

Infographic: Bilingualism among Canadian children and youth, 2006 to 2016

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Fifty years ago, the *Official Languages Act* made English and French Canada's two official languages and marked a new era in communication between the Canadian population and federal institutions.

In the 2016 Census, 17.9% of Canadians reported that they could hold a conversation in English and in French, the highest percentage ever recorded in the country.

The *Official Languages Act* stipulates that the federal government must make efforts to "encourage and support the learning of English and French." The federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages 2018-2023 also has a target of increasing the national English–French bilingualism rate to 20% by 2036.

In this context, it is important to have a better understanding of the dynamics of English–French bilingualism among Canadian children and youth, who are more likely to be or to become bilingual than their older counterparts. From 2006 to 2016, the bilingualism rate among youth aged 5 to 17 rose from 16% to 19% nationally.

Today, Statistics Canada is publishing a new infographic, entitled "[Bilingualism among Canadian children and youth](#)," which uses integrated 2006 and 2016 Census data. A more detailed study entitled "[Results from the 2016 Census: English-French bilingualism among Canadian children and youth](#)," published on October 3 this year in *Insights on Canadian Society*, is also available.

English–French bilingualism among Canadian children and youth varies across the country

The evolution of bilingualism among children and youth can be measured by following a cohort of youth from 2006 (when they were aged 5 to 17) to 2016 (aged 15 to 27).

In 2006, 17% of children and youth aged 5 to 17 had sufficient knowledge of both official languages to hold a conversation. By comparison, 10 years later, when they were aged 15 to 27, their bilingualism rate had risen to 27%.

However, the increase in English–French bilingualism was not the same in all provinces.

Among youth from the same cohort who lived in Quebec, just over one-quarter were bilingual in 2006. Ten years later, two-thirds were bilingual.

The bilingualism rate also rose significantly among children and youth of the same cohort who lived in New Brunswick: from 37% in 2006 to 50% in 2016.

However, the increase in English–French bilingualism among the children of this cohort was lower elsewhere in the country.

Acquisition and retention of bilingualism is higher among Quebec youth

Youth in Quebec who were not bilingual in 2006 were much more likely to become bilingual in 2016, compared with their counterparts in other provinces.

Among Quebec youth aged 5 to 17 in 2006 who were not bilingual at that time, more than half (55%) had become bilingual 10 years later, compared with 7% of youth from the same age group in Canada outside Quebec.

The retention rate of English–French bilingualism among those who were already bilingual in 2006 was also higher among Quebec youth.



In Quebec, almost all (94%) youth who were bilingual in 2006 were still bilingual in 2016—including those with French as a mother tongue.

In contrast, in Canada outside Quebec, about two-thirds (65%) of youth who were bilingual in 2006 were still bilingual in 2016. This proportion was lower among youth whose mother tongue was English (61%) or a language other than English or French (46%).

Furthermore, youth aged 14 to 17 in 2006 had lower retention rates in Canada outside Quebec. In this age group, 50% of youth with an English mother tongue who were bilingual in 2006 were still bilingual 10 years later.

In Canada outside Quebec, the English–French bilingualism retention rate was also lower among youth whose parents were not bilingual and were less educated, those who lived in a lower-income family, and those who lived in a region with a low concentration of Francophones.

Note to readers

The above results use data from the 2006 and 2016 censuses of population, as well as integrated 2006 and 2016 Census data. This integrated dataset includes answers from respondents to both the 2006 and 2016 Census of Population long-form questionnaire. With this dataset, changes in the bilingualism of respondents can be tracked over a 10-year period.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3901](#).

The infographic "[Bilingualism among Canadian children and youth](#)" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada — Infographics (11-627-M)*.

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).