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Chair

The Honourable Andrew Telegdi

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• (1110)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Andrew Telegdi (Kitchener—Waterloo, Lib.)): I call the committee meeting to order. We're going to hear witnesses on international experience and credentials recognition.

We're going to start with Madame Lortie. You can go for five to seven minutes, and then we will go to questions and answers.

[Translation]

Mrs. Andrée Lortie (President, La Cité Collégiale): Thank you very much.

I will be making the presentation. Denis Hubert is with me today because he works closely with our clientele. He will be available to help answer questions.

Thank you very much for inviting us. This is a subject we feel strongly about, and I must say that we were very pleased you were able to hear from us today.

First of all, I would like to present a particular perspective that may be different from what you've heard thus far. I know that the Association of Canadian Community Colleges made a presentation. I am president of La Cité collégiale, which means that responsible for a college that serves approximately 12,000 students every year, including 3,500 at the postsecondary level, in one-year, two-year and three-year programs. Almost all of our students are in the skilled trades area, as well as in support and integration programs such as Job Connect and continuing education programs.

I am here to talk about the reality at La Cité collégiale, a French-language college in Ontario created some 15 years ago with the support of the federal government, under a federal-provincial agreement.

The profile of our students has changed considerably. Fifteen years ago, our clientele was mainly of francophone descent from Ontario, with some from Quebec, whereas now 32% of our students come from 80 different countries around the world. So, 32% of our 3,500 students is starting to be a pretty significant community. We also offer a lot of skilled trade programs and employability programs. There again, about 70% of our student clientele is ethnocultural, meaning that they come from a variety of cultural communities.

I would like to talk about the Canadian government's two priority objectives. We are aware of its objectives in relation to immigration, and I should say the Marc Arnal and Diane Vincent are co-chairing a steering committee that deals with minority communities and has

made recommendations which we support. There is the whole matter of settlement and integration of the immigrant population, but there is also the other objective set by the federal government, which relates to official languages and official language minority communities.

There is a very direct connection between those two objectives. Today, I would like to make some recommendations that could help the government attain its goals both with respect to immigrant settlement and integration and the official language communities.

I am aware of the fact that the bill deals with the recognition of credentials. There is no doubt that the community colleges have expertise, experience, and a network available to them that enhances their ability to recognize the foreign credentials of our immigrant communities. That was the first point I wanted to make.

The second point I would like to address has to do with the way our communities respond to immigrants. We clearly have the ability to attract the communities but, once we have them in our institutions, we often have problems making them feel welcome. We must avoid what happened to our Vietnamese communities which, even though they spoke French, never really became integrated into the francophone community because there was no true host community there for them. We are currently experiencing that with members of African communities, people from the Congo, Djibouti and other countries. So, we don't want to make the same mistake that was made with the members of the Vietnamese community.

The reality in the colleges is that there is often a major government investment, meaning that a lot of things can be done. The Association of Community Colleges of Canada has addressed this point far better than I could. On the other hand, we don't seem to make it to the next step, which would be an investment enabling two things to occur: first of all, to ensure that foreign credentials are far more readily accepted, in terms of education or experience, and second, to go a little bit further by establishing mechanisms that will really allow immigrants to become integrated, and especially, will ensure that they have an opportunity to find well-paid jobs in areas where a career is possible.

•(1115)

I would like to quickly go through some fairly specific recommendations we are making. There are currently federal-provincial agreements in place with all the provinces. My suggestion to the committee is that there be some agreements between the federal government and the provinces relating to immigrant settlement and integration, under which community colleges such as La Cité collégiale would be given resources which we could then use to really support our cultural communities.

When I look at our statistics at La Cité collégiale and I compared the number of students starting their studies with those who have been successful, I note that the graduation rate of students from the cultural communities is far lower.

We also have data on client satisfaction compiled using surveys conducted by the Ontario government, not by La Cité collégiale. Again, those numbers are quite low, but they are much lower for our immigrant communities.

So, our first recommendation is that resources be provided through the mechanism of federal-provincial agreements.

Our second recommendation has to do with recognition of foreign skills and credentials. We have started to do this, but our work is still at a very preliminary level. There is still a great deal to be done, not only inside the institutions, but across networks. There has been some work done in New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. But at the present time, the ability not to reinvent the wheel is practically non-existent.

However, there are some organizations in place. There is the Réseau des CEGEP et des collèges francophones du Canada, an organization that represents all college level French-language institutions in Canada. Through that organization, I believe it would be possible, through the provision of funding, to ensure better practices, and that whatever has been developed in some provinces could be shared with the rest of Canada.

People are also talking about labour shortages, and particularly skilled labour. Many immigrants opt for community service programs, programs that fit with the country's cultural realities. I could cite the example of the skilled trades. There is an incredible shortage in that area. You have surely seen the statistics in that regard. According to predictions, the number of plumbers and electricians who will be retiring over the next few years is quite scary, because we will be facing a shortage. I think we have to take steps now to tell immigrants in which areas jobs will be available—well-paid jobs. So, there is work to be done at that level.

Another point I want to make has to do with the community college environment. We have noticed that our students come from countries where post secondary education means a university education; that is something that is well known. But when people do post secondary studies, they go to university. In other words, the community college environment is not well known. And yet it is a place where we are training people in such areas as health care, the media, police work—indeed, in every area imaginable. There is a real need to get more information out to people about the community colleges, because when immigrants are selecting a type of training, they do not always choose those areas where there are well-paid jobs

or jobs, where certain kinds of experience can be recognized. That is the case for the health care sector, for example.

I work a lot with the CNFS, the Consortium national de formation en santé. This consortium, which is subsidized by Health Canada, has had great success. Its primary goal is to train more health care professionals in minority Francophone communities—in other words, Francophone professionals, and to retain them in the regions.

When you see the kinds of problems we're facing in the health care sector and the number of immigrants coming into Canada whose credentials are not being recognized... College level training may not allow someone to become a nurse, but it will allow someone to become a nursing assistant or health care attendant. However, in order for that to happen, immigrants have to be referred to the right institutions and be made aware of the community colleges.

The next step is to support these institutions in terms of their ability to integrate immigrants. I won't go into detail on this. Other recommendations are also made in that area. I am talking here about Eastern Ontario. But as you know, there is a model in place in Toronto, called TRIEC, which is working well. It is a consortium.

•(1120)

I would like to conclude with one recommendation that I see as a major one. In terms of Francophones outside Quebec, there is one thing that is working and one thing that is not working. When Francophones do things for and with Francophones, the results are generally quite incredible. When we work within bilingual institutions, whose mandate is to operate in both English and French, given that the majority is Anglophone—and I'm not talking about a lack of good will here—the result is often that there is very little time to do things in French. It is not a priority, and because of that, it doesn't happen.

In developing structures to settle immigrants and mechanisms to foster better integration, we really need to try and establish and stimulate the establishment of Francophone consortiums. That doesn't mean that we want to exclude Anglophones. Employers can be part of this through sectoral tables, and so on. However, for the consortium, the priority then becomes determining what to do for our French speaking immigrants? By fostering the development of such groups that work with and for Francophones, we achieve better results. We saw this with the Consortium national de formation en santé; it involves seven universities and three colleges that had a specific targets in the health care sector and that were held accountable for results. Indeed, we are well on our way to achieving those results. Now we need to do the same thing in the area of immigrant settlement and integration.

I will conclude on that note, Mr. Chairman. I would be very pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Faille.

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): I am very pleased to be the first one to speak today.

In fact, my colleague and I share responsibility for immigration matters. I see that he has quite a few questions for you. So, I won't use up his time, but I do want to thank you for your opening statement.

Mr. Clavet.

Mr. Roger Clavet (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Thank you very much, Meili.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am very pleased to welcome our representatives from La Cité collégiale, a Francophone institution which is an object of pride for all Francophones, whether they are living in Canada or Quebec. Indeed, you have built bridges with other institutions that go well beyond the borders of Ontario.

In your presentation, I clearly sensed that this is something you feel very passionate about, Ms. Lortie, but at the same time, it looks as though you are facing enormous challenges. Having been on the campus of La Cité collégiale a few times, I did notice that members of ethnocultural communities represent a significant part of the student population. In addition to being Francophone, this community is faced with the major obstacle of having to constantly seek funding. That is an ongoing struggle for anyone who has ever lived in a minority situation.

In your report, you said there are significant challenges. For example, many members of ethnocultural communities who enrol in programs at La Cité collégiale are having trouble completing their studies, precisely because of financial, social and other realities.

Do you have any specific examples? Are we really talking about serious problems among members of ethnocultural communities who start their studies in September—in other words, at the same time as everyone else, and end up having to quit?

Perhaps you could tell us how extensive the problem is?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: We have data on that. In Ontario, the government has established performance indicators to assess the performance of the community colleges. One of those performance indicators is the “graduation rate”. Every year, we follow a process that involves assessing the graduation rate by program. We have a system for tracking our students. Surprisingly, the students have agreed to identify themselves. We developed a questionnaire to find out where our students were from. After that, we were able to see who was starting out in our programs and who was completing them. Thus we were able to identify very clearly that our cultural community or immigrant clientele start their studies, but often drop out after the first or second semester.

We know that there are a variety of factors associated with that, because we carry out exit interviews. We sit down with our students who drop out and ask them some questions. Some of them agree to be interviewed and tell us things like: the percentage of college staff from the cultural communities is very small; so, the role models are not always there.

Let me give you an anecdotal example that clearly illustrates the problem.

We have students studying to become nursing assistants. There are required to do a practicum at the Elisabeth Bruyère Health Centre in Ottawa, which is an extended care facility. We noticed that our students were starting out in the practicum and then dropping out of the training. We discussed it with staff, and what emerged from our discussions was that the clientele at the Elisabeth Bruyère Health Centre is composed mainly of people 80 or 85 years of age who require long-term care and are not used to being cared for by nursing assistants from the cultural communities. They become aggressive and even somewhat violent; they say things like: “I don't want her, I don't want to be cared for by that Black girl”. Consequently, the student in question, who was 20 years of age, decided to drop out. She couldn't deal with that kind of trauma.

That then prompted us to develop sessions, working with the Elisabeth Bruyère Health Care Centre, to teach our students how to deal with that. This is not a personal problem, and its adult clients, who are 80 or 85 years old, won't change. There is no question of changing these people's attitudes.

• (1125)

Mr. Roger Clavet: But isn't there a vicious circle there? Because the ethnocultural communities are under-represented on the staff, we're basically sending them the message that it will be difficult at the bottom, and it will be just as difficult at the top.

Can La Cité collégiale do something about this? For example, could it increase its ethnocultural representation on the Board of Directors?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Can you get that kind of message out?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes.

For example, there was recently a new appointment. Here name is Ms. Bermingham, a person well known in the Ottawa region who works with the cultural communities and now sits on the Board.

Also, we have developed a very specific action plan to hire more academic and administrative support staff from the cultural communities. We have set up working groups in our communities to help them prepare their resume, show them how to present themselves properly, and so on.

But that raises a major issue—one that you clearly touch on, Mr. Clavet, which is resources. I can tell you that at La Cité collégiale, my full-time staff currently teaches 48% of the post secondary program courses, which means that we hire very few teachers.

The Ontario government has just made some very encouraging announcements. We should be receiving additional funding for post secondary education. I have to say I am very happy about the agreements signed by the Ontario and federal governments, because I believe this should help us to provide post secondary education. But it is a question of resources.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Just to conclude, you have given me an opening to address another point. I want to talk about funding for the Réseau des CEGEP et des collèges francophones du Canada. How does that network operate? Who is driving it? And who can fund it? Is it federal-provincial funding?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: At the present time, the network is funded through the Department of Canadian Heritage, and it is one of the only national networks that includes Quebec. All the CEGEPs in Quebec are members, as well as all institutions providing college level training outside Quebec.

It is managed by two CEGEP executive directors and two college presidents from outside Quebec. That network is in place because the federal government wanted to create a Francophone network at the national level. It's a network that operates with a very small budget, but which has the capacity to bring together all these institutions and present certain national projects.

My hope is that it will receive much more support, but we are very pleased that it does exist and we want it to continue. It's a very good mechanism.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Madame Lortie and Monsieur Hubert, for being here this morning. I want to echo what Monsieur Clavet said about your passion. Your enthusiasm for the task was evident even before the hearings began this morning. So I appreciate your presence here today.

I'm wondering if there are any particular credential recognition issues that students from francophone countries face that are maybe different from those faced by students from anglophone countries, or if in your discussions with colleagues you've discovered any differences in how that works.

• (1130)

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: There are a couple of levels here. There's language, obviously, which is absolutely major. You may speak French outside of Canada and you may speak French in Canada, but we've found with our employers that very often the words have not the same cultural meaning. This has created a lot of issues. So there are some language elements—and I'm not really answering your question—that need to be dealt with that are very specific to francophones. And they may exist in English, I don't know.

But in terms of recognition—and I will ask Denis for some feedback, because he knows certain areas, such as the trades, much better than I do—I would say that for post-secondary programs, one of our largest issues is that there are not many mechanisms in French for credit recognition or experience recognition.

So you might not have done much in English, but just compare it to what's been done in French, where, because your critical mass is smaller, the resources you've invested have obviously been smaller also. You're not as far ahead. When I talk to my colleagues at the 22 English colleges in Ontario, much more has been done, whether it's in nursing or engineering or other things like that. We haven't done as much. We're always behind because of the lack of critical mass. Not as many people are in it.

There's also the networking. We're just starting to network. I was talking to you about the work we're doing in B.C. We're doing some work in Saskatchewan also, and in Nova Scotia, but this is all just starting. It's been going on for maybe two or three years. The network of French language colleges in Quebec has had, at the most, 15 years of existence, whereas everywhere else it was set up in the sixties.

I would say that generally. I can't be more specific.

Denis.

Mr. Denis Hubert (Vice-President, Innovation and Market Development, La Cité Collégiale): Perhaps I would add that in the trades area, for example, we are in a situation where a good majority of our new clientele have come from, say, Africa or Haiti. Compared with the other 22 colleges, where they get a larger variety of immigrants—from Asia, Indonesia, and so on—we don't have a lot of that clientele. We are dealing with a clientele from the sub-Saharan and central African areas, and a lot of these people are coming from countries that are very, very poor and that have very little infrastructure. It becomes hard for us in the trades area, for example, to analyze prior knowledge in electricity or plumbing or whatever.

What's hard and difficult also is the personal drama you face with the individual coming in. You're asking that person, "How can you justify that you know this?" A lot of the time, they arrive here with very little documentation, or *encadrement*, in order to be able to explain to us where they're at.

The second problem is one that we're dealing with in a program we've initiated, integrating immigrants to employment. In the culinary arts, for example, you find yourself in a classroom with, say, 55 students with 55 different profiles—from being very close to a culinary arts expert, or chef, to very little knowledge, depending on which countries they are from. As a teacher, you're faced with trying to deal with them in a heterogeneous fashion. It's very challenging, and we don't have the means for more tools in order to do this. Unfortunately, we have to treat those students like every other ordinary student. We don't take enough time to do the framework necessary for that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: With regard to credential recognition and prior learning assessment, are there systems in place in Quebec that would be parallel or that we could take advantage of in other parts of the country? Is there any cooperation in place?

I would suspect that in the province of Quebec they're a little farther along, or that more resources go into that.

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: One of our major challenges is provincial jurisdiction. Education is a provincial jurisdiction, and you have to rise above that. Such things as the network of colleges and CEGEPs have permitted us to at least start talking to each other, because through the normal channels, whether they be by ministries, there's not much going on. As you know, there's not much in English, but when you add to that the fact of being French, there's even less.

So I would say it's starting. We're realizing it in terms of didactic material. In all the other areas, yes, we can share and not reinvent, but it hasn't even been explored yet. We're just starting to talk.

• (1135)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I notice one of your recommendations was incentive for the francophone community in eastern Ontario to become a true host community. We've heard that as we've travelled across the country in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and other places. I wonder if there's more you could say about that particular recommendation.

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: I'll start with a comment, and Denis might want to add, as you can see by his expression.

Ottawa and eastern Ontario are perceived as having no immigrants. I work on a provincial committee, and it's like everybody in downtown Toronto is an immigrant, and maybe in London also, but if you talk about Ottawa, it's not part of that.

I've got a college in which 32% of our clientele is ethnocultural. That's why we're saying in eastern Ontario, because the employers are mainly all French and English, white, one of our additional challenges—and I find at the college that placement is really important—is making sure our employers are sensitive to the added value of diversity. It doesn't come naturally like it does in Toronto. You have to really work with employers to make sure that placements are successful, and you really provide support for your students. Otherwise we'll end up with 98% of the white students getting well placed and a lower placement rate for our ethnocultural students.

So I'm saying that the community is here. It is often French, coming via Montreal, but it is coming and settling here. It is good news for the French language community because, in view of our assimilation, we're getting more numbers, and it's good for our community. But at the same time, we don't recognize the additional challenges.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Anderson.

[*Translation*]

Hon. David Anderson (Victoria, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'm very pleased to hear from someone who really likes her work and has something very important to say to us. It's really very impressive. Congratulations.

What is the funding system in place for the 34% of your student population who come from other countries? Is it the same as for students from Ontario or the other provinces?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes, it's exactly the same. There are treated exactly the same way.

In my brief, you can see that I presented a major plan to my board of directors, with very specific strategies aimed at improving the graduation rate. In terms of funding, there is absolutely no difference between a Canadian-born student and an immigrant student.

Hon. David Anderson: Is that because of the federal-provincial agreement?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: In Ontario, funding for the colleges is granted on a per student basis.

Hon. David Anderson: But what is the specific situation of those students? I'm talking about things like the cost of living. Is it the same thing?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes, it's the same thing.

Hon. David Anderson: I see that you have noted the linguistic realities. In many countries, training is provided in French, even though that isn't the language of the country. So they come here with very little knowledge of French.

Do you offer courses to remedy that problem?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes. In fact, that is one of the things that is most costly for us. This year, I had 28 groups taking upgrading courses in French. Those courses were offered to them to enable them to reach a high enough level to successfully conclude their program of study, but only at the post secondary level. We decided to do this because otherwise, the failure rate is too high. So, the courses are offered, but they're subsidized by the college, which means that we have decided to invest money in this kind of training to the detriment, in my opinion, of other areas of training. There is no special funding available for these courses. That is one of the reasons why I thought it important that I appear before the committee today. The resources that would make it possible to ensure proper integration simply are not there.

Mr. Denis Hubert: Perhaps I could add something. We are constantly confronted with the phenomenon of double minority status. What this means is that clients who come from another country that are experiencing certain language problems do not want to acquire a sort of double minority status by adopting French, even though they may have a good or at least some knowledge of the language. If they're talking to someone from HRSDC or someone at a provincial office, they feel uncomfortable.

In my area, I deal with more than 8,000 clients every year, almost 70% of whom are first- and second-generation new Canadians. When they arrive here, they are experiencing a loss of power. There are circumstances such that they do not want to be a source of trouble. They want to adapt as easily as possible.

I too often lose Francophone clients from other countries, who end up going to Anglophone institutions because they don't want to come along and say to people that they have the right, here in Canada, to work in French or learn in French. So, they decide to forget the whole idea, and we lose them.

• (1140)

Hon. David Anderson: You clearly stated that things do work well when they are done for and by Francophones. I believe the terms you used were quite specific.

However, are there enough organizations out there that they can find jobs and really live in French?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Not only is that the case, but bilingualism in Ottawa is an added value.

We have noticed that when our students complete their program of study, they are bilingual. They pick up English. It is everywhere: in the media, the stores, and so on.

If you are bilingual, you increase your chances of finding employment in a region like eastern Ontario; we can see that. So, it's not a handicap, it's an added value. And I would even say this, Mr. Anderson: we have just completed a fund-raising campaign of which one of the joint chairs was John Kelly—you may know him—a unilingual anglophone who said he wanted bilingual employees. He wants to support a French-language college because it is an added value.

So, it isn't a handicap in eastern Ontario—far from it. It is an asset.

Hon. David Anderson: If I have the time, I would like to ask you one last question. It's difficult to generalize, but are there groups of people, such as immigrants from Haiti or the Congo, who find jobs in French, whereas others find bilingual jobs or jobs in English? In that respect, are there groups that are quite well differentiated from the others?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: That's a very good question. However, I can't really answer it because we've never really looked at that. We haven't done that kind of tracking. We survey students six months after they leave the college, to find out whether they have a job and whether it is a job related to their training program. However, I don't know whether they're working in English or in French, because we've never done that kind of tracking.

But it is a very good question, even though I am quite unable to answer it. I can tell you, though, that they are working.

Hon. David Anderson: Thank you very much and congratulations.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Thank you.

We will now start a second round of questions and answers. Your interventions will have to be quite short, since we will soon have to conclude this part of the meeting.

We will continue now with Ms. Helena Guergis.

[English]

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome. I'm really pleased that you are here today. My apologies for being late. I did miss your presentation and a lot of the questions around the table, so I hope my question won't repeat something that has already been addressed.

I would personally like to see companies that have federal contracts, and even our government bureaucracy, reflect more of our multicultural country. My question is, do we offer new Canadians French language training that's equivalent to the English training? I think we should. I believe it is important to provide new Canadians with the opportunity to work at all levels of government, and it appears that maybe some new Canadians don't have this because

they need the French language. I really think we must give them the same opportunity to learn the French language.

I'd like you to comment on that for me if you can.

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: On whether we are providing them with equivalent French language training, Denis is in that business much more deeply. But when you make the comparisons, outside of Quebec—and I'm really being precise—for French language communities in minority situations, the answer is always that you're never at the same level. Your critical mass isn't the same, and there are priorities that pertain to majority situations. You often have communities, and French language communities, that are striving to survive and develop themselves, so you never have the same types of resources.

What I'm getting as feedback from the various groups in all provinces right now is that the francophone communities are really developing. There's an energy there that you can sense when you work with communities in B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, or the Maritimes—and you can really feel it. But it's a question of putting in the incentives and resources for networks to be in place, so a community is never alone, and they can access what's been done elsewhere. That permits them to go a bit further.

So when you talk about language training, I would answer that you do not have the same capacities as in English, simply because of numbers and resources.

●(1145)

Mr. Denis Hubert: Yes. We are a deliverer for Citizenship and Immigration Canada of the LINC program, for example, and I delivered both the English and the French parts of the program.

Necessarily, for the English program, there are many more resources, greater numbers, a greater number of teachers, and so on and so forth. In the French part of the program I'm delivering, it's more of a challenge, because my groups are smaller—four, five, six people. This is not meant to be a criticism of the program. It's an excellent program; we would like to see it built upon. We would like to add to LINC, or CLIC, elements going beyond difficulties in language.

We would like to have more resources, so when they are coming to our country we could say we'll work on business skills, employability skills, family skills, social integration, and so on. We have 24 colleges in Ontario. We are already there; we are already partly paid by the federal government to be there. Use the infrastructures in the community and maximize that so the overhead costs won't be that much, and let's amplify some of the programs already offered through Citizenship and Immigration Canada—LINC, for example.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you. I agree with your recommendation on that.

Are you affiliated with other schools across the country?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Well, there are two things. We're part of the community colleges association of Ontario, so we're one of 24 colleges. In French, we're part of the network of colleges and CEGEPS in Quebec, a national group that regroups all institutions delivering college education en français. There is also the consortium for health to train health professionals. As you know, that's subsidized by Health Canada. It has seven universities and three colleges nationally, outside of Quebec.

Mr. Denis Hubert: And we're also a member of the ACCC, which is the Association of Canadian Community Colleges.

Ms. Helena Guergis: Thank you.

The Chair: Merci beaucoup.

Mr. Temelkovski.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the exciting presentation you made. I'd like to bring your attention to page 12, "Bridging program for foreign-trained nurses". I see there is an extensive outline of a program in which nurses can participate in receiving their credentials in Canada in a progressive manner.

My question is in terms of doctors. Would they be able to qualify for this sort of program?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: That's an answer I couldn't really give you honestly, because it really deals with the university level. I know that in the consortium the University of Ottawa, as you know, has been really active in increasing the numbers of doctors who are able to work in French outside of Quebec, and the whole issue of foreign-trained doctors is a big issue for the Government of Ontario. It's not an easy one, but my comment would be more what I'm hearing from the rector of the university, which is that the challenges are very great.

What I know they're trying to do in some cases is perhaps not to bring people who can actually work as doctors, but who will work in the field of public health, to at least try to recognize some of the training and experience and use it in areas where there is a real need. It may be as a doctor, in public health, or in other areas.

I can tell you about a parallel with nurses. Working with nurses and providing training, as you can see, is very new. We're talking January 2005, so it's a very new program. Often maybe we're not successful in taking a nurse and having her work as a nurse, for all kinds of reasons, but maybe that nurse can work as a nursing assistant. Maybe that nurse can work as a health care aide. In some cases the person can work as a nurse, with some of the training, but at least we're not losing the expertise the person has acquired in her own country in an area that is crucial in Canada, which is the whole area of health care.

I wouldn't feel right about answering that question, because it's not an area of medicine colleges deal with.

• (1150)

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: My question was more to ask if they chose to enter the profession of nursing, as opposed to continuing as doctors.

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Oh, okay. You know, that is an interesting question. That's a question I'd have to follow up. I'd have to speak with the people in the program, and because it's so new—January 2005—I'm not convinced we have those kinds of data yet.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: We have some doctors who have shown interest in becoming nurses as opposed to doctors.

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: I can tell you that from our end it would be extremely well received. There wouldn't be barriers put up to prevent that, obviously.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Faille.

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: As I was mentioning earlier, Mr. Clavet will be asking the questions.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much. La Cité collégiale is like a small city in a larger city; it is a mini-city, you might say. We may not always realize it, but when you look at the figures for this institution, it is clear that it is a large, major institution. There are certainly at least ten or more buildings. You offer 70 programs, have more than 3,000 full-time students, and between 7,000 and 8,000 part-time students. That in itself presents a challenge in terms of management, logistics and growth.

My question relates to the important partnerships that you have to establish with the community where La Cité collégiale is located. Has there been an attempt to develop partnerships with training centers or with people who could, say, facilitate preparation for an interview when someone arrives at La Cité collégiale? Do you have any partnerships in place with organizations that work with the multicultural communities?

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: Yes, we do have partnerships. You will see some specific examples listed in our brief.

However, as president of the college, I believe we haven't done enough of this and there is still a great deal of work to be done in terms of partnership development. We did establish certain partnerships with our various communities when we began to see that we were advertising our programs to them, but that when the time came to hire personnel from the cultural communities, people were telling us there was no demand. At one point, we were thinking that if there was no demand, there were nevertheless trained people available, and that therefore, it simply wasn't possible that none existed in east Ottawa. Perhaps we hadn't found the right way to connect with them. Or perhaps our interviews created barriers without our realizing it.

So, working with human resources, we started to develop a whole strategy for meetings with the different cultural communities to talk about job opportunities, to create an environment where people would be better prepared and understand the process, and also to adapt and change our process, which was sometimes inadvertently quite discriminatory. Practices had been in place for ten years. We thought things were working. So, certain steps were taken.

Mr. Roger Clavet: And now you're on the right track, even though there is still work to be done.

Mr. Denis Hubert: Recently we identified more than 30 different organizations in Ottawa involved in some way with helping immigrants and facilitating job entry. Last fall, we organized a focus group with students from our institution. We asked them what had been the biggest issue for them when they came to Ottawa to train. They told us they felt they were kind of in the dark, and that they didn't know where to go, or which door to knock on. Should they go to the YMCA? To HRSDC?

That is one of the reasons why we advocate creating a central access point where new Canadians could find all kinds of answers and be directly referred to the appropriate institution.

Mr. Roger Clavet: On page 6, you have a breakdown by sector for all respondents born outside Canada. It shows that in some cases, 80% of them are opting for general arts and science. However, 16% are going into hospitality and tourism. It's a long list, that includes such areas as communications and media studies, health sciences, and so on.

In which of these areas are the needs of the Francophone community most acute? What are the areas where we need a lot more workers but where, based on this breakdown, we are not getting the required numbers?

• (1155)

Mrs. Andrée Lortie: The skilled trade sector is quite striking. In the region, employers are systematically telling us that. We need people in the trades, in electricity and all the others. There's a desperate need there. We are realizing that there's a great deal of work to be done to get our students interested in the trades. That was my spontaneous answer.

The second area where we know there is a need is the media industry. There are two institutions in Canada that provide media training: the Jonquière CEGEP and La Cité collégiale. In terms of the proportion of immigrants and members of ethnocultural communities taking media studies at La Cité collégiale, I can tell you that the number is very small. And yet this is often a community with superior writing skills. They could do some really interesting things in that field. They're not drawn to the media sector, probably because our immigrants come from Africa. Knowing what we do about realities in the media and political spheres, it isn't easy to go into that field. But there are jobs available there. It's a matter of convincing our communities to look to those areas.

Mr. Roger Clavet: Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame, and Monsieur Hubert, for your testimony.

We're going to take a break at this time for a few minutes, and then we'll reconvene in camera. We'll come back in public at 1 o'clock to hear some more witnesses.

Thank you.

• (1155)

(Pause)

• (1310)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): I want to thank our witnesses. We will now be addressing the matter of family reunification. We have three groups appearing before us this afternoon. They are the Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue, represented by Monique Fay; the Regroupement des critiques juridiques communautaires d'Ottawa, represented by Ms. Laurie Joe, and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, represented by Sungee John.

Welcome.

I want to thank you, Ms. Fay, for making the long trip here to Ottawa. I believe you left this morning.

Ms. Monique Fay (Coordinator, Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue): Yes.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Thank you for being here. Without any further ado, I want to let you know that we will begin by asking you to make a five-minute presentation. You will then have a chance to provide additional details as you answer questions from colleagues. That is the process for this afternoon's meeting.

We will begin with Ms. Monique Fay, who is representing the Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Thank you.

Ms. Monique Fay: Good afternoon. I am very pleased to be here today. As Ms. Faille just said, I am here representing the Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. I want to apologize to committee members for not being able to have my brief translated in time.

The Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue is an organization which was put in place by the departments with a view to providing settlement and integration services to new Canadians in the region. Abitibi-Témiscamingue is a very large region situated at the 47th parallel. It covers a surface area of 65,000 square kilometres with over 2,814 kilometres of highway. It includes five RCMs, 66 municipalities, and a population of a little more than 145,000.

The region of Abitibi-Témiscamingue is taking concrete steps to promote job entry and retention among immigrants. It also focuses on certain initiatives in order to demonstrate that it is active and ready to make an effort to host more immigrants, facilitate their labour market integration and finally, try to keep them here. Thus we have put in place an immigration advisory table, as well as the Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue. These organizations ensure that there is dialogue and discussion among key immigration stakeholders in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region. They position their region as a destination and settlement area for immigrants, make immigration a factor in the region's socio-economic and demographic development, and foster the long-term settlement of immigrants in Abitibi-Témiscamingue.

Today we are taking a position on this issue by emphasizing the importance of family reunification. We have chosen to make our views known on this particular topic because we see this matter has being of critical importance for the regionalization of immigration. The Carrefour de l'immigration de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue believes that family reunification is crucial for newcomers to Canada to quickly feel at home here. It fosters stable immigration, a larger family component and, by that very fact, an increase in the economic class. The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act must give priority to a steady increase in the rate of immigration into the regions. We also believe that processing times for family reunification applications involving spouses and children must be reduced.

When members of a family are separated, that has a considerable impact on the family dynamic, both during the separation and after they are together again. You could even say that real integration only begins when the family is reunited. We believe in the importance of family reunification in terms of ensuring better integration and stable immigration of newcomers to Canada who want to settle in the regions, and finally, of ensuring the socio-economic welfare of these individuals.

Immigrants to Canada face various barriers that prevent family reunification. They find themselves confronted with unacceptable obstacles that compromise or delay reunification with members of their family living outside Canada. However, that situation is caused by a particular problem, very long application processing times.

I would now like to talk to you about the situation in the regions. It is even more dramatic. The difficulties facing newcomers affect one of the main success factors with respect to immigrant integration—in other words, services provided in the community. We believe that at the present time, the CIC service offer does not adequately meet the needs of new Canadians who settle in the region of Quebec. For example, in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, we are served by the offices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada in the Outaouais region, located more than 500 kilometres from where we live. In other cases, services are available in the Montreal region, which is more than 700 kilometres away from Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and sometimes more, depending on the departure point.

Despite the good will of CIC staff, it is difficult to serve such a large area. Furthermore, immigration-related information and documentation are hard to access, and Internet service is not available to everyone.

• (1315)

Finally, the success of efforts aimed at ensuring the permanent settlement of newcomers in the regions is dependent on our ability to gear services to immigrant needs. The availability of regular services across the Abitibi-Témiscamingue area is one factor that will certainly foster retention. In our opinion, regionalization depends on solid local and regional structures and decentralization of authority. In that respect, CIC's desire to move forward with regionalization seems somewhat lukewarm.

We would like to make a number of recommendations. They are presented in a spirit of cooperation with the various authorities involved in immigration.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue would like to obtain the services of a regionally designated physician.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue would very much like to benefit, in the short term, from a regular monthly field service to be provided by the regional management of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue would like Citizenship and Immigration Canada to sign a partnership contract, either with a federal service located in the region and in every RCM, or with an official RCM, university or related kind of organization.

Abitibi-Témiscamingue would like Citizenship and Immigration Canada officers to be completely familiar with and have a better perception of the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region, so that we can benefit from higher visibility and better credibility with Citizenship and Immigration Canada officers, particularly at border points.

To conclude, our region does not feel it is well served by current immigration services. We would like to see a change there so that expectations in Abitibi-Témiscamingue can be met. The current context clearly suggests that the region is ready to rely more on immigration and retention of immigrants to ensure its social, cultural and economic development. Working with governments, Abitibi-Témiscamingue must find a way to attract more immigrants and pay closer attention to their integration and retention.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Thank you very much for your testimony. We will move on now to Ms. Laurie Joe.

Ms. Laurie Joe (Lawyer, Regroupement de: Clinique juridique francophone de l'Est d'Ottawa / Clinique juridique communautaire (Centre-ville) / Services juridiques de l'Ouest d'Ottawa / Services juridiques communautaires du Sur d'Ottawa, Regroupement des cliniques juridiques communautaires d'Ottawa): Thank you. My name is Laurie Joe. I am a lawyer in the Ottawa region. We have submitted a brief that contains five recommendations. I am going to set that document aside and talk to you about two of those five recommendations, in particular. We can then talk about the summary of the five recommendations. My first point will be presented in French; my second, in English, if you don't mind.

The first point has to do with the reunification of the children of refugees with their parents. By "refugees", we mean people who are in Canada and who have been officially recognized as refugees under Canadian legislation.

As you know, they are required to make an application to become landed immigrants in Canada. Waiting times can be as high as two, three or even four years. At the present time, the dependent children of these individuals, who are outside Canada, do not have the right to enter the country. We are recommending that Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the committee support the right of the dependent children of refugees to come to Canada during the settlement period. We are also recommending that medical exams and any other exams be carried out in Canada, not abroad.

If that recommendation is supported and implemented, we will then have two solutions to the problem of children being separated from their parents. First of all, as Ms. Fay pointed out, integration will happen more quickly, more easily, and probably in a more lasting manner for people who are already here in Canada.

We are also recommending that children who often end up in refugee camps in far away countries, and cannot benefit from the care and attention of their parents, be allowed to become more easily integrated into the Canadian community, and that they be able to start school and learn both English and French, if they are not their mother tongue. Thus these children will be protected, and will no longer be at risk.

As you all know, children that are separated from their parents, that are outside Canada and don't benefit from the active monitoring of an organization or a member of the immediate family of their parents are often—and I would even say almost always—at risk. Our first recommendation is therefore to facilitate the entry into Canada of the children of refugees, even though these children are not yet landed immigrants, because the parents have been recognized as refugees, and have already been through the process of identifying them and determining the reasons why they should be recognized as refugees.

● (1320)

[English]

The second point I would like to present of the five recommendations is the question of the bar to sponsorship for people in Canada, whether they are landed immigrants or Canadian citizens, who have to rely on social assistance. The regulation specifically speaks to social assistance from the time the sponsorship is filed to the moment the decision is made.

That time delay has gotten longer and has resulted in delays in family reunification. But at the point that the sponsoring family must go on social assistance, the regulation kicks in and they are no longer able to sponsor their family members.

Under the former Immigration Act, up to 2002, if that situation arose, a landed immigrant or Canadian citizen would have the right to appeal before the Immigration Appeal Division and would be allowed to bring in humanitarian and compassionate circumstances. The rights of appeal are much more restrictive under the new act, what we call the IRPA, or the post-2002 act.

We feel this regulation ignores all of the humanitarian and compassionate principles of immigration and refugee protection inherent in the Canadian act. Moreover, it goes against the best interests of the child.

All the members around the table today, regardless of your party affiliation or your views on the present budget vote, agree that family reunification is a good thing for integration of Canadian citizens and landed immigrants. Creating this bar to sponsorship, I would submit, goes in the face of everything that all parties stand for in Canada. All parties want an act that has integrity and is fair towards all people.

Our recommendation is that you revoke that section in the regulations and allow humanitarian and compassionate principles. Before 2002, these principles were considered by both the

Immigration Appeal Division and Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Before I answer questions, I would like to leave you with the summary of our five points.

First, the operations manuals allow you to set up a prioritization for family class and family reunification. We are encouraging this committee to send out a strong statement that prioritization should be done. Family reunification is a serious element right now in the immigration scheme.

Second, we urge you to consider allowing children refugees to join their parents, even though their parents have not been given landed immigrant status. These parents have been recognized as refugees in Canada and should be given certain rights and protections.

Third, we encourage you to reinforce the principle that DNA testing should be a last resort.

Fourth, we ask that you remove the bar on sponsorship.

Fifth, we ask that you reconsider subsection 117(9) in part 7 of the regulations. This is the prohibition on persons being allowed to sponsor their family members if they were not examined at the time the sponsor was landed. There is also a new section to this effect in the act. It creates further problems to sponsorship.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1325)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Thank you very much, Ms. Joe.

We will continue now with Ms. John.

[English]

Ms. Sungee John (Interim President, National Action Committee on the Status of Women): Thank you.

My name is Sungee John. I'm the interim president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, or NAC for short. NAC is Canada's largest feminist organization. It has operated for over 30 years to represent women's equity, advocating for women on issues such as child care, anti-violence, and a woman's right to equal pay for work of equal value.

Many of the presenters have given this committee very detailed, very articulate, and very passionate presentations, so I won't go over many of the very fine points that have been presented by previous presenters. For this allotted time, I want to focus briefly on the impact that the policy on family reunification has had on women, in particular immigrant women, because they are the ones who are making the applications most of the time.

For many women, especially immigrants and new Canadians, family reunification is not an attainable goal. As part of this presentation, we support the submissions of previous presenters such as the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Chinese Canadian National Council, and the Canadian Council for Refugees.

On the issue of economic status as a barrier, many women come to Canada, usually by way of sponsorship, under the family class. Under the current regulations, women in many countries are not able to emigrate to Canada because of the way in which the current point system rewards language skills and education—namely, the successful completion of a post-secondary degree or higher. Often women do not have the same degree of access to higher education, or education in general, that men have in their respective countries. This also means that they are usually dependent upon their spouse's income when they are sponsored and dependent upon the husband's willingness to sponsor the woman's relatives.

For immigrant women hoping to sponsor their families under their own names, the low-income cut-off raises the bar until it is almost out of reach, since so many are working in low-wage and often part-time jobs. Statistics have shown that Canadian women earn 70¢ for every dollar of a Canadian man's salary. For immigrant women, that amount is even lower. If they have children to raise, opportunities for retraining and enhancement of job skills are either sacrificed or lost due to lack of access to information.

In cases where there is marriage breakdown, women face further obstacles as they struggle for custody and perhaps seek social assistance. By seeking public assistance, they become ineligible to sponsor under the family class, thereby being kept away from a much needed source of emotional support. This begs the question of how many applications for family sponsorship are actually being made by women.

In light of this, we recommend that the low-income cut-off be eliminated as well as the barriers to sponsorship for applicants receiving social assistance. We also recommend that there be an audit made to determine the ratio of applications under family class by women, so we know exactly how accessible this sponsorship mechanism is to women.

There's another issue I wanted to raise that I hadn't run across in looking at some of the previous witnesses' testimony, and that is family reunification for refugees in limbo. While this is not an overwhelmingly large percentage of the immigrant sector, the struggles of refugees in limbo to even get to the starting line of the family reunification process are often underreported. It is because of this very fact that their plight should be addressed even more openly and transparently.

Accompanying me to this hearing is Ms. Nawal Haj Khalil, a woman who, along with her two children, has been denied permanent resident status since being granted convention refugee status 11 years ago. For 11 years, and not by her choice, Ms. Haj Khalil has not been able to reunite with her husband, nor her children with their father, because she is not entitled to sponsor him. What is the reason for denying a long-time refugee permanent resident status, except some form of cruel and unusual punishment?

• (1330)

For refugees in limbo, the fact that they met the criteria for refugee designation should be enough reason for granting permanent resident status...unless the government contributes to their continued stateless status.

Oftentimes the greatest obstacle faced by immigrants is the immigration officers themselves, whose decisions are difficult to challenge and are often subjective. In this regard, we recommend that the status of refugees in limbo be remedied by granting them permanent resident status.

In conclusion, for many immigrant women, life in Canada is a constant struggle. They struggle with the isolation of living in a new culture and marginalization as members of a community not quite welcomed by all Canadians. They bear the brunt of their spouses' struggles to find meaningful employment and their frustration as they find this challenge difficult to face. All the while, their self-esteem, health, and well-being suffer as a result. If they had the support of close relatives nearby, immigrant women would have greater opportunities to adjust and thrive in their new home.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act made a few positive changes; however, more needs to be done to ensure that fairness and consistency are applied in equal numbers.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Thank you very much.

We will now begin the first round of questioning. We should try to keep the interventions short, since we do have to be in the house at 2 p.m. Try to keep your questions and answers brief, please.

Mr. Mark.

[English]

Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

To our witnesses, thank you for being here today.

There is no doubt we all agree that our families are important and they should be with us. I think we need to get back to an even more basic problem, not disregarding all the other points you've raised that are very important in terms of what's wrong with the system.

I think the big problem we have is because we operate on a quota system, the more newcomers there are to this country, the greater the demand to have their families join them. That's why we have 120,000 in the queue already—just waiting for parents to come to this country.

So how do we get around that? Do we raise the numbers? I actually don't know. We know the demand is going to be there. It's just going to put more pressure on the system, so how do you do it without raising the numbers? As you know, 60-40 is the ratio we work on today of skilled labour versus family and refugee class.

● (1335)

Ms. Sungee John: Certainly one immediate step would be to increase the quota system. The current level of 225,000 is far too low for a country of Canada's size, especially if we're going to allow immigration that represents 1%. Then 225,000 isn't 1% of 31 million.

Certainly the 60-40 ratio also needs to be reconsidered, because it is not applied in a way that reflects what immigrants bring. They may come in as sponsored immigrants, but eventually they contribute equally to the Canadian economy. In some cases they contribute more, because they find jobs in areas that many Canadians don't accept. They are contributing back to the system. They're paying taxes and getting involved in their communities. That, in a way, makes up for more than the initial compassion of being admitted as a family class sponsor.

Ms. Laurie Joe: Thank you.

Ms. John mentioned two points. I'm going to take up the second point, on the 60-40 ratio. I'm older than I look—I can't believe a woman actually admits that—because I can tell you, that 250,000 number has been around for a long time, and I have not seen a tendency towards increasing the quota. Let's assume it's not going to be the recommendation of this committee or Parliament to increase the numbers. Looking at and retwiggging the 60-40 ratio, on the other hand, would, I suggest, give you a number of short-term benefits and a number of long-term benefits. You've already identified many of them.

The short-term benefit I think to a Canadian citizen or landed immigrant, or to a person who is applying who is maybe not even in Canada, or a person who is in legal limbo, is that at least they're going to have a more honest expectation of what's going to be happening. In a broader realm that's the problem with the ratios, that people have—I don't want to use the word “unrealistic”, but they're given certain expectations that stem from Parliament, from the act, from the reports being filed by Citizenship and Immigration, and from the different communities that are assisting immigrants and are passing out that information. There is a whole network there, whether it's underground or above ground. That's the first thing I think: a more honest and transparent, I think is the word you used, explanation of the ratios. Let's assume we're not going to increase the numbers.

I think, and I referred to this in our submission, a clear prioritization within the department would go a long way as well to assisting with the problem. You said initially that you feel there are a lot of pressures on the system. The pressures may not necessarily be as a result of the numbers but because of the delays, because of the limbos, and because of the costs, both economic, social, and cultural, to families or persons who are already here and already have the legal right to sponsor. Because of the delays in family reunification, what's happening is that you are going to get ultimately an economic and social cost not just for that person, for their individual traumas—it's a trauma to be separated from your family, or, as you said, it is a hard thing—but for Canadians as a whole. The example, again, that I used was the person who may go on social assistance even for a temporary period of time.

Mr. Inky Mark: Essentially the challenge is that the optics of having “too many immigrants in this country” are that it will cost the system for health care, and on and on. Those who are advocates need to clarify the message that they're really an asset to this country.

Ms. Laurie Joe: Yes. That perhaps is more about public education exercises that I will leave to you to engage in, but from the point of view of at least the lawyers in the community I work in, what we're saying is that you can do small measures, which are contained in the brief, that are not going to necessarily increase the numbers of people coming in but may alleviate the pressures on the system.

I want to go back to the problem of temporary reliance on social assistance.

● (1340)

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): You will come back to it. I'm sorry, Inky.

Madam Fry.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much.

You were talking a bit about retwiggging the 60-40 ratio. I would like to hear more ideas on how you see that being retwiggged. I am very much in support of immigrant women being able to have the stability and ability, when they're here, to get training to do the things they need to do to integrate and become part of the economic, social, political, and cultural life of Canada. I think that's a key piece.

But there is an issue we need to think about, and I want to know how you see us dealing with the issue. Canada now has a very low birth rate and an aging population, so we need workers; we need people who will work and contribute to the economy. You have to find the balance of a vibrant economy that is capable of supporting and integrating refugees and other people who are not able at this point in time to get work or become integrated fully.

How do we balance that? What is a good balance? How do we find a way to have an economy that is supported and will continue to support good settlement and integration? That is the big one.

I must admit that the concept of bringing in spouses, to be temporary residents here in some sort of way as soon as possible with their independent refugee or immigrant, is key. I think otherwise it tends to remind one of the times when we didn't allow people to bring their families in, and that led to a huge problem in our society many years ago.

I think those are good things, but there is a reality piece I would like us to find a solution for, because if we want this to happen, we have to be able to find concrete ways of supporting it. That is, how do we deal with the economic resources that are going to be necessary ten years down the road, with a vibrant worker population, where we can grow, be competitive, and have a good economy so that we can support integration?

That's the basic question.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): I just want to remind you that you should keep your interventions short and to the point. Thank you.

Ms. John.

[English]

Ms. Sungee John: Personally, I have a different view about the 60-40 ratio and also the quota. I'm of the personal belief that there is quite a lot of room for expansion and that our economy can sustain that expansion. As we explained before, the 60-40 is a very arbitrary ratio that was applied. That does not translate into the eventual economic impact that both categories, the 60 or the 40, are bringing into this country. So to define it by those two criteria is difficult, because if you ask me, I would say increase both of them. I strongly believe that our economy can sustain that, because immigrants have proven over the years, over history, that they contribute to improving the economy of a country.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Yes, but, Ms. John, you can't increase both of them and still have a 100% ratio. You're going to have to say you're going to make it 55-45 or whatever. That's what I'm asking, because you talked about the ratio. Do you have a suggestion for a workable change in the ratio? That's my question. Have you done any work and any research to show what would be a better ratio? Do you mean keep the ratio the same and just increase the amounts on each side? I thought I heard you say change the ratio.

Ms. Sungee John: I would say increase the quota, and with the ratio itself I would say don't follow the 60-40 exactly to the letter.

Hon. Hedy Fry: What would you suggest is a good one?

Ms. Sungee John: At this point, I prefer not to deal with the ratio.

I think family class should be treated as a separate category altogether. I personally feel that if a refugee or a person is allowed in this country under the independent class, it should follow that they be given more leeway under the family class to sponsor their spouses, their children, and their parents, because that only improves the overall well-being of that person, thereby making it easier for that person to contribute to Canadian society.

• (1345)

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Would anyone else like to make a quick comment?

[English]

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Could I ask one question?

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Thank you.

You mentioned that we should eliminate the low-income cut-off. Could you give us a little more on that rationale?

Ms. Sungee John: Many immigrant women are often working in the low-wage sector, without retraining, without access to retraining or upgrading their skills. Let's also look at the lack of recognition of

their skills, because we know that the regulatory bodies themselves are often obstacles to immigrants finding meaningful employment and rebuilding their careers in this country. Without those avenues being open to them, many have to take low-wage jobs. These jobs are often minimum wage, or just above. That makes them the working poor and automatically puts them below a certain ceiling that the regulations have set for sponsorship.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Is the low-income minimum cut-off above the minimum income?

Ms. Sungee John: Many of the women who are hoping to sponsor are below the income level they ask for.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: At \$8 an hour, that would be about \$15,000 to \$16,000.

Ms. Sungee John: Not all are making \$18 an hour. And as we know, in some sectors, especially if they're—

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: No, I'm saying \$8.

Ms. Sungee John: Not all of them are making \$8. In some sectors, their employers are allowed to pay them less.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Lower than minimum wage?

Ms. Sungee John: In Ontario, I think the minimum wage is still \$7.15.

Ms. Laurie Joe: I think you're all assuming that these women are gainfully employed 40 or 45 hours a week. Is it 45 hours a week in Ontario?

Ms. Sungee John: I think it's 44 now.

Ms. Laurie Joe: I think that's a wrong assumption. What Ms. John was saying is that women are being underemployed, or because they don't have close family members to help assist with child care or other supports to the family, they're not able to.... And of course there are all the obstacles dealing with what you heard about this morning, credentials, etc.

Mr. Lui Temelkovski: Would it be better if it were stated that maybe as long as they're working, gainfully employed, they would be able to sponsor somebody?

Ms. Sungee John: Again, how do you define "gainfully employed" if they're working in a low-wage...?

Many women, if they have children, can only work part time. They can't work full time, because they have to be there for their children.

Ms. Laurie Joe: Or their elders.

Ms. Sungee John: Exactly.

Ms. Laurie Joe: Elder care is going to be a huge issue. It is today, and it's going to be even larger in 10 years.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): Mr. Anderson, do you have a question?

[English]

Hon. David Anderson: Merci, Madame.

I would like to thank you for your presentations this afternoon. I appreciate them very much.

Your response to questions, if I may preface my own question, has indicated one of the dilemmas of the committee. We constantly struggle between numbers in an attempt to limit discretion, and then, as Ms. Joe pointed out, the overwhelming need to have humanitarian and compassionate consideration is taken into account, which of course is the opposite of numbers, amounts of money, pay per hour, how many hours you are working or numbers of people on a particular list, or 60% to 40%.

So my question really is for Ms. Joe. In the system overall, you've raised the issue of the importance of humanitarianism and compassionate consideration, which I must say I entirely agree with, in your presentation, but you've limited it in some respects to the issue of the refugee cases you listed in your five points. When you put it forward, does that mean you have confidence in the discretion of the officers in the immigration system to make appropriate humanitarian and compassionate decisions?

If you have doubts about it, as many witnesses do, that's when politicians, administrators, and committees such as this fall into the habit of saying "Ah ha, we'll limit discretion by putting in benchmarks, numbers, and timetables," thus, in my view, limiting the opportunity for a more humane system.

I wonder if you could expand on this rather philosophical point, having raised humanitarian and compassionate consideration, how far you think we can trust it to go, given the administrative systems we have.

• (1350)

Ms. Laurie Joe: Thank you for giving me a chance to speak about my point number four, which is the bar to sponsorship on social assistance.

To clarify, I wasn't speaking solely to the issue of refugees. I was also speaking to the issue of landed immigrants and Canadian citizens. Point two, which was about bringing children of refugees to Canada while they're in legal limbo, did solely deal with refugees, but in point four, which was about the bar to sponsorship, in fact, in most of the cases I've seen, the people are already landed or Canadian citizens. So I'll talk in response to that.

In terms of applying the principles of humanitarian and compassionate consideration, they were entrenched in the former immigration acts. They continue to be entrenched in IRPA, but what has happened is you have a more restrictive right of appeal and you have a more restrictive opportunity to argue humanitarian and

compassionate principles before the Immigration Appeal Division. That's the point I was dealing with today, a very difficult question.

Do I as a litigator, as a lawyer, have complete faith in an individual immigration officer to apply discretion? About the hypothetical immigration officer, I would say, yes, given proper structure, a structure that is transparent, that provides assistance to them, that provides training to those immigration officers, that allows them exposure to a whole registry of decisions being made and what factors are being relied on.

I can look to the case of Baker as an example of where you see an unequal application of humanitarian and compassionate considerations. In a hypothetical, perfect world, absolutely, I have complete faith, but we're not in a perfect world. We are dealing with the realities, as the Honourable Ms. Fry pointed out, and how you as parliamentarians can make suggestions on the implementation that will....

I think your point was to address the economic matters, but in my social assistance question, those people were working when they applied to sponsor their family member.

Let me give you the hypothetical. They became disabled. In Ontario it takes eight months to two years to get on a disability pension. Once you're on a disability pension, the regulation says you can sponsor your family member, but meanwhile, what happens during that eight months to two years? You become ineligible to sponsor. So the system is not perfect.

Hon. David Anderson: If I have time, Madam Chair—

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): You have 30 seconds.

[English]

Hon. David Anderson: I would just like to make a further observation. I'm just totally baffled by the lack of support—outside of the particular witnesses who come before us who essentially represent immigration groups—on the issue you've raised of family reunification. We get bombarded with letters about the importance of the family and family values, yet this absolutely critical point of keeping children away from their parents through a deliberate decision of government seems to be lost.

I just wonder whether you have noticed in your practice—all of you, if you wish to comment—whether this concern for the refugee child is widespread. One of the great puzzles is why it is so rarely raised, except in the context of the straight immigration system. It seems this is a generic problem that deals with our society's almost indifference, in certain circumstances, to family values.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): You had 30 seconds.

[English]

Hon. David Anderson: Madam Chair, I apologize, but you and I have often had to struggle with compassionate and humanitarian concerns, as members of the board. I was a member of the previous board and my colleague was a member of the more recent board. I'm sure we've both been in dissent a number of times on that issue, unable to understand why our concepts of humanitarianism and compassion were not shared by everybody else.

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): I'll be compassionate with you, Mr. Anderson. If you can complete in 30 seconds or....

Hon. David Anderson: Have you noticed outside of the specifics—and indeed Ms. John is a member of a wider organization, not a strictly immigration organization—if there is the concern for the family that Ms. Joe has expressed, which I must say I devoutly share, in our wider society?

• (1355)

Ms. Sungee John: I think there's concern, but the mainstream public, the larger Canadian public you may be referring to in terms

of concern, hasn't taken ownership of this issue because they're not that familiar.... Due to a lot of negative publicity, negative articles about immigration, especially in 1999 and when the boat people arrived, and often the negative discourse about refugees and immigrants that has historically taken place and still continues in Canadian society, there is a level of xenophobia I would attribute to the mainstream public and their fear of outsiders.

[Translation]

The Vice-Chair (Ms. Meili Faille): We will conclude this session on that note. You have provided very interesting testimony. I want to thank you and I certainly encourage you to continue to defend your position with respect to family reunification. The committee has heard from many people all across Canada, who have expressed the same concern. This committee conducts its work in a non-partisan spirit. We are very concerned about this. Very soon, we will be drafting a report—unless something happens in the next few days—that I hope will meet your expectations. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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