

Office of the
Commissioner of
Official Languages



Commissariat
aux langues
officielles



ANNUAL REPORT

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The Speaker of the House of Commons

Ottawa

Mr. Speaker,

Pursuant to section 66 of the *Official Languages Act*, I hereby submit to Parliament, through your good offices, the annual report of the Commissioner of Official Languages covering the period from April 1, 2020, to March 31, 2021.

Yours respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Th  berge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "R" being large and prominent.

Raymond Th  berge

The Speaker of the Senate

Ottawa

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Raymond Th  berge

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Raymond Th  berge
Commissioner of official languages

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

This was an extraordinary year. It began with the COVID-19 pandemic in full swing and has ended much the same way. I am grateful to my team for staying the course under less-than-ideal conditions and for continuing to faithfully monitor the status of English and French in federal institutions and in Canadian society. Despite the health crisis, my office succeeded in publishing several key reports, which are described in this annual report.

This crisis has in many ways changed our way of life, our institutions and our convictions. On the one hand, it has illustrated the strength and resilience of our federal institutions. On the other hand, it has shed a harsh light on what is not working: specifically, the not inconsiderable structural impediments that are hampering our collective efforts.

SYSTEMIC PROBLEM

The COVID-19 pandemic forced our federal institutions to react promptly and decisively, and what happened? Too often, **urgent safety communications** were issued in only one of our two official languages, and Canadians had to wait for the translation into the other official language. This situation exposed the corporate culture of many work units in federal institutions that do not always prioritize official languages or respect the principle of equality of English and French. The complaints my office has received over the past few years, the investigations we have conducted and the report we released on emergency situations clearly show the recurrent nature of this problem.

One of the root causes of this issue is the improper assessment of the **language requirements** of positions, which means that many public servants lack the second language skills to be able to respond to the public or supervise employees in either official language.

In my opinion, the problem relates to a certain lack of maturity on the part of **federal institutions** when it comes to official languages, which translates into two things: a lack of clearly defined processes and mechanisms integrated into the business processes of federal institutions; and a work environment where employees rarely have the opportunity to speak or work in the non-predominant official language, be it their first or second official language.

The pandemic has also weakened official language minority **communities** by eroding not only their community service sector but also their arts and culture sector.

The shortcomings exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with the structural problems that have been apparent for several years, highlight the pressing need to **modernize the *Official Languages Act***. This review of the Act and its instruments is long overdue and highly anticipated, even though the government reaffirmed its commitment in the September 2020 Speech from the Throne and tabled its reform document, *English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada*, in February 2021. I am pleased that the principle of substantive equality is at the heart of this document, but I must stress that we need to turn those intentions into action as soon as possible!

PROGRESS

Meanwhile, my office has been working to advance a number of other issues.

We documented the **linguistic insecurity** of federal government employees in their first or second official language and raised public interest in the issue. We also provided federal institutions with tools to help them better understand the issue and address this challenge. I am disappointed by the degree to which public servants are often uncomfortable using the non-predominant official language at work, whether it be their first or second official language. There is a strong need to foster a workplace that not only supports their language rights and enhances their language skills, but also takes full advantage of existing language capabilities.

We also completed the first exercise of the **Official Languages Maturity Model**, a self-assessment and planning tool for federal institutions, which is being implemented with the support of my office. Thirteen federal institutions have gamely embarked on this exercise, and nearly all of them have developed a progress plan to better integrate official languages into their decision-making and business processes, which will help them to meet their obligations under the Act.

ISSUES TO MONITOR

We have been monitoring other ongoing issues, as well, and will continue to stay abreast of these situations as they evolve.

The upward trend in the number of complaints continued this year, and my office is now receiving over 1,000 complaints a year. Complaints related to service to the public filed under Part IV of the Act were once again the focus of our investigations. Although there were fewer complaints from the travelling public because of pandemic-related restrictions, the number of complaints about communications with the public continues to be high.

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a rapid shift in the use of **digital technologies** and **teleworking**. The question that now needs to be asked, particularly at a time when the Act is in the process of being modernized, is how will federal institutions ensure compliance with the rules and principles regarding language of work and service to the public in this new work environment?

Another ongoing issue is airport authorities' respect for the language rights of the **travelling public**. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted another aspect of the importance of clear messaging in both official languages for the travelling public. It is no longer simply a matter of locating exits or taxi stands, but of understanding additional health and safety measures.

Federal, provincial and territorial agreements on **official languages in education** continue to be a source of frustration for official language minority communities. Minority-language education and second-language education are key to the vitality of these communities and to linguistic duality in Canada. It is possible—necessary, even—for the two to move forward in tandem. My office will continue to monitor the education file closely.

Post-secondary education in French also continues to be a concern, as evidenced by the current situations at Campus Saint-Jean in Edmonton, Laurentian University in Sudbury and the Université de l'Ontario français in Toronto. I am keenly aware of the needs of this sector, which not only constitutes part of the educational continuum of French linguistic minority communities, but also unleashes the communities' potential through activities in training and in research and development. The sector can count on my support to encourage the federal government to provide additional resources.

This year, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted several shortcomings in terms of official languages within federal institutions. What I found more troubling, however, were the results of our study on linguistic insecurity among federal government employees. Despite the decades that have passed since the language-of-work provisions were added to the Act in 1988, it is still awkward—and sometimes even risky—for federal public servants to use the non-predominant official language in a designated bilingual workplace in 2021, whether as their first or second official language. This is a deep-seated problem in the culture of the federal public service that also has a negative impact on service to the public and the success of linguistic duality in this country. The problem requires concrete action, and I am calling on federal institutions to work together to address it immediately.

This year, a new format has been developed for my annual report. The content is organized chronologically, with key issues and activities presented under themes that have emerged over time. More importantly, this report continues to be an annual record of the official languages compliance issues addressed by my office. I hope you enjoy reading it!

THEME 1

PANDEMIC: COMPLIANCE, COMPLAINTS AND THE CHALLENGE FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE

April 2020

COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The 2020–2021 fiscal year begins during the COVID-19 pandemic, and many complaints related to this health crisis are filed with my office.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how most of us operate and in some cases revealed certain practices within the federal public service that were seen by Canadians and public servants as lacking respect for their language rights.

I recognize that federal institutions worked incredibly hard to ensure the health and safety of Canadians in the face of adversity. Unfortunately, shortcuts were also taken with regard to language obligations, particularly in terms of the use and status of French.

My office received 138 complaints related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which is just over 7% of the total number of complaints for 2020–2021. Two thirds of these involved government communications with and services to the public. Many complaints concerned Health Canada's decisions in March and April 2020 to temporarily allow English-only labelling of disinfectants and other products. Some complaints were about English-only text messages sent by the Government of Canada through the COVID Alert application, and several others involved the nonequivalent use of French during press conferences given by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health.

Although it is too early to draw conclusions from these complaints, most of which were still under investigation at the time of writing this annual report, I would like to state what should be obvious: any measure regarding the health or safety of Canadians is effective only if it is communicated to them in both of Canada's official languages. Using both English and French ensures that 98% of Canadians can be reached. This is a basic public safety measure.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a parent receiving an emergency text message about COVID-19 in the official language he doesn't understand . . . How does he know what the new threat is to him and to his family? How does he react to protect his loved ones? Whom does he turn to for answers in his first official language? During an emergency, the timely availability of clear and understandable messages in a person's first official language is crucial. Failure to ensure this can result in serious consequences.

In 2020–2021, almost one third (40) of the complaints received in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic were filed by federal public servants. These employees reported receiving English-only emails, briefing notes, conference calls and emergency alerts, despite the fact that they work in regions designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes. The complaints are still under investigation, but I can only say that this is an unacceptable recurring problem that has been documented in my office's reports over the years.

The use of both official languages is not only a matter of respecting Canadians' rights but also a matter of public safety, especially for vulnerable or disadvantaged people in an emergency situation, such as the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021. I encourage you to read my office's October 2020 report, [*A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*](#).

April 2020

LANGUAGE TESTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

COVID-19 disrupts another important service: Language testing within the federal public service.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdowns had an impact on the staffing of bilingual positions in the federal public service. The Public Service Commission of Canada, which plays a key role in administering the language tests required for this staffing, was forced to suspend its in-person operations in March 2020, which brought staffing to a halt for a time.

The Public Service Commission took steps to address this problem, first by granting temporary exemptions from the requirement to use its tests, then by giving federal institutions the authority to administer their own tests, and finally by gradually introducing new Public Service Commission online tests, both supervised and unsupervised.

I applaud the Public Service Commission for adapting quickly by shifting to digital technologies. However, I am concerned about

federal institutions' ability to ensure strict quality control and supervision of their language testing. Another concern is whether these in-house language tests may have led or may yet lead to supervisory positions' being filled by candidates who do not meet the language requirements of the positions. When this happens, subordinate staff may not be able to work in the official language of their choice, as is their right in designated bilingual regions. Ultimately, both the public service's bilingual capacity and the public's right to services in the official language of their choice run the risk of being compromised. The Public Service Commission and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat are working together to try to minimize the impact of the new measures on federal public servants and their rights.

April 2020

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND TELEWORKING IN A NEW PUBLIC SERVICE

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights structural changes that are happening in Canadian society, particularly with respect to digital technologies and teleworking. What impact will these changes continue to have on official languages?

Like many of you, I spent most of the past year working from home and accessing the various online services that are helping me to live my life during the current health crisis. Effectively, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for ongoing transformations in services to the public and in the way work is structured both in Canadian society and, more specifically, within the public service.

The question is how will the principles and rules governing the government's official languages obligations hold up in this shifting environment?

When defining their bilingual staffing needs, federal institutions will have to consider the fact that their services and workforces are becoming

increasingly delocalized. My office has developed an [online interactive tool](#) to help determine the linguistic identification of positions. The *Dionne* case, discussed in this annual report, should serve as a warning about federal employees' right to work in the official language of their choice.

Canada is currently actively preparing to modernize its *Official Languages Act*, including the new conditions under which the Act and its instruments will operate. I issued recommendations on the [modernization of the Act](#) in 2019.

My office will be closely monitoring these issues in the coming months.



October 29, 2020

REPORT ON EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Report – A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages

In the wake of the government's initial shortcomings in terms of communicating in both official languages during the COVID-19 pandemic, I asked my office to conduct a broader study on the impact of emergencies on official languages. Through a questionnaire posted on our website, we consulted with over 2,200 people, and the key finding was that one official language, usually French, often takes a back seat in emergency situations. Few federal institutions have mechanisms, processes or procedures in place to ensure the use of both official languages in emergency communications. Unfortunately, this is also the case under normal circumstances, as well: teams operate in one official language, and the other is simply a translation.

The Canadians who responded to our questionnaire described the extent to which they feared for their health, safety and even their lives when they could not receive information in the official language of their choice from public authorities. On this issue, they made few distinctions between the various levels of government, the important thing being that all emergency communications must be released simultaneously in both official languages. My office received numerous complaints about this problem in 2020–2021.

I therefore recommended in my study report that the Government of Canada implement internal procedures and work tools for communications in both official languages, and then evaluate their effectiveness both in normal times and in times of crisis. I also asked certain federal institutions to encourage and support other levels of government to do the same. Over the course of the past year, I have spoken about this with federal deputy ministers and official languages champions. I am pleased to see that a number of parliamentarians have relayed my findings and recommendations to Parliament.

Failing to respect language rights, regardless of whether there are extenuating circumstances resulting from an emergency or crisis situation, is still a violation of rights guaranteed by quasi-constitutional legislation and cannot be excused.

November 12, 2020

LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS OF POSITIONS AND SAFETY ISSUES

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the problem of inadequate staffing.

During times of crisis, the limited capacity of federal institutions to provide services to the public in both official languages becomes apparent. If a federal institution has underestimated the level of language skills required for its employees, despite the tasks and duties of their positions, then during an emergency situation, those employees will likely be unable to respond to the public with the same attention to detail and quality of service in both official languages. The same is true for managers when it comes to supporting their employees.

Failure to properly apply the Act in assessing the language requirements of positions can result in members of the public or even public servants becoming victims of an emergency situation because they do not receive vital information in the official language they understand.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a person responsible for public safety in a federal institution who needs to fill a team leader position and who is reviewing the linguistic profile of this bilingual position . . . One of her employees has all the required experience and would be the ideal candidate, except for his second language skill levels (BBB), which are below what is normally required (CBC). She feels that this is not a problem because one of his colleagues is perfectly bilingual and could assist him, if necessary, and because the employee could also take training to improve his second language skills. The linguistic profile of the position is therefore set at the lower level (BBB/BBB), and the employee is promoted.

What if the bilingual colleague is not in the office on the day of an emergency and the team leader cannot communicate safety instructions in the other official language? What if the bilingual colleague is a subordinate, a superior or a peer who is not in the same position (at the same group and level) and therefore does not have the same expertise as the team leader?



THEME 2

COMMUNITIES: PANDEMIC IMPACT, EDUCATION BARRIERS AND LINGUISTIC INSECURITY



2020–2021

FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS

There is still a strong interest in French second language and immersion programs in Canada, but schools cannot seem to keep up with the demand because of a lack of qualified staff.

I strongly believe in the importance of ensuring that all Canadians have access to education in their first official language and the opportunity to learn their second official language. However, learning French as a second language continues to be a significant challenge.

In 2020–2021, the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the shortage of French second language teachers, including in French immersion programs. French language schools are also experiencing a teacher shortage. Faced with the difficulty of hiring enough qualified teachers for small, remote or hybrid classrooms, some schools have chosen to replace their French immersion program with a core program, which has fewer hours of instruction.

My office examined this ongoing problem, and we released our report, [*Accessing opportunity: A study on challenges in French-as-a-second-language education teacher supply and demand in Canada*](#), in 2019. We are still in the process of following up on the recommendations I made in that report.

The actions being considered by the federal government on this issue in its reform document on the modernization of the *Official Languages Act* suggest that it is taking the problem seriously.

Spring–summer 2020

IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all Canadians, we know that some segments of the population are more vulnerable, such as official language minority communities. Here are some examples of the negative impacts the health crisis has had on these communities.

Information in the official language of the linguistic minority

My office received several complaints in 2020–2021 alleging that federal institutions did not issue information on health emergency measures as systematically in French as they did in English. Official language minority communities, regardless of where they are in Canada, should receive crucial health and safety information in their official language at the same time as official language majority communities.

Community support

Remote, isolated, scattered or small official language minority communities must often rely solely on community organizations for the services they need. Community organizations are critical to their vitality, and yet operate with minimal resources. The health crisis has had a severe impact on these organizations. Like other service providers, but with limited means, they have had to go digital and reduce their operating costs. Compounding the problem is the fact that many remote communities in Canada still lack high-speed Internet service. For [community organizations in Ontario](#), for example, the pandemic has resulted in reduced staff hours, layoffs, use of financial reserves and the risk of closure.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a community mental health agency in a small, remote Francophone community in Ontario that has had to cut its staff to two days a week after suspending its self-funding activities . . . This situation, which has been playing out in various ways in official language minority communities across Canada, leaves the communities without services that support their well-being at a critical time. With many organizations seriously questioning their ability to resume their operations after the COVID-19 pandemic, governments need to provide special support to community networks, which are often the only resources these communities have.

I would, however, like to highlight two initiatives that could serve as models for other public authorities in Canada:

1. The Government of Ontario, in collaboration with the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, created a \$1 million [relief fund for Francophone organizations](#) to help support them during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Canadian Heritage, as part of its Official Languages Support Programs, adapted its management rules to maintain funding to recipient organizations despite delays in delivering promised results or the refocusing of their activities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vitality of communities' arts and culture sector

The vitality of official language minority communities also depends on their cultural scene, and the arts community plays a key role. Perhaps the most vulnerable groups among community-based and non-profit organizations at this time are in the arts and culture sector. Virtually all of their activities have been suspended as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Association acadienne des artistes professionnel.le.s du Nouveau-Brunswick reported a 25% drop in employment in May 2020 and is [calling for support measures](#) for French-language organizations. In Quebec, the English-Language Arts Network created a web page that [lists valuable resources](#) that can help arts groups deal with the health crisis.

Despite the fact that the arts community tends to be one of the more resilient sectors of our society, I hope that government funders will step up to the plate to provide support during the current health crisis.

French-speaking immigrants, refugees and international students

Immigration is another sector that has suffered setbacks because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some areas, recruiting immigrants has stopped altogether, while in others, integrating recent newcomers has been hampered by lockdowns. In the case of French linguistic minority communities, this slowdown has added to the challenge of recruiting and retaining Francophone immigrants. In Manitoba, for example, there has been a dramatic decline in Francophone immigration. In Newfoundland and Labrador, a community forum held last October drew attention to the situation of newcomers who temporarily lost access to the in-person settlement services provided by COMPAS, the local host organization. COMPAS has managed to maintain its telephone and online services, however.

Many French-language post-secondary institutions in French linguistic minority communities, including Université de Saint-Boniface, Université de Hearst, Collège Boréal, Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick and Université Sainte-Anne, are also experiencing a [sharp decline in their international student population](#).

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT an actor-director in a small English-language theatre in a remote part of Quebec who hasn't worked in a year and who is watching the community theatre that she has worked so hard to support being forced to give up its space and equipment and head towards closure . . . Will she give up her vocation to find another job? Will she move to a bigger city where there are more opportunities to continue her work in the arts? Will her community then be left without a theatre and without an artist to breathe cultural life into the English-speaking minority population? This is why we need to stand together and why federal institutions need to support the arts groups that are constantly fostering and sustaining a sense of community belonging.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT one of the last immigrant families to arrive just before the COVID-19 pandemic . . . They are isolated in their accommodations and unfamiliar with the host community. They can't get around easily and have trouble understanding emergency messages. They can't meet face-to-face with staff who are responsible for helping them settle and who are operating at limited capacity. It is clear that integrating this family into an official language minority community poses a huge challenge. But this family is vital to the growth of the community!

I encourage Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to consider the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having and will continue to have on the demographic vitality of official language minority communities. Successfully integrating people we have welcomed into our country and introducing them to our two official languages is an important part of ensuring the vitality and growth of communities. Given the Department's encouraging efforts regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees, which were noted during a follow-up to the recommendation stemming from an investigation, I am confident that positive action will be taken regarding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community health

My office has had several opportunities to review the access of official language minority community institutions to health research funding offered by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. In 2020–2021, we concluded a follow-up to the recommendations arising from the investigation of a complaint filed in 2014. The follow-up found that the federal funding agency has made improvements by consulting with communities and better incorporating community-specific realities into research in general. However, it still faces a significant challenge in that it still has no mechanisms to ensure that these community institutions have equitable access to its research funds.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a public health researcher, working alone in a small French-language university, who must develop partnerships with other institutions, is exploring a little-studied topic and target population and wants to write her research proposal in French but knows that the granting agency's review committees will probably not be able to understand it and that her project will be in competition with other research projects submitted by large nationally or internationally recognized teams . . . Does this researcher have adequate resources to prepare a solid proposal? What chance does she have of obtaining funding under these circumstances? This is the reality faced by many research specialists working on projects that involve official language minority communities, and this is why granting agencies need to have mechanisms to strengthen the research capacity of smaller institutions so that they can compete fairly.

After the follow-up to the recommendations was completed, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research launched their action plan for 2021–2031, one of the priorities of which is to enhance the vitality of Canada's English and French linguistic minority communities. The federal funding agency also stated that it will be launching a grant program for official language minority communities in 2021 and that it plans to take action in the future to ensure that applications in French are funded at least in the same proportion as the percentage of applications received in French.

While I am encouraged by the initiatives proposed by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, I still have concerns about this situation because public health authorities responsible for official language minority communities need to have access to accurate, reliable and timely data to properly serve these populations. This is especially true when trying to navigate the uncharted waters of a health crisis.

Summer 2020

CAMPUS SAINT-JEAN

The 2020–2021 fiscal year sees a number of disquieting developments in post-secondary education in official language minority communities, but the main focus is the threat to Campus Saint-Jean in Edmonton, Alberta.

The University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean in Edmonton is and has been one of the cornerstones of Western Canada's French-language post-secondary education system for over a century. The Government of Alberta's budget cuts in December 2019 and March 2020 hit this institution hard. It had to reduce its course offerings by 20% and is experiencing a significant budget shortfall. As part of a restructuring process and in light of current and future budget cuts, the University has even considered moving or eliminating Campus Saint-Jean.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT the only institution in Alberta in which Francophones and Francophiles can pursue their studies in French at the college/university level having to close . . . What would the students do? Move to another province where they can study in French? Go to an English-language institution? Drop their chosen field of study? Closing Campus Saint-Jean would be an unacceptable step backward at a time when Canadians want to move forward in learning both official languages and when the labour market needs more and more bilingual workers.

I understand that this crisis, which has been well articulated by the [Save Saint-Jean campaign](#), is the result of chronic operational and structural underfunding. Provincial per capita funding

for the institution has been frozen for several years at a quota of just over 500 students, even though student enrolment is now almost double that, reflecting the growth of the Francophone community in Alberta. The province has also failed to invest in structural upgrades to the campus over the past 20 years, and federal funding for the Official Languages in Education Program has not increased since 2009.

Alberta's Francophone community, represented by the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, has taken legal action against the provincial government and the University of Alberta to save Campus Saint-Jean. As part of its restructuring process, the University of Alberta now appears to recognize the autonomy and distinct status of Campus Saint-Jean. I will continue to monitor this issue closely.

Post-secondary institutions that operate in the language of the official language minority community are part of the educational fabric that is crucial to the vitality of these communities. They are also a valuable resource for Canadians who want to enhance their skills in their second official language.

The Government of Canada has recognized this over the years by helping to support the operation of these institutions and even helping to create new ones. It must continue to do so and, if necessary—as in the case of Toronto's new Université de l'Ontario français—use its spending power to encourage the provinces and territories to consider the singular value of these institutions.

Summer 2020

EDUCATION AGREEMENTS

Federal, provincial and territorial education agreements have caused significant challenges that my office has investigated.

Federal, provincial and territorial cooperation in minority language education and second language instruction is achieved through agreements that are renewed every five years. The 2018–2023 cycle of agreements represents a federal investment of \$1.2 billion, but negotiations for these agreements have extended into the current year, causing serious delays in accessing funds.

I have seen the real-world impact of these delays. For example, at Campus Saint-Jean in Edmonton, a plan was announced to open satellite sites in September 2021; however, the University of Alberta suspended Campus Saint-Jean's funding for three months because of the delay in signing the agreement, which threatened to set back the opening of the satellites. Fortunately, the problem was eventually resolved with no major repercussions.

In the previous round of agreements (2013–2018), my predecessors conducted several investigations following complaints about the lack of transparency of provinces and territories in the allocation of federal funding.

Canadian Heritage responded by making a commitment to the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada and the Commission nationale des parents francophones to advance their priorities and improve accountability and transparency regarding these agreements. I highlighted and commended this effort in my [2018–2019 annual report](#).

In the current cycle, the federal government agreed to add a clause allowing Quebec to opt out of its agreement. In my [2019–2020 annual report](#), I highlighted the fact that Quebec's English-speaking community would still like the province to be transparent about the allocation of federal funds earmarked for learning in the official language of the minority community.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT Quebec's English-language school boards no longer knowing whether they are getting federal funding to support official language education, let alone how much, because Quebec has opted out of the agreement, with financial compensation to ensure that the province receives its share of federal funding . . . What kind of support would the boards have for their initiatives? Under what government priorities could they plan their development? If Quebec has the right to opt out of an agreement that includes accountability provisions, it is only fair that the province's English-speaking community be ensured transparency regarding the allocation of funds received from the federal government.

Canadian Heritage has not yet confirmed how it intends to monitor and audit the provinces and territories with respect to accountability and transparency in the allocation of funds.

The current cycle of agreements has brought both good and bad news. I am very pleased, for example, that Yukon and the Northwest Territories have received increased funding to hire more teachers to meet demand. On a similar note, I commend Alberta for new transparency mechanisms, such as a stakeholder advisory council and a website that shows how the funds are being allocated.

Despite these positive signs, I am hearing from some school boards that they are still not being consulted across the country in the negotiations and that there is still no way of knowing where negotiations stand in a process that still lacks transparency.

January 8, 2021

LINGUISTIC INSECURITY IN THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

My office surveys 11,000 federal public servants about their experience using their first or second official language at work.

Linguistic insecurity is the sense of unease, discomfort or anxiety a person experiences when using or trying to use their first or second official language. It can have a negative impact on a person's confidence or comfort in speaking the official language of their choice. Nearly 11,000 federal government employees shared their experiences in a [survey conducted for my office](#).

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a federal public servant working in a region that is designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes and in an office where her first official language is rarely used in her work relationships, in her meetings or with her team leader, even though she has the right to use it . . . Would she feel comfortable speaking it? She would probably be feeling linguistically insecure.

Our study highlights the importance public servants place on the use of official languages in the workplace, and I am happy to see that many of them would like more opportunities to use both official languages at work. However, a good number of people whose first official language is not the predominant language in their workplace or who want to use their second official language at work are experiencing feelings of linguistic insecurity.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a federal public servant fresh out of second language training, trying to articulate his ideas in that language about a complex subject using a fraction of the words he would normally use, and his colleagues respond to him in his first official language . . . Would he feel comfortable continuing to use his second language? He would probably be feeling linguistically insecure.

This is not a new problem in the public service, but I am pleased that we have been able to provide new documentation based on the experience of federal employees. Those employees have suggested several ways to address this issue, including offering ongoing encouragement for public servants to use the official language of their choice and providing non-judgemental environments in which to take risks in using and hearing their second official language.

My office has posted tools online that can help people gain a better [understanding of linguistic insecurity](#) and that suggest [best practices for creating a bilingual, inclusive and safe workplace](#) in which public servants can thrive in either official language.

Our survey has sparked a conversation about linguistic insecurity in federal institutions, and my office will help to keep it going by sharing the results of our research with public servants. We will encourage federal institutions to explore other opportunities to better understand

this issue, including the experiences of public servants in different regions, the relationship between language of work and language of service, and the impact of linguistic insecurity on well-being in the workplace. By identifying challenges and finding solutions, we can all work together to promote greater linguistic security in the federal public service, which will result in better communications with and services to the Canadian public.

Quotes from our survey

“If senior management were to use both official languages equally more often, the employees would feel more comfortable.”

“Maybe it’s up to me to make an effort to use my own language more often so that my colleagues can improve their second language.”

THEME 3

MODERNIZATION OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT* AND UPDATE ON THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES MATURITY MODEL

2020–2021

THE *DIONNE* CASE: FEDERAL EMPLOYEES' RIGHT TO WORK IN THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF THEIR CHOICE AT RISK

My office and I are concerned about the Federal Court's decision in the *Dionne* case regarding the right of federal employees to work in the official language of their choice.

In 2020–2021, we continued our work on the appeal of the Federal Court's decision in *Dionne v Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions*, which introduced a narrow interpretation of federal institutions' obligations regarding language of work under Part V of the Act.

André Dionne works in a federal government office in Montréal, Quebec, which is in a region designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes. Mr. Dionne, whose language of work is French, complained that he often had to call on the services of unilingual English-speaking specialists who work in his federal institution's office in Toronto, Ontario, which is in a region that is not designated as bilingual for language-of-work

purposes. The Commissioner concluded that his complaint was founded, and Mr. Dionne took his case to the Federal Court. The court dismissed his complaint.

The Federal Court's decision runs the risk of having a major impact on federal employees' right to work in the official language of their choice. Given that virtual teamwork is becoming increasingly common, it is important that this practice be subject to the fundamental rights recognized by Part V of the Act.

If this ruling is used as a precedent in future cases, it could have a negative impact on all language rights in Canada.

April 2020

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES MATURITY MODEL: THE FIRST YEAR

The Official Languages Maturity Model gives an idea of federal institutions' level of maturity in integrating official languages into their decision-making and operational processes.

My office developed the [Official Languages Maturity Model](#) to help federal institutions better integrate official languages into all their activities. The objective of the approach is not to judge the quality of initiatives within a federal institution or to evaluate its compliance with the Act. Rather, the goal is to give institutions tools to get a detailed overview of the processes and measures

that are in place and then provide them with a roadmap to help them strengthen their capacity and consistently meet their language obligations.

The Official Languages Maturity Model allows organizations to see where they stand on a scale based on established standards, so that they can better define their strengths, identify their shortcomings and establish what they

have to do to move forward and improve. These standards, taken from the Act, are broken down into 28 indicators covering service delivery and communications with the public; governance, leadership and strategic direction; and people management. The maturity scale shows where a federal institution stands with respect to its organizational processes according to the following levels:

- Somewhat informal practices (levels 1 and 2)
- An integrated structure with clearly defined mechanisms and processes (levels 3 and 4)
- An organization that demonstrates innovation and leadership (level 5)

The Official Languages Maturity Model gives my office an overview of organizational maturity in terms of official languages across the federal government.

In 2019–2020, the first group of selected federal institutions completed the Official Languages Maturity Model exercise. They included Natural Resources Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, four institutions from the Health portfolio, and six institutions from the Innovation, Science and Economic Development portfolio.

Each group of selected federal institutions goes through a three-step process:

1. The institution conducts a self-assessment.
2. My office validates the self-assessment results based on the information provided by the institution.
3. The institution develops a progress plan to improve its organizational maturity.

Nearly all of the first 12 participating federal institutions developed and submitted a progress plan in 2020–2021. Although the institutions generally did not achieve the highest levels of maturity on most indicators, some areas stood out. For example, many federal institutions showed higher levels of maturity on governance and leadership indicators, thanks in part to the creation of structures such as official languages

champions and official languages teams. The indicators with the lowest levels of maturity included accountability, language of work, people management and communications with the public, which means that the institutions generally do not have formal processes in place to help them consistently meet their official languages obligations.

The 2019–2020 exercise highlighted several practices that attest to a higher level of organizational maturity. Here are some examples.

NATURAL RESOURCES CANADA periodically reviews its language training directive to ensure that it is up to date and meets current needs. The review of the directive is incorporated into the directive itself.

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL OF CANADA uses a questionnaire to monitor implementation of measures to support the development of official language minority communities so that it can ensure that the measures identified are actually implemented and that they effectively meet the communities' needs.

THE CANADA REVENUE AGENCY has accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that governance instruments are used. Under its progress plan, senior management is briefed annually on the implementation of those instruments, and complaints shared by my office are used to review organizational processes.

The Official Languages Maturity Model can be used effectively in a wide variety of federal institutions, whether they are large or small, centralized or decentralized, or veteran or newcomer in terms of official languages. This tool is already generating interest among other federal institutions, among provincial and municipal administrations, and among community

associations. I am confident that the tool's proactive (as opposed to reactive) approach will help advance official languages in Canada.

I am proud of the Official Languages Maturity Model that we have implemented over the past year—it creates a collaborative culture that values, defends and promotes official languages rights and obligations.

Fall 2020

PARLIAMENTARY PROTECTIVE SERVICE: AN ENCOURAGING STORY

The Parliamentary Protective Service, which has been the subject of complaints filed with my office, decides to conduct a self-assessment based on the Official Languages Maturity Model exercise.

The Parliamentary Protective Service and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police have generated numerous complaints about problems obtaining services in French from them on Parliament Hill. It is patently unacceptable that both official languages are not being treated equally on the very site where the equality of their status was passed into law. This is not only a question of Canadian identity but also a matter of public safety.

The Parliamentary Protective Service has been investigated, has received recommendations and has been monitored by my office. It therefore recently decided to conduct a self-assessment of its organizational maturity in terms of official languages using the [Official Languages Maturity Model](#). I am heartened by this decision, as the process could help the institution to gain a better understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and to develop the capacities it needs to be able to fully meet its language obligations.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a French-speaking immigrant family who have recently become Canadian citizens visiting the nation's capital to see Parliament—the heart of the democracy they have embraced and that has welcomed them—only to be told by a security guard on the Hill, “Sorry, I don't speak French . . .” This would be both discouraging and deplorable.

Fall 2020

SERVICE IN THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE OF YOUR CHOICE AT AIRPORTS: AN ONGOING PROBLEM

Canada's airports are key facilities where Canadians are still too often confronted with services and communications provided in only one official language.

Over the years, my office has documented the problem of narrow interpretation and application of language obligations to the travelling public. We have received thousands of complaints. Over the past seven years, we have audited the Canada Border Services Agency and the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority, but our recommendations have been only partially implemented. In 2020–2021, I had to revisit this recurring problem on several occasions.

In my report, [*A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*](#), I pointed out that Canadian international airports lacked services in French for Canadians returning home from abroad during the COVID-19 pandemic, including from the Canada Border Services Agency.

In the fall of 2020, I obtained intervener status in two legal cases that raise several issues concerning the interpretation of the travelling public's language rights: *Michel Thibodeau v St. John's International Airport Authority* (T-1023-19) and *Michel Thibodeau v Greater Toronto Airports Authority* (T-2013-19). In these proceedings, I intend to seek a broad and liberal interpretation of the *Official Languages Act* with respect to bilingual services and communications provided to the travelling public by airport authorities, in order to clarify the requirements of the Act.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a French-speaking Canadian who lands at an international airport in a major Canadian city in September 2020 and is unable to understand the lockdown instructions posted solely in English by the authorities or to have them explained in his official language by a bilingual employee . . . This would be unacceptable. In Canada, emergency measures are not just for one language group.

September 23, 2020

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

The *Official Languages Act* is on the parliamentary agenda!

In the Speech from the Throne on September 23, 2020, the Government of Canada recognized the importance of protecting official languages and minority language rights and committed to strengthening the Act. There have been delays in the timetable announced, but I remain steadfast in my position that the government must effect a meaningful, in-depth [modernization of the Act](#) as soon as possible. I will be following this process closely, and my office will continue to provide its unique perspective on the issues specific to the Act and its enforcement.

Excerpts from the Speech from the Throne

“The fourth and final foundation of this plan is to stand up for who we are as Canadians. We cannot forget what has made us a country that is welcoming. A country that celebrates two official languages. That achieves progress on gender equality, walks the road of reconciliation, and fights discrimination of every kind.”

“Canada must continue to stand up for the values that define this country, whether that’s welcoming newcomers, celebrating with pride the contributions of LGBTQ2 communities, or embracing two official languages.”

“Our two official languages are woven into the fabric of our country.”

“The defence of the rights of Francophones outside Quebec, and the defence of the rights of the Anglophone minority within Quebec, is a priority for the Government.”

“In this vein, 51 years after the passage of the Official Languages Act, the Government is committed to strengthening this legislation among other things, taking into consideration the unique reality of French.”

November 12, 2020

LINGUISTIC IDENTIFICATION OF POSITIONS: A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM THAT AFFECTS SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC

Complaints reveal a systemic problem when it comes to considering official languages requirements in staffing (section 91 of the *Official Languages Act*).

In November 2020, my office published a report containing an in-depth analysis of the issue of improper assessment of language requirements for positions being staffed in the federal public service. We also released an accompanying tool to help federal institutions address the problem.

In-depth analysis

The [in-depth analysis](#) was based on over 600 complaint investigations, the vast majority of which were founded, but few of which led to changes in staffing practices, despite the repeated recommendations in the investigation reports. It showed that federal institutions often fail to objectively establish the language requirements of positions in regions designated as bilingual for language-of-work purposes. As a result, people hired to work for the federal government are often unable to communicate with or provide service to the public in the official language of their clients' choice or to provide supervision in the official language of their employees' choice. Like other professional skills, language skills are essential to quality service to the public and to a bilingual work environment.

I am pleased to note that our report triggered a decision by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat to create an interdepartmental working group to examine this issue.

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT a young unilingual English-speaking Canadian who is recruited to a federal institution in the National Capital Region (Ottawa side) and whose duties require him to respond to members of the public who speak French . . . This public servant would end up unintentionally failing to respect his employer's language obligations, and the public would pay the price.

Tool

My office developed an [online interactive tool](#) that helps managers establish the language requirements of a position logically, consistently and objectively. It complements the one developed by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat. Our tool has generated a great deal of interest among the managers who have been introduced to it, and time will tell whether it helps federal institutions to improve the way they establish the language requirements of the positions they are seeking to staff. I encourage federal institutions to use this tool so that they can better succeed in fostering a work environment and service culture that respect both of Canada's official languages and meet the real needs of Canadians.

February 2021

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES REFORM DOCUMENT

The Government of Canada responds to repeated requests and releases its reform document entitled *English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada*, which outlines its intention to strengthen the *Official Languages Act*.

The Government of Canada's long-anticipated [reform document](#) was released in February 2021 by the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages. It has been almost two years since the [Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages](#) and the [House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages](#) published their reports and recommendations on this issue. My office released publications in [2018](#) and [2019](#), and various other stakeholders have released reports and recommendations, as well.

I am pleased to see that the Government of Canada's proposed overhaul is based on the principle of substantive equality, because beyond guaranteeing the equal status of English and French, the new Act must provide the means to actually achieve this equality.

Now that we know the broad outlines of the reform, there will be a period during which everyone can provide comments on what the bill should include. I will be listening to your feedback to ensure that everyone is heard.

I am also pleased to see that the reform document reflects many of the recommendations I made in 2019, such as providing greater support to official language minority communities, expanding the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages and appointing bilingual judges to the Supreme Court of Canada.

At the time of writing this annual report, the bill had not yet been tabled. I would now like to see the government move from talking about its good intentions to putting them into action and immediately introducing legislation that makes the Act relevant, dynamic and strong. This should be the government's priority when it comes to official languages.



End of 2020–2021

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES MATURITY MODEL: CONTINUED

Preparations begin for the next round of Official Languages Maturity Model exercises, despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

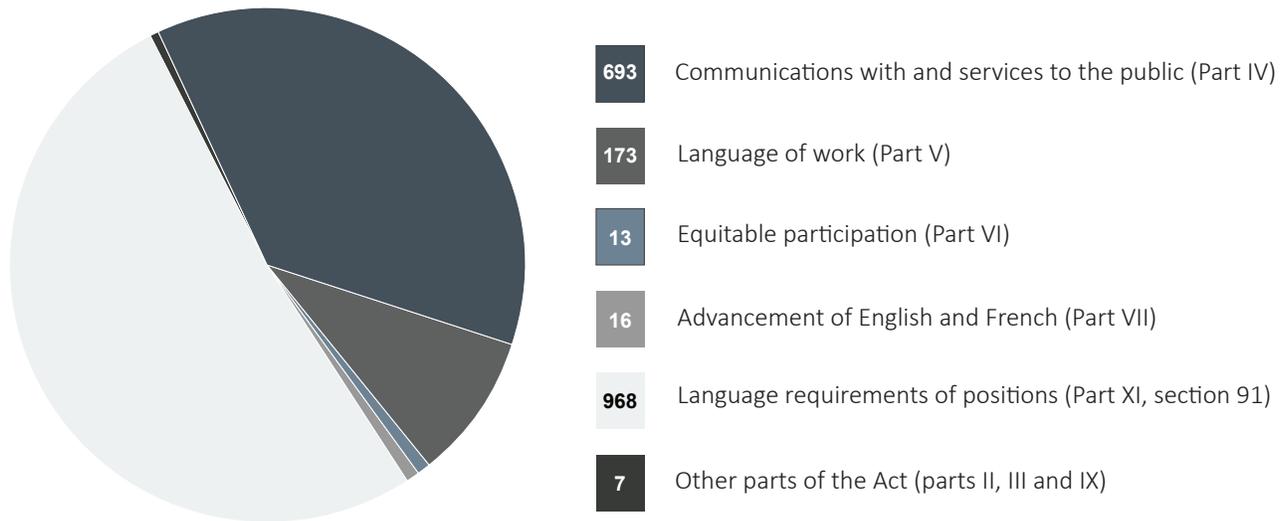
The COVID-19 pandemic effectively derailed the second exercise of the [Official Languages Maturity Model](#) planned for 2020–2021. Of the federal institutions originally selected for this exercise, only Elections Canada was able to complete the exercise and is currently preparing its progress plan to strengthen its official languages capacity.

Nine federal institutions will begin their self-assessment exercise in May 2021 and another nine will begin theirs in October 2021. They are all part of major departmental portfolios, including Public Services and Procurement Canada; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; Public Safety Canada; and Transport Canada.

In the coming years, other federal institutions will be invited to participate in Official Languages Maturity Model exercises. I am confident that the institutions that take part in these exercises will be able to better identify their strengths and weaknesses and improve their level of maturity with respect to official languages.

STATISTICS ON ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS IN 2020–2021

FIGURE 1
ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS IN 2020–2021
BY PART/SECTION OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*



Total: 1,870

Complaints filed under Part IV of the Act

The number of complaints filed under Part IV of the Act decreased slightly in 2020–2021, from 731 to 693. However, it is still the second-highest number of admissible Part IV complaints recorded in the past 18 years. It is interesting to note that, like many parts of our society, the types of complaints were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the number of complaints from the travelling public decreased in 2020–2021 for obvious reasons. And Part IV complaints involved other types of services, including online services and communications.

Complaints filed under Part V of the Act

In 2020–2021, there was a slight decrease in the number of complaints filed under Part V of the Act. As a proportion, however, the number of language-of-work complaints remained stable (taking into account the anomaly in the number of section 91 complaints described in the next paragraph).

Complaints filed under Part XI of the Act (section 91)

There was a significant increase in the volume of complaints filed under section 91 of the Act in 2020–2021. It is important to note, however, that 806 of the 968 admissible complaints were not investigated, because it was determined that they had not been filed in good faith. Excluding these complaints, the number of section 91 complaints actually decreased from 420 to 162, which is within the average for the previous nine years.

Analysis of admissible complaints, by location of incident

The number of admissible complaints regarding incidents that occurred in New Brunswick decreased in 2020–2021 compared to the previous two years (–26%), when we received a fairly large number of complaints against Correctional Service Canada (about services to the public and language of work at Dorchester Penitentiary), Elections Canada (about the 2019 federal election) and Air Canada. In 2020–2021, there were very few complaints about these institutions in New Brunswick.

The number of admissible complaints regarding incidents that occurred in Alberta increased significantly compared to the previous four years (+145%). In 2020–2021, the majority of complaints for this province involved signage at Calgary and Edmonton international airports. Nearly three quarters of Alberta’s 120 complaints were about written communications or ground service from these airport authorities.

The number of admissible complaints regarding incidents that occurred outside of Canada dropped significantly compared to the previous four years (–75%), likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1

ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS IN 2020–2021

BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY AND BY PART/SECTION OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*

LOCATION OF INCIDENT	SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC (PART IV)	LANGUAGE OF WORK (PART V)	EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION (PART VI)	ADVANCEMENT OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH (PART VII)	LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS (PART XI, SECTION 91)	OTHER PARTS (PARTS II, III AND IX)	TOTAL
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR	11	0	0	0	0	0	11
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
NOVA SCOTIA	10	1	0	0	0	0	11
NEW BRUNSWICK	23	16	1	2	5	0	47
QUEBEC	152	63	2	4	16	2	239
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (QUEBEC)	17	16	1	1	257	1	293
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (ONTARIO)	125	62	6	7	679	4	883
ONTARIO	131	8	2	0	7	0	148
MANITOBA	24	1	0	0	0	0	25
SASKATCHEWAN	20	1	1	1	0	0	23
ALBERTA	117	1	0	1	1	0	120
BRITISH COLUMBIA	49	0	0	0	3	0	52
YUKON	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
NUNAVUT	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
OUTSIDE CANADA	4	3	0	0	0	0	7
Total	693	173	13	16	968	7	1,870

Table 2

ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS OVER 10 YEARS (2011–2012 TO 2020–2021)
BY PROVINCE AND TERRITORY

LOCATION OF INCIDENT	2011 2012	2012 2013	2013 2014	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017	2017 2018	2018 2019	2019 2020	2020 2021
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR	11	8	18	12	14	28	16	24	32	11
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND	3	3	4	4	2	5	2	7	4	4
NOVA SCOTIA	33	9	8	13	16	10	20	22	60	11
NEW BRUNSWICK	36	24	31	42	41	87	51	65	62	47
QUEBEC	55	70	59	56	68	148	129	166	213	239
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (QUEBEC)	49	49	37	64	121	92	96	156	163	293
NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION (ONTARIO)	200	152	182	193	351	429	307	336	500	883
ONTARIO	77	52	75	78	58	106	124	153	192	148
MANITOBA	25	20	20	13	14	13	18	11	9	25
SASKATCHEWAN	2	2	8	16	4	6	25	14	6	23
ALBERTA	12	9	9	28	8	43	49	56	48	120
BRITISH COLUMBIA	7	8	19	18	16	25	33	25	30	52
YUKON	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	5	6	2
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES	1	0	1	0	2	2	4	7	6	4
NUNAVUT	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
OUTSIDE CANADA	7	9	5	12	8	23	19	40	30	7
Total	518	415	476	550	725	1,018	894	1,087	1,361	1,870

Table 3

ADMISSIBLE COMPLAINTS OVER 10 YEARS (2011–2012 TO 2020–2021)
 BY PART/SECTION OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*

	2011 2012	2012 2013	2013 2014	2014 2015	2015 2016	2016 2017	2017 2018	2018 2019	2019 2020	2020 2021
SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC (PART IV)	341	252	282	320	344	565	457	550	731	693
LANGUAGE OF WORK (PART V)	79	83	103	126	125	183	138	212	172	173
EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION (PART VI)	1	6	13	11	24	34	16	22	11	13
ADVANCEMENT OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH (PART VII)	45	39	30	37	62	32	50	12	20	16
LANGUAGE REQUIREMENTS (PART XI, SECTION 91)	42	30	44	45	156	192	222	285	420	968
OTHER PARTS (PARTS II, III AND IX)	10	5	4	11	14	12	11	6	7	7
Total	518	415	476	550	725	1,018	894	1,087	1,361	1,870

CONCLUSION

This past year has been a long and challenging one. My office and I have experienced all kinds of emotions and have had to overcome many obstacles, but we have managed to fulfill our mandate as protector and promoter of official languages. We have also released several reports on important issues this year, which have been the result of years of observation, analysis and lessons learned.

The volume of complaints we receive is still trending upward. Whereas several years ago we were receiving some 400 or 500 complaints a year, the trend over the past couple of years puts the annual number of complaints well over 1,000. This year, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in the number of travel-related complaints, the overall volume continued to be high. We also saw a significant number of complaints from the general public in other areas, such as online services and communications related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The federal government has its work cut out. Modernizing the *Official Languages Act* must be the first step in the government's efforts to reform federal language policy. All political parties and stakeholders seem to agree on this issue. Although the federal government released its reform document early in 2021—a positive and encouraging commitment after years of hesitation—we are still a long way from passing a bill into law and from that law's coming into force, but I am hopeful that a solution is near. Reforming federal language policy cannot stop there, however; there is so much more to be done.

This past year also highlighted the lack of attention paid to official languages during crises. My report on safety and official languages examined this problem.

Our study on linguistic insecurity revealed the troubling unease felt throughout the public service with respect to official languages. The use of French in the workplace is still not encouraged or supported more than half a century after linguistic duality was made official. French-speaking public servants are reluctant to speak French for myriad reasons, which are outlined in our study. The same is true of their English-speaking counterparts, who are not afforded optimal conditions for speaking their second official language, which deprives them of many opportunities to practise their French. According to our study, many of them are asking to be given the chance to use their second official language at work. The study

also showed that English-speaking public servants in Quebec are not always comfortable using their first official language at work. Ultimately, Canada's linguistic duality is not being expressed or advanced in the federal public service, which naturally has an impact on the quality of service it provides to the public. In my opinion, the root of the problem is the lack of official languages leadership in our federal institutions. Although we do have some official languages leaders, there are simply not enough of them. Official languages need to be at the heart of the decisions made in every one of our federal institutions.

Some of these problems have already been documented. The Clerk of the Privy Council's 2017 report entitled *The Next Level: Building a Culture of Inclusive Linguistic Duality in the Federal Public Service* provided some possible solutions and called for numerous measures to be implemented. Where are we with this? The Clerk's 2019–2020 Annual Report to the Prime Minister on the Public Service of Canada makes no mention of official languages, nor does Blueprint 2020. In the September 2020 Speech from the Throne, the Governor General stated that “our two official languages are woven into the fabric of our country.” This must be tangibly reflected in the federal government. Linguistic security needs to be a top priority for the Clerk of the Privy Council. There seems to be a certain amount of awareness of this issue, given that an interdepartmental working group has been created, on which my office is represented; however, I doubt that this will be enough to address the current problems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of change, and the government now has a tremendous opportunity to modernize the federal public service and to give official languages a truly central role.

I would like to close with a quote from Sue Duguay, president of the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française:

“We’ve been dreaming of our language rights for a while now, but the time has come to transform our dreams into reality by working together to see our language and our culture grow and our language rights respected!”

– Source: [Open letter on the need to act collectively in favor of language security across the country](#)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this annual report, I would like to make the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1

Given that the federal government has announced that a bill to modernize the *Official Languages Act* will be tabled by the end of 2021, I am calling on all members of Parliament to work together to pass legislation that benefits all Canadians.

Recommendation 2

I recommend that:

- a) the Prime Minister of Canada and his Cabinet review the issues of safety and official languages raised in my report, *A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*; and
- b) the Privy Council Office develop a publicly available roadmap within six months of the release of my 2020–2021 annual report in order to address those issues.

Recommendation 3

I recommend that the Clerk of the Privy Council:

- a) immediately address the issues raised in my report, *Implementing Section 91 of the Official Languages Act: A systemic problem*, so that concrete action can be taken to address the recommendations made therein within the specified deadlines;
- b) immediately exert influence by promoting the expansion of linguistic duality within the federal government in order to ensure that official languages are at the heart of public service reform; and
- c) implement strategies by June 2022 in order to combat the linguistic insecurity described in my study, *Linguistic (in)security at work – Exploratory survey on official languages among federal government employees in Canada*.