

What We Heard

Report on the Dialogue Day between representatives of Canada's Francophone minority communities and Employment and Social Development Canada

Employment and Social Development Canada
Dialogue on October 18, 2024

1. Introduction

Overview

2. What We Heard (Summary)

- a. The “by and for” approach
- b. Credential recognition and immigration
- c. Youth and education
- d. Consistent and meaningful consultations

3. Conclusion

Appendix: Lists of participants from Canada’s Francophone minority communities
and the federal government

1. Introduction

Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) annual Dialogue Day with representatives of Canada's Francophone minority communities took place on October 18, 2024, in Montréal. This was the first time since 2019 that ESDC had held these discussions in person.

On the evening of October 17, 2024, a networking event brought together participants from both Official Language Minority Communities (OLMCs) and federal partners represented at Dialogue Days, including the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat; Canadian Heritage; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada; and Canada Economic Development for Quebec Regions.

Overview

The day began with a presentation, led by colleagues from Canadian Heritage (PCH), with the participation of the aforementioned federal partners, on the new Interdepartmental Working Group on the Labour Needs and Economic Development of OLMCs, which is co-chaired by ESDC and PCH. The session provided an opportunity to present the Working Group's objectives and work, as well as to initiate discussion with representatives of Francophone minority communities on the priorities that the Working Group should promote.

Representatives of Francophone minority communities recognize the merits and importance of the interdepartmental and community collaboration approach. While acknowledging the relevance of the three proposed priority themes (employment from a horizontal perspective, entrepreneurship from a horizontal perspective, and retention of immigrant workers in communities), community representatives asked that the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Labour Needs and Economic Development of OLMCs identify specific issues within the three identified priorities, and that it address social issues such as social cohesion and learning culture, but also access to housing, food, and skills "to thrive" in OLMCs (e.g., identity, civic engagement, language learning). The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) will submit a summary of its members' thoughts on the working group's approach following the Dialogue Day.

In addition to the interdepartmental session, representatives of Francophone minority communities presented the challenges they face, as well as the work they have done and innovative initiatives in the field of employment and employability. Organizations representing various regions of the country presented their local realities.

More specifically, the following questions were addressed:

- Training early childhood educators in minority communities;
- Skills to thrive, a continuum of measures to align skills development with labour market needs, as well as the "by and for" approach in minority settings;

- Labour needs in OLMCs, particularly in specialized sectors;
- Employment in Francophone minority communities; and
- Economic growth in OLMCs.

2. What We Heard (Summary)

The opinions expressed in this discussion do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada. They represent the viewpoints of the stakeholders involved.

a. The “by and for” approach

Expectations for a “by and for” approach are high in Francophone minority communities (FMCs). This approach should no longer consist of just an EN or FR checkbox on a form. There are English-speaking organizations that serve Francophones and vice versa. The needs are not the same. The “by and for” concept is important. This is another element that the Interdepartmental Working Group should address.

b. Credential recognition and immigration

The Government of Canada, through IRCC, is making significant efforts in the field of foreign recruitment, in particular to support sectors of the economy in dire need of a workforce.

In the health and social services professions, there are many opportunities (e.g., mental health, home care, dentistry), but Francophones are at a disadvantage in these sectors. A report presented as part of the Ministers’ Council on the Canadian Francophonie mentions that the labour shortage in certain sectors is explained by the lack of French-language training, as well as by issues relating to the recognition of foreign credentials. This last aspect is the most inequitable and only perpetuates labour shortages and the feeling of social rejection among new arrivals.

The federal government must demonstrate leadership in this area, particularly by signing bilateral agreements with other countries, or by facilitating the interprovincial mobility of workers and professionals through Red Seal-type programs. To propose solutions, the key stakeholders, including the provinces and territories and the professional associations under their jurisdiction, need to be at the table, especially in the sectors most in demand. In addition, a sector-based approach, adapted to the reality of certain professions, should be favoured.

c. Youth and education

From a youth perspective, it’s important to realize that opportunities for young people in remote or rural areas to pursue a career in French are virtually non-existent. Furthermore, there is a gap in federal funding programs for youth employability. In fact, most of these programs target certain categories of youth facing barriers, but the barriers faced by young members of FMCs are not sufficiently recognized, especially when it comes to the needs of young immigrants. This leaves a significant

portion of Francophone youth in the lurch, with no choice but to adopt English or migrate to Quebec.

To ensure that Francophone learners don't switch to English-language training, we need to focus on retaining them. The federal government must ensure that the option of studying in one's first official spoken language is available throughout Canada. In fact, educational achievements help to keep young people from leaving their regions, and bring hope for the economic survival of those regions. The importance of ongoing training should also not be overlooked, as it allows us to demonstrate to Francophone workers that we believe in them, and that we are committed to their professional development within their own community. Informal and non-formal learning opportunities are also particularly important for this ongoing training, especially so that FMC members can adjust their skills to employers' needs. The early childhood sector is a good example of how important it is to promote a profession—in this case, the profession of educator—to recruit and retain qualified staff.

d. Consistent and meaningful consultations

Aligning programs with the real needs of Francophone minority communities is a necessity. To do this, OLMC representatives contend that the Government of Canada should consult them on a given issue during dialogue or consultation sessions, and match the needs of the field with the programs offered.

The Interdepartmental Working Group on Workforce and Economic Development of OLMCs should be a forum for reflection in collaboration with experts in the field, the OLMCs, within a partnership framework based on ongoing dialogue. Since employment represents a very broad issue for the Interdepartmental Working Group, it would be useful to distinguish key issues (e.g., labour shortages, retention of young people in the regions, recognition of foreign credentials, literacy, needs of employers in the communities) so that they can be the focus of specific dialogue sessions and policy work. As a matter of fact, the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada*, in consultation with its various members, will be sharing its in-depth thoughts on the subject following the Dialogue Day.

3. Conclusion

Dialogue Day with the FMCs showed that the conversation must continue on an ongoing basis and in a diligent manner. Participants want to continue working to keep the communication channels open.

The FMCs also noted that it is important to make a clear distinction between Dialogue Days and consultations. Dialogue Days are an opportunity to analyze major cross-cutting issues in an informal setting, while consultations are formal opportunities to gather community opinions on policy or program options. Communities would like to have access to an analysis of the issue to be discussed at an upstream dialogue session, so that they can be prepared to hold discussions on it.



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According to FMC representatives, a one-size-fits-all solution is not the right approach, and the proposed federal interdepartmental approach was welcomed by all parties.

FMCs want to continue participating in the development of federal government solutions for their communities. The organizations also pointed out that it would be important to work in a coordinated fashion and to bring other marginalizing factors into the discussion, such as the wage inequity between men and women, and to find different solutions, such as getting older workers back to work if they so wish, or transferring knowledge between new arrivals and the host population. It would also be helpful to promote program analysis and development through a Francophone lens.



Lists of participants from Canada's Francophone minority communities

Organization name	Representative
Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF)	Pierre-Luc Lanteigne - Director, Youth Employability
Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF)	Andrée-Anne Côté - Project Coordinator
Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne (AFFC)	Soukaina Boutiyeb - Director General
La Commission nationale des parents francophones (CNPF) and Fédération des aînées et aînés francophones du Canada (FAAFC)	Jean-Luc Racine - Director General
Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)	Irving Lewis - Director
Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)	Catherine Rousseau - Early Childhood Program Manager
Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)	Danielle Manton - Director, Justice
Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)	Manon Tremblay - Director, Health
Le Réseau de développement économique et employabilité (RDÉE Canada)	Roukya Abdi Aden - Director, National Cooperation and Research
Le Réseau de développement économique et employabilité (RDÉE Canada)	Jean-François Parent - Manager, Research and Public Policy Analysis
Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA)	Hector Vera - Policy Analyst
Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA)	Sophie Boudreau - Governmental Liaison Officer
Conseil de développement Économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse (CDÉNÉ)	Amel Souid Mezaguer - Economic Immigration Manager
Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC)	Johanne Baumgartner - Project Coordinator
Réseau pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences (RESDAC)	Geoffroy Krajewski - President, New Brunswick
Société économique de l'Ontario	Soriba Kante - CarriElles Project Coordinator
Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones (FNCSF)	Valérie Morand - Director General

Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB)	Ulrika Lucia Obama - Director of Communications
Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick (SANB)	Ali Chiasson - Director General
Société Santé en français (SSF)	Antoine Desilets - Director and Manager
Assemblée communautaire fransaskoise (ACF)	Ronald Labrecque - Executive Director

List of federal government participants

Employment and Social Development Canada	Responsibilities
Firmin Andzama	Director - Centre of expertise, Part VII of the OLA
Marie Lebel-Racine	Manager - Centre of expertise, Part VII of the OLA
Claire Forget	Senior Policy Analyst - Centre of expertise, Part VII of the OLA
Tania Claes	Senior Policy Analyst - Centre of expertise, Part VII of the OLA
Samantha Rowe	Policy Analyst - Centre of expertise, Part VII of the OLA
Julie L'Allier	Manager - Enabling Fund
Paul London	Manager - Enabling Fund
Stéphanie Vallon	Director – Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care
Lise Comeau	Manager – Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care
Mihail Markov	Oversight Manager – Early Learning and Child Care, Service Canada
Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat	
Daniel Cadieux	Manager - Oversight and Compliance, Official Languages Centre of Excellence
Karim Adam	Director - Oversight and Compliance, Official Languages Centre of Excellence
Canadian Heritage	
Jalila Bendarhou	Executive Director - Official Languages Branch
Patrick Cyr	Manager - Official Languages Branch



Canada

Alice Gaudreau	Policy Analyst – Official Languages Branch
Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada	
Hubert Carrier	Senior Policy Analyst
Stéphanie Legault	Manager
Patrick Hyndman	Manager/Special Advisor
Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada	
Linda Garand	Manager - Portfolio and Intergovernmental Engagement Secretariat