

# “English and French: Towards a Substantive Equality of Official Languages in Canada”

Vision Document for a Modernization and Reform of the Official Languages Act and Other Related Instruments

The reform project for the *Official Languages Act* will be oriented around the following guiding principles:

1

The recognition of linguistic dynamics in the provinces and territories and existing rights regarding Indigenous languages

2

The willingness to provide opportunities for learning both official languages

3

Support for the institutions of official language minority communities

4

The protection and promotion of French throughout Canada, including in Quebec

5

The Government of Canada as an example through strengthening of the compliance of federal institutions

6

An Act for the Canada of today and tomorrow: Regular review of the Act and its implementation

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## SUMMARY

- The official languages reform provides an opportunity to renew the foundations of Canada's language regime in order to respond to social changes, such as the stagnation of the level of bilingualism of English-speaking Canadians outside of Quebec or the declining demographic weight of Francophones across Canada.
- This modernization requires a whole-of-government approach and close collaboration with provincial and territorial governments.
- The vision document sets out the Government of Canada's intentions with respect to the official languages reform and modernization of the *Official Languages Act* (Act).

*Ce document est également disponible en français*

### Complementary initiative

The establishment of an expert committee to study and recommend measures to strengthen the place of French in federally regulated private businesses.

## MEASURES

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The Government is proposing 56 legislative, administrative and regulatory measures for official languages reform. Many of these will be of interest for provincial and territorial governments.

1

To **recognize the linguistic realities in the provinces and territories**: take stock of the linguistic situations of the provinces and territories in the Act itself; and state that the Act does not abrogate or derogate from the rights of other languages, notably Indigenous languages.

2

To **encourage the learning of both official languages**: strengthen initiatives aimed at the learning, acceptance and appreciation of both official languages; encourage cooperation between the levels of government in the promotion and delivery of quality French as a second language programs; establish a new immigration corridor for French-language teachers; and develop, with provincial and territorial governments, a framework for the recognition of French-language teaching diplomas at the pan-Canadian level.

3

To **support official language minority communities**: protect and promote the presence of institutions in official language minority communities, in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments, by improving support for key sectors (e.g. health, education); establish an obligation for the federal government to adopt a policy on Francophone immigration; improve French-language learning opportunities for newcomers while respecting existing agreements with provincial and territorial governments; and foster accountability in agreements between the federal government and provincial and territorial governments.

4

To **protect and promote the French language throughout Canada**: recognize the predominant use of English in Canada and North America and thus that it is imperative to do more for French; establish that the purpose of the Act is to advance the substantive equality of status and use of English and French and to protect official language minority communities; list the areas in which the federal government wishes to take action to protect and promote French, such as diplomacy; recognize the activities of the Ministerial Council on the Canadian Francophonie; encourage federally regulated private businesses to do more for French as a language of service and language of work; and launch a committee of experts as a first step in strengthening the place of French in federally regulated private businesses in Quebec and in other regions with a strong Francophone presence.

5

To **improve the compliance of federal institutions**: strengthen the powers of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the oversight role of the Treasury Board of Canada; mandate bilingualism of Supreme Court judges in the Act; and entrust the horizontal coordination of the Act to a single department.

6

Finally, to **ensure the relevance of the Act in the future**: undertake a complete review of the Act minimally every ten years.

## NEXT STEPS



Calls with each of the provinces and territories may take place in order to formally discuss the vision document.



Following these discussions, the Government will begin preparations for a bill. It is expected to be ready in 2021.