



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 086

Monday, February 12, 2024

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



Standing Committee on Official Languages

Monday, February 12, 2024

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.)): This meeting is called to order.

Welcome to meeting number 86 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

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

I will summarize the instructions and guidelines for those joining us virtually. It has been three years since we started using the Zoom application, so we are used to it. Nonetheless, I wish to inform the committee that, in accordance with our routine motion regarding sound tests, all the witnesses have performed the required tests before the start of the meeting. Everything is in order, so the interpreters should be able to hear everyone well and we can proceed smoothly in both official languages.

Today, we have a special visitor for the first hour of the meeting. Mr. Gilles Grenier, professor emeritus from the University of Ottawa, is appearing as an individual. We also welcome Ms. Karen Greve Young, the CEO of Futurpreneur Canada, who is joining us by videoconference.

Before we begin, I apologize for starting late. Such are the uncertainties of parliamentary life. There were two votes in the House before the meeting, which delayed us by about 15 minutes.

As a result, I will be very strict with your speaking time. To our esteemed guests, you will each have five minutes to tell us a bit...

Would you like to say something, Mr. Godin?

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Yes, Mr. Chair, I would like to know how the time will be divided. It is 4 p.m. now. We have lost half an hour. The meeting was originally supposed to be divided into two one-hour parts. How will we proceed now?

The Chair: For the first part, we will start with a full series of questions. Then, time permitting, we will have a second round of questions, but with reduced speaking time.

Mr. Joël Godin: What does that mean in practical terms?

The Chair: It will be reduced by half.

Mr. Joël Godin: So we will have two 45-minute sessions, is that right?

The Chair: No, that's not what I meant.

We will finish the first part of the meeting at 4:30, and will then have an hour with the next group of witnesses.

Another option would indeed be to divide the meeting into two 45-minute parts. Is that agreeable to everyone?

Some members: Agreed.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): For my part, I have to leave at 5:30.

The Chair: Yes, you have important obligations, I have no doubt.

So the committee agrees that we will divide the meeting into two 45-minute parts.

I will give each witness five minutes. I will be strict with the time to leave us more time for questions and answers.

Let us begin with Mr. Grenier.

Mr. Gilles Grenier (Professor Emeritus, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Hello, everyone. Thank you for inviting me.

I am a professor emeritus in the economics department at the University of Ottawa.

I will present the findings of some of my past research that relates to the committee's concerns. The research looked at the economics of the labour market and included the links between language and immigration on the one hand, and salaries and financial status on the other. The research looked at Canada as a whole, at Quebec, and at the other provinces to some extent, including Ontario and New Brunswick. The data was drawn from various Canadian census records. I used the econometric methods that economists use to analyze the effects of certain variables on other variables.

Here is an overview of what I learned from that research.

In Quebec, the income levels and financial status of francophones have improved relative to anglophones since the 1970s.

I also did research on Ontario and made some interesting findings. Francophones in Ontario have very good incomes relative to anglophones. That is not the problem. The problem in Ontario is the reduction in the demographic weight of francophones as a result of assimilation and immigration, which is very high. As to the language spoken at home, francophones account for just 2% of Ontario's population.

The situation in New Brunswick is also interesting. In the past, francophones had lower incomes than anglophones, but they have caught up quite a bit in recent decades. The proportion of francophones in New Brunswick has dropped a bit, but it is steady. On the whole, francophone communities in New Brunswick are holding quite strong.

In Ontario, the problem is with the numbers, but francophones do quite well financially.

I also conducted a few studies on immigration and its impacts on the official languages. My recent research focused primarily on Quebec, and Montreal in particular, to determine what percentage of immigrants integrate into the francophone or anglophone community in terms of the language used at home and at work.

On the whole, my research showed that immigrants use English more than French at home and at work as compared to non-immigrants. Immigration therefore increases the prevalence of English and decreases that of French. That is the case not only in Quebec, but in the other provinces as well.

Up until about 2016, however, new immigrant cohorts in Quebec tended to use French more and more, so the impact on the prevalence of French was minimal. Unfortunately for the French language, the 2021 census showed a reversal of the trend, with recent immigrants using English much more than French, contributing to the decline of French.

My research showed that immigrants' country of origin was a determining factor in the language community they choose. Given the global prevalence of English, immigrants are likely to choose English if they have no prior ties to French. So the immigrants' country of origin plays a decisive role in the language they choose.

Other studies also looked at the effect of language of work on income, for both francophones and anglophones in Quebec and for immigrants. The results were a bit disappointing for French, as the research showed that a francophone could earn more by working in English, while an anglophone, even a bilingual one, did not earn more by working in French. The best outcome was for those who worked about 75% of the time in English and 25% of the time in French, as they earned more than those who worked in English or French only. So English is a necessity and French is just an asset. That is one conclusion.

I also conducted research on immigrants in Quebec and the results were the same: immigrants could earn more by working in English.

In conclusion, since English is the dominant language globally and immigration is the main source of population growth, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain linguistic balance in Canada.

• (1605)

Thank you.

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

[English]

Ms. Greve Young, the floor is yours for a tight five minutes.

Go ahead.

Ms. Karen Greve Young (Chief Executive Officer, Futurpreneur Canada): Thank you very much.

Dear members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Karen Greve Young. I am the CEO of Futurpreneur Canada. We are a national non-profit organization that helps diverse aspiring entrepreneurs launch successful businesses across the country.

We have a long-standing partnership with the Government of Canada, consistently working together since 2001 and, in fact, in Futurpreneur's 27-year history, we have supported more than 17,700 entrepreneurs aged 18 to 39 in launching more than 14,000 businesses spanning every province and territory. Quebec has been our largest province to date.

Our unique model combines up to \$60,000 of collateral-free loan financing alongside one-to-one mentorship, and we have a unique partnership with the BDC through which we co-lend our resources.

We fill a critical gap by helping diverse young entrepreneurs who otherwise might struggle to access the financing and mentorship they need to launch a successful business.

We provide all of our services in both official languages, French and English, to all our clients across the country no matter where they are. As a national Canadian organization, we always ensure that we consistently serve entrepreneurs in the official language of their choice. In fact, I have been with Futurpreneur for five years. Since I joined, we have grown our bilingual capacity by 82% to ensure seamless client support in both official languages.

Today, all of Futurpreneur's 120 employees are fluent in English, and nearly 50% of our staff are fluent in French, either francophone or fully bilingual. We have the capacity to communicate with and serve all clients and members of the public in either official language at any time in any region. Our Quebec-based staff are all fully bilingual and can serve English-speaking clients as well as francophone clients.

We purposely invest in francophone talent, skills and experience outside of Quebec to best serve and represent the diverse needs and experiences of official-language minority communities. Over half of our French-speaking staff are located outside Quebec, and every Futurpreneur team has at least one fully bilingual team member.

• (1610)

[Translation]

We also have more than a dozen team members, including myself, who can work in French, although they have not completely mastered the language and are not counted among the 50% of the team who are perfectly bilingual.

[English]

Futurpreneur is committed to inclusive economic impact and achieves this by helping diverse young entrepreneurs start and succeed. Recognizing and elevating the diversity of OLMC entrepreneurs, including newcomers, BIPOC entrepreneurs, 2SLGBTQIA+ entrepreneurs and people with disabilities, means taking an intersectional approach and understanding that linguistic barriers may be part of a wider set of systemic barriers.

As we are meeting during Black History Month, I do want to specifically note the importance of supporting Black entrepreneurs across Canada, many of whom are francophones outside of Quebec. One of the entrepreneurs who received a loan and mentorship through Futurpreneur's Black entrepreneur start-up program is Ingrid Brousillon, a francophone newcomer who settled in Vancouver. Ingrid is the founder of Griottes Polyglottes, a company focused on team-building and personal development through theatre workshops.

We recently featured Ingrid in our Black History Month storytelling campaign with an interview that you can find on our social media channels that seamlessly goes between French and English. Her story highlights the importance of ensuring that the entrepreneurial ecosystem can support OLMCs anywhere in Canada. In fact, Futurpreneur's Black entrepreneur's start-up program team, who are all members of the Black community, are bilingual and able to provide services in French or English.

Our indigenous entrepreneur start-up program, which is fully staffed by members of indigenous communities, also has members who can provide services in both English and French.

I do want to highlight the importance of partnerships with local, regional and national organizations, associations and networks that support OLMC entrepreneurs. Futurpreneur works with a variety of partners and organizations focused on OLMCs to refer or recruit entrepreneurs, to share information and best practices and to work on collaborative initiatives.

This model has been highly successful, and we consistently work with the ecosystem across Canada to ensure that programs adequately serve diverse young entrepreneurs in OLMCs, thus contributing to Canada's inclusive socio-economic development.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Greve Young.

Can you conclude in 10 seconds?

Ms. Karen Greve Young: Yes.

Supporting OLMC entrepreneurs has been and will continue to be core to Futurpreneur's work, and we look forward to continuing our successful partnership with the Government of Canada in support of inclusive economic development.

Thank you.

[Translation]

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

We're going to start the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes for questions and get answers. It will be interactive.

We're starting with the Conservatives. Mr. Godin, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Young and Mr. Grenier.

Through the study we're currently conducting, we want to learn about best practices for official language minority communities.

Mr. Grenier, you said that in Quebec, people who were bilingual had better incomes. Do you have any data indicating whether official language minority communities outside Quebec are experiencing economic gain or decline? We'll talk about demographics afterwards.

Mr. Gilles Grenier: I did some studies on this a while ago, but I don't have the most recent data. So I don't want to go too far.

Mr. Joël Godin: I don't want the exact figures, but can you give us an order of magnitude?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: Okay.

As I said, as far as Ontario is concerned, all the economic results show that Franco-Ontarians are doing well economically. The Franco-Ontarian community is very dynamic and has a lot of entrepreneurs. According to income and labour market data, the situation is very good.

I haven't checked for all the provinces, but I think that's the case elsewhere as well, in general. As I said, there has been an improvement in New Brunswick, for example. Acadians in New Brunswick are doing relatively well economically.

So, in terms of the value of their contribution, the francophone communities, at least in Ontario and New Brunswick, are dynamic. They contribute to society and they have good economic conditions.

• (1615)

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

I will now turn to Ms. Young.

You ended your presentation by saying that you were open to new best practices.

What practices could improve the performance of official language minority communities, give them the tools they need to do better economically and make them more attractive, so that francophones in regions outside Quebec will want to settle there?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Greve Young: Thank you for the question.

I will approach it from the employee side, as well as our services side.

As I mentioned, close to half of our bilingual employees live outside of Quebec. In fact, we pay a premium to employees who have English and French, because we value having the French language in order to serve francophone Canadians, wherever they live.

In terms of our services, again, we have francophone or French—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Young. I understand that your organization has a structure and employees, but that's not exactly what I wanted to know.

In concrete terms, what additional tools would you like to have in your tool box so that your organization is better and can support people who want to settle in official language minority communities?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Greve Young: That is interesting. I'm sorry. I did not fully understand your question.

We currently already serve francophone Canadians, regardless of where they live. We have francophone team members throughout the country. An additional tool that we are currently using, but could use more of, is partnerships with organizations that are in rural communities where we have a number of francophone Canadians. We currently have 21 partnerships. We could have more to ensure that we have people in place, in addition to our staff members.

Having online tools is also very helpful, so that an anglophone in Quebec or a francophone, wherever they are across the country, has access to all of our webinars, which are always—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Godin: I'm sorry to interrupt you, Ms. Young, but I don't have much time left.

I guess what I'm asking is this. What would you ask the government to do to make the regions more attractive and more prosperous? What tools can we put in your tool box to enable you to enhance prosperity in regions that include official language minority communities?

[*English*]

Ms. Karen Greve Young: Futurpreneur is currently up for funding renewal with the federal government. The federal government's funds help us to ensure that we can deliver our services. As I said, we seamlessly deliver our services in French or English. However, we need funding in order to employ the people who work with entrepreneurs and give them mentorship and funding.

To be honest, I think more of what the government is currently doing to support those organizations that are supporting francophones outside of Quebec.... We partner with them today and we'd like to continue partnering. We need to continue doing our work in order to make that happen. We do provide everything in both languages today. I think the fact that the government celebrates both languages is brilliant.

I know that I'm not getting exactly to the answer that you were asking me for, but I'm feeling very supported. I hope we are supporting entrepreneurs as they would like to be supported wherever they are.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Young.

[*English*]

That's all the time we have for Monsieur Godin.

[*Translation*]

I now give the floor to Angelo Iacono of the Liberal Party for six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Grenier, your area of expertise, economics, obviously relates to bilingualism, language of work, minority languages and immigrants. This committee is mandated to reflect on issues directly affecting official language minority communities, particularly francophone communities outside Quebec.

Most of the articles you've written concern the situation in Montreal or, more generally, in Quebec. Do you have any knowledge of the economic situation of francophone communities outside Quebec?

• (1620)

Mr. Gilles Grenier: Yes, a little.

You're right to say that most of the articles I've written have focused on Quebec, and especially on Montreal. That said, some 20 years ago, I wrote an article on francophones in Ontario and New Brunswick. More recently, I had a master's student update my results from that study. As I said in my presentation, the update showed a significant improvement in the economic status of New Brunswick francophones. Their level of education had finally caught up with that of anglophones. When we analyzed income, we didn't see any significant wage gap between francophones and anglophones. At times, we even noted a positive difference in favour of francophones.

From the perspective of—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you, Mr. Grenier.

Mr. Chair, could we ask the witness to provide us with that new data as soon as it's been updated? Thank you.

I have another question for you, Mr. Grenier.

Last November, the Government of Canada announced new immigration targets. By 2026, the government wants to integrate 6%, 7% and then 8% francophone immigrants.

What do you think of these new targets?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: I think they're very ambitious and I'm not sure we'll be able to meet them. The federal government has long had targets for francophone immigration outside Quebec, that is to say to attract francophone immigrants to provinces other than Quebec, but, as I understand it, those targets were met only once. In my opinion, significantly increasing immigration levels for the next few years to nearly 500,000 immigrants a year will make it even more difficult for francophone communities to meet those targets.

I nevertheless encourage the government to make an effort to ensure that we have francophone immigrants. There are good francophone immigration pools around the world. For example, people from Haiti, Morocco and Algeria come to Canada to study or work here, as do many people from France. Most of them go to Quebec, but many could settle in Ontario or other provinces as well.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's perfect.

What could Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada do to increase the pool of potential candidates and improve recruitment?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: It's not easy, because the pool of immigrants who will integrate into English is much larger than the pool into French. English is the world language. Currently, the vast majority of immigrants to Canada come from China, India, the Philippines and other Asian countries. Although those countries are not predominantly anglophone, English is the prevailing second language. Immigrants from those countries therefore tend to integrate into English. Even if they go to Quebec, it's very difficult to integrate them into French.

The francophone pool is always smaller. Despite that, French is not a dead language in the world. It remains a key international language. North African countries like Algeria and Morocco are important for francophone immigration. In addition, sub-Saharan African countries, particularly those in West Africa, such as Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Congo, are sending more and more immi-

grants to Quebec, but they could send immigrants to the other Canadian provinces too.

There are good francophone immigration pools in Quebec and outside Quebec.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: I'm pleased to hear you say that the French language is not dead.

Recently, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada announced a new immigration policy. Would you like to share your comments on it with our committee?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: I imagine you're talking about the policy to admit 500,000 immigrants a year. Personally, I find that this policy aims to bring in too many immigrants. I've expressed that opinion in the past, particularly when I've made suggestions for Quebec. I've always thought that Quebec's immigration levels were reasonable, but that the projected targets for the rest of Canada were much too high.

We're now seeing the consequences of that. Just look at the housing crisis. Canada's population, particularly Ontario's, has grown so rapidly that we now have a housing shortage that's making it hard to integrate immigrants.

I think Canada's immigration policy has set targets far too high. They're perhaps twice what they were five or six years ago.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Grenier. You will certainly be able to provide more details in the next round of questions.

It's now the Bloc Québécois's turn. Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Grenier, in 2019, you published an article entitled "Quebec's language policy and economic globalization". According to the summary, francophones in Quebec have seen their purchasing power improve and now have better control over the economy. However, in the labour market, working in English pays more than working in French, particularly for immigrants.

This committee has seen studies that tended to say the opposite, that is to say that anglophones are apparently poorer and experience more unemployment, for example. However, those studies were based on the first official language spoken and the median.

You have studied the language of work aspect more. Can you tell us a little more about that?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: A number of methodologies can be used to compare wages and incomes. Depending on which one is used, results can vary.

As for the method I used, I don't necessarily want to get into the technical details. Economists who compare wages usually use microdata. It's called the human capital earnings function. This tool completes a regression analysis of wages using such variables as education, experience, employment and other characteristics. We added language of work to the explanatory variables. We had controls on acceptable and reasonable differences in wages, and we were trying to see what impact the language of work had on wages.

For immigrants in Montreal, we did end up with the somewhat disappointing result that it was more profitable to work in English than in French. You have to understand that it's much harder for immigrants in Montreal. We want them to learn French, so we offer them French courses. However, when they enter the labour market, French is often not enough and they also need to learn English to function properly.

So Quebec is in a somewhat unique situation compared to the rest of Canada. In Toronto, there is only one language: Everyone has to learn English. On the other hand, in Quebec the government wants immigrants to learn French, and that's not always easy. They also have to learn English. Immigrants from francophone countries often have limited knowledge of English when they arrive. So it's a bigger challenge for Quebec than it is for the rest of Canada.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You also said that, despite the progress made by francophones, the decline of French in Quebec is a cause for concern. The challenge is to integrate more immigrants into the francophone majority. The federal government recently said that it also had a mandate to protect and promote French in Quebec, and that's something quite new.

Isn't it somewhat inconsistent that in Quebec, for example, all funding for programs supporting the economic development of official language minority communities is allocated to English, or to strengthening anglophone economic development, particularly to support groups that promote recruiting immigrants to fill anglophone positions?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: I don't want to venture too far into anglophones' needs in Quebec. I think English is already very alluring in Quebec. We don't need to work to get more people to speak English.

I can't say any more in that respect.

• (1630)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You stated that the economic situation for francophones in Ontario and Quebec had improved.

Could the fact that they speak more English and work more in English be one of the factors that explains that?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: Yes, up to a point. More and more francophones have become bilingual over the past 20 or 30 years.

In today's world, English is an international language, a bridge language. If you go to Europe, you'll see that people complain about the value placed on English and the dangers it poses. So we're not the only ones in this situation in Quebec, but we can deal with it. It's okay to use English to a certain extent, to communicate with people abroad, but there's still room for French. It remains a

key international language. It's spoken in Africa, Asia and the Americas.

As an economist, I think that French must be able to compete with English. We know that English is so predominant around the world that French could never replace it, but other languages, including French, must be able to compete with English, and certain activities, such as scientific research and business, must be conducted in French.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I think that a number of countries, such as Italy, are also experiencing this phenomenon, but Italians still retain their place in the labour market and in the economy.

Mr. Gilles Grenier: The difference is that Italians, for example, learn English as a second language, but speak Italian at home in their country. In Quebec, the problem is that there's a large anglophone community—

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Grenier. That's all the time we have.

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

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

I'd first like to ask Ms. Greve Young a question about the barriers entrepreneurs are facing.

On a number of occasions, this committee has heard about the lack of French-language child care services across the country and, more generally, the lack of affordable child care services.

Can you tell us how important access to child care is for the entrepreneurs you work with who are pursuing business opportunities?

[English]

Ms. Karen Greve Young: Access to child care is a priority for both women and men entrepreneurs under 40 whom we support. They are into the child-bearing years. In fact, some of the entrepreneurs we've supported have started day cares for their communities. Those are the businesses because there is so much demand. In fact, several of those businesses are francophone child care centres outside Quebec. As you identify, that is very much a need that we've seen. That's anecdotal.

I would say that entrepreneurs' most valuable resources are their time, the money they need and the advice that they get. Child care that frees up their time to do their business is a need. I don't have hard data on that, but anecdotally, yes. They also need funding, and they need funding without fear of discrimination. That's something we provide. That's why having it available and adjudicated in both languages is important wherever entrepreneurs are. They also need mentorship and coaching, and they need mentorship and coaching in the language that they're most comfortable in—either French or English.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you very much for sharing that. It's great to hear about the work the entrepreneurs you're working with are doing on child care services—especially francophone child care services.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Grenier, as we know, the federal government recognizes the need to financially support federal public servants who speak both official languages. It also recognizes the need to ensure that they have access to language training services.

Do you feel it's important that this approach be applied to other occupations in Canada?

• (1635)

Mr. Gilles Grenier: Should we encourage bilingualism in the private sector or in other occupations in the same way we're trying to do in the federal public service? Certainly.

I think we should have more bilingual people in Canada, more people who speak French. A lot of anglophones learn French through French immersion programs. Unfortunately, they rarely have the opportunity to practise it because they work mainly in English. I think we should strive to ensure that workplaces in Canada become much more bilingual, as is the case in Quebec to some extent.

In Quebec, it's perfectly normal to work in both languages. For example, in restaurants in Montreal, they ask customers if they want to be served in French or English. I'd like us to do the same in Ottawa, and I'd like servers to let us to order in the language of our choice. However, we often don't do it because we're afraid the person won't understand us.

In my opinion, we should encourage more and more people to work in both official languages. That would distinguish us as Canadians. It would make us stand out from Americans. In Canada we speak two languages, and in the United States they speak only one.

Does that answer your question?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes. That's a good suggestion.

The committee has talked a lot about the link between education and economic development. As we know, there's a huge shortage of French-speaking teachers across Canada. Our schools and day cares need teachers and educators.

Do you think it would be important for the federal government to commit to finding solutions, in partnership with the provinces and organizations involved in education, to address this labour shortage? Would it also mean finding solutions in terms of economic development?

Mr. Gilles Grenier: There are labour shortages in all areas, particularly in education and health care. Efforts should most certainly be made to hire more educators and teachers who can teach in French. On the other hand, it's not easy, because there are indeed labour shortages just about everywhere.

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

That's all the time we have for the first part of the meeting. We have to suspend the meeting temporarily at 4:45 p.m. in order to do the sound tests for the next witnesses.

Thank you, witnesses, for coming and sharing your knowledge with us. If you feel that additional information should be sent to us, please do not hesitate to forward it to our clerk. She will transmit all written information to the committee members. Please note that this written information carries the same weight as testimony.

I'm suspending the meeting for a few minutes.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1640)

The Chair: We are resuming the meeting.

I welcome the witnesses who are participating via videoconference in the second hour of our meeting.

To begin, we welcome Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins, professor from the Université de Moncton. The last time I saw him, I'd say his hair and beard were a little less white.

We also have with us Mr. Kenneth Deveau, from the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Mr. Desjardins is from southeastern New Brunswick, in Acadia; and Mr. Deveau is from Baie Sainte-Marie, in Nova Scotia.

Welcome, dear friends.

You each have about five minutes to present your statements. I'm adamant about sticking to the five-minute time limit, because that gives committee members more time to ask questions. Afterwards, there will be the interactive question and answer period with the various representatives of our political parties, who are quite sedate these days, given the times.

That said, we'll start with Mr. Desjardins, who has five minutes.

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins (Professor, University of Moncton, As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

My name is Pierre-Marcel Desjardins. I'm a professor of economics at the Université de Moncton. I've worn other hats, including that of chair of the board of RDEE Canada for two years.

I'd like to submit four points to you.

Firstly, it often happens in economics that we don't give enough importance to what we might call transaction costs. Language is one element. There is geographical proximity, historical proximity, but also cultural proximity, including language. According to forecasts on the growth of the world's French-speaking population, the proportion of the world's francophone population is becoming increasingly important, mainly because of what is happening in Africa.

Secondly, when we need access to a workforce, sometimes the statistic we refer to is mother tongue—this is often an important point for companies. Alberta, for example, has 79,000 native French speakers, but 260,000 people who can speak French. When it comes to economic development, it's often just as important to look at the ability to converse in French when we do our analysis.

Thirdly, when we talk about bilingualism or the French fact—I have the New Brunswick context in mind in many of my references—we often get the impression that it's the bilingual people, mainly the francophones, who benefit. I'm referring here to what are commonly known as call centres or customer contact centres. In general, in New Brunswick, the percentage of the workforce that is unilingual English-speaking, i.e., speaks only English, is 56%. However, in customer contact centres, this percentage is 66%.

Remember that when you call a toll-free number, you're told to press 1 if you want to speak French and 2 if you want to speak English. Technology directs calls to the right place. Unilingual English speakers benefit from the presence of the French-speaking community and bilingualism.

Finally, fourthly, in my studies, particularly in Atlantic Canada and more specifically in New Brunswick, when you look at the averages, it may seem that the francophone community is perhaps underperforming economically. However, when you look at the situation in individual counties, francophones are generally more successful than their anglophone fellow residents in the same county. In fact, francophones are mostly concentrated in rural areas, while anglophones are mostly concentrated in urban settings.

I heard testimony from the two people who appeared before me. When we talk about public policy, it's extremely important to have policies that encourage rural development, because that's where francophones are concentrated. Often, when people move to more urban environments, mainly for economic and financial reasons, the rate of assimilation increases.

Among the targeted programs, we can think of early childhood, whose services should be offered in French. They shouldn't even be bilingual, but in French. We need schools, government services, arts and culture services in French. All the French-language services we're able to bring to rural areas contribute to the growth of francophone minority communities, some of which are often concentrated in more rural areas.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjardins.

I now give the floor to Mr. Deveau, from the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse.

Mr. Deveau, you have a maximum of five minutes.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau (Chief Executive Officer, Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse): Thank you for this opportunity. I hope to be as effective as Mr. Desjardins.

My name is Kenneth Deveau and I am the executive director of the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse. I have a doctorate in education from the Université de Moncton. I

was vice-rector of Université Sainte-Anne, as well as director and founder of Invest Nova Scotia, of which I was also vice-chair and chair. Recently, I completed the MIT Regional Entrepreneurship Acceleration Program. So I've gone from education at the beginning of my career, to economic development. Today, I'm going to try to make the connection between these two fields, share my thoughts with you, and perhaps make some suggestions.

Basically, we're talking about the vitality of our official language minority communities, or OLMCs. A community's vitality is defined by its ability to maintain itself as a distinct entity and to flourish within that context, and it can be summed up in three points: the status of the group, its language and culture, its institutional completeness and, of course, demographic factors. The latter receives much of our attention, but they are often the consequence of the other two factors.

Let's talk about status first. In economics, the language of business is English, whether in our communities, nationally or internationally. I've listened to the previous testimony. However, there are areas where French has a special status, and we should focus more on these areas when it comes to commercial exchanges for our communities. I'm thinking in particular of Quebec. Could we promote more trade between Baie Sainte-Marie and Quebec, for example? Are there specific domains where we could do more? It would be better to work in areas of endeavour that are already established, rather than trying to create new ones. I'm thinking in particular of culture and education. You've already talked about institutions and explored the question of education. Education, from pre-school to post-secondary, is an important factor contributing to the economic development and vitality of our communities. This has been studied extensively.

On the economic front, I'll focus on post-secondary education, to keep it brief. In Nova Scotia, after seafood products like fish and lobster especially, the export product that brings in the most revenue is post-secondary education. Université Sainte-Anne plays a major role in this. In Nova Scotia, foreign students are very important to the francophone economy. They represent more than just tuition fees. They're also a skilled workforce for our entrepreneurs and customers for our businesses. What's more, education is a gateway to international markets, whether in Europe, the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa. This is under-exploited, and I'm convinced there's a role for the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse to play here. There are under-exploited opportunities that we need to explore further.

Finally, I'll address the demographic issue, which is very important. Mobility means we're losing our young people, and that's a double loss. They're leaving our regions, like Madawaska—as you know, Mr. Arseneault—to pursue post-secondary education. We're losing not only our young people, but also the future leaders of our communities. The best and the brightest leave us and often don't come back. How can we bring them back? Before, we were looking to develop businesses. Now, given flexible working patterns, there may be more opportunities to explore.

We've also talked about immigration here at this committee. Francophone immigration is one of the priorities of the Canadian francophonie, the Government of Canada and the governments of certain provinces. Later, I'd like to tell you about a project of the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, concerning St. Mary's Bay. I'll use this project to venture to make some recommendations when you ask me questions.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to answering your questions.

• (1650)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deveau.

In the first round of questions, each political party will have six minutes.

Mr. Godin, the committee's first chair, will begin this round.

Mr. Godin, you have six minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to clarify that I'm not the chair of the committee; I'm the first vice-chair. You are the chair.

The Chair: Indeed, you are the first vice-chair of the committee. Sorry.

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Desjardins and Mr. Deveau, thank you for being here this afternoon.

What I heard was good to hear. In my opinion, you can give us many suggestions to equip minority regions, so that they remain attractive and prosper more.

My first question is for you, Mr. Desjardins. Do you have access to all the data needed to paint a proper picture of the situation of francophone entrepreneurs?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: The difficulty lies in defining “francophone entrepreneur”.

Is it the entrepreneur who speaks French, but whose employees speak English? Is it foreign ownership? Nailing down this definition is often the biggest challenge. Even with Statistics Canada censuses, it's not easy to access this information. Even if a definition could be found, obtaining the information needed to conduct analyses on business people would remain a challenge.

Mr. Joël Godin: If I understand correctly, this would be a very important tool to be able to conduct economic development based on the French language in minority communities, and development based on the English language in Quebec. That said, let's focus more on French-speaking regions.

If I understand correctly, you can still define certain categories, such as francophone entrepreneurship, francophone customers and bilingualism. However, you say that Statistics Canada should give you access to this data, since it would allow you to be even more effective.

Is that correct?

• (1655)

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: Yes, that's right.

The data we use is often census data. We're not necessarily offered the data to analyze a company's structure. Instead, we are given access to data related to places of residence and households. The data are therefore more related to employees, and not to the business environment.

We have statistics on language of work, but these don't allow us to connect that with types of business and markets. For example, we don't know whether these companies export to French-speaking markets. We need to make all these links to get a complete picture of the situation. Often, we have to conduct surveys and interview people in a company to build up a socio-demographic profile of a region. For example, I've done studies comparing Gaspésie with northern New Brunswick. It can be done. However, it's much more complex to compare companies in Gaspésie to companies in New Brunswick.

Mr. Joël Godin: It's not the same reality, indeed.

Thank you, Mr. Desjardins.

Mr. Deveau, earlier you said that foreign students were very important for maintaining the economic vitality of official language minority communities. There's the demographics, but there's also the economic impact.

Can you tell us a little more about that?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Yes, certainly.

According to the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, international students are a clientele, but they're also a resource. Indeed, international students who settle in our regions, even for a short time, patronize local businesses. For a rural region like St. Mary's Bay, this is an important clientele. For our businesses and employers, it's also a highly skilled workforce.

Personally, I think there's an under-exploited international business opportunity here, given the ties we could have with foreign countries.

I'd like to come back to your question, which was about research.

In addition to Statistics Canada data, we need to equip organizations, like the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, so that they can establish partnerships with researchers like Mr. Desjardins, and study the economy of our regions. That way, we'd have fewer problems when we set up projects, thinking they're a good idea but without having the evidence to make the right decisions at the right times.

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

My next questions will be for both of you, Mr. Desjardins and Mr. Deveau.

Would it be possible to send the committee best practices from official language minority communities? This could provide inspiration for all communities in Canada.

Also, would it be possible to suggest additional tools that would be necessary?

We talked about statistical data. I think that's a very important element, but surely there are other data. Our speaking time is limited, but I'd like to take this opportunity to ask you to send us these answers in writing. This would enable us to prepare a better report and invite the government to be more proactive, and to take the right steps with regard to the attractiveness of these communities. This attractiveness must be maintained. We also need to retain our knowledge and our young people. Finally, we need to keep foreign workers and students here. We need to make our communities more attractive and function even better, in addition to encouraging people to use French.

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: It would be our pleasure to do so.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

The next questions from the Liberals will come to us from the shyest member of the group, Mr. Darrell Samson.

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

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also thank you, Mr. Desjardins and Mr. Deveau.

Mr. Deveau, it's always a pleasure to see you back in top form. I know you love the research field, so you jumped at the chance to come and see us. That's what I realized with my colleague Mr. Godin, and I find this essential.

Two issues are close to my heart. The first is about RDEE, the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, which you know very well. At the Sommet national sur la francophonie économique en situation minoritaire, held in 2022, the RDEE explained that it was essential for the government to create a plan dedicated to francophone communities, either an economic plan or a strategy, to achieve its objective.

Do you have any comments on this? What do you think it might look like?

• (1700)

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: Among the factors identified were early childhood and immigration, as they often go hand in hand. Immigrants want their children to grow up in French. When they arrive in francophone minority communities outside Quebec, having access to early childhood services in French becomes attractive for them. Among those factors was also the issue of schools. Often, immigrants who settle in regions where French is not the majority language still want the opportunity to raise their children in French. It goes beyond simply speaking French at home. So—

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you for your answer, Mr. Desjardins. I don't want the answer to my question to focus on immigration as such.

I will ask Mr. Deveau if he can add to the debate on this issue.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Thank you for this opportunity, Mr. Samson.

Again, I'll go back to the idea of coming up with a thoughtful, progressive strategy based on research. I really believe that research is of the utmost importance. There is university research, but there is also a lot of applied research going on as we develop our projects. I'll give you an example of a project that we are in the process of preparing, in St. Marys Bay—

Mr. Darrell Samson: I'm sorry to interrupt. I know you want to talk about that, but I'm not going to let you because it's my time and I don't want to lose my second question, which is also important. I'm sure someone else will let you follow up on that. That said, you can certainly send us that example, which would be very useful for the committee.

So, Mr. Deveau, we know that young people are leaving our communities and that we have to put an end to that. We also know that the young people in our minority communities have a great sense of innovation and a great deal of creativity.

What can we do to work with young people, to stimulate their interest, so that they would create in the communities instead of having to go to the big cities? It would be important to look at that.

My question is for Mr. Deveau.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Okay. Thank you for your question, which I am happy to answer.

First, some young people from our regions are extremely qualified and live in major Canadian cities, which are experiencing serious housing problems. We have connectivity issues in our regions. Addressing those issues and developing strategies that would support people working remotely would help bring back young people who have potential and who are able to exercise leadership in our regions, from our regions. Organizations like the Conseil de développement économique could create these strategies.

Statistics actually show that the majority of entrepreneurs start their business after the age of 40. If we can bring young people of that age back to the communities, we will have budding entrepreneurs to make our regions prosper. That would bring capital to our regions, which is really the crux of the matter.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Mr. Desjardins, do you want to add anything on this? I'm giving you the opportunity.

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: I will answer quickly by saying that, when it comes to mobility, we want to stay in rural areas, but we need access to what is happening elsewhere. For that, we need high-speed Internet access, which is unfortunately not always available in rural areas.

On the other hand, without necessarily having an airport in every community, we would have to have air services that would enable us to go to the major centres once or twice a month to attend meetings and participate in development. These two elements would enable people to live in rural areas, in our francophone communities, and to remain open to the rest of the country and the rest of the world.

High-speed Internet and air transportation are two fundamental elements.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Okay.

My colleague Mr. Godin asked you to send your best practices to the committee in writing. I like that idea.

In the document you will be sending us, could you add a paragraph on the challenges and obstacles facing our communities? That would help us think about ways to eliminate those barriers and find better solutions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Samson.

I now give the floor to the committee's second vice-chair, Mario Beaulieu, of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have six minutes.

• (1705)

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

I'd like to thank our guests.

Mr. Deveau, you talked about the importance of areas, particularly with regard to immigration.

Could you elaborate on that?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Immigration is an urban phenomenon, not only in Canada, but everywhere.

If we want immigration to serve the Canadian francophonie, we have to develop measures to promote rural immigration. The welcoming francophone communities initiative is an interesting tool. At the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, we're building on the welcoming francophone community in Clare. We're going to set up a cohort.

I want to stress the importance of thoughtful action. We're really looking at a pilot project to establish best practices and expand them to the rest of Nova Scotia and, through our partners at the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité, across the country.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So it would be good to regionalize immigration and promote immigration in rural areas.

Are you saying this because you believe that French-speaking communities are more likely to be found in rural areas, or because highly urban areas favour anglicization?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: You answered the question by asking it. That's exactly right.

Old-stock French-speaking communities across the country are in rural areas that are losing ground, usually in favour of large urban centres.

For example, in Nova Scotia, the largest pool of francophones is now in Halifax. Francophones in Halifax have moved there from other provinces, mainly Quebec, but they also come from other countries.

Halifax benefits disproportionately from francophone immigration compared to Clare, Inverness or Chéticamp, so we're working with the province to develop solutions that will better distribute francophone immigration across the province by encouraging immigration to old-stock communities, where the French language has a better chance of survival.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: So you agree with Charles Castonguay, who says that immigration to places where the proportion of francophones is higher gives immigrants a better chance of becoming francophone or of maintaining their francophone identity.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Absolutely.

In fact, they will integrate better. That said, for that to happen, we need a critical mass. You can't do it one immigrant at a time. That's why the cohort idea is really important. People integrate better as a group than as individuals.

If we can help these immigrants settle in areas such as St. Marys Bay, where life is still lived in French, we would give this community a better chance of survival, but we would also give these people a better chance of integrating as part of the larger Canadian francophone family, of course.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: It's reassuring to hear what you have to say, because the proposal to target certain regions wasn't well received. That doesn't mean we want to depopulate other regions.

The language transfer rate among francophones outside Quebec increases with each census. Do you think there should be measures to counter this trend?

I would also like to come back to the topic of the study, which is economic development. You said that the language of work was English. Do you think it's possible for the language of work to be French in Nova Scotia or New Brunswick?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: In some institutions, particularly educational institutions, yes.

I'm sorry, but the customers of Nova Scotia's major seafood exporters are all over the planet. Trade with these customers is done in English. Of course, we talk to each other in French behind the scenes, but the work is done in English. I think it's going to stay that way.

At the very least, if these investments are made in communities like St. Marys Bay or the Acadian Peninsula in New Brunswick—communities with a real chance of survival—we'll come out ahead.

• (1710)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Perhaps it underscores the importance of the economic development of francophone communities outside Quebec. In Quebec, we see that businesses with French as the language of work often have francophone owners. There's a fairly significant correlation. So the more business people in francophone communities outside Quebec are able to develop their businesses, the more we'll be able to establish workplaces that operate in French.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: Do you mind if I respond to that?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Please go ahead.

The Chair: You have 20 seconds left.

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: You're absolutely right. There are specific areas we should focus on. I'm thinking in particular of culture, education and tourism. However, in other areas where there's a position in international markets, it's capital that counts, and I think that investing in regions where the language has a chance of survival is a winning choice.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Deveau.

Mr. Beaulieu, your time is up. You may have a chance to come back to it later.

We're going to move over to the NDP now. Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

I'd like to thank the witnesses. What they've told us today corresponds word for word to the concerns we're hearing here at home in Manitoba's francophone communities. It certainly reflects what we're hearing from the urban community in Saint Boniface, but it particularly reflects the concerns of rural communities across our province as well as in the Prairies.

Thank you for giving us such clear recommendations. As my colleagues know, I've been talking about the need to invest in early childhood services and in education in this committee for nearly three years. Personally, I have experienced my own difficulties in this regard. Our community has a francophone day care centre, but because of the labour shortage, I was never able to send my children there. When time passes and parents have no other options, they end up sending their children to the anglophone system, and we sometimes lose them forever.

I have questions for both of you, starting with Mr. Desjardins.

How important is it to invest in early childhood services? We know that we need infrastructure, that is to say day care centres, but also staff to take care of children. How important is it for the federal government to make stable investments in this area? How essential are these investments in retaining young families in our communities?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: This is fundamental in a number of ways.

First of all, there's a lot of talk about labour shortages. That said, we must help parents who want to enter the workforce. I think early childhood services are essential to promote the integration and retention of these people in the workforce.

Second, there's often a linguistic challenge. The situation in Manitoba is somewhat similar to what we experience in our region. We have bilingual options, but that often means that English becomes dominant. This confirms the importance of having early childhood services in French. It's said that kids will pick up English on the street and don't need to go to day care or school to learn it. This is fundamental.

Third, there's the issue of child care affordability. Not all parents can afford to pay extremely high fees to send their children to day care. Some, unfortunately, have to make the choice to stay at home, whether it's one parent or both. Sometimes, they are single-parent families. These parents don't do it by choice, but simply because the fees are really very high.

In that context, I would add one last element: provincial governments need to be at the table as partners, because they're the ones managing the funds on the ground. If, despite the directions given by the federal government, the funds aren't managed on the ground in such a way as to make francophone day cares truly accessible, we're missing the boat.

• (1715)

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

I'm going to use the time I have left for Mr. Deveau and look at the subject from another angle.

You talked about the essential role of international students. We know that the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship announced a few weeks ago that Canada was would be reducing the number of international students it receives. Unfortunately, we didn't hear any promise that French-language institutions would be granted an exemption. Representatives of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne told us that they were very concerned about this situation. Our institutions and communities depend on international students. What's very concerning is that the international community has already heard this announcement, and people are already thinking of studying elsewhere instead of coming to Canada.

Can you share your views and recommendations with us? Do you think it would be important to have an exemption for students who will be studying solely in French?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: I'm going to be very efficient: My answer is yes to everything you said.

We know that there's a market in education. International students are being used as a marketable commodity, somewhat underhandedly, at some institutions in Canada. We've seen examples of that. However, that's not the case with Canada's French-language universities and colleges. It's an integral part of our goals, as a society, to ensure the survival of these communities and even their development.

So the answer to your question is yes, absolutely.

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

How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You're just over your time. You're at six minutes and five seconds.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

Thank you very much.

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

Since we have to end the meeting at 5:30 p.m. sharp, we won't have time for the full next round of questions, so I'm going to give four minutes to the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party, and one minute—so just enough time to ask a good question—to the NDP and the Bloc Québécois.

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

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

Thank you to the witnesses.

Mr. Desjardins, you talked about the definition of small business, and that worried me a little. We're making significant investments, and we don't want to waste money. We want to do the best we can to help francophone businesses in minority communities.

Can you elaborate on that a little more? What definition would you suggest to describe what constitutes a francophone business? What would you suggest we do?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: Earlier we were talking about francophone entrepreneurs. Is it the manager or is it the business owner? That's what needs to be defined. That's part of the challenge.

In francophone minority communities, it doesn't matter if the president, owner or manager of a business is anglophone, as long as the employees can operate and work in French. I would consider that a francophone business, in a way, because the francophones in those communities can work there.

I tend to have a slightly broader definition of what constitutes a francophone business. Let's consider, for example, a multinational corporation that sets up in a community, but employs francophone people from that community. Even if it's a German company, it still enables people to live and work in their community, and in French. Given these kinds of situations, I think we need to have a fairly broad definition.

Mr. Marc Dalton: From your perspective, is it worth investing in these companies?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: Absolutely.

In the past, people often had to leave their communities in order to find employment. Now, when a region has lots of economic activity, they at least have a choice. I would never criticize anyone who wants to go elsewhere to make a living. However, what I do see as a serious problem is when people want to stay in their communities—often rural francophone communities—but they're forced to go elsewhere because of the lack of opportunities and choices.

Economic activity is always beneficial, whether it's local entrepreneurs or companies from elsewhere setting up in the community. If we can generate economic activity that creates high-quality jobs, in other words, jobs that enable people to make a good living, that should be applauded.

• (1720)

Mr. Marc Dalton: A witness who appeared just before you talked about the housing crisis, which is adding to the challenges

around integrating immigrants, not only from francophone countries, but from other countries too.

Mr. Deveau, you talked about how important francophone immigrants are to Nova Scotia and the Maritimes.

Do you sense similar tensions where you're from? Are you able to provide assistance to immigrants in your regions? I'm from Vancouver myself, and I know we're facing this challenge. Can you talk about that aspect?

The Chair: Mr. Dalton, that's an excellent question, but your time is up. Thank you very much.

Mr. Serré, over to you, for four minutes.

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

I would like to thank our two witnesses, Mr. Deveau from Nova Scotia and Mr. Desjardins from New Brunswick. I myself am a proud Franco-Ontarian from northern Ontario. Your comments make me feel right at home. In fact, I'm sure we have cousins in common. I really appreciate the information you provided.

I don't have much time, but I'd like to ask a question about the role of the provinces and municipalities. When we talk about labour shortages, that often includes a lack of services in French, especially in the areas of health and education, which are under provincial jurisdiction. There are also problems related to French-language services in the legal system.

Do you have any specific recommendations for the committee on how to work more closely with the provinces?

A number of national organizations have indicated that, in minority situations, the federal government should intervene. We are, after all, citizens of the provinces, and the provinces have a role to play.

Do you think the provinces should play a greater role in supporting the francophonie in these areas?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: I'll try to answer the question.

In terms of immigration, the situation in Nova Scotia is quite interesting. Successive governments have made commitments in this area, and there have even been partnerships between the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse, the provincial department responsible for immigration, and other players in the immigration field to target francophone immigration development strategies that solve problems rather than create them. That's a good example to see.

The federal government does have an important role to play in certain areas, and we see this in immigration. However, with regard to early childhood services, Nova Scotia is facing some challenges that I'd like to bring to your attention. Funding transfers for early childhood services have not necessarily solved problems for francophones in Nova Scotia. In some cases, it may even be the opposite.

I would encourage you to support us and our province when it comes to early childhood services. This will help safeguard early childhood education services in French in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Marc Serré: Mr. Desjardins, would you like to add anything?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: At the provincial level, it often depends on the agenda and the priorities of the government of the day. I don't think we can come to just one conclusion that applies uniformly to all provinces and regions.

I think it's essential that all three levels of government work together and pull in the same direction. We have to make sure that services are offered, but also that everyone does their part. When one level of government sets priorities, but other levels of government have different priorities, we unfortunately might not achieve the desired results in most cases.

• (1725)

Mr. Marc Serré: Since I only have 20 or 30 seconds left in my time, Mr. Deveau and Mr. Desjardins, I wonder if you could enrich the committee's reflections by sending us your recommendations with regard to rural regions in particular.

Also, do you have any recommendations for the federal government to get Statistics Canada to ask better questions in order to obtain data on francophones? I'm thinking here of rights holders, yes, but of other things as well.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Serré. We'll come back to this at the end of the meeting.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for one minute. You have time for a good question.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll try to ask my question quickly so that our guests have time to answer it.

We've been talking about the importance of delivering services in French and having workplaces that operate in French. In addition to the provisions that apply outside Quebec, Bill C-13 has also enacted legislation that's supposed to guarantee, or at least support, the delivery of services in French in federally regulated businesses in Quebec.

Don't you think that French should be the predominant language, if not the common language, also within federal institutions located in areas with a higher concentration of francophones?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: I'm perhaps more familiar with the situation in New Brunswick. In some regions in the northern part of the province, and even in the Moncton area, French is the main language of work in some federal departments. For example, I worked at Fisheries and Oceans Canada's head office in Moncton when I was a student, and I spoke French most of the time. I'm also the chair of UNI Financial Cooperation, which is a credit union that operates in French, since it is subject to the Bank Act.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Desjardins.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu. I allowed you to go over your allotted time of one minute.

Ms. Ashton, now over to you, also for one minute.

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

Mr. Desjardins, we talked about the labour shortage in education and the need for teachers, for example. Do you think it is essential to address the shortage of education workers in order to ensure the economic development of our communities?

Mr. Pierre-Marcel Desjardins: That is critical.

It's important to understand that solutions often take time to materialize, so we have to act now if we want to solve the problem within a few years. Supporting post-secondary institutions is essential, in my opinion.

Ms. Niki Ashton: What do you think, Mr. Deveau?

Mr. Kenneth Deveau: I couldn't agree more. I want to insist on a final point. It's very important that these teachers be trained in Canada, or that they be retrained with the Canadian context in mind.

The Chair: Thank you to Ms. Ashton and to the witnesses.

I'm sorry, but I have the unfortunate task of having to cut short the discussions, because we absolutely have to adjourn at 5:30 p.m. Some votes in the House caused us a bit of a delay. This is a common occurrence in Parliament. We had to cut 15 minutes from each of the two hours scheduled for the meeting.

To the witnesses, thank you for your testimony. Feel free to send us in writing anything that you would like to add. It will carry as much weight as your verbal testimony. You can send additional information to our clerk, who will forward it to the committee members.

Before we close, I would like to welcome a new permanent member of the committee, Annie Koutrakis, of the Liberal Party.

Thank you for accepting this mandate on a permanent basis.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much. I'm glad to be here with you.

The Chair: I would also like to thank Mr. Majumdar for filling in for a Conservative colleague.

Thank you, everyone.

The committee is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>