Equity and Inclusion Lens

Diversity Snapshot

FRANCOPHONES
We are a distinct community in Ottawa, while also being part of all the other communities. Among us, there are Francophones with disabilities, Francophones living in poverty, young and senior Francophones, visible minority Francophones, Francophone immigrants, and Aboriginal Francophones.
1. Who we are

We are a distinct community in Ottawa, while also being part of all the equity groups included in the Equity and Inclusion Lens. Among us there are Francophones with disabilities; young and senior Francophones; visible minority Francophones and Aboriginal Francophones; Francophone immigrants; GLBT Francophones; Francophones living with low income, and wealthy Francophones; rural Francophones, some of which are farmers; and urban Francophones.

We have been part of Ottawa since Champlain’s passage in 1612 and clearly part of the beginnings of the city as a permanent place of residence.

The composition of our community has changed significantly over the past few decades. Immigration from France, Francophone Africa and the Middle East, as well as internal migration from Quebec, New Brunswick and from small communities in Ontario and across Canada has diversified the original French-speaking community.

SIZE OF THE FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY IN OTTAWA

According to the census of 2006, 15.1 per cent of the population of Ottawa reported French as their mother tongue.

16.6 per cent of the Ottawa population learned French as their first official language.

According to an inclusive definition of Ottawa Francophones that focuses on the usage of the French language, adopted by the Assemblée Francophone of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, 17.7 per cent of the Ottawa population has either French as their mother tongue or French as their first official language.

According to the 2001 census, 11.8 per cent of the Francophone population of the Ottawa Census Division was composed of members of a visible minority, primarily blacks.

According to the 2006 census, 39 per cent of Ottawa citizens speak French.
2. Contributions we make

There are a number of ways in which we contribute to the city of Ottawa: the development of institutions serving the city, the enrichment of culture, and the building of a city that is welcoming to a diversity of people.

The Ottawa Hospital is one example of the institutions created by Francophones; it was founded in 1860 by the Sisters of Charity under the leadership of Elizabeth Bruyère (History of Lowertown). The University of Ottawa is another example, founded by the Oblate Fathers (History of the University of Ottawa). For a chronicle of the contributions of Francophones to our city’s heritage, you may consult the “Raconte-moi Ottawa” Website, developed by the Vanier Muséoparc in collaboration with the Department of Canadian Heritage and the City of Ottawa.

In terms of cultural expression, one can mention the vibrant French-language theatre in Ottawa, and the creation of La Nouvelle Scène as a permanent home for many of the productions. The Francophone music scene has also made a contribution to the artistic life of the community and so too the literary scene, with Daniel Poliquin and others.

The Francophone community in Ottawa, and in Canada more generally, has also played a historical role in teaching Canada to live with difference and to try to figure out how different groups can live together. The creation of a diverse society is of course of particular symbolic and practical importance for Ottawa as the national capital of a bilingual country.

A DEFINITION OF FRANCOPHONES:

The Assemblée Francophone and Comité Interagences, under the direction of the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, strove to develop a new definition for “Francophone community” that focuses more on language usage than on first language learned (mother tongue). This new definition, which allows for a better-rounded and more representative profile of the Francophone community of Ottawa, therefore includes:

» persons whose first language or languages are French or French plus a non-official language, and who can conduct a conversation in French.

» persons whose first language is not English or French but whose first official language is French.

» persons who speak primarily French or French plus a non-official language at home.

» persons who have both official languages as first languages spoken.

SPCO, 2004
3. Barriers and inequities

Despite the long history of Francophones in Ottawa, and the contributions made by this community, there are many barriers and inequities that are often linked with non-recognition of the importance of preserving the French language and the establishment, maintenance and growth of the necessary institutional basis.

1) Impact of amalgamation on access to French-language services

The amalgamation of 11 regional municipalities in 2001 into the current City of Ottawa has reduced the relative importance given to French-language services in the region. We went from a situation where four municipalities in the region (Vanier, Ottawa, Cumberland and Gloucester) were offering services in French before amalgamation to the current reality where only 10 per cent of child care services in the newly amalgamated city and 5 per cent of recreational services are offered in French.

2) Demographic changes and access to French-language services

Before the Second World War, Francophone communities were often centred on Francophone parishes across the City. Following the Second World War, and the transformation of Ottawa around the dominance of the federal government, the Francophone presence became increasingly concentrated around Lowertown and Vanier with a movement to the suburbs towards Orléans.

In recent years, the Francophone population is becoming increasingly distributed across the city, with an increase in the number of Francophones living in the western sections of the city and a lower percentage in the more traditionally Francophone areas, such as Lowertown (Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française – CRCCF, Université d’Ottawa.)

These changes in the distribution of Francophones across the city of Ottawa have created new demands for services in French in neighbourhoods other than the traditionally Francophone areas, and new challenges in serving Francophones across Ottawa.

3) Supply-driven French-language services vs. demand-driven

Many Francophones switch to using English in dealing with public officials or in commercial transactions once it becomes clear that service in French will take longer or will be of lesser quality. These factors make the demand for French services appear to decrease, perpetuating the belief that Francophones do not need services in French.

A widespread assumption is thus maintained that all Francophones are bilingual and do not need Francophone services. This myth hinders the growth of French-language services, and thus penalizes unilingual Francophones and those preferring services in French and, in addition, it washes out the issue of rights.

Services that relate to personal care, such as services to women survivors of violence or medical services, are of critical importance and are not sufficiently available in French. As with recent immigrants and Inuits, Francophones are often less comfortable in their second language, particularly in situations of distress, and are thus excluded from existing English-language services (Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes, 2008).
4) Assimilation into an Anglo-dominant culture
The number of Francophones who speak mainly French at home is less than the number with French as their mother tongue. This is a symptom of a loss of vitality of the French language and an assimilation of Francophones into Ottawa’s Anglo-dominant culture.

The issue of assimilation is of huge concern for the Francophone community. For example, in 2006, according to the Statistics Canada study of the vitality of official language minorities, in Ottawa only 63 per cent of children with at least one Francophone parent went to a French-language primary school, 22 per cent went to immersion programs in English-language schools and 13 per cent went to regular programs in English-language schools. The percentages in high schools were even lower, 55 per cent of students with at least one Francophone parent went to French-language high schools, 27 per cent to immersion programs in English-language schools and 18 per cent to regular programs in English-language schools. (Corbeil and Lafrenière, 2006)

The reasons for this situation are complex and relate, among others, to the dominance of the English language in the Ontario labour market; the dominance of English in the mass media in North America; the urbanization of Francophones in Ontario, which means that increasingly they are living in communities in which they are a minority in their neighbourhoods and in their community; and the high level of exogamy (marriages outside one’s cultural group of origin).

The consequences are clear: poor capacity of institutions to offer services in French and a feeling on the part of the Francophone community of having to be on the defensive.

5) Insufficient institutional basis for the provision of French-language services
On a political and administrative level, Francophones have argued for the development of French-language services. The struggle to ensure services would be offered in French was first concentrated around education and the creation of French-language schools and school boards, but since this goal has been at least partially obtained, the mobilization and activity for the creation of French-language services has grown to include health services (the struggle for the continued existence of Montfort Hospital was particularly important for the Francophone community in Ottawa), justice-related services, women’s services, child care, etc.

This is usually referred to as a demand for services “par et pour” (by and for) Francophones, in other words services offered solely in French, rather than on a bilingual basis. This has been a major question for the Francophone community, but certainly the central thrust of Francophone demands has been the creation of French-language services and institutions.

The principal arguments for this position have been that bilingual services have generally meant, in practice, that the services have been developed, created and implemented in English with a minor effort at translating them into French. They are therefore not thought out in terms of the specificity of the Francophone community — they are merely translations of English services. In addition, bilingual services have often tended to evolve, or slip, into being primarily in English. In order to have services that are culturally sensitive to the Francophone reality, services need to be created in French.
A recent study on French-language services in the justice sector in Ontario outlines seven models of French-language services: integrated bilingual services, parallel services, multi-service centres, itinerant services, electronic services, horizontally integrated services (across units of a government) and vertically integrated services (across governments). It indicates that the majority of services follow the model of integrated bilingual services while noting the community’s interest in parallel services (Cardinal and Sauvé, 2009).

In summary, the strategies of the Francophone community have centred on making the argument for their constitutional rights to services of equal quality, using the courts to defend these rights, and calling for the creation of French-language services in preference to bilingual services.

6) Integration of Francophone immigrants

Immigration from France, Africa and the Middle East has sustained the growth of the Francophone population in Ottawa. In 2001, Francophone immigrants accounted for 12.3 per cent of Ottawa’s French speaking population.

In addition to immigrants from overseas, a considerable inflow of internal migrants from Québec and from other small communities has diversified the original Francophone community in many respects. According to the 2001 census, 11.8 per cent of the Francophone population of the Ottawa Census Division was composed of members of a visible minority.

Francophone immigrants face formidable challenges in integrating in Ontario and in Ottawa. Compounding the systemic challenges facing all immigrants (such as the non-recognition of foreign credentials and difficulties in finding employment) are unique challenges related to their preference of French as their first official language. Notably, these unique challenges include the insufficient availability of French-language services in Ottawa, the dominance of English in the Ontario job market, and the ambivalence of some parts of the traditional Francophone community toward welcoming the new immigrant population (Andrew and Burstein, 2007).

7) Accommodation of an increasing diversity

Up until recently, the Francophones of Ottawa constituted an ethno-linguistic community that by and large shared a culture, a settlement history as one of the founding groups, and a heritage in the building of networks and institutions. With immigration, Ottawa’s Francophones have, over a short period of time, become a linguistic community with multiple heritages, diverse ethnicities and cultures, and distinct histories.

This important change of reality did not entirely sink into the imagination of some pockets of both the original Francophone community and of the newer generation of immigrants. Francophone immigrants and visible-minority populations often feel that there are barriers to their acceptance by the traditional Francophone community.

The accommodation of diversity is a major challenge in the future of Ottawa’s Francophone community, as the success of initiatives to promote the vitality of the French language and the development and maintenance of the necessary institutional basis will undoubtedly require sustained advocacy and collaboration from a strong and cohesive network of communities.
8) Myths relating to bilingualism policies

Myth # 1: One of the barriers to policies around French-language services in the City of Ottawa is the overriding presence of the Federal government with its policies of language. Fuelled by a fear of not getting federal employment without a proficiency in French, there is a belief that one must be bilingual to work for the federal public service. The reality, however, is that over 60 per cent of public service positions in Canada require knowledge of only one official language; and 40 percent require varying levels of bilingualism. Moreover, 72 per cent of federal public service positions in Canada are held by Anglophones. In the National Capital Region, where federal services are to be offered to all regions of Canada, 65 per cent of positions are designated bilingual (OCOL, 2008).

Myth # 2: Following the adoption of the City of Ottawa’s Bilingualism Policy, a false belief that only Francophones can now work in the City of Ottawa has taken hold in certain sectors of the community. The reality is that only 27 per cent of positions are now designated bilingual.

Myth # 3: Bilingualism in Ottawa costs too much. The reality is that only one-tenth of a percentage point of the total municipal budget is spent on expenses related to bilingualism in the city of Ottawa.

Myth # 4: With an increasing diversity in Canada, there are more speakers of non-official languages in Ottawa than there are of French. The reality is that French remains the second-most-spoken language in Ottawa and this position of the French language is in part due to growth in the number of Francophone immigrants and children of immigrants who choose French as their first official language. Duality in official language is not contradictory to an increasing diversity.

Myth # 5: Francophones are bilingual, so they do not need services in French. The reality is that there are many Francophones who are not bilingual (especially Francophone immigrants); but more importantly, bilingual Francophones have the right to access public services in the official language of their choice as sanctioned by the federal Official Languages Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; the Ontario Government’s French Languages Services Act, and the City of Ottawa’s Bilingualism Policy.

9) Stereotypes fuelling anti-French sentiment

As often is the case, stereotypes are held and spread whenever there are unfounded fears that are justified by false ideas and assumptions. Some of the stereotypes held about Francophones include that they are party-goers, fond of eating, drinking, singing and dancing – fun but not serious.

These stereotypes in turn fuel anti-French sentiments and movements, which may hinder progress in the promotion of the vitality of the French language and the inclusion of the Francophone community.
4. We envision – a Francophone-friendly city

» Organizers of a public meeting or consultation think of how to include Francophones without being reminded to do so.

» People don’t say how expensive simultaneous interpretation and translation are.

» Every public event at the City of Ottawa includes a component in French.

» The Francophone perspective and consultation with the Francophone community are included automatically in the planning stage of every City policy, program and activity.

» Services are clearly tailored “pour et par” the Francophone community whenever suitable.

» Policies, programs and activities targeted to recent immigrants are in both French and English, as well as in other languages.

» All signage and public notices are in both French and English.

» Public transportation is safe, secure, affordable and accessible in urban and rural areas, and includes information (written and oral) in French and English.

» Public events at the City of Ottawa regularly include reference to the contributions of the Francophone community.

» There is a sufficient capacity across City services to respond rapidly to citizens asking to be served in French.

WHAT CAN I DO?

✓ Object when I hear something that I think is anti-Francophone (a stereotype, a joke, an insult) even though objecting may be unpopular.

✓ Seek appropriate information from reliable sources.

✓ Be friendly and open to the French language and culture – for example try saying “Bonjour” and “Merci” to Francophone co-workers and team members.

✓ Notice when Francophones in my team are not being heard in a discussion; take action to draw them into the conversation.

✓ Be a Francophile (someone who supports the Francophone community and services in French).

✓ Remember that Ottawa has an official policy on bilingualism.

✓ Be proactive about increasing the capacity of the City to serve Francophones in French.

✓ Partner with Francophone community organizations.

✓ Perceive “difference” as value added, not “less than.”

✓ And, if I am a Francophone, I know that my culture enriches the city and I will use my power to create opportunities for others.
5. Council mandates and legislation

- The Ottawa City Council enacted the *Bilingualism Policy* on May 9, 2001. The policy reaffirms the Council’s commitment to offer services in the two official languages to both residents and staff. The policy is based largely on that of the former City of Ottawa and is deemed both practical and flexible in its approach. The Bilingualism Policy’s specific provisions govern several features of civic activity, notably communications, the proactive delivery of services in both languages to citizens and staff, work organization including designation of positions, language training, and cultural program management.

- Advisory Committee on French-language Services and an administrative Division of French-Language Services were created in 2001, following the adoption of the Bilingualism Policy.

- *Ontario Government French Language Services Act* was adopted in 1986 and mandates that all of the services that are provided to the public by a ministry or agency of the Government of Ontario (driver’s licence, birth certificate, information, etc.) are available in French in the government offices located in or serving a designated area. The City of Ottawa is one of the regions designated. Although municipal governments were explicitly excluded from the Act, this legislation has expanded the range of public services offered in French.

- *The Charter of Rights and Freedoms* establishes constitutional protection for Francophones and for minority francophone communities. *The Official Languages Act* of the federal government was adopted first in 1969 and amended in important ways in 1988 and 2005. The amendments of 2005 were particularly interesting to Francophone minority communities in that they opened up judicial recourse to the obligations under the act, where federal government departments were required to take positive measures to promote the vitality of the Official Language Minority Communities (OCOL, 2006b).

6. What’s happening in Ottawa?

- *The National Capital Commission* has been the chief agency in underlining the importance of the bilingual nature of Ottawa, but mention should also be made of the financial support given to the City of Ottawa by the Department of Canadian Heritage to promote the enhancement of French-language services in the context of Ottawa’s role as the national capital of a bilingual country.

- *The City of Ottawa Advisory Committee on French-Language Services* and the Community and Protective Services department have expanded child care services in French so as to better serve Francophone families, particularly Francophone immigrant families. The impetus for such expansion partly resulted from a new study by Ronald Bisson, looking at the specific needs of immigrant Francophone families. Because of the place of many of the adult Francophone immigrants in the labour force (shift work, multiple part-time employment, etc.) traditional full-time public day care offering service during the day was not useful to these families and a particular effort was made to expand home-based child care and to develop the network of foreign-born operators of these services. Providing adequate and culturally sensitive child care in French is crucial to the possibility for immigrant Francophones to choose Francophone services and therefore increases their chances of integration into the Francophone community.
• **Designation of bilingual positions**, pursuant to the adoption of the Bilingualism Policy. This project took place from the summer of 2004 to late spring 2008 and involved reviewing permanent positions in the City of Ottawa, on the basis of clearly defined criteria, in order to designate a certain number of them bilingual. The project ensured that the City Council motion that no employees would lose employment because of designation was respected.

• **Systematic planning.** The City is now beginning a process of systematic planning for the development of French-language services and therefore moving from a position of reacting to specific situations to that of planning, on a more long-term basis, for the development of French-language services.

7. **Relevant practices in other cities**

It is difficult to identify exemplary practices of the delivery of French-language services in other Canadian cities. More relevant examples might be the diversity of English-language services in the City of Montréal. There is also a wealth of material about minority-language regimes in Europe, although relatively little research exists on municipal policies. Indeed, the Institute of Official Languages and Bilingualism and the Centre on Governance of the University of Ottawa, supported by the French-Language Services Advisory Committee of the City of Ottawa, have produced a report on the question of language policies in bilingual cities (Dionne et Shulman, 2008).

8. **Sources**

• Action ontarienne contre la violence faite aux femmes. 2008. “Faire le pont : Mieux comprendre les services en français en Ontario”.


• Dionne, Émilie & J. Shulman. 2008. « L’État des lieux : L’Interaction des langues en milieu urbain ». Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme (ILOB), Université d’Ottawa


9. Acknowledgements

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