

Economic outcomes of official language minority permanent residents

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Introduction

An important contributor to demographic and economic growth, immigration is also recognized for its key role in the promotion of both official languages—especially the preservation of French. Canada welcomes immigrants to renew its labour force and meet labour needs. At the same time, attracting and retaining more immigrants with a strong command of English or French is a strategy to not only promote official languages but also to ensure the vitality of official language minority communities (OLMCs) (Guignard Noël and Forgues, 2020; Canadian Heritage, 2020).

For more than two decades, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), in collaboration with other departments, has implemented the Action Plans for Official Languages (APOLs), which guide federal institutions' priorities, actions and responsibilities in promoting both official languages (Canadian Heritage, 2020). As stated in the APOL 2018–2023 and reiterated in the 2024 Policy on Francophone Immigration, IRCC aims to attract and retain Francophone immigrants while promoting the vitality of Francophone communities. One of the action areas in support of IRCC's mandate is the production of evidence-based data and research. These efforts aim to improve shared expertise and knowledge about Francophone immigration and Francophone communities, as well as ensure evidence-based policies, programs and services (IRCC, 2024; Bacher and Diouf, 2021; Canadian Heritage, 2013).

This study stems from these IRCC research mandates and focuses on the profile and economic outcomes of French-speaking permanent residents outside Quebec and English-speaking permanent residents in Quebec.

Previous studies have examined the profile of immigrants in OLMCs and their economic outcomes (Houle, 2019; Morency et al., 2017; Ravanera et al., 2014). They showed that a substantial proportion of linguistic minorities were highly qualified and worked in management and science, technology, engineering and medicine (STEM) fields. Immigrants admitted to OLMCs were theoretically in a position to enter the job market and achieve economic performance consistent with their level of education and/or skill level.

Paradoxically, the literature reports that official language minority immigrants have often faced difficulties in professional integration, leading to employment rates and/or earnings that are generally lower than those of immigrants who belong to the linguistic majority (Houle, 2015; Environics, 2015). For example, it took economic immigrants at least five years to achieve the average annual income of a Canadian-born individual (Houle, 2015).

These findings can be explained by various factors. Gallant et al. (2018) reported that in Quebec, English-speaking immigrants had trouble accessing jobs that matched their area of professional qualification or level of education. To overcome this barrier, they found alternatives, such as working in fields outside their area of professional qualification or returning to study in the same field to obtain a higher degree than the one they already held. Others opted for a degree in a different field (Gallant et al., 2018). In Canada outside Quebec, French-speaking immigrants developed similar strategies. For example, workers belonging to the linguistic minority accepted teaching positions even if they had other professional qualifications (Sociopol, 2020). Furthermore, while a large proportion of Francophone minority immigrants—especially women—held degrees in health care, most worked in other sectors (GGI, 2020). Access to information is a contributing factor. French-speaking immigrants with limited English proficiency often found it difficult to access job search assistance services, especially if French-language services were unavailable.

This report provides a recent sociodemographic portrait of immigrants: specifically, French-speaking permanent residents in Canada outside Quebec and English-speaking permanent residents in Quebec. It also includes an analysis of economic outcomes over a 10-year period following admission, based on recent data from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). This research lays the groundwork for developing more in-depth profiles in the future, as recommended in the synthesis of knowledge from IRCC-commissioned reports (Bacher and Diouf, 2021).

The first section above provides an overview of the context and issues surrounding Francophone immigration outside Quebec and Anglophone immigration in Quebec. The second section outlines the methodological approach. The third section provides a descriptive analysis of the sociodemographic characteristics and occupational integration of French-speaking immigrants to Canada outside Quebec and English-speaking immigrants in Quebec, using employment-income-related indicators and statistics. The fourth section examines the link between place of residence, official language proficiency and employment income. The report closes with a conclusion.

Methodology

Population

This study focuses on French-speaking permanent residents¹ admitted to Canada outside Quebec and English-speaking permanent residents admitted to Quebec between 2005 and 2021. Except for the analysis of admission trends, only individuals aged 20 to 54 were included in the portrait and statistical analyses. The comparison groups are immigrants who speak the majority official language spoken in each of the two geographical areas, as well as the non-immigrant population.²

Data source

The data used comes from the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB). This database includes IRCC administrative data linked to Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) tax data. It therefore contains data on the demographic characteristics of all immigrants as gathered at the time of admission, as well as the incomes of all individuals who filed their tax returns on an annual basis. The Longitudinal Administrative Databank (LAD) was consulted for data on the non-immigrant population.

Measures

One of the key measures in this study is knowledge of official languages, which is used to distinguish between different linguistic groups. This characteristic is collected upon admission. This study uses the official languages measures developed by IRCC. These measures have evolved over the years. The following variables are therefore based on IRCC's 2006 and 2016 linguistic measures:

Pre-2019 linguistic variable: a French-speaking permanent resident is:

- a. a permanent resident who declares French as their mother tongue; or
- b. a permanent resident whose mother tongue is a language other than French or English and who declares knowledge of “French only” (excluding multiple responses in English and French).

1 The terms “immigrants” and “permanent residents” are used interchangeably throughout this report.

2 The only rates compared between the non-immigrant population and the immigrant population are employment rates and income. The non-immigrant population includes citizens by birth, immigrants established before 1952 and non-permanent residents.

Post-2019 linguistic variable: a French-speaking permanent resident is:

- a. a permanent resident who declares knowledge of “French only”; or
- b. a permanent resident who declares “French and English” as their official languages, as well as French as the official language in which they are most at ease.

Equivalent measures exist for English-speaking permanent residents.

Under the former measure, a combination of mother tongue and official language was used to determine a person’s linguistic profile. With the new method, permanent residents can now identify the official language in which they are most comfortable. By moving away from the concept of mother tongue and focusing on the first official language used in Canada, the new measure aims to provide more robust and inclusive data that better reflects immigrants’ linguistic profiles.³

The other key measures used in this study are income, which indicates earnings received, and employment rates, which are used to assess the level of labour market participation in the population of interest. Results for incidence of employment income and income are presented according to the number of years since permanent residence was acquired.

³ For more information, visit the Policy on Francophone Immigration page.

Results

Admissions of official language minority immigrants have increased significantly in both Quebec and the rest of Canada

From 2005 to 2015, the number of French-speaking permanent residents admitted annually outside Quebec hovered around 3,000 (Figure 1). Since 2016, this minority has increased, both in number and in proportion to total admissions of permanent residents outside Quebec. In absolute numbers, the population of French-speaking permanent residents outside Quebec rose from 3,885 admissions in 2016 to peak at 8,425 admissions in 2019,⁴ before declining post-pandemic.

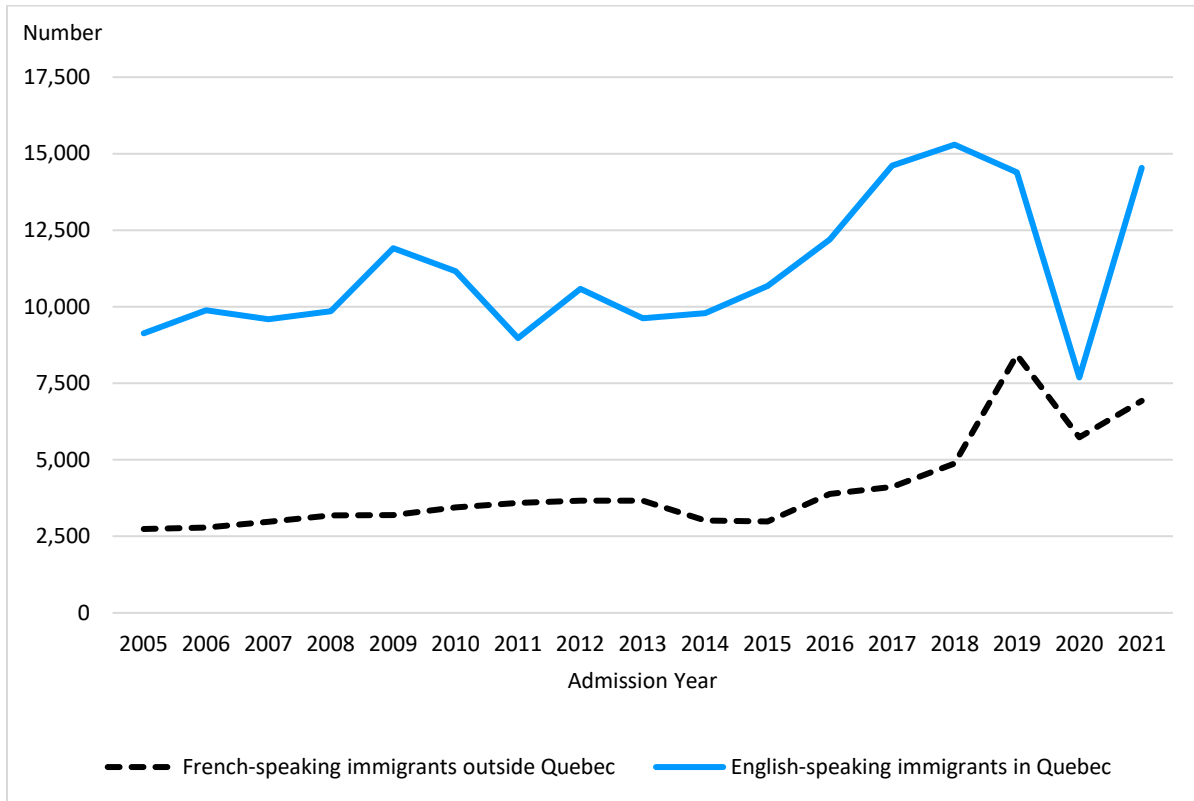
This increase in admissions can be attributed, in part, to various IRCC initiatives to support Francophone immigration from outside Canada, such as the launch of the Francophone Mobility Program in 2016, the awarding of additional points for French-language proficiency in 2017 and improved promotion of the Welcoming Francophone Communities initiative. The marked increase in admissions observed since 2019 also coincides with the implementation of IRCC's latest definition of official languages.

In Quebec, there were at least twice as many admissions of English-speaking immigrants as there were of French-speaking immigrants in the rest of Canada. Annual admissions hovered around 10,000 between 2005 and 2015, and 15,000 between 2017 and 2021 (except in 2020).

In total, between 2005 and 2021, 69,225 French-speaking immigrants were admitted outside Quebec and 189,890 English-speaking immigrants were admitted in Quebec.

⁴ Proportionally, there was an increase from approximately 1.6% in 2016 to 2.8% in 2019.

Figure 1: Number of official language minority permanent residents by admission year



Note: The admission data in the IMDB may differ slightly from the data in IRCC’s administrative databases. Figures are rounded to the nearest multiple of five.

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2022.

Women, young people and highly educated individuals make up a large proportion of official language minority immigrants

Women accounted for just over half ($\pm 52\%$) of French-speaking permanent residents in Canada outside Quebec and English-speaking permanent residents in Quebec (Table 1). The vast majority ($\pm 96\%$) of linguistic minority immigrants were admitted to Canada between the ages of 20 and 49, and most (53.9%) had a university degree.

These characteristics are similar to those of the linguistic majority groups; however, there are differences in terms of level of education, self-reported knowledge of official languages, admission category, country of birth and intended province of destination.

Outside Quebec, 53.9% of French-speaking permanent residents held at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 61.7% for the linguistic majority.

Nearly 51% of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec self-reported knowledge of the official language of the majority, English. In Quebec, only 14.7% of English-speaking immigrants reported an understanding of French.

Just over half of official language minority immigrants were economic immigrants. Among minority language immigrants, sponsored immigrants and refugees were generally overrepresented, accounting for just under 50%, while among majority language immigrants, they accounted for just under 33%.

Approximately 55% of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec came from France (24.8%), Haiti (6.9%) and African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (10.5%), Morocco (8.0%) and Cameroon (5.6%). Overall, Africa was the leading continent of origin for French-speaking immigrants (54.7%), followed by Europe (30.7%). In Quebec, English-speaking permanent residents were mainly from Asia (64.7%), notably China (12.2%), the Philippines (10.5%), India (9.1%), Iran (5.8%) and Syria (5.0%).

Data on country of origin and admission category suggests that immigration in official language minority contexts was also a reflection of recent decades' humanitarian migration flows.

Lastly, a large percentage (±90%) of French-speaking immigrants in Canada outside Quebec intended to settle mainly in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia and New Brunswick. Among the linguistic majority, the top destinations, in descending order, were Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of permanent residents in Canada outside Quebec and in Quebec, aged 20 to 54 at time of admission (percentage)

		Outside Quebec		Quebec	
		French-speaking	English-speaking	English-speaking	French-speaking
Sex	Female	52.6	51.0	51.6	50.3
	Male	47.4	49.0	48.4	49.7
Age group	20 to 29	36.0	38.2	34.6	35.7
	30 to 39	43.4	41.3	41.2	47.2
	40 to 49	17.1	17.0	19.4	14.6
	50 to 54	3.5	3.5	4.8	2.5
Self-reported official languages	English only	4.8	94.6	79.1	1.1
	French only	45.9	0.1	0.8	60.3
	English and French	46.1	1.2	13.9	34.7

	Neither English nor French	2.5	3.9	5.9	3.7	
	Unreported	0.7	0.2	0.2	0.3	
Level of education	None	2.7	1.7	2.0	3.9	
	Secondary or below	19.1	16.2	20.5	14.1	
	Postsecondary	16.7	15.1	17.0	24.6	
	Baccalaureate	27.0	41.5	41.9	29.6	
	Post-baccalaureate	26.9	20.2	17.8	27.4	
	Unreported	7.6	5.3	0.7	0.5	
	Top countries and regions of birth	France	24.8	n/a	n/a	24.0
Democratic Republic of Congo		10.5	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Morocco		8.0	n/a	n/a	9.2	
Haïti		6.9	n/a	n/a	9.3	
Cameroon		5.6	n/a	n/a	5.6	
India		n/a	24.2	9.1	n/a	
Philippines		n/a	14.2	10.5	n/a	
China		n/a	9.3	12.2	n/a	
Pakistan		n/a	3.8	n/a	n/a	
United Kingdom		n/a	2.8	n/a	n/a	
Iran		n/a	n/a	5.8	n/a	
Syria		n/a	n/a	5.0	n/a	
Algeria		n/a	n/a	n/a	11.3	
Americas		2.2	11.2	16.5	8.7	
Europe		5.9	7.3	9.4	5.4	
Africa		30.4	8.4	8.8	22.3	
Asia		5.6	17.8	22.1	4.1	
Oceania and other		0.1	1.0	0.6	0.1	
Admission category		Economic	54.3	66.1	50.8	67.1
		Sponsored by family	23.2	25	32.2	22.3
	Refugee	20.1	7.5	14.9	8.1	
	Other	2.3	1.4	2.1	2.5	
Province of intended destination	Newfoundland and Labrador	0.4	0.4	n/a	n/a	
	Prince Edward Island	0.3	0.7	n/a	n/a	

	Nova Scotia	1.5	1.8	n/a	n/a
	New Brunswick	7.1	1.1	n/a	n/a
	Ontario	58.7	51.5	n/a	n/a
	Manitoba	6.0	6.0	n/a	n/a
	Saskatchewan	1.8	4.3	n/a	n/a
	Alberta	12.1	15.3	n/a	n/a
	British Columbia	11.6	18.7	n/a	n/a
	Territories	0.5	0.2	n/a	n/a
	Quebec	n/a	n/a	100.0	100.0
Pre-admission work experience	No	50.3	51.2	58.2	52.9
	Yes	49.7	48.8	41.8	47.1

Note: The sociodemographic characteristics of the linguistic groups in Table 1 may differ slightly from those of the population established in the various years after admission in the next sections.

Source: Statistics Canada, *Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2022*.

Official language minority immigrants, with the exception of long-established Francophones, were less likely to be employed compared with the linguistic majority and non-immigrants

The probability of being employed is measured by the employment income incidence rate, or employment income frequency. This is defined as the proportion of immigrants aged 20 to 54 at admission who reported at least \$500 (2021 constant dollars) in employment income (wages or salaries and net income from self-employment) in a fiscal year.

In Canada outside Quebec,⁵ from 2009 to 2021, the incidence of employment income among the linguistic minority fluctuated between 76.6% and 82.3% (Figure 2). Initially, English-speaking immigrants had higher employment rates than the linguistic minority. This trend changed as of the seventh year after admission, at which point the incidence of employment income among French-speaking immigrants rose rapidly to exceed that of the majority group.

The situation is quite different in Quebec, where the incidence of employment income among English-speaking immigrants was well below that of French-speaking immigrants for the full 10-year period. The gap widened over time, from 5 to 8 percentage points.

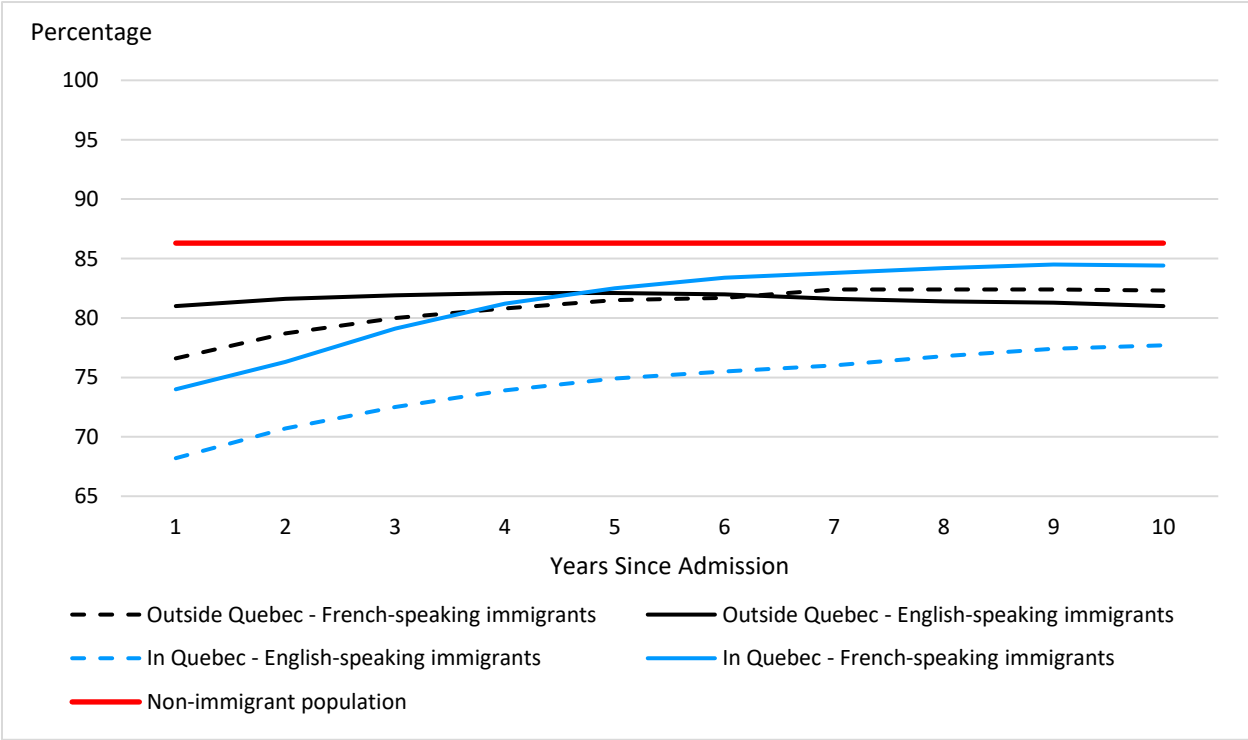
⁵ Results for employment rates and income are based on place of residence as per the tax data.

English-speaking immigrants also had the lowest employment rates. Ten years after admission, only 77.7% of English-speaking immigrants in Quebec were employed, compared to 81.0% of the English-speaking majority outside Quebec. Moreover, 82.3% of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec were employed, and 84.4% of French-speaking immigrants in Quebec were employed.

Overall, employment rates for both the minority and majority linguistic groups remained below that of the non-immigrant population⁶ in Canada.

As mentioned above, these trends could be explained by the fact that recent official language minority immigrants faced many barriers to labour market integration, including a lack of access to employment services in their language of choice. However, over the years, these barriers tend to gradually disappear as a result of improved knowledge of the labour market and development of professional integration strategies (Sociopol, 2020; Gallant et al., 2018).

Figure 2: Incidence of employment income among permanent residents in Canada outside Quebec and in Quebec, aged 20 to 54 at time of admission, by number of years since admission and official language



Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2022; Longitudinal Administrative Databank, 2021.

⁶ The employment rate of the non-immigrant population was determined using data from the Longitudinal Administrative Databank for people aged 20 to 54. This rate was at 86.3% in 2021.

Despite strong growth over time, the median incomes of official language minority immigrants were lower than those of the linguistic majority and non-immigrants

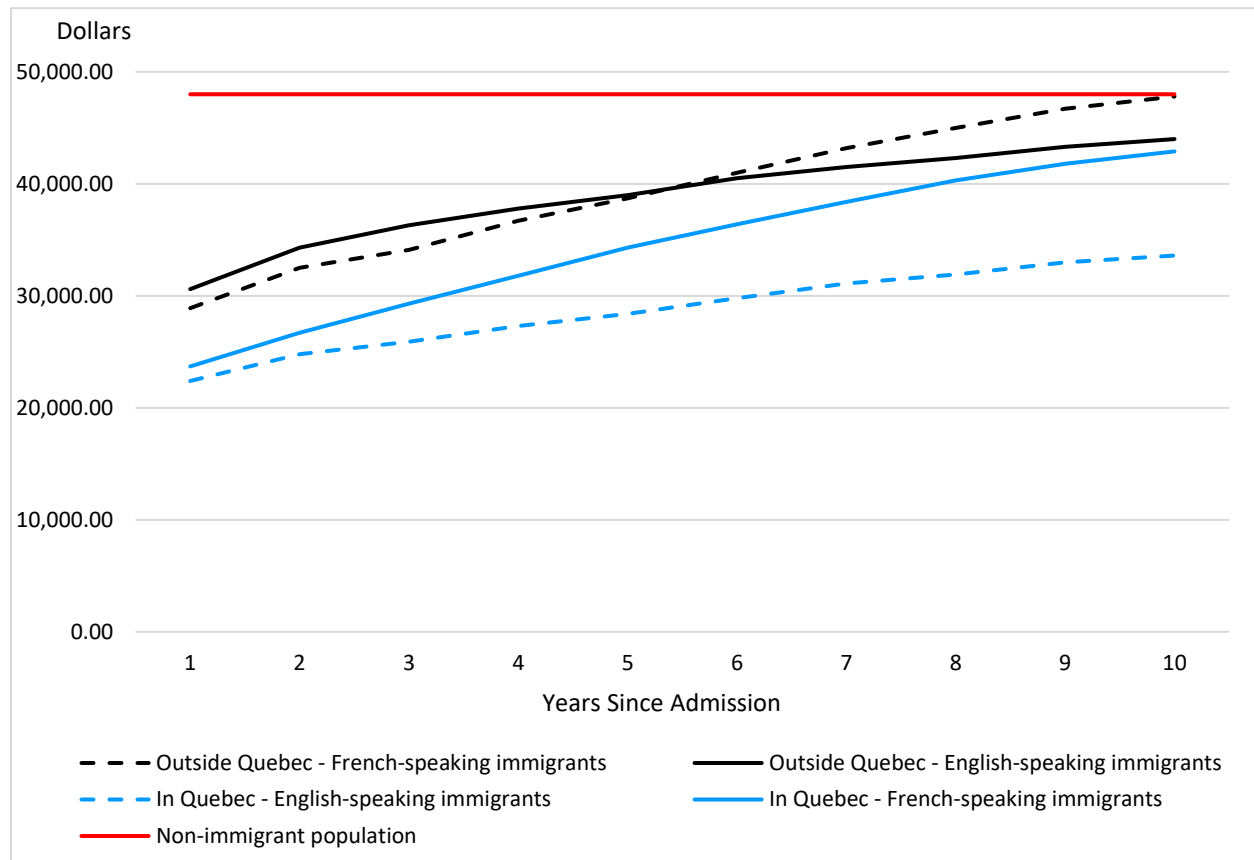
Similar to employment rate trends, French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec had lower median incomes than their English-speaking counterparts from year 1 to year 5, after which point they closed the gap, surpassing the linguistic majority (Figure 3). Over the 10 years following admission, median annual earnings increased from \$28,900 to \$47,800 (+65%) for French-speaking immigrants and from \$30,600 to \$44,000 (+44%) for English-speaking immigrants (in 2021 constant dollars). Wage gaps between the minority and majority group varied from -6% to +8%.

In Quebec, median earnings increased over time for both linguistic groups. However, the wage gap between the two groups widened. Not only did French-speaking immigrants have higher median incomes than English-speaking immigrants, but the differences became increasingly pronounced over the years. For example, the median earnings of English-speaking immigrants were \$22,400 in year 1 and \$33,600 in year 10, while the median earnings of French-speaking immigrants were \$23,700 in year 1 and \$42,900 in year 10. This means the earnings of the linguistic majority were 6% higher in the first year and 28% higher in the tenth.

Overall, French-speaking immigrants who had been admitted to Canada outside Quebec at least 10 years prior were those whose median earnings were closest to the median earnings of the non-immigrant population (\$48,000 in 2021).⁷

⁷ The median earnings of the non-immigrant population were determined using data from the Longitudinal Administrative Databank for people aged 20 to 54.

Figure 3: Median employment income of immigrants in Canada outside Quebec and in Quebec, aged 20 to 54 at time of admission, by official language



Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2022; Longitudinal Administrative Databank, 2021.

The results of the multivariate analyses were used to compare the earnings of immigrants from both linguistic groups while taking into account differences in sociodemographic characteristics. To this end, a regression was performed based on an initial model that included the logarithm of earnings as the dependent variable and knowledge of the official language⁸ as the main independent variable (Model 1 in Table 2). A second estimation was carried out by combining the elements of the first model with variables reflecting sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, immigration category, region of origin or birth, years since admission, years of Canadian work experience, admission cohort and province of residence (Model 2 or model after adjusting). These two models are evaluated separately for minority and majority language

⁸ This binary variable equals 1 when the individual is a speaker of French in Canada outside Quebec or a speaker of English in Quebec according to IRCC's language measures as defined above.

immigrants, both in Canada outside Quebec and in Quebec, at intervals of 1, 5 and 10 years after admission.

Model 1, which did not control for sociodemographic characteristics, showed that French-speaking immigrants in Canada outside Quebec had lower wages than their English-speaking counterparts from 1 to 5 years after admission. After 10 years of permanent residence, the income of the minority exceeded that of the majority. The gap between the two linguistic groups narrowed over time. These results correspond to those reported in the descriptive section.

After the adjustment in Model 2, French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec earned less than the linguistic majority throughout the 10 years after admission. The difference in earnings between minority and majority language immigrants was 15% (-0.167 log points) 1 year after permanent residence, 9% (-0.091 log points) after 5 years, and 4% (-0.045 log points) after 10 years. The income gap in favour of the linguistic majority therefore narrowed over time.

In Canada outside Quebec, widening gaps were identified between Model 1 and Model 2 for years 1 through 5. At first glance, knowledge of French seemed to have only a minor impact on income (Model 1). However, once these factors were taken into account, the impact of knowledge of the minority language on income was deemed to be more substantial and adverse (Model 2). Furthermore, both models confirmed that the incomes of French-speaking immigrants almost caught up with those of their English-speaking counterparts over time. This catching-up, observed only outside Quebec, could be explained by the fact that just under half of the French-speaking minority self-reported as bilingual upon admission. This French-speaking minority in Canada outside Quebec may also have become proficient in English in the years following. Consequently, the impact of language may have been underestimated in the multivariate analyses for years 5 and 10. However, this potential improvement in English language skills over time is not measured in the IMDB data.

In Quebec, the trends in Model 1 are similar to those presented in Table 2, particularly the fact that English-speaking immigrants earned less than their French-speaking counterparts, with the gap becoming more pronounced over time. After adjustment in Model 2, in the first year after acquiring permanent residence, English-speaking immigrants earned higher wages than the French-speaking majority. However, this advantage was not confirmed in the other years, as the results were not statistically significant.

Table 2 : Regression results - Logarithm of earnings at year 1, year 5 and year 10 after acquisition of permanent residence (log points)

In Canada outside Quebec												
	Year 1				Year 5				Year 10			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	10,137	**	10,514	**	10,353	**	10,511	**	10,468	**	10,663	**
French-speaking immigrants	-0.126	**	-0.167	**	-0.049	**	-0.091	**	0.051	**	-0.045	**
In Quebec												
	Year 1				Year 5				Year 10			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	9,792	**	10,105	**	10,162	**	10,338	**	10,409	**	10,585	**
English-speaking immigrants	-0.029	**	0.051	**	-0.128	**	0.000		-0.189	**	-0.007	
**significantly different value than the estimate for the reference category (p < 0.01)												
Note: Each model also includes control variables: immigration category, region of origin or birth, years since admission, years of Canadian work experience, admission cohort and province of residence.												
For French-speaking immigrants in Canada outside Quebec, the R-squared values are 0.000 for Model 1 and 0.153, 0.125 and 0.109 for Model 2 at years 1, 5 and 10 respectively. For English-speaking immigrants in Quebec, the R-squared values are 0.000, 0.003 and 0.006 for Model 1 and 0.170, 0.125 and 0.117 for Model 2 at years 1, 5 and 10 respectively.												

Source: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2022.

Conclusion

This study provided an overview of official language minority immigrants. It highlighted the economic outcomes of the different official language groups over time, especially in the 10 years after permanent residence was acquired.

Overall, official language minority immigrants had the same sociodemographic profiles as their majority language counterparts. There were slightly more women and young people among official language minority immigrants. The majority had at least a university degree. Just under half of the French-speaking minority outside Quebec also reported knowledge of English. Nearly half of linguistic minority immigrants were admitted as refugees or sponsored by family. Most official language minority immigrants were therefore well equipped to enter the labour market and contribute to economic development.

Despite these sociodemographic similarities, descriptive and regression analyses showed that immigrants who spoke the minority official language at the time of admission had lower employment rates and median income than the linguistic majority shortly after acquiring permanent residence. In Canada outside Quebec, many more official language minority immigrants participated in the labour market over time, earning incomes that were generally close to those of the linguistic majority and the non-immigrant population. In Quebec, the gaps between the linguistic groups widened.

The analyses also indicated that economic outcomes were better for French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec than for English-speaking immigrants in Quebec. Just over half of French-speaking immigrants outside Quebec reported knowledge of the majority official language. These results are consistent with Houle (2019), in that Francophone immigrants outside Quebec, who were almost all bilingual in this study, had similar or better economic outcomes than their Anglophone counterparts.

These findings suggest that economic success is associated with knowledge of the majority official language, and that knowledge of the minority official language alone is not sufficient. We need to strike a better balance between the objective of ensuring the vitality and sustainability of both official languages and the professional development of official language minority immigrants.

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