



ANNUAL REPORT

2022-2023



SEO

SOCIÉTÉ ÉCONOMIQUE
DE L'ONTARIO

*Votre succès,
notre réussite*

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DENIS LAFRAMBOISE
PRESIDENT

PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT

It is a great honour and privilege to present our annual report for the year 2022-2023.

Over the past year, SÉO has continued to increase its visibility and influence in Ontario's francophone and bilingual economic ecosystem.

Our various teams organized and/or participated in over a thousand activities during this period. Thanks to this constant presence, coupled with dynamic promotion in both the social and traditional media, SÉO has stood out from the crowd.

SÉO representatives were actively involved in the various activities organized in the community over the past year. From high-level symposiums to networking evenings organized by our partners, golf tournaments and more, SÉO was there. Not to mention our own events, including a Happy Hour event in collaboration with RDÉE Canada's Sommet sur la Francophonie économique in September 2022.

SÉO has also left an indelible mark on the national and international scenes through its many initiatives: active participation in the RDÉE Canada Economic Forum in the fall of 2022, the Université Laval Trade Missions, virtual and face-to-face job fairs in Paris and Morocco as part of Forum Mobilité Destination Canada, and the Salon Afrique-Canada Immigration et Investissement in Côte d'Ivoire.

We had the great honour of leading an economic mission to Morocco, the aim of which was to forge ties that would boost trade between business people here and in Morocco, and to promote Ontario as a destination of choice for people who might want to immigrate to Canada.

Our hard work and tenacity have certainly not gone unnoticed by our clients, our partners and, we hope, our funders. We are proud to announce that our five-year agreement with the Department of Employment, Social Development Canada has been renewed, and we are confident that other agreements will be renewed in the coming year so that we can continue to offer a diverse range of activities and cutting-edge solutions.

Forward-thinking is a key word in the new vision we have adopted over the past year. Our vision complements our mission, which is to be the leader in the economic and sustainable prosperity of Ontario's francophone and bilingual communities. As a leader, we want to drive this space to new heights by advancing solutions in entrepreneurship, employer support, immigrant employment integration and community economic strengthening.

In fact, our vision reflects what's already happening on the ground. For example, our business incubator, Ontario's first virtual francophone incubator, enables francophones from all over Ontario – whether they're in Kapuskasing, Sudbury, Hamilton, Toronto, Ottawa, Hawkesbury or Cornwall – to acquire the knowledge they need to start a business in their community. Over the past year, more than a hundred people have passed through the virtual turnstiles of this new Franco-Ontarian training institution.

Several collaborative agreements have also been signed over the past 12 months, including one with the Centre de transfert d'entreprise du Québec (CTEQ). The aim of this alliance is to adapt existing CTEQ training courses on business transfer and takeover for our clients.

In the area of employability, we continued to work hard with our partners across Ontario and with employers to help attract newcomers to help alleviate labour shortages.

The second edition of the Greater Sudbury Job Fair, aimed at attracting newcomers to the region by putting them in touch with potential employers, is just one of several examples of successful activities in this regard. This event, organized by SÉO and its partners, enabled us to find employment for nearly forty French-speaking and bilingual job seekers in the city of the Big Nickel and surrounding area.

Complementary employability programs such as ProAction - aimed at helping highly qualified job seekers find employment in their areas of expertise, particularly health and cybersecurity – and Carrielles – aimed at helping racialized women find employment – are further examples of innovative initiatives. These programs have continued successfully over the past year.

Still about employability, various collaborative agreements have also been signed for the 2022-2023 period, including one on employability and training with the Université de l'Ontario français.

SÉO also continued to make its presence felt in francophone communities, thanks in part to its ongoing support for local project organizations, its JeunInno project and its tourism initiatives.

And that's just the tip of the iceberg!

Over the past year, we have also adopted a new strategic plan. This roadmap, which will govern our actions over the next five years, proposes several improvements to our existing programs and initiatives.

Of course, we will continue to build and improve projects such as the business incubator and the mentoring program for business people. We're confident we'll be able to renew programs like CarriElles and Élan F, a business incubator program in the Hamilton area. Additional actions in early childhood, the implementation of additional support services for employers, the continuation of our tourism initiatives, and much more are also part of this fine roadmap.

The Board of Directors has laid the foundations for a new, more modern governance model. One of the aims of this new model will be to improve succession planning within the Board of Directors. This will undoubtedly improve the fluidity of communications and deliberations between successive members of the Board.

Reviewing our corporate culture is another of the Board's priorities, and steps to this end have been taken over the past year.

Board members were also called upon to sit on other boards, including the Fédération des gens d'affaires francophones de l'Ontario and RDÉE Canada, where one of our own, Vice-President Julie Tremblay, became President of this national organization that brings together SÉO and similar organizations in other Canadian provinces and territories.

In conclusion, we tip our hats to the dynamic and hard-working staff at SÉO. We would also like to salute our colleagues on the Board of Directors, and the members of the subcommittees who work so hard to support the Board in its deliberations. Finally, we would like to thank our clients, our partners and, above all, our funders. See you next year.

Denis Laframboise, President

Patrick Cloutier, Executive Director



PATRICK CLOUTIER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Entrepreneurial Support

BUSINESSES ARE AT THE HEART OF OUR ECOSYSTEM

We can't stress this enough. Small businesses support communities, create jobs and contribute to the local economy. Not to mention that, in some cases, they make a substantial contribution to the municipal tax base.

Healthy, francophone and bilingual SMEs are also key to the sustainability of the economic ecosystem that the SÉO supports. They are not just part of the landscape of our towns and villages. They are the backbone. That's why SÉO has given itself the important mandate of fostering the emergence of new businesses and supporting existing ones.

"At the SÉO, we provide a wide range of resources and services to help our customers on their path to entrepreneurship or in achieving their business goals," explained Monique Hébert-Bérubé, Economic Development Manager.

These services include business coaching, assistance in writing financing proposals, assessment of market trends and mentoring. Training and workshops on subjects such as business planning, marketing and financial management are also part of SÉO's offering, not to mention the training we provide as part of the business incubator.

In fiscal year 2022-2023, the economic development team reached over 8,000 people with its entrepreneurship services.

Over 155 activities were offered last year. Nearly 5,500 people responded to their invitations. These activities included group coaching sessions, networking events, workshops on *Becoming an Entrepreneur in Ontario*, *Entrepreneurial Ethics and Time Management*, *Different Forms of Entrepreneurship*, *Validating Your Business Idea* and much more.

The economic development team also organized more than 25 networking sessions, attracting nearly 900 people. These activities enabled SÉO clients to create new networks, forge new partnerships and acquire new knowledge through exchanges with peers.



The entrepreneurial team continued to focus on certain demographic groups, such as women, who face challenges in the business world. It attracted over 270 participants to 12 activities dedicated to them. But that's not all they did. Nearly 1,600 women took advantage of the full range of entrepreneurial services offered by SÉO.

Over the past year, the organization has devoted a great deal of attention to sustainable development, not only in the conduct of its activities, but also in its dealings with its customers. For example, SÉO has developed a multitude of resources, including videos, to raise awareness among entrepreneurs of the economic benefits of sustainable development.

SÉO has also published a guide, entitled *Acheter et vendre de manière responsable*, which presents a variety of information on what constitutes responsible purchasing, the specifics of a responsible purchasing process, positioning oneself as a responsible supplier, adopting responsible purchasing policies, and more. Within the framework of sustainable development, SÉO will continue to work with its customers to create a more sustainable and equitable future for the entire population.

In addition to its own networking activities, members of the entrepreneurship team were actively involved in numerous other events, conferences and movements organized by collaborators and partners. The Sommet sur la Francophonie



économique, planned by RDÉE Canada for September 2022, attracted some 20 SÉO representatives, and several presentations were given by members of the entrepreneurial team, including the Economic Development Manager.

The entrepreneurial team also worked with other economic players on 120 committees, including economic development committees, Chambers of Commerce, business improvement areas and tourism task forces. An equal number of partnerships were also established, demonstrating SÉO's commitment to working with like-minded groups whose goal is the economic development of Ontario.

"Overall, it's been a very productive and fruitful year," adds Ms. Hébert-Bérubé. "Our incubator continues to grow. Our company takeover program is gaining prominence. The entrepreneurial component of the JeunInno program is continuing its mission to inspire our young people to go into business, and our mentoring program is expanding. And that's not counting new initiatives like our Québec-Ontario trade missions, and our collaboration with RDÉE Canada for the 48 hours Top Chrono."

Entrepreneurial support services are made possible thanks to the financial support of the Department of Employment, Social Development Canada (EDSC).

"Overall, it's been a very productive and fruitful year. Our incubator continues to grow. Our company takeover program is gaining prominence."

Monique Hébert-Bérubé



Entrepreneurial Support – Business Incubator

ENTREPRENEURIAT SÉO, A SUCCESSFUL FIRST FULL YEAR



Ontario's first virtual French-language business incubator has gained prominence in its first full year of operation.

EntrepreneuriatSÉO, which launched in November 2021, offers comprehensive French-language training for people wishing to start a business from the comfort of their own home, no matter where they are in Ontario. They learn the basics of starting a business from the advice and expertise of SÉO team members and partners.

More than a hundred people have passed through the virtual turnstiles of this new entrepreneurial knowledge institution in 2022-2023. During this first full year, nearly 70 women and 33 men registered for one of its streams, whose services were spread over three cohorts. The streams included the General, 50+, Immigrant, Youth, Black Women, Neo-agriculture, and a new Early Childhood, launched in September 2022. A high percentage of participants were newcomers to Canada. Nearly 65% of registrants identified themselves as members of a visible minority.

At the end of their 14-week training program, aspiring entrepreneurs had the option of taking part in the Desjardins pitch competition. Indeed, thanks to a partnership with Desjardins, EntrepreneuriatSÉO registrants were invited to present their business idea at the end of their 14-week program for a chance to win one of Desjardins' \$1,000 merit scholarships, one per stream and per cohort. Over the past year, Desjardins has awarded a total of \$8,000 in bursaries. Following an agreement signed in 2022-2023, the SÉO has secured this sponsorship from Desjardins to perpetuate the pitch competition and merit bursaries for the next three years.

In its first year, EntrepreneuriatSÉO added some 100 new resources to its library. In addition, microprograms have been added to the service offering. One of these microprograms concerns entrepreneurship, for which EntrepreneuriatSÉO has developed seven modules and an equivalent number of videos.

For several years now, sustainable development has occupied a prominent place in SÉO's actions, a trend that extends to the training courses offered as part of this program. To this end, five videos plus an introductory video have been created to raise awareness among aspiring business people. SÉO has also developed a new guide to responsible purchasing and selling to augment its resources.

"The incubator offers customized resources, training and coaching specifically designed for different demographics and sectors," explained EntrepreneuriatSÉO Coordinator Thuy Blais, "This allows us to ensure that content is relevant, culturally sensitive and addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by francophone businesses and certain demographics and sectors."

But EntrepreneuriatSÉO is much more than a business incubator, according to Ms. Blais.

"It's a supportive ecosystem where we connect francophone entrepreneurs with a broader network of support, including experienced mentors, industry specialists and advisors who understand the specific needs and nuances of running a business in Ontario's francophone community. This access to expertise can greatly improve the chances of success for our francophone entrepreneurs," concluded Ms. Blais.

Entrepreneurial Support – Company Takeover

AN ESSENTIAL SERVICE TO ENSURE THE LONG-TERM FUTURE OF OUR BUSINESSES

Over the past year, SÉO has added several new components to its range of entrepreneurship services.

Company Takeover is the process of transferring a business from one owner to another. Business people thinking of retiring want to prepare the ground for the sale of their business. Unfortunately, in many cases, the succession doesn't necessarily want to take it over. And finding buyers, particularly French-speaking ones, can be difficult.

The results of a survey carried out over the past year show that 41% of entrepreneurs are planning to retire or sell their businesses within the next ten years. Unfortunately, 44% of these people do not have a succession plan.

That's where SÉO's Company Takeover Services step in. Through its service offering, SÉO helps business owners prepare for the sale of their establishments. And with all our other entrepreneurial services, our organization prepares potential buyers to become business owners in their own right.

"Awareness of our Company Takeover services has continued to grow over the past year," explained Economic Development Manager Monique Hébert-Bérubé. "They are attracting more and more interest, particularly from potential buyers from immigrant backgrounds as well as from abroad."

This interest from the immigrant and international communities in buying Ontario businesses has prompted the program to take steps to better understand this sector, including collaborations with key immigration partners.

To enhance its offering, SÉO also signed a partnership agreement with the *Centre de transfert d'entreprise du Québec* (CTEQ), which offers similar services in the neighbouring province. One of the aims of this agreement was to adapt the CTEQ's existing business transfer training courses for SÉO's clientele, incorporating the entrepreneurship component of the Ontario company's microprograms.

Another of SÉO's achievements in this area over the past year was the development of a seven-module training program in conjunction with entrepreneurship specialists. In addition, SÉO deployed a mini-program comprising four webinars, in partnership with Desjardins, Run2Canada, Ayoub HR, and the CTEQ. Collaborations with the National Bank of Canada and the Toronto Business Development Centre, plus a noteworthy presentation at the Sommet national sur la Francophonie économique complete the picture.

"Over the coming year, we will continue to perfect our offering and prepare the next generation of Francophones to take over the establishments built by the hard work of local people," concludes Ms. Hébert-Bérubé.

"Awareness of our Company Takeover services has continued to grow over the past year. They are attracting more and more interest, particularly from potential buyers from immigrant backgrounds as well as from abroad."

Monique Hébert-Bérubé

Entrepreneurial support services are made possible thanks to the financial support of the Department of Employment, Social Development Canada (EDSC).



Entrepreneurial Support – Mentoring

**ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS WITH
CUSTOMIZED MENTORING**

Over the past year, SÉO has continued its transition to the new Élo Mentoring platform, while promoting the business mentoring service to its entrepreneurial clientele and future mentors and mentees.

Thanks to this platform, the MentoratSÉO program has access to a database listing the names of over 600 people. This group of mentors and mentored is made up of business people, individuals with diverse professional backgrounds, experts of all kinds, as well as company founders. With its business mentoring service, SÉO provides innovative coaching and advice to emerging business owners and established business people.

From April 2022 to March 2023, the SÉO team continued to encourage clients to create their own profiles on the new platform. This enabled them to exchange ideas and build relationships with other members based on their areas of expertise and needs.

At the end of the financial year, some 15 of the 20 or so twinnings were still active. A dozen people also called on the service for information specific to an activity.

The last financial year was also marked by increased program promotion, thanks in part to webinars designed for both mentees and mentors/mentees. During these information sessions, each party was able to discover the advantages and benefits of such support, and to understand the issues involved in pairing, as well as the skills and prerequisites required.

One of the aims of these efforts, in addition to promoting business mentoring among its clientele, was also to recruit new mentors and mentees. As a result, SÉO succeeded in adding over thirty names to its database.

“Through a dynamic approach, we are able to respond to the changing challenges and needs of our program members, striving to ensure an enriching and rewarding mentoring experience for all.”

Monique Hébert-Bérubé



“By promoting individuals, the exchange of expertise, skills and experience, our program supports the mutual growth, fulfillment and realization of the goals of each of its members,” says the Manager responsible for the program, Monique Hébert-Bérubé. “Through a dynamic approach, we are able to respond to the changing challenges and needs of our program members, striving to ensure an enriching and rewarding mentoring experience for all.”

The new year will see the launch of new initiatives, including group sessions, the creation of a sharing and networking space, and the expansion of the program to include certain partner organizations.

Entrepreneurial Support – Élan F

A FRANCOPHONE MOMENTUM IN HAMILTON THAT WE HOPE WILL CONTINUE!



Photo taken at Élan F's closing event. From left to right, Julien Gérémie, CCO Executive Director, Alain Dobi, RIF Executive Director, Patrick Cloutier, SÉO Executive Director, and Tarchouna Hamdi, Founder of Cersina and winner of the incubator's first prize.

Et c'est pas fini, c'est rien qu'un début...

The lyrics popularized by Quebec singer Emmanuelle in a song of the same title in the 1970s seemed to have found an echo at a closing ceremony for Hamilton's Élan F incubation program at the end of March 2023.

"Élan F will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on the community and inspire the implementation of other projects of a similar nature," said SÉO Executive Director Patrick Cloutier at the event, which brought together customers, partners, and community representatives.

Launched in November 2021 as part of Entrepreneuriat Hamilton, the Élan F incubation project was one of the flagship projects of Hamilton's Communauté francophone accueillante (CFA) action plan. The Hamilton CFA is one of 14 CFAs established with financial support from the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as part of the Official Languages Action Plan (OLAP) 2018-2023, Investing in Our Future. The Hamilton/Niagara Community Health Centre was the trustee organization for the Hamilton CFA initiative.

The SÉO, the Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario (CCO) and the Réseau en immigration francophone du Centre-Sud-Ouest (RIFCSO)'s mandate, to whom the Élan F project was entrusted, was to create an environment conducive to entrepreneurship and to provide a structure to support the entrepreneurial ambitions and projects of Francophone newcomers to the Hamilton area. Élan F was also to support them in acquiring business skills and setting up their own businesses.

During these three years, two distinct programs were implemented. The *Élan F pre-incubation program* introduced French-speaking newcomers to the world of entrepreneurship. The *Élan F Incubation Program*, introduced in recent years, offered entrepreneurs 10 months of group and individual training, networking workshops and personalized consulting services.

"We hope that this program will be reborn and continue," said SÉO program manager Yvette Plentai, herself a Steel City resident. "It's essential that we continue to support newcomers, encourage their active participation and positive contribution to the francophone community."

"We hope that this program will be reborn and continue. It's essential that we continue to support newcomers, encourage their active participation and positive contribution to the francophone community."

Yvette Plentai



Entrepreneurial Support – Trade Missions

FRUITFUL EXCHANGES BETWEEN LOCAL AND QUEBEC BUSINESS PEOPLE



Fostering opportunities for meetings and networking has always been one of SÉO's key areas of expertise.

Over the past year, thanks to a number of activities organized as part of Université Laval's Trade Missions, local business people have been able to network with colleagues from the Quebec City region, and establish new business relationships.

The first exchanges took place in Toronto in the spring of 2022. Then, from February 13 to 17, 2023, it was the turn of French-speaking entrepreneurs from Ontario to discover Quebec City's business ecosystem.

The aim of this exchange was to enable participants, who had been pre-selected according to their sectors, to benefit from Quebec expertise and skills, build business strategies, consolidate partnerships, and expand distribution networks. Sectors covered included technology solutions, media and audiovisual, publishing, and distribution of imported products.



The meetings organized have also led to increased business exchanges, the acquisition of new knowledge and the enhancement of the services available to participants. They also strengthened ties between the organizers, SÉO and Université Laval, and contributed effectively to economic development strategies between the two provinces.

"Thanks to these exchanges, several new business partnerships have been established between Ontario companies and Quebec organizations and businesses," said SÉO Economic Development Manager Monique Hébert-Bérubé. "These partnerships have also opened up new avenues for expansion and growth for participating companies."



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Monique Hébert-Bérubé

These trade missions are made possible thanks to the financial support of the Secrétariat du Québec aux relations canadiennes.

Employment Assistance

AN ESSENTIAL ROLE IN A DIFFICULT CONTEXT



Labour shortages have continued to dampen the momentum of Ontario's economy over the past year, a trend that has not spared Ontario's francophone and bilingual ecosystem. Fortunately, the team at SÉO's Employability and Immigration Program was on hand to help.

Over the same period, more than 300 clients entered the Ontario job market thanks to the SÉO, and other significant figures confirm that the SÉO employability team plays an essential role in Ontario's francophone and bilingual ecosystem by helping immigrants find employment.

"By facilitating their professional integration, our program has continued to have a positive impact on the lives of French-speaking immigrants wishing to settle in Ontario," said Aïssatou Sonko, Program Manager. "Thanks to the SÉO, members of our clientele can find a job in their field of expertise, or make a career change. We equip them to make the choice that corresponds to their economic context as soon as they arrive, and we accompany them until they find a job."

Assessing clients' skills is one of the initial steps in the support process. The attentive staff at SÉO then guide them in revising their resumes, writing cover letters, preparing for job interviews, and so on.

SÉO also offers training workshops and networking sessions with employers. In fact, over 1,000 people have taken advantage of the 50 or so employability training workshops offered by the employability team. "We met or exceeded all our annual targets in every respect," added Ms. Sonko.

In fact, SÉO's work with immigrant job-seekers has been highly acclaimed. "This increased awareness has even led to a slight expansion of our team," says Ms. Sonko.

The team, now ten-strong - which also has a mandate to support employers (see separate article) - has not been content with a reactive role over the past year. It has also played a prominent proactive role on the international scene, through its efforts to recruit future workers.

"By facilitating their professional integration, our program has continued to have a positive impact on the lives of French-speaking immigrants wishing to settle in Ontario."

Aïssatou Sonko



To this end, in November 2022, team members headed for Paris, France, and Rabat, Morocco. Mission: to introduce potential French-speaking and bilingual immigrants to the Ontario job market at the Mobility Forum - Destination Canada, employability fairs organized by the Government of Canada.

During these meetings, followed by a virtual version of the event, members of the SÉO delegation approached several hundred people interested in immigrating to Ontario. They presented job offers from our partners and explained the options available to them to make Ontario their destination of choice.

SÉO also took centre stage at these gatherings, hosting three major workshops. One of these workshops, in which immigrants shared inspiring stories about their own journeys, was particularly well received by the audience.

This visit by SÉO to the French and Moroccan capitals helped to raise SÉO's profile, as did its presence the previous month at the Salon Afrique Canada Immigration Investissement (SACII) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. This active participation is no stranger to SÉO's future ambitions, as it aims to play a greater role in the immigrant space.

OTHER RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES

Here in Canada, in addition to participating in various job fairs in Ontario and elsewhere, SÉO continued to work with partners to organize various training activities and job fairs.

These activities included a virtual speed-jobbing day organized with RDÉE Canada. At this event, newcomers met potential employers virtually, in a setting reminiscent of a speed-dating scenario.

The Foire de l'emploi francophone (Job Fair) du Grand Sudbury, organized by SÉO and local partners, is another example of an activity designed to help immigrants by putting them in touch with potential employers.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS

SÉO continued to work in partnership with various organizations. In fact, we have strong partnerships in every region of the province of Ontario (North, East and Central Southwest).

In the Ottawa region, for example, the SÉO is a member of a collective of partners representing the Point d'accueil francophone - d'Ottawa. The PAF is a unique place created by 10 francophone partners to facilitate access to French-language services for francophone newcomers to the city of Ottawa.

In Sudbury, the SÉO also has several best practices thanks to its agreement with the Centre de santé communautaire du Grand Sudbury (CSCGS) as part of the Communauté francophone accueillante (CFA) project. CSCGS and SÉO work together to ensure ongoing settlement services and social and economic integration.



Photo: Patrick Cloutier, Executive Director, Aïssatou Sonko, Employability and Immigration Program Manager, Siham Chakrouni, Special Projets Manager, and Stéphanie Cotnoir, Employability Advisor.



NORTHERN ONTARIO

Northern Ontario continued to receive special attention. Efforts continued to attract workers to the region. Various initiatives were undertaken, including tours of potential partners and solicitation activities in the southern part of the province. Over the past year, thanks to the efforts of SÉO and its partners, nearly forty French-speaking or bilingual immigrants have settled in the north, a region renowned for its low cost of living, nature, and fresh air.

The North is also a region with a large francophone population, which brings us back to SÉO's main *raison d'être*: to contribute to the economic development of Ontario's francophone and bilingual ecosystem.

A strong, vigorous economy depends to a large extent on a skilled workforce. In the current context, economic immigration is an essential option for filling jobs in this province.

"In the coming year, SÉO will continue to reach out to francophone and bilingual newcomers across Ontario to support them on their path to employment," concluded Ms. Sonko.

Assessment and referral services:

334
clients

Employability training workshops:

52
workshops

1035
clients

Entrepreneurship training workshops:

7
workshops

75
clients

General employment assistance services for newcomers and as well as recruitment support services for employers are made possible thanks to the financial support of the Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Employment Assistance – ProAction

LOOKING FOR HIGHLY QUALIFIED PEOPLE

Moving to a new country can be both an exciting and challenging experience, especially if you're looking for a job in a sector for which you're highly qualified.

That's why, a few years ago, SÉO set up the ProAction program, in collaboration with the Economic Development Council for Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (CDEM), the BC Economic Development Association and RDÉE Canada. It is funded by Employment and Social Development Canada through the Foreign Credential Recognition Program.

The aim of this program is to help highly qualified newcomers gain initial work experience in their field of expertise, particularly in the healthcare and cybersecurity sectors.

To achieve this, SÉO works closely with employers and people eligible for the program to connect them through workshops, meet-and-greet sessions, and various other networking initiatives. In 2022-2023, some 200 people took advantage of the meetings offered by SÉO, enabling them to establish links with specialists in their chosen field.

What's more, over 80 highly qualified people - some 50 men and 35 women - have been able to find a job that matches their career path or aspirations, thanks to the work of the SÉO's ProAction team.

Once hired, recruits are matched with people who help them understand the intricacies of their chosen profession. By observing these professionals in action, new employees can familiarize themselves with the latest trends, technologies, and best practices in their industry. This knowledge enables them to match their skills and qualifications to the expectations of Canadian employers, enhancing their employability on the job market.

Last year, some 45 employers took part in the program. Employers benefit from a 16-week wage subsidy.

"Our ProAction program is an essential bridge between newcomers and the Canadian job market," said Patrick Cloutier, SÉO Executive Director. "This program offers newcomers the opportunity to immerse themselves in Canadian work culture, build networks, acquire industry-specific knowledge, improve their language skills, and gain Canadian work experience. By participating in this program, newcomers can overcome barriers, increase their employability, and accelerate their integration into the Canadian workforce. With our support, newcomers can confidently navigate their way to a successful career in their adopted country."

The ProAction program was made possible thanks to the financial support of Employment and Social Development Canada.

PROACTION

Employment Assistance – CarriElles

A PROGRAM THAT EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS



Au mois de mars dernier, afin de souligner la fin du programme et de rendre hommage aux participantes et aux partenaires, la SÉO a tenu un événement de clôture au siège social de la SÉO, à Ottawa.

SÉO's CarriElles program sunsetted at the end of March 2023, but not without having made a significant impact on the future of over a thousand women during its three years of operation.

Launched in 2019 by SÉO thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC), CarriElles aimed to specifically help Francophone and bilingual newcomers from visible minorities, racialized women, find employment in Ontario quickly and easily.

Over the past year, the CarriElles team has made 272 matches. Of the 240 or so participants in 2022-2023, 95% have been successful in securing employment; 85% are now working in positions that match their field of study and skills.

Members of the CarriElles team work directly with employers to match them with candidates who have the skills, professional interest, and abilities to do the work required. Over the past year, nearly thirty employers have worked with SÉO on this program.

Last March, to celebrate the program and pay tribute to our participants and partners, we held a closing event at our head office in Ottawa.

"The CarriElles program has far exceeded our expectations," said Siham Chakrouni, Program Manager at SÉO, at the event. "Our greatest wish is that it becomes a permanent program at SÉO so that we can continue to help these women integrate the job market."

The CarriElles program was made possible with the financial support of the Ministry of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC).

At the end of the event, some of the program's candidates shared their personal stories. Here are a few of them.

"I wanted to say thank you for everything the program has already enabled me to achieve. I've also come to say that I sincerely hope the program doesn't end like this."

"I'm still looking for a job and all the optimism and motivation I feel is thanks to CarriElles and your team of dedicated advisors."

"Raïssa is superb in coaching and tonight I realized that the whole SÉO team is just magnificent!"

"We, the newcomers, are happy to be able to count on people who are human in approach."

"I hope and wish that the adventure doesn't come to an end."

"The CarriElles program has far exceeded our expectations. Our greatest wish is that it becomes a permanent program at SÉO so that we can continue to help these women integrate the job market."

Siham Chakrouni



Employment Assistance – Early Childhood and Tourism

A NEW PLATFORM TO SUPPORT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION SECTORS

The implementation of a new networking platform between job seekers and employers in the early childhood and education sectors is one of the complementary employability initiatives launched in 2022-2023.

This platform, called *Carrières PEE* (<https://carrieres-pee.com/>), was proposed by RDÉE Canada and its member organizations, including SÉO. Its objective? To meet the recruitment challenges faced by employers in these sectors in French-speaking minority communities.

Thanks to this tool, qualified French-speaking candidates with training in education and early childhood, who are permanent residents of Canada or have authorization to work here, can create their profile, consult employers' job offers and apply for positions that interest them. In just a few months, SÉO has enabled some fifty qualified candidates to join.

Employers can post job offers, consult a wide range of applications, and invite candidates to virtual interviews. Nearly fifteen Ontario employers have taken advantage of this new service offered by SÉO and its partners and have created their own profiles. They have posted 25 job offers.

In addition to implementing this platform, SÉO has also developed complementary tools, including two guides. The first is a guide to hiring staff, designed for employers; the second, for job seekers, covers topics related to the job search process. Webinars and promotional video capsules complete the range of complementary tools.



“Although funding for the platform ended in March, we are confident that it will be renewed in the coming year,” says Siham Chakrouni, Manager of *Carrières PEE* at SÉO. Early childhood and French-language education remain vital sectors for Ontario's francophone and bilingual ecosystem, and for all francophone minorities in Canada. It's essential that we make our contribution.

EMPLOYABILITY IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: THE MISSION CONTINUES

Over the past year, the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation (OTEC) has continued to implement a tool for job seekers and recruiters in the tourism sector.

This tool, called *Atlas Emploi*, enables OTEC and its partners to provide job seekers with the means to establish skills profiles, find jobs matching their skills, access apprenticeship opportunities and much more.

Atlas Emploi is an online tool that uses artificial intelligence to match the skills of job seekers with career paths, as well as to provide data on the job market, resources, training and more.

“If you're a newcomer, you may be eligible for a free trial of this new tool,” said SÉO project manager Siham Chakrouni. “Contact us for more details!”

Recruitment Support
for Employers

EMPLOYER SUPPORT, AN ESSENTIAL COMPLEMENTARY MANDATE

Supporting newcomers on their path to employment in Ontario would be a somewhat more difficult task if the SÉP didn't maintain close ties with employers. In addition to providing employment assistance for immigrants, the SÉO employability team has another important mandate: to support employers in their recruitment efforts.

"The members of the SÉO employability team are specialists in this field," says Aïssatou Sonko, SÉO Employability and Immigration Program Manager, "They know about hiring programs and all the other ins and outs of economic immigration. So, they can advise employers and put them in touch with potential candidates."

Employability staff therefore work closely with employers to identify their needs and propose customized recruitment solutions. Among the measures proposed, SÉO offers a wide variety of solutions, including international preselection of applicants, job postings on our website, networking activities, job fairs, and more.

"Our customer base is growing all the time, thanks in part to our excellent reputation, but also to our team members' hard work in clearing the way and raising awareness," says Ms. Sonko.

Over the past year, SÉO organized some twenty information sessions for employers. The organization's representatives reached 300 employers, raising their awareness of SÉO's services, Francophone immigration and available recruitment solutions.

As in previous years, many of these information sessions were held in Northern Ontario. The province's North remains a region particularly hard hit by labour shortages. It's also a region with many French-speaking communities.

On the networking front, SÉO orchestrated some 20 Meet & Greet sessions. Each meeting in this series, dubbed Employer Connection (Connexion Employeur), featured an employer who was invited to present its company or organization and then meet the participants. Some 800 job seekers took advantage of the SÉO offer.

Job fairs are also excellent opportunities to support employers. Over the past year, SÉO has been involved in half a dozen events in Canada and abroad, aimed at job seekers, on the one hand, and employers on the other.

“Our customer base is growing all the time, thanks in part to our excellent reputation, but also to our team members’ hard work in clearing the way and raising awareness.”

Aïssatou Sonko



The Foire de l'emploi francophone du Grand Sudbury (Job Fair), which took place in February, is one of SÉO's flagship activities. More than twenty employers from the region took part in the event organized by SÉO and its partners. Following the event, the employers hired some forty people.

SÉO also attracted nearly a dozen employers to a virtual “speed-jobbing” activity organized last March, in collaboration with RDÉE Canada.

In addition, during its participation in the Mobility Forum - Destination Canada in November 2022 (see article published on pages 11, 12 and 13), SÉO presented some 125 job offers from Ontario recruiters, 20% of the total presented at this event, which took place in Paris, Brussels, Rabat and online, and was attended by some 15,000 people interested in immigrating to Canada.

“Thanks to our excellent relationships with employers, we are better able to help newcomers find employment. And conversely, we’re able to build bridges between recruiters and these job seekers. It’s a great recipe,” concludes Ms. Sonko.

Community Economic Empowerment

SERVING FRENCH-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES

Being a minority in a predominantly English-speaking province like Ontario presents unique challenges for Francophone regions, communities, and their organizations.

That's why SÉO has given itself the mandate to work hand in hand with them. The goal: to help them strengthen themselves economically, socially, and culturally, while fostering a sense of belonging among the people who live in these predominantly French-speaking neighbourhoods, towns, and villages by giving them the means to play an active role in shaping them.

SÉO achieves this by encouraging the organization of social and cultural activities, as well as networking opportunities.

It also does this by supporting training opportunities, ensuring access to French-language services, promoting economic development, and fostering social ties. Finally, it contributes through complementary initiatives such as the Route touristique Champlain and JeunInno (see articles on the following pages).

“Through our initiatives, we give Francophone communities the means to take charge of their lives and flourish,” says Monique Hébert-Bérubé, Economic Development Manager. By supporting community activities, events, and organizations, we are helping to maintain the vitality and richness of the Francophone identity. This strengthens the cultural fabric of communities and fosters a sense of pride and belonging among residents.”

Last year, members of the SÉO team participated in and played key roles on over 120 different committees. We worked closely with Chambers of Commerce, business improvement areas, tourism committees, agricultural groups and arts and cultural associations.

SÉO also collaborated with 115 organizations across the province. Among other things, it has worked on projects such as mobilizing key partners in the Highway 11 corridor to overcome barriers and help recruit workers.

“Through our initiatives, we give Francophone communities the means to take charge of their lives and flourish.”

Monique Hébert-Bérubé



In addition, as a participant in various round tables, SÉO has contributed to various action plans. The organization has also played an active role in economic fairs designed to promote communities and attract visitors.

In addition, SÉO has helped organizations such as Chambers of Commerce to organize business galas. It helped mobilize partners. It also supported more than 50 organizations, groups, and individuals in their quest for funding.

“Recognizing the importance of helping to strengthen communities in these minority settings is essential to ensuring the continued growth, resilience and well-being of Ontario's Francophone population. Together, we will continue to work towards a future where Francophone communities thrive, celebrate their heritage and contribute to the diversity of Ontario's cultural landscape.”

Community Economic Empowerment services are made possible are made possible through the financial support of the Department of Employment, Social Development Canada (EDSC).

Community Economic Empowerment – Tourism

**DISCOVER FRANCOPHONE ONTARIO OR
DISCOVER ONTARIO IN FRENCH**

“The Champlain Route attracts tourists from Ontario, across Canada and abroad.”

Monique Hébert-Bérubé



Showcasing Ontario's rich French and Francophone heritage through tourism tours. This is yet another way in which the SÉO supports the province's Francophone and bilingual ecosystem, while promoting the vitality of Francophone businesses, organizations, and communities or those offering services in French.

Ontario has a population of over 600,000 Francophones spread across the province. They can be found everywhere. In the major centres, of course, but also in many communities to the south, east and north. Their presence has left its mark on Ontario's history, and continues to shape the province's cultural, social, and economic fabric.

The French presence in Ontario began in the 17th century. One of the first explorers was Samuel de Champlain – mapmaker, naturalist, ethnographer, and adventurer. This Frenchman travelled the Ottawa River, the Mattawa River, Lake Nipissing, the French River, and the waters of Georgian Bay in search of, among other things, a suitable location for a trading post.

One of SÉO's flagship projects is the Route Champlain tourist route. This route is based on the same route once taken by the French explorer. Tourists will discover picturesque landscapes, historic sites, bucolic spots, rural destinations and much more, all with French as their common denominator.

“The Champlain Route attracts tourists from Ontario, across Canada and abroad,” explains Monique Hébert-Bérubé, Economic Development Manager responsible for tourism at SÉO. With the help of more than 18 tourism industry partners and RDÉE Canada, the Champlain Route has been extensively promoted over the years.

The Route Champlain circuit crosses seven regions and offers over 87 stops. Visits are varied and include the old prison in L'Original, a haunted tour of Ottawa, provincial parks such as Parc Voyageur in Chute-à-Blondeau, Parc Champlain in Mattawa, Parc Awenda in Tiny, near Penetanguishene, and historic sites such as Sainte-Marie among the Hurons in the Midland region. Route Champlain also offers breweries, restaurants, and other rural destinations.

Over the past year, SÉO has continued to work with communities to identify French-language product and service offerings, and to promote them through the Route Champlain or other tourism circuits, including Salut Canada, which is operated by RDÉE Canada in collaboration with its members across Canada, including the SÉO in Ontario. Marketing the Route Champlain is one of the next steps in the development of this tourist route.

“Showcasing the rich Francophone past of our vast territory, as well as the dynamism of today's Francophonie, will undoubtedly help ensure the sustainability of our ecosystem for generations to come,” concluded Monique Hébert-Bérubé, Economic Development Manager.

Community Economic Empowerment – Tourism

PODCASTS AND CULINARY EXPERIENCES ON THE MENU



Over the past year, two senses - taste and hearing - have been the focus of new experiences promoted by the SÉO Tourism team and several partners.

SÉO has collaborated with Culinary Tourism Alliance to showcase French-language culinary experiences with some 30 SÉO tourism partners, including Microbrasserie Cassel Brewery in Casselman, Fromagerie St. Albert, Moulin de Provence in Ottawa, Château des Charmes in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Sainte-Marie among the Hurons in Midland, and more.

“Highlighting French-language culinary experiences as part of Great Taste of Ontario is a great way to showcase tourism operators in Ontario’s Francophone and bilingual ecosystem, or those who offer services in the language of Molière,” says Siham Chakrouni, Special Projects Manager who has overseen the tourism file for the past year.

That same year, SÉO worked on the production of tourism podcasts, available in French and English. Thanks to funding from the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development through Ottawa Tourism, the Ottawa ByWard Market was showcased.

Support from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism has also enabled SÉO to showcase three other exceptional tourism experiences in the Niagara, Windsor-Essex, and Thousand Islands regions.

For each podcast, key points of interest on the itinerary are indicated on a map, complete with photos. The podcast describes what the listener sees and tells the story of the place, includes background information and more. Visitors can listen to the podcasts as they progress from one itinerary to the next.

“We’re very proud of these podcasts,” says Anne-Marie Forcier, who oversaw economic development last year. “It’s another great way to showcase our tourism ecosystem.”

“Highlighting French-language culinary experiences as part of Great Taste of Ontario is a great way to showcase tourism operators in Ontario’s Francophone and bilingual ecosystem, or those who offer services in the language of Molière.”

Siham Chakrouni



These projects were made possible by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development through Ottawa Tourism, and the Ontario Ministry of Tourism.

Community Economic Empowerment – JeunInno

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR THE CHALLENGES OF TOMORROW

To highlight the positive contribution of the JeunInno program in Greater Sudbury and the Municipality of French River since its launch in early 2020, and to acknowledge the indispensable support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which contributed to the tune of \$427,300, SÉO organized a recognition event at the Backstreet Gallery in Noëlville on March 24. From left to right: Renée Carrier, French River's Deputy Mayor, Mireille Dupuis, JeunInno Program Officer, Patrick Cloutier, SÉO's Executive Director, Monique Hébert Bérubé, SÉO's Economic Development Manager, John Vanthoof, MLA for Temiskaming-Cochrane, Annie Hébert, Vice-President of the Conseil des industries culturelles de Rivière des Français (CICRF), Dianne Kuzniar, President of CICRF and Shannon McKinnon, employee of Backstreet Gallery in Noëlville.

Through the JeunInno program, SÉO continued its work to prepare the next generation by stimulating young people's leadership, creativity, and sense of entrepreneurship.

The JeunInno program was launched in 2020. Its objective: to help counter the rural exodus by helping young people develop a sense of belonging to their home regions, towns, neighbourhoods, and villages, as well as contributing to their prosperity.

Over the past year, more than a thousand young people have enrolled in the various activities of JeunInno, a program offered in collaboration with the Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario and funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Workshop projects on the themes of Career Videography, Arts and Business, Event Management and Awareness Building continued to be particularly popular with young people over the past year. This period was also marked by new initiatives.

Festiv'Arts consisted of a series of workshops presented in collaboration with Noëlville's Backstreet Gallery. The two-day festival program, first held in August and then to be held in March 2024, featured a variety of artistic activities, including workshops delivered by local artists such as musicians and painters. Some 300 young people aged 10 to 18 enjoyed the proposed activities.

Four new activities presented in French River and Sudbury as part of the awareness-building program were also added to JeunInno's offering in 2022-2023. The introduction of event management workshops and JeunInno's active involvement in community festivals in French River and Toronto complete the picture of initiatives for 2022-2023.

"The sustainability of Francophone communities in this province depends in large part on the adults of tomorrow," said Monique Hébert-Bérubé, SÉO's Economic Development Manager. "It's essential to make these young Francophones aware of the current context and prepare them to become leaders in their communities."

JeunInno was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

1021
registration in 2022-2023

283
Festiv'Arts participants

119
activities implemented

Language Services

VICE VERSA, A CONTINUING MISSION



Providing quality language services continued to be the top priority for Vice Versa, SÉO's social enterprise, over the past year.

Vice Versa offers a full range of language services, including translation and community interpreting. The company works with qualified and experienced linguists who are highly proficient in both French and English. They have in-depth knowledge of different sectors, including business, enabling them to provide specialized and accurate translations.

"Our team is here to provide a top-notch service, responding to our customers' needs and requests in an efficient and professional manner," asserted Yvette Plentai, the manager responsible for Vice Versa. "What's more, we understand the importance of cultural nuances in communication, and our linguists are trained to take these aspects into account in their work."

Vice Versa was created more than a decade ago by SÉO to support its various mandates by promoting the provision of French-language services, particularly in predominantly English-speaking regions of Ontario.

Through this venture, SÉO and Vice Versa also support the integration and inclusion of French-speaking immigrants who have difficulty speaking English. This enables them to better adapt to their new environment.

"Our team is here to provide a top-notch service, responding to our customers' needs and requests in an efficient and professional manner."

Yvette Plentai



"Our growth continues, driven by the enthusiastic recommendations of our satisfied customers. Through word-of-mouth, our influence extends to the private, public, and not-for-profit sectors, reaffirming our commitment to creating meaningful connections in our communities," concluded Ms. Plentai.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

On the road to sustainable development

SÉO has begun to lay the foundations for a sustainable development approach, a philosophy whose objectives encompass the environment, social equity and economic efficiency.



In 2022-2023, SÉO refined its knowledge in this area through training courses leading to certification by RDÉE Canada, of which SÉO is a member. SÉO has also obtained level 1 certification from Ecocert Group, an independent international company that offers training, tools and certificates in sustainable development.

In addition, SÉO has begun to implement various initiatives designed to raise awareness of sustainable development among the SÉO team, its customers, and the general public.

Internally, these initiatives include a toolbox, articles, guides and videos. SÉO has also implemented a microprogram for entrepreneurs. Finally, SÉO collaborated with York University in Toronto to develop a training program for students.

Economic Mission to Morocco

In November 2022, SÉO organized an economic mission to Morocco, with the aim of forging ties that would boost trade between business people here and in Morocco, as well as promoting Ontario as a destination of choice for people who might want to immigrate to Canada. The delegation, comprised of SÉO Chairman Denis Laframbroise, Executive Director Patrick Cloutier, and Managers Siham Chakrouni and Aïssatou Sonko, met with representatives from Collège LaSalle, the Centre régional d'investissement Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, and local political figures. They were accompanied by Faouzi Metouilli, President of Torontobased MF Consulting & Affairs, and organizer of the meetings.



A Great Success for the 4th Edition of 48h Top Chrono!

The 48h Top Chrono competition, organized by RDÉE Canada in partnership with the SÉO, took place on February 24, 2023. This fourth Ontario edition, held virtually, attracted 28 participants.

Set up by RDÉE Canada, the 48h Top Chrono competition was designed to bring together immigrants from different backgrounds living in Ontario but sharing a common passion for innovation and entrepreneurial projects.

Accompanied by 30 stakeholders, including entrepreneurship experts and judges, the candidates presented six ambitious projects. At the end of the competition, three of them caught the jury's eye. The winners went home with cash and in-kind prizes.

Among the prizes, SÉO offered the winners places in its virtual business incubator.

"An activity like 48h Top Chrono is an excellent opportunity for Francophone and bilingual newcomers to sharpen their entrepreneurial spirit, hone their skills and acquire the self-confidence they need to set up their own business," says SÉO Executive Director Patrick Cloutier. "Our thanks to RDÉE Canada for organizing this event in Ontario. Special thanks to my colleagues at SÉO who worked hard with the RDÉE Canada team to make this event a success. I'd also like to take this opportunity to salute all participants, whether you won or not. You're all winners. Good luck in all your projects."





THANKS TO THE SÉO TEAM

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