

Profile of
English-Speaking Youth
Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine

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RIESS
Regional **Individual** Employment
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ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

Three community organizations commissioned this profile of the situation of young people in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region: the Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA), the Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders (CAMI) and Vision Gaspé-Percé Now. A study grounded in community-based participatory action research was developed, with the goal of hearing directly from young people about their realities in order to take action on issues affecting them in the region's communities.

A mixed methods approach combined an on-line survey with focus group discussions exploring questions related to out-migration, education, employment, social life, services and more. A total of 438 young people aged 15-35 filled out the survey and nine focus groups were held in a total of six communities with a total of 82 youth.

This summary document presents key findings from *Profile of English-Speaking Youth Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine 2020*. The full document can be found at www.casa-gaspe.com/document-centre/ (English only).

Author: Mary Richardson, PhD, consultant
Co-author: Mary Zettl, MA, research assistant
With: Kim Harrison, executive director, CASA



Committee for Anglophone Social Action

168 Gerard D. Levesque
New Carlisle, QC G0C 1Z0

Tel: 418-752-5995 / 418-752-2127
Toll-free: 1-877-752-5995

www.casa-gaspe.com



Council for Anglophone Magdalen Islanders

787 chemin Principal
Grosse-Ile, QC G4T 6B5

Tel: 418-985-2116, extension # 1

www.micami.ca



Vision Gaspé-Percé Now

28 Rue St. Patrick
Douglastown, Gaspé, QC G4X 1H0

Tel: 418-368-3212

www.visiongaspeperce.ca

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A PORTRAIT

OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING YOUTH (15-29) IN GASPÉSIE-ÎLES-DE-LA-MADELEINE

There are approximately 1,205 English-speaking youth aged 15-29 in the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (GIM) region according to the 2016 census. The proportion of youth in GIM is similar among French and English speakers overall, but varies by MRC.

**Youth (15-29) in the English and French-speaking Populations
Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and its MRCs, 2016**

GEOGRAPHY	ENGLISH SPEAKERS			FRENCH SPEAKERS		
	Total population	Aged 15 to 29	Proportion	Total population	Aged 15 to 29	Proportion
Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine	8,790	1,205	13.7%	79,340	10,360	13.1%
MRC Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine	695	95	13.7%	11,495	1,475	12.8%
MRC La Côte-de-Gaspé	1,735	205	11.8%	14,970	2,115	14.1%
MRC Le Rocher-Percé	1,230	115	9.3%	15,810	1,965	12.4%
MRC Bonaventure	2,510	380	15.1%	14,690	1,925	13.1%
MRC Avignon	2,570	415	16.1%	11,465	1,555	13.6%

Source: J.Pocock Research Consulting, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada. Population in private households – 25% sample. The linguistic concept is First Official Language Spoken with multiple responses distributed evenly.

Income

English-speaking youth are more likely to be earning \$20,000 or less (after tax) than their Francophone counterparts (66% vs. 60.7%) in the GIM.

Aboriginal identity

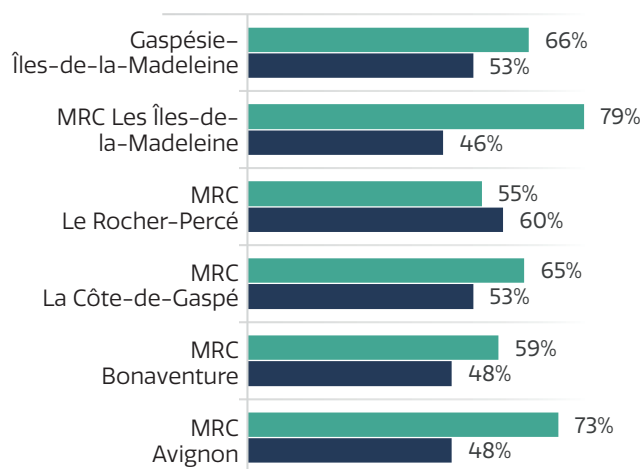
In the MRCs of Bonaventure, Rocher-Percé and Côte-de-Gaspé, the proportion of English-speaking youth reporting an aboriginal identity is between 10%-20 %. In MRC Avignon, home to the First Nations communities of Listiguj and Gesgapegiag, 83% of youth report an Aboriginal identity.

Education

English-speaking youth are more likely to have low educational attainment than Francophones (66% vs. 53%) in all MRCs, with the exception of Rocher-Percé.

Low Educational Attainment

(High School Diploma or Less) in the English-speaking and French-speaking Populations Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and its MRC Territories, 2016

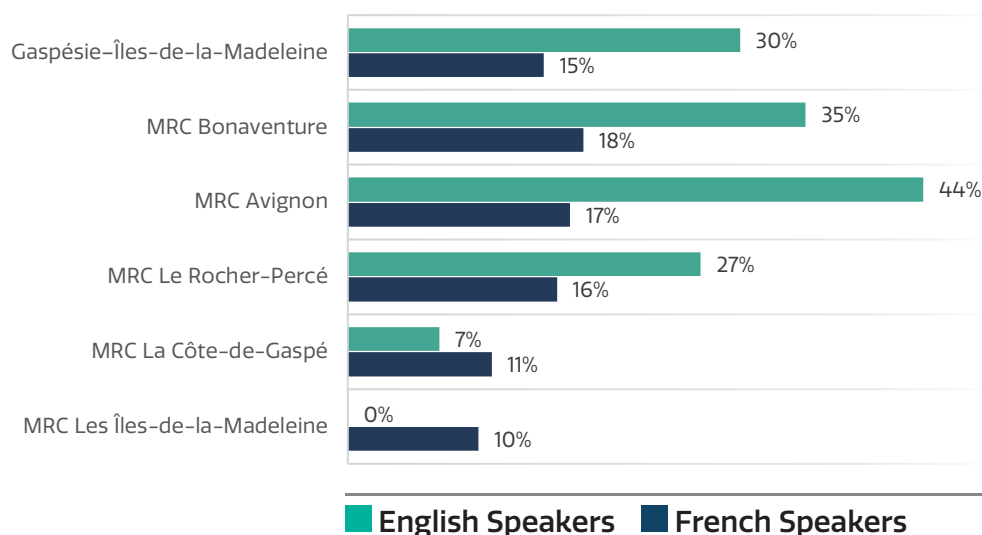


English Speakers French Speakers

■ Employment

- Compared to Francophone youth in GIM, Anglophones are more likely to be out of the labour force, with variations by MRC (44% vs. 39%).
- Employment rates among English-speaking youth in GIM are much lower overall than among French speakers (40% vs 52%).
- Compared to Francophone youth in the region, English-speaking youth are more likely to be unemployed (30% vs. 15%) with variations by MRC.

Unemployment rate among youth aged 15–29 and MRC territories, 2016



Source: JPocock Research Consulting, 2016 Census, Statistics Canada. Population in private households – 25% sample. The linguistic concept is First Official Language Spoken with multiple responses distributed evenly. (The data below for MRC Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine does not reflect community realities. It is possible that the census was taken during the fishing season when most people have seasonal work.)

A 2016 study by Youth Employment Services (a provincial youth employment service for English speakers) surveyed Anglophone job-seekers and found that in Gaspésie-les-Îles the main barrier to

employment was perceived to be *French language skills* (79.7%), followed by *lack of services in English in my region* (37.6%).

STUDY FINDINGS

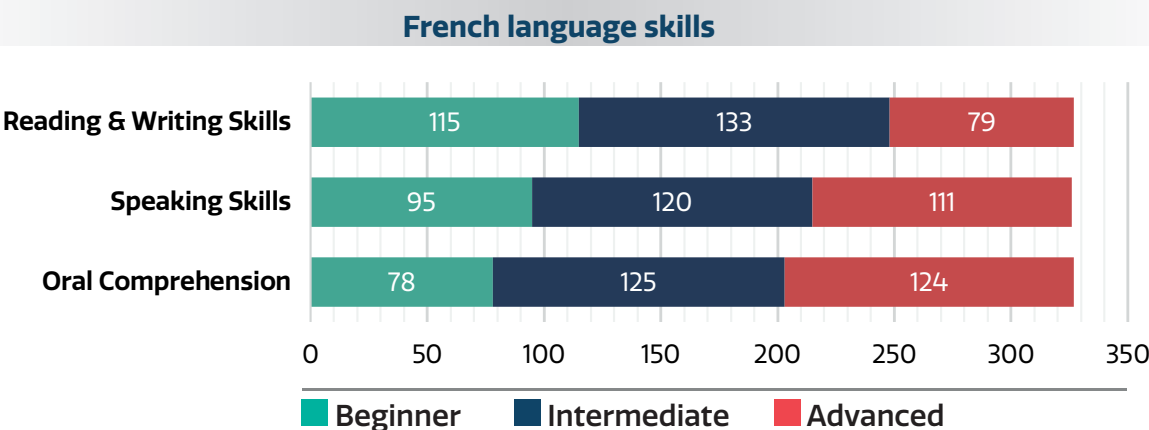
Although statistics on “youth” generally focus on the 15–29 age group, the partner organizations decided to include people aged 30–35, because of their actions in the areas of employability and skills training. Therefore, the results presented below are for all respondents aged 15–35.

A total of 438 youth aged 15–35 responded to the survey and were relatively evenly spread across this age range. The largest proportion of respondents were from MRC Bonaventure, followed by the Magdalen

Islands, MRC Côte-de-Gaspé, MRC Avignon, then MRC Rocher-Percé.

French Language Skills

Three-quarters of all survey respondents had some level of French language skill (oral comprehension, spoken French, reading and writing skills) which they self-assessed as follows:



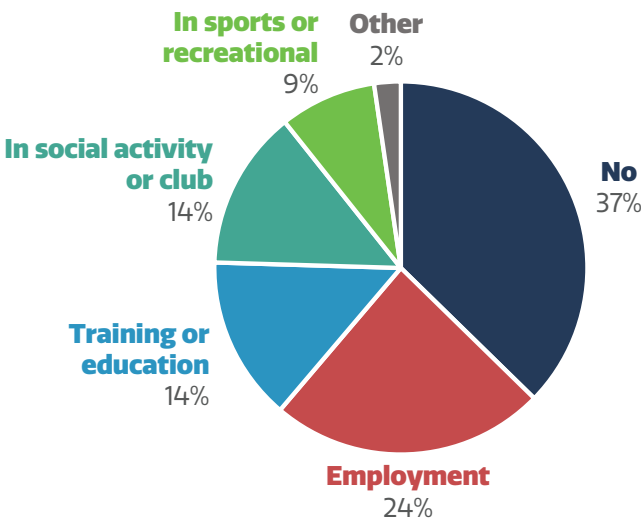
Sixty-one percent of survey participants found their French level (or lack thereof) was a barrier to accessing opportunities. The barrier also specifically related to hindering opportunities in

- employment (24%)
- skills training and education (14%)
- participation in social activities (14%)
- participating in sports or recreational activities (9%)

Only 37% of respondents reported their French level was not a barrier to accessing opportunities; in other words it was either not required or their French was sufficient.

The remaining 2% of respondents who selected “other” cited similar areas of their lives where they felt the language barrier: being promoted or getting a higher paying job, and unable to understand French so it hinders everything from day-to-day tasks to socializing.

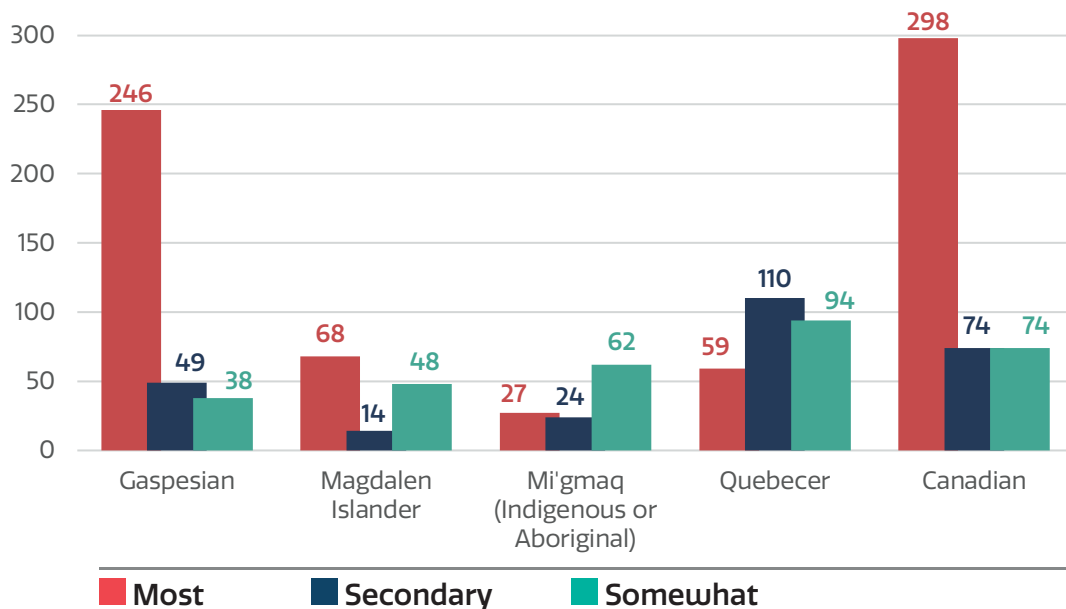
French level a barrier for opportunities



IDENTITY

Respondents were asked how they identify themselves among six options: Gaspesian, Magdalen Islander, Mi'gmaq, Quebecer, Canadian, Other. They could report the identities as being most, secondary, or somewhat important. As shown below, Canadian and Gaspesian were by far the most frequently selected responses. All Magdalen islanders chose "Magdalen Islander" as their first identity and a total of 113 respondents identified as Mi'gmaq as their primary, secondary or tertiary identity. Few identified primarily as Quebecers.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOURSELF?
(NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS)**



Focus group discussions revealed that some participants related 'Quebecer' to being 'French' and therefore did not identify as such. Several focus group participants indicated that they did not feel accepted as a 'Quebecer' despite having a long family history in the region, simply because they were English speakers.

"It's all equal for me, I couldn't put a 1, 2 or 3. I was not bilingual growing up, but I am now. I feel more like a Quebecer now, because I can take part in different events. Speaking French has allowed me to be a part of society."

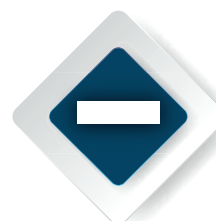
"I'm really proud to be from the Gaspé, but I've always felt like an outsider in Quebec. I'll never fit in because I'm not 'French'. Even though I speak French I've always felt excluded."

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY LIFE

Almost half of respondents reported there were very few social and recreational programs in their community, while 42% reported there were 'some'. This clearly shows a lack of activities in the region's communities.



When asked what they liked most (+) and least (-) about their community, responses point to two contrasting sides of the same reality for young people. Interestingly, the responses regarding the people and social culture within the communities was very indicative of the dichotomous nature of small towns. The sense of community support and comradery between people in the region was liked most by respondents, but that also came with a lack of privacy and gossip, which they liked least.



Small community, friendly people, safe

Gossip, lack of privacy, small-mindedness

Tranquillity, beauty, scenery, nature, outdoors

Remoteness, lack of services, commerce, infrastructure

French-English mix of language and culture

Language challenges and barriers

Over two-thirds of respondents planned to remain in the region (definitely or probably).

Only 13% reporting planning on leaving and 20% were unsure.

Motivating factors to stay in or leave the region

STAY

- 1 Family
- 2 Partner
- 3 Work

LEAVE

- 1 French level
- 2 Lack of jobs
- 3 Lack of jobs in my field

EDUCATION

Education and skills training

Among respondents, 34% reported high school as their level of education. As there were an estimated 50% of all survey participants under the age of 19, many of the high school and elementary school level education levels are likely from the younger respondents.

School language

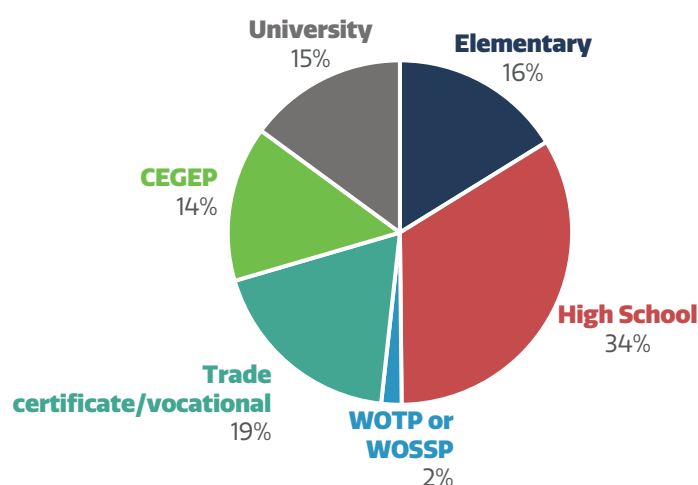
Elementary school

- 83% in English
- 13% in French
- 1% in Mi'gmaq

High school

- 91% in English
- 7% in French

Education level



School life

Focus group participants spoke of the disadvantage of having separate French and English high schools, particularly for socializing and sports. They also felt that their course choices were limited, sometimes reducing their options for higher education. The French curriculum in English schools was also considered insufficient and frustrating for students who wished to improve their skills and opportunities.

Many teenagers in the Baie-des-Chaleurs area spoke negatively of the closure of the high school in Bonaventure and the combination of the English elementary and secondary grades into one school. In addition, adult education was not seen to provide sufficient choice of training. When asked what skills training they would be interested in, 143 respondents provided ideas. The main suggestions are shown in the table below.

Training Program Wish List (main suggestions)

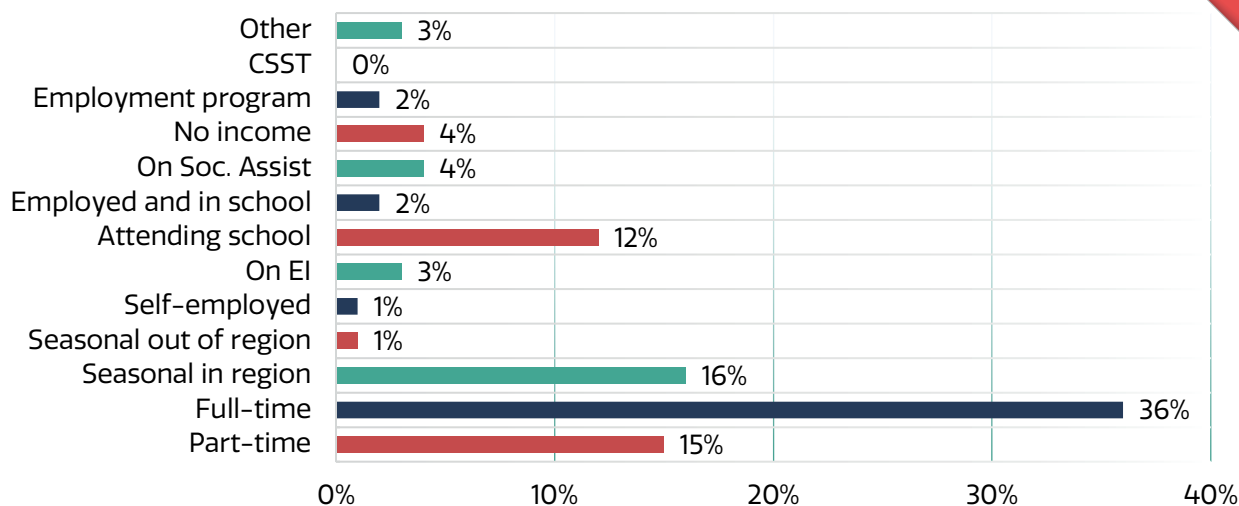
CATEGORY	SPECIFICS
Trades	Welding, electrician, construction, trucking, heavy equipment operator, carpentry, mechanic, small vessel or train operator
Medical/Health	Home care, nursing, medical secretary, dental hygienist, speech therapy, paramedic, first aid, ultrasound technician
Arts	Photography, music, writing, digital art, graphic design
Certificate	DEP, College, university, CEGEP (no specification given)
Business/Administration	Accounting, entrepreneurship, social media marketing, business course
Multiple Interests	Respondents gave several answers covering multiple fields: culinary, trades, medical, legal, esthetics, arts, business administration, computer science, home care
Language	Learning French, teaching French to English-speakers, learning/teaching other languages
Pedagogy (teaching)	Teacher, teacher's assistant, early childhood education, special education, outdoor education

EMPLOYMENT

A significant proportion were employed, either full or part-time, or seasonally.

When asked if they were looking for work, one-quarter said they were, and most looked through family and friends. Focus group discussions suggested that employment opportunities are perceived as limited overall, but more so for English speakers. Entrepreneurial interests were considered challenging to pursue due to a perceived lack of resources, knowledge and sometimes, support from the community.

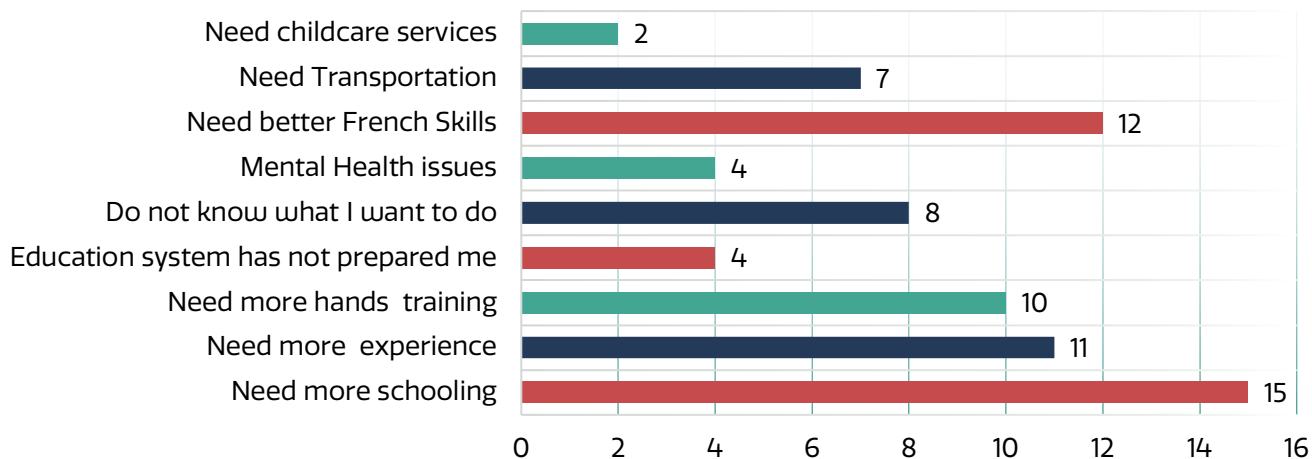
Current employment situation



Those without higher education feel they cannot leave their community for work. Others leave the region in search of better opportunities and wages despite wishing to stay in their community.

In the survey, roughly three-quarters of respondents felt they were prepared for the work they wanted. Those who did not provided the following reasons:

Reasons for not feeling prepared for work



Focus group discussions suggested that language and limited availability of jobs were the two largest barriers to entering the work force for youth. Although roughly half of the high school aged focus group participants felt they were bilingual enough to get a job, the rest needed to learn French to be able to compete with their peers for similar positions.

Health & Wellness

Health and wellness was a theme that emerged in focus group discussions. Participants pointed to social norms that encourage the use of drugs and alcohol, risk-taking behaviour and many hours on screens and social media. Some perceived an increase in mental health issues (depression and anxiety) alongside a lack of services in English for dealing with them. Wait lists to see a therapist are said to be long, forcing some to go to the Emergency Room to receive care.

Young parents

Of the 438 respondents, 126 had children. Of these, 24 were single parents 72 had school-aged children.

Childcare access:

- 54% of parents had access to childcare
- 23% did not
- 23% did not need it

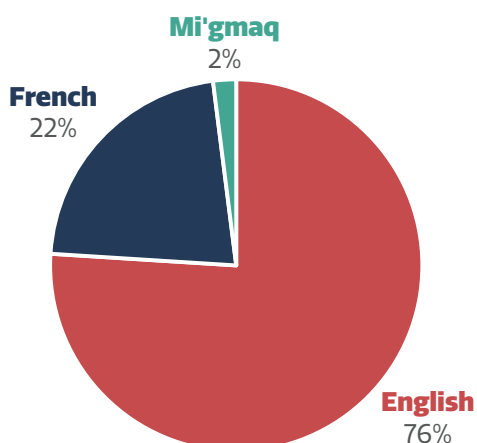
Childcare language:

- 47% had had English childcare
- 39% had French childcare
- 12% had bilingual childcare
- 2% reported childcare in another language
- less than 1% was in Mi'gmaq

Children's language of schooling:

- 76% reported their children attending school in English
- 22% were attending in French
- 2% were attending in Mi'gmaq.

Child Schooling Language



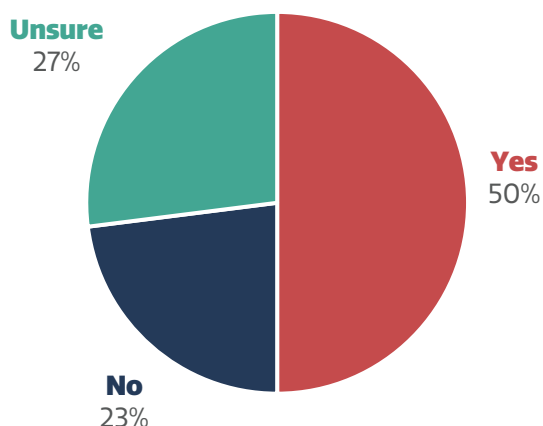
When asked if respondents would put their children in French Immersion:

- 46% responded yes
- 25% responded no
- 29% responded that they are unsure

Youth living outside the region

The majority of respondents living outside the region had left for school or work. While a few left to be with friends, family or a life partner, 24 respondents said that they left because they did not see a future in the region.

When asked whether they had an interest in returning, half of the respondents said yes.



Factors motivating people to return and preventing them from returning were similar to the reasons given for staying in the region by respondents living in the GIM. People were motivated to return for family, work or a life partner. However, the lack of work opportunities and their French level were the main factors preventing them from returning.

CONCLUSION

■ Interacting factors

A set of complex interactions take place between language, education, employment, social life and services, such as transportation and child care. Exposure to and acquisition of French language are affected by schooling, jobs, friends and family. Some young people are able to acquire a high level of fluency because of their life circumstances (family and friends), while others simply do not have the opportunities to do so.

One's skill level in French, in turn, has a strong impact on employment opportunities, since many jobs require also good communication skills in French. When a young person is not relatively skilled in French this creates barriers not only to employment, but also to social activities, training and further education. These linguistic issues are compounded by historic tensions between English and French speakers, which are still felt to some extent today. Many youth felt that having separate schools (and

social and sports activities) does nothing to ease these tensions or assist in improving French language acquisition.

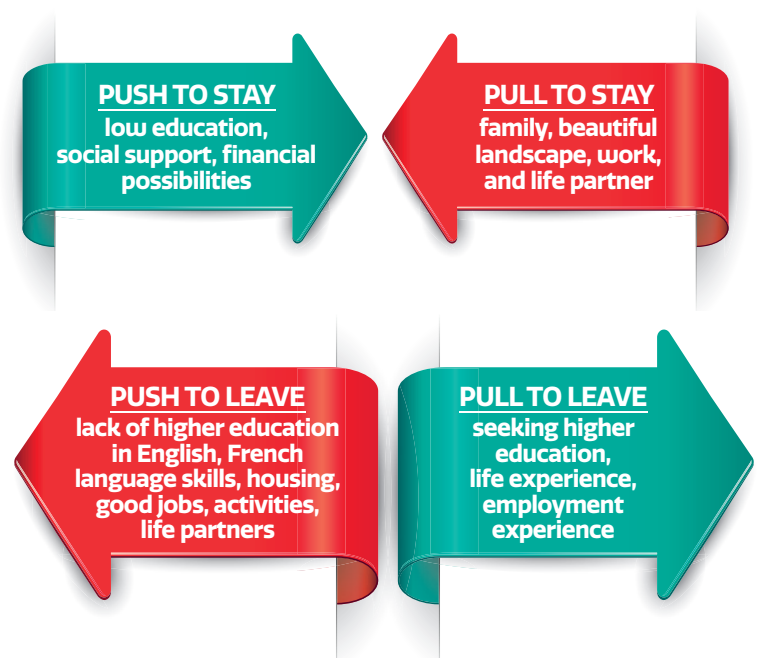
Additional barriers to employment and social participation in general include limited transportation options, limited availability of child care and limited educational opportunities in the region beyond high school.

■ Opposing forces to stay or leave

It would seem that young people in the Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine are subject either to negative factors that push them to stay, or positive factors that act as a pull. When young people lack education, social support or financial possibilities, they are "pushed" to stay in the region, but not by positive or attractive factors. On the other hand, their attachment to family, to the beauty of the land, to their work or to a life partner can all act as a magnet, attracting them to stay in the region.

When young people lack higher education options in English, French language skills, housing options, good jobs, social activities and potential life partners, they are "pushed" to leave. On the other hand, they may be attracted (positively) to leave the region by a desire for higher education, a more cosmopolitan life experience or more advantageous employment experience.

These forces that encourage some to stay and others to leave contribute to the devitalization of the region as young people migrate out of the region, or stay but with poor job prospects and incomes. Being an English speaker, especially if not bilingual, exacerbates the situation.



Despite what can in some ways seem a bleak portrait of the situation of youth in the region, almost half (43%) of survey respondents said they definitely plan to stay in the region, with an additional quarter (24%) saying they probably will stay.

Interestingly, among those who are living outside the region (leavers) fully one half are interested in returning. The main reasons for wanting to be in the region are family, a life partner and work; and the

main reasons for leaving are an insufficient level of French language skill and jobs (in general or in their field).

This points to a strong connection to “home”, to family and to the region.

Recommendations based on study findings (graphic)

Language skills	Enhance French language training through work and at school to help English speakers improve their French language skills, including the possibility of a French immersion program
Education	Facilitate access to education and training opportunities, specifically providing more diverse skills training
Employment	Enhance job opportunities for English Speakers, including support for entrepreneurship (business development)
	Provide counselling services such as personal coaching and career counselling
	Work with traditional rural industries, occupations, knowledge and skills
Social life	Create more places for youth to socialize and more activities that bring them together
	Organize activities that increase social connection and interactions between English-speaking, French-speaking and Mi'gmaq youth in nearby communities
Health and well-being	Create initiatives to access and improve knowledge on how to access health and social services, particularly for mental health and addiction
Mobility and attractivity	Explore promising approaches for attracting youth back to the region
	Work with mobility and migration—support young people who want to leave, and support them to come back
Governance	Involve young people in community planning and decision-making
	Protect what makes rural life attractive already—consider the impacts of policy decisions in all areas on quality of life, particularly those aspects that seem unique to rural communities and attract people to live in them: for example, nature, recreation, pace of life, and social capital.

RURAL YOUTH

Rural youth struggle with the challenges of being rural, such as seasonal work, little access to public transportation, limited formal support structures, and restricted educational and training opportunities. While many youth view rural communities as a safe environment and a good place to raise a family, these same communities are often perceived as lacking in employment, education and social opportunities. As a result, a higher proportion of rural than urban youth leave their home communities for work or school, even when they are reluctant to do so. This reluctance is related to what is often a strong sense of attachment to place, to family and to community.

As such, rural youth outmigration is driven by much more than purely economic factors. Young people from rural areas, like their urban and adult counterparts, move for a complex mix of subjective, personal reasons and objective, structural, economic reasons. Youth outmigration emerges as a policy issue primarily because it threatens the future of rural communities—not because it negatively impacts young rural out-migrants.

It follows that the focus for policy should be on attracting young people back to their home region, not preventing them from leaving. In addition, positive narratives and images of rural communities are needed to counteract the dominant cultural narratives that tend to frame rural places as “failed” and “failing” elements of a world that is moving toward urban lifestyles and standards. These negative images may lead rural young people who stay in their home communities to feel characterized as failures too—people who are stuck in place in a world on the move.

Source: Foster K., *Finding a Place in the World: Understanding Youth Outmigration from Shrinking Rural Communities* 2018.
<https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/73932>

RECOMMENDATIONS

■ General recommendations for rural youth¹

Focus on return migrants—develop community assets and connections that are proven to attract people back.

- 1** Involve young people in community planning and decision-making—for example, through the creation of a youth community council.
- 2** Work **with**, not **against**, traditional rural industries, occupations, knowledge and skills—make room for rural skills and knowledges in school curricula, and help young people see opportunities for success in traditional rural occupations.
- 3** Work **with**, not **against**, mobility and migration—support young people who want to leave, develop supports for households that commute short or long distances for employment, and support and encourage telework.
- 4** Start with schools, and start early—recognize schools as more than educational institutions; they serve as community hubs, signals of vitality and hope for the future, and assets.
- 5** Protect what makes rural life attractive already—consider the impacts of policy decisions in all areas on quality of life, particularly those aspects that seem unique to rural communities and attract people to live in them: for example, nature, recreation, pace of life, and social capital.
- 6** Consider place-based approaches such as place-based education and place-based development that strengthen local economies and broaden the imagination of young people in regard to the possibilities of life in their home communities.

1- Recommendations 1 to 6: Foster K., Finding a Place in the World: Understanding Youth Outmigration from Shrinking Rural Communities 2018. <https://dalspace.library.dal.ca/handle/10222/73932>

