



The Effects of the Pandemic on the Arts & Creative Sector in Québec: How Anglophone Artists, Creators, and Performers Are Faring in a Time of Adversity



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Context

The arts, entertainment, and recreation sector is infamous for being in a state of constant flux. The experience of consecutive short-term contracts and annual seasonal employment terminations is a familiar reality for many creators, producers, and performers in Québec (Jeannotte, 2021). What is unique for some Québec artists is the experience of a linguistic divide in the provincial arts sector. In 2016, English-speaking artists in the province earned less than their Francophone counterparts, on average, making a median income of “85 cents for every \$1 made by Francophone artists” (Hill, 2020). On the national level, statistics from the 2016 Canadian Census show that Anglophone artists from Québec have a lower median income than the rest of Canadian artists. These findings are especially surprising when considering that, nationally, English-speakers in Québec represent a significant portion of Canadian artists. Anglophones in Québec account for 4.6% of all Canadian artists, despite only representing 2.8% of the Canadian labour force (Hill, 2020). The data indicate that two factors, occupation and language, are related to discrepancies in income levels in Québec.

Effects on anglophone youth

These issues lead us to question how this statistically significant group, English-speaking artists in Québec, are fairing during a global pandemic? Of particular importance is an assessment of young Anglophone artists that have comparative incomes disproportionate to the provincial income figures. Jesse Stong, Director of the Young Creators’ Unit at Playwrights’ Workshop Montréal, noted that many professional theatres are overloaded with shows and fringe festivals set to be rescheduled, making it difficult for youth to find any new jobs (in new productions) during the early stages of their career. He mentions that digital platforms are useful tools, but can never replace the experience of holding live performances, since young theatre professionals learn most effectively from audience reactions and engagement. These difficulties are reflected in the rate of collection of Canada’s Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) among youth and those employed in

the arts sector. Statistic Canada reported “as the COVID-19 pandemic substantially reduced employment in accommodation and food services, as well as in arts, entertainment and recreation, young workers saw their total actual work hours drop significantly from the March-to-September 2019 period to the March-to-September 2020 period” (Morissett et al., 2021). Youth aged 15 to 24 significantly account for 25% of the workers in the arts and hospitality industries, when compared to workers 25 and older that represent 6.2% of those sectors’ workforces (Morissett et al., 2021). These findings are troubling when considering that this age range is considered to be crucial formative years in social actualization and career development (Blakemore, 2021; CBC News, 2021). The youth employed in the arts and creative industries are especially affected by these difficulties. The arts, entertainment, and recreation sectors accounted for the second highest rates of collection of CERB at 62.7% (Morissett et al., 2021). The position continues to be difficult when considering that those that are young and Anglophone artists in Québec experience an intersection of employment difficulties.

Why address this issue now?

The COVID-19 pandemic’s effects on employment prospects will have lasting consequences for young artists’ and Anglophone artists’ financial security and quality of life. The present trend of turning towards remote work in education and employment is not a possibility afforded to many of those employed in the creative sector (Canadian Association for the Performing Arts, 2021; Jeannotte, 2021). Many in-person gigs and employment opportunities that youth artists counted on pre-pandemic will not be recovered. The Québec Government’s reinstatement of recreational closures reveals a potential for future instability in the province’s creative sector. However, the government has implemented measures to provide funding for the creative sector.

The Québec government has entered into a three-year cultural funding agreement of 158 million dollars with the city of Montréal (Global News, 2021). These initiatives are set to focus on the cultural development of Montréal and on public access to cul-

ture and heritage, indicating that the funding may not have widespread impact since it will not create jobs for artists that are not contributing to cultural projects. The funding also fails to reach English speaking Quebecers and youth outside of the city of Montréal that experience a scarcity of employment opportunities. Overall, it is not a sufficient solution for the issues that artists in the many regions of Québec face today.

The Government of Canada has offered \$1.9 billion of their fiscal plan to support the recovery of the arts, culture, heritage and recreational sports sectors. The details about the eligibility criteria and application procedures have yet to be released (Canadian Heritage, 2021). Previously, the federal government has granted fiscal funds to established industries and artists. In 2020, the Government of Canada provided the popular musician Grimes with a \$90,000 grant (The National Post, 2020).

Recommendations

The provincial and federal Governments should prioritize the use of funding as financial aid for artists experiencing financial hardship. President Macron of France has announced additional financial aid to artists in the country affected by the COVID-19 recession (France 24, 2020). The monetary relief is set to directly offer a full year extension of special unemployment payments to artists, as well as providing the most vulnerable with an additional support fund of 7 billion Euros.

There should be increased investments in the creative and arts sector. The funding offered from the federal government and provincial government needs to be assessed based on a criterion of financial need. The government should establish clear guidelines and implement a system that ensures funding will support struggling artists rather than provide a larger platform to 'big name' artists. The federal and provincial governments have not indicated that they consider financial need as a qualifying condition for any funding. *Y4Y Québec believes it is essential for the federal and provincial governments to be more transparent in funding initiatives, while providing funding that serves to improve the finan-*

cial situation of the most vulnerable in society. It is particularly important to address the concerns of the youth and OLMC artists that reportedly have lower income levels than linguistic-majority artists across the country.

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