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Mr. Phil McColeman

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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•(0845)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC)): Good morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. Today is Tuesday, June 10, 2014, and we are continuing our study on the renewal of the labour market development agreements, also famously known as LMDAs.

For our first hour, as part of our panel, we're pleased to have with us, from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, Ms. Suzanne Bossé, executive director, along with her president, Ms. Marie-France Kenny. Appearing as an individual, we have Dr. Donna Wood, adjunct assistant professor. Finally, joining us by way of video conference from Mississauga and also appearing as an individual, we have Ms. Miana Plesca, associate professor and interim assistant dean from the College of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph.

My apologies if I've butchered your name with some pronunciations. I'm not great at French, as you know, or as at least committee members know. We welcome you to our committee to witness today.

Let's begin with Ms. Bossé for up to 10 minutes, please.

Ms. Kenny, if you prefer to go first, that's fine with us.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-France Kenny (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Mr. Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, to appear before you today.

My name is Marie-France Kenny and I am the President of the FCFA. I am accompanied by our Executive Director, Ms. Suzanne Bossé.

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada has been in existence since 1975. Its mandate is to speak on behalf of the 2.5 million francophones who live in a minority situation in the nine provinces and three territories outside Quebec.

More specifically, the FCFA focuses on promoting linguistic duality, developing the capacity to live in French throughout the

country, and fostering the participation of francophone citizens in Canada's development.

Our federation includes 21 member-organizations, including 12 associations representing francophones in each province and each territory, and 9 national francophone organizations that are active in areas such as early childhood, literacy, skills development, health and culture, and we work with clients such as young people, the elderly and women.

For the purpose of its mandate, the FCFA is particularly interested in the implementation of the Official Languages Act. I must admit that we are rather disappointed that the officials who spoke before this committee about labour market development agreements, LMDAs, made no mention of the commitments and language considerations that are included in these agreements, or that should be included. We are concerned about this. If the FCFA is here today, it is mainly to correct these shortcomings.

First, the LMDAs that were signed by the provinces and the territories between 1996 and 2008 all include language provisions. A language provision ensures that when money is transferred from the federal government to a provincial government, the province respects its obligations under the Official Languages Act. In fact, these obligations under the law must accompany devolution. These clauses deal specifically with part IV of the act, which requires that federal offices communicate and provide services in French and in English where the numbers justify it. Under the language clauses of the LMDAs, those obligations are devolved upon provincial and territorial governments.

Those very same language clauses contain two significant shortcomings.

On the one hand, as is the case in many federal-provincial-territorial agreements, the implementation of these clauses is imperfect and there are few accountability measures. Provinces basically do not account for how well they have met their obligations under the Official Languages Act.

I would like to point out that during the negotiations on the renewal of labour market agreements, the federal government showed leadership on the inclusion of firm and clear language clauses. We call on the government to be just as firm when the LMDAs are renewed.

That being said, the Official Languages Act is much more than part IV, that is the part dealing with services to the public and communication with the public. Part VII of the act requires that federal institutions take positive steps to support the development of official language minority communities.

The Official Languages Commissioner recently concluded an investigative report regarding a complaint about how the labour market agreement and labour market development agreement had been implemented in British Columbia. The commissioner confirmed that the federal government is responsible for ensuring that language obligations, not only those under part IV on services to the public, but also those under part VII on positive measures, are implemented when it signs funding transfer agreements with provinces and territories.

In the case of an LMDA, what would positive measures to support the development of our communities look like? At a minimum, in consultation with the communities, the provincial governments would have to craft action plans that meet their real needs, such as access to the kinds of training that francophones are looking for, support for job searches, or measures that focus on the specific needs of francophone immigrants looking for jobs.

Make no mistake: we are not talking about consulting communities in a vacuum. There is a much broader benefit for provincial and territorial governments, and for our communities, when the latter can participate in consultations that include various civil society groups for the purpose of developing LMDA-related action plans. When that happens, there is a much greater chance of the issues and concerns of our communities being fully integrated within these action plans.

• (0850)

Finally, in order to ensure effective and efficient implementation of the LMDAs and any related action plan, one must also ensure that all relevant stakeholders within our communities participate.

The other official languages issue I would like to speak to you about is that of data and research. Currently, the federal government's labour force surveys do not include a language component. It is therefore very difficult to have systematic information on how many francophones are employed, how many are unemployed, which age category is the most affected by underemployment and unemployment, and what kind of training is offered, in what language and where.

This is a major issue. It is a major issue for federal institutions and for provincial and territorial governments that may want to know more about the employment situation of francophones in order to take targeted positive steps for a specific francophone community. It is also an important issue for organizations like the FCFA and its members, that federal institutions and governments often turn to when they are trying to better fulfil their language obligations.

I will end my remarks with a few recommendations that sum up my comments.

First, your committee must recommend that the government insists on strong language clauses that include implementation and accountability measures for the purposes of both part IV of the Official Languages Act, that is service to the public and

communications, and part VII, on positive measures to foster community development.

Second, these language clauses must include wording about consultation, cooperation and collaboration with all key stakeholders in francophone communities in order to ensure efficient and effective implementation of the LMDAs in a way that meets the real needs of these communities.

Third, the federal government must strengthen its capacity to collect language data on Canada's labour force in order to fill our knowledge gap on the employment profile of francophone communities.

Finally, we support the recommendation of the Institute for Research on Public Policy to adopt a standardized approach for information and data collection, which would allow for a better understanding of that information.

Thank you.

I would be happy to answer your questions.

• (0855)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Madame Kenny.

Ms. Wood, we'll now go to you for up to 10 minutes, please.

Dr. Donna Wood (Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Victoria, As an Individual): Thank you.

Good morning. My name is Donna Wood. I'm an adjunct assistant professor of political science at the University of Victoria. My area of expertise is comparative federalism. I'm interested in comparative federalism; I used to work as a public servant with the Government of Alberta before I moved into an academic role.

In my work in looking at comparative federalism, I've studied how the European Union, Australia, and the United States manage employment programming, but most of my experience has been on the Canadian situation in terms of how we manage federal-provincial relations in employment policy.

Quite specifically, over the past two years I have been assessing the governance arrangements post-devolution in all 10 provinces, involving over a hundred interviews in all 10 provinces across Canada. I'm pleased to be here at this committee today, because I've just returned from doing 25 interviews in Atlantic Canada to understand better how the Atlantic provinces are implementing their LMDAs post-devolution, particularly the new provinces that have come on after 2009, which are Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island, but I also did stop in New Brunswick.

So on the basis of these interviews that I've been doing over the past two years, how is the system working today?

Every developed country has a public employment service to match job seekers with employers. A robust public employment service ensures that all Canadians have an opportunity to access the labour market and that employers can get the skilled workers they need.

It needs to be public so that those who are having difficulty finding work, especially youth, immigrants, aboriginal people, and disabled people, as well as those dependent upon government income support, which includes employment insurance recipients as well as social assistance persons, have access to the individualized services and supports they need in order to get a job. Also, it needs to have federal government leadership in order to ensure that there is a pan-Canadian cohesiveness and coordination of this system across Canada, to ensure that there is mobility of workers across the country, and to ensure that there are comparative information and research at all levels—local, regional, provincial, national, and international.

As you know, until 1996 Canada's public employment service was managed directly by Ottawa through a network of 500 Canada Manpower offices across the country. Since then, the system has been transformed, with 80% of the programming now designed and delivered by provinces and territories through a variety of bilateral federal-provincial agreements, 49 of them in total, of which the labour market development agreement is the most important of this basket of agreements. The LMDAs transferred to the provinces over 3,600 federal staff, assets, and almost \$2 billion in funding from the unemployment insurance account.

It has taken over 17 years for all provinces and territories to assess, negotiate, and sign a devolved LMDA, one at a time. In taking on these responsibilities, each province has rationalized their internal infrastructure and their relationships with employers, service delivery providers, post-secondary institutions, and their community organizations. Many have transformed the training programs on offer, as well as the supports and services they provide to social assistance claimants and other vulnerable groups. It has been a huge undertaking for provinces to take on these responsibilities.

In my estimation, devolution has led to many positive outcomes.

Provincial governments, as well as their regional and local offices, have now developed a significant capacity, expertise, and knowledge in the policy domain. The current agreements have provided provinces with enough flexibility to match programming to local conditions, thereby improving program effectiveness. This is a key OECD recommendation: that labour market programs, in order to be effective, must be matched to local conditions and have that degree of flexibility. The other thing is that devolution and the clarification of federal-provincial roles and responsibilities that came with it have also increased harmony in federal-provincial relations in the sector, and this has been a major accomplishment.

But what are the problems with the current arrangements? Even though successful, devolution is incomplete, and governance problems remain.

First of all, there is the absence of a Canada-wide multilateral strategic framework or agreement on goals, objectives, and measures within which these provincial programs rest. That's because they're governed by 49 bilateral agreements. We don't have a multilateral framework.

Second is executive dominance, including weak federal-provincial coordination and limited opportunity for stakeholders or citizens to

participate in what these programs are, either on a pan-Canadian basis or, in some cases, at the provincial level.

Third is a lack of transparency, reporting, knowledge-sharing, comparative research, and processes to facilitate mutual learning between the provinces that are now running these programs.

• (0900)

Fourth is a continued fragmentation and residual incoherence resulting in weak accountability. Our 14 governments are inextricably intertwined in labour market matters. The policy area cannot be managed as watertight compartments or through unilateral federal or provincial action. The federal government should not aim to dictate a detailed program design, as was attempted through the Canada job grant. Ottawa's role should be strategic not operational.

What do I suggest in concrete terms? I suggest the following.

First, our 14 governments should collectively undertake to reform and expand the forum of labour market ministers, with a mandate to act as a multilateral, pan-Canadian intergovernmental forum responsible for consulting on and determining all aspects of employment training and policy in Canada.

This forum already exists. It needs to be made more robust. In order to make it more robust, it would require the creation of a larger and permanent secretariat and establishing a formalized way that relates to the FLMM to secure business, union, community, expert, and aboriginal input into labour market programming. It would also require building linkages with other intergovernmental forums, like the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and the ministers of social services, because of the interrelationship with social assistance programming.

Second, I believe that a new national agency needs to be created and I'm calling it the Canadian institute for labour market information. This agency would be charged with identifying, maintaining and disseminating labour market information; data gathering and analysis for comparative research; monitoring and sharing of best practices between the provinces; assessing trends and policies across Canada and internationally; and evaluating labour market program results.

It would perform for labour market matters a similar role as the Canadian Institute for Health Information, called CIHI, provides in health care, and would operate under a similar collaborative federal-provincial governance structure. That collaborative governance structure is essential for this to be successful because of the interconnection between the federal and provincial governments.

Third, I would recommend that provincial and federal governments finish the work needed to consolidate, affirm, and fully operationalize the devolution decision, including negotiating the transfer of programs for youth and persons with disabilities to provincial governments.

The only remaining direct federal oversight, in my view, should be in regard to programs for aboriginal persons, which are managed through the ASETS program. But these programs need to be better co-ordinated in defined ways with provincial programming. This final step would also include the recognition of an enhanced federal role in research co-ordination, comparative benchmarking, and pan-Canadian reporting.

To conclude, what do I think should happen next to ensure effective labour market programming?

I'm aware that Minister Kenney's office is undertaking consultations, with limited provincial involvement, on LMDA renewal. These are happening in one province at a time, but I also believe that these consultations are inadequate to achieve the kind of collaborative transformation and labour market programming that is needed.

These discussions should be replaced with a broader, longer, and more transparent consultation process that is shaped by our governments with the help of pan-Canadian groups, many of whom you have heard from today and other days in terms of this LMDA renewal process.

These pan-Canadian groups would represent employers, community organizations, and research institutes. This process should be managed by a credible external organization such as a research institute.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present to you today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We move on to Ms. Plesca, who's with us from Mississauga on video conference.

You have 10 minutes.

• (0905)

Dr. Miana Plesca (Associate Professor and Interim Assistant Dean, College of Business and Economics, University of Guelph, As an Individual): Thank you. I hope you can hear me well; if not, ask me, and I will speak up.

I'm a labour economist at the University of Guelph and I think I'm here because my specialization is in program evaluation. Most of my work looks at how to evaluate all these active labour market policies: what the right methodology is, the literature, what the conclusions are, how we can interpret all of these findings.

First of all, I want to congratulate whoever put out the report. It's an excellently written report, and it's public. I'm going to use it in class. I wish the media would use it more often, because there are many misconceptions going around. It had lots of numbers, which I love.

I think I'm here for the part about the employment benefits and support measures evaluation. There has been a medium- to long-term evaluation of outcomes over five years for people who have gone through these programs.

Now, I have to say that I'm lost in acronyms. Maybe you're better than I am with the acronyms—I don't know—because although we define the same concepts, the literature has one name, and each

country has its own definition. So I'm going to try to be less confusing.

Again I'm going to talk about the evaluation of EBSM, employment benefits and support measures. We can split them into two, employment benefits and support measures.

Employment benefits are a bit more expensive. They refer directly to cash that we pay for individuals to go to training, or targeted wage subsidies, or creating jobs especially for the individuals who come to these programs. On the support measures—the other part of EBSM—I'm only going to talk about employment assistance services, which the literature also calls job search assistance.

Let me from the get-go mention that when we look at these evaluations, we as economists tend to focus on the efficiency goal of these evaluations. There is also an equity level, about which we say, perhaps these programs are in place to help the neediest, who otherwise would have access to no other types of services. While we acknowledge that, when we look at the hard numbers we are focused mostly on the efficiency side, and so we tend to ignore the equity part, although the other speakers have well addressed it, and we tend to see how much these programs are worth—what the bang for the buck is, if you want.

This long-term evaluation has found very large impacts for the skill development programs. These programs are for unemployed people who are on benefits and can qualify for training. We look at the impact on four types of outcomes: their earnings, their probability of being employed, their probability of being on EI, and the amount of benefits they claim on EI for one and up to five years after they have gone through this program.

We looked at the impact of the program in the early 2000s. What the evaluation found was very large impacts for the skills training programs, I think a bit larger than the literature finds, and for a couple of reasons.

One is that maybe the methodology is somewhat geared—and if I have time, I may explain why—towards finding higher impacts. That's one possibility that goes against the large impacts that were found.

Another possibility is that we looked at long-term impacts. Most evaluations look at a year or at most two years after the training happens, but here we go up to five years. There is an emerging literature that shows that longer-term impacts could be higher for people who have gone through these training programs.

So let us go back to the expensive programs. The skill development, the training, seems to have a very large impact. On targeted wage subsidies and earning supplements, there is mixed evidence. People seem to move on and off employment insurance in subsequent years. Maybe they learn how the system works; maybe being in a targeted wage subsidy program gives them enough labour market experience that they can claim benefits. That is a more mixed kind of evidence.

We have very bad evidence for self-employment programs, but the report acknowledges, and I agree, that we don't measure self-employment programs well, because we look at earnings outcomes, and the self-employed have other types of benefits—the way they file taxes, the way the tax incentives are, the way they build the business. We should look at the rate of success or failure of their self-employment business, because the outcomes that we look at currently are not very relevant for them.

• (0910)

Concerning job creation partnerships, the [*Inaudible—Editor*] employment created jobs. I hope there is not a typo, because while the report didn't talk much about it, there were huge employment benefits in years four and five. If it's not a typo, I think we really need to look into it. If it does have huge employment benefits, maybe it's even a contribution to the theoretical literature, because we tend to think that these job creation programs don't do too well. It's true, if we look at our own evaluation that I am talking about, they don't do too well in the first year or the second year; they pick up in year four and year five. And if this is true, and further evaluation shows that this is true, maybe we should put more money and more energy into these job creation partnerships, if truly the impact in years four and five is this high.

So these are the expensive ones. The cheaper one is the employment assistance service, the job search assistance programs where you just teach people how to write their resumé, how to dress for an interview, and what to say at the interview. It is the darling of all labour market programs because it's very cheap. It doesn't cost as much as to retrain a worker in a new occupation. You just put them in a classroom or one-on-one interventions and just tell them how to behave at an interview, and it's very successful. The impacts are modest. They are not huge, but they are very consistent all across time and easy to implement, easy to deliver.

So what has happened is that a lot of the provinces have switched their attention and focus on these employment assistance services because they work and they are cheap. I don't want to put them down too much, but I think we have to be very careful here because emerging evidence shows that, while they are effective, they are mostly displacement programs. They do not create new jobs; they do not benefit in terms of productivity. It's just that you direct an individual to a job that could have been occupied by another equally qualified individual, but this other individual gets displaced from the job because they didn't come to this particular program. So yes, they are cheap and they seem to be effective, but they do not create new jobs; they do not improve productivity.

So, again, it depends on what the government has in mind with all of these LMDA policies. If the goal is to increase productivity and to make the Canadian labour force more productive, then I think we should be careful about the displacement effects, which nobody has measured in the Canadian context because it is hard to measure them. But the literature seems to indicate that the skill development programs do build skills and do have an impact on productivity. Employers see that the skill is there and create new jobs to attract the skill. There is an extra layer that we do not address with evaluation because it talks about the productivity effects and general equilibrium effects that are more likely to be important for skill

development rather than for the cheaper employment assistance service.

I'll just say one more thing. In terms of the methodology of the report, we are worried that what we measure in this evaluation of the EBSM is a bit too high, because claimants can be selected into the different streams. Either they self-select or the case workers may select them because case workers are graded on managing for results, so there is an incentive for the case worker to take the best workers and assign them to treatment because then these workers will be successful. The problem is that the workers who get assigned to these treatments and who we measure the effects for might have been more successful regardless, because they are cream scheme; they are selected in this context.

That's why I think that all of these impacts are a bit too high. If we measured them properly in a random assignment trial, for instance, they would be a bit lower, but I still believe that the impacts are there and I think the point that I take home from this is that long-term impacts are even higher and that all of these programs seem to work in the long term.

I'll stop here.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Now we'll move on to our first round of questioning, of five minutes each.

Madame Groguhé.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for speaking to us about LMDAs.

Many things were said. When we are talking about matching jobs that have to be filled and individuals looking for a job, clearly skills development is important. That does not include today's literacy level in Canada. This is a significant problem which has already been pointed out to us. The statistics that we have been provided with are troubling.

My question is for you, Ms. Kenny.

When LMDAs are being renewed, how can literacy be accounted for within minority francophone communities? What would you recommend?

• (0915)

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: The language clauses we were talking about are very important for this. In some of our communities, such as in New Brunswick, the literacy levels are lower than those of anglophones. Therefore those are needs that must be accounted for.

We told you that positive measures have to be taken under the language clauses because we need to be assured that the province will work with francophone groups on everything that is related to the development of skills and literacy.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that \$7.5 million were included under Canada's official languages roadmap for 2013 to 2018 for literacy and skills development. However, to date there has been no program, no program criteria and no deadline. Absolutely nothing has been done on this since 2013.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Fine.

Given how important this issue is, I would not want an opportunity to be missed on the grounds that this is not relevant for individuals who are looking for a job. It is very important that we be aware of this issue. That is why I asked you a question about it.

You said that you had some concerns about how the negotiations on the implementation of the Canada Job Grant had been undertaken, and about the changes that were going to take place.

I would like to know if you have similar concerns about the LMDA negotiations. What kinds of pitfalls do you think must be avoided?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Yes, we do have similar fears. I would say that the language clauses are not all the same for each province. The situation can be different within these negotiations.

In terms of LMAs, we stated that the government made sure that it had firm language clauses which, I agree, was more difficult. The government did demonstrate leadership for the LMAs.

We want to make sure that just as much attention is paid to the language clauses in the LMDAs. That said, it is straightforward to include a language clause. However, there is no point in including a language clause if you do not make sure after the fact that those obligations have been met. Not only must there be a language clause, but there must also be accountability.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Witnesses have consistently raised accountability as a concern. Without accountability, how can one assess the outcome of the measures that were to be implemented?

What kinds of specific problems do you think minority francophone communities are dealing with in terms of labour market training? What recommendations would you make to this committee that would help us better meet your concerns?

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: Well, we already said this. Francophone communities must be included in the other consultations. They could then contribute to the development of these plans, which would mean they would not be crafted in a vacuum.

I can give you a concrete example of the kinds of difficulties one encounters.

Let us take for example a training program that is offered where there have to be 30 participants. It is possible that in our communities there may only be 5 or 7 participants. Under the Official Languages Act the requirement to take positive measures and offer equitable—not equal—service, would mean that the same training in French would be provided to those seven individuals. In other words, the needs and specific characteristics of each community have to be accounted for. One doesn't have to have 30 participants for a course. That is one concrete example I can give you.

Employment problems vary from one community to another. Earlier we were talking about literacy. One must also consider francophone immigrants and their need for extra literacy and skills development training.

In summary, we think that the key to success in terms of language issues truly lies, on the one hand, in firm language clauses, and, on the other hand, in rigorous follow-up to make sure that the obligations under the language clauses and the Official Languages Act have been met.

● (0920)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. McLeod, you have five minutes.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses as we continue a really important study on the renewal of the LMDA agreements.

I think we've heard consistently about the need for better data to understand what we need to do and where we need to go, and I think two themes have been emerging in the particular issue of the structure. One is to say that Stats Canada should be tasked with some enhanced market information versus what a couple of the witnesses proposed, a CIHI model.

Ms. Wood, you were calling it the institute for labour market information and were certainly encouraging that structure for enhancement as opposed to Stats Canada simply collecting a few more data fields. Could you talk about why you believe that's important?

Dr. Donna Wood: I think our research capacity in the labour market field is significantly deficient. I think what we've done with devolution is that we have moved the responsibility to each one of the provinces according to an accountability framework for these various different agreements, and we have not, as a country, been able to even develop research where we can compare one province to another. I think it's very important to do comparative research, particularly interprovincial research to understand what Ontario has put in place and its results compared to other provinces'. I don't think you can do that by having some more statistical models and data collected by Statistics Canada. I think you need a vibrant research institute that actually develops a research plan that would look at what the objectives are that we are trying to achieve with these programs.

That's why I think it's also very important that on a pan-Canadian basis, we not just do everything by these segmented bilateral agreements. Where are we going with our labour market programs? What are our overall strategic objectives? Then, how do the provinces achieve those through the particular defined agreements, and how are they accountable for them? I think you need a vibrant research institute that has a capacity to actually use the data that is collected and to actually increase administrative data that would go to a research institute and would not necessarily go to a Stats Canada institute.

I think that's why you need something like a CIHI equivalent that would put a research agenda in place for this policy area, that would collect the information that governments would require in order to understand where we're going with this particular policy area. I don't think some additional surveys in Stats Canada would do that.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Great. I appreciate that.

You also had some comments about the importance of mobility. Could you maybe flush out your thinking around mobility and how things could be structured? Obviously that is a significant concern of the federal government. These training programs are very insular to each province right now in terms of where people are taking their training and what they do with it. Could you talk a little bit more about that particular issue?

Dr. Donna Wood: I can. Part of what I'm saying here is that devolution took responsibility, where the federal government has a continuing significant responsibility, and moved the design and delivery to the provincial level. But I think in this policy area we need to have a national perspective on it so that Canadians can move across the country, and so that we know what services they can get as they move across the country. For me, the fact that we are one country means that this is why there has to be a national dimension to labour market policy. I say this because our research has been significantly weakened in this area. We don't know what the services and supports are from one province to another in a way that we would be able to compare, so that people would be able to easily move from one province to another.

I think that's why we need a national dimension to labour market policy, to enhance the mobility of workers as they move from one province to another. That would be an area of research. Indeed, if you had a research institute, they could focus on these sorts of issues.

• (0925)

The Chair: That's going to end that round of questioning. You only have 10 seconds left, and I would assume that you will not use those 10 seconds. Thank you.

Now we move on to Mr. Cuzner for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Thanks very much.

I'd like to go to Ms. Plesca first, and I apologize for the actions of our clerk here. She had told me that she was having trouble getting witnesses to appear and she really had to twist arms.

I'll tell you, the testimony today has been excellent with some really good points brought forward.

But I do want to go to Ms. Plesca. Are you suggesting that there would be significant benefit in extending the evaluation period past the five years, going to a seven-year evaluation period? Do you see merit in that?

Dr. Miana Plesca: Maybe not, because we already see years four and five with very high impacts. We did some analysis on U.S. data and it picks up up to year 10. We look 10 years down the road and you see the benefits persisting. But even year five is fabulous, I think, because we see that there are long-term impacts, and they pick up. They don't diminish—quite the opposite. They pick up. There are explanations for that, mostly related to occupational mobility.

People are going to switch occupations if the government gives them a hand in training. For the new ones, they are going to do better later on.

But my understanding is that now it's conducted across provinces, so the new evaluation that's coming out is going to be across all 10 provinces and maybe the territories, and it's going to have the comparative results that the previous questioner had asked about. That will be interesting as well, because you can have best practices. You see a province getting better impacts and we will wonder why. I think that's coming out in the next year's report.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: The other one you talked about was those who get training in life skills, interview preparation, resumé preparation, and all that. And it's a low-cost initiative. I'm failing to see the downside of giving people this. A lot of times those people who access those services are lacking in confidence and self-esteem, and it gives them that first opportunity. Maybe it prepares them to go into that interview so that an employer says, this person can fill this job. It's a building block. I'm not seeing where it's any great liability on the government's part to assist people in that realm.

Dr. Miana Plesca: Maybe I misspoke.

It's a very good program. What I don't want to see is it becoming the only program, especially if you think of an equity thing. Maybe these really are the unemployable people whom, in the absence of the job search assistance programs, would be stuck. So you do give them this first leg-up, which is good. Especially from an equity point of view, I would like to see it continued.

The trend that I think is happening is that it displaces the other programs. The report shows that across time most resources are going to go to these employment assistance services to the detriment of other programs. Again, it depends on what the government wants. If it's giving a leg up to unemployable individuals then it should focus all the resources on that. If it wants productivity increased from the whole economy then it shouldn't ignore the other aspects, in particular the skills development. Both are very important. They have slightly different macro purposes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Great. Thanks very much.

Ms. Wood, I want to thank you for this term “residual incoherence”. I've raised three young boys, so residual incoherence is something that I've dealt with extensively.

A voice: Yes, girls are no problem.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: From your experience and comments, what I drew is that fact there are still silos. Say you have that single mom who just gets out of a bad relationship and she's got two kids. She's receiving support from provincial community services with dental and medical support and some living allowance and what have you, and she takes a training program and there are supports there. Sometimes the cases that come to our office are the ones who are not willing to make that next step. The supports aren't there or the communication between the federal and the provincial levels of government aren't there. If she takes an entry-level job then she may have to surrender those medical benefits and supports. She exposes her kids by not having those types of support.

Can you comment on the ability of the provinces and the federal officials, through the LMDAs, to work together to provide her with that opportunity just past the training, that first and maybe even second job opportunity.

• (0930)

The Chair: Ms. Wood, you'll have to hold that response and comment, because Mr. Cuzner was quite lengthy with his preamble and he's well over his time already of five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Sorry, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll move on to Mr. Mayes for five minutes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today. Your testimony was very interesting and I think very valuable to the study that we're doing now.

Matthew Mendelsohn, director of the Mowat Centre, was a past witness who appeared before the committee. There was a report on the Mowat EI task force final report, and what it recommended was:

...federal funding streams (LMDAs, LMAs, Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, and the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers) be collapsed into a single transfer, funded from general revenues, and modelled on the LMAs. EI qualification should be eliminated as a precondition for accessing active employment measures.

I thought that was a very interesting comment in that report, and I just would like to get your comments and thoughts on that. One of the challenges—Madam Wood, I appreciated what you were saying—is trying to coordinate all of these things and to ensure.... I think our government has proven that we want to allow provinces and communities to set their priorities rather than the federal government doing so, but there is some accountability and there need to be some outcomes.

The reason that we introduced the Canada job grant was the fact that some of the provinces were not having good outcomes. I might say that Quebec has done very well in outcomes, but there were some challenges where there were some labour skill shortages in some of the regions in this country, so they needed to be addressed. We heard that.

I've been on this committee for a number of years and we heard that in our study of various regions, various sectors of the economy. They said they had some real skill shortages. We needed to respond to that need and come up with some idea by working with the employer, the provinces, and with the federal government.

Could you maybe just comment on some of the remarks I've just made? Thank you.

Madam Wood, do you want to start, please?

Dr. Donna Wood: Yes, thank you very much.

I think what we've done with the LMDAs and the LMAs is that we have sorted out, quite significantly, federal-provincial roles and responsibilities, meaning that the provinces have that design and delivery responsibility. I think we need to take that to the next step, to just improve the coherence—one more step—in two ways.

Number one is to not have the four separate agreements that you just described. I think I do agree that these agreements should somehow or other be collapsed into one agreement that has overall objectives and goals, without their individual accountability arrangements, because otherwise the provinces would be operating in silos as they try to manage these four separate agreements. So that's the first bit of coherence. I think they could and should be collapsed into one funding agreement.

The other coherence element that I would bring into that is, I would also ask and suggest that the residual federal programming for youth and persons with disabilities be part of that coherent transfer. That would bring another piece of coherence to it.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Can I cut you off just to hear a comment from Madam Kenny, please.

Ms. Marie-France Kenny: I'm not specialized in labour market....

[*Translation*]

I am here to tell you about language obligations. Whether there is one agreement because everything has been streamlined or whether there are ten, the important thing for us is the language clauses.

[*English*]

Mr. Colin Mayes: Okay.

Madam Plesca.

Dr. Miana Plesca: I think employers complain a lot about skill shortages. I think the government listens maybe a bit too much. The evidence is that any skill shortages are localized to certain occupations, certain industries, including, of course, the petroleum sector in Alberta. But the labour market should sort this out. It takes a bit of a time. IT has a great shortage right now.

I understand that the government's response would be to increase the funding for the skills development program, which I like. But, on the other hand, at some point you say, "Why don't employers go and train the workers that they need? Why should the government intervene?" I'm not convinced that we have enough evidence to say that there is market failure, that the government is responsible to train employers to resolve skill shortages.

I think employers are a bit too risk averse and should train more themselves. Having said that, sure, more training would be beneficial. The problem is that you don't have a crystal ball to know what occupation and industry will be in demand five years from now, or even two years from now, so it's a bit tricky.

If you want me to elaborate more, I will. I just don't know how much time we have.

• (0935)

The Chair: No, thank you.

Dr. Miana Plesca: I have lots of stories about the skill shortage.

The Chair: That's the end of that round.

Now I should mention to the witnesses, and I did mean to say this during Mr. Cuzner's questioning, that for the working of the committee I have to keep fair tight rein on the time. So any of the answers that you're not able to give today, you should be fully aware you can submit to the committee after this meeting. You can also send in any other submissions that you wish to as we continue this study. Feel free to do that, or if you can work it into your answers here today, please do so.

Now we move on to Madam Sims, for five minutes.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Thank you very much.

I think it's very clear—and not much of this is being denied by anybody—that the data we're using to inform some of our decisions around training, immigration, or any of the other issues, really seems to be not present. I was interested that today in the media we're reading stories of how a new skill stream is going to be expedited for Canada in the immigration process, through the LMO, using that as data. I keep thinking that we've had hundreds and thousands of violations of those LMOs. I am not sure why so many were given out while people are being laid off work. Canadians are being laid off work while at the same time when we get to LMDAs....

Let me just reiterate, having well over 350,000 temporary foreign workers, and many of them in jobs that Canadians could be doing and are willing to do, that's what they have come out and said, not just to us but to government, that it is a major concern that we are lacking data.

I've heard a different perspective from Ms. Wood today as to how she thinks that data really needs to be compiled if we want it to really serve us well, and the need for the provinces and the territories to work together, as well as the federal government. But the bit that I want to focus on today is the access to and administration of the LMDAs. I don't think any of us around this table are unaware of some pitfalls. We are hearing from some of the provinces on this. When the Canada job grant was announced, especially, there was this kind of guttural response, visceral I would say, asking what are you doing? We've just got our infrastructure working and now we feel under attack again.

We do need a revised framework. One of the things we keep hearing is that fewer than half of unemployed Canadians have access to EI funds and, therefore, LMDA money. I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on that. I'd like to start with Ms. Wood, and then I have other questions.

Dr. Donna Wood: I think that we have these four segmented agreements to the following effect: this pot of money is for people who are EI-eligible, and there are fewer people EI-eligible; this pot of money is for non-EI; this pot of money is for disabled persons; and this pot of money is for older workers. These are unemployed and marginally employed folks who need access to a wide variety of programs. What the provinces are doing when somebody comes in the door is that they're trying to provide those services in a seamless way, and then behind the scenes are trying to figure out how they use these various pots of money, as well as provincial money, in order to be able to provide the services to the people coming in the door.

I do think that a more streamlined federal-provincial funding mechanism would be useful. That's got to do with what the services are for the people coming in the door. I think we also need to have a more robust research stream, and particularly a comparative research stream. That would be a very significant role for the federal government, but which is not in place at the moment.

The provinces are generally fairly highly resistant to being compared with one another, which is why I think the labour market programming needs to be done in a collaborative fashion between the federal and provincial governments. They can agree to some overall goals, for which they would then be willing to provide information and data. They could be compared and judged one from the other by using a system like benchmarking. That requires administrative data, not the kind of data that you would collect from Statistics Canada. That's why I think we need a more robust research mechanism, particularly one that is federally led. The provinces themselves would then be responsible for the array of programs within a more streamlined funding mechanism.

• (0940)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

My next question is, do you think that only people who are on this very restricted EI right now should get access to training, or should training be opened up to people who are not on EI as well?

Dr. Donna Wood: I absolutely do believe training should be opened up, yes. That's what the LMDAs were providing. That was a wonderful opportunity when the LMDAs came on board because the provinces did not have the funding to be able to do that kind of training. Certainly, that was the difficulty when the Canada job grant was offered, is that provinces had now had the ability to offer training to non-EI clients, and these are the people coming in the front door. So they were very concerned about the Canada job grant because it was taking away the funding they were making available for training.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That's the end of that round.

Mr. Butt, you're our last questioner. Go ahead, for five minutes.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for joining us today.

My questions will be for Professor Wood and Professor Plesca.

Do you have any examples of best practices that you can share with the committee? Are there provinces, are there sectors, are there areas that are doing a much better job of training and retraining, and having higher success rates in actually finding people employment opportunities across the country? Are there provinces that we can learn from, that other provinces should be emulating?

Professor Plesca, do you want to start?

Dr. Miana Plesca: All right, sir, I will.

I think evidence shows that very expensive programs also have very large benefits, so if the training is very intense, very targeted, and you pay a lot of money for the best training providers, the results are equally high. The evidence I know of is from the U.S. I don't know of any best practice evidence from Canada.

I would say one more thing, though, and it's about the Canada job grant, in some sense. The federal government, I think their idea was the literature shows that employers know better how to train and get better results from training, maybe because they select workers who would have a better impact from training. But I think there is some evidence emerging, and we should pay attention to it, that if we properly measure government training, the one that LMDAs do, their impacts are pretty high as well. I think the literature has mismeasured the impacts of training mostly because of the occupations that are associated.

I'm with the provinces on this. It's not necessarily that the employers always know better. The governments do a decent job, on average. Again, I don't know best practices, but on average, the governments don't do as poorly as the literature had seemed to indicate in the past. It's not the fault of the government. It's just that the federal government is coming up with this idea. The literature seemed to think employer training is better, but maybe not. Maybe government training is as efficient.

Mr. Brad Butt: Professor Wood, would you like to comment?

Dr. Donna Wood: I'll make my comments in terms of best practices between provinces in outcomes of the programming, and then best practices in governance.

In terms of best practices between provinces in outcomes of the programming, we don't know. The reports we have do not allow us to compare provinces' best practices—whether Alberta's results are better than Manitoba's results, for example—because we do not do a good job of comparative research within the Canadian context. This is part of what I would see a Canadian CIHI equivalent doing in the labour market area, allowing us thereby to compare results from one province to another. But it would have to be done as a collaborative process, where provinces agreed to what they were trying to do so they could be compared with each other. It could not be federally imposed.

That's on the one side—comparing results. This is why we need this kind of research.

On the governance element, that is the comparative research that I am doing. When I'm looking at governance, I'm comparing provinces on such practices as do they have single windows and do single windows produce better results? That's one example. For example, Quebec and Alberta have a single window, where their citizens walk into the same door and get access to an array of services.

Another element that I'm doing some comparative work on is comparing to what degree they are contracting their services. For example, is B.C. going to be getting a better result because most of their employment services are contracted through third-party delivery agents versus civil servants providing those services? B. C. is the one doing most of that, whereas other provinces are holding some of the services in-house.

Another element is that different provinces have different approaches to partnerships. Quebec, of course, is the leader on that one, in how their labour market partners' council works.

Therefore, when I talk about governance, that is what my research is on. I'm trying to compare provinces on the governance element. I'm about 60% of the way through and have described to you some of the themes I'm going to use. But the bottom line is that I think it's imperative to compare our provinces. Provinces are highly resistant to being compared, but if we want good labour market results, they need to be willing to be compared, we need to have a framework so they can be compared, and we need to do the research and analysis to generate information so we can improve how we do labour market programming.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you very much. That wraps up our first hour.

On behalf of the committee, I want to thank all of the people who have been witnesses here today and part of our panel. Certainly, it has been very worthwhile in hearing some of the very practical thinking that has gone into your testimony this morning. We thank you for that.

We'll recess while we set up for the second panel.

●

_____ (Pause) _____

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● (0950)

The Chair: We will resume our committee hearing today. For the second hour we have Mr. Guido Contreras, the associate director of research, policy and strategic partnerships with the Rupertsland Institute. Also, as an individual witness, we have Julie Drolet, an associate professor at the University of Calgary.

Each of you will have up to 10 minutes for your presentations. Mr. Contreras, perhaps you'd like to begin, please.

Mr. Guido Contreras (Associate Director, Research, Policy and Strategic Partnerships, Rupertsland Institute): Thank you.

I wish to thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before you today. Renewing the labour market development agreements and the associated suite of programs is a key policy piece not only for the provinces but also for the aboriginal communities.

I'm the associate director of research, policy, and strategic partnerships for the Rupertsland Centre. I work very closely with the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research at the University of Alberta. The RCMR was established in 2011 and is the only research institution in Canada devoted to Métis issues.

I'm also engaged on aboriginal labour market programming issues at both the national and provincial levels, and I was a contributor to the recent RCMR publication *Painting a Picture of the Métis Homeland*.

I will concentrate my comments on the relationship with governments and particularly with the provinces on skills development and education. I will make a few general comments at the end of my remarks, and I will begin with a very short synthesis of the policy environment review at present.

Although the Constitution of Canada, as you are aware, recognizes Métis as one of the aboriginal peoples of Canada, neither federal nor provincial governments have wanted to take jurisdictional responsibility for Métis historically. Generally speaking, they have preferred to take the following three main stances:

First, whenever they can, they prefer to treat Métis as regular citizens and avoid Métis-specific programming altogether.

Second, where Métis are able to access programs it is usually because they are included under a pan-aboriginal umbrella.

Third, with very rare exceptions, aboriginal programs accessed by Métis follow a first nations paradigm, and are specifically not designed for Métis.

Of course, the situation is not black and white, and there are significant provincial variations in the policy environment. However, by and large, these are variations in degree within the three metrics.

Lastly, lately there's a general realization or a growing realization that Métis can no longer be ignored, and this is driven largely by the success of Métis court actions. We anticipate these judgments will ultimately have a positive impact on the policy-making environment.

The Métis have organized at the national level, but are mainly mostly provincial organizations, and whether the funding is federal or provincial, the programs are inevitably delivered at the provincial level by provincial Métis organizations.

We learned three things from this study: Métis organizations don't have the capacity to engage in policy development anywhere near the extent of the provinces or the federal government; secondly, policy is driven by needs, and the Métis organizations do what they need to do to maintain funding; and lastly, they operate in a silo, and there is significant political disunity at the national level, and that causes a great deal of concern.

In terms of litigation and skills development, a great part of the need for aboriginal labour market programming stems from poor secondary school outcomes, which are characteristics of most aboriginal peoples, though less so for Métis.

Jurisdictionally, education and labour market programs are considered a provincial area of responsibility, and you may assume that the provinces would be the main interlocutor for Métis organizations. This is not the case. The Government of Canada remains the main funder of skills development for programs, and these programs work to a different degree in different provinces.

In terms of education, for example, we noted that in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and British Columbia, Métis organizations have been included at some level in consultations and policy development. In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario, governments in these provinces contribute to fund education institutions, but this is not so in Alberta. So there's a big gap here. There's a big difference from province to province.

● (0955)

Funding for innovative programs for Métis students in K through 12, which is a precondition for a successful entry into the labour market, has been meagre and sporadic at best. There are very few

examples of provincially supported education programs anywhere in the Métis homeland.

I'd like to pay attention to the LMDAs and the labour market development agreements and their impacts on aboriginal peoples. I would like to focus on the Métis homeland, an area that extends from Ontario to British Columbia.

I want to begin by noting two points. First, the federal government funding targeting aboriginal employment and training was not transferred to the provinces under the LMDAs. Instead, at the time, Canada entered into agreements with representative organizations from the aboriginal peoples to deliver the components of the federal program. From day one of the devolution exercise, there were two streams to this particular program: one to the provinces and territories, and one to the aboriginal peoples.

Second, from this perspective, the important thing is that the relations with provinces and territories be maintained. We are not that concerned about the framework of the program but rather how we create relationships with the provinces to access and work with them in the programs.

There is a very unequal relationship between these two streams of programming. If you look at the language in the programs you will notice that the LMDAs have no termination date. The aboriginal agreements, on the other hand, were initially set for three years and need to be renewed every five years.

My argument is that devolution was intended to be permanent for provinces and territories and contingent for the aboriginal programs.

Today, federal dollars still fund two labour market program delivery systems. The federal government should be applauded for this. Aboriginal organizations are in the best position to design and deliver programs that the Métis need. This is a key principle that everyone should understand and uphold. Provinces, rather than working through the aboriginal labour market delivery agents, prefer to deliver programs through their own administrative and departmental structures.

The risk is that the practice may foster duplication. Some of the provinces and ASETS holders work in isolation and at cross purposes with each other.

In this regard, the LMDAs contain an aboriginal specific clause calling for the delivery of integration for aboriginal programs. As promising as this particular clause is, there are two problems with it. Number one is that there is no requirement, under the joint committee, to involve representatives of the aboriginal organizations or aboriginal peoples, and ASETS holders. Number two is that the clause was never actually implemented.

We know that the interaction, in terms of education, varies across the provinces and so does the training and how the provinces have devolved this.

I'll give you three examples. In Saskatchewan, the Gabriel Dumont Institute reports, both from provincial and Métis officials, that there is a very strong collaborative relationship. In British Columbia, a provincial government official stated that there was little awareness of what was taking place from one province to the next in relation to the Métis. In Alberta, the provincial government has tried unsuccessfully for the past 12 years to develop an aboriginal workforce strategy. It's now been pushed to March or April of 2015. I'm involved in this. We don't think there is a chance that will happen.

It's perhaps because of this policy vacuum that we know Alberta is developing duplicate services. They recently announced a new aboriginal employment service for Calgary. The city already has two centres, one for first nations and one for Métis, which act in tandem to provide status-blind services to all aboriginal clients in the city of Calgary. We don't know what the service delivery gap is and the players were not clear on this.

• (1000)

I have three very quick recommendations. Moving forward, I would like to make these in relation to the devolution of the labour market programs to provinces and their relationship to aboriginal peoples.

First, we need to continue to support aboriginal delivery of aboriginal programs by aboriginal peoples. By that, I mean the first nations, the Métis, and Inuit peoples of Canada.

Second, I believe that this committee needs to encourage the provinces to work with ASETS holders and representatives of the aboriginal peoples, and to eliminate duplication. The provinces should discuss proposed aboriginal labour market initiatives with representatives of the aboriginal communities.

Third, the provinces should be required to put some skin in the game, if you will allow my colloquialism. If the Government of Canada is transferring funding, ideally, a portion of that funding should be targeted at aboriginal peoples and delivered through ASETS holders as a common delivery agent for all aboriginal labour market programming.

Thank you.

• (1005)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Drolet, for 10 minutes.

Dr. Julie Drolet (Associate Professor, University of Calgary, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee.

I would like to thank you for inviting me today to speak in the context of the study of labour market development agreements. My remarks will largely relate to my recent work as a researcher, where I led a knowledge synthesis study on the role of employers in bridging newcomers' absorption and integration into the Canadian labour market, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council this past year.

The project was undertaken by a research team affiliated with the Pathways to Prosperity partnership, a national research alliance of

university, community, and government partners dedicated to fostering welcoming communities and promoting the integration of immigrants across Canada.

The primary purpose of the synthesis was to provide a broad overview of current research and to document key components in order to identify specific gaps based on existing research evidence. The methodology included a systematic scoping review of a wide range of peer-reviewed and grey literature resources and methodologies. Published studies are found in journal articles, book and book chapters, dissertations, and background materials, as well as research commissioned by government departments and other stakeholder agencies, research institutions, think tanks, and employer and business-related organizations. In addition, 188 e-mails were sent to employers, employer councils, and settlement agencies for additional resources.

Because the Canadian-born workforce is aging, baby boomers are retiring and the number of young workers entering the workforce is declining, there is also a growing skills and labour shortage amidst global competition for talent. As skilled Canadian-born workers are becoming increasingly difficult to find, immigrants will play a more significant role in Canada's labour force. Governments in Canada have been taking steps to address these issues by formulating and implementing changes to the immigration program to make it more employer-oriented. Employers are also being invited to participate in skill training initiatives such as the Canada job grant. In this context there is a need to consider employer practices and behaviour that will help to close the skills gap.

Employers are key actors in the immigration system. Employers are actively encouraged to hire newcomers in Canada, yet newcomers face challenges from the lack of recognition of their foreign education and work credentials, and this hard reality is forcing a re-examination of the long-standing federal attachment to the human capital model with a view to achieving earlier labour market integration. Greater and more direct employer involvement in the immigration programs may call for new approaches in the immigration integration continuum and strategies to support the capacities of employers to engage. For example, the express entry system will provide a new opportunity for an increased role for employers, in part to facilitate a better match between skilled immigrants and the labour market.

The federal and provincial governments, the community of employers, and service providers all have roles to play in increasing employers' capacity to hire and recruit immigrants.

The federal government's role in the immigration program has a tremendous impact on employers in terms of making decisions on who is admitted to Canada, including foreign workers and foreign students. In this context, immigration policies and programs affect employers' hiring practices in the workplaces and the ability to attract, retain, and integrate newcomers.

There is evidence in the literature reviewed of the international race for skilled labour in the new knowledge economy that makes it necessary for immigration policies and programs to attract the skilled workers that the economy needs, as well as to offer and provide a desirable future for immigrants. The literature describes the pressure to change immigration policies to better reflect labour market realities. The literature also suggests that immigration policies are trying to address common barriers faced by newcomers. The provincial nominee program, Canadian experience class, temporary foreign worker, and express entry, are all prominently featured in the literature with respect to the supply and development of skills.

The synthesis found a lack of evidence of employer engagement in the provision of settlement services, notwithstanding the substantial employer's stake in hiring and optimizing immigrant workers. Employer involvement in settlement has not been extensively or systematically studied, and there has been no attempt to carefully analyze and disseminate best practices in this field. There is a large gap in the literature on skills implementation in the labour market from the perspectives of employers.

•(1010)

Although the literature identifies difficulties that employers face when hiring skilled immigrant workers, there is little information directly from the employers' perspective or information on what employers are actually doing in the workplace. The literature mostly focuses on barriers that arise in the workplace and what employers could be doing to address those barriers. The online literature clearly articulates a number of motivations and value propositions for hiring newcomers and foreign workers.

The labour market development agreements enable provinces and territories to support a wide range of unemployed and employed individuals with employment services, skills development, upgrading, work experience, and more.

Comprehensive approaches to labour market training are needed to develop the skills of low-skilled workers who are already in the labour market and to increase the labour market participation of groups that remain under-represented such as immigrants, persons with disabilities, aboriginal people, youth, and older workers.

With the gaps in the literature, it is critical to better understand how employers and employer organizations foster meaningful employment and settlement for immigrants. Further research is needed to explore the employers' perspective on how they assist in the integration of immigrants and what benefits or challenges are faced by employers in this process.

Research on good practices by leading employers and by small and medium-sized employers should be undertaken to share successful practices that can be of value to other employers. Immigrant employment councils, community organizations, government, and other stakeholders must look to employer leaders for meaningful immigrant employment solutions in urban and small city contexts. Research is needed to better understand how decent work that provide living wages, benefits, and social protection mechanisms can be made available to more workers in the mainstream labour market and in immigrant communities. Finally, research is needed on employer-initiated programs aimed at helping employees and their families to settle as well as promoting a more receptive

local environment. Employers' role vis-à-vis newcomers' families has yet to be considered.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your presentation.

Now we move on to our round of questioning.

I think I have it right.

Madam Sims, you're going first.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you.

I want to thank both of you for coming and appearing before the committee and giving up your valuable time but, more important than that, giving your valuable insight and your input on this whole topic.

As you've heard, you know, there is a lot of concern about who can and who cannot access the LMDAs as they are. We also know that there are going to be some changes.

So, my question to you first, Ms. Drolet, is this: what kind of consultations should take place with the provinces and territories in preparation for the renewal of the LMDAs?

Dr. Julie Drolet: I'd like to speak in the context of the recent study that we conducted—

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Yes, absolutely.

Dr. Julie Drolet: —and I think that's where there is a need to involve employers and employer groups, but also to take a holistic approach. I think there's also value in including post-secondary institutions in that and thinking about longer term perspectives, employers, settlement agencies, and looking at all of these stakeholders because I think a comprehensive approach is required.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Do you believe—I just want to push on that one a little bit—that representatives of employee groups or organizations advocating for workers should also be part of this process?

Dr. Julie Drolet: I think it would be worthwhile to hear from them as well.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Okay, thank you very much.

What do you think about expanding the apprenticeship programs as a means of best matching skills to labour shortages? Who would benefit from training focused on employers' actual needs? Is this something you see as equally advantageous to all parties, or will it only benefit one?

•(1015)

Dr. Julie Drolet: I'm not sure that I can comment on that question.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: What about you, Mr. Contreras?

Mr. Guido Contreras: I do think that everyone should contribute, every sector of society. In terms of apprenticeship, aboriginal apprentices' representation is significantly more than the mainstream average, particularly for women. The only caveat I have is the assumption, or for anyone to assume, that aboriginals may only want to be involved in the trades when in fact they want to be involved in every aspect of the labour market.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

We had a witness here earlier, Matthew Mendelsohn, who suggested that qualification for EI be eliminated as a pre-condition for LMDA access, that with so few people being able to actually get on to EI, it was too restrictive. He suggested that all federal funding streams: LMDAs, LMAs, funding of persons with disabilities, as well as the targeted initiatives for older workers all be collapsed into a single transfer. Would you be able to comment on an alternative like that? Do you support that model or do you have some other suggestions?

Dr. Julie Drolet: I'm not sure that I can comment, but perhaps in terms of providing other suggestions, I do think that given the number of people who are unable to access those benefits, there is a need to rethink how it could be made more accessible.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you.

You talked quite a bit about integration of new immigrants. Recently, at least at my office and at those of many MPs I've talked to, we've been very concerned about how some of the services that would help in that integration are going to disappear. If you were looking for a model way to integrate newcomers into the Canadian landscape, what kind of infrastructure or support systems do we need to have in place so they can get on their feet and also become fully contributing members to build Canada into a truly beautiful nation that it can be?

Dr. Julie Drolet: In my opinion, I believe there remains an important role to be played by the immigrant sector agencies in providing settlement and integration services. At the same time, we're also seeing more mainstream organizations becoming more inclusive and promoting welcoming communities across Canada. We see that with the development of the local immigration partnerships across the country.

Now we're starting to look at what this might look like. As these partnerships evolve and further develop and are strengthened, I think that's where we need to understand.... Our view is that we need to look to the literature to understand what's been known, what's been published. As we take stock of that evidence, there is a need for more collaboration and looking at how these partnerships can be strengthened, moving ahead.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Thank you very much.

I will pass them over to you, Chair.

The Chair: That's a wise choice.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

And thank you to the panellists for your presentations this morning.

Mr. Contreras, I was most interested in the points that you made and particularly your opening comments and closing recommendations. It seems to me to be a bit of a contradiction. You were saying that there were three items there to start with. One of them was that the Métis were treated as regular citizens and the other was that the Métis were treated as following the first nation paradigm.

Can you just elaborate on that, and is that not a contradiction? It seems to me that being treated as regular citizens, you'd want a

separate Métis stream in that area. But if you were saying that Métis are following the first nation paradigm, and yet they're being treated as regular citizens....

The Métis in my area, and I have a lot of them in western Manitoba, are certainly very entrepreneurial in their development of small businesses and businesses in general. In fact, Mr. Goodon in Boissevain was one of the first recognized Métis in Canada for business person of the year when they brought that award out. I had the opportunity of dealing with that when I was an MLA in Manitoba. They're very entrepreneurial and yet you're saying that there are organizational capacities in developing policy that you can't compete with the provinces in regards to.

I just saw that there seemed to be some contradictions. Also in areas being developed from Ontario to B.C., there are provincial and territorial opportunities there as opposed to aboriginal and Métis streams.

So are you wanting to be in the aboriginal and Métis streams there, or would you sooner be in the provincial and territorial ones? Can you just clarify some of that for me?

• (1020)

Mr. Guido Contreras: I began by saying that our study indicated.... And we researched and did talk to people. We did primary and secondary research and interviews with policy players from Ontario west. What we found is that everyone agrees, particularly within the aboriginal communities and the Métis communities, to the extent that they are part of a program designed for aboriginals, that it's usually a pan-aboriginal program.

Provinces and territories and the federal government—I think this has been discussed for many years—have always tended to relinquished having any direct relationship with the Métis to create Métis specific programs. The final analysis is that when Métis access these programs, it is usually in the context of a pan-aboriginal umbrella and those umbrellas are often first nation centric. I can give you examples of that.

A recent government report in Alberta on the priorities that the LMA committee developed tells us that about 95% of all the cases they cite are regarding first nations. The language is aboriginal but it's first nation specific. I can table that report if the committee wants. I have a copy of it here.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Well, thank you.

Ms. Drolet, you spoke of the Pathways to Prosperity synthesis, the conference. I believe you referred to systematic scoping reviews on the studies. I'm just wondering, of the study that was done, what involvement would there have been of the Métis? Was there any involvement from your end that you know about of the Métis people in regard to the Pathways to Prosperity programming and conferences you've put forward?

Mr. Contreras can add to this as well.

Dr. Julie Drolet: Yes. The research team that led this knowledge synthesis project were all members of the alliance of Pathways to Prosperity, which represents approximately 200 academic collaborators and also a number of partners across the country, represented from various immigrant sectors, community organizations, non-profits, and also various levels of government, at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.

I'm not sure that I can comment on the membership of Pathways to Prosperity, because it does represent many hundreds of people across the country. It's a seven-year partnership that's funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's partnership program. The members of our team included representatives from two immigrant sector organizations in British Columbia, one from Kamloops and one from Prince George. It also involved many student research assistants and graduate students—about seven of them in total—and also a senior policy adviser from Pathways to Prosperity and an academic librarian. That was the composition of our team.

In terms of our team that led the study, there was no representation of Métis people in that particular initiative.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Now we'll move on to Mr. Cuzner for five minutes.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: I'd like to get two questions in, and I'd like to carry on from where Mr. Maguire was coming from, because I don't know if I'm any clearer.

Your recommendation is that there be an aboriginal component in each provincial LMDA. I thought that was already there. Are you looking at a specific percentage of the LMDA to be identified for aboriginal?

But more so, you're specifically asking that Métis be identified in that. So it's more the fact that Métis should be identified with first nations. Is that sort of where you are with it?

•(1025)

Mr. Guido Contreras: Sure, I'll clarify that.

The LMAs contain a clause that calls on the joint committee, federal and provincial officials, to work together and integrate their respective programs with the aboriginal communities. The argument that we made and that came from this particular research is that even though the clause is there, it was never enacted. That's number one.

Number two, the clause itself does not contain any mediation for the provinces, territories, and federal government to incorporate or include aboriginal representatives in that particular committee or in that particular discussion. So that is the number one part of this.

The second part of it is that whenever provinces choose to be involved in aboriginal programmings—and the LMDAs and the LMAs all contain aboriginal language in there. So we don't work at counter-purposes to each other, it would be appropriate for the provinces to invite and consult with the aboriginal communities, and to the extent that is possible, deliver services to the communities through the existing agents we have in place. For the past 16, 17, 18 years the aboriginal community has been painstakingly trying to develop a labour market service delivery structure that has hundreds of delivery points across the west, Ontario to the west.

It's counterintuitive that the provinces are not using this structure and consulting with aboriginal communities to the extent that they should.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner: Thank you.

Ms. Drolet, I appreciate your concern around the sharing of the information. I think it was one of the last or second-last studies we did. It's like *Groundhog Day*: we continue to do a very similar study all the way through here.

Testimony that was pretty surprising was when the Canadian Federation of Medical Students, the CMA, and the Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada all have sort of different groups of numbers as to the need to develop more seats in medical institutions, in universities across the country. It's sort of crazy that we're not getting that exchange of information.

But you had mentioned the professional organizations and having a little more skin in the game. You've seen some, like the Canadian Dental Association, are doing a good job of recognition of foreign credentials. Do you see that those professional organizations should have more skin in the game too? Are there many of those that just aren't getting it done as well?

Dr. Julie Drolet: What we've found in the literature was that for many newcomers and immigrants, there continue to be concerns about having their credentials and work experience recognized in Canada.

We're starting to see some work happening in those areas with the provincial regulators. In terms of our findings from the literature review, that continues to be an area where there's substantial work under way.

Again, there are many different facets to understanding these issues and there is a need to try to bring these various perspectives together. I think it does very much vary by different fields and what they look like. It then has different associations that are accredited sometimes at a provincial level. As a social worker, that's how it happens. There are different processes involved around who's required to be accredited or not in that sense.

The Chair: Mr. Armstrong.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Contreras, you talked a lot about access to the programs in different provinces, particularly out west. Are there provinces out west that have some best practices that you've experienced working with the Métis population? Are there some provinces that do a better job using the LMDA funds to support first nations and Métis access to the programs?

Mr. Guido Contreras: I think so. What we found is that in British Columbia, for example, there is a very close working relationship between the Métis nation of British Columbia and provincial officials. As a result of that, they're working on expanding the K-12 program and targeting a lot of the best practices to the K to 12 level, and I think that is a best practice.

In Ontario, for example, the provincial government entered into a relationship with the Métis nation of Ontario. The officials are very proud of that relationship. It led to the development of a Métis studies chair at the University of Ottawa, and I think those are very good practices.

In terms of access to the labour market, there is a really good case in Saskatchewan where the GDI, Gabriel Dumont Institute, has been working very closely with the provincial government. As a result of that, they have developed a number of synchronicities, a number of programs. They're targeting Métis people, or aboriginal people in general, with very good results. So there are some best practices in the province.

My argument is that it's uneven. Someone mentioned earlier that provinces tend to work in silos and so best practices are not necessarily copied and transferred from one jurisdiction to the next one.

• (1030)

Mr. Scott Armstrong: We talked about when devolution took place in 1996. We moved forward with negotiations with the provinces, completing them as recently as in the last couple of years. There were two tracks. One track, of course, was the LMDAs to the provinces, and then we had the ASETS programs, and others.

Do you find that some provinces are more restrictive in trying to use LMDA funds to fund first nations programs or Métis programs, based on the fact there's another stream coming from the federal government? Would that be your opinion?

Mr. Guido Contreras: By and large, the provinces do take seriously the need to provide services to all of their citizens. In terms of policy development, some provinces are doing much better.

I note for instance that the Alberta government, since 2000 when they produced a fairly good document called "Strengthening Relationships", has tried to create an aboriginal workforce strategy. They have gone through many different consultative stages and developmental stages, and then nothing has taken place since. Now that's 12, 14 years back. It's way too long for anyone to implement a labour market program.

That is not to say Alberta is not doing what they need to do to actually provide services. I'm saying that in relation to targeting these particular services through a very structured policy drive, it hasn't happened.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I'm going to switch gears here and talk a little bit more about what Ms. Sims is discussing in regard to expanded eligibility and access to the program.

We have heard from some employers that they would like to see it expanded to capture a greater number of workers. The problem that we need to discuss then is that since the LMDAs are funded solely from premiums from employers and employees, can you square the circle there?

Should we expand the programs using funds that many of the clients won't have contributed to? Do you have any comments on that?

Mr. Guido Contreras: Are you asking me?

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Either of you two.

Dr. Julie Drolet: I don't think I'll comment on that. It's not my area.

Mr. Guido Contreras: Everyone should have ample access to all Canadian programs.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: We should review the funding formula and look at access to try to capture more people, and take a look at that.

Mr. Guido Contreras: Absolutely.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: I wanted to get some support on that.

One of the recommendations is that the provinces need to put some skin in the game. Can you expand on that? What do you mean when you talk about provinces putting some skin in the game, Mr. Contreras?

Mr. Guido Contreras: Sure. The data hasn't been properly set up. There are tonnes of problems with the provincial data.

I think if money is being directed to aboriginal communities, the provinces should be asked to report on how they are investing it in aboriginal programs, not only in terms of the investment but also of their consultative stages and how they are seeking to integrate provincial programs with aboriginal labour market programs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Brahmi.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tarik Brahmi (Saint-Jean, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Ms. Drolet.

I would like to know whether, as part of your studies, you focused specifically on the aspect of the language clauses that we talked about earlier with the previous witnesses, that is, as concerns francophone minorities in Canada.

Did you come upon anything in that respect in your research?

• (1035)

Ms. Julie Drolet: As part of this study, in which we conducted a literature review, we did not consider this aspect.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: All right.

So I imagine that when you study the obstacles that immigrants face, language emerges as one of the obstacles to their labour market integration.

That means that you study the language aspect in general, but not the minority or majority aspect. Is that the case?

Ms. Julie Drolet: Yes, exactly.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: All right, perfect.

Did you study another aspect, namely, accountability?

I know that you studied the fact that there are a great many programs and agreements. Have you determined whether the federal government is capable of assessing each of the different programs, given that it deals with different provinces that use different methods?

What did you find out?

Ms. Julie Drolet: We did not focus on this aspect in the findings of the study or the literature review.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: If you did not consider it, that means that provincial accountability is not a problem. Is that what you are saying?

Ms. Julie Drolet: No.

It is just that, as concerns my presentation today and what we learned from the literature review, this topic did not come up as part of the project.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: All right.

I would like to discuss another aspect that gave rise to a situation that I personally experienced.

When I immigrated through regular immigration channels and dealt with the officials at Immigration Canada, I remember clearly that they told me in no uncertain terms to go to the offices of the department of Human Resources and Skills Development to get a social insurance number. Then they guided me toward the Canada Revenue Agency, where an official took the time to explain to me clearly that I had to fill out a tax return and how to go about doing so. It was very directive.

As concerns employment, I personally had no connection, that is, during the immigration process, I had the impression that it was considered very important that I receive my social insurance number and that I pay my taxes. However, I also had the impression that it was not very important for me to get work.

Is that an aspect that you studied? Should we grant the same kind of importance to that aspect as to explaining to an immigrant that he or she must pay his or her taxes?

Ms. Julie Drolet: I believe that services are slightly different, depending on which community people are in.

For example, it might be different if you are in a rural community or a small town as opposed to being in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal.

The important thing is to ensure that these services are all integrated as seamlessly as possible so that new arrivals can obtain all the information they need, including as concerns access to employment.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: It is true that newcomers have not paid into the employment insurance fund.

Nonetheless, would you recommend that new immigrants should be able to benefit from the employment insurance fund in order to obtain training that would allow them to enter the labour market? Or should this be a clearly separate thing?

Ms. Julie Drolet: I think that it should be a part of it.

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Perfect.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Our last questioner will be Mrs. McLeod.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, also thank you to the witnesses.

I think I'm going to start, Mr. Contreras, and take this down to a really granular level, because I'm trying to get my head around how it mixes and matches.

I'm going to use Kamloops, British Columbia, as an example because it's the community I'm from, and there's an ASET holder, the Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, there. There's Open Doors, which is busy delivering the programs through the provincial government, and there is another available opportunity through, for example, the B.C. AMTA strategic partnership fund.

Now as I understand it right now, a Métis person could enter through any of those doors.

• (1040)

Mr. Guido Contreras: Every agreement has a distinctive identifier and you have a specific contingency that you need to be eligible for as clientele, I guess. So you could provide something called minimum levels of services to absolutely anyone.

I'll give you an example. The centre in Calgary provides these types of services to first nation clients. In fact, there's a large non-Canadian or immigrant community coming in through the centres, but those are self-serve services that are open to everyone.

When it comes down to the point of targeted interventions, investment in skills resources, that is when those individuals need to go to their respective agreement holders in order to access the funding they need for their intervention.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: So if someone were eligible, had the number of hours and met the current eligibility criteria, they could currently go through Open Doors, or Shuswap Nation Tribal Council, and get the support they need, and it's a choice. Is that...?

Mr. Guido Contreras: If they are first nations, they will go to their respective first nations' agreement, and if they meet the conditions of the EI Act, they will have access to either part I or part II dollars, as long as they are within that particular jurisdiction.

But the Shuswap Nation, for example, will not provide investments of... [Inaudible-Editor] skills services, or pay for education training or whatever that is, to someone who is Métis, for example, because every constituency has a different agreement.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: So to take my example of the three groups, how are you actually recommending and feeling that we should change it? Should the money follow the person, or how are you seeing it? Again, we're really at a granular level, I know, but sometimes it helps to look at how these have worked on the ground, and then you can make some of those bigger decisions.

Mr. Guido Contreras: I propose to you that Canada has done really well since the devolution in delivering programs to the aboriginal community and their respective constitutional groups. So I think that should remain.

In terms of what happens at the ground level, I'll give you an example. In Calgary, there is a first nation and Métis centre, one in the north and one in the southern part of the city. They have these two entities that have an agreement where any aboriginal individual, absolutely anyone, can access services through either one of the two doors.

When funding is required for that particular individual, that is when the file is transferred to their respective organization. So if that individual is first nation, then that file will be transferred and the individual will be sponsored by a first nations' agreement.

The reason for this is that if, for example, a Métis centre were to fund a first nations' client, Canada would not recognize that. We would not be able to upload the investment and the result...because the particular identifier that the Métis agreement would have would not be meeting the conditions of the first nation individual.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: One of our earlier witnesses felt that we should have our ASEP program, and then take the LMDA, the LMA, and the targeted initiative for older workers, and really collapse them a little bit into one piece. To some degree, that makes some sense.

I have one concern. I had someone from my riding yesterday who was looking at the student job program, as an example. By not having anything set aside as a bit of a carve-out for youth with disabilities going to university, they found it was a real challenge for their particular group to actually access....

So I appreciate the thinking around collapsing and making some sense, but would we not lose that targeted, important work that we do, again, whether for older workers or those with disabilities...?

Does anyone care to comment on that piece?

•(1045)

The Chair: We're really over time here, and I hesitate to continue it longer because of the amount of time I've given to Mrs. McLeod.

I will wrap up the meeting now. You should be aware, as I mentioned to the previous panel, that if you have further submissions to make or you wish to respond to any of the conversation and questions here today, you're welcome to submit those to our clerk at any time during the course of this study.

I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for taking the time to be with us here today in Ottawa.

With that, we will adjourn the meeting.

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