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# Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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**Tuesday, June 7, 2016**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Good morning. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on March 8, the committee will resume its study on the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees.

Appearing before us today are Mr. Brian Dyck, national migration and resettlement program coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee Canada; Reverend Majed El Shafie, founder and president of One Free World International; and, in a change, Ms. Leslie Emory, board director of the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants.

Welcome. Each panellist has seven minutes for an initial presentation.

Mr. Dyck, we will start with you.

**Mr. Brian Dyck (National Migration and Resettlement Program Coordinator, Mennonite Central Committee Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this opportunity to come before you today to talk about our part in the efforts to respond to the Syrian crisis. Canada's private sponsorship of the refugees program has been an important part of Canada's humanitarian immigration program, and it's important to understand how it fits with the current context of refugee resettlement in Canada.

The Mennonite Central Committee was the first non-governmental organization to sign a sponsorship agreement, in March 1979. We have continued to be a part of refugee resettlement work with Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches in Canada, as well as other partners over the years, to bring tens of thousands of refugees to Canada. We've also been involved in relief, development, and peace-building around the world.

We are currently involved in the largest operation in our 96-year history. Between donations from our sponsors and grants from the Canadian government, which we are very grateful for, and others, we have spent \$35 million U.S. on programming for supporting displaced people in the Middle East, with about half of that money going to support displaced people still in Syria.

Resettlement of Syrians and Iraqis is something we started looking at promoting in a bigger way at the beginning of last year, in 2015. We developed plans to raise awareness about resettlement and the role it could play. Then, in September, when the picture of Alan Kurdi hit social media, we set aside our awareness campaign and

started answering the many phone calls and emails coming into our offices.

Our response as a sponsorship agreement holder, SAH, has taken three basic forms.

First, we and other SAHs have often been the first place that people turn to for information about refugees and about refugee situations in general. Our staff in the provinces we work in, from British Columbia to Ontario, went out to countless information nights that had crowds of a size we'd never seen before. People wanted to know more. They wanted to know how to get involved.

Second, once groups were formed, we walked with them through the settlement commitments they were making, helping them match up with often the blended visa office referred profiles that were coming out from the government. In other cases, we worked with people in Canada who had family members who were refugees in the more complicated process of filling out the sponsorship application forms and filing them with the Canadian government.

Third, we helped these groups, once the arrivals started to happen, to sort out arrival details and to navigate the first full days of helping someone settle into a new home.

There have been some challenges in this process. First and foremost is keeping up with the demand of our constituents and others who want to work with us. We've had so many new groups coming to us, in addition to the groups we've always worked with over the years, and there's been a steep learning curve for many of these groups. It has been a challenge.

Second, it has been difficult to get blended visa office referred profiles all the time. There are hundreds of groups across Canada still waiting to get involved, and the number of profiles that the visa officers can provide is limited. However, one positive development because of this is that groups are coming to us and asking who else they can help. It has been exciting to see that while last year we as the Mennonite Central Committee had a tenfold increase in the number of sponsorships we have submitted, it was not just Syrians and Iraqis; many other populations benefited from this.

Third, the frenetic pace of the arrivals during the surge was nearly overwhelming as we tried to make sure that the right people got information about arrivals. In addition to that, some of the blended VOR profiles came with high needs. It has been a challenge to find the resources for that, but we have been working with that, and in the early days it appears it's still going well.

As we look ahead, I think there are a number of things we need to keep an eye on. First, we want to make sure that the help that this refugee population is getting does not divert help from other populations. We have been hearing from the government that they want to continue to deal with the backlogs of other populations around the world, where people can wait for up to five years, sometimes more, for a decision to be made.

Second, we anticipate that Syrian refugees, like other populations, will have sponsorship needs themselves. They will look to us to help them find ways to get their family members here. That's something we'll need to think about as we go. We'll need to make sure, in the years ahead, that's part of the plans for immigration levels going forward.

Finally, we want to make sure that the refugee resettlement in this context does not overwhelm, that we think about this in the context of everything else that's going on. MCC believes that while resettlement plays an important role in mitigating suffering and is good for Canada and the hosts who supply support, it's important for us to make sure that the focus is on the root causes of forced migration, and trying to deal with it is important in diplomacy, peace building, relief aid, and development.

Thank you.

• (1110)

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

Reverend El Shafie, you have seven minutes, please.

Thank you.

**Rev Majed El Shafie (Founder and President, One Free World International):** Mr. Chair, respectful members, thank you for having me here today.

On September 2, 2015, the world woke up to a small child by the name of Alan Kurdi face down on the beach. That's when the rest of the world started to react, to do something with regard to the refugees, having known it had been happening for the last four years. The picture of Alan Kurdi was not new.

One Free World International has been operating with different refugees on the ground for the last 13 years in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Syria. Next month we will be taking members of Parliament to the Soleimani and the Kobani areas to witness the situation there on the ground, not just helping the refugees here but helping the refugees there as well.

One of the MPs who joined us in the past, Mr. Brad Butt, is behind me here, and I want to acknowledge his presence. In the last year or so there were conversations about the migrant crisis, which is how the media labelled it, but I cannot disagree more. They are not migrants. They are refugees. They are legitimate refugees and that's

what we should call them, not migrants. They didn't leave their countries of their own choice. They were forced to leave their home.

Before we speak about resettling the refugees here in Canada, we obviously have to talk about jobs, education, access to health care. There are way more important things before we even get to this point, even before the refugees get on a plane to come to Canada. More issues have to be discussed.

The first step is to discuss the source of the problem. Without dealing with the source of the problem, I can guarantee there will be more refugees. It doesn't matter how many you take here in Canada, there will be more and more refugees. It's not a matter that 25,000 came here to Canada; it's a matter of the five million refugees that are elsewhere right now. Without dealing with the situation in Syria, in Iraq, this issue will not be resolved. Dealing with the source as an international community, as Canadians, as part of NATO is the only way to end this refugee crisis.

The second step is green zones. We've been working very closely with the refugees there. Many of the refugees indicated to us that they don't want to leave their home. It doesn't matter what you want to think about it, but many of the refugees do not want to leave home. They want to be in an area protected by NATO troops, by UN troops, known as a green zone, and to return home if they wish after the war is over. We have to understand it's not easy to leave your home, your roots, your language, your friends, your neighbourhood. Many of these people would love to stay home, but in a protected area known as a green zone.

On the third step, the original resettlement, there's one question I need an answer for. I have no idea why countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Dubai are not taking any of the refugees. Everybody is talking about Europe, Canada and the United States while these Arab Muslim countries are wealthy, share the same language, traditions, culture, even the jokes. If I told you an Egyptian joke right now, you would not laugh. The fact and the reality is that one question that we have to understand and we have to ask the international community is why none of these Arab Muslim countries are taking more refugees and trying to help on the ground.

• (1115)

The resulting regional resettlement we are talking about, what I call the chosen ones, the ones we chose, came to our attention through the work on the ground. Most of the 25,000 Syrian refugees who came to Canada are Sunni Muslims. Now, I don't have a problem with Sunni Muslims.

Listen, I'm a man who used to be in prison. I'm a man who was tortured for his faith back home in Egypt, so I will not be talking to you in political correctness. I will be talking to you in honesty.

It's not about the fact that most if not all of the 25,000 are Sunnis. I don't have a problem with Sunnis, but my question here is why none of them are what we call the vulnerable minority. Why are none of them Christians? Why are none of them Yezidis? Why are none of them Ismailis? Why are none of them Muslim Shiites? Why are none of them Druze?

If today, it was a Conservative government and they brought in 25,000 Christians, we would not hear the end of it. The truth is that I would not even be happy if all of the 25,000 they brought in were Christians, because there are more and more vulnerable minorities that need to be helped.

We have to help the most vulnerable minorities. We cannot be politically correct about it, and we cannot count only on the UNHCR or the United Nations. There are many other organizations on the ground that can also be assets to us and help us. We have to be fair.

When the refugees arrive, there are many challenges they face. At One Free World International, we worked on a closed project with over 600 families here from Syria. We did a project to bring previous refugees to work with the newcomer refugees. We were able to build bridges between old refugees who came here to the country and new refugees who just arrived.

**The Chair:** Reverend El Shafie, you have 15 seconds.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** In my last 15 seconds, I don't want you to think I am anti-immigrant. I don't want you to think that I'm anti-Syrian, or something like that. I used to be a refugee myself. I came to this country 13 years ago. I ate as a refugee. I drank as a refugee. I bled as a refugee. But with all due respect, there is nothing more important to me than the safety and security of Canada, and the fairness of our process. I am here for the refugees.

Thank you, sir.

**The Chair:** Ms. Emory, you have seven minutes please.

**Ms. Leslie Emory (Board Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI)):** Good morning, committee members, and thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today.

The Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, OCASI, represents the collective voice of Ontario organizations serving immigrants and refugees. We have over 230 member agencies across the province.

OCASI is supportive of the government's decision to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada. In fact, we joined our 10 sister umbrella organizations across Canada to issue a news release in December 2015 to affirm the support of the national immigrant and refugee serving sector for this initiative.

We are proud of the way our sector stepped up to meet the challenge, sometimes at personal cost to many of the front-line workers who went above and beyond. OCASI acknowledges that there were challenges overall, including for our sector, and there are aspects of our program delivery and structure that may need to be strengthened.

Despite all the challenges, we believe this experience demonstrated our strength. It demonstrated the value that we provide: one, through services and programming; two, through strengthening community capacity and leadership; and three, in supporting individuals and families on their journey to becoming Canadians.

In September 2015, we collectively issued a set of recommendations on how Canada should respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. We believe these recommendations are still relevant, even more so today. I will mention some of them here.

The first is on improving family-linked admissions. Flexible measures, such as temporary resident permits, should be introduced for Syrians with family in Canada. We recommended that 10,000 government-assisted refugees be admitted by the end of 2015, and we are happy to see that the government exceeded that number. However, the fact that the government shut down the infrastructure after reaching the 25,000 target left a bad taste and threatened the goodwill that had been created in the Canadian public. We welcome the announcement that these resources are to be restored.

Regarding the facilitation of private sponsorship of Syrians, the government has supported the efforts of private sponsors, including efforts to restore full access to interim federal health coverage to privately sponsored refugees. The risk of large medical costs no longer deters sponsors. However, much more can be done. In particular, we should work to reduce the red tape for sponsorship applications and make processing of applications faster.

The government must allocate significantly more resources, human, financial, and logistical, in order to realize these recommendations. In particular, it should allocate more resources for processing and allocate additional resources for overseas visa offices so that refugees can arrive more quickly. The government should alleviate the pressure on the visa offices by transferring some of the overseas processing of visas to an office in Canada. The government should continue to provide timely information through the government website, and to set up a hotline to answer questions and facilitate processing. At present, much of the burden of providing information is taken up by community-based organizations and by other groups that are often not resourced to do this work.

On the importance of maintaining responses to other refugees, we strongly urge the committee to recommend that the needs of other refugees must also be met, including the many refugees from sub-Saharan Africa who are in precarious situations in the Middle East and Europe. They should receive the same courtesies that are given to Syrian refugees.

In addition to refugee resettlement, there is an urgent need to fast-track family reunification for Syrian refugees as well as refugees from other countries.

OCASI believes there are additional priorities that need to be taken into consideration going forward. Canadians have opened their hearts, their minds, their homes and communities to create the space for so many people to be involved in refugee resettlement. This should be supported by the government.

The resettlement experience has highlighted for the immigrant and refugee serving sector that many challenges still need to be addressed, and there are gaps we have to fill, such as the lack of formal coordinating systems, including for service delivery and case management.

• (1120)

We see several areas for improvement, including the need for more funding that should flow faster, the need for more resources and information to support the work, and the need for improved communication between government and the sector at all levels.

In Ontario, we are thankful that the provincial government made its funding commitment several months before the federal government, allowing many service delivery organizations to prepare their capacity. Six years of federal funding cuts to settlement have had a detrimental impact on the sector, including capacity, especially in trained and experienced staff.

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative highlighted the critical need for investment in social housing and the need for strategy and action on a national housing initiative. It further highlighted the need for a poverty reduction strategy, including an increase in social assistance rates, the monthly income that is given to government-assisted refugees. It also highlighted the need for rent subsidies.

We ask you to recommend that the government immediately end the transportation loan scheme, which only serves to further impoverish a group that is already facing significant financial challenges.

The Syrian refugee resettlement initiative highlighted the need for affordable and appropriate child care, more language classes for different levels of learners, and different service times outside of the usual daytime classes in many more locations.

**The Chair:** Ms. Emory, you have 15 seconds.

• (1125)

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** Finally, the experience highlighted the ongoing need for public education on anti-Islamophobia, anti-xenophobia, and anti-racism. We are happy that the City of Toronto, the province, and other stakeholders such as the Red Cross have stepped up to counter the narrative of exclusion. The federal government must also step up by mounting a public education campaign on Canada's refugee and humanitarian programs.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara, please, for seven minutes.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all of you for being here. Thank you for the work you've done and continue to do. This committee wants to thank you for all the hard work you've been doing.

Mr. Dyck, I want to ask you about the Mennonite Central Committee. In my region, the Waterloo region, they've done a tremendous amount of work. They are the one group that has done so much for Syrian refugees in working with all different types of agencies to help integrate them here in Canada and in our region as well. I've helped out with a number of fundraisers with the MCC to help sponsor a Syrian refugee family.

What have been some of the success stories? How has the MCC been so established in building these networks and in integrating so well these refugees who are coming to our areas? Could you elaborate on that?

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** Thank you very much for that question.

In the five provinces we work with, we have provincial staff in each one of those provinces who work hard to build connections in the community with our constituents, the people who are our natural constituents in terms of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. We have a strong relationship with them in all the things we do, so I think we build on that.

In communities such as Kitchener-Waterloo, we do have a high profile there. When things happen, people turn to us and ask what they can do. I think people come to us based on our reputation.

In particular, in Ontario we had one person before September working on refugee resettlement. I think we have about four staff working on that now and spreading out over the entire province. In the other provinces as well, we've had to add staff.

It's this direct connection with the community, I think, that's important: making sure that we're there to troubleshoot as problems come up and making sure that we satisfy our commitment as a sponsorship agreement holder to ensure that this settlement goes well in these 12 months that we are involved in.

But the commitment goes beyond that, usually, because relationships are built. That is really one of the strengths of the private sponsorship program. It's not just about resettling refugees, about bringing people from there to here. It's about building a community, a community that can go on beyond this.

I was at an event here in Ottawa-Gatineau on Sunday to remember the Nansen medal that the people of Canada received 30 years ago. That was an important event. It was celebrating the Indochinese, the Southeast Asians, coming here. We see that community now as a very important part of Canada and being one that is involved in refugee settlement at this point. I think that's what this is really about. It's about building a future Canada.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** Thank you very much.

I'd like to share a bit of my time with Mr. Ehsassi.

I have one more question, for Mr. El Shafie.

I liked your testimony, and I understand that you've been saying this situation will not disappear unless there is stability and security in these regions. It is critically important that we have stability in this volatile region.

In your testimony, you mentioned there's a lot of Sunni Muslims who are coming. I want to mention there's a lot of privately sponsored individuals. If sponsors are Armenian, then they will sponsor Armenian Christians. There are other families who are sponsoring their families from abroad through private sponsorships who don't associate with any religion. I think you're missing that aspect. I don't think we should keep grouping certain people and certain religious sects. There are a lot of individuals who are spiritual but not religious, and who are atheists, who may come from a Muslim or a Christian background because of their family name, but they might not be practising. I think you didn't underline that.

Maybe you could elaborate on that.

• (1130)

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Absolutely. Thank you for your comment.

With regard to private sponsors, there are private sponsors from almost every religion that exists here in Canada. The mosques are involved in private sponsorships, and the churches are involved in private sponsorships. This is absolutely fine.

I am not talking about private sponsorships. I am talking about government sponsorships. It is important we understand that many of these groups do not have the ability to take on private sponsorships, such as the Yazidi community, for example. The Yazidi community is not a big community here in Canada. The Yazidi community does not have temples here in Canada. This makes them more vulnerable in the sense they don't have anybody to support them or to be private sponsors to bring the community here.

The important thing about private sponsorship is that it involves individuals or organizations. I am talking about when the governments decide to move in to protect the most vulnerable. It doesn't matter who the most vulnerable are. I don't care if they are Muslims, Sunni or Shia. For example, you had 70 Ismaili people who were killed in Syria last year. Nobody knew anything about it. The Ismaili community does private sponsorships as well, and many of them will bring their own families. To bring all 25,000 from one community, from one sector...it should be, in my opinion, a balance. What we need to see is a balanced relationship between our government and the most vulnerable. That's how I see it.

Thank you.

**Mr. Marwan Tabbara:** My remaining time goes to Mr. Ehsassi.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi (Willowdale, Lib.):** Yes, first of all I would like

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

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Oh, sorry.

**The Chair:** Ms. Rempel, for seven minutes, please.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll start my questions with Mr. El Shafie.

The government has said they are not using religion or ethnic minorities; they're turning a blind eye to prioritizing refugees. We had officials from the department tell us that out of the cohort that has been processed so far, and I believe this is how it was phrased, there were nine Yazidi cases.

For those of us in Canada who don't understand, because we are in a secular country, what it means to be in a region where warfare is conducted due to religious differences, can you tell us bluntly whether or not you think the government has done a good job of prioritizing those who are most at risk? As someone who has been tortured and sentenced to death for your own faith, can you tell us why it's important not to turn a blind eye to this?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** So far, I appreciate...I will not try to be politically correct. I appreciate the Prime Minister is trying to fulfill his campaign promise to bring 25,000 here to the country. I appreciate that he is trying, but it's not about fulfilling this promise. It's about saving the most vulnerable and the most in need of protection at this point.

Our organization went even to ISIS territory and was able to rescue between 300 and 400 Yazidi girls from ISIS territory. Some of these girls were as young as nine years old and were being raped 20 times a day. That's the truth.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Would you say, then, that the government has failed—

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Yes, the government has failed big time in helping them. Absolutely. This will bring me to my next point.

Even if the government brought only nine cases of Yazidis, what is nine cases of Yazidis? What will this do for a community that is facing genocide?

With all due respect, I have to sit down and debate whether what is happening to the Christians and the Yazidis in Iraq and Syria is genocide or not. Even after the EU, the U.K., and the United States have recognized that it is a genocide, we are still here debating whether it is genocide or not. This alone is a red flag.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Oftentimes when we talk about this issue, we are accused of being xenophobic or not tolerant of religion. I would say that this is not the case. I think we have a responsibility as a country to ensure that we are protecting the most vulnerable.

Do you think having this discussion would characterize us as xenophobic?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I don't think so. If we have an honest and healthy discussion and we hear about all perspectives of the story... Quite honestly, you have to understand that we have a very big problem in Canada. It is called political correctness. Political correctness is the very cancer in our Canadian society. This is the reality. That is what we are facing here. The truth, the reality is that our political correctness will never help this nine-year-old Yazidi girl whom they used to rape nine times a day.

• (1135)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

Mr. Dyck and Ms. Emory, you both alluded to the fact that the needs of other refugees must be met. With a very brief answer, do you feel that the needs of other refugees from other parts of the world are perhaps not being met or prioritized equitably, given the focus on the Syrian refugee initiative?

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** Thank you for the question.

I think that there are efforts, and I have been in discussion with the immigration department about their plans for that. They have plans for that. There was a very deep hole dug in terms of backlogs in a lot of the African missions, and they are working on that. We have hope that, as we talk about levels plans for 2017, 2018, and 2019, this will be taken into consideration.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Just to be more precise, the government has said that it is not treating other cohorts of refugees differently, that there isn't an impact. Do you believe that there has been an impact on other cohorts of refugees?

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** From what I have seen in terms of arrivals this year, there have been a lot of arrivals from African missions. New cases aren't being put in because the backlogs are there, but there is hope that in the year to come, there will be more opportunities.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Ms. Emory, I would ask you to answer. Keep in mind that we are writing a report to deal with this, so your frankness is appreciated.

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** One thing that comes to mind, for sure, is the cost of transportation being covered for the Syrians but not for other refugees. That is a big factor, a big difference.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Perhaps on that note, in terms of cost, during the campaign the government said that the entirety of the Syrian refugee initiative would cost \$250 million. We are now seeing the cost around \$1 billion.

I read your report, which was issued in February. Your report was about language training capacity being limited, mental health services, and all sorts of things. You are asking for more resources, and you are asking that a significant amount of more money be put in this.

Do you feel that the government adequately costed and budgeted the...? We all want to help this cohort when they come to Canada, but do you feel that there needs to be more planning, or that perhaps there hasn't been an adequate costing done in terms of the overall cost of services, to provide services to this refugee group?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I can't speak to the costing that is happening on the government side. I can certainly say that, with the large number of refugees in the community needing language instruction, child care, and all those things, there isn't the full capacity to support them at this point in time.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Something I am very concerned about is the ability, specifically for women in the Syrian refugee group, to access language training, as I believe it is leading to isolation. Could you speak to this and what your experience has been? Are you seeing some refugees being isolated due to lack of language training services?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I think that in the case of Syrian refugees, women without the language and often with large families, with those factors together, tend to be isolated. What we need to do is introduce programs that work for them and work with their lifestyle to bring them into the community, and offer, for example, alternative language instruction models with child care.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** You all talked about the root causes of forced migration. Do you think Canada's response to prevent the root causes of forced migration has been adequate?

Ms. Emory, go ahead.

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I think—

**The Chair:** I believe you are both out of time, and I think it would be—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** You took 10 seconds of my time. Perhaps the witness could answer briefly.

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I don't really know. It's one of those things where there is so much need. The need is so great and the government is stepping up in the current context. Could more be done? Absolutely.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses.

My question is for Ms. Emory.

You mentioned there are a number of areas where there are gaps with respect to resettlement. We touched on the language training.

I wonder if you could share any information on the situation with wait-lists. Are Syrian refugees waiting to get into language training, for example? I know that is the case in British Columbia; there's no question about it. In the meantime, the LINC funding in British Columbia is actually being cut. I wonder if you could elaborate on that for me.

• (1140)

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** There a couple of issues with respect to LINC language training, and one of them is child care. If it's imperative that the mother have child care while she's attending LINC classes. She will face wait-lists, because all of the seats that include child care spots are currently taken.

Also, to say what we said before, they're often not looking for full day classes. They'd like to have other models of learning where maybe they come in the afternoon, bring their children, and share child care. The structure as it exists now is not suitable for many.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On the question around poverty—and you touched on that, as well—Syrian refugees are on an income assistance rate. Then, after 12 months, they continue to be on an income assistance rate. We have already seen, because of the high cost of housing, that many people are heading to food banks and the like. Of course, come the 13th month, if they have not been to a language class, the probability of their finding employment is even more diminished. Therefore, their reliance on income assistance increases.



To that end, the suggestion in your comments, I think, was to increase income assistance rates. Would you support, for example, the minister convening a meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts to talk about how we are going to manage this issue for Syrian refugees, and other refugees for that matter, from the federal side, and then, for the provincial counterpart, that's pretty well for anybody who is on income assistance?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** Absolutely. That would be a great idea.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On the question around housing, this is a major critical problem, as well. We've heard from other presenters to this committee who talked about the issue of housing. First, people were stuck in hotels for a very long time. There are still some families, by the way, with a larger family size who are still there and it's three or four months since they arrived. Many of them who have been moved to permanent housing are in undersized housing and inadequate housing. Already the rent subsumes a large amount of their income.

To that end, in your comment, you suggested a national housing program and rent subsidies and the like. I wonder if you could share with us how extensive the problem is in housing in your communities. I know it is big in my community in British Columbia, but it would be good to get a broader view about what's happening across the country.

Ms. Emory and perhaps Mr. Dyck, as well...

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I can say that in Ottawa, there is big concern around what will happen in month 13. Many of the refugees got into a housing scenario where there were subsidies in the first year, and they're receiving their payments and whatnot. When they move into month 13, invariably their overall income goes down, and then housing becomes precarious as a result.

The question is whether they will be really ready and able, at that point, to secure sufficient income to cover off the costs they will have. I think for many of the Syrian refugees, that won't be the case. They will run into financial hardship in month 13.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Mr. Dyck.

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** From my provincial coordinators, I'm hearing the same thing across Canada, except if there has been an economic downturn in an area, in which case, there is more housing available, which is an unfortunate reality.

When I speak with groups about sponsorship, I will show them what a government-assisted refugee will be getting and tell them that this is their benchmark in terms of what they need to provide support. Inevitably, they'll look at that and say that it's not enough. I'll say that if they think that's not enough, then there are a lot of government-assisted refugees over the years who have had to live on that and have struggled, and that is based on the social assistance levels in their area.

This is not just a problem for Syrians; this is a problem for a lot of low-income people across Canada.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** You call for a national affordable housing program.

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** Well, she did.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Ms. Emory did.

Would you agree that's something we need?

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** I think this is an opportunity to look at issues of poverty, of housing, other things. It's complicated because a lot of those issues are provincial, and so it's going to take a federal, provincial and territorial discussion, but I think it's something to look at.

• (1145)

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

National affordable housing is a federal program which ended in 1993. With that being said, perhaps it is time for us to bring back one to address the housing crisis for everyone across the country.

Ms. Emory, on the Syrian resettlement question, you raised the issue, touching on it briefly, around the transportation loan issue, and for other refugees who are without it. Of course, the government made an announcement at the end of February, but for those who were processed at the end of March, for the private sponsors, they will still have that loan waived. Primarily it's because they've already reached their 25,000.

Would you call for a policy for all refugees, that is to say, for everyone to have their transportation, medical costs, waived equitably?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** Yes, for all refugees.

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

You mentioned in your presentation about the flow of the money and how it could go faster. I know that in organizations in British Columbia, Syrian refugees began to arrive in December. Organizations did not get their money until well into the spring of the following year, and hence they were stuck in a difficult situation.

Is that your experience as well? When did the money actually flow for your organization and others like yours?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** My organization isn't a RAP provider, so we don't get those funds.

However, I think there were some delays of a couple of months. I think it had to do a lot with the amount of time, everything that was happening so quickly.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, for seven minutes, please.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Virani and Ali Ehsassi also.

My question is for Ms. Emory.

Based on OCASI's finding in the February 2016 environmental scan report, it was stated, "Clients who spoke only Arabic...could face difficulties accessing some services, particularly those targeted for people with particular health conditions and for survivors of torture, violence, and human trafficking." The report goes on to state, "Even with adequate referrals, efforts may be required to ensure the services are appropriate as well as accessible in Arabic." Moreover, another point brought up was, "Resettlement support should be provided by trained employees and not volunteers." However, it seems there is a significant lack of trained employees who are proficient in Arabic or other Syrian languages.

Given all of this, how is your organization working to address these issues of language barriers and service accessibility?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** I think it varies by organization.

In our organization, we have over 20 Arabic-speaking workers, and we have added volunteer interpreters to supplement that work. I think it becomes more of a challenge in smaller communities where they may not have the Arabic-speaking settlement workers.

The only other piece, again, is with that large influx of refugees over a very short period of time, there was an increased need for Arabic speakers.

I think agencies did what they could to upscale. They used volunteers if needed, and used their in-house people as well.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Do you have enough employees who can speak Arabic?

**Ms. Leslie Emory:** In my agency we do, yes. Across the province, there are pockets where that's not the case.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Thank you.

I'll be splitting my time with Mr. Virani and Mr. Ehsassi.

**Mr. Arif Virani (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.):** Reverend El Shafie, it's good to see you again. I was there when you received that citation from the Raoul Wallenberg Foundation for fighting anti-Semitism. Congratulations again on that.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Thank you.

**Mr. Arif Virani:** You've expressed a lot of concern about who is coming in as GARs, government-assisted refugees, as opposed to who isn't, and with respect to opposing exclusions based on particular religions. I just want to clarify one thing and then ask you a question.

In terms of the UNHCR, the policy of the government has been to use the UNHCR to help in identifying the most vulnerable, and that is a religious blind assessment. There are no stipulations provided to the UNHCR, nor do they provide us with information about how there are this many people in this particular religion.

There was a question on the Order Paper, which was actually presented by my colleague Ms. Kwan, which asked about the policy of the previous government. In response to that question on the Order Paper, it was made clear that the previous government specifically put a stop to receiving individuals from Syria as refugees who were practising the Muslim faith.

I want to ask you about your perceptions and observations about that historic policy of the previous government, in terms of actively excluding one particular religion.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** First, in regard to the UNHCR, I don't think we should count fully and completely on the UNHCR. It's important there are other NGOs that are respected and have high accountability and integrity. I'm not saying not to deal with the UNHCR. I am a refugee that came through the UNHCR. I'm saying it's important that we have as many partners on the ground as possible in order to get the full picture.

You have to understand, and we have to remember, the UNHCR is also a political organization, and they have many political measurements on different issues. My opinion is we cannot put all of our eggs into one basket. That would be point number one.

Point number two, is I am not familiar with the previous government's policy, but if this is true, this would be a shame, and I would not agree with it. It's as simple as that.

• (1150)

**The Chair:** Mr. Ehsassi.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Once again, I want to thank all the witnesses. The purpose of our committee is to draw on the experience that you bring to the table, and we're eternally grateful that you agreed to appear as witnesses.

I want to follow up on a question for Mr. El Shafie. I think it would be fair to say that most of your testimony related to our conduct in foreign affairs and things of that nature. The mandate of this committee, sir, is to ensure that to the best of our abilities we draw on the experience of various Canadians to make sure as we go forward that we can provide the best services to have people who are coming from Syria benefit from having come here and having success in the long term.

I noted in one section you listed a number of different countries that, regrettably, have been sclerotic in their response to the Syrian crisis. Were you suggesting that we follow their examples and not do anything? I'm not quite sure what the purpose of that was.

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** No, I mentioned them because we have to have a dialogue with them for them to do more, as we are. That's what I meant. I meant countries like Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and so on, to speak with their governments to encourage them to do more to help the refugees on the ground similar to what we are doing.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** I would say that we are speaking to the countries in the region. We have been working co-operatively with all of them. That has been an important aspect of our approach to the Syrian refugee issue.

I have a second question. You appear to have some qualms with the religious affiliations of certain people who are coming here. As my colleague, Mr. Virani, pointed out, the process is blind to religious affiliation.

Given that there are 28,000 refugees that have arrived so far, thanks to the efforts of many and the efforts of the government, do you have the figures as to how they break down in terms of religious affiliation?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** Quite honestly, all our information is through our people on the ground. For example, in Jordan, many of the refugees came from the Zaatari camp in Jordan. All our information is from working with different NGOs on the ground and here in Canada. We have been working with a reporter from the CBC in order to get some answers from Global Affairs Canada or Immigration Canada.

I don't have these figures. Do you have these figures?

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

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** I've had the opportunity to meet many of them. They come from diverse backgrounds. I don't mean that your evidence is anecdotal—

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** No, I'm 100% sure of my evidence. If you can prove me wrong, please do that.

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

Mr. Saroya, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses for giving us their side of things.

My first question is for Mr. El Shafie.

You mentioned countries like Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, among other Sunni countries that are not taking people from Syria or Iraq, but Syria, especially. What do you think is the problem there?

**The Chair:** If I could interject for a second, we have strayed a little beyond the mandate of our committee, and we seem to be straying even further into foreign affairs at this point.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. Chair, actually, the study's scope includes how to best help Syrian refugees and the government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis. There are many ways that this would be included, including how we respond to...all of the witnesses here today have talked about how part of helping the refugees is ensuring we're dealing with issues that are included in situ.

I think to say that this isn't part of the scope would be a gross mischaracterization, and I would think my colleague's question line would be allowed.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Could you please list where, within the scope of the study, you believe this fits?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Is this study not to look at the government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis? Is that not the core of this study?

**The Chair:** There are five points. They're quite specific, that the study—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Could you read to the committee what the first line in the scope is, the actual content of the study, like the—

**The Chair:** Sure, and then it gets into the specifics. The—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** But what's the first line?

**The Chair:** It reads:

That the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration study the federal government's initiative to resettle Syrian refugees to Canada. The specific focus of the study is as follows:

It says that the "specific focus of the study is as follows", and I can read through the five points if you'd like.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I would just say, for all of my colleagues here, that we have witnesses who are here who are spending time resettling refugees. To say that we can't ask questions about how we are responding to perhaps dealing with issues in countries that they would be returning to, I think is just....

My colleague's question is not out of scope at all, and I think you're uncomfortable with his question, and that's why you're raising this.

**The Chair:** No, we have a specific scope of study. If the committee wishes to go beyond the existing scope that was agreed upon, that is a decision for the committee to make. Perhaps for clarity I should read through the points of the scope of study:

1. The engagement of Canadian individuals and groups in the resettlement effort; including programs funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada in order to facilitate integration into Canadian society as well as how that funding was distributed;
2. Integration challenges facing the resettled refugees and how they could be addressed, including:
  - a) Proximity to family in Canada;
  - b) The availability of employment counselling and placement services, as well as the experience of...refugees attempting to enter the job market;
  - c) The availability and cost of permanent, affordable housing and the transition from temporary to permanent housing;
  - d) The access to and transition into appropriate educational programs for refugee children;
  - e) The need for and availability of English as a Second Language...and French language programs;
  - f) The type of medical support needed and the timeliness of what was provided;
3. Resettlement capacity of destinations for Government Assisted Refugees and Privately Sponsored Refugees;
4. The different federal programs (Government Assisted Refugees, Privately Sponsored Refugees, and Blended Visa-Officer Referred refugees) for refugee resettlement and any differences in resettlement support and initial outcomes as well as the programs in Quebec;
5. Opportunities for family reunification under the One Year Window.

That is what was agreed upon as the scope of our study, so I'm ruling that has moved quite a distance beyond the scope of study, and I—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** I challenge your decision, and I would like a recorded vote.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Erica Pereira):** The question is shall the decision of the chair be sustained?

(Ruling of the chair sustained: yeas 5; nays 4)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Don't ask about that, Bob.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Saroya, you have four minutes and 25 seconds.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Mr. El Shafie, you talked about the most vulnerable. You mentioned a number of groups. Because they're the minorities, they don't go to the UN groups, LGBT and all those people, because they are discriminated in those UN groups.

What would you suggest to the government that it should do to put them back on the thing so that we can bring more of them to this country compared to the larger groups?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I think they should be in direct contact with their communities here and overseas, communicating with them.

One Free World International had a petition, and we met with the Minister of Immigration—he is a great man—and we presented to him a proposal to bring 400 Yazidi girls to Canada. Until now there has been no answer on our proposal, to the point that we had to have a petition signed in front of me in English and French in order to bring these 400 to 500 Yazidi girls, and until now they are not here.

What we can do is to start to listen to the NGOs, and start to listen to the people on the ground in order to be in contact with these groups to know their exact need and to bring them here.

When we are helping the non-vulnerable, I don't know why it's so bad to... They keep saying that we have to be religion blind. Why? If they are persecuted because of their religion, why don't you want to see it? This is one thing I don't understand. There is nothing wrong with that.

Anyway, that's my answer. Thank you.

• (1200)

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Thank you.

Brian Dyck, you mentioned that hundreds of groups want to get involved and want to help out. What is holding them back? Why can't they help out? In your testimony you mentioned there are hundreds of groups that want to get involved.

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** There are some challenges in terms of this program that was landing a lot of people from November, January, and February. It was a big operation and was not sustainable. Now in this post-February 29 era, it's difficult for enough profiles to get to them. That's been the challenge. Our challenge has been to try to make sure they're engaged to connect them and keep them engaged with this. We'd like to see building on this moment when so many people are interested in being involved in refugee resettlement and thinking about international issues in this way.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** What would you like to see the government do more to make sure?

**Mr. Brian Dyck:** I think it's important for the government to build a sustainable program, one that doesn't just move 25,000 in a short period of time, but goes forward from this moment to put in resources to continue to build refugee resettlement. Humanitarian immigration is an important part of the Canadian immigration plan.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** May I ask a question?

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Sure.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Mr. El Shafie, I'd like to clarify. You presented the Minister of Immigration with a plan to bring 400

Yazidi girls to Canada, and you've had no response on that. Is that correct?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** I had one meeting with him, briefly. After that I received a call from his chief of staff with some of my lawyers, and after that it's been really silent. We didn't get anything.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** What would that plan do? Do you have 400 girls identified through your organization to bring to Canada?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** That's correct.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Have you not had a response from the Minister of Immigration on how to bring those girls to Canada?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** We tried to communicate with him in different ways, including other ministers in the cabinet.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Are these girls at risk of sexual slavery or have they come out of sexual slavery?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** They are sex slaves, and we rescued them.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** And the Minister of Immigration has not responded to your report. Is that correct?

**Rev. Majed El Shafie:** No. We received a call from his chief of staff, and after that, the chief of staff did not follow up.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** When was this?

**The Chair:** Thank you. Unfortunately, the time is up.

I'm sorry, we will have to suspend. I would like to thank all of the panellists for their tremendous insights on this important area of study.

Thank you.

We'll now suspend for a few minutes.

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\_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

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• (1205)

**The Chair:** I'd like to call the meeting to order.

Our second panel today consists of Mr. Aslam Daud, chairman of Humanity First; Ms. Khim Tan, who's here by video, and is the senior program manager, immigrant services program, at Options Community Services in Vancouver, British Columbia; and Ms. Jessica Fern, director of programs at the International Development and Relief Foundation.

We will begin with Mr. Daud, for seven minutes, please.

• (1210)

**Dr. Aslam Daud (Chairman, Humanity First):** Good afternoon.

I'll begin with a bit of an introduction to Humanity First, and then I'll go to what we have been doing and address some of the specific questions that are the mandate of this committee.

Humanity First is a humanitarian relief organization registered in 46 countries across six continents that has been working on development projects and responding to disasters to provide humanitarian relief since 1995. Humanity First also has a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, which is ECOSOC. We are also a sponsorship agreement holder with the Government of Canada.

Humanity First is in the forefront of privately sponsoring refugees and resettling them in Canada. Over 1,000 refugees have been successfully resettled in Canada by Humanity First since 2010. They are now gainfully employed and are positively contributing to the society.

Recently, Humanity First has been engaged in sponsoring Syrian refugees. Over 200 Syrian refugees have been successfully resettled in Canada, and hundreds more will be arriving soon.

Some of the principles of Humanity First for resettling refugees is to provide them safety with dignity, care with compassion, support with respect, accommodation with comfort, employment and training, education with hope.

The first point I would like to address is engagement of Canadian individuals and groups.

Humanity First has taken a lead role in creating synergistic relationships with various groups and the general public interested in helping refugees by engaging them in a very simplified and practical step-by-step approach for the sponsorship and resettlement process. Humanity First has taken a leading role to bring together constituent groups, individuals, co-sponsors interested in sponsoring refugees, volunteers wishing to engage in the resettlement process, donors, supporters, and religious organizations, to assist with the refugee resettlement. We have engaged Canadian individuals and groups to become part of one of the following three groups, donors, volunteers, or sponsors, or all of the three groups.

We are working with over 60 groups, each consisting of 10 to 15 individuals who got together to form a co-sponsor group, which means we are engaging about 500 to 600 volunteers who are provided training. These groups consist of doctors, lawyers, neighbours, work colleagues, students, families, ladies, alumni and sports friends. The only thing that was common in all groups was that every member of each of the groups had a passion to help refugees.

We have a very systematic and advanced training and orientation method that we provide to all of our partner groups. We have a well-established organizational structure and a cookie-cutter template that we give to our volunteers and co-sponsor groups for the sponsorship and resettlement work.

The second point is on integration challenges.

While it is quite normal and expected that newly arrived refugees will face certain challenges during their early days in Canada, we were quite prepared for it and were able to address those challenges very efficiently. One of the specific challenges that we faced and addressed was proximity to family in Canada. Humanity First is one of the very few private sponsorship organizations that actually went to Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and other countries to select Syrian refugees. After the initial selections, we started getting spin-off referrals and our pool of applicants grew considerably. Unlike many other sponsorship agreement holders, over 98% of our sponsored cases did not have any family link in Canada. Due to this fact, we had to put in more resources and much more funding was needed for the resettlement work.

With reference to employment and the job market, finding jobs for Syrian refugees was a mixed experience for us. Syrian refugees who were technically skilled or unskilled labourers were the fastest to find employment compared with more educated refugees and professionals. In our experience, there were some refugees who got a job within the first week of arrival, while there are others who have not found a job even after six months. Some of the newly arrived Syrian refugees were able to find work. Actually, most of the Syrian refugees found work within the first two months of their arrival, while others found a job within four to six months. There were only a few who could not find a job and needed language training or other skill upgrades.

●(1215)

With reference to affordable housing, Humanity First did not face any challenges in finding suitable accommodation for Syrian refugees thanks to the generosity of our co-sponsor groups, who were willing and ready to afford rental accommodation at market rate. Our model included temporary accommodation as guests at the houses of our donors and supporters for the first few days to a maximum of two weeks, and then a move to the refugees' own rental apartments that were fully furnished by Humanity First and our co-sponsor groups.

With reference to the education of children, we did not encounter any challenges with the education of children. All Syrian refugees were successfully and immediately admitted to schools or colleges.

With reference to the English language, this was a challenge for most Syrian refugees whom we sponsored. We have encouraged them to join full-time or part-time ESL courses, and as a result, they have been quick to learn to a satisfactory level to communicate in English. As a backup, we continue to engage Arabic translators as and when needed.

With reference to medical needs, there was only a handful of individuals who had special medical needs because of their permanent disabilities or physical health and sickness. These were addressed through the IFH, the interim federal health program, provincial health coverage, and the generosity of our partner physicians, dentists, and pharmacists.

In terms of the resettlement capacity of Humanity First, due to overwhelming interest and response from the public, our capacity is only limited by the quota restrictions that are put in place by the government. We have the capacity to sponsor and resettle many more refugees. If we have more quota and if the government has the capacity to continue to process applications at a fast pace, we can sponsor many, many more refugees.

Point number four is the impact of different refugee sponsorship streams—

**The Chair:** You have a few seconds, Mr. Daud.

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Okay.

Initially, privately sponsored refugees had the impression that the government-assisted refugees had an advantage and received more benefits; however, this impression was rectified when they saw the generosity of private sponsorship.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Perhaps you could submit the rest of your remarks and we'll circulate...oh, they're already circulated.

Thank you, Mr. Daud.

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms. Tan, you have seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Khim Tan (Senior Program Manager, Immigrant Service Program, Options Community Services):** Thank you for the opportunity to address you on post-arrival Syrian refugee needs.

My name is Khim Tan, and I represent Options Community Services, which is funded by IRCC to provide settlement services to newcomers residing in Surrey and North Delta.

While there are many issues to address, I shall focus my presentation on six issues.

First, there are long wait-lists for formal language classes such as LINC. While IRCC is working on reducing wait-lists, there is an immediate need to offer informal language classes, such as volunteer-led English conversation circles. These classes help newcomers gain literacy skills and community connections. It should be noted that many Syrian refugees are not yet accustomed to structured learning environments, which require regular attendance, being on time, class participation, learning retention skills, etc.

I'm convinced that offering informal language literacy classes to Syrian newcomers meets multiple outcomes. It increases their ability to participate in formal language learning, increases social connections through volunteer involvement, and increases newcomers' awareness of community resources and knowledge of settlement-themed information.

Second, the huge outpouring of support from Canadians has resulted in settlement service providers being inundated with more volunteers and donations than they can handle. Settlement service providers need help to manage volunteer screening, training, and retention before they can leverage the capacity and contributions of volunteers.

I've met university students, retired school teachers and principals, nurses, all of whom are eager to help. We have brainstormed many possibilities, but lack human resources to organize. IRCC needs to acknowledge and fund settlement service providers to harness volunteers' capacity so that they may play a meaningful role in the resettlement of Syrian newcomers.

Third, since more than 50% of Syrian newcomers are under the age of 25, there is a need to offer newcomer youth programming in a timely manner, before isolation and disconnect set in and vulnerability increases. Many of these youth have little or no education or language skills. Obtaining parental consent and youth buy-in is important for these youth to benefit from activities aimed at helping them gain language skills, life skills, friendship with

Canadian youth, as well as increased confidence to participate in social, physical, and recreational activities.

Fourth, while partnerships and collaborations are being forged between settlement service providers and regional health care providers in order to meet newcomers' needs, we need IRCC to work closely with provincial ministries to address funding gaps that greatly affect newcomers' ability to access primary medical, dental, and mental health services in a timely manner.

For example, Vancouver Coastal Health operates Bridge Clinic, which provides primary health care services to refugees. Bridge Clinic's recent funding cuts have resulted in newcomers being transferred to Surrey-based New Canadian Clinic and Burnaby-based Global Family Care Clinic, both operated by Fraser Health Authority. Unfortunately, these clinics lack the capacity to take over clients exiting Bridge Clinic as well as to deal with the rapidly increasing number of newcomers residing east of Vancouver.

Fifth, there is a lack of information dissemination on Syrian refugee profiles, i.e., number of family members, number and ages of children, medical conditions, etc., so there's a lack of information dissemination from settlement assistance program providers to settlement program providers. For example, instead of disseminating information on refugees settling in Surrey to settlement program staff, information is being given to moving-ahead programs, which provide wraparound case management support to vulnerable newcomers.

Please note that newly arrived Syrian refugees are mostly wait-listed for these moving-ahead programs. Meanwhile, settlement workers try to be timely in providing newcomers with support and services in spite of the fact that more time is taken to uncover and assess their needs.

● (1220)

Sixth, and this is my last issue, refugees must be provided proper information and facts prior to their arrival in order to help them manage their expectations. At the ground level, settlement workers spend a lot of time helping newcomers minimize the grief and confusion caused by wrong expectations or miscommunication.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Tan.

We had a slight technical difficulty for a few seconds when you were presenting; however, we have a copy of your presentation, and as soon as it's translated, we will circulate it to all committee members.

Ms. Ferne, for seven minutes, please.

**Ms. Jessica Ferne (Director of Programs, International Development and Relief Foundation):** Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, thank you for the kind invitation to speak with you today.

I am the director of programs at IDRF, the International Development and Relief Foundation. As our name suggests, IDRF provides effective humanitarian assistance and long-term development programming for people in great need around the world. For well over 10 years of our 32-year history, IDRF has been working in Lebanon with vulnerable communities. Since the Syrian crisis began, we have focused our efforts in Syria and now also in Turkey, providing relief to refugees and people affected by this conflict. As a proud Canadian-headquartered international NGO, we also support programming here at home, particularly for refugees, newcomers, and people living in poverty. While we are here specifically to discuss Canada's efforts to welcome Syrian refugees here, organizations like IDRF see Canada's work overseas as being fundamentally and inextricably linked to our efforts here to welcome our newest neighbours.

In March of this year, I travelled to visit some of IDRF's projects and partners in Lebanon and Turkey, visiting refugees who are living in informal settlements as well as those based in urban centres. Across all communities, I was struck first and foremost by the intense interconnectedness of mental health, employment, and education. While there, I spoke with educators who told me of the children born into this war who show clear signs of post-traumatic distress. Adults are sometimes differently but also strongly affected. Without adequate and sustained mental health services, we believe that Canada's efforts here in education and employment will be fundamentally undermined at the outset. I know this recommendation to invest in mental health programming has come forward here many times before, but I truly believe it cannot be said often enough.

In Lebanon and Turkey, and indeed elsewhere where we work, we see that schools and employment programs, services with which most refugees interact, can play a key role in offering safe, confidential, and dignified services for the whole family, particularly when educators and staff are trained resources. I am familiar with some of the programs that our school boards are offering, although I am by no means an expert, and would like to see these streamlined in post-secondary programs, job readiness programs, and early childhood education programs, and elsewhere if they are not already. As well, complementary and coordinated initiatives overseas and in Canada would help to bridge people from one context to another. Of course, such programs will only be truly effective if they are funded as sustained services over a period of many years rather than months.

Many refugees choose Canada as their home based precisely on their hope for a better future for themselves and their children which they cannot find in the neighbouring host countries where they currently reside. Their frustration will no doubt carry over if they arrive in Canada only to face similar challenges here. Training and

language instruction is most effective when tied to concrete, guaranteed opportunities for dignified employment. IDRF is optimistic that many industries will see a rising demand for Arabic speaking skills. As well, we hope that programs will work with potential employers to create incentives and to expand employer awareness of the jobs they can offer and how they can restructure to support refugee skills development.

No one knows the experience of being a refugee in Canada like refugees themselves. One of IDRF's Canadian programs works closely with six different GTA school boards using a peer-to-peer tutoring model as an instrument for building inclusive school communities and promoting youth leadership. In addition to the skills development and interpersonal supports which such programs obviously provide, peer programs have tremendous potential for both adult and youth refugees to assume community leadership roles in both school and civic space. A well-designed, refugee-led program tailored to refugee needs and priorities could offer benefits in terms of Canadian experience, self-esteem, and general well-being.

In response to resettlement, IDRF has worked in close partnership with our friends at the Afghan Women's Organization, an excellent Toronto and GTA SAH and settlement agency. This model of international and local NGO partnership is one that we implement around the world. It is successful and it is one that we would recommend other similar organizations consider.

We began this partnership in direct response to the high demand on resources of settlement agencies, particularly around the liaison with private sponsorship groups. I am sure that many of you saw in your constituencies, as we did among our donors, that Canadians have been so eager to help that occasionally they have been frustrated at being unable to do more, more quickly. We further found that sponsorship groups were at times overwhelmed and confused by the responsibilities of being a sponsorship group even though they had participated in training programs. We know that these programs exist—we have referred to them ourselves—but information is sometimes stagnant, lecture based, groups still have questions, and there's a high demand on settlement agencies. An improved, dynamic community orientation program with two-way feedback might better prepare Canadians. This is yet another area where we think that peer mentorship is invaluable.

At IDRF, we have linked groups whose families have arrived with those awaiting families. This has reduced both anxiety and workload, and increased networking and skills sharing as Canadians look for ways to give while they wait.

• (1225)

In all cases, small to medium-sized organizations, faith groups, and informal networks, both in person and online, have a key role to play, and I believe they could be better mobilized and resourced to provide oversight and support to groups.

I would like to close with a brief story of an encounter I had in Istanbul in March, which has even greater significance for me today in light of the horrific attack that occurred there early this morning. I was meeting with a local agency that provides Syrian refugee children with remedial education, and when I told them that I was Canadian, one young man said to me, “Canada is a beautiful country. You have been so welcoming to the Syrian people, and we are so very grateful. Many Syrians are happy to come to Canada. Thank you for all that you are doing.”

I was deeply humbled to know that this was the reputation of my country for this man and I'm honoured to share that with you.

I know that at IDRF we see this both as a confirmation of the work that is happening and a call to even greater action. Here and abroad, we will continue to do what we can to surpass these high expectations that Syrian refugees and hopefully all refugees have of Canada.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ferne.

Mr. Sarai, you have seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.):** I want to thank everyone, specifically Ms. Tan. Options Community Services is in my riding and, in fact, one of their offices is above my office. I welcome you from Vancouver, and I welcome Ms. Ferne and Mr. Daud.

I've been very enthused not just by what I've heard from you three here today but from the past witnesses. We met members of the Austrian delegation, but I think we're one of the only countries in the world where the enthusiasm of Canadians to accept refugees exceeds the number of refugees we're willing to take. Everyone thought that we were not going to be able to meet the targets or wondered how we would accommodate them. The most frustrating problem we've had is people on wait-lists to receive refugees, and they're not able to get them fast enough. That's a good problem to have.

Ms. Tan, I understand that your frustration or need at the present time is to get more funding to help volunteer coordination. What I'm hearing, and you can correct me, is that there are a lot of volunteers who want to help, but to coordinate that, you need more funding help. Is that right?

• (1230)

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Yes, and thank you for asking that.

I safely say that I don't only speak for Options Community Services. I know that across the board many settlement agencies traditionally use volunteers. That's part of the way we provide

programming for newcomers, but because of the increased number of Syrian newcomers and the immediate needs that we're seeing, we have limited staff hours to manage the flow of volunteers coming in.

As you say, even though it is a good problem, we want to make sure that we can gain the support of volunteers, as many as we can, so that they don't start losing interest.

Again, the answer is yes. Options Community Services, as well as other agencies that I know, are quite strapped with very few staff hours to manage the influx of volunteers. Many of us have a special email or hotline number catered to receiving all these volunteer requests, and there are just so many responses and requests on a daily basis that we have to get to.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** You stated that IRCC had said they are increasing ESL and the LINC program funding and you're waiting for that. Have you made a proposal with respect to this informal language training, the conversational training? Has there been a proposal to teach this type of English language training?

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Thank you for asking.

We do know that IRCC is trying really hard to increase formal language learning through LINC. We have communicated, and with the short-term Syrian refugee funding pockets, we have been able to increase our conversation circles as best we can.

Again, I think there are many areas that we can improve on with many more of these types of conversation circles. I would say what we're trying to do is really not have a cookie-cutter type of program, but focus circles on youth, children, women, and men.

We have lots of ideas, enough volunteers—wonderful retired educators who've stepped up to the plate—but lack of funding to create more space. I think one of the many pieces that people might not realize is that, even though we have free hands in terms of volunteers offering the capacity, a lot of agencies lack the funding to acquire more space for these activities.

The very short answer is yes, we've reached out to IRCC. They've managed to offer short-term funding. Again, we're also trying to impress upon them that short-term funding is good, of course, but longer-term funding to sustain these activities is really important whilst the newcomers wait for formal language training.

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you.



Ms. Ferne, you stated that post-traumatic stress disorder was a big thing, that we need to address that. Do you think the federal health program that's now been reinstated, where refugees get the extended benefits in terms of health, is helpful for that, or do you think it's still lacking in terms of getting them the health care they need when they arrive?

**Ms. Jessica Ferne:** While I'm not an expert on the availability of the services for that, I would say any opportunity to expand access to health services for refugees is key. In our experience, and the experiences of our partner agencies too, learning to navigate the health system is a challenge for everyone. Certainly, when we work internationally, one of things we always look to do is find ways to integrate, where appropriate, mental health services into existing services that communities access. This is to make it more confidential, more discreet, to be able to find ways to connect with people in more accessible and safe places. I think, absolutely, it's key to offer health services and to make those as widely available as possible, inform people about them. But I would suggest as well that where appropriate, there might be opportunities to weave an awareness of what services are available and how to access them into the other essential services that many refugees need to access first or are going to go to first as a great way of connecting people with those programs.

• (1235)

**Mr. Randeep Sarai:** Thank you.

Dr. Daud, from your presentation it seems that you've handled most of the challenges very well. You seem to have a great success rate in housing everyone and getting them jobs.

You're finding that unskilled workers are actually getting jobs faster than those who come with trades or skill abilities. Can you perhaps elaborate on that challenge? How can we improve their ability to integrate faster?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** The professionals, for example, engineers and doctors, we have a couple of engineers who have come, and they're struggling to find a job when Canadian experience is lacking. I think it would help to have a program where they're invited to have a mentorship with an organization, or to have special funding available to give them employment.

Unskilled or—

**The Chair:** You have 10 seconds, Mr. Daud.

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor for seven minutes.

[English]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC):** I will ask a question in French. Maybe you'll need the translation.

[Translation]

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here.

I am not a regular on the committee, but the topic is really interesting.

Ms. Ferne, you talked about children a lot. We know that refugees experience things differently when they arrive in Canada, depending on whether they are adults or children. Two Syrian refugees have just settled in Boischatel, in my constituency. They speak neither English or French. So that is a problem.

Some of the children we are taking in have not been in school for a long time. What is the challenge of placing them in a school situation where they feel safe? They were not safe in their own country. Canada is a very safe country, but how do the children adapt? Is their experience different from that of the adults?

[English]

**Ms. Jessica Ferne:** We're talking about a generation of kids who have gone through this conflict over the last six years. There are some children who know only this conflict, when you're talking about very young children. Then you're talking about older youth, who have had their education severely disrupted and their opportunities for the future disrupted. There, I think, many young people particularly feel a keen sense of frustration and also high levels of trauma. As you say, they're coming into our school system, and even though there's a lot of opportunity here it can be really difficult to fit in and to navigate that.

For me, I think what's absolutely vital, first of all, is to recognize that youth need youth-only space. Youth need youth-friendly space that's targeted to their particular needs. Youth will be navigating all sorts of challenges around schooling, around work, around personal relationships, around the unique health needs of young people that are different from children and different from adults. We recognize this in the social services we provide and a lot of our partners provide.

To me, key to this is integration and specialized services that recognize that refugee youth will have particular needs relating to all of these different areas. They need a safe, targeted space for them in their own language to be able to feel comfortable talking about these issues.

I would also add that we know that these youth will have different faiths and beliefs and experiences, and they'll need a lot of information to be presented in a safe and respectful manner relevant to that. Again, peer-to-peer networks are a great way to tap into that and also to tap into the powerful volunteer base we have among Canadian youth and among refugee youth who really want to find a meaningful way to get involved. There's often no power like talking to a peer, someone who knows what you've gone through or can empathize in some way. Where possible, support for those kinds of programs can be very valuable.

• (1240)

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** We often hear about federal support, but, in your communities, in each of your provinces, do you get assistance from the provincial government in order to integrate Syrian refugees? The federal level is doing its share, but the provinces must do theirs too. Is there dialogue with the various provincial governments to help with integrating the refugees?

[English]

**Ms. Jessica Ferne:** I don't know that I would speak in the best way to the dialogue with the provinces, because our work here has always been in support of existing settlement services and SAH agencies. We support their work, just as we do overseas.

I know that a big part of the demand on their time is the constant communication and negotiation. Information is changing all the time. We've stepped in with some of our partners to help relieve the burden on their staff time so that they can devote those resources to managing that communication and we can take on some of the responsibilities around, for example, working with sponsorship groups. That has made us aware of those incredible demands that groups are having to navigate with both hands. It's a lot, and we're happy to step in and relieve some of that. We recognize that it's a huge burden.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Sylvie Boucher:** Okay.

That's fine.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Kwan, for seven minutes, please.

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

Thank you to all the witnesses.

Ms. Tan, you mentioned that the services of Options were primarily for refugees settling in Surrey and Delta and in those areas. You didn't speak to the issue around housing and the high cost of housing. I know that in the Lower Mainland a lot of the Syrian refugees, particularly the GARs, have gone out to Surrey and Delta and beyond because of the lack of affordable housing. Even if they are able to settle in Surrey or Delta, they're often actually under-housed. Their family size is far larger than the accommodations they are able to attain, and then, with the welfare rate they have, that subsumes a large sum..

I'm wondering if you could elaborate on the issue around housing and what you're seeing there.

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Thank you, Ms. Kwan. I think all you said is true.

As an example, when the first group of refugees arrived in Vancouver, many of them were housed in temporary housing in the Vancouver area. Many of the hotels were housing them. It got to a point where, many months after their arrival, they weren't finding housing. Then, 30 families were earmarked and moved to Surrey to yet another temporary housing situation. There was a huge hotel. We could accommodate them.

Thirty families were there for well over a month and there were three agencies, i.e., Options Community Services, S.U.C.C.E.S.S., and DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society, all major settlement service providers, were charged with helping them find housing. It took a while. As you say, many of the family units are large.

The housing east of Vancouver in Surrey is less expensive but still very expensive in proportion to the financial support they get, as you

said yourself. It takes up the bulk of the allowance. Regardless, it took a long time, but we did a lot of back and forth with landlords to find them housing.

One of the challenges is also the refugees' expectations, lack of information, and lack of facts. It took a while for us to explain the housing situation in greater Vancouver and in Surrey as well. It took a while to house them. We did find accommodation within Surrey for the bulk of them. There were a few families who did not manage to find housing. They were turned back to Vancouver, to the Immigrant Services Society of BC. That is the RAP service provider.

I want to agree with you, in that when we were finding housing, it was really difficult to find affordable housing within Surrey, and we did try to work with our counterparts in Langley and beyond to find housing as well.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I wonder if I could interject. Going forward, month 13 kicks in for a lot of the Syrian refugees. There are some accommodations where the landlord had made special provisions. What happens in month 13? That is really now my primary concern with respect to how they are going to survive with the limited resources that they have, and especially in the context where they can't even get into an ESL class. The prospect of getting employment is severely limited because of that.

● (1245)

**Ms. Khim Tan:** I agree. Maybe I should also say that when we move them from temporary housing, i.e., the hotel, to permanent housing, i.e., a basement suite or an apartment, I think in the minds of the refugees and also for ourselves as service providers, they are still temporary accommodations, because of the question of the sustainability of the rent rates in the long term, as you said. Really, a lot of them sort of make do with the size of the suites that we found them. Certainly, in their minds, this is still temporary, until they figure out how to settle permanently.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** Would you support the call for a national affordable housing program not just for Syrian refugees but for others as well?

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Definitely.

With settlement service providers, I have to stress that, of course, we're trying to deal with immediate needs, but again, we do our part to lobby for the national housing strategies, to accommodate a growing number of refugees as well. As you said yourself, many of them will take a while before they actually become independent and are able to afford housing.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** It is likewise on the issue around poverty. This has surfaced on many occasions with other witnesses on different days. People are really having a tough time trying to survive on the income assistance rate, and that's irrespective of whether they are Syrian refugees or others on the income assistance rate across the country.

Would you also then support a call for a national strategy to address poverty, and perhaps for the minister to convene a meeting with his provincial and territorial counterparts to address this issue?

**Ms. Khim Tan:** The answer is yes.

I want to say that what we're trying to do immediately is help, because the refugees are aware that one year will go by really fast. We're trying to help them as best we can to budget and to survive on the little they have, because they know that moving forward that's the little that they'll have for a while to come.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** On the same line, with respect to language training, you mentioned the issue of conversational training, particularly for women so that they don't become shut-ins, and they're not able to get into a class due to a lack of available child care. Even for the longer term, for the regularized classes, are you finding that there are huge wait-lists as well? That was the presentation from other witnesses that we heard last week, and we've had a Syrian refugee who's going into his 13th month and has yet to get into a class.

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Due to the lack of LINC classes, the formal language classes, there's a wait-list across the board. No matter which city you ask about, the wait-list is there. Part of the challenge of placing the Syrian refugees, the women with children, is that not only is there a lack of LINC classes, but there's also a lack of LINC classes that offer child-minding support, so there's an added challenge there.

Again, I go back to the fact that while we are waiting, and I know IRCC have said they're really trying their best to move as quickly as they can, we're seeing the refugees on a regular basis and I still think the turnaround for informal could be faster.

**Ms. Jenny Kwan:** I have 10 seconds, so it's a quick question.

Have you actually had a LINC funding increase?

**Ms. Khim Tan:** Some agencies have, but not fast enough to meet the wait-lists.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Ehsassi, you have seven minutes.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll be sharing my time with Mr. Shaun Chen.

I would like to thank the witnesses. Obviously, all of our witnesses have been enmeshed in the challenge and we're grateful for all their input.

My first question is for Mr. Daud from Humanity First.

Thank you very, very much for your comprehensive statement. I have it here before me. There was one particular section that related to medical need. You say here that there was only a handful of individuals who had special medical needs. Would you care to elaborate on that?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Yes. We had only three or four individuals with special medical needs. One of them was permanently disabled and had some medical conditions for which he needed urgent care. We were able to provide that through IFH, plus through our panel of doctors. There were a couple of others who got sick because of

various personal medical conditions who were also taken care of, so we did not face any challenges in providing that medical care.

• (1250)

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** Thank you very much for that.

My second question is for Ms. Ferne.

Obviously, in the past I've had the opportunity to draw on your organization's expertise and your own expertise, so I'm eternally grateful for that. I appreciate that you do a lot of amazing work on the ground in Lebanon and Turkey, and one of the challenges in both those countries is that a lot of the refugees' children have no access to educational opportunities.

Having looked at the activities of IDRF, I understand that you are active on the ground there, so I was wondering if you could explain to us whether Canada's government assistance of \$240 million in development assistance, or the \$650 million we provide in humanitarian assistance, is something that has proven helpful, and how you go about providing educational opportunities for the children in Lebanon and Turkey.

**Ms. Jessica Ferne:** While IDRF has not received money personally from the government—our agency has not been funded for that—I know many of our colleagues have been and are doing exceptional work that we've had the opportunity to see.

Speaking for my own organization, IDRF support comes from a very engaged donor base. We are a proud Islamic faith-based organization, but we're committed to diversity. The projects and partnerships we undertake, and in all of our work internationally—Lebanon and Turkey are no exception—we always work with local organizations based in those communities.

One of the communities with which we work very closely is the Palestinian refugee community as well, who were displaced in Syria and then displaced yet again into Lebanon. They live in areas often outside of those areas where Syrian refugees or poor Lebanese communities are. We're trying to expand the scope of the work that we do to work with refugees and displaced people throughout those countries, always working in direct partnership and led by local organizations that are doing this.

One of the things we're seeing there is that with a lot of programs, because they can't be tied in effectively to existing national programs, or because these programs have restrictions about the ability for young people to get jobs when they graduate, there is a real sense of helplessness and frustration among a lot of young people about the point of completing their education, where it will take them, where they will use it, where they will go. A lot of services have their hands full dealing with that, or dealing with the symptoms of stress, which I mentioned.

As well, one thing I didn't talk about is that we are working more and more with schools programs that serve children with physical and mental disabilities in those areas. Again, where there are limited resources, a lot of times those children are the last to access those programs.

We've been working always to fund those local organizations and the work they're doing, to try to also create a sense of hope for young people that there's value to the education they're getting, and of course, hope that one day they will be able to use it in the careers of their choice.

**Mr. Ali Ehsassi:** I have two minutes remaining for Mr. Chen.

**The Chair:** Yes, two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Shaun Chen (Scarborough North, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I know that as of today, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees website reports that there are 4,844,762 registered Syrian refugees and over a quarter of those are children under the age of 18.

You talked about some of the challenges that are faced by young people, and I want to hone in on a specific multi-layered issue. They are struggling to get settled, and in general to access health services, including mental health services, but on top of that, the issues they faced in the regions they came from are very dire. These children, millions of them, have been forced out of school. They have a higher risk of being exploited or abused. Some of them, as we have heard from witnesses today, are victims of sexual slavery.

Do you know of any services or programs being run in Canada now that are able to specifically address that multi-layered challenge, in terms of these children coming from war and conflict and the types of mental health services they might need arising from their lived experiences?

•(1255)

**Ms. Jessica Ferne:** My colleagues might be able to speak to that very well because they're quite connected with local services.

From what I see, there are a lot of services that are scrambling to try to meet these various needs. They're seeing the youth who are coming in and trying to adapt their services to them. There's obviously a high demand for these kinds of services.

I think the key is also making sure that they're widely available, that there's some level of consistency, that there's longevity, that young people can count on it. They may be directing their energy to certain immediate needs, but that doesn't mean they're not going to need to cycle back to these services after 12 months and beyond. It's making sure that those are available.

It's also making sure that people know where they are and how to get them. I'm constantly learning about amazing work that's happening in our own communities, which I had no idea was there and that I can refer people to. It's how people learn about these services and how we can connect young people to them.

Again, it's why I say that to me, health, education, employment, are very interconnected, and making people aware, making service providers and educators aware of the services there, is key.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Ferne.

Mr. Saroya, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses who are doing all of the good work. Keep it up.

First, Mr. Chair, I will say thank you to Dr. Aslam Daud. He has looked after many different charities. One of the charities he looks after is housing homeless people. Once a year, I work with the 360° kids, and I end up going to his place in -29°C. I'm an old man, my feet were swollen, and he was the first guy standing on the door welcoming people.

Thank you. Keep up the good work. I really appreciate your hands-on work.

My question is for Dr. Aslam Daud or anybody else.

A cap was recently placed on the number of private sponsorship applications. Do you believe that this was a positive or a negative change? Would you like to see private sponsorship applications capped or uncapped?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** As a private sponsorship agreement holder, and being involved in private sponsorship, I will say that a cap is a big challenge for us.

On the other hand, I also understand the issue of challenges of the landing, and that there has to be enough resources. The solution is not in putting on a cap or not. The solution is increasing the capacity of the immigration offices on the ground so they can process the case.

There's a balance that needs to be there. If you tighten the cap, then the processing is fast, but very few people come in. If you remove the cap and make it open, there will be a lot more applications and the processing will be slow. We have the band-aid solution of increasing the cap, which I do want to do, but the permanent solution lies in increasing the capacity of the immigration department in the visa offices.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Do you think it would be helpful for organizations like yours if you could bring more people in compared to somebody else?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Absolutely.

As a private sponsorship program, we are deeply involved with the sponsorship process. We know the refugees. We do the due diligence, and we are able to select the most vulnerable and the most needy, and also those who are connected in Canada. In that way, we are doing a lot of the groundwork that is helpful to IRCC. It's a matter of having the increased capacity to process these cases.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Have you witnessed any cases of sponsorship breakdown where the private sponsor brought in the people? Who can fulfill their promise on the private side?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** Sponsorship breakdown is uncommon in the SAH community. The reason is that either they're family linked, or the organizations are already well placed to do the sponsorship. It would be a rare thing to see a sponsorship breakdown. It would happen only because of certain specific conditions, for example, if there is a secondary migration, or if there is an issue where the demand is a lot more than what is being provided. In that situation it could occur, but I'm not aware of any breakdowns.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** Anybody can take this question.

What are the main challenges that refugees face as they transition to their new lives in Canada? What are the main challenges that settlement support agencies have in responding to the needs of refugees?

**Dr. Aslam Daud:** The biggest challenge is to find employment for them.

What we recommend is that there should be a program. When we are taking refugees, we are opening our hearts. There should be some type of model where we provide a three-month, a six-month, or a one-year program, which is funded so they get the Canadian experience and they are streamlined. They will become taxpayers soon. It's an investment in the future. Rather than making them dependent on the 13th month, investing in the early time would make them very successful.

• (1300)

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** If I can go back to Vancouver, the biggest challenge we heard from the Surrey-Vancouver area was about the

LINC classes, the people waiting for 13 months and still didn't get a chance to attend the schools. If they can't learn the language, then they can't find a job. Do you have anything to add to this?

**Ms. Khim Tan:** I think there are ways that we can help, and I will mention something again that was mentioned this morning.

We think about what kind of language classes are important to tie the language learning with employment possibilities. I think we're also challenged by working with all the different counterparts. There is a language counterpart working with employment counterparts and working with the settlement counterpart, so that there is an integrated approach to serving them and helping them.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Tan.

I'd like to thank all of the panellists for the tremendous work that they're doing and all of the insights they provided to the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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