see that since the conditional permanent residence scheme that required, like you said, the spouses to live together for two years before permanent residency would be finalized.... That was removed, and that was a good move forward.

However, when the spouse who was experiencing violence leaves the abusive situation, what we've often seen is that the abuser will send what we call a poison pen letter to the IRCC stating that this woman—in our case, because we serve women at the clinic, it's always a woman—left him and that she was using him to get status in Canada. What they don't understand is the abuse that she took throughout the course of their marriage and the fact that she left as a result of abuse.

She won't even know that this letter went out from her spouse, her ex-partner, asserting fraud until she's called in to an admissibility hearing or a misrepresentation hearing. At that point, she's standing in front of an officer and trying to prove that, yes, her marriage was genuine and, yes, she left because of abuse.

Again, because she was in an abusive situation, she doesn't have all the documentation. She was an immigrant woman. She might have been afraid to approach the police. There are so many factors surrounding—

• (1705)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Sorry, because of time, I'm trying to get to a quicker answer.

Have you seen cases where women have been abused or have claimed abuse and been deported based on that? You're saying that the hearing process is a tougher process, and it needs to be better. I have not seen too many cases where, as a result of a claim of fraud, somebody has been removed. Are you saying that women have been removed?

The Chair: Please be very brief.

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: Yes, we have seen cases where poison pen letters have had severe consequences on our clients. They come to us looking—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Were they consequences that were removals?

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: No. There were threats of removals or, at least, hearings. At that point we try to find another stream, or we assist with the misrepresentation.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses today for all of their presentations here. It's most important to deal with these issues as we develop our package for migration challenges.

Before I get into it, the last set of witnesses were dealing with both skilled workers—self-sufficient persons—and those who are basically refugees and don't have the skills, so high skills and low skills. Can I just ask each of you what your thoughts are in this regard? The question of how compassionate Canada should be came up in the questions. We're all compassionate. We all believe that we need migration into Canada. We're short of labour in many areas, as each of you pointed out.

What would you suggest would be the best means of dealing with the types of people we bring into the country? Should they be those who are self-sufficient, have the resources and can be self-sustaining, and virtually—if I could put it this way—be no burden to the government or the taxpayers? Or should we be bringing in people who may be able to be that way as well, but are more likely to be low-skilled and are coming in because they are being persecuted in their countries that they're leaving? I guess that doesn't really depend on the skill level. They could be persecuted at both high and low levels. Which type of person should we be bringing in, if there's a limited number that you can bring in and relocate in the world, regarding the 64 million refugees who are presently out there?

Mr. Syed Hussan: Why don't I try.

I think there are so many different things you're talking about, and you're mixing them all up.

First of all, we don't have to talk about compassion; we have to talk about responsibility and accountability. Canada profits from displacement. Canadian corporations are responsible for creating the conditions that force migration, so that has to be part of the equation: it's about taking responsibility.

Second, the idea that low-skilled workers are a burden on the government is completely, factually incorrect. We know for a fact that many, many people.... Who's deemed low-skilled in this country? They are care workers and people who grow our food. They are not burdens. Without them, our entire economy would collapse. We don't have national child care. We are a growing services-based economy with an aging population. There are low-skilled—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Excuse me, I'm very well aware that we are short on labour. To your point about the temporary foreign workers and that sort of thing, later on I'd like to ask about that as well. We're very aware that we could use all the high-level and low-skilled workers, basically, who may want to apply to come in right now. My colleague was asking at what levels that should be. It's not a matter of being a burden. It's a matter of how they get integrated into Canada. Should we be bringing people in who are most in danger of losing their lives versus anyone else?

Mr. Syed Hussan: I think we should be bringing in a mix of people, including those who are most at risk, as well as people whom we are responsible for displacing. That's the part of the equation that's just not being considered, that forced migration is not a separate question from displacement. Why are these people migrating in the first place? That has to be brought into the conversation.

•(1710)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Would anyone else care to answer that?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: I can only speak to how, if Canada would like to harness all the good talents that international students have, the effect in their home countries would be brain drain. How does that affect their home countries? Is Canada's plan to get all these talented people and leave the home countries on their own? I think it's a balance of what our priorities are, of what our values are.

Mr. Larry Maguire: That's why I'm asking about those most persecuted. They may have low skills or they may have high skills and they may be highly educated. I'm just asking who we should be accepting, those who are most in danger of losing their lives or others.

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: I can't answer. Sorry.

Mr. Syed Hussan: There needs to be a massive expansion of the government-sponsored refugee system, which is actually being made smaller and smaller and being turned into a private refugee sponsorship system. Part of the conversation has to be an expansion of government-assisted refugees themselves. I think we need to separate.... What is happening here, as you're essentially saying, is inland refugees versus overseas refugees. They're being pitted against each other. This kind of....

People will come, whatever path is available to them. They might come as refugees, international students, foreign workers, because that's the path that's forced upon them. That's not a fundamental characteristic of who they are. We need to expand the system and we need to stop trying to treat all of these categories as opposites to each other.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Okay, I agree.

What does Canada need to do to eliminate some of these backlogs that we have of people who have come to our borders, in order to make sure that we can get them into the workforce in a proper amount of time rather than having to wait a year and a half before they even get a hearing? What do we need to do to speed up that process, to get them into the workforce as quickly as we can, or make sure that the people who are coming in are the ones who are actually going to be legally allowed into Canada?

There are those who are being sent back out of the country or deported again—a smaller proportion—but how do we sort that out? What is the best way of doing it? There certainly is a huge backlog right now, and it's eroding the confidence of Canadians in regard to our immigration process.

Mr. Syed Hussan: The reason there is a backlog is that there is a quota. There is essentially a ceiling and people aren't being processed. In addition, the IRB, the ID, all of these divisions don't have enough members. The bigger issue is that the levels and mix are not responsive to the reality.

Let me speak to international students. There are about 400,000 international students coming into the country each year, but there are fewer than 300,000 people coming into the country as permanent residents. A lot of these students want to live here as permanent residents. Ten years from now, they're going to become undocumented. We have members across the country who are students, who are not getting PR.

Our problem is that we're not understanding that the entire immigration system needs to have more people come in, and with a broader and a different mix than is currently in place.

The Chair: I need to end it there. Sorry.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for their presentations.

It's important to note that government-assisted refugees, inland asylum seekers—which is under the protected persons stream—immigrants and so on are all under different streams. To somehow create an environment where they are competing against each other is a false dichotomy. I had to say that and put that on the record.

Ms. Abuzgaya, I think you raised really critical issues around the safety of women—sexual violence, violence against women, domestic violence and so on—and the fact that women need to seek asylum because of that.

You mentioned that the United States, under the current administration, is not a safe country anymore, and therefore, you say that the safe third country agreement should be suspended.

On the flip side of it, the Conservatives argue that we should in fact apply the safe third country agreement to the entire border. Within the government, Minister Blair is in fact considering that because he did not refuse to entertain that at the public safety committee.

I would just like to have your quick comments on that aspect, please.

• (1715)

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: Very quickly, I think we can say, at least from the clinic's perspective, that we believe the current U.S. administration has not really been standing up for its human rights obligations in regard to asylum seekers who present themselves at their borders. We see this with the migrant caravan dilemma that they've been facing, specifically the fact that they're not allowing these people who come to the border to even seek asylum when they are legally allowed to do so.

For us as Canadians to say, “You people who have come to the United States, you can't even seek asylum, but the minute you come to the Canadian borders, we're going to say 'Hey, you're already in a safe country'” means there is a huge gap there.

Do you see what I'm saying?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, thank you. I think what you're saying, if I can interpret that correctly—which, by the way, other witnesses at this committee have stated—is that if Canada suspends the safe third country agreement, we're not forcing people to risk their lives to

cross over irregularly. We would then actually have orderly migration where people would show up at the official point of entry and be able to make their claim, and then they would go through the IRB process and be assessed accordingly, to determine whether or not their claim is a legitimate refugee claim.

I think that is what I understood.

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: Yes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Hussan, I think that's one of the key issues for all migrants, whether they be caregivers or otherwise. I think what I heard you say is that Canada should adopt a policy that clearly states that if you're good enough to work here, you're good enough to stay. That is permanent residence on arrival.

Mr. Syed Hussan: Absolutely.

Historically care workers used to come here as permanent residents, and that was taken away. We know that historically most of the first wave of settlers were given land and encouraged to come here as farmers and given permanent residency. It is when racialized poor people from the global south started coming here and working... When I talk about 12 hours of work, no breaks and lack of decent, dignified living, this is what people's experiences are. If people are working here, they should be able to get permanent status on arrival.

I want to add that we want to make sure that even if people are so-called “not good enough to work” then they shouldn't be deemed inadmissible, for example, for medical reasons. We want to create a society where everyone should be able to come here and live with dignity.

Very quickly, if the safe third country agreement is expanded, people will continue to come but in more and more risky situations. Migration is not going to stop until displacement stops. If people need to move, they will move. If we make it harder, we're just putting their lives more at risk.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: On the issue of different people with different skill sets or different abilities, I think you might be referring to Canada's policy on medical inadmissibility whereby we have a policy that discriminates against people with disabilities. Are you suggesting that Canada should repeal that section of the discriminatory law that exists in our immigration act?

Mr. Syed Hussan: Absolutely. Paragraph 38(1)(c) is inhumane. It is discriminatory. It's against Canada's international obligations. It couldn't even stand up in court. As thousands of people have argued, it should be repealed.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Yasmine, I asked you about the safe third country agreement, but I'm also going to ask you about immigration policy. Should Canada adopt the principle that if you're good enough to work, you're good enough to stay, and therefore be a permanent resident on arrival...and likewise on the issue of medical inadmissibility?

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: I echo my friend here with regard to his assertions that we absolutely need to have live-in caregivers and other migrant workers to have permanent residency on arrival. We also believe that section 31 on medical inadmissibility should be repealed. We also have concerns surrounding the financial inadmissibility piece, but I won't go into too much detail regarding that at the moment.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I know this might be a little further afield, but it's still an important issue that Canada defines family differently than a lot of communities today. People look at their siblings, who may be adults, or their aunts and uncles, part of their extended family network, as part of their immediate family. Our immigration policy does not recognize that. Do you think that should be changed? We used to have an immigration stream whereby a sibling could sponsor another sibling to come. We no longer have that. Should we be changing our definition of family to recognize extended family as part of the family unit?

• (1720)

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: Absolutely. I agree with those statements 100%. Some immigration streams are available for siblings who want to sponsor other siblings, but they're extremely limited and they don't encompass how people perceive their families. I think it is completely contrary to Canada's objective of reunification of families and the other policy objectives they have.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Mr. Hussan.

The Chair: That's it.

Mr. Whalen.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Mina, congratulations on your great success in Canada. I certainly thank you for all your work in helping with the resettlement of new Canadians and teaching them English. Your children as well should be commended for their volunteerism.

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: Thank you.

Mr. Nick Whalen: You stopped in many different countries before finally arriving in Canada to settle. Why didn't you settle in one of those other countries, and why did you ultimately choose Canada?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: It was easier. It was easy to get employment. The processing times are much faster. They definitely ask for the same number of documents, like passport and employment history and educational background and all those documents, but then to get permanent residency took a long time. As a young person at that time, it was not easy for me to navigate all the channels to get permanent residency.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Was it easier to become a permanent resident in Canada than in any of the other countries?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: It was easier to get permanent residency in the United Arab Emirates than to get it here.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, so why did you choose Canada instead of the United Arab Emirates?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: I was thinking about the future of my children. In the United Arab Emirates, I wouldn't be able to raise them as.... My children wouldn't be able to play outside, for

example. When they arrived at YVR in June, they went out of the airport and my son said, "Ma, the air is so clean." He wouldn't have said that anywhere else in the world. Those small things made a difference, and I know that in Canada they will have a good future. They will be contributing citizens of their new country.

Mr. Nick Whalen: You talk about support that's available to people being settled in Canada. Should they have more support than is available to Canadians who are already here?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: Actually, I think it's a win-win for everybody if there is support for them. They are new to the country and they don't know how to navigate the school system. They don't know where everything is. They don't know where to start, and they don't know how to plan their careers in Canada. It's important that those channels are addressed so that they can be independent and contribute on their own.

What I'm hearing is that our budget for settlement workers in schools is being reduced or it's not there. It's hard to offer all these programs and then stop them and then do it again. It's quite hard.

Mr. Nick Whalen: You've done some research on the Filipino community and I'm assuming the Filipino community, like many communities of new Canadians, is very interested in family reunification. Are you picking up any trends in that community as to whether or not they feel that removing the safe third country agreement and allowing more irregular migration might actually limit the ability for them to get their parents into the country? Do they see unfairness in the system? How is that dynamic playing out?

Ms. La Trinidad Mina: I haven't heard of that.

Mr. Nick Whalen: That's good to hear. I'm glad to hear that's not the case.

Mr. Hussan, you said the temporary foreign worker program is inhumane. Do you have any qualifications you'd like to make to that statement?

Mr. Syed Hussan: I did not say it was inhumane. I said the treatment of workers in the system is inhumane. I'll give you one example. On average, our members work between 12 and 14 hours a day. They work six to seven days a week. They don't have breaks when they're working on farms. There are no toilet facilities available.

• (1725)

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, so we're talking about worker conditions.

We've actually also seen documentation that suggests the hourly wage paid by companies that employ temporary foreign workers, at least in Atlantic Canada, is actually 30¢ less than what is paid by the companies that don't. That's in the same industry.

You also said it doesn't have an impact on wages. Do you have a qualification you'd like to make to that statement, that immigrant workers don't put downward pressure on wages?

Mr. Syed Hussan: It's not the workers who put pressure on wages. It's the laws that reduce minimum wage. It's the fact that you've created a temporary system where people are tied to the employer and can get deported if they speak up. Have you ever—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Sorry, sir, are you saying that we should expand the number of people who can come in as workers so that they just come as permanent residents, and that we eliminate the temporary foreign worker program?

Mr. Syed Hussan: I'm saying a few different things.

One, there should be streams for permanent immigration for low-wage and so-called low-skilled workers. I don't believe they're low-skilled; they're deemed low-skilled. Two, there should be an increase in minimum wage laws. Three, there should be anti-reprisal protections.

In the meantime, there should be open work permits. There should be permits for workers facing abuse. For example, in Atlantic Canada, what's happening—

Mr. Nick Whalen: Yes, of course, but what countries are doing it better? You're pointing out a lot of flaws in our system, but I'm wondering what countries are doing this better.

Mr. Syed Hussan: It's important to understand that Canada has more responsibility because it's profited from the displacement of those people. When we talk about the conditions here being better, it's because they are worse there. We say we are here because you are there. This is what we have to deal with. You have to put this into the context of global migration patterns. We're not leaving our homes in search of better jobs because Canada is better. We're leaving our homes because corporations, banks and the global economic system have made it impossible for us to live with dignity in places we've called home.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Ms. Abuzgaya, you had mentioned—or perhaps I misheard—that Canada's immigration system perpetuates gender-based violence. I wonder if you'd like to qualify that statement and also answer this question: What country is doing it better?

Ms. Yasmine Abuzgaya: To qualify that statement would be quite extensive. I believe you can refer to our written submissions that we have provided to the committee, which go into far more detail in the exact manners in which the Canadian immigration system and policies perpetuate and act as a vehicle of gender-based violence.

As for what countries are doing it better, I would flip that statement on its head a little bit and think about what standard Canada wants to hold itself to. Are we only in the business of comparing ourselves to other western countries or do we have certain standards and values that we would like to uphold?

The Chair: I need to end it there.

Mr. Maguire, I can give you one minute, and then I want one minute for the committee.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Mr. Hussan, the seasonal agricultural workers program, you mentioned, has been in place for 50 years. It's one of the solutions of the four that you had. Of course the seasonal agricultural workers are not part of the migrant stream. They come in for eight months and they go home again.

Can you elaborate on whether you're in favour of that program, given that these people are voluntarily coming into the country?

They're working the hours they want to work. They have housing and food provided, those sorts of things. Can you elaborate on that for me?

Mr. Syed Hussan: We have members who've been coming into the seasonal agriculture program for 35-plus years. They've come every year for 35 years. They are not temporary workers. They've spent more than the majority of their lives here. They want to be here with their families. At the least, they want to be able to change bad jobs. At the least, they want their families to be able to visit with them. At the least, they want to be able to not actually live in employer-provided housing, which is completely inhumane, by and large.

Not just that, but they have no say in the writing of the contracts that are state to state. Most agricultural workers across the different provinces are exempt from labour protections: minimum wage, overtime pay and ability to unionize. To call this a choice is a complete misrepresentation of what is actually happening, which is maximum exploitation of people.

What we are calling for is that those people should be able to come here with permanent resident status. Those who are here already should be given permanent resident status. They deserve that and much more.

As one example, just in Ontario, agricultural workers paid over \$385 million into EI and did not take a cent back last year. They are actually paying into the system. Canada needs to actually compensate people by giving them permanent residency. That is the absolute minimum that can be done—

● (1730)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Because we're running out of time, I'd like to interrupt to say I agree that there is quite a difference between the seasonal agricultural workers and the temporary foreign workers you were talking about.

The Chair: I do need to end it there.

Thank you, witnesses, but stay here for a minute. I just want to give the committee a few dates to keep in mind.

This is a reminder that we won't be meeting this Thursday. That meeting is not called.

This study is coming to an end. We've asked the analysts to come with a summary of evidence. We've asked that it be available January 21—that's a working date, a goal of January 21. You should receive a summary of evidence of the study to date.

To back up from that, it means we then need to begin the settlement services study. It's the only study that's now agreed to. You've already all submitted your witness lists. I'd ask that you review your witness lists for settlement services, if you want, and make any changes to them by January 7. We have a long list of witnesses, but you just might want to take a look at that.

We will resume on January 28 with a business meeting where we'll consider the summary of evidence, and you'll decide whether you want to hear more witnesses on the migration study. We'll begin on January 30 with the settlement services study. That will be for five meetings. The motion calls for seven. We'll have five meetings, and I'm going to reserve a couple of meetings in late February in case you want more witnesses on the migration study.

Right now what you need to know is this: January 7, review your lists; January 21, expect the summary of evidence, God willing, inshallah. On January 28, we'll have a business meeting to consider the summary of evidence to see if you want more witnesses on this study. On January 30, we'll begin with five witnesses, probably beginning with departmental officials. Then we will continue with the settlement services study until the draft report is ready for consideration. Then we'll consider that.

One last note is that you'll remember we passed a motion with respect to travel. We have not heard back. The buzz seems to be that it will not be a unanimous consent motion this week, but we haven't heard anything official on that.

Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Will the—

The Chair: Sorry, Ms. Kwan is first.

I didn't see you.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

Thanks for that update, Mr. Chair.

I know that in the last appearance with the minister we lost some time with him, for reasons that I won't go into. We all experienced it.

Given that, and with this study coming to an end, I would like to suggest that we ask the minister to come back to discuss the levels plan. We haven't had an opportunity to do that effectively, I think, with the minister, because of the various interruptions that have occurred.

Mr. Chair, if that needs to be moved as a motion, I'm happy to do that, or give notice of the motion.

The Chair: There is a motion that was made, I believe, by Mr. Tilson, but wasn't presented....

Mr. David Tilson: No.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: No. It was rejected.

Mr. David Tilson: I gave an excellent presentation.

The Chair: You did present it, and it was defeated.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It was rejected, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Yes, it was defeated.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd like to bring that back.

The Chair: I don't think it's allowed to present a motion of the same nature to one that has been defeated. It would have to be a different motion. You might want to think about a different motion. We wouldn't consider the same motion a second time, a motion that has been defeated.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay.

Mr. David Tilson: Unless there is unanimous consent.

The Chair: That's true, if there's unanimous consent.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm sure they'll consider it.

The Chair: Do I have unanimous consent?

I don't see that.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: In that case—

Mr. Randeep Sarai: It would be your Christmas gift.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Then I would like to make the suggestion, given that the motion the last time, to my recollection, was to strictly discuss the levels plan, that perhaps we invite the minister to come back to talk about the levels plan in conjunction with the upcoming budget and the IRB processing related to the levels plan and the streams to that. It would be all three components that we could have a discussion about with the minister.

• (1735)

The Chair: I would need a notice of motion for that, if it is truly a different motion.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It is.

The Chair: I'm not sure it is a different motion, frankly. I need to think about that. But I would need a notice of motion.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'll be happy to table one.

The Chair: Mr. Tilson.

Mr. David Tilson: Will our hours of meeting change?

The Chair: Yes.

We understand, informally—I don't have it formally yet—that we can expect to be meeting on Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:30 to 5:30. It's slightly better than Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 to 5:30.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes.

The Chair: I wish you all a good holiday. We'll see you in January.

The meeting is adjourned.

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