



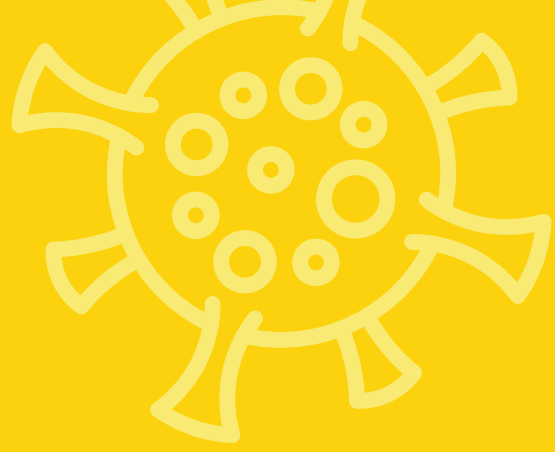
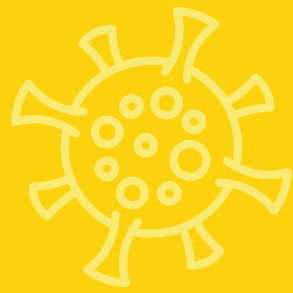
Stratégie nationale  
pour la sécurité linguistique

# NSLS Annex: Impact Covid-19

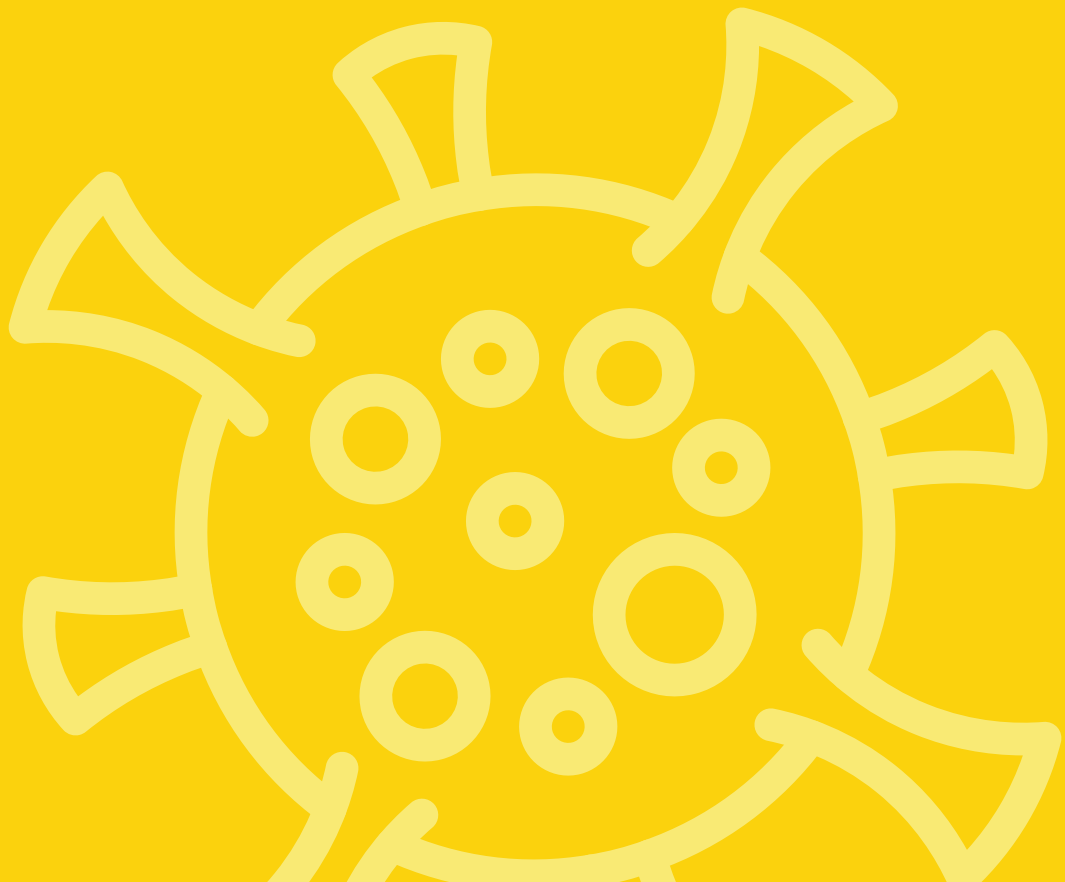


# Contents

- Context and Evaluation Framework.....4**
- Analysis and Interpretation.....6**
- Sense of Belonging, Confidence and Language Resilience.....6
- Education.....8
- The Workplace.....10
- Culture and Media.....11
- Public Policies.....12
- Conclusion.....13
- Analysis Overview.....14
- Acknowledgements..... 14**
- Executive Summary..... 16**
- Evaluation Tools.....16
- The Survey.....16
- Evaluation Limitations .....17
- Key Findings..... 19**
- Sense of Belonging to the Canadian Francophonie.....19
- Education.....21
- The Workforce.....22
- Culture and Media.....22



# **Context and Evaluation Framework**



# Context and Evaluation Framework

In March 2020, the FJCF released the *National Strategy for Linguistic Security*, after more than two years of reflection, research, and consultation. The COVID-19 pandemic occurred in the same month. Youth are very concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their mental health, academic motivation, and lack of French language activities, among other things.

In November 2021, the FJCF mandated us to conduct an impact assessment in order to better understand the consequences of COVID on the linguistic security of Canada's young Francophones.

We designed an evaluation framework based on the overall purpose and focus areas of the *National Strategy for Linguistic Security*. Based on these focus areas, we formulated the following broad preliminary questions:

## 1. Sense of Belonging, Confidence and Language Resilience

- How has the pandemic affected the overall focus of the NSLS?

## 2. Education

- How has the pandemic affected language security in educational institutions?
- How has the pandemic affected students' language security beyond school (at home and with friends)?

## 3. The Workplace

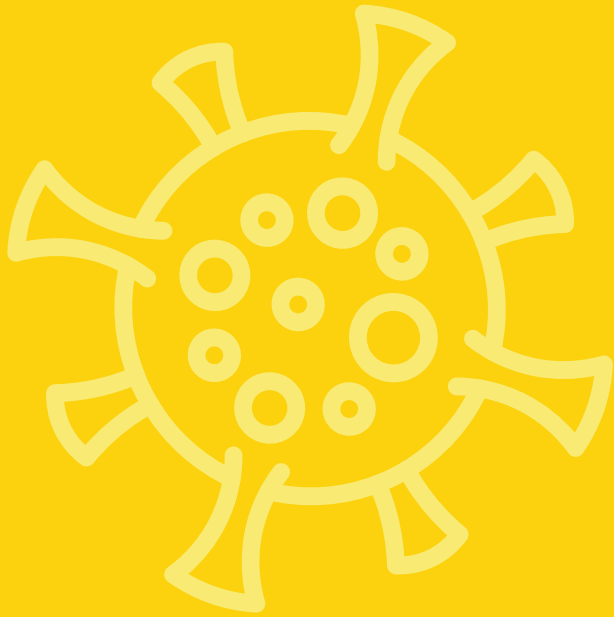
- How has the pandemic affected the promotion of linguistic duality and the active offer of services in French at the economic level?

## 4. Culture and Media

- How has the pandemic affected the influence of Canadian Francophone artists, arts organizations and cultural products?

## 5. Public Policies

- How has the pandemic affected the legislative framework at different levels of government?



# **Analysis and Interpretation**



# Analysis and Interpretation

At first glance, it is difficult to see how the manifestations of the global pandemic among French-speaking youth differ from those affecting other groups of citizens in Canada. It is recognized, of course, that those who were in primary or secondary school, or who were pursuing post-secondary education during the pandemic, were hit especially hard (virtual classes, restrictions or abolition of extracurricular activities, separating circles of friends, etc.), but again, these are consequences that other groups of young people in Canada have also experienced.

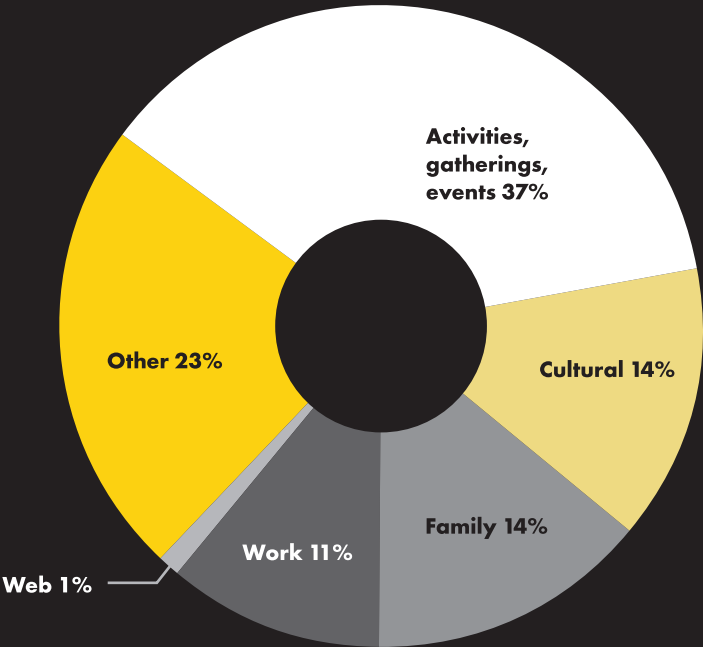
It is important to note that the respondents were not unanimous about the reality of the linguistic experience during the pandemic. For some, the isolation confined them to a less diverse environment, where a language other than French came first. For others, in their forties, the decrease in face-to-face activities and the simultaneous rise of the virtual world will have marked an increase in exchanges. The fact that these exchanges take place, for the most part, through social networks on the Web does not diminish the

fact that opportunities to exchange in French have multiplied exponentially. However, the comments indicate that while the exchanges are more numerous, they are also much less profound. Something has been lost in the substitution of face-to-face for virtual.

## Sense of Belonging, Confidence and Language Resilience

French is a living language and the Canadian Francophonie is, in a way, a huge network. The affirmation of a sense of belonging requires social interaction. We do not live our Francophonie in a vacuum.

**The main manifestations of the sense of belonging of young Francophones living in a minority situation**



The impact of the pandemic on social relations has been nothing short of staggering. The health measures have resulted in a dramatic decline in opportunities to live in French. The decrease in the number of activities where Francophones can gather was the factor most often mentioned by respondents as the cause of the erosion of their sense of belonging to the Canadian Francophonie.

**French-speaking youth have been deprived of countless exchanges with their circle of Francophone friends, concerts, festivals and gatherings - including several major events that bring together young Francophone Canadians at the provincial, territorial, regional and pan-Canadian levels.**

The impact of this deprivation should not be underestimated. Gatherings - in all their forms - allowed young people to:

- exchange with other Francophones (whether from their community or from elsewhere in the Canadian Francophonie);
- speak French;
- gain confidence in their language skills;
- and above all, enjoy living in French.

In fact, given the impossibility of participating in face-to-face activities, we note that several respondents changed their behaviours: notably, their cultural habits. Many sought to fill the void by consuming cultural products - especially music (recordings and shows broadcast on the Web). In some cases, the search for cultural content and products has resulted in the discovery of an expanded, global Francophonie.

**In many cases, however, it has simply resulted in the increased consumption of Anglophone culture.**

On the other hand, it should be noted that the pandemic seems to have had less of an impact on the sense of belonging of those whose cultural participation was already through *consumption* (of content, media or cultural products) rather than through *face-to-face participation*. Among those who were already involved in this form of cultural consumption, many believe that access to culture even increased during the pandemic, fuelled by the proliferation of French-language content on the Web.

A major trend is that attendance at French-speaking venues dropped dramatically during the pandemic. Given the health measures and constraints on gatherings, this seems self-evident. But - based on several comments and responses during the interviews - we venture the following hypothesis: many Francophone venues will have difficulty reconnecting with audiences after the pandemic. New habits have taken hold and, for many, so has an increased distrust of crowds. This may weaken attendance rates for Francophone venues and cultural activities in particular. Young people have become accustomed to living virtually and consuming culture online, often for free. This does not bode well for Francophone cultural venues.

At a purely statistical level, our research indicates that the linguistic resilience of youth was little affected by the pandemic. The vast majority of respondents indicated that their level of confidence in speaking French remained largely unchanged during the pandemic. The pandemic does not appear to have affected the likelihood of respondents continuing to speak French in a group where the majority spoke English, for example.

However, some comments indicate that a significant portion of respondents have felt linguistically weakened since the start of the pandemic. Many respondents indicated that they have noticed their French language skills erode since the start of the pandemic. There are many factors that have contributed to this erosion: fewer opportunities to practise French, being confined to a home where English is the primary language of communication, moving to a community where French is less prevalent, etc., but the consequence remains significant:

**many respondents now feel less able to speak and write in French than they did before the pandemic began.**

## Education

We attempted to assess the impact of the pandemic on two fronts for education: in educational institutions (schools, colleges, universities) and at home (with family and friends).

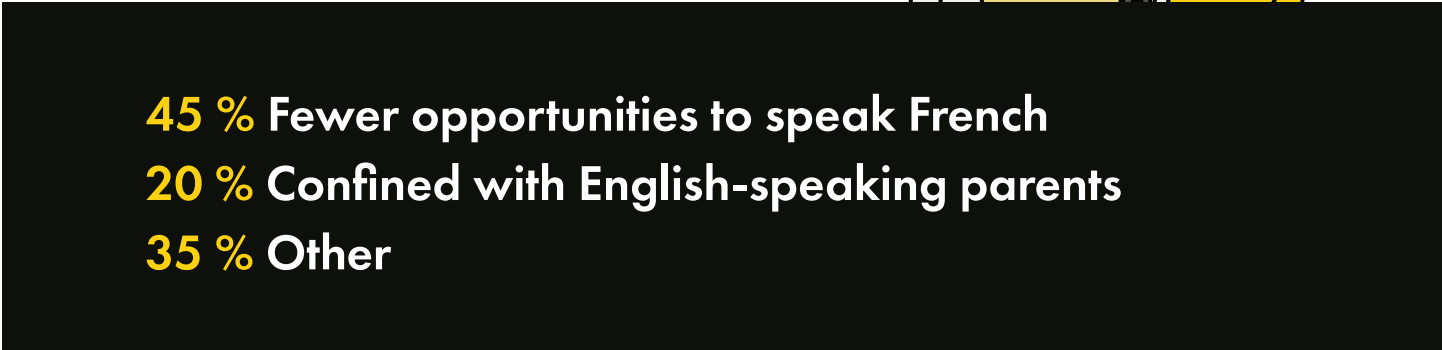
In terms of educational institutions, several comments and responses indicate that the strategies deployed by the community seem to have mitigated the alienating effect of virtual courses. Respondents report that they are just as comfortable expressing themselves in French virtually as they are face-to-face, that their teachers encourage them to speak up, etc. On the other hand, several respondents reported that most students never turn on their cameras during virtual classes and that they are less likely to participate in a real discussion during classes than when they are in the classroom.

**Indeed, the closing of schools and the widespread elimination of extracurricular activities will have left its mark on the lives of French-speaking youth.**

The learning experience is necessarily changed. The closures and other measures have contributed to a dramatic decline in opportunities to speak French in an educational context, especially in terms of informal exchanges between students, interactions between students and teachers outside the classroom, etc.

It should be noted that the educational impact of the pandemic appears to vary greatly depending on the age and circumstances of the respondents. The pandemic affected a whole generation of young people at a critical time in their social and identity development. Some early high school students report that during periods of confinement, they retreated to social relationships, virtual experiences and cultural content in English first. Those who were a little older and for whom the sense of belonging to the Francophonie was already well established seem to have had an easier time finding resources and seizing opportunities to exchange in French or to consume Francophone culture independently.

**Reasons why French-speaking youth in a minority context express themselves less in French during a pandemic:**



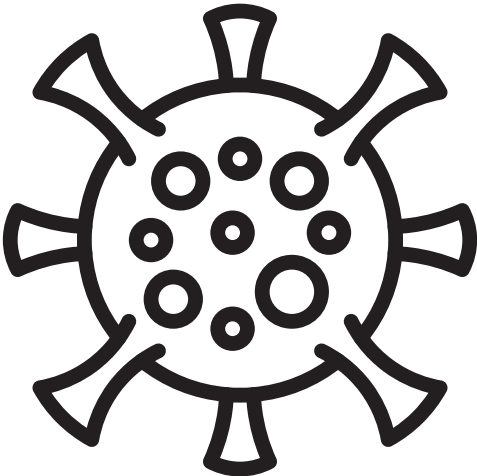
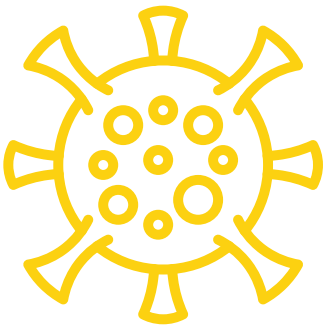


Others, who were graduating from high school at the start of the health crisis, were deprived of graduation ceremonies, proms and a host of other activities that usually mark the transition to post-secondary education or the job market. It was an abrupt end to high school for many.

Some, who were starting their post-secondary education when the pandemic first hit, experienced a completely unusual start to the school year. Respondents reported disappointment, frustration, and dismay at the lack of social contact at the start of their student life. They report that the economic climate has significantly reduced their academic motivation and that they feel that their post-secondary experience has been inferior in terms of the quality of learning opportunities and largely devoid of the social experiences that usually enrich early undergraduate study. A generation of young people will have been deprived of the opportunity to study in French in the classroom for almost two years.

On the other hand, some respondents explained that the transition from high school to post-secondary education, just as the first waves of the pandemic were being felt, had been beneficial for them. In spite of everything, they were able to forge ties with new colleagues who shared the same passions and the same sense of belonging to the Francophonie. It is important to note that these respondents already felt well anchored in their Francophonie at the time of the outbreak of the pandemic. It was their initiative, autonomy and resilience that ensured the continuity, and even the deepening, of their sense of belonging to the Canadian Francophonie.

In terms of the language security of students beyond educational institutions, we note that the role of the home as a language pillar was reinforced during the pandemic. Without many opportunities to live in French and practice French at the community, social and academic levels, respondents capitalized on the opportunities available at home. Notably, the impact of exchanges at home on the sense of belonging has doubled since the start of the pandemic.



# The Workforce

We attempted to assess the impact of the pandemic on the promotion of linguistic duality and the active offer of services in French at work.

Overall, we find that the pandemic seems to have increased the value of linguistic duality in the workplace. The majority of respondents indicate that their employer already valued employees' linguistic duality before the pandemic, and that this valuation increased during the crisis period. The phenomenon is almost identical in terms of active offer. Respondents indicate that their employers were already promoting active offer and that the pandemic has increased this trend. Respondents also reported that they have had more opportunities to communicate with their colleagues and supervisors in French since the start of the pandemic.

The interviews paint a hazier picture of language security in the workplace since the pandemic. Some confirm that the pandemic and the concurrent labour shortage have prompted their employers to value and capitalize more on the language skills of their employees. Others report that their employers were often overwhelmed by the constant changes to health measures. It was reported that businesses were in survival mode, with little energy left to devote to factors seen as peripheral, including the linguistic duality of employees and the active offer of services in both languages.

## Impact of the pandemic on the promotion of linguistic duality and the active offer of services in French



## Culture and Media

We sought to assess the pandemic's impact on the influence of Canada's Francophone artists, arts organizations and cultural products. It is important to distinguish between live arts, performances and other activities (all disciplines combined) that take place in front of an audience, and virtual performances and cultural products (books, films, sound recordings, etc.).

The reach of the performing arts - especially live performance - dropped dramatically during the pandemic due to health measures and the prolonged closure of almost all theatres across the country.

**The vast majority of respondents indicate that Francophone arts and culture are an important part of their lives, just as much today as before the pandemic**



Responses indicate that the diversity of accents heard on the air did not change significantly during the pandemic. Francophone art and cultural products appear to be widely accessible to the vast majority of respondents. It is important to note that respondents themselves saw a significant increase in virtual performances and cultural content during the pandemic and that many praised the resourcefulness and innovation of artists who found new ways to share their work with audiences during the pandemic.

Several comments and interviews confirm that French-speaking youth have made a point of finding cultural resources on the Web, especially given the almost complete vacuum of cultural activities available in person. It was reported that virtual activities and resources were a balm for many, especially during the most intense periods of confinement.

That said, the share of respondents who indicated that they do not have access to the work of Francophone artists has increased since the start of the pandemic. Access was reported to have decreased for all arts disciplines and cultural products, with the exception of music and film. Comments indicate that some health measures, such as the closure of French schools and venues, may have left some youth unprepared and unsure of how to access Francophone cultural products.

## Public Policies

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We have attempted to assess the extent to which the pandemic has affected the legislative framework of the three levels of government with respect to French, and how public policy changes have affected French-speaking youth during the pandemic.

Respondents noted little change in public policy affecting French during the pandemic. Some reported frequent delays in translation at the provincial/territorial or local level, resulting in challenges in accessing information about the pandemic and updates on health measures, among others. There was a perception that regional governments lacked the manpower and time to ensure translation.

**Some respondents indicated that they relied on English resources and information rather than waiting for French versions that would have been outdated by the time they were published.**

It was mentioned that the Sommet sur le rapprochement des francophonies canadiennes, initiated by the Government of Quebec, was timely. Not only was it a remarkable step forward in terms of public policy, but it was also a very welcome face-to-face reunion for the participants.



## Conclusion

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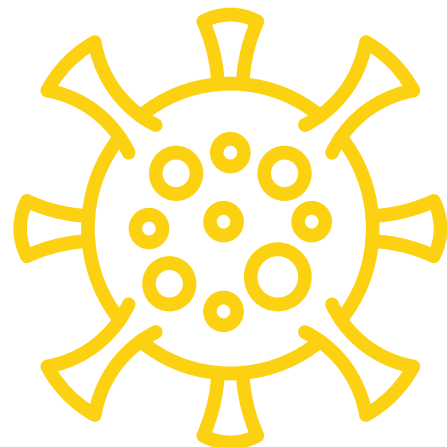
The global pandemic has certainly affected the language security of French-speaking youth in Canada. But its impacts are not widespread.

The consequences of the pandemic vary from one individual to another, namely because of the timing of the crisis in relation to the identity and linguistic development of young people and according to the specific context in which each individual evolves.

There is an alarming loss of opportunity in some areas. This is particularly true for large gatherings, major events and many local cultural activities that have been postponed or cancelled due to health measures. For young people, these opportunities are lost forever. But it would be premature to suggest that the consequences of the pandemic will necessarily be disastrous.

Some respondents say that the pandemic has cost them important experiences, diminished their quality of life in French and even affected their mastery of the language. For them, it can be said that they have lost a real asset. But others say that the pandemic was a new opportunity, a personal turning point during which they took charge of their lives and found new ways to live and thrive in French. Some gains were made in terms of language security for youth during the pandemic, namely for those who found an abundance of new content, experiences and resources on the Web - and especially social networks - to support their personal growth and language development.

For young people, and for organizers, mobilizers, creators, producers, broadcasters, employers, schools and other stakeholders in the Francophone community and economic network, the impact of COVID has yet to be measured. The pandemic is still ongoing and its impact on language security will depend largely on whether life returns to "normal". It will also depend on the willingness and ability to return to some of the social and collective habits that we may have taken for granted in the pre-COVID era. Let us hope that this return to normalcy is not too long in coming.

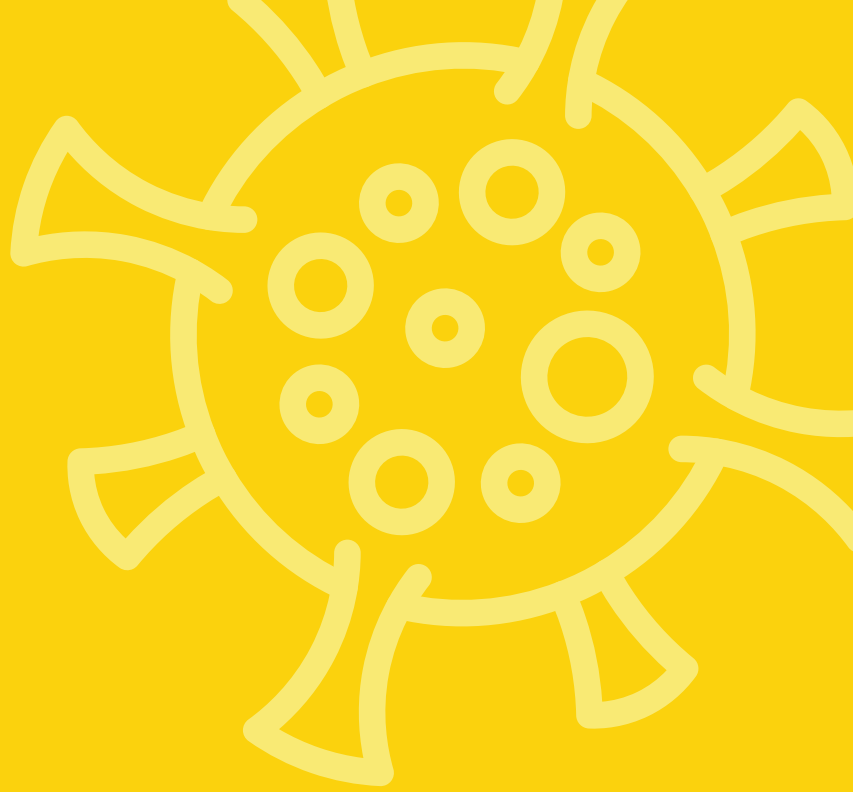


## Analysis Overview

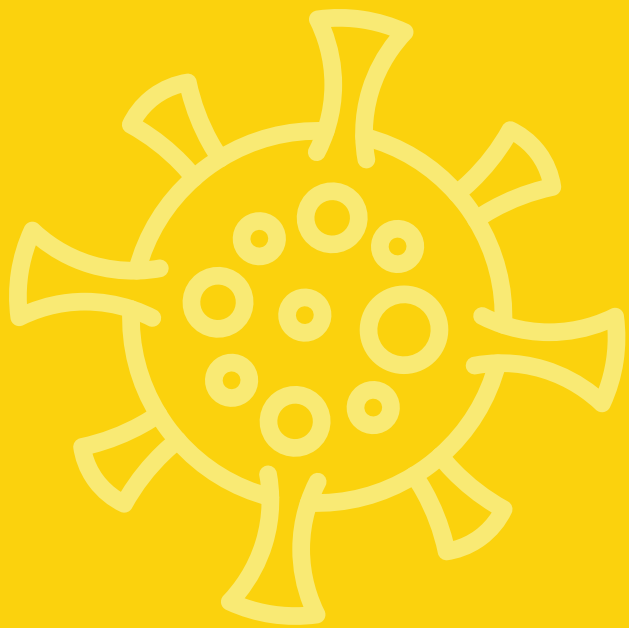
- The global pandemic has certainly affected the language security of French-speaking youth in Canada. But its impacts are not widespread.
- The consequences of the pandemic vary from one individual to another.
- Health measures have led to a dramatic decline in opportunities to live in French.
- French-speaking youth have been deprived of countless exchanges with their circle of Francophone friends, concerts, festivals and gatherings - including several large-scale events that bring together young Francophone Canadians at the provincial, territorial, regional and pan-Canadian levels.
- Attendance at Francophone venues dropped critically during the pandemic. Many Francophone venues may have difficulty reconnecting with audiences after the pandemic.
- Several comments and responses indicate that the strategies deployed by the education community appear to have mitigated the alienating effect of virtual courses.
- The closing of schools and the widespread elimination of extracurricular activities will have marked the evolution of French-speaking youth.
- The role of the home as a language pillar was reinforced during the pandemic.
- The pandemic seems to have heightened the value of linguistic duality in the workplace.
- The reach of the performing arts - especially live performances - dropped dramatically during the pandemic due to health measures and the prolonged closure of almost all theatres across the country.
- French-speaking youth made a point of finding cultural resources on the Web during the pandemic.
- Respondents noted little change in public policy affecting French during the pandemic.

## Acknowledgements

*The FJCF would like to thank Éric Dubeau (consultant), François Girard (translator), Isabelle Poirier (graphic designer) as well as all those who participated in the process.*



# **Executive Summary**



# Executive Summary

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## Evaluation Tools

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Based on the evaluation framework, we have developed and deployed the following tools in the current evaluation mandate:

- Online survey
- Interview protocol

The interview protocol served as the basis for the interviews we conducted. The interviews sought to probe certain aspects of our evaluation. The guest list for these interviews was developed in two stages: first, survey respondents could indicate their interest in participating in the interviews. Then, the FJCF added some names to the guest list, seeking to ensure greater representativeness of French-speaking youth.

Interviewees under the age of 18 were required to have a parent or legal guardian sign a consent form and submit it to the FJCF directly, prior to the start of the interview.

## The Survey



**15** pages  
**40** questions  
**143** respondents  
**397** comments received



## Evaluation Limitations

This study was launched in the winter of 2021-2022, approximately two years after the start of the pandemic. Thus, although several questions in the survey take a *before/after* format, the value of this data remains limited, as we did not establish a baseline before the start of the pandemic.

The survey did not contain any questions on public policy and we preferred to explore this issue with respondents during interviews. This methodology choice means that we have a much smaller pool of respondents for the analysis of that issue.

### Survey respondent location:

- 40 different cities/locations.
- 70% live in urban areas.

### Representativeness:

- 8% of respondents identify as Indigenous.
- 12% of respondents are members of a visible minority.
- 10% of respondents live with a disability.

### Linguistic affiliation

- 80% of respondents indicate that French is their main language spoken at home.
- 3% of respondents report having a language other than English or French as their primary language spoken at home.

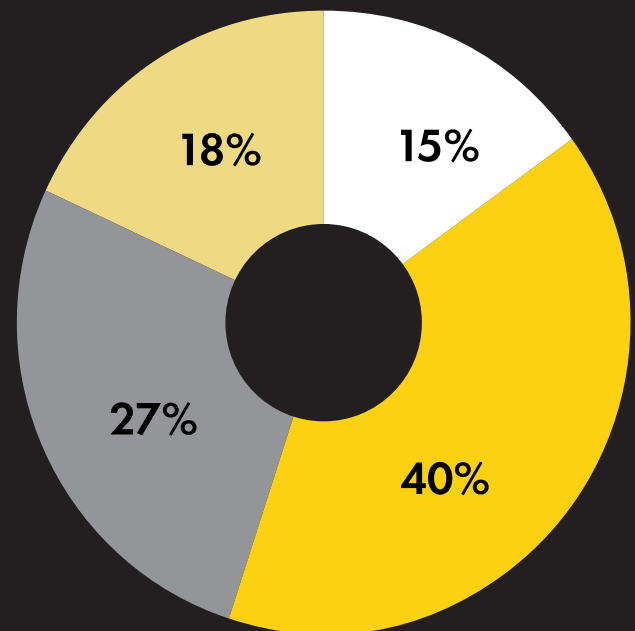
## Survey respondent age groups

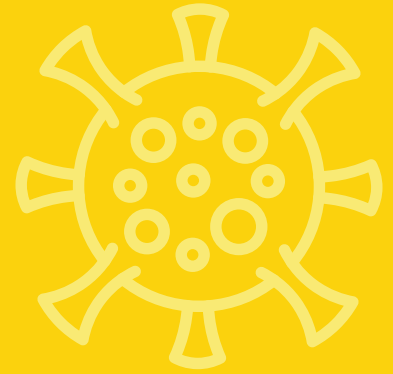
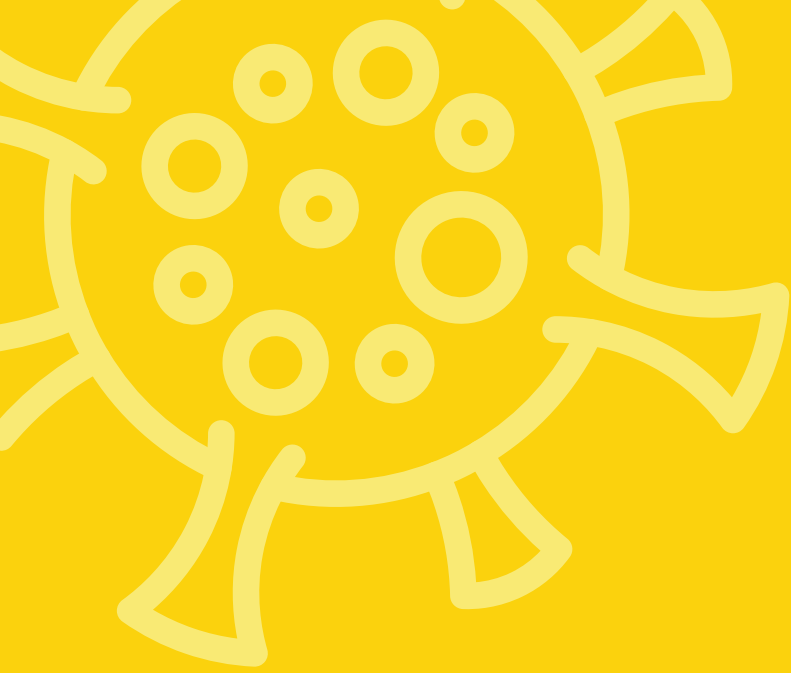
**15%** of respondents are between 13 and 17 years old

**40%** of respondents are between 18 and 21 years old

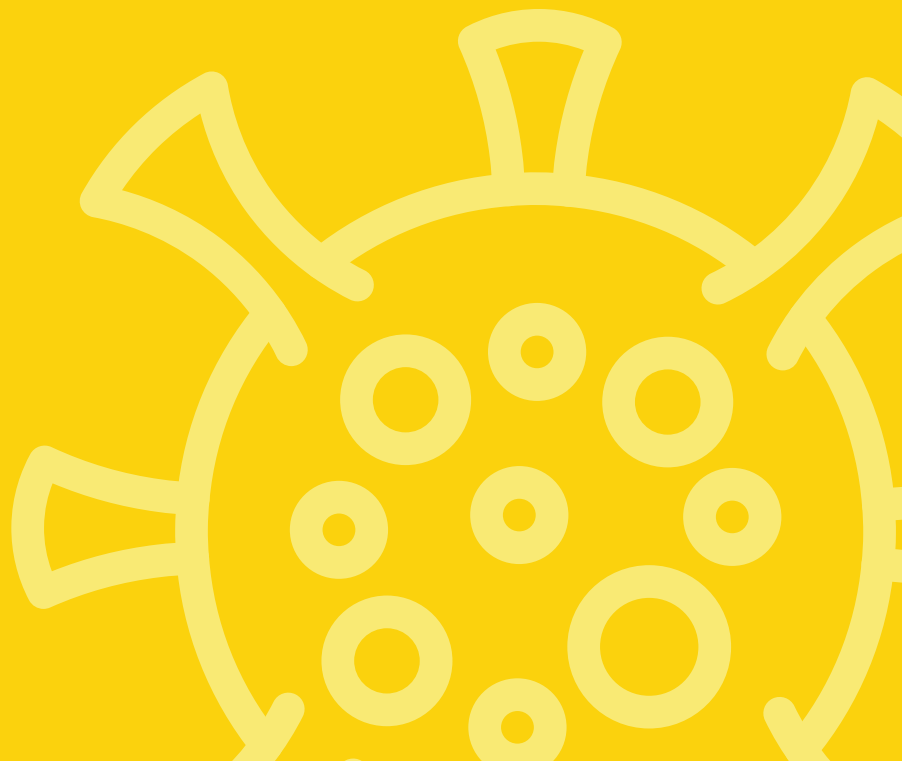
**27%** of respondents are between 21 and 25 years old

**18%** of respondents are 26 years old and up





# Key Findings



# Key Findings

## Sense of Belonging to the Canadian Francophonie

### Modulation of the sense of belonging:

- 48% of respondents indicate that their sense of belonging has remained largely unchanged since the start of the pandemic;
- 28% of respondents indicate that their sense of belonging was stronger before the pandemic;
- 24% of respondents indicate that their sense of belonging is stronger today;
- 30% of comments mention a feeling of disconnection, distance or increased isolation from the Francophonie since the start of the pandemic;
- Respondents aged 18 to 21 were the only ones among whom the majority (54%) indicated that their sense of belonging was stronger before the pandemic;

### Vectors for a sense of belonging:

- The decrease in the number of activities or events that allow Francophones to get together is the most frequently mentioned factor in the erosion of the sense of belonging (37% of respondents);
- Before the pandemic, the main manifestations of a sense of belonging were participation in activities, gatherings and events held in French (36% of responses).
- Respondents indicated that their sense of belonging rarely came through work (3% of responses) and through the web prior to the pandemic (1% of responses).

### Manifestations of belonging:

- The vast majority of respondents (82%) indicate that their French language habits have changed, at least in part, since the start of the pandemic.
- Since the start of the pandemic, the main manifestations of the sense of belonging are the consumption of cultural products (movies, music, books, periodicals, etc.), with 19% of the responses (a 7% increase since the start of the pandemic); 76% of the responses on cultural products mention music.
- A majority of respondents (65%) indicate that they have been participating in French language activities in their community since the start of the pandemic; a decrease of 24% at the start of the pandemic.
- Speaking French at home with family and friends has also become a more significant manifestation of belonging (14% of responses; an increase of 7% since the start of the pandemic).

### Confidence in language skills:

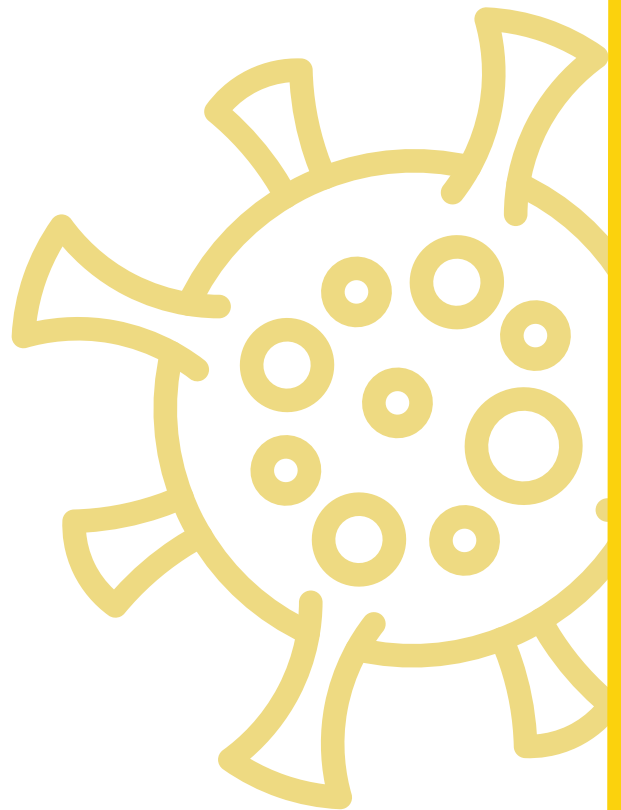
- The vast majority of respondents (73%) indicate that their level of confidence in speaking French has not changed much since the start of the pandemic.
- The main factor contributing to a decrease in confidence would be the decrease in opportunities to speak French (45% of responses).
- 20% of responses report a decrease in confidence due to confinement with an English speaker (partner or parents) during the pandemic.

### Opportunities to speak French:

- 44% of respondents indicated that their opportunities to speak French were greater prior to the pandemic;
- 41% of respondents indicated that their opportunities to speak French have not changed much since the start of the pandemic;
- Respondents aged 22 to 25 indicate that opportunities to speak French were greater prior to the pandemic at a slightly higher rate than average (50% of respondents);
- Respondents aged 30 to 49 years indicate that opportunities to speak French have remained virtually unchanged since the start of the pandemic (86% of respondents).
- The majority of responses (52%) indicate that opportunities to speak French have decreased due to the confinement and its impact on a range of social practices (e.g., fewer gatherings, fewer social interactions, fewer events in French, etc.).

### Consumption of Francophone cultural products:

- 84% of respondents participated in gatherings or activities in French before the pandemic.
- The vast majority of respondents listened to music in French (75%) and read books or periodicals in French (75%) before the pandemic.
- Attendance at Francophone venues has dropped since the start of the pandemic (BEFORE: 66%; SINCE: 39%) as well as participation in French language gatherings (BEFORE: 84%; SINCE: 57%)



## Education

### Sense of language proficiency:

- A majority of respondents (68%) feel comfortable speaking French at school; a 12% decrease since the start of the pandemic.
- 12% of respondents indicate that they do not feel comfortable speaking in French at school; an increase of 2% since the start of the pandemic.

### Active participation in the programming offered:

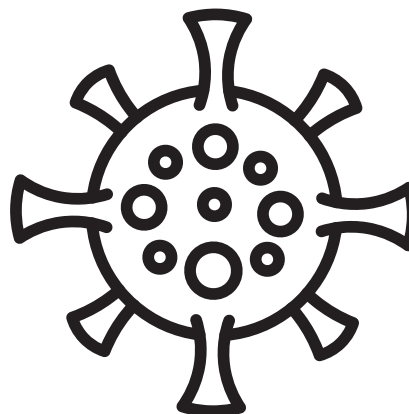
- A majority of respondents (52%) indicate that they participate in French language activities at school; a decrease of 26% since the start of the pandemic.
- 22% of respondents indicate that they do not participate in French language activities at school since the start of the pandemic; an increase of 13% since the start of the pandemic.

### Language commitment:

- Two thirds of respondents (66%) report that school staff encourage them to speak French; a decrease of 6% since the start of the pandemic.
- A large majority of respondents (69%) indicate that they exchange with their colleagues (friends, other students) in French at school; a decrease of 16% since the start of the pandemic.
- 8% of respondents indicate that they do not exchange with their colleagues (friends, other students) in French at school; an increase of 2% since the start of the pandemic.

### Impact of imposed virtual schooling:

- Two thirds of respondents (66%) agree that virtual school has affected their opportunities to express themselves in French.
- Two thirds of respondents (66%) agree that virtual school has affected their opportunities to express themselves in French with other students and educational staff outside of class.
- A majority of respondents (53%) agree that virtual school has reduced their opportunities to express themselves orally in French.
- 30% of respondents agree that virtual school has provided them with new opportunities to express themselves in writing in French.



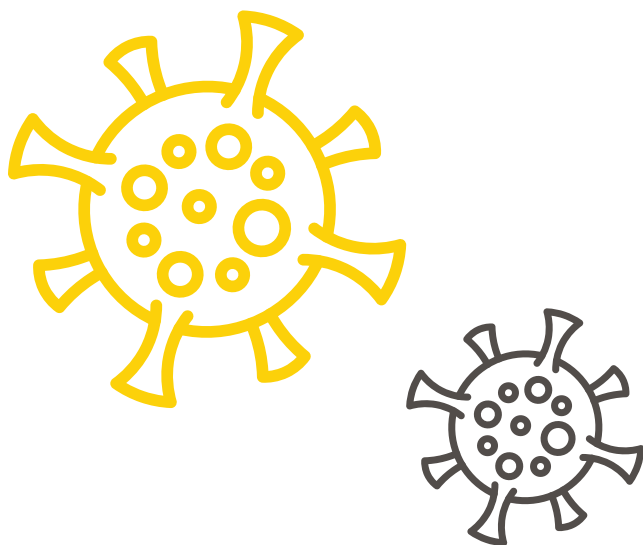
## The Workforce

### Valuation by employers:

- The majority of respondents (62%) indicate that their employer strongly values linguistic duality; an increase of 10% since the start of the pandemic.
- The vast majority of respondents (82%) indicate that their employer values linguistic duality at least in part; an increase of 9% since the start of the pandemic.
- Two thirds (66%) of respondents indicate that their employer was at least partially involved in the active offer of service in both languages prior to the pandemic.

### Opportunities to exchange in French:

- The vast majority of respondents (74%) indicate that they have the opportunity to communicate with their colleagues in French at work; an increase of 12% since the start of the pandemic.
- 15% of respondents indicate that they do not have the opportunity to communicate with their colleagues in French at work; a decrease of 6% since the start of the pandemic.
- The vast majority of respondents (71%) indicate that they have the opportunity to speak French with their supervisors at work; an increase of 12% since the start of the pandemic.
- 18% of respondents indicate that they do not have the opportunity to communicate in French with their supervisor at work; a decrease of 4% since the start of the pandemic.



## Culture and Media

### Plurality Awareness:

- The majority of respondents (64%) indicate that they regularly hear different French accents on TV and the radio; an increase of 3% since the start of the pandemic.
- 33% of respondents indicate that they do not regularly hear different French accents on TV and the radio; a decrease of 3% since the start of the pandemic.

### Access:

- The vast majority of respondents (74%) indicate that they have access to the work of Francophone artists and arts organizations; a decrease of 5% since the start of the pandemic.
- 23% of respondents indicate that they do not have access to the work of Francophone artists and arts organizations; an increase of 5% since the start of the pandemic.
  - The vast majority of respondents (87%) indicate that they have access to books and periodicals in French; a decrease of 5% since the start of the pandemic.
- Almost all respondents (97%) indicate that they have access to French-language music recordings; an increase of 5% since the start of the pandemic.
- The vast majority of respondents (87%) indicate that they have access to French-language films; an increase of 2% since the start of the pandemic.

### Recognition and appreciation:

- Almost all respondents (91%) indicate that Francophone arts and culture are important to them; a decrease of 1% since the start of the pandemic.

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