

August 19, 2022

## 2021 Census: Language

The 2021 Census Day was May 11, 2021. On August 17, 2022, Statistics Canada released its fourth set of data from this Census, on language.

### Knowledge of Official Languages

- 4.5% of Torontonians had no knowledge of either official language (English and French), down slightly from 4.9% in 2016 and 5.3% in 2011. Within the city, there is a high concentration of people with no knowledge of either official languages in north-west Scarborough (north of the 401 expressway, west of Markham Rd, east of the Don Valley and south of Steeles). This area is one of the City's traditional immigrant reception areas. Other smaller pockets can be found in the downtown such as Kensington-Chinatown area; and north Etobicoke (see Map 1).
- In 2021, a greater proportion of women+ than men+ had no knowledge of either official language, English and French (5.2% vs 3.7%, respectively), and as well had greater knowledge of both English and French (9.3% vs 7.8%, respectively).

### Mother Tongue

- Toronto continues to be a mosaic of languages. According to the 2021 Census, 42.5% of Toronto residents had a mother tongue other than English or French. This represents a slight decrease from the 2016 figure of 43.9%.
- Just over one half of all Toronto residents (50.2%) reported English as their sole mother tongue. An additional 5.4 of Toronto residents identified English and a non-official language as their multiple mother tongues, an increase from the 2016 figure of 3.4%.

### Language spoken at home (Home Language)

- 25.9% of people in Toronto regularly spoke a language other than English or French at home, a similar rate to 2016.
- 1,244,555 people, or 44.9% of Toronto residents, reported speaking at least one non-official language at home, including 35,750 residents who reported speaking multiple non-official languages at home.
- Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Spanish and Tamil were the top non-English languages spoken at home.
- There are notable shifts among the number of speakers of Toronto's most spoken home languages. The number of Cantonese speakers, the second most prevalent home language category, decreased by 10%, while the number of Tagalog speakers (third most prevalent) increased 21% and the number of Spanish speakers (fourth most prevalent) increased 12%.

## GLOSSARY

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Statistics Canada maintains a [Census Dictionary](#) for the Census of Population, 2021. Many more terms associated with the Census can be found there. Statistics Canada also publishes [2021 Census of Population reference products](#) with further information.

**Age:** The age of a person on the day of the Census, May 11, 2021.

**Census Division (CD):** a group of neighbouring municipalities joined together for the purposes of regional planning and managing common services (such as police or ambulance services). Census Division is the general term for provincially legislated areas (such as county, *municipalité régionale de comté* (MRC) and regional district) or their equivalents.

**Census Metropolitan Area (CMA):** one or more adjacent municipalities centred on a population centre (known as the core). A CMA must have a total population of at least 100,000, based on data from the current Census of Population Program, of which 50,000 or more must live in the core based on adjusted data from the previous Census of Population Program. To be included in the CMA, other adjacent municipalities must have a high degree of integration with the core, as measured by commuting flows derived from data on place of work from the previous Census Program.

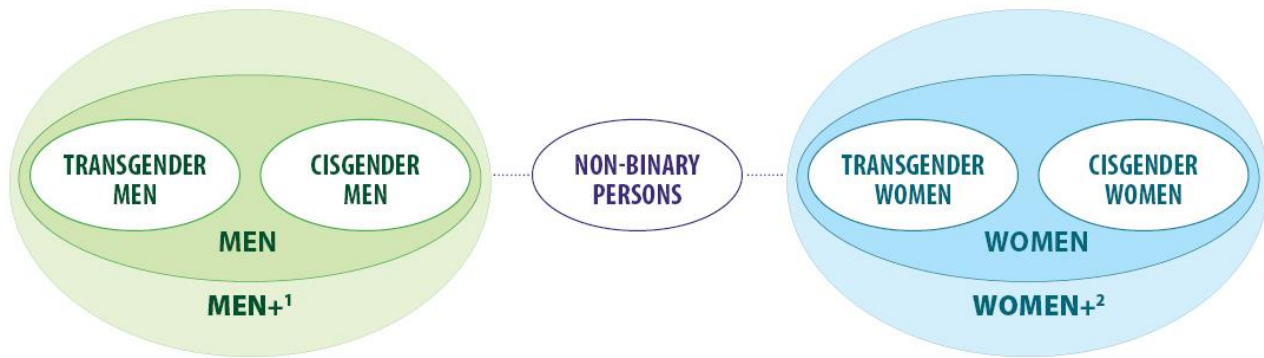
**Census Tract (CT):** a small, geographic area, typically with a population smaller than 10,000 persons. Their geography is relatively stable over time to allow for comparison of changes from Census to Census.

**Centre:** as seen in several Maps, Centres are defined in the City of Toronto Official Plan. They play an important role in how the City manages growth. The Scarborough, North York, Etobicoke and Yonge-Eglinton Centres are places with excellent transit accessibility where jobs, housing and services will be concentrated in dynamic mixed-use settings with different levels of activity and intensity. More information can be found in the [Toronto Official Plan](#).

**Downtown:** The City of Toronto's definition of Downtown is consistent with the definition of [Downtown](#) used by [Statistics Canada](#) in their reporting on growth in urban centres based on the 2021 Census results. Downtown is bounded by Lake Ontario to the south, Bathurst Street to the west, the mid-town rail corridor and Rosedale Valley Road to the north and the Don River to the east, as defined in Map 41-1 of the Downtown Plan of the City of Toronto Official Plan. Downtown is the largest economic node in the city and the region. Parts of Downtown are expected to see growth, and the Downtown Plan directs how and where within Downtown that growth should occur. More information can be found in the [Toronto Official Plan](#).

**Gender** refers to an individual's personal and social identity as a man, woman or non-binary person (a person who is not exclusively a man or a woman). For city of Toronto, gender data was disseminated using the two-category gender variables 'Men+' and 'Women+' as illustrated in the following graphic prepared by Statistics Canada. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Gender Variables



1. This category includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons.
2. This category includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.

Source: Statistics Canada

**GTHA** refers to the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. This area is comprised of the single-tier municipalities of Toronto and Hamilton, the regional municipalities of York, Durham, Peel, and Halton, and the cities and towns within the GTHA regional municipalities. This is not the same geography as the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area as defined by Statistics Canada.

**Language spoken most often at home (Home Language)** refers to the language the person speaks most often at home at the time of data collection. A person can report more than one language as "spoken most often at home" if the languages are spoken equally often.

For a person who lives alone, the language spoken most often at home is the language in which they feel most comfortable. For a child who has not yet learned to speak, this is the language spoken most often to the child at home. Where two languages are spoken to the child, the language spoken most often at home is the language spoken most often. If both languages are used equally often, then both languages are included here.

**Mother tongue** refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data was collected. If the person no longer understands the first language learned, the mother tongue is the second language learned. For a person who learned two languages at the same time in early childhood, the mother tongue is the language this person spoke most often at home before starting school. The person has two mother tongues only if the two languages were learned at the same time and are still understood by the person. For a child who has not yet learned to speak, the mother tongue is the language spoken most often to this child at home. The child has two mother tongues only if both languages are spoken equally often so that the child learns both languages at the same time.

**Undercoverage** is the number of persons excluded by the Census who should have been counted, as determined by Statistics Canada. Although Statistics Canada makes a great effort to count every person, in each Census a notable number of people are left out for a variety of reasons. For example, people may be traveling, some dwellings are hard to find,

and some people simply refuse to participate. Overcoverage can also occur, when people are counted more than once or should not have been counted in a given population. Undercoverage is generally more common than overcoverage. The total impact of the coverage errors is the net undercoverage.

## NOTES

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The numbers in this Backgrounder are not adjusted for undercoverage, See the Glossary for an explanation of undercoverage.

All figures in this backgrounder are randomly rounded to multiples of 5 by Statistics Canada as a privacy measure.

All data in this backgrounder are based on geographic boundaries available at time of writing. In the event of any future boundary revisions, some data totals may change. This is especially the case for small area units such as Census Tracts.

The information previously collected by the long-form Census questionnaire was collected in 2011 as part of the voluntary National Household Survey. In 2016, Statistics Canada restored the mandatory long-form Census questionnaire in an effort to improve data collection. The families, households, and marital status numbers reported in this backgrounder are based on the mandatory short-form component of the Census for 2011, 2016 and 2021, and therefore can be compared.

## FUTURE CENSUS RELEASES

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The City of Toronto will be releasing more backgrounders coinciding with each Census release, except for the Census of Agriculture. The [2021 Census release schedule](#) is available from Statistics Canada online. The City of Toronto will be preparing backgrounders for the following releases:

- September 21, 2022
  - Indigenous peoples
  - Housing
- October 26, 2022
  - Immigration, place of birth, and citizenship
  - Ethnocultural and religious diversity
  - Mobility and migration
- November 30, 2022
  - Education
  - Labour
  - Language of work
  - Commuting
  - Instruction in the official minority language

## PAST CENSUS RELEASES

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The City of Toronto has released the following backgrounder to date, to coincide with the 2021 Census release schedule. Older backgrounders relating to 2016 Census and 2011 Census and National Household Survey topics can also be accessed on the City's website, under item [City of Toronto Census Reports](#).

- [Population and Dwelling Counts](#), February 9, 2022
- [Age, Sex at Birth and Gender, and Type of Dwelling](#), April 27, 2022
- [Families, Households, Marital Status and Income](#), July 13, 2022

## REFERENCES

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## TABLES, CHARTS AND MAPS

Table 1: Top 15 Mother Tongue Languages in the City of Toronto  
(Excluding Official Languages)

Rank	Mother Tongue	Persons	% of Toronto (single responses)	Change since 2016
1	Mandarin	112,620	4.1%	1.1%
2	Yue (Cantonese)	103,530	3.7%	-9.7%
3	Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino)	82,185	3.0%	-1.3%
4	Spanish	78,575	2.8%	7.9%
5	Portuguese	60,360	2.2%	1.7%
6	Tamil	52,905	1.9%	-8.0%
7	Italian	50,995	1.8%	-18.6%
8	Iranian Persian	34,575	1.2%	*
9	Urdu	34,460	1.2%	-7.9%
10	Russian	33,770	1.2%	-6.6%
11	Arabic	32,985	1.2%	10.6%
12	Korean	32,805	1.2%	-2.6%
13	Bengali	31,335	1.1%	10.1%
14	Vietnamese	27,445	1.0%	10.8%
15	Gujarati	27,090	1.0%	2.6%

Table 2: Top 15 Home Languages in the City of Toronto  
(Excluding Official Languages)

Rank	Language Most Often Spoken at Home	Persons	% of Toronto (single responses)	Change since 2016
1	Mandarin	86150	3.1%	-1.8%
2	Yue (Cantonese)	74845	2.7%	-10.3%
3	Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino)	51355	1.9%	20.8%
4	Spanish	46355	1.7%	11.6%
5	Tamil	40825	1.5%	-2.8%
6	Portuguese	35625	1.3%	6.6%
7	Iranian Persian	23600	0.9%	*
8	Korean	23115	0.8%	-2.2%
9	Urdu	22650	0.8%	-4.1%
10	Russian	21060	0.8%	-8.7%
11	Italian	21040	0.8%	-22.4%
12	Bengali	20505	0.7%	8.3%
13	Vietnamese	19130	0.7%	12.4%
14	Arabic	18060	0.7%	9.6%
15	Gujarati	18045	0.7%	9.2%

\* Note: The language, "Iranian Persian" was included as part of a larger category "Persian (Farsi)" in the 2016 Census.



Figure 1: Top 76 Mother Tongue Languages, Toronto, 2021 (Excluding English)

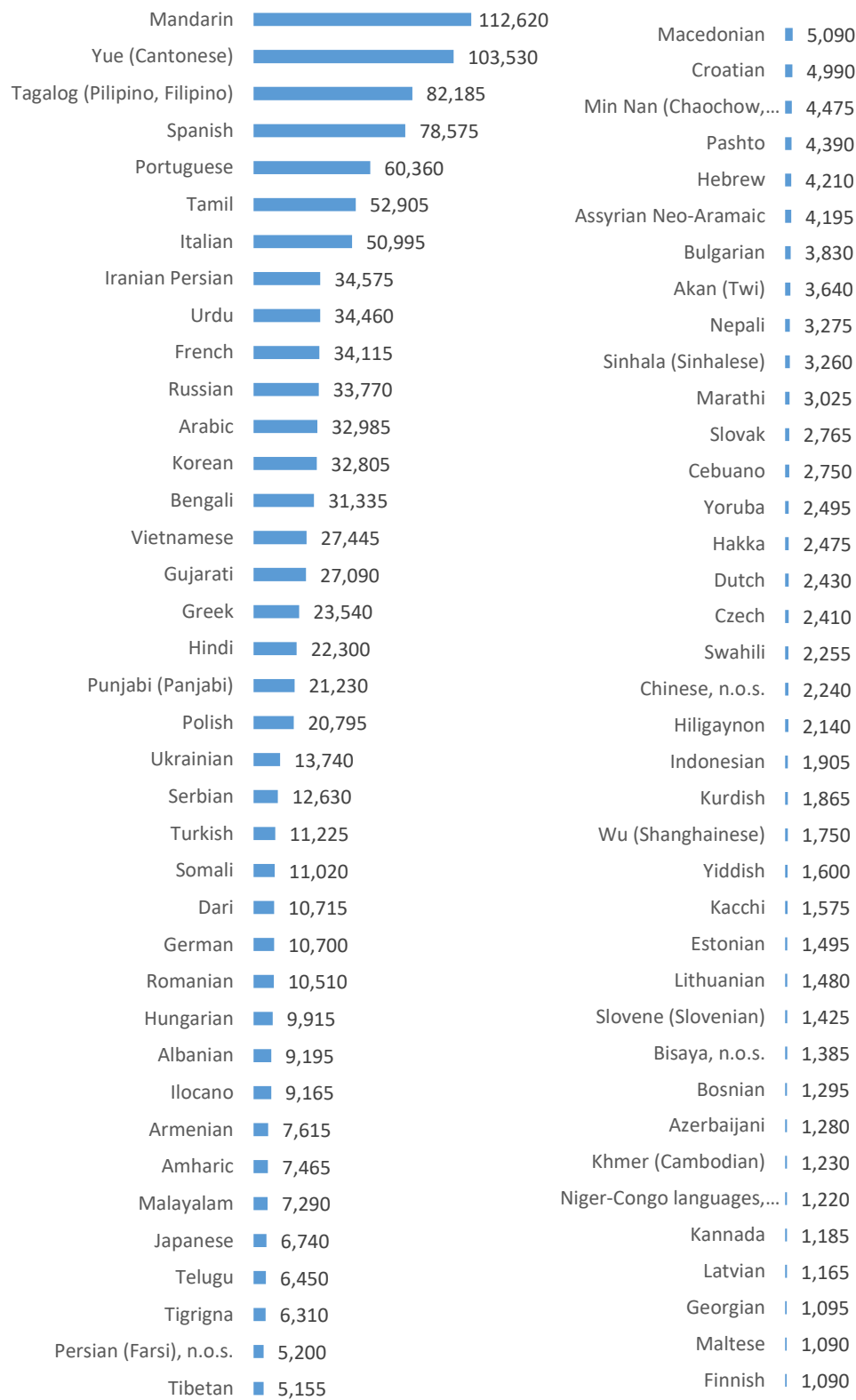


Figure 2: Top 76 Home languages, Toronto, 2021 (Excluding English)

