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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





## Standing Committee on Official Languages

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• (1605)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)):** Good afternoon, everyone.

The clerk informs me that we have quorum. I therefore call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 60 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I would like to inform the committee that all members and witnesses have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting. Ms. Ashton has completed her test. Today, we are beginning the study on increased francophone immigration to Canada, as per the motion adopted on Friday, April 21, 2023. To ensure that the meeting runs smoothly, I would like to give some instructions to the witnesses.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** I have a question, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Go ahead.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I don't know if it's a point of order.

Has it been 10 minutes already since we voted in the House?

Normally, according to the procedure, we have to wait 10 minutes for members to get to the room after a vote.

I don't know if I'm wrong.

**The Chair:** I didn't keep track. That's a good point.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** The legislation requires it

**The Chair:** The Standing Orders require it, yes.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I don't think it's been 10 minutes. We shouldn't start if we haven't given members at least 10 minutes to get here.

**The Chair:** Honestly, I thought it had been 10 minutes.

The vote ended at 3:52 p.m. We'll wait a little bit. You have a good point, Ms. Kayabaga. I'm going to suspend the meeting.

• (1605)

(Pause)

• (1610)

**The Chair:** I call the meeting back to order.

I was just telling you that, in order to make sure the meeting runs smoothly, I'd like to give some instructions to the witnesses and the members.

Before you speak, please wait for me to call on you. If you are participating by videoconference, click on the microphone icon to activate it. Please mute yourself when you aren't speaking. As for interpretation, for those participating in the meeting via Zoom, you have a choice at the bottom of your screen between floor, English and French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and choose the desired channel. I'd like to remind you that all comments from members and witnesses should be directed to the chair.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses.

From the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, we have Alain Desruisseaux and Olivier Jacques. Mr. Jacques is joining us by videoconference from Paris—lucky him—close to the Seine, while we're in Ottawa.

From the Department of Canadian Heritage, we have Ms. Boyer and Ms. Boily.

Mr. Jacques, I believe that this is your first time appearing before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Is that possible?

• (1615)

**Mr. Olivier Jacques (Area Director, Latin America, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** That's right. This is the first time.

**The Chair:** Welcome.

Representatives from each department will have five minutes to present their opening remarks. We'll start with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

I'm also told that there will be another vote in the House during today's meeting. Does the committee agree that even though the bells are ringing, we should continue until two minutes before the vote?

There being no objection, we have unanimous consent.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC):** Mr. Chair, we're starting a study that is very important, and people from the departments have come to testify, but we know very well that we're going to be interrupted again, and we'll lose 30 minutes.

In that context, is it possible to schedule another time slot? We'll do the work as planned with these people today, but I'm sure their expertise is relevant enough to have them come back and give us more information.

Would the committee agree to an extra hour or hour and a half so that we can do our work properly?

**The Chair:** Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.):** I think Mr. Godin missed Ms. Boyer and her team so much that he wants to see them again for four more meetings.

I understand why he's proposing this. I agree, as long as it's for one hour, because I want to respect the schedule of Ms. Boyer and the officials who have been with us for several weeks.

**The Chair:** We can schedule an extra hour next Friday. I think there's unanimous consent.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** I was going to suggest that as well.

**The Chair:** We'll let the clerk handle that. It'll be at least an hour, because we're going to lose more or less an hour today.

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

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux (Director General, Francophone Immigration Policy and Official Languages Division, Department of Citizenship and Immigration):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, members of the committee.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging that I join today's meeting from the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

Immigration plays a key role in supporting Canada's immediate economic needs, reversing our longer-term downward demographic trends, sustaining our official languages, and continuing to support humanitarian needs as part of the global community.

In 2019, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, announced a comprehensive francophone immigration strategy that aimed to reach a 4.4% target of French-speaking immigrant admissions outside Quebec by the end of 2023. The strategy also supports the successful integration and retention of French-speaking newcomers and strengthens the capacity of francophone minority communities.

As you are surely aware, we reached the 4.4% target of French-speaking immigrants admitted to Canada outside Quebec before the end of 2022, a year earlier than the target date, and we are committed to at least meeting this target again this year, if we cannot exceed it.

In 2022, Canada welcomed over 16,300 French-speaking newcomers outside Quebec, three times as many as in 2018. This is the highest number of French-speaking immigrants admitted to Canada outside Quebec since we started collecting data in 2006. These French-speaking newcomers have already begun to enrich and contribute to their new francophone minority communities. They will support the preservation of the French language and help address

the labour shortages across Canada, which will be beneficial to population growth and economic prosperity in francophone minority communities.

We reached our target for francophone through concrete actions, including increasing the additional points allocated to francophone and bilingual candidates under the express entry system in 2020; introducing the time-limited temporary resident to permanent resident pathway in 2021, a measure that had no cap; and improving promotional activities in Canada and abroad, including the Destination Canada mobility forum.

New financial investments announced at the end of April as part of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-28 provide \$137.2 million over five years for seven francophone immigration initiatives. These investments provide IRCC with the means to contribute to the vitality of francophone minority communities across the country, notably with respect to their demographic weight. Taken together, the francophone immigration initiatives will contribute to consolidating IRCC's settlement and integration capacity by strengthening the francophone integration pathway and language training opportunities.

These investments will make it possible to continue to offer French-language services of equal quality to anglophone services to a growing number of French-speaking newcomers in francophone minority communities. This additional funding will also allow us to increase our promotional activities and lay the foundation for long-term improvements to selection mechanisms.

Among our initiatives, the new Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration located in Dieppe will explore new avenues to optimize our results and ensure we meet the diverse needs of francophone minority communities across the country.

We are committed to doing even more in the coming years. The new version of Bill C-13 sets out ambitious commitments for the government, particularly with regard to francophone immigration. The department is committed to successfully meeting this challenge. We are currently laying the groundwork for a new francophone immigration policy, including new admissions targets that will be ambitious and achievable.

We will continue to work in close collaboration with partners to provide francophone minority communities with the tools they need to welcome and retain people who want to set down roots in these communities, in particular, by pursuing the welcoming francophone communities initiative.

In closing, I hope I have given committee members a good idea of what our department is doing to encourage newcomers to settle in one of our many francophone minority communities across Canada.

Rest assured that we will do everything in our power to achieve ambitious new francophone immigration goals in the coming years.

With that, I would be pleased to answer the committee's questions.

Thank you.

• (1620)

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

We'll now turn the floor over to Ms. Boyer, from the Department of Canadian Heritage, for five minutes.

**Ms. Julie Boyer (Assistant Deputy Minister, Official Languages, Heritage and Regions, Department of Canadian Heritage):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, committee members.

With me today is Sarah Boily, the director general of Official Languages. Thank you for inviting us to appear before you as part of your study on francophone immigration.

Francophone immigration is a key component of the Government of Canada's vision for the reform of Canada's language regime, which was made public in February 2021 in the document entitled "English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada". Immigration is one of the factors that will help slow the decline of French and support the increase in the demographic weight of official language minority communities.

This key component of the reform of Canada's language regime is being implemented in two stages.

[English]

First, legislative measures on francophone immigration are included in Bill C-13, which aims to strengthen and modernize the Official Languages Act. Bill C-13, which you know well, proposes to add to the text of the act the obligation for the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to develop a francophone immigration policy that will contain objectives, targets and indicators.

Second, the initiatives in support of francophone immigration in the recently released official languages action plan for 2018 to 2023 total over \$137 million over five years. There are also many other initiatives in the action plan that will contribute to establishing successful conditions for welcoming, integrating and retaining newcomers in official-language minority communities.

• (1625)

[Translation]

With Bill C-13, the desire to protect the demographic weight of francophone communities is being realized. In addition to providing for the adoption of a francophone immigration policy, which is a positive measure in itself, the bill reiterates the importance of essential sectors for the vitality of official language minority communities, such as culture, education, health, justice, employment and immigration.

[English]

Moreover, by strengthening part VII of the act and specifying the obligations of federal institutions to take positive measures and assess their impact, federal institutions are encouraged to take posi-

tive measures in all of these key areas. Restoring the demographic weight of francophone communities is really a shared responsibility and requires all key federal departments to play their part.

[Translation]

Francophone immigration is one of the four pillars on which the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-28 is based. As I mentioned, this pillar is the subject of new investments of more than \$137 million over five years across seven initiatives in support of francophone immigration.

Through these initiatives, the federal government will stimulate francophone immigration to Canada in a number of ways.

[English]

Through these initiatives, the federal government will support Canadian employers in recruiting French-speaking foreign workers and increase supports provided to French-speaking immigrants upon their arrival in Canada. Colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada are developing an integrated approach to francophone immigration to stem the decline in the demographic weight of francophone populations in Canada. As well, the federal government plans a targeted expansion of promotion and recruitment supports for francophone immigration as well as a corridor for the international recruitment of French, French second-language and French immersion teachers.

[Translation]

I would also like to add that, in addition to the immigration initiatives that will be prepared and implemented by my colleagues at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Canadian Heritage supports the initiative to support the recruitment and retention of French-language teachers in Canada, which aims to recruit and retain teachers from recent immigration.

Finally, in the context of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-28, we are committed to fostering diversity, inclusion and equity objectives through new initiatives to support the most vulnerable clientele.

In conclusion, I would like to say that immigration is one of the threads, if not one of the cables, that will make it possible to formulate a successful reform of Canada's language regime.

We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Boyer.

Just to get us up to speed after the clause-by-clause study of Bill C-13, I want to tell you that the first round is six minutes for each political party. The subsequent rounds are five minutes for the official opposition and the government, and two and a half minutes for the second and third opposition parties.

We begin the first six-minute round for each party with the first vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being with us today. There are people around the table who we've seen frequently over the last few weeks and months, and we're glad to have been able to build a good relationship. I apologize for the inconvenience of the procedure in the House of Commons.

My questions will be directed first to Mr. Desruisseaux from IRCC. They will be brief and to the point.

Mr. Desruisseaux, I thought your opening remarks were interesting, in that I understood that everything was going well in terms of immigration to Canada and francophone immigration.

You said that in 2019, IRCC announced a francophone immigration strategy to reach a target of 4.4%. What was the target before 2019?

• (1630)

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** To my knowledge, there was no clearly defined target that was agreed upon. However, that's something I'd like to check.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

If it's possible to pass that information on to the clerk, we'd appreciate it.

You also mentioned that in 2022, Canada welcomed more than 16,300 francophone newcomers outside Quebec, three times more than in 2018.

What was the impact of this on the demographic weight of francophone immigrants in Canada?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Do you mean the demographic weight of the communities?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I'm talking about the demographic weight of francophones in Canada.

Has achieving our objectives maintained the demographic weight of francophones in Canada, that is, people who speak French?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** If we consider the admissions that were confirmed last year, and if we compare them to the statistical projections in terms of demographics, this result contributes to slowing the decline.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** It means that we're not breaking even. This result is not enough.

Is that it?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** That's right, it's not enough.

The demographic studies, including those commissioned by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, suggested much higher increases in admissions.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** They suggested a certain number per year in order to catch up.

You made a good presentation to the committee, and the picture was very bright. However, we know that more needs to be done. I'd like you to tell us more about the Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration in Dieppe, New Brunswick.

How long has it been open?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** The centre—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** That's a technical question—

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Okay

The centre opened in November.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** How much money was invested in this centre before the renewal of the action plan for official languages in 2023?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** I don't have the exact figures, but these amounts were absorbed by the department while waiting for the investments made under the action plan.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Is it the Department of Citizenship and Immigration or the Department of Canadian Heritage?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** They have been absorbed by IRCC.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** How much money has been allocated to the centre for the next five years?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** An amount of \$25 million has been allocated to this initiative.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Do you know how much money was invested before the action plan was adopted?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** It's marginal, because we're talking about operational costs.

The launch of the centre and the immediate priorities pointed to staffing. For us, it was really important to build the necessary platform to be ready as soon as the funding was confirmed.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Desruisseaux, how will the centre allow us to have more French-speaking immigrants quickly?

It should be remembered that today's study is about increasing francophone immigration. In what way will the Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration in Dieppe have a positive impact on the increase in francophone immigration in the Maritimes in the near future?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** The centre has a national mandate, but it will be one of many measures that will contribute—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** How will the centre contribute to it?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Essentially, it will promote new measures that will enable us to intensify our efforts to promote francophone immigration.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So the measures aren't defined.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** The measures are—

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So they haven't been defined yet.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** We're in the process of finalizing the terms of the programs.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

Mr. Desruisseaux, if you had a magic wand, if you were a magician who had to choose proactive and effective measures to implement quickly in terms of francophone immigration, what would you suggest to the committee?

You've made us think things are going well. You told us that what you were doing was quite good. Yes, it's probably good, but we on the committee want to do more, faster.

What advice would you give the committee?

**The Chair:** You have 40 seconds.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Do I only have 40 seconds?

We absolutely have to promote promotion. Promotion is the starting point. In our opinion, if we want our measures to be far-reaching, it's important to increase the number of admissions.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** How can we do that?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** If we want to increase our pool of francophones, we must promote Canada as a destination of choice. We must first have applicants, and then go out and find candidates.

• (1635)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** I should have asked the question earlier, because now I have other questions. Thank you, Mr. Desruisseaux.

**The Chair:** You still have 10 seconds, Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

Mr. Desruisseaux, if you had to take just one measure to get immediate results with African countries, which represent a large pool of francophones, what would it be?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** I would like to turn to my colleague, Mr. Jacques.

**The Chair:** It's too late now, but it's an excellent question, and we'll come back to it later.

Ms. Kayabaga, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses who are with us today, and I'm interested in the answer that Mr. Jacques was going to give to my colleague Mr. Godin.

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** If I had one measure to suggest to promote Canada on the African continent and to increase the number of francophone candidates interested in immigrating to Canada, outside Quebec, it would be an advertising campaign for people who are considering immigrating abroad, outside Africa.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you for the answer, which allows me to make the connection with my next question.

Several people on this committee have talked about systemic barriers. We know that 60% of francophones are in Africa. However, when we look at the figures on the admission rate of francophones from West Africa, that is, from Black francophone Africa, we realize that they are very low.

You understand that these rates must be taken into account when determining the number of visas to be granted to students wishing to come and study in Canada. How can you manage this so that we continue to attract talent to Canada?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** First of all, I would like to mention that West Africa is one of the main pools of francophone candidates for immigration. One of our biggest sources is Cameroon. Then there are the North African countries, France, of course, as well as the Ivory Coast.

Then, in terms of the acceptance rate of study permits for francophone students from Africa, who aren't immigrants as such, but students, it's generally lower than elsewhere.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm sorry, but my time is limited, so I want to move on to the next question.

Can you tell us a little bit about the resources that the department already has to strengthen all of these measures? What are you missing to be able to do that?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** The department has added two immigration offices on the African continent, in Addis Ababa and—

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Are two offices enough, or do you need more?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** That's one of the measures.

Also, since 2018, 67 new positions have been created in immigration offices located on the African continent.

Finally, our network is integrated: when the resources in our offices on the African continent are insufficient to ensure the processing of applications, we can count on a helping hand from immigration offices elsewhere in the network or in Canada. This allows us to ensure more equitable processing times.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Since the creation of these two offices, have you seen a change in the numbers, which are very low?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** If we talk about study permit applications, the acceptance rate—

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** No. I'm talking about the acceptance rate for francophone students from West Africa. The numbers are low. Since you've taken steps to address this issue, do you think the situation has improved? Do you have any data that can confirm that this is the case?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** I have data on the acceptance rate of study permits granted to French-speaking Africans in general, but not only from West Africa. In 2021, the acceptance rate was 27%, while in 2022, it rose to 35%. So there has been an increase in the number of French-speaking African students.

• (1640)

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Is this data detailed by region or by country? Could you send that data to the clerk?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Yes, absolutely.

**The Chair:** You still have one minute and forty seconds

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Okay.

Mr. Desruisseaux, since you intend to strengthen the reception capacities of francophone minority communities, what measures are you putting in place to do so?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** We talked briefly about promotional activities. All of our settlement and integration efforts are aimed at ensuring that there are poles of attraction, that the host communities are well prepared and that the conditions are in place to ensure the success of newcomers.

A great deal of progress has been made since the implementation of the francophone immigration strategy. Funding for francophone communities in Canada for the settlement of francophone immigrants has increased from \$39 million in 2019 to \$53 million in 2020 and to \$72 million in 2022.

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

I'll just reiterate to the witnesses that if they have any documentation to support their answers, they can send it directly to our clerk.

Before I move on to the next questioner, I would like to inform the committee that I am on the clock for the vote, and that there are 25 minutes and 42 seconds left. When there are about two minutes left, I will let you know, don't worry.

Our next speaker is the second vice-chair of the committee.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I would like to know if there is anything planned regarding francophone immigration to Quebec.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** As far as francophone immigration to Quebec is concerned, for us, the framework remains the Canada-Quebec Accord.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

Will anything be done? There's a risk of robbing Peter to pay Paul. Since the pool of francophone immigrants isn't unlimited, if you work hard to welcome more francophone immigrants outside Quebec, isn't there a risk of receiving fewer in Quebec?

We know that francophone or francotrope immigration to Quebec is crucial. This is the main reason there has been a slight increase in language transfers to French, which are now tending to level off.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** The accord provides a framework for co-operation between the federal department and its Quebec counterpart. This co-operation is excellent, and there have been discussions about the risk you mentioned. We must remember that we are dealing with the international Francophonie. We are talking about a pool of 350 million people. The Quebec government has been very active and effective for many years in terms of promotion. In short, there is a lot of collaboration with the Quebec government in the field. It's something we're watching closely.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, there is nothing concrete yet.

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Mathematically, you're right. We target the same clientele. However, it seems that the planet is sufficient for the different levels of government. It's an ongoing dialogue.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We'll have to see.

There was an article in *La Presse* that talked about the fact that Quebec is trying to attract more French-speaking immigrants, and the federal government is trying to attract them to outside Quebec, and that this creates a conflict. At the federal level, express entry is the platform for selecting newcomers. In Quebec, it's Arrima, which we're told isn't very well connected. The article in *La Presse*

seemed to blame Quebec, but lawyers told me that it was rather the opposite.

Without wishing to blame anyone, I don't know if anything is planned in this regard. We're also told that francophones have an advantage in applying outside Quebec because the federal government gives 50 more points to those who speak French. They have a better chance of being accepted, whereas in Quebec, you have to have the Certificat de sélection du Québec, which makes the process a little more complex. So, basically, there's nothing planned in this regard.

• (1645)

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** In accordance with the Canada-Quebec Accord, Quebec is in charge of the selection process. In my opinion, just like the federal government, the Quebec government can put forward facilitating measures. I don't have the details of the article we are talking about.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Some people tell me that many newcomers are tempted to move outside Quebec because they think it's easier and faster to obtain permanent residence or citizenship. We'll see what happens, but it's certain that anything that might harm francophone immigration to Quebec will accelerate the decline of French, not only in Quebec, but across Canada.

Charles Castonguay has conducted several studies on francophone immigration, assimilation and the movement of Quebecers outside Canada. We know that language transfers to English increase with each census, outside Quebec and even in Quebec now. If newcomers settle outside Quebec and become rapidly anglicized, it is like pouring water into a leaky bucket.

Is there any data on the situation and on language transfers? Have you evaluated these factors or do you plan to do so?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Yes, such data exists, but I don't have it. I know that data on interprovincial mobility is more difficult to obtain, but we do have data that provides good indications on retention. We could provide that to you.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'd like you to send them to us, yes.

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada tells us that a target of 4.4% of francophone immigration isn't enough. Do you plan to increase the immigration thresholds?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** In the policy being developed, we're doing the groundwork to ensure that the department will comply with the new requirements set out in Bill C-13, which commits the department to developing the necessary measures to ensure that the demographic weight of francophones is restored and that the way is paved for growth.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Desruisseaux. We can come back to this.

There are 19 minutes left before the vote.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you, and thank you to the witnesses.



Mr. Desruisseaux and Mr. Jacques, I'd like to talk about targets as well. We know that, according to the FCFA's studies, a 12% annual rate of francophone immigration outside Quebec is needed to reverse the decline of French and revive the francophone economy. What means are you giving yourself to succeed in exceeding the target of 4.4% of francophone immigration outside Quebec in Canada?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** I beg your pardon. I misunderstood the last sentence of your question.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** What means are you giving yourself to succeed in exceeding the 4.4% target for francophone immigration to Canada from outside Quebec, since we know that it is essential to exceed it in order to reverse the decline of French?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Essentially, we're in the process of developing a policy that will provide a framework for all measures and give teeth to the 2019 francophone immigration strategy that I referred to. It's about making sure that it's consistent with the commitments in Bill C-13 and that we can develop measures.

You've seen the announcements in the Official Languages Action Plan 2023-28. That gives a good idea of some of the measures that will follow. However, the policy will essentially put forward measures that will cover the entire continent in immigration, measures to promote Canada internationally. I mentioned the settlement program and the francophone integration pathway. So we want to make sure that—

• (1650)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I know you've already touched on this, but let's talk a little bit about recruitment and the work that needs to be done on the ground.

In its report on francophone immigration, the Senate recently recommended increasing resources for visa offices in sub-Saharan Africa. We also know that Cameroon represents a pool of many more potential francophone immigrants, yet the Canadian embassy that provides visa and immigration services is in Senegal.

Do you intend to add these services in Yaoundé, Cameroon? What's your plan to increase the number of offices and open new ones in sub-Saharan Africa?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Mr. Jacques, do you want to answer that question?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** In terms of processing applications, we can rely on the entire network of 60 offices that the department has set up abroad, as well as the offices established in Canada, so we don't have to rely on offices in sub-Saharan Africa or Africa generally to ensure we meet the targets set by the department.

Adding resources does help facilitate the process. As I mentioned earlier, we've added resources in sub-Saharan Africa, and we've also created offices, but I'd like to emphasize an even more important element, which is the need to act as an integrated network. It allows us to spread out the workload and make sure that we meet the targets set by the government.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** It's nice to say that you're going to work in an integrated way, but the targets we have in front of us are very ambitious.

Specifically, are you going to add points of service to process visas and immigration applications at the Cameroon embassy, for example? Is that part of your plan?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** There are no plans at the moment to add resources in Yaoundé, Cameroon. We plan to use the office in Cameroon for printing visas and promoting immigration outside Quebec, and we'll rely on all IRCC offices to process applications.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** More generally, under the current system, what authority does Canada have over the visa application centres, since they're all run by private companies, such as VFS Global?

Does Canada have the jurisdiction to increase the number of visa application centres in African countries?

If we want to increase the number of French-speaking immigrants in the country, shouldn't Canada take over the processing of visa applications?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** VFS Global is a private company that provides us with visa application centre services. It has contractual obligations towards Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and the Canadian government.

Therefore, we have some control over this private company, and we can open other offices. We can ask this private company to open other visa application centres elsewhere in the world, if we're prepared to make the financial contribution required.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** In our view, if we're serious about meeting these ambitious targets, Canada is going to have to take the lead and take back the essential services that have been privatized and that contribute directly to the recruitment, reception, and immigration process of francophones.

My last question—

**The Chair:** Your six minutes are up, Ms. Ashton. It goes by very quickly. You'll have an opportunity to continue the discussion later.

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

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

Mr. Desruisseaux, with regard to what Mr. Jacques said, we've noted for several years that it was difficult for immigrants to access immigration offices, as my colleague Ms. Ashton just said. I give the example of Reunion Island. Reunion Island's population is young, and it's an extremely important and interesting pool, not only for people who would like to come and study in Canada, but also for workers who want to immigrate to Canada. The problem was that people had to go to Paris to provide their biometric data. I don't know if that's still the case, but it was in some French-speaking places, like Reunion Island.

Are we looking at giving these people services closer to them so that we can count on this important pool? I think the average age is 35 or 40, or even under 35.

Do you have anything like that planned? You can promote as much as you want in many countries, but if you don't provide services close to these people so that they can take the necessary steps, it becomes a very significant obstacle.

• (1655)

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Mr. Jacques, would you like to answer this question?

**Mr. Olivier Jacques:** Residents of Reunion Island have to actually provide their biometric data and have their photograph taken at a visa application centre. They can provide their biometric data in any country or visa application centre. They don't have to travel to Paris. The closest centre to Reunion Island is in Mauritius. To get there, you have to take a 45-minute flight and spend a few hundred dollars. However, I agree that this is an additional step that residents of Reunion Island must take in order to hope to study, work or immigrate to Canada.

Canada could consider opening a visa application centre on Reunion Island. However, we need to see how many applications there are and whether it's profitable for private enterprise to open such a centre on this island. I know this was studied in the past, and the number of requests proved insufficient.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I'll come back to what Mr. Desruisseaux said earlier.

If francophone immigration is adequately promoted, and Canada is present to facilitate recruitment, this would inevitably generate applications and encourage the growth of francophone immigration.

There are still a lot of young people who have come to Canada. I've met many of them, who are still here. They came to study, especially at Quebec CEGEPs. They went to study in the Lower St. Lawrence, where many of them eventually put down roots. They became Canadian citizens, and they participate in the Canadian economy. So that's kind of what we're aiming for, in principle.

My next question is for the three of you.

What could the Standing Committee on Official Languages do to help you do your job, to ensure that we reach the targets, whether yours or those of the FCFA, of 12%, 15% or 20% of francophone immigrants?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** The committee has already done a lot of work, particularly with Bill C-13. The requirements are quite clear.

The work ahead of us certainly concerns IRCC. Despite all the progress of the last few years, it's true that there's still a lot of work to do. However, all this work involves many other players and many other federal partners. Positive action is going to be critical.

When we meet with people on the ground, people who provide services to newcomers and people in the communities, they often tell us about concerns related to the issue of housing and access to child care, school services and health services. These are obviously services that are essential and that play a role not only in attracting people, but also in retaining them in the communities.

• (1700)

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

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

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, witnesses, for being with us today.

Thank you very much, Ms. Boyer, for participating in our meeting. It's been so long since we've seen each other, as Mr. Godin mentioned. We were missing you and we thought it would be appropriate to invite you. In fact, Mr. Godin just told me that you are part of the family.

On a more serious note, I don't necessarily want to talk about the countries that Canada is targeting for francophone immigration, but rather about the needs that we have in our communities. We need to determine our needs and the needs of the Canadian Francophonie, particularly in the areas of early childhood and education. We know that there's a labour shortage in early childhood, which exists everywhere in the Canadian Francophonie. I'll let my other colleagues talk about the Quebec Francophonie, with all due respect.

Yesterday, for example, Canada announced the extension of the agri-food pilot program, which will make it possible to determine where the needs are in our communities. It will also facilitate access to permanent residence.

Is it possible to do the same things within the Francophonie? Are we able to establish the needs in collaboration with the authorities and organizations on the ground, and then turn to IRCC? People often point fingers at you and say that the department isn't doing its job, but I'm not sure where we can go to get francophone immigrants and what exactly our needs are.

Do you agree that it's important to determine what our needs are in all communities in all provinces, from one end of Canada to the other?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** Yes, I totally agree with that.

A better knowledge of labour needs will facilitate the way we target our recruitment efforts, for example. It'll allow us to know where we need to make efforts to fine-tune the selection process. I'm also thinking of ways to match the needs of communities and employers with those of international applicants who have already begun the process of determining where they want to settle.

Last fall, Mr. Jacques and I went to Rabat, Morocco, for Destination Canada. I spoke with prospective immigrants. The question that came up most often was about labour needs. They wanted to know what we could offer them. Among them were people specialized in the health field as well as teachers.

Some of the needs were very well defined in the public consultations, but we want to know what the communities' needs are, because they have their own specific needs.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** We know that some communities have major problems in terms of health and education.

Is there good communication between our education system, the provinces and IRCC? Could we improve it?

How can we better determine the needs in the communities? Cameroon was mentioned earlier, and you mentioned Morocco. How do we target our efforts there, especially if there is no embassy or if there are geographical barriers, for example? Here we're lucky; we have highways 401, 416 and 40, so travel is easy. However, I know this isn't the case in some countries, where even air travel is complicated. I sometimes hear that people from Gabon have to go through Cameroon first to get to Dakar. They need money to get there, just to immigrate to Canada or to get a visa.

How do we tie all these elements together and improve the process to facilitate francophone immigration?

**Mr. Alain Desruisseaux:** First, the process can certainly be improved. It involves a number of players, and co-operation is essential. Many efforts have been made to improve this. I'm thinking in particular of the efforts that have been made to build bridges with the communities themselves and to ensure that the work corresponds to their needs. The FCFA is very supportive of that, in terms of aligning our efforts with the needs of the communities.

On the federal-provincial front, there is a lot of discussion at the Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration table, and there will be more. There's also a lot of discussion at the table of the Ministerial Council on the Canadian Francophonie, or MCCF.

• (1705)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Desruisseaux.

There are two and a half minutes left before we have to suspend to go and vote, and I have two questions for you, colleagues. Since everyone is sitting at the table—virtually, in the case of Ms. Ashton—I'll ask you the first one.

Is there unanimous consent to resume the meeting immediately after the vote?

Everyone is in agreement.

Secondly, we've lost a little bit of time because of the voting, but we could extend the meeting until 6:00 p.m. Do we agree to extend the meeting?

**Mr. Joël Godin:** No, Mr. Chair.

We can go until 5:45 p.m. at the latest.

**The Chair:** Okay.

I'll extend the meeting as long as possible.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** We've talked about inviting the witnesses back, but I don't want us to do it for 15 minutes. It would be a waste of time.

**The Chair:** Yes, I understand.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, I've done the math, and I think we should end the testimony for today, because we have to discuss our business after the meeting. We've heard 36 minutes of comments from our guests, which means we're 84 minutes short.

So I'd suggest that we end our guests' testimony and take an hour and a half at another meeting to make up for that lost time, ideally Friday. I find this very interesting, and it's their testimony that will form the basis of our study. If they're not available, we'll understand. It's the clerk's job to arrange that.

**The Chair:** Are you available on Friday? Is there a consensus around the table?

Ms. Ashton, you've indicated that you're okay with that. That's fine.

Is there unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I'm going to suspend the meeting so we can go to the vote.

Witnesses, you are—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Am I going to get my turn back at the next meeting?

**The Chair:** No, we can't do that. We're going to start from the beginning, which is even better for you, because you're going to have another six-minute round.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So we'll start from the beginning, is that right?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's right.

I'm going to suspend the meeting so we can go to the vote.

Witnesses, we'd like to thank you for being with us today. We'll see you on Friday.

The meeting is suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]





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