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Brief submitted by the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada to the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

Publication date:
January 22, 2026

1.

As Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada, I would like to share with you my observations and thoughts on Francophone immigration outside Quebec as part of your study of ways to improve order, fairness and efficiency in Canada's immigration system. More specifically, this brief will address the fourth theme of your study, namely the strategies that can be implemented to encourage a greater proportion of French-speaking newcomers to live, work and contribute across Canada.
2.

This topic is very important to me, as immigration is crucial to the vitality of Francophone minority communities (FMCs) due to its influence on their demographic weight.
3.

As you know, FMCs have faced a major challenge for decades: their demographic weight is declining, as established in Statistics Canada censuses. This is a troubling reality because FMCs' weight is related directly to their ability to obtain services in the official language of their choice and to ensure that institutions critical to their vitality, such as schools, continue to exist.
4.

Although immigration policies and levels may change, immigration is still considered the main driver of Canadian population growth. It directly influences Canada's demolinguistic balance, which is something I first shared in my [2021 report on the 4.4% immigration target for French-speaking immigrants in communities](#) and reiterated on page 1 of my November 2025 report titled [Taking Action for Strong and Resilient Communities: Observations at the midpoint of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023-2028](#).
5.

Therefore, over the past few years, I have repeatedly highlighted how vital Francophone immigration is for FMCs, including in:

a.

the Standing Committee on Official Languages' 2024 study on the [increase in Francophone immigration to Canada](#);

b.

the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages' 2023 study on [Francophone immigration to minority communities](#); and

c.

the Standing Committee on Official Languages' 2022 study on [Francophone immigration to Canada and Quebec](#).
6.

In 2003, the federal government took steps to reverse the continuing decline in FMCs' demographic weight. The Citizenship and Immigration Canada–Francophone Minority Communities Steering Committee had set a 4.4% immigration target for French-speaking immigrants to achieve in 2008. This target corresponded to the demographic weight of the French-speaking population based on mother tongue and first official language spoken outside Quebec according to the results of the 2001 Census. According to data and analyses from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), this target was not achieved until 2022.
7.

Meanwhile, Statistics Canada noted a steady decline in the demographic weight of FMCs, from 6.1% to 3.5% between 1971 and 2021—a drop of more than one-third [1](#).
8.

Since 2023, the *Official Languages Act* [2](#) (the Act), a quasi-constitutional law, has required the federal government to “recognize the importance of francophone immigration in enhancing the vitality of French linguistic minority communities, including by restoring and increasing their demographic weight [3](#).” The Act defines “restoration” as a return of the demographic weight of Francophone minorities to 1971 levels, for example, 6.1% of the population outside Quebec [4](#).
9.

To restore French linguistic minority communities, section 44.1 of the Act requires the IRCC minister to adopt a policy on Francophone immigration outside Quebec.
10.

The Act also now requires the federal government to “recognize the importance of the French language to trade and economic activity and the contribution of francophone immigration to the economy [5](#).”
11.

Lastly, immigration is explicitly recognized by the federal government in the Act as a key sector that must be supported to enhance the vitality of FMCs [6](#).
12.

By adopting all these provisions on Francophone immigration in the Act, the federal government has set objectives and defined parameters to equip itself with tools that will allow it to take coordinated action to foster Francophone immigration. This must be considered in the objectives and design of the Canadian immigration system.
13.

The Canadian immigration system must continue to evolve to achieve equality in the status and use of both official languages. Over the past five years, several of my investigations have found inequalities and gaps in the experiences of French-speaking immigration candidates. In response, IRCC implemented tools to ensure that immigration services of equal quality in both official languages are available and committed to taking ongoing measures and making measurable improvements. However, I continue to receive complaints about alleged incidents akin to this type of inequality and disparity.
14.

I believe that during the next review of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), legislators should ensure that the IRPA aligns with the Act so that new Francophone immigration commitments are met, as Francophone immigration is considered an important sector for enhancing the vitality of Francophone minorities, in particular by restoring and increasing their demographic weight.
15.

However, to encourage more French-speaking newcomers to settle and remain in FMCs, the federal government must identify the main barriers it can address or influence to ensure the implementation of optimization measures.
16.

In this regard, I believe that IRCC should take the following measures:

a.

Regularly revise the “French-speaking permanent resident admissions targets” upward and ambitiously while ensuring that they are accompanied by the means, resources and timelines needed to restore and increase the demographic weight of Francophone minorities.

b.

Adapt and strengthen its promotional and awareness campaigns targeted at French-speaking candidates' countries of origin. This could be done through targeted communication with these applicants, before and after their arrival, to inform them of the reality of the programs and services available in minority language communities (for example, it is harder to access childcare or health care services in French).

c.

Ensure that employees who process applications, particularly in visa offices or visa application centres, are better informed of the realities of “living in French” and studying in a Francophone minority context in each province and territory.

d.

Continue to work with post-secondary institutions in FMCs, even as the federal government continues to further reduce the number of study permits issued to foreign students. Obtaining a study permit makes it easier for French-speaking applicants to be eligible for permanent residence, which is why it is so important to highlight this issue.

e.

Ensure that the Francophone lens (as defined in the Policy on Francophone Immigration) is always applied at every stage of the development of all immigration policies, programs and measures, regardless of the political, sociopolitical and economic context.

f.

Maintain and strengthen its leadership and influence on Francophone immigration, from promotion to retention, as well as in its collaboration with provincial and territorial governments on programs and decisions that could affect institutions serving Francophone minorities.

g.

Further foster an immigration system that considers the needs and priorities raised by key Francophone immigration organizations (for example, reception, settlement and integration services), allowing for flexibility to make the necessary adjustments in a timely manner, particularly considering the actual increase in the number of French-speaking newcomers admitted.

h.

Implement effective and coordinated measures that target promising pools in the international Francophone community, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, as mentioned in my study on the 4.4% target (2021), the Francophone immigration threshold projections established for the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (2022), and the IRCC dashboard (2024), to respond to unique challenges related to on-site services, accessibility and socioeconomic realities, among other things.

i.

Provide more guidance on Francophone immigration, particularly through the Policy on Francophone Immigration, ensuring that concrete and structural programs and measures are implemented based on research, evidence and consultation with key stakeholders.

j.

Move forward with measures such as the Francophone Immigration Support Program, which is a program “by and for Francophones” that aims to protect and promote linguistic duality, preserve the French language, and enhance the vitality of FMCs.

k.

Work with the relevant federal institutions to find ways to provide reasonable support and administrative relief to Francophone immigration programs to encourage candidates to apply and to encourage eligible institutions or organizations of all sizes and from all provinces and territories to participate.

l.

Continuously reassess how all its immigration programs and decisions impact the vitality of FMCs and make the necessary adjustments based on this assessment to mitigate or offset any negative effects on FMCs. Where possible, these analyses should be based on consultation, dialogue, research and evidence.
17.

In 2024, I was delighted by the federal government's announcement of a new economic program for French-speaking workers for 2027–2028, as this would address the needs expressed by several Francophone immigration stakeholders and myself. Since then, IRCC has held preliminary consultations with key Francophone immigration stakeholders. I expect dialogue and consultations will continue in preparation for the launch of this highly anticipated program.
18.

I recognize the significant potential of new technologies (for example, artificial intelligence) for processing applications, among other things; however, it is important to remember that these technologies must be used responsibly. We must ensure that equivalent information about the realities of official language minority communities (for example, access to services and representation of cultural and linguistic diversity) is available in both official languages. In addition, the federal institutions that use these new technologies must ensure that they meet their obligations to provide access to services of equal quality in the official language of applicants' choice.
19.

In conclusion, I have highlighted several areas for reflection and action that will lead to more French-speaking newcomers being selected, received, settled, integrated and retained, particularly with a view to enhancing the vitality of Francophone minorities. Given the importance the federal government now accords to Francophone immigration in the Act, I expect the government to fully embrace its responsibilities with regard to all its programs, policies and decisions relating to Francophone immigration. I invite the government to adopt a more comprehensive, coordinated approach to sustainably restore the demographic weight of Francophone minorities while taking into account the needs and priorities of FMCs, as well as relevant research and evidence.

Footnotes

- 1

Statistics Canada. [Population by first official language spoken and geography, 1971 to 2021, Table: 15-10-0032-01](#)
- 2

[Official Languages Act, RSC 1985, chapter 31\(4th Supplement\)](#)
- 3

Official Languages Act, RSC 1985, chapter 31(4th Supplement), preamble and paragraph 44.1(2)(b).
- 4

Official Languages Act, RSC 1985, chapter 31(4th Supplement), definitions et interpretation, and paragraph 3(1).
- 5

Official Languages Act, RSC 1985, chapter 31(4th Supplement), preamble and paragraph 44.1(2).
- 6

Official Languages Act, RSC 1985, chapter 31(4th Supplement), paragraph 41(6)(c)(v).



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Date modified: 2026-02-20