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Key facts on the French language in British Columbia in 2021

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Key facts on the French language in British Columbia in 2021

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

This fact sheet gives an overview of the situation of French in British Columbia in 2021. It begins by providing information on the changes in the number and proportion of the population who can have a conversation in French, whose first official language spoken is French, whose mother tongue is French, and who speak French at home or use French at work. Next, it presents information on French-language instruction in primary 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.

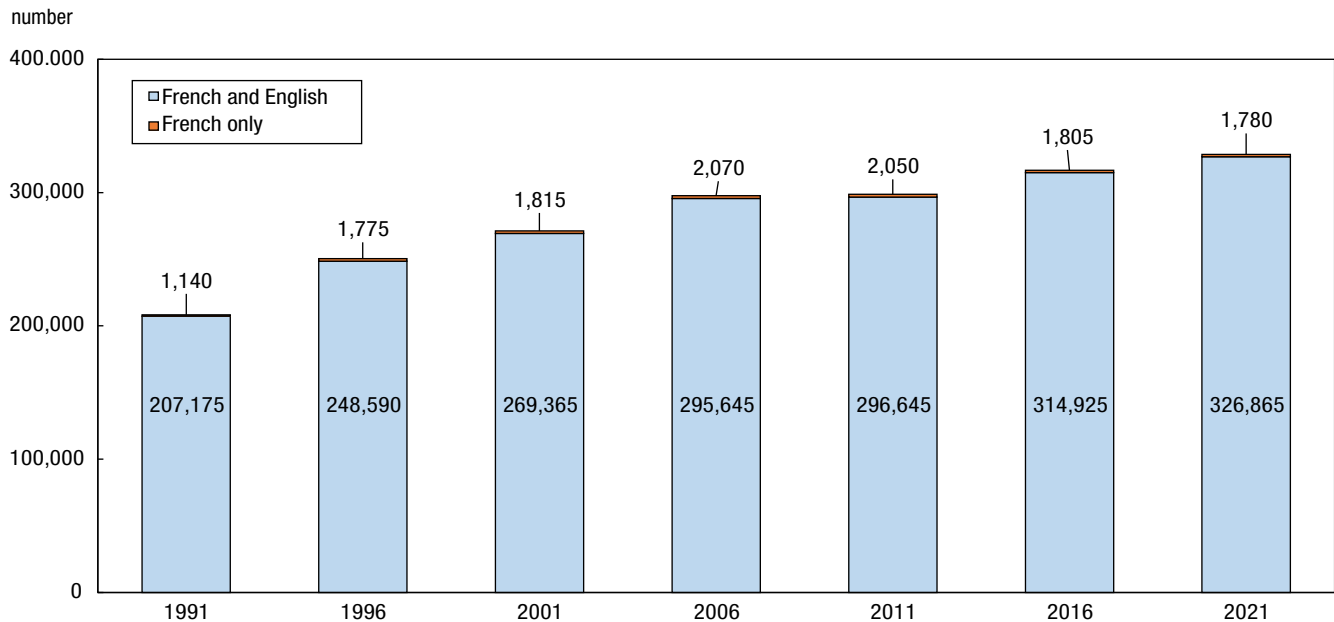
The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the Census of Population. To learn more about census concepts and the historical comparability of data, please refer to the 2021 Census of Population *Languages Reference Guide* and the *Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide*.

Highlights

- In 2021, 328,650 British Columbians could conduct a conversation in French. This number is up from 2016 (+11,915) and 1991 (+120,335). The demographic weight of this population rose from 6.4% in 1991 to 7.3% in 2006, before falling over the next 15 years to 6.6% in 2021.
- In 2021, 76,370 people (1.5% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home. Among those with French as one of their mother tongues, less than half (47.3%) spoke French regularly at home.
- In 2021, 23,340 workers living in the province (1.0%) used French at least regularly at work. Most worked in educational services (32.4%) or public administration (12.3%).
- About 1 in 25 immigrants (4.2%) could have a conversation in French in 2021. This proportion was lower than that of the non-immigrant population (7.9%).
- Nearly two-thirds (63.6%) of British Columbians who had French as their only first official language spoken in 2021 were born in Canada, but outside British Columbia.

Ability to conduct a conversation in French

Chart 1
Population who can conduct a conversation in French, British Columbia, 1991 to 2021

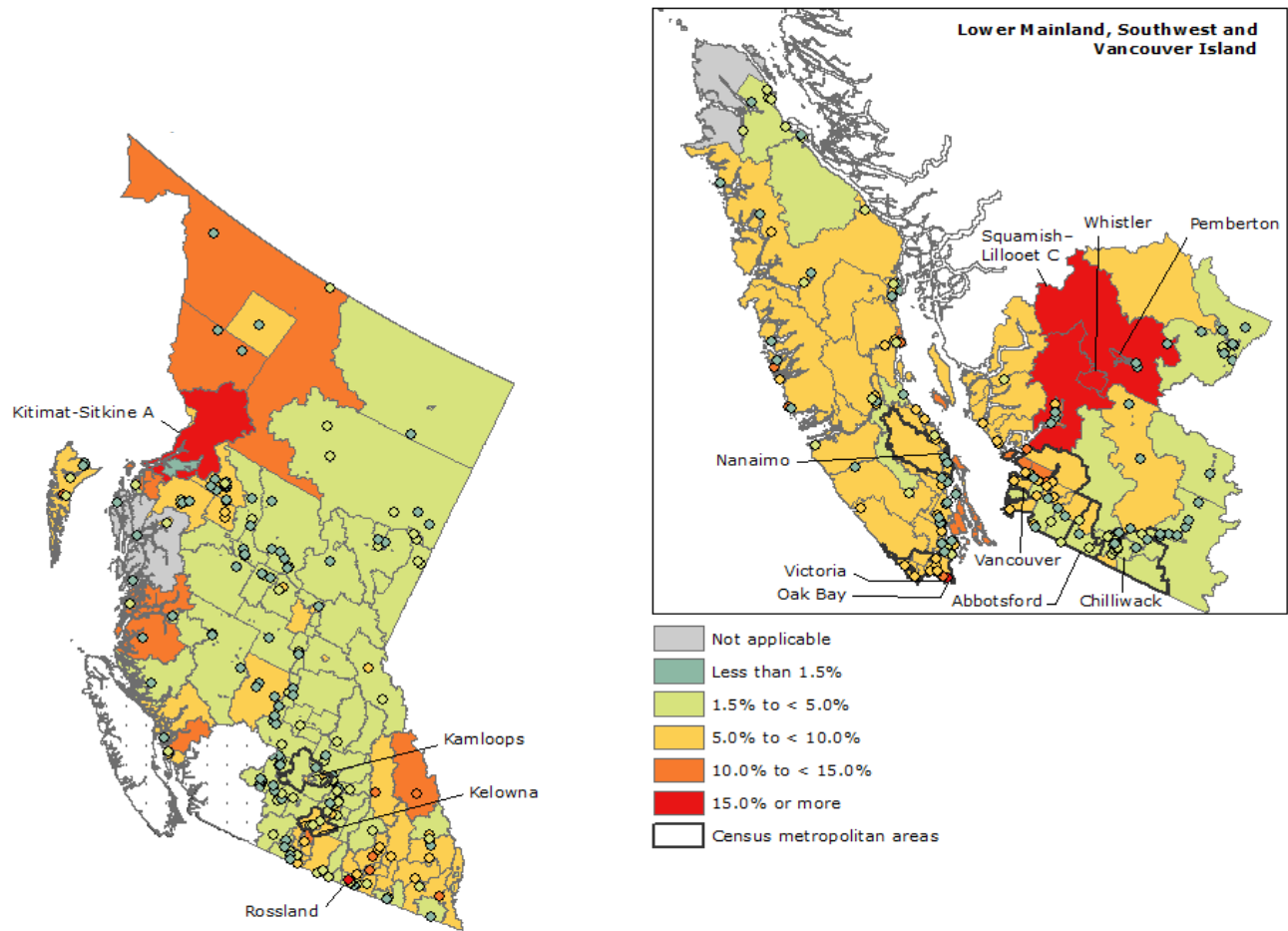


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 328,650 British Columbians could have a conversation in French. Almost all (99.5%, or 326,865 people) could also do so in English.
 - The number of people in the province who could have a conversation in French has been rising since 1991 (+120,335). From 2016 to 2021, this number continued to increase (+11,915), reaching a record high in 2021.
- In 2021, 6.6% of the British Columbia population could have a conversation in French. This was higher than in 1991 (6.4%), but lower than the all-time high recorded in 2006 (7.3%).
 - From 1991 to 2021, the number and proportion of British Columbians able to conduct a conversation in French was up among those who did not learn French first at home in their childhood: while 160,475 (5.0%) could have a conversation in French in 1991, this rose to 258,635 (5.3%) in 2021.

Map 1

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



Note: Circles represent census subdivisions with a smaller land area.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

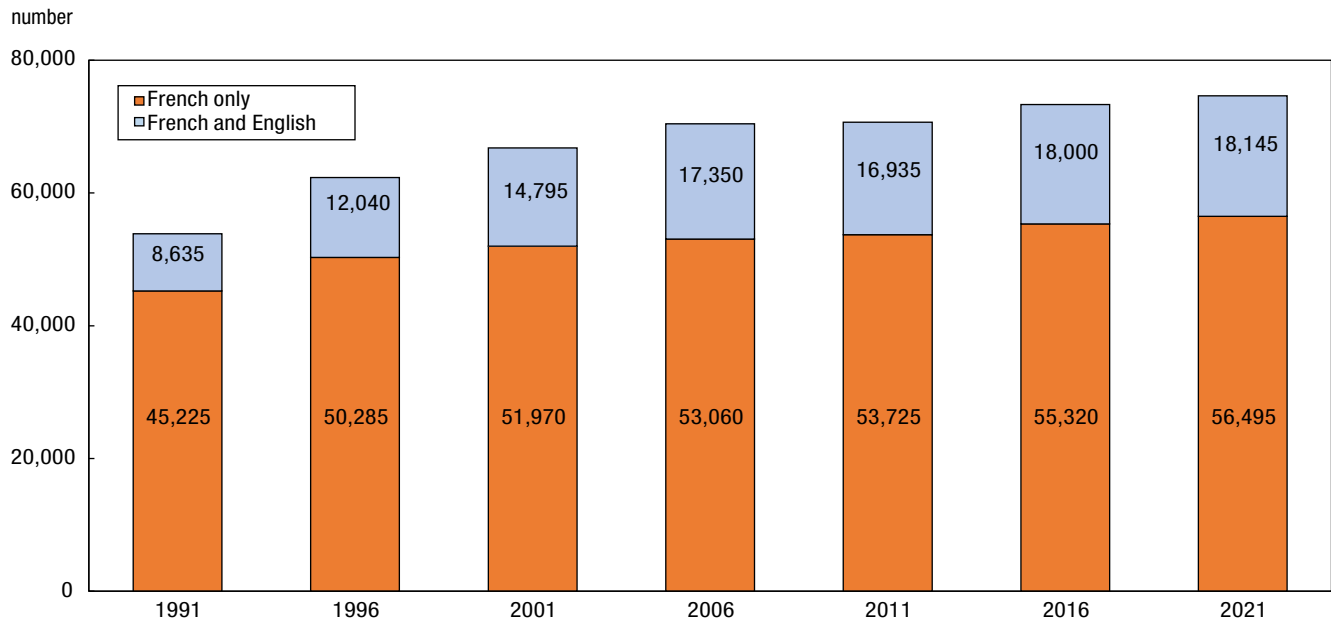
- In 2021, in 350 of British Columbia's 537 municipalities,¹ less than 5% of the population could have a conversation in French. Conversely, in 39 municipalities, 10% or more of the population knew French.
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest proportion of people who could have a conversation in French were in the Squamish-Lillooet regional district, just north of Vancouver: Pemberton (18.9%), Squamish-Lillooet C (16.8%) and Whistler (15.9%).
- The municipalities that had the highest number of people who knew French were in the Vancouver census metropolitan area (CMA): Vancouver (61,400), Surrey (22,005) and Burnaby (12,135).

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, British Columbia, 1991 to 2021

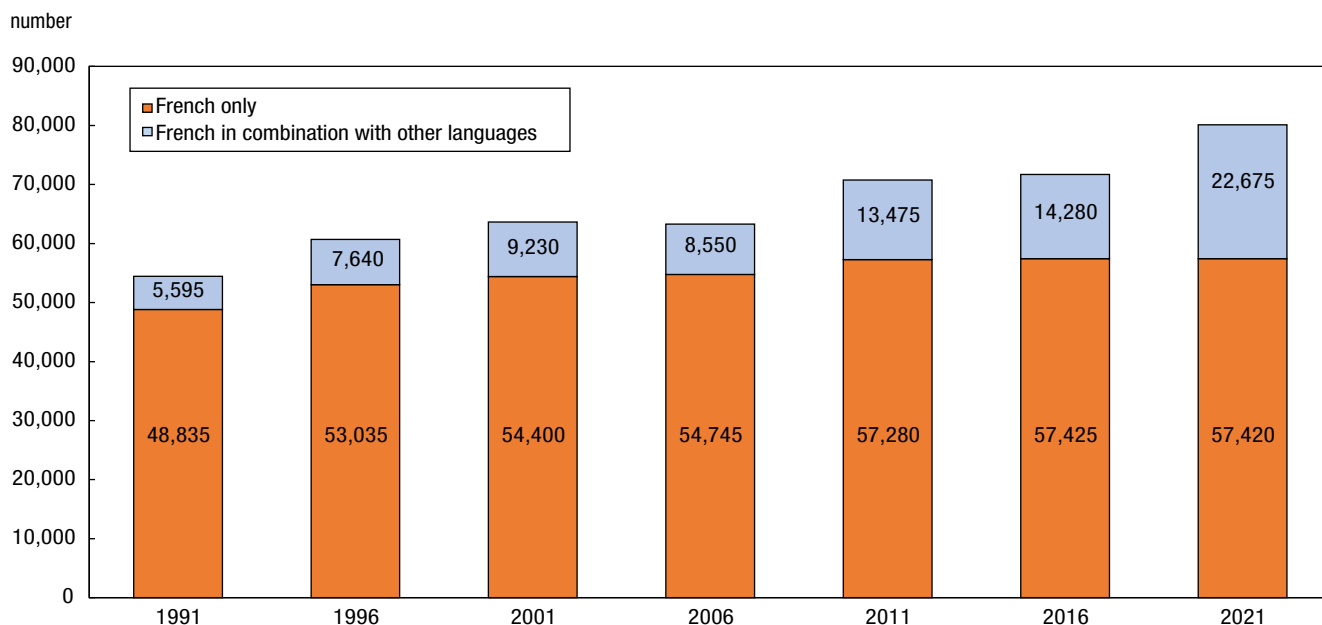


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 56,495 British Columbians (1.1% of the population) had French as their only first official language spoken and 18,145 residents (0.4% of the population) had French and English as their first official languages spoken.
 - The number of people with French as their only first official language spoken has increased steadily since 1991 (+11,270) to reach an all-time high in 2021. However, the demographic weight of this population fell from 1.4% to 1.1% during the same period.
- From 1991 to 2021, the number of British Columbians who had French and English as their first official languages spoken more than doubled, from 8,635 to 18,145.

French as a mother tongue

Chart 3
Population with French as mother tongue, British Columbia, 1991 to 2021

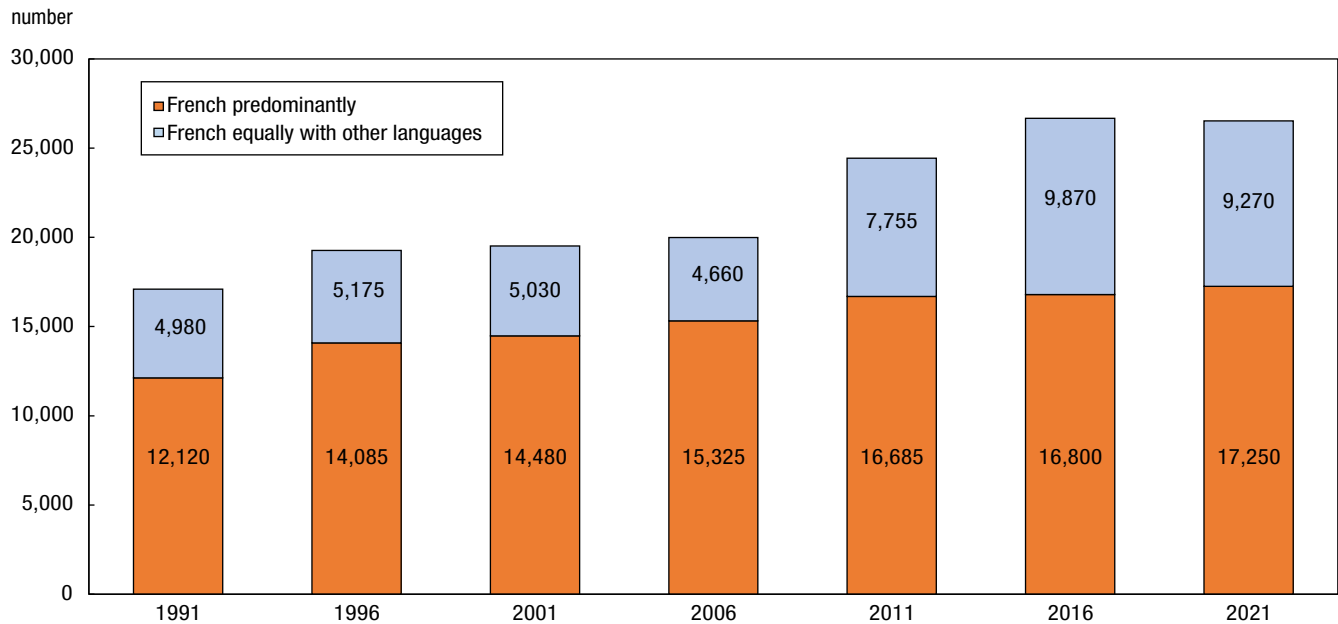


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 80,095 British Columbians (1.6% of the population) had French as one of their mother tongues, up from 1991 (+25,655) and 2016 (+8,390). However, their demographic weight remained stable (from 1.7% in 1991 to 1.6% in 2021).
 - In 2021, 71.7% of these residents (57,420 people) had French as their only mother tongue, while 28.3% (22,675 people) had French as their mother tongue along with other languages (mainly English).
- Among people who were married or in a common-law relationship and who had French as one of their mother tongues, just under a quarter (23.7%) were in a relationship with another person whose mother tongue is French.

French spoken at home

Chart 4
Population speaking French most often at home, British Columbia, 1991 to 2021

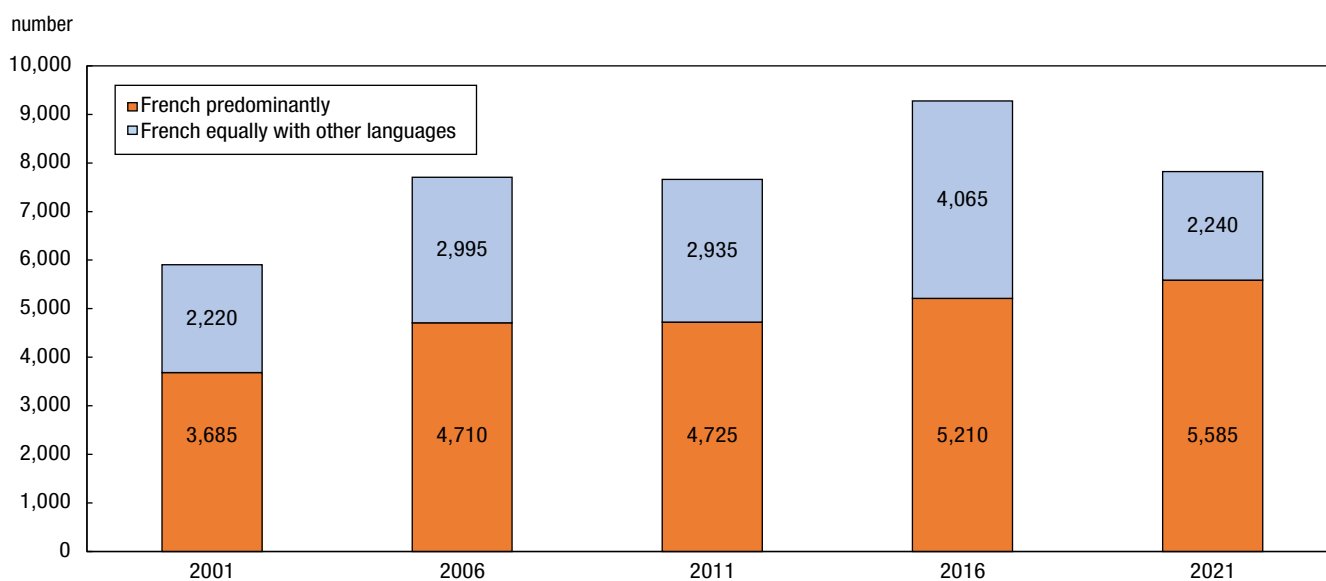


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 76,370 British Columbians (1.5% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home.
 - Of these, over a third (34.7%, or 26,520 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. Their numbers rose from 1991 (+9,420), but have remained fairly stable since 2016 (-150).
 - Moreover, 49,855 residents (65.3%) spoke French regularly at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often (generally English).
- Among people with French as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages:
 - Just under half (47.3%, or 37,900 people) spoke French at least regularly at home in 2021. However, this rate varied by age, ranging from 75.6% among those under age 15 to 36.3% among those aged 45 and older.
 - Just over a quarter (27.2%, or 21,785 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages, up from 1991 (26.3%, or 14,335 people).
- Among residents of British Columbia whose mother tongue is not French, 38,470 (0.8%) spoke French regularly at home.
 - The vast majority of these residents (87.7%, or 33,735 people) spoke French at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often (generally English).

French used at work

Chart 5
Population using French most often at work, British Columbia, 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, 2001, 2006, 2016 and 2021, and the National Household Survey of 2011.

- In 2021, 23,340 British Columbians used French at least regularly at work. This represents 1.0% of the province's workers.²
- In British Columbia, 7,825 people used French most often at work, predominantly or equally with other languages, accounting for 0.3% of the province's workers.
 - The number of workers who used French most often at work grew from 5,905 in 2001 to 9,270 in 2016. It then fell from 2016 to 2021 (-1,445).
- In 2021, among workers who used French at least regularly at work, most worked in educational services (7,570 people, or 32.4%), public administration (2,880 people, or 12.3%) or professional, scientific and technical services (2,110 people, or 9.0%).³
- Among workers who spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages, 38.1% also used French regularly at work in 2021.
- Most workers (55.6%) who used French regularly at work lived in the Vancouver CMA.

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

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

Instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels

- In 2021, 55,580 (6.3%) of the 884,130 children under 18 living in the province were eligible⁴ for instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels.
 - Nearly one in two eligible children (49.5%, or 27,520) lived in the Vancouver CMA.
- In British Columbia, 112,290 people attended or had already attended a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada, representing 2.4% of the population aged 5 and older.
 - Of those who had never attended a French-language school, 248,170 (5.3%) had instead attended a French immersion program in an English-language school.
 - Among school-aged children⁵ who were eligible for instruction in French, 23,960 (55.7%) were attending or had already attended a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada.

French among immigrants

- In 2021, the proportions of recent⁶ immigrants and established⁷ immigrants living in British Columbia who could have a conversation in French (3.9% and 4.3%, respectively) were lower than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (7.9%).
 - The proportion of recent immigrants who spoke French at least regularly at home (1.9%) was higher than that of the non-immigrant population (1.6%), but the proportion for established immigrants was lower (1.2%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who had French as their only first official language spoken (0.8%) was lower than that of the non-immigrant population (1.2%). However, the proportion of immigrants who had French and English as their first official languages spoken (0.7%) was higher than for the non-immigrant population (0.2%).

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

5. Children aged 5 to 17.

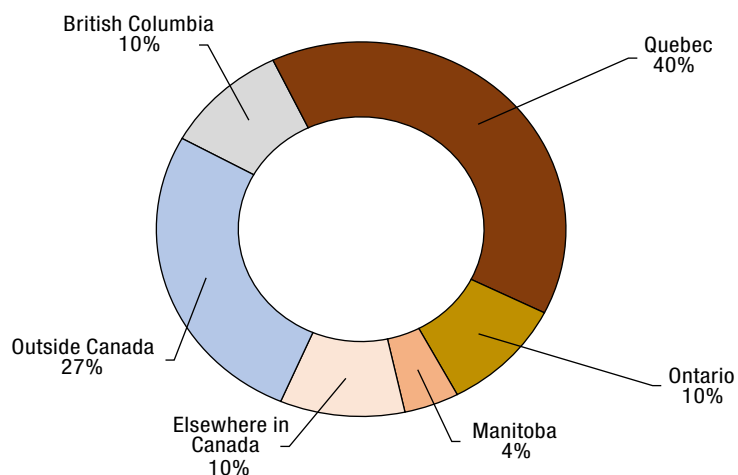
6. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

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, British Columbia, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among British Columbians whose only first official language spoken is French, nearly 1 in 10 (9.9%, or 5,440 people) were born in the province.
 - Just under two-thirds (63.6%, or 35,070 people) were born in another province or territory, with the majority coming from Quebec (40.2%, or 22,180 people), Ontario (9.6%, or 5,300 people) or Manitoba (3.9%, or 2,140 people).
 - More than a quarter (26.6%, or 14,650 people) were born abroad, mainly in metropolitan France (13.2%), Africa (5.9%) or Belgium (1.4%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the British Columbia population whose only first official language spoken is French was positive (+2,235).
 - While 5,445 people with French as their only first official language spoken left British Columbia to settle in another province or territory from 2016 to 2021, 7,680 people moved to the province during the same period, with the majority coming from Quebec (54.1%), Ontario (20.6%) and Alberta (15.5%).

Appendix

Table 1
Comparison of selected French-language indicators, British Columbia, 1991 to 2021

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
French as first official language spoken ¹	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.5
French only	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.1
French and English	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4
Knowledge of French ²	6.4	6.8	7.0	7.3	6.9	6.9	6.6
French only	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
French and English	6.4	6.7	7.0	7.3	6.8	6.8	6.6
French as mother tongue	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6
French only	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2
French in combination with other languages	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.5
French spoken most often at home	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5
French predominantly	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
French equally with other languages	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2
French used most often at work ³	..	..	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3
French predominantly	..	..	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
French equally with other languages	..	..	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1

.. 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, British Columbia, 2021

Frequency ²	French used at work ¹		French spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total population	2,433,600	100.0	4,951,655	100.0
Only	2,585	0.1	11,050	0.2
Mostly	2,995	0.1	6,195	0.1
Equally	2,240	0.1	9,270	0.2
Regularly	15,515	0.6	49,855	1.0
No mention	2,410,260	99.0	4,875,285	98.5

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

2. “Only” includes people who solely use or speak French. “Mostly” includes people who predominantly use or speak French along with at least one secondary language. “Equally” includes people who use or speak French most often equally with at least one other language. Finally, “regularly” includes people who use or speak French as a secondary language and have at least one other main language.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 3
Use of French at work,¹ by frequency and industry sectors, British Columbia, 2021

Selection of industry sectors	Use of French at work			
	At least regularly ²		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total	23,340	100.0	7,825	100.0
Construction	755	3.2	245	3.1
Retail trade	1,325	5.7	210	2.7
Transportation and warehousing	860	3.7	145	1.9
Finance and insurance	795	3.4	165	2.1
Professional, scientific and technical services	2,110	9.0	480	6.1
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	715	3.1	210	2.7
Educational services	7,570	32.4	4,550	58.1
Health care and social assistance	1,815	7.8	360	4.6
Accommodation and food services	810	3.5	165	2.1
Public administration	2,880	12.3	390	5.0
Other sectors	3,700	15.9	910	11.6

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, British Columbia, 2021

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		French ¹		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	76,370	1.5	37,900	47.3	38,470	0.8
0 to 14 years	16,920	2.4	6,380	75.6	10,545	1.5
15 to 44 years	33,880	1.8	16,580	54.4	17,305	0.9
45 years and older	25,565	1.1	14,940	36.3	10,630	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, British Columbia, 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	327,350	6.7	73,875	1.5	55,150	1.1	17,725	0.4
Non-immigrants	261,500	7.9	52,895	1.6	41,250	1.2	6,160	0.2
Immigrants	60,185	4.2	18,415	1.3	11,900	0.8	10,325	0.7
Recent immigrants ²	7,705	3.9	3,660	1.9	2,680	1.4	1,715	0.9
Established immigrants ³	52,480	4.3	14,760	1.2	9,215	0.8	8,605	0.7
2011 to 2015	6,920	4.1	2,575	1.5	1,580	0.9	1,935	1.2
2001 to 2010	13,835	4.4	4,330	1.4	2,295	0.7	3,400	1.1
1991 to 2000	9,190	3.1	2,800	0.9	1,575	0.5	1,620	0.5
1980 to 1990	6,645	4.0	1,835	1.1	1,175	0.7	880	0.5
Before 1980	15,890	5.7	3,230	1.2	2,590	0.9	770	0.3
Non-permanent residents	5,660	3.3	2,560	1.5	2,010	1.2	1,235	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.

Table 6
Comparison of French-language indicators, by Census Metropolitan Area, British Columbia, 2021

Census Metropolitan Area	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 - Province	328,650	6.6	76,370	1.5	56,495	1.1	18,145	0.4
Vancouver	172,050	6.6	43,115	1.6	25,925	1.0	14,255	0.5
Victoria	39,715	10.1	7,895	2.0	6,100	1.6	1,080	0.3
Kelowna	15,155	6.9	3,085	1.4	2,985	1.4	400	0.2
Abbotsford - Mission	8,350	4.3	1,875	1.0	1,230	0.6	520	0.3
Nanaimo	7,555	6.6	1,570	1.4	1,280	1.1	170	0.1
Chilliwack	4,855	4.3	1,040	0.9	1,000	0.9	145	0.1
Kamloops	6,010	5.4	1,095	1.0	965	0.9	115	0.1

1. Includes all mentions of French.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.