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ASSOCIATION DES COLLÈGES ET UNIVERSITÉS  
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## ENGLISH-FRENCH BILINGUISM OUTSIDE QUEBEC: AN ECONOMIC PORTRAIT OF BILINGUALS IN CANADA

The Conference Board of Canada

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada is unique as a bilingual nation, in that both of its official languages—French and English—are deeply rooted in the origins and identity of the country. However, while Canada at the national level is officially bilingual, the rate of bilingualism varies greatly from one province to another. These two languages clearly symbolize a duality that is ubiquitous in Canada’s culture, its values, and its public policy.

In North America, francophones make up a small minority of the total population. Given that situation, it is not surprising that mainly French-speaking Quebec has the most bilingual population in Canada. This is not surprising: where two languages exist, the benefits of learning the language of the majority are well documented by many Canadian and international studies. Unsurprisingly, it is also in Quebec that debates about the place and role of bilingualism in Canada often receive the most attention.

It is therefore interesting to look at the other side of the coin—in other words, to examine bilingualism in Canada outside Quebec. This report provides an economic portrait of bilingual (French-English) individuals in Canada outside Quebec and seeks to quantify the footprint and contribution to the economy of these bilingual Canadians. We begin with a review of the literature, followed by an economic portrait of bilinguals, using data from the 2006 and 2016 Canadian censuses. Next, we add the results of a survey, created by The Conference Board of Canada and carried out by Léger, of 1,000 bilingual workers outside Quebec. Finally, we use a methodology developed at the Conference Board to estimate the contribution of bilingual workers to Canada’s gross domestic product, by industry and by province.

### Portrait of Bilinguals in Canada

The literature review shows us that in the Canadian labour market there are indeed advantages to being bilingual. In particular, the studies we looked at show that bilingual workers tend to occupy well-paying jobs and generally receive higher wages than their unilingual colleagues. However, the studies also make it clear that bilingualism, in of itself, is not the sole reason behind higher revenues. Rather, bilingual individuals are better positioned to obtain jobs in certain sectors that are better paid, such as in the public service or in management. Moreover, these studies lead us back to the idea that while bilingualism is not necessarily a skill that has additional value in the labour market, it is an indicator of the presence of valued productive characteristics, such as perseverance and adaptability. This does not mean that unilingual individuals do not possess these characteristics, only that bilingualism can be indicative of those characteristics that are otherwise difficult to observe.

Canadian census data point in the same direction. The data show that bilingual Canadians outside Quebec tend to stay in school longer and to be more likely to obtain university degrees than the general population or unilingual Canadians. We also find that bilingual workers tend to earn higher incomes and are more likely to be active in the labour market. Moreover, bilingual workers are employed mainly in the service-producing industries—particularly in public administration, educational services, health care, and professional, scientific, and technical services. The first three—public administration, educational services, and health care—are among the largest employers of bilingual workers in every province.

The results of the Conference Board survey largely corroborate what census data illustrate and confirm the themes identified in the literature review. In addition, the survey allows us to understand the value that respondents attach to bilingualism. For example, the majority of respondents have a generally positive view of the effects of bilingualism on the labour market and believe that being bilingual allows them to advance further in their careers and obtain higher wages. Respondents also said that their bilingualism gives them more job opportunities in their field of work. Finally, we note that the majority of bilinguals who responded to the survey (59.5 per cent) learned English first.

### Bilingualism and Economic Production

The last chapter of the report uses a methodology developed by the Conference Board to estimate the economic contribution of bilingual Canadians outside of Quebec. In fact, we estimate the contribution of bilingual workers to gross domestic product by industry and by province. We find that bilingual workers outside Quebec generate 10 per cent of Canadian GDP outside Quebec. In addition, we find that bilinguals generate around 20 per cent of GDP in educational services and in public administration outside Quebec. However, it is in the finance, insurance, and real estate industry that bilinguals create the most wealth in dollar terms, with their contribution to GDP approaching \$31 billion. Another interesting result emerges when looking at GDP at the provincial level. The work of bilinguals accounts for 38 per cent of New Brunswick's GDP and around 12 per cent of GDP in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. Finally, we also examine GDP per capita, which is a measure of our standard of living. We find that the per capita GDP of bilinguals is higher than that of unilingual anglophones in all provinces except Alberta and Saskatchewan.

### Conclusions

This report confirms that, even outside Quebec, being bilingual is a big plus in the Canadian labour market. While it is intuitively more advantageous to learn the language of the majority than learning the language of the minority, learning French in Canada outside of Quebec is closely linked to success in the job market. Knowing the second language does not explain on its own the success of bilingual individuals. However, the data show that bilinguals tend to study longer, are able to obtain better paying jobs, and contribute significantly to the economy. The fact that proficiency in both official languages is imperative for some positions in the federal public service explains, in part, these results. However, bilinguals are also able to better position themselves in the private sector, particularly in management positions and professional services. It is true that the census and survey data used here are self-reported by respondents and therefore do not take into account the quality of the respondents' bilingualism or degree of fluency in the second official language. This, however, has very little influence on our results, since (as the literature review shows) it is not the use of the second language at work that is associated with better pay, but only the knowledge of this language.