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Key facts on the French language in Alberta in 2021

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Key facts on the French language in Alberta in 2021

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

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

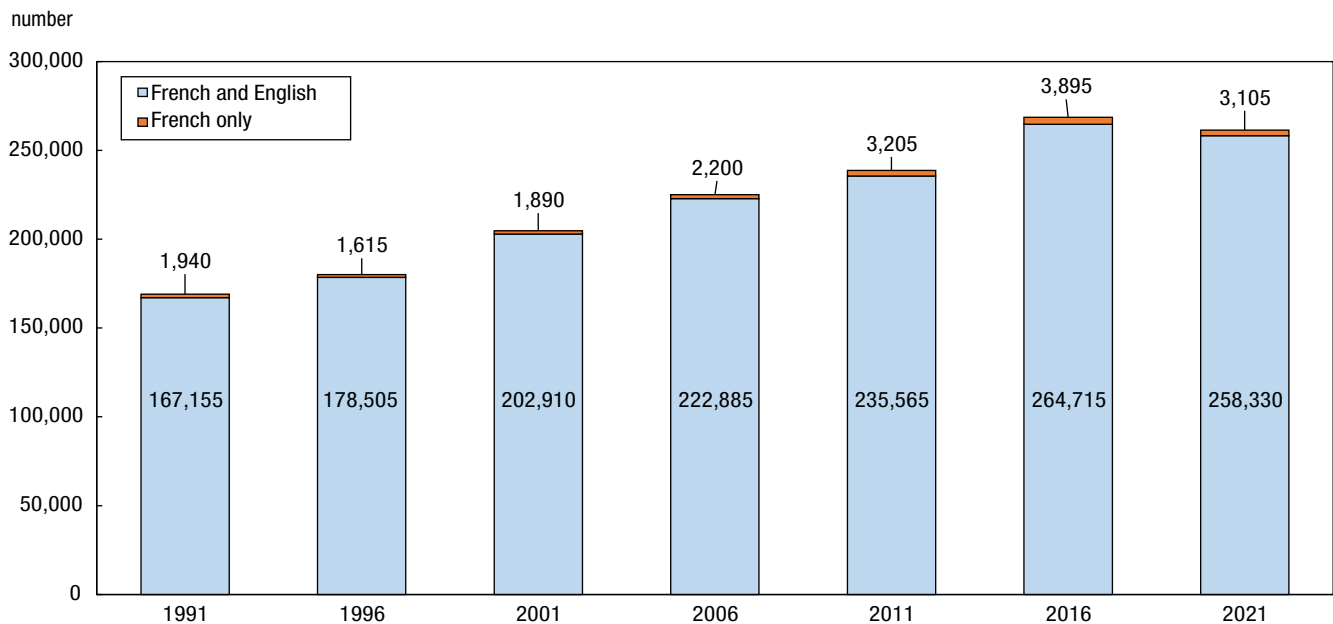
The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the Census of Population. To learn more about census concepts and the historical comparability of data, please refer to the 2021 Census of Population *Languages Reference Guide* and the *Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide*.

Highlights

- In 2021, 261,435 Albertans could conduct a conversation in French. This number rose steadily from 1991 to 2016 (+92,340), but fell from 2016 to 2021 (-7,175). The demographic weight of this population stood at 6.6% or higher from 1991 to 2016, before falling to 6.2% in 2021.
- In 2021, 75,460 people (1.8% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home. Among those with French as one of their mother tongues, half (49.7%) spoke French regularly at home.
- In 2021, 21,770 workers living in the province (1.1%) used French at least regularly at work. Most of them worked in educational services (30.6%) or public administration (11.9%).
- Nearly 1 in 20 immigrants (4.7%) could have a conversation in French in 2021. This proportion was lower than that for the non-immigrant population (6.8%).
- Nearly three in four Albertans (74.6%) whose only first official language spoken in 2021 was French were born outside the province.
- Between 2016 and 2021, for the first time since the 1986-to-1991 period, the net interprovincial migration of the Alberta population with French as its only first official language spoken was negative.

Ability to conduct a conversation in French

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

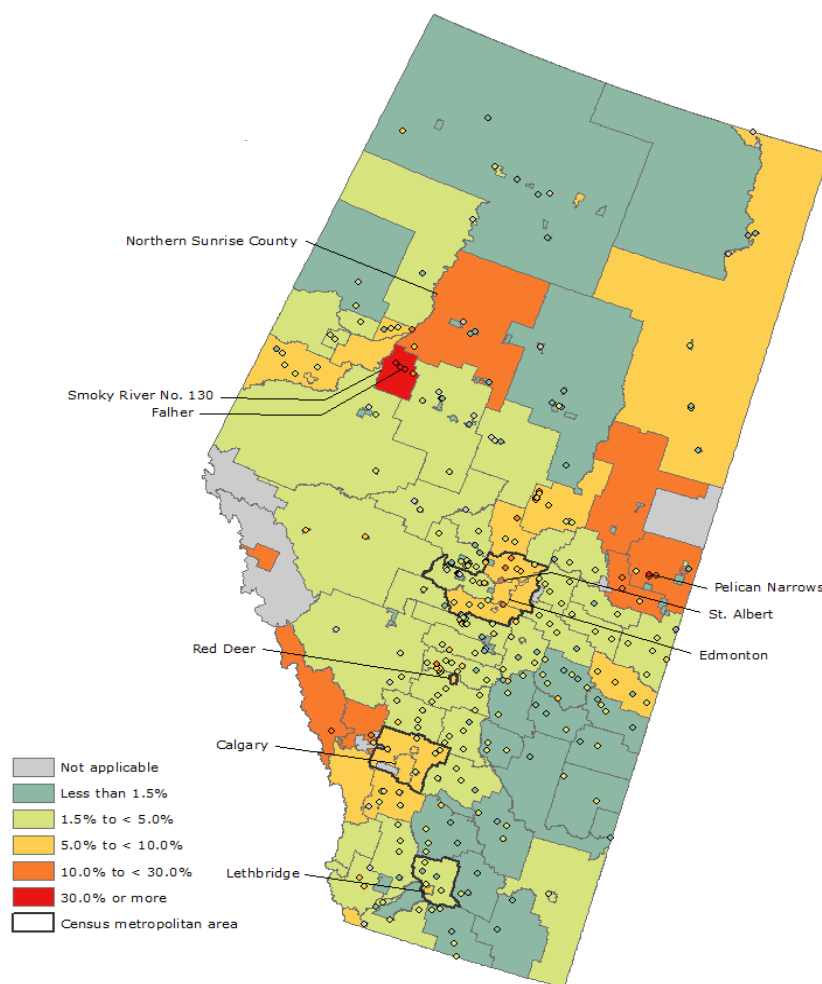


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 261,435 Albertans could have a conversation in French. Almost all (98.8%, or 258,330 people) could also do so in English.
 - In 2021, the number of people who could have a conversation in French was higher than in 1991 (+92,340), but was down from 2016 (-7,175). This was the first time a decline in this number was observed in a census in Alberta.
- In 2021, 6.2% of Albertans could have a conversation in French. This was a 50-year low. From 1991 to 2016, the demographic weight of this population stood at 6.6% or higher.
 - From 1991 to 2021, the number of Albertans who could have a conversation in French rose among residents who did not learn French first at home in their childhood (+69,085). Among these residents, the proportion of people able to speak French edged down from 4.7% in 1991 to 4.5% in 2021.

Map 1

Proportion of Alberta's population who could conduct 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.

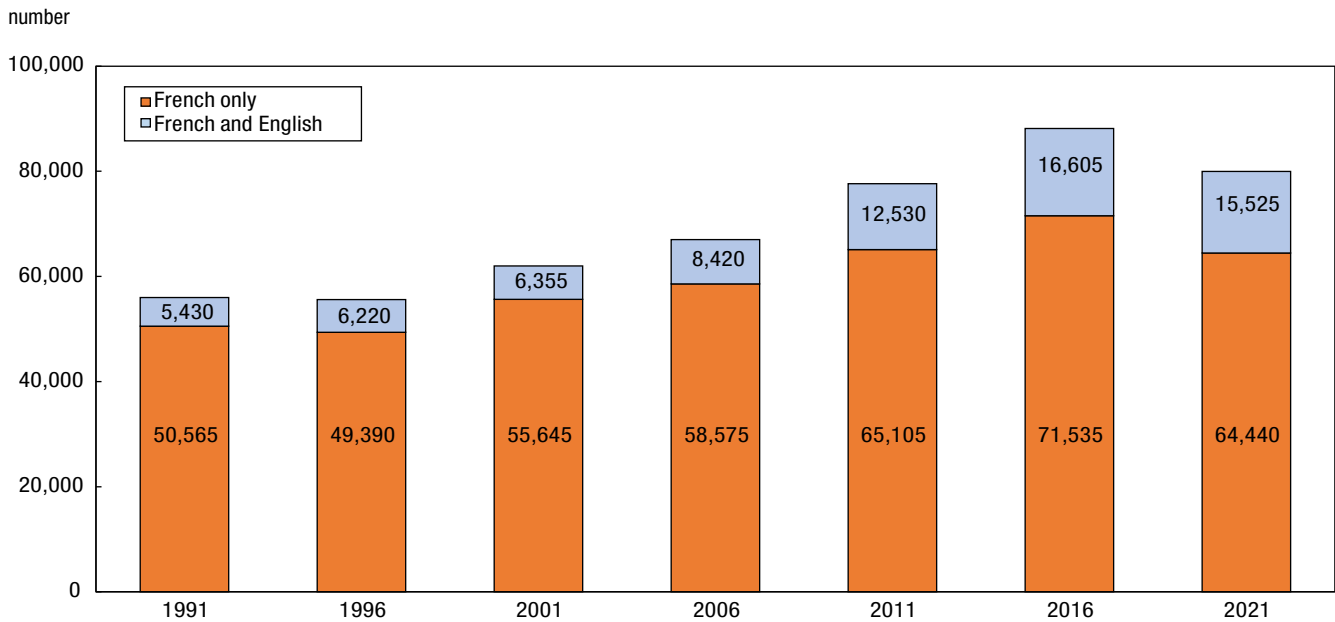
- In 2021, in 299 of Alberta's 387 municipalities,¹ less than 5% of the population could conduct a conversation in French. Conversely, in 19 municipalities, 15% or more of the population knew French.
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest proportion of people who knew French were all in the northern part of the province: Falher (52.8%), Smoky River No. 130 (50.0%) and Northern Sunrise County (23.1%).
- The municipalities that had the highest number of people who knew French were Calgary (86,180), Edmonton (67,240) and St. Albert (7,170), a municipality in the Edmonton census metropolitan area (CMA).

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, Alberta, 1991 to 2021

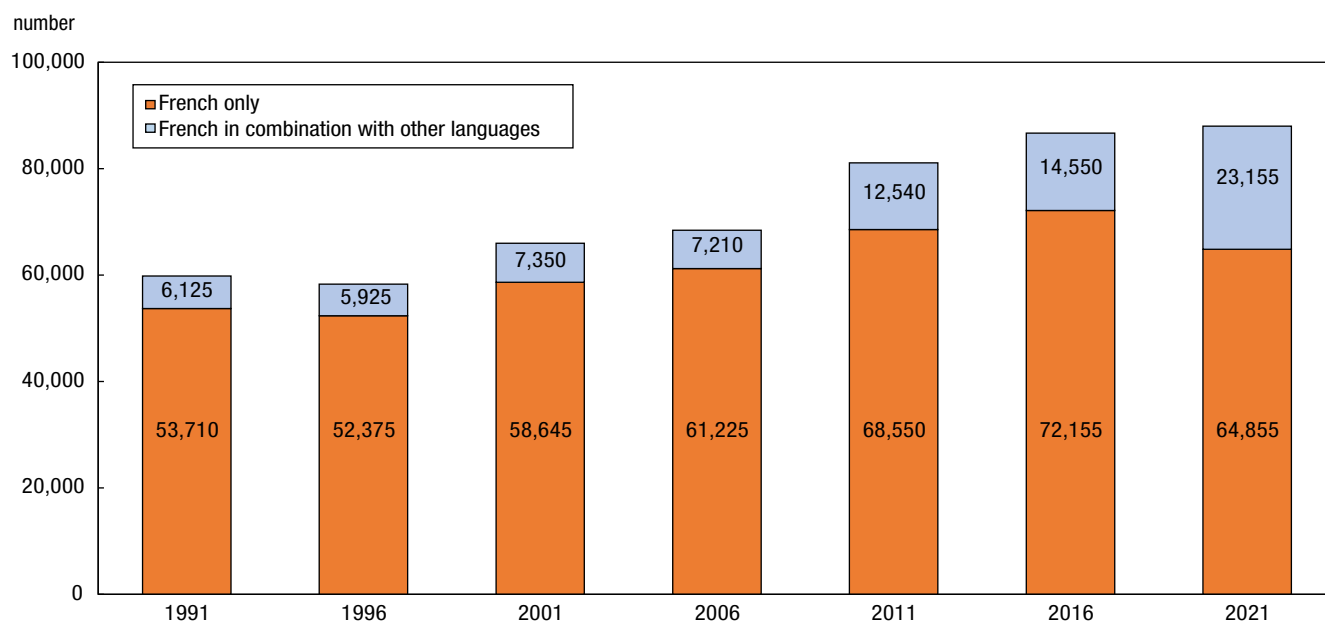


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 64,440 Albertans (1.5% of the population) had French as their only first official language spoken and 15,525 residents (0.4%) had French and English as their first official languages spoken.
 - In 2021, the number of people with French as their only first official language spoken was higher than in 1991 (+13,875), but down compared with 2016 (-7,095). Before this drop, this number had risen consistently from 1996 to 2016 (+22,145).
 - From 1991 to 2021, the demographic weight of the population whose only first official language spoken is French fell (from 2.0% to 1.5%). In 2021, this was the lowest proportion ever observed in a census in Alberta.
- From 1991 to 2021, the number of Albertans with French and English as their first official languages spoken almost tripled, from 5,430 to 15,525.

French as a mother tongue

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

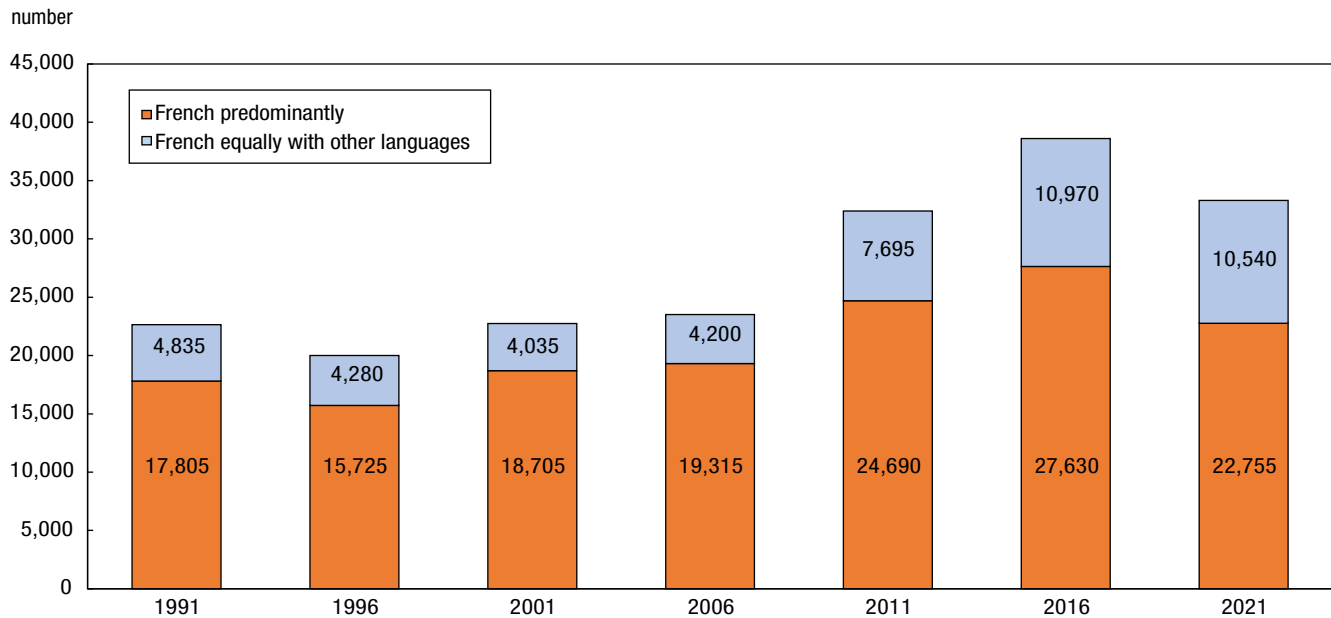


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 88,010 Albertans had French as one of their mother tongues, up from 1991 (+28,170) and 2016 (+1,305). However, their demographic weight fell from 2.4% in 1991 to 2.1% in 2021.
 - In 2021, 73.7% of these residents (64,855 people) had French as their only mother tongue, while 26.3% (23,155 people) had French as their mother tongue along with other languages (mainly English).
- Among people who were married or in a common-law relationship and who had French as one of their mother tongues, nearly a third (32.5%) 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, Alberta, 1991 to 2021

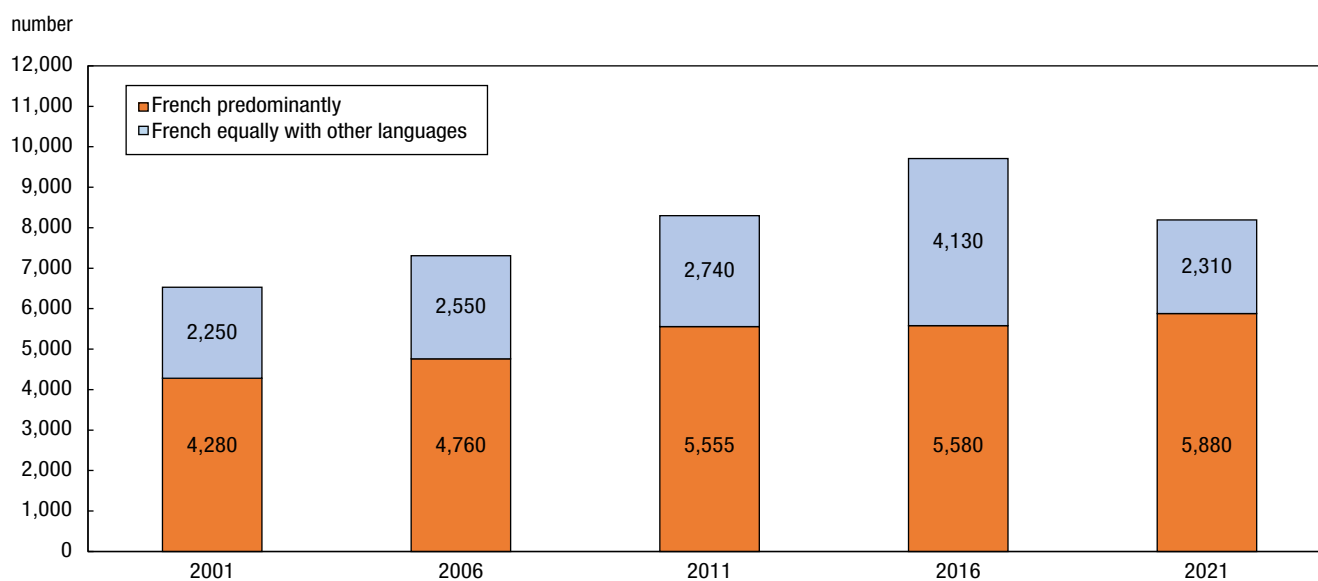


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 75,460 Albertans (1.8% of the population) spoke French at least regularly at home.
 - Of these, less than half (44.1%, or 33,295 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. This was down from 2016 (-5,310), but higher than in 1991 (+10,650).
 - Moreover, 42,165 people (55.9%) 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:
 - Roughly half (49.7%, or 43,780 people) spoke French at least regularly at home in 2021. However, this rate varied by age, ranging from 77.8% among those under age 15 to 38.3% among those aged 45 and older.
 - Close to a third (32.0%, or 28,120 people) spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages in 2021. Compared with 1991, their number increased (+7,860), but their proportion decreased (from 33.9% to 32.0%).
- Among Alberta residents whose mother tongue is not French, 31,680 (0.8%) spoke French regularly at home.
 - The vast majority of these residents (83.7%, or 26,510 people) spoke French at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often (generally English).

French used at work

Chart 5
Population using French most often at work, Alberta, 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, 21,770 Albertans used French at least regularly at work. This represents 1.1% of the province's workers.²
- In Alberta, 8,190 people used French most often at work, predominantly or equally with other languages, accounting for 0.4% of the province's workers.
 - The number of workers who used French most often at work rose from 6,530 in 2001 to 9,710 in 2016, then fell from 2016 to 2021 (-1,520).
- In 2021, among workers who used French at least regularly at work, most worked in educational services (6,655 people, or 30.6%), public administration (2,600 people, or 11.9%) or health care and social assistance (2,045 people, or 9.4%).³
- Among workers who spoke French most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages, 38.3% also used French regularly at work in 2021.
- Nearly two in five workers (38.7%) who used French regularly at work lived in the Edmonton CMA and more than a third (36.3%) lived in the Calgary CMA.

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

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

Instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels

- In 2021, 67,145 (6.9%) of the 971,390 children under 18 living in the province were eligible⁴ for instruction in French at the primary and secondary levels.
 - Nearly two in five eligible children (37.4%, or 25,140) lived in the Edmonton CMA.
 - A similar proportion of eligible children (35.7%, or 23,980) lived in the Calgary CMA.
- In Alberta, 105,565 people attended or had already attended a regular French program in a French-language school in Canada, representing 2.7% of the population aged 5 and older.
 - Of those who had never attended a French-language school, 187,705 (4.8%) had attended a French immersion program in an English-language school.
 - Among school-aged children⁵ who were eligible for instruction in French, 24,675 (49.6%) 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 recent⁶ immigrants and established⁷ immigrants living in Alberta who could have a conversation in French (3.5% and 5.0%, respectively) were lower than the proportion for the non-immigrant population (6.8%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who spoke French at least regularly at home (1.9%) was similar to that of the non-immigrant population (1.7%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who had French as their only first official language spoken (1.3%) was slightly below that of the non-immigrant population (1.6%). However, the proportion of immigrants who had French and English as their first official languages spoken (1.1%) was higher than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (0.1%).

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

5. Children aged 5 to 17.

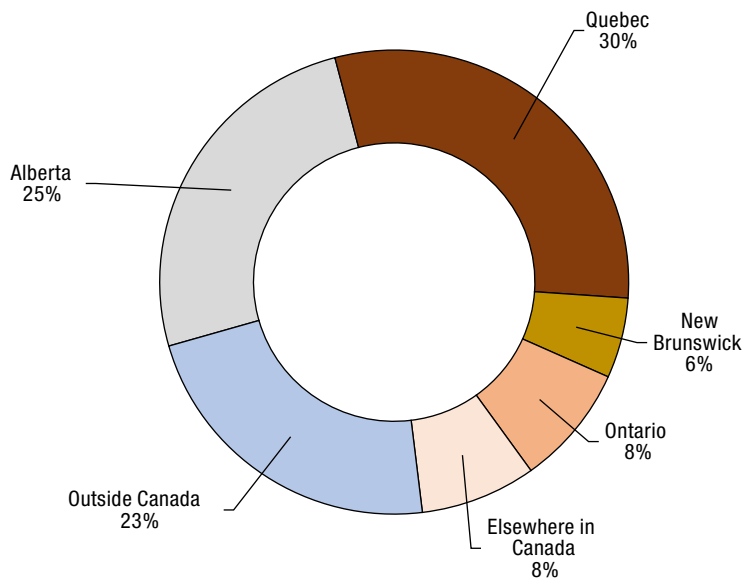
6. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

7. 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, Alberta, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among Albertans whose only first official language spoken is French, roughly a quarter (25.4%, or 16,200 people) were born in the province.
 - Just over half (52.1%, or 33,280 people) were born in another province or territory, with the majority coming from Quebec (30.2%, or 19,250 people), Ontario (8.4%, or 5,375 people) or New Brunswick (5.6%, or 3,575 people).
 - More than one in five (22.5%, or 14,345 people) were born abroad, mainly in Africa (13.5%), specifically in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2.7%), Cameroon (1.8%) or Côte d'Ivoire (1.4%), or in metropolitan France (3.8%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the Alberta population whose only first official language spoken is French was negative (-3,515).
 - While 5,865 people with French as their only first official language spoken moved to Alberta from another province or territory from 2016 to 2021, 9,380 people left the province during the same period, with most settling in Quebec (50.2%) or Ontario (19.8%).
 - For the first time since the 1986-to-1991 period, the net interprovincial migration of the Alberta population with French as its only first official language spoken was negative.

Appendix

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

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
French as first official language spoken ¹	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.2	2.2	1.9
French only	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.5
French and English	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.4
Knowledge of French ²	6.7	6.7	7.0	6.9	6.6	6.7	6.2
French only	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
French and English	6.6	6.7	6.9	6.8	6.5	6.6	6.1
French as mother tongue	2.4	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.1
French only	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.5
French in combination with other languages	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5
French spoken most often at home	0.9	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.9	1.0	0.8
French predominantly	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.5
French equally with other languages	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.2
French used most often at work ³	..	..	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.4
French predominantly	..	..	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
French equally with other languages	..	..	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.1

.. 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, Alberta, 2021

Frequency ²	French used at work ¹		French spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total population	2,030,730	100.0	4,221,835	100.0
Only	3,140	0.2	15,490	0.4
Mostly	2,740	0.1	7,265	0.2
Equally	2,310	0.1	10,540	0.2
Regularly	13,580	0.7	42,165	1.0
No mention	2,008,960	98.9	4,146,375	98.2

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, Alberta, 2021

Selection of industry sectors	Use of French at work			
	At least regularly ²		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total	21,770	100.0	8,190	100.0
Construction	1,105	5.1	430	5.3
Retail trade	1,080	5.0	175	2.1
Transportation and warehousing	885	4.1	210	2.6
Finance and insurance	765	3.5	190	2.3
Professional, scientific and technical services	1,615	7.4	465	5.7
Administrative and support, waste management and remediation services	810	3.7	265	3.2
Educational services	6,655	30.6	4,385	53.5
Health care and social assistance	2,045	9.4	535	6.5
Other services (except public administration)	760	3.5	295	3.6
Public administration	2,600	11.9	425	5.2
Other sectors	3,460	15.9	810	9.9

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, Alberta, 2021

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		French ¹		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	75,460	1.8	43,780	49.7	31,680	0.8
0 to 14 years	18,415	2.3	8,630	77.8	9,790	1.2
15 to 44 years	33,270	1.9	18,850	54.8	14,415	0.8
45 years and older	23,780	1.4	16,305	38.3	7,480	0.5

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, Alberta, 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	260,415	6.2	73,580	1.8	63,820	1.5	15,190	0.4
Non-immigrants	212,390	6.8	53,070	1.7	49,935	1.6	4,460	0.1
Immigrants	45,325	4.7	18,890	1.9	12,605	1.3	10,235	1.1
Recent immigrants ²	6,805	3.5	3,695	1.9	2,800	1.4	1,550	0.8
Established immigrants ³	38,515	5.0	15,200	2.0	9,800	1.3	8,690	1.1
2011 to 2015	9,270	4.8	4,370	2.3	2,910	1.5	2,430	1.3
2001 to 2010	14,375	6.0	6,070	2.5	3,640	1.5	4,235	1.8
1991 to 2000	5,655	4.5	2,350	1.9	1,555	1.2	1,180	0.9
1980 to 1990	3,495	3.8	1,055	1.2	655	0.7	480	0.5
Before 1980	5,725	4.5	1,355	1.1	1,045	0.8	365	0.3
Non-permanent residents	2,700	4.2	1,615	2.5	1,280	2.0	490	0.8

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.

Table 6
Comparison of French-language indicators, by Census Metropolitan Area, Alberta, 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	261,440	6.2	75,465	1.8	64,440	1.5	15,525	0.4
Calgary	98,455	6.7	26,615	1.8	19,495	1.3	7,100	0.5
Edmonton	96,805	6.9	30,405	2.2	25,175	1.8	6,550	0.5
Lethbridge	5,590	4.6	1,295	1.1	905	0.7	235	0.2
Red Deer	5,310	5.4	1,280	1.3	1,110	1.1	200	0.2

1. Includes all mentions of French.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.