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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1105)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 66 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.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of June 15, 2023. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

To keep the meeting running smoothly, I would like to outline a few rules to follow for witnesses and members. Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating by video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

For interpretation for those participating via Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either the floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use your earpiece and select the desired language channel.

Although the room is equipped with a sound system that performs well, it is possible that audio feedback will occur, which can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious hearing injuries. The most common cause for audio feedback is an earpiece being too close to a microphone. So we ask all participants to be very careful when using their earpieces, especially when their microphone or that of their neighbour is on. In order to prevent incidents and to protect the interpreters' hearing health, I invite participants to ensure that they are speaking properly into the microphone assigned to them, as well as to avoid manipulating their earpiece and to put it on the table, away from the microphone, when it is not being used.

I remind you that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the “raise hand” function. The committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with our routine motion regarding sound tests, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses have completed the required sound tests before the meeting. That said, I would like to let you know that a witness who was supposed to be here today is not yet here. We don't know if it was an oversight on their part. So we may have to do a sound test along the way.

Welcome, everyone, and welcome to the witnesses.

I invite Mariève Forest—

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Godin.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I would just like a clarification. Normally, we get briefing notes from the Library of Parliament ahead of time, but for this meeting, we only received them this morning at 10 a.m., and the meeting began at 11 a.m.

Does that late submission stem from a computer problem? Is it common? Is this a new practice? Was this document simply submitted only today for uncontrollable reasons?

• (1110)

The Chair: It was indeed for uncontrollable reasons that the document was submitted only this morning at around 10 a.m., if I remember correctly.

Mr. Joël Godin: So this will not be common practice for future meetings.

The Chair: No. However, at the end of this meeting, I would like to take a quick minute to talk to you about the two upcoming meetings. I'll talk to you about that after we hear from all the witnesses.

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

The Chair: So now we have Ms.—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Chair, will it be two speakers per hour or everyone at the same time?

The Chair: We have a big two-hour block, so we'll be able to “mix” our questions based on our areas of interest.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, we will start over the order of questions during the second hour of the meeting. Is that correct?

The Chair: Yes, exactly. This is the format that committees have already agreed to.

I would now like to welcome Mariève Forest, president and senior researcher at Sociopol, who is here in person. From the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, a beautiful province, we have Cyrille Simard, vice-president, development. He is from my region and is participating in the meeting via Zoom. Also joining us in person are two representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones: Valérie Morand, executive director, and Tanya Saumure, second vice-president. The person missing is Luisa Veronis, associate professor at the University of Ottawa. We hope to see her soon and, if she comes, we will do a sound test on the spot.

As usual, we will let the witnesses make a brief presentation of up to five minutes. I am very strict about speaking time. If you don't have time to finish your presentation, that's fine. You will have the opportunity to do so as we ask you questions. I apologize in advance if I interrupt you a little before the end of your five minutes to tell you that you have 30 seconds left.

With that said, we'll begin with Ms. Forest for five minutes.

Ms. Mariève Forest (President and Senior Researcher at Sociopol, As an Individual): Good morning.

I want to thank the committee for taking the time to better understand the dynamics of increased francophone immigration.

As mentioned, I am the president of Sociopol and a senior researcher. We do a lot of work on issues related to francophone immigration.

In recent years, my colleague Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault, other artisans, including Luisa Veronis, who is not here, and I have conducted more than a dozen studies on francophone immigration. As you can imagine, I could talk to you about this for hours, so feel free to ask us questions.

Today, I have chosen to focus my remarks on three findings that enable me to emphasize the somewhat more problematic dynamics that have been noted in recent years.

I would like to begin by emphasizing the importance of supporting the entire integration pathway for francophone temporary residents. I would remind you that the selection of economic permanent residents from former temporary foreign workers, known as the “two-step migration” process, has experienced a significant increase in Canada since the early 2000s.

Following this finding and at the request of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, or IRCC, we conducted three studies—in 2022, I believe—aimed at better understanding the transition pathways to permanent residence for francophone skilled temporary foreign workers who had chosen to settle in the west, in Ontario or in the Atlantic provinces.

According to IRCC data, between 2012 and 2021, just over 10,000 francophones with skilled temporary foreign worker status settled in one of the regions studied. That accounts for between 2.3% and 3.3% of all skilled temporary foreign workers who were welcomed. I am mentioning these temporary residents because we are talking about thousands of francophones who, over the years, have obtained their permanent resident status and who hear about

francophone communities often one, two or three years after they arrive.

To this day, the federal government does not fund settlement services for temporary residents who speak French. There is also no process for welcoming these people. Considering the increase in the proportion of temporary residents who transition to permanent residence and the difficult language retention of French in a minority context, we cannot afford to come into contact with these people several months or years after their arrival in Canada. Therefore, it seems important to us to create a settlement pathway specifically for francophone temporary residents, so that these people understand, even before they set foot in Canada, that francophone institutions are ready to welcome them and integrate them. This is a unique situation. It may not be necessary for anglophones, but it is important for francophones.

I would now like to talk about the importance of deploying a full suite of settlement services and ensuring that they are structurally managed. Year after year, our studies show that the services offered are more comprehensive on the anglophone side. They are deployed in more settings, and the staff of those organizations have access to more forums for consultation and professional development. On the other hand, our studies remind us of the importance of providing a welcome that preserves the linguistic security of immigrants and makes them want to show their roots in French in Canada. This is essential for the well-being of the people we welcome, but also for the vitality of francophone communities.

Through our work with the Comité consultatif national en établissement francophone, a body established by IRCC, we recently conducted a broad consultation with settlement stakeholders in francophone communities, involving more than 100 people. These consultations and the analysis of the services offered clearly show the absence of the principle of substantive equality between the settlement of francophones and that of anglophones. For example, while Canada is recognized as a model for resettling refugees, the ability of francophone communities to provide resettlement assistance in French remains very limited today compared to what is provided in English. The work of this committee has also largely shown the need for the francophone sector to receive support to develop its capacities, to improve its coordination and to ensure the visibility of francophone communities.

• (1115)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left, Ms. Forest.

Ms. Mariève Forest: Okay.

In closing, I would like to talk about the position that could be put forward in the context of immigrant settlement.

We did an evaluation of the welcoming francophone communities initiative, through which 14 francophone communities received funding. The approach relies on a localized and inclusive consideration of immigrants, rather than simply putting the burden on them and their ability to integrate into the community.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

Ms. Mariève Forest: That kind of perspective is more interesting for francophone communities.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I'm sure you'll have a chance to complete your remarks through questions.

Cyrille Simard, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Cyrille Simard (Vice-President, Development, Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick): Mr. Chair, honourable members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to share with you the experience of the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, or CCNB, regarding immigration and increased francophone immigration to Canada in particular. As a francophone training institution located outside Quebec, we are in a good position to enlighten the committee on this issue.

I am speaking today following our November 2022 appearance before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages on the issue of francophone minority immigration. We also had the honour of testifying before Christiane Fox, deputy minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, in connection with the initiative to attract and integrate more francophone immigrants to the country.

Like other institutions of higher learning, the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick is a major pillar in attracting and retaining immigrants in francophone minority communities. As a professional and technical training institution, the CCNB works closely with local economic stakeholders to ensure that its training is aligned with labour market needs and requirements.

Our graduates, after having been with us for a few years, are not only ready to enter the labour market, but have also developed deep ties within our communities. However, while our international students bring real added value, their temporary resident status excludes them from some federally funded settlement services that are reserved for permanent residents. Therefore, a change is essential in that regard to maximize our contribution to their integration and retention.

On the other hand, we believe that introducing a program with simplified access to permanent residence for international graduates outside Quebec would greatly facilitate the achievement of our francophone immigration objectives. Despite the diversity of existing programs, many of these graduates unfortunately face administrative mazes and extensive delays in their efforts to become permanent residents.

In addition, a closer relationship with IRCC is required to manage the increase in immigration with efficiency and integrity. Such cooperation would allow for the exchange of information on study permit approval rates, the monitoring of fraud and the monitoring of our students' permit applications.

We are constantly looking for ways to improve the welcoming and integration of international students. However, we are concerned about the lack of predictability around study permits, given that only 36% of students who apply for them in New Brunswick obtain them. This creates problems such as course overload and increased challenges in terms of access to housing or language preparation. Other options being considered include extending post-graduation work permits for university students to four years and systematically linking work permits to study permits.

The CCNB has seen a significant increase in international enrolment in recent years. To put this in perspective, from 200 in 2016, enrolments surpassed 1,100 this fall, or nearly 48% of our total number of students. This is a positive development, especially when we know that, in 2022, more than 90% of these students applied for a post-graduation work permit and that 90% of them were hired. Many of the students we welcome are from west Africa or central Africa.

To illustrate a concrete situation that we are facing, let's look at the building trades. The country as a whole is facing a housing crisis, and New Brunswick is no exception. However, our growth potential is limited by two factors. First, in many countries, the building trades are passed down from generation to generation or mentor to apprentice without the need for post-secondary education. Second, in a number of regions, these trades are often poorly paid, leading families to perceive a limited future for young people who would like to enter these professions.

Through our successful collaborations with our provincial government partners, local organizations and embassies, our understanding of these issues has grown. As a result, we have seen an increase in enrolment in these programs in particular, but much remains to be done to meet the actual demand.

● (1120)

The Chair: You have 30 seconds left.

Mr. Cyrille Simard: The leap in international enrolment at the CCNB is excellent news, but it also generates major challenges that require a robust and well-structured strategy and, therefore, increased resources, as previously mentioned.

So I remain at your disposal to answer any questions that may help you in your thinking on this subject. If I don't have the answer to a question, I will undertake to provide it to you as soon as possible. Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simard.

Go ahead, Ms. Morand. You have five minutes.

Ms. Valérie Morand (Executive Director, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Actually, it will be our 2nd vice-president, Mrs. Saumure, who will give the opening remarks.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mrs. Saumure.

Mrs. Tanya Saumure (2nd Vice-President , Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Mr. Chair and dear members of this committee, thank you for inviting the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones to appear as part of your study on increasing francophone immigration to Canada. I am accompanied today by our general manager, Valérie Morand.

I'd like to wish you a happy Franco-Ontarian Day, on this September 25.

I look forward to the committee's effective follow-up on this important issue to ensure the sustainability and growth of francophone minority communities across the country.

I would like to talk about the opportunities associated with increased francophone immigration. With the exception of the pandemic period, during which enrolment declined slightly, French-language schools in minority settings are growing steadily across the country. For example, since 2016, more than 13,000 new students have joined the network, while 73 new schools have opened. Many rights holders are discovering that they can send their children to school in French. Many want to pass on their mother tongue to their children, or reclaim it for themselves, as they were previously forbidden to learn French. This growth in school enrolment is largely due to students from recent immigrant families. They are helping to redefine the Francophonie, which is now highly diverse and resolutely plural.

Following the 2021 census, Statistics Canada revealed that the country's linguistic diversity continues to grow. We are also seeing this in our schools, for example at the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario, one of our members that covers the greater national capital region, students and staff from over 130 countries speak 96 languages. Once again, according to the latest data by Statistics Canada, just over four out of every 10 school-age children who attended an official language minority school came from an immigrant background. This, once again, is confirmed by the attendance of students in our schools.

In Ontario, the identity survey recently carried out by the Ontario government to determine students' country of origin, year of arrival and place of birth showed that nearly one in two students in the province's French-language schools, or 44%, came from an immigrant background. This is significant when you consider that 65% of the students in our national school network are in Ontario.

School plays a role that goes far beyond educating children. It is a key player in the integration of these students and their families. Unfortunately, this role is not sufficiently recognized by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. The French-language school system must not only ensure the recruitment, reception and retention of students from recent immigration—what is known in school circles as “RAM” in French—it must promote the transmission of francophone culture and help families settle in our communities. To play effectively this role, the school needs to work hand in hand with organizations that help French-speaking newcomers.

Many of the French-speaking immigrants in our network come from countries in conflict, and therefore need support to ensure their academic success and well-being at school. Yet French-language schools face a chronic underfunding problem. In 2009, the

Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction provided \$5,200 per student for the additional costs associated with French-language schooling in a minority context. In 2023, due to network growth and the rising cost of living, each student will receive just over half of this amount, despite the program enhancement announced by the federal government in the new action plan for official languages.

Ottawa must continue to catch up financially, while the provincial and territorial governments must adapt their funding formulas to reflect the specific nature of French-language schools.

During the current school year, the Supreme Court of Canada will deliver its ruling on the issue of admission management for French-language schools in the Northwest Territories. Immigrant families and Francophile parents would like to be able to enrol their children in French-language schools.

Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, created 40 years ago, must be able to reflect the new reality of our communities.

• (1125)

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left, Mrs. Saumure.

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: Okay.

The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones also welcomes the upward revision of francophone immigration targets, not only to ensure the demographic weight of francophone communities outside Quebec, but also to meet the crying need for manpower in French-language schools.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Saumure.

The witness who was supposed to be here hasn't arrived yet, so we're going to begin the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes.

Mr. Godin, the first vice-chair of the committee, you have six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish our Franco-Ontarian friends all the best. It is important that the Standing Committee on Official Languages keep them in mind today.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for participating in our meeting. It's important that you give us the necessary tools so that we can do a better job.

Ms. Forest, earlier you mentioned that we need to support the integration process and pathway. I think that's important. You also mentioned that you received a mandate from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. What was the purpose of the mandate? Has the mission been accomplished?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Thank you for the question.

In fact, there are a number of elements. I didn't receive a mandate from IRCC to carry out this integration pathway. The first thing I talked about was temporary residents. But I think you are referring to the second point I raised.

Mr. Joël Godin: In your opening remarks, you talked about a request from the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. I simply want to know what the objective of that request was and whether that objective was achieved.

Ms. Mariève Forest: Okay.

The request was for research on the transition of qualified francophone temporary foreign workers to permanent residence. We needed to understand how this transition was taking place and the difficulties experienced, as well as how this transition could be improved. In our research, we looked at three regions: the west, Ontario and the Atlantic region.

The reports are not published yet, but we have tabled them and they will be published. They are currently being translated.

• (1130)

Mr. Joël Godin: You talked about the fact that Canada is an international model, but you also said that the lack of substantive equality between the integration of anglophones and francophones was a problem here in Canada. Can you tell us more about that?

Ms. Mariève Forest: The perception is that Canada is a model for the integration of immigrants in general. However, I don't think that Canada is a model for the integration of francophone immigrants.

Is there substantive equality at each stage of the integration journey? Are we achieving substantive equality when it comes to recruitment? The answer is no. Is substantive equality achieved in terms of the services provided? Do francophone immigrants receive quality settlement services? To that, I would say that the quality and quantity of services are different between the anglophone and francophone sectors.

In my opening remarks, I also talked about resettlement services. There aren't really a lot of services offered in French to refugees. In addition, no active offer is made to these people when they arrive in Canada. In other words, we aren't telling them that they have the right to be welcomed in French, and we're not asking them what their preference is in that regard. I think that's something that could be done.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Forest. I would have liked to ask you many more questions, but my time is limited. Later, I will come back to the targets and their consequences, as well as the fact that we are in catch-up mode.

Mrs. Saumure, earlier, I really liked the fact that you talked about the fact that, in 2009, there was \$5,200 per student, but that in 2023, it's only about 50% of that. What is the impact on the current development of francophone students, considering that the action plan for official languages reduces the federal government's financial participation by about 50%?

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: Welcoming and supporting students and staff from immigrant backgrounds has a cost for our institutions.

We can't do it with 50% of the funds when enrolments are growing. The funding has to increase accordingly.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll ask my question another way. Does this situation mean that immigrants in our communities who want to learn French aren't encouraged to do so because they have fewer services?

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: Most of them don't know about our school system. Not everyone knows that they can get an education in French.

Mr. Joël Godin: That's what Ms. Forest mentioned.

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: Yes. Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada officers, embassies, consulates and high commissions can be part of the solution.

I see that Ms. Morand would like to add something.

Mr. Joël Godin: What I understand is that it's not a question of money, but a question of will and intent, and that the agencies and people who are in contact with these immigrants could provide them with the information, which would not cost a penny more.

Ms. Valérie Morand: I would qualify the answer by saying that both elements are valid.

Yes, the programs need to be better targeted. As Ms. Forest mentioned, there is no substantive equality at all stages of welcoming and supporting immigrants. So there has to be a will to better target the programs. They were modelled on others. For example, the settlement workers in schools program has been modelled on the anglophone model, but it doesn't meet the needs of French-language schools.

We also need better funding to hire officers like those in Ontario, which is a model. Whether it's the newcomer settlement program or the professional integration program for immigrant teachers, funding is granted by the province to each school to hire officers to support the students. Hiring that staff comes at a cost.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Morand. You'll have an opportunity to say more later. I gave you an extra 30 seconds, and I have to be fair to everybody.

Our next round of questions goes to the Liberals.

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for being here this morning.

Ms. Forest, could you prove that there is a correlation between the participation of francophone minority communities in on-the-ground recruitment programs and an increase in francophone immigration to these same communities?

• (1135)

Ms. Mariève Forest: Recruitment is done internationally. Are you talking about that? Are you asking me whether francophone communities travelling abroad to recruit has an impact on those specific communities?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes.

Ms. Mariève Forest: I don't have specific data on that correlation. When we interview immigrants, many tell us that they travelled to Canada after interacting with Destination Canada.

I can also add that there are fewer opportunities to advertise internationally, fewer francophone immigration recruitment activities and fewer offices to process applications in countries with a francophone tradition. This has a negative impact on recruitment capacity.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Does that mean there are not many or they are held to a minimum?

Ms. Mariève Forest: That's not the right word, I'm sorry. I would say that international promotional activities remain limited.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Last year, our threshold for francophone immigration was 4.4%. Do you believe we can reach that threshold this year?

Ms. Mariève Forest: There's been an increase. We had that target for a long time, and we finally reached it because various programs were put in place. All indications are that we can reach that percentage again this year, because we haven't stopped any of the efforts we made in previous years. We've really achieved a higher percentage because measures were taken to target francophone immigrants. Therefore, if new measures are introduced, we could reach an even higher percentage.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: In your opinion, what would the ideal threshold be for francophone immigration to Canada to ensure that francophone communities maintain their demographic weight?

Ms. Mariève Forest: I didn't bring it up this morning, but Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault and I did a study for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada where we presented demographic projections. According to our assessment, if we significantly increase francophone immigration by 10%, 15% or 20%, for example, the demographic weight of francophone communities will increase by 2036.

At the moment, our studies show that a target of 4.4% is not enough to maintain the demographic weight of francophones. If we want to keep their demographic weight where it was in 2021, we need to increase francophone immigration. If we want to restore the 1971 demographic weight, which is specified in the act, we'll have to work much harder.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: What challenges do we need to overcome in order to grow the country's francophone communities?

Ms. Mariève Forest: The two studies we did include recommendations. We want the federal and provincial governments to bring in additional measures to spur recruitment of immigrants.

Of course, we must also consider the whole journey to integration. For example, we need immigration programs specifically targeting francophones. Recruitment quotas could also be required in certain programs. We need a number of measures put in place. There's no secret recipe that will enable us to recruit enough immigrants overnight.

We feel that how we treat temporary residents is also extremely important. We need to adopt positive measures for temporary francophone residents. They are already in Canada. The Collège com-

munautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick representative talked about international students earlier. It would be quite easy to target the measures. Since these individuals are highly motivated to stay in Canada, we should give them a clearer path to permanent residency.

• (1140)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You talked about targeting recruitment. What should we be intensifying, targeting or improving?

Ms. Mariève Forest: When we conducted our study, there was only one office processing applications from the many African countries with a francophone tradition, and it was located in Dakar. I haven't checked to see if things have changed since then. Why not open more offices? There are many in countries where anglophones are recruited. That would be pretty easy to do.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I have some examples of countries—

The Chair: Mr. Iacono, unfortunately your time is up. You can come back to that later.

Next, we go to the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Beaulieu, second vice-chair of the committee, you have the floor.

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

Happy Franco-Ontarian Day to our friends in Ontario.

I will start with the representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. In Ontario, 44% of students in French-language schools are immigrants. Recently, our request was granted to have the total number of rights holders calculated, because a substantial proportion of them didn't have access to French-language schools. It varies from region to region; some places have virtually no French-language schools.

With regard to francophone immigration outside Quebec, don't you feel it's important to target regions that have French-language schools?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Yes. I'll give you an example on the ground that I think speaks for itself: Our smallest school board is in Nunavut, and it consists of a single school. If you look at the student profile, there's an extremely large black population. Why is that? The first immigrant family from a village in Cameroon came to town. It went well for them, word got out and several families from the same village ended up settling in Iqaluit. We're seeing more or less the same thing in schools. When integration goes well, when families are welcomed and able to settle in, it snowballs.

However, there's one thing I'd like to add. It's great that we have more ambitious francophone immigration targets, but once we welcome these families, we need to make sure they continue to live as francophones, because they will be in a predominantly anglophone environment, which is why it's so important that we have inclusive and welcoming communities. We feel that's fundamental, both for the organizations that help them and the schools that integrate students and, by force of circumstance, their parents and families.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Basically, when it comes to rights holder and francophone newcomer access to French-language schools, do you think things will get much better in the coming years in terms of them being widely accessible?

In addition, to complete my other question, if newcomers arrive in a region where there is no French-language school nearby, how will they be properly integrated?

Ms. Valérie Morand: It's an ongoing challenge.

We talked about the 73 new schools built and opened since 2016. Building new infrastructure is our school system's main priority. I must admit that our system is relatively new, since we were only able to start building our network across Canada in the mid-eighties. So, yes, we'd certainly like have more French-language schools and do a better job promoting the French-language school network.

Earlier, Ms. Forest talked about Destination Canada. I had the opportunity to take part in its international fair a number of times. The people who went there were almost at the end of their immigration process in Canada, and we would walk away with at least 200 new enrolments in our schools. The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones booth was one of the busiest. Parents don't know that they can have their children continue their education in French. They mistakenly believe that they have to give up education in French for their children when they come to Canada and live in a minority setting, and that's not true. We offer a range of services, including enrolling their children in a French-language school.

Unfortunately, in some provinces and territories—one example was mentioned—it's still hard to exercise the right to manage school admissions. Francophone and francophile families sometimes face resistance when they want to enrol their children in French-language schools. However, I'd say that it's happening less and less. That said, we've gone to the Supreme Court of Canada again to address situations where there's a little more resistance.

• (1145)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So if new francophone immigrants are shown where they can go to French-language school as soon as they get here, that could also help steer them.

Ms. Valérie Morand: Yes, absolutely. We were just talking about promotion. Our website is another national and international window and it shows what we have to offer in terms of education in French in Canada.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay.

Ms. Forest, I know we're going to run out of time, but my next question is for you.

Sociopol did a study on postsecondary education in the minority language. You talked about the English-language postsecondary education system being overfunded in Quebec and the French-language postsecondary education system being underfunded outside Quebec. Can you tell us a little more about that and the impact it's having?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Thank you for the question, Mr. Beaulieu.

The study was commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage, and yes, there is quite a significant funding gap between the English-language college and university network in Quebec and French-language postsecondary institutions outside Quebec.

Unfortunately, I don't have the numbers with me, but that study showed a huge gap between the percentage of francophones in a given province and the percentage of those who have access to postsecondary education in French in that province, which was generally half as high. The percentage is even lower out West, where the French-language campuses are small.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

I'd like to remind witnesses that they should always feel free to send any additional information to the clerk. The clerk will forward the information to all committee members. That way, they can send us the figures or statistics they refer to.

We will now go to the last question for our first round of questions. Niki Ashton, for the NDP, you have the floor for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to welcome all the witnesses today.

As we know, the purpose of our study is to inform us on the situation and challenges the country is facing. In addition, we're wondering what recommendations we could make to the federal government to find solutions. It's very important.

I spoke at length about the challenges related to education in French and French immersion. I come from western Canada, where we face a major labour shortage in French-language education and immersion. We're also seeing extremely high demand from families. However, our day care centres, primary schools and high schools can't meet that demand due to the labour shortage.

To the representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, what are the main challenges? What would you recommend the federal government do to resolve the labour shortage? What suggestions do you have for immigration?

• (1150)

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

We'd like the settlement workers in schools—SWIS—initiative to be expanded. It's a great initiative, but it's out of touch with current realities in our school boards. I remind you that francophone immigration ensures the vitality of francophone minority communities.

Ms. Valérie Morand: Ms. Ashton, if I may, I'd like to add something.

When we talk about a shortage of school staff, even in early childhood centres, you're absolutely right: We're truly experiencing that to a great extent right now. We need to speed up the process for recognizing teacher and early childhood worker qualifications from abroad. Right now, people are struggling through the process. We therefore need to work more closely with the professional associations to find a more flexible mechanism that helps these skilled workers find their place in Canada.

We talked about Destination Canada. When I was there, I wore two hats. I was there to raise awareness of what we had to offer in terms of education in French as a first language in a minority setting. Our website had an interactive map. I was also there to collect resumé from teachers and staff who wanted to come work for our school boards. On our website, we had a section with all the job offers in the various school boards, including information on salary and the hiring process, as well as mock interviews.

However, there's only so much the federation can do. The professional associations have their role to play as well. In my opinion, that's where we need to work to facilitate recognition of these qualified individuals' credentials.

Ms. Niki Ashton: In terms of capacity and coordination, do you think the federal government has a direct role to play in getting that done with the professional associations?

Mrs. Tanya Saumure: I'll say it again: Our federation supports higher francophone immigration targets to increase the demographic weight of francophone communities outside Quebec and to address the dire need for staff members in French-language schools.

Ms. Valérie Morand: I would add that we need to ensure that Canadian embassies, high commissions and consular services abroad are aware of the French-language school network, both for staff recruitment and student enrolment. People come to Canada thinking there's only one system, and yet we have 29 employers of choice. We've been criticized for this for 20 years. So it can certainly be better coordinated.

We must also remember that it's important to provide services at every stage of the integration process, to ensure we have inclusive and welcoming communities, promote staff and student onboarding and seek out these qualified people who arrive in the country and very often still don't know about this employer of choice. In francophone minority communities, schools remain the number one employer of francophones. They aren't the only one, but often they are an employer of choice.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Ms. Forest, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Mariève Forest: Thank you very much.

I'd like to remind you that we rely a lot on immigration to address the labour shortage. However, proportionally speaking, right now, we're still welcoming a lot of professionals who speak English. As a result, the more Canadian demographics rely on immigration and the more anglophone immigrants we welcome, the less likely it will be for me as a francophone to run into someone who speaks French when I need health care or when I seek services in my municipality, for example. I'd therefore like to remind you that it's important that solutions to the labour shortage include significant francophone immigration thresholds.

• (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

We're going to begin the second round. The first round will be five minutes.

Mrs. Goodridge, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you to all the witnesses for participating in our meeting today.

A special hello to Mrs. Saumure, whom I have known for a long time and who has held a number of roles.

I'd like to begin by addressing the shortage of francophone teachers, which I hear a lot about. Although there are many opportunities, the shortage is an impediment in a number of regions. Could you tell me your general perspective on the labour shortage?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Thank you for the question, Mrs. Goodridge.

At the moment, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones is working closely with its English-language counterpart, the Canadian School Boards Association, to better understand this shortage of teachers, both in the French as a first language education system and in immersion programs, so that we can get a 360-degree view of the issue.

The AI-based project is funded by Canadian Heritage and aims to gather data from both English- and French-language school boards to really understand the issue and take action to help school boards, employees and employers address the teacher shortage. We're expecting a partial breakdown of the data this summer, and next spring we'll have a more detailed picture.

However, another major factor in this shortage is the teacher training continuum. Universities have a role to play in recruiting students who choose to enrol in these teachers' colleges. The school boards also have their own role to play in welcoming these new teachers and making sure they retain them. We must nevertheless recognize that one in five teachers ends up leaving the profession because of the educational requirements. This data will certainly help us put measures in place to counteract the shortage of teachers, but teaching needs to be valued, and we need to foster working conditions that will make teachers want to stay on in their chosen profession.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you very much.

Cyrille Simard, I know that when people attend by video conference, we sometimes forget that they are here, but I haven't forgotten you.

You talked a lot about the francophone minority situation in Atlantic Canada. Can you give us some suggestions for improving francophone immigration in a minority context in the Atlantic Canada region?

Mr. Cyrille Simard: Thank you.

Obviously, as I emphasized in my remarks, my perspective is that of a professional and technical training institution, namely an institution that aims to address the labour needs and required skills for businesses and organizations on the ground. So I'm going to look at this through that lens.

I pointed out the significant growth we've seen in recent years. That said, despite the fact that many international students want to settle and work here, we have some challenges.

Upstream, our main challenge today is finding a way to more easily target the students who will enter our programs, because we offer 80 programs and 16 fields of study. It's really important that we know what percentage of people will get student visas, which presents another challenge. If we had that information up front, we could better plan our budgets and ensure that we place students in the right program. Some of our programs are facing low enrolment. If we don't know ahead of time what percentage we're going to get, it unfortunately becomes harder for us to fill those spots.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simard and Mrs. Goodridge. That's all the time we have for now. You can come back to that later.

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

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

First, I want to thank all the members around the table who agreed to let me return to the committee on a permanent basis. Second, I want to wish my Ontario colleagues a happy Franco-Ontarian Day, an extremely important day.

My questions are for the representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, but before I ask them, I want to tell Ms. Forest that I really liked her comment that Canada is a model for immigration, but certainly not for francophone immi-

gration. I thank her for raising that, because it's important that we reflect on it as elected officials.

Now, I want to congratulate the federation, but also the school boards it represents, for the great progress we've seen. You mentioned that there were 13,000 students and 73 additional schools. This shows that the needs have truly been there for several years. It's unfortunate that it took until the early nineties for the Supreme Court to confirm the right to manage admissions. This demonstrates that the work is getting done on the ground, but that we still have a long way to go.

I'd like to talk briefly about the official languages in education program, or OLEP. A new official languages action plan has just been released, and you would agree that it provides exceptional investments to support francophone communities outside Quebec. In 2015, the federal government invested a total of \$2.2 billion in this area. Today, we're at \$4.1 billion, almost double that. It's very important.

Can you very briefly describe OLEP? We know that funding is still not being distributed as fast as it should, despite government policy.

Ms. Valérie Morand: Yes, absolutely.

Now that the action plan for official languages has been announced with its education component, the official languages in education program, we have a one-year transition period so that the provinces and territories can reach bilateral agreements with the federal government. We were assured that there would be no service interruptions, that is to say French-language school boards would continue to receive funding, but they did not.

We're working very closely with Canadian Heritage to see how to remedy this situation, because the school boards, which are employers, were forced to lay off staff a month before the beginning of the school year. That's not what we'd prefer, given the shortage of teachers and staff. As a result, the boards have committed to running a budget deficit for the current year to retain staff, but that isn't an ideal situation.

Mr. Darrell Samson: No, it doesn't. Under any government, it's always about the process, but I'm glad you pointed out that it's important nonetheless.

In the new version of the Official Languages Act, a very important provision has been added so that Francophone school boards are consulted before real estate is disposed of, because we know that in British Columbia, among other places, you have to wait over 20 years for a piece of land to become available. How has this been received in your communities?

Ms. Valérie Morand: It's been very well received. It's a phenomenal gain. The difficulty currently is obtaining information from the Department of Public Works and Government Services in real time, but that's more of a bureaucracy issue. Learning in real time when federal properties become available on the market at a preferential cost, before they are put on the market for the general public, is of fundamental importance in meeting the need to build new schools. You must understand that the cost of building a new school from scratch on a plot of land is enormous. Having access to existing infrastructure gives us a major head start.

• (1205)

Mr. Darrell Samson: I just want to come back to the issue of professional bodies, which you mentioned. The federal government has already emphasized the importance of working closely with provinces and professional associations in health and education, among other areas. It's already on the list, and we want to follow up to determine the exact path we're going to take to reach the goal, because it's crucial. I've seen it myself, as general manager...

The Chair: Thank you for that comment, Mr. Samson.

The next round is for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Ms. Forest, perhaps you could complete your answer to the question I asked earlier. I was talking about the gap between the English language post-secondary education system in Quebec, which is overfunded, and the French language post-secondary education system outside Quebec, which is underfunded. You spoke about that.

Your study shows that 24.9% of university enrolments in Quebec study in English, and that spending by English-language universities accounts for 32% of total spending by Quebec universities. Can you tell us a little about how you arrived at these conclusions? What impact does this have on Francophone minorities outside Quebec, English in Quebec and Francophones in Quebec?

Ms. Mariève Forest: It's as if it were easier to turn to English. That's why we're here, after all. From what I read last weekend, 40% of those enrolled in university in Montreal this year are studying in English. So the problem is far from being solved.

We can look at different data. If we focus on Francophone minority communities, the role of post-secondary institutions is crucial in cementing our interest and ability to live in French and pass French on to our children. Studies on the vitality of Francophone communities have shown that this dynamic is extremely important. Imagine the number of people who, at the age of 17, will be switching languages to English for their studies. We also see that Francophones are more likely to move to study, because they still want to try to study in French. They also have higher student debt than anglophones.

So there are all sorts of very technical dynamics that we can take into consideration. But basically, the important thing to remember about post-secondary education is that it seals our commitment to a language. Clearly, then, post-secondary institutions cannot be seen as superfluous. They're just as important as primary and secondary schools, and the supply is nowhere near meeting potential demand.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

Ms. Ashton, you have two and half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Very well.

I'm going to continue on the subject of education, because that's what we need to focus on, particularly in Western Canada, as I was saying a few moments ago.

The Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028 includes a Francophone immigration initiative with a goal of recruiting and retaining Francophone teachers from abroad. Do the witnesses have any comments on this initiative?

Once again, Ms. Morand, would you like to begin?

• (1210)

Ms. Valérie Morand: Certainly.

As far as recognition of professional skills is concerned, the idea of creating a table with the professional bodies for accelerated recognition of prior learning has been put forward. That would certainly be a step in the right direction.

I can point to another proposal. In the Canadian system, although the federal government plays a role in education, it falls, as you know, under provincial and territorial jurisdiction. We are already seeing a willingness on the part of some provinces to create more spots in faculties of education so that more students to enrol. So, at the end of their studies, mathematically, there should be more graduates and therefore new teachers available for French-language schools.

We also need to do more to promote the positions that are available. We're hearing from our school boards, which are employers, that recruiting from abroad is an extremely cumbersome process, often with only modest results. It requires fairly robust human resources management services to support interested candidates in their efforts to have their professional skills recognized, and in their search for accommodation. Indeed, as you know, today's employers don't just give an employee a job, they also have to take care of settling them in. Given the housing crisis, we're experiencing this very acutely in our school boards. So it creates a difficult situation for smaller school boards—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Morand. I apologize for cutting you off, but there are preexisting agreements between the political parties as to the time allotted for questions.

The next round is for five minutes.

Mr. Généreux, I believe you are sharing your time with Mr. Godin. I will therefore let you know when you've reached the halfway mark. You have two and half minutes.

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

Madame Morand, you've been part of Destination Canada, having participated in many of its activities. What percentage of the countries targeted by Destination Canada are French-speaking, so-called Francophone or, at the very least, Francophile, compared to the number of English-speaking countries?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Let's just say that the formula set by the Canadian Embassy in France is as follows. Until recently, there were two-day fairs in Paris. People came to the fair, mostly from within France, but there were also people from out of town and from neighbouring countries. Then it was on to Belgium.

Belgium has now been ruled out. The new formula is two days in France and three days in Morocco. That's because Canada has realized that the Maghreb countries, particularly Morocco, are really a prime source of Francophone immigration.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So we all agree that we're looking for candidates from French-speaking countries.

With all the information available on social media in 2023, I think people generally know that Canada is a bilingual country. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that's quite easy to find out. So, if you want to know if it's possible to study in French in Canada, it's fairly simple to find this information, if you're a true Francophone and you want to study here in French, which is actually possible anywhere in Canada.

When you say it requires robust human resource management teams, are you referring to people within Destination Canada who will promote Canada, like you and your colleagues, to attract people here? Are these the people you think should be at a higher level or have better skills to be able to attract people and tell them they can study in French anywhere in Canada?

Ms. Valérie Morand: I would add two nuances to your question.

First of all, I was mainly thinking of human resources management services within Canada that support the selected candidate. Interviews are often conducted virtually. Once the candidate has been chosen, made an offer and accepted it, there's a whole process to support them and bring them to Canada. Some school boards will travel to these fairs, but not the majority: of the 29 school boards that make up the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, only 6 or 7 will go.

Secondly, in my experience, even if there's a mistaken belief that information is easy to find, I often see a lack of understanding of the Canadian system. When people stop by the kiosk, the first question I ask them is whether they have determined where they will settle in their immigration plans. Some tell me they're thinking of Ontario, the Northwest Territories or Manitoba. You understand that they have no idea of the distances between Canada's various regions. If they've chosen to settle in one province and then decide to move, new steps must be taken, since Canada is a federation.

So they often need to be reminded to finalize their immigration plans properly. It's to their own advantage. It will save them a significant amount of trouble and red tape. As you say, there's information available online. In fact, we do a significant amount of website referencing, and when we do, we see very high traffic. Despite this, there's still a lack of understanding of the Canadian system.

• (1215)

The Chair: Mr. Godin, you have a little less than a minute and a half of time left.

Mr. Joël Godin: I'll get straight to the point, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Morand, you mentioned that the current government promised you back in March, when it tabled the Action Plan for Official Languages, that there would be a smooth flow of funding. However, I gathered from your answer is that this is not currently the case.

What are the day-to-day consequences? Is French-speaking immigration directly affected by the fact that the government hasn't kept its promise?

Ms. Valérie Morand: I think that Francophone immigration is affected by default, since the students are already attending our schools. I believe that the government's true intention was laudable, wanting to ensure that there would be no interruption of services. However, that's not what we're seeing on a day-to-day basis.

Of course, we can't blame the provinces and territories for waiting until the money is in their coffers before renewing funding. It's that hiatus, that transition period, that's particularly difficult.

Administrators faced a heartbreaking decision: they had to choose between letting some of their staff go in order to balance the budget, or continuing to employ these people. In the end, they decided to keep the staff, even if it meant running a deficit. It was a leap of faith; the thinking was that the money would follow, but—

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Morand.

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

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

Ms. Morand, I'll continue in the same vein. The process is repeated every five years, is that right? What do school boards do after five years, ten years or fifteen years? Do they plan accordingly?

The federal government is driven by its own rules, Treasury Board rules. I'm just trying to understand: is planning done every five years, knowing that there will be an interruption in funding or a transition period?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Thank you for the question.

It should be noted that core funding is provided by provinces and territories. That remains the same; there are no changes in that regard.

What we're talking about are additional costs associated with educating children, which are funded by the federal government. That money is fundamental to paying for the music teacher, early childhood spaces and school activities that require cultural animators, for example. Those are the employees affected by delayed payment. In the context of the last Action Plan for Official Languages, an increase of \$60 million was granted at the eleventh hour. That amount completely changed the equation when the time came to keep all these people on the job, who allow students to experience their Francophony at school.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you so much.

I just wanted to get off on the right foot and now I'll ask my own questions.

First, I too would like to wish the people in my community and all Franco-Ontarians a Happy Franco-Ontarian Day.

Madame Morand, earlier you mentioned professional bodies. As we know, there's a shortage of teachers across Canada. In Quebec, I believe we're talking about 8,000 teachers. Are the professional bodies aware of this? Are they open to creating pilot projects and changing the way they do things?

Ms. Valérie Morand: I believe there's a growing awareness, yes. Could that translate into higher dividends? It certainly does.

A few years ago, we tried to establish a dialogue with professional bodies, which differ from province to province. It's vitally important for qualified teachers to know which province they're moving to, because they'll have to start all over again if they change provinces. Ontario has a pilot project to further foster the professional recognition of qualified French-speaking teachers from abroad. So some progress is being made. Should there be more initiatives like this? The answer is yes, absolutely.

● (1220)

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

Ms. Forest, you briefly touched on the Welcoming Francophone Communities initiative. If memory serves, there are fourteen of them, including Hawkesbury, which I'm sure you're familiar with. Incidentally, that's where I was born and raised.

In your opinion, is this a model that works or should it be improved?

Ms. Mariève Forest: In this case, it's a report that's still in the writing stage, so I only have the preliminary data.

Personally, I was assigned to the community of Yellowknife, where I had the opportunity to visit. I've seen great progress there, and it's not just due to the Welcoming Francophone Communities initiative. A lot has happened in terms of immigration, there's been a before and an after. However, some communities have been less successful than others.

In Yellowknife and smaller communities like yours, we found that people were finally being welcomed in a more humane way and participating in socializing activities. In fact, we weren't just offering them a service, like helping them write their resumes, and people were grateful. It also generated engagement. When things are done right, it makes organizations that don't have a specific

mandate for settlement services more sensitive to appointing immigrants to their board of directors, for example. It also raises community awareness.

Mr. Francis Drouin: In your opinion, should the Department of Citizenship and Immigration give prospective immigrants the choice to share their personal information with third parties? We often hear that there are local organizations, but that people don't know about them. When they land in Montreal or Toronto, they don't really know which organizations offer services in French and which don't.

In your opinion, how could we balance privacy with sharing information with third parties, if people have given their consent? We need to be able to serve these people well once they've settled in Canada.

The Chair: That's an excellent question, Mr. Drouin, but you'll have to wait five minutes for the answer.

Mr. Dalton, you now have the floor for five minutes.

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

Mr. Simard, you spoke briefly about the number of people from Africa who enrol in programs and want to receive their education here. You mentioned that about 36% of applications are accepted. One witness mentioned to us that several students have come to Canada when their applications have not been accepted, which is of great concern to us.

Is the situation similar at New Brunswick Community College? What can we do to ensure that these students remain in the programs and have access to support services?

Mr. Cyrille Simard: Unfortunately, there was a small network interruption and I didn't hear your question very well.

However, I'd like to clarify something. When I mentioned the 36%, it referred to the percentage of students who apply to our programs and are successful in obtaining a study permit. For example, if 1,000 students have applied, 360 will get a study permit.

Of course, there are many ways in which we could be more successful. As I said in my opening remarks, we need to ensure that the work permit is associated with the study permit, so that the person doesn't have to go through a double pathway to obtain a post-graduation work permit. In our view, this is an important aspect. These people also need to have access to settlement services, in the same way as immigrants who obtain permanent resident status.

The length of the work permit after graduation is important to us. A college has one- or two-year programs, essentially. The post-graduation work permit is always granted based on the length of study. Yet we believe that, in the college sector in particular and in specific sectors, it would be nice if there were post-graduation programs as long as those for university students.

• (1225)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much, Mr. Simard.

My next question is for the representatives of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones.

You reminded us that in 2009, grants were around \$5,000, but they've since been cut in half. If you take inflation into account, the amount is even less. In 2009, I was a teacher. Back then, the amount allocated for each student was around \$8,000, which was a very big increase.

What happened? Can you tell us about these grants and the impact of their decrease?

Ms. Valérie Morand: When we looked at the figures, we realized that there had been an erosion in the amounts paid out, due to the increase in school enrolments. Since 2009, we've seen a steady growth in the number of enrolments in our schools. So we have more students in our schools and the cost of living has increased, but the amounts have remained the same since 2009.

To answer your question about the effect of the grants, I would say that these sums complement what the provinces and territories offer to enhance students' educational and pedagogical experience, so that they can live their francophonie to the full. I was talking about cultural animators, leadership camps and early childhood services, for example. There's even a project here in Ottawa called Café communauté, where we offer parents of students from immigrant backgrounds the chance to meet on themes of their choosing. This project is funded in part by the federal government.

Mr. Marc Dalton: I'm sorry to interrupt, but we have very little time.

What percentage of francophile or francophone immigrants enrol their children in francophone school board programs? Is it a large number? Is it a majority or a small minority?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Through the Statistics Canada census, we learned that we have roughly two-thirds of the children of rightful claimants in our schools. So there's a third that we're missing out on, and there are nearly 600,000 students who are eligible.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll do that afterwards. Is it about the allocation of speaking time?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, I asked a question. If we had divided this into two one-hour blocks, as usual, at the end of the first hour, we would be back to the first round.

The Chair: We'll finish this round, Mr. Beaulieu, and we'll come back to it later, I promise. I'm going to give the floor to Ms.

Kayabaga, and when we start the next round, I'll make sure we listen to that.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's six minutes for me and six minutes for the NDP.

The Chair: It's five minutes. Thank you.

Ms. Kayabaga, you have the floor.

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

I welcome all the witnesses, who have been here for some time now.

I'd like to come back to the question my colleague Francis Drouin asked earlier. I'd like it to be answered, because it is indeed relevant. He talked about a system where people would register to access services. We also need some information about people who arrive in the country, such as who they are, when they arrived, how they arrived, why they came here and where they are, so that we can easily communicate with them. What do you think?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch your question because of the poor sound quality.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Please allow me to speak.

One of the complaints from local organizations is that they don't know who's entering the country. Would it be necessary to ask potential French-speaking immigrants if they agree, by checking a box, to have their information shared with a third party, whilst respecting their privacy?

Ms. Valérie Morand: Yes, certainly. The practice recently implemented in Ontario could become a best practice, since it allowed us to collect, for the first time, data on students' country of origin and year of arrival in the country. As a result, we found that 44% of students in Ontario's French-language schools come from immigrant backgrounds. Of course, we already knew this, since we could see that there were many immigrant students in our schools. So, yes, it's possible to get that data. Ontario has done it, but I'm not aware of similar practices elsewhere in the country.

• (1230)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I'd like to continue on the issue of the integration of francophones who arrive and settle in minority francophone communities.

In the past, witnesses told us that even though they were francophones who had always lived in French, who had gone to school in French and who had worked in French, they had to pass a test to obtain permanent resident status. We received a lot of feedback regarding this test, which is very complicated, not only for French-speaking immigrants, but also for Canadians.

Do you think this test should be updated to reflect the French we use in Canada? It seems to me that it limits francophones in their efforts to come and settle in the country. People might even be encouraged to take the English test, if it's easier than the French one.

Ms. Mariève Forest: I want to make sure I understand: are you talking about the language proficiency test that is required for permanent residency?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Yes.

Ms. Mariève Forest: In fact, people are given extra points when they demonstrate their language skills in certain immigration programs. Often, extra points are given for French. Obviously, there are costs associated with these exams. Someone who has done all their schooling in French but doesn't check the box on their application indicating that they are a francophone will be obliged to take the test.

So I think we should adopt measures to reduce the number of people who are forced to take this exam. For example, if I've done all my schooling in French, that testifies to my abilities in French and I could be exempted from this exam.

Also, while I've heard comments about the nature of this exam, I haven't studied it specifically. I can't take a position on whether the exam should be changed.

Ms. Valérie Morand: The exam should certainly be developed in Canada.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: So you're suggesting that we should make changes to this exam, in order to retain francophones. What I've heard from immigrants in my community who have had to take this exam is that it was better for them to take the English exam, because it's much easier. A situation like this means that francophones who find themselves in official language minority communities, like London, will want to speak English and integrate in English.

I'll continue on the issue of integration. What can we do to continue to support francophones who settle in communities like mine, London, and want to live in French?

I have a beautiful story to tell you about my mother.—

The Chair: Ms. Kayabaga, I'd love to hear your story, but I have to interrupt you; I am sorry.

Mr. Joël Godin: You're tough, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I know I'm tough, but the role you've given me is that of the bad boy.

If I understand correctly, Mr. Beaulieu had a motion to present. We decided for today to do a single two-hour block instead of holding two one-hour blocks, because there would have been a block with only one witness.

Our housekeeping motions specify that, starting with the second round of questions, the Liberals and Conservatives have five minutes to ask their questions, compared with two and a half minutes for the Bloc and NDP. Now, Mr. Beaulieu was asking for unanimous consent from the committee that the Bloc and NDP also have five minutes to ask their questions.

• (1235)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Chair, I asked you the question at the beginning of the meeting. I asked you if we were going to be penalized if we do the three rounds of questions in this two-hour block—in the end, we have four. Otherwise, normally, this would be a

meeting where we have a second one-hour block, during which we would have reverted to a first round of five-minute questions. I asked for this at the beginning and you told me we'd go back to the first round.

The Chair: What I meant was that the order of speakers would not change.

You have to be Cartesian: at the very beginning of the legislature, we passed routine motions outlining exactly what we've done today. These are the notes. What's happening today is the norm. In fact, it is the chair's prerogative to divide the two-hour meeting into two one-hour blocks. According to the routine motions we passed, each political party has six minutes for the first four questions. After that, the Liberals and Conservatives have five minutes to ask their questions, and the NDP and Bloc have two and a half minutes. This ensures that the proportion in the House of Commons is respected.

Since the witnesses are here, I would ask you to save time if there is unanimous consent to give five minutes, instead of two and a half, to the Bloc and NDP members. If not, I'll respect our routine motions. Is there unanimous consent?

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Why don't we continue by sticking to our motions? We could talk about all that afterwards, since the witnesses are here.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Marc Serré: As we have no time to lose, we should respect the motions we have already adopted.

The Chair: The committee must be transparent. Is there unanimous consent to allow Bloc and NDP members to ask five-minute questions today instead of two and a half minutes?

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, personally, I give my consent, because if the meeting had been divided into two one-hour blocks, they would have had more time.

The Chair: That is a false perception, Mr. Godin. According to the routine motion we adopted, we don't divide meetings into two one-hour blocks. It's at the discretion of the chair, and I do it when there are enough witnesses. Do you understand?

Mr. Joël Godin: There were four witnesses this morning.

The Chair: There are three, two of whom are—

Mr. Joël Godin: There were four, but there was someone who didn't show up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That's correct.

Mr. Joël Godin: Personally, I give my consent. That said, I'd like us to come back to this matter later.

The Chair: All right. I note that the other members of the committee also give their consent.

So, we'll move on to the next question, which comes from the Bloc Québécois.

Monsieur Beaulieu, you have the floor for five full minutes.

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

I'd like to come back to the question of post-secondary institutions. A recent Statistics Canada study shows the close link between attendance at French-language post-secondary institutions, for example, and language of work. We can therefore assume that the underfunding of universities outside Quebec harms French as a language of work, on the one hand, and that, conversely, in Quebec it benefits English and harms French, on the other.

Ms. Mariève Forest: Language retention is, in part, about the enjoyment of speaking French and feeling that your French is good enough to go and work in French. That is heavily dependent on post-secondary education. Adequate funding for the education system, from early childhood to post-secondary, would help address the challenges related to language retention and language transfer. We know that underfunding contributes to higher rates of language transfer and lower retention, as do issues surrounding immigrant recruitment.

In Canada, almost 100% of population renewal is from immigration. However, for more than 50 years, the Government of Canada has not recruited enough Francophones. It's clear that these measures, programs and policies directly contribute to the demographic decline of francophone communities.

• (1240)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I would add that Canada doesn't recruit enough francophone immigrants because it hasn't adequately funded French-language schools.

Ms. Mariève Forest: That's why we need retention. Retention and demographic renewal are two sides of the same coin.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: For allophones outside Quebec, almost all of the language transfer is toward English. For francophones, I think it's 40%.

Ms. Mariève Forest: At the moment, there is no active offer of service in French, particularly for refugees. Even if the offer were there, there aren't enough resettlement services available in French. That's something that could boost allophones' interest in choosing French in Canada.

Ms. Valérie Morand: I would just add that, for students from immigrant families who attend a French-language school and choose post-secondary education in French, the most important factor is a strong francophone identity. That's a product of identity construction in our schools, which all the federal funding supports. If the federal government gives us less, we can't do as much work on that. It has a domino effect.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The study of language policy models around the world shows that the territoriality principle has the biggest impact on protecting minority languages. According to this principle, a given territory has an official language. Territorial bilingualism is one example; it can be called different things.

Mr. Simard, as a representative of the Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick, you know that New Brunswick has one of the lowest francophone assimilation rates outside Quebec. Do you think that francophone immigrants who settle in New Brunswick, especially in more francophone surroundings, are more likely to integrate into life in French and are more likely to complete a language transfer into French eventually?

Mr. Cyrille Simard: There's no doubt that, if that's how it worked, the likelihood of integration and retention would be higher. That said, we need to recognize that we are in a bilingual province and that it's up to us to ensure the retention of newcomers.

For example, we give students from Africa extra English training to make sure they stay. Even if they want to preserve their French, which we all want, they could end up leaving the province and going elsewhere if they can't find work. So we have to strike some kind of balance to create conditions that will make it possible for them to continue living in French while giving them the tools, such as some mastery of English, to better integrate into the labour market.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Simard.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for five minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

Mr. Simard, I'd like to give you the opportunity to share your advice and recommendations for addressing the labour shortage in French-language and French immersion education. That's what I would like to hear.

Mr. Cyrille Simard: Thank you.

At the risk of repeating myself, as I said in my presentation, there should be more funding to help international students settle here. That would be a good way to improve things. We believe there should be a new pathway to permanent residence specifically for international college and university graduates outside Quebec. Such a program would enable us to achieve better results.

We also talked about work permits for students. Work permits should be associated with study permits so people don't have to jump through the same hoops twice. In addition, the duration of work permits for college students is an important factor, particularly in industries like construction. If a student is in a one- or two-year program and gets a post-graduation work permit that is too short, they'll have a hard time getting into the labour market. An electrician sometimes has to wait three years for access to what are called blocks, or apprenticeship courses, so they can rise through the ranks in the profession. Blocks aren't always available on the ground. A longer post-graduation work permit would give them a better chance to get into the labour market.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Ms. Morand and Ms. Saumure, I'd like to discuss settlement and the challenges you talked about, particularly in terms of housing. I live in the west, but I'm also further north, and housing is very expensive, particularly rental housing. We're not a big city like Toronto or Vancouver, though. We've been told that's a challenge for newcomers, including those who come to teach in our schools.

What do you think the federal government should do? Should it give new teachers and educators financial assistance for housing so they can come and stay in our communities?

• (1245)

Ms. Valérie Morand: Yes, there are certainly solutions that should be implemented. Right now, some employees host new teaching staff in their own homes, which is not a good solution. Some school boards have bought buildings to convert into residences for new staff, but I'm sure you can see that isn't ideal. Managing employees is one thing, but if employers also have to attend to their well-being, their accommodation, and so on, where does it end? It's starting to get a little onerous for them.

Over the past 30 years, we've seen all levels of government disengage from their investments in social housing. That's how we ended up in this situation. How do we fix it? I don't have a solution to offer, but housing definitely needs to be part of the conversation about francophone immigration policy. People talk about inclusive communities that welcome the people we bring here. Well, it starts with housing, it starts with a job, and it starts with a school for their children, because parents want a better future for their kids than for themselves. That's often the main reason why they choose a new homeland.

I don't have a specific solution to offer, but it's certainly something that will have to be taken into consideration because it's part of the equation for the successful integration of these newcomers into francophone communities.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Ms. Forest, you talked about the challenges around access to early learning. Can you tell us about those challenges and explain how they contribute to the decline of French in Canada?

Ms. Mariève Forest: I haven't done any recent studies on that. It's more of a general principle related to vitality. As you can imagine, if child care from zero to four or five years—depending on

when school starts—is in English, that undermines linguistic security, which is hard enough to maintain as it is, even when kids are fully educated in French.

An underfunded school system means that extracurricular activities sometimes take place in English, for example. That, too, undermines children's linguistic security, and may get parents thinking it's just easier to enrol their children in English schools. Perhaps their child throws tantrums because they don't want to go to school in French because they're embarrassed. That's a personal decision, a decision nobody can criticize. Going to day care in French can be complicated.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Forest.

We have just under 10 minutes left in the meeting, so I want to thank today's witnesses. As I said, if they have relevant information that they didn't have time to share with us, be it paper documents, fact sheets or statistics, they shouldn't hesitate to send it to the clerk, who will forward it to the members of the committee.

I would also like to tell members that the matter I wanted to discuss—the information from Ms. Lecomte and the Library of Parliament—has been resolved. We'll have access to that information next week, as usual.

Finally, I'd like to say that I won't be here on Wednesday. This is the first time in seven years that I absolutely have to leave Parliament Hill. Mr. Godin, the committee's first vice-chair, will preside that meeting. In addition, there has been a slight change: the minister who was scheduled to appear this Wednesday has agreed to appear on Wednesday, October 4, and the witnesses who were scheduled to appear on October 4 will appear this Wednesday.

I don't see any more questions or comments, so I'll adjourn the meeting. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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