



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 024 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, September 29, 2016

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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are studying the roadmap for official languages and immigration in francophone minority communities.

This morning, we are pleased to have with us representatives from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. Joining us is the federation's chair, Melinda Chartrand.

Welcome, Ms. Chartrand.

Accompanying her is Roger Paul, the federation's executive director.

Good morning, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Roger Paul (Executive Director, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Good morning.

The Chair: In terms of how we will proceed, first, we will listen to you speak on the subject of immigration for 10 or so minutes, followed by questions. Then, we will discuss the roadmap, followed by another period of questions.

Before we get started, however, I'm going to give the floor to Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): I think the witnesses would prefer to talk about the roadmap and then immigration.

The Chair: Oh, very well. That's no problem. We'll start with the roadmap, then, followed by immigration.

Also, Mr. Samson, would you prefer to deal with the five questions straightaway?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): It's done.

The Chair: Very good.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I checked with the other committee members, and they all seem to be fine with the five questions proposed by the analyst. We'll have the questions sent to the groups concerned so that they can send us a brief without having to come here.

The Chair: Very well. We'll consider the matter settled.

Ms. Chartrand, the floor is yours.

Ms. Melinda Chartrand (Chair, Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones): Good morning everyone.

My name is Melinda Chartrand, and I am the chair of the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, or FNCSF for short. I want to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting our organization to appear and contribute to the committee's study of the roadmap and immigration in francophone minority communities.

Accompanying me is Roger Paul, the FNCSF's executive director. As part of our presentation this morning, we will provide some background on the FNCSF to help you become more familiar with our organization, as well as share our views on the roadmap and immigration.

We'll also touch on the FNCSF's requests for the next roadmap, which will soon be developed. In addition, we'll discuss the role immigration plays in building and strengthening the elementary and secondary education network in francophone minority communities across Canada.

In the package we provided, we briefly describe how the school boards came about. To give you some context, I will now tell you a bit about the FNCSF. You were given a document that explains what our organization is all about.

Mr. Roger Paul: Mr. Chair, my apologies for interrupting the presentation.

The clerk submitted a request to us, one she has also given you.

We didn't have time to translate our brief or the document Ms. Chartrand is referring to. I'm not sure whether you'll allow us to hand it out, but it is rather important that you have it.

The Chair: Okay.

Yes, Mr. Choquette?

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Chair, the documents can be filed but not handed out. To do that, we would need the documents in both official languages, out of respect for the English language just as much as the French language. That's extremely important.

The Chair: We don't have consent, so you'll have to file your documents.

Thank you.

Ms. Melinda Chartrand: Thank you.

The FNCSF is a non-profit organization that represents the 28 French-language school boards in minority communities across Canada. The school boards provide French-language educational services to more than 150,000 students in some 630 schools in nine provinces and three territories.

With regard to the roadmap, the FNCSF is calling for a better distribution of federal funding for French first-language education in francophone communities to better respect francophones' rights and more effectively manage their schools.

The FNCSF, the Commission nationale des parents francophones, or CNPF, and the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, or FCFA, have produced a report entitled "Objectif 2018/2023". Unfortunately, the document is currently available only in French.

In the report, the three national organizations representing francophone parents, French-language school boards, and francophone and Acadian communities call on the Department of Canadian Heritage to make significant improvements in view of the signing of the next Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, commonly referred to as the OLEP. As you know, Canadian Heritage renews the protocol with the Council of Ministers of Education, or CMEC, every five years.

I will now ask Mr. Paul to go over the highlights of the joint FNCSF-CNPF-FCFA report, "Objectif 2018/2023", and to present our recommendations for the renewal of the next multi-year action plan for official languages.

• (0855)

Mr. Roger Paul: Thank you, Ms. Chartrand.

Good morning everyone. Thank you for having us this morning.

Our apologies for not handing out the document, which is available only in French, as we mentioned. It was released just a few days ago, but we've prepared a brief overview of the main points, in both English and French. I believe you have that document.

Since 1970, the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction has defined the terms governing federal funding transfers to cover the additional costs of providing minority-language education and second-language instruction.

We were asked to talk about the roadmap today, were we not? I just want to make sure we are all on the same page. We also refer to the roadmap as the next action plan. That roadmap or next action plan includes the official languages in education program, which we will refer more succinctly to as the OLEP. We'll be talking only about the OLEP, so when I refer to the protocol, that is what I'm referring to.

The protocol has never been modernized to reflect the new reality of elementary and secondary education, from kindergarten to grade 12. In other words, it has never been updated to reflect section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Mahe decision, which you are no doubt familiar with, led to the creation of French-language school boards across the country in the 1990s, but the protocol predates that.

While the protocol is a positive measure by the Government of Canada to support the development of francophone and Acadian communities, it still contains what we believe to be significant shortcomings that undermine the effectiveness of the measures taken by the federal government. And when I say "we", I am not just speaking on behalf of the FNCSF. I am obviously talking about a document being presented by the FNCSF, but it was also jointly produced with the CNPF and the FCFA, thus, it represents a nationally held view.

On Monday, we appeared before the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages for two hours. We discussed only the protocol, and we are delighted to be able to speak to you about it today.

These historical shortcomings have been the focus of studies and reports brought to the government's attention on multiple occasions since the first protocol was signed in 1970. Today, 35 years after section 23 of the charter was adopted, the protocol still fails to meet the needs of communities or shed light on how federal funding is spent on French minority-language education in the country. After all, knowing who is handling the money and what it's being used for is important.

In an effort to address those shortcomings, the FNCSF, together with the CNPF and the FCFA, is calling for the adoption of a separate tripartite protocol between the Government of Canada, the CMEC, and the FNCSF. We are asking that the protocol be ready by 2018, when the next multi-year official languages action plan comes into force.

We believe the tripartite protocol would give a real voice to the communities when it comes to the management of federal funding for French first-language education in K-12 schools in minority communities.

• (0900)

It would also lead to greater accountability and transparency in the administration of federal funding. As you know, this money, earmarked for French-language schools outside Quebec, will help us to strengthen the French language and francophone culture in our schools. It is our view that the tripartite protocol would prevent provincial and territorial governments from continuing to unilaterally determine the priorities of minority French elementary and secondary education.

Finally, adopting a separate tripartite protocol would be a positive step in terms of public policy, bringing the protocol in line with section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The protocol's modernization through the creation of a separate minority-language education protocol is not a radical proposal.

The Chair: Mr. Paul, I have to stop you there. You had 10 minutes for your presentation. You'll have an opportunity to round out your comments in answering the committee members' questions.

I would just advise committee members that you will each have five minutes of speaking time during the first round, rather than six minutes. So I would ask that you kindly stick to your five minutes, which includes answers.

Mr. Généreux, you may go ahead.

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

Thank you, Mr. Paul and Ms. Chartrand.

Mr. Paul, when you talked about the need to better support the communities, did you mean at the municipal level or at the school level?

Mr. Roger Paul: I was speaking in general terms. In our view, the community comprises all those with ties to the school, be they municipal officials, school representatives, or parents.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Under a new protocol, would you like to see the money in the hands of another institution? Who currently receives the funding? Is it the school boards?

Mr. Roger Paul: No, that's the problem. Under the protocol, established even before the existing school boards were created, the additional funding for language and cultural education goes directly to the provinces, the ministries of education, and sometimes even without the school boards being consulted. Ministries get to decide, distributing the money as they see fit. That's where the problem lies.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Correct me if I'm wrong, but education is under provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Roger Paul: Absolutely.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Consequently, when the federal government gives the provinces funding, they are the ones who decide how to spend that money. Your tripartite protocol includes the provinces, does it not?

You indicated that the changes you are calling for under the new protocol aren't major. What are they?

Mr. Roger Paul: I'd like to begin by responding to your comment. Education is indeed a provincial domain, and we are well aware of that. However, when the federal government gives the provinces funding to invest in education, it has a responsibility to hold the provinces accountable for that funding. But there is no real accountability. We don't know where the money is going.

Another flaw in the protocol is that it doesn't require the provinces to consult with the communities. Provinces can do so if they wish, but when is up to them. In many cases, though, they don't consult at all. It should be noted that, when they do consult, the discussions aren't proper consultations, so steps are missing. The protocol needs to be modernized. It states that the provinces may undertake consultations, but we believe they have a duty to do so.

In terms of accountability, when you give the provinces and territories funding to improve French-language education and francophone culture in our schools, I would think you expect that money to be used as intended.

● (0905)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I don't claim to be a judge or lawyer, but are you saying that the provincial governments are not allocating the money as prescribed under the protocol?

Mr. Roger Paul: I don't want to make any sweeping statements, since we have very little time at our disposal to answer your questions. Nor do I want—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The question will probably come up again.

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes, but there are 50,000 other questions. We spent two hours before the Senate this week, and they asked the same questions. Regardless, if you are asking us whether the money is being spent as intended, in a number of cases, the answer is no.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Very well.

Mr. Roger Paul: We can give you many examples.

Here's a quick one to illustrate what's happening. During a trial in Yukon, the judge asked the territory's deputy education minister to confirm that all funding intended for French-language education had indeed been allocated to French first-language education. The deputy minister was forced to admit that she had redirected \$2 million of French first-language education funding to immersion programming. That's in Yukon, not some large province. The deputy minister redirected that money without asking anyone for permission or notifying the school board.

I ask you, then, is the money being used as intended, as the provinces and territories are claiming. In a number of cases, no. Many such examples exist.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Samson, over to you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Généreux. You did a great job of starting off this round of questions.

I'd like to pick up on the last thing you said, Mr. Paul. Mr. Fraser, the Commissioner of Official Languages, has also repeatedly pointed out in his reports that the money wasn't necessarily being used as intended.

I have three questions and would ask that you take no more than a minute to answer each of them. I'm wondering about the three shortcomings you highlighted with respect to the agreements protocol under the former official languages in education program, or the OLEP.

The first shortcoming has to do with the priorities established under the program. Are those priorities good for the school boards or not?

The second shortcoming revolves around accountability.

The third shortcoming concerns the signatories.

In your view, do the priorities set by the ministries truly reflect the priorities of the school boards in Canada?

Mr. Roger Paul: As far as your first question goes, when the protocol was being negotiated, the communities weren't consulted. The protocol was negotiated strictly between the ministries of education and the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Next, once the protocol determines how the process will work, the action plan is created. In some cases, the province, through the ministry of education, will choose to review the board's strategic plan and, without asking the school board any questions, determine how best to help it, and all the other school boards. Those determinations then become the priorities laid out in the action plan.

Does the action plan reflect school boards' priorities? Far from it in many cases. The action plan has to go to Canadian Heritage, but, sometimes, that happens six months later. There's a problem when it comes to determining school boards' priorities for language and cultural education.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Let's say I were to ask a school board what its five priorities were. Would I find those priorities in the ministry's action plan?

Mr. Roger Paul: Far from it.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Very well. Thank you.

The second shortcoming pertains to accountability. You said that, under the old protocol, there was no way to ensure accountability. I know that some mechanism for accountability is now in place between Canadian Heritage and the provinces.

But is anyone aware of what's going on? Do school boards have a hand in the process by which Canadian Heritage holds education ministries to account?

• (0910)

Mr. Roger Paul: It depends on the province or territory.

I'll give you the most common example. The province's education ministry gives the school board money to spend on priority X or Y. Then, at the end of the process, the ministry has to answer to Canadian Heritage in a very lengthy report.

I commissioned a study of all those reports for all the school boards around the country. It takes an extremely smart person to figure out that we don't know where the money went, because the expenditures are grouped in broad categories that provide little detail. At the end of the day, there is precious little accountability.

Mr. Darrell Samson: So accountability is a problem for the school boards as well.

The third shortcoming involves the signatories.

You're proposing an innovative concept. Why do you think the school boards or the organization representing them should be a signatory to the protocol?

Mr. Roger Paul: It's to prevent that very lack of accountability and the failure to consult the communities. You asked why I think that, but it's actually all the communities, parents, and school boards who feel that way. There wouldn't be three organizations at the table. The umbrella organization representing the communities and parents, in other words, the FNCSE, would, with their consent, make sure the process was being followed, not to mention properly negotiated from the outset.

We are not trying to interfere with what the provinces and territories are doing. For us, it's simply a matter of oversight. Then, action plans and a few ground rules can be established.

You're doing that already. What we're asking for is nothing new. It's what we've been asking for since 1970. In fact, in 2005, the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages sought exactly the same thing in recommendations 5 and 6 of its report.

On Monday, we asked the committee members whether it was possible to revive those recommendations. They smiled. Nevertheless, what it shows is that recommendations 5 and 6 were sound. They sought more or less what we are asking for. Is it possible to take another look at those recommendations and see whether they make sense in 2016?

The federal government is already doing it. What we are asking for isn't new. You already negotiate education matters directly with associations representing indigenous peoples in British Columbia and Manitoba. You already sign agreements directly with the associations, without necessarily involving the province.

We want to be part of a process that already exists. The current protocol deals not only with French first-language education, but also with immersion and post-secondary programs. That's why we are proposing a separate tripartite protocol. We aren't necessarily interested in a protocol that deals with immersion and post-secondary education; we are concerned solely with K-12 schools and support for language and culture for French-language school boards. We aren't asking for anything unreasonable.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'd like to wrap up, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll come back to you later.

I'm going to have to be a bit stricter when it comes to speaking time.

Mr. Choquette, you may go ahead.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for being here today. This is an extremely important discussion. As far as the roadmap goes, education is the cornerstone of minority communities. That's even true in Quebec. We'll get into immigration a bit later.

You spoke at length about your recommendation to create a tripartite protocol. We should definitely explore that idea and see how we could make it work. The fact that we are talking about a provincial responsibility is indeed problematic. Something else we need to consider is how do we ensure proper accountability.

You likely know that British Columbia went to court in order to assert its rights. This is what Mr. Power had to say about the ruling:

The ruling has a number of positives. For the first time in Canada, a court has determined that a ministry of education must treat the needs of francophones differently when it comes to education. The judge also called for the creation of a special budget for francophone schools, so that the province could no longer compare the needs of English-language and French-language schools when deciding which ones it would fund.

Would you mind briefly sharing your thoughts on the ruling? Could it help you in your efforts?

● (0915)

Mr. Roger Paul: There's no doubt that the ruling issued this week is extremely significant for the country's francophone and Acadian communities. But we are far from having what we asked for in British Columbia. We got the Supreme Court's ruling not that long ago. It addresses the equivalence of educational infrastructure within the same region.

In other words, a parent could notice that the French-language school was in terrible condition, unlike the English-language school. Let's assume it's an immersion school, since English-language schools are the ones providing immersion programs. The parent might conclude that their child could learn French at the English-language school, which is in much better condition and has better facilities. After comparing the two schools, a parent has to exhibit real fortitude when choosing to enrol their child in a French-language school.

The British Columbia government, like many others, used to treat all school boards equally. When the school boards were created a mere 20 years ago, what do you think happened to those schools? What kinds of schools did we inherit? Schools that the anglophones didn't want anymore. Today, we are in those schools, which are in disrepair.

In the provinces and territories, the approach hasn't changed. In other words, when it comes to infrastructure, we are treated as though our schools are new. We are told to wait, told that our turn will come one day or in two years, told that, out of some 20 schools, we are going to be given one, and so it goes. I've seen the schools in British Columbia. Having been the executive director of a school board not that long ago, I can tell you those aren't the schools parents will choose.

As for the ruling, the judge ordered the ministry of education to set aside funding. The fact of the matter is buying land in Vancouver is inconceivable. The school board simply can't afford to purchase a piece of land that could cost up to \$25 million. Who has that kind of money? The ministry of education. We are told that it's not our turn, that the amount wasn't budgeted for and therefore isn't available. So the court ordered the ministry to set aside funding in order to help the school board if a similar situation were to happen again.

The other issue involves helping the school board in its negotiations with the anglophones, who have lovely schools that are empty. The regulations are the problem. Even though its public money, under the current rules, the government can't compel an English-language school board to turn over one of its schools. I don't mean that it should give up the school for free, but for a reasonable price. Thanks to the court ruling, not only will that be possible, but it will also be mandatory from now on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vandal, you have five minutes. Please go ahead.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you.

I'd like to come back to the OLEP. It's a long-standing problem that's never been resolved.

Did you raise it when the two previous roadmaps were being evaluated?

Mr. Roger Paul: Absolutely. Not only did we raise it in the evaluations, but we even discussed it with your committee. Some 15 or 20 years ago, my predecessor, the late Paul Charbonneau, asked for the same thing we are seeking now. It's right there in the brief. It's not new. The Senate committee asked for the same thing in 2005. Twenty years ago, the CNPF put out a report whose title translates to "Where have all the billions gone?" Good question—we don't know where they've gone.

The organization that became the FCFA also produced a report stating more or less the same thing. What we are calling for now will come as no surprise; no one is going to fall off their chair in shock. I think we're well-positioned, for that matter. We don't want to be involved in areas that don't concern us, such as immersion education. We have views, and we believe in linguistic duality. But there's no reason to mix the two envelopes.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Would you mind commenting on the evaluations of the two previous roadmaps? The reason we are here is to examine them before a new action plan is established. How would you say those evaluations were handled?

● (0920)

Mr. Roger Paul: I alluded earlier to the fact that we had asked lawyers, consultants, and researchers to analyze all that. We told them that, for the analysis, we would provide them with the reports for each of the 28 school boards in the country who belong to our network, as well as the reports submitted by the provinces and territories. Occasionally, we had to file an access to information request with the ministry of education to obtain a report. So we asked those experts to analyze the reports and to try to make sense of it all. It proved an impossible feat. We knew the ministry had spent so many millions on such and such priority, but nothing more. And if the information could be identified, the school board didn't even know that it had received a specific amount of funding for a particular priority.

As for what's been negotiated, the funding is supposed to be based on a fifty-fifty split. That's the condition imposed by the federal government. It's prepared to hand over x million dollars provided the ministry contributes the same amount. We found out a few weeks ago that the federal government, in very broad terms, was indeed providing x million dollars. But where's the other 50%?

Mr. Dan Vandal: It's impossible, then, to carry out a real evaluation. There aren't any indicators to measure.

Mr. Roger Paul: It's a very general form of accountability, and the excuse that's always given is the fact that education is a provincial responsibility. That's true, but if the federal government provides funding intended for language and culture, it has a right to hold the provinces and territories accountable for that money.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Very well.

Are there any other problems with the two previous roadmaps?

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes. The old protocol presents a big challenge. Many education ministries will be reluctant to make changes. We met with some ministry officials this summer. I know this won't be the case for all of them, but the fact is some of them may be more comfortable sticking with the status quo. They may very well wonder why the process should change when it has been the same for the past 30 or 40 years. Here we are, proposing a different way of doing things. Yet, there's nothing revolutionary about it.

This is something only we can ask for. The anglophones couldn't make this request: they have immersion schools. Nor could post-secondary institutions. I am talking about the OLEP priorities. They could try asking for it, but they wouldn't have any legal basis. The only ones covered by section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms are the French-language school boards. We were granted the right to manage our schools, and pursuant to that right, francophone schools can make their own decisions on language and culture. They can decide for themselves where to spend the money and how to set their priorities.

If section 23 gives us the right to manage our schools, why is it not respected when setting priorities that will be paid for using federal money? That's really what it boils down to.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul.

That ends the first round of questions, which focused on the roadmap. Now we'll move on to the second issue, immigration.

You have 10 minutes to give your statement and share your views on the subject.

Mr. Roger Paul: As I already mentioned, I may not speak as passionately during this second part, but the issue is equally important.

Ms. Melinda Chartrand: Thank you.

Five principles guide the actions of the FNCSF and its network of French-language schools in the exercise of their unique mandate and their efforts to ensure the development, vitality, and sustainability of francophone minority communities.

Was the document handed out?

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes, in both English and French.

Ms. Melinda Chartrand: One of those principles is the right to manage admissions, a right that is inherently tied to immigration in francophone and Acadian communities. Members of official language minority communities, through their school boards, should be able to decide, on a case-by-case basis, who should be admitted to their schools. Minority communities are much better qualified than education ministry officials to make decisions affecting the development and vitality of francophone communities. School boards should have the right to manage admissions, and that right should be protected under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Consider, for example, developments in Yukon affecting immigration and the right of school boards to manage admissions. The FNCSF applauds the territorial government's recent decision to delegate, to Yukon's French-language school board, control over admissions to École Émilie-Tremblay, Académie Parhélie, and the future francophone high school.

Broader admission criteria for Yukon's French-language schools enabled the territory's francophone school board to take its place alongside the rest of the country's francophone school boards, which already have the full-fledged right to manage admissions. Yukon's French-language school board now has the authority to decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether or not to admit children of eligible parents to its schools. Those eligible parents include newcomers, some of whom were part of the recent wave of immigration. That's a tremendous advancement for the French fact in Yukon.

Yukon's French-language school board had long sought the power to grant admission to the children of its francophone ancestors, immigrants, and francophiles, in order to better realize the intent of section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The FNCSF views the ability of school board-based management in francophone minority communities as vital to the future and vitality of francophone and Acadian communities. There is no denying that future depends on immigration.

●(0925)

Mr. Roger Paul: Thank you, Ms. Chartrand.

Some good things are being done in a number of areas. Let me say that the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones coordinates an all-party committee funded by Canadian Heritage. The committee is made up of school boards, community organizations, the departments of education of nine provinces and territories, as well as some federal departments, including Canadian Heritage, and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. That committee has been discussing the issue for five years.

We just produced a report on our accomplishments in a document titled "L'École de Raphaël". You can view that document on our website, at fnscf.ca. We set out four priorities in that document. One of them — immigration, in terms of education in French — has been at the heart of our discussions for five years, even 10 years, and it will remain a priority. We are actually organizing a summit on education, in May 2017, as part of which 600 individuals will participate in Ottawa, in Edmonton and in Moncton, and that priority will be on the agenda. You could consult the document to find out more about our immigration objectives.

We talk a lot about intersectoral strategy among the various sectors of a community. On that matter, I believe you will be hearing from the representatives of RDEE Canada later. There is the whole issue of municipalities and partners in the community. As for immigration, we are discussing strategies, inclusion, access and citizen participation with them.

I will now talk about the 5%.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We could perhaps go to questions. I am afraid we will run out of time.

Mr. Roger Paul: Okay.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Unless you have one last point to raise, we should go to questions.

Mr. Roger Paul: I would actually like to add something.

In terms of immigration, what do we need in school boards and in communities?

First of all, we have to focus more on strategies to attract immigrants to our French-language schools and our francophone communities. Right now, French-language schools are absolutely unknown to immigrants, both anglophones and francophones. It's as if we did not exist. Something needs to be done about that. If we want to attract more immigrants or new Canadians to our schools, we first have to let them know that the schools exist.

Second, as Ms. Chartrand mentioned, we must have the right to admit those immigrants. Right now, a number of the country's school boards don't have access to allophones—people who don't speak French or English. Since they do not speak either of those two languages, why should they have to attend one school over another? We should have the right to admit allophones and provide them with the services they need. That was my second point.

Third, we need settlement workers. They are present in significant numbers in the larger school boards, especially anglophone ones. When we welcome a family of newcomers, we have to establish rapport with them, even in school. As you know, cultures differ from one another. We have to be able to explain to those people how things work in Canadian schools and express the desire for them to participate in the vitality of the community and the school.

• (0930)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul.

We will now go to questions, starting with Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning. Thank you for joining us today.

You say that new immigrants are not aware of the existence of French schools or English schools in minority communities. So that's a vision problem on the part of the provincial or the federal government.

That said, how do you ensure to attract a small portion of those immigrants? All school boards and all provinces must be able to attract immigrants.

As you said, you don't have access to allophones. As a result, they do not attend your schools. Judging by what is happening in Quebec, integration is difficult for those people.

How can we integrate and retain a newcomer who does not speak French or English?

Of course, we are mostly talking about French in the case of the francophone minority.

Mr. Roger Paul: Thank you.

Perhaps I expressed myself poorly or perhaps I was misunderstood.

It's not that immigrants don't know about English-language schools or French-language schools, but rather that they are unaware of the existence of French-language schools. They think they will only find English-language schools when they arrive.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Mr. Roger Paul: So awareness should be raised about French-language schools to remedy this shortcoming.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes.

Mr. Roger Paul: However, the necessary funding should not be taken from the budgets for school board programs. The funds should be provided as part of a campaign.

We are talking about linguistic duality, and it seems to me that the two linguistic communities must be treated equally. So if newcomers are aware of the existence of English-language schools, but they have very little awareness of French-language schools, we have to find a way to raise awareness about francophone schools. To do that, financial resources are needed, but school boards don't have the resources to do the necessary promotion.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: However, the province—and you are part of a province—does have the funding to promote linguistic duality. That must vary from one province to another, but in terms of official languages, your province must be able to ensure that its department of education is also promoting French.

Are there any difficulties in that respect?

• (0935)

Ms. Melinda Chartrand: I could explain that situation.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Okay.

Ms. Melinda Chartrand: I am the president of my school board, in Toronto, and this is something we are experiencing on a daily basis.

The major obstacle for francophones is that we have no visibility when it comes to promoting the language.

There are a number of multicultural associations in our regions, but we are not part of the group that welcomes newcomers. Some of them go through Buffalo, for example, to get to Fort Erie, where there is a multicultural centre. Only the anglophone public school board is part of that team.

We have community agents in the province. However, there should be more workers in establishments to provide a better welcome and to be available during meetings with newcomers. For example, at the Niagara multicultural centre, no services in French are provided.

We have been working on this for five to 10 years. Ottawa also has a large number of centres. It is important to maintain those relations between workers in establishments and francophone school boards that are working with various immigrant cultural groups.

Mr. Roger Paul: A good example is the country's only official bilingual province, New Brunswick. We may expect that, in New Brunswick, which is an officially bilingual province, francophones would be part of the groups welcoming newcomers.

Let's take the example of the Syrians who recently arrived in Canada. We would like to integrate those new Canadians in our schools. However, there is no infrastructure in place that would enable New Brunswick francophones to participate in welcoming them.

We have sent letters to the Minister of Education. We have supported the three New Brunswick school boards in protesting the fact that only anglophones have access to newcomer welcome services at the airport. That service is funded by the province, but francophones are excluded. So integration is impossible in those conditions.

We have developed a video in Arabic to try to attract them our schools, but that was done with limited means.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Samson, the floor is now yours.

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

I will briefly talk about three issues.

The aspect my colleague, Ms. Boucher, brought up is very important. I would like to bring it back into our discussion. She said that provincial departments should ensure the promotion of francophone schools to immigrants to achieve true linguistic duality.

That's exactly where the problem lies. We could check in all the provinces—with perhaps New Brunswick as the lone exception—and see that it's not a priority. School board are not consulted even though they could cooperate on immigrant integration.

I would like you to provide a quick answer to my questions. Why is francophone immigration important to French schools?

Mr. Roger Paul: You know that, in our French-language schools, we talk about welcoming rights holders. You know the difference between a rights holder and a non-rights holder.

According to a renowned researcher, Rodrigue Landry, who is from New Brunswick, only one student out of two with rights holder parents chooses a French-language school for the same reasons that were just mentioned.

With all the competition among school boards when it comes to immigration, it would be important for newcomers to know that we have two official languages and that they can be educated in either of the two. However, they don't know that.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In addition, of course, if few francophones join a community, that community gets assimilated.

I will close with one last issue.

Department of immigration representatives met with us on Tuesday. They told us they had a 4% target for immigrants choosing French. Currently, only 1.5% of them opt for French. A department team is in charge of this file, and we hope improvements will be made. I also hope that will be the case.

What strategies could you suggest for the department to make progress and achieve that target? We definitely want it to achieve the target.

• (0940)

Mr. Roger Paul: I wouldn't want to tell them what to do.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I would like to do that.

Mr. Roger Paul: I am not in the same position as you. That said, my colleague who is the president, told me that there were programs, but that they were relatively unknown.

For example, would there be a way for francophones to have their fair share of settlement workers? We don't have that right now. The vast majority of those settlement workers are in anglophone school boards. It would be important to implement a strategy for that.

We are talking about the federal government and pointing the finger at everyone, but some departments may have somewhat more specific responsibilities in that area. When it comes to immigration, if we are serious and really want to see an increase in our provinces and territories—4% or 5%, depending on who you talk to—we need a strategy for promoting linguistic duality in education. That is the key consideration. I was talking about promotion for our school boards, but I am also talking about promotion for the community.

The Chair: Are you done, Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Yes.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, it is now your turn.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We have talked about the situation of Yukon, which has worked very hard to obtain the right to accommodate a number of clientele, in addition to rights holders. The situation is problematic across Canada. People have talked about the Quebec situation, which is very different in this regard. They said we would need an asymmetrical approach—in this case, for official language minority communities—except in Quebec.

Could that approach enable immigrants and, as you said, francophiles, as well as people with francophone ancestors to join the communities?

Education is what leads people to decide to live and work in French. It would even have to start in early childhood. The Commissioner of Official Languages will actually present a report on early childhood soon.

Can you say a few words about a potential asymmetrical approach and about the importance of early childhood?

Mr. Roger Paul: As for asymmetry, we are talking about two realities—education and the francophonie. It is not news to you that the reality is not the same in Quebec as elsewhere in the country.

We recently went before the Supreme Court to try to resolve the issue of student enrolment. We really respect the fact that the reality is different in Quebec. We mustn't dumb things down by treating everyone the same. When it comes to school boards and access to infrastructure, I have given you a good number of examples where everyone was treated equally. But this is rather a matter of determining what Quebec's needs are and what the needs of francophones outside Quebec are. Those two are not diametrically opposed, but some approaches or community realities are different. So if you are asking me whether asymmetry is really the path to take, I would say that the answer is yes. We would even like that asymmetry to apply to what we are asking for.

Of all the school boards from across the country, we are alone in being protected in terms of education. Colleagues from the Quebec English School Boards Association told me that they have decided to approach the government about what they want to do.

Regarding government funding for our school boards, I think it is easier to come to an understanding with a single province. In the case of Quebec, Canadian Heritage is interacting specifically with that province and talking about its priorities in education with a single department of education. It's far from easy to interact with all the other provinces and territories, especially since their approaches are very different. That's where we advocate some sort of asymmetry.

We are not asking that Quebec be included in an all-party agreement covering education from kindergarten to year 12. We talked about the mother tongue from kindergarten to year 12 outside Quebec. It goes without saying that Quebec's approach will be different, and that's not a problem. The reality, however, is not different.

• (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We are continuing with Mr. Arseneault, who will be the last member to take the floor.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

If I have any time left at the end of my question, I will share it with my colleague, Mr. Vandal.

I would like to discuss education, the roadmap and immigration. However, earlier, you mentioned the term “duality” three times.

I am from New Brunswick, where the concept of duality is not synonymous with bilingualism. Our province is officially bilingual, and the term “duality” means that there are two leaders—one francophone and one anglophone—in very specific sectors. That's what duality is at home. In fact, when we talk about duality, my natural tendency is to say, “Oh”. In New Brunswick, we have a francophone department of education and an anglophone one. There are never any disputes over fund transfers. Without going into details, I would say that the funding is allocated on a per capita basis.

My question may be of a legal nature.

We will read your brief later—perhaps some have done so already—but does it contain any legal arguments related to section 23 of the charter? We all know that education is a provincial responsibility. Federal transfers to the provinces must respect the obligations set out in the charter, in particular, section 23. Provinces are required to report on how they are distributing and managing that money. The money comes from the federal government, which is subject to the charter provisions. Has that argument been put forward already, legally speaking?

Mr. Roger Paul: No.

That is a very good question.

That argument is certainly made in our brief. As you surely know, before we submitted our brief, we consulted our lawyers, that is, the lawyers of the three federations, as well as the communities, parents, and all other interested parties. We are simply saying that if the federal government provides funding to support French-language school boards that are protected under section 23, it must demand results. This of course is very difficult. We know that it will take time

to negotiate a new protocol. The federal government could even negotiate directly with the school board without going through the ministry of education. That is the case in some sectors, such as health, and justice for first nations and associations. There is nothing stopping it from doing that.

We are following the rules, but we would like to change them a bit to get a separate protocol. It is not that onerous. It makes sense that our rights are protected under section 23 of the charter. If we are included in the process from the outset, it would be possible to discuss appropriate accountability by the provinces. The communities, parents and school boards are not part of Canadian Heritage. We defend francophone rights across the country. Before signing a protocol, if we see there is no accountability or that funding is not allocated in accordance with the priorities identified, we could do something then, but it would be too late once the protocol is signed. We have to be at the table from the start.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your explanations, Mr. Paul.

Mr. Paul and Ms. Chartrand, thank you very much for your contribution to the committee's work. Your presentations were very well done.

We will take a five-minute break.

Ms. Boucher, I think you have something to say.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Chair, I have a request and I think my colleagues will agree.

If we sent our questions that we did not have the time to ask Mr. Paul or Ms. Chartrand, could they send us their answers later on?

• (0950)

The Chair: That's an excellent idea. I think everyone is agreeable.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Can those answers also be published?

The Chair: Mr. Paul, if we send you a few questions, I suppose you could answer in writing?

Mr. Roger Paul: Yes, I will be very pleased to do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. René Arseneault: Ms. Boucher has another request.

The Chair: Please go ahead, Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Would it possible to publish the answers provided by Mr. Paul and Ms. Chartrand, as though there were part of the record of proceedings?

The Chair: I think so.

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): There will have to be a motion to that effect.

The Chair: Do you agree that the answers should also be published?

Some hon. members: Okay.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Once again, thank you very much for your presentation.

We will take a five-minute break before moving on to the next group of witnesses.

● (0950)

(Pause)

● (0955)

The Chair: Let us return to our study of the roadmap and immigration in francophone minority communities.

I am very pleased to welcome representatives from the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité Canada, Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau, its president and executive director.

Welcome, Mr. Bigeau.

Also with us is Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden, the national cooperation administrator.

Welcome to you as well, Ms. Abdi-Aden.

The rules for our proceedings are as follows. You will have ten minutes to make a presentation. We will then have a questions and comments period.

We will begin by spending 10 minutes on the roadmap. We will then have 10 minutes for immigration.

Mr. Bigeau, you have the floor.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau (President, Executive Director, Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDEE) Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Hello, everyone. I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting us here today.

My name is Jean-Guy Bigeau and I am the president and executive director of the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, ou RDEE, of Canada. It is a non-profit organization that has more than 160 employees and experts and that has a presence in every province and territory.

As we mark our 20th anniversary in 2017, our network continues to be the leader and advocate for economic development and employability in francophone and Acadian minority communities in Canada.

We are here today primarily to talk to you about the government's roadmap for official languages and, more specifically, the issue of francophone immigration in minority communities. That part will be covered by my colleague, Ms. Abdi-Aden.

What has the current roadmap allowed us to do? Under the 2013-18 roadmap, RDEE Canada received total funding of \$69 million over five years. While this might seem like a substantial amount at first, we must remember that it is used to fund all the network's activities, in every province and territory.

Nonetheless, stable, long-term funding like this allows us to undertake innovative projects over several years and to offer a range of services to francophone minority communities. The results of these activities are concrete and tangible.

For example, it has allowed us to help francophone entrepreneurs draft and develop business plans; to support market studies; to help

businesses with expansion, acquisition and succession; and to support young entrepreneurs and business networks.

We also have more specific projects, such as the creation of day camps for francophone youth in the territories; the development of green practices for small francophone municipalities in western Canada; the retention of young workers in the maritime provinces through exciting placement programs or through tourism development for local businesses.

Although the enabling fund for official language minority communities is flexible enough to allow us to tailor our activities to the needs of francophone and Acadian communities, the program's parameters are nonetheless for a very specific niche. In the next roadmap, it would be interesting to create funding envelopes similar to the enabling fund for other departments, specifically, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Small Business and Tourism, and Environment and Climate Change Canada. These departments could then ratify partnerships with representative organizations such as ours in order to offer all the necessary services to minority communities.

Moreover, RDEE Canada published two documents in the past year pertaining to your committee's study, specifically, the white book on economic prosperity in francophone and Acadian communities, as well a Canadian economic development plan for official language minority communities. If you are interested, we would be pleased to share these documents with the committee after this presentation.

● (1000)

The Chair: We are interested.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, we are interested.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: Now let us turn specifically to the next roadmap.

Francophone and Acadian communities or FACs across the country have evolved considerably in the past decade, but not all in the same way. Very little research is done on the economy of official language minority communities, or OLMCs. As a result, little data is available, and return on investment analyses are very difficult to obtain.

Yet the world's francophone communities make up a considerable economic space. With a presence in 33 countries and representing 6.5% of the world's population, these communities contribute 8.4% of the world's GDP, and account for 11% of agricultural land and 6% of energy reserves.

Based on the footprint calculated by Statistics Canada, the multiplier of the francophone economic space is 1.52. In other words, each GDP value from Canada's francophone economic space contributes \$1.52 to Canada's GDP.

Unfortunately, in 2011, OLMCs accounted for just 6% of Canada's total population, a 3% drop since 1971. As a result, there are big gaps between what businesses need and the availability of labour with the required skills. Business owners in Canada are aging and do not necessarily have succession plans. This is especially true in FACs and is a crucial issue for the survival of both the businesses and the communities.

Similarly, Canada has 153,000 francophone immigrants who are already settled in each province and territory outside of Quebec. Yet there is a glaring problem in matching economic immigrants' skills with employers' needs.

This is also an issue in the youth economy. It has become increasingly complicated for our youth to overcome barriers to employment and to acquire the skills, work experience, and abilities required to make a successful transition to the labour market. Youth migration and specifically the exodus from rural communities is also an issue of growing concern. Priority should therefore be given to projects that encourage youth to remain in the regions for the long term.

Growth and development inevitably depend on national projects focusing on a range of services to support youth. What is needed in particular are partnerships with youth business; a job-readiness cybermentoring program; more work placements for youth before they make career choices; and measures to support family succession and the creation of new businesses.

Moreover, it is estimated that the green economy will account for 2.1% of the world's GDP by 2020, so job creation in this sector and stimulating economic growth in order to preserve resources and support individuals are indispensable. This is why technical support for francophone and bilingual communities that are seeking solutions would be a long-term investment. It is clear that the greening of local economies is not only necessary for the environment, but is also an interesting avenue for stimulating growth and prosperity in these communities.

The lack of access to French-language early childhood services in francophone minority communities is also a serious challenge for the survival of the language. Since the majority of children spend much of their early years in daycare, a French-language environment is essential for the development of their identity. Infrastructure is either out of date or non-existent. This is combined with the high cost of rent, the labour shortage, the difficulty recruiting skilled workers, and the lack of stable, long-term funding. These are the three pillars that have to be consolidated.

● (1005)

Based on the Bisson study conducted in 2012 on the impact of investments in early childhood on the economic vitality of francophone communities, one can reasonably conclude that there is a total of between 44,000 and 77,000 children under the age of five who might use French-language early childhood services in minority communities in Canada.

Finally, given that the tourism industry is continually changing and modernizing, there are incredible opportunities for FACs to offer attractive and competitive tourism products and to deploy related marketing efforts.

In 2016, tourism accounted for 2% of Canada's GDP and helped sustain more than 170,000 companies and close to 627,000 jobs. The international French-language market could potentially represent 200 million national and international visitors, travelling for pleasure or business. By providing more structure for French-language and bilingual tourism products across Canada, we could better meet market and client needs, while increasing the competitiveness of the destination and of French-language and bilingual products.

We therefore recommend that a program be created for the development and marketing of innovative French-language and bilingual tourist products, in order to make them more appealing and competitive.

Thank you for your attention. I will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bigeau.

We will begin with the questions and comments immediately.

You have the floor, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Bigeau and Ms. Abdi-Aden.

I have been a businessman for more than 25 years. My operations are in an area I would describe as rural, the La Pocatière area, in the Lower St. Lawrence. We are facing a serious labour shortage in this sector right now.

You are saying that, in francophone minority communities, there are also serious labour shortages. That is what I understand. From among the programs and the \$60 million you have received in the past five years, are certain amounts specifically invested in looking for workers?

How do you proceed in this regard right now?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: Yes, definitely.

That is a good question. Our network is not just in Quebec; it also extends beyond Quebec. In communities, our network focuses on identifying as many job opportunities as possible.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I assume those jobs are primarily for francophones.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: They are primarily for francophones or bilingual job seekers. Our objective is of course to find people in the francophone community, but we often look for bilingual people in very specific sectors.

We share expertise from one province to another. We also share training and information. With respect to francophone immigration, we also match immigrants' skills with market needs.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I would like to go back to my initial question about the \$60 million you have received.

Can you tell us quickly what percent of your overall budget is devoted to this specific issue?

I am asking because \$60 million is quite a bit of money. You said earlier that it seems like a lot but that it could be higher for the whole of Canada. Everyone can always use more money. Personally, I think this is a critical issue. We have to be able to promote integration through networks or through the funding that we allocate to Canadian Heritage and to Canada as a whole. This is linked with immigration. Newcomers represent the workforce of tomorrow. Let there be no mistake: we are not having more children in Canada.

You mentioned accountability earlier and I completely agree with you. How can we ensure that the money spent really goes to the right places where we have to integrate newcomers? How can these people be integrated into the labour market?

Does your organization spend a significant percent of its money on that?

•(1010)

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: I would say that the majority of the funding we receive goes to labour, looking for and placing workers. There are five main areas of activity in our network: tourism, francophone immigration, the youth economy, the green economy, of course, and services to businesses and entrepreneurship. In all of these sectors, we always strive to meet labour needs.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: At the end of your presentation, you mentioned tourism. You mentioned placing more emphasis on bilingual tourism.

To my knowledge, the tourism dollars that are spent in Canada right now serve both official languages. Would you like to see a greater emphasis on French-language tourism outside Quebec? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: Yes.

I will let Ms. Abdi-Aden answer your question. Among other things, she is responsible for the tourism sector in our organization.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So she is a specialist in that area.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden (Administrator, National Cooperation, Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité (RDEE) Canada): I am not a specialist, but ...

Mr. Bernard Généreux: You almost are.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: I have learned about it.

The money spent on tourism in Canada goes toward marketing. You are familiar with Destination Canada, the organization responsible for tourism marketing.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Yes.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: This organization is responsible for marketing in both official languages. It therefore has a presence in France, for example, and other French-speaking countries. There have been budget cuts in recent years, however, that have greatly affected France. There are fewer resources to promote francophone products in France and very little funding for developing tourism products.

This does affect not only Francophone communities but tourism as a whole in Canada. That is why Canada lost a lot of points and

slipped from the 17th to the 16th most popular tourist destination in recent years. It is because we invest very little in developing products and everything goes to marketing. Everything is done in both official languages, however, including promotion.

What Mr. Bigeau really meant is that we have big markets. Yet the French-language companies in the tourism sector are very small. We must help them to be competitive and offer products that can compete with very appealing international tourism products.

So there is a lot of work to be done in developing the products offered.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor now.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to mention something before my colleague takes the floor.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Généreux.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I simply want to point out a problem.

When the witnesses start speaking, their microphone is clearly on, but I can't hear them. It takes a while before I can hear them. I don't know if that is normal or if I'm the only one with this problem.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No, it happened to me earlier.

The Chair: Is it a problem with the sound?

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Maybe the system I am using is defective.

Has anyone else had the same problem?

Mr. René Arseneault: I can hear clearly.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I like to use the earpiece when you are speaking to each other. Otherwise, I can hear what is being said.

The Chair: Okay.

Let me know if it happens again.

Mr. Vandal now has the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

You began by saying that you had received \$69 million under the 2013-18 roadmap. How does that compare to the amount you received under the first roadmap?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: I was not with the organization at the time.

I'm not sure, but I could tell you later.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Okay.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: It was in the same range.

The Chair: I have been told that it was roughly the same amount.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I am quite familiar with the Conseil de développement économique au Manitoba, the CDEM, which works closely with the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba, the AMBM. Do all the provinces use the same model or is it unique to Manitoba?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: It is unique to Manitoba.

It is, however, standard practice for each member to work in both languages in the fields that I mentioned before.

In Manitoba, however, there is a formal relationship with the bilingual municipalities.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I have only five minutes. That is a not a lot of time.

Can you tell us a bit about the challenges you face? What can we do better in the future? What challenges did you face with the last two roadmaps?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: As I said, it would in our view be ideal if the enabling fund model were also available to other departments and sectors.

For example, we spoke about immigration, tourism, and even the environment. With respect to the green economy, we are doing a lot of work in French and in both languages. We want to increase our capacity in this regard. We want to place a greater emphasis on participation. There are also a lot of job creation opportunities in these fields.

It would be helpful for us to have access to additional funding from other departments.

•(1015)

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: If I may, I would like to add something briefly.

You know that the action plan and the roadmap are leveraged funds. If they remain leveraged funds, we must ensure that regular departmental programs continue to fund francophone activities and initiatives and that the money allocated through the roadmap or the action plan does not replace those programs.

This is a major challenge that we have observed since 2002 or 2003, when the action plan and roadmap came into effect.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I understand what you are saying.

Can you tell us a bit about the private funding you have obtained for the RDEE?

I know there is a great emphasis in Manitoba on matching private donations and on job creation.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: That formula is used in each province and territory. When we have business dealings with private-sector businesses, there is a partnership agreement. For all the initiatives we launch, there is a financial contribution from the private sector, in nearly equal proportions. For example, if we develop a business plan and want to disseminate it, the private sector helps fund its dissemination.

Mr. Dan Vandal: So those are large amounts of money.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: The private sector plays a big role in funding because we have direct ties with it in each of our fields of activity.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Do you have statistics of the jobs created?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: We have in fact commissioned a study on the network's economic impact that will be released very soon. Then we will have more information on the impact of all our activities in all fields, including tourism, immigration, and business support. Right now, each sector is analyzed separately.

Mr. Dan Vandal: You do not have any statistics now on the jobs you have created?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: As I recall, we have created 900 jobs.

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: We can send you the information. We also have a study on this that was conducted in 2012.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Can you talk to us about youth and entrepreneurship?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: Yes.

We have been working on this since last year. We are in the process of consolidating our base and developing a youth program right across the country, especially from the economic point of view. In particular, we want to help young people start up small businesses and with succession planning. We have seen that this is also an issue. So we are preparing young people to take over businesses.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bigeau.

We will now move on to Mr. Choquette.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presence today.

This morning, we discussed two themes that are fundamental to communities: education and the economy. In the first case, the goal is to ensure that people receive an education and secondly, that they can work and participate in all aspects of their community's life. This is very important. You also spoke briefly about labour issues.

How do you coordinate your approach with the education sector? Do you keep in touch with the sector so as to establish a relationship with young people leaving school and to determine your communities' training needs?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bigeau: Yes, I talked about that earlier.

We have signed a formal agreement for the recruitment and training of skilled workers in order to meet labour needs in the early childhood sector.

We have business ties with nearly the whole community, including the immigration and tourism sectors and the school system. Our goal is not to become involved in education but rather to focus on infrastructure and job creation. For instance, we work with the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne to ensure that training is provided in all sectors, especially tourism and early childhood. We have this kind of partnership with a number of organizations, including the education sector.

•(1020)

Mr. François Choquette: The Liberal government has talked a lot about investing in infrastructure and transitioning to green energy. As I recall, a bill on this subject passed second reading yesterday. The goal is to calculate the impact of municipalities' infrastructures on climate change, to determine how those impacts can be mitigated, and to make any adjustments necessary.

You said you want francophone communities to continue developing this green economy. As I understand it, they are already developing expertise in this area.

Can you provide any further details and tell us if you have any additional needs in this regard?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bibeau: We have developed a program that originated in the western provinces, in Manitoba, specifically. It is called Éco-Ouest. We are working with municipalities, especially small ones, to assess the effects on climate. We are trying to promote the implementation of recycling services. We are doing this in a structured way and our services are now in demand.

Actually, several communities and municipalities are now using this service. We are also in the process of developing a national strategy. In this regard, we are seeking additional funding in order to make the program available in every province and territory in Canada. That is just one example. The green economy is an area of activity that we want to get francophone and Acadian communities involved in.

Mr. François Choquette: Has this model been successful and have you been successful with it? Has it also created a lot of jobs?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bibeau: Yes.

Mr. François Choquette: It creates a lot of jobs. That is important.

I also have questions about another area. Do you take a different approach to economic development, entrepreneurship, and job creation for newcomers and immigrants who arrive in francophone minority communities, as compared to those who may have been there for a long time? Do you have an approach to ensure that immigrants do not go work in official language majority communities and that they will be attracted to francophone communities, if they speak French of, course?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bibeau: As a rule, we assess market needs.

We already know what the needs are and what skills are needed. When newcomers arrive, in order to facilitate their economic integration, for example, we match their skills with market needs. It is precisely this strategy that we use, so to speak, to provide for the successful economic integration of immigrants. This is the way it is done in each province and territory. At the national level, we have working groups in each field of activity that I mentioned earlier, and each one of our members participates. Of course, we set out a work plan and are careful to take a consistent approach to helping immigrants integrate. This is the way we operate in each province and territory.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bibeau.

Mr. Arseneault, you may ask a short question.

Mr. René Arseneault: Welcome, Mr. Bibeau. I would like to thank you and your colleague for the information you are providing.

Does your organization work with francophone minority economic development agencies?

Mr. Jean-Guy Bibeau: Yes.

In most cases, we work directly with them. In New Brunswick, for instance, the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick is a member of our network. Whether in New Brunswick, Manitoba or Alberta, the francophone economic development agencies are part of our network.

Mr. René Arseneault: Okay.

As to federal agencies ...

The Chair: I'm sorry, Mr. Arseneault, if you don't mind, we will now move on to the second part of the presentation.

Ms. Abdi-Aden will now talk to us about immigration.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: Thank you very much.

I will do an overview, and speak in support of what Mr. Bibeau has said several times.

Just like your committee, our network considers that francophone immigration is a priority for the vitality and development of francophone communities, but also for the economic development of Canada. That is why we are pleased today to be able to present to you some strategies that would help the integration of immigrants into francophone communities.

Too often, there is a false perception afoot that francophone immigration is an obligation, that immigrants are brought here because of a law. Rather than an obligation, francophone immigration should be considered an opportunity and an asset, not only to strengthen our French-language communities, but also to strengthen the social and economic fabric of Canada as a whole.

Perhaps you already know these demographics, but between 1991 and 2011, the proportion of francophone immigrants in francophone and Acadian communities rose from 6.2% to 11.7%; so there has been an increase in those numbers. In addition, out of 2.5 million francophones outside Quebec, 12% are immigrants. This upward trend has to be seen as an opportunity to benefit from this immigration.

As a network, our role is to facilitate economic immigration aimed at meeting needs such as access to the francophone workforce needed to grow Canadian businesses. We also attract francophone investors, to stimulate job creation or to maintain jobs for Canadian men and women. That said, there are some challenges currently in matching up the need for workers in Canada with the pool of potential francophone immigrants.

In our opinion, we need to look at two issues. First, how can we increase our communities' capacity to recruit, receive and integrate francophone immigrants? Secondly, how can we ensure the successful establishment and integration of francophone immigrants in our communities?

To overcome these challenges, we have to deploy efforts on five fronts simultaneously.

The first involves employers. We have to make employers aware of the value hiring francophone immigrants adds to their business. We have to help these employers to develop a better grasp of the immigration process. We have to help them with the management and optimization of diversity in the workplace, so that they may retain the immigrants they hire. We have to guide and support the employers in recruiting, hiring and retaining skilled francophone immigrant workers.

You have probably heard it said several times before that Canadian employers feel the immigration process is an administrative headache. Very often, they'd rather leave a position vacant rather than try to recruit.

The second front we feel we need to work on is the dissemination of information. In my opinion, this is crucial. Before immigrants arrive, we need to provide them with information on the workplace and the immigration programs that are available to them. We also have to give them information on the tests and French-language courses that are available.

Francophone immigrant entrepreneurs interested in doing business in Canada must also be informed about the business environment and about the immigration programs available to this category of immigrant. We have heard several times about the challenge of finding a new generation of entrepreneurs. Immigrants who have a good business sense can also acquire francophone businesses, rather than seeing them close and having to start all over from scratch.

The third front is recruitment. We have to give immigrants information, because it is important, let me reiterate, that they know the labour market they are headed for.

We have to help welcome immigrants by setting up exploratory visits and introducing them to the immigration services of Canadian embassies. Canadian embassies often organize exploratory visits. I think that our network and the communities should take part in these visits to create the proper tone.

There are two categories of immigrants that are often neglected, but can be a good source of francophone immigration for us: these are temporary workers and international students. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada focuses strongly on those two categories. If our organization provided services to those two categories of immigrants, this could allow them to stay in our communities and gradually acquire permanent residency.

There has for years now been a Canada-wide push to further the recognition of credentials, and we have to continue working on that front. We have to inform immigrants about the process they have to undertake to have their credentials and diplomas recognized, and that has to begin before they arrive in Canada.

●(1025)

This is of course work we do on a regular basis to further the economic integration of immigrants. We support the immigrants and give them the necessary tools to help them integrate rapidly into our communities and become fulfilled members of society.

According to our practical experience on the ground, there are many ways to support the economic integration of immigrants. Our network has put in place several initiatives to facilitate that integration. For instance, last year, RDEE Canada organized a virtual job fair so as to use modern tools to facilitate the recruitment process, both for skilled immigrants who are in Canada or abroad, and for Canadian employers. The event attracted more than 1,018 visitors, and 68 of them received job offers. A second edition of the event will take place this winter, in 2017.

We also developed the Pre-Departure program, which has been in place since September 2015. Its purpose is to inform immigrants about the labour market and integrate them into it much more quickly. They can begin this process before they even arrive in our country. This program offers a complete range of employment and entrepreneurship, services, integration into various business environments, and information about settlement services in the various destination communities.

We are in the process of developing a replacement career project for immigrants that would offer francophone immigrants the opportunity of practising other professions than the ones they were initially trained in, while allowing them to use their skills in related employment. The objective of that project, if it is approved, would be to guide these newcomers toward new careers in areas such as business, finance, administration, accounting, computers, architecture, engineering, marketing, advertising and health.

Regarding the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, I would just add one thing. You know that a sum of \$149 million has been set aside for language training. I have only one reservation. That is very good, but those funds were for the provision of language classes in French or English. You know that an immigrant can only take one course. He cannot take both French and English courses at the same time. That said, those programs have allowed non-francophone immigrants to benefit from French-language courses.

In conclusion, we believe that the regular programs of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada should support the whole continuum of francophone immigration, including the economic integration of our francophone immigrants. Indeed, employability is an essential link in the integration journey and in the retention of immigrants. If a family arrives but the father or mother cannot find work, imagine the mental and social impact this can have on the family and the children. I find that that link in the continuum is often neglected. We have to support that aspect. We already have services in place, but they have to be enriched, strengthened, and we have to ensure that these programs are adapted to the needs of immigrants.

Consequently—

●(1030)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madam Abdi-Aden.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: No problem.

The Chair: Perhaps you could continue by answering the questions of the members of the committee.

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: Absolutely.

The Chair: We have 15 minutes left.

Ms. Boucher, Mr. Samson and Mr. Choquette, you all have five minutes.

We will begin with Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, and welcome.

This was very interesting. Several questions came to my mind.

A little earlier, regarding the five million immigrants, you said that there had been an increase and that there were now 12% outside Quebec. In this 12% group which contains francophones and anglophones, what percentage are French-speaking, according to your figures?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: In fact, that is 12% of the entire francophone immigrant community. The increase I was talking about concerned immigrants outside Quebec from 1991 to 2011. During that period, the number of francophone immigrants outside Quebec, in the rest of the country as a whole, went from 6% to 11%.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Fine.

I have several questions.

You also spoke about the difficulty of attracting French-language immigrants to francophone minority communities, of integrating them and finding them work. Some of the immigrants who arrive from other countries already have credentials, diplomas. I am thinking of an immigrant doctor I know in Quebec who now drives a taxi.

Outside of Quebec, are there any provinces that would recognize this immigrant's credentials, given the shortage of doctors?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: There are professional corporations everywhere, and they have criteria. Since all of the professions are regulated, newcomers cannot immediately practice their profession, but must go through a process. In certain provinces, the process may be easier than in others, but they certainly need specific support.

That is why we have a replacement career program, so that such people are not lost to jobs like driving taxis. They have to be able to live, they have to work. Rather than letting them drive a taxi, for example, or work at Walmart, they can be guided into replacement careers that can be closer to what they did and can allow them to finance some of the studies they are asked to do, or to acquire training. This could allow immigrants to practice the profession they would like to after a few years. And so we would like to launch a program like that in the future.

• (1035)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Do the immigrants who arrive here gravitate to urban areas, or rural ones?

Can you give me an approximate percentage for both?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: The majority of them head for the cities. In fact, 66% of our francophone immigrants outside Quebec arrive in Ontario first. Many of them are in Toronto or Ottawa. However, after we talk with them and introduce the services we

offer, they are ready to go elsewhere. In fact, it depends on what they know.

Here is a very good example. One family wanted to go to a certain province. These people took advantage of the services we provided through the Pre-Departure program we put in place last year. After we told them that their professions were in greater demand in another province, they were ready to consider the possibility of going there. Also, there was one family that went to Prince Edward Island because they knew that they could easily be integrated there.

Very often, it is because of a lack of information, support and guidance that immigrants who arrive in the big cities are caught in the process: they settle in, they register their children in school, they find a little job. But employment is important for the family. I think that immigrants are ready to move or to arrive in a different province or a much smaller place. I don't think their minds are closed to the idea of going to less urban areas, if there are jobs there.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Earlier, you said that it would be advisable to show them, before they arrive, what jobs are available in Canada and where they can go. I am surprised that that is not being done, in 2016. I was under the impression that that was done ahead of time.

Should Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada be heading up this process?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: First of all, the francophone Pre-Departure services have only been in place since last year. There were none for francophones previously. We put this program in place last year. We manage the employability aspect and the information on economic integration. We have a funding agreement that will end in March 2018. This program has been in place since last September and works very well. As I was saying, I have concrete examples. However, we have to make sure that it continues.

Indeed, it is essential that immigrants be told where they can go, particularly as regards the labour market, but also in order to be able to access the services that are available in communities. We have to tell them that those services exist in our communities and that they can go to this or that location, because there is a school there, or francophone physicians or an available job.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Boucher.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I will first give the floor to my colleague. I'll continue after.

The Chair: Mr. Arya, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya (Nepean, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You mentioned the problems faced by the adult immigrants with respect to language. I'm quite aware of it, as my wife teaches English as a second language at the Ottawa Catholic School Board here.

My question concerns integration, which you mentioned in your opening remarks. In your opinion, what are the two major challenges faced by francophone immigrants outside of Quebec in terms of integrating?

[Translation]

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: In fact, even if these issues are becoming less challenging, language training and the recognition of credentials are still problematic for immigrants and francophone communities.

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya: You mentioned something about entrepreneurship issues. Again, kindly elaborate in a very short time.

[Translation]

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: As I was saying, our communities are facing a challenge when it comes to finding a new generation of entrepreneurs. Many francophone business owners have reached retirement age and they need someone to take over. Some francophone immigrants arrive with entrepreneurial projects. Others are not satisfied, do not want traditional or conventional work and want to be independent, and we tell them that they could acquire a business whose owner is close to retirement, or we help them to get closer to business ownership by drawing up business plans and helping them to find financing. We work on that aspect of things.

In fact, many immigrants want to become entrepreneurs.

• (1040)

[English]

Mr. Chandra Arya: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay, I will continue.

I really liked your comment that immigrants are like opportunities we have to seize.

I have two questions. I will ask them quickly in the interest of time.

Regarding schooling, what is being done in conjunction with the schools? Does your association have a relationship with the schools? Is there some kind of partnership today?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: Very often, you know, there are joint action mechanisms in francophone communities, either at the national level or in the provinces and territories. As I was saying, economic integration is part of the immigration process.

We have issue tables where we sit with other organizations, such as the school boards, among others, in order to ensure, as I was saying, that the children integrate successfully, among other things. For the parent who has a job, we try to see how we can mobilize that adult and offer sustainable employability services.

In Canada, we also have to follow the children in the schools and see how their integration is going. So there is a global plan for each province and territory, where all of the actors work together. Francophone immigration is a societal project. It isn't just a file to be processed. We want to create something

We want to ensure that in all of the communities, whether in the schools or in the health area, these immigrants are integrating with the help of French-language services. Sometimes they may work in English, as francophones do in many provinces and territories. However, they have to develop a sense of belonging to the

community. To get there, all of the services the family needs, including school services and economic integration services, have to be available, and all of these organizations have to work together to ensure that the services meet the needs of immigrants.

The Chair: Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Abdi-Aden, I'd like to talk about the return of the French Significant Benefit Program, now called *Mobilité francophone*. As you know, previously the French Significant Benefit Program made it possible to attribute more points to economic immigrants who wanted to settle in minority communities. The program has been back for a short time, since the end of summer, if I remember correctly.

I suppose you are very happy that this program has been brought back. Have you already begun to use it and promote it? Are you seeing any effects yet? It's good that it is back, but we also want to see it produce some positive outcomes, if you will.

Can you talk to us a bit about this renewal? How are things going? Do you have the information you need to promote it? Do you have the necessary network to circulate information about the program so as to attract immigrants who could have a positive impact on the economy of minority communities?

Ms. Roukya Abdi-Aden: Yes, absolutely. We are very pleased that this program is available, and we use it. We provide the information to the employers. When we meet them, the employers tell us that they do not care whether candidates are anglophones or francophones, so long as they have the skills they need. If they have to speak English in the enterprise, that is not a problem. Whether they come from Africa or India is immaterial. Employers are looking for someone.

In addition when we present this other advantage and tell them that with *Mobilité francophone*, they don't have to do the labour market assessment and the process is much quicker, they get onboard with us straightaway. We promote this and we disseminate this information as widely as possible. For instance, at Destination Canada, which takes place in November in France and Belgium, we bring along Canadian employers to recruit francophone immigrants. However, they come because we have dangled this carrot. They are interested.

The virtual job fair we will be organizing next February is also an essential tool we use so that these businesses can see from their offices that they can recruit competent people, and that in addition they have a significant advantage, as the former name of the program indicates, in the whole process. The immigration process is a headache for employers. They have to pay fees. They need an employee right away or in six months, and not in two or three years. That is always what happens. So this is really an asset.

However, as I was saying, the services have to be in place so that we can go and get these employers and tell them that in addition to all of the advantages, we already have candidates. Preselections have to be carried out to ensure that the candidates are qualified and available. In this way employers can find the skills they need in France or Tunisia, and not only in China.

•(1045)

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

I want to thank you as well, Ms. Abdi-Aden and Mr. Bigeau. This was a very good presentation. I thank you on behalf of the committee.

I would like to mention to committee members that Madam Clerk is continuing her work regarding the witnesses we will be welcoming next Tuesday. For the moment, she is waiting for answers. We cannot tell you yet who will be coming, but the contact work is ongoing according to the priorities we all chose together for the list.

Mr. Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Mr. Chair, earlier Ms. Boucher mentioned that we might have additional questions to ask.

If that is the case, do we provide them to Madam Clerk?

The Chair: Yes, and she can send these additional questions either to Ms. Abdi-Aden or Mr. Bigeau. We will distribute the answers when we receive them.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So they will be on the public record.

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Fine.

The Chair: We will adopt an official motion on that.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Can we ask one of the members of the committee to draft that motion?

The Chair: Madam Clerk will do that for us.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Very well.

Thank you, Madam.

The Chair: So, until we meet again next week, and thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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