

# **2021 Census Language Highlights - Waterloo Region**

The following highlights data for Waterloo Region from the [2021 Census by Statistics Canada](#).

## **First Languages**

Waterloo Region is becoming increasingly diverse. More than a quarter of the population have a first language that is not English or French. A person's first language or "mother tongue" is the first language they learned in childhood and still understand.

- 69.2% have English as a first language
- 1.0% have French as their first language
- 26.0% (151,325 individuals) have a non-official first language
  - This compares to 26.9% across Ontario and 21.4% across Canada
  - In the 2016 census, 23.4% (123,990 individuals) had a non-official first language. This is an increase of 27,335 individuals and equivalent to 52.6% of Waterloo Region's total population increase over those five years.
- An additional 3.8% had multiple first languages - most of which were English and a non-official language.
- The top first languages are (single language responses only):

	<b>2021 census data</b>	2016 census data	% change since 2016
Punjabi (Panjabi)	<b>10,625</b>	4,745	<b>123.9% **</b>
Mandarin	<b>10,415</b>	9,400	10.8%
Spanish	<b>10,155</b>	8,435	20.4%
Portuguese	<b>9,955</b>	9,775	1.8%
Arabic	<b>9,535</b>	6,560	45.4%
German	<b>9,275</b>	different language categories in 2016	
Urdu	<b>5,755</b>	3,240	<b>77.6%</b>
Gujarati	<b>5,670</b>	2,775	<b>104.3%</b>
Serbian	<b>5,175</b>	5,065	2.2%
Romanian	<b>4,975</b>	5,560	-10.5%
Polish	<b>4,915</b>	5,270	-6.7%
Hindi	<b>4,120</b>	1,565	<b>163.3%</b>
Vietnamese	<b>3,805</b>	3,690	3.1%
Pennsylvania German	<b>2,785</b>	different language categories in 2016	
Korean	<b>2,680</b>	2,090	28.2%

Tigrigna	<b>2,605</b>	780	<b>234.0%</b>
Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino)	<b>2,595</b>	1,710	<b>51.8%</b>
Yue (Cantonese)	<b>2,305</b>	2,205	4.5%
Russian	<b>2,295</b>	1,775	29.3%
Iranian Persian	<b>2,260</b>	different language categories in 2016	
Malayalam	<b>2,030</b>	620	<b>227.4%</b>
Croatian	<b>1,930</b>	2,090	-7.7%
Dutch	<b>1,755</b>	2,095	-16.2%
Turkish	<b>1,700</b>	785	<b>116.6%</b>
Italian	<b>1,655</b>	1,910	-13.4%
Dari	<b>1,595</b>	different language categories in 2016	
Hungarian	<b>1,500</b>	1,710	-12.3%
Somali	<b>1,405</b>	990	41.9%
Tamil	<b>1,390</b>	735	<b>89.1%</b>
Bengali	<b>1,345</b>	915	47.0%
Greek	<b>1,265</b>	1,330	-4.9%
Pashto	<b>1,120</b>	1,020	9.8%
Telugu	<b>1,115</b>	320	<b>248.4%</b>
Albanian	<b>1,085</b>	990	9.6%
Amharic	<b>1,070</b>	795	34.6%
Ukrainian	<b>920</b>	785	17.2%
Nepali	<b>910</b>	255	<b>256.9%</b>
Lao	<b>885</b>	1,025	-13.7%
Kurdish	<b>755</b>	640	18.0%
Armenian	<b>655</b>	650	0.8%
Bosnian	<b>650</b>	530	22.6%
Czech	<b>590</b>	740	-20.3%
Bilen	<b>570</b>	100	<b>470.0%</b>
Persian (Farsi), (not otherwise specified)	<b>505</b>	different language categories in 2016	
Slovak	<b>500</b>	575	-13.0%

\*\*Languages with more than a 50% increase between 2016 and 2021 censuses are highlighted in blue

## Home Languages

While the majority of residents of Waterloo Region speak English at home, a growing proportion speak non-official languages most often at home.

- 80.3% have English as a home language
- 0.3% (1,630 individuals) have French as a home language
- 15.2% (88,290 individuals) most frequently speak a language other than English or French at home (single language responses only)
  - This is an increase from the 2016 census when 12.7% (64,220 individuals) spoke a non-official language at home
- 4.3% (24,825 individuals) regularly speak multiple languages at home with most of those (4.0%) speaking English and a non-official language, 0.2% speaking both English and French and 0.1% speaking multiple non-official languages
- The top home languages (single language responses only) are:
  - Punjabi - 8,130 individuals
  - Mandarin - 7,635 individuals
  - Arabic - 6,290 individuals
  - Spanish - 5,835 individuals
  - Portuguese - 4,645 individuals
  - Urdu - 3,760 individuals
  - Gujarati - 3,755 individuals
  - Serbian - 3,385 individuals
  - German - 2,715 individuals
  - Hindi - 2,620 individuals
  - Vietnamese - 2,570 individuals
  - Romanian - 2,400 individuals
  - Pennsylvania German - 2,270 individuals
  - Polish - 2,120 individuals
  - Korean - 2,035 individuals
  - Iranian Persian - 1,585 individuals
  - Malayalam - 1,400 individuals
  - Tagalog (Pilipino, Filipino) - 1,380 individuals
  - Russian - 1,370 individuals
  - Turkish - 1,200 individuals
  - Yue (Cantonese) - 1,170 individuals
  - Dari - 1,045 individuals
  - Somali - 875 individuals
  - Pashto - 810 individuals
  - Tamil - 805 individuals
  - Bengali - 785 individuals
  - Croatian - 765 individuals
  - Nepali - 735 individuals
  - Telugu - 700 individuals
  - Albanian - 655 individuals

- Amharic - 640 individuals
- Bilen - 525 individuals
- Hungarian - 505 individuals
- Most individuals that speak a non-official language most frequently at home are multilingual. 86.8% of individuals with a non-official home language (single language responses only) also know at least one of Canada's official languages
- Combining both single and multiple home language responses, 19.3% of Waterloo Region residents regularly speak a non-official language at home. This is the 11th highest proportion among census divisions/regions in Canada with more than 50,000 population (see the full list of [census divisions by non-official home language here](#))

## Knowledge of Languages

Nearly all residents in Waterloo Region are able to conduct a conversation in one of Canada's official languages (English or French), though there are still over 10,000 individuals that have not yet learned one of Canada's official languages. Multilingualism is increasing with a third of residents knowing at least one non-official language.

- 98.0% understand English (6.3% are bilingual and know both English & French)
- 1.9% (10,915 individuals) don't know English or French.
  - This compares to 2.4% of the population of Ontario and 1.8% of the population of Canada
  - In Waterloo Region, this is a slight increase from the 2016 census when 1.8% (9,305 individuals) didn't know English or French
- 33.6% (194,930 individuals) know non-official languages (other than English or French)
  - This is an increase from the 2016 census when only 27.9% (147,265 individuals) knew non-official languages. This is an increase of 47,665 individuals and equivalent to 91.6% of Waterloo Region's total population increase over those five years.
  - While not one of the largest groups, given global events and the welcoming of Ukrainians fleeing war, it is notable that as of the 2021 census there were 1,615 individuals that know Ukrainian in Waterloo Region
- Among individuals that do not know English or French, the most common languages spoken at home are (see [mother tongue by knowledge of official languages table by Statistics Canada](#)):
  - Portuguese - 1,140 individuals
  - Arabic - 1,095 individuals
  - Mandarin - 1,095 individuals
  - Punjabi (Panjabi) - 1,015 individuals
  - Spanish - 745 individuals
  - Vietnamese - 510 individuals
  - Serbo-Croatian - 380 individuals
  - Gujarati - 355 individuals

- Serbian - 290 individuals
- Pennsylvania German - 265 individuals
- Tigrigna - 250 individuals
- Romanian - 250 individuals
- Yue (Cantonese) - 245 individuals
- German - 225 individuals
- Korean - 220 individuals
- Urdu - 215 individuals
- Dari - 190 individuals
- Nepali - 160 individuals
- Polish - 145 individuals
- Iranian Persian - 145 individuals
- Russian - 135 individuals
- Turkish - 130 individuals
- Somali - 115 individuals
- Albanian - 105 individuals
- Hindi - 105 individuals
- Kurdish - 100 individuals

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### **Additional Data and Notes**

- The data highlights above do not include Indigenous languages or sign languages
- Total population of Waterloo Region grew from 535,154 in 2016 to 587,165 in 2021 - a 9.7% increase (52,011 individuals)
- For comparison, [language highlights from the 2021 census at a national/provincial level](#) are also available from Statistics Canada
- The 2021 census data was collected in May 2021. It therefore does not include any changes that occurred since that time (for example, recent waves of immigrants or temporary residents). Waterloo Region received over 10,000 new permanent residents since the census - between June 2021 and May 2022 ([IRCC monthly arrivals data](#))
- While the national census is widely seen as a very reputable source of data, Statistics Canada acknowledges that some groups were typically undercounted. Net undercounts for groups with non-official mother tongues were estimated to be approximately 6% ([Statistics Canada, 2021](#)).
- For more information about [language learning options in Waterloo Region](#) see [immigrationwaterlooregion.ca](http://immigrationwaterlooregion.ca)
- Additional census [immigration](#) and [housing](#) summaries for Waterloo Region are also available

### **Links to Key Data Tables**

- [Waterloo Region 2021 census community profile](#) (Waterloo Region data with options to also look at other geographic areas, with all 2021 census data released to date. The majority of the data highlighted above is from the community profile.)
- [Mother tongue by knowledge of official languages](#) (Waterloo Region & other geographies)
- [Home language](#) (by provinces and census divisions)
- [Mother Mother tongue by home language and knowledge of official languages](#) (by provinces and census divisions/census subdivisions)
- [Permanent Residents – Monthly IRCC Updates](#) (monthly data on new permanent resident arrivals, available for Waterloo Region and other regions)
- [Waterloo Region 2016 census community profile](#) (Waterloo Region data for the previous census)

Contact the Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership (Dan at [dvandebelt@regionofwaterloo.ca](mailto:dvandebelt@regionofwaterloo.ca)) if you have any questions about the above data.

#### Additional analysis 26aug2022

- In 2021, more than one in four Canadians reported a first language other than English or French, equivalent to 170,000 people, according to 2021 census data from Statistics Canada. Among Canadians whose first language is neither English nor French, 65% spoke an official language at home on a regular basis.
- 16.1% of all school age children (age 5-19) live in a home where a non-official language is the main or one of the main languages spoken regularly. (11.0% speak a non-official language only while 5.1% speak English as well as a non-official language). The 16.1% rate for school age children is slightly lower than the proportion of all ages that most frequently speak a non-official language at home (19.3% of all ages).
- 9 out of 10 people who speak a non-official language at home also know English. Of those that speak a non-official language at home 10% don't know either English or French, 3.7% also know both English and French, 0.1% also know French, and 86.2% know English.