



Facts on Canada

Canada's French Language and Identity: A Vibrant Presence

- According to the 1996 census, French is the mother tongue of 81.5 percent of Quebec's population and is spoken at home by 82.8 percent of the population. Just under a million (970,000) Francophones live outside Quebec.
- French is spoken by 8.9 million people in Canada, 26 percent of whom live outside Quebec. Of this number, 6.7 million indicate that French is their mother tongue.
- More and more children are learning French in schools throughout Canada: enrolment in French immersion programs jumped from 37 800 in 1978 to some 312 000 in 1996-97.
- In 1995, 2.7 million young people (54 percent of students) were studying French or English as a second language, an increase of 10 percent in 25 years.
- Internationally, it is estimated that some 850 million people speak English and 283 million speak French. As well, *La Francophonie*, which represents 11 percent of the world's population, accounts for 10.7 percent of the world's Gross National Product (GNP) and 15.8 percent of world trade. Clearly, a knowledge of both languages provides a competitive edge in the battle to conquer new markets. As a bilingual nation, Canada has that edge.
- The *Official Languages Act* makes French and English the official languages of Canada and provides for special measures aimed at enhancing the vitality and supporting the development of English and French linguistic minority communities. Canada's federal institutions must reflect the equality of its two official languages by offering bilingual services.
- The *Constitution Act, 1982*, guarantees that Canada's two official languages have equal status in terms of their use in all the institutions of the Government of Canada.
- The Société Radio-Canada (the French-language division of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) broadcasts programs in French across the country. In addition, since January 1995, the Réseau de l'information (RDI) has been broadcasting French-language television news and public affairs programs 24 hours a day. Its objective is to ensure a French current affairs presence throughout the country.

- The Government of Canada supports a group of television networks from Quebec and across Canada as part of an international Francophone broadcasting consortium known as TV5. Today, the Government of Canada contributes approximately \$7.5 million annually so that TV5 can continue to provide high-quality domestic and international Francophone broadcasting for Canadians.

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