



# Impact Assessment Brief

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Anticipated Effects of American Tariffs on the  
Economic Vitality of English-speaking  
Quebecers

March 12, 2025

# Context

## Tariffs

On February 1st, 2025, President Trump announced a 25% tariff on almost all Canadian imports to the United States. The move by Canada's largest trading partner marks the biggest disruption to North American trade relations in decades, challenging Canadian economic policymakers like seldom before.

The first wave of tariffs came into effect on Tuesday, March 4th, 2025, but some were subsequently paused until April 2, 2025. Canada responded immediately with retaliatory tariffs, launched in [two phases](#): the first is an immediate 25% tariff on \$30 billion worth of imported American goods, and the second applies to an additional \$125 billion worth of goods. The second phase of the Canadian tariffs will come into effect on April 2, 2025, mirroring the American delay.

The American tariffs are expected to have a devastating effect on the Canadian economy, stoking inflation and [undermining economic growth](#). They are also expected to lead to significant job losses in industries such as steel and aluminum manufacturing. In Québec alone, the tariffs are anticipated to have dire consequences, leading to the loss of [160,000 jobs](#). [Manufacturing hubs](#) like Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Trois-Rivieres, and Drummondville are projected to be hardest hit, as they have significant exports to the United States.

The first phase of Canada's counter-tariffs, meanwhile, are expected to [spare](#) Québec from major effects, as the goods listed are not among the main industrial imports to the province. However, peripheral impacts, such as the increased prices of goods, are likely to affect all Quebecers. At the same time, the Institut du Québec, a provincial research institute, notes some benefits of raising the cost of American imports, such as [increased demand for local products](#), which could potentially strengthen local economies.

Overall, the tariffs stand to have a lasting effect on Canadian and American economies. Rather than creating a temporary change in markets, they are likely to alter international markets and our national economy permanently. We can therefore expect not an eventual return to normal, but the creation of a new normal.

## Impact of Economic Crises on Vulnerable Groups

In times of economic uncertainty or crises, vulnerable groups in the labour market are more likely to suffer. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, [women](#) and [racialized groups](#) across Canada were increasingly alienated and detached from the labour market. In Québec, economic gaps between English-speaking communities and the province's Francophone majority widened: English speakers now earn \$5,000 less than French speakers and experience an unemployment rate four percentage points higher. That compares to a gap of \$2,000 and two percentage points, respectively, prior to the pandemic.

# English Speakers Need Help

The current tariff war and anticipated economic shocks may scar the Canadian economy for years to come. Hundreds of thousands of workers are expected to lose their jobs over the next few months. The federal government has sent a [strong message](#) that it will support Canadians during this difficult period, and the same leadership is needed from the provincial government.

Yet at a time when government employment support is most critical, the Québec government is [actively cutting funding](#) for employment service providers. In 2022, unemployment [dropped](#) in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in the years following, the government responded by gradually cutting employment support services. Now, however, these support services will be underresourced at a time when they are more necessary than ever. Thousands of Quebecers are likely to lose their jobs and will need employment services in the coming months.

The American tariffs are expected to hit English speakers hard: 9.4% of the English-speaking labour force is employed in the [manufacturing industry](#), and manufacturing is a leading employer for English-speaking Quebecers in the Mauricie and Centre-du-Québec regions, which include Trois-Rivières and Drummondville. More robust targeted employment services for English-speaking Quebecers are essential, therefore, given that this group will be hit hard by forthcoming economic downturns and crises.

Adding to the reverberations felt from the American tariffs, English speakers were not included as a targeted group in the 2023-2024 or 2024-2025 *Plan d'action des services publics d'emploi* put forth by the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale. They were similarly overlooked in the dedication of targeted funds for employment services. English speakers make up 14.9% of Québec's population and 22.7% of its unemployed, meaning that the provincial government has no plan for nearly a quarter of its unemployed population during one of the worst economic climates in years. Put another way, the provincial government has created a vacuum in employment service provision for English-speaking Quebecers that must be addressed. Otherwise, this situation threatens to prolong the unemployment of an already struggling population while depriving Québec of their skills and labour.

In the context of the current tariff war, it is more crucial than ever that Québec develop a robust employment action plan for English-speaking Quebecers, in concert with existing employment service frameworks, to accelerate their integration into the Francophone labour market. Paradoxically, the crisis could present an economic opportunity for both the English-speaking community and Québec as a whole by forcing Québec and Canada to develop new strategies to strengthen their economies and make them less dependent on the United States. English-speaking Quebecers are also well-positioned to facilitate interprovincial and international ties, solidifying the growth and prosperity of Quebec.

To deliver on the potential contributions of English-speaking communities to Québec's changing labour market, two additional interventions are needed. First, the Government of Québec must develop a targeted French language learning strategy for the province's

almost 600,000 English speakers, who make up over a third (37.9%) of its adult language learners.<sup>1</sup> No dedicated plan currently exists for this group, despite their strong motivations to learn and identification of lack of French proficiency as a primary barrier to language market entry.

Second, the provincial government must develop skills training programming to help its unemployed population enter into new industries and contribute to enhanced economic productivity in the province. This training must include English language options to ensure already vulnerable English speakers are not left behind: currently, English speakers pursue vocational training at [less than half the rate](#) of French speakers (5.6% compared to 12.6%). Thus, while the framework for vocational training already exists through the English school boards and Francophone *Centres de services scolaires*, English language institutions in particular need strong resourcing to respond to evolving labour market dynamics with speed and agility, and English-speaking Quebecers need robust resources to adapt and thrive in the face of economic uncertainties.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend that the Government of Québec develop an employment strategy for English-speaking Quebecers that recognizes and addresses their specific barriers within the framework of existing employment services. This plan should be developed in consultation with English-speaking Quebecers and English-language institutions, with representation from the regions of Québec, and diverse groups including youth, women, and visible minorities.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that the Government of Québec create a dedicated strategy and action plan to promote French-language learning for English-speaking Quebecers, including designated funds for expanded French language learning. This plan should be developed in consultation with diverse English-speaking Quebecers and English-language institutions, with representation from the regions of Québec, and diverse groups including youth, women and visible minorities.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend that within [current](#) and future commitments to support industry and provide retraining opportunities, the Government of Québec develop specific strategies, accompanied by targeted funding, for English-language skills training initiatives in particular. This support should be inclusive of English-speaking Quebecers, and enacted through the existing vocational education framework, in partnership with industry stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on PERT's internal calculations using an inclusive definition. Language learners are defined as all non-immigrant English speakers plus all immigrants and permanent residents who do not speak French as their mother tongue.

## About PERT

Founded in 2020, PERT is a non-profit organization focused on addressing the employment and employability issues faced by Québec's English-speaking communities. PERT's work is critical as the employment situation of English-speaking Quebecers continues to worsen. English speakers are overrepresented among Québec's economically vulnerable and unemployed, comprising 14.9% of the province's total population but 23% of all individuals living in poverty and 22.7% of all unemployed individuals. Critical policy interventions, alongside evidence-based programming, are necessary to enhance English speakers' labour market integration and mobilize their potential contributions to the provincial economy.



# PERT

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