



Poverty and Social Exclusion in Quebec

Quebec's English-speaking Communities

A Brief submitted by the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) in contribution to the development of the third Action Plan to combat poverty and social exclusion by the Government of Quebec

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The *Community Health and Social Services Network* (CHSSN) submits the following brief in the interest of contributing to the development of the third generation of measures to be included in the government Action Plan to improve the situation of individuals and families living in poverty and social exclusion in Quebec.

English-language Communities among the Many Faces of Quebec Poverty

In their 2012 study of the Quebec population, the *Institut Nationale de Santé Publique du Quebec* (INSPQ) draws attention to the socioeconomic status of its English-speaking communities. Using findings from the 1991 and 2006 Census of Canada, their analysis concludes “*not only that Anglophones have lost a relative socioeconomic advantage in comparison with Francophones, but also there are widening gaps within the Anglophone population*” (INSPQ, 2012; 1). For the purpose of the INSPQ study, socioeconomic status (SES) is analyzed using four dimensions; education, labour force activity, income and low-income cut-offs (LICOs) as recommended by *Centre d’étude sur la pauvreté et l’exclusion* (CEPE) for measuring poverty in Quebec. Overall, “*...Anglophones are proportionally more likely to live below the LICOs and to experience unemployment*” (INSPQ, 2012: 12).

The INSPQ study also examined income inequality within the Anglophone population itself, as it is strongly associated with poorer health status, lower life expectancy and lower levels of social cohesion and inclusion. Among Anglophones, inequality in income distribution increased markedly between 1991 and 2006. Regional and gender income disparities were also greater among English speakers than French speakers. In particular, the English-speaking communities residing in the Montréal CMA (some 85% of Quebec’s English-speaking population) stand out markedly for much higher income disparity indexes than those living in other geographical areas, particularly among men, and the gap between rich and poor has also grown larger over time (INSPQ, 2012; 21- 27).

Not surprisingly, the 2012 INSPQ study warns that the effects of the decline in socioeconomic status and growing division between rich and poor among its English-speaking communities, both in terms of social problems and health needs, will be increasingly felt by all Quebec citizens across the province in coming years. An understanding of this trend is crucial to effective government planning and policy concerned with combatting poverty and social exclusion in our era. The difference in the socioeconomic situations of Quebec’s two major language communities must be taken into account if action on behalf of the poor and socially excluded is to successfully reach some of its most vulnerable citizens.

While the English-speaking communities of Quebec include a substantial 1,046,498 Quebecers representing 13% of its citizenry, there is not always strength in numbers. Economic inequalities and regional disparities are adding to the challenges provincial and regional organizations and networks already face as leaders in promoting the interests and well-being of Quebec’s minority English-language population. “Minority” in the present context bears no resemblance to a wealthy and cohesive elite secure in its capacity to care for its own. It refers to a diverse group with a long history in Quebec characterized by markedly growing numbers of poor and income inequalities that increasingly challenge their efforts to mobilize on their own behalf.

Persistent Low Socio-economic Status and Social Exclusion

Where does Quebec's English-speaking community stand when the evidence-base is brought up to date?

The composite measure for socio-economic status developed by *Patrimoine canadien/Canadian Heritage* (PCH) in 2015 using the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) points to the continuing prevalence of low socioeconomic status among Quebec's English-speaking communities (Canadian Heritage, 2015). Looking across the 76 sub-provincial regions of Canada, including Quebec's administrative regions, English-speaking communities within Quebec and French-speaking communities outside of Quebec were assessed for their SES and ranked accordingly.

At a provincial level, Quebec's English-speakers displayed the second highest level of socio-economic vulnerability when aspects such as low education levels, unemployment and labour force participation and low income tendencies are analyzed. On a regional basis, very high levels of socio-economic vulnerability are observed in the English-speaking populations in Quebec's Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine, Nord-du-Quebec¹, Abitibi –Témiscamingue, Cote-Nord and Estrie regions when these key socio-economic indicators are analyzed. These five regions are ranked among the top ten in terms of the measure for poverty when all Official language Minority Communities across Canada are taken into consideration.

Living below LICO

According to the 2011 NHS, 21.6% of Quebec's English-language population is living below LICO compared to 16.3% of Francophones. The greatest gap between minority and majority language populations in terms of this measure of poverty is evident in the 25-44 years age group - a life stage typically characterized by entry to the job market and establishment of a household. Among English-speakers aged 25-44, 23.2% are living below LICO compared to 14.7% of French-speakers of the same age.

Unemployment

Quebec's English speakers continue to show much higher unemployment rates when compared to Francophones (9.4% compared to 6.9%). In 2011, the rate of unemployment among Anglophones is higher than Francophones in 11 of 15 Quebec regions. In certain regions like the Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine, the percentage of unemployed English speakers (26.5%) was much higher than the provincial norm for Quebec's English-speaking communities (9.4%) and higher than the rate for the Francophone population living in the same territory (14.8%). In the region of Montreal, 12.4% of English-speakers are unemployed compared to 9.4% of French speakers (CHSSN, 2014).

Furthermore, the unemployment gap has grown between Quebec's language communities in recent years and is more marked among young workers 15-24 (16.9%) and 25-44 (8.7%) than for the older workers in the 45-64 age group (7.7%) (Canadian Heritage, 2015). Among 25-44 year olds, 17.5% of English-speakers are out of the labour force compared to 11.8 % of French speakers.

¹ It should be noted that the population of Northern Quebec is primarily Cree and Inuit.

Intergenerational decline in levels of social integration and sense of belonging

English-speaking youth and young parents today are more likely than the youth of yesterday to face long-term unemployment. The past tendency of Quebec's minority English-language communities to surpass the majority in terms of high levels of high educational attainment has also all but disappeared among the younger age cohorts. The effects of persistent economic disadvantage are no doubt evident in probes like the 2011-2012 *Canadian Community Health Survey* which reveals that "English-speaking youth (15-24) score low on many mental and emotional health indicators compared to other age groups within their language community and compared to Francophones of the same age...males score lower than females on many indicators" (CHSSN, 2015; 10). These include low scores on indicators for social integration, sense of belonging, emotional attachment, high levels of stress and anxiety, low-self-esteem and low scores on feeling skills and competencies are recognized.

High levels of CEPE Vulnerable Groups

Groulx, for *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion* (CÉPE, 2011; 11), points out that new immigrants and people with physical limitations, like the frail elderly, are among the groups that are vulnerable to the persistence of low income and social exclusion. Both these groups form a markedly substantial portion of Quebec's English-speaking communities.

According to the 2011 NHS, arrivals from outside Quebec (international and interprovincial) within the prior 5 year period represented 10.1% of the English-speaking population compared to 2.9% of the Francophone group. The difference between the minority and majority language populations with respect to newcomers is even higher in some regions like the Capitale-Nationale region (16.6% of English-speakers compared to 2.0% of French-speakers), the Outaouais (14.1% compared to 4.3%) and Montreal (12.4% compared to 9.3%).

A 2013 study of Quebec's English-speaking seniors conducted by *Quebec's Community Groups Network* (QCGN) and funded by Quebec's *Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés* tells us that there are 268,696 English speakers who are 55 years of age or over living in the province. They form a group larger than the population of Prince Edward Island and represent more than a quarter (25.4%) of Quebec's minority language group. The English-speaking communities of the Estrie and Gaspésie-Iles-de-la-Madeleine regions have the largest proportion of English-speaking seniors at 37.7% and 36.5% consecutively. For these regions, more than one in three English-speakers is 55 years of age or over (QCGN, 2013; 5).

Provincially, the proportion of the oldest seniors (75-84 and 85 plus) among English speakers, generally considered to include the frailest elderly, tends to outweigh the proportion among Francophones. At the regional level, the greater proportion of English-speaking seniors 85 years of age and over is most pronounced in the Estrie and Laurentides regions followed by Abitibi-Temiscamingue, Lanaudière, Bas-Saint-Laurent, Cote-Nord, and Montérégie (QCGN, 2013; 5).

Importantly, among English-speakers aged 65 and over, 57,285 have low levels of income (income less than \$20K) representing a substantial 41.5% of Quebec's English-speaking senior group (QCGN.2013; 7).

Both of these vulnerable groups show low levels of bilingualism. The immigrants of Quebec's English-speaking communities tend to be much less English-French bilingual than their non-immigrant counterparts (54.5% compared to 73.9 %.) (CHSSN, 2015; 7). English-speaking seniors show much lower levels of English-French bilingualism than the younger generations (QCGN, 2013; 5).

Recommendation

Question 2.1 Can you identify other issues that should guide the development of the third government Action Plan for strengthening the social and economic safety net?

The evidence-base drawn from the 2011 Census of Canada and National Household Survey and analysed in accordance with the definitions and priorities of the *Centre d'étude sur la pauvreté et l'exclusion (CEPE)* underscores the importance of recognizing language as a factor when identifying socio-economic inequalities in Quebec. The CHSSN recommends that the English-speaking communities of Quebec be made visible among the many faces of Quebec poverty.

The English-speaking communities of Quebec represent a substantial 13% of its population and are notably prominent among Quebec's most vulnerable citizens. Any process of planning and implementation of action to combat poverty must recognize the struggle of the individuals and families who reside in these communities to maintain economic self-sufficiency and to integrate as full citizens of Quebec society. Efforts to prevent the causes and reduce the impact of poverty must be cognizant of the fact that these vary among Quebec's population in accordance with unique factors like region, language and age. When the specific characteristics and context of the target population – the poor and socially excluded – are overlooked, the process to prevent poverty risks promoting its persistence.

The CHSSN recommends that the specificity of the poverty and accompanying social exclusion of English-speaking communities be made an issue in the third Action Plan of the Government of Quebec. It is hoped that this would be a step toward remedying the evident under-representation of these communities among the current government program offerings intended to support Quebec's economically and socially disadvantaged.

References

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