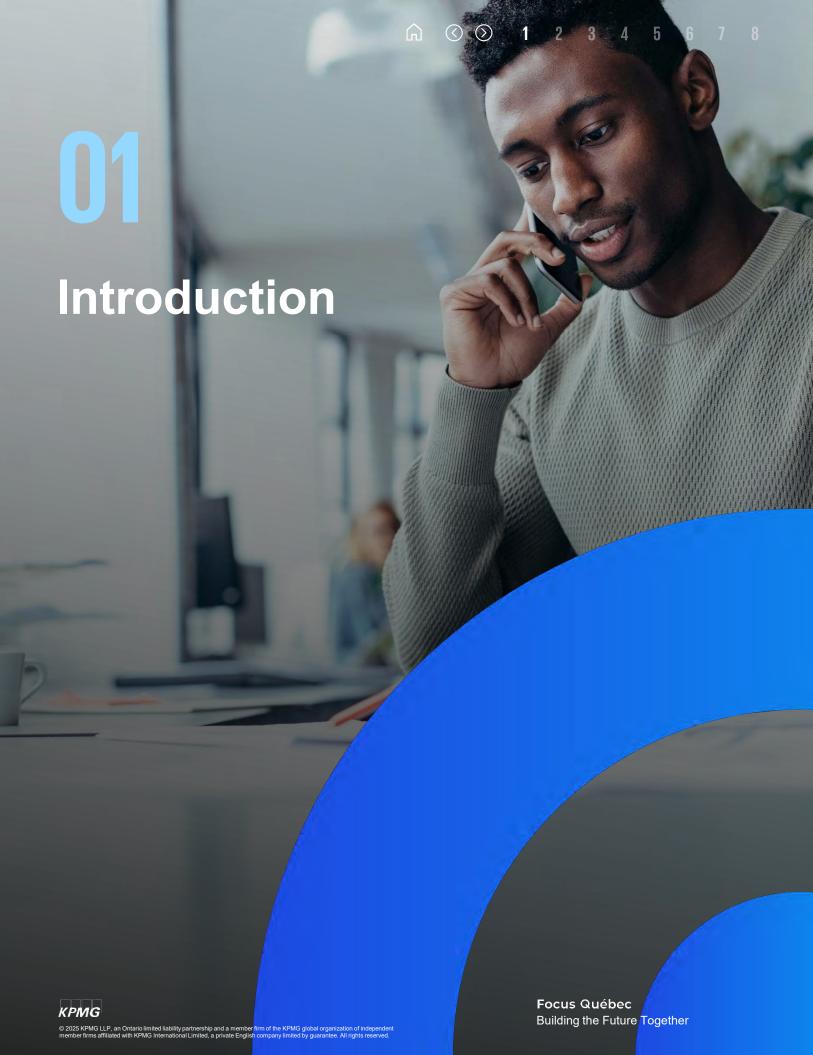


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Focus Québec survey

This guide presents survey findings and concrete solutions for businesses.



The annual Focus Québec survey, launched in fall 2021 by KPMG in Québec, aims to explore the key challenges facing Québec entrepreneurs.

This initiative strives to deepen our understanding of how businesses and organizations are responding to fluctuations affecting business and society at large. It seeks to guide them in bolstering their operations and their prosperity.

In fall 2024, KPMG surveyed 350 business leaders across the province. Our survey methodology is detailed at the end of the report.

*Note: The survey was completed prior to the U.S. election.

This year's survey tackles a variety of critical issues:

- Geopolitical risks and complexities
- Changing tax landscape
- Wealth management
- Prosperity, workforce and technology
- Cybersecurity
- New, more sustainable growth practices

Each section of this edition summarizes our findings based on survey data. The market outlook has been analyzed by seasoned professionals, providing valuable insight into the challenges facing businesses and the opportunities available to them.



02

Geopolitical risks and complexities:

Navigating our current environment





In the current political and economic environment, Québec SMBs must make high-stakes decisions, each of which can result in significant consequences. Despite the prevailing uncertainty and risk, these major challenges can be transformed into growth opportunities.



for Québec entrepreneurs

- Growing protectionist attitudes in key markets (e.g., economic decoupling, shifting trade relations)
- Integrating generative Al and other technologies
- Business growth prospects or intrinsic challenges
- Environment and climate change (e.g., decarbonization, energy transition)
- Changes in working arrangements, including the long-term impacts of hybrid work

88%

The change in U.S. president generates significant economic uncertainty and disruption. Rising U.S. market protectionism is the key concern for Québec business leaders. Eighty eight percent anticipate economic disruption and business instability.

87%

Even before the U.S. presidential election, 87% of Québec leaders expressed concern that the Canadian economy could be adversely affected by rising U.S. protectionism through less favourable bilateral agreements and higher tariffs.

"Québec entrepreneurs have experienced extraordinary situations and much upheaval in recent years. Their agility and resilience in overcoming these challenges may prove highly useful in the years ahead in an economic environment that could see higher trade tensions and complex geopolitical conditions."

How and where

to focus

Develop alternative scenarios:

Design various scenarios and anticipate their impacts on the broader economy, and your business in particular, to adopt effective strategic planning that incorporates contingencies.

2

Develop alternative scenarios:

Create various scenarios to anticipate economic and political impacts that support effective strategic planning.

3

Take action: Review your supply chain and diversify revenue streams to mitigate sector and geographic risk exposures.



Caroline Charest
Partner, Strategy & Economics
and National Economics
Leader, KPMG in Canada





Navigating U.S. tariffs

Over the past five years, Canadian businesses have made significant strides in operational efficiency and have reorganized their supply chains to address challenges, including the pandemic, high interest rates, and inflation. The impact of the mutual tariffs proposed by the U.S. and Canada on the recent trade landscape has been substantial.

87%

of Québec executives have already reassessed their organization's business strategies to minimize risks and seize business opportunities that may arise.



"In the short-term, many companies that rely on crossborder trade will need to conduct in-depth risk assessments of their supply chains and goods to determine how their operations and revenues may be affected."

Key findings from the U.S. tariffs survey

of the Canadian businesses surveyed export or sell to the U.S.

of them say their business will be impacted by U.S. tariffs.

are now preparing or bracing for a recession.

are shelving capital investment plans until there's clarity on trade relations.

admit potential tariffs are a "wake-up call" to improve productivity in Canada and in their business.

of Québec business leaders "wholeheartedly believe" that the federal and provincial governments "must stand firm in protecting Canada's sovereignty and values."

KPMG conducted a survey of 250 business leaders across Canada to gauge their reaction to U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff threats and what actions, if any, they had already taken or were planning to take. Survey conducted between January 21 to January 27, 2025.

* KPMG in Canada survey, conducted January 21-27, 2025

Building supply chain resilience

88%

of Canadian businesses said they had diverted or are considering diverting goods to countries not facing tariffs. Forty four percent said they are already reconfiguring their supply chains to divert U.S.-destined exports to these thirdparty countries.

* KPMG in Canada survey, conducted January 21-27, 2025

"Every Canadian organization affected by the new tariffs needs to build resilience and agility now. This means reviewing its entire supply chain strategy and assessing its operating risks and contractual obligations, as well as alternatives, in this new trade environment."



How can you make your supply chain more resilient to cross-border trade risks?

- Plan for business continuity: Develop a plan that includes crisis contingencies and steps to follow in the event of a major disruption, complete with communication and recovery strategies.
- Regulatory compliance: Ensure compliance requirements are met internally and by suppliers by assessing product origin and classification.

Alain Sawaya

Partner & National Service Line Leader Supply Chain & Procurement KPMG in Canada



- Assess transfer pricing: Align your transfer pricing operations with compliance requirements while optimizing cost efficiency.
- **Diversify your suppliers:** Reduce the risk of interruption by diversifying your supplier base to avoid any over-reliance on a single supplier.



Other than political instability, addressing technology and environmental threats also remains high on leaders' agendas. Cybersecurity and the adoption of disruptive technologies, alongside climate change and access to reasonably priced energy, are the top threats considered by Québec business leaders.

4 top risks threatening business growth



Cybersecurity, including risk of cyberattacks, potential data losses, foreign interference and loss of customer trust.



Energy security and financial accessibility.



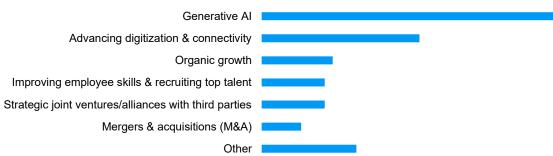
Emerging and disruptive technologies, such as advancements that disrupt your market or business, including generative artificial intelligence like ChatGPT.



Environmental and climate change, such as disruptions to a business or market caused by climate change.

To navigate an uncertain economic landscape and seize new growth opportunities, businesses must adapt and innovate to remain competitive.

Strategies identified as most important to achieving growth goals







Impact of tax changes

The Canadian tax landscape has undergone significant changes, notably with the announcement of a potential increase in the capital gains inclusion rate, raising concerns among entrepreneurs that this change will stifle economic growth.

In Quebec, the government's review of business support measures has heightened uncertainty as to the future availability of such assistance and the competitiveness of businesses.

90%

of Québec entrepreneurs believe that the new tax measures discourage business by limiting the money available for consumption. 86%

of Québec SMB leaders share the concern that the government is considering introducing new taxes, such as a wealth or windfall profit tax.

"Business leaders are concerned about the impact of tax changes on their ability to invest and grow. Limiting the funds available for consumption can result in lower spending and investment in innovation, which could harm the overall economic growth of our businesses and Québec."



Marie-Eve Rioux
Partner and Tax Lead
KPMG Private Enterprise
KPMG in Canada

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"There is a strong reaction from business leaders to the abolition or tightening of certain tax measures that could affect not only the wealthy, but also the middle class. Entrepreneurs fear that any tightening will stifle investment and innovation, which is crucial to the growth of SMBs and our economy. In addition, the idea that the government could go after property values could also be a concern for homeowners counting on growth in their property value for retirement."



Éric Thibault
Tax Partner, Government
Assistance Practice
KPMG in Canada

 \bowtie

89%

The increase in the lifetime capital gains exemption for small business owners, up to \$1.25 million, is still seen as welcome relief by 89% of respondents.

"This measure somewhat mitigates the impact of the increase in the capital gains inclusion rate and protects SMBs. This shows that, while the tax changes are a concern, there are measures to support entrepreneurs."

Éric Thibault

How to be proactive and anticipate tax changes?

- Keeping up with changes: Stay informed about tax developments by following government announcements and consulting with experts who conduct constant monitoring.
- Assess the impact: Analyze new tax measures to understand their impact and make informed investment decisions.
- Collaborate with tax leaders: Work with professionals to help minimize your tax burden, leverage all available government assistance to reduce project costs and better manage the impacts of tax changes.
- **Diversify investments:** Explore new markets or sectors that are less affected to mitigate risks associated with tax changes.
- Focus on innovation: Invest heavily in innovation to enhance your business's efficiency and mitigate the impact of new tax measures.



90%

of business leaders believe higher personal income tax rates put Canada at a competitive disadvantage to other advanced economies in recruiting top talent. How can compensation structures be tweaked to attract and retain talent in a changing tax environment?

- Analyze compensation structures: Assess and adapt compensation structures to attract and retain talent while considering tax issues, which are vital in a competitive environment.
- Communicate transparently:
 Inform employees about tax issues to maintain engagement and trust.
- Explore non-monetary benefits:
 Offer non-financial benefits to offset high tax rates and improve employee satisfaction.

Genuine support for Canada's green transition

The recently introduced "clean economy" federal tax credits have sparked considerable interest from businesses, influencing strategic business and investment planning decisions.

90%

90%

of respondents plan to use the new federal clean economy investment tax credits to offset their climate and decarbonization costs. These credits, which cover a significant share of project costs, strongly influence business investment decisions.

of respondents agree these tax credits positively influence their business decisions. Businesses see the tax credits, ranging from 15% to 40% of project costs in some cases, as a source of strategic leverage.

"These measures are attractive and fuel the creation of new economic niches. The tax credits and abundant electricity supply also attract many foreign investors who are willing to produce these new technologies, thereby strengthening Québec's green economy. This reflects the growing trend of integrating sustainability into business strategies, where environmental and economic considerations intersect. Businesses view these credits as both an opportunity to cut costs and a means to engage in sustainable practices, thereby meeting the increasing consumer demand for environmentally friendly solutions."

87%

of respondents believe the Canadian government is providing major support to help businesses transition to the clean economy, such as through clean energy and technology initiative tax credits.





Yara Bossé-ViolaPartner, R&D Tax Incentives
KPMG in Canada





Divest, acquire or manage wealth in 2025?

Mergers & acquisitions

In recent years, Québec's M&A market has seen disruption and uncertainty amid resilience and adaptability in the face of constant change.

35%

of Québec business owners feel their businesses have a high appetite for mergers & acquisitions over the next three years, while 45% plan to make acquisitions with a moderate impact. This shows a determination to explore growth opportunities but with a thoughtful approach.

Jean-Philippe Parent Managing Director KPMG Corporate Finance Partner, Deal Advisory KPMG in Canada

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88%

of CEOs believe they are under increased pressure regarding the long-term prosperity of their business. This highlights the growing importance of sustainability and sound business strategies.

In this environment, it is crucial to:

- Strategically assess: Carefully analyze acquisition opportunities to ensure consistency with the organization's long-term growth objectives.
- Develop organizational agility: Foster an agile culture to adapt promptly to market changes and economic conditions.
- **Build in innovation:** Invest in innovative technologies and solutions to bolster operational competitiveness and sustainability.

"To ensure sustainable growth, businesses must adapt to changing economic and political conditions while focusing on investing in technological and business innovations. An M&A project is a key tool to accelerate this process."

Succession and wealth management

The primary purpose of a succession plan is to preserve the heritage built by the current generation, aiming to ensure continuity and prosperity for future generations.

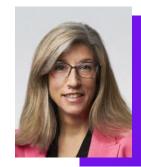
74%

of next-generation family members are not interested in taking over the family business. This trend highlights a shift in values and priorities. The up-andcoming generation has different aspirations and is focused on seeking new opportunities rather than on the continuity of the family business.

of Québec business owners are planning a business transfer in the next three to ten years. This major shift could bring about significant challenges for family business productivity and continuity, as well as substantial changes to the entrepreneurial fabric of Québec.







To guide the business succession or transfer process:

"It may not be possible for a family member to take over the business. In such a case, it may be necessary to identify an individual from outside the family who can take over the reins of the business. If this is the case, the family dynamic will be completely altered, as a liquidity event would provide the family with considerable financial resources."

Carol Rabbat Partner, Family Office **KPMG** Law KPMG in Canada



Find the right people for your team:

Build a team of knowledgeable advisors, including lawyers, accountants, and business management experts.

Develop strategies to effectively manage the wealth transfer:

This includes minimizing tax impacts and resolving potential family disputes or litigation.

Establish a robust

governance structure: Implement effective governance that provides clear policies, ensures decision-making, and resolves conflicts.



Different expectations from one generation to the next



"Given the changes in the labour market, 88% of Québec leaders anticipate a significant impact on their operations, owing primarily to an aging workforce and the need to recruit skilled workers to replace them. This raises concerns about a potential slowdown in productivity over the next five years."

Laetitia Debout Partner, Management Consulting People and Change KPMG in Canada

of leaders expressed concerns about the growing gap between the expectations of older and younger employees. This situation leads them to reflect on the best strategies for remaining attractive and fostering collaboration within diverse teams.

How can you get employees from different generations working together on your teams?

- Rethink your value proposition:
 Identify employee expectations to meet the needs of different generations.
- 2 Strengthen your business culture:
 Create an inclusive culture that values diversity to attract and retain diverse talent.
- Drive creativity:

 Establish collaborative work environments and organize co-building workshops to boost cohesion and encourage the sharing of ideas.

Top operational priorities for CEOs to meet their growth goals



Understanding and implementing generative Al across the business



Offering employees a Advancing digitization value proposition to attract and retain top talent



and connectivity across the business



Seeking protection against capital and input cost inflation

Implementing environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives



Other

Artificial intelligence (IA): Driving productivity gains

To address skills shortages, steadily rising average hourly earnings, and sluggish productivity, 93% of business leaders are turning to automation and AI to remain competitive. Today, businesses are experimenting with AI and generative AI technology solutions to enhance or expedite business processes across all levels, including support functions.

Al and generative Al are not mere gimmicks—they are revolutionary tools for the Québec economy, capable of generating productivity gains and new sources of value while driving innovation.





"Technology innovation is moving at an unprecedented pace. It is vital for leaders to fully commit to building generative Al into their businesses. That means not just adopting new technologies but also transforming workforce skills and reassessing business processes to drive sustainable growth."

David Marotte Québec Leader, Data & Al KPMG in Canada







"Generative AI use will continue to grow. For best performance, it's important for employers to clearly determine and communicate how they expect employees to use these tools. Clearly, this strategy must continuously evolve and not dampen innovation."

Yassir Bellout Partner, Cybersecurity Strategy, Transformation and Governance KPMG in Canada





How can we ensure ethical and effective AI adoption in the workplace?

- Develop a framework for responsible Al use: Develop clear processes and controls to ensure AI is used in an ethical and secure manner.
- Clearly communicate to your employees: Educate employees about the appropriate use of Al tools to set expectations and reduce the risks of improper use.
- Provide employees with continuous training: Provide training, user guides and online resources to ensure proper and ethical tool use.

Explore our training courses today

If you have any questions about the Skills Development Centre, including how to create a personalized learning journey, please reach out to ctr_dev@kpmg.ca

Boost your productivity with the Skills Development Centre

This collaborative training initiative between KPMG in Canada and Microsoft offers programs to assist businesses in navigating the opportunities and challenges of generative AI. It aims to develop their ability to manage operational cybersecurity risks and responsibly implementing these insights and strategies into their organizations. Sign up for training today!





Cybersecurity: A business issue beyond technology



"Organizations recognize that cybersecurity requires advanced experience and significant investment to fend off increasingly sophisticated threats. That's why it's vital to clearly determine where to focus your time and investment to make substantial progress in your cybersecurity posture."

Guillaume Clément Partner, Cybersecurity

Partner, Cybersecurity, Cyber Defence Services Leader

KPMG in Canada

X

39%



73%

of businesses have no plan to deal with a potential ransomware attack.

How is strong and optimized cybersecurity established?

- Assess your cybersecurity posture:
 Get a clear vision of your cybersecurity posture to identify your strengths and vulnerabilities.
- Prioritize threats:

 Develop an action plan to prioritize and appropriately remedy any identified vulnerabilities.
- Invest in advanced security solutions:
 Implement next-generation security solutions featuring built-in AI for real-time threat detection and response. Eighty one percent of businesses are considering AI to bolster cybersecurity.
- Adopt good basic cybersecurity hygiene:
 Make sure all your systems and software are
 up to date with the latest security patches and
 perform real-time security console monitoring.





"In Québec, ransomware attacks are a very real threat. Contrary to popular belief, most malicious groups do not target specific organizations, focusing instead on easily exploitable vulnerabilities, regardless of size or industry."

Anne Labbé
Senior Manager
Cyber Incident Response
KPMG in Canada





How AI can help boost cybersecurity culture

- **Visibility:** All can identify anomalies and interpret behaviour patterns in real time that might cause security issues.
- **Efficiency:** Al tools that automate and integrate cyber protections can help identify and stop a threat before it reaches the organization's front line.
- Scalability: Al enables larger and faster scaling of security guardrails and policies across internal operations and to its entire supply chain—a doorway for many attacks.
- Customization: Al can help differentiate between users, enabling organizations to prioritize and provide tailored, individual security controls.
- Quantification: Al tools can translate data into meaningful metrics and insights that organizations can use to influence secure behaviours across the organization.



"Business leaders recognize the need to invest in technologies that both improve operational efficiency and support innovation and responsiveness to market fluctuations in order to seize new growth opportunities. Additionally, 80% believe that integrating generative AI into business operations would significantly enhance our company's value to potential buyers."

Mario Poirier
Partner, Cybersecurity
Platforms and Solutions
KPMG in Canada



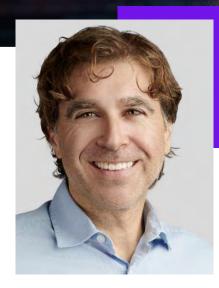




Al: Securing the accelerator

80%

of organizations are concerned that generative AI will make them even more vulnerable to cybersecurity breaches compared with 93% last year. Eighty six percent of leaders have decided to ramp up cybersecurity spending to protect their operations and intellectual property from AI threats.



"Risk management must be systematically integrated and become practically instinctive throughout the transformation process, rather than being seen as a step to be added later."

Jean-François De Rico Partner, Technology Risks Al Governance and Privacy KPMG in Canada



How can cybersecurity can be strengthened in the Al era?

1

Adopt robust security processes:

Develop clear security processes to ensure secure Al integration.

2

Create a culture of security awareness:

Prioritize security awareness by training employees on best practices and encouraging them to report suspicious activity to mitigate Al risks.

3

Implement a strong compliance framework:

Develop an Al governance and risk control framework with clearly defined responsibilities and systematically integrated risk management. 07

New practices for more sustainable growth

New, more sustainable growth practices

Regulatory compliance is not merely a question of adopting and fine-tuning sustainability practices and initiatives, including environmental, social, and governance factors. Integrating such practices is vital to comply with current standards and, more importantly, to ensure business sustainability and generate long-term sustainable value. Québec SMBs are under increasing pressure to incorporate sustainable practices into their operations.

87%

of SMBs report increased pressure from lenders to meet more stringent environmental requirements, which may significantly impact their ability to raise capital.



"To deploy a truly effective sustainable strategy, organizations must avoid simply shifting issues around. In fact, sustainability goals must be thoroughly baked into their everyday activities and choices.

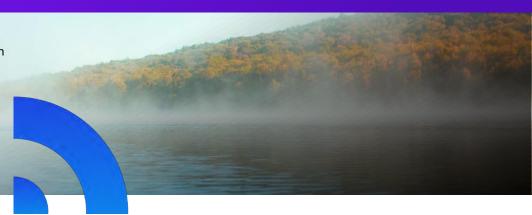
This holistic approach turns sustainability issues into opportunities to grow and innovate, while building business resilience to future challenges. In short, a well thought-out, fully-integrated approach to sustainability becomes a bona fide performance driver, combining social responsibility and economic value creation."

Violaine Paquette

Partner and Head of Advisory Services KPMG Private Enterprise, Québec Region KPMG in Canada







88%

of SMBs acknowledge that stakeholders' sustainability expectations evolve faster than their strategies can keep up.

The rapidly changing regulatory framework governing sustainability further complicates operational, logistical and financial sustainability challenges. This makes strong crossfunctional collaboration in businesses even more important.

"In an ever-changing economic environment, businesses must be agile to adapt to new legislation, changing sustainability standards and innovative technologies. Anticipating and understanding the impact of these external factors is key to adopting effective strategic planning, capturing opportunities and mitigating risks. That's why it's vital that each business unit understand how sustainability reporting and due diligence can influence its strategy and operations. Building these considerations into all levels of the organization translates overall business goals into each department's actions, encouraging a consistent and sustainable approach."



Margot Schleich Manager, ESG KPMG in Canada

Ensure that business goals align with society's expectations.

Conduct a detailed sustainability risk and opportunity assessment as a key first step.

Assess stakeholders' expectations. This approach serves to:

- Ensure business goals meet the moment of society's expectations
- Boost employee engagement and customer loyalty
- Attract environmentally conscious investors

Develop a detailed plan.

This plan should:

- Build in sustainable project strategies from the outset
- Use innovative technologies to speed up the transition
- Set out clear and measurable milestones tied to strategic goals
 - Build in sustainable project strategies from the outset
 - Using innovative technologies to speed up the transition
 - Set out clear and measurable milestones tied to strategic goals

Exploring funding opportunities.

Businesses can:

- Apply for government grants or tax credits
- · Explore green loan options
- Partner with sustainability-focused investors

Preparing for sustainability regulations: Looking ahead to take smarter action

The ecosystem surrounding sustainable development is evolving rapidly. We have transitioned from a voluntary system to a mandatory framework. Companies must now adapt to stricter sustainability requirements.

"With the new Federal Register on plastics supporting Canadian ambitions to reduce plastic pollution, companies are now not only required to improve their visibility, understanding, and tracking of the life cycle of plastics placed on the Canadian market for reporting purposes, but they are also encouraged to consider how they can enhance their practices in the long term, taking into account Canadian goals on this issue."



Sander Jansen Executive Director, ESG KPMG in Canada



To find out for more information:



The new Federal Plastics Registry

In April 2024, the Canadian government announced the creation of a new Federal Register on Plastics (FRP) as part of broader efforts to achieve its Zero Plastic Waste goal by 2030. In accordance with subsection 46(1) of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act (1999) (CEPA), the FRP now requires affected companies to annually report information on plastics placed on the Canadian market to support and inform ongoing and future efforts to reduce plastic pollution across Canada. The first reporting period will conclude on September 29, 2025.

New CSSB standards

The Canadian Sustainability Standards Board (CSSB) has released its first two Canadian Sustainability Disclosure Standards (CSDS) in an effort to support companies in identifying and reporting sustainability information that investors need for informed decision-making.

To find out for more information:

Cet ready for CSSB sustainability disclosures



« Public perception and stakeholder trust are increasingly influenced by companies' commitment to sustainable initiatives. Ignoring these updates can not only affect their image but also their market position, as consumers and investors are increasingly favoring responsible and transparent companies. It is therefore crucial for companies to take these changes seriously and integrate sustainable practices into their overall strategy to maintain their reputation and competitiveness. »

Benoit Chéron
Executive Director,
ESG KPMG in Canada

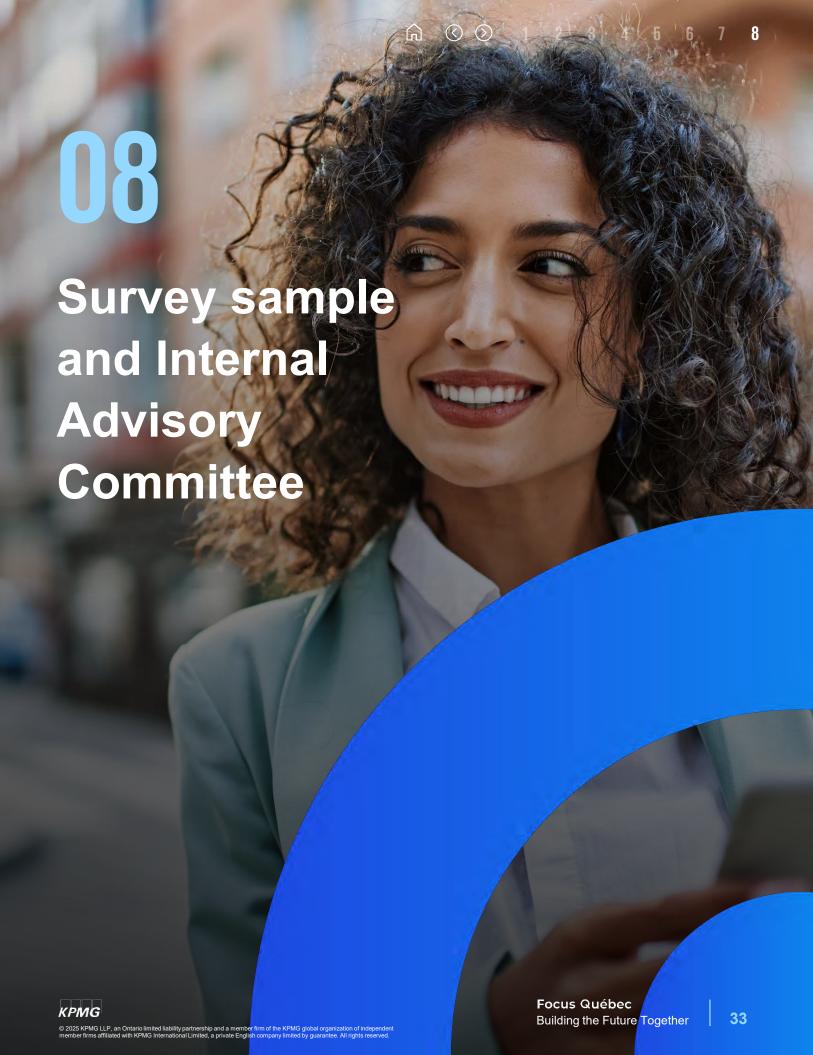
Anticipating the consequences of Bill C-59 targeting greenwashing

Whether intentionally or by mistake, greenwashing will no longer be tolerated in Canada. With the adoption of federal Bill C-59, strengthened measures to combat this practice have been in place since 2024. From now on, an organization's environmental or social statements must be supported by sufficient and appropriate evidence or rely on internationally recognized methodologies.

The penalties are severe, and the reputational risk is high



To find out for more



Survey sample

About the KPMG Focus Québec survey

In September 2024, KPMG in Canada surveyed more than 700 small and medium-sized businesses across the country, including 150 in Québec. The survey was conducted in Québec until September 6, 2024, to collect the opinions of 200 additional organizations, bringing the total to 350. Almost half (47%) of the **350 Quebec businesses** reported annual revenue between \$500 million and \$1 billion, 40% reported revenue of \$100-\$499.9 million, and 13% reported revenue of less than \$100 million. **All respondents are business owners or executives.** The interviews were conducted by the leading business research firm Sago.

*Note: The survey was completed prior to the U.S. election.



The businesses surveyed operate in a variety of industries:

- Automotive
- · Building and construction
- Consumer and retail (including restaurants)
- Energy and/or natural resources (e.g., oil and gas, mining, renewable energy)
- Financial services (e.g., banking, insurance, securities, asset management, intermediaries)
- Health, pharmaceutical and life sciences
- Manufacturing
- Professional, scientific and technical services
- · Real estate
- Technology, media and telecom
- · Transportation and warehousing
- · Energy and utilities



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Divest, acquire or manage wealth in 2025?



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