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Key facts on the English language in Quebec in 2021

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Key facts on the English language in Quebec in 2021

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

This fact sheet gives an overview of the situation of English in Quebec in 2021. It begins by providing information on the changes in the number and proportion of the population who can have a conversation in English, whose first official language spoken is English, whose mother tongue is English, and who speak English at home or use English at work. Next, it presents information on English-language instruction in primary and secondary schools, on English spoken among recent and established immigrants, as well as on the mobility and place of birth of individuals whose first official language spoken is English. Additional data on these topics can be found in the appendix.

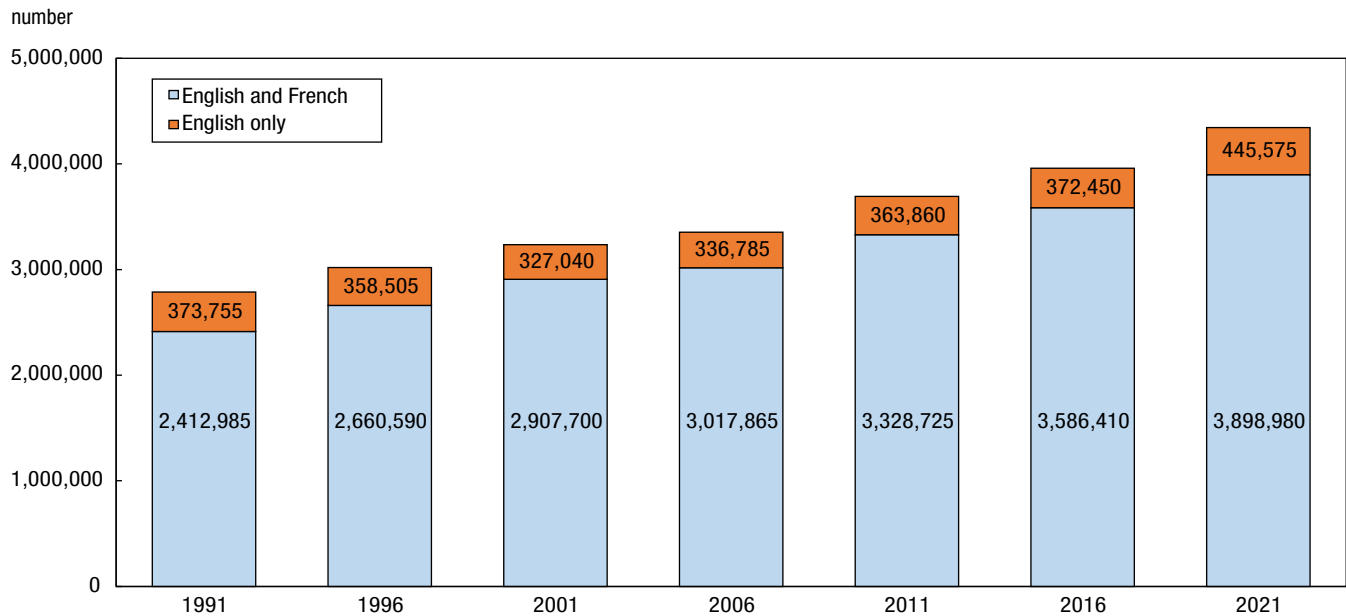
The information presented in this fact sheet comes from the Census of Population. To learn more about census concepts and the historical comparability of data, please refer to the 2021 Census of Population *Languages Reference Guide* and the *Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide*.

Highlights

- In Quebec, 4,344,550 residents (51.7% of the population) could have a conversation in English in 2021. This number and proportion were the highest ever observed for the province in a census.
- In 2021, 1,611,375 Quebec residents (19.2% of the population) spoke English at least regularly at home. This includes all those who spoke English most often at home, whether predominantly (874,185 people, or 10.4% of the population) or equally with other languages (237,485 people, or 2.8%). Moreover, among people with English as one of their mother tongues, the vast majority (90.1%) spoke English regularly at home.
- In 2021, 1,452,285 workers living in the province (35.4%) used English at least regularly at work. This includes all those who used English most often at work, whether predominantly (570,380 workers, or 13.9%) or equally with other languages (228,415 workers, or 5.6%).
- Two-thirds of immigrants (66.6%) could have a conversation in English in 2021. This proportion was higher than the proportion for the non-immigrant population (48.9%).
- More than a third of Quebec residents (36.0%) who had English as their only first official language spoken in 2021 were born outside Canada.

Ability to conduct a conversation in English

Chart 1
Population who can conduct a conversation in English, Quebec, 1991 to 2021

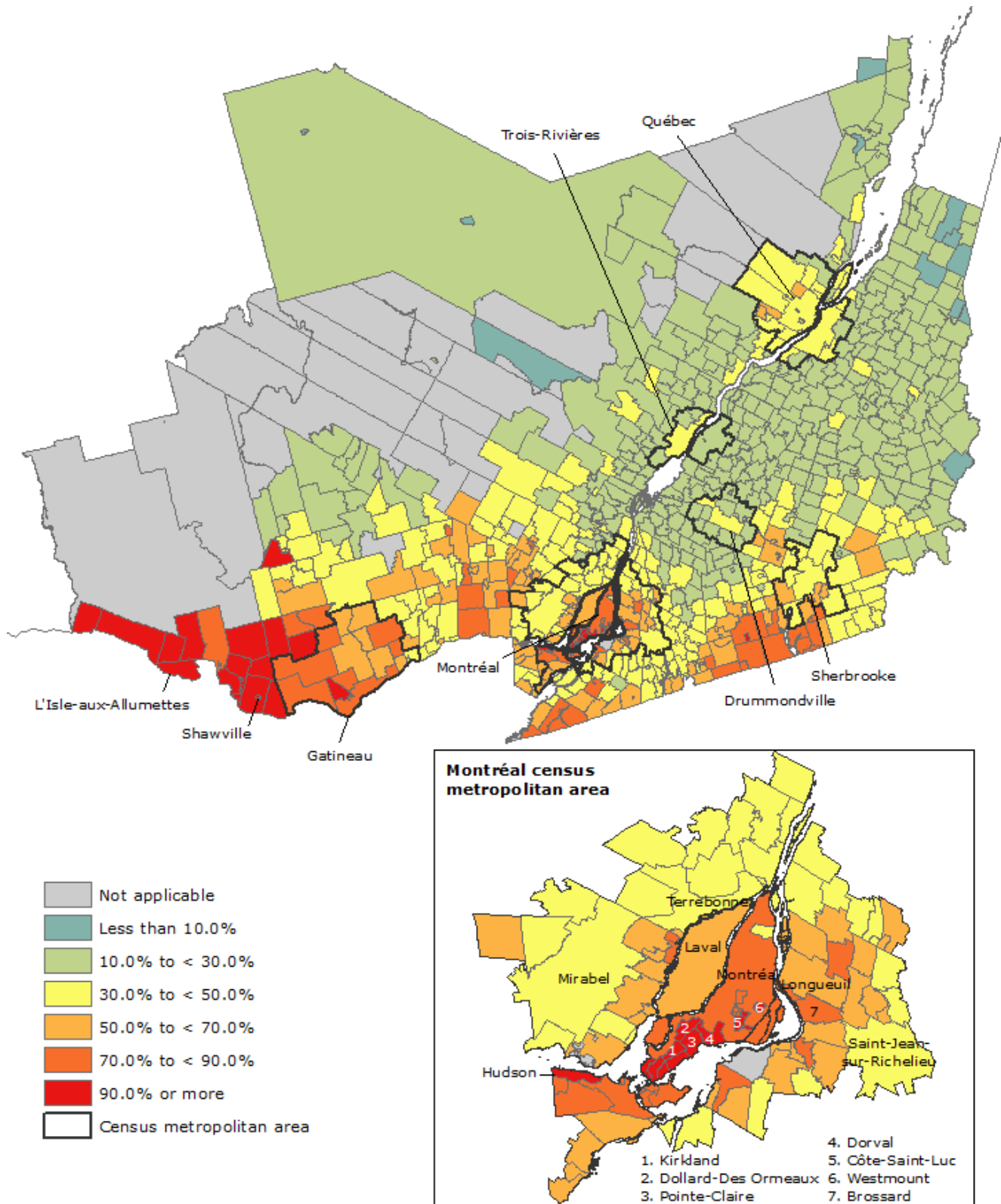


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 4,344,550 Quebec residents could have a conversation in English, representing an all-time high.
 - Of these, 445,575 people could converse in English, but not in French. After decreasing in the 1990s, this number has been rising since 2001, and in 2021, topped the 1991 figure (+71,820 people). In 2021, these people represented 5.3% of the Quebec population, down slightly from 1991 (5.5%), but higher than in 2016 (4.6%).
 - Moreover, 3,898,980 people could have a conversation in English and French in 2021, a number that has been steadily increasing since 1991 (+1,485,995). They represented 46.4% of the population in 2021, the highest proportion observed in a census in Quebec.
- For the first time in the census, more than half of Quebec residents (51.7%) could have a conversation in English in 2021.
 - The proportion of Quebec residents with a French mother tongue who could converse in English rose from 31.4% in 1991 to 42.2% in 2021. Meanwhile, this proportion remained fairly stable among those who learned a language other than French or English first at home in their childhood, from 67.5% in 1991 to 68.8% in 2021.
 - In the 2021 Census, the proportion of the population whose mother tongue is not English but who could converse in this language varied by census metropolitan area (CMA). For example, it was higher in Gatineau¹ (68.2%) and Montréal (58.7%) than in Sherbrooke (44.6%), Québec (40.6%) or Saguenay (23.1%).

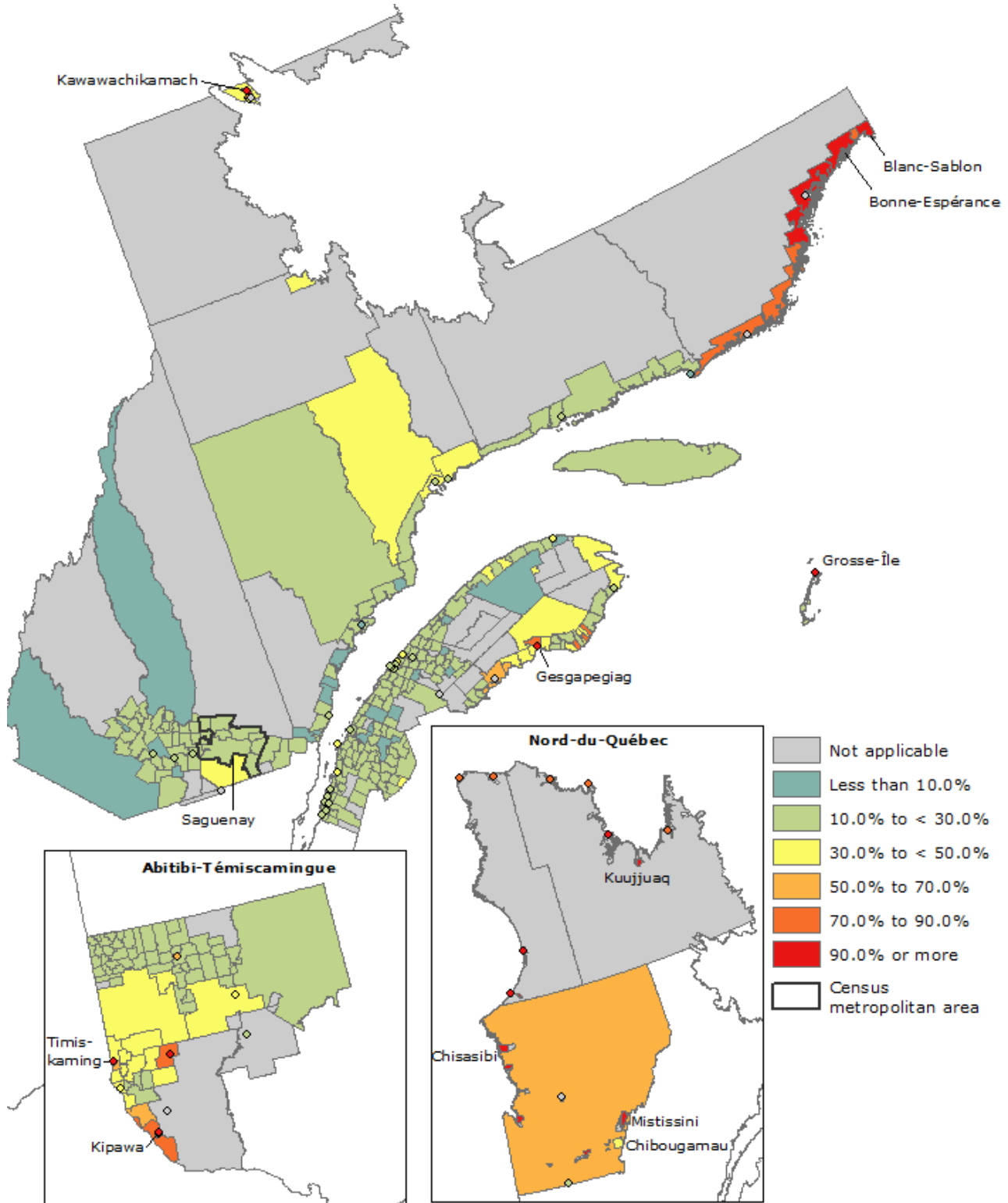
1. In this fact sheet, the Gatineau CMA refers to the Quebec part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

Map 1
Proportion of Southern Quebec's population who could conduct a conversation in English, by census subdivision, 2021



Note: Circles represent census subdivisions with a smaller land area.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Map 2
Proportion of Eastern and Northern Quebec's population who could conduct a conversation in English, by census subdivision, 2021

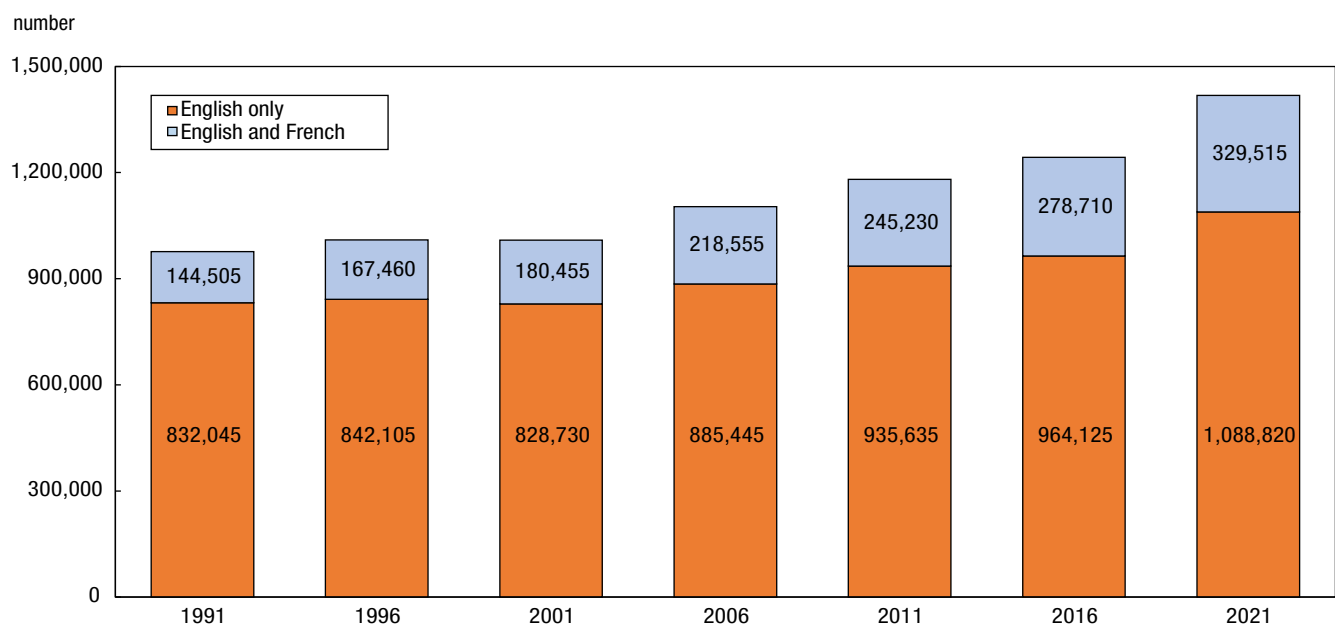


Note: Circles represent census subdivisions with a smaller land area.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, in 250 of Quebec's 1,168 municipalities² at least 50% of the population could have a conversation in English. In addition, in 40 municipalities, at least 95% of residents knew English.
- The municipalities with a population of more than 500 that had the highest proportion of people who could speak English were Bonne-Espérance, a municipality in the Basse-Côte-Nord where the entire population could have a conversation in English, as well as L'Isle-aux-Allumettes (99.6%) and Shawville (99.4%) in the Pontiac region in Outaouais.
- The municipalities with the highest number of people who knew English were Montréal (1,225,790), Laval (287,340) and Québec (233,880).

English as first official language spoken

Chart 2
Population with English as their first official language spoken, Quebec, 1991 to 2021



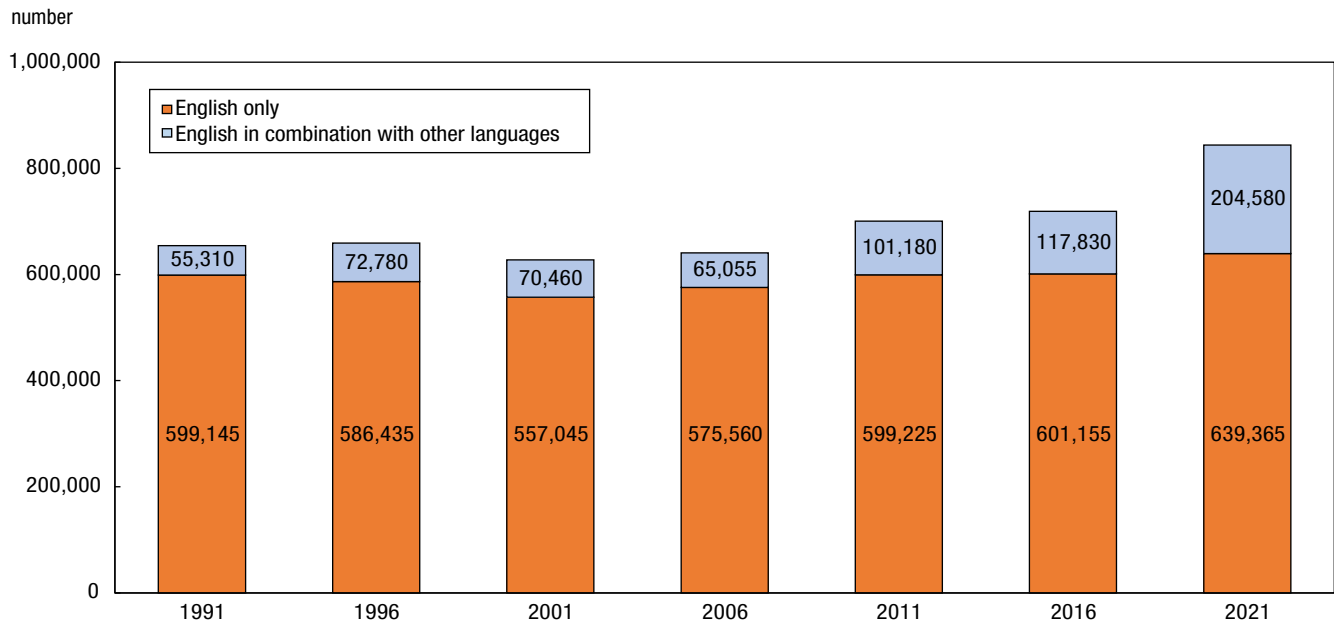
Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,088,820 Quebec residents (13.0% of the population) had English as their only first official language spoken and 329,515 residents (3.9%) had both English and French as their first official languages spoken.
- From 1991 to 2001, the number of people with English as their only first official language spoken remained fairly stable (-3,315). Over the next 20 years, it increased steadily (+260,090 people). In 2021, this population topped the 1 million mark for the first time.
 - The demographic weight of this population remained relatively stable from 1991 (12.2%) to 2016 (12.0%). It then increased to 13.0% in 2021.
 - In the 2021 Census, the vast majority of Quebec residents whose only first official language spoken is English lived in the Montréal CMA (79.7%).
- The number of people who had English and French as their first official languages spoken more than doubled from 144,505 in 1991 to 329,515 in 2021. Their demographic weight also increased consistently over these 30 years, from 2.1% to 3.9%.
 - In 2021, the vast majority of this population lived in the Montréal CMA (86.2%).

2. In this fact sheet, "municipality" refers to a census subdivision for which data are available.

English as a mother tongue

Chart 3
Population with English as a mother tongue, Quebec, 1991 to 2021

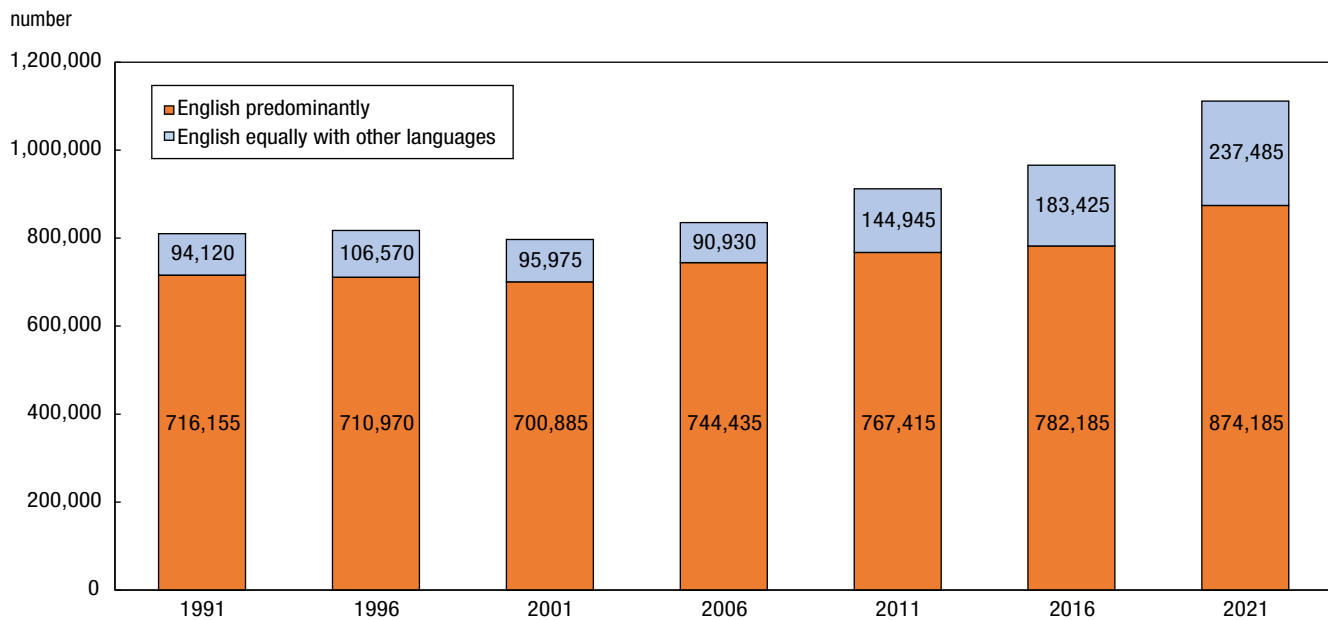


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 843,945 Quebec residents (10.0% of the population) had English as one of their mother tongues. This number declined from 1996 to 2001 (-31,715 people), but then rose steadily from 2001 to 2021 (+216,445 people).
 - In 2021, 75.8% of these residents (639,365 people) had English as their only mother tongue, while 24.2% (204,580 people) had English along with other languages.
 - Moreover, three-quarters (75.8%) of the people who had English as mother tongue along with other languages also had French as one of their mother tongues.
- From 1991 to 2006, the demographic weight of the population with English as one of their mother tongues fell steadily from 9.6% to 8.6%. Following a decade of relative stability, this proportion rose between the last two censuses to 10.0% in 2021.
- Among married people or common-law partners who had English as one of their mother tongues, close to three in five (58.9%) were in a relationship with another person whose mother tongue is English.

English spoken at home

Chart 4
Population speaking English most often at home, Quebec, 1991 to 2021

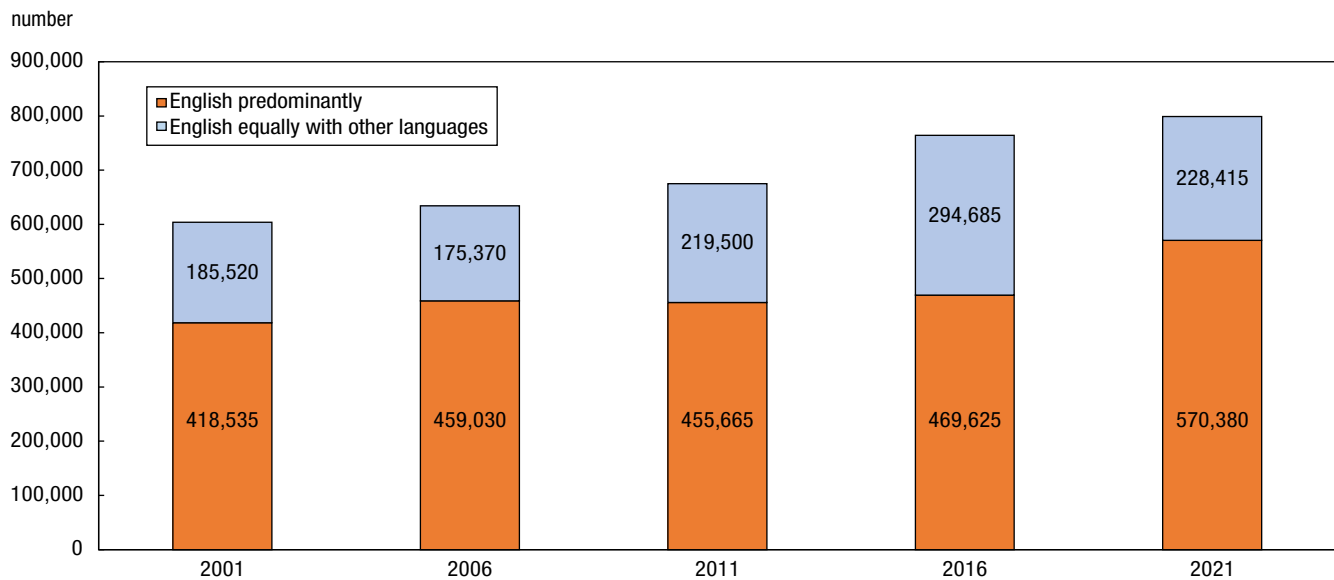


Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2021.

- In 2021, 1,611,375 Quebec residents (19.2% of the population) spoke English at least regularly at home.
 - Of these, more than two-thirds (69.0%, or 1,111,670 people) spoke English most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. After falling from 1996 to 2001 (-20,680 people), their number increased steadily from 2001 to 2021 (+314,810 people).
 - In addition, 499,705 people (31.0%) spoke English at home as a secondary language while speaking another language more often.
- Among people with English as their mother tongue, alone or with other languages:
 - The vast majority (90.1%, or 760,490 people) spoke English at least regularly at home in 2021. However, this rate varied by CMA: it was higher in Montréal (92.6%) and Gatineau (91.3%) than in Sherbrooke (82.0%), Québec (66.1%) or Saguenay (59.0%).
 - Around five in six (83.7%, or 706,500 people) spoke English most often at home, predominantly or equally with other languages. From 1991 to 2021, their number increased (+132,510), but their proportion decreased (from 87.8% to 83.7%).
- Among Quebec residents who did not learn English first at home in their childhood, 850,885 (11.3%) spoke English at least regularly at home in 2021.
 - The proportion of the population who spoke English regularly at home varied by mother tongue: it was higher among those whose mother tongue was Tagalog (82.5%), Hindi (76.0%) or German (72.9%) than among those who first learned Kabyle (8.3%), French (6.1%), Innu (Montagnais) (3.9%) or Atikamekw (1.3%) at home in their childhood.

English used at work

Chart 5
Population using English most often at work, Quebec, 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, 1,452,285 Quebeckers used English at least regularly at work. This represents 35.4% of the province's workers.³
- In Quebec, 798,795 people used English most often at work in 2021, predominantly or equally with other languages, accounting for 19.5% of the province's workers.
 - The number of workers who used English most often at work increased steadily from 2001 (604,055) to 2021 (798,795).
- In 2021, among workers who used English at least regularly at work, many worked in professional, scientific and technical services (188,300 people, or 13.0%), retail trade (158,980 people, or 10.9%) or health care and social assistance (155,700 people, or 10.7%).⁴
- Among workers who spoke English most often at home, predominantly or with other languages, 89.2% also used English regularly at work.
- Most of the people (72.1%) who used English regularly at work lived in the Montréal CMA.

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

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

Instruction in English at the primary and secondary levels

- In 2021, 303,835 (18.1%) of the 1,677,580 children under 18 living in the province were eligible⁵ for instruction in English at the primary and secondary levels.
 - Roughly two-thirds of eligible children (65.6% or 199,355 children) lived in the Montréal CMA.
- In Quebec, 965,570 people attended or had already attended a regular English program in an English-language school in Canada, representing 12.3% of the population aged 5 and older.
 - Among school-aged children⁶ who were eligible for instruction in English, 175,305 (76.2%) were attending or had already attended a regular English program in an English-language school in Canada.

English among immigrants

- In 2021, the proportions of recent⁷ immigrants and established⁸ immigrants living in Quebec who could have a conversation in English (60.9% and 67.7%, respectively) were higher than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (48.9%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who spoke English at least regularly at home (33.1%) was higher than that of the non-immigrant population (16.1%).
 - The proportion of immigrants who had English as their only first official language spoken (25.2%) was higher than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (10.3%). The proportion of immigrants whose first official languages spoken were English and French (16.5%) was roughly 10 times higher than the proportion of the non-immigrant population (1.6%).
 - In 2021, nearly 7 in 10 non-permanent residents (68.9%) could have a conversation in English and about one-third spoke it at least regularly at home (35.0%) or had English as their only first official language spoken (32.3%).

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

6. Children aged 5 to 17.

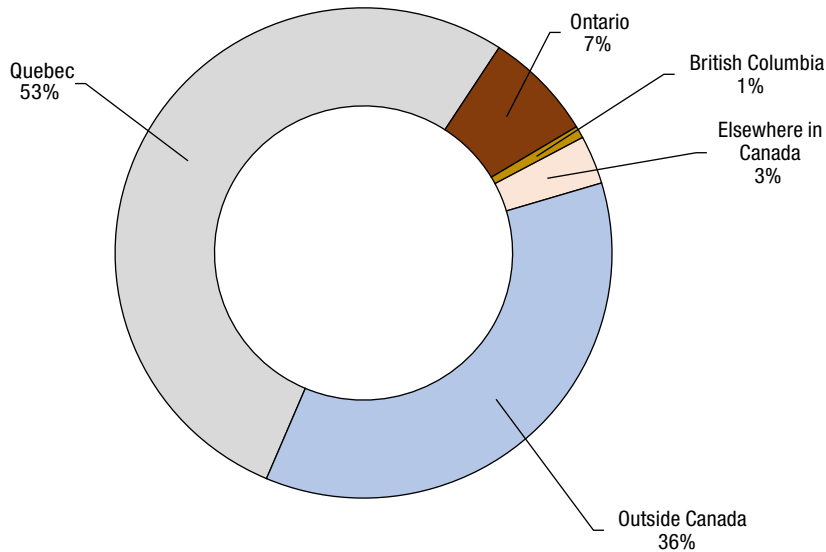
7. Immigrants admitted from 2016 to 2021.

8. Immigrants admitted before 2016.

Mobility and birthplace of the English-speaking population

Chart 6

Place of birth of the population whose only first official language spoken is English, Quebec, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

- In 2021, among Quebec residents whose only first official language spoken is English, just over half (52.8%, or 569,600 people) were born in the province.
 - Around one in nine (11.2%, or 120,930 people) were born in another province or territory, with large proportions coming from Ontario (7.2%, or 77,675 people) or British Columbia (0.8%, or 9,085 people).
 - More than a third (36.0%, or 388,025 people) were born abroad, such as in Asia (18.4%)—particularly in India (3.6%), the Philippines (2.9%) or China (2.9%)—and in the United States (2.7%).
- From 2016 to 2021, the net interprovincial migration of the Quebec population whose only first official language spoken is English was negative (-3,915). This is the smallest intercensal decrease since comparable data have been collected.
 - From 2016 to 2021, 46,810 people with English as their only first official language spoken moved to Quebec from another province or territory, with the majority coming from Ontario (64.5%), British Columbia (12.3%) or Alberta (10.4%). During the same period, 50,725 people left the province.

Appendix

Table 1
Comparison of selected English-language indicators, Quebec, 1991 to 2021

Indicator	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
	percent						
English as first official language spoken ¹	14.3	14.3	14.2	14.8	15.1	15.4	16.9
English only	12.2	12.0	11.6	11.9	12.0	12.0	13.0
English and French	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.9	3.1	3.5	3.9
Knowledge of English ²	40.9	42.9	45.4	45.1	47.2	49.1	51.7
English only	5.5	5.1	4.6	4.5	4.7	4.6	5.3
English and French	35.4	37.8	40.8	40.6	42.6	44.5	46.4
English as mother tongue	9.6	9.4	8.8	8.6	9.0	8.9	10.0
English only	8.8	8.3	7.8	7.7	7.7	7.5	7.6
English in combination with other languages	0.8	1.0	1.0	0.9	1.3	1.5	2.4
English spoken most often at home	11.9	11.6	11.2	11.2	11.7	12.0	13.2
English predominantly	10.5	10.1	9.8	10.0	9.8	9.7	10.4
English equally with other languages	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.9	2.3	2.8
English used most often at work ³	..	..	17.6	17.0	17.4	19.4	19.5
English predominantly	..	..	12.2	12.3	11.7	11.9	13.9
English equally with other languages	..	..	5.4	4.7	5.7	7.5	5.6

.. not available for a specific reference period

1. Corresponds to the sum of the "English" and "English and French" 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 English use at work and frequency of English spoken at home, Quebec, 2021

Frequency ²	English used at work ¹		English spoken at home	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total population	4,100,450	100.0	8,406,905	100.0
Only	290,925	7.1	623,305	7.4
Mostly	279,460	6.8	250,885	3.0
Equally	228,415	5.6	237,485	2.8
Regularly	653,485	15.9	499,705	5.9
No mention	2,648,165	64.6	6,795,530	80.8

1. Among workers who were employed during the census reference week.

2. "Only" includes people who solely use or speak English. "Mostly" includes people who predominantly use or speak English along with at least one secondary language. "Equally" includes people who use or speak English most often equally with at least one other language. Finally, "regularly" includes people who use or speak English as a secondary language and have at least one other main language.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 3
Use of English at work,¹ by frequency and industry sectors, Quebec, 2021

Selection of industry sectors	Use of English at work			
	At least regularly ²		Most often	
	number	percent	number	percent
Total	1,452,285	100.0	798,795	100.0
Manufacturing	141,745	9.8	77,040	9.6
Wholesale trade	72,785	5.0	44,745	5.6
Retail trade	158,980	10.9	70,615	8.8
Transportation and warehousing	86,320	5.9	54,885	6.9
Finance and insurance	88,795	6.1	47,840	6.0
Professional, scientific and technical services	188,300	13.0	111,865	14.0
Educational services	89,170	6.1	62,615	7.8
Health care and social assistance	155,700	10.7	71,230	8.9
Accommodation and food services	67,115	4.6	35,140	4.4
Public administration	111,140	7.7	60,070	7.5
Other sectors	292,250	20.1	162,745	20.4

1. Among workers who were employed during the census reference week.

2. Workers using English 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
English spoken at least regularly at home, by age and mother tongue, Quebec, 2021

Age group	Mother tongue					
	Total		English ¹		Other languages	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Total	1,611,375	19.2	760,490	90.1	850,885	11.3
0 to 14 years	264,095	19.0	163,555	94.1	100,540	8.3
15 to 44 years	735,400	24.0	314,915	90.8	420,490	15.5
45 years and older	611,880	15.5	282,015	87.2	329,860	9.1

1. Alone or in combination with other languages.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Table 5
Comparison of English-language indicators, by immigrant status and period of immigration, Quebec, 2021

Immigration status and period of immigration	Knowledge of English ¹		English spoken at home ¹		First official language spoken			
	number	percent	number	percent	English only		English and French	
					number	percent	number	percent
Total	4,317,180	52.0	1,585,155	19.1	1,078,560	13.0	331,770	4.0
Non-immigrants	3,369,695	48.9	1,112,625	16.1	707,375	10.3	110,685	1.6
Immigrants	805,700	66.6	400,570	33.1	304,650	25.2	199,850	16.5
Recent immigrants ²	123,455	60.9	61,800	30.5	51,705	25.5	29,840	14.7
Established immigrants ³	682,250	67.7	338,775	33.6	252,950	25.1	170,010	16.9
2011 to 2015	119,825	62.0	51,065	26.4	33,975	17.6	36,375	18.8
2001 to 2010	213,305	68.3	92,165	29.5	61,535	19.7	61,790	19.8
1991 to 2000	133,120	69.9	66,860	35.1	52,885	27.8	31,495	16.5
1980 to 1990	82,130	65.9	43,435	34.9	31,770	25.5	18,720	15.0
Before 1980	133,865	71.5	85,250	45.5	72,785	38.9	21,630	11.6
Non-permanent residents	141,785	68.9	71,960	35.0	66,530	32.3	21,240	10.3

1. Includes all mentions of English.

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 English-language indicators, by census metropolitan area, Quebec, 2021

Census Metropolitan Area	Knowledge of English ¹		English spoken at home ¹		First official language spoken			
	number	percent	number	percent	English only		English and French	
					number	percent	number	percent
Total - Province	4,344,550	51.7	1,611,375	19.2	1,088,820	13.0	329,515	3.9
Montréal	2,742,960	64.6	1,240,050	29.2	867,685	20.4	284,025	6.7
Québec	346,630	41.8	45,645	5.5	14,310	1.7	9,285	1.1
Gatineau ²	256,980	73.5	105,095	30.1	63,670	18.2	12,720	3.6
Sherbrooke	107,200	47.7	24,230	10.8	12,615	5.6	3,825	1.7
Saguenay	38,370	23.9	4,350	2.7	1,465	0.9	400	0.2
Trois-Rivières	51,805	32.6	6,900	4.3	2,130	1.3	1,215	0.8
Drummondville	30,340	30.2	4,045	4.0	1,330	1.3	630	0.6

1. Includes all mentions of English.

2. Quebec part of the Ottawa-Gatineau CMA.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.