

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are approximately 292,185 individuals in Canada, who claim a Portuguese ethnic origin. Most are concentrated in the urban areas of Toronto and Montreal, but they are also significant populations scattered throughout small and rural centres, in nearly every province of this nation. Yet, despite their numbers, Canadians of Portuguese background (also referred to as Luso-Canadians) have traditionally been underserved and underrepresented in the social and political structures of our society. For many years, it was clear that there was a need for a national organization, which could represent their concerns to the various levels of government in Canada and Portugal. With this objective in mind, in March of 1993, a group of 250 Luso-Canadian individuals and associations formed the Portuguese-Canadian National Congress and charged it with the mandate to act upon issues relating to the full participation of community members in Canadian society. In 1994, the founding Directors of the Congress received funds, from the Federal Government for a national "Needs Assessment," - the first Canada-wide project of this type to be conducted on this community - to help identify those issues.

The present study utilized data from the 1991 census, the distribution of 1,000 copies of an extensive questionnaire, as well as the realization of 18 focus groups - that were conducted in areas of significant Luso-Canadian concentrations - in order to accomplish the following goals: Broadly profile the national Luso-Canadian population; gather opinions from Portuguese-Canadians, regarding what they believe to be the major issues affecting their communities and the role of the Congress in their resolution; raise a greater awareness of the organization amongst the scattered Luso-Canadians; and collect suggestions for improving ongoing Congress communications and representativeness.

The questionnaire also surveyed Congress members and other individuals involved in community associations and community development. Because of this non-random questionnaire distribution, the answers to the *survey* section of this project must be regarded as the *opinions of that segment of the Luso-Canadian population, which is heavily involved in community organizations and development*, and should *not be generalized* to the community-at-large. However, despite this limitation, the questionnaire nonetheless provided valuable information on the demographics of a significant part of the community, on patterns of integration, and ways in which this segment of Luso-Canadian society resolved common life problems and accessed social services. The survey also drew attention to the need for the Congress and other Luso-Canadian organizations to better reach out and include Azorean Portuguese and youth.

The information which emerged from the focus groups was not similarly limited, since it was drawn from a more representative segment of the Luso-Canadian population, and could thus be generalized with greater confidence. A final important aspect of this project was the emphasis which was placed on securing regional volunteers, for the organization and realization of the focus group meetings. This local involvement promoted ownership and participation in this study, by those in the scattered communities.

CENSUS PROFILE

Figures from the 1991 census, which were compiled for this assessment, revealed that, the vast majority of Portuguese-Canadians (92%) live in Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia, with the greatest number (over 60%) residing in the Census Metropolitan Areas of Toronto (48%) and Montreal (13%). The figures also showed that there are proportionately more young people and fewer seniors in the Luso-Canadian community than in the population-at-large, but that many young people are rapidly losing the capacity to speak the Portuguese language. Figures for these three provinces illustrate that Luso-Canadians in these regions also display

significantly lower levels of formal education than the population-at-large, and that they have many fewer individuals with post-secondary studies, even in comparison to a number of other, significant minority groups. These proportions are comparable to and, in some cases, *lower than* those reported for the Aboriginal communities. The figures also show that the Portuguese community in these provinces does *not* have a disproportionate percentage of its population living in low-income situations (as defined by Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cutoff). However, they display one of the *lowest* percentages of individuals earning above \$40,000 a year (with proportions that are roughly equal to the Black/Caribbean community). On a national level, Portuguese immigrants also tend to earn significantly *lower average incomes* than their counterparts, (especially in the case of Portuguese immigrant seniors, who rely more heavily than their peers on government transfer payments). These lower income levels, along with the lack of a high-earning sector in the community, are a reflection of the scarcity of Luso-Canadians in skilled trades, technical postings and management.

MAJOR ISSUES AFFECTING THE COMMUNITY

People in both the questionnaire and in the focus groups identified the major educational, economic, social, political and cultural issues, which they felt were affecting their communities:

Educational Issues:

- The **academic “underachievement”** of Portuguese-Canadian youth. This includes such issues as the low number of Portuguese students entering post-secondary education, the high drop-out rate, the economic marginalization and “*social reproduction*” of Luso-Canadian youth and the perceived lack of encouragement of their children's education, by Portuguese parents.
- The **lack of English- or French-language skills** amongst those of the first generation.
- The **lack of structures and facilities for the teaching of Portuguese**. Including the lack of support from the Portuguese government for cultural and linguistic promotion.
- Various **problems of the school system**, (such as the failure to effectively discipline children, the failure to inform parents when academic problems arise, the barriers to the movement of students from Basic- and General- levels to Advanced, etc).

Economic issues:

- **Unemployment and youth unemployment.**
- The disproportional **concentration of Portuguese in low-paying, low-status jobs.**
- The fact that **many individuals in the community are facing severe financial difficulties**, especially seniors.
- Luso-Canadian workers **are not upgrading their job-skills**. There is also a **need for retraining programmes** which serve those with less formal education and language skills.
- The presence of **disadvantaging labour laws.**
- The **high number of disabled workers** and a subsequent **lack of adequate support** from Worker's Compensation.
- The **fears of Luso-Canadian students of not finding suitable employment**, after graduation.

Social issues:

- The **lack of integration** of Portuguese-Canadians into Canadian society.
- The **disunity** of the community.
- The **nonexistence of culturally and linguistically appropriate social and community services** and of **adequate information** about available services.
- **Conflict and difficulty in communication between young people and their parents.**
- Various **issues affecting the health and well-being of women** (ex. subjugation, paternalism and domestic violence).
- The **isolation of seniors.**

- The **lack of senior's housing**.
- The **need for affordable day care**.
- **Stereotyping and discrimination** against Luso-Canadians (especially in Quebec).
- The **increase of substance abuse and gang involvement amongst all youth**.

Political issues:

- The **lack of political representation** at all levels of government.
- The **lack of a strong national political voice**.
- The **lack of participation or interest** in the political process.
- The **lack of knowledge of the political process**, amongst community members.

Cultural issues:

- The **loss of the Portuguese language and culture amongst young people**, (with concomitant issues, such as the lack of interest among young people; the lack of linguistic promotion on the part of Luso-Canadian parents and the Portuguese government).
- The **cultural duality of Luso-Canadian youth**, (especially in Quebec).

Other major issues that were not discussed under previous headings included:

- The **isolation of remote communities**, which is leading to their rapid demise.
- The **lack of communication, cultural promotion and service** by local consulates.
- The **need to provide support and education to Luso-Canadian business people**.

Those contributing to this study were asked to **prioritize** these issues and to provide opinions regarding the **role which the Congress should play** in resolving these problems. People in both the survey and the focus groups urged the organization to:

- **Provide leadership, become a more active political voice** in defense of the community.
- **Educate and mobilize the community**, especially in promoting the benefits of post-secondary education amongst young people and their parents.
- **Unify the community**, through developing strength in actions and positions and through facilitating communication between scattered communities and different segments of Luso-Canadian society.
- Become **more open to the community-at-large**, by improving communication to the dispersed communities and creating better regional representation.
- Foster **more diverse representation**, especially from amongst the Azorean community and young people.
- **Better utilize the community's human resources**, through more local representation, development and promotion of more community involvement.
- **Promote the involvement of youth** in the community.

When asked to give their opinions on how to **improve the functioning and structure of the organization**, the majority of opinions centred around the need for:

- **More (and better) communication** with the community and with Congress members.
- More **direct contact, local and youth representation**.
- **Voting** on important matters should be conducted **at the local level and only by individual members**, (not by organization-members).

PROFILE OF CONGRESS MEMBERS AND INDIVIDUALS MOST INVOLVED IN LUSO-CANADIAN ORGANIZATIONS

The questionnaire, which was sent to Congress members and to individuals whose names figured on contact lists of community organizations, churches and the media, provided valuable insights into that segment of the Luso-Canadian population that is most active in community organizations and development.

The first part of this section attempted to formulate a general profile of this population.

The responses revealed that, amongst respondents, there was an *overrepresentation of Portuguese from the European mainland, the elderly and retired, the self-employed and those who have a higher education and income*. Adversely, young people and Portuguese of Azorean background were relatively underrepresented.

The majority of those who responded to the survey also seemed to be well integrated, in terms of their knowledge of one of the official languages, degree of acceptance of a Canadian identity, political participation, their views on education and their abilities to resolve life problems. However, a number of findings in these sections were either surprising or conspicuous:

Firstly, while the majority stated that they felt equally Canadian as Portuguese and indicated that they did not plan to return permanently to Portugal, an overwhelming number also stated that *keeping the Portuguese culture was very important to them*. This has obvious implications for cultural and multicultural programmes; Secondly, while the rate of political participation was relatively high in this population, amongst those who had not voted in the previous elections, the major reason given was *the fact of not holding Canadian citizenship*. This indicates the need to continue to promote the idea of Canadian citizenship; Thirdly, while a majority of respondents, regardless of their educational backgrounds, felt overwhelmingly that a university education was the target to be desired, for their children, a *minority still regarded high school as a sufficient level of education*. Surprisingly, these did not come from those without formal education, but rather from amongst the ranks of those with limited levels of primary to secondary schooling.

Finally, when asked to describe how they dealt with various life issues, most respondents also did not indicate significant difficulties in dealing with problems such as understanding official letters, work-related, legal, and family issues. However, they did show a *very heavy reliance on sons or daughters to help resolve most issues* - even conjugal difficulties. A large minority of individuals, most of these males, also responded that they simply *ignored conjugal problems*.

Most respondents also indicated that they had never needed a social service centre, community centre or community health centre, Immigration, Unemployment Insurance, Worker's Compensation, Social Assistance/Welfare, or Legal Aid and that they had never used any of the listed social services in the Portuguese language. Yet, approximately 17% of those who had never used any of these said this had been due to the fact that *none of these services was available in Portuguese*, in their regions.

The majority of those who had used these services also indicated that they had been adequately served, in terms of written and verbal communication, with the *most* favourable response given with regards to the services rendered by the Immigration Department and Unemployment Insurance, while the *least* favourable the Worker's Compensation and Welfare offices.

The majority also indicated that they had easy access to their local Portuguese Consular offices. The exception to this rule were the people responding from the *Maritimes, Saskatoon, Northern and South-Central Ontario, as well as 15% of the respondents from the Toronto area*, who generally cited a *difficulty* in accessing consular services. Approximately equal proportions rated the service they had received as "*good*" to "*excellent*", "*reasonable*", "*bad*" or "*terrible*". Suggestions for improvement of consular service centred around the need for *staff development and training* in the areas of *public relations*, the *addition of more staff*, as well as the *reduction of bureaucracy*. Finally, in the question asking why some respondents had not attended English- or French-as-a-Second-Language classes, one significant response was that the classes had been offered at *inconvenient times of the day or year*.