

PREBUDGETARY  
CONSULTATION  
Network priorities

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## CONTEXT

A recent report by the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) identifies the following challenges facing Québec's English-speaking communities when it comes to poverty and employment:<sup>1</sup>

- The provincial poverty rate for English speakers is 10.0%, almost twice as high as that of French speakers (5.8%).
  - English-speaking youth aged 15 to 24 are more than twice as likely (16.8% vs. 8.1%) than their Francophone counterparts to experience poverty.
- Data on low-income earners within the linguistic groups demonstrates that English speakers are twice as likely to live under the low-income cut-off (LICO) compared to French speakers.
  - 8.9% of Québec's English-speaking population live under the LICO threshold, compared to 4.5% of French speakers.
- English speakers experience an unemployment rate of 10.9%, four percentage points higher than French speakers' 6.9%.
  - This difference has doubled since the 2016 census, when the gap was two percentage points.
  - Among English speakers, youth aged 15-24 experience the highest unemployment rate, at 17.4%, followed by individuals aged 65+, with an unemployment rate of 12.7%.
- English speakers have a median after-tax income \$2,800 lower than French speakers and a median employment income \$5,200 less than French speakers.
  - The gap in median employment income between English and French speakers has widened significantly over the last five years; it was previously \$2,648 in the 2016 census.

With higher rates of unemployment across regions, and higher rates of poverty in every region except the Côte-Nord, there is significant data

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<sup>1</sup>PERT. 2023 A Snapshot of Poverty Among Québec's English-Speaking Communities., 12

indicating that Québec's English-speaking communities (especially workers from some of the country's key industries experiencing substantial change) need substantial support to learn new skills and trades. English speakers in the regions need access to French language training for all levels of learners for example, to increase fluency, mitigate barriers to education, increase employability and social participation, as well as to access critical support and services that are increasingly available in French only.

## ISSUES

The following issues have been brought to light by RDN's member organizations during general consultations, by recipients of the 2022-2024 Employment Strategy through feedback gathered as part of the program's Community of Practice, or through the analysis of Census 2021 data.

(1) Even though more than one third (36.5%) of the 1, 253, 578 English speakers in Québec live in regions outside of Montreal and Laval, there is a significant lack of infrastructure belonging to English-speaking communities in regions that aren't near Québec's major urban centres. In more than a handful of regions, English public schools and regional non-profit organizations are the only remaining physical structures.

- Non-profit organizations with regional mandates to support the vitality of English-speaking Québécois need support to strengthen their financial, human, and legal resources to be regarded as quality employers in the current labour market and retain qualified staff to effectively accomplish their mandates in support of vulnerable populations.
- Increasingly, these organizations require support accessing diversified funding opportunities, and finding administrative efficiencies to mitigate gaps in the services available to their communities as demands increase and provincial employment resources are slashed.

(2) Regional English-speaking communities in Québec often lack the critical mass required for significant investments, factors contributing to this include:

- The reality that English-language post-secondary education is largely unavailable in regions without large urban centres, forcing young people to leave regional communities to pursue studies.
- The decline of certain key resource-based industries and subsequent decline in employment opportunities for English speakers with linked skillsets and/or limited language skills in those regions.
- The lack of housing and support services in certain regions makes them less viable for current residents and less attractive to newcomers.

(3) Organizations that are members of the Regional Development Network (RDN) working to support regional English-speaking communities have expressed that employment assistance service deficits in their regions mean that critical needs expressed by English speakers outside of Montreal and Laval related to employability are unaddressed or under-addressed:

- There remain a large proportion of the organizations mandated by Québec to offer employment assistance services (such as employment counselling, résumé writing, interview skills, job search skills and job placement services) who lack the capacity to effectively support English-speaking clients.
- This year, regions such as the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine, where the unemployment rate for English speakers is almost three times higher than that of French speakers and more than double the provincial rate, saw provincial funding for employment assistance support service providers cut 10% to 33%; English service offers were immediately ended by organizations that could no longer support them financially.
- Programs developed for urban populations with higher base levels and that are delivered by organizations with no physical presence or long-standing ties to their communities make it difficult for regional

community organizations to mobilize community use of some support services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Regional English-speaking organizations are experts on the vulnerable populations within their communities and well-positioned to provide additional support for the development of complimentary employment and employability services because of their long-standing relationships and increasing credibility with their Francophone service provider counterparts. Through their work at the direct community level, regional organizations supporting Québec's English-speaking communities not only manage to fill gaps where there are service deficits, but they also promote greater collaboration between English- and French-speaking community organizations offering employment assistance services, including those dedicated to young people and other vulnerable segments of the population.

The organizations currently funded by the strategy provide additional support for the continued development of both employment assistance services and relationships among service providers and English-speaking Quebecers. In doing so, they foster greater collaboration between English-speaking community organizations and other organizations offering employment services, including those dedicated to youth and other vulnerable clientele.

- The aim being to attract more young people and vulnerable clientele to the services and improve their employability.

The increased resources available under the Employment Strategy will strengthen the capacity of recipient organizations to pursue ongoing program objectives, and help ensure strong, sustained relationships with service providers in the regions over time. The government has the opportunity to partner with the community to support the sector's attempts to overcome the labour shortage.

- The current Employment Strategy envelope must be increased so that the minimum funding available to beneficiaries enables them to work on developing the same orientations for their communities as those

set out by **Emploi Québec** in the **Public Employment Services Action Plan**:

- Gather, analyze, and disseminate relevant labor market information that considers labour shortages, digital transformation, and the transition to a greener economy.
- Train the unemployed and enhance the skills of employed workers.
- Outreach to under-represented populations in the labor market and adaptation of services to meet their specific needs.
- Prioritize actions with a lasting impact.
- Mobilize labor market partners to meet the challenges of a changing labor market.

**Proposed budget:** 1.4 million annually.

## CONCLUSION

Increasing the resources available to strengthen the capacity of recipient organizations to pursue community support initiatives related to employment assistance will support vulnerable jobseekers whose needs are not being met by existing service providers; to this effect, the government has the opportunity to collaborate with the English-speaking regional communities in support of its efforts to overcome the labour shortage.

The current provincial employment context will require more and more regional English-speaking organizations to develop and deliver complimentary services to ensure that vulnerable English speakers have access to critical employment assistance support services, these community-led initiatives will require investments that respect regional realities and are reinforced by a trusted backbone organization with proven ability to support their successful deployment in some of the province's most marginalized communities.