

Office of the ombudsman

French services

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2023-2024

ombudsman



May 30, 2024

Mr. Michael Goldbloom
Chair, Board of Directors
CBC/Radio-Canada

Ms. Catherine Tait
President and CEO
CBC/Radio-Canada

Members of the Board of Directors
CBC/Radio-Canada

Mr. Goldbloom, Ms. Tait and Members of the Board of Directors:

I am pleased to submit the Annual Report of the Office of the Ombudsman, French Services, for the period April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024.

Sincerely,

Pierre Champoux
Ombudsman, French Services
CBC/Radio-Canada

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INITIAL REMARKS

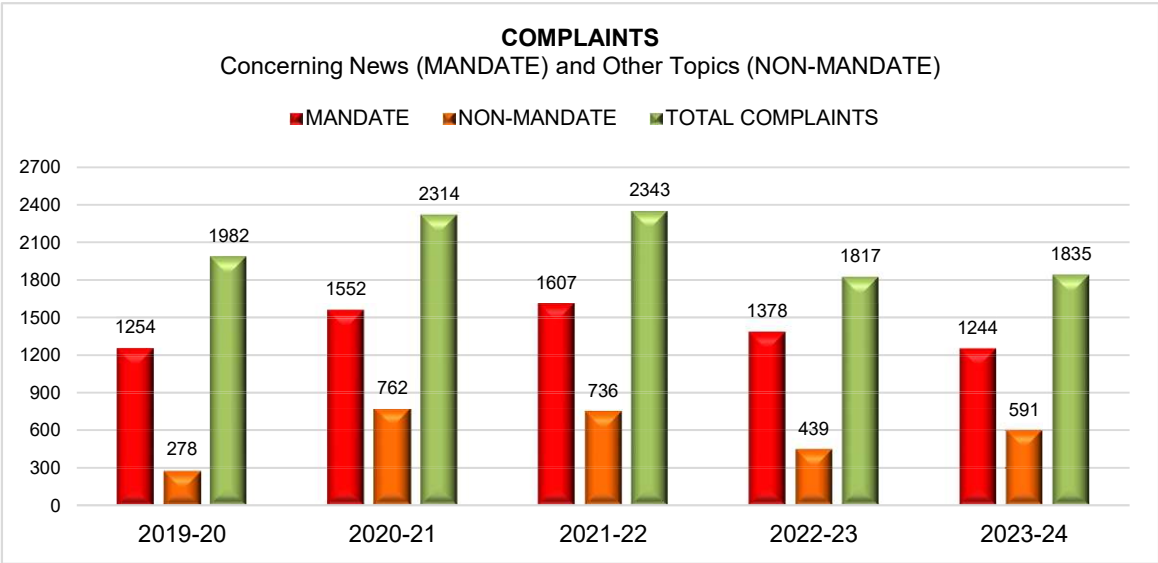
I am pleased to present the annual report of the Office of the Ombudsman, French Services, for the period April 1, 2023, to March 31, 2024.

This report would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution of my office’s new administrator, Mariline Laverdure, who took over from Laure Simonet on January 1, 2024. I am also grateful to my English Services counterpart, Jack Nagler, whose presence and sage advice are always appreciated.

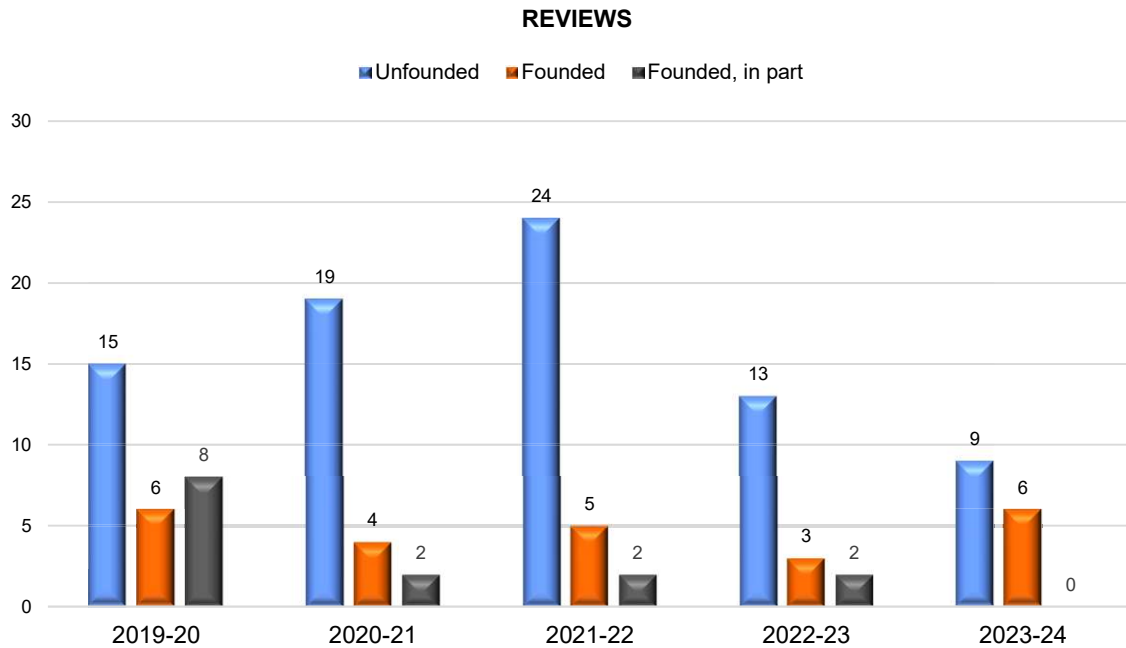
I extend sincere thanks as well to Catherine Tait, President and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, whose discretion attests to her trust and her respect for the independence I need to exercise my duties comfortably.

My office received 1,835 complaints and comments from members of the public during 2023-24, virtually the same number as the previous year (1,817; i.e., an increase of 1%).

Of that number, 1,244 were within my mandate because they involved content that was subject to CBC/Radio-Canada’s Journalistic Standards and Practices ([JSP](#)). That was a decrease of 10% compared with the previous year. I asked the relevant department to respond to 427 of those complaints (-25%), 353 of which (-31%) included a right of review, meaning that the complainant could appeal to my office if they were not satisfied with the response.



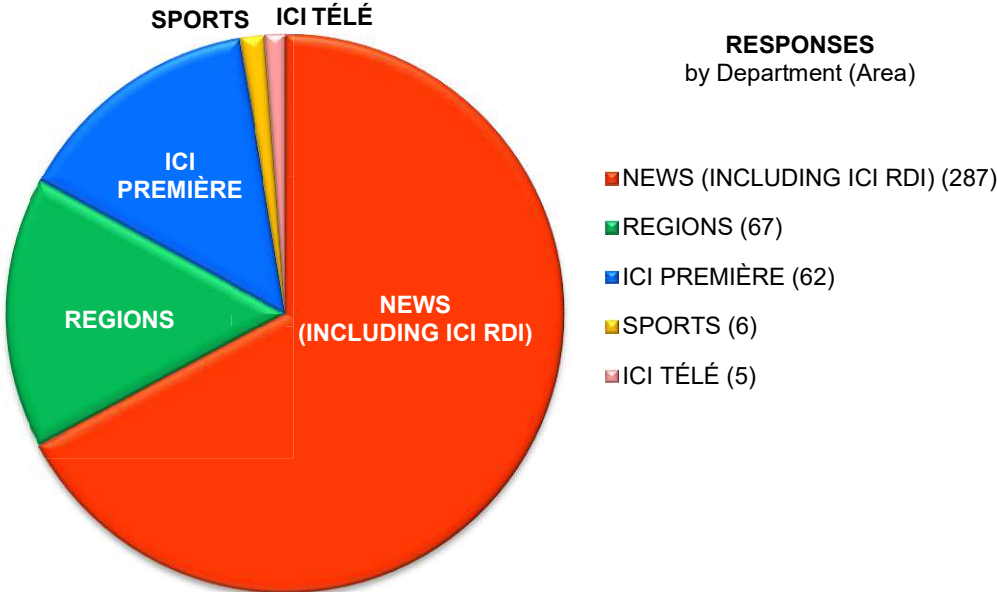
I was asked to produce 15 reviews in 2023-24, three fewer than during the previous fiscal year. In six cases, I concluded that there had been a breach of the JSP, and in the nine others, I found there had been no breach (see Appendix III, p. 23).



I thank you for your attention and hope you enjoy reading this report.

HIGHLIGHTS

As is generally the case, news content produced by the News department (including ICI RDI) accounted for the largest number of complaints for which I requested a departmental response in 2023-24, namely 287. This nonetheless amounted to a decline of 40% versus the previous year. The other sources of complaints were Regional Media (67 requests for response) and ICI PREMIÈRE radio (62), with Sports (6) and ICI TÉLÉ (5) a distant fourth and fifth, respectively.



I remind the reader that the teams have 20 working days in which to respond to a complaint that includes a right to ask for a review. The average response time during the past year was 12,6 days, only a marginal increase from the 12,2 days recorded the year before. On a few rare occasions, I granted an extension and informed the complainants involved (I thank them, incidentally, for their understanding and open-mindedness).

ON THE NOTION OF BALANCE OVER TIME

In his 2022-23 annual report, my colleague Jack Nagler included some thoughts on the notion of balance, that fundamental component of the JSP, which can sometimes appear to be inconsistent. First, a reminder of the JSP definition of the term:

We contribute to informed debate on issues that matter to Canadians by reflecting a diversity of opinion. Our content on all platforms presents a wide range of subject matter and views.

On issues of controversy, we ensure that divergent views are reflected respectfully, taking into account their relevance to the debate and how widely held these views are.

We also ensure that they are represented over a reasonable period of time.

As I have often written, balance is generally measured over time, as stories, interviews and programs emerge, sometimes over a period of weeks or even months. I think that remains true and defensible. The problem is that not all Canadians consume their news the same way. Some consult the full gamut of platforms and others may be die-hard radio listeners, while for many francophone Canadians, the 10 p.m. *Téléjournal* remains their main source of daily news. In other words, not everyone is exposed to the full range of content presenting those “divergent views,” whether they are present in a single story or program or, as is often the case, distributed across a number of stories or interviews on multiple platforms.

The conflict that has raged in the Middle East since October 7, 2023, combined with the polarization of opinions, has highlighted more than ever how difficult it is for the public to assess whether the journalism for such a complex story is balanced. At the same time, it's evident that news producers need better tools to measure and demonstrate balance if they want to defend their choices effectively. I realize that the answer surely does not involve a mathematical formula, but it seems to me that the conflict in the Middle East highlights a need to clarify what is meant by “balance,” for the benefit of Radio-Canada’s diverse audiences.

Consequently, I received many complaints alleging a lack of balance in Radio-Canada coverage of the Israel-Hamas war, claiming that it favoured one side or the other. Did every story have to systematically present every point of view? Did an interview offering a pro-Palestinian perspective necessarily need to be followed by one presenting a pro-Israeli voice, and vice versa? What constitutes “a reasonable period of time”? That depends on the context, the story angle or the content of the interview. The guideposts in that regard are fluid and subject to interpretation.

Balance is not gauged in the same way for a topic that is covered over a span of months or years, compared with a non-recurring story that soon fades from the public interest. In this polarized world, it seems, many people, convinced that they perceive a lack of balance, end up suspecting bias in favour of the opposing camp.

Like my CBC counterpart, I believe that, whenever possible, we should resist the temptation to shelter behind the “balance over time” explanation, however valid it may be on occasion, and think about ways of demonstrating to Canadians the concrete efforts made to ensure balanced coverage — most notably when it comes to a divisive issue such as the Middle East conflict, but also with regard to by-elections, as I mentioned in two reviews published last August.

Read the review [Contextes et équilibre \(Téléjournal\)](#) [in French]

Read the review [Fragile équilibre \(Tout un matin\)](#) [in French]

Citizens, including journalists, do not have enough eyes and ears to see, read and hear everything. What can be done to help the public better assess the overall balance of coverage? Is it reasonable to assume, for example, that an interview aired during an ICI PREMIÈRE radio program can counterbalance an investigative piece featured on TV's *Enquête* a week later? Although I am a massive consumer of news and information, it is physically and humanly impossible for me to listen to, watch or read everything. This is all the more true of "ordinary" people, who cannot reasonably be expected to be permanently riveted to their screens or radio.

Today, information circulates in multiple forms and on multiple platforms, consumed by disparate audiences that sometimes have difficulty distinguishing between truth and fiction, professional and amateur, sincere and manipulative. This atomization of distribution channels is not problematic in itself, but it does generate its share of challenges, and I think it is worthwhile to encourage reflection.

Other reviews that addressed the topic of balance:

[Ces mots décrivent-ils bien ce qui se passe au Proche-Orient?](#) [in French]

[Une soif d'équilibre](#) [in French]

| AI HAS ARRIVED

During the winter, an email message arrived in the Office of the Ombudsman's inbox with the following subject line:

« Violation présumée du Code Journalistique du Québec : Partialité et Impact Humanitaire dans la couverture de la Guerre Israël-Hamas par Radio-Canada. » ["Suspected breach of the Journalism Code of Quebec: Bias and the humanitarian impact in Radio-Canada's coverage of the Israel-Hamas war."]

The author of the message complained about certain aspects of coverage of the Middle East conflict, quoting at length from the "*Code journalistique du Québec*" to substantiate her criticisms. That was enough for me to take an interest in this document, which I did not know existed.

With good reason, as it turns out, because it does not exist.

I therefore pointed that out to the complainant who, in a frank manner that did her credit as well as surprised me, replied as follows:

« I used a tool so that I could structure my points and properly express my request. I am sorry about the references that do not exist. »

In other words, the complainant probably asked an artificial intelligence tool to help her write her complaint (something she is perfectly entitled to do).

Is this a first for my office? I cannot be sure, but it seems quite possible. I also think this phenomenon is likely to continue, which in and of itself is not objectionable when it comes to the audience, and for anyone wishing to file a complaint about a complicated subject. The same cannot be said, of course, when it comes to news content production.

Since the launch of ChatGPT barely a year and a half ago, AI has become an unavoidable topic of conversation and indeed of concern, not least in the media sector. There are clearly opportunities here, but also tremendous risks. How can we leverage this technology for the betterment of journalism? And how, on the contrary, do we prevent it from becoming a powerful tool for misinformation or disinformation? There are many questions here, and they extend far beyond the realm of news and information.

Among the tools made available by Radio-Canada over the past year, I note the text-to-speech feature currently being trialled that lets web users listen to articles rather than read them. There is a clear disclaimer, immediately before the news copy, that this is a trial and that the tool is “powered by artificial intelligence.” The effect is quite realistic, even if certain inflections occasionally give away the fact that the voice is artificially generated.

Is there a danger that this sort of “broadcasting” will one day give rise to a complaint? It certainly cannot be ruled out, although so far I have not received any. But now may well be a good time to look at whether we need to update the JSP to reflect this new reality, however artificial it may be.

| A MATTER OF VISIBILITY

Last year, I somewhat egotistically emphasized the issue of discoverability, or rather a lack thereof, which in my opinion has hampered the visibility of the Office of the Ombudsman. Allow me, therefore, to revisit this subject to see what improvements have been made and which are still pending.

The word “Ombudsman,” with the appropriate link, is now displayed at the footer of every Radio-Canada.ca page. The [Radio-Canada Info and OHdio](#) mobile apps both provide a link to the [reviews page](#), but RC Info is still the only one that links directly to the [home page of the Ombudsman’s site](#).

In any event, locating these links in the apps is no easy task, in my opinion, because they are relegated to the *Réglages* [Settings] section and not, as would seem appropriate, included directly in the content that might be subject to complaint.

While drafting this report, I had the opportunity to raise the issue with Digital Media leadership, which sent me a proposal for how the Office of the Ombudsman could be given greater visibility in articles, whether viewed online or on the app. I am therefore hopeful that this matter will be resolved in short order for the benefit of all Canadians who get their news on the public broadcaster's digital platforms.

I am well aware that fielding a complaint may not be the most enjoyable experience, but it is worth remembering that each such occurrence can be an opportunity for improvement, if only because it allows the team in question to take the pulse of their audience and gain a better understanding of how the public perceives their work. The same is true of my reviews, which I mean to be constructive and instructive, both for the public and journalistic staff. By making it easier for audiences to contact the Ombudsman, Radio-Canada will demonstrate the kind of transparency that strengthens the trust Canadians have in our news and information — something we can never take for granted.

In keeping with this desire to demystify the role of the Ombudsman, I continued my tour of regional team offices this past year, visiting Moncton, where I had inspiring and energizing conversations and was interviewed for the morning show *La matinale*, on ICI PREMIÈRE, and the *Téléjournal Acadie* newscast, on ICI TÉLÉ. Further trips are on the agenda for the year to come, including to British Columbia this fall, for the conference of the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman, in which I am involved as secretary of the board of directors. While I'm there, I will stop in Vancouver to meet with the Radio-Canada team.

I was also fortunate to be invited to speak at universities in Sherbrooke, Montreal, Ottawa and Moncton, where I explained the mandate of the Ombudsman to journalism, communications and public relations students. I can honestly say it feels as if I learn as much from them as they do from me, if not more, because their questions are so interesting and thought-provoking.

Last fall was marked by two firsts: I took part, with my colleague Jack Nagler, in CBC/Radio-Canada's [Annual Public Meeting](#), and then shared my thoughts, in a more personal vein, in a video for [Sous les projecteurs](#) ("Spotlight").

I also thank the *People & Culture* team for inviting me to present my 2022-23 Annual Report and 2023-24 Mid-Year Update at two meetings attended by a few dozen people, both in person and remotely. This is a sign of curiosity that I find healthy and refreshing.

Lastly, I remind the reader that I publish a monthly *Mot de l'ombudsman* internal newsletter, in which I look back at the past month's activity with examples of complaints and comments received by my office.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS BY TOPIC

| THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Having only just emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, and with the conflict in Ukraine dragging on, in the middle of 2023 the world experienced a lull that was both short-lived and relative, before being engulfed by the horror of another war: The Middle East in turn erupted in violence, on the morning of October 7, 2023, as Hamas launched an attack on Israel.

This of course contributed to the number of complaints and comments doubling in the second half of the year compared with the first (1,228 versus 607). Coverage of the Israel-Hamas war resulted in 278 complaints and comments, including some thirty identical complaints sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. The authors condemned, among other things, the choice of certain words (e.g., *guerre* [war]) and the absence of others (e.g., *génocide*), which they felt were more accurate descriptors of what was happening on the ground. This led me to review one complaint in which an audience member, in addition to repeating the grievances stated in the above-mentioned series of complaints, accused Radio-Canada of wilfully ignoring certain events held in support of the Palestinian cause.

Read the review [*Ces mots décrivent-ils bien ce qui se passe au Proche-Orient?*](#)
[in French]

Radio-Canada's word choices also drew numerous complaints from supporters of the Israeli cause, notably regarding the absence of the term "terrorist" when describing Hamas, except when quoting people. I nonetheless wrote that the decision to use that label or not was a matter of journalists' editorial freedom, while also informing News management that some people were unhappy that journalists were not using it.

Overall, in 2023-24, I received a roughly equivalent number of complaints criticizing Radio-Canada for displaying, in its coverage of the conflict, a pro-Israeli bias on one hand (51%), and a pro-Palestinian bias on the other (49%). While it would be risky to draw any formal conclusions regarding Radio-Canada's impartiality, this provides a fairly good illustration of how the same coverage can be interpreted in diametrically opposed fashions, depending on one's point of view.

| DIVERSITY

Questions around sexual and gender diversity have also given rise to many complaints in recent months, most particularly in the wake of the segment “[Trans express](#),” broadcast during an episode of the ICI TÉLÉ program *Enquête*. Some sixty individuals and groups complained that the reporting was transphobic and in their opinion was likely to further disempower the trans community. As of this writing, I still do not know whether the complainants will be satisfied with the response from News management or whether a request for review is forthcoming. During the year, there were a hundred-odd complaints about news content dealing directly or indirectly with the issue of sexual and gender diversity, with some people defending it and others offended by it.

As I noted in my Mid-Year Update, cultural diversity was also a topic of intense debate in 2023-24, particularly in the wake of an [interview](#) featuring writer and producer Mara Joly on the ICI PREMIÈRE program *De l’huile sur le feu*. I received around fifty complaints alleging that it contained racist remarks against white people.

Read the review [Manipuler avec soin \(De l’huile sur le feu\)](#) [in French]

| RECURRING THEMES

Moderation of user comments and the quality of French are complaint subjects that recur every year. In 2023-24, each of them prompted 62 complaints.

Given the current era of polarization and erosion of trust, I must also mention the 94 email messages I received that criticized editorial choices. Some audience members decried what they thought was undue focus on a potential candidate for president of the United States, while others found fault with Radio-Canada for taking too long to pay attention to a series of demonstrations by German farmers, viewing this as wilful withholding of that news story for fear that it would provoke Canadians to do the same.

My mandate as Ombudsman does not give me the latitude to intervene in editorial decisions like those regarding the choice of topics for coverage, story angles, stories’ position in a newscast lineup, or story format. I nevertheless assured these skeptical audience members that their grievances would be forwarded to the people involved, if only to apprise the latter of that perception, be it founded or not.

Lastly, this year my office received about two dozen requests for removal of articles, stories or images, most often from people wishing to close the book on a difficult episode in their life. The JSP clearly state that “online material remains accessible indefinitely” and that CBC/Radio-Canada “generally [does] not agree to requests to remove published material,” while accepting that “[t]here can be exceptions ...,” for example when there are safety considerations.

It is therefore rare for a content removal request to be accepted straight away, but the review of such requests can be an opportunity to ensure that cases are handled fairly and that, for example, the outcomes of legal proceedings are duly reported on, as stipulated in the JSP (under [Court Reporting](#)).

I commend the departments involved for the sensitivity and consistency with which such requests are generally handled. However troubling they may be, they must be examined fairly, bearing in mind not only the public interest, but also the need to respect the people involved.

| NON-MANDATE COMMUNICATIONS

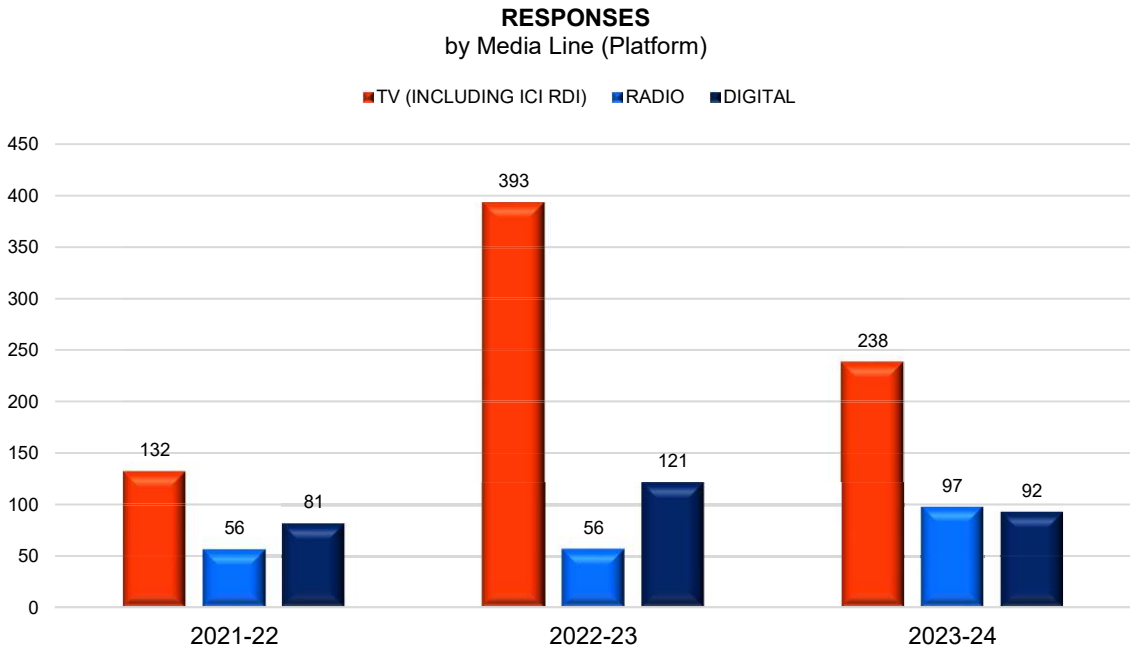
Nearly 600 messages received by my office in 2023-24 concerned subjects unrelated to my mandate, a number roughly in line with the average of previous years.

Comments about programming made up more than a third of those communications (215) and concerned, for example, a TV series coming to an end, or one being shown on the EXTRA premium subscription version of ICI TOU.TV. In addition, technical issues prompted some fifty complaints, while advertising in English seen occasionally on ICI TOU.TV continued to raise the ire of some viewers. I will not elaborate on this last point except to express my hope that a solution can be found sooner rather than later, given how absurd this situation can seem in the eyes of the public.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS BY MEDIA LINE

Of the 427 complaints for which I requested a departmental response, more than half (238) concerned news content broadcast on TV (ICI TÉLÉ and ICI RDI). This represented a decrease of 39% compared with the previous year (during which, I remind the reader, there was a series of 265 complaints about a single interview on ICI RDI).

Complaints pertaining to radio content and programs were up by 73%, to 97, slightly ahead of the total for digital content, which prompted 92 complaints, down by 24% compared with 2022-23.



Despite a lower number of complaints, digital was the media line that resulted in the greatest number of reviews.

Reviews concerning news content seen on TV:

- [Histoire de camp \(Téléjournal\)](#)
- [Contextes et équilibre \(Téléjournal\)](#)
- [Une soif d'équilibre \(Téléjournal 22 h\)](#)

Reviews concerning content heard **on radio**:

[Fragile équilibre \(Tout un matin\)](#)

[Manipuler avec soin \(De l'huile sur le feu\)](#)

[Un contrat est un contrat \(ICI Ottawa-Gatineau\)](#)

[Quand l'invité refuse d'entrer dans la danse](#)

Reviews concerning content viewed **on digital platforms**:

[Des soupçons sans fondement \(ICI Alberta\)](#)

[Recalcul : le tramway de Québec \(ICI Québec\)](#)

[Incendies, climats et scepticisme \(RC.ca\)](#)

[Électrosensibilité, consensus et transparence \(RC.ca\)](#)

[Sources de doute \(ICI Québec\)](#)

[Vandalisme et liberté d'expressions \(RC.ca\)](#)

Reviews concerning **multiplatform coverage**:

[Le retour d'un totem et la mémoire de Marius Barbeau](#)

[Ces mots décrivent-ils bien ce qui se passe au Proche-Orient?](#)

(Since this ranking cannot claim to be scientific, I have listed each review under the platform most directly concerned.)

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPLAINTS BY DEPARTMENT

Not surprisingly, the News department was the one asked to process the most complaints during the past year: two-thirds of the complaints for which I requested a review were directed toward it. They resulted in eight requests for review, and in three instances I found that the JSP had been breached.

[*Histoire de camp \(Téléjournal\)*](#)

[*Contextes et équilibre \(Téléjournal\)*](#)

[*Le retour d'un totem et la mémoire de Marius Barbeau \(Téléjournal\)*](#)

[*Une soif d'équilibre \(Téléjournal 22 h\)*](#)

[*Incendies, climats et scepticisme \(RC.ca\)*](#)

[*Électrosensibilité, consensus et transparence \(RC.ca\)*](#)

[*Vandalisme et liberté d'expressions \(RC.ca\)*](#)

[*Ces mots décrivent-ils bien ce qui se passe au Proche-Orient?*](#)

The review [*Contextes et équilibre*](#) (see also the review [*Fragile équilibre \[Tout un matin\]*](#)) helped shed light on certain shortcomings in coverage of by-elections. Unlike a general election, to which significant resources are dedicated, by-elections receive more modest coverage — which, I noted, can easily jeopardize the balance principle, because of the limited number of stories and interviews. I therefore thought it was a good idea to call News management's attention to the “need for improved co-ordination between departments in the case of a by-election, to have a better overall view of coverage and avoid causing or exacerbating a lack of balance.”

The Regional Media teams, for their part, were asked to respond to 67 complaints, four of which led to reviews:

[*Des soupçons sans fondement \(ICI Alberta\)*](#)

[*Recalcul : le tramway de Québec \(ICI Québec\)*](#)

[*Sources de doute \(ICI Québec\)*](#)

[*Un contrat est un contrat \(ICI Ottawa-Gatineau\)*](#)

The fourth of those reviews provided the opportunity for ICI Ottawa-Gatineau management to issue a constructive reminder to its teams about the importance of respecting the so-called interview contract (i.e., the boundaries of the topics that a person has agreed to talk about during an interview). While it is true that the term “interview contract” appears nowhere in the JSP, in the interests of fairness and maintaining public trust, journalists must

inform their interviewees of the topic of the interview, without actually letting them know what specific questions will be asked.

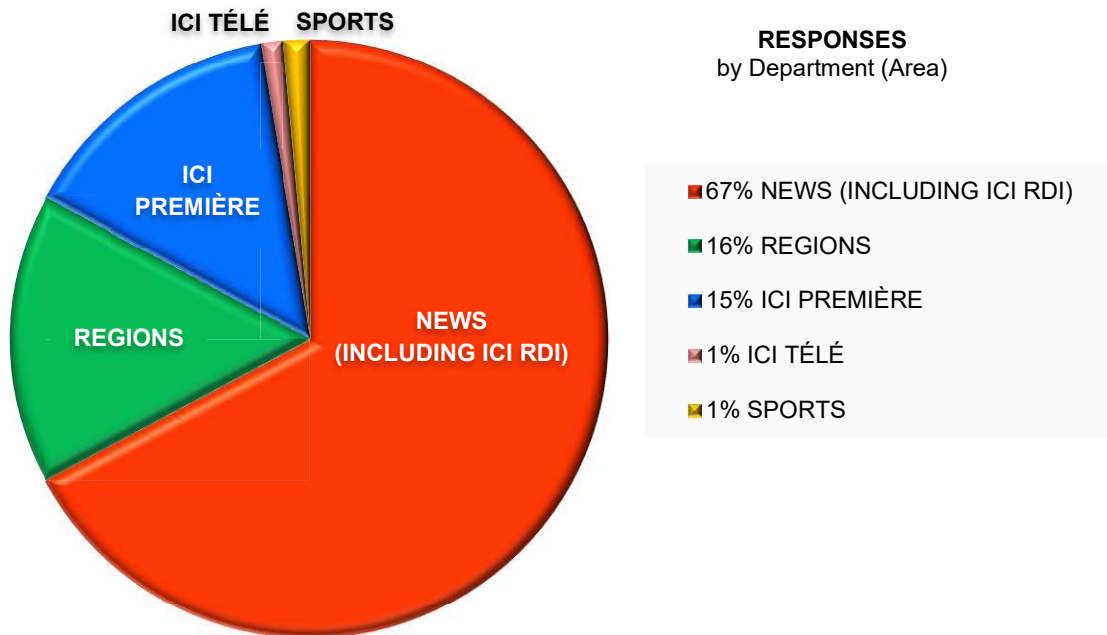
Lastly, ICI PREMIÈRE responded to 62 complaints about radio content, three of which resulted in reviews:

[Fragile équilibre \(Tout un matin\)](#)

[Manipuler avec soin \(De l'huile sur le feu\)](#)

[Quand l'invité refuse d'entrer dans la danse](#)

Note that, of the 62 complaints fielded by ICI PREMIÈRE, 50 pertained to the same [interview](#), aired on *De l'huile sur le feu* on September 17, 2023, with writer and producer Mara Joly. In the resulting review, [Manipuler avec soin](#), I concluded that the interview itself was compliant with the JSP, but that a breach had occurred when a clip was posted on the Instagram social platform, since not even a modicum of context had been provided. In my opinion, ICI PREMIÈRE management acted with diligence and transparency in removing the post in question and adding a warning on the program page.



Reviews concerning content seen on TV:

[Histoire de camp \(Téléjournal\)](#)

[Contextes et équilibre \(Téléjournal\)](#)

[Le retour d'un totem et la mémoire de Marius Barbeau \(Téléjournal\)](#)

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[Sources de doute \(ICI Québec\)](#)

[Vandalisme et liberté d'expressions \(RC.ca\)](#)

Review concerning **multiplatform coverage**:

[Ces mots décrivent-ils bien ce qui se passe au Proche-Orient?](#)

CONCLUSION

The trend observed in recent years seems to be gathering momentum: Discourse is becoming harsher, positions more radical, and there is no longer any room for nuance. Nearly 80 years ago, Albert Camus wrote the following:

« [W]e live in a world of abstraction, a world of bureaucracy and machinery, of absolute ideas and messianism without subtlety. We gasp for air among people who believe they are absolutely right, whether it be in their machines or their ideas. And for all who cannot live without dialogue and the friendship of other human beings, this silence is the end of the world. »

— Albert Camus, *The Century of Fear*, 1946

Camus was alluding to terrorism in its various guises, but his remarks strike me as still relevant today, given the impermeability of our echo chambers, those spaces where ideas circulate without any danger of their adherents being challenged, or swayed in their beliefs, whatever they may be. Seen from the extremes, nuance is sometimes perceived as a sign of weakness or a refusal to commit. It seems that anyone who tries to take up a centrist position is doomed to upsetting people, being too far right for some, and too far left for others. And yet this is the tricky position in which the public broadcaster must remain, for the benefit of those who form the so-called silent majority. This, in the interest of dialogue and open-mindedness.

Before I conclude my third annual report, I must mention the forthcoming departure of my English Services counterpart and invaluable ally Jack Nagler, who will be moving on to new challenges at the end of 2024. I thank him wholeheartedly for his patience and generosity, and for the wonderful wisdom he has shared with me for nearly three years.

I also extend my gratitude to Catherine Tait, whose term will come to an end in a few months' time, and whose trust and discretion I have appreciated.

And finally, at the risk of repeating myself, warmest wishes to Laure Simonet, who retired at the end of February after 18 years with the Office of the French Services Ombudsman. Laure can rest assured that the insights she so generously shared with the incoming

administrator, Mariline Laverdure, have ensured a smooth transition and helped the Office of the Ombudsman to fulfil its ongoing mission with diligence and efficiency.

Jack, Catherine, Laure and Mariline: I thank you.

Pierre Champoux
Ombudsman, French Services

APPENDIX I

COMPLAINTS FORWARDED TO DEPARTMENTS FOR A RESPONSE

BY MEDIA LINE

	TV (INCLUDING ICI RDI)	RADIO	WEB	RADIO-WEB-TV
2023-2024	238	97	92	0
2022-2023	393	56	121	4
2021-2022	132	56	81	7
2020-2021	109	57	122	7
2019-2020	118	33	105	11

BY DEPARTMENT

	NEWS	REGIONS	ICI PREMIÈRE	ICI TÉLÉ	SPORTS	TOTAL
2023-24	287	67	62	5	6	427
2022-23	480	57	30	3	4	574

APPENDIX II

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE TIME

	COMPLAINTS PROCESSED	AVERAGE RESPONSE TIME (DAYS)
2023-2024	427	12.6
2022-2023	574	12.2
2021-2022	276	11.7
2020-2021	295	8.5
2019-2020	267	7.9

APPENDIX III

REVIEWS BY THE OMBUDSMAN

	NUMBER OF OMBUDSMAN REVIEWS REQUESTED	AVERAGE TURNAROUND TIME FOR REVIEWS (DAYS)
2023-2024	15	37
2022-2023	18	9.1
2021-2022	31	11.5
2020-2021	25	20.4
2019-2020	29	17.5

REVIEW OUTCOMES

	COMPLAINT UNFOUNDED	COMPLAINT FOUNDED, IN PART	COMPLAINT FOUNDED
2023-2024	9	0	6
2022-2023	13	2	3
2021-2022	24	2	5
2020-2021	19	2	4
2019-2020	15	8	6

APPENDIX IV

MANDATE OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

| PRINCIPLES

CBC-Radio-Canada is fully committed to maintaining accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity in its journalism, as expressed in its unique code of ethics and practice, the Journalistic Standards and Practices. Our journalistic mission is to inform, to reveal, to contribute to the understanding of issues of public interest and to encourage citizens to participate in our free and democratic society. We base our credibility on fulfilling that mission through adherence to the values, principles and practices laid out in the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

The Ombudsman is completely independent of Radio-Canada program staff and management, reporting directly to the President of CBC/Radio-Canada and, through the President, to the Corporation's Board of Directors.

| MANDATE

Audience Complaints and Comments

The Ombudsman acts as an appeal authority for complainants who are dissatisfied with responses from Radio-Canada information or program management.

The Ombudsman generally intervenes only when a correspondent deems a response from a representative of the Corporation unsatisfactory and so informs the Office of the Ombudsman. However, the Ombudsman may also intervene when the Corporation fails to respond to a complaint within a reasonable time.

The Ombudsman determines whether the journalistic process or the broadcast involved in the complaint did, in fact, violate the Corporation's Journalistic Standards and Practices. The gathering of facts is a non-judicial process and the Ombudsman does not examine the civil liability of the Corporation or its journalists. The Ombudsman informs the complainant and the staff and management concerned of the review's findings and posts such findings on the Ombudsman's website.

As necessary, the Ombudsman identifies major public concerns as gleaned from complaints received by the Office and advises Radio-Canada management and journalists accordingly.

The Ombudsman and Radio-Canada management may agree that the Ombudsman undertake periodic studies on overall coverage of specific issues when it is felt there may

be a problem and will advise Radio-Canada management and journalists of the results of such studies.

The Ombudsman establishes a central registry of complaints and comments regarding information content, and alerts journalists and managers on a regular basis to issues that are causing public concern.

The Ombudsman prepares and presents an annual report to the President and the Board of Directors of the Corporation summarizing how complaints were dealt with and reviewing the main issues handled by the Office of the Ombudsman in the previous year. The report includes mention of the actions, if any, taken by management as a result of the Ombudsman's findings, provided such disclosure does not contravene applicable laws, regulations or collective agreements. The annual report, or a summary thereof, is made public.

The Office of the Ombudsman reports annually on how each media component has met the CBC/Radio-Canada standard of service for the expeditious handling of complaints.

| COMPLIANCE WITH JOURNALISTIC POLICY

The Office of the Ombudsman is responsible for evaluating compliance with the Journalistic Standards and Practices in all content under its jurisdiction. It can be assisted in this role by independent advice panels.

Panel members are chosen by the Ombudsman. Their mandate is to assess content over a period of time, or the overall coverage of a particular issue by many programs, and report their findings to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will advise Radio-Canada management and journalists of these findings.

The evaluation measures performance in respecting the fundamental principles of Radio-Canada journalism. All employees of Radio-Canada News, as well as the content they create, and employees of Local Services, Radio Talk information programming, or any service involved in the creation of news, current affairs and public affairs content must respect all of the principles of the Journalistic Standards and Practices namely:

- Accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity.

With the exception of fiction and comedy, content produced by other employees which touches on politics, social issues, economics, cultural issues, scientific issues or sports — particularly if the issues are controversial — must respect the following principles:

- Accuracy, fairness and balance.

User-generated content, when incorporated into information programming, must conform with the principles of the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Moreover, in an election or referendum period, the Journalistic Standards and Practices applies to all content related to the campaign, parties or candidates that is broadcast and published by Radio-Canada, regardless of the department concerned.

The Journalistic Standards and Practices applies to all news, current affairs and public affairs content commissioned by Radio-Canada and produced by third parties.

The Office reports bi-annually.

| JURISDICTION

The jurisdiction of the Office of the Ombudsman covers all content, produced for radio, television or the internet (including social media used by Radio-Canada) that falls within the scope of the Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Complaints beyond the Ombudsman's mandate should be addressed directly to the programs concerned, or Audience Relations.

| APPOINTMENT

When filling the Ombudsman's position, the Corporation openly seeks candidates from outside as well as inside the Corporation.

After appropriate consultation, the President and CEO establishes a selection committee of four. Two members, including the committee chair, must be from the public. People currently employed by the Corporation or employed by the Corporation within the previous three years will be excluded from nomination as public members. The other committee members are chosen, one among Radio-Canada's management, the other among its working journalists. At least one of the above selection committee members shall be Indigenous or from an equity-seeking community such as racialized Canadians. Canadians with disabilities, and Canadians who self-identify as LGBTQ2. Members representing the Corporation and journalists jointly select the committee chair among the two representatives of the public.

The selection committee examines applications and selects a candidate to be recommended for appointment by the President and CEO. When evaluating candidates for the position of Ombudsman, the selection committee shall consider candidates' awareness of and sensitivity to the diversity, experiences and voices of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and Canadians.

The Ombudsman appointment is for a term of five years. This term may be extended for no more than five additional years. The Ombudsman's contract cannot be terminated except for gross misconduct or in instances where the Ombudsman's actions have been found to be inconsistent with the Corporation's Code of Conduct.

The outgoing Ombudsman may not occupy any other position at Radio-Canada for a period of two years following the end of his/her term but can, at the discretion of the incoming Ombudsman, be contracted to work for the Office of the Ombudsman.

Office of the ombudsman

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2. RESPONSE TO THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE FRENCH SERVICES' OMBUDSMAN

TO: Broadcasting and Innovation Committees

MEETING: June 13, 2024

FROM: Luce Julien, General Manager News, Radio-Canada

SUBJECT: News and Current Affairs, French Services Management
Response to the 2023-24 Annual Report of the French Services' ombudsman

INTRODUCTION

French Services News & Current Affairs management thanks the Radio-Canada Ombudsman, Pierre Champoux, for his work during the last year and takes note of the conclusions in his annual report covering the year 2023-24.


The presentation of the Ombudsman's report is among the opportunities we have to delve into the very essence of our profession. To pause and reflect on some fundamental questions about our work: What is it that we do? Why do we do it? How do we do it?

It is an important moment that allows us take stock of the year gone by and to draw lessons from it.

The year 2023 was one of conflicts.

The war in Ukraine, first of all. That conflict, which it was hoped would be short-lived, has dragged on.

And then there is the Middle East. In this part of the world where, sadly, surges of violence are commonplace, the most recent example, on October 7, 2023, was sudden and brutal.



Since then, the two sides have waged not only a ground war, but also one of image and public relations, forcing media entities to weigh the significance of words every day.

And speaking of words, more generally, this year also focused on the ills of the French language, which according to many complainants is being mistreated.

With that in mind, we have decided to launch a number of initiatives that aim to promote improvements to our language skills.

In addition, the past year has seen us examine the question of gender identity through a new lens — that of gender-affirming care.

Visceral reactions from many viewers prompted us to reiterate the public broadcaster's duty to turn its attention to all topics, even the most sensitive ones.

Lastly, we are looking ahead to the 2024 review of the Journalistic Standards and Practices, something we do every six or seven years.

COMPLAINTS

The number of complaints about content subject to the CBC/Radio-Canada Journalistic Standards and Practices (JSP) decreased by 10% during the year, to 1,244.

The various management departments were asked to respond to 427 of them.

Two-thirds of those (i.e., 287 complaints) directly concerned news content on the main radio and TV networks, online and on ICI RDI. That was a decline of 40% compared with the preceding year.

The Ombudsman received a total of 15 requests for review, of which eight concerned the News department, four pertained to Regional Media and three were about content on ICI PREMIÈRE.

In six cases, the Ombudsman found that there had been a breach of the JSP.

He concluded that three News stories had breached the JSP:

- [*Contextes et équilibre*](#) (*Le Téléjournal*).
- [*Électrosensibilité, consensus et transparence*](#) (Radio-Canada.ca).
- [*Le retour d'un totem et la mémoire de Marius Barbeau*](#) (*Le Téléjournal* and Radio-Canada.ca).



In addition, he found that one interview by Regional Media had breached the JSP:

- [Un contrat est un contrat](#) (ICI Ottawa-Gatineau).

As had two on ICI PREMIÈRE:

- [Fragile équilibre](#) (*Tout un matin*).
- [Manipuler avec soin](#) (*De l'huile sur le feu*).

TOPICS

The Israel-Hamas conflict: A war of words

In times of conflict, words are often tools for making political demands, and the weapons of choice for factions waging an image war.

The controversy over the spellings “Kiev” and “Kyiv” that made headlines soon after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is one example.

The Israel-Hamas conflict provides yet more, showing us that words carry weight, and the way they are wielded is seldom harmless.

Our coverage of that war alone resulted in 278 complaints and comments last year.


Around thirty complainants demanded that we justify our decision to circumscribe the use of the terms *guerre*, *terrorisme*, *terroriste* and *génocide* (“war,” “terrorism,” “terrorist” and “genocide”).

Fortunately, very swiftly after the attack by Hamas, we held team meetings and consulted with experts and academics specializing in fields relevant to the matter: international law, armed conflicts and security, the Middle East, and multilateral co-operation in matters of international security.

Taken together, that expertise allowed us to explain to our audience that the word *war* is not restricted to descriptions of armed conflict between two states.

It can also be used when the parties are, on the one hand, a state (Israel) and, on the other, a non-state entity (Hamas) that controls a territory and is liable to engage in repeated hostilities.

Moreover, in the case that concerns us, there are several criteria allowing us to state that Israel and Hamas are at war:

- 
- The scale of the logistical operations and the number of victims.
 - The deployment of a major national army (Israel's) on multiple fronts (land, sea and air).
 - The use of significant and diversified weaponry.
 - The phenomenon of urban guerilla warfare present in the Gaza Strip.

Added to that is the fact that Radio-Canada has always urged its journalists to tread carefully when using any terms that could give the impression of bias.

Consistent with those of media entities including the BBC, Associated Press, Agence France-Presse, Reuters and the Globe and Mail, Radio-Canada's policy is that the words *terrorism* or *terrorist* are to be used only when attributed to a specific source: a politician, an expert, a contributor and so on.

We believe that journalists are capable of describing acts — even the most violent and upsetting of acts — without qualification.

The same goes for *genocide*. All the more so given that at this time, specialists are not in agreement with respect to events in Gaza and prefer to speak of “the risk of genocide.”

International bodies will be in a position to rule on the issue with the benefit of hindsight, time and analysis. Radio-Canada cannot be a substitute for the authorities in that respect.

More recently, a viewer wrote to us to say:

We are reading and hearing on your platforms the pejorative, inaccurate expression “Ministère de la Santé du Hamas” (“Hamas Health Ministry”) when the proper expression is “Ministère de la Santé de Gaza” (“Gaza Health Ministry”).

Hamas is de facto a party, an organization; it is not Gaza itself.

This choice of words is prejudicial to the Palestinian people and to the impartiality of news broadcast on Radio-Canada and in (too) many other media, unfortunately.

Would we say or write “The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) Health Minister” in Quebec or “the Liberal Party of Canada Justice Minister” in Canada? [Freely translated.]

We argued that the designation *Ministère de la Santé du Hamas* does not conform to established codes because it is difficult to find an accurate name in French that would distinguish that entity from the West Bank Ministry of Health, also known as the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

We emphasized that the matter is more complicated than it appears at first glance.

For example, we might employ the term ***Ministère de la Santé de Gaza géré par le Hamas***





(“Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry”) to denote that it is not an autonomous entity.

But in choosing that title, would we not run the risk of implying that said entity lacks credibility?

We know full well that every term used is scrutinized by both sides in the conflict — that the slightest nuance is analyzed.

As a result, media outlets must weigh various arguments against each other to preserve their neutrality and independence.

The Israel-Hamas conflict: a matter of balance

The Ombudsman wrote in his report:

Like our CBC counterpart, we believe that, whenever possible, we should resist the temptation to shelter behind the “balance over time” explanation, however valid it may be on occasion, and think about ways of demonstrating to Canadians the concrete efforts made to ensure balanced coverage....

Striving for balance is the main impetus for our work.

In the context of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, however, trying to reach that goal is increasingly tantamount solving a difficult jigsaw puzzle.

This war is so complex, its roots in history so deep, that in spite of our best efforts, some people can have the impression that our coverage is unbalanced.

This is compounded by the fact that Gaza is de facto inaccessible by foreign journalists who would like to freely conduct their work there, which prevents us from reporting on the reality on the ground.

Fortunately, our correspondents have been able to travel to the West Bank and report on the situation from there.

Gender identity

This is another sensitive topic that elicited some very strong reactions.

Even before it was broadcast, detractors of the “Trans express” segment on the program *Enquête* had begun arming themselves.



In the days following the broadcast, protests erupted on all sides.

We heard from more than 60 complainants.

The segment did not cover all of the issues surrounding gender transition. We had chosen a more specific angle: the speed with which gender-affirming medical care can be offered to minors.

The topic had already polarized discussions.

Some people claimed that we had targeted the trans youth community; others questioned the credibility of the experts we quoted.

Still others took us to task for not giving enough attention to young people whose transition experience has been positive.

We must point out that, by its very nature and its complexity, this topic required us to enter the private sphere of the families we approached.

As a result, it was extremely difficult to persuade them to tell us their stories on-camera. Despite our best efforts, many of them turned us down.

In short, we called many people but, alas, persuaded very few.

Even people who were happy with the gender-affirming care they received expressed their reluctance and declined to comment for our story.


We can never overstate how mindful we are of the strength of character it took for those who did agree to our request to open up, in all their vulnerability, and to candidly share their experiences.

That said, we remind the reader that the role of the media is to examine social, political, economic and other matters.

Sensitive or taboo subjects must not be ignored — quite the contrary.

They are necessary, because they enrich public debate.

“Whatever is well conceived is clearly said, and the words to say it flow with ease.” — Nicolas Boileau



Radio-Canada staff have always cared about the quality of the French language.

The same is true of our audience members, who have consistently viewed the public broadcaster as a benchmark when it comes to language.

And yet, for some time now, our audience has become increasingly demanding.

They criticize our mistakes, our violations of linguistic codes, and are quick to call us out.

True, the language of Molière is not always easy to work with, and some linguistic skills upgrading is occasionally needed to counter the encroachment of anglicisms and to restore our reference points.

With that in mind, we recently introduced a series of initiatives designed to guide and support our news professionals.

We got the ball rolling with a survey, which found that:

- 71% of respondents graded the quality of French in our news content 8/10 or better.
- 51% consider that the quality of French at Radio-Canada has declined in recent years, while 43% feel it is stable.

We then took advantage of March, Francophonie Month, to launch a quiz game called *Le français, ça me parle!* (“French speaks to me!”).

The quiz questions, which challenge players to identify common errors, are now featured on digital displays at Maison de Radio-Canada.

They will remain there for the rest of the year.

And that is not all: A second initiative underway aims to pair interested employees with designated co-workers to receive comments and advice.

This is a start. Already, though, we can feel some ripples of pride spreading through the teams at Radio-Canada.



WORKSTREAMS

Visibility

The French Service Ombudsman noticed that improvements have been made when it comes to the discoverability and visibility of his office. However, he observed that:

The Radio-Canada Info and OHdio mobile apps both provide a link to the reviews page, but RC Info is still the only one that links directly to the home page of the Ombudsman's site. In any event, locating these links in the apps is no easy task, in my opinion, because they are relegated to the *Réglages* [Settings] section and not, as would seem appropriate, included directly in the content that might be subject to complaint.

We forwarded that comment to Maxime St-Pierre, Executive Director, Digital Services, French Services. He summed up the work being done in his area:

In the past year, Radio-Canada has implemented mechanisms to improve the discoverability of the Ombudsman's site, that is, in the mobile apps RC Info and RC OHdio, as well as in the footers of all pages of the [Radio-Canada.ca](https://www.radio-canada.ca) site.

We are now planning to enhance discoverability of the Ombudsman's site in the coming year, improving its visibility on all news story pages, including in our mobile applications and directly on the website. [Freely translated.]


Artificial intelligence

A recent [report](#) by our journalist Jean-François Bélanger explored advances in the use of artificial intelligence by media.

He noted the extent to which AI could radically alter how the news consumed by the public is created — such that it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

I deemed it necessary to respond and to reassure our audience that we have every intention of safeguarding the profession:

Clearly, artificial intelligence will be a tool for the practice of journalism. We cannot ignore that AI is now a fact of life. Will we eventually see a Radio-Canada newscast read by digital avatars? The answer is no. Our role is to try to separate truth from falsehood every day. So we are not going to contribute to weakening journalism —



because that's what this is about. Using AI as a tool is one thing. For it to become the engine of a news department? I really can't imagine that. [Freely translated.]

In addition, on May 15, 2024, CBC/Radio-Canada published its [approach to artificial intelligence](#).

The approach, which emphasizes “care and transparency,” is grounded in seven principles previously stated by News & Current Affairs management that serve to guide us in making responsible use of AI in all our operations.

Review of the Journalistic Standards and Practices

The preliminary work ahead of the review of the JSP recently began.

AI will certainly be among the main topics of the consultations to be held this year.

CONCLUSION

Fielding and processing complaints is an exercise in humility.

It requires us to admit our errors, when necessary, and correct them.

It gives us the opportunity to respond to questions our audiences ask of us. To explain to them what we do, and how and why.

We believe that a pedagogical approach is a powerful antidote to public distrust and disenchantment.

The thanks and compliments we receive as part of that process are evidence of this, and they are not to be taken lightly — even though there are far fewer of them than there are grievances.

We thank the staff members who take part in the process and, in so doing, demonstrate their profound commitment to our wonderful profession.

Lastly, we are grateful to Pierre Champoux for his invaluable wise counsel.