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Key facts on the French language in Ontario in 2021

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Key facts on the French language in Ontario in 2021

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

This fact sheet gives an overview of the situation of French in Ontario 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.

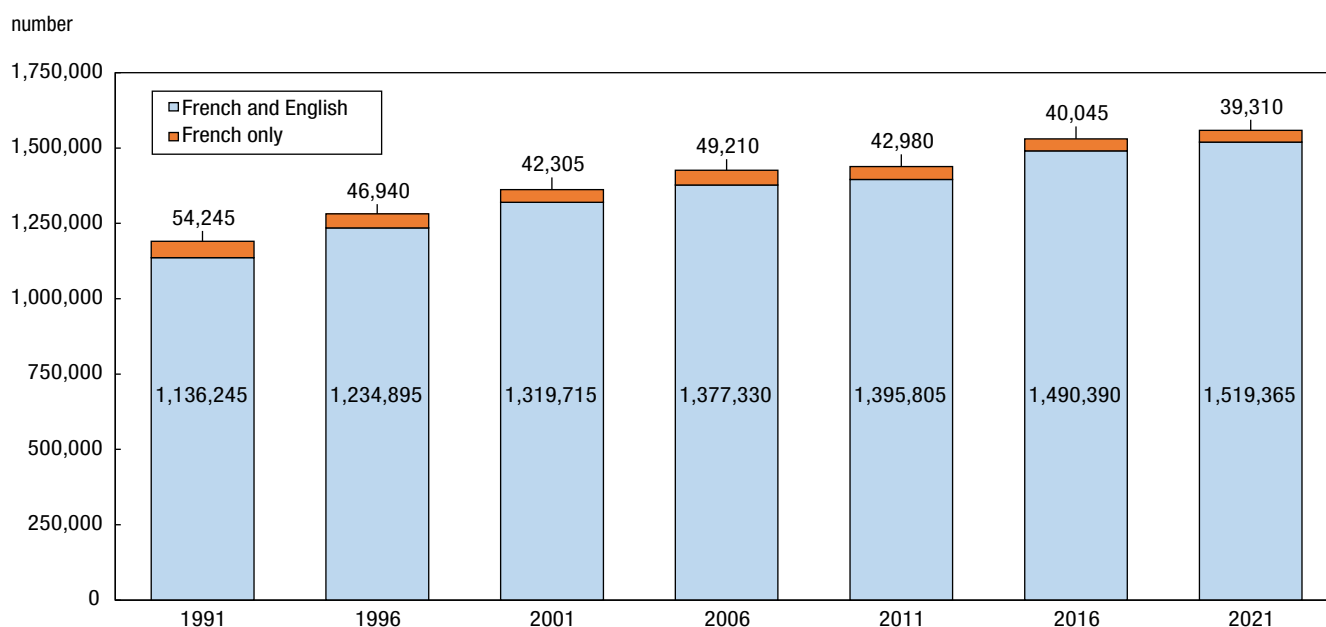
The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the Census of Population. To learn more about census concepts and the historical comparability of data, please refer to the 2021 Census of Population *Languages Reference Guide* and the *Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide*.

Highlights

- In Ontario, 1,558,670 residents (11.1% of the population) could have a conversation in French. This was the largest number ever observed in a census in the province. In contrast, the demographic weight of these residents was at its lowest level in 50 years.
- In 2021, 594,735 Ontarians (4.2% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home. This includes all those who spoke French most often at home, whether predominantly (254,870 people, or 1.8% of the population) or equally with other languages (78,385 people, or 0.6%). Moreover, among people with French as one of their mother tongues, two-thirds (66.0%) spoke French regularly at home.
- In Ontario, 301,655 workers (4.6%) used French at least regularly at work. This includes all those who used French most often at work, whether predominantly (80,050 workers, or 1.2%) or equally with other languages (41,390 workers, or 0.6%).
- Roughly 1 in 17 immigrants (6.1%) could have a conversation in French in 2021. This proportion was lower than that of the non-immigrant population (13.5%).
- Around three in five Ontarians (58.7%) whose only first official language spoken was French in 2021 were born in Ontario.

Ability to conduct a conversation in French

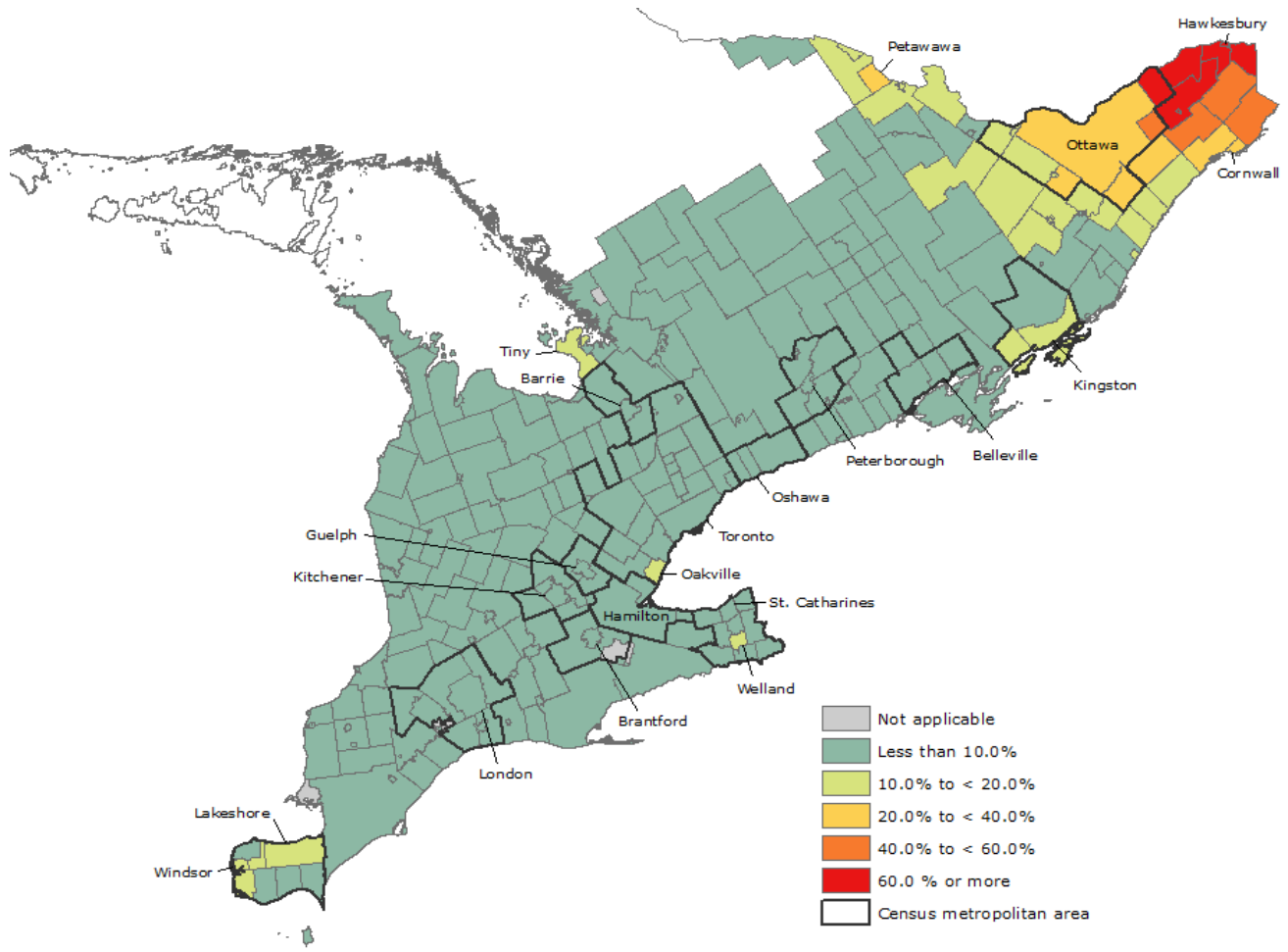
Chart 1
Population who can conduct a conversation in French, Ontario, 1991 to 2021



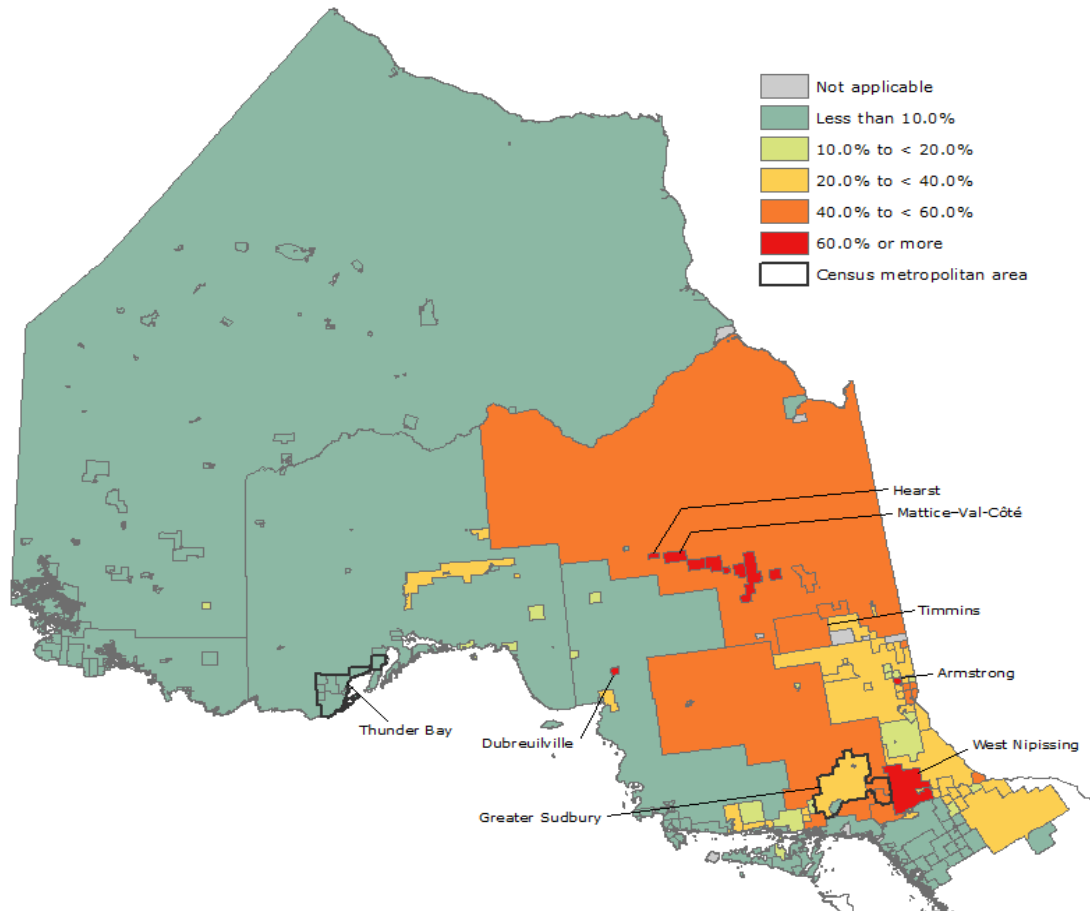
Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,558,670 Ontarians (11.1% of the population) could have a conversation in French. This was the largest number ever recorded in a census in Ontario.
 - Almost all (97.5%, or 1,519,365 people) could also do so in English. This number has risen steadily since 1991 (+383,120 people).
 - A small proportion of these residents (2.5%, or 39,310 people) could converse in French, but not in English. This was down from 1991 (-14,935 people).
- Following a period of relative stability from 1991 to 2006 (11.9%), the demographic weight of Ontarians who could have a conversation in French fell to 11.3% in 2011. After rising to 11.5% in 2016, this proportion then fell again to 11.1% in 2021. This was the lowest proportion recorded since the 1971 Census.
 - From 1991 to 2021, the number and proportion of Ontarians who could have a conversation in French increased among those who first learned English at home in childhood: 555,710 people (7.5%) could have a conversation in French in 1991, and it rose to 747,900 people (8.1%) in 2021.
 - Among residents whose mother tongues are neither French nor English, the number of people who could have a conversation in French rose from 1991 to 2021 (+92,875). However, the proportion of people able to speak French among this population fell from 6.5% in 1991 to 5.8% in 2021.

Map 1
Proportion of Southern and Eastern Ontario's population who could conduct a conversation in French, by census subdivision, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Map 2**Proportion of Northern's Ontario population who could conduct a conversation in French, by census subdivision, 2021**

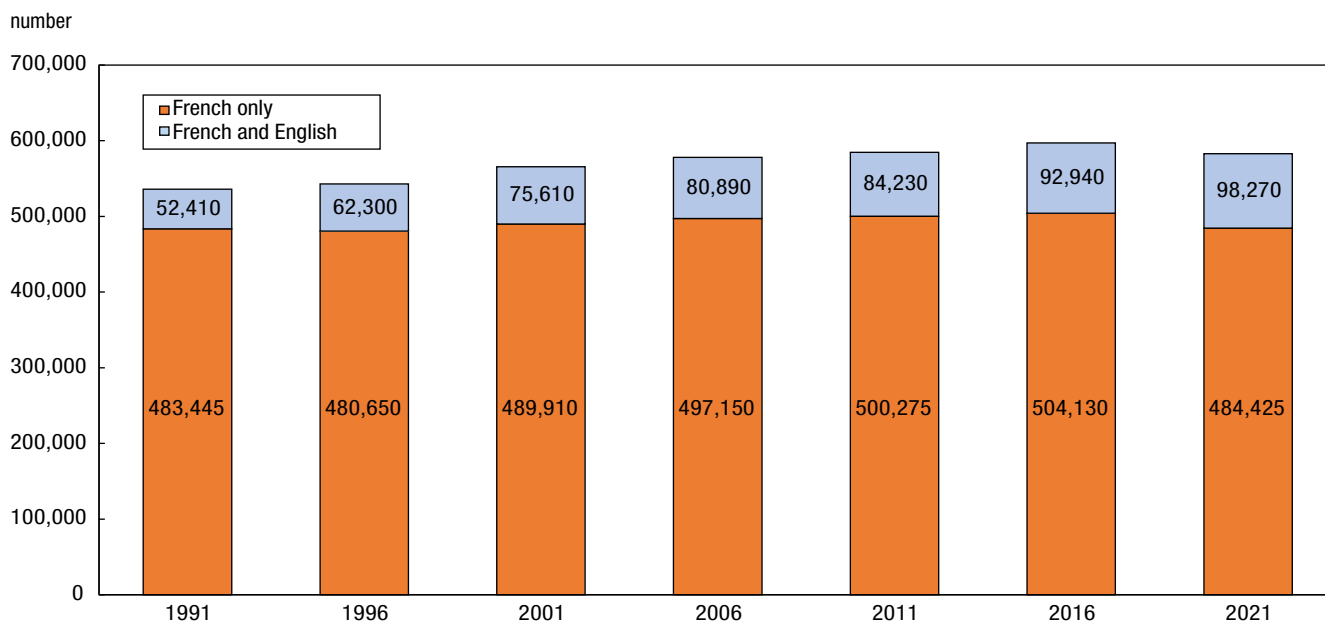
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, in 233 of Ontario's 539 municipalities,¹ less than 5% of the population could conduct a conversation in French. However, in 30 municipalities, 50% or more residents knew French.
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest proportion of people who knew French were all located in northern Ontario: Mattice-Val Côté (96.3%), Hearst (93.2%) and Dubreuilville (90.4%).
- The municipalities that had the highest number of people who knew French were Ottawa (381,310), Toronto (239,470) and Greater Sudbury (61,500).

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, Ontario, 1991 to 2021



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

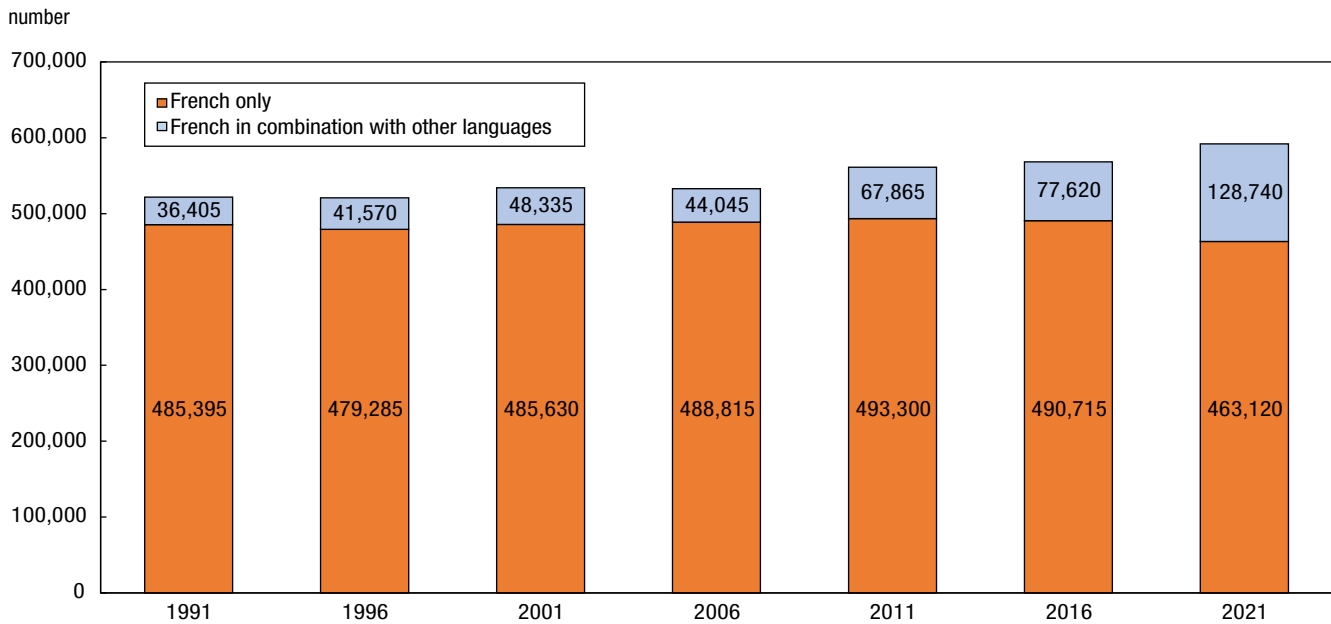
- In 2021, 484,425 Ontarians (3.4% of the population) had French as their only first official language spoken and 98,270 residents (0.7%) had French and English as their first official languages spoken.
- The number of residents with French as their only first official language spoken rose consistently from 1996 to 2016 (+23,480), but then fell from 2016 to 2021 (-19,705).
 - From 1991 to 2021, their demographic weight fell steadily from 4.8% to 3.4%.
 - In the 2021 Census, the proportion of residents with French as their only first official language spoken was higher in some census agglomerations (CAs) and census metropolitan areas (CMAs) in the northeastern part of the province, such as Timmins (32.4%) and Greater Sudbury (22.7%), as well as in some CAs and CMAs close to the Quebec border, such as Hawkesbury² (74.4%), Cornwall (18.1%) and Ottawa³ (14.9%).
- The number of Ontario residents with French and English as their first official languages spoken nearly doubled from 52,410 in 1991 to 98,270 in 2021.
 - Of these residents, three-quarters were living in the CMAs of Toronto (49.5%) or Ottawa (27.3%) in 2021.

2. In this fact sheet, the Hawkesbury CA refers to the Ontario part of the Hawkesbury CA.

3. In this fact sheet, the Ottawa CMA refers to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.

French as a mother tongue

Chart 3
Population with French as a mother tongue, Ontario, 1991 to 2021

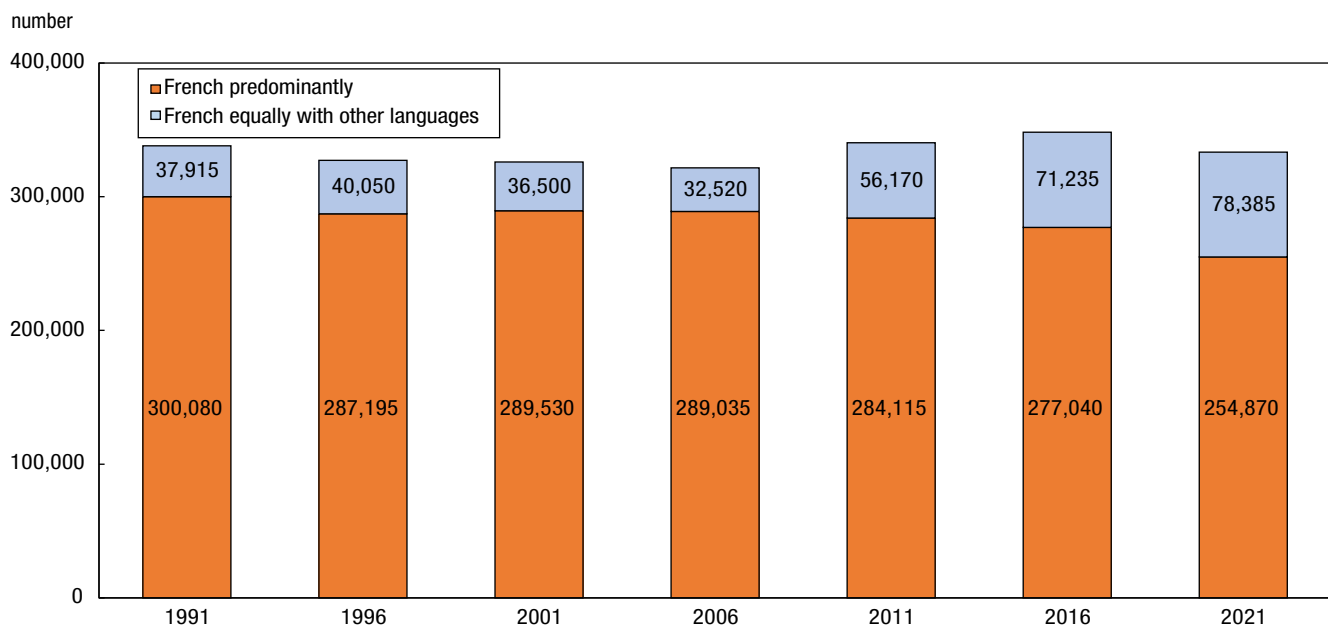


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 591,855 Ontarians (4.2% of the population) had French as one of their mother tongues. While this number varied little from 1991 to 2006 (+11,065 people), it increased steadily from 2006 to 2021 (+58,995 people).
 - In 2021, 78.2% of these residents (463,120 people) had French as their only mother tongue, while 21.8% (128,740 people) had French along with other languages.
- The demographic weight of this population fell consistently from 5.2% in 1991 to 4.4% in 2006. After a period of relative stability, it stood at 4.2% in 2021.
- Among married people or common-law partners who had French as one of their mother tongues, almost half (48.2%) 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, Ontario, 1991 to 2021

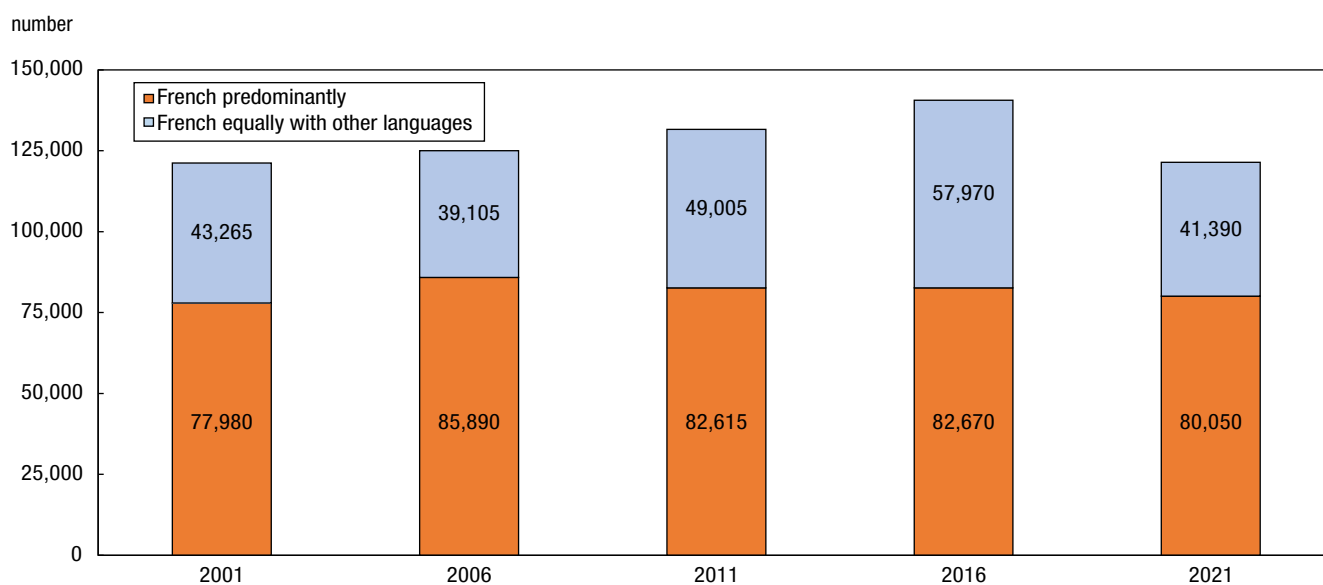


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 594,735 Ontarians (4.2% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home.
 - Among these residents, more than half (56.0%, or 333 250 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. Their number declined from 1991 to 2006 (-16,445 people), then rose until 2016 (+26,725 people), before falling again from 2016 to 2021 (-15,030 people).
 - Moreover, 261,480 residents (44.0%) spoke French 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:
 - Two-thirds (66.0%, or 390,830 people) spoke French at least regularly at home in 2021. However, this rate varied by age, ranging from 83.5% among those under age 15 to 59.9% among those aged 45 and older.
 - Half (49.9%, or 295,375 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages, down from 1991 (61.0%, or 318,500 people).
- Among Ontario residents whose mother tongue is not French, 203,905 (1.5%) spoke French at home at least regularly.
 - The vast majority of these residents (81.4%, or 166,025 people) spoke French at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often.

French used at work

Chart 5
Population using French most often at work, Ontario, 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, 301,655 Ontarians used French at least regularly at work. This represents 4.6% of the province's workers.⁴
- In Ontario, 121,445 people used French most often at work, predominantly or equally with other languages, accounting for 1.9% of the province's workers.
 - The number of workers who used French most often at work rose from 121,245 in 2001 to 140,640 in 2016. It then fell by 19,195 from 2016 to 2021.
- In 2021, among workers who use French at least regularly at work, most worked in public administration (67,070 people, or 22.2%), educational services (52,460 people, or 17.4%), or health care and social assistance (37,870 people, or 12.6%).⁵
- Among workers who spoke French most often at home, predominantly or with other languages, 74.5% also used French regularly at work.
- A large proportion of residents (43.2%) who used French regularly at work lived in the Ottawa CMA.

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

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

Instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels

- In 2021, 349,875 (12.6%) of the 2,781,415 children under 18 living in the province were eligible⁶ for instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels.
 - Around 3 in 10 eligible children (29.7%, or 103,835 children) lived in the Toronto CMA.
 - Roughly one in four eligible children (23.5%, or 82,355 children) lived in the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA.
- In Ontario, 769,420 people were attending or had already attended a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada, representing 5.8% of the population aged 5 and older.
 - Of those who had never attended a French-language school, 884,120 (6.6%) had instead attended a French immersion program in an English-language school.
 - Among school-aged children⁷ who were eligible for instruction in French, 179,995 (67.1%) 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 recent⁸ immigrants and established⁹ immigrants living in Ontario who could have a conversation in French (6.2% and 6.0%, respectively) were lower than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (13.5%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who spoke French at least regularly at home (2.6%) was lower than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (4.9%).
 - The proportion of recent immigrants who had French as their only first official language spoken (2.5%) was higher than the proportion of established immigrants (1.4%), but lower than for the non-immigrant population (4.3%). However, the proportion of immigrants who had French and English as their first official languages spoken (1.3%) was higher than that of the non-immigrant population (0.4%).
 - In 2021, nearly 1 in 20 non-permanent residents (4.8%) could have a conversation in French, about 1 in 35 (2.8%) spoke it at least regularly at home and about 1 in 50 (2.1%) had French as their only first official language spoken.

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

7. Children aged 5 to 17.

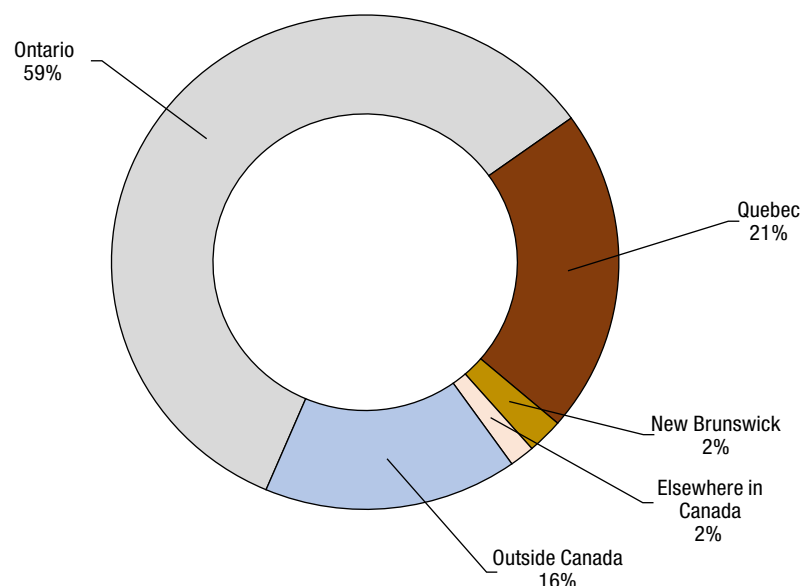
8. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

9. 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, Ontario, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among Ontarians whose only first official language spoken is French, around three in five (58.7%, or 280,585 people) were born in the province.
 - A quarter (25.1%, or 119,990 people) were born in another province or territory, with large proportions coming from Quebec (21.2%, or 101,150 people) or New Brunswick (2.3%, or 11,000 people).
 - Around one in six (16.2%, or 77,285 people) were born abroad, primarily in Africa (8.3%)—especially the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1.7%) and Morocco (0.8%)—in metropolitan France (2.9%) or in Haiti (1.6%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the Ontario population whose only first official language spoken is French was positive (+470).
 - From 2016 to 2021, 23,560 people with French as their only first official language spoken settled in Ontario from another province or territory. The vast majority were from Quebec (76.8%) or Alberta (7.9%). A total of 23,090 people left the province during the same period.

Appendix

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

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
French as first official language spoken ¹	5.4	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.6	4.5	4.1
French only	4.8	4.5	4.3	4.1	3.9	3.8	3.4
French and English	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Knowledge of French ²	11.9	12.0	12.1	11.9	11.3	11.5	11.1
French only	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3
French and English	11.4	11.6	11.7	11.5	11.0	11.2	10.8
French as mother tongue	5.2	4.9	4.7	4.4	4.4	4.3	4.2
French only	4.9	4.5	4.3	4.1	3.9	3.7	3.3
French in combination with other languages	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.9
French spoken most often at home	3.4	3.1	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.6	2.4
French predominantly	3.0	2.7	2.6	2.4	2.2	2.1	1.8
French equally with other languages	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6
French used most often at work ³	..	..	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.1	1.9
French predominantly	..	..	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2
French equally with other languages	..	..	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.9	0.6

.. 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, Ontario, 2021

Frequency ²	French used at work ¹		French spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total population	6,492,890	100.0	14,099,790	100.0
Only	44,040	0.7	188,560	1.3
Mostly	36,010	0.6	66,305	0.5
Equally	41,390	0.6	78,385	0.6
Regularly	180,210	2.8	261,480	1.9
No mention	6,191,240	95.4	13,505,055	95.8

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, Ontario, 2021

Selection of industry sectors	Use of French at work			
	At least regularly ²		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total	301,655	100.0	121,445	100.0
Construction	11,950	4.0	5,850	4.8
Manufacturing	10,485	3.5	4,485	3.7
Retail trade	21,130	7.0	7,370	6.1
Transportation and warehousing	9,265	3.1	3,130	2.6
Finance and insurance	16,315	5.4	5,400	4.4
Professional, scientific and technical services	20,170	6.7	5,475	4.5
Educational services	52,460	17.4	37,600	31.0
Health care and social assistance	37,870	12.6	15,910	13.1
Accommodation and food services	7,205	2.4	2,415	2.0
Public administration	67,070	22.2	16,145	13.3
Other sectors	47,740	15.8	17,665	14.5

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, Ontario, 2021

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		French ¹		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	594,735	4.2	390,830	66.0	203,905	1.5
0 to 14 years	136,880	6.1	72,425	83.5	64,455	3.0
15 to 44 years	223,505	4.1	138,055	67.7	85,445	1.6
45 years and older	234,350	3.7	180,345	59.9	54,005	0.9

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, Ontario, 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	1,550,545	11.1	583,210	4.2	477,860	3.4	100,405	0.7
Non-immigrants	1,276,985	13.5	464,155	4.9	404,010	4.3	41,185	0.4
Immigrants	255,030	6.1	108,155	2.6	65,770	1.6	55,135	1.3
Recent immigrants ²	36,015	6.2	20,840	3.6	14,680	2.5	9,050	1.5
Established immigrants ³	219,015	6.0	87,315	2.4	51,090	1.4	46,080	1.3
2011 to 2015	35,940	7.8	17,990	3.9	10,425	2.3	9,335	2.0
2001 to 2010	66,595	7.1	30,040	3.2	16,905	1.8	17,535	1.9
1991 to 2000	41,880	4.9	17,090	2.0	9,760	1.1	9,975	1.2
1980 to 1990	26,750	5.3	9,625	1.9	5,530	1.1	5,055	1.0
Before 1980	47,860	5.6	12,570	1.5	8,475	1.0	4,180	0.5
Non-permanent residents	18,530	4.8	10,905	2.8	8,085	2.1	4,095	1.1

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, Ontario, 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	1,558,670	11.1	594,735	4.2	484,425	3.4	98,270	0.7
Toronto	461,210	7.5	141,445	2.3	69,060	1.1	48,625	0.8
Ottawa ²	425,215	37.8	201,855	18.0	167,650	14.9	26,800	2.4
Hamilton	50,630	6.5	13,135	1.7	9,255	1.2	3,110	0.4
Kitchener - Cambridge - Waterloo	36,615	6.4	8,960	1.6	5,580	1.0	2,690	0.5
London	35,735	6.6	9,705	1.8	5,790	1.1	2,475	0.5
St. Catharines - Niagara	31,460	7.3	9,390	2.2	10,070	2.3	1,220	0.3
Windsor	39,915	9.5	11,535	2.8	8,905	2.1	2,505	0.6
Oshawa	30,605	7.4	8,910	2.2	6,205	1.5	1,565	0.4
Barrie	13,600	6.4	4,050	1.9	3,300	1.6	590	0.3
Kingston	21,255	12.6	6,075	3.6	5,035	3.0	675	0.4
Greater Sudbury	63,445	37.6	32,160	19.1	38,365	22.7	1,135	0.7
Guelph	14,355	8.7	3,100	1.9	1,765	1.1	585	0.4
Brantford	6,470	4.5	1,510	1.1	1,230	0.9	245	0.2
Peterborough	9,200	7.2	1,695	1.3	1,135	0.9	180	0.1
Thunder Bay	9,570	7.9	2,310	1.9	2,185	1.8	160	0.1
Belleville - Quinte West	7,930	7.2	2,640	2.4	2,560	2.3	185	0.2

1. Includes all mentions of French.

2. Ontario part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.