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Census in Brief

Languages used in the workplace in Canada

Census of Population, 2016

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- not available for any reference period
- .. not available for a specific reference period
- ... not applicable
- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0^s value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- ^P preliminary
- ^r revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- ^E use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- * significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

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Highlights

- English and French are the languages of convergence and integration into the labour market: in 2016, 99.2% of Canadian workers reported using English or French at work.
- In Quebec, the predominant use of French in the workplace fell from 82.0% in 2006 to 79.7% in 2016. This decline was mainly in favour of the equal use of French and English, which rose from 4.6% in 2006 to 7.2% in 2016.
- In Canada outside Quebec, 98.6% of workers reported using English at least on a regular basis, and 9 out of 10 workers reported using only English. These proportions are similar to those observed in 2006.
- The proportion of workers who use more than one language at work rose from 14.9% in 2006 to 15.4% in 2016.
- The use of “other” languages (i.e., other than English and French) at work remained unchanged at close to 5% across the country. However, less than 2% of the population used them predominantly.
- More than 6 in 10 workers (61.1%) used an other language, mainly Inuktitut, in Nunavut, down from 61.7% in 2006.

Introduction

The 2016 Census data indicate the importance of international migration in the evolution of Canada’s population. Despite increasing ethnocultural and linguistic diversity within the Canadian population, English and French remain the languages of convergence and integration into Canadian society.

The census collects information on language of work primarily to measure the use of English and French in the workplace in Canada, particularly in Quebec and in areas of contact between the English- and French-speaking populations. This information is also used to study the linguistic integration of immigrants into the labour market and into Canadian society in general.

The data on language of work confirm the importance of Canada’s official languages, English and French, as the languages of communication in the public space.¹ For example, 99.2% of Canadians who were employed between January 1, 2015, and May 7, 2016, reported using English or French at work at least on a regular basis.

The portrait of languages used at work is fairly stable across the country.² The proportion of workers who reported using English rose from 85.0% in 2006 to 85.8% in 2016 (Table 1), an increase of 1,538,205 people. Conversely, despite an increase of 277,015 in their numbers, the percentage of workers who used French at least on a regular basis at work fell across the country from 25.7% in 2006 to 25.0% in 2016. Less than 5% of Canadian workers reported using an other language³ in 2016. This language was not the main language of work for more than half of these workers (2.6%), but was used on a regular basis in addition to English or French.

The proportion of workers who use more than one language rose slightly from 14.9% in 2006 to 15.4% in 2016.

1. Since 2001, the Census of Population has included a two-part question on the languages used at work. The first part asks about the language used most often at work, while the second part asks about languages used on a regular basis at work in addition to the main language, if any. More than one response was accepted for both parts.

2. In this article, data from the 2016 Census of Population are compared only with data from the 2006 Census of Population. As indicated in the note published with the 2011 National Household Survey results, the high rates of non-response and imputation can affect the comparability with census data, particularly for language of work, where we often see little variation from one census to another.

3. The expression “other language” refers to any languages other than English and French. It includes Aboriginal, immigrant and sign languages. Some data products also use the expression “non-official languages” to refer to the same concept.

Languages used in the workplace in Canada

Table 1

Use of English, French and other languages at work, Canada, Quebec and Canada outside Quebec, 2006 and 2016

	English		French		Other languages	
	2006	2016	2006	2016	2006	2016
percentage						
Canada						
Only ¹	70.2	70.7	14.1	13.3	0.8	0.8
Mainly ²	6.2	5.8	6.2	5.9	0.6	0.6
Equally with another language ³	1.9	2.9	1.5	2.2	0.6	0.9
On a regular basis (in addition to the main language) ⁴	6.7	6.4	4.0	3.6	2.7	2.6
Total	85.0	85.8	25.7	25.0	4.6	4.9
Quebec						
Only ¹	4.6	4.6	58.6	56.5	0.4	0.3
Mainly ²	7.8	7.4	23.4	23.2	0.4	0.4
Equally with another language ³	4.7	7.4	4.7	7.4	0.4	0.6
On a regular basis (in addition to the main language) ⁴	23.3	23.1	7.7	7.2	1.6	1.6
Total	40.4	42.5	94.3	94.4	2.8	2.9
Canada outside Quebec						
Only ¹	90.0	90.1	0.6	0.6	0.9	0.9
Mainly ²	5.7	5.4	1.0	0.8	0.7	0.7
Equally with another language ³	1.1	1.6	0.5	0.7	0.6	1.0
On a regular basis (in addition to the main language) ⁴	1.7	1.5	2.9	2.6	3.0	2.9
Total	98.4	98.6	4.9	4.6	5.2	5.4

1. Includes all respondents who reported using only that language most often at work.

2. Includes all respondents who reported using that language most often at work and at least one other language on a regular basis.

3. Includes all respondents who reported using that language most often at work and at least one other language equally.

4. Includes all respondents who reported using that language regularly, but not most often at work (one or more languages reported).

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2016.

Equal use of French and English at work is on the rise in Quebec

Across Quebec, the use of French at work at least on a regular basis (94.4%) remained fairly stable between 2006 and 2016. However, the proportion of workers who reported using French predominantly decreased from 82.0% to 79.7%.

Moreover, although 42.5% of workers in Quebec used English at work in 2016 (compared with 40.4% in 2006), its use as a predominant language of work fell from 12.4% in 2006 to 12.0% in 2016.

The increase in the overall use of English at work in Quebec was driven by several factors including increases in certain jobs where individuals are more likely to work in English and the evolution in certain industry sectors. For example, the number of workers using English in the sector of professional, scientific and technical services rose from 158,055 in 2006 (60.3% of workers in the sector) to 194,640 in 2016 (62.8% of workers in the sector). The increase in the use of English at work was also observed for certain areas and cities in the province of Quebec. At a local level, these increases are not only driven by the factors mentioned above but also by local industry.

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The decline of French—and English—as a main language at work resulted in an increase in the proportion of workers who use both languages equally. In 2016, 7.2% of Quebec workers reported using English and French equally, compared with 4.6% in 2006.⁴

The proportion of Quebec workers who used other languages together with an official language was also up, from 2.4% in 2006 to 2.6% in 2016.

More workers in Quebec whose mother tongue is English or an other language use French predominantly at work

In Quebec, an increasing number of workers whose mother tongue⁵ is English or an other language use French as their main language at work or equally with English⁶ (Table 2). In particular, 48.1% of workers whose mother tongue is an “other” language primarily (only or mostly) used French at work in 2016, compared with 46.5% in 2006. Similarly, 24.7% of workers whose mother tongue is English mainly used French at work in 2016, compared with 23.3% in 2006. Among those two groups, the equal use of French and English has also risen significantly since 2006, up nearly six percentage points for other-mother-tongue workers and almost four percentage points for the workers with English as their mother tongue.

Conversely, 91.4% of workers whose mother tongue is French reported using French primarily at work in 2016, down from 2006 (93.0%). This decline was primarily in favour of workers who use French equally with another language, English in most cases. Between 2006 and 2016, the proportion of French-mother-tongue workers who used French equally with another language rose from 2.9% to 4.3%.⁷

Table 2
Use of French at work, by mother tongue, Quebec, 2006 and 2016

	Mother tongue ¹					
	English		French		Other languages	
	2006	2016	2006	2016	2006	2016
Use of French at work	percentage					
Only ²	6.1	7.0	69.3	67.6	21.4	25.0
Mainly ³	17.2	17.7	23.7	23.8	25.1	23.1
Equally with another language ⁴	8.2	12.1	2.9	4.3	12.8	18.6
On a regular basis (in addition to the main language) ⁵	36.4	33.0	3.4	3.5	18.0	14.1
Total	68.0	69.8	99.2	99.2	77.4	80.9

1. Only single responses to the question on mother tongue were considered.

2. Includes all respondents who reported using only French most often at work.

3. Includes all respondents who reported using French most often at work (single responses) and at least one other language on a regular basis.

4. Includes all respondents who reported using French most often at work and at least one other language equally.

5. Includes all respondents who reported using French regularly, but not most often at work (one or more languages reported).

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2016.

4. The data in Table 1 differ slightly, as they also include the use of other languages equally with French or English.

5. Mother tongue refers to the first language learned in childhood and still understood. Only single responses to the mother tongue question are considered here.

6. Table 2 refers to the use of French equally with another language, but that language is English in almost all cases.

7. In Quebec, the decline of French as the predominant language at work during this period is primarily due to the combination of two factors: a decrease in the predominant use of French by workers whose mother tongue is French and a decline in their demographic weight, which fell from 80.1% to 77.2% of all Quebec workers. The increase in the predominant use of French at work among those whose mother tongue is English or an other language could not offset the combined effect of those two factors.

English is used at least on a regular basis by almost all workers in Canada outside Quebec

In Canada outside Quebec, 98.6% of workers reported using English at least on a regular basis, and 9 in 10 workers reported using only English. These proportions have remained constant since 2001. Less than 6% of workers reported using an other language at work.

The portrait of languages used in the workplace is more complex in regions where several linguistic groups coexist, such as the Moncton, Ottawa–Gatineau and Sudbury census metropolitan areas (CMAs). The same goes for the Montréal CMA, where French and English are spoken.

Decline in the use of French by workers in several areas of contact between the English- and French-speaking populations

English and French intermingle in the Moncton, Ottawa–Gatineau and Greater Sudbury CMAs. The same trends are observed in each of these three CMAs: an increase in the overall use of English (from 94.0% to 94.4% in Moncton, from 91.1% to 91.6% in Ottawa–Gatineau, and from 97.3% to 98.0% in Greater Sudbury) and a decline in the overall use of French (from 44.1% to 43.7% in Moncton, from 44.7% to 43.9% in Ottawa–Gatineau, and from 28.2% to 25.4% in Greater Sudbury) between 2006 and 2016. In all these CMAs, there was an increase in the use of English as the language of work equally with another language. The use of French equally with another language is rising in each of these CMAs, but its use as a predominant language (only or mainly) and secondary language (in addition to the main language of work) is declining.

In the Montréal CMA, the predominant use (only or mainly) of French fell from 72.2% in 2006 to 69.6% in 2016. The same is true for English, whose predominant use declined between 2006 (19.1%) and 2016 (17.9%). Furthermore, the overall increase in the use of French (from 91.5% in 2006 to 91.8% in 2016) and English (from 55.8% in 2006 to 57.8% in 2016) in Montréal is the result of equal use of these languages with another language in the workplace.

Use of other languages at work is concentrated in Toronto, Vancouver and Montréal

Given the cultural diversity that characterizes Canadian society, a growing number of “other” languages (i.e., languages other than English and French) are reported as a mother tongue or language spoken at home.⁸ However, their use in the labour market remains limited. For example, only 4.9% of Canadian workers (970,915 people) use an other language at work, including 2.3% who use it predominantly or equally with an official language (2.0% in 2006).

In 2016, 80.3% of workers who reported using an other language were immigrants or non-permanent residents. As well, 86.1% of workers who reported using an other language at work had an other mother tongue.

In 2016, the use of other languages at work was particularly perceptible in certain employment sectors. For example, nearly half of the entire population who used an other language at work had jobs in accommodation and food services (11.6%), retail (10.3%), health care and social assistance (10.1%), manufacturing (9.3%) and construction (8.0%).

The proportion of workers who use an other language at work was above the national average (4.9%) in three provinces and two territories: Manitoba (5.5%), Ontario (5.6%), the Northwest Territories (6.8%), British Columbia

8. See the release on [language data](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/lang-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/lang-eng.cfm>) and the article [Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Canadian homes](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm>).

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(8.9%) and Nunavut (61.1%). In the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, the main other languages used at work are Aboriginal languages.⁹

The use of other languages at work is also highly concentrated geographically: 64.5% of the workers who use an other language in Canada live in one of the three largest CMAs in the country, i.e., Toronto (33.5%), Vancouver (21.1%) or Montréal (9.9%). These three CMAs account for most immigrants in Canada.¹⁰ Four other CMAs have more than 20,000 people who use an other language at work: Calgary (4.4%), Edmonton (3.2%), Winnipeg (2.2%) and Ottawa–Gatineau (2.2%). Table 3 presents the main other languages used in Canada and in each of these large CMAs.

Table 3
Main other languages used at work,¹ Canada, Montréal, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa-Gatineau, Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton census metropolitan areas, 2016

Canada		Montréal		Toronto		Vancouver	
Language	Number	Language	Number	Language	Number	Language	Number
Mandarin	147,365	Spanish	25,435	Mandarin	58,975	Mandarin	57,355
Cantonese	126,985	Arabic	12,550	Cantonese	54,670	Cantonese	48,315
Punjabi	97,550	Italian	9,055	Punjabi	27,430	Punjabi	39,475
Spanish	96,525	Mandarin	7,905	Spanish	24,500	Korean	11,235
Tagalog (Pilipino)	46,965	Cantonese	4,815	Portuguese	18,835	Spanish	7,860
Ottawa-Gatineau		Winnipeg		Calgary		Edmonton	
Language	Number	Language	Number	Language	Number	Language	Number
Arabic	4,350	Tagalog (Pilipino)	7,200	Cantonese	6,355	Punjabi	4,540
Spanish	3,545	Punjabi	2,440	Punjabi	6,330	Tagalog (Pilipino)	4,015
Mandarin	2,745	Mandarin	1,385	Spanish	5,620	Cantonese	3,760
Cantonese	1,365	Cantonese	1,370	Tagalog (Pilipino)	4,850	Spanish	3,160
Vietnamese	840	Spanish	1,065	Mandarin	4,205	Mandarin	2,705

1. Figures include all responses to part A (language used most often) and part B (other languages used on a regular basis) to the question on the language used at work.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2016.

Among the three largest CMAs, the use of other languages at work is more common in Vancouver (14.1%) than in Toronto (9.5%) and Montréal (4.2%). Vancouver has a high concentration of people with Cantonese, Mandarin or Punjabi as their mother tongue,¹¹ which fosters widespread use of these languages in the public and private spheres. In the Richmond census subdivision (CSD), part of the Vancouver CMA, 30.4% of workers use an other language at work. This is the highest proportion among CSDs with a population of over 200,000.¹² Vancouver also stands out for its high proportion of use of other languages among the older immigrant cohorts. Even among immigrants with an other mother tongue who arrived in Canada between 1991 and 2000, the rate of use of other languages at work was nearly 35% (Chart 1).

9. These are mainly Dogrib (Tlicho), South Slavey, North Slavey (Hare) and Dene in the Northwest Territories, and Inuktitut in Nunavut.

10. See the census release on [immigration and ethnocultural diversity](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/imm-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/rt-td/imm-eng.cfm>) data.

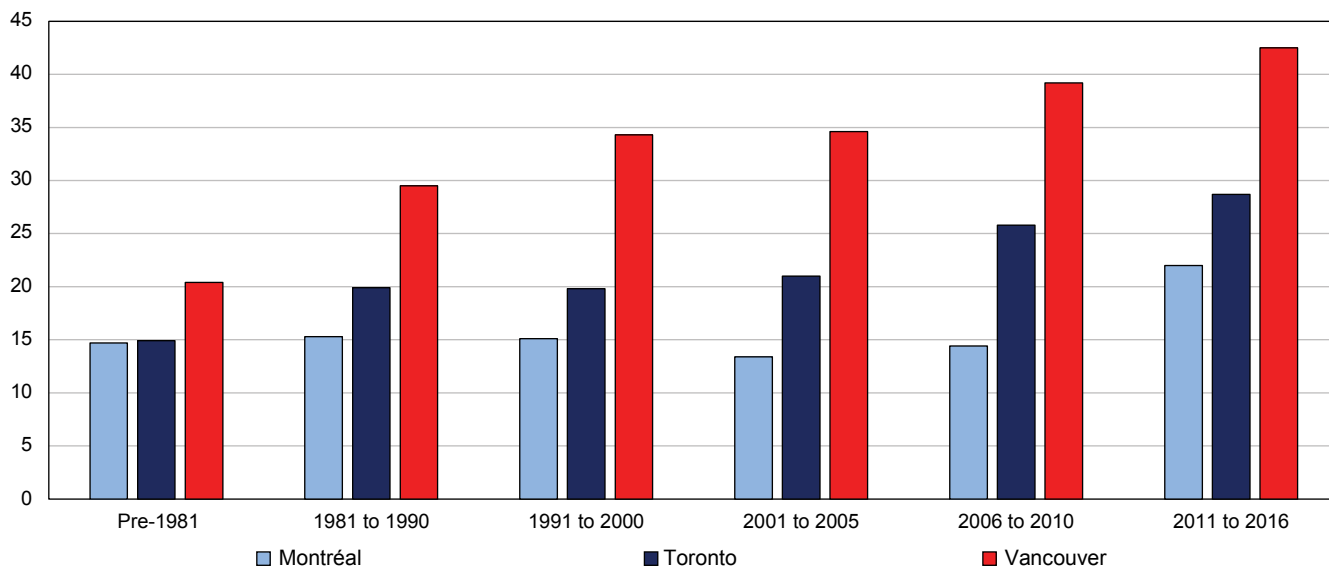
11. These three mother tongues represented nearly 50% of people with an other mother tongue in the Vancouver CMA in 2016 (17.7% for Cantonese, 16.5% for Mandarin and 15.0% for Punjabi). By comparison, Toronto has no other language that represents more than 10% of people with an other language. For more information, see the article [Linguistic diversity and multilingualism in Canadian homes](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016010/98-200-x2016010-eng.cfm>).

12. Mandarin and Cantonese are the languages used by most workers who use an other language at work in Richmond.

Chart 1

Use of other languages at work by immigrants with an other mother tongue,¹ by immigration period, Montréal, Toronto and Vancouver census metropolitan areas, 2016

percent



1. Only single responses to the question on mother tongue were considered.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006 and 2016.

Chart 1 also shows that the use of other languages at work by immigrants with an other mother tongue is much more common among recent immigrants than among long-established immigrants. This shows that the longer immigrants are in the country, the more likely English and French are to become the languages of work.

Between 2006 and 2016, there was a decline in the proportion of workers with an other mother tongue who used other languages at work in those three CMAs: from 17.1% in 2006 to 14.6% in 2016 in Montréal, from 21.5% to 19.9% in Toronto, and from 32.2% to 31.4% in Vancouver.

This decline is mainly due to two factors. First, in 2016, the proportion of recent immigrants to Canada with an other mother tongue who settled in Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver was smaller than the proportion of the entire population with an other mother tongue living in those three metropolitan areas. In particular, 61.6% of all workers with an other mother tongue lived in those three large CMAs in 2016, compared with 54.4% of recent immigrant workers. In relative terms, the Prairie provinces attracted more recent immigrants. As well, fewer recent immigrant workers living in those three CMAs resulted in a relative decline in the use of other languages at work by the population with an other mother tongue.

More than 6 in 10 workers use an other language in Nunavut

The number of workers who use an other language at work in Nunavut rose from 8,760 in 2006 to 10,375 in 2016. However, their proportion among all workers fell from 61.7% to 61.1% during that period. Almost all workers in Nunavut who used a language other than English or French used Inuktitut. In 2016, 59.1% of workers in Nunavut (10,040 people) used Inuktitut at work at least on a regular basis.

The proportion of workers who use an other language at work is very high in certain CSDs. Most of these CSDs have a large Aboriginal population. For example, 37.9% of workers in Iqaluit use an other language at work, primarily Inuktitut (37.4%). As well, four CSDs have at least 1,000 workers who use an other language at work, representing more than 50% of workers: Mistissini (86.1%), Chisasibi (86.0%) and Kuujjuaq (60.3%) in Quebec, and Rankin Inlet (64.3%) in Nunavut. The main other language used at work in those CSDs are as follows: Cree in Mistissini and Chisasibi, and Inuktitut in Kuujjuaq and Rankin Inlet.

Data sources, methods and definitions

Data sources

The data in this analysis are from the 2016 Census of Population. Further information on the census can be found in the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X.

Specific information on the quality and comparability of census data on language of work can be found in the [Language Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/guides/003/98-500-x2016003-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-500-X2016003.

Methods

Random rounding and percentage distributions: To ensure the confidentiality of responses collected for the 2016 Census, a random rounding process is used to alter the values reported in individual cells. As a result, when these data are summed or grouped, the total value may not match the sum of the individual values, since the total and subtotals are independently rounded. Similarly, percentage distributions, which are calculated on rounded data, may not necessarily add up to 100%.

Because of random rounding, counts and percentages may vary slightly between different census products, such as the analytical documents, highlight tables and data tables.

Definitions

Mother tongue refers to the first language learned in childhood and still understood.

Since 2001, the Census of Population has included a two-part question on the languages used at work. Part A asks about the language used most often at work, while part B asks about the language or languages used on a regular basis at work in addition to the main language, if any. In 2016, this question was asked of Canadians aged 15 years and older who were employed between January 1, 2015, and May 7, 2016 (Census Day being May 10, 2016). More than one response was accepted for both parts. In this article, unless otherwise indicated, the statistics on the languages used at work include all respondents who reported that language in part A or B, alone or with another language.

Predominant use of a language refers to that language being the only language used most often at work (single responses to part A), alone or with another language used regularly at work (Part B).

The expression “**other language**” refers to all languages other than English and French. Some data products also use the expression “non-official languages” to refer to the same concept.

Please refer to the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016](http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm) (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X, for additional information on the census variables.

Additional information

Additional analyses on language of work can be found in *The Daily* article on Labour (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/171129/dq171129b-eng.htm>) of November 29, 2017.

Additional information on language of work can be found in the *Data tables* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/dt-td/Lp-eng.cfm?LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GID=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=0&PRID=10&PTYPE=109445&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2017&THEME=126&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=>), Catalogue nos. 98-400-X2016085 to 98-400-X2016095 and 98-400-X2016343 to 98-400-X2016345; the *Census Profile* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>), Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001; and the *Focus on Geography Series* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/fogs-spg/Index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-404-X2016001.

For details on the concepts, definitions and variables used in the 2016 Census of Population, please consult the *Dictionary, Census of Population, 2016* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rates and other data quality information, the *Guide to the Census of Population, 2016* (<http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/98-304/index-eng.cfm>), Catalogue no. 98-304-X, provides an overview of the various phases of the census, including content determination, sampling design, collection, data processing, data quality assessment, confidentiality guidelines and dissemination.

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