



INFORMATION SHEET

Strengthening Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*

The Idea

Transform the *Official Languages Act* into a means to truly promote linguistic duality in Canadian society. This could be achieved by:

- Clearly defining **what it means to take positive measures** to support the development of official language minority communities.
- Allowing official language minority communities to **play an active role** in the implementation of Part VII.
- Including **specific language clauses** in all federal funding agreements with the provinces and territories.
- Guaranteeing **universal access to second-official-language learning** for all Canadians who want it.
- **Promoting the benefits of linguistic duality** to all Canadians, rather than simply defending the concept.

The Principles

Part VII has two objectives, namely **supporting the development and vitality of official language minority communities** and **promoting French and English in Canadian society**.

To achieve this, the following principles must be applied:

- **Consultation** of communities by government.
- An approach that empowers communities to **take control** of their own development (by and for/by, for and with).
- Positive government measures that have a **real impact** on community development.
- **Restoration of the demographic weight** of Francophone minorities across the country.
- **Equitable access** to French-language education, French immersion programs and services in both official languages throughout Canada.
- **Increased awareness** in the Canadian population regarding the importance of linguistic duality as a core value, and recognition of the social, cultural and economic benefits that our two official languages bring to Canada.



The Issues

With regard to support for the development and vitality of OLMCs:

- The federal administration has a **weak framework** for community consultation. The underlying principle is poorly understood and poorly applied by federal institutions.
- The Federal Court has found the **duty to take positive measures**, as currently defined in the *Act*, to be vague and unclear. As a result, **the Court has gutted this provision**, undoing 10 years of work aimed at clarifying and explaining the meaning of positive measures for federal institutions.
- **Canada's immigration policies** do not place enough emphasis on linguistic duality and are contributing to **eroding the demographic weight** of the Francophonie.
- Over the last 50 years, successive governments have spent more time **defending Canada's linguistic duality than promoting it**. The fact that our two official languages have equal status remains poorly understood.
- Opportunities to learn French **continue to fall short of demand**.
- Official language minority communities **lack the means** to take control of their own development, according to their priorities and needs.

Example

Over the last 30 years, less than 2 percent of immigrants settling outside Quebec have become part of the Francophone community. During the same period, the relative weight of Francophone minority communities decreased from 4.8 percent (1991) to 3.7 percent (2016).

The Solutions

Consultation:

- Establish an **advisory council** with members drawn from OLMCs, with a mandate to:
 - Provide government with an accurate picture of community needs.
 - Help government draft a five-year plan to support community development.
- Ensure that all federal institutions that have an impact on community development hold **regular and meaningful consultations** with communities.

Empowerment:

- Empower community groups and institutions to manage **those components of federal programs** designed to support minority language communities.
- Empower each community's own groups and institutions to **deliver government-funded local services** in the language of the minority.

Positive Measures:

- Change the wording of the *Act* to **clearly define the obligation to take positive measures**, leaving no room for reasonable doubt.



- Spell out in the Act itself **specific types of positive measures required** to address critical gaps in OLMC development (early childhood services, education and training, immigration, service delivery).
- Instruct federal institutions to **define positive measures in consultation** with the communities.
- Include **binding language clauses** in federal-provincial/territorial transfer agreements.

Demographic Weight:

- Enact **clear and enforceable policies with regard to Francophone immigration**, in order to restore and maintain a strong Francophone presence in all regions of Canada.

Promotion of French and English in Canadian Society:

- Create a **fund to promote linguistic duality** in order to continually raise awareness among all Canadians:
 - Increase acceptance and recognition of French as an official language enjoying equal status with English.
 - Inform the public about the economic benefits of linguistic duality for Canada, both domestically and abroad.
- Work with the provinces and territories to **eliminate waiting lists** for French immersion programs and create more opportunities for adults to learn their second official language.
- Improve **access for young Canadians to postsecondary education in French**.

The Impact

Strong Francophone communities throughout the country, universal access to second-official-language learning for all Canadians who want it, and a better understanding of the equal status of our two official languages as well as the benefits of linguistic duality.