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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Friday, June 2, 2023

• (0925)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** We will now begin the public part of the meeting.

Welcome to meeting number 62 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on April 21, 2023, the committee is meeting to continue its study on increased francophone immigration to Canada.

I would like to inform the committee that all members and witnesses participating remotely have completed the required connection tests in advance of the meeting.

To ensure that the meeting runs smoothly, I would like to give some instructions to the witnesses and members.

Please wait for the chair to recognize you before you speak. If you are attending via videoconference, click on the microphone icon to turn on your mike, and please mute it when you are not speaking.

As far as interpretation is concerned, those participating via Zoom can choose at the bottom of the screen between the floor, English and French. Those in the room can use the headphones to select the desired channel.

I would remind you that all interventions by members and witnesses must be addressed to the chair.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses.

First of all, we have with us Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs, former director of planning and accountability for the Quebec government's Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration. She is appearing as an individual and joins us by videoconference.

We also have with us Ms. Bintou Sacko, director of Accueil francophone du Manitoba. I'd like to say good morning to her: I know it's early in Manitoba.

From the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, we have Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko, vice-president, and Mr. Alain Dupuis, executive director. They're regulars. I'd like to welcome them once again.

Finally, we have Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden, manager of the National Consultation on Economic Development and Employability for the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Canada, or RDÉE Canada.

Each witness will have five minutes to make their presentation, before we open the floor to questions. I'll let the witnesses know when they have about 30 seconds left. I'll be very strict about time, because there are a lot of witnesses and I want everyone to be able to ask questions, and there will certainly be many. I want to make this clear so that the witnesses won't be offended if I interrupt them after five minutes.

Ms. Meggs, you are the first to speak. You have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs (Former Director of Planning and Accountability, Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Francisation et de l'Intégration, Gouvernement du Québec, As an Individual):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's always an honour and a privilege to appear before you.

Since our last meeting in April 2022, on this same matter, a number of important events and decisions have occurred.

On the federal side, Bill C-13, An Act to amend the Official Languages Act, was passed by the House of Commons. Congratulations. I know you worked very hard.

On the Quebec side, the reform of the Charter of the French Language has been adopted and is now being implemented. Most recently, the Minister of Immigration, Francisation and Integration announced her own initiatives concerning immigration and the French language.

This morning, I want to draw your attention to a particular commitment in Bill C-13: that the federal government, recognizing and taking into account the fact that French "is in a minority situation in Canada and North America due to the predominant use of English," is committed to "protecting and promoting French." The bill even recognizes "the necessity of protecting and promoting the French language in each province and territory" and states that every federal institution must avoid, or at least mitigate, the direct negative impacts of this commitment in carrying out its mandate.

If there's one area where recognizing the importance of protecting the French language in Quebec has been clear over the past 50 years, it's immigration.

The preamble to the Couture-Cullen agreement, signed in 1978 by Canada and Quebec, recognized that immigration "must contribute to Quebec's social and cultural enrichment, taking into account its specifically French character."

The Meech Lake accord incorporated the principles of this agreement and went even further. It provided that Canada would conclude an agreement on immigration with Quebec that would provide an undertaking by Canada to withdraw services for the linguistic and cultural integration of all immigrants wishing to settle in Quebec, where those services are provided by Quebec.

The Canada-Quebec Accord relating to Immigration and Temporary Admission of Aliens, signed in 1991 and still in force today, implements this undertaking, despite the failure of the Meech Lake accord. As immigration is a shared jurisdiction in the Constitution, the immigration accord sets each government's role in this area. It also has quasi-constitutional status in that it cannot be amended without the consent of both governments.

We now have a reformed Official Languages Act that states that federal institutions must avoid initiatives that might have negative impacts on the commitment to protect the French language in each province. We also have a Canada-Quebec Accord on Immigration that clearly aims to protect Quebec's specifically French character.

I would like to make one last point to complete the picture, outside the legislative context.

English is not only predominant in Canada and North America. The number of English speakers in the world—1.3 billion—is almost five times greater than the number of French speakers—277 million. The pool for recruiting French speakers from abroad is therefore five times smaller. It will never be easy to attract enough immigrants to maintain the demographic weight of French speakers, whether in Quebec, outside Quebec, or in Canada as a whole.

Moreover, it will always be easier to obtain permanent residency in a province other than Quebec. While selection is done by Quebec, admission is done by the federal government. Federal policies and administrative decisions on immigration further limit Quebec's appeal and may draw French-speaking immigrants with temporary status in Quebec to another province to apply for permanent residency. I named a few last year; I could provide you with more examples during the question and answer period if you're interested.

This approach may help meet francophone immigration targets outside Quebec, but such measures go against the spirit and letter of Bill C-13 and certainly against the spirit and objectives of the Canada-Quebec accord. Francophone immigration is critical for the entire Canadian francophonie.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer your questions.

• (0930)

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

I now turn the floor over for five minutes to Ms. Sacko, from Accueil francophone du Manitoba.

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko (Director, Accueil francophone du Manitoba):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you very much for inviting me to appear today.

My name is Bintou Sacko and I'm the director of Accueil francophone du Manitoba. This service is an initiative of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine.

Francophone immigration is one of the top priorities for expanding the francophone space in Manitoba. Three major themes were suggested to us, and I'm going to talk to you about them in a very concrete and pragmatic way.

I'll start by talking about the consular services that are needed abroad to support immigrants from French-speaking countries, particularly Africa.

For some years now, some visa offices, according to the model that was devised, whether embassies or high commissions that are still found in Canada, have been offering services to many countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, the Dakar office has 16 countries in its catchment area, while the one in France has 14. It's also important to look at where international students and French-speaking immigrants come from. Generally speaking, 82% of countries are served by the Dakar office, and 33% by the Dar es Salaam office. Applications from nine African countries are rejected at a rate of 75% to 80%. This has a major impact on the attractiveness of applying, and on the recruitment of people who come from these areas.

It's important for the Canadian government to take concrete action to improve accessibility to services at Canadian embassies and consulates in sub-Saharan Africa. In addition, it must relieve some of the congestion in visa offices by increasing the number of consular services and application processing capacity in several sub-Saharan African countries. It must also review the mechanisms for assigning visa officers to French-speaking African countries, in order to remove systemic barriers for Canadian citizens of immigrant background who also have experience in the communities and who understand the francophone immigration strategy very well. We also need to review the reasons for arbitrary refusal of visas and study permits, and try to eliminate them altogether. Indeed, it's the system that generates them. Finally, we need to properly align Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada practices in embassies with francophone immigration objectives in our francophone communities. I think this will help increase acceptance rates for francophone applicants.

With regard to temporary residents living in Canada, who constitute an important pool, I think it would be very interesting to take a concrete look at the programs that enable them to access permanent residency. We need to remove certain barriers, such as language tests, for Canadian university graduates and for people working here in a French-speaking environment. French tests are imposed on them and they have to pay for them; it's one of the conditions for permanent residency. We also need to create bridging programs to apply for permanent residency, perhaps in the last year of university studies or afterwards, to help retain students.

There is also a need to make it easier for francophones to apply for refugee status, or to set up a national committee to work with Canadian professional bodies to develop a clear plan for francophones, or immigrants in general, who have degrees in specific fields, such as medicine, nursing, accounting, engineering or teaching.

With regard to the resources and services that need to be put in place to improve the francophone settlement sector, the National Francophone Settlement Advisory Committee has been working for the past three years, in conjunction with a committee, on a national coordination model for the francophone immigration sector. It will soon be tabling its recommendations to IRCC on how to improve the settlement sector. This will have an impact on the integration of immigrants in the future, as the report takes into account the strengthened track record of initiatives by and for francophones. This report will propose, among other things, coordination of the francophone settlement sector and very concrete recommendations that take groups into account.

To improve the approval rate, five-year consular service plans, as well as awareness programs, must be put in place, in addition to equitable promotion and recruitment models, in French-speaking African countries as elsewhere.

• (0935)

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sacko. You'll have the opportunity to say more on the subject when we ask you questions.

We'll now hear from Mr. Méhou-Loko, from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada.

You have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko (Vice-President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting the FCFA to appear today.

I'd like to begin by expressing our deep appreciation for this committee's recent work on Bill C-13. This all-party effort has resulted in a considerably enriched bill.

With regard to francophone immigration, your committee has taken a major step in support of the francophonie by adopting an amendment that reinforces the objective of the francophone immigration policy promised in Bill C-13, namely to restore and increase the demographic weight of our communities. You also chose 1971 as the reference year for restoring the demographic weight of our communities.

We have the political will, we have the legislative framework, and we will have new regulation models based on that framework. The question is whether it's enough. Unfortunately, the answer is no.

Achieving the 4.4% target for francophone immigration by 2022 comes at the end of two decades during which the government has struggled to even get close to this target. Prior to 2019, results rarely exceeded 2%.

Just over a year ago, the FCFA shared with the members of this committee a study it had conducted on francophone immigration targets. This study showed that, even if the government were to reach 4.4% again for 2023-24 and beyond, the decline in the demographic weight of our communities would continue. Our study also shows that any target below 10% would, at best, mean maintaining the current demographic weight.

If we want to put the francophonie back on the path to growth and meet the new obligations set out in Bill C-13, we need to move to a target of 12% as early as 2024, and then increase this target progressively, until it reaches 20% in 2036. We could then restore the demographic weight of the francophone and Acadian communities to what it was in 2001, i.e., 4.4% of the population. By 2036, we would have achieved the objective first set by the Action Plan for Official Languages, which has just been completed, and then by the official languages reform document published by the government in 2021.

On the other hand, we wouldn't even be at the 6.1% of the reference year of Bill C-13, which is 1971. This is important to know. Indeed, a progressive target that would increase from 12% to 20% may come as a surprise, it may seem big, but it's simply because we have a lot of catching up to do after nearly 20 years of stagnation in francophone immigration.

It's also important to know that we didn't invent these figures. The demographic study carried out for the FCFA uses statistical data and the Demosim model, the Government of Canada's demographic projection tool.

Even so, many are wondering how it would be possible to achieve a 12% target, when over the years, the government has failed to meet the current target. The answer is simple: we need to put in place a series of specific measures for francophone immigration, which we've been calling for for years.

There's no lack of goodwill at IRCC, but there's a lack of tools, because it's not just by making small changes to general immigration programs like Express Entry that we'll achieve these objectives. Immigration to minority communities is not the same as immigration to majority communities. We need a francophone immigration policy that includes specific measures and programs, tailored to the realities of the francophone and Acadian communities, but that also takes into account francophone population pools around the world.

Here are a few recommendations.

First, the government must adopt a holistic francophone immigration policy that includes levers tailored to Canada's francophonie, including enhanced funding, to enable francophone communities to participate directly in its implementation.

Secondly, the government must create a separate economic program for francophone immigration outside Quebec, tailored to the labour needs of francophone and Acadian communities, which will enable communities to participate in the recruitment and selection of French-speaking immigrants.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. I look forward to your questions.

● (0940)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Méhou-Loko.

Last but not least is Ms. Abdi Aden, from RDÉE Canada.

Ms. Abdi Aden, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you about the recruitment and economic integration of French-speaking immigrants.

For over 10 years, the members of RDÉE Canada, as well as its network in nine provinces and three territories, have been working closely with Canadian employers, both francophone and non-francophone, raising awareness, mobilizing and supporting them in recruiting and integrating the talents and skills of French-speaking immigrants.

I can tell you that it's not an easy task, because the companies we work with are mostly very small or small businesses. In fact, according to Statistics Canada figures for 2020, almost 1.2 million businesses in Canada, or 97.9%, are small businesses with fewer than 10 employees. Those we encounter in the provinces and territories often have two or three employees. The task is not an easy one. These companies don't always have the capacity and tools to recruit locally or internationally, let alone the resources to integrate these new French-speaking immigrants into their businesses and adopt diversity and inclusion policies.

We're also delighted to have reached our target of 4.4% by 2022. However, now that the course has been set after so many years, we need to maintain and surpass it. We have some catching up to do, especially since the Government of Canada, through the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, has announced a target of half a million new permanent residents by 2025. That's a huge number. A lot of people need to come to Canada.

If we are to succeed in this ambitious project, our system must be reviewed to better recruit and integrate these newcomers, including francophones. At RDÉE Canada, we hope that the proposed modernized system will include a selection process that places greater emphasis on criteria such as the skills required in the job market, rather than on selection criteria related solely to education.

I'm an immigrant myself. I arrived over 20 years ago, and I'm still flabbergasted to hear about the same challenges that existed back then, such as prior learning recognition, the need for a first Canadian experience, or language barriers. In recent years, these have been compounded by issues of discrimination in hiring and inclusion in the workplace.

The difficulties faced by French-speaking immigrants are often the same as those experienced by other immigrants. However, francophone settlement services are not as well developed as those offered to the English-speaking majority. Why is this? Because they're new, and because IRCC funding is often based on the number of applicants we serve. If we have fewer French-speaking applicants, we'll receive much less funding than others. This represents a major challenge for us. As providers of economic integration services, we find that we can't always offer the same quality of service to French-speaking immigrants, due to a lack of resources, as I was saying.

With regard to international recruitment, RDÉE Canada and its network recently adopted a strategy, based on five interrelated axes, for the recruitment of an international workforce in French-speaking areas, and for the engagement of employers. This starts with identifying the workforce needs of Canadian employers. Secondly, it's important to raise the awareness of these employers, because many of them are, as I said, very small companies or small businesses that don't have the means to recruit internationally, or are afraid to do so. So the third step is to support them. Fourthly, we need to set up a continuous recruitment process in French-speaking areas, by adopting targeted missions, in partnership with employers. Finally, it's important to put in place a process to ensure that candidates selected on these missions are matched with employers and job offers.

Whether for international recruitment in French-speaking areas, or for economic integration once people have arrived in Canada, it's important to put in place holistic integration programs that cover all aspects of the recruitment or economic integration process.

In conclusion, the task is colossal, but nothing is impossible. We need to continue the work we've started, but we need to do things differently. It's important that we're strategic, that we all work together, and that we don't go off in every direction.

● (0945)

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Abdi Aden. You'll have an opportunity to expand on your position by answering the questions.

I'd like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations.

I would like to inform you that, for the first round, a representative of each political party will have six minutes to ask questions.

Mr. Marc Dalton will have the honour of opening the ball.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to all the witnesses. The presentations were interesting. I had some technical difficulties, but I'm glad to be here virtually.

My first question is for Ms. Meggs, formerly of the Quebec government.

For the first time, we're hearing that we've reached our objective of 4.2% francophone immigration outside Quebec. What about the number of immigrants to Quebec? Are we meeting our targets? Is this still a problem? Are there too many? Can you talk a little more about the situation of francophone immigration in your province?

• (0950)

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs:** That's an important question.

Recruitment has never been easy, but it has to be said that, in terms of principal applicants in the skilled worker category, Quebec was able, thanks to its selection grid, which it has just set aside and which gave points for French, to select a majority of people who spoke French.

We also have to be careful about what we define as a French-speaking person. In 2010, the Auditor General of Quebec stressed the need to ensure the greatest possible equity. He noted that, in the interviews we conducted at the time—we do fewer now, as everything is done online—immigration officers were a little too discreet about the number of points they gave for French. So the ministry decided to make language tests compulsory, so that everyone would be assessed according to the same criteria.

In other categories, such as family reunification and refugees, there are a few less, but it's coming. In the family reunification category, around 50% of people speak French or say they can communicate in French. However, when it comes to temporary immigration, which has become a big part of immigration in both Canada and Quebec, the results are not as good. There are no language requirements at all, except what the employer asks for, or what the educational institution requires, in the case of a student. This creates a problem, because people from the temporary immigration category make up an increasingly important part of the pool for permanent recruitment. So there's work to be done on that front. This will have an impact in the medium term.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much.

My next question is for all the witnesses.

According to the testimony we've heard, there are two main reasons why many university and college students are turned away. The first reason is that they don't have the financial resources to live here while they study. I understand that. The second reason is that they say they have no intention of returning home after their university studies. I find this a little bizarre. In reality, we want these students to continue their studies to the end, but if they are honest about their intentions, we reject them. It's a bit disconcerting.

Do you think this is a problem?

I'd like each witness to say a few words on the subject. We can start with Mrs. Sacko, from Accueil francophone du Manitoba.

Do you think the system works well for immigrants who come here to study?

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Dalton.

Earlier, I mentioned the reasons for arbitrary refusals to obtain visas and study permits in Canada. I think your question touches on exactly the two reasons for refusal that are really unfair.

When students say they want to stay here in Canada, this is very much in line with the Francophone Immigration Strategy. Indeed, minority communities work hard to ensure that students can stay in Canada after their studies. However, if they say so before arriving in Canada, their visa application is refused.

What's more, they are required to submit a career plan linked to their high school studies. The absence of such a plan can also be a reason for refusal. When a student completes Grade 12, he or she is automatically asked to submit a career plan here. It's—

• (0955)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Sacko. Mr. Dalton's time has already expired.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Six minutes goes by very quickly.

**The Chair:** Indeed. I'm sorry, Mr. Dalton.

It's now the Liberal Party's turn.

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

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses, both in the room and those joining us remotely.

I have a few questions, but I'll start with the representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, since they're here in person.

First, I'd like to understand the situation in Canada, generally speaking.

What are Canada's needs in terms of francophone immigration? Has the FCFA considered the differences between the needs of our minority communities and those of other communities? Are these differences reflected in our immigration policy and criteria? I'm thinking of types of employment, for example. If Ms. Ashton were here today, we could both advocate having people working in early childhood settings, for example.

Do your members across Canada also share their needs with you?

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** Thank you for that extremely pertinent question, Mr. Drouin.

The FCFA has indeed looked into the needs of communities. The needs are immense, insofar as the prosperity of our communities today is threatened by the decline of the French language. We need to re-establish the demographic weight of our communities, and that means targeted francophone immigration to francophone communities outside Quebec.

It's also important to understand the targets. When we do this analysis today, we realize that our immigration targets are very low, and that we haven't managed to reach them to date. In fact, last year, for the first time, we managed to very slightly exceed the 4% target. However, we reiterate what we've said in the past, that it's important today to re-establish the demographic weight of French-speaking communities outside Quebec.

On this subject, the FCFA has been very clear. As I said in my opening remarks, we didn't invent targets. We used the tools at our disposal, which are also used by the Canadian government, to establish targets that will essentially enable us to re-establish the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec as quickly as possible and continue to safeguard our communities, so to speak. That's where we are today. We're talking about safeguarding communities that are threatened because of their demographic weight.

There's another important element to consider, and it's been mentioned. What needs to be done? We must have the courage to take extremely ambitious measures. We have tools at our disposal today, and we need to use them wisely and effectively. For example, we need to set up an immigration program aimed exclusively at francophone communities outside Quebec, rather than taking immigrants from a pool on the same basis as all other immigrants. We really need an immigration policy for minority francophone communities. It's essential.

What's more, it will be very important for this immigration policy not only to target skilled immigrants, but also to target the populations we need. Earlier, you talked about early childhood workers; that's part of the communities' needs. We need them. We can't rely exclusively on Express Entry. We need to go much further and have a program that will enable us to go out and find workers who are essential to maintaining and safeguarding our communities.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much.

Mrs. Sacko, I liked your comment about the need to increase consular services. It's a question I've been asking myself.

Over the past 20 years, embassies in French-speaking Africa have been rationalized. I imagine that the lack of services for communities in French-speaking areas of Africa, which you mention, corresponds to what you hear from them.

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** That's right. While some embassies offer services to 16 countries, Canadian consulates located in other French-speaking African countries are unable to provide any services at all. In order for their application to be processed, nationals of certain countries are therefore obliged to travel or send their file to where these 14 or 16 countries are represented.

What's the point of having a consulate in a country if you can't get any consular service? Perhaps it's time to look into the possibility of re-establishing consular services in these French-speaking countries. It has often been said that the recruitment pool is much larger in sub-Saharan Africa than in any other part of Africa. Consulates in French-speaking African countries should be given far more resources to provide consular and visa services. That way, nationals wouldn't have to spend a fortune travelling from one country to another just to pick up a visa or permit. I cite the example of

the Canadian embassy in Senegal, which offers services to many surrounding countries.

• (1000)

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** On the subject of organizations on the ground that will offer services to potential immigrants, I wonder if we fully understand the reasons why, for example, the acceptance rate for study permit applications from Tunisia is 73%, while it's much lower in other countries.

I understand that a study permit may be refused simply because the information given is incorrect and does not confirm a bank account. In principle, this is fraud. In my opinion, it's a waste of time for our immigration officers.

How do we ensure that agencies in the field submit realistic applications, rather than applications that are unlikely to be accepted and that waste the time of the people responsible for processing them?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Mr. Drouin, but your time is up. You can come back to it later.

Now it's the Bloc Québécois' turn. Mr. Beaulieu, second vice-chair of the committee, will have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Meggs.

You said that there were federal government immigration policies and administrative decisions that hindered Quebec's attractiveness or had the potential to attract French-speaking immigrants with temporary status in Quebec to another province to apply for permanent residency.

Could you give us some examples of the main factors working against Quebec?

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs:** I had, in fact, prepared a short list for you.

Actually, we've just talked about one of the examples, namely the refusal rate for applications for study permits or visitor visas, among others, from Africa in general, but French-speaking Africa in particular.

Another example is the program to regularize the status of people with temporary status, announced in 2021 and due to be implemented soon. This program does not apply to Quebec, and that's normal, since Quebec makes its own selection. However, the federal government provided a cap for immigration in general, but no cap for francophone immigration. This could have encouraged francophones in Quebec to move outside the province to apply for permanent residency.



In a similar vein, privileges have been created for employers outside Quebec who hire French-speaking temporary foreign workers, but these privileges do not apply to Quebec employers. And yet, this wouldn't be a bad idea, since, as I was saying, temporary immigration is now a challenge for permanent French-speaking immigration.

What's more, the fees charged by the federal government to obtain permanent residency are in no way modulated for people already selected by Quebec. And yet, in their case, the federal government's only job is to check their medical and criminal records. It doesn't have to process these files, because that's already been done by Quebec. For example, the federal fee for a family of four applying for permanent residency is \$3,230, while the Quebec fee is \$1,418. Not only does such a family have to go through both processes, but they have to pay twice as much for the second application they have to make to the federal government. I should also point out that Quebec does this at a discount, because, according to its calculation, the cost of processing an application for permanent residency is \$1,115. It's unreasonable for the federal government to impose the same fees on people already selected by Quebec as it does on immigrants elsewhere in the country to obtain permanent residency.

These are examples that illustrate that, in addition to the challenges of having two levels of government dealing with these applications, certain policies contribute to the problem. Yet, from my understanding of Bill C-13 and certainly the Canada-Quebec Accord on Immigration, this should be avoided wherever possible.

• (1005)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In your presentation, you said that the federal approach could help reach francophone targets outside Quebec, but that it went against the spirit and letter of Bill C-13, as well as the objectives of the Canada-Quebec Accord on Immigration.

You've just spoken to us about this. Could you tell us more?

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs:** In fact, we need French-speaking immigrants throughout Canada. That's kind of the point I'm trying to make. If the number of francophones drops in Quebec, it's going to drop everywhere in Canada. There's already a lot of interprovincial migration, so there's no need to encourage that.

The Canada-Quebec agreement on immigration is an example of how the asymmetry of the language issue was recognized 50 years ago. In this agreement, as in previous ones, the federal government clearly recognized the need to protect French in Quebec. To this was added Bill C-13, which specifies that Canada should not implement policies that run counter to the objective of protecting French in all provinces, including Quebec.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I have one last question for the FCFA representatives.

Have you considered the impact of assimilation, i.e., the ever-increasing rates of language transfer to English?

In a context where the rate of assimilation continues to rise, aren't efforts in the area of francophone immigration just a flash in the pan?

**The Chair:** That's an excellent question, Mr. Beaulieu, but your six minutes are up.

It's now Mr. Boulerice's turn, and he's happy to finally come and sit down at the—

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire):** In fact, Mr. Boulerice has been replaced by Mr. Johns.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Johns.

You have the honour of sitting here in the best committee on the Hill.

It's your turn, for six minutes.

**Mr. Gord Johns (Courtenay—Alberni, NDP):** It's a huge honour to be joining you at this committee, especially with such an important conversation.

First, I want to thank the witnesses for the conversation.

I'll start with Mr. Méhou-Loko.

British Columbia, my home province, right now has the fifth-largest francophone community. We're competing for fourth right now. Can you speak about what better supports need to be in place to support immigrants, but also the challenges in ensuring that British Columbia maintains that level within the francophone community and that immigration gets as far west as British Columbia?

We know it's a huge challenge for the francophone community, and for British Columbians in general, to ensure that we maintain that level of francophones.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** Thank you very much for that excellent question.

At the FCFA, we are following the British Columbia issue very closely, as you know. To date, several decisions have been made in this regard.

That being said, I'm going to turn the floor over to the FCFA's general manager, Mr. Alain Dupuis, who will give you a few answers on the subject.

**Mr. Alain Dupuis (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada):** In British Columbia, the challenge is to select more francophones for the Provincial Nominee Program. The majority of immigrants are selected by the province. However, the vast majority of federal immigrants still choose Ontario and Quebec.

This is a conversation that needs to take place between the two levels of government. The federal government certainly needs to think about how to ensure that the immigrants it brings to Canada will settle across the country, so that francophone immigration doesn't essentially benefit Ontario and New Brunswick, as is currently the case. So there's work to be done and thought to be given to the immigrants selected by the federal government and how to ensure that they settle across the country.

However, the provincial part is important. In this regard, couldn't the federal government also encourage the provinces to adopt a quota of francophones in the Provincial Nominee Program, to ensure that the selection is made at all levels?

• (1010)

[*English*]

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

Ms. Sacko, can you speak about what the federal government is doing to support the operations within Accueil francophone du Manitoba and other settlement services?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** Thank you for your question.

At both the federal and provincial levels, governments are very involved in the settlement of immigrants who arrive here. Refugees are also part of the new arrivals. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada funds settlement services for convention refugees, as well as a share of some privately sponsored refugee programs. Settlement services help these people establish themselves in the community, with transitional housing and assistance in acquiring permanent housing, for example. Many services are federally funded, such as employment assistance, health services, cultural services and early childhood services.

The Manitoba government, which is very involved in the process, funds settlement programs for immigrants who come to Manitoba, but it's not enough. When we talk about the program aimed specifically at francophones, we're talking about the principle of services offered by and for francophones. In an English-speaking province where we know that assimilation is very strong, we would also like to see some equity in terms of settlement services and service quality. We'd like to see the aforementioned principle taken into account, and for these services to be managed by French-speaking organizations, specifically to help French-speaking immigrants. Francophone immigrants face a double challenge in minority communities such as Manitoba. The language challenge is real. After their arrival, immigrants are obliged to upgrade their language skills. It's part of their integration process. We have to finance these language courses. This doesn't necessarily delay their integration, but it does lengthen it. If you have to take the time, when you've already...

[*English*]

**Mr. Gord Johns:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

Eighty-five per cent of immigrants from Africa who settled in Manitoba between 2011 and 2021 reported English as their first official language spoken, but only 8% reported French as their first official language.

What are the long-term consequences for francophone immigrants, and for Canadian society in general, if the government's investment in settlement services does not increase?

This is for Ms. Sacko again.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** If settlement services aren't better funded, they'll be discouraged. Our aim is to create a link with the French-

speaking world. There's a lot of effort being put into recruiting francophones who can strengthen the demographic weight of francophone minority communities. When these people arrive and see the language burden, there's a risk that they'll assimilate and move away from the francophone community if they don't also have access to services...

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Sacko. I know six minutes is short, but we have to give everyone a chance to speak.

We will now have two five-minute rounds.

Madame Gladu, you have the floor.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today.

Ms. Abdi Aden, you're very familiar with the situation of services to francophones across Canada. What are the biggest problems in this regard? What is the situation?

• (1015)

**Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden:** I'm going to answer from the angle of economic integration, because that's my field of expertise.

The services we offer are basic. We help immigrants write a résumé, for example, when they need something else. I spoke to you about the different challenges of integration. We're talking about recognition of prior learning and job search, among other things. We're not able to offer much more than basic services to French-speaking immigrants, because we have limited funding.

When it comes to economic integration, there's a lot of work to be done with the employer beforehand. When an immigrant arrives and wants to find a job, that's when we miss an opportunity in Canada. Even if you bring in skilled people, they have to work in the areas of expertise for which they've been trained. Twenty immigrants were once asked to raise their hands if they were working in their field of expertise, and 90% of them didn't raise their hands. It's kind of a waste.

For our part, we're not funded to work with employers. There's a lot of preliminary work to be done to accompany employers and connect them with job offers. These services are almost free. We're told to do economic integration, but it's not just about preparing CVs or giving workers a bit of information about the job market. It's about supporting them a little more deeply, helping them get in touch with employers and working with Canadian employers to get them to hire these French-speaking immigrants.

There's also the entrepreneurship aspect. There's a lot of work to be done in this area, because we have a serious recovery problem in Canada. Many business owners are about to retire, so we need to stabilize the entrepreneurial system in Canada.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you.

[English]

The next question is for Ms. Sacko.

When you talked about increasing consular services abroad, you also said we should get rid of arbitrary criteria. Can you tell us what you think the arbitrary criteria are?

[Translation]

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** I think I mentioned two of these arbitrary criteria. First, if students say they want to stay in Canada after their studies, the officer refuses them the visa outright. If they have to present a career plan and the officer doesn't find it clear, he can refuse them a visa.

In other words, an agent can sometimes reject an application simply because he or she is not convinced of the merits of the case. But what exactly does this mean? Does it mean that the applicant does not have sufficient financial means? Does it mean that the agent simply doesn't like the photo? Does it mean that the form is badly filled in?

There are arbitrary refusals like this which are not justified and which lead to a kind of systematic rejection. It's the system that rejects people, and we have no idea why there are these arbitrary refusals. This needs to be much clearer.

If the file is poorly put together, the person should be given the chance to review or update it. If it's a question of a lack of financial means, the applicant should be given the chance to prove, for example through other bank accounts, that he or she has sufficient financial means to make the application acceptable. The current criteria don't help the client at all, and his file is rejected arbitrarily.

**Ms. Marilyn Gladu:** Thank you.

Ms. Meggs, you talked about the initiatives Quebec has taken to increase francophone immigration. Could you give us a few examples?

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs:** Quebec recently announced that it would make knowledge of French mandatory for all categories of permanent residents. This means that the newcomer will have to know some French before being selected by Quebec. The level of French knowledge will be verified by language tests. In addition...

• (1020)

**The Chair:** Ms. Meggs. I know the speaking time is short. This round was five minutes. You can come back later to answer other questions.

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

**Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses who are with us today to help us find ways to increase francophone immigration to Canada.

I'll start with you, Ms. Abdi Aden. In the past, we've done a bit of recruiting together in the third world for Destination Canada.

As you know, our government has invested \$4.1 billion to ensure that the Official Languages Act will truly facilitate development on the ground. Immigration is one of the four pillars of the Action Plan

for Official Languages 2023-28. How will this investment in the action plan help organizations increase the number of francophone immigrants and retain them in provinces other than Quebec?

**Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden:** Thank you, Mr. Samson. It's a pleasure to talk to you again.

This new investment is very timely and will help us a great deal with international recruitment. I believe there's a \$25-million fund over five years dedicated to this.

As I was saying, we want to put in place a targeted recruitment strategy, targeting countries where there are candidates with the skills Canada needs, to meet the labour needs of employers in every province.

I like Destination Canada and we should keep it, but it would be important to explore other recruitment pools. We need to match employers' needs with immigrants' skills. We need to select people based on job opportunities in the various provinces.

Earlier, Mr. Dupuis talked about the number of French-speaking candidates who settle in provinces other than Quebec. Sixty percent of them settle in Ontario and the remaining 40% in other provinces. This leaves some communities with very few French-speaking immigrants. What's more, the skills of the people living in these provinces don't necessarily correspond to the needs of the job market or to what is required in job offers. Organizing targeted recruitment missions in partnership with employers would therefore go a long way towards improving matters.

Of course, there's the whole aspect of francophone immigration policy that will be deployed. We'll also be improving settlement services, because we need to go beyond the basic services offered by francophone service providers, and offer slightly more specialized services that meet the needs of the candidates we receive.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you very much. I look forward to seeing these improvements in the near future. Thank you for your input.

Representatives of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, you began your remarks by thanking our committee, but we must also thank you for the work you've done and for your testimonials. It helps us make progress on this vital issue.

This year, we're at 4.4% francophone immigration. How did we manage to reach this target this year? The governments of the last 25 years, both Liberal and Conservative, have never been able to exceed 2%. What did we do differently?

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** That's an excellent question, and one we in fact put to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to find out whether a new formula had made it possible to reach the target.

It's true that the 4.4% target has been reached, but it's by no means enough. We need to do better, and as everyone who has spoken so far has said, we need to review our recruitment pools. We absolutely must be a little more innovative in the measures we take and, above all, set much more innovative and ambitious targets.

• (1025)

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** We'll have to dig a little deeper to find the formula, but it's off to a good start.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Samson. Your time is up. Time flies, I know.

The next two questions will be two and a half minutes each.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'll let my friends from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada finish answering.

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

We've certainly reached the 4.4% target, but what have we done better? We've certainly reduced waiting lists. But have we been innovative enough to exceed expectations? You know, I was a journalist when the 4.2% target was proposed, a long time ago. I'm delighted that we've achieved it. In fact, I was present on the day of the announcement...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In terms of integrating language transfers for new arrivals and francophones, do you take this factor into consideration?

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** Absolutely. I'd like to come back to the question you asked us earlier, Mr. Beaulieu. You asked us whether we were taking assimilation into consideration. Assimilation is certainly one reality, but there's another. I stand before you, the father of two children who were born in Ontario, who are Franco-Ontarian and who speak French. The reality of life in French still exists in our communities. Assimilation is certainly present, but the vitality of the communities still exists.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We can tell a lot of anecdotes, but when it comes to figures from scientific studies—

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** Those are facts too.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** All right, but it's the numbers that interest me.

What we see is that over 99% of language transfers by allophones or newcomers are to English. In the case of francophones, it's over 40% or 42%, and this rate increases with each census. In my opinion, this is a factor that needs to be taken into account.

We also have to take into account where immigrants are going to live, something we don't always consider. When they go to live in areas where there are no services in French—and there are many of them—it's hard to imagine that they'll continue to live in French and integrate French into their...

**Mr. Yves-Gérard Méhou-Loko:** I'll let Mr. Dupuis answer the question.

**Mr. Alain Dupuis:** It's a challenge, but it's a bit of a chicken-and-egg debate. If we don't have immigration, the vitality of our communities is not assured, nor is the maintenance of French-lan-

guage services. For our part, we believe in it, and we think that immigrants should be included and sent to communities where there is vitality.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dupuis. That's all the time we have, unfortunately.

[*English*]

Mr. Johns, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**M. Gord Johns:** Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Sacko, can you identify in which sub-Saharan countries you think we need additional consular services? Can you also tell us about the challenges immigrants have with their immigration processes, and maybe add if long wait times influence the decision of immigrants to emigrate to Canada?

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** Thank you for the question.

I'm going to name a few French-speaking countries in sub-Saharan Africa, but it's not an exhaustive list: Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso. None of these countries has consular capacity or what it takes to serve people. The inhabitants of these countries are practically all served by the Dakar office.

One problem is access to Canadian embassies or consulates, which is difficult for prospective immigrants. It's not easy to pass through, enter or request services. Sometimes you have to call a number, which may not be accessible to everyone, especially when we're talking about toll-free numbers in Africa. As a result, people can't find out how their file will be processed, which can take a very long time if it's handled by a consulate. These people have no way of contacting the consulate to find out the status of their file, and this discourages some people. It can be very difficult and time-consuming.

Another problem is the availability of services. If you always have to rely on an embassy located in another country to obtain your visa, where shipping costs are very high, it becomes very complicated for the future immigrant. Some of them wait three or four years for an answer, which is discouraging.

• (1030)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Sacko.

For the next two rounds, the allotted time will be five minutes.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

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

Good morning to all the witnesses. Thank you for being here.

Mrs. Sacko, I'm going to follow up on what you were saying. I'll give you a brief background. In CEGEPs in Quebec, we're having trouble with the acceptability and acceptance of African students, in particular. You talked a lot about the consular services that are offered from one country to another. In your opinion, how can service be improved or extended within consulates or in certain regions or countries in Africa, so that Canada can better help these people come to us?

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** Thank you for the question.

As I said in my opening remarks, I think embassies need to work with French-speaking communities. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada must properly align its practices with francophone immigration objectives. I think Alain Dupuis and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada have often mentioned this. As I said, the communities are working hard to promote and recruit, as well as to help immigrants settle in Canada.

Extending consular services to countries where they don't exist doesn't just involve Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. Other ministries are also involved in this process, and these ministries must determine where services are lacking.

I mentioned the Canadian embassy in Côte d'Ivoire or Senegal. Isn't it time to bring back, little by little, the services that have been abolished or, in some cases, never existed, so that people can access these services directly in their own country? We could also set up a telephone hotline where people could call to find out the status of their case. After two or three years of waiting, some applicants still haven't received an answer, and are simply told that their application is being processed. People don't know who to contact for information. These services could be offered by consulates, which would help or encourage people, especially in Africa.

In Quebec, as far as CEGEP students are concerned, there has been a lot of media coverage of the fact that the system leads to many systematic refusals. Yet many of our applicants come from French-speaking sub-Saharan Africa.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** One of the reasons given for refusal is that these students, it seems, are unable to prove that they have the money to support themselves and pay their tuition fees during their three-year stay here. Yet CEGEPs have notarized documents proving that these students have \$100,000 in their bank accounts in Africa. Yet these students have their applications denied in a response that I imagine is automated.

I'm not sure what's going on here, and we really need to look into this. How is it that a student, through his parents, is able to prove that he has \$100,000 in his bank account, but is told that he can't come to Canada because he can't support himself? Something's not right here. This reason is not valid, it can't be.

I don't have much time left. I don't know if you want to conclude there, Mrs. Sacko.

• (1035)

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** Of course.

It's not a reality, unfortunately. There's also a lot of evidence that applications have been turned down for no financial reason whatso-

ever. Sometimes the files have not even been checked; all the evidence and documents have been provided, but the files have never been processed.

That's why we're proposing the creation of ombudsman or audit offices. When an officer makes a decision, there's no way to overturn it. There is no way to verify the veracity of the elements on which the officer based his decision to refuse an application. There is no recourse. Maybe it's time to have recourse for people whose applications are refused arbitrarily, so that we can at least review their files.

Sometimes these people approach federal MPs through acquaintances they have in Canada, or ask family members to plead their case with federal MPs, so that their file can be processed. It's a long and arduous process, which could be avoided by creating a mechanism to allow people to check what's going on. These subjective decisions have a huge impact on their lives.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mrs. Sacko.

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

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here this morning.

Ms. Abdi Aden, what measures should the government take to increase its drawing power?

**Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden:** Canada attracts a lot of people. It doesn't need to promote itself to attract French-speaking immigrants. You only have to go to Africa to realize that many people want to leave their country to come to Canada.

It's more a question of attracting the people we want. Let's not forget that, at its core, the immigration system serves economic purposes. Canada looks for people to come and work here. This is the *raison d'être* of our immigration system. Today, labour needs are widespread. There are sectors that are more in need of labour—

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** I'm sorry to interrupt, madam. I understand what you're saying, but is there something missing in the way we're advertising? The acceptance process will be accelerated for certain types of candidates. Many people would like to come here, but not all will be accepted. What should the government focus on to attract candidates who will be accepted more quickly because they have the skills we're looking for?

**Ms. Roukya Abdi Aden:** One example that has just been implemented is the results-based system. With its Express Entry programs, the government has just put in place a system that will recruit people with the skills Canada needs.

In the countries where Canada promotes itself, we also need to inform people about our labour needs. That way, the people we're looking for will be more likely to apply. It's not enough to say that Canada is a beautiful, bilingual country. We have to say what our workforce needs are and what skills we're looking for.

We need to set up partnership programs with certain countries. Other countries, such as Germany, have several partnership programs with certain French-speaking countries to attract people with the skills they're looking for.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

Ms. Meggs, can you tell us about the pools from which French-speaking immigrants are most often sought, and what is being done to attract them to Canada?

**Ms. Anne-Michèle Meggs:** There are the Francophonie countries, of course, as well as countries whose nationals can learn French more quickly upon arrival in Canada, such as Spain. However, the majority of applications come from North African countries that are former French colonies. These are the largest pools of French-speaking immigrants. Currently, under the Quebec program, which is the equivalent of Express Entry, 30% of applications come from three African countries: Morocco, Algeria and Senegal. Requests from Senegal have increased a lot recently. That's where people are expressing their interest.

However, I'd like to come back to the question of temporary immigration, because it's people in this category who form the recruitment pool for permanent immigration. Temporary immigration doesn't have the same French-language requirements: The employer can find the workers he wants, and simply specify the language required for the job.

● (1040)

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Thank you.

Mrs. Sacko, when French-speaking immigrants arrive in official language minority communities, what are the biggest challenges they face in living and participating in society?

**Mrs. Bintou Sacko:** If we look at the current situation as a whole, the biggest barriers for people arriving in official language minority communities have to do with the recognition of their prior learning. When we select candidates for immigration, whether under provincial or federal Express Entry programs, we recruit candidates who are highly qualified and who arrive here with many skills and years of experience. Based on their track record, these people are the cream of the crop, but they can't work in their field of expertise. The non-recognition of their prior learning poses a big problem, because it forces these people to rethink their integration goals and settle for jobs that aren't necessarily in their field to build up the necessary experience, which can take a long time.

I also mentioned language not long ago. Language programs need to be very well structured. I'm thinking of learning English, for example. We know how important this is for francophones in minority communities. But programs have been eliminated and waiting lists are long. These people don't have immediate access to these programs to prepare them...

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mrs. Sacko

Witnesses, please forgive me for having to interrupt you during the meeting, but we did manage to ask you a lot of questions. I invite you not to hesitate to send us in writing any additional information you feel is relevant to the committee, through our clerk, Ms. Dallaire.

That said, next week we'll hear from other witnesses on the subject of increasing francophone immigration to Canada.

Once again, thank you for your patience, witnesses. I also thank the members of the committee.

The meeting is adjourned.

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