

Study: A look at immigration, ethnocultural diversity and languages in Canada up to 2036, 2011 to 2036

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On the eve of the 150th anniversary of Confederation on July 1, 2017, Canada can be described as a nation of ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity. This diversity stems from the Aboriginal people who lived here well before the first European settlers arrived, as well as from various waves of international migration over time. The country's diversity also evolved as English and French became the languages of convergence and integration into Canadian society.

According to the first census conducted four years after Confederation in 1867, 16.1% of the 3.7 million people in Canada were born abroad. The main countries of birth of immigrants were then the British Isles (84%), the United States (11%) and Germany (4%).

In 1871, 31.1% of the population was of French origin, 24.3% of Irish origin, 20.3% of English origin, 15.8% of Scottish origin and 5.8% of German origin. Three decades later, in 1901—when the census collected data on language for the first time—61.8% of Canada's population had English as their mother tongue, followed by 27.9% with French, 2.7% with German, and 2.2% with Gaelic.

Since the early 1990s, immigrants have accounted for an ever-increasing share of Canada's population on account of sustained immigration, progressively increasing numbers of deaths and relatively low fertility.

Using the most recent methodological developments in demography, new population projections have been developed at Statistics Canada. These projections provide a portrait of what the ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Canadian population could look like up to 2036, according to various scenarios and assumptions.

The results of these population projections, presented today in two new reports, reveal that the proportion of immigrants in the Canadian population could continue to increase until 2036 and could be almost twice as high as in 1871. As a result, the country's language and ethnocultural composition would change in all the scenarios selected.

Nearly one in two Canadians could be an immigrant or the child of an immigrant by 2036

According to the report *Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036*, if current immigration levels continue in the coming years, the proportion of immigrants in Canada's population could reach between 24.5% and 30.0% in 2036, compared with 20.7% in 2011.

The projected increase in the proportion of immigrants up to 2036 could affect the future proportion of the second-generation population, that is, the population with at least one parent born abroad. In all scenarios, nearly one in five people (19.7%) would be second generation in 2036, up from 17.5% in 2011.

Immigrants and second-generation individuals combined, who represented 38.2% of Canada's population in 2011, could account for nearly one in two people (between 44.2% and 49.7%) in 2036.

The immigrant population would continue to be concentrated in the census metropolitan areas in 2036, particularly Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver

According to the results of these projections, the geographic distribution of immigrants in 2036 would be similar to the 2011 estimate. For example, in 2011, 9 in 10 immigrants lived in a census metropolitan area (CMA), a proportion that could be between 91.7% and 93.4% in 2036. At the end of the projection period, as in 2011, Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver would remain the three main places of residence of immigrants. In 2036, 33.6% to 39.1% of all immigrants in Canada would live in Toronto; 13.9% to 14.6% in Montréal; and 12.4% to 13.1% in Vancouver.



The projection results show that from 2011 to 2036, the proportion of immigrants in the population would increase in almost all regions of the country, although regional differences would remain. The proportion of immigrants in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec (except Montréal) and in non-CMAs would remain below the Canadian average at the end of the projection period.

In 2036, the five CMAs with the highest proportions of immigrants in their populations would be Toronto (between 46.0% and 52.8%), Vancouver (between 42.1% and 48.5%), Calgary (between 32.7% and 40.8%), Montréal (between 28.4% and 34.2%) and Winnipeg (between 29.2% and 40.5%).

The proportion that the immigrant and second-generation populations together would represent in the total Canadian population would also continue to be very different from one region to the next at the end of the projection period. In 2036, these proportions could be between 77.0% and 81.4% in Toronto and between 69.4% and 74.0% in Vancouver, compared with between 3.8% and 4.7% in the non-CMA parts of Newfoundland and Labrador and between 5.0% and 6.4% in Saguenay.

More than half of immigrants in Canada would be of Asian origin in 2036

If recent trends in the composition of immigration remain the same throughout the projection, in 2036 between 55.7% and 57.9% of Canada's immigrant population would be Asian-born, up from 44.8% in 2011. Conversely, the proportion of European immigrants would decrease from 31.6% in 2011 to between 15.4% and 17.8% in 2036. Therefore, the arrival of many individuals born abroad affects not only population growth, but also the ethnocultural and language composition of the immigrant population.

Over one-third of the working-age population in 2036 would belong to a visible minority group

In 2036, among the population aged 15 to 64, often referred to as the working-age population, between 34.7% and 39.9% would belong to a visible minority group, up from 19.6% in 2011. The proportion of the 15-to-64 population who are members of a visible minority would increase in all areas of the country between now and 2036. South Asian would still be the group with the most people in 2036, as was the case in 2011.

The proportion of people with a non-Christian religion would increase between now and 2036

The number of people with a non-Christian religion could almost double by 2036, accounting for between 13% and 16% of Canada's population, compared with 9% in 2011. Within this group, the Muslim (between 5.6% and 7.2% of the total population in 2036), Hindu (between 2.5% and 2.9%) and Sikh (between 2.3% and 2.7%) faiths would see the number of their followers grow more quickly because of their representation among immigrants, although they would still represent a small proportion of the total Canadian population.

The number of unaffiliated people would continue to increase and could represent between 28.2% and 34.6% of all Canadians in 2036.

More than one-quarter of the Canadian population in 2036 would have a mother tongue other than English or French

According to the second report entitled *Language Projections for Canada, 2011 to 2036*, the continuation of immigration trends would contribute to the growth of the population whose mother tongue and language most often spoken at home is neither English nor French.

In 2011, the population whose mother tongue was neither English nor French totalled 6.9 million and accounted for 20.0% of the Canadian population. In 2036, this population could reach between 10.7 million and 13.8 million people, or between 26.1% and 30.6% of the Canadian population. In 2011, this population had speakers of nearly 200 different languages.

Immigration and its composition would have other effects on the diversification of official-language communities and the Canadian language portrait up to 2036.

Decline in the proportion of the English- and French-mother-tongue populations up to 2036

The proportion of Canada's English-mother-tongue population could decline from 58.7% in 2011 to between 52% and 56% in 2036, while the proportion of the French-mother-tongue population could decrease from 21.3% in 2011 to 17% or 18% in 2036. French would by far remain the most prevalent mother tongue after English, with between 7.5 million and 7.8 million speakers in 2036. In comparison, in 2011, none of the other mother tongues had a population of 500,000 persons.

The proportion of the French-mother-tongue population could decline in both Quebec (from 79% in 2011 to between 69% and 72% in 2036 in the three main projection scenarios) and in the rest of Canada (from 3.8% in 2011 to between 2.7% and 2.8% in 2036). Other scenarios with different internal migration patterns show that the decrease in the proportion of the French-mother-tongue population in Canada outside Quebec could be more modest.

Meanwhile, the share of the English-mother-tongue population could either grow or decline in Quebec (from 8.2% in 2011 to between 7.9% and 8.8% in 2036), mainly due to immigration, but decrease in the rest of Canada (from 74% in 2011 to between 64% and 69% in 2036).

A strong majority of the population would continue to speak English or French most often at home

By 2036, between 45% and 48% of the other-mother-tongue population would have adopted English or French as their home language. As a result, the English-home-language population could represent 64% to 67% of the total Canadian population (68% in 2011), while French as the language spoken most often at home could fall from 21% in 2011 to approximately 18% in 2036. In total, in 2036, 82% to 85% of the Canadian population would speak one of the two official languages most often at home.

Outside Quebec, this proportion would be between 81% and 85% (with French accounting for 1.8% to 1.9%) and in Quebec, the proportion would be between 87% and 89% (with English accounting for close to 13%).

As the first official language spoken, English to increase and French to decrease by 2036

Regarding the country's two official languages, the projections indicate that the population whose first official language spoken (FOLS) is English could rise from 75.4% in 2011 to approximately 78% in 2036. This would correspond to between 31.9 million and 35.3 million people by 2036, versus 25.9 million in 2011. In 2036, the French FOLS population could be between 8.6 million and 9.2 million (7.8 million in 2011), falling from 23% of the Canadian population in 2011 to less than 21%.

In Canada excluding Quebec, English would be the FOLS of 95% of the population, while in Quebec, the English-language population defined by this criterion would increase from 13.6% in 2011 to between 16.7% and 17.5% in 2036. This increase in English in Quebec would be the result of both international migration and the adoption of English as the language spoken most often at home by part of the other-mother-tongue population living in Quebec.

Moreover, Quebec's French FOLS population could fall from 85.4% in 2011 to approximately 82% in 2036. In Canada excluding Quebec, this population could decrease from 3.9% in 2011 to between 3.0% and 3.6% in 2036, regardless of the scenario, due to population aging, language transfers toward English (French-mother-tongue people speaking English most often at home), and the incomplete transmission of French to children.

More diverse official-language populations

As in 2011, the English FOLS population could be more ethnoculturally diverse than the French FOLS population in 2036. However, the growth of the population with an immigration background would be higher in the French FOLS population.

Between 48% and 53% of Canada's English FOLS population could have an immigration background in 2036, compared with 44% in 2011. Furthermore, between 26% and 31% of the French FOLS population would have an immigration background in 2036, up from 15% in 2011.

Despite an increase in the number of speakers, the percentage of the Canadian population able to speak French could decrease between 2011 and 2036

The percentage of the Canadian population able to speak French could decrease from 29.8% in 2011 to between 27.6% and 28.4% in 2036. However, the total number of French speakers could rise from 10.2 million people in 2011 to between 11.7 million and 12.5 million people in 2036.

In 2036, one in two French-mother-tongue individuals would be bilingual

Depending on the immigration scenario and recent trends in acquiring the second official language, the country's English–French bilingualism rate could be roughly 18.5% in 2036, compared with 17.5% in 2011. However, additional scenarios analyzed in the language projection report show that this bilingualism rate could be higher if more people were to learn and maintain their second language, especially in Canada excluding Quebec.

Quebec's French-mother-tongue population could have the strongest growth in English–French bilingualism in Canada. This rate could be close to 49% in 2036, up from just under 39% in 2011.

Note to readers

This release presents new population projections drawn from two separate but complementary analytical reports.

*The first report, entitled *Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions, 2011 to 2036* (91-551-X), was produced with the financial support of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It presents projected results for the evolution of the immigrant population and for various ethnocultural diversity indicators.*

*The second report, *Language Projections for Canada, 2011 to 2036* (89-657-X), was produced with financial support from the Department of Canadian Heritage and IRCC. It presents projection results for the evolution of languages in Canada—the first extensive language projections to be produced by Statistics Canada.*

*Both projection reports that are the subject of today's release draw on the September 2015 report *Projections of the Aboriginal Population and Households in Canada, 2011 to 2036* (91-552-X).*

The projections in both reports were prepared using Demosim, a microsimulation-based population projection model. They are based on the 2011 National Household Survey counts (adjusted for net census undercoverage) and on other data sources.

These projections are not predictions. Rather, they are a tool to show how the ethnocultural and language composition of the Canadian population could evolve in coming years based on various growth scenarios. All the scenarios developed provide a possible population growth range according to various characteristics. Whenever possible, readers are encouraged to consider this range instead of a single scenario. The projected language characteristics do not necessarily provide a complete picture of what the language situation could be in 2036, since such projections were not prepared for other language dimensions (language of work, language used in the public sphere, etc.)

The scenarios used in both reports take into account the uncertainty surrounding the future course of the level and composition of immigration by country of birth, of the geographic distribution of immigrants, and of fertility, mortality, emigration and internal migration. In addition to all these criteria, the diversity projections take into account the uncertainty surrounding the future course of religious mobility. As regards the language projections, the scenarios and assumptions consider the uncertainty surrounding the language composition of immigration, the acquisition and maintenance of bilingualism, and language transfers during individuals' lifetimes.

To ensure continuity between both projection reports, many of the scenarios used in the two reports share the same assumptions about the level and composition of immigration and about fertility, mortality, emigration, etc. The only assumption that differs in these shared scenarios is the one pertaining to internal migration. For the language projections, the assumption is based on the average of the estimated migration patterns for the periods from 2001 to 2006 and from 2006 to 2011. For the diversity projections, the assumption also includes the period from 1996 to 2001. The reason for this distinction is that, from a language standpoint, the migration patterns for 1996 to 2001 were exceptional and are unlikely to occur again in the near future.

While both projection reports have scenarios in common, other scenarios are specific to each publication. Essentially, the purpose of these other scenarios is to highlight the uncertainty related to certain projection components specifically addressed in each of these reports.

*These projections take into account a number of components and characteristics other than those mentioned above. The methodology of the projections is described in more detail in a separate report entitled *Demosim: An Overview of the Methods and Data Sources* (91-621-X).*

In addition to the products available with this release, customized projection products can be ordered by contacting Statistics Canada.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5126](#).

The publication *Immigration and Diversity: Population Projections for Canada and its Regions*, 2011 to 2036 ([91-551-X](#)) is now available.

The publication *Language Projections for Canada*, 2011 to 2036 ([89-657-X](#)) is also available.

The publication *Demosim: An Overview of Methods and Data Sources* ([91-621-X](#)) is available.

The infographic "*Demographic, Immigration and Diversity Projections, Canada and Regions – 2011 to 2036*" and "*Language Projections for Canada, 2011 to 2036*", which are part of *Statistics Canada – Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)), are also available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).