Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages
Commissariat aux langues officielles

TAKING ACTION FOR STRONG AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES:

Observations at the midpoint of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028

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PREFACE

Following the positive response to my report *A Shared Future: A Closer Look at Our Official Language Minority Communities* published last year, I am pleased to present, for the second consecutive year, a report on community issues as my term as Commissioner of Official Languages draws to a close. I hope this report will shine a spotlight on the daily realities of official language minority communities (the communities) more than ever before.

My main theme this year is the midpoint of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028 (Action Plan). As I stated in my 2024–2025 Annual Report, the communities and the challenges they face remain one of my top priorities.

The Government of Canada developed the Action Plan to fulfill its commitment to the communities and promote official languages. Since 2003, the Government of Canada has adopted whole-of-government strategies to support official languages across the country. The current Action Plan is the fifth consecutive strategy, and it includes $4.1 billion in funding, which is the most funding allocated to a five-year plan since it came into effect. That is why I decided to do a targeted monitoring—it is an undertaking that I consider to be essential at the halfway point. This assessment provides an appraisal of the status of the Action Plan's implementation.

The primary focus of my approach is to consider the Action Plan's impact on the communities. This midpoint is the perfect opportunity to highlight both the challenges and the successes of the Action Plan.

Six topics particularly caught my attention:

- The Partnerships to Strengthen Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* (the Act)
- The Policy on Francophone Immigration
- The Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration
- The Official Languages Health Program
- Federal-provincial-territorial agreements on minority-language education and second-language instruction
- The Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities Program.

I also monitored issues that cut across these programs and initiatives, such as administrative processes and accountability mechanisms, as well as funding allocation delays.

By focusing on a handful of initiatives and programs, my team was better able to understand the progress of those initiatives' implementation at the national and regional levels. We held several discussions with representatives from federal institutions and from the communities throughout spring and summer 2025 and analyzed the information gathered in order to identify key trends. The information contained in this report reflects the situation at the time of these discussions.

Although I will focus primarily on the Action Plan in this report, I would like to emphasize that I am also following other issues, particularly those related to learning, as the following examples illustrate.

First, the challenge to the Government of Quebec's *Act respecting the laicity of the State* will be heard by the Supreme Court of Canada, and the Court has accepted my request to intervene. I will speak to the interpretation of section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, particularly with regard to the right of the English-speaking minority to manage and control its institutions and education.

Second, I cannot ignore situations like the one in Prince Edward Island, where nearly half of children of rights holders do not attend a French-language school. According to the 2021 Census of Population, 2,230 school-aged children were eligible for minority language education, but only 1,435 were actually educated in French.[1] According to the Government of Prince Edward Island, in the 2024–2025 school year, only 1,256 children attended a Commission scolaire de langue française school.[2]

The Fédération des parents de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard insists that there is a direct link between a lack of French-language early childhood infrastructure and the high proportion of children of rights holders who attend English-language schools.

Similarly, I am closely monitoring the case of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (CSF). The Supreme Court of British Columbia partially ruled in CSF's favour with regard to its lawsuit regarding French-language education. CSF's suit seeks compliance with section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, putting CSF in opposition with the Province and the Vancouver Education Board.

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[1] Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). Census Profile (Eligibility and instruction in the minority official language of school-aged children). 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa.

[2] Student Enrolment, K-12, 2024-2025 | Government of Prince Edward Island.

OBSERVATIONS BY PROGRAM AND INITIATIVE OF THE ACTION PLAN FOR OFFICIAL LANGUAGES 2023–2028

Partnerships to Strengthen Part VII

The Partnerships to Strengthen Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* initiative (formerly the Centre for Strengthening Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*) has a budget of $20.1 million over five years. It reports to both Canadian Heritage and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

In 2024–2025, the two organizations and various networks discussed priorities, such as restoring the demographic weight of Francophones, employment and economic development in minority communities, and the protection and promotion of French, including in Quebec.

I am following the scope of this new initiative closely. It must address communities' concerns while also adequately equipping federal institutions to integrate a linguistic perspective into their programs and services. Ultimately, I expect policies that are more inclusive and tailored to communities' needs.

I have also noticed a certain willingness on the part of key players to collaborate and communicate with communities to facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan, particularly with regard to consultations.

Federal institutions and community groups must remain informed of the initiative's implementation process, including by developing innovative consultation methods. Therefore, the initiative must promote better coordination among partners and closer intergovernmental and intersectoral collaboration. Ultimately, strong partnerships between the federal government, French-speaking and English-speaking communities, provinces and territories, and municipalities are the key to strengthening Part VII.

Francophone immigration

As I mentioned in my 2021 report on the 4.4% target for French-speaking immigration in communities, immigration is the main driver of Canadian population growth and a key factor in the country's demolinguistic balance. Since its modernization in June 2023, the Act has recognized this in its preamble and in section 44.1. This section requires the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to adopt a Francophone immigration policy aimed at promoting the development of Francophone minorities in Canada, in particular by ensuring that their demographic weight is restored to what it was in 1971 (i.e., 6.1% of the population) outside Quebec.

Policy on Francophone Immigration

The creation of the Policy on Francophone Immigration (the Policy) was first announced in the Action Plan. This Policy, which was adopted in 2024, is the tool used to implement and structure the federal government's distinct vision for Francophone immigration in the context of French-speaking minorities. It consists of five action areas: the Francophone lens, admissions targets for French-speaking permanent residents, the immigration continuum, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and data and research.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) conducted its first annual review of the Policy implementation plan in 2024. According to IRCC's presentation to community stakeholders, the Policy appears to be on track and delivering the expected results. However, some measures may be subject to correction or withdrawal.

I agree with the key Francophone immigration organizations, such as the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) and the Comité atlantique sur l'immigration francophone, that it is too early in the Policy's implementation to determine whether it will achieve its objective of enhancing the vitality of Francophone minority communities, particularly in terms of restoring and increasing their demographic weight.

To achieve this, IRCC must ensure that newcomers to Francophone minority communities are integrated and retained as much as possible.

IRCC should maintain and strengthen its leadership and influence across the entire immigration continuum, as well as in multiparty collaboration between federal departments and provincial and territorial governments. I would also advise IRCC to keep its ear to the ground at the community level so as to be able to adapt to changing needs in a timely manner. All in all, I invite IRCC to fulfill its commitment to integrate a Francophone lens into every stage of its policy and program development and to do so even in the context of restructuring, budget cuts and reduced immigration.

As previously mentioned, the Policy includes five action areas, one of which is admissions targets for French-speaking permanent residents. These targets are quantified and set out in multi-year immigration level plans.

I have taken note of the new increased target of 12% for 2029 that was announced during the last federal election campaign and published by the government in IRCC's 2025 consultations on immigration levels. In Spring 2022[3], FCFA published demographic projections for Francophone minority communities according to different thresholds or targets for Francophone immigration. With these projections in mind, it proposed the adoption of progressive targets, beginning with a 12% target for 2024 and rising at a rate of 2% every two years until reaching 20% in 2036. FCFA's objective with this exercise was to reach a demographic weight of 4.4% by 2036. In contrast, the government's time frame for the new 12% target is 2029, and there is no time frame set for reestablishing French minority communities' demographic weight to 6.1%, as the Act requires. Nevertheless, I recognize that this represents a step in the right direction, given the current context. There is, however, still a distance to go. We still must promote the admission of French-speaking newcomers, as well as their reception, settlement, integration and retention within our communities across the country.

I therefore strongly encourage IRCC to anticipate the impact that the increased targets will have on the demand for reception, settlement and integration services. The government has been taking promising and innovative approaches, such as establishing the Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration, but it must also ensure that conditions are put in place that allow for the demographic weight of Francophone minority communities to be restored and increased in a sustainable manner.

I expect that as the admissions targets for French-speaking permanent residents progress, they will be accompanied by the means, resources and a timeline that will allow for the demographic weight of Francophone minorities to be restored to and grow beyond the 1971 level of 6.1%.

By adopting the Policy, as required by the modernized Act, the federal government has committed to improving its approach to Francophone immigration. However, this commitment must be accompanied by concrete, concerted and formative measures if its implementation is to yield the results Canadians and Francophone minority communities expect.

Lastly, beyond the administration of Action Plan programs, some front-line stakeholders told us during our discussions that the information provided by IRCC and its partners, particularly in its missions abroad, has not always reflected the reality of Canada's Francophone minority communities. Several stakeholders spoke frankly about feeling embarrassed seeing IRCC staff offering potential newcomers a vision of "living in French" that minimizes the challenges they will face in a minority language environment. I fear that this situation might discourage many newcomers and influence their decision to leave their host region or even leave Canada altogether, which could jeopardize the long-term success of the Francophone immigration project. Therefore, I invite IRCC and its partners to ensure that our communities' reality is better communicated and understood.

Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration

The Centre for Innovation in Francophone Immigration has incredible potential to launch innovative projects tailored to the realities of regional needs in Francophone-minority communities. With a budget of $25 million over five years, the Centre launched the Francophone Immigration Support Program (FISP), which provides

[3] Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, *Faire le point sur la cible en immigration francophone Bilan, enjeux et pistes d'action*, March 2022 [in French only].

grants and contributions to support such endeavours. To date, 12 projects, most of which are in Ontario, have received FISP funding in Canada. Having said that, this initiative seems modest compared with the promises made when it was first announced, which included hiring some 30 employees.

Furthermore, it would be best to improve the promotion surrounding the FISP in a way that would increase its visibility and foster more partnerships. FISP has been well received by current funding recipients, but it took some time to get off the ground. There has also been some criticism that IRCC's responses to project proposals can be slow and that there is a lack of clarity both on the reasons for which proposals are rejected and on the criteria that define the "innovative" aspect of projects. Taken together with the administrative burden, all of this constitutes a major obstacle for smaller organizations.

Nevertheless, there are some promising examples out of Ontario. The Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario is preparing to implement an innovative project that will aim to identify and select Francophone immigrant workers in early childhood education.

Meanwhile, the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean is using FISP funds to conduct a study on systemic barriers that limit access to the teaching profession for Francophone immigrants who are also members of visible minority groups.

In order to achieve its objectives through initiatives such as FISP, I would advise IRCC to integrate a Francophone lens into all of its existing and future programs.

Official Languages Health Program

The Official Languages Health Program (OLHP) aims to improve access to health services for communities. It consists of three components: training and retention of health professionals, health networking, and projects related to health services access. This initiative was allocated $206.7 million over five years.

I would like to acknowledge the work of Health Canada's Official Language Community Development Bureau in helping refine the OLHP over the past several years. The program is creating positive outcomes for communities.

The health challenges that linguistic minorities face differ from one province and territory to another. I therefore invite the federal government to continue supporting community stakeholders in their respective spheres of influence in order to highlight those challenges and find innovative solutions.

Overall, I am delighted with the OLHP's many achievements, particularly its role in increasing the number of graduates who can provide services to patients in their preferred official language and its support for the creation of a new service point in British Columbia. Together with the province's commitment to providing health services to its French speaking community, Health Canada's investments through the OLHP have contributed to the creation of the very first Francophone community health centre in British Columbia, Santé Ouest, which opened in November 2024. The centre has also allowed RésoSanté Colombie-Britannique to build relationships with new health partners in the province.

Nunavut, where networking is critical, offers another good example of collaboration. There, OLHP funds help the Réseau de santé en français au Nunavut to maintain its relationship with the staff at Nunavut's only hospital (located in Iqaluit), and it has also been used to hire an interpreter to facilitate communication with Francophones.

This example is a big step forward in terms of access to French-language health care for the Franco-Nunavummiut community, even though there is still a long way to go to achieve a truly equal service in both official languages in the territory.

Access to health funding remains crucial for communities, and communities' needs flow from the realities of their respective regions. For instance, family medicine and growing mental health needs are important issues in most communities. As a result, stakeholders on the ground have told us that the 10% increase in OLHP funding is not enough to offset the steady rise in the cost of living and that the increase comes with additional accountability requirements. Moreover, the administrative burden associated with these conditions directly affects organizations' ability to adequately serve their communities and even forces them to make difficult decisions about implementing new initiatives. That is why it is necessary to provide funding that is tailored to recipients, who are full partners. It is also essential that this funding be made available nationwide within a reasonable and consistent time frame.

The shortage of bilingual staff is likely to get worse in the coming years, particularly with the growing and aging population, meaning that communities will find themselves facing language barriers. That is why I strongly encourage Health Canada to promote training measures for bilingual health professionals, to offer and fund bridging programs that help graduates trained outside of Canada to enter the Canadian market, to ensure collaboration between departments, and to fund integration initiatives.

The scope of federal-provincial-territorial health agreements goes far beyond the OLHP, and health care is a provincial and territorial responsibility. Nevertheless, I call on the federal government to continue taking a leadership role, in particular by taking the necessary measures to ensure that funding agreements with governments include language clauses and action plans with transparency and accountability measures that clearly illustrate how the funds will be distributed.

Federal-provincial-territorial agreements on minority-language education and second-language instruction

This analysis covers some key initiatives from the second pillar of the Action Plan, titled "Promoting Lifelong Learning Opportunities," and it focuses particularly on those undertakings related to minority-language education and French second-language learning. The education sector is primarily a provincial and territorial responsibility, so many of the Action Plan's initiatives must be carried out in collaboration with the provinces and territories through the negotiation and implementation of federal-provincial-territorial agreements.

Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction

The Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction (the Protocol) sets out a strategic framework the Government of Canada uses to establish bilateral agreements with each province and territory.

Negotiations between the federal government and provincial and territorial governments on the 2024–2025 to 2027–2028 Protocol, which were supposed to begin by March 31, 2022, did not conclude until 2024. In this regard, stakeholders in the field continue to grapple with instability and a difficult transition between the end of one protocol and its corresponding agreements and the beginning of a new protocol and the agreements that come with it.

I welcome the addition of a clause stipulating that the terms and conditions of the Protocol must remain in place until a subsequent protocol is ratified. While it may be true that this clause can serve to prevent interruptions in the Protocol's terms and conditions, I urge signatories and stakeholders to ensure that it is not used to circumvent the prescribed timelines.

For the first time, funding specifically for post-secondary education and teaching staff has been included in the Protocol. These elements are essential to the continuum of minority-language learning, and the decision to include them ensures a certain degree of equality among the provinces and territories. It also removes some of the administrative burden by not requiring project applications. As part of the process of collecting information, many stakeholders informed my office that they are optimistic about this decision but that they are waiting to see and analyze the agreements and accompanying action plans before rendering an opinion.

Availability and content of agreements

All provinces and territories, except one province, have signed their bilateral agreements for 2024–2025 to 2027–2028. However, information about these new agreements has been slow to trickle out, which is a concern I have raised many times before. Canadian Heritage has informed us that it recognizes how important it is for stakeholders to have access to these agreements, and it stated that it expects to have them published at the end of November.

At the time of gathering information for this report, access to the signed agreements and action plans outlining the planned initiatives varied from one stakeholder to another. Many key stakeholders in the education field did not know how the funds would be used, which put them in a precarious situation, especially those stakeholders who are directly and financially involved in implementing the action plan resulting from the agreement in force in their province or territory. This was one of the biggest challenges stakeholders mentioned. Some had obtained information from their provincial or territorial representatives, while others had received signed agreements from Canadian Heritage. However, some did not have access to the signed agreements at all.

The Protocol and agreements stipulate that, once signed, the Protocol, bilateral agreements, their corresponding action plans and accountability reports can be made public by either party, but all levels of government have a role to play in ensuring the transparency and accessibility of these documents once they are signed. I commend jurisdictions like Alberta that published their agreements right away on their government websites, and I encourage other provinces and territories, as well as the federal government, to follow their example.

As a reminder, the Act now requires that federal–provincial–territorial agreements be published. Therefore, Canadian Heritage must take the measures necessary to meet its obligations. I hope that the next protocol will spell out the relevant obligations contained in the Act even more clearly.

As I have said many times, consulting with key stakeholders in first- and second-language education is essential to the agreement negotiation process. Under the agreements, the provinces and territories are free to determine their consultation processes, but several stakeholders have said that they would like to be involved and have their suggestions considered. Being at the forefront of the process prevents them from being presented with a done deal when the agreements come into force.

Furthermore, several stakeholders in the field of minority-language and second-language education have said it is difficult to track the flow of funds from the agreements. This is a point of contention before the Federal Court in the case of the *Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador v Canadian Heritage*. This challenge, along with the current dialogue and consultation format, can create a feeling of distrust around how funding is distributed.

As mentioned in my 2018–2023 Action Plan monitoring report, greater transparency, communication and effective accountability measures around the distribution of funds would lead to greater mutual trust.

The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones told us there is a balance to be considered between the number of small-scale initiatives and the accountability required. It is important to consider whether distributing funds across several initiatives and projects, rather than funding a smaller number of large-scale projects, will address the main challenges and priorities of French first- and second-language educational institutions.

Lastly, one of the main shortcomings observed is the amount allocated. Although stakeholders express gratitude for the funding they receive, it does not always reflect the reality of school boards and community organizations. For years now, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones has called for an increase in federal funding, because many French-language school boards are struggling, in part due to the lack of indexing of funding for over a decade.

Canada–Quebec agreement

The Canada–Quebec Agreement on the Implementation of the Action Plan for Official Languages 2024–2025 to 2027–2028 is different from all other federal, provincial and territorial agreements. Stakeholders in the English-speaking communities of Quebec (ESCQ) fear that the new wording of this agreement, from its title to its content, will lay the groundwork for all funding earmarked for the linguistic minority to pass through the provincial government rather than being given directly to communities.

In addition, for the first time, the Quebec bilateral agreement combines provisions on English-language services, particularly in the areas of health and justice, as well as funding for minority education, second-language instruction, post-secondary education, and teacher recruitment and retention, like other provincial and territorial bilateral agreements. ESCQs welcomed the new funding for teacher recruitment and retention.

It is difficult to assess the concrete impact of the Canada–Quebec Agreement—the only agreement not accompanied by an action plan—on the community. Stakeholders would like more clarity, transparency and accountability as to how federal funding will be used to support English-language education and provide English-language services to their community. Furthermore, any federal government funding to support and promote French in Quebec, an objective now enshrined in the Act, must not come from existing envelopes dedicated to ESQCs.

Employment assistance services for official language minority communities

Communities enrich our linguistic heritage and play a vital role in strengthening Canada's workforce and economy, which is why it is essential for the federal government to continue to promote the economic vitality of these communities and the well-being of the people who live there.

The $206.6 million in funding over five years, starting in 2023–2024, and $54 million per year thereafter to implement Stream 2 (Employment Assistance Services) of the Enabling Fund for Official Language Minority Communities (Enabling Fund) is worth mentioning. Community organizations across the country welcome this significant investment, and I welcome the enhancement of the Enabling Fund, which will improve access to employment assistance services.

The project timelines were revised to mitigate the impact of any delays and ensure successful implementation. Some community organizations said that this change will allow them to carry out their initiatives over the full five-year period (2025–2030), as planned.

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) is also showing foresight by announcing continued funding of $54 million per year for Stream 2 of the Enabling Fund after 2030, which ensures greater financial predictability for community organizations that provide employment assistance services and sets an example for how to address recurring issues with funding allocation and payment delays.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the executive director of Horizon TNL believes that the new Stream 2 funding complements its other funding sources very well, including programs from IRCC, ESDC and the provincial government.

As for adapting to realities on the ground, the Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité du Nouveau-Brunswick (RDÉE NB) told me about the latitude it has been given by ESDC. With this new financial support, RDÉE NB confirmed that it will be able to enhance the employment assistance services it offers to job seekers and Francophone businesses through its partner, Working NB. Essentially, RDÉE NB has decided to use the funds to remove barriers to participation in existing programs.

In Quebec, this funding supports a key sector and a community demand. However, several projects awarded to groups through the Enabling Fund are slow to get off the ground for reasons that will be discussed later. Community organizations are struggling to find viable solutions at the risk of losing their funding.

Several organizations have expressed satisfaction with the funding agreements for Stream 2 of the Enabling Fund. Some signatories highlighted the speed with which they received their funds after signing their agreement. However, uncertainty persists for those who have not yet signed agreements.

In general, most organizations are satisfied with the process, despite some communication challenges with ESDC during negotiations. It goes without saying that communicating with organizations in the official language of the community should be a priority for all federal institutions, in all regions.

Funding timelines need to be reviewed to avoid postponing them all. The fair and equitable implementation of projects must be ensured for all Enabling Fund recipients.

Agreement in British Columbia

The Federal Court of Appeal ordered that the Canada-British Columbia Labour Market Development Agreement (the Agreement) be terminated or amended by April 1, 2024. The Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique (FFCB) told me that it had taken a number of steps over almost two years to try to enforce the Court of Appeal's decision, but with no success.

On March 15, 2024, ESDC and the Province of British Columbia amended the Agreement. FFCB claims that it was not notified or consulted about the agreement during the negotiations. Later, ESDC offered FFCB $15 million over five years to reestablish a community managed Francophone employment service.

As the voice of British Columbia's official language minority community, FFCB has expressed concerns about a lack of measures in place and about ESDC's willingness to act following the Court of Appeal's decision. It believes that the ESDC funding is insufficient to implement the Federal Court of Appeal's decision. This issue is currently before the Federal Court.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE ACTION PLAN FOR OFFICIAL LANGUAGES 2023–2028

The following section presents general observations related to ESCQs with regard to the Action Plan, as well as reflections on the horizontal issues I have identified. These trends surfaced throughout discussions held as part of my monitoring of the six topics in question.

English-speaking communities of Quebec

Last year, I debunked certain myths about ESCQs in two of my reports. I also highlighted their significant contribution to Canadian bilingualism and the recognition of the French fact in Quebec.

Unfortunately, certain initiatives, such as the new funding envelopes supporting the early childhood sector are not available to ESCQs, despite the fact that these types of services strengthen the intergenerational vitality of communities. However, in my report on my monitoring of the 2018–2023 Action Plan, I recommended that in the 2023–2028 Action Plan, the Minister of Official Languages provide Quebec's English-speaking communities with a funding envelope equivalent to that of initiatives that support early childhood development.

Some Action Plan initiatives, such as the Dedicated Fund for the English-Speaking Communities of Quebec, are aimed solely at ESCQs to address the unique challenges they face. For example, although I have not included it in my review, the funding for the development of Quebec's English-speaking communities through the arts is an encouraging initiative. In particular, it aims to create opportunities to bring the French- and English-speaking arts communities closer together.

Challenges

The current context in Quebec remains challenging for the province's English-speaking minority, particularly in health and education, as federal government funding initiatives are often heavily scrutinized or even rejected.

On the one hand, the strengthening of the *Charter of the French Language* (through Bill 14) and the resulting guidelines have caused some confusion around enforcement of the right to be served in English in the health care, business and community sectors. For example, some health care workers still struggle to understand under what circumstances they can offer services to the public in English, so they choose to err on the side of caution with regard to their language obligations for fear of being penalized. As a result, members of ESCQs risk being deprived of their right to obtain health care in English.

On the other hand, under Bill M-30, the *Act respecting the Ministère du Conseil exécutif*, any organization that receives more than 50% of its funding from the province is under provincial government jurisdiction. This includes many community organizations that serve the English-speaking population, meaning that these groups cannot enter into agreements with the federal government without the approval of the Quebec Minister Responsible for Canadian Relations. Currently, funding delays related to this Bill are hindering the

implementation of the Action Plan in Quebec, which could undermine the vitality of the community. Nearly two years after it was announced, several key programs have yet to launch.

For example, as I mentioned earlier, a few projects funded by the Employment Assistance Services stream of the Enabling Fund in Quebec have not gotten off the ground because of delays caused in part by Bill M-30. In addition, ESDC's Social Partnership Initiative, granted to the Regional Development Network in spring 2024, has not yet begun. This is funding of over $1 million to help vulnerable communities, and community stakeholders are genuinely concerned that it will lapse.

Therefore, I urge federal institutions to collaborate proactively with their provincial and community partners to overcome the challenges that Bill M-30 poses and to ensure those challenges do not hinder the achievement of the Action Plan's strategic objectives.

Administrative processes and accountability mechanisms

As I mentioned earlier, we have heard from stakeholders that Action Plan initiatives do not always reflect the reality and needs of communities, both in terms of their design and their implementation. There is often tension between federal institutions' desire to achieve the objectives of a national program and organizations' desire to adapt such a program to the specific needs of their respective communities. The feedback I have received from these organizations established that they are calling for greater flexibility, meaning that the ideal balance has not yet been achieved.

Accountability is essential for the Action Plan's initiatives to be effective. It also ensures sound financial management and that objectives get achieved. However, organizations often find themselves facing rigid, complex processes that create an unreasonable workload and high operating costs.

For example, increased funding for health networks has come with heavier reporting requirements. While this increase in funding was much appreciated by community organisations, the additional reporting burden has unfortunately discouraged some organizations from applying. I know that Health Canada is working closely with communities to better respond to their specific needs, and I hope this collaboration will yield results that benefit both parties.

Institutions should aim to be flexible without compromising the transparency and accountability of initiatives, especially when dealing with small organizations that have limited resources.

The goal is not to limit accountability, but to optimize it and add some context:

- Community stakeholders, which are generally small organizations, have limited resources.
- Any process selected for funding and applications must be simple, effective and adapted to realities on the ground.
- Overly burdensome processes can negate the value of the funding and discourage participation.

While each organization has a role to play, Canadian Heritage, as Action Plan lead, must take a leadership role in the plan's implementation and reporting. The evaluation of initiatives and of the Action Plan should take into account the qualitative results that actually reflect the concrete impacts on communities, as well as quantitative results.

In this regard, I noticed that Canadian Heritage is doing several evaluations of the Action Plan, in addition to publishing its Accountability Framework, which sets out immediate, intermediate and long-term objectives for each of the plan's four pillars. A horizontal evaluation of the plan will begin in December. In addition, a review of the first two years of the Plan, scheduled for spring 2026, is underway. I look forward to seeing the results of this work.

Funding allocation delays

Funding allocation delays have persisted for several years, to the detriment of organizations. In some cases, funding can arrive as late as the end of a fiscal year. As a result, organizations are often forced to spend this money immediately on unplanned projects because they are unable to carry it over to the following year. This situation creates unpredictability and uncertainty and has organizations fearing they will lose part of their funding. Many organizations find themselves in precarious situations and are forced to take measures to compensate for funding shortfalls, such as postponing certain projects, laying off staff or running deficits.

This is particularly true in the early childhood sector, where ESDC funding delays of almost two years have put several organizations in a vulnerable and unstable situation. At times, these delays have led to service being disrupted and even to qualified employees being laid off.

In terms of employment assistance, ESDC has pushed the funding period from 2024–2029 to 2025–2030 for Stream 2 (Employment Assistance Services) of the Enabling Fund to allow organizations to implement their projects over five years. However, this does not allow unspent funds to be carried over from one year to the next.

My report on the monitoring of the 2018–2023 Action Plan urged federal institutions to take proactive measures in this regard.

A certain degree of rigour on the part of federal institutions in terms of preparation would help avoid funding allocation delays and ensure projects are implemented on time, while more flexible administrative requirements would better meet the needs of community organizations.

I would also like to note that several federal institutions have established good relationships with their funding recipients and have demonstrated good faith.

Each institution approaches funding allocation delays differently, because there is no common approach among the Action Plan initiatives. However, at the time of writing, Canadian Heritage's Official Languages team is consulting with communities to improve its contribution processes and program structure. Without presuming what concrete results might come from the initiative, the midpoint of the Action Plan seems like a good time to take this step.

CONCLUSION

Fall 2025 marks the midpoint of the current Action Plan, and federal institutions will soon begin to consider the next five-year plan. It is essential to identify community priorities before the next plan is developed in order to ensure it is implemented in a timely manner, following the end of the current plan.

Monitoring the Action Plan has been one of my priorities throughout my mandate, and this is my last opportunity to emphasize how important the Action Plan's initiatives and programs are, as well as their implementation by federal institutions.

The Action Plan remains a historic investment in the well-being of official language minority communities and a fundamental step toward them being able to access services comparable to those that linguistic majorities enjoy. Meeting communities' needs depends both on the design of the Action Plan initiatives and the ability to carry them out effectively. Similarly, implementation-related challenges must receive close attention.

I hope for a smooth transition between this plan and the next one and that special attention will be paid to the changing needs of the various official language communities from coast to coast to coast.

Some stakeholders fear that the provinces and territories will profit from the increased federal funding at their expense. In the absence of binding clauses and agreements that could give communities more reassurance, federal funding should be provided directly to communities as much as possible.

With regard to the impending budget cuts, we know from experience that increased vigilance is appropriate to avoid disproportionate impacts on official languages. The public service's ability to serve the public in both official languages and support Canada's linguistic duality must not be allowed to erode: that would undermine the considerable progress the Action Plan has made possible.

In the same vein, the final recommendation in my 2024–2025 Annual Report urged all deputy heads to consider the language obligations and rights of their respective organizations during any budget reduction exercises in the federal public service.

As I mentioned in the preface, having reached its midpoint, the Action Plan is at a decisive moment. Decisions related to the implementation of the second half of the 2023–2028 Action Plan and its renewal in 2028 must reflect everything that closely affects communities and the government's commitments under Part VII of the Act.

The institutions involved, in collaboration with the Minister responsible for Official Languages as lead, must demonstrate foresight in the development and implementation of the next Action Plan. To achieve this, they should:

- consult communities to identify their needs and make any necessary adjustments to their initiatives or programs;
- avoid funding gaps as much as possible by ensuring a smooth transition between the current plan and the next one; and
- better integrate the specific needs of our various communities across the country and adapt as those needs change.

I remain optimistic, but my appraisal is mixed: for too long, certain recurring problems have been detrimental to our communities, whose future and whose destiny are very important to me. At this midpoint, I call for urgent action. I dare to believe that if federal institutions take the suggestions in this document on board and commit to taking action, there is reason for hope.