



# 8 PILLARS



## FOR MODERNIZING THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

**1** Canada's social contract for the 21st century is based on **three key principles** that must be constantly reaffirmed: **linguistic duality, multiculturalism and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.**

**3** Enhancing Canada's bilingual capacity requires both **strong Francophone communities and a bilingual workforce.** **These assets will ensure that:**

- The Canadian government can serve citizens in both official languages at all times;
- Canada can become a real economic force in both French and English.

**5** Fundamental principles of Canada's linguistic duality **remain misunderstood**, including equality of status and equal use of our two official languages. The current debate on the bilingualism of party leaders is a perfect example.

**7** French remains the **vulnerable official language and requires protection.** The demographic weight of the Canadian Francophonie is declining, as is the presence of French in the public sphere.

**2** Canada is as much a member of La Francophonie as it is a member of the Commonwealth. The international Francophonie is expected to experience significant population growth over the coming years (**700 million French speakers by 2050**). We must enhance Canada's bilingual capacity in order to ensure that our country is well positioned in the global economy of tomorrow.

**4** The full implementation of the *Official Languages Act* remains the great piece of **unfinished political business of the last 50 years.** For decades, the *Act's* own structural flaws have prevented full compliance, leading to the stagnation of Canada's linguistic duality.

**6** The majority of Canadians **support our country's linguistic duality.** English and French remain the two most widely spoken languages in Canada.

**8** *The Official Languages Act* **has not brought about universal access to second-official-language learning** for all Canadians who want it.

- ***An Act that reflects Canada's commitment to celebrating its diversity and to protecting its two official languages, while maintaining respect for Indigenous languages and traditions.***
- ***An Act that enhances Canada's reputation as a country of laws, where minorities are respected.***
- ***An Act that puts our two official languages to work for our country's economic and social development.***
- ***An Act that strengthens the status of French and English as the two main common languages in a country of a thousand accents.***
- ***An Act that supports genuinely pan-Canadian linguistic duality, with a strong Francophonie in all regions of the country and a bilingual workforce from coast to coast.***

**THAT IS WHAT AN *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT* FOR THE 21ST CENTURY LOOKS LIKE.**



# 8 GOOD IDEAS



## FOR MODERNIZING THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT

### 1 Genuine positive measures to support the development of Francophone communities across the country

#### The Issue

In its current form, the *Official Languages Act* commits the federal government to taking positive measures to support the development of official language minority communities and to promoting English and French in Canadian society. However, the *Act* does not specify what positive measures should be taken, nor how communities should be consulted and actively participate in the implementation of government initiatives that affect them.

#### The Solution

- In the *Act*, specify what positive measures should be taken and assign categories of positive measures to specific federal institutions.
- Create an official language minority communities advisory council.
- Support the empowerment and autonomy of official language minority communities.

### 2 Universal access to second-official-language learning for all Canadians who want it

#### The Issue

Demand for French-language education, French immersion programs and French-as-a-second-language classes exceeds supply.

#### The Solution

- In the *Act*, include the principle of universal access to second-official-language learning for Canadians.
- In the *Act*, include an obligation for the Minister of Official Languages to work with the provinces and territories to develop more French-language educational opportunities and French-as-a-second-language programs at the elementary, secondary and postsecondary levels.

### 3 An immigration policy that supports Canada's linguistic duality

#### The Issue

Year after year, less than 2% of immigrants who settle outside Quebec are French-speaking.

#### The Solution

An immigration policy that takes into account the government's commitment to restoring the demographic weight of Francophone and Acadian communities to 4.4% by 2023.

#### 4 A bilingual federal justice system all the way to the Supreme Court

##### **The Issue**

Supreme Court judges who do not understand French rely on interpretation services, which do not always provide an accurate reflection of the arguments made before the Court.

##### **The Solution**

Remove the exemption in the *Act* so that all Supreme Court judges can hear cases in both official languages, without the assistance of an interpreter.

#### 5 A central agency responsible for enforcing the *Act* throughout the federal administration

##### **The Issue**

No federal institution has the authority or power to ensure consistent implementation of the *Official Languages Act* throughout the federal administration and to demand results from the other institutions. As a result, several federal institutions simply do what they want, in the manner they see fit.

##### **The Solution**

Assign responsibility to a central agency, namely the Treasury Board, for the overall implementation of the *Official Languages Act*, and provide it with the powers necessary to fulfil this mandate.

#### 6 More effective mechanisms for seeking justice when the *Act* is not respected

##### **The Issue**

It can often be difficult for citizens to seek justice when a federal institution fails to meet its language obligations. Complaints to the Commissioner of Official Languages frequently take years to process and federal institutions often ignore the resulting recommendations.

##### **The Solution**

Create an official languages administrative tribunal to hear complaints concerning violations of the *Act*, with the authority to impose penalties on offending institutions.

## 7 Binding language clauses in federal-provincial/territorial agreements

### The Issue

Federal funding agreements with the provinces and territories often provide little benefit to Francophone minorities, and fail to compel the provinces and territories to report on how the money was spent.

### The Solution

Include language clauses in all federal funding agreements, requiring the provinces and territories to take measures to promote linguistic duality and providing for rigorous accountability.

## 8 A review of the *Official Languages Act* every ten years

### The Issue

Canadian society is changing at an accelerated pace, and a 30-year-old *Official Languages Act* no longer reflects the current context.

### The Solution

Review the *Act* every ten years to ensure it remains relevant and current.