

Census in Brief

English–French bilingualism reaches new heights

Census of Population, 2016

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- . not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Highlights

- In 2016, the English–French bilingualism rate in Canada reached the highest proportion ever at 18.0%.
- Bilingualism increased in most provinces and territories.
- Two-thirds of the growth of the bilingual population is attributable to Quebec.
- Contrary to what was observed between 2006 and 2011, all mother tongue groups contributed to the growth of the bilingual population between 2011 and 2016.
- There was an increase in the bilingualism rate for each age category of the school-age population with English as a mother tongue between 2011 and 2016.

Introduction

English and French are the two official languages of Canada. This linguistic duality is an important aspect of the Canadian Confederation, which is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Since 1901, the Canadian Census of Population has been measuring the ability to conduct a conversation in English and French.¹

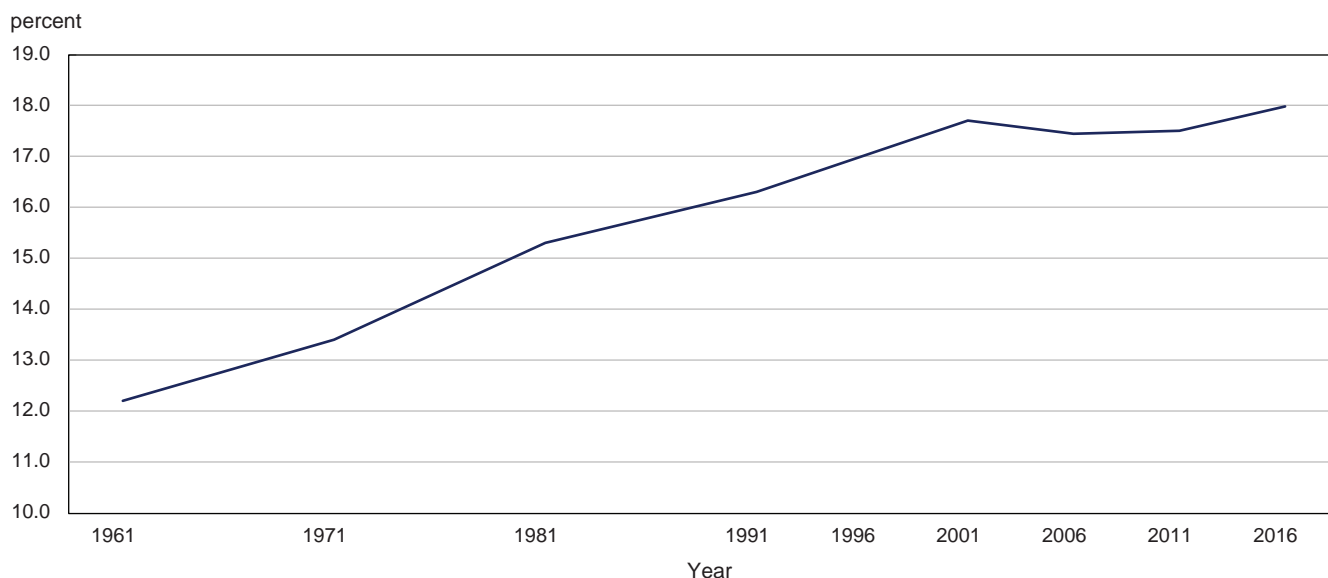
Since the first *Official Languages Act* was passed in 1969, the English–French bilingualism rate has seen constant growth in Canada, rising from 12.2% in 1961 to 17.7% in 2001. However, it seems to have levelled off since then. In 2006 (17.4%) and in 2011 (17.5%), the bilingualism rate remained more or less stable, slightly below the threshold reached in 2001.

Between 2011 and 2016, the English–French bilingualism rate rose from 17.5% to 18.0%, an increase of 0.5 percentage points. This is the highest proportion ever for English–French bilingualism in Canadian history.

1. The way this information has been collected has fluctuated over time, but is nevertheless evidence of a long-standing interest in English–French bilingualism and the evolution of the official languages.

English–French bilingualism reaches new heights

Chart 1
English–French bilingualism rate, Canada, 1961 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016.

Increase in the bilingualism rate in most provinces and territories

In 2016, the bilingualism rate increased in most of the provinces and territories, though several of these increases were very small. The provinces and territories that saw the biggest increases are Quebec, the Northwest Territories, New Brunswick and Yukon.

The bilingualism rates remained practically unchanged in Manitoba (8.6%), Alberta (6.6%) and British Columbia (6.8%).

English–French bilingualism reaches new heights

Table 1
English–French bilingualism rate, Canada, provinces and territories, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016

	<u>2011</u>	<u>2016</u>	
	percent		Difference
Canada	17.5	18.0	0.5
Newfoundland and Labrador	4.6	5.0	0.4
Prince Edward Island	12.3	12.6	0.3
Nova Scotia	10.3	10.5	0.2
New Brunswick	33.2	34.0	0.8
Quebec	42.6	44.9	2.3
Ontario	11.0	11.2	0.2
Manitoba	8.6	8.6	0.0
Saskatchewan	4.6	4.7	0.1
Alberta	6.5	6.6	0.1
British Columbia	6.8	6.8	0.0
Yukon	13.1	13.8	0.7
Northwest Territories	9.1	10.3	1.2
Nunavut	3.8	4.3	0.5
Canada outside Quebec	9.7	9.9	0.2

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

These recent trends contrast with the trends from the previous period. Between 2006 and 2011, the bilingualism rate had declined in every province except Quebec. The only other increases in the English–French bilingualism rate in Canada had been observed in Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

In 2016, the provinces and territories that posted bilingualism rates above 10.0% were Quebec (44.9%), New Brunswick (34.0%), Yukon (13.8%), Prince Edward Island (12.6%), Ontario (11.2%), Nova Scotia (10.5%) and the Northwest Territories (10.3%).

Geographic concentration of bilingual people

Bilingual people were largely concentrated in Quebec and in the neighbouring regions of New Brunswick and Ontario. In 2016, these three provinces comprised 85.8% of Canada's bilingual population, the same proportion as in 2011. By comparison, these provinces comprised 63.6% of the Canadian population.

However, most bilingual people live in Quebec. In 2016, Quebec was the province of residence of 57.9% of English–French bilingual people in Canada. In 2011, this proportion was 57.4%.

The growth of English–French bilingualism comes mostly from Quebec

In Canada, the number of bilingual people rose from 5.8 million in 2011 to 6.3 million in 2016, an increase of 455,910 people. Proportionally speaking, this population grew by 7.9% between 2011 and 2016, which is greater than the growth of the entire population (5.0%).

In Quebec, there were just over 3.6 million bilingual people in 2016. This is an increase of 8.8%, or close to 300,000 people, compared with 2011. This represents 64.0% of the total growth of the bilingual population in Canada.

English–French bilingualism reaches new heights

Table 2
Bilingual population (English–French), Canada, Quebec, and Canada outside Quebec, 2011 and 2016

	2011	2016	Difference	Growth from 2011 to 2016
	number			percent
Newfoundland and Labrador	23,450	25,940	2,490	10.6
Prince Edward Island	17,005	17,835	830	4.9
Nova Scotia	93,440	95,385	1,945	2.1
New Brunswick	245,890	250,460	4,570	1.9
Quebec	3,328,725	3,620,715	291,990	8.8
Ontario	1,395,805	1,490,840	95,035	6.8
Manitoba	103,145	108,475	5,330	5.2
Saskatchewan	46,570	51,365	4,795	10.3
Alberta	235,565	264,780	29,215	12.4
British Columbia	296,645	314,980	18,335	6.2
Yukon	4,415	4,900	485	11.0
Northwest Territories	3,715	4,280	565	15.2
Nunavut	1,200	1,525	325	27.1
Canada outside Quebec	2,466,850	2,630,770	163,920	6.6
Canada	5,795,575	6,251,485	455,910	7.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2011 and 2016.

In 2016, there were 95,035 more bilingual people in Ontario than in 2011, an increase of 6.8%.

The bilingual population of New Brunswick increased 1.9% over the same period, the smallest growth of all the provinces and territories.

In relative terms, the provinces with the largest increases in their bilingual population are Alberta (12.4%), Newfoundland and Labrador (10.6%) and Saskatchewan (10.3%). Relatively significant increases were also observed in Yukon (11.1%), the Northwest Territories (14.9%) and Nunavut (27.1%). Therefore, the English–French bilingual population rose from 9,330 people in 2011 to 10,705 people in 2016 in all the Canadian territories.

The majority of bilingual people have French as their mother tongue

In 2016, people with French as their mother tongue (single responses) represented 52.6% of the English–French bilingual population in Canada, and had a bilingualism rate of 46.2%, up almost 2 percentage points from 2011 (44.4%).

In 2016, the bilingualism rate for people with an other mother tongue² was 11.7%, a proportion that has not changed since 2011.

For people with English as their mother tongue, the bilingualism rate was 9.4% in 2016. This is an increase of half a percentage point over 2011 (8.9%).

2. The expressions "other mother tongue" and "other language" refer to all languages other than English and French. These include Aboriginal, immigrant and sign languages. Some data products also use the expression "non-official languages" to refer to the same concept.

All mother tongue groups contribute to the growth of bilingualism

Between 2006 and 2011, the increase in English–French bilingualism in Canada was primarily attributable to people with French as their mother tongue. Moreover, the increase in bilingualism was largely concentrated in Quebec.

Quebec was still the main driver of bilingualism growth in Canada between 2011 and 2016. However, the portion of the growth attributable to the other provinces and territories increased from 10.3% between 2006 and 2011 to 36.0% between 2011 and 2016. All mother tongue groups also contributed to the growth of bilingualism.

In 2016, the population with English as its mother tongue (single responses) had 161,310 more bilingual people than in 2011. This equals 35.4% of the growth of the bilingual population in Canada during this period. There were 153,595 more bilingual people in the French-mother-tongue population (33.7% of the growth in the bilingual population), and 91,455 more bilingual people in the other-mother-tongue population (20.1% of the growth in the bilingual population). The remainder of the growth in bilingualism is attributable to people who reported more than one mother tongue.

In Quebec, just over half of the growth in the number of bilingual people is on account of the population with French as its mother tongue (single responses). This represents an increase of 147,510 people.

Between 2011 and 2016, an increase of 61,490 bilingual people was observed in the English-mother-tongue population in Quebec, and an increase of 60,345 bilingual people was observed in the other-mother-tongue population in Quebec.

Two-thirds of the growth in English–French bilingualism among the other mother tongue population comes from Quebec, compared with 38.1% for the population with English as its mother tongue.

Outside Quebec, the English–French bilingual population rose 6.6% between 2011 and 2016, to 2.6 million people, or almost 164,000 more bilingual people than in 2011. Specifically, 3.7% of the growth in the bilingual population is attributable to people with French as their mother tongue (6,080 people), compared with 19.0% for people with an other mother tongue (31,100 people) and 16.4% for people with multiple mother tongues (26,915 people).

The bilingual population with English as its mother tongue increased by 99,825 people in Canada outside Quebec between 2011 and 2016. This represents 60.9% of the growth of the bilingual population. This is a significant change compared with the previous period. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of bilingual people with English as their mother tongue decreased slightly in Canada outside Quebec.

Growth of English–French bilingualism among school-age people with English as their mother tongue

In Canada outside Quebec, people with English as their mother tongue who develop the ability to conduct a conversation in French generally do so in school, when they are between 5 and 19 years of age. Bilingualism rates then gradually decline from one age group to the next.

Between 2011 and 2016, the bilingualism rate rose in each age category for the school-age population with English as its mother tongue. The bilingualism rate has risen among the 5-to-9 and 10-to-14 age groups with English as their mother tongue since at least 2001, but has declined in each census for people aged 15 to 19 years.

These conflicting trends have changed the age when English–French bilingualism peaks among people with English as their mother tongue in Canada outside Quebec. Since 2011, the English–French bilingualism rate has been the highest among the population aged 10 to 14 years. In 2016, its rate was 15.0%.

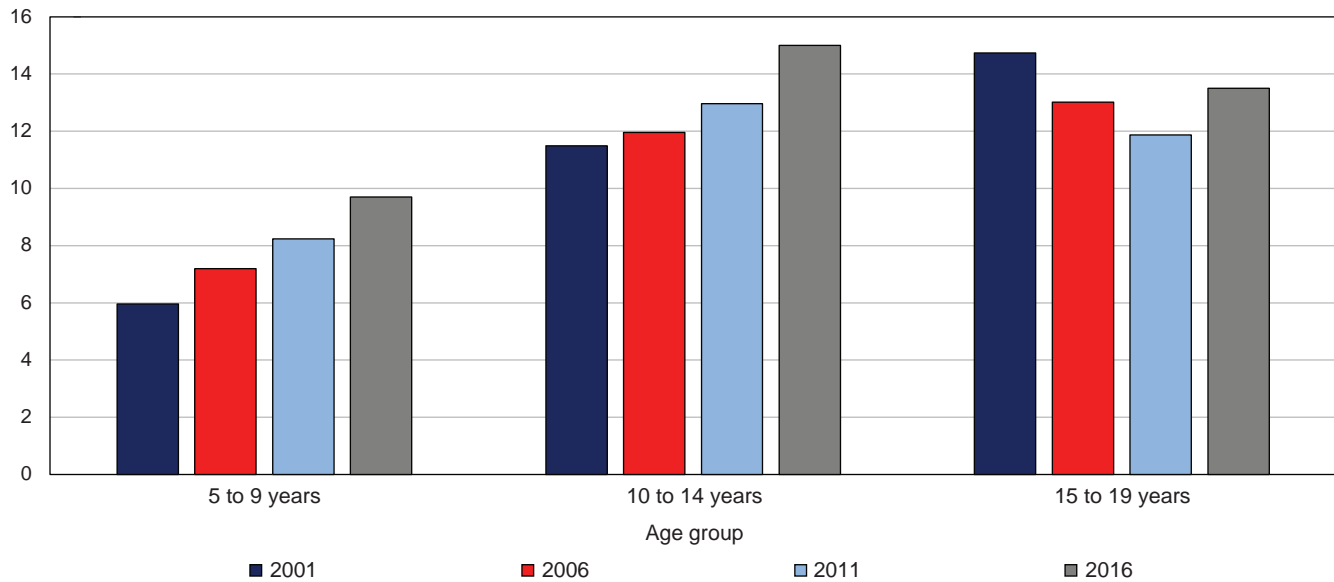
English–French bilingualism reaches new heights

In the past, bilingualism peaked among youth aged 15 to 19. In 2016, the bilingualism rate of this group rose to 13.5%. For the first time since 2001, the rate for this age group was up compared with the previous census. In 2011, it was 11.9%.

Chart 2

Rate of English–French bilingualism, by age group of people with English as their mother tongue, Canada outside Quebec, 2001 to 2016

percent



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2001 to 2016.

Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

The data in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population. Further information on the census can be found in the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Specific information on the quality and comparability of census data on language can be found in the [Language Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016003.

Methods

Random rounding and percentage distributions: To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Because of random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products, such as the analytical documents, highlight tables and data tables.

Definitions

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-301-X, for additional information on the census variables.

Additional information

Additional analyses on language can be found in [The Daily](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802b-eng.htm) (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/170802/dq170802b-eng.htm) of August 2, 2017, and in the Census in Brief articles entitled [Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Canadian homes](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016010 and [English, French and official language minorities in Canada](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016011/98-200-x2016011-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016011/98-200-x2016011-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016011.

Additional information on language can be found in the [Highlight tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/lang/index-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hlt-fst/lang/index-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016005; the [Data tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=118&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2016&THEME=118&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X2016045 to 98-400-X2016079 and 98-400-X2016343 to 98-400-X2016345; the [Census Profile](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E), Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001; and the Focus on Geography Series, Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

An infographic entitled [Immigrant languages in Canada, 2016 Census of Population](http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm) (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm) also illustrates some key findings on immigrant languages in Canada.

For details on the concepts, definitions and variables used in the 2016 Census of Population, please consult the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rates and other data quality information, the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X, provides an overview of the various phases of the census, including content determination, sampling design, collection, data processing, data quality assessment, confidentiality guidelines and dissemination.

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