

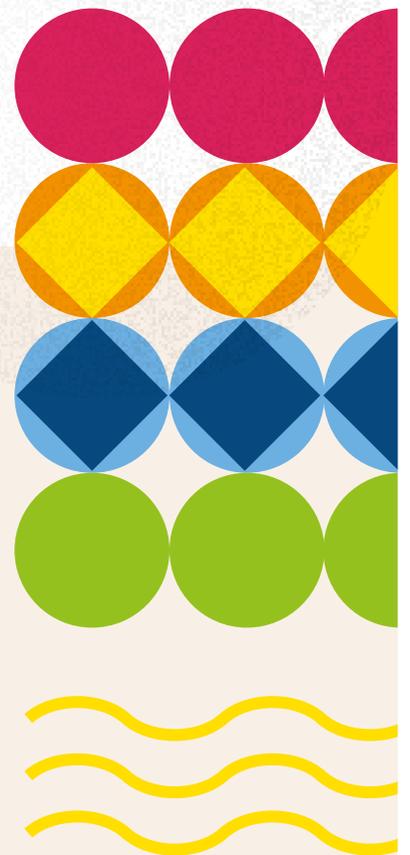
Revitalizing the **Francophonie and Official Languages** in Canada

Election Priorities for Canada's
Francophone and Acadian
Communities

About us

Created in 1975, the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada* is the national voice of 2.7 million French-speaking Canadians who live in Francophone and Acadian minority communities across nine provinces and three territories. The federation's 20 members include 12 associations representing Francophones at the provincial or territorial level, as well as eight national organizations representing specific sectors or groups (literacy, culture, justice, seniors, youth, women, early childhood, colleges).

Francophone and Acadian minority communities are found in all federal ridings outside Quebec. They are home to people who can live their everyday lives in French, thanks to a network of community and cultural organizations, schools and post-secondary institutions, healthcare services and businesses. The voting decisions of people in these communities are influenced by the positions candidates and parties take on language issues.



Election priorities

1 A recovery plan for Francophone and Acadian minority communities

What's at stake

The pandemic has weakened Canada's Francophonie, along with the country's linguistic duality. The wide-ranging impacts of the situation include the following:

- **The French language and the communities that speak it have suffered a loss of vitality.**
 - Various cultural and community organizations that supported the everyday vitality of French have had to suspend their programming and now face an uncertain future.
 - Online learning has undermined the linguistic confidence of many young people, often leading to a decline in language skills.
 - The social and economic impacts of the pandemic have been disproportionately felt by certain specific groups, including seniors, women, immigrants and members of racialized communities, as well as artists and cultural workers.
- **Canada's network of Francophone associations has lost its most valuable asset**, namely volunteers.
- **Multi-service centres**, including those that depended on income from performance venues to fund childcare services, **have been destabilized**.

Alongside the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities continue to face other challenges that threaten their very existence:

- Various key sectors (economic, education, health, early childhood, community, culture, public service) have experienced **labour shortages**.
- **Many French-language post-secondary institutions face serious financial challenges.** As a result, some students have had no choice but to enroll in English-language programs.
- **Francophone immigration to minority language communities has stagnated.** Since 2003, the federal government has consistently failed to meet its Francophone immigration targets, leading to a decline in the demographic weight of the Canadian Francophonie over the past two decades.
- **French-language childcare spaces are in short supply**, forcing Francophone parents to enroll their children in English-language centres—a trend that directly contributes to assimilation.

The solution

In terms of a post-COVID recovery, we hope your party will commit to specific, tailored, and robust support measures designed to help Francophone minority communities restore the economic, social and cultural resources lost during the pandemic.

In particular, such measures should include:

Concrete solutions to address not only the shortage of French-speaking and bilingual workers in several development sectors, but also the continuing education needs of such workers in all regions of the country.

Investments to support the recovery of community and cultural organizations and institutions based in the Canadian Francophonie.

A permanent fund to support the development of French-language post-secondary institutions within minority language communities.

Dedicated funding for French-language early childhood services in the context of a new national childcare program.

New mechanisms for restoring and increasing the demographic weight of the Francophonie as part of a forward-looking and effective Francophone immigration policy.

A commitment to providing all Canadians with universal access to learning French.

Protecting current investments in the *Action Plan for Official Languages* and securing substantial additional funding for the next plan in 2023-2028.

2 Modernization of the *Official Languages Act (OLA)*

What's at stake

The OLA has not been thoroughly updated since 1988. As a result, it no longer reflects the realities of present-day Canada or the needs of the country's Francophone minority communities.

There has been an overall loss of momentum in terms of linguistic duality within the federal administration. As a result, the status of French as an official language—equal to English—has been called into question.

Because not all Canadian citizens have the opportunity to learn French, knowledge of the country's two official languages has stagnated among non-Francophones.

For the past three years, all federal parties have agreed on the importance of promptly modernizing the OLA. Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities have been calling for such a step for several years.

On June 15, 2021, the government introduced Bill C-32: *An Act to amend the Official Languages Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts*. The proposed legislation included several provisions that the Canadian Francophonie has been seeking, such as the following:

- Acknowledging the unique situation of French in Canada and North America.
- Recognizing the need for differentiated measures to achieve substantive equality between the country's two official languages.
- Securing the right to be heard before the Supreme Court in either official language without the need for an interpreter.
- Protecting key institutions based in Francophone minority communities, including post-secondary and cultural institutions.
- Protecting the Court Challenges Program.
- Strengthening positive measures to support the development of official language minority communities.

However, the bill lacked certain provisions that Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities see as essential for truly achieving the goals of the OLA.

The solution

Canada's Francophone and Acadian communities call on the next government to commit to introducing a bill to modernize the OLA within 100 days of taking office. Such a bill should include the main elements of Bill C-32, along with the following additional measures:

Designating the Treasury Board as the sole central coordinating agency responsible for overseeing the implementation of the OLA:

The government's proposal focused on strengthening the role of Canadian Heritage in the implementation of the OLA, with additional support from the Treasury Board. The FCFA, which has been observing how the federal administration operates for some five decades, considers this approach unacceptable. Above all, **a sole central coordinating agency** must be designated to oversee the implementation of the OLA. The communities we represent consistently deem this the most important measure to be included in a modernized OLA.

Expanding the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages:

The Commissioner's **power to issue orders** must be extended to Part VII of the OLA. Furthermore, the Commissioner must be able to impose **monetary penalties**. These expanded powers are essential both for establishing credibility when dealing with federal institutions and for ensuring the latter's compliance with the OLA.

Strengthening Part VII of the OLA:

Part VII deals directly with the development of official language minority communities. For the time being, the government prefers to define the obligations stemming from Part VII by way of a regulation. Nevertheless, the FCFA believes that the principle of "positive measures" needs to be clarified in the wording of the OLA itself, along with other guiding principles for interpreting Part VII. These include:

- A framework for **community consultations** and for defining their role in the implementation of the OLA.
- A requirement to negotiate **binding language clauses** in agreements, including transfer agreements, with provinces and territories.
- Recognition of **the restorative potential of positive measures** and the principle of substantive equality.

Committing to restoring and increasing Francophone immigration across Canada:

New provisions included in the bill required the federal government to adopt a Francophone immigration policy. The FCFA believes that such a policy needs to be clearly tied to the goal of restoring and **increasing the demographic weight of the Canadian Francophonie**, including Quebec.

Our network is here for you!

Thank you for reading this summary of the Canadian Francophonie's election priorities. We would be happy to provide you with any additional information you may require. We can also put you in contact with leaders of member organizations active in your region or in a particular sector.

We truly appreciate your contribution to political life in our country.
Best of luck in the election campaign!

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