



PERT PROVINCIAL
EMPLOYMENT
ROUNDTABLE

**Brief:
Pre-Budget
Submission
2024-2025**

Submitted to Minister of Finance, Eric Girard.
Submitted by the Provincial Employment Roundtable.

Introduction

The Provincial Employment Roundtable Table (PERT) is pleased to submit this brief and proposition to the Ministry of Finance's 2024-25 Pre-budget consultations. Founded in 2020, PERT is a non-profit organization focused on addressing the employment and employability issues that are being faced by Québec's English-speaking communities. Since its creation, PERT has become the leading voice on the solutions to English speakers' employment challenges. Through its research and stakeholder coordination work, PERT has published over 25 reports that capture the employment issues and needs of English speakers across all 17 regions of the province and has established a membership of 90 employment service deliverers, educational institutions, regional organizations, and employers.

The employment situation of Québec's English-speaking population continues to worsen, as demonstrated by the higher unemployment rates and French-language barriers that English speakers face in Québec's labour market. In this brief, we identify two key contributors to the continued employment challenges of English speakers: a lack of targeted employment services and programs for English speakers and a lack of work-integrated French language training programs to help them enter and remain in the labour market. English speakers' employment and economic challenges are part of the larger economic headwinds that are facing Québec, which include unprecedented labour shortages, demographic decline, and problems with attracting and retaining talent.

This mémoire summarizes PERT's research findings, particularly the employment challenges facing the English-speaking community in Québec, and advances recommendations for the next budget that will address these challenges and help create a more productive, inclusive, and prosperous Québec for all.

Situation

Québec's English-speaking communities (ESCs) number over 1.2 million English speakers and represent 14.9% of the province's population.¹ Over the past two decades, these communities have faced decreasing vitality, particularly with regard to their economic development and employment.² A primary challenge is unemployment; English speakers represent 15.8% of Québec's labour force but 22.7% of its unemployed population. In the 2021 Census, English speakers had an unemployment rate of 10.9%, four percentage points higher than that of French speakers at 6.9%. In 2016, English speakers had an unemployment rate of 8.9% compared to 6.9% among French speakers, and in 2011, English speakers had an unemployment rate of 9.4% compared to 6.9% among French speakers.

¹ Adapted from Statistics Canada. (2021). 2021 Census - 25% Sample Data, [custom table]. All statistics in this report are based on calculations derived from Statistics Canada data tables, unless otherwise indicated.

² Official Languages Support Programs Branch. (2011). *A portrait of the English-speaking communities in Québec*. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/communaction/en/communities/statistical-profiles/portrait-english-speaking-communities-quebec>

Consistent disparities in unemployment are not the only indicator of English speakers' declining economic vitality; Québec's English-speaking communities are also characterized by lower median employment incomes compared to French speakers (\$32,000 versus \$37,200).³ This trend extends as far back as the year 2001.⁴

Among the various issues contributing to English speakers' employment and economic challenges, there are two that we urge the Québec government to address in the upcoming budget:

Issue 1: Lack of targeted employment services

There is a lack of employment services targeted to the specific needs of English-speaking clientele. In 2022-23, the Québec government spent over \$1.5 billion on employment support measures for Quebecers.⁵ In 2021-2022, the Québec government spent over \$888 million on employment support measures. Despite the prioritization of measures to deliver employment assistance to the public, approximately 3% of the funds for employment services and programs are currently being delivered to the English-speaking community through English-language groups.⁶ This represents roughly \$7 million dedicated to the 699,015 English speakers, who represent 15.8% of the labour force. A lack of targeted employment services was one of the leading employment barriers identified by English speakers in the labour market in a 2021 survey we conducted.⁷ Additionally, some English speakers are reluctant to approach general employment services and government services bureaus such as Services Québec due to linguistic barriers.

Targeted government support is needed to improve the infrastructure of employment services and programs accessible to English speakers in Québec. Given that the majority of employment services are delivered in French and that there is no targeted government measure to ensure that English speakers can access employment services, many are struggling to access the employment support they need to enter and navigate the labour market, contributing to higher unemployment. Of the English speakers who reported being

³ Median income is considered to be a more accurate measurement of income, as average income is more easily skewed by outlier data.

⁴ William Floch and Johanne Pocock. (2012). "The Socio-Economic Status of English-Speaking Quebec: Those Who Left and Those Who Stayed," in *Decline and Prospects of the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec*, ed. Richard Y. Bourhis.

https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2014/pc-ch/CH3-2-16-2013-eng.pdf

⁵ Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. (2023) *Rapport annuel de gestion 2022-2023 du ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale*. Gouvernement du Québec.

https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/emploi-solidarite-sociale/publications-adm/rapport/RAG_2022-2023_MESS.pdf

⁶ Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. (2022). *Portraits régionaux du soutien financier gouvernemental versé aux organismes communautaires pour 2021-2022*.

https://cdn-contenu.quebec.ca/cdn-contenu/adm/min/emploi-solidarite-sociale/publications-adm/documents-administratifs/soutien_finan_reg/LI_soutien-fin-org-communautaires-ttes-regions_MESS.xls.

Based on a calculation of the amount allocated to community organizations dedicated to serving the English-speaking community.

⁷ Provincial Employment Roundtable. (2022). *2021 Employment Survey of English-Speaking Quebecers & Organizations*. Provincial Employment Roundtable.

https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf

unable to access employment services in our survey, 46.4% indicated that it was due to a lack of services in English.⁸

There are over 70 English-language organizations across our network that work to provide vital employment programs and services to English speakers, including job placement in French-language workplaces, career planning and decision-making, directing and referring English speakers to the existing services (accompaniment, translation), directing English speakers to French-language training, and providing wrap-around support (addressing personal or life issues impacting career development). These organizations are sometimes the sole providers of employment support for English speakers, particularly in non-urban regions and cases where English speakers do not have adequate French language skills to communicate with local employment service deliverers. Yet organizations in our network are facing significant capacity challenges, and they lack the required funding and resources to help English speakers integrate into local labour markets. An action plan for targeted employment services for English speakers is required; this plan's objectives should be to reduce the friction to labour market integration for English speakers and increase their access to employment services. In order to ensure that services reach English speakers, English-language community organizations and employment program providers should be key stakeholders and funded with the capacity to deliver local programs directly within their communities across Québec.

Issue 2: French-language training for the workforce

Despite high rates of bilingualism (64.8%) among Québec's English speakers, French language proficiency remains the largest barrier to employment.⁹ In our survey, 67% of English-speaking respondents identified their French language skills as their top barrier to employment in the last three years, and 62% of respondents indicated their French language skills narrowed the range of employment opportunities available to them. English speakers who identify themselves as bilingual can still face challenges in the labour market if their French language skills are determined to be inadequate by employers or in cases where they experience discrimination because of their mother tongue or accent. They can also experience internal barriers, such as a lack of confidence in communicating in French.

In 2023, the Québec government committed \$214 million over five years to establish Francisation Québec and fund French-language learning, including offering adult French language learning services in class, online, and at work.¹⁰ We are pleased to see the inclusion of specialized courses by the employment sector, as well as work-integrated French-language training programs in partnership with employers. However, awareness, promotion and uptake of these programs among employers and English speakers remain low, and there are minimal incentives for employers to undertake French-language training beyond access to subsidies to help cover training time.¹¹ Additionally, there remains a gap in

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Adapted from Statistics Canada. (2021). 2021 Census - 25% Sample Data, [custom table]

¹⁰ Ministère des Finances. (2023). "Discours sur le budget," Gouvernement du Québec.

https://www.finances.gouv.qc.ca/Budget_and_update/budget/speech.asp#:~:text=To%20ease%20thei%20socioeconomic%20integration,the%20rollout%20of%20Francisation%20Qu%C3%A9bec.

¹¹ Gouvernement du Québec. (2024). "Offrir un cours de français en entreprise."

<https://www.quebec.ca/entreprises-et-travailleurs-autonomes/francisation>

the French-language training offer; particularly, there is limited access to profession-specific training and training to bolster linguistic confidence.

Further, Québec is losing highly educated talent due to the lack of pathway programs that bridge English speakers graduating from English-language post-secondary institutions into French-language workplaces. The lack of bridging programs to help graduating English-speaking students enter the labour market contributes to the brain drain of skilled workers who often leave Québec after struggling to find employment. Recent efforts to force an intermediate level of French-language acquisition in the post-secondary education system are misguided and are not enough to overcome the French-language barriers and linguistic anxiety that can arise from navigating a highly regulated French-language labour market. Efforts should instead be placed on aiding students to acquire French in the workplace after graduation through bridging programs that focus on workplace integrated French-language training. This approach would be the most effective way to address linguistic barriers and provide graduates with the relevant language training they need to work in Québec post-graduation. French language barriers and lack of language training have resulted in the exodus of thousands of English-speaking youth and graduates in science, healthcare, technology, and other in-demand fields in Québec. Data shows that English-speaking Quebecers with graduate degrees are less likely to stay in Québec compared to English speakers with college or high school diplomas.¹² The Québec government has indicated that it needs these highly-skilled graduates to help close its wealth and productivity gap with Ontario.

Proposition

Solution 1: Dedicate funds for a plan d’action des services publics d’emploi for the English-speaking community

Objective: Allocate \$17 million to deploy a new plan d’action des services publics d’emploi for English-speaking Quebecers that aligns with the action plan for employment services launched by the Ministère de l’Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. The action plan has 5 Orientations, which would best be delivered through community groups in the English-speaking community. The Provincial Employment Roundtable and its partners at the Regional Development Network are best placed to coordinate the implementation of the action plan within the English-speaking community.

Table 1 - Investment in the plan d’action des services publics d’emploi for the English-speaking community by 5 Orientations over 3 years (in millions of \$)

Orientation	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Total
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¹² William Floch. (2018). *Taux de rétention selon le niveau éducationnel*. Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d’expression anglaise.

Collecting, analyzing and disseminating relevant information on English speakers in the labour market that considers the phenomenon of labour shortages, digital transformation, and the transition to a greener economy	0.3	0.41	0.11	0.82
Qualifying unemployed English speakers and improving the skills of employed workers through skills training	2.1	4.0	2.1	8.2
Reaching English-speaking client groups that are underrepresented in the labour market and adapting services to meet their specific needs.	0.98	1.5	1.22	3.7
Prioritizing interventions whose scope is sustainable.	0.2	0.5	0.4	1.1
Mobilizing labour market partners to face the challenges of a changing labour market.	0.6	1.7	0.9	3.2
Total	4.18	8.11	4.73	17.02

Solution 2: Targeted funding for work-integrated French language training

Objective: Dedicate \$7 million to support the creation and implementation of a dedicated work-integrated French-language training network for English speakers. The Provincial Employment Roundtable will work with its network of partners to recruit Québec employers and post-secondary institutions across Québec to participate in work-integrated French-language training for English speakers in the labour market.

Table 2- Investment in the creation of a dedicated work-integrated French language training program for English speakers in partnership with Québec employers over 3 years (in millions of \$)

	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	Total
Research, program design, and evaluation	0.55	0.71	0.4	1.66
Engagement and recruitment of Québec employers	0.3	0.5	0.4	1.2
Program implementation	0.93	1.2	0.67	2.8

Promotion and mobilization of the program among stakeholders across the regions	0.3	0.8	0.4	1.5
Total	2.08	3.21	.1.87	7.16

The Provincial Employment Roundtable’s Activities

The three main areas of activity for PERT to accomplish its mission and address the employment challenges facing the English-speaking community are: research & policy, engagement & communications, and partnerships.

Engagement & Communications

Engagement with stakeholders and government is a key reason PERT was created, and it accomplishes this work in three key ways:

- Sectoral tables
- Meetings with stakeholders and government
- Public events

PERT has created 4 sectoral tables and now has over 90 members:

- **Employment Services Sectoral Table:** The Employment Services Sectoral Table seeks to bring together practitioners, experts, users, stakeholders and industry leaders from the employment services sector in order to discuss the gaps in employment service delivery and skills training that are contributing to the employment and employment challenges experienced by the English-speaking communities of Quebec.
- **Education Sectoral Table:** The Education Sectoral Table brings together educators, education experts, and students from across the province of Québec in order to discuss the gaps in education and programming that are contributing to the employment and employment challenges experienced by the English-speaking communities of Quebec.
- **Employers Sectoral Table:** The Employer Sectoral Table brings together stakeholders and industry leaders from Quebec’s business community, nonprofits and para-public sectors in order to discuss the gaps in policies, tools, and training that are contributing to the employability and employment challenges experienced by the English-speaking communities of Quebec.
- **Regional Table:** The Regional Sectoral Table brings together stakeholders and community organizations working in the regions to consider policy issues, develop policy recommendations, and create solutions that respond to the issues and challenges facing the English-speaking living in regional communities in Quebec in the areas of employment and employability.

Research & Policy

Since its creation, PERT has developed and refined its research capacity. In 2022-2023 alone, PERT conducted:

- **66** interviews with subject matter experts
- Surveyed **700** members of the English-speaking community
- A systematic review and analysis of 2021 census demographic data and labour force characteristics for English speakers in each of Québec's administrative regions

Additionally, our research has yielded the publication of several reports, including:

- **A Snapshot of Poverty Among Québec's English-Speaking Communities**
- **Census 2021 Update:** A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers
- **Québec and the rest:** A survey of national and international approaches to adult language training
- **Learning French as an Adult:** A Review of Current Best Practices in Adult French-Language Training in Québec

A full list of our reports is available at: <https://pertquebec.ca/our-reports>



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