



**CENSUS • RECENSEMENT**

## **2021 Census Fact Sheets**

**Updated content for the 2021 Census of Population:  
Family and demographic concepts, and activities of daily living**

**2021 Census of Population**

Release date: July 17, 2020



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## **Updated content for the 2021 Census of Population: Family and demographic concepts, and activities of daily living**

The census is the country's storyteller. Through good and difficult times, the census has been providing a detailed picture of Canada's changing mosaic—giving Canadians facts on where we came from, to where we are, and guiding decisions on where we want to be. To respond to the country's needs and write the next chapter of Canadians' data foundation, Statistics Canada conducted country-wide engagements. We also conducted a census test with over 135,000 households to determine whether new or revised questions under consideration can be easily understood and correctly answered. We listened to Canadians, because we know that this is about your census, your community, your future.

This series of fact sheets provides an overview of the changes in content for the 2021 Census of Population, as the census process is ever changing to reflect changes in the Canadian population and its demographic characteristics.

This fact sheet covers the theme of family and demographic concepts, and activities of daily living. This theme encompasses census content from the following topics: demographic concepts, sex at birth and gender, and activities of daily living.

For information on the broad social trends related to the specific topics within this theme, please see the respective sections below.



## Demographic concepts

### Why are these questions asked?

Demography content is essential to enumerate the population and provide population counts that form the base of the Demographic Estimates Program. The census counts and demographic estimates are used to calculate federal–provincial fiscal transfers and are required by over 30 acts and 25 statutes and regulations.

### Current trends and data gaps for this topic

Demographic variables from the census include population counts, density and growth, population by age, sex and gender, dwellings' and households' counts and growth, as well as many family characteristics including lone-parent families, blended families, and multigenerational families, marital status, and mobility.

These data are instrumental to monitor trends related to Canadian demographics, such as population aging and centenarians, the growing ethnocultural diversity, and regional differences including rural and urban, and phenomena such as urban spread. Very often, the census is the only source of reliable statistical information for many sub-groups of the population, at the regional level.

The demographic variables included in the census also evolve with the changing demographic landscape: for example, in 2021, a new question on gender will be included. Recent censuses have measured emerging trends related to common-law and married same-sex couples, blended families, and young adults living with their parents.

Demographic variables included in the census are submitted to a wide consultation process including Canadian experts and academics after each census, and are also aligned with international work such as the United Nations' *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses*.

### Approach for the 2021 Census

As a result of its consultations and testing, Statistics Canada has modified the answer categories of the question on the relationship to Person 1.

| Changes considered                                                                                                                                                                                | Resulting approach for 2021                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Some concerns were raised about the reference to "same-sex" and "opposite-sex" in the answer categories for the question on the relationship to Person 1.                                         | The references to "same-sex" and "opposite-sex" were removed in the answer categories.                                                                                      |
| Some concerns were raised about the use of "Partenaire en union libre" in the French version of the questionnaire. A version of the question that used "Conjoint de fait" instead was considered. | Quantitative testing has shown that the use of revised wording yielded conflicting answers with the marital status question. The labelling will remain the same as in 2016. |
| No changes were considered for the other demographic questions (e.g., date of birth and age, marital status, place of residence 1 and 5 years ago).                                               | These questions will remain the same as in 2016.                                                                                                                            |

### What to expect in 2021

The references to "same-sex" and "opposite-sex" relationships were removed from the question on the relationship to Person 1 in the 2021 Census. Testing has shown that this will not impact the quality or level of detail of the data on same-sex and different-sex couples.

The questions on date of birth and age, marital status, and place of residence 1 and 5 years ago will remain the same as in the 2016 Census.



## Sex at birth and gender

### Why are these questions asked?

In June 2017, Bill C-16 was passed in Parliament, adding gender expression and identity as protected grounds under the *Canadian Human Rights Act* and the *Criminal Code*. In 2018, the federal budget allocated funds to create the Centre for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics, emphasizing the need for data on the non-binary and transgender population.

During the 2016 Census and when participating in surveys, some Canadians expressed dissatisfaction with the question on sex, which gave Canadians only two response options: male and female.

To better reflect how some Canadians describe themselves and to address the gaps in information about Canada's transgender and non-binary population—while maintaining the same high standards for data quality and historical comparability—Statistics Canada has developed a revised sex at birth variable and a new gender variable, as well as the classifications associated with each. As a result, new standards for the [gender and sex variables](#) were released in April 2018.

Sex at birth and gender are distinct concepts, but they are interrelated. Sex at birth refers to biological attributes, while gender is a multidimensional concept with psychological, social and behavioural components. Gender is a reflection of how individuals describe themselves at the time of the survey (e.g., man, woman, non-binary), and it can change over time.

### Current trends and data gaps for this topic

In recent years, the public awareness and sensitivity towards LGBTQ2 communities has grown substantially. Limited reliable data exist currently in Canada on transgender and non-binary populations, which is perceived by many experts as a source of limitation for governments, non-governmental organizations (NSOs), and researchers to understand their experiences and address their needs, issues and concerns.

Given the small size of these populations, the census is a relevant statistical vehicle to collect data on gender minorities at the regional level. Such data will help to develop inclusive policies, programs and laws at the federal, provincial and territorial, and municipal levels in many areas: justice and crime, social discrimination, violence, housing, social isolation, access to services, labour market activity, immigration, well-being, etc. Federal departments and secretariats such as the LGBTQ2 Secretariat, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Employment and Social Development Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Canadian Human Rights Commission, Public Service Commission, Justice Canada, Public Safety Canada, and Women and Gender Equality Canada are likely to make extensive use of data on the transgender community, when available.

Following the 2016 Census, Statistics Canada conducted many consultations with experts, academics, and LGBTQ2 communities in order to understand the needs and challenges associated with producing reliable data on the transgender and non-binary populations living in Canada. In April 2018, Statistics Canada released a new standard on gender, and a revised standard on sex at birth. Since then, Statistics Canada has implemented a question on gender in many of its data collection vehicles, and started releasing some results.

Statistics Canada also participated in international work related to gender. Statistics Canada and the Office for National Statistics led an in-depth review on the issues and challenges related to measuring gender, and is currently participating on a task force from the UNECE with the goals of developing international standards on sex and gender, and providing recommendations on how to measure these populations in censuses, surveys, and administrative files.



## Approach for the 2021 Census

As a result of its consultations and testing, Statistics Canada has modified the instructions for the question on sex and has added a question on gender.

| Changes considered and tested successfully                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Resulting approach for 2021                                                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Concerns were raised that the concept of sex was not clear and that some Canadians were using this question to report their gender instead of their sex.                                                                                                          | The question now refers to sex at birth rather than just sex. Also, a note stating that sex refers to the sex assigned at birth has been included below the question. |
| The transgender and non-binary population felt that they could not answer the question on sex in the 2016 Census.                                                                                                                                                 | A new question on gender that allows transgender and non-binary respondents to identify themselves has been added, in addition to the question on sex at birth.       |
| Also, the version of the question on sex in the 2016 Census needed to be updated in accordance with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's new policy direction—adopted in 2018—to modernize the Government of Canada's sex and gender information practices. |                                                                                                                                                                       |

## What to expect in 2021

The 2021 Census will include a question on sex at birth and a question on gender. This will allow the transgender and non-binary population to identify themselves and will maintain historical comparability for demographic data.

For more information on sex at birth and gender, including the results of the 2019 Census Test, please refer to [Sex at birth and gender: Technical report on the changes to the 2021 Census](#).



## Activities of daily living

### Why are these questions asked?

The questions on activities of daily living provide information about people in Canada who may have a long-term health problem or difficulty. The questions on activities of daily living are a first step in identifying people who may have a disability and who could then be selected to participate in a follow-up survey on people with disabilities. Because the census is the only source for these data, information from the questions on activities of daily living is essential for conducting the follow-up survey on people with disabilities.

The information from the questions on activities of daily living is also used to monitor the new *Accessible Canada Act* and to support policy and program development by governments and organizations. People with disabilities are one of the four designated employment equity groups under the *Employment Equity Act*.

### Current trends and data gaps for this topic

To ensure that the census measures important trends in society and continues to produce relevant, high-quality data, content changes were proposed for the 2021 Census. In our consultations with data users, it has been noted that information on activities of daily living have become increasingly important, particularly in light of Canada's aging population. In order to have a more inclusive measurement strategy for disabilities, including non-visible disabilities, the current census questions were introduced in 2016. For the 2021 census, instructions for mobility limitations were added within help text to assist parents and guardians of young children respond appropriately.

Any changes made to census content are carefully analyzed and discussed with stakeholders and guided by expert advice to preserve data relevance, overall quality, coverage and comparability over time, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met. Statistics Canada works closely with external stakeholders such as Employment Skills Development Canada (ESDC), as well as a technical advisory group of experts in the field of disability to develop census content.

### Approach for the 2021 Census

As a result of its consultations and testing, Statistics Canada has not changed the placement of the questions on activities of daily living, but has made a minor change to the instructional text about how to respond for young children.

| Changes considered and tested successfully                                                                    | Resulting approach for 2021                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A minor change to the instructional text was considered to provide help on how to respond for young children. | A minor change was made to the instructional text for the questions on activities of daily living to clarify how to respond for young children for activities such as walking, climbing and learning. |

### What to expect in 2021

Content for the 2021 Census questionnaire will include returning content from the 2016 Census, with a minor change to instructional text. This will have a minor impact on comparability since fewer young children will be positively identified as having a difficulty in activities of daily living. However, the follow-up survey on people with disabilities includes respondents aged 15 and older, so this change should not impact comparability for that survey.



## Additional information

The content of the 2021 Census questionnaire is the result of extensive engagement, discussions and testing, including comprehensive one-on-one interviews and a rigorous 2019 Census Test involving more than 135,000 households across Canada. Additional information on this can be found in the [2019 Census Content Test: Design and methodology](#) fact sheet.

Any changes made to census content are carefully analyzed and discussed with stakeholders and guided by expert advice to preserve data relevance, overall quality, coverage and comparability over time, as well as to ensure that legislative and policy requirements continue to be met.

For more information on sex at birth and gender, including the results of the 2019 Census Test, please refer to [Sex at birth and gender: Technical report on the changes to the 2021 Census](#).

For further information on new and modified content, as well as a description of content that was tested but did not proceed to the 2021 Census questionnaire, see [Painting a Portrait of Canada: The 2021 Census of Population](#).