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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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•(0850)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Ladies and gentlemen, we will begin. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we will continue our study on the roadmap and immigration in Francophone minority communities.

This morning, we are pleased to have, by videoconference, two representatives of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta: Jean Johnson, President, and Isabelle Laurin, Executive Director.

Madam, sir, welcome to the committee.

We will begin with the roadmap. You will have five minutes to make a presentation, and then we will move on to a period of questions, answers, and comments. Then we will address the immigration issue.

Will Ms. Laurin or Mr. Johnson be making the presentation?

Mr. Jean Johnson (President, Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta): It will be me, Jean Johnson.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Johnson. We are listening.

Mr. Jean Johnson: Perfect. Thank you very much.

I would like to begin by thanking you for inviting us to give you our opinion as part of your study on Canada's roadmap for official languages 2013-2018.

My name is Jean Johnson, and I am president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, the ACFA.

Founded in 1926, the ACFA is the organization that has represented Alberta's francophone community for 90 years. I want to point out that Alberta's francophone community is much older than that. French was the first European language spoken in our territory. It is estimated that the first francophones appeared in what would become Alberta in 1705. It is important to make that historical note since, even today, some people believe francophones arrived in Alberta very recently. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

Our community has a rich and interesting history because it had to overcome many obstacles to its continued existence and development. The creation of the Province of Alberta in 1905 and the erosion and disappearance of language rights vastly exacerbated the assimilation of our many founding francophone communities. That is why the establishment of our first French-language schools in 1984 and the judgement of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Mahé case in 1990 breathed new life into Alberta's francophone

community. Today we are proud to say that full-time French-language education is spreading to a growing number of primary and secondary schools, including 40 francophone schools that have been managed by our community through four school boards since 1993. We also have more than 225 French immersion schools across Alberta in addition to our postsecondary education institutions.

However, some major issues still persist. We strongly support the common front of parents, communities and school boards in favour of modernizing and subdividing the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction in order to enhance the vitality of the francophone and Acadian communities. Our vision of Alberta's francophone community is inclusive of anyone wishing to live in French in Alberta. We are therefore here on behalf of 238,000 Albertans who constitute our French-language community.

As we look to the next action plan for official languages, I would like to address five points. I could take a look back, but I prefer to look ahead and propose some pathways for our future, some of which are highly innovative.

First, it is becoming necessary to enhance the Canada-community agreements. I do not know whether you are aware, but the funding granted to our community under the Canada-community agreement has remained at the same level since 1991, that is for the past 25 years. Over that time, our community has undergone enormous changes and has diversified, thus creating new needs. According to Statistics Canada, the French-mother-tongue population of Alberta increased by 43% between 1991 and 2011, rising from 56,730 inhabitants to 81,085. We take in many francophones from across the country and around the world. In 2016, we can see that this population is only growing.

Over the years, we have put considerable effort into minimizing our spending. Here are a few examples: we have shared payroll services; spaces and human resources are shared where possible; we use technology, in particular for online training seminars; we hold meetings via videoconference to enhance knowledge and information-sharing, while reducing travel-related costs; we have platforms that we use to share the best resources among organizations; we work together to maximize travel; and many others. However, despite our efforts, the federal government has not taken into account our population growth or increases in the cost of living, which has put enormous pressure on our community network and has prevented us from being competitive—

The Chair: Mr. Johnson?

Mr. Jean Johnson: Yes?

The Chair: Mr. Johnson, you may supplement your arguments when you answer the questions from committee members.

● (0855)

Mr. Jean Johnson: All right.

The Chair: Our time is somewhat limited.

I will immediately move on to Ms. Salwa Meddri, coordinator of the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba, who is here with us in Ottawa today.

Ms. Meddri, you have five minutes for your presentation, following which we will have some questions for you and our other witness who is in Edmonton.

Ms. Salwa Meddri (Coordinator, Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba, thank you for having me here.

The Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba is an initiative of the Société franco-manitobaine and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, that has been developed under the roadmap and the community plan.

There are a total of 13 francophone immigration networks in Canada. The Manitoba network previously existed in the form of a cooperative network of partners that worked together in the community, but Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has funded that position on a full-time basis since 2013, when the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba was born.

Without further ado, I will move on to the essential points of the roadmap 2013-2018. This roadmap definitely contains objectives that are optimistic about immigration. The linguistic component is one of the basic elements of the roadmap, from which I want to cite the following passage:

The Government of Canada will promote the benefits of Canada's official languages and invest in official language training for newcomers.

I am going to analyze that statement. I do not claim to be an expert, but I will give you my humble opinion and those of our partners. Immigration applicants are required to pay higher fees for French tests than for English tests, both before they arrive in Canada and for permanent residence. On this point, I refer you to the recent report of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The academic level of the French test is very high. A level ranging between five and seven, and even up to eight, is required for certain occupations, which is not within the everyone's grasp. The places where the tests are taken, such as the offices of the Alliance française or the French cultural centres in certain countries, are not always accessible. Candidates must also wait a very long time from the date of the exam until they receive their results as the tests are corrected only in France.

English language courses are available and offered to all permanent residents, but that is not the case of French courses. English-language learning is virtually mandatory in the francophone minority communities, and a full range of settlement and integration services are also provided. French, however, is optional.

"Improving efforts to recruit French-speaking immigrants to minority communities" is also part of the roadmap. We have been witnessing a reintroduction of the Mobilité francophone program since this past June. This is a very positive step forward for us, and we are definitely delighted with it.

However, for international fairs such as Destination Canada, IRCC has cut funding to community groups that have a major role to play in talking about the various services offered to provide assistance to future permanent residents.

There is also the Entrée francophone pilot project, the purpose of which is to share the database of francophone applicants who have been identified as such in the Entrée express program in order to match them with employers and thus facilitate occupational matching to provide better employment opportunities and accelerate the process within the Entrée express pool.

We can find no data on francophone applicants in the Entrée express program, since those applicants are not identified, partly as a result of the French test problem. In addition, not enough points are assigned to francophone applicants who speak English.

Yesterday, we had a meeting with the coordinator of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne, the FCFA, the organization representing French-language communities outside Quebec, and IRCC to discuss various problems. We hope the suggestions made by the communities and organizations during the consultations conducted last August will help in finding solutions. It was also apparent from the consultation in summer 2012 that, to maintain community vitality and take advantage of progress achieved, it is important to attract French-language immigrants to francophone minority communities and to ensure they are well integrated.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will increase its support for recruitment and integration of French-language immigrants in six minority communities outside Quebec.

● (0900)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Meddri.

I am going to make the same comment I made earlier, that you may supplement your remarks in response to questions from committee members.

Ms. Salwa Meddri: That is perfect.

The Chair: First, I want to thank the people from Edmonton for getting up so early to take part in our debates.

We will start immediately with the first series of questions and comments.

Mr. Généreux, you have five minutes.

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

Thanks to our witnesses for being with us this morning.

You received funding under the last roadmap for the promotion of French, integration, and so on.

Mr. Johnson, you said you had not received an increase in 25 years. However, that has encouraged you to develop efficient ways of doing things.

Which of the initiatives you have conducted in the past 25 years would you carry out if you were granted additional funding?

Mr. Jean Johnson: In the past 10 years, we have witnessed a dizzying increase in Alberta's francophone population. Consequently, the demand for services in the community has risen and we are no longer able to meet that demand. What is becoming frustrating to a large degree is that we are losing these people, who ultimately opt for services in English.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Exactly where did the money come from?

Was it granted under regular programs outside the roadmap?

Mr. Jean Johnson: Part of it came from the roadmap and the Canada-community agreement. To improve our efficiency, we would like an increase, but also a kind of community self-determination. We would like to sign an agreement with the federal government on funding transferred to the representative organization. All the mechanisms have been established in Alberta, and the community organizations recognize ACFA as the leader in the development of Alberta's francophone community.

We are currently making decisions and recommendations to Canadian Heritage at the evaluation table, but the decisions are being overturned by Canadian Heritage's officers on the pretext that Ottawa's jurisdictions are not consistent with local jurisdictions. In our view, these are harmful actions for our communities.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I see. Thank you very much.

What you just said is very interesting, but I also want to let Ms. Meddri give us her views.

In addition to the funding you have received under the regular programs, both existing programs and the roadmap, what would you do if you received more funding tomorrow morning?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: I would simply like to clarify one point. The Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba has never received funding as such. We operate on funding allocated to settlement services, particularly Accueil francophone, which is the subject of an agreement between the federal government and SFM. However, and I feel I can speak on everyone's behalf in this instance, funding for community services and francophones in general is inadequate. I can confirm that we are doing a lot with little in the way of financial and human resources.

Getting back to Manitoba, we have just conducted a survey on services available in French for francophone newcomers. However, only two or three organizations are funded by IRCC, and the others not at all. The fact remains that, as a result of the goodwill of those around the table, we want to move the matter forward and improve the situation across Canada.

• (0905)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

I would like to say good morning to the parliamentary secretary and member for Edmonton Centre, who has just joined us.

Now I will turn the floor over to Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to Ottawa, Ms. Meddri. I would like some clarification of one point concerning your organization's funding.

Does it come from the roadmap or regular programs?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: For this year, it comes from the Réseau en immigration francophone du Manitoba as part of the settlement and immigration file.

Mr. Dan Vandal: These are departments—

Ms. Salwa Meddri: It comes from an agreement with the federal government.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Has your organization received funding from the roadmap?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: No.

Mr. Dan Vandal: In your view, what impact has your organization had on immigration to Manitoba since it was established in 2006, I believe?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: The Réseau en immigration francophone has officially existed under the name RIF Manitoba since 2013, but it has been in existence since 2003, since the creation of Accueil francophone. In fact, it is Accueil francophone that advanced the cause of the Réseau, which was previously a partner network.

Pardon me, but what was your question?

Mr. Dan Vandal: What impact do you think your organization has had on immigration to Manitoba?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: The partners around the table have joined forces to establish a common objective and avoid working in isolation. The Réseau en immigration francophone has developed a strategic plan for Manitoba. The idea is to bring everyone together around the table. The essential components of the Réseau are recruitment, integration, retention, and regionalization. This is making a difference in that area.

The best example I can give you is the intake of Syrian refugees. The community and partners have all joined forces to support the efforts of Accueil francophone, the mandate of which is to take in refugees sponsored by the federal government and to help it carry out its mission, its mandate, more effectively.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Recruitment, intake, and integration constitute the work that you do.

Is there one field in which you have had more success?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: It really is a set of factors. We are in the process of determining in what ways we have been less successful and in what areas we could make a bigger effort. The retention rate in Manitoba is quite high. However, as I mentioned earlier, we are unfortunately not doing a lot of recruitment work.

IRCC has cut funding for promotion outside Canada, particularly for Destination Canada. Consequently, partners and stakeholders who should be at that fair to promote our provinces outside the country are not all present. There are also domestic initiatives that we cannot carry out for lack of funding and resources. We are trying to achieve our objectives with limited means and the resources we have, or rather do not have.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Who recruits francophone immigrants to Manitoba?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: The Province of Manitoba attends this international fair. Brigitte Léger is our partner at the World Trade Centre. This year, the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities, or CDEM, will also be taking part.

• (0910)

Mr. Dan Vandal: What is your best asset in the immigration field?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: In what sense?

Mr. Dan Vandal: I am talking about what you are most successful at.

Ms. Salwa Meddri: We work together, in cooperation, to achieve successful integration and to meet the needs of newcomers to our communities, whether it be Winnipeg or outside Winnipeg. That is what we are most successful at, through our municipal, provincial, and, we hope, federal partners.

Mr. Dan Vandal: What can the federal government do to help you play your role as an immigration worker more effectively?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: I would say the most urgent thing would be to be able to offer more services to meet integration needs so that we can promote retention, of course. Among this immigrant population, international students and temporary workers are seriously hurt by the lack of funding and services. That shortage is related to eligibility criteria for settlement service and services funded by IRCC. A very large number of those international students are unfortunately left to their own devices. The demand for work permits and the transition to the job market are a concern for them. However, no assistance is offered for that purpose.

Temporary workers wishing to renew their work permits, for example, face enormous administrative challenges, but there is no contact person they can speak to directly. They can only use the 1-800 number. There are agents, of course, but their answers may vary with the person who is on the other end of the line. For temporary residents, processing times for work permit renewals merely add to the other difficulties.

We need support in order to remove these barriers so we can facilitate permit renewals and assist temporary workers and international students, improve retention and integration, and facilitate occupational training in French, which does not exist in Manitoba.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Meddri.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for coming to testify before us. I want to thank the Alberta people for getting up so early this morning to come and meet with us. I very much appreciate that and find it very pleasant to have you with us.

Last Thursday, we heard from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones. Those people told us about the roadmap, but also about the memorandum of understanding between the federal government and school boards, that is to say the provincial education departments across Canada. They said they had to review that.

As I am sure you know, British Columbia has filed a huge lawsuit against the federal government to ensure that provincial education departments provide education services in the minority language, that is in French in the case of British Columbia.

Those people are seeking better funding for infrastructure, which is not funded in an equal manner. The argument that is raised against their position on the MOU is that education is unfortunately a provincial jurisdiction.

How can these two aspects be reconciled?

Have you at the ACFA reflected on the education situation and other areas where federal and provincial jurisdictions are at issue?

Mr. Jean Johnson: I think the people from the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones really want to take part in the discussions and negotiations on those agreements. We support the "for and by the francophone communities" approach and the idea that that approach should be systematically adopted.

Alberta—and this is the case of British Columbia as well—is one of the only provinces that does not have a policy, let alone an act, respecting French-language services.

Having said that, we are in the process of negotiating this agreement with the Province of Alberta so that a policy on French-language services can be implemented. However, the work does not stop there. This opens a small door, but it is a delicate proposition. This kind of policy can be changed at the whim of any government that comes to power.

The important thing for us is federal government intervention and support so that these clauses are adopted and supported by and for the francophone communities. We would make enormous gains in Alberta, and I am convinced that would be the case of the other provinces as well.

• (0915)

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson.

Ms. Meddri, you said it was impossible for you to attend Destination Canada. However, your purpose in doing so would be to promote the settlement of francophone newcomers to minority communities.

Can you tell us more about that?

What is the situation with regard to Destination Canada?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: Destination Canada is an international fair that is held in Paris and Belgium over almost a week. As I mentioned, representatives from the province attend it along with partners, the World Trade Centre in particular, and, this year, CDEM.

Community organizations previously had an opportunity to attend the fair as a result of funding granted to the province for settlement programs. The province facilitated that because it understood the importance of the community organizations' contributions to the fair. The province's attendance there is of course necessary and essential because its representatives can discuss Manitoba's nominees program and the opportunities it affords.

As for the community component, it is very important to reassure future nominees attending the fair and to tell them they will have to follow a process but that they will subsequently not be alone. They must be made to understand that an association of organizations will take it upon itself to go and pick them up at the airport, drive them to temporary accommodation, and guide them through administrative procedures. They must also be told that organizations will support them in looking for a job or a family physician, in particular. They must be reassured they will not be abandoned.

We are a minority community—so be it—but together we can change things, and that is reassuring. The personal connection makes a difference. It can influence an immigration applicant's choice of province and the destination he or she may choose.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Meddri.

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

First, I will speak to our friends from Edmonton.

Earlier you talked about needs related to new challenges. The growth in Alberta's francophone population is indeed a new phenomenon. However, your resources are not adequate to cope with that growth.

How could additional support under the roadmap help you provide the services you need?

● (0920)

Mr. Jean Johnson: Earlier I mentioned that the agreements between Canada and Alberta were very important. However, I think the federal government can play another role. I am going to ask Isabelle Laurin to say a little more about that. The federal government's leadership on the Official Languages Act is becoming crucially important for us. I know that is beyond the scope of this discussion, but there are a lot of points on that subject we would like to discuss.

I am going to hand the floor over to Ms. Laurin.

Ms. Isabelle Laurin (Executive Director, Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta): The needs of Alberta's francophone population are only growing, and that growth creates pressure. Since funding under the Canada-community agreement has not increased in so many years, it is extremely difficult to earn competitive salaries in Alberta. The cost of living is relatively high here and private-sector salaries are extremely high.

We therefore have few staff who can provide the services. Furthermore, the variety of services necessary is increasing. We need early childhood services. A report by the Commissioner of Official Languages that was published this week concerns the need for day care services. In Alberta, the need is absolutely glaring. We have francization needs in our primary schools, at the kindergarten and early kindergarten levels. We also have needs with respect to our seniors. Needs are being filled in justice and health as well.

We also have to make ourselves known. As we are a number of small networks spread all over Alberta, we should be able to invest in the promotion of our communities so that people from outside the province know we exist. It often takes two or three years for people to discover that there are francophone communities in Alberta. We need infrastructure. In Calgary, we need a centre where people can gather.

In short, the needs are enormous, and we need the roadmap's support.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

I am going to share my speaking time with my colleague Darrell Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Thank you and good morning, everyone.

I appreciate what you said about the past 10 years. A considerable effort has been made to enhance the vitality of the communities, and suddenly some of them realize they have additional needs. Some areas have not received increased funding under the roadmap for 10 years, and I believe that is causing some very serious problems across the country.

Furthermore, if I correctly understood, accountability is important for you, so that you know where the money intended for the province and, ultimately, for your organizations, is going.

With regard to immigration, I will quickly review the issues.

You talked about tests, a very important point. That was raised by the IRCC. I believe it is important to note the points you have made in our report. If I correctly understood, you said that the tests were difficult, that they cost far too much, and that the distances that had to be travelled to take them were a problem.

The second question, for which I would like a very brief answer—

The Chair: Mr. Samson, could you hold that question for later?

We are immediately going to the second round, which is about immigration. We have somewhat covered the immigration issue during this first part, but we are going to ask the people from Alberta to make their presentation and to discuss this matter with us.

Ms. Meddri, if you wish, you may take a few minutes to complete your presentation on immigration.

For the moment, I will turn the floor over to Mr. Johnson.

● (0925)

Mr. Jean Johnson: Thank you very much.

First of all, I want to reiterate that it is important and necessary to have services by and for francophones and to match those services with our community's organizations and institutions. Our community has had to fight and fend for itself over the years due to a lack of government services in many sectors. As a result, it has established francophone organizations and institutions designed to meet its own needs.

It is important that the programs and services developed to meet the needs of francophone immigrants be offered by our community and that they be consistent with our community architecture, if we genuinely want to carry out our twofold mandate and ensure that francophone immigration genuinely helps enhance our vitality.

When the IRCC's decisions do not take into account our existing structures and services, that weakens our services and community. In many instances, we feel the processes and decisions made undermine the community by excluding certain sectors of the community from the discussions, in particular its representative organization. We are there to support and encourage the empowerment of our community organizations. If something has to be done, government representatives should be not an obstacle, but rather a factor in the empowerment of those organizations, as we are for them.

A flexible approach must also be taken to the criteria applied. Some immigrants, such as temporary foreign workers and international students, are not eligible for certain services. The problem is that those immigrants do not receive first-hand information and fall victim to biased information given to them by people who have not necessarily gone through our community's services, which is very harmful.

Canada has recently taken in a large number of Syrian refugees. Our community would like to be able to play a role with francophone refugees who are currently being served by anglophone institutions.

We would like our francophone welcome centres in Alberta to be accredited to take in government-sponsored francophone refugees. This is being done in Manitoba, but that is not the case in Alberta.

We have made a conscious choice to build a diverse French-language community. The ACFA has for many years coordinated the RIF, a mechanism financed by the IRCC, whose purpose is to promote joint action and cooperation with various players operating in francophone immigration in our province. If the department funds that mechanism, its call for tenders should be consistent with it and help advance our community plan for francophone immigration and community life.

In summer 2015, a call for tenders that was issued caused a crisis in our community. We have to stop creating mechanisms that divide the community. Our present situation was established by the department. A clear division is occurring within the community, especially in the Calgary region, and that should not be happening.

We are in favour of empowerment, we are responsible for ourselves, and we develop strategies together. I consider it highly offensive that the policies administered by the department's regional

representatives should interfere in this process and dictate how we conduct our activities.

Agreements negotiation should be a process that accommodates the community's desire to take charge of itself and set its own priorities. Priorities should not be imposed on us, particularly since we do not even know where they come from.

The reality of the communities varies from province to province. Consequently, we should stop applying catch-all solutions to all regions of the country. It is ridiculous for anyone to espouse that philosophy. We would like these agreements to respect the communities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

Ms. Meddri, you have two minutes if you wish to add something.

● (0930)

Ms. Salwa Meddri: We can never overemphasize the words “by” and “for”; they are very important, even essential. They are our rallying cry. When newcomers receive French-language services from a francophone organization, it makes a difference. The act of directing them to other francophone services will also strengthen their attachment to the francophone communities. And I mean “communities”, because there are many in Manitoba, and they are all equally important. We must retain these newcomers in our francophone communities and provide them with services in the language of their choice and in the commonly used language. This is extremely important, and we can never repeat it enough.

I mentioned temporary workers and international students, but I would also like to emphasize that there is a kind of ambiguity, as it were, in the pre-arrival services that are provided, particularly in Manitoba, by an anglophone organization. In this particular case, that organization has established a French-language service for immigration applicants to provide them with information and orientation sessions concerning the province. That is very good. We have begun negotiations and discussions with that organization to have it refer francophone candidates who come to settle in Manitoba to local francophone organizations in the community. However, there is no guarantee the organization will do so, since it also offers a full range of settlement services and has the opportunity to serve all classes of newcomers, once again, in English.

This imbalance in the assistance and funding of solid, well-established organizations harms francophone organizations. It vastly undermines our ability to do our work. I can only reiterate and support the remarks Mr. Johnson made.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Meddri.

With our remaining time, we will have a three-minute round of questions.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here so early this morning.

I am going to ask two questions about aspects that concern me.

Mr. Johnson, you said that the francophone population is growing astronomically in Alberta but that, at the same time, you lack manpower. Can you explain to me why that is the case when we are taking in so many people? Earlier the lady beside you said she was lacking manpower. I would like to understand that.

My question concerns your francophone centre. You would like it to be recognized as an organization that takes in refugees and as a stakeholder, like the organization in Manitoba. Who recognizes the centres, the province or the federal government?

Mr. Jean Johnson: That currently depends on financial capacity.

As regards employability, it is very simple: we have no money to hire people. We have qualified people who could provide services, but that is not possible. We are caught in an impossible situation. The francophone population is increasing, but we cannot provide services due to a lack of financial resources. We have a lot of people who have skills and could benefit our communities, but we do not have adequate resources, and that is really unfortunate.

I would like to add something on the importance of the words “by” and “for”. An anglophone agency will often say it offers services in French. There is a major distinction to be made here. People are welcomed in French, but the conversation switches to English shortly thereafter. People are welcomed and then all the services are provided in English. They tell these people, “No problem, we’ll look after you,” but then they are placed in an anglophone context. Can we stop doing that? I think it is really harmful.

I would like to say something else. I apologize for the passion I put into this, but this is often what we feel back home. The federal government departments must take on a responsibility. At one point, we asked for assistance to support the efforts of the people who are arriving in Quebec, for example. They make a request to the intake and settlement centre, except that they are not eligible for the services based on the funding of those organizations. So we try to find resources, but, as soon as we contact another department, they refer us elsewhere saying this is IRCC’s business. There is a total disconnect from reality, and it is becoming very frustrating to try to manage it.

If you ask the communities what they will do, we will have a list of items concerning operational efficiency, but all departments must be engaged. This is everyone’s business.

● (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I have a request for you, Mr. Johnson.

The Chair: Just a moment, Ms. Boucher. We said we would try to limit ourselves to three minutes for this round.

Now let us go right away to Mr. Samson, who had a question earlier and whom I interrupted.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Could you provide us with that list?

The Chair: Mr. Johnson, could you send us the list through the committee clerk?

Mr. Jean Johnson: It would be a pleasure for us to send you the list.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Darrell Samson: [*Inaudible*] It should be the regions, the school boards, and the communities that set their priorities, and there should be some flexibility in that regard. That is what I understand from your presentation.

I will finish my question. Ms. Meddri, you said that arriving immigrants have the option to take French courses but that English courses are compulsory.

Could you say more on that point?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: Since I live in a province and in a minority community, I want to say that English is a necessary evil. People are required to take English courses. Depending on the system, when immigrants arrive in Manitoba and are eligible for services, they are taken in, as it were, by a francophone organization for settlement purposes, but they have to go through two organizations.

There is the entry program, which gives orientation sessions over four weeks in intensive English. Then they are eligible for the language assessment test in order to meet the standard, or *benchmark*, so they can learn English based on their level and the direction they subsequently want to take.

That is not the case for French. It is optional and not important since the Université de Saint-Boniface receives funding to offer French courses to newcomers up to a certain level. However, the number of spaces is very limited. The number of newcomers who may benefit from the program is limited.

If immigrants are allophones, which is the case of the Syrian refugees, they are offered French literacy programs so they can learn English or pursue any direction they want in life. Unfortunately, they are told to take English so they can get a job, have a career, and so on. In essence, French is neglected.

That effort even goes so far as to influence parents’ decision whether to register their children at a French-language school. They come here with the preconceived notion that, if their children go to a francophone school, they will never learn English. The francophone settlement services and the people in the field constantly explain to them that children have an ability to learn and adapt and that, at some point, they will “catch” English. They also explain to them that giving their children or any person a chance to be bilingual will set them up for success in all fields.

Mr. Darrell Samson: It is strange to hear that because, last week, the department told us in its presentation that people are targeted just to further francophone immigration.

● (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for both groups.

We know that minority francophone immigration targets are 4.4% for Canada as a whole. What are the targets of Alberta and Manitoba? Are you hitting those targets? If not, what could you do to achieve them in each of your provinces?

The Mobilité francophone program, previously the francophone significant benefit program, was restored this summer, or in June. We have heard that it is very difficult to start it back up because businesses are no longer inclined to use it since they have to start over from scratch and have somewhat lost confidence in that tool.

The Alberta people may start answering, and then it will be Ms. Meddri's turn.

Mr. Jean Johnson: With regard to the 4.4% target, Alberta is not that invested in recruitment. Over the past 10 or 15 years, the Alberta economy, which has changed in recent years, has attracted people. Consequently, primary immigration helped achieve that 4.4% target. Secondary immigration also helped achieve it. I am talking about the people who settled in Quebec for a while and then came to Alberta for economic reasons.

What is interesting is that we are still seeing an increase in that migration and in that immigration to Alberta for the same reasons, despite the fact that Alberta's economy has declined. That puts us in quite an interesting position. The economic decline is causing a rising influx of newcomers.

As for the Mobilité francophone program, the private sector has definitely lost confidence in it. After the Harper government cancelled the program, a natural conflict arose between employers and employees. We had to commission labour market impact studies and so on. That put employers and employees in a position of conflict. Consequently, people are not convinced that restoring the program is really beneficial.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

I turn the floor over to one final speaker, Ms. Lapointe.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning and welcome to the witnesses. Thank you for being with us here this morning.

Ms. Meddri, earlier you said that francophone immigrant retention is quite high in your province. Can you quantify that?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: There are no specific figures on that. However, I can say that quite a large number of interprovincial migrants seek intake and settlement services when they are in the community. That is an initial indicator that gives us an idea of the retention rate. There are also international students and temporary workers who wind up staying in Manitoba

We currently have no such figures, but we are working on that. They will give us an evaluation tool to determine the efficiency of our programs and what specific aspects need improving.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It would be interesting to see what works and what does not. I agree with you.

Mr. Johnson and Ms. Meddri, you discussed interprovincial migration. I know that the subsidies follow people depending on the place where they arrive. Can you tell us how many francophone immigrants from Quebec wind up in Alberta or Manitoba?

Ms. Salwa Meddri: That is hard to quantify in any objective way for two reasons. The first is that, if they are still permanent residents, they are eligible for the settlement services and programs offered in

the community even if they change provinces. However, if they change provinces and have become Canadian citizens or naturalized citizens, they are no longer eligible for those services. They still need support and assistance to integrate more fully because the provinces are not all the same and the realities are not identical, but unfortunately they do not receive those services as a result of the eligibility criteria. So that does not provide a clear idea of the rate or number of interprovincial migrants.

• (0945)

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

That brings this first round of consultations to an end.

Thank you very much, Mr. Johnson, Ms. Laurin, and Ms. Meddri.

We have heard some very good presentations. You have provided the members of the committee with some invaluable information.

Thanks to all of you.

We will break for a few minutes before moving on to the next group.

• (0945)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (0955)

The Chair: Dear friends, we are resuming our study of the roadmap and immigration in the francophone minority communities.

In the next hour, we will hear from the Société franco-manitobaine, represented by Bintou Sacko, francophone hospitality manager.

We were supposed to hear from Robert Thérien, from the Conseil de la coopération de la Saskatchewan, who withdrew at the last minute as a result of a schedule change.

We will therefore conduct this study with the Société franco-manitobaine. We welcome Bintou Sacko, who is with us by videoconference.

Madam, you have five minutes to make a presentation. Then we will go around the table and committee members will speak, ask you questions, or make comments.

Madam, we are listening.

Ms. Bintou Sacko (Francophone Hospitality Manager, Société franco-manitobaine): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On behalf of the Société franco-manitobaine, I want to thank you for your invitation. It is truly a pleasure for me to appear before the committee this morning.

My name is Bintou Sacko, and I have been the francophone hospitality manager since 2005.

I will address the points that are outlined on immigration in the roadmap since I have been the person responsible for that file for the Société franco-manitobaine from the start. This is a very important file for us. From that perspective, I will explain to you why immigration is one of the five strategic focus areas for the growth of the francophone space in Manitoba. French-speaking Manitoba has made great advances in this direction in the past 15 years. The provision made for immigration in the roadmap would definitely make a major difference for francophone immigration, particularly among francophone refugees. This year we were fortunate to take part in the 2016 cross-Canada consultations on official languages. That had an impact on the francophone community and is important for linguistic duality in the communities.

In the past few years, francophones have chosen to come to Manitoba precisely because the French language is spoken there. That is what encourages them to come to Manitoba. The various bodies that took part in the consultations all agreed that French-language services should really be supported.

There is a major challenge for minority immigrants. What we see is that services are not often of the same standard in both official languages, and some services are not at all provided in French for francophone newcomers. It would therefore be quite appropriate to put a little more emphasis on the importance of the two official languages and to determine how they can be brought to the same level.

There have definitely been some successes. I will discuss Manitoba's bill 5 to enhance and support the francophone community and the estates general that were held by the Société franco-manitobaine a few months ago. That really enabled the francophone community to redefine itself and to review what it is lacking so that we can include certain aspects and enhance the francophone community here in Manitoba. In fact, other structures also need support, in areas such as early childhood, the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine and the Université de Saint-Boniface, so that more technical and occupational programs are offered in French in more specific fields since they are virtually non-existent in Manitoba.

With respect to minority francophone immigration, the establishment of the Accueil francophone structure, which I manage, has truly enabled the franco-Manitoban community to make immigration a priority. That structure has obviously helped us take in immigrants and support them in their integration process by providing all the services they need, whether it be administrative services for housing or social services, and the connection they can establish with the francophone community from the outset so they can access services in the language of their choice.

Unfortunately, the changes made by the last government had a considerable impact on recruitment, particularly the recruitment of newcomers, and on certain files such as immigration. Consultations were recently launched with IRCC, and we can really see all the support we are receiving in immigration. We can see that the files are beginning to grow in scope, to become important, and to advance.

●(1000)

There are definitely still some challenges.

With respect to recruitment, as I noted, it is important to target recruitment zones more effectively so many more francophones come to us here. Since we live in the minority, as we constantly say, people become anglicized much more quickly as a result of several factors, particularly access to English-language services there. Consequently, we should be strategic about recruitment and match recruitment strategies with those of Canada's embassies abroad.

As regards intake, we must really strengthen existing intake structures. Since the number of newcomers, especially refugees, is sharply increasing, we need far more resources and support in order to help them integrate.

There is also a major challenge in housing, especially social housing.

It takes an enormous amount of time to integrate these newcomers, three to five years, and even up to seven years in some cases for them to integrate fully into Canadian society.

As for socio-economic integration, we must increase upgrading efforts for both languages. We must of course offer language training in the areas of expertise of certain newcomers who arrive here with quite high education levels. They often simply need language training that really targets their areas of expertise so they can enter the labour market.

Support programs, in particular, should be developed with the professional associations so that they are slightly more amenable to recognizing newcomers' skills and experience.

With respect to socio-cultural integration, it is really important to create spaces so that minority francophone immigrants feel even more included and integrated.

This year, Manitoba made an effort to take in Syrians, a project that was really a priority for the federal government. Accueil francophone is the only francophone structure in Canada that has an agreement in place with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to take in refugees. We were fortunate to take in more than 160 Syrian refugees from December 2015 to March 2016.

It was an initial success, but I can tell you it involved many challenges. They were neither francophone nor anglophone, but rather allophone. Many interpretation services were necessary, and we are still working with those Syrian refugees.

That slightly alters the data. The francophone community does not just want to be a service supplier in that sense. It also wants to be able to integrate those Syrian refugees into the francophone community so they can really grow and develop and so this effort in a way works to the advantage of the francophone community.

●(1005)

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

Ms. Bintou Sacko: That brings my presentation to an end.

The Chair: All right.

We have covered the two topics, the roadmap and immigration. I am also going to ask committee members to speak on either of those topics.

We will begin with Ms. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Good morning, madam. Thank you for being here this morning.

Your presentation was very interesting. You talked about francophone refugees as opposed to francophone immigrants. I would like to know what differences there are in the way the immigrant group and the refugee group integrate. Are you dealing with the same types of problems? Do the organizations in general have different approaches to the two groups?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Thank you for your questions.

It is very interesting. There are two different ways of integrating immigrants.

Economic immigrants arrive in our province prepared. They have had a chance to choose the province they want to live in and have a good reason for having chosen one province rather than another. As a result of their preparation, they are able to take various factors into account. They have communicated with people, obtained information, and made a choice.

Refugees unfortunately have not made that choice. They knew they were going to Canada, but they had virtually no idea of the province where they would have to integrate. Consequently, they do not understand the concept of bilingualism or even that of the francophone minority community. The majority of those people were not selected based on a point system, and we have no idea of their level of education when they arrive here.

Some refugees never went to school, and others have fallen far behind in refugee camps. Others have experienced so much trauma and have never had a chance to overcome or understand what they experienced. It is only when they find themselves in Canada, in a situation in which they feel safe, that they begin to reflect on their experience and remember everything.

The process is much slower and longer for refugees. We offer them all kinds of resources. First, they are financially supported by the federal government for one year. They are also supported psychologically, emotionally, and morally. For some, it is like dying and being reborn, since we teach them everything.

In the case of economic immigrants, the debate takes place at a certain level because they have well-established objectives when they arrive here, even if they do not always understand the concept of living in a minority as a francophone. We explain it to them, but the approach takes place at a certain level.

That is the difference between the two. Was I clear?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, very clear. Thank you very much.

I am going to ask you a question on the roadmap.

What would be the first demand that you, as an organization, would make of the federal government that would help you most and that you would like to see in the roadmap?

• (1010)

Ms. Bintou Sacko: There are many. I took part in the consultations and had to emphasize several points. I will not restate them all here. If I had to choose one case among so many others, I would talk about the Syrian refugees who have arrived in Canada. As a francophone organization, we were involved in taking those refugees in. We welcomed them and we had interpreters, but unfortunately we were forced to redirect them to English language training. In fact, our franco-Manitoban school division did not have adequate resources to integrate the Syrian children who arrived. Manitoba is an anglophone majority province, and English therefore dominates.

To integrate, those immigrants therefore needed to learn English, which is the majority language. However, they also needed to learn French, although we were not even able to give them the choice since some of the services and resources are not provided in French. We were forced to direct them immediately to the anglophone sector and to register them for language courses. That is a danger for us as a community because we risk losing them over the long term, whereas we did all the preliminary work.

That is one example among so many others.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Sacko.

Now we will hear from Mr. Arseneault.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Good morning, Ms. Sacko.

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Good morning, sir.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you for being with us today.

Earlier you explained that, with the change in government, you had seen repercussions from the roadmap. In particular, files are growing in scope and beginning to advance. What you mean by that? What is beginning to advance more than previously or differently from what was happening under the former government?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Here is a specific example. Under the previous government, we witnessed the cancellation of a program that was very important for francophones, the Entrée express system. We had to do a great deal, but a lot of noise was made for that program to be restarted. The program helps support francophone communities in recruiting immigrants by assigning enough points to francophone immigrants who decide to come and live in the francophone minority communities here in Canada. It was a very important program that had previously been cancelled. It was restored in other forms in order to support the francophone communities in recruiting and selecting immigrants.

The second aspect concerns the consultations that have been conducted and enormously appreciated. The new government has finally made us feel that it needs to hear from the people in the community, those who are on the ground and who can genuinely share their ideas and say specifically what they need as a community for services to be up to scratch. All the groups were united. Here in Manitoba, for example, more than 30 groups were consulted in several fields, including official languages and immigration. Series of consultations have been launched based on the various programs offered. It was really good.

So we are experiencing those changes and we really feel that we are being listened to.

Mr. René Arseneault: I see.

You called that francophone immigration program the express system. Is that correct?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: It was Entrée express, yes.

Mr. René Arseneault: Entrée express, pardon me.

You say the program is no longer in existence but is still around in other forms or other ways. Is that what you are saying?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. René Arseneault: However, is the funding sufficient to achieve its goal?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: As for funding, that is another matter. The francophone community definitely still needs funding in order really to move the file forward.

To date, the recruitment target set by the francophone minority communities has not been achieved. Far more resources are definitely needed. For example, there is a program called Destination Canada, which is very important for recruitment and promoting the minority communities. Unfortunately, however, the program is not 100% funded, and not everyone has an opportunity to take part in it. The program currently targets only two European countries, whereas there is a pool of francophone immigrants outside those countries in which we could do much more promotion.

We obviously need more financial resources to conduct much more promotion in those countries, or those zones, in order to recruit francophone immigrants. That limits us somewhat, and so far the target has not been achieved. The financial question is therefore a factor.

•(1015)

Mr. René Arseneault: I see.

Ms. Bintou Sacko: We definitely need much more financial support to achieve our objectives.

Mr. René Arseneault: Has your organization conducted studies to determine, with respect to Manitoba specifically, what financial resources you would need, what they would be used for, and to what purpose they would be directed?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: No, we have not conducted any studies of that kind, but we are developing a strategy with the Province of Manitoba. Several meetings have been organized concerning the communities in the province of Manitoba. The federal government is also working together with us to adopt a strategy for the franco-Manitoban community that will enable us to cover the five strategic focus areas and to determine the financial resources we will need to work there. In this case, we are talking about recruitment, intake, integration, retention and socioeconomic integration. The five strategic focus areas are thus touched upon. Once this strategy is in place, we will be in a better position to determine what resources we need in order to move the files forward.

Mr. René Arseneault: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much for your participation and testimony. They are very much appreciated.

You talked about the Entrée express program and the francophone significant benefit program, now called Mobilité francophone. We have heard about the negative effects of the cancellation of that program over a certain period. Businesses and entrepreneurs got out of the habit of using that tool, which is very important, to encourage new francophone immigrants to come and to get them into the workplace as quickly as possible. We know it is the economy that makes it possible for us to continue to grow as part of a francophone community.

Are you working with businesses, talking to them about the return of this program and telling them they should use it and consider its benefits? How are they receiving the program's return?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: They are receiving it very positively. When the francophone significant benefit program was cancelled, we felt a sense of total separation from employers, and discouragement set in. The program's restoration brought us back to the starting point. We would like to convince those employers to continue supporting the francophone community through recruitment.

A few weeks ago, we received representatives of the four Canadian embassies in Paris, Tunisia, Morocco and Senegal. Their representatives came here to Manitoba to meet with employers interested in recruiting internationally and talked about the new program and the available opportunities. It was very positive. There was a meeting in the morning with members of the community to learn more about how the program works and what it provides and to establish ties with our overseas embassies. In the afternoon, the employers who had been invited came to listen to the representatives and to make contact with them and facilitate recruitment.

So the return of the program has been positively received. It was done in cooperation with other structures here in Manitoba and of course with the province itself.

The program has been relaunched, and we hope to be able to continue our activities so that people can use it.

•(1020)

Mr. François Choquette: That is very good news.

In Canada as a whole, the target francophone immigration rate in the minority communities is 4.4%. What is your target in Manitoba? Are you far from it? Do you know the figures?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: I do not have the exact figures, but I know that, over a specific year, the target was still 7% in Manitoba, whereas we had not even achieved 4%. We are a little behind.

The settlement program and immigration-related resources were previously managed by the Province of Manitoba. Those resources were withdrawn by the federal government, which somewhat limited the action that the Province of Manitoba could take to address recruitment in various places. So that also had consequences. In addition, limits were set because the population of Manitoba was rapidly increasing. At one point, our target of 10,000 fell to 5,000. So that had an impact on francophone recruitment here in Manitoba.

Mr. François Choquette: The federal government therefore cut the funding offered to the provinces to encourage francophone immigration?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: The entire immigration program as a whole was cancelled. Manitoba managed a portfolio for a long time. I would remind you that, until 2003, we managed the structure of Accueil francophone and that our contribution agreements were signed by the Province of Manitoba. That funding was withdrawn from the province, as a result of which we are now signing our contribution agreements directly with the federal government, with IRCC. The province thus does not have enough resources to manage the portfolio. In spite of everything, the candidate recruitment program is still in existence, but the province does not have enough resources to do everything it would like to do.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Good morning, Ms. Sacko.

I have a question for you concerning the roadmap.

I know that the Société franco-manitobaine noted during the consultations held in 2011 that the roadmap was not aligned with the franco-Manitoban community's priorities, even though the community had a strategic plan.

Could you explain your take on the roadmap to us? Is the roadmap currently aligned with the priorities of the community and the Société franco-manitobaine?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Absolutely. The priorities stated in the francophone immigration file are in complete alignment with the strategy of the Société franco-manitobaine.

As I said at the outset, growth in the francophone space is the strategy of the Société franco-manitobaine, and immigration is part of that. The roadmap underscores the areas that are very important, particularly language training, which is currently very important for francophone immigrants arriving in our province. That aspect is supported by the Société franco-manitobaine.

In fact, Manitoba is still considered a leader in francophone immigration. You are our member, and you know that perfectly well. We are working very well with you and the Winnipeg World Trade Centre on recruitment.

So all the files are absolutely supported by the Société franco-manitobaine, and that aligns very well with its strategy in the francophone immigration file.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Could you tell us about topics other than immigration, such as education, health and youth? Would you be able to discuss those subjects or just immigration?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: I am much more prepared to address the immigration issue, but perhaps I could discuss the education sector, since I have been in the community for some time now.

A lot of recommendations can be made on education. I briefly touched on early childhood, which is currently a priority for Manitoba's francophone community. The idea is to support early childhood by opening day care centres. This is a very tough file for the francophone community. There is a very big deficiency in this area.

As regards secondary education, registration in the franco-Manitoban school division is increasing. This comes back somewhat to the immigration issue. New things are happening right now. That school division was initially established based on the needs that existed at the time. However, we know the community is changing, and, with the estates general, we have observed many changes, particularly in education. Our task is to strengthen the structures of the franco-Manitoban school division in order to meet the needs arising from changes in the community.

In postsecondary education, the Université de Saint-Boniface is currently the only francophone university in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It also needs to be supported in establishing many programs. We have extensively discussed French-language occupational and technical training. Those programs are virtually non-existent here in Manitoba. Those kinds of programs are available only in English. People are therefore required to learn English or to be proficient enough in English to take that training. If they had the choice, they would be much more comfortable doing it in French. We therefore need to support a structure of this kind so that we can move forward.

I do not know whether I should talk about other fields.

Mr. Dan Vandal: That is fine.

When we discuss immigration, I like to think of it in terms of recruitment, intake, and integration. In what area is Manitoba most successful? Is it in recruitment, intake, or integration?

● (1025)

Ms. Bintou Sacko: I would say its intake capacity is very strong. That is the first structure that was created. Programs have been developed based on the needs of clients, in particular to welcome them at the airport and help them settle here in the community.

However, once immigrants are settled here, we need strong programs to integrate them. Whether you like it or not, integration depends on employment. We need a lot of programs that are more capable of supporting them in this area so that they can quickly access the labour market. As the pool is somewhat limited in the francophone community, these people will look everywhere.

In addition, a single structure, Winnipeg's World Trade Centre, focuses on recruitment, and I know it needs a lot of support.

The Chair: Mr. Vandal, you may ask one final question.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you.

I would like to know what field has the most deficiencies. Is it recruitment or integration?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: I would say both. Recruitment and integration are two areas requiring considerable investment.

Mr. Dan Vandal: Thank you very much, Ms. Sacko.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Lapointe, you have two minutes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

Good morning and welcome.

Earlier you said you had been invited to a consultation on official languages and had enjoyed it. You had a number of recommendations.

The ideal would be for you to prepare a list of your suggestions concerning the roadmap since we will not be able to address them all today. Then we would be able to include them in our report, whether they concern the roadmap or immigration. You may send them to the clerk, and that will be very much appreciated.

• (1030)

Ms. Bintou Sacko: All right. I will be pleased to do that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

On the topic of immigrant recruitment, you said we were not focusing very much on certain countries. You mentioned Morocco and Senegal.

Are there any other countries that we should target for francophone immigration?

Ms. Bintou Sacko: As I said, current recruitment efforts are very much focused on France and Belgium, on European countries. Even though we have received the representatives of the embassies of Morocco, Tunisia, and Senegal, we have not done any promotion in those countries to recruit potential immigrants.

When I talked about expanding the pool, I was thinking of the Maghreb, which should now be our focal point, and the francophone region of West Africa, which is really very francophone and where there are a lot of educated people. They could be excellent candidates for Canada.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you.

I am going to come back and ask you to look at your list and tell us some good things, suggestions or things that should be improved with respect to the roadmap 2008-2013. That would be very interesting. Our time being what it is, we have not been able to look at all that.

Ms. Bintou Sacko: Exactly. I will be pleased to do that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you very much.

The Chair: That brings this first part of the meeting to an end.

Ms. Sacko, thank you very much for contributing to the proceedings of our committee. We wish you good luck.

A few people have asked that we discuss the committee's business. We can devote 10 minutes or so to that.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: We made a request concerning French tests some two weeks ago, and have since heard no news on the subject, I would like to know where matters stand. This is very important for me.

In addition, every time we ask a question, I see that the roadmap and immigration blend into each other. Some of us are a bit confused.

Are we covering only the roadmap, only immigration, or both? Yes, the remarks touch on the roadmap, but I see that virtually all our questions focus on immigration.

The Chair: Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I noted that Ms. Sacko was not at all prepared to discuss the roadmap.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: No, not at all.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I believe it was just for immigration.

The Chair: Are there any other comments?

Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Immigration is one of the elements of the roadmap. The vitality of our communities depends in part on education. Then there is immigration. There are several pillars.

Immigration is one of the things that concern us most and that we want to focus on, but that does not mean we cannot ask questions on the other pillars. Education and early childhood are recurring issues, even though they are provincial jurisdictions. Ontario invests large sums in the official languages in education program, but all provinces support their education system.

The subjects discussed will depend on the various witnesses that we will be hearing. Some of them will be more forthcoming or more concerned about immigration, while others will discuss education and the vitality of our communities.

The Chair: I would like to go back to your first point.

Madam Clerk, do we have any information on the French test?

The Clerk of the Committee (Ms. Christine Holke): I did the necessary follow-up with the department to obtain a copy of the test, but I have not received any news. This morning, as Ms. Boucher asked me, I sent the department another email requesting an update, and I still have received nothing. I will call my parliamentary contact after the meeting and do the necessary follow-up.

• (1035)

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Arseneault?

Mr. René Arseneault: Can the chair summon the bureau—

The Chair: We will let the clerk make a final attempt.

Mr. René Arseneault: We can make a third polite approach, but after that—

The Chair: I will intervene.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: This is important because everyone tells us it is very difficult. Once again this morning, a large percentage of immigrants were rejected because they did not pass the test, the passmark of which is 80%. You have to consider that they are still immigrants.

The Chair: We will ask the clerk to make an extra effort, and if that does not work, I will intervene.

Are there any other comments?

Mr. Samson, you have the floor.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

When we began this process, we gave ourselves four or five final meetings in which to address immigration. Then we began to hear groups that had enough expertise to offer opinions on both topics, but not all the groups can do that.

We should organize our next meetings on that basis. There may be a meeting where four, five or six persons discuss only immigration in the group that we have already targeted. We are not changing strategies, but we are trying to focus on one topic at a time. Otherwise we will be confused when we ask questions. The first two, three or four witnesses could speak based on their field of expertise. The list is starting to get shorter for that question.

The Chair: Yes, Madam Clerk?

The Clerk: When I send out invitations, it is very clear that we are asking them to address both topics. We are asking them to tell us if they are unable to address either of the topics or if they are reluctant to do so. That is very clear. It is even in bold letters in my invitation.

That is what I am doing now, but, if you want me to change strategies, I will be pleased to do so.

Some hon. members: No.

The Clerk: To date, no witness has told me he or she could not address one of the topics.

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Madam Clerk, I also suppose it is not easy to take everyone's schedules into account. We can only hear these witnesses over a certain period of time, but they also have their schedules. I understand it may be complicated to coordinate all that and to ensure they discuss only immigration and the roadmap. It becomes complicated to determine who will be coming together and when.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: It was you who said there was a deadline for the roadmap. We did not say it because we are not in the government.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: People talk to us about immigration even when we ask questions about the roadmap. I have nothing against that, but there are other things in the roadmap. That is why I would like us to make a decision: do we want to address the roadmap or do we want to talk more about immigration? It does not bother me that we are discussing immigration, but there is more than immigration in the roadmap. That is all I wanted to note.

The Chair: Mr. Lefebvre, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: I agree with what Mr. Samson said.

So far we have heard more from people or groups who could talk about immigration and who put the emphasis on that. Other witnesses will come and talk more about the vitality of the francophone community or education. At that point, it will be up to us to ask more questions about financing, programs, or any other topic related to the roadmap, which could provide material for our study on that.

Ms. Boucher, I understand what you said.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You are the one who has a deadline. That does not concern me since I am in opposition. I can ask all the questions I want. It is you who has a timeline, but we have not stuck to the roadmap timeline so far since we have just talked about immigration. A few people talked about education.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, some people briefly addressed the education issue.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, a little, but that is not—

The Chair: We can ask the clerk to mention to the witnesses that they should speak a bit about education, about youth, about—

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: That would be very good.

The Chair: Then we could ask them questions on that.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Yes, but when we ask questions, it depends on the tangent they go off on. We cannot talk about the roadmap if they have said nothing about the roadmap.

Mr. Darrell Samson: We can nevertheless ask them questions.

The Chair: Yes.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: All right.

The Chair: Is that it for that question?

Some hon. members: Yes.

The Chair: I just want to note that, if we have not received any news about the test very soon, I will send a letter demanding that it be sent to us.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: It would be good for us all to try the test, to see whether we pass.

• (1040)

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Ms. Lapointe, I just want to tell you that you will have to send me off somewhere on a boat because I failed the test five years ago. Based on my result, I would not even be supposed to be Canadian.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Have a good week in your ridings meeting your fellow citizens. We will see each other again when the House resumes. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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