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• (1550)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome to meeting number 85 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, as everyone recalls, the committee is resuming its study on the economic development of official language minority communities.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Kitchen (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): On a point of order, the interpretation....

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kitchen.

Please wait a moment.

There was a little technical problem with interpretation, but it seems to be resolved now.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: Thank you very much. Pardon me.

[*English*]

The Chair: If I speak in English, does it work in French as well?

[*Translation*]

It's working.

We will continue the meeting.

There are a lot of instructions, but I think that in 2024, everyone is very familiar with the Zoom application.

I can tell members of the committee participating in the meeting virtually or in the room, as well as our guests joining us, that all sound checks were done and they were successful. Everything is therefore working well.

I ask our guests to keep the following instructions in mind:

When you take the floor, please address the Chair. If you are using the earpiece near your microphone, make sure to avoid putting them next to each other, because it can cause interference likely to injure the interpreters.

In accordance with our routine motion regarding connection tests, I wish to inform the committee that, once again, all witnesses

and members of the committee performed the required connection tests before the meeting if they are participating via videoconference.

I would now like to welcome the witnesses.

From the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, we welcome by videoconference Ms. Mona Audet, President, and Mr. Denis Desgagné, Executive Director.

We are happy to welcome you, Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné.

I must tell you I'm quite strict about speaking time limits to give a chance to several committee members to ask questions and interact with you.

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

Ms. Mona Audet (President, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for having us as part of your study on the economic conditions of official language minority communities.

I'm speaking to you on behalf of the Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences, or RESDAC, a network for literacy, basic education, family literacy, employability and skills development in all Canadian francophone minority communities. We are especially known for the role we play in developing skills in informal settings, but it is clear, especially in today's world, that by doing so we are making a contribution to setting up conditions for economic development.

Clearly, economic development is one of the developmental cornerstones for francophone and Acadian communities. It would be hard to imagine our growth and our contribution to Canada's prosperity without skilled human resources, jobs, businesses and structures to support economic development.

For about two decades, the knowledge economy has been transforming the work ecosystem. Large international organizations, such as the World Economic Forum and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, are predicting large scale disruptions that will require the majority of employees to reskill and upskill. Employers throughout the country have already recognized this and are asking for general, socioemotional, managerial, transversal, professional and basic skills development. Canada set off in this direction through the Skills for Success program, which emphasizes the skills required to participate in, adapt to, and be fulfilled by learning, work and life.

Very recently, in its amended form, the Official Languages Act recognized the right to minority language lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

Allow me to clarify the differences between these three learning contexts. The formal context is a diploma course offered by educational institutions. The non-formal context is structured learning that does not lead to a diploma offered by organizations and businesses. The informal context is one where individuals use a variety of resources and activities to learn independently.

At RESDAC, we take these issues seriously. We considered and published many studies on the subject. We also mobilized the Table nationale sur l'éducation to redefine the continuum of lifelong learning and outline four personal development skills to meet the specific needs and challenges of francophone communities. They include language skills, as well as skills pertaining to identity affirmation, citizen engagement and coexistence. These skills reflect the needs of our communities and were developed by and for our communities.

As you already know, the “by and for” principle is an important one, because in the Canadian system that values bilingualism, we are increasingly subjected to policies, programs and resources designed for the anglophone majority, sometimes even for the francophone majority in Quebec, and they are not always adapted to us.

To confirm the validity of our proposals and our communities' support for this skills development venture, we organized the Sommet national sur l'apprentissage pour la francophonie canadienne, to be held on March 4, 5 and 6, 2024. Intersectional participation in the summit will create synergy between the formal, non-formal and informal learning sectors, which will then be deployed in a national action plan.

We already anticipated the follow-up to the summit by developing several strategies. To start, the RESDAC dashboard, Topo, will finally offer evidence and a composite index on our communities' needs and assets. A French-language digital micro-certification platform will lead to skills recognition. There will be a Skills Development Centre of Expertise. There will be a competency framework and a capacity development framework for about 800 community organizations that support the social, economic and cultural vitality of our communities.

We are also working on a new approach, namely literacy efforts based on civic-minded and engaged families, as well as continuing education through the Plateforme canadienne de formation à distance.

In closing, we call on you to recognize the importance of French-language minority skills development as a condition for their communities' economic development. As a result, we recommend that you strongly encourage the government of Canada to take positive measures in support of our community development strategies in formal, non-formal and informal contexts for growth and success. These measures must be asymmetrical, meaning they target the specific context, needs and assets of francophones. To quote the well-known expression in English, I would say we don't want “one size fits all”.

● (1555)

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: That was five minutes on the nose, Ms. Audet. Bravo!

We will start the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask questions of the witnesses.

First of all, I'd like to welcome Mr. Kitchen.

[*English*]

It's your first time here at this committee, I think.

Mr. Robert Kitchen: It's my second time.

The Chair: It's your second time.

[*Translation*]

I'd also like to welcome Ms. Diab, who is replacing Mr. Samson. As you know, it's total chaos at the Atlantic airports in Moncton and Halifax.

We will now start the first round of questions.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for exactly 6 minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't know why it has to be exactly 6 minutes. I think my colleague Marc Serré will feel called out!

Ms. Audet, thank you for taking part in this exercise, even if you are doing so by videoconference, unfortunately. I would have preferred to see you in person, but I am still very happy to hear from you.

In your presentation, you talked about asymmetry. In the Official Languages Act, the modern version of which passed last June, we recognized asymmetry between francophone and anglophone minorities in terms of positive measures taken by the federal government.

In this context, what do you think asymmetrical positive measures look like?

Ms. Mona Audet: By asymmetry, I mean tools developed by francophones and for francophones. It's easier for francophones to find tools in English than in French. However, tools in English often don't represent our communities. Whether it be in Winnipeg or Vancouver, culture is important, and so are communities; that's what it means to us. It's about measures designed by francophones, for francophones and, above all, with francophones.

Mr. Desgagné, if you want to add something, I invite you to do so.

• (1600)

Mr. Joël Godin: Indeed, Mr. Desgagné, if you want to take the floor, let us know. We would be happy to hear from you.

Ms. Audet, along the same lines, are you telling me this is a major problem for you every day in terms of the work you do to develop skills and literacy?

The Chair: Please wait a moment before answering, Ms. Audet. I stopped the timer, Mr. Godin.

The interpreters are asking you to turn off your microphone when you are not speaking. It creates interference, which affects their work.

Mr. Godin, I am restarting the timer. You have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Chair, I already asked my question, so I will wait for Ms. Audet's answer. If she wants me to provide more information, I would be happy to do so.

Ms. Mona Audet: You're right, Mr. Godin. I will give you a real example.

I shouldn't answer in the first-person plural, but I will anyway. In Manitoba, all our literacy programs are based on Louis Riel, on the Festival du voyageur, on the francophone community, on rural communities, and so on. That is what we mean by asymmetry. It means going to find what exists in our communities to teach it to our learners.

I also know that my colleagues all over the country do the same thing, because people need encouragement to learn more about their host community or the community in which they have been involved for a long time. Francophones also need to design and review the documents.

I give the floor to Mr. Desgagné.

Mr. Denis Desgagné (Executive Director, Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences): I do indeed want to add a comment. On a national level, organizations for the majority are often used to meet the needs of the minority. These large recognized organizations therefore do things in English and translate them for minorities, which is completely inappropriate.

There was even a case where people from Quebec's French-speaking majority were tasked with a mandate extending beyond our five years of operation to meet a very specific need, and we had to help them because they did not understand the situation of minority communities.

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

I do not want us to dwell endlessly on the subject of asymmetry, because I want your opinion on the economic situation of official language minority communities, or OLMCs, especially in your region.

However, what is happening with symmetry between official language minority communities? Could those communities use the same tools and documents?

Ms. Mona Audet: No, they absolutely could not.

As I said earlier, it's important to respect the provinces and territories and take into account where people live. If we get a document from Vancouver or somewhere else, for example, it must be adapted to our communities. We therefore have to work together to develop those tools.

Mr. Joël Godin: Ms. Audet, speaking of development, I note that we are conducting a study on the economic development of official language minority communities. It is important.

What is the situation on your end right now? Do you need specific tools to ensure even more success and appeal for the community you represent?

Ms. Mona Audet: I am not sure I understood your question, but I will try to answer it. If needed, Mr. Desgagné can add some points.

RESDAC is a Canada-wide network. In fact, it is the one network that allows all colleagues to work together and focus on development and creation, for instance.

Currently, we do not know what will happen with RESDAC. If we lose RESDAC, we will lose not only the collaboration between our members, but the creative component as well. Indeed, we can often take a program developed for francophones elsewhere and adapt it to our needs.

I hope I answered your question.

Mr. Desgagné, you can add to this, if you like.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, Ms. Audet, I wanted to understand the current situation on an economic level. What I understand from your answer is that you are worried about the possibility that RESDAC will not survive the current situation.

Did I get that right?

Ms. Mona Audet: Yes, that's it, absolutely.

Mr. Joël Godin: Why would your network get wiped off the map?

Ms. Mona Audet: We have been negotiating with the people from the Skills for Success program for two years, and things are not moving quickly. There is work to be done. We are just waiting for a decision from them.

I don't like to talk about finances, because it's not the case. However, I must say that RESDAC has done a great deal of work over the last two years. We have the tools and the research; there are so many things we can provide to our partners and the economic field.

The situation is worrisome. We will see what happens. I will not give up, I can assure you.

• (1605)

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Audet.

I had more questions to ask, but the chair is giving me the sign that my time is up.

The Chair: Indeed, the chair will bring out his whip.

Thank you, Ms. Audet and Mr. Godin.

I'd like to inform you that we're experiencing technical difficulties on Ms. Ashton's side. I don't know if she can hear us. If Ms. Ashton can't speak right away, she can have her turn later. So there's no need to worry about Ms. Ashton.

The second six-minute speaking turn goes to the Liberals.

Mr. Drouin, the floor is yours.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses who have joined us by videoconference.

Earlier, you talked about the challenges of requalification and its impact on our communities. I'm trying to understand where you situate that. Regarding requalification, what's the difference between where we were 30 years ago and where we're headed in the future? What needs may be created that will impact the network and your members, though not you directly?

Ms. Mona Audet: I could give you a very simple example. You know that many immigrants come to settle in Canada, correct? Often, they've had a very good education and have very good qualifications, but their prior learning isn't recognized, so they can't work. Also, some don't speak English.

That's why, regarding requalification, RESDAC has created a digital page that will enable these immigrants to quantify and qualify the training they can take. They will then have a certain level of skills and knowledge.

Indeed, we need to revisit all this, because the world is increasingly skills-driven, and so are businesses.

I hope I've answered the question correctly. If not, Mr. Desgagné can do it.

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's fine, thank you.

If I understood correctly, you mentioned digital credentials. Is that right?

Ms. Mona Audet: Yes.

Mr. Desgagné will explain it to you.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Over the past two years, we've set up a microcertification platform. These are certifications that are awarded for skills acquired in informal training, whether structured or in a self-learning context. It's a system that exists internationally. In fact, Canada has just announced a \$75 million investment in a similar platform for the recognition of skills in the health care field. In collaboration with several partners, both formal and informal edu-

cational institutions, we have set up this platform, which will in fact be unveiled during the summit.

In addition, we are in the process of putting in place the whole process of skills recognition. We have a matrix comprising several skills frameworks at international, national and provincial levels. This allows us to recognize skills. What's more, the wonderful thing is that our partners in post-secondary education, at college and university levels, can certify this.

Mr. Francis Drouin: Could you clarify for the committee what you mean by "skills"?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: In Canada, we have a framework. Under Employment and Social Development Canada, the Skills for Success program has defined, in conjunction with the employment community, nine skills that are sought by employers and entrepreneurs in employees. This is a recognized framework, used by many international organizations. We have adapted it to the reality of official language minority communities. In fact, this is the first time this skills framework, which even has the support of UN-ESCO, has been adapted for a minority.

Mr. Francis Drouin: I see.

You say you work in partnership with post-secondary institutions. In other words, you're adding value to skills development assistance.

It's not necessarily the recognition of technical training, which is often a challenge in the provinces. For example, you mentioned the health care field earlier, but this also concerns other professions.

Is that right?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: RESDAC works with the entire education community, including post-secondary institutions. In fact, colleges and universities are increasingly working on the concept of skills. It's becoming easier and easier to recognize these skills and issue a microcertification based on them. We recognize these skills in a CV.

As the president of RESDAC was saying earlier, these can be the skills of francophones, francophiles, but also newcomers. I wouldn't want us to confuse the recognition of prior learning with the recognition of skills.

• (1610)

Mr. Francis Drouin: That's exactly what I was getting at.

I have time for one last question.

The network has pointed out gaps in economic development.

I know your network very well. I see that you contribute to economic development, but what challenges or barriers do you see for the next few years, or 10, 15 or 20 years from now?

If you had to make one recommendation to the government, what would it be?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Many points were raised in the brief submitted by Ms. Audet.

Today, we have a dashboard that lets us know where supply and demand are in terms of training and skills. Today, we can better respond to needs in terms of employability. We are also experiencing a fourth industrial revolution. We need to address these issues.

As the chair said a few minutes ago, we've done several studies to better adapt to the reality and challenges of the 21st century and really tackle these issues.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desgagné. If necessary, you can complete your answer later, during the next turns.

The next questions will come from the Bloc Québécois, from the second vice-chair of the committee.

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

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

First of all, with regard to Quebec, do you collaborate much with the province, or do you tend to work on your own?

What is your working relationship with Quebec?

Ms. Mona Audet: I'll be happy to answer the question.

We work very closely with the Institut de coopération pour l'éducation des adultes, or ICÉA. I'm sure you're familiar with this organization, Mr. Beaulieu.

We also work with the Centre de documentation sur l'éducation des adultes et la condition féminine, or CDÉACF, which is located in Montreal.

We work a lot with partners, in particular with Mr. Daniel Baril, who is the executive director of ICÉA. He's one of the researchers with whom we work very closely. We're very proud to work with partners from Quebec.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Thank you.

You said there was a difference between literacy and skills acquisition for francophones in minority settings as far as Quebec is concerned. Could you tell me a little more about that?

Ms. Mona Audet: I'll let Mr. Desgagné field the question.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: This is a special situation. The Canadian francophonie is a minority, and we recognize that.

In andragogy, we train adults, and it's the context that determines the needs. The work context in Montreal is very different from that in Fort McMurray or Caraquet. That's the approach we take when we try to find solutions in terms of jobs or when we develop a training program to meet local needs.

As a matter of fact, we work with organizations along these lines, such as the Factory, which does remarkable skills development work in Montreal. However, if this organization were to move to St. Boniface to meet the needs of this region, it would have to work with other organizations, such as Pluri-elles, who are working on the ground to better meet the needs of the St. Boniface community.

So, the work is done in partnership. We work with players on a local scale, as they are better able to respond to needs, according to the context.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think the literacy needs in Quebec are considerable. Do you have an opinion on this?

Do you consider the situation to be very different from that of francophones outside Quebec? That's certainly the case where francophones are very much in the minority. In Quebec, it may seem surprising, but there are still pretty obvious literacy needs among francophones.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: A study by the Literacy Foundation which was published last week in Quebec, reports on the extent of this problem. Yes, as you say, there is a problem in French-speaking Canada. It's a question of cultural literacy. Cultural institutions are not the same from one city to another, from one public library to another, if I may say so.

So, the context is totally different, and the difficulties are growing. When majority organizations meet the needs of the minority, assimilation occurs as a matter of course. People have to work for employers without any language security. You know the consequences that follow.

• (1615)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Yes, I know them. Some of my Franco-Ontarian friends had to relearn French, because they were completely anglicized.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Yes, that's a good example.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: This is also happening in Quebec.

Earlier, we talked about the fear that your organization might disappear. In the revised Official Languages Act, the federal government is supposed to be committed to strengthening opportunities for francophone minorities to pursue quality learning in formal, non-formal or informal settings, according to what you said.

In terms of funding, as I understand it, nothing is happening. You're having trouble getting adequate funding.

Is that right?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: It must be said that, not so long ago, RES-DAC experienced a situation where it found itself dormant for five years. We had to file a complaint with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada to obtain funding. This enabled us to launch initiatives, such as the digital microcertification platform.

However, we're coming up to March and the agreement has not yet been renewed. We're losing momentum. We're currently trying to mobilize the Table nationale sur l'éducation and the Canadian Commission for UNESCO to create a new synergy, but we'll be forced to cut staff. We are currently without an agreement.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's very important to point this out, because literacy and skills development are crucial to preserving a language and passing it on to newcomers. It's unfortunate that you're having trouble getting funding. Perhaps we could mention this in our report.

As I understand it, you also don't receive any money from programs that aim to foster economic development—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

That's an excellent question, but, as you know, your time is up.

Ms. Ashton seems to be back online.

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

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

I would like to thank our witnesses, Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné, for their testimony.

In Manitoba, we are great admirers of the work you do, Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné, and we all know how important it is.

With respect to our study, which involves economic development, how are you collaborating with Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, on the Skills for Success project, which is the research project on the skills for success capabilities of the Canadian francophone?

Ms. Mona Audet: I will let you answer, Mr. Desgagné.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: The agreement has enabled us to revive a certain dynamism across the country, break isolation and work in partnership with all the economic and social organizations and their spokespeople.

We really do have something solid to meet future needs. ESDC seems to have to pull out all the stops and work very hard. Unfortunately, despite the good relationship we've had over the last few years, the fact remains that we had no sign of the agreement being renewed at the end of the year.

So, what's somewhat frightening for the organization is falling back into dormancy, an experience it's already had, and losing that dynamism.

ESDC transfers large sums to the provinces, but there are no resources for us. We do not even benefit from the usual consultations with RESDAC's spokesperson organizations.

As a result, we're falling back into a kind of dormancy and survival mode, and we're not really responding to current needs. The majority of organizations we know are able to do this, but exclusively in English. All research is done in English.

I could name you several sites that have been funded by ESDC but do research exclusively in English. We're going to make this research available in French, but it doesn't meet the specific needs of official language minority communities.

• (1620)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

I want to address the issue of economic development and immigration. As we know, immigration targets are ambitious.

Could you provide some comments on the fact that francophone adults from immigrant backgrounds could have particular needs when it comes to skills development support?

Ms. Mona Audet: I can answer this question, Mr. Desgagné, as it falls within my wheelhouse.

It's important to understand that the immigrants who arrive here are highly qualified. They have particular needs, depending on their status. There are different categories of immigrants, including refugees, asylum seekers and economic immigrants.

Thirty-five to forty percent of them do not speak English. They must therefore take the English courses that are provided. Some provinces, including Manitoba and some territories, pay for the courses and offer programs in English.

It's also important to think about the issue of recognition and the enormous amount of work that people do regarding employment. You encounter a double standard, two different worlds, when you contact an English-speaking company as opposed to a French-speaking company. Let me explain.

A francophone who would like to work in a profession offered only by English-speaking companies has to work doubly hard. He has to learn English and structure his new life, he has to go through preparation interviews, and so on.

In the workplace, English poses a double challenge. Immigrants who don't speak English need some time to adapt. Are we going to tell them not to apply if they don't speak English? Of course not. We need to provide them with the necessary resources and the opportunity to succeed.

Thanks to the digital microcertification program, it will be extraordinary to be able to access qualifications or skills that immigrants can incorporate into their CVs that will make them more attractive candidates.

These people want to work, and they need to work. They want to get involved and live in our communities.

I hope I've answered your question correctly. You see, I'm speaking from the heart.

Ms. Niki Ashton: I can see that very well.

This is also the reality of our French-speaking communities outside Quebec.

The purpose of our committee is to make recommendations to the government.

Can you suggest any recommendations as to what the government could do in terms of economic development to support the work you do or the needs of the communities you work with?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: One of the recommendations we could perhaps make concerns newcomers.

Currently there is a whole network for newcomers that works with the country's francophone immigration networks. These networks do very good work. Their members take care of the newcomers' basic needs, which are established according to Maslow's pyramid. These include, for example, the need to find work or housing.

We also need to think about community vitality. New arrivals feel a need to belong. It's to meet this need that RESDAC has developed skills that enable them not only to succeed, but also to flourish, whether in terms of language, as Ms. Audet pointed out a few seconds ago, or in terms of identity affirmation and civic engagement.

RESDAC, in collaboration with the Table nationale sur l'éducation, has defined four skills to be able to better meet the need for belonging, development and vitality enrichment. If we only work on the economy—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desgagné. You can continue later. I'm sorry, but we've even gone over the speaking time.

We'll move on to the second round of questions.

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

Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC): Thank you, Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné, for your comments.

Do you work mainly with newcomers?

Ms. Mona Audet: No, we don't.

I gave an example from Manitoba earlier to show what I do on a daily basis. The network helps everyone who wants to improve their skills and knowledge. We work with all these people, because it's important.

Anyone who decides to come to a literacy or skills development centre should receive quality services that reflect their francophone reality. This applies to both immigrants and people from rural and northern communities, for example.

We try to provide a quality service to everyone, so that people can acquire skills and knowledge and have these abilities recognized.

• (1625)

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you for the clarification.

Are many newcomers unable to read in either French or English, or are these people in the minority?

Ms. Mona Audet: Your question is a bit annoying, but I'll try to answer it without offending anyone. You know that economic immigrants are well educated, right?

I'm talking about refugees who have been in camps for three or four years. They come to the provinces and territories and don't know where to go. They have often had little or no schooling. These people really need services. I don't like to name them, because it's like putting them in a machine. These people want to learn and work hard. They want to succeed and get into the job market.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Thank you. It's an important job.

Mr. Desgagné, you spoke a bit about skills recognition. Many people's qualifications aren't recognized here. It's challenging for them. That's the case for many newcomers. For example, 20,000 doctors in Canada can't practise because their skills aren't recognized. There are also 30,000 nurses in the same situation. Do you have any recommendations?

The Conservative Party feels strongly that these people should have their skills recognized. I'm not saying that anything goes, but their skills should be recognized here. These immigrants are often qualified doctors, but they can't practise when they get here. It's discouraging for them. It isn't good for them or for Canada.

Do you have any comments on this?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Thank you for the question.

We need to work with all organizations in the Canadian francophonie. In the case of doctors, for example, our organizations must look into prior learning assessment. These people know their work inside and out, and we support them.

We work more on skills recognition, or what we call digital badges. This will ensure that certain skills are recognized and certified by post-secondary institutions. However, prior learning certification falls under the purview of the formal sector. In the informal sector, microcredentials are awarded by educational institutions in a formal capacity.

We must work in partnership with the organizations in this process. Prior learning assessment falls under their purview. We must work across the board with mechanics, for example, and people from all fields.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Do you have any brief comments on this, Ms. Audet?

Ms. Mona Audet: Yes, I do, Mr. Dalton.

We need to rap on the knuckles of the professional associations and tell them that people from other places have the required knowledge.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Audet.

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

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

I would like to welcome the witnesses.

I want to pick up on the question that my colleague asked earlier about the communities that you serve. In these communities, are there people whose children attend French-language schools and who also want to improve their French so that they can help their children or family members in the schools?

• (1630)

Ms. Mona Audet: I'll let Mr. Desgagné answer your question.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: We work with all these organizations to support newcomers to Canada. For example, we help them understand how the institutions work and we guide them towards the schools. A number of RESDAC members work in partnership with the schools on literacy or numeracy and on various competencies such as digital skills. We seek, for example, to better guide newcomers towards host communities and francophone immigration networks.

We have a good network. We're working with all the institutions to better support these people. Not only do they need housing and an education, they also need a sense of belonging in Canada's francophonie.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: In your organization dedicated to the growth or development of francophone skills in minority communities, is there room for anglophones who want to join the francophone community? This would help build the francophone community.

Do you play a role in this? If so, what role?

Ms. Mona Audet: A number of our colleagues provide French courses, not just RESDAC.

You just mentioned schools. Schools provide French courses for young people who speak Arabic, for example, or another language. We provide French courses, and a number of my colleagues do as well. It's important.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: I was talking specifically about parents or guardians, the people who support the individuals attending a French-language school, but I'll move on now.

Are the services provided by the network currently available in all provinces and territories?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Yes, they're available.

We have a member in each province and territory. In some cases, it's a network rather than a member. In Ontario, for example, it's the Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes, or COFA, which has a number of members. This coalition is supported by the provincial government.

I could also give the example of Alberta. In Edmonton, a single member goes to great lengths to cover an entire area. That's how we operate across the country.

Ms. Arielle Kayabaga: Do you think that the action plan for official languages 2023-28 entitled "Protection, Promotion, Collaboration" contains programs and initiatives to support the skills development of adults in official language minority communities?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: We have always worked with Canadian Heritage to make our needs known across the country. The action plan provides a number of opportunities to work with departments.

We submitted a five-year plan, which helps us work across departments. As my colleague said, we haven't yet received any responses, except from small departments, which are very helpful.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kayabaga.

Thank you, Mr. Desgagné and Ms. Audet.

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

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

I'd like to close the loop on your funding issues. Canadian Heritage is responsible for taking positive measures under part VII of the Official Languages Act. Are you meeting with any people from this department? We haven't been able to meet with the minister. It has been challenging. Have you had any meetings? Is it easy to reach them, or is it difficult to make requests?

• (1635)

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Really, if any department understands positive measures and the situation of francophone minority communities, it's Canadian Heritage. We're working with people in that department to change the culture of the other departments responsible for taking positive measures. I believe that this responsibility is shared by all federal institutions.

I can confirm that Canadian Heritage is working very closely with RESDAC.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In that case, why isn't your funding secured and why the uncertainty?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: The Department of Employment and Social Development manages the skills for success program. Our funding mainly came from this program. There was also the social partnership initiative for official language minority communities and the enabling fund for official language minority communities. This is all within the department.

In terms of community development, Canadian Heritage funds a significant part of the activities carried out by the 800 organizations listed in our brief.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You said that your main focus is on training the trainers. Do you provide many services in workplaces? Do you receive any requests from these places?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Yes. That said, RESDAC is a network of organizations. RESDAC member organizations provide services in workplaces or organizations if they can meet the demand.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desgagné.

That's all, Mr. Beaulieu. Two and a half minutes go by quickly.

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

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

I'll focus on our committee's recommendations. I should note that you must be able to continue your work. To this end, the federal government must renew its support.

Ms. Audet, what recommendations could this committee make to support your work and meet your economic development needs in francophone communities?

Ms. Mona Audet: We spoke at length about the importance of giving our members and partners the opportunity to develop French programs designed by and for francophones. We often talk about the economy, but it's a broad field. Schools, organizations and community members all participate in the economy, along with businesses. In small communities, businesses are significant. If an anglophone business can be persuaded to hire young or not-so-young people, even though they only speak French, the economy will benefit.

I would recommend that the Government of Canada ensure that funds earmarked for francophones are given to francophones and to the appropriate people. Is it right to give grants to a group in Quebec that has no idea about the situation outside Quebec? It's time to sit down with francophone communities and discuss positive strategies for building strong communities across Canada.

That's one recommendation. I'm sure that Mr. Desgagné has more.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Our president just spoke about the asymmetry issue. It's in our brief. We also need positive measures to support strategies for developing skills to succeed and flourish. We recommend this so that we can fulfill our mission and you can fulfill your mandate.

The Chair: That's all for now. You have only 10 seconds left, Ms. Ashton. Thank you.

There are two five-minute rounds left, which will bring this second round to a close.

We'll give the floor to Bernard Généreux for five minutes.

Sorry. I see that Mr. Godin will be speaking this time.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to hear your thoughts on the impact of your organization in your community.

Could you provide any statistics on the number of adult students and on recruitment from an economic standpoint? Are these people becoming rare gems in your community, and are they quickly drawn to work in companies? Are these people a way to address the labour shortage?

• (1640)

Mr. Denis Desgagné: You're already familiar with the network's literacy statistics. On average, more than half of francophones in minority communities haven't achieved a level that would allow

them to flourish socially or economically. That's 52% of the francophone population in minority communities. That's an average. We know that, in New Brunswick, for example, the average is close to 70% for level 3. We're working in that environment.

Majority language organizations help meet the literacy needs of these people. However, since these services are provided in English, the problem continues to grow. That's the situation. We aren't on the ground meeting needs.

Since our last agreement, Mr. Godin, we've introduced tools for the first time that help our members identify supply and demand to meet their needs. We're increasingly working with economic development components to better meet our members' needs.

Francophones feel insecure. That insecurity is growing as a result of what we call the fourth industrial revolution. Technology can be a threat, not to mention financial insecurity. We're here to help these people get a foothold in the job market, or get better jobs and better living conditions.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do you think this practice is a way to assimilate francophones into official language minority communities?

Mr. Denis Desgagné: Well, it certainly has repercussions. As far as we're concerned, we clearly see language insecurity flowing from it and we understand the repercussions of it all. That's why we focus on this so much and give this type of presentation to anyone who will listen. We're trying to help these people and make them feel secure about their linguistic cultural identity.

Mr. Joël Godin: My next question may be more for Ms. Audet.

Your work is vital to training the workforce in official language minority communities. However, do you have the capacity to meet demand? If there is an increase in demand, do you have the tools and means to make it happen?

Ms. Mona Audet: That's a big question, Mr. Godin. How might I best answer it?

We certainly don't have the resources right now to meet the demand. That's for sure.

It's important to understand that we've conducted research and studies and worked with our partners, but there's still work to be done. That's why we need to ensure continuity. I'm talking here not only about RESDAC, but also about the other organizations that will all work together to ensure that the needs of francophones are met.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Audet.

Ms. Mona Audet: We have the—

Mr. Joël Godin: I have to interrupt you right now, Ms. Audet.

Ms. Mona Audet: Oh, that's a shame.

Mr. Joël Godin: Actually, the Chair is indicating that I have a little more time. I'll let you continue, and then I'll have another question.

Ms. Mona Audet: I can't quite remember what I was saying.

I wanted to say that we have the resources and the potential, but we have to sit down with our partners and we have to make sure that we fund francophone communities properly. We need to give them the resources and the opportunity to work, including RESDAC.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you.

Ms. Audet, earlier you mentioned funding from Skills for Success. Can you tell us what that is?

Ms. Mona Audet: That's the Skills for Success program, an Employment and Social Development Canada program.

Mr. Joël Godin: You receive funding from that department-led program, isn't that so?

Ms. Mona Audet: Yes, absolutely. We've received funds from that department, and we are currently in the renewal process.

Mr. Joël Godin: As I understand it, you are not receiving any contributions under the Official Languages Support Program for 2023–2028. Is that correct?

Ms. Mona Audet: There is funding for organizations that are members of RESDAC, but not for RESDAC itself.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Audet, Mr. Desgagné and Mr. Godin.

Mr. Serré has the floor for the final five minutes.

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

Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné, you've been working tirelessly for many years, and I'd like to thank you for that. I want to congratulate you on your work in adult literacy and recognition of prior learning. It's very important work.

Indeed, there have been repercussions over the last 40 to 50 years. It's clear that the assimilation of francophones outside Quebec is largely due to the fact that the federal and provincial governments didn't necessarily fund RESDAC and its organizations. The onus was on the provinces, and we know that they don't do much about it. So people rely on English-speaking organizations and translated documents. That doesn't work.

First of all, I'd like to understand the breakdown of funding for the national network. In what proportion do the ten provinces and

three territories fund services for francophones nationwide, compared to the portion paid by the federal government? Do you know?

• (1645)

Ms. Mona Audet: No.

Mr. Marc Serré: Would it be possible to obtain a table showing these percentages? It would inform our discussions as we draft recommendations for economic development. It would be helpful to know if the federal share of funding is 80% or 90% and the provincial share is 5% or 2%, for example.

Ms. Mona Audet: Mr. Serré, I'll take the liberty of answering that question.

As you know, there are agreements between the federal government and the provincial and territorial governments. But we have no idea how much is allocated for services to francophones. We have no way of knowing how much money is transferred from the federal government. We don't know the amounts or the percentages.

Mr. Marc Serré: Yes, but you know the amounts that your members receive.

Ms. Mona Audet: Yes, we do know those, absolutely.

Mr. Marc Serré: That's what I'm asking.

Ms. Mona Audet: Oh, I see.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'd like to know what amount your members receive from the federal government, and what amount they receive from their province.

In the 1990s, the federal government delegated all responsibility for training to the provinces, which I think was a big mistake. We're looking at how the federal government can strengthen training services for adults in official language minority communities across the country.

My second question has to do with tracking statistics. We have very little data, so what recommendations would you make about questions that Statistics Canada might ask?

We know that Statistics Canada is not an especially robust organization when it comes to collecting data on francophones. So it needs a little nudge and some recommendations from us, I'm sure.

Mr. Denis Desgagné: I can tell you that over the past few years, Statistics Canada has worked with us to better define which international studies are carried out and when. It has given us information that allows us to create our own dashboard.

That said, you are correct: I can provide you with questions that Statistics Canada could ask to obtain more precise data. That would be a tremendous help.

Mr. Marc Serré: That's excellent. If you could suggest some questions, we could include them in our recommendations. That would be very good.

My next question—

Ms. Mona Audet: Mr. Serré, I can answer that.

Mr. Marc Serré: I'm listening.

Ms. Mona Audet: I'll give you the example of "Mona Toba". You remember that expression, don't you?

I receive \$124,670 from the Province of Manitoba for 13 literacy centres and I receive \$25,000 from the Official Languages Support Program for 12 homework assistance centres. Those are my figures. We'll find the other amounts for you.

Mr. Marc Serré: Wonderful. Thank you very much.

I have a third question.

I'd like to talk about any programming or software available to literacy networks for adult and distance education, such as Contact North. Obviously, if you're located in a big city, you can't offer your services to adults in smaller centres.

Do you have any recommendations on how the federal government could help you with access to computer networks to use videoconferencing?

Ms. Mona Audet: Mr. Serré, I will gladly answer your question.

We have the Remote Training Program, or Programme F@D, which is implemented by COFA. We work with partners across the country. This has given us the opportunity to offer online training, train our facilitators and host people.

We've achieved great results. The statistics clearly demonstrate that. People have learned. That's wonderful. Unfortunately, that program will not be funded.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Audet.

Ms. Mona Audet: All the online training and Zoom meetings that we have—

I apologize, Mr. Chair. I'm talking too much.

The Chair: Thank you for participating, Ms. Audet and Mr. Desgagné.

You've quietly had conversations with representatives from the French-speaking regions of British Columbia, Quebec, Montreal, Central and Northern Ontario, and Manitoba. It's certainly something that will be useful to us, and I thank you for it.

I also wanted to ask you to forward your briefing materials to our clerk. She'll be sure to pass them on to all Committee members, as they all need to have access to them.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Mona Audet: By the way, I look forward to seeing you at the national summit on learning for Canada's francophonie. I'll be pleased to greet you.

The Chair: Have a good day, everyone!

We will suspend for a few moments and resume in camera for Committee business.

[*Proceedings continue in camera.*]

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