

The French-speaking countries

There are more than 7000 languages in the world.

The biggest number of people speak English, or Chinese or Hindi or Arabic

English is a world language, but French is also a world language.

Some people are native speakers – they were born with a language, they learned it from their parents, they spoke it all their lives.

Some people are second-language speakers; they learned a new language when they were children or adults.

Many millions of people speak French in many countries of the world. There are about 450 – 500 million French speakers – some native speakers, some second-language speakers...

In the whole world, a total of 29 independent countries speak French. In these countries, French is the official language, but some people speak other languages too.

We call these ‘Francophone’ countries – countries where people speak French. Sometimes French is the language of native speakers. Sometimes French is the official language of the government and the country, but many people are not native speakers of French. Their native language is a local language, but they can speak French as well.

Outside France and Africa, the Francophone countries in the world include many other independent countries, such as:

Canada - People speak French in the province of Quebec, and in the city of Montreal. But all Canadians learn French in school, and it is an official language of the whole country. Most Canadians are proud to be multilingual.

Belgium - People speak French in the province of Wallonia, and in the city of Brussels. But all Belgians learn French in school, and it is an official language of the whole country.

Switzerland - People speak French in the west of the country, and in the city of Geneva. But all Swiss learn French in school, and it is an official language of the whole country.

Monaco - Everybody in this very small country of 40,000 people can speak French. French is the only official language of the country. Some people can also speak a local language, Monegasque, which is like Italian.

Luxembourg - Everybody can speak French but not everybody is a native speaker

Haiti – everybody can speak French but not everybody is a native speaker. Many people speak Creole instead.

Vanuatu – some people can speak French, but not everyone

Some Francophone countries like French Guyana, Martinique and Guadeloupe are not independent countries, they are part of France. They are departments or regions of France, and here French is also the official language.

In Africa, 21 countries are called ‘Francophone’ countries. In these countries French is the official language or it is one of many official languages. Most of the people speak French, and there are strong connections to France.

The biggest Francophone country in Africa is the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with 84 million people – it is bigger than France.

And the smallest Francophone country in Africa is Seychelles, with 100,000 people.

In all these African countries, there are other local languages too. In the whole of Africa there are about 2000 languages – about 80 just in Senegal.

French is a very important language in these Francophone countries.

New words for this article

1	native speaker	person who speaks a language as a mother language
2	official language	language of the government
3	Francophone	French-speaking
4	Creole	language which is a mixture of 2 languages

Comprehension Questions

- 1 What is a Francophone country?
- 2 What is a native speaker?
- 3 In what province is Montreal?
- 4 Where is Wallonia?
- 5 Which Francophone country is bigger than France itself?

5	Democratic Republic of Congo is bigger than France
4	It is in Belgium
3	It is in the province of Quebec
2	learned it from their parents
1	Someone who was born with a language, they The countries where people speak French

Comprehension questions

Answers