



## FRANCOPHONE IMMIGRANTS IN ONTARIO

### Challenges of Inclusion and the Role of the Co-operative Movement

#### Social Economy Fact Sheet #11

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#### Birds' Eye View

Ontario is home to 548,940 Franco-Ontarians, 4.8% of the province's population.

58,520 Francophones from racial minorities live here. They generally have more education than Franco-Ontarians and the population as a whole.

Most settle in Central (55%) or Eastern Ontario (36%), particularly Toronto and Ottawa.

They come from Africa (31.5%), Asia (30.5%), the Middle East (18%), the Caribbean (8.5%) and the Americas (7.8%).

Despite above average educational and language skills, Francophone immigrants are often under-employed and are more likely to live in poverty.

*The successful inclusion of visible minority francophone immigrants within Francophone communities in Ontario is important for a simple reason: Francophones here have a strong interest in maintaining their socio-political and economic status to preserve their cultural identity and hard won French-language services guaranteed federally and provincially. But how do new immigrant Francophones, many belonging to racial minorities, fit into Ontario's predominantly white Francophone communities? This Wilfred Laurier University team explores the question from the perspective of Ontario's co-operative movement, active since the past century.*

#### Employment: Higher Education and French Fluency Insufficient to Overcome Race and Other Barriers

When it comes to employment, newcomers face many significant barriers. As part of a racial and linguistic minority, Francophones face particularly problematic and oppressive settlement conditions. Mastery of French, one of Canada's official languages is not enough. In fact, the unemployment rate for Francophones from racial minorities (11.2%) is almost double that of Francophones in general (6.1%). They earn less too. In fact, 33.7% live below the poverty line, compared to Francophones in general (14.1%) and all racial minorities (25.9%).

Several factors seem to interact to make this happen. Social and

economic exclusion appears to be greater in minority Francophone communities given the complex and tenuous relations between Francophones within a greater Anglophone social movement. Second is the complexity of joining a minority within a minority. French is not enough to survive in an English-dominated sea. Finally, settlement services in French are very inadequate.

#### Can Co-operatives Help?

Most early co-operatives started in farming communities and informal saving institutions. Today they empower individuals in need of financial, housing, and employment services, child-care and settlement opportunities. They also help to keep communities and local businesses alive, retaining profits and control within the community, e.g. consumer-co-op, worker co-op, producer or marketing co-op.

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'Francophone' is a political construct. We refer to visible minority Francophones as 'Francophone immigrants', 'Francophones from racial minority backgrounds' or 'Francophone Newcomers'. The 'Franco-Ontariens de souche' or Franco-Ontarians, belong to the dominant, white Francophone community.

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## Methods

To explore the intersectionality of race, language and culture relative to social and economic exclusion in Ontario and whether co-operatives could help to improve inclusion, the study conducted:

- (a) an extensive literature review on immigration in Canada and the co-operative movement in Canada and Quebec;
- b) semi-structured, 45-120 minute interviews with 43 key informants; and
- (c) two focus groups., for a total of 16 participants. Six were involved in the co-operative movement either in Canada or their country of origin.

Participants were selected through purposeful sampling and the snowball method. 16 had participated from 10-30 years in the co-op movement, 21 were newcomers, and six were visible minority francophones working within the social economy either as practitioners or as individuals working

## Results

Our findings confirm our sense that the co-operative model could potentially offer much to support inclusion for Francophone immigrants in Ontario, but there are a number of challenges that must be faced if we are to seize this opportunity effectively.

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Co-operative entrepreneurship has been and remains an important part of the social economy for Francophones, both within and outside of Quebec. For Francophones in Ontario, co-operatives are a vehicle with which francophone communities can ensure linguistic, economic and political survival. Patterns of inequality within a society largely reflect material resources, and given the comparatively higher rates of unemployment among Franco-Ontarians, co-operative involvement could be beneficial to the larger Francophone community.

The most compelling argument that co-operatives can and do have an impact on Francophones' lives is the emergence of the Mouvement Desjardins in Quebec and Ontario. In 1900 in Lévis, Québec, Alphonse Desjardins created a credit union model to fight exploitive money lending practices, which were crushing French Canadian farmers. Over the next 100 years, the Desjardins Group became the largest integrated co-operative financial institution in Canada, with assets of \$152 billion dollars.

There are 66 co-operatives in Francophone milieus in Ontario with over 264,000 members and assets over \$2 billion. They include *casse populaires*, a funeral co-op, agricultural and housing co-operatives, mostly in Northeastern and Eastern Ontario. While New Brunswick has more francophone co-operatives than any other province outside Quebec, there are more francophone co-op members in Ontario, doing substantially more business than anywhere outside Quebec.

Employing a diversity lens and critical theory, four overarching themes emerged: i) the co-operative model as a tool for social and economic inclusion; ii) challenges of integration with minority francophone communities; iii) challenges related to co-operatives and newcomers; and iv) issues related to education and leadership within the Franco-Ontarian community.

## In short: Co-ops Must Change to Bridge the Gap

What we've learned through this study is that thoughtful and purposeful attention must be given to the needs of all immigrants wishing to settle successfully in Canada. This takes time, energy and coordinated efforts between all social service and political bodies committed to the integration of new Canadians in Ontario.

Traditionally, Francophones in Quebec and in minority Francophone communities across Canada have benefited from different co-operative initiatives, which ensured their economic and cultural survival. It is incumbent upon the francophone co-operative leadership in Ontario to extend this courtesy and therefore this experience to Francophones in immigrant communities.

Indeed, participants were frustrated with the current leadership of the francophone co-operative movement in Ontario. They felt that Desjardins leaders were particularly out of touch.

Based on their rich panoply of views, we offer several recommendations: 1) the co-op movement should return to its values of education, solidarity and cooperation; 2) the leadership should create spaces for women, young people and immigrants as they are the future champions of the co-operative movement; 3) spaces are needed for Francophones to debate fundamental questions relative to co-op development; and 4) spaces for research on co-operatives and strategies of co-op development should be created in order to stimulate debate within Francophone communities in Ontario.

## To Find Out More

[http://socialeconomy.utoronto.ca/english/project\\_pages/project\\_11.php](http://socialeconomy.utoronto.ca/english/project_pages/project_11.php)

