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Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to the witnesses and members of the public who are following these proceedings. This is meeting number 82 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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

I was going to skip the usual reminders, but I see we have someone new joining us remotely.

• (1105)

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Audrée Dallaire): It's Ms. Enayeh, a witness, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: All right.

Since we have someone new, I will go over the rules.

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

To ensure that the meeting runs smoothly, I will ask members and witnesses to keep the following rules in mind.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. If you are on the video conference, please click on the microphone icon to unmute yourself. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

Interpretation services are available. Those on Zoom have the choice, at the bottom of their screen, of either floor, English or French. Those in the room will need to put in their earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

Although the room is equipped with a high-quality audio system, feedback can occur. This can be extremely detrimental to the interpreters and is most commonly caused when someone wearing their earpiece gets too close to the mike. I would ask all of you to be extremely careful when putting in or removing your earpiece. Please speak clearly into the designated mike and avoid touching your earpiece. Please lay it on the table far from your mike when you are not using it.

Keep in mind that all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

Members in the room who wish to speak are asked to raise their hand, and members on Zoom are asked to use the “raise hand” feature. The clerk and I will do our best to maintain a consolidated speaking order.

I would like to let the committee members know that all the witnesses participating virtually underwent the necessary connection tests prior to the meeting, pursuant to our routine motion.

Now I wish to welcome the witnesses.

From the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, we have Ms. Boutiyeb, executive director, and Ms. Enayeh, president.

From the Provincial Employment Roundtable, in Quebec, we have Mr. Salter, executive director, and Mr. Walcott, director of engagement and communications.

This is how the meeting is going to go.

Each organization will have five minutes for opening remarks. We will then move into questions and answers. Unfortunately, it is my job to strictly enforce the time limits, but the more everyone stays within their allotted time, the more likely we'll be able to have a second round. That will also ensure that every party has an opportunity to ask the right questions. Even though I will be strict about the time, it is very nice to have all of you. I will let you know 15 seconds before your time is up.

We will now get started.

Ms. Boutiyeb, you may go ahead. You have five minutes.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb (Executive Director, Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Enayeh, our president, is actually going to go first.

The Chair: Very good.

You have five minutes, Ms. Enayeh.

Ms. Nour Enayeh (President, Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I am speaking to you from the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh peoples in Vancouver.

On behalf of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, or the AFFC, I want to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting us to share our recommendations on the economic development of official language minority communities.

My name is Nour Enayeh, and I am the AFFC's president. Joining me today is our executive director, Soukaina Boutiyeb.

The AFFC is a non-profit feminist organization working to highlight the role and contribution of more than 1.3 million francophone and Acadian women in minority communities through education and advocacy. The AFFC is fortunate to have 15 member organizations.

This year, the action plan for official languages formally recognized women's crucial contribution to the development of official language minority communities. In particular, they ensure that francophone identity is passed on. Ongoing concrete investments in francophone and Acadian women are essential to recognize their contribution and support the economic development of our communities.

Our communities face many challenges. The rise in gender-based violence during the pandemic and the lack of any mention of the francophone community in the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence are troubling. The AFFC is also alarmed by the funding reality of our member organizations, which do not all receive core funding. Core funding is essential if they are to continue playing their role in the community.

In addition, francophone immigrant women have unique needs that immigration programs and services fail to take into account. Taking their specific circumstances into account would help francophone immigrant women not only integrate better, but also become more involved in social and economic life. In Canada, women make up 54% of caregivers, and they need access to French-language health care and services tailored to their realities.

Gender-based analysis plus, or GBA+, is meant to mitigate the impacts of government programs and services on the basis of the identity factors unique to each individual. In order to be fully effective, GBA+ should be undertaken comprehensively and results should be publicly available.

The AFFC has some recommendations for the committee to consider.

First, we recommend that the government earmark funding specifically for francophone and Acadian women's organizations, as part of the funding allocated by the various federal institutions.

Second, we recommend that the government provide specific core funding to all francophone and Acadian women's organizations in minority communities and invest \$280 million over five years in the core funding allocated to Canada's francophone community.

Third, we recommend that the government undertake GBA+ in a more comprehensive manner and make the results publicly available.

Fourth, we recommend that the government uphold its commitment to gender equality and take the needs of francophone immigrant women into account in its immigration programs and services.

Fifth, we recommend that the government top up its investment to implement the National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence and earmark funding specifically for organizations representing francophone and Acadian women in minority communities.

Finally, we recommend that the government support francophone caregivers by investing in better access to services and resources.

Mr. Chair, members of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, thank you. Ms. Boutiyeb and I are available to answer your questions.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Enayeh.

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

Mr. Nicholas Salter (Executive Director, Provincial Employment Roundtable): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before I get started, I want to say that I would be pleased to answer members' questions in French. However, as the executive director of an organization representing the English-speaking community in Quebec, I will be giving my opening statement in English.

[English]

Mr. Chair and esteemed committee members, on behalf of the Provincial Employment Roundtable, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Through my remarks and our discussion, I hope to highlight the issues and needs of Quebec's English-speaking communities as they pertain to employment.

First off, here is a bit more background about who we are. The Provincial Employment Roundtable, otherwise known as PERT, is a non-profit, multi-stakeholder initiative whose main goal is to address issues of employment and employability facing the English-speaking community in Quebec.

PERT accomplishes this through researching the major challenges that these communities face, and by engaging with our network of over 90 members from across the province of Quebec. Our members contribute their knowledge and expertise through their participation in our four sectoral tables, which regroup employment service providers, employers, educators and regional community organizations. Our sectoral tables inform our research agenda and provide feedback on our analysis. They also serve as a place for collective mobilization and the development of solutions and initiatives to help address and increase awareness of the employment issues our communities face.

While I'm pleased to be here today to have the opportunity to share the most up-to-date employment statistics regarding Quebec's English speakers, the economic trends that these statistics reveal are truly worrying.

PERT's quantitative research, which primarily uses Canadian census data, shows that Quebec's English speakers, who represent 57.4% of the total official-language minority community labour force in Canada, experience higher levels of unemployment, lower incomes and higher rates of poverty than the French-speaking majority in Quebec, as well as all other OLMCs across the country.

More specifically, our analysis of the new 2021 census data shows that English speakers had an unemployment rate of 10.9%, which is four percentage points higher than that of Quebec's French speakers at 6.9%. English speakers also earn a median employment income that is \$5,200 lower than French speakers. These gaps in unemployment and income have been present and growing since at least 2001, and have effectively doubled between 2016 and 2021. A deeper dive into unemployment and income data shows that there are disparities even within the English-speaking community, with English speakers living in the regions, as well as visible minorities, immigrants, first nations and Inuit, experiencing worse outcomes.

While the myth of the wealthy Quebec anglophone persists, the realities on the ground are very different. We see high levels of income disparity within Quebec's English community and disproportionately higher rates of poverty compared to French speakers: 10% versus 5.8%. Despite representing only 14.9% of Quebec's population, the English-speaking community accounts for nearly one-quarter, 23%, of the nearly 450,000 Quebecers living in poverty.

The data is pretty stark. The English-speaking community in Quebec faces important economic challenges, and these challenges are a threat to its continued vitality in the province.

To find appropriate solutions, however, it's important to understand why English speakers have been falling behind in recent years. The research we have done thus far has helped us to identify three main barriers to employment driving the downward economic trends for our community: first, a lack of access to specialized and targeted English-language employment services; second, an ineffective French-language learning system, particularly for adults in the labour market, and the lack of diverse programs offered to support the language-learning needs of individuals in key professions; and lastly, a lack of access to English-language skills training programs due to the limited availability of these programs across the province, particularly in the regions. Data shows, for example, that English speakers complete vocational and technical training programs at less than half the rate of francophones, at 6.2% versus 13.2%, limiting their ability to participate in in-demand trades and careers in Quebec.

As you all know, employment is an area of shared jurisdiction. As such, we believe that to effectively address the challenges and begin to reverse the worrying employment and economic vitality trends we've outlined, governments across all jurisdictions need to work together in a collaborative and coordinated way.

The first steps in doing this work involve recognizing employment as a cornerstone of economic development and community vi-

tality in the English-speaking community of Quebec, and developing a strategy that prioritizes impact and accountability; improving the relationship between federal institutions and the English-speaking community in Quebec concerning economic development; ensuring coordination and co-operation between the federal government, particularly Canadian Heritage and ESDC, and the provincial government in areas of shared jurisdiction; investing in research on the employment and economic development of the English-speaking community; and developing a pan-Canadian plan to strengthen investments in free and accessible adult French-language training programs.

Over the last three years, PERT has built a robust and diverse network of partners whose perspectives and expertise drive our capacity to develop solutions to the problems I have outlined today. We are especially proud of our partnership with the Regional Development Network and YES, an employment organization in Montreal with which we've deployed a French-language confidence-building program for jobseekers across the province.

Nevertheless, all of our members and stakeholders stand ready to work with all levels of government to develop and implement innovative solutions that will help address our community's employment challenges. The one missing piece we require to put our vision in place is adequate and sustainable government investment.

• (1115)

Thank you for your time.

[*Translation*]

I would be pleased to answer your questions in French, as best I can.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Salter.

[*English*]

Here on Parliament Hill, you can feel free to speak in one or both official languages. Feel free to talk in English or in French.

[*Translation*]

We will now begin the first round.

Each party will have six minutes to question the witnesses, beginning with the Conservative Party, as we always do.

Mr. Généreux will start things off. I will be enforcing the six-minute time limit.

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

Thank you to the witnesses. It's very good of them to be here today.

Ms. Enayeh and Ms. Boutiyeb, what do you think of the fact that the government hasn't done more to recognize the work of francophone women all over the country? Is that how you feel?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Thank you for your question, Mr. Généreux.

In Canadian society, in general, francophone and Acadian women tend to be overlooked. What we want and need tends to be overlooked as well. That's a reality we face.

The National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence illustrates that reality, which we've talked a lot about. The purpose of the action plan is to eliminate violence. The reality, though, in provinces and territories is that services for francophone and Acadian women are a luxury. No service to end gender-based violence by and for francophone women exists.

There is no trace of francophone women in the national action plan, so there is still a long way to go.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: The action plan for official languages 2023-2028 sets out funding for all of French-speaking Canada outside Quebec, in every area, and, in theory, that includes francophone women.

Have you seen any of that money since the spring?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: No, not since the spring.

Nevertheless, for the first time—at least since I've been on the job—the official languages action plan recognizes the role of women in language transmission and community vitality. We see it as a step forward, and we take great pride in it. We will see how that translates into funding.

Another important thing to remember is that not all of our member organizations receive core funding. We represent 15 organizations across the country. There are no such organizations in the Northwest Territories, Newfoundland and Labrador or Nunavut because there is no funding.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: How much core funding do you receive or normally receive? What are you expecting given the latest funding announcements?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Not all women's organizations receive core funding, as I said. Some receive very little of what they actually need. Some of our member organizations might receive \$40,000 a year, say. That doesn't cover much.

Generally speaking, our in-house research shows that an organization needs at least \$350,000 a year to pay an employee and an executive director, and to cover all the other resources it needs to support its core activities. That depends on the organization's mandate, for instance, whether it serves women directly or does advocacy work. On the whole, however, an organization needs at least \$350,000 a year.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Are you talking about how much funding your national organization needs? You said you had 15 member organizations in Canada.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: I'm talking about organizations in each province. The Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne

is a national organization that represents provincial and local organizations.

We have an organization in Manitoba, called Pluri-elles. It provides direct services to women in Winnipeg.

We have an organization in New Brunswick called Regroupement féministe du Nouveau-Brunswick. It does advocacy work, which is a different mandate.

• (1120)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: If I understand correctly, yours is a national organization, and you have 15 provincial and local organizations relying on you.

How much do you receive in annual funding?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: If memory serves me correctly, the Department of Canadian Heritage gives us \$342,100.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do you think each of the 15 provincial organizations should receive the same amount?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: The Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne should receive a lot more than that, since it has a national mandate, but yes, the provincial organizations need at least \$350,000 to operate.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: In the action plan for official languages 2023-2028, the government allocated an overall amount. You said that the plan was a step forward because the government had given the matter some thought and included the word “women”. If I understand correctly, though, it did not tie any funding specifically to francophone women's issues.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Not as of yet. We are waiting to see how the money will be allocated.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: All right, but how do you see yourselves fitting into the overall funding?

Are you looking at how it might be possible to access more money through the Department of Canadian Heritage directly or through other national organizations?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Through other organizations. It's important to keep in mind that the Department of Canadian Heritage isn't the only partner in the official languages action plan. Other departments have a role as well.

As the president mentioned in her opening statement, one of our recommendations calls for every department that provides funding to the public to automatically allocate core funding to francophone women's organizations.

Oftentimes, that is overlooked at the end of the process.

That is why we have made it one of our recommendations today.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: You have 30 seconds.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Where did you get your numbers, Mr. Salter?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: They're from the census.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: All the figures you mentioned in your opening statement come from Statistics Canada's last census.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: That is correct. We also did some in-house analysis. The information is available on our website and is included in the brief we will be submitting.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Your numbers surprised me. Obviously, I assume you are referring specifically to anglophones in Quebec.

The Chair: You have five seconds left.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I will leave it there, but I have to tell you I find those numbers quite surprising.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

There will be an opportunity to follow up.

The next questioner is Ms. Kayabaga, from the Liberal Party.

Go ahead, Ms. Kayabaga. You have six minutes.

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

Good morning.

Welcome to the witnesses.

Ms. Enayeh, you said that francophone women face immigration challenges.

Could you elaborate on that?

What do you recommend to address those challenges?

Ms. Nour Enayeh: The AFFC did a study on the specific needs of francophone immigrant women, and we learned that they face tremendous challenges because of intersecting identity factors.

Women who immigrate here shoulder many burdens that women who are already settled may not, including intersecting identity factors and challenges specific to the immigration process. All of those needs are outlined in the AFFC's study.

It is our hope that the reality of francophone immigrant women will be viewed differently because they have very different needs.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: May I add something?

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: All right. You have two seconds.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: On a concrete level, they need access to mental health services, among other things.

Oftentimes, immigrant women are under pressure to not only immigrate successfully as fully contributing women, but also look after their families.

Therefore, we could certainly provide a number of suggestions if there is time.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Ms. Enayeh, you said you wanted the government to automatically allocate core funding to francophone women's organizations.

Can you talk a bit more about that?

As you know, in Canada, the provinces are fairly independent. That money would have to go to the provinces.

How could we make sure the needs you talked about are addressed?

Ms. Nour Enayeh: I'll give you a real-life example.

British Columbia, a province with no policy on French-language services, has only one organization that supports francophone women experiencing violence.

It is closing its doors in March for lack of funding. Precisely because the province is under no obligation to provide services in French, the organization does not receive any core funding.

Francophone women in British Columbia will no longer have any service in their language.

● (1125)

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: You said that much of the work you do is aimed at eliminating gender-based violence.

This weekend, we were able to keep the measure to provide funding for that purpose, even though the Conservatives voted against it during the 30-hour voting marathon.

Can you talk a bit more about why you need that funding to help francophone women in Canada?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Certainly.

If I may, I'd like to tell you about something that happened to our organization.

During the pandemic, on top of everything else, the AFFC was the victim of an attack. We received a suspicious package. It had a message saying—I apologize for this language—that a woman's place was in the kitchen, that immigrant women do not belong in Canada and that if we didn't listen, we would get a beating.

That is actually what the message in the package that was sent to us said. It was a real shock. I still get goosebumps when I tell the story. That is what happened. As an organization, we were attacked.

Imagine being a francophone woman living in a rural or urban community of a province or territory where there is no service.

We need services. We need prevention. We need to change society's mindset. We need a society that is fair, just and safe for everyone.

We need shelters, but above all, we need to raise awareness and educate people in order to prevent violence. Those are things we have to keep an eye on.

We need a real investment that reflects francophone women and their needs.

As I said, having access to services in French is a luxury in some regions, but it shouldn't be.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: You brought up mental health. The Conservatives also voted against that support during the 30-hour voting marathon we had this weekend. Luckily, we were able to keep that support.

Can you tell us how you would like to access that mental health funding?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: We absolutely need French-language services for mental health prevention and support. Mental health tends to be thought of only when a person is in crisis. Women carry a huge mental load, worrying about a million things at once. I may be here speaking with you, but I'm also a caregiver, so I have to go back home, look after my mother and pick up her medication. I have to think about my spouse and my family. I have to do my job. I'll be honest with you. Those are all things my spouse doesn't necessarily think about. That is the daily reality for a woman.

On top of that, when you don't have any services, when you don't have a place to call, when you can't afford to pay for services or when they are not available in your region, it's challenging. It's important to keep in mind that an entire population is struggling with mental health issues, especially after the pandemic. We are in dire need of French-language services by and for francophones.

I cannot stress that enough.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Boutiyeb.

Our next questioner is the second vice-chair of the committee.

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu. You have six minutes.

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

Thank you to our witnesses. My first questions are for the Provincial Employment Roundtable representatives.

Generally speaking, where do you get your funding?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: Generally, our funding comes from the Province of Quebec. This last fiscal year, I would say that about 94% of our funding came from Quebec. We also received a small amount of funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What about your round table partners?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: I would say they largely receive a mix of funding. However, most employability services are funded by the Province of Quebec. I would say our funding comes primarily from the province.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Do you acknowledge that, to ensure the future of French in Quebec, it's crucial that immigrants be taught French and integrated?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: We're focused on the English-speaking community. We don't necessarily focus on immigrants. However, one of our organization's priorities is francization, improving our system for learning French in Quebec.

We've done research on this, we've taken stock, we've asked questions to find out whether Quebec—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Let me go back to my question. Your study is based on the first official language a person speaks. According to the last figures I saw, it includes about a third of immigrants in Quebec. Does it also include first nations with anglophones?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: I'm sorry, is that a question or—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes. A number of experts and the Government of Quebec believe that, to maintain the demographic weight of francophones, it will take 90% of language transfers to successfully integrate and francize 90% of newcomers.

You believe that at least a third of immigrants who speak English or who would like to function in English are entitled to services in English. That's part of your mission.

• (1130)

Mr. Nicholas Salter: Yes, absolutely. It's clear to us that, in the English-speaking community, people are very willing to improve their French skills. In the current political context, I think that—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You're not answering my question.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: You're asking me if we include immigrants. Immigrants whose first official language spoken is English define themselves more as anglophone than francophone Quebecers. We don't define them that way; they want to be included that way. Establishing a system in which we can welcome them in English will enable us to give them good employment services and put them in contact with resources in French.

We're working hard to develop and improve a learning system—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Your primary mission is to provide professional training, which you talked about earlier. You weren't talking about professional training in French, you were talking about professional training in English.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: We need to provide services in English to help people cope with economic challenges—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: If professional training for newcomers is given in English, that will necessarily contribute to their anglicization and make it more difficult for them to integrate into the francophone environment.

Before going any further on this subject, I'd like to talk about something important, because our time is very limited—

The Chair: One moment, please, Mr. Beaulieu.

When witnesses are interrupted, it really becomes difficult for the interpreters to do their job.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. I will be careful.

When you presented your results, you used indicators that generally yield those kinds of results.

A person's first official language spoken is a derived variable that takes into account the mother tongue spoken most often at home and knowledge of French, among other things. It's a very broad indicator.

When we use more varied indicators, such as mother tongue, which is also that of English-speaking newcomers, the reverse happens.

In 2016, according to Statistics Canada, the average employment income was \$7,800 more for anglophones, and the median employment income was \$947 more.

The data from your studies apply only in the case of the first official language spoken. We don't have access to the other data yet.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: My colleague Mr. Walcott can give you the exact statistics.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. I'll let you speak.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: The gap is still there, if you use the mother tongue.

We use definitions such as first official language spoken because they are related to the self-determination of English-speaking Quebecers—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The language used at home—

Mr. Nicholas Salter: There are a number of definitions. You're talking about specific statistics, so—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: The median employment income somewhat excludes the diversity of incomes.

I'll let you speak, Mr. Walcott.

Mr. Chad Walcott (Director of Engagement and Communications, Provincial Employment Roundtable): I will try to address all the points you raised.

In our opinion, the definition of an English-speaking Quebecer, which includes the first official language spoken variable, better demonstrates what's needed on the ground. I'll give you an example.

As part of our research, we interviewed an American who was already working a bit in Quebec and who moved elsewhere in Canada. According to him, the francization pathway for newcomers to Quebec was not adapted to his abilities. His French was already at an intermediate level and he wanted to move to an advanced level.

However, the courses currently being offered to new immigrants in Quebec are not at that level. They are actually cultural courses and core French courses, where you learn how to order a coffee, for example.

So we use the first official language spoken in our studies to take into account people whose level of French is somewhere in the middle and who need more specialized services.

When we talk about mother tongue as opposed to the first official language spoken, the most recent statistics show that the unemployment gap is maintained. The numbers are different. It's 10.5% for the anglophone community—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Walcott.

Mr. Chad Walcott: The most recent figures are for 2021.

The Chair: That's all the time Mr. Beaulieu has. You will be able to speak again in the next round of questions.

The next six minutes will go to Ms. Ashton, who is joining us remotely from northern Manitoba.

Go ahead, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Good morning. Welcome to the witnesses.

My questions are for the women of the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne.

Ladies, thank you very much for your presentation, as well as the clear recommendations you made to our committee.

First, I want to say that I'm very disappointed to hear that the federal government's proposed action plan for official languages doesn't include francophone women experiencing violence. I would say that's a serious oversight that needs to be addressed as soon as possible.

A few days ago, on December 6, we honoured the memory of the victims of the Polytechnique massacre. This day serves to underscore the importance of taking action and putting an end to violence against women. As a country, we need to take action and recognize what you've told us.

In the same vein, do you support the move to have the federal government sign agreements with the provinces and territories to fund the national action plan to end gender-based violence?

• (1135)

Ms. Nour Enayeh: Ms. Boutiyeb, I'll let you answer that question.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: I'm not sure I understood your question.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Are you in favour of the measure requiring the federal government to enter into agreements with the provinces and territories to fund services specifically for francophone women facing violence?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Thank you for repeating your question.

I know there are provincial and territorial agreements, and that's totally understandable.

However, national plans must also include language provisions and funding specifically for francophones in minority situations to ensure that the public and linguistic minorities have access to those services in French.

Provincial and territorial agreements are therefore to be expected, but the federal government must ensure that language provisions are automatically included in those agreements to guarantee that all francophone women in that situation have access to services in French.

These services must focus not only on prevention and awareness, but also on women who are victims or survivors of sexual assault.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay, thank you.

You talked a lot about the challenges immigrant women face. Canada is required under the new Official Languages Act to meet much more ambitious immigration targets, and the government has promised that.

Given the challenges faced by immigrant women, can you explain the various supports that francophone women need in the Canadian immigration system?

Do you believe that our immigration system does everything it should to accommodate francophone women?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: I'd like to take a step back to remind everyone that the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario released a report showing that, even though immigrant women were not native French speakers, their children nevertheless spoke French in our francophone minority communities. We must therefore recognize that francophone women ensure that language is transmitted within the communities and that incredible work is being done in that regard.

That said, the migration path of immigrant women is a challenge, because each woman experiences a situation of her own, and integration is often done uniformly. No gender lens is applied to immigrant women's integration. They have no services tailored to their needs.

We've set forth recommendations. Sometimes it's as simple as ensuring that child care services are included in the services provided to women, or offering them at non-standard hours so that mothers can take advantage of them. The idea is to provide immigrant women with services tailored to their needs and to take into account the fact that migration pathways are changing. The needs of women today can change tomorrow. So we need to have a proactive system. Just because we did something yesterday doesn't mean we have to do the same thing for the next 15 years. We must always ensure that we adequately meet the needs of immigrant women, who ensure the vitality of our communities.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

You talked about early childhood. We know that a bill on the funding and accessibility of child care programs has been referred to the House of Commons. The Senate recently made an amendment to add the following:

8(1) The Government of Canada commits to maintaining long-term funding for early learning and child care programs and services, including early learning and child care programs and services for Indigenous peoples and official language minority communities.

(2) The funding must be provided primarily through agreements with provincial governments and Indigenous governing bodies and other Indigenous entities that represent the interests of an Indigenous group and its members.

This amendment clearly states that Indigenous peoples and official language minority communities must determine the type of services offered in our communities outside Quebec, obviously, including French-language child care services.

● (1140)

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you support that measure? Do you think it's very important?

The Chair: That's a great question, but you'll have to wait until the second round for an answer.

We will now begin the second round.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

My first questions are for the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne.

We're doing a study on the economy, and there's no question that women are highly skilled, but what more can the government do to help women and minority families prosper?

I know you've talked about this before, but could you tell us more?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Thank you.

I can answer, and then Ms. Enayeh can take over if she has anything to add.

First of all, when we think about policies or programs, we have to put francophone women in the forefront. We mustn't forget them or put them in the background. When you put something in place, you have to automatically ask yourself how it will affect francophone women. Is it going to have a positive effect on them, or is it going to increase gender inequality or create another kind of inequality in society? Will it help people, or will it perpetuate negative effects on the public? Those are the questions that need to be asked first.

Then I could talk about GBA Plus, gender-based analysis plus, which Canada adopted in 1995. We question the fact that a comprehensive analysis is not always conducted. Sometimes, people say that GBA Plus was applied, but we note that francophone women were left out. So we recommend taking more time to do that kind of analysis.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you.

Can you paint us a picture of entrepreneurship among francophone and Canadian women in minority situations?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: It certainly won't be specific data on the subject, but it must be recognized that women often experience financial insecurity. Women must be encouraged by entrepreneurship and we need to ensure that they're not at risk of experiencing that type of insecurity. Women have responsibilities in everyday life. There is the issue of access to a pension plan. Not all women work for an organization that has a pension plan. In short, there are many factors that can have an impact on women's financial security in the future.

Entrepreneurship must be encouraged among women, but we must also provide them with concrete support to ensure that they succeed.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you very much.
[English]

Mr. Salter, some of your statistics were quite surprising, as far as the unemployment rate among the anglophone minority goes.

Is your focus, as an organization, strictly on the anglophone minority group, or is it on the entire province of Quebec?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: The focus of our organization is on Quebec's English speakers. We focus on their employability. We think of ways to understand the problems, and we use a lot of the census data to better understand those problems. We want to mobilize solutions, which, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, include English employment services and skills training, as well as pairing with French-language training that targets specific professions and the workplace.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Is your funding strictly from the Province of Quebec?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: The majority comes from the Province of Quebec, yes.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Why are they doing this? Is it because they're concerned? Why are they funding your organization?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: They've clearly presented data that demonstrates that Quebec's English speakers are under-represented in the labour market. We're facing a labour market shortage, and the solution is a win-win situation, I think, for all governments. It's offering better English employment services targeted towards the people on the front lines by building the capacity of English-speaking OLMC organizations, as well as by pairing with French-language training to help people improve their French-language competency, get into certain professions, or improve their professional vocabulary and confidence.

Therefore, it's a win-win situation for all governments. The employability of English speakers is an opportunity to do economic development, as well as to protect the French language.

• (1145)

Mr. Marc Dalton: My understanding is that most young anglophones growing up are actually quite fluent in French, so these statistics are surprising. Are these unemployment rates more among the older generation? Can you make some sense of this? Is it more the immigrant population?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: [Technical difficulty—Editor] that two-thirds of the English-speaking community in the census indicate

they are able to hold a conversation in French. Holding a conversation in French is different from being able to perform at a high level in a career. Again, one-third of the population isn't even able to hold a conversation in French. For the other two-thirds, their French-language competency is unclear.

Therefore, one thing we want to see is better data collection on French-language competency, so we can understand how to move people from, perhaps, beginner to intermediate and more expert levels. This would be, again, for the workplace and for a specific profession.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Are the trends getting worse, or are they stable? What does the current—

Mr. Nicholas Salter: [Technical difficulty—Editor] the unemployment gap that has been present for almost 20 years has doubled since the last census, from 2016 to 2021, from two percentage points to four percentage points. The employment income gap... Median employment income is what most economists use, as a comparative average has distorting effects. Therefore, median employment income is what you would use for a comparative between populations. The gap in employment income has doubled in the last five years, as well.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Would you say that's because they're just not able to engage in the economy—that it's become more difficult for them, being strictly anglophone?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: Beyond using the census as a data point, we do a lot of focus groups, conferences and events. We hold a lot of events across the country, in terms of trying to gather information. We've done a survey. The top thing identified for us is French-language barriers. That's what English speakers tell us themselves, in terms of their challenges in the labour market. That's why we've spent a lot of our organizational effort trying to build a well-functioning French-language training system.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Obviously, you—

The Chair: That's all the time we have.

Thank you, Mr. Salter.

Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

[Translation]

The next questions will come from Marc Serré, for five minutes as well.

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

Thank you very much to the witnesses for their work. It's really interesting to look at the very meaningful work that both organizations are doing in their communities. Their recommendations to the committee will help us enrich our study.

My first question is for Mr. Salter.

[English]

I'll just pick up a bit on Mr. Dalton's questions about the bleak numbers. There's a perception out there. When you look at anglophones in Montreal, do they need support, versus anglophones in Gaspésie or the Laurentians? There seems to be a discrepancy in either the perception or the support needed for McGill in Montreal versus other institutions in the regions.

Do you have stats that look at more regional...outside of Montreal? What recommendations do you have for us to be working more closely with the Province of Quebec to look at supporting anglophones outside of Montreal, if that's appropriate?

Mr. Nicholas Salter: Are you interested specifically in anglophones outside of Montreal?

Okay. The regional aspect is, obviously, a pretty important one. We have a breakdown by region, but the situation in terms of the unemployment gap and the income gap can widen significantly, Gaspésie being one example of where there are significant gaps. It's even bigger than what we see at the provincial level. What's needed there is different, perhaps, from what we need in an urban setting, though I would argue that there are still needs in an urban setting, particularly for visible minority communities and other sub-communities within the English-speaking community.

In the regions, it's just about a lack of access to opportunity and a lack of access to services. That's why we strongly believe.... We work with regional partners. There's an existing network of OLMC organizations across the regions that could be better supported to work on employment with a "for us, by us" model, and we think the federal government could play an important role in that.

Obviously, we don't want to duplicate services either, so you want to make sure that the existing services that are being offered by the Quebec government are kind of...and that jurisdiction is respected, while giving the English-speaking community an opportunity to build its own targeted services that meet its unique needs. In fact, each region is different as well, so it can get complicated fast, but that's why you need a tailored approach for each region.

Mr. Chad Walcott: If I may just add—

Mr. Marc Serré: Answer quickly, please.

Mr. Chad Walcott: English speakers experience higher unemployment in every region of Quebec, with the top three being Côte-Nord, Gaspésie and Montreal, actually, in terms of unemployment.

Mr. Marc Serré: We could look at the statistics in Montreal because there's a perception that they may not need that support, but that's something you could provide to the committee.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Boutiyeb, thank you very much for your organization's six recommendations and for the work you do for, through and with francophone women. You're right, we need to do better.

Among your recommendations, there's one we haven't talked about today. You talked about immigration, gender equality and violence against women.

What are your recommendations for family caregivers? What challenges do they face from a francophone perspective? Is there a specific angle to be considered? Do you have any specific recommendations for the federal government to help with that?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: The reality is that there are definitely more services to be provided.

Caregivers are often isolated. During the pandemic, their work became even more visible to us. They have been recognized for the enormous amount of work they do.

Access to respite services and support services in French, as well as services offered to people who are caregiving, is very problematic. The challenge is even greater in rural areas than in urban areas. There's still a lot of work to be done.

One of the recommendations made by some caregivers is the tax credit. The amount they can claim is not enough. Most of the time, these people have to give up their jobs in order to take care of their loved one. Women are often the ones who end up doing this kind of work.

Mr. Marc Serré: Earlier, you talked about the 15 organizations in your network and the funding you receive from the federal government. What about provincial funding? It seems that some provinces don't provide any support to the organizations in your network.

Can you provide us with a picture of provincial funding? What can we do to ensure that the federal government works more closely with the provinces in this area?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: Of the 15 organizations in our network, only seven receive core funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. As for the other organizations, we will follow up and provide a response to the committee later.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Chair, did I have six minutes' speaking?

The Chair: Yes.

I let Mr. Dalton go straight through. I will therefore extend everyone's speaking time equally.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Salter, earlier you talked about support for second-language anglophones. You asked what we could do for them in terms of employment. You also mentioned the situation in Montreal in relation to the regions. That's still a challenge. There are a lot of statistics on that. These are really completely different realities.

I would like to know more about the support needed for anglophones outside Montreal to ensure bilingualism in terms of employment.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: There are highly francophone communities outside Montreal. We'd be very surprised to learn that there are still unilingual anglophones in the Gaspé, for example. There is a francization component and a French as a second language learning component, but there is also a component related to employment assistance services. The needs are completely different—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Salter.

I gave an extra minute on that round.

Mr. Beaulieu, since I gave the other two political parties extra time, you have the floor for three minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

I'd like to clarify something relating to Mr. Dalton's questions.

Regarding that funding, it was Kathleen Weil, a former member of Alliance Québec, who launched the program. The Legault government decided to keep funding it.

I think you're painting a false and biased portrait of the situation. Let's look at other indicators, such as the median. We know that this indicator doesn't take into account the fact that many anglophones earn very high incomes. The median doesn't take that disparity into account. Statistics Canada data aren't available yet, but if we look at mother tongue, language spoken at home and language used at work, we get a very different portrait. I don't know if you've looked at those numbers.

One researcher, Gilles Grenier, studied the consequences for people who worked in English compared to those who don't work in English. He found that francophones who work in English have higher incomes than those who work only in French. For newcomers, working only in English in the Montreal area pays better than working only in French.

A recent Office québécois de la langue française study found that people who use only English at work earn, on average, \$46,000 per year, which is 20% more than the average income of those who work only in French. The situation is very difficult.

The fact is, Mr. Salter, part of the work you do when you target newcomers, immigrants, conflicts with Quebec's efforts to francize them.

• (1155)

Mr. Nicholas Salter: We are working to help the government of Quebec achieve its objectives. The purpose of our analysis is to understand the needs on the ground. I would say that, not including immigrants, if we look at mother tongue only, my colleague can give you some data—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: That includes immigrants too.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: If we look at mother tongue, there's still a disparity. Our data are not false. We can show them to you.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: My information suggests otherwise. Please send me your data.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: I will.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In 2016, there was a gap.

Mr. Nicholas Salter: We have data for 2021, and there's a gap.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: People can make numbers say just about anything. It all depends on how—

Mr. Nicholas Salter: That's not really true. The numbers say what they say.

Here's an example relating to average income. If Bill Gates were in the room with us today and we calculated the average income of everyone here, it would look like we're all millionaires, but when I checked my bank account this morning, I didn't have millions of dollars.

Averages can skew data. There's a wide social and economic gap within the anglophone community, so that bumps the average up.

We're not hiding that. We're saying there are some very poor people who need help. If we look only at the average, we can't target the people who need help and who have French language learning needs.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Salter.

If you have documents for us, please send them to our clerk so she can get them to all the committee members.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

My questions are about funding for early learning. The Senate adopted an amendment to Bill C-35, which is now back in the House of Commons. The Senate clearly recognized the fact that there has to be targeted funding for child care in French outside Quebec. As we know, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, the FCFA, supported that recommendation.

I would like to ask Ms. Boutiyeb and Ms. Enayeh if the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne thinks this is an important amendment.

Ms. Nour Enayeh: Yes, I think it's very important. I've worked with refugee women, and the issues that came up all the time were child care and access to daycare. This amendment will definitely give francophone women across the country a break so they can focus on their lives and keep working.

Ms. Boutiyeb, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: It needs to be permanent. We can't have a universal child care system for five years and then tell women to figure it out on their own. It has to be permanent, and everyone has to have access to it no matter where they are in Canada.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

We know that affordable housing is another challenge, especially given that we want to bring many francophone families from around the world to Canada.

Do you think the federal government should take concrete action on affordable housing?

Ms. Nour Enayeh: Yes, I do.

I live in Vancouver, so I'm very aware of the problems families are encountering, not only in British Columbia, but across the country, because of inflation. Inflation and the cost of living are hitting women harder than the general population.

The Chair: We can't hear you, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Sorry.

I'd like to move a motion. I'll give it to the clerk, who can share it with the committee members.

The motion reads as follows:

Due to the announcement of significant job cuts at CBC/Radio-Canada, the committee expresses deep concern about the implications for access to information for Francophones across Canada and Quebecers, as well as for the workers who will be affected. The committee strongly condemns this decision and formally requests Catherine Tait, CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, to testify for no longer than one session to provide clarification on the reasons behind and the strategic vision of CBC/Radio-Canada concerning these substantial cuts.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I'm looking forward to debating this motion.

The Chair: Is this a notice of motion, Ms. Ashton?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, that's right.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Before we wrap up, I'd like to thank the Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne, represented by Ms. Boutiyeb and Ms. Enayeh; and the Provincial Employment Roundtable, represented by Mr. Salter and Mr. Walcott. This was their first time here. I thank them for being here and participating in our deliberations. It was very interesting.

I wish you all a happy holiday.

Mr. Bernard Généreux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I just want to say a few words.

Ms. Boutiyeb, on behalf of Canadian men, I'd like to apologize for what happened to you at your office. I understand you received a suspicious package with a letter demanding that women go home.

You know that Canadian society has evolved considerably. We've come a long way from that now. You received a package demanding that you go home, possibly from men, but that doesn't represent the values of most Canadian men. We hope such a thing will never happen again.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll suspend—

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think everyone here agrees on that.

Ms. Boutiyeb, I want you to know you have the support of the Bloc Québécois, even though my questions were mostly for Quebec organizations—

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): We can understand why.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Our focus is Quebec, but we absolutely support the cause of francophone women.

Ms. Soukaina Boutiyeb: I think support comes with concrete recommendations, so please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll suspend for a few minutes to bring in the new witnesses.

• (1200)

(Pause)

• (1205)

The Chair: Good afternoon, we're resuming with new witnesses.

With us is Étienne Alary, Executive Director of the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta; and Elisa Brosseau, Chair of the Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association. They will share their five minutes of speaking time.

We also have representatives of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, Executive Director Daniel Boucher and President Angela Cassis. Unfortunately, Ms. Cassis doesn't have the right headset, so she can only support Mr. Boucher.

Mr. Alary and Ms. Brosseau, you have up to five minutes to share. I'm very strict about speaking time because I want to make sure we have time for two rounds of questions.

You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Étienne Alary (Executive Director, Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for having us this morning.

The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, the CDÉA, was founded in 1997. It performs a number of functions for the Alberta francophonie. For businesses, the CDÉA offers services to existing and future small and medium-sized francophone businesses. The biggest challenge is still retaining those clients. Once they receive certain basic services to launch their business, they have to look to anglophone providers for financing.

That's why, for years, we've been calling for the creation of a fund to support francophone entrepreneurs in western Canada, similar to the Alberta women entrepreneurs loan program and the Black entrepreneurship loan fund created during the pandemic.

On the employment front, the CDÉA merged with Accès Emploi Alberta in 2023. Our merger will ensure better services for the francophone community because, most of the time, entrepreneurship and employability are inter-related, especially when it comes to issues around the bilingual labour shortage in our community.

The CDÉA's head office is in Edmonton, and we have an office in Calgary, but, as a provincial organization, there's demand for our services in rural areas too. Since its creation, our organization has had one employee to serve the province's northeast. We've also had a contract employee for about a decade in the province's northwest.

Because of that, we've had an impact on rural economic diversification. For rural areas, the youth exodus is a huge challenge. To address that, we've created various financial literacy and entrepreneurship workshops, as well as camps for young francophone entrepreneurs. Our initiatives have reached 2,500 elementary and high school students over the past year and led to the creation of a number of school-based businesses.

This year, the CDÉA is also managing the prairies francophone economic development fund, which has a \$1.8 million envelope over three years. This is part of the economic development initiative in the prairie provinces, the EDI. It funds economic development initiatives, such as setting up a sewing co-operative for African women or opening a café in a francophone visual arts centre.

Since I'm talking about rural communities, I'll hand things over to Elisa Brosseau, Chair of the Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association.

• (1210)

Ms. Elisa Brosseau (Chair, Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association, Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta): Thank you.

The Alberta Bilingual Municipalities Association, the ABMA, is a not-for-profit association that represents member municipalities in Alberta. Its message is simple and clear: Bilingualism is a driver for economic growth. The ABMA plays a crucial role in Alberta's economic development because it knows that placing bilingualism at the core of municipal economic strategies can help communities create jobs, improve tourism and optimize investment opportunities.

Not surprisingly, Alberta's bilingual municipalities have a vast network of organizations, institutions and businesses that have achieved great success by offering services in French. However, we have to do more to put those networks and achievements on the national map for several reasons, the most important one being that very few people in our province and across Canada know how big and dynamic Alberta's francophone communities are.

The ABMA wants to ensure that municipalities have the tools and resources they need to respond to the needs of francophone newcomers, tourists and businesses. We also want to recognize our country's commitment to the two official languages and build a meaningful, collaborative relationship among francophone communities in Alberta to ensure that they remain economically sustainable for generations to come.

Bilingual communities are in the best position to identify opportunities for greater synergy and collaboration in order to optimize the scope and impact of services provided to the francophone population because they are closest to francophone businesses and residents. By working collaboratively with local and provincial governments, francophone communities across Alberta can develop new ideas, new solutions and a new perspective on what success means in Alberta.

Thank you.

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

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

Mr. Daniel Boucher (Executive Director, Société de la francophonie manitobaine): Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank the Standing Committee on Official Languages for inviting me to appear today.

My name is Daniel Boucher and I am the executive director of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, or SFM. As the voice of Manitoba's francophone community, the SFM works to advance all areas of the community's activities with the help of its vast network of collaborators and partners.

Today, I'd like to talk about three main issues: the implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages, federal-provincial-territorial agreements, and the lack of research on the economic impact of the francophonie. I will keep my remarks brief so that I can answer your questions at the end.

The SFM would like to take a moment to acknowledge the leadership shown by the federal government and parliamentarians in getting C-13 and the new Action Plan for Official Languages, or APOL, passed. These are essential tools for promoting prosperity in our communities. That said, we are increasingly concerned about the delay in implementing the action plan, which is limiting the economic development of Manitoba's francophone community and all other francophone communities in Canada.

Through their hard work in providing stimulating jobs here at home while strengthening every aspect of community life, our community organizations act as catalysts for the economic vitality of our country and our province. It's important to stress that bilingualism is an essential part of Canada's competitive advantage. French is an economic asset on which we must build. The decline in the demographic weight of francophones across Canada calls for urgent and accelerated action on the part of the federal government.

It goes without saying that the economic development of our communities depends to a large extent on the availability of services in French, including education and health services. These services help to attract and retain bilingual workers and new arrivals. This has a major impact not only on the competitiveness of our economy, but also on the ability of our local businesses to grow and flourish.

That said, our communities are still waiting for new agreements on French-language services and the federal and provincial funding that goes with them. In the meantime, community organizations and the workers who support them are suffering from economic insecurity in times of uncertainty. In addition, the lack of language clauses in the Canada health transfer leaves much to be desired, making it more difficult for French-speaking people to obtain services in their first official language. We therefore encourage the federal government to conclude the agreements, to add language clauses to the agreements that still do not have them, and to support the municipalities so that they can offer services in French.

We are living through a revolution that is fundamentally transforming the way we work and the way we claim our rights. Never before in human history has so much data been produced. Yet there is a glaring lack of understanding of the weight and economic impact of the Canadian francophonie and bilingual entrepreneurs. Despite the work of organizations such as the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, or RDÉE Canada, and its members, among others, more needs to be done to encourage the collection and, above all, the analysis of evidence in this area.

The Conference Board of Canada's 2018 report on English-French bilingualism outside Quebec is an excellent example of a methodologically robust analysis that provides a better overall picture of our realities than mere anecdotes. Analyzing and integrating research into the logic of our work is what allows our organizations to respond to real needs and work with different levels of government to find winning solutions. This could be done by encouraging collaboration between our economic development agencies and Statistics Canada, for example.

Thank you for your attention and for giving us the opportunity to present our point of view today. I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

For the witnesses taking part in the meeting by videoconference, we're going to move on to the first round of interactive questions with each of the political parties, for six minutes.

We will begin with the first vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Godin, who will have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to thank the generous witnesses who are with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you for taking part in our study and for providing us with the information we need to be better, so that we can implement recommendations and provide you with the tools you need.

First of all, I'd like to say hello to Mr. Alary, whom I had the privilege of meeting in Calgary this summer, at a round table I took part in with a number of other speakers. This opportunity will allow me to take our conversation a little further.

Mr. Alary, during your speech you mentioned that you have one full-time employee and one contract employee.

Is that enough?

Mr. Étienne Alary: Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Godin.

In my presentation, I talked about employees in the northeast and northwest of the province. The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta has a team of 12 permanent employees, including four in Calgary, five or six in Edmonton and those I referred to who provide services in rural areas.

Economically, we could certainly do more, but given that funding has been relatively stable for a number of years, if we wanted to have an employee, say, in Fort McMurray or Grande Prairie, we might have to axe a position elsewhere in the province.

Rather than robbing Peter to pay Paul, how can we better serve our community? Sometimes we have to be creative. We know that there are demographic changes in our communities. To stay relevant, I could talk about employability, another important area we'll be working on over the next year.

I know that speaking time is limited. So I'll finish now and answer any other questions you may have.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Alary, I believe you were given a mandate by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada, or IS-DE. You've been entrusted with the task of managing a PrairiesCan funding program.

Can you tell us a bit about the mandate and responsibilities you were given for this program?

• (1220)

Mr. Étienne Alary: It involves the creation of a Canada Economic Development fund for the Prairies that, three years ago, was called the Western Francophone Economic Development Fund. However, as I'm sure you already know, Western Economic Diversification Canada has split its activities into two regions: the Prairies, covered by PrairiesCan, and the Pacific, for which it's created PacificCancouture.

For the Prairies, which include Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, the Economic Development Initiative envelope, which was previously managed by the department, is now managed by the Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta. We're working with our economic development counterparts in the other two provinces to encourage the creation of projects originating from community organizations in each of the provinces.

In the end, we're trying to achieve a fair distribution of the \$600,000 budget envelope. There would then be \$200,000 per province to encourage some of the projects I mentioned in my presentation, such as the creation of a sewing co-operative for French-speaking African women—

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you. I'm sorry to interrupt you, but speaking time is very limited.

In fact, I'd like to come back to an announcement you made last year about the creation of the Alliance de la francophonie économique canadienne, or AFEC, with your counterparts from New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec.

What difference do you see between the AFEC and RDÉE Canada?

Mr. Étienne Alary: As you know, RDÉE Canada is the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité. It focuses on entrepreneurship, employability and economic development. The AFEC aims to promote economic and trade missions between French-speaking entrepreneurs in these provinces, such as the Rendez-vous d'affaires de la Francophonie, which takes place in Quebec City every two years. I know that the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec often sends delegations of French-speaking entrepreneurs who want to do business in Alberta.

The difference between the AFEC and RDÉE Canada is that RDÉE Canada helps entrepreneurs get started in business, while the AFEC has a more economic perspective; it aims for interprovincial exchanges between francophone entrepreneurs.

Mr. Joël Godin: So the objective is to develop markets in the more francophone sectors. I think it's a great initiative. Congratulations.

We know that French is a minority language in Alberta, and that many tourists come to your region.

Would it be possible for you to use French for your tourism industry?

Mr. Étienne Alary: A few years ago, we created a French-language tourist guide so that tourists could discover certain attractions in French. We've created bilingual tourist circuits.

We know that the tourism market is very important in Alberta. Our towns in the Canadian Rockies, including Canmore, Banff and Jasper, are often overflowing with tourists. I know that the Lake Louise region was closed on a few occasions this summer. So our projects are also aimed at bringing tourists to other parts of the province.

To do this, we work with Travel Alberta, the provincial tourism agency. As I mentioned, we've set up bilingual tourist circuits, which allow francophone entrepreneurs to stand out and offer certain services. We've set up a number of economuseums to showcase craftspeople at work, such as a cheese maker in Vermilion and a beekeeper in the Watino region in the northwest of the province.

So there are a number of great initiatives to help us better serve our French-speaking clientele. You should also know that this year, Travel Alberta made the French market one of its priorities for attracting tourists to Alberta. We've signed a partnership agreement with this provincial agency so that we can continue this collaboration.

Mr. Joël Godin: How are English-speaking Albertans reacting to this initiative?

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

It's now the Liberals' turn.

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

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

I would like to thank the witnesses, who are with us by video-conference.

I have a question to try to understand the ecosystem of francophone communities in Alberta.

You referred to the Economic Development Initiative, or EDI. The Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta is now involved in implementing this program for the Prairies region.

In Ontario, we have "sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités" or SADCs—that is, Community Futures Development Corporations. Is it the same in Alberta? Are there SADCs in that province that are more attuned to the reality of francophone minority communities?

Mr. Étienne Alary: The EDI is a federal program. In Alberta, we have the Community Futures Network of Alberta, a rural development network. In some places, particularly in the northeast and northwest of the province, the people in this network are more sensitive to the bilingual or francophone fact and work with us to increase bilingualism in these regions.

Mr. Francis Drouin: In other words, in regions where there are more francophones, you have a good working relationship with these people and you work very well together.

Mr. Étienne Alary: Yes, we want to work together. Bilingualism extends to both French and English. There's a great deal of openness and we're counting a lot on co-operation.

• (1225)

Mr. Francis Drouin: I would now like to ask a few questions of the representatives of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, to better understand the development context of Franco-Manitoban communities.

Mr. Boucher, do you also participate in the implementation of federal programs?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: We don't do it directly, but we do have the Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba, which is part of RDÉE Canada, as well as the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba. We work with the municipalities. We have federal and provincial programs, which we don't implement directly, but which are sometimes coordinated by the Association des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba. This association works closely with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Manitoba Association of Municipalities. All of these players contribute to the economic development of francophone communities.

At the Société de la francophonie manitobaine, our role is one of consultation and coordination. We work with various groups to promote much broader issues that are often political in nature, so to speak, including demands that we have programs and services in place to support us.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Back home in Ontario, I always say that it's a lot easier in my riding than elsewhere, because 60% of the population is francophone. That's a lot, but there are still challenges.

In Manitoba, are francophones scattered all over the place? What gaps need to be filled so that you can provide good service?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: There are a lot of bilingual municipalities. We now have 17, I think. Some municipal councils have passed by-laws requiring their meetings or minutes to be bilingual, for example.

We work in partnership with our English-speaking friends in the municipalities and we promote the importance of the French language in our communities as a means of ensuring that the quality of services is maximized for everyone. For us, services in French are essential, but it also improves the overall delivery of services.

We feel that we have made a great deal of progress with our friends in what I would call English-speaking municipalities. Some of them have declared themselves bilingual by decree. We are continuing along this path. It's not easy work, but it's work that is continuing and progressing very well.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay.

Ms. Brosseau, since we're talking about municipalities, I'd like to know what role your association plays in supporting the economic development of francophone communities in the bilingual municipalities you represent. Does this vary from municipality to municipality? Is it limited to translating the website, in some cases, or is there a real active offer of economic development services for francophones in our municipalities?

[English]

Ms. Elisa Brosseau: We have different initiatives. Some are broader and do encompass all of our members. We have 19 municipalities in Alberta that see themselves as being bilingual. In that case, for everybody, it is to help translate their website to be English and French. However, we do have some projects that could be more specific to a certain region, or a couple of municipalities that are more closely neighbouring than others.

We are still in our infancy. We've had projects in the past, but we are currently waiting for some results on some grant applications that we have with Heritage Canada and PrairiesCan in order to continue some of those larger projects for all of our members.

[Translation]

Mr. Francis Drouin: Okay, thank you very much.

I have just enough time left for one last question.

Mr. Alary, you talked about the Alliance de la francophonie économique canadienne, or AFEC, and the need to forge links between francophone communities. People are often inclined to look for resources outside their own country. We forget that francophones in Alberta, for example, can offer services to francophones in Quebec. What's more, there are often people in Quebec who don't speak English, because it's their second language, so official language minority communities can help build those links.

Do you see this as an advantage of creating the AFEC?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds left to answer.

Mr. Étienne Alary: Yes. I would even say that we often have delegations at our annual business meeting, which is our flagship event in francophone entrepreneurship in Alberta. It's often a great opportunity for discovery for our entrepreneurs and for francophone business people in Quebec. For example, the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec came last year and wants to come back this year. We want to encourage that exchange.

• (1230)

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

Go ahead, Mr. Beaulieu. You have six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank our guests for being here and sharing their knowledge with us.

The mission of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine is to demand from all levels of government the right to communicate and flourish in French, as well as to ensure that a full range of services are offered in French. I'd like to know where things stand.

Do all francophones have access to services in French or is it a minority?

Furthermore, how does the provision of services in French affect the economic development of francophone communities in Alberta and Manitoba?

This question is for both organizations.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Basically, the answer is no, but I would add that we are in the process of preparing arguments here and there to ensure an increase in the offer of services in French, since that has quite a significant economic impact. We have to realize that people often want to live in French, especially in rural areas, and it's important that they have access to services in French, to French-language schools and to things that allow them to live in French in their community.

For us, it's work that bears fruit, but it's also work that must be done over the long term. Given the assimilation rates and injustices of the past, there was work to be done to rebuild this entire relationship. However, I think that the current approach is the right one and that we are making progress with respect to French-language services. The City of Winnipeg has just announced that it is conducting a comprehensive review of its services in French, with a view to improving them, not reducing them, of course. So it's very encouraging.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Is there anything to be said about that in terms of the organizations in Alberta?

Mr. Étienne Alary: There is no doubt that services in French are evolving. A new francophone policy was put in place in 2018 by the provincial government. So this is brand new. We're working very hard with our organization representing the Albertan francophonie, the ACFA, to ensure the full influence of the francophonie in all spheres, not just in urban areas, but in rural areas too.

As I said in my opening remarks, to be even more relevant, we're connecting with another organization to better serve our community, because there are often overlapping services in the community. We believe that coming together like this can only benefit the Franco-Albertan community.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Earlier, we heard from representatives of a Quebec organization who gave us a very detailed picture of the situation of anglophones, particularly in economic terms. Are there any such studies in Alberta that can give us an overview of the economic situation of francophones, but also of the province in general? In the past, some studies have shown that there has been growth in the economic development of francophones, but that was because they worked in English.

Are there any studies that give us an overview of the situation?

Mr. Étienne Alary: As my counterpart from Manitoba mentioned in his presentation, we would probably benefit from more studies in this area. He cited a Conference Board of Canada study. Our national network, RDEE Canada, wants to work with the francophonie network, in this case the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, in order to better equip our community.

Obviously, we have conclusive data, but the fact remains that these are general data from Statistics Canada. According to this data, in 2021, there were 6,800 businesses in Alberta that said they were bilingual, or where at least 50% of the owners were French-speaking. This is a basic figure, but I think a more in-depth study would allow us to determine the real economic impact.

I don't know if Mr. Boucher would like to add anything.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: We can't work towards the future without really knowing what the current situation is and what the trends are. For us, it's crucial to have evidence that reflects the reality and gives us the real picture of the situation, because that is what enables us to develop our strategies for the future. That is very important, and it's entirely consistent with the way things are done.

• (1235)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think that's even more important in your situation. Indeed, given that there are relatively few francophones left, a great deal of effort has to be made to maintain that presence.

What do you think of the famous principle that services should be offered where numbers warrant? For example, have you seen cases in your communities where a decline in French has led to cuts in services?

The Chair: I would ask you to answer the question in 30 seconds.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: That's not necessarily the case, because different governments have different obligations and they have to honour them. The federal government has obligations, the province

has obligations and the municipalities also have obligations, including the City of Winnipeg.

In our case, it's not so much an argument that we use. We often talk about staff or personnel, for example. We're in the process of developing strategies to ensure that staff and human resources are in place in key locations to deliver services.

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

I now give the floor to Ms. Ashton from the NDP, who is joining us by videoconference from Manitoba, for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses. I am obviously very pleased that the committee is hearing today from people from Manitoba, in this case from representatives of the Société de la francophonie manitobaine.

Welcome, Mr. Boucher and Ms. Cassie. My questions are for you.

As you know, the purpose of the committee is to make recommendations to the federal government so that it can put the necessary measures in place.

Mr. Boucher, in your opening remarks, you talked about all the work done by the Société de la francophonie manitobaine and by communities across the country, through the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, to improve and strengthen the bill to reform the Official Languages Act. I would also like to thank you for the work you have done. However, you also expressed concern about the delay in implementing the bill, and more specifically about the impact of this delay on core funding for francophone minority organizations.

What does that mean to you? What kind of recommendations do you have for us so that we can shorten that time frame?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Basically, I think everything has been put in place. The action plan for official languages and the act are there. It's unfortunate that there's a delay because it may interfere with the operations of a number of organizations. In fact, it may even lead to job losses in some cases.

For example, we can talk about direct federal programs, as well as the agreements between the federal government and the provinces and territories that I mentioned. These programs and agreements are known for their constant delays, mainly because we have to negotiate with the provinces. This is a major problem for us, and we've seen organizations that have had to shut down their activities with the communities. That is one of our major, and even very significant, concerns.

People may not realize the impact that our organizations have on the development of our communities culturally or economically, or in all sectors. We are concerned about that.

I'll use health as an example. Health is an important area, and delays cause problems. The health care system in the provinces is very cumbersome, which means that, by adding this complexity, we can have to wait months and months to obtain services. These things are just not acceptable.

My recommendation would be to find a way to speed up the process as soon as possible.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay. Thank you.

Our study is on economic development. However, it's always linked to education and access. Here, in Manitoba and in the west, our francophone school boards are facing a major labour shortage in the fields of education, early childhood and French immersion.

Do you have an opinion or a recommendation in that regard? Is it important for the federal government to take action on this labour shortage, obviously in partnership with the provinces and the organizations that deal with it?

• (1240)

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I'll try to answer your question very quickly. My colleagues from Alberta can add to that.

With regard to education, as well as health, one of the things that would be really important is to speed up the certification process for teachers, who come from all over. We're seeing shortages across Canada. Of course, we can't necessarily take from one to give to the other, but the francophone immigration rate is very high here in Manitoba. It's still not high enough, but it's still high.

We're asking that the federal government play a certain role in this area in co-operation with the provinces, but also with the professional associations. I know this is a provincial jurisdiction, but I think there needs to be a constant update on the importance of speeding up the accreditation processes so that we can actually get people into the systems, because the current situation doesn't make sense.

I personally know a number of people who are perfectly capable of teaching in our schools but who don't have the necessary certification. I think that's a big part of the problem.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Do you think child care services contribute to the economic development of our communities?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I absolutely do.

I think that's where economic development starts. We live in a society that has evolved enormously in terms of family and the way we work outside, among other things.

These French-language child care services are essential. We think this can never be emphasized enough. These services also an important economic lever because they allow family members to work outside at their own pace. It's really important for us.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much.

If I had more time, I would have put that question to the other witnesses.

Mr. Boucher, are you concerned about the budget cuts at Radio-Canada and their impact on francophone communities here, in Manitoba, and across the country?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: I'm very concerned.

I think Radio-Canada is part of our daily lives. The more its budget is cut, the less communication in French will be possible. For us, this is essential.

Thank you very much.

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

Since we're disciplined, we have time for a full second round.

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

Mrs. Laila Goodridge (Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for being here today. It's absolutely extraordinary to welcome to the Standing Committee on Official Languages an entire group of witnesses from western Canada, especially Albertans. It's quite rare. We generally hear from people in Ontario and Quebec, and we don't always hear from Albertans. So I'll take advantage of that.

Mr. Alary or Ms. Brosseau, can you talk a little bit about the tourism projects you're working on in Alberta? What effect does that have on small communities?

Mr. Étienne Alary: I can start and Ms. Brosseau can add some information.

I spoke earlier about the impact on our entrepreneurs of creating savings or seeing artisans at work. This allows, for example, a francophone cheese maker from Vermilion, a small community, to increase the number of visitors through the economuseum concept.

The economuseum concept, which originated in Quebec, is an international network that has established itself in western Canada. We have five right now. A sixth is being built. What's interesting about this concept is that even an anglophone entrepreneur, who would see the added value of bilingualism, could decide to create an economuseum if the criteria were met. Afterwards, all signage in front of the business or on the building would be bilingual.

I'll give you an example of an economuseum in Calgary. It's the Bridgeland Distillery, which has some products that are recognized around the world. Everything is bilingual in the neighbourhood where the distillery is located. This is an advantage for the francophonie.

The economuseum also represents a great added value to the tourism industry in rural areas. Obviously, I mentioned Calgary, but the other economuseums are in rural areas, and they belong to francophone entrepreneurs who believe in them. It's a beautiful showcase that's part of a bilingual tourism route project, which must allow visitors, when they arrive in Alberta, to find a good tourist route. They can go from Edmonton to Fort McMurray and come back through Cold Lake. They are offered suggestions of things to do for two or three days. A whole host of services are offered.

Ms. Brosseau, do you want to talk about municipalities?

• (1245)

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: I want to add something quickly before I ask Ms. Brosseau some questions.

As the member of Parliament for Fort McMurray—Cold Lake, I often make short stops when I travel between Fort McMurray and Cold Lake.

There are signs in the various francophone and bilingual businesses. People know then that it's possible to obtain services in French. A lot of people stop, especially with these signs. This is the case in the hamlet of Plamondon, in Bonnyville, in Lac la Biche, in St. Paul and in Cold Lake. There are many francophone or bilingual businesses.

Ms. Brosseau, could you tell us about how things are done in rural areas?

[English]

Ms. Elisa Brosseau: That's right, Laila. We did have a campaign where we had stickers. We also have something on our website. Businesses can go ahead and download a badge that they can put on their website to promote that they actually have bilingualism in the business, so a tourist or somebody new to the municipality can get some type of service in French and English.

I want to tell you about an application we also have with Heritage Canada to do a larger-scale awareness campaign as—

[Translation]

Mr. Joël Godin: Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

The interpretation isn't working.

[English]

The Chair: Just a second, Ms. Brosseau, there is no interpretation right now.

[Translation]

It's working now. You may continue.

[English]

Ms. Elisa Brosseau: We currently have an application with Heritage Canada to do a larger awareness campaign. What we're finding, as municipalities, is that a lot of tourists and newcomers who come to Alberta don't actually realize how much bilingualism there actually is here in Alberta: francophone people, schools and culture. That's a project we would like to work on next year. It's to have a larger, national-scale awareness campaign to show people that, in fact, there are French-speaking people here, and they can access services both in French and in English here in Alberta.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: Thank you.

Most of you guys have touched on the Conference Board of Canada report that talks about how bilingualism has economic advantages. That is exceptionally clear, just as you pointed out. Most people do not realize that French was the first European language spoken in the province of Alberta. We were founded by the French. Most of our larger cities have a French heritage. Calgary's Rouleauville was completely French. The first missions in most of our larger cities, all the way to the smallest ones, were French. That is very important.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Goodridge.

Mrs. Laila Goodridge: It's important to speak in English and in French.

The Chair: You have every reason to be proud.

Mr. Iacono, you have five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): I want to thank the witnesses for being here this morning.

My first question is for Mr. Alary and Mr. Boucher.

In terms of service delivery, what is your relationship with your provincial government? Is it good? How supportive is your provincial government?

Mr. Étienne Alary: As I said, Alberta has adopted a new policy for the francophonie. The policy focuses on increasing French-language services through engagement with the community.

Of course, as a francophone organization in Alberta, we don't receive provincial funding. However, we're connected to Accès Emploi, the francophone employment centre in Alberta, which receives mainly provincial funding. This ties in with the federal-provincial agreements on francophone employability, which establish how we can serve our clients.

We need to build bridges over the long term and engage in ongoing lobbying to make room for the French language. Some agencies in Alberta are open to this idea. One English-speaking provincial agency acknowledges that we fill a special niche when it comes to the francophonie. We can make small inroads of this nature.

In the past, we developed projects in rural areas in partnership with certain organizations. For example, we conducted a study to develop the hemp fibre industry in the northwestern part of the province. The development of this type of market isn't primarily a francophone matter. It's a bilingual matter. The provincial government funded this study, which was led by the CDEA. It involved about 20 partners, including English-speaking municipalities.

• (1250)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Boucher, do you have anything to add? We can give you some time to respond.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: We've had a new government for less than two months. That said, our engagement with this government is off to a good start. The government seems open to our ideas and concepts. However, we must point out that we made inroads with the previous government, which lasted seven years. For example, economic development was a niche area for the previous government. It was important for that government to make progress in this area.

Generally speaking, we had a good relationship with the former government, and we also have a good relationship with the new one. We plan to bring together the federal, provincial and community sectors to find common solutions. That's our goal.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

Ms. Brosseau, a number of official language minority communities, or OLMCs, are located in rural areas. What initiatives are you proposing to support them?

[English]

Ms. Elisa Brosseau: We have a couple of different initiatives, as I mentioned. One is helping to showcase to municipalities the importance of having a website in both French and English, and having signage on the outside of the municipal buildings that says "welcome" in both English and French. Last year, we did a project where we worked with six different municipalities to help translate some of their signage within the municipalities to French and English, including museums and different types of municipal buildings.

Again, we're just working right now on a project of awareness across Canada to help bring in more newcomers and tourism to those municipalities.

[Translation]

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Canadian francophonie is diverse. It's becoming larger and larger with the influx of immigrants from the French-speaking world.

Mr. Boucher, what initiatives have you implemented to help newcomers succeed? Have you created initiatives to help them start businesses?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Our francophone immigration strategy has been in place for quite some time. This week, we're celebrating the 20th anniversary of Accueil francophone du Manitoba and the 10th anniversary of the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba, or RIF. We've worked with various governments.

In the early days, we started building a relationship with the province when it came to our immigration work. These days, we work mostly with the federal government. A francophone immigration network involves various stakeholders. The approach is integrated and comprehensive. It doesn't just fall to one organization. Job offers, job placement and housing play a crucial role in helping newcomers settle and integrate successfully. Our strategies include looking at an individual's life as a whole. Obviously, we consider employment a key issue.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boucher.

Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

Our time is up.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

The Chair: We'll now turn to Mr. Beaulieu, who has two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

Do any communities or municipalities still operate primarily in French?

Mr. Étienne Alary: In northern Alberta, some communities with somewhat older populations were predominantly French-speaking. One example is the northwestern town of Falher, a member of the Alberta Bilingual Municipal Association, or ABMA. Unfortunately, communities such as St. Paul and Bonnyville have aging populations. As we discussed, the rural exodus is a major issue. We must try to address this issue so that our young people can stay in their communities. Cold Lake is more or less bilingual. It has a francophone or bilingual military base. The francophone population is connected to this base. In rural areas, the aging population is a major issue when it comes to the survival and development of these communities.

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Municipal council meetings in the rural municipality of De Salaberry and the village of St-Pierre-Jolys, Manitoba, are held entirely in French. All elected officials must be able to speak both official languages. The municipalities of Ritchot and Taché have a strong mix of anglophones and francophones.

Some municipalities have a higher concentration of francophones. However, we work in both official languages in most cases.

• (1255)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In terms of francophone immigration, some francophone newcomers settle in places where there are very few French speakers.

Would it be more effective to give them information so that they can settle in French-speaking municipalities or communities?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: We basically encourage them to become part of our rural francophone communities. However, as we said earlier, people need jobs to live comfortably and support their families. It isn't always easy to make choices. Our welcoming francophone communities initiative focuses on attracting people to our communities, our bilingual municipalities, throughout Manitoba. That's our goal, but immigrants can't always...

The Chair: You have less than five seconds, Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you, Mr. Boucher. Keep up the good fight.

The Chair: I don't want to cut you off, but...

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

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay, thank you.

Again, my question is for Mr. Boucher.

As part of this study, we heard about the work done by the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities, or CDEM, and in particular the Destination Manitoba event. Since the passage of Bill C-13, an act for the substantive equality of Canada's official languages, we've set much more ambitious immigration targets. We want them to be even more ambitious.

Does this CDEM initiative help boost local economic development by promoting the province's attractions and opportunities for francophone immigrants and the business community? Would federal support for this type of long-term initiative play an important role?

Mr. Daniel Boucher: Absolutely. Thank you for your question, Ms. Ashton.

In terms of francophone immigration, the key is to get to know people, to talk to them about the area in person and to help them fully understand our situation. I think that these initiatives would support and encourage a somewhat better-structured francophone immigration, based on various factors that include employment. In addition, I think that the federal government can certainly play a role. This type of initiative works. It helps us recruit more and more people who can work in our communities and settle here, in French, in Manitoba.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I'll take my last few seconds to ask Mr. Alary the same question that I put to Mr. Boucher about the cuts at Radio-Canada.

Mr. Alary, are people in Alberta concerned about these cuts and the impact on the province's francophone communities?

Mr. Étienne Alary: It's a major concern, especially given the number of positions slated for cuts and the impact on our regional stations. Cutting positions in Alberta, Manitoba or Saskatchewan will negatively affect media coverage of our francophone communities. It's unfortunate that the crown corporation has reached this point.

We understand that the media is facing a somewhat challenging period these days, from a financial perspective. We're hearing about the decrease in advertising sales, for example. That said, these issues are nothing new. In the 1990s, we heard about regional stations closing in Saskatchewan and in other places.

Sometimes teams are streamlined to make them more efficient. However, if a single journalist is taken out of the field in Edmonton or Calgary, the community along with francophone communities across the country will lose out.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Alary and Ms. Ashton.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Sudbury's mayor, Paul Lefebvre.

Mr. Lefebvre is also a former member of Parliament. He served on the Standing Committee on Official Languages for four years.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here.

Further to Ms. Goodridge's comments, I must say that it's wonderful to hear from all these francophones from Quebec, northern New Brunswick, Ontario or other places. It's great to hear from all these French speakers from across Canada.

We have a great country and much reason to be proud.

I want to remind committee members that there won't be any meeting on Wednesday this week for the reasons discussed last week.

On behalf of the committee, I would also like to thank our support staff and our assistants, who often come up with good questions. We frequently don't have time to write them down ourselves.

I want to thank all the information technology technicians; the interpreters, who work remotely and who do an outstanding job; the clerk and the analyst, who are incredibly helpful; and above all, the next generation.

The meeting is adjourned.

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