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Ethnicity, Language and Immigration Thematic Series

Key facts on the French language in Nova Scotia in 2021

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Key facts on the French language in Nova Scotia in 2021

by **Nicolas Auclair**, **Catherine Frigon** and **Gabriel St-Amant**

This fact sheet gives an overview of the situation of French in Nova Scotia in 2021. First, it provides information on the changes in the number and proportion of people in the population who can conduct a conversation in French, whose first official language spoken is French, whose mother tongue is French, who speak French at home or use French at work. Next, it presents information on French-language instruction in elementary and secondary schools, on French spoken among recent and established immigrants, as well as on the mobility and place of birth of individuals whose first official language spoken is French. Additional data on these topics can be found in the appendix.

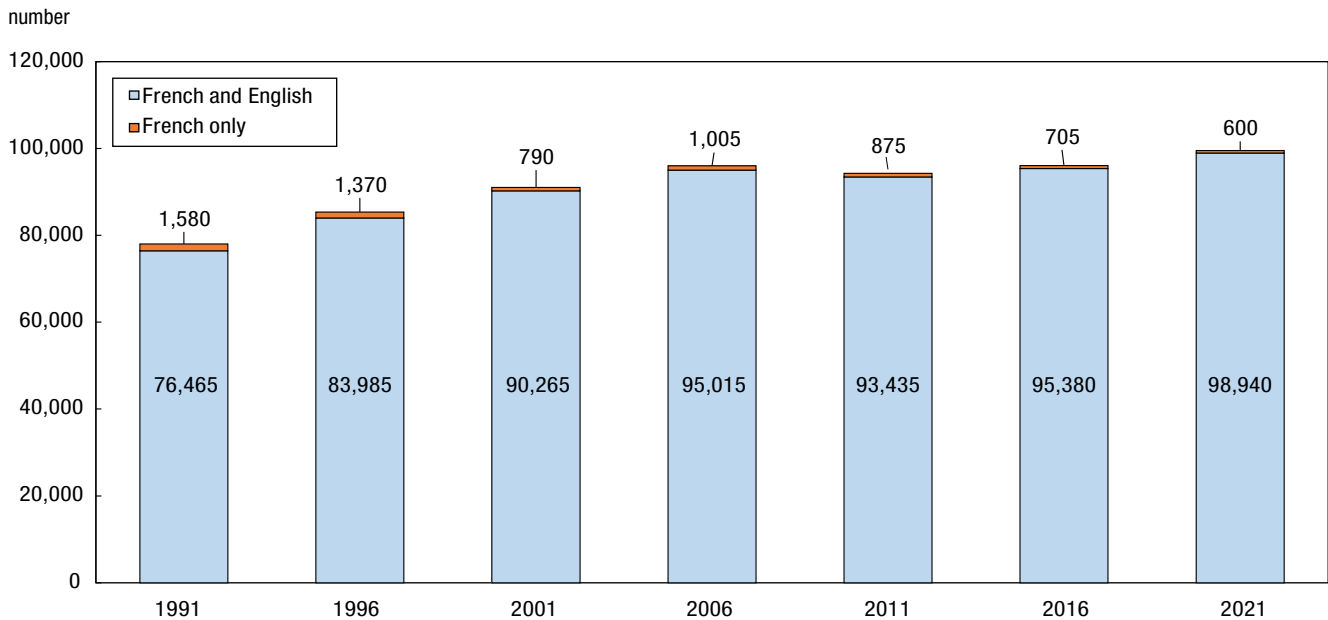
The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the Census of Population. To learn more about census concepts and the historical comparability of data, please refer to the 2021 Census of Population *Languages Reference Guide* and the *Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide*.

Highlights

- In 2021, 99,540 residents of Nova Scotia were able to conduct a conversation in French. This was up from the numbers recorded in 1991 (+21,495) and in 2016 (+3,455). The relative proportion of these residents also increased from 8.8% in 1991 to 10.6% in 2006, then fell to 10.4% in 2021.
- In 2021, 28,635 people (3.0% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home. Among those with French as one of their mother tongues, more than half (56.6%) spoke French regularly at home.
- In 2021, 13,880 workers living in the province used French at least regularly at work (3.3%). A large proportion of these people worked in educational services (22.9%) or public administration (18.8%).
- Almost 1 in 11 immigrants (8.8%) could conduct a conversation in French. This proportion was higher among immigrants admitted before 2016 (10.3%) than among immigrants admitted between 2016 and 2021 (5.2%).
- Nearly three in five (57.1%) Nova Scotians whose only first official language spoken was French in 2021 were born in that province.

Ability to conduct a conversation in French

Chart 1
Population who can have a conversation in French, Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2021

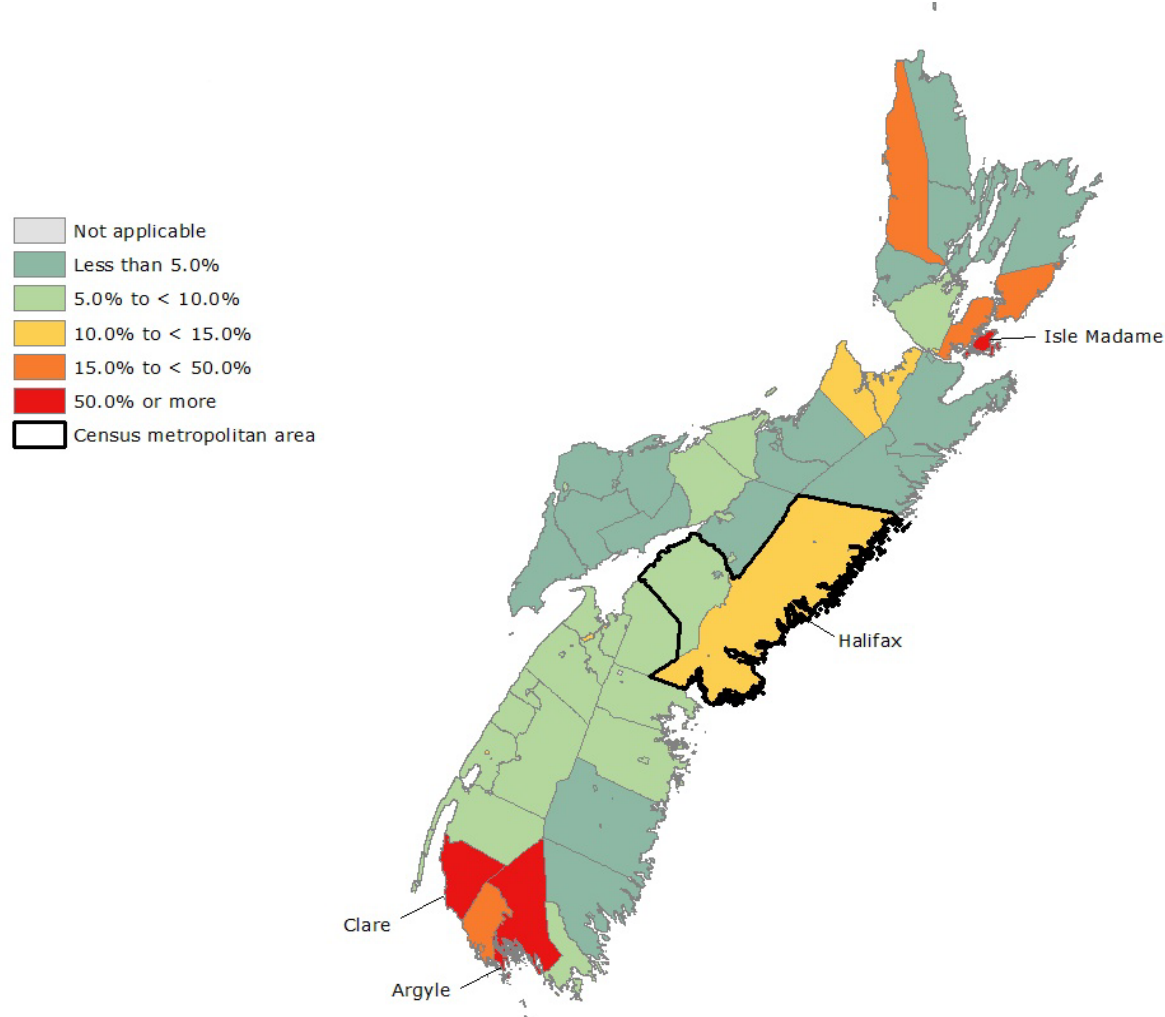


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 99,540 residents of Nova Scotia could conduct a conversation in French. Almost all (99.4%, or 98,940 people) could also do so in English.
- The number of people who can have a conversation in French has increased since 1991 (+21,495) and continued to rise from 2016 to 2021 (+3,455).
- The proportion of the population who can conduct a conversation in French has increased over the past 30 years, rising from 8.8% in 1991 to 10.4% in 2021. However, this proportion is still lower than the peak reached in 2006 (10.6%).
 - This upward trend since 1991 is mainly driven by the increase in bilingualism among individuals who learned English first during their childhood. Among people with English as their mother tongue, 39,435 (4.8%) were able to have a conversation in French in 1991, a number which rose to 62,945 (7.4%) in 2021.

Map 1

Proportion of Nova Scotia's population who could conduct a conversation in French, by census subdivision, 2021



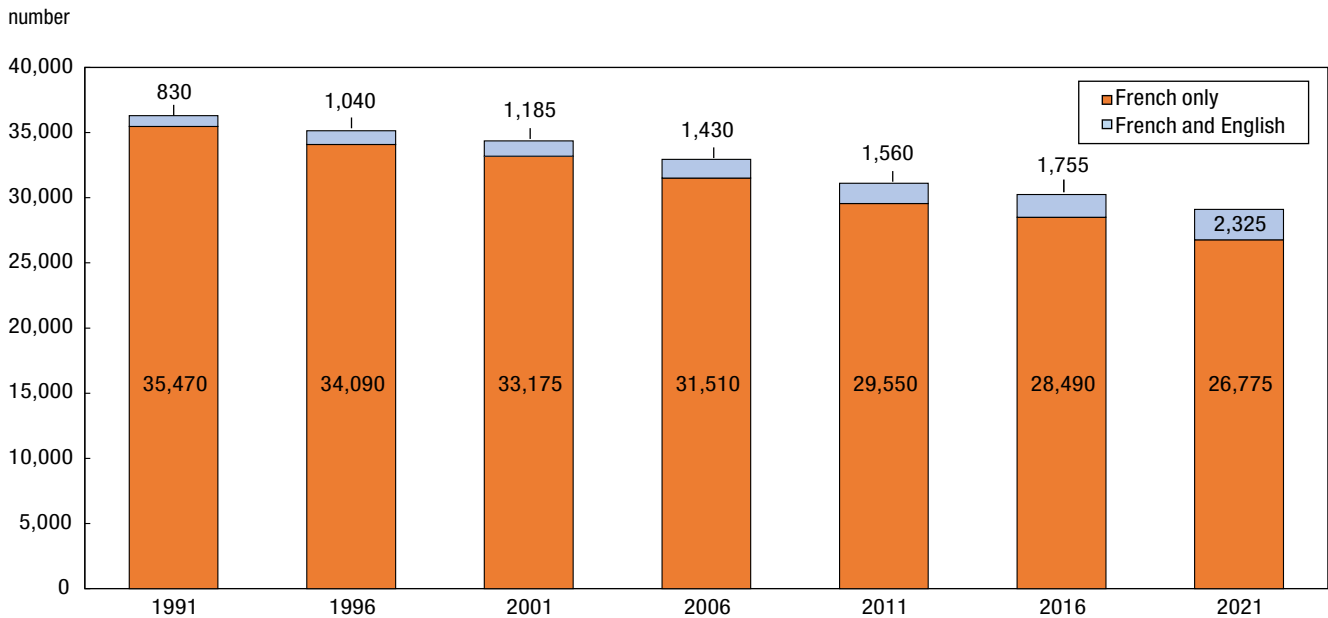
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, in 38 of Nova Scotia's 84 municipalities,¹ less than 5% of the population could conduct a conversation in French.
- The municipalities with a population of over 500 that had the highest proportion of people who spoke French were Clare (69.6%), Argyle (municipal district [MD]) (57.2%) and Richmond Subdivision C (56.0%), which includes Isle Madame.
- The municipalities with a population of over 500 that had the largest number of people who spoke French were the capital, Halifax (53,755), Clare (5,255) and Argyle (MD) (4,475).

1. In this fact sheet, "municipality" refers to a census subdivision for which data are available.

French as first official language spoken

Chart 2
Population with French as their first official language spoken, Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2021

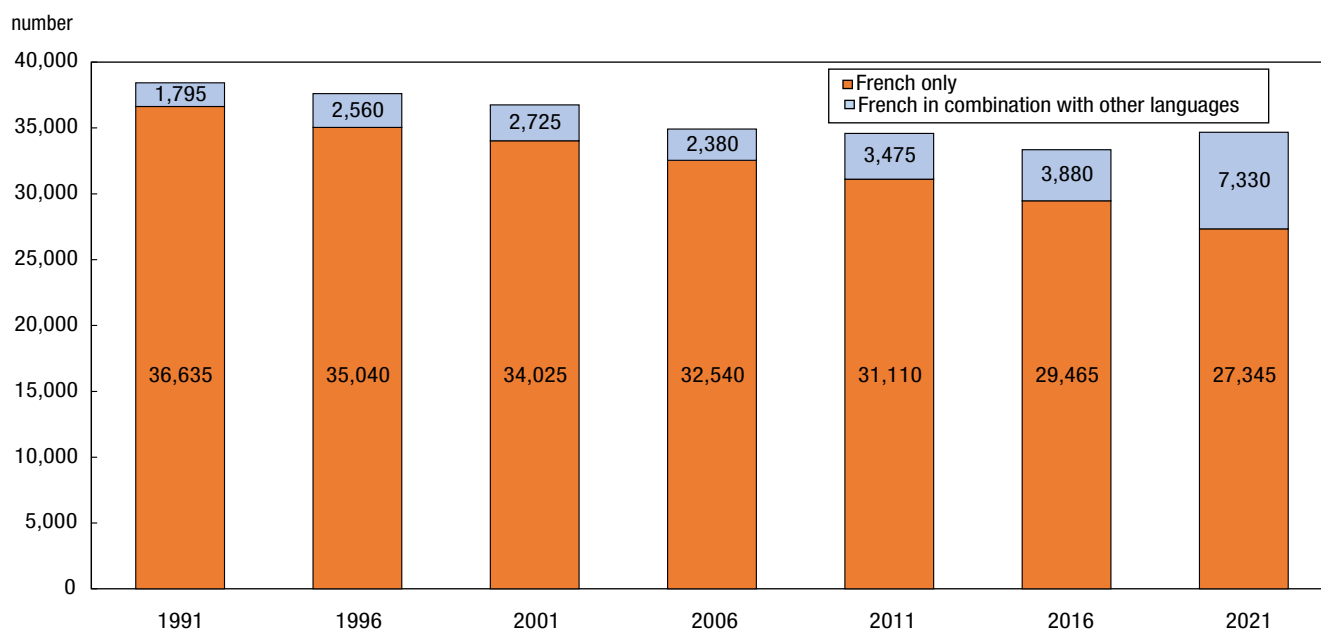


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, there were 26,775 Nova Scotians who had French as their only first official language spoken (2.8% of the population) and 2,325 had both French and English as their first official languages spoken (0.2% of the population).
 - From 1991 to 2021, there was a decline in both the number of people with French as their only first official language spoken (-8,695) and the relative proportion of this population (from 3.9% to 2.8%).
 - In 2021, 2,325 people had both French and English as their first official languages spoken, up from 1991 (+1,495).

French as a mother tongue

Chart 3
Population with French as mother tongue, Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2021

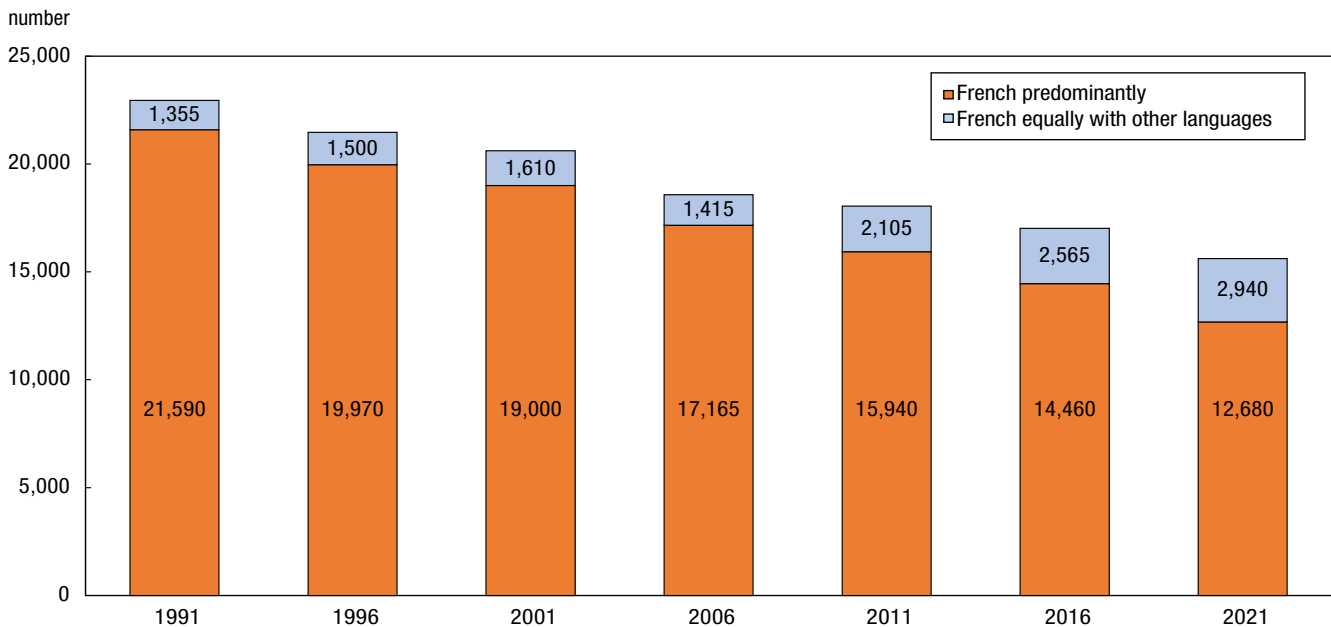


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 34,670 residents of Nova Scotia (3.6% of the population) had French as one of their mother tongues, up from 2016 (+1,325). However, this number is lower than in 1991 (-3,750).
 - In 2021, 78.9% of these people (27,345) had French as their only mother tongue and 21.1% (7,330 people) had French as their mother tongue along with other languages (mainly English).
- Among people who were married or in a common-law union and who had French as one of their mother tongues, nearly two in five (38.4%) were in a relationship with another person with French as a mother tongue.

French spoken at home

Chart 4
Population speaking French most often at home, Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2021

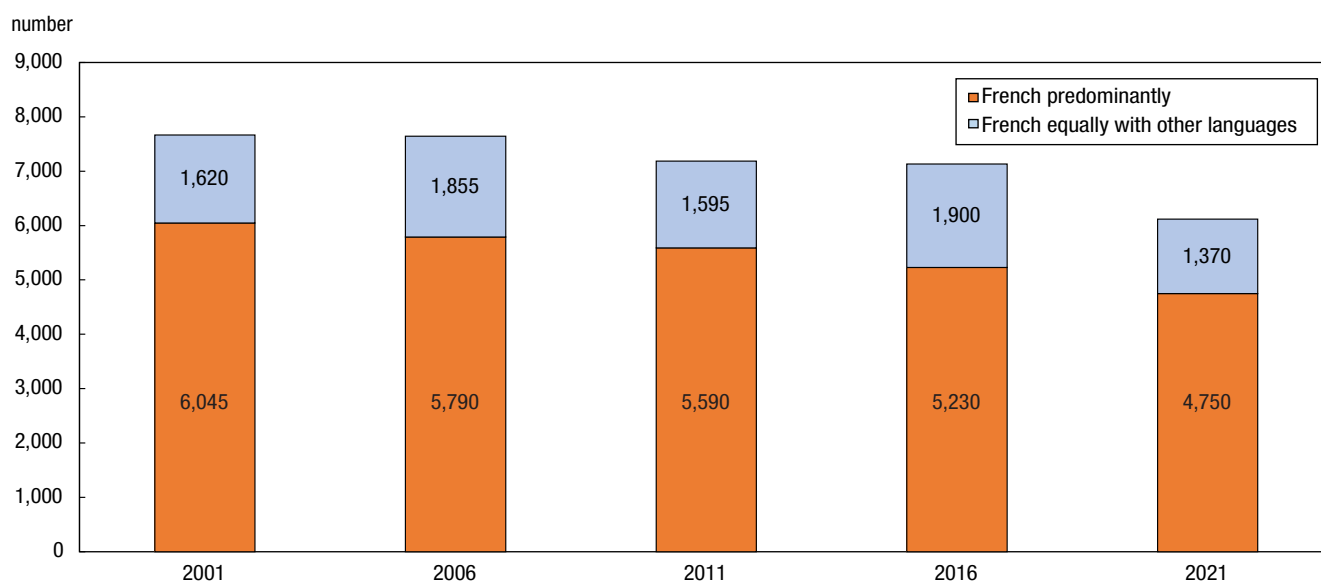


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 28,635 Nova Scotians (3.0% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home.
 - More than half of them (15,625, or 54.6%) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. This number was lower than in 2016 (-1,415 people).
 - A total of 13,015 people (45.5%) spoke French regularly at home in addition to their main language (usually English).
- Among people with French as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages:
 - 56.6% spoke it at least regularly at home in 2021 (19,610). However, this rate varied with age, ranging from 78.0% among people under 15 years to 51.0% among those aged 45 and older.
 - 40.9% spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages (14,165 people), down from 1991 (21,905 people, or 57.0%).
- Among people whose mother tongue is not French, 9,025 (1.0%) spoke French regularly at home.
 - Of these, the vast majority (7,565 people, or 83.8%) spoke French at home as a secondary language and spoke another language more often (usually English).

French used at work

Chart 5
Population using French most often at work, Nova Scotia, 2001 to 2021



Notes: Among workers who were employed during the census reference week. In 2021, changes were made to the census questions regarding languages used at work. Comparisons with previous cycles must therefore be made with caution. For more information, consult the Languages Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population of 2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021, and the National Household Survey of 2011.

- In 2021, 13,880 Nova Scotians used French at least regularly at work, accounting for 3.3% of the province's workers.²
- In the province, 6,115 people, or 1.4% of the province's workers, used French most often at work, be it predominantly or equally with other languages.
 - The number of people who used French most often at work decreased from 7,665 in 2001 to 6,115 in 2021.
- In 2021, among workers who used French at least regularly at work, most worked in educational services (3,185 people, or 22.9%), in public administration (2,615 people, or 18.8%), or in health care and social assistance (1,490 people, or 10.7%).³
- Among people who spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages, 66.1% also used it regularly at work.
- Nearly half (49.4%) of workers using French regularly at work were living in the Halifax CMA.

2. Persons employed during the Census of Population reference week.

3. Based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

Instruction in French in primary and secondary schools

- In 2021, 16,800 (10.0%) of the 168,460 children under 18 living in the province were eligible⁴ for instruction in French.
 - More than half (8,580 children) lived in the Halifax CMA.
- In Nova Scotia, 38,835 people attended or had already attended a regular French program in a French language school in Canada, representing 4.3% of the population aged 5 and older.
 - Of those who had never attended a French-language school, 69,870 (7.7%) had attended a French immersion program in an English-language school.
 - Among school-aged children⁵ who were eligible for instruction in French, 8,070 (63.3%) were attending or had already attended a French-language school.

French among immigrants

- In 2021, the proportions of recent⁶ immigrants and established⁷ immigrants living in Nova Scotia who could conduct a conversation in French (5.2% and 10.3%, respectively) were lower than the proportion among the non-immigrant population (10.7%).
 - The proportions of recent immigrants and established immigrants who spoke French at least regularly at home (2.6% and 3.1%, respectively) were similar among the non-immigrant population (3.0%).
 - The proportions of recent immigrants and established immigrants who had French as their only first official language spoken (1.5% and 1.9%, respectively) were lower than among the non-immigrant population (2.9%). However, the proportions of recent and established immigrants who had French and English as their first official languages spoken (1.3% and 1.2%, respectively) were higher than for the non-immigrant population (0.1%).
- In 2021, more than two-thirds (67.8%) of immigrants with French as their only first official language spoken were living in the Halifax CMA.

4. According to the criteria set out in the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, except citizenship.

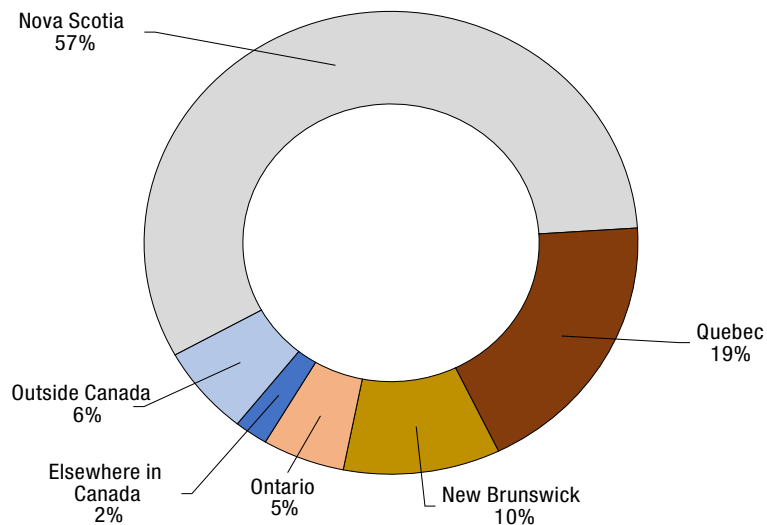
5. Children aged 5 to 17.

6. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

7. Immigrants admitted before 2016.

Mobility and birthplace of the French-speaking population

Chart 6
Place of birth of the population whose only first official language spoken is French, Nova Scotia, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among Nova Scotians whose only first official language spoken is French, nearly 3 in 5 (57.1%, or 15,295 people) were born in the province.
 - More than a third (36.7%, or 9,830 people) were born in another province or territory, with significant proportions coming from Quebec (18.9%, or 5,055 people), New Brunswick (10.3%, or 2,755 people) or Ontario (5.4% or 1,440 people).
 - About 1 in 15 people (6.3%, or 1,675 people) were born abroad, specifically in metropolitan France (1.6%), Africa (2.2%) or the United States (0.6%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the Nova Scotia population whose only first official language spoken is French was positive (+655).
 - While 3,025 people with French as their first official language spoken settled in Nova Scotia from another province or territory from 2016 to 2021, 2,370 people left the province during the same period.

Appendix

Table 1
Comparisons of selected French-language indicators, Nova Scotia, 1991 to 2021

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
French as first official language spoken ¹	4.0	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.3	3.2	3.0
French only	3.9	3.7	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	2.8
French and English	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Knowledge of French ²	8.8	9.5	10.1	10.6	10.4	10.5	10.4
French only	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
French and English	8.6	9.3	10.1	10.5	10.3	10.5	10.3
French as mother tongue	4.3	4.2	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.6
French only	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.2	2.9
French in combination with other languages	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.8
French spoken most often at home	2.6	2.4	2.3	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.6
French predominantly	2.4	2.2	2.1	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.3
French equally with other languages	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3
French used most often at work ³	..	..	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.4
French predominantly	..	..	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.1
French equally with other languages	..	..	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. Corresponds to the sum of the “French” and “French and English” categories.

2. According to the knowledge of official languages.

3. Among workers who were employed during the census reference week. In 2021, changes were made to the census questions regarding languages used at work. Comparisons with previous cycles must therefore be made with caution. For more information, consult the Languages Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021, and the National Household Survey of 2011.

Table 2
Frequency of French use at work and frequency of French spoken at home, Nova Scotia, 2021

Frequency	French used at work ¹		French spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total population	425,190	100.0	958,990	100.0
Only	2,735	0.6	9,800	1.0
Mostly	2,010	0.5	2,880	0.3
Equally	1,370	0.3	2,945	0.3
Regularly	7,770	1.8	13,010	1.4
No mention	411,305	96.7	930,355	97.0

1. Among workers who were employed during the census reference week.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 3
Use of French at work¹, by frequency and industry sectors, Nova Scotia, 2021

Selection of industry sectors	Use of French at work			
	At least regularly ²		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total	13,880	100.0	6,115	100.0
Construction	405	2.9	185	3.0
Manufacturing	740	5.3	350	5.7
Retail trade	940	6.8	295	4.8
Transportation and warehousing	435	3.1	135	2.2
Professional, scientific and technical services	680	4.9	185	3.0
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	270	1.9	100	1.6
Educational services	3,185	22.9	2,485	40.6
Health care and social assistance	1,490	10.7	520	8.5
Accommodation and food services	260	1.9	95	1.6
Public administration	2,615	18.8	420	6.9
Other sectors	2,805	20.2	1,315	21.5

1. Among workers who were employed during the census reference week.

2. Workers using French at least regularly includes all those who reported using this language at work, whether it was most often or on a regular basis as a secondary language.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 4
French spoken at least regularly at home, by age and mother tongue, Nova Scotia, 2021

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		French ¹		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	28,635	3.0	19,610	56.6	9,025	1.0
0 to 14 years	5,540	4.1	2,730	78.0	2,810	2.1
15 to 44 years	10,155	3.0	6,350	60.3	3,805	1.2
45 years and older	12,940	2.7	10,530	51.0	2,410	0.5

1. Alone or in combination with other languages.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 5
Comparison of French-language indicators, by immigrant status and period of immigration, Nova Scotia, 2021

Immigration status and period of immigration	Knowledge of French ¹		French spoken at home ¹		First official language spoken			
					French only		French and English	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	98,535	10.6	27,675	3.0	26,795	2.8	2,220	0.2
Non-immigrants	92,240	10.7	25,595	3.0	25,290	2.9	1,160	0.1
Immigrants	6,285	8.8	2,085	2.9	1,290	1.8	890	1.2
Recent immigrants ²	1,120	5.2	550	2.6	330	1.5	280	1.3
Established immigrants ³	5,170	10.3	1,540	3.1	955	1.9	615	1.2
2011 to 2015	710	8.0	335	3.8	140	1.6	120	1.4
2001 to 2010	1,315	10.6	460	3.7	275	2.2	240	1.9
1991 to 2000	640	9.6	180	2.7	120	1.8	100	1.5
1980 to 1990	700	12.8	175	3.2	95	1.7	90	1.6
Before 1980	1,805	10.8	395	2.4	335	2.0	60	0.4
Non-permanent residents	765	3.4	325	1.5	220	1.0	165	0.7

1. Includes all mentions of French.

2. Admitted to Canada between 2016 and 2021.

3. Admitted to Canada before 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.