

LESSON 1 - TO DO MORE:

This document supplements Lesson 1. It provides activities as well as additional information specific to particular themes. The six themes presented here are social issues animating the Quebec of today, which will be addressed in the next budget.

Summary

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Education in Quebec

The **education sector in Quebec** is facing major challenges. In fact, according to a Statistics Canada report dated December 2018, Quebec ranked eighth among all Canadian provinces in terms of investment in education and Quebec teachers are the lowest paid in the country. Likewise, the challenges of fighting against dropping out of school, poor service to students and the school tax are increasingly discussed in the public sphere. To this effect, the current government announced for the year 2019 an investment of \$1.7 billion for the creation and improvement of school infrastructure.

Education is at the center of the priorities of Mr. Legault's government. He said he wants a national turnaround in education, from kindergarten for 4 years old, to the renovation of schools in Quebec.

Activities: Distribute the following items to students and ask them to do additional research on the subject. Discuss the probing questions with your students.

Prompting questions: Do you think investing in education is a priority? If so, what measures should the government put in place? Have you noticed any changes or problems in your education? What would you like to see as changes?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [Quebec budget: billions earmarked for education but critics say don't expect services](#) *Global News* (March 21, 2019)

- [Quebec teachers' unions protest outside provincial budget announcement](#), *Global News* (March 27, 2018)
- [More than a third of Quebec teenagers are in psychological distress: study](#), *CTVNews* (October 10, 2019)
- [Quebec schools to receive \\$2.3B in funding for renovations](#), *CBC News* (September 22, 2019)
- [Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective](#), *Statistics Canada* (December 11, 2018)

Minimum wage

In 2018, several Canadian provinces debated an increase in the minimum wage. In Ontario, the minimum wage has been raised to \$14/hour (up from \$11.60) with the goal of reaching \$15 in 2019. However, the new government has decided not to increase it again as it believes that such an increase could be detrimental to the Ontario economy.

The Quebec government has decided to raise the minimum wage to \$12.50 on May 1, 2019. There are many opinions regarding the increase in wages to \$15, some are strongly in favour, while others are strongly opposed to it. While a higher minimum wage would increase the incomes of the lowest paid and reduce the disparity, the costs for business owners would be higher.

Activities:

Ask students to research the subject and read articles. Organize a class debate with the students. Assign one group to be in favor of the \$15 minimum wage and the other to be against the increase. Ask them to develop arguments to defend their point of view on the issue.

Suggested questions: Do you think the level of the minimum wage is an important issue? What is the impact of the minimum wage on young Quebecers, as well as on society and the economy? Do you think it is important to satisfy companies? Why?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [Quebec to hike hourly minimum wage by 60 cents, reaching \\$13.10 on May 1](#), *CBC News* (December 18, 2019)
- [Quebec unions urge incoming CAQ government to adopt \\$15 minimum wage](#), *Global News* (October 15, 2018)
- [Minimum wage earners in Quebec more likely to be able to afford to live on their own: study](#), *CTVNews* (July 18, 2019)
- [The inconvenient truths of the \\$15 minimum wage: Business can't just "make more money"](#), *National Post* (January 9, 2018)
- [In a fight over minimum wage at Tim Hortons, the worker loses](#), *Maclean's* (January 4, 2018)
- [Minimum wage hikes could cost Canada's economy 60,000 jobs by 2019](#), *CBC News* (January 3, 2018)

Environmental issues

Environmental issues, and mainly climate change, have raised a lot of debate since the 2018 provincial elections as well as during the 2019 federal election campaign. Experts on climate change and civil society are calling for a shift towards renewable energies and environmentally conscious policies. As such, Montreal was the scene of the largest march in the history of Quebec on September 27, 2019. Nearly half a million people marched through the city streets to voice their opinion and respond to the call of young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. It is up to the provincial government to take these elements into account when planning its projects that have an impact on greenhouse gas emissions and economic growth in the province as part of its budget. Among them, there are public transit, roads, urban sprawl, oil and gas exploitation, hydraulic fracturing and hydroelectric dams.

Recommended reading and resources:

- [Legault admits he faces a lack of credibility on environmental matters](#), *CTVNews* (December 12, 2019)
- [2013–2020 Climate Change Action Plan](#), *Ministère de l'Environnement et lutte contre les changements climatiques*
- [CAQ general meeting cautiously endorses a series of green policies](#), *Montreal Gazette* (May 25, 2019)
- The '[Environment](#)' section of the Huffingtonpost

Healthcare

The health sector makes up a very large share of the provincial budget. However, despite all the money that is invested, health services face many problems including the lack of family doctors, long waiting time in the emergency units, an insufficient number of nurses, the increase in demand for services to seniors, or the underfunding of services offered to people with mental health problems.

Among the services that are covered by the public healthcare system, there are quality and accessibility issues. Other services, such as dental care, drugs, vision care or mental healthcare are partially or completely borne by patients, placing them out of reach for many people without private insurance.

Educational activity:

Suggested questions: What health services should be covered by the public system? What should be the government's priorities in the health sector? What do you think of the idea to establish a salary ceiling to doctors?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [Health Minister Danielle McCann says changing doctors' pay key to improving Quebec healthcare](#), *Global News* (January 1, 2020)

- [Year in review: CAQ started rebuilding Quebec's health network in 2019](#), *Montreal Gazette* (December 28, 2019)
- [Health professionals calling for long-term solutions with ERs running at double capacity across Quebec](#), *CBC News* (January 7, 2020)
- [Quebec medical specialists seal 3-year deal with the provincial government](#), *Global News* (December 11, 2019)
- [Quebec pledges money for home care as demand grows](#), *CTV News Montreal* (September 20, 2019)
- [Medical wait times starting to rise again in Quebec: survey](#), *Montreal Gazette* (December 21, 2019)
- [Study points to "problematic" lack of English in Quebec healthcare](#), *Montreal Gazette* (October 30, 2019)
- [Quebec Mental-Health Data Shows Youth Hospitalized After Suicide Attempts Has Doubled](#), *Huffington Post* (April 20, 2019)

Labour shortage

From one election to the next, the political class promises to create many jobs. However, in recent years, a trend seems to have set in and several regions have been plagued by a **labor shortage**.

Several young people leave the regions to settle in larger cities. Job prospects are sometimes better in the city, but this creates problems for some rural employers as they have difficulty recruiting employees. In addition, it is becoming more and more apparent that the real shortage of labor is felt in the regions. Raising immigration thresholds alone is not a sufficient solution to the challenge posed by the shortage, since many newcomers face a problem with the recognition of foreign diplomas by Quebec. With this in mind, the Quebec Experience Program (PEQ) was created, allowing Quebec graduates and temporary foreign workers to access an accelerated selection program for qualified workers, which facilitates their immigration process. In 2019, the Legault government submitted a review of this program aimed at restricting its accessibility. Faced with a lack of support from civil society and the fears expressed by educational (universities, CEGEPs, etc.) and economic (Chambers of Commerce, Employers Council, etc.) institutions, the government has decided to cancel its revision temporarily.

Activities:

Distribute various news articles to students on the issue of labor shortages. Have students read and summarize the information, and then present it to the class.

Suggested questions: Is the scarcity of labor a problem? What measures should be put in place to resolve this problem? What should the role of government be in this matter? And you, are you thinking of leaving your municipality to go to work in another city? Do you think that the reform of the Quebec Experience Program (PEQ) proposed by the Legault government and then withdrawn in November 2019 was a viable solution in a context of labor shortage?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [As Quebec cuts immigration, businesses turn to temporary foreign workers](#), *CBC News* (August 15, 2019)
- [In midst of labour shortage, Quebec to subsidize recruitment of temporary foreign workers](#), *CBC News* (August 26, 2019)
- [Labour minister hopes to attract more anglophones to Quebec's workforce to address labour shortage](#), *Global News* (December 30, 2019)

Household debt

Quebecers' **household debt rate** has increased significantly in recent years. Canadians' debt payments are at their highest in the past decade. A study recently found that the average resident of Quebec owed about \$1.70 for every dollar earned. While some media present financial risks to households as drastic, others are reluctant to do so.

Distribute articles on household debt and discuss the potential impact on the Quebec economy.

Questions: Could the financial situation of households be potentially catastrophic? Should there be a preset limit on debt? What could explain the increase in the debt ratio in recent years?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [UPDATE 1-Quebec rolls out new credit card rules aimed at lowering high household debt](#), *Reuters* (August 2, 2019)
- [Quebec's household spending shows generational shift from boomers to millennials](#), *CBC News* (January 15, 2019)
- [Canadians' mountain of household debt is rising again](#), *Financial Post* (December 13, 2019)
- [Household Debt Soaring Among Canada's Young Adults, And It's Not Mortgages](#), *Huffington Post* (August 20, 2019)

Student loans

Students face increasing debts as a result of their post-secondary education. According to a report by Aide financière aux études entitled "Statistics on financial assistance for studies - 2016–2017 Report," the average debt of Quebec students was \$11,044 in 2016–2017. For some, paying off their debts will take them more than seven years. This has serious social and economic consequences, as young people are likely to delay the purchase of a home or the time to start a family because of debt and interest payments. It will also affect general spending patterns which in turn will affect the economy.

Distribute various news articles to students on the issue of growing student debt. Have students read and summarize the information, and then present it to the class.

Suggested questions: Do you think student debt is an important issue? What is the impact of student debt on young Quebecers, as well as on society and the economy?

Recommended reading and resources:

- [Statistiques de l'aide financière aux études — Rapport 2016-2017](#), *Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur*, (2019)
- [Andrée-Anne, 30 000 \\$ de dettes étudiantes : «Je ne suis plus sûre de vouloir continuer»](#), *Huffington Post* (03 septembre 2019)
- [Dettes d'études : que faire lorsqu'on ne peut pas payer](#), *Le Journal de Montréal* (27 août 2015)
- [Le prix insoupçonné de l'endettement étudiant](#), *ICI Radio-Canada* (18 octobre 2017)
- [Plus de la moitié des étudiants s'endetteront pour étudier](#), *Radio-Canada* (18 août 2014)
- [L'endettement étudiant : un « investissement » rentable ?](#) *Institut de recherche et d'informations socio-économiques (IRIS)* (mars 2012)