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The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Good morning.

This morning, we are continuing our study on the roadmap and immigration in francophone minority communities.

I have to tell you that there is a slight change in the agenda because we will have a vote at 10:00 a.m. So we are going to try to deal with everything in the first hour because witnesses have been invited. We will have to completely change the agenda to shorten the presentation time of the witnesses, who have come from all over.

We're going to start. I suggest we hear from the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne first. Blandine Ngoga Tona is the president and will speak to us by videoconference.

Good morning, Mrs. Ngoga Tona, and welcome.

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona (President, Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne): Good morning, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're going to give you 10 minutes, so about five minutes on the roadmap and five minutes on immigration. We will then go around the table.

The Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta will follow, and we'll wrap up with the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences. So we'll have a lot of work in the next hour.

So let's get started.

Welcome, Mrs. Ngoga Tona. Please go ahead. You have about ten minutes.

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Thank you, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I would first like to thank you for inviting the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne to come and give its remarks on the next official languages action plan.

The acronym is AFFC. It is long.

The AFFC is the voice of 1.3 million francophone and Acadian women living in minority communities, and the representative for 12 organizations of francophone and Acadian women across the country.

With its consultation process last winter, the AFFC feels very informed about the needs of francophone women in these

communities. It defends the rights of Canadian francophone women to live and develop fully in French.

We are going to combine our two interventions. We will speak about the roadmap while addressing immigration. I hope we won't go over 10 minutes.

We would like to focus our remarks on three specific aspects: accessibility to French day care services; health care services provided in French, geared to women's needs; and the capacity building of organizations, by and for francophone women.

Let's start with day care services. I'm sure you know already that francophone or exogamous families, and mainly immigrants, resign themselves to putting their children in an anglophone day care service when they are unable to place them in a francophone day care. This contributes to the loss of French, despite themselves.

This is a distressing situation. It is harmful for the family, the child and the community. As the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages indicates, language and culture is traditionally passed on within families through the mother. There's a reason why we call our first language our "mother tongue".

Providing francophone day care services helps to share this responsibility of protecting the language and culture of francophones but, also, to ensure the vitality of a community for which this language and culture are central.

However, this social infrastructure allows much more. It enables the confident participation of women in the labour market, thereby giving them the right to fully contribute to the development of their regions and to grow professionally.

In fact, it is very often the woman who decides to stay home to take care of the children in French, when the service is not available. In connection with that, I would like to show how this affects immigrant women.

To provide some context, a francophone woman who immigrates here may be a professional but, most often and mainly in the case of refugee families, she has never worked and her literacy level is very low.

She has many children, too. This woman, like all the others, is asked to facilitate the family's integration process and balance. This integration usually involves English classes, a job in an environment that, most of the time, is in English. There is also a whole system of guidance, mainly in English, in the francophone minority community. This is possible for her only if she can send her children to school or day care.

If the need for day care services in French is the same for all francophone women, the issue becomes critical for immigrant women for two main reasons: first, French isn't necessarily their mother tongue and, second, the need for integration involves either classes or a job. This makes the situation even more difficult. If a woman is required to spend her day in English and her child isn't placed in a French day care, how much quality time do you think this family will give to French?

That's the first thing. Yet, these immigrants come here as francophones, and most francophone immigrants who live here—the vast majority, I don't have recent statistics; they are from 2010—over 60% of them arrive from Africa. So these people have other mother tongues.

If there isn't a school structure or day care that allows children to begin their development in French, how many parents are willing to pay for a francization course or themselves francize their children, whereas they had a foundation that was supposed to be French?

I will speak about a second aspect: the active offer. With regard to health care services in French, we would like to focus on the need for services for vulnerable women, especially those who face violence.

Do you know how many transition houses in French there are in minority communities? One, and it's in Toronto. It only offers first-stage housing. All the other centres that take in women at the second and third stages, and all the crisis housing aside from the one in Toronto, operate in English. If a francophone woman is in crisis, or has an immediate need because of violence, she may have to use an interpreter, and it all depends on when the interpreter is available. That's the reality for women in minority communities. As for the population of transition houses—I'll take the case of Manitoba, which I have more statistics for—over 80% of the occupants are immigrant women.

Once again, that means that there is a lot of awareness and work to be done to be able to respond adequately to this reality.

It is well known that these services are lacking, mainly because no policy requires anglophone institutions to provide services in French. They are tied to the limited capacities of organizations that hire a bilingual employee here and there who is available at specific times. Often, you need to go through an organization in Quebec to obtain interpretation services. Again, this depends on whether the need is expressed during regular business hours. Outside those hours, there is no telephone consultation service for francophones in minority situations who are in crisis.

So what does a francophone immigrant woman who lives in British Columbia do, when she fears for her safety or the safety of her children and who needs help when the employee is on vacation or isn't available? This is the reality for women in minority situations. We now believe that by applying the comparative gender analysis in the next action plan on official languages, you will realize the importance of the two points I have just mentioned on achieving substantive equality in Canada, with a consideration of the reality of immigrant women.

We also think it is necessary to promote a social structure that would recognize the reality of the needs of all social groups of the new francophonie, which is, in fact, multicultural. These organiza-

tions think about these social infrastructures, think about the impact on women and provide inclusive programming that reflects the diversity of multicultural francophonie in minority communities, that is to say outside Quebec.

So, to complete this analysis of the situation, I will speak about our last point, which is capacity building of organizations created by and for francophone women in minority communities. This reinforcement begins with proper core funding and funding that takes a long-term perspective. The change isn't immediate. The change should be gradual and should support these organizations in the long-term because that work that is done is different and has different variables that require time to better understand in order to structure the appropriate response.

Our resources are mostly eaten up by funding research work, while we would do better to use them to provide direct, high-quality services. If that was done, we would all benefit from the new roadmap.

In terms of immigration and this reinforcement, it is important to encourage more solidarity initiatives in which immigrant women could meet, talk about their reality, and find solutions that allow them to see how they could meet their needs and integrate further into the reality of the francophone minority. We don't want to lose francophone women who settle in our regions because the social structure isn't adapted to their reality.

Thank you, and I can now take your questions.

● (0855)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Ngoga Tona, for your presentation.

At the clerk's suggestion, we will continue with all the speeches, after which we will do a round of questions and comments.

So we will move on to a presentation by the executive director of the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta, Georges Bahaya. We will follow the same format, about five minutes for the roadmap and five more minutes for immigration.

Go ahead, Mr. Bahaya.

Mr. Georges Bahaya (Executive Director, Reception, Settlement and Integration, Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, committee members.

This isn't an easy topic, but you have the text and you can refer to it.

I would first like to thank you for inviting the Centre d'accueil et d'établissement du Nord de l'Alberta, of which I have been the director for 13 years. The centre is a western organization that welcomes francophone newcomers. I will present the perspective of a reception centre in a minority community.

As for the roadmap, I will speak to two points. For us, the roadmap is necessary for minority communities. Second, I will show that the roadmap is an intelligent way to fight assimilation. These are two points that are very important to us.

Why is the roadmap necessary? For a settlement organization like ours, which welcomes thousands of newcomers who settle in western Canada, the roadmap is the only way to assert Canada's bilingualism. Only to the extent that this roadmap is supported will our newcomers be able to keep the French language in a predominantly anglophone environment.

In fact, newcomers have to invent a new life for themselves in these new environments. Through integration services in French, they can use the French language, provided that they have access to services in French. For us, the roadmap is a guarantee. It is an assurance that allows all francophone migrants or immigrants to have access to services in French with regard to the success of their process of settling.

As for the intelligent way of fighting assimilation, bilingualism in Canada is not just a given from our heritage and a source of pride, but it is also a noble value. What would become of our communities if we did not manage to keep French alive?

Ladies and gentlemen of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, without the roadmap on linguistic duality, bilingualism would be a reality that would be losing steam, and tongues would wag. People would say that bilingualism was only a myth, and they would welcome us to the land of the assimilated.

Francophone migrants from minority communities know something about this. As soon as they can't find services or even employment in French, they simply become assimilated by the anglophones, who will not even guide them to the few services that are offered in our minority communities.

The roadmap is, for us, a lever on which our minority communities can lean in order to avoid losing their identity and their vitality.

I would like to make two recommendations in this respect. The roadmap must increase and strengthen the reception and settlement resources that our francophone minority communities have. The roadmap does not go into much detail about funding for francophone immigration. I have attended many meetings where people asked how much money was set aside for francophone immigration. An answer was often not given.

Francophone reception centres are required to beg for funding from the same envelope as anglophone centres for receiving francophone newcomers. We would like you to give true support to the reception centres in francophone minority communities.

We have a second recommendation relating to the roadmap. The entire community life sector should be given resources and a variety of services with adequate funding. We receive newcomers and assess their needs, but we can't do everything. We have to direct them to services that will be able to meet their needs.

When those services don't exist, we have no choice but to refer them to the anglophone majority, with the risk that at some level,

these people will assimilate into the majority language and move away from our services.

So there you go, ladies and gentlemen, that is what I can tell you about the roadmap on official languages, which is very important to us as a reception centre. In short, our communities need services, and immigrants need a community where there are services. That is our major concern.

• (0900)

In terms of immigration, without making this introduction any longer, I first want to state that francophone immigration in small minority communities is a necessity.

Then I want to show that we need French-language community services if we want to sustain that francophone immigration. If there are no services in French in the community, it is useless.

Finally, as the lady said earlier, we have to have services provided by and for francophones.

I will start with the first point, the need for francophone immigration in minority communities. We feel that, just as the English-speaking majority benefits from immigration to increase its population, we francophones should also take advantage of immigration to increase our population and overcome our demographic deficit. We are very frustrated to see that the target of 5% of francophone immigrants has never been reached. We would like it to be reached so that our communities can benefit from immigration in the same way as anglophones do. Otherwise, our communities will die, they will disappear over time.

Francophone immigration is a necessity. We must be able to comfortably support it, as we do for the anglophone community.

Let us turn to services in French for the community. I am going to refer to a recent study conducted in western Canada, for which my organization acted as a fiscal agent. The study is entitled "Francophone immigration in the territories and western Canada: realities and prospects after 10 years of welcoming centres and services". The study was conducted by prominent researchers in western universities under the guidance of Professor Paulin Mulatris. The study will be published soon. It was funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

The study dealt with some points that I would like to briefly mention to you. The study also came up with recommendations. One is that services should be developed that are tailored to the level of training of immigrants. I am taking the term "immigrants" to mean francophone immigrants.

The study found that organizations seem to meet the basic needs of immigrants better, but they become less efficient over the long term. This in fact means that organizations assisting immigrants in minority communities provide only basic services. When the time comes for specialized services, we are obliged to turn to English-language ones, which somewhat defeats the purpose of trying to integrate those immigrants into minority francophone communities. They end up embracing English, the language of the majority, the majority community.

The study also says that we should examine the possibility of developing personalized services that meet the real needs of the people received. Once again, our services are somewhat lacking; they do not always meet all the needs. We have to further strengthen them.

We have to create new social services to cope with emotional and health problems. When we receive newcomers with mental and emotional health problems, for example, we have no other choice but to send them to the English-speaking system. There is nothing more frustrating than having to go through an interpreter when you are with someone who is sick and has mental health problems. It is very frustrating, the work needed does not get done. So we have to have specialized services.

The study also mentions that we must equip the first points of contact, francophone or anglophone, with information on services in French. Here again, the same thing happens. The few services that we have for newcomers are not at all well known. We really have to promote them more so that they can be used as intended.

These recommendations from the research adequately demonstrate that our communities need new services for francophone immigrants. We need to strengthen the existing services; I will just provide two examples.

First and foremost, we feel that we must increase the operational capacities of our reception services so that we can better accommodate and better integrate the newcomers. I will give an example. We would like to be able to extend to all minority communities the resettlement services in Manitoba, where there has been great success in resettling francophone refugees. The Manitoba experience is enjoying a good deal of success, so we should extend it to all other communities.

I can certainly tell you how frustrated we were when the Syrians arrived. We were ready to welcome them but we were almost forgotten. We were like actors, observers, while our anglophone colleagues were welcoming the Syrians, including any French-speaking Syrians in the group. They were received by the majority anglophone community and were therefore cut out of our host communities. We really think that things have to be looked at a little closer. Even when French-speaking refugees arrive, they are received by the anglophone community; they are not directed to our communities. However, we are ready, willing and able to help them. It just leads them to become assimilated into the majority.

● (0905)

The second point is—

The Chair: Mr. Bahaya, time keeps rolling on, so I suggest that you elaborate on your second point when the members of the committee are asking questions.

Our final presentation is from the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, represented by Mr. DesRoches and Ms. Lopez.

As I said, you have approximately five minutes in which to make your presentation.

Mr. Donald DesRoches (President, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): Good morning.

Mr. Chair, Vice-Chairs, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, allow me to tell you a story.

At 6 a.m. on Monday morning, the alarm clock goes off. Marie-Lise and Adrien get up to start their day. The morning routine is important to start them off on the right foot. First, Marie-Lise prepares breakfast. This morning it will be porridge, fresh fruit, milk for the children and coffee for the adults. She chose this brand of oatmeal because, on the package, she noticed with satisfaction that it was low in sugar and fat. Too much sugar that early in the morning would make the bus driver complain that the children were wired. To get the recipe right, she used a measuring cup. Each 28-gram serving of oatmeal requires 150 millilitres of water. So she needs 600 millilitres of water, a little more than two cups.

On the weekend, when the family has more time, the children are responsible for measuring the ingredients. As she learned during her family literacy sessions, it is good to make them practice that kind of calculation. She also has to pay attention when serving the individual portions. If they are not divided equally, the children might get a little envious, right?

It is Adrien's job to get the children up. He makes sure they are dressed and seated at the breakfast table by 7 a.m. at the latest. The family then takes a few minutes to talk over the day's schedule. Then, at 7:30 a.m., the school bus comes to pick up the children to take them to school. At that point, Marie-Lise and Adrien leave the house and go to work.

Because they have always had jobs since they arrived in Canada eight years ago, they realize that they are lucky. Marie-Lise is a team leader in a fish processing plant. Her six-person team is responsible for packaging the fish. The work itself is largely automated, but they have to keep their eyes open because the computer system sometimes crashes. Then they have to go through a series of computer operations to restart the system at the same time as they continue packaging the fish manually.

Adrien works as a janitor in a school-community centre. When he arrived in Canada, his language level was not sufficient to allow him to work in French. He immediately registered in upgrading courses offered in his host community. In six months, he had finished his language training and had even taken a series of courses on hazardous materials used in the workplace. He then landed his first job. Seven years ago, he obtained an advanced certificate in hazardous materials management. He now updates the janitors' training manual each year. In addition, he writes all of the new required procedures.

For you and me, the story of Marie-Lise and Adrien is not unusual at all. It could happen in any town or village in Canada. In fact, the story is made up. Not only are Marie-Lise and Adrien not real people, but their situation as described is equally fictitious. The chances of two francophone immigrant adults having such a level of literacy and being able to master the nine skills deemed essential in order to operate in our knowledge-based society are not as good as one might believe.

What exactly are those essential skills?

They are: reading, writing, document use, numeracy, computer use, thinking, oral communication, working with others and continuous learning.

According to international studies on literacy, literacy training and adult skills, about 42% of Canadians between the ages of 16 and 65 perform lower than the levels necessary to function in our knowledge-based society. That percentage has been essentially the same since the middle of the 1990s. Among francophones in Ontario and Manitoba, it is about 55%, and about 65% in New Brunswick.

In a world where the flow of information has become constant and technological transformations are accelerating at lightning speed, there are major challenges in essential skills. This has a direct impact on the country's economic, social and cultural development.

RESDAC, the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, which I am representing here before you today, is currently the only national organization, anglophone or francophone, that still exists in the country.

Many other organizations have had to close their doors in recent years.

• (0910)

Our organization is the only one still open. We sustain literacy and skills development in Canada. Our clientele is made up of francophone adults, particularly those at lower levels of literacy.

We are one of 42 organizations that make up the Forum des leaders de la francophonie. We are probably the only one in that group that does not have core funding. We had funding of that kind in the past, but when the government wanted to encourage departments to assume their responsibilities, the funds were transferred to Employment and Social Development Canada and the core funding was no longer there.

We exist today because, for years, we have generated our own funds that we kept in a reserve account, precisely to allow us to continue to fulfill our mandate. Although we have reduced our activities to a minimum, our reserve will be exhausted in March 2017.

The concept of literacy encompasses the development of the essential generic, technical and language skills. For francophones living in minority situations, there are major obstacles to literacy: level of education, access to education, the rural nature and small size of the minority francophone communities, access to training because of physical distances, as in northern Alberta, for example, limited funding. There are also the diverse needs of the communities and the learners. A learner-centred approach is needed, focused on the needs of the learners. There are other obstacles, such as a fear of, or unfamiliarity with, technologies, and a limited selection of training options.

However, the advantages of literacy are clear. Incomes increase, unemployment decreases, productivity and the gross domestic product increase, health improves, social trust is enhanced, citizen participation and volunteer participation increase, cultural capital becomes richer, language and culture are passed from one generation to another. We are well aware how important passing on the

language is if we are to ensure the long-time survival of our minority communities.

Let us go back to the story of Marie-Lise and Adrien.

It might be said that they are part of the lucky 55% of francophones living in minority situations. As francophone immigrants to Canada, they have succeeded in charting a course for themselves during their eight years living among us. Not only do they have jobs that match their skills, but they also put those skills to use every day. Not only do they know how to read and write, they are also capable of deciphering the nutritional information on their oatmeal. These are daily skills that people need to acquire and use. They need to know how to choose wholesome products so that their families can grow up in good health.

Marie-Lise is also able to do the calculations she needs for her recipe. The family members are able to have a conversation about the daily schedule together, ensuring that French is being passed on to the children.

In their jobs, Marie-Lisa and Adrien are able to use technology, to solve problems, to demonstrate their ability for team work, as well as to commit themselves to their ongoing education. Adrien specifically has access to French courses. Should that not be the case for all French-speaking Canadians?

As MPs, you know those Canadians, you meet them when you do your rounds. They vote for you. You meet them in local activities. They seek your help, I am sure, just as they seek it from their municipalities and their provincial politicians.

People who seek help already have a skill level that allows them to interact with you in the context of the system. However, there is an entire stratum of society that does not have those skills. I think that we have a duty to support those people in developing their skills.

Since francophone immigration is seen as a priority and a preference in ensuring the survival of francophone minority communities, and since literacy and skills development are seen as important keys to the economic, social and cultural prosperity of those francophone communities, I now want to talk to you about RESDAC's requests.

In the new official languages roadmap—what we call it does not matter—there will be a new section on development. We would like that section to include literacy and skills development and to address the skills of immigrants.

• (0915)

We would also like a Canada-wide strategy to develop literacy and skills, a continuing education and lifelong learning strategy for adult francophones and a reinvestment in local services written into the various agreements and transfers. All kinds of federal-provincial agreements can fund activities of that kind. But the federal government needs to play its watchdog role.

• (0920)

The Chair: I have to stop you, Mr. DesRoches.

We have to start the period for questions and comments right away.

Mr. Donald DesRoches: That's it? Okay.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation.

I would ask members to clearly indicate to whom they are addressing their questions, because we have three groups before us this morning.

The floor goes first to Mrs. Boucher for five minutes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning.

Thank you for joining us. It was very interesting to listen to you and, above all, to understand your reality. I am from Quebec, where the reality is different.

I am going to ask three questions. One goes to the representatives of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, the second to Mr. Bahaya and the third to Mr. DesRoches.

For a number of weeks, we have often heard francophone groups tell us that funding was cut and that the money was instead given to anglophone groups assisting French-speaking immigrants in their area. Did that happen to the AFFC and the CAE du Nord de l'Alberta?

Mr. DesRoches, could you tell me how much your core funding was, and how long ago it was taken away?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Thank you very much for your question.

I am Blandine Ngoga Tona.

Yes, there were a lot of cuts to the funding for women's groups. Right now, only five of the 12 groups we represent receive funding. As for the others, volunteers do the work for two reasons. First, most of the time, we are told that funding women's groups is not necessary. Second, we are told to contact Status of Women Canada.

However, generally, you need a project to do so. For us to develop projects, we would need to have at least one employee to just do the preliminary work to gather the necessary material. If we don't even have core funding, how can we bring together women and assess how we are going to develop a project that specifically addresses their needs?

At the end of the day, it's counterproductive if we don't even receive the core funding .

The Chair: Thank you, madam.

Mr. Bahaya, you have the floor.

Mr. Georges Bahaya: Thank you for the question.

In terms of funding, I will give you two examples. The first is an organization in the Fort McMurray area, which was providing employability services to francophones. Its funding has been cut and the money directed to anglophone organizations. That French-language service has almost disappeared.

I remember that this issue was raised at our community's annual general meeting. This is a specific case that you can check. Right now, the francophones who arrive in Fort McMurray to look for

work have to go to an anglophone organization, whereas our community had provided those services for a long time and it was going very well.

I refer to the second example in my document. It is an indirect cut in the sense that francophone positions are funded within anglophone organizations, to prevent us from providing services in French. We believe that those funds should be directed to francophone organizations, so that we can deliver the services ourselves. That's why we keep using the slogan that my colleague used just now: "We want services provided by and for francophones."

Why fund the position of a French-speaking person? A French-speaking person in an anglophone organization is not a francophone. The position is basically limited to interpretation, but it does not create links between those immigrants and the community.

In a settlement and integration process, the community is really the sap that enables newcomers to thrive in the community. Once they become members of their own francophone community, they will also integrate into the larger majority community.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bahaya.

Mr. DesRoches, you have the floor.

Mr. Donald DesRoches: That question was not for me directly, but it is the same reality. The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills has issued a call for tenders for literacy development initiatives. It did not specify that services in French had to be provided by francophone groups. As a result, anglophone groups outside Quebec received funding to provide literacy services in French.

The core funding was between \$400,000 and \$600,000 a year. The last grant was in 2013.

• (0925)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Good morning, Ms. Ngoga Tona. My question is about the core funding for the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne. What core funding does your organization receive from governments?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: The funding has been and continues to be reduced every year. Last year, we received \$284,000 and this year, \$275,000. Two years ago, we received almost \$300,000, and \$500,000 three or four years before that. Funding is reduced every year, to the point that we are constantly wondering whether it will be cut the following year. This is what has been happening for pretty much the past two years. So funding has gone down from almost \$1,000,000 to \$500,000, \$300,000, \$284,000 and \$275,000 now.

Mr. Dan Vandal: So that's your core funding.

I would now like to talk about the roadmap. Have you benefited directly from the roadmap programs or funding?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Yes, we have received core funding through the Canadian Heritage official languages program.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What are the figures for the roadmap?

What has been achieved through the roadmap?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: We received funding from Canadian Heritage only for our project on mother tongue transmission in an exogamous context.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Could you describe your organization's programming accomplishments through the roadmap?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Of course.

As I mentioned, the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne represents 12 women's groups across the country and many of those groups have projects on violence against women, for instance. Almost 100 women a year receive services for that.

In terms of exogamy, the Alliance has set up a project called "FrancoZone", particularly for the Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta and Nova Scotia. In addition to our organizations, other women's groups use that program to see how we can promote the activities of women in exogamous couples who pass on French, their mother tongue, to their children.

We also have a mentorship program to encourage young francophone women to become leaders in their communities. I think we have demonstrated at the various levels of the roadmap that our program meets the official languages requirements.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

We are all aware of the importance of access to services in French when French is our mother tongue, whether in terms of social services or health care.

In the case of services related to violence against women, how does the availability of French-language services compare to that of English-language services in your community?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: I will use the example of Manitoba, where I live. Unfortunately, there is no first stage housing in Manitoba for francophone women going through a crisis or conflict situation. Francophone women also don't have access to a crisis response service call line. In other words, women who are going through a crisis or conflict situation must turn to an anglophone organization. The organization also doesn't have any bilingual employees, but the management is apparently planning to recruit bilingual staff if the organization obtains the necessary funding. They use volunteer or interpretation services as needed. I have often volunteered at the second stage centre for women who are victims of violence.

Unfortunately, that organization only has enough space to accommodate 10 people at a time. With 40 people waiting for housing every year, the waiting list for housing is long if we consider the fact that 80% of the clients are francophone newcomers. Our situation is critical, not only at the first stage, but also when it comes to support structures for francophone women in general and francophone immigrant women in particular.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go to Mr. Choquette for five minutes.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

This has been very thought-provoking and enlightening. I also have a background in education, which starts in early childhood and goes all the way to adulthood. You talked about basic skills. However, immigrants—and I am talking about newcomers here—don't all have basic skills when they arrive in Canada. Francophone refugees are one example. It is very advantageous to be able to provide them with basic skills as soon as they arrive.

Mr. DesRoches, you said that you have not received core funding since 2013. In spite of everything, you continue to provide services thanks to your reserves.

If you no longer have core funding, to whom has that funding gone?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez (Acting Director General, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): I will try to answer. That is a good question, but I don't know who has received that core funding.

Our core funding initially came from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, which decided to no longer provide core funding to national organizations or provincial coalitions. That decision came into effect in 2013.

In addition, the office has realigned its services so as to meet only labour market needs. However, when we talk about literacy and skills development, we are also talking about families, communities, citizen participation and about parents, who have the skills that enable them to support their children's development, and so on. We are also talking about work, but that's not all. The office currently really has a different approach that we don't fully understand. It operates sort of like a private business that wants to choose its partners and operate solely on the basis of developing the labour market.

Mr. François Choquette: So that's not really an approach focused on supporting official language minority communities.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: That may be its objective, but only in an economic perspective, aligned with the labour market.

Mr. François Choquette: The "by and for" approach is often talked about. But are those services provided by official language minority communities?

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Yes, that's generally the case. We can still obtain project funding, but it does not always come from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills. We sometimes get funding from our members, in the provinces and territories, through their own government organizations, under agreements....

Mr. François Choquette: You manage to obtain project funding, but you no longer have any core funding.

How does that affect your daily reality?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: I am currently president of Collège Acadie, on Prince Edward Island. That is a two-headed organization of the type we see in official language communities. We provide literacy programs, but we also provide college programs.

For service delivery on Prince Edward Island, we receive money under labour market development agreements, but the amount is insufficient to provide all the services to Prince Edward Island's francophone adult learners. So we have to play with project funding across the territory. We can submit a project to one department or another, but the service is not focused on learners' needs.

When it comes to core funding for an organization like our small college, on Prince Edward Island, RESDAC is essential for business intelligence on new approaches. We are talking about the quickest ways for learners to acquire labour market skills, essential skills or family literacy skills to ensure the passing on of the language.

We have not had a face-to-face meeting with the RESDAC people since 2014. Everything is done over the telephone, by videoconference or through other means. Videoconferences are fine and well, but I know Ms. Ngoga Tona, and it would be much more interesting if she were here with us. That said, this is the reality of our country.

We want to know what the world's best practices are in terms of adult education. RESDAC, on the other hand, goes from a legal literacy project to a health literacy project, and then on to something else. That meets some needs, but it is not focused on learners' holistic needs. They go from one thing to another, and there is no continuity in the work being done.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. DesRoches.

Mr. Samson, go ahead.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I want to thank everyone for being here today. I appreciated your presentations.

Our committee is focusing on two extremely important considerations, which have been under discussion for years: immigration in minority settings and the roadmap that guides the committee in its work.

I have a few quick questions. I will begin with you, Mr. Bahaya.

You say that the 5% target is far from being reached. What do you think the problem is? What is the solution? If you were the chair of this committee and I gave you all the funding you needed, what would you do?

Mr. Georges Bahaya: The political will must be there. I am happy that you are asking me the question as a member, as you will be the ones doing the work.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Exactly.

Mr. Georges Bahaya: You have the power to influence departments' decisions to help them reach the objectives. I manage projects. When I apply for funding, I am provided with objectives. If I don't reach those objectives, I am penalized. There are no penalties in this case, and that is why the situation has remained unchanged.

If I say that I will serve 1,000 clients, I will be given \$1 million. If, at the end of the year, I have not served 1,000 clients, the funding will be taken from next year's \$1 million, enabling me to serve them.

This is a fairness issue. We are feeling a bit frustrated because we are being forgotten. The solution would be to send more francophones to minority communities, as was promised, and to provide the organizations that serve those people with means.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I ask that you answer my next question in five seconds.

Department representatives have presented to us their strategy or action plan. They told us that some people were responsible solely for the francophone immigration issue. Do you know them well?

Mr. Georges Bahaya: Are you talking about government representatives?

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

Mr. Georges Bahaya: Yes, I know some of them.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Are they working only on francophone immigration in Canada?

Mr. Georges Bahaya: I think so, but it's just a matter of seeing the results of their work.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you.

I will put two important questions about literacy to Mr. DesRoches.

Let's take for example a 45-year-old francophone or Acadian who has not had access to French schools. Can you provide that person with services, and to what extent? What problems could arise?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: The situation varies a great deal from one province to another. In New Brunswick, there is a literacy program both in the community and at the college level. In other provinces, including British Columbia, there are some major shortcomings in terms of access to those services.

As for your example of a 45-year-old francophone, we mustn't forget that they may have never had access to education in French because, at the time, that right was not enshrined in the charter. Even if that individual is 45 years old today, if their parents are rights holders, according to our legal advisers, there is a constitutional obligation to provide them with services.

It's not their fault if they dropped out of school at the age of 15 or 16 or did not have access to a French-language school in their community. That's really the cause of their current literacy problem. The services were not provided when they were supposed to be. According to our legal advisers, there is a constitutional obligation under section 23 to ensure that those people have access to services.

So far, literacy and skills development have been seen as something that is nice to have, if there is funding for it. However, it is not handled with the seriousness shown toward elementary education and high school education, which are protected under the charter.

• (0940)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay.

Have you thought about a court challenges program?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: When our core funding came to an end, we established a three-pronged strategy to figure out what to do to ensure that francophones in minority communities have access to literacy services in French.

We submitted a complaint to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages concerning the consultation process used by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, since we did not feel respected as francophones in the consultation process. We may have been consulted without realizing it. We have not yet received the commissioner's report. It is supposed to be sent to us this week.

We have also requested a bit of legal advice to find out, under sections 20 and 23 of the charter, what the basis would be....

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm almost out of time.

The Chair: You are already out of time. Thank you very much, Mr. Samson.

In closing, I will allow you three short questions, starting with Mr. Arseneault, who will be followed by Ms. Lapointe and Mr. G n reux.

Mr. Arseneault, go ahead. Please keep your question short.

I ask that the witnesses provide a quick answer.

Mr. Ren  Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. DesRoches, I was very surprised earlier by the percentage—65%—of New Brunswick people who do not meet the criteria in terms of basic skills in literacy, numeracy and computer literacy that you brought up. I am summarizing.

Can you put that statistic into context? In what context did that figure of 65% appear?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: It comes from international studies. Those surveys were done by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, around the world, on competencies at levels 1 to 5.

Mr. Ren  Arseneault: Could you send those documents to the clerk?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: Certainly.

Mr. Ren  Arseneault: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Donald DesRoches: That percentage is higher among francophones than among anglophones in New Brunswick. In Ontario, the discrepancy is not as dramatic, but it is very large in New Brunswick.

Mr. Ren  Arseneault: Have you established a correlation between rural areas and urban areas?

Mr. Donald DesRoches: Of course.

Mrs. Gabrielle Lopez: Recently, Statistics Canada undertook a more in-depth analysis of the data from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences, PIAAC. When the latest international survey was carried out, in 2013, a special analysis was done for New Brunswick. We asked them to do that for Ontario, and they also did it for New Brunswick. I will send you that information, as well.

Mr. Ren  Arseneault: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lapointe, go ahead.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivi re-des-Mille- les, Lib.): I would like to put a question to Ms. Ngoga Tona.

You said that child care was not available in French. What problems are caused by that lack of child care services in French?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Waiting lists are very long. There are insufficient child care services. My children are aged 4 and 6, and their names have been on the waiting list for years. So the children had to attend anglophone kindergartens, and they then had to be refranzed when they went to school. The waiting lists are very long.

That's just the situation experienced by one parent. The supply is insufficient to meet francophone parents' demand. I am talking about only the situation in Winnipeg. If we gathered data across Canada, I think that we would see that a lot more parents in minority situations don't have access to francophone kindergartens.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: May I continue?

Mr. Bahaya, I would like to ask you a quick question about immigration and the retention rate of francophones in minority communities. Have you been able to calculate how many people are remaining in francophone communities?

Mr. Georges Bahaya: I don't have the exact figures, but in Alberta, I think the retention rate is 90%. We are happy because very few people leave despite Alberta's current economic context. We continue to receive clients. We have reached our targets, and no drop has been noted.

Those who are there stay on. They receive a small amount of community support, but that support must be enhanced. Community services people are working very hard to help them feel comfortable, as that enables retention. Despite the difficult economic conditions, they are successfully staying on.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. G n reux.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bahaya, I will nickname you Mr. Accountability. Your remarks are very thought-provoking. Organizations are actually forced to take accountability seriously. When it comes to members, a government election every four years is how we remain accountable, in a way. I think it is worthy of merit that you care about ensuring that the money is spent productively.

In the last election, the government announced that it would put in place infrastructure programs, and it is currently implementing them. There is a lot of talk about social infrastructure for early childhood. Ms. Ngoga Tona talked about that. Do you feel that francophones in minority communities have access to those programs?

Mr. Georges Bahaya: I am not sure. As for infrastructure programs, I don't think they have been implemented yet. So we are waiting for them, and the community is calling for them.

We have asked that a community centre and a health centre be established in Calgary. We are waiting and we have been lobbying for that. That program is good news because there is a flagrant lack of infrastructure in our communities.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Everyone has talked to us about that, especially with regard to early childhood.

Ms. Ngoga Tona, earlier, you put a lot of emphasis on social infrastructure when you said that people from all walks of life must be allowed to use that infrastructure.

What exactly were you trying to say?

Mrs. Blandine Ngoga Tona: Thank you for your question.

On that note, I want us first to acknowledge that the current francophonie is multicultural and that there needs to be an active offer where people are informed that the services exist.

Mostly, we must promote the services to new immigrants. If the structures don't reflect reality and the fact that a multicultural francophonie exists and that it includes people who have different levels of education and literacy, very few people will know that services are available.

The existing services are not very well adapted to reality and needs. How many daycares are available? When do they open? Can women who have children under the age of two access them, for example?

We must keep in mind that activities should be organized not only in daycares, but also in cultural centres.

We also must keep in mind that women will come with small children. The social structures must meet needs, given that women need daycares when they take part in activities and that they will have many children. There needs to be a space where children can take part in activities at the same time as the parents.

For the most part, we aren't meeting the needs of parents and women here. That's why I'm saying the infrastructure must reflect the reality of the women, whatever it may be, regardless of their social strata.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ngoga Tona.

This concludes the meeting today. Thank you to all our guests. The presentations were excellent.

Thank you Mr. DesRoches, Ms. Lopez, Mr. Bahaya and Ms. Ngoga Tona for your presentations.

I want to let the committee members know that the meeting on Thursday morning, when we'll be joined by the Minister of Canadian Heritage, will be held in the Centre Block. We need to remember that the meeting will be held there and that it will be televised.

This concludes the meeting today. Thank you for meeting with us. It has been a pleasure.

The meeting is adjourned.

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