

Summary

In order to establish and strengthen the predominance of the French language, Quebec has adopted an ambitious linguistic policy for immigrants' integration in French. In the spirit of the policy, French must be the main language used in public communication (at work, in teaching, in communication with the government, and in trade and business) without, however, excluding English or other languages. While the socio-linguistic context reflects this policy direction — particularly in the Montreal CMA, where 75 percent of immigrants live — an in-depth analysis reveals a wide diversity of linguistic integration profiles.

To demonstrate this diversity, rather than focusing on data concerning the demographic weight of linguistic groups (francophone, anglophone and allophone) defined by a single language (whether the mother tongue or the principal language used at home), this study looks at data that illustrate the remarkable diversity of linguistic profiles present in the population. While French is predominant, the bilingualism of a large portion of the population living in the Montreal CMA, but also in the province as a whole, is an important feature of the linguistic reality, as is the use of English in daily life, especially in the workplace.

There is no doubt that in the last 30 years, significant progress has been made concerning immigrants' use of French in everyday life in Quebec. For most, French is the predominant language of communication in several contexts: they prefer to use French (instead of English) in the public sphere and often also in their private lives. However, the majority of immigrants and their children feel it is important to know both French and English because they realize, as do most of the other people with whom they are in contact, that life in a modern Quebec society that is open onto the world requires knowledge of both languages.

Immigrants' use of French is nevertheless not as widespread as it could be, which often results in calls to tighten language policy. To what extent should this route be taken? While public debate will decide the issue, the study recommends that the debate take into account an essential historic fact: the progress of French in Quebec is due largely to the major socio-economic changes that have occurred since the Quiet Revolution, and not solely to the implementation of language policy. These changes have allowed Quebecers whose mother tongue is French to take their place in the economic, cultural, scientific and political spheres. Similarly, the linguistic integration of immigrants depends on their social and economic integration, which continues to present numerous shortcomings that public policy and government action should attempt to remedy.