

# A STUDY OF COMMUNITY DEVITALIZATION AND REVITALIZATION AMONG ENGLISH SPEAKERS IN GASPÉSIE-ÎLES-DE-LA-MADELEINE



**PERT**

PROVINCIAL EMPLOYMENT ROUNDTABLE  
LA TABLE RONDE PROVINCIALE SUR L'EMPLOI

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The views expressed herein are those of the Provincial Employment Roundtable. They do not purport to reflect the views of the CRPMT de la Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the Commission des partenaires du marché du travail, or the Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale.

This report was prepared by the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) in partnership with the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), Vision Gaspé-Percé Now (Vision), and the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI).

## Authors

Morgan Gagnon, Policy Research Lead, Provincial Employment Roundtable  
Sta Kuzviwanza, Director of Policy and Research, Provincial Employment Roundtable

## Contributors

Scott Guy, Policy Research Intern, Provincial Employment Roundtable  
Nicholas Salter, Executive Director, Provincial Employment Roundtable  
Jessica Synnott, Executive Director, Vision Gaspé-Percé Now  
Sophie Wheeler, Executive Assistant/Project Coordinator, Vision Gaspé-Percé Now  
Mike Vigneault, Executive Director, Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders  
Allen Richards, Executive Director, Council for Anglophone Social Action  
Fay Gallon, Programs Manager, Council Anglophone Social Action



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>About</b> .....	4
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	10
<b>Methodology</b> .....	12
<b>Findings</b> .....	14
Environmental scan.....	14
Community survey.....	20
<b>Discussion</b> .....	27
Substance use and mental health and well-being.....	27
Access to essential resources and services .....	28
Education .....	29
Language .....	29
Motivations to work and seasonal work.....	30
Attitudes towards the future of the community .....	31
Interrelation of issues .....	32
<b>Action Plan</b> .....	33
Implementation Considerations .....	34
Recommendations .....	35
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	41
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	42



# ABOUT

## CASA

The Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA) has been an integral advocate for the social, cultural and economic development of the English-speaking population of the Gaspésie since 1975 (49 years). CASA's mandate territory includes the four MRCs of the region (Avignon, Bonaventure, Rocher-Percé and Côte-de-Gaspé) with a notable Anglophone presence (7075 or 9.3%). In Rocher-Percé and Côte-de-Gaspé, CASA collaborates with Vision Gaspé-Percé Now (VGPN). In 2023-2024, CASA collaborated with more than 60 local, regional, provincial, and federal stakeholders to deliver social, cultural and economic development programs. Employability is a crucial aspect of CASA's service delivery.

## Vision Gaspé-Percé Now

Vision Gaspé-Percé Now is a non-profit community organization. Our mandate is to ensure that services are provided for our English-speaking community and to enhance the quality of life for all English-speaking Gaspésians. We accomplish this by making our presence in the community known, by preserving our heritage, and by promoting the unique characteristics we have to offer our Francophone and Aboriginal neighbours.

Vision's mandate targets key resources in health and social services, education and community development, and we support other organizations and committees that strive to accomplish the same mandate. We labour to improve the lives of our community by reaching out to our senior, student, youth, and family populations, as well as the 0 to 5 age group.

Vision has developed partnerships with the major institutions in our community, such as our hospital, senior centres, schools, and government agencies, to ensure that the needs and concerns of the English community are heard and recognized. We work with them to find solutions to our common concerns.

The broad scope of our activities sets us apart as an organization, both geographically and in the range of subjects we cover. Vision is making English-speaking Gaspé a more inclusive, informed, and tightly-knit community for everyone.



## CAMI

Firmly anchored in the English-speaking community of the Magdalen Islands since 1987, the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI) was founded to promote and protect the rights of English-speaking Magdalen Islanders and inform them of these rights in the following areas: language, social welfare, health, education, justice, culture and heritage conservation. CAMI has two main areas of activity: First, Community Health and Social Services programming focusing on access to services in English. Second, Culture and Heritage with three museums and 4 different exhibitions, CAMI continues to tell the history of the English-speaking community and share their rich culture with the thousands of visitors each year.

## PERT

The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is a non-profit, multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to address the employment and employability challenges facing Québec's English-speaking communities. Through our research and the work of our partners, we engage all levels of political decision-makers in developing solutions and ensuring adequate resources to improve the prospects of English-speaking Quebecers in the labour market.

PERT has two main pillars: engagement and research. We engage with our network of nearly 100 stakeholders to identify the most pressing employment issues facing Québec's English speakers. PERT also researches these issues to develop evidence-based solutions that can be presented and implemented by our stakeholders, which include the community sector, government, educational institutions, employers, and employment service providers.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A growing body of literature examines the devitalization - and subsequent revitalization efforts - among rural communities both within Canada and worldwide. Much of this scholarship focuses on towns and municipalities, and little information is available about the vitality of particular demographic groups within geographically defined communities. In Québec, there are pockets of English-speaking communities spread out across non-urban regions. These English speakers face issues related to their status and vitality as a linguistic minority group in Québec, in addition to the broader patterns of devitalization (e.g. reliance on resource-based industries, population decline) characterizing many rural areas in the province.

This report aims to fill in data gaps on the socio-economic status and community vitality of English speakers in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and provide insight into policies and practices that can enhance the vitality of English-speaking communities in the region. The report also examines the relationship between employment and community vitality among English speakers in the region. As such, it presents the findings from an environmental scan on best practices in rural community revitalization as well as the results of a community vitality survey conducted in partnership with three local English-language organizations: Vision Gaspé-Percé Now, the Committee for Anglophone Social Action, and the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders.

The community survey examines issues and solutions related to employment as a core element of community vitality.

Environmental scan results and survey findings revealed that while employment is an essential element of community vitality for English speakers in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, it is one piece of the puzzle. Other issues, such as access to mental health care, low housing stock, and lack of childcare, often need to be urgently addressed to ensure the baseline well-being of communities. Addressing these challenges better enables community members to engage in employment and employment-related programming.

Our key survey findings were:

- **Substance abuse and mental health were identified as critical issues** that need to be urgently addressed in the region. In the community survey, one-quarter of respondents (24.7%) identified substance use as a major issue in the region, and one-third (32.9%) identified mental health as a major issue.
- Approximately **one-third (28.6%) of respondents identified access to essential resources as a major barrier to employment**, as well as an area in which more support was needed and a key indicator of community vitality.

- Almost **one-fifth (17.8%) of respondents identified lack of access to English-language education as a major regional issue**. Similarly, one quarter (23.8%) identified lack of education as a contributing factor to high unemployment among English speakers.
- Respondents had mixed views on language; **three-quarters (76.2%) of survey respondents identified a lack of French-language proficiency as a barrier to employment** among English speakers. However, respondents also expressed concern about linguistic discrimination in the region and a desire to protect their English-speaking identity.
- Respondents displayed different attitudes towards seasonal work; many emphasized the need for more full-time work opportunities in the region, while others indicated that English speakers' engagement in seasonal work was due to a lack of motivation within the community to find more full-time employment.

We utilized these findings to develop the following Action Plan, outlining concrete recommendations to improve English speakers' vitality and employment outcomes in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region.

## Action Plan

### Pillar I: Foundational Supports

#### 1. Address Mental Health and Addiction Issues



**Strategy:** Acknowledge the current addiction challenges within communities and expand access to mental health and addiction services with bilingual support, tailored programs, and community awareness initiatives.

#### 2. Promote the Development of Affordable Housing



**Strategy:** Work with local stakeholders to increase affordable housing by drawing upon local assets and introducing community-oriented models, such as cooperative housing, community land trusts, and mixed-use developments that include affordable units.

#### 3. Expand Family and Child Support Services



**Strategy:** Increase the availability of child-care and family support programs by drawing upon existing resources and establishing intercultural community partnerships.

#### 4. Expand Access to General English-Language Services



**Strategy:** Increase bilingual service offerings in healthcare, education, and public services through partnerships with services providers and incentives for language training among current employees.

## Pillar II: Mid-level Supports

These supports facilitate increased exchange, engagement, and attachment to the community, facilitating buy-in and uptake of employment interventions.

### 5. Increase Secondary School Engagement and Retention



**Strategy:** Implement retention programs that provide academic support and place-based engagement activities to keep youth enrolled in school and contribute to their future career paths.



### 6. Support Leadership Development and Civic Engagement

**Strategy:** Create leadership training programs focused on community building, civic engagement, and advocacy skills. Empower emerging and current leaders to serve their communities by creating support and resource-sharing networks.

### 7. Enhance the Image and Visibility of English Speakers



**Strategy:** Implement media campaigns that highlight the contributions of the English-speaking community and foster positive sentiments about English speakers both within the English-speaking community and externally. Enhance image and local representation through civic engagement initiatives.



### 8. Facilitate Cultural and Social Integration

**Strategy:** Organize regular bilingual community and networking events to create opportunities for positive interactions and linguistic exchange between English and French speakers. Promote cultural exchange through social programming oriented towards individuals at different life stages (e.g. youth, young professionals).

## Pillar III: Employment Interventions and Supports

This pillar builds upon the previous two, highlighting specific employment-related interventions and supports to increase labour market engagement and outcomes among English speakers, especially when considered as a part of a holistic approach to community vitality.

### 9. Enhance French-Language Learning Programs



**Strategy:** Develop tailored French language courses focused on workplace vocabulary and conversational skills. Offer scheduling that accommodates diverse work patterns (e.g. full-time as well as seasonal work).



### 10. Develop Targeted Employment Initiatives

**Strategy:** Create job programs tailored to English speakers, focusing on sectors with identified growth potential, such as tourism, or which are responsive to community needs, such as healthcare. Implement job matching services and promote remote work opportunities.

### 11. Invest in Educational Resources and Partnerships



**Strategy:** Advocate for enhanced educational resources and partnerships, including place-based programming and curricula and pathways into major industries in the region.



### 12. Encourage Social Enterprise and Innovation

**Strategy:** Facilitate the creation and growth of social enterprises that address local issues and provide employment opportunities. Facilitate access to funding and business development resources for community-driven projects.

# INTRODUCTION

Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (GIM) region reports one of the lowest economic performances in Québec (Hamelin, 2022). The region has a resource-based economy, with much of its primary economic activity driven by the fishing and forestry industries (Ministère de l'Économie, de l'Innovation et de l'Énergie, 2022), as well as by tourism and hospitality (Boulais-Préseault, 2023). These industries and the rural communities that grow around them tend to be highly sensitive to industry shifts and disruptions. These shifts can be triggered by different factors, such as natural fluctuations in the availability of resources or federal legislation to protect and manage natural resources and the environment (Wilson-Forsberg, 2013). At the same time, these communities are experiencing widespread technological and demographic changes, such as increasing automation, the advent of remote work, and the influx of city-dwellers moving to the countryside since the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes, in turn, have socioeconomic repercussions, such as lower housing stock and increased housing costs (Guimond and Simard, 2010). GIM, as a result, is grappling with questions of community vitality pertaining to devitalization, revitalization, and the creation of more resilient local labour markets to provide economic security and access to meaningful work.

Within this context, English-speaking communities in GIM are not only impacted by overarching issues of community vitality; they additionally experience unique community and labour market dynamics tied to their position as linguistic minorities and their small population size. Of the 88,530

people living in GIM, approximately 7,738 identify English as their first official language. These English speakers are spread across the region in small communities, many of which are in demographic decline and occupy a precarious socioeconomic position. English speakers tend to face greater challenges integrating into the labour market compared to the region's French-speaking majority: English speakers in GIM face higher unemployment rates than French speakers (18.7% compared to 10.7%) and earn lower median employment incomes (\$22,800 compared to \$29,400). English speakers are also more likely to be engaged in part-time and temporary work than French speakers (Provincial Employment Roundtable, 2024). Stakeholders in the region indicate that English-speaking communities face specific obstacles related to employment and vitality, including lack of post-secondary education, lack of English-language employment services, and lack of tailored French-language training. These obstacles, community stakeholders report, are compounded by other vitality-related issues in the region, such as reliance on seasonal and primary industries, access to mental health and substance abuse services, and aging populations.

In this report, we present qualitative data related to the employment and vitality of English speakers in GIM in order to fill in gaps in the available quantitative and qualitative data and additionally provide insight into policies and practices that can enhance the employment and vitality of English-speaking communities in the region. We conducted our research in partnership with three organizations serving English

speakers in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine: Vision Gaspé-Percé Now (Vision), the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), and the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI). Together, we distributed a community survey to English speakers across the region to examine their current employment situation and employability and vitality needs. This report presents the survey findings as well as findings of an environmental scan on the subject of rural community vitality, which aims to identify factors affecting rural community vitality as

well as targeted solutions. We conclude with recommended actions to support the vitality of English speakers and communities in GIM and targeted interventions to increase English speakers' employment and socioeconomic outcomes. We conclude that while employment is an essential component to the economic and overall vitality of English speakers in GIM, establishing a base level of community mental and physical well-being is equally essential to ensure community members can engage with employability interventions.



# METHODOLOGY

PERT researchers completed this project in collaboration with the three partner organizations: Vision, CASA, and CAMI. Research was conducted in the following steps:

## 1. Environmental scan

Researchers conducted an environmental scan of existing scholarship and research to identify new approaches and best practices regarding community revitalization that could be implemented to address the unique situation of GIM. Literature was identified through an online keyword search on various search platforms and online databases using terms such as “rural,” “community revitalization,” “Canada,” and “Québec.” The search returned a mix of scholarship and documents, including literature reviews, theoretical frameworks, community reports, and case studies. These were reviewed for applicability, and ultimately 16 sources were included in the scan. Researchers analyzed the results to identify common themes and best practices in community revitalization and labour market integration in rural community contexts.

## 2. Informational interviews

Next, we conducted semi-structured informational interviews with staff from each of the three partner organizations and eight local employers for a total of 11 interviews. We aimed to gather contextual information on the current state of employment and vitality of English speakers in GIM. Individuals were queried on the following subjects:

- Skills profile of employees (including language)
- Linguistic composition and dynamics within the workplace
- Integration of English speakers within the workplace
- Role of organization within the community as an employer
- Contributing factors to devitalization for English-speaking communities
- Vitality indicators for English-speaking communities

Researchers transcribed and analyzed the interviews afterward to identify key themes regarding community vitality and labour market integration for English speakers in the region. These interviews were also used to develop the community survey questions, including specific questions asked and answers provided for the multiple-choice questions.

## 3. Community survey

Finally, we developed a community survey to fill in existing data gaps on the labour market situation of English speakers in GIM and identify concrete actions, practices, and policies that could be implemented to support labour market integration and improve the vitality of English-speaking communities in GIM. We designed the survey utilizing principles of community-based research. The partner organizations reviewed the questions to ensure the content was relevant and

accessible to their communities and that the information gathered would enable them to better understand local labour market realities and community vitality issues. Researchers then collaborated with the three partner organizations to develop dissemination strategies to distribute the survey broadly to English speakers and maximize its reach.

From December 2023 to March 2024, CASA distributed the survey online and in-person, Vision distributed the survey online and in-person at specific community events, and CAMI shared the survey online and mailed it to their community members. Each organization also offered respondents the opportunity to be entered into a draw to win a gift card as an incentive for participating in the survey.

In total, the survey received 193 responses. Of the 193 respondents, 175 identified as members of the English-speaking community.<sup>1</sup> Survey results presented in this report focus on the responses of these 175 individuals (n=175).

We asked respondents about the following:

- Their demographics (e.g. age, gender)
- Their employment situation
- Major challenges facing the English-speaking community in GIM
- Needed supports
- Signifiers of community vitality

The survey results were analyzed to identify themes and issues related to our research questions.



<sup>1</sup> Notably, only two of the sources identified mentioned language or linguistic minority communities, and no source discussed language at length.

# FINDINGS

## Environmental Scan

The environmental scan aimed to identify new approaches and best practices regarding community revitalization that could be implemented to address the unique situation of the GIM region. We therefore concentrated the environmental scan on the theme of community revitalization, particularly rural revitalization and the revitalization of communities with resource-based economies.

The scan returned a total of 16 applicable sources,<sup>2</sup> including multiple literature reviews, which provided helpful inventories and quantified much of the existing literature. Following an analysis of each source, we identified two main types of literature:

- 1. Key concepts**, which are ideas and approaches to understanding and responding to change within rural communities
- 2. Solutions**, which are specific strategies and changes communities have implemented to improve their vitality. These were largely derived from case studies.

### Key Concepts

This section presents key concepts that emerged in the environmental scan with respect to understanding community vitality. The aim of presenting these ideas is to offer insight into vitality within communities based on systemic analyses of devitalization and revitalization in rural communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Notably, only two of the sources identified mentioned language or linguistic minority communities, and no source discussed language at length.

### 1. Factors of community vitality

Several sources in the environmental scan divide community vitality into various categories. Bill Reimer (2011), for example, identifies seven factors that impact community vitality: economic, policy, demographic, social, environmental, historical, and health factors. Meanwhile, Stacey Wilson-Forsberg (2013) identifies five community factors that affect its ability to respond to change: relationships, resiliency, ability to mobilize community assets to create community capital, civic engagement, and diversity. While these authors offer different ways of categorizing communities, both conclude that there is no singular element of a community that determines its vitality.

### 2. Scope of community impact

Of the factors that affect community vitality, there are some that communities have significant influence over and others where community influence is limited. External actors such as government and constraints such as the supply of natural resources are contributors to or catalysts of change in community vitality that individual communities often have little control over. For example, federal preservation policies or climate disasters can devastate a rural community heavily relying on fishing, and no strong community leadership or entrepreneurial spirit can necessarily recover that industry. Reimer (2011) highlights the need to consider the surrounding context to establish what is within versus outside of

a community's control when examining a community's capacity to respond to change. Bruno Jean (2006) additionally emphasizes that focus on rural community development in the face of devitalization, while important, can also obscure a lack of government care or intervention in rural communities, which is also important.

### **3. Interrelation of factors of community vitality**

In addition to identifying different factors of community vitality, Reimer (2011) and Wilson-Forsberg (2013) suggest that these elements overlap with and affect one another. For example, strong relationships within a community may be described as a social asset but can simultaneously be mobilized for favourable policy or governance outcomes through civic engagement initiatives or utilized to create a social enterprise in the community, which would be an economic asset. These different elements of communities thus affect one another, forming a dynamic web that shapes community vitality.

### **4. Change over time**

Building upon the interrelation of factors of community vitality, Reimer (2011) and Ruoyan Zhang, et. al. (2022) add an additional consideration: time. While elements of community vitality may belong to multiple categories at once or affect one another, Reimer highlights how the role they play within a community might change over time. He describes four components of change: stressors (external actors over which communities generally have less control), assets (over which the community has greater control), governance (relationships among community members and with bodies

outside of the community), and outcomes (results of change), and explains how a given factor of a community might transform. For example, in response to a stressor like youth outmigration, a municipality might come together (governance) to convert an abandoned warehouse (physical asset) into affordable housing for youth and young families (outcome). But we must consider the change over time: the outcome of retaining or attracting young families might generate assets (e.g. more workers) and/or stressors (growing number of children being sent to a too-small school). For this reason, it is important to build a dynamic understanding of how communities change and how efforts to change communities have various consequences.

Together, the key concepts examine how different factors influence a community's vitality and ability to change or respond to change. The sources identify key elements of community vitality and stress the interconnection of these elements, especially over time. This can inform the development and deployment of specific interventions and solutions, as well as evaluations to measure their long-term impacts.

## **Solutions**

Solutions are specific approaches, initiatives, and solutions communities have implemented to support positive growth and revitalization efforts. These are drawn from case studies identified through the environmental scan. They do not present an exhaustive list of strategies or solutions guaranteed to effect positive change. Rather, they highlight different ways communities have mobilized existing resources to improve their situation.

## 1. Place-based solutions

Following the recommendation to consider what is outside of versus within the scope of community control, several sources identify place-based solutions that draw upon local assets as promising areas for revitalization that are often within the scope of a community's power. Reimer (2011) and Rhonda Koster (2010) discuss utilizing physical place-based assets to create solutions, such as building a tourism industry highlighting local sights, as well as non-physical place-based assets, such as strong community heritage and pride that fosters civic engagement.

## 2. University-community partnerships

Partnerships between universities and communities can offer favourable, multidimensional opportunities for change and growth for universities and communities alike. Sandra Grunwell and Inhyuck Ha (2014) discuss an example of a university and community in North Carolina that had a symbiotic relationship: the town relied on the business of the university community while providing essential services to many members of the university community. The town, therefore, solicited feedback from the university community to shape its development (from changes in business hours to attraction of new industries) to ensure the outcomes were mutually beneficial.

Marilyn Miller (2008) examines a Saskatchewan town's development of a university-community partnership that resulted in the creation of a continuing education center in the town. The center offered increased learning opportunities to youth and adults in the community and provided economic stimulation.

For example, the center recruited a local woman who owned a greenhouse to teach a gardening class, which provided her with additional income from her instructor's salary and the creation of a new customer base (her students). In this way, educational opportunities can directly drive community economic development.

## 3. Primary education-community partnerships

Similar to university-community partnerships, Gerald Pitzel et al. (2007) discuss how primary education also goes hand-in-hand with community economic development. The authors discuss an example in rural New Mexico, wherein government stakeholders enacted a mixed top-down and bottom-up approach to revitalize rural education through grassroots community partnerships. They emphasize the importance of working with community members to better understand how a school can meet wider community needs (e.g. opening the building to other community members during non-school hours) and vice versa (e.g. engaging students in local economic development efforts). Like Grunwell and Ha, the authors highlight the value of catalyzing the interconnectedness of local institutions in small communities.

## 4. Social enterprises

Examining community economic development head-on, several authors illustrate that local social enterprises are highly effective opportunities for economic development in rural communities. Kelly Gillis (2014) suggests that rural communities often have qualities such as physical and emotional closeness

and an understanding of their mutual interdependence that can be harnessed to empower or support social enterprises. Community-oriented social enterprises, ranging from cooperative farms to youth-run tech-support businesses operating out of a community centre, can draw the support of community members who recognize that their capital will be reinvested in the community. Juan-Luis Klein et al. (2020) note that social enterprise need not be limited to a cooperative-style business; a private business with a mandate or dedication to serve the community can equally function to buoy a community.

## 5. Creative and recreational programming

Duxbury and Campbell (2011) discuss the role that the arts and creative economies can play in economic and broader community development in rural areas. They suggest that arts programming can offer a recreational outlet for youth, as well as a chance to develop their social skills and competencies, such as leadership or entrepreneurship. Further, the entrepreneurship dimension of creative arts might offer an attractive job opportunity to help address youth outmigration or attract newcomers to the area (complemented by lower rents and increased proximity to nature typically offered by rural communities). While this can be a powerful economic generator, the authors stress the importance of balancing this with the needs and values of the community, particularly monitoring the potential for rural gentrification and exploitation of the arts.



Aranka Ignasiak-Szulc (2020), meanwhile, discusses the role that sports and recreational programming play in a community, similar to that of the arts. These programs create opportunities for youth to be active and develop soft skills like leadership. They also provide other groups, such as seniors, opportunities to engage in health and social programming.

## 6. Supporting key people

Lastly, Kenichiro Onitsuka and Satoshi Hoshino (2018) highlight the importance of local leadership, or “key people” in rural communities. These are often people whom the

community trusts and who play an active role in advocating and organizing to enact positive change for the community. These individuals play an essential role, acting as interlocutors between the community and other stakeholders such as industry or local and regional governments. However, Onitsuka and Hoshino note that these people frequently face issues of burnout owing to the work demanded of them. They discuss the importance of developing support networks, e.g. among key people across different communities, who can provide emotional support and share resources.



# Summary of Rural Community Vitality Scholarship

Key Idea	Summary
Factors of community vitality	Many different factors (e.g. economic, environmental) influence community vitality.
Scope of community impact	Some factors over which communities have little control (e.g. federal government policy, environmental events) can have significant impacts on community vitality.
Interrelation of factors of community vitality	Factors of community vitality overlap with and affect one another.
Change over time	The role that different factors of community vitality play may change over time, and should therefore be considered in planning and measuring change.
Place-based solutions	<b>Solution:</b> Place-based solutions draw upon local community assets, largely within community control, to effect community revitalization.
University-community partnerships	<b>Solution:</b> Partnerships between universities and communities can be symbiotic, and specifically introduce new opportunities for programming and economic development into communities.
Primary education-community partnerships	<b>Solution:</b> Primary education institutions can partner with communities and local businesses to better meet community needs and engage students within the community.
Social enterprise	<b>Solution:</b> Social enterprises are effective forms of economic development in rural communities in particular because they draw upon place-based assets.
Creative and recreational programming	<b>Solution:</b> Creative and recreational programming offers outlets for youth and adults, opportunities to develop soft skills, and pathways into entrepreneurship.
Supporting key people	<b>Solution:</b> Key people are local leaders who play an essential role in advocating and organizing for change in communities and may require more support.

## Community survey

Between November 2023 and March 2024, we distributed a survey to different English-speaking communities in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine in collaboration with our three community partners. We aimed to fill in existing data gaps on the labour market situation of English speakers in GIM and identify concrete actions, practices, and policies that could be implemented to support labour market integration and improve the vitality of English-speaking communities in GIM. The results are summarized below.

### Respondent Demographics

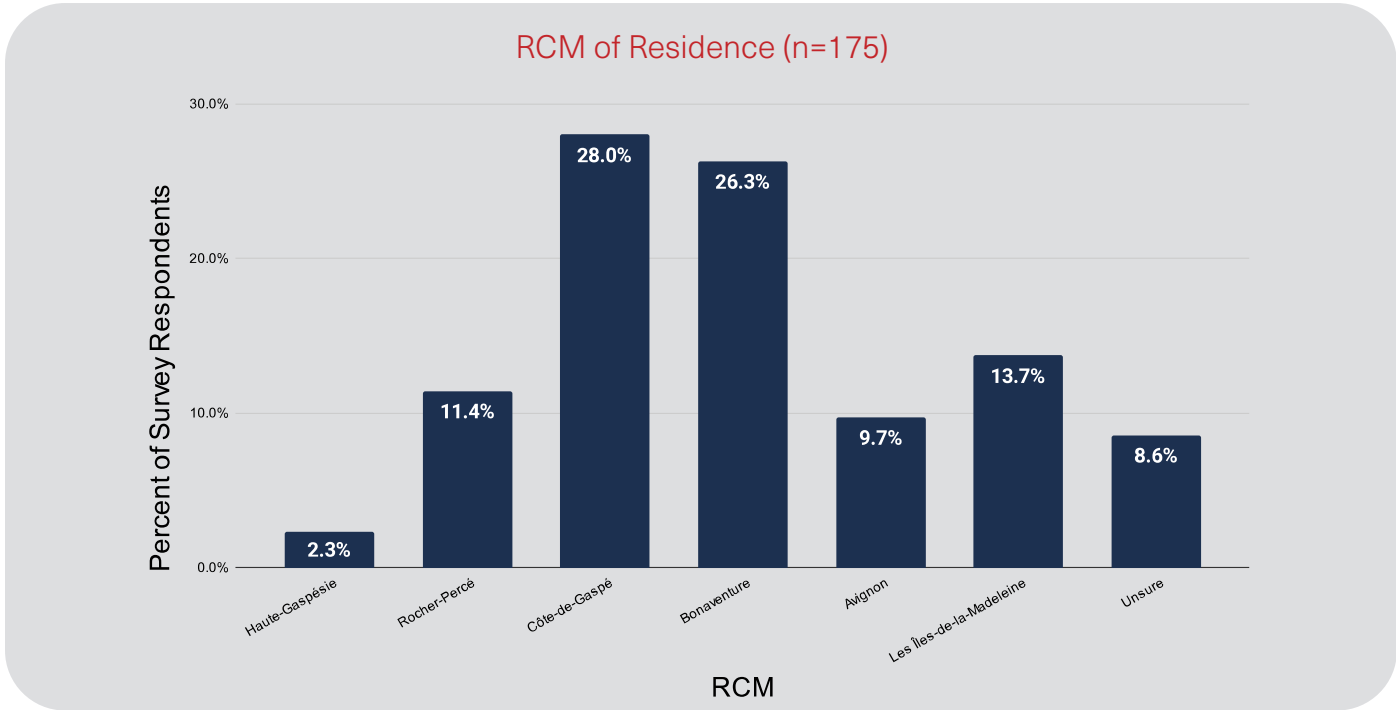
To capture respondents' linguistic identity, we asked them to indicate the community they belonged to: English, French, and/or Indigenous. We filtered the responses according to those who identified as English speakers. Indigenous respondents who did not consider themselves members of the English-speaking or French-speaking community but for whom English or English and French were their first official language(s) spoken were also included in the survey sample (n=175).

More than three-quarters of respondents (76%) identified English as the official language they were most comfortable expressing themselves in, while 20.6% indicated they were equally comfortable expressing themselves in English and French. 3.4% indicated a preference for French.

We additionally asked participants to describe their French proficiency; the majority of the survey respondents were fluent (37.1%) or intermediate (37.1%); 5.7% indicated they had no French-language skills.

The majority of survey respondents (52%) were between 25 and 45 years of age. Almost all of the survey participants (87.6%) were women, and all participants had completed at least secondary school, with the majority (65.7%) having completed either CEGEP or a Bachelor's degree. Most participants (81.6%) were employed in some capacity, and about a quarter (24.7%) were employed seasonally. Industries in which survey respondents worked included healthcare and social assistance (32.1%), the non-profit sector (17.6%), and agriculture (12.2%), though 30.5% of survey-takers chose the "Other" option to define their area of work.

Survey respondents were distributed relatively equally across the region, with the highest proportion (28%) residing in the regional county municipality (RCM) of Côte-de-Gaspé.

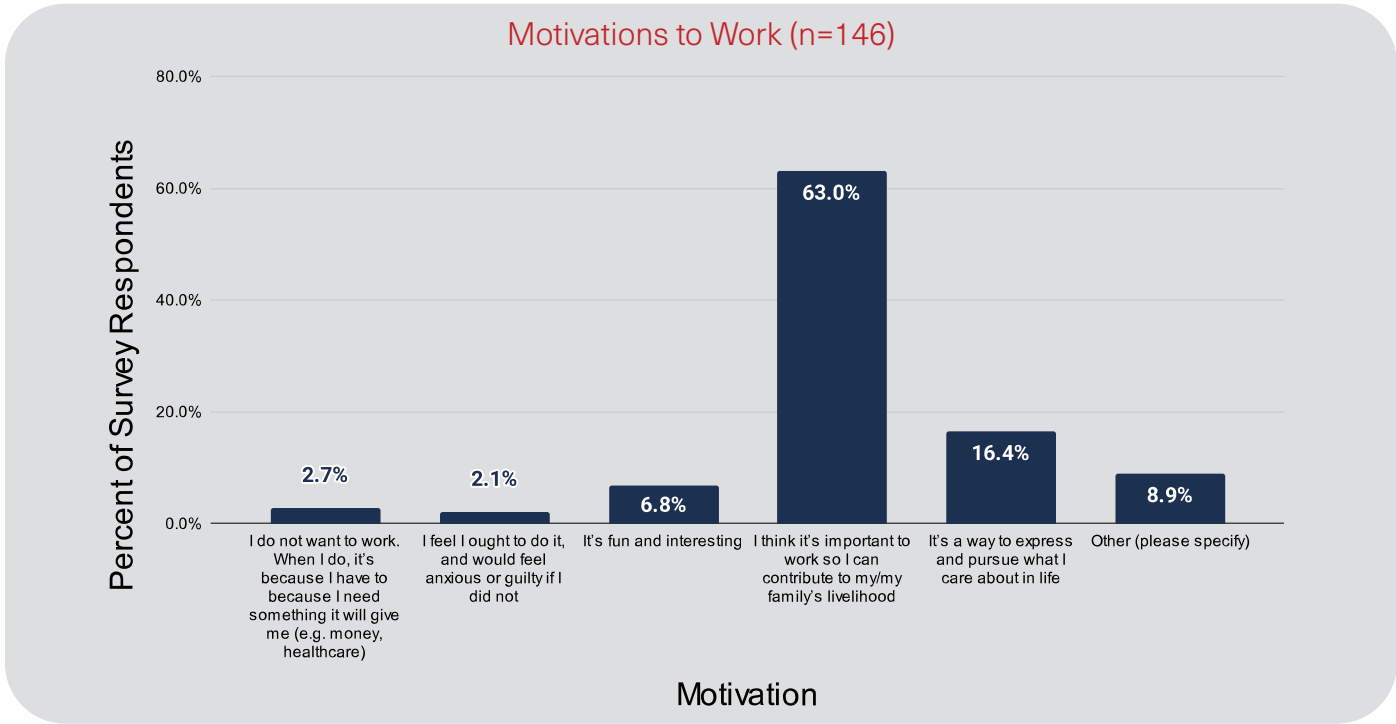


Graph 1: Share of Survey Respondents by RCM

### Motivations to Work (Q13)

We asked survey respondents about their motivations for working. Most respondents (63.0%) said they worked to contribute to their livelihood or that of their family. Some (16.4%) felt that their work was personally enriching because it

embodied their values and what they cared about in life. The remaining participants indicated that they felt that they ought to work (2.1%), that they found work fun and interesting (6.8%), or another reason (8.9%).



Graph 2: Motivations to work among Survey Respondents

## Employment Issues (Q14, Q15)

We asked respondents why they thought English speakers in GIM face higher unemployment rates than French speakers in the region. The most common response was lack of adequate French skills (76.2%), followed by limited access to resources (28.6%), lack of English-language support services (27.2%), and lack of job opportunities (26.5%).

An open-ended question asking about the main employment issues faced by English speakers in GIM echoed the closed question above. 86 respondents identified language as the leading employment issue among English speakers, although respondents had diverse opinions on this theme. Some described the issue as a language barrier, while others indicated that lack of French-language proficiency or bilingualism among English speakers was the root of the problem. Others still indicated that confidence in French was the main challenge. Finally, some respondents indicated that discrimination against English speakers was the issue.

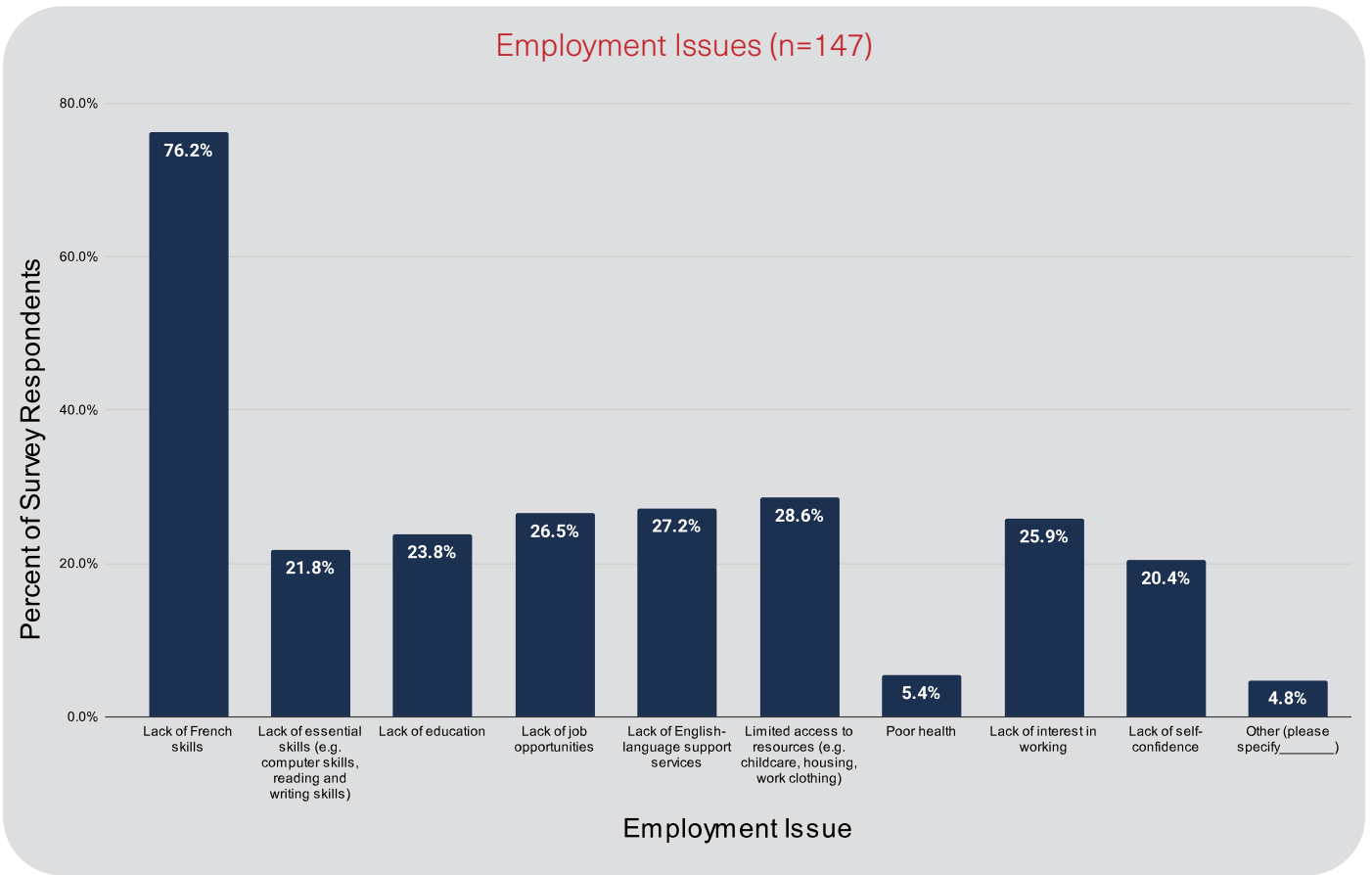
Eleven respondents indicated that lack of motivation to work was an issue for the English-speaking community. One individual wrote, “[English speakers] have no motivation to work; there are so many opportunities, but they would rather sit home and do nothing.” Several individuals connected a lack of motivation to seasonal work. Six respondents also indicated that seasonal work was an issue and that there weren’t enough full-time or quality job opportunities.

Nine respondents indicated that education, including lack of education and lack of education programming and support, was a significant employment issue for the community.

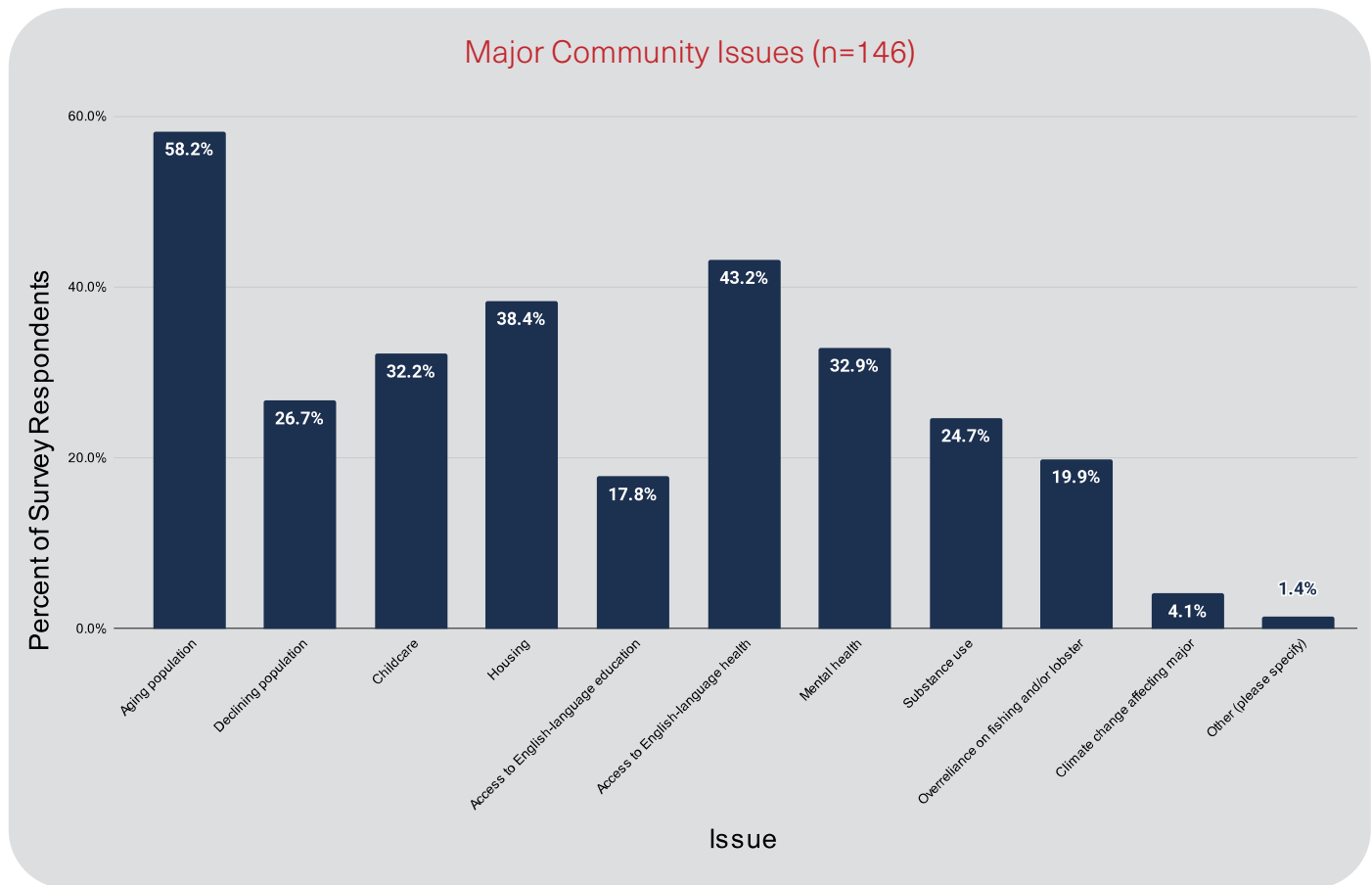
Responses to an open-ended question on the same subject echoed previous questions; respondents were concerned about access to essential services and resources, including child-care, housing, transportation and health care (10), language and language laws (8), and access to English-language education (4). Two respondents from the Îles-de-la-Madeleine named isolation as an issue.

## Major Community Issues (Q16)

We then asked survey respondents to identify the major issues in their community more broadly. Most (58.2%) cited the aging population as a major issue, as well as growing concern around the declining population (26.7%). Other issues included access to English-language resources such as healthcare and essential services (43.2%), housing (38.4%), mental health services (32.9%), and childcare (32.2%). A quarter (24.7%) also indicated that substance abuse was an issue.



Graph 3: Main Employment Issues identified by Survey Respondents



Graph 4: Main Community Issues identified by Survey Respondents

## Future of the Community (Q18, Q19)

Most respondents (56.3%) felt concerned or worried about the future of English speakers in GIM.

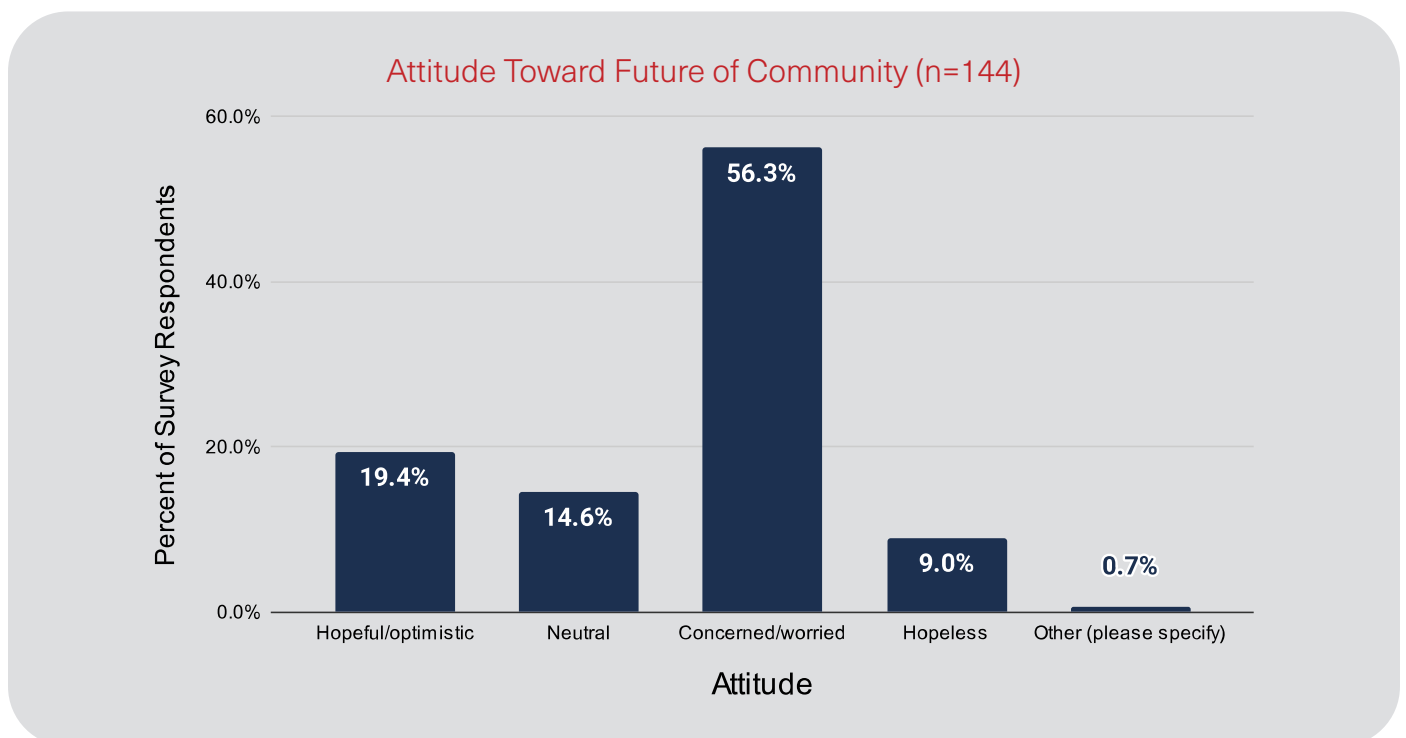
Participants shared mixed responses when asked in an open-ended question if they had additional comments on the future of their community in Quebec. The majority of respondents (12) shared negative sentiments, including fear, concern, and anger. Seven of these mentioned language rights or legal status of English speakers. Others shared sentiments evoking hopelessness for their community. One individual stated, “It’s a dying community, destined to be a ghost town.”

Two responses were neutral, and three were more optimistic, remarking on the collaboration and growing relationships they saw between

English and French speakers in the region. For example, one individual stated, “I believe we have to meet 50/50. If people want to stay in the region, they need to learn the French language, and if [the government and broader Franco-phone community] want [English speakers] to stay in the region, they need to offer them the education, and [English speakers] need to work the jobs that are available.”

Another stated, “[I] would like to see a more inclusive, more collaborative community developing (already seeing progress).”

Meanwhile, five responses discussed local services, most expressing frustration with the lack of access to English services.



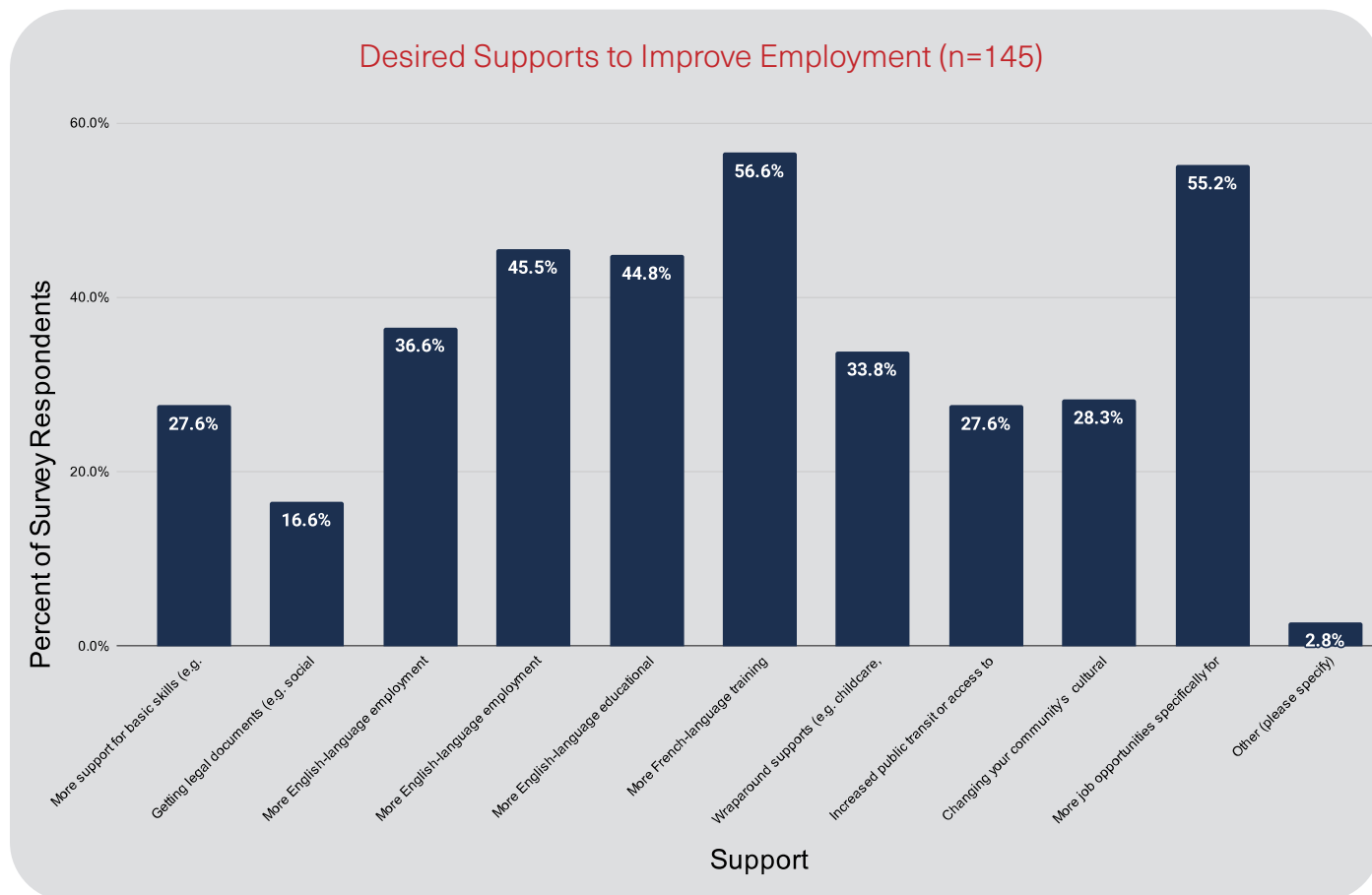
Graph 5: Attitude toward Future of Community among Survey Respondents

## Additional Supports (Q20, Q21)

According to survey respondents, more French-language training (56.6%) is the key to addressing employment issues in GIM and increased job opportunities for English speakers (55.2%). Respondents additionally favour English-language resources, including employment programs (45.5%), educational opportunities (44.8%), and employment support (36.6%).

In an open-ended question, we asked survey respondents about additional programs or services needed in their community. Major themes included education and French language training (7), increased community services and programs (6), and changing the current dynamics of work.

Respondents highlighted the need for educational and language training opportunities that fit within the parameters of their lives, such as flexible online learning programs they could complete while working and French classes that emphasized socialization within the broader community. They also highlighted diverse community services, including accompaniment services, outreach services (e.g., home healthcare), and a community centre. Lastly, respondents discussed the need to change community members' mentality around work and create methods to make work, particularly full-time work, a more attractive option.



Graph 6: Desired Supports to Improve Employment among Survey Respondents

## Vitality Indicators (Q22)

In an open-ended question, survey respondents were asked to imagine their community in 10 years and describe signs of community well-being. Within the responses, employment, access to services, education, population dynamics (e.g. aging populations, an influx of youth), and community cohesion were commonly cited indicators of community vitality.

Of the 84 total responses, 35 discussed employment. Survey respondents suggested that community well-being would be reflected through more job opportunities, higher employment rates, more engagement in full-time work, and higher motivation to work.

Seventeen respondents described continued or increased access to services and community programming as signs of vitality. Concrete examples included access to health care in English (including mental health and addiction services), increased services and programming for children (including daycare), and increased confidence and motivation to access services and programming.

Slightly fewer (14) respondents indicated that population demographics would be a sign of vitality. Generally, respondents discussed population growth as a sign of vitality, but several discussed changes in population demographics, such as an increased proportion of youth and young families.

Education was additionally listed as a sign of vitality by fourteen respondents. Most described this in terms of strong enrollment in local schools,

although several described increased English-language education options in the region or higher education levels within the community.

Fourteen respondents also touched on language as an indicator of community vitality, although there were diverse opinions on this theme. Some described vitality in terms of increased bilingualism (among both French and English speakers), while others described more visibility of the English language, and still others discussed less linguistic discrimination directed towards English speakers. This tension is demonstrated in the following quotations from two survey respondents: one described their idea of vitality as a future in which the “English community is blended with the French community,” while another stated, “They want to acclimate us with neighbouring French towns to finish off the English once and for all.”

Thirteen respondents described increased community cohesion as a sign of community vitality. Some discussed this as increased cohesion within the English-speaking community, while others discussed increased cohesion between the region’s English, French, and Mig-Maq communities. Others also characterized community cohesion in terms of increased sense of belonging and decreased feelings of isolation.

Other vitality indicators included more housing (nine) and financial security (five).

# DISCUSSION

In this section, we extract and analyze key themes from the informational interviews, the environmental scan, and the community survey. We present these findings together in order to identify key issues and solutions to devitalization among GIM's English-speaking communities, including examining the role of employment in improving vitality.

## Substance Use and Mental Health and Well-being



Among the more pressing issues identified by interviewees and survey respondents alike were substance use and mental health and well-being. In the community survey, one-quarter of respondents (24.7%) identified substance use as a major issue in the region, and one-third (32.9%) identified mental health as a major issue. The open-ended responses and informational interviews reinforced this point, especially within les Îles-de-la-Madeleine. One stakeholder stated,

“ **This is one of the biggest issues that we are facing in terms of devitalization. The accessibility of street drugs in this community is overwhelming. The percentage of youth and adults using substances in this community is quite high. I have heard numerous times from school staff that the level of vulnerability among school-aged children is so high compared**

**to previous years. [...] We have been experiencing much higher levels of suicide and youth deaths in recent years. For a small community of 450 people, we have lost 3 young men to suicide in a year and a half.**

- Stakeholder in Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine

Drug use and related mental health issues are identified by this stakeholder as a crisis within their community. They emphasize the urgency with which this needs to be addressed to save the lives of community members and, downstream from that, to improve community vitality and enable community engagement with other interventions, including education- and employment-related interventions. Furthermore, they state that the response must be a joint effort between different institutions in the community, including law enforcement, health and social services, and schools. This holistic approach understands that substance abuse affects different areas of individuals' lives and that diverse institutions within a community can all be meaningful sites of intervention.

While this feedback comes from a stakeholder within les Îles-de-la-Madeleine, the majority of survey respondents who indicated that substance use and mental health were issues within their community came from other RCMs in the region. This suggests that from the perspective of community members, substance use and mental health are region-wide issues in GIM.

## Access to Essential Resources and Services



Stakeholders and survey respondents alike highlighted the lack of essential resources and services within their communities. These include services that would help to address previously identified substance use and mental health issues, such as treatment and detox centres and mental health programming, but extend to other necessities such as affordable housing, childcare, and transit. Notably, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents were women, which may impact respondents' engagement with these resources, especially childcare. Women often take on the responsibilities of arranging childcare owing to traditional gender dynamics and may be more heavily impacted by a lack of childcare in the region.

Following from this, survey respondents described the different ways in which the lack of essential resources affected both employment and community vitality: without these resources, individuals may not have the stability to pursue employment or employment programming. Furthermore, women, young families, and newcomers may face heightened difficulty getting started in the region, negatively impacting the retention and attraction of these demographics.

The lack of these resources and its impacts on employment and community vitality can impact all individuals in the region, including French speakers. Investments in these areas would, therefore, benefit both linguistic communities.

At the same time, survey respondents and interviewees also described a distinct lack of English-language services and professionals in particular. About 43% of survey respondents indicated that the lack of English-language health care and other services was a significant issue in the region. Informational interviewees expanded on this point, noting, for example, that there is no English-speaking child psychologist on the Gaspé coast, so families are often referred to resources outside of the region. Furthermore, the size of the population introduces an additional constraint - a practicing psychologist living within a given community may not be able to serve many community members because they have pre-existing relationships that pose a conflict of interest or jeopardize privacy. There is a need, therefore, to not only increase these types of services but to do so in a way that is sensitive to the nature of the communities in which they would be introduced.

In open-ended responses, respondents noted that continued or increased access to English-language services would be markers of increased community vitality. Interviewees agreed, emphasizing that such services would result in increased treatment of mental and physical health issues among English speakers, leading to better health outcomes. Furthermore, access to English-language resources and services would suggest strong English-speaking institutions or the presence of English speakers within institutions, which could result in better employment pipelines for English speakers within the region.

## Education



Survey respondents and stakeholders highlighted the importance and need for increased educational resources in the GIM region. Almost one-fifth (17.8%) of respondents identified lack of access to English-language education as a significant issue in the region, and similarly, almost one quarter (23.8%) identified lack of education as a contributing factor to high unemployment among English speakers. Stakeholders explained that there are very few English-language post-secondary educational opportunities available in the region. English speakers must move away to pursue CEGEP or university in English and often do not return. In conjunction, English speakers who remain in the region often have lower levels of education due to a lack of access to schools.

Stakeholders also emphasized that elementary and secondary education systems need reform as well. One interviewee noted that English-language schools are not providing adequate French-language training, such that English-speaking youth tend to have low French-language proficiency when they graduate. Another interviewee suggested that the secondary school curriculum was not adequately tailored to the realities of English-speaking youth in the region and that they would benefit from culturally adaptive reforms to better reflect the English-speaking community's reality. This is echoed in the literature; connecting all levels of education to local industries, businesses, and stakeholders can strengthen the relevance of education, foster pipelines into employment, and simultaneously enhance the capacity of local enterprises.

## Language



Throughout the survey, respondents shared different challenges, opportunities, and attitudes concerning language. This is consistent with other surveys and research conducted by PERT (Provincial Employment Roundtable, 2022); English speakers frequently discuss language and linguistic identity as a barrier to employment and a source of community tension. In the survey, we distinguished three main contentions related to language. First, survey respondents indicated that many English speakers in GIM need to improve their French language skills to better integrate into the workforce, especially in full-time positions. Lack of French language proficiency was cited as the number one barrier to employment and the number one area in which English speakers would benefit from support. Informational interviews with partner organizations echoed the need for increased French-language proficiency among English speakers, while informational interviews with employers established that French-language training in the region must be sensitive to the different industries in which English speakers work, as well as the interests, motivations, and schedules of various types of workers.

At the same time, survey respondents highlighted linguistic tensions as a contributing factor to unemployment for English speakers and, more broadly, to feelings of frustration and alienation in the region. Survey respondents described linguistic discrimination in hiring processes and discomfort speaking French in certain spaces for fear of being called out or mocked for their

accent. Thus, while they often articulated an appreciation of the need to speak French and participate in Francophone society, some English-speaking respondents also expressed negative sentiments, such as not feeling welcome or encouraged to speak French. Stakeholders added nuance to this point; they suggested that negative experiences with French speakers, or perceived hostility from French speakers, were not felt in some communities; it may, therefore, be community-specific or depend on the individual.

Survey respondents and stakeholders shared concerns about linguistic tensions that played out at the policy level, especially surrounding French-language policies, notably in the French Language Charter. In this case, respondents described their concerns and fears that new French-language policies in Law 14 (Bill 96) would cause English speakers to leave the region, owing either to frustration with the policies or the potential reduction of opportunities. Stakeholders echoed concerns about the impacts French-language policies would have on their communities, especially in relation to employment opportunities and access to English-language services. Stakeholders have indicated that both the language policies and employers' interpretations of it have negatively affected linguistic hiring practices in the region. This is largely an external constraint; English-speaking communities in GIM have little direct control over provincial language policies, but this may be an important area for joint and long-term advocacy to improve labour market integration of English speakers, while other workarounds and solutions are explored in the interim.

Finally, survey respondents identified a desire to protect their English-speaking identity. For example, one respondent expressed hope for the visibility of English in different institutions and the importance of continued and expanded programming and services for English speakers in the region.

Taken together, these different experiences and dispositions surrounding language in Québec and Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine highlight mixed emotions among English speakers about their identity as English speakers living in predominantly Francophone regions. There is a strong drive to protect this identity and, simultaneously, the recognition of the necessity and importance of participating in Francophone society, as well as the desire to be recognized and valued by this community.

## Motivations to Work and Seasonal Work



Survey respondents discussed work patterns in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine at length. Many noted that English speakers often worked in seasonal industries, particularly fishing, and relied on Employment Insurance (EI) for the remainder of the year. Respondents displayed two schools of thought concerning this. Some described full-time non-seasonal work opportunities as inaccessible to English speakers, explaining that full-time positions typically require a mastery of French. This can increase the reliance on seasonal work. Seasonal work in industries that rely on physical labour, such as fishing or forestry, does not typically

require a high level of bilingualism. One employer at a fish processing facility explained: “If you have two hands, you can work here.”

Other survey respondents, however, directed frustration toward English speakers in the region receiving “government handouts” (i.e. EI) and described a lack of motivation to work within the community. This is reflected in the quantitative data in the survey; when asked why unemployment was higher among English speakers in the region, 27% of respondents indicated the lack of job opportunities, and 27% of respondents highlighted the lack of desire to work. Interestingly, when asked about their own motivations to work, only 3% of respondents indicated that they did not want to work. This suggests a possible disparity between community members’ perception of themselves as being generally willing to work versus their perception of the community as a whole as being less willing to work. However, these findings may reflect the survey sample because most respondents were employed full-time.

Stakeholders added nuance to this point: while efforts to increase access to full-time jobs are essential, they need not be accompanied by the disparagement of seasonal work or workers. Stakeholders highlighted that seasonal industries, like fishing and forestry, are the primary economic drivers in the region and play an important role in the community’s culture and history. Moreover, seasonal work often involves intense physical labour that requires rest during the off-season, hence the need and justification for reliance on EI. Given the negative perceptions highlighted in the survey, they described the importance of valorizing seasonal work among English speakers in the region.

## Attitudes towards the future of the community



Survey respondents shared sentiments and feedback on the vitality and longevity of their communities. In a closed question, we asked respondents to share how they felt about the future of the English-speaking community in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine. The majority (56%) indicated concern or worry about the community’s future. Interviewees sometimes shared similar sentiments regarding worry about the community, noting that there were many overlapping issues in their community, often without clear solutions. Where there were clear solutions, these were often beyond their ability to implement (e.g. more affordable housing).

Survey responses that were more neutral or optimistic about community vitality tended to focus on assets or opportunities. Survey respondents discussed strong community engagement and cross-community collaboration as concrete opportunities for growth and indicators of vitality. Similarly, interviewees emphasized that increasing community engagement, particularly civic engagement and leadership, was essential to improving vitality through individual soft skill development and growth in community stewardship and advocacy. Another interviewee suggested that cross-community collaboration between English and French speakers was also an important component of vitality. This collaboration could facilitate increased access to essential services and community integration. The literature echoes this point, indicating that establishing community relationships, community engagement, recreational

programming, and support for community leadership are factors of vitality that endow communities with the non-material resources necessary to respond to change.

## Interrelation of Issues



A major finding in the interview and environmental scan data, which bears on all other themes discussed in this section, is the interdependence of themes, i.e. how different institutions and factors come together to shape and react to community change. For example, one stakeholder identified how early entry into the fishing industry in their community affected high school retention rates and how low education rates and high incomes from fishing work were often connected to substance abuse and mental health issues among youth, which schools were ill-equipped to address. Another stakeholder discussed how lack of access to daycare affected

employment and the attraction of new families to the region, as individuals (often women) could not work without childcare. This, in turn, was related to access to and valorizing vocational training in the region as a pipeline for training and certifying daycare workers.

These examples echo a key idea that emerged from the environmental scan, namely that diverse factors within a community intersect in ways that affect its vitality and capacity to respond to stress and change. Thus, while we set out to examine employment as a core component of vitality in our research, the findings suggest that employment is but one piece of the puzzle. Furthermore, other issues often need to be addressed more urgently to ensure the baseline well-being of communities and, after that, to facilitate community members' ability to engage in employment or employment-related programming.

# ACTION PLAN

This Action Plan builds upon the findings identified in our report. It advances twelve detailed recommendations, broken down into steps that can be implemented by community stakeholders and their regional and provincial partners.

The recommendations are divided into three pillars:

**1 Foundational Supports:** focuses on the implementation and increased accessibility of essential resources, such as health care and housing. These are necessary precursors for individuals to be able to engage in other programming and interventions.

**2 Mid-level Supports:** highlights areas such as secondary education, civic engagement, and cross-community collaboration in order to promote community cohesion and especially affinity. This is a social asset that provides motivation to participate in community and economic development.

**3 Employment Interventions and Supports:** outlines targeted recommendations to improve the employability and employment outcomes of English speakers in the region.

These recommendations are preceded by implementation considerations, which are suggestions to ensure an intentional and effective implementation of the Action Plan.



# Implementation Considerations

- **Asset Mapping:** Identify assets in each English-speaking community in the region and how these can be mobilized. Consider physical assets, economic assets, social assets, etc.
- **Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage local community members and local and regional stakeholders to foster collaboration and facilitate partnerships and buy-in. To ensure broad support and resource alignment, stakeholders can include businesses, government agencies, educational institutions, and community groups. Engagement methods can include dedicated social media campaigns, town halls, and direct outreach.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establish metrics and evaluation processes to track the development of implemented recommendations. Evaluations should monitor changes in assets and stressors that arise from implemented recommendations and ongoing changes. Additionally, they should identify opportunities for continued improvement.
- **Resource Allocation:** Secure funding and resources through grants, partnerships, and community fundraising to support these initiatives. Specific attention should be paid to securing program funding for organizations.



# Recommendations

## Pillar I: Foundational Supports

These supports are essential components of community vitality and necessary prerequisites for employment-related interventions.

### 1. Address Mental Health and Addiction Issues



**Strategy:** Acknowledge the current addiction challenges within communities and expand access to mental health and addiction services with bilingual support, tailored programs, and community awareness initiatives.

- ◆ Collaborate with local stakeholders, such as healthcare providers, educational institutions, and law enforcement, to develop joint initiatives to address substance use.
- ◆ Ensure access to bilingual mental health and addiction support services within communities.
- ◆ Identify and develop local support networks, such as community outreach programs and peer support groups for individuals and families affected by mental health and addiction issues, with bilingual facilitators. These networks can also be used to raise awareness and reduce stigma.



### 2. Promote the Development of Affordable Housing

**Strategy:** Work with local stakeholders to increase affordable housing by drawing upon local assets and introducing community-oriented models, such as cooperative housing, community land trusts, and mixed-use developments that include affordable units.

- ◆ Collaborate with community leaders, local government and developers to identify land and funding opportunities for affordable housing projects.
- ◆ Promote cooperative housing models that allow residents to contribute to and share in the ownership of housing developments.
- ◆ Collaborate with regional and provincial organizations to advocate for policy changes to increase affordable housing and help support first-time home buyers.

### 3. Expand Family and Child Support Services



**Strategy:** Increase the availability of childcare and family support programs by drawing upon existing resources and establishing intercultural community partnerships.

- ◆ Expand existing resources and programs through partnerships with French-language childcare providers, facilitating bilingualism at an early age and increasing family support networks.
- ◆ Establish new childcare facilities and expand existing ones.
- ◆ Lower enrollment thresholds and incentivize participation in vocational training programs for daycare workers.



### 4. Expand Access to General English-Language Services

**Strategy:** Increase bilingual service offerings in healthcare, education, and public services through partnerships with service providers and incentives for language training among current employees.

- ◆ Support local institutions and employers to understand and navigate the Charter of the French Language to ensure a robust English-language service offering.
- ◆ Increase partnerships with service providers to inventory and promote current English-language service offers.
- ◆ Provide language training programs for English-speaking professionals to learn French and integrate successfully into the healthcare, education, and public services sectors. Simultaneously support French-speaking professionals to improve their English proficiency, offering incentives for completion.
- ◆ Develop a community feedback system to identify areas where English-language services are most needed and track progress
- ◆ Expand opportunities, such as Dialogue McGill, that incentivize English speakers to access professional training and bring their skill sets back to the region.

## Pillar II: Mid-level Supports

These supports facilitate increased exchange, engagement, and attachment to the community, facilitating buy-in and uptake of employment interventions.

### 5. Increase Secondary School Engagement and Retention



**Strategy:** Implement retention programs that provide academic support and place-based engagement activities to keep youth enrolled in school and contribute to their future career paths.

- ◆ Augment and tailor school curricula to specific interests and career trajectories of youth within the context of their region and in line with place-based learning.
- ◆ Partner with local businesses and organizations to offer community-specific internships and apprenticeships that provide practical experience and motivate students to complete their education, while providing them with extra skills to enter into their preferred career pathway.
- ◆ Develop bilingual engagement activities such as sports, arts, or place-based clubs that appeal to diverse interests and provide positive after-school options. These can also be a site of linguistic exchange for youth.
- ◆ Create after-school tutoring and mentoring programs, offering educational and French-language support to assist students with their studies and personal development.



### 6. Support Leadership Development and Civic Engagement

**Strategy:** Create leadership training programs focused on community building, civic engagement, and advocacy skills. Empower emerging and current leaders to serve their communities by creating support and resource-sharing networks.

- ◆ Offer leadership training workshops covering topics like project management, community organizing, and advocacy strategies.
- ◆ Provide seed funding and resources for community-led initiatives proposed by community actors to address specific local needs (both in terms of civic engagement and more broadly).
- ◆ Partner with organizations that specialize in civic engagement to import existing programming, workshops, and resources.
- ◆ Create a network of community and civic leaders to facilitate resource sharing and mutual support opportunities.

## 7. Enhance the Visibility of English Speakers



**Strategy:** Implement media campaigns that highlight the contributions of the English-speaking community and foster positive sentiments about English speakers both within the English-speaking community and externally. Enhance image and local representation through civic engagement initiatives.

- ◆ Deconstruct myths about the English-speaking community, especially those held by the community, which feed negative perceptions.
- ◆ Launch a public awareness campaign to discuss underlying or “root” issues in the community and region as well as to highlight the achievements and contributions of the English-speaking community.
- ◆ Enhance civic engagement initiatives and support community leadership to ensure English-speaking representation and promotion of the English-speaking population.



## 8. Facilitate Cultural and Social Integration

**Strategy:** Organize regular bilingual community and networking events to create opportunities for positive interactions and linguistic exchange between English and French speakers. Promote cultural exchange through social programming oriented towards individuals at different life stages (e.g. youth, young professionals).

- ◆ Establish a calendar of intercultural community events, including festivals, workshops, and social gatherings, with activities designed to appeal to both linguistic groups.
- ◆ Create intercultural social clubs and interest groups to foster regular interaction and collaboration between English and French speakers of all ages.
- ◆ Facilitate joint projects that contribute to community vitality, such as local improvement efforts, where participants can work together towards common goals.

## Pillar III: Employment Interventions and Supports

This pillar builds upon the previous two, highlighting specific employment-related interventions and supports to increase labour market engagement and outcomes among English speakers, especially when considered as a part of a holistic approach to community vitality.

### 9. Enhance French-Language Learning Programs



**Strategy:** Expand tailored French language courses focused on workplace vocabulary and conversational skills. Offer scheduling that accommodates diverse work patterns (e.g., full-time and seasonal work).

- ◆ Partner with Francization Québec and local educational institutions to enhance the design and delivery of French language courses that are context-specific to the local job market in GIM.
- ◆ Develop and promote language exchange programs that pair English and French speakers for mutual learning and intercultural exchange.
- ◆ Develop and promote French-language professional mentorship programs that pair French-speaking mentors with English speakers learning French in the labour market.



### 10. Develop Targeted Employment Initiatives

**Strategy:** Create job programs tailored to English speakers, focusing on sectors with identified growth potential, such as tourism, or responsive to community needs, such as healthcare. Implement job matching services and promote remote work opportunities.

- ◆ Establish a network of employers that are willing to hire English speakers, provide on-the-job language training, and identify and develop employment opportunities tailored to the skillsets of English speakers in the region.
- ◆ Implement bridging programs that help youth as well as individuals with low French-language proficiency to gain language skills to enter the predominantly French-speaking workforce.
- ◆ Organize job fairs and networking events in collaboration with employers, educational providers, and community organizations to connect English speakers with potential job opportunities.

## 11. Invest in Educational Resources and Partnerships



**Strategy:** Advocate for enhanced educational resources and partnerships, including place-based programming and curricula, and pathways into major industries in the region.

- ◆ Advocate for a modified funding structure for vocational education that enables the offering and promotion of English-language vocational education programs in the region, and lowers current enrollment thresholds.
- ◆ Develop pilot programs in vocational education in tandem with major industries and employers in the region, and ensure dissemination across the region.
- ◆ Increase accessibility of post-secondary education through other means, including online education.
- ◆ Create destination programs, where attractive post-secondary education programs are implemented and offered in the region with the aim of increasing options available to youth in the region, and attracting new youth to the region.



## 12. Encourage Social Enterprises and Innovation

**Strategy:** Facilitate the creation and growth of social enterprises that address local issues and provide employment opportunities. Facilitate access to funding and business development resources for community-driven projects.

- ◆ Collaborate with local stakeholders, including educational institutions, economic development committees, and community organizations, to identify areas of collaboration and establish educational-enterprise partnerships.
- ◆ Partner with entrepreneurship organizations to offer business development programming, mentorship, and network opportunities.
- ◆ Create a local incubator program to help social enterprises develop and scale their operations.
- ◆ Provide grants and micro-loans to support the establishment of more social enterprises in the region that focus on local needs.

# CONCLUSION

The findings from our research on the employment and vitality of English-speaking communities in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine underscore the multifaceted nature of community devitalization and revitalization. Our environmental scan revealed key concepts and practical solutions that have been successfully implemented in similar rural and resource-based communities. These included place-based solutions, partnerships between education and economic development, and programming to support civic soft skill development and civic engagement. In the survey, we identified factors such as substance abuse, mental health, access to resources, education, language, and work patterns as critical elements impacting the vitality of English-speaking communities in GIM.

We also identified numerous solutions to enhance vitality among English speakers in GIM, which are detailed in the Action Plan. Identified solutions include targeted mental health and substance use support, increased access to English language services such as health

care and employment services, development of essential resources such as housing and childcare, increased educational programming at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, support for civic engagement, increased cross-community collaboration, and targeted employment initiatives including employment programs, investment in entrepreneurship, and French-language training.

Furthermore, our informational interviews added insights and nuance to these solutions, as well as an indication of the urgency of different interventions. Critically, essential resources and support must be increased in GIM to ensure the baseline well-being of community members. Following this, community members will be better able to engage in targeted interventions to facilitate increased labour market integration and retention. This holistic approach recognizes the interconnection of the different factors of community vitality to better achieve meaningful, sustainable change for English speakers in GIM.

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