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## Ethnicity, Language and Immigration Thematic Series

# Key facts on the French language in the Northwest Territories in 2021

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# Key facts on the French language in the Northwest Territories in 2021

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

This fact sheet gives an overview of the situation of French in the Northwest Territories<sup>1</sup> 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, French spoken among recent and established immigrants, and 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 in this fact sheet is taken from the Census of Population. To learn more about the 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

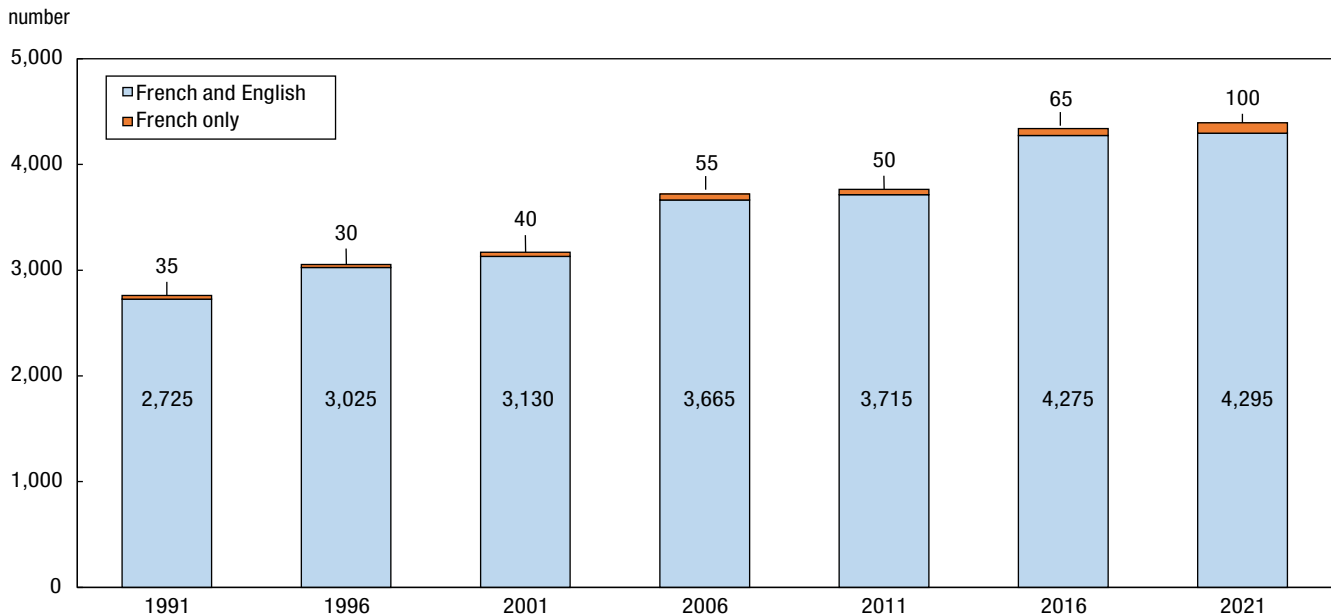
- In the Northwest Territories, the number and proportion of residents who could have a conversation in French or who used French most often at work reached all-time highs in 2021.
- Just over 1 in 10 people (10.8%, or 4,395 people) could conduct a conversation in French in 2021.
- In 2021, 1,470 people (3.6% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home. Among those with French as one of their mother tongues, two-thirds (67.0%) spoke French regularly at home.
- In 2021, 595 workers living in the territory (2.9%) spoke French at least regularly at work. Many of them worked in public administration (37.8%) or educational services (29.4%).
- Roughly 1 in 11 immigrants (8.7%) could have a conversation in French in 2021. This proportion was higher among immigrants admitted before 2016 (9.2%) than among immigrants admitted between 2016 and 2021 (6.2%).
- In 2021, more than 7 in 10 territory residents (71.3%) whose only first official language spoken was French were born in Canada, but outside the Northwest Territories.

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1. For historical comparability, all the information in this fact sheet is based on the current borders of the Northwest Territories.

## Ability to conduct a conversation in French

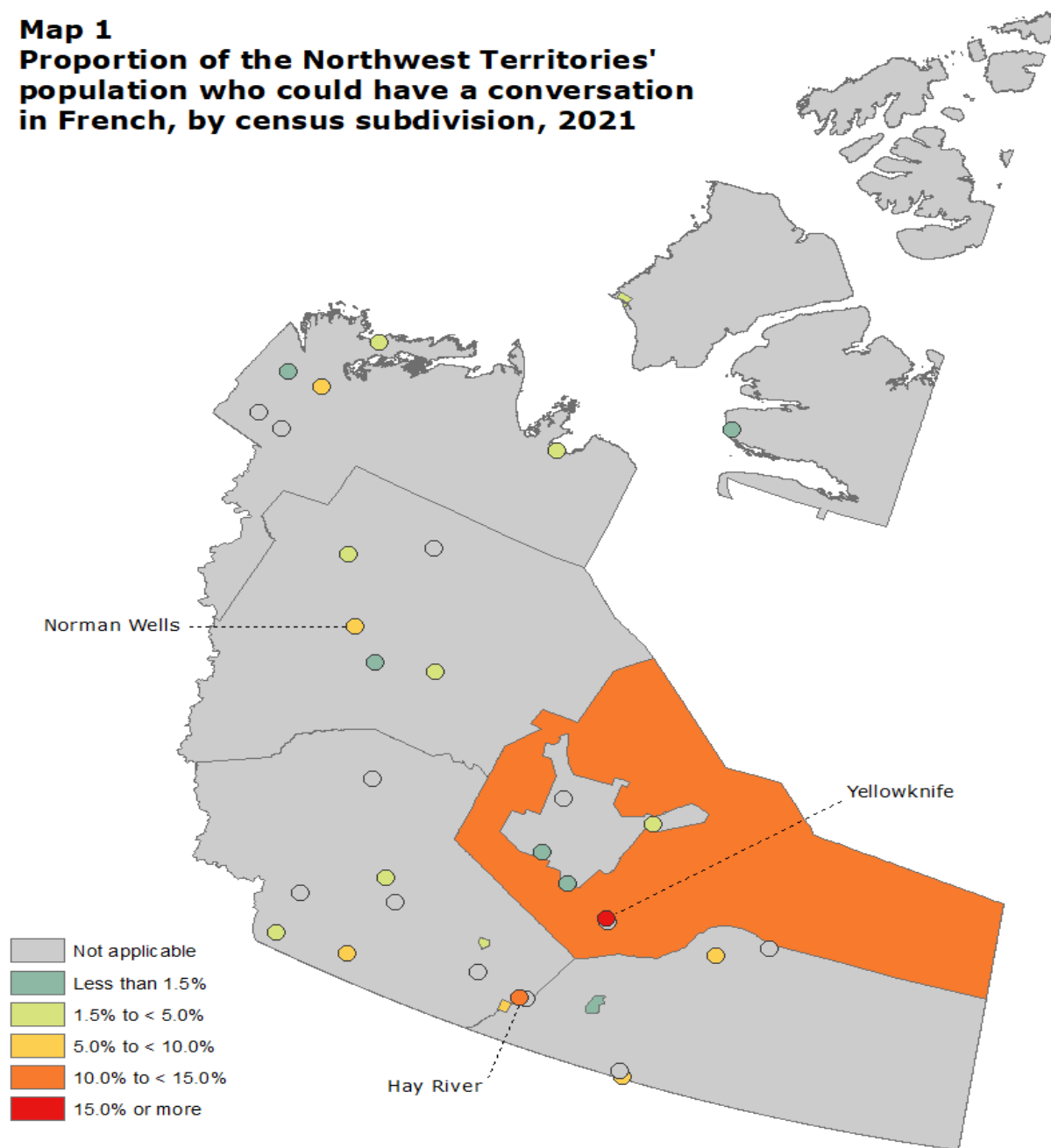
**Chart 1**  
Population who can conduct a conversation in French, Northwest Territories, 1991 to 2021



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

- In 2021, 4,395 residents of the Northwest Territories (10.8% of the population) could have a conversation in French. Almost all (97.7%, or 4,295 people) could also do so in English.
  - The number of people who could conduct a conversation in French was higher than in 1991 (+1,635) and 2016 (+55). The 2021 figure was the highest ever observed in a census.
- From 1991 to 2021, the proportion of the population who can conduct a conversation in French also increased (from 7.6% to 10.8%). In 2021, this was the highest percentage ever observed in a census.
  - This upward trend since 1991 is driven by the growth of the population with French as one of their mother tongues (+395) and by the increase in bilingualism among people who first learned English in childhood. Of these people, 2,750 (8.9%) could have a conversation in French in 2021, up from 1,565 (5.8%) in 1991.

**Map 1**  
**Proportion of the Northwest Territories' population who could have 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.

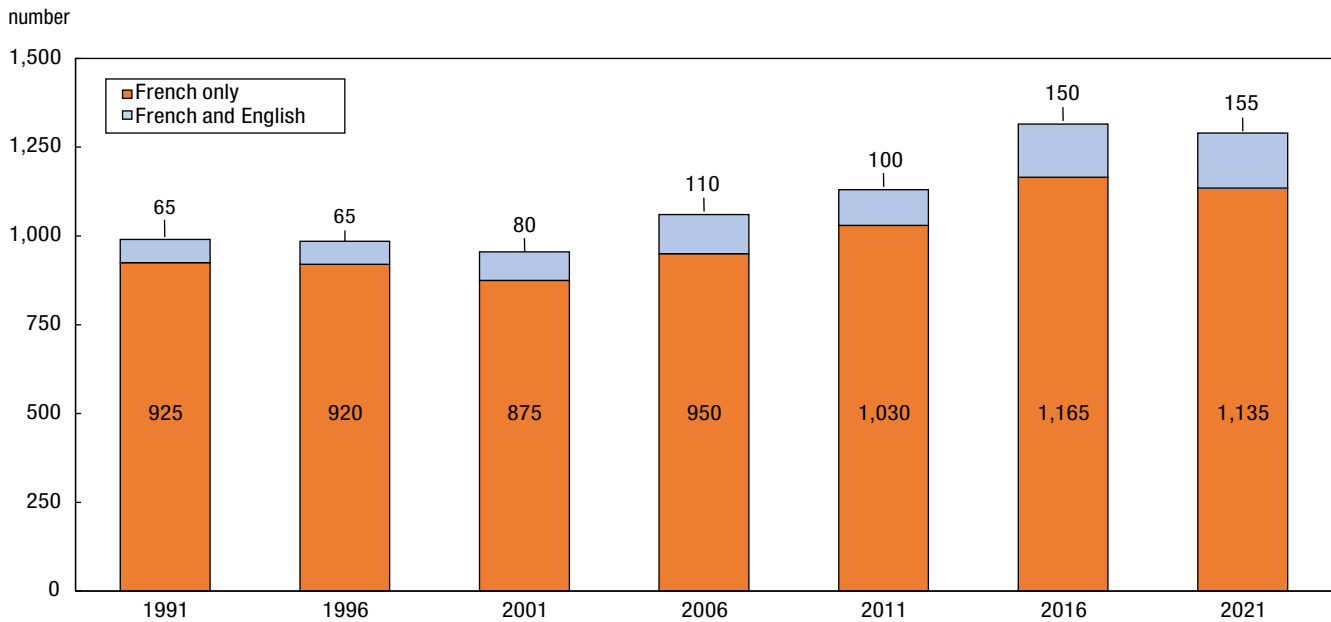
- In 2021, in 24 of the Northwest Territories' 33 municipalities,<sup>2</sup> less than 5% of the population could have a conversation in French.
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest proportion of people who spoke French were the capital, Yellowknife (17.1%), Hay River, located on the shore of Great Slave Lake (10.4%), and Norman Wells (8.1%).
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest number of French speakers were Yellowknife (3,430), Hay River (325) and Inuvik (185).

2. In this fact sheet, the term "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, Northwest Territories, 1991 to 2021**

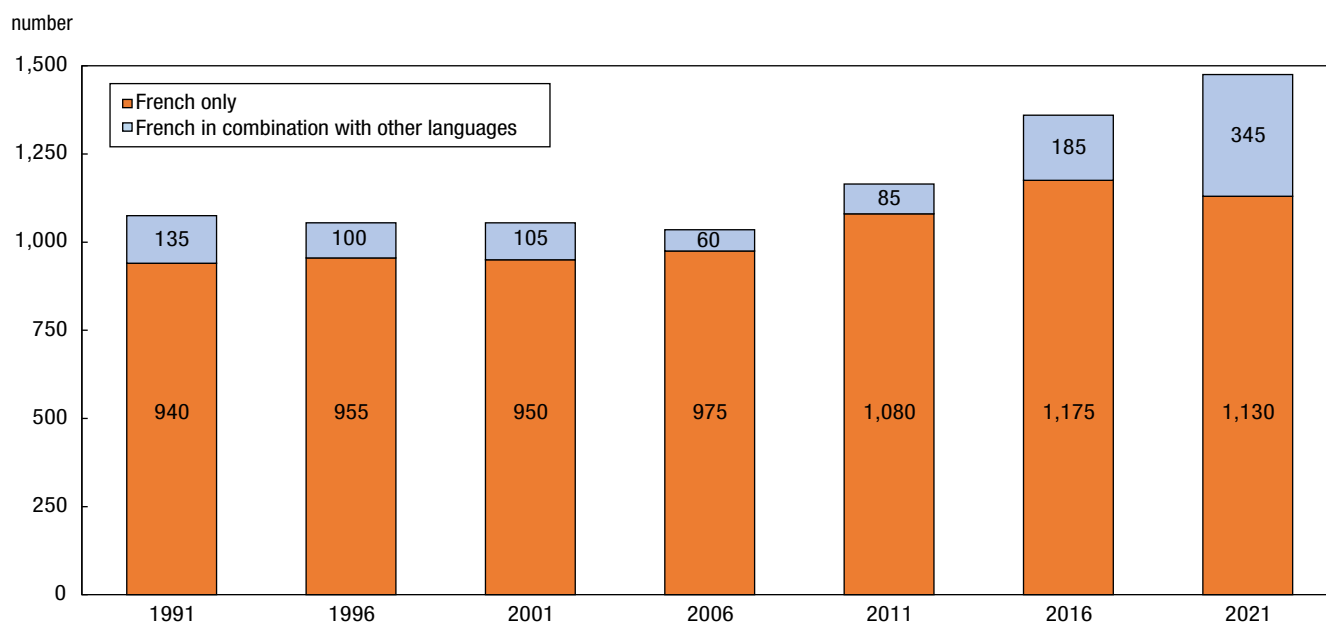


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,135 Northwest Territories residents (2.8% of the population) had French as their only first official language spoken, and 155 residents (0.4%) had English and French as their first official languages spoken.
  - From 1991 to 2001, the number of residents with French as their only first official language spoken declined (-50), but rose from 2001 to 2016 (+270). This population remained fairly stable between 2016 and 2021 (-30).
  - The number of Northwest Territories residents with English and French as their first official languages spoken increased from 1991 to 2021 (+90).

## French as a mother tongue

**Chart 3**  
Population with French as mother tongue, Northwest Territories, 1991 to 2021



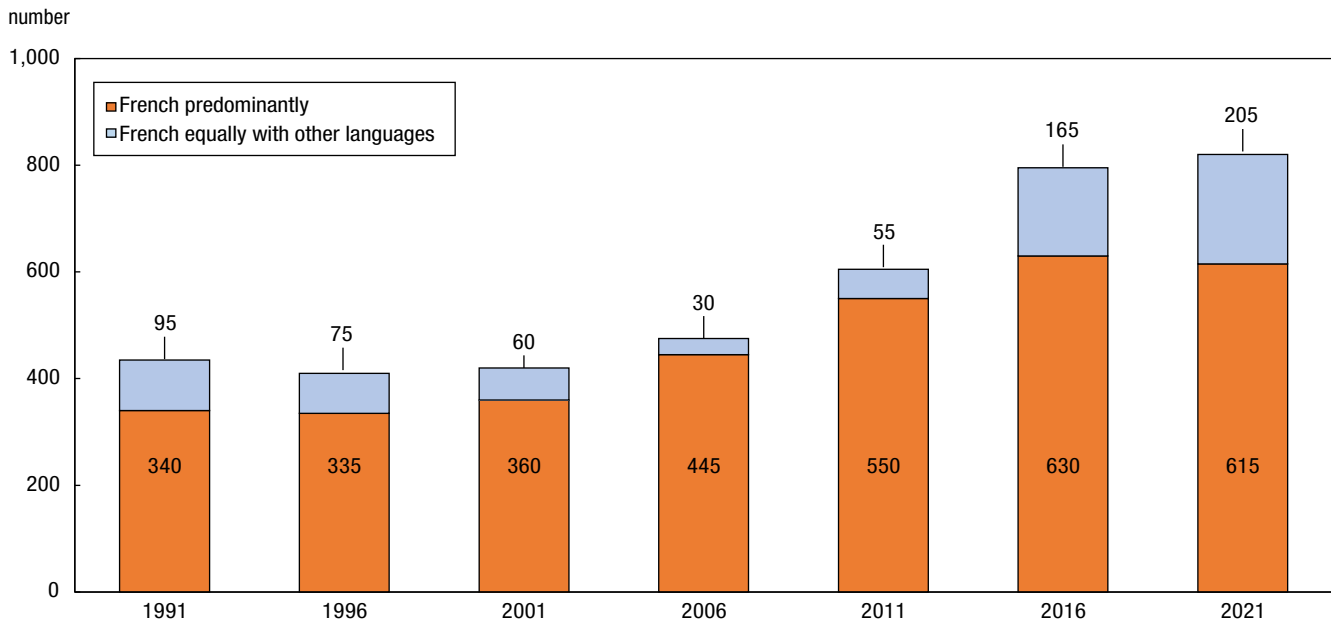
Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,470 Northwest Territories residents had French as one of their mother tongues, up from 1991 (+395) and 2016 (+105).
  - In 2021, 76.9% of these residents (1,130 people) had French as their only mother tongue, while 23.5% (345 people) had French as a mother tongue along with other languages (mainly English).
- From 1991 to 2006, the proportion of the population with French as one of their mother tongues edged down from 3.0% to 2.5%. It recovered thereafter, with the proportion rising to 3.6% in 2021.
- For roughly two in five (39.7%) people who had French as one of their mother tongues and who were married or in a common-law relationship, French was also the mother tongue of their spouse or partner.



## French spoken at home

**Chart 4**  
Population speaking French most often at home, Northwest Territories, 1991 to 2021

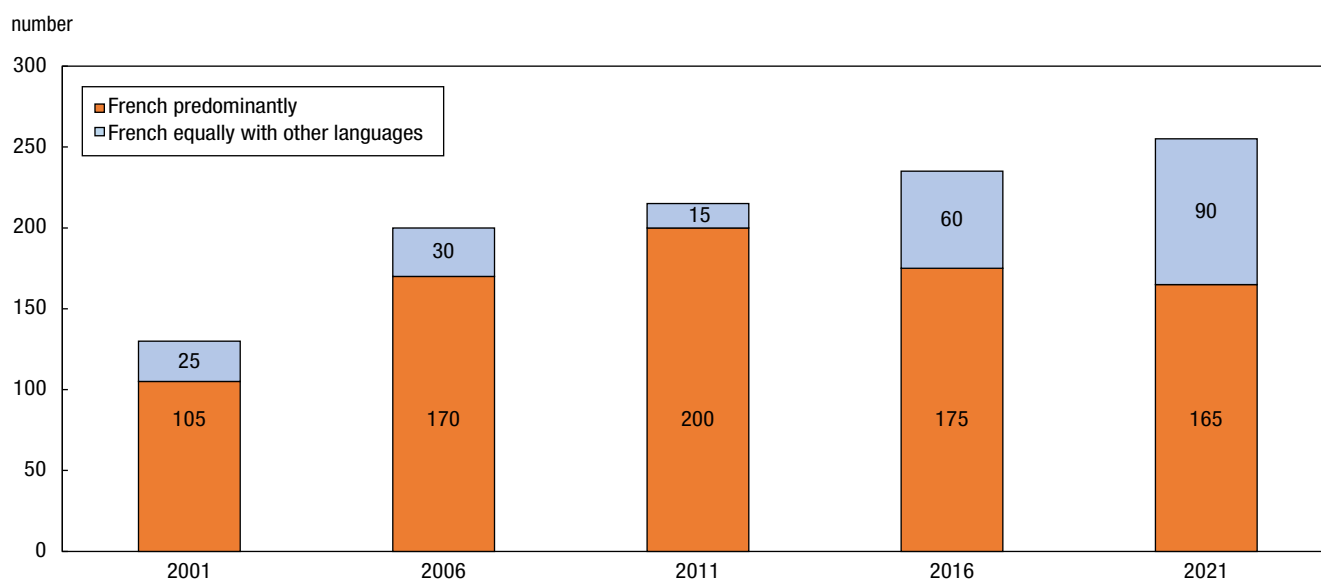


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,470 Northwest Territories residents (3.6% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home.
  - More than half of these residents (55.8%, or 820 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. This was up from 1991 (+380), but remained fairly stable from 2016 to 2021 (+25).
  - Moreover, 650 people (44.2%) spoke French regularly at home in addition to their main language (usually English).
- Among people with French as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages:
  - Two-thirds (67.0%, or 985 people) spoke it at least regularly at home in 2021. However, this rate varied by age, ranging from 86.4% among those under age 15 to 47.9% among those aged 45 and older.
  - Half (49.7%, or 730 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. This was up from 1991 (37.2%, or 400 people).
- Among residents of the Northwest Territories whose mother tongue is not French, 480 (1.2%) spoke French at least regularly at home.
  - The vast majority (81.3%, or 390 people) spoke French at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often (usually English).

## French used at work

**Chart 5**  
Population using French most often at work, Northwest Territories, 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, 595 residents of the Northwest Territories used French at least regularly at work, accounting for 2.9% of the territory's workers.<sup>3</sup>
- In the Northwest Territories, 260 people, or 1.2% of the territory's workers, used French most often at work, predominantly or equally with other languages.
  - The number of people who used French most often at work increased from 130 in 2001 to 260 in 2021.
- In 2021, among workers who used French at least regularly at work, most worked in public administration (37.8%, or 225 people), educational services (175 people, or 29.4%) or retail trade (4.2%, or 25 people).<sup>4</sup>
- Among those who spoke French most often at home, predominantly or with other languages, 52.0% also used French regularly at work.
- Among workers who used French regularly at work, 8 in 10 (81.5%) lived in Yellowknife.

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

4. The industry sectors are based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS).

## Instruction in French in primary and secondary schools

- In 2021, 1,110 (10.9%) of the 10,195 children under 18 living in the territory were eligible<sup>5</sup> for instruction in French.
  - More than 7 in 10 (73.0%, or 810 children) lived in Yellowknife.
- In the Northwest Territories, 1,775 people were attending or had already attended a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada, representing 4.7% of the population aged 5 and older.
  - Of those who had never attended a French-language school, 2,970 (7.9%) had actually attended a French immersion program in an English-language school.
  - Among school-aged children<sup>6</sup> who were eligible for instruction in French, 525 (66.9%) 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 recent<sup>7</sup> and established<sup>8</sup> immigrants living in the Northwest Territories who could conduct a conversation in French (6.2% and 9.2%, respectively) were lower than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (11.2%).
  - The proportions of immigrants and non-immigrants who spoke French at least regularly at home were similar (3.7% and 4.0%, respectively).
  - The proportion of immigrants with French as their only first official language spoken (2.5%) was lower than the proportion for the non-immigrant population (3.1%). However, the proportion of immigrants who had English and French as their first official languages spoken (1.4%) was higher than that of the non-immigrant population (0.4%).

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

6. Children aged 5 to 17.

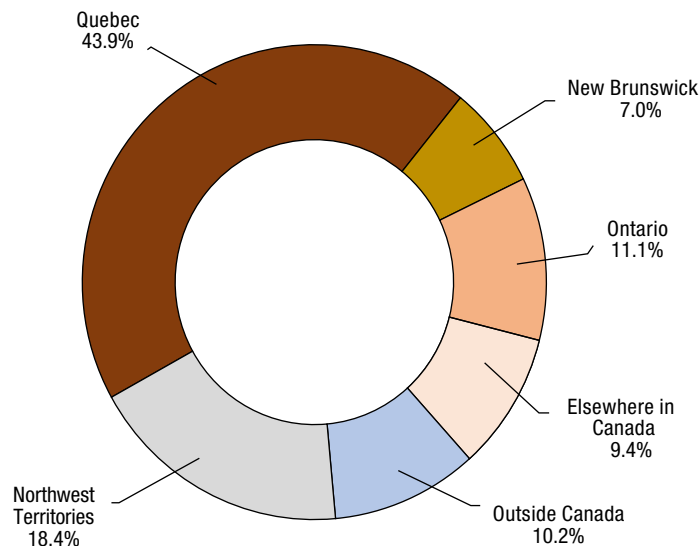
7. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

8. 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, Northwest Territories, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among Northwest Territories residents whose only first official language spoken is French, nearly one in five (18.4%, or 225 people) were born in the territory.
  - More than 7 in 10 people (71.3%, or 870 people) were born in another province or territory, with large proportions coming from Quebec (43.9%, or 535 people), Ontario (11.1%, or 135 people) or New Brunswick (7.0%, or 85 people).
  - Roughly 1 in 10 (10.2%, or 125 people) were born abroad, mainly in metropolitan France (4.1%) or Africa (4.5%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the Northwest Territories population whose only first official language spoken is French was slightly positive (+25 people).
  - While 400 people with French as their only first official language spoken settled in the Northwest Territories from another province or territory from 2016 to 2021, 375 people left the territory during the same period.

## Appendix

**Table 1**  
**Comparison of selected French-language indicators, Northwest Territories, 1991 to 2021**

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
French as first official language spoken <sup>1</sup>	2.7	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8	3.2	3.2
French only	2.6	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.8	2.8
French and English	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4
Knowledge of French <sup>2</sup>	7.6	7.7	8.5	9.1	9.2	10.5	10.8
French only	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
French and English	7.5	7.7	8.4	8.9	9.1	10.3	10.6
French as mother tongue	3.0	2.7	2.8	2.5	2.8	3.3	3.6
French only	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.6	2.8	2.8
French in combination with other languages	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.9
French spoken most often at home	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.5	1.9	2.0
French predominantly	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.5
French equally with other languages	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	0.5
French used most often at work <sup>3</sup>	..	..	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.2
French predominantly	..	..	0.6	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8
French equally with other languages	..	..	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.4

.. 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, Northwest Territories, 2021**

Frequency <sup>2</sup>	French used at work <sup>1</sup>		French spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Total population</b>	<b>20,600</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>40,545</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Only	95	0.5	440	1.1
Mostly	75	0.4	170	0.4
Equally	90	0.4	205	0.5
Regularly	335	1.6	645	1.6
No mention	20,005	97.1	39,075	96.4

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,<sup>1</sup> by frequency and industry sectors, Northwest Territories, 2021**

Selection of industry sectors	Use of French at work			
	At least regularly <sup>2</sup>		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction	0	0.0	0	0.0
Construction	10	1.7	0	0.0
Retail trade	25	4.2	10	3.8
Transportation and warehousing	15	2.5	0	0.0
Professional, scientific and technical services	20	3.4	10	3.8
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	10	1.7	0	0.0
Educational services	175	29.4	135	51.9
Health care and social assistance	40	6.7	15	5.8
Accommodation and food services	10	1.7	0	0.0
Public administration	225	37.8	60	23.1
Other sectors	75	12.6	30	11.5

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, Northwest Territories, 2021**

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		French <sup>1</sup>		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,470</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>985</b>	<b>67.0</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1.2</b>
0 to 14 years	435	5.1	255	86.4	175	2.1
15 to 44 years	720	4.1	505	72.1	215	1.3
45 years and older	315	2.2	230	47.9	90	0.6

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, Northwest Territories, 2021**

Immigration status and period of immigration	Knowledge of French <sup>1</sup>		French spoken at home <sup>1</sup>		First official language spoken			
					French only		French and English	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,445</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>1,640</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>3.0</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Non-immigrants	4,025	11.2	1,445	4.0	1,100	3.1	150	0.4
Immigrants	360	8.7	155	3.7	90	2.5	50	1.4
Recent immigrants <sup>2</sup>	50	6.2	30	3.7	25	3.1	10	1.2
Established immigrants <sup>3</sup>	305	9.2	130	3.9	70	2.1	50	1.5
2011 to 2015	45	5.6	15	1.9	15	1.9	10	1.3
2001 to 2010	110	10.8	65	6.4	40	3.9	30	2.9
1991 to 2000	35	5.6	15	2.4	0	0.0	0	0.0
1980 to 1990	35	10.6	10	3.0	10	3.0	0	0.0
Before 1980	80	14.2	15	2.7	10	1.8	10	1.8
Non-permanent residents	60	14.6	40	9.8	20	4.9	40	9.8

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.