



# Agora on Access to Justice in French

## Person-centred services

Winnipeg | June 26-27, 2026

On behalf of the organizing committee, the Ministers' Council on the Canadian Francophonie (MCCF) welcomes you to the Agora on Access to Justice in French, a forum for reflection and discussion that brings together legal, community, academic and governmental stakeholders from across the country.

Through this process, the MCCF wishes to bring about a collective ideation on the issues surrounding access to justice in French from a person-centred justice perspective.

The Agora serves two purposes. The first is to apply a Francophone lens to better define the main challenges associated with accessing justice, while respecting the realities specific to each province and each territory. Second, it seeks to bring forward concrete and realistic lines of action that can drive public policy discussions.

With these goals in mind, the Agora also aims to strengthen cooperation among actors in the justice system and identify priority action areas for the years ahead.

We wish you a productive Agora!

### Organizing Committee (in alphabetical order)

**Teresa Collins**, Executive Director, Francophone Affairs Secretariat, Government of Manitoba

**Jean-Benoît Deschamps**, Administrative Crown Counsel for Bilingual Prosecutions, British Columbia Prosecution Service

**Dr. Marie-Hélène Girard**, Associate Professor and Research Team Lead for "One Justice One Access" (1J1A), McGill University

**Mathieu Langlois**, Senior Counsel for the Official Languages Directorate, Justice Canada

**Réналd Rémillard**, Executive Director, *Fédération des associations de juristes d'expression française de common law* (FAJEF)

**Christiane Saad**, Director, *Réseau national de formation en justice*

## Emcee: Catherine Clark

Catherine Clark is a nationally respected communications specialist, emcee, and co-founder of *The Honest Talk*, Canada's fastest growing forum for women, featuring a leading podcast, media site, and live event series.

Catherine is also the President of Catherine Clark Communications, providing counsel to individuals and corporations.

Catherine has been actively involved in local, national and international board work and is currently vice-chair of the Board of Governors of The Ottawa Hospital and a member of the Board of Directors of Hydro Ottawa Group.



## Participation Tools

The Agora on Access to Justice in French will avail of several technologies to facilitate your participation and enrich discussions throughout both the plenary and working sessions.

To make the most of these tools, we ask that you bring your mobile device (phone or tablet) as well as your personal headphones.

Two simultaneous interpretation services will be available. Your personal headphones are required to access these.



The Interprefy tool is used to provide interpretation services. Please scan the QR code displayed on the screen or on the tables to access it.



The Slido platform is used to maximize participation. The tool will collect your questions and comments during the sessions. Please scan the QR code displayed on the screen or on the tables to access it.

Share the event in your networks: #Justiceenfrançais



Access to Justice in French

# Agora

## RBC Convention Centre – Winnipeg

### Friday June 26 AFTERNOON

12:00 p.m. Opening Lunch

**1:00 p.m. Opening Remarks – Room 2GH**  
The hon. Glen Simard & the hon. Marc Miller

#### 1:20-2:30 p.m. Presentation – Room 2GH

1:20 p.m. Intersecting Views on Person-centred Justice

1:40 p.m. Evolution of Language Rights

2:10 p.m. Impact of Different Justice Administration models in Canada

#### 2:40-3:45 p.m. Working Sessions

- Group 1 Room 2E: Administration of Justice
- Group 2 Room 2F: Justice and Technology

#### 4:00 p.m. Sharing Session – Room 2GH

4:30 p.m. Remarks  
Kelly Burke, Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada

5:15 p.m. Welcome Reception

**Delta Hotel – Room Delta BC**

View the  
program  
online



### Saturday June 27 MORNING

8:00 a.m. Breakfast

**9:00 a.m. Opening Remarks – Room 2GH**  
The hon. Laura Lang

#### 9:10-10:00 a.m. Opening Remark – Room 2GH

9:10 a.m. International Perspective

9:30 a.m. Perspectives of the Judiciary

#### 10:15-11:30 a.m. Working sessions

- Group 3 Room 2E: Family Law
- Group 4 Room 2F: Criminal Law

#### 11:30 a.m. Sharing Session – Room 2GH

12:00 p.m. Lunch

### Saturday June 27 AFTERNOON

#### 1:00-2:15 p.m. Working Sessions

- Group 5 Room 2E: Victim Support Services
- Group 6 Room 2F: Francophone Immigration

#### 2:15 p.m. Sharing Session – Room 2GH

#### 3:00 p.m. Next Steps – Avenues of action

4:00 p.m. Closure of the Agora

# Overview of Presentations

## Opening Remarks | The hon. Glen Simard

The Honourable Glen Simard is Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs, Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations, Minister responsible for the Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Corporation, Government of Manitoba, and provincial-territorial co-chair of the MCCF.

## Opening Remarks | The hon. Marc Miller

The Honourable Marc Miller is Minister of Canadian Identity and Culture and Minister responsible for Official Languages, Government of Canada, as well as the MCCF's federal co-chair.

## Intersecting Views on Person-centred Justice | J  r  my Boulanger-Bonnely

What does “access to justice” mean? To kick off Agora discussions, this presentation will offer a few answers to that question, which is simple in theory but complex in practice. The first part will retrace the emergence of the concept and its evolution over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second part will focus on some more recent notions, including person-centred justice. The presentation will highlight initiatives from here and beyond that exemplify this change in perspective.

### Suggested Resources

- Boulanger-Bonnely, J. (2024). Person-centred Justice and Dispute Resolution: The Potential of Lay Courts. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society*, 39(3), 404–445. <https://doi.org/10.1017/cls.2024.30>
- Farrow, T. C. W. (2014). What is Access to Justice? *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 51(3), 957–988. <https://doi.org/10.60082/2817-5069.2761>

## Evolution of Language Rights | Fran  ois Larocque and Roger Bilodeau

This segment deals with advances in legislation and case law pertaining to language rights in Canada. Panelists will cover the most recent measures adopted by provinces and territories, as well as structuring court rulings that are shaping the interpretation and implementation of these rights.

## Impact of Different Justice Administration Models in Canada | Serge Rousselle

Which models of justice administration genuinely deliver equal access to justice of equal quality in French? Drawing on real-world examples from across the provinces and territories, this presentation examines existing approaches through a few key questions: Are language obligations structural or incidental? Does the system rely on the individual request, or on an active, institutionalized offer of service? Are resources embedded at the heart of the state apparatus, or relegated to its periphery? Where do the real decision-making levers and capacity for action lie, and where are the main bottlenecks? Each question opens a path toward concrete, transferable solutions.

## Remarks | Kelly Burke

On March 30, 2026, Kelly Burke became Canada’s eighth Commissioner of Official Languages. She is an experienced lawyer and administrator who has dedicated her career to promoting official languages and defending language rights for over 25 years.

## Remarks | The hon. Laura Lang

The Honourable Laura Lang is Minister of Justice, Minister responsible for the French Language Services Directorate, Minister responsible for the Women and Gender Equity Directorate, as well as Minister responsible for the Workers’ Safety and Compensation Board, Government of Yukon.

## International Perspective | Prof. Markku Suksi

This presentation examines how Finland's constitutional provisions (sections 17 and 122) and the Language Act shape the use of Finnish and Swedish in judicial proceedings. While the legal framework establishes a substantive right to use either language, its implementation reflects a balance between individual and territorial principles, varying across administrative, civil and criminal jurisdictions. The discussion highlights practical challenges affecting the exercise of these rights, such as linguistic capacity in the justice system, procedural constraints and legal representation, and presents current efforts to strengthen Swedish-language service continuity throughout the justice process.

### **Suggested Resource**

- Suksi, M. (2025). *Two National Languages as Languages of Procedure in Finland*. *Just. Journal of Language Rights & Minorities, Revista de Drets Lingüistics i Minories*, 4(2), 187-228. <https://doi.org/10.7203/Just.4.30695>

## Perspective of the Judiciary | The hon. Richard Chartier and The hon. Caroline Magnan

This conversation between two judges – one experienced, the other recently appointed – will offer different perspectives on the issues specifically encountered by members of the judiciary. They will address training, integration within Francophone communities, and the responsibilities of institutions.

### **Next steps: Avenues of Action | The hon. Mary T. Moreau, The hon. Réjean Aucoin, The hon. Marianne Rivoalen and Jacqueline Sirois**

Panelists will be called upon to share their views, rooted in the Agora's discussions, on what might constitute the main priorities and possible next steps.

# 1. Working Group on Justice Administration

## Background

Justice is an area of shared jurisdiction. Between a justice system management model that operates in response to service demands and a more proactive one in avoiding inefficiencies, how can we improve the offer of services in French while at the same time respecting the diversity of language frameworks that coexist in the country?

## Objectives

In this working group, participants will explore the main organizational issues that arise when incorporating language considerations and determine which models and practices hold promise and can be adapted to different contexts.



## Working Session

**The hon. Paul S. Rouleau (facilitator); Julie Laliberté and Dr. Marie-Hélène Girard**

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions in smaller groups:

- How can the offer of services in French be improved, despite the shortage of bilingual workers?
- What are the structural or organizational barriers that hinder the offer of justice services in French?
- What levers (legal, organizational, institutional) show strong potential for improving access to justice in French?

### Barriers and levers for increasing demand and offer\*

	... to increase demand	... to increase offer
Barriers...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer wait times and a perception of lower quality</li> <li>• Lack of awareness and information about language rights and available services within the population</li> <li>• Limited access to resources and services in French</li> <li>• Geographical and access constraints</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shortage of bilingual legal professionals (judges, lawyers) and justice staff (clerks, interpreters)</li> <li>• Insufficient awareness-raising among Anglophone stakeholders</li> <li>• Lack of French training</li> <li>• Linguistic insecurity and limited use of French</li> <li>• Institutional frameworks and operational constraints</li> </ul>
Levers...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Orientation and access tools (directories, single point of access)</li> <li>• Availability of resources in French (documents, forms, websites)</li> <li>• Awareness of language rights (information, reading of rights)</li> <li>• Access to services in French from the moment of arrest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Policy and legislative frameworks</li> <li>• Language standards and qualifications</li> <li>• Team structure and capacity (bilingual teams, planning of French-language trials)</li> <li>• Operational means and resources (technologies/AI, mobility of judges, funding)</li> </ul>

\*The information provided in this table is taken from a pan-Canadian study on access to justice in French in minority settings, led by Dr. Marie-Hélène Girard and her 1J1A project team involving legal experts, organizations and governments. Publication forthcoming (fall 2026).

## 2. Working Group on Justice and Technology

### Background

There is a tension between the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and new technologies, and the risks of misuse, which can hold serious consequences for law and the administration of justice. However, AI could lead to an increase in the number of legal professionals offering services in French. AI is gradually transforming the way the population interacts with the justice system, but it would be dangerous to think it can replace legal expertise. At the same time, AI creates an opportunity for institutions to innovate by developing sound public tools that can generate a more equitable access to justice in French.

### Objectives

This working group will examine the opportunities and pitfalls associated with using new technologies to offer services in French. The goal is to share concerns and see what the future holds in terms of tangible progress.



### Working Session

#### Christine O’Doherty (facilitator); Valentin Callipel and Philip Louis

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions:

- When it comes to your practice and French-speaking clientele, what are your concerns with the use of technology tools?
- Are you familiar with any concrete initiatives that support legal professionals in offering services in French?
- Are there any resource-sharing models that could be used in the area of justice-related technologies to improve the offer of services in French?

#### Person-centred Justice in the Age of AI – Christiane Saad

Examples of application: *predictive policing, risk assessment, analysis of evidence, research, drafting.*

Challenges of AI integration	Principles to be strengthened in the face of AI challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of relevant data, transparency and interpretability of AI decisions</li><li>• Integrated bias and discriminatory impact</li><li>• Threat to confidentiality and human rights</li><li>• Ethical responsibility of rulings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Algorithmic transparency and explainability</li><li>• Ethical guarantees against discrimination and prejudice</li><li>• Human surveillance and remedy mechanisms</li><li>• Inclusion and person-centred design</li><li>• Strong privacy protections</li></ul>

#### Suggested Resources

- Canadian Judicial Council (2024). Guidelines for the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Canadian Courts. <https://cjc-ccm.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2024/AI%20Guidelines%20-%20FINAL%20-%202024-09%20-%20EN.pdf>
- Girard, M.-H. et Lehoux-Jobin, E. (2026). Law in the age of algorithms: AI and the generation of legal texts in Canada. <https://jurisource.ca/ressource/ia-et-la-generation-de-textes-juridiques-au-canada/>
- Saad, C. (2026). Intelligence artificielle – Risques et enjeux éthiques en droit. <https://jurisource.ca/ressource/intelligence-artificielle-risques-et-enjeux-ethiques/>
- UNESCO. (2025). Guidelines for the Use of AI Systems in Courts and Tribunals. <https://www.unesco.org/fr/node/200071?hub=195885>

## 3. Working Group on Family Law

### Background

Major amendments to the Divorce Act were adopted in 2019 and these are gradually being implemented. Among the changes are a range of language protections, such as a person's right to use the official language of their choice in any proceeding under the Act. The family law administrative systems in the provinces and territories have their own specificities. Do practitioners have the proper tools to support their French-speaking clientele?

### Objectives

This working group will give participants the chance to explore various issues related to family law and the delivery of services in French along a continuum that involves several actors.



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### Working Session

#### **Elsy Gagné (facilitator); Marie-Josée Poirier and Nicholas Liang**

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions:

- What are the barriers that put Francophone families at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing family law services?
- Are there any practices that hold promise for the equitable offer of services for Francophones?
- How, within your respective areas of practice, can the different levers (legal, organizational, institutional or community-based) be mobilized to improve equity and accessibility in the family justice system in French?

#### **Suggested Resources**

- Government of Canada (2024). The Divorce Act Changes Explained. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/cfl-mdf/dace-clde/div200.html>
- Government of Canada (2025). Official Languages Rights under the Divorce Act. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/fl-df/language-linguistiques.html>

## 4. Working Group on Criminal Law

### Background

Equitable access to justice in French in a minority setting, especially in the area of criminal law, continues to pose significant institutional and organizational challenges. Case load and file complexity are considerable and are made all the more complex by the fact that the many actors answer to different authorities, including municipalities and federal, provincial and territorial governments. Moreover, language rights are not managed the same way everywhere.

### Objectives

In this working group, participants will explore potential actions and promising practices for improved access to criminal justice in French by identifying the contributions that are required of key players. The discussion is expected to help identify opportunities to collaborate and pool resources.



### Working Session

#### **Sarah Boily (facilitator); Jean-Benoît Deschamps and Laura Nagy**

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions:

- Among the challenges, which ones should be prioritized to move closer to equity between English and French in criminal cases?
- How can support for stakeholders in this area (police officers, lawyers, legal aid, Crown prosecutors, judges, court staff) be strengthened to increase the availability of services in French?
- What coordination and governance mechanisms could encourage greater sharing of resources across the country?

#### **Suggested Resources**

- Centre canadien de français juridique (2025). Interprétation judiciaire dans les Cours provinciales, territoriales et supérieures du Canada. <https://jurisource.ca/ressource/interpretation-judiciaire-dans-les-cours-provinciales-territoriales-et-superieures-du-canada-etude/>
- Deschamps, J.-B. (2026). Directory of decisions citing section 530 and Part XVII of the Criminal Code. [https://cmfc-mccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Repertoire-de-decisions\\_Art-530.pdf](https://cmfc-mccf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Repertoire-de-decisions_Art-530.pdf)
- Girard, M.-H. and Richard, È. (2026). Barriers and enablers to accessing criminal justice in French in British Columbia. <https://jurisource.ca/ressource/les-obstacles-et-les-leviers-de-la-justice-criminelle-en-francais-en-colombie-britannique/>

## 5. Working Group on Victim Support Services

### Background

There is no single profile for victims of crimes against the person. Women, children, youth and the elderly are among the most affected populations. Their families, too, require the appropriate types of support. Law enforcement agencies, social and health services, and community groups are on the front lines when it comes to supporting vulnerable clients, and their linguistic obligations are uneven. Once the legal system becomes involved, the quality of the French-language service delivery continuum affects how justice is delivered.

### Objectives

Participants in this working group will examine promising practices and potential actions for strengthening the availability of services in French.



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### Working session

#### **The hon. Annie Piché (facilitator); Liliane Tshiama Kalonji and François D'Aoust**

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions:

- What are the main barriers Francophone victims face when accessing support services in French?
- What practices or initiatives can ensure that the support offered is better adapted, more accessible and of higher quality for Francophones who are victims of crime?
- What coordination and governance mechanisms could increase the offer of victim support services in French?

### Suggested Resources

- Alliance des femmes de la francophonie canadienne (2023). *Stratégie nationale et plan d'action pour contrer les violences faites aux femmes et filles vivant dans les communautés francophones et acadiennes*. <https://affc.ca/publications/strategie-nationale-et-plan-daction-pour-contrer-les-violences-faites-aux-femmes-et-filles-vivant-dans-les-communautes-francophones-et-acadiennes/>
- Government of Canada (2022). National Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence. <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/gender-based-violence/intergovernmental-collaboration/national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence/first-national-action-plan-end-gender-based-violence.html>
- Government of Canada (2025). Victims of Crime Research Digest. <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.505656/publication.html>

## 6. Working Group on Francophone Immigration

### Background

All newcomers to the country must adapt to new responsibilities and become familiar with rights under the body of Canadian legislation which, depending on their country of origin, may be considerably different. Already vulnerable when it comes to legal matters related to housing, family, labour and crime, the fact that they are French speaking exposes them even more, especially when they do not know the language of the majority.

Furthermore, French-speaking immigrants trained abroad in the field of law are a resource that can be leveraged to strengthen access to justice in French in Canada. Their professional integration and recognition within provincial and territorial legal systems, however, remain imbalanced and are sometimes limited by structural barriers.

### Objectives

The discussions of this working group will help identify priority avenues for reflection.



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### Working Session

#### Nicolas Rouleau (facilitator); Aissa Nauthoo and Ruphine Djuissi

Participants will be invited to discuss the following questions:

- What are the main barriers encountered by French-speaking newcomers when accessing justice in French?
- How can legal information be made more easily accessible for French-speaking newcomers?
- How can we foster the inclusion of French-speaking newcomers as active participants in the justice system?

#### Suggested Resources

- National Committee on Accreditation (2021). Legal Systems Classification Lists. [https://nca.legal/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/NCA-Legal-Systems-Classification-List-Oct-2021\\_revised-Nov2025.pdf](https://nca.legal/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/NCA-Legal-Systems-Classification-List-Oct-2021_revised-Nov2025.pdf)
- Fédération des associations des juristes d'expression française de common law (2025). Promotion des carrières dans le domaine de la justice parmi les personnes racisées francophones. <https://jurisource.ca/ressource/promotion-des-carrieres-dans-le-domaine-de-la-justice-parmi-les-personnes-racisees-francophones-etude/>
- Sutter, A. & Esses, V. (2021). A Qualitative Look at Serious Legal Problems Facing Immigrants in London and Toronto (Ontario). Justice Canada. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/ilto/index.html>







## Law Society of Ontario Accreditation

- This program contains 3 hours and 55 min. of Professionalism content
- This program contains 2 hours and 30 min. of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Professionalism content



## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank everyone who lent support to the Organizing Committee, as well as the **panelists and speakers** for their essential contributions to the design, strategic direction and planning of the Agora on Access to Justice in French.

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The Organizing Committee also wishes to recognize the research and coordination work of MCCF staff that went into making this Agora a reality:

Research and Development: **Magdalena Martinez**

Logistics Coordination: **Virginie Dallaire**

Administrative Coordination: **Kelly Tabuteau**

Executive Director: **Sylvie Painchaud**

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