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**An Uncertain Future for the Future of Québec:
Policy Brief on the Under-Employment of English-speaking Youth in the Quebec Civil Service**

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CONTEXT

Since the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic, post-secondary students have been amongst the hardest hit economically. In the span of two months, the unemployment rate amongst Canadian post-secondary students almost doubled, and less than a quarter of previously employed students continued working their regular hours.¹

The global pandemic further exacerbated pre-existing issues of economic vulnerability and underemployment amongst English-speaking youth in Quebec. According to a 2018 CHSSN report, the unemployment rate amongst English-speaking youth was 13.3%, whereas that of their French-speaking counterparts was 9.8%.² Across different industries, the under-employment of English-speaking youth is perhaps the most pitiful within the Quebec civil service. In general, anglophones have represented between 0.7% and 1% of the provincial civil service for nearly half a century, despite representing 7.4% of the population in 2016.³

¹ Statistics Canada, “Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Postsecondary Students,” *The Daily*, Statistics Canada, May 12, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200512/dq200512a-eng.htm>.

² Community Health and Social Services Network, *Key Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Quebec’s English-Speaking Youth (15-29)* (CHSSN, 2018): 1-2.

³ Celine Cooper, Patrick Donovan, and Lorraine O’Donnell, *Employment of English Speakers in Québec’s Public Service: Working Paper no.1*. (Montreal: QUESCREN, Concordia University, 2019), 7.

Statistics Canada, *Census Profile, 2016 Census (Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001)* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2017).

The provincial government, when collecting data related to civil service participation rates, uses the term anglophone to denote those with English as a mother tongue. The term “English-speaking” refers to a broader conception of the English-speaking community, whose statistical definition includes persons whose first official language is English. Due to the definitional complexity, it is impossible to determine the exact number of English-speakers in the Quebec civil service. Thus, to ensure the comparability of statistics, the civil service participation rates are compared with the anglophone representation in the population.



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Youth are equally under-represented, composing 15.6% of the provincial civil service's regular workforce despite constituting 23.8% of the Quebec population in 2016.⁴ In plain language, English-speaking youth in Québec face “a double whammy” when it comes to finding employment in the Quebec civil service, and this can be further compounded if they also belong to other under-represented communities or groups.⁵

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM? AND WHY ADDRESS IT NOW?

With COVID-19 currently presenting serious problems regarding employment prospects and financial security and future consequences many years following the end of the pandemic for youth, there is an urgent need for governments at all levels to intervene in more permanent ways. Despite temporary and uncertain intervention by federal and provincial governments to support students and youth, many young English-speaking Quebecers continue to fall through the cracks.

In 2018, only 1.1% of student hires and interns in the Quebec civil service were anglophones.⁶ The global pandemic has presented the Quebec government with a significant opportunity to step up and improve the participation of English-speaking Quebecers in the provincial civil service, especially through summer employment. In doing so, the Quebec civil service could act as a “springboard” for young English-speakers to practice and improve their French language skills for a career in Quebec.

⁴ Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor, “L’effectif de la fonction publique du Québec 2015-2016 : Faits saillants,” Gouvernement du Québec, 2016,

https://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/PDF/effectif_fonction_publicue/1516/faits_saillants.pdf, 2.

Statistics Canada, *Census Profile, 2016 Census*.

Youth being defined in this set of statistics as 35 years old or younger. Statistics from 2018 indicate little change in their representation, thus the 2016 statistics were used for comparison with Census data.

⁵ The groups the Quebec civil service has targeted for improved participation are anglophones, Indigenous persons, cultural communities (includes visible minorities and persons with a mother tongue either than English or French), women, and persons with a disability.

⁶ Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor, “Les membres de communautés culturelles, les anglophones, les Autochtones et les personnes handicapées,” Statistiques en matière d’accès à l’égalité en emploi, Gouvernement du Québec, 2018, https://www.tresor.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/PDF/effectif_fonction_publicue/groupes_cibles_1718.pdf.



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CALL TO ACTION

The civil service is the best equipped to meet the needs of English-speaking youth in the current circumstances. The provincial civil service is well-suited to fill in the gaps and support English-speaking youth because of its following characteristics:

- A capacity to become a major employer of summer students and interns;
- An opportunity for youth to transfer their French-language knowledge from the classroom to the workplace, and
- A secured place for youth to begin their careers.

Moreover, addressing the under-representation of anglophones and other designated groups is long overdue. Beyond the youth of Quebec, there are several benefits for the Quebec civil service in increasing the participation of young English-speaking Quebecers amongst its ranks:

- Achieving previously set goals for diversification in hiring,⁷
- Profiting from a more diverse workforce, and therefore new and different perspectives and ideas,
- Facilitating the integration of English-speaking youth in francophone settings,
- And addressing the “brain drain,” through which talented English-speaking youth leave Quebec to find employment elsewhere.

⁷ In 1999, and amended in 2005, the Quebec government introduced a 25% hiring target (Cooper, Donovan, and O'Donnell, *Employment of English Speakers in Québec's Public Service*, 9-10). This target had the goal that 25% of hires into the Quebec civil service would be from their designated groups. As of 2018, this target had not been met, with only 18.7% of new hires being members of under-represented communities (Secrétariat du Conseil du trésor, “Les membres de communautés culturelles,” 5).



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IMPROVING ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Youth 4 Youth Québec believes that the Québec government should take action to address the under-participation of English-speaking youth in the provincial civil service and their increased precarity following the COVID-19 global pandemic. As a voice for English-speaking youth in Québec, dedicated to highlighting their needs, we recommend the following:

- Satellite offices of Emploi Québec, “pop-up” style, in English-language CEGEPS to help youth find jobs in the civil service (and elsewhere);
- Improved outreach of the Québec civil service to English-speaking youth and increased effort to recruit young English-speaking Quebecers, especially during these unprecedented times; and,
- A supportive, learn-on-the-job program dedicated to employing youth within the civil service who wish to improve their French-language skills.

Moreover, Youth 4 Youth Québec recognizes that the chronic under-participation of English-speaking youth in the provincial civil service has many complexities. Addressing the issue holistically extends beyond recruitment, including retention. The issue of under-employment of English-speaking youth in the Quebec civil service must extend beyond summer student positions and internships. However, increasing the number of anglophone hires during the summer months is a start. We remain open to working through these issues, as we fundamentally believe that increasing the employment of the English-speaking community in the provincial civil service is a win-win situation for all parties involved.