

Supporting the economic development of Québec's English-speaking communities

Presentation by the Provincial Employment Roundtable

Submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on
Official Languages for its study, 'Economic Development of Official
Language Minority Communities'

December 6, 2023

About Us

The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is a non-profit, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to address the employment and employability challenges facing Québec's English-speaking communities. Through our research and the work of our partners, we engage all levels of political decision-makers in developing solutions and ensuring adequate resources to improve the prospects of English-speaking Quebecers in the labour market.

PERT's main pillars:

Stakeholder Engagement

- Foster an environment of engagement and collaboration between different stakeholder groups
- Mobilize resources and other solutions
- Work with governments for the benefit of stakeholders

Research & Policy

- Develop a deeper understanding of the challenges & problems in the employability and employment landscape
- Identify gaps in the data and improve the availability of information
- Develop solutions & policy recommendations

Summary

The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is pleased to submit this brief and present it to the Standing Committee on Official Languages to contribute to its study of the economic development of official language minority communities (OLMCs). We believe this is an important study, which we hope will shed light on the needs of our community and lead to the development of new government actions that address the economic development challenges in Québec's English-speaking communities, particularly in employment and employability.

There are over 1.2 million English speakers in Québec, comprising 14.9% of the province's population.^{1,2} The English-speaking community of Québec (ESCQ) makes up Québec's official language minority community and represents the largest linguistic minority within a Canadian province (55.8% of the total OLMC population in Canada). This community has also experienced considerable demographic and economic shifts in the last four decades. In 1977, the Québec government adopted the Charter of the French Language, commonly known as Bill 101, which established French as the common language of work and society in Québec. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, an exodus of English-speaking Quebecers led to declines in the populations of English speakers in most regions of Québec. In more recent years, however, the number of English-speaking Quebecers has increased, especially in the regions of Montréal, Laval, Estrie and Outaouais.

¹ Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021).

² Unless otherwise indicated, all statistics in this report are based on internal calculations derived from Statistics Canada data tables.

Today, the ESCQ is the most diverse OLMC in Canada, with 35.9% of English speakers identifying as visible minorities, 32.5% as immigrants, 64.8% as English-French bilingual, and 12.8% as youth aged 15-24. These communities have also experienced significant economic changes over the past decades. English-speaking Quebecers have experienced an upward trend in their poverty and unemployment levels compared to French speakers in the province, as well as a downward trend in their income levels, such that they have occupied a more precarious economic position than French speakers for over 20 years.³ In the 2021 Census, English speakers experienced higher unemployment rates (10.9% compared to 6.9%) and lower median incomes (\$32,000 compared to \$37,200) than French speakers, with the gap widening over the past census years. Along with these employment and socioeconomic challenges, English-speaking communities face an aging population, outmigration of youth, and regional isolation, among other challenges.

This brief provides an overview of the employment and socioeconomic situation of English-speaking Quebecers, including unemployment rates, incomes, poverty levels and low-income status. By focussing on employment, the brief provides data that supports what has long been known: that employment is a cornerstone of economic development for communities.⁴ While it is important to address economic development through multiple approaches such as multisectoral collaboration, support for local businesses, and entrepreneurship, employment should be a key focus and measure for economic development within the ESCQ. Employment is not only a source of income, meaning, and community for individuals, but it contributes to community economic development and vitality by providing individuals with the power to reinvest in their community.

As part of its new *Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-28*, the federal government dedicated funding of \$208 million over five years and \$54 million per year to ESDC to expand the *Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities*. This funding is intended to help local organizations provide employment assistance services, which was our primary recommendation to the federal government in its consultations for the Action Plan.

The federal government has a key role in supporting the economic development of the ESCQ, especially in addressing its employment challenges, which trends suggest may worsen without better interventions. In order to support these efforts, we propose that federal institutions:

- Recognize employment as a cornerstone of economic development and community vitality in the ESQC by developing a strategy that prioritizes impact and accountability.

³ Official Languages Support Programs Branch. 2011. *A portrait of the English-speaking communities in Québec*. Canadian Heritage.

<https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/communaction/en/communities/statistical-profiles/portrait-english-speaking-communities-quebec>.

⁴ See, for example, Timothy J. Bartik. 2020. *Bringing Jobs To People: Improving Local Economic Development Policies*. W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research.

https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1022&context=up_policypapers.

In a Canadian context, see Rachelle Pascoe-Deslauriers. 2020. Putting employers to work in economic development in the Atlantic provinces of Canada. *Local Economy*, 35(2), 165-175.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0269094220907550>.

- Improve the relationship between federal institutions and the ESCQ community sector with regard to economic development
- Ensure coordination and cooperation between the federal government (particularly PCH and ESDC) and the provincial government in areas of shared jurisdiction, such as addressing the employment challenges facing the ESCQ
- Invest in research on the employment and economic development of the ESCQ
- Develop a pan-Canadian action plan to strengthen investments in free and accessible adult French-language training programs

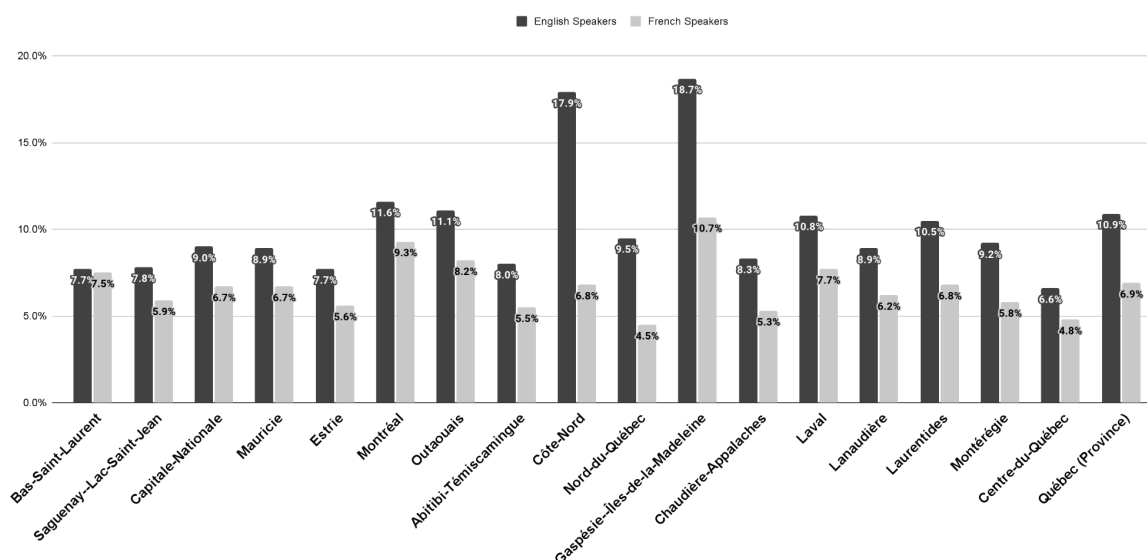
Employment and socioeconomic challenges for Québec’s English-speaking communities

1. Unemployment

1.1 Unemployment rates

According to the 2021 Census, there are approximately 699,015 English speakers in Québec’s labour force, accounting for 15.8% of the labour force. English speakers live and work in all of Québec’s 17 administrative regions, with most English speakers working in the regions of Montréal, Montérégie and Laval. Across Québec as a whole, English speakers experience an unemployment rate of 10.9%, which is higher than the unemployment rate of French speakers (6.9%) and the provincial unemployment rate (7.2%). Notably, in all of the 17 administrative regions of Québec, English speakers have higher unemployment rates compared to French speakers.

Graph 1: Unemployment rates of Québec by administrative region and first official language spoken



Source: Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021)

1.2 Youth unemployment

Youth employment is a particular challenge in Québec’s English-speaking communities. English-speaking youth aged 15-24 experience the highest unemployment rates of any age-linguistic group in Québec (17.4%), despite having the highest levels of self-reported bilingualism of any age or linguistic group. This is higher than unemployment rates for French-speaking youth of the same age group (10.9%). Regional disparities in youth unemployment also highlight the specific barriers that English-speaking youth outside of urban areas face.

1.3 Unemployment among English-speaking visible minorities

English-speaking visible minorities in Québec face an unemployment rate of 12.3%, which is 2.3 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for white English speakers, who have an unemployment rate of 10%. The higher unemployment rates among racialized English speakers indicate that language and race are key factors in employment outcomes.⁵

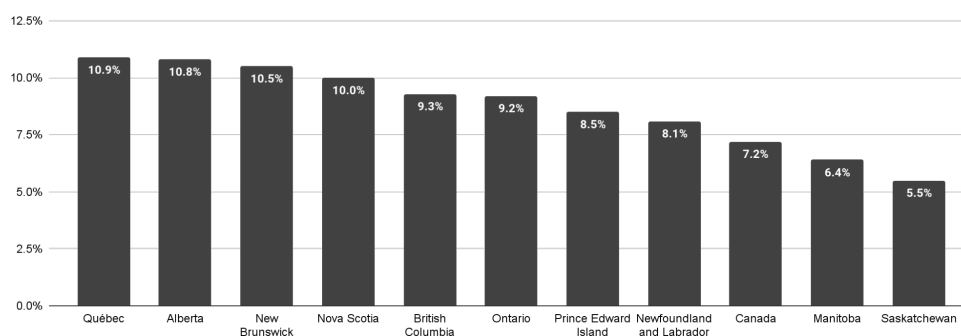
1.4 Unemployment among English-speaking immigrants

Immigrants represent a significant proportion of the total population in Québec and make up roughly a third of Québec’s English-speaking population. English-speaking immigrants experience more socioeconomic vulnerability compared to English-speaking non-immigrants. English-speaking immigrants face an unemployment rate of 11.6%, which is 1.3 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate of non-immigrant English speakers (10.3%).

1.5 Comparison of unemployment among OLMCs across Canada

English-speaking workers in Québec constitute the highest share of the total OLMC labour force in the nation (57.4% of the total OLMC labour force in Canada). As of the 2021 census, English-speaking Quebecers face an unemployment rate of 10.9%, the highest among OLMCs in all ten Canadian provinces.

Graph 2: Unemployment rates of OLMCs in Canada by first official language spoken



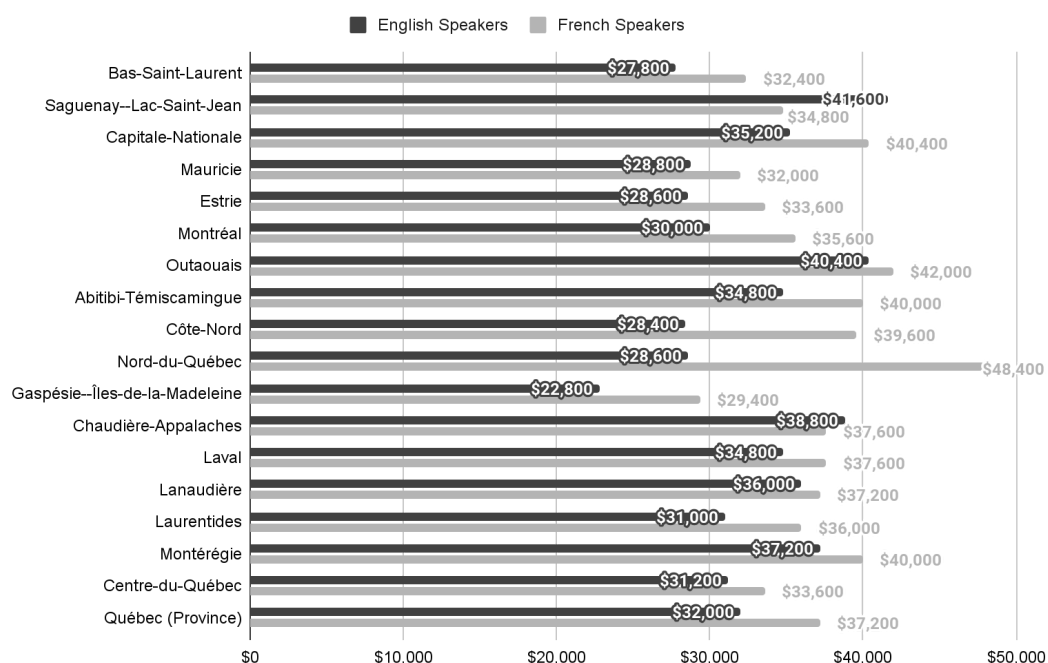
Source: Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021)

⁵ For more reading, see Yasmin Jiwani, et. al. 2021. “Language as a technology of power: An intersectional analysis of the Charter of the French Language,” in *La Charte. La loi 101 et les Québécois d’expression anglaise / The Charter. Bill 101 and English-Speaking Quebec*. edited by Lorraine O’Donnell, Patrick Donovan, and Brian Lewis (Québec: Presses de l’Université Laval) 249-279.

2. Income

Income is an important measure of economic well-being. English speakers in Québec are more likely to live below the low-income cutoff than French speakers.⁶ According to the 2021 census, English speakers had a median employment income of \$32,000, which was considerably lower than that of the French-speaking majority at \$37,200. English speakers earned a median employment income lower than that of French speakers in 15 out of the 17 regions of Québec. In the regions of Estrie, Abitibi-Témiscamingue, Nord-du-Québec and Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, English speakers earn at least \$5,000 less than French speakers. These disparities highlight the unique situation of English speakers living in regions outside of Montréal, where employment opportunities and resources are greatly reduced.

Graph 3: Median Employment Income in Québec by administrative region and first official language spoken

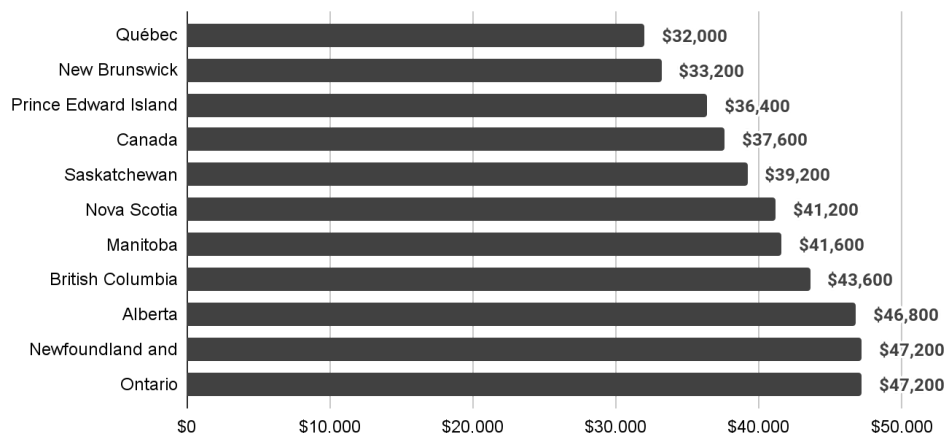


Source: Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021)

In addition to employment challenges, Québec's English speakers continue to face higher income disparities than other OLMCs in Canada.

⁶ Statistics Canada considers the after-tax low-income cutoff for an individual to be \$22,060 in large urban areas (population 500,000 or more) and \$14,431 in rural areas; for more information see Statistics Canada. 2022. *Low-income cut-offs, after tax (LICO-AT – 1992 base) for economic families and persons not in economic families, 2020*. Government of Canada. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/tab/index-eng.cfm?ID=t2_5

Graph 4: Median Employment Income of OLMCs in Canada by first official language spoken



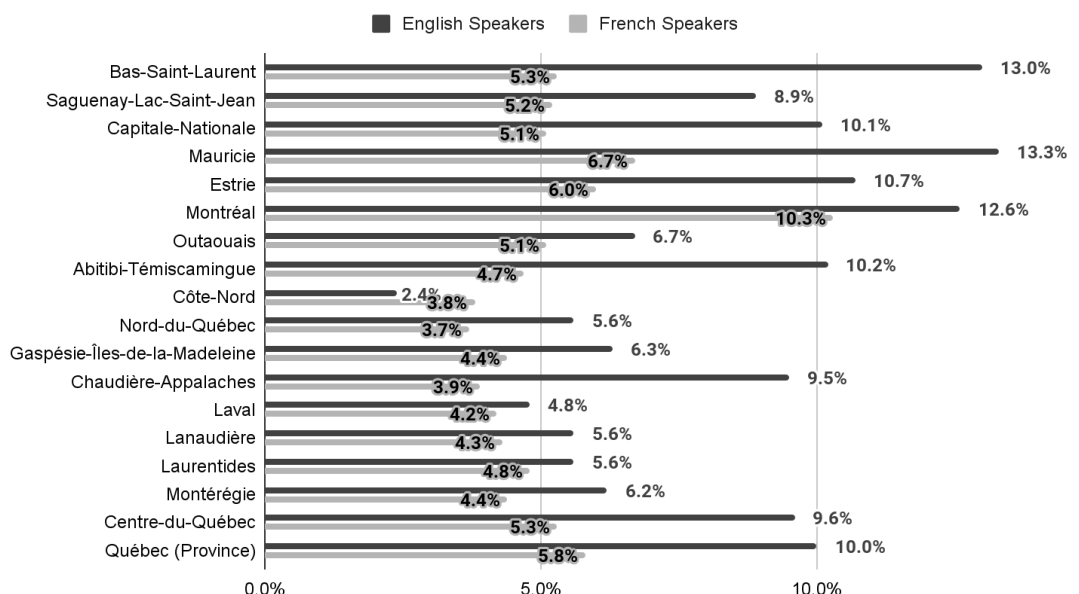
Source: Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021)

3. Poverty

Unemployment causes a loss of income and work-related benefits that have been shown to be strongly associated with an increased risk of poverty.⁷ While many individuals who live in poverty may remain in poverty despite being employed, the impacts of poverty are further exacerbated when individuals are unemployed. For Québec’s English-speaking population, high unemployment rates and low incomes suggest an increased risk of poverty, reflected in the disproportionately high rates of poverty that English-speaking Quebecers experience: 10% of the English-speaking community lives in poverty, almost double the 5.8% of French speakers who live in poverty. It is further observed that English speakers have higher rates of poverty compared to French speakers in 16 out of the 17 administrative regions of Québec.

⁷ Duncan Gallie, Serge Paugam, & Sheila Jacobs. 2003. “Unemployment, poverty and social isolation: Is there a vicious circle of social exclusion?” *European Societies*, 5(1), 1-32.

Graph 5: Poverty Rate of Québec by administrative region and first official language spoken



Source: Provincial Employment Roundtable calculations based on data from Statistics Canada (2021)

Unemployed individuals experiencing poverty also take significantly longer to re-enter the labour force, and there is no evidence to show that the experience of living in poverty is a motivating factor in accelerating re-entry into the labour market.⁸ As a result of prolonged unemployment, individuals experiencing poverty can be constrained by their lack of income when it comes to gathering information and resources needed for the job application process. Their skills diminish over time, resulting in lower re-employment wages.⁹ This situation can create a cycle of social exclusion, where unemployed individuals living in poverty are eventually marginalized from the labour force.

This link between unemployment and poverty, particularly within the English-speaking community, highlights the need for a multi-faceted employment strategy that reaches the most vulnerable members of our community in order to enhance their quality of life and economic well-being.

4. Access to employment services and skills training

Through its Commission des Partenaires du marchés du Travail (CPMT) and the Ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MTESS), the Québec government delivers employment services and skills training programs using partnerships with stakeholders such as community groups, employers, and unions. However, the language of program delivery poses a barrier for some English speakers – most employment programs and services are delivered in French to serve the French-speaking majority.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Emmanuel Apergis, Nicholas Apergis. 2020. "Long-term unemployment: A question of skill obsolescence (updating existing skills) or technological shift (acquiring new skills)?" *Journal of Economic Studies*, 47(4), 713-727.

With the federal government's new investment in employment assistance services for official language minority communities, there is an opportunity to tackle these challenges by improving the infrastructure of English-language employment services and skills training programs in Québec. Employment assistance services and skills training programs have long been delivered to English speakers through the community sector, and while there have been some key successes, organizations in our network lament the lack of resources available to them as well as the lack of awareness of programs among English speakers. When asked what they perceived as the most significant barriers to employment for English speakers, 46% of organizations in our 2021 Employment Issues and Needs survey indicated that a lack of information and uncertainty about accessing these resources was a significant barrier to English speakers accessing their services.¹⁰ Targeted support and investments in these areas are needed to increase the employability and labour market integration of English-speaking Quebecers.

5. French-language barriers to employment

Despite high rates of bilingualism, French-language proficiency remains the largest barrier to employment. In a survey conducted by PERT in 2021, 67% of English-speaking respondents identified their French-language skills as their top barrier to employment in the last three years.¹¹ PERT's survey also revealed that 62% of respondents indicated their French-language skills narrowed the range of employment opportunities available. English speakers identifying as bilingual may still face challenges in the labour market if their French-language skills are judged not to be adequate or in cases where they experience discrimination because of their mother tongue or accent. While French-language training is provided to youth through Québec's standard education system, adults in the labour market have limited access to quality French-language learning programs. Targeted support and investments are needed to bolster Québec's adult French-language learning system to enhance access, quality and availability for all Quebecers, including the ESCQ.

6. Coordination and cooperation challenges between stakeholders, including the community sector, provincial government, and federal government

A community's vitality depends on its organizations and institutions. This has been particularly the case for Québec's English-speaking communities, whose successes and resilience are tied to the work of organizations in the community sector. In regions outside of Montréal, community organizations are the backbone of English-speaking communities. English-language organizations serve as an interlocutor between English speakers and governments in order to ensure that adequate resources and services are available in their language. Better coordination and consultation between the federal government and the ESCQ community sector is needed in order to improve the current economic development challenges facing the ESCQ. More feedback mechanisms are needed for community organizations to work directly with the federal government in the implementation of its official language policies and programs in Québec. This includes consulting on and evaluating how funding is allocated to ensure that there are adequate resources going to organizations that

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

work on employability. Funding requirements, including eligibility criteria, need to be further simplified and broadened to ensure that organizations delivering services to English speakers can continue to do so. This funding is particularly essential for organizations operating in rural and remote regions where meeting the critical mass requirements for program delivery is difficult.

It is also important for the federal government to ensure more accountability for the funding allocated to the ESCQ by updating existing funding approaches and models so that funding goes to the most impactful programs and communities in need. Additionally, better coordination and cooperation between the federal government (particularly PCH and ESDC) and the provincial government is needed in their areas of shared jurisdiction, which includes addressing the employment challenges facing the ESCQ.

7. Research on the employment and economic development of English-speaking communities

There remain considerable gaps in the federal and provincial governments' understanding of the situation of Québec's English speakers. Much of the socioeconomic data available on English-speaking communities is collected and published by Statistics Canada through the Census of Canada. The Québec government does not regularly collect employment and socioeconomic data on linguistic minorities in the province. This has led to gaps in the data available to analyze and address disparities between linguistic communities.

Various institutions in Québec, including PERT, have been working to address these gaps by developing evidence-based research to better inform government policies. This community-based research has emerged from recognizing that federal statistics on linguistic minorities are limited and that communities are well-placed to develop and conduct research on the issues they face. PERT has been a leader in developing and disseminating data and research to provide a more accurate picture of the employment situation of English-speaking Quebecers. However, more resources must be dedicated to improving this research capacity and increasing the available data on official language minority communities. Data is particularly needed for English-speaking communities outside of the Montréal region whose specific reality has been historically overlooked in economic portraits of Québec's English speakers. Such research is essential to developing a thorough understanding of the situation, challenges, and opportunities facing the ESCQ.

Recommendations

Québec's English-speaking communities have demonstrated considerable resilience over the past few decades as they fight to maintain the vitality of their communities. In order to go beyond survival and thrive, what is most needed is support from governments who recognize the unique barriers, successes and aspirations these communities have. The federal government has a key role in supporting the economic development of the ESCQ, especially in addressing its employment challenges. In order to support these efforts, we propose that federal institutions:

Recommendation 1: Recognize employment as a cornerstone of economic development and community vitality in the ESCQ by developing a strategy that prioritizes impact and accountability.

In addition to new funding for employment assistance services among official language minority communities, federal institutions should work with the stakeholders in the ESCQ to develop an employment strategy that addresses the unique employment disparities facing English-speaking Quebecers. This strategy should include new measures to ensure accountability for the funding allocated to the ESCQ by updating existing funding approaches and models. The strategy should also include evaluation measures to ensure that programs meet their intended objectives and that the communities most need assistance are served.

Recommendation 2: Improve the relationship between federal institutions and the ESCQ community sector with regard to economic development

More feedback mechanisms are needed for community organizations to work directly with the federal government in the implementation of its official languages policies and programs in Québec, particularly those with regard to economic development. This includes consulting on and evaluating how funding is allocated to ensure that there are adequate resources going to organizations that work on employability.

Recommendation 3: Ensure coordination and cooperation between the federal government (particularly PCH and ESDC) and the provincial government in areas of shared jurisdiction, such as addressing the employment challenges facing the ESCQ

Coordination and cooperation between the federal and provincial governments is necessary in order to address the challenges facing the ESCQ. The current employment situation of the ESCQ necessitates dedicated and long-term cooperation between governments.

Recommendation 4: Invest in research on the employment and economic development of the ESCQ

More resources must be dedicated to funding organizations dedicated to improving the frequency, availability and quality of data and research on the employment and economic situation of the ESCQ. There is also a need to fill research gaps by regularly measuring unemployment rates and employment incomes. This can be done by enhancing Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey and Job Vacancy and Wage Survey, which currently does not collect OLMC data. Better data is also needed to measure and track the impact of employment and economic development programs and policies on the ESCQ by funding organizations to conduct evaluation activities.

Recommendation 5: Develop a pan-Canadian action plan to strengthen investments in free and accessible adult French-language training programs

This includes bursaries and work-integrated learning opportunities for communities seeking French-language training. Current federal investments, including French immersion programs and increased recruitment of French-language teachers, should set specific targets and ensure that they include English-speaking Quebecers as a target learner group.