



Education Research Brief no. 7

OUTMIGRATION OF QUEBEC'S ENGLISH-SPEAKING YOUTH

Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN)

By Nadine Ciamarra and Patricia Lamarre
With Patrick Donovan and Lorraine O'Donnell



Across Canada, the percentage of young people in the total population is in decline.

In 2020, youth in the 15-29 age group represented 19% of the Canadian population, and this proportion is projected to shrink further in the coming years (Statistics Canada, 2020). In Quebec, the proportion of 15-29 year olds gradually declined from 20.3% in 1996 to 17.8% in 2016 (Institut de la statistique du Québec [ISQ], 2021). English-speaking youth in Quebec are proportionally more numerous, but also declined from 21.7% in 1996 to 20.5% in 2016, or 225,585 people¹ (Statistics Canada, 1996; Pocock, 2018).

A factor in the decline of Quebec's English-speaking youth is outmigration. This has been a concern for some time now. It affects the vitality not only of the English-speaking community but of Quebec's entire population, since it represents the loss of valuable human resources within the province (Floch & Pocock, 2012; see also Lamarre, 2012; Sioufi & Bourhis, 2018).

Outmigration is an issue overall for the province.² Every year between 1972 and 2018, more people of all ages and linguistic groups left Quebec than moved into the province from other parts of Canada. In fact, between 1972 and 2020, the difference between the number of people who left Quebec and those who entered was 601,987 (ISQ, 2020a).

Quebec English Speakers and French Speakers in 2016

1 097 925
Total English Speakers

225 585
English Speakers Aged 15-29

6 795 280
Total French Speakers

1 188 525
French Speakers Aged 15-29

Source: 2016 First Official Language Spoken (FOLS) data from Pocock, 2018

¹ In comparison, there were 1,188,525 French-speaking youth (first official language spoken), who made up 17.5% of the majority linguistic group (Pocock, 2018).

² For a discussion of outmigration for Quebec within the context of interprovincial migration overall in Canada, including data on other provinces with net population loss through interprovincial migration, see Paillé, 2021 (in press).

If we examine youth and interprovincial migration, we see that the 15-29 age group represented 35.2% of the population that entered and 31.7% of the population that left Quebec in 2019-2020, and that a higher percentage of 20-29 year olds left than entered (ISQ, 2020b).

These statistics can likely be explained to some extent as youth coming to study in the province. In a survey of students from Quebec's three English-language universities, Holley (2017) reported that, of the 455 survey respondents (which included Quebec-born students, students from the rest of Canada, and international students), 46% said they intended to stay in Quebec after they graduated, and 18% were unsure. Many students from the rest of Canada and abroad come to study in the province but leave after graduation, contributing only temporarily to the vitality of Quebec's official language minority (OLM).

There are several key push and pull³ factors that stand out in the research on youth migration. For the OLM population in rural and remote regions, the lack of English-language post-secondary education opportunities, paired with career opportunities in urban areas or other provinces, discourage secondary school graduates from remaining in their home region to study or work (Advisory Board on English Education [ABEE], 2018). Holley (2017) found that the **factors influencing student retention after university graduation consisted (in no particular order) of job opportunities, friends, a safe place to live, and the cost of living**. Quebec-born students were primarily concerned by the cost of living and having a good group of friends. Sioufi and Bourhis (2018) also note that linguistic tensions⁴ in Quebec were frequently cited among English speakers as push factors. While most English speakers in Quebec under 24 are highly bilingual,⁵ they are at a disadvantage when it comes to employment. Drawing on the findings of Floch, the ABEE (2018) states that many "report that there is a glass ceiling that makes it difficult for them to establish a professional space in Québec (p. 22) ... [and therefore], upward mobility has become outward mobility for well-educated English speakers" (p. 24). This reality may be partly explained by their sense of having inadequate French-language skills for the working world and feeling unappreciated for the skills that they do possess (ABEE, 2018). Furthermore, bilingual English speakers with a high education level might see better opportunities in the larger Canadian and global market, where salaries tend to be higher (ABEE, 2018; Clemens, Labrie & Emes, 2016).

³ According to Sioufi & Bourhis (2018), push factors are reasons that drive people to leave their place of origin and migrate elsewhere (e.g., economic hardship, linguistic tensions, and corruption), and pull factors are reasons that attract individuals to new areas (e.g., high quality of life, career opportunities, and freedom).

⁴ These include "avoiding linguistic tensions, being victim of collective discrimination, perceiving English-French relations as zero-sum, and endorsing the separation acculturation orientation" (p. 1).

⁵ See Brief no. 5 in this series.

A recent report sheds further light on the issue (Crossland & Brown, 2021). It indicates that **14% of health and social services career program students⁶ at English-language CEGEPs intend to work outside Quebec following completion of studies.** Of respondents with a permanent address in the Montreal census metropolitan area, 12% of them planned to leave the province for work, six times the 2% who considered moving to another Quebec region for work. The top five reasons for respondents choosing to leave the province were language proficiency (22%), possibility of employment (17%), lifestyle (17%), financial reasons (13%), community (9%), family/friends (8%), culture (7%), other (3%), and moving closer to home (3%). The report authors state, “[t]his seems a clear call for proactive measures to increase access to employment in Quebec’s regions, to raise awareness of those regional employment opportunities, and to provide for increased assistance in supplementary French-language proficiency training” (Crossland & Brown, 2021, p. 45).

Reasons English-speaking youth may choose to leave region or province



Source: Holley, 2017; Sioufi & Bourhis, 2018

The outmigration of educated youth from the province and from Quebec’s regions to Montreal impacts the sociodemographic composition of Quebec’s English-speaking communities. For example, in the education sector, meeting the needs of Anglophone “students from low socioeconomic backgrounds could become an increasingly important issue ... as those who are leaving the province are generally those with economic mobility, educational credentials and bilingual skills” (Lamarre, 2012, p. 187).

This point is supported when we look at **unemployment and low-income cut off rates, which are higher for English-speaking youth.** The overall unemployment rate among Quebec’s youth has decreased considerably from 1998 to 2016 (14% to 10.5%) (ISQ, 2019), and continued to fall until the 2020 pandemic hit. The unemployment rate, however, was higher among English speakers (13.3%) than Francophones (9.8%) in the 15-29-year-old age group in 2016. Among English-speaking youth, 68.2% were living on a low income, as opposed to 59.5% of French-speaking youth, and 23.6% were living below the low-income cut off, compared with 14.9% of French-speaking youth (Pocock, 2018).

In terms of salaries, Quebecers in general had lower median salaries than the Canadian median in 2015. Indeed, women and men between the ages of 25 and 64 with a bachelor’s degree had lower median annual salaries in Quebec (\$63,305 and \$75,107, respectively) than in Canada (\$68,342 and \$82,082) (Statistics Canada, 2017). Further discrepancies in salaries can be seen between youth from Quebec’s different language communities: only 6.5% of English-speaking youth (age 15 to 29) in Quebec had an income of \$50,000 or more, in comparison to 8.6% of French-speaking youth (Pocock, 2018), despite their higher education levels. When we look to English-speaking youth, 20.4% of them had a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2016, in comparison to 13.9% for French-speaking youth (Pocock, 2018).

In summary, although Quebec’s English-speaking youth are more bilingual and educated than in the past, they not only earn less than their Francophone counterparts, but they also seem to have a harder time finding employment in their field. These are likely among the many factors contributing to why many choose to leave the province to find economic opportunities elsewhere, or express their intention to do so.

⁶ Note that respondents to this survey (Crossland & Brown, 2021) include people with permanent addresses inside and outside Quebec and people who declared their main language as either English, French, or other.

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Authors: [Nadine Ciamarra](#), M.A., Grad.Dip., and [Patricia Lamarre](#), Ph.D., with [Patrick Donovan](#), Ph.D., and [Lorraine O'Donnell](#), Ph.D.

Management and production: [Lorraine O'Donnell](#) or [Patrick Donovan](#).

Linguistic revision: [Linda Arui](#)

Design template and layout: [Fabian Will](#)

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