Information and Communication Technologies in French

- Hardware
- Software
- Websites

www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca
The Charter of the French language applies to information and communication technologies. Sections 52.1 and 205.1 of the Charter protect consumers’ rights by obliging designers, manufacturers, distributors and merchants to offer the French-language version of software if such version exists, and subparagraph 9 of section 141 protects workers’ rights by obliging enterprises that employ 50 or more people to generalize the use of French in information technologies.

Québec government departments and agencies apply a policy governing the use of French in information and communication technologies.

What is the scope of the wording “information and communication technologies in French”?

The wording “information and communication technologies in French” applies to all hardware, software and services used to gather, process and transmit information. The term “information technology” generally refers to electronic data processing, and “multimedia” defines the information technology sector comprising communications and interactive media.

Hardware includes keyboards, printers, fax machines, smart devices and other data-input and output peripherals. Indications on command buttons and keyboards must be in French. If applicable, an electronic display in French may reproduce or generate French diacritical marks (acute and grave accents, cedilla, diaeresis).

Software includes software applications (for word processing, etc.), operating systems, software packages, network management systems, development tools, courseware and peripheral drivers. Software must include French-language user interfaces, i.e., menus, commands, dialogue boxes, help and messages in French.

In this context, the word “services” generally applies to website interfaces that allow users to access databases, carry out commercial transactions, exchange various types of documents or obtain technical support. Services of this type must be in French. They may involve forms, voice recognition, video animation or touch screens.
What you need to know

a) Consumers’ rights

All computer software distributed, sold or rented, offered for retail sale, for rent or otherwise in Québec must be available in French unless no French version exists. Software can also be available in languages other than French, providing that the French version can be obtained on terms that are at least as favourable.

Sections 51, 52, 55 and 57 of the Charter of the French language stipulate that all inscriptions on the following product components and related documents must be in French: wrapping, labels, directions and warranties; catalogues, brochures, folders and similar publications; order forms, invoices and receipts. The same obligation applies to all product signs, posters and displays.

Designers, manufacturers, distributors and merchants are thus required to offer the public software in French if such version exists. Even if there is no French-language version of the software, the packaging and documents that accompany the software must be in French or in French and another language, in accordance with section 51.

b) Workers’ rights

The right to work in French in Québec is protected by the provisions of the Charter of the French language focusing on the language of work and francization of business firms (enterprises). The chapter on the francization of enterprises obliges all businesses that employ 50 or more people in Québec to generalize the use of French, including in the area of information technologies (section 141, subparagraph 9).

This means that employers must install a French-language version of all hardware and software at their employees’ workstations, for normal access. A similar obligation applies to documents and databases available via intranet sites. It is therefore up to business firms to adopt a policy of procuring and developing information technologies in French, with clear language specifications for suppliers.

c) Language of Québec business firms’ websites

All enterprises with an address in Québec are covered by section 52 of the Charter, which applies to all advertising documents made available to the public. On business firms’ websites, any commercial advertising must thus be provided in French, unless it is covered by one of the exceptions set forth in the Charter or its regulations.

Firms that employ 50 or more people in Québec must use French in communications (including electronic communications) with the civil administration, clients, suppliers, the public and shareholders (section 141, subparagraph 5). They must also use French as the language of work and the language of internal communication (section 141, subparagraph 3).
In the case of Web applications, firms that employ 50 or more people in Québec must comply with subparagraph 9 of section 141 by providing at least one interface in French. In addition, in the case of e-commerce, enterprises with an address in Québec are obliged to comply with sections 51, 52, 55 and 57, by providing consumers with appropriate information to carry out their electronic transactions in French (order forms, invoices, receipts, quittances).

d) Obligations applicable to suppliers of the Québec civil administration

The Québec civil administration (government departments and agencies) applies a French-language policy in the area of information technologies based on the following two principles:

- Communications between the civil administration and citizens must comply with all characteristics of French;

- The computerized workstations of regular employees and specialists must enable maximum use of French.

Information technology francization specialists at the Office québécois de la langue française (OQLF) can answer questions like the following:

- How should I plan the francization of my hardware and software?
- Does a specific software exist in French?
- How can I improve my firm’s purchasing and development of information technologies in French?
- Is the French-language version of my software compatible with other software?
- How can I configure the keyboard driver to optimize use of the standardized keyboard (standard CAN/CSA Z243.200-1992)?
- What is the right term in French for a new Internet concept?
- What is the right code to order a given printer in French?
The OQLF has an array of valuable tools to help you use information technologies in French:

PIF, a database on information technology products (hardware and software) in French available in Québec. Check PIF (www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/pif) before buying a product or if a merchant has told you that a product is unavailable in French.

Bétel, a technolinguistic tool for evaluating hardware and software. Bétel checks the French-language characteristics of information technology products according to established standards. The results are displayed on the OQLF website (www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ressources/ti/definition_betel.html).

Le grand dictionnaire terminologique (GDT) contains 3 million terms in French, along with their definitions and, in many cases, English-language equivalents, in a wide variety of fields of specialization. You can consult this essential reference work free-of-charge via the www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca website.
Additional advice and information

How to contact an OQLF information technology specialist:

Direction du soutien administratif et technique en francisation
Office québécois de la langue française
Édifice Camille-Laurin
125, rue Sherbrooke Ouest
Montréal (Québec) H2X 1X4

Telephone: 514 873-8265
1 888 873-6202 (only in Québec)

Fax: 514 864-3948

E-mail: info@oqlf.gouv.qc.ca

For more information about the Charter of the French language or the OQLF, see the www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca website.

For the PDF version of the OQLF folders (in French), see the www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca website. Click Ressources, Bibliothèque virtuelle, then Dépliants.