



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 068

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, October 4, 2023

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to the 68th meeting 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 may attend in person or by using the Zoom app.

To ensure the meeting runs smoothly, I would like to pass on some instructions to the 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. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

As far as interpretation is concerned, those participating via Zoom have the choice at the bottom of their 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 this room is equipped with a good sound system, sound feedback may occur, which can be extremely harmful to interpreters and cause serious injury. The most common cause of audio feedback is an earpiece being placed too close to a microphone. So we ask all participants to exercise great caution when handling their earpiece, especially when their microphone or that of the person sitting next to them is on. In order to prevent incidents and to protect the hearing health of interpreters, I ask participants to make sure that they speak into the microphone assigned to them and that they avoid holding their earpiece in their hands when it is not in use. The earpiece should be placed on the table, away from the microphone.

I remind you that all comments from 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 who are on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk of the committee and I will do our best to keep track of the speaking order, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in that regard.

In accordance with our routine motion regarding connection testing, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses have completed the required connection testing prior to the meeting. Unfortunately, at this time, Mr. Paquet is experiencing technical difficulties, which we are trying to resolve as quickly as possible.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses: Mr. Pichette and Mr. Castonguay are in attendance, and Mr. Paquet is participating virtually.

I would also like to welcome the new members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the best committee in town: Mr. Lehoux, a regular, and Ms. Taylor Roy.

Each witness will have five minutes to present. Then there will be interactions with the members for a set period of time and I will later explain how it works. For now, we are going to listen to the witnesses.

Before I go to Mr. Castonguay and start the clock, I must tell you that I have the difficult task of managing speaking time, so I may have to cut you off. That also applies to members. The stricter we are on speaking time, the more likely it is that everyone can ask their questions.

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

Prof. Charles Castonguay (Retired Professor, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My presentation is entitled "Canada's Language Policy: Stubbornly Going the Wrong Way".

The 2021 census confirmed that the French character of Quebec is now under threat. In the meantime, the current Canadian policy to promote francophone immigration outside Quebec seems quite irresponsible. In 2021, the percentage of Canadians who speak French as a language of use at home dropped below 20%. In Quebec, the francophone majority has fallen to record lows, reaching 76% for native speakers and 79% for the language used at home. On the other hand, the weight of English in Quebec is increasing on both fronts. Assimilation to English drives these trends. Assimilation of French-speaking Canadians now using English at home is steadily increasing, from 280,000 in 1971 to 460,000 in 2021.

Since 2001, a similar trend has emerged in Quebec. Between 2001 and 2021, the anglicization of Quebecers whose mother tongue is French has seen their number increase from 8,000 to 40,000. The anglicization of native francophones is now progressing as fast in Quebec as outside Quebec. As for Canadians whose mother tongue is not one of the two official languages, 2.9 million now use English, while the number who now use French, almost all of whom live in Quebec, is only 290,000, or exactly ten times less. Across Canada, English gains more than 3.3 million speakers through assimilation while French has a net loss of 170,000.

The 2021 census also tells us something new about francophone immigration. For the most part, they are immigrants whose mother tongue is French or immigrants whose mother tongue is not one of the two official languages and who are more comfortable in French than in English. Previous censuses have shown that, outside of Quebec and New Brunswick, the majority of immigrants whose mother tongue is French become English-speaking, and most of them do so in the first generation. On the contrary, the vast majority of those who settle in Quebec do not become anglicized.

Logically, these immigrants should be encouraged to settle in Quebec or New Brunswick rather than elsewhere. In 2021, Quebec, in particular, had 87% of the Canadian population whose mother tongue was French, but only 77% of immigrants whose mother tongue was French. In other words, Quebec is already not receiving its fair share of these immigrants. On the other hand, since the 2006 census, a growing majority of Quebecers with mother tongue other than French or English have assimilated to French rather than to English, proof that there is good news sometimes. On the contrary, outside Quebec, Canadians whose mother tongue is neither French nor English did not show any tendency towards higher francization. In 2006, more than 2.2 million had become anglicized, compared to a minuscule 10,700 who had become French-speaking.

In 2021, whether or not these immigrants were, at some point in their lives, more comfortable in French than in English, nearly 2.7 million of them, or 400,000 more, had assimilated to English, compared to 12,500, a microscopic 1,800 more, to French. Clearly, for French to flourish properly in Canada, immigrants whose mother tongue is not French nor English but who are more comfortable in French than in English must be encouraged to settle in Quebec. The same must be done for immigrants whose mother tongue is French.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay.

You can tell us more by answering questions along the way, as you know.

We will now go to Mr. Roger Pichette, from BB Immigration, for five minutes.

Mr. Roger Pichette (Lawyer, BB Immigration): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

To respect the time allocated to us, we have chosen to present five recommendations and to share with you two small pitfalls to avoid in the work you have been mandated to do, always with the objective of increasing the success rates of francophone immigrant applications in Canada.

The first recommendation is to strengthen the role of authorized representatives with francophone populations of Africa and Francophonie. The goal is very simple: we must prevent these people's money to be taken by charlatans who are not helpful and, even worse, sometimes cause the first application to be denied. I will make suggestions in this regard in a moment.

The second recommendation is to allocate additional resources to embassies responsible for the large francophone and francophile populations. Once again, I am not reinventing the wheel by telling you this. Just on Monday, I compared the work permit applications for the five largest anglophone populations to the seven largest francophone populations. The processing times for applications from the French-speaking populations are double those from the English-speaking populations. This is something that can be easily acted upon.

The third recommendation is to allow officials to gather additional information when an application that is overall solid contains insufficient details. This was a common practice in the past but it unfortunately tends to fade or even disappear. The file may be very solid, but it may be missing something like a comma or it needs clarification, or another version of a document may be required. This now leads to a denial, whereas the official reviewing the application could simply send a letter requesting clarification, in order to do a more specific analysis and make a decision based on the application.

The fourth recommendation is to provide more descriptive and detailed reasons for denial. People who choose Canada will not give up after their application has been rejected a first time. If the reasons they are given for the denial are so nebulous that they do not know at all the reasons for the decision, they will make a second and a third application, which will be rejected again. In addition, you will see that artificial intelligence will cause problems.

This brings me to the fifth recommendation. We must work to minimize the biases introduced by the use of artificial intelligence in the processing of applications. Canada's attractiveness means that we will keep receiving more applications, and we will not be able to handle that influx without artificial intelligence. Given the origin of francophone immigrants, we must work to minimize the biases introduced by artificial intelligence. A person can understandably be rejected a couple of times, but some applicants risk being excluded for life if we rely only on robots. We therefore believe that artificial intelligence tools should be tuned to better reflect this reality. After all, the fact that a case is handled by artificial intelligence should not result in a less fair decision.

In closing, I would like to make two suggestions to avoid certain pitfalls.

First, temporary immigration should not be excluded from your thoughts and recommendations. Unfortunately, this was a mistake made in Quebec, which greatly delayed the debate and made it purely semantic. Our programs allow immigrants to go through temporary status to get to permanent status. Please include temporary immigration in your thoughts and recommendations.

Before I answer your questions, I would like to say one last thing.

Bilingualism needs are not directly proportional to the number of applications in French sent to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. At BB Immigration, we are no better than others. The majority of practitioners have to do the same. When we see that it will be easier and more efficient to process the request in English,

[*English*]

we're just going to switch to English and do it in English for the benefit of our clients.

[*Translation*]

The need for departmental and consular bilingual services should not simply be determined by the number of applications in French

I hope I managed to stay within my allotted time. I am now ready to answer your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pichette. You still have a full minute.

Mr. Roger Pichette: In this case, I'm going to talk about settlement services. Your motion talks about settlement services. The needs for settlement services are extremely diverse. There are people who arrive here with a binder full of information about the area where they will settle, while others arrive with a bag only.

In our view, it seems unwise to put a lot of effort, energy and government money into settlement services. Perhaps it would be better to promote the bilingualism of the resources already available in the various Canadian and Quebec communities, in order to ensure a better integration of francophone immigrants in these communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Pichette.

Since Mr. Paquet has not arrived yet, I will suspend the meeting for a few minutes.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Let us not suspend the meeting.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Let us continue the meeting, and then, if Mr. Paquet can join us, we will hear him. If not, we will continue with the witnesses who are here.

The Chair: Agreed.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Godin for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Pichette, thank you for being here in person.

Mr. Castonguay, I listened to your presentation and found it very interesting. I must tell you that we came to the same conclusion: French is declining in Canada and Quebec. However, I would have liked to hear you talk more about how to counter this situation and stop the bleeding of French in Canada and Quebec. I just wanted to tell you.

Mr. Pichette, what I like about your remarks today is that you are on the ground and that you live every day the concerns of immigrants who want to come to work in Canada. You mentioned the need to strengthen the role of our representatives in Africa, because it is a very important part of the Francophonie.

Can you explain what is blocking the system? We know—correct me if I am wrong—that a lot of French-speaking Africans want to come here. What is the holdup? Where do you get involved in the process? Would you suggest to us tools that would make us even better and that would help you bring in more immigrants.

Mr. Roger Pichette: Thank you very much, Mr. Godin.

In these countries, everyone knows someone who has been to Canada. These are very tight-knit communities, and people will rely on what they hear from their third neighbour rather than consulting a lawyer, a notary or a regulated Canadian immigration consultant. They will believe the wonderful story they are told and cannot afford to pay a lot of money. They are going to go through a process that is often bound to fail, because they are misled by people who are often unscrupulous or have absolutely no experience in this area.

So when I talk about strengthening the role of representatives, it is really to make it clear to people that they should not give their money to just about anyone if they want to immigrate to Canada, but that they should work with people whose skills we have verified. We have professional associations that are supervised and whose members can provide appropriate advice.

Mr. Joël Godin: If I understand correctly, you are suggesting that Canada should have a certification program for immigration professionals abroad, more specifically in Africa, in order to make sure that they are more efficient, more professional and more respectful of the administrative relationship. Is that correct?

• (1655)

Mr. Roger Pichette: Certifications already exist. A regulated consultant is subject to Canadian regulations. The same goes for lawyers and notaries in Quebec.

We need to do some public education abroad. We must explain to people that not everyone is able to help them properly. We must try to convince them to keep their money for their project. They can do it by themselves or with the help of the right people, not with the dream merchants that we unfortunately see too often in these markets.

Mr. Joël Godin: The poor are being exploited, as one might say.

I will move on to another stage of the process once the person has successfully applied to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. Earlier, you talked about an application being rejected once, twice or three times, sometimes because of a small detail. What would be the solution to speed up the process and to have more French-speaking immigrants come to Canada?

Mr. Roger Pichette: Frankly, I do not know if we can do both. Sometimes a longer process can avoid applications being rejected when in fact they should not. As I was saying earlier, asking for clarification on a document for which the applicant did not provide an official version can be a way to avoid a denial.

I will give you an interesting example. Recently, a reason has been given repeatedly to deny temporary resident status. You will see that it is so meaningless that it is then very difficult to make a subsequent application. The only justification you are given, after months, is that the reason for your visit to Canada is not compatible with a temporary stay, given the information you provided in your application. That's it. It's over. We do not give you any information. Good luck with your second application.

As I told you, these people want to come to Canada. You certainly have an idea of how attractive Canada is for these people, who are literally fascinated by our country. Therefore, they are not going to give up: they are going to apply again blindly, then they are going to be denied a second, a third and sometimes a fourth time, before they really understand why their application is not moving forward.

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

I would also like you to explain what happens after a first denial. Does the applicant who wants to immigrate to Canada have to start again and wait for a long time, or is it possible to apply for a review, analysis and correction to update the application file?

Mr. Roger Pichette: Obviously, there are always legal remedies. However, you will agree with me that an African immigrant cannot easily go to the Federal Court of Canada to challenge a decision. He could also make access to information requests, but that it is not always straightforward, as you know. Therefore, in real life, if someone asks me what to do after a denial, I tell them in 85% of cases that the best strategy is to file a new application, to wait again for the same duration and, if the applicant does not know clearly why the application was rejected, to pray that it will work this time.

Mr. Joël Godin: To your knowledge, is the processing time for francophone immigration applications much longer than for English-speaking immigration applications?

Mr. Roger Pichette: The figures I presented to you for this week seem to indicate that. The majority of English-speaking immigrants come from India, the Philippines, the United Kingdom, China or the United States. In these five countries, the processing time for a work permit application is 9, 8, 6, 11 and 5 weeks, respectively. In France, it is 15 weeks; in Tunisia, 19 weeks; in Morocco, 19 weeks; in Algeria, 18 weeks; in Senegal, 11 weeks; and in Ghana, 13 weeks.

Mr. Joël Godin: Should we conclude that the various stakeholders do not necessarily have the same resources? That is what you said in your presentation.

Mr. Roger Pichette: I can only assume that, because I do not have the exact figures, but it looks very much so.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Pichette and Mr. Godin.

I am told that Mr. Paquet is not here yet.

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

Mr. Francis Drouin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Castonguay, one of your statements shocked me, but I am not surprised. I am used to it. In 1965, a song by Mr. Raymond Lévesque told us that schoolchildren in Alberta did not have access

to French-language schools. Today, they have access to it. Francophone resilience outside Quebec is very strong. We just need to support and understand it.

Whether it is the francophonie in Quebec or the international Francophonie, francophones are a minority worldwide. It is up to us to do the work. I am used to working in a minority environment and being called a francophone on an artificial life support. Columnist Mathieu Bock-Côté, for example, spoke to me when he eulogized francophones outside Quebec.

Given the fertility rate, whether in Quebec, in the rest of Canada or elsewhere in the world—for example, it is 1.7 children per woman in Quebec and 1.83 in France, I believe that immigration is the way that the Francophonie will survive. So I am reaching out to you. It is up to us to work together to address this issue. The largest French-speaking population is in Africa, and this where the future of the Francophonie lies.

Mr. Pichette, you made some very good suggestions. You talked about charlatans and people abusing other people's goodwill, and I have a problem with that. I do not know how we can deal with this, knowing full well that we have to be the best. We have no choice. In the Francophonie, we must be better than all the others in immigration, because we are already part of a minority. Whether in France or Canada, we are a minority.

How can we be more effective, more efficient, in attracting French-speaking immigrants from Africa?

We have no choice but to rely on Africa. The birth rate is high and young people make up more than half of the population over there. Young people want to work and they do not have a job. In Canada, Quebec is a great place to welcome them.

You mentioned the importance of having more resources in embassies. Why do you say that?

● (1700)

Mr. Roger Pichette: We want the people who process the applications to have the time to do it the right way, so they can afford to ask for clarification before sending a denial letter.

It would also help employers who are reluctant to use workers from the Maghreb, for example, rather than from France. If it takes four more months to bring someone from the Maghreb, employers will still turn to France, even if it may prove less advantageous for all sorts of reasons, such as attractiveness, the situation relative to the eurozone, and so on.

You are right, Mr. Drouin. Young francophones are in Africa. They are increasingly educated and they are eager to come to Canada. This is why an increase in resources would allow those responsible for processing applications to have more time to do their work properly.

Also, when Canadian consular services provide information sessions, they could warn people against charlatans and explain who the authorized representatives are. When such a warning comes from someone standing beside the Canadian flag, in other words, from the government of the country where the applicants want to go, they certainly listen very carefully.

It may seem that I am looking out for my own interests, since I am a lawyer, but my practice is governed by a code of ethics, not by what my second cousin did in 1992 when he came to Canada.

Mr. Francis Drouin: When you want to attract immigrants, you have to enlarge the target population. I agree.

We must change the way we deal with labour shortages. For example, here in Canada, we are trying to attract nursing professionals and doctors. What role can professional associations play? Do our colleges and universities also have a role to play?

Mr. Roger Pichette: They certainly have a role to play. As you said, Mr. Drouin, the flexibility or lack of flexibility of the professional associations plays a role. Those who showed the most flexibility are those with the most newcomers.

If you look at the statistics of the associations of engineers, of nurses, or other professionals, you are going to find out who has reasonable flexibility and who has so little flexibility that immigrants with medical degrees end up doing Uber transportation or other types of jobs.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I see that Mr. Castonguay raised his hand, but my next question is for both of you.

Do you think we should have more embassies in French-speaking countries, although there are—I know very well—coups and instability in some of those countries? Should we have a greater presence and more local processing centres instead of forcing people from Gabon, for example, to go to Dakar, which creates a geographic obstacle for them?

I know that in Canada we benefit from being able to travel across the country, but in Africa it is different. Often, you have to fly to Paris to go to another country in Africa.

Do you believe that Canada should increase the number of its embassies and processing centres in French-speaking countries?

Mr. Castonguay, you have the floor for about 33 seconds.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: I do not really like being associated with Mr. Bock-Côté. You have to think outside the box. I am trying to make you realize that we are dealing with a problem of underfertility, not only among francophones, but also among anglophones, in Quebec and outside Quebec. However, the latter manage to recruit new anglophones in quantity, while French is in deficit in this regard.

• (1705)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Drouin and Mr. Castonguay. You can come back to this later. The time is already up.

Mr. Paquet, we will try our luck, live.

Mr. Stéphane Paquet (President and Chief Executive Officer, Montreal International): All right, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You have the floor for five minutes. If I interrupt you, it will be because I have been told that there are technical problems.

Mr. Stéphane Paquet: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for welcoming me to your committee, which you referred to earlier as the best committee in town.

I am going to start by saying a few words about Montréal International. I will tell you a bit about who we are and what we do.

Montréal International is Greater Montréal's economic development agency. Our mandate is to...

The Chair: Excuse me, Mr. Paquet.

I do not know what is going wrong, I am not a technician, but it does not work on this side.

Mr. Stéphane Paquet: It worked when we did the tests earlier.

The Chair: I am the Chair of the Committee, but I have no solutions to this problem.

I know you have been quite patient so far and have passed all the required tests.

I suggest that you continue to listen to what is happening here and, if you wish, send your comments in writing to our clerk. Committee members would be most grateful.

We may consider a future invitation, if possible, to have you in person or virtually, when the issue is fixed.

Mr. Stéphane Paquet: I will send you my notes on what I had to say.

The Chair: Please accept the apologies from Parliament Hill and from committee members.

Mrs. Goodridge, the floor is yours.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Personally, I can hear well what Mr. Paquet is saying.

The Chair: Mrs. Goodridge, I can confirm that technically, when the sound comes in, everything is perfect. In fact, it is not just good sound, but perfect sound. The problem seems to be between the room and the interpretation booth.

Mr. Paquet, please accept our apologies. You have no idea how embarrassing this is. However, we must move on to other questions.

Please send your notes to the Clerk, who will forward them to the committee members. We will resolve the issue and invite you, if possible, to a future meeting.

Mr. Godin, the floor is yours.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chairman, I think we could suggest to our guest that he provides not only his speaking notes, but also, specific recommendations if he has any beyond his speech. This will allow us to table a useful report. I think it would have been interesting to hear what he had to say, because he knows the reality of our businesses in Quebec and in Canada. Unfortunately, technology does not allow it at this time.

Mr. Paquet, I would be grateful if you could send us the text of your speech and your specific recommendations.

The Chair: I absolutely agree with that.

We will now move to the next questions.

I now give the floor to the second deputy chair of the committee, Mr. Beaulieu, for six minutes.

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

I would also like to thank our guests for joining us.

I think Mr. Castonguay wanted to add something, so I am giving him the opportunity to do that.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: The underfertility of the English-Canadian and French-Canadian peoples is well known.

I will speak now about what is less known. Based on the census data, Quebec is becoming a province just like the others, since there is now a net anglicization of francophones in Quebec. According to the last census, this anglicization affected 40,000 people. On the island of Montreal, this involves 5% of young adults whose mother tongue is French. This is close to what we see in New Brunswick, where the anglicization rate is almost equivalent to that of eastern Ontario. It is a continuum. We are all in this together. That is how I see it.

I also see that the assimilation rate of young adults whose mother tongue is French in Alberta is 63%, a finding that also hurts. The problem is not just related to underfertility. These anglicized francophones will raise their children in English. This is a loss for the French-speaking population. They become more comfortable in English than in French; it is that simple.

The language used at home is an excellent indicator of the official language in which the individual is most comfortable. I invite you to read the 2006 Statistics Canada survey report. Among the authors, let me mention Jean-Pierre Corbeil and Sylvie Lafrenière. They found that the language used at home goes hand in hand with the official language in which individuals are most comfortable. Indeed, it is the official language most often used in public, for example to request services from the federal government, municipalities or provinces. They are really interconnected vessels.

These statistics on the language used at home, which becomes the mother tongue of children, are really stunning. They really need to be considered. The committee needs to look at that. Does the committee really think that Canada's linguistic duality depends on "the vitality of official-language minority communities"? This is from the first sentence of Minister Ahmed Hussen's 2019 strategy. I could not believe it.

It is said that Canada's linguistic duality is based on the vitality of French-language minority communities, but what about Quebec? The other community, which is called the majority, becomes, in its behaviour, a minority like the others. In fact, it is a minority like the others in Canada, where there is an official minority language, and that is French. This is what the United Nations told us in a certain judgment.

Let us be practical. There are some 10,000 French-speaking allophones outside Quebec, whereas, according to the last census, there were 1,300,000 "francotropic people"—as I call them—outside Quebec. The latter were of French, Belgian, Romanian, Latin American and African origin. Of that 1,300,000, about 10,000 people have become French-speaking. The others have switched to English, because it is the most convenient language, the one that pays the most, and that is where they see their future.

In Quebec, francization occurs among francotropic people, such as Spanish speakers, Portuguese speakers from Brazil and Portugal as well as Romanians. Many Africans, especially those from former francophone African countries, are French-speaking. The Haitians are French-speaking. If Quebec now attracts a majority of recruits, compared to English, that is good. However, the competition is still fierce. Currently, French slightly outweighs English as the language adopted by newcomers whose mother tongue is not one of the two official languages.

• (1710)

That includes Africa and a very significant portion of the world, largely due to francotrope immigration from these countries. These newcomers assimilate to French because of a predilection for the language, based either on a linguistic affinity between their language and other languages derived from Latin, like French, or because they come from former French colonies or protectorates.

For historical reasons, Vietnam was once a recruitment country. A majority of newcomers with Vietnamese as a mother tongue could be expected to assimilate to French. They do not assimilate to French outside Quebec, however. Haitians do, but only by a slim majority. Among immigrants whose mother tongue is an African language, it rarely happens.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: Mr. Godin, since you asked me for a practical suggestion, I suggest that you speak to the current minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay. You will be able to speak to this topic again later. I have the difficult task of managing speaking time.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

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

My questions are for Mr. Pichette.

First of all, the government says it has reduced immigration application processing times, and that wait times are the shortest they have ever been since the pandemic.

Do you consider the current wait times acceptable?

• (1715)

Mr. Roger Pichette: If you ask our clients that question, they will tell you that the process can never be fast enough. Ask people on the other side of the world and they will also tell you that the process is slow. In my opinion, however, your statement is not at all unreasonable. I tend to agree with what you said about the reduction in wait times since the pandemic, but we also need to establish whether they are temporary or permanent.

If permanent, they are definitely the shortest they have been since the pandemic. I agree with that. However, the labour shortage situation means that application approvals can never be fast enough from a company's perspective. Companies would always prefer to have a 19-week wait time for a worker from Morocco, for example, shortened to five weeks. They will always be glad to gain these three months.

Is it acceptable? Nothing is ever going to be fast enough for the private sector, but catering to every company's wait time preferences is not a reasonable objective.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Like a number of witnesses, you raised the question of on-the-ground support.

Do you think that consular support services should be expanded for sub-Saharan African immigrants?

Mr. Roger Pichette: To the extent that consular services are defined as services that we choose to offer, they can be very wide-ranging. If the underlying objective is to increase francophone immigration success rates, we should offer briefings that highlight the role of authorized representatives, the importance of not allowing indiscriminate access to immigration files, and ways to obtain clarifications about a rejected application so that the next one is better prepared. As for determining the scope of these kinds of measures, you would know better than me.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Can you tell us what deters your clients the most from immigrating to Canada?

Mr. Roger Pichette: Wait times are definitely a factor. The situation is different now, but before the pandemic, the wait times for a permanent residency were twice as long in Quebec as they were everywhere else in Canada. Obviously, when people asked me if they should go to Quebec or Canada, I would tell them that things would move a lot faster in one than the other.

Again, some of these people are arriving from countries that lack the same level of government services that we provide, or lack the same relationship with them. They do their best to prepare their application, which is often quite lengthy, only to receive a one-line letter in return. They learn that their application has been turned down because it's not thought to be a good one. All the rest of the letter is copy-pasted. They try to figure out what happened, but have no access to anything. I think that discourages them fairly quickly. If they have the option of going to France or somewhere else at that point, they will.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right, thank you.

I would like to ask you one last question about employers and recruitment.

In your opinion, could recruiters on the ground work harder, with federal government support, of course, to get people to come to Canada?

Mr. Roger Pichette: Yes. There is definitely a range of issues to deal with, like security, logistics and travel, but there is always room for improvement. Obviously, we have to bear in mind the cost-benefit ratio. I imagine that your fellow citizens often ask you questions about that. We cannot spend public funds on major initiatives to recruit a couple of workers. I understand that. However, while we may not necessarily be able to do more, we can always do better.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I am not sure how much time I have left. Do you have anything to add or any recommendations for the committee?

The Chair: You have one minute and 20 seconds left, Ms. Ashton.

Mr. Roger Pichette: I think what we really need is to improve our communications with these people. They prepare their case and have it processed at a cost, with or without representation. If no one bothers to ask, why would they think to submit their documents in the original Arabic, for example? They would assume that no one would read them. If applications are denied because an original Arabic version is not on file, but the reason given for the refusal is unclear, it means that these educated francophones, able to meet workforce needs, are being denied the opportunity to submit an application that accurately reflects their profile as applicants. In a way, the rug is being pulled out from under them.

Did I go over my time?

• (1720)

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you have other examples of things the government has done?

Mr. Roger Pichette: For example, someone's work permit application was turned down twice because of doubts over the authenticity of the job offer. I had to file two access to information requests before I found out that the labour market assessment performed by the federal department and by the Quebec department, along with an employment contract, were insufficient. The officer wanted to see a logo on the employment contract. This is what blocked the application not once, but twice. What do you think happened next? As I was about to bring an appeal in Federal Court, the applicant withdrew and the employer had to start the whole process over again.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Pichette. That is really interesting.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

I am going to use my discretion as chair to conduct the next round of questions. You will all have half as much time as usual to ask your questions.

Mr. Généreux, you have two and a half minutes to speak.

Mr. Joël Godin: Excuse me, Mr. Chair. Before going further, I would like us all to reach agreement on the time matter. We started the meeting late. We planned to spend an hour with the witnesses, and I think we should stick to that plan. It is not our fault that technical problems prevented things from working properly. As parliamentarians, we should not be penalized. The minister will be joining us afterwards and he will have an hour to testify.

Are you able to adhere to the full hour scheduled with these witnesses?

The Chair: I would be pleased to oblige, but then the minister's testimony would be cut short.

After 6:30 p.m., we have to move on to other things. We will have 15 minutes with the clerk and after that, all the members have other obligations.

It is the committee that—

Mr. Joël Godin: Can we not extend the sitting, like we have in the past?

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Please proceed, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I, along with several other committee members and the minister, have another meeting at 6:30 p.m. sharp. Immediately after our meeting, the minister has to appear before another committee. I wouldn't want him to be late for that committee meeting.

The Chair: Mr. Généreux, if you don't mind, I'll cut the question period in half. That way it's fair to everyone.

You have the floor for two and a half minutes.

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

Mr. Pichette, our leader, Pierre Poilievre, has proposed that a future Conservative government would implement a measure to recognize the skills of professionals within 60 days of them arriving from abroad. That would happen in several fields, including doctors and nurses. It means that they can be welcomed more quickly. Do you think that is a good idea?

As you know, our MPs' offices have practically become Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada offices. Three employees from my team call IRCC every day. We have to set up appointments with these people in advance in order to deal with all these cases. There are many horror stories like the one you told about the logo. It is crazy.

Some mechanisms within IRCC simply don't work. Nearly 1.5 million people, or more, are still waiting for their applications to be processed.

What do you propose?

I believe that there should be a service that deals with the small details that are missing, such as logos or commas. Otherwise, applicants have to start the whole process all over again and, for the most part, pay fees a second time. It just doesn't make sense.

I'll give you a chance to answer my questions.

Mr. Roger Pichette: When it comes to skills recognition, the professional orders will clearly take issue with that because they'll want to protect their turf. Perhaps there should be some pressure on them to complete their analysis within a reasonable timeframe. I don't think that 60 days is an unreasonable amount of time to determine whether an applicant is eligible to become part of a medical order, the bar or another order. It would make sense. The professional orders will say that they need money to pull it off. Discussions will obviously need to take place.

As for the other point you raised, you're right again. We're missing something. We're sort of victims of our appeal, which we underestimate. There aren't many places in the world that are as geopolitically stable as Canada and offer the same quality of life. We're always going to attract more people than we'll be able to handle, even if we increase processing capacity.

I don't have the magic solution, but I'm open to any and all suggestions. Obviously, more resources would make things interesting.

The Chair: Mr. Pichette, thank you for keeping to the time limit.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor for two and a half minutes as well.

• (1725)

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses.

Mr. Pichette, I really liked some of your recommendations. I'll certainly include them in the questions that follow.

Mr. Castonguay, I have to say that I'm quite disappointed in your vision. Perhaps you're talking about statistics from certain parts of the country. I don't know if you're aware, but since 1996, francophone regions in Canada are in charge of managing their own schools. There has been a steady increase in the number of students in francophone schools across most of Canada, including the territories. In the last 15 years, the number of students in francophone schools in Nova Scotia has almost doubled; that's impressive.

If I were to accept your proposal, it would be tantamount to saying that Nova Scotia, for example, should simply agree to become completely anglicized and no new francophone immigrants should be sent there because it's a waste of time. It's very disappointing to hear that.

I'll tell you the truth. If you look at the increasing number of students in francophone schools across Canada, you'll see that an incredible community is being built. I recognize that Quebec is making its own efforts, but to say that it's a waste of time for immigrants to move to other provinces, where there is a vibrant community, is really short-sighted when it comes to bilingualism and linguistic duality in Canada.

I'm very disappointed, but you're entitled to your opinions and I respect that. I assure you, however, that there are incredibly vibrant minority language communities across Canada.

I don't know if my two and a half minutes are up. I don't have any questions except this one: Don't you think that the strategy you're suggesting will eliminate French in provinces and regions other than Quebec, New Brunswick and maybe Northern Ontario?

The Chair: Please answer in five seconds or less.

Prof. Charles Castonguay: The house is on fire, and it's time to save the furniture.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for one minute and fifteen seconds.

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

In your opinion, does federal language policy take scientific data into account? Is it based on science?

Prof. Charles Castonguay: No. It's going in the wrong direction and heading straight for the wall.

Mr. Samson, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but according to the last census, the anglicization rate of native French-speaking Nova Scotians was 57%. The majority are becoming anglicized, despite French-language schooling. Even in Quebec, French-language schooling isn't working. Half of those who attend francophone primary and secondary schools because they have to, go on to attend an English CEGEP. On the island of Montreal, English-language CEGEPs now take half of all new recruits, while there is one anglophone for every three francophones on the island.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Castonguay, to buck this trend a little, what if we adopted a model—

Prof. Charles Castonguay: I haven't even mentioned Alberta yet. There, only one person in 1,000 becomes French-speaking and adopts French as the language used at home. In Quebec, the majority become French speakers. Send people where they can thrive in French, have children in French and contribute to Canada's linguistic duality.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Castonguay.

Ms. Ashton has the floor for one minute and fifteen seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to ask Mr. Pichette one last question. Just before I do, though, I want to say that, as a francophile from Western Canada, I'm a little troubled by some of the comments I've heard during this meeting. Of course, we welcome all testimony. That said, here in Western Canada, we need immigration and we need to continue to meet the significant demand in our communities for education in French, not to mention early childhood services in French and

French immersion classes. That's how we'll grow a bilingual generation across the country, outside Quebec.

A few minutes ago, Mr. Pichette, you shared some really striking examples with us. Can you give us any other examples of things IRCC hasn't done what is needed to help people who want to immigrate to Canada?

● (1730)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton. That's a very good question. Unfortunately, we are out of time. We have to move on to the second hour of our meeting, which will be devoted to other witnesses.

Mr. Pichette and Mr. Castonguay—unfortunately, Mr. Paquet was unable to join us—if you think of any other information that's important for us to have, please share it with our clerk. You can put it in writing, and the clerk will ensure that all the information is sent to committee members.

Congratulations, Mr. Pichette. You were nervous, as it was your first time here, but you needn't have worried.

All of the witnesses did a good job. Your interventions were clear. Thank you very much, on behalf of the committee.

Once again, please feel free to send us in writing any additional information you think we should consider as part of our study.

Thank you very much.

I'll suspend the meeting long enough to let our next guests in.

● (1730)

(Pause)

● (1735)

The Chair: We are back in session.

I'd like to welcome the new Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship and his accompanying officials, Ms. Fox, Deputy Minister, and Ms. Scott, Assistant Deputy Minister, Settlement and Integration.

As you know since you're used to appearing in committee, you have five minutes for your speech. Then we'll move on to questions. I'm very strict about keeping to the time limit, to give everyone a chance to ask their questions.

Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

I just wanted to make sure we're on the same page. The motion adopted by the committee for today's meeting stipulated that we would have a full hour with the minister. Earlier, there seemed to be a scheduling problem for committee members on the other side of the table. I'd just like to remind everyone that the wording of the motion that was proposed and adopted clearly states that it's a full hour.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, the motion does indeed say that it's a full hour, but, as you've seen, we experienced technical problems in the first hour, unfortunately. It's nobody's fault, not mine or yours. It is certainly not the minister's fault.

As you know, it takes the unanimous consent of the committee to be able to exceed the meeting's normally scheduled end time.

I suggest we start right away to maximize our time with the witnesses who are here.

Minister, you have the floor for five minutes.

Hon. Marc Miller (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Kuei kuei, ullukkut, tansi, bonjour, hello.

As you indicated, Mr. Chair, I have with me today my colleagues Christiane Fox and Catherine Scott.

Before I begin, I'd like to point out that we are on the unceded traditional territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

I am pleased to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages for the first time as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship.

Colleagues, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's discussion.

For years, we've been seeing a demographic decline in francophone communities outside Quebec, as I'm sure you are aware, particularly given that this committee includes representatives from some of those communities. According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census, the percentage of francophones has declined in every region of the country, with the exception of the Yukon.

[*English*]

One way to support the vitality of the French language in Canada is to increase francophone immigration to strengthen the linguistic, demographic and economic fabric of francophone communities. We have been spearheading several initiatives to boost francophone immigration in minority francophone communities and we're already seeing some positive results, with more to come.

[*Translation*]

In 2022, we reached our target of 4.4% French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec, a year ahead of schedule. We will maintain that same target for this year. However, there is still much work to be done to strengthen the French language in Canada.

We are working with our partners, including community stakeholders, to set new targets for the next three years. These will be ambitious, realistic and achievable targets that will help us address the issue of declining francophone minority communities.

IRCC's relationship with Quebec, as you no doubt know, is defined by the Canada-Quebec Accord. This agreement is guided by the principle that immigration must help preserve Quebec's demographic weight and protect its distinct identity. Our government will continue to work with the Quebec government to maintain the vitality of the French language and defend Quebec's interests.

[*English*]

There are other ambitious measures the Government of Canada is taking to protect the French language. This is demonstrated in the recent release of our comprehensive five-year plan, "Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration". It includes seven key initiatives that build on existing measures and it introduces new ones totalling more than \$137 million over five years.

The modernization of the Official Languages Act, which received royal assent in June of this year, recognizes the importance of leveraging immigration to enhance the vitality of francophone minority communities. We're working to increase and restore their demographic weight by taking a whole-of-government approach to achieve our goals.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

To that end, we are currently working on developing the francophone immigration policy, including new admission targets for French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec. Reforms to the Express Entry system, which allow for targeted selection of French-speaking applicants, will be crucial in helping us meet our commitments for francophone immigration after 2023.

The new policy will guide future action on francophone immigration outside Quebec, and will aim to foster the vitality of Canada's francophone minorities and contribute to maintaining or increasing their demographic weight.

[*English*]

These initiatives will help promote the French language across Canada. Our efforts will enhance the cultures of francophone communities outside Quebec and contribute to slowing and progressively turning around the troubling trend of a declining francophone population.

[*Translation*]

We are continuing our efforts in francophone immigration outside Quebec, a top priority for the coming years.

Thank you. I'm now ready to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You finished your presentation in four minutes. That's better than five.

We'll begin the first round of questions. Each intervention will be six minutes, which includes questions and comments.

We begin with the committee's vice-chair.

Mr. Godin, you have six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thanks for being here.

First of all, I want to thank you for being available after you were appointed. We had an immigration file to deal with together, and I had the chance to speak to you directly. I just wanted to say thank you.

Now, to get to the heart of the matter. I mean no disrespect, but I'm going to ask you some short questions and I'm hoping your answers will be short as well, since we don't have much time.

Here's my first question. You've been a minister since July 26. Have you received your mandate letter from the Prime Minister?

Hon. Marc Miller: No, I haven't.

Mr. Joël Godin: Is there a deadline for that? Should we rely on the former immigration minister's mandate letter, or do you expect to receive a new letter?

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, I have my own priorities. Obviously, the former minister's mandate letter is still in effect, given the objectives that were previously set for the department. As you know, committee work doesn't necessarily last, it goes beyond the mandate of a particular minister. I intend to continue fulfilling the—

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you. In fact, what you mean is that it's a copy-paste of what was done before. The Cabinet shuffle did not give us a new minister to revive francophone and anglophone immigration to Canada.

Is that the case?

Hon. Marc Miller: With all due respect, that's not necessarily true. I know Minister Fraser had his priorities. As you know, he learned French when he was minister, which is commendable.

I have my own goals and ambitions. As you know, I'm concerned with—

Mr. Joël Godin: Minister, you don't have a mandate letter from the Prime Minister.

Is that correct?

Hon. Marc Miller: I have my priorities and I communicate directly—

Mr. Joël Godin: Minister, you don't have a mandate letter from the Prime Minister. Is that correct?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't write the mandate letters, as you know, Mr. Godin, but I do have my priorities. I have communicated my four priorities directly to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Joël Godin: However, you don't know whether the Prime Minister is going to come back to you with a mandate letter or not. You don't have that information. I understand that it's not up to you.

Is that the case?

Hon. Marc Miller: I have work to do.

Mr. Joël Godin: Yes, thank you.

I'll move on to another question. You know that Bill C-13 has been passed and we now have legislation.

In what way does the Minister of Immigration currently have a responsibility, an obligation to act, to encourage francophone immigration, among other things, today, October 4?

Hon. Marc Miller: First, we have a duty to co-ordinate with Quebec with regard to the arrival of French-speaking people in the province to maintain the vitality of the French language. Immigration is an option, but it's also a matter of co-ordinating respecting areas of jurisdiction, notably those of the Quebec government, as determined in the agreement with which you are very familiar.

Second, outside of Quebec, we have a responsibility—

Mr. Joël Godin: Please excuse me, Minister, but I'm talking about your responsibility as minister with respect to the new legislation that is in effect and received Royal Assent on June 20.

What is your responsibility and what do you have to do right now as Minister of Immigration to enforce the act?

Hon. Marc Miller: Basically, it's about increasing the number of francophones who come to the country, outside Quebec. This is Canada's primary responsibility, which falls within its jurisdiction. In fact, it's enshrined in the act itself.

Mr. Joël Godin: Minister, you know that there is a new section on francophone immigration in Bill C-13, which now has the force of law.

When are you going to meet the act's immigration obligations?

Hon. Marc Miller: That will happen as early as this year. You'll see what happens in light of the new targets I've asked my department to set. These targets are both ambitious—

Mr. Joël Godin: Was this done at your discretion or because it is a legislative requirement?

Hon. Marc Miller: What the law requires, the law requires—

● (1745)

Mr. Joël Godin: I am asking you: Is that a legislative requirement?

Hon. Marc Miller: The law requires objectives, as you know—

Mr. Joël Godin: We are talking about indicators, objective and targets.

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, exactly. In addition to what is set out in the legislation, to ensure the vitality of the French language outside of Quebec—

Mr. Joël Godin: I want to stop you there, Minister. Did you know that section 44.1 is not currently in effect?

Hon. Marc Miller: It doesn't matter whether—

Mr. Joël Godin: Did you know that? I'm asking you a question.

Hon. Marc Miller: It doesn't matter. I have that objective and, in light of the new targets and indicators being established, you will see that we have a realistic objective for our work outside Quebec.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you know when the Canadian government will issue the decree in this regard?

Hon. Marc Miller: No, I don't.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister. I have a few more questions.

Would you agree that, demographically speaking, the proportion of francophones is declining across Canada, including in Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller: When you consider the number of people who speak French, both inside and outside Quebec, the French language is under threat, with francophones living in an English-speaking sea.

Mr. Joël Godin: Therefore, you agree with my statement.

Hon. Marc Miller: I totally agree that French in North America is under threat.

Mr. Joël Godin: Are you the best person to enforce the Official Languages Act, given your statement that you didn't want to see the Charter of the French Language in the bill?

Hon. Marc Miller: What I wanted to see written into the bill, Mr. Godin, is that the federal government does its work according to its areas of jurisdiction, and that Quebec, obviously, does it within its own area of jurisdiction. We have the same objectives, that is, to ensure the vitality of the French fact, but the primary job of the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is to promote the French fact outside Quebec, and then to work with Quebec within its jurisdiction. My answer is yes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Minister.

With regard to francophone immigration targets, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, is not comfortable with your position on the targets you've set. According to the FCFA, a target of at least 10% is needed to restore the demographic weight of francophones in Canada.

Do you agree with that statement? Will you put in place the necessary means to reach a target higher than 10%?

Hon. Marc Miller: We don't disagree on the target, but I want to make sure it's achievable, and I intend to hit it.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Iacono, you may go ahead for six minutes.

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

Thank you for being here, Minister, to answer a few questions.

Can you give us an overview of the consultations IRCC is conducting in order to develop a francophone immigration policy?

Hon. Marc Miller: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

As your fellow member pointed out, the Official Languages Act requires the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to adopt a francophone immigration policy. The policy will set out realistic targets, as I just said, as well as the mechanisms necessary to achieve them.

I mentioned the 4.4% target, which actually wasn't ambitious. However, the Government of Canada had never achieved it. We are well aware that a 4.4% target won't cut it, especially with the mechanisms currently in place at IRCC.

My goal is twofold: first, set a more ambitious target, and second, introduce mechanisms that will make it possible to achieve the target in the years ahead, even raise the threshold.

Certainly, we recognize that immigration is something that will help restore the community's demographic weight. It's not the only factor, and it's important to point that out. We have an action plan that requires funding. We have a budget of \$13.4 million just to develop the policy.

The last thing I want to say is that none of this can happen without consultation. We've consulted the stakeholders who care deeply about the French language across the country. With the help of those stakeholders, particularly the people at the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, we will be able to reach the targets, which have to be both realistic and ambitious.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: You said the 4.4% target was hard to achieve. What target do you think we could achieve?

Hon. Marc Miller: I said that the target of 4.4% had never been met previously, but we hit it a year sooner than we said we would.

I can tell you that I won't be satisfied until we meet the targets. That's just my nature. It's obvious that the mechanisms in place to achieve the 4.4% target weren't as strong as we would've hoped.

That is why I'm uneasy, albeit ambitious. We need to establish processes both within and outside the country so we can bring newcomers to the country properly and ensure the language's survival. We can't just ask French-speaking people to come here and then leave them to fend for themselves. We need to put supports in place and have the funding necessary to preserve and sustain French-speaking communities.

• (1750)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Can you give us an idea of the measures IRCC has taken to help French-speaking newcomers integrate outside Quebec?

What is the feedback from the people on the ground? What are organizations saying about the measures?

Hon. Marc Miller: That question is particularly relevant in the wake of the last one.

In 2022-23, IRCC invested nearly \$72 million to strengthen the francophone integration pathway, a suite of settlement and resettlement services provided in French by francophone communities.

The 2023-28 action plan for official languages sets out an additional investment of \$50 million to bolster the reception capacity of francophone minority communities.

That makes it possible to support a number of initiatives that have never been funded. People want to see results. I can tell you that, further to our consultations, most stakeholders were glad not only that the Official Languages Act was being overhauled, but also that services and supports were being established to preserve and sustain the French language outside Quebec.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Under the action plan, \$137.2 million is being invested in francophone immigration over five years, in addition to a total of \$84.3 million invested under the previous action plans.

How will that funding help IRCC promote Canada and recruit francophone immigrants?

Hon. Marc Miller: When I talked about the importance of raising the target of 4.4% to 5%, 6%, 7% or 8%, I mentioned the mechanisms that had to be in place. That requires planning. We can't just pluck francophones from the pool of people who want to come to Canada and tell them to figure it out. That would be unacceptable. We have to set up the necessary activities to promote Canada abroad, while obviously undertaking activities in Canada to support newcomers.

That is why we carried out 540 activities in Canada and about 290 activities internationally in 2022. That involves a lot, especially putting in place the resources, in west Africa and other parts of the French-speaking world, to promote Canada and make sure that those who want to come to Quebec receive the support they need. We have a lot of applications and a lot of work to do to make sure the sorting and triaging of applications from people wanting to come to Canada is free from systemic racism. At some point, that has to be addressed.

The work starts—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. You'll get a chance to follow up on that point.

We now go to Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the minister for being here.

Very quickly, I'd like to give notice of the following motion, so we can discuss it at the next meeting:

That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), and taking into account the Radio-Canada reports last Tuesday, which revealed new violations of the Official Languages Act within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), the committee hear from the RCMP Commissioner, Mike Duheme, no later than October 18 to discuss the RCMP's plan to comply with the Official Languages Act and respect the French language.

Minister, earlier you spoke about the decline of French outside Quebec. The answer you gave my fellow member was evasive.

Do you think Quebec is experiencing a decline of French?

Hon. Marc Miller: French is clearly under threat in Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're playing semantics. Is there a decline, or is French under threat?

Hon. Marc Miller: French is clearly under threat in Quebec. There is absolutely no doubt about it.

• (1755)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: However, you don't think there's a decline.

Hon. Marc Miller: In the 1970s and 1980s in Quebec, English was spoken more often in Montreal. I lived in Montreal. I think there has been a push by Quebec to strengthen the French fact, but a threat still looms because of Quebec's geographical location in North America.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're evading the question again.

Whether we consider people with French as their mother tongue, the language they use at home, their first official language spoken or their language of work, French has declined as compared with English in Quebec. It's even worse in Montreal. By all those indicators, there's a lot more English in Montreal. Therefore, French is declining in Quebec, but you don't seem to want to admit it.

Hon. Marc Miller: I can tell you what I see when I go door-knocking in my riding. I see people—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I don't want to get into that. It's easy to give anecdotes.

Hon. Marc Miller: No, it's important, because I'm talking about the survival of French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'm talking about scientific data and statistics.

Let's move on to another topic, then.

Hon. Marc Miller: We agree on the same principle, meaning that French must be preserved and revitalized in Quebec. There's no disagreement there.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If you don't admit that French is declining, it's tough to take the necessary actions to stop that decline.

I would say that francophone immigration is critical outside Quebec, but also in Quebec. Earlier, you seemed to say that you were ready to work together. I'm happy to hear it, because people at various IRCC offices in the world apparently didn't want to work with Quebec.

If your focus is on increasing francophone immigration outside Quebec by using IRCC offices all over the world, there's a risk of robbing Peter to pay Paul—unless there is genuine co-operation. Quebec draws from the same pools of prospective newcomers, after all. If you did work together, the federal government could help Quebec achieve its francophone immigration targets. Obviously, Quebec has some authority over immigration, but it does draw from the same pools.

Otherwise, temporary immigration is available, as are all the other immigration categories that fall solely under federal jurisdiction. Are you ready to try to increase francophone immigration in those categories in Quebec?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, I absolutely am.

First, I want to say that the people who come here are not objects. We can't just move them around and say it's all the same thing. We can't take something from one to give preference to another. That's not at all the case.

Personally, I want Quebec to exercise its right to bring in people who speak French and help them. I've spoken with my Quebec counterpart, Minister Fréchette. She wants us to think about how French speakers who come to Quebec to do their studies can access permanent residence. We are certainly ready to work on that. That's a mechanism that could be introduced outside Quebec as well, without taking anything away from anyone.

In the case of international students studying in Quebec, for instance, the levels or thresholds are too low to accommodate all of them. Obviously, that's a discussion that has to be had with Quebec. If French speakers want to settle elsewhere, that is their right. Every human has the right of mobility. They can choose where they want to live. It's clear that francophone communities need to be prioritized, whether in Quebec or elsewhere.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That's it.

I didn't necessarily mean dictating where people have to go. I was talking about giving preference to the French fact and its vitality. The francophone immigration pools aren't infinite, and we should try to coordinate our efforts so as not to undermine each other. That said, you seem to be open to the idea, and I'm glad.

The FCFA talked about the need to raise the francophone immigration target to 10%. I think an overall increase is needed.

Do you think it's possible to raise the target beyond 4.4%, which clearly won't cut it to stop the demographic decline?

Hon. Marc Miller: What I said to the FCFA representatives is that I would like to see the target at 6%. That would be a 50% increase of a target that was hard to achieve. We need to be ambitious, and we need to put mechanisms in place to ensure the system is sustainable and, then, increase the percentage. That is the heavy responsibility I am putting on the shoulders of the officials to my left and right. Nevertheless, I think it's doable.

• (1800)

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Ashton, you may go ahead for six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Since we're on the subject of the FCFA, I want to point out that its target for francophone immigration outside Quebec is 12% over the next three years, in order to restore the demographic weight of francophone and Acadian communities to 1971 levels.

Do you support the FCFA's recommendation to raise the target to 12%?

Hon. Marc Miller: I've met with FCFA representatives on two occasions, one of them being in person. What I told them was that I agree that the francophone immigration target needs to be increased, no matter the number. They recommended 10%, if I'm not mistaken. The target has to be achievable. I don't want to do what politicians do and set targets, only to disappoint everyone when they aren't met.

I want to put mechanisms in place within the department to make sure we are able to keep raising the target. I think going from 4.4% to 6% is tough but doable. I'm not convinced we'll be able to hit that level right now, but I am confident that the public servants next

to me will put in place the mechanisms needed to address the challenge. After that, it will be easier to increase the target to 7% or 8%.

I say this before the committee: it will be tough. We will have to make a concerted effort to revisit how we attract people who speak French to Canada, whether they are from west Africa or other parts of the world.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I don't have a lot of time.

We've heard from witnesses who've attributed the failure to attract francophone immigrants directly to the lack of [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

The Chair: I have to interrupt, Ms. Ashton. I stopped the clock. The sound cut out for five to 10 seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: All right.

We've heard from a number of witnesses who've said that the failure to attract francophone immigrants was directly tied to the lack of visa offices, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Are you in favour of increasing consular service and visa office capacity, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, as recommended in the Senate report on francophone immigration that came out this year?

Hon. Marc Miller: Yes, but I want to qualify my answer.

Let me tell you that we recently increased our office capacity in west Africa, particularly Cameroon. I also want to say that the 27% rate we saw in 2021, which was unacceptable, is now up to 37%.

We still have work to do from a staffing and resource standpoint, of course, but we also have to examine the reasons that were identified, regardless of what they were, for rejecting the applications of prospective immigrants to Canada, as compared with the rest of the world.

I don't think the problem is necessarily due to a lack of resources, but there is no doubt that staffing was sometimes an issue. We can remedy the situation. That's what I was talking about when I mentioned putting in place mechanisms to bring up the levels.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Today, Radio-Canada reported that there was little happening at the immigration centre in Dieppe. When will the centre really do what it's supposed to do, and why has your government dragged its feet?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'll answer quickly, and then I'm going to pass the floor over to my deputy minister.

It's already staffed with a half-dozen people. They're working on a contribution and support program with a budget of around \$25 million. An announcement will be made later this year.

It's clear that a centre of this size is working directly on what I was talking about, in other words, putting mechanisms in place that will make it possible to raise our levels. The activity level at the centre is expected to grow, but since it's still early days, I don't think we can judge the centre's performance after just a few months in operation.

I'm going to ask my deputy minister to answer the other part of your question.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'm satisfied with your answer and, since I have very little time, I would like to move on to another topic. I would just add that it is taking a long time to get the Dieppe innovation centre up and running. Since the opening of this centre was announced several years ago, our expectations for it are greater.

Let us move on to the role of the government in terms of concrete measures and the leadership we need when it comes to immigration, particularly outside Quebec.

Since your government is responsible for solving the francophone labour shortage, could you propose a specific immigration pathway to attract francophone teachers—from early childhood to high school—recognizing that Canada has a deficit of 10,000 teachers in immersion classes, francophone schools and early childhood centres? Is the federal government prepared to provide the leadership our communities need in this sector, given that education comes under provincial jurisdiction, but that it is up to the federal government to deal with the labour shortage?

• (1805)

Hon. Marc Miller: Labour is the responsibility of all levels of government. Our action plan includes \$16 million for the retention of francophone teachers. As far as Quebec is concerned, we are always ready to work with it to ensure that we respond appropriately to this shortage of teachers—

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. I'm sorry to interrupt, but I have to be fair to everybody. We're well over six minutes.

Mr. Kmiec, welcome, as this is the first time you are participating in a meeting of the best committee on Parliament Hill. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec (Calgary Shepard, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister. I see that you appeared before this committee prior to appearing before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, of which I am a member. We were supposed to have you tomorrow, but you cancelled your visit.

Since you talked about foreign students in a francophone context, how do you read this article that I have here?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't see what you're showing me. You can read it.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: The title of the article, loosely translated, is “French students in Quebec in housing hell”. The subtitle states that, between scarcity and the cost of goods, young people arriving in Montreal face a number of challenges in being able to find housing before they return to university.

It takes two minutes to read this article, the time it takes to post a message on social media, where I know you spend a lot of time. How can we convince francophones from other countries to come here when they read such articles in international newspapers?

Hon. Marc Miller: First of all, if you look at the demand for housing among students, you see that it is constantly increasing. I don't know if I could answer your question in a social media message or in less than two minutes, but clearly there is a dynamic to be respected with the provinces. Moreover, Quebec claims exclusive jurisdiction over international students, which is not necessarily the case in the other provinces, where this responsibility is shared.

In post-secondary institutions, there is a lot of money at stake and a lot of promises are made. As you know, a foreign student pays three to four times what my son would now pay at McGill University. Both the federal and provincial governments have a role to play in this area. One of their responsibilities is to properly house these people.

This article talks about a reality, but the fact remains that the demand among international students is very strong.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It's more of a customer service issue, and that's why I'm asking the question. International students select from all the countries where they could choose to study. Some come to Montreal to try to find housing and prepare for the school year. However, according to this article published in *Le Monde*, a French student found housing in a half-basement, which she says is a proper cave, with no light coming in. She says that, fortunately, she will be gone before the winter.

The article goes on to say, concerning international students, that the 20% increase in rent prices in Montreal since the COVID-19 pandemic, and even more so the shortage of available housing, is forcing them to engage in a real struggle before they can consider starting school.

Also in the article, a French student, Valentine Descamps, posted a message on the page of a Facebook group devoted to students looking for housing in Montreal. In her message, she says that a week of intensive searching has yielded nothing. She says that she is a very calm person with a smile and asks for help, stating that she is starting school in a couple of days.

When stories like this come out, they are often directed at your department. They are about the lack of housing, and about IRCC client service, which is one of the worst performing departments, with a backlog of 2.2 million or 2.3 million applications. How can we convince students to come to our country when there are so many problems at the federal level? How do we ensure that, when they arrive, their experience on the ground is positive?

Hon. Marc Miller: Mr. Kmiec, with all due respect, you're mixing apples and oranges.

First of all, Quebec is a very popular destination for foreign students, be they from France or elsewhere, who want an education in French. As you know, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is not responsible for housing in downtown Montreal.

I'm not coming up with excuses, but—

• (1810)

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Are you not responsible for housing for foreign students when they choose a Canadian or Quebec university?

Hon. Marc Miller: The Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship administers the visa process—

Mr. Tom Kmiec: You don't deal with that at all; it leaves you in different.

Hon. Marc Miller: No, obviously, we have a moral responsibility—

The Chair: One moment, please.

Mr. Kmiec, the interpretation can't keep up at all if two people are speaking at the same time. If you ask a question and interrupt the minister for the three seconds he is speaking, the interpretation cannot follow. So be patient, ask the question and wait for an answer.

Hon. Marc Miller: First, in terms of service standards for students, we are currently below the 60-day threshold, at 46 days. Second, in terms of responsibility for housing, educational institutions clearly have a role to play. The federal government can get involved, but the provincial government must also contribute.

We have made major investments, particularly at the Université Laval and, on the west coast, at the University of British Columbia, to ensure that there is acceptable housing for foreign students. This is a discussion that will have to be coordinated with the provinces and with the institutions themselves.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: It only takes two minutes to read a post on social media, which I know you spend a lot of time on. I have here an article from *La Presse* titled, loosely translated, "International students are struggling to obtain services", which talks about the services the federal government does not offer students when they apply or when they want to change something.

Many students want to enrol in the post-graduate work permit program—

The Chair: Mr. Kmiec, your time is up. Thank you very much.

I now give the floor to Ms. Taylor Roy and Mr. Samson, who will share the next five minutes.

Ms. Taylor Roy, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank the minister, as well as Ms. Fox and Ms. Scott.

[*English*]

I will speak in English because I represent a community that has a minority francophone population.

We heard from the witnesses previously that one of the concerns is that many of the francophone communities are not keeping up the language—that their children are speaking English and that they are actually losing some of the francophones there.

In my riding there is an organization by the name of Trille Blanc, which is a francophone organization trying to develop a community for francophones, for seniors, for child care and so on.

[*Translation*]

There's also an organization called AFRY, which stands for Association des francophones de la région de York, and another called PARTAGEZ le français.

[*English*]

Under the action plan for official languages—and I understand you're going to be working with the Minister for Official Languages—are there programs or other things that are being done to ensure that immigrants who come into these communities retain their French language? Are we supporting these minority communities in their work to keep the French language alive there?

Hon. Marc Miller: It's a really important question. I alluded to it in one of my answers to a question from one of your colleagues on the other side.

When people who speak French to come to this country, we can't expect them to keep the language when after two generations—and the statistics prove that it's two generations—it will disappear if they're not properly surrounded. The overarching threat to the French language is the English language, just by its volume, in particular outside Quebec but also inside Quebec.

Having raised, and continuing to raise, three kids in three different languages, I totally understand the struggle of your constituents in making sure that the dominant language does not take over, whether it's through friendships or just by people's surroundings. It is a constant struggle.

I'm not going to say that the federal government has all the answers, but the official languages plan has settlement services that have gone from 50 to 80 communities across the country. That's important.

When I met with some institutions in London that were working with IRCC and were funded in large part by it, they talked about the importance of making sure that unilingually French people not only get their community supports but are also able to be integrated into a predominantly anglophone area, while at the same time preserving the language that we want to support, French.

It is a challenge. I think it's one that we can really live up to as the federal government, but there is the need for provincial governments to step up. In this case it's Ontario, but we've also seen this need in New Brunswick and other provinces.

It is a partial answer to your question. When we talk about thresholds and the mechanisms that we need, it is important to have those proper supports in place in order for French to thrive outside Quebec. Otherwise, you are just creating conditions such that after 60 to 65 years, people are then speaking the dominating language, which more often than not is English.

• (1815)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Leah Taylor Roy: Thank you.

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

Mr. Darrell Samson: I can't contextualize my question in a minute and a half.

Minister, I want to congratulate you. I know that you are the right person to fulfill the government's commitments, but time is very limited and we have to act quickly, turning on a dime, as we say back home.

It is recognized that almost 100% of the population increase today is due to immigration. By 2032, all of that growth is expected to come from immigration.

You said something very important. You talked about the mechanism. I'm interested in the existing mechanism, as it is a mechanism that we can improve upon if we quickly turn on a dime.

I understood that the first one that worked well was to remove barriers to admitting international students so that they could more easily receive their visas and go to schools during the pandemic. I would like us to be able to apply this strategy to francophones, since it is a strategy that has helped us quickly and greatly.

Hon. Marc Miller: That's something we're looking at. In my opinion, it will be important to put this mechanism in place. When I talk to my department about my ambition, they answer me by talking about the pool of candidates, and thus about the game plan to reach the thresholds. However, it is clear that the current pool is insufficient to meet the demand.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Exactly. I will soon share with you new mechanisms and strategies for filling this pool.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Minister, you will soon be setting immigration thresholds. Did you consult Quebec and, if so, did you take its suggestions into account?

Hon. Marc Miller: As you know, these are not just suggestions, but demands, which I think are very legitimate. We have disagreements at certain levels. In particular, I made it very clear that Quebec could make an additional effort in terms of welcoming family class immigrants, which includes spouses and parents.

The thresholds will have to be discussed. I talked about mixing apples and oranges. Very often, the public discourse mixes up the temporary nature of the stay of certain people who come here, be they students or foreign workers in the agricultural sector, with the immigration thresholds needed to ensure the sustainability of the population and offset the declining birth rate. In the latter case, there is a need for coordination.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Quickly, do you agree that a society's ability to integrate and welcome should be taken into account in determining immigration levels?

Hon. Marc Miller: Across Canada, the answer is yes. When someone tells me that, I want to get into the details and clarify what it means.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You are somewhat following the objectives of the Century Initiative, which is to welcome 500,000 immigrants a year. That seems to me to be determined more by ideological causes than by a consideration of the capacity to integrate. We talked about the housing shortage, among other things, but we don't get the impression that you are taking that into account.

Hon. Marc Miller: That's your point of view.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you have no comment on that?

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't share your point of view.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So you're saying that you look at the capacity to accommodate.

Hon. Marc Miller: Absolutely.

First of all, volume is volume. Then you have to look specifically at what provinces, businesses, universities or economic sectors are actually calling for international workers. When you take all that into account and add asylum seekers and the ambitious demands of Canadians and Quebecers to welcome international refugees—be they from Ukraine, Afghanistan or Syria—that is a lot of people.

Yes, we need accommodation capacity and infrastructure, but I think that, as a country, Canada is able to take in all those people, whether it be in terms of housing, welcoming, integration or francization, for which we pay hundreds of millions of dollars to Quebec—

• (1820)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Did you base that on data?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. Your time is up.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Minister, francophone communities outside Quebec consider francophone immigration to be essential to their survival.

As the new minister, what priority do you give to the work that needs to be done on francophone immigration?

Hon. Marc Miller: In terms of who we are as a country, this is one of my top priorities. As a minister, I never have the luxury of having a single priority, but I would put that work at the top of the list.

We are talking about our identity as a bilingual country. If we at the federal level are not doing our job in our own area of jurisdiction, we should all be ashamed. We have a mission to do that. I think it's achievable as a societal project for our country.

Ms. Niki Ashton: As you said, there is also an obligation in the legislation.

Let's talk about the reality of immigration. Why are the processing times so bad? In the case of the skilled worker program, in 2021-22, 100% of applicants had to wait more than 180 days for their application to be processed. How can you hope to attract francophone immigrants with such unacceptable time frames?

Hon. Marc Miller: I'll yield the floor to my deputy minister, Ms. Fox.

Ms. Christiane Fox (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Thank you very much for the question.

Actually, after the COVID-19 crisis, there were delays in processing applications. We have been very transparent about the initiatives the department has taken to process all files.

Since then, we have returned to our service standards in several categories. The standard, which was 60 days for students, is now 46 days. What's more, for the Global Talent Stream of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, processing times are 14 days: we're now on schedule to attract global talent here in Canada.

It's not over; we've made progress, but there's still work to be done.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Fox.

That's all the time you had, Ms. Ashton.

The next five minutes will be shared between Mr. Godin and Mr. Kmiec.

Mr. Godin, I'll let you know when you have about two and a half minutes left.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I'd like to hear you talk about the Centre d'innovation en immigration francophone, which was announced in 2022. There's confusion now: the minister says one thing, but officials came to tell us something else and replied in writing that there was no customer service.

I think there's an urgent need for action on francophone immigration. Is the Centre d'innovation en immigration francophone indispensable in the short term to get results on the ground?

Hon. Marc Miller: First, it's not a customer service centre. In the short term, it may not be indispensable, but in the medium and long term, it is.

I used the word "mechanism" several times during my testimony. This will be a very important centre for distributing and selecting projects, and for fostering the contribution of people who have more expertise than I do in promoting the French fact outside Quebec. What's more, this centre will perfect our systems and the way we do things in West Africa or the rest of the world.

There are already six people working there, which isn't as many as we'd hoped. There's reason to talk about enhancing their work.

Mr. Joël Godin: Forgive me, Minister, but my time is short.

I think it's a poor investment of Canadians' money to have spent \$12.9 million to create this centre and then spend \$5 million a year, through the Action Plan for Official Languages, to make it effective. I sincerely believe that the public servants who are with

you today are competent and that they know very well the problems and shortcomings that can be corrected in order to obtain an immediate result.

I just wanted to give you my opinion. I think we're on the wrong track and wasting time. Meanwhile, francophone immigration is declining and we're not reacting.

I now give the floor to my colleague Mr. Kmiec.

The Chair: Mr. Kmiec, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Tom Kmiec: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have another title to read to you, Minister, from a great Radio-Canada podcast: "International students affected by the housing crisis." We were talking about the fact that there are a lot of international students who work hard to come here to Canada, but who, after a few months or a year, find that it's not worth it to finish their studies in Canada and settle here.

I always thought that the goal of the Canadian government and all politicians was to bring people here to convince them to stay here, not just to find work and study, but to become Canadian citizens. For me, the goal of immigration is to have more people join our Canadian family and, of course, the Quebec family.

How can we maintain an immigration program that doesn't fulfil all these objectives, with people saying it's not worth staying in Canada, because it's too expensive, because it's too difficult to find housing and because it's too difficult to finish your studies in Canada because of all these problems?

• (1825)

Hon. Marc Miller: I don't want to minimize the plight or the testimony of these people, but there are also hundreds of thousands of people who say it's worth staying. I would also say that not all international students come here to stay. You only have to think of the cabinet members who went to Oxford. They didn't go to study there with the intention of living in England. They came back and became ministers or held other positions.

International students are highly coveted people. Canada is always a popular destination for them. Not everyone has to or wants to stay, but in some cases, there are also avenues for people to stay.

There are certainly establishments that aren't doing their job and are just filling their coffers, but there are others that are doing their job very well.

[English]

Mr. Tom Kmiec: I'm sorry, Minister; I'm going to have to interrupt just so I can ask you this one last question.

Earlier this year, Neil Yeates, a former deputy minister of the department, produced a report called “IRCC Organizational Review Report”. I'm told that it's a 28-page report and that Paul Wells has obtained a copy of it.

In it are organizational recommendations for this department. Organization deeply impacts all streams of immigration. It will impact the quality and our ability to attract French-speaking students and immigrants to Canada.

Have you read the report, first of all? Have you looked at the recommendations? Can this committee have that report?

Hon. Marc Miller: It's far from me—and I hope it doesn't affect my political position—to recommend that people read Paul Wells' Substack, but he did a great article on that with the deputy minister to my right, Christiane Fox,. She committed to implementing a great number of the recommendations in the report. I think that's worth a further discussion.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

I'm sorry, Mr. Kmiec. We've even exceeded five minutes.

I give the floor to Mr. Serré.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for coming today, and on such short notice. Thank you also for the work you do.

As soon as you were appointed, in July, during your first speeches, you started talking about francophone immigration. So, I think you've grasped the issue very well and the importance of restoring the demographic weight of francophones across Canada, especially in regions like mine, in Northern Ontario.

Earlier, a witness, Mr. Pichette, presented us with five recommendations. One of them concerned the fact that problematic companies, notably because they have fraudulent intentions, are targeting their publicity to international students. What steps will you take to prevent these companies from taking advantage of Canada's appeal to exploit international students?

Hon. Marc Miller: It's clear—and I've spoken publicly about this—that there are actors in Canada and outside the country who are taking advantage of this student demand and giving false hope to many people. It's very unfortunate to see them suffer and receive an education that doesn't live up to their expectations, especially in institutions that aren't the best players, not planning very well to support these people, whether in terms of housing services or other services. It's a problem I don't want to exaggerate, but I don't want to minimize it either. Some provinces, in the exercise of their jurisdiction, do a better job than others.

The challenge facing the federal government and me, as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, is to figure out what I need to solve. It's not my job to police the structural funding of higher education by the provinces, and I'm sure the provinces would call me to order if I tried to do so. Institutions have adapted to accommodate international students who pay three or four times what our children pay. It's a problem and part of the discussion about the ecosystem that's been created.

My job as Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship is to look at the visa process, to look at the reliability of the institutions that benefit from that process and the international students who come here, and to stop fraud. We are working—and this will require coordination with the institutions concerned and the provinces—to determine which institutions are more sound than others, even if it means rewarding the good players later on and punishing the bad ones. It's not going to happen overnight. I know people may be frustrated by that statement, but it's a valve that can't be closed overnight without very negative repercussions.

● (1830)

Mr. Marc Serré: Thank you very much.

In the action plan, we've added \$137 million for the next five years. In terms of francophone immigration, you mentioned the importance of offering more consular services in West Africa, particularly in Cameroon.

Our colleague Mr. Drouin, president of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, spoke earlier about the importance of increasing francophone immigration from Africa. Will you be taking steps, in addition to those taken in West Africa, to go after more African students with the funds from the action plan?

Hon. Marc Miller: Actually, despite what your colleague said when he decried the Centre d'innovation en immigration francophone in Dieppe, this centre is going to help us in this aim, that is, to put in place, in the context of missions abroad, in West Africa or elsewhere, the right mechanisms to be able to make Canada shine.

Earlier, I talked about funding to address the shortage of French-speaking teachers. Your colleagues raised, among other things, the importance of having this support, different from what an English-speaking immigrant would need. We need teachers. We can talk all we want about provincial laws and this beautiful federal law, but it's in public schools that we're going to ensure the longevity of our language and the education of my children and grandchildren.

We need to talk about public school reform in French, in Quebec, even if it's outside my area of expertise. The future of our beautiful French language depends on quality education. What appeals to me most, when we talk about the longevity of our language, is education in French.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, Ms. Fox and Ms. Scott, the first time we asked you to come here, you came. At the committee's request, we had to reschedule your appearance, and all three of you returned at the first opportunity. The committee would therefore like to thank you for your availability.

I would like to tell committee members that, for the upcoming study on the economic development of official language minority communities, political organizations must provide their witness lists this Friday, no later than 4 p.m. Ottawa time. This applies to the NDP, Bloc Québécois, Conservative Party and Liberal Party.

The committee's analyst has provided us with a framework for developing the report she proposes we write on this study. I don't see any problem with people taking a look at the index she has prepared for us. If you have anything you'd like to suggest to her individually, you can send it to her in writing, it will be quicker.

Because of the technical problems that occurred in the first hour, we won't have time to take five minutes to continue the meeting behind closed doors, as we would exceed the allotted time. Therefore, we will deal with what we had to deal with at the next in camera meeting. If you agree with me, I give my blessing to the analyst to start writing this report based on the development framework she has proposed to us today, which I fully agree with.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

• (1835)

Mr. Joël Godin: I have a quick question, Mr. Chair.

Minister, thank you for taking the time. I'd like to check whether the committee could receive a copy of the document entitled "IRCC Organizational Review Report". I think it could be useful in the study we're currently conducting on francophone immigration. Would it be possible to send a copy of this report to the clerk so that we have all the information?

Hon. Marc Miller: We'll look into it, but I think it's possible.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>