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The Honourable Michael Chong

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• (1530)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC)): Welcome to the 42nd session of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Today is Tuesday, March 24, 2015.

We are here pursuant to Standing Order 108 to study the Government of Canada's programs designed to promote francophone immigration into Canada's official-language minority communities.

Four groups are joining us today. We will start with Ms. Hébert, from the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick.

The floor is yours, Madam.

Ms. Anne Hébert (Director General, Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Seven minutes is not a great amount of time, so I am going to talk very quickly. My apologies for that in advance.

My name is Anne Hébert. I am the Director General of the Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick, an organization founded in 1979 to be the voice of the province's francophone business community. We represent almost 1,000 companies of all sizes, from all sectors, and from all regions of the province. We also have the mandate to manage the RDEE New Brunswick.

Let me give you a little background.

For us, access to qualified labour has been the greatest concern for francophone entrepreneurs for more than 10 years. Our population is also decreasing, especially in rural areas, where most francophones are located.

When francophone companies find access to qualified labour difficult, they become less productive and less competitive. There is a danger that we will have fewer francophone entrepreneurs and fewer opportunities for the next generation of entrepreneurs. This means that we are going to lose a large number of francophone businesses.

The demographic challenges are greater in rural areas where our primary and secondary sectors are located. Forestry, agriculture, fishing and transportation are already experiencing major labour problems.

New Brunswick's francophone population represents about 33% of the total population of the province. Between 2006 and 2011, only 12% of newcomers had French as their official language. If the birth rate does not go up and if our population growth comes from immigration only, we are going to lose ground quickly. Even if we

succeeded in increasing the birth rate to maintain our demographic weight, we would lose all the economic and social advantages stemming from the diversity that immigration provides.

Francophone immigration is more difficult and needs more effort than anglophone immigration. In a province in which it is difficult to live in French only, it is doubly difficult. We have French-language immigrants who choose anglophone communities to live in and who send their children to anglophone schools because they see how necessary it is to speak English. In terms of immigration, therefore, we do not start on an equal footing with anglophone communities. Our position is that special steps must be taken to facilitate, encourage and stimulate francophone immigration.

The Francophone Significant Benefit program was an example. Unfortunately, it no longer exists. The new program, Express Entry, focuses on businesses and their needs, and that is good. But we do not know the importance that will be attributed to language inside the program.

Businessmen have positions to fill. When they are looking for workers, they are not concerned with the relative weight of their linguistic communities. They are looking for the skills they need. How are we to convince companies and employers to recruit francophones? They have to be given the tools.

Those tools can take several forms. For example, incentives could be offered for companies that recruit francophones. Our organization's expertise is not in immigration. Do not ask us to dissect programs and analyze how they work. But we know business very well. If their costs are reduced, if processes are streamlined, if steps are eliminated, if the road to francophone immigration is made easier, that is the road businessmen will take.

Having francophone immigrants come to our country can be streamlined in the same way, by reducing costs, streamlining the process and eliminating steps. The bigger the pool of potential francophone immigrants, the more likely businesspeople are to have access to francophone immigrants.

Another way of doing so would be to provide support to businesses in the sectors where we know the need is most urgent, with a view to encouraging them to choose francophone immigrants with the skills they are looking for.

We must increase awareness among the immigrants that want to come our way. We must explain to them the reality of the linguistic duality, the climate, the bilingual labour market, the opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship. We must also make them aware of their right to services in French, because otherwise they will look for those services in English, increasing the likelihood that they will become part of anglophone linguistic communities.

The system as it currently operates does not encourage regional organizations to direct francophone immigrants towards French-language services, because their survival depends on the number of cases they handle. So they do not want to refer those clients elsewhere, with the result that potential francophone immigrants are steered towards English-language communities.

• (1535)

In conclusion, minority francophone communities are facing major challenges in immigration, but they also have major needs for immigration. This must be recognized and measures must be put in place to mitigate these additional challenges that majority language communities do not face.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Hébert.

We now move to Mr. Corbiveau from the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador.

Mr. Gaël Corbiveau (Director General, Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador): Thank you.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, my name is Gaël Corbiveau and I am the director general of the Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador.

The Fédération des francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador was established in 1977 and is a not-for-profit organization working to preserve and promote the rights and interests of our communities. Since 2007, the FFTNL has been working in support of francophone immigration in its communities. In 2010, it created an internal initiative to promote francophone immigration. The purpose of this initiative is to showcase our province as a destination for immigrants from francophone countries and to encourage employers to hire bilingual employees from abroad when they cannot find employees in Canada. Our mission is to bring candidates and potential employers together.

In January 2011, thanks to provincial and federal funding, the FFTNL established the Réseau d'immigration francophone de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. This network has a year-round, full-time coordinator. Its goal is to make life easier for new arrivals. The objectives of the network are as follows: to increase the number of francophone immigrants to Newfoundland and Labrador; to maximize the potential offered by permanent residence programs; and to improve newcomers' ability to integrate into the province's francophone communities.

To achieve these objectives, our network established an advisory board made up of key representatives from the francophone community and the field of immigration. The board monitors the development of francophone immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador. Its members are: the Association communautaire franco-

phone de Saint-Jean, in the provincial capital, the Association francophone du Labrador, the Association régionale de la côte Ouest, our provincial RDEE, the Association for New Canadians, or ANC, the Refugee and Immigrant Advisory Council, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the provincial government's Office of Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Newfoundland and Labrador has made great progress in recent years in raising awareness of and promoting francophone immigration. The RIF is very active in the francophone community and among immigration agencies, such as the Partenariat local en immigration de Saint-Jean, and the province's coordinating committee on newcomer integration. We also have a presence in the province's business community.

Despite this success, francophone newcomers to our province are at a disadvantage compared with the majority population. They do not have any direct services in French. Among the services unavailable to them are: settlement services, pre-arrival services, integration services, immigrant and family support and counselling services, refugee services, international student services, and educational support services for students.

The FFTNL believes that the federal government's francophone immigration plan will be successful only if communities have the right tools as well as an adaptable mandate and flexible funding. We are encouraged by initiatives such as the outreach tours to Canadian embassies in Paris, Tunis, Rabat and Dakar, and by the introduction of the employer liaison network. We are anxiously awaiting the introduction of one or more measures to include a "francophone lens" in the express entry system, which is the new system for managing applications for permanent residence.

Minister Alexander's statements clearly support francophone immigration, but we are now waiting for him to take action. However, the federation is concerned by certain federal decisions that are detrimental to francophone immigration. For example, cancelling funding for francophone communities to participate in the Destination Canada employment fair, and abruptly ending the Francophone Significant Benefit program last September.

It should be noted that we cannot meet this government's goal for increasing francophone immigration unless we have targeted assistance, because our communities are at a definite disadvantage when competing for immigrants. As I said earlier, official language minority communities must have the proper tools to be successful and to meet the outcomes established by the federal government.

Another challenge is the identification of French-speaking immigrants according to their first official language spoken. We often lack data on newcomers whose mother tongue is neither English nor French but who speak French fluently. As a result, these clients are not systematically referred to francophone communities since they were not identified as francophones at their point of entry into Canada.

Too often, we meet immigrants who have been here for months or even years but do not know that there is a francophone community here to support them. This is a particularly cruel blow for these newcomers as the lack of support often makes their integration longer and more difficult. They and their families run the risk of being completely assimilated by the linguistic majority.

● (1540)

But it is also a significant blow to our communities because they lose members, to the detriment of our institutions and especially our French-language schools.

In closing, the FFTNL would like to present several recommendations that we believe are consistent with the priorities of the government and our communities.

First, that the government integrate a francophone lens into the express entry system to help us at least partially compensate for a disadvantage in attracting newcomers.

Second, that the government work at the community and regional levels to promote francophone immigration, taking into account the specific characteristics of these communities and regions.

Third, that the provincial government be asked to serve as policy levers for francophone immigration, and that the partnership between the two levels of government be strengthened.

Finally, that communities have the tools they need to take effective strategic action on francophone immigration in the areas of immigrant recruitment, settlement and integration, and particularly the operational capacity to offer direct services.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for your attention.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Corbeineau.

I now give the floor to Mr. Hominuk and Mr. Kashama, from the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario.

Mr. Peter Hominuk (Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

This year, we are celebrating 400 years of French presence in Ontario. This is the 400th anniversary of Samuel de Champlain's arrival in the Penetanguishene area. We are going to hand out a logo showing Champlain's astrolabe and a button saying "Ontario 400". The logo has been adopted by the province and the community in order to recognize our 400 years of French presence.

My name is Peter Hominuk, the director general of the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, the AFO. I represent the organization on Citizenship and Immigration Canada's steering subcommittee for Ontario. I am accompanied by Ferdinand Kashama, the Assemblée's vice president.

Thank you for inviting us to this discussion on your current study of Government of Canada programs for francophone immigration into official-language minority communities.

First, it is important to point out that the AFO, as an umbrella organization and the voice of the Franco-Ontarian community, does not claim to have a monopoly on expertise in immigration matters. However, as the representative of the Franco-Ontarian community,

the Assemblée is keenly interested in francophone immigration matters and their impact on the development of our community. Indeed, our community's survival and vitality greatly depends on the arrival of francophone immigrants. Welcoming, including and integrating new francophone immigrants into our great community is therefore a priority for us. We have the ability to bring together and coordinate and it is our wish to use those abilities for the benefit of francophone immigration in Ontario.

Ontario has the largest minority francophone community outside Quebec, numbering 611,500 individuals. According to the last census, the growth in the francophone population is largely the result of the arrival of francophone immigrants. So we can see the degree to which francophone immigration is important for French-speaking Ontario.

In 2006, immigrants represented 13.7% of the francophones in Ontario. According to Statistics Canada's last census, Ontario takes in more than 50% of the French-speaking immigrants who settle outside Quebec.

In terms of immigration, Ontario is in the unique position of being able to maintain three support networks for francophone immigration, one for the east, one for the centre and southwest and one for Ontario's north. For us in Ontario, the responsibility for immigration is also shared between the province and the federal government.

In recent years, the province has indicated that it wants to play a more and more active role in this area. In March 2012, the Government of Ontario announced the development of its very first immigration strategy, including an expert roundtable on immigration in Ontario. Ontario set itself a target of 5% of its immigrants being francophone, while the federal target is 4%.

In March 2015, the Ontario government tabled a bill designed to encourage the establishment of immigration programs and supporting the integration of immigrants and other individuals in Ontario. The preamble to the bill mentions that one of the objectives is to allow communities across Ontario, including Franco-Ontarian communities, to attract, welcome and integrate immigrants. You will understand that we attach great importance to francophone immigration to ensure that our language endures, our culture is enriched and the linguistic duality of our province is strengthened.

Quebec is the bastion of the Canadian francophonie, but francophones outside Quebec form the buttresses that prevent Canada from falling divided into two linguistic groups that are identified with a specific territory, with Quebec speaking French and the rest of Canada speaking English. Francophones outside Quebec are essential in building a Canadian identity on the two official languages. They show the face of a Canada that is bilingual from coast to coast, thereby allowing any Canadian with one of the two official languages to move anywhere.

Like Quebec, the AFO urges francophone immigration to be wholly coordinated and, as a result, urges that an action plan be developed that makes use of the structures and initiatives already in place. It is important that all immigration initiatives be included in a more comprehensive action plan that would include other services such as health, social services and language training, to name but a few. This comprehensive action plan should be placed in the hands of the francophone community, which is in a better position to understand its own needs, through its voice, the AFO.

It is in that context that the Assemblée makes the following recommendations.

It is imperative that existing community structures be improved so that the inclusion and integration of newcomers into our communities can be successful. Sufficient financial resources must be provided.

CIC must ensure that francophone officers are present at ports of entry in Ontario and must establish links between CIC services and francophone community groups.

● (1545)

Better support for secondary immigration must be considered. In other words, that CIC's financial resources for welcoming be transferred to the new province of destination when, for example, francophone immigrants arrive in Quebec and then settle in Ontario after a few months in Canada.

There must be better coordination between CIC, Ontario, and the francophone community in Ontario. The lack of coordination between these three key parties causes obvious difficulties.

CIC must also work more closely with the Government of Ontario to rapidly develop an action plan so that the target of 5% francophone immigration can be met.

We also recommend that the promotion abroad of French-speaking Canada outside Quebec be expanded, that the promotional tools be developed in partnership with the francophone communities and that those communities, and employers, be invited to all promotional activities overseas in order to offer potential immigrants the possibility of living in French outside Quebec.

We ask that CIC provide support for community stakeholders that goes beyond the one-stop shop approach in remote minority communities where organizations cover vast areas. In other words, the federal government must adopt an approach based on sharing resources and locations.

The break-even point for remote minority regions must be adjusted to reflect the reality of those regions and that other services be added to a bidding process if investments are not justified.

Together with the professional organizations, CIC must be part of a process to harmonize and standardize terminology and the qualification criteria for coming to work here.

We recommend that employability training be provided by francophone or bilingual institutions that are capable of monitoring how immigrants are included in Ontario's francophone community.

That said, we need an approach that will involve the four main actors, so that immigration plays a key role in the vitality of the French-language minority community in Ontario and in Canada.

First, this means government agencies, provincially and federally, so that programs can be coordinated with a view to integrating newcomers into the francophone minority. This involves, first, negotiations to establish a policy framework for immigrant selection and, second, an evaluation of the extent to which quantifiable objectives, including the number of immigrants who can speak French, where they settle in Canada, and the demand for services tailored to their specific needs.

Then it means welcoming organizations that are suitably equipped to expose newcomers to our francophone reality in order to help them in their search for economic and social opportunities. This includes both the possibility of working in a francophone or bilingual environment and the availability of government services in French.

We must also mention the francophone immigrant support networks in the three major regions of Ontario; they allow Ontario's francophone community to enjoy coordinated recommendations, planning, and initiative and project implementation in francophone immigration matters. The networks are also demonstrating collaborative leadership in francophone immigration by bringing together partners in various sectors—education, communities, employment, municipalities, culture, health—leadership that develops links between the newcomers and the established community. This suggests developing social policies and implementing ways to support their integration into the francophone community. For young people, these links very often begin with sports and in school. Hence the importance of schools in integrating newcomers.

The final actors are the newcomers themselves. They need to be made aware, before they are selected, of the possibility of living in the French-language community. They must be exposed to the reality of Canada's linguistic duality and of its official language minorities, as well as of the advantages of being able to communicate in both of Canada's official languages.

Finally, the AFO supports the 32 recommendations drawn up by Ontario's Expert Roundtable on Immigration in September 2012, but I will not read those 32 recommendations.

Thank you for your time.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you.

The floor now goes to Mr. Boileau and Mr. Ghaleb, from the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner.

[English]

Mr. François Boileau (Commissioner, Office of the French Language Services Commissioner): Good afternoon, and thank you very much for inviting me today. It's a great pleasure to be here.

[Translation]

I am accompanied by Mohamed Ghaleb, our Project Manager, Investigations, Research and Surveillance. Before you, therefore, you see one third of the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario.

The commissioner's office was established in 2007 to ensure the effective implementation of the French Language Services Act, which was unanimously adopted by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 1986. Like our counterparts at federal level, Graham Fraser and his team, and in New Brunswick, Katherine d'Entremont, whom you had the pleasure of hearing from a few weeks ago, the commissioner's office receives complaints from the public. We work together with the Government of Ontario to make sure that those complaints are treated systematically and in order, and that changes are made to the way in which French-language services are processed by the government and the institutions in the province of Ontario.

Immigration is a priority issue of my office since its inception. In fact, my first recommendation as commissioner concerned this issue. I had asked the minister responsible for francophone affairs to review the definition of the francophone population of Ontario in order to ensure that it adequately reflects the new reality of this population.

As such, Ontario's francophone population has benefited, since June 2009, from a new inclusive definition of francophone, a first in Canada. The inclusive definition of francophone, or IDF, reflects the diversity of Franco-Ontarians, regardless of their place of birth, ethnic origin or religious affiliation.

Ontario has also been active on the national scene through the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie, calling for the IDF alone to be used to count the Franco-Ontarian population, even though none of its federal, provincial and territorial government counterparts have yet to follow suit.

In 2011, there were, according to the IDF, 611,500 francophones in Ontario, accounting for nearly 5% of the total population. There is no question that, aside from the statistical exercise, the adoption of the IDF is enabling newcomers to identify as francophones in Ontario and takes their contribution to the francophone community into account, thereby reinforcing their feeling of belonging to their host community.

Thus, if we want to attract them to our francophone communities, francophone immigrants must be an integral part of their new community. The IDF certainly contributes.

In Ontario, responsibility for newcomer integration programs, for example with settlement, language training and employment, is shared between the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade of Ontario and the Department of Citizenship and Immigration of Canada.

There is certainly some overlap between programs, but the Ontario government has looser eligibility requirements than its federal counterpart. Nevertheless, it is important that, before and as soon as they arrive, immigrants realize that they can not only obtain service in French from the federal and provincial governments, but

also live in French, such as applying to have their children educated in French and obtaining community assistance in French. We need to make the newcomers aware of those services and opportunities

As our friend from AFO, Peter Hominuk, said earlier, in 2012, the Ontario government announced the development of its first immigration strategy to attract more highly skilled workers. This clear goal and this leadership by the government were reflected in the announcement of a 5% target for francophone immigration, which will contribute to the vitality and the social, economic and cultural development not only of the francophone community, if it is reached, but also of Ontario society as a whole.

Since the publication of Ontario's first immigration strategy in 2012, the provincial government has undertaken a number of actions. Notably, a working group was formed to develop measures for achieving the 5% target under the leadership of the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade. As you know, immigration is an area of jurisdiction shared between the federal government and the provinces, which means that the various levels of government must join forces to facilitate progress.

This is why my colleagues Katherine d'Entremont and Graham Fraser and myself wanted to lead by example, by stating four guiding principles. More recently, in 2014, Graham Fraser and I published a joint report to present an overview and analysis of the issues surrounding immigration to francophone communities. We formulated eight recommendations, primarily to the federal government, but also to the Government of Ontario.

• (1555)

These recommendations deal with: support for French-speaking immigrants through francophone institutions and organizations; information and resources for French-speaking newcomers; co-operation with provincial and territorial governments; accountability, and incentives for employers to recruit and select francophone and bilingual workers.

During this celebration period of the 400th anniversary of the French presence in Ontario, and as we approach the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017, we believe that the two levels of government must join forces and show leadership so that immigration truly contributes to the development and vitality of francophone minority communities and must ensure that Canada's changing demographic mosaic continues to be in line with the specificities of Canadian society.

As proof, we see that, although Ontario's francophone population represents 5% of the total population in the province, 2% of the immigrant population had French as its first official language spoken, according to Statistics Canada's 2011 census data.

As is the case for the Canadian population as a whole, we need immigration to offset the sharp decline in the birth rate and higher rates of population aging. Immigration has a direct impact on the community's vitality.

We also need immigration to ensure the continuity of French-language services. For example, we will need more nurses to take care of our aging population, and more early childhood educators, teachers of French and many other subjects.

It is clear that, over the years, Canada and Ontario francophone communities have benefited less from immigration than have the anglophone majority communities.

In conclusion, I believe that our governments must act now to redress the current immigration imbalance affecting francophone communities. We have formulated a plan with eight recommendations. If you remember anything from my presentation only, let it be those eight recommendations. It is time to act on them.

I will be pleased to answer any questions you and your colleagues may have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boileau.

We have one hour and 15 minutes for questions and comments.

We will start with Mr. Gravelle.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the witnesses for joining us today.

Unfortunately, I will not be able to be here for the entire meeting.

I have some questions, and I will start with Mr. Hominuk and Mr. Kashama.

I live in Sudbury, in northern Ontario. There used to be an organization called "Contact interculturel francophone de Sudbury". I do not know if you are familiar with that organization. Its goal was to help new francophone immigrants to adapt to northern Ontario.

We take a lot of things for granted, like going to the bank, housing or employment for the spouse or the young people. The organization was funded by the government but, two years ago, there were cuts and the services it was providing were unfortunately transferred to two places, to Ottawa and to the YMCA in Sudbury, a bilingual organization. Personally, I see bilingual organizations as anglophone organizations. The effect was to reduce immigration to northern Ontario because no one was helping immigrants to settle there any longer.

Can you provide any comments about that organization, which is now operated from Ottawa?

• (1600)

Mr. Peter Hominuk: Thank you for the question, Mr. Gravelle.

All we know is that, at some stage, Contact interculturel francophone de Sudbury lost its contract with CIC. The Conseil économique et social d'Ottawa-Carleton, which looks after the network in eastern Ontario, was given the mandate for one year. It deals with building, or continuing to build, the network in the south. At that point, the staff changed. I know that CIC has issued a call for tenders in recent months in order to find a new group that can run the network in northwestern and northeastern Ontario on a little more permanent basis.

The AFO has made its views known about CIC's conditions. We hope that a francophone group from northern Ontario will be the next to coordinate the network. We are firm believers in the idea of "by and for". In other words, the work has to be done "by and for"

people in the north and it must be a francophone organization that provides the services.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Thank you.

It is much easier to coordinate arrivals for people arriving from abroad if you are right there in the north, rather than in Ottawa, say. For someone from Ottawa to be helping someone to find housing in Sudbury makes no sense, as I see it. Hopefully, northern Ontario will be responsible for that.

Earlier, you talked a little about the 400th anniversary of the presence of French in Ontario. Are you satisfied with the grants allocated by the federal government? Have you received sufficient assistance to organize a major celebration?

Mr. Peter Hominuk: That is not an easy question to answer. We are happy with the investments that have been made by the Government of Canada. They are not as extensive as those made in Quebec or Atlantic Canada but Canadian Heritage has still been investing in recent months. We in Ontario will be able to hold an appropriate celebration.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Boileau, what is the biggest challenge in your office?

Mr. François Boileau: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Can you sum it up in two words?

Mr. François Boileau: My two words are "inadequate resources".

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. François Boileau: We receive more than one complaint per day. That may not seem like a lot, given the number of francophones in Ontario, but is still a big challenge because the types of complaints vary a lot. Some complaints are very easy to handle and need absolutely nothing in the way of investigation, just a good contact. Our contacts in the departments can help us to change a text or correct errors here and there. Mistakes like that are quite rare because the Government of Ontario does a very good job with its documents in French and its websites. Generally, all the guidelines for communication in French are followed quite well.

However, there are more complex complaints, such as, for example, when there is a shortage of health services in French in the Peel region. That is another story. Complaints of that kind cannot be settled immediately just by calling someone. They are a lot more complex. We have received complaints about the lack of post-secondary programs in French in the south-central Ontario region. After we investigated, we found that from 0% to 3% of the programs offered in English were also offered in French. Complaints like that need much more detailed analysis, of course.

I will end with another example, if I may. Take someone who has had issues with a local children's aid society and whose two children, aged 2 and 4, have been taken in by a foster family that is unilingual English. If the social workers assigned to the case are anglophone as well, it means that the children have no ability to interact. They likely will not understand what is happening. At least we try to give them one more opportunity. That is the kind of complaint that gets us worked up and that keeps us very busy. We get them very frequently.

•(1605)

The Chair: You have one minute left.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Okay.

Mr. Hominuk, many immigrants choose to stay in northern Ontario, but they often don't stay there for a long time. Are there enough immigrants to replace them as they leave? Are we losing ground?

Mr. Peter Hominuk: I cannot specifically tell you about immigration in the north. Most francophone immigrants who settle in Ontario go to southern Ontario and fewer immigrants go to eastern Ontario. There are not many in the north. I know that the network and the groups in the north are developing immigrant retention strategies there, but that is not the trend right now. We will have to develop strategies.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

We will now move to Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for being here this morning.

My first question is for the witnesses from the various provinces, Ms. Hébert, Mr. Corbineau and Mr. Hominuk.

Why do francophone immigrants settle in your provinces? Is it for economic or family reunification purposes? What services do they choose to use?

When they accept a job in your provinces, can they be close to an official language minority community, a francophone community? Do they subsequently choose to move closer to a francophone community because they decided to settle in your province for a longer term?

That's basically an indirect question. In other words, are they staying in your province for only one year and then leaving quite quickly to settle in another province such as Quebec? Or do they stay in the province and settle for a longer term to then get closer to a francophone community, when they don't necessarily have the chance to establish themselves close to a francophone community because of their employment?

They don't always work in French because there are also francophones who have jobs where English is spoken exclusively.

Ms. Anne Hébert: I don't know the exact number, but over 80% of francophone immigrants who come in through New Brunswick decide to stay there. I don't have the statistics, but we often hear that francophone immigrants come to New Brunswick because they know that it is a province where they will be able to live in French. However, there are obstacles. There are not many jobs where you can work exclusively in French, where you can be unilingual francophone and easily find a job. That is one of the biggest challenges.

We are doing a better job than we did of informing them about that before they come here. In the past, we would attract them by telling them that our francophone community had great vitality, but we realized that, even though we were able to draw them here, we could

not always keep them. I think they now settle here more as they know what to expect.

There are one or two programs that directly deal with the economy and that enable immigrants to come here more quickly. There is a program provided by the New Brunswick government and it works quite well, except that our quotas are comprehensive, meaning that there is no anglophone quota or francophone quota. The anglophone and francophone quotas are unofficial. We would love to reach those quotas, but we don't slow down anglophone immigration because we have trouble catching up on the francophone side. That is a problem.

Have I answered your question properly?

•(1610)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Partially, but I will give an opportunity to the other witnesses to answer it. I will come back to it.

Mr. Corbineau, you have the floor.

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: Thank you, Mr. Gourde

I don't have the exact numbers, but I can say that, after having worked since 2008 in community immigration and francophone immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador, the economy was very good in terms of jobs. Also, most francophone newcomers came for economic purposes, as far as I know. I said that the economy was very good and I hope that it will come back. This year is a bit unique.

Most immigrants came to our province because they had found a job here before they arrived. We have very few francophone refugees per year. You can count them on the fingers of one hand, not more. To my knowledge, family class immigration is relatively low. It exists, but it is marginal. I am inclined to say that, for the most part, they stay here. Clearly, a good economy is very important. I think that factor contributes to the retention of immigrants.

In the third part of your question, you asked whether immigrants move closer to the community. I would say that it is a real challenge. If those people find a job with our immigration network, with Destination Canada for example—which is an employment forum organized every year by the Canadian embassies in Paris and Brussels—they often stay. If they come with children, we will be able to retain them in our francophone schools and put them in touch with our francophone associations. Things go well afterwards. However, it is often difficult to keep newcomers who do not go through our network and who find jobs in other ways, directly with companies or public job banks. It is a real challenge to keep them and to make them come to our communities or institutions.

In my previous presentation, I mentioned the number of francophone immigrants with French as their first language, their first official language. Sometimes, it is not their first language. They speak another language in their country of origin. It is very important to attract them to our organizations and communities, and to retain them. That is particularly important in rural areas. Two children can make a huge difference in a school. They can help save a classroom or open a second one. That is extremely important for us. It is a considerable challenge to be well acquainted with immigrants in the economic class and to retain them in our organizations.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you.

Mr. François Boileau: Mr. Gourde, if I may add, employment is clearly the most important factor for newcomers, whether they come here directly or whether they come from Quebec. They don't always come with the desire to enrich Ontario's minority community or to help Ontario meet a target set at 5%. It is great if they do, but this shows that the more targeted the recruitment strategy is—meaning working together with francophone communities—the more specific it is and the more we will be able to retain those people, those newcomers in the communities where they will be integrated.

By the same token, once they are here, the more we educate them on the opportunities for their families and for themselves to enjoy a life in French in our communities, the easier their integration will be, including their integration into Ontario's society in general, which is anglophone. That might seem ironic, but it's the truth: the more easily they integrate into the francophone community, the easier it will be for them to integrate into the entire community and to know the ins and outs of everything the society has to offer, because that can also be provided in French. That therefore makes better citizens and helps their families feel welcome and integrated here. As a result, it will be easier to have a stronger community.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boileau and Mr. Hominuk.

Ms. St-Denis, you have the floor.

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

Listening to you is a bit discouraging. As a francophone, I am a little discouraged. I am not quite sure; you have some nice principles and recommendations.

Mr. Corbiveau, you appeared before this committee in 2012, at which time you said that Destination Canada was helping bring immigrants here, but there was no structure to integrate them.

Have things improved in the last three years?

• (1615)

Mr. Gaël Corbiveau: Over the past three years, little has changed. Our francophone immigration networks still do not have authorization to provide direct services, not in my area anyway. Some benefit from some provincial funding, but not us.

There is also the problem that many economic class immigrants arrive with temporary visas—and therefore do not have permanent visas—while our funding is only for permanent visas. So that is still a real challenge.

I repeat what I said in 2012, we attract them, we reach out to them in Europe, but when they get off the plane on Canadian soil, we do not have the right to look after them because they don't have permanent visas. It is a little ironic. That is when they most need us and that is the most critical time for us to retain them, but officially, we don't have the right to provide services to them. That is true until they obtain permanent visas, which takes place after one year or a year and a half, but they no longer need us and we may well have lost them in the meantime.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Are you not discouraged by the situation?

Mr. Gaël Corbiveau: We cannot be.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: We cannot be.

In your provinces, how does the francophone community see immigrants? Immigrants come to work and get jobs. How does the community accept them as such? Are they welcomed? Are they included?

How is that perceived in Acadia and in Newfoundland?

Ms. Anne Hébert: We have conducted some quite in-depth surveys to get an idea of that situation. In New Brunswick, there was a lot of talk about the unemployment rate. We might think that people see immigrants as competition for jobs, but that is not at all the case. Businesses don't really think about immigration as the first solution to their workforce problem.

However, when we ask them specifically whether they would consider hiring francophone immigrants to work in their companies and whether they have seen many francophone immigrants in their regions, the response is very positive. In fact, over 90% of people are very open to that when we ask them the question.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: Is that actually the case?

Ms. Anne Hébert: It is the case, but the instinct is not there. We survey our entrepreneurs every year and, as I said earlier, the workforce question has been a top concern for over 10 years, but the question on the efforts put into immigration and access has never been on the list of concerns. We need to ask them the question. We therefore need to work with the business community to make them see that it is a solution.

Furthermore, in the past, companies had some not-so-good experiences, not necessarily with the immigrants, but with the immigration process that has since changed a great deal. At any rate, it is easier today. However, entrepreneurs are scared of those administrative formalities that are making the process long and difficult. If they need someone, they need them right away.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: And what about Ontario?

Mr. Ferdinand Kashama (Vice-President, Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario): Thank you for giving me the floor.

I will answer by relying on the information at our disposal, but also on my personal experience.

In Quebec, immigration is organized. Quebec even goes to the source to select people, but as soon as those people come here, integrating them is a problem. We say that they are not integrated but we continue to look for others. There are therefore gaps in the integration of immigrants.

They also come to Ontario. Some find jobs here, but francophone organizations don't have the resources needed to retain them in francophone communities, which results in a transfer. In fact, given that the francophone community does not have sufficient structure to welcome newcomers, they try to integrate into the anglophone community. It seems that the problem is coming up more and more.

The AFO has worked hard to try to help immigrants and to redirect them to the existing services. The efforts are considerable, but the means hardly match. That is what I wanted to add.

•(1620)

Mr. Peter Hominuk: Because we have three networks rather than a provincial structure in Ontario, we think that there should be a representative organization for the francophonie, an entity or provincial structure that can plan and coordinate, so that there is still a provincial strategy. That was one of the commissioners' recommendations.

We think that our organization could play that role. The government could also choose a different organization. At any rate, the lack of provincial coordination has created some holes. Although the three regions are managing fine, the lack of provincial coordination will cause harm to the community in the long term, I think.

We see that, because of the scope of immigration, Ontario has experienced a significant demographic change. The central and southwestern region, which, among the three regions was the third largest in terms of population, will, in the next few years, become the region with the most francophones in Ontario.

That places a lot of pressure on community groups. There has not always been community infrastructure but we can see now that groups are trying to organize themselves. The funding to support them is not necessarily available. The province contributes through schools, but there are other services that go hand in hand with that. So we are talking about better federal-provincial coordination because the massive influx of people creates health care and social services needs. Although we are talking about provincial jurisdictions, support is needed, especially for French-language services, to be able to set up the services.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

I will now give the floor to Mr. Williamson.

[English]

Excuse me, Mr. Chisu. Go ahead.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Thank you very much for your presentation.

I'll be speaking in the other official language of Canada, which is English, because it's much easier for me.

Mr. Boileau, how many francophone immigrants settle in Ontario each year? Do you have an idea? Is this number stable? Is it decreasing or declining? What cities welcome the highest number of francophone immigrants?

Mr. François Boileau: Thank you very much for your question.

It's difficult to answer this question with precision because of the lack of data. It's easier to know who came through the normal channels directly into Ontario, but for those who came from Quebec, for instance, it's less easy to know exactly what the current percentage is. It's difficult.

We know that it's increasing, as Peter Hominuk said earlier, in London, Hamilton, and Toronto. They are the fastest-growing populations of francophones in Ontario, and actually in the country. Ottawa is not lagging far behind, and is close. Toronto, London, and Hamilton are the main points, but the problem remains that it's only

2%. That we know. Francophones are only 2% compared to the rest of the population that immigrates to Canada.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I was just asking this question because in my riding of Pickering—Scarborough, we just inaugurated two French schools. One is an elementary French school, a Catholic school, and the other one is basically a college in Pickering, which goes to grade 12. This means that in my area the French language and the number of people who would like to go to school in French is increasing significantly.

•(1625)

Mr. François Boileau: Absolutely. I was there at the inauguration in Pickering. It's a marvellous school.

It's a great opportunity for francophones, but they have to know that there are services, and that's the main problem, the main issue. As Ferdinand very eloquently stated earlier, we have difficulties organizing ourselves to make sure that people know that there is a francophone community. They come here for employment, but beyond that it's difficult for them to know about services in French available from the federal and provincial government and that it's possible to send their kids to French school. If they knew that in advance, they would plan in advance, but once the kids are already in school in September, it's difficult to take them away and put them into French schools. So, this lack of knowledge is [*Inaudible—Editor*] to a strong integration within our francophone communities.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: However, another issue that I've found is that the Durham region, for example, is not necessarily offering services in both languages, French and English. I don't know about other regions. I think Peel and Toronto are offering bilingual services, but there other regions in the 905 area code. Durham might be resistant to doing so because they say it costs a lot of money to offer services in French. I'm encouraging them to offer services in French. I have the Franco-Ontarian flag in my office. That is quite important, because it's very important to speak both official languages.

Mr. François Boileau: Good for you.

Durham is doing this. We're making strong efforts with the Durham municipal township to alleviate—

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: There is a kind of resistance there.

Mr. François Boileau: —the misconception that it would cost more money. It doesn't, because it doesn't fall back on them. The French Language Services Act in Ontario does not apply to municipalities. It applies only to government institutions. It applies to municipalities only if the municipality acts on behalf of the provincial government.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Another point you mentioned had to do with the act in Ontario applying to the translation of other acts, for example, into French, to be bilingual. But that does not apply to the regulations. You cannot apply an act if you don't also have regulations translated into French. Is your office or the Government of Ontario doing anything about that?

Mr. François Boileau: Yes sir, we are. Thank you for that question as well.

Not all acts are translated. They are adapted in both languages so they have equal force of law. You're absolutely correct. The French Language Services Act says that some regulations could also be adapted into French and they would have equal force. Doing that is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Attorney General. In our second annual report a couple of years ago, we recommended that the Government of Ontario and the Attorney General take steps to ensure that all important regulations be translated. We devised different criteria. I believe we had five criteria for this. If you'd like to have them, I'll gladly send them to your office. We're making quite good progress. I believe right now we have 40% of regulations adapted into both languages, but we're going for 60%. Not all of the most important ones are translated yet, but we're getting there.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: I'm telling you about this because, for example, the Professional Engineers Act in Ontario is translated into French, but the regulations are not. I'm a professional engineer, which is why I'm telling you this. The regulations are very important for the francophone community, which is doing engineering work all over Ontario and also coming from different provinces including the province of Quebec.

Mr. François Boileau: You'll find me in complete agreement on this issue.

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boileau and Mr. Chisu.

[English]

And now we'll go to Mr. Williamson.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Mr. John Williamson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here.

Ms. Hébert, I am very happy to see you again.

In response to a question from the opposition, you said that it was difficult to find skilled labour in New Brunswick. Did you refer to Moncton specifically or to the entire province of New Brunswick? Could you elaborate on that?

Ms. Anne Hébert: It is in New Brunswick in general, not only in the cities. In fact, we have just conducted a survey in the entire province that has shown that our entrepreneurs in the rural regions of northern New Brunswick—where the unemployment rate is higher than in the rest of the province—are the most concerned. We might think that this was the case in the Moncton area because the unemployment rate is lower in this area and in the large cities, but that is not the case. The university attracts a number of people to the cities, the people have a higher level of education and young people are more interested in living in the city. As a result, in the rural regions, the training level and the education level, which are lower there, exacerbate the issue of workforce access.

Mr. John Williamson: I think you will agree that, in order to attract immigrants, we need to provide jobs. You need to have an environment where it is possible to work. However, I would not want to put words in your mouth.

Ms. Anne Hébert: Absolutely, yes, I agree with you.

Mr. John Williamson: As you know, in 2014, more people died than were born or came there. So immigration is not needed in francophone communities only; it is needed both in the north and in the south. I am wondering whether we are making enough effort to attract francophone immigrants. Perhaps we should focus on cities such as Moncton, Fredericton or Saint John. Do you agree with that? Actually, could you just tell me on which areas we should focus in New Brunswick to attract immigrants, given that we recognize that there must be jobs for them to stay there in the long term?

Ms. Anne Hébert: Yes, absolutely, we cannot convince immigrants to come to us, bring them there and then have them on EI. We know that the needs are pressing in some sectors. For instance, the forestry sector has suffered. A lot of factors have contributed to things not going so well in that sector over the past seven or eight years. The sector is now doing much better and that is a good thing. Projects that will need a lot of workers in the sector are under way in New Brunswick. This sector has been slightly overlooked by young people. So we know that there is a need here. Why not work with this industry to bring together francophone immigrants and the forestry sector in the north of the province, which is predominantly francophone? That would be a nice union.

We talk about the knowledge industry and we have discouraged young people from going into traditional sectors. The problems experienced in some sectors discourage young people from heading into those sectors. There will be a shortage as a result. The employees are quite old, the average age is very high in those sectors, so this is a golden opportunity to promote immigration and meet the needs of that industry. I am talking about the forestry industry and the transportation industry. We know there have been problems in trucking for years and so on.

Mr. John Williamson: We should not just think about the needs of big cities, but rather the sectors where we still need workers.

Ms. Anne Hébert: Absolutely.

Mr. John Williamson: At the end of the day, New Brunswick is active in terms of the provincial nominee program.

How does your organization work with the province to recruit immigrants?

• (1635)

Ms. Anne Hébert: So far, we have not been of service to business in immigration matters. However, in light of the change in the direction of the RDEE program, we are currently working with the Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick and with the Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick. We committed to covering the economic aspect and to working directly with businesses. We have just started, but that's the direction we are going in.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

I will now give the floor to Ms. Day.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to welcome the witnesses.

On March 17, I submitted a notice of motion that reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages ask the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to provide it with statistical data on the new "Express Entry" application management system, which began operating in January 2015, particularly regarding the number of people currently in the Express Entry pool, the number of people who have come to Canada since the system was implemented, their country of origin, their languages spoken, including their proficiency in one official language or both, and their education level, before the appearance of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

To avoid going in camera and thereby not being able to benefit from our guests' presence, I will not ask that we discuss this notice today. I will therefore move to my question, which is for Ms. Hébert.

On March 2, 2015, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration said he was disappointed with the francophone immigration in the country for 2013-2014. He recognizes that there are significant barriers to francophone immigration. An article from the *Conseil économique du Nouveau-Brunswick* was published on October 28, 2014. According to the council, the federal government should not have changed the temporary foreign workers program and should not have eliminated the francophone significant benefit program since it was meeting the pressing needs of the business community.

In this program, do you think there are gaps in terms of incentives for hiring francophone workers?

Ms. Anne Hébert: That is our position precisely: since we do not start on a level playing field, we need positive measures to encourage francophone immigration. That will not happen on its own. We will have to make additional effort. The francophone significant benefit program was one of those positive measures, but it was eliminated, unfortunately. Perhaps it was not working as well as it should have been and the intention may have been to replace it with something else, but we don't know whether there is something else to replace it with. We talked about express entry, but we don't know what priority will be placed on language in this program.

In terms of the temporary foreign workers program, the situation is completely different. Those people come to work for a limited period. However, some major companies took advantage of the program to fire the Canadian workers who were in those positions. They misused the system. The fact remains that the small and medium-sized businesses were using it correctly, that they needed to have access to it the most and that they were the ones that were penalized. The criteria have therefore been changed. The program was not eliminated, but the new conditions no longer allow our entrepreneurs to have access to it.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Earlier, you said that the retention rate within your francophone community was 80% when you were looking after newcomers, which is a rather interesting number.

Have you felt any changes ever since the express entry program was implemented?

Ms. Anne Hébert: It was implemented too recently for me to be able to know how it works and whether its impact will affect us in a different way.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: The minister will soon appear before our committee and we hope that he will tell us more about the issue.

I think Mr. Boileau said earlier that he didn't have any statistics on internal migration. What I am about to say might be a tad simplistic, but I think young people from the eastern provinces are migrating more towards Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta. I don't have the right numbers with me, but if I had them, I could confirm this statement. In my case, half of my family lives in Ontario right now, and the same is true in the case of one of my friends. In a nutshell, lots of young people are leaving.

Could you obtain statistics on the migration within the country?

● (1640)

Mr. Mohamed Ghaleb (Project Manager, Investigations, Research and Monitoring, Office of the French Language Services Commissioner): In fact, I think we pretty much know who comes to Ontario. As everywhere else in Canada, the francophone immigration rate is 2%. However, we no longer have access to some of the details we used to access before through the demographic profiles prepared by the Government of Ontario. That was done based on the data collected through the census, but that is no longer being done. The idea was to determine exactly where the immigrants came from. There are cases of immigrants coming directly from abroad, but there are also interprovincial immigrants.

However, we know that 70% of francophone immigrants in Canada, basically three-quarters, are in Ontario.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I don't remember which one of you said that you could not assist those who came here as temporary workers. I think Mr. Corbineau said it.

Under the express entry program, we help people come here and they will be able to become immigrants after a certain time. If we cannot help integrate those people into francophone communities, can we expect Canadian duality to be undermined in terms of immigration?

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: Yes. Among the economic class newcomers, these temporary workers make up the majority. The temporary visa process is faster, actually. For an employer, it is much easier to recruit someone in a few weeks instead of waiting for months on end. Entry express promises that the waiting period will be six months, but it remains to be seen whether that will be the case. The waiting period used to be one year or a year and a half. Most of those people came with a temporary visa.

However, if we are not able to assist them, it is very difficult to attract them to our services and to keep them in our communities.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I imagine that the legislation would need to be amended for foreign workers to have access to temporary visas.

Have the organizations been asking for that?

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: The challenge for our immigration networks to provide services to temporary workers has been brought up a number of times before immigration officials and before the minister himself. Some immigration networks are lucky to obtain provincial funding, which enables them to provide those services. But that is not the case in my province.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you.

The Chair: Okay, thank you.

[English]

Mr. Daniel, please.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, folks, for being here. It's quite an interesting discussion. As an immigrant here myself, one of the key things for my coming here was jobs. I suspect that's the same situation with francophones who are coming here. Certainly, it's an important factor.

We've had witnesses here before who have actually told us that most of the francophone communities are having trouble retaining their own communities within that organization.... In other words, the younger people are going off to other places for education and are not coming back. Clearly, they're not coming back because, for their qualifications, those are the jobs that actually will support them. That's a fairly important factor.

I'm going to turn to a subject that's a little different. What countries is Canada competing with to attract francophone immigrants? Francophone people obviously are immigrating to different countries as well.

Let me start with you, Monsieur Boileau.

Mr. François Boileau: It's a good question. I'm not sure that I would have a quantified answer. I don't think I have an answer that will be rigorous, so this will just be off the top of my head.

France obviously would be one country that would attract francophone immigration, especially from the continent of Africa, and Belgium too, I would suggest. For Switzerland, I'm not sure, because Switzerland has very specific immigration policies that are quite difficult. I would suggest that France would be a direct competitor for Africans.

• (1645)

Mr. Joe Daniel: Are you suggesting that they have the right skill sets to fill the positions there or...?

Mr. François Boileau: I'm not suggesting anything. I'm just trying to answer your question correctly. Obviously in Canada we have

[Translation]

credential recognition. I'm not sure whether that is the proper term.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: It's okay. There's interpretation.

Mr. François Boileau: Yes, there's interpretation.

[Translation]

Foreign credential recognition falls under federal jurisdiction. Especially in Ontario, we wonder how those people are going to become members of professional associations. That falls under our jurisdiction in Ontario, and it is more complicated. Jean Augustine, our equity commissioner, is working on this issue. She is helping newcomers have their skills and credentials recognized so that they can join the professional associations in Ontario. That is a latent problem in Ontario. Slowly but surely, we are addressing it.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Is there anybody else?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Hébert: I don't think we are competing with another country. The proof is that we are never up to date with processing all the applications from potential immigrants who want to come to Canada.

Canada is a wonderful country and many people want to come here. The question is this: how do francophone immigrants integrate into communities where French is not the predominant language? The problem is not the number of immigrants who hope to come to Canada, but rather the way they can be integrated into, attracted to, and retained in our communities.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Let me respond to you.

In your earlier statement you stated that there are lots of jobs. You've got thousands of businesses looking for people for positions you can't fill. These immigrants can't take those positions? Why is there this discrepancy? Why is there this gap?

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Hébert: First, those businesses have not necessarily started the process of filling those positions through immigration. We are talking about small and medium-sized businesses in smaller regions where managers have often not gone to university or even graduated high school. All those processes are intricate for them. So those businesses don't always turn to immigration.

Second, those jobs don't always allow immigrants to come. The positions are not really recognized as being accessible to immigrants. Many factors come into play.

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Okay.

Let me give some of the others a chance.

Is there anybody else?

[Translation]

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: I am somewhere between Mr. Boileau and Ms. Hébert. There is not a great deal of competition, but France is still a competitor.

Let me explain. France's economy is not doing so well, but it is not doing so bad either. The media blow things out of proportion. In fact, every year, France attracts twice as many immigrants as Canada.

The competition actually is in other countries. I am thinking of francophone Africa in particular. The education system there is based on the French model, as history would have it. As a result, France has a huge advantage in terms of credential recognition. A doctor from a country in francophone Africa will have a much easier time working in France. There are barriers, but significantly fewer than here. Also, France's family reunification system is much more flexible than Canada's.

As a result, our problem has to do with the recognition of credentials. Mr. Boileau mentioned it in relation to all the regulated professions, such as teaching or health care. That is a huge challenge, a tremendous challenge. We have had to deal with that before as a lot of bilingual nurses, from Belgium especially, applied and we haven't been able to follow up on their applications because of the issue with the recognition of credentials and professional associations.

That is why I am sort of sitting on the fence. I think France is a competitor in this area.

• (1650)

[English]

Mr. Joe Daniel: Okay.

[Translation]

Mr. Ferdinand Kashama: I'd like to give my opinion on the subject.

I know that immigration in France is virtually inevitable. A lot more people try to immigrate to France, as mentioned.

Canada is very far from francophone countries. It can be difficult to get into Canada. The thing that's been a problem for years is how to integrate these individuals with credentials from their home countries. That's been an issue as long as I've been in Canada, and no solution has ever been found. I'm not sure whether the answer will fall from the sky or come from decision makers.

The question we have been asking for years is who has the authority to fix the problem. It's an issue that keeps coming up. How can we fix the problem? I don't know. The solutions just aren't coming.

That's what I wanted to add. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

It is now over to Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, NDP): I'm going to share my time with Ms. Day. She will go first.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd just like to clarify something. I don't want to take time away from the witnesses, but I'd like the committee to deal with our notice of motion today.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nicholls, your turn.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Most of my questions are for Mr. Boileau.

[English]

I'm going to ask them in English.

In November 2014, there was a report that came out, "Time to Act for the Future of Francophone Communities". In that report there were recommendations made that the federal government should report by April 30, 2015—or the minister—about the impact of changes to the immigration system.

Have you or anyone in your office been in contact with the minister to see if that deadline will be met?

Mr. François Boileau: We haven't been in contact with CIC because it's not our direct responsibility. It's the responsibility of our federal counterpart, Graham Fraser's office.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Have you spoken with Mr. Fraser about that?

Mr. François Boileau: We did, but on this specific point I don't think they've received any information. I don't want to go further, not knowing exactly what type of discussion has been entered into between my federal counterpart and CIC.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: In that report you jointly recommended that the federal government develop long-term tools and incentives for selecting francophone workers.

Do you have any idea of what those tools and incentives would be? Could you give the committee any idea of what they might be proposing?

[Translation]

Mr. François Boileau: The francophone significant benefit program we were discussing earlier is a good example of an incentive. The program clearly benefited employers. With the government's somewhat surprising decision to eliminate the program, we have one less tool in our arsenal.

Ontario, unlike other provinces, has very few tools that support immigrant selection. We would welcome any and all incentives. The francophone significant benefit program was one such incentive.

And since we are down an incentive, replacing it would probably be a good idea. That is more or less what we are saying in the joint recommendation. It's good to do something new, and the program's elimination may have been warranted, even though it came as a bit of a surprise. Francophone communities weren't consulted. But other incentives are needed in order to reach the proposed targets, in other words the 4% federal target and our 5% target in Ontario. I'd like to know what strategies and action plans are being put in place to meet those targets. The government has a responsibility to come up with some as well.

Also important is working with the communities, and we've made that very clear in the joint report. Communities have a very clear understanding of their region and their needs. We're talking about incentives, but it's important to engage people in the communities in order to figure out what will work. What will work in St. John's, Newfoundland, may not necessarily work in Labrador City. And the same goes for Ontario. I can assure you that the solution for Sudbury won't be the same as the one for London.

In this vast country of ours, understanding the distinct situation and needs of official language minority communities is essential. And that means involving them in the process. They need to be part of the solution.

• (1655)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: You recommended relying on francophone organizations to provide services to French-speaking immigrants. That was one of your recommendations.

I have a question for all of you. In *DesRochers v. Canada (Industry)*, the Supreme Court established that services of equal quality had to be made available in minority language communities.

Do you think the federal government's current immigration policy and programs take into account the francophone perspective? A simple yes or no answer will do.

Mr. Boileau, you can go first.

Mr. François Boileau: It's hard for me, as the provincial commissioner, to give a straight yes or no answer about a federal issue.

But if you'd like to discuss the *Desrochers* decision, I'd be happy to do so, having been trained as a constitutional lawyer.

Right now, though, I'm going to let my colleagues answer your question.

Ms. Anne Hébert: If the answer is yes, that perspective is becoming increasingly difficult to make out.

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: We get the sense that there are two parallel systems: an anglophone system and a francophone one. From the get-go, francophone minority communities have a huge handicap, and we don't have many tools left to overcome that handicap.

Mr. Peter Hominuk: No.

Mr. Ferdinand Kashama: When we look at Quebec, we see that the province has an organized network in place, from start to finish. But that isn't the case in the rest of Canada.

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: I'd like to make a point that no one has mentioned, given that it doesn't concern our provinces directly.

I'm extremely worried about the outcome in the case brought by the Yukon's French-language school board against the Yukon government. The territorial government doesn't want to consider newcomers as rights holders in French-language schools. If the court agrees, it would be a disastrous blow to our communities. If ever there were an institution that allowed for a community to form and develop, it's a school. Without newcomers, it would be a disaster. This is a tremendous concern. Were awaiting the outcome.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: Thank you.

Mr. Boileau, you recommended in your report that the federal government develop an action plan in cooperation with the provinces.

How should the federal government go about consulting the provinces? Should it consult with community organizations or the provincial ministries? How should that work?

Mr. François Boileau: Many provinces are much better equipped in terms of newcomer selection. In Ontario, we have very few tools

in that regard, but we have to start somewhere. That is why we recommended that the Ontario government establish a group of experts that includes community representatives and CIC officials. We came up with that recommendation in cooperation with the Ontario government, so it comes as no surprise to the province. The group would bring together representatives from CIC and provincial ministries, francophone immigration stakeholders—Peter Hominuk talked about that earlier—university and college administrators or professionals, school board administrators or professionals, business and chamber of commerce leaders and municipal representatives.

The group of experts would do three things: develop a holistic strategy for promoting, recruiting, welcoming, training, integrating and retaining francophone immigrants; develop a government-wide strategic plan, with a specific timetable, for achieving the 5% target; and, of course, establish annual evaluation and accountability mechanisms that are transparent and accessible to the public. That's a very important element. In many cases, there is little understanding around what the accountability mechanisms are.

Earlier, your colleague Ms. Day mentioned a motion. It looks a bit like one of the recommendations we, the commissioners, put forward. Our fifth recommendation was that the federal government

report, by April 30, 2015, on the actual or anticipated impact of the changes to Canada's immigration system, including Express Entry, on immigration to francophone communities.

Basically, accountability is hugely important.

Obviously, as the provincial and federal commissioners—and I'm speaking on behalf of my federal counterpart since we did write the report together—we have a responsibility to make sure that obligations are met and that measures are implemented by the prescribed deadlines. Given that we are dealing with accountability, the process has to be transparent, and that means involving the communities. It's perfectly normal for governments to make the decisions. We just want to understand them. It's important to know the explanation and justification behind those decisions, which need to be rooted in achieving the objectives of both the federal Official Languages Act and the province's French-Language Services Act.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boileau and Mr. Nicholls.

Mr. Leung, you may go ahead.

[English]

Mr. Chungsen Leung (Willowdale, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll probably be the last speaker.

It appears to me that there is either a disconnect or a mismatch between policy direction and allocation.

I come from countries where people do speak multiple languages. In Canada, of course, I recognize the fact that this is a bilingual country and that I have to learn two languages. The reality is that language itself should be economically driven.

If government policy is to allocate resources to driving a bilingual culture, then there should be an effort across the board here to develop the economy first in those multiple languages. Also, because we live in a much smaller world today, the language of commerce, as we saw, is going to be English, Chinese, Hindi, or even, in the Middle East, Arabic, and so on. The strength of an economy driven in the French language is mostly in francophone Africa and the Caribbean, as in Haiti, or France. Yes, in Canada we also have a centre of a francophone economy.

My question for the panel is, if you wish to make a recommendation to federal politicians, what should the weighting be? To me, it doesn't make sense to just pour a lot of resources into the French language when for people that we bring in either as immigrants or that we educate, that will not offer a job opportunity.

Having worked in Australia and Southeast Asia, I increasingly see that even in Australia, they're saying that they need to be a bilingual country, whether in English and Chinese, or English and Japanese, or English and Korean.

I'd like to hear some of your comments, please, Mr. Boileau.

[Translation]

Mr. François Boileau: If I may, I would stress the importance of understanding the facts as they relate to the bigger picture.

French is the fifth most spoken language in the world and the second most learned language globally. Currently, there are 270 million French speakers around the world, and by 2050, that number will rise to 850 million, if I'm not mistaken. And 80% of those French speakers will be in Africa, a continent that is experiencing incredible population growth and bursting with economic potential and partnership opportunities.

In order to achieve a long-term vision for the future, Canada has to put the economy first. I completely agree with you, and I am well aware of how important the economy is. That's why we need to craft a long-term vision that takes into account the fact that the world is shrinking, the fact that an amazing array of untapped opportunities is sitting on our doorstep, and we can't miss out on that. It would be foolish to ignore the the African continent, which holds incredible potential.

I'd like to give you a very quick example, if I may. If we look at what two Ontario colleges are doing, we see that, right now, Collège Boréal, in northern Ontario, is working with countries in Africa to help build courses and training programs around mining. Clearly, mining is, first and foremost, an economic undertaking.

Similarly, La Cité collégiale is working with people in the Ivory Coast to help develop a police academy. This is an incredible asset. We've built ties with people in Africa—ties, which, as of right now, are enriching our francophone community while, of course, helping those African nations.

So I'm perfectly at ease discussing the economy. Our economic concerns aren't any different. Being francophone doesn't make us foolish. We, too, want to make money and ensure that our children can prosper in a francophone environment.

• (1705)

Mr. Gaël Corbineau: I'd like to build on what Mr. Boileau said.

We're seeing more and more articles being written about the population explosion happening right now in French-speaking Africa. By 2050, or thereabouts, French will be the most spoken language in the world. That's not that far off.

Mr. Peter Hominuk: I'd like to draw your attention to the findings of a study that the Conference Board of Canada did within the past two years. The study showed that bilingualism in New Brunswick and Quebec resulted in billions of dollars in additional economic benefits. In Ontario, we'd like to see what those figures would be if the province were to ever decide to become officially bilingual. Clearly a francophone economy exists, and it may be larger than we think.

I'd also like to point out that Canada's French fact isn't limited to Canada's francophones. In Ontario, enrolment in French-language schools recently hit 100,000 students. I'll give you a statistic. Ontario has twice as many anglophones in immersion schools, as compared with French-language schools. As we speak, more than 300,000 students in Ontario are in an immersion school. Our friends at Canadian Parents for French, whom we work with a lot, often tell us that the school boards can't even keep up with the demand for immersion programs.

There's still a lot of room for improvement when it comes to the status of French in Canada and global competitiveness. We need to ask ourselves what kind of country we want. If we truly want a bilingual country, we need to give every Canadian the opportunity to benefit from both official languages.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hébert, go ahead.

Ms. Anne Hébert: Because of our history and the challenges we faced around bilingualism in the old days, we tend to view bilingualism as an expense and a burden, and we overlook its economic potential. As a country, we really need to see the economic potential that bilingualism holds. And the same goes for our province, which is also bilingual. It could be considered a mini Canada.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Do you have another question?

Mr. Chungsen Leung: Yes, I have a final question.

In the entire policy, are we able to attract in the province of Quebec, let's say, the cross-cultural/cross-language training of Canadians from other provinces who are unilingual English—for example, Ontario right across to British Columbia? Do we have that?

I met a lot of French-speaking students out in B.C. and in other provinces, but when I do work in Quebec, in Chibougamau and so on, I don't usually see English-speaking students coming in, or English-speaking workers coming in as often. There are a few places in northern New Brunswick, for example Bathurst, where I've worked, and Chibougamau.

Why do you find that type of cross-education is not as popular? Are there any comments on that?

• (1710)

[Translation]

Mr. François Boileau: You're looking at me, but I prefer not to answer. That would be a good question for my federal counterpart, the Commissioner of Official Languages. He is the best person to answer that kind of question. I can't really comment on what goes on in Quebec, as I don't have the slightest clue.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you all. Your input will be of great benefit to us as we study francophone immigration.

We're going to take a five-minute break, after which we'll discuss Ms. Day's motion.

[English]

We'll suspend for five minutes and then come back.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1715)

[Translation]

The Chair: We are now resuming the 42nd meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

Ms. Day, you have the floor.

Would you mind reading your motion first and then explaining it?

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My motion reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Official Languages ask the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to provide it with statistical data on the new "Express Entry" application management system, which began operating in January 2015, particularly regarding the number of people currently in the Express Entry pool, the number of people who have come to Canada since the system was implemented, their country of origin, their languages spoken, including their proficiency in one official language or both, and their education level, before the appearance of the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Mr. Chair, I am introducing this motion because we have the impression that the new Express Entry program will bring a larger number of people who do not speak French into the country and may cause an imbalance in provinces where a certain proportion of linguistic duality must be maintained.

We know that 80% of immigrants to Canada are allophones and that they end up choosing English as their preferred official language. And given that a two-track system is being put in place, with Express Entry, we are concerned that it will cause an imbalance between anglophone and francophone communities, particularly in communities with a francophone minority.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gourde, you may go ahead.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I think this is the kind of question we can ask the minister directly when he appears before the committee next week. And for that reason, we are going to vote against the motion. That being said, I

encourage my colleague to put her questions directly to the minister. If she doesn't do it, other members of the committee could.

The Chair: Any further comments?

Ms. St-Denis, please go ahead.

Ms. Lise St-Denis: I still suggest that we send the request in the motion to the immigration minister's office. He may not be able to give us all the information on the spot, so he would probably benefit from seeing the questions ahead of time. And he could even provide us with the answers in advance, which would be very helpful.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. St-Denis.

Mr. Nicholls, over to you.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: I was going to say the same thing. If we ask the minister to bring the information with him, he'll have the answers when he appears before the committee.

I can't see why you would vote against the motion. All we're asking the minister is to make sure that he has the information with him.

• (1720)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You want to request the information before he appears, but we're saying you can ask those questions when he's here. I think that makes perfect sense.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls: If he doesn't have the information, asking the questions will be pointless. If the minister or his deputy says that he doesn't have the data with him, it will just prove that the motion was warranted. We need that information.

We'll see.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: You just explained why we have to vote against the motion. If the minister doesn't have all the information with him, at that point, you can introduce a motion like this one. As for us, we prefer to wait to see what the minister's answers are.

The Chair: Very well.

Ms. Day, your turn.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I'd just like to stress the importance of having this information, especially because getting it from Citizenship and Immigration Canada is very hard. Precisely because they are from other countries, all immigrants are screened. The department knows exactly which languages they speak when they get here, what their situation is, whether they are refugees, and, if they are allophones, which official language is next on their list of spoken languages.

That's pretty basic information, and it's always nice to have the data ahead of time when asking the minister questions. Otherwise, we're going to ask him why he didn't bring the information, which will be a big waste of committee time. It will be a waste of the minister's time as well. And I don't think we're here to waste time.

The Chair: Very well.

All those in favor of Ms. Day's motion?

[English]

(Motion negated)

[*Translation*]

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sure that Minister Alexander's deputy will review the transcript of the committee meeting to prepare the minister for our questions.

Without further ado, this meeting is adjourned.

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