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**Chair**

**Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskyj**



## Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1630)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Borys Wrzesnewskij (Etobicoke Centre, Lib.)):** Committee, I understand that Mr. Arnold has a commitment that he has no option but to leave for. I will allow Mr. Arnold the opportunity to quickly say a few words, and we'll then launch right into questions.

I understand you have to leave in about seven to 10 minutes.

**Mr. David Arnold (Chief Migration Officer, Immigration and Border Protection, Australian High Commission):** Yes, that's correct. I'd be happy to extend it to 15 minutes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

In that case, we will commence.

Mr. Arnold, would you like to say a couple of words, because there won't be a full opportunity for questions and answers in your case?

**Mr. David Arnold:** It's up to you if you would like me to do that. I did put something together that's a good seven to eight minutes long, but I'm happy to just go to questions if you have them, as well.

**The Chair:** Okay.

We still don't have everyone here, so perhaps just to get it on the record, take a couple of minutes, Mr. Arnold, and then we'll go into questions.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Good afternoon, everyone. My name is David Arnold. I am the chief migration officer. I work for the Department of Immigration and Border Protection as part of the Australian government. I'm a posted officer here at our high commission, just down the road on O'Connor Street.

We thank you for the opportunity to present today and talk a little about some of the client service modernizations that my department has been undertaking over the last couple of years, and certainly what we're looking to do into the future.

My department manages millions of entries into and departures from Australia of temporary visitors and permanent migrants, as well as Australian citizens. This includes the monitoring and resolution of their status, and the promotion of values and Australian citizenship.

Our visa system plays a key role in promoting Australia's economic and social prosperity. Australia has a universal visa system—that is, every single individual who wishes to travel to Australia for temporary or permanent purposes is required to have a visa before they board their method of travel.

The department already manages a significant volume of activities through digital channels. One such example is our electronic travel authority, which I know Canadians have introduced recently; as well as our ImmiAccount, an online portal for visa applicants; and SmartGate. Like Canada, we have traditionally had front-line officers doing a passport check and an admissibility check, like a border service officer here. We've moved that to more automation through SmartGate, using e-passports and biometric capture.

ImmiAccount, in particular, has been quite a success for us in moving clients away from higher-cost channels such as face-to-face ones and by telephone. Individuals who make application to travel to Australia are required to establish an ImmiAccount. It's not dissimilar from, say, setting up an Internet banking facility with your financial institution. It acts as our front door. Since its launch in 2013, it has grown significantly. Clients are able to access 41 forms, essentially 41 visa types to travel to Australia. It generates in excess of \$1.1 billion a year in revenue through visa application charges.

Last financial year, we received more applications via ImmiAccount than we did paper applications. Applications lodged via ImmiAccount are 100% electronic. We have no paper files for those applications. Approximately 18 months ago, Australia moved away from the issue of foil; we refer to it as a “visa label”. There is no longer any legislative means to issue a foil to a visa applicant or visa holder to Australia. For example, in the very limited processing that some of my staff do here in Ottawa, we don't see passports. That has enabled the department to set up a rather agile and responsive service delivery network, where we can pick up visa applications and caseloads and move them very quickly depending on the issues—for example, post-natural disasters or generally big demand, such as during Chinese New Year.

We are moving our eLodgement to our biggest caseloads in the foreseeable future, which will be Chinese nationals and Indian and Indonesian applicants. We do partner with service delivery agencies, as Canada does. Those organizations at the moment accept applications on our behalf via paper. That will soon move to digital for those particular markets, which will enable us to move our most significant caseloads around our service delivery network.

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

We'll move to our first round of questions.

Mr. Tabbara.

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

Thank you all for being here. We apologize that we had to quickly run to the House for votes.

As you know, for all of us MPs, most of our work is dealing with a lot of immigration files, so we're looking at ways to improve the system. With the advanced technology available now, are there better ways to improve client services through more online services or with technology? I'd like to hear from a couple of you.

If anyone wants to speak first they can, but maybe we can go around and ask that question.

**Ms. Chantal Desloges (Lawyer, Desloges Law Group, As an Individual):** I have a couple of comments about that.

First of all, in terms of use of technology, I think there are a lot of functions within IRCC that could be automated to allow for a greater client touch without necessarily generating more work for people by having to send handwritten emails.

For example, there are very simple software solutions that allow you to send autogenerated emails to people at various periods of time. One of the biggest complaints from clients is not necessarily about how long they have to wait but that they don't know what's going on; they're not able to find out what's happening with their case. Even just an autogenerated email that we'd send to them every once in a while just to let them know and reassure them that everything is fine, that their file is with us, and that we're working on it and we'll get back to them if we need anything, I think, would be an easy solution.

The other thing is interview scheduling. A lot of time is wasted calling people for interviews that they can't make at a particular time and then they have to be rescheduled through a manual process that is very time-consuming and labour-intensive. There are simple software solutions that allow people to choose their own interview time, which are fully automated and don't require any manpower whatsoever. Those would be two really simple ways.

Finally, there is the immigration e-CAS system, through which you can go online and check your case status. There is rarely any useful information in it. That system already exists and it could be used to much greater effect if officers could simply upload the information more regularly. People could go on and check their status online and not have to bother with phoning the telecentre or emailing Immigration.

• (1635)

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

That was one of my other questions. A lot of our time is wasted just getting status updates. Clients come in and ask where their application is, at what step, and then we have to fill out a consent form and so on and go through all the steps and then call and finally deliver that message to our constituents.

Thank you for sharing that.

Would anyone else like to share?

Go ahead, Mr. Green.

**Mr. Stephen Green (Lawyer, Partner, Green and Spiegel LLP, As an Individual):** I'll be very brief.

I think it's important to understand that immigration is a human endeavour, so while we can push a lot of stuff to technology, please don't forget that there is a human element to this. In the old days we used to have centres that people could walk into. I would submit that if you opened up some of those centres to a restricted audience who could attend there, 50% of your inquiries would drop.

My last comment would be that the call centre is a wonderful thing. It has helped a lot of people, but the problem, unfortunately, is that there's not enough information given out. If I call on behalf of my clients, it takes about four to five minutes for me to go through a process to identify myself. If you call the bank, you give them your client ID and you're in—one, two, three. Immigration actually goes through the application: is your client's address this? Is your client's telephone number this? What is your address? What is your name? And it must do this for each file. So if I have four files, I go through this four times. It's really not efficient.

Last, you can't tell the client on the phone that their application is in process; we know that. They have to be able to give more information. If that was released, and if these call centre people had more authority to give out information, your workload would drop with respect to the basic inquiries.

**The Chair:** Ms. Lockett, you had your hand up.

**Ms. Arleigh Lockett (Representative, Syrian Refugees Grave-nhurst):** I was just going to say that I'm from a private sponsorship group, and I know that one of the concerns our groups have had regarding delays in refugees coming here when we have applied for them is that some groups are very self-conscious about asking the MP for help but others are relying heavily on the office, which is very forthcoming in offering it. However, if access to the up-front information on the website—from the minute the group comes together and wants to sponsor and even before a group applies—were better and modernized and thought through from the point of view of a group of volunteers trying to figure out how to navigate this system and what the rules were, they wouldn't be calling their MP's office so often. The information is there, but the path through it is tenuous; it's very hard to find the information, and it's not all up to date.

**The Chair:** Mr. Langford.

**Mr. Vance P. E. Langford (Chair, Immigration Law Section, Canadian Bar Association):** Our brief highlights a number of technical issues that the Canadian Bar Association's immigration law section believes could help. We've put those under the larger umbrella of program improvements that could be made. I think that's what the Government of Canada would like to achieve.

Some of our recommendations are around communication. They sound simple and they sound practical. Maybe it's trite, but in terms of updating clients on delayed applications, it's that issue of how "in process" really means nothing. They include perhaps making a more robust system of where processing status is actually at, with accountability for processing times that are published, and also requesting additional information before refusing applications. As we move to a more automated system, it's about not losing the human element and not forgetting that peoples' lives are affected by the system.

The example of that is express entry, with that sort of one-touch approach that was talked about. It wasn't an official policy, but if peoples' job offers didn't have specific language in the job offers according to the ministerial instructions, they were bounced. I had highly educated people come to me after failing three times in express entry. Simply, there could have been a request for the proper documentation before refusing.

Also in our suggestions is increasing transparency on decision making by giving better written reasons. A suggestion made was to attach the GCMS printout to the rationale for the decision. That isn't really hard to do, and that would make it no longer necessary to do an access to information request to get the reasons in order to understand whether this was just not a viable application or whether it should be appealed or redone.

Those are some suggestions.

• (1640)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Rempel, I understand you're splitting your time with Mr. Tilson.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Yes, thank you.

Mr. Arnold, your country has a very organized immigration system. We know that. You have dedicated visa subclasses for skilled visa, family visa, parent visa, etc. I'm wondering if you could comment or maybe expand upon the effectiveness of implementing these specific subclasses for visas and how that has improved your client service delivery.

**Mr. David Arnold:** It would be fair to say that it has made the client journey easier, I think, to identify which particular visa they should be applying for in their particular circumstances. In saying that, though, it is an area of our business that's under continual review. About 18 months ago we undertook a fairly harsh cull of some of the subclasses that we did have. There is also another body of work around visa reform at the moment, which the government has commissioned, and that will seek a further reduction in subclasses.

Yes, it has worked, but at the moment it would probably be fair to say that we have too many.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Could you expand upon that a bit? What are some of the experiences you've had? What is the impetus in terms of looking at condensing the number of classes as that relates to client service delivery? Where is the right balance? I would say that also having very vague characteristics makes it difficult to apply, too, so in your experience, where would you see that right mix?

**Mr. David Arnold:** From an operational perspective, it's about maintaining knowledge and a centre to undertake processing of that particular visa, especially if it's not automated. If you have a particular subclass where application rates are relatively low because they were always falling into another category, having to maintain that becomes quite high cost. Rationalizing it and shrinking it down into what we term more "streams" of what activity they are undertaking under the banner of the subclass allows that concentration to occur.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** Have you had to deal with instances where you perhaps have had one applicant apply through different streams writ large, even if it's for citizenship or whatnot? How has your country dealt with that?

**Mr. David Arnold:** I'm sorry. What do you mean?

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** For example, let's say that in Canada you're applying for citizenship and you're applying under different classes or different programs. Sometimes that gums up the amount of resources it takes to process these applications.

**Mr. David Arnold:** I see.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** How have you looked at managing that sort of issue from a service delivery perspective?

**Mr. David Arnold:** We have a legislative framework for instances like that. If an individual lodges an application for, say, citizenship by descent—as the individual has a parent who's an Australian citizen—but is in fact not eligible for that particular part of our citizenship program, then that application is deemed invalid. We can't do anything with it.

The money is given back to the applicants and they're invited to apply for the most appropriate stream or component of citizenship, as an example.

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

My next question, just before I had it over to Mr. Tilson, is for Ms. Desloges.

In previous studies that we've had at committee, you've talked very briefly about how current immigration laws already allow officials to apply discretion in exceptional circumstances, essentially talking about section 25. I just want to give you a quick opportunity to talk about this in terms of service delivery. Because it is such a nebulous process, could you see improvements in triggering that process from a service delivery perspective?

**Ms. Chantal Desloges:** Section 25 gives officers the very broad discretion and ability to waive any requirement of the act or regulation. So to the extent that certain service delivery factors are regulated—they're actually mentioned in the regulations—then I suppose section 25 could be used, but I think most procedures and most things related to service delivery are not in the regulations. These are dealt with by policies, so it wouldn't apply.

• (1645)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel:** David.

**Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC):** Thank you.

Mr. Langford, thank you for the brief that has been prepared, and obviously we have a time problem here today.

I wonder if you could tell us the top priorities of the Canadian Bar Association for recommending improvements to client service delivery.

**Mr. Vance P. E. Langford:** Thank you, Mr. Tilson.

The Canadian Bar Association's immigration law section in our brief made submissions about two types of issues that we think are really important. One is structural. We don't think that you can deal with client service delivery by improving the IRCC alone, because Canada Border Services Agency, ESDC, and Service Canada with respect to the temporary foreign worker program, are part of the overall system in Canada. Some of the problems and areas of emphasis for improvement we would like to see would be with respect to ports of entry in particular, the mindset at ports of entry in dealing with travellers, and having the resources and expertise necessary to deal with immigration issues when people are primarily focused on enforcement and goods.

One of the recommendations in our submission is that there be immigration experts embedded at major ports of entry and available by telephone or otherwise 24/7 as experts for immigration matters. You really need to look at the whole system with ESDC and the temporary foreign worker program. It's almost like that's ignored as part of the cycle, but ESDC and the issuance of LMIA's affects people's work permits and applications for permanent residence. It's very important to the whole cycle, and so if you're not talking and looking at efficiencies there, then there are problems. That's CBSA, ESDC, and we've made a number of... Those are structural issues, and the other area is sort of programmatic issues. You can see that we've made a number of specific recommendations there.

Probably the number one recommendation with respect to program is communication and remembering that these are people.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. David Tilson:** That's it?

**The Chair:** That's it.

Just before we move on to Mr. Davies, I'd like to thank Mr. Arnold for appearing.

I know that you have a prior commitment, a hard commitment that you have to depart for, but I also understand that you'll be potentially making a submission. We look forward to that. Thank you so much.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Thank you.

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

I have about five questions to ask Mr. Arnold, so I'm wondering if it's possible to take time—

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, that's fine.

**The Chair:** You are okay?

**Mr. David Arnold:** My colleague can run with it. They're probably not out of bed yet.

**The Chair:** In that case, Mr. Arnold, at any point please don't feel any discomfort if you have to just get up and leave.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Five minutes, Mr. Chair, or seven?

**The Chair:** Seven minutes.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Arnold.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, it's a pleasure.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Since we have the opportunity to learn more about your system, I think it's a very valuable time for us.

Mr. Arnold, what is the approval rate and the average length of time to process, say, visitor visas?

**Mr. David Arnold:** Globally, I don't have the figures to hand, but I'd happy to share those.

If I look locally here, I have a very low refusal rate. It would be in the single digits, and with our commitment under our service standard for a visitor visa—noting that the individuals my office sees here are often those who might have a health or character issue—given that Canadian citizens are eligible for eTA, we look to process about 80% of those within three weeks.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Three weeks?

**Mr. David Arnold:** That's correct.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Thank you.

One of the frustrations that constituents in my riding of Vancouver Kingsway have experienced when they've sponsored relatives to come over here to visit for a wedding or whatever, is that when they're rejected, there is no internal appeal process. The only option is either to apply again, brand new, or to ask for judicial review, which as a practical matter is simply just not done. The amount of time and money that it would take is simply not worth it in 99% of the cases.

I'm wondering if Australia has any kind of internal review process for an applicant who has been turned down for a visa?

• (1650)

**Mr. David Arnold:** Not internally, but depending on their circumstances and the visa they've applied for, they can make application to the MRT, which is our migration refugee tribunal. They can make application to that. A good example might be an individual who is a citizen of country X who is married to an Australian but holds no permanent status. They apply for a visit visa, and the decision-maker who is not satisfied they have funds or ties to their home country may refuse that, but because they have a tie to Australia, they're eligible for that decision to be reviewed.

A visitor visa applicant, for example, who bears no ties to Australia has no right to review for their application made offshore or overseas.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Thank you. We've already heard a reference to the reasons. I've seen many of the forms that a person will receive if they're turned down for a visitor visa in Canada, and it's just a series of statements with some boxes checked off. There's immense frustration among people because the form essentially tells them nothing. That person then comes to our office. We then have to contact the member of Parliament line and can often get someone on the line to read us the reasons in the file, and we transmit those reasons to the applicant.

I'm just wondering, how does it work in Australia? Were someone to be rejected, are they told the reasons and, if so, in what kind of detail?

**Mr. David Arnold:** They are, in significant detail. The decision record for refusal for a visitor application is probably on average about five to six pages. My case officers are required to put in detail the basis for their decision and how they couldn't be satisfied that the individual was a genuine temporary visitor to Australia, or whether or not we're satisfied of their character or health requirement. It is detailed, absolutely.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Thanks.

I joke with people that I don't have a constituency office, but an immigration law practice in Vancouver.

Another source of frustration for my constituents is that there's never anybody whom the applicant or the sponsor can talk to. It's very anonymous. You just get a case number. If someone has a pending application in Australia, is there anybody whom an applicant or a sponsor can actually talk to within your immigration structure to find out about the status of the case, or to discuss where it's at?

**Mr. David Arnold:** Absolutely. As I said in my introduction, we're looking to push those types of inquiries to our online ImmiAccount, where clients can get an update of where their application is at. But again, if we use the region that I belong to, which is the Americas from Chile up, we offer a five-day call centre based here in Ottawa. We provide service in four languages between the hours of 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Those immigration officers can access exactly the same system as the decision-maker. So an applicant who has a spouse in our pipeline can ring that number for the cost of a Canadian call, and we'll give them as much information as we can.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Excellent.

Does Australia do interviews for "permanent resident" applications to Australia—I don't know if you use that terminology—and if so, what percentage of the applicants would have to go through an interview?

**Mr. David Arnold:** I don't know the exact percentage, but again, with the situation locally here, it's very, very low. The decision-maker can decide to interview an applicant if they're not satisfied, if they're missing a piece of information, or if a bit of information just doesn't make sense. They'll invite the applicant or the sponsor for an interview, but it would be a single digit figure for my office, definitely.

**Mr. Don Davies:** One of the most troubling areas that we deal with in my Vancouver office is Chandigarh, India. Our experience is that there's over 50% refusal rate for people applying for visitor visas, and it's a source of incredible frustration to the community of Vancouver.

Is there a place like that for Australia, a place that you focus on particularly? Is there a country or a place with a particularly high rejection rate? I'm always told by the government that Chandigarh is difficult because there's a fear of a high rate of forgery or fraud. I don't know if that's true or not, but that's what we're told. Does Australia have a similar experience with a particular place?

**Mr. David Arnold:** There's not one specifically that I can talk to, but depending on particular risk factors with the country of origin of the applicant, then that could very well result in a higher refusal rate. Again, it depends. Instances of fraud.... From the intelligence that we have available, whether it be previous refusals or just general factors within the applicant's country, with the applicant applying, say, for a student visa to undertake English, but who may not necessarily be a genuine temporary entrant because they're just trying to get out of their own country, could result in a higher refusal rate.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Finally, if there is a single innovation that Australia has brought in to make its immigration system more user-friendly or efficient, what would it be? What advice would you give us?

• (1655)

**Mr. David Arnold:** Go to full eLodgement. In my experience, getting my diplomatic visa here, it was a matter of completing a fillable PDF, with a bar code on the back. That still required printing. Move to a fully agile solution, as we have, noting that you need to do that carefully for big markets like India and China, which we're yet to do.

Also move away from a foil, the label.

**Mr. Don Davies:** Thank you very much for assisting.

**Mr. David Arnold:** It's a pleasure.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Dzerowicz.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz (Davenport, Lib.):** Perhaps I could beg your patience also, just because I'm so excited that you're here, Mr. Arnold, as well as all of our guests. I just want to say a huge thanks to all of you for spending an extra hour waiting for us.

I'm going to ask a few questions, Mr. Arnold. If you don't have time to respond to them, I'd be very grateful if you just give us written responses.

One question I have is this. We have the issue of a huge backlog in a number of different categories, in terms of spousal applications, in terms of parents and grandparents, in terms of visas, in terms of different places in the world. Does a similar backlog exist for different classes of applications in Australia? I'll start with that question.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, absolutely. Our minister will set an immigration planning level. For example, for our partner program, I may be allocated—these are just figures for the purposes of an example—50 places. I may get 1,500 applications.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** How's that dealt with? Do you just fill the 50 you have that might have existed from years before? How is that worked through?

**Mr. David Arnold:** The minister sets our immigration program yearly. Once the year is reached, which for us is 30 June, those positions will need to be filled.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Okay.

As you know, we're a multicultural nation. I believe we only offer services in English and French. Does Australia offer immigration services in any other language for anything? If so, could you explain that?

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, we do. It's often demand driven. For example, my catchment includes Mexico and some Central American countries, so those forms are available in Spanish. Our eLodgement system was first designed in English, but simplified Chinese will be part of our build for the introduction of eLodgement into China.

The department also offers what's called the "translating and interpreting service". It's a 24/7 service available to any individual. We service our 911 equivalent, as an example. It takes close to one million calls a year. It's an interpreting service offered over the phone. I have four languages here that I provide service in. For an individual, say, who might speak Farsi—we don't have any Farsi speakers—they'll use an interpreter on shore at no cost to them.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** That's helpful.

You talked quite a bit about your ImmiAccount. Could you provide a bit more detail in writing, not now, on what that is? That would be helpful. You said it was set up like a bank account.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, I'd be happy to.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** The thing I'd love to get a little more information about is what happens when someone is checking their ImmiAccount for the status of their application, whatever it is. What type of information would you give back? Often, what we say here is that it is just "in process", which is a source of great frustration for us. If you could maybe provide something back to us on that, I think it would be of great interest to the committee.

That's my last question for you, as I have a couple of other questions for the rest of the panellists.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Do you mean in response to the ImmiAccount status?

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Yes.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Clients of my department may share some frustrations that clients of the Canadian department have. That's largely to do with our IT system requiring some changes that just say "processing". In saying that, though, government has allowed for investment to improve that. We will have more status updates introduced this year in March, including that "you require a health assessment". But it would be fair to say that we still need to mature on what status updates we do offer.

We have noticed a significant drop in client inquiries, though, since the introduction of ImmiAccount. Clients are able to upload information, as well, in response. A case officer might say, "I need an RCMP check." They'll send that request to ImmiAccount. It tells the client there's something there. Once they upload it, that wakes the application up for the decision-maker to say that it's there. The application actually moves quicker, and therefore the need for status updates becomes less.

• (1700)

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** Thank you so much.

**Mr. David Arnold:** You're welcome.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** I have a couple of questions for CBA as well as TD, if I can get to them.

Thanks very much for your prepared report.

One of the ideas from our family reunification study was to have something similar to a CRA number, system having one number for an applicant for whatever processes they go through. One of the points you make is that IRCC shares client delivery service for the temporary foreign worker program with Employment and Social Development Canada. Do you have some thoughts to share on that and whether you think that would be useful.

I'm going to ask my two or three questions and if you're able to get to the answers, that's great. If not, if you can give me a written response, that would be also very much appreciated.

The second thing I want to ask you about is the removal of red flags and the procedure for that. You were talking about ports of entry. I'm curious about that. I'm also interested in this because there are red flags on a number of the people I deal with. I've no clue. Some of them, I think, were fairly applied and some, and some not. So I wouldn't mind your talking a little about the issue and maybe making a recommendation on the process to remove that, and what you think is fair.

You also mentioned ports of entry. It is common knowledge among Canadian immigration lawyers the need to avoid certain points of entry, based on a history of lengthy delays, unwarranted scrutiny, and bad decisions. Could you highlight which ports of entry those might be? It would be helpful to us in trying to figure out how to help.

My last question for you concerns program and technical issues. You suggested that if we're evolving our client service delivery system, we might want to bring in the CBA at the design stage to test it with lawyers. In that regard, do you know what percentage of applicants to our system use immigration lawyers? This may be an unfair question. It's just a question that came up, and I'm curious to hear your response.

Then to TD, if we don't have enough time, I'd love a written response on this as well.

**The Chair:** We only have a couple of seconds.

**Ms. Julie Dzerowicz:** The reason we've brought you here is that we're trying to use the best practices in service delivery that you would recommend. What are the one or two recommendations for our immigration system...?

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll wait for your written responses to that series of questions.

Mr. Saroya, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.



Mr. Arnold, you talked about India, Chandigarh specifically. In my riding, that is the biggest issue for 80% of the immigrants. I have two full-time staff. They answer the confused questions. I'm not sure if it's a matter of confusion with the clients or on this side. What sort of rejection rates are there in Chandigarh? Would you know?

**Mr. David Arnold:** I don't know much about that catchment at all. I'm sorry.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** I thought you said your rejection was in the single digits. Is this on the North American side?

**Mr. David Arnold:** It's for my caseload here in Ottawa.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** This question is for everybody. What can we do? For example, I got two emails this morning from dissatisfied customers. They are confused. What can be done to improve the system, the understanding between the applicants and headquarters?

**The Chair:** Mr. Langford.

**Mr. Vance P. E. Langford:** One of the suggestions in our brief is that you give immigration program managers at visa offices greater resources both to handle client service and to be accountable for client service. If you have someone in that jurisdiction who doesn't understand the status of an application, they should be able to get an answer either through a 24/7 call centre or an immigration program manager, who would simply receive an email and action it through his or her office, rather than taking months to respond and then having that client or their representative have to refer to the case management branch and escalate it and do other things to preserve the person's status when it could have just been a routine inquiry.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Green.

**Mr. Stephen Green:** I think you have to ask why it was refused. In many of the cases that I see, the applicants haven't been given the proper forms or they have been misinformed. I think it would be tremendously helpful if the consulate in Chandigarh reached out to the community, and the community here as well, and ask what they need to demonstrate for a visitor visa application. A lot of them are refused just because they don't understand the process, and not because the visa officer is making a wrong decision. The visa officer just doesn't have the documents because the applicant doesn't know what's needed.

**The Chair:** Ms. Malik.

**Ms. Saima Malik (Assistant Vice President, Sales Capabilities, Digital Channels, TD Bank Financial Group):** At TD, we've introduced a couple of things. One of them is for our staff to access internal resources—so not just the call centre, but through internal chat. That allows them to share documents, browse documents in real time, and pull up applications and view them at the same time as the resource who is actually interacting with the customer.

In regard to being more transparent with customers, we introduced social media capabilities. Customers are allowed to ask questions of experts, and that information is then made publicly available. It goes through someone in audit or legal to make sure we can share that information publicly, but it is then posted so that information is then available to all customers who potentially have a similar question.

What's different about it from a typical FAQ or search answer is that they are questions that are very specific and unique to the customer. Other customers who are in those types of situations can then search for that information and get that response and use it at least as their first gate of information.

**Mr. Bob Saroya:** I've noticed many times that well-educated people make mistakes on applications, simple mistakes, and cases are rejected.

Is there any suggestion from any of you for the application to be made much simpler than what we have out there?

**The Chair:** Ms. Desloges.

**Ms. Chantal Desloges:** Applications are sent back for very, very minor deficiencies, something like you missed a box or your photograph was the wrong size, things that could easily be rectified.

My recommendation would be to send an email or call the applicant and tell them to replace it, instead of sending the whole thing back. Not only does that result in delay and extra expense to the client having to do it all over again, but it also sometimes leads to a loss of substantive rights. That means that somebody may fall out and lose status while that application is been sent back, and now they're here illegally. Or, you could lose the right to sponsor somebody, for example, your child ages out in terms of the date for sponsorship.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms. Zahid, five minutes, please.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all of you. I'm sorry for all the time confusion today.

My first question is for Mr. Arnold.

In Canada, a frustration that many of my colleagues and I share is that due to cutbacks in service levels and staff by our immigration department, members of Parliament have to do a lot of immigration work. In representing a riding with a heavy immigrant population, a lot of our resources are dedicated to checking the status of the applications. The applicants are not able to do so and don't get the response or answer they need. These inquiries constitute as much, or more than, 80% of what we do: just checking the status of the applications.

Could you discuss the role of Australian parliamentarians in your immigration system? Are they faced with the same challenges, or have you been able to overcome those?

**Mr. David Arnold:** I think it would be fair to say that they do encounter the same challenges.

Our department introduced and has had parliamentary liaison officers for a while, who are located in our states—the equivalent of your provinces. Our electoral offices have contact details for that individual, and they act as the conduit to get particular updates.

Certainly, I get them here. Often they are inquiries from individuals who are frustrated because their applications are taking too long. We do a very quick assessment by that particular officer to see if it is within the service standard. If it already is within the service standard and there's no compelling or compassionate reasons as to why the application needs to be expedited, the parliamentary liaison officer will deal with that very quickly. If it requires consultation from the post or the processing officer, it will be referred to me. Individuals also write to parliamentarians as well, and that gets referred to me to respond, normally on their behalf.

A lot of it is status updates, in particular for some of our programs where the wait is long, such as for a spouse.

• (1710)

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** You indicated some of your processing times, and mentioned, for example, a three-week processing time for the TRVs. Are the processing times globally for different categories—TRVs, spousal applications, sponsorship of other dependent family members—about the same, or do certain regions have a higher processing time as compared to other regions?

**Mr. David Arnold:** We publish our service standards on our website, and it's a global service standard. I will update my material to reflect a peak period to indicate that applications may be taking longer; for example, they might extend to six weeks. I'm just coming off a peak period from the Christmas period.

I'll use websites and social media to do that, but we have a global service standard.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** Are you aware of any particular regions in the world where the processing time is much longer compared to certain other regions? Maybe if you don't have the information, you could get us it.

**Mr. David Arnold:** Yes, I'll check that for you. I'd be happy to.

**Mrs. Salma Zahid:** It is possible to get that information, thanks a lot.

My next question is for Mr. Langford. I certainly recognize the important role that immigration lawyers and consultants play in our immigration system, particularly when it comes to the more complex cases. I think we would agree that for routine matters and most cases, it should be easier for applicants to complete the process successfully without third-party assistance.

What specific changes in technology and process would you recommend to make it easier for clients to successfully navigate the system without the assistance of a third party?

**Mr. Vance P. E. Langford:** If you're asking me to talk lawyers out of a job, that's a difficult one for me to answer.

However, I can tell you that there is a premise made in regard to lawyers, and we've made submissions that many of the government websites are actually quite negative about representatives, and lawyers in particular. We would advocate for change in that area.

To answer your question, if you have a client who is educated or even has secondary education and is approaching doing an immigration application in Canada, the first place he or she goes is to the website. The website is improving, and I've seen

acknowledgement that it needs to be improved, so that's understood. Terrific. However, it does need to be simplified.

As we migrate now to global case management and online applications, the overall recommendation would be just to use plain language, easy to follow check lists, and perhaps systems in GCMS that require the documents before you can file the application.

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

Mr. Tilson.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Ms. Malik, one of the biggest problems for members of Parliament is the complaints that we get from constituents about service delivery, delays in processing times, and their inability to get status reports. It's an awful problem for us.

How do you deal with those things?

**Ms. Saima Malik:** There are a couple of things we've introduced, including newer technologies for how we optimize our standard questions and answers.

We're going through a process right now where we help to triage customers. The goal is that there are standard questions and there should be standard answers available to all customers, but if we know it's a specific case that needs support or assistance, we're essentially guiding that customer into an assisted help function, whether it be through chat, directly through a call to the call centre, or eventually things like video calls or co-browsing.

We're really helping customers with the goal and intention of resolving their issue in one interaction, so that if they need an answer or a simple answer, we're able to provide that; but if they need to speak to a human, we make that simple and easy for them.

One recommendation to this group is that we've seen a number of our digital interactions move to mobile, and that has forced us to make our experiences, whether they be an application process or contacting the bank, much simpler and easier for things like reviews of application processes and simplifying that process. Because of the nature of mobile experiences and access via your smart phone, you really have to optimize and slim down that process.

We've also taken advantage of technologies that are available out there such as chat or click to call to understand where the customer is coming from and the experience they've had—for example, what application process they were in or what their inquiry was about.

The other thing we've taken advantage of is virtual assistance. We are looking at technologies now that take advantage of understanding and mining answers and knowledge bases to help respond to the customer in a chatbot-like fashion. When and where we feel it's the right time to have them connect with a human, we'll do that.

• (1715)

**Mr. David Tilson:** Thank you very much.

Do I have any more—

**The Chair:** The bells aren't going.

**Mr. David Tilson:** The bells aren't going. Well, that's good news.

Thank you for your comments.

You are in competition. We love competition, but one of the issues of competition is improving your digital service offerings. What do you do? I'm saying there are obviously other institutions that you're in competition with. How do you keep up?

**Ms. Saima Malik:** We constantly benchmark.

We have certain KPIs that evaluate the time it takes a customer to get through an application process and how quickly a customer's query is resolved. We use external agencies or organizations to help benchmark those KPIs to understand how we're competing, not only with our own FSIs but also looking globally at how other organizations in the FSI space are performing. We're constantly optimizing things like our application process and how our

customers utilize some of our self-help and assisted-help capabilities. We use external organizations to help benchmark.

**Mr. David Tilson:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'd like to thank our witnesses for appearing at this committee meeting and for their understanding of the compressed amount of time we had. I dispensed with the niceties of introducing all of you individually, as is the normal practice of the committee, for the same reason, but we do have all the information. The committee truly appreciates your understanding.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

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