
Census in Brief

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

Census of Population, 2021



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Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

Highlights

- In 2021, in Canada outside Quebec, 1.6 million adults and children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion at the elementary or secondary level in an English-language school in Canada.
- In 2021, nearly 700,000 school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion. This represented 1 in 6 (16.9%) children aged 5 to 17.
- The proportion of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in French immersion was higher in New Brunswick (37.3%) and Prince Edward Island (28.6%) and lower in Alberta (10.1%) and Saskatchewan (10.1%).
- In 2021, approximately half of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were living in the large urban centres of Ottawa and Moncton were in or had been in French immersion, compared with approximately 1 in 10 children living in Chilliwack, Lethbridge, Kamloops, Calgary and Barrie.
- In municipalities in Canada outside Quebec where at least 30% of adults knew French, approximately half of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion in 2021.
- In 2021, in Canada outside Quebec, close to half (47.0%) of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in French immersion had an immigrant background.
- In Canada outside Quebec, in 2021, nearly one in five school-aged children who were in or had been in French immersion had a mother tongue other than English or French, such as Mandarin, Punjabi or Arabic.
- Among those who were in French immersion for at least one year in their childhood, just over 6 in 10 (60.9%) young women aged 18 to 24 in Canada outside Quebec whose mother tongue is not French could have a conversation in French in 2021, compared with just under half (49.4%) of young men in the same age group.
- In Canada outside Quebec, in 2021, nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of bilingual English–French young adults aged 18 to 24 whose mother tongue is not French had been in French immersion for at least one year during their childhood.
- More than 100,000 children and adults whose mother tongue is not French who were in or had been in French immersion spoke French at home in 2021. This represented 15.4% of people aged 5 to 60 years who spoke French at home in Canada outside Quebec.
- Among those who were in French immersion for at least one year during their childhood, 1 in 10 workers whose mother tongue is not French, or 72,000 workers, used French at work in 2021. Of these, half worked in the educational services (26.1%) or public administration (24.1%) sectors.

Introduction

French immersion programs were created in Quebec in the mid-1960s through the efforts of anglophone parents—mothers¹ in particular—who were keen on having their children become fluent in French while attending an English-language school. Since the adoption of the *Official Languages Act* in 1969, French immersion programs have been offered in many English-language elementary and secondary schools in Canada. In these programs, students learn French as a second language by taking some subjects in French, as well as French-language courses.²

Because of the ever-growing popularity of immersion programs, the Government of Canada would like to shorten waiting lists to better meet increasing demand and educational needs in the provinces and territories with a view to strengthening bilingualism in the country.³ English–French bilingualism is widely considered a cultural and economic advantage, both on an individual and a national level.⁴

New data on language of instruction from the 2021 Census of Population paint a unique portrait of current or past schooling in French immersion programs of adults and children in the provinces and territories except Quebec. The census does not collect data from Quebec residents on whether they were in French immersion.

By examining these new data based on the characteristics of parents of children and on different local contexts, a better understanding of factors related to participation in French immersion programs is now possible. Other language characteristics collected in the census also shed light on the link between immersion programs and knowledge of French as a second language.

Today, Statistics Canada is releasing an initial in-depth analysis of participation in French immersion programs in the country, based on 2021 Census data. This analysis examines factors that may be related to availability of French immersion programs and choosing of these programs. In addition, it looks at the possible links between schooling in a French immersion program and English–French bilingualism as well as the use of French at home or at work in adulthood.

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1. See Kathryn Jezer-Morton, 2020, “Canada’s “Founding Mothers” of French Immersion,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, and Fred Genesee, 2019, “Exploring Canada’s Bilingual Landscape,” *Linguistic Duality, De Jure and De Facto, Marking the 50th Anniversary of the Official Languages Act, Canadian Issues*, p. 49 to 52.
 2. French immersion programs are only offered in English-language schools and are intended for students for whom French is not their first language. Sometimes, students whose first language is French are also in these programs. Furthermore, some students who do not have French as their first language can also attend a French-language school. It should be noted that French-language schools do not offer French immersion, since they offer a regular French program.
 3. Canadian Heritage, 2023, *Action Plan for Official Languages 2023–2028: Protection-Promotion-Collaboration*.
 4. See, for example, Martin Turcotte, 2019, “Results from the 2016 Census: English–French bilingualism among Canadian children and youth,” *Insights on Canadian Society*, October, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 75-006-X.

Definitions and concepts

French immersion programs in Canada are elementary or secondary programs offered in English-language schools, in which French is the language of instruction for most of the school day; many, if not all, subjects are taught in French, except English classes. Immersion programs were created so students can acquire French-as-a-second-language skills ([Elementary–Secondary Education Survey Definitions Guide, 2020-2021](#)). This is why people whose mother tongue is not French, in particular, are considered in this analysis.

Mother tongue

In this analysis, people whose **mother tongue is not French** refers to people who do not have French as a mother tongue; in other words, people for whom French is not the language or one of the languages first learned at home in childhood and still understood. These people had English, another language or a combination of languages other than French as their mother tongue or tongues.

In Canada outside Quebec, almost all (96.5%) school-aged children who were in or had been in French immersion for at least one year did not have French as a mother tongue in 2021.⁵ The vast majority (78.4%) had English as a mother tongue, 4.6% had English and another language (i.e., a non-official language) as a mother tongue, and 13.4% had one or more other mother tongues, such as Mandarin (2.6%), Punjabi (1.7%), Arabic (1.6%), Spanish (1.3%) or Tagalog (1.2%).

Age group

In this analysis, **children** are school-aged children. They are considered school-aged if they were between 5 and 17 years of age on December 31, 2020, i.e., they were born between January 1, 2003, and December 31, 2015, inclusively. Meanwhile, **adults** were between 18 and 60 years of age. French immersion programs did not exist or were not as widespread during the elementary and secondary education of people who were older than 60. The analysis also examines **young adults** aged 18 to 24 years. It includes people who were born in Canada or who arrived in the country before adulthood, since they are likely to have been in French immersion.

Gender

Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category “non-binary persons” are distributed into the other two gender categories. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, the category “men” includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons, while the category “women” includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons. For more information on the concept of gender, please consult [Filling the gaps: Information on gender in the 2021 Census](#).

5. Consequently, 3.5% of children who were in French immersion had French as one of their mother tongues, 1.0% of whom had French as their only mother tongue. The proximity of an immersion program to home is one reason that could drive parents to choose this program for their French-mother-tongue child rather than a regular French program offered in a French-language school.

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Participation and bilingualism

In this study, the rate of **participation** is the percentage of children or adults living in Canada outside Quebec in 2021 who were in or had been in French immersion for at least one year at the elementary or secondary level in an English-language school in Canada.

People are considered to be English–French **bilingual** if they reported knowing English and French well enough to have a conversation in each of Canada’s two official languages.

Geography

In this analysis, the term **large urban centre** refers to a census metropolitan area (CMA). A CMA is an urban centre with a population of 100,000 or more. The large urban centre of Ottawa corresponds to the Ontario part of the Ottawa–Gatineau CMA. The term **urban centre** refers to a census agglomeration (CA) with a population of less than 100,000, and the term **municipality** refers to a census subdivision (CSD).

Approximately 1.6 million Canadians have been in French immersion since these programs were created in the 1960s

In Canada outside Quebec, in 2021, approximately 1.6 million children and adults whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion in an English-language school in Canada for at least one year. This represents 10.3% of the population aged 5 to 60⁶ who do not have French as a mother tongue.

In 2021, approximately 900,000 of these individuals were living in Ontario, more than 200,000 were living in British Columbia, and close to 200,000 lived in Alberta. Approximately a quarter of the population aged 5 to 60 whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion in the urban centres of Ottawa⁷ (28.6%) and Cornwall (25.9%) in Ontario or in the urban centres of Moncton (30.6%) and Fredericton (26.3%) in New Brunswick.

New data on language of instruction from the 2021 Census also shed light on how participation in French immersion programs has changed among people whose mother tongue is not French who were living in Canada outside Quebec in 2021 and who were born in Canada or arrived in the country in their childhood⁸ since these programs were created.⁹

In Canada outside Quebec, 3.6% of people aged 45 to 60 whose mother tongue is not French were in French immersion once the first programs were created in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. Participation was almost three times higher (9.7%) among people aged 25 to 44 who started school in the 1980s and 1990s, i.e., when immersion programs expanded across the country. This proportion rose to 12.8% among young adults aged 18 to 24 who were educated in the 2000s, then reached 16.9% among children aged 5 to 17 who began their schooling between 2008 and 2020, which corresponds to the last period of growth in popularity and availability of French immersion programs in Canada (Chart 1).

6. French immersion programs did not exist or were not as widespread during the elementary and secondary education of people who were over the age of 60 on December 31, 2020.

7. The Ontario part of Ottawa–Gatineau.

8. This analysis includes people who were born in Canada or who arrived in the country before adulthood, since they are likely to have been in French immersion.

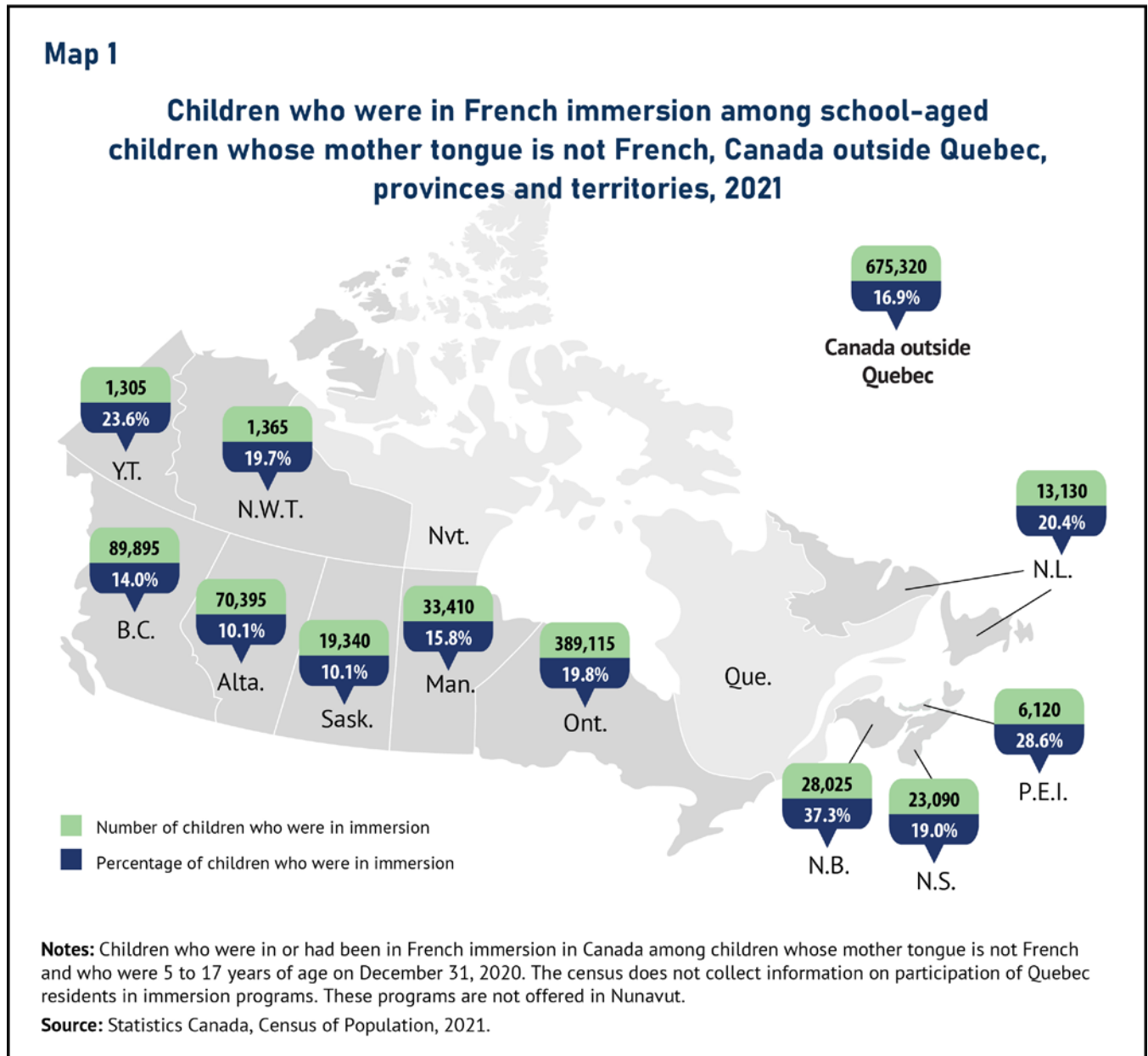
9. This is merely an estimate since other components such as emigration, migration to or from Quebec, and mortality, played a role over the years.

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In 2021, one in six children were in or had been in French immersion in Canada outside Quebec

In Canada outside Quebec, among the 4.0 million school-aged children in 2021¹⁰ for whom French was not their mother tongue, close to 700,000 (16.9%) were in or had been in French immersion.

This proportion varied considerably between the provinces and territories¹¹ (Map 1). In Alberta and Saskatchewan in 2021, it stood at 10.1%, but was more than double in Yukon (23.6%), approximately three times higher in Prince Edward Island (28.6%), and roughly four times higher in New Brunswick (37.3%).



10. School-aged children were between 5 and 17 years of age on December 31, 2020, i.e., they were born between January 1, 2003, and December 31, 2015, inclusively.

11. Nunavut is not included in this analysis because no French immersion programs are offered in this territory.

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

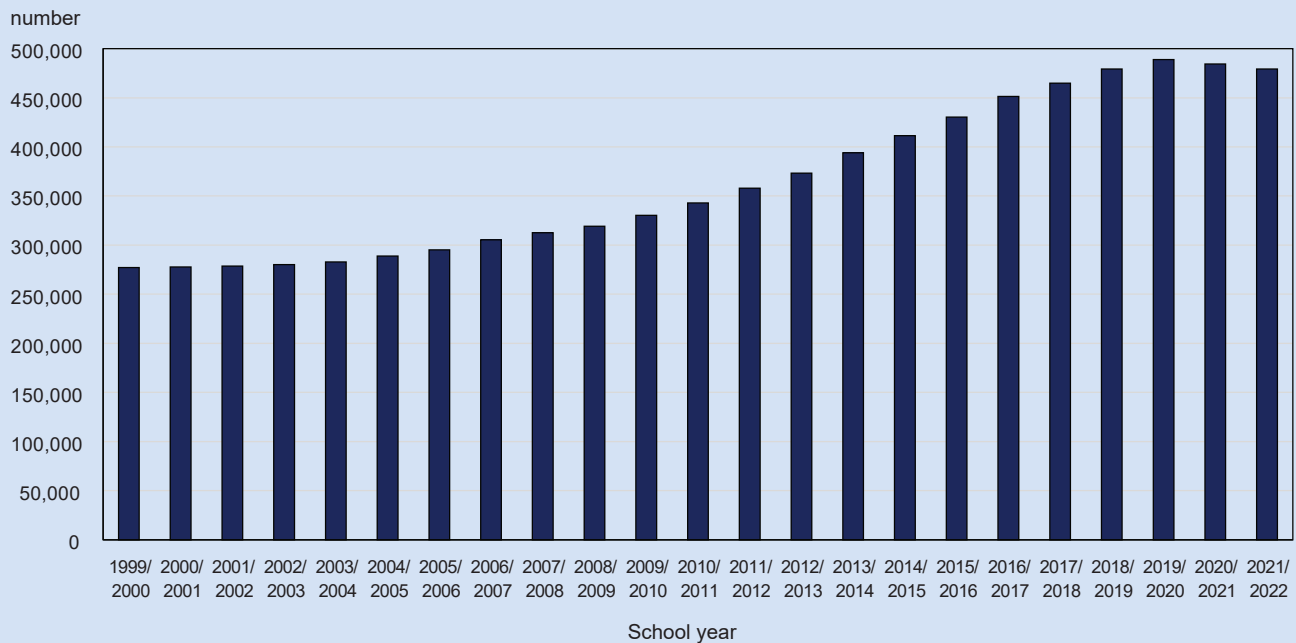
In Canada outside Quebec, enrolment in French immersion programs in English-language schools increased in the 20 years before the COVID-19 pandemic

According to the [Elementary–Secondary Education Survey](#), the number of yearly enrolments in French immersion programs increased over two decades in Canada outside Quebec, rising from 277,000 students in 1999/2000 to almost 489,000 in 2019/2020, an increase of 76.4% in 20 years (Chart 1). Approximately half of this growth occurred over the past decade in Ontario, and to a lesser extent, in Alberta and British Columbia.

This upward trend was followed by two consecutive drops in 2020/2021 and 2021/2022, bringing the number of students enrolled in French immersion to just under 480,000 in 2021/2022. These decreases started in the first full school year affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart 1

In Canada outside Quebec, enrolment in French immersion programs has increased strongly since the early 2000s



Source: Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary Education Survey, 1999/2000 to 2021/2022.

In Canada outside Quebec, more than one in eight (12.6%) students in an English-language school were enrolled in a French immersion program in 2021/2022. This rate has almost doubled in 20 years (7.1% in 2001/2002).

In 2021/2022, Grade 1 had the highest proportion of enrolments in French immersion, accounting for 17.1% of students in English-language schools in Canada outside Quebec.

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

In 2021, approximately half of children living in Ottawa and Moncton had been in French immersion, compared with 1 child in 10 or less in Chilliwack, Lethbridge, Kamloops, Calgary and Barrie

It is known that the availability of French immersion programs is lower in rural areas, which can be seen in participation. In Canada outside Quebec as a whole, in 2021, participation of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French in French immersion programs was almost twice as high among children living in urban centres (18.2%) than among children living outside these centres (9.6%).¹²

In 2021, the number of school-aged children with a language other than French as their mother tongue who were in or had been in French immersion was higher in the large urban centres of Toronto (162,000), Ottawa (72,000), Vancouver (50,000), Edmonton (27,000), Winnipeg (26,000) and Calgary (24,000). Proportionally speaking, this represented 18.5% of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French in Toronto, 14.9% in Vancouver, and 22.1% in Winnipeg. In fact, data from the 2021 Census revealed that participation in French immersion programs varied widely between the school populations of urban centres (Chart 2).

Among large urban centres, participation of children whose mother tongue is not French in French immersion programs was lower in Chilliwack (6.6%), Kamloops (10.1%) and Abbotsford–Mission (11.5%) in British Columbia, in Lethbridge (8.6%), Calgary (10.3%) and Edmonton (12.3%) in Alberta, and in Barrie (10.3%) and St. Catharines–Niagara (11.4%) in Ontario.

In contrast, just over half (51.1%) of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French living in the large urban centre of Ottawa were in or had been in French immersion. Elsewhere in eastern Ontario, immersion programs were also popular among school-aged children in the urban centres of Cornwall (43.2%), Hawkesbury¹³ (41.5%), Brockville (29.6%), Petawawa (26.2%) and Kingston (23.5%).

Participation in immersion programs was also high among school-aged children living in the New Brunswick urban centres of Moncton (45.0%), Fredericton (43.2%), Bathurst (39.6%), Saint John (37.0%), Miramichi (34.4%) and Campbellton¹⁴ (33.0%).

Participation was also high in northern Ontario, such as in Elliot Lake (40.2%), Timmins (35.2%), Greater Sudbury (31.7%), North Bay (29.2%), Kenora (25.6%) and Sault Ste. Marie (24.3%).

It should be noted that immersion programs were popular among school-aged children living in the urban centres of Yellowknife (34.4%) in the Northwest Territories; Charlottetown (34.2%) and Summerside (29.7%) in Prince Edward Island; St. John's (32.0%) and Gander (26.8%) in Newfoundland and Labrador; Canmore (28.2%) in Alberta; Whitehorse (28.1%) in Yukon; Salmon Arm (25.7%) and Squamish (23.4%) in British Columbia; and Halifax (24.4%) in Nova Scotia.

Some urban centres with higher participation in immersion programs had similar characteristics related to learning French. Many of these centres—such as Ottawa, Timmins, Moncton and Bathurst—had large francophone communities. In others, French was used in the labour market because of the presence of certain employers, e.g., in Fredericton, where the provincial government is a major employer, as well as in Petawawa and Kingston, where the Department of National Defence is located. Lastly, other urban centres stood out for the very high level of education of their population, such as Canmore, Charlottetown and St. John's.¹⁵ These factors may account in part for participation in French immersion programs.

12. Children living in urban centres are more likely to have been in French immersion than those living outside urban centres, even when factoring in other characteristics linked to participation in these programs, such as the parents' education, which is generally higher in urban areas.

13. The Ontario part of the Hawkesbury census agglomeration.

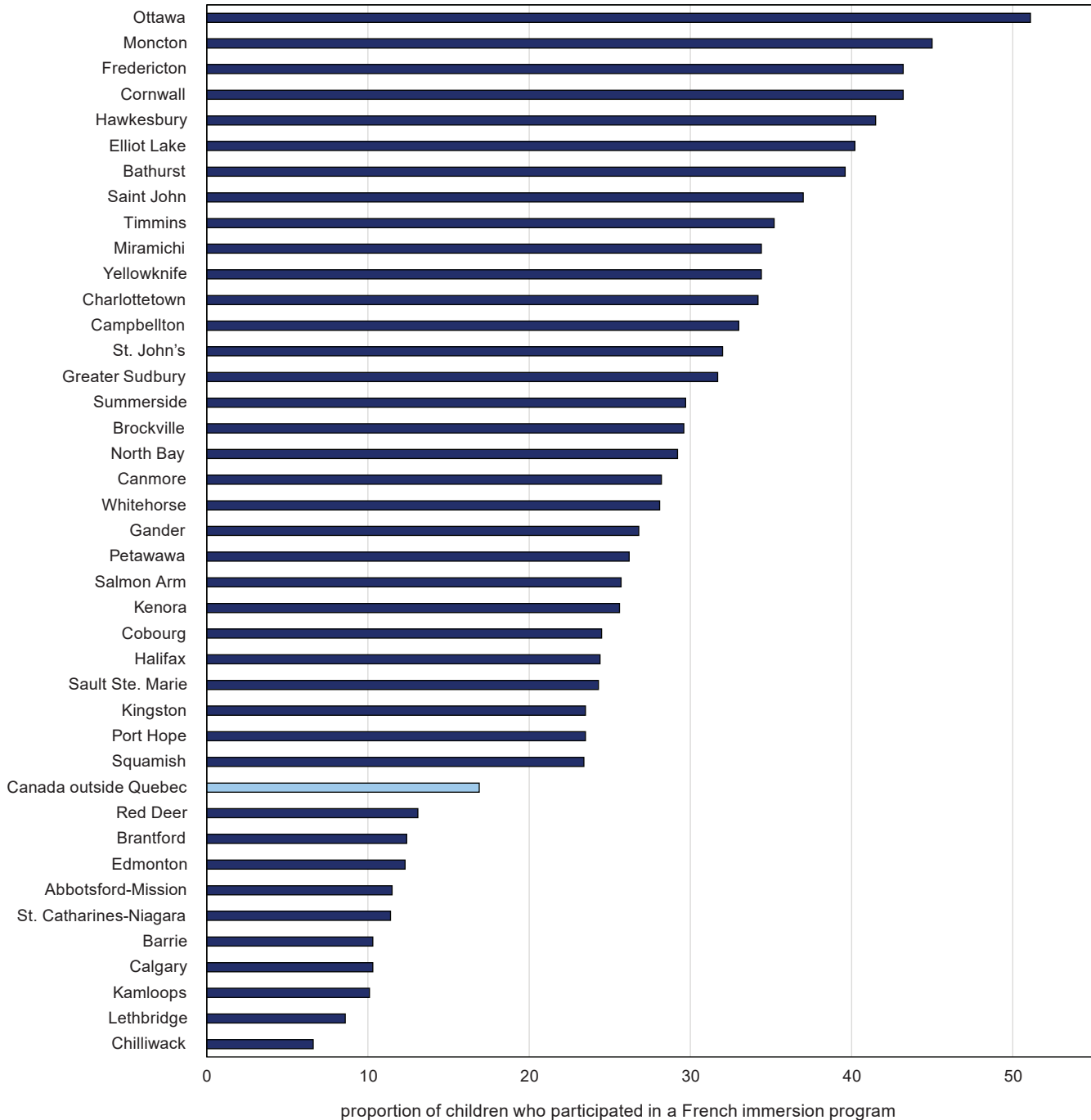
14. The New Brunswick part of the Campbellton census agglomeration.

15. In 2021, 52.6% of the Canadian population aged 25 and older had a postsecondary diploma, certificate or degree in 2021, compared with 58.7% in St. John's, 62.7% in Charlottetown, and 70.2% in Canmore. In fact, Canmore was the Canadian urban centre with the highest proportion of people with postsecondary credentials.

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Chart 2

Top 30 urban centres with the highest participation in French immersion programs and top 10 large urban centres with the lowest participation, Canada outside Quebec, 2021



Note: Among urban centres (CMAs and CAs) with more than 1,000 school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French, who were in or had been in French immersion in Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

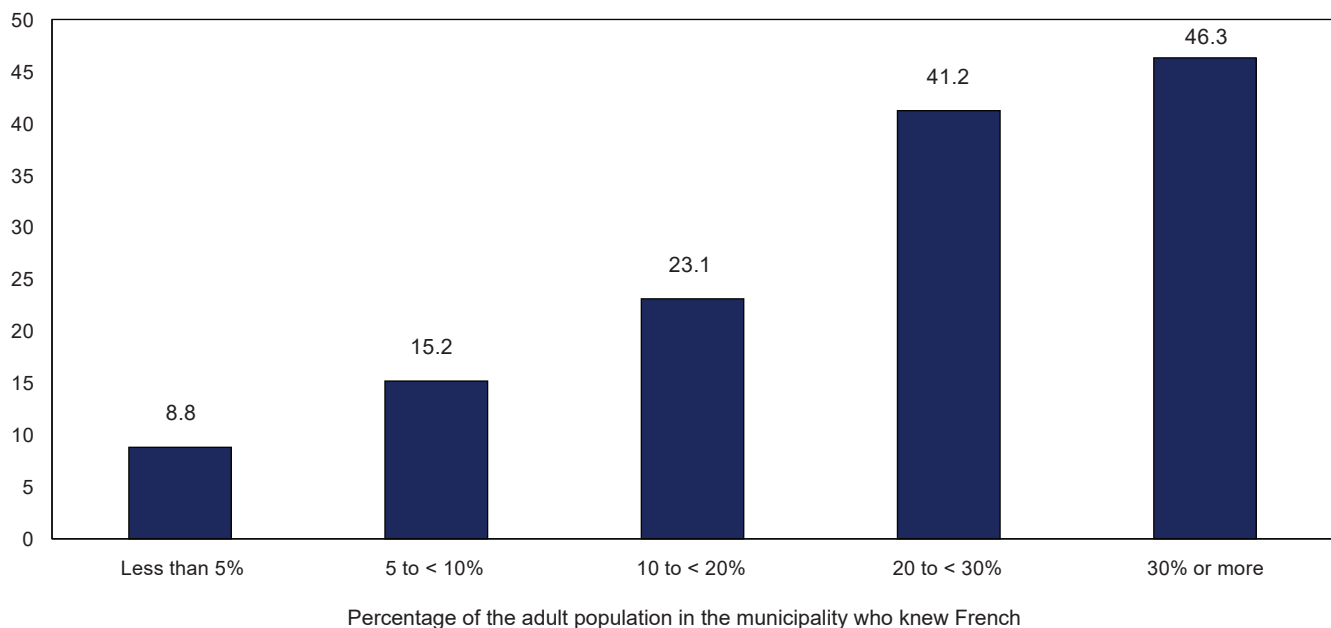
In municipalities where at least 30% of adults know French, approximately half of children were in or had been in immersion as of Grade 1

The presence of French-language communities and the use of French in the local labour market are reflected in the knowledge of French among the adults who live in those municipalities. In Canada outside Quebec, knowledge of French among the local adult population is one reason why French immersion programs are popular for children beginning their education¹⁶ (Chart 3).

Chart 3

The more adults in a municipality who knew French in 2021, the more likely the children in that municipality were to be in French immersion as of Grade 1

percentage of children who were in French immersion



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In 2021, in municipalities where at least 30% of adults knew French well enough to have a conversation, approximately half (46.3%) of children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion at the age corresponding to Grade 1. By comparison, in municipalities where less than 5% of adults knew French, participation in immersion programs was on average 8.8% among children of the same age whose mother tongue is not French.

In addition to characteristics of the local context, including availability of a spot in a program offered close to home, parents' choice of a French immersion program for their child as of Grade 1 is also related to their own education, their English–French bilingualism, or to the fact that they themselves were in immersion in their childhood (Chart 4).

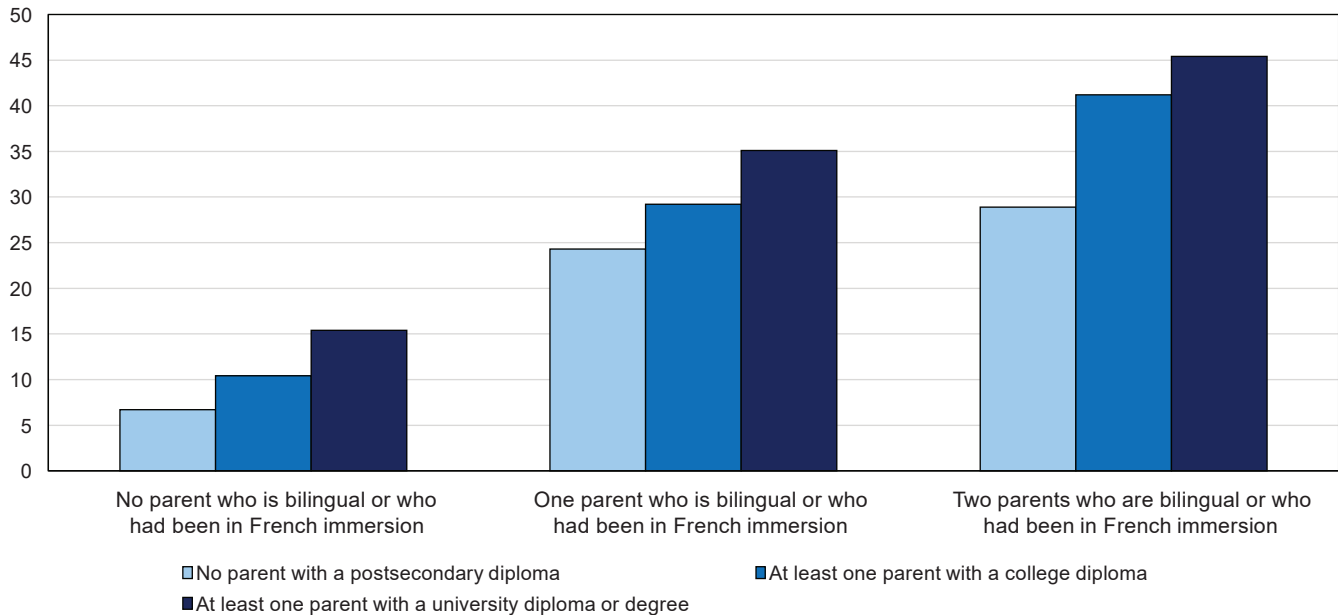
16. This section is based on an analysis of the choice of immersion programs by parents of children who did not have French as a mother tongue and who were born in 2014, i.e., they were 6 years old on December 31, 2020. In Canada outside Quebec, these children were usually in Grade 1 at the time of the census in May 2021. Grade 1 was found to have the highest rate of enrolment in immersion programs. It is also before Grade 1 that parents make the majority of the first decisions about their children's schooling.

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Chart 4

Children with parents who are bilingual, have a higher level of education or had been in French immersion are more likely to have also been in French immersion as of Grade 1

percentage of children who were in French immersion



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In Canada outside Quebec, the more parents of children with a language other than French as their mother tongue were educated, bilingual, or had been in immersion, the more likely these children were to have also been in French immersion.

For example, the percentage of children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion at the age corresponding to Grade 1 was 10% or less among children whose parents were not bilingual or had not been in immersion, and did not have a university degree. In contrast, 45.4% of children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion when both their parents were bilingual or had been in immersion and at least one parent had a university degree.

Moreover, if both parents were bilingual or had been in immersion, this percentage remained high when they had a college diploma (41.2%) or did not have a postsecondary diploma or degree (28.9%). Therefore, parents' education level does not seem to be the main factor associated with participation in French immersion programs, compared with having parents who are bilingual or who had been in immersion.

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Close to half of school-aged children who were in French immersion have an immigrant background

In 2021, close to half (47.0%) of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion had an immigrant background,¹⁷ compared with more than half (53.0%) of children who were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents. Children born in Canada to a parent born outside Canada (19.1%) were more likely to be in French immersion than other school-aged children whose mother tongue was not French (15.8%). Therefore, children with an immigrant background were as likely as other Canadian children—if not more—to be in immersion.

Up to three-quarters of school-aged children who were in or had been in immersion had an immigrant background among those living in the large urban centres of Toronto (76.8%), Vancouver (67.4%) and Calgary (51.1%). Furthermore, in some large urban centres, namely Vancouver (33.2%), Toronto (32.6%) and Abbotsford–Mission (27.9%), up to one-third of school-aged children who were in or had been in French immersion had a non-official language as their mother tongue.

French immersion programs are slightly more popular among girls

In 2021, more than half (52.7%) of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in French immersion were girls, while less than half (47.3%) were boys. Among all school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French, girls (18.3%) were slightly more likely than boys¹⁸ (15.4%) to be in or have been in French immersion.

Slightly more than 6 in 10 young women can have a conversation in French in adulthood after having been in immersion in their childhood

In 2021, half (50.2%) of children and adults whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in French immersion for at least one year could have a conversation in French. In comparison, among adults and children whose mother tongue is not French who had never been in immersion, 4.1% could have a conversation in French. Therefore, people whose mother tongue is not French and who had been in immersion were 12 times more likely to be able to have a conversation in French.

That said, there are reasons why a person who was in immersion would not have developed the ability to have a conversation in French or kept up their French over time. For example, they may have been in immersion for a short time¹⁹ or they may have forgotten French due to a lack of opportunities to use it after their studies.

Among young adults aged 18 to 24 whose mother tongue is not French and who had been in French immersion, 55.7% reported that they knew French well enough to have a conversation (Chart 5). This proportion was higher among young women in this age group (60.9%) than among young men (49.4%).

17. In other words, they were born outside Canada or have at least one parent who was born outside Canada.

18. In the [Elementary–Secondary Education Survey](#), a very similar gap between girls and boys in immersion programs was also observed.

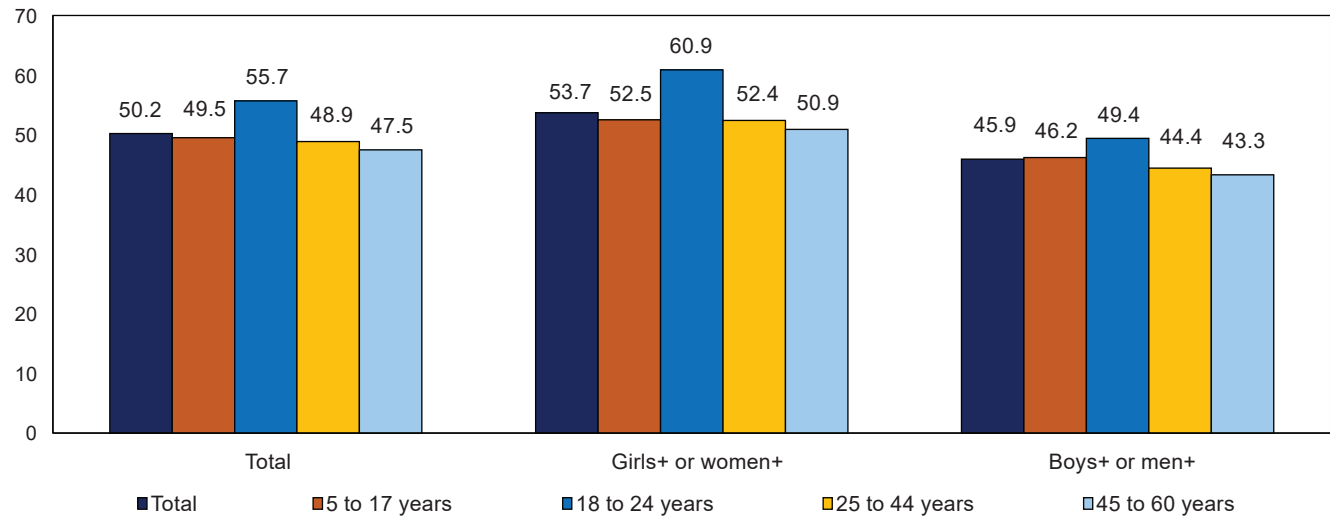
19. Acquiring and maintaining bilingualism are related to the number of academic years in French immersion. Allen (2008) used longitudinal data to show that after six or more years in immersion, 75.8% of youth in Canada outside Quebec who do not have French as a mother tongue could have a conversation in French at age 21 (Mary Allen, 2008, "Youth Bilingualism in Canada," *Education Matters: Insights on Education, Learning and Training in Canada*, vol. 5, no. 4, December, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-004-X).

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Chart 5

Half of people whose mother tongue is not French who were or had been in immersion for at least one year could have a conversation in French in 2021

proportion who can have a conversation in French



Note: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses. In these cases, individuals in the category “non-binary persons” are distributed into the other two gender categories. Unless otherwise indicated in the text, the category “men” includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons, while the category “women” includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Moreover, young adults aged 18 to 24 with at least one Canadian-born parent (59.9%) were more likely than young adults whose parents were born outside Canada (46.3%) to be able to have a conversation in French into adulthood after having been in French immersion.

People who live in a municipality where a larger proportion of the population speaks French on a daily basis are more likely to be able to converse in French. In 2021, the proportion of adults and children who were in or had been in immersion and who could have a conversation in French was 59.4% in municipalities where at least 5% of the population spoke French at home, compared with 48.3% in municipalities where French was spoken by less than 5% of the population.

More than two-thirds of adults and children whose mother tongue is not French and who had been in immersion could have a conversation in French in the urban centre of Summerside in Prince Edward Island, as well as in Bathurst, Campbellton and Edmundston in northern New Brunswick. This compares with less than a quarter of those living in Brooks, Alberta; Norfolk and Tillsonburg, Ontario; and Weyburn, Saskatchewan.

In Canada outside Quebec, approximately two-thirds of bilingual young adults whose mother tongue is not French had been in French immersion

According to the 2021 Census results, in Canada outside Quebec, elementary and secondary education in French, including immersion, was strongly associated with English–French bilingualism among people whose mother tongue is not French.²⁰

20. See Étienne Lemyre, 2023, “English–French bilingualism in Canada: Recent trends after five decades of official bilingualism,” *Census in Brief* series, June, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-200-X.

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Nearly 6 in 10 adults and children whose mother tongue is not French and who were bilingual in English and French were in or had been in French immersion for at least one year (58.2%).

This rate was even higher among school-aged children (68.6%) and young adults aged 18 to 24 (65.7%), which reflects the recent increase in enrolment in immersion programs. Meanwhile, 59.3% of bilingual adults aged 25 to 44 whose mother tongue is not French had been in French immersion, as had 29.4% of those aged 45 to 60.

Almost one in six people who speak French at home in Canada outside Quebec had been in immersion

In 2021, more than 100,000 adults and children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion spoke French at home on a regular basis, i.e., outside the school environment. They represented approximately 1 in 6 people (15.4%) aged 5 to 60 years who spoke French at home regularly in Canada outside Quebec in 2021.

Among school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion, 8.7% spoke French at home at least regularly in 2021, either as a secondary language spoken regularly or the language spoken most often at home.

This relation between French immersion and speaking French at home can also be observed at the end of secondary school studies. Adults whose mother tongue is not French and who had been in immersion (5.1%) were 12 times more likely to speak French at least regularly at home than those who were not educated in French²¹ (0.4%).

There are a number of reasons why adults whose mother tongue is not French and who were in immersion in their childhood speak French at home. For example, in 2021, 39.9% of these adults who speak French at home spoke French at work on a regular basis,²² 22.3% had a spouse whose mother tongue was French,²³ and 26.6% had school-aged children²⁴ who were also in or had been in French immersion.

In 2021, 1 in 10 adults, or 72,000 workers, who had been in French immersion in their childhood used French at work

In Canada outside Quebec, 10.1% of adults²⁵ whose mother tongue is not French, who had been in French immersion for at least one year in their childhood and who were employed used French regularly or most often at work.

The proportion of adults whose mother tongue is not French, who had been in French immersion and who used French at work was higher in New Brunswick (20.0%) and Ontario (12.8%), but lower in Alberta (5.0%) and British Columbia (4.2%). By comparison, 1.1% of adults whose mother tongue is not French and who were employed in Canada outside Quebec used French at work at least regularly if they had never been in immersion.

21. In other words, those who attended neither a French immersion program nor a regular program in a French-language school.

22. Among adults whose mother tongue is not French, who had been in immersion and who were employed during the census reference week.

23. Among adults whose mother tongue is not French, who had been in immersion and who were married or in a common-law relationship during the census reference week.

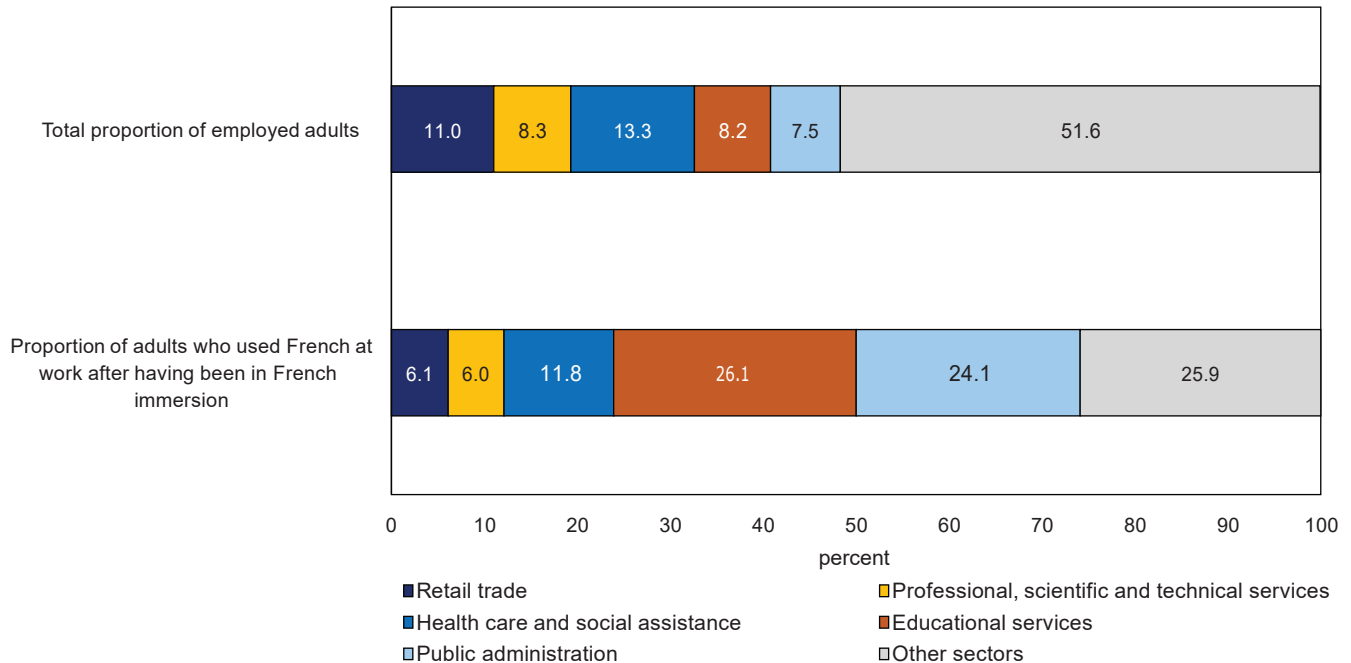
24. Among adults whose mother tongue is not French, who had been in immersion and who lived with at least one of their children at the time of the census.

25. Population aged 18 to 60 who were born in Canada or arrived in the country before adulthood.

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

Chart 6

In 2021, half of adults who used French at work after having been in French immersion were employed in educational services or public administration



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Adults who used French at work after having been in immersion in their childhood were concentrated in certain job sectors (Chart 6), with approximately half being employed in either educational services (26.1%) or public administration (24.1%). In contrast, these sectors employed 8.2% and 7.5%, respectively, of the adult working population in Canada outside Quebec.

Looking ahead

This first in-depth analysis on participation in French immersion programs and on the impact of these programs on bilingualism in Canada’s two official languages were made possible thanks to new questions on language of instruction in the 2021 Census.

Future analyses are planned to expand the portrait of language of instruction in Canada. Some topics they will explore include the effect of the proximity of schools that offer a French immersion program on participation of children whose mother tongue is not French in these programs, and the educational path of children eligible for instruction in the minority official language. As a complement to the Census of Population data, the results from the [Survey on the Official Language Minority Population](#), which will be released for the first time near the end of 2024, will shine a new light on these questions.

Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021

Additional information

The main findings from the 2021 Census on language of instruction in Canada were published in *The Daily* on November 30, 2022, in an article entitled “[897,000 children are eligible for instruction in the minority official language in Canada](#)” and in the infographic “[Children eligible for instruction in the minority official language, 2021](#).”

In-depth analyses on attendance of eligible children in French-language schools in Canada outside Quebec, based on results from the 2021 Census, can be found in the article, “[The school closest to home: Proximity of French-language elementary schools and enrolment in the Maritime provinces](#).”

More information on language of instruction is available in [data tables](#) and the [Census Profile](#). These resources are also available through the [Language Statistics Portal](#).

[Reference materials](#) are designed to help users make the most of the 2021 Census data. They include the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), and the [2021 Census of Population questionnaires](#). The [Instruction in the Minority Official Language Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#) is also available.

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