

## Census in Brief

# Linguistic integration of immigrants and official language populations in Canada

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 <sup>s</sup> | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| <sup>p</sup>   | preliminary  |
| <sup>r</sup>   | revised  |
| x              | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i>                                   |
| <sup>E</sup>   | use with caution   |
| F              | too unreliable to be published   |
| *              | significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )   |

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## Highlights

- In 2016, 72.5% of immigrants reported having a mother tongue other than English or French (a non-official language).
- A larger proportion of recent immigrants (i.e., those who arrived between 2011 and 2016) reported having French as their mother tongue than immigrants who arrived before 2011.
- Over three-quarters (76.4%) of immigrants reported knowing more than one language, compared with 27.5% of Canadian-born people.
- More than half of the immigrant population spoke English or French most often at home in 2016.

## Introduction

The ability of immigrants to speak one of the official languages is considered an important condition for their full participation in Canadian society.

In the 1921 Census of Canada, more than 70% of the foreign-born population reported English or French as a mother tongue, and less than 30% reported another language. In contrast, in the 2016 Census, more than 70% of immigrants reported a language other than English or French as their mother tongue, and less than 30% reported English or French.

The 2016 Census provides further insight into the language profile of immigrants in Canada and their integration into the country's official language populations.

## Seven in 10 immigrants report a language other than English or French as their mother tongue

In Quebec, where the majority of the population is French-speaking, 70.5% of immigrants reported having an "other" language as their mother tongue in the 2016 Census. The remaining immigrants reported French (22.0%) and English (7.5%) as their mother tongue.

In the rest of Canada, a slightly higher proportion (72.9%) of immigrants reported an "other" language as their mother tongue. More than one-quarter (26.0%) of immigrants reported English and only 1.1% reported French as their mother tongue.

## A larger proportion of recent immigrants than established immigrants report French as their mother tongue

In Quebec, the proportion of immigrants with French as their mother tongue has increased over the periods of immigration, rising from 20.9% for immigrants who arrived before 1981 to 26.6% for [recent immigrants](#), i.e., those who immigrated between 2011 and 2016.

The opposite trend was observed among the immigrant population with English as a mother tongue: the proportion was 13.8% for people who immigrated before 1981 and 5.1% for recent immigrants.

Furthermore, in Quebec, 68.3% of recent immigrants reported an "other" mother tongue. However, this proportion was slightly higher among immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1981 and 2010 (between 72% and 75%), but lower among immigrants who arrived before 1981 (65.3%).

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In Canada outside Quebec, 80.7% of recent immigrants reported that they had an “other” mother tongue, or a higher proportion than observed among established immigrants. Among individuals who immigrated before 1981, 56.2% reported an “other” mother tongue, while 42.7% reported English as their mother tongue.

**Table 1**  
**Distribution of the immigrant population, by mother tongue and period of immigration, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2016**

	Period of immigration				Total
	Before 1981	1981 to 2000	2001 to 2010	2011 to 2016	
Mother tongue	percentage				
Canada					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	39.1	19.9	16.7	15.7	23.3
French	3.5	3.2	4.8	5.9	4.1
Other language	57.3	76.9	78.5	78.5	72.5
Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	13.8	6.9	4.9	5.1	7.5
French	20.9	18.8	22.9	26.6	22.0
Other language	65.3	74.3	72.2	68.3	70.5
Canada outside Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	42.7	21.9	19.0	17.9	26.0
French	1.1	0.9	1.3	1.4	1.1
Other language	56.2	77.3	79.7	80.7	72.9

**Note:** To simplify, multiples responses have been equally redistributed between language categories.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

### Over three-quarters of immigrants report knowing more than one language

Although a large proportion of the 7.5 million immigrants reported neither English nor French as their mother tongue, the vast majority (93.2%) of them were able to conduct a conversation in English or French. In other words, 6.8% of immigrants reported being unable to conduct a conversation in either official language.

Immigrants were more likely than Canadian-born people (non-immigrants) to report knowing more than one language. In 2016, 76.4% of immigrants reported knowing at least two languages, compared with 27.5% of non-immigrants.

However, immigrants' knowledge of languages varied from region to region. In Canada outside Quebec, the majority of the immigrant population knew English, either alone (19.4%) or with at least one language other than English or French (72.0%). A lower proportion reported being able to conduct a conversation in French (5.9%).

On the other hand, half (50.3%) of immigrants in Quebec were able to conduct a conversation in both official languages, in addition to any other languages.

Quebec also had the largest proportion of the immigrant population with knowledge of French. Specifically, 80.5% of immigrants living in Quebec reported being able to conduct a conversation in French.

The proportion of immigrants with knowledge of at least one of Canada's official languages is high (93.2%) largely because knowledge of English or French is one of the selection criteria for economic immigrants admitted to

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Canada and because these are the two languages of convergence in the public sphere. Furthermore, Quebec's immigration policies specifically promote admission of immigrants with knowledge of French.

**Table 2**

**Distribution of the population, by immigrant status and number of languages known, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2016**

Number of languages known	Canada		Quebec		Canada outside Quebec	
	Non-immigrant	Immigrant	Non-immigrant	Immigrant	Non-immigrant	Immigrant
	percent					
<b>Total population</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Knowledge of one language</b>	<b>72.5</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>53.9</b>	<b>12.5</b>	<b>78.9</b>	<b>25.5</b>
English only	58.5	16.9	2.0	2.5	78.1	19.4
French only	13.6	0.9	51.6	6.1	0.5	0.0
Other language only	0.4	5.8	0.3	3.9	0.4	6.1
<b>Knowledge of more than one language</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>76.4</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>87.5</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>74.5</b>
English and French only	16.7	2.5	36.9	8.8	9.8	1.4
English, French and at least one other language	3.0	9.6	6.9	41.5	1.6	4.3
English and at least one other language	7.4	59.6	0.7	12.5	9.7	67.6
French and at least one other language	0.4	3.6	1.7	24.2	0.0	0.2
Several other languages only	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	1.1

**Note:** Data on the number of languages known were derived using information on knowledge of official languages and those on knowledge of non-official languages.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

### Over half of immigrants speak English or French most often at home

Data from the 2016 Census showed that there were more immigrants who reported speaking English or French most often at home than who reported having either language as a mother tongue.

In Canada outside Quebec, 26.0% of immigrants reported English as their mother tongue in 2016, while 51.5%, or nearly twice the number, spoke English most often at home. In Quebec, French plays an important part as a language immigrants speak most often at home. Specifically, 38.7% of the immigrant population in this province said that they spoke French most often at home in 2016, compared with 22.0% who reported French as their mother tongue. Furthermore, 16.2% of individuals reported speaking English most often at home, compared with 7.5% who reported it as their mother tongue.

The percentage of recent immigrants who spoke a language other than English or French most often at home was much lower in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. In 2016, 62.6% of new immigrants in Canada outside Quebec spoke a language other than English or French most often at home, compared with 48.8% of recent immigrants in Quebec, a difference of 13.8 percentage points.

This difference can be explained by the large number of immigrants from French-speaking African countries (such as Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and countries in Northern Africa (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) who are settling in Quebec and who tend to adopt French at home.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of the immigrant population, by language spoken most often at home and period of immigration, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2016**

	Period of immigration				
	Before 1981	1981 to 2000	2001 to 2010	2011 to 2016	Total
Language spoken most often at home	percentage				
Canada					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	69.0	44.3	36.0	31.4	46.4
French	4.5	5.6	7.8	8.5	6.4
Other language	26.4	50.1	56.2	60.1	47.2
Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	30.1	16.0	10.6	9.6	16.2
French	33.0	37.9	41.7	41.6	38.7
Other language	36.9	46.2	47.7	48.8	45.1
Canada outside Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	74.5	48.6	40.9	36.1	51.5
French	0.5	0.7	1.2	1.3	0.9
Other language	25.0	50.7	57.8	62.6	47.6

**Note:** To simplify, multiples responses have been equally redistributed between language categories.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

## The majority of immigrants in Canada outside Quebec have English as a first official language spoken

The knowledge or predominant use of English or French generally leads immigrants to one of Canada's two official language communities in the public sphere, and even the private sphere. [First official language spoken \(FOLS\)](#) is a general indicator of this linguistic orientation.

According to the 2016 Census, 90.8% of immigrants in Canada outside Quebec had English as FOLS, compared with 2.0% for French.

In Quebec, the percentage of immigrants with French as FOLS was 62.5% in 2016, while one-third had English as FOLS. The distribution also changes depending on the period of immigration. Specifically, among immigrants who arrived before 1981, 44.0% had English as FOLS and 51.2% had French. Among recent immigrants, 26.0% had English as FOLS, while 68.1% had French.

1. Many of these immigrants from Africa with a mother tongue other than English or French adopted French as a language spoken at home before they arrived in Canada.

**Table 4**

**Distribution of the immigrant population, by first official language spoken and period of immigration, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2016**

First official language spoken (FOLS)	Period of immigration				Total
	Before 1981	1981 to 2000	2001 to 2010	2011 to 2016	
percentage					
Canada					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	88.6	83.0	80.1	75.5	82.5
French	7.5	9.4	13.5	14.3	10.8
Neither English nor French	3.8	7.6	6.5	10.3	6.8
Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	44.0	34.5	28.4	26.0	33.1
French	51.2	60.7	69.0	68.1	62.5
Neither English nor French	4.8	4.9	2.6	5.9	4.4
Canada outside Quebec					
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
English	94.9	90.3	90.1	86.2	90.8
French	1.4	1.7	2.7	2.6	2.0
Neither English nor French	3.7	8.0	7.2	11.2	7.2

**Note:** The “English-French” category has been equally redistributed between the “French” and “English” categories.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

## Immigrants comprise 23.9% of the English FOLS population and 10.4% of the French FOLS population

The orientation of immigrants towards one of the two official languages influences the composition of the first official language spoken (FOLS) populations and the growing proportion of immigrants in these populations.

In 2016, immigrants represented a larger proportion of the French-speaking population in Canada outside Quebec than in previous censuses. Specifically, this proportion rose from 9.9% in 2006 to 12.8% in 2016, an increase of 2.9 percentage points. An increase of 2.4 percentage points was also observed for the French FOLS population in Quebec.

On the other hand, immigrants represented a larger percentage of the English-speaking population. In Quebec, immigrants comprised almost one-third (32.9%) of the English FOLS population. However, this percentage was slightly lower than the percentages observed in 2006 and 2011. In the rest of Canada, immigrants represented 23.5% of the English FOLS population in 2016, an increase of almost 2 percentage points since 2006.

**Table 5**

**Percentage of immigrants in the French first official language spoken population and in the English first official language spoken population, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2006 to 2016**

	Census year		
	2006	2011	2016
First official language spoken (FOLS)	percent		
<b>Canada</b>			
Total	19.8	20.6	21.9
English	22.3	22.9	23.9
French	8.0	9.2	10.4
Neither English nor French	77.4	79.9	80.8
<b>Quebec</b>			
Total	11.5	12.6	13.7
English	32.5	33.6	32.9
French	7.6	8.8	10.0
Neither English nor French	60.9	62.1	66.2
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>			
Total	22.4	23.1	24.3
English	21.8	22.4	23.5
French	9.9	11.7	12.8
Neither English nor French	79.9	82.4	82.7

**Note:** The “English-French” category has been equally redistributed between the “French” and “English” categories.

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

## Data sources, methods and definitions

### Data sources

The data in this analysis are from censuses of population and the 2011 National Household Survey. Further information on the 2016 Census of Population 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.

Additional information on the quality and comparability of census data on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in the [Place of Birth, Generation Status, Citizenship and Immigration Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/007/98-500-x2016007-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/007/98-500-x2016007-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016007.

### 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

**Recent immigrant** refers to an [immigrant](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop221-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop221-eng.cfm>) who first obtained his or her landed immigrant or permanent resident status between January 1, 2011, and May 10, 2016. **Established immigrant** refers to an immigrant who obtained landed [immigrant](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop221-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/pop221-eng.cfm>) or permanent resident status before 2011.

The **first official language spoken** variable was developed by Statistics Canada in 1989 at the request of the federal government to help estimate the potential demand for government services in either official language. Statistics Canada proposed two methods (methods I and II) to estimate first official language spoken. Method I was adopted in the *Official Languages (Communications with and Services to the Public) Regulations*. Under Method I, first official language spoken is derived successively from answers to the questions on knowledge of official languages, mother tongue and language spoken most often at home. For more information, see *Population Estimates by First Official Language Spoken*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division and Language Studies, 1989.

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 other census variables.

## Additional information

Additional analysis on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in *The Daily* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171025/dq171025b-eng.htm>) of October 25, 2017, and in the Census in Brief articles entitled *Children with an immigrant background: Bridging cultures* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016015/98-200-x2016015-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016015, and *Ethnic and cultural origins of Canadians: Portrait of a rich heritage* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016016/98-200-x2016016-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-200-X2016016.

Additional information on immigration and ethnocultural diversity can be found in the [Highlight tables](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/imm/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/hltfst/imm/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-402-X2016007; 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=2017&THEME=120&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=2017&THEME=120&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X2016184 to 98-400-X2016215; 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](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

A brief historical picture of changes in Canada's immigration source countries can be found in the [Video centre](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/video/index-eng.cfm>).

Two infographics are also available. *Immigrant population in Canada* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017028-eng.htm>) shows some of the key findings, mainly on the place of birth of immigrants and recent immigrants to Canada. The second infographic, *Gateways to Immigration in Canada* (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017029-eng.htm>), shows the main admission programs under which immigrants have come to Canada since 1980.

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>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rates and other information on data quality, the *Guide to the Census of Population* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), 2016, 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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