
Census in Brief

A portrait of citizenship in Canada from the 2021 Census

Census of Population, 2021



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Highlights

- The 2021 Census counted 33.1 million Canadian citizens, either by birth or by naturalization.
- Of the total population living in Canada, close to 3.2 million were not Canadian citizens, but were either a permanent resident/landed immigrant or a non-permanent resident.
- India and China were the top countries of citizenship reported by non-Canadian citizens in the 2021 Census.
- In 2021, four in five (80.7%) eligible immigrants were naturalized Canadian citizens.
- Just over 3.7 million Canadian citizens have multiple citizenships, many are naturalized Canadian citizens.

Introduction

Citizenship refers to the country where a person has met the legal requirements to be a citizen. The vast majority of those living in Canada are Canadian citizens by birth, while others are Canadian citizens by naturalization. Canadian citizenship is associated with certain rights and responsibilities that are not available to non-Canadian citizens. For example, only Canadian citizens can hold a Canadian passport, serve on a jury or exercise their political influence by voting or running for political office. They also have access to Canadian consular services while travelling or living abroad.

The census provides information on the citizenship status of Canada's population. Citizenship is a key indicator that helps estimate the number of potential voters and the planning of citizenship classes and programs.

Canada also recognizes the right for Canadian citizens to hold citizenship from other countries. As such, the census collects information about the population with more than one country of citizenship. This helps provide a richer picture on the citizenship of the country's population.

Canadian citizenship policy and legislation has evolved over time. These changes, together with the COVID-19 pandemic and other world events, may have had an effect on the trends for citizenship in Canada. This *Census in Brief* will present key findings on citizenship based on 2021 Census data.

Did you know? Canadians may be citizens by 'birth' or by 'naturalization.'

Canadian citizenship by birth includes those born in Canada, with some exceptions (such as children of diplomats). It also includes those born abroad with at least one parent who is a Canadian citizen, also known as *Canadian citizens by descent*. However, a maximum number of generations born abroad limits the ability to become a Canadian citizen by birth.

Canadian citizens by naturalization includes immigrants who go through the legal process to apply for citizenship. The first step is to be a permanent resident (or landed immigrant) in Canada. Permanent residents are those who have been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. After [meeting eligibility requirements](#), permanent residents can apply to become Canadian citizens. The final step for successful applicants is to attend a citizenship ceremony and take the Oath or Affirmation of citizenship.

An [immigrant](#) refers to a person who is, or who has ever been, a landed immigrant or permanent resident. Such a person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Immigrants who have obtained Canadian citizenship by naturalization are included in this group.

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Some may first arrive in Canada temporarily as a non-permanent resident before applying for permanent resident status. [Non-permanent resident](#) refers to a person from another country with a usual place of residence in Canada and who has a work or study permit or who has claimed refugee status (asylum claimant).

For more information on immigration, citizenship and place of birth, please see [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021 - Figure 2.6 Immigrants, non-immigrants and non-permanent residents, by citizenship and place of birth](#).

To learn more about Canadian citizenship, please visit [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada](#).

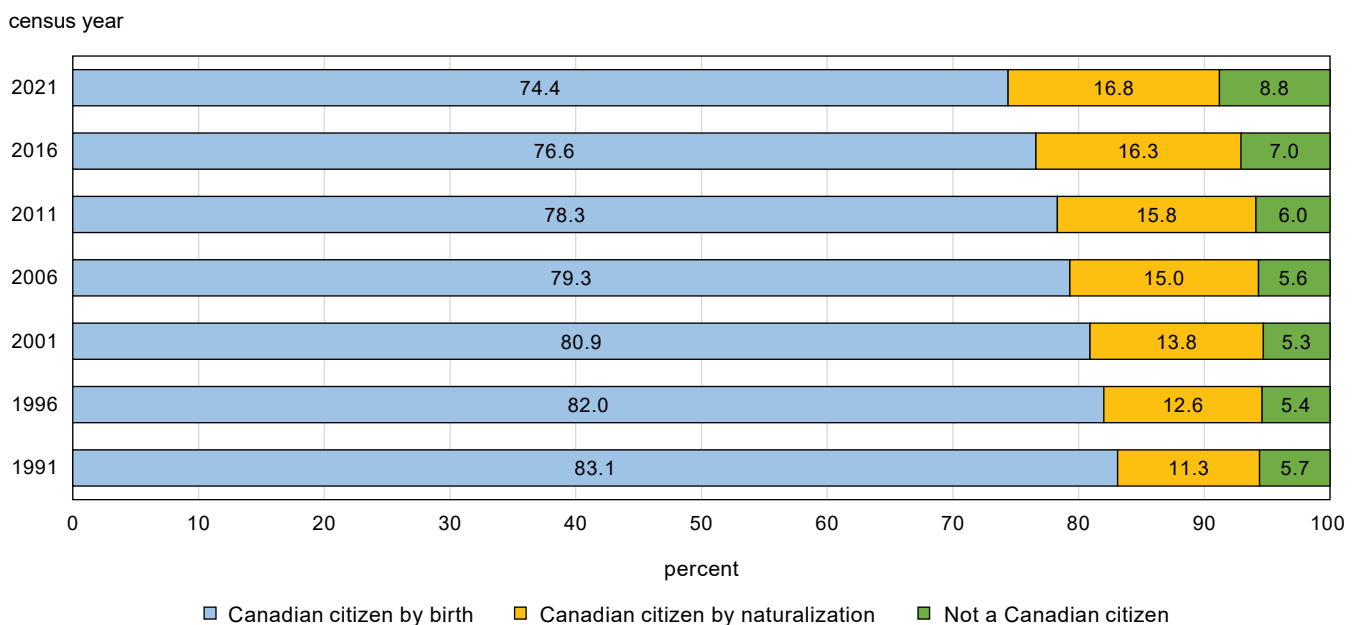
Vast majority of those living in Canada are Canadian citizens

In 2021, over 9 in 10 people living in Canada (91.2%) were Canadian citizens. About three-quarters (74.4%) or 27.0 million were Canadian citizens by birth and 16.8% (6.1 million) were Canadian citizens by naturalization. Another 8.8% (or about 3.2 million) of the total population living in Canada were not Canadian citizens, but were either a permanent resident/landed immigrant or a non-permanent resident.

Over the last 30 years, the size of each group (Canadian citizens by birth, Canadian citizens by naturalization, and non-Canadian citizens) has increased, but not at the same pace. Canadian citizens by naturalization and non-Canadian citizens have more than doubled in size from 1991 to 2021, while Canadian citizens by birth has been rising more slowly, increasing from 22.4 million in 1991 to 27.0 million in 2021.

In the 1991 Census, 83.1% of Canadians were citizens by birth. With the [aging population](#), a [declining fertility rate](#) and sustained immigration, the proportion of Canadian citizens by birth fell to 74.4% by 2021. Conversely, a larger share of Canada's total population were either Canadian citizens by naturalization (16.8% versus 11.3%) or not Canadian citizens (8.8% versus 5.7%).

Chart 1
Population of Canada by type of Canadian citizenship, 1991 to 2021



Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 1991 to 2006, 2016 and 2021; National Household Survey, 2011.

Canadian citizens by descent: A small population

Canadian citizens by birth who are born abroad, also known as Canadian citizens by descent, represent a relatively small population in Canada. In 2021, there were 322,530 Canadian citizens by birth born outside the country, accounting for 0.9% of Canada's overall population.

Following Canada, the United States is the top country in which Canadian citizens by birth are born. In 2021, over one-quarter (28.1%) of Canadian citizens by descent were born in the United States. The United Kingdom, Germany, China and Mexico rounded out the top five countries of birth of Canadian citizens by descent living in Canada.

Canadian citizens by descent are younger than Canadian citizens born in Canada. In 2021, close to half (48.9%) of Canadian citizens by descent were younger than 25 years, compared to nearly a third (32.5%) of Canadian citizens by birth born in Canada.

Non-Canadian citizens are younger than Canadian citizens

Understanding the demographics of Canadian citizens and non-Canadian citizens can help estimate the number of potential voters as well as to plan and develop policies, services and programs related to immigration and citizenship.

In 2021, there were about 26.3 million Canadian citizens (or 72.6% of Canada's total population) of voting age, that is, 18 years and older, who lived in private households in Canada.

[Younger people](#) make up a considerable share of the population who are not Canadian citizens. In 2021, close to one in six (15.4%) non-Canadian citizens were aged 15 to 24, compared with more than one in ten (11.1%) Canadian citizens. The difference was even more pronounced for those aged 25 to 54 years, with about three-fifths (60.7%) of non-Canadian citizens in their core working-age compared with more than one-third (37.6%) of Canadian citizens.

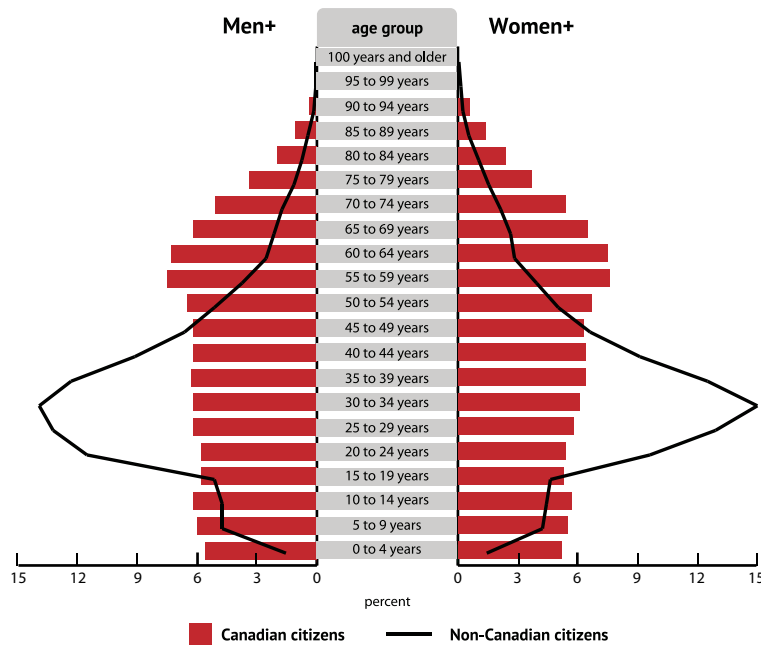
While the median age for the total population in Canada was 41.2 years in 2021, the median age of non-Canadian citizens living in Canada (33.6 years) was almost a decade younger when compared with Canadian citizens (42.8 years).

Of Canadian citizens, 50.6% identified as women¹ and 49.4% identified as men², compared to non-Canadian citizens living in Canada, 50.5% identified as women and 49.5% identified as men.

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

Chart 2

Age pyramid of Canadian citizens and non-Canadian citizens, 2021



Notes: Given that the non-binary population is small, data aggregation to a two-category gender variable is sometimes necessary to protect the confidentiality of responses provided. In these cases, individuals in the category "non-binary persons" are distributed into the other two gender categories and are denoted by the "+" symbol. The category "Men+" includes men (and/or boys), as well as some non-binary persons. The category "Women+" includes women (and/or girls), as well as some non-binary persons.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In 2021, four in five immigrants have Canadian citizenship, but the naturalization rate has declined

Obtaining Canadian citizenship is often seen as the last step in the immigration process. For many immigrants, citizenship is a key indicator of integration as it allows them to vote, enter politics and increase their employment opportunities.

Adults who immigrate to Canada are eligible to become citizens if they have permanent resident status and fulfil certain conditions, such as living in Canada for a certain number of years and demonstrating adequate knowledge of Canada and its official languages. Children under 18 whose parent or parents have become citizens — or who are applying for citizenship simultaneously — are also eligible to become citizens if they are permanent residents.

Since the 2016 Census, the residency requirement of immigrants before they can apply for citizenship was reduced from four to three years. Based on the current physical presence requirement in Canada, the naturalization rate for immigrants who have settled in the country for at least three years was 80.7% in 2021.

To compare the naturalization rate between the 2011, 2016 and 2021 censuses, it is necessary to calculate the number of immigrants who have settled in the country for a similar period (at least four years) given the policy changes in the physical presence requirement over time. Among all eligible immigrants admitted to Canada at least four years before a census year, 83.1% or just over 6.0 million immigrants reported Canadian citizenship in the 2021 census, while a larger proportion of the immigrant population reported Canadian citizenship in 2016 (85.8%) and 2011 (87.8%).

This decline in the naturalization rate started before the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on previous studies^{3,4}, a combination of factors could explain this trend, such as, the level of education, income and knowledge of the official languages of immigrants, as well as changes to migration patterns or citizenship policies, the socio-political and economic conditions of the source and receiving countries and international events.

Policy and legislative changes and the naturalization rate

Explaining the naturalization rate requires analyzing changes made to citizenship policies and laws. For instance, the requirements around the time spent in Canada as a permanent resident or non-permanent resident changed twice in the last decade.⁵ The physical presence requirement as a permanent resident prior to June 11, 2015 and after October 10, 2017 was three years and applicants could claim a portion of the time spent in Canada as a non-permanent resident.⁶ During the period between those dates however (June 11, 2015 to October 10, 2017), the physical presence requirement as a permanent resident increased to four years and applicants could not claim any time spent in Canada as a non-permanent resident. As such, the processing and dissemination of census data takes into account these changes, in the calculation of the naturalization rate for immigrants who are eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship.

Another change was the increase in the fee to apply for a citizenship grant in 2015. This may have been a challenge for some, particularly among refugees, families and those with lower income.⁷

Higher percentage of established immigrants are Canadian citizens by naturalization than recent immigrants

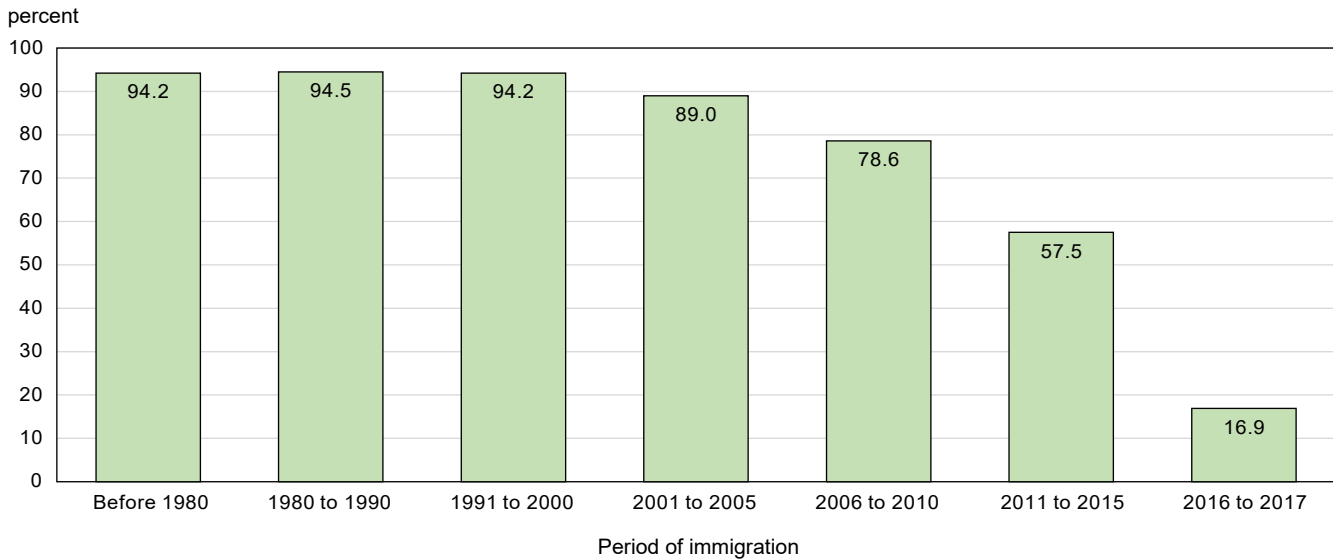
Becoming a Canadian citizen increased with the time spent in the country. In 2021, most immigrants (94.3%) admitted to Canada before 2001 have Canadian citizenship, compared with 57.5% of immigrants who landed from 2011 to 2015 and 16.9% of immigrants who landed from 2016 to 2017.

3. Hou, Feng and Picot, Garnett. 2019. "[Trends in the Citizenship Rate Among New Immigrants to Canada](#)." *Economic Insights*, no 101. Statistics Canada Catalogue no: 11-626-X. (accessed September 30, 2022).
4. Hou, Feng and Picot, Garnett. 2021. "The decline in the naturalization rate among recent immigrants in Canada: Policy changes and other possible explanations." *Migration Studies*, 9(3), 1030-1053
5. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. No date. [Changes to citizenship requirements 2017 to 2018](#). Last updated October 11, 2017. (accessed September 30, 2022).
6. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. No date. [Residence/physical presence requirements](#). Last updated October 11, 2017. (accessed September 30, 2022).
7. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada. July 2020. [Evaluation of the Citizenship Program](#). Catalogue no: Ci4-213-2020E-PDF, p. 6 (accessed September 30, 2022).

A portrait of citizenship in Canada from the 2021 Census

Chart 3

Percentage of immigrants who are Canadian citizens, by period of immigration, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Did you know? Place of birth is different than country of citizenship.

Place of birth refers to the name of the geographic location where the person was born. The geographic location is specified according to geographic boundaries current at the time of data collection, not the geographic boundaries at the time of birth. A person can only have one place of birth.

Citizenship refers to the country where the person has citizenship. Citizenship can be by birth or naturalization. It is based on a specific relationship between a state and a person that provides certain rights and responsibilities. For example, an American citizen by birth can be born in the United States or in one of its dependencies or associated overseas territory, such as 'Guam,' 'Northern Mariana Islands,' 'Puerto Rico,' or the 'Virgin Islands of the United States.' A person may have more than one citizenship. A person may be stateless, that is, have no citizenship.

India and China were the top countries of citizenship for those who did not have Canadian citizenship

Respondents reported more than 190 other countries of citizenship in the 2021 Census. India and China were the top two countries of citizenship reported by those who did not have Canadian citizenship. Both permanent residents (16.8%) and non-permanent residents (28.6%) most frequently reported Indian citizenship. Just over 1 in 10 permanent residents (12.7%) and non-permanent residents (11.1%) reported Chinese citizenship. Philippines ranked third in the country of citizenship reported by permanent residents (11.4%), while France (5.8%) ranked third among non-permanent residents.

In the 2021 Census, 3,560 persons in Canada reported being stateless or no citizenship. India (22%) was the most frequently reported place of birth of the stateless population, followed by Lebanon (14%), Saudi Arabia (10%) and the United Arab Emirates (10%). Of the stateless population, close to one quarter are non-permanent residents, and about half are recent immigrants, that is, they came to Canada from 2016 to 2021. Of the recent immigrants who reported being stateless, 74% are refugees and 15% are immigrants sponsored by family.

Did you know? The citizenship question changed in the 2021 Census

The census is designed to provide timely, high-quality information on Canadian communities from coast-to-coast-to-coast. To respond to the country's needs and prepare for the 2021 Census, Statistics Canada conducted country-wide engagements and a census test with over 135,000 households to determine whether new or revised questions under consideration could be understood easily and answered correctly.

Based on consultations and testing, Statistics Canada modified the wording and format of the citizenship question from a single, select-all-that-apply question to a two-part question to clarify the main concepts being measured and to improve data quality. The citizenship question in the 2021 Census asked respondents if they were (1) a citizen of Canada and (2) a citizen of a country other than Canada. This is different from the single-question in 2016 that asked for both Canadian citizenship status and other citizenship in the same question, in which respondents may have only answered part of the question.

The new question format has an impact on the historical comparability for multiple citizenships. It resulted in an increase in the number of responses for people who hold more than one citizenship, particularly those who hold Canadian citizenship (by birth or by naturalization) and citizenship of a country other than Canada. The results are in line with the findings from the 2019 Census Test and indicate improved data quality for multiple citizenships. The 2021 Census data are still comparable to those of the previous censuses for other key measures such as Canadian citizenship status.

The Census of Population has been collecting citizenship data since 1901.

For more information, please see the [Place of Birth, Generation Status, Citizenship and Immigration Reference Guide, Census of Population, 2021](#) and [Updated Content for the 2021 Census of Population: Immigration, ethnocultural diversity and languages in Canada](#).

Over 3.7 million Canadian citizens reported more than one citizenship

Since 1977, Canada recognized multiple citizenships, that is, Canadian citizens have the right to hold citizenship with more than one country.

In 2021, 11.2% or 3.7 million Canadian citizens reported more than one country of citizenship. This was over double the number reported in 2016, when 4.5% or 1.4 million of all Canadian citizens identified as having more than one citizenship. One factor that may explain this increase is the change to the format of the 2021 census citizenship question to better measure and capture multiple citizenships. Hence, caution should be exercised in interpreting this as a growth in the population with multiple citizenships.

Compared with Canadian citizens by birth, a higher percentage of Canadian citizens by naturalization have multiple citizenships. In 2021, 44.7% of Canadian citizens by naturalization had multiple citizenships, compared with 3.7% of Canadian citizens by birth.

The United States (18.5%) and the United Kingdom (10.0%) were the top countries of citizenship reported by Canadian citizens by birth with multiple citizenships, while the United Kingdom (8.7%) and Pakistan (5.7%) were the top countries reported by naturalized Canadian citizens with multiple citizenships.

Among those who do not have Canadian citizenship, 2.0% reported more than one country of citizenship.

Looking ahead

This *Census in Brief* offers a glimpse on citizenship in Canada for 2021. This information can help provide insight into who we are and how we have changed over time in the country. Policy makers at all levels of government, researchers and academics, businesses, labour organizations and public interest groups will use the citizenship data to meet the needs of the population living in Canada. More research and studies could be done to better understand the acquisition of Canadian citizenship or multiple citizenships, which will help inform future policies and programs.

In the coming months, another release from the 2021 Census related to this broad topic of citizenship, place of birth and immigration will reveal more details about non-permanent residents in Canada.

Additional Information

Additional analysis on immigration is available in the [Daily article on immigration](#) that was released on October 26, 2022.

Additional information on citizenship is available in the [Data Tables](#); and the [Census Profile](#), Catalogue no. 98-316-X.

For details on the concepts, definitions and variables used in the 2021 Census of Population, please consult the [Dictionary, Census of Population, 2021](#), Catalogue no. 98-301-X.

In addition to response rate and other data-quality information, the [Guide to the Census of Population, 2021](#), 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. A reference guide for [Place of Birth, Generation Status, Citizenship and Immigration](#) is also available.

Acknowledgements

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