



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 015

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1545)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): Good afternoon, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

[English]

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[Translation]

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format. Members are attending in person or using the Zoom application.

[English]

Given the ongoing pandemic situation and in light of the recommendations from health authorities to remain healthy and safe, all those attending the meeting in person should follow the directives of the Board of Internal Economy.

[Translation]

I thank members in advance for their cooperation.

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly, as I am doing.

For those participating by videoconference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute your mike. When not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

As regards interpretation, those of you who are on Zoom have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either Floor, English or French.

Those in the room may use your headset and select the desired channel.

[English]

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise me, and please note that in the case of technical challenges, we may need to suspend for a few minutes, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f) and the motion adopted by the committee on Monday, January 31, 2022, the committee is resuming its study on francophone immigration to Canada and Quebec.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

I apologize for my throaty Gerry Boulet-like voice. I'll try not to sneeze or sniffle near the microphone. I wanted to chair the meeting all the same.

In the first hour, we have Charles Castonguay, retired professor of mathematics and statistics.

We also have Alexandre Cédric Doucet, president of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, and Ali Chaisson, its executive Director.

Liane Roy, president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, and Alain Dupuis, its executive director, are also present.

Lastly, from the Société nationale de l'Acadie, we have Martin Théberge, president, and Véronique Mallet, executive director.

Each of the organizations will have five minutes for opening remarks, after which we will proceed with a period of questions from the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I will signal to you when you have about one minute left.

And with that, I give the floor to Mr. Castonguay for five minutes.

Prof. Charles Castonguay (Retired Professor of Mathematics and Statistics, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to share with you some thoughts on how immigration could help stabilize Canada's linguistic duality most effectively.

Low fertility undermines both official language populations in Canada. The fact that francophone and non-official-language minorities are being assimilated into the English community offsets the low fertility of the anglophone majority. However, assimilation into English weakens Canada's francophone minority, and its inability to assimilate its fair share of non-official-language immigrants even more so, including in Quebec.

As a result, the weight of the French-language minority is constantly declining overall across Canada, outside and even in Quebec, since the turn of the century. All these trends are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. Consequently, it's high time we changed the linguistic ground rules in Canada.

Using immigration to reinforce Canada's francophone minority might be a partial solution. The best way to do that would be, first, to increase the percentages of French-mother-tongue immigrants and francophone non-official-language immigrants who are likely to be assimilated to French rather than English. Second, those groups should be directed to regions of Canada where the francophone minority is still strong enough to integrate them successfully. The most appropriate regions for that purpose are, in descending order of effectiveness, Quebec, New Brunswick and eastern and northern Ontario.

It clearly isn't enough merely to promote francophone and French-mother-tongue immigration to regions outside Quebec. According to the most recent census, 2.5 million non-official-language immigrants outside Quebec had assimilated to English. Those 2.5 million immigrants included several hundreds of thousands of francophones. By contrast, a minuscule 14,000 immigrants assimilated to French. Censuses have even revealed that, outside Quebec, New Brunswick and eastern and northern Ontario, most French-mother-tongue immigrants assimilate to English starting in the first generation.

Canada's francophone minority now represents no more than 20% of the total population. To help stabilize that number, at least 20% of immigration to Canada should consist of either francophones or French-mother-tongue speakers. Furthermore, as Quebec comprises 90% of the country's francophone population, Canada should encourage 90% of its francophone and French-mother-tongue immigrants to settle in Quebec. That's the only way immigration has any chance of effectively helping to stabilize Canada's linguistic duality.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

• (1550)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay.

You completed your presentation in four minutes.

Would you like to take 30 seconds to say more?

Prof. Charles Castonguay: No. With your permission, I'd prefer to spend the time speaking with the committee members.

The Chair: All right. That will be a pleasure.

We now yield the floor to Alexandre Cédric Doucet, president of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, or SANB.

You have five minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet (President, Acadian Society of New Brunswick): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

My name is Alexandre Cédric Doucet, and I am president of the Acadian Society of New Brunswick, the organization that represents the Acadians and francophones of the province of New Brunswick. I am accompanied today by Ali Chaisson, executive director of SANB.

Thank you very much for inviting SANB to appear before your committee as part of its study on francophone immigration to Canada and Quebec.

Immigration is an especially important area of intervention for the Acadian nation. In New Brunswick, in particular, where French is the mother tongue of some one-third of the population, immigration policies and programs have an essential role to play in maintaining the demographic weight of the francophone community, one that is protected by section 16.1 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. I should also point out that the governments of Canada and New Brunswick are therefore required under the charter to ensure that their immigration policies and programs do not assist one community at the expense of the other and, at the very least, that they maintain the demographic weight of the minority community.

Unfortunately, what the Acadian nation of New Brunswick has witnessed in the province is a very disturbing reality. New Brunswick's francophone community has not benefited from immigration to the same degree as the anglophone community. This is an area where the federal government has undermined the Acadian nation by treating it in the same way as the rest of Canada.

It goes without saying that federal immigration policies can enhance the vitality of the francophone minorities without taking into consideration the specific linguistic composition of those provinces. With a francophone population of approximately 32%, New Brunswick requires permanent, customized federal government immigration support to help it maintain and develop that population. This is because New Brunswick's unique linguistic balance is disturbed every time the percentage of francophone newcomers falls below the percentage of francophones living in the province.

For example, the federal government's target of 4.4% of francophone immigration outside Quebec does not reflect New Brunswick's specificity. If applied to New Brunswick, the 4.4% francophone immigration rate is in fact an assimilation rate. Moreover, in its 2014 New Brunswick francophone immigration action plan, the provincial government gave itself until 2020 for the number of francophone immigrants settling in the province to reflect its linguistic makeup. However, after failing to meet that 2020 target, the government pushed it back to 2023.

Bearing that in mind, we strongly encourage the Standing Committee on Official Languages to recommend that the Government of Canada negotiate an agreement with New Brunswick that reflects the linguistic and constitutional specificity of the only officially bilingual province in the country. More specifically, it should consult the New Brunswick government and concerned representatives of both official language communities and negotiate and adopt a five-year agreement on support for the distinct educational and cultural institutions of both communities to ensure their protection and promotion. That five-year agreement should focus on primary and secondary education, early childhood, post-secondary education, health and, of course, immigration.

According to projections derived from a baseline scenario, by 2036, the francophone population of New Brunswick will have fallen closer to one-quarter of the total population, rather than one-third, as is currently the case. An annual 10% of francophone immigration to Canada outside Quebec would help to slow the decline in New Brunswick and to reach a francophone population percentage of 30% in 2036.

To do that, the province must be granted a federal quota of at least 15% of the francophone immigration target over the next few years in order to maintain growth in its Acadian and francophone population and thus avoid decline. Engineering that increase will be no easy task: raising the number of francophone immigrants means expanding funding for institutions and integration services and reinforcing the francophone support system. Greater financial and human resources will have to be introduced to support efforts to meet the target so we can inform the New Brunswick population and increase its awareness of diversity, inclusion and multiculturalism.

In short, increasing the number of francophone immigrants in the province would help maintain or expand the francophone population. However, our hosting capacity must be taken into consideration in this process because it will have a significant impact on our retention rate. Initiatives will also have to be funded to respond to those social challenges and to help us learn to live together.

I appeal to your courage and sense of responsibility as statesmen and stateswomen. A bright future lies ahead for Canada and Acadie. We are at a veritable crossroads. It is up to you to decide the direction of this major Canadian project and its distinct implementation within our language minority communities.

Thank you.

• (1555)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Doucet.

We will now continue with the brand new president of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

Ms. Roy, I believe this is your first visit to the committee.

As committee chair, I am pleased to give you the floor. You have five minutes.

Ms. Liane Roy (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, I am speaking to you today from Moncton, New Brunswick, which is part of the traditional land of the Micmac people. I am accompanied by the executive director of the FCFA, Alain Dupuis, who is joining us from Ottawa.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the progressive new francophone immigration target that the FCFA du Canada introduced on Monday.

Members of the committee, the clerk has distributed to you some tables that will accompany my remarks and help you to follow my presentation and the figures they contain.

As you know, in 2003, the federal government established a target of 4.4% of French-speaking immigrants to be admitted outside

Quebec every year. That target was to be met in 2008, but the deadline has been pushed back to 2023.

In the past 18 years, we have seen very little progress in meeting that target. Annual results have rarely exceeded 2%. In 2021, the rate was 1.95%. During that time, the demographic weight of the francophone and Acadian communities fell from 4.4% in 2001 to 3.8% in 2016. If this trend continues, it will be 3.1% in 2036.

As I said when we revealed our restorative target, a major change is needed. We can no longer continue on the same path. The situation is now so harmful that remedies are called for. Which is why we have requested that the government mobilize the resources to achieve a target of 12% by 2024, rising to 20% in 2036.

We didn't pull these numbers out of a hat. They come from a serious demographic study conducted for the FCFA by the Sociopol corporation. Based on a Statistics Canada model and data, it shows what we will need to restore the demographic weight of our communities to 4.4% by 2036. That goal was incidentally set by the government itself and announced twice, first in the action plan for official languages 2018-23 and then in the official languages reform document released in February 2021. To meet it, we will have to do francophone immigration in a completely different way using all resources at our disposal. For years, the government has relied on general immigration programs such as express entry to meet its target. That hasn't worked.

We need a francophone immigration policy that includes specific programs and measures designed to address specific realities. Those measures must include a distinct francophone economic immigration program that meets the needs of Canadian francophone communities and employers. They will have to provide specific francophone components for family class sponsorship, refugees and provincial nominee programs. Lastly, the communities will have to play a leading role in selecting francophone immigrants. They will also have to facilitate entry by international francophone students by lowering the barriers preventing them from obtaining visas and study permits. We also recommend that the pathway from temporary to permanent residence introduced for a limited time last year be made permanent for francophone candidates.

Above all, additional support must be provided to the francophone and Acadian communities so they can engage fully in all immigration phases, whether it be international promotion, improved French-language reception and settlement services, mobilizing employers for recruitment purposes or developing welcoming and inclusive communities to ensure success for those who settle there.

The francophone and Acadian communities have been working hard to meet the immigration challenge for the past 20 years. We have proven that we have the necessary expertise and know-how to create the francophonie of the future, a diversified and pluralist francophonie. However, that francophonie will exist only if the government adopts this restorative target and genuinely provides the means to achieve it.

Thank you. I am now ready to answer your questions.

• (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

We will conclude with the Société nationale de l'Acadie and its president, Mr. Théberge.

You have the floor for five minutes, Mr. Théberge.

Mr. Martin Théberge (President, Société nationale de l'Acadie): Good afternoon, everyone.

The Société nationale de l'Acadie, or SNA, of which I am president, is a non-profit organization that is the voice of francophone representative associations and francophone youth associations in the Atlantic provinces. The Comité atlantique sur l'immigration francophone, or CAIF, is a regional consultation mechanism that SNA created to encourage all stakeholders to work together and to speak with one voice. It is in that capacity that I am before you today.

My name is Martin Théberge, and I am accompanied by my colleague Véronique Mallet, who is our executive director.

Francophone immigration is essential if we are to thrive. The declining birth rate, outmigration, an aging population and, especially, linguistic assimilation are factors that we can fight only if the francophone population increases, and it must necessarily do so through immigration. On these issues, SNA supports and congratulates the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, for its recent recommendations.

Despite the urgent nature of the situation, the contribution that immigration has made in our community is still below the level of our needs. According to the report released by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in November 2021, francophone immigrants represent approximately 7% of all immigrants to the Atlantic region, 15% in New Brunswick and less than 4% in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador. These rates reflect neither the demographic weight of the francophone population of New Brunswick, which is 32%, nor that of the other three Atlantic provinces as a whole, which is 11.9%.

Our four provincial governments are aware of the importance of francophone immigration. Each one has its own plan and wishes to work with us through our provincial nominee program. Yet no province has reached its targets to date.

As the Commissioner of Official Languages noted in the statistical analysis study he recently submitted to you:

The 4.4% target for French-speaking minority immigration was adopted in 2003 to stem the decline in the demographic weight of the French-speaking minority population, which was 4.4% in the 2001 census.

Nearly 20 years later, our demographic weight has constantly fallen, while efforts to reach the 4.4% target, which has been pushed back to 2023, have never exceeded 2%.

In Acadie, we both attract and retain immigrants, and we have made progress on several fronts since the mid-2000s.

Why then isn't francophone immigration increasing. Certain administrative and governmental realities have had a negative impact on francophone immigration rates. I would like to highlight a few.

International students are a class of trained and skilled immigrants to Canada. In the Atlantic region, we estimate they represent approximately one-third of francophone immigrants. There would be many more of them if their study permit applications weren't frequently denied. And while some lucky ones are actually granted permits, their permanent residence applications are often refused as well.

Consequently, we would like the federal government to examine immediately the reasons why the applications of foreign francophone students are denied and to rectify the situation by seeing that more applications are accepted. Nearly all immigration classes are in the same boat. We therefore urge the federal government to find ways to facilitate permanent residence for francophone minority immigrants.

There is also the credential recognition problem, one of the main impediments to economic integration. More than a third of immigrants questioned in the Atlantic region said they weren't really working in their areas of expertise, or indeed at all.

Since this issue is one of the points the committee is examining, I'd like to mention that CAIF is working on a feasibility study for the creation of a credential recognition centre, especially for teachers of French, a field where the need is acute. We therefore ask that the federal government take immediate action by working with professional associations to facilitate credential recognition for foreign immigrants.

In the Atlantic region, it is impossible to integrate fully without an excellent command of the English language. However, after fewer than five years of permanent residence, more than a quarter of francophone immigrants landed between 2011 and 2016 do not know enough English to conduct a conversation. Allow me to point out as well that studies show that becoming bilingual does not undermine the use of French by those immigrants.

We therefore hope that Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, will help its community partners make English classes available for francophone immigrants.

Lastly, IRCC cannot be the only organization that takes measures to promote francophone immigration.

In 2003, the public diplomacy program, which made it possible for SNA to conduct international promotion, was shut down. No comparable program has since been introduced to take its place.

Through its diplomatic relations, Acadie has managed, for example, to maintain a French consulate general in the Atlantic provinces, an essential instrument in attracting European immigrants. SNA has also been involved in other similar measures and promotions.

• (1605)

We therefore implore the federal government to view the francophone immigration issue in a broader, international relations perspective and immediately commit to developing a francophone diplomacy strategy—

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Martin Thériège: —that will support the new francophone immigration policy.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Thériège

I extended your speaking time by 20 seconds because Mr. Castonguay didn't use all the minutes he had.

I'm strict when it comes to speaking time, as my colleagues know.

We will begin the first round of questions. The representatives of each party will have respectively six minutes. We will begin with the first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Joël Godin.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to take this opportunity to express my disappointment. The House of Commons is currently proceeding with speeches on Bill C-13, An Act for the Substantive Equality of Canada's Official Languages, while the Standing Committee on Official Languages is sitting. I find that awkward on the government's part, and I wanted to say so here in committee.

Thanks to the witnesses for being here today. I believe that the representatives of the four organizations can agree on one point: there's a serious problem with francophone immigration.

You've all shown that it's time to act.

Mr. Castonguay, my first question is for you. You talk about raising the targets. As a parliamentarian, I think that's an easy solution. However, I need to draw on your knowledge to determine how we can reach our targets. I agree with you that they must be raised, but it's easy to raise a number. Would you please give us some specific recommendations on how we can meet them?

That question is also for the representatives of the other three organizations. Would you please give us some specific recommendations on this?

I invite the witnesses to suggest two or three recommendations in quick succession to assist us in drafting a report that's effective and provides Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada with the necessary tools.

Mr. Castonguay, you may begin.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: I'm not an expert on immigration or selecting and recruiting immigrants. However, there's obviously an enormous problem not just outside Quebec, as I mentioned in my remarks, but also in Quebec itself. Until recently, Quebec has managed to maintain the weight of francotropes among these newcomers to—

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Castonguay. I don't want us to discuss past facts. Everyone around this table today and all the witnesses agree: we have a problem.

I'd like you to recommend measures and solutions for solving the problem.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: Based on what I see, the solutions will have to be developed by the Quebec government, which has expertise in recruiting and admitting francophone immigrants, and the federal government.

Something is definitely wrong with the present situation. It's total confusion. The immigrants who arrive in Quebec will now come through the foreign workers program. These are temporary workers or students who have temporary status. They enter society through their studies and work. Then they'll want to be selected as immigrants. Quebec didn't select them first. The federal government has complete authority over those programs—

Mr. Joël Godin: Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Castonguay.

Thank you for answering my question.

I now go to Mr. Thériège from the Société nationale de l'Acadie.

You discussed the problem of the Atlantic provinces. You said that the provincial governments were aware of the problem and were prepared to work with the federal government. I'm going to ask you a very simple question: do you think the new version of the Official Languages Act will actually meet the immigration expectations of the governments of the four Atlantic provinces?

• (1610)

Mr. Martin Thériège: I think there are two parts to the answer. First, there has to be a connection. That's the most important factor. As I said, you can't deal with immigration in isolation. There has to be a connection with the Official Languages Act.

Second, there also has to be a connection with an international diplomatic strategy. It's absolutely necessary that the measures support what the community wants, and the work the community does in cooperation with the provincial governments also has to support the government.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Thériège.

Now I'll go to another witness, Mr. Doucet from the Acadian Society of New Brunswick.

Mr. Doucet, you also said that the Canadian government must work with the New Brunswick government. You also made the same observation as everyone else, and you mentioned a five-year agreement. We're aware there's an enormous amount of catching up to do.

If you had a magic wand, what would you say to parliamentarians to provide a quick solution to this problem that has dragged on for many years?

Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet: Thank you for your question.

I think I should remind parliamentarians that section 95 of the Constitution Act, 1867 specifically provides that immigration is an area of shared jurisdiction. Subsection 16.1(1) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides that the two official language communities in New Brunswick have a right to distinct institutions. So it's supplemented with immigration, which is an area of shared jurisdiction. Like Quebec, New Brunswick should have far more powers and much more funding to ensure its own immigration.

Consequently, we want a devolution of federal government authority to the provincial government of New Brunswick so we can manage immigration on our own.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'd like to ask Ms. Roy a question, but I don't have a lot of time left.

I'd just like to know what kind of funding you expect, in the budget that's tabled tomorrow, for the immigration and official languages component.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

If she wishes, Ms. Roy may respond to you later as she answers other questions.

We now yield the floor to Mr. Drouin for six minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank all the witnesses here this afternoon.

I also want to applaud the questions that my colleague Mr. Godin asked. I know we agree with each other on the international francophonie, although we may disagree on the local francophonie. He may take issue with the fact that the Standing Committee on Official Languages is sitting while Bill C-13 is being debated in the House, but I personally feel this is a great opportunity for members other than those of the Standing Committee on Official Languages to speak on behalf of their communities. I think we should emphasize that because the official languages belong to us all, not just the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

On that issue, Ms. Roy, I don't know if you knew you were going to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages this week. However, I did hear your statement about the targets the federal government has to meet. As you well know, we haven't met our 4.4% targets for decades.

Is the FCFA establishing ties with the international francophone communities in order to attract francophones to Canada?

Ms. Liane Roy: Going back to Mr. Godin's earlier question, we'd like the budget to provide more funding for recruitment, which some of our partners are doing. The SNA is doing good recruitment, and the people of New Brunswick are as well. So it would be good to have funding so we could recruit people from francophone populations who might come to our communities.

We definitely foresee it in the measures we're suggesting to the government respecting a francophone immigration policy that it might establish.

That policy is a very important factor. In fact, at the start of the week, we suggested that a whole series of programs might be included in it. The possibility of conducting our recruiting effort is entirely consistent with those measures.

• (1615)

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much.

Mr. Alain Dupuis (Director General, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Piggybacking on Ms. Roy's remarks, the former roadmaps for official languages provided for funding to support communities that travelled overseas, that took part in Destination Canada, in Europe, the Middle East and various other regions of the world, and that funding was cancelled.

The communities haven't received any federal government funding to conduct those promotional activities abroad for many years now.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I know the Cité collégiale is playing a major role in Africa providing training to prepare francophone immigrants who want to come to Canada.

Mr. Dupuis, your efforts are important. I know we've had many meetings in which we discussed how important it was to introduce a bill to modernize official languages. In fact, Ms. Roy, his predecessor and you told me many times how important it was for you that the bill be introduced as soon as possible.

However, is it perfect? That remains to be seen, and I'm sure you'll be proposing amendments.

How important do you think it is for the bill to be debated and for you to have an opportunity to discuss it in committee as soon as possible?

Ms. Liane Roy: It's very important for us that the bill be adopted because it has some very good components; we've discussed that. However some components need to be reworked. We hope we can work with the various committees to ensure that the amendments we propose are considered. Most of you in this room have received them.

So we think it's very important that it be done quickly but, above all, that it be done well and that we have a chance to make amendments to the components that need to be reworked. For example, we're proposing an amendment respecting francophone immigration that we'd like to see added to the bill.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Ms. Roy.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to introduce my motion, which I circulated to all committee members on April 1^x.

I don't know whether the members of the committee would like me to read it, but it's simply related to Bill C-13. Parliament will be in recess for two weeks, and I think it's important that we have an opportunity to submit our witness lists. The motion mentions April 25, but, since we'll be returning from the parliamentary recess in the week of April 25, that doesn't allow committee members much time to think about the people they'd like to invite. With that in mind, Mr. Chair, I don't think any speaker in the room would oppose the idea of starting the pre-study of Bill C-13 as soon as possible.

I propose to invite the Minister of Official Languages and the President of the Treasury Board—I know we've had many questions about the role of the Treasury Board and centralization. I ask the committee members to vote for this motion, and, as a matter of form, I will read it to refresh everyone's memory.

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(f):

1. the Committee begin a subject matter study on the Government's modernization of the Official Languages Act, comparing Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, to enact the Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act and to make related amendments to other Acts; to Bill C-32, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts, from the 43rdrd Parliament, and English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada;
2. the Committee invite the Minister of Official Languages and the President of the Treasury Board to discuss the changes between Bill C-13 and previous legislation, and to respond to questions on the current bill before the House;
3. members of the Committee submit their prioritized witness lists for the study to the clerk of the committee no later than 12:00 p.m. on Friday, April 25, 2022, and that the compiled list be distributed to members that same day;
4. if Bill C-13 is referred to the committee by the House during the subject matter study, all evidence and documentation received by the Committee during the study related to Bill C-13 be taken into consideration by the Committee during its legislative study of Bill C-13;
5. the clerk of the Committee notifies immediately each Member of Parliament who is not a member of a caucus represented on the Committee, to inform them of the beginning of the subject matter study in order to invite them to start working on their proposed amendments to the Bill, which would be considered during the clause-by-clause study of the Bill C-13; and
6. the Committee begin this subject matter study no later than Wednesday, May 4, 2022.

● (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

Before going any further, as everyone has received a copy of the motion, I'd like to know if we have the unanimous consent of committee members.

First, I'd like to hear what Mr. Beaulieu has to say.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Personally, I think it's unfortunate that we're encroaching on the witnesses' time. Since we have a lot of them in the first part of the meeting, I wonder whether we shouldn't extend it because we'll be penalizing the witnesses and the members wishing to ask questions.

I'm not in favour of the motion. All the studies we're conducting right now are entirely relevant to the study of Bill C-13. Since we've already discussed a pre-study, I'm not in favour of this motion.

The Chair: I've considered that point, Mr. Beaulieu. This isn't the same motion as the last one, which we can't discuss because we were in camera. It's not exactly the same, and that's why I allowed it. Believe me, I checked with our advisers before deciding the matter.

Are there any further remarks on this motion before we move on?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I had requested the floor.

The Chair: We are listening, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I somewhat agree with my Bloc Québécois colleague. It's a bit insensitive to intervene in this way in the middle of a witness panel.

I suggest that the committee adjourn debate on the motion and resume it at another time.

The Chair: First, the motion was duly submitted on Monday. Everyone has read it. It is being moved by the mover. Therefore I'm listening.

Madam Clerk, we will suspend briefly because I want to check something.

● (1620)

(Pause)

● (1620)

The Chair: We're back.

There will be no debate. We have to vote on Mr. Godin's motion to adjourn debate on the motion introduced by Mr. Drouin.

Madam Clerk, you may proceed with the vote.

(Motion of Mr. Godin agreed to by 6 votes to 5.)

● (1625)

The Chair: That's settled then.

Mr. Beaulieu, do you wish to add anything?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Could we extend the first part of the meeting slightly since we'll be hearing from three witnesses in the second part?

The Chair: Yes, we'll do exactly what we did on Monday. I checked with the committee's support staff, and we can extend the meeting in the same way, with two rounds of questions for each of the two hours.

I may have to shorten the second period of questions.

We will continue with Mr. Beaulieu, who has six minutes to question the witnesses.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Castonguay.

We've seen a sharp decline in the number of francophones and francotrope allophones as a percentage of permanent immigrants since the Canadian immigration system was changed and permanent immigrants are now being admitted with temporary student or worker status.

Would you agree that the Canadian government should allow Quebec to control the entry of immigrants with temporary status?

Prof. Charles Castonguay: I think there's a problem impairing communication between the Canadian and Quebec governments, and I don't know what it is. There's a duplication of responsibility for immigration, as a result of which many immigrants from France, for example, who are frustrated with the endless delays in regularizing their status and acquiring permanent residence. It's scandalous.

In addition, large numbers of francophone African students who want to come and study in Quebec are being refused.

It isn't surprising that, according to new immigration data, the immigrants Quebec is receiving aren't 80% or 90% francophone or francotrope, even though that would be normal. I repeat, this isn't a problem that solely affects francophone minorities outside Quebec. The majority in Quebec is desperate. According to the most recent census in Quebec, French is the mother tongue of only 78% of Quebecers. That's unheard of in the history of Canadian censuses since 1871.

One of the major problems is immigration: the recruitment and selection of an appropriate number of immigrants to maintain an 80% francophone majority in Quebec. The percentage is declining with each census. We'll see what it is in the new data in August, when the percentage will be below 78%. It's inevitable. It's mathematical, if you will pardon the term.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Here's an example. Students who apply for temporary study permits are first accepted by a CEGEP or French-language university. The data are virtually the same for Quebec and regions outside Quebec. In Quebec, students receive an acceptance certificate from the Quebec government, and, in some cases, 80% are refused by the Canadian government.

That's why I think the Quebec government should have the last say in the matter, and a mechanism should ultimately be found for students outside Quebec.

A chancellor of a francophone university outside Quebec told us he was travelling abroad to recruit francophone immigrants but that the vast majority of temporary students recruited were refused by the Canadian government. This is incomprehensible. Students from the francophone pools are essentially the ones with the highest refusal rates.

I don't know whether you or the other speakers have any suggestions for us.

When refusal rates in the francophone African countries such as Algeria, for example, are 80% or 90%, it seems to me there should be a way for the immigration department to issue an instruction prohibiting refusal rates over 50%, or something like that.

• (1630)

Prof. Charles Castonguay: In my opening remarks, I talked about having a Canadian perspective on the subject. The problem affects both Quebec and francophone communities outside Quebec. There has to be an overview, a global view, because the weight of francophones isn't just declining in New Brunswick or Quebec; it's falling across all of Canada. It's in free fall. We've gone from 29%

in the 1951 census to 21% in the 2016 census. It will dip below 20% if this continues.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Here's what I think. The FCFA is asking us to raise the immigration rate outside Quebec to 12%, whereas the 4.4% target has never been met since 2008.

I'm not challenging your request, but isn't there ultimately a risk we'll be robbing Peter to pay Paul? We need to take a new approach to increasing immigration in and outside Quebec. I don't see how we can do it if there's no political will to do so.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: I think the Canadian government should open its eyes and see the problem as you've presented it.

All the provinces need more, an increase in the weight of mother-tongue francophones, francotropes and allophones who are prepared to acquire the French language and culture. All of us, all the provinces, need them.

How do we go about it so that Quebec doesn't hurt New Brunswick or itself and doesn't hurt Ontario and so on; what is the...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Beaulieu.

We can come back to that.

The next round of questions will come from Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Boulerice, you have six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us today for this very important matter.

My first question will concern the international component and is for Mr. Théberge or Ms. Mallet or both.

Immigration is obviously an international phenomenon, and we need to promote our francophonie here at home using our diplomatic tools. We need visa offices, which are really lacking in the present government's consular services network, but we also need cultural, economic and diplomatic relations.

How should the francophone immigration policy be coordinated with other departments, such as Global Affairs Canada, for example, to ensure it focuses on Acadie, not on ivory tower discussions with IRCC?

Mr. Martin Théberge: Thank you for your question.

We alluded to that earlier. We're saying the central issue is that we can't handle immigration as a single entity. We can't deal with immigration in isolation.

Earlier my FCFA colleagues referred to the previous program. A diplomacy program has an impact on immigration, but also on many other sectors of society. It enables a people, such as the Acadian people, to recruit internationally, establish cooperative arrangements, promote its artists and promote Acadie and Canada as places that are good to live in. It has an impact on immigration and on other sectors as well.

That kind of program would be combined with immigration as long as Global Affairs Canada, for example, agreed to recognize the ability to conduct international initiatives as sources of vitality and development of a people. That would also help give the Acadian people the power to attract and integrate more immigrants to and in their community. You can't discuss immigration by discussing immigration alone.

● (1635)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Thériault.

My next question is for Ms. Roy or Mr. Dupuis.

Everyone agrees that there's a large potential francophone immigration pool in Africa. The Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa are undergoing significant demographic growth. It was noted earlier that there are systemic barriers or biases in the programs in which the applications of very large percentages of students from Africa are denied.

Do you care to comment on that? I think it's a major concern for the future.

Ms. Roy, you mentioned new targets, 12% in 2024 and 20% in 2036. How did you arrive at 12% in 2024 and 20% in 2036?

I obviously understand that the 4.4% targets are completely ridiculous. That's been a sad failure for 20 years. Why those specific figures? I'm curious.

Ms. Liane Roy: I'll answer first and Mr. Dupuis can definitely add to my response. I've been following this issue for a very long time.

It's very important to eliminate barriers for international students. One issue in particular is always a problem, and that's the fact that students are required to demonstrate that they will return to their country after completing their studies. We think that results in a dichotomy because we have a labour shortage across the country. These students, who are trained in Canada, could help offset that shortage when they obtain their study permits. One of the major obstacles to obtaining a study permit is that they have to prove they will return to their country. That's often the sticking point. I won't say any more than that because I want to get to the second question you asked.

We commissioned a demographic study on francophone immigration and its demographic weight in our francophone and Acadian communities. We released that report on Monday, at the same time as the targets proposed by the federal government. Those targets weren't pulled out of a hat; they come from that very serious study. This is the first time we've had a study that provided so much evidence to help us meet those targets. We wanted a target designed to achieve the objectives of restoring, growing and developing our

communities to ensure they're strengthened. We had to take a careful look at all those figures.

I'll stop there and yield the floor to Mr. Dupuis so he can clarify certain points that I made.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: All right.

Please answer briefly. I'd also like to ask Mr. Doucet a question.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: The demographic study shows that we would have to achieve 16% annually to meet the 4.4% target. That's what we'd need to restore the demographic weight of our francophone communities by 2030. We clearly need a much more ambitious policy backed by new resources.

We can no longer hope that IRCC's general immigration programs will meet the specific needs of our communities. We need custom measures for the Canadian francophonie, such as a distinct francophone economic immigration program with yearly targets and partnerships for employers and communities based on the communities' labour requirements. That's only one measure, but we have to custom build an ambitious policy to meet those targets.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice. Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

We will begin the second round, starting with questions from Bernard Généreux.

Mr. Généreux, you have five minutes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to all the witnesses.

I could take a picture of all these people today. You obviously aren't all the same people, either witnesses or committee members. I was here in 2009, nearly 12 years ago, and we were considering exactly the same issues.

After the billions of dollars the federal government has invested in the past seven years—we waited seven years to propose a reform of the act—here we are today with sharply declining francophone immigration in the minority communities, and in Quebec as well, as Mr. Dupuis said.

Ms. Roy, you relied on the study that you commissioned in determining that the new target should be raised from 4.4% to 12% and then potentially to 20%. Personally, I agree with the idea. The problem is that the current government doesn't have the will to do it despite the huge sums of money it distributes hither, thither and yon in all sectors in Canada.

Do you sincerely think it wants to increase francophone immigration?

• (1640)

Ms. Liane Roy: Following the discussions we had with Minister Fraser's office and the parliamentary secretary, and those that Mr. Dupuis and his team had with various officials, I think there's a willingness to listen, dialogue and cooperate with us on those targets and the policy.

We know we'll never meet those targets, and we realize this is an ambitious project, but we have to do things differently, as I said in my remarks. We have to do francophone immigration differently. You don't do immigration in minority communities the same way as in majority communities.

Consequently, it's important that francophone immigration policy be developed by and for francophones. We have to have a say in that policy. When we held our press conference on Monday, we introduced a series of measures and programs that should be included in that policy. We referred to them earlier, and we touched on the issues of international students, family sponsorship and refugee resettlement.

So we'd like to have programs designed through a francophone lens to ensure we can meet these targets. That's what will be needed to restore our demographic weight.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Roy, we've been talking about "by and for" francophones for many years.

To a certain extent, I see a form of hypocrisy here. As Mr. Beaulieu and Mr. Boulerice said earlier, regarding francophone immigrants from African countries and the Maghreb, there's a certain form of discrimination right now, and the blame is laid on the algorithms of a piece of software, as a result of which some applicants aren't accepted because they don't have enough money or for I don't know what reason.

What's necessary is a political will that we're not seeing right now. You talk about the policies you'd like to see put in place with the government's assistance and "by and for" francophones. The government will listen to you and give you money hoping you'll stay quiet for a few more years.

In reality, policies have to change from within the federal government. Mr. Castonguay discussed this earlier: what we're experiencing right now is an absolute aberration compared to what we would like to have. These are two completely different worlds.

Mr. Dupuis, I don't know whether you can respond to what I just said, but it's as though all of us had our heads in the sand. We're going backwards and don't realize that the problem is in the political environment, which prevents the emergence of specific measures that will produce results.

Mr. Alain Dupuis: It's clear to us that an entirely new strategy is required. We can no longer aspire to more francophone immigration by trying to change a few criteria in a few programs. We need programs that are tailored to our communities.

I think that all the parties now have the political will to take action. This is the third time we have appeared before this committee to sound the alarm. How many more times will we have to come and testify to explain that there's a major crisis and that a new policy is needed? We have some solutions...

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dupuis.

You'll be able to continue a little later.

We will now give the floor to Mr. Iacono for five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin with a comment. It's very easy to criticize what the government of the day is doing or has done over the past six years. What did the previous government do over a ten-year period? Not only did you do nothing, but you blocked funds. So rather than criticizing, I think we should expend our energy on finding solutions, particularly when we have witnesses. It's not just a matter of criticizing the government of the day, but looking in the mirror before commenting on others.

My question is for Mr. Chaisson or Mr. Doucet. With a view to attracting more francophones, the Permanent Resident Program and the Express Entry process, for example, assign them more points.

What other initiatives should IRCC introduce to increase francophone immigration to Canada?

How successful will it be over the long term?

• (1645)

Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet: Thank you for your question, Mr. Iacono.

My colleague, Mr. Chaisson, can finish answering this question. Without repeating myself on matters pertaining to fields of jurisdiction and the decentralization of immigration in the province of New Brunswick, I think that we also need to look outside the box. At SANB, we are trying to rely as much as possible on the IRCC targets. We are attempting to put forward other concepts that could be introduced, including constitutional concepts. If my reading of the Constitution is correct, official languages is not a field of jurisdiction. Usually, when a subject is not mentioned in the fields of jurisdiction, the federal government is responsible for it. If you are willing, I'd like to refer to former Senator Jean-Maurice Simard, who argued that because official languages are not a field of jurisdiction as such, it's up to the federal government to deal with it. It could therefore sign agreements directly with institutions.

What institutions could do a better job of recruiting and retaining than the postsecondary institutions which are already doing so on an everyday basis, but lack financial resources from the federal government? I believe it would be easy to implement certain concrete ideas, but there is a lack of creativity on the part of the federal state at the moment.

I'll give the floor to Mr. Chaisson, if he has anything to add.

Mr. Ali Chaisson (Executive Director, Acadian Society of New Brunswick): Thank you.

I would just say that the problem lies with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. I don't agree that it's the fault of Canada's Parliament or governments of any stripe. It's the department's problem. It sets peculiar objectives.

Unfortunately, apart from my respect for the Standing Committee on Official Languages, I must say that we have rarely been called upon by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. And yet, that committee is responsible for criticizing and studying what the IRCC does. The Standing Committee on Official Languages ought not to be a catch-all. As soon as a problem arises, it shouldn't always end up with this committee. At some point, part of the burden will have to be shared.

In dealing with this specific issue, a particular conclusion will inevitably be reached, which is that IRCC put all its eggs in one basket—the Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver regions—and to hell with the rest! IRCC regional funding is directly determined by the number of immigrants a province receives. If one province is at the low end at the outset, then that's where it will stay. At a certain point, as President Doucet was saying, it would perhaps be a good idea to try something else. We need to be a little bit more creative.

With respect to francophone immigration, when Quebec signed an agreement with the federal government, the IRCC officials breathed a side of relief because they would no longer have to deal with French. x

But a few years later, francophones came back and said they said to themselves that they were still burdened with the problem of French. People at the department still have not adjusted to the fact that they need to serve the francophonie outside Quebec.

That, members, is the problem.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chaisson,

Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Mr. Beaulieu is the next person to speak.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Although I have a lot of respect for Mr. Chaisson, I don't agree with him at all.

It's all very well to blame public servants and IRCC, but there have to be people higher up giving orders. It's as if we were saying that governments, no matter at what level, are all doing the same things and have no power over their department. Whether it's one level of government or the other, it's the all the same, and neither is it very constructive.

I'm very skeptical, and I think there's going to have to be a major effort to get results. We're being told that things will be okay because there have been discussions with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. But Bill C-13 is asking for a blank cheque. It doesn't have anything concrete, and nothing but good intentions.

I believe there is a very simple method that could be used. The refusal rate, which is at 80%, needs to be reduced, and the approval rate raised to 50%. It's that simple. It seems to me that it can be dealt with.

What do you think about this, Mr. Théberge?

• (1650)

Mr. Martin Théberge: As I was saying, we can't concentrate on only one thing, and shouldn't look at immigration in isolation.

In our brief that was tabled, and in my speech, I mentioned several factors, and various avenues that we should be focusing on.

I'll also take the liberty of reacting to what was said just now. For francophone immigration, we can't just focus on regions like Toronto, eastern Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. We also need to concentrate on locations like Chéticamp and Caraquet.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I fully agree, but I have something to add.

IRCC services in Montreal are terrible. They operate mainly in English. The rejection rates are as high in Quebec as they are everywhere else.

I think we're all in the same boat, and that we need to get together to change things.

Mr. Martin Théberge: Let's not forget that the community has begun working together very successfully and that a lot has been accomplished. We introduced services, added promotional activities and other things like that, and yet even today, the francophone community immigration organizations have neither the power nor the right to serve refugees, or certain communities.

We want to collaborate with governments and work hard, but as the FCFA pointed out, this needs to be done "by, for and with" francophones.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Théberge.

This will be the final question in this round, because we have to temporarily suspend the meeting.

Mr. Boulerice, as the replacement for Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have a very courageous committee chair today, who's working despite having COVID-19.

Mr. Doucet, I very much liked your intervention on one-size-fits-all federal policies, in which attempts are made to apply the same thing to New Brunswick as to Newfoundland and Labrador, not to mention Nova Scotia.

For New Brunswick. When your population is 30% francophone, it makes no sense to apply a 4.4% target.

I wanted to give you the opportunity to comment again on the specific federal-provincial agreement you were talking about. You provided a long list of issues, like education and health, in which changing things could lead to a different approach for New Brunswick francophones.

I'm going to give you the opportunity to talk to us about this.

Mr. Alexandre Cédric Doucet: Thank you very much for your question.

I believe that the one thing we've been requesting for a number of years now is an alignment between the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the federal Official Languages Act. We would therefore like New Brunswick's linguistic specificity to be included in the act.

Fortunately, with the work done by the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick and several other New Brunswick organizations, we've already succeeded in getting that into Bill C-13, tabled on March 1. ^xMore specifically, there's a new section 45.1, which talks about federal recognition of New Brunswick's linguistic specificity in terms of the equal status of both languages and both official language communities.

Including that in the Official Languages Act can compensate for earlier damage. So when immigration is added on, even given the five-year agreement and the various jurisdictions, when I see this compensation, I see dollar signs.

When I see that in the federal-provincial negotiations, with New Brunswick, in this instance, I believe it gives the province of New Brunswick and the federal government the equipment they need to negotiate something together. And the burden is not only on New Brunswick, but also on the federal government.

That's what we'd like to see in the official languages plan that could stem from Bill C-13, tabled^x on March 1.

• (1655)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Doucet and Mr. Boulerice.

I'd like to thank all the participants for a good debate and some good answers. We feel honoured by your presence today.

If you feel there might be additional information that could be useful to us for this study, you can always send it in writing to our clerk, who will distribute it to all the committee members.

We are now going to suspend the meeting for a short while to allow our guests to leave and to welcome the next group of witnesses.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1655)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1655)

The Chair: We will now be hearing from witnesses who have never appeared before our committee in our six years.

We have Mr. Mohamadou Sarr, Assistant to the Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Studies. We also welcome, from my region, Mr. Cyriaque Kiti, the Chief Executive Officer of Afremac Consulting Inc., and Alain Laberge, Director General of the Franco-Manitoban School Division.

You will each have five minutes to present the matters that you would like to tell us about today. When there is approximately one

minute left, and again when there are only 15 seconds left, I'll indicate it on a piece of paper.

On that note, in order to save time, I'll ask you to go first Mr. Sarr.

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

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr (Assistant to the Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, Université de Sherbrooke, As an Individual): Good afternoon, Mr. Chair and committee members.

I'd like to thank you for having invited me to talk about my experience as an immigrant, first of all, and also as someone who spends a lot of time working with immigrants.

In my comments, I want to place an emphasis on students, because they represent a clientele of interest to Canada, and in fact of interest to many countries. According to an article that appeared in the magazine *Les Affaires*, tuition fees are now between \$20,000 and \$70,000 a year, or even more.

In its 2018-2019 budget report, the University of Toronto pointed out that tuition fees from foreign students accounted for 30% of its revenue, which is more than the provincial grants that account for an estimated 25%. A net decline in the number of foreign students would place some universities at risk, as occurred recently with Laurentian University. Canadian universities are adopting a variety of strategies to attract international students, particularly at the postgraduate level.

In 2017, Quebec received 12% of the international students in Canada, compared to 48% in Ontario and 24% in British Columbia. It's clear that there is a discrepancy for francophones to make up. A more comprehensive strategy is required rather than simply looking at things from one angle.

I am talking about international students because generally speaking, international students attend elementary school in their own country. They will have also have gone to high school there, and perhaps even for some of their university studies. They often come precisely when they can be productive to society. When it's for graduate studies, there is an element of wealth creation. So I want to stress that a global strategy is needed.

Statistics show that over two-thirds of students remain after graduating. Once someone has graduated, it's often much easier for them to find a job, and to integrate and adapt. Less of an investment is required from that standpoint.

I would suggest trying to attract as many francophone students as possible. I'm sure you'll all remember that a few years ago, during an election campaign, a government promised to exempt international francophone students. For example, if Quebec were to sign an agreement with France, French people would be attracted and it would be much easier. But really, the most francophones are in Africa.

Because France is a developed country, it's much more difficult to attract experts from there.

Why doesn't it work? There's a feeling that there may be a quota. Perhaps we don't want a lot of Africans. That's something people feel. However, there is a genuine possibility of going there and finding highly qualified people who would contribute to wealth creation, and who would be acting as ambassadors. Africa has changed a lot. I'm talking about Africa and the Maghreb. I could say more about it during the round of questions, because I wouldn't want to go past my allotted time.

Globally, it's much easier to attract students, particularly for institutions in the other provinces, in Acadia for example.

Thank you.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sarr.

We will now give the floor to our adopted Acadian, Mr. Cyriaque Kiti, for five minutes.

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti (Chief Executive Officer, Afremac Consulting Inc): Good afternoon to all the committee members.

I feel very honoured to be here today.

As Mr. Arseneault mentioned, I am the chief executive officer of a company that specializes in business and human resources development. I'd like to take this opportunity to add that I'm also here as Benin's Honorary Consul to New Brunswick. Benin decided to step up its economic relations with the province of New Brunswick, and accordingly established its honorary consulate two years ago. This genuinely gives me a good opportunity to work with you.

On immigration, I'd like to quote Albert Camus: "Yes, I have a country—the French language." French is a language that blends and binds. Canada is a strong, brilliant country that is respected around the world for its bilingualism. Its attraction is its quality of life. It's known for its strong economy, its political stability and its cultural and linguistic diversity. Most Canadians speak two, if not more, languages. It's therefore important to preserve this linguistic asset, and even more important to strengthen it by allowing all Canadian citizens to have access and proximity to their second language.

By the way, when I hear my children switching back and forth between English and French, I'm impressed.

The Canadian authorities, particularly those who handle immigration and official languages, should continue to strive to make cohabitation between anglophones and francophones possible. Francophones also need to acknowledge that the language of Molière is full of rules and complexities. They can therefore be indulgent by supporting and encouraging efforts made by politicians to speak it. It's pleasant to hear an anglophone who does not understand French make an effort to say a few words in that language. We francophones are not shy about trying to express ourselves in English. Basically, it's possible to learn how to live together and perhaps change an entire country.

Consequently, I'm very honoured to be telling you that the 4.4% francophone immigration target, which according to everyone who spoke before me, is difficult to meet, has a built-in paradox. What I mean is I don't understand why we can't meet this target, which is

certainly very reasonable from my standpoint. To get there, I have a few suggestions we can talk about.

First, it would be very important to better inform and better educate the host communities. This means that the people who are responsible for organizing the immigration process need to be better informed about what immigration is and what it gives to Canada. As you know, some perceive immigration as a threat, while people in business see it as an opportunity.

Second, what's required is a combined effort by the federal and provincial governments, and business organizations around the world, more specifically the chambers of commerce and educational institutions. Direct involvement by the new communities themselves and the new immigrants is also essential.

Third, we need to identify the heavily francophone countries full of dynamic young people capable of integrating readily and quickly.

Fourth, it's important to identify the Canadian organizations that could play an important role in easing the procedural and recruitment burden for businesses.

• (1705)

And then I would say that it's also very important for governments to invest in preparing newcomers.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Kiti.

You will be able to go on at greater length as you answer the questions that follow.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Laberge for five minutes.

Mr. Alain Laberge (Director General, Franco-Manitoban School Division): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon to all the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm currently living in Lorette, a small village in southeastern Manitoba covered by Treaty No. 1,^x the traditional territory of the Anishinabe, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota and Dene, and in particular the ancestral land of the Métis Nation.

I'd like to thank you for inviting me to testify on behalf of the Franco-Manitoban School Division, the only school division that covers all of Manitoba, on the francophone side, of course, with 24 schools and about 6,000 students who share a common language, French, and that provides a cultural and social picture of our magnificent francophone minority community.

You will no doubt have guessed that my comments today will be directly related to education. I know that education is not a federal jurisdiction, but rather a provincial one. However, as some of the people who spoke earlier mentioned, immigration cannot be examined in isolation.

I can't speak about the importance of francophone immigration to minority communities without mentioning the importance of inclusion as opposed to integration. I don't want to get into the semantic details of these two words, which are often used in different ways, but which we don't always understand. What is crucial to understand is that despite all the targets we would like to meet, successful immigration needs an inclusive and welcoming society. Without a form of social inclusion in which students and parents are stakeholders and contributors to the community, immigration will remain an attempt to integrate newcomers who have to adapt and who create ghettos. That's the worst thing that could possibly happen to our francophone communities.

In the document containing the statistical analysis of the 4.4% target, Raymond Th  berge said, in 2003, that the primary objective of the strategic framework took a special interest in studying that 4.4% target. The goal was to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants to bolster the demographic weight in francophone minority-language communities.

The figures from the last census in 2019 showed that Canada had acquired 340,000 new residents. Of these, Manitoba had welcomed approximately 19,000, only 300 of whom spoke French, for a percentage of 1.5%. To this could be added those who speak both languages, but honestly, in the French-language education system, families that identify as speaking two languages rarely attend francophone schools, often owing to unfamiliarity with them—about which I will speak a little later—or simply because they are disillusioned about the fact that we have a province and a country that claims to be bilingual, but that is not.

So the target was 4.4%. In my view, that should be a starting point rather than an end in itself. It has not been reached since 2003, there's a further decline every year, and the gap continues to grow, meaning that our communities are stumbling along like a wagon with a broken wheel.

Without francophones, it's hard to create an educational community or a community school, a term we use in New Brunswick, which is very dear to us. It's also health, the economy, the arts, culture, sports, etc.

Unlike the majority-language schools, the minority schools are simply not required to provide education and programming that would be called "educational". There's a whole component made up of people's values, culture, heritage and identity that is very important and that there wouldn't be in a first-language school.

It's important to point to the Canadian Charter of Rights that now allows for rights holders in our schools, and to the parents who protested 25 years ago in front of the school division to ensure that we could have the "by and for".

So although it's a provincial jurisdiction, why should education and immigration go hand-in-hand? Immigration plays a key role in expanding the minority community school network. Most of the time, it's the place where the francophone community can get together, the key meeting point. The school is where a future generation can prosper in a spirit of equity and social justice.

I'll finish up with a small anecdote. I meet many parents who come to our schools. The first thing they ask is why they can't work

in French in Manitoba? Why can't there be a French-language clinic in Manitoba? Why can't they be served in French? There is a feeling of disillusionment that leads them to withdraw their children from francophone schools to place them in anglophone schools because they want to make sure that they will be able to find a job when they grow up.

Thank you very much.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Laberge.

We're going to start the first round of questions. The questions will come from each of the political parties, one at a time, for six minutes each. We'll begin with you Mr. Godin. Please go ahead.

Mr. Jo  l Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for their contributions to this committee meeting.

My first question is for Mr. Mohamadou Sarr.

You mentioned that two-thirds of the students remain in Canada after they graduate. I think that's a development tool. I am not using the expression in the pejorative sense, quite the contrary. The capacity to attract students strengthens immigration, because these are people who will stay here after graduation. If we are going to target one group in particular, we might as well focus on people who are going to stay here.

How can we attract more students? Can you make a few suggestions for us? The fact remains the same. I was saying to the first group of witnesses that we all know that francophone immigration has been a major problem for several years now. What we want right now is to find solutions and prepare a report.

Can you, Mr. Sarr, give us one or two recommendations on how to be more effective at attracting more students?

• (1715)

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: Thank you very much.

You're absolutely right. I fully agree with you. Many of the problems lie with the red tape. There are many applications and many institutions that admit students from abroad, but in the paperwork, many permits are refused because there is no evidence that the student will leave after graduating.

The concrete solution I can suggest already exists in Quebec. It involves doing what is done for students from France and Belgium, with exemptions for lump sums, by which I mean tuition fees, particularly in areas where there is a large gap that needs closing. I'm talking about Quebec but there is also Universit   Saint-Anne in Nova Scotia, and postsecondary institutions in New Brunswick that are having problems. We could make it easier for students to come here, particularly, as I was saying earlier, Canada did not have to pay for their elementary and secondary schooling. Having these foreign students come here would be beneficial.

Mr. Joël Godin: I understand your recommendation, but ever since we began studying francophone immigration, we've found that the problem is not the number of students who want to come, but rather resistance to the process, the red tape and the controls in some regions of the planet, like the African region, which we do not appear to have sized up properly. We don't really know whether it's because of the system or the criteria used.

Beyond financial assistance, how can we sort all that out?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: That's exactly what we don't know, what's in the black box. In other words, do we really want to welcome francophones, but also maintain a certain balance, and not have too many black people all at once or people who are wearing veils. It's certainly more difficult to attract someone from countries like France and Belgium.

I receive calls every day from people who come from these parts of the world, who want to come to Canada and who are submitting applications. We help them.

Mr. Joël Godin: Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Sarr.

What I understand from your recommendation is that there ought to be financial assistance for some students to cover part of the tuition fees.

I have a question for you, Mr. Kiti. You are from Benin and I believe you live in New Brunswick. Is that correct?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: You are probably in touch with young people in Benin. I'd like to know how things are done over there. There would appear to be a problem of access and mentoring to make the application process easier, to help fill out the forms properly and meet the deadlines.

Can you tell us what it's like for a young person who wants to come and study in Canada?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Certainly.

What's happening right now in Benin, if not in Africa generally, is that people are poorly informed about Canada's requirements. Even among ourselves, translating from English to French or French to English sometimes causes us problems. After a quarter of a century of living in Canada, I sometimes want to fill out documents that I don't understand online because there are several questions that look identical or very similar. People therefore need to be better informed about Canadian procedures.

The second thing that happens in Africa, including Benin, is that many applications are sent to Accra, Ghana, which is where the Benin applications are generally processed. As it happens, many are refused. Sometimes it's for minor reasons, such as financial requirements. We know of parents who are very rich and who have the means to pay for their children's education. But the visas are rejected simply because the parents don't want to reveal how much money they have. Couldn't there be a way of sorting that out?

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kiti.

You can give us further details in connection in response to another question.

The next questions will come from Ms. Patricia Lattanzio.

Ms. Lattanzio, over to you for five minutes.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before starting, I'd like to thank the three witnesses for having spent their time with us this afternoon.

I'd like to ask Mr. Kiti a thing or two.

I share your opinion, Mr. Kiti, when you say that being bilingual can only contribute to our country and to Canadians and that you like how we can live together in diversity. I agree with you.

To return to the question, you made some suggestions. I'd like to hear your comments about your fourth idea, about investing in preparing newcomers.

Could you tell us more about this?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Preparing newcomers would require a contribution from the welcoming communities. Of course here, in most provinces, we have communities that need to be in contact with local agents, people living in communities in Canada who can get this information to different countries.

I believe that I could inform a lot of people. Mr. Sarr could certainly do so in his country. We need to have a role, and the communities need to play an important role, in preparing all the people who want to immigrate.

Very briefly, let's take the example of an Acadian who wants to prepare Africans to come and live in Canada. That's a problem from the get-go. An Acadian would not be an ideal person to prepare Africans, because the Acadian will not understand some of the socio-cultural contexts of the African community. We therefore need to play a more important role in terms of deciding what preparation is needed before other Africans come here to live.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Are you suggesting establishing immigrant reception centres in the Canadian communities?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: It's not necessarily creating new centres. The existing centres can already refer to the communities and to people like me or others. If we want to get workers from Benin or Togo or the Ivory Coast, we know the information these people require in order to come and live here. Sometimes too, these people have dreams that they don't find when they get here. Sometimes people think that once they get to Canada everything will be easy, when in fact we work harder in Canada than in most other countries.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: How does it work in Benin for a person who would like to come here? For example, let's look at an international university student who applies.

What are the obstacles they will face to come to Canada?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: The greatest obstacle is definitely the cost. Evidence on finances is required to come and study in Canada, as well as evidence—which I heard Ms. Roy mention—to the effect that after graduating, they will return to their country.

You are well aware of the in generic response to the fact that we were not convinced. It's vague and meaningless, but thousands of visas are denied for unknown reasons, which Mr. Sarr just called the black box. There are cases for which we simply don't understand why the visa was refused, when the applicant met all the criteria. I would like to ask the members here and will take this opportunity to ask you.

Let's take this opportunity to ask committee members to make an effort to get a clear answer, for every visa that is refused, as to why it was refused? Rejected visas could then provide information for future applicants.

• (1725)

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: In short, you're saying that the refusal alone is not helpful and that any refusals should require a rationale. Is that correct?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Yes. There needs to be a rationale for each refusal. That would enable future visa applicants to better prepare themselves.

Ms. Patricia Lattanzio: Okay.

Thank you, Mr. Kiti.

My next question is for you, Mr. Laberge. You said that there were 6,000 francophone students in Manitoba and that for some years now there has been some growth, but not enough

Can you give us your opinion of this minimal growth?

Mr. Alain Laberge: We are working closely with organizations like Accueil francophone and the Francophone Immigration Networks, the RIFs. What we have noticed is that many people who arrive here are not directed to the right places. As my two colleagues mentioned, many people are refused because of small details, which means that we don't get enough of the people we need to have in our schools and our systems.

The same is true of our employees. People from Africa, the Maghreb, France and Belgium are already certified but are not allowed to teach in Canada because the provinces don't recognize their certificates or degrees. They travel across an ocean, enter a country and are jobless because their skills are not recognized.

I think that the major problem is that we bring some of them here and abandon them after 12 or 15 months. We stop mentoring them even though this mentoring is extremely important.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Laberge and Ms. Lattanzio.

Next up is Mr. Beaulieu.

You also have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon.

On the one hand, I like the suggestion of exempting students from tuition fees or at least a portion of the fees. I think that in Quebec, there is a program that allows francophone students to pay the same tuition fees as Quebec students, which are lower.

On the other hand, we have a big problem with the rejection rate. For example, only 15% of applicants from Algeria are accepted.

For Benin, in 2020, I think it was 17%. The same is the case for most of the francophone African countries, including Algeria, and it's also the case for Haiti. However, for India and some other countries, the acceptance rate is 50% or more. These rates are much higher. It's hard to understand. In my riding there are many applicants for temporary permits who are waiting for an answer and not getting it. They're being told that they have not convinced the authorities they would not remain in Quebec or Canada. And yet, at the same time, we claim to be in favour of having foreign students stay here permanently.

Among all the people you know, you must surely know some African students who applied for study permits. What reasons were given for these rejections? What do you think can explain these high rejection rates?

These people have been accepted by a Quebec university education institution, but then refused by the federal government. Based on your experience, can you tell us why?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: Usually, it's because of the financial evidence they need to supply. Normally, for the first study permit application, it's often the consulate that does the checking. Quebec often accepts the application, but then finds itself in the black box. If we were at least told that it was a money problem, then we would know that the financial evidence was inadequate.

Just recently, a few weeks ago, I saw a student who had his year of tuition fees paid by the Student Direct Stream, which deposited the amount he requested in trust at the Desjardins Caisse Populaire, and allowed a month for the application to be processed. He too was refused, even though the funds were already here. That's the crazy sort of stuff we're encountering.

But it's still possible to acquire more interns, if only to decrease the risks. A relatively interesting measure was introduced not long ago, allowing universities to have interns for up to 120 days. That doesn't require a work permit. It's a helpful measure that gives universities and companies an opportunity to test people to see if they might be useful, with a view to hiring them or conducting a research project with them.

Basically, the problem is always this black box. We think that it's because of the money. And yet as shown in the last case we mentioned, with the person who had sent everything required, he received the same response to the effect that there was nothing to prove he would leave after graduating.

• (1730)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: And yet we're supposed to be encouraging people to come here.

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: Exactly.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's really incomprehensible.

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: I just like to point out that in Quebec, France and Belgium are exempt from the lump sum amount. For undergraduate studies, they pay tuition fees at the same rate as Canadians, which is about \$4,000 per term. There were plans to do this for other francophone countries, but it never happened. However, for others, there's an agreement between Quebec and some francophone countries. There is even an agreement with China now. But it's all about quotas. For example, there will be 80 scholarships for Algerians, but 80 scholarships for 4,000 students is not a whole lot.

Everything's okay for French and Belgian students, but it's difficult to attract them because the climate is pleasant there and the living standard is the same as here in Canada.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think that Mr. Kiti said earlier that one of the problems was the transition from French to English when filling out forms. Did you find that it was difficult to converse with the immigration officers who were speaking French?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Absolutely, yes.

Most of the documents are available in French, but getting service in French from the officers can sometimes be a bit difficult.

I'd like to take this opportunity to say that although we are talking a lot about students at the moment, there is considerable potential for workers. I'll use my remaining 10 seconds to thank the chair, who just recently, in the middle of the pandemic, helped me welcome 13 families, a total of 43 people, all francophones from Togo, to New Brunswick. I believe that we mustn't overlook the potential of workers. This means that it's important to work with economic councils and business centres.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kiti.

I could let you continue sending compliments my way, but I have to move on to the NDP member.

Mr. Boulerice, it's over to you for six minutes.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses.

My first question is for Mr. Laberge.

I'm replacing my colleague, Ms. Ashton, who couldn't be with us today. She had to be in the House to present her bill. You all know her and realize that this is very important to her.

She wanted to ask a question—based on her own experience—about the problems she encountered when she wanted to register her twins for day care services in French. As is the case it for many francophone day care centres, there is a shortage of early childhood educators in Thompson, a shortage that has been aggravated by the pandemic. Attempts to recruit early childhood educators from outside Canada have proved very difficult.

Mr. Laberge, do you think the federal government should have a francophone immigration policy that would include early childhood educators, something that would help francophone and francophile communities begin to teach their children French from a very young age by enrolling them in French-language services?

Mr. Alain Laberge: It's true that it's a major challenge, and even more so in the regions.

In Thompson, we opened a francophone school three years ago and there is a day care service, but for about 14 months, it proved impossible to fill vacant positions. Parents are waiting to enroll their children. When children begin to attend a francophone school in a minority community, they're going to stay. But if there is no places in a francophone day care centre, they're going to have to attend an English-language day care. I know that there are shortages there too, but I think the situation is even more desperate and difficult for us.

So, in response to your question about whether we should have a policy, I may not be a born politician, but I do have an administrative bent. So as an administrator I would say that once our day care centres are full, our schools are full, our children are speaking French and we have created an educational community that is much broader than the school itself, then of course.

• (1735)

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Education, of course, is a provincial jurisdiction.

I've heard people from the Maritimes say that the situation is not so bad for elementary school, but that afterwards, in high school, when sports and cultural infrastructures are in short supply, people are drawn towards English-language institutions. They have better resources because of their size, and they have programs that are more attractive to teenagers.

Have you encountered that where you're from?

Mr. Alain Laberge: Definitely.

It's not so dire in Winnipeg because we have a somewhat higher concentration of francophones, which means that we can have larger secondary schools, and sports teams, but if you're a high school student in a rural school where, from grade 9 to grade 12, there is a total of perhaps 50 students, then you're obviously not going to have a hockey team or a football team. It's impossible.^{xx}

So what this means is that there are students who would like to remain in a French school, but our schools are not always appealing. In several provinces, the schools that were turned over to the francophone school boards were the relics the anglophones no longer wanted. I'm not saying that to be nasty. So imagine a brand new school with a gymnasium right beside a francophone school built 60 years ago that doesn't have a gym. That's what we have in two of our regions. As a parent, it's all very well to be a hardcore francophone and love the French language, but you're going to opt for the English school.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Yes, unfortunately. Nevertheless, I think some investments might be possible in some instances and that these would be appreciated.

Mr. Sarr and Mr. Kiti, you spoke earlier about student recruitment. And to be sure, there is discrimination; that was also discussed. I wanted to know more specifically how you assessed the quality of the work done by our Canadian consular services abroad on behalf of students and workers.

Mr. Kiti, you spoke earlier about doing a better job of preparing newcomers. Do you feel there should be improvements in the quality of our consular services?

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: I was saying earlier that I have now spent a quarter century, as of this year in fact, in Canada. At the time, it was even more difficult to come to Canada. It's somewhat better now, but there's still a lot of work to do. The question I ask myself, and that I'm asking you, the MPs, is about the work you might be able to do with us. It would amount to determining whether there is any preferential treatment for some countries compared to others.

We commented about the fact that it was easier for some countries to get visas. One might say that it's close to discrimination. If so, it means that improvement is needed.

We could work together with us to prepare reports, at both the provincial and federal levels, and with the host communities, to ensure that the cases are well documented.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Do you have any comments, Mr. Sarr?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: What he has said is true. The biggest problem may be the enormous number of agencies all over the place that take advantage of people. I think that if we can work together, we need to look at all the information and make sure that it's not confusing.

Sometimes, people go to the appropriate location but then feel lost, and have to call on someone for help. They are asked for money, and sometimes there is even fraud involved.

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: There might also be assistance available from consular diplomatic representations. They could be very helpful.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Good. We have 10 seconds left, and I will give them to the chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

We had agreed informally that we were going to extend the meeting that was supposed to end 10 minutes ago. I will continue, because we had agreed on it, but only for another two and a half minutes.

Mr. Lehoux first, and then we'll move on to Ms. Kayabaga.

Mr. Lehoux, you only have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Richard Lehoux (Beauce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses here today.

Mr. Kiti, you're a consultant. There has been a lengthy discussion on students, but you also raised the matter of workers who might be interested in coming. I just heard Mr. Sarr mention that there were some problems with fraud, because there are far too many consultants.

What kind of controls could be introduced?

It's important to work together. It's understandable that there might be abuse, and it does nothing to improve the system.

Do you have anything in mind that you could suggest to us?

• (1740)

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: What I would suggest is approaching diplomatic representatives about the validation of skills, diplomas, and degrees.

I know that the government of Canada has accredited doctors who check people's health and safety. I think that a system should be introduced to enable Canada to check people's files more easily. As you know, diplomatic representations are accredited and inject some rigour into the process. They could certainly provide support. If, for example, it became necessary to establish law firms that could verify the documents, it would contribute enormously, and prevent fraud.

As Mr. Sarr just said, there is work to be done at this level.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: Mr. Sarr, do you have anything to add to what Mr. Kiti said?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: Yes. He spoke about speeding up the process, and that's something we should all work on together, particularly the federal government and the provincial government. Sometimes, you're just handed a sheet of paper and it takes months if not years.

It's true, of course, that COVID-19 made things worse, but I don't think it's the main factor that discourages people and leads to all the abuses.

Mr. Richard Lehoux: All right. Thanks to both of you.

Mr. Laberge, I have a brief question. If you don't have time to answer, I'd appreciate it if you could send a written response.

You said that it was very important to get parents involved. Do you have anything to recommend to us in terms of inclusion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lehoux, but I'm going to have to stick to the timing.

The next two and a half minutes are for Ms. Kayabaga.

Please go ahead, Ms. Kayabaga.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to begin by thanking our witnesses for being here today.

As I have only two minutes, I'll begin with Mr. Sarr. And then move on to Mr. Kiti.

You spoke about ways of changing or expanding immigration services for international students from francophone African countries. We've been told that the refusal rates for them are very high.

Do you think this has something to do with the shortage of resources for francophones? What's your opinion on that?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: We certainly do sometimes get the impression that there is a high turnover rate. I noticed some really extreme cases this year. The students arrived at the airport, and were sent back home. They had to pay for another ticket, which can sometimes cost over \$2,000.

It happened because they arrived in the middle of a term. This year, there were really a lot of problems. I think that these resources, it's clear and we have noticed it...

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Do you think the number of visa offices in Africa should be increased?

The Senegal office is already serving around 26 countries. Do you think more offices would be helpful?

I will now ask my final question because there's only a minute left. Do you think there ought to be a francophone immigration unit to deal solely and specifically with francophone immigration?

Mr. Mohamadou Sarr: That might indeed be effective. It's a problem that exists around the world. Some of our students often go to other countries. They travel in order to get a visa. It could help, particularly if the provincial and federal governments work together.

Mr. Cyriaque Kiti: Perhaps the MPs...

The Chair: Thank you very much. That's all the time we have.

We'd like to let our witnesses know, Mr. Kiti, Mr. Sarr and Mr. Laberge, that they can send any additional information they might have wanted to give us in writing to our clerk. She will then distribute it to all the committee members, and they in turn will familiarize themselves with it. Any supplementary information that could add to what we know, and help us as we prepare our report, would be welcome.

I would like to thank you on behalf of the committee and all of its members. It was truly a very interesting meeting. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned. Good afternoon to everyone.

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