

PLATFORM

“BY youth, FOR youth”

2021



CONTEXT

The Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française (FJCF—French-Canadian Youth Federation) is a national organisation founded in 1974. Managed by youth, for youth, the FCJF is made up of eleven associative member youth organizations active in nine provinces and two territories. It contributes to the sociocultural and identity development of French-speaking youth aged 14 to 25 through activities, pan-Canadian events – such as the Jeux de la Francophonie canadienne (Canadian Francophonie Games) – and youth employment programs.

Canada's Francophone youth have their country's future at heart. The FJCF's members have led a deep reflection process to bring out a certain number of key issues for the future of our youth, and for the future of Canada. For each issue, they identified a series of actions that appeared crucial. Canada's youth would like to see these issues and courses of action be brought to the forefront of the public debates leading to the next federal election, and be considered in the proposals and commitments of every candidate, leader and party that seek to form the next government.

In the following pages, you will find a list of the major directions we would like to see for the next government mandate, BY youth, FOR youth.

SUMMARY OF COURSES OF ACTION

Issue: Mental Health

- *That the Government of Canada develop and implement a Mental Health Action Plan, with particular attention to the needs of youth in all areas of their lives.*
- *update Part II of the Canada Labour Code to include a section on mental health.*
- *work with provincial and territorial governments to develop and implement a Pan-Canadian Mental Health Care Plan.*

Issue: The New Economy

That the Government of Canada

- *update the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy to reflect the new post-pandemic economic paradigm.*
- *put forward a Connectivity Policy that would take into account the relationships that young people across the country have and aspire to have through digital means.*

Issue: Education

That the Government of Canada

- *revise the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP) to include post-secondary institutions that provide French-language instruction in a minority setting.*
- *develop a strategy to ease the burden of student debt.*
- *in conjunction with provincial and territorial governments:*
 - *promote an increase in the number of Francophone teachers in French, immersion and French second language programs.*
 - *revise and adapt curricula and framework programs to reflect the true history of our country.*

Issue: Plurality of identity

That the Government of Canada

- *put forward an Action Plan on Plurality of Identity that recognizes and takes into account the diversity and intersecting identities of French-speaking youth.*
- *urgently modernize the Official Languages Act.*

Issue: The environment

- *That the Government of Canada is strengthening its climate plan to make it a true generational environmental action plan.*

Context and analysis

One out of five Canadians is currently living with a mental illness.¹ The issue is felt especially strongly among youth, who have the highest rate of mental health problems of any population in Canada - problems that often emerge just as young people are entering post-secondary education or the workforce.² This is exacerbated by the current pandemic context, which reinforces isolation and uncertainty and creates an overall anxiety environment. To underscore the urgency of the need for action on mental health, suicide remains the second most common cause of death for youth aged 15–34.³

Despite the importance of this societal issue, Canada still doesn't have a National Mental Health Strategy. As such, the differences in policies, programs and services from one province and territory to the next, and the absence of a pan-Canadian framework, are certainly among the factors that halt progress in this area. The courses of action are several: prevention, promotion and raising awareness — namely in order to combat stigmatization, increase the offer and access to health care services, re-establish one's well-being, coordination, etc. The well-being of young people depends on this issue.

The Canada Labour Code, as it currently stands, makes no reference to mental health. With the drastic changes to work structures brought about by the pandemic, it is incumbent upon the Government of Canada to address the issue of mental health rights and obligations in the workplace.

Courses of action

That the Government of Canada develop and implement a Mental Health Action Plan, with particular attention to the needs of youth in all areas of their lives.

This plan should, among other things:

- Help fight stigmatization against mental health;

¹ Mental Health Commission of Canada, *The Need to Invest in Mental Health in Canada*, 2013, page 1.

² Mental Health Commission of Canada, *Making the case for investment in Canada's mental health system using economic considerations*, 2017, p12.

³ Statistics Canada, *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*, 2010.

- Foster the development and access to resources and services in French, particularly in schools and post-secondary institutions across the country;
- Support these resources with adequate funding so that mental health services are readily available to all Canadians and mental health professionals have the resources to provide care quickly and effectively;
- Increase public discussion and public awareness around mental health issues across Canada.

That the Government of Canada update Part II of the Canada Labour Code to include a section on mental health.

This update should, among other things:

- Define and ensure the rights and obligations of employers and employees with respect to mental health in the workplace;
- Pay particular attention to issues affecting youth and those entering the workforce, including diversity and intersecting identities.

That the Government of Canada work with provincial and territorial governments to develop and implement a Pan-Canadian Mental Health Care Plan.

This plan should, among other things:

- Ensure greater accessibility of provincially and territorially insured mental health services so that services are truly available to all Canadians.

We recognize

- That since 2015, the federal government has provided funding to the provinces and territories to improve mental health services and invests in support of Indigenous mental health services.⁴
- The \$45 million investment over two years, starting in 2021-22, to develop national mental health standards in collaboration with provinces and territories, health organizations and key stakeholders.⁵
- The \$100 million investment over three years, starting in 2021–2022, to support mental health interventions for the populations most severely impacted by COVID-19, including youth.⁶
- The investment of nearly \$250 million since the beginning of the pandemic to develop tools for virtual care and mental health and to support the Kids Help Phone program.⁷

In the blind spot

- Since mental health is an issue that particularly affects Canadian youth, it is necessary to mobilize ministries of education, school boards, divisions and commissions, schools, universities, colleges and other post-secondary institutions, etc., to adequately equip them to respond to the mental health issues that arise among the student population. Each of these jurisdictions should be called upon to develop and implement its own youth mental health policy, and to receive funding to put it into action.

⁴ Government of Canada, *Budget 2021: A Recovery for Jobs, Growth and Resilience*, page 75.

⁵ *Ibid*, page 77.

⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷ *Ibid*, page 78.

Context and analysis

Canada operates in a highly competitive global economic environment where economic success increasingly depends on knowledge, education, information, technology, creativity and resilience. On the other hand, the prevalence of the demand economy (characterized by a predominance of self-employed workers paid on a per diem or short-term contract basis) and the economic downturn due to the global pandemic is making access to the labour market more difficult, particularly for youth, creating considerable concern.

In a digital society, where technology is evolving at a dizzying pace and life is increasingly instantaneous, not to mention telecommuting is becoming a new norm in many industries, it is important to ensure good connections between Canadians from all walks of life, wherever they are in the country.

In this context, the world of work and the relationship to work are changing rapidly. Flexible working conditions, continuous skills development, and the need for resilience to adapt to constant change are all key factors for young people who will soon be entering the labour market or who have recently entered it. Unfortunately, the current federal legislative and policy framework is poorly suited to the realities of this new economy.

Courses of action

That the Government of Canada update the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy to reflect the new post-pandemic economic paradigm.

The Youth Employment and Skills Strategy must, among other things:

- Ensure fair conditions for contract workers, considering that youth typically work in industries that rely on the on-demand economy;
- Take into account that youth are more affected by the employment consequences of COVID-19 than other demographic groups.⁸ Adapt the parameters of employment programs for in-school

⁸ Government of Canada, *Budget 2021: A Recovery for Jobs, Growth and Resilience*, page 19.

and graduate youth accordingly to ensure that as many young people as possible have access to them;

- Develop and implement a post-pandemic economic recovery strategy that focuses on innovation and the integration of current technologies such as artificial intelligence, with a focus on local, green and sustainable priorities, to ensure the sustainability of the Canadian economy;
- Ensure equal pay for everyone, everywhere in Canada;
- Implement Universal Basic Income in Canada;
- Create incentives for Canadian businesses to hire and retain youth, including active provision of options and access to the necessary equipment for telecommuting;
- Ensure that any internship offered in Canada is paid.

That the Government of Canada move forward with a Connectivity Policy that recognizes the relationships that youth across the country have and aspire to through digital means.

This policy should, among other things:

- Ensure Employment Insurance Reform;
- Facilitate access to quality computer equipment and tools to promote virtual work and school;
- Protect young teens from cyberbullying and other forms of abuse related to their online presence;
- Promote the inclusion of cybersecurity training in Canadian schools;
- Protect privacy rights by restricting the information a company can collect, store and sell;
- Implement stricter requirements to limit the spread of false information on social networks.

We recognize

- The federal government's commitment (Budget 2019) to ensure access to high-speed internet service for all Canadians by 2026.
- The mandate letters from the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth, which referred to:
 - The need to revise the *Employment Equity Act* to advance work on equity, diversity and inclusion for under-represented groups, including youth.
- The Minister of Labour's mandate letter, which includes completing the implementation of the *Pay Equity Act*.
- The mandate letter from the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion which aims to, among other things:

- Substantially increase the number of jobs and supports available to youth and students to increase the amount of paid work experience available to young Canadians in 2021.
- Introduce and implement a plan to modernize the Employment Insurance system for the 21st century, including for self-employed and on-demand workers.
- The \$109.3 million investment in 2022–2023 in the *Youth Employment and Skills Strategy* to better meet the needs of vulnerable youth who face multiple barriers to employment.⁹
- The \$1 billion investment in the Universal Broadband Fund to support high-speed internet access for Canadians in rural and remote communities.¹⁰

In the blind spot

- Unpaid internships remain a common practice in Canada outside the public service. This situation is highly discriminatory towards youth.
- The significant negative labour market impacts of COVID-19 for youth, including job loss and mental health impairment.
- The pandemic has shown that not all Canadians have equitable access to quality computer equipment, making it difficult to work or attend school at home.
- Similarly, access to stable, quality internet has proven difficult for many. In some cases, poor internet quality may even prevent youth from completing their online training or put them at a disadvantage compared to their classmates.
- The costs associated with the purchase and renewal of equipment are a barrier¹¹, which has undeniable consequences regarding education and, by extension, the work force in regard to the jobs held.

⁹ *Ibid*, page 124.

¹⁰ *Ibid*.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, *Canadian Internet Use Survey*, October 2019.

Context and analysis

Education is a worthwhile investment for Canada. Youth must have access to quality education in order to sustain the country's creative, technological and economic advantage. Access to French-language education is especially important as it supports the development and vitality of Francophone and Acadian communities and encourages bilingualism across the country. French-language schools, colleges and universities are essential institutions and gathering places for our communities. To address the educational needs of Canada's Francophone community, the federal government has a long-standing history of collaboration with provincial and territorial governments on minority-language education.

However, French-language education practises vary greatly from one province and territory to another. The provinces and territories lack transparency and accountability regarding the use of public funds provided by the federal government to support minority language education. Debt is a huge obstacle, even a financial barrier, for many who wish to pursue post-secondary education. The pandemic has only exacerbated the situation. We also note that many communities are experiencing a perpetual shortage of Francophone teachers.

Courses of action

That the Government of Canada revise the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP) to include post-secondary institutions that provide French-language instruction in a minority setting.

That this review ensure that French-language and immersion education funds are used for these purposes, provide transparency and accountability for the use of these funds, and impose sanctions on non-compliant provinces and territories.

That this review take into account post-secondary institutions that provide French-language instruction in a minority setting, in addition to primary, intermediate and secondary institutions.

That the Government of Canada develop a strategy to reduce the burden of student debt.

Government measures should include offering scholarships for students pursuing post-secondary education in French in Canada.

That the Government of Canada work with provincial and territorial governments to increase the number of Francophone teachers in French, immersion and French second language programs.

We propose two ways to achieve this course of action:

- Offering grants to forgive student debt or to reimburse an amount equivalent to undergraduate tuition fees for those who commit to teaching in a French-language minority school for a specified period of time;
- The launch of mobility subsidies to enable Francophone teachers to accept a position in a French-language educational institution far from their place of learning or residence.

That the Government of Canada, in cooperation with provincial and territorial governments, review and adapt the curriculum and educational frameworks to reflect the true history of our country.

That this review pay particular attention to the history of Indigenous people and Francophone communities across Canada. In particular, the review should respond to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission's* Calls to Action 62 and 63: "*Education for Reconciliation*".¹²

We recognize

- The modernization of the *Official Languages Act*, currently underway.

¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Calls to Action*, 2012, page 9.

- In collaboration with the provinces and territories, increased investment in educational and community infrastructure for institutions that support official language minority communities.
- Increased core funding for organizations working to promote and support minority language education programs (Official Languages Action Plan 2018–2023).
- The creation of micro-grant programs for identity-building activities (Official Languages Action Plan 2018–2023).
- New investments to develop and support teacher recruitment strategies for minority schools (Official Languages Action Plan 2018–2023).

In the blind spot

- While tuition fee revenues at educational institutions have tripled since 2001¹³, total public student debt in Canada now stands at over \$28 billion.¹⁴
- There is still a lack of transparency regarding the funding of the Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP), so it is currently impossible to know whether the funds that the federal government provides to the provinces and territories for minority-language education are actually used for this purpose.
- Some recent situations (e.g.: Laurentian University's recourse to the *Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act*, Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique v. British Columbia, ACFA v. Government of Alberta and University of Alberta) have confirmed the need to protect minority educational institutions and to force provincial and territorial governments to respect their commitments and avoid legal proceedings.
- Cuts to education were made at the expense of French second language and immersion courses in some boards, districts, divisions or school boards during the pandemic. Although teacher shortages were a reality prior to the pandemic, the situation has shone a light on the cracks and many students find themselves without French language instruction.
- On the other hand, many students did not have the privilege of continuing their education online for extended periods of time during the pandemic, as the services and availability of online education varied by school, board, division, and districts.

¹³ Joel Harden, *The Case for Postsecondary Education Renewal*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, March 2017, page 5.

¹⁴ Canadian Federation of Students, *The Political Economy of Student Debt in Canada*, April 2017, page 3.

ISSUE: PLURALITY OF IDENTITY

Context and analysis

French-speaking youth in Canada are changing. In the past, the Canadian Francophonie as it was understood was primarily composed of minority Francophone communities in certain regions of the country that were historically Francophone centres. Today, the larger French-speaking community is showing significant development and reflects some broad demographic and social trends. French-speaking youth are more mobile and live in all regions of the country, bilingualism is on the rise¹⁵ and Francophone immigrant communities are flourishing. For many French-speaking youth in minority situations, intersectionality has become a defining identity factor (both in terms of geographic origin and sense of belonging to multiple identities, including cultural and sexual diversity). The intersection of identity among French-speaking youth must be recognized in the development of action plans to support their communities, whether they focus on youth or on official languages.

Courses of action

That the Government of Canada put forward an Action Plan on Plurality of Identity that recognizes and takes into account the diversity and intersecting identities of French-speaking youth.

This action plan should, among other things:

- Recognize that respecting a plurality of identities is a fundamental value that is part of the shared values of the Canadian people and that pluralism is essential to the future of Canada.

That the Government of Canada urgently modernize the Official Languages Act.

This modernization should, among other things:

¹⁵ <https://www.rcinet.ca/fr/2019/12/17/hausse-du-bilinguisme-chez-les-jeunes-canadiens-et-en-particulier-les-quebecois/>

- Update the *Official Languages Act*, based on the recommendations made by Francophone minority communities, and review its implementation to ensure its relevance now and in the future;
- Fund an official languages awareness and promotion campaign that would publicize and promote the different Francophone accents in Canada;
- Announce concrete measures to promote language security across the country.

We recognize

- The modernization of the *Official Languages Act*, currently underway.
- The mandate letter from the Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages, which aims for
 - A modernization of the *Official Languages Act* that:
 - promotes the development of minority language communities, the protection of their institutions and the increase of bilingualism throughout the country and in the public service;
 - is taking concrete steps to recognize the minority context of the French language in North America and the need to further protect it.
 - Improved government-wide supervision and coordination of the implementation of the *Official Languages Act*.
- Canada's participation as a founding partner of the Global Centre for Pluralism.

In the blind spot

- Diversity and cross-identity are still too often ignored in Canada, and there are some unfortunate trends, such as the rise of Francophobia, which is one of the many forms of discrimination and hatred that have been on the rise in Canada in recent years. There is a need for an awareness campaign on pluralism, accents and language registers to counter stigma and discrimination and to strengthen the sense of belonging of all Canadians. We want to see campaigns to change social perceptions in schools and cultural institutions across the country, aimed at changing popular beliefs that are rooted in our societies, but also in the media - where diversity is still too rarely seen and heard.

Context and analysis

Canada's natural resources are an extraordinary asset. Countless scientific studies indicate that the environmental situation is critical, and action is more than urgent. The Yukon declared a climate emergency in 2019, joined by British Columbia in the face of forest fires and flooding in the summer of 2021. A recent study reports that Canada's temperatures are increasing, on average, about twice as fast as they are globally.¹⁶ Climate change, dwindling sources of drinking water, erosion of biodiversity, pesticide use and oil development are among the many issues that have brought the environment to the forefront of the concerns of a significant portion of Canadians.

Young people, who will soon inherit this situation, want the Government of Canada to take concrete, conscientious and timely action that will ensure the sustainability of natural resources at home and around the world for generations to come. We look to our country to take on a global environmental leadership role, a role that is ours because of Canada's abundant natural resources. We believe that the situation is dire, and that immediate action is essential.

Courses of action

That the Government of Canada strengthen its climate plan to make it a true generational environmental action plan.

This plan should set ambitious, clear and achievable goals and include concrete actions that will make Canada a global environmental leader, including

This plan should set ambitious, clear and achievable goals and include concrete actions that will make Canada a global environmental leader, including

- Imposing sanctions on companies that don't respect their obligations in terms of sustainable development;
- Not only meeting Canada's commitments and obligations under the Paris Agreement, but aiming to far exceed them;
- Reducing Canada's net greenhouse gas emissions to zero by 2030;
- Reviewing and updating the Canada Water Act and the Action Plan for Clean Water.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, *Canada's Changing Climate Report - Summary, 2019*, page 5.

- Providing immediate access to safe drinking water in all communities, including all northern and Indigenous communities;
- Investing in sustainable technologies to enhance the new economy;
- Aiming for 100% renewable energy in Canada by 2050.

We recognize

- The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change's mandate letter which namely aims to:
 - Exceed Canada's 2030 climate action target.
 - Continue to charge for pollution while putting money back into the pockets of Canadians.
 - Continue to support the manufacturing, transportation, natural resources, and energy sectors in their efforts to transition to a carbon-neutral future by creating well-paying, sustainable jobs.
 - Create a new Canadian Water Agency to ensure safe, clean and well-managed water.
- The Government of Canada's commitment to plant two billion trees to clean the air and green communities.¹⁷
- The adoption of the Paris Agreement by Canada and 194 other countries.
- The Government of Canada's commitment to eliminate coal as a source of electricity by 2030.
- Canada's ban on single-use plastics.
- The Government of Canada's requirement that 100% of passenger cars and light trucks sold in Canada be zero-emission vehicles by 2035.
- The passage of the *Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act*.

In the blind spot

- Many researchers believe that the commitments of the Paris Agreement will not be enough to counteract major climate change trends. Youth are ready to step up to the plate and support approaches that would go further, faster and stronger.
- *Canada's Mid-Century Long-Term Low-Greenhouse Gas Development Strategy* is an important vision for the future. But the Strategy's timeline (mid-century) is too late. Targets need to be met more quickly.
- Policies and laws legislating the protection of water, including drinking water, are outdated, in urgent need of updating, and must be accompanied by progressive and sufficient measures to ensure the sustainability of water in Canada.

¹⁷ Government of Canada, *Speech from the Throne to Open the First Session of the 43rd Parliament of Canada*, December 5, 2019.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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