

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE EIGHTEENTH REPORT OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
STANDING COMMITTEE ON CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION ENTITLED,
“In Demand Yet Unprocessed: Endemic Immigration Backlogs”**

INTRODUCTION

The Government of Canada thanks the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration (the Committee) for its report, *In Demand Yet Unprocessed: Endemic Immigration Backlogs* (the Report), which was tabled in the House of Commons on December 14, 2023. The Government of Canada also extends its appreciation to the witnesses – including immigration lawyers and immigration consultants, non-profit organizations, immigration serving organizations, and industry advocates among other individuals – who shared their time and expertise on the root causes and overall impacts of application backlogs and processing times. These witnesses proposed creative solutions to improve the timeliness of processing and the quality of client services, while ensuring equity and transparency are prioritized. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC/the Department) and Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) both benefit from the opportunity to learn from the Committee’s observations and recommendations on how to strengthen Canada’s immigration system by tackling backlogs and wait times, as well as other potential enhancements to the system.

The Government is attuned to the many challenges faced by the immigration system and has been taking concrete steps to address these. To this end, the Government welcomes the Committee’s 40 recommendations outlined in the Report that aim to improve Canada’s immigration system, as the Committee outlined in three parts:

- *Lengthy wait times and their impacts:* Seven recommendations (#1 to 7) explored the problems affecting all immigration processing streams, from small backlogs (e.g. within citizenship inventory) to the largest backlog (e.g. within temporary resident inventory) and how these backlogs have caused hardships for workers, students, refugees, family members and protected persons in Canada;
- *Probable causes of application backlogs and processing delays:* Seven recommendations (#8 to 14) addressed the root causes of backlogs and processing delays in the immigration system, particularly in the express entry and temporary resident visa streams, as well as challenges including capacity management, digital transition and circumstantial impacts such as the COVID-19 pandemic; and,
- *Requirements and solutions:* 26 recommendations (#15 to 40) proposed solutions, including as proposed by witnesses at Committee, regarding the improvements to the immigration system, such as providing clients with more accurate and equitable processing times, improving transparency and fairness measures within the immigration process, and ensuring the Department has capacity to proactively respond to global humanitarian crises.

Before turning to the Government’s responses to each of these recommendations, this document provides a brief overview of the context in which immigration to Canada occurs, and the efforts that are already underway to address application backlogs and processing times in Canada’s immigration and citizenship programs.

Managed migration contributes to Canada’s social, cultural and economic objectives

Canada’s immigration framework is built upon a managed migration model, which includes annual admission targets for permanent residents, processing of temporary residents for work, visit or study, and options for vulnerable populations. These and other activities are all undertaken to realize a wide range of objectives as outlined in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), including “to permit Canada to pursue the maximum social, cultural and economic benefits of immigration”.

International migration accounted for nearly all recorded growth (96%) in 2022. By 2032, it is projected that immigration will account for 100% of Canada’s population growth and labour force growth. Immigration-driven population growth in Canada goes beyond just the numbers:

immigration enables key contributions to meeting Canada's labour demands and growing the economy, as well as to enhancing Canada's social and cultural fabric.

Demand for permanent and temporary residency remains strong

The demand for permanent residency in Canada continues to outstrip the number of admission spaces available, established by the Immigration Levels Plan, which projects the number and "mix" of permanent resident (PR) admissions permitted each year. PRs can be admitted to Canada under three classes – Economic, Family, Refugee and Protected Persons – with an additional category for "Other" immigration, including Humanitarian and Compassionate provisions. The Government's admission targets are aimed to support family reunification, prioritize economic growth and respond to humanitarian crises around the world.

Canada has also seen growth in volumes of non-permanent residents – temporary workers, international students, and asylum claimants – entering Canada. This growth is driven by a combination of greater numbers of individuals seeking protection in Canada, as well as domestic considerations regarding temporary foreign workers and international students, placing pressure on the whole of government. While IRCC undertakes rigorous forecasting of temporary resident application intake, it does not control the number of non-permanent resident applications received, nor can it directly control the number of asylum claims made in a given year.

Including visitors, IRCC in 2023 received 5.98 million temporary resident applications and made 5.86 million decisions. This is an increase of 53% on decisions rendered in 2022. The Government acknowledges that the growth in volumes of temporary residents have indeed resulted in bigger backlogs and longer wait-times, as was highlighted in the Report. In recognition of this rapid increase, the Government announced in January 2024 two-year intake cap on international student permit applications to stabilize the number of international students in Canada. As of February 2024, processing times for study permits are at 66 days, slightly above the 60-day service standard. The Department expects to return to and maintain service standards once it has adjusted to recent changes requiring that study permit applications include verified Letters of Acceptance and a provincial or territorial attestation letter as per the Ministerial Instructions setting an intake cap referenced above.

Concrete actions are underway, and progress is being made

At the time of the Committee's study (May 5, 2022 to November 1, 2022), Canada was still recovering from the depths of the COVID pandemic. Canada's border had only been open to fully vaccinated foreign nationals for discretionary travel for 8 months, following a closure of 17 months, and the resettlement of Afghan nationals as well as support for individuals fleeing the war in Ukraine was a priority. In recognition of ongoing service delivery challenges stemming from the pandemic, the Prime Minister in June 2022 announced a new ministerial task force to improve government services with a focus on reducing wait times, in particular to improve the processing of passports and immigration applications, and clearing out backlogs.

Separately, IRCC in February 2023 launched a Strategic Immigration Review – *An immigration system for Canada's future: Strengthening our communities* – to hear directly about how Canada's immigration policies and programs can best support Canada's present and future needs. This was accomplished through a comprehensive policy, research and engagement exercise to define a vision for the future of Canada's immigration system. The Review's final report was made public in October 2023, and committed the Government of Canada to improving its services, including work towards reducing application backlogs and improving adherence to service standards, with planned actionable measures and initiatives to ensure Canada continues to be a destination of choice. Some of these measures are already underway, while others are in development, such as: positioning the immigration system to adapt quickly and to respond equitably and sustainably to growing global humanitarian crises; better integrating housing, health care and infrastructure planning, along with other important services, into Canada's immigration levels planning, in close collaboration with provinces, territories and municipalities; and, making IRCC's website more user-friendly, so that applicants can easily find the information they need. In addition the Review's final report highlighted the development of a new Francophone Immigration Policy to enhance the vitality of Francophone minority communities, while maintaining and increasing the demographic weight of French

linguistic minority communities in Canada. The new policy, announced by the Minister in January 2024, recognizes Francophone immigration as a key and permanent IRCC priority that is integrated into Departmental decision-making and processes, has set a new Francophone immigration target of 6% of admissions for French-speaking permanent residents for the Canadian population outside of Quebec, and will ensure that IRCC reaches the targets outlined in the Levels Plan. New Departmental measures will focus on strengthening IRCC's actions across the immigration continuum for permanent and temporary residents and will be supported by an investment of over \$137 million as part of the Government of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028.

The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) assessed IRCC efforts between January 1 and December 31, 2022, to process permanent residence applications in support of economic, family reunification and humanitarian objectives. The OAG made six recommendations to improve PR processing – all of which the Department agreed with. Since the audit was conducted, IRCC has continued to reduce its backlogs by digitizing applications, hiring and training new staff, and harnessing automation technologies to increase processing capacity and efficiency. As a result, many PR lines of business are now back or close to meeting service standards – that is meeting the standard for at least 80% of submitted applications. In August 2022, IRCC also began publishing monthly data to inform the public about ongoing efforts to reduce application backlogs.

In parallel to the Prime Minister's taskforce, Strategic Immigration Review, and OAG study, IRCC in 2022 began work on the third phase of its Digital Platform Modernization (DPM3) programme. DPM3 is comprised of program and policy enhancements, updated business processes and new technology platforms, all with the objective of building a digital organization that continually adapts migration, citizenship, and passport services to create new and innovative ways to serve clients, support strong and prosperous communities, assure Canada's health and security, and advance the nation's international position all while improving overall client and employee experience. The Department will soon begin implementation of the programme's first project, which will lay the groundwork for an enhanced client experience through a new single window for clients. It is anticipated that the new online account will be gradually deployed to clients in all IRCC lines of business starting in Spring 2024 (with a sub-category of temporary resident visitor visa clients), continuing into 2025.

Finally, the 2024-2026 Immigration Levels Plan (Levels Plan) was tabled on November 1, 2023, and aims to balance Canada's need for population and economic growth with its capacity to welcome and integrate newcomers, while maintaining confidence in Canada's immigration system. The Levels Plan signalled an intent to implement a whole-of-government approach to levels planning, in recognition of ongoing domestic pressures, the approach to which will continue to evolve in future plans through a phased implementation, as signalled in the report *An Immigration System for Canada's Future*.

Moving forward

While Canada is recognized internationally for its managed migration system and continues to be a leader in refugee resettlement, IRCC and its partners must remain vigilant to resolve existing and emerging challenges. The Government recognizes that modernizing and strengthening the immigration system is necessary to ensure Canada remains a destination of choice and continues to support the world's most vulnerable. In this context, the Government agrees either fully, partially, or in principle with the vast majority of the Report's recommendations and is already taking action in several areas.

In all cases, future action will be carefully considered to ensure changes in one part of the system do not result in unintended risk to Canadians, service impacts, or cost elsewhere in the system. Efforts to strengthen efficiencies will be made in consultation and coordination with federal immigration program service delivery partners such as the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) to ensure the continued safety and security of our communities.

The Committee's recommendations are addressed under the five themes below:

- Enhancing the user experience;

- Processing refugee, family class and vulnerable persons;
- Facilitating newcomers' connection to the labour market;
- Managing applications and resources; and,
- Improving officer training.

A note to readers: "Agree in principle" is used where the Government agrees with the intent of the Committee's recommendation, but the wording of the recommendation is not entirely in keeping with its policy intent and/or operational reality. "Partially agree", on the other hand, is used when the Government agrees with part of the recommendation, but not its entirety.

The Government's responses to each of the Committee's 40 recommendations follow.

THEME 1: ENHANCING THE USER EXPERIENCE

(Responds to Recommendations: 3, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 23, 25, 26, 30, 31)

The Committee identified actions within the immigration system that could lead to greater efficiency, transparency, clarity, timeliness and choice for those who interact with the system. The Government agrees, either partially or in full, with all recommendations in this sub-theme, with work currently underway.

Digital Platform Modernization Programme and Client Experience Platform

*Recommendation 3 – Immediate Issuance of Acknowledgement of Receipt: **Agree***

*Recommendation 10 – Auditing Online Portal and Forms: **Agree***

*Recommendation 11 – Consulting with Users of the Online System and Portal: **Agree***

*Recommendation 12 – Plain Language and Improving French: **Agree***

*Recommendation 16 – Real-time Updates on Cases: **Agree***

*Recommendation 23 – Creation of Permanent Residence Portal for Caregivers: **Partially Agree***

*Recommendation 31 – Opportunity to Correct Minute Errors in Immigration Applications: **Agree***

Through the Digital Platform Modernization (DPM) Programme, IRCC is redesigning its business to provide a modern client experience and a more efficient immigration system, underpinned by new technologies and data capabilities. A key objective of this redesign is to reduce the number of stand-alone, unintegrated digital tools for clients, and to instead introduce a single point of interaction with IRCC that can support clients throughout their immigration journey in a clear and consistent way. To this end, IRCC is introducing a new online client account that will serve as the single window for applicants, through which IRCC will provide greater transparency into clients' case status. Beginning in 2024, this new online account is expected to be rolled out incrementally over the next two years to all IRCC clients, including clients applying to the Caregiver programming.

IRCC regularly engages with clients on their service experience pain points and is working to provide greater visibility and assurance, especially when submitting information online. As part of the new online account enabled by DPM, IRCC is introducing notification functionalities throughout the process, including automatic confirmation when an application is successfully submitted online.

As with all online systems, there are times when bugs and errors may occur, especially with aging technology. The Government agrees with consulting users of the online system and portals to troubleshoot glitches and technical problems. For general web content, outside authenticated accounts and portals, IRCC monitors web performance and user feedback data through mechanisms such as: Canada.ca task success survey, page feedback tool, web analytics, and usability testing. As a result of these feedback mechanisms and based on client feedback, IRCC has, among other actions, updated the Secure Sign in page to help users find technical help, and now maintains troubleshooting content in the online IRCC Help Centre. Online

accounts and portals have similar feedback mechanisms and tools that can identify technical issues.

The Department continuously works to find solutions to existing problematic accounts and portals. In fact, ongoing efforts to create a new online account for clients is being informed by engagement with external partners and clients in co-design workshops and surveys, as well as regular, rounds of usability testing sessions. The new online account will also provide the ability for clients to submit their feedback online from within the platform, which will support the gathering of in real-time information to help fix any technical problems encountered by clients. In addition, all client-facing legacy portals are due to be replaced with the new online account as it is incrementally rolled-out over the next two years. Consequently, the Department commits to reviewing known bugs related to the online portal and resolving in priority order those that impact clients' ability to receive IRCC services. The Department will prioritize urgent and high-priority maintenance tasks, taking into account client's pain points.

Another way that the Government can enhance users' experience with the immigration system is to ensure the language used is clear and accurate, in both official languages. As such, the Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to implement the use of plain language and improve the quality of written French. IRCC follows the plain language requirement of the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Canada.ca style guide when simplifying operational and policy content in French and English into user-focused, plain language web material, prioritizing readability and diverse audience needs. Through the new online account, IRCC will enhance the use of plain language in all of its application processes, including the use of written French. IRCC will continue conducting usability testing of any client-facing correspondence, online portals, application processes and web content, in French and English, prior to and after their official launch to ensure that the language used is clear and understandable for clients. Separately, a project is now underway to improve user experience and readability of application guides.

In addition, IRCC has undertaken recent efforts to improve the use of plain language in its application processes and client correspondence. For example, the Department is currently leading an initiative to review and amend refusal letters for temporary resident programs, which represents the last step in the application process (i.e., the decision). To this end, the Department has consulted with partners to simplify the most complex correspondence language, the study permit refusal letter itself, and simplified the language for the grounds on which clients were being refused. The Department is currently working to apply these enhancements to other temporary resident program refusal letters, and will implement these changes into circulation as part of the Digital Platform Modernization roll out.

The Committee highlighted in its recommendations the need for publically available accurate and equitable processing times, as well as greater transparency of the application process in order to correct probable causes that created the backlogs. Beginning in September 2022, IRCC has launched application status trackers for most temporary resident, permanent resident and citizenship programs to help clients and their representatives easily track the status of their application online and to provide clients with more accurate case status updates. IRCC's website offers information to help clients understand how to check the status of their application and what the various client statuses mean. The How to check your application status page and the Help Centre are top visited sections of the IRCC website. As the new online account for clients is rolled out through DPM, application tracking functionality will be integrated into this new account and enhanced. Features of the new online account, once complete, will include: a modernized online program finder (i.e., self-assessment tool) that will make it easier for clients to find programs that best suit their needs; the ability for clients to change their contact information online, which will eliminate the need to call or email the Client Support Centre to update or confirm changes; the ability for clients to upload requested and additional documents directly to their account rather than having to email them to the Client Support Centre for manual upload; the consolidation of client tools into a single account, with a single sign-on, which will mean fewer IRCC account user names and passwords to remember as well as supporting a tell-us-once approach as clients continue their immigration journey; and a new account look and feel, which will offer an improved and more consistent user interface and experience for clients. When changes to the online account or new case status tools are

implemented, IRCC updates the website accordingly and ensures information on how to check applications are easy to use and understand.

In order to provide a more client-oriented service, the Committee recommended the opportunity for applicants to make minor corrections to errors, such as a missing document. The Government agrees with this recommendation. Currently, clients may update their application or correct errors at any time until a decision is made. IRCC's website provides clients with instructions on how to update information on their applications, including making changes and corrections to information on file and providing missing documents. Clients may make submissions via IRCC's webform at any time while their application is in process. These submissions are reviewed by IRCC staff, necessary updates are made, and document submissions are attached to the applications. Moreover, the new online account enabled by DPM will have enhanced validation capabilities to reduce instances of missing documents or information. It will also give clients new self-serve capabilities, allowing them to make changes to some of their personal information such as their mailing address. Clients will also have the ability to upload additional information/documents, including officer requested documents, or inform IRCC of a change to be made in their application post-submission before a final decision is made in their file.

Transparency, Accuracy and Procedural Fairness

*Recommendation 7 – Providing Clear Options for Citizenship Ceremonies: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 17 – Accurate Processing Times: **Agree***

*Recommendation 25 – Outlining Criteria for a Clearer Understanding of the Determination Process: **Agree***

*Recommendation 26 – Recording of Interviews: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 30 – Provision of Officer Notes to Immigration Applicants: **Agree in Principle***

In order for Canada to remain a top destination of choice to strengthen and build our communities, the Government must ensure a modern, efficient, fair and transparent system. To this end, the Government agrees with posting accurate processing times online. Currently, IRCC posts processing times of recently finalized applications for IRCC's core lines of business on the Departmental website, which includes both the lines of business that have service standards and equally those that do not. Some lines of business that are low volume, temporary in nature, or pilot programs are not reflected. IRCC continues to evaluate the performance of these programs with the intent to publish the processing times as the data become reliable enough for clients. The processing times are updated weekly based on historical data, and demonstrate how long the Department took to process 80% of applications in the past six months for permanent residence and citizenship programs, and eight weeks for temporary residence programs. Actual application processing times experienced by applicants will vary according to a number of factors including: the type of application submitted, the number of applications currently being processed, how well and how quickly clients respond to any IRCC requests or concerns, how easily IRCC can verify the information provided, and input from partners on background and security checks. The Department conducts usability tests with clients on website information to ensure information about processing times is communicated in a way that is clear and useful to clients. At the same time, the Department is exploring new methodologies to calculate forward-looking estimates of processing times by the end of 2024. This will allow the Department to provide clients with more accurate expected wait times, accounting for volume and inventory.

The Government believes that the Committee's recommendation to issue all relevant officer notes to applicants at every stage of the application process aligns with the Open Government initiative, which Canada has been a member of since 2012, and will improve transparency, which is a key element of a positive client experience. Actions to address this recommendation are already in progress, by way of IRCC's Operational Transparency pilot, starting with the release of Officer Decision Notes when an application is refused. Per preliminary pilot results, the disclosure of this type of information helped clients have a better understanding of why their application was refused, reducing the access to information requests when compared to applications which did not include Officer Decision Notes.

Further, the new online account, will include the proactive release of officer decision notes related to an application, as part of improved application case status information. Officer decision notes will begin to become available for lines of business as they are onboarded to the new online account, starting in 2024. It is anticipated that the new online account will be gradually deployed to clients in all IRCC lines of business starting before the end of 2025. The pilot was executed to determine the potential impact of this project, as well as key considerations for expanding the release of all officer notes more broadly. An analysis will be required to determine what officer notes are considered relevant and releasable. Prior to full implementation however, measures need to be put in place to prevent the inadvertent release of confidential/sensitive or third-party information. Consideration is also being given to ensuring that this initiative meets privacy and data management expectations. Consequently, the Government agrees in principle with this recommendation to provide officer notes to immigration clients.

The Government agrees to the Committee's recommendation to outline proper criteria for a clearer understanding of how determinations are made. The *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and Regulations, as well as public policies and Ministerial Instructions, are published online and accessible to both officers and the public. IRCC also publishes publicly and routinely updates Program Delivery Instructions and Operational Bulletins that outline the requirements and assessments that take place in making a determination on an application. Finally, on its website, IRCC simplifies operational and policy requirements into user-focused, plain language web content. This content prioritizes diverse audience needs and meets the plain language requirement of the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity and the Canada.ca style guide. The website also offers program-specific guides, document checklists and a Help Centre of frequently asked questions, outlining the requirements for various programs and information required to submit an application.

Specific to applications, officers apply principles of procedural fairness when making decisions, which includes informing applicants of concerns, where needed, and giving them the opportunity to respond. The Department is committed to providing clear communications to clients outlining reasons for its decisions with reference to the applicable legislation and is currently working to improve the clarity of the final decision. This is part of the Operational Transparency pilot that includes reviewing the wording in the TR refusal letters to simplify the language and structure of the letters, as mentioned previously.

Similar to the Government Response to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration's report on *Promoting Fairness in Canadian Immigration Decisions*, the Government agrees in principle that IRCC or third-party interviews be recorded for accountability purposes and used as evidence for any judicial review of a final decision. IRCC is wholly committed to ensuring procedural fairness in interviews. While some IRCC decision makers also conduct limited remote interviews for eligibility purposes, using telephone and videoconferencing, the audio or visual recording of interviews poses a privacy challenge, particularly for vulnerable persons whose safety may be compromised in a recording. Given that the premise of this recommendation is to use recordings for the purposes of evidence in a judicial review, the video would form part of the public record and be accessible impacting the privacy of vulnerable clients including potential victims of human trafficking or forced marriages. In light of these considerations, the Department commits to further exploring the possibility of recording (audio and/or video) while ensuring procedural fairness and accuracy in applying the applicable sections of the Regulations and/or Act and maintaining the safety of clients and employees. This includes exploring best practices currently used by other bodies such as the Immigration and Refugee Board. Further, the Department will continue to explore ways to streamline the interview process such as the development of Standard Operating Procedures that may be used across Canada and abroad.

The Government agrees in principle with the recommendation that the Department make it clear to clients that they may choose the citizenship ceremony format best suited to their needs, and that any self-administered oath of citizenship be subject to robust integrity measures. Canada welcomed a record number of 364,166 new citizens in 2022-2023, compared to approximately 248,000 in 2019-2020 (pre-pandemic), enabled in part by the implementation of virtual ceremonies (also called video ceremonies) and related efficiencies.

As of July 2022, IRCC resumed holding in-person ceremonies while maintaining virtual ceremonies, as a stream of service delivery that provides efficiency, timely service, and flexibility to clients as they can accommodate more clients from coast to coast to coast, including those in rural and remote regions. Clients are invited by the Department to either an in-person or virtual ceremony, based on operational considerations, but can request a change of format (e.g. from virtual ceremony to an in-person ceremony or vice-versa) and the Department makes best efforts to accommodate client preference.

Virtual ceremonies have contributed to a significant reduction in grant inventories, while modernization initiatives, such as online electronic applications for most grant of citizenship applications and electronic citizenship certificates, have reduced and continue to reduce processing times with a return to service standards projected for spring 2024.

A number of factors, including volumes of clients served and costs would be impacted if in-person ceremonies were set as the default option. Instead, the Department is seeking to increase the percentage of clients that complete the Oath in-person in 2024-2025 as well as clarify that all individuals have the opportunity to request the citizenship ceremony format that best suits their needs, subject to availability.

In addition, the Department continues work to modernize Canada's Citizenship Program to improve client service, increase processing efficiencies and enhance program integrity. As the Citizenship Program continues to modernize, the Department will reflect on the feedback received from Canadians, and incorporate this into the assessment of options and decisions on a way forward.

THEME 2: PROCESSING REFUGEE, FAMILY CLASS AND VULNERABLE PERSONS

(Responds to Recommendations: 4, 5, 6, 13, 19, 20, 22, 24, 36, 37, 38)

The Government agrees, either partially, in full, or in principle, with the recommendations in this theme, with work currently underway. Details explaining these views are outlined in the paragraphs below.

Refugee class

*Recommendation 4 – Waiving UNHCR Determination Requirements for Privately Sponsored Refugees: **Partially Agree***

*Recommendation 5 – Expanding the List of Partners for Refugee Referral: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 6 – Program Integrity Framework for Sponsorship Agreement Holders: **Partially Agree***

The Committee recommended “that IRCC waive UNHCR refugee determination requirements for privately sponsored refugees” for which the Government partially agrees. Under the Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program, some sponsor groups are already not required to provide refugee status determination documents, in keeping with the Committee's recommendation. Specifically, Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs), who represent about half of all admissions under the program, are not required to submit a Refugee Status Determination (RSD) issued by the UNHCR with their applications. SAHs are a longstanding, trusted partner and are required to assess whether applicants meet the refugee eligibility requirements, as per their Sponsorship Agreement with the Minister. PSR applications submitted by sponsors in Quebec are also not subject to the RSD requirement.

The other two sponsoring streams – Group of Five (G5) and Community Sponsor (CS) – are required to submit a RSD as part of their sponsorship applications. The RSD is proof that the applicant has undergone a refugee status determination process and has been found to be a refugee. As such, this requirement is in line with program objectives to offer protection to the displaced and persecuted. It also helps, in part, to manage access to the program, as only those who have successfully gone through a refugee status determination process are able to submit an application through these streams, which limits the number of applicants able to apply. Individuals who have not undergone a refugee status determination process may still access the PSR program if they are sponsored by a SAH. The Department is currently exploring other ways

to better manage application intake in the G5 and CS streams in order to reduce the inventory and maintain shorter and more predictable processing times.

Approved in March 2022, and implemented in October 2023, the introduction of the Program Integrity Framework (PIF) was a response to the need for IRCC to improve monitoring and awareness of support being provided by SAHs. This need was identified through the 2007 and 2015 PSR Program Evaluations, as well as a trend of integrity concerns and sponsor compliance issues ongoing since Operation Syrian Refugees. The PIF was developed by IRCC in consultation with the sponsorship community as represented by the SAH Council, the SAH Navigation Unit, and the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program. Throughout its development, IRCC took a facilitative approach that recognized the administrative burden this new process would entail for sponsors, while balancing the need to satisfy integrity concerns in the PSR program.

IRCC recognizes that this initial framework exercise has further room to develop and therefore partially agrees with the recommendation that IRCC address the concerns regarding the PIF and requirements for SAHs. As the PIF exercise is scheduled to run every five years, IRCC is already working with the sponsorship community to solicit feedback to allow the Department to incorporate lessons learned and further streamline the process while ensuring integrity concerns are addressed. There remains strong continuing interest for refugee sponsorship with high demand for new application spaces from SAHs and high intake from G5/CS, as well as applications from new organizations wishing to become SAHs.

The Government agrees in principle with the recommendation that IRCC end its over reliance on the UNHCR to select and process refugee applications and instead expand the list of partners for refugee referral. As part of the Strategic Immigration Review, IRCC committed to partnering with organizations working on the ground to refer people to Canada in need of humanitarian and other pathways.

In recent years, IRCC has increasingly been called upon to quickly develop and implement immigration responses for various crisis-affected populations, including those who do not fit within the refugee definition. In this context, including in response to the situation in Afghanistan, IRCC has new partners to identify persons for resettlement and other established new partnerships to identify persons for resettlement via both regular programs and special measures. As noted in the Strategic Immigration Review, IRCC is working to further diversify Canadian referral partners, which allow Canada to be more inclusive in our humanitarian response.

In the context of the Government-Assisted Refugees (GAR) program, Canada largely relies on the UNHCR as its primary refugee resettlement referral partner. The UNHCR is the United Nations agency entrusted with the protection of refugees globally, with over 29 million refugees under its mandate. This global mandate, along with its extensive international footprint and expertise in refugee protection, enables the UNHCR to identify and refer refugees in need of resettlement. The UNHCR also provides refugees with wrap around supports so that those who are not identified for resettlement have access to food, medical care, and shelter, and works with refugee-hosting countries in order to reduce the risks of forcing a refugee or asylum seeker to return to a country where they are likely to face persecution.

The Department also works with other referral partners where there is a need to enhance referrals for a specific group. For example, IRCC recently added ProtectDefenders.eu and Frontline Defenders as direct referral partners for Human Rights Defenders under the GAR program. Further, as announced in 2023 by the Prime Minister, Rainbow Railroad is a referral partner, playing an important role in providing the Department with LGBTQI+ referrals.

Under the PSR program, IRCC works with over 135 SAHs, which as noted above may identify refugees not holding a refugee status determination for private sponsorship.

Under the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot (EMPP), Canada's complementary pathway for refugee labour mobility, IRCC has signed Memoranda of Understanding with eight partner organizations to identify, refer, and connect potentially eligible candidates with Canadian employers. Of these eight standard partners, three are also designated Trusted Partner organizations, which means that they have agreements with IRCC to issue "trusted partner referral letters" to candidates that they have assessed to meet the EMPP's protection-based eligibility criteria. IRCC continues to support the expansion of the complementary pathways

ecosystem by encouraging greater independent access and uptake of the EMPP by other humanitarian organizations working in refugee resettlement, including SAHs and community sponsors, as well as Canadian employers associations and regional economic development agencies looking to bolster their labour force.

Temporary Public Policy

*Recommendation 19 – Temporary Public Policy for Protected Persons: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 22 – Temporary Public Policy on Regularization: **Partially Agree***

Section 25.2 of the *Immigration, Refugee and Protection Act* provides the Minister with the authority to grant a foreign national permanent resident status, or an exemption from requirements of IRPA or Regulations if the Minister is of the opinion that it is justified by public policy considerations. A temporary public policy can be created to address the situation of a group of foreign nationals in similar circumstances, who would not otherwise qualify in an existing immigration class or program. Each public policy has distinct eligibility criteria and distinct conditions, and is intended to be a solution to address the unique needs of an identified population, and their specific circumstances. A temporary public policy can be revoked by the Minister should it no longer be required.

The Government agrees in principle with the Committee’s recommendation to create a temporary public policy for protected persons currently in the backlog to allow them to obtain permanent residence automatically. While acknowledging that there are increasing processing times for protected persons waiting to obtain permanent resident status, and there is a need to improve and reduce the inventory of those waiting, creating a temporary public policy would significantly exceed permanent resident targets and undermine the 2024-2026 Levels Plan and the resulting funding provisions that support permanent resident processing as the volume of admissions would exceed the Government-approved Levels Plan.

The Government remains dedicated to ensuring that protected persons be granted permanent resident status as soon as possible and continues to implement measures to do so. This has been demonstrated by the growth in admission targets for protected persons since the re-introduction of the multi-year Levels Plan in 2018 – from 16,000 to 27,000 in 2024. Incremental growth to 29,000 in 2025 and 2026 (each) as projected in the 2024-2026 Levels Plan further expands the Government’s commitment to try to reduce processing times resulting in more applications being processed to final decision in that category.

As with all permanent resident admissions, targets are subject to planning; consultations with provinces, territories, partners, and stakeholders; and subsequent approval by the Government – which is underway for the 2025-2027 Levels Plan. The comprehensive consultation that supports planning efforts with provinces and territories takes place through the Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration, including direct bilateral discussions, as well as multi-jurisdictional input to the annual stakeholder survey and subsequent Ministerial roundtables. Results of this engagement is a key consideration in target setting whereby, through the Levels Plan, targets are set based on a number of factors, including funding, processing capacity and the establishment of responsible admission targets. This rigorous process enables operational predictability to support IRCC and its partners in balancing its broad range of humanitarian, family and economic immigration goals.

While we understand the call for more permanent resident spaces for protected persons in Canada, their needs have to be balanced with the needs of various sectors of Canadian society and other vulnerable populations that have been promised protection, within the parameters of what can be delivered. Despite an overall 61.29% increase in total admission targets since the 2018-2020 Levels Plan, from 310,000 in 2018 to 500,000 in 2026, growth cannot keep stride with demand for permanent residency, which continues to outpace available spaces in all categories. Targets established in the Levels Plan have been set to capacity according to funding and operations, and would thus require additional investments in order to commit to an initiative of this scale.

As outlined in the report, *An Immigration System for Canada’s Future*, which lays out a pathway to strengthen our immigration system, IRCC will also continue to build a more whole-of-government approach to immigration levels planning in order to promote integrated planning and coordination across levels of government with partners and stakeholders.

The Government of Canada recognizes the contributions of undocumented people to the economy, and acknowledges the increased vulnerability that comes from their lack of authorized status. In the 2021 mandate letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, direction was given to “[b]uild on existing pilot programs to further explore ways of regularizing status for undocumented workers who are contributing to Canadian communities.” Work on implementing this commitment is underway. Granting permanent residence – outside of existing pathways and levels planning by way of a temporary public policy – would not serve to expedite the granting of status for those already on a track towards permanent residence, such as some temporary foreign workers, including caregivers. To this end, the Government partially agrees with the Committee’s recommendation to create a temporary public policy to regularize undocumented people and temporary foreign workers, including caregivers, and the Government will continue efforts currently focused on the undocumented population.

Caregiver Pilots

*Recommendation 24 – Removing Barriers for Home Support Workers, Home Child Care Providers and Caregivers: **Partially Agree***

As economic pilots, the Home Support Worker and Home Child Care Provider pilots are subject to an annual processing cap of 2,750 applications each, as established in subsection 14.1(2) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. This processing cap limits the number of caregiver applications that can be processed in a year, but does not limit the number of applications that can be received. To ensure that the Department does not receive more applications than it has the authority to process, Ministerial Instructions were introduced in 2021 that establish intake caps of 2,750 applications (for principal applicants) per pilot, per year. Subsequently, in 2023, intake sub-caps were introduced to distribute the 2,750 spaces to ensure that caregivers already working in Canada have a reasonable opportunity to apply.

The Home Support Worker and Home Child Care Provider pilots will expire in June 2024, and the Department is examining future potential program options with consideration of intake volume in relation to labour market needs and permanent resident admission levels. In April 2023, the Ministerial Instructions for the Home Support Worker and Home Child Care pilots were amended to reduce the work experience requirement from 24 months to 12 months, further reducing barriers for applicants. Note: the Live-in Caregiver Program closed in 2014 and the enabling text was removed from the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* in 2017. Therefore, the Government partially agrees with the Committee’s recommendation to remove the cap per program for the Home Support and Home Child Care Provider Pilots, and remove the two year work experience for the Live-in Caregiver Program.

Family Class

*Recommendation 20 – Acting on Ministerial Mandate Letter for Accelerated Family Reunification: **Agree***

The Government agrees with the recommendation that the Minister of IRCC act on his mandate letter to speed up family reunification applications for both refugee and family class applications, and that the government regularly publish the processing times for these streams.

The COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on all business lines for the Department, including the family class sponsorship program. Since then, IRCC has initiated a series of measures to improve the processing times for the family class sponsorship program, noting that Quebec-destined applications face additional delays in processing compared to other applicants, given limited level space under family class to accommodate demand of Quebec-destined applications. Such measures include file digitization, remote processing, the use of streamlined processing measures and online portals, as well as an increase in the number of decision-makers. These measures have demonstrated results: over the course of 2023, IRCC has reduced its pre-July 2022 spouse and common law partner overseas inventory (outside Quebec) by over 85%, positioning the Department for ongoing improvements to the processing time. At the end of 2023, processing times for spousal permanent resident applications (excluding Quebec) are approximately 13 months (overseas) and 10 months (in-Canada), compared to 17 months and 11 months (respectively) for the same period in 2022. IRCC has also alleviated pressures on the parent and grandparent inventory through increased admission targets for this category, from 25,000 in 2022 to 32,000 admissions in 2024. At the end of 2023, processing times for parent

and grandparent applications (outside Quebec) are approximately 24 months, compared to 38 months for the same period in 2022.

In addition to faster processing times for spousal permanent residents, in May 2023, IRCC announced new measures to strengthen family reunification. These include faster and more accessible temporary resident visa processing for spousal permanent resident applicants using streamlined tools and techniques; most eligible temporary resident visa applications for spousal sponsorship using these streamlined processing tools are processed within 30 days. Looking ahead, IRCC is exploring the use of advanced analytics for overseas family class spouse and partner applicants, including automation of certain positive decisions with all admissibility and final decisions made by an officer before the end of summer 2024. Since June 2023, the Department posts family class sponsorship program processing times online for Quebec destined and Rest of Canada applications, which are updated on a weekly basis. Similarly, the Department began publishing the processing times for the refugee program – Government-assisted refugees, Privately sponsored refugees and Protected persons and convention refugees (in Canada) – in 2018; dependents of Protected Persons was included as of March 2023.

Protected persons in Canada who have dependent family members abroad can, as of December 2019, submit a permanent residence application for themselves and their family simultaneously at a single location versus before when family members could only apply after the protected person was found eligible for permanent residence. A related pilot was introduced in 2019, which processes the applications for permanent residency of both the protected person and their family members abroad simultaneously. A review of the pilot is currently underway to determine its future. Furthermore, in September 2020, the Minister signed a temporary public policy exempting certain in-Canada protected person applicants for permanent residence and their eligible family members from the need to undergo additional immigration medical examination thereby speeding up family reunification.

Vulnerable Afghan nationals

*Recommendation 13: Special Immigration Measures for Afghans – **Partially Agree***

*Recommendation 36: Housing Supports for Afghan Interpreters – **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 37: Lifting Quota for Afghans Who Served Canada – **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 38: Bringing Afghans Who Served Canada to Safety – **Agree***

The Government shares the Committee's dedication to welcoming Afghans who assisted Canada during its engagement in Afghanistan and is working to bring them to Canada as quickly and safely as possible. In October 2023, the Government of Canada met its commitment to welcome at least 40,000 refugees and vulnerable Afghans by the end of 2023, which remains one of the largest commitments in the world. The Government recognizes that many Afghan nationals remain at risk of reprisal from the Taliban, and it remains steadfast in its commitment to help vulnerable Afghans.

Since August 2021, Canada has welcomed 47,010 refugees and vulnerable Afghans as of January 25, 2024. As part of the Government of Canada's commitment to vulnerable Afghans, 23,000 spaces are allocated to Afghans who assisted Canada in Afghanistan and their families, through programs including the Special Immigration Measures (SIMs) program and the permanent residence pathway for the extended family of former Afghan interpreters (EFPP). Global Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces have provided enough referrals to fill all 18,000 spaces originally allocated under the SIMs program, and 13,655 Afghans have arrived through this pathway as of January 25, 2024. Under the EFPP, IRCC has received enough applications to welcome to 5,000 Afghans through the program. 3,235 of these individuals have arrived under this pathway as of January 25, 2024.

The Government of Canada will continue to process the existing applications it has received through the special programs and measures for Afghans on a priority basis. It will also continue to help vulnerable Afghans by welcoming them through its regular immigration programs, including economic, family reunification, and refugee resettlement programs.

As with any crisis of this magnitude, there is more demand for these programs than Canada is able to provide, taking into consideration the need to balance Canada's commitment under the Afghan Resettlement Initiative with commitments to non-Afghan immigrants and refugees.

These commitments, both for Afghan nationals and non-Afghan immigrants alike, are subject to the Levels Plan. Program intake caps and/or expiry dates are a standard practice for temporary measures to ensure that the Department is able to process applications received and welcome successful applicants to Canada. While the Government of Canada remains committed to this population, IRCC must also consider its capacity to fulfill the promise of protection that has been offered to others in need amidst Canada's broad range of humanitarian, family and economic immigration goals. As a result, the Government agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation to lift the quota for Afghans who served Canada. Canada's support for Afghans remains steadfast, and efforts to help Afghans inside and outside Afghanistan continue. Program intake caps take into account a number of considerations, including the evolving situation on the ground, resources available to process applications and provide settlement supports, and other immigration pathways available for the population.

While Canada's fulfilment of its commitment to welcome at least 40,000 vulnerable Afghans and refugees is a notable milestone given the challenging operational context, the Government of Canada recognises that many people are still facing a dire humanitarian situation. For those Afghan clients who are still in Afghanistan and the wider region, several obstacles continue to pose challenges, such as Taliban exit controls and third country entry and exit requirements. Strong humanitarian partnerships are crucial to navigating these challenges and bringing Afghans to safety in Canada. The Government continues to work with like-minded countries, partners in the region, and non-governmental organizations to mitigate these challenges, demonstrate flexibility and to support safe passage activities for vulnerable Afghans.

The Government of Canada continues to advocate in a variety of multilateral fora, including the G7, the UN, and through regular and sustained dialogue led by Canada's Special Representative for Afghanistan based in Doha, for the Taliban to respect international obligations and to allow Afghans safe passage out of Afghanistan. Canada will continue ongoing efforts to engage with a wide range of partners, including NGOs and private-sector service providers, to address challenges related to securing safe passage for Afghan nationals who are eligible for Canada's immigration programs. To this end, the Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to "urgently and expeditiously bring Afghans who served Canada and their loved ones to safety in Canada" and remains committed to securing the safe passage and resettlement of all those eligible Afghans whose applications remain in processing.

Given the significant risk to collection officers, biometric equipment, and the personal information and safety of clients, IRCC has implemented a multi-stage approach to security screening for Afghan clients in line with other crisis response situations where the biometric screening and determination of admissibility cannot be done in country due to safety and security reasons.

The first step of this approach is the collection of enhanced biographic information from clients while they are still in Afghanistan. Clients who do not trigger admissibility concerns after enhanced biographic screening may be invited to travel onwards to a third country where biometric screening and a determination of admissibility can be made before onward travel to Canada. IRCC has invested in additional capacity at various locations in its global network – which increased the capacity to almost 200,000 biometric enrolments per year – to ensure timely biometric collection for Afghan nationals at these third country sites.

Given that identity screening via biometric collection is an integral component of the immigration process, the Government only partially agrees with the Committee's recommendation 13. In line with its response to recommendation 17 in the 2022 Government Response to the Report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, *Honouring Canada's Legacy in Afghanistan: Responding to the Humanitarian Crisis and Helping People Reach Safety*, the Government of Canada objects to waiving biometric requirements until clients' arrival in Canada.

IRCC carefully assesses and balances security, operational, and humanitarian considerations when making decisions on exempting certain visa requirements, including the collection of biometrics. Biometric information provides a reliable and accurate tool for establishing and confirming a person's identity throughout the immigration continuum. Through biometrics-based domestic screening, Canada receives key information related to the identity of the individual and potential reasons for inadmissibility. These include criminality and security-

related concerns, and can help to identify known or suspected criminals, members of terrorist and organized criminal entities, war criminals or persons committing crimes against humanity, or anyone engaging in activities that could pose a risk to the safety and security of Canada. It is critical that biometric screening is undertaken prior to the arrival of individuals in Canada. This is an important risk mitigating step to ensure that we can confirm the identity of individuals seeking to travel to Canada, and to help ensure that those few bad actors who pose a threat to Canada's immigration system or to Canadians remain overseas.

On October 4, 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced their "Illegal Foreign Nationals Repatriation Plan" which requires all foreign nationals residing without legal status in Pakistan to depart by October 31, 2023, and prohibits the provision of accommodations to those who entered the country irregularly. The Repatriation Plan complicates IRCC's efforts to provide housing for Afghans who arrived in Pakistan through irregular means, or who have not maintained their legal status. The Government of Canada agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation to provide housing supports to Afghan interpreters and their family members who have fled to third countries. Since September 2021, over 13,800 clients have used accommodation services in Pakistan and the Government will continue to provide limited and exceptional temporary accommodation measures for Afghan clients in Pakistan. In the coming weeks and months, as more eligible and admissible Afghans with applications in process continue to arrive in Canada, IRCC expects the need for temporary accommodations will reduce.

In general, the Government of Canada works closely with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on Canada's refugee programs around the world. In many locations, the IOM is Canada's service provider for immigration medical exams, transportation logistics and in exceptional circumstances, temporary accommodations in advance of departure. Given the current circumstances in Afghanistan, the IOM primarily provides this support in Pakistan for refugees and vulnerable Afghans destined to Canada.

Under current exceptional circumstances, eligible Afghan clients in Pakistan who are eligible for the Resettlement Assistance Program and entered Pakistan legally, receive temporary accommodation from the IOM after successfully passing eligibility and security assessments.

THEME 3: FACILITATING NEWCOMERS' CONNECTION TO THE LABOUR MARKET

(Responds to Recommendations: 1, 2, 18, 21)

Recommendation 2: Comprehensive Plan for the Labour Market – Agree in Principle

The Government agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation to address the labour force crisis in Canada through developing comprehensive economic, education and training plans that will address labour market needs into the near, mid and longer term future. Canada's labour market has been experiencing labour shortages across multiple sectors, which has led to competitive wages and more meaningful employment opportunities for workers. The situation has improved since record-high vacancies experienced in recent years, but shortages persist in critical areas such as healthcare. The Government of Canada is working with all governments and partners, including provinces and territories (P/Ts), employers, unions, and Indigenous communities to ensure that job seekers and workers have access to the training and supports required to thrive in today's and tomorrow's labour market, and businesses have access to the talent they need to grow.

ESDC programs are flexible and adaptable to immediate and long-term needs. ESDC monitors and responds to changes in the labour market by adjusting its policies and calibrating its investments in its existing suite of programs to provide support when and where it is needed most. For instance, new technologies and evolving approaches to work in the shift to a low-carbon economy often require workers in all industries to adapt to new skills requirements. ESDC is working to align training opportunities to labour market needs and prepare Canadians for jobs of the future as outlined in the Government's interim Sustainable Jobs Plan. One of the key federal measures announced in the Plan and the 2022 Fall Economic Statement was the introduction of a new Sustainable Jobs Stream under the Union Training and Innovation Program to support unions in leading the development of green skills training for workers in the

trades. This is a component of the proposed \$250 million investment to help Canadian workers thrive in the economy of the future.

Through the bilateral Labour Market Agreements, the Government of Canada also works collaboratively with P/Ts and provides funding to help people prepare for and return to work. Together, these agreements constitute the federal government's largest investment in training representing just under \$3 billion a year in base funding. Budget 2023 invested an additional \$625 million in 2023-2024 in the Labour Market Agreements with P/Ts, who have the flexibility to support Canadians' access to training that is aligned with the needs of their local labour markets, including for high demand industries and skilled workers.

In the short-term, the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) Program is available to employers who have demonstrated difficulties hiring Canadians and permanent residents to fill in job vacancies. Recent program changes, including the development of a TFW Program Workforce Solutions Roadmap (currently in place until August 30, 2024), and the Recognized Employer Pilot, which launched on September 12, 2023, help Canadian employers to better respond to changing labour and economic conditions and have helped streamline the administrative process.

The Government recognizes the importance of continued cooperation with P/Ts to respond to ongoing and future labour market pressures. For example, the Foreign Credential Recognition Program (FCRP) is supporting labour market efficiency and growth by supporting the labour market integration of skilled newcomers in Canada by funding projects with P/Ts, regulatory authorities and other organizations. These projects improve foreign credential recognition (FCR) processes and provide loans and employment supports (e.g., work placements, wage subsidies) to skilled newcomers to help them fully use their talent. Budget 2022 announced an additional \$115 million over five years starting in 2022-2023 and \$30 million ongoing for the FCRP to expand the Program with an initial focus on supporting internationally educated healthcare professionals.

In the Fall Economic Statement 2023, the Government also announced plans to continue working with P/Ts to remove barriers to internal labour mobility. This will allow workers, including newcomers, to move more freely between P/Ts to find employment in regions where they can fill shortages and find the best job opportunities to match their skills. Additionally, the Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration (FMRI) will collaborate with the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) and other relevant F-P/T tables on areas of mutual priority in FCR. The FMRI will consider the implications of FCR in immigration selection; the impact of Canada's complex regulatory environment; and enhancing the quality of FCR pre-arrival information sharing. This collaboration on shared labour market issues will help ensure Canada has a skilled and adaptable workforce as well as efficient and inclusive labour markets that drive economic growth across Canada. FLMM Ministers met on January 16, 2024, to discuss ongoing priorities concerning Canada's labour market, where they agreed to strengthen collaboration on FCR and labour mobility. These will be key areas of work for the FLMM going forward.

Further, IRCC's Settlement Program funds services that help newcomers settle and adapt to life in Canada, including employment-related services. Employment-related services equip newcomers with employment-related knowledge and skills that help them prepare for, and connect with, the Canadian labour market. These employment-related services also help newcomers learn about regulated professions in Canada, connect them with the regulatory body for their intended profession, and access other existing supports (such as the projects funded through ESDC's Foreign Credential Recognition Program).

International Student Program

Recommendation 1 – Automatic Issuance of Post-Graduate Work Permits: Disagree

The Government recognizes the importance for timely issuance of study permits and the need to respect processing service standards. However, automating the issuance of post-graduation work permits (PGWP) would not address this issue. On that note, as of February 2024, processing times for study permits are at 66 days, slightly above the 60-day service standard. The Department expects to return to and maintain service standards once it has adjusted to recent changes requiring that study permit applications include verified Letters of Acceptance

and a provincial or territorial attestation letter as per the Ministerial Instructions setting an intake cap on the number of study permit applications that IRCC will accept into processing for 2024.

At this time, the Government does not agree that post-graduation work permits should be automatically issued to international students who have successfully completed their studies given ongoing work to better align the program with labour market shortages, all while calibrating the intake of temporary residents with planned levels of permanent residents.

To that end, in January 2024, IRCC made two initial changes. Starting September 1, international students who begin a study program that is part of a curriculum licensing arrangement will no longer be eligible for a post-graduate work permit upon graduation. Under curriculum licensing agreements, students physically attend a private college that has been licensed to deliver the curriculum of an associated public college. These programs have seen significant growth in attracting international students in recent years, though they have less oversight than public colleges and they act as a loophole with regards to post-graduation work permit eligibility. Second, graduates of master's degree programs that are less than two years in duration are now eligible to apply for an open work permit for up to three years. Previous guidance tied the length of a PGWP to the length of an individual's study program, hindering select master's degree graduates by limiting the amount of time they had to gain skilled work experience. This change recognizes that graduates of master's degree programs are excellent candidates to succeed in Canada's labour market and to potentially transition to permanent residence.

IRCC continues to explore further changes to program eligibility so that it is better targeted to occupations in shortage while balancing the desire to limit the number of temporary residents who come to Canada to work or study.

Work Permit Program

*Recommendation 18 – Work Permits for Asylum Claimants in Canada: **Agree***

*Recommendation 21 – Temporary Public Policy for Issuance of Open Work Permits: **Partially Agree***

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to grant open work permits to asylum claimants in Canada and is committed to ensuring asylum claimants have access to work permits as soon as possible, once requirements are met, so that they can support themselves and reduce reliance on provincial, territorial, and municipal social services.

In November 2022, IRCC introduced a Temporary Public Policy under which asylum claimants may receive an accelerated work permit as soon as they: submit their claim information, provide biometrics, undergo a medical exam, and their claim is determined eligible for referral to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB). Once the eligibility decision is made and the Immigration Medical Exam is completed, the work permit is issued within one to two weeks, as of February 18, 2024, compared to the approximate 30-day processing time prior to the public policy. The improvement in processing times for work permits to asylum claimants can be attributed not only to the temporary public policy, but also to the automation of work permit processing for asylum claimants.

For persons making an asylum claim at an inland IRCC office, IRCC's 'Single Touch Eligibility' processing pilot combines two appointments into one by fast tracking routine eligibility determinations, which allows for accelerated eligibility decisions and referrals to the IRB in one appointment. Clients who have their IMEs completed at the time of their eligibility appointment will also be issued their work permit at this time, which eliminates mail delays.

Additionally, for persons making an asylum claim at a port of entry, CBSA's 'One Touch' processing model, launched in September 2022, allows officers to determine eligibility and refer claimants to the IRB immediately, which has resulted in work permits being issued within a matter of days of the medical examination being passed.

IRCC actively continues to explore and implement innovative approaches to accelerate in-person appointments and eligibility decisions, allowing for faster issuance of work permits to claimants.

The Government partially agrees with the Committee's recommendation to issue open work permits to all undocumented people and temporary foreign workers in Canada. Temporary foreign workers have legal status in Canada and are legally authorized to work.

The Government of Canada recognizes the contributions of undocumented people to the economy, and acknowledges the increased vulnerability that comes from their lack of authorized status. In the 2021 mandate letter to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship, direction was given to “[b]uild on existing pilot programs to further explore ways of regularizing status for undocumented workers who are contributing to Canadian communities.” Work on implementing this commitment is underway. Any effort to provide status to undocumented people would be included in this work, and it may or may not include the issuance of work permits.

In 2023, there were approximately 1.3M work permit holders with permits (for all purposes) becoming effective in that year. 80% of these work permit holders had open work permits (all under the International Mobility Program), while 20% had employer-specific work permits. Within employer-specific work permits (approximately 270,000), 32% were under the International Mobility Program, and 68% were under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP). Most temporary foreign workers in Canada already receive open work permits. However, many temporary foreign workers are recruited by employers to fill specific labour market gaps through a process that ensures that their wages and working conditions meet Canadian standards and ensures that there is no downward pressure on Canadian wages and working conditions. Employer-specific work permits provide workforce stability for employers and for workers. They provide the assurance of up-front employer vetting, and assurance of a job upon workers arrival in Canada. Unlike employers of open work permit holders, employers of employer-specific work permit holders are subject to inspections and penalties if they are non-compliant with program conditions such as provincial employment and recruitment laws, or the terms and conditions of the offer of employment. ESDC and IRCC are jointly working to deliver on the Budget 2022 announcement to implement a new Temporary Foreign Worker Program Agriculture and Fish Processing Stream. The new stream will help to strengthen worker protections and help to ensure Canada's food producers have access to a stable and reliable supply of labour, which includes increased worker mobility within the primary agriculture, and fish and food processing sector.

Depending on the program, Canadian employers have obligations regarding accommodations for temporary foreign workers. Under the TFWP, employers hiring workers under the Agricultural Stream and the Seasonal Agricultural Stream are required to provide adequate, suitable and affordable housing, as defined by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and in accordance with applicable Provincial/Territorial municipal legislation. Under the Low-Wage Stream, employers must provide suitable and affordable housing or ensure its availability. This must cost less than 30% of the workers income before tax. Finally, there are no obligations regarding accommodations under the High-Wage and Global Talent Streams or under the International Mobility Program.

Employers must pay for the round trip transportation costs for temporary foreign workers to arrive at their work location in Canada at the beginning of their work period, and to return to their country of residence at the end of their work period if they are being hired under the Seasonal Agricultural Stream or the Low-Wage Stream of the TFWP.

Furthermore, in 2019, IRCC implemented the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers. This is a measure providing workers on an employer specific work permit who are experiencing, or who are at risk of experiencing abuse in their job, the opportunity apply for an open work permit and to leave the abusive situation quickly and to work for any employer in Canada. This permit mitigates some of the barriers that migrant workers have previously faced in reporting abuse, such as loss of their work authorization, fear of deportation, and employer retribution. Additionally, the Open Work Permit for Vulnerable Workers program is facilitative and expedient in nature and has a lower burden of proof, recognizing that abuse is often difficult to substantiate. The permit is also available to family members of the foreign worker in Canada.

Additionally, the Changing Employers Public Policy, which was introduced in May 2020, permits employer-specific work permit holders to change employers or occupations from within Canada more quickly. This public policy also allows temporary workers already in Canada to request

interim work authorization to begin working for their new employer in advance of a final decision on their work permit application.

THEME 4: MANAGING APPLICATIONS AND RESOURCES

(Responds to Recommendations 8, 9, 14, 15, 32, 33, 34, 35, 39, 40)

The Government agrees, either in full, in part or in principle, with all of the recommendations in this theme, with work currently underway on a number of key improvements to the Department's structure to ensure that the management and allocation of resources is done effectively to support a nimble system that properly addresses client needs.

Application management

*Recommendation 8 – Increase Visa Office Capacity: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 9 – Processing of Applications by Departmental Employees: **Agree***

*Recommendation 15 – Accountability of Government in Clearing the Backlog: **Partially Agree***

*Recommendation 32 – Creation of an Immigration Ombudsperson: **Partially Agree***

IRCC recognizes that many people around the world have experienced delays due to an influx of applicant submissions in the processing inventory, which saw increased pressure following the country's path to post-COVID recovery. Application intake remains at record highs as Canada continues to be a destination of choice.

The Government partially agrees with the Committee's recommendation that a deadline be set to clear the backlog of applications and that accountability measures be put in place through a task force to ensure that the deadline is met.

Noting that processing times across all lines of business were significantly impacted during the global pandemic, IRCC had relatively stable processing times across many lines of business in 2019. There have been significant improvements made in reducing backlogs and stabilizing processing times as the country recovers from instabilities exacerbated during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government has announced several funding commitments in recent years to address the increase in application backlogs and processing delays. For instance, as part of the 2021 Economic Update, \$85 million was allocated for 2022-23 to reduce backlogs in Canada's immigration system, speed up the process of citizenship, reunite families, and welcome people who can help to address gaps in Canada's labour shortages. In addition, the Government announced increased funding to address higher temporary resident processing and asylum processing volumes in Budget 2022, as well as commitments related to the Levels Plan and special immigration measures for Afghanistan and Ukraine.

As mentioned previously, significant progress has been made towards application backlog reduction. Most notably, backlogs of permanent resident applications in inventory were reduced in the following lines of business between January 2023 and December 2023: Federal High Skilled inventory from 20% to 17%, Provincial Nominee Program (Express Entry) from 38% to 20%, and Spouses, Partners and Children (except for Quebec) from 24% to 15%. As of December 31, 2023, 56% of permanent resident applications in IRCC inventories were within the Department's service standards, compared to 42% at the end of December 2022.

IRCC has also been working to reduce the TRV application inventory while continuing to process new applications. To contribute to these efforts, IRCC created two temporary public policies to expedite and streamline the processing of the majority of TRV and parent and grandparent super visa applications that were in inventory on or before January 16, 2023. Of the 240,000 eligible applications in the inventory, 227,000 applications received final decisions prior to the expiry of the temporary public policies.

Both a Departmental Action Plan and the 2024 Operational Plan have been developed with the goal of reducing application backlogs. As part of the Operational Plan, internal target dates for backlog reduction of key PR lines of business were implemented on January 31, 2023. In addition, specific attention will be given to resolving backlogs in key missions as part of the 2024 Operational Plan. A Department-wide approach across PR programs will better enable IRCC to prevent and reduce backlogs at the program level. The Department also undertook a

regular review of the aged inventory throughout 2023 to ensure all applications were captured and completed applications that were ready, were finalized. Older files are typically more complex, with outstanding client or partner action (such as security, medicals, etc). Therefore, setting a deadline to clear the backlog at the final decision stage may be a challenging commitment given some requirements to finalize applications are outside of IRCC control.

It's also important to consider that some lines of business like TR, asylum and citizenship are demand driven, while others like PR are limited by levels admission space and a varying degree of intake controls. PR processing outputs are capped to match admission space in the Levels Plan, and while PR application intake remains larger than what the Department can actually process, backlogs will continue to form. Levels planning is informed by a number of factors – including processing times, which vary across categories/programs – but given not all have intake controls, the Government's toolkit to manage inventories and processing times is incomplete. Where regional backlogs exist, IRCC will continue to improve on its existing workload monitoring and workload sharing tools to distribute cases across the global processing network and better identify where capacity challenges exist to manage workloads and reduce backlogs where possible, and where admission space in the Levels Plan allows. IRCC will continue to expand the approach of setting internal targets to each program using service standards, with targets and reporting to be in place by July 2024.

As mentioned previously, on January 22, 2024, the Minister of IRC introduced a cap (i.e. intake control) for two years to study permit applications, which will contribute to the Department reducing the backlog and improving processing times, as application intake control is now in place. This intake cap will not impact current study permit holders, study permit renewals, or individuals pursuing master's and doctoral degrees, and elementary and secondary education. Backlogs in uncapped programs (ex: Federal Business) are tied directly to admissions levels. Setting a backlog reduction deadline without adjusting the annual admissions levels will not achieve the intended result. Given the nature of a temporary resident application, processing is faster and these backlogs can be more fluid than with permanent resident applications. However, TRV and Work Permit programs have uncapped application intake, which leads to volume unpredictability, which in turn can lead to backlogs. In 2023, the level of demand across temporary resident programs was unprecedented. Without changes to intake controls and/or admissions levels, the Department will continue to carry an inventory for some lines of business, which will result in the continued existence of a backlog. This would negate the purpose of a backlog reduction task force, as a new backlog would once again be created.

The Department is exploring how to institute additional intake control mechanisms for programs where they do not currently exist, or are not effectively used. Reconciling the disparity between application intake, inventory and planned output is the most effective mechanism for reducing processing times and addressing application backlogs. Governance structures are well in place, along with operational committees, that provide accountability for the internal targets and adherence to the operational plan. Given the measures in place, the progress that has been made thus far in permanent resident backlog reduction, and the internal target dates already set, a special task force is not recommended at this time.

The Government agrees in principle with the Committee's recommendation to increase the capacity of visa offices in order to assist with the effective processing of applications and to communicate effectively with clients. IRCC leverages its integrated network in Canada and abroad to ensure timely, efficient, and risk-based processing of applications. The Government regularly reviews the Department's overseas operations and IRCC works closely with Global Affairs Canada on this to carefully evaluate and adjust its footprint to best serve clients and meet Canada's migration goals.

IRCC has explored numerous innovative policy and operational solutions to reduce inventory and provide faster and better client service, including mandating electronic applications, which has allowed IRCC to better manage its workload by distributing cases across its global processing network. Furthermore, the Department continues to explore the use of automation and advanced analytics to responsibly develop and deploy data-driven technologies in line with privacy requirements and human rights protections to Temporary Resident and Permanent Resident lines of business. This includes using advanced analytics to automate the triaging of applications. Client communication has also improved since the implementation of an

automated email triaging tool, which formats unstructured incoming client emails. This allows IRCC to respond and action enquiries more efficiently. IRCC is also exploring the use of Robotic Process Automation technology which uses software techniques to automate internal processes. Automating tasks will not only enhance the efficiencies of client services and communication tools, but it will free up human resources, including visa officers, to address other Departmental priorities that cannot be computerized. Any increase in capacity must be balanced with the current fiscal environment, available funding and changes in technologies and tools. Where changing priorities require increased capacity, IRCC will prioritize the redirection of workloads, rather than increase resources. An increase in visa processing productivity may also be supported via technology, such as the implementation of automated systems.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation that applications should be processed by IRCC employees and not outside contractors, as has always been the case. As outside contractors, Visa Application Centres (VACs) have no role in the processing of applications. VACs are operated by third-party service providers contracted with the Government of Canada, and are used to provide specific supports including the collection of biometrics and administrative services to overseas applicants. VAC employees do not process applications, are not authorized to provide immigration advice to clients, or play a role in the decision-making process; they are expressly forbidden from doing so. All applications are processed exclusively by IRCC employees at offices inside and outside Canada.

The development of an Ombudsperson Office has been recommended by the Committee to, among other things, oversee the operations of IRCC, supervise processing times for all immigration streams, and to mandate changes to processing times and methods. The Government partially agrees with this recommendation.

IRCC has recently undergone a significant structural realignment to streamline accountabilities, increase efficiencies and improve client service delivery. This realignment was informed by a strategic review of immigration policies and programs that captured the views of IRCC employees, partners and stakeholders.

To reinforce the importance of service to clients, through this realignment IRCC created a new sector for Client Service and Innovation in October 2023. This sector is led by a Senior Assistant Deputy Minister, whose role includes advancing IRCC's agenda to transform the client experience and service design. This includes accountability for setting service standards and ensuring both client feedback and research is integrated into service design.

At the same time, IRCC has made several key investments to boost operational capacity and address backlogs, including technological improvements, and hiring over 1,200 new processing officers during 2022-23. IRCC continues to work to reduce inventories to a healthy level and improve processing times for all lines of business, while balancing its response to ongoing international crises and increasing levels of intake.

It is worth noting that, a similar recommendation to establish an Ombudsperson Office was made by CIMM in the report on *Differential Treatment in Recruitment and Acceptance Rates of Foreign Students in Quebec and the Rest of Canada*, as well as the report on *Promoting Fairness in Canadian Immigration Decisions*. Following these previous recommendations, IRCC committed to carrying out a study on a prospective Ombudsperson Office. The study is still being finalized, but preliminary results suggest that a number of the issues raised have since been advanced through new initiatives put in place by IRCC to improve client service, and reduce bias within decision making. Other issues now fall under the mandate of the new role of Senior Assistant Deputy Minister of Client Service and Innovation mentioned above.

IRCC response to humanitarian crises

Recommendation 14 – Public Policy for Non-Discriminatory Treatment of Refugees: Partially Agree

Recommendation 33 – Processing Those Arriving in Canada from Emergencies Abroad: Agree in Principle

Recommendation 34 – Investing in Emergency Preparedness: Agree

The Government partially agrees with the Committee's recommendation to create a public policy to ensure that, when there is a humanitarian crisis, all refugee applications are processed using the same criteria regardless of country of origin. Each crisis situation is evaluated to assess what solutions are most appropriate, and whether existing immigration and refugee programs are sufficient or if new ones are required.

Canada has a proud and longstanding tradition of providing protection to the world's most vulnerable populations, which is why regular immigration programs are already in place to provide resettlement for refugee populations. Applications for refugee resettlement are assessed based on the guidelines and procedures in place for the Government-Assisted Refugee and Privately Sponsored Refugee programs and are generally the same regardless of country of origin. Individuals cannot apply directly to the Department under the Government-Assisted Refugee Program; instead, applications are submitted to IRCC by a referral partner. Resettlement applications are submitted while applicants are overseas, and applicants must receive a positive decision on their file prior to resettling in Canada. A refugee must meet admissibility and eligibility criteria which include a well-founded fear of persecution in their country of origin based on factors such as race, religion, nationality or membership in a particular social group. When exceptional circumstances arise, the Minister may decide to expedite applications from specific countries by his own initiative.

The migration response required in the context of a humanitarian crisis may extend beyond the capacity of existing immigration programs and therefore requires a more nuanced, agile and flexible approach. The eligibility criteria for IRCC's refugee programs are defined in IRPA (s.95-97) and IRPR, and reflect Canada's commitments under the UN Refugee Convention. Some populations do not meet the eligibility thresholds and criteria set out in the Act and Regulations because of administrative or factual circumstances, but do otherwise have high humanitarian needs resembling refugees. In these cases, IRCC has been called upon to facilitate eligibility. In order to bring these cohorts to Canada as Permanent Residents, these cohorts are exempted from one or more eligibility criteria via a public policy. Exempting cohorts from certain eligibility criteria does not necessarily mean that the applications are expedited. Cohorts with exemptions to refugee eligibility criteria may fall within the Humanitarian and Compassionate & Other or the Refugee categories of the Levels Plan. Therefore, while a public policy cannot be used to grant refugee status directly, it can be used to exempt foreign nationals from certain requirements, thereby facilitating access to refugee protection for individuals who would not otherwise be eligible. As such, using a temporary public policy to grant permanent residence is an approach that can be considered to address the situation of a group of foreign nationals in similar circumstances, who would not otherwise qualify in an existing immigration class or program.

IRCC is increasingly called upon to quickly develop and implement migration responses to a range of humanitarian crisis situations and other pressures. To prepare for such situations, the Department is continuing to explore ways of enhancing its ability to anticipate, and comprehensively manage emerging situations in a manner that is not disruptive to existing programming. The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to invest in emergency preparedness programs to respond to global humanitarian crises so that resources are not removed from the delivery of existing programs, and agrees in principle with the creation of a departmental division independent of other resources and staffing, for the processing of applications from people in emergency situations.

The International Affairs and Crisis Response (IACR) Sector was developed during the Department's recent realignment in 2023 as a new sector of the Department focused on prioritizing responding to international humanitarian crises through emergency preparedness programs. The development of the IACR was inspired by findings from the Strategic Immigration Review, as well as parliamentary feedback, such as recommendation three from the First Report of the Special Committee on Afghanistan, which called for IRCC to create an emergency response mechanism for future humanitarian crises. This new sector has been given the responsibility of advancing Canada's interests in international migration through evidence-based policy development, international diplomacy, advocacy, and engagement, including in collaboration with other government departments.

The IACR Sector provides evidence-based policy development, strategic program support, and oversight for program integrity. It guides functional responses to emerging risks and crises from a migration perspective, overseeing international workforce and platform for effective program design and delivery. IRCC can, for example, prioritize application processing in response to emergency situations, while continuing to mitigate operational impacts in other lines of business. IACR will play a critical role in the Department providing evidence-based policy development and strategic supports for any programs or special measures implemented in response to a crisis, and streamlining coordination across the Department's implicated sectors.

IRCC is developing a Crisis Response Framework, which was one of the considerations proposed by IRCC's recent Strategic Immigration Review to improve preparedness when responding to humanitarian crises. It seeks to provide the overarching guiding principles and vision for successful response. Informed by lessons learned from recent responses, the Framework aims to provide a more proactive and predictable process for advising the Government on its responses based on consistently-applied criteria informed by equity considerations, and will be supported by a playbook, tools and resources to improve operational readiness and coordination across the Department and with partners.

Human Resources

*Recommendation 35 – Additional Resources for New Immigration Measures: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 39 – Additional Funds for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada: **Agree in Principle***

*Recommendation 40 – More Staffing in Call Centres: **Agree in Principle***

The Government of Canada is committed to the success of its immigration programs as evidenced by the significant investments that have been dedicated to IRCC in recent years. In this vein, the Government agrees in principle with the following three recommendations from the Committee: 1) that when new immigration measures are introduced, commensurate resources and levels numbers are provided to meet the demands of new initiatives, 2) that IRCC allocate more staffing resources in call centres so people can receive timely information about their cases, and that 3) the Government of Canada provide the Department with additional staffing and resources to fully address the application backlogs and processing delays.

IRCC began receiving ongoing funding to support immigration through the 2017 Levels Plan. Since the re-introduction of the multi-year Levels Plan in 2018, there has been a corresponding growth in human and financial resources to meet the demands of new Departmental initiatives.

IRCC is taking further action to reduce its overall backlog in permanent resident applications and mitigate potential delays for existing applications, including those of prospective resettled refugees. Measures include hiring over 1,200 new processing staff to support immigration levels as well as investing in and expanding the use of technology and new online options for applicants. The recruitment and onboarding of a significant number of staff has been a key contributor to IRCC's success in managing and reducing its historic levels and application volumes coupled with processing efficiencies and innovations in client service. IRCC is developing an innovative human resource strategy to address impediments to staff recruitment and swift onboarding, as well as the retention of existing staff.

IRCC is also augmenting its capacity with temporary duty assignments and work-sharing with other offices, as well as leveraging a multi-pronged approach to help reduce application backlogs, including an increased focus on innovation, digital modernization and the recent introduction of automation tools. These include advanced analytics models deployed on extensions, Robotic Process Automation to support real-time digital intake of applications, call-centre enhancements and improved client self-serve tools.

The Department has also invested heavily to foster productivity gains in support of more efficient processing, the benefits of which are being realized. IRCC's Client Support Centre (CSC) has aimed to attain objectives by first evolving its ways of working, both internal efficiencies and automation, and once this is achieved, to evaluate staffing resource requirements. IRCC's CSC has focused on on-going initiatives to improve performance, maximize out-put, and

optimize the use of its resources in a continuous effort to improve the services offered to Canadians and prospective newcomers.

Funding investments from Budget 2022 allowed IRCC to stabilize resources at the CSC on a permanent basis, as well as improve tools and technology aimed at ensuring timely client support and maintaining priority operations. The CSC has staffed all positions that it was funded for, and can expect these employees be fully performant by July 2024. The implementation of automation at CSC is another way that IRCC has continued to accelerate its modernization efforts and deliver timely client service improvements. Streamlining some of the Department's client services with automation has enabled processing officers to receive documents from clients in a timely manner, supporting more efficient decision-making processes. CSC also has plans to continue modernizing its internal training to enhance its efficiency to decrease the learning curve for new personnel while maximizing the productivity of the centre's current resources.

THEME 5: OFFICER TRAINING

(Responds to Recommendations 27, 28, 29)

*Recommendation 27 – Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training for Officers: **Agree***

*Recommendation 28 – Best Practices and New Training for Officers on Genuineness of Marriages: **Agree***

*Recommendation 29 – Training and Hiring Local Officers: **Agree***

The Government agrees with all of the proposed recommendations under this theme. Launched in January 2024, there is ongoing work underway at IRCC – in part, as a response to the CIMM Report on *Promoting Fairness in Canadian Immigration Decisions* – to ensure that the training offered to visa officers and Departmental staff include sections that prioritize better understanding of different cultures and their traditions to bridge knowledge gaps, reduce miscommunications between applicants and decision makers, and to continue to maintain an unbiased decision-making process.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to surveying various jurisdictions' immigration officer trainings to support the development and deliver training that assists officers in making informed decisions, while at the same time, prioritizing cultural awareness, and acknowledging and unlearning biases. The Department acknowledges that there is room for increased consistency among officers and offices, and room to improve and solidify the training model.

IRCC commits to exploring immigration officer training models and formats of like-minded partners. Further, IRCC commits to continue its efforts to ensure that immigration courses cover anti-bias, anti-racism and cultural awareness in order for officers to make informed decisions when processing applications and conducting interviews. The Department conducts regular reviews to identify trends in decision making and provide immigration officers with evidence-based risk information to mitigate potential bias and racism.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to work with external stakeholders to inform the development of culturally sensitive best practices, training material and guidelines for visa officers. IRCC is in frequent contact with external stakeholders, including immigration consultants and representatives, when it comes to the development and improvement of internal training and guidance for officers.

Canadian visa officers stationed overseas work very closely with locally-engaged staff, who share their expertise and knowledge of the region's local cultural norms. This cultural knowledge of locally-engaged staff is routinely leveraged during case consultation, and more formal training can be provided to overseas visa officers as needed. Depending on the specific legal, religious or cultural context of a region, overseas visa officers working within the Global Network may arrange specific training on family law when deemed useful.

To ensure that the context within which the Department is working continues to reflect current events and ever-changing global realities, in 2018, IRCC has also established a bimonthly session with key stakeholders of the immigration representative community, including members of the

Canadian Bar Association Immigration Law Section, the Canadian Association of Professional Immigration Consultants and l'Association Québécoise des avocat(e)s en droit de l'immigration. These sessions are a platform wherein immigration practitioners, including law professionals, can promote dialogue and an exchange of information between the Government of Canada and immigration practitioners including bringing forth ideas to improve client service and operational efficiency.

IRCC commits to continue its efforts to identify trends in decision making and to provide visa officers and other staff with evidence-based risk information to mitigate potential biases and racism, by including this information in material guidelines specific to different cultural norms of marriage, including 2SLGBTQIA+ culture, with consideration for non-cisgender identities and gender expressions.

The Government agrees with the Committee's recommendation to hire and train local officers and teams to specialize in the processing of specific applications and streams. IRCC continues to work closely with GAC on the creation of new positions abroad. Depending on the locations identified for any newly hired and trained local officers, sufficient lead time is required in order to arrange for necessary office space fit-ups, which also includes shipping IT equipment from Canada. The Locally Engaged Migration Officer Development Program (LEMO-DP) was created in November 2022 to ensure consistency in training and development of Locally Engaged Migration Officers. LEMO-DP participants follow a rigorous training program and are evaluated by an experienced IRCC officer before they are able to work on cases independently. LEMO-DP participants must complete IRCC mandatory training, as well as the *Immigration Refugee Protection Act* and Regulations certification course that includes modules on assessing eligibility and admissibility across temporary and permanent resident lines of business.

APPENDIX I TO THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

| IN DEMAND YET UNPROCESSED: ENDEMIC IMMIGRATION BACKLOGS | |
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| Recommendations | Response |
| <p><i>Automatic Issuance of Post-Graduate Work Permits</i></p> <p>1. That IRCC automatically issue post-graduate work permits to students who have successfully completed their studies.</p> | Disagree |
| <p><i>Comprehensive Plan for the Labour Market</i></p> <p>2. That IRCC, working with Employment and Social Development Canada and the governments of Quebec, the provinces and territories, which are more aware of the labour needs in their jurisdictions, take immediate steps to address the labour force crisis in Canada through developing comprehensive economic, education and training plans that will address labour market needs into the near-, mid- and long-term future.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Immediate Issuance of Acknowledgement of Receipt</i></p> <p>3. That IRCC issue an acknowledgement of receipt electronically when the file is submitted online.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Waiving UNHCR Determination Requirements for Privately Sponsored Refugees</i></p> <p>4. That IRCC waive the UNHCR refugee determination requirements for all privately sponsored refugees while respecting the jurisdiction of Quebec and the provinces that receive and approve private sponsorship applications.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Expanding the List of Partners for Refugee Referral</i></p> <p>5. That IRCC end its over reliance on the UNHCR to select and process refugee applications and instead expand the list of referral partners to include other credible, established organizations to help select and process refugee applications.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Program Integrity Framework for Sponsorship Agreement Holders</i></p> <p>6. That IRCC address the concerns regarding the Program Integrity Framework and the new set of requirements for Sponsorship Agreement Holders.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Providing Clear Options for Citizenship Ceremonies</i></p> <p>7. That IRCC make clear to all individuals that it is their choice to choose the citizenship ceremonies process best suited to their needs; and that while in-person ceremonies should be the default option, virtual ceremonies should also be allowed; and further, that any self-administered oath of citizenship be subject to robust integrity measures.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Increase Visa Office Capacity</i></p> <p>8. That IRCC increase the capacity of visa offices to process applications, and notably, to communicate effectively with clients.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Processing of Applications by Departmental Employees</i></p> <p>9. That IRCC's processing of applications in overseas visa application centres be done by departmental employees and not by outside contractors.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Auditing Online Portal and Forms</i></p> <p>10. That IRCC audit the online portal process for bugs and errors, commit to immediately correcting these bugs and errors, and ensure that all public facing internet forms are working properly.</p> | Agree |

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| <p><i>Consulting with Users of the Online System and Portal</i></p> <p>11. That IRCC consult with users of the online system and portals so that the government can properly troubleshoot the frequent portal glitches and technical problems.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Plain Language and Improving French</i></p> <p>12. That IRCC immediately implement the use of plain language in all of its application processes, and that the website be updated to improve the quality of the written French in the online application process for francophone applicants.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Special Immigration Measures for Afghans</i></p> <p>13. That IRCC immediately ensure that all individuals and their immediate families who supported the various Canadian missions in Afghanistan be granted special immigration measures into Canada without delay and that, if they have already undergone previous biometric examination as part of those missions, they be considered exempt until they are landed on Canadian soil.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Public Policy for Non-Discriminatory Treatment of Refugees</i></p> <p>14. That IRCC create a public policy to ensure that, when there is a humanitarian crisis, all refugee applications are processed using the same criteria regardless of country of origin.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Accountability of Government in Clearing the Backlog</i></p> <p>15. That IRCC set a deadline to clear the backlog and put in place accountability measures to ensure that the deadline is met; and that a special task force be established and a deadline be set to process older backlog applications.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Real-time Updates on Cases</i></p> <p>16. That IRCC update its online and public facing internet systems to provide real-time case updates to individuals, their appointed advocates and anyone else they authorize to see their private information on their behalf.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Accurate Processing Times</i></p> <p>17. That IRCC post accurate processing times online.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Work Permits for Asylum Claimants in Canada</i></p> <p>18. That IRCC grant open work permits to asylum claimants in Canada without delay.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Temporary Public Policy for Protected Persons</i></p> <p>19. That IRCC create a temporary public policy for protected persons to allow them to obtain permanent residence automatically, as they have waited in the backlog, in some instances, for years.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Acting on Ministerial Mandate Letter for Accelerated Family Reunification</i></p> <p>20. That the Minister of IRCC act on his mandate letter to speed up family reunification applications for both refugee applications and family class applications and that the government regularly publish the processing times for these streams.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Temporary Public Policy for Issuance of Open Work Permits</i></p> <p>21. That IRCC issue open work permits to all undocumented people and temporary foreign workers in Canada.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Temporary Public Policy on Regularization</i></p> | Partially Agree |

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| 22. That IRCC create a temporary public policy to regularize undocumented people and temporary foreign workers in Canada, including caregivers who have worked in Canada to obtain permanent residence, and where the backlog has directly impacted their lives and livelihood. | |
| <i>Creation of Permanent Residence Portal for Caregivers</i> 23. That IRCC create a specific permanent residence portal for the caregiver programs. | Partially Agree |
| <i>Removing Barriers for Home Support Workers, Home Child Care Providers and Caregivers</i> 24. That IRCC remove the cap per program for the Home Support and Home Child Care Provider Pilots, and remove the two year work experience requirement for the Live-in Caregiver Program. | Partially Agree |
| <i>Outlining Criteria for a Clearer Understanding of the Determination Process</i> 25. That IRCC develop proper criteria that are outlined clearly so that officers and the public can understand how these determinations are made. | Agree |
| <i>Recording of Interviews</i> 26. That IRCC or third-party interviews be recorded for accountability purposes, and that the recording may be used as evidence for any judicial review of the application decision. | Agree in Principle |
| <i>Cultural Awareness and Sensitivity Training for Officers</i> 27. That IRCC survey various jurisdictions' immigration officer trainings to determine whether there is a model for training that is most suited to the Canadian context; that IRCC consequently develop and conduct training to assist officers in making informed decisions with cultural awareness and sensitivity in mind when processing applications and conducting interviews. | Agree |
| <i>Best Practices and New Training for Officers on Genuineness of Marriages</i> 28. That IRCC work with external stakeholders, including Quebec stakeholders, lawyers specializing in Quebec civil law and faith community leaders, to establish best practices and new training and guidelines to assist visa officers in recognizing and understanding different cultural norms of marriage, and how to question applicants in a culturally sensitive way to assess the genuineness of a relationship. | Agree |
| <i>Training and Hiring Local Officers</i> 29. That IRCC train and hire local officers and teams to specialize in the processing of specific applications and streams. | Agree |
| <i>Provision of Officer Notes to Immigration Applicants</i> 30. That IRCC issue all relevant officer notes to applicants at every stage to ensure that applicants get updates on their files through a more enhanced and efficient system. | Agree in Principle |
| <i>Opportunity to Correct Minute Errors in Immigration Applications</i> 31. That IRCC allow minor corrections to be made, including a missing document, and provide sufficient time to submit or correct errors before returning or refusing immigration applications in order to provide more client-oriented service. | Agree |

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| <p><i>Creation of an Immigration Ombudsperson</i> 32. That IRCC create the position of an immigration ombudsperson to oversee the operations of IRCC, and who, with actionable powers, would have the authority to supervise processing times for all immigration streams, including temporary immigration streams, and to mandate changes to processing times and methods, as needed.</p> | Partially Agree |
| <p><i>Processing Those Arriving in Canada from Emergencies Abroad</i> 33. That IRCC create a departmental division independent of others in resources and staffing, for the processing of applications from people in emergency situations.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Investing in Emergency Preparedness</i> 34. That the Government of Canada and Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada invest in emergency preparedness programs to respond to global humanitarian crises so that resources are not removed from the delivery of existing programs.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Additional Resources for New Immigration Measures</i> 35. That, when the Government of Canada introduces new immigration measures, additional resources and additional level numbers are provided to meet the demands of the new initiatives.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Housing Supports for Afghan Interpreters</i> 36. That IRCC provide housing supports to Afghan interpreters and their family members who have fled to third countries.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Lifting Quota for Afghans Who Served Canada</i> 37. That IRCC lift the quota for Afghans who served Canada and for their loved ones in need of safety.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>Bringing Afghans Who Served Canada to Safety</i> 38. That IRCC urgently and expeditiously bring Afghans who served Canada and their loved ones to safety in Canada.</p> | Agree |
| <p><i>Additional Funds for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada</i> 39. That the Government of Canada provide additional staffing and resources at IRCC to fully address the application backlogs and processing delays that have plagued the department for years and caused massive upheaval in the lives of refugees, immigrants, temporary foreign workers, and students.</p> | Agree in Principle |
| <p><i>More Staffing in Call Centres</i> 40. That IRCC allocate more staffing resources in call centres so that people can receive timely information about their cases.</p> | Agree in Principle |