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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault





## Standing Committee on Official Languages

Wednesday, November 29, 2023

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 79 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3) and the motion adopted by the committee on September 20, 2023, the committee is meeting to continue its study on the economic development of official language minority communities.

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

To keep the meeting running smoothly, I would like to outline a few rules to follow for witnesses and members.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. If you are participating by videoconference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

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

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

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

Members in the room who wish to speak are asked to raise their hand, and members on Zoom are asked to use the “raise hand” function. The committee clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated order of speaking. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

In accordance with our routine motion regarding sound tests, I wish to inform the committee that all witnesses have completed the required sound tests before the meeting.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

From the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, we have Stephen Traynor, vice-president, Policy, Planning, Communications and Northern Projects Management Office.

Welcome, Mr. Traynor.

From Prairies Economic Development Canada, we have Anoop Kapoor, assistant deputy minister, Policy and Strategic Direction.

Welcome, Mr. Kapoor.

We also have Ginette LeBel, present by videoconference, senior business officer. Welcome.

For information, we have one hour to hear testimony and question our two guests. We will suspend the meeting after an hour, at about 5:30, so we can start the second part of the meeting.

I would like to welcome our witnesses.

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

**Mr. Stephen Traynor (Vice-President, Policy, Planning, Communications and Northern Projects Management Office, Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency):** Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, my name is Stephen Traynor and I am the vice-president of policy, communications and the Northern Projects Management Office for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, or CanNor.

I am pleased to join you in person here in Ottawa. I respectfully acknowledge that we are on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe people.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today to speak about CanNor's support in Canada's three territories for the economic development of official language minority communities.

CanNor works with Northerners, indigenous peoples, communities, businesses, organizations, the territorial governments and other federal departments. Our mandate is to help build diversified and dynamic communities that foster long-term sustainability and economic prosperity in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

In the context of today's appearance, CanNor works closely with the Francophone economic development organizations in each territory, namely the Association franco-yukonnaise, the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest, and the Association francophone du Nunavut. The goal is to encourage and support projects that foster economic diversification, business development, innovation, and partnerships.

CanNor is responsible for promoting and delivering the economic development initiative, or EDI, fund in the territories. As the committee is aware, the EDI was announced by the Government of Canada in 2018, through the "Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future". CanNor's share of the EDI, relatively speaking, is small—just \$80,000 a year. As such, we also support Official Language Minority Communities or OLMC-related projects through our regular funding streams, including our flagship program, inclusive diversification and economic advancement in the North, or IDEANorth. Funding for the EDI was recently renewed under the 2023-2028 action plan.

I would like to provide the committee with a few examples of our initiatives.

The first example underscores the importance of partnerships and collaboration.

CanNor provided \$240,000 over three years, under EDI, to the Association franco-yukonnaise to work with Carrefour Nunavut and the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest to attract Francophones to move to the territories with the goal of filling job vacancies.

In addition, CanNor provided \$755,000 over two years to the Association franco-yukonnaise under the Jobs and Growth Fund, to promote the Yukon as a travel destination for francophones from Quebec. The project supports Yukon businesses that offer services in French to adapt their product offerings to the French-speaking market.

In the Northwest Territories, CanNor provided \$285,500 over three years to the Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CDETNO), under the IDEANorth funding program. The Conseil developed and delivered tools and training workshops targeted at Francophone entrepreneurs and youth in partnership with stakeholders such as chambers of commerce and school districts. Through participation in targeted promotions and events, CDETNO also promoted economic opportunities.

• (1645)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 30 seconds left, Mr. Traynor.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Okay.

In Nunavut, CanNor provided \$350,000 for a one-year project to the Association des francophones du Nunavut, under the Canada community revitalization fund, to renovate a francophone community and cultural centre in Iqaluit.

[English]

I would like to conclude by briefly touching on recent engagement activities. CanNor officials participated in interdepartmental

working groups and activities related to the implementation of the Official Languages Act. We also provided input on future engagement strategies with the official-language minority communities—

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Mr. Traynor, your speaking time is up. Please conclude your presentation quickly.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Okay.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak about CanNor's role in the development of official language minority communities.

• (1650)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Traynor.

We will not move on to Mr. Kapoor or Ms. LeBel. I do not know which of you wants to speak on behalf of Prairies Economic Development Canada.

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor (Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Strategic Direction, Prairies Economic Development Canada):** I will be speaking, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Mr. Kapoor, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, my name is Anoop Kapoor and I am the assistant deputy minister for Policy and Strategic Direction at PrairiesCan. Ginette LeBel, senior business officer in the PrairiesCan Saskatoon office, is with me virtually today.

I will speak about what PrairiesCan does to support the economic development of official language minority communities.

In the prairie provinces, there are about 112,000 individuals with French as their first official language. In 2021, this was about 1.7 % of the overall population on the prairies. There are 72 official language minority communities in the prairie provinces. Over the past five years, PrairiesCan has invested \$34.9 million to assist these communities to thrive and prosper economically and culturally.

Every year, PrairiesCan invests \$2.24 million in dedicated support towards enhancing the vitality of our official language minority communities. Of this amount, \$640,000 comes from the national economic development initiative, or EDI.

Currently, PrairiesCan grants this dedicated funding to francophone economic development organizations, or FEDOs, in each of the three prairie provinces. The FEDOs are unique not-for-profit organizations in the prairies providing dedicated support to francophone organizations and businesses.

EDI provides francophone community organizations with access to funding for their local economic development initiatives.

In 2020, a three-year pilot project was launched to enable the FEDOs to deliver EDI on behalf of PrairiesCan, enabling them to work directly with francophone communities on economic development. With the implementation of the EDI, 35 projects for a total of \$1,273,500 were funded across the three provinces. This funding assisted 195 businesses, supported 49 not-for-profit organizations and created or maintained 161 jobs. This delivery model addressed regional needs by bringing the funding decision closer to the communities. As such, the EDI continues to be delivered by the FEDOs for another three years.

[English]

Finally, since 2018, PrairiesCan has provided an additional \$23.5 million to 39 projects, including eight businesses that self-identify as francophone, applying through our programs. This funding supported the creation of 200 jobs, served over 400 businesses and provided training to 1,100 people.

[Translation]

PrairiesCan officers have ongoing relationships not only with the FEDOs, but also with other Francophone stakeholders.

We also enhance the vitality and development of official language minority communities through our use of the official languages lens, another example of positive measures taken by PrairiesCan. The official languages lens is applied to the evaluation of all departmental funding program applications so that francophone communities also benefit from them.

Since 2018, and to date, in all programming, 186 projects totalling \$115 million have been identified as extending their activities to benefit francophone communities, by using the official languages lens.

We also fund francophone tourism organizations, given that tourism is an economic driver for francophone businesses in the Prairies.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Kapoor.

Before proceeding with our questions, I want to say that the first round is a reserved block of six minutes for the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party.

Given that I am replacing the chair, who has unfortunately been kept at home, I want to welcome my colleague René Arseneault, who is with us virtually but is not entitled to vote.

Mr. Arseneault, thank you for being here in spite of the situation you find yourself in.

For committee members, I am going to withdraw as chair. I am going to sit in my chair as a member so that I can question the witnesses.

I invite the second vice-chair to act as chair.

• (1655)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ)):** If the Conservative Party is ready, you have the floor, Mr. Godin.

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

Mr. Traynor, in your presentation, you talked about investments by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. This is the Standing Committee on Official Languages. You will understand that I am mainly interested in what is happening at the agency from the standpoint of French, because the most vulnerable official language in Canada is obviously French.

How many employees are there in your team?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** In our team, overall, at CanNor there are just over 100 staff.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So you have about 100 employees.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That's right.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

How many of your employees speak French?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** I'm sorry.

[English]

I don't have that information with me, but I can get that back to you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You may not know the exact number, but can you estimate the number based on the people you see every day?

For example, what proportion of your employees can speak French and English? Is it 50% or 25%? I think this is an important question in a bilingual country.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** It would be less than 50%.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So it would be 50%.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** It would be less than 50%, but I'd have to get back to you on that.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Okay.

I would now like you to tell me how many francophones and anglophones there are among your agency's executives. More precisely, how many of your agency's executives can speak French?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Most executives in the government, including at CanNor, need to speak French. While we are in the north, often with our colleagues it's more English than French, but when we're here in Ottawa, we certainly participate in meetings and speak both English and French.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You know that in the north, the Northwest Territories and Yukon are two territories of Canada where the French fact is growing.

Are you aware of that? You are indicating yes.

Are there many employees in your agency who are able to speak French, outside of the executive level?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That is a good question.

[English]

All of our CanNor offices are designated under the Official Languages Act as providing bilingual services; however, sometimes due to turnover, we may have temporary or isolated problems in a specific office, but we certainly ensure that we can dispatch those services from other offices. All our offices are designated as providing bilingual services.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Is it true that in order to access financial assistance and to be understood better, heard better, and treated better, it is preferable for people to submit their applications in English?

• (1700)

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** We have both official languages on our website, and during our expression of interest process, we accept them in both English and French. Before that time, we do have staff on the ground who meet with potential applicants, and they are able to speak both English and French, so they receive both languages.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** However, you cannot confirm that applications in French receive treatment equal to the treatment of applications in English.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That would be difficult for me to say.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, how much time do I have left?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** You have one minute left.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Chair, before going further, is it possible to interrupt my speaking time? I would like to move a motion for which notice was given earlier. I would like the committee to consider the motion and decide on it today.

That given that the government of Canada has failed to protect manufacturing jobs for Quebecers and that hundreds of foreign replacement workers will be coming to Quebec to work at the NorthVolt plant, and considering that these jobs should have gone to Quebecers, the committee expresses its concern that these foreign workers may not have adequate French language skills to comply with language laws in force in Quebec. And, the committee call on the Minister of Languages, the Minister of Industry, and the Quebec Lieutenant to appear before the committee to discuss this matter, for two hours each.

I think it is important that this committee be able to be the guardian of the official languages. Considering that the decline of French is recognized in Quebec, these contracts and investments have to include protections so that French is respected and so that it is promoted among these foreign workers. As I said earlier, the most vulnerable official language is French. We see that there is a decline, so we have to ensure that we have ways to stop the decline, reverse the curve, and protect and promote both official languages.

I think this motion is relevant to what follows from the agreement the government has signed. I urge the committee to take a position. I hope my colleagues feel the same as I do regarding the official languages and French in Quebec. I hope the committee will take the necessary measures to require that the foreign replacement workers be attuned to French. This is a great opportunity to promote the language of Molière.

We may have to see the contracts, as we have been asking to do for several days. They may contain language provisions, but so far, the government has not wanted to make the contracts public.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Thank you.

I want to let our witnesses know that we sometimes move motions this way. Once we finish discussing them, we will come back to you.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

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

I applaud my colleague's motion.

I have some points to raise regarding the Northvolt plant. I imagine my colleague has not discussed this with the government of Quebec, given that it supported this investment. The government, which sponsored Bill 96, supported this investment.

This proposal has nothing to do with French. I know this motion does not even come from Mr. Godin. He had to stretch it so that it would not be out of order at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. If the notice of motion had been provided to the chair before the meeting, it would have been rejected, because it has no connection with official languages. We are seeing the same thing happening in other committees.

Regarding the foreign workers, I want to remind everyone that blaming them for the decline of French or the lack of respect for Canada's official languages is a bit absurd.

If Mr. Godin wants to talk about foreign workers, I will ask him whether he has discussed it with the representatives of the Union des producteurs agricoles, for example, whose members bring in foreign workers every year to work in our agricultural fields. Has he discussed it with the UPA representatives to find out whether all the foreign workers speak very good French? I know what the answer is; it is no. They do not speak French very well; they do not speak English very well. Often, they speak Spanish. They work in our fields in Quebec, in Ontario, everywhere in Canada. I think that wanting to pursue the discussion of the foreign workers issue is an effort, on that subject, to make poutine using just a drop of sauce.

I respect my colleague, but I know this motion comes from the leader of the official opposition, because the same motion was made in all the other committees. It is more or less the same as what happened for carbon pricing. A motion was made in all committees to attempt some kind of takeover of the committees.

I repeat: it is absurd to claim that the government of Quebec, which introduced Bill 96, a bill to defend the French language, is opposed to the investment in the Northvolt plant because foreign workers would be coming here for a few weeks, or even a few months, to transfer knowledge to Quebec workers before leaving again.

This is comparable to any investment that is made abroad by Canadian companies. When Bombardier, for instance, builds planes somewhere else, it brings in Quebec workers, regardless of where it sold its planes. The Quebec workers transfer knowledge to the foreign country and then come back to Canada. This is an entirely standard practice.

I will not propose anything now. Mr. Godin has proposed that this motion be considered while the witnesses are here at the committee. We could go on and on about the value of this motion, but I think we should stick to the subject. The witnesses are here to discuss the subject being studied.

I will stop here, but I may come back to some points later. I think we are wasting time. I would propose that we set this motion aside and come back to our witnesses and the subject we are concerned with.

Thank you.

• (1705)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Mr. Serré, did you want to speak?

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

I have nothing to add.

My colleague, Mr. Drouin, has really pointed out how partisan this motion is. We have witnesses here for two hours to discuss the subject being studied. Out of respect for the witnesses, I think we should proceed with the discussion.

We are talking about creating 3,000 jobs at the Northvolt plant. The comments made in Mr. Godin's motion are not valid. These are jobs in Canada. As Mr. Drouin said regarding the issue of foreign workers, knowledge is transferred when there is investment in other

countries. That is entirely standard practice, and these are temporary jobs.

The motion that is before us, which was distributed to all parliamentary committees, displays an extremely partisan spirit. The government of Quebec supports the Northvolt plant, the unions support it, but the opposition parties want to play politics.

This project will mean that Quebec gets a place in the auto industry for 20 or 30 years. This project is very important. A plant will be built and jobs will be created.

With that said, our work goes on. We are hearing witnesses right now, and I think it is time to continue the discussion with them.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

• (1710)

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP):** I think this motion raises good questions, but I do not think it is appropriate to talk about it now.

As the member for a northern and western riding, I am interested in our witnesses' testimony and I would like to ask them questions, so I wonder whether it would be possible to postpone the conversation on the motion to later.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Mr. Dalton, you have the floor.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** This is a very significant investment, in Quebec. There will be hundreds of employees, and French is really important.

I therefore believe that this motion is very important and very relevant.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Thank you.

Mr. Drouin, you have the floor.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Mr. Chair, I move to adjourn the debate.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Okay. Call the vote.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, my hand was up.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** I saw you and I was going to give you the floor, but Mr. Drouin moved to adjourn the debate. Normally, there is no debate on a motion to adjourn. We go straight to the vote. I'm sorry.

I will ask Madam Clerk to call the vote.

**The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Aurée Dallaire):** The vote is on adjourning the debate.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** I would like to understand. Are we voting on adjourning the vote?

**The Clerk:** You are voting on adjourning the debate that is underway.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** So we are postponing debate on my motion.

**The Clerk:** If the committee adopts the motion to adjourn, it ends the debate, and it goes back to what it was doing before, that is, questioning witnesses.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** However, resuming the debate at a later date is not ruled out.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** If we adjourn the debate and we can come back to it later, I agree.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** The practice is that if the debate is adjourned, we can come back to it at another meeting, but not during this one.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 10, nays 0)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** So we will continue.

Mr. Godin, you have one minute left.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Traynor, what indicators does your organization use to determine whether your investments are having a positive effect on the development of French in the territory?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Thank you very much.

Certainly, we work well with the Association franco-yukonnaise, as well as the other two French organizations, one in Nunavut and one in NWT.

[Translation]

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Excuse me, Mr. Traynor. I do not want to interrupt you or not respect you.

My question is this: what indicators does your organization use to measure the effectiveness of its investments in the francophone organizations in the territory?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** The measures and results we use are with the Association franco-yukonnaise, which represents all three organizations. It gives us information on the number of job fairs it does in Quebec, for example, to encourage workers. It gives us the number of conversations and meetings it has with the municipalities in the north, as well as with entrepreneurs. Certainly, it also tells us how well it is doing as an organization, how many meetings it has and that type of information.

• (1715)

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Mario Beaulieu):** Thank you. Time is up.

Mr. Godin, I invite you to resume the chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** I thank Mr. Beaulieu for his work as chair.

I now give the floor to Mr. Samson, from the Liberal Party, who has six minutes to question the representatives of the two organizations who are with us during this first hour.

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

I thank the witnesses for being with us today. We are also happy that you are managing so well in French. That continuity is very important.

Mr. Kapoor, in your presentation, you said that 39 projects were designated as francophone or came from francophone organiza-

tions. How do you determine that? Is it by using a form in which the language is specified?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** In general, we have a form that is offered in English or in French, in which the applicant can tell us whether they belong to an OLMC or other information we can use to verify that aspect.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Is it determined by the fact that the form is filled out in French or is it specified somewhere that it is a franco-phone group?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** In the form, the person can indicate whether they belong to an OLMC, for instance.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Fine.

I think I understood that you had funds reserved for OLMCs. Is that correct?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** Yes, we invest funds associated with the EDI. We are talking about \$30.2 million over five years. Those are funds reserved for OLMCs.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Fine, thank you.

Mr. Traynor, you talked about a number of projects carried out in francophone communities. The last one you mentioned was a community centre.

Can you give us more details about that investment, tell us the amount, and tell us what proportion of those funds came from your agency?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Certainly.

[Translation]

Thank you for the question.

[English]

There was approximately \$350,000 for a one-year project that went to the Association des francophones du Nunavut.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I'm only interested in [Inaudible—Editor]. You said “*centre communautaire*.” The last one in your—

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Yes. That is correct.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** It came from the Canada community revitalization fund, so it was from our agency in addition to the normal funds we get through the EDI.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Yes. Those were the funds given toward that centre.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That's correct.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Okay.

[Translation]

My next question deals with rural areas as compared to urban areas. In your case, it is probably entirely rural areas, so the question is not relevant.

In the Prairies, is a distinction made between rural areas and urban areas, Mr. Kapoor?



**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** In our region, most OLMCs are rural.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** I am not talking about OLMCs; I am talking about the funding you offer. I want to know what percentage of the funds goes to urban areas and rural areas, respectively. Is it 50/50 or is it divided differently? I am trying to determine whether the economic development funds are given mainly to rural areas, because the agency itself is associated with that kind of area.

• (1720)

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** I do not know how much was invested in our region for rural areas. I know the rough amount, but not the exact figures.

[English]

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Can you send that to us? I'd really like to understand what percentage of your funding goes to urban versus rural because these are rural economics, and we know that urban areas receive all kinds of funding through other avenues, so I'd like to know. Could you send that to us, please?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** Yes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** My last questions concern new businesses.

Are you seeing a rise in the number of new businesses you are funding? I am always afraid we will end up funding the same businesses because they are successful. Are there new businesses or people who want to start up new businesses?

What kind of work do you do to encourage young people? Do you go to see them in the secondary schools? How is this innovation created among young people?

Maybe Mr. Traynor wants to answer.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Thank you. That's a great question.

I will say that we work directly with the francophone associations, and they work directly with all entrepreneurs. They provide things like training on how to be an entrepreneur. They assist them with getting their websites and businesses.

A good example is in Nunavut. They helped a francophone outfitter be able to meet standards in English and French, to encourage international tourists.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** How do you do that? Is it your association that's funding a local organization to do that work?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That is correct. We directly fund the francophone associations in each territory. We focus on one in Yukon that represents all three—

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Fifteen seconds left.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** —but we provide additional funding as needed on certain projects to individual ones.

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Could you send me those that you have done in the last two years in that area?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Certainly, we can send that to you.

[Translation]

**Mr. Darrell Samson:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Samson.

Thank you, Mr. Traynor.

We are going to move on to another round of six-minute questions.

The Bloc Québécois representative, Mario Beaulieu, who is pinch hitting for the chair, is next up.

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

Thanks to the representatives of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and Prairies Economic Development Canada for being with us. My question is for both organizations.

Essentially, you do not offer services only to the francophone communities in your regions; you offer them to the entire population.

What percentage of your grants, approximately, do you give to francophone communities?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Under EDI, we receive approximately \$80,000 per year, and that has amounted to \$240,000 over the last three years. Our organization has topped it up with other funds, just over \$1 million in addition to that for the last three years in CanNor to francophone associations and francophone businesses.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So it is about \$1 million for the last three years and \$80,000 for the francophone communities. Did I understand correctly?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That is \$80,000 directly to the francophone association that represents all three. We've provided an additional \$1 million to francophone associations to be able to support businesses as well.

In total, that's \$1.3 million over the last three years, directly.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** What is your total budget?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Would that be for my organization?

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, I am talking about your organization.

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** The budget of my organization is generally about \$40 million per year.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Right. Of that amount, there is \$1.3 million for francophones.

Mr. Kapoor, what about you?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** As I said before, when we apply the official languages lens to projects, we see that almost \$115 million has been invested over the last five years. In total, we have invested nearly \$2 billion over the last five years, so, for official languages, I would say we have invested nearly 5% of our budget during that period. Those are rough amounts rather than exact figures.

• (1725)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Do you give grants directly to businesses or do you deal only with intermediaries?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** We give grants to small and medium businesses directly and to francophone economic development organizations in our region, as I said. Those are not-for-profit organizations, so they use the funds to support other projects from the official language minority communities. We use the...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So you subsidize businesses directly and you also subsidize intermediaries.

Mr. Traynor, is it the same thing for you? Do you subsidize businesses directly or do you deal only with intermediaries?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** It is a combination of the two. First, it is just for the francophone associations.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** However, you also subsidize businesses directly.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Yes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Right.

How do you go about selecting businesses from the francophone communities? There may be businesses that apply for grants from you but are not really part of the francophone communities.

Is there a criterion for determining that? How do you verify it?

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** In CanNor, we normally have an expression of interest period where everyone applies and we work with them. Prior to that, we have staff, economic development officers, who work with the francophone communities and work with the businesses. We have conversations before that period opens up and during that period. They're in English and in French.

Then, once everyone applies for the oncoming year, we look at them and we take into account the nature of the project, the amount sought, the quality of the economic development, and also the value brought to the community or the territory: an aspect of how much that brings to the francophone community and how much it supports economic development for them.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** So there might be an anglophone business that offers a service on the francophone side. It would not necessarily be businesses that came from the francophone communities.

[*English*]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Not necessarily, because we usually work very hard on the ground to understand the francophone community and support the businesses directly. We work with the francophone associations to clearly identify who is francophone with

the communities in the north. They're quite tight, and they usually know who's who.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Is it the same thing for you, Mr. Kapoor? Do you have criteria for determining whether they are enterprises from the francophone communities? Can it be anglophone enterprises that provide services to francophones?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Fifteen seconds left.

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** For the businesses, they submit their applications to our department, which then evaluates their projects and their proposals. Then it grants funds based on the criteria.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Kapoor. Unfortunately, time is already up.

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

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

I also thank the witnesses.

I am the member for Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, which is in northern Manitoba. I know that some people in my riding are familiar with the work Mr. Traynor did in his previous position. Our region is not one of the regions covered by the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, but, as a member from western Canada and northern Manitoba, and also a francophile, I would very much like to hear you talk specifically about the work you support on the ground here in our region of Canada.

You talked about an investment in a community centre. That is something very important. In our communities, the biggest needs involve educational facilities and services. I know your work relates to businesses, but I would like you to tell us, Mr. Traynor and Mr. Kapoor, how your programs promote educational opportunities for members of the francophone communities in your regions and in ours.

• (1730)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Mr. Traynor can answer first and then Mr. Kapoor, or vice versa. The question is for both.

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Thank you.

[English]

To give you an example for NWT, we provided funding to the Conseil de développement économique des TNO, the francophone community in NWT. They provided entrepreneurial capacity-building tools and training in order to attract investments for the various businesses. We work with the francophone communities directly to make sure they provide the pertinent training for entrepreneurs who are French in NWT.

[Translation]

The same is true for the other territories.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Do you want to answer too, Mr. Kapoor?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** Under the economic development initiative, or EDI, we work with the Manitoba's Conseil de développement économique, Alberta's Conseil de développement économique and Saskatchewan's Conseil économique et coopératif. Those organizations use the funds allocated for EDI programs to support entrepreneurs, francophone immigrants, and communities, to build the capacities of the communities and create an entrepreneurship ecosystem.

With those projects, the organizations are able to offer training in finance, for learning how to develop networking or knowing how to present a business to investors. These activities have been supported thanks to part of our investment in francophone economic development organizations.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

We know that another major need in communities in western Canada is access to early childhood services in French. Some entrepreneurs offer those services at home, for example.

Do PrairiesCan and CanNor offer programs in the field of early childhood services?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** For CanNor, at this point in time, we do not have any programs that are supported.

[Translation]

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** For PrairiesCan, our priority is to support entrepreneurs rather than children. I think other FEDOs in our region receive support from the Department of Employment and Social Development for setting up projects in this area.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I understand, but there are people who are engaging in entrepreneurship in this area, so I was wondering whether you supported this kind of work.

I also want to point out that access to this type of services in French is a major challenge in our communities.

Some of our communities in northern and western Canada are receiving new immigrants at present.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 15 seconds left.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** What type of specific and direct programs do you have, to encourage new immigrants to approach you?

• (1735)

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Ms. Ashton. That is a very good question, but your speaking time is unfortunately up.

I will take this opportunity to let the witnesses know that if they want to send us additional information, they can do it through our clerk, who will then forward it to us. For example, they could answer Ms. Ashton's question in writing.

For the speaking times for the next round, in order to adhere to the representation of the political parties, there will be two four-minute turns for the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, the Bloc Québécois and the NDP will not have speaking time in this round.

We will continue with Ms. Goodridge for four minutes.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

I too am a member from the north and the west, since I represent the riding of Fort McMurray—Cold Lake.

My question is for Ms. Kapoor, and he may answer in English if he wishes.

Mr. Kapoor, do you know what percentage of PrairiesCan employees are francophone or bilingual?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** I think about 15% of our employees are bilingual.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Of that 15%, how many offer services in French?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** I think the bilingual employees we have are able to offer services in French. PrairiesCan ensures that there are enough bilingual employees in each province to offer service of equal quality in both official languages.

[English]

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** The real piece that I'm trying to figure out is that being in the far north, in Fort McMurray, we don't really see PrairiesCan on the ground very often.

This is a question I have particularly. My colleague was asking about the separation between urban and rural. What exactly is your separation for urban versus rural when it comes to the Prairies, and how do you have the funding broken out for each of the different provinces? I understand you give money directly to CDÉA and all the different provincial organizations, but how is the specific money that comes straight from PrairiesCan to different francophone groups across the province broken out?

**Mr. Anoop Kapoor:** First of all, we invested about \$2.2 million in our FEDOs. The OLMCs in our region reach out and seek projects. They do a call for proposals. That's how the EDI money, from a project perspective, is distributed across the communities.

Second, we offer programs that are open to rural and urban communities throughout our region. Anyone can apply to those projects. Our programs are not divided by urban or rural. For francophone communities, we have allocated a specific amount of money every year. Our regular programs are open, whether you are from a rural community or an urban community.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** Okay. So then—

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 15 seconds left, Mrs. Goodridge.

**Mrs. Laila Goodridge:** In that case, I'll stop here, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** I will take this opportunity to invite both agencies to provide us with a breakdown of the number of bilingual and francophone employees serving the clientele.

The next speaker is Mr. Iacono, but he unfortunately hasn't done the required sound test.

Mr. Iacono, please say a few words so we can see if the sound quality is good enough for the interpreters.

• (1740)

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Good evening, Mr. Chair. It's always a pleasure to see you chair the committee. You have good team spirit and lots of enthusiasm, which lends colour to our meetings. You really have—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Mr. Iacono, your kind remarks really leave me feeling uncomfortable.

I'm told that the sound test has been successfully done. So you have the floor for four minutes.

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

Good evening to the witnesses.

Mr. Traynor, what positive initiatives is your agency implementing to comply with the Official Languages Act?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** I can indicate that, as I noted earlier, all of the CanNor offices are designated under the Official Languages Act as providing bilingual services. Our website is in English and in French. We accept applications in English and in French. Our interactive applications are also in English and in French.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** So you do have some positive initiatives.

What are the main obstacles for the OLMCs?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** The main obstacles, as in most situations, are often funding and capacity.

I certainly know that we support the Association franco-yukonnaise to be able to get more French employees. They do a lot of work. They give presentations to CEGEPs and other schools in Quebec to encourage francophone workers. That is certainly a barrier for them up north, and we're trying to work with them to find

the money to be able to encourage those types of activities for them.

They also support the other two territories in the goal of providing more francophone workers for entrepreneurs and businesses in the north.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Do you have only finance as an obstacle, or are there other obstacles?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** Right now, it's mainly finance. We certainly have lots of conversations with the francophone community. Certainly, they have challenges themselves with capacity, and we always work to find the capacity in the best way we can.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** How does your agency manage its planned expenditures, which have been increased under the action plan?

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** I don't exactly understand the question.

[English]

It's mainly because we have not seen an increase in the action plan funding for our department. We have remained at \$80,000 for a number of years and ongoing.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** Haven't the amounts been increased, as far as you know?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** As far as I know, we have not received any increase.

[Translation]

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** I see.

In the context of the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we have discussed the principle of services developed by, for and with the communities concerned. How are you implementing that principle in your interactions with the OLMCs?

[English]

**Mr. Stephen Traynor:** That's a great question.

We work directly with the three associations. In particular, we often have ongoing conversations between them and our economic development officers in the north. We also participate in official-languages discussions in the territories about what is needed and how we can work collaboratively. We also work with each entrepreneur in the northern territories. We're very fortunate that we have people on the ground to be able to have those conversations and to be in constant communication.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 15 seconds left.

**Mr. Angelo Iacono:** All right.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

That concludes the first part of the meeting.

I would like to thank Mr. Traynor, from the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, and Mr. Kapoor and Ms. LeBel, from Prairies Economic Development Canada.

I would remind you that, if you have any information you wish to forward to the committee so we can prepare a better report, please contact the clerk. She will be pleased to pass it on to us.

We will suspend in order to welcome our next witnesses.

• (1745) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1745) **The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Good evening, everyone.

We will resume where we left off, but with two new groups of witnesses.

We have with us Mr. Fabiano, representing the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, and Ms. Cousineau, who is vice-president for business innovation and community development at the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Thank you for being with us.

Each of you will have five minutes to deliver your opening remarks. Then the members will be free to ask you questions.

We will begin with Mr. Fabiano.

**Mr. Nick Fabiano (Vice President, Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, everyone.

My name is Nick Fabiano and I am the vice-president of policy and communications at the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, better known as FedNor.

I welcome the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the work that FedNor does to support the economic development of official language minority communities.

First of all, I want to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation. I would like to thank the members of the first nation for welcoming us on their ancestral territories.

Prior to being established as a standalone agency in 2021, FedNor had operated as a branch within Industry Canada since 1987. Our mandate was and continues to be the promotion of economic growth, diversification, job creation and sustainable communities in the region.

Our region is home to approximately 840,000 residents, roughly 6% of the population of Ontario. It also includes some 110,000 francophones, who represent 13% of the region's population, and nearly 20% of Ontario's francophones. Our region is also home to 105 first nation communities and 150 municipalities, most of which have a population of 2,000 or less.

FedNor has approximately 100 employees, more than 90% of whom are located in six offices across northern Ontario. Our presence in Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, Kenora

and North Bay allows the agency to work directly with businesses and to collaborate with partners across the region to grow northern Ontario's economy.

Recognizing that communities are important economic drivers, FedNor targets its support to help create the conditions necessary for economic growth and development.

• (1750)

[English]

By supporting community economic development capacity, FedNor is empowering communities to take advantage of growth opportunities that arise. This is where FedNor support can have a positive impact by helping them create jobs, expand entrepreneurship, attract investment and develop a skilled and bilingual workforce to foster growth.

FedNor also works with other government departments, as well as national and regional stakeholders, to further the business and economic development that encourages growth in the region's francophone communities. Recent activities include providing support to local rural and northern immigration pilot communities to build their capacity to facilitate newcomer attraction, integration and retention, including French-speaking and bilingual newcomers.

Through its core programming, such as the northern Ontario development program and the regional economic growth through innovation fund, FedNor makes targeted investments to build stronger communities and to help businesses scale up.

Support for businesses and entrepreneurs is also available through our community futures development corporations. The community futures program supports 24 CFDCs in northern Ontario, 12 of which receive incremental funding to ensure they are able to provide services in both official languages, as they serve communities that have significant francophone populations.

Finally, FedNor provides targeted support to official-language minority communities in the region through the Government of Canada's economic development initiative. Since November 2015, FedNor has contributed approximately \$6.4 million, or \$800,000 a year, through the EDI program, toward 43 projects that assisted businesses and organizations in capitalizing on economic opportunities.

In addition to the economic development initiative, FedNor's other core programs support businesses and communities throughout northern Ontario, including those that belong to, or form part of, official-language minority communities. The northern Ontario development program and the regional economic growth through innovation program have invested \$63 million in 134 official-language minority community projects since November 2015, which represents 19% of our total funding provided by these programs.

[*Translation*]

To elaborate further, I would be happy to take your questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You're very good, Mr. Fabiano: you completed your remarks in exactly five minutes.

Ms. Cousineau will now face the same challenge.

You have the floor for five minutes, Ms. Cousineau.

**Ms. Linda Cousineau (Vice-President, Business Innovation and Community Development, Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario):** Thank you.

[*English*]

Good evening, Mr. Chair and distinguished members of the committee.

My name is Linda Cousineau. I am the vice-president of business innovation and community development for the federal economic development agency for southern Ontario.

I want to start by recognizing that I'm joining you from Waterloo, which is the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinabe and Haudenosaunee people.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the invitation to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I am pleased to be here to share the work that FedDev Ontario is doing to support southern Ontario's official language minority communities.

Southern Ontario is home to the largest French-speaking population outside Quebec, and the needs of our OLMCs are diverse. Eastern Ontario is home to well-established communities and ecosystems around Ottawa and Cornwall. To the west, the communities are proportionally smaller and more dispersed. Cities such as Toronto and Hamilton have growing francophone populations, in part fuelled by immigration.

FedDev Ontario leverages its regional footprint to connect with these communities and the knowledge gained informs investments in community capacity building, economic development, entrepreneurship and business growth.

We also engage officials from FedNor to address province-wide issues and provide cohesive support for all of Ontario's francophone communities.

FedDev Ontario recently relaunched its economic development initiative, which is a component of Canada's Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028. Over the next five years the agency will deliver \$4 million in support.

This initiative aims to support OLMCs by strengthening the rich cultural fabric of francophone communities, while accelerating economic growth within these communities. It enables financial support for projects that encourage economic diversification, business development, innovation, and partnerships. It also provides support for small and medium-sized businesses in OLMCs.

For example, Collège La Cité received \$1.79 million over four years to support francophone businesses and entrepreneurship. La Cité delivered training and workshops, as well as collaborated with businesses on applied research to support innovation and product development.

• (1755)

[*English*]

In addition to this dedicated program, FedDev Ontario also helps small and medium-sized businesses owned by francophones become more productive, innovative and competitive. It supports entrepreneurship in these communities through its regional and national programs, including the community futures program and the Black entrepreneurship program.

For example, through the Black entrepreneurship program's ecosystem fund, the Mouvement Ontarien des femmes immigrantes francophones is receiving a non-repayable contribution of up to \$1.7 million. With this support, the organization is providing access for Black entrepreneurs and Black-led businesses to advisory services, mentorship, networking events, coaching, the International Black Economic Forum, and an entrepreneurial boot camp, as well as introductions to potential partners and investors to help them start and/or grow their business.

Projects like these are supporting francophone entrepreneurs such as Angèle Adoté, founder, owner and operator of Dûnu Donuts in Ottawa, which is a street food and doughnut business that is bringing African cultural food to new audiences.

FedDev Ontario has also made investments that support and promote francophone tourism and cultural offerings of our official-language minority communities through programs like the tourism relief fund and the Canada community revitalization fund.

FedDev Ontario will continue making investments to support jobs and promote the economic growth of francophone businesses. It will continue its work to build an economy in southern Ontario that is inclusive and promotes the vitality of its official-language minority communities.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to share FedDev Ontario's role in economic and community development for official-language minority communities.

I'm pleased to answer your questions.

[*Translation*]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Ms. Cousineau.

You used a little less time than your colleague. You still had 30 seconds left.

We will now begin the first round of questions.

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

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

Thanks to the witnesses.

My first questions are for Mr. Fabiano.

Many students make the decision to live and study in northern Ontario. I'm thinking, for example, of the students at Laurentian University.

What kinds of programs are being introduced in northern Ontario to enable that region to retain young talent?

• (1800)

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** That's an excellent question.

As we said, we are short of young people in northern Ontario, and it's very important to keep young people in our region.

At FedNor, we're introducing education programs in conjunction with the schools, but we're also supporting institutions in the field of innovation.

[*English*]

We will work with innovation centres in the different universities and colleges to create an opportunity for new entrepreneurs, to work with those individuals and to keep them there.

[*Translation*]

Incidentally, FedNor does a lot of work with the five communities targeted by the rural and northern immigration pilot program to attract new workers and newcomers to northern Ontario.

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

What is the percentage of bilingual positions in your organization?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** As I just indicated, we have 100 positions at FedNor, 55 of which are designated bilingual. However, since we have a lot of employees in the north, particularly in Sudbury, we have more bilingual positions than that. So we have at least 55 bilingual employees.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** How many of those 55 employees provide services directly to the public?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Most of those people provide services directly to the public. Since we are a small organization, we don't have a lot of managers or executives. Consequently, most of the 55 bilin-

gual positions are occupied by people who work with citizens in the region.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** When you say there are few administrative positions and more services, that's music to my ears.

What's the process that an entrepreneur has to go through to secure federal government funding?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** It's very simple. We have a process for entrepreneurs and businesses seeking support. As I said, we have two programs: the northern Ontario development program and the regional economic growth through innovation program. You just have to submit an application. You can do that at any time, not just in three months out of the year. We always accept applications.

We first determine whether every application meets program requirements. For example, the project must be located in northern Ontario and stimulate economic development. We determine funding amounts based on that.

I would add that most of our funding goes to communities and organizations that assist entrepreneurs because the money we allocate directly to entrepreneurs has to be repaid to us a few years later.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** How much time does it normally take to file an application and receive the funding?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Once the application is in our system, it has to go through two stages. First, we have to determine whether it meets program requirements. Then we request financial documents. From that point, our service standard is to reach a decision within 80 days.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** I see. That's good.

You just partly answered my next question. What requirements does an entrepreneur have to meet?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** It really depends on the program that—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Pardon me for interrupting, Mr. Fabiano, but I just want to advise Mr. Dalton that he has 30 seconds left.

• (1805)

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** I see.

It really depends on each program. For an innovation program, you have to show that the project will have an impact on the growth of the business. You have to show that it's something new that will increase the business's production. So it really depends on the program you've applied for.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** All right.

Is my time up, Mr. Chair?

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Yes, it is.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton and Mr. Fabiano.

Mr. Serré, you now have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fabiano and Ms. Cousineau, thank you for the work you're doing on economic development in Ontario.

For your information, I believe that FedNor is the economic development agency with the most francophone and bilingual employees providing services. I think it's a model that other economic development agencies should follow. We'll be looking at the figures a little later.

I'd also like us to discuss the Centre pour l'entreprise des femmes PARO, money, immigration centres and immigration. Lastly, I would like to add that the Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario, FedNor, has been around for 36 years and became an independent agency under the Liberal government in 2021.

Our government has increased funding for economic development agencies since 2015. Their funding had undergone major cuts for 10 years under the former Harper government, but our government has been investing in them since 2015.

Mr. Fabiano, my first question concerns the Centre pour l'entreprise des femmes PARO. What has FedNor done to support that entrepreneurship development organization for francophone women in northern Ontario?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thank you for that question.

The PARO organization works with women entrepreneurs. It helps businesses and offers mentorship and assistance in preparing business plans. It's actually a support group for women entrepreneurs.

According to FedNor, this kind of organization is really important in northern Ontario. In many cases, it's not a matter of providing money for businesses, but rather of mentorship and access to experienced people who can help the business. That's why we extensively invest in innovation centres.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** The government has created a rural immigration pilot project, but that was introduced in northern Ontario several years ago. As you may know, the committee has extensively discussed the importance of francophone immigration for official language minority communities.

What role does FedNor play in helping municipalities and organizations take in more francophone immigrants in northern Ontario?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thank you for your question.

The immigration issue is really important for northern Ontario. We have the same obstacles as everywhere else in country, but I think they're bigger in northern Ontario because there's a shortage of communities for new immigrants.

As you mentioned, five communities are involved in the pilot project: Timmins, Sudbury, North Bay, Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie. We've invested in three-year projects for each of those communities. The goal is to assist new immigrants so they can work with entrepreneurs who need them. When immigrants arrive in the community, they must be able to get the support they need. An immigrant arriving in Toronto can find support, but a new immigrant arriving in Timmins can't find a community. We aren't the ones who provide the support, but we support the organizations that do.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** You support the organizations in large part because you mainly have francophone and bilingual employees, or bilingual positions.

Ms. Cousineau, I'd like to ask you the same question. What role does FedDev Ontario play in supporting francophone immigration in southern and southeastern Ontario. What is the role of entrepreneurial organizations for francophone women in those regions?

• (1810)

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for that question.

FedDev Ontario plays a supporting role with organizations, women and newcomers to Canada. We've also supported a project with the PARO organization in southern Ontario with a contribution of \$1.7 million. That organization promotes skills development in the town of Renfrew, in the united counties of Prescott and Russell and the united counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry so that women in those regions can access programs enabling them to develop the skills they need to find jobs and businesses.

As I mentioned in my presentation, we also have a project—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Ms. Cousineau, you have 30 seconds left in which to answer Mr. Serré's question.

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** All right.

We also have a program for women called the Mouvement ontarien des femmes immigrantes francophones. That organization supports women in the region's businesses.

We have a lot of opportunities to support women through the economic development initiative and regional funding programs.

**Mr. Marc Serré:** Thank you, Ms. Cousineau.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Serré and Ms. Cousineau.

We will continue with Mr. Beaulieu for six minutes.

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

Mr. Fabiano, was I correct in understanding earlier that you said roughly 50% of your employees occupy bilingual positions?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** That's correct.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Do any employees occupy bilingual positions without knowing French when they start?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** No, because, according to the Canadian government's rules, you have to be bilingual to occupy a bilingual position. We're strict about that: employees who occupy bilingual positions are required to take an exam every five years to maintain their language level.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In the federal public service as a whole, certain bilingual positions are occupied by people who don't speak French but are then required to take language training. You're telling me that's not the case in your organization.



**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** In that kind of situation, a person occupying a bilingual position who takes language training may be granted a temporary exemption. Since our organization is really small, we try to hire bilingual employees. Our organization also provides French courses for employees who aren't bilingual.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Is it the same for persons occupying positions that aren't necessarily bilingual?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** That's correct. We try to provide language training, particularly for people occupying positions that aren't bilingual.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Ms. Cousineau, is the situation the same in your organization?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** We encourage language training and the use of French in our organization.

[*English*]

We provide training to our staff so they have the capacity to work in both official languages. In terms of positions, if a position is designated bilingual, it is staffed by a bilingual individual.

I would note that 100% of our executive committee is bilingual and this supports the tone at the top.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you.

I was also wondering whether you directly subsidize certain businesses or whether you always go through intermediaries.

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** We provide direct grants to most businesses, but, as I just explained, we also support organizations. It's not a matter of giving the organizations money so they can then give it to the businesses. We try to work with the organizations, particularly in official language minority communities, which may perhaps allocate small amounts of money to businesses, but which are there mainly to provide support and expertise. The idea is not so much to hand out money, but especially to provide people with support.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** You provide grants to organizations whose mission is to support businesses.

As for direct grants to organizations, how do you ensure that the businesses come from or support francophone communities? I'm referring to the "by-and-for" concept, meaning by and for the communities in the case of schools.

● (1815)

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Businesses are required to state on their applications whether they are francophone, meaning that at least 50% of their business is owned by francophones. As I was saying earlier, our officers are very much engaged in the community and are very familiar with the businesses and organizations that work with francophones in the region.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Has a business that, in your opinion, wasn't really a francophone business ever applied for a grant?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** That has never happened in the 10 years that I've been at the agency, although it may have occurred before then.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Do you have a team that focuses more on the economic development of francophone communities?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** We have a few people who are experts in the field, but they aren't on my team. Their work is auditing businesses and associations. I'd say that one or two employees are more involved with the funds of the economic development initiative, or EDI.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Is the situation more or less the same in your case, Ms. Cousineau? Do you provide direct grants to businesses and to organizations that support businesses?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Yes, we do both. We support businesses directly through our programs. We also support organizations that provide services to entrepreneurs and other businesses to help them grow.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Will most of your francophone communities budget go directly to organizations or businesses?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** I want to make it clear that we support francophone organizations through all our programs. In the EDI program you refer to—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** —we have non-profit francophone organizations in the regions to ensure that we maximize results and reach all francophone communities in Ontario.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu and Ms. Cousineau.

We will now continue with Ms. Ashton for six minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Fabiano and Ms. Cousineau, you've both spoken about your work with newcomers and immigrants to Canada. You've also discussed the fact that our communities put a lot of pressure on them and expect that, given their experience, they will help us educate our children, support our communities or build a better future for the francophone outside Quebec.

I wonder whether people understand that the lives of newcomers, particularly minority language newcomers, are very hard. Would you please tell us more about the challenges that they report to you and that guide the efforts you make to support them more effectively?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thank you for that question.

As you just said, newcomers and immigrants face major challenges, particularly in rural regions. Matters are slightly more difficult when they're in the linguistic minority.

We try to offer services to provide financial support to organizations in the cities I mentioned and to reduce the obstacles you've described. However, immigrants are more than employees; they have families, which also need support from the communities, and that's sometimes hard to get. Immigrants who work for an organization or business may receive a lot of support, but not their families. This is ultimately a family issue.

I know that, in small northern Ontario communities, for example, people join forces to help both immigrant workers and their families because that really helps them fit into the community. We've done a lot of work in those small communities.

• (1820)

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Thank you.

Ms. Cousineau, would you please tell us about the challenges facing newcomers that your organization knows about? Would you also tell us how you try to respond to them in the best possible way?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for your question on newcomers.

Our agency invests in organizations that work with newcomers. We have allocated \$3.3 million to the Toronto Business Development Centre. As my colleague explained, it's an organization that helps businesses start up in Canada. Newcomers who arrive with their families are given assistance to create an environment in which they can adjust and succeed. We hear they're under a lot of pressure, but, with the contribution and services that the organization provides, we try to improve the situation of those businesses so they can succeed.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** All right. Thank you for telling us about the investments you make.

Since some witnesses say that we should support immigrants more and that the objective of this study is to make recommendations, do you think we need to increase the resources allocated to FedNor and FedDev Ontario, and to other economic development networks, if we want to provide better support for francophone newcomers?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for your point of view, but I'll leave it to you to make recommendations. Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Ms. Ashton, you still have 1 minute and 10 seconds.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** All right.

Mr. Fabiano, I'm going to ask you a question about investments and the work that FedNor has done with a number of indigenous communities in your region. Is more work also being done for francophone communities as neighbours and as regions, for example?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thank you for that question.

The answer, quite simply, is yes, because we find that the work we do with—

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** There are 15 seconds left.

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thanks to the work we do with first nations communities, their businesses benefit the entire region. A synergy has formed between the businesses and the minority language com-

munities. All businesses in the regions have to cooperate extensively.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Fabiano and Ms. Ashton.

We will now begin the second round, the “deuxième ronde”, of questions. Actually, I should say “deuxième tour” since, as our committee's work concerns the official languages, we should make an effort to speak proper French.

We will continue with Bernard Généreux, of the Conservative Party of Canada, who will have the floor for five minutes.

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

Thanks to the witnesses as well.

Mr. Fabiano and Ms. Cousineau, what kind of support do your two organizations provide under the economic development initiative? Is it just grants or also other types of contributions, such as loans and so on?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Most of the funding allocated under the EDI isn't really granted as loans because the organizations we work with mostly receive grants and contributions.

If funding is allocated to a business whose aim is to make a profit, then, yes, it comes in the form of a loan, which will subsequently have to be repaid.

• (1825)

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I see.

Are you able to determine whether the contributions, repayable or not, that are made to official language minority communities are beneficial, that is to say, whether they actually have a positive impact?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Yes, one of the indicators is an increase in the number of jobs in the region, and, thanks to the money we've allocated under the EDI, we've established or expanded 41 actual community and regional projects.

There have also been 407 training and consultation sessions with the communities, and 100 financial plans have been established. So, in addition to increasing job numbers, these are other elements that foster a better ecosystem for minority language entrepreneurs.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Ms. Cousineau, I imagine your agency also contributes to the economic development initiative?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Yes, of course, we contribute to it.

[English]

In southern Ontario, we are delivering the economic development initiative, and we have an allocation of contribution value of \$4 million over five years. That's \$800,000 annually. I can speak to the results of the last five years, as well as the program and its delivery. Our investment of \$4 million resulted in assistance to 1,000 businesses and 78 organizations. This leveraged an additional \$6.3 million, and over 270 jobs were created and maintained.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** I see.

I believe it was Mr. Serré who criticized us earlier for making budget cuts at the time. The present government, which has been in power for eight years, has reinvested heavily, but do you think that has really changed matters?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Would you please clarify your question?

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** In the past eight years, including the last five to which you referred, the federal government has invested more money in economic development across the board. Do you think that has changed the situation on the ground or not?

I'm asking Mr. Fabiano the same question.

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for that clarification.

Let me tell you about FedDev Ontario's budget for the 2023-24 fiscal year.

[*English*]

That's a total of \$431.5 million in our main estimates, which includes \$390.9 million in grants and contributions funding.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** What percentage of those amounts is earmarked for official language minority communities or minority communities?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** There are many programs that can support francophone businesses and communities. The economic development initiative isn't the only initiative providing direct support to francophone communities.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Mr. Fabiano, would you please answer my question?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** FedNor has allocated \$800,000 a year, through the economic development initiative, to support francophone communities. All the programs together total approximately \$40 million, and we use a portion of that money to support francophone businesses.

**Mr. Bernard Généreux:** Thank you.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Généreux and Mr. Fabiano.

Mr. Drouin, representing the Liberal Party of Canada, the floor is yours.

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

I want to salute the work of FedDev Ontario, an organization that I know very well.

Ms. Cousineau, I wanted to take another look at the relationship that your organization has with the community futures development corporations, or CFDC, which are virtually everywhere on the ground. What kinds of programs do they offer? What role do they have to play in the official language minority communities?

I heard the names Prescott and Russell, a region that I know very well, since it's part of the riding that it is my pleasure to represent. I know there are other regions in southern Ontario where French-lan-

guage services are offered, so I'd like to hear you tell us about that subject.

• (1830)

[*English*]

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** FedDev Ontario provides operating funding to community futures development corporations so that these organizations across southern Ontario are able to have access to business supports, entrepreneurship training, business counselling and loans to support the growth of the business.

They also contribute to supporting community and economic development in rural communities. We support 36 community futures development corporations in southern Ontario. Six of them receive incremental funding to ensure that they are able to provide supports in both official languages, as they serve communities that have significant francophone populations. The CFDCs that serve francophone populations include Prescott-Russell—as you noted—Renfrew, central Niagara, north Simcoe, Essex, Cornwall and counties.

In terms of the CFDCs, they are really instrumental. About 60% of our rural population is being served by CFDCs, but that is also augmented by the programs that FedDev is able to deliver directly.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thank you very much, Ms. Cousineau.

What I think is good is that the community futures development corporations guide the businesses that want access to more funding. Those corporations have a good relationship with FedDev Ontario and can thus facilitate contact between your organization and the non-profit organizations or businesses that need more funding or are seeking access to a broader range of programs.

My other question concerns promoting entrepreneurship among women. You discussed it briefly with my colleague Mr. Serré. I was wondering what programs FedDev Ontario offers to support entrepreneurship among women. There is a business in my riding right now called L'Original Packing. The owner, Ms. Bonneau, has taken it over from her father. She accessed \$100,000 from FedDev Ontario through a program focusing on entrepreneurship promotion among women in particular. I was wondering if you could explain to the committee the role that kind of program plays in the communities.

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for that question.

[*English*]

That particular program was a women entrepreneurship fund that provided up to \$100,000 in non-repayable contributions to women-owned and women-led businesses. It helped promote companies like L'Original Packing so they could grow.

I would draw your attention to a recent investment announcement by FedDev Ontario for a company located in Vars, Ontario, through our regional programming. This business is women-led. It's called Beau-Roc. They do dump truck mechanisms. That company is expanding to reach global markets. We're helping them with a \$6.1-million repayable contribution so they can grow, access new markets and create jobs in an OLMC. That is an example of a company that's grown over the years with various supports through the ecosystem.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** You have 30 seconds left.

**Mr. Francis Drouin:** Thanks very much. I am very familiar with the Beau-Roc business too.

Thank you for the work you do. Once again I want to acknowledge the important role you play in the economy in general and in the economy of the rural francophone minority communities in particular. I think your federal agency is a key economic development player.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Mr. Drouin.

We are coming to the end of the second round.

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

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Mr. Fabiano, what would be the most important improvement that we could make to assist you in your work?

• (1835)

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Our aim as an economic development agency is to continue implementing national programs in the communities.

[English]

We deliver the program in a community for the needs of the community. It's about continuing to be able to do what we do and fill the gap in national programs. Continuing to work with the community is probably the most important thing. Funding is always a question I leave for others, but I think us being able to continue to work in these communities directly is the most important thing.

[Translation]

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Ms. Cousineau, what aspect of the economic ecosystem of the francophone communities should mainly be reinforced?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** I'm sorry, I didn't hear the question.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** What aspect of the economic ecosystem of the francophone communities should be reinforced on a priority basis?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** Thank you for your question.

[English]

It's across the board. We're hearing from businesses across the region and entrepreneurs about the pressures created by our current economic conditions, the impact on the supply chain and the current inflationary times.

That said, we had an opportunity recently to support the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario with a project, because they identified a need. Official-language minority communities have to come together to create regional plans that can strengthen the communities and meet their needs, including around things like entrepreneurship. The investment we announced recently for the Réseau franco-santé du Sud de l'Ontario of about \$330,000 serves to help a community meet their needs.

[Translation]

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Ms. Cousineau.

I would like to remind you that, if you have any information to pass on to us, please don't hesitate to do so.

Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I want to thank the witnesses as well, and I, in turn, would like to ask what can be done to meet the needs of their teams.

Mr. Fabiano, what can we do to support you and, more particularly, newcomers to the communities who are trying to access your services?

**Mr. Nick Fabiano:** Thank you for your offer of support.

One thing that I think helps is that FedNor has become an independent and self-governing agency. As a result, we have greater access to other departments that are in Ottawa. We can communicate directly with all the other departments.

As I previously said, this isn't just a matter of money. We're also able to hear the opinions and know the obstacles and needs of citizens in various regions of northern Ontario so that we're sure they're well understood in Ottawa. This is really the kind of support we're trying to keep offering in our region.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Do you have another question, Ms. Ashton.

If not, Ms. Cousineau, do you want to add to what's been said?

**Ms. Linda Cousineau:** I agree with my colleague's response.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Ms. Ashton, do you want to adjourn?

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** I jokingly said that I'm not the only one who's asking to adjourn.

With all my respect for the witnesses, I want to thank them for their testimony and all the work they are doing on the ground.

**The Vice-Chair (Mr. Joël Godin):** Thank you, Ms. Ashton. You had 20 seconds left.

Echoing your remarks, I want to thank Mr. Fabiano and Ms. Cousineau, to whom I repeat that they are welcome to bring any further information they may have to our attention should they so wish. We will be pleased to accept that information because it will help us prepare an effective and rigorous report.

In closing, colleagues, I want to inform you that the Minister of Public Safety will be unavailable to testify as part of our study on bilingualism in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. We will also resume consideration of our draft report on increased francophone immigration to Canada at our next meeting.

In the hope that what I'm about to say proves to be true, I want to announce that our meeting next Monday will be chaired by our chair, Mr. Arseneault.

I wish you all a good evening.

Shall the committee adjourn?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Vice-Chair (Joël Godin):** The meeting is adjourned.

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