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How Will the Reform of Québec's *Charter of the French Language* Affect Your Municipality?

The reform of the *Charter of the French Language*, driven largely by Bill 96,¹ has had a number of repercussions for municipalities. Several particularly impactful provisions came into force on June 1, 2025.

Setting an example

First of all, the amendments to the Charter require the State and its civil administration (which includes cities and municipalities) to use French in an exemplary manner.

In concrete terms, that means municipalities need to set an example in the use, promotion, development, and protection of French. However, it is worth noting that some municipalities are recognized as bilingual by the government, and this exempts them from certain requirements.

Main changes and obligations

1. Exclusive use of French in internal and external communications

This means that all municipal staff must exclusively communicate in French (both orally and in writing) with colleagues and citizens alike, barring some exceptions. To that end, municipalities covered by the *Charter of the French Language* have until September 1, 2025, to adopt a directive specifying when a language other than French may be used.¹

The directive must list the exceptions to this obligation to use French exclusively, namely:

- Communications with some people who have a limited understanding of French
- International relations and relations outside Québec
- Bodies and municipalities that the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) has designated as bilingual
- Hiring for a bilingual position
- Writing scientific or technical documents in English, if French is difficult to use or if the document is intended for an international audience
- Emergencies, health and safety situations, and reasons of natural justice

It is important to note that these exceptions remain specific and limited.

2. Job-related language requirements

No language other than French may be used as a condition of new or continued employment. If a language other than French is required, the employer must:

- Have taken all reasonable means to avoid imposing such a requirement; and
- Clearly justify, in the job offer, the need to use a language other than French in the performance of duties.

3. Public signage and advertising

Public signage and commercial advertising must always be in French. When another language is also used, French must be markedly predominant.

"Markedly predominant" means that:

- The French text must take up at least twice as much space as the other-language text
- It is equally legible and permanently visible
- For dynamic signage, the French text must be displayed at least twice as long as the other-language text.

4. Company names and trademarks

If the name of a business is visible from outside the premises and it includes an expression from a language other than French, it must be accompanied by a clearly predominant statement in French. Registered trademarks in a language other than French that are visible from the outside must be accompanied by French terms. Bill 96 also requires municipalities to include compliance clauses in their supply contracts. These clauses require the wording on products, containers, and packaging, as well as accessories and related documentation (such as instruction manuals), to be in French.

¹ Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec

For more details on this directive, please visit the Ministère de la Langue française support page for emissaries.

Contracts and legal proceedings

From now on, membership and service contracts must be provided in French. In addition, before entering into an agreement with a private company, the municipality must ensure that the latter complies with the linguistic obligations set out by the OQLF, in particular by requiring an attestation of compliance or other equivalent document.

If the municipality brings legal proceedings, it must provide certified translations of any documents that are not drafted in French.

Permits and financial assistance

All verbal or written communication between a business and a municipality regarding permits, authorizations, and financial assistance must be in French, unless the Charter provides for an exception.

The francization process

The *Charter of the French Language* already requires municipalities to use French in an exemplary manner. As such, they are not required to adopt or follow a francization program as private-sector businesses do.

Penalties

When it comes to municipalities, the OQLF favours correction and compliance rather than fining.

When the OQLF receives a complaint, it can require a report on the municipality's linguistic situation and prescribe corrective measures.

For serious and repeated offences, it can recommend that the Attorney General take legal action to address the issue. If the municipality fails to comply, a court may order it to do so.

Municipalities that contravene the Charter may also have their contractual agreements cancelled. The government may also order the resolution, resiliation, or suspension of a contract if it results in failure to comply with the Charter.

Employees who fail to comply with the Charter may also be subject to disciplinary or administrative sanctions. On the other hand, employees cannot be punished for choosing to work in French.

Where to start?

Here are some steps to take to determine and improve your municipality's compliance with the *Charter of the French Language*.

- Ensure that internal communications are in French.
- Draft internal and external policies in French.
- Produce official documents (invitations, agendas, minutes, etc.) in French.
- Encourage email communication in French.
- Ensure that information documents and website are in French.
- Guarantee that French is markedly predominant on signage and in advertising.
- Use French for internal and external signage.
- Make companies more aware of language requirements.
- Update permit applications to reflect language requirements.
- Ensure that purchasing and procurement managers carry out compliant transactions.
- Train staff on language rules.
- Require potential contractors to provide an OQLF compliance certificate before a contract is awarded.
- Determine whether bilingualism is needed in each position.
- Post job offers in French, justifying bilingualism when necessary.
- Ensure that the default language of service is French in all areas of municipal activity.