

# **HANSARD**

**NOVA SCOTIA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY**

**COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**HUMAN RESOURCES**

**Tuesday, December 13, 2022**

**Committee Room**

**Support Connecting Newcomers to the Workforce;  
and  
Appointments to Agencies, Boards and Commissions**

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**HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Chris Palmer (Chair)  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard (Vice Chair)  
Dave Ritcey  
John A. MacDonald  
Nolan Young  
Hon. Tony Ince  
Ali Duale  
Kendra Coombes  
Suzy Hansen

In Attendance:

Judy Kavanagh  
Legislative Committee Clerk

Gordon Hebb  
Chief Legislative Counsel

**WITNESSES**

**Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration**

Ava Czapalay  
Deputy Minister

Jennifer L'Esperance  
Senior Executive Director, Immigration and Population Growth Branch

**YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth**

Inhae Park  
Provincial Outreach Manager

Thivjan Tharmaratnam  
Chief Operations Officer



House of Assembly  
Nova Scotia

**HALIFAX, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2022**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES**

**9:00 A.M.**

CHAIR  
Chris Palmer

VICE CHAIR  
Melissa Sheehy-Richard

THE CHAIR: I call this meeting to order. This is the Standing Committee on Human Resources. I am Chris Palmer, MLA for Kings West and Chair of this committee. Welcome, everybody.

Today, in addition to reviewing appointments to agencies, boards, and commissions, we will hear from witnesses from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, and from the YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth, regarding support connecting newcomers to the workforce.

At this point I would like to ask everybody to please put your phones on silent mode or make sure they're turned off - a little gentle reminder. I would now ask the committee members - beginning to my left here, with Ms. Sheehy-Richard - to please introduce themselves for the record by stating their name and their constituency.

[The committee members introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: For the purpose of Hansard, I also recognize the presence of Legislative Counsel Gordon Hebb to my right and Legislative Committee Clerk Judy Kavanagh to my left.

We'd like to ask the witnesses to indulge us for a couple of minutes. We have to attend to a bit of committee business here in our Human Resources Committee. We will begin with agencies, boards and commissions appointments. May I call on MLA Young to proceed?

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Community Services, I move that Judy Heffern be appointed as Member to the Management Corporation of the Kings Regional Rehabilitation Centre.

THE CHAIR: There's a motion on the floor. Any discussion?

All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Kent Rodgers be appointed as a Member of the Board of the Nova Scotia College of Chiropractors.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Paulette Anderson, Brian Murray, and Betty Thomas be appointed as Non-Denturist Members to the Denturist Licensing Board of Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Marion Ripley be appointed as Public Representative to the Board of Directors of the Nova Scotia College of Dispensing Opticians.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Monica Moriarty, Lori Peters, and Phillip Veinotte be appointed as Members to the Board of the Nova Scotia College of Medical Laboratory Technologists.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Alana Baxter and Robyn Schleihauf be appointed as Public Representatives to the Board of the Nova Scotia College of Nursing.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Gregory Fevens and David Melvin be appointed as Members to the Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Health and Wellness, I move that Francesca Carone and Phoebe Mandry be appointed as Public Representatives to the Nova Scotia Board of Examiners in Psychology.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: For the Department of Justice, I move that Linda Campbell be appointed as Member to the Accessibility Advisory Board.

THE CHAIR: All those in favour? Contrary minded? Thank you.

The motion is carried.

We will just attend to one other piece of committee business before we begin our questioning this morning with our witnesses. Our January meeting will be on skilled labour shortages and impact on critical infrastructure in Nova Scotia. The witnesses will be from organizations listed at the bottom of today's agenda that everyone has. The approved witness for NSCC is Jill Provoe, vice president academic and equity. She has asked whether her colleague Tom Gunn, dean of the School of Trades and Transportation, may attend in her place if she is not able to.

Does the committee agree to this? We have general agreement. That is official. The committee will now change the witness to Tom Gunn.

Thank you, witnesses, for indulging us through that bit of business. Any other business we have at the end, we as a committee will ask for that after our witnesses have spoken today.

Today our topic is support connecting newcomers to the workforce. I'd like to welcome all our witnesses to our committee today. I would like to ask you all to introduce yourselves, starting on my left here. All four of you introduce yourselves, and then we'll come back to everybody to see if they'd like to give an opening statement.

Please introduce yourselves.

[The witnesses introduced themselves.]

THE CHAIR: Thank you, everybody. I'd like to begin with Ms. L'Esperance, if you'd like to open up with any opening comments, or anybody who would like to, going from my left to right.

Ms. Czapalay.

AVA CZAPALAY: Good morning. I'm very happy to be here with my colleague Jennifer L'Esperance, the senior executive director for Immigration and Population Growth. I'm also happy to have our partners from the YMCA join us this morning. The role the YMCA plays to help set up newcomers for success in our communities is key to building on the growth we're seeing across the province.

I want to start by sharing a short story of someone we met during our recent recruitment mission to Paris and Morocco, where we promoted Nova Scotia for what it is - a fantastic place to study, work, live, play, and grow. Prior to the Destination Canada Mobility Forum 2022 event in Paris and Morocco, we did a Nova Scotia Labour Market

Priorities draw through the federal Express Entry program. As a result of the draw, we sent invitations to 150 eligible francophones. A few weeks later, at the recruitment event in Morocco, we saw hundreds of people.

One of them was Tarik, an architect who had received one of our invitations. I wish I could express the joy in Tarik's expression when he approached us at our booth. He was so excited to know that he had a chance to make Nova Scotia his new home. We're glad to share that we're working now with partners here to help Tarik secure a job offer.

Each newcomer has unique experiences. Tarik's story was one of many that left us feeling nothing short of inspired.

As many of you know, government is committed to growing our province to two million people by 2060. According to the Statistics Canada population clock, since hitting our population milestone of one million people last December, Nova Scotia has grown by another estimated 30,000 people.

Part of the work we do to retain newcomers is making sure they're linked to the things that will help ensure that they stay, like employment opportunities, community supports, and family connections. I'd like to share with you some examples of programs and services that we have to connect newcomers to Nova Scotia's workforce.

Through our economic-based immigration programs, newcomers arrive in Nova Scotia with a job offer in hand, ready to fill our labour needs and contribute to Nova Scotia's bright future. When newcomers arrive with their families, they come with the same aspirations that any other family would: to live, work, and thrive.

Part of the work done by our settlement services is to provide wraparound supports for all family members, like connecting spouses to work, connecting children to schools, and other supports like language training and connections to community. Through our Nova Scotia Works providers, we're focused on connecting people to jobs and jobs to people.

You'll know that we have more than 50 Nova Scotia Works centres across Nova Scotia that deliver employment and career services. No matter where people find themselves in life, or in the job search process, there are passionate staff in every region who can help connect people to meaningful work.

We also continue to host job fairs all over the province through Nova Scotia Works, all with employers eager to hire the talent they need for their businesses. In July, our Immigration and Population Growth branch hosted a one-stop job fair that connected newcomers to employers in a variety of sectors. We had over 40 employers and 476 registered attendees, and, that day, several newcomers were given job offers on the spot. We're focused on attracting the talent we need to support our health care sector and to grow

our skilled trades sector - people who will build houses and create the infrastructure that we need to support our growing population.

Our department includes the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency which supports us in matching newcomers with skilled trades to employers looking for trades workers. This committee has already heard about our marketing campaign out right now in other jurisdictions in Canada aimed at attracting those working in health care and the skilled trades. This campaign has been very successful in generating over 100 million impressions and over half a million website visits. It's great news - people are looking to come here.

The campaign also promotes our More Opportunity for Skilled Trades tax refund - it goes by the acronym MOST - for skilled trades workers who are under the age of 30.

From the website LiveinNovaScotia.com, people can connect with our six navigators. They work with newcomers and communities throughout Nova Scotia to help people understand what kinds of work opportunities and supports exist in different regions. Our navigators have responded to more than 900 inquiries so far, and I'm happy to say that those inquiries keep coming.

We know that retention is an important component to population growth. Simply put, newcomers need to feel a sense of belonging in their communities and in their workplaces in order to stay. To help employers build welcoming and inclusive work environments, the department has developed the Welcoming Workplaces toolkit. The toolkit is offered online for free through Nova Scotia Works and can help businesses attract and retain talent. Our settlement service providers understand how critical welcoming workplaces and welcoming communities are to retaining newcomers, and our department understands the critical role settlement service providers play, too.

In 2023, we will continue to support settlement service providers, like the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia and the YMCA, who help families find success wherever they choose to settle in the province. Other community-based partners like municipalities, chambers of commerce, business development groups, Regional Enterprise Networks, Nova Scotia Community College and the universities, and sector councils also support this work. It takes all of us working together to help people achieve the kind of personal success that translates into provincial success.

So, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I know we can make tremendous progress by working together to not only make people feel welcome in Nova Scotia but to connect them to the employment opportunities they need to thrive. Thank you for your time, and we look forward to your questions.

THE CHAIR: Mr. Tharmaratnam.



THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members, for the invitation to speak today and share some of the wonderful work of the YMCA. The YMCA of Greater Halifax/Dartmouth has been around over 160 years, providing wraparound service to all Nova Scotians. We provide child care and empower youth. We offer summer camps and develop student athletes. We offer inclusive health and fitness, and support seniors to age well. We connect employers to future employees, and newcomers to their communities. At the YMCA we are helping to build healthy communities, through the power of belonging.

As a multi-service organization, the YMCA has many connection points with newcomers. Beyond assessment and referrals, programs, and interventions, there are several stories like the newcomer youth who dropped in for basketball at the Community YMCA, who was engaged by our child and youth team, connected to our YMCA immigration staff, and now attends Saturday Study Skills to get the academic supports he needs to excel in school. More directly, our YMCA immigration service has been around for over 30 years and provides expertise in settlements and communities across Nova Scotia.

[9:15 a.m.]

We know when newcomers feel welcomed and connected, when their children feel safe, settled, and engaged, when their families can participate and contribute, they stay in the communities they choose. We provide several programs and services to meet this mission. Our School Settlement program ensures children and their families are oriented, have the language, and academic supports. The staff ensure newcomers are connected to community events, recreational activities, and can make friends in a meaningful way. Our Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters program supports vulnerable and isolated newcomer mothers at a critical preschool stage, empowering them and their children for future success.

More recently, our mobile crisis team adapted to be at the forefront in supporting Ukrainian nationals fleeing the war. Working with our partners and backed by the department, we have supported the transition from airplanes at the Halifax Stanfield International Airport into communities across the province.

I also want to highlight the innovative work of our team in creating nationally recognized programs like the Gender-Based Violence Prevention Project and the Youth 2SLGBTQIA+ Newcomer Program. I cannot underestimate the impact our staff have in welcoming newcomers and creating a more inclusive Nova Scotia.

Before I talk about our rural, regionalized settlement services through the YREACH program, I would like to thank and acknowledge the support, both federally and provincially, that has allowed us to continue to do this work. The support has been vital to ensuring that our services are not simply an extension of our HRM office, but the services

are offered across the province in a meaningful way where we are able to connect with clients locally in their new communities.

Although only a small portion of the funding is related to direct employment support, through this funding we were able to establish innovative programs like Sector Partnerships for Enhanced Language Learning, which provides workplace-specific language training. Delivered on-site, it allows employees to gain fluency, build confidence, and obtain an awareness of workplace communication practices.

Our focus is settlement of newcomers, and we recognize labour market contribution is a key factor in this. Our staff often coach newcomers through interview prep, resume writing, and job searches. However, their greatest impact is in connecting with employers in the area and supporting them beyond a warm referral. We also work closely with our partners in the employment sector, like Nova Scotia Works, to build on local resources and the capacity in the community.

Our YMCA immigration settlement staff are often the only settlement-specific persons in these small communities, and they work collaboratively to build creative solutions to meet the demands of our clients. For example, in the Annapolis Valley, when transportation was a concern for some newcomers seeking seasonal employment, our YMCA settlement staff resourced several bikes and took the time to teach them how to cycle to and from their employer. Our team is committed to providing in-person, accessible, client-centered support that is community-based. As one of our newcomer staff in Truro highlighted: When I see services that I need in my community, that's what makes me want to stay.

In closing, I would like to leave you with this story. A family who arrived in the midst of the Syrian crisis to Pictou County was looking to relocate to Toronto. Our staff collaborated with our partners to find meaningful employment, they provided language training opportunities, they supported their children to get access to recreational activities and Summer camps. This family is now a staple in the community, and as the mother proudly states: My children may leave for Halifax one day, but you will find me here because this is my home now.

I hope you will recognize that the YMCA is more than connecting newcomers to the workforce. We are a multidisciplinary organization that provides wraparound settlement to newcomers and their families. As we look to build a stronger Nova Scotia, successful settlement, participation, and contribution of newcomers will lead to greater retention in our workforce across the province. Thank you for your time.

THE CHAIR: We'll now open up with our question-and-answer period. It is the protocol of this committee that we do by show of hands. I'll make a list of questioners, and then each of the members will be asking questions as I recognize them. I would like to ask the witnesses to please wait until you are recognized before you start to speak for the

microphone. I would like to ask Mr. Tharmaratnam to move your microphone in front of your face a little bit more. As you can tell, we have a bit of background noise happening today, so that will help with Legislative TV as well, so we have a good signal on you.

We'll probably do questioning until 2:45 p.m. (Laughter) Sorry, I was thinking this was a 1:00 p.m. meeting. I apologize. We will do questioning until 10:45 a.m. You didn't know that you were going to be here a little longer today. We'll begin with our question-and-answer period. I recognize MLA Hansen first, and we'll do a running order from there. MLA Hansen.

SUZY HANSEN: I want to say thanks so much for being here today. I appreciate the work that the YMCA does for all people in community, but I'm glad as well that we're working together to make it better for everyone.

I have a few questions, but this one in particular is about health care. One critical hurdle for newcomers to Nova Scotia is that they're not guaranteed they'll have access to public health insurance. This leaves a significant group of people unable to access health care: people who have not yet been granted permanent residency, babies born in Nova Scotia to parents who are not eligible for Medical Services Insurance, children and spouses, people who have been granted refugee status who themselves were excluded, and temporary foreign workers. In Nova Scotia, migrant workers must have a one-year work permit to be eligible for MSI. Workers under the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program are not eligible because their contracts are only up to eight months.

Kerian Burnett came to Canada from Jamaica in April through the Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program. After two months, she fell ill and was unable to work. She was diagnosed with cancer which required two surgeries, and her doctor advised her to stay in Canada to undergo life-saving treatments, but she does not have health insurance. I mentioned this in the House, how important MSI coverage is for all folks that come here.

This is to the YMCA: Can you comment on whether you think these changes are needed to health services in Nova Scotia? I mean, the department can answer if they'd like, too.

THE CHAIR: Ms. L'Esperance.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: As you can appreciate, Department of Health and Wellness would be the people to talk about the MSI rules, but I can give you a little bit of information as I understand it, in terms of who's eligible and who is not.

You're correct in terms of the one-year work permit requirement for MSI coverage. Our programs support economic immigrants who come with a permanent job offer. They would then be supported with a work permit - likely for two years at least - and so they

would be covered for MSI for them and their families. Refugees come with a permanent residence status as well, so they would also be eligible for MSI with their families.

The Temporary Foreign Worker Program is a federal Service Canada program, and they allow people on shorter work permits to come - that would be less than one year. My understanding is that it does need to be a one-year work permit to be eligible for MSI, and employers are committing to providing the health care coverage when they're supporting employees to come with them.

I'm not familiar with the particular circumstance that you mentioned, but it is a conversation that we continue to have with our Department of Health and Wellness colleagues.

SUZY HANSEN: Obviously, I do understand the differences between provincial and federal, but I'm just wondering because we are trying to grow the population. Most of those folks end up staying here - they have families here, they marry here - but they're still finding it hard to be able to access those services.

Is there a way provincially that we could be doing better at making sure that these folks, who do stay because of family and marriage, have access to those services immediately?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: Good question. It is something that, of course, we want everyone to be covered in the way that they need to be with the health care that they need.

One good example of some great collaboration that's happened around health care is for our recent Ukrainian arrivals. Anyone arriving from Ukraine, they are on a temporary authorization to travel, called the Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel. We never had that type of travel authorization in the past, and so there was no provision for health care with that. We worked with our colleagues at the Department of Health and Wellness, and now anyone arriving on that is eligible for MSI.

In fact, more than 2,000 people arriving from Ukraine have applied with their families to get MSI coverage, and that is now eligible. Lots of great conversations happening to ensure that people are covered the way that they need to be.

THE CHAIR: MLA Young.

NOLAN YOUNG: As many of you know, I'm a Red Seal tradesperson. I worked in the trades for years, taught at the Nova Scotia Community College. I know tradespeople are in demand in Nova Scotia's labour force.

I'm just wondering, for the millions of people who may be tuned in right now and watching (Laughter), could you tell us if there's any work connecting newcomers to apprenticeship opportunities?

AVA CZAPALAY: Maybe I'll start and invite the YMCA to follow with any specific programming that they might be aware of.

This group will know, for sure, that we've had a concentrated marketing campaign targeting skilled trades workers and health care workers. It's been a really successful campaign. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, over a hundred million impressions tells you the power of social media.

Also, and more importantly, our navigators are fielding inquiries from skilled trades workers across Canada saying: We want to come to Nova Scotia and practise our trade in Nova Scotia. To date, we've had over 900 inquiries from people who are seriously looking at coming here.

For skilled trades workers - those who are watching, and beyond - we say we have jobs here in Nova Scotia, and we have jobs in communities throughout Nova Scotia. We want people to come here with their skills job ready, because the work is here, and employers are ready to hire. The government, for instance, has added an incentive: the MOST program, which is a tax incentive for 30-year-old and younger trades workers, just to say an extra welcome. Then we want them to look at communities throughout Nova Scotia and consider, perhaps, opportunities outside of urban areas. Rural Nova Scotia needs workers as well.

I'd just ask Jen or our colleagues from the YMCA if they want to contribute with some specific programs that might be in place for trades workers.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia is another settlement organization, and they do have specific bridging programs for skilled trades and people who support the construction industry. There has been a lot of success there, which has been fantastic.

I did want to share one story that came out of our campaign attracting skilled trades workers. There was a mechanic in Ontario who saw our ads. They contacted our navigators, and they are now living in Beaver Bank. The gentleman is a mechanic for trucks and cars in Beaver Bank and was specifically set up with the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency to make that connection to an employer to enter apprenticeship and work as a mechanic in Nova Scotia. That was a direct result from our campaign.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Park.

INHAE PARK: As Thivjan mentioned, we do provide a variety of programs in Halifax, and that includes employment navigation. We have a small team. The services include job search, resume writing, interview practice, and organizing job fairs - many job fairs with a variety of employers - and employment-related workshops and information sessions.

Outside of HRM, we have a variety of settlement staff to provide settlement support. Oftentimes they are only one person, so therefore they provide a wide range of services that include employment support, similar to the ones mentioned.

What we do is, the settlement staff oftentimes in their local community has direct contact with employers through their Atlantic Immigration Program work, and then previous contacts and connections. So the employer reaches out to our settlement staff directly to look for the employees. As well, we work with our community partners and collaborate with the local immigrant services and provide (Inaudible) and connect newcomers to any training opportunities or employment opportunities available in the local market, because they have specialities and expertise.

We also have great partners like ISANS and other organizations who have specialized programs. We make referrals to newcomers and make sure that they are aware of those services and programs that are available to them. We make those referrals to them so they can get the support that they need.

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I'll just close on this story. In Pictou County, there were several Syrian refugees who came through the crisis who had trades backgrounds. One example is a painter who, through the work of the YMCA and the settlement staff connecting with him about some of the experiences he had, it was about trying to help him get to a base level of language so he could get the employment opportunities within the community. Now he's successfully employed, working for a company, and thriving in the community.

We know that when newcomers are coming to Nova Scotia, they might have some skills, they might have had work in the trades. They might not have the formal titles but they've had a level of training, and it's about us trying to bridge that gap. That's the work that we've done in rural communities, to try to define those connections.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince.

HON. TONY INCE: My question would be for the YMCA. The Auditor General's report outlined that the department relies on service providers such as the YMCA to determine settlement needs for immigrants. The new immigration goals will clearly increase the department's reliance on people like yourself. What will you need from this government in order to expand your services?

[9:30 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: Who would like to take that answer?

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think just the continued support. I think we have a great relationship with the department - we've been very forthcoming, and have had a great rapport in addressing some of the concerns and some of the successes that we've had. It's just the continuation of the relationship that we have, and to expand on the services that we can provide that meet the labour market goals and the population growth goals.

TONY INCE: You had mentioned those individuals who are coming who may have the skills. Can you highlight a little bit more that gap that you're trying to bridge? They may have some of those apprenticeship skills or some of the skills that may be in line with what we need here. How are you bridging that gap?

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think the success of our staff and the success of the YMCA are in the community connection and having the people on the ground in these communities working with the local employers. A lot of the time, it is that connection piece - a newcomer comes into a community, but they don't necessarily know who to reach out to or where to find the employment. Beyond just writing up a resume, it's knowing how to walk in at an employer's door and say, I have the skills and I can work for you.

I think that is the secret sauce to our success. We have people working in these communities who can bring the newcomer with that skill set to the employer who needs the skill set.

INHAE PARK: Also, the successful settlement and integration and invitation goes beyond that principal applicant with a job offer to employment. At the YMCA, we support the family as a unit. The principal applicant knows that their children are doing well in school, they get involved, and their spouse gets the language training they need. If all the family members are getting the support that they need, and they are doing very well, then they tend to stay longer in the community. They get a sense of belonging, and they call the place home.

This is a very integral part of the settlement and integration. The settlement workers across the province work very hard to ensure that the newcomers get the support they need, as well as build the capacity of the community to be more welcoming and inclusive.

AVA CZAPALAY: I wanted to mention that the Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency funds the Trades Practical Assessment program, and that is administered by ISANS. This program provides those entering Nova Scotia with trades experience the opportunity to be placed with a trades employer for three months, with wages paid by the program.

The program reduces barriers that some employers may feel when hiring someone who is internationally trained, and it also provides the newcomer with experience in the workplace. We do know that many participants continue to be employed well beyond the three months of the program.

THE CHAIR: MLA Sheehy-Richard.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: That leads into my question. We know that the labour needs vary around the whole province. Can you tell us a bit more about the services that are available to newcomers so that they can build on their skills once they get here and transition careers - maybe stepping stones up the ladder, so to speak?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: There are many programs that we fund and capacity that we build throughout the province for newcomers to be able to work and thrive in communities and workplaces. Again, most of the newcomers who come to Nova Scotia come where the family, the principal applicant, has a job and is ready to come and work. As Inhae has pointed out, making sure that the full family is supported is really important as well.

I will point out one program that has been a great success. ISANS has a six-week work placement program, and those community connections and employer connections can't be understated. All of us have a professional network of some sort, and newcomers come to a new place, likely without that professional network. They may have an employer, but maybe not a network, so anyone who does not have that first Canadian experience can get a six-week, unpaid work placement with an employer.

We heard there was a person who is actually currently with the Ukrainian Canadian Congress. She came prior to the current situation, but she was able to go through this program and get a professional network. The employer got additional supports for subsidies and wage support. She was kept on longer, and then found permanent employment.

The Province wants to be a leader in this space, so the Province has actually set up a similar program within the provincial government where ISANS candidates can come and work with the provincial government - paid - for six weeks. We've had some really great success from that. We at the Immigration and Population Growth branch provided a paid placement for someone for six weeks. She was so wonderful that she's still working with us today, and I hope she stays forever.

I know there was another individual at another department who got the six weeks of paid work placement. They did not have a permanent position to put her in, but that deputy minister called me and said: Do you have anything over there? They're really great. For someone who's brand new to Nova Scotia, or brand new to Canada, and this is their first Canadian work experience, they now have a resume with government experience on it, and they have a network, and they have connections. They have a deputy minister



vouching for them, saying this person is really fantastic. Showing that leadership for employers to provide those connectivities for newcomers is a really important part of what we do as well.

INHAE PARK: To add to that, we have great examples of partnering with employers. We have a program called SPELL, which is Sector Partnerships for Enhanced Language Learning that we started with the health care sector that provides enhanced language learning, workplace English language learning for the CCAs. Oftentimes, the CCAs are internationally educated overseas. Long-term facilities across Nova Scotia hire these people, and their career goal is to become a nurse or an LPN. I saw that we provided their workplace English so that they can have that workplace success, as well as help them navigate how to upgrade their skills to achieve their career goals to become a nurse.

To those, we provide study groups, we provide workshops, we provide a guest speaker coming into the program. It has been very successful. Interim Pathway for Caregivers has been a great partner to support our work with this population. We expanded to another sector now. That includes the manufacturing company so that we have a group of newcomers working from very low-level English to higher level. We got great feedback from the employers. They see that their employees, the English is improving, their confidence is building, and they're moving toward their career goals to be an RN or LPN.

The other example is in the SPELL program. We have this project called EMPP project, which is the Economic Mobility Pathways Pilot. The other CCAs coming - they are refugees coming as a skilled worker, working at the long-term care facility. Actually, they are participating in the SPELL program as well, because they are internationally trained nurses.

Those are some of the examples.

THE CHAIR: MLA MacDonald.

JOHN A. MACDONALD: I want to start by thanking all of you folks for what you did when the Ukrainian issue happened. You guys were able to mobilize, which is perfect. I just have a question regarding that.

As has been mentioned, it's very important for newcomers to actually feel welcome wherever they're going to be moved into, because if they're not welcome there, they're not going to stay.

For me, can you share with us a bit of the ways in which we are supporting Ukrainian nationals in their integration into Nova Scotia? You don't have to say with just Ukrainians. I will let the deputy minister decide who.

AVA CZAPALAY: Perhaps I'll start and then invite my colleague Jen L'Esperance to elaborate.

Thank you very much for emphasizing the importance of the welcome. As my colleague mentioned, this was a unique situation for us because we had Ukrainians arriving who had a lot of needs but were arriving much the same as any of us around the table would arrive in a country - you just kind of walk in, right? Their authorization allowed them to come in not as refugees, but as travellers.

Job 1 was making sure that we had people and systems available to harness the welcome that Nova Scotians wanted to provide. We quickly reached out to the YMCA to help assist us with coordinating the needs of our Ukrainian arrivals with the help that Nova Scotians wanted to offer. We worked with the Atlantic chapter of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress as well. A number of other partners jumped in, including ISANS. We have a welcome booth at the airport - maybe some of you have seen that.

We really initially wanted to say to people as they arrive: Welcome. We want you here, and we want to support you, and also we recognize that you've had a very difficult time. Wherever you are, we want to help you. You don't necessarily have to decide this minute that you want to stay, but we want to help you where you are.

You will have seen that on June 2<sup>nd</sup> we welcomed a flight from Ukraine - a chartered flight. The Premier and Minister Balsev and Minister Fraser were there. I'll say that the Premier and Minister Balsev greeted every single arrival - every single one. I think you were there too, MLA MacDonald.

It was a long process getting those folks off the plane and sorted out, but what struck us is that most people arrived with very little. It became very apparent that there were very complex requirements needed to support this group of individuals.

We know today that we have more than 2,000 Ukrainians who have applied for MSI here in Nova Scotia. That's our best way of understanding how many are here, and they have settled in communities throughout the province.

I'll ask Ms. L'Esperance to elaborate on some of the specifics around what we've done. I think some of the welcome supports we've offered to Ukrainians will be translated into supporting other arrivals.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: I will be brief, to give the YMCA some time. They've been our lead in the coordinating portion of this, and have done a fantastic job of making sure that not only are they providing services but also bringing any service requirements to light. Like I said, this type of authorization for travel has never happened before. There's no place where people have to declare that they're coming to Nova Scotia before they come.

So that welcome booth - with people going there and saying, I've arrived and I don't have food or a place to stay - is really our best chance to provide those services. We've also set up a website where people can register, employers can register, and people who would like to support can register.

I think the best thing that the Province has done, though, is to be coordinated not in a siloed department-by-department sense. We have a multi-department working group who really looks at, for example, whether the people arriving are eligible for health care. No? So let's change those policies to make that happen. Can they get child care if the parents would like to work and if they're able to work? They need child care, so how can we make sure that that support is available? There are Department of Community Services supports that are required, and they have been in lockstep with us making sure that they can onboard anyone who needs community services supports.

[9:45 a.m.]

From a provincial point of view, making sure that we have that coordination has been really integral, and then having partners such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, ISANS, and particularly the YMCA, who provide that coordination, has been key. I'll let you talk about some of the specifics.

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: Like I said in the opening remarks, we've been at the forefront, whether it was helping welcome people at the airport or helping them settle in the communities that they choose to go to. Similarly, I think one of the benefits of the YMCA through supporting the Ukrainians has been our collaboration - not only to work within our departments - whether it's that they needed a gym pass to blow off some steam or they're going to Pictou County or the South Shore and they needed to get connected to the YMCAs down there. I think our YMCAs across Nova Scotia have been great in bringing us together to help with this crisis.

Beyond that, Inhae can talk about some of the direct supports that our immigration team has provided. I do want to give a quick shout-out, because I think the mobile crisis response team within YMCA immigration services has really done a great job in coming together and dealing with this crisis, and then taking all the learnings from it. So if any of these things were to come in the future, we have a baseline to kind of work from as well.

INHAE PARK: As Jennifer L'Esperance mentioned, we've been partnering with the Province to respond to the Ukrainian arrivals to Nova Scotia since, I think, April. To add to what has been said, we do have 10 settlement hubs across Nova Scotia and over 20 different language instruction sites. We are placed in the locations newcomers can access, that are convenient and comfortable for them. We work very closely with our staff across the province to respond to the Ukrainian arrivals. That could be at community meetings to talk about any Ukrainian-related support and provide practical assistance.

That could include one-on-one settlement support, invite them to group activities they're organizing, and provide on-site school settlement support for the children and youth. They make sure they are supported, and parents are happy with that.

We work closely with community organizations to co-share the programming. We work with the Family Resource Centres, library to provide conversation groups, or any family-related activities. We do the co-planned events, so we organize welcoming community initiatives that happen in the community, and then there's the International Café in the Valley or EMBRACE Truro Festival. Our YMCA settlement staff is all involved in those kinds of community initiatives.

Also, our YMCA settlement staff does orientation sessions as part of building welcoming a more inclusive community. They go to meetings and events, and they talk about what kind of settlement services are available in their community, as well as talk about the benefits of immigration, then barriers and challenges that immigrants face. That includes, of course, the Ukrainians.

Another initiative that we take on through this initiative is we are involved in a national steering committee, also the weekly stakeholder meeting that the Province is organizing. There are 18 different settlement organizations in Nova Scotia. We reach out to all of them and bring them all together and have those at all the service provider organization meetings. I think we've had them four times. We share the updates - what's happening on a national level, regional level, and locally. We want to hear what's happening in their own community as well. We share those things. We troubleshoot and share resources, and then just being connected. That has been going on, yes.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ritcey.

DAVE RITCEY: Our province continues to grow and it's important to plan ahead to support those who are already here, as well as newcomers settling in. Can you tell us some of the ways in which implementing the Auditor General's recommendations on immigration and population growth aim to provide these supports?

AVA CZAPALAY: For sure, retention of newcomers, immigrants, and Nova Scotians are key features of our population growth strategy. Making sure, first of all, that newcomers, both immigrants and people from elsewhere in Canada, feel welcome and well settled is a key component. The Immigration and Population Growth branch is a very nice fit with the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, because we also have our Skills and Learning branch which supports people connecting to work in Nova Scotia.

Retaining Nova Scotians, retaining youth is another priority. I think I've mentioned to this committee before that our youth population increased for the first time last year, and increased again this year, so we are retaining youth. We want to make sure we retain youth

throughout Nova Scotia, so we're working hard to ensure that youth see a pathway to employment and a future for themselves in all communities.

Similar to what we've said about immigration and newcomers, we want to make sure that our youth feel connected to employers. With our Nova Scotia Works offices - they have 53 offices throughout Nova Scotia - virtually any community you want to name, there's a Nova Scotia Works office nearby. People can go there to become job ready if they aren't, get help with interview skills, help with their CV, that kind of thing. Also, it's understanding what programs exist to help people connect to work and then also working with employers to help them understand the skill sets they need, how to go about seeking workers in Nova Scotia, and using the centre as a base for that.

One of my favourite pathways, of course, is through apprenticeship, but also through skilled trades. There's a bright future for anyone out there - and I'm looking at you, MLA Sheehy-Richard, because I think your daughter is a welder. We need skilled trades workers coming to Nova Scotia. Also, for our youngsters to see a pathway to skilled trades here because there are jobs in the skilled trades, and we need everybody to be out there promoting the skilled trades pathways, a pathway to a bright future whether you're a newcomer, an immigrant, or a Nova Scotian looking for work in communities.

A broad range of responses, but at the end of the day, people will stay here if they're connected to work, and, also, then connected - feel that sense of community, both in the workplace and outside of the workplace.

SUZY HANSEN: I think all of this is absolutely wonderful, and I don't mean to, like, make it sound like I'm going in a different direction. But I really feel like we're painting a picture that isn't completely accurate and I need us to be able to speak some truths because at the end of the day, in order for us to fix things, we need to know what's wrong - not that it's wrong. More, it's about how we can adjust the way we do things and adapt in order for us to do it a better way, so that we can keep people here, and that we can make newcomers and folks feel safe when they're in their communities.

I agree that in order for people to have a well-rounded feeling of being Nova Scotian, you have to feel like you're connected to work, connected to community, and have a safe and welcoming home space to call your own.

Growing the population requires access to housing, hospitals, public transit, and other public services and infrastructure. To the YMCA, what are the biggest reasons why newcomers struggle in Nova Scotia?

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think for us, our role has always been making sure that we are providing the newcomer voice at the table. When we're talking about things like housing, transportation and health care, our role has always just been to make sure that we are able to come to the table or we're able to bring the newcomers to the table

to talk about their issues. These are things that are outside of the things that we are dealing with on a day-to-day basis.

I think I'll pass that on, if you want.

INHAE PARK: Our settlement staff share the information on what's available to them in the community. That includes housing options and transportation, and help them to navigate and access those services and programs available to them. Also, our staff are on different tables and discussions, so that, as Thivjan mentioned, they are putting their perspective so that their voice is heard and their needs are reflected in the wider decisions and discussions that are happening. We make sure that we are working collaboratively to find solutions to help support newcomers coming to Nova Scotia.

The employers are part of the solution. They actually provide accommodation - a place to stay - to their employees, and they arrange transportation to and from the work site. Sometimes we have an experience that we organize the group sessions - that was outside of the workers group, of course, and over the weekend, and that they provided the buses to pick them up so that they can go to the event that our settlement staff are organizing. So all these community members, and that includes employers, are part of the solution and trying to solve this problem together. This is collective work.

SUZY HANSEN: I'm really glad to hear that. I remember in your initial comments, it was wraparound supports, which are exactly that.

How can the Province learn from that when it comes to other newcomers or other families who come here, in order for them to have similar supports but not exhaust the YMCA to do all of that work? I know you have a number of spaces, but at the same time there are a lot of folks here and across the province, and you guys are only one organization as of right now. I know you work with other organizations, but I think - how can we as a government do better to do that work?

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think one of the great things about our relationship with the department is that we do have a strong collaborative relationship. When these opportunities do come and we're able to learn, we share feedback. I think there is a great road map already there, so it is just about expanding on it and working together to grow the collaborative networks across the province.

INHAE PARK: As you can see, it's this Ukrainian initiative that all this government, the representative government, together is trying to solve the problem at the same table. There were great examples of that, so that we - somebody mentioned the quote a lot that is the Ukrainian project, that we are building a car while we are driving. Yes, that's how it feels. And then all these government organizations and community partners come together at the same table to talk about the common goal of supporting newcomers

coming to Nova Scotia. That was very inspiring and encouraging to see. I think there will be more discussion happening, for sure, for the future.

THE CHAIR: MLA Duale.

ALI DUALE: First of all, thank you for coming, and specifically for the YMCA, the service that you provide for the community.

My question is pertaining to the deputy minister. I'm excited, as a newcomer, by the ambitious idea of this Province, but also I'm scared. The reason I'm scared is 25,000 a year. That's a huge uptick. I'm wondering if this ambition is being consulted and being included with this vision - organizations like the YMCA or ISANS. Those are the organizations and the communities that you rely on.

My question to you is: Has there ever been consultation when this ambition and this vision were put on the table? That would be my question.

[10:00 a.m.]

AVA CZAPALAY: It's nice to see you. Two million by 2060, 25,000 people a year. Last year we did grow our population by 30,000, so we exceeded the 25,000. We know that the key pillars of our population growth not only include attracting immigrants but also attracting people from the rest of Canada, and also retaining international students, and also retaining Nova Scotians. That's how we'll get to 25,000. It's not all immigrants. It's a mix.

We're looking at all the levers that can be pulled and maximizing them. Of course, the YMCA and ISANS and our other 16 settlement associations are huge partners in that. That's why we've undertaken a recent settlement review to see what new services are being requested of our settlement service providers. What are they seeing in communities throughout Nova Scotia in terms of the needs of newcomers? MLA Hansen did get to the heart of the matter when she mentioned the need for flexible and responsive programs, and I completely agree. Our programs can't be static. They have to respond to what people are needing and requiring.

We rely on them to provide us with that feedback, but we also have many other partners in all of this. Retaining youth: I mentioned the apprenticeship piece. I mentioned Nova Scotia Works in terms of helping connect people to work and work to people in communities throughout Nova Scotia. International student retention is a big opportunity here in Nova Scotia. We support the Study and Stay Nova Scotia program, which has a high rate of success for helping international students who want to stay in Nova Scotia connect to community and connect to jobs as they graduate. It's a mentoring program, essentially, that helps students who are international students be mentored by a company and ultimately find work here. It has an over 90 per cent success rate in retention.

We're looking at all the levers and working with all partners to make sure that Job 1 is to keep people here regardless of where they come from.

ALI DUALE: I'm not sure if you answered my question. My question was a direct question and was: Has there been consultation with organizations like the YMCA before this panel was put in place? What I understood from your answer is that your vision is not only immigrants; it's a multiple vision. What I'm interested in is it seems you're relying on organizations like the YMCA. Did you consult them with this vision? They are the ones who are taking the load. If that's not the case, I would urge the department to include those organizations in your vision, because they are the ones who eventually take the load.

My question is: I'd like to see this succeed. If this kind of consultation and this kind of collaboration is not taking place, I see failure. I hope that would be the case. I'd like to see it happen.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: The answer is that yes, we have consulted in several ways. Also mentioned today was the Auditor General's report that recently came out. The Auditor General feels as though maybe we've consulted too much, that we really emphasized the needs of settlement, and we've seen it through the eyes of our settlement organizations so much that we also needed to really get that provincial perspective ourselves, which is why we undertook the settlement review.

The settlement review is a bit more balanced in the sense that we also consulted again the settlement organizations, but also consulted newcomers and other people in the community to make sure that we have that balanced view of what those needs are, especially considering the growth that we are about to undertake.

We've talked a lot about the Ukraine initiative today, and not only specifically because of the support for Ukrainian newcomers, but also just because of what it represents. The federal government has shown the model that we have to the rest of Canada to say that it is one of the best in Canada in terms of the response that we've had. One of the comments that we've heard from the federal government is that partnerships aren't made in crisis. One of the reasons that we were able to respond as well as we could is because of the partnerships that we had with settlement organizations, and those partnerships weren't made when they were needed the most. They were made before that.

We do rely quite heavily on the insights of those settlement organizations, and another way in which we consult is we do a request for proposals for funding for settlement organizations. That request is out right now. Settlement organizations can also formally tell us, here's what we need to support not only what we're seeing now but also the growth intended for the future.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince, and then MLA Sheehy-Richard.



TONY INCE: This question is for the department. I understand that you currently have six navigators in the province. Given the needs and the increase that we're looking at in terms of people coming, what are the needs of the department in terms of increasing the staff capacity to meet the needs of the newcomers coming?

AVA CZAPALAY: Certainly, we have a sharp eye on what we need as a department and a branch to manage the growth in our population - specifically to the navigators. We have six navigators; they're based throughout Nova Scotia. They currently have had over 900 inquiries.

Just to backtrack a moment, the navigator's role is to provide a personal touch. Once people take a look at our *Live In Nova Scotia* website, they see our ads, our billboards, our radio clips, whatever, and they make the decision, I think I'd better look at this a little more closely, then we want to attach them to a person rather than have them bounce around between websites. They connect with a community navigator who's in a position to say there are job opportunities here that meet your interests. If you're asking about what a community is like, we have connections to all kinds of community partners. Here's what it's like to live in this community. Our navigators are not operating in isolation: They're operating as part of a larger ecosystem of Chambers of Commerce, the Regional Enterprise Networks, probably the local MLA offices. They're part of a whole group of people within communities who are trying to help people settle well.

Looking at the navigators, we're really pleased with the work they're doing. We really see that that personal approach is paying off. I mention the numbers, but we also hear anecdotally. People are writing in to thank us and to thank the navigators for helping connect them to communities. We do feel as though that navigator approach, that personal touch, helps differentiate ourselves, perhaps, from other jurisdictions as well, and we do see that role continuing. In terms of the volume, we're monitoring that, and we'll be letting government know if we need to increase the number of navigators in order to respond to the volume. Right now we feel that the six navigators are handling the work, especially because they're part of a larger ecosystem. Many of them are co-located, for instance, within a Regional Enterprise Network, so they have access to a wider array of supports and services.

TONY INCE: Speaking about the rural areas and the navigators, what is being done to address the non-traditional jobs or the industry requirements in the rural areas? To give you an example, are we looking at, in those rural areas, IT? Some of those areas that are mostly in the urban - but because we have to look at the rural areas, now.

AVA CZAPALAY: The nature of our campaign is oriented toward skilled trades and health care workers, but if those are the primary people making inquiries, they often have a partner or expanded family and are looking for other opportunities too. People are saying: I'm a welder, but my partner is interested in IT. The beauty with some of the IT jobs is that they are remote jobs, so people can come with their job. Many of you will recall

we did have a remote worker campaign for a while, and it's blended into our Live in Nova Scotia campaign, because what we're really promoting with the Live in Nova Scotia campaign is the work-life balance that you can have here.

For digital jobs, if people bring a job with them, that's great. If a community identifies an IT job, the best way that they can connect to employers is through our Nova Scotia Works office, by letting the Nova Scotia Works office know that they have jobs in the IT sector, and that puts that information into the system so our navigators will then become aware that there are IT jobs in this area. When they get inquiries, they can then connect people with that opportunity.

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: I'm going to take a minute to elaborate on the opportunity of my son, because it is really a feel-good story. In 2017, he was at NSCC to take power engineering. Before he even graduated he was offered a job in Windsor five minutes from his home, which is incredible. Since then he's left that job, turned down four other jobs, and is waiting any day now to have an internal position with Capital Health. He is working currently at our Hants Community Hospital locally, as well as Cobequid under the same manager.

He also went from his third class when he graduated, had a really hard time passing the provincial portion, gained the skill base in the employer he had. They gave him ample opportunities to work his way up in study. He's now third class and he's joining the apprenticeship program to work towards his second class.

That's a really feel-good story, and of course a proud mom moment to brag about that work that's being done for our youth. He's 23 years old and probably will stay and work and have a family here. It makes Mom happy. Even better, when he files his income tax this year, he's going to have a pretty significant chunk of change that he can put towards eventually moving out of our basement that we're turning into an in-law suite for him, and get into a house. We're working on that as well. The future is bright for the skilled trades. I know other members have brought it in. Enough of my bragging and being proud for a minute.

I want to talk a bit about credentialing. I know as an MLA, I'm constantly hearing: Why can't you get these health care workers working faster? Why can't you get these people working in trades? Why can't we get them? I guess in that area, that comes up a lot through immigration. I just was wondering what kinds of supports we have to navigate those newcomers so that they can get the credentialing that is recognized so that they can, for example, work in our hospitals and our long-term care facilities and everywhere else they're needed.

AVA CZAPALAY: I have to jump in here and congratulate your son. I'm congratulating him on his resilience. A lot of young people need to build that skill, and it

sounds like he's acquired that early, which bodes well for you and your in-law suite. (Laughs)

When we attract newcomers to Nova Scotia, whether they're immigrants or whether they're from the rest of Canada, we want to make sure that they are well-employed according to their experience and their skills. We do have a wide range of programs that are in play right now to help people navigate through that regulatory process, regardless of whether they're a chartered accountant or a health care worker. I'll just ask my colleague Jen L'Esperance to highlight a few of those programs.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: I'm sure YREACH will have a comment after myself as well. It's definitely top of mind for us to make sure that people who are arriving are able to have meaningful work and work in their field of study. We support individuals who have that job offer, so they are coming with a job offer, but sometimes they want to upgrade their skills or bridge to something else, or it could be their spouse who is interested in a particular occupation that needs some additional support.

[10:15 a.m.]

I'll talk to a couple of programs at ISANS. The deputy minister already spoke about the Trades Practical Assessment, which is a really fantastic one supported by our Nova Scotia Apprenticeship Agency. They also have several bridging programs for financial services, architects, engineers, nurses. Some of them are the hard qualification skills, and others are that networking, making those connections, and language skills.

I think the language can't be understated. There are specific language requirements for most licensed occupations, and most of the time it's for very good reason. We want people to be in a workplace where they can fully function in the first language of the clients they are serving. Sometimes there are occupational health and safety considerations as well, to make sure that we're putting - you know, if a cook is in a kitchen, we want to make sure that they can communicate with the other people so that no one gets hurt in that kitchen.

There are really good reasons for a lot of these qualification requirements, and settlement organizations are well positioned to be able to help support people with their language and other qualifications. We also work closely with the regulatory bodies to make sure that those qualifications are up to date with what's reasonable to expect and what's really needed in that workplace.

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think from our perspective, what we notice with the credentialing piece has been that, whether it's support with the language side of things or whether it's supporting the individual in their rural community trying to access the credentialing body, which may be located in Halifax, we know that that is a need with some of the populations that we serve. We're going to be looking at that for increasing that

support to meet the demand in the upcoming call for proposals with the department, so that's great to hear.

THE CHAIR: Ms. Park, would you like to answer?

INHAE PARK: When we work with the newcomers, usually settlement staff does a little bit of basic needs assessment and finds out what their needs are and then what their skills are. Based on that, we do provide either direct services to them or connections to the services and programs available. We work with partners like ISANS - it's that credential recognition - so we refer our client to the engineering program or nursing program or accountancy program so that they have the information and then they can access those programs.

Also, we work with - there are a lot of other initiatives happening. The red word education system - that program is available. That's a credential recognition. Staff is current with the information and trends of what's happening in the sector and then provide that information so that it can provide the timely, appropriate resources and information to the newcomers we serve.

I know that there have been a lot of great initiatives happening in the Department of Health and Wellness, and then Health Association Nova Scotia to reduce barriers for the newcomers to the pathway to those credential recognitions. I think they're excited to see those great conversations and initiatives happening.

THE CHAIR: I have MLA Young and then MLA Hansen.

NOLAN YOUNG: It's funny as we hear that jackhammering, before I was thinking: Good-paying jobs come to Nova Scotia. I don't know. (Laughter) Trades, that's it. The lowest unemployment in 50 years.

I'm just wondering if you could - you talked a bit about it, but if you can tell me a bit more about interprovincial migration to Nova Scotia, perhaps regarding credentialing or what work may be done to ensure smooth transition to the province.

I'll throw that out.

AVA CZAPALAY: Certainly it was going through my mind as I was listening to Inhae respond, that one of the things we do, regardless of the occupation or the sector, is we're very aware of what other jurisdictions are doing across Canada so that what we do here is consistent. Thinking of apprenticeship - somehow I always think of that when I look at you - making sure that our apprenticeship requirements from trade to trade are consistent across Canada. Trade mobility is a top priority, and people who have a trade are finding it very mobile now to move from one jurisdiction to another with their trade intact.

I'll just see if one of my colleagues wants to respond as well.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: We've seen really great success with net interprovincial migration. Not only are we attracting many more people here but fewer people are leaving as well - a really fantastic situation there.

Our branch, Immigration and Population Growth - that was one of the main changes that we now have, not only immigration but also population growth which includes attracting people from the rest of Canada.

We've recently released a francophone population growth action plan to attract francophone people from the rest of Canada, and if you look at some of those skills that might be difficult to attract internationally, such as French teachers. Teacher credentialing - we're able to do that with French teachers from the rest of the world, but if they're already working in Canada as a French teacher, they can more easily come into our schools and work as a French teacher here.

Having that plan to be very targeted and intentional about our attraction for the rest of Canada and targeted to those skills that make the credentialing even easier to work in Nova Scotia is a really exciting place to be, and we're seeing lots of great success with it.

INHAE PARK: I want to add one other great example of that interprovincial migration: the SPELL program. How this program started is that our staff across the province work very closely with the long-term care facilities - CCAs, mostly. That's how I noticed, so I reached out to one of the employers who has multiple locations across the province where settlement staff are located, trying to find out what their needs are and then how we can work together. In that meeting, they identified that they do a lot of recruitment in other provinces, mostly from Ontario, that they're pulling a lot of CCAs - the internationally credentialed nurses to either study at the local college, and then they'll go to recruit those people to come to work in Nova Scotia.

In that meeting where the employer identified the language needs - they have great language skills, however their English needs to be improved to have better workplace communication, and then they're having a hard time over the meeting - going toward improving their career goals, as well as their settlement needs. Those are the things to identify.

I told the employer, let's work together on that. We do have language instruction, and we do have settlement staff with those locations, so how can we work together to support your employees? That's how we started the SPELL program. The program includes curriculum design. Together, we partner to include the curriculum design with the subject matter expertise from that organization, and scheduling of workplace learning as well as project evaluation.

We started a pilot project, and they were supported by the IPG. It was a great success, and the evaluation was fantastic. That's why we're able to keep supporting these folks coming from other provinces to Nova Scotia.

SUZY HANSEN: We talked earlier, or there was a mention earlier about long-term care and CCAs, and our immigration framework has been linked to the recruitment strategy on long-term care in order to deliver the reformed process that we need to keep - to have people here in those professions.

I'm just going to read a little piece on foreign workers to provincial nominee programs:

“Renewed efforts to attract foreign workers through provincial nominee programs (PNPs) over the last 20 years have increased Nova Scotia's immigration rates. However, Nova Scotia's most recently calculated 5-year retention rate (65%) for immigrants remains lower than every other jurisdiction outside of Atlantic Canada, and below the national average . . . Economic immigrants have the lowest retention rate . . . whereas the rate is slightly higher for refugees . . . Compounding the matter are known factors in Nova Scotia, such as healthcare labour casualization, lack of mandated [long-term care] staffing levels, high cost of living, low pay, and benefits and minimal settlement infrastructure.

Taken together, these issues point to the likelihood that immigrant CCAs in Nova Scotia will struggle to build long-term viable careers in the province and may not stay.”

We have seen that - folks moving on to other professions. We were very pleased to see that there was an increase in the pay standards, but I hear consistently from CCAs that turnover in their workplace is incredibly high, and it impacts quality of care and workplace safety. What is the department doing to improve working conditions in the health care professions that immigrants in Nova Scotia are entering?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: I'm thinking about different parts to respond to. Of course, first of all, retention - we've had recent retention numbers come out. Our one-year retention rate has increased by 4 per cent, so we're at 77 per cent now for our one-year retention rate.

We still have aspirations to get higher in terms of our longer-term retention rate, so I appreciate that comment. It's definitely a priority of ours. That's why we're supporting the settlement supports that we are.

Also involved in retention is ensuring that we're attracting people with the skills that we need and that they can find meaningful work and want to stay in their workplaces, as you've suggested. We recently had a fantastic success with recruiting skilled refugees. We've partnered with Health Association Nova Scotia, but specific employers especially, to find this untapped resource - refugees in particular countries, such as Kenya, do not have the ability to work legally there. However, they're very well trained and are looking for a place to call home with their families. We're able to provide that here in Nova Scotia.

Recently in Kenya we made 65 conditional job offers to continuing care assistants. We're partnering with employers such as the MacLeod Group, who are actually looking at not only providing a job but hiring two settlement workers themselves to provide settlement support at that workplace. They are providing accommodations for the families who are arriving. They travelled to Kenya and met with candidates, talked to not-for-profit organizations to really understand the types of supports they will need once they get here, so that they can settle well for the long term with them and their family.

It's the type of wraparound supports that we need to think not just about the job offer - and yes, the wages do help. Good wages, not only for the candidate but for the family, have been a fantastic advancement for continuing care assistants, but also making sure that all of those wraparound supports for the candidate and their family are in place. It's individual to the candidate who's arriving. It's not a one-size-fits-all for any newcomer who's arriving.

SUZY HANSEN: That's wonderful. I'm glad to hear all of that. I really am.

The other piece is that we know that newcomers' status is attached to employment, so when you are in a situation where your employer is abusing you, as an employee - that might change your status, if you leave that job, right? How is the government working on that part, if that is the situation that employees are facing?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: It is a great concern of ours. We want to make sure that people come and feel safe to be themselves, to work in an environment that is safe for them.

If we're talking about permanent residents, they have all the labour mobility of anyone else. But often our candidates are arriving on temporary work permits that are specific to the employer. We've completed 100 webinars this year to talk to employers about how to onboard candidates and how to work with the immigration programming.

The Atlantic Immigration Program has been a really fantastic asset. When it became a permanent program, we introduced mandatory intercultural competency training to make sure that employers have this training before they are able to recruit any newcomers to come to their workplaces. We've also advanced our compliance and investigations unit, where we go to employers and we say: How is it going? We interview newcomers and we

say: How is it going? and we educate them on their rights. Now that we're also part of Labour, Skills and Immigration, our labour standards division is right in our office, so we're able to talk to them about how to best communicate to newcomers about their employee rights.

We know that when newcomers come, the job opportunity doesn't always work out. It can be like anyone else starting a new job. It may not be a best fit. So if it's not, we now provide 60 days for that individual to find new employment and still maintain their nomination with the Province and the federal government so that they're not penalized.

When I say 60 days, I mean 60 days. (Laughs) We're as facilitative as possible to make sure that the newcomer is not penalized, and truthfully, the employer is the one who needs to think a little bit more as to whether or not their workplace was the right place for not only that newcomer more newcomers who are coming to work with them. We're as facilitative as possible with those candidates who want to move on to a new employer. Luckily, there are many employment opportunities right now that they can find.

[10:30 a.m.]

MELISSA SHEEHY-RICHARD: That made my ears burn a little bit because that's what I was wondering - basically what our employers are saying about those programs, typically, generally speaking. Could you give me some examples?

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: Now that we are one year into our Atlantic Immigration Program and we've now designated about 700 employers under our Atlantic Immigration Program - in five years we designated about 1,500 employers under the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program, and we already have more than 700 under the program in less than a year - we have been interested to know about that intercultural competency training. Truthfully, we're a little bit concerned about creating one more step for employers. We don't want to provide any processing or any more time to employers than necessary, but we really felt that this was a very important piece. We're hearing only positive feedback. We're not hearing: Why do I have to spend so much of my time in this training? We're hearing: Thank you so much, I know it's only myself as the hiring manager that needs to take it, but can I bring more staff as well? More of them want to take it.

Actually, the YMCA helps to facilitate that training so they might have more to say, but they're asking about expanded services to make sure that their workplace is best suited for newcomers. It feels like a real changing time right now, where people want to do this well. They don't only want to do it, they don't only want to hire newcomers and find the labour that they need, but they really want to support their staff well, and they're looking to our settlement organizations and the Province to do that.

INHAE PARK: Yes, as a settlement organization, we do provide intercultural competence training to the employers outside of HRM. Since January I think that we had



close to 300 employers participating in that training. It's going really well and feedback has been very positive, and employers were really engaged this session and had a discussion about how they can create more welcoming workplaces for the newcomer employees. They did a very practical exercise on what they can do when they go back to their workplace and some of the things they can do.

The people who are taking that training are in management roles, decision-makers, so they can make changes in their workplace. It isn't mandatory training for the employers; however, employers are really engaged in the settlement process of newcomers, we see more and more. I've been with the settlement sector for a long time, but more than ever, a lot of community members, including employers - it's part of that settlement support that we provide to the newcomers to Nova Scotia, which is fantastic. We can see great success and great feedback, and then we continue to do so.

ALI DUALE: I'm just wondering: Have we seen the last 10 years statistics of immigration for Nova Scotia? I was wondering if we have any numbers within the department on immigration versus migration and the differences. Are there any numbers that exist?

AVA CZAPALAY: MLA Duale, you'll be aware that our immigration numbers continue to track upwards. We're on track for another record year for landings. Last year was a record year. In 2021 our total landings - that's the number of immigrants who arrived here in Nova Scotia - were 9,160. In 2022 so far, and this is as of September - it goes on a January to December year in terms of tracking - as of September we had 10,670 landings. That's what I meant in Public Accounts when I said we're on track for a record year after a record year in terms of immigrant landings.

In terms of - do we have the newcomer numbers with us from the rest of Canada? In 2021 - and I can file these number later if you want - our in-migration from the rest of Canada was 20,484. That same year, we had 10,535 Nova Scotians leave, so the net income was 9,949. This year, our net migration is 14,079, and I'm really pleased to emphasize that the majority are youth. Our actual age in Nova Scotia is declining now, so we can't claim to be an aging province anymore. (Laughs) It really was a thrill for us when Statistics Canada announced that our average age is declining, and it's declining because of in-migration, and it's declining because immigrants are typically younger than the average age of a Nova Scotian. We go back to 2013, 2014; we have a lot of statistics to share.

Jen has more numbers to share.

JENNIFER L'ESPERANCE: A number I keep a close eye on as well is our rural immigration. Traditionally, immigrants come to urban cities. We've had a really concerted effort over the last couple of years to make sure that we are migrating more newcomers to rural areas. The Atlantic Immigration Program has been a real asset for that. In the Atlantic Immigration Pilot Program, 35 per cent of endorsements - so candidates - were going

outside of HRM. That is in comparison to, traditionally, about 82 per cent of people coming to Halifax. Even in the permanent program, we're actually, this year, at 50/50; 50 per cent are going to rural areas and 50 per cent are coming to Halifax, specifically for the Atlantic Immigration Program. Because it's employer-driven, there are more rural employers engaged because of our engagement that we're doing with our team of employers in the rural areas, and then more people are being attracted to those areas.

ALI DUALE: Quite honestly, the reason I'm asking this question - I'm very optimistic of this vision. It's one of the things that I'm in favour of. My intention is to see this succeed and to become fruitful for the next generation of Nova Scotians, but also, within my question, I'm wondering about in-migrations: Do we have a picture of exactly what part of Canada are they coming from? What kind of trades skills are they bringing to Nova Scotia? What makes them interested to come to Nova Scotia?

The reason I'm thinking all of these questions is it will give us a real picture of where we're heading and what we are missing. Without a number, you cannot go anywhere. That's why I'm interested to see all of these numbers being in place in order for us to look five years from now, to see where we were, what we have accomplished. I'm happy to hear this great news of having youth coming back here. Those are the things that I really believe will make this vision a success. Please, if you can, just elaborate who are these people, and what makes them come to Nova Scotia.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you for mentioning your commitment to ensuring our population growth succeeds. For sure, all of us need to lock arms and make sure that the people who choose to come here feel welcome and feel well settled.

In terms of newcomers from the rest of Canada, I mentioned our marketing campaigns. Perhaps I'll start there. Our marketing campaign specifically targets skilled trades workers and health care workers. We know that those workers are responding because anecdotally, we know that they're coming here and settling; they're telling us. Our borders are open, so people can come in and leave freely. One of the ways that we're looking at surveying people coming from the rest of Canada is that when they apply for their health card, we can ask them a few questions about who they are and how they settled here.

But also, newcomers are welcome to reach out to people within the community - the YMCA and others - and they'll be able to report back to us on exactly who's coming. Maybe I can ask the YMCA if they can provide you with some specifics.

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: I think more than specific when you're asking about who's coming. It's right here. (Laughter) I mean, to be honest, I grew up in Ontario, and as a younger individual, when we were looking at opportunities - beyond the lifestyle of Nova Scotia, it is the opportunity in Nova Scotia to thrive, and that is what's attracting.

I know just anecdotally from living in New Glasgow and speaking to a ton of people - like myself, they're between the age bracket of 25 and 45 who had moved and settled in that region over the last three years. I can say that the big thing is that the people here are welcoming, the lifestyle is great, but the opportunity that you get here, especially when you're talking about the opportunities in places like Toronto or B.C. or Ontario, there is immense potential.

That's why they're coming here. That's why I chose to come here. Those may not be the facts, but I think that's the anecdotal stories.

INHAE PARK: We have examples of newcomers actually settling in Nova Scotia first and then always thinking that the grass is greener, so they move to the bigger provinces, like Toronto or Alberta, and then they move back, actually. People are very welcoming here, they like it here, but they moved to the other provinces and they didn't get the same kind of support that they had before or they didn't feel very welcome.

So we see people moving back here. At the YMCA, again, we mentioned that we support the family as a unit, but we also support the children and youth. That is our niche. We have been working with the newcomer children and youth for a long time. They have a very different, unique set of needs, different from their parents. That is our commitment: supporting youth.

Understanding the settlement needs of children and youth and supporting this population is our passion. It is our strength, and it is our commitment. It is a foundation to our mission of building healthy communities through the power of belonging. Children and youth are the future generation workforce. For us, doing the job is building a future workforce in Nova Scotia, and we are very proud of that.

THE CHAIR: MLA Ince, with just over two minutes. In the interests of time - this will probably be our last question. We want to be able to give our guests the opportunity to do some closing statements.

TONY INCE: The one thing I haven't heard much about - and we're talking about growing our province. We're talking about - you've mentioned a bit about francophones. What conversations are being had with those francophone individuals from the continent, from African countries?

AVA CZAPALAY: We're really proud of our francophone immigration and population-growth strategy. We worked with the community here in Nova Scotia to develop a strategy that everyone has agreed to. One of the first things that we did once the strategy was made public is Jen and her team had an immigration draw focusing on francophones, and 150 people were issued letters of invitation.

Then we quickly followed up with a trip to Morocco and we really had a lot of very skilled people seeking to move to Nova Scotia. They spoke Arabic, French, and English. As Jen mentioned, it was everyone from French teachers to health care workers to early childhood educators - a wide range of talent. In the past year, we've done 22 different marketing missions looking at potential immigrants, and certainly have a focus on achieving our goals in our francophone immigration and population-growth strategy.

Jen also mentioned the 100 webinars that we've done in the past year, helping both newcomers and potential newcomers and also employers understand the various immigration pathways to coming here. It's a multi-pronged approach, but I have every confidence that we will definitely meet the goals that are expressed in the Francophone immigration and population growth strategy. We'll see our Francophone communities throughout Nova Scotia thriving with the newcomers that will be here.

[10:45 a.m.]

THE CHAIR: The time for our questions and answers has come to an end. We'd like to give our guests an opportunity to give some closing statements. Maybe I can go in reverse order this time.

THIVJAN THARMARATNAM: First of all, thank you to everyone for having us here today. Hopefully you learned a little bit more about some of the settlement programs that the YMCA has to offer.

When we're talking about connecting newcomers to the workforce, I hope you realize it does come down to the retention and the contribution and the participation of not just the individual, but their families. That has been our mission, what we do well at the YMCA. We hope to continue to do that going forward.

INHAE PARK: I'd to finish with this quote that I like: "Diversity is a fact, inclusion is a practice, equity is a goal."

Diversity has become more and more a fact in our community, and the landscape of communities is changing. I came as an immigrant myself, and I've seen a lot of different faces on the street, and that makes me excited. When I came here, I didn't see a lot of immigrants on the street and people stared at me. Now, I think people see me as a normal - I wouldn't say normal, but just a citizen on the street. Diversity is becoming more the fabric of our society.

What we do is very important to provide the support they need to be a more welcoming and inclusive province so that people will stay. Employment is a factor of attraction, but settlement integration is a factor of retention.

THE CHAIR: I think a lot of us are going to look up the Hansard to get those quotes you mentioned. That was very good.

AVA CZAPALAY: Thank you very much for the invitation to be here today and the great questions and the interest in this topic. For sure, getting to two million people by 2060 will be a collaborative effort. It will require all of us, and it will require our settlement providers, it will require our community partners, our employers - all of us to lean in and do the work that we need to do to help people settle well, to help them feel welcome, and to help them stay here in Nova Scotia.

I just want to say that our focus is not to just set up programs and say, there, we've done that. Our focus is to be flexible and nimble and to respond to whatever the situation is that arises. If we have Ukrainians suddenly needing a home here in Nova Scotia, we want to be nimble and respond to that. If we have an opportunity to retain more international students, we want to do that and be nimble in doing that.

Working with community partners to help welcome immigrants and newcomers from the rest of Canada - all of those things are what will help us get to two million by 2060. It's a collaborative effort, and so far we're on track.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of our committee and the millions who have watched today, we want to thank you all for coming. Thank you to our guests for coming today. We do have just a small bit of committee business to attend to. Our meeting is over at 11:00 a.m., so we will ask you now to be excused. Thank you for coming today.

We'll take a two-minute break just to allow our guests to leave.

[10:49 a.m. The committee recessed.]

[10:53 a.m. The committee reconvened.]

THE CHAIR: Order. Could I please ask our committee members to come back to the table?

We covered most of our committee business at the beginning of the meeting, but just to announce that our next meeting will be on January 31, 2023 - can you imagine? - from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. (Laughter) Questions will be over at 2:45 again. Sorry about that.

Our witnesses that day will be from the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration; the Department of Public Works; Nova Scotia Community College; and the Apprenticeship Board. The topic will be Skilled Labour Shortages and Impact on Critical Infrastructure in Nova Scotia.

Is there any other discussion? Any other business at all that we need to attend to?

Seeing no further business, I adjourn. This meeting is now over.

[The committee adjourned at 10:54 a.m.]