



# PERT

## **Beyond Stereotypes:**

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Understanding English-speaking Mature  
Workers and Ageism in Québec



# Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the many research participants and subject matter experts who participated in this study.

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The views expressed herein are those of the Provincial Employment Roundtable and La Passerelle. They do not purport to reflect the views of the Government of Canada.

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## Executive Summary

In the context of an aging population in Québec, as well as a shrinking labour pool amid ongoing labour shortages, this report aims to identify issues related to the labour market integration and retention of mature workers in Québec. More specifically, it explores the intersection between ageism and linguistic identity in Québec, given the higher socioeconomic precarity experienced by English speakers in the province.

To explore these subjects, we collected quantitative data from the Census of Canada, conducted an inventory of the employment programs targeted towards mature English-speaking workers, and held focus groups with mature workers. Through our research, we determined that unemployment tends to increase as workers get older in Québec. This was the case regardless of mature workers' linguistic identity, indicating that age may be a larger contributing factor to unemployment among mature workers than their official language spoken. Other variables we examined, such as labour force participation rate, showed that English-speaking mature workers tend to have higher labour force participation than French-speaking mature workers, indicating that language likely still plays an important role in mature workers'

labour market experiences. Generally, we did not identify consistent trends of labour market precarity among English-speaking mature workers compared to French-speaking mature workers. However, socioeconomic indicators such as the low-income cutoff show that a greater proportion of English-speaking mature individuals tend to live below the low-income cutoff.

Our qualitative data reflects this heterogeneity. Focus group participants shared diverse experiences, both positive and negative, related to aging in the Québec labour market. When they discussed language, it was often in relation to aging or ageism they had experienced as an older English speaker. For this reason, age and ageism emerged as a theme in the focus groups. This is in contrast to previous research, which has demonstrated that French-language barriers are the leading barrier to labour market integration for English speakers in Québec.<sup>1</sup> The different findings on age and language in this report indicate the need for further research on age and language in Québec in order to improve our understanding of how these factors impact labour market outcomes for English-speaking Quebecers.

<sup>1</sup> "2021 Employment Survey of English-speaking Quebecers and Organizations," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2022, [https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT\\_MC\\_Design\\_SRQEA\\_CORE\\_EINR\\_D5R02\\_20220823\\_EN\\_Web.pdf](https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PERT_MC_Design_SRQEA_CORE_EINR_D5R02_20220823_EN_Web.pdf); "CENSUS 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Census-update-2021-En.pdf>

## OUR RESEARCH FINDINGS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- English speakers and French speakers tend to have declining labour force participation and increasing unemployment rates as they age, highlighting the significant impact of age on workers' experiences in the labour market. However, the following differences between the linguistic groups appear in the quantitative data:
  - Mature English speakers tend to have higher rates of labour force participation than French speakers (for individuals aged 45 and older, English speakers have a labour force participation rate of 56.2% compared to French speakers' 49.6%).
  - Mature English speakers tend to have higher unemployment rates than French speakers for individuals aged 45 and older (English speakers have an unemployment rate of 10% compared to French speakers' 7.4%). However, as the age increases, the unemployment rate among French speakers increases sharply, surpassing that of English speakers.
  - Among individuals aged 45-64, French speakers earn more in median after-tax income. From the age of 65 onwards, English speakers earn more.
  - A higher proportion of mature English speakers live below the low-income cut-off (for individuals aged 45 and older, 7.5% of English speakers, compared to 4.7% of French speakers, live below the low-income cut-off).
- There are five employment programs targeted towards mature English speakers in Québec, all of which are in the Montréal area. Program providers indicate that the main issue in their ecosystem is a lack of resources and support for existing programs that would enable them to meet the evolving needs of their clients more effectively.
- Focus group participants indicated that ageism was a significant barrier to employment and retention within the labour force. They described how ageist hiring practices and myths negatively impacted the hiring process and, for those holding jobs, how it limited the opportunities available to them.
- Participants described experiencing poor mental health as a result of lengthy job search processes and narrowing opportunities, including frustration, isolation, depression, and anxiety.
- Program providers delivering employment services to clientele exhibiting signs of poor mental health indicated that they often performed significant socio-emotional work to help rebuild their clients' confidence prior to the job search process.



TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES IDENTIFIED THROUGH OUR RESEARCH, WE ADVANCE THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING MATURE WORKERS:

- 01** Increase collaboration between employment service providers, government stakeholders, and employers working on issues related to the employment of English-speaking mature workers
- 02** Sensitize employers, hiring managers, and recruiters to the needs and diversity of mature workers
- 03** Structure workplaces to meet the diverse needs and interests of mature workers
- 04** Offer training opportunities to upgrade the skills of mature workers
- 05** Ensure adequate funding for organizations providing English-language employment support to mature workers





# Introduction



# Introduction

More than a fifth of Québec's population comprises individuals aged 65 and older, a proportion that increased from the 2016 to the 2021 Census. A similar phenomenon is observed across Canada: every province and territory has experienced an increase in its share of individuals aged 65 and up.<sup>2</sup> These demographic shifts have significant implications for the workforce: the working-age population (those aged 15-65) is forecasted to shrink, affecting the labour pool and, by extension, economic growth in Québec and the rest of Canada.

Yet as the proportion of mature individuals within populations grows and the need for workers increases, mature workers, commonly referred to as those aged 45 and over,<sup>3</sup> continue to face ageism, a particular form of discrimination that often limits their ability to re-enter into and advance within the labour market. Ageism is broadly defined as discrimination or bias against individuals according to age and often intersects with other elements of individuals' identities, especially gender, disability, and race.

This report considers an additional dimension to ageism: language. English speakers in Québec face additional language-related barriers to labour market integration, retention, and promotion. Previous research conducted by the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) has found that English-speaking Quebecers experience heightened economic

precarity compared to French speakers in the province, including higher unemployment rates and lower median incomes.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these more tangible outcomes, English speakers also report experiences of frustration and isolation as a result of linguistic and language-related barriers in Québec.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, ageism in the workplace can lead to a lack of opportunities as well as mistreatment and is linked to adverse mental health outcomes.<sup>6</sup> In combination, language barriers and ageism together may have greater adverse effects on both the individual. Further, insofar as language barriers and ageism affect labour market detachment, they also stand to have negative impacts on the province, which desperately needs workers.

This report, therefore, examines the intersection between linguistic identity and age in Québec to improve our understanding of the critical issues and opportunities mature English speakers face in the labour market. It also proposes actionable policy recommendations for employment service providers, employers, and the government. We hope that our findings and recommendations help to facilitate the labour market integration and retention of English-speaking mature workers, combat ageism, and foster age-inclusive work communities.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Map 4 The populations of the Atlantic provinces are aging quickly," Statistics Canada, last modified April 27, 2022, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220427/mc-a004-eng.htm>

<sup>3</sup> This threshold varies across organizations.

<sup>4</sup> "CENSUS 2021 Update: A brief review of the latest data on employment among Québec's English speakers," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Census-update-2021-En.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> "Poverty and Social Exclusion in Quebec- Quebec's English-speaking Communities," Community Health and Social Services Network, last modified June 30, 2023 <https://chssn.org/brief-poverty-social-exclusion/>

<sup>6</sup> Hyun Kang and Hansol Kim, "Ageism and Psychological Well-Being Among Older Adults: A Systematic Review," Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine, 8 (April 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1177/23337214221087023>.

<sup>7</sup> Québec has begun to introduce some programming to address ageism and support mature workers. See, for example, "Un service d'accompagnement pour favoriser l'emploi des 60 ans et plus," Conseil du patronat du Québec, accessed February 27, 2024, <https://retravail.com/ressources-humaines/service-accompagnement-emploi-personnel-experimente/>



# Methodology





## Methodology

The research for this report was conducted from August to November of 2023 using quantitative and qualitative research methods.

In our quantitative research, we explored the demographic and labour force situation of mature English speakers by examining census data and conducting an inventory of the existing employment programs and services for this demographic group.

In our qualitative research, we engaged with mature individuals to identify age- and language-related challenges and opportunities they experienced when navigating the labour market, including job search, the workplace, and accessing employment supports. We conducted this research in three phases.

### Phase I: Demographic and Labour Force Portraits

The Census of Canada is the only publicly available data source providing detailed demographic and labour force data on the population according to their first official language (FOLS).<sup>8</sup> This type of information is unavailable through provincial data sources. We ordered custom data tables from Statistics Canada's 2021 Census of Canada with demographic and labour force data for individuals in Québec aged 45 and older. In this report, we utilize the age of 45 as the threshold for mature workers to offer a comprehensive view of the demographic group. However, we disaggregated the data into age ranges of 10 years (e.g., individuals 45-54), enabling us to examine data and trends according to more specific age brackets. We additionally broke down the data according to FOLS. We then extracted and analyzed this data to develop a demographic and labour force profile of mature English-speaking and French-speaking workers in Québec.

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<sup>8</sup>. Statistics Canada uses various methods to measure and classify official language speakers in the Census. In this profile, we use their First Official Language Spoken (FOLS) designation to measure the number of English speakers and French speakers in Québec. FOLS designation is a derived concept, taking into account a person's knowledge of Canada's two official languages, their mother tongue, and their home language (i.e. the language they speak most often at home). For individuals who fall into both English and French as their first official language category, we evenly divide them among the English FOLS and French FOLS populations

## Phase II: Inventory of Employment Support Programs and Services

We conducted an inventory of the available employment and employability programs targeted toward Québec’s mature English-speaking population through a Google search using the keywords listed below. We searched words from Column A in various combinations with words from Columns B and C. We then consulted the first five pages of each search return for programs meeting the search criteria.

Keywords: Québec +

COLUMN A	COLUMN B	COLUMN C
Mature workers	Employment	Employment
Aging workers	Skills	For the workforce
Older workers	Upskilling	Program
Experienced workers	Professional skills	Course
45+	Interview	Service
55+	Job search	Support
Seniors	CV	
Executive		
Managerial		



## Phase III: Focus Groups and Interviews

### Research Participants

In October of 2023, we conducted focus groups and interviews with mature job seekers and mature workers to collect qualitative data. When necessary, researchers conducted interviews in place of focus groups to meet the scheduling needs of participants. Focus groups and interviews followed a semi-structured format and were recorded and transcribed.

Participants were recruited through email and newsletter outreach, as well as in-person outreach by PERT researchers and project collaborators at La Passerelle, a local organization providing employment programs for mature workers. To be eligible, participants had to reside in Québec, be aged 45 or older, identify as English speakers and/or be comfortable expressing themselves in English, and either have a job or be unemployed and actively searching for work (retirees were not included in this study).

The focus groups and interviews convened a total of 22 participants aged 45-71. Of those 22 participants:

- Fifteen identified as women, seven identified as men
- Seventeen were from Montreal, and five were from other regions in Québec
- Fifteen were most comfortable expressing themselves in English, six were equally comfortable expressing themselves in English and French, and one was most comfortable expressing themselves in French

- Seven were immigrants to Québec, and 15 were born in Canada or Québec

The focus group and interview transcriptions were coded thematically to identify the most common challenges, issues, opportunities, strengths, and solutions expressed by participants. All direct quotes that appear in the report are from transcripts of the recorded interviews. Some quotes have been lightly edited for clarity, without changing the meaning or intent of the speaker.<sup>9</sup> We utilized the identified gaps and needs to develop an analysis of the current employment and employment support ecosystem.

### Subject Matter Experts

We additionally conducted two informational interviews with subject matter experts, both employment service providers in Québec, in March of 2024 to verify preliminary findings. The interviews followed a semi-structured format and were recorded and transcribed.

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<sup>9</sup> Examples are: removing repeated words; omitting filler words; and shortening long quotes with ellipses.


## Findings Summary

English-speaking mature workers occupy a unique position in Québec. They are a small cohort of roughly 288,265 individuals, representing 6.5% of Québec's total labour force. This group tends to have labour market outcomes similar to French speakers as they age, highlighting the significant impact of age on workers' experiences in the labour market. Older individuals in Québec tend to have lower rates of post-secondary completion, lower labour force participation, higher unemployment, and lower incomes.

There are some unique experiences among mature English speakers. For example, they tend to have a higher labour force participation rate than their French-speaking age peers. 25.9% of English speakers aged 65-74 are in the labour force, compared to 18.9% of French speakers in the same age group. Generally, mature English speakers are heavily engaged in the healthcare, education, and retail industries. Before age 64, however, the largest share of mature English speakers work in manufacturing, while professional, scientific, and technical industries

are dominant among those over the age of 65. A similar phenomenon occurs among French-speaking mature workers. Their engagement in the healthcare industry remains high, while their engagement in the manufacturing industry decreases after age 65, and engagement in retail and professional, scientific and technical industries increases. English speakers aged 65 and up also tend to have lower unemployment rates than French speakers, which aligns with their high labour force participation rate and their higher employment-related incomes. However, the low-income cut-off data indicates that there may be economic reasons why mature English speakers have high engagement in the labour market. Across all age brackets aged 45 and up, there is a higher percentage of English speakers as compared to French speakers who live below the low-income cut-off.





The program inventory data, meanwhile, returned a total of 5 English-language employment supports targeted toward mature workers, all of which were located on the Island of Montréal, with none identified in Québec's 16 other regions. This inventory indicates the limited resources available to mature English speakers, who would additionally benefit from more holistic support, including information on accessing financial assistance for those who are low-income, physical and mental health support, and networking activities.

Through the focus group discussions, research participants shared diverse stories that, when analyzed, suggest that English-speaking mature workers are a heterogeneous group with varied strengths, weaknesses, needs, interests and motivations. Participants shared a multiplicity of narratives: many discussed remaining active in the workforce because they found it intrinsically fulfilling, in addition to financially beneficial. Others described a need to work because their pension did not cover the rising costs of living. Others still described the barriers they encountered in the hiring process, including ageist assumptions.

This data paints a complex picture of mature English-speaking workers in Québec that does not readily fit into a specific narrative or trend. Instead, we have summarized three main takeaways from our research on which to advance meaningful interventions that can support English-speaking mature workers in a diversity of ways.

## AGEISM

Ageism was one of the major barriers that the participants discussed concerning work. While some described explicit experiences of ageism, others experienced ageism as the lack of opportunity or promotion. This affected their working situation in particular; they

felt frustrated and disheartened by the lack of opportunity within their careers, while those who were unemployed found it challenging to bridge into new employment opportunities. This is borne out in the statistical data: unemployment rates sharply increase with age. Ultimately, this reflects a larger issue: our society frequently devalues the experiences and worth of older individuals, making use of assumptions and stereotypes to justify this.<sup>10</sup>

Our participants emphasized the need for targeted programs that help integrate them into jobs that match their experience and qualifications, and equally the need to sensitize recruiters, hiring managers, and employers on the diversity that exists among mature workers, as well as the need for inclusive hiring policies and work options in response. Participants also described concrete examples of what an age-inclusive workplace looks like, touching on elements such as comprehensive benefits packages and opportunities for continuous growth.


## MENTAL HEALTH

Participants discussed the relationship between ageism, working, and mental health. Several participants indicated that in a work-oriented culture, a lack of work can result in a vacuum of purpose, socialization, and schedule. Further, when this occurs in the context of societal ageism, wherein mature individuals already express that they feel devalued, the lack or loss of one of the main areas from which an individual derives value carries extra weight. It can additionally be more challenging for individuals to recover, owing to ageism-related barriers to re-entering the labour market. Service providers report that, as a result, they observe that many of their clients are experiencing isolation and depression.

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Martine Lagacé, et. al., "An Examination of the Social and Economic Impacts of Ageism," Federal, Provincial and Territorial Forum of Ministers Responsible for Seniors, last modified February 2022 <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/employment-social-development/corporate/seniors/forum/ageism-social-economic-impacts/ageism-social-economic-impacts-en.pdf>





In our interviews, program providers emphasized that they must do significant socio-emotional work with their clients before they can prepare them for the job hunt and in advance of providing more direct employment assistance such as editing cover letters or interview coaching. They are spending more time rebuilding the confidence of their clients to prepare them for their job search, as opposed to meeting their clients at a time when they are ready to begin the job search. This echoes previous PERT research:<sup>11</sup> In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, employment service providers are providing more support aside from direct employment assistance, ranging from confidence coaching to connecting clients with mental health services and food security options. Many indicated

that this was essential to helping their clients reach a point where they are ready to receive direct employment services.

Program providers stressed that while their staff are often highly skilled in providing wrap-around support and coaching services, they needed more funding to hire designated and better-trained staff, such as social workers, to perform this work and deliver more holistic and integrated support to clients. Another solution proposed was to establish partnerships with organizations already providing psychosocial services so they can more seamlessly refer their clients to these services.

In this vein, program providers emphasized the need to collaborate with government stakeholders and funders to ensure that funding opportunities and programming to support mature workers are developed in concert with both mature workers and the employment service providers to ensure they meet their needs.

## LABOUR MARKET PRECARIETY

Several participants discussed returning to work because their pension was insufficient to cover the rising costs of living or owing to other issues of financial insecurity.<sup>12</sup> This parallels the quantitative data establishing that English-speaking mature individuals are more likely to live below the low-income cut-off than their Francophone counterparts. Program providers provided additional insight on this: in these situations, or situations where mature workers are laid off a few years before retirement, English speakers who had worked at predominantly English organizations faced additional barriers to finding work. While they may have some French-language proficiency, they were often out of practice with workplace French.

This highlights the need for access to work-integrated and life-long French-language learning resources and, more broadly, the need for policy change to support mature workers and seniors to retire comfortably. The higher rate of English speakers living below the low-income cut-off also highlights the need for financial assistance and programs to help aging English speakers meet their basic needs, including housing and food.

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<sup>11</sup>. "Mapping Employment Supports for Québec's Racialized and Immigrant English-speaking Communities," Provincial Employment Roundtable, last modified July 2023, <https://pertquebec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Mapping-Employment-Supports-for-Quebecs-Racialized-and-Immigrant-English-speaking-Communities.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> See "Elderly Poverty," Conference Board of Canada, accessed January 30, 2024, <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/hcp/elderly-poverty.aspx/>; "Brief – Financial Precariousness is not a Function of Age," Réseau FADOQ, last modified May 13, 2021, [https://www.fadoq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/la-precarite-financiere-na-pas-dage\\_en.pdf](https://www.fadoq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/la-precarite-financiere-na-pas-dage_en.pdf)

# Demographic and Socio-Economic Portrait

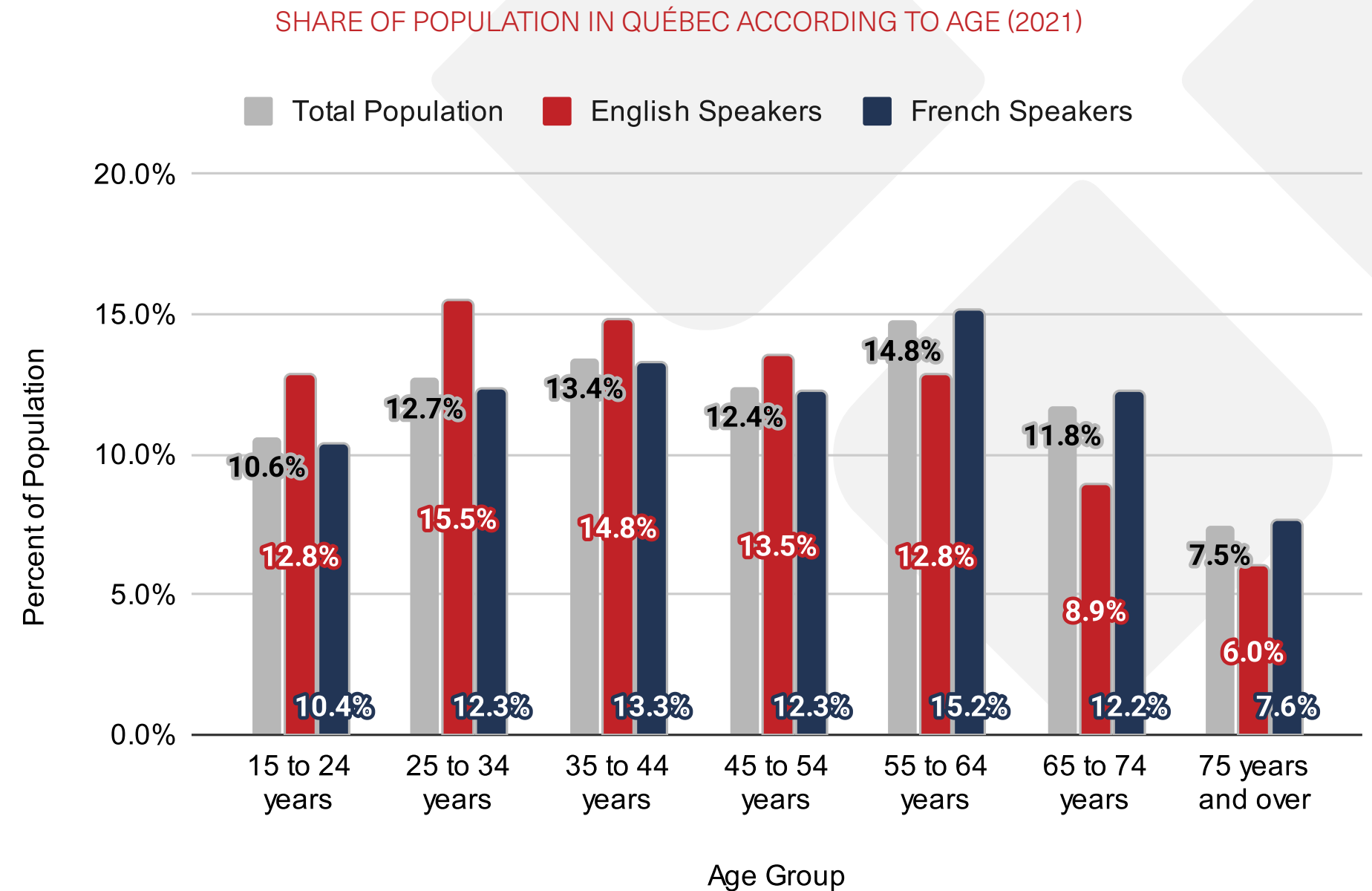




## Population

There are 513,158 English speakers aged 45 and over in Québec, making up 41.2% of the English-speaking population. In contrast, the province has 3,301,013 French speakers aged 45 and over, making up 47.3% of the French-speaking population.

When further broken down according to age, we see that English-speaking youth comprise a larger share of the English-speaking population than English-speaking mature individuals. The inverse is true among French speakers: mature individuals make up a larger portion of the French-speaking population than youth.

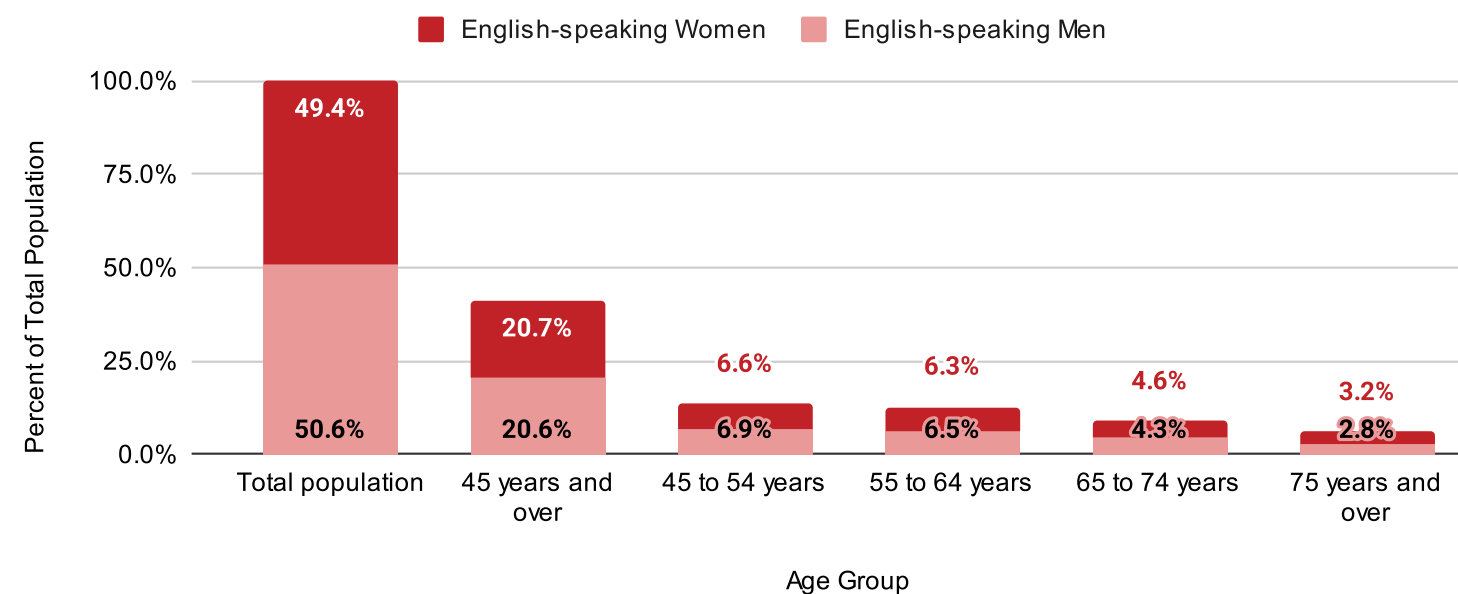




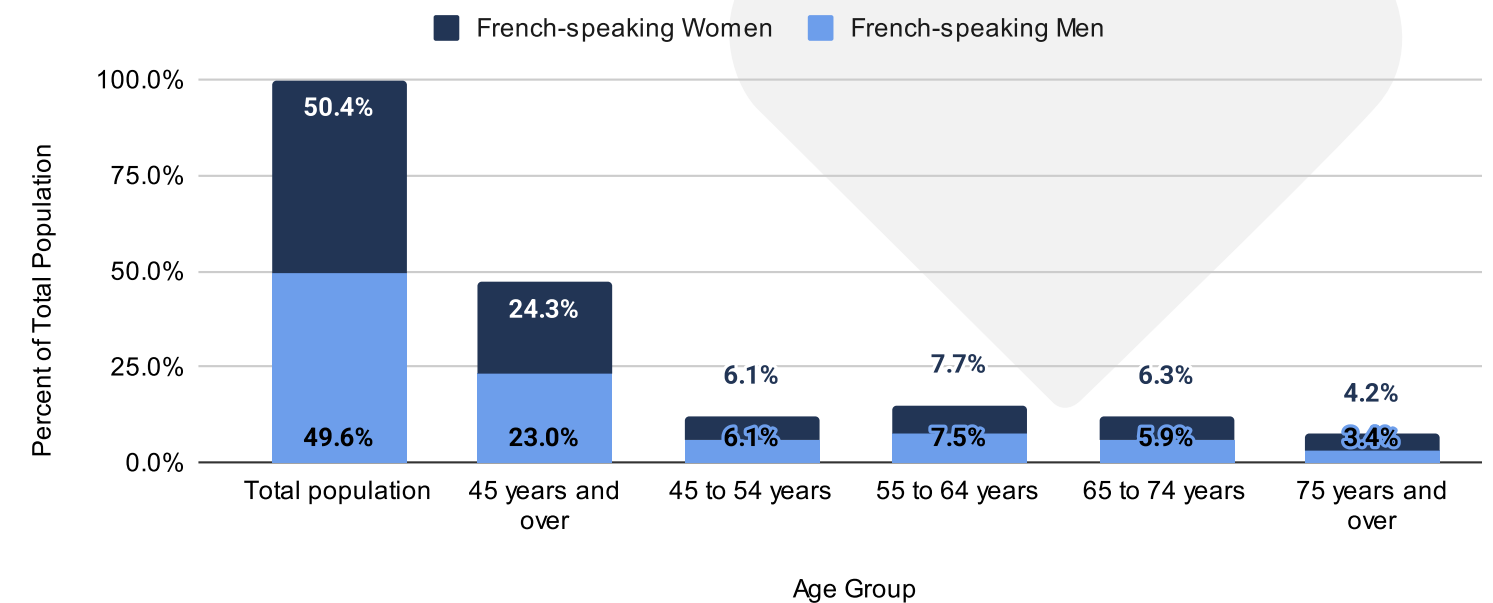
# Gender

Women and men aged 45 and over each represent a fifth of the total population of Québec respectively. As individuals age, however, women tend to represent a larger proportion of the population than men. This is consistent with national trends; women tend to live longer than men.<sup>13</sup>

SHARE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING POPULATOIN, AGE 45+ (2021)



SHARE OF FRENCH-SPEAKING POPULATOIN, AGE 45+ (2021)

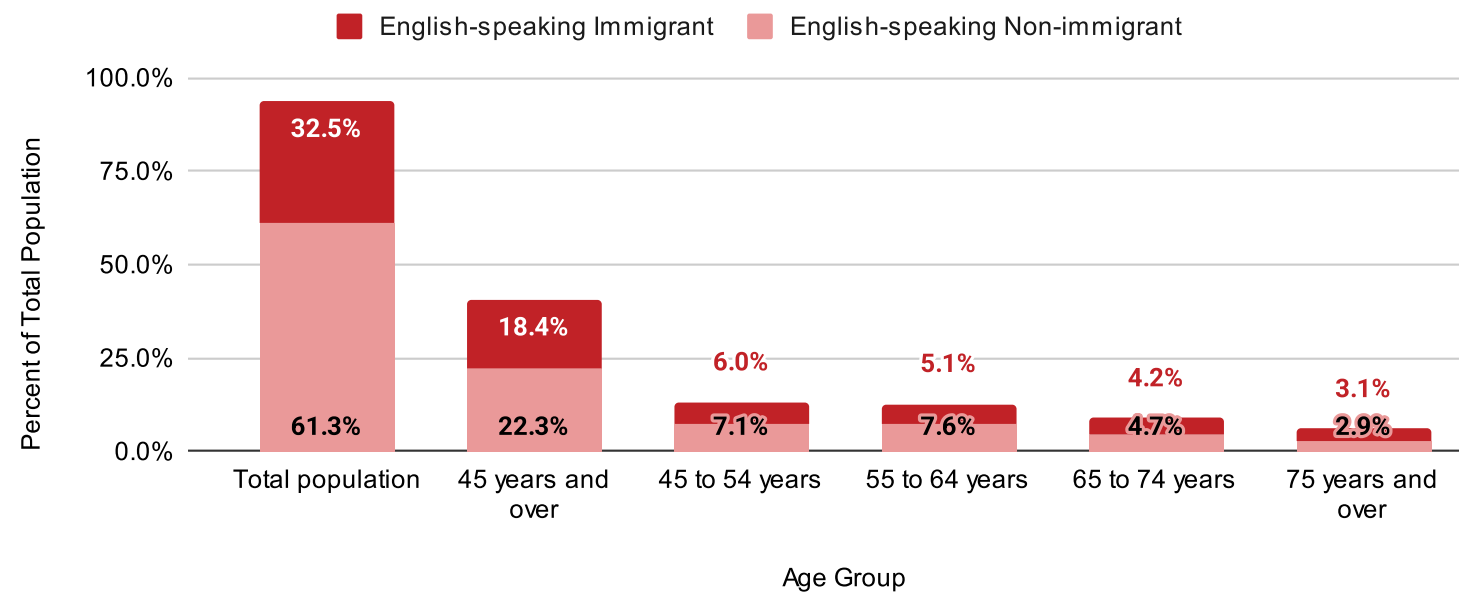


<sup>13</sup>. "Health-adjusted life expectancy in Canada," Statistics Canada, last modified April 18, 2018, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2018004/article/54950-eng.htm>

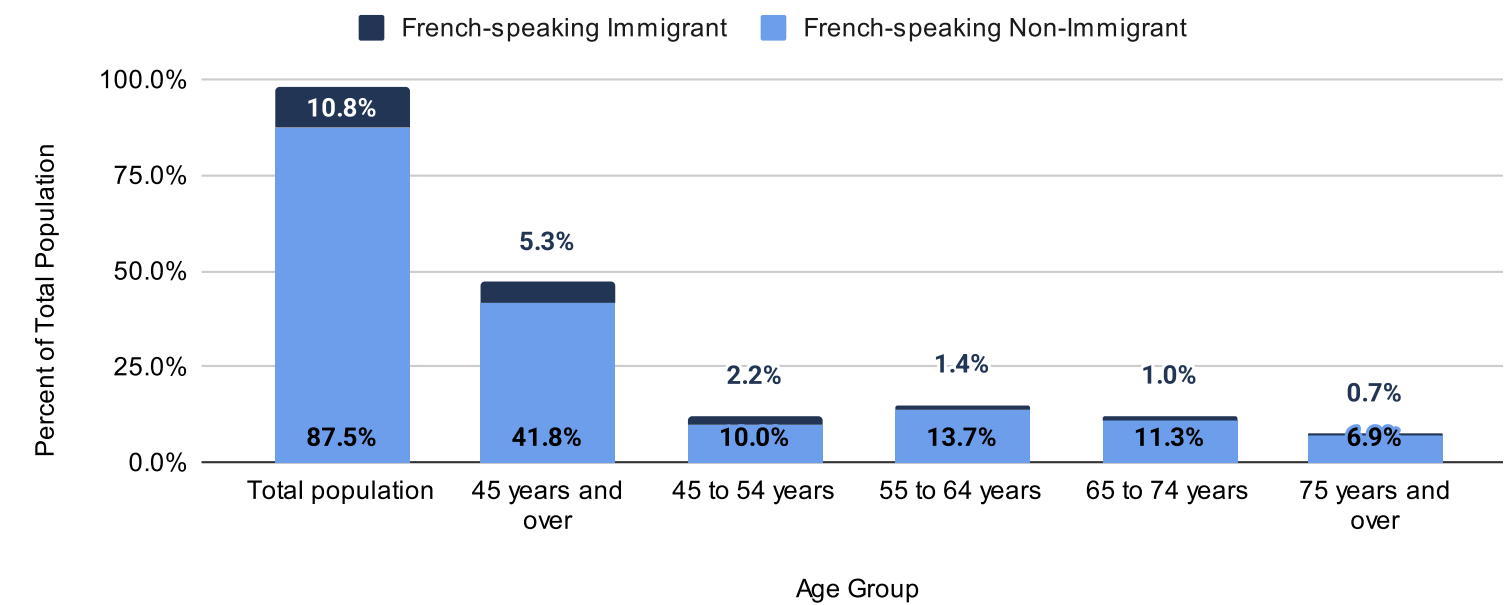
# Immigration Status

Immigrants<sup>14</sup> make up a very small portion of Québec's total population and French-speaking community. Among English speakers, however, immigrants comprise a relatively large proportion of the population compared to non-immigrants. In fact, there are slightly more English-speaking immigrants aged 75+ than non-immigrants.

SHARE OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING POPULATION ACCORDING TO IMMIGRATION STATUS, AGE 45+ (2021)



SHARE OF FRENCH-SPEAKING POPULATION ACCORDING TO IMMIGRATION STATUS, AGE 45+ (2021)

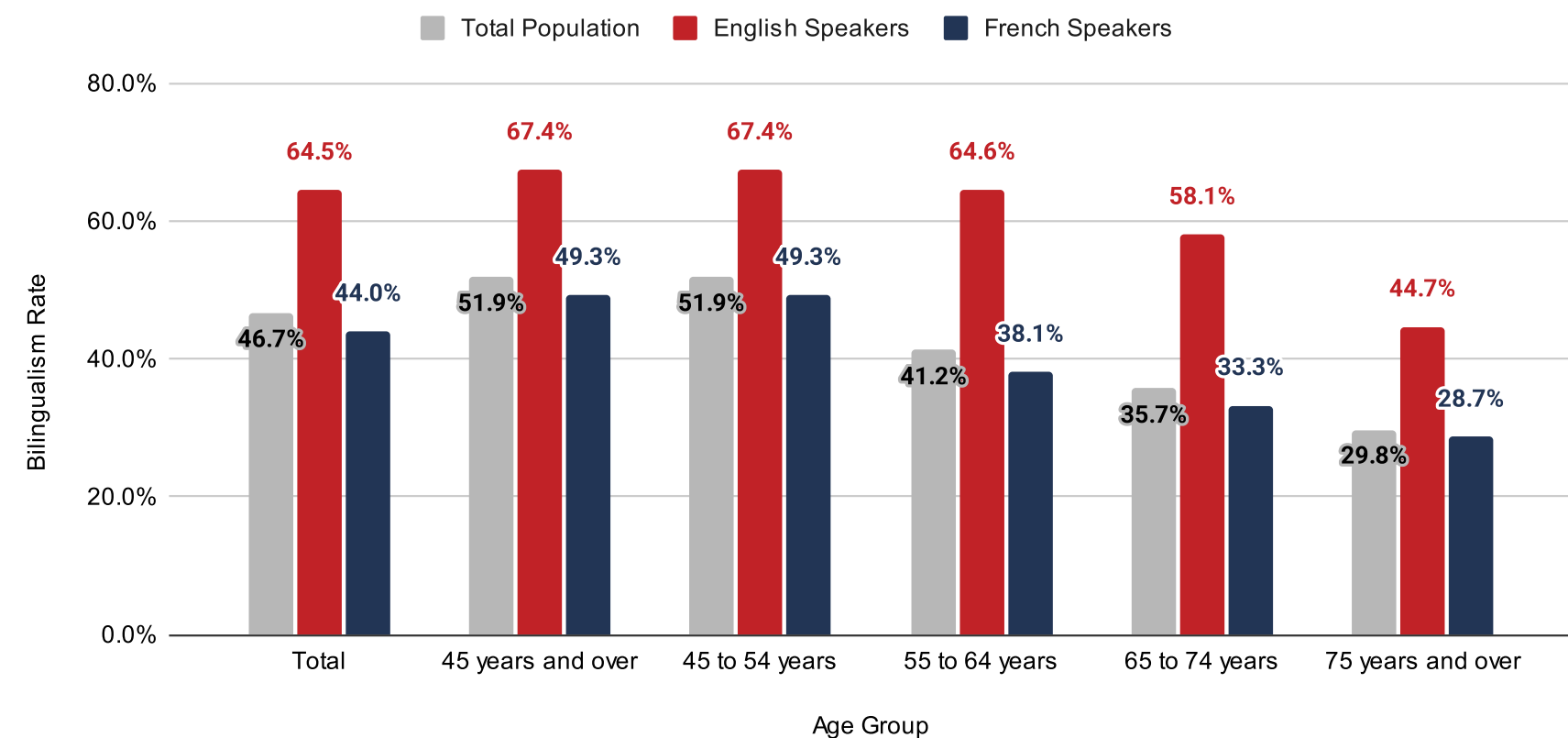


<sup>14</sup> Immigrants are defined by Statistics Canada as people who are or ever have been landed immigrants or permanent residents in Canada. It does not include non-permanent residents, a category which includes international students and refugees.

# Bilingualism

Across each age bracket, English speakers have higher levels of bilingualism<sup>15</sup> than French speakers. Bilingualism declines with age; among English speakers, 45-54-year-old English speakers have the highest rates of bilingualism, while English speakers aged 75+ have the lowest rates.

BILINGUALISM RATES OF POPULATION IN QUEBEC, AGE 45+



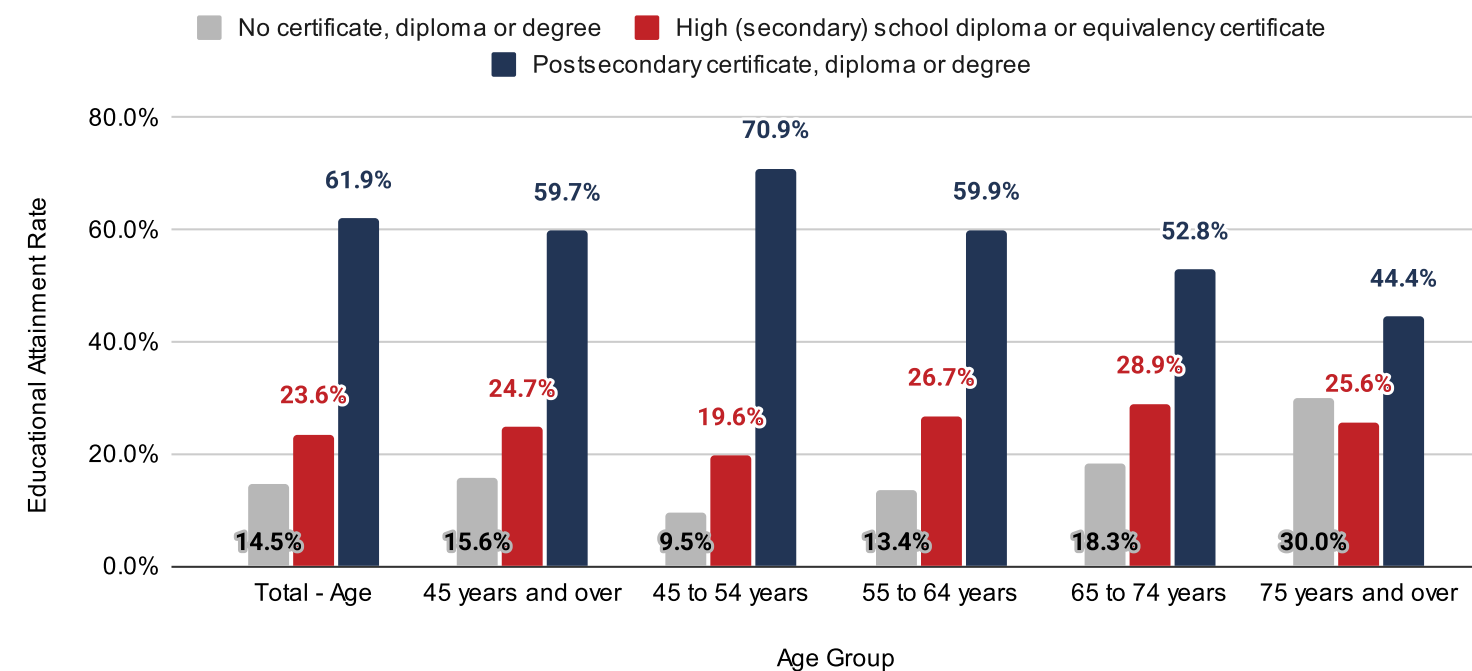
<sup>15</sup> Statistics Canada utilizes the term “knowledge of official languages” in reference to whether an individual can conduct a conversation in English only, French only, in both or in neither language. This is used to measure bilingualism. It should be noted that this metric relies on self-reported data, and primarily measures conversational ability. For this reason, it captures a broad spectrum of bilingualism, ranging from intermediate to full fluency.



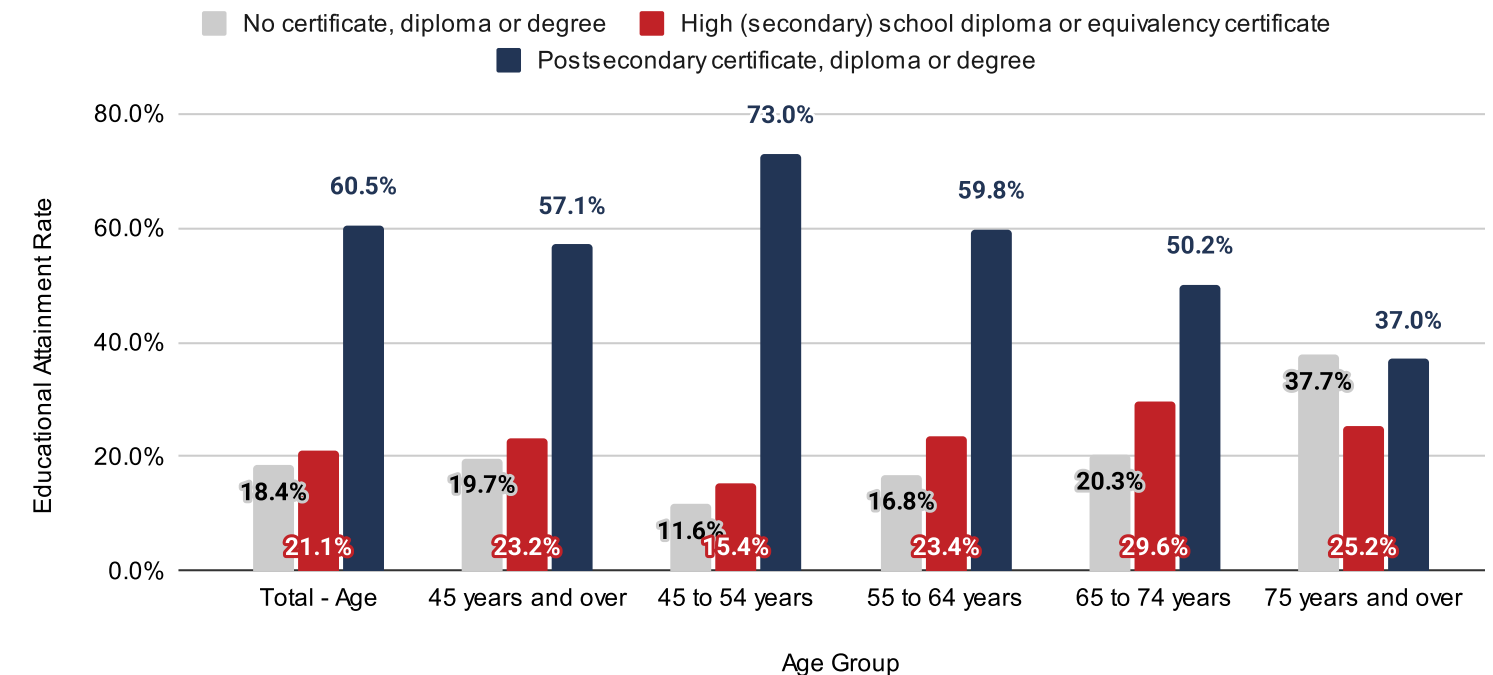
# Education

Post-secondary education rates are high among both English and French speakers, with English speakers having slightly higher rates of post-secondary education on average. Post-secondary education tends to decline as the population ages, with French speakers experiencing sharper declines in education with age. From the 45-54 age bracket to the 75 and up age bracket, there is a 26.5 percentage point decline in post-secondary education rates among English speakers. Among French speakers, the decline is 36 percentage points across the same age brackets.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT RATES OF ENGLISH SPEAKERS, AGE 45+ (2021)



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT RATES OF FRENCH SPEAKERS, AGE 45+ (2021)



# Labour Force Profile

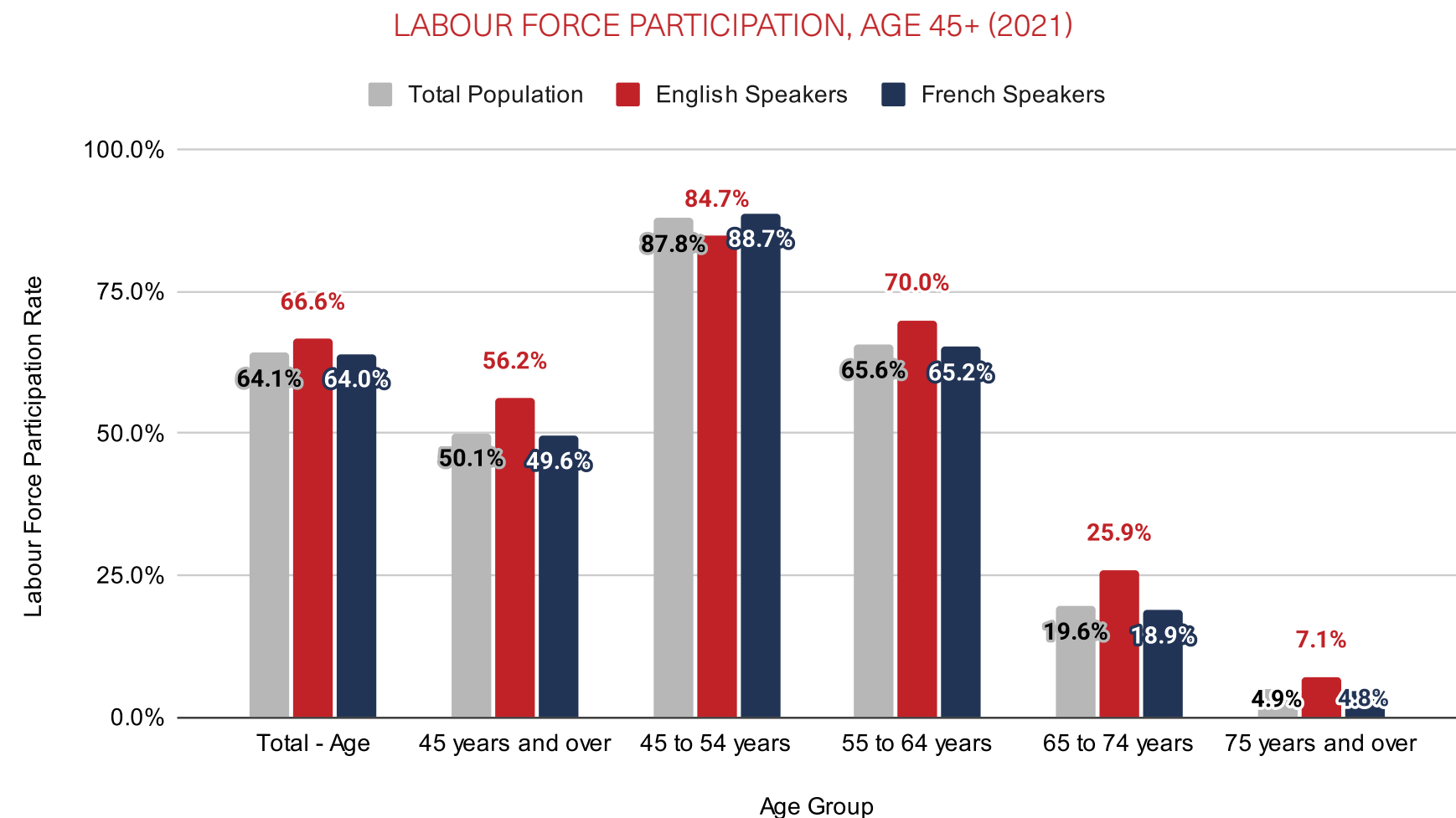
## LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION

In Québec, there are 1,934,800 individuals aged 45 and over in the labour force. They comprise just over two-fifths (43.6%) of the province's total labour force of approximately 4,435,460.

Mature individuals aged 45-64 have higher labour force participation<sup>16</sup> rates compared to the total population, irrespective of their linguistic community. Labour force participation declines considerably after age 65, corresponding with the normal retirement age under the Québec Pension Plan (65).

English speakers generally tend to have higher labour force participation rates than French speakers, with the exception of the 45-54 year age group.

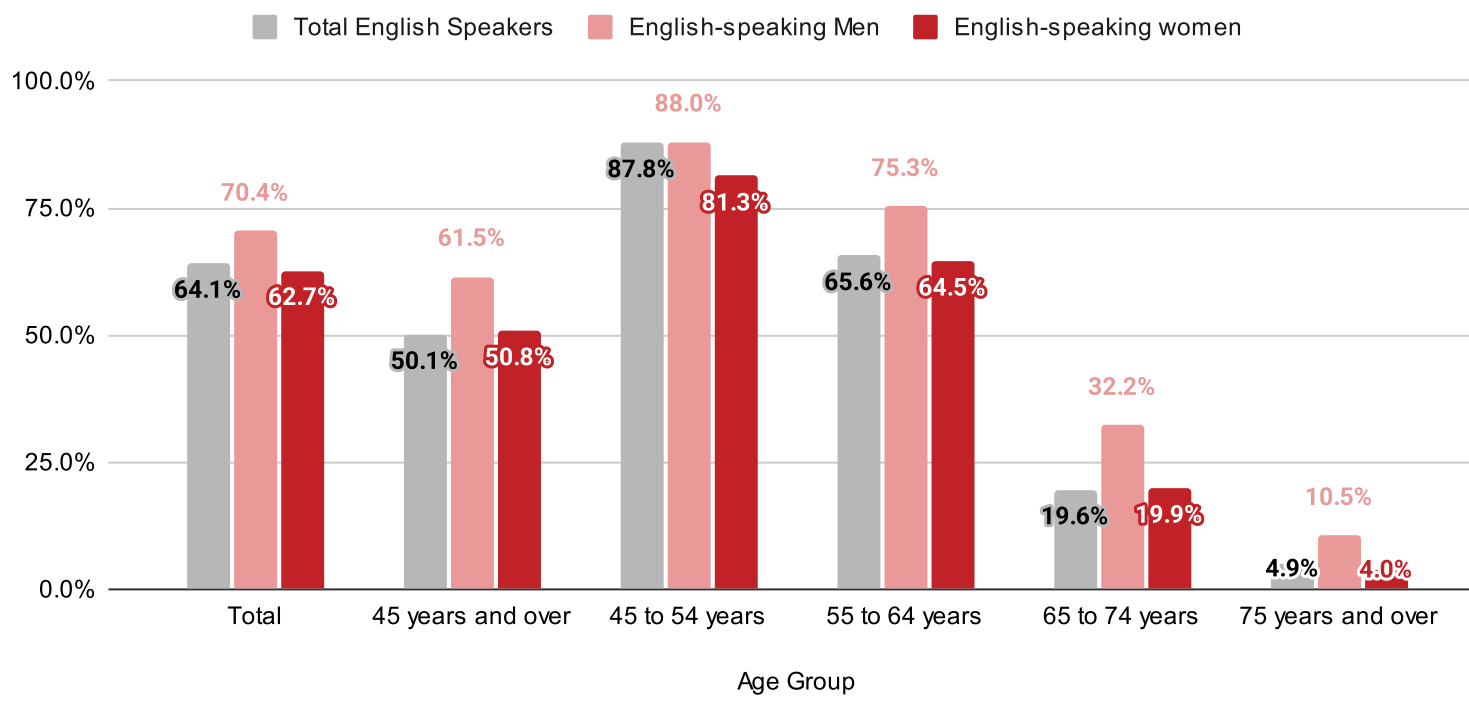
<sup>16</sup> Labour force participation refers to the proportion of the working-age population (aged 15 and over) who are either employed or actively seeking employment and are therefore considered to be part of the labour force.



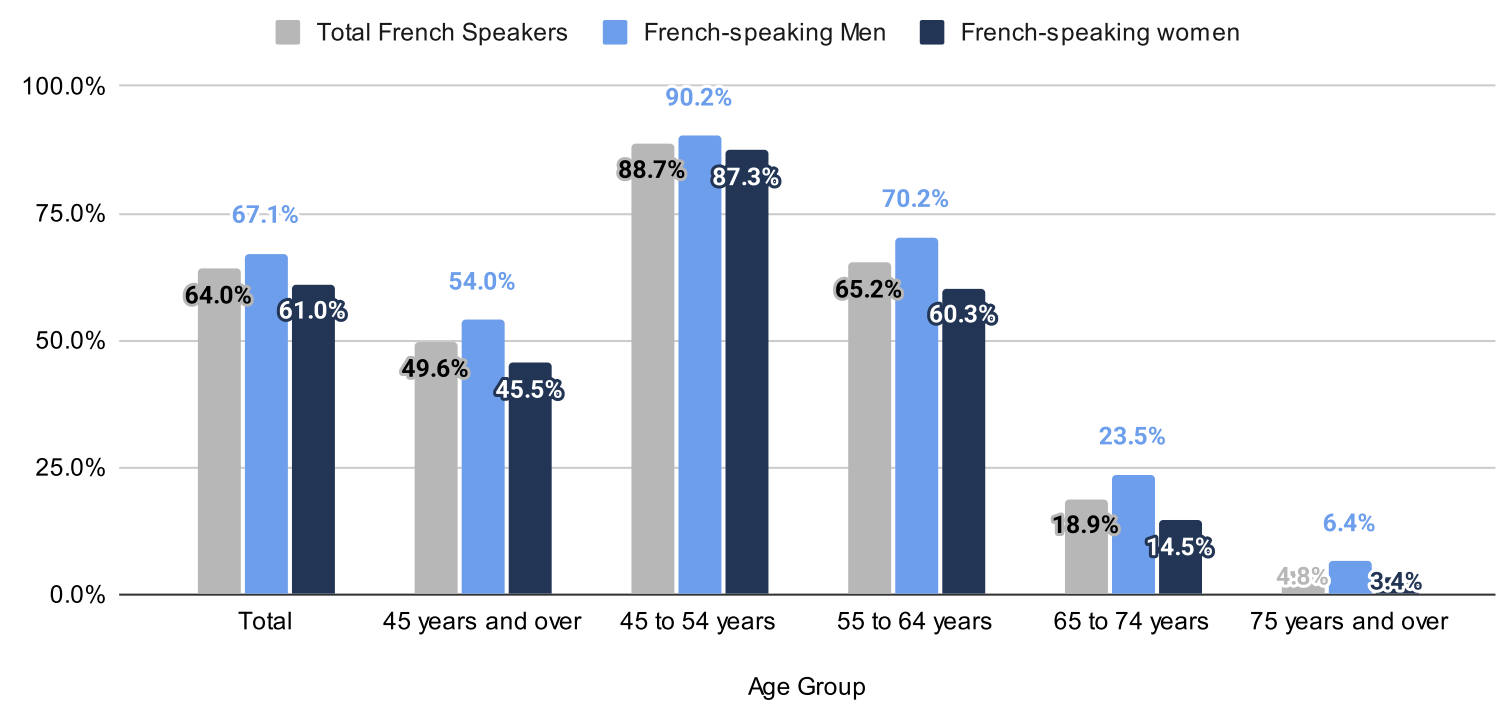
# Labour Force Participation According to Gender

Among English speakers, men tend to have higher labour force participation rates than women. This is also true among French speakers, with mature French-speaking women age 45+ having the lowest labour force participation rate among all groups.

LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATE RATE OF FRENCH SPEAKERS, AGE 45+ (2021)



LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATE RATE OF FRENCH SPEAKERS, AGE 45+ (2021)





# Industry

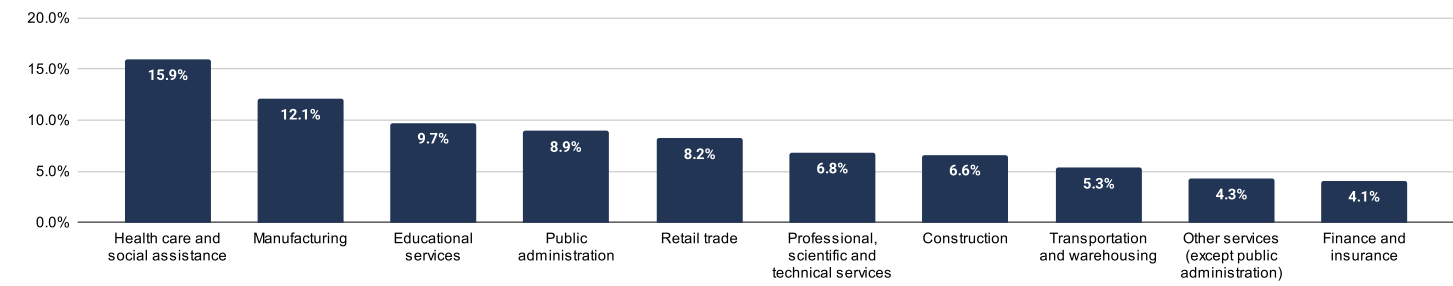
The top three major industries are the same for English speakers aged 45-54 and 55-64: manufacturing, healthcare and social services, and professional and scientific industries. Manufacturing is not a leading industry for English speakers aged 65 and up, however. This is perhaps due to the physical demands of many occupations in this industry. The leading industries for English speakers aged 65+ are professional, technical, and scientific industries, healthcare and social services, and educational services.

Among French-speaking mature workers, health care is consistently the top industry. It is the top industry among French speakers 45-54 and 55-64, followed by manufacturing. From age 65+, however, retail is the top industry among French speakers.

TOP INDUSTRIES AMONG ENGLISH SPEAKERS AGED 45-54 (2021)

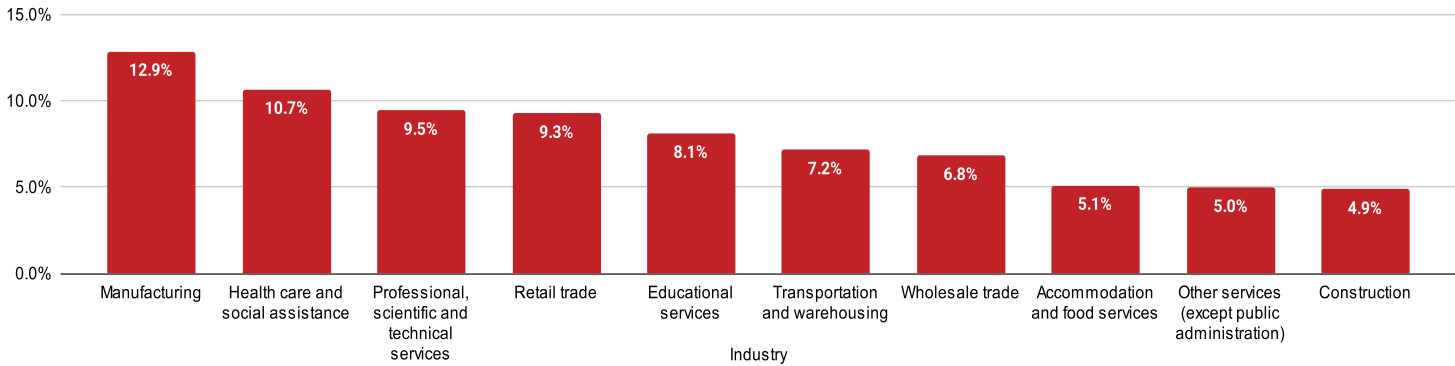


TOP INDUSTRIES AMONG FRENCH SPEAKERS AGED 45-54 (2021)

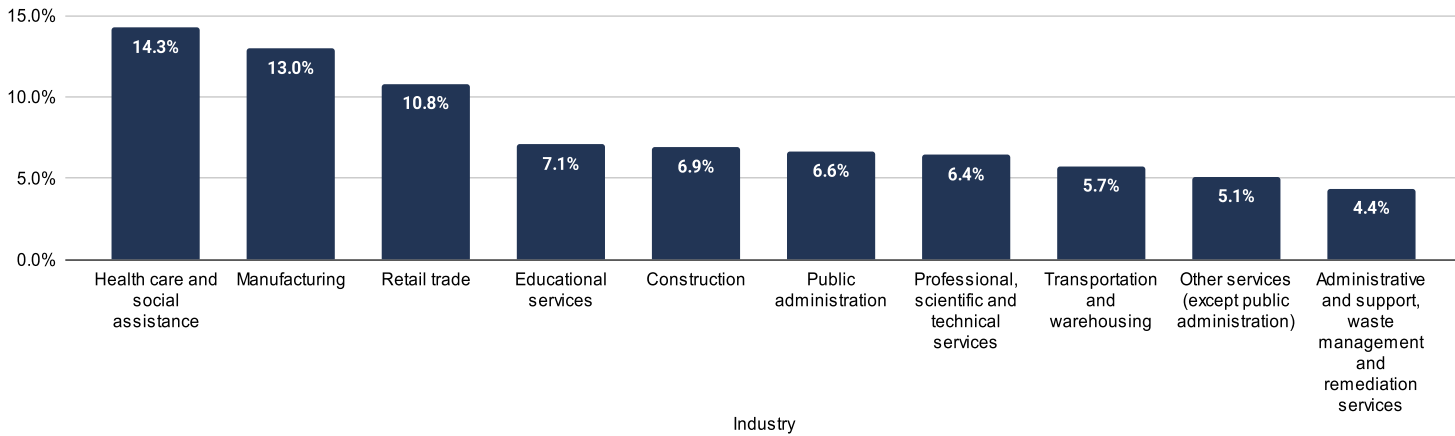


# Top industries 55-64

ENGLISH SPEAKERS AGED 55-64 (2021)

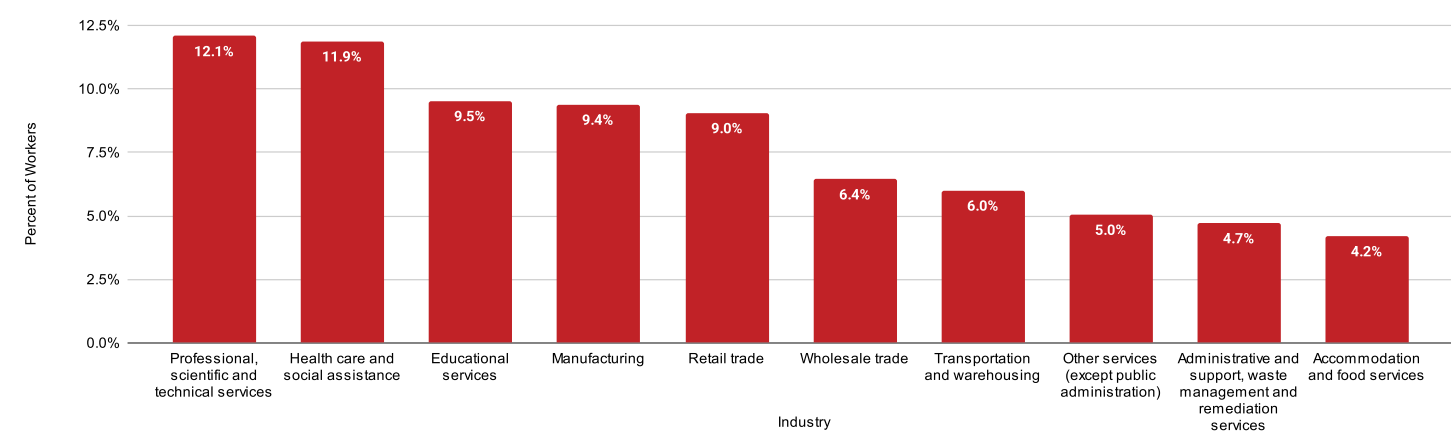


FRENCH SPEAKERS AGED 55-64 (2021)

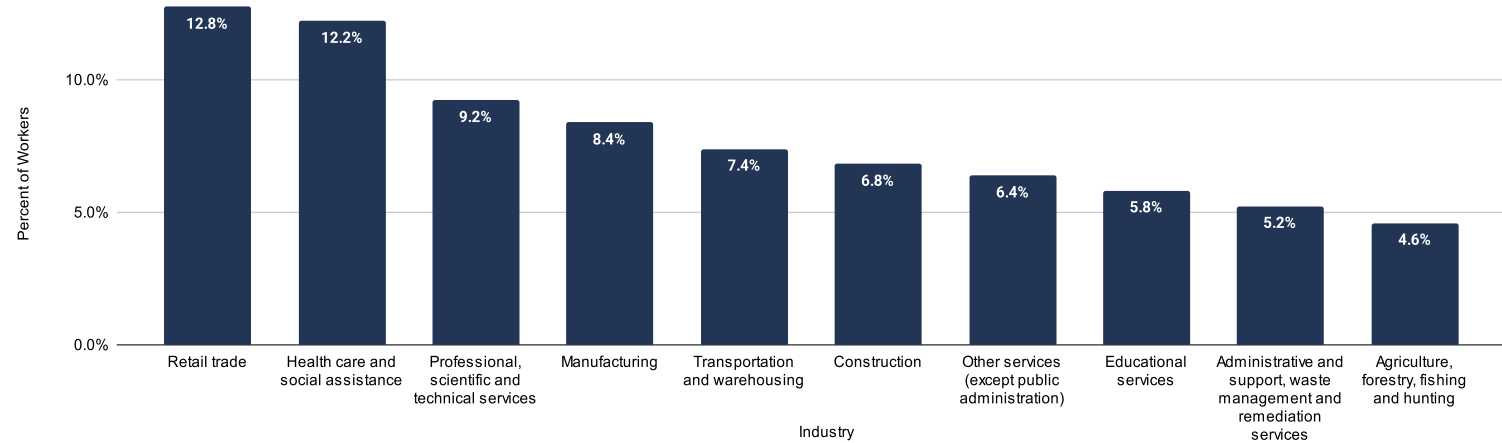


# Top industries 65-74

ENGLISH SPEAKERS AGED 65-74 (2021)



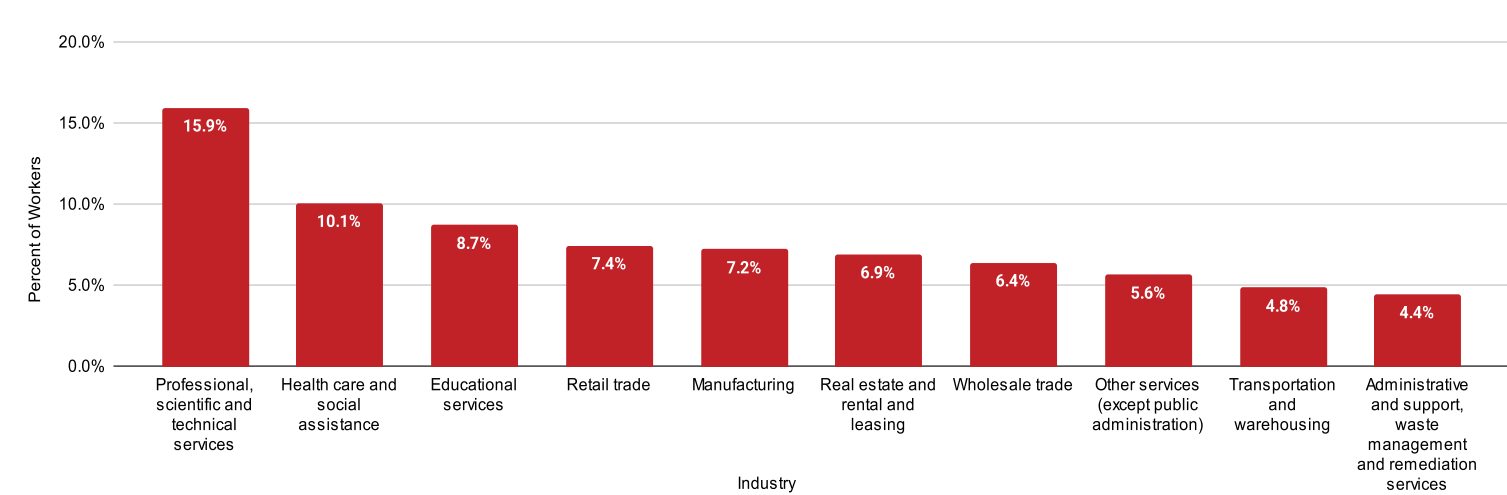
FRENCH SPEAKERS AGED 65-74 (2021)



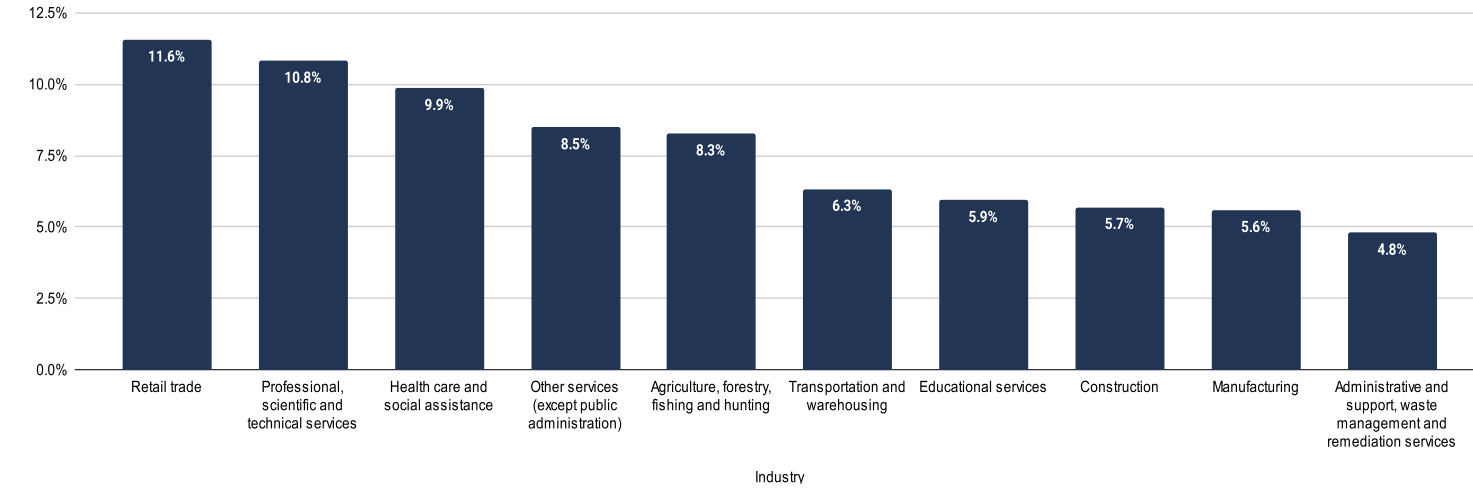


# Top industries 75+

ENGLISH SPEAKERS AGED 75+ (2021)



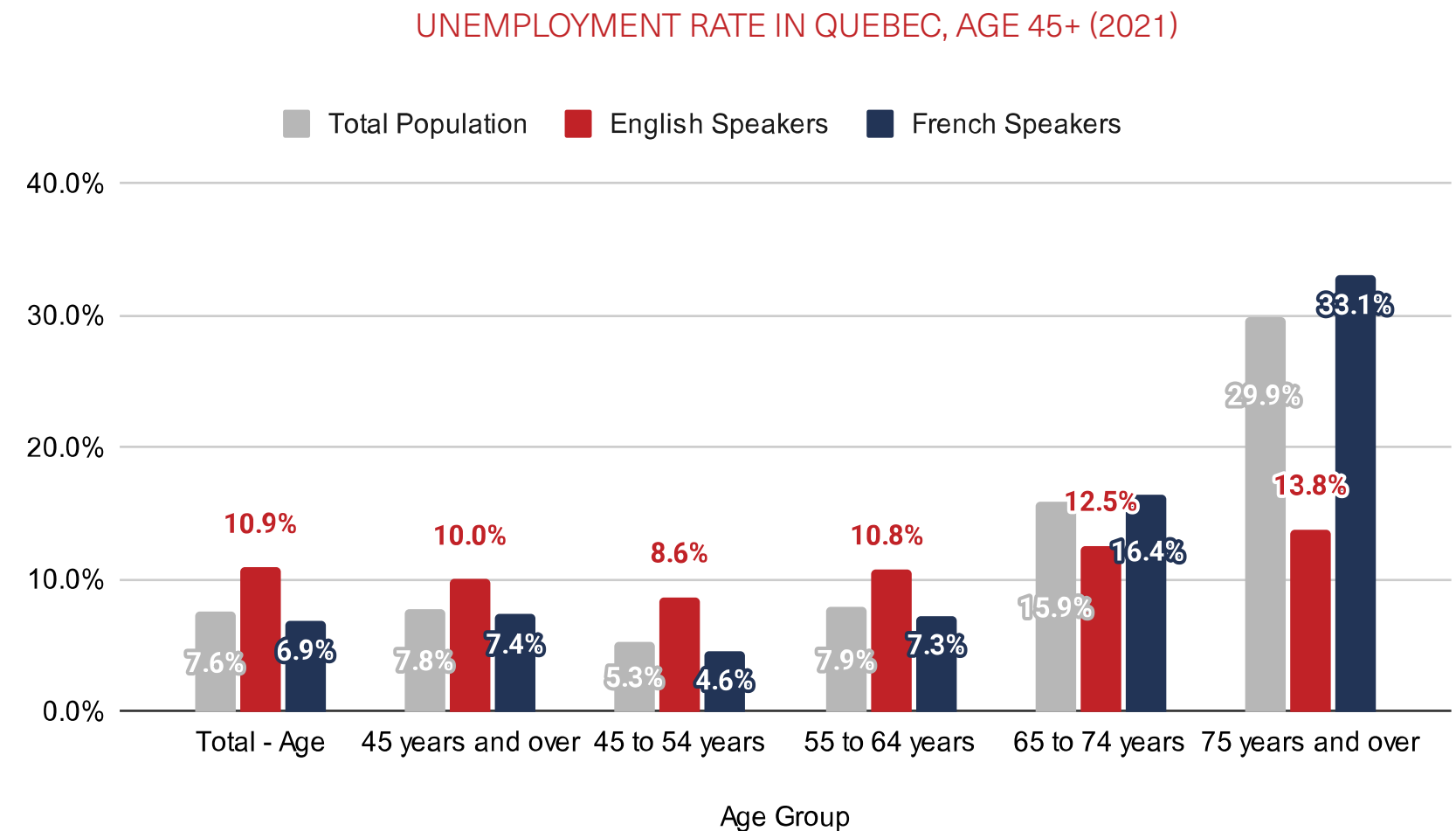
FRENCH SPEAKERS AGED 75+ (2021)



# Unemployment

Among English and French speakers, unemployment rates<sup>17</sup> increase as workers age. English speakers experience higher unemployment rates than French speakers between ages 45-64, but lower unemployment rates than French speakers from the age 65 onwards.

While English speakers experience a gradual rise in unemployment according to age, French speakers experience a sharp increase in unemployment as they age with unemployment rates roughly doubling between the 55-64, 65-74, and 75+ age groups.



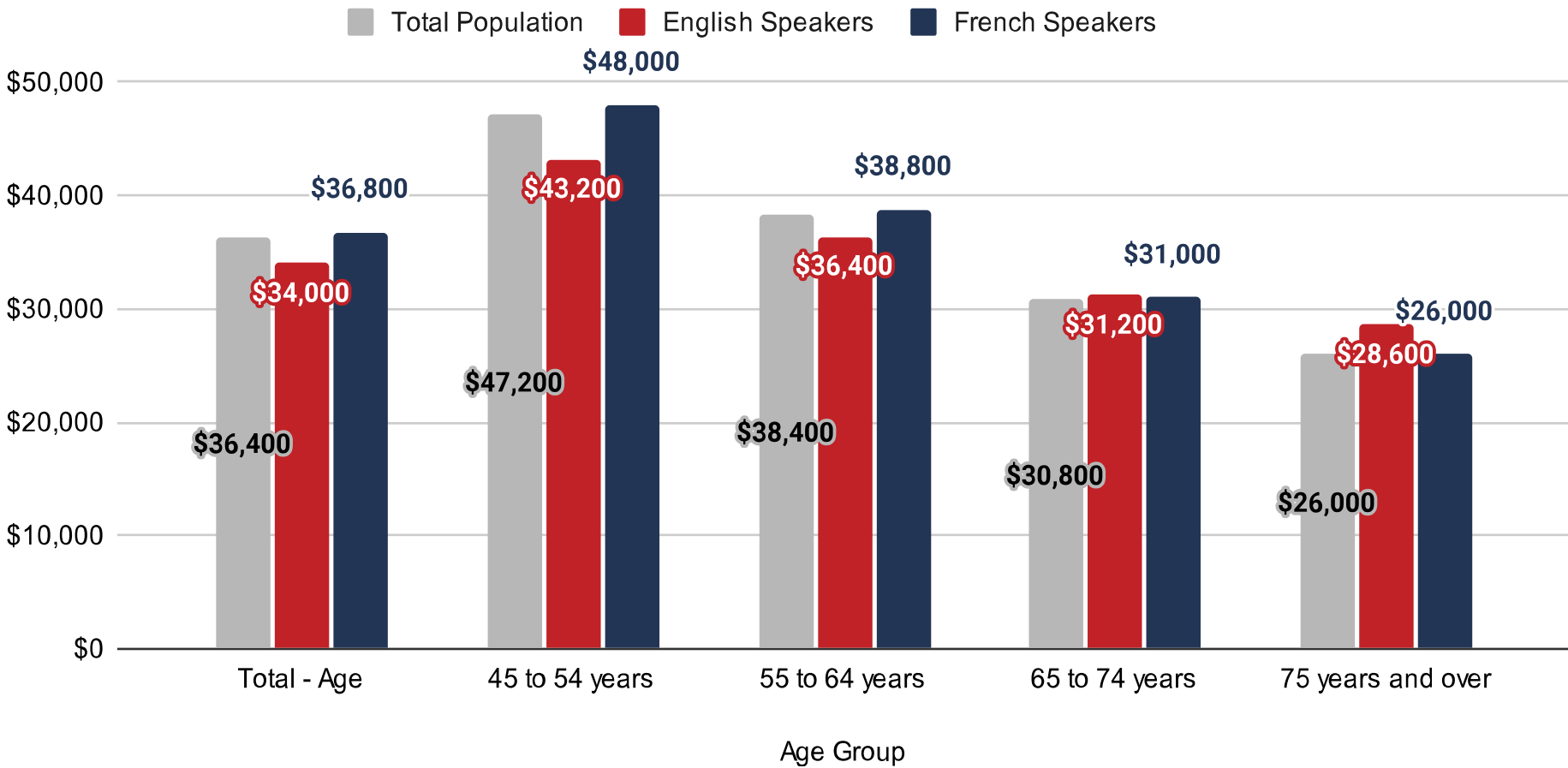
<sup>17</sup> Unemployment rate refers to the proportion of the labour force that is unemployed.

# Income

## MEDIAN AFTER-TAX INCOME<sup>18</sup>

Across both linguistic groups, median after-tax income<sup>19</sup> declines with age. English speakers have a lower median after-tax income than French speakers aged 45-54 and 55-64. Notably, English speakers aged 45-54 earn \$4,800 less than French speakers in the same age group.

MEDIAN AFTER-TAX INCOME IN QUEBEC, AGE 45+ (2021)



<sup>18</sup> The data in this section pertains to individuals who speak only English or only French as their first official language. Individuals who speak both official languages were not distributed among English and French speakers in the graph below. This is due to limitations on the data available.

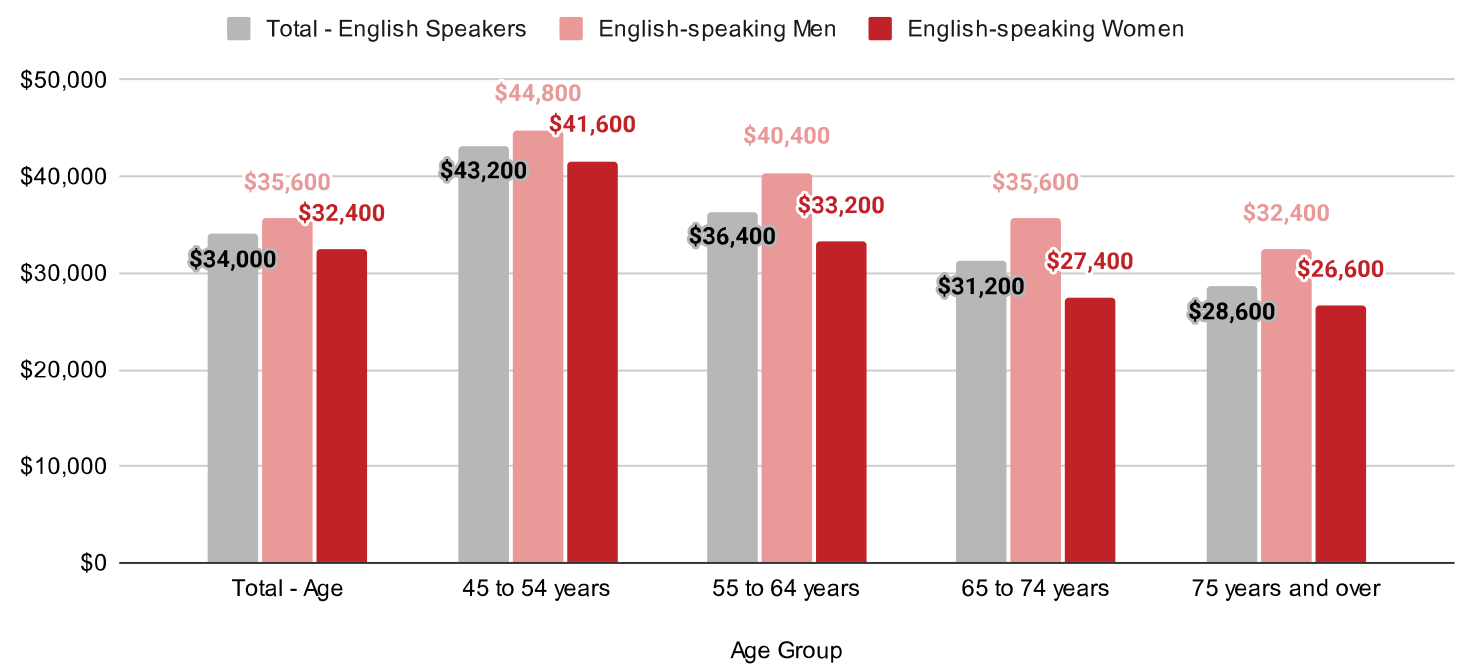
<sup>19</sup> After-tax income refers to the total income of a person less income taxes.



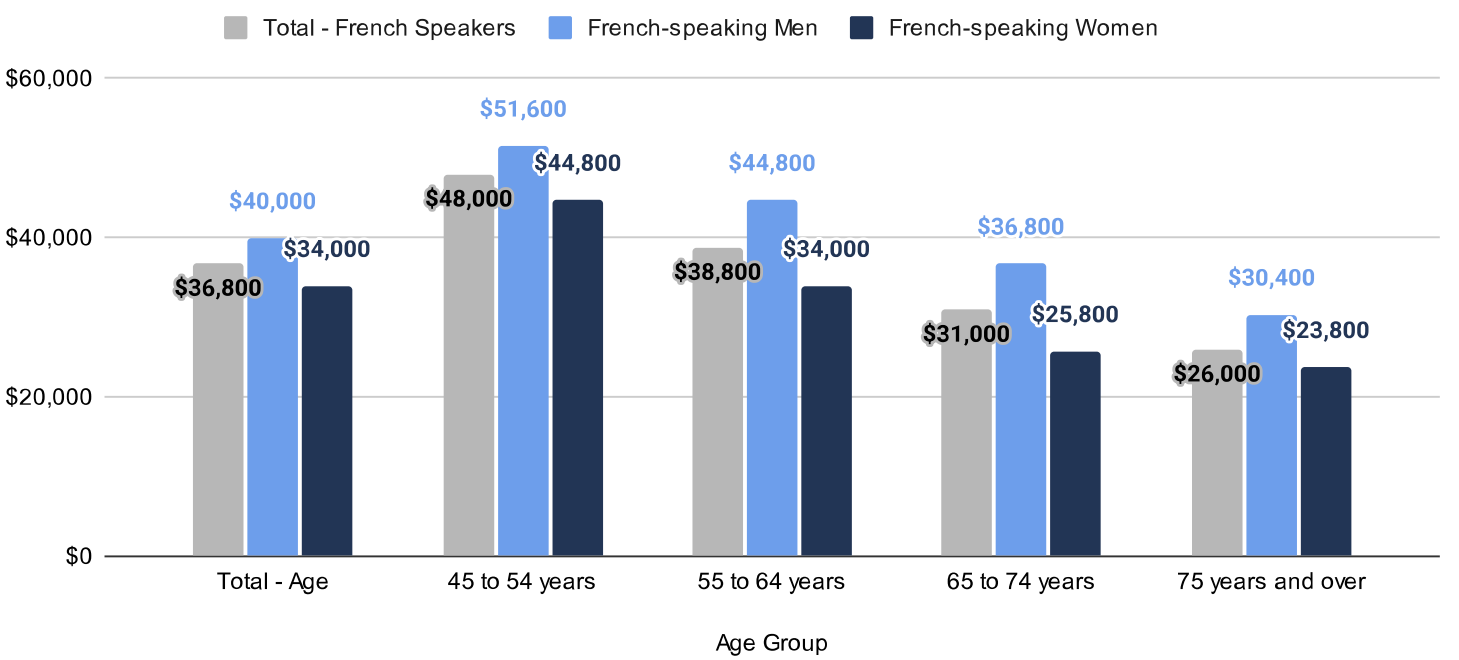
# Median After-Tax Income According to Gender<sup>20</sup>

English-speaking women in Québec consistently earn lower incomes than men; this is also true of French-speaking women.

ENGLISH SPEAKERS AGE 45+ (2021)



FRENCH SPEAKERS AGE 45+ (2021)



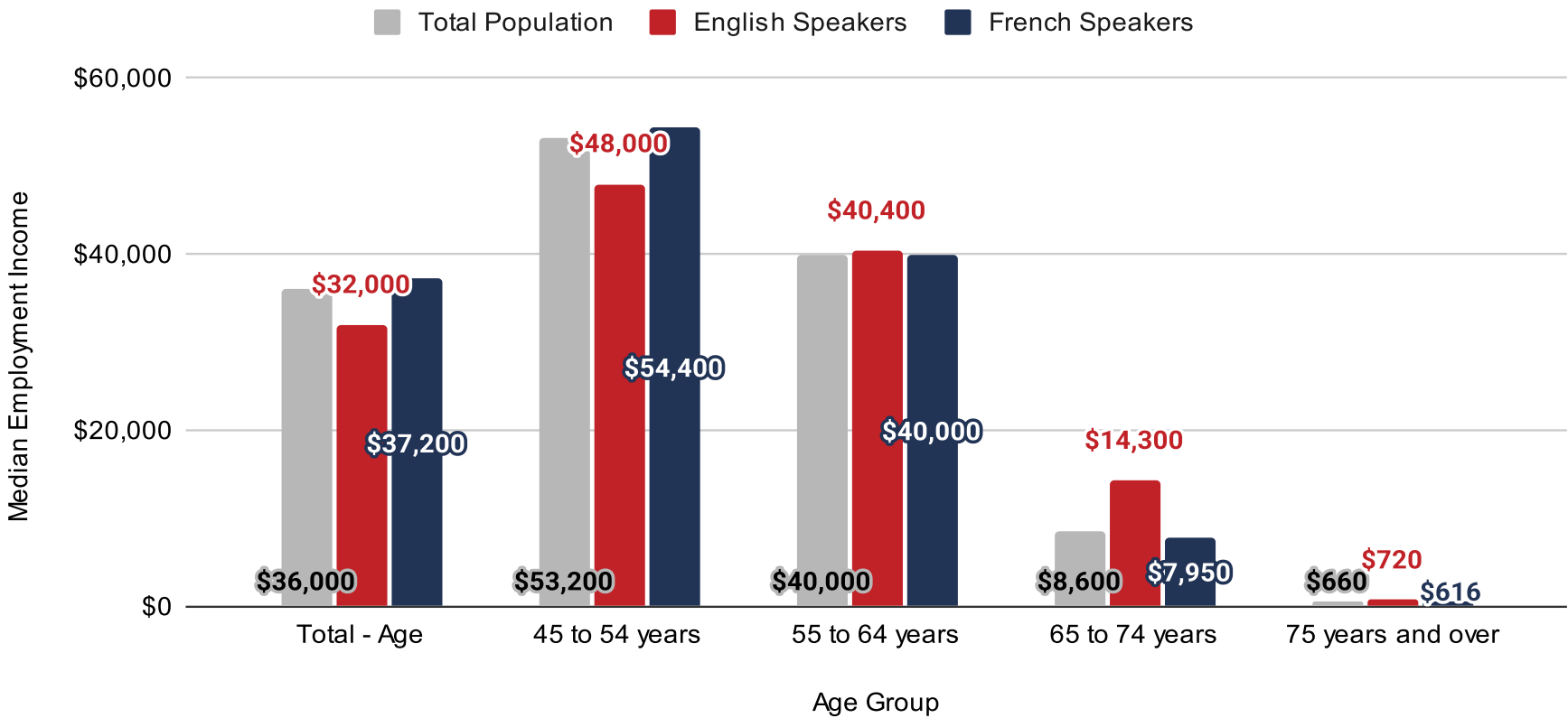
<sup>20</sup> The data in this section pertains to individuals who speak only English or only French as their first official language. Individuals who speak both official languages were not distributed among English and French speakers in the graph below. This is due to limitations on the data available.

# Median Employment Income<sup>21</sup>

Similarly to median after-tax income<sup>22</sup>, median employment income declines with age for both linguistic communities. The decline in median employment income as individuals age corresponds with the normal retirement age in Québec (65), declining labour force participation rates, and higher unemployment rates for aging workers.

Among individuals aged 45-54, English speakers earn less than French speakers. Among individuals aged 65 to 74, however, English speakers earn more than French speakers. This may be linked to the higher labour force participation rates among English speakers aged 65 and over.

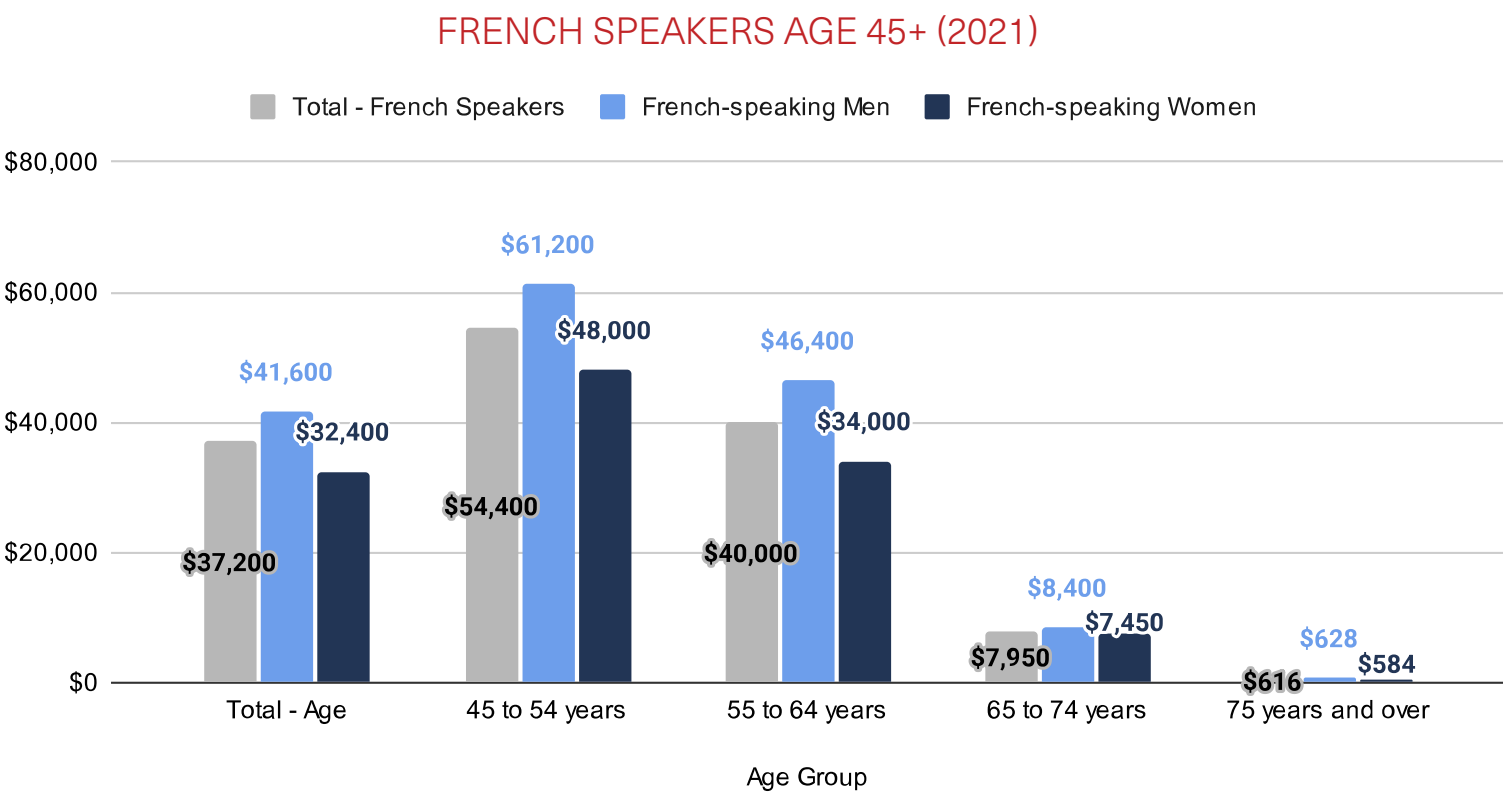
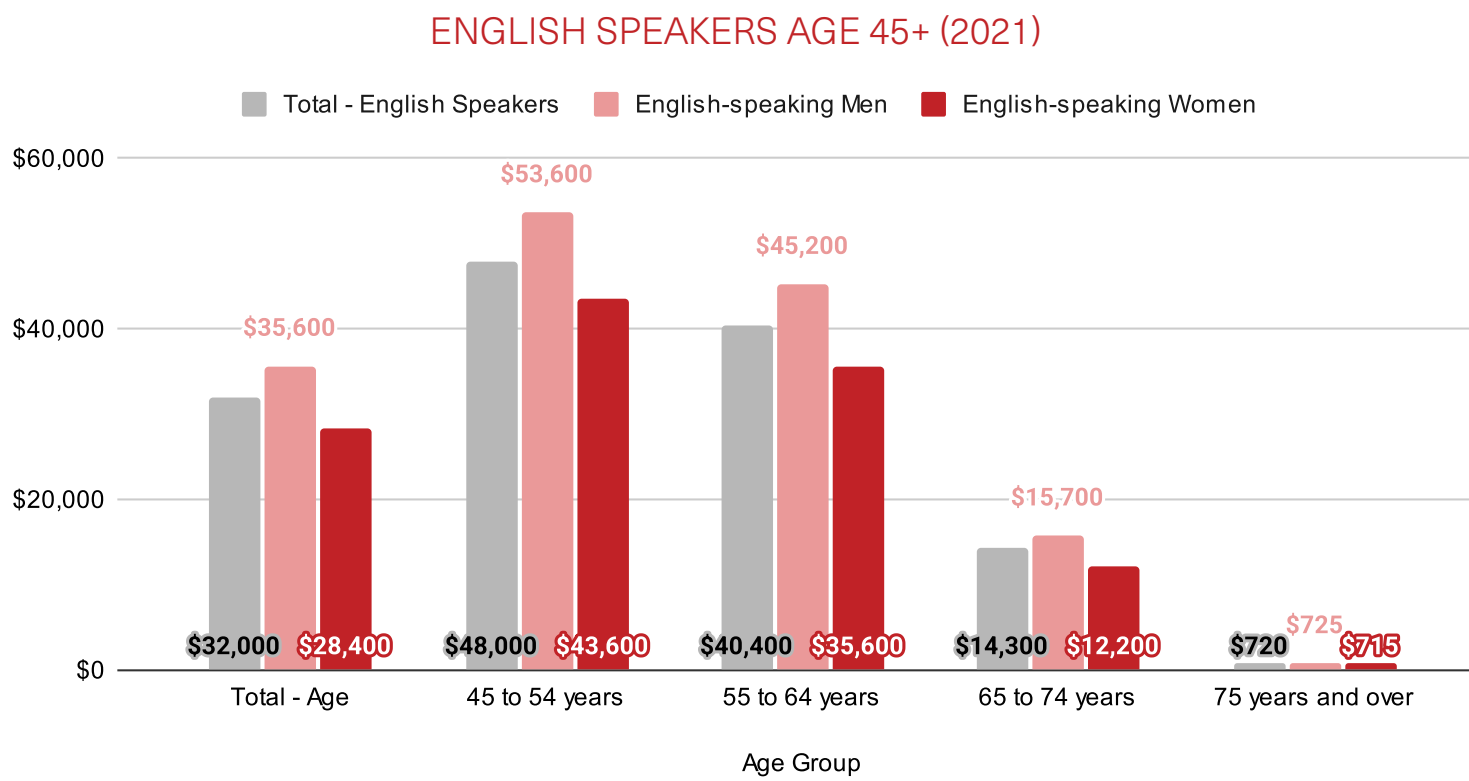
MEDIAN EMPLOYMENT INCOME IN QUEBEC, AGE 45+ (2021)



<sup>21</sup> Median employment income refers to income that a person receives as wages, salaries and commissions from paid employment, including self-employment.  
<sup>22</sup> The data in this section pertains to individuals who speak only English or only French as their first official language. Individuals who speak both official languages were not distributed among English and French speakers in the graph below. This is due to limitations on the data available.

# Median Employment Income According to Gender<sup>23</sup>

As in the median after-tax income data, English-speaking and French-speaking women tend to earn less than men. However, when we examine the employment income data for English-speaking men and women, we see that English-speaking mature women aged 65-74 earn \$3,000 more than men in the same age group. This is the only age group where we see English-speaking women outearning men.



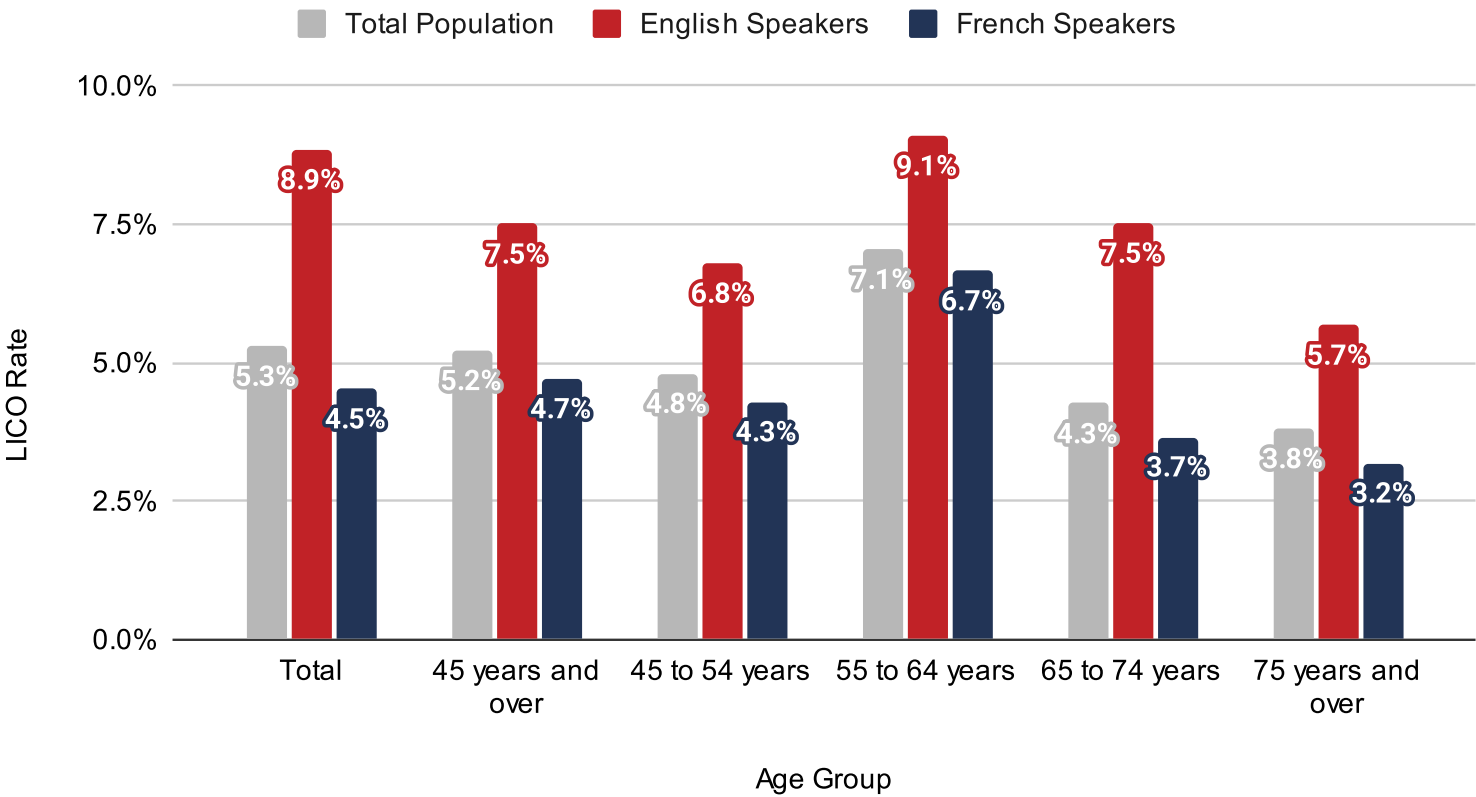
<sup>23</sup> The data in this section pertains to individuals who speak only English or only French as their first official language. Individuals who speak both official languages were not distributed among English and French speakers in the graph below. This is due to limitations on the data available.



# Low-Income Cut Off

English speakers are likelier to live below the low-income cut off (LICO)<sup>24</sup> than French speakers, irrespective of age. The proportion of individuals living under the LICO threshold peaks at age 55-64, with 9.1% of English speakers aged 55-64 living under the LICO.

LOW-INCOME CUT OFF RATE IN QUEBEC, AGE 45+ (2021)



<sup>24</sup> LICO refers to the thresholds below which individuals would likely have devoted a larger share of their income than average to basic necessities such as food, shelter, and clothing. In 2020, the LICO threshold for a 3-person family in Québec was \$33,433 in large urban areas (population 500,000 or more) and \$21,871 in rural areas.



# Program Inventory







## Program Inventory

A variety of organizations provide employment support for English-speaking Quebecers. There are at least 19 regional organizations across Québec with a mandate to serve English-speaking communities, and more than 30 community organizations and employment service providers are dedicated to delivering employment support to Québec's English speakers.<sup>25</sup>

However, a significantly smaller number of organizations deliver tailored programs to mature English-speaking workers. This section presents an inventory of the programs and services in Québec targeted toward mature English speakers.<sup>26</sup>

### PROGRAM DETAILS

Our search returned five employment supports targeted to mature workers. Each organization sets its threshold for eligibility, ranging from 40+ to 50+. Generally, programs offered one-on-one support on an ad-hoc or regular basis to mature workers, including CV and cover letter support, job search support, interview coaching, and career counselling. Only La Passerelle had a more structured offering: a 12-week program mixing individual coaching, workshops, and networking for mature job seekers.

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<sup>25</sup> These figures are based on internal PERT calculations. For insight into the English-language community and employment service provision network, see <https://pertquebec.ca/sectoral-tables/>

<sup>26</sup> The search also returned some additional programming, such as French-language immersion programs targeted towards individuals aged 45 and over, that were not included because they do not provide employment support.

In total, we identified five employment supports offered by a total of four organizations:

Program Provider	Program Name	Target Audience	Location	Funder
Agence Ometz	General Employment Services	Jewish people, People over 45, people with disabilities	Montréal	Emploi Québec
Agence Ometz	Access 45+ Program	Jewish people, People over 45, people with disabilities	Montréal	Services Québec
La Passerelle	Job Search Assistance Program	Individuals 40+	Montréal	Services Québec
Centre des femmes Montréal	Job Support - Women 50+	Women 50+	Montréal	Ville de Montréal, Centraide, Gouvernement du Québec
Executives Available	General Employment Services	Individuals 40+	Montréal, Vaudreuil, Repentigny	Services Québec

All identified programs were offered in Montréal, with one program additionally serving individuals living in Vaudreuil and Repentigny. Two supports were targeted towards Jewish individuals aged 45 and over (although open to all), and one program was targeted towards women aged 50 and over. All programs were free. Typically, programs were funded by the Government of Québec via Services Québec.



# Focus Groups



# Focus Groups

In October 2023, we conducted focus groups and interviews with 22 mature individuals in Québec. Researchers asked participants about the following:

- Employment challenges they or others in their networks and communities had experienced
- Realities of being a mature worker in Québec, including negative perceptions of mature workers and benefits of hiring or working with mature workers
- Current or potential programming or resources that could help to address the identified challenges

Participants shared insights on the challenges and opportunities they faced in the labour market and the impacts their experiences had on their mental health and outlook on employment. They also discussed strengths, coping strategies, and solutions with respect to navigating Québec's labour market.

The following section outlines the key themes researchers identified through focus groups and interviews regarding participants' experiences as mature workers.

## EXPERIENCES OF AGEISM


### EXPLICIT EXPERIENCES

When asked about their encounters with ageism, most participants indicated they had encountered ageism, and some participants cited specific instances where they had experienced it. One participant described an experience where a colleague “calculated how many years left he thought I had before retiring” to determine if she would be worth investing in as an employee. Another participant described an interview where a hiring director asked if she would be comfortable reporting to someone younger than herself. She described this as a difficult moment, not because she had any issue reporting to a younger manager, but because she realized the director perceived her as old. In both instances, participants were aware that they were perceived as old or older by a potential employer and that the hiring manager considered their age as part of their decision-making process.

Participants gave examples of negative assumptions recruiters and employers made about them based on their age during the hiring process or their employment, including that they were slow to learn, less physically fit, unlikely to stay in a position for a long time, expensive to hire, or overqualified.

One participant discussed the possible thought process of a hiring manager who reviews the CV of a highly experienced mature worker applying for a part-time position:





*“They look at someone with all that experience and might question that. And to some extent, I think they’re making an assumption that [a big salary] is what the person is going to want. [...] They’re not even going to bother having a discussion with you because they think this person is out of my price point.”*

- Participant #20, 46-year old woman

Another participant described an interview where he was asked about his physical capabilities by a potential employer and warned about the physical demands of a job: “And they’re [telling] me, ‘You have to go outside. It’s going to be raining soon.’ This is to inspect cars and do a datasheet and data entry for a brokerage of cars. [They said] ‘It’s going to get cold. You have to scrape the ice, and you have to look underneath the car.’”


In this case, the participant felt that the hiring manager perceived him as not physically fit to perform the job owing to his age, even though the physical requirements were not taxing and he considered himself very fit. In general, participants pointed out that while the ageist assumptions applied to them may be true of individuals in their demographic group, they were not true of them specifically or their demographic group as a whole.

## IMPLICIT EXPERIENCES

Many participants found it difficult to identify specific examples or experiences of ageism. Instead, they described impressions of how they were perceived by current or potential employers, recruiters, and the world at large. Participants described feeling that their age was an unacknowledged issue and that they needed to utilize buzzwords like “quick-learner and adaptable” to counter perceptions about mature workers being slow. Some also discussed the experience of work opportunities becoming fewer and farther between:

*“I have had close personal relationships with some headhunting firms, you know, and I don’t even know if it’s conscious, but I go and check on their website, and I see jobs that normally in the past [they] would have called me for. And I don’t get it. They’re not doing that effort to reach out to me and call me. And I haven’t actually gotten a single interview from [them].”*

- Participant #11, 64-year-old man



Another participant described a situation where her boss gave a project to someone younger because they considered that person to be especially competent because of their youth. She described this experience as an example of ageism, indicating that “they’re not telling me, but I’m hearing it.”

Participants discussed how these experiences might seem small individually, but over time, they compounded, leaving participants with the impression that their age negatively impacted their work opportunities. Because these experiences were often characterized by a lack of opportunity, such as slowly being ignored or omitted, rather than overt acts of ageism, they caused participants to feel self-doubt: they were unsure if their experiences “counted” as ageism. Because of this, they were uncertain of what steps to take to address the issues they encountered.

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Some participants described instances where they felt that ageism intersected with biases related to other elements of their identity, such as immigration status or gender. For example, several participants described working in industries heavily reliant on digital literacy skills (e.g. IT, business intelligence, digital marketing, graphic design) that valued youth based on the assumption that young people are more technologically savvy. Several women-identifying participants, in particular, noted that these industries are often also male-dominated. As a result, they expressed that they felt they were working against two forms of bias to find jobs in their industries.

In these moments, several participants indicated that they were uncertain about the root cause(s) of their lack of success in the labour market, i.e. whether it was related to multiple biases, a singular bias, or if they simply were not the best candidate for the job they applied to. This lack of certainty was a source of self-doubt; participants described

not knowing if they were experiencing discrimination or if their qualifications and interview skills were simply insufficient. As a result, they were unsure of how to improve their job search outcomes.

Following this, participants emphasized that their individual experiences, needs, and abilities were much more nuanced than the stereotypes applied to them. They expressed a desire to be seen as individuals and assessed on that basis instead of as homogenous members of the same group(s).

## LANGUAGE

Several participants discussed how age intersected with French-language proficiency. French immersion programs were introduced in the 1960s in Québec, so some participants over age 63 did not receive significant French-language education. Several participants described having a low French-language proficiency in different competencies, especially writing. They indicated that this low proficiency impacted their job opportunities and ability to navigate a predominantly French-language labour market, compounding the challenges they faced due to being mature workers. They also expressed an interest in French-language learning opportunities. They noted, however, that language skills development and testing were largely something they thought they had to do on their personal time, without any support from employers or the government.



## COPING STRATEGIES

Many participants discussed strategies they used to counter ageism in the hiring process. In some groups, participants traded advice, offering suggestions for issues others had encountered. These strategies centred on minimizing one's age or subverting ageist stereotypes. Examples included downplaying their experience, removing schooling dates from resumes and utilizing buzzwords such as “adaptable” and “searching for a fast-paced environment” to convey that they were energetic. Some participants shared how they explicitly addressed age in the interview process by indicating they were interested in working for a long time. When asked where they saw themselves in five years, others described how they would indicate their desire to keep evolving through work experiences as a signal that they wanted to work long-term.

These strategies reflect their assumptions – and reality – that as job seekers, mature individuals cannot always directly challenge ageism in interactions with recruiters and potential employers. Instead, in many situations, they resorted to various strategies to identify ageist stereotypes and distinguish themselves from them or minimize their association with them. Within this context, many participants described feeling that they had been put in the defensive position of combatting stereotypes instead of being able to speak freely about their experiences and strengths.

Furthermore, participants noted that many ageist stereotypes screened them out of hiring processes before they could enact some of these coping strategies. One participant stated: “One of the things when it comes to job hunting is that the [strengths that are associated with age] are all great things you can talk about in an interview. Unfortunately, the [ageist] assumptions may screen you out, and that's my fear.”

In this vein, participants emphasized the need for employers, hiring managers, and


recruiters to be sensitized to the needs of mature workers, as well as the harms of ageism and ageist stereotypes.

## BENEFITS OF BEING A MATURE WORKER

Following discussions of the negative assumptions and experiences of being a mature worker, researchers asked participants to describe any benefits of being a mature worker and hiring mature workers. Many participants discussed their relationship with age, noting while they were older, they did not feel “old.” They described having continual learning experiences and firsts - first marriage, first business ownership - in their 40s and 50s onwards. For many, their spirit of discovery and self-growth was not tethered to age or, more specifically, to youth. Several participants expressed that their tendencies and attitudes correlated more with their disposition and personalities than their age.

Further, participants expressed that the accumulation of experiences endowed them with a surety of self, emotional maturity, and practical knowledge that enabled them to contribute in meaningful and unique ways within a workplace. As one participant said, “You've got all this stuff in your head, right, from all those years of life experience. And that allows you to make connections that other people just couldn't make.”

Another participant gave an example of how their experience and knowledge transcended the rapid technological changes in their industry and that potential employers often ignored this. He likened it to building a house: while some tools may change over time, the basics of engineering and architecture remain the same. As a result, individuals with that higher level of knowledge remain an asset: “You still need people who know where to drill the hole.”



Another participant discussed the importance of accumulated experience in reference to a project manager posting they had seen, which required a high level of expertise with three years of experience: “From the job description, [employers] want you to be the perfect project manager. And I can’t really see how somebody could [be] that after three years.” The participant indicated that that level of expertise often requires years of experience, work, and study to develop, something that individuals in their age group usually had. Participants agreed that accumulated expertise was an invaluable asset for mature workers in the workplace and that it supported the creation of a diverse environment with contributions from both older and younger workers. They also indicated that this experience equipped them to be effective mentors, and they expressed interest in exchanging with younger mentees.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Participants described the importance of finding a job and working as they aged. The mental health benefits of working included having a routine, a regular source of social interaction and community, and a sense of purpose and value. Several participants noted that work is one of the main ways people occupy their time in our society, as well as one of the main methods of contributing to our society and finding meaning in life. For this reason, participants indicated that work was often essential to their sense of worth and belonging.

Participants also described the negative impacts of long-term job searching or being unable to work. They discussed how this made them feel stressed and resulted in poor mental health precisely because they felt alienated from working society: “I just want to be out of the house and have some meaning in my life because society here turns a lot around working. Everybody’s working, so you’re an outcast when you’re not working.”

Another participant described their feelings about an interview question about their strengths and weaknesses: “It’s clear I won’t choose a real weakness. Do I tell them I have depression and anxiety? I would not. But this is my real weakness, you know? My weakness is not that I’m old. My weakness is that nobody’s hiring me, and that causes anxiety.”

Participants discussed other impacts that being unable to find work had on their lives. One participant indicated that they developed a strong skepticism toward employers when they were laid off after working at an organization for several decades. She told her children:

*“Do not have any loyalty to any corporation you work for. You’re going to have to jump ship. Get two years’ experience, then jump into another company. That’s the only way you’re going to get a decent salary and you’re going to move up. Do not have loyalty. They don’t care about you.”*

- Participant #1, 61-year-old woman



Several other participants, meanwhile, discussed the relationship between their mental health and lack of employment income. In some cases, they needed to supplement their income because their pension was insufficient to cover the rising cost of living. This added stress to their job search, as it became a matter of needing to work in addition to wanting to work.

For many participants, the importance of work and finding meaning and value through working took on more significance with age: “I guess the biggest challenge is not to buy into this idea that you have less value. [...] I’m very interested in not giving my power away to a culture that might be youth-obsessed.”

## SOLUTIONS

In addition to the short-term coping strategies participants shared to help one another deal with the more immediate experiences of the job search and hiring process, participants also highlighted longer-term solutions to combat ageism and facilitate the integration and retention of mature workers in the workplace. These included sensitizing employers to the existence and harms of ageism, creating work environments that were inclusive of age diversity, offering mature workers opportunities to continue to grow in the workplace and upgrade their skillsets, creating programming to match mature workers with industries and employers in need of workers or that are otherwise open to hiring mature workers. Participants noted that while some programs and initiatives are already in place, these need to be more widespread and better targeted to mature workers to ensure they have concrete and meaningful impacts.





## Conclusion & Recommendations





## Conclusion

Mature English-speaking workers in Québec face a complex labour market environment. Our quantitative results demonstrate that unemployment rates increase as workers age, regardless of their linguistic identity. This highlights age as likely the primary factor driving unemployment among mature workers. However, variables such as labour force participation and low-income cut-off rates complicate this picture and indicate that linguistic identity may still be an important factor; mature English speakers have a higher labour force participation rate as compared to French speakers, and mature English speakers are more likely to be low-income than French speakers.

The qualitative findings echo this complexity. In focus groups, research participants shared challenges related to aging in the Québec labour market and discussed language in the context of their experiences with age and ageism as mature English-speaking workers. Some also discussed how they faced French-language barriers to work and yet were still interested in French-language training to improve their French. One of the emergent themes was the benefits of being a mature worker, with participants discussing how mature workers contributed to more diverse workplaces and brought invaluable work experience to the workplace.

The different findings on age and language in this report indicate the need for further research on age and language in Québec in order to improve our understanding of how these factors impact labour market outcomes for English-speaking Quebecers.

Québec, like other provinces and territories, is facing an aging workforce, carrying the risk of future labour and skills shortages. Although the eventual exit of aging workers from the labour market cannot be avoided, there are mature workers who are delaying their exit and continuing to work. This is the case for some mature English-speaking workers who choose to stay in the labour market for various reasons, including economic necessity and a desire to remain engaged in the labour market. Key strategies can be deployed to help this population better integrate into the labour market. We offer the following recommendations to support this goal.



## Recommendations

### **INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS, GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS, AND EMPLOYERS WORKING ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING MATURE WORKERS**

Program providers providing employment support to English-speaking mature workers welcomed the introduction of new government policies, services and programs, such as targeted recruitment campaigns and specialized training for employers to facilitate the integration and retention of mature workers in the labour market. Still, they expressed disappointment that they are not generally consulted as subject matter experts in the design or implementation of these policies and programs. There is a need to foster collaboration between the various stakeholders who develop policies and programs to support mature workers, including those working with mature English-speaking workers.

This can include:

- Creating a provincial stakeholder group for mature workers brings together government stakeholders, employers, employment service providers, employment service users, and other groups such as researchers, including organizations providing employment support to English speakers.
- Evaluation of the existing offer of government-funded employment services and programs for mature workers to ensure that they meet the diverse needs of mature workers, including English speakers.

### **INCREASE COLLABORATION BETWEEN EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDERS, GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS, AND EMPLOYERS WORKING ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE EMPLOYMENT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING MATURE WORKERS**

Research participants expressed their perceptions that employers and recruiters had hiring practices that did not demonstrate an awareness of ageism or outwardly displayed ageist attitudes. Participants emphasized the need for employers, hiring managers and recruiters to understand the potential value that mature workers can add to a workplace and to utilize hiring approaches that enable them to show their full experience and fit for specific roles.

This can include:

- Creating and executing a campaign on the benefits of age diversity and recognizing age as a form of diversity.
- Training for recruiters and hiring managers is needed to sensitize them to the best ways to interact with and evaluate mature candidates.
- Working with employers to change their hiring processes and practices to ensure they are inclusive of mature workers.
- Specific training for employers and managers regarding supervising, working with, and supporting mature workers.



## STRUCTURE WORKPLACES TO MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF MATURE WORKERS

Participants discussed working formats, leadership styles, and workplace benefits that would best attract and support them. Workplaces can be structured to attract and support mature workers.

This can include:

- Hybrid working contracts
- Flexible contracts
- Part-time contracts or work-sharing contracts
- Benefits and healthcare packages that reflect the more common needs of mature workers (e.g. healthcare with strong pharmaceutical plan)
- Opportunities to transmit knowledge to and/or mentor other individuals in the workplace

## OFFER TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES TO UPGRADE THE SKILLS OF MATURE WORKERS

Participants noted that, in many cases, workplace technologies or different aspects of workplace culture are changing at an accelerating rate. Many stressed that while they are self-motivated to take on additional training where they may have a skills gap, they would also benefit from skills training offered by employers and workplaces that value continuous growth.

Examples of training include:

- Courses to upgrade the technical skills of mature workers.
- Work-integrated French-language learning courses
- Courses to sensitize mature workers to current workplace and workplace culture norms.



## ENSURE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT TO MATURE WORKERS

Employment service providers serving English-speaking mature workers discussed the additional work they took on to meet the expanding needs of mature workers, including offering mental health support and confidence-building. These organizations noted that they operated with inadequate funding and needed more resources.

This can include;

- Increased funding to hire staff to provide additional/peripheral services to clients (e.g. support for newcomer integration, mental health intervention).
- Funding to support the development of partnerships and referral services between organizations to streamline service provision and increase efficiency.
- Funding for targeted promotion of employment services to mature English speakers
- Funding to develop or enhance programs related to entrepreneurship and self-employment for mature workers.





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