

## ARE ANGLO-QUEBECKERS POORER? NO!

“The number of English-speaking Quebecers has increased over the last five years in the province [and] they have higher unemployment rates than their French-speaking counterparts, in addition to earning less money and being more likely to live in poverty,” in *La Presse*, May 17, 2023.

Publishing findings by PERT (Provincial Employment Roundtable) as gospel and without checking them first (particularly with experts), our media reported that English-speaking Quebecers have lower incomes than francophones and that they are more affected by unemployment and poverty.

At the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages, in Ottawa, similar remarks were made in 2021 by then-president of the Quebec Community Groups Network and former Liberal Member of Parliament for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Marlene Jennings, as well as (and this should have caused an uproar) by the Commissioner of Official Languages, Raymond Thériault.

What are these claims based on? Do these claims accurately reflect descriptions of what has been the dominant reality up until now? A reality based on the cultural division of labour that places Anglo-Quebeckers at the top of the income pyramid? Have things changed that much over the past 50 years in Quebec, a province where French-speaking Quebecers remained less educated than Anglo-Quebeckers and occupied the lowest-paying jobs, with lower incomes and higher unemployment rates than Anglo-Quebeckers? A reflection of the Quiet Revolution, when francophones were still associated with the era of hewers of wood and drawers of water?

While the income gap between francophones and anglophones in Quebec has narrowed over the past half a century, the picture painted by the PERT study does not hold up for three main reasons:

1. the erroneous choice of first official language spoken (FOLS) as a criterion for identifying Quebec’s anglophone community;
2. the decision to omit average income as a criterion for comparison between anglophones and francophones in Quebec; and
3. the lack of any reference to the link between language of work and employment income.

## 1. The choice of FOLS

Initially, the organization claimed that 1,253,578 people identify as English-speaking Quebecers. This represents 14.9% of Quebec's population. This claim is highly questionable. In fact, by using a more objective criterion to define the English-speaking population, only around one million people spoke English as their main language at home in 2021, the year of the most recent federal census.

However, to define English-speaking Quebecers, the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT) used FOLS (first official language spoken) tables, a variable constructed by (or derived from) Statistics Canada to meet the requirements of the federal *Official Languages Act* on the basis of three variables assessed in the census: knowledge of official languages, mother tongue and language spoken most often at home (see Charles Castonguay at <https://lautjournal.info/20170317/langue-demystification-de-la-plop-de-statistics-canada>). No federal census has ever asked respondents to identify themselves as anglophone or francophone to determine what federal services to provide in each community.

According to the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, which operated in the sixties, the main language used at home is the most reliable indicator of the number of speakers of a language. However, according to the 2021 census, 986,285 Quebecers (11.7% of the population) said they mainly used English at home.

One question arises: where did the additional 267,000 people that the PERT study included in the Anglo-Quebec community come from? Adding a quarter of a million people favours the Anglo-Quebec community by raising the number of English-speaking Quebecers to 1,253,278. What effects might this artificial swelling have on income comparisons between anglophones and francophones?

Important clues were revealed when we compared PERT data (based on FOLS criteria) and cross-referenced language of use and income. The PERT study uses FOLS criteria to identify anglophones, setting the median employment income for Anglo-Quebecers at \$32,000 and average employment income at \$48,720. But for the 986,000 people whose language of use was English, the median employment income was \$36,000 and the average employment income \$52,850.

**Table 1 - Language spoken at home (language of use)**

Characteristics of the population aged 15 and over	Quebec Average	English	French	Other	English/French
<b>Population aged 15 and over</b>					
<b>Labour force</b>	6,918,730	726,850	5,359,385	558,185	103,575
<b>Median employment income</b>	\$36,000	\$36,000	\$37,600	\$25,000	\$38,000
<b>Average employment income</b>	\$46,240	\$52,850	\$46,560	\$35,040	\$50,600

Turning 267,000 non-anglophones into English-speaking Quebecers resulted in a \$4,000 (11.1%) drop in median employment income for Quebec’s “English-speaking” community and a \$4,130 (7.8%) drop in average employment income. As a result, the federal government has artificially impoverished Anglo-Quebeckers to reverse the dominant reality, which places anglophones at the top of the cultural division of labour, even in 2021. These are statements echoed by the federal Commissioner of Official Languages, the Quebec Community Group Network and mainstream Quebec media. PERT’s reasoning is flawed and does not stand up under closer scrutiny.

## **2. The use of median income and the exclusion of average income**

PERT’s study uses median income<sup>1</sup> to compare anglophones and francophones. The English speakers added through FOLS criteria come largely from allophone immigrant backgrounds with little knowledge of English and even less of French. With incomes well below average, it is no surprise that this group is dragging down the FOLS’s median income for English speakers. Excluding average income<sup>2</sup> paints an incomplete picture of reality, because average income reveals that English-speaking Quebecers tend to have higher incomes than French speakers.

PERT said it prefers using median income to better reflect the general situation of English-speaking Quebecers. When we add average income in the analysis, it becomes obvious that this was a political choice that only reflects a partial reality. The addition of 267,000 non-English speakers (with considerably lower incomes) to the total number of Anglo-Quebeckers has a significant impact on the PERT study. If we were to remove 21% of the people PERT included in the total number (i.e. those using the main language at home), the tables and graphs in their pseudo-study would paint a very different picture, in terms of both income and unemployment rates.

The reason for the choice to use average employment income or average after-tax income as the main benchmark quickly becomes clear. Even using FOLS figures, PERT’s study shows that the average employment income of anglophones is slightly higher than that of francophones (\$48,720 vs. \$46,240 average employment income). Calculating average employment income based on language of use widens the income gap in favour of anglophones even more (\$52,850 for anglophones vs. \$46,560 for francophones). Demonstrating the growing poverty of Anglo-Quebeckers in this way is, for the federal government, essentially a political aim to strengthen the Anglo-Quebec community. We can see their true colours.

### 3. Language of work and income

There is a clear link between language of work and employment income. So, it is astonishing that a report such as PERT’s, which focuses primarily on the employment of Anglo-Quebeckers, completely overlooks language of work. Data from the 2021 federal census show that earnings associated with working in English are moderately higher than the median, and dramatically higher for the average, when compared to earnings associated with working in French.

When English is the language of work, median employment income is \$4,600 higher (\$43,000 vs. \$38,400), and average employment income exceeds that of individuals working in French by \$15,000 (\$61,800 vs. \$46,640). So, more than 60 years after the start of the Quiet Revolution, working in English in Quebec in 2021 meant earning an average income more than 30% higher than that of people working in French. This leads to high levels of English language substitution among francophones and allophones, a major contributing factor of anglicization.

**Table 2 - Language of work**

Characteristics of the population aged 15 and over	Quebec Average	English	French	Other	English/French
Labour force	6,918,730	668,480	3,773,015	36,245	249,940
Median employment income	\$36,000	\$43,600	\$38,400	\$16,400	\$43,200
Average employment income	\$46,240	\$61,800	\$46,640	\$26,120	\$56,050

## Conclusion

Do we want an accurate description of reality or not? Do we want to convince the public that Anglo-Quebeckers are poorer than francophones? All you have to do is focus on the population sample that best serves your cause, select the most effective unit of measurement, and discard inconvenient data. This is what we are compelled to believe after reading reports from the Provincial Employment Roundtable (PERT).

To paint an accurate picture of reality in Quebec, it is important to use the most reliable linguistic factor (language used at home), examine the most relevant economic variable (average income), and cross-reference this data with language of work. After rigorous analysis, the persistent economic inferiority of francophones is irrefutably clear. A fatal blow to the picture painted by PERT.

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<sup>1</sup> The median income divides the population into two perfectly equal halves, so that 50% of those surveyed earn less and 50% earn more.

<sup>2</sup> Average income is the average after-tax income of all individuals in Quebec aged 16 and over.