



Office of the  
Commissioner of  
Official Languages

Commissariat  
aux langues  
officielles

# A SHARED FUTURE:

A closer look at our  
official language  
minority communities

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**OCTOBER 2024**

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*Un avenir en commun : regard sur nos communautés de langue officielle  
en situation minoritaire*

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## PREFACE

I am pleased to present my report *A shared future: A closer look at our official language minority communities*. As I stated in my [2023–2024 annual report](#), released in May 2024, Canada’s federal language policy is in a year of transition. The modernization of the *Official Languages Act* (the Act) has introduced a number of changes that are gradually being implemented, including in the operations of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. My 2023–2024 annual report focused on compliance issues and the impact of modernizing the Act, in order to give these issues the attention they deserve. Similarly, I wanted to highlight some of the concerns experienced by official language minority communities (OLMCs). These communities are often on the front lines of official languages challenges across Canada. The purpose of this report on their status is to highlight their realities, needs and achievements.

Community issues are a window through which we can observe the relationship between federal institutions and OLMCs and the way in which the former are meeting their commitments under the Act to protect language rights of all Canadians and promote the vitality of OLMCs. There are, of course, disparities and shortcomings to report on this subject, but there are also significant advances. At the top of this list is obviously the modernization of the Act in June 2023, which was a major accomplishment and the result of a concerted effort by politicians, public servants and members of the Canadian public.

The Government of Canada’s key commitments as set out in Part VII of the Act are the basis of this report on the status of OLMCs. Although the vitality of OLMCs and the promotion of English and French continue to be paramount, the Act now also refers to the economic benefits of bilingualism and the importance of giving everyone in Canada the opportunity to learn a second official language. This report also includes an examination of the problems being experienced by the English-speaking communities of Quebec, whether in terms of the recognition of their rights, their perceived legitimacy as OLMCs, or their growing socio-economic vulnerability. As recent events have shown, the unique position of Quebec’s English-speaking communities within Canada’s linguistic landscape comes with its own set of challenges.



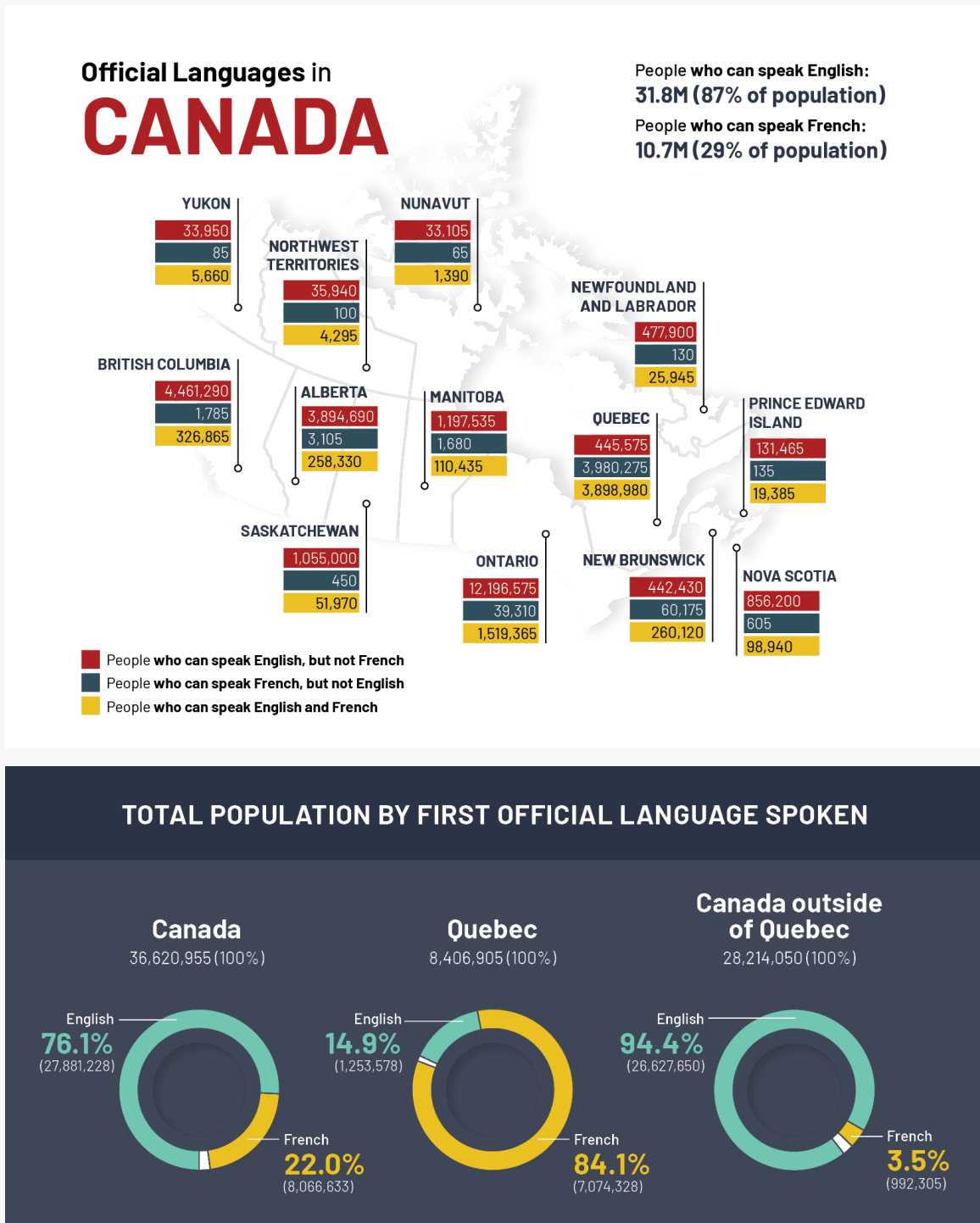
The urgent need to protect the French language in Canada is now clearly recognized in the Act. This is a major undertaking that is engaging all communities across Canada. In the six years since the beginning of my mandate, I have heard many concerns about this from communities and they are reflected in this report. However, I want to emphasize that Quebec’s English-speaking communities are not excluded from the issue of protecting the French language. In fact, they are partners in the achievement of this goal, and they embrace that partnership. They want to contribute to the vitality of the French language in Canada, and it is up to us to acknowledge that role while protecting their rights as OLMCs. There are also other allies of the French language in Canada, and we need to recognize the essential role played by those who defend, promote, teach and study French as a second language from coast to coast to coast.

In addition to the protection afforded by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (the Charter) for minority language education in elementary and high schools, the modernized Act now commits the federal government to advancing opportunities for members of English and French linguistic minority communities to pursue quality learning in their own language throughout their lives. I was pleased to see this commitment to the learning continuum, which now explicitly ranges from early childhood to post-secondary education and extends beyond the formal context.

Several key issues, such as health and the economy, are addressed only marginally in this report, although they are very important for OLMCs. This should not be regarded as an omission, but rather a necessary choice for a concise report that focuses on a number of other sectors—which are experiencing or preparing to experience major transformations in connection with the modernized Act—as well as various environmental factors. In addition, certain issues have been set aside so as not to undermine the integrity of ongoing investigations or to prejudice cases that are in the process of being challenged in court.

This report is divided into four sections. The first examines the main elements in the learning continuum, and the second focuses on intergovernmental issues—in this case, between the federal government and the provinces and territories. The third section explores certain aspects of OLMC vitality, while the fourth briefly addresses Statistics Canada’s long-awaited Survey on the Official Language Minority Population. I hope that my report on the status of OLMCs will inspire some insightful discussions on the current reality of OLMCs. More than just an overview of the situation, the report presents courses of action intended for those who have the power to effect change on a political, institutional or social level.

FIGURE 1



Source: Statistics Canada, [Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001, Ottawa.



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## LEARNING

The modernized Act expresses the government’s commitment to “advancing . . . opportunities for members of English and French linguistic minority communities to pursue quality learning in their own language throughout their lives, including from early childhood to post-secondary education.” This commitment is crucial to the vitality of OLMCs for generations to come. For too long, these communities have been calling attention to urgent and growing needs across the entire learning continuum. Now is the time for all federal institutions involved to take action and turn these words into concrete measures. This will require a true understanding of OLMCs’ reality in terms of all levels of minority language education.

### ***Early childhood***

The past year has brought some good news when it comes to early childhood, a key element at the very beginning of the learning continuum. First, the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care Plan, which is modelled after Quebec’s \$10-a-day child care centres, has allowed child care facilities across Canada to breathe a little easier. I am studying this initiative carefully to determine whether OLMCs everywhere are having their specific needs taken into account through language clauses or other appropriate mechanisms. It would be unacceptable if all OLMCs were not able to benefit from this positive policy for child care services.

The second piece of good news is the recently passed *Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act* (Bill C-35), which guarantees long-term funding for OLMC child care programs and services. Without the mobilization of OLMCs, the briefs submitted by key organizations (including my office) at the committee stage, and a final amendment made in the Senate, this Act would not have taken into account the official languages perspective provided for in the modernized Act. The funding will ensure better access to these programs and services and will also help to strengthen language transmission and to retain young people in minority language educational systems.

Major challenges lie ahead, however. First, English-speaking communities in Quebec do not have access to many of the funds available under the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028* (the Action Plan) in the area of early childhood, such as the Support for Early Childhood Development Program. Because access to early childhood services in the first official language is essential to the vitality of these communities, the government must take their needs into account when designing its funding programs.

With respect to French OLMCs, demand is currently outpacing supply, and there is an acute shortage of qualified labour in the field of early childhood. It has also been observed that the funding granted to service providers does not take into account the increased cost of wages and infrastructure, which seems to be discouraging the participation of some large service providers in this sector. The needs are particularly pronounced in rural areas, in remote areas such as the Far North where operating costs are much higher, and in regions that are experiencing strong growth in the French-speaking population, whether because of immigration or migration from rural to urban areas. In Ontario, for example, the enthusiasm of Francophone parents has caused waiting lists to lengthen dramatically.



The widespread shortage of educators has already made headlines across the country, but Francophone minority communities also have to deal with the fact that they have smaller pools from which to recruit staff. In addition, both their clientele and their service providers are scattered. These issues ultimately result in a lack of French-language child care spaces, which forces many parents to enrol their children in nearby English-language child care centres, making future generations vulnerable to assimilation.

I would like to point out that there are some interesting initiatives that are setting an example in an attempt to alleviate the situation. In the Yukon, French-language daycare Le Petit Cheval Blanc is recruiting internationally to fill its vacant positions. Newfoundland and Labrador is offering bonuses of more than \$5,100 a year to certified early childhood educators at Les P'tits Cerfs-Volants family and child care centre, which provides licensed childcare services. Manitoba is investing in training early childhood educators to ensure that they have a solid career path. Saskatchewan is working with post-secondary institutions, including Collège Mathieu, to strengthen the professional development of early childhood educators. These measures are enhancing the value of this profession and thus contributing to the vitality of OLMCs. However, they are but supplementary to the broader commitment of federal institutions to take positive measures to address the early childhood development needs of OLMCs.

In preparation for the renewal of early learning and child care agreements with provinces and territories in 2026, the federal government would do well to consult with a wider range of stakeholders, both in workforce training and early childhood services, to give communities the opportunity to replicate successful practices elsewhere in the country. It is essential that OLMCs be given the means to participate fully in implementing the vision of the national child care program.

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Minority language education is fundamental to the full development of OLMCs. Schools are undoubtedly the most important institution for their survival.

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### ***Elementary and high school education***

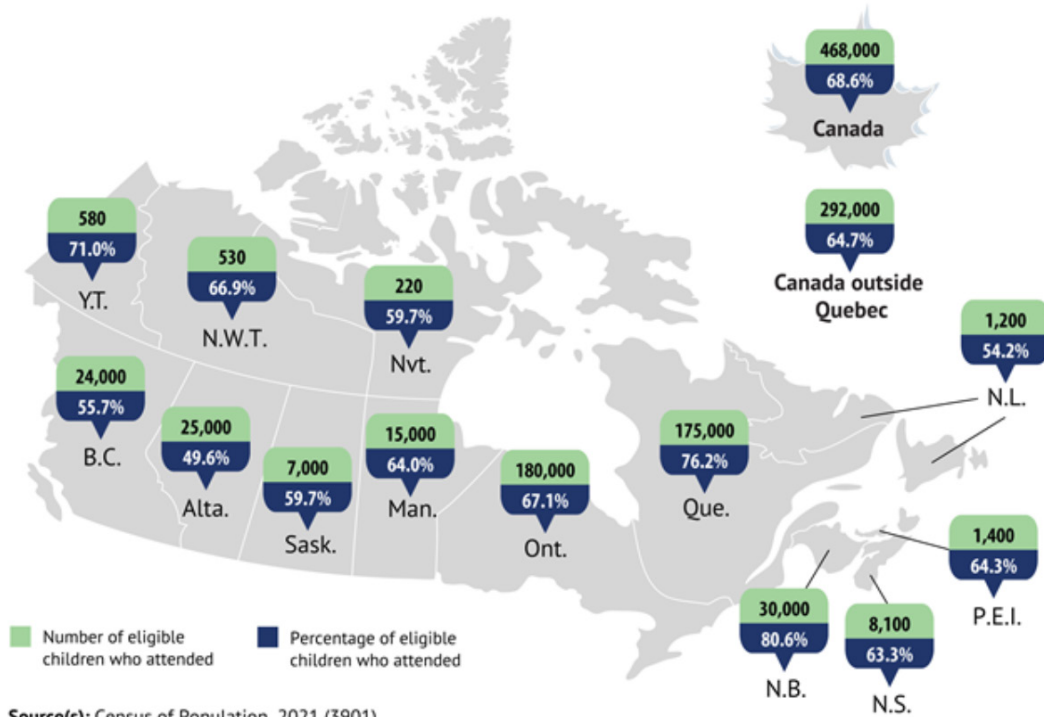
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In 2023, I had the opportunity to intervene before the Supreme Court in the *Commission scolaire francophone des Territoires du Nord-Ouest v Northwest Territories (Education, Culture and Employment)* case. In its decision, the Supreme Court set aside ministerial decisions refusing to admit children of non-rights-holder parents to French-language schools in the Northwest Territories. According to the Supreme Court, the Minister of Education, Culture and Employment should have considered the values of section 23 of the Charter in exercising her discretion. When ministerial decisions have a significant impact on the values enshrined in section 23 of the Charter, particularly the preservation and development of OLMCs, these values must be taken into account, even when there is no direct infringement of the right guaranteed by section 23 to rights holders. This decision supports the fight against the linguistic erosion suffered by OLMCs in Canada, especially in more vulnerable communities such as those in the territories.



FIGURE 2

**Children who attended a regular program or school in the minority official language among eligible children aged 5 to 17, Canada, Canada outside Quebec, provinces and territories, 2021**



Source: Statistics Canada, “[897 000 children are eligible for instruction in the minority official language in Canada](#),” The Daily, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 11-001-X, November 30, 2022, p. 15.

The 2021 Census provided much-needed data on rights holders. The data confirmed that more than one third of the children of rights-holder parents who are eligible for education in French outside Quebec have never attended a French-language school. In Quebec, nearly a quarter of eligible children have never attended an English-language school.<sup>1</sup> According to Statistics Canada, there are a number of reasons for this, including distance to the closest school. I encourage Statistics Canada to continue to expand its analyses in this area, including through the post-censal Survey on the Official Language Minority Population, which is scheduled to be released by the end of 2024. The modernized Act commits the government to restoring the demographic weight of the Francophone minority through immigration, but the government must also ensure that new generations are not lost to assimilation through majority language schools.

I am therefore pleased that the modernization of the Act includes the federal government’s commitment to periodically estimate the number of children of rights holders. It is essential that the government honour this commitment, and I look forward to the process to be developed by the Minister of Canadian Heritage under section 2.3 of the Act.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, “[897,000 children are eligible for instruction in the minority official language in Canada](#),” The Daily, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 11-001-X, November 30, 2022, p. 2.

The new census data and other Statistics Canada data sources on eligible children<sup>2</sup> will help various stakeholders to better focus their research, outreach and recruitment efforts with rights holders and to strategically prioritize the construction or expansion of schools. I am also very much looking forward to the release of data from the new post-censal Survey on the Official Language Minority Population, which will include data on OLMC education. The federal government will need to use this information to take the necessary measures to strengthen this learning continuum, which is so essential to the vitality of OLMCs. I hope that more comprehensive data will provide a detailed picture of the situation of rights holders in terms of their children’s eligibility to attend minority language educational institutions, in particular so that provincial and territorial governments can make informed decisions about the allocation of funds in this area.

### ***French immersion and French as a second language***

Education programs in French as a second language (FSL) and in French immersion are at the heart of Canadian bilingualism. According to the most recent Census in 2021, Anglophones outside Quebec who have participated in an immersion program are 12 times more likely to be bilingual.<sup>3</sup> In Quebec—where the first public French immersion program was introduced in 1965—English-speaking students continue to benefit from these programs, which are an essential tool for developing French language skills.

The 2021 Census also showed that interest in these programs is widely shared by all segments of the Canadian population across the various language and ethnocultural groups. According to a survey my office commissioned in 2021, more than three quarters of respondents agreed that provinces and territories need to make more spaces available in immersion programs. Respondents from diverse language and ethnocultural groups were among those who most strongly agreed with this statement.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, French immersion is still too often seen as just one option among many rather than an important and necessary program. In some regions, including Canada’s national capital, school boards are currently evaluating the possibility of drastically reducing immersion programs at the elementary school level, while in New Brunswick the structure of these programs has been called into question several times in recent years. Other regions are experiencing a shortage of staff to teach these programs. Given that the Act “recognizes the importance of providing opportunities for everyone in Canada to learn a second official language,” I am calling on all levels of government to commit more resources to improving access to French immersion programs. These programs have proven their worth and generate a high level of interest year after year, so we need to seize this opportunity now to strengthen Canadian bilingualism from coast to coast to coast.

Ours is a shared linguistic ecosystem in Canada. Anglophones attend French-language postsecondary institutions. They live, work and play alongside their French-speaking neighbours, friends and work colleagues. And with the rising rates of exogamy, they are increasingly living in households and raising children with their French-speaking partners and co-parents. If the vitality of Francophone minority communities hinges on individual community members’ ability to use French and to live, raise their children and access services in their language, it is in everyone’s interest to support English speakers’ access to opportunities to become bilingual in all parts of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, [Children eligible for instruction in the minority official language: A data ecosystem](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-20-0001, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, [Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021](#), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-200-X, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Official Languages Tracking Survey 2021: Final Report](#), 2022, p. 31.

## ***Post-secondary education***

Post-secondary institutions in Francophone OLMCs face enormous challenges due to chronic structural and operational underfunding, which limits access to French-language programs and training within these communities. Some also anticipate that the federal government's recent decision to cap the number of international students will have a negative impact on their financial viability and their French-language programming, starting in September 2024.

The modernized Act nevertheless includes a new commitment by the federal government regarding post-secondary education, which is now explicitly included in the continuum of lifelong learning. Students and university administrations are waiting to see what concrete form this new commitment will take with respect to post-secondary education. The time has come to begin discussions with the provinces and territories on the structure of long-term funding for these institutions, whether through the Council of Ministers of Education or another coordinating mechanism. I also expect that there will be guidance on this commitment in the Part VII regulations, which are currently being drafted.

Post-secondary institutions in Francophone OLMCs provide essential professional and technical training to meet the needs of French-speaking workers in fields such as education, health care and the justice system. They are also an essential vehicle for the transmission of language, culture and identity, all of which are essential to the vitality of OLMCs. In short, they train the leaders of tomorrow.

Quebec's English-language universities and colleges represent a crucial link in the learning continuum for the vitality of the province's English-speaking communities. However, they too are facing serious challenges. English-language universities are being affected by the Quebec government's decision to raise tuition fees for non-French-speaking students from outside the province and require them to meet a minimum proficiency level in French. English-language CEGEPs are currently in a transition period to comply with the new obligations of Law 14 (more commonly known as Bill 96). For example, when the number of applications exceeds the number of students who are allowed to be admitted, Law 14 requires that CEGEPs prioritize students who have been declared eligible for English-language elementary and high school education in Quebec. It also requires all students in English-language CEGEPs to take certain courses in French, and some will be required to take the standardized French exit exam in order to graduate. The Quebec government has also imposed a cap on the number of students who can attend English-language CEGEPs.

Quebec's English-language post-secondary institutions have grave concerns—and I share these concerns—about the impact of these measures on their student enrolment and on their financial sustainability. Two universities have reacted by filing lawsuits against the Quebec government under the Quebec and Canadian charters of rights and freedoms.

Quebec's English-language universities, CEGEPs and colleges are part of the solution, not part of the problem. These institutions can play a leading role in societal efforts to protect and promote the French language. Given their national and international profile, they can be a valuable resource for students who are looking for a post-secondary education experience in English while being immersed in the French language and culture. I am concerned by this complex situation, and I intend to broaden my understanding of its impact, not only on these educational institutions, but also on the vitality of Quebec's English-speaking communities.

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### ***Scholarly research in French***

Another important issue that has resurfaced in recent years is the gradual decline of scholarly research conducted in French in Canada. The growing dominance of English-language research is a global trend that has been going on for decades and is of great concern to the House of Commons, according to a June 2023 report by its Standing Committee on Science and Research.<sup>5</sup> For example, the federal granting agencies allocate more than 80% of their funding to English-language projects, and they are receiving fewer and fewer applications for funding in French.<sup>6</sup>

However, research in French promotes the vitality of all French-speaking communities in the country as well as the vitality of French in the production and dissemination of knowledge and science. When aligned with topics of interest for these communities, research in French helps to better understand them, which in turn helps to adopt public policies that can meet their needs. It also enables French-language post-secondary programs and institutions to build their reputation and create a significant economic impact in their region while helping to enhance the vitality of French-speaking communities.

Given that the modernized Act now includes supporting the advancement of scientific knowledge in French, the federal government seems to be moving in the right direction. In addition, the Action Plan supports initiatives to improve the French-language research ecosystem in Canada, including the creation of a committee of experts to examine the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge in French and the establishment of a new French-language research assistance service by Acfas. However, challenges can arise during the design, implementation and sustainability of these kinds of initiatives. I expect the government to meet its obligations in this area under the new Act and to take action if any difficulties arise.

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<sup>5</sup> Parliament of Canada, House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research, [Revitalizing Research and Scientific Publication in French in Canada](#), June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne et Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, [Bâtir ensemble le postsecondaire en français de l’avenir](#) [translation: [Shaping the Future of French Postsecondary Education Together](#)], Report of the National Dialogue on Postsecondary Education in a Francophone Minority Context, 2022, p. 68 [full report available in French only].

## ***Adult education***

The final link in the learning continuum is adult education. In today's world of knowledge and skills development, every Canadian must have opportunities to continue to learn. Learning in the minority official language is an established right. The modernized Act reflects this by setting out the obligation of federal institutions to take positive measures to implement the government's commitment to "[advance] formal, non-formal and informal opportunities for member of English and French linguistic minority communities to pursue quality learning in their own language throughout their lives."

This choice of words is not accidental. It reminds us that learning happens not only in formal educational institutions, but also in the workplace, at home, in community organizations, during sports and cultural activities, and in a multitude of other settings. Communities are concerned about developing skills that will enable their members to be agile and resilient in the face of the social, economic, technological and climate changes that are unfolding all around us. The challenge is not insignificant, because outside of Quebec, New Brunswick and Ontario, there are currently few adult education services for members of OLMCs. I am counting on federal institutions to listen to their needs.



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## INTERGOVERNMENTAL AGREEMENTS

I have said many times that the federal government needs to be proactive and show leadership regarding official languages by ensuring that language clauses are included in federal-provincial-territorial agreements. OLMCs are unanimous in wanting to see a greater number of clear and concrete commitments to them recorded in such agreements.

Past experience has proven that the lack of strong, specific language provisions in intergovernmental agreements has too often resulted in funding that is disadvantageous to these communities: for example, with regard to early childhood education. The addition of a language commitment in the *Canada Early Learning and Child Care Act* should help to avoid this scenario in future agreements.

The Federal Court of Appeal's decision in *Canada (Commissioner of Official Languages) v Canada (Employment and Social Development)*<sup>7</sup> clarified the need for the federal government to enforce its obligations, particularly through appropriate language clauses protecting the rights of official language minorities when it enters into service delivery agreements with provincial or territorial governments. Similarly, this decision signals the importance for federal institutions to give themselves the means to enforce the language clauses included in these agreements.

This is why I stress the importance of including evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in language clauses, as well as clear accountability and transparency mechanisms that will confirm the tangible, measurable and lasting effects intended and achieved by these agreements. More generally, any intergovernmental initiative that affects these communities should produce and make accessible to its recipients evidence-based data that allows them to identify needs in a nuanced way, account for the outputs of the actions implemented, evaluate the results obtained, identify success stories and thus determine what the best practices are from the perspective of supporting the vitality of OLMCs. This data would help answer the communities' questions about the absence, inadequacy or slowness of funding provided to their organizations through the provinces and territories.

Without including these language clauses, some agreements are clearly more advantageous to the interests of OLMCs. This is the case with the federal-provincial health accords, including Manitoba's, which contains commitments to improve access to French-language services, and Alberta's, which supports several projects in the Francophone community.

Quebec's case is unique because of the level of discretion granted to the province by the agreements with the federal government. In the area of health, English-speaking communities have a consultation mechanism for communicating their priorities to Health Canada and the Government of Quebec. However, the lack of a binding commitment in the agreement creates a sense of insecurity within the communities. A high level of vigilance is required from all stakeholders to ensure that their interests are reflected in these agreements.

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<sup>7</sup> [Canada \(Commissioner of Official Languages\) v Canada \(Employment and Social Development\)](#), 2022 FCA 14.

Formal commitments made and recognized by the signatories of federal-provincial-territorial agreements are a stabilizing and necessary protection for OLMCs, which must otherwise depend on the goodwill of the provincial or territorial government in power.

The modernized Act now requires federal institutions to consult OLMCs and to take the necessary measures to promote the inclusion of language clauses in the agreements they enter into with the provinces and territories that can contribute to the implementation of the government's commitments set out in subsections 41(1), (2) and (3) of the Act. It is essential that the Part VII regulations clarify this obligation and provide a framework for it.





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# VITALITY OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY COMMUNITIES

## ***Francophone immigration***

The federal government has recently made significant progress on the Francophone immigration file with new obligations in the modernized Act, the announcement of new targets in the 2024–2026 Immigration Levels Plan, and the adoption of the Policy on Francophone Immigration. These developments have come less than three years after the release of my [Statistical analysis of the 4.4% immigration target](#) in November 2021, in which I recommended that a full analysis of the target be conducted and that a clearer objective and a new, higher target be set. I also recommended that the new objective and target be included in a policy on immigration to Francophone minority communities.

In November 2023, the federal government announced its 2024–2026 Immigration Levels Plan, which sets out new evolving objectives for Francophone immigration to French-speaking minority communities: i.e., 6% of total immigration to Canada outside Quebec in 2024, 7% in 2025 and 8% in 2026. I am aware that Francophone OLMCs are concerned that these targets are insufficient.

In January 2024, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) announced its Policy on Francophone Immigration, in accordance with the requirements of the modernized Act. The purpose of the Policy is to restore and increase the demographic weight of Francophone OLMCs to what it was in 1971: i.e., 6.1% of the Canadian population outside Quebec, compared to 3.5% in 2021. The Policy contains several interesting elements and tools, such as the “Francophone lens” (which has yet to be defined and operationalized), a continuum of immigration programs and services, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and increased data and research efforts. I will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the Policy.

To ensure that Francophone minority communities do not see their demographic vitality eroded in the long term and that Francophone immigration can benefit from a certain amount of momentum, I am expecting IRCC to actively listen to Francophone OLMCs and take into account both their concerns and the recent recommendation of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, which echoes the demands of the communities. In its April 2024 report, the Committee called on the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship to acknowledge that the new targets of 6%, 7% and 8% for 2024, 2025 and 2026, respectively, are not sufficient. It also encouraged the government to increase its Francophone immigration target to 12% in 2024, and to continue increasing it gradually to 20% by 2036.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to remember that the retention of French-speaking immigrants in Francophone minority communities is an issue that is growing in tandem with recruitment. The availability of social services in French in these communities is an important factor in retention, in addition to personal elements such as employability, recognition of prior learning, and access to training, housing and daycare. These types of factors determine whether a newcomer will stay in their host community. This dynamic affects smaller OLMCs, such as those in British Columbia or Prince Edward Island, and certain remote communities, such as those in the territories.

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<sup>8</sup> Parliament of Canada, House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, [Openness to the International Francophone Community: Optimizing Francophone Immigration to Canada](#), April 18, 2024, p. 10.

In August 2024, the federal government announced the addition of 10 new communities to the Welcoming Francophone Communities initiative, along with an extra \$11 million in funding. I was pleased with this announcement, which is in line with one of the recommendations in my report on [Monitoring the Implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023](#).

In the same announcement, the federal government introduced its Francophone Minority Communities Student Pilot Program, which aims to improve the reception and integration of French-speaking international students by giving them the opportunity to study in French-language or bilingual post-secondary institutions in minority communities and by offering them a direct pathway to permanent residence after graduation.

These efforts are commendable, but there is still a need to continue to be attentive to OLMC organizations and institutions that play a key role in achieving the objectives targeted by these programs. I have noted that the groups receiving Francophone immigration funding are frustrated by the programs' cumbersome administrative procedures.

Each stage of immigration is a pivotal stage, whether it is recruitment, selection, admission, reception or integration. To create conditions conducive to retention, a cross-sector cooperative effort is needed to support the vitality of these communities, backed by multiple federal institutions and their provincial and territorial partners as part of intergovernmental strategies across the country.

### ***Funding for community organizations***

OLMC organizations across the country have chronic funding problems. Although up from previous years, the amounts announced in the Action Plan, particularly with respect to core funding for OLMC organizations, have remained significantly lower than the amounts OLMCs have identified for their needs. In addition, various community organizations have reported worrying delays in the disbursement of funds under the Action Plan's various initiatives—some envelopes are already more than a year late. These delays can have a major impact on the organizations OLMCs depend so much upon.

Many of these organizations are already in a precarious financial situation and rely on government funding to retain staff, avoid debt and continue to provide essential services to their communities. Funding delays not only impact their day-to-day activities, but also weaken their ability to implement their initiatives and anticipate events that are critical to their mandate and survival.

As I highlighted in my 2022 report on monitoring the implementation of the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023*, federal institutions must develop the necessary measures to minimize delays in the delivery of Action Plan funds and ensure the rapid deployment of the initiatives announced therein.<sup>9</sup> I am calling on the government to reassess its approach to the disbursement of Action Plan funds in order to optimize their deployment and thus avoid seeing many of these organizations made more vulnerable. Both OLMCs and the federal government would do well to measure more transparently and thoroughly the effectiveness of official languages programs in order to better respond to the structural challenges they face.

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<sup>9</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Monitoring the Implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023: Investing in Our Future – Analysis and Recommendations for the Next Five-Year Plan](#), May 2022, p. 12.

I read the *Horizontal Evaluation of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023: Investing in Our Future* report, in which Canadian Heritage commits to identifying “ways to produce and ensure accountability and the availability of financial data that would help to better assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Action Plan and any subsequent plans.” Some community groups have suggested that an independent review of the allocation of these funds could accelerate and even improve the process.

I encourage Canadian Heritage to continue to improve its approach to monitoring, measuring and disbursing funds related to the Action Plan while continuing to work closely with community groups. Optimizing the distribution of funds to avoid greater vulnerability of grantees is essential to achieving the objectives of the Action Plan.

### ***Increase in the number of bilingual points of service***

The *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations* (the Regulations), which govern Part IV of the Act, were amended in 2019 to expand the criteria that determine which federal offices and points of service are required to provide service to the public in both official languages. The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) estimated that more than 700 existing points of service would be re-designated as bilingual with the coming into force of the new provisions, which will raise the percentage of bilingual offices from 34% of all federal points of service in 2019 to 40% when the amendments have all come into force.<sup>10</sup>

OLMCs have, of course, welcomed the increased availability of bilingual services, including in communities that have never had them before. Like them, I believe that this change will help make it easier for them to live their lives in their language.

It has been five years since the amended Regulations were passed, but the amendments have yet to be implemented. TBS chose to wait for the 2021 Census data in order to have better information for the application of the new provisions. The implementation schedule thus now coincides with that of the new provisions of the modernized Act.

This poses a significant challenge because the designation of new bilingual points of service will come at the same time as the new obligations regarding the language requirements for managerial and supervisory positions and at the same time as TBS’s recognition of the right of all employees working in designated bilingual regions to work and be supervised in the official language of their choice, regardless of their position’s language requirements. I recognize that TBS has multiple priorities; however, earlier implementation of the amended Regulations could have ensured that this issue was resolved before embarking on the new challenges of implementing the changes to the Act. Another concern is that the shortage of bilingual workers could complicate the staffing of new bilingual positions, and some organizations fear that the bilingual workforce will be drawn from their own organizations, which will undermine their own recruitment and retention efforts.

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<sup>10</sup>Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, [Annual Report on Official Languages 2019–20](#), 2021, p. 5.

Nevertheless, I see it as a positive development that the federal government is increasing its capacity to serve the Canadian public in both official languages by 2025, if work continues as scheduled. TBS will have to ensure not only that all federal offices are informed of these new requirements, but also that the Regulations are interpreted broadly and liberally, in accordance with the Federal Court's February 2024 decision in *Thibodeau v Greater Toronto Airports Authority*.<sup>11</sup>

### **English-speaking communities of Quebec**

Over the past two years, English-speaking communities in Quebec have seen significant changes in both provincial and federal language policy, with the expansion of Quebec's *Charter of the French Language* and the modernization of Canada's *Official Languages Act*, which means that this OLMC has had to find its footing and readjust not just once but twice.

I am aware of the communities' concerns about certain elements of the modernized Act, and I will continue to closely monitor its implementation to analyze how its amendments are affecting the vitality of Quebec's English-speaking communities.

For several years now, the English-speaking minority in Quebec has been facing challenges that are threatening its vitality. First, its legitimacy as an OLMC is all too often questioned. There seems to be confusion between the majority status of the English language in Canada and the minority status of the English-speaking communities in Quebec. In a difficult context, which includes the provincial legislature's adoption of Bill 21 and Bill 40, Quebec's OLMCs have engaged in several legal proceedings to protect their rights guaranteed under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Lawsuits have also been initiated against Bill 96's amendments to the *Charter of the French Language*, citing the infringement of the community's constitutional rights. I will continue to monitor all of these court cases very carefully.

One of the main challenges facing the English-speaking minority in Quebec is the perception that it does not recognize the value of French as the province's common language. This persistent perception is nevertheless a myth whose exposure would benefit everyone. The most recent Census data from 2021 tell us that 71% of Quebecers with English as a mother tongue are bilingual, and that most of them regularly use French at work, at school or at home, or have it as another mother tongue.<sup>12</sup> Quebec's English-speaking communities have a long tradition of promoting federal and individual bilingualism among Canada's English-speaking majority, as well as defending the rights of French-speaking minorities outside Quebec. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that the rights of English-speaking Quebecers are protected and respected, and that Quebec's English-speaking minority is recognized as a provincial community whose commitment to bilingualism continues to be a key factor in the success of this political community we call Canada.

On that point, I was very concerned about the health directive issued by the Government of Quebec in July 2024, which caused confusion about English-speaking Quebecers' right to receive health services in their language. I am encouraged to see that a new directive was issued in September to reaffirm this right. As I repeatedly stated in my report, *A Matter of Respect and Safety: The Impact of Emergency Situations on Official Languages*, it is essential that the public be able to receive communications and services in the official language of their choice.

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<sup>11</sup> [Thibodeau v Greater Toronto Airports Authority](#), 2024 FC 274.

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada, [Table 98-10-0170-01 – Mother tongue by first official language spoken and knowledge of official languages: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions](#), 2022.

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Providing health care to all Canadians in the official language of their choice is a matter of basic safety and respect, and all governments should be striving to do just that.

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When Canadians need health care, whether in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada, they must be able to communicate clearly and quickly with health care providers. They may also be at their most vulnerable, when every second counts. Providing health care to all Canadians in the official language of their choice is a matter of basic safety and respect, and all governments should be striving to do just that.

Another example of disparity is in the province's cultural industries. Spokespeople for Quebec's English-language cultural networks recently reported that public funding for their television and film production has drastically fallen over the past 20 years. I think that every OLMC should receive public funding for its cultural productions that matches or exceeds these communities' demographic weight relative to the total population of their respective province or territory. It is important that they be able to add their own unique characteristics to Canada's cultural creation.

An additional misperception that persists among nearly half of Canada's French-speaking population is that Quebec's English-speaking communities are a privileged elite that is not well integrated into contemporary Quebec society.<sup>13</sup> However, these communities are showing signs of socio-economic vulnerability. According to census data, the unemployment rate for English-speaking Quebecers rose from 8.9% in 2016 to 10.9% in 2021<sup>14</sup>, while the rate for Quebec's Francophones remained relatively constant at 6.9% during the same period. Although the 2021 Census showed that *average* incomes among English-speaking Quebecers are higher than those of their French-speaking counterparts, the same cannot be said for other indicators. *Median* incomes are lower among Quebec's English speakers than among its French-speaking population. According to the 2021 Census, the percentage of English-speaking Quebecers whose income was below the poverty line (10%) is almost twice that of French-speaking Quebecers (5.8%).<sup>15</sup> The English-speaking population in most of Quebec's administrative regions has higher unemployment rates, lower median incomes and higher poverty rates than the Francophone majority, despite the former's high workforce participation rates and higher levels of education.

In June 2024, my office published a study called *Building Bridges: Perceptions and realities about the English-Speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada*, which found that misperceptions persist about the English-speaking minority's relationship with French. According to the study, Francophones in Quebec tend to underestimate English-speaking Quebecers' ability to speak French, how often they speak it, and their interest in Quebec's Francophone culture.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Official Languages Tracking Survey 2021: Final Report](#), 2022, p. 23.

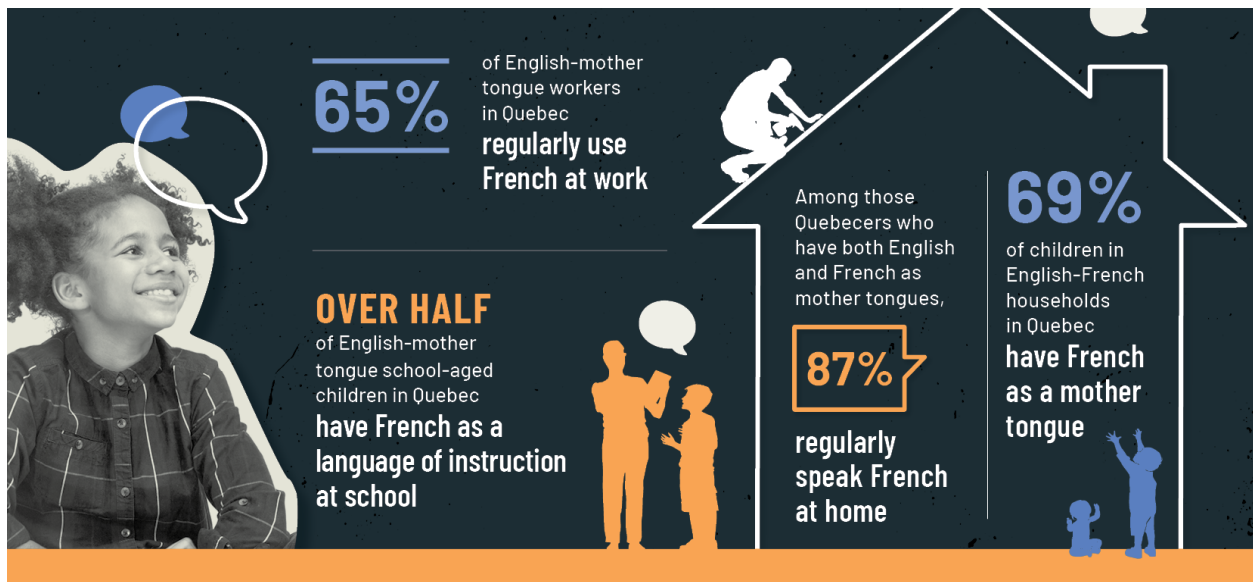
<sup>14</sup> Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), [Census 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers](#), 2022, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT), [Census 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers](#), 2022, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Building Bridges: Perceptions and realities about the English-speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada](#), June 2024, p. iv.

However, the study also showed that, whether English or French-speaking, the vast majority of Quebecers say they get along well with each other on an individual basis. The study presented some interesting opportunities, including encouraging more social interactions between the two language communities: for example, through youth exchange programs, which should be expanded to promote English-French interactions not only in Quebec but across the entire country. I hope that the study will help debunk myths about Quebec’s English-speaking communities and restore their legitimacy as OLMCs that are essential to Canadian bilingualism and that enhance Canada’s diversity.

FIGURE 3



**Source:** Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Building Bridges: Perceptions and realities about the English-speaking communities of Quebec and their relationship with French in Quebec and bilingualism in Canada](#), 2024.



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## SURVEY ON THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGE MINORITY POPULATION

Statistics Canada will soon publish the results of the Survey on the Official Language Minority Population, which is a follow-up to its 2006 post-censal survey. I would like to commend Canadian Heritage for commissioning this long-awaited initiative, which is being realized after numerous requests from OLMCs, to which I lent my support.

The survey was conducted among the English-speaking population in Quebec and the French-speaking population elsewhere in Canada. It will document their language skills and practices in daily activities at home, at work and in society. It will also give us updated information to improve our understanding of OLMCs' situation in terms of issues such as access to government and legal services, education, health care, minority-language arts and culture, identity and workforce participation.

The results of this survey are being eagerly awaited by researchers, community organizations and policy makers. Because of its large sample size, it helps to compensate for an obvious lack of reliable, nuanced data on OLMCs. I look forward to accessing this data, which will support my office's work over the next few years.





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## CONCLUSIONS

This report on the status of OLMCs addresses only a fraction of the recent issues in certain sectors of activity of OLMCs and of linguistic duality organizations. Of course, there are other important OLMC issues—such as health, arts and culture, the economy, and conditions for young people, women and seniors. A broader inventory of all language-related sectors could paint an even more detailed and nuanced portrait of the challenges that have been overcome, that are being overcome, and that need attention and discussion. Rest assured that all aspects of official languages and all OLMC issues are on my office’s radar and will be the subject of studies, investigations or reports at the appropriate time.

The vitality of official languages will always require vigilance. The modernized Act is a step forward that will strengthen the foundations of Canada’s federal language policy, but its impact ultimately rests with the people and institutions that make them come alive. However, I have observed that official language majority communities often know very little about their OLMC neighbours,<sup>17</sup> even though the former clearly have a role to play in the latter’s vitality. It is essential that all levels of government work together and that the institutions concerned, including Canadian Heritage, take concrete initiatives to raise awareness about OLMCs and their realities across the country.

The past year has given us many promising new tools. The modernized Act has clarified existing rights and obligations and enhanced our toolbox. The regulations governing Part VII of the Act, which are currently being developed, could potentially set out the terms and conditions under which federal institutions will be required to implement Part VII of the Act and help to advance substantive equality for all OLMCs and for both official languages. It is important for all stakeholders to continue to be vigilant to ensure that the regulations provide the necessary clarifications. I am encouraged by the drive and determination of OLMC members—as well as the efforts of numerous public servants, elected officials and politicians—to advance official languages issues over the past six years. I would also like to acknowledge my office’s hard work and dedication.

With committed stakeholders and newly redesigned tools, I am hopeful that we are in a better position to ensure the future of official languages in Canada. I know that there will always be new and different challenges, and that my office will need to stay sharp and continue to investigate complaints, make recommendations to institutions, and take advantage of its new tools, including mediation and orders, as well as administrative monetary penalties as soon as they come into force. It will also be important to raise public awareness of the importance of respecting and exercising the rights and obligations set out in the *Official Languages Act*, even more so now that new rights and obligations will need to be clarified in the coming months with the application of the *Use of French in Federally Regulated Private Businesses Act*. Finally, I hope that federal institutions, OLMCs, and provincial and territorial governments will cooperate more closely so that both official languages can take their rightful place alongside Indigenous languages in Canada’s shared experience and identity. Ensuring the vitality of OLMCs means investing in a Canada that is diverse, open and respectful, not only to its people, but also to its history and the future that we are shaping together.

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<sup>17</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, [Official Languages Tracking Survey 2021: Final Report](#), 2022, p. 23.