



Réseau pour le développement
de l'alphabétisme et des compétences

RESDAC Brief

To the Standing
Committee on Official
Languages



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Introduction

Thank you for considering this brief/submission as part of the study of Bill C-13 to modernize the *Official Languages Act*.

We would like to propose an amendment to Bill C-13 to ensure that it more adequately addresses proper support for the continuum of lifelong learning in the minority language.

Proposed amendment

We are proposing that subsection 41(3) be rewritten as follows in order to clarify the different settings in which lifelong learning takes place, namely formal, non-formal and informal.

41 (3) The Government of Canada is committed to advancing opportunities for members of English and French linguistic minority communities to pursue quality learning, *in formal, non-formal and informal settings*, in their own language throughout their lives, including from early childhood to post-secondary education.

Formal settings refers to institutions such as pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, colleges and universities that deliver structured, recognized learning. Non-formal learning also tends to occur in an intentional and structured manner, but it often occurs in the workplace or in the community and is less supported and recognized. The same applies to informal learning, which refers to any other unstructured situation, whether in the workplace or with family, through civic or community engagement, or in recreational activities.

This amendment is justified considering the following:

- 1) the current global context, in which lifelong learning is more vital than ever;
and
- 2) the historical significance of the learning continuum for the vitality of francophone minority communities.

The right to learn in a changing world

In Canada and around the world, education and training are becoming indispensable to personal growth. They are also key to community development and prosperity.

The pandemic that has been dragging on for the past two years has shaken up many models, accelerating change and requiring a great deal of adaptation. This context serves as a reminder of how important it is to never stop learning. As UNESCO put it, “knowledge, education and learning need to be reimagined in a world of increasing complexity, uncertainty, and precarity.”¹ In its recent report on the future of education, UNESCO urges us not to limit education to formal institutions:

The right to education should be broadened. We are no longer well served by framing the right to education simply around schooling. Everyone everywhere should have a right to lifelong learning. We should support the right to information and the right to culture as necessary enabling components of the right to education. A right to connectivity must be built in.²

Defined in this way, the right to learning is truly vital to accessing information, culture, work and connectivity—in other words, civic participation. As the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education pointed out back in 2016, his report recognized “...adult learning and education as an essential component of the right to education and a key pillar in the education system.”³

In concrete terms, this vision of lifelong learning suggests a continuum of learning needs, at all ages and in all areas of life. In response to this, a continuum of education, training and learning services are needed, including everything from early childcare centres to post-secondary institutions and all other adult learning services.

¹ UNESCO (2021). *Futures of Education*. Website.

² UNESCO (2021). [Reimagining our futures together: a new social contract for education](#). International Commission on the Futures of Education. Paris: UNESCO, p. 117.

³ Singh, Kishore (2016). *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education*. New York: United Nations General Assembly. A/71/358, p. 11.

The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL)⁴ as well as the OECD⁵ and the Council of Europe (CEDEFOP)⁶ have identified three complementary learning settings:

- Formal learning is learning that takes place in education and training institutions, is recognized by relevant national authorities and leads to diplomas and qualifications.
- Non-formal learning is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. It usually takes place as part of structured activities in the workplace and through civil society organizations.
- Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, within the family, in the workplace, in communities and through individuals' interests and activities.

Recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning outcomes is a practice that makes visible and values the full range of knowledge and skills acquired in various settings and through various means in different phases of people's lives.⁷ To support this, partnerships need to be encouraged between education and training institutions and family and community organizations.

By adopting the *Skills for Success* program in 2021, Canada moved forward with meaningful action focusing on “the skills needed to participate and thrive in learning, work and life.”⁸ It follows initiatives launched by organizations like the Royal Bank of Canada⁹ and the Conference Board of Canada.¹⁰

The French-language learning continuum

For several decades now, francophone and Acadian communities have been making the French-language learning continuum a collective priority. The Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages noted this back in 2005:

Francophone communities in a minority setting consider French-language education to be a continuum, along which tools must be provided so that their

⁴ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2012). [UNESCO guidelines for the recognition, validation and accreditation of the outcomes of non-formal and informal learning](#). Hamburg: UIL.

⁵ Werquin, Patrick (2012). *Recognizing Non-Formal and Informal Learning. Outcomes, policies and practices*. Paris: OECD.

⁶ European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2014). *Terminology of European education and training policy (second edition)*. Luxembourg: CEDEFOP.

⁷ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2012). *Op. cit.*

⁸ Canada. ESDC (2021). *Learn about the Skills*. Website.

⁹ Royal Bank of Canada (2018). *Humans Wanted. How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption*. Toronto, p. 3.

¹⁰ Conference Board of Canada. (n.d.). *Finding Your Employability Skills*. Online.

members may succeed in using French throughout their lives and in all sectors affecting community life.¹¹

The Government of Canada recognized this in 2021 and committed to “strengthening the educational continuum from early childhood to post-secondary levels in the minority language.”¹² The links in this continuum are early childhood development, primary and secondary education and post-secondary education. However, adult education must be added to that, as the Standing Committee on Official Languages recommended in 2018:

That the Government of Canada recognize that adult literacy and essential skills development is an integral part of Canada’s minority-language education continuum and allocate resources to it accordingly.¹³

Together, these links support lifelong learning, which “implies that all individuals, at every stage and in all areas of their lives, can acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to meet their own needs, fulfill their aspirations and contribute to their community.”¹⁴

RESDAC members are the primary operators serving the adult demographic of this continuum. We face a significant challenge, for we know that literacy levels among francophones adults are concerning. The latest data, which are from the 2012 PIAAC survey, reveal that 52% of francophones living in a minority situation in Canada are below level 3 on the literacy scale. This threshold is considered the minimum needed to function in today’s society.¹⁵

This unenviable position is below the average for the anglophone majority (43%). It is also worth noting that these averages obscure the fact that many francophone communities are more likely to have low literacy levels.

As we pointed out to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages in 2018, among this demographic of adults, low literacy skills can lead to greater linguistic insecurity and make it more difficult to transmit language and culture in the family environment. It limits how much parents can do to help their school-age children with their learning. It makes it harder for these adults to enter the labour market. It deprives them of some of the tools needed to fully assume their civic role within their

¹¹ Senate of Canada (2005). *French-language Education in a Minority Setting: A Continuum from Early Childhood to the Postsecondary Level*. Interim Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. Ottawa, p. 14.

¹² Canada (2021). *English and French: Towards a substantive equality of official languages in Canada*. Op. cit., p. 17.

¹³ House of Commons of Canada (2018). *Adult literacy and skills development : an essential component of the education continuum in official language minority communities*. Ottawa, p. 11.

¹⁴ Johnson, M.L. (2018). *L'apprentissage tout au long de la vie pour notre communauté francophone. Guide pour une stratégie locale d'impact collectif*. [Available in French only] Ottawa : RESDAC.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada (2013). *Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*. Ottawa, p. 87, 104.

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communities and society. Simply put, this situation is undermining the vitality of our communities.¹⁶

Over the years, francophone communities have established a wide range of associations and organizations in many sectors, including health, justice, education and culture, to support their development and growth. The ability of adults to participate in the governance and activities of these kinds of associations and organizations is linked to their skill level. Functional illiteracy among francophones in minority communities is preventing half, and in some cases three-quarters, of adults from participating fully in the development of their communities.

How should we respond to this inequity? Francophone communities make important contributions to Canadian society, not only because of the fact that they speak one of the country's two official languages, but also because of their diversity and their long history of resilience and social innovation. Recognizing the right to lifelong learning serves as a tool to support everyone's active citizenship and their contributions to social cohesion and prosperity in Canada. By further clarifying the scope of lifelong learning in subsection 41(3), Bill C-13 will unleash the full potential of francophone minority communities.

RESDAC

The [Réseau de développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences \(RESDAC\)](#) is dedicated to French-language adult education, which includes literacy and basic skills training, family literacy and the development of all *Skills for Success* that the Government of Canada is now prioritizing. RESDAC's members deliver services in this area of expertise in nearly every region of Canada. Over the years, our network has developed expertise that is not offered by other organizations. We deliver a wide range of formal, non-formal and informal learning services to francophone adults living in minority situations, particularly those who are among the most vulnerable.

¹⁶ RESDAC (2018). *A Plea for a Comprehensive and Consistent Approach to Adult Education for Minority Francophones in Canada*. Brief presented to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages. Ottawa: February 26, 2018.