



PERT PROVINCIAL
EMPLOYMENT
ROUNDTABLE

**Response to ESDC's Building
Canada Strong: Youth in the Labour
Market National Engagement**

Introduction

The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is pleased to participate in Employment and Social Development Canada’s national engagement on youth employment to share our insights on the challenges facing young people in Québec’s labour market. While young Quebecers are facing growing employment and economic challenges as a whole, English-speaking youth are experiencing unique labour market challenges related to their status as a linguistic minority in Québec. In this brief, we share findings from custom Census data and perspectives from our 2024 consultations and survey of English-speaking youth aged 15-34 in Québec. These insights provide the Government of Canada with critical perspectives directly from English-speaking youth, as well as highlight the strategies and initiatives needed to help put them on successful employment pathways.

English-speaking youth in Québec

Population and labour force participation

English-speaking youth (15-34) in Québec represent a “minority within a minority”¹, being an official linguistic minority community (OLMC) within Québec’s French-speaking majority. They represent 4% of the province’s population, compared to 19% for French-speaking youth. Despite being a smaller demographic group, English-speaking youth represent a large proportion of Québec’s English-speaking population (28%).²

They also demonstrate weaker ties to the labour market compared to French-speaking youth; the labour force participation rate for English-speaking youth lags behind their French-speaking peers by 7 percentage points (72% compared to 79%).³ This gap is even wider for English-speaking youth aged 15-24, who lag 9 percentage points behind French-speaking peers.

Linguistic profile

English-speaking youth are highly bilingual, particularly the younger cohort aged 15-24, who are more likely to be bilingual than their French-speaking peers (74% compared to 66%).⁴ Despite this high rate of bilingualism, language remains the primary barrier to entering and retaining employment in Québec. Our research showed that half of the youth surveyed felt

¹ Pocock, J. (2024). [Socio-demographic profile of Québec’s English-speaking youth aged 15-29](#). CHSSN.

² Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

that their French skills were not high enough for the jobs they want (55% overall, including 33% who said this was very true as a current barrier for them).⁵ These anxieties about their French language levels reflected consultation findings that they lacked confidence to speak French at work, especially with regard to workplace pressures to speak “the right French” and uncertainty about proficiency expectations. Despite this, English-speaking youth expressed a sense of pride in their ability to speak French and motivation to speak French at work.

Education

English-speaking youth complete high school at slightly higher rates than their French-speaking peers (4 percentage points higher).⁶ However, they fall behind during the transition to post-secondary education; French-speaking youth are more likely to hold a post-secondary degree (10 percentage points higher). This suggests a “transition gap” where English-speaking youth may be leaving the province for education, delaying or choosing not to pursue post-secondary education after high school.

Our consultations with English-speaking youth revealed language-related anxieties in their education and career planning, including concerns about whether their French language levels were adequate to succeed academically in a French-language university.

Unemployment and employment rates

English-speaking youth face an unemployment rate of 13%, nearly double that of French-speaking youth (8%). The situation is most acute for younger youth (15-24), who face an unemployment rate of 17% compared to 11% for their Francophone peers. This gap has persisted for years: unemployment rates among English-speaking youth ages 15-24 were 16% according to the 2016 Census, compared to 12% among their French-speaking peers that year.⁷

Employment rates among youth indicate both labour market challenges and opportunities: English-speaking youth have an employment rate of 63%, compared to 73% for French-speaking youth.⁸

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kuzviwanza, S. (2022). [Employment Profile of English Speakers in Québec](#). PERT.

⁸ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y's 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

Income

Census 2021 data show persistent income gaps between English- and French-speaking youth in Québec that widen with age.⁹

- Age 15-24: English-speaking youth earn a median employment income of \$8,800—about \$2,100 less than their French-speaking peers (81 cents per dollar).
- Age 25-34: English-speaking youth earned \$33,200, roughly \$6,000 less (85 cents per dollar).

Employment type

Across Québec, English-speaking youth lag their French-speaking peers in permanent jobs by 4 percentage points, and lead in part-time jobs by 2 percentage points.¹⁰ English-speaking youth in the regions outside Montréal and Laval have 6 percentage points fewer permanent roles and 5 percentage points more part-time roles than French-speaking youth.¹¹

Obstacles and barriers facing English-speaking youth in finding and maintaining employment

Linguistic barriers

Language is the most significant structural barrier facing English-speaking youth in Québec. We conducted focus groups with 70 youth and surveyed over 200¹², and found that 55% of English-speaking youth surveyed indicated that they feel their French skills are insufficient for the jobs they want. These linguistic barriers limit not only their job opportunities but also their ability to build professional connections and access employment services.

Discouragement in the job market

Three out of four youth surveyed identified a "discouraging job market" as a barrier to getting the jobs they want.¹³ This is compounded by softening hiring demand, increased competition for positions, and a rapidly changing labour market. For example, youth described applying

⁹ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y's 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² PERT's 2024-2025 research project (Report forthcoming), *Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences*, conducted in collaboration with Youth 4 Youth Québec explored the employment status, experiences, and needs of English-speaking youth ages 15-34 in Québec, focusing on factors shaping their employment journeys and outlooks. The study combined a review of qualitative studies, analysis of Census 2021 data and original research findings from consultations with 70 youth across several regions, and a regionally representative survey of 239 youth.

¹³ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y's 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

for many postings and not hearing back from employers, as well as challenges navigating the strict French language requirements for most jobs in Québec.¹⁴

Regional disparities

Youth from non-urban regions face a distinct lack of employment opportunities. In regions like Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Côte-Nord, unemployment rates for English-speaking youth skyrocket to 28% and 22%, respectively.¹⁵ In our consultations with youth, we found that those from the regions face particular challenges, such as limited local job options, transportation barriers, and a lack of access to English-language services.

Mental health and well-being

Mental health is a critical, self-reported barrier. When asked whether their health, mental health, stress, or experiences with disability were preventing them from getting jobs, a third of youth (33%) indicated that this felt ‘very true’ for them. Altogether, roughly half of the youth reported struggling with their health or well-being.

Race and intersectional barriers

Census 2021 data show that racialized youth in Québec have lower labour force participation than white Quebecer youth. Racialized English-speaking youth have a labour force participation rate of 70%, similar to that of racialized French-speaking youth (71%). This is lower than the rates for white English-speaking youth (73%) and white French-speaking youth (80%).¹⁶ This suggests that racialization may be a stronger barrier to labour market entry than language.

In our survey, 53% of English-speaking youth, 60% of white English-speaking youth, and 68% of Canadian-born English-speaking youth felt optimistic about their career prospects in Québec over the long term, while only 45% of racialized and 48% of immigrant youth respondents did.¹⁷

Networks and mentorship

Over half of the youth surveyed (57%) cited a lack of career support and professional connections as a top barrier to employment. Unlike their Francophone peers, who may have

¹⁴ The updating of the *French Language Charter* (Bill 96) has changed employers’ hiring practices for linguistic minorities, with some employers reporting that they reduced or stopped hiring English speakers entirely. See, Leger. (2025). [Employer Perceptions of English-speaking Employees](#). (CCQEA).

¹⁵ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

¹⁶ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

¹⁷ Ibid.

established local networks, English-speaking youth often lack the ‘social capital’ to access the hidden job market. This challenge extends to a lack of mentorship, where English-speaking youth lack access to professional mentors, particularly those within French-speaking communities. In our survey, 40% of youth expressed a high interest in mentorship programs.

Credential recognition & overqualification

A third of English-speaking youth (35%) surveyed cited credential recognition as a barrier to accessing employment.¹⁸ English-speaking youth are also more likely to be overqualified in their jobs than French speakers (21% compared to 13%).¹⁹

Gaps in skills, employment support and services for youth

Tailored programs

Governments at the provincial and federal levels have consistently failed to address the heightened unemployment of English-speaking youth in the province. Research shows that English-speaking youth have lower access to employment services relevant to their linguistic and employment needs to obtain timely career guidance.^{20 21}

English-speaking youth are not listed as a targeted employment group by the provincial government, and there is a lack of targeted federal programs. These programs need to be tailored to reflect the reality of youth, integrating French-language training with skills training, networking and job search support to help them navigate the evolving labour market context.

Federal and provincial funding

There is a major gap in funding reaching minority communities. Organizations providing employment support to English speakers have expressed concern about the flow and access of funds for programs, particularly given the various agreements between the federal and provincial governments. In a 2025 survey of 10 employment service providers for English-speaking clients in Québec, only 1 organization reported having received funding from the provincial Jeunes en mouvement vers l'emploi (JMVE) program. This suggests a

¹⁸ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y's 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kuzviwanza, S. et al. (2021). 2021 Employment Survey of English-Speaking Quebecers & Organizations. PERT.

²¹ Wilson, J. (July 22, 2024). Graduates with advanced degrees struggle to find jobs in Québec: report. Human Resources Director (HRD).

lack of institutional support for English-speaking youth, particularly programs that will address their specific needs.

Regional service deserts

In consultations, youth in rural areas reported a distinct lack of specific employment support services compared to those in urban centres. While most knew of employment programs, they often could not find the specific type of support they needed locally.^{22 23}

Effective programs to help put English-speaking youth on successful employment pathways and reduce unemployment

French language training & work placements

English-speaking youth benefit from programs that combine French language training with paid work placements. In our survey, 73% of youth indicated that they needed French language courses to improve their employment outcomes, but the language training had to be practical and embedded in employment.²⁴ Additionally, half of the youth surveyed identified employer-sponsored training as ‘very helpful’, highlighting its importance in addition to classroom learning.²⁵

Mentorship & networking

Given the challenges of networking and mentorship among English-speaking youth, programs specifically aimed at addressing this need are vital. In 2024, PERT launched Circonflexe, a linguistic mentorship program that pairs French-speaking mentors with English-speaking mentees to address both the language-learning and mentorship needs of English speakers. In its first cohort, we welcomed 180 participants across 15 regions, developed 22 partnerships, and hosted 16 networking events, allowing more than 900 attendees to expand their professional networks or practice their French in a professional setting. We’ve also recently launched the second cohort, and to date, have received over 200 mentor applications and over 250 mentee applications. However, long-term funding for this

²² Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

²³ Also see PERT’s forthcoming (2026) report, Need to Know, Want to Know: English Speakers and the Struggle to Learn French in Québec’s Regions.

²⁴ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

²⁵ Forthcoming report from PERT and Y4Y’s 2024-2025 research project, Québec English-Speaking Youth Employment Experiences.

and similar programs remains a challenge, highlighting the need for a long-term strategy to invest in these types of critical initiatives.

Dedicated community-led funding streams for OLMC youth

The federal government must ensure that funds intended for youth employment in Québec include specific, earmarked allocations for the English-speaking community. These funds should flow directly to community organizations that can deliver tailored, bilingual support services that address the unique regional and linguistic barriers identified above. Without this targeted approach, English-speaking youth will continue to fall through the cracks of broad employment programs at the provincial and federal levels.

About PERT

The Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) is a non-profit organization working to address the employment challenges and opportunities of the English-speaking communities across Québec. Through policy & research, development, and engagement efforts, we collaborate with diverse partners including regional and community organizations, educational institutions, employment service providers, employers, and government. PERT is dedicated to building and strengthening employment support networks and ensuring inclusion in Québec's labour market for generations to come.



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